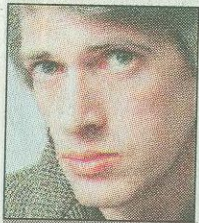


## The Arts

## Contriving a striking absence on canvas



Visual Arts  
Aidan Dunne

Allyson Keehan once described her own work as the exploration of “contrived absence”. It might sound obscure, but it’s not a bad description of what she does in her paintings which are always, in themselves, sumptuous and beautifully made. Her starting point is the traditional genre of the still life. Looking at the work in *Appropriately Strange and Disciplined* at the Monster Truck Gallery, you quickly notice that she devotes a disproportionate level of attention to the fabric backdrops rather than the objects per se, sometimes to the point of the complete exclusion of the objects, as in one of the best paintings in the show, *Purple Embroidered Material*.

Elsewhere, *Gold Ring* depicts a gold ring occupying a tiny, peripheral space in a virtuosic study of a background fabric.

On the other hand, with *Venetian Mask and Peacock Feather*, she seems to become so engaged with the title subject that there

is, in terms of her approach, perhaps too much of it, so that we have something approaching a conventional still life. But, given her reference to “contrived absence”, a mask is an appropriate inclusion, evoking an absent subject. Each work does this in some way or another.

A red stain on a patch of fabric in *Châteauneuf-du-pape* is all that we see of the wine. *Mrs Blake’s Bottle of Jack* has been emptied. There is something contrary about devoting a huge amount of care and skill to the depiction of what is essentially an empty space, a space containing only the residue of a person.

With *Purple Embroidered Material*, you could say that the contrariness is even more pronounced. A flat, two-dimensional fabric is painstakingly depicted on another fabric. Keehan does highlight the way the golden thread sits on the surface rather than becoming part of it, and actually the gold gives the painting a great zing. Apart from an echo of the person or persons who produced and embroidered the fabric, the work also recalls all-over painting in the mode of Jackson Pollock. Out of these ingredients, something exceptional emerges: a work that summarises and surpasses Keehan’s concerns to date. This is the first month of Monster Truck’s collaboration with the Royal Hibernian Academy, which is an exciting development for the gallery, but it is a pity that its exhibitions are allocated such brief runs.

MAIREAD O’HEOCHA’S FINE exhibition *Home Rules* at mother’s tankstation

ban-like structures parachuted into a rural setting, or provisional, as in caravans and mobile homes. Heaps of debris, rubbish bins, a skip – all indicate a process of continuous transformation, of making and unmaking and re-making and ant-like industry. She is a very capable painter, though one or two odd mannerisms come through: the cars she depicts, for example, just don’t look right. Compare and contrast with the work of Kevin Cosgrove, to take a relevant example.

AT KEVIN KAVANAGH, *Better is Something You Build* is a busy, noisy exploration of contemporary sculpture by five young artists. Curated by Jacqui McIntosh, the show considers the possibilities for making things with real, three-dimensional materials in an age of virtuality, when digital information in endlessly mutable forms is the main medium of communication and cultural exchange. Given which, there is an appropriately low-tech, even perverse edge to much of the work included, all of which is engaging and persuasive.

Two pieces visually dominate the show and one of them, Graham Hudson’s *International*, also dominates aurally. It features a rough-hewn “arch” of cardboard packaging that spans the width of the gallery. At the foot of each pillar of the arch, lighted bulbs drag against record turntables, distorting the sound of a pair of LPs. These symmetrical events, linked by a trail of consumption, point to global homogeneity.

Karin Brunnermeier’s tragicomic *Hansi-Nummer (Ring-Clown)*, in which the prone body of a clown bears the fatal imprint of a huge ring of metal, presumably the circus ring, is succinctly expressed, both funny and horrible.

Ulrich Vogl is adept at winning elaborate effects from simple

means, and does so with the two small pieces he shows, including a piece of inked foil that becomes a celestial vista when seen through a slide-viewer. Eamon O’Kane’s DIY small-scale cinema, screening an animated film, also displays a penchant for quick-witted improvisation.

Gereon Krebber’s *Slice of a barricade* is a representation of sorts: a scarred, burnt wedge that looks as though it might be excerpted from a bigger structure, evoking civil protest. It’s appropriate, given the show’s underlying appeal to us not to lose touch with the real.

LINDA SHEVLIN’S PAINTINGS in *Crave* at the Cross Gallery are inspired by the spectacle of burnt land, of places ravaged by forest fires or burnt-off vegetation. The idea is that, as Anselm Kiefer suggested with his scorched earth paintings a few decades ago, burning clears the way for new growth and in that context, metaphorically, burning is painting. Shevlin uses dark earth colours and builds up highly glazed surfaces that recall Hughie O’Donoghue. But her work is patchy, with some paintings lacking a sense of gravity and depth. In several cases the smoky skies, particularly, tend to look both over-worked and vacuous.

◆ Appropriately Strange and Disciplined: Allyson Keehan, *Monster Truck Gallery*, 73 Francis St, Dublin (concluded); Home Rules: Mairead O’heocha, *Mother’s tankstation*, 41-43 Watling St, Ushers Island, Dublin, until Feb 16; *Better is Something You Build*, group show curated by Jacqui McIntosh, with Karin Brunnermeier, Graham Hudson, Gereon Krebber, Eamon O’Kane and Ulrich Vogl, Kevin Kavanagh Gallery, 66 Great Strand St, Dublin, until Mar 1; *Crave*: Linda Shevlin, Cross Gallery, 59 Francis St, Dublin, until Mar 1

Tomorrow  
Theatre  
opening  
nights at  
Abbey  
and Gate