

Dublin: Mairead O'hEocha at Douglas Hyde Gallery and Sarah Browne at Project Arts Centre

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Mairead O'hEocha's paintings are a stealth project. Her exhibition, via An Lár (An Lár is used on Irish road signs to indicate the town center), at Trinity College's [Douglas Hyde Gallery](#) (through July 13, 2011), consists of purportedly deadpan views of contemporary Ireland. They've been accepted as such by critics and by the curator who wrote the introduction to the exhibition, which places O'hEocha in the tradition of Corot, Morandi, and Maureen Gallace (who does, indeed, paint deadpan Irish landscapes). These viewers have been taken in by the paintings' craftsmanship, the subtlety of their restrained palette, and the enduring popularity of landscape in Irish art and imagination.



Mairead O'hEocha 'Church St., Gorey, Wexford' oil on board, approx. 40 x 50 cm

Mairead O'hEocha embodies Harold Bloom's concept of belatedness; he wrote about literature, but the same can be said of the visual arts, and most particularly about painting. What can a serious painter do after Manet, Picasso, Pollock? O'hEocha shares this predicament with several generations of painters following WWII, including Fontana, Lichtenstein, Yves Klein and John Baldessari. I suspect she also shares Theodore Adorno's concern that after the horrors of the 20th Century, art cannot continue as usual. Her paintings parody the sublime, filled as they are with the lowliest of contemporary structures: box-like warehouses, garages, generic cottages and kitsch decoration intended to personalize the landscape with the degraded, mass-produced descendants of the Classical tradition.



Mairead O'hEocha 'Statue, Leighlinbridge, Carlow' oil on board, approx. 40 x 50 cm

These modest, easel-sized landscapes include everything that Irish Tourist Board images leave out: banal and littered urban and suburban spaces, mobile homes, abandoned property, bags of garbage and security cameras. And they avoid the well-developed conventions of landscape painting: a clear progression from fore to middle to background, a visible vanishing point, framing foliage

and staffage (people and animals included in landscapes to liven them and aid the composition). Her brushwork becomes more lush and impastoed in areas where the paintings represent the least, reminding us that even within representational painting, such brushwork inevitably represents not the subject, but the artist.



Mairead O'hEocha 'Workyard, Smithfield, Dublin' oil on board, 46 x 55 cm

The exhibition's title directs us to a center which is always missing, for the paintings are particularly un-centered and without focus. The wall in Church St., Gorey, Wexford obscures what might be a view beyond, yet offers too little to hold our interest. Like Gertrude Stein's famous description of Oakland, there is no there, there. One scans the abject sites for meaning and understanding which they never reveal. Some of the forms do not even resolve; what is the box-like object in front of what is presumably a mural on a courtyard wall in Workyard, Smithfield, Dublin? Or the formless, white shape on the far left of Enclosure, Unyoke, Wexford?



Mairead O'hEocha 'Enclosure, Unyoke, Wexford' oil on board, approx. 40 x 50 cm

This provocative and disturbing body of work addresses more than the Celtic Tiger, now bankrupt and in debt. It speaks to that segment of Ireland whose national myths have not caught up with industrialization, much less the world wide web; whose artistic values are stuck in a time warp that occludes the present and hence, any workable vision of the future. It is a demand to see things as they are, as a necessary first step to improving them.