The Untold Want
The Untold Want
Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin, 2015
FOREWORD  Patrick T Murphy

The untold want, by life and land ne’er granted
Now, Voyager, sail thou forth, to seek and find

Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass (1871-72)

To get to conceive of an exhibition, not based on chronology, or, a thematic argument but as a sensibility is a rare opportunity. It is a decade since the RHA presented “I not I”, that combined three films of Samuel Beckett plays with the paintings of Philip Guston and the sculpture and video work of Bruce Nauman. The exhibition collapsed culture, media, generation, to point to the existential status shared by the three artists.

Our intention here is somewhat similar, to combine artists of different ages, media and cultural backgrounds to probe a poetic and spacious sensibility. The immensity of space, the beauty of nature, the vulnerability of humanity and the isolation of mortality are all orchestrated here into three stanzas (both in the Italian sense of room and in the sense of poetic verse).

Caroline Hancock has been my co-curator on these compositions. It was her concept to create an exhibition from the thoughts and works of the late Willie McKeown. It has been a privilege and an education to work so closely with her on realization of this project.

While some loans were difficult to secure and some unattainable we are deeply indebted to those collectors, gallerists, artists and colleagues who did respond so positively to our requests. And would like to thank Claudia Carson, Helen Simpson and Lieven van den Abeele for their assistance in securing the loans of some important pieces in the show.

The exhibition would not have been possible without the support of the Joseph F. McCrindle Foundation, NYC, the William McKeown Foundation, and the behind the scenes commitment of Dominic Echlin and Andrew Martindale.

My continued acknowledgement to my colleague, Ruth Carroll, without whom this project and indeed most productions here would not take place so seamlessly.

We are indebted to the Friends of the RHA for their support of the organization which demonstrates how we are valued within our community. And to the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon for their important annual funding.

Installation view of the exhibition Pool, Kerlin Gallery, Dublin, 2010
William McKeown, Connemara, 2010, 15 watercolours on fabriano paper, each 56 x 54.5 cm, Collection of Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane, Dublin
Dorothy Cross, Relic, 2009, Shark (Porbeagle), 21 carat gold leaf, 60 x 70 x 182 cm
© Kerlin Gallery, Dublin
William McKeown, The Morning Room, 2010
Installation view of the exhibition William McKeown, Five Working Days,
Ormeau Baths Gallery, Belfast, 2010
© The William McKeown Foundation and Kerlin Gallery, Dublin
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Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1855-56)
One of William McKeown’s last projects was part of The Golden Bough exhibition series at The Hugh Lane in Dublin in 2011. He called it a Willie McKeown readymade, though the process to arrive at that illusion demanded considerable exactitude and effort. This elegant oval room, Gallery eight, was not an original part of Charlemont House but reconstructed in the early twentieth century in classical Georgian-style. It is therefore partly a fake structure which McKeown went to great pains to strip back to its purest state, painting it entirely an exquisitely profound dark brown. The intervention appeared minimal but came as a violent surprise to familiar visitors. The only light came naturally from a glass ceiling in such a way that it took centre stage in this room. The Waiting Room was named with reference to previous “rooms” he had constructed. This title evokes McKeown’s interest in existential questions. His rooms often attempted to relay the feeling of being an outsider or separate, of being in a state of expectancy or dwelling in memories rather than in the present moment. Constructed from scratch or adapted within an existing room, these rooms were quiet spaces in which every detail, opening and placement were established with absolute subtlety and mastery. All materials utilised were chosen with care from the basic building materials on the outside to the pristine interior painted with high quality Farrow & Ball paint on which drawings, watercolours and/or paintings are seamlessly hung and lit by neon strips or old-fashioned bare lightbulbs. The rooms allowed a controlled demonstration of the wider implications of his two-dimensional work, in terms of their meaning and complementary functions, including observations concerning human psychology and art’s liberating power. McKeown invites the viewer to transcend certain fixtures that one can be trapped in. It is paramount to actually experience these rooms or artworks since reproductions or written accounts can never convey this fully.

In the text to accompany this exhibition, McKeown wrote: “In The Waiting Room I wanted to turn the focus of the space onto the apparently emerging light, the dawn, the vertical path leading out of the seductive trap of the room, the cockcrow warning of the unfurling of a space in the heart, a place of freedom and happiness, a place to breathe in the sky and to dance.”

As was his wont on occasion, he also quoted “The Untold Want”, a short poem by Walt Whitman. Leaves of Grass, the collection in which it appears, was an attempt to reach out to common readers. Plain grass grows anywhere, and the author wrote in plain verse. At the time, in the nineteenth century, some thought it obscene for its openly egalitarian views and sexual references as in a very contemporary fashion it bridged between transcendentalism and realism. Another famous poem from this collection “We Two Boys Together Clinging” inspired David Hockney in 1961.

The experimental quest to which this poem calls gave the tone to this exhibition and catalogue, which seeks to create dialogues with the late William McKeown’s art and sensibility. Some artists present here are his lifelong friends, others are his stated heroes, but others still were probably moody or entirely unknown to him. At
once intimate and public, inward looking and open, comforting and frightening, constrained and free, the artworks brought together here share a tendency to consider nature, light, and relations with other human beings with immense care and concern. Some profound affinities and some gross dissimilarities are likely to transpire in this contextual exercise. As encouraged by the curator Helen Molewirth in a conversation with artist AA Bronson. “Preserve, not in amber, but to preserve in a way to make sure that the dead still have their say. The logic of the present is only made possible by such much absence.”

