

BUTLER ■ GALLERY

Ailbhe Ní Bhriain

May 3 – June 15, 2008

The Butler Gallery is delighted to host an exhibition of photographs and video works by Cork based artist Ailbhe Ní Bhriain.

... Ailbhe Ní Bhriain makes *extraordinary* photographs and videos of constructed imaginary places. Composed of details from many different photographs and video shots, taken in and of *real* places from her travels, her work creates *other* worlds - fictional, impossible, yet strangely evocative of places we sense we might know of from afar or vaguely recollect from dreams or memory.

The mysterious quality of Ní Bhriain's photographs – part room, part landscape – have the feel of small stage-sets or contained spaces that tip into a postmodern sensibility for the Gothic (ruins), and the surreal (illogical and strange). Abandoned rooms, flooded floors, bog trees' darkened silhouettes against stormy white-weather, shadows spilling branches that creep into the corners of sparse, decaying rooms, scraggly bushes and grass that grow out of their sea-floors, drapery strewn across tiled rooms, on peeling walls or curtaining windows, demonstrating a skill for detail as masterful as that of a Flemish painter's feel for fabric-folds.

The effect of seamless layering or collapsing one element of the picture's image over or under or into another, disrupts the spatial plane and we touch into a degree of unknowingness. Light hangs in darkness' shadow, casting visibility, illuminating details, yet it seems as if we are not on terra firma. What is inside, what is outside, external or internal remains unclear. Skies appear inverted, forests press up against open rooms and isolated objects defy gravity. The present or 'tangibly there' is intertwined with an immaterial *other* -

insubstantial, faded elements that float and hover and appear as if lodged somewhere between the very act of appearance and

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disappearance - slipping in or out of (in)visibilities. In Ní Bhriain's scenes eerie unsettling dwells as emptied out and silenced space, where inhabitants have left and entropy begins and where nature seems on the verge of taking back. These are displaced spaces - places that have been left behind in aftermath or perhaps touch the future from its hither side. It is as if they are coming from the far edge of what can be seen, like Rebecca Solnit's *Blue of Distance*, and although in part or vaguely familiar, they dislodge any sense of rational connection, of ordered belonging, *they are places you can never go.*¹

(From an essay by **Clíodhna Shaffrey** to accompany this exhibition.)

Ailbhe Ní Bhriain was born in 1978 and lives and works in Cork. She received a B.A. in Fine Art from the Crawford College of Art, Cork in 2000, an MA in Fine Art from the Royal College of Art, London in 2004 and is currently completing her PhD by Practice in Fine Art at Kingston University, UK. Ní Bhriain has won many prestigious awards, is a lecturer at the Crawford College of Art & Design and has exhibited widely both nationally and internationally. Upcoming group shows include works at the Galway Arts Centre and Galerie Polaris, Paris. Ailbhe Ní Bhriain is represented by Domobaal Gallery, London.

In addition to our regular funding, this exhibition is gratefully supported by Cork City Council Artist's Development Bursary & Cork Film Centre Artist in Residence Programme.

¹ Rebecca Solnit, *A field guide to getting Lost: The Blue of Distance*, pp 29, Viking Penguin, USA, 2005

**Butler Gallery
The Castle
Kilkenny
Ireland**

**t: + 353 56 7761106 f: +353 56 7770031
e: info@butlergallery.com
www.butlergallery.com**