

## CAREER DEVELOPMENT

David O'Kane *Glaciated Landscape*, 2007, oil on canvas, 147 x 214 cmDavid O'Kane *House*, 2007, oil on canvas

David O'Kane

David O'Kane *Scriptorium*, 2007, oil on canvas, 214 x 214cm

# Generating Perspectives

DAVID O'KANE OUTLINES SOME OF THE KEY OPPORTUNITIES HE HAS AVAILED OF THUS FAR.

IN June of this year the final CAP foundation exhibition took place on Leeson Close, off Lower Leeson Street in Dublin. The exhibition and scholarship have represented an extraordinary opportunity for emerging artists graduating from the National College of Art and Design over the last decade. A total of 20 artists have benefited from this unique scheme. The Pilaro family initiated the scholarship in 1997; and over the years the judging panel was composed of many well-known figures in the Irish and the international art world – including Enrique Juncosa and Noel Sheridan. The selection panel for the final year consisted of Luke Clancy, Linda Pilaro, Duncan McLaren and Neil Burke-Kennedy. Burke-Kennedy designed the remarkable studio and garden on Leeson Close, which functions perfectly as an artist's studio and was transformed yearly into an exhibition space. Each year two artists were provided with a studio for one year and a quarterly stipend of €800. The CAP Foundation commissioned a work on paper from each artist for their permanent collection and purchased several of my larger artworks preceding the opening of the exhibition in June. The exhibition was accompanied by a publication, featuring interview between the two artists and the art critic Luke Clancy. This year's show was dedicated to Noel Sheridan, who was a major inspiration for the entire programme.

Daniel Lipstein and I were chosen on the basis of our degree show exhibitions at NCAD. I graduated with a joint honours degree in History of Art and Fine Art Painting in 2006. The CAP foundation studio was mainly suited to painters but it also provided a unique backdrop for my animated video work. This was particularly important for me as I work in a variety of media, which develop in tandem influencing one another. My degree exhibition was a conceptual investigation into the nature and perception of illusion through various aesthetic experiments. These were installed in the highest room in the college, which had a huge circular window. I effectively transformed the space into a huge camera, which had at its heart a camera obscura – revealing an inverted projection of Dublin. This contextualized the other elements of the exhibition, which included several experimental animated video pieces; a painted diptych and a

series of twenty-four small paintings.

In order to generate new perspectives in my work, I felt that I needed some new stimulation outside of Ireland. I think that travel is one of the most important sources of inspiration for any artist. Therefore in the autumn of 2006 I applied for and received a Travel and Mobility Award from the Arts Council of Ireland to travel to New Zealand. I travelled around the world in the winter with this award and Henry Higgins travel bursary that I had already received from the RDS. My principal destination was New Zealand. Due to the distance, however, I incorporated some other cities and areas into this research trip. My itinerary included London, Singapore, Cambodia, Kuala Lumpur, Tokyo, New Zealand, San Francisco and New York.

In London I visited the extensive *Holbein in England* exhibition at the Tate gallery. I arrived in Cambodia specifically to see the temples of Angkor, which I documented with thousands of photographs, several videos and some sketches. In Tokyo I visited the Mori Arts Centre gallery and the Mori tower to see a retrospective exhibition of Bill Viola's. I went to see an exhibition of collages by the Czech artist Jan Svankmajer at the Czech embassy. I also went to see his most recent film in a small art house cinema in the Shinjuku district – I wrote my BA thesis on Svankmajer's film and animation. I travelled a short distance out of Tokyo to visit the Ghibli museum, which showcases the work of Japan's most renowned Anime Filmmaker, Hayao Miyazaki. In New Zealand I visited a lot of commercial galleries and project spaces. The landscape was inspirational, especially Franz Josef Glacier in the South Island and in Rotorua, on the North island, I saw the geographical oddity that George Bernard Shaw named *Hells Gate*. In San Francisco I visited two sculpture studios: one in the city itself and another in the area to the north called Nappa. I also resumed contact with some artists I met while on the Erasmus exchange to Groningen in the Netherlands in 2005. My final destination on this trip before I returned to Ireland was New York.