It appears essential to pursue a conversation started during McKeeown’s lifetime in an exhibition curated by Gavin Delahunty. “A certain distance, endless light A project by Felix Gonzalez-Torres and William McKeown” took place at mima, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, in 2010. Indeed as one of the installation views reveals, on this occasion, Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s single string of light bulbs, “Untitled” (Leaves of Light), from 1993 was presented in a room next to William McKeown’s Th Dayroom (2004-2010). The exhibition text indicates that “inside, the room is plastered to a smooth finish and painted in a heritage colour called ‘Dayroom Yellow’. There is an insinuating sense of the sophistication of the room, amplified by the sickly yellow of the walls and the sodium light emitted by the double fluorescent tubes. The room sits between elegance and artifice. Inside the room is hung a colour pencil drawing and a painting, representing respectively a single snowdrop and an expanse of sky. These offer a glimpse of a potential outside that can be imagined by the viewer. They are metaphorical windows that stand in lucid contrast to the actual door and window of the room, which serve to remind the viewer of the illusion in which they are involved.”

The viewer’s participation and empathy are at the core of Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s art, and he engaged with the community through his involvement with Group Material. Mass-produced sweets and printed sheets of paper in forever replenished stacks are left for organic dissemination over the course of an exhibition, as endless counterpoints to finite. Often based on his personal experience in New York City in the 1980s and 1990s, his choice of imagery and objects convey love, freedom, togetherness and separation or loss, in reflecting the contexts of devastating battles with AIDS. Using actual or portrayed floating curtains, surfaces of water, or empty soiled pillows and bedsheets. His artworks are inextricably tied to the human body, its presence or its absence. “Untitled” (Portion of Dead), 1991, is composed of an endless supply of white candies individually wrapped in cellophane. The overall dimensions vary with each installation but “Untitled” (Portrait of Dad), 1991, is composed of an endless supply of white candies individually wrapped in cellophane. The overall dimensions vary with each installation but

1. William McKeown passed away at the early age of 49, in October 2011. His foundation is in development, in tandem with the Berlin Gallery who has represented his work since the late 1980s, in the hope to carry William McKeown’s art beyond the islands where he practiced and attempt to get beyond a certain isolation. This project receives a great accolade from Patrick T. Murphy at the Royal Hibernian Academy in Dublin by accepting his work and host “The Untold Want”


3. I had just buried Dan. And the extraordinary thing about this was that there was nothing extra ordinary about it at all. If people aren’t themselves sick, they know someone who is, or they are struggling to assimilate the loss of someone who was. For me, Faulkner (1952) has temporarily overaken life in New York City. And most of the artists I know are humming for ways to express this.”

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5. A leitmotiv was the hundreds of photographs of birds soaring in the sky which rather like Gober’s memories of growing up in American New England in the 1950s and 1960s, William McKeown’s presbytarian upbringing on a farm in County Tyrone in Northern Ireland is portrayed in works relating to the local lane, the well, the meadow, birch trees or wild flowers. References to religion, guilt, psychological tensions and constraints are described in the various texts he wrote. Gober’s rooms and installations seem to have been highly influential to McKeown’s own constructions 4.

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Gonzalez-Torres took over the years. Despite this persistent, actual images of birds appear in only eighteen of his artworks: puzzles, paper stand works, a sculpture, billboard, or classically framed black and white photographs, fourteen of which were hung on the wall in his last exhibition at Andrea Rosen Gallery in New York, “Untitled” (1991) in 1993. These are significantly also present in “Untitled” (1992) in 1993 which consists of 12 page booklets. “Untitled” (1991-1993), two billboard-sized photographs of ominous clouds and a lone bird, covers a dark corner in the gallery with the evocation of infinite space and travel.

An artist’s quest to allow us, the viewer, to experience the world with renewed attention and pander life and death in imaginative ways, desire and othersness, is at the heart of this exhibition. It celebrates the extraordinary capacity of art – even with the most minimal form – to conjure up infinity and wonder.

Robert Gober’s individual idiosyncratic strangely illusionistic sculptures tend to be re-creations and amalgations of domestic equipment such as sinks, drains, urinals, colour called “Dayroom Yellow” Childhood memories of rooms where he practiced as cribs and playpens. These generic industrial objects, as well his famous cast body-fragments, are expertly hand-crafted and painted to resemble and exaggerate the originals and become artworks with multilayered and open-ended meanings which accumulate throughout his oeuvre. In this transformative process, Gober arrives at life-like sculptures which nevertheless, on closer inspection, glaze as off-kilter and altered. Spatial, physical and time-related boundaries are blurred. Equivalence and the act of looking are challenged. Everyday things are revisited via a highly subjective yet detached prism which questions authoritative notions of truth and certainty. In the catalogue of the controversial 1993 Whitney Biennial in New York which included this text, Thelma Golden indicated that: “Revisitation approaches to history and recovered information are at the heart of the discussion of diversity. Our understanding of culture is mediated by the presentation of ‘fact in print or media or object’ as presented in museums. The recontextualisation of such data is explored in the work of Renée Green, Fred Wilson, and Robert Gober.”

Rather like Gober’s memories of growing up in American New England in the 1950s and 1960s, William McKeown’s presbytarian upbringing on a farm in County Tyrone in Northern Ireland is portrayed in works relating to the local lane, the well, the meadow, birch trees or wild flowers. References to religion, guilt, psychological tensions and constraints are described in the various texts he wrote. Gober’s rooms and installations seem to have been highly influential to McKeown’s own constructions 4.

