

Anthony Cleary's work Pulled into existence (through tension) explores the connections and interfaces between familiar forms and materials. His work often responds to urban environments of structure and assembly, drawing from the architectural, the constructed, the precise, and the engineered. The materials he uses are diverse, ranging from ash incorporated to stainless steel and Eco-concrete. His sculptural works also sometimes form new associations. Many of his works specifically reference industrial and urban infrastructure, or yacht and aircraft construction. He is also fascinated by trimlines, street signage and road markings, both both official and unofficial. At its core, Anthony's work explores tension, balance, asymmetry and contrast as catalysts for insight and understanding. He manipulates structure and spatial form to control movement, balance, and energy, to create works that are kinetic and dynamic, sprung and poised, pulled into existence by tension.

Dermot Blighe is a multidisciplinary artist working with sculpture, film and sound. His experience of working on large scale film productions strongly influences his art practice, which is concerned with models of reality and fiction, and the tension between surface appearances and function. His work draws from research in historiography, science fiction literature, philosophy, visual culture and music. He is interested in the aging materiality of modernist architecture. The objects he creates are a hybrid reconfiguration of the antique, the functional and the imagined, combining the familiar and abstract, built form as a response to the lived experience of urban spaces and infrastructure, built form as a response to the lived organic entities to form a new wildcity, places that are open and yet confining. The intruders is an acoustic sculpture incorporating an arrangement of found objects. It is a noise-creating form that harnesses the energy of multiple things, giving them a kind of life. The intruders is an element of Blighe's ongoing project The Keep, which responds to a shift in reality, elicited by the rise of new technologies and neoliberal economics.

Artists

Astrid Newman is an artist and curator living and working in Dublin. She has exhibited and performed in numerous spaces including Market Gallery, Glasgow; The Royal Irish Academy, Dublin; Kat Hole Gallery, Tokyo; Newlyn Gallery, Cornwall; Glabe House, Donegal and The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh. In 2019 she completed an MA in Art and Research Collaboration (ARC), during which time she was awarded a practice-based curatorial research residency at The LAB Gallery, Dublin. She is a previous co-director of Embassy Gallery, Edinburgh and is co-founder of conchry, an online platform publishing forthcoming interviews from around the globe. In 2019, along with Becka Butler and Clara Roche she was awarded the Westford County Council Percent for Art Commission. She is working on a curatorial project exploring hospitality, funded by an Arts Council Project Award.

Curators' Biography

wax rhapsodic

Curated by Astrid Newman

Dermot Blighe, Anthony Cleary, Frances Hennigan, Oona Hyland, Dīaa Lagan, Elida Maiques, Gillian O'Shea, Lucy Peters, John Roch Simons, Cathy Scullion, Izabela Szczutkowska

The LAB Gallery
Wednesday 12 January to Saturday 22 January 2022

Dīaa Lagan is a multidisciplinary artist originally from Aleppo, Syria. Through sculptural installations and intimate paintings, he explores the complexities and contradictions he has experienced as a Middle Eastern immigrant to the Western world. He views his work as an exploration of the fragile and fluid relationships that connect heritage and spoken folklore, and how these relationships are shaped and reshaped by contemporary social and political forces. His paintings and sculptures often directly reference Islamic art and architecture, using light and shadow to explore geometric and organic forms. In particular, he investigates the role of forms within traditional decorative writing that are specific to Arabic calligraphy. Many of his works investigate how a sense of belonging can be achieved while being a stranger, and how the self is continually formed and articulated while in a state of temporary permanence. Dīaa's practice serves as a meditation on identity and rebirth, amid the perplexity of transnationalism.

