

# Making it back to the Futures

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VISUAL ART

There is evidence of the handmade in a group exhibition at the RHA, while new paintings are engrossing

THE SEVEN ARTISTS in *Futures* at the RHA share "a fascination with making" say the show's curators, Patrick T Murphy and Ruth Carroll. "With each artist the nuance of the handmade and in some cases the homemade is evident."

There are seven artists in *Futures*, so it's not really big enough to be a survey show. In these trying times survey shows are certainly becoming popular - *Noughties but Nice* at the Limerick City Gallery, to name but one - and perhaps in suggesting a common preoccupation Murphy and Carroll are hinting that the show they've selected does say something about the spirit of the age.

Let's start with the title. Rewind time almost 100 years and the Italian Futurists, currently the subject of an exhibition at Tate Modern, were embracing the promise of a mechanised, technological and, it must be said, violent future with irrational and misguided zeal. Even a cursory glance confirms that the featured artists in *Futures* are altogether more cautious and critical in their outlook.

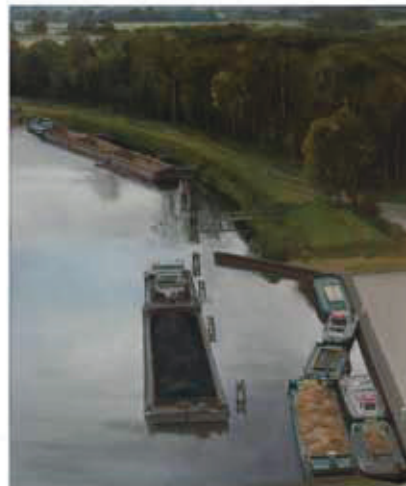
Seamus Nolan's work fits firmly under the heading of relational aesthetics, hinging as it does on intervention, direct engagement and social, political and ethical issues. It's as likely, or more likely, to turn up as a subject of discussion on Joe Duffy or in the news pages of the papers as it is in conventional visual arts media

outlets. His *Futures* piece revisits an earlier, contentious Project display (he's currently showing a filmed re-enactment of a public hearing on the Corrib gas pipeline at Project), featuring the hammers used by protesters to damage aircraft at Shannon. The hammers are displayed and documented in a context of labour and informed, intelligent dissent.

There's a dystopian air to Maria McKinney's biggest piece, an arrangement of shopping trolleys laden with what looks like masses of balloons formed by joined-up cocktail umbrellas. Three nude mannequins are in the midst of this consumerist celebration, their backs liberally studded with hundreds of burnt matches.

There might be a comment on self-destructive behaviour in all this. Indeed, shopping, obsessive behaviours and the transformation of everyday materials and objects are recurrent features of McKinney's work. Supermarket shopping baskets feature in several of her other pieces, all sprouting fantastic, woven interventions. Taken individually, though, they are much more startling and effective than they are en masse.

Though they work in different idioms entirely, there is some common ground between painters Kevin Cosgrove and Sinéad Ni Mhaonaigh, in that both view the artistic process, and a picture in the making, as a space of possibility, even of transformative potential.



Kevin Cosgrove's *Barges (boat lift)*, 2009

Cosgrove has followed a consistent course since his exceptionally accomplished degree show at NCAD some years back. His subdued, representational images, made with a beautifully casual air, often feature the workshops of boat builders, surfboard or cabinet makers, or motorcycle mechanics. We also see cabin cruisers on blocks, perhaps awaiting repair, a section of a military vessel, and an office interior.

They have been described as mostly male environments, which is true, though more significantly they centre on making things, craft, skill and reaching out and exploring the world. An exploratory impulse is also evident in Cosgrove's paintings. Many of his series are built around a particular kind of space. He doesn't identify these locations literally, but they have, typically, the qualities of spaces perhaps, introducing a more ominous note, a landscape under threat.

A tactile painter, Cosgrove uses rich, creamy coats of oil paint to create sumptuous surfaces. He is judicious in his palette, using colour sparingly and well, always finding an edgy balance between austerity and lushness.