Gober’s incongruous combination of a nosebox placed on a child’s plastic chair above a drain in Untitled (1994-95), modeled with cast plastic, painted bronze, silver-plated steel and wood, carries anxious connotations of tears and hints at human vulnerability. A commentary by Gober points to his conscious use of common devices which are as conduits between the known and inside the unknown, the projected interior and the unpredictable but therefore exciting exterior: “I thought of the drains as metaphors functioning in the same way as traditional paintings, as a window into another world. However the world that you enter into through the metaphor of the drain would be something darker and unknown, like an ecological unconscious.”
The reality of an unconscious ecology is central to Dorothy Cross’s work. Transforming the very real residues of the ebb and flow of life and nature into newly meaningless propositions is the principle of her quasi alchemical art. With enquisit impertinence, she appropriates what is already beautifully elemental in the world and transcodes it into surreal or supremely real gems. Her curiosity for flora and fauna, science and history is without bounds as she operates often phenomenally simple metamorphoses through taxidermy, gilding, or assemblage. What appears to be in a state of decay is revitalised through her touch and care. Found objects, natural spaces or organic bodies are some of her primary sources of inspiration as she repeatedly breaks through institutional frames and their controlling limitations. Cross’s sculptures and larger scale projects, such as the operas and Ghostship in the bay of Dublin, seek to ignite a sense of wonderment, a temporary collective belief in the improbable and an inquisitive trust in the unknown.

Cross made her first bronze sculpture called Foglove (2005-2014) following a commission for a web-project by DIA Foundation in New York in 2005. All the visual, botanical and symbolic data about this flower are merged into this hybrid form that sprouts into the world directly and forcefully from the floor with no standardising art plinth. Some of the bell flowers have morphed in the process into human fingers and 15 watercolours, now in the Hugh Lane collection, for instance. Cross’s work foregrounds the difficulty of finding a visibility moderate.

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The emotional power of Mendieta’s bodily imprints resembles William McKeown’s series of images of watercourses in which the body’s presence, or rather the absence of it, is retained in instant processes, or washes, that are akin to photography and its impressions. Waiting for the Corncrake (2008, now in the Ulster Museum collection in Belfast) is composed of thirty (a significant numerical reference to a monthly cycle) works on paper; it relays memories of anticipating the arrival on the farm of this bird, rare and elusive then and now nearly extinct due to the effects of modern farming. The minimal nature of these rectangles of light and non-white washes focuses the eye and the mind of the viewer on the infinite variations.

The land of Ireland and its representation is one of the subjects of Vivienne Dick’s otherworldly 1985 16mm film Rothc. The camera pans across the boglands of Kerry and the lunar landscape of the Burren. Venice Connolly writes that: “The word ‘Rothach’ can be translated from Irish to mean cycle or wheel and the film closes with a recursion of Seán O Riodáin’s Irish-language poem, ‘An Rothach’, which evokes a moment between sleep and wakefulness. Despite the relatively conventional nature of the images, this use of oral notation (particularly in the Irish language) seems to work against a ‘tourist’ perspective. In the process, the film seems to mobilise the landscape as a text to be read. So while Visibility Moderate foregrounds the difficulty of finding a vocabulary adequate to the representation of the landscape, Rothac seems to privilege
Coulthard in 1996, Goldin explains that “I have never believed in a single decisive pic-
ture of someone but in a variety of pictures that record the complexity of a lifetime.”

Vivienne Dick’s work was included in a project in London in 1988 which was
introduced in the catalogue by James Coleman and Declan McGonagle as follows: “Our
imagination in this exhibition has been to show a selected number of artists within whose
work imaging is an important part of narrative structure. The exhibition is representa-
tive of their work in a range of disciplines – drawing, painting, performance, language,
film-making and photowork. Particular ideas/processes are present in the work which
link the artists and their activity to a continuum from Armagh to America – beyond
expectations of categorisation or nationalistic identities.”

This publication includes a still scene from Reinhart, a photograph credited to B. Rival which could practically have been taken by Mespolou, as well as a portrait of the artist by her great friend Nan Goldin.

Part of the radically independent No Wave scene in the late 1970s and early 1980s in
New York, Vivienne Dick developed her style and experimented filming in Super-
8, with all the freedom and simplicity this technology implied: The use of hand-held
camera. The only constant is unpredictability. By mixing-up the conventions of singular
movement, the viewer is thrown into an atmosphere of uncertainty. The footage is also often fidgety due to the hand-held
add to the confusion by conjuring up potential shifts in meaning and thus enhancing
AGAIN”. Borders and emotions are highly strung. Harahan’s experimental sound-mixes
are often allusive to the exploration of space and the fear of never being able to return. A boy plays
the fiddle and repeatedly appears in various settings punctuating the elusive narrative.

In 2012, Paul Nesbitt curated a posthumous exhibition of William McKeown’s work
on one floor of Inverleith House in Edinburgh, while simultaneously screening Agnes
Martin’s 1976 film Gabriel, about a boy’s relation to nature and abstraction in the moun-
tains of the American West. The catalogue of the 2006 Douglas Hyde Gallery exhibition
A Dream of Discipline (and Other Works) that grouped work by Kathy Prendergast, Dorothy
Cross and McKeown, reproduced a 1913 photograph by Marguerite Mespolou of a man
cutting turf on a bog in County Galway that references some of the traditions which are
part and question in Reinhart.

Nan Goldin’s photographs have been merged into various slide shows (often accom-
panied by a highly evocative music selection) and books such as The Ballad of Sexual
Dependency (1986), The Other Side (1993), or Couples and Loneliness (1998) that all chro-
nicle a certain generation, relationships with her family, friends, and lovers. From the
classical black and white Christmas at The Other Side, Boston (1970), to the contemplative
portrait of Anthony by the sea, Brighton, England (1979), a confrontationally raw reminder
in Nan one month after being battered (1984), and the dazzlingly baroque Cibachrome
of Joy at the Love Ball, NYC (1991), Nan Goldin self-consciously endeavours to fix her mem-
ories and control how her existence is depicted and memorialised.

