

## The Tyranny of Ambition

COSMÉ MCMOON

Mr Bayfield, I am a serious pianist. I have ambition. I...

ST. CLAIR BAYFIELD

Oh, you think I didn't have ambition? I was a good actor. But I was never going to be a great actor. It was very hard to admit that to myself. But once I had, I felt free from the tyranny of ambition. I started to live. Is ours not a happy world, Cosmé? Do we not have fun?

*Florence Foster Jenkins, Dir. Stephen Frears, 2016*

My intention as a practising painter and curator of this exhibition is to share with a wider audience some fascinating, delightful and not-so-well known recent and contemporary painting from Ireland and the UK. Work by painters with whom you may or may not be familiar making the kind of painting that attempts to challenge orthodoxy and frustrate – if not subvert – expectations. The kind of painting that doesn't rely upon celebrity approval or box-ticking thematic curating. Paintings that I, as a painter, regard as genuinely ambitious. Ambitious for the work, that is.

*Try again. Fail again. Fail better.*

Samuel Beckett

The title of this exhibition was 'discovered' whilst watching Stephen Frears' remarkable biopic Florence Foster Jenkins. The signal moment came when one of the central characters declares that once he

had confronted what he referred to as 'the tyranny of ambition' – only then could he truly start to live; to be happy. A sentiment with which, as a painter, I heartily agree. Age and experience have caused me to abandon my search (conscious or otherwise) for approval, I've learnt to 'set my own agenda' – to acknowledge my intentions and pursue them diligently.

At the height of the late modernist movement ambition in painting was measured (literally) in metres – the larger the painting, the greater the ambition. That these paintings now only exist in corporate foyers or airport lounges testifies to their ultimate purpose as the visual equivalent of 'elevator music'. Some ambition.

*The greater the artist, the greater the doubt.*

*Perfect confidence is granted to the less talented as a consolation prize.*

Robert Hughes

This doesn't mean surrendering to complacency, but the realisation of the importance of intentions; and an acknowledgement that they will differ profoundly from ambition. And differ they do; ambition is broadly regarded as a manifestation of ego, a desire for acknowledgement, approval, status and material wealth. Intention on the other hand is an expression of a very different and more profound desire that signals a shift in values. A shift that involves a rejection of the dominant market-driven model. Replacing it with a more enquiring, generous and intelligent form of discourse.

As ambition drives us to do the things, we think we ought to do, so ambition drives artists to be the kind of artist they think they ought to be – or WANT to be. Intention invariably transcends ambition because it has the potential to enable us to become the artist we NEED to be.

*A gift consists not in what is done or given, but in the intention of the giver or doer. Seneca*

Ambition is invariably strategic, calculating and acquisitive. Many years ago, the art market colonised the art world and now it is ambition – as defined by the market – that drives much art. As a practitioner I have to accept this. Nonetheless, I'm constantly striving to acknowledge my intentions – to reach a fuller understanding of my practice. It's been my experience that ambition has invariably hindered that process.

This exhibition is an attempt to address that predicament. To move away from 'brand' – what the Australian critic Robert Hughes referred to as 'People buying with their ears, rather than their eyes'. Another aspect of this shift is recognition of the place that generosity should occupy in art.

*I don't know why we're here, but I'm pretty sure it's not to enjoy ourselves.*

Ludwig Wittgenstein

Which brings me to an important factor in this exhibition and a key aspect of the selection process. Some years ago, I wrote an essay entitled *I don't LIKE art*<sup>1</sup>. In short, I want everyone who visits this exhibition to take the time to look at the work in the show and instead of asking themselves whether they like it or not. Instead – to ask themselves 'What do I think about this object? And why?'

Looking at painting should generally arouse curiosity, reflection and empathy. It's of no consequence whether I or anyone else approves, disapproves or even 'likes' it. Painting and art more widely should impact our consciousness and not simply be a mirror for our ignorance and our prejudices – or an expression of our approval or disapproval.

<sup>1</sup> [www.grahamcrowley.co.uk](http://www.grahamcrowley.co.uk) – and click on Texts

Almost two hundred years ago at the height of the enlightenment, painters like Turner, et al. reinvented painting. It would no longer be merely a state of affairs but a state of mind. Thirty or forty year's later photography would cement this cultural shift.

*You should listen to your heart, and not the voices inside your head.*  
Marge Simpson

Intention and its problematic sibling – authenticity – have been absent from debates about contemporary art practice for too long. That's due in part to the uncertainty and irony that accompanied much postmodern culture; causing a temporary retreat – if not abandonment – of notions of authenticity. The emergence over the last twenty or more years, of what has become referred to as post-conceptual painting, challenges that.

