

John Graham, *Feeling of Knowing*, *Visual Artists' News Sheet*, Issue 6, November - December 2021



# Feeling of Knowing

JOHN GRAHAM REVIEWS A RECENT GROUP EXHIBITION AT THE COMPLEX

**THROUGH A SERIES** of commissioned responses, the four artists in 'Feeling of Knowing' seek to harness intuitive qualities to present individual artworks in dialogue with each other and with the distinctive gallery space. Tall and dramatically open to the lattice of timbers holding up the pitched roof, here and there in the rough-hewn space, steel pillars are a reminder of older industries, echoing the Victorian ironwork of the Fruit and Vegetable Market across the road. In this windowless vault, the walls become their own event, with alternate areas of exposed brick, plaster and raw concrete bearing its history as a former fruit storage and ripening facility. Refashioned over time - a concrete filled door-way is particularly mysterious - the scuffed surfaces and ancient paint remnants feel cave-like, a secret chamber discovered through excavation.

Viewers are drawn into the exhibition dialogue, an inevitable consequence of visiting the show, and also through the conversations and reference material made available on the gallery website. Curators Mark O'Gorman and Paul McGrane have a talent for fostering connections, with an ongoing series of projects that are unusually drawn out in their development, and open to unpredictable outcomes. Chatting in the space during the installation, Áine McBride described how Denis McNulty had: "Blow-torched a scaffolding pole and pushed it through". The hole thus made acts like a rear window into the works of *Perceptron (How can I be sure?)* (2021), a large suspended stack of dark grey insulation panels backgrounding a shiny red skin. Beneath this smooth membrane, glow-bars of light rotate sequentially, like fire-flies tethered to an indiscernible clock. Positioned just outside the gallery entrance, the work arrests your navigation of the space, obliging you to consider its reflective bulk while finding your way around it. Infrastructural remnant or some kind of space junk, this mysterious monolith feels like a conduit to hidden knowledge, teasing you with its quizzical intelligence.

Like a DIY moment in careful preparation, Áine McBride's *Arrangement for Four* (2021) is an assembly of laminated chipboard panels lying low to the ground. Settled within or on top of these configurations, bowls, variously made of glazed ceramic, wood or Bakelite, seem adrift across the white surfaces, the retro vessels upended or ignored, like unwanted prizes after the fair. Fixed to one of the steel columns opposite, a printed record of online transactions reveals the ironically complex escapades behind the acquisition of these low-value objects. McBride's sculptural constructions tend to form and reform according to location and context, and here, perhaps, the bowls provided a cryptic nod to the gallery's former function.



'Feeling of Knowing', installation view, The Complex, October 2021; photograph by Kate-Bowe O'Brien, courtesy the artists and The Complex

To the left of McBride's floor piece, a small painting, *Ordinary Language* (2020/2021) appears unassuming against the mottled wall. The linen surface looks oddly exposed, as though the paint was stripping it down as much as building it up, its coloured daubs and dashes suggesting a still life continuing to accumulate and decay. This is the first painting I've seen by Aleana Egan, an artist normally identified with sculpture, but whose frequently layered, object assemblages might easily be considered painterly. On another wall - this one pristine white - a trio of hung forms are slumped against gravity, their linear armatures carefully wrapped but erupting in places. Various covered in plaster, muslin and a raw silk called Noil, these *Returns* (2020/2021) seem smaller and more delicate than similar works seen previously, like the tender shoots of their more robust cousins.

If Egan's work seems vulnerable, the works shown by Conor O'Sullivan have a distinctly tough aesthetic, their hard, reflective surfaces suggesting life in some brightly lit utility. Mostly mirror and stainless steel, *Tipping Scale* (2021) repels and attracts in the way mirrors often do. Inserted into laser-cut openings, a series of photographic prints appear to show some sort of scanning device, the images flickering across the polished surface, recalling McNulty's LED lights opposite. Spotlights and strong shadows create drama in the installation overall, with some works picked out while others seem shy in the shade. A small photography by O'Sullivan, *Shutterstock* (2021), is nailed to the rough wall. Showing a view through a metal shutter into a retail or storage area, it also looks like a photograph of a photograph - another moment of hide and seek.

**John Graham is an artist based in Dublin.**

**'Feeling of Knowing' was presented in the Ground Floor Gallery at the Complex, Dublin, from 16 to 28 October 2021.**