As a photojournalist, Abbas has traveled the world to document its people, their
habits and conflicts. He is renowned for his regular reports in Iran, his native coun-
try, during the revolution in the late 1970s and periodically ever since, as well as for
his major photographic essays on the great religions and beliefs. The caption for one of
his photographs from 1988’s A Dream of Discipline (and Other Works) reads: “NORTHEN
IRELAND Belfast. A wall crumbles down after being set on fire, presumably by the
IRA. 1972.” The word ‘presumably’ assembles the uncertainties and necessary pru-
dence. The fully flung action shot of this firefrieger could seem puny compared with the
formidable counter forces of water and collapsing brickwork. The sky is threaten-
ing. Violence and beauty converge. Suspense is at a peak. Somehow it reminds me of
Yves Klein’s 1960s Leap Into The Void photomontage – but this imagery is real.

Experimental filmmaker Seamus Harahan has primarily recorded and responded to
the Northern Irish context. He was one of the artists to represent Northern Ireland at
the Venice Biennale in 2005 with McKeown and Mary McIntyre. Before Sunrise
(2006) appears to be an illicit early morning walk through Alexandra Park in North Belfast.

There is at once something romantic and sinister about this scene. The Super-8 camera
leads the viewer to the “peaceline” line constructed to separate neighbouring communities
after the 1994 IRA ceasefire. One graffiti chillingly states: “DON’T PLAY MY... GAME, EVER
AGAIN”. Borders and emotions are highly strung. Harahan’s experimental sound-mixes
add to the confusion by conjuring up potential shifts in meaning and thus enhancing
an atmosphere of uncertainty. The footage is also often allusive to the exploration of space and the fear of never being able to return.
Declan Long writes: “Where we do gain corners-of-the-eye glimpses of Belfast’s dammingly ‘important’ territorial delineations – as in the film Before Sunrise, which stars a stroll through a public park adorned by a ‘peace-line’ feature – the actuated drifting of the camera renders the authority and significance of such structures surprisingly negligible.”

Hara’s films are evocatively anti-heroic compared to Hunger by Steve McQueen, or even films by Willie Doherty. But they share shots, such as incessant rain on a window pane, insignificant encounters with birds, insects, or flowers which are simple releasing moments of humility, connection and hope.

Frédéric Bruly Bouabré’s extraordinarily prolific storytelling and archiving of the world and its ways survive his recent bodily passing. The titles of his series – often hundreds – of small drawings with texts give an idea of the scope of his pedagogical, spiritual, anthropological and artistic recording method. For instance ‘The Book of Divine Laws Revealed to the Order of The Persecuted’, ‘Knowledge of the World’, ‘Museum of African Faces’, ‘Symbols and Myths’, ‘The Universe’, ‘Stars From My Dreams’, ‘High Diplomacy’. Inspired by a solar vision in 1948 in Senegal while he was working on the railway line from Dakar to Niger, he began to depict and therefore memorialise the nearly extinct, non-written language and culture of his fellow Bété people. He famously researched and invented (or re-invented, since he is sometimes compared to Champollion who discovered the Rosetta Stone) ‘African Writing’, comprising 4,48 monosyllabic pictograms, and put it to use through writing and translations. Théodore Monod published the alphabet in 1958 in the bulletin of IFAN (French Institute of Black Africa), which he directed. Bruly Bouabré was born around 1923 in Zéprégüé (then in the centre of French West Africa, now in Ivory Coast since the independence in 1960). He charted the expressive influence of patterns and forms of sacred volcanic rocks located in the forests in the region. He ceaselessly gave expression to his daily study of human customs, world affairs and ecology, as well as to chance encounters with symbols he found in scraps, peels, stones, cola nuts, or clouds. Both abstractions and realities were ‘imaged’ for the sake of transmission, and he became known as Cheik Nadro – the reveler.

A vibrant repetitive grid of 194 pens and coloured pencil drawings on cardboard constitute ta venue au monde de l’humanité chair [The coming into the world of dear humanity], 2011, expresses the sap of life, the nurturing mother figure producing human beings for the sake of posterity and heritage. The handwritten texts in the margins systematically run on to indicate Les enfants XX courent vers la mère patrie [Children from XX run towards the mother land] and chart the whole world by indicating approximately each country (as it was then), along with his signature star and sun symbols. The generous dynamism of these women’s abdomens and the keenness of their offspring turns into a quasi automatic country-building machine which deserves decoding beyond the apparent naïvety of the drawings. Make love, not war.

William McKeown has a history with the Royal Hibernian Academy in Dublin. In 2002, the Director, Patrick T. Murphy invited him to curate “The Holiday Show”. Andrew Vickery, one of the artists he presented then, was included in the exhibition in Praise of Shadows curated by Paolo Colombo at the Irish Museum of Modern Art based on Junichirō Tanizaki’s eponymous book which very aptly coincided with McKeown’s solo exhibition there in 2008. In 2012, Vickery’s Arcadia Anıde paid homage to his relationship with McKeown. A series of paintings depicting a road trip become slides which are projected onto a model theatre stage. The soundtrack, 2 Waltzes followed by birdsong, further emphasises an ideal pastoral paradise. Country dwelling, camping, tea and Hobnob biscuits by the sea, but a Parisian train station hints at departure or arrival. The title translates from Latin as “both Arcadians” or sweet innocents, in connexion with the apparent splendid unities of the imagery. Nicolas Pousin’s classical seventeenth century painting Et in Arcadia ego in the Musée du Louvre in Paris equally deals with the hardships of mourning and mortality. Yet it is life that is praised, despite its absence.

In the 1942 film Now Voyager, Bette Davis responds “Oh, Jerry, don’t let’s ask for the moon. We have the stars.”