The dominance of the art market has fostered a moderately sophisticated yet insidious form of censorship to flourish. Which along with a systemic decline in academic standards has encouraged the idea that painting is no different from illustration. Strange as it may seem, no one goes to painting to be informed. Painting may have the potential to be transformational; but seldom, if ever informative. To ignore this is to 'miss the point'. Some of the best painting can be simultaneously fascinating and irritating; even downright disturbing. As far as I'm concerned certainty has no place in any discussion of painting – let alone art. I think Ludwig Wittgenstein had it about right when he suggested that art is an 'open concept' – meaning that any attempt at a definition is futile.

*Anxiety is the handmaiden of creativity.*  
T.S. Eliot

The paintings that I have selected for this show vary wildly in intention and appearance and is an acknowledgement of the healthy

pluralism that characterises so much contemporary painting. Nonetheless, as a painter, I'm convinced that all the paintings in the exhibition are in one sense or another distinguished. And one of the most distinguished is the painting of the Carrigfadda Forest by the painter and archaeologist Paul Ringrose who died in 2019. Paul's painting depicts in a powerful and uncompromising manner the damage sustained by Carrigfadda Forest in West Cork during Storm Ophelia in 2017.

In his moving testimony<sup>2</sup> to the destructive power of nature which Paul wrote shortly before his death, he manages to avoid what John Ruskin referred to as the 'pathetic fallacy'. Paul leaves us a profound and poignant legacy in both image and word.

Tracy White Fitzgerald's painting of a designer bentwood chair is a seemingly effortless mixture of languages; that of image and pattern. In this joyful painting Tracy has created the illusion of a plausible but fictitious space by directly combining the patterned, naked linen and the illusionistic chair – to startling effect.

Sarah Dwyer's sensual and extravagant paintings appear to be wrestling with appearances. Elements mingle in a way that's tantalisingly ambiguous; but somehow never vague. Colour is unbound and unattached, drifting amongst the various forms. It's as if the boundaries between the experience of the body and sense of place have collapsed into each other – and become one.

Jack Hickey's photorealist *Hicksville* exudes a wonderful stillness – and so much 'air'. This is one of those remarkable paintings that makes the invisible – visible. As we look up, what do we see? Not just a water tower. But a water tower immersed in light, space – and time. The illusion of light and time of day are palpable – you'd imagine you could 'set your watch by it'.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Ringrose's essay *Carrigfadda and Me*.

The paintings of Susie Hamilton are visually stunning. Her paintings represent a rare and precarious synthesis. They also exhibit a startling immediacy that's endowed with an acute intelligence. I think Susie puts it beautifully when she says of her paintings 'I encourage paint to curdle, ooze, creep and flow in order to undo or corrode the image.' Isn't that why we love painting?

David Wiseman manages to produce sumptuous paintings that are simultaneously celebratory and contemplative. His brush strokes appear to float and tumble around each other in a luminous arabesque. His is a rare accomplishment, one that transcends common notions of beauty by creating the illusion of light – and air. Visual alchemy.

John Stark's exquisitely executed paintings bring a contemporary sensibility to the meditative and the esoteric. I'm fairly certain that few ecclesiastics ever received neon messaging. Echoes of Omar Khayyam's epic poem *The Rubaiyat* – 'The moving finger writes; and, having writ: Moves on:'

Joanna Whittle confirms in breath-taking fashion something I mentioned earlier; that when it comes to ambition, large paintings must be regarded with a degree of scepticism. Her utterly compelling and highly wrought miniatures speak volumes – an illustration of exquisitely judged intention. Tiny jewels.

Niamh Porter's wonderfully still and thoroughly compelling monochromatic 'bathroom' painting is a brilliant mixture of the exquisite and the ethereal – the parochial and other-worldly. Her painting delivers one of paintings eternal and finest accomplishments: to present us with the familiar rendered thoroughly unfamiliar, as seen for the first time. Exquisite.

Gabhann Dunne's painting of his daughter is sumptuous. He has managed to get the paint to become an active partner in the process of painting. One moment the paint is opaque and the next it's so transparent we can see the drawing beneath. Gabhann captures the spirit of the painting when he describes his daughter as 'left alone in her thoughts, opaque and independent.' Spot on.

I'm pretty sure that if Samuel Beckett were still around to see Manar al Shouha's shifting, transparent paintings he would have approved. Manar's apparently prosaic scenes put one in mind of not only the demimonde of Beckett's *Watt* but also the rather ethereal works of Louis Le Brocquy which were much admired by Beckett.

