

In the Line of Beauty

IMMA, Dublin 12 October – 23 February

Beauty is back. Again. And this time it's living in a far more contingent and perhaps even open relationship with truth. The fact is, the pair have been seeing other people for years now, with Dave Hickey, among others, organising dates. So even if, as the curator asserts, the scheme of this IMMA show has been to gather a group of 11 younger Irish artists around the question 'What is your idea of the line of beauty?' the task is not straightforward. For starters, the question embeds a reference to William Hogarth (who originated the theory of the line's existence during the mid-eighteenth century) and another to the 2004 novel by Alan Hollinghurst, a nesting that suggests that there's tolerance, here, for notions of beauty filtered through artists and writers rather than direct encounters with it.

The point seems to be not so much to narrate an encounter with curvy lines (although, there are plenty of those throughout, for example, hiding in the gravitationally draped cardboard and tape lines of Aleana Egan) or contemporary novels (Oisín Byrne's large-scale line-drawn portraits of sleeping figures seem to strike a reference to Hollinghurst). But rather to propose

a meetup between artists who might feel comfortable deploying the word 'beauty', at least in the sense that Hickey, another reference point for the show, famously offered during the 1990s (primarily via essays collected in *The Invisible Dragon*, 1993).

At the centre of this small show is a print from Hogarth's *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753), a multipanel graphic catalogue of serpentine feints, from drapery to musculature, periwigs to petals, putti to cacti. The image is a tiny exhibition in itself, a distorting transtemporal mirror of the gathering through which we walk at IMMA, leading from a large text-driven piece (Joseph Noonan-Ganley's *A Pot in the Life of Janet Hamer*, 2012, also includes some handmade ceramics) via Sam Keogh's abject recycled works in plaster and wounded raku, to a room filled with the paintings of Ciarán Murphy.

In between, *In the Line of Beauty* offers (as per Hickey's gloss on beauty itself) various machines for capturing attention and various equally varied conceptual cargos ready to unload. Fiona Hallinan's *Unsold* (2011/2013), a wall piece that creates an ordering of real petals and leaves, acknowledges a resonant truth of the natural

world, the fabulous detail of nature (you can zoom right in and the resolution still holds up), while underlining the fierce contingency and diverse economies of visual pleasure.

A similar micro approach to the issue comes in David Beattie's *Approaching Reality* (2013), a draped polyester mobile stirred by every molecular shift of the room's air, as well as (just to be on the safe side) its own tiny electric fan. Thermodynamics, meanwhile, also come under scrutiny in Caoimhe Kilfeather's mahogany, lead and steel sculptures, oceanically sagging and yearning into Hogarthian curves. And at the climax of the show – both at the end of the serpentine route the curator has planned through the gallery, and at the exhibition's densest moment – hang Murphy's canvases. A collective full stop that registers as the beginning of a fresh sentence, their compulsive surfaces, their fleeting, absent-image images – like *L2* (2013), featuring a mammoth planetary orb quietly struggling to remain visible – are armed with beauty and adequate to the task of waylaying us long enough to unload their precious cargo of uncertainty. *Luke Clancy*



Sam Keogh, *Plaster, Ink, Found Containers, Acrylic Varnish*, 2013, plaster, ink, found containers, acrylic varnish, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and Kerlin Gallery, Dublin