

VISUAL ARTISTS IRELAND, VAN, SEPT/OCTOBER 2014

Caoimhe Kilfeather, this attentive place, TBG+S, 2014

John Graham

---



Camille Killfeather, 'This Attentive Place', Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin, 2014

Caoimhe Kilfeather

'This Attentive Place'

Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin

20 June – 20 August 2014

Caoimhe Kilfeather seems interested in the space around objects as much as the objects themselves. In her recent exhibition a diaphanous blue screen (made from overlapping sheets of oiled and pigmented paper) reshaped the gallery's coordinates and provided an atmospheric setting for a number of seemingly related though rather mysterious artifacts.

Varying between dark and lighter shades, the wall of suspended sheets, titled *The Rigid Thing*, *The Moving Act*, led the viewer towards an opening at its farthest end and continued inside to form a right angled enclosure. The translucent drapes made a softly glowing perimeter, filtering the exterior brightness, and casting the exhibition's contents with a square of melancholy light.

Bound at its centre by thin bands of shiny brass, a foursome of dyed and cast concrete uprights faced each other in secret conference. These tall slabs seemed vaguely megalithic, broodily dominating the inner sanctum, like a dark tomb or hearth, a shelter for transformations of one kind or another. The title of the work, *A Shade*, suggested

another reading: that the forms were solidified shadows, negative matter cast from an absence of light (and what better material than concrete to describe this metamorphosis).

The Kind Thought That Sent Them There was positioned towards the opposite corner of the reconfigured room. Four bronze forms rested on a pale wooden table. The low table was drop-leafed, one up and one down. The irregular surfaces of the round forms had been cast from something wrapped or woven, and there was a single small opening in each. They looked like the nests of weaverbirds. Or perhaps they were maceheads, waiting for the armourer to fix their wooden shafts.

A sculpture doesn't have to look like something, but it's difficult to escape comparisons, especially when we're led towards them. An accompanying text emphasised Kilfeather's interest in the place of the exhibition and her attempts to redefine it, from an "ostensibly public, to a more private and subjective setting". (1) We're also told that her works reference "domesticity and habitation". (2) If that's correct then my preceding comments about birds' nests and the transformative hearth seem apt. On the other hand my observations about shadows and medieval weaponry are probably way off the mark. It's difficult to pin Kilfeather's work down to a specific reading, but that is part of its strength. The artist seems to promote ambiguity, exploring contradictions between her materials and her forms, and inviting subjective responses to a complex grammar of making and allusion.

The use of cryptic titles is another oblique strategy. Two framed black and white photographs, *At The End of His Nature* (1) and (2) depict the same subject – a paved and enclosed courtyard – from the same point of view: a room leading out to the open area. If the gallery space is a reconfigured domicile (as the exhibition text suggests) then perhaps it extends to the images of exterior space framed on the wall. The image of the courtyard garden is a kind of joke, a self-consciously unconvincing *trompe-l'oeil*. Or does the title *At The End of His Nature* imply something else? Are the closed doors in the second photograph a reference to death? Kilfeather's titles sound bookish (Emily Dickinson comes to mind), but also teasing and suggestive. Perhaps I was led up the wrong garden path?

Adjusting to the blue-stained gloom I noticed that cladding had been removed from the room's structural columns and that the concrete ceiling was painted a dark grey. The space felt raw but honest, as though undressed of anything superfluous. Here and there the stripped back austerity was relieved by warmer lights directed toward the walls. As

well as the two photographs, two untitled works were picked out in this way. A column of uniformly pale slip cast ceramic tiles was slotted together by way of opposing lips at the top and bottom. Viewed from the side the flat shapes had a simple interlocked elegance. From the front they became an ironed-out Brancusi, a potentially endless column of starched rhomboids.

Five rectangles of woven wire were placed just beyond the blue confines. Their metallic lustre seemed internal, as though charged with the current running through all of Kilfeather's work, a poetic energy of reticence and release.

"Inhabited space transcends geometrical space", Gaston Bachelard wrote, reminding us that the true coordinates of a space are found in subjective experience. (3) While 'This Attentive Place' felt uniquely intimate, the title seemed to refer to the common experience of all those who have visited or worked in the gallery. Carried in memory – habitations occur there as much as anywhere else – this exhibition's 'legacy of attention' will be extended in many memories, no doubt, over time.

John Graham is an artist based in Dublin.

Notes

1. TBG+S exhibition statement
2. Ibid
3. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 1958