Judith Tucker's gloriously luminous, crepuscular paintings of the Humberston Fitties are sympathetic depictions of a marginal place in failing light. But although they may be sympathetic, they exhibit an uneasy and tense quality. Beneath the surface of Judith's paintings lurks imagery that when it emerges is tenuous, partial and brittle. The Fitties is one of those places that carries the weight of identity – and attendant memories. Brilliant.

Mollie Douthit's paintings are thoroughly intimate and utterly unassuming meditations upon selfhood. States of mind. A delicious mix of reflection, confessional and wry humour. It takes courage to make something so tentative – so spare. *Mary and Barb* is marvellously incongruous – simultaneously witty and moving. Quite stunning.

Eileen O'Sullivan's *A Room of Possibilities* is just that, a fascinating cornucopia of beginnings – of things partial: gestures, daubs, propositions and proposals. A frenzy of false starts. This is the sort of painting that embraces its gestation. Anyone who's ever attempted to paint will immediately understand this remarkable picture.

The late Ken Kiff's barnstorming *Talking to a Psychoanalyst: Night Sky* is probably one of the most important and influential paintings of the late 20th century. Touched as it is by allusions to Freud et al channelled through Goya's *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* – and much more. What also marks this painting out as significant is the way in which Ken employs elements of expressionism in such a tender and understated manner.

Maria Emilov's remarkable and precarious painting appears to echo something of the post war 'Ecole de Paris' movement. Maria explores an improvised and edgy sort of painting that echoes the kind of angularity and dissonance synonymous with the music of Ornette Colman and Pharoah Sanders. The paint seems simultaneously atomised and animated – as if dancing.

Geraint Evans' wonderfully perplexing painting depicts a familiar yet parallel world in which men and women are involved in some faintly familiar but unspecified activity or ritual. He painstakingly portrays a society – that simply isn't. Geraint's world is one in which even light behaves unpredictably – a world that's as utterly compelling as it is opaque.

Stephen Dunne is a truly remarkable painter. His paintings are among some of the most joyful and life affirming I've seen. He manages to balance an air of wonder with a cultivated knowledge of our wider culture. It takes more courage to display genuine sensitivity and generosity of spirit than it does the desire for sophistication. Stephen's is an effortless synthesis of the classic and the romantic. Absolutely timeless.

Claire Kerr's paintings are utterly mesmerising. They lure us in by virtue of their seeming modesty. But their apparent simplicity is deceptive and ultimately disarming. Claire, like Joanna Whittle, employs a studied form of understatement to great effect. Her paintings allow



us a glimpse of a world that at first appears orderly but on closer inspection is anything but. Captivating.

Lara Viana's paintings are some of the most accomplished and influential of her generation. These transparent, almost luminous works, are visually exquisite. Looking at Lara's paintings is a thoroughly mesmerising experience. Just as the spectator begins to unravel the painting the mystery is compounded. Elements constantly dissolve and then condense. This is painting at its most elusive and elastic.

Enjoy.

Graham Crowley, Painter, November 2022

Acknowledgement:

I'd like to thank all the painters and collectors who've kindly lent paintings and made this exhibition possible. I must also thank the staff at The Highlanes Municipal Art Gallery who've worked so diligently to mount this exhibition.

And finally, a special thank you to Aoife Ruane, the Director of Highlanes Gallery, who entrusted me with the responsibility of curating this exhibition.





Joanna Whittle, *Glow (Slump)*, 2022, Oil on Linen, 14 x 18cm

## **Paul Ringrose**

### *Carrigfadda and Me*

Carrigfadda in West Cork is one of many sacred mountains in Ireland. I can see it from my studio and the archaeologist in me has been fascinated by it for a long time. It is a classic triangular peak, like Croagh Patrick or the Sugar Loaf in Co. Wicklow, but is distinguished by its modest scale (only 313m) and particularly by the complex of stone circles, dating from about 1200 BC, that surrounds it. This small but distinctive peak (Christianised, and marked with a Marian cross in 1950/1) is often visible from these circles, pointing to their possible function: not accurate cosmological observation, as is so often assumed, but nevertheless as part of a solar-based and visually interconnected religious cult. It is clear that there must also have been a lunar dimension to this cult: lunar alignments are the only statistically significant features of these sites. The Scottish stone circles that those at Carrigfadda resemble, although 1000 years older than their Irish counterparts, also had a measurable interest in the movement, though not the rising or the setting, of the moon. In our modern world it is easy to forget that moonlight had far more practical importance for our ancestors because, amongst other things, they could work by moonlight.

