

Resource & engagement for second level students & teachers supporting  
Content Area 3: Today's World

## ***Moments of Being* - Contemporary Irish Painting**

*Laura Fox, Paul Hallahan, Elizabeth Magill, Colin Martin, Ciarraí MacCormac, Eleanor McCaughey, Eve O'Callaghan, Lesley-Ann O'Connell, William O'Neill, Ciara Roche, Annette Smyth, Mark Swords, Lee Welch.*



*Details of works, top left to right: Annette Smyth, Eleanor McCaughey, Lee Welch, and Eve O'Callaghan.  
Middle left to right: William O'Neill, Laura Fox, Paul Hallahan, Leslie-Ann O'Connell, and Elizabeth Magill.  
Bottom left to right: Ciara Roche, Mark Swords, Ciarraí MacCormac, and Colin Martin.*

**Curated by Brenda McParland**

**Saturday 18 January – Saturday 15 March 2025**



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Describing the exhibition, we have highlighted:

- **Theme & subject matter:** the 'story' behind the artwork, what the work is 'about'.
- **Process & media:** the techniques and materials used by the artist to create the artworks.
- **Composition & layout:** the arrangement of visual elements in an artwork, or placement within the gallery spaces.

A glossary of words highlighted in *bold italic font* to aid your understanding is on page 9.

Designed to assist you in an inquiry-based exploration of the artworks, this resource includes:

- Associated events you might like to attend.
- Information about the artists.
- Questions to consider & discuss relating to:  
Artists Theory & Thinking  
- motivations behind the work;  
Processes & Media  
- techniques & materials to create the work;  
Art & the Environment  
- a source of inspiration;  
Art as Social Commentary or Commentator  
- raising awareness through art.

Combine this resource with our associated learning & engagement events listed below:

Exhibition opening

Sat. 18 January at 2:30pm

Join us in the gallery and meet the artists.

Gallery Tours for Junior & Senior Cycle using Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS).

<https://solsticeartscentre.ie/event/school-gallery-tours-primary-and-secondary>

Playing with Abstraction

Post-primary class groups

Friday 7 Feb at 9:30-11am & 11:30-1pm

Guided by local exhibiting artist Lesley-Ann O'Connell, students will explore the artist's processes, experimenting with abstraction and reconstruction to create multi-layered imagery, unravelling possibilities of process and media, composition and layout.

<https://solsticeartscentre.ie/event/playing-with-abstraction-secondary-school>

Cut & Collide: Mixed Media Collage Workshop  
Saturday 8 Feb at 10am-12:30

Student/Adult workshop

Inspired by her artistic practice, focusing on the making process and self-expression, join exhibiting artist Eleanor McCaughey for this experimental workshop exploring pattern, line, texture and shape with various materials.

<https://solsticeartscentre.ie/event/cut-and-collide-mixed-media-collage-workshop>

Creative Clutch; Compositions for Still-life  
Painting with artist William O'Neill

Saturday 1 March at 10am-2pm

Art students/Adult workshop

Explore a fresh approach to painting objects and their potential as subject matter. This painting masterclass will focus on the angles, positive and negative spaces that occur through careful planning and experimentation of assembly.

<https://solsticeartscentre.ie/event/creative-clutch-masterclass-in-still-life-paintings>

Gallery Walk & Talk: An exploration of contemporary painting

Sat. 8 March at 2:30pm

<https://solsticeartscentre.ie/event/gallery-walk-and-talk>

In Conversation with Colin Martin, artist, lecturer and Head of School at the Royal Hibernian Academy.

## About the exhibition – *Moments of Being* – Contemporary Irish Painting



This group exhibition by thirteen Irish artists, gives prominence to the diversity of approaches to painting in Ireland today. Figurative, abstract, mixed media and experimental painting practices feature. The narrative of paint is questioned, controlled, dismantled and unified, re-emerging in imagery, installation and sculptural form.

Several of the paintings are new and exhibited for the first time in *Moments of Being* – Contemporary Irish Painting. Laura Fox, Lesley-Ann O’Connell, William O’Neill and Annette Smyth are based in Co. Meath.

**Themes & subject matter:** Ideas and themes explored in this large group show include landscape, still life, portraiture, personal narratives, observations of everyday life, the body, identity and place, the natural world, contemporary culture and the virtual, history, politics, and the materiality and essence of painting.