Vija Celmins’s highly detailed drawings are all to do with perception, the personal experience of looking and recording, the impossibility of representation and its challenges. She transfers and compresses the intensity of staring at the night sky (or rather images thereof) onto paper. The microcosm of the drawing allows our mind’s eye to shift back to the infinite macrocosm of the universe. The first photographs available of the moon in the media at the end of the 1960s inspired her to choose the Milky Way galaxy as one of her subjects, leading to her studies of great expanses such as oceans, deserts, night skies, clouds and later cobwebs. These works are constructed with repetitive painstaking slowness creating the dense layers that form an alluring drawing except for the white edges of the paper that remain visible to insist on the fact this is an object, a reproduction. These serial fields transcribe a unique relation to time and place. Untitled no: 10 (1994-95) is a charcoal drawing of night sky in which the stars and the comet have been rubbed-in with an eraser; the white paper ground becomes the light source which shines through the thick black surface. Incidentally, Celmins had dedicated Untitled no: 9 (1994-95) to the memory Felix González-Torres. In an interview in 2011, Celmins mentioned that “when you look at the work, you have that double thing you should have all the time, where you’re looking at the making and a kind of a re-describing of the surface, and the image is interwoven with that surface. (...) I found it so like I really got to know the image, and it sort of unfolded along with, like, the drawing, the image, the surface, the scale; everything, like, was made together. (...) I wanted somehow to have both things, an image that was in your mind, that was vast, and the reality which was very restrained and flat and made, and that was actual.”

In the year 2000, the exhibition curated by Patrick T. Murphy and Richard Turchia called The Sea & The Sky, presented at the Royal Hibernian Academy in Dublin and at the Beaver College Art Gallery in Philadelphia, included a 1982 drawing of the sky from China by Vija Celmins and two watercolour Sea Drawings by McKeown, as well as an endless paper stack work by González-Torres.

Mary McIntyre’s 2014 framed colour giclée photograph taken in an empty art college studio during a holiday period is part of a new series and is given a viewing platform like a controlled growing facility to learn to look at what appears to be nothing once again. The eye is being trained to observe the minutiae of all things; the viewer
Thus related to the ‘heroic’ stature of classic American postwar abstraction but her She herself preferred the association with the Abstract Expressionist legacy and was therefore celebrated as representative of Minimalism. Systemic Painting at the Solomon R. gesso, acrylic and graphite painting of subtle horizontal bands.

... as you would step onto a beach into the light.”

“...edges opened up and became porous for the eye and air, showing areas of canvas. He developed his unprimed roughly woven canvases resembling a skin. At the beginning of his career he painted monochromes, very few of which survive today due to the artist’s iconoclastic self-criticism. With a profound respect for simple, traditional but fine materials (first working in acrylic and then linen and oils) and crafts (reflecting his influential prior experience as a weaver), his painting practice moved from flat highly subtle tonal gradations to more expressive brushstrokes. The edges opened up and became porous for the eye and air, showing areas of canvas. He tried to create a painting that feels concave, and this concave space is a mirror of the space I find in nature. You can cross the proscenium of the edge and enter the painting...”

... his abstraction seeks to invite and include the viewer. He went to great pains to make his art open and life enhancing like taking in a breath of air. His engagement with beauty was classical and inevitably composed with complementary elements of darkness, light and colour. But in addition he transferred his deepest experience of pure pleasure, hardship and pain to attain near ecstasy through art and allow hope and humanity to emerge. Indeed some of the paintings are reminders of the exaltation one can feel being in a particular moment, in a specific place, with a special person.

McKeown stated that ‘When the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery in its visionary wisdom purchased this Agnes Martin Untitled No 7 from the 1980 ROSC people queued to laugh at the Pyjama painting. It is now widely recognized as being one of the most beautiful works of art in an Irish public collection.” The work referred to is Martin’s gesso, acrylic and graphite painting of subtle horizontal bands. Having exhibited in New York City at Betty Parsons Gallery from 1957, Martin’s work was included in the seminal 1966 exhibition Systemic Painting at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and was therefore celebrated as representative of Minimalism. She herself preferred the association with the Abstract Expressionist legacy and thus related to the ‘heroic’ stature of classic American postwar abstraction but her strength lay in her separateness and independence. Her interests and beliefs merged

... is being told to scrutinise this interior detail and all its light, texture and tone variations. White on white. The spaces, walls, edges, ridges, corners, surfaces, shelves, wires, emphasise the emptiness. The path to the Distribution Point of Light speaks of a certain urge to find something. A human feeling within this geometrical abstraction. The near central switch calls to mind the electrical devices painted by Celmins in the 1960s, or Geber’s futures.

This constructed space by McIntyre and her previous built interventions such as a floor for Silent Empty Waiting for the Day at Belfast Exposed in 2011 have tight connections with the forced physical viewing experience in McKeown’s rooms. They could refer to the relative security and comfort of domestic interiors. But something sinister or clausrophobic exudes from these structures however sublime the associated artworks are. What is this absurdly Beckettian endless ‘waiting’ they speak of?

The in-between status of the outsider who never feels he or she quite belongs is one of the tropes of modernist painting which William McKeown sought to undo in his own work. He was critical of what he termed “international, white, Western, patriarchal, corporate Modernism” and progressively moved away from what he perceived as an excluding flat surface. He developed his unprimed roughly woven canvases resembling a skin. At the beginning of his career he painted monochromes, very few of which survive today due to the artist’s iconoclastic self-criticism. With a profound respect for simple, traditional but fine materials (first working in acrylic and then linen and oils) and crafts (reflecting his influential prior experience as a weaver), his painting practice moved from flat highly subtle tonal gradations to more expressive brushstrokes. The edges opened up and became porous for the eye and air, showing areas of canvas. He tried to create a painting that feels concave, and this concave space is a mirror of the space I find in nature. You can cross the proscenium of the edge and enter the painting...”

