

Building a Pallas: 20 years of modern art in Ireland

Periodical Review 20/16, curated by Brian Duggan, Sarah Glennie, Jenny Haughton and Declan Long, Pallas Projects Gallery, Dublin, 2016

By Aidan Dunne

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Over five instalments, the *Pallas Periodical Review* has developed to become a fresh, never entirely obvious take on the year's visual art in Ireland. The Review bit gives it vital leeway: besides art per se, it can include documentation and other related material. Last year it blossomed with two venues, the other being the NCAD Gallery. Not so this year (which is a pity because it was a great idea). Also this year, there's a change of emphasis. To mark Pallas's 20th birthday, four selectors looked back over art of the last 20 years, not just one. Their edited highlights are all contained in one relatively restricted venue.

The numbers are daunting. Not just four selectors – Brian Duggan, Sarah Glennie, Jenny Haughton and Declan Long – but a virtually limitless number of artists and happenings. In the event, it's a pleasingly concentrated show, but it doesn't feel over-packed, and it encompasses a broad range of projects and history with some ingenuity. Not least in the case of a boxed plywood shelf packed with compact, nicely coloured books. They are the Douglas Hyde Gallery's distinctive hardback exhibition catalogues produced from 1999-2014.

The Douglas Hyde's director, John Hutchinson, retires this month, and the exhibit is a modest though effective tribute to his distinctive curatorial tenure. While the gallery's programme has been wide-reaching, he did manage to imbue it with a sense of his own aesthetic, which is concisely summed up by a combination of quite intense, occasionally austere shows in the main space, complemented by boundary-breaking displays in Gallery 2, displays that often came under the heading of applied arts. Vitally, these latter shows, tied to everyday life, implicitly made the case for the aesthetic validity and significance of habitually downgraded craft skills. Given the mood of the times, we can only hope that Hutchinson is not succeeded by the curatorial equivalent of a Trump or a Farage.

Artist Fergus Feehily is represented not by a work hanging on the wall but by a collection of his zine-like publications produced from 2005 to 2014, an appropriate and thoughtful choice. A veritable torrent of artists and curators sweeps in under the auspices of ephemera from FOUR Gallery from 2005-2009. Issue one of Sarah Pierce's *The Metropolitan Complex Papers* (it's now up to issue 17) is there. It documents a roundtable discussion on curating, making and showing art in different locations. *The Complex*, which takes myriad forms, is Pierce's ongoing practice. Some of the key public art projects of the period are represented. There's a photograph of Dorothy Cross's 1998 Nissan Art Project *Ghost Ship*, the phosphorous-painted vessel glowing eerily by night. Seamus Nolan's *Hotel Ballymun*, from 2007, is also recalled. Less high-profile but equally eligible are Deirdre O'Mahony's *The Cross Land* for Clare County Council, Michael McLoughlin's *Mary's Dream Home* for South Dublin County Council and Aileen Lambert's *En Route* for Mayo County Council.

Every piece earns its place and manages to widen the context in some way. *Burn*, from 2002, by the late Patrick Jolley with Reynolds Reynolds, still possesses the power to shock. Clare Langan's post-apocalyptic *Too Dark for Night* from 2001 is more pertinent than ever. Amazingly, there's still space for Aquinas, Nina Canell & Robin Watkins, Willie Doherty, Anthony Haughey, Des Kenny, Isabel Nolan, Emer O'Boyle and Margaret O'Brien. Callan Workhouse Union will put in a guest appearance.

It's fatal to start thinking of what isn't there. Other selectors would certainly have come up with a substantially different show, and you're not going to encapsulate 20 years in this scale and format. But it is an impressive achievement, and demonstrates what can be done with modest resources and a great deal of hard work.

Aidan Dunne, December 2016

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