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Art-Watching, Edited Supplement

Niamh Ann Kelly

Technological University Dublin, niamhann.kelly@tudublin.ie

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, N.A. (Ed.) 2006, Supplement 'Art-Watching', in *Circa*, 116:113-128, 2006.

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Art-Watching

**A collaborative project of art and text
by Brian Fay & Niamh Ann Kelly**

Art-Watching: Introduction

Art-Watching, like most collaborative projects, began as a series of conversations. These conversations revolved around the nature, purpose and pleasure of looking at and watching art. Discussions evolved to work, and work developed into the forthcoming publication *Art-Watching*. The following pages are an introduction to *Art-Watching*, a limited edition art book that will consist of digital drawings and texts reflecting upon chosen paintings from the collection at the Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane.

There are two main parts to this Circa supplement. Firstly we have included an essay, *Watching Over Art – Thoughts on Art and Art Criticism*, and a selection of digital drawings responding to specific works at the Hugh Lane Gallery that will appear in the *Art-Watching* book. These digital hand drawings are tracings of the paintings' cracked surfaces and record the effect time and history has had on their materials and supports. Secondly, and specifically for this supplement, we invited 12 art writers, critics, historians curators and conservators to submit a short reflection on the subject of 'watching art'. Each contributor has focused on a particular work or exhibition that had a significant impact on them.

We wish to thank the following for their generous support: Barbara Dawson, Christine Kennedy, Liz Forster, Joanna Shepard at Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane; John O Connor, The School of Art,

Design & Printing and the Faculty of Applied Arts at the Dublin Institute of Technology; Information Design; Peter Fitzgerald at Circa Art Magazine; all the invited writers; and the artists, museums and galleries that aided the printing of all the images used in this supplement.

—*Brian Fay and Niamh Ann Kelly*

Art-Watching Circa Supplement is funded by the School of Art, Design & Printing, and by a Creative Practice Award from the Faculty of Applied Arts' Research & Scholarship Awards, Dublin Institute of Technology.

Art-Watching Drawings:
Brian Fay

Art-Watching Text:
Niamh Ann Kelly

Circa Supplement Design:
Information Design
Art-Watching Book Design:
Brenda Dermody



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Cover, detail from Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, *Woman Meditating*, Oil on Canvas. , Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, undated.
Left, detail from Henri Fantin-Latour, *Blush Roses*, Oil on Canvas, 44x36cm, Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, undated.

Watching Over Art *Thoughts on Art and Art Criticism*

by **Niamh Ann Kelly**

Ira Gershwin phrased it well: *someone to watch over me*. First penned in 1926, the song became the anthem of the lovelorn seeking the attention of another to focus on them, to stay with them, watch over their every action and keep them safe. Bird-watchers will move from country to country, even across continents, to see that their chosen flock has arrived at its intended destination in safety and then to observe all their activities from a respectful distance. Trying to consider why it is that I am endlessly drawn to view and experience art – old art and new art, to revisit works in collections, to see temporary exhibitions – and further to ‘read’ it, both privately and in more public forms through review, the word ‘watching’ keeps coming to mind. As people watch over each other, birdwatchers over birds, I think there is room also in this term for me to begin to consider my personal and professional engagement with art.

The philosopher Emmanuel Levinas fore-fronted his consideration of ethics as fundamental to thought by claiming that this knowing of ethics starts only with the facing of our *other* – whoever that may be. With this in mind, he wrote of vigilance as a state of watching over the other; an act defined by an ethical understanding of love. In interview with Richard Kearney, he said:

I have described ethical responsibility as *insomnia* or *wakefulness* precisely because it is a perpetual duty of vigilance and effort which can never slumber. [... L]ove cannot sleep, can never be peaceful or permanent. Love is the incessant watching over of the other; it can never be satisfied or contented with the bourgeois ideal of love as domestic comfort or the mutual possession of two people living out an *égosime-à-deux* (1).



Without wishing to deny the wide and emphatically social importance of what Levinas discussed, I want to consider a resonance in his words for how I understand art. This relates firstly, to my own love (and I mean love) of art, and I believe I share this with many more, and secondly, to what it is I think art does.

Why is it – having raced through Amsterdam in the rain, negotiated New York in snowy subzero temperatures, or pushed through the sticky London underground – that I feel restful and even at peace as I stand in front of a Vermeer painting? Never mind wet clothes, or piercing cold air or a clammy atmosphere. I don’t really care about the pushing jostling crowd in a packed exhibition gallery or the people who seem to peer at art solely through the lens of their camera, usually while standing in front of me. I am here in front of these small canvases of wonder and I will return to see

**After Corot:
Woman
Meditating,
digital hand
drawing,
dimensions
variable, 2006,
Brian Fay**



**After Orpen:
Captain Shawe-
Taylor, digital
hand drawing,
dimensions
variable, 2006,
Brian Fay**

them again and again, and each time I will see each one differently. What is it that brings thousands to Venice every other year in the most uncomfortable season to be there? Or to another art biennale around the globe? Why is Kassel descended upon at five-year intervals to make it such a riveting and provocative art event on a huge scale? When did people start booking tickets to gain entrance to National Galleries and at what point did the Tate Modern become the busiest modern and contemporary art space in this part of Europe? As soon as the Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane reopens to the public this summer, tracks will be beaten to Charlemont House from all directions by art lovers descending once again on its modern and contemporary collection, keen also to inspect its new wing. Clearly, I am not alone in proclaiming a love of art through worn pavement, plane tickets, subway stubs and overstaying welcome with friends conveniently