Carrigfadda is strategically located. The approach from Reenascreena reveals an impressive, even imposing, aspect of the hill, bringing you to the pilgrimage path, presumably the original approach. When you get to the top, the views are surprisingly extensive, back east to the Bealadh Gap, and west right to the end of the peninsula. The harbour mouth at Cape Clear is clearly visible, as is the passage tomb at the apex of the island, one of the few outside the northern half of the country. The existence of this tomb must surely have had something to do with the Cape's position as the most south-westerly point on the island of Ireland. I am convinced that this sunset orientation was one of the points of importance of Carrigfadda and its associated complex of

stone circles. It is perhaps no coincidence that the townland of Carrigfadda is called Carrigagrianane, the rock of the sun.

To come now to the recent history of the hill and to my particular interest in it. Carrigfadda was planted with Sitka Spruce approximately forty years ago. These trees quickly grew into a typically brooding mossy pine forest, until eight years ago when a large section at the very top of the hill was completely flattened by a storm.

My work until then had been focused on deciduous woodland interiors. I was preoccupied with trying to capture in paint the force and power of the unstoppable growth, both primary and secondary, that I saw in old woods, and particularly the violent backlit green at their heart. But now I found I could not ignore the smashed remains of the woods at Carrigfadda, where the only re-growth was deep moss in long dripping streets. As the rest of the forestry on the hill was progressively flattened by a series of storms, including Ophelia in 2017, my work became increasingly focused on the damage, which seemed to me to be more like the effects of bombing than old-fashioned windthrow. And as I worked it became clear to me that this more direct reaction to what I take to be the effects of global warming somehow reflected my own situation.

I had at that point been through a long struggle with liver disease and then cancer, which had culminated in a liver transplant in 2015. The operation was successful, all seemed well and I began to piece my life back together. Then, shockingly, the cancer returned. I was given the diagnosis for a second time and this time it was terminal. It now seems to me that the cancer and the catastrophic effects of climate change on the woods both represent threats that seemed comfortably distant ten years ago but now are very real, present and personal.

Although I don't want to engage in pathetic fallacy, it remains the case that both my woods and my life have been turned upside down. Whether making polemic paintings that don't even feel like my own is helping at all with either situation is unclear. Maybe after

all it is true that global warming is a 'hyper object', that is to say, something of such enormity as to be beyond our human capacity to engage with practically, despite efforts like mine. This strikes me as a depressing thought, though I suppose others may see it as a mercy. I often like to think that the solar religion of our ancestors was preferable in some ways to our Christian inheritance of dominion over the earth; but it must be said that our ancestors, including no doubt those at Carrigfadda, were already well advanced in the process of forest clearance that has brought us to where we are now.

In any case, I feel that there is a connection between my jagged, smashed-up paintings of the woods and my health situation - though in fact the paintings were begun long before I knew about the return of the cancer. Certainly I am exploring destruction and the sense of an ending in both contexts. And yet perhaps things are not so simple after all, for even as I have to face the idea that I am now in the last phase of my life, I find that the felling of the old-fashioned forestry regiments of pine at Carrigfadda is actually a welcome thing for me. It is not a sadness because out of this destruction, at least, there is the hope of regeneration.

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Paul Ringrose, *Carrigfadda and Me*, 2018, Oil on Canvas, 106cm x 100cm, Private Collection.

## **Ken Kiff**

*Talking with a Psychoanalyst: Night Sky*

*Talking with a Psychoanalyst: Night Sky* is probably one of Ken Kiff's most accomplished – not to say – finest paintings.

It's number 113 of over 200 works on paper that are collectively referred to as *The Sequence*. Kiff started work on *The Sequence* in 1971 and continued working on it until his death in 2001. It was never intended to be a series so much as a diary. For Ken Kiff, *The Sequence* was a way of exploring possible imagery and new subject matter – to exercise his imagination. When viewed as a totality it's tantamount to an autobiography.

This is also a picture with an illustrious 'pedigree'. In this painting Ken Kiff is referencing one of Goya's most celebrated etchings, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* from *Los Caprichos*, 1799. What I find extraordinary about this painting is the effortless way in which the world of appearances and that of the mind share a common language and are allotted equal 'weight'. This really is painting as a state of mind.

By the way, I knew Ken quite well. We taught together at the Royal College of Art and I like to think we were friends.

Graham Crowley, November 2022.





Ken Kiff, *Talking with a Psychoanalyst: Night Sky* (Sequence No. 113), 1973 – 79,  
Acrylic on Paper, 81.2 x 137.2cm, Private Collection.

## **Manar Al Shouha**

### *A Night in Dublin, No. 2*

Since arriving in Ireland I have begun to mix my painting subjects between what I see here in Dublin as well as what I have experienced in Syria.

