

Maeve Connolly, (Exhibition review) published in *Artforum*, April 2010: 207-208.

Katie Holten
Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane
Dublin

Katie Holten's exhibition is the sixth installment in "The Golden Bough," a suite of solo shows that borrows its title from James George Frazer's 1890 study of mythology and religion. The curator's statement frames the series as a reflection on the institutional dynamics of the art world, envisaging the museum as a sacred site assailed by generations of artists—referring to myths discussed by Frazer, such as the "King of the Wood," according to which a sacred tree is guarded by a pagan priest who has murdered his predecessor and is doomed to the same fate. Holten's exhibition, which is accompanied by a sister show, "The Golden Bough II," at LMAK Projects, New York, makes direct reference to this source material. Small tree branches partly covered in gold paint are displayed around the walls; copies of Frazer's book are laid out on wooden laboratory-style table, along with a collection of pencil drawings, tree fragments, postcards, and small paper sculptures. Separate pages from the book are also presented, with selected words circled in pencil and incorporated into drawings that suggest biological organisms.

The extracted pages include a section on the "Killing of the Scapegoat," a ritual practice in which a slave was kept in luxurious confinement for a year before being publicly sacrificed to atone for the sins of others. This story hints at the significance of some of the objects on the table, among them a tiny goblet made of twisted gold paper, perhaps intended to suggest a poisoned chalice, while another is a postcard of an unidentified man (recognizable to some as James Joyce) standing with his back to the camera as he looks out over an unknown city. Both the organic forms that decorate the extracted pages of Frazer's book and the sculptural installations placed around the room have been painted the same distinctly clinical greenish color as the lower half of the gallery walls. Known as Cosmic Turquoise, it was identified by astronomers at Johns Hopkins University in 2001 as the "average" color only to be superseded a year later by a new, corrected average color, Cosmic Latte.

These details are provided in a short wall text alluding to parallels between science and mythology as systems for interpreting the world. Holten's text cites her collaborations with scientists investigating climate change and her participation in an interdisciplinary research group exploring the spatial dynamics of quarantining, integrating this quantitative information with anecdotal references to childhood memories and recent personal experiences, including some involving extreme weather. A link is suggested, for example, between the painting of the gallery walls and a watermark left by flooding on the walls of Holten's apartment. This juxtaposition of the institutional and the domestic, the formal and the informal, extends to the treatment of the exhibition space—a room dominated by two ornate wooden benches. As these benches form part of the heating system, they are permanent and present a challenge to every artist exhibiting in this series. Some artists (such as Brian Duggan and Corban Walker) have responded by enclosing one or both within large sculptural structures, emphasising the formal and architectural properties of the gallery space. Holten's approach is more pragmatic – one of the benches is covered by the large table-structure, which includes vents that allow the heat to escape, while the other continues to function both as a source of heat and as a seat from which the artifacts on the walls and table can be viewed at a distance. These strategies of informality and subtle hospitality produce a situation in which exclusively scientific modes of analysis and observation are both evoked and effectively undercut.

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