

Mairead O'hEocha, Tom Molloy, Michel Huisan

Small was beautiful in 2011, as solo shows trumped bloated biennials, and the tactic of giving artists dedicated space to explore their ideas. Instead of coralling them into sprawling group shows, paid off. Mairead O'hEocha's work was lost in Dublin Contemporary, but her exhibitions "Whisper Concrete" at Butler Gallery in the spring and "Via An Lár" (Via Town Center) at Douglas Hyde Gallery during the summer allowed her paintings to effect their magic. Painted wet on wet, O'hEocha's oils have an intimate quality, showing, through her perspective gaze, Ireland's hinterlands, caught between semiurban and rural, historic and modern, pre and postrecession.



Mairead O'hEocha, *Statue at Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow*, 2011, oil on board, 19 1/3 x 25 "

"Doubt" by Tom Molloy, at Rubicon Gallery, was a distillation of the relationship between art and literature—between showing and telling. While "Convergence", a major group exhibition at Limerick City Gallery of Art, aimed to investigate the two forms, it took Molloy's direct yet subtle touch to fully connect and contrast the nature of each. The centrepiece of his show, which ran concurrently with the Limerick exhibition, was *Subplot*, 2008: a rewriting of George Orwell's *1984* in which only the lines relating to the affair between Winston Smith and Julia are reproduced, interspersed with blank spaces representing other portions of Orwell's narrative. The result made the visual relationship between their story and the rest of the novel. It was a tribute to literature and to love.

That Ireland's artists live in the shadow of the country's literary reputation was demonstrated when both Dublin Contemporary and the Lyon Biennale referenced W. B. Yeats' line "a terrible beauty is born" in their titles. Out of context, the line is relatively meaningless, and neither exhibition concerned itself overly with aesthetics, but at Lyon, the work of Michel Huisman made it all worthwhile. *No 46 (The Secret Garden)*, 1990, is a reminder that beauty may be found in the most unexpected circumstances: The viewer lies under a gray bucket of scummy water, set on a low plinth, to come face to face with a hidden, magical world. Meanwhile, *No. 74 (Surrendering Birds)*, 1999, consists of seventy-two boxes containing broken model birds clutching pathetic white flags in their beaks or claws. A text on each box reads "the manufacturer accepts no responsibility in case the bird refuses to surrender," though it was heartbreakingly clear these birds had lost the fight. Huisman's works contain a world of story particularly resonant in our present interesting times.

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