

**Arena: As Above, So Below, at Green On Red Gallery by Jess Fahey, March 2025**



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# DAMIEN FLOOD: TODAY

NOVEMBER 22, 2022

WHEN I think of archaeology and anthropology, I think of three things: digging, death and Damien Flood's paintings. Over a decade ago I critically called out Flood in my first text on his paintings, *The Corrupt Geologist and the Awkward Coroner*.

Extract: "Damien Flood's paintings look like they were made by a corrupt geologist. He is knee-deep in browns, drips, rainbows, islands and mountains, that either shadow or seem to be in the act of swallowing everything whole around them. His daily painting routine is a process of excavation, when several layers of painted horizons are either covered over or dug back up, using the awkward relationship between chance and intent to uncover a corrupted space or form."

That was 2011. Later, in 2020, in the monograph essay *The Mythology of D & Me*, I wrote: "Words, words, words, and paint; the dumb reality of words and paint." I have written and spoken many dumb words about Flood's paintings. Experiencing his work today (Wednesday 16th November, 1pm) at Green on Red Gallery Dublin, I wanted to experience them as they are, without words, without sublimation — solid to gas. But here I am. That says something that I won't understand until after today.

Today I thought about civilisation. That thing we proclaim when emerging from the wilderness after being lost for days in said wilderness. The shout of CIVILISATION! as we exit the woods, dirty and almost dead, is elevated to

saviour in this context. But what are we really shouting at the moment of least hope followed by gracious relief.



Detail.

Civilisation, outside the context of despair and relief, is a society that has reached a mature and highly developed state of development in terms of human behaviour, technology, and what Michel Foucault might call “the administration”, or with sunshades and bondage gear on, “the police”. Culture is generally included in the definition of civilisation. And yet I like to think of culture as the thing that questions and criticises the foundations of civilisation, while also keeping in mind that the final resting place of culture will be, for good or ill, the tomb of civilisation, not the wilderness of culture. To my mind culture exists in efflorescence not civilisation. Civilisation is culture all grown up, secure in its own legacy. Sean Scully thinks he and his paintings are civilisation. He may be correct.

Today sunlight flashed the space like the most shameless streaker. There was a feeling that the world within and the world without were not so separate, as the excoriating sunlight shed the space of a softer skin. Revealed: the pockmarked walls; the patched-up floor; the rusty brown-orange scrawls on the ceiling, as if a metal bird had tried and failed to escape. SQUAWK! More and more I believe the setting for art determines its capacity to be more than its individual parts, more than a showroom or window display for the penniless artist, looky-loo consumer or loaded collector.



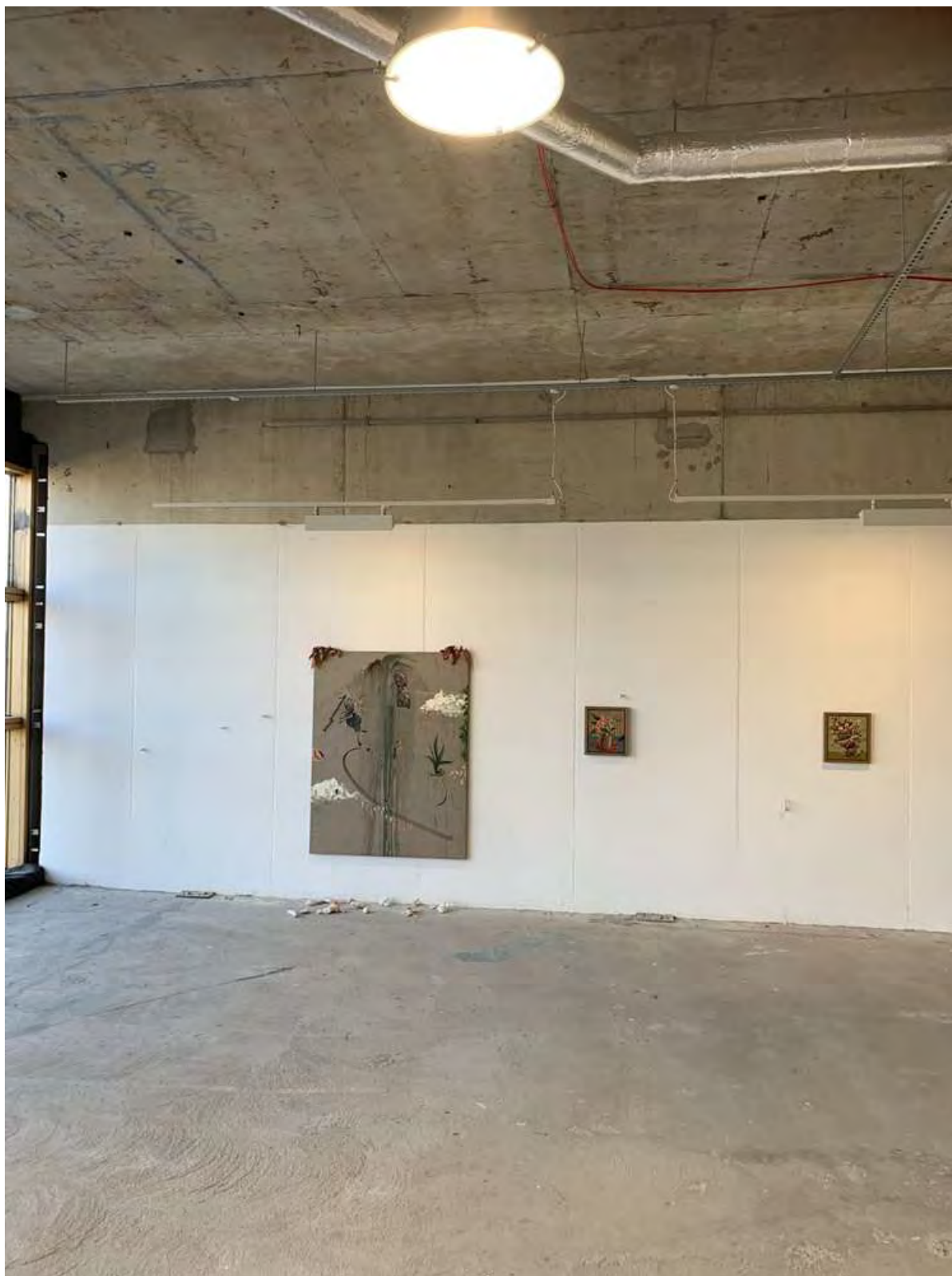
Against and within this setting, Flood's paintings infer ruined civilisation from the vantage point of the lively wilderness of painted forms. But not just from an objective looking down from the concrete and conduit rafters of

Green on Red, but ruination from one painting to the next. As I enter the gallery, paintings are full and fat with colour and paint, but gradually recede and disintegrate to end in a withering and anaemic painting at the far back wall, with bone-white broken sculptures of fruit and veg sprinkled on the floor beneath.



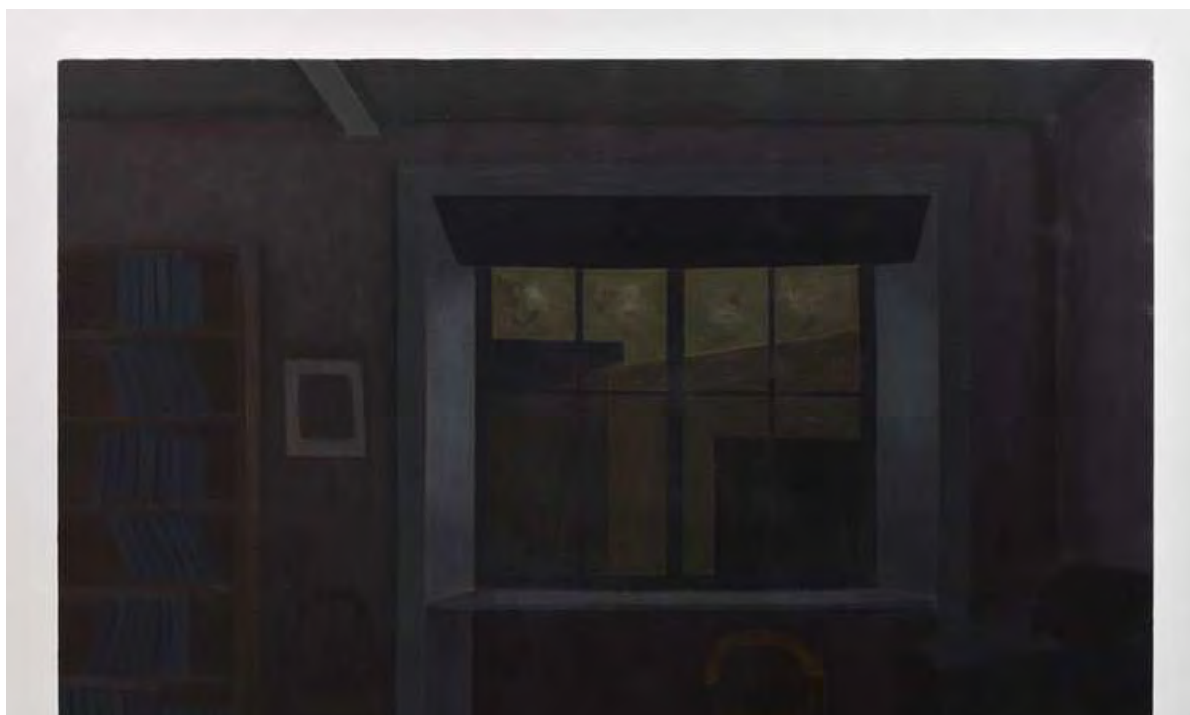
Green on Red's crumbling — but never fully gone retail potential — helps with the culture-cum-civilisation simpatico between Flood's work and the space. They know each other. Standing here I think of culture as always