**Composition & layout:** Selected and curated by Brenda McParland, project curator at Solstice, the artworks interconnect throughout the gallery spaces. A mix of large, small-scale and one floor work, the *curatorial* layout of artworks purposefully guides your eyes through each space. Large works and installation create impact as you move from one room to the next. To emphasise shadows and texture some works require natural light while others are spot lit.

**Process & media:** Analysing our perception of what is, some artists depict the familiar in meticulous painted detail. Process driven, others use the *materiality* of paint as a foundation for other media. Creating semi-abstract forms Lesley-Ann O’Connell and Mark Swords use paint as a backdrop for stitching and collage. Described as open and unrestricted, Eleanor McCaughey creates mixed-media installations. Ciarraí MacCormac deconstructs painting with her playful acrylic paint skins. Eve O’Callaghan seeks minimalism, capturing spherical paint forms within steel. Elizabeth Magill and Paul Hallahan evoke illusional spaces within their paintings, while Colin Martin, Annette Smyth and William O’Neill paint with intricate detail. Lee Welch’s portraits in muted tones express only the essential details, while influenced by other minimalist painters Laura Fox exposes the backs of some paintings to reveal gestural marks otherwise hidden.

For this resource, we have chosen four of the thirteen artists to explore in more detail.

To view all artworks in this exhibition see: <https://solsticeartscentre.ie/event/moments-of-being>

## The Artists

The artists are at various stages in their artistic careers, emerging, mid-career and established.

**Laura Fox** is an emerging artist creating minimalist abstract paintings influenced by the history of art, and inspired by American artists Robert Ryman, Agnes Martin and Irish artist William McKeown.

**Paul Hallahan** creates abstract paintings exploring the natural world and our place within it.

**Elizabeth Magill** has layered landscape paintings, *imbued* with a sense of interiority, reflection and human presence. Represented by the Kerlin Gallery, Dublin.

**Colin Martin's** practice is concerned with the intersection of *analogue painting* with digital and technological cultures. His practice explores spaces that blur boundaries between the real and virtual and where technology, culture and politics have become *synthesized*.

**Ciarraí MacCormac** deconstructs painting, dissolving distinctions between painting and sculpture with her playful acrylic paint skins.

**Eleanor McCaughey's** practice explores thematic threads surrounding the body, identity and place using symbols and metaphors that express personal narratives in mixed media installations. Represented by the Kevin Kavanagh Gallery, Dublin.

**Eve O'Callaghan** explores the materiality and essence of painting, creating minimal abstract works that combine organic shaped stainless steel frames with traditional painting processes, light and shadow.

**Lesley-Ann O'Connell's** new abstract stitched fabric and collaged paintings are inspired by interiors, still life and landscape. Represented by the Kevin Kavanagh Gallery, Dublin.

**William O'Neill's** graphic paintings of retro clutch bags push new boundaries of still life in his practice,

**Ciara Roche's** new large cinematic paintings and small works on paper of uncanny domestic scenes and public spaces inhabit the worlds of reality and fiction.

**Annette Smyth's** new paintings are both representational and abstracted depictions of buildings under construction.

**Mark Swords'** work is open and unrestricted, incorporating numerous influences and a diversity of interests such as crafts, history and literature. Represented by the Kevin Kavanagh Gallery, Dublin.

**Lee Welch** draws inspiration from history and current affairs. Figures, objects and their environments are stripped back, becoming semi-abstract forms suggestive of a wider narrative.

See Useful Links on page 9 to gather more information on each artist on social media and websites.

## Questions to consider & discuss

### Artists Theory & Thinking - Eleanor McCaughey



Eleanor McCaughey *Deconstructed Painting 2*, curtain, paper, fabric, collage, plaster, acrylic 310x200x400cm

McCaughey's practice explores themes around the body, identity and place, using symbols and *metaphors* that express *personal narratives*. Continually evolving through research, studio-based experimentation and her lived experiences of endometriosis, infertility and menopause, this work is a personal attempt to express what it is to live in a female body, exploring a feminist *phenomenology* of art and form.

Her playful exploration of the materiality of paint via form, colour, rhythm, flow, gestural marks, layering and collaging is in her own words 'continually in flux'. Investigating the possibilities of paint as a medium in two-dimensional and expanded three-dimensional forms, the work is physical, tactile, and handmade through brush stroke, mark making, and moulding.