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room. The old space was the room of Western, Christian, patriarchal culture. Secondary categories within this culture - women, other cultures, gays, nature and otherness - were separated and contained by the patriarchs in annexes to the main room, but the walls to these annexes have dissolved. We have entered a totally new space, a space where issues of gender, sexuality and identity no longer function as mechanisms of separation and difference. This is the most exciting thing to happen for two thousand years."
Abbas

Belfast, 1972
silver gelatin print on fibre, 40.5 x 30.1cm
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art,
Purchase 2006
Frédéric Bruly Bouabré

La venue au monde de l’humanité chérie (from The coming into the world of dear humanity), 2011
pen and pencil on card, 194 works, each 14.2 x 10.8cm
Courtesy Magnin-A Gallery, Paris, France
Vija Celmins

Reverse Galaxy, 2010
mezzotint, edition of 30 +10 AP, 41 x 30cm
Courtesy McKee Gallery, New York

Untitled #10, 1994-1995
charcoal on paper, 63.2 x 55.9cm
Private Collection, New York
Dorothy Cross

Foxglove, 2012
bronze, 124 x 44 x 41cm
Private Collection
Image courtesy of the artist and Kerlin Gallery, Dublin
Vivienne Dick

Rothach, 1986
16mm transferred to DVD, colour,
9' duration
Courtesy of the artist and LUX, London
Robert Gober

Untitled, 1997
cast plastic, painted bronze, paper, silver-plated steel, wood, 43.8 x 33 x 33 cm
Private Collection
Image courtesy of the artist, Photography Erma Ettick

Prison Window, 1992
Plywood, forged iron, plaster, latex paint and lights
48 x 53 x 36 inches with 24 x 24 inch opening
Image courtesy of the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, Photography Geoffrey Clements
Nan Goldin

Anthony by the Sea, Brighton, 1979
cibachrome, 76 x 102cm
© Nan Goldin, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

Joey at the Love Ball, NYC, 1991
cibachrome, 76 x 102cm
© Nan Goldin, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

The Hug, NYC, 1980
cibachrome, 102 x 76cm
© Nan Goldin, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
Felix Gonzalez-Torres

"Untitled" (Portrait of Dad), 1991
White candies individually wrapped in cellophane, endless supply.
Overall dimensions vary with installation
Ideal weight: 175 lbs
© The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation
Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

"Untitled", 1991-1993
Billboard
Two parts: dimensions vary with installation
© The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation
Courtesy of Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York
Seamus Harahan

Before Sunrise, 2007
S-vhs, 3’ 45” duration, Courtesy of the artist and Gimpel Fils, London
Byron Kim

Untitled (for B.L.), 2011
acrylic on canvas, 228.6 x 182.8cm
© the artist and James Cohan Gallery New York/Shanghai, photography Christopher Burke

Untitled (for P.B.), 2011
acrylic on canvas, 228.6 x 182.8cm
© the artist and James Cohan Gallery New York/Shanghai, photography Christopher Burke
Agnes Martin

Untitled No. 7, 1980
gesso, acrylic and graphite, 184 x 184cm
Collection Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane
© Estate of Agnes Martin/ARS, NY and NARAD, Dublin, 2015
Mary McIntyre

**A Complex Variety of Greens** (from Emerald to Viridian), 2011
colour lightjet photographic print, 122 cm x 152 cm,
Courtesy of the artist

**The Path to the Distribution Point of Light**, 2015
colour lightjet photographic print, 110 x 130cm,
edition of 3,
 Courtesy of the artist
William McKeown

Open Drawing, Narrow Lane, 2005
colouring pencil on paper, 28 x 25 cm
Image courtesy of Kerlin Gallery and the
William McKeown Foundation

Ocean, 2009
oil on linen, 182 x 168cm
Image courtesy of Kerlin Gallery and the
William McKeown Foundation
Ana Mendieta

Anima, Silueta de Cohetes, 1976
Super 8mm, colour, silent film transferred to DVD,
2’22” duration
© the Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC, Courtesy
Galerie Lelong, New York

Birth, 1981
Super 8mm, black and white, silent film transferred
to DVD, 2’03” duration
© the Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC, Courtesy
Galerie Lelong, New York
Andrew Vickery

Arcades Ambo, 2012
mixed media and slide projection, 66 x 76 x 32cm
Collection of the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaion
Abbas (or Abbas Attar)  
born in Iran, 1944; lives in Paris, France  
“I am not interested in religion as faith. A person’s relation with God is not my problem. What I am interested in is how religion affects societies – politically, socially and economically.”  

Frédéric Bruly Bouabré  
born in Zéprégühé, Ivory Coast, 1923; died in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, 2014  
“The existence of a universal kinship, the unity of the world, and the necessity of cultural crossbreeding constitute the foundation of the artistic project Frédéric Bruly Bouabré holds dear.”  
Yaya Savané quoted in Lynn Cooke and André Magnin (eds.), Worlds Envisioned: Alighiero e Boetti, Frédéric Bruly Bouabré, DIA Center for the Arts, New York, 1994, p. 79. 

Vija Celmins  
born in Riga, Latvia, 1938; lives and works in New York City, USA  
“I see drawing as thinking, as evidence of thinking, evidence of going from one place to another.”  
“Many words for things still seem best in Latvian. Words that don’t have a proper translation into English, like žugtā, which means you’re doing things the most awkward way, it’s more than a word, it’s a cultural concept that is inside of me. Or words like plava, which means field or meadow. It has totally different images connected for me than the English word field. Or a word like mezonīgs, which means fierce or from the forest; beast-like. I think, in some essential way, Latvian words shaped how I saw images.”  