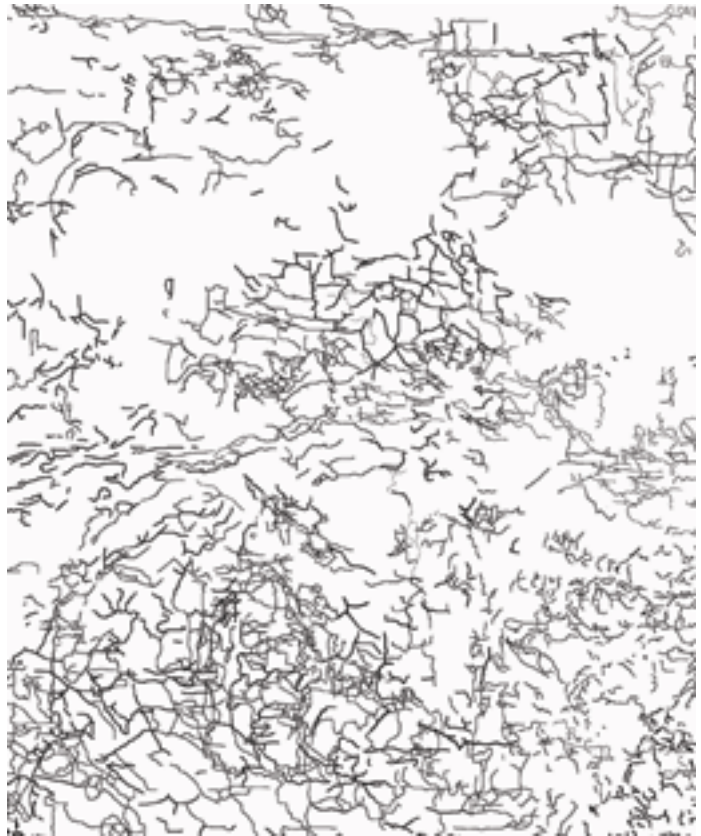
located in other art intense locations.

Art holds for me a fascination that compels me to keep looking out for it, to keep watch. To 'follow' art is to become its lover of a sort. To see and experience as much of it as possible, as often as possible, is a commitment as well as a passion. Its reach moves far beyond that of a mere hobby or social distraction. Both the pleasure and challenge of this watch feeds and propels the activity itself. Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel made it difficult to proclaim this kind of affection for art – *the love of art* became a dirty phrase, hi-jacked in the name of a well-intentioned critique of the social economically-driven elitism associated with art collections, galleries, institutions in the past (2). But I would like to reclaim that term, the love of art, and in doing so remind myself that no, maybe art is not actually 'for' everyone. Few would argue that such an issue is relevant to other disciplines of human endeavour, and yet there seems to me to be a discomfort with this fact, contributing to a growing embarrassment among many about art's functions. This makes art challenging to watch over: for the watcher, art can be unpredictable and not necessarily easy to understand or engage with and there can even be uncomfortable realizations from an encounter with art. But also, art can provide plenty of pleasure by way of what it communicates and most especially, by its presence.

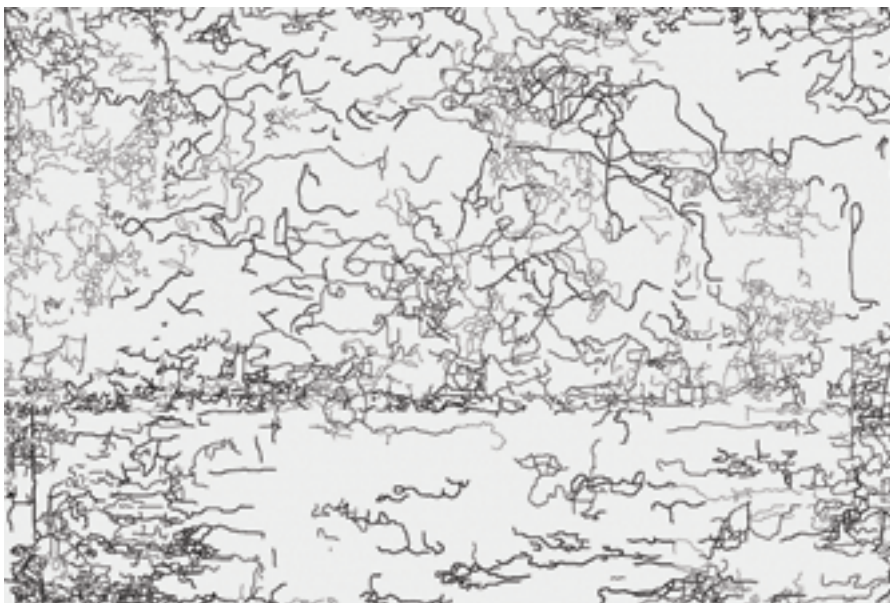
A reaction against the physicality of art has been the dominant focus of an embarrassment about art's materialism in recent years, with apologists emerging in many public forums to iterate a contemporary enthrallment to process for process' sake. This is an attitude, I feel, with potentially profound pitfalls for art's survival as it suggests a desire to undo the definition of art's status. The fundamental ability of art to create a caesura in everyday life, to make us pause, if only for a while, is reliant upon its actual presence, in some material or sensual form, even if it is only *there* for a moment. Art is a type of *other* (to allude again to Levinas) and needs to exist outside of us, literally and physically. That

is how and why we can hold vigil over it.