When I paint scenes of the Damascus, bus scenes, I always ask myself 'Why I am doing it?' I always remember the feeling of taking the bus and watching people gazing out the windows. Often the bus felt like a boat taking them away from our country, away from our present reality and wanting to live in the past that will never exist. They seemed to me powerless and angry and they could not express themselves. I kept feeling they were looking over their shoulders as if they were waiting to go back in time. Even though we all knew this was not possible.

I was 16 years old when the war in Syria broke out and it has dominated my life ever since. On account of my lack of freedom in expressing myself, and because the media doesn't always show the more interesting angles in the news, I decided to reveal my nation's suffering in my own distinctive way, through my art. My mother is a very important figure in my life. I am her only child and she always encouraged me to pursue my painting. I love her for that.

I came to Dublin in December 2021 and sought asylum here. My paintings reflect on the realities and difficulties that I and others feel when caught up in conflict and forced migration. It is important to me that my paintings communicate that what happened wasn't every Syrian person's fault. Europe is now focused on Ukraine but we need to remember that the effects of the war in Syria continues with many young people fleeing Syria, because they have none or little freedom of choice.



Manar al Shouha, *A Night in Dublin, No. 2*, 2022, Mixed Media on Canvas, 150 x 100cm

## **Mollie Douthit**

### *Mary and Barb*

A devout catholic neighbour and her twin boys, along with the non-religious dad turned up for my neighbourhood birthday party. A tall box was handed to me. I was smiling even before I unwrapped it, the shape made it evident: I was getting a Barbie! But, as I peeled away the paper I slowly uncovered something I wasn't prepared for: Mother Mary. The dad sensed my let down, so to my rescue he chimed in 'Ooooooooooh, a glow in the dark Mother Mary, Cooooooooool!' I graciously smiled, but really, I wanted to turn to him and say, 'I think we both know how awkward this is.'

Then came the conundrum of having the responsibility of this newly acquired spiritual object. I couldn't get rid of it, but couldn't live with it glowing nightly, impeding my slumber. It found its way into a closet where it more than likely remains.



Mollie Douthit, *Mary and Barb*, 2022, Oil on Linen Panel, 41 x 31 cm.

## **Gabhann Dunne**

### *The Memory of Pine*

The painting is of my daughter, Morrigan, in a contemplative moment. My children feature prominently in my work on the environment. I now often see the natural world through their eyes and lens, particularly as I grow older. In the present work, Morrigan wears an orange dress that she proudly wore in Paris on a recent visit. She is surrounded by some of the finest objects ever made which are displayed in the Musée des Arts décoratifs. Morrigan's mind is elsewhere, and, in that moment, I wondered what was occupying her. During the painting of the work, I placed various motifs in the background. Birds, trees... and yet I continuously scrapped them away. I finally left her alone in her own thoughts – opaque and independent.



Gabhann Dunne, *The Memory of Pine*, 2022, Oil on Board, 45 x 35cm.

## **Stephen Dunne**

*Which Way the Wind Blows*

I've been painting these lemon yellow birds throughout the pandemic, they sit immobile on branches, transfixed in a highly coloured landscape, something a little off, in a toxic Zone similar to Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. An invisible poisoned landscape of contagion, the canary in the coalmine, the first things to go, fragile, flight, a stand in or substitute for the figure. The entangled network trapping them in a home or nest of something unquantifiable, vast and manipulative. The high key colours expressing alarm or warning from nature. Not moving, as all around them whirls.





Stephen Dunne, *Which Way the Wind Blows*, 2022, Oil on Linen, 75 x 90cm.

## **Sarah Dwyer**

### *Peeled Away*

Incorporating both figurative and abstract imagery, Dwyer's dynamic compositions are the result of processing her own surroundings and the human day-to-day experience, in addition to an indulgence in our desire for play. Surfaces, in turn, retain traces of process and development within their own archive presenting the viewer with a navigable visual history. In her most recent work, life drawing anchors the practice. The conversation between the figure and the artist's hand evolves through the seams, creases, and cracks of flesh, and the weight, line, and form of the corresponding marks. Exploratory and dynamic, Dwyer wields drawing as a method of processing her own relationship with the body and confronting the experiences of which the body keeps score. In performing the body's expansion and contraction, growth, loss, and change, life drawing becomes a tripartite act of survival, celebration, and achievement.



Sarah Dwyer, *Peeled Away*, 2022, Oil and Pastel on Linen, 130 x 100cm.

## **Maria Emilov**

*DOM, At The Crack Of Dawn, Stir Up This Silence*

Grieving my mum, I spend time visiting places from my childhood, avid to dig into the past, family and stories. It was a challenging road to learn more about myself too.

Going back to Plovdiv, walking on the streets, and checking some favourite spots of my childhood, I started my project *At The Crack Of Dawn, Stir Up This Silence*.

