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The sea melts into the sky at sunset in Dublin dusk, by Roy Coyne



Conor Walton's baked loaf of bread



Sonya Falcone's Campo de Color provides a riot of colour

Alternative views at the Biennial

From industrial detritus to terracotta plates heaped with spices, the second Dublin Biennial at CHQ brings together a fascinating selection of international modern art

The journey art has made in the public consciousness over the past century can be summed up

by the following gem. While Andrew Duggan was sourcing industrial debris for an artwork due to be installed at the Dublin Biennial, the workmen unearthed a massive block of aged polystyrene. By mistake, it was delivered to the Biennial Gallery on the day of the opening and with no time to find space to store it, it was left standing among the exhibits. At the reception that evening it attracted so much attention Duggan made a pragmatic decision – he gave it a title, NAMA Bear, and a price, €2,220. A week later, it is still drawing admiring scrutiny.

Today is the last chance to see what is the second Dublin Biennial. An exhibition of international contemporary art curated by Maggie McGee, it strikes a neat balance between the kind of outré artworks one can appreciate – without necessarily wanting to take them home, and a number of excellent, accessible paintings, sculptures and installations.

Regarding avant-garde art,



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the oft-heard philistine jibe is “my five-year-old kid could do that”. The point being that the five-year-old kid didn't. The artist did.

The glory of art is its power to affect the viewer on myriad levels. We can be drawn to it because its beauty engulfs us like a warm, comforting breeze as in Rod Coyne's plein air, Dublin Dusk, a dreamscape of sea melting into sky at sunset. It can startle as with Gavin Turk's filled black bin bag entitled Refuse – there's no danger of the Gallery help throwing it out with the trash, it's a black painted bronze weighing a ton. Its tactile essence can appeal – see Karla Sachse's Baskets of Experience woven out of old newspapers.

Its originality can rivet attention as in the case of Catriona McGloughlin's wall-



Although it looks like junk, Andrew Duggan's Hole could embody what modern, living art could be

Ros Drinkwater

to-wall, ceiling-high stack of bed quilts and mattresses, and Cuisine of Rome by Romanian artist Ilie Mitrea, a collage combining an embroidered table mat and a painting of a young couple cooking dinner in a warm climate.

It can dazzle – Helen Steele's Urban Jungle, a piece of digital action art that captures the vibrancy of Dublin City, and Sonya Falcone's collection of 300 terracotta plates heaped with salt coloured by spices and pigments. Entitled Campo de Color, it had great success at the Venice Biennale 2013. Displayed in the shopping mall outside the gallery as an enticement inside, the work is literally international – Falcone collects a new spice from every country she visits.

Art can also serve as a timely reminder that there is beauty in the humblest ob-

jects – Conor Walton's simple portrait in oil of a baked loaf of bread, and Ian Joyce's Cosmology, an arrangement of wooden spoons on a white wall. Last, but by no means least, it can provoke thought and debate on serious issues. Canbra Hodson's series of photographs charts her own investigation into the unsolved disappearance of a friend in 2011, and Anupama's wheelchair stacked with rocks is her response to a serious accident which left her unable to walk.

One of the most intriguing exhibits is Chinese artist Zhi XinXin's table covered with white porcelain plates, cups, bowls and serving dishes all splattered with what I took to be raspberry coulis – until I read the title – Hurting. Not coulis then, but blood? XinXin hits the nail on the head when in her catalogue note she pos-

its that: “The interpretation of the work depends on the context and its relevance to the audience. Thus the final explanation goes beyond the artist's original concept – for me it is audience who finishes my artwork.”

Certainly true for this viewer. Seeing that title, my thoughts went straight to events in China, 1959–1976, the white porcelain standing for the innocent victims, the spattered red, the pain they endured. That led me to think, will the global wave of Islamic terrorism burn itself out, as did the Cultural Revolution? Such thoughts filled my head all the way home and I fell asleep with those red spatters still on my mind.

For any piece of art, the real test is how long is it likely to hold our attention – five seconds, or five centuries?

Andrew Duggan's heap of industrial detritus, entitled Hole, is uncompromisingly junk, a great mess of slabs of reinforced concrete with the metal spikes that secured them intact, rubber tubing, discarded plastic containers, rusty nails and shredded plastic. It would be hard to imagine anything more unlovely, but picture it placed outdoors in a garden – think how the effects of the elements – hoar frost, raindrops, snow, would change it throughout the year. It would of course be colonised by bacteria, fungus and plants, changing it from a heap of rubbish to a living artwork that would hold your interest for years. That is art.

The Dublin Biennial 2014, finishing 4pm today; CHQ Building, IGSC, Docklands, Dublin 1; dublinbiennial.com



Opening Times

Mon: Fri: 7am - 7pm

Sat: 10am - 6pm

Sun: Closed

Bank Holiday Monday (01st June) : 12pm-6pm



History

- History
 - Restoration
 - John Rennie
 - The Crimean War Banquet



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