

Postgraduate Education

Expanded Sculpture

AUDREY WALSH OUTLINES THE RECENT IADT MA EXHIBITION 'UNASSEMBLED' AT THE LAB GALLERY.



Anishta Chooramun, *Taking A Bow*, 2020 (sculpture); Lisa Freeman, *Brows For Days*, 2020 (digital video and vinyl; photograph by Jamin Keogh)

EVEN THOUGH THE term sculpture continues to be employed largely to describe the construction and situation of an artwork in a space, the possibilities of expanding sculpture beyond its physical properties into differently defined spaces – relating to ideas, sound, movement, light and virtual reality – was rigorously explored in a recent exhibition, 'Unassembled', at The LAB Gallery (16–19 January). Academics have taken different stances when evaluating the sculptural space, with critics like Rosalind Krauss analysing the encounter between spectator and artwork, and artists such as Joseph Beuys instead describing sculpture in terms of conceptual practice. It is interesting to bear these kinds of theoretical differences in mind, when looking at this show, curated by Julia Moustacchi, which presented the practice-based research of ten artists at the conclusion of their IADT Masters in Art and Research Collaboration (ARC).

Looking broadly at the work in this exhibition, it is clear that sculpture was employed in some sense by many of the artists, in most cases forming part of a multidisciplinary practice, rather than as a standalone media. Anishta Chooramun – the only artist in this exhibition who defines herself exclusively as a sculptor – invited a classical Indian Kathak dancer to perform in the space alongside her work, *Taking A Bow*, with the performance beautifully demonstrating her collaborative research process. It was interesting for the artist and curator to include this element of Chooramun's process which, while it was expressed in the final artwork, was in itself a completely distinct encounter for the spectator, allowing them to engage with both the material form of the physical work and also the conceptual framework behind it.

Other forms of expanded sculpture in the exhibition included installations which were not limited to the experience of one object but were accompanied by screen-based or virtual technologies. A striking example of this was Marie Phelan's work *Shapeshifter*. Here she used video, audio and sculpture to draw on the acoustic properties of a specific site in County Roscommon, with haunting field recordings of crows at

dusk permeating the gallery, emanating from her eerie beak-headed figures.

'Unassembled' engaged with the concept that the ideal space of the exhibition has changed for artists, curators and art audiences. Artists and curators have traditionally used models and drawings to plan and design exhibitions. In recent years, however, newer technologies of pre-visualisation have become more widespread in art production. Artists are finding new ways to display artworks and explore alternatives to conventional physical exhibition spaces. This sense of exploration was particularly evident in Lisa Freeman's work, *Brows for Days*, an audio installation with digital video on flat screen TV. Her drawing and text-based vinyl works were placed both inside and outside the gallery, engaging with the formal properties of the architecture of the space. Her work played with familiar symbols and fonts, arranging a contradictory assembly of chaos. Here, the idea of the gallery space as part of the installation was explored in depth and Freeman was unrestrained in her use of space and light, reaching onto the street outside to draw it back into her work. Her choice of colour for the vinyl was fresh and lively and held the viewer's attention in the busy exhibition space.

Continuing this exploration of the gallery space itself as a trope, were Marie-Louise Halpenny's striking, large-scale photographic prints, titled *Gang of 20*, *Blind in One Eye* and *103 Previous Convictions*. At first glance, her seemingly innocuous urban scenes had a steely presence, with the clarity of post-produced images. On closer inspection, their setting between two columns of text, with a string of words (like 'brawl', 'dark', 'feral' and 'rampage') gave them a darker tone. This language was extracted from journalistic accounts of street crime and violence that had occurred at the locations of her shots. Taken in isolation, these words felt like a frame to the architectural images; however, the text-image combination created something altogether more meaningful and disturbing.

Audrey Walshe is an artist/researcher and IADT ARC MA student.

