



Rita Duffy, *Ornithopter*, 2023. © Artist

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### **Artist Rita Duffy: "art is the thing that is most hopeful" in an era of cataclysm**

Rita Duffy believes in the power of art to help tackle the seemingly insurmountable global challenges of climate change, inequity and migration.

The veteran Northern Irish artist, well known for her acerbic political commentary in works such as 'The Raft Project' which replicated 19th century painting *The Raft of the Medusa* to critique Brexit politics, in this exhibition, focuses her keen gaze on migration and climate change in a soon-to-be-revealed series of exciting new works that form the backbone of her first solo exhibition in the Crawford Art Gallery.

Duffy's new triptych of paintings, *Epiphany*, *Belfast to Byzantium* and *Ornithopter*, grapple with the grotesquery of a world of socio-economic divisions against the backdrop of climate change, migration and increasing attempts to use borders as a fortress to protect the affluent .

Referencing post-Trump US politics, the 2021 Kabul airlift and the history of Northern Irish people as settlers in the US Bible Belt, the trilogy is a painful satire of global affairs, painted with a nod to Hieronymus Bosch, Brueghel and Goya.

Duffy holds a horrifying mirror up to the current state of world affairs, and yet she believes not all is bleak: art and creative thinking are our hope for the future, she says.

“I think art is the thing that is the most hopeful,” Duffy says. “There is a sense of cataclysm all around us, in our movies, our culture. It’s almost like we’re digging ourselves into the negative darkness and that’s where art’s role becomes more and more important.”

An artist known for her Northern Irish roots and her pervasive interest in social justice, she says identifying herself as nationalist in the context of the climate crisis is problematic, even as a large political shift is underway in her native Northern Ireland.

“I think there’s a phenomenal, unstoppable energy bubbling up in Ireland. Now more than ever, local politics are important as they speak to the global. There is only one issue we need to be urgently addressing and that’s climate change,” she says.

“There’s nothing else on the agenda. We’re coming into a post-nationalist state, because it doesn’t matter what your nationality is or where you’re from. If you don’t have clean water to drink or a safe place to live, waving a flag is not going to make any difference to you.”

Mary McCarthy, Director of Crawford Art Gallery says "Crawford Art Gallery continues to champion artists practice through these solo presentations as well as through group exhibitions. Duffy’s work is relevant pertinent and visually arresting. We hope our visitors will be inspired and engaged by her rich visual imagery".

Persistent Illusion by Rita Duffy is in the Gibson Galleries at the Crawford Art Gallery in Cork City from Saturday, June 10 to Sunday, October 8 2023.

**ENDS**

For additional imagery please click [here](#)

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Editor's notes: Rita Duffy is available for interview by arrangement.

### **More about Rita Duffy**

For Permanent Illusion, her first solo exhibition at Crawford Art Gallery, artist Rita Duffy presents a trilogy of new, largescale works that address urgent themes of planetary crisis and political chaos. This triptych for our times has its genesis in Duffy's intense series of small, satirical drawings, *The Emperor has No Clothes* (2020), which was recently acquired by Crawford Art Gallery for the National Collection.

Rita Duffy (b.1959) is one of the major contemporary artists to emerge from Northern Ireland. Encompassing themes and images of Irish identity, history, and politics, her work is often both personal and autobiographical. In her work, she also pays homage to the language of magic realism. A member of Aosdána, Duffy has previously been Artist-in-Residence at Trinity Long Room Hub Arts and Humanities Institute (Trinity College Dublin) and held a Leverhulme Fellowship with the Transitional Justice Institute (Ulster University) to look at the role that visual art has in post-conflict societies. She continues to work from her studio on the Cavan/Fermanagh border.

### **More about Crawford Art Gallery**

Crawford Art Gallery remain open until Autumn 2024 after which time it will close for capital redevelopment of the building.

Crawford Art Gallery is an Irish national cultural institution, dedicated to contemporary and historic visual art, located in a significant heritage building in the heart of Cork city. Offering a vibrant and dynamic programme of temporary exhibitions, it also houses a collection of national importance which tells a compelling story of Cork and Ireland over the last three centuries.

Originally built in 1724 as the city's Custom House, the Gallery is home to the famous Canova Casts, gifted to Cork two centuries ago. Featured in the Gallery's collection of more than 3,000 objects are contemporary artists Aideen Barry, Gerard Byrne, Maud Cotter, Dorothy Cross, Tacita Dean, and Sean Scully as well as much-loved works by Irish artists James Barry, Harry Clarke, Mainie Jellett, Seán Keating, Daniel Maclise, Norah McGuinness, Edith Somerville, and Jack B. Yeats.

An oasis of calm and tranquillity, Crawford Art Gallery is open seven days a week, free to enter, and a must-see for locals and tourists alike. Welcoming over 250,000 visitors annually. The Green Room at the Crawford Café serves the best of local Cork and Irish produce, treated with a light hand by chefs committed to simplicity and flavour.

### **Opening Hours**

Monday–Saturday 10:00am–5:00pm  
Late opening Thursdays until 8:00pm  
Sundays / Bank Holidays 11:00am – 4:00pm  
Open Daily | Entry Free

### **Free Tours**

Sundays and Bank Holidays 2:00pm  
Thursdays 6:30pm

This project is in support of the Night-Time Economy and funded by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media.



An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir,  
Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán  
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