

## Visual Art round-up: Painters who break the rules

Two intriguing group exhibitions ask whether we can believe our eyes

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### What Is and What Might Be – *Ten contemporary painters*

Highlanes Gallery, Drogheda

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The Drogheda Arts Festival has been and gone but the Highlanes centrepiece show runs on into June. Its starting point was one of the most famous paintings in Europe: Hans Holbein's 1533 masterpiece *The Ambassadors*. The painting, an exercise in virtuoso realism, harbours a strange secret: an anamorphically distorted image of a skull, visible as such only when viewed from an acute angle. Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan lighted on Holbein's transgression of the rules of representation. Holbein undermines the viewer's sense of superiority, of being in control, Lacan argued, unsettling an imagined order with a glimpse of mortality staring right back at us.

Three co-curators, artist Colin Martin, Temple Bar's Cliodhna Shaffrey and Highlanes' Aoife Ruane looked for contemporary painter who similarly choose to break the rules in various ways. Most radically, perhaps, Susan Connolly seems to undo the fabric of the gallery itself, apparently peeling back a layer of wall-covering to reveal bare plaster. But the peeled layer is actually paint, and we realise we are looking at a painting. It's a visual conundrum worthy of the dialogue with Holbein that the curators have in mind.

The largest work is also site-specific, Neil Carroll's *How Many Is a Million?*, a dazzling mural that explodes, figuratively speaking, the gallery space. Carroll's constructed paintings have consistently explored the idea of using architectonic elements to make spaces that transcend architecture, and he does exactly that here. In a different vein, using geometric patterning, Miranda Blennerhassett does something comparable.

Fabrication is also at the heart of Kevin Cosgrove's *Workshop with Clock*, in which we're looking at a place where things – we are no sure what – are made and the tools and equipment used to make them, but not the things themselves, or the people who make them. What has been made is the painting. Fergus Feehily's *Cloud (reprise)* is an image of a cloud, because he says it is and we can see the resemblance once he has pointed it out: in fact it's a found piece of plywood in a found frame. You get the picture. Kevin Mooney, Mairéad O'hEocha, Mark O'Kelly, Kathy Tynan and Andrew Vickery also feature. The only problem with the show is that it leaves us wanting to see more from several of these artists, and it's easy to think of others who could happily have been included. *Until June 17th, highlanes.ie*