There is however, a difficulty with understanding art as exterior to us, which could be argued to lend weight to the oversimplification of art, particularly from the past: to reduce it to a historical document or to see it simply as a record of or reference to some event outside of itself. This can problematically relegate art to being read as an illustration, giving it a secondary standing in the field of knowledge. To counter this attitude, Anton Kaes some twenty years ago usefully articulated that visual culture, in his example film, could become not only interpretative material in itself, but in fact be a source of knowledge for the future, what he called the “visual writing of history”(3). I think art does something even more active than that: I know art as intervention, and often it appears self-consciously designed to be so. Art intervenes in its subjects’ lives, and by disrupting common expectations or understanding presents the possibility for the reader to reflect that bit further on what the artwork suggests to them. In a society alarmingly governed by images, and images of images, the widening technology of art today allows for some balance in this domain by contributing thoughtful alternatives to more mainstream knowledge media.



I believe that one of the primary results of what artists do through their practice and the products of their practice is to intervene in everyday experience and so their art holds a



Above, After Henry: Girl in White, digital hand drawing, dimensions variable, 2005, Brian Fay.

Left, After Hone: Evening Malahide, digital hand drawing, dimensions variable, 2005, Brian Fay.



type of vigil over us, its subjects. As art critics, historians, theorists, curators, collectors and artists continue to 'show and tell' the art they have known, the visitor too returns to the gallery to see, hear and read once more the art that has touched them: all are watching over something they love that, in turn, keeps watch over them.

Notes

1. Kearney, Richard, *States of Mind – Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers on the European Mind*. 1995. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 195.
2. Bourdieu, Pierre & Darbel, Alain, *The Love of Art*. 1991. Cambridge: Polity Press.
3. Discussed in Frank van Vree's text 'The Sensation of the Image', in: NAI Publishers/Nederlands Foto Instituut, *The Image Society – Essays on Visual Culture*. 2002. Rotterdam: NAI Publishers/Nederlands Foto Instituut, 61-63.

Left, After Fantin-Latour: Blush Roses, digital hand drawing, dimensions variable, 2005, Brian Fay. Below, Nathaniel Hone, Evening Malahide, Oil on Canvas, 85x126cm, Dublin



City Gallery The Hugh Lane, c. 1883. Top right, Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, Woman Meditating, Oil on Canvas, 38x29.2cm. Top far right, Henri Fantin-Latour, Blush Roses, Oil on Canvas, 44x36cm, Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, undated. Bottom right, William Orpen, Captain Shawe-Taylor, Oil on Canvas, 73.2x62cm, Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, 1908. Bottom far right, Grace Henry, The Girl in White, Oil on Canvas, 61x51 cm, Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, before 1912.



I. Seeing Colours

by **Mieke Bal**

One of my memorable experiences of art watching was the renewed encounter with Manet's *Olympia*. I had always looked at this painting with the eyes of discipline: "knowing" that "she" was a prostitute and the black woman a servant bringing in flowers left by a customer.

Until the day that I look at the painting not for content but as an assemblage of flat shapes. I suddenly realized that the shape of the black woman's body was so ample, broad, that it seemed implausible she was just walking in. That changed everything. Suddenly she became a friend, sitting at the bedside of a friend, perhaps even a lover. The flowers are hers to give, since no one else is there. And why presume a client, other than to confirm, against what is visible, a story older than the painting?

This surprise made me look again at the shapes. Then I saw the white woman's gorgeous chestnut air, barely set off against the brownish background. This ton-sur-ton reflected back on the black woman's face, which I had failed to pay attention to, and saw her features in much more detail now that I was sensitized to seeing color as nuance. I have never looked at the painting in the same way. It is not that form is more important than content. It is that looking at form first changes content.

Mieke Bal holds the position of Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences Professor (KNAW), and is a Professor of the Theory of Literature in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Amsterdam.

Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1865, oil on canvas, 130.5x190cm. [Courtesy Musee d'Orsay, Paris].



Carl Andre, *144 Magnesium Square*, 1969, Magnesium, 10x3658x3658mm. [Courtesy and © Tate London 2005 and © DACS, London/VAGA, New York 2006].

2. For Ana Mendieta

by **Fionna Barber**

Up to 1997, I used to spend a couple of weeks every July in London teaching students at the Open University Summer School for the now defunct course 'Modern Art, Practices and Debates'. A feature of the Summer School was the daily visit to a London gallery, giving many students first-hand experience of artworks they previously knew only from reproduction. One of my last teaching sessions provided what was to be a rather memorable encounter with two works in the collection of the old Tate Gallery on Millbank. This particular year the Tate was displaying Carl Andre's *144 Magnesium Square* in the central sculpture court. A floor piece consisting of twelve rows of twelve metal tiles, this was intended to be walked upon, with the result that the surface would be repeatedly altered by the impressions left on it. As Andre said, it then 'becomes its own record of everything that's happened to it.'