The Body That Makes

CHLOE AUSTIN DISCUSSES THE ULSTER UNIVERSITY MFA INTERIM EXHIBITION, 'KEEP-DRY', AT CATALYST ARTS, BELFAST.

DIVISIONS, ROOMS AND corners at Catalyst Arts are occupied by a variety of mediums. Through the positioning and the presence of these works, a sense of wonder and memory is evoked. Key themes surface as one navigates the space: texture, scale, place, edge and light. Each artist aims to introduce new modes of communication through use of sculpture, video, sound and painting.

Vasiliki Stasinaki's, *Hellenism*, is a work that commands attention. Three monitors are stacked like a pillar, surrounded by freestanding Greek statuettes. You feel the urge to come close, to study the carefully casted female faces, which embody the emotions coming from the screens. The work addresses (dis)connection of place, a striking theme that also underpins Sarah Smith's *Loom*, which focuses on the historical struggle for interconnectivity of women referencing labour. The entanglement of the loom threatens us, towers over us, as the body that 'makes' is displaced by the body that 'perceives'.

A sculptural installation by John Connolly displays an assortment of found and made objects, elevating them from the floor of the gallery using a plinth, which becomes part of the work and showcases his interest in methods of display. In the process of looking at the intimate canvases of Saffron Monks-Smith, our bodies are controlled. We move closer to view these small pieces that seek to capture our fear of darkness and our fascination with the unknown. On the opposing wall, we encounter Gemma Kirkpatrick's painting series, *A House Made of Sugar*. On a larger scale and using a tense colour palette, we are confronted with lost objects and forgotten spaces. Objects find themselves take the place of figures, and human gestures exist within the shadows. There are connections between Kirkpatrick's paintings and Stephanie Tanney's sculptural installation. Exploring narratives of home and displacement, we are invited to explore her manipulated wardrobe, catching glimpses of different angles, via a mirror placed behind the structure. Through use of lighting, the piece is highly complimented by expressive shadows. Both artists transform our perceptions of objecthood and value, creating curious juxtapositions and experiences.

A sculptural video installation by Nollaig Molloy is situated in an enclosed space. Two vid-

eo works, projected onto a table, are accompanied by audio narration. The work seeks to explore the values of craft in a contemporary context, posing questions about gesture and abstraction in the action of making. Similarly, Dominic McKee-own's sharp and exposed sculptures emphasise the importance of process. The relationship between metal and cement is dramatised by lights, casting harsh shadows. The materials are manipulated and exposed, connected and disconnected. Similar material concerns run through my video installation, *Loved to Death*, comprising close-up and confrontational images of exposed flesh, supported by a text piece. Here, the body lives as something fragmented and desecrated; the body is the object. Fragmentation also occurs in Sinead O'Neill-Nicholl's performative sound piece, *Fuck You Up*, which invites viewers to ascend a ladder into an enclosed space, where they encounter a powerful deconstruction of the female voice.

Jennifer Alexander's *Bonnie is, Just Over a Few Horizons*, displays her interest in process and memory. This large-scale piece features projected images, which illuminate the unique texture of the canvas. There is specific emphasis on distortion of image and memories over time. Further examining this relationship, Valanti Athanasiou uses abstraction to challenge conventional perception and thinking. Her projection displays patterns supported by spoken word, promoting feelings of tranquillity and consciousness. Rosemary McMillen's video installation conveys modes of communication between feeling and thought, reality and abstraction. Video projected onto casted pots, highlights performative aspects that can exist within contemporary sculptural practices.

Developed in line with popular culture, contemporary sculptural practices have embraced abstraction, futurism and installation, among other approaches. 'KEEP-DRY' has successfully managed to combine a diversity of mediums and is a prime example of how sculpture has evolved to truly expose ideas of presence and wonder.

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'KEEP-DRY' (9 to 17 January), installation view, Catalyst Arts, Belfast; photograph by Trevor Wilson, courtesy of MFA 2nd Year Students and Catalyst Arts