

## REVIEWS

Ciaran Murphy

# CIARAN MURPHY

MOTHER'S TANK STATION, DUBLIN

6 SEPTEMBER - 14 OCTOBER

To paint from life, first define life. To paint reality, first define reality. Is what we see on the screen a representation of reality, another reality or part of our own reality, another object in our world or an object in an alternative untouchable world, or even something merged with ourselves just behind the retina? Ciaran Murphy's painting is consistent in something: it takes nothing for granted, makes no claim to truth, denies all singularities.

Indeed, his painting takes pleasure in the blank unknowables that are mashed up with perception, apparently prepared to follow where that pleasure leads, from academic soft focus to adolescent kitsch, screengrabs to *natures mortes*. Not that you'd notice if you weren't watching very carefully. The images are quiet and deathly final, but still rather offhand; apparently evacuated of bombast, they invite us, goad us even, to take them primarily for chummy and easygoing, rather than bleak and unrelenting, which they also are, in their own way.

Largely created from found photographs, the paintings move from the green-toned anonymity of *Nightvision* (2006), a tree-striped landscape rendered in a cartoon version of familiar electronic

greens, to *Rabbit 2* (2006), a silky rendering of a dead rabbit, a creature who has palpably just shuffled through a transition from subject to object.

Most curious of all, perhaps, are paintings from a series featuring woolly mammoths and based on scenes from *Walking with Dinosaurs*. Here, as elsewhere in the show, an occasional abruptness in the compositions reveals the images' origins as frames hacked from video images, dislocated segments that have been violently deprived of the illusion of movement, imperfect remnants of a dynamic that itself is several degrees separated from even a faulty notion of the natural world.

Another image (a small oil, not part of the exhibition, of a primate from a Victorian-style natural history museum) throws some light on what must be a more than coincidental connection with Sugimoto. The two artists seem at least to have embarked on a similar safari, a similar project to disrupt and interfere with notions of the natural.

All that busy activity at the literary level cannot help, eventually, giving way to an unsettling array of stylistic variation. While the paintings are all similar in their physical impact – small-scale, precious, unframed, mostly oil on stretched paper – within this there remains plenty of skittering about in terms of style and finish. Despite all the hot semiotic frame-within-a-frame action, there is still an

abiding interest in the atmospheric everyday business of putting paint on a surface; on the sheens, glows and half-reflections achievable. As deeply crisscrossed by suggestive discourse as this work is, it still reveals a painter with time to think about how paint works, and even how it looks.  
*Luke Clancy*

*Rabbit 2*, 2006,  
oil on stretched paper,  
23 x 27.5 cm.  
Courtesy Mother's  
Tank Station, Dublin