My research from this extensive trip provided stimulus for new work, which I could not have collected had I remained in the CAP studio during those two winter months. I began to develop to different strands of work during the 10 months I actually spent at the studio, which I was able to invest with more thought and time.

I embarked on a series of experiments in animation, video and painting. The impetus for this series of work came from my own reading of various short stories by the Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges. Several works in particular interested me, namely *On the Exactitude of Science*, *The Circular Ruins* and *The Library of Babel*. I named one of the works after Borges *The Circular Ruins*. This painting uses the basic conceit of the story to communicate a particular uncertainty about reality, hinting at the author's obsession with infinity through the repetition of a model within a model. An inherent part of most of my work is its reluctance to conform to reality, its inability to adhere to logic and its distortion of any degree of certainty.

The inspiration of the actual studio space, my travels, literature and the process of painting later conjoined in the site specific animated video work *Defragmented Thoughts*. The creation of this of this video work was akin to an alchemical experiment – at times it was instinctual and at others intensely methodical. It is literally the convergence of imagination and reality. *Defragmented Thoughts* questions and elaborates on the painted world that I have created. The final layout of the exhibition was extremely important. The viewer entered the CAP Foundation's gallery space and engaged with the various paintings and then proceeded into the garden to watch the video work. The Déjà vu experience of having already explored the space in which the work was created and the paintings that it referenced was very important.

I had begun investigating the possibility of undertaking an MA or some form of further study as far back as the beginning of 2006 after I had completed my BA thesis at NCAD. The receipt of the CAP award gave me the time and space to make very informed applications to various universities. I was able to submit the work I was producing at the CAP studio to support all of my applications and in this way the studio was instrumental in this process.

I made an extensive application to the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, (German Academic Exchange Service) also known as DAAD, for further study in Germany. Several lecturers connected to NCAD informed me about the DAAD scholarship. Many famous artists have received a scholarship from the DAAD, including Damien Hirst, Rachel Whiteread, Mark Wallinger and Tacita Dean. I also made several applications to various Higher-level institutions in Germany.

I was specifically interested in Berlin and Leipzig in eastern Germany. I was accepted as a guest student to the class of Professor Neo Rauch at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst (Academy of Visual Arts) in Leipzig. I was also accepted to the Master's programme in Spatial Strategies at the Kunsthochschule in Berlin Weissensee.

The receipt of the DAAD scholarship was a help – it funds one academic year's study in Germany and a two-month language course in Berlin with a monthly stipend of €715. I began studying under Professor Neo Rauch in October of this year in Leipzig. Rauch's work is incredible, enigmatic and mysterious. I feel that my own is progressing along a similar vein and I am excited about developing it further under his tuition. One of the most exciting possibilities here in Leipzig for me personally is the potential to make very large work.

The Academy of Visual Arts in Leipzig is housed in a beautiful building. It belongs to the oldest academies of arts in Germany. Founded in 1764 and since 1950 the school bears its present name, Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst Leipzig. Today, 530 students are enrolled in the courses. The professors and lecturers teaching at the HGB have an international reputation.

I have arrived in Leipzig after two months of learning German in the extraordinary city of Berlin. Both Berlin and Leipzig are burgeoning centres for art and culture. I have already met a host of inspiring intellectual and creative individuals who contribute to the vibrancy of both of these cities. Leipzig is home to the famous Spinnerei<sup>(1)</sup> cultural complex, which includes galleries and artists studios. More than 80 professional artists from the area of fine arts alone work in this compound. Seven commercial galleries including the famous Galerie EIGEN+ART present art from Leipzig and all over the world. I feel that working in Leipzig will be an enriching experience and a wonderful place to advance my art practice and career. I already have the possibility of undertaking an MA in Spatial Strategies next year in Berlin but I will also investigate the possibility of doing a Meisterschüler Degree under Professor Rauch here in Leipzig.

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## NOTES

(1) www.spinnerei.de