Because I took fresh, crisp breaths a morning, walking the close hill with the Roman theatre ruins. And I've just read about a cruel legend of a woman buried alive in the house to be built. In this twilight of the dawn, I've seen the blurred shadow of mum and grandma, looking at me and flying over the city like my star in the dark morning.

Painting and memories embrace most of the functions of the eye for me. My inner image has a sense of the incidents happening, and it's reworked within the 'studium'; the brush thought, and oil paint move. To let me still dive into the moment's loop on this hill to go Home.



Maria Emilov, *ДОМ, At The Crack Of Dawn, Stir Up This Silence*, 2019-2020,  
Oil on Canvas, 81cm x 81cm.

## **Geraint Evans**

### *The Exercise Club*

I am interested in the ways in which we perceive, encounter and experience the natural world and read it as landscape. My paintings employ a stylized pictorial language to explore the notion that landscape is partly a social and cultural construct.

The idea that nature can provide a physical and spiritual tonic developed during the 18th and 19th centuries in response to the growth of cities and rapid industrialization. Whilst writing about the motivation of walking and ramblers clubs, Rebecca Solnit suggests that those that campaigned for free time, the right to weekends and holidays, also campaigned for the space in which to spend that time.

I imagine that the four members of *The Exercise Club* are acting out an early morning collective fitness regime amongst the giant redwoods of a half-completed diorama. Before they begin their daily work to fabricate this most unnatural of natural landscapes, they step into a woodland clearing to stretch and breathe deeply, immersing themselves in a simulacrum of untrammelled wilderness.



Geraint Evans, *The Exercise Club*, 2022, Oil on Canvas, 119 x 125cm.  
Photo: BJDeakin Photography

## **Susie Hamilton**

*Fiery Pegasus*

*Thorny Wood*

*Fiery Pegasus* and *Thorny Wood* are from a series based on images of Samurai and plays by Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare. They were part of my show *Unbound* at Paul Stolper Gallery (London), last May.

*Unbound* refers both to the energy of warrior-horsemen and to the way in which I encourage paint to curdle, ooze, creep and flow in order to undo or corrode the image. In this way the figure and landscape are unshackled from realism and the rider's fury, heroism and ambition are challenged or annulled as he dissolves in veils and pools of acrylic.





Susie Hamilton, *Fiery Pegasus*, 2022, Acrylic on Canvas, 40 x 40cm.

## **Jack Hickey**

*HICKSVILLE*

Jack Hickey's work attempts to illuminate the incidental moments in the mundane everyday. At the centre of this is the human condition and our behaviour in a socially accelerated world. Insignificant objects provide clues to the personal experiences, which are universally shared, stories of intimate encounters and feelings of isolation within the crowd.

The open space in the work represents the distance between individuals, the unsaid and the unrequited. It is an example of the void inherent in a modern world, where true human contact has become illusive, almost impossible. His works strive to show the hole at the centre, the empty room within, the point where unease begins.



Jack Hickey, *HICKSVILLE*, 2020, Oil on Canvas, 90 x 70cm.

## **Claire Kerr**

*A sheet of hand-made continuous-feed paper*

My work is quite slow and painstaking, accumulated layers of paint and glaze - and I embrace that slowness, not only because of the interesting surface it creates, but also as an end in itself, a meditation on labour and on time passing - on how strange it is to live in the world. I like the idea of the impossible - apparently futile - task, evoked in this painting of continuous feed paper made by hand. Normally we think of reams and reams of this spewing out of printers, and although it is becoming obsolete, it is still sometimes used for billing or for printouts of computer programs; I rather laboriously started making single sheets of it by hand with white and green paper and I've painted one of those sheets. I was thinking about the shrinking lifespan of technological objects, but also the assumption we have that technology is instant or labour-free - whereas of course the work involved is simply displaced or of a new kind.



Claire Kerr, *A sheet of hand-made continuous-feed paper*, 2022. Oil on Panel, 30.5 x 25.4cm.

## **Eileen O'Sullivan**

### *A Room of Possibilities*

Climbing many staircases in a run-down building in Singapore, to get to a flea market on the top floor, I stumbled across this brilliantly inviting, white tiled space. The window at the back let light into the eery empty space, a full wall of glass at the entrance allowed me to peer inside. I photographed the space to log it in my memory as I thought it would make a very interesting exhibition space. In the studio this photo became a challenge to paint. I enjoyed using 'single-point-perspective' to map this room on the canvas. As the painting progressed it seemed creepy or austere so I made the decision to add playful, colourful elements into the space. I wanted the space to feel like a permanent element and for the child playing, the person marking out a guide on the ground and the confetti, to feel more ephemeral. The colours and the mark making are the tools I used to help me portray these elements.



