

PROJECT PROFILE



Iron R 2 National Sculpture Factory, Cork (7 - 12 April 2014), photo by Jedzrej Niezgodna

Ultra Violet Orange

SARAH KELLEHER PROFILES 'IRON R 2' AT THE NATIONAL SCULPTURE FACTORY (7 -12 APRIL).

JAMES L Hayes is adamant that Iron R 2 should not be called a workshop. The project – a collaboration between CIT Crawford College of Art and Design in partnership with the National Sculpture Factory – which first took place at the National Sculpture Factory in 2012, is a far more ambitious concept. The 'R' stands for research and Iron R 2 can best be understood as an intensification of Hayes's four-year-long research project into the medium of cast iron, which allows participants the rare opportunity to physically engage with the process of metal casting. The participating artists in Iron R 2 were: Tom Lyons, Serena Porrati, Sarah O'Flaherty, Rachel Fallon, Ruth E Lyons, Michael O'Hara, Kathryn Maguire, Aga Tamiola, Angela Fulcher, Nedyalka Panova and Emma Houlihan.

Hayes is an artist and educator who has been involved in metal casting since the 1990s. He spent seven years with AB Fine Art Foundry in London, working on multi-million pound projects for artists such as Rachel Whiteread, Anish Kapoor and Barry Flanagan. These projects were predominantly realised in bronze, a notoriously costly material with an imposing classical pedigree; cast iron, however, is infinitely more democratic, both as material and as a process.

Before getting down to the practical nitty-gritty of this 'not-a-workshop' workshop, it's worth considering the fairly hefty associative baggage metal casting carries with it where contemporary art practice is concerned – not all of it useful or particularly generative. Cast metal is often seen as the material of choice for the less adventurous type of public art commission: the lump in the town square, the inoffensive bust of the sportsman or public figure.

Bronze multiples are a useful way for high-end commercial galleries to capitalise on the work of their top shelf artists, allowing collectors to buy into reputations founded on more avant-garde practices or ephemeral media. In material terms, bronze is laden with the weight of history and canonical prestige whereas iron is utilitarian and prosaic, more associated with radiators, mines and bridges than fine art.

In short, metallurgy – an old school, highly technical and specialised discipline – has suffered in terms of contemporary art discourse. More recently, though, artistic strategies for production have been shifting. Materiality and processes of making are back with a vengeance. The emphatically handmade and sensuous are gaining

favor, despite, or even because of, the ubiquity of digital media and computer screen culture. There is an excitement among practitioners about engaging with new, or rather, old materials, as much for their conceptual associations as for any physical characteristics.

Grayson Perry chose to use cast iron for his *Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* (2011), drawn by its humble, utilitarian nature. More recently, Matthew Barney made the spectacularly volcanic metal casting process central to his film project *River of Fundament* (2014). So, as the pendulum of fashion in contemporary sculptural practice swings back towards an increased engagement with physical materials and processes, learning how to cast iron proved an attractive proposition to a wide range of artists.

Hayes encountered the near-obsolete process of hands-on iron casting on research trips to the United States, where it has flourished in pockets of the Midwest since the 1950s. There, iron pourers form a doughty sub-culture that gathers periodically to take part in almost tribal 'pours', where the talk tends towards a macho vein: how much your furnace can handle rather than the nuances of avant-garde sculptural trends. However, it was precisely this do-it-yourself, make-it-yourself inventiveness and resourcefulness that that Hayes wanted to transplant back to Ireland. It's a process that has much to recommend given our current 'age of austerity'; on a practical level it is attractive because it is (relatively) cheap and (relatively) accessible. Three tones of iron, the amount used during the Iron R 2 pour, costs around €450 compared to €20,000 for the same amount of bronze. The casting process is simple, verging on lo-fi, but very labour intensive. To paraphrase Debbie Allen from *Fame*, "This is where you start paying – in sweat".

To begin with, the raw material – scrap iron in the form of old radiators, fire grates and bathtubs – is broken down by hand, using brute force and lump hammers, into usable chunks. Then the casting begins. This involves creating a furnace where iron is directly melted on a stack or bed of coke (fired or cooked coal). The fuel source is taken up to white-heat temperature; the iron is then added until it melts down and around the stacked fuel source. The molten metal collects at the bottom of the furnace (known as the 'well'); the well is tapped by breaking the plug or seal on the outside of the furnace, and the liquid iron is then drained into pre-heated ladles for distribution into molds.