Summer School nights tended to involve heated discussion of various art-related issues, often with my friend and fellow teacher Wendy Frith. This year, prompted by Andre's floor piece, these happened to include both the gendering of Minimalism and the death of the Cuban artist Ana Mendieta, killed in a fall from the window of her thirty-fourth floor apartment in 1985. Her husband Carl Andre, with whom she had been having a heated argument, was allegedly standing right behind her. He was arrested, charged and subsequently acquitted of Ana Mendieta's murder.

And so back to the Tate, where another exhausting day was enlivened by our discovery of Bruce Naumann's *Double No*, a video piece involving a reflected image of a clown jumping up and down repeatedly chanting 'No, no, no'. Warily, Wendy and I were making our way

back through the sculpture court when something quite unexpected happened. Suddenly, and without a word passing between us, we found ourselves on top of *144 Magnesium Square*, jumping up and down and shouting ‘No, no, no....’

There are various versions of what happened next, in what has apparently become one of the Summer School legends. My favourite is the one where Wendy and I were hauled away by security guards and thrown out the doors of the Tate, with instructions never to return. But I like to think our interaction with *144 Magnesium Square* still endures, marked indelibly on its tiled surface.

Fionna Barber teaches Art History at Manchester Metropolitan University, and has recently written for the Open University on the gendering of modernism.

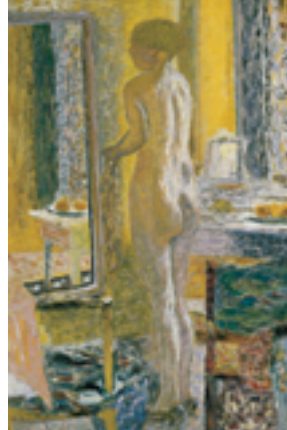
3. Sunday Morning in Paris

by **Ciarán Bennett**

Bonnard stroked her; the delicate nimbus of her aureole stretched its tumescent nipple, and glided his hand around the soft curves of her breast. The elided tonal green cream of the painted stroke, moved tenderly touching the rib cage, and smoothly like the oil which lubricated it, caressed her abdomen, moving laterally over her mons, and dissipating its tonal delicacy in the ripper greens of her thighs.

At a recent exhibition of Bonnard (Pierre Bonnard, *The Work of Art, Suspending Time*) at the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, I saw a painting of a young girl. She was maybe sixteen with a streak of whiteish lime yellow paint, from below the curve of her small breast, stroking and touching the immature curves of her body, across the ribcage slowly moving and experiencing the tactile movement of such a caress, the paint a smooth movement of continuous languor, touching and stroking such delicate pubescence. It was if Bonnard had just left her, the memory still in his fingertips of the soft and yet febrile touch of her skin, which transmuted itself to his paint, his fingers and brush.

To my surprise in a dark alcove nearby, were his pho-



Left, Pierre Bonnard, La toilette, 1931, Huile sur toile, 154x104.5cm, [Courtesy Musée d'Orsay & Galleria internazionale d'Arte moderna, Venise, © Claudio Franzini © ADAGP, Paris, 2006].

Right, Pierre Bonnard, Modèle dans l'atelier de l'artiste, c. 1916, Epreuve originale ancienne, 18x13cm, photograph, [Courtesy Musée d'Orsay, Paris Photo RMN, © Jean Schormans © ADAGP, Paris, 2006].

tographs, which I had never seen before. The postage-stamp sized photo of the girl, with the very deliberate lighting of a photographer’s studio, are reflected in the final paintings. As if the light from the small nipples, which flows down the abdomen on the left recreate the textural moment of remembered sexual experience, as a painterly moment of recall, accentuated by a predisposed distant pose. The photographic image, directly reflected the composition of the final painting, they had the same preconceived motif.

Ciarán Bennett is a Writer, Curator and President AICA (Ireland).

4. Expressions of Irish Landscape

by **Síghle Bhreathnach-Lynch**

From the middle of the eighteenth century landscape has proved to be the most popular category in Irish art; for artist and viewer alike. Why this should be so is a complex story but one in part related to the centrality of the land to Ireland’s visual culture. Consequently a great many art exhibitions focus exclusively on individual responses to the environment. As a devotee of landscape

Gerald of Wales (Giraldus Cambrensis, b. 1146 – d. 1223), Decorated initial and map, Initial 'L' (oqui) and a partially damaged map of islands including Ireland (labelled 'Hybernia') and 'Britannia', (Arundel 14f.27v), Topography of Ireland, (Topographia Hiberniae) [Courtesy Collection of the British Library].



art, a highly enjoyable part of my ‘art watching’ revolves around experiencing new ways of seeing through the eyes of the artist. Of all the exhibitions I have seen one stands out above the others; the Éire/Land Exhibition, held at the MacMullen Museum, Boston College, Massachusetts, February to May 2003. It exceeded the usual expectations of a landscape exhibition in several innovative ways starting with the title of the display. It was brief and startlingly to the point ~ *Éire/Land*. It instantly brought to mind that Ireland is not only a beautiful place but before it is anything else it is a landmass. Indeed it is this concept of Ireland as territory, as a basic icon of the Irish nation, a country fought over for centuries by waves of invaders, each seeking to inscribe and possess it, which provided a leitmotif throughout the exhibition. Displayed side by side the usual paintings, water-colours, drawings and sculpture, photographs, video and installations, were early maps, illuminated manuscripts, Celtic ornaments and political cartoons.