Eileen O'Sullivan, *A Room of Possibilities*, 2022, Oil on Canvas, 100 x 100cm.

## **Niamh Porter**

*For Florence*

Oval travertine lavatory on a matching travertine floor.

Florence Knoll's interiors are evocative, seductive, and glamorous. Carefully, she arranges sensual materials, orchestrating palpable intimacy, and we're left longing for the experience of stepping inside. Like walking onto a film set, we imagine ourselves at this sink, looking in the mirror; but unlike a film, it was reality, and she designed it just for us.

The practice of painting is a balancing act; how much to use and in what way. Where to add more, and where to take it away. When is colour enough, and when is it too much? In these moments, I imagine myself as the designer and do what feels right. The subtle changes in Florence's bathroom, solid to soft, warm to cold, and shadow to light, becomes the language of painting, fuelling intuition in moments of doubt.





Niamh Porter, *For Florence*, 2022, Oil on Canvas, 50 x 40cm.  
Photo: Dave Bourke

## **John Stark**

### *Feed Your Demons*

My recent still life paintings are an attempt to access a low plane reality and clarified sense of vision in contrast to previous tyrannical ambitions. The everyday is confronted with humility and without evasion, in meditation and undisturbed presence. Fruits, vessels and various kitchen arrangements are bound up in the idea of self-negation and reduction of ego. I am trying to get closer; to the object and the viewer, and in that liminal space of nearness an eerie outer space opens up; an unreal space of (re) presentation.



John Stark, *Feed Your Demons*, 2021, Oil on Wood Panel, 100 x 75 cm.

## **Judith Tucker**

*Night Fitties: and we'd walk down here to the beach*

*Night Fitties: Why destroy a thing of beauty?*

The Humberston Fitties in Lincolnshire is one of the UK's last remaining plotlands. Here, since the 1930s, local people and visitors have erected their diverse dwellings to enjoy the simple restorative pleasures of seaside life. Since 2013, Judith Tucker has been working with the radical landscape poet Harriet Tarlo and residents, exploring the meeting of social history, personal memory and place amongst this contested coastal community. Tucker's series of paintings *Night Fitties* explore the play of light and dark and the uncanny transformations of the quirky chalets that take place after hours as well as notions of vulnerability, precarity, occupation and emptiness. The paintings, prompt the viewer to consider, in the shadow of recent dramatic political changes, how notions of place and identity are constructed on domestic and larger scales, as reflected by the play on flags and other indications of Englishness.



Judith Tucker, *Night Fifties: and we'd walk down here to the beach*, 2019, Oil on Linen, 60 x 80 cm.

## **Lara Viana**

### *Untitled*

“It might be a confusion of sense but it appears that these paintings seem to contain a quality of heat. Invariably this feeling would simply issue from the use of colour alongside a certain set of associations related to the employment of imagery but I would detect something beyond these more obvious elements and this I think pertains to the functioning of memory. This is not to imply that these paintings are directly about the working of memory but I would claim that they have either a lingering or even a quality of yearning. Simply put, we enter these paintings not just as a means of discovering a lost continent trapped between the virtuality of memory and the actuality of place but we leave them touched by a feeling of otherness which I designate when I utter the word heat. Such passages through and within the work of art are by no means straightforward but the elegant gestural trails of paint, the various saturations of colour and mood cushion us into believing that such a passage might yield a revelation of the elsewhere. As sensation these paintings appear direct and yet as disguised narrative there is something less secure, like a half remembered experience corroded by repression. The idea of a group of paintings that touch both this quality of corrosion and caress leaves me wanting to see more because I wish to linger within such strange mixtures of sense.”

Jonathan Miles, London.



Lara Viana, *Untitled*, 2022, Oil on Board, 30 x 25cm, Courtesy domobaal.  
Photo by Andy Keate

## **Joanna Whittle**

*Glow (Slump)*

*Clearance (Forest Lights)*

*Forest Shrine (Knock)*

In *Glow (Slump)* a makeshift tent sinks into an uncertain ground, with gossamer layers of fabric which are at once unravelling into dereliction and incongruously glowing from within, whilst a small green light gleams uncertainly against the dusk. In *Clearance (Forest Lights)*, a heavy shrine broods in dark woods, glittering impossibly with daubed lights; a site of clandestine activity, whilst *Forest Shrine (Knock)* sits quietly, disordered with the detritus of remembering. And in each an unseen hand or press of foot in mud or moss, ever present, ever absent. In each tiny arena of surface, the paint moves about motile and pausing here and there to describe fabric or mud or sky within this mossy layered surface which becomes evidence of ritual in itself.





