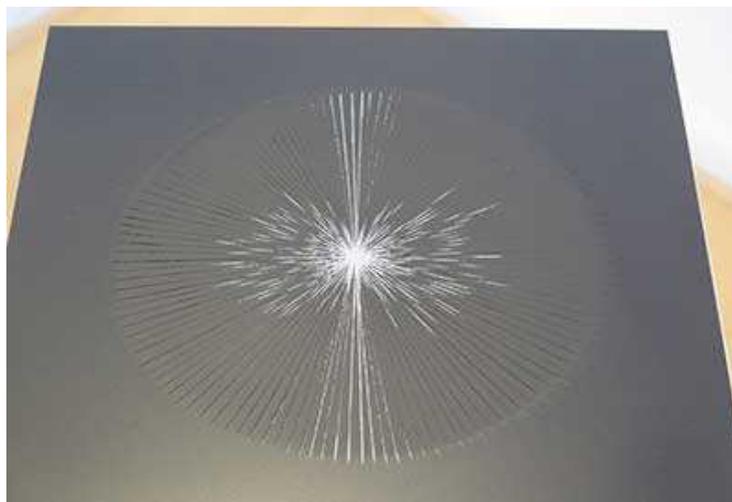


Helen Mac Mahon - Reviews

18 May 2015 - Our Arty Blogger is back! Des Kenny gives a personal response to our current exhibition by Helen MacMahon - Profero...



Art and science find common ground in Helen Mac Mahon's show in the First Floor Gallery of Draíocht. These two divergent disciplines combine to form a dialogue which illuminates their parallel search for truth and beauty. The placement of the art works in the gallery seems to follow a hidden mathematical theorem for defining exhibition space. An ordered harmony of coherent intervals places each work exactly where it is required to satisfy a luminous eye.



Radii is placed on a slender white pedestal in a corner of the gallery. A square mirror painted in a meditative black reveals a silver star in the heart of the equitable form. The black absorbs light while the silver mirror reflects light causing a shimmering tension on the surface and a sense of movement appears to occur as the viewer circulates the form. The act of looking transforms the indolent object into a twinkling illusion.

On the wall are four images created with the aid of heat cast by a variety of different light bulbs upon a heat sensitive material. The light source is on a timer which comes on and off in fifteen minutes cycles. Notional forms appear on the heated surfaces and fade like a spectral entity when the surface cools. Steely blues and purples gather in the centre while emerald greens and toxic oranges flare out towards the edges. Pulsating cycles of presence and absence articulate these works with the parallel patterns of life and death that is part of life's convulsive existence.



A sculptural arrangement of metal slinkies holds center stage on the gallery floor. The slinkies appear to float upon the white parapet and their surface ripples with illusory movement. A wave like pattern rolls across the undulating surface as the observer approaches the installation. The false sense of motion is triggered by the moving spectator. Our formulation of reality depends on retinal information that unfortunately provides false data to the brain. The perception of the world formulated by our glaring eyes is untrustworthy and doubt begins to gather on the abundant shores of reason.



Placed in a gentle curve are four Magnographs, beautifully crafted devices which display the effects of magnetic energy upon a receptive film. The inner workings of the device are displayed which of course raises the natural curiosity level of a visitor. The lid of the apparatus is tilted forward revealing a mirror showing the inverted image of magnetic material placed on the underside of the display surface. The bowels of the mechanism are exposed to inquisitive investigation awakening a beckoning call that lays deep within the human psyche, a desire for knowledge. The inclination to understand the unknown lifts a species beyond the control of its environment to controlling its habitat. The exquisite pleasure derived from comprehending the concept of these mechanisms is perhaps uniquely human.



While black is the predominant colour for the objects in this exhibition allowing light to focus on the viewing surfaces this technique is absent when looking at a group of digital photographs examining the luminous property of light. The white gallery walls surround the gleaming images with bordered neutrality, transporting the inner light of the photographs to flutter towards the visitors receptive eyes. Silver spectral shapes emerge from gloomy depths and float eloquently like snowflakes unwinding in the air. Circular shapes materialise from an ethereal blue as phosphorescent oranges and yellows simmer in the darkness.