The exhibits were displayed under unusual and intriguing headings; *mapping; digging; possessing and responding today*. The selection of maps called attention to how land is mediated via the map while the manuscripts provided fascinating visual impressions of medieval Ireland. The inclusion of key Celtic objects were tangible reminders of the range of creative talent in ancient Ireland but equally importantly of the vital roles played by these items in establishing a separate cultural identity in the nineteenth century. The largest body of landscape paintings formed the section on possessing the land. Here the iconic representations of Paul Henry and others vividly brought to life the special qualities of the western seaboard. The concluding section explored how contemporary artists chronicle both change and continuity in their responses to a single county, Mayo. Installa-

tions, videos, paintings, photographs and sculpture were the vehicles of expression for this group of artists, Irish and American. It provided a stimulating way in which to draw the many strands of this fascinating exhibition together in a meaningful contemporary context.

Dr Síghle Bhreathnach-Lynch is Curator of Irish Art at the National Gallery of Ireland and lectures and publishes on all aspects of 19th and early 20th Century Irish Art.

5. Gijsbrechts's Joke

by **Hanneke Grootenboer**

Trompe l'Oeil with Studio Wall and Vanitas Still Life by Cornelius Gijsbrechts is an example par excellence of a painting that is able to philosophize on the nature of vision. Generally, trompe l'oeil paintings perform the practical joke that the picture we see is not the picture we get. Taking the joke seriously, Gijsbrechts confronts the viewer with the potential failure of perception when creating a trompe l'oeil of a trompe l'oeil. This dazzling picture-within-a-picture undermines the distinction between reality, illusion, disillusion and self-delusion. If we look, for instance, at the marbled maulstick that runs across the lower right corner of the painted painting, it remains impossible to tell whether it touches the “canvas” or leans against the marble shelf of the niche. We have to admit that the marble shelf looks more real than the imitation marble of the maulstick, whose intention nevertheless is to appear more lifelike in contrast to the “canvas”. What is painted, what is real, what is supposed to appear as if it is painted, and what must look more real than reality? Gijsbrechts created an ambiguous and ambitious play with referentiality by adding a supplementary perspective of the trompe l'oeil board partition to the illusionism of the vanitas painting. Allowing for (at least) two mutually exclusive points of view, this picture creates an ironic distance between the image and its ground (the “canvas”), between the “canvas” and the board partition, and with the actual canvas on which it is



Cornelius Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *Trompe l'Oeil with Vanitas Painting and Studio Wall*, 1668, 152x118cm, Oil on canvas, [Courtesy & Currently presented at the exhibition "Highlights" at: Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, Denmark].

painted. The doubling of perspectives provokes our eyes to the point of insult, and of doubt. Where has the “real” painting gone? The inconsistency of the illusionist levels that Gijsbrechts piles up ceaselessly eventually results in our awareness that the vanitas allegory we regard is turning into an allegory of our own looking, narrating the impossibility of ever getting this picture straight.

Hanneke Grootenboer is research leader at the University of Amsterdam and author of The Rhetoric of Perspective: Realism and Illusionism in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Still Life and Trompe l'Oeil Painting (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

6. The Meaning in the Encounter

by **Siún Hanrahan**

What does art watching offer? An invitation to think; to discover and explore an idea, another perspective, an other's perspective (as best I can). It also offers a

reminder that thinking is not a disembodied activity; our senses do more than record data for the mind to process, we make sense in, through and of our sensual engagement with the world around us. The sensual is a vehicle of intellect and the intellect is a vehicle of the senses. The whole self is engaged by art and in thinking.

Some works transcend invitation and compel engagement. Remembering such encounters, I lingered upon a particular drawing, *Andromeda* (2000), by Alice Maher and an exhibition of John Shinnors' *Estuary Paintings*. Each visit to an art gallery carries within it the hope of significance, relatively few yield it, and yet every visit involves a negotiation of meaning.

In reflecting upon the value of art watching, it seems to me that an important aspect of the encounter it offers is that the meaning an artwork claims (the perspective it offers) reveals itself as composed, as a fabrication – something made up by someone. Although this, in my view, is true of all of the meanings we forge, the process of



Alice Maher *Andromeda*, 2000, charcoal on paper, 60x120 inches. [Courtesy Green on Red Gallery].

composition is suppressed in many of the vehicles through which we articulate meaning (this piece of writing, for example); meaning is offered as somehow pre-existent, with the articulation a gesture that simply reveals its structure rather than creating it.

Gazing upon a drawing or a painting, I look to make sense of the perspective it offers. The meaning that I negotiate emerges in the interaction between my self and the work, neither wholly my imposition or fabrication, nor wholly inherent in the work. And despite my best efforts, the work remains other than the meaning I negotiate, its significance unconsumed by the sense that it



John Shinnors, *Lighthouse, Evening*, 2000, oil on canvas, 168x183cm. [Courtesy the Artist].

makes to me. When the work is powerful, I am drawn back again and again, and still the work is unconsumed by the meanings forged.