The molten metal can reach temperatures of between 2350-2700 degrees centigrade and the entire process requires teams of people to prepare and co-ordinate the use of the material.

It is entirely as hazardous and exhaustingly labour intensive as it sounds, but expertly facilitated and managed by a team of world leading cast iron artists and educators. This year's team included: Rian Kerrane from the University of Colorado, Denver; Matt Toole from the Savannah College of Art and Design in Georgia; Andy Griffiths from Carmarthen College, Wales; and Robert Harding from Coleg Sir Gar, Wales, supported by Donal Dilworth and Dobz O'Brien from the National Sculpture Factory. Iron R 2 expanded on the scale and ambition of Iron R, with 45 participants including established artists, students from CCAD / CIT and the Coleg Sir Gar in Wales. The increased scope of the project meant that production moved from the National Sculpture Factory to the Dynasty Space in the Marina Commercial Park – a particularly apt venue given that this site was the old Ford car plant and originally housed a multi-storey foundry block. Matt Toole's volcanic open-air performance *Meitheal na hAbhann*, midway through the week, further primed the artists for the culmination of the 'workshop', emphasising the spectacularly dramatic nature of the 'pour' by decanting molten iron from huge lever mounted buckets into waiting pyres.

Toole's performance also sharpened the audience's appreciation of the very visceral danger of working closely with molten metal and the tightly coordinated teamwork the process requires. Ultimately though, these demands were widely felt to be among Iron R 2's most exhilarating and refreshing characteristics. As Ruth E Lyons commented, studio practice for visual artists is often a solitary and isolating process, so gaining the opportunity to work intensively alongside others is re-energising and energising. Equally the immersive, physical experience of engaging with a material process from start to finish was felt by some to be almost exotic. Recent graduate and recipient of the NSF's graduate bursary award Thomas Lyons was attracted to Iron R 2 precisely because he felt it provided a contrast to the college experience, which focuses on conceptual and contextual processes rather than providing a grounding in any type of object making. Traditional sculptural practices are almost non-existent in the art education environment, he argued, so he jumped at the chance to get hands on with a 'monumental' material.

Apart from the empowering lift of acquiring a new skill and the bonding exercise of group problem solving and teamwork in a challenging environment, it was the conceptual and associative aspects of iron as a material that attracted many of the artists and students who took part. Rachel Fallon, the only 'repeat customer', having taken part in Iron R 1 and Iron R 2, continues to be drawn to the material because of its rich multiple associations with protection and defense and its centrality within the domestic environment.

Lynn Dennehey and Oisín Banville, both students at CCAD, were thrilled by the primal, elemental nature of the material. Iron is a base metal, literally an element on the periodic table, so the foundry process felt, to quote Lynn, like "melting the world". Engaging viscerally with the material during each stage of the process, from solid to liquid and back again, was also revelatory. Angela Fulcher described her encounter with the molten iron as "like having the sun in a bucket" and likened its colour to "ultra-violet orange juice".

Iron R 2 succeeded in contradicting any preconceptions that cast iron is an outdated or conceptually exhausted medium. Rather, the opportunity to engage with a material and a process with such a rich, traditional heritage was felt by many to be creatively exciting. As an educational experience, it was by all accounts unrivalled. As Rachel Fallon commented, there are few opportunities for artists who want to learn metal casting; most art colleges no longer have furnaces. Iron R 2's openness to the conceptual properties of the material, its demonstration of the elemental, performative nature of the process, as well as the exhilarating opportunity it gave artists to learn a new, practical skill proved a heady, satisfying mix for the participants. Ultimately, to quote Lynn Marie Dennehey, it allowed artists the chance to reconnect with "the satisfaction of working really hard and the joy of simply making".

Sarah Kelleher is an independent arts writer based in Cork and a recent graduate from the MA in Modern and Contemporary Art in UCC. She is currently working at the National Sculpture Factory in Cork, is the editorial assistant of Enclave Review and a teaching assistant within the History of Art Department at UCC.