All in all science and art collaborate on equal terms to present an engaging show from the thoughtful vision of Helen Mac Mahon.

Desmond Kenny is an artist based in Hartstown, Dublin 15. He is a self taught painter, since he began making art in 1986 he has since exhibited widely in Ireland and abroad, solo shows include Draíocht in 2001, The Lab in 2006 and Pallas Contemporary Projects in 2008. His work is included in many collections including the Office of Public Works, SIPTU, and Fingal County Council. Kenny's practice also incorporates print making and he has been a member of Graphic Studio Dublin since 2004.

Original review can be found at - http://www.draiocht.ie/blog/category/helen_macmahon

**TACTILE at Catalyst Arts, Belfast, 2014. Helen MacMahon,
Polychromatic Shadow Configuration Device, 2013.**

Posted on [March 22, 2014](#) by [Slavka Sverakova](#)



Helen MacMahon, Polychromatic Shadow Configuration Device 2013, material: trestle, spotlights, coloured lighting gels, PVC tape, MDF. Photo by Jordan Hutchings includes two visitors interacting with the installation.

Mac Mahon lists her engagement with space and light as a dominant concept of her art practice (see <http://www.helenmacmahon.com> “Subject matter is simply space and light”) Before I write about her installation in some detail, I would like to introduce the other four works of art that formed the TACTILE exhibition at Catalyst Arts from 7th until 14th March 2014.

Clodagh Lavelle offered High Heart, 2012 – a circular installation of soft sculptures, connected to ropes and pulleys, to enable people to change the shapes and where they were. She quotes four lines from a poem *Under the Paris Sky* by Leonard Cohen that gave title to her installation: *Her legs are long/Her heart is high/The chains are strong/But so am I.*



Her inspiration appears to be grounded in a paradox of our existence: the idea of human beings trying to protect themselves connects to” the sense of the unattainable” (her statement on the gallery handout)

David Frederick Mahon made a small organ titled Tres Bon (make circle with forefinger and thumb), 2014 (wooden speaker box, motor, Bon Tempì organ). A pleasant appearance of a toy shrouded in sophistication



David Frederick Mahon, Tres bon (make circle with forefinger and thumb), 2014, material: wooden speaker box, motor, Bon Tempì organ.

In place of a dry artist's statement, Mahon inserted a poem which starts with a line *I dream of you* and ends with *I am your dream artist*. In between the two he gives a salient and honest profile of an inventive artists with sense of humour.

Rachael Campbell-Palmer constructed a circular timber structure from which were suspended on a rope spheres destined to be smashed against one another. I saw just the debris of the Activity 1:3 Embrace Indecision Conquer all Obstacles, 2014



Rachael Campbell-Palmer, Activity 1:3 Embrace Indecision Conquer All Obstacles, 2014, Construction timber, polyester rope, Crystacal R, galvanized bolts, gloss paint, PVC foil.



Her rendering of play facilitates to heighten an awareness of the similarity between the joy of both construction and destruction – as observable in childhood. In adulthood the disability to perceive the difference between the two requires deviant character. The exhibition was about touching works

of art in opposition to the ubiquitous warnings in galleries and museums. Looking at the broken spheres – just one line: Ne touchez pas – il est brise.

DSNT (Oisín O'Brien) projected a multicoloured “stain” which pulsated at variable speed and depth on the white wall – both escaping accurate observation. The guessing and catching up was highly enjoyable, difficulty to register and to remember the changes had not diminished the intoxicating high speed cognitive play of hues.



Titled *prtclez m8*, 2014, it was made with MacBook, projector, xbox connect and laser eyez (I guess that is the software), and continuously changed its size and appearance – in relation to people moving in front of the image.

Helen MacMahon used an enclosed dark space for her light installation, mentioned in the title of this post. That decision anchored it in a scale of a domestic interior and life size bodies.



