

Maud Cotter making sense of space

Wednesday, September 18, 2013
By Tina Darb O'Sullivan

Maud Cotter is one of Ireland's most accomplished artists.



Her work is concurrently in two exhibitions: a solo show 'A Solution is in the Room' at CIT Wandesford Quay Gallery, Cork, and a two person show, 'The Air They Capture is Different' with Karl Burke in the Mac, Belfast.

In 'A Solution is in the Room', Cotter engages with the sparseness of the gallery to amplify her work. In the main space she has installed three composite sculptures built around hand fabricated steel frames.

"I'm presenting not a complete body but an emerging body of work," says Cotter. "I started exploring that by working very freely using steel as a drawn line in space. I very purposely made all this work just with cardboard and steel, so it's the most menial of materials. A challenge in some way was to find some meaningful statements within those simple materials."

'Sieve or points of decision in redistribution' is a work based on the household sieve. Realising the value in the ordinary is a key focus in Cotter's practice. "My thinking is a sieve is something through which something passes and it becomes somewhat essentialised. You take away stuff and you allow stuff through and it's a filtering process. I'm interested in, I suppose, something of the total experience we've had with the recession and ideas of how things have become more centralised. How people have taken away things that they can do without in some ways. That there is an essentialisation of things happening. So a sieve is a metaphor for redefining direction."

Cotter considers the way the work interacts in the gallery context of huge significance. The element of the pieces working together induces a special feeling, a cohesiveness integral to the viewer's experience of the work.

Photographs of the environment Cotter inhabits seed the work. Carrier objects are a point of interest for her, on both the domestic and architectural scale.

"It's capturing space and it's dispersing space somehow," she says. "It's unlocking space. I'm interested in the idea of the order it carries, something really special. I like to find moments that unlock that. I'm intrigued by simple utilitarian objects. They're not mechanical but have retained their

usefulness, because they have such an elemental nature, such a simple utilitarian identity.”

Cotter’s show with Karl Burke in Belfast came about when Hugh Mulholland, curator of the Mac, saw images of her work in progress. Burke’s sculptures are also large scale fabricated metal pieces.

Cotter’s work in both exhibitions was made in the National Sculpture Factory in Cork. “It’s very important for me because I have my home studio, which is a certain space and it’s fine. Then if I want to do something larger, I can take a space in the factory.”

Cotter initiated a series of articles in conjunction with these exhibitions. As well as New York-based writer Aengus Woods’s essay, writer and curator Matt Packer also wrote a piece. The only stipulation for the essayists was not to mention Cotter’s work.

“I didn’t know what Matt was going to say in this essay,” says Cotter. “I just asked him to deal with that sense of the immediacy, the empowerment of a feeling that you hold within your own environment. A solution. You don’t have to wait for things, you can essentialise and you can work on processes that move things forward.”

Both papers include several images taken by Cotter of objects which underpin the making of her current body of work. “Along with those I took some images of the pieces in fabrication so it’s a little bit like a drawing. Or things that I’ve seen in the environment that I found interesting or that were stimulating for me in my practice.”

Cotter plays on the awareness that CIT Wandesford Quay Gallery is an extension of an educational faculty. She herself taught at CIT Crawford College of Art & Design in the 1980s and has since frequented universities internationally as a visiting artist and lecturer.

“The thing I’m doing here with ‘A Solution is in the Room’ is also about sustaining a practice. There are things that are underlayers of practice. So I thought that I would deal with that in this show because of the context of the Crawford and its students. It’s not just directed exclusively at students but it may be of interest to them. The idea is that it’s not simply a case of going out there and behaving like a stockbroker. It’s about finding integration and sustaining points of building a life. It’s the softer idea of what constitutes a career in the arts.”

* A Solution Is In The Room runs in [CIT Wandesford Quay Gallery](#) until Oct 5. Cotter will give a talk about the exhibition at 7pm, Culture Night, on Friday. The Air They Capture Is Different is at the Mac until Oct 13.