Consider and discuss the relevance of the title of this artwork, *Deconstructed Painting 2*.

Acknowledging the serious themes explored, compare them to McCaughey's use of bright colours and playful abstract forms.

Examine the multiple processes, use of colour, and positioning of elements in this artwork.

- Use words or drawings to describe your interaction and reaction to each element.

"The 'woman' arises in connection with female identity and takes on multiple forms, as a mermaid, siren, bird, monster."

McCaughey questions female social identity and the idealised representation of women in art history.

- Chose a period in art history and examine how the female form is represented.

- Select a female artist from a past era and learn more about their practice and position in society at the time.

## Questions to consider & discuss

### Processes & Media - Ciarraí MacCormac



Ciarraí MacCormac

*Vitals*, 2024

Recycled paint skin

47 x 22 cm

“My work is about playing games with paint- exploring and exploiting its properties by ways of process-led strategies. I relentlessly experiment with paint in order to have direct engagement with the medium.”

Interested in how a material (paint) can change from one state or form to another, Ciarraí MacCormac explores the possibilities and physicality of paint. Releasing it from the confines of a frame or canvas, she believes the area outside these ‘restraints’ is a limitless space to be utilised, allowing the medium to create its own structure; the work becomes a body of paint.

The process involves applying layers of acrylic paint to a glass plate. Once dried, the paint ‘skin’ is removed from the glass and hung from walls or ceilings with hooks or nails. In this position, the paint skin oozes, collapses and buckles as the material creates its own form, giving it a value in itself, changing the method of painting and process of making. Recently exploring the longevity of the paint skins, MacCormac has introduced other materials to support these works. This has allowed her to be more ambitious in scale and “the bodies of paint control the viewer’s bodies as they navigate the space around the works.”

“Colour choice in my works have no meaning. Colour is just something attached to paint. I use paint not to express meaning but rather to offer a possibility of the paints functions; the paint boldly exposes its own construction.”

- While not a priority to the artist, discuss the impact of colour on you the viewer.

Do you agree MacCormac’s “technique dissolves distinctions” between painting and sculpture?

- Give reasons for your answer.

These works *inadvertently* relate to the human condition, the self, what it means to be alive.

- Identify and discuss this connection with these ‘bodies’ or ‘skins’ of paint.

MacCormac questions why paint is used as a medium or tool to pose as something else.

- What do you think she means by this?

- Question how and why you use paint.

- Experiment with paint as a solid form or free-standing structure.

## Questions to consider & discuss

### Art & the Environment – Colin Martin



Colin Martin  
Procedural City  
(Zorn Palette), 2024  
Oil on canvas  
90 x 130 cm

Colin Martin's current practice explores spaces that blur boundaries between the real and virtual world, where technology, culture and politics have become *synthesised*. The work explores the evolving relationship between humans and technology. Using *representational art* to record and probe the digital age, he often references science fiction genres and previously imagined futures, now obsolete.

Inviting us to reflect on the entwined connections between technological advancement, social progress and our planetary environment, Martin has also produced large-scale paintings of sites of mass human activity such as music festival encampments, vaccination hubs, big tech warehouses and the architecture of megacities.

Martin explores 'our *prosthetic* relationship with technology.'

- What do you think he means by '*prosthetic* relationship'?
- Describe his use of imagery to convey human and technological bonds.
- Compare this imagery to a digital component; a circuit board for example and discuss.

Observe the scale and meticulous attention to detail in these artworks. In your opinion, how does this affect you the viewer?

"My current work is focused on technology, digital cultures and the longevity of some traditional genres of painting; I use them as a prism to look at future orientated cultures."  
- As a group, discuss this statement by the artist.

Research the *Zorn palette* – also known as the "limited palette" that Martin uses here.

Compare and contrast the works of Colin Martin, Annette Smyth, and Ciara Roche in this exhibition. List the similarities, differences, styles and subject matter.

