

BUTLER ■ GALLERY

Aideen Barry

January 16 – February 28, 2010

The Morphology of the Other

The Butler Gallery is delighted to present a multi-media exhibition by Aideen Barry. *The Morphology of the Other* addresses a sense of fear of impending futuristic doom. The exhibition evokes the threat of what we humans might eventually morph into - creatures devoid of compassion and empathy. Barry's inherent rebellion is targeted against the society in which we live, challenging our progress and lack of, and encouraging responsibility towards a 'new world' attitude. Barry's philosophical interests lie with "the uncanny". She frequently plays with the notion of the subverted female character in her film and performative works, referring to hysterical female creatures in Irish Gothic literature. This interest in the Gothic is a constant in Barry's work, combining nightmare with humour, having the effect of equally enticing and repelling the viewer.

For this artist, the creative process begins with drawing – material comes to life by way of the drawings she conjures up in her fervent imagination. These images then become realised in animations, films and sculpture. Drawing continues to be an important entry to cultivating other ideas and mediums. One gallery in the exhibition is dedicated to a salon hang of her drawings, revealing the evolution of her sculptural output.

Aideen Barry's practice is in some measure informed by a diagnosis of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), which manifests itself in her obsession with cleanliness and dust free environments. Barry's depiction of the contemporary housewife, nesting in celtic tiger suburban Ireland, is obsessed with perfection and sanitisation in an effort to attain control in a vulnerable society. The fear of 'the other' is the unseen germ, odour or dust particle, threatening the health and well-being of the family unit, without any thought given to the detrimental effects of chemicals incorporated into cleaning sprays. This new kind of Gothic germ is one we cannot see and one difficult to sanitise or control, for example. The artist proposes that this sterilising of the environment will alter ourselves both psychologically and physically in future generations. Barry's interest in the contemporary

hysterias of cleanliness has informed her creation of a Dystopian view of the future domestic, creating Shelleyesque creatures of a Gothic Horror disposition: half-hoover, half-housewife - sucking and consuming particles of dust, in a gravity-defying levitation. The artists diagnosis of OCD has propelled her research into the 'uncanny' repetitive gesture, or Tourette. Through playful manipulation of materials, a productive dialogue emerges between object and body, expressing human behaviour in the strange area between amusement and discomfort, creating balance and tension at the same time.

Vacuuming in a Vacuum, A Film created in Zero Gravity, 2009 was informed by Barry's residency at Kennedy Space Centre, NASA, in 2008. While preparing to undergo astronaut training, Barry shot films in parabolic flight while experiencing zero gravity. This project was a compelling follow on from Barry's performative film *Levitating*, which played with the notion of authenticity and illusion, but also uncovered Barry's Buster Keaton-like slapstick, evident in much of her work, and a healthy counterpart to her condition. The objects that were created in response to this experience simulated materials used by NASA's precision engineers to create their own functional devices, in particular utilitarian objects that 'hoover' or suck dust, skin and excreted particles.

The Dystopian Domestic that Barry refers to is a very real space, merging the everyday with the futuristic. Barry proposes that the slippage between this future horror and our contemporary nightmares is evident now in television advertising, NASA TV, and in the suburbia in which we live. With her *Weapons of Mass Consumption* series, Barry takes the war on germs to a more militant level. Her long time dream to be the first Irish woman in space is a passion she keeps alive through the ambition and scope of her accomplished and visionary work.

Aideen Barry is a Visual Artist, working in the media of performance, film, sculpture, lens-based media, sound art, drawing and animation. Barry received her BFA from the Galway Mayo Institute of Technology in 2002 and her MA from the Institute of Art, Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire, Dublin in 2007. Barry has shown both nationally in Ireland and internationally at Centre Cultural Irlandais, (Paris), Moderna Museet, (Sweden), The Wexner Centre for the Arts in Ohio (USA), and The Walter Phillips Gallery (Canada). In 2008 she represented Ireland at The LOOP Biennial in Barcelona, Spain. Barry was Artist in Residence at the Banff Centre in Canada and at Skafffell in Iceland in 2008. In 2009 she undertook a residency in NASA in the USA.

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