Her *Polychromatic Shadow Configuration Device* re-conciliates art and non-art, optics and aesthetics – they all remain themselves while becoming a new visible entity. Separate and integrated? This is clearly a paradox. Indeed, but one that has been understood by artists for millenia. Spirit and substance, form and content remain opposed and integral in Leonardo da Vinci. Not just artists, also thinkers engaged with that concept. Marcilio Ficino famously asserted that were the materials and instruments available to people, they would have shown their artistry by recreating the heavens. MacMahon does not represent the light per se, but the way in which an idea may be made visible. The idea is in the light, in the matter. We are drawn away from how it works and how it is made. We provoke the rays by moving in front of the projection not to see an illusion, but to evoke the beauty of the natural law. The order and number of colours and tones depends on distance, angle and timing.



Transformation is happening spontaneously as a result of free play.





As E H Gombrich (in *Symbolic Images*) suggested it is towards the intuition of the participating viewer that the appeal is ultimately made.



An objective level of truth connects to the imaginative subject via a play with the installed set up, a process which posits the intrinsic value of art in terms of its effect on the viewer, and its place in the aesthetic experience.

The external object of perception is an image of the viewer's being, it is made by her free volition.

Whenever art enhances freedom, be it for an individual person or a society, it touches upon the tradition, which is referred to as "classical". The emphasis is on *vita activa*, the focus is on the relationship between the viewer and art, on the participatory and re-creative experience a work of art may offer. This idea was well understood by the renaissance artists, it appears in Leon B. Alberti's theories. Thanks to E Panofsky's *Idea (A concept in Art Theory)* the Ficino's central theoretical tenets are readily accessible in English. There is more. At one point Ficino describes the artistic strategy of Botticelli: to represent earthly beauty through its inherent formal principles of line and motion, beauty is at once a form of the body, and it is not the same as body. Abstracting from matter leads into matter, the function of the visible image is to raise the mind above the image without leaving the image behind. Concordia Discors.

A resonance with similar concept made visible by Janet Echelman +Google in Vancouver recently contributed to the good feeling about the TACTILE exhibition.



Image courtesy DesignBoom, 20/03/2014

All other images courtesy of Jordan Hutchings.

Original review can be found at -

<https://slavkasverakova.wordpress.com/2014/03/22/helen-macmahon-polychromatic-shadow-configuration-device-2013-at-catalyst-arts-belfast/#more-2052>

The Irish Times

High grade art from this year's graduate crop

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[Aidan Dunne](#)

There are terrific things to see, and on occasion hear, at this year's art-school graduate exhibitions. You never know what to expect.

At Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology, for example, [Declan Graham](#) ushered visitors into a school counsellor's office and into the mind of an imagined, troubled boy, [David Crow](#). The walls were embellished with clusters of Crow's densely worked drawings, in which he tries to make sense of inner and outer worlds that seem equally strange and disturbing to his mind. The counsellor's notes lay on the desk. Graham's bravura installation vividly conveyed the complexity and perplexity of mental life and the strategies used in attempts to understand and cope with it.

At Cork Institute of Technology's Crawford College of Art and Design, Mark Buckeridge's tremendous performance piece is a rich musical meditation on suicidal thoughts. Historically, many musicians have art-school backgrounds, and one can see Buckeridge heading that way, but at the same time he likes the license that the fine-art context allows, mingling composition, performance, audience involvement and theatrical spectacle without being pinned down as any one thing.

Crossing boundaries

Also crossing boundaries, at Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT), [Janna Kemperman](#) devised and filmed a powerful piece of physical dance theatre, *Performer*, about how identities are fashioned to fit social structures and conventions. Conversely, Michael Dignam's compelling performative video installation at the National College of Art and Design features individuals exercising quirky personal, expressive skills in fairly brutalist urban, architectonic spaces.

Another NCAD sculpture graduate, Eva Richardson McCrea, ambitiously films sections of *Incident at Antioch*, a play by the French philosopher and theorist [Alain Badiou](#). Badiou is a darling of cultural theorists, in the mould of [Michel Foucault](#) or Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Not so much a drama as an extremely solemn political dialectic, his play explores the possibility of generating a new political reality through revolution.

Drawing on the theoretical framework laid out in his best-known philosophical work, *Being and Event*, he has very specific ideas about what is possible politically, and how, and why. Richardson McCrea's stylised treatment, with high production values, and implying links to Ireland's recent history, inescapably recalls Gerard Byrne's elaborate filmed re-enactments of cultural texts, while not being overshadowed by them.