Donald Judd: *Untitled*, 1965

Judd Foundation, Marfa, Texas

Shep Steiner

One of the surprises of visiting the Judd Foundation confronts the visitor at the entrance to the West Building of La Mansana de Chinati. *Untitled* (1965, 56 x 127 x 94cm) in brown enamel on hot rolled steel is positioned lengthwise relative to the doorway and at a distance of about fifteen feet. The so-called 'floor box' is carefully placed to be the first work viewed, and of course, it goes without saying that Donald Judd himself installed the work as well as the nine other 'firsts' which fill the space. Just beyond it, for example, there is the first floor box to contain a Fibonacci progression: *Untitled* (1964). And beside this yet another floor box that constitutes the first example in the artist's corpus of materials subcontracted out to Bernstein Brothers Sheet Metal Specialties Incorporated: *Untitled* (1964). Evidently Judd had the brass sidewalls of the piece fabricated by the Bernstein Brothers while he and his father built the red enamel drip tray, which constitutes the tabletop.

In any case, with a high strip of windows on the wall opposite backlighting *Untitled* (1965), the momentary effect upon entering the building is of seeing in black and white. The staging is highly calculated to say the least, right down to the step up and back down to floor level necessary to cross the threshold from outside to inside. What strikes one as so curious about the work and its placement is how supremely unaesthetic it all is. I would not hesitate to characterize it even as an object to be disregarded and bypassed for other more interesting works—the red coloring of the two other floor boxes are both real temptations for the eye. The brown colour is the main motor here. In addition to making the work extremely difficult to see, one cannot help but condemn the artist for his poor choice of palette. The tabletop itself concentrates these problems. Unlike the sidewalls, which pick up the stable values of the concrete floor, and take on a uniform hue that one wants to call true to the material nature of the hot-rolled steel that Judd uses in this work for the first time, the horizontal surface of the recessed table top refuses to settle down into a homogenous brown. The high-gloss finish catches all manner of stray light. It is mottled and darkened by shadows, glare from the ceiling bounces off it, and, last but not least, it showcases a dazzling array of natural light that floods in from the opposite strip of windows. This play of shadow and light is supremely distracting and strikes one as not properly of the work. However, in contrast to the darkly shaded inside surface of the two-inch inset that frames the flat, it is clear that the mobile play of pink, blue, and white light is intentional. The rigidity and stability of the two-inch rim quarantines the play of reflections, puts the incidental nature of reflection in specific tension with the intrinsic qualities of the brown surface coat, and even brings to a focus the possibility that looking at the table top is the work's primary purpose. Despite the relative simplicity of *Untitled* (1965), especially in comparison to Judd's earlier floor boxes, there is a complexity of effects that is not only dazzling, but which has gone completely unnoticed in the literature. One just cannot fail to note that there is a transparency that inheres in the light brown colouration, that the dark brown of the inside rim takes on the characteristics of an appliqué strip, and that the coloured highlights take their place on the recessed surface of the tabletop as an illusionistic focal point. *Untitled* (1965) provides nothing less than an analytics of surface effects.

Judd's basic trajectory away from painting toward work in three-dimensions is well known. What *Untitled* (1965) makes perspicuous is also his difficult, even cryptic, return to painting—one might call it his return to modernism in a minimal way. The crucial experience in face of this object—and, we should add, in face of the other two floor boxes in the West Building—is focused in and on the tabletop. In the encounter with *Untitled* (1965) specifically, the beholder looks *into* as well as *onto* the surface of the recessed tabletop as one would a death's-head in an open coffin (an effect even more pronounced in the wall-mounted progression *Untitled* [1964] in brass and blue lacquer on galvanized iron). The image appears as the most fragile and coveted of things. Recessed to a depth of two inches relative to the rim it takes the form of a precious thing once lost, here



Donald Judd: *Untitled* (1965) © Judd Foundation / VAGA (NY) / IVARO 2010

conjured back to life, and now miraculously held as if in cupped hands. The anthropomorphic character of the combined illusion and support is precise; the image only appears as a function of the safety and distance provided by the rim and the obdurate sidewalls that make up the minimalist cube. The illusion of depth on, and, impossibly, as surface, the illusion of a positive world of color—of pastel pinks, turquoises, and whites—conjured out of and as the color brown, is breathtaking.

The upshot of all of this amounts to a fairly dramatic rereading of Judd's practice, which I will not go into here, other than suggesting four telescoped points. 1) Relative to existing Judd scholarship, all of which uses the artist's famous text, 'Specific Objects' (1965), as a primary point of departure, a very different picture of Judd's minimalism emerges from confronting his actual works. 2) In a work like Judd's *Untitled* (1965) we see a particular moment in the development of a very tense relationship between what we can call the 'inert support' and conversely the 'localized illusionistic surface.' 3) If

in 1964-65 this 'inert support' is a distinct modality of the object, describable in objective terms and separate from an aesthetic mode of reception keyed to 'localised illusion,' within a year these terms will become impossible to disentangle from one another. The principle reason for this being that if this tension was intrinsic to the object in 1964-65, it will in a very short time, undergo an expansion to the extent of ultimately embodying the relationship between the object and the *mis-en-scène* of the gallery, with the object serving as inert support for the illusionistic activation of surrounding space, and vice versa. 4) In its largest sense *Untitled* (1965) amounts to one attempt in a string of attempts to reinvent the notion of a medium, a project Judd will return to again and again and again. Marfa tells us this and much more.