In the apparent uncertainty of the meanings that emerge in my encounter with an artwork, the evident possibility of other interpretations that may be equally valid, the openness and contestability of meaning (all meaning) is revealed. By extension, also revealed is the value of returning again and again to encounter the other, even when this is an uncomfortable experience.

Siún Hanrahan is an artist and writer, and a research coordinator at the Dublin Institute of Technology.

7. Your Move

by **Christina Kennedy**

Working with all artists as they create site-specific installations presents opportunities for unique insights as the work evolves towards its final form. This was particularly true for me in the case of *Golden Door* which Brian O'Doherty / Patrick Ireland created for his current retrospective Beyond the White Cube at Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane. The process has been revelatory also, in terms of how this artist, possibly its most astute critic, has addressed what is a completely new gallery space for the first time and put it through its paces.

It was fascinating to observe the way Ireland seemed to “feel” the gallery space through his body, in a state of intense concentration, moving forward and back, side to



Brian O'Doherty / Patrick Ireland, *Golden Door*, [Courtesy Dublin City Gallery the Hugh Lane & the Artist].

side, confronting each wall, one eye tightly shut, as he choreographed imaginary ropes in space. Numerous rapid sketches continued the process with related thoughts on colour, and very quickly Ireland had a firm sense of what he wanted to exact from the space. Assisted by Brendan Earley and Fergus Byrne, he mapped it out, all lines and curves being devised without measurement or ruler of any sort.

The resulting artwork is an enveloping mind/body experience. The ropes carve the room into slices of space, which though obviously just air have the presence of architecture. The arrangement of the ropes pushes and pulls the space into various configurations. The sensation of passing through and under ropes especially those which evoke lintels (and there are more than one in *Golden Door*) invoke a particularly vertical response in your nerve endings, well mine anyway. The ropes when precisely lined up, one eye closed, with certain panels of wall colour, snap into focus with the effect of making the ‘slides’ of colour bear out from the wall.

Your body sizes itself against the space and you become intensely aware of your own kinaesthetics, like walking on a stage or from the light into pitch black. *Golden Door* is a kaleidoscope of vistas which open momentarily as you sight them, crouching, bending, leaning, extending your body which disappear with your next step. You come to realise that you the viewer complete the work. You are implicit in its forms and your behaviour within the work constantly re-configures it.

No other artwork of my personal experience so explores the possibilities of perception and of space as created by one's own sense of location in it.

Christina Kennedy is Head of Exhibitions at Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane.

Right, Edward Hopper, *Early Sunday Morning*, 1930, Oil on canvas, 89.4x153cm,

[Courtesy Whitney Museum of American Art, (Purchase, with funds from Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney 31.426, Photograph by Geoffrey Clements)].

Below, Richard-Max Tremblay, *Portrait of John A. Schweitzer*, 1987, Silver print, 50x40cm, [Collection of the Artist, Photo Courtesy the Artist].



8. And so on

by **Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith**

Whenever I'm in New York I make a point of revisiting the group of paintings by Edward Hopper in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, which includes *Seven AM* (1948) and *Early Sunday Morning* (1930). I'm not entirely sure why. Perhaps the attraction is nothing more than these paintings' sense of highly theatrical calm, their offer of momentary respite from a crowded schedule of art tourism, not to mention the bustle of Madison Avenue outside. Recently, my sense of the second of the two works mentioned has been subtly altered by a close encounter with Dirk Bengtsson's bizarre homage, *Edward Hopper: Early Sunday Morning* (1970), which adds a small swastika in a white circle to the bottom left-hand corner of Hopper's composition, a provocative motif also deployed in other paintings by Bengtsson. This particular work was included in a retrospective at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm of this still underappreciated cult figure, whose *Hitler's Dream Kitchen* (1974) is one of the funniest works of serious

contemporary art this side of Martin Kippenberger. My encounter with Bengtsson in turn offered a useful key to the paintings of his younger compatriot, Karen Mamma Anderson, who contributed a short essay to the exhibition catalogue. In this essay she acknowledges the legitimising effect of Bengtsson's unique blend of eclecticism and traditionalism on her own practice. She also notes that the Hopper painting to which Bengtsson paid his eccentric respects 'is painted from a stage set which was, in turn, presumably painted from a photograph', likening the play of appropriation, homage and influence to a game of Chinese Whispers. While I have been interested in Andersson's work for some years I had previously tended to triangulate it crudely with reference mainly to her own contemporaries internationally, from Peter Doig to Neo Rauch. While I think I now understand Andersson's work and its more immediate cultural context a little better because of my encounter with Bengtsson it remains to be seen how this reshuffling of the deck will affect my next viewing of the Hopper. And so on and so forth.

Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith is a critic, occasional curator and Senior Lecturer at University College Dublin.

9. The Portrait, a Struggle to See

by **Nancy Pedri and Richard-Max Tremblay**

— Can you see how he fights for control? How he mocks you who are trying so hard to pierce the intensity of his gaze? Portraits, he reminds you, are about a struggle to



assert authority over self ... and not only over the image of self, but also over its very integrity. Poised, assured, stern he resists me just as he resisted you.