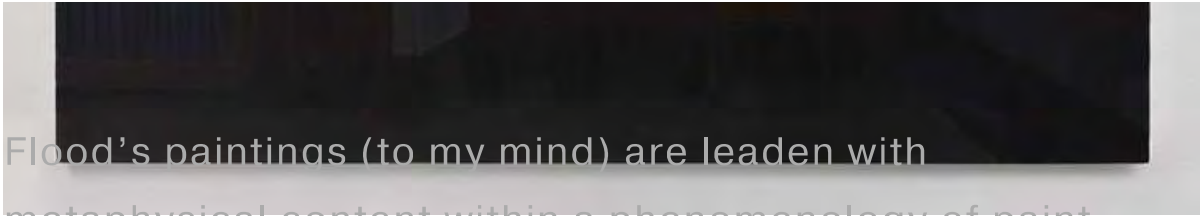
coming while simultaneously disappearing from view. I think of culture as not permanent; a flash in the pan. Its power not residing in the archive or the record. In this space, among these paintings and painted things, the idea of culture becomes one of momentum and transition. Green on Red, like culture, is set in the dusty concrete of its own decay. The gap-toothed walls held together by the braces of a hollow building waiting for commerce to save it, not culture to sustain it. Green on Red (with art) is more representative of culture than civilisation. Filled with Flood's work it feels like I am standing in the ruins of Pompeii and Herculaneum with triple glazing. It is more 2010 artist-run than 2020 artist-run. The white and polish of commercial spaces and art museums was never my thing anyway, and less and less so these days. I have come to think of them as agencies of consumption and control.



Flood's project also makes me think about time, especially how, outside and inside the gallery, the low winter sun and cloudless blue expanse, frame and suffuse the work with light and colour. It makes me think of Einstein's Theory of

Relativity when it came to public attention, if not public understanding. When, up to its publication, philosophers were engaged in a metaphysics of space-time *à la* Henri Bergson *et al.* Why I think of Einstein and Bergson here is because the transition from a philosopher's theory of time to a scientific theory of time is documented in Katherine Waugh and Fergus Daly's film *I see Darkness*, screened concurrently down the road at the Museum of Photography Dublin. In a debate in New York in 1922, Einstein asserted that there was "no such thing as a philosopher's time", and that Bergson's version of it was merely "psychological time". In some ways I feel Flood's paintings lean towards Bergson's psychological time. There is something about the 'last' painting in the gallery that is suggestive of *the* last painting Flood painted in this body of work, or will ever paint. In the same way Stephen McKenna's darkest painting *Large Night Interior* exhibited at the Kerlin Gallery in 2017 was literally his last painting, and looked it too.





Flood's paintings (to my mind) are laden with metaphysical content within a phenomenology of paint. Anselm Kiefer keeps coming to mind. Flood however is a kid-Kiefer, truncating and saturating massive metaphysical landscapes into portraits of body parts connected by the fibrous (healing) tissue of paint. The artist's scars, and manifest in different ways, different forms.



All this could be read as discontents, especially in person, contra the digital image of Instagram, which tends to colour and compress Flood's paintings, resulting in graphically readable and digestible images, even desirable images, but

sacrificing the minutiae of mess and the particular for the consumable, uniform, whole. Unlike online, I have never been able to digest Flood's paintings in person. We have two on our walls at home, which are still left undigested after 4000 breakfasts in their company. My gag reflex is always on high alert around them. That's why art on Instagram frustrates me so much. It's consumable. Capitalist. Easy.





Freud's *Civilisation and its Discontents* comes with a bevy of symptoms, fetishes, anxieties, repressions and so on.

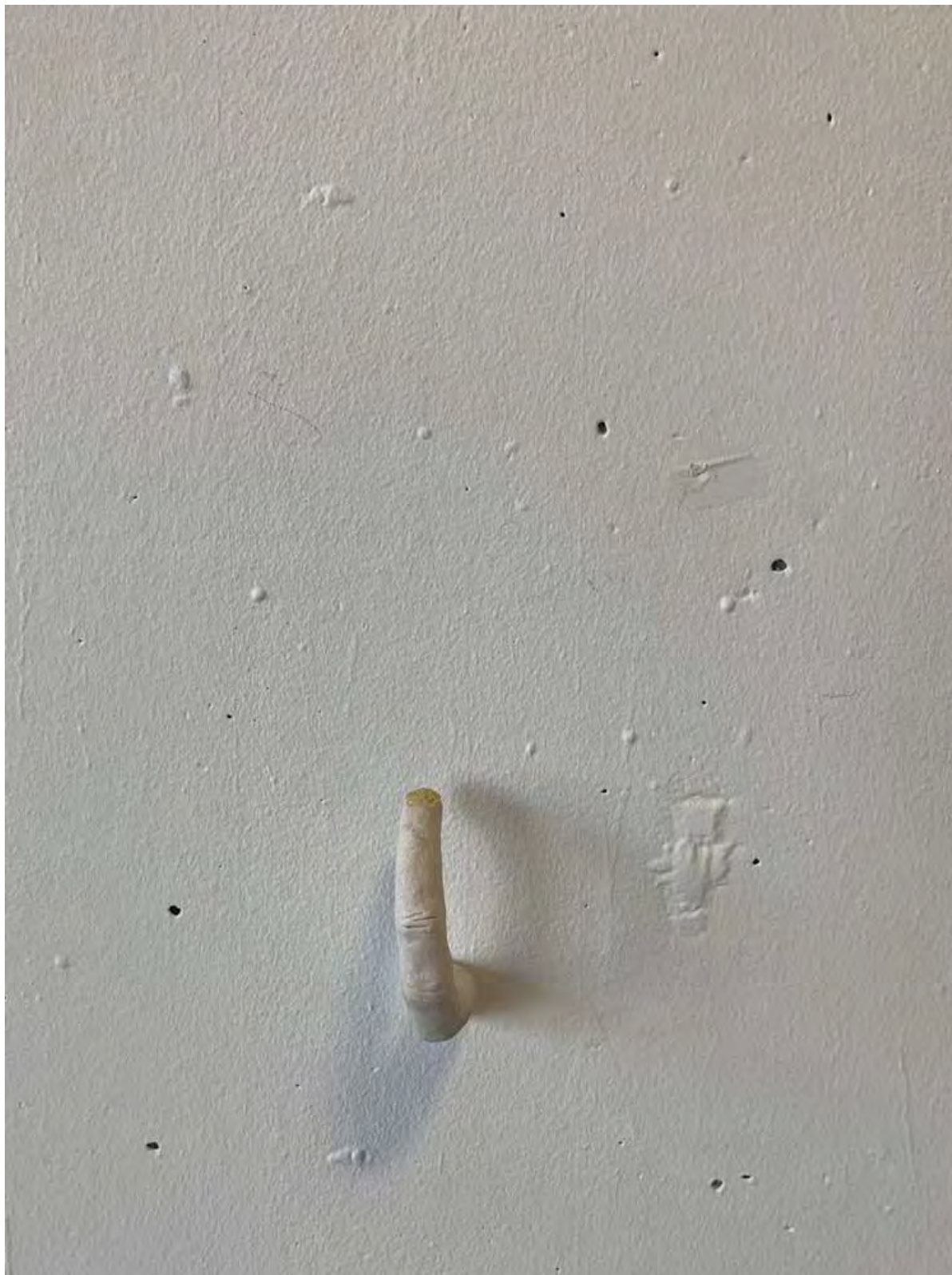
Flood's pictorial mythology is not so explicit in respect to either the signification or representation of such discontents, except for the ever-present brain-pan. But there is a new emphasis re the silhouette or tear in the fabric of his warped time-space gradients. In one instance the profile of a vase is substantiated by an impastoed setting without, and a gradient setting within. The vase is a void to be filled.

There is a Sisyphean effort in Flood's paintings that demonstrates a repeated ambition to reach beyond their flat and fenced-in perimeters, like the startlingly weird fingers that flirt and fondle the gallery walls. A fetishistic excess. A social and masturbatory gesture. The artist, symbolically and imaginarily, among others, but realistically, alone. The gold and glazed ceramics of heads and fruits seem to exist out of exasperation, the last death rattle of culture echoing in the halls of civilisation. One last breath before everything turns to stone, to history, to dust.



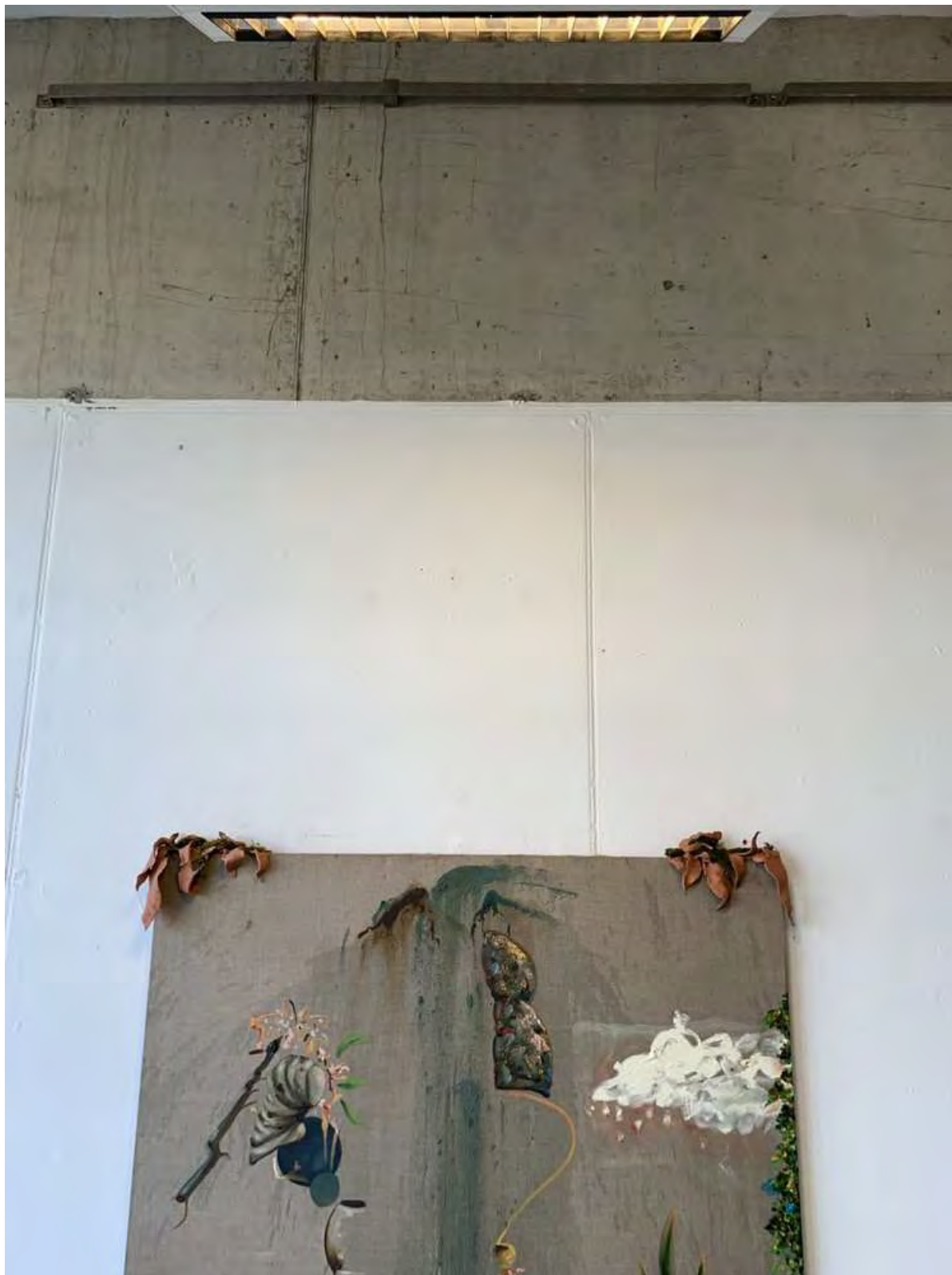
Of course we can be more light-hearted in our estimation of Flood's work. Less heavy. Less elevated. Less. His work is deterministic, tacit, in its painterly objective. Raw linen or gradients are the consistent foils for his spoiled paint. After

inspecting Flood's paintings all these years, I find they continue to use the same raw repertoires and transitional effects to balance the neurosis of the clotted and complex builds and weaves of monstrous forms. The other stuff in the gallery, pottery gone bad, is like the cutlery on a well-dressed dining table, where *animals* toast to civilisation, while stuffing their gout faces with the spillover and excess of capitalist culture.



So can we digest the paintings of Flood without getting sick ourselves? Are they too much? They are paintings that are determinism to be themselves. They are healthy in their sickness *to be, and to be more*. They are science-fictions

of the past, regurgitations of what was to what could be. Skulls and mountains, death and the sublime, earth and the ethereal still pervade and parade in the work. The lost and found of civilisation finds its home as a cornucopia of forms on the *slippery when wet* horizon of time and space, belief and heavy metal. It seems that Flood does still believe in illusionistic space, but illusionistic space without all the trickery. Like the farther you stand back from a painting the realer it gets. No. Flood's paintings look the same up close as they do from afar.



There is a theory, one sourced from Immanuel Kant and later expounded through psychoanalysis, that we experience reality through fantasy. I wonder if all cultural production is a way of getting closer to reality. That

somehow, among these works saturated by the natural low-lying winter sun, and further lit by the uncanny fluorescence of the gallery lighting, that painting, at its best, brings us closer to reality when it is displayed in the lights of day and detritus of life.

Green on Red director, Jerome O Drisceoil, mentioned Edvard Munch today. My brain bristled with identification. Munch is all about death and sickness and repetition, but so what. Death and sickness is commonplace for all of us. What makes Munch interesting psychoanalytically, and by extension artistically, is what he did with death and sickness in his paintings, an example and description that might bring us closer to the florid obfuscation of Flood's work.\*



Damien Flood's paintings are at odds with *themselves* — if we can use that pronoun. Landscape wanting to be portraits; lively still lives of nature morte identification. They are undead. Perhaps the nature of all contemporary painting is to become and not to become simultaneously. This is what Francis Bacon did so well, landscape as

portrait, and the existential uncanniness of doubling the conventions of art history, whereby past becomes present becomes postmodern in a warped temporal and spatial relationship that would make Bergson proud. A narrowing of the secular landscape for something more sacred — can we say sacred anymore in relation to art? Einstein has left the building at Green on Red. The sun has dimmed. The blue turned to a pin-pricked black. And Bergson has reentered the atmosphere... in flames. We just don't know if he will survive the impact. I think he will.—**James Merrigan**

*\*Edvard Munch lost his mother at age 5; and his sister, who became his maternal substitute, aged 14 — she was just a year older than Edvard. Munch would experience countless other family tragedies throughout his 80 years, and would invest most of his energies in the repeated and periodically portrayals of his sister's sickbed. Psychoanalysts have called Munch's painted repetitions of his sister's sickbed as a "lifelong transitional object" — reflective of the Freudian death-drive — an object that helps the infant transition from the mother's incubated embrace into the real world. But I think what some psychoanalysts define as a transitional object is in essence a fetish, something that loses its healthy and developmental definition, to one that is more cultural in a corruptive and destructive sense. Recently I have been thinking a lot about Edvard Munch, and at the mention of Munch while at Green on Red, I started to understand Damien Flood's work apropos*

*Munch. More generally I wonder what motivated Munch to paint what he did and the way he did? There was the fin de siècle permissibility in terms of what a painter could paint at the end of the nineteenth century in respect of expressionism. There were the tragic formative years of his childhood, which we can psychoanalyse, and further label his paintings as life-long transitional objects or perverted fetishes. Leaving Munch behind, what if we ask the same questions of Flood? The fetish is many things, not one thing. It's anthropological, it's commodity borne, it's sexual, it's an object, it's a psychic process. Outside of so-called normative sexuality, the fetish can be something more than a stiletto. The fetish can be a hamster. Slavoj Žižek tells a story about a friend of his who lost his wife. Žižek says they were very much in love, but for some reason his friend didn't show any signs of sadness or mourning for his deceased wife. To the point that Žižek felt his friend was psychotic. Later Žižek discovered that his friend was keeping a hamster, and not only keeping a hamster, but on bended knee, caring and loving a hamster. When the hamster died, Žižek says that his friend was heartbroken in excess of the little creature he now mourned. Of course the hamster didn't invoke the sadness that his wife's death couldn't — the mourning for his wife was just delayed, suspended in the object of the hamster. So the fetish is less an object of a specific aesthetic, and more a fantasy-process that can be fixed to any object, stiletto or hamster, when the world of meaning or emotion is pulled from under us. The fetish is defined by disavowal.*

*That is why I believe that all artists are fetishists. Žižek calls the symptom a partial truth, and the fetish a partial lie. Edvard Munch whipped his paintings; he also placed eyelashes in his paintings. In another sense the fetish is a way of coming close to death without dying, close to sex without having sex, close to the absolute without succumbing to it; close to art without having to make it. As Georges Bataille said, “The fetishist never loved an old shoe more than an art lover loved a piece of art.”*

## TEXTS



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### **DAMIEN FLOOD: TODAY**

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Nov 22, 2022



CRITIC'S GUIDE - 24 NOV 2016

## Critic's Guide: Dublin

A round-up of the best shows in the city, ahead of the second edition of Dublin Gallery Weekend

BY GEMMA TIPTON



Damien Flood, *Pear and Shadow*, 2016, oil on canvas, 1.5 x 2 m. Courtesy: the artist and Green on Red, Dublin

### Damien Flood, 'A Root that Turns as the Sun Turns'

[Green on Red Gallery](#)

19 October - 27 November

Damien Flood's enigmatic paintings tantalize and beguile. Like a forensic investigation of a Hieronymus Bosch, in which the earthly and unearthly delights have been atomised, Flood's fragments of disembodied shapes and forms, hover and cluster on perfectly balanced canvases. There are recognizable elements: leaves, the edge of a jug, faces or masks, a match that smokes from its unlit end. But there are also less easily identifiable shapes that, begging for resolution, invite satisfying speculation. The artist places us on the edge of stories with multiple meanings. He is brave with colour too, in *Family* (all works 2016), glowing green, sharp red and vibrant blue emerge from a pale yellow-green foggy ground, which might or might not bear figures. *Shadow and Pear* is a reversed black-primed canvas in which the shadow is disconnected from the pear, separated across an inscrutably symbolic field. In this, Flood's fourth solo show with Green on Red, he has pared back his canvases, to make works that invite your questions to linger. They are all the more satisfying for their open-endedness.

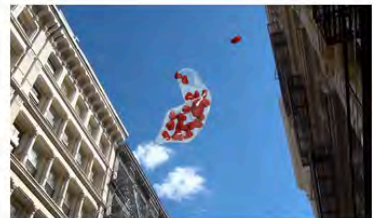
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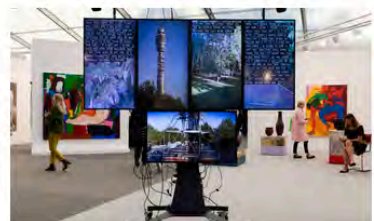
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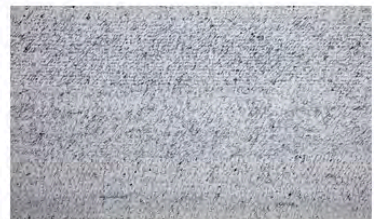
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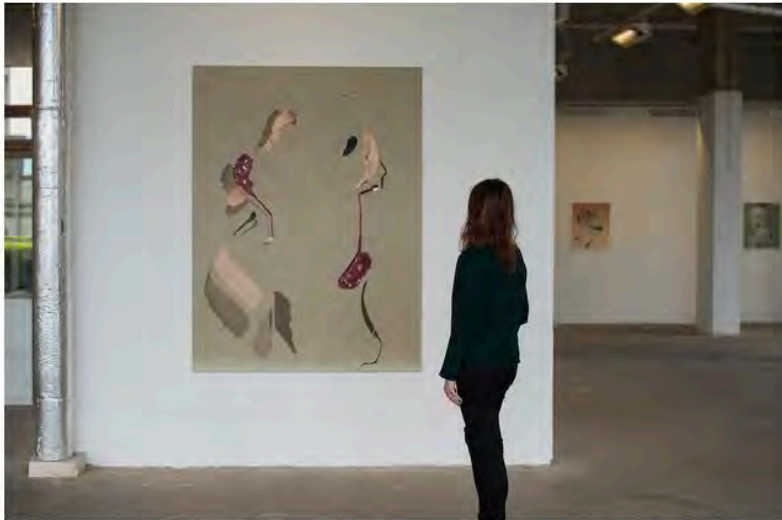
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## Philip Kavanagh, Partings from Semblance

November 30, 2016



Damien Flood, *Parting*, 2016, oil on canvas, 180 x 140 cm, installation shot of 'A Root that Turns as the Sun Turns' at Green on Red Gallery, Dublin, photograph courtesy of the artist.

### Damien Flood's 'A Root that Turns as the Sun Turns' at Green on Red Gallery.

'A Root that Turns as the Sun Turns', a new series of paintings by Damien Flood, is a somewhat melancholic celebration in the haziness of memory, and in the moments of solidity amidst this haziness. Common to all the paintings in this series are forms that offer varying levels of withdrawal and distance from the memories that informed them. They appear like living fossils, symbiotically tied to each other and to the unconscious from which they seem to emerge. They give this unconscious a body and a life to populate, both inside and outside the frame, and in the lived experience the viewer brings to it.

In *Simple Game*, these forms float like quiet monuments, testaments to memory, to placelessness, and to a dignity beyond that which is certain. The same could be said of the objects in *Parting*. They emerge through a subtle violence, always orientated back towards an absence, yet simultaneously and optimistically persisting forward, like blossoming becomings, estranged yet content.

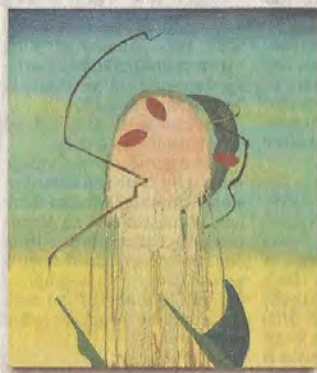
These forms embrace a coming together, though it is not a coalescence achieved through any conventional logic. They seem to move through paralogical relations, exceeding quantitative connexion and the very need for a representational epicentre. Fleeting resemblances do persist, although these instances seem more catalytic than anything else. At times these paintings carefully touch off the representational, but in the service of plurality and movement, rather than fixed resemblance. These are glimpses of the delimiting territories that permeate this body of work, but this is where representation ends in 'A Root that Turns as the Sun Turns': right at the beginning.

**Phillip Kavanagh** is an artist and writer currently based between Dublin and Leitrim.

Damien Flood, ['A Root that Turns as the Sun Turns'](#), at Green on Red Gallery, Dublin, 19 October - 27 November 2016

[PDF](#)

## Damien Flood is like a Miró in Dún Laoghaire



Bottom, *Tilly and Kish*, Damien Flood



### Aidan Dunne Visual Art

*Terra Incognita* – Damien Flood  
Municipal Gallery, Dún Laoghaire  
★★★★

The spare, formal grammar of the paintings in Damien Flood's *Terra Incognita*, with linear flourishes and enigmatic, sometimes tear-shaped motifs against background expanses, has echoes of the great Joan Miró, though with a quite different palette. Where Miró delights in bold primary colours, Flood's palette tends to be more muted, toned-down and earthy, even though he certainly does use colour, and lots of it. Like Miró, he is dealing in this exhibition with memory. And like Miró, he approaches it in terms of personalised, stylised details, linked to specific images and things, though for the most part not obvi-

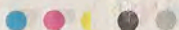
ously so.

In his work to date he has shown an interest in conceptual bids to understand the world, both orthodox and unorthodox, from philosophical theories to alchemical dreams. His paintings suggest that he is drawn to the essential strangeness that links all such enterprises.

He embarked on this project by asking a question suitably in tune with his previous concerns: What is it to know a place? To find out, he looked to straightforward historical research and one-to-one interviews with residents of the Dún Laoghaire area. The upshot is a sense of a place in terms of the individual, usually unseen and largely unstated histories of those who live there. Flood focuses on precise details culled from the stories he has heard.

**“Where Miró delights in bold primary colours, Flood's palette tends to be more muted, toned-down and earthy”**

Just as important is a sense of the ground of each painting as a context, a generative layer that can incorporate both the physical, topographical precinct and the psychological landscape – the mixture of outer and inner worlds that we each inhabit. The outer gains primacy in *Cinder*, a reference to a fire that destroyed a church. *Captain* looks to the harbour and is a contemplation of experience and retirement. *Playground* indicates the commonality of experience in a lifelong friendship. Once you enter into the spirit of things, it is an engaging show. Until August 27th, [drcoco.ie/arts](http://drcoco.ie/arts)



**ARTS**

## Infinite Plane interprets Dubai's life and landscape

Irish artist goes around the streets of the city, understanding its culture, history and legacy, and paints his idea of the places he visits

*By Jyoti Kalsi, Special to Weekend Review*

*July 22, 2015*



Image Credit: Damien Flood

Irish artist Damien Flood's abstract paintings are based on his research on philosophy, theology, alchemy, art history and the natural sciences, and they explore the mutability of "reality" and language. But his first exhibition in Dubai, "Infinite Plane" is different because it is inspired by the city, and is based on physical research rather than books.

The Dublin-based artist got the opportunity to do a two-week research trip to the UAE after winning the Elizabeth Fitzpatrick Travel Award. His abstract paintings featuring simple lines and squiggles, squeegee trails of paint, and minimalist forms convey the mood and feeling of the landscape, while also delving into the psychology of being a spectator in a dynamic, new place.

We spoke to Flood about his work and his Dubai show. Excerpts:

### **How was your research for this show different from your other work?**

As an artist I endeavour to ask questions about the world we live in and to bring back a bit of mystery and sense of wonder. My research mainly involves reading early writings on philosophy and theology, especially old, defunct belief systems.