ARTISTS
Dorothy Cross, born in Cork, Ireland, 1956; lives and works in County Galway, Ireland

“In 2005 the DIA Foundation, commissioned me to create a web-based project. The resulting artwork, Foxglove digitalis purpurea, included a series of images of a young girl inserting her fingers into foxglove blossoms. The piece is accompanied by a soundtrack on which the same child recites the scientific characteristics of the drug digitalis, derived from the foxglove flower, effects of which are paradoxically curative (stimulating the heart) and negative (serving only in blue). The dangers of touch and its efficacy are both part of the plant’s mythology. In her recent work Cross has cast the foxglove flower’s hallucinogenic form in bronze. At first these sculptures appear to be typical botanical specimens, but a closer examination reveals that five bells on each stem are cast fingers that mimic the flower’s petals. Moving away from the technological medium in which touch is mediated, Cross achieves here a more direct connection in which the hand becomes part of the plant itself.”

Vivienne Dick

“...I continue to be interested in exploring possibilities of relationships based on reciprocity, negotiation and respect for difference. I am interested in different experiences of being in the world (...). I am interested in how the world we live in continues to be structured and led by a masculine (and western) point of view. It is both confusing and more necessary to challenge this emphasis on ‘having’, or we risk destroying all life.”


Robert Gober

“...at the time that I made this sculpture my psychiatrist was a child psychiatrist. The waiting room or hallway was borderline stumpy but also wonderful because there were an equal number of adult-sized chairs and child-sized chairs, evoking an equivocality that frequently moved me. As is often the case, I didn’t realize this sculpture’s real life source until well after its completion. I am convinced that for me the visual decisions or ideas happen in oblique, semi-conscious ways. This image or object was the silent companion of my walking cure. Sometimes the tissues were on a side table or the couch, but the chair, a small wooden one, was always there next to me. In putting the two objects together I thought I was placing adult-sized burdens on a child, magnified yet again the large drain underneath. One time in San Francisco someone asked me what the piece meant. I responded that I should understand what it is physically before worrying about meaning. When you know that the painted tissue box is bronze, you know that it is unnaturally heavy and then the meanings start to flow from the physical thing itself.”


Nan Goldin

“...In 2005 the DIA Foundation, commissioned me to do a show that would disappear completely. It had a lot to do with disappears disappearance and learning. It was also about trying to be a threat to the art-marketing system, and also, to be really honest, it was about being generous to a certain extent. I wanted people to have my work. The fact that someone could just come and take my work and carry it with them was very exciting. Penal said that we rehearse our fear in order to lessen them. In this way a ‘letting go’ of the work, this refusal to make a static form, a monolithic sculpture, in favor of disappearing, changing, unstable, and fragile form was an attempt on my part to rehearse my fear of having Ross disappear day by day right in front of my eyes. It’s really a weird thing when you see the public come into the gallery and walk away with a piece of paper that is ‘yours’.”


Seamus Harahan

“...Around 1989 everyone was fighting for wall space. So the floor space was free, the floor space was marginal. I was frequently moved me.


Felix Gonzalez-Torres

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of the square, making a sort of contradiction, a
dissociation, though I didn’t set out to do it that way.
When I cover the square surface with rectangles, it
lightens the weight of the square, destroys its power.”
Agnes Martin quoted in Lucy Lippard, “Hemage

Mary McIntyre,
born in Celeraine, Northern Ireland, 1946; lives and works in Belfast, Northern Ireland.
“I often use titles like Reverie, which convey that idea of
being lost in one’s own thoughts and the notion that a lot of the time when we’re concentrating on
something in particular, we’re not really seeing what is in front of us at all. Instead, we’re actually caught
up in our own thoughts. I think that has become a very
strong element in the work. I would hope that there is
a space in my work for people to indulge their own
particular viewpoint.”

William McKeown,
born in County Tyrone, Northern Ireland, 1962; died in Edinburgh, Scotland, UK, 2011.
“There are two types of art - open and closed. All closed
art is negative and anti-life. Art which is open accepts
without judgement; is expanding, positive, and life
enhancing.”
William McKeown, The Holiday Show, Royal
Hibernian Academy, Dublin, 2002, p. 4.
“My work is not about nature. It is about a response to
a particular type of space. A space where there are no
rules, no morals, no laws, no judgements, no systems.
A space that is unconditional, all embracing, and free.
This space, of course, is found in nature, but it can also
be found in someone else’s eyes.”
William McKeown, The Sky Begins At Our Feet,
Belfast, Ormeau Baths, 2002, unpaginated.

Ana Mendieta,
born in Havana, Cuba, 1948; died in New York,
USA, 1985
Press release statement for the exhibition
“Silueta Series 1977”, Corroboree, Gallery of
New Concepts, University of Iowa, Iowa City,
December 1977.
“The first part of my life was spent in Cuba, where
a mixture of Spanish and African culture makes up the
heritage of the people. The Roman Catholic Church
and ‘Santeria’ - the culture of the African divinities
represented with the catholic saints and magical
powers – are the prevalent religions of the nation.
It is perhaps during my childhood in Cuba that I first
became fascinated by primitive art and cultures. It
seems as if these cultures are provided with an
inner knowledge, a closeness to natural resources. And it is
this knowledge which gives reality to the images they
have created.
It is this sense of magic, knowledge and power, found in
primitive art, that has influenced my personal attitude
about art-making. For the past five years I have been
working out in nature, exploring the relationship
between myself, the earth, and art. Using my body as
a reference in the creation of the works, I am able to
transcend myself in a voluntary submersion and a total
identification with nature. Through my art, I want to
express the immediacy of life and the eternity of nature.”

