

Niamh O'Malley's current exhibition at the Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, affirms her ongoing interest in the processes through which images are constructed, revealed and obscured, and her continued capacity to estrange apparently familiar objects and environments. But this gathering of entirely new works, including video, sculptural assemblages, constructions and drawings, also seems to mark a subtle shift in her practice. As recently as 'Garden', her 2013 solo show at Project Arts Centre, O'Malley was focusing her attention primarily on practices of viewing, and associated mechanisms of illusion and projection. In the Douglas Hyde Gallery, however, the formerly central position of the viewer has been displaced, or perhaps supplemented by an exploration of relationships between things and images.

***Nephin*, 2014, is one of two new HD video works produced specifically for this show. Taking its title from a mountain in northwest Ireland, this work seems initially to provide a point of orientation for those familiar with your earlier video works. I'm thinking here particularly of *Flag*, 2008, which tracked a precise and silent circular motion around its billowing central object. *Nephin*, however, suggests a much more dramatic sense of pursuit, because the mountain is framed as a kind of target that seems to constantly escape the camera. Is it useful to read this work as a pursuit, rather than a study, of the mountain?**

Nephin is a 21min 31sec silent video loop in black and white. It was filmed from a car through a pane of glass which had a small black mark painted on it. It presents the circumnavigation of a mountain in the west of Ireland. I was certainly interested in the sense that that image of the mountain is constantly eluded; the path of the road sometimes twists the eye/camera away from the landscape, bumps in the road unsettle the image, the hedges occlude and reveal, and the mountain itself shape-shifts as you travel. There is no point in the video where the camera settles upon a framing. The black mark on the glass is fixed in relation to the lens and becomes, in my understanding, some sort of extension of the eye or even the pointed finger. A marker of attention, trying to settle on its object, it steadies the chaotic foreground; it is a constant reminder of the intention, to see the mountain. Many of my previous videos have used the fixed camera/framing as a useful space of containment within which to 'study' the site or subject which has often been quite unfamiliar to me. In *Nephin* I am faced with the idea of producing some sort of document of a mountain, a landmark, the ultimate still image or fixed point in that it stands in a different time-space to ours. I think I know it very well and therefore risk unknowing it through scrutiny, this may have led to the resulting relentless pursuit within the work.

In *Nephin* there seems to be a deliberate confrontation between thing and image, as though the mountain resists its reduction to image. Would you see this relationship between thing and image as important in the show overall, or in the relationships between its component elements?

Nephin as a dominant feature on the Co Mayo landscape is often pictured or 'imaged' and the space of such 'images', as copies of a copy (our select and often flattened reading) is a powerful one. It seems to me that to produce an image is to extend the nature of the original 'thing' into

one of subjectivity, which can perhaps be enough ... or all we can manage. In other words, of course it is never the 'thing' but to circle or circumnavigate that problem reminds us it exists.

Perhaps because my own research is currently focused on transport, both imaginative and actual, I was struck not just by the forms of motion in *Nepkin* but also by your interest in Zizek's concepts of 'discord', which he explains through reference to the 'disproportion' between the inside and outside of a car. Zizek notes that while cars look and feel small at first, they become more spacious when 'outside reality' is viewed through the barrier of the car windows. Would you see these ideas as relevant to your extensive use of glass in the show, in sculptural assemblages, framed works and also in the two-channel HD video *Glasshouse*, 2014?

Glasshouse is a silent 2-channel video in black and white, filmed near Odense in Denmark. A fortuitous site with rows of derelict greenhouses afforded the possibility of a lengthy tracking shot where the glass panes could be recomposed and positioned in a painterly timeline. I've long been interested in surfaces that function as boundaries or barriers between one thing and another and the arrangement of different opacities within the video at times positions the background landscape as simply another surface to be panned and scanned. The ability of glass to become a screen, which distances or somehow re-surfaces the real, on which we can view or imagine the world (like the car-windscreen) is fascinating. In some moments of pure clarity, however, such as the moments in *Glasshouse* where the glass is completely removed, the idea of the open window is reconfigured as a potent intrusion of noise-like reality. In other works in the exhibition such as *Double glass, floor*, and *Glass* (both 2014) I am trying to examine some of the supposed limitations and the actual flexibility of the medium. Glass with its implicit translucence and fragility also embodies a state of solidity. It is an object with depth, colour and surface. It can be looked at or looked through. In these instances I've painted on both sides of the panes of glass. I've held glass horizontally just off the floor and leaned it against the gallery wall. The painted marks are indexical, one mark leading to another, a composition in time. The marks sit unabsorbed on the glass - and lie also as marks on whatever the glass itself reveals through its transparency or its reflective surface. The lack of absorption in the painted glass works is contrasted in the works on paper where I think of the imprint, the marks made that cannot be erased, the surfaces which retain mark and memory, compressed and sometimes held under glass in a frame. The mono-prints for example are like photographic stills; the ink sits into the surface and slowly develops and forms a skin.

There are two transparent, screen-like objects in the show, *Stand (Pale straw)* and *Stand (Rose)*, both 2014, that seem to invite repositioning or use in relation to other elements of the exhibition – could you expand on their propositional quality?

The Douglas Hyde exhibition has been a new kind of exercise for me in expanding on the relationship between my still works (drawings, paintings, prints, sculptures) and the moving image pieces. Works like the two 'stands' hope to animate the viewer and in doing so reframe or filter the gallery space, for the visitor and artworks alike. Some of the works in this show are 'images' not trying to be things. Others are devices, sometimes lifted from experiments in front

of the camera back into a space where they can become 'things' turning other things into 'images'.

The exhibition includes a wall-mounted sculptural work, *Canopy*, which again suggests functionality. But would it be fair to say that here the proposition is more directly addressed toward the architecture of the gallery?

Perhaps, in that it was wonderful to work within an architecture that allowed me to extend the exhibition vertically and this particular space, which I know and love, could not help but influence this new body of work. The grey glass of *Canopy* can hardly cast light, situated as it is against the concrete ceiling, but it reminds you of the ceiling. It does not need to provide shelter but for me it does also conjure the distinctive view from above and descent into the bunker-like space that exists within the Douglas Hyde Gallery.

Perhaps because its scale and placement frustrates its use as an actual shelter, I wonder if *Canopy* also draws attention to the considered absence of sound in the exhibition, and perhaps more generally in your work?

I find a paring back is necessary, perhaps even a constituent part of any art-production. Sound is only one thing that is eliminated. Perhaps it is more often commented on because we read video in relation to cinema. I think I understand video as another extension of the image-making I work with in painting and drawing, so sound is just another missing part (like what lies outside the frame) in the particular form of attention that is presented. Sound also plays out time in a very particular way. I like the time-space of the works to be ambiguous, to strip duration of agency. Which lasts longer; a sculpture, a video or a drawing?