Oona Hyland's work Active Forgetting highlights an institutional massacre which took place in Irish Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries, between 1922 and 1998. This work is an exploration of insidious trauma from both a personal and political viewpoint. Active Forgetting is concerned with the power of trauma, which can be intergenerationally transferred. It does not judge and can haunt the children of survivors. The unspoken grief of minority subjects is another concern. Erasure is an important theme in this project and integral to the material process of production. Active Forgetting consists of experimental works, realised primarily through print, but also through film and alternative photography processes such as Cymotype. Hyland's film Touching Time is made in collaboration with Anna Viola Hallberg. Like Hyland, Hallberg is concerned with ideas of 'whiteness', marginalisation and the saggeat, and the legacy of betrayal involving both people and institutions of the state (as Hannah Arendt would say the 'banality of evil'). Active Forgetting explores these ideas, not to illustrate them but to embody them through the process of making.

Frances Hennigan's work leads the viewer into the gaming world. Her video guides you through a desolate and bleak landscape on the quest of the player. Your favourite streamer plays for your entertainment. She seems to sparkle, perfect in pink. She addresses you, and only you, in her sweet, soft voice. Through the camera, she shares with you her intimate thoughts about this world. Where does she end and the character begin? How does her tender, honest, alluring tone make you feel? Could you share your honest opinions here, in this space? What do others dislike about you? Have you ever been ignored? How long can you tolerate being alone? Are you different than your own? Could you love here? Where can you go when there is no space where you can belong? How do your needs for human connection get met when you're somewhere you don't feel you belong? Do you change your environment or adapt yourself to belong?

Lucy Peters has a background in the fashion industry and, like many people, she has become increasingly concerned with the vast volumes of mass-produced clothes that are consumed and casually thrown away. Her exploration of over consumption has encompassed research into the practices of fashion retailers, including those that are closing down, and also the strategies that have been developed by charities to manage huge warehouses full of discarded, and often worthless, fast fashion clothing. Making It Lastest is a series of soft sculptures informed by research into production and consumption practices, and the physical architecture of fashion retail display. Her sculptures are made by methodically dismantling discarded items of clothing into material components, which are then slowly woven and knotted into large textured forms. Each piece can take up to five months to complete, and each work is composed of material that has been recycled, donated or discarded.

Gillian O'Shea's practice explores themes of transformation, escapism and climatic change. Her multidisciplinary immersive installations feature soft organic paper and fabric sculptures. Lighting and audio are arranged to slowly uncover an alternative world where things are not what they seem. Pulse is an immersive video featuring a number of real and imagined curious characters in the form of miniature moving carnivorous plants which are explored through the impact of destruction. The intention of the work is to highlight the impact of destruction using the theme of a battle to explore the tensions between human power dynamics and the natural world. The work uses the metaphor of domestic greenhouses seeking to control wild plants, giving a material form to the collision between human and natural worlds.

Elida Maiques is a Wicklow-based artist with roots in Guatemala and Spain. Her long-term project I Am a Forest upholds an ethic of interdependence across generations, cultures and species. Since 2017 this project has involved seed-gathering, tree propagation and wildlife art workshops with her local school and other communities. In 2021 I Am a Forest focused prominently on birdsong, music anthropology and archaeology. In this exhibition, Maiques presents a musical notation system of her own, based on the spectrogram of Wicklow birdsong. This notation is used to create a wall drawing of blackbird music, paired with an audio piece. The audio refers to a forest performance organised by Maiques, in which a non-hierarchical orchestra of professional musicians and others played birdsong music. The instruments used included bones, claws, and tinplate (Mayan ceramic flutes), some of which are presented in the exhibition. Forest birds responded to this hummingbird orchestra and it became a trans-species performance. This event was recorded and edited into a short film, which will be released later in 2022.

ARC & The LAB Gallery

The Masters in Art and Research Collaboration (ARC) is a full time practical taught masters programme, offered by Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design & Technology. The ARC programme is co-directed by Maeve Connolly and Sinead Hogan and open to artists, critics, curators and those engaging with art in other roles. Since 2009, IADT lecturers and students have collaborated with the LAB Gallery curator Sheena Barrett on numerous projects, and in 2016 the LAB Gallery and IADT launched the ARC-LAB Gallery Curatorial Scholarship, a unique initiative in curatorial education at postgraduate level.