Shep Steiner is a critic based in Vancouver. He is currently working on a book-length study of post-war modernist art: *Mnemotechnical Bodies: Close Readings in Modernist Sculpture, Painting, and Criticism: 1950-1970*.

James Hayes: Looking into the Light of Dark Matters

Droichead Arts Centre, Drogheda

Tina Kinsella

The humble, routine object regularly takes centre stage in the work of James Hayes. Re-framed and de-familiarised in a bizarre, off-kilter, vaguely vertiginous manner, the commonplace object assumes a supernatural status; it morphs into a fetish, a juj, a talisman.

In his last exhibition, *In Memory of Hostile Things* at the Limerick Printmaker's Studio and Gallery, Hayes cast the domestic fly-swat in the starring role; he sculpted it in heavy bronze, mounted it on four plinths, and made it emit buzzing, insect-like sounds. With his current installation at the Droichead Arts Centre, Hayes returns to everyday objects once again: here, sculpted wax and bronze replicas of polystyrene jet planes and a video projection of revolving wind turbines are accompanied by a droning, pulsing audio track.

You hear this work before you see it. The gallery space is divided by an expanse of blank white wall which obscures the main exhibition area from view. A displaced humming noise whirs and vibrates rather ominously in the recesses of the dimly-lit interior. On the other side of the partitioning wall, at the far end of the room, a split-screen digital video is being projected. Shot close-up and from varying angles, two wind turbines are slowly rotating. The intervening floor space is occupied by twelve sculptural jet planes elevated at various heights on quadripods that look strangely like electricity pylons; their tails face the screen, their noses point at the incoming visitor. One lone jet plane sits atop a quadripod facing the projected video. This singular jet is flanked on either side by the other twelve planes, six on each side, as if in battle formation. Their shadows fall across the screen of turbines and multiply along the floor. Meanwhile, the audio track continues to throb quietly in the background. Do we hear the sound of wind turbines turning or jets stealthily flying? We are not entirely sure. The overall effect is unsettling, even a little uncanny.

In his essay *Das Unheimliche* (1919) Sigmund Freud explored the etymology of the German word *unheimlich* (which in English we translate as 'uncanny'). He observed that the uncanny is not simply that which we find frightening, eerie or grotesque but that which we specifically encounter as unhomely. In other words, implicit in experiencing something as uncanny we are aware that we once knew it and recognised it as 'homely'. He writes:

'This uncanny element is actually nothing new or strange but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed ... an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function of and significance of what it symbolises.' (Freud, 'The Uncanny' [1919])

The homely and the unhomely are powerfully set in tension in this installation. Hayes manages to make the form and propellers of the wind turbines

unavoidably reminiscent of the form and propellers of the blackened and bronzed sculpted jet planes, yet the textural surface of the objects - the planes sculpted and the turbines projected - doesn't allow for too easy a fit. The monotonously drumming audio track - at once the sound of circling wind turbines and the hum of planes - further disturbs the placement of and conversation between the objects. The interplay of sound and form seems to suggest that the planes and turbines are one and the same object, but not quite. Overhead, the glass apex in the roof sheds no natural light. Instead, the space is artificially lit, softly, by a few roof-mounted spotlights which cast a diffused light over the oily, pliable texture of the twelve planes modelled from wax and the burnished lustre of the single plane cast in bronze. The shape is the same but the textures seem to be interrogating each other. Adding further textural and denotative intrigue, Hayes has sculpted the surface of the wax planes to mimic polystyrene. The use of wax - a natural hard-wearing yet impermanent substance capable of mutating between both liquid and solid form - and the evocation of polystyrene - a man-made, brittle, non-biodegradable material suggestive of industrial process and fabrication - highlights pertinent issues such as temporality and sustainability. Still, the wind turbines continue to circle and though their form harkens toward that of the jet planes, the turbines themselves remain austere white and strangely petrified on the enormous video screen. They continue to rotate mechanically, reliably, and rather beautifully in the background. They are pristine, bright and gigantic. There is something rather Orwellian about the whole scene.

