

Bright futures at the RHA

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The Royal Hibernian Academy's Futures 10 exhibition is an annual showcase for emerging artists "around who exists a growing critical and curatorial consensus". It's not a compendium, like the RHA Annual Exhibition. Rather, numbers are limited, so that each artist faces the challenge and opportunity of staging a solo show.

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The RHA's director, Patrick T Murphy, and curator Ruth Carroll choose the exhibitors. They could, Murphy notes, opt for an external curator, as several group shows do, but in the nature of things they see a great deal of work by emerging artists, so why shouldn't they put their own judgment on the line and see how things go?

That's what they've done, selecting seven artists from a broad, generally strong field of possibilities. The artists are not necessarily the best younger ones around, but all are interesting, with something distinctively of their own to offer.

Some will go on to develop as important talents in the long term, but, as Murphy observes of the artists highlighted in previous Futures exhibitions, some may disappear from the scene entirely. Sustaining a practice, he points out, requires absolute commitment – and, he might have added, the occasional lucky break.

Futures 10 runs until October 24th at the RHA Gallagher Gallery, Dublin 2;
royalhibernianacademy.ie

1 Fiona Chambers hunts images from mass cultural sources, such as the internet, television, glossy magazines and newspapers. She then appropriates or reworks them in some way that, often humorously, is revealing of the cultural mores they embody. Here her Ugliest Dog is a cheerful mutt with a prize rosette, and a series of meticulous drawings (and a painting) document with forensic precision a succession of catwalk falls by fashion models. It's subtle but quietly persuasive.

2 The film *Inception* is a tour de force in many respects, but, as more than one reviewer has noted, dreams are not like the dreams in the film. They are, though, very like the haunting, impossible worlds generated by **Ailbhe Ní Bhriain** in her beautifully textured audio-video installations. She doesn't rely on cutting-edge CGI; indeed, as she notes

herself, she's not particularly techie at all. She just tries to figure out ways of achieving what she imagines: hypnotic, in-between spaces that are both familiar and utterly strange. We begin to orientate ourselves in a domestic interior and notice a fish swimming calmly by, then a school of tiny fish turning in unison, then sheep grazing on a hillside. Ní Bhriain references the Irish landscape, the sea and an indeterminate elsewhere. *The Emigrant* is the appropriate title of her main piece. It has an elegiac quality that recalls Andrei Tarkovsky.

3 Magnhild Opdøl comes from a farming background in Norway, and her work, which often combines sumptuous pencil drawings and taxidermy, stems from her experience of lyricism and cruelty on the farm and in nature, where life and death are not stark opposites but casually continuous. She appeals to our sentimentalised, idealised view of nature with lush, sensuous close-up drawings of cat, fox and faun. Look more closely and there are traces of something much darker going on: images of cuddly animals are bound up with intimations of violent death. Luxuriant fur is juxtaposed with raw, torn flesh. We wax sentimental about animals yet use them brutally, and nature is red in tooth and claw. Since completing her master's at NCAD in 2007, Opdøl has exhibited extensively, and that experience serves her well. She has produced an exceptional, thoughtful show.

4 Niall de Buitléar's accomplished sculptures and drawings present elegant, geometric, architectonic forms. They are composed of functional, usually humble materials – corrugated cardboard figures prominently at the RHA – and built up in a slow, methodical, even obsessive way. And they are algorithmic, with simple procedural rules producing big complex pieces. Their forms, materials and methodology refer us to mass production and consumption, and to the patterns underlying organic processes and industrial fabrication.

5 Rhona Byrne's work usually falls into the category of art practice referred to as relational aesthetics. That is, it is based on, or emerges from, the artist's social interactions with others. On a residency in Pittsburgh she embarked on a project about funfairs and came into contact with a group of roller-coaster enthusiasts. She went to their convention, and several engaging results are on view, but her main work is a sculpture called *Uprooted*, in which a copse of wooden posts, each perched on a single furniture castor, ascend to ceiling height. It's a great metaphor for uncertainty, precariousness, perhaps anxiety.