Andrew Vickery,
born in Devon, UK, 1963; lives and works in
Berlin, Germany.
“Taking the scenic route
Driving to the Mourne Mountains (where the mountains sweep
down to the sea), making coffee in the back of the Land
Rover on a beach on the Antrim coast. Mrs. McClean’s
cherry madeira cake. Daring to stand too close as the
approaching waves crash onto the rocks. (By the sea,
by the sea, by the beautiful sea. You and me, you and me.
I), looking at the longest beaches so that walks
and conversations could go on and on. Walking in the
Wicklow mountains; stopping to explore woodlands
and ruined buildings; photographing each other on the
cliffs in County Waterford. The bedroom, an oasis in an
autistic Presbyterian farmhouse, the lane, on the hill,
drinking too much wine on a summer night.
Two in one nature”
Andrew Vickery, The Paradise [39] – Arcades

EXHIBITION WORKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Courtesy of the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vivienne Dick</td>
<td>Christmas at the Other Side, Boston, 1972</td>
<td>gelatin silver print, 61 x 51cm</td>
<td>Courtesy of the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary McIntyre</td>
<td>Two in one nature</td>
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<tr>
<td>William McKeown</td>
<td>The Sky Begins At Our Feet, Belfast, Ormeau Baths, 2002, unpaginated</td>
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<td>Ana Mendieta</td>
<td>Taking the scenic route</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Gober</td>
<td>Untitled, 1997</td>
<td>cast plastic, painted bronze, paper, silver-plated steel, wood, 43.8 x 33 x 33cm</td>
<td>Private Collection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vija Celmins</td>
<td>Falling Stars, 2010</td>
<td>mezzotint, edition of 30 + 10 AP, 41 x 30cm</td>
<td>Courtesy McKee Gallery, New York</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vija Celmins</td>
<td>Divided Night Sky, 2010</td>
<td>mezzotint, edition of 30 + 10 AP, 41 x 30cm</td>
<td>Courtesy McKee Gallery, New York</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vija Celmins</td>
<td>Untitled #10, 1994-1995</td>
<td>charcoal on paper, 63.2 x 55.9cm</td>
<td>Private Collection, New York</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Andrew Vickery</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
nan Goldin
Heart-shaped bruise, 1980
cibachrome, 51 x 61cm
Courtesy of the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

nan Goldin
The Hug, NYC, 1980
cibachrome, 102 x 76cm
Courtesy of the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

nan Goldin
Nan one month after being battered, 1986
Cibachrome, 76 x 102cm
Courtesy of the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

Felix Gonzalez-Torres
Untitled, 1989/1990
print on paper, endless copies, two parts, 44cm at ideal height x 142.2 x 58cm
Courtesy Carlos and Rosa de la Cruz Collection
© The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Collection, Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

Felix Gonzalez-Torres
"Untitled" (Portrait of Dad), 1991
white candies individually wrapped in cellophane, endless supply, ideal weight 175 lbs
Courtesy Carlos and Rosa de la Cruz Collection
© The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Collection, Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

Felix Gonzalez-Torres
Untitled, 1991-1993
billboard, two parts, variable dimensions
Courtesy Sammlung Hoffmann
© The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Collection, Courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

Byron Kim
Untitled (for B.L), 2011
acrylic on canvas, 228.6 x 182.8cm
Courtesy of the artist and James Cohan Gallery, New York/Shanghai

Byron Kim
Untitled (for P.B.), 2011
acrylic on canvas, 228.6 x 182.8cm
Courtesy of the artist and James Cohan Gallery, New York/Shanghai

Agnes Martin
Untitled No. 7, 1980
gesso, acrylic and graphite, 184 x 186cm
Collection Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane

Mary McInerney
The Path to the Distribution Point of Light, 2015
colour lightjet photographic print, 110 x 130cm, edition of 3
Courtesy of the artist

William McKeown
The Meadow, 2008
oil on linen, 182 x 148cm
Private Collection

William McKeown
The Barley Field, 2008
oil on linen, 63 x 62cm
Courtesy of the Kerlin Gallery, Dublin and the William McKeown Foundation

William McKeown
The Barley Field, 2008
oil on linen, 182 x 148cm
Courtesy of the Kerlin Gallery, Dublin and the William McKeown Foundation

William McKeown
Open Drawing, Narrow Lane, 2005
colouring pencil on paper, 28 x 25 cm
Courtesy of the Kerlin Gallery, Dublin and the William McKeown Foundation

William McKeown
Hope Painting #26, 2005
oil on canvas, 68.2 x 45.8cm
Courtesy of the Kerlin Gallery, Dublin and the William McKeown Foundation

William McKeown
Hope Painting #24, 2005
oil on canvas, 68.2 x 45.8cm
Courtesy of the Kerlin Gallery, Dublin and the William McKeown Foundation

William McKeown
Hope Painting, White White, 2006
oil on linen, 48 x 45.5cm
Courtesy of the Kerlin Gallery, Dublin and the William McKeown Foundation

William McKeown
Snowing, 2008
oil on linen, 48 x 48cm
Courtesy of the Kerlin Gallery, Dublin and the William McKeown Foundation

William McKeown
Ocean, 2009
oil on linen, 182 x 148cm
Courtesy of the Kerlin Gallery, Dublin and the William McKeown Foundation

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Untitled, 2009-2011
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Ana Mendieta
Anima, Silueta de Cohetes, 1976
Super 8mm, colour, silent film transferred to DVD, 2’ 22” duration
Courtesy of the Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection and Galerie lelong, New York

Ana Mendieta
Birth, 1981
Super 8mm, black and white, silent film transferred to DVD, 2’ 03” duration
Courtesy of the Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection and Galerie lelong, New York

Andrew Nickolas
Arcades Ambles, 2012
mixed media and slide projection, 66 x 76 x 32cm
Collection of the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaion

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The RHA would like to thank the following Corporate Benefactors for their support: Arthur Cox, ESB, and Quilter Cheviot.