It has become almost customary to berate graduate artists for not dealing with contemporary political or cultural events, or indeed with whatever else anyone feels they should be dealing with. This year it would be hard to make any particular charge stick. US military flights feeding through Shannon, the ban on cutting blanket bogs, surveillance technologies and practices, the legacy of the Magdalene laundries, global unrest: all are tackled very well, most of them repeatedly.

Identity, from every point of view, is perennially popular with young artists, in ways that range from

the playful (Melissa Breen's *Cosplay* photographs at IADT) to the historical (Deirdre McGing's account of an Anglo-Irish family, at Dublin Institute of Technology) to the deadly earnest (Robert McCormack's consideration of the African migrants who sell newspapers at traffic intersections, at DIT; [Matthew Ashe](#) at IADT; and [Anna Dudek](#) at CIT).

Less predictably, this year there is a resurgence of interest in optical phenomena, almost a return to op art. Rather than reflecting an infatuation with new technology, this has to do with an interest in the mechanics of perception, and it plays out in lively and inventive ways: in the work of Colm Eccles at IADT and of Helen MacMahon and [Mark Reynolds](#), both at DIT, for example.

Comparably, there's an interest in materials, and in materials not being what they seem. Sarah Doherty's sculptures, *sede vacante*, at DIT are a particularly good example: she is acutely attentive to the historical and cultural meanings of the forms and illusions she creates. Marilyn Gaffney's collages, in two and three dimensions, at Moxie Studios, are also very impressive.

It's encouraging to see young artists asking us to question the basics of looking and seeing rather than being carried away on the tidal wave of image production that has swept through contemporary culture.

Photography at both DIT and IADT has been reliably strong in recent years, and that remains broadly true, even if there's a slight dip at IADT, with several underwhelming projects – though [Lisa Burke](#), [Heber Hanly](#), [Karena Hutton](#), [John Jordan](#) and work already mentioned maintain the standard.

Certainly at DIT there are a number of terrific projects. As well as those referred to, Maciej Pastka's documentation of a marginal urban community in north Poland is memorable, as are Neil Dorgan's *War Games*, Kasia Kaminska's exploration of the Gaeltacht civil-rights movement that sprang up in Connemara in the late 1960s, [Patricia Klich](#), Treasa O'Hanlon's *Lolita* and Irene Siragusa's look at nighttime violence in Dublin.

Most accomplished

It's hardly surprising that the most accomplished exhibition overall is NCAD's master-of-fine-arts show at Moxie Studios. If you're going to see just one graduate show, make it this one. Highlights include Christine Lanney's hypnotic performance videos, Gwen Wilkinson's images of evanescence, Hannah Moore's tent installation, printmakers [Niall Naessens](#) and [Lilian Ingram](#), and Jane Giffney's intricate works with human hair.

At Moxie you'll also find a number of very good painters making up something close to a movement or school, a notional grouping that would include such more established figures as Paul Doran, Mark Swords and Fergus Feehily. They don't all make the same kind of work, but what comes across is a sympathy in outlook and attitude. At Moxie are Eveleen Murphy, [Natasha Conway](#) and [George Warren](#), and one could add two impressive BAs to that list, [Andrew Simpson](#) and [Daniel Jackman](#).

Add Diarmaid O'Sullivan and Susan O'Leary at CIT as convincing painters and it might seem perverse to suggest there is a crisis in painting.

The crisis is that painting appears to be used as a default option by students and staff who are not fundamentally engaged with it and don't ask the most obvious questions about ability and intention.

Original article can be found at www.irishtimes.com/high-grade-art-from-this-year-s-graduate-crop-1.1427480?page=2

Other reviews

Billion Journal - DIT Graduate Show. June 2013

<http://www.billionjournal.com/time/about.html>

Culture Trip - Ireland's Ten Contemporary Artists, November 2014.

<http://theculturetrip.com/europe/ireland/articles/ireland-s-10-contemporary-artists-and-where-to-find-them/>

Artfetch, Emerging Artists. March 2014

Top ten emerging artists Ireland, March 2014

<http://blog.artfetch.com/top-ten-artists-emerging-ireland/>