

DOMOBAAL

Rebecca Geldard writing about Ailbhe Ní Bhriain's work, extracted from the essay for 'Oyster Grit' - a group exhibition introducing a line-up of gallery artists as at September 2007.

..... "In another context, a visual alliance between the photographic practice of Ailbhe ni Bhriain and the drawings of Jeffrey T Y Lee might seem odd. However, despite their different perspectives on authorship, both appear driven by inquiry into the landscape, the evocative lure of the monochromatic and a need to control the elements at their disposal. Modes of representation feature heavily: whether questioning our relationship to the design and delineation of spatial territory or human culpability in the recording of historic events. Where ni Bhriain explores the push and pull between notions of access to the picture plane and material or conceptual opposites (dark/light, internal/external, manmade/organic), Lee adopts a process-based, minimal approach to describing interior and exterior settings, yet both have made works that have the potential to co-exist as facsimiles of real places and moments snatched from the collective memory.

Ní Bhriain consciously constructed 'Perimeter' series is fraught with the tension created between reordered architectural surfaces - the glossy and impenetrable qualities of which are by turns seductive and repellent. With her stylised imagery, Ní Bhriain confronts us with our aesthetic assumptions about the task and appearance of photography, until we realise the personal commitment involved in customising these vacillatory images (that could be the precursory or end shots abutting narrative explanation). As in Cramer's rural realm, the lack of human presence creates drama without pathos and the curious juxtaposition of rigorous geometric planning and the sensory possibilities of matter hints at a lack of resolution between logistical and fantastical agendas.

The Cork-based artist's post-production sensibility implies a contrary attitude to materiality and space. In each frame, internal and external worlds overlap; rotated urban elements and re-contextualised plant life are combined to create improbable areas of detail (such as the dull shine of floor tiles bearing down from the top of an image or the glimmer of borrowed light framing the cylindrical curvature of a concrete tunnel) within an otherworldly whole. Where Cramer's breathy mountain scenes appear to absorb the attention they receive, the weighty quality Ní Bhriain's tonally dark, often filmic images threatens, like the back draft of a raging fire or thermonuclear blast, to suck those before them into the picture frame. Light features as a necessary evil - a source of vital interruption to the orchestration of obscurity. But the natural life here has adapted to and morphed within the darkness: the inky reach of a reflected forest about to spread its feathery way across a waterlogged floor is suggestive of a primordial realm, but contemporary facets - mirrored walls, sheeting or rope, which may contain or stultify action - pull us back into the present."

No matter how quietly shocking or out of their time the works of these (eight) artists may appear, the apparent non-conformity of this group is driven by individual default settings over a collective sense of design. There is little evidence of preoccupation with trend or ownership - as if they might be curators of lost thoughts or property. The past, the many sources of reference unashamedly acknowledged in these works, offers an essential portal between states, a Narnian wardrobe of unknown elements that must be negotiated in the process of moving forward, a backstitch during the re-hem of a second-hand garment essential to the wending linear strength of the hand-sewn whole.