Homely and unhomely. Hayes's installation brings a heightened awareness to the objects on view. The wind turbine is purportedly the harbinger of a new, environmentally enlightened age and the plane is symbolically emblematic of relentless industrialised energy consumption. That is the official line. Hayes's installation places such presumptions in contention. The ideological and political discourses concerning energy generation and consumption, which situate

our energy use and abuse in a paradigmatic binary, are being critiqued. In heralding the wind turbine as a saviour in the face of progressive ecological global devastation are we simply trying to find a quick-fit, desperate cure-all? Is the wind turbine an ecological panacea or a political placebo? Or simply a marketing ruse?

Hayes's work asks us to question our own complicity with the ideological discourses that enable us to soothe our conscience regarding our interactions with our planet and, thereby, with each other. The questions

his installation raises are not so easily answered but they are concerns worth raising. A week after seeing this work, the droning of turbines (or jet planes?) is far from a distant memory. I suppose that is a good thing.

Tina Kinsella is a PhD candidate at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin. *James Hayes: Looking into the Light of Dark Matters* was on view, 3 September – 4 October 2010.

The Black Mariah CCAD/LSAD Graduate Selection

Triskel @ ESB Substation, Cork

This exhibition says as much about the fundamental pedagogies of the art colleges these artists indirectly represent as it does about the health of the Irish art world.

The practices of the Crawford graduates are immersed in matters of medium, almost to the point of fetishism: the simultaneously surreal and flat / formal acrylic painting of Collette Cronin, reminiscent of a slightly disturbed dream in a land of 3D SketchUp; the architectural ceramic work by Kevin Callaghan, creatively colliding built forms from the East and West to create a hybrid of unknown origin, fashioned in rugged red clay; the 'terrible beauty' of materials failing under duress and incandescence in Molly King's transformative lard sculpture; and James Greenway's silent exploration of the innate qualities of super 8 film - loops of crackling footage drifting back and forth, almost whispering nostalgia for a forgotten time.

This aesthetically inclined work was directly countered by the more conceptually weighed pieces from the Limerick School of Art graduates. Maurice Reidy's malevolent photographs bring you psychologically outside of the frame, while Aideen Greenlee tackles serious issues of female representation and voyeurism by concocting what could be described as 'Woman's Weekly porn'. Sarah Feehily's stainless steel Judd-like sculptures nearly steal the show: simple steel forms folded and reflected at times in ice cold mirrors, all untitled and all demanding possession of a space that is more rough than ready.

This exhibition was a smart attempt to marry the two schools of practice, one which would have been helped, however, by giving all of the artists equal exposure. But either way an exciting exhibition, full of the friskiness of the next generation.

(not art)

The Black Mariah CCAD/LSAD Graduate Selection was on view at Triskel @ ESB Substation, 15 August – 5 September 2010.



James Hayes: *Looking into the Light of Dark Matters...* (2010). Installation shot. Courtesy of the artist.



Looking into the Light of Dark Matters.. 2010
cast wax, welded steel, cast bronze, digital audio and video
Exhibited various: Droichead Arts Centre,
Good Children Gallery, New Orleans



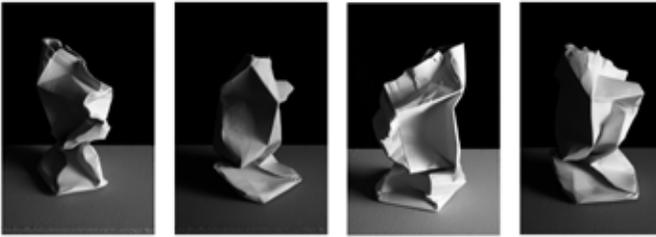
in an attempt to find the rights words (detail) 2009/10
cast bronze multiple x 2500 bronze pencils.
Location: Aras Inis Gluaise, Co.Mayo



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cast bronze multiple x 2500 bronze pencils.
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A Room Full of Domestic Bliss'
cast bronze/spray and MDF plinths
Exhibited various: Ev+a-2008, Philadelphia Icebox



Crushed 2006
cast bronze & spray paint
Exhibited various



Ball of Twine (1 & 2) 2003
Cast bronze & patina
Exhibited Various



Ball of Twine (1 & 2) 2003
Cast bronze & patina
Exhibited Various