Acknowledgements

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Izabela Szczutkowska's practice has always revolved around the ontological question of photography as well as auto-biographical elements such as concept of home and identity. Her research is primarily led by a continuous inquiry rather than a search for the answers. Stan, meaning west in Irish, concerns the idea of choice. Not the consequence of choice, but the very moment of making it, a continuous culmination of an uncertain agency. Through the process-led exploration of two main motifs present in this project – a human body and a stone – Izabela examines intersections between what may be thought of as the internal and the external, dependent and independent. Izabela has developed an intuitive methodology where she tears out parts of photographic prints. The texture of the torn paper indicates scanning, a suggestion of what it has been. The works are displayed as spatial arrangements of prints in different sizes, in a configuration determined by lines and texture.

Cathy Scullion is a visual artist and curator based in Belfast. Taking a multidisciplinary conceptual approach to her work, Cathy explores ways in which material and process can be used to examine internal and external factors that determine the relationships we have with others. Time, process, and tactility are important in the creation and display of her work. Recently Cathy has been exploring ideas of embodiment theory through practices like weaving and stitching. As I Cannot Write takes its title from an embroidery sampler made in the 1800s, but it deals with experiences that remain current, by exploring situations when people have felt silenced or unable to speak. In this project Cathy uses gesture, movement, and ritualised physical action to question who has agency of voice, employing 'the needle as the pen' to create a form of coded communication through her stitched stories.

John Roch Simons works primarily with portraiture, in intention, Place and Legacy, he responds to a gap in history, exploring an almost forgotten good ancestor through archival and immersive field research, documentation, and interviews. Kathleen Goodfellow (1891-1980) was a philanthropic patron of the arts. Little is known of her legacy. She secured a valuable archive by secretly financing The Dublin Magazine (1926-1958), a significant artist forum, and gifted a modest and private about her philanthropy, to An Táisce. She was generous with her influence, modest and private about her philanthropy, and avoided attention. Beyond Estelita Solomon's portraits of Kathleen Goodfellow (held in the collections of the National Gallery of Ireland and The Hotel Stigo), no photograph of her exists in the public realm. Her own photographic collection was destroyed after her death, possibly at her request. This project is conceived as a portrait of Goodfellow's legacy. Beyond her name on the pillar of The Grove, her legacy is an overlooked secret. This project draws from histories of art, culture and literature to explore personal relationships with place, and emphasise the deep connections between public, private and non-human worlds.

wax rhapsodic

My number one fear is the acceleration of days.
No such thing supposedly, but I swear I can feel it.
Jenny O'Fhill, Weather

In urban landscapes, bird song has changed. Birds have transformed their call to keep pace with human noise, adopting higher notes, singing faster. The louder their surroundings, the higher the pitch.

As an environment, the gallery often forms an inconsistent soundscape. One might imagine that a flock of birds would have trouble acclimatising.

In a period during which societal, political and cultural volume is at its peak, the works in this exhibition pull together to form a rhapsody: a composition of irregular form that at times echoes our noisy surroundings; speaking to rising technologies, urban infrastructure, consumption and fraught power dynamics. Generous in its execution, the arrangement simultaneously offers up moments of quiet contemplation, intimate whispers through headphones, resting kinetic forms, evidence of slow, methodical processes that butt up against their sonorous counterparts.

wax rhapsodic brings together the work of Dermot Blighe, Anthony Cleary, Frances Hennigan, Oona Hyland, Dīaa Lagan, Elida Maiques, Gillian O'Shea, Lucy Peters, John Roch Simons, Cathy Scullion and Izabela Szczutkowska.

The exhibition is an invitation to consider the present through a collision of visual, aural and kinesthetic prompts, to reflect upon our relationship to the external and to embrace the quieter moments within the work that are, at times, difficult to reconcile.

During intervals in recent history, when as a population we were confined to our immediate surrounds, people reported a change in the vocal repertoire of birds. A study on sparrows demonstrated that while it might have seemed to human ears that bird song had gotten louder, the sparrows actually sang more quietly. Their 'sweeter, softer songs carried further given the lack of background noise'.

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