– John does try very hard to control his image. Just look at how his jacket unmistakably falls open to show the ‘V’ on his tie. The struggle, and you are right to see a struggle, is that John wants the camera to be the mirror he expects it to be. Of course, it never is a mirror. Or, if in this case it seems like it is, it is I who fashion the mirror. I make the choices (composition, square format, black and white, etc.). What you see is not what John wants, but what I give.

– So, you exercise the power. Your choices make you believe that you are the image-maker, the producer of self. But, what of me who looks at this portrait? Do I not participate in its production? I’d rather think that I make of John what I want to make of him.

– Just as John addresses me, his viewer, so I address you. I look at John and tell you “Look here. Do you see what I see?” I want you to see what I see. No, I *need* you to see what I see. Ultimately, you are the reason for the portrait.

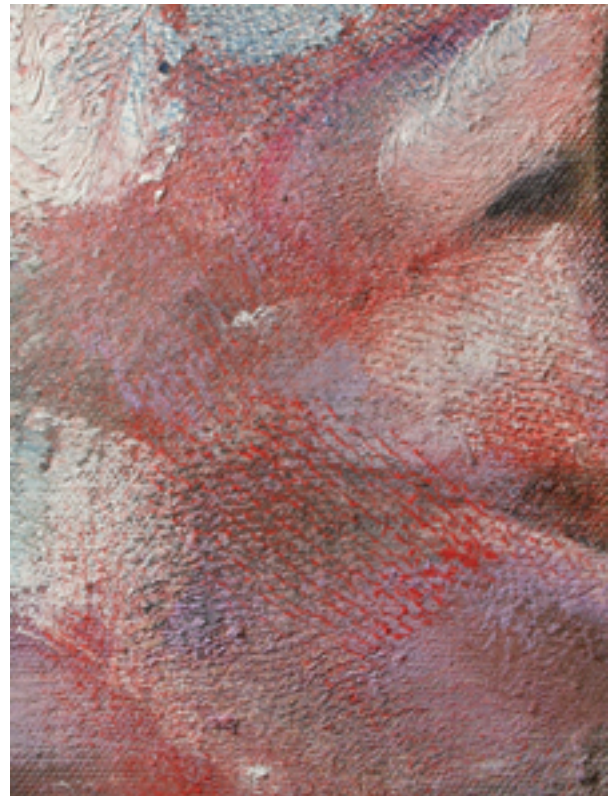
– To look, then, is to change the patterns of control. It is to step into the portrait and to roam freely both within and without the photographic space. Securing our own conditions of seeing, each of us (John, I, you and you) initiates a struggle that shapes the image and allows it to come into being. What else is there, but constant disintegration and genesis?

Nancy Pedri, a literary critic who specializes in word and image relations, is a professor at McGill University (Montreal).

Richard-Max Tremblay is a Canadian painter and photographer based in Montreal who studied at Goldsmiths’ College in London and has exhibited widely in Canada and Europe over the past 30 years.



**Above, Francis Bacon: *Portrait of Henrietta Moraes* (1969), Oil on canvas, 35.5x30.5cm, [Private Collection].
Below, Detail of paint surface to the left of Moraes’ nose and mouth.**



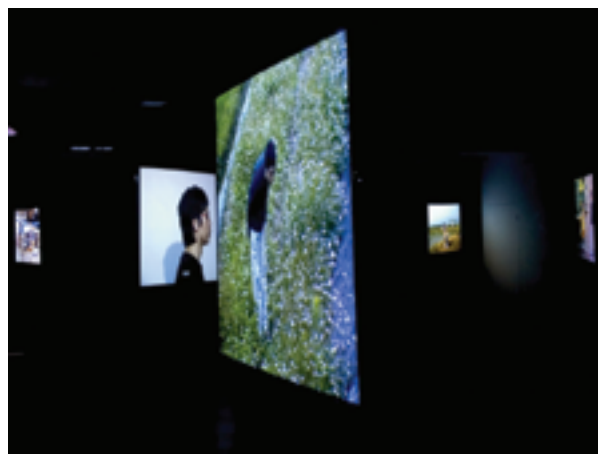
10. Close Encounters with Francis Bacon

by **Joanna Shepard**

In January the exhibition Francis Bacon: Portraits and Heads, which had begun at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, closed at the Hamburger Kunsthalle. Attracting thousands of visitors, it comprised some fifty paintings from the 1940s to 1990s; intimate head and figure studies of Bacon's lovers, friends, acquaintances and self-portraits, emanating their authoritative presence in gilded frames from pristine white walls. The show over, they were prepared for their journeys home, and I was present for two days as the show was dismantled.

When paintings are taken down and examined on tables under bright lamps in the quiet of a closed museum, the relationship between artwork and viewer acquires an unusual intimacy. Viewed up close, they seem no longer to 'stand on ceremony', and a particular kind of scrutiny comes into play which heightens awareness of their physicality. Formal concerns may preoccupy while the painting is on display, but now the canvas weave and paint textures, the wooden stretchers and frames command attention; great triptychs and tiny portraits alike reduced to their physical features, their 'ingredients'. It is a pleasure to be able to view paintings in this way, and the canvases awaiting departure richly repaid such attention, revealing the unique painting techniques Bacon used to achieve astonishingly diverse effects, principally from oil paint.