## Questions to consider & discuss

### Art as Social Commentary or Commentator - Lee Welch



Lee Welch

*Novak Djokovic reading the NY Times 2024*

Acrylic on linen  
64.5 x 50 cm

Lee Welch is known for his paintings in which figures, objects and their environments are stripped back to their most essential details: semi-abstract forms that are suggestive, using single layers of paint in pastel and earth tones, leaving a gauzy finish, while unpainted sections reveal strips of bare canvas or tactile fabric. In his painting of world-renowned tennis player Novak Djokovic, Welch strives to capture a playful moment, highlighting Djokovic's humorous side. Intentionally obscuring Djokovic's face by the magazine, his image gazes back at the viewer from the cover, a reminder from the artist not to take life too seriously. Yet, amid his light heartedness, Djokovic's decision to decline the COVID-19 vaccine was a subject of intense discussion and debate. Many found Djokovic's refusal perplexing, given his status as a public figure and role model in sport. However, while recognising the importance of vaccination for public health, Djokovic asserted his right to make his own medical choices in line with his beliefs and values, stressing the significance of individual *autonomy* and informed consent.

The controversy surrounding Djokovic's stance highlights the intricate interplay between personal *autonomy*, public health imperatives, and societal obligations.

It prompts conversations about vaccine hesitancy, the role of athletes in advocating for health initiatives, and the ethical considerations surrounding mandatory vaccination policies.

- Discuss the importance and power of using art as a social commentator for these conversations.

Welch talks of his paintings waiting 'mutely, patiently for the viewer to animate them', sparking connections to societal events, or hard-to-reach emotions.

- Create a self-portrait using symbolism, colour, and composition to emphasise your strengths, emotions and beliefs.



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### Glossary

**Analogue painting** is created using traditional materials such as pencils, paints, paper and canvas.

**Autonomy**, the right, independence or freedom of will or one's actions.

**Curatorial**, relates to the selection, organisation and display of artworks in a gallery or museum.

**Imbued**, to inspire or permeate with a feeling or quality.

**Imperatives**, an essential or urgent thing.

**Inadvertently**, without intention, accidentally.

**Installation art** is usually mixed media constructions, often designed for a specific place, for a temporary period.

**Materially driven practices** focuses on the properties and quality of chosen materials, and then the exploration of how to utilise or apply it into an artwork.

**Metaphor** is a thing regarded as representative or [symbolic](#) of something else.

**Personal narratives** or a personal account of events; a story.

**Phenomenology** is a philosophy of experience.

**Prosthetic**, an add-on or artificial replacement (e.g. prosthetic leg). Here the artist refers to our reliance and relationship with technology.

**Representational art** depicts anything from the real world.

**Synthesized**, something made by combining different things.

**Zorn Palette** comprises of four colours; vermilion, ivory black, flake white and yellow ochre used by the Swedish portrait painter Anders Zorn (1860–1920).

**Useful links:** Find out more about each artist's work. Look at their websites, search and follow on social media, and gain additional insight into their artistic careers and practices.

Here are some links to get you started:

Ciarraí MacCormac <https://www.ciarraimaccormac.com/>

Eleanor McCaughey <https://dublinartlife.com/interview-with-eleanor-mccaughey>

Two links exploring *Sea of Change* by Eleanor McCaughey at RHA, 2024 outlining the artists' research & mapping method, documenting colour, form & texture as a starting point for work:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SGsAQV2vq-zPWEKGFvMtc7Z0kjEqN5u/view>

<https://www.eleanormccaughey.net/a-sea-change-into-something-rich-and-strange.html>

Colin Martin reviews his exhibition *Empathy lab* at Highlanes Municipal Art Gallery, 2024.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dU2zDf3lGVg>

Lee Welch reviews his exhibition *In Praise of idleness* at Pallas Studios, 2024.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Xw2Tlvj-sQ>

## Visiting Solstice:

Solstice Gallery is open Tuesday-Saturday 11am-4pm.  
Individual students and teachers can visit the gallery during opening times.



Class and group gallery tours must be booked in advance.

To book a tour, workshop or event please contact:

Deirdre Rogers, Visual Arts Facilitation & Public Engagement Coordinator at 046 909 2308 or by emailing [deirdre.rogers@solsticeartscentre.ie](mailto:deirdre.rogers@solsticeartscentre.ie)

If you wish to be contacted directly about upcoming events and opportunities, please let us know and we can add you to our mailing list.

We encourage feedback to assist us in developing these resources and events to best meet your needs. Please get in touch with suggestions or any questions about our programme.

Best of luck to all students in their creative studies.

Deirdre Rogers

Visual Arts Facilitation & Public Engagement Coordinator

## Student notes: