

The First Frontier was the Horizon

Rachel Clarke, Abigail Connell, Kevin Cosgrove, Paul Gaffney, Aileen Hamilton, Penelope Lacey Monaghan, Ben McCabe, Jennifer O' Brien, Lesley Ann O' Connell, Carol O' Connor, William O' Neill, Eileen O' Sullivan, Hazel O' Sullivan, Annabel Potterton, Joanne Reid, Mette Sofie Roche, Annette Smyth, Charles Tyrrell, Suella Wynne.



Image: William O'Neill, Night-time imposter, Oil on linen, 110 x 140 cm, 2022. Courtesy the artist.

12 September – 24 October 2026

Curated by Ruth Hogan

Resource & engagement for second level students & teachers supporting

Content Area 3: Today's World

Describing the exhibition on page 3, 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 artists to create the artworks.
- **Composition & layout:** the arrangement or placement of the artworks 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 and their work.

Questions to consider & discuss on pages 5-8 explore the works of four artists relating to:

Artist 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

Celebratory reception for Culture Night Friday 18 Sept at 6pm

Join us in the gallery and meet the artists.

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

Throughout the exhibition

Free, booking essential.

In Conversation with exhibiting artists Kevin Cosgrove, Charles Tyrrell, and William O' Neill

Sat 10 Oct at 1.00 pm

Free entry

Exhibiting artists Kevin Cosgrove, Charles Tyrrell and William O'Neill will lead an engaging conversation offering insights into their individual creative processes, influences, and themes that shape their work within this exhibition.

Landscape Painting & Urban Plein Air with Annette Smyth

Saturday 12 & 19 September, 10am – 2pm

€60 for both days, booking essential.

Exhibiting artist Annette Smyth will guide two sessions on landscape Plein Air painting.

The Banal & Spectacular with Jennifer O'Brien

Thu 15 Oct, 11.00 am

Post-primary class groups & general public.

Free, booking essential

A performative talk and workshop by Jennifer O'Brien discussing the material and architectural influence of Navan on her practice. Attendees will take part in a postcard-making workshop that responds to immediate local surroundings and lived experience.

About the exhibition *The First Frontier was the Horizon*



Photo @ Fintan Clarke

The First Frontier was the Horizon, 2025

Light box film, Marc Augé box, Birch Plywood, L brackets, 6 x 200 cm

The First Frontier was the Horizon, is the second group exhibition of 2026 that marks the 20th anniversary celebrations of Solstice Arts Centre. This exhibition shows the work and practices of many emerging and established artists originating from County Meath, who have previously exhibited at the Centre over the last two decades.

The title *The First Frontier was the Horizon* takes its title from one of the artworks by Jennifer O' Brien, whose sculptural practice investigates aspects of exploration and discovery. This **pioneering** sense of deep enquiry is reflected in many of the artworks on display.

Process & media: Including a wide range of local artists, *The First Frontier was the Horizon* demonstrates the *multi-disciplinary* practices evolving from the region. Reflecting the breadth of visual inquiry through a selection of 53 artworks using painting, ceramic, photography and sculptural installation.

Themes & subject matter: The artists use a wide range of themes such connection, time, disruption, everyday environments, consumerism, nature, abstraction and movement. Mostly wall-mounted, with the exception of 11 floor based works, each grouping of works follows a theme, colour composition or variety of scale to guide the audience through each space.

Composition & layout: Involving 19 artists, careful consideration is given by the **curator** in the selection and display of each artwork. Displayed on the Café Gallery Wall, Gallery Foyer and within 3 large rooms of the main gallery, each must be given adequate space to be viewed, while linking to the next.

To coincide with the exhibition, Solstice has commissioned participating artist Hazel O' Sullivan to design a limited-edition artist notebook. Titled '*Aperture of Oenach*', it is available to purchase online and from our bookshop.

We have chosen four artists to explore in more detail on pages 5 - 8.

The Artists

Rachel Clarke's practice centres around the complexities of the human condition, using paint as a primary medium.

Abigail Connell, a student of painting at the National College of Art & Design exploring time, sequence and disruption.

Kevin Cosgrove's work centres on unpopulated workspace interiors, the overlooked environments of everyday labour.

Learn more about the artist's work connecting to Art & the Environment on page 7.

Paul Gaffney seeks to translate an experience of *multisensorial engagement* using the medium of photography.

Aileen Hamilton uses drawing, painting, sculpture and installation to explore nature intersecting with personal experiences.

Penelope Lacey Monaghan is a *multidisciplinary artist* inspired by social connections, environmental concerns and nature.

Ben McCabe's painted works focus on figurative imagery, inspired by the people and spaces that surrounds them, viewed through a queer lens.

Jennifer O' Brien is a Meath-born artist working across installation, film, sculpture, and text.

Learn more about Jennifer O'Brien's Art as Social Commentary or Commentator on page 8.

Lesley Ann O' Connell creates abstract stitched fabric, and collaged paintings inspired by interiors, still life and landscape. She is represented by the Kevin Kavanagh Gallery, Dublin.

Carol O' Connor uses nature as a way into a painting, not to depict but to evoke a feeling or a response to an image.

William O' Neill's graphic paintings push new boundaries of still life in his practice.

Eileen O' Sullivan's work occupies a space between painting, DIY, and craft, questioning traditional hierarchies of artistic labour and the *commodification of making*.

Hazel O' Sullivan reimagines Irish artefacts and objects within a *retro-futurist* narrative using painting, drawing, and multidisciplinary sculpture. She is represented by Kerlin Gallery, Dublin.

Annabel Potterton paints organic still-life compositions, focusing on pattern, colour and shape often made abstract.

Joanne Reid's sculptural practice is rooted in a fascination with *material culture* within everyday urban contexts.

Mette Sofie Roche's practice is process-led using sustainable materials, involving thread, organic fibres and fabrics.

Learn more about the artists Process & Media on page 6.

Annette Smyth's paintings are both representational and abstract depictions of buildings under construction.

Charles Tyrrell works within the realm of non-representational, abstract imagery,

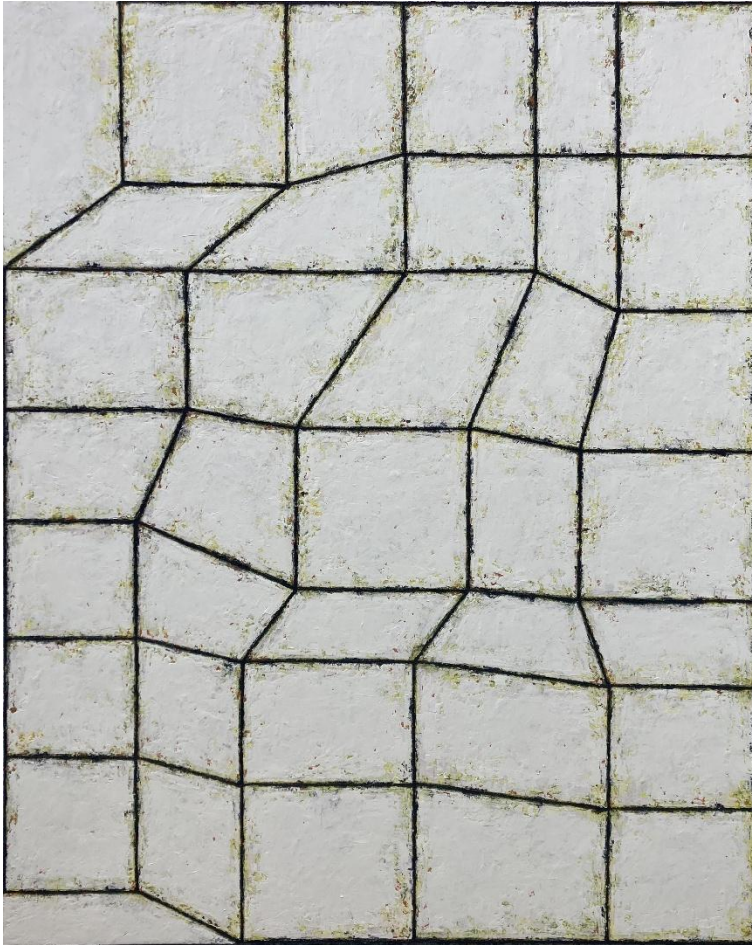
Represented by Taylor Galleries, Dublin, learn more about the Artists Theory & Thinking, page 5.

Suella Wynne is a photographic artist whose practice incorporates textiles and mixed media.

See Useful Links on page 10 to gather more information on some of the artists.

Questions to consider & discuss

Artist Theory & Thinking - Charles Tyrrell



CG7.23.