Portrait of Henrietta Moraes (1969) is intriguing for its striking palette and composition, but especially from a technical point of view. The hair and flesh tones are a riot of broad, almost violently applied brushstrokes, tempered with superimposed, transparent 'veils' of vivid colour and texture where Bacon delicately and repeatedly pressed woven textile into the impasto while still wet, sometimes laden with paint or raw pigment. While intensely worked, the surfaces retain huge vitality due to this skilful balancing of painterly and precise mark making, and they contrast sharply with the emphatically matt, featurelessness of the brilliant yellow in the surrounding area. The portrait is catalogued as 'oil on can-



Tsui Kuang-Yu, Video Installation, 2006, [Copyright the Artist, Photo Courtesy Dave Gibbons].

vas', yet this yellow is almost certainly a synthetic household emulsion, deliberately selected for these particular optical properties as a means to magnify the dynamism of the head.

A painting cannot be evaluated solely as the sum of its physical parts, but after such scrutiny, when it returns to a pristine wall somewhere and formal concerns predominate once more, the sense of the artist's achievement becomes all the more remarkable.

Joanna Shepard is a graduate of the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, and the Conservator at Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane.

11. The Lateral View

by **Brandon Taylor**

Tsui Kuang-Yu's video installation at the Taiwan Pavilion at Venice last summer was remarkable for showing parodies of so-called correct behaviour in modern urban life – for instance the artist guessing the names of objects thrown at the back of his head, from behind, or evading the descent of heavy objects dropped from above. What impressed me even more was the lateral view that could be taken of the screens themselves – the viewer could even inch round to confront the screens sideways on, as if they were pencils of vertical light hung disembodied in the dimmed gallery space. It occurred to me that sever-

al, perhaps many works of modern and modernist art were best viewed from the side – not in a spirit of perversity but because the works themselves propelled the viewer into that raking or oblique view. For instance, looking at a work of classic modernist abstraction, Mondrian's *Composition in Red, Blue and White* of 1937 in the Pompidou Centre in Paris, you will see a blue patch at top left wrapping itself right round the edge of the canvas, and a red patch at lower left just inching onto the canvas surface that cannot be seen from the front – while several of Mondrian's horizontal and vertical black lines nudge over the canvas corner and ask to be inspected there, on the sides. For Mondrian as well as Tsui, the work seems to want to be inspected laterally. I would certainly like to understand why.

Brandon Taylor is Professor of History of Art, University of Southampton and the author of Art Today (2005).

12. Extract from an Unpublished Novel

by **Gemma Tipton**

Maud was stuck on a conundrum about art and love. *Can I love a work of art without wanting to own it?* In art, is love about looking or is it about possession? There was a gap too, she thought, between the kinds of art people said they liked, and what they bought. In the company of friends she once asked: 'If you could own any one work of art, by any artist, and have it to look at every day of your life, what would it be?'

They had all thought for a while.

'A Monet,' said Claire. 'The waterlily pond.'

'Picasso,' said David. 'Any one would do.'

'Kandinsky,' said Annette, '*Cossacks*, for the unexpected rainbows.'

'Whistler,' said Peter, 'the beautiful *White Girl*.'

'And what about you, Maud?'

'Chagall, one of his circus cows or flying women. *The Birthday*, perhaps, or *Above the Town*.' She looked to Alan, 'Well?'

'I think,' he said. 'If I wanted a work of art, I would probably get it.' Peter had looked at him hard just then.

Maud thought Alan was probably right about himself, but she and the rest of them must be wrong. There were no delicate blues and greens in the art at Claire's house. No soft petals dissolving into water and light. On her walls were bare etchings, line drawings, pale abstracts, restrained and quietly framed. And that, naturally, went for Peter too. No nineteenth-century experienced-yet-virginal-mistresses there.

David had a range of contemporary 'names' on his walls, but it did not seem as if he had extended his passion for Cubism to purchasing any available, or affordable examples. And although, ironically, Annette said she wanted to possess a Kandinsky, it was in her bedroom that a small Monet watercolour hung.

'What are you getting at?' They wanted to know.

'Well, it's the difference between what you think you want, which is probably what you're told you want, and what you get. I say I love Chagall. I've never made any work like his, I've never tried to. I spent days looking at his paintings when the big exhibition was on, I drank them in. But when I bought a picture a few days later, it was a small lonely painting of hinted ghosts. Why didn't I buy something figurative?'

'Then is love looking or having?'

'It's more than that,' Maud went on. 'It's the idea of the work, the gallery where you first saw the paintings, the person who introduced you to Impressionism, the gardens you played in as a child. With Chagall, it's a love so strong you can fly, it's dreams and a man who gave me a book of his life. But you can't own those things.'

'You're saying it's more than the work?'

'Yes, it's what you put into it, but more than that again, it's what other people put into it, for you to find when you get there. It's a complex spell. People need to believe it's there so they can find it and think a little rubs off on them.'

Gemma Tipton is a writer and critic of contemporary art and architecture based in Dublin.