This show is different because instead of reading books I did physical research. I came here with absolutely no agenda and had no idea what to expect. I got a map of Dubai and started walking around the streets. At the end of the day I would go through the photographs I had taken, make notes about my feelings and ideas and do some sketches and watercolour paintings to see what kind of visual language was emerging from my experiences of the city.

### **What are the things you noticed while walking around?**

I wanted to see where the old parts and the new parts of the city were and where they crossed over. So I spent a lot of time in Deira and Bur Dubai. As I strolled through these areas, I was struck by the fact that people still wear traditional clothes and maintain their connection with the desert.

Europeans have left these things behind as they move forward, but here it is heart-warming to see that even young people hold on to the culture, and that the desert has been preserved despite the rapid pace of progress and modernisation.

I was really surprised to see the different cultures that live together here. One of the themes running through the show is time, because I feel Dubai has managed to compress time by building in just over a decade what would otherwise take more than a century to achieve. Being here and seeing all this got me thinking about time, life, culture and relationships with the landscape.

### **How did you translate your thoughts into these paintings?**

I do a lot of research before beginning a new body of work, but I always start a painting with no plan in mind. So when I started these paintings I had no idea what was going to come out. I was like an archaeologist exploring my own mind, excavating my experiences and feelings and examining them. And it was exciting to see what would come out.

I found that my predominantly grey palette had changed to match with the different landscape and light. Even the tone of the night sky was so different from home. The paintings turned out beautiful and succulent because my experience of the place was so beautiful. And they ask questions about time and space, about how you experience a landscape and try to instil that emotion in others and make them feel that sense of wonderment.

### **What does the show's title refer to?**

“Infinite Plane” is a reference to the first time I saw the desert. I had never been in a desert before and the endless sand stretching out in all directions makes you feel so tiny. The rolling sand dunes gave me a feeling of hopefulness, but there was also a sense of danger and melancholy. It was like being in a place that is beyond time and space — an infinite plane, which provided me a space where my paintings have room to have infinite interpretations.

## **What do you want to convey through the intriguing titles of your paintings?**

The titles convey my thoughts and feelings about the things I saw and experienced in Dubai, but they also reflect the metaphysical questions evoked by my experiences here.

For example, "Tomorrow" sums up my first experience of Dubai. Driving through the city and seeing all those sparkling new skyscrapers made me think about the idea of the future and of the fact that tomorrow is merely an idea we have created to feel some sense of control over time in our finite existence.

"Red Flag" is a reflection on the beauty of the desert but also the danger of it. The forms and shapes in "Sculpture" are inspired by the mountains and landscape of Fujairah. It was so dramatically different from Dubai, and the primordial look made me feel more in touch with the past, more peaceful and more at home there.

Astronomers and explorers have always been part of my work because we are all explorers in our own way. In "Astronomer" I have tried to convey that feeling of exploring something new, either outside or within yourself.

*Jyoti Kalsi is an arts enthusiast based in Dubai.*

*"Infinite Plane" will run at Grey Noise, Al Quoz, until July 31.*

# A DUBAI-DÉRIVE ON DAMIEN FLOOD'S INFINITE PLANE

By Rachel Bennett

## TOPOGRAPHIC ENCOUNTERS

It's difficult to get purchase on Damien Flood's *Infinite Plane*. A frustration compounded when you understand the works are the fruits of a strategically conceived research trip. Flood's exploratory approach was to pick locations from a map – that flat expanse of navigable terrain, the comforting retreat of all new arrivals. These were easily definable and arbitrary points of departure for unpredictable cultural and topographical encounters with Dubai, Sharjah and the northern coast of Oman.

Such acts of encounter welcome and demand urban-unfamiliarities; Flood becomes the observer of ideas emerging as he moves through unknown landscapes. The approach is not a new one – in 1955 Debord and his *Letterist International* companions championed this *drift* (a kind of authentic experience-through-aimless-perambulation) as a fundamental of *psychogeography*, and Baudelaire's *flâneur* was an early, though more passive, proponent of a similar kind of experience making.

A traveller accesses a precious initial phase, a temporal twilight zone where the new retains a fleeting and irredeemable unfamiliarity. In this tradition, Flood investigates what is distilled from the initial experience of a place. These strategies – mapping, photographic documentation – imply a direct investigation into reality, and the outcomes – the images caught, the paintings created – suggest that some precarious place within this once unfamiliar landscape was located, a vantage point from which to experience and observe.

The landscape is the almost-immediate context of viewing, lying just beyond the gallery doors. But still, Flood's renderings shift and dissemble; subversions abound in aborted lines, canvases rotated, paint accumulated and bleached out. That initial lack of purchase is persistent and pervasive.

## UN-PLANNING

Whilst the touristic ephemera of maps and photographs might imply otherwise, a major strategic approach was un-planning (incidentally, though we never discuss Debord, this un-planning remains true to the *Situationist* conception of the *dérive*). "I do not pre-work, there are no sketches," Flood explains. When I ask him about the almost 1000 photographs that constitute part of his research he counters, "I don't know if I ever looked back through them".

Even if he had tried to plan, what he experienced was a confluence of landscape and people. He's interested in the gestures he saw, identifying in them something that's both formative and formed. Gestures and landscape are fused in memory, existing on an imaginary plane. A symbiotic relationship between place and people emerge in works like *Lovers*, *Mask* and *Guy*.

*Guy* is a postcard, an *aide-memoire* that summons the sense of a driver and a desertscape. He drove Flood into the sand, his verbose gestures and the terrain both almost readable in the lick of paint traversing a bare, blasted expanse of canvas. These are scenes and situations fused together as far as Flood encountered them, that is to say — the relationships do not tangibly exist. Regardless, these remembered landscapes are inhabited and shaped by the many constituent experiences of encounter.

## PERFORMING REMEMBERING

Flood's own gestures dashed on the canvas are both place and person, and neither. They're a conflation and invention as memory is wont to do. But there's magic in these sensory encounters; he recounts, almost reminisces, "*a kind of alchemical process takes place when you first experience something. It cannot be restructured or recreated – those little sparks can only be alluded to.*"

Not documentation then, but the extension of experience. "*It's a beautiful way to research; experiencing things,*" he says. The sentiment is neatly chiasmic – researching is a beautiful way to experience too, it seems.

He sustained the momentum from the trip, proceeding immediately to his Dublin studio where he worked between the paintings frenetically, on multiple canvases simultaneously. This was kinesthetic, it bound painting to remembering and remembering happened in painting. "*I was figuring out what I was interested in through the act,*" he explains.

Mental filtering and sifting is enacted with abundant impulsivity and intuitiveness. In *Tomorrow* turpentine poured onto the canvas is erosion, a violent reconfiguration – and finger prints on canvas sides belie the developmental rotations each has gone through. The phases of the process are a presence themselves. Like the photographs taken and never reviewed – the former iterations of the paintings aren't dismissed but constitute a phrase in the performance of remembering.

Some works signal arrival or delay; all are *in medias res*. Encroaching shapes exacerbate the sense of process, alien presences caught moving in or else departing from the frame. These visitors are aggressive and subversive or out of place and peeping in *Corset*, *Sleeper* and *Award*, strange and interesting, signaling arrival and granting formal harmony in *Telescope*.

The sense that we witness just part of a process persists.

## THE DIVERGENCE OF MEMORY AND EXPERIENCE

There's a distinction between memory and remembering. Memories are complete, perfected and cast as artefact. Remembering is the active process.

These are visual renderings of multitudinous experience – sensory and intellectual, cultural and associative. All those mental sensations immediately and irrevocably lost, forever the preserve of the initial encounters. Begging the question of what it is to 'know' a place – who is better equipped, the tourist in the throes of the unfamiliar, or the resident equipped with (or jaded by) insight?

## LEGITIMACY

Flood is confused when I ask to what extent the dominant de-lined figures are borrowed from his trip, finding the word 'borrowed' curious. I modify my question "*are they direct references, residual shapes you gained through your experience?*" This elicits a response; "*they are shapes that were not found in my practice before, they are of this place but they are not specific to this place*"

Afterwards I question myself – why did 'borrowed' feel appropriate – it implies that it is not his own to take or use; without familiarity there is a lack of ownership. Which in turn knocks into counter questions about ownership through familiarity. Ultimately the strategies of fresh encounter may be a more authentic way to know a place, before our perspective is grimed with the residue of experience and association. Anyway, temporal and spatial ownership is too moot a concept.

That said, even 'borrowing' feels too weak a word for some works. In *Hunch* and *Award*, arterial and fleshy objects seem like they've been violently extracted from elsewhere, in *Sleeper* the canvas

is rent by a slick wound. There's a foreboding implication that in trying to fix or encapsulate an experience you are ripping it from reality; memory making is violence here, when remembering is not kept in motion.

Flood's *Imaginary Plane* is a trajectory between *then* – the moment of encounter – and *now* – the moment of viewing. Or perhaps *then* is the moment of conception and *now* the moment of creation? Either way, the landscape of this plane is neither present nor real, it is conjured somewhere on that indiscernible tangent we traverse between encounter and memory, remembering and experience.

#### CORRUPT FLÂNEUR?

Flood's role in his previous work has been described as that of a "[corrupt geologist](#)". *Infinite Plane* sees him take on the mantle of anthropologist, tourist, *flâneur* and urbanist – not corrupt so much as an acknowledged outsider, the tourist who visits each role. Via this unfamiliarity there is a freshness and authenticity of encounter, amounting to a series, which – whilst not quite documenting a place or time – casts a vigorous impression of those specificities of encounter. We won't reassemble it, but we might be a little more prescient of its process

By Rachel Bennett, originally published on [Fat Nancy's New Diet](#).

THE SUNDAY TIMES

# CULTURE



## **Damien Flood – Interior Sun**

The Green on Red Gallery's eclectic stable of artists is put through their paces, both in Dublin and abroad, by proprietor Jerome Ó Drisceoil who likes to venture beyond the stagnant local art market. His current show is by Damien Flood, a young Dublin artist who has already enjoyed international exposure. Flood asserts his works are "conversations about what's going on in contemporary painting". You can certainly detect an array of influences – going back as far as Braque and de Chirico. The beautifully dense and expressive *Flight* is followed by the prosaic

minimalism of *Pin Head*, giving way to the surreal landscapes of *Source* and *Fragment*. The works are united in tone and mood. The colours are muted: grey and black dominate, with a touch of subdued blue and an occasional shocking splash of green. What initially feels like abstraction resolves itself into minimal figuration. The solutions to these ostensible conundrums are often provided by the cryptic titles. An exhibition of quiet intensity that invites attention and exploration.

**John P O'Sullivan**

*Green on Red Gallery, Dublin Tue–Fri: 10am–6pm, Sat 1pm–4pm, 01 671 3414*

# Artist in an A-frame

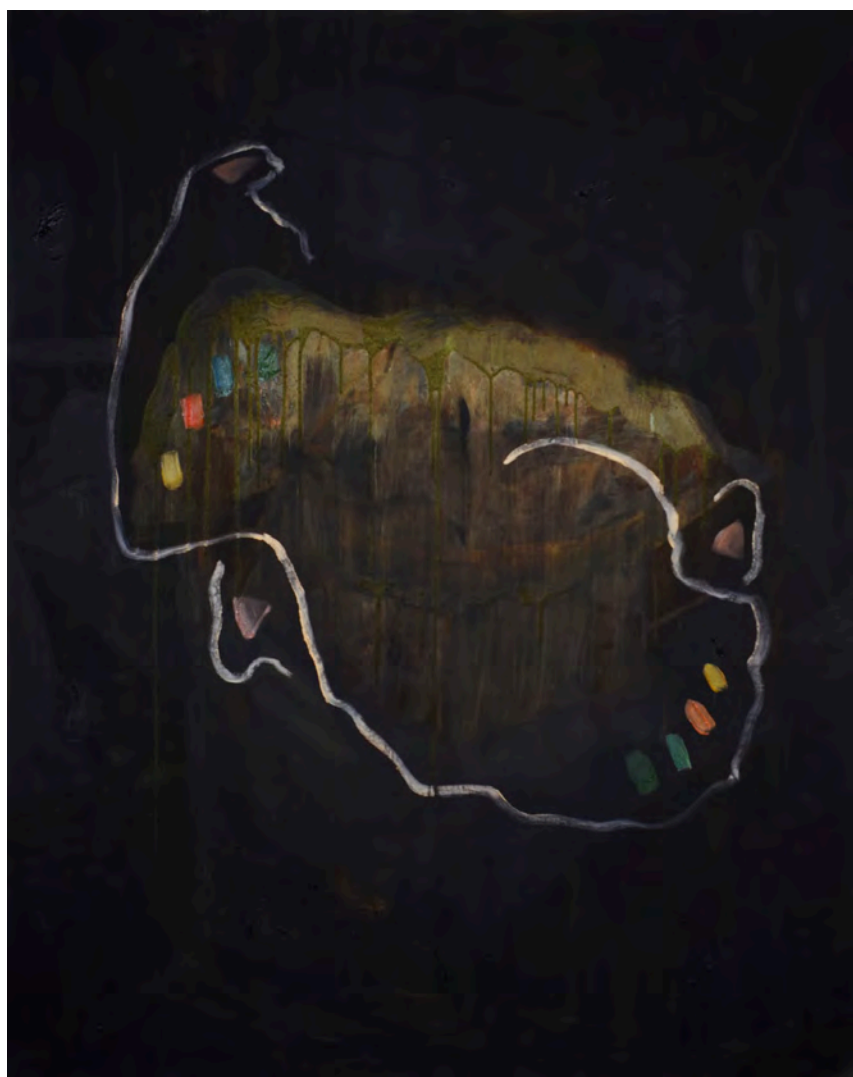
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2014

[Space as the Object as Object: Damien Flood at Green on Red Gallery, Dublin, Ireland](#)

“In art there is only one thing that matters: what cannot be explained.”  
from the notebooks, Georges Braque

We were visiting Dublin in January. Green on Red is a fine experimental art gallery there, with a terrific curator and a great space, and I have written about it before:

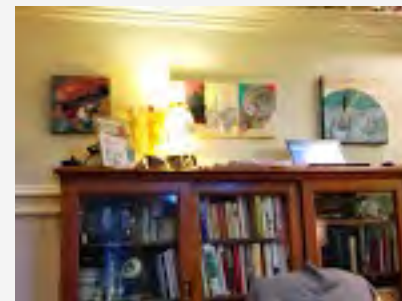
(<http://artistinanaframe.blogspot.com/2012/08/anything-is-mirror-vexed-endings-at.html>). Through February 22nd, their newest show, Damien Flood’s Interior Sun,” is on view. The largest paintings, works such as “Interior Sun,” (150 x 125cm), will pull you in immediately,



and become your true love (at least, for the moment that you stand before them) offering clean, stark, fore-grounded heroic strokes of movement against quietly complex backgrounds. The space is clear, the brushstrokes objects in themselves. The nobility reaches back to an Abstract Expressionist core. These paintings are the sons and daughters of Motherwell and Twombly. Flood calls these resolved works “pop songs” (interview with James Merrigan, *Afterworlds*, 2013, published by Green on Red Gallery, Dublin; from here on, *Afterworlds*). Flood on the “pop song” process: “when that painting happened, it was ‘bang!’ “ But he also says, “I know the pop songs work too well, and I know that curators will usually love them. I don’t get anything from them” (*Afterworld*).

Now, to be fair, Flood hasn’t said this about any of the works in this show. But I am going to go on record and say that the term “pop song” does indeed include “Interior Sun.” So I am now going to break with “Interior Sun,” get the lovely, catchy, so-familiar, so-deep melody out of my head, and go for the Miles Davises and Keith Jarretts of the show.

3 PAINTINGS AT 210



## BLOG ARCHIVE

- ▼ 2014 (1)
  - ▼ February (1)
    - [Space as the Object as Object: Damien Flood at Gre...](#)

- ▶ 2013 (9)
- ▶ 2012 (24)
- ▶ 2011 (216)

## ABOUT ME



 [Ann Knickerbocker](#)

I am a painter living with my husband in California. My portfolio can be found at [annknickerbocker.com](http://annknickerbocker.com) Over 20+ years, we took our children to France as often as we could, for 7 summers, and for 8 months in the Poitou-Charentes. Then the two of us spent two years in Normandy, where we bought a 19th-century stone house. We came here to California when we discovered we couldn't really BE French. My "Artist in an A-Frame" blog is once again active as I get my bearings. The blog "A Small, Fine-Art Sketchbook," a story with images, was written from February through June of 2013. Do come and visit Gallery Route One, in Point Reyes Station, West Marin, California, where I am an artist

I want to visit with the smaller, noisier paintings, the ones that are still moving and growing and changing, like living organisms. Flood mentions that “the paintings that really work for me are the ones I really struggle with” (*Afterworld*). A painter’s hardest moments, I have always thought, are those where the painting is going along very nicely, behaving, it’s working, and then, suddenly, the damned thing rises up and resists the painter’s every move. When I am painting, this resistance, this sudden awkwardness on the part of the painting, can make me think “it’s over.” But looking at Damien Flood’s show, I realized that, no, that’s when it’s all beginning! Take a look at “Slouch” (90 x 75 cm):



In the notes for this show, the gallery tells us that we can see “the jostle of marks and strokes and lines” here. Just as we are often pulled in to paintings that are resolved, noble and clear, we should also be ready to be pulled into this kind of layered ambiguity. Here, there is a lovely little patch of blue a little north of center, falling lines of paint enclosing it, a just-a-bit-off grid upper left, a few drops of paint left, drips, a field of muddy green paint below. This painting is an utterly lovely mess. It shifts... it won’t be caught.... fighting the reasoned sense of space is that pattern in the back, and the drips, and the colors, and the sheer effort the painting expends to reduce all your attempts at solving it ... to nothing. It won’t be catalogued, or boxed-in, or reduced to a mere thing. This painting has been given its own life. Because, as the show’s publicity says, “there is an unpredictability and courage here that is nerve tingling and alive.” Yes.

So if this work isn’t the child of Abstract Expressionism, what is it? A new direction, a new voice. Pieces from art history, yes, but, as Ezra Pound wrote, “Art is a departure from fixed positions, felicitous departure from a norm...”

I have thought about the felicity of clogged and unresolved and still-moving-in-space paintings, and I came up with two names...

The first is Elizabeth Murray, someone whose lithographs are on show at Stanford University’s Cantor Art Center. In an interview several years ago, Murray said that abstract work is always difficult to see:

You’re confronted when you are looking at a painting where you don’t have specific images .... You’re confronted with something that you are challenged to resolve and unify in some way, because there is a unity there. I keep harping on this – and that’s what has to work. What has to work is it has to resolve in secret almost.

[pbs.org/art21/artists/murray/clip1](https://pbs.org/art21/artists/murray/clip1)

Murray has it right. The viewer needs to be presented with an unresolved work to keep thinking about; otherwise, we may as well all be painting daisies in vases, something to walk by quickly on one’s way to lunch. Take a look at “Down Dog,” a lithograph from



Murray has been dismissed (without any analysis or reasoned interpretation, as here with Hilton Kramer: <http://observer.com/2005/10/caution-to-viewers-murrays-paintings-may-induce-vertigo/#axzz2t2DjBJwJ>) but she has been ably defended by Jerry Salz. Why isn't she accorded the respect due her? Salz writes that it could be due to several things:

First, her idea of beauty, while juicy, is dissonant, deviant, and brash. It is an unsettling, tempestuous beauty .... [and] There's very little visual letup in her art, which can make looking at her paintings vexing .... Her iconography is domestic ... [but] the vibe is cosmic .... Everything is replicating, shattering or turning into other things .... Her space is orgiastic and overflowing .... Murray has pulled painting apart, moved it around, made it physical.

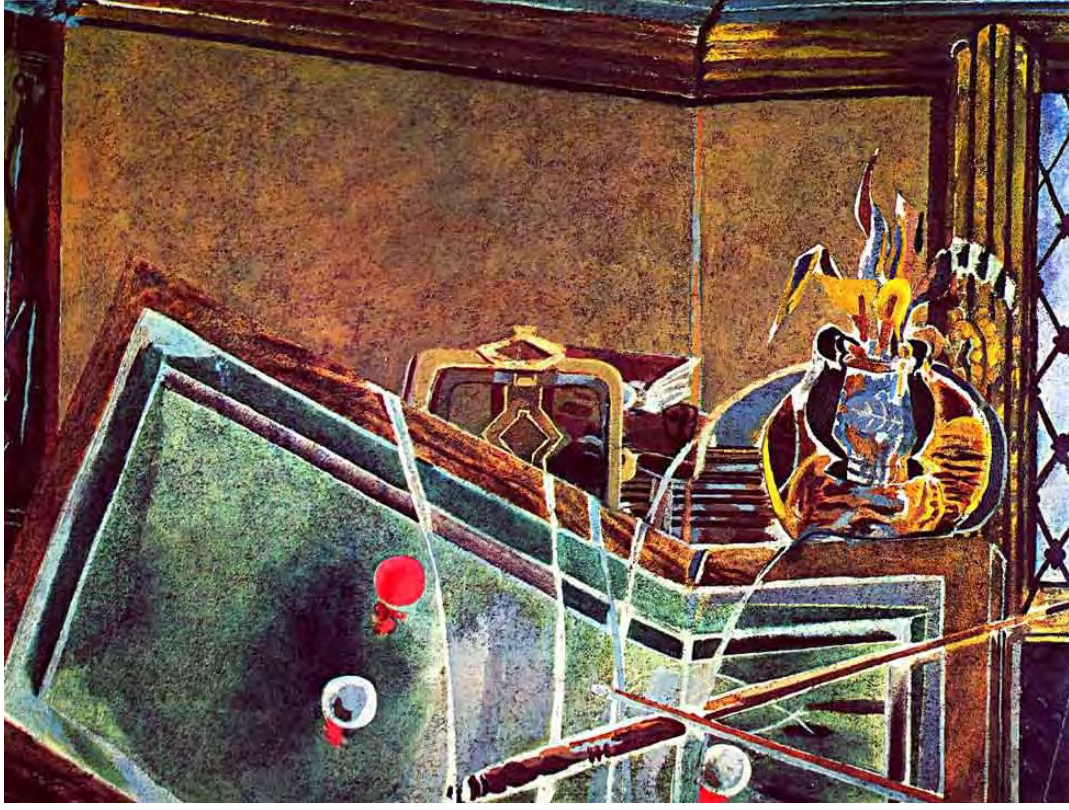
"Relentless Tempest," [www.artnet.com/magazines/features/Salz](http://www.artnet.com/magazines/features/Salz)

Murray herself has said that, when she went to Chicago for art school, she was no longer under pressure to be "ladylike" or conventional. She loved the students she met: "As much as I wanted to be an artist, I wanted to be different the way they were different, because it felt like freedom!"

[pbs.org/art21/artists/murray/clip1](http://pbs.org/art21/artists/murray/clip1)

I find Murray's work uplifting and brave, and I think she reaches out to her audience with a fresh, new iconography and a new eye for color. She and Flood are very close in their daring and their unexpected lack-of-exact imagery. It's about painting, but it's also about living, fighting past the pop song to the stillness between the notes behind.

The second artist with a straight line to Damien Flood's work at Green on Red is Georges Braque. Flood admires him, as the conversation in *Afterworlds* shows. Flood's Braque's is not the man of the early Cubist discoveries, chained to Picasso. I think Braque's later work, with its confounding inclusion of the "everyday" object (just given a glancing blow) is far more powerful. Flood's objects float in the same kind of space as Braque's and, while Braque's everyday painted world gives us more recognizable, tactile "things," there is a shared shadowy light and bent solidity in both artists' work. Here is Braque's "Billiard Table," from 1944:



The corner of the room is almost three-dimensional, but shut off, in real representation, by a dense line that opens that corner like a book, with the billiard table springing out of it. And just when the viewer sees that, the front-most pool cue resists it, because it is straight...

Now look at Flood's "Armature," 30 x 40 cm:



One could perhaps say that the title of this painting, one of Flood's most descriptive (!), means framework, something to hang onto... but, no. The painted (apparently foregrounded) "object" here is uncertain, hovering, its colors muted, with an overlayer of hesitant blue and yellowed strokes. The longer one looks, the more the "object" recedes ... and then comes forward. It is open, it is closed, it is floating, it then becomes deadly solid and pulled down by gravity. It won't be readily resolved. The painting has won.

(Thanks to Jerome O Drisceoil and Martin Rochford; higher resolution images coming shortly!)

Posted by [Ann Knickerbocker](#) at [10:50 AM](#) [No comments:](#)



Recommend this on Google

Labels: [Abstract Expressionist Heir](#), [Damien Flood](#), [Elizabeth Murray](#), [Georges Braques](#), [Green on Red Gallery](#), [Irish Contemporary Painters](#), [Jerome O Drisceoil](#), [neither foreground nor background](#), [the disappearing object](#)

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2013

### [Inside Confined Spaces and Breaking Free](#)

We drove into Milan... its historic, winding vortex of streets was pretty tough to navigate... and difficult to fully appreciate until we parked our car and walked the cobblestones and piazzas.

# *ad hoc* MUSEUM

## (Part 3)

The final part of a series of reviews by James Merrigan on aspects of Dublin Contemporary 2011, alongside exhibitions that ran concurrently at commercial galleries, art centres and non-profit spaces.



Sofia Hultén, *Immovable Object / Unstoppable Force*. (2005 - )  
 DVD Video, 14 min. Image courtesy of the artist.  
 Image: greenonredgallery.com  
 Additional graphic by Author.

Since the Rachael Thomas debacle (the original curator of Dublin Contemporary 2011), the job title of 'curator' has taken on a gravitas that is more gilt-edged than that of 'artist'. When Dublin Contemporary was pulling away at the seams it was because Thomas was dropped. When Jota Castro and Christian Viveros-Fauné took Thomas' place as curators of Dublin Contemporary, the event was saved without an artist in sight. The three names that will be remembered from Dublin Contemporary 2011 (well, four if you include Thomas Hirschhorn for reasons that have already been given in Part 1 of *ad hoc* MUSEUM), are Rachael Thomas, Jota Castro and Christian Viveros-Fauné. Looking from the outside, artists in this Biennale landscape of formalwear professionalism come across a bumbling degenerates; to be kept in check by the curators' 'proper' compass.