Oil on canvas

160 x 200 cm

Originally from Trim, Co. Meath, since his early years as an art student in NCAD, Charles Tyrrell has remained committed to **abstraction**. His initial motivation came from exploring **American Abstract Expressionism**. Over time, his practice evolved towards a less **expressionistic**, more pared-back and minimalist style. Ultimately, he sees his work as self-contained; in and of itself.

Tyrrell's art practice involves a daily commitment of hours in the studio, working across a range of materials and mediums: oil on wood panel, canvas and aluminium, and timber constructions. It is said he has a 'no-nonsense' approach to painting, highlighted in his titles: CG7.23; the seventh painting completed in 2023.

Tyrrell's work remains firmly *non-representational*. Rather than depicting what he sees, he explores the underlying forces that shape his surroundings.

- Reflecting on a rugged landscape on the Beara Peninsula, West Cork where he has lived since 1984, can you see links to this landscape when looking at this artwork?
- Observe the reworked layers of painted colours in Tyrrell's painting CG7.23.
- Notice the large scale of his canvases, and how they are positioned on the wall.

In his application of paint or line Tyrrell 'applies certain simple rules: divisions, boundaries, patterns and forms. He works and reworks the surface according to this methodology.'

Aidan Dunne, The Irish Times, April 15, 2009.

- In your opinion, does his methodology create loose, flowing imagery or more structured compositions?

Exhibiting extensively in Ireland and abroad Charles Tyrrell is a member of **Aosdána** and an associate member of the **Royal Hibernian Academy**.

- Find out more about these organisations and their importance in supporting Irish artists.

Questions to consider & discuss

Processes & Media - Mette Sofie Roche



For the Love of Poppies II (blue)

Mixed media – Poppy seed heads, Crochet silk cover, acrylic gold paint, glass dome, 20 x 10 cm



For the Love of Poppies IV (red) (detail)

Mette Sofie Roche emigrated to Ireland from Norway five decades ago. She works from her studio in Co. Meath and periodically from a studio on the island of Handnesøya in North Norway.

Committed to a process-led art practice using sustainably sourced, non-toxic, organic or recycled materials, she is drawn to thread, fibre and cloth. Investigating the materials fragile interconnectedness with nature, she combines processes like eco-dying, cyanotype and mono print with traditional techniques such as stitching, mending, crochet, weaving and knitting.

Through her making and visual expression, she aims to give focus to the ordinary, the un-noticed. Often perceived as feminist skills, e.g. crochet and stitching, and long associated in the making of functional items such as blankets or clothing, Roche elevates their credibility and visibility within the genre of contemporary art.

The small “poppy head” sculptures invite slow, contemplative looking to reveal how simple gathered materials, combined with traditional techniques can carry a quiet presence of the landscape with the underlying message of a need to protect and care of our eco-system.

- Discuss the artists use of materials, technique and display in these two artworks to demonstrate ‘the need for protection and care of our eco-system’.

- In your opinion, does the artist’s combination of materials and technique elevate them from humble objects to works of art?

Gathering, collecting, preserving, drying and storing are part of the artists research and making process.

- Gather and experiment with different found objects and natural materials to create a sculptural form.

Questions to consider & discuss

Art & the Environment – Kevin Cosgrove



Machine Shop,
2026

Oil on linen.

56 x 76cm

Kevin Cosgrove's painting *Machine Shop*, one of three artworks in this exhibition, depicts an unpopulated interior workspace. Using oil on linen, he is known for painting overlooked everyday environments of labour such as woodworking sheds, mechanics' garages and machine maintenance yards; places shaped by manual trade and the quiet routines of local economies.

Through detailed **representational paintings** and his belief in the value of work and manual know-how, Cosgrove considers how built environments accumulate meaning through time and repeated use, bearing traces of working life where material structures, social histories, craftsmanship and skills intersect.

Cosgrove takes the opportunity to create something extraordinary out of the ordinary.

Although filled with intense detail, the artwork carries a stillness that emerges through his process of sustained and attentive looking.

- What does this statement mean, and do you agree?

Investigate the difference between *realism*, *representational painting*, and *photorealistic art* imagery.

Cosgrove's composition, a central bared window framed by an organised, yet cluttered and well-used workspace serves as a narrative.

- What narrative or story do you imagine is behind Cosgrove's choice of subject matter in this painting?
- Discuss the composition and environment depicted.
- Does it make you curious about the person or people who use this space?

Questions to consider & discuss

Art as Social Commentary or Commentator - Jennifer O' Brien



I Call This One, IKEA Sunset, 2026

IKEA Yellow Bag, 2026

Car seat headrest with screen, chrome pipes, heated and bent mild steel + yellow Ikea bag, led batten light.

