

Crawford Art Gallery



Conor Clinch 'Ryan as Klaus' (2020) © Conor Clinch, Courtesy Vogue Italia

Press Release 14/01/22

Crawford Art Gallery announces a major exhibition of contemporary photography, *SATURATION: the everyday transformed*.

SATURATION: the everyday transformed will run from 29 January – 26 June 2022. The Exhibition explores recent work created by a new generation of artists who use photography to explore lives played out in front of them. Through the use of colour they create heightened moods, experiences and emotional states.

transforming the artist's everyday reality in different ways and artworks featured progress on a spectrum from heightened versions of what is still a recognisable realism to the fantastic, hyperreal and occasionally bizarre. Embracing aspects of street, music and fashion photography with elements of the documentary tradition, the exhibition makes for a display that is light-hearted, if sometimes claustrophobic, celebratory but also conscious of the fragility, as well as the beauty, of human life. Inevitably it reflects, if often accidentally, major changes in both society and technology – how photographs are taken, shared and consumed.

Whereas a preceding generation of photographic artists showed a bias towards landscape, or rather place, as subject matter, the artists here put humanity in all its colourful and gloriously messy complexity at the very centre of their practices. Their work, while sometimes no less political than that of their predecessors, foregrounds questions of personal identity through images that document an emerging – colourful – generation.

Curators William Laffan and Dawn Williams commented 'We are delighted to be working with thirteen extraordinarily talented artists who push the boundaries of colour in their photography as they transform everyday life into art'.

The exhibition will feature work by: **Dragana Jurišić, Ruth Medjber, Michael Hanna, Eva O'Leary, Pádraig Spillane, Conor Clinch, Hazel Coonagh, Megan Doherty, Cáit Fahey, Audrey Gillespie, Vittoria Colonna, Ayesha Ahmad, Niamh Swanton** and is curated by William Laffan and Dawn Williams.

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For more images click [here](#)

Notes to the Editor

A bias towards landscape, or rather place, as subject matter has been a noticeable feature of much Irish photography over recent decades while, perhaps unsurprisingly given the weightiness of some of the themes explored, a certain earnestness of approach and austerity of visual expression have often been stylistic and methodological hallmarks.

Borders, liminal spaces, contested territories, domestic and, particularly, institutional interiors – and the historical resonances that cling to them – the land and land art, architecture, cityscapes and multiple aspects of the environment have been very fruitfully explored by, among many others, Willie Doherty, Paul Seawright, Dara McGrath, Paul Gaffney, John Gerrard and Gary Coyle. While the impact of human intervention on place is very often implicit, people themselves are, more often than not, absent. Though the trend is far from limited to Ulster, this preference is neatly illustrated in a 2015 book, *After the Agreement, Contemporary Photography in Northern Ireland* by Sarah Tuck, which includes just ten photographs featuring people (and most of these explicitly reference the iconography of para-militarism). While the title of another recent book, *Where are the People? Contemporary Photographs of Belfast 2002-2010*, suggests a corrective to this overwhelming predominance of the photography of place, it includes only five photographs showing people, and overt human presence is often marginal, at best.

Two photographers from Derry, **Megan Doherty** and **Audrey**

~~Concepts~~, offer a radically different vision to this seemingly pervasive emphasis on the photography of place, or (very often empty) space – by putting humanity in all its gloriously messy complexity at the very centre of their practices. Their work, while sometimes no less political than that of their older predecessors, foregrounds questions of personal identity. Doherty photographs the youth culture of her native city creating haunting images that blend the neon-lit aesthetic of Nan Goldin with the impulse to document an emerging generation, associated with North American photographers such as

Olivia Bee or Petra Collins. Gillespie, uses saturated colour (working in 35mm format) to express heightened emotive states and explore some of the big themes of art – transience, mortality and, indeed, her own 'existential crisis with femininity'. In tackling complex subjects with rigour and subtlety, both artists have created significant – and highly original – work, extracting beguiling beauty from quotidian life.

Doherty's and Gillespie's work are included in a major exhibition at the Crawford Art Gallery, Cork, focusing on the figurative photography of a new generation of artists. In addition to its focus on lives lived, a recurring interest is the way in which colour can be used expressively to create work that is light-hearted, often witty, though, paradoxically, sometimes claustrophobic. Inevitably, much of the work also reflects, if often only accidentally, major changes in both society and technology, how photographs are taken, shared and consumed.

