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‘School Days: The Look of Learning’, Lewis Glucksman Gallery, University College Cork, Cork, Republic of Ireland, 1 December 2010 - 20 March 2011

‘School Days: The Look of Learning’ is framed as an exploration of the ‘experiences and environments of school, college and university’, focusing on school as a place of both organised learning and social interaction. The selection of works, which includes *Hidden Curriculum* by Annette Krauss, signals an engagement with discursive and participatory modes of practice, such as those examined in *Curating and the Educational Turn*, edited by Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson, (reviewed in *Art Monthly* 339). But rather than staging the gallery as a school, curator Matt Packer employs more traditional strategies to closely examine the relationship between looking and learning, while also considering the institutional and aesthetic specificities of the Lewis Glucksman Gallery, located on the campus of University College Cork. The exhibition opens with *Hervion College II, Den Bosch*, 2005, one of a series of photographs by Raimond Wouda depicting groups of teenagers in the bright coloured schools corridors and canteens of various Dutch cities. Even though Wouda is a consciously obtrusive presence within these common spaces, using scaffolding to achieve an elevated position, only one or two students look directly at the camera, setting themselves apart from their peers in the process.

Rineke Dijkstra’s six minute video *Ruth Drawing Picasso*, 2009 depicts a wholly different environment, in which a degree of detachment is presented as both necessary and valuable. This tightly framed shot of a uniformed school girl, absorbed in the production of a drawing while on a visit to Tate Liverpool, operates partly as a portrait but also highlights the function of the art gallery as space in which the activity of looking is taught and modelled. Many of the children seen and heard in Ronan McCrea’s photographic series *School Play*, 2008/9 and sound installation *Break*, 2010, are the same age as Ruth but instead of sitting still, they are running around a playground designed by the artist as part of a public commission for an ‘Educate Together’ school in Dublin. This is a relatively new model within the Irish education system, characterised by an ethos of inclusion and, in keeping with this philosophy, McCrea’s design features overlapping colourful circles rather than the markings usually associated with organised sports. Shot from a height and depicting the playground in use, the *School Play* photographs invite speculation about the precise ways in which abstract patterns might structure social interactions between these children.

Extending this exploration of abstract form, Corin Sworn’s sculptural work, *1837, 1914, 1975* (dating from 2008) is composed of wooden elements (pegs, rods and bases) which can be assembled in various ways. The work derives its title from three distinct moments in the development of children’s learning tools, beginning with the first toys designed by Friedrich Froebel, followed by the mass production of ‘tinkertoys’. The last date refers to the production of toys by the wood workshop at Summerhill, a liberal boarding school in Suffolk that figures in two other works by Sworn. *The Rules*, 2007 is a silkscreen with text drawn from a 1971 list of Summerhill school rules advising students that, for example, ‘hitch-hiking is not allowed’. Some sense of the environment in which these rules were developed is offered in another work, *Weekly Meetings*, 2008/2010, a collage of black and white photocopies depicting a student meeting. This interest in Summerhill seems somewhat nostalgic but the use of Arts and Crafts-style lettering in *The Rules* suggests a nuanced sense of the relationship between education and social history. In addition, the proximity of Sworn’s sculpture to McCrea’s photographs acts as a reminder that even relatively ordinary schools may function as sites of innovation and critical reflection.

A much darker perspective on experimental approaches to education can be found in Eva Kotátková's *Sit Straight*, 2008, featuring videos of schoolchildren wearing devices designed by the artist to draw attention to the disciplining of posture in classroom situations. The videos are projected from within wooden stands that are both sculptural and functional, perhaps alluding to behavioural continuities between school and gallery. Elsewhere, in a series of drawings taken from a body of work entitled *Walk To School* 2008/2010, loosely based upon her own memories, Kotátková envisages school-going as an assemblage of potentially traumatic rituals and routines that pervade every aspect of childhood experience. Annette Krauss' *Hidden Curriculum*, an ongoing project since 2007, is far less personal in its methodology and mode of address but it echoes Kotátková's concern with everyday social rituals. Working with high school students in Utrecht, Krauss employs workshops and interviews, documented with video, text and photography, to explore forms of 'misbehaviour' ranging from cheating at exams to more ambiguous disruptions of social conventions. Some elements of the video archive are accessible only to the participants, and these occlusions are signalled through text-only entries. An important historical precedent for *Hidden Curriculum* is suggested by the nearby presentation of Darcy Lange's *Work Studies in Schools*, 1976-1977, a series of video recordings of teachers and their students in secondary school classrooms. Like Krauss, Lange shifts between the roles of observer and interviewer. But as only a small selection of his videos are actually available for viewing at any one time, it is difficult to fully determine the scope and focus of his inquiry.

The exhibition culminates in an exploration of architectural forms, both invented and actual. Eamon O'Kane's *Froebel Studio*, 2010, is an 'interactive playspace' bounded by geometric screens intended to reference the work of Mondrian, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier and Charles and Ray Eames (all influenced by Froebel's ideas), while Kotátková's *Model of a school building created from a memory*, 2008, deliberately confuses scale so that miniature classrooms are dwarfed by potted plants. Finally, *Universities With Exhibition Galleries (from the Campus as a Work of Art series)*, 1998 by Christian Philipp Müller, consists of framed silkscreen prints featuring plans of ten international universities, overlaid (in red) with the plan of the University of Luneburg, Germany. A text presented with the prints alludes to the evolution of the museum as 'a place to learn about history', briefly noting differences between the galleries in terms of their function and formation. The positioning of this work close to a display of antiquated classroom furniture from the collection of University College Cork, acts as an effective reminder of the institutional situation of School Days, so that the university gallery emerges as an important site of curatorial learning and research.

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