Dimensions variable

Photo @ Fintan Clarke

Jennifer O'Brien works across installation, film, sculpture, and text in an exploration of place in relation to the Irish state's pursuit of **modernity**, speed, and efficiency, and how these shape both the landscape and our lived experience.

Approaching sites as places where political, historical, and emotional experiences occur, O'Brien is drawn to the overlooked spaces between, beside and beneath. For example, roads, public buildings, and transport networks, are often perceived as purely functional. However, O'Brien sees them as sites of memory, uncertainty, and everyday experience, where histories of progress, failure, and belonging exist within the contemporary Irish landscape.

While exploring possibilities, O'Brien was struck by a customer review describing a stunning sunset they witnessed from the café in IKEA, Dublin, a highly consumerist environment.

In response, O'Brien created two artworks *I Call This One, IKEA Sunset* and *IKEA Yellow Bag*.

Follow [this link](#) to watch the video shown on the elongated headrest within the artwork.

- Discuss the materials used.
- In your opinion, how do the two works connect?
- Why do you think O'Brien displayed them this way?
- Considering her use of materials, and composition, do you see some humour in the work?

O'Brien incorporates materials such as concrete, industrial lighting, and found objects to question how everyday architectures and infrastructures shape our understanding of landscape, memory, and place.

- Why do you think she uses these materials, and do you think they are relevant to what she is trying to convey?

An exploration of place is central to O'Brien's practice.

- Consider and discuss this in relation to unused or derelict spaces where you live.
- Are you inspired by these spaces?
- What type of artwork would you create to highlight an unused or un-noticed public space?

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Glossary

Abstraction (in art), when an artist has either removed (abstracted) elements from an object to create a more simplified form or produced something which has no source at all in external reality.

Algorithmic, connected with or using mathematical instructions or rules for calculation.

American Abstract Expressionism is the term applied to new forms of abstract art developed by American painters such as Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Willem de Kooning in the 1940s and 1950s. It is often characterised by gestural brushstrokes or mark-making, and the impression of spontaneity. [Explore more here](#)

Aosdána, founded in 1981 by The Irish Arts Council, honours artists whose work has made an outstanding contribution to the creative arts in Ireland, and assists members in devoting their energies fully to their art practice.

Archival material refers to historical or specialised materials typically stored separately from library collections.

Banal, so lacking in originality as to be obvious, common-place and boring.

Commodification of making is the process of transforming objects, services, ideas etc. into commodities, or objects for sale.

Curator, selects, organises and displays artworks in a gallery or museum.

Expressionistic art refers to the expression of subjective emotions, inner experiences and spiritual themes, as opposed to realistic depictions of people or nature.

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

Material culture is culture manifested by the physical objects and architecture of a society.

Modernity, the quality or condition of being modern.

Multi-disciplinary artist works across multiple disciplines (sculpture, installation, drawings, electronic, etc) or artistic fields to create works.

Multisensorial engagement involves the use of several of the physical senses of touch, smell, taste, hearing, and sight.

Non-representational art refers to total abstraction, bearing no trace of any reference to anything recognisable.

Photorealistic art are artworks that looked photographic.

Pioneering, involving new ideas or methods.

Realism in art is the attempt to represent subject-matter truthfully, without artificiality, exaggeration, or speculative or supernatural elements.

Representational paintings represent some aspect of reality.

Retro futurist is characterised by a blend of old-fashioned "retro styles" with futuristic technology.

Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA) is an artist-based and artist-oriented institution in Ireland, founded in Dublin in 1823.

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

<https://www.instagram.com/kevincosgrov/>

<https://www.paulgaffneyphotography.com/>

<https://www.penelopelacey.com/>

<https://www.irishartsreview.com/new-generation/jennifer-obrien/>

<https://www.kevinkavanagh.ie/artists/37-lesley-ann-o-connell/overview/>

<https://www.williamoneill.ie/>

<https://www.eileenosullivan.com/>

<https://www.kerlingallery.com/artists/hazel-osullivan#tab:thumbnails;tab-1:slideshow>

Joanne Reid - short video on process and themes: <https://www.creativity.oide.ie/film/rha-joanne-reid>

<https://annettesmyth.com/>

[Charles Tyrrell](#)

Visiting Solstice:

Solstice Gallery is open Tuesday-Saturday 11am-4pm.



Individual students and teachers can visit the gallery during opening times.

However, class 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

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