Joanna Whittle, *Forest Shrine (Knock)*, 2021, Oil on Postcard, 14 x 9 cm.

## **Tracy White Fitzgerald**

### *Bendy Chair*

My paintings focus on those quieter often uncelebrated spaces in our lives. With a focus on the contradictions in everyday life; boom and bust, aspirational and actual, public and private.

*Bendy Chair* is part of the *Iconic Furniture* series of work which draws inspiration from aspirational design magazines and websites. Drawing from the concept of 'fast home décor', the disposable nature of design now as opposed to furniture built to last and transcend fashions. Pattern is used to give a sense of place and time. Painted large scale on linen in acrylic, using gloss and matt varnish to add further texture.



Tracy White Fitzgerald, *Bendy Chair*, 2022, 90 x 90cm, Acrylic on Linen.

## **David Wiseman**

*Dusk Pitshanger Riverside*

My larger works on canvas and paper are mostly made in the studio but I also work directly from the landscape with a variety of mixed media on smaller works on paper. Although spending a lot of time in Devon, Wales and the south coast of England, I am equally inspired by the local rivers and parklands close to my Ealing home. My paintings are begun in a loose freely drawn calligraphic way using a wide variety of brushes, rollers, scrapers, sponges etc. the final image being extracted in a playful organic way using overlaid marks and glazes to express qualities in nature such as mood, light, colour, atmosphere. I want to convey a feeling of change and movement in the landscape and for the paintings to be intriguing, tantalising and ambiguous held between the pure plastic qualities of the paint and all the celebratory, magical illusions and evocations of the depiction of nature.



David Wiseman, *Dusk Pitshanger Riverside*, 2020, Acrylic on Canvas, 102 x 76cm

# **The Tyranny of Ambition**

26 November 2022 – 18 February 2023

Manar Al Shouha, Molly Douthit, Gabhann Dunne, Stephen Dunne, Sarah Dwyer, Maria Emilov, Geraint Evans, Susie Hamilton, Jack Hickey, Claire Kerr, Ken Kiff, Eileen O'Sullivan, Niamh Porter, Paul Ringrose, John Stark, Judith Tucker, Lara Viana, Joanna Whittle, Tracy White Fitzgerald, David Wiseman.

Curated by Graham Crowley

Produced by Aoife Ruane and Stephen Hodgins

Highlanes Gallery Team:

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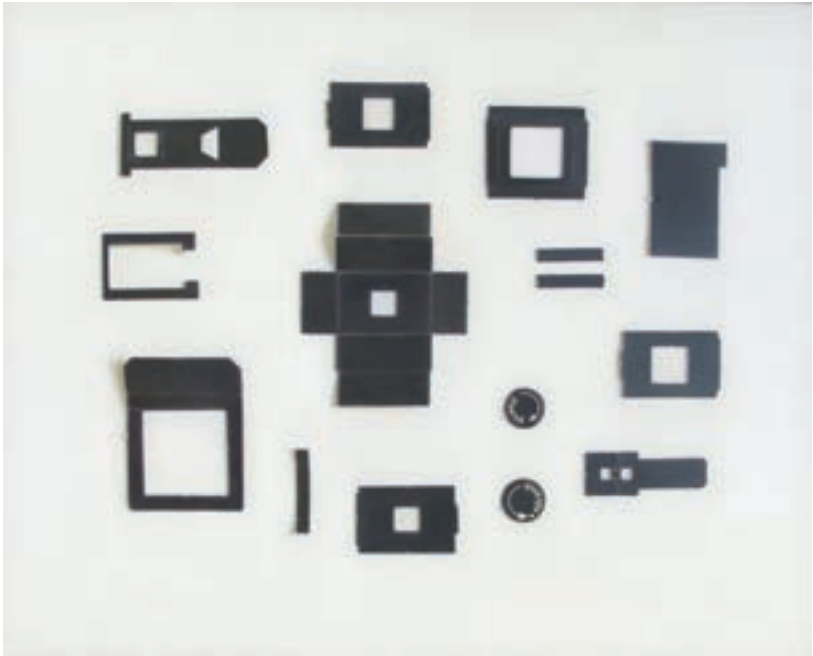
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Established in 2006, Highlanes Municipal Art Gallery, is the home of the Drogheda Municipal Art Collection, and presents a dynamic programme of temporary exhibitions and associated public programme, and received Full and Maintenance of Accreditation through the Heritage Council's Museum Standards Programme for Ireland.

The gallery is located in Drogheda, in the heart of the Boyne Valley, Ireland.





Claire Kerr, *Pinhole camera kit*, Oil on Panel, 25.5 x 20.5cm, Private Collection