I come to this observation via another group show that ran concurrently with Dublin Contemporary – *O* at the Green on Red Gallery Dublin. Unlike John Hutchinson (the Director of the Douglas Hyde Gallery), who has become an institution in and of himself, Jerome O'Drisceoil (the Director of Green on Red Gallery Dublin) is the unnamed curator of many punchy curated group shows over the last decade. For the Irish art world this is too obvious to mention, but to new publics who visit the gallery his name is not on the poster or press-release that accompanies the shows at the gallery. Should this be left unsaid? Is the job title of 'Director' what the curator aspires to so nothing is left to say? Or perhaps 'Director' signifies embedded within the institution, while the freelance, transient curator is influential beyond his/her immediate circle? Things that are left unsaid or unadvertised in a world that is built on reputation and momentum could be termed as a type of self-effacement. What if, as artists, curators and writers we decided to become anonymous? No Name. No Bio. No Identity. No Branding. What would become of Mike Wilson's "reputational economy"?[1] (footnote on next page).

Throughout O'Driscóil's selection of artists for the group show *O* (which, to my mind reads like a favourite list; Jonathan Monk, Douglas Gordon, Roman Ondak), this thread of self-effacement gains some ground – epitomised by Damien Flood's painting *Curtain*, which is relegated to the hallway that brings you to the gallery proper. We could view this painting as a copout – an opaque layer of bright green oil paint 'nearly' covering up the successful and failed attempts beneath. Flood transforms the 'copout' by drawing a gash on the flat layer of colour – activating a narrative that says as much about the process of painting as it does about what was and what will be revealed through the painted image; 'acting' as both exit and entrance to the rest of the work in the gallery.



Damien Flood, *Curtain*, 2011.

Oil on Canvas

Image: [greenonredgallery.com](http://greenonredgallery.com): Courtesy the Artist.

1. Mick Wilson, Visual Artists Workers Forum: 'Work It', Project Arts Centre, Dublin, 20 April 2011. In 2009 Renée Ridgway wrote: "As twenty-first century attention economics maintains its momentum, where an artist's standing in the

Jonathan Monk's piece of fabric with sewed outlines of Ireland and the UK – *Where I Am Visible/ Where I Am From Invisible* – is just as demure as Flood's *Curtain*. The textile associations of both also play with 'covering-up' the subject. As does the publicly inconspicuous performances of Jiri Kovanda, shown at the Green on Red as archival photos with text on paper. While in Roman Ondak's video *Stray Man*, the 'viewer' is portrayed as unsure how/unwilling to participate in the intimate play between art object and gaze 'in' the gallery.

Sofia Hultén's works stands out against the coy behaviour of the other works in *O* because they progress this idea of 'hidden potential' to the extreme – testing the imagination of the viewer in her playful 'persuasion' on the ordinary to produce the extraordinary. She describes her work *The Actual Calculated Size of a Black Hole* as "A framed photograph of a popular science book, which describes the size of a black hole if it had the same mass as the earth. The size of the hole is drilled through the glass frame, the photograph and the wall behind where the photograph hangs." Here, something that is out of reach for many of us – black hole theory – is formally compressed into a 'full stop', but retains its mystery even though the artist has brought the conceptually and physically unattainable into our living space.

Just like Keith Winter's works at The Joinery (mentioned in Part 1) that force the gaze of the viewer in on themselves, Hultén does the same with material. *Artificial Conglomerate* 2010 consists of the cyclic narrative of finding a rock at a building site; making a latex mould of said rock; "pulverising" said rock; and reconstituting the

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...reputational economy is determined by his or her coefficient of specific visibility; how can shadowy, more poly-vocal initiatives at the edges find ways to surface, or, for that matter, to remain hidden?" <http://northeastwestsouth.net/hi/node/404>

# Finding a way to look anew



AIDAN DUNNE

## VISUAL ART

**T**WO FINE SOLO exhibitions currently running in Dublin are representative of a significant strand of contemporary art and, more specifically, painting. The two artists, both fairly young, are Ciarán Murphy, at the Douglas Hyde Gallery, and Damien Flood, at Green on Red. It's not that their work is of a piece: they are each following distinct, separate lines of enquiry. But both show paintings, mainly quite small in scale and sparing of colour, with an approach to subject matter that is at once allusive and ambiguous. And as images per se, what they do could be described as fragmentary and oblique.

Murphy, we are told, works from photographs. In fact he col-

lects lots of photographs from different sources, images that seem to him to hold out the possibility of a painting. A photographic look comes through in the paintings he makes from them, but often in a very spare, selective way, as though he is leaving much of the information out of the image. He's not just simplifying or streamlining it, that is to say, he's actually making something almost abstract. So there's nothing of the style called photorealist about his approach.

There is clearly an awareness of the history of painting in what he does, though. It's interesting that while he is a felicitous painter, technically, with a nice touch and obvious competence, he steers clear of any kind of polished consistency. He prefers inconsistency, with sometimes a brusque, offhand manner and sometimes a more nuanced, considered approach to brushwork. More often than not the paintings have a slightly pallid, distanced quality, as though referring to something remote, something in the depths of memory.

Hence, perhaps, the melancholic tone to his work mentioned in a brief catalogue note.

If the main unifying factor in Murphy's show is mood, Flood's lays out something like a thesis,



indicated in his title, *Counter Earth*. A catalogue text by Mary Conlon fills in the background to the idea, which derives from the hypothesis by the Greek philosopher Philolaus. His proposal for the make-up of a non-geocentric universe entailed an opposite, shadow-earth, mainly so that his planetary scheme could accord with his own numerical theory. It's an idea with considerable imaginative appeal, and mirror-worlds have appeared in many works of fiction.

For Flood, its appeal seems to lie in the possibility of de-familiarising the process of seeing and recognising. It's a way of making us look anew and not take anything for granted, a bit like the so-called "Martian" poetry of Craig Raine and Christopher Reid. Flood offers us elliptical fragments of landscapes and diagrams. Sometimes they come across as selec-





Left: *Green Vortex* by Damien Flood. Above: *Hare* by Ciarán Murphy

tively edited photographic views, and sometimes they are over-painted photographic prints. Always there's a terse, unresolved quality to the finished pieces, as if Flood doesn't want to slip into pictorial formula.

In withholding so much of conventional pictorial architecture, are both artists simply being perverse, trying to project a sense of profundity that isn't really there? The answer is no, but to understand why we probably have to see their work in the context of certain issues relating to modern and contemporary art. And especially, it could be argued, in relation to the way painting has evolved to deal with two major sets of problems that have undermined previously implicit assumptions about art and artists.

One is the invention of photography in the mid-19th century, the beginning of a process that is still

ongoing – just look at the seemingly unstoppable, exponential development of digital imaging technologies. Painting has fruitfully engaged with photography on many levels, but there's no way around the fact that a mechanical process did muscle in on its territory and pretty much take over a major part of its workaday job, so that painting had to engage in some soul-searching, asking itself what it was really about. It's been doing so ever since.

The second set of problems has to do with Modernism and its aftermath. Leading up to High Modernism, the history of Western painting has been viewed as holding to the dream of achieving one grand, all-encompassing style. That is, a style capable of addressing the complexity of the world in terms of one self-consistent, coherent vision. This concept suits the

heroic idea of the artist, imposing his – it was usually his – will on the perplexing diversity of things.

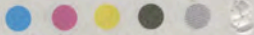
Think Van Gogh, Cézanne, Picasso, Matisse, or Mondrian.

As modernity segued into post-modernity, that idea became untenable. Take the work of the highly influential Belgian painter Luc Tuymans. It sets out to deal with the problem of how to make paintings about a world in which all the old certainties have gone, and one in which painting's representational job has long been filled by photography. The second or third-hand photographic image becomes the painter's pallid source, a slim connection with an uncertain subject of questionable authenticity.

Yet, as with Beckett's "Try again, Fail Again, Fail better", the artist has to keep trying. In a press release, Flood is rightly compared to another artist with a significant international profile, younger than Tuymans, but recognisably trying to deal with some of the same problems. That's the Polish artist Wilhelm Sasnal, who makes paintings, but also films, and who is involved in music as well – this multiplicity of activities is not untypical of the younger generation of artists today (Murphy will actually give a musical performance with Thierry Michel in the Douglas Hyde at 1.15pm on February 26th, for example).

The Douglas Hyde, incidentally, has shown both Sasnal and Tuymans over the years.

Ciarán Murphy, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Trinity College Dublin  
Until March 16th  
*Counter Earth*, Green on Red Gallery, 26-28 Lombard Street East  
Until March 6th



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**Damien Flood:  
Counter Earth**

With a master's degree in fine art from NCAD still warm in his hand, Damien Flood has already made a name for himself here and at the Saatchi Space in London during Frieze 2008. It is easy to see why: his modestly-sized paintings share an aesthetic and palette that is singular, refined and experimental.

Influenced by Japanese Ukiyo-e painting, this exhibition of new works features mountains in a symbolic role, emerging from the void in paintings such as *Red Line*, and in cross-sections, such as in *Far Away Valley*.

Nature is also abstract, as in *Coupling*, where the tops of sparse trees stand in a wash of grey green mist, while their leaves are written across the canvas like a script.

A combination of an earthy palette and atmospheric composition means that even when he takes a more abstract turn, as in *Optical Band Width*, left, his painterly DNA remains imprinted.

**Kate Butler**

*Green on Red, Dublin,  
Tue-Fri 10am-6pm, Sat  
1pm-4pm, 01 671 3414*