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ENCLAVE REVIEW

**Crawford 100
Wandesford Quay Gallery, Cork
Fergal Gaynor**

This exhibition, celebrating 100 years of education in the Crawford College of Art and Design building on Sharman Crawford Street, is a quiet affair. Its curatorial organisation was admirable: recent graduates from the College (Tina Darb O'Sullivan, Tom Dalton, Lana Shuks and Raphael Llewellyn) were given the opportunity to put together a show in a substantial institutional space under the guidance of the experienced Clíodhna Shaffrey. But the need to concentrate on the CCAD building, rather than on the art educational institution, must have seemed a poisoned chalice for the fledgling curators – until the early seventies it housed a technical college, the predecessor of the current CIT in Bishopstown. Alongside artworks by current members of staff, therefore, appear objects associated with the old Crawford Municipal Technical Institute, offering sporadic glimpses of a quite different educational environment: some prospectuses from the sixties, a replica

of the ceremonial key with which the building was first opened, a clock that hung outside the director's office and co-ordinated the college's other timepieces, etc. The handful of memorabilia from the art college alongside these – two photographs of life-drawing classes from the Emmet Place academy, a single review notebook, a photocopy of an Evening Echo article about a student protest in 1991, etc. – only serve to give a taster of what might have been: an evocation of the Crawford as a changing art educational environment.

These fragments punctuate a selection of work from a number of Crawford lecturers and tutors. As the overriding impression is one of modesty (apart from a few pieces, such as Pádraigh Trehya's short film dramatising the psychological relationship of James Joyce to John McCormack in terms of the Shem and Shaun characters of *Finnegans Wake*, a sense of strong art-practical ambition is lacking) the viewer's thoughts naturally wander to the question of the relation of art teaching to art practice. On the basis of one or two artworks and a list of names, of course, this is never likely to amount to anything more than idle speculation, but it's tempting to see in the solid technical accomplishment of Colin Crotty's or Eileen Healy's paintings suitable models for a teaching practice.

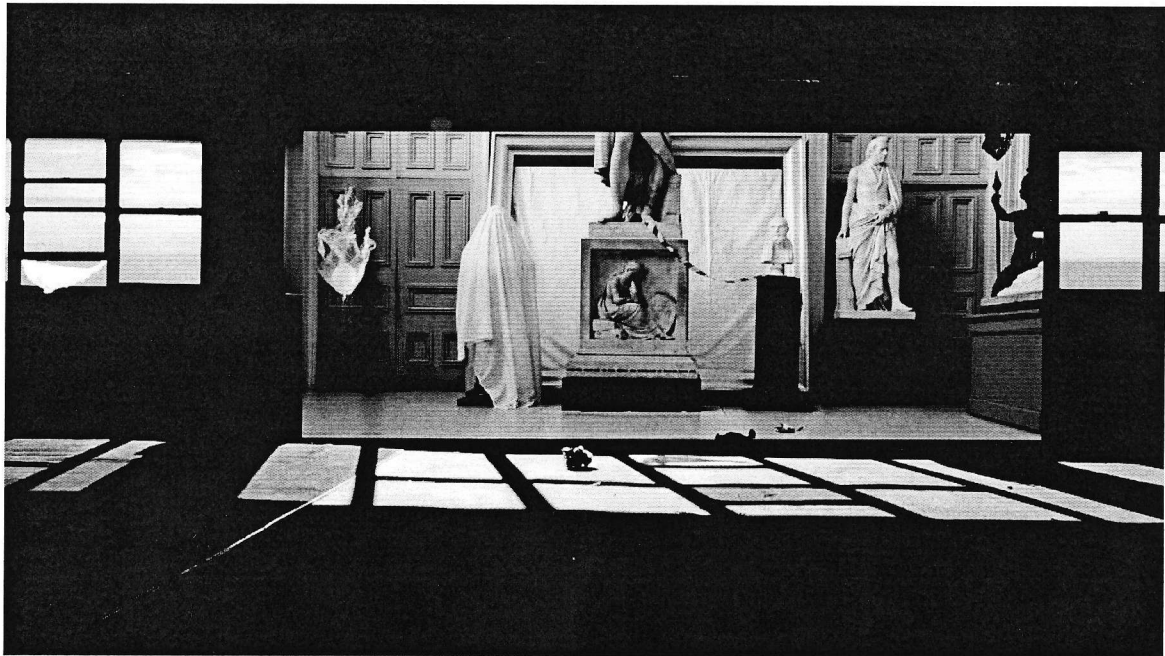
The works were generally well-displayed, and I was particularly happy to have the opportunity to view Ailbhe Ní Bhriain's collaged digital video *Emigrant III* (2010), in ample space in one of the gallery's two arched cellars. This is the third time I've encountered her work, the first being at the *Darkness Visible* show in Galway in 2008. The second, at this year's eva, was sufficiently recent for it to be still active in my thinking. It's intriguing stuff, one of the best engagements with the possibilities of digital video I've come across. The capacity for image manipulation and collage runs the risk of producing a new literalness – fantastic or hallucinatory scenes that merely reinforce ingrained, prosaic understanding by extending it out to unencountered experiences. This is the weakness of much of Dalí's painting (when it isn't being out and out kitsch) – a floppy watch or melting body keeps the naturalistically represented watch or recognisable body firmly in place, it simply

adds the diversion of the distorting mirror to its perception and raises the result to the status of the truly reimagined. Ní Bhriain's work has more in common with pre-war De Chirico (via the closing sequence of Tarkovsky's *Nostalgia*, perhaps), those paintings which justify the epithet 'metaphysical', and cast the viewer back on a consideration of temporality and spatiality.

As in De Chirico different experiences of space are combined in the same image, with each being given discrete zones (bordered by a curtain, screen, corner or horizon – this is clearer in eva's *Great Good Places*), sometimes gently transgressed (e.g. water laps from behind a screen through which the open sea can be discerned). The addition of motion to Ní Bhriain's images brings in another kind of zoning – layering. Drifting

minutiae on the image's surface, for instance, give the impression of underwater currents, though the objects behind belong to an indoors scene and may be disturbed from time to time by what appears to be a breeze. The juxtaposition of different spatial experiences places emphasis on the images' temporality – a slow duration that includes motion, but not change, a kind of extended pause between acts (Virginia Woolf's intermediating section in *To the Lighthouse* comes to mind). In contrast to post-Newtonian concepts, time is understood by Aristotle to be a function of the innate changeability of the various beings. Such a way of thinking raises the question whether without change there could be any time. In Ní Bhriain's digital videos such an impossible, 'timeless' universe is made apparent.

Fergal Gaynor is a writer, independent scholar, member of Art / not art and co-editor of Enclave Review. His *VIII Stepping Poems and Other Pieces* was published by Miami University Press in 2011. *Crawford 100* was on view 24 May – 23 June 2012.



Ailbhe Ní Bhriain: Still from *Great Good Places III* (2011).
HD video, colour, sound, 10:24 min. Courtesy Domobaal
Gallery, London.