SATURATION: the everyday transformed takes as its theme what Susan Sontag described as 'everyday life apotheosized the kind of beauty that only the camera reveals'. Megan Doherty has articulated a very similar artistic goal or ambition, describing her 'search for beauty in the mundane'. Illustrating the transformative power of the camera is a 2017 work by **Eva O'Leary**, *Spitting Image* in which the artist photographed a group of teenage girls while they were looking at their own reflections in a mirror. A small image displayed

...as the main series of photographs shows the process through which the artwork was created and through which adolescent gaucherie is transfigured into art; the uniform backgrounds of electric blue are key here. O'Leary exposes – and plays with – the old trope that the camera does not lie. She notes; 'No matter how much I object politically or artistically to the rhetoric of commercial photography, I am seduced by its tricks – the ways it sweetens the body, masks the unpleasant, and transforms beauty and desire into myth.'

Artists transform reality in different ways and to different degrees and the show moves on a spectrum from heightened versions of what is still a recognisable realism in the work of **Cáit Fahey** and **Dragana Jurišić** to the fantastic, hyperreal and occasionally bizarre. Within the show's parameters of (mostly) colourful photography of people, the sheer range of subjects explored and artistic effects deployed can dazzle. In many instances, a certain gorgeousness of aesthetic results, but often with a slight edge of the Freudian uncanny. There is a playfulness – though not without a touch of menace – about the work of **Hazel Coonagh** – a giantess interacting with social housing – or that of **Niamh Swanton** – body parts in garden hedges. Audrey Gillespie and **Pádraig Spillane** eloquently explore specifically queer sensibilities while several of the artists are concerned with quite new strategies for the representation of gender-related issues.

A sense of the absurd underpins **Ayesha Ahmad's** evocation of the aesthetics of the American diner, while **Vittoria Colonna** offers a protean, kaleidoscopic and quasi-surrealist vision fusing her exploration of dreams, paint and escapism into digital art. Artists are variously inspired by masquerade, drag, fetish objects and the imagery of the graphic novel. Moods and emotive states evoked span the range from teenage *ennui* to high camp – the latter rather appropriately given the show's genesis, at least in part, in Sontag's writings; humour is often not far from the surface.

How colour reflects emotive states is a theme tackled by many of the artists. In a series of forty photographs, **Michael Hanna** recorded his home lit with a different colour every week. These progressed

through the spectrum from red to violet, with each week providing a new sensory living environment within the same space. The project entitled *A Living Colour Index* investigated how novel experiences play a part in memory formation and in turn set the parameters for our experience of time.

The show deliberately collapses hierarchies within photographic practice and includes work by **Ruth Medjber**, who will produce a large-scale sensorial and immersive installation evoking the swell of the crowd and the heightened emotional response of the audiences at live music events and festivals. **Conor Clinch** pushes the chromatic register to an extreme of vivid intensity to tell stories in an honest and inclusive way through his distinctive imagery and documentary-style films often inspired by his work in the fashion industry. Indeed, many of the artists featured simultaneously pursue their own artistic projects and enjoy successful commercial practices allowing for a creative slippage between the two disciplines of the sort that Eva O'Leary has articulated so well. Megan Doherty writes of her 'insatiable hunger for a world beyond the monotony of small-town life' and she and the other artists included in ***SATURATION: the everyday transformed*** offer their own versions of 'everyday life apotheosized', exemplifying in the process Sontag's evocative image of the photographer as the 'voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes'.

More about Crawford Art Gallery

Crawford Art Gallery is a National Cultural Institution in Ireland and is dedicated to contemporary and historical Irish and international visual art. Located in a significant heritage building in the heart of Cork city it is home to a collection of national importance, it offers a vibrant and dynamic programme of temporary exhibitions which probe the future, contemplate the present and reveal the past to create engaging conversations across the timelines. Originally built in 1724 as the city's Customs House, the Gallery is home to the famous Canova Casts, gifted to Cork two centuries ago. Featured in the gallery's collection of 3,000 objects are contemporary artists

Gerard Byrne, Dorothy Cross, Hughie O'Donoghue, Daphne Wright and Sean Scully alongside historic works by well-known and much-loved 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 265,000 visitors annually, the Gallery boasts an award-winning Café in stunning surroundings, serving fresh local produce for which Cork is famous.

Opening Hours

Monday–Saturday 10.00am–5.00pm

Late opening Thursdays until 8.00pm

Sundays and Bank Holidays Gallery: 11am - 4pm

Entry Free

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