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Caoimhe Kilfeather
TEMPLE BAR GALLERY & STUDIOS



View of "Caoimhe Kilfeather," 2014.

As one of the more admired young Irish artists of recent years, Caoimhe Kilfeather has, naturally enough, featured in a good number of respectable group shows. At such gatherings, however, her minimal sculptures have often stood out—or rather stepped back—as notably undemonstrative, even somewhat morose presences. Included among the up-and-coming talent selected for "Holding Together" at Dublin's Douglas Hyde Gallery in 2010, Kilfeather chose to show a modest early work, *Schefflera Arboricola*, 2007: an apparently fragile geometric representation of a household plant, constructed from thin rods of unpolished steel. Keeping to itself in a quiet corner of Douglas Hyde's grand modernist space, this little linear sculpture cut quite a solitary figure: a wallflower at the party. In 2012, Kilfeather's main contribution to "Futures"—the Royal Hibernian Academy's annual roundup of bright young things—was *Last*, 2012, a tall, cast-concrete curtain. It seemed both a work of great, solemn tenderness—every minor fold and crease of the soft fabric granted monumental fixity—and a firm refusal of expressive disclosure. The curtain was, perhaps, something for the artist to hide behind while on

this public stage. (Mary McCarthy's praise for the "mind hiding inside" the words of Elizabeth Bishop seems worth recalling: "like an 'I' counting up to a hundred, waiting to be found.")

When given sufficient room of her own, Kilfeather tends to create taut, economical arrangements of pared-back forms, using a varied range of tough industrial materials that include not only steel and concrete but also lead, coal, cast iron, and heavy timber. These combinations of differently sized and weighted sculptures—sometimes accompanied by small black-and-white photographs—incorporate allusions to architectural details or domestic fittings. Occasionally, pieces resembling jewelry or woven textiles (handmade with overlapping metal strips) point to an interest in decoration. But the style is usually austere, the attitude stern. There may be passing stylistic similarities to such formally reserved artists as Claire Barclay or Becky Beasley, but Kilfeather's work is less likely to draw on precise allusions to art, design, or literature. Her sculptures have a definite, homely worldliness, but they are intriguing partly because they are so contained within their own world. In this regard, it made perfect sense that the centerpiece of "Before it stirs the surface," a solo presentation at Dublin's Oonagh Young Gallery earlier this year, should have been a tentlike structure (Quarter, 2014) that could not be entered, and that left little room in the small space for anything, or anyone, else.

The setup at the center of Kilfeather's most recent solo exhibition, "this attentive place," looked at first to be in deliberate, dramatic contrast to Quarter's inaccessible dwelling. It appeared to present a much more open and inviting artistic proposition. Using a large, light-filtering oilpaper screen to delineate an alternate internal boundary and to determine the gallery atmosphere, Kilfeather had once again installed a dominant room-within-a-room, though in this case visitors were welcomed into it. But physical access did not guarantee mental access. This rudimentary space held objects and images that emphasized domestic warmth and simplicity, among them a wonky drop-leaf table supporting four spherical cast-iron vessels (*The Kind Thought That Sent Them There*, 2014), a bulky black pillar conceived of as the installation's hearth (*A Shade*, 2014), and two photographs offering open and closed views through patio doors to a pleasantly overgrown private garden (*At the End of His Nature I & II*, 2014). Each element seemed at once consoling and enigmatic. Together, they constituted an impressive amplification and intensification of Kilfeather's "attentive" but determinedly guarded art. Oddly, the mixture of gathered work in this, her most prominent solo exhibition to

date, might have been mistaken for a well-curated group show—almost as if she had found a way to give the impression of opening up, while remaining resolutely within her own world.

—[Declan Long](#)