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ARTFORUM

Kilkenny

Mairead O'hEocha

BUTLER GALLERY

Kilkenny Castle

March 19–May 1

Concentrating on those parts of Ireland that are not urban yet not quite rural either, Mairead O'hEocha's paintings are small in scale but encompass concentrated narratives that hint at both pre- and postrecession Ireland.

Her pedestrian, unpopulated scenes depict roadside views of the southeast coast of Ireland. It is a part of the country that is, historically speaking, soaked in blood. From the Norman invasions to Cromwellian slaughter to the Battle of Vinegar Hill during the 1798 rebellion against British rule, this lush and fertile ground has been fought over, inch by inch. And yet O'hEocha shows it subdued, not by war and sacrifice, but by tarmac and concrete. The mundane business of living has tamed the land and made its inhabitants docile too.

Painting in oils, wet on wet, and in a style that echoes the flat aesthetic of artists such as Maureen Gallace, O'hEocha neither romanticizes nor mythologizes. Adept at the deft gesture, she shows the results of the old Irish dream of a house to call your own. What emerges is a could-be-anywhere world of refuse bins and rubbish dumps, palm trees and concrete, tacky gestures (horses and eagles on gateposts, fake castles in gardens) and humdrum hedges. These are not the scenes found in real estate or vacation brochures, but they are just as acutely and accurately Ireland as any of the country's castles, or its much-vaunted forty shades of green.



Mairead O'hEocha, *House with Miniature Round Tower, Co. Carlow, 2008*, oil on board, 15 1/2 x 19".

— Gemma Tipton

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