

Clodagh Emoe
The Change of Heart (after Yves Klein) No. 2
 2006

one helplessly into their logic through a scrupulous verisimilitude, were represented in the press as media events. McCarthy's work under the guise of the International Necronautical Society relies on the kind of suspension of disbelief that doesn't occur in this exhibition, a sense that in some way his obsessive research projects, and the conspiratorial forms they take, are serious. When this suspended state momentarily flips into conviction then art takes the form of magic. For too long (under the guarantee of various moribund critiques) the gallery space has conveniently performed the function of the degree zero of art. If we consider that even the 'image poor' horrors of July 7 last year were fuelled in part by a vision of a fiery cross moving through London, north, south, east and west, then the activities of Dickinson & McCarthy, working on the periphery of the gallery system, perhaps points to a more elemental counter-symbolic function for art. This show, meanwhile, presents an interesting metaphor. ■

DEAN KENNING is an artist.

■ **Clodagh Emoe**
 Temple Bar Gallery and Studios Dublin March 1 to April 8

The trouble with a show that explores emptiness as its central theme is that the lack of inherent existence in things can leave you with a sense of deprivation rather than a vision of the illusory nature of phenomena. Clodagh Emoe's first solo show totters on this edge in a series of videos and mixed media drawings in which a handmade aesthetic ensures that we remain conscious of the artist's precarious subjectivity. For the eponymous piece in the show, Emoe cuts the words 'I am here somewhere' out of cardboard and suspends them against the wall using matches and wire, and, in the antithesis of neon, lights it from below. The six inch tall, low-tech letters embody Emoe's struggle with how to represent the shifting, indeterminate self, presenting a slightly coy self-portrait that pokes at the kernel of why artists make art: to be fully present and produce a record of that fleeting moment.

In another piece, Emoe etches an abstract shape in Perspex around the quote, 'The Human Being is Death in the Process of Becoming' which is projected to fill an opposite wall so that the etching appears like thick graphite. Perhaps it is a comment on the mind's projections and delusions and the way we persistently avoid the thought of death in the West, but the Buddhist wisdom clashes with a Gothic delivery rendering it a little flat.

Several pieces in the show were inspired by a found first edition copy of *Approaches to Philosophy* by JF Wolfenden, 1932. Emoe stipples the foxed and browned loose pages of the book with burnt holes, the size of match heads, which read like bursts of lucidity puncturing Wolfenden's thesis, or conversely, as sieves through which his notion of truth falls, insubstantial and empty. She uses his chapter on 'Appearance and Reality' to mirror her own practice: 'The difficulty begins when we attempt to define more clearly what we mean by the object.' She takes a hole-puncher to Wolfenden's high-handed 'journeyings' which he hopes 'have brought us a little nearer ... to our longed-for goal,



that city of the mind where Beauty, Truth and Goodness are known for what they are', almost obliterating one page of text. The framed, desecrated pages with their singed or perforated edges begin to look like aerial maps of mountain ranges or coastlines, too often a dodgy metaphor for location of the self.

More successful and fresh are the pieces of work in which the artist herself appears. *The Change of Heart (after Yves Klein) No.1*, 2006, takes Klein's infamous 1960 photograph *Leap into the Void*, removes his falling-flying figure and inserts her own climbing on to the same ledge. It's wonderfully unclear whether the change of heart is driving her to emulate Klein or to refrain from it. It acts as a cunning, succinct image of the contemporary artist's relationship to past masters: when is a tribute a rip-off, a response an admission of defeat? In Emoe's case, the question of gender and its legacy is hard to ignore. It recalls what Louise Bourgeois said about being an artist: 'My early work is the fear of falling. Later on it became the art of falling. How to fall without hurting yourself. Later on it is the art of hanging in there.'

The short video loop, *The End is in the Beginning*, 2006, expands the wit and perceptiveness of these ideas. It shows Emoe trying in vain to climb through windows and over walls. Some look like domestic spaces, others like art institutions, notably the Irish Museum of Modern Art. One is a freight container, another a sleek black marble wall. Her ungainly efforts are cut rapidly into short shots that reiterate the gestures of raising herself up and failing to overcome the threshold. The rhythms match a boppy, ridiculous 60s song by Serge Gainsbourg in which he repeats 'Il me rend fou' (It drives me crazy). The image is framed by black on either side, echoing the size of the Klein photograph and its reworking. Emoe's eloquent and hilarious piece shows the absurdity of the artist's existence and a practice that relies and thrives

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on the presence of obstacles. It best encapsulates the quote by Hannah Arendt that Emoe uses in her brochure for the show about 'the sheer capacity to begin, which animates and inspires all human activities and is the hidden source of production of all great and beautiful things'. ■

CHERRY SMYTH is a critic and curator.

■ Ian Breakwell

Anthony Reynolds Gallery London March 10 to April 8

Ian Breakwell died of lung cancer in October of last year, and this exhibition operates as both an opportunity to view his final works and as a memorial to the artist. Breakwell was renowned for work that looked at the minutiae of life, often his own, using whatever medium was appropriate to the story he was telling. Words featured prominently, in both spoken and written form, and from the early 60s Breakwell exhibited, published and broadcast his diaries on radio and television. This habit continued until the end of his life, and the works here are accompanied by extracts from his final diaries, which offer an unflinching, and typically unsentimental, account of his illness.

The diary extracts interweave with the series of 13 drawings that dominate the exhibition, offering insights and explanations, as well as encouraging new connections and ruminations. The series was made not long after Breakwell's final diagnosis, in the summer of 2004, and the decision to make 13 pieces of work seems significant, as a symbol of the misfortune that has befallen him. Yet the diary offers an alternative view, that the drawings were the result of insomnia caused by shock, and that he made one each night that he suffered from sleeplessness. 'On the fourteenth night my normal sleep pattern returned and the series ended', he concludes simply. Other numbers appear in the works, with diary entries that see Breakwell calculating the extra years of life he has had compared to other cultural figures – 'I've had twice as long as Schubert, twenty years more than Kafka, and forty more than Charlie Christian' – as well as the amount of 'cigarette pauses' he has taken during his smoking life (164,250, although Breakwell's cancer ironically was discovered to be an adenocarcinoma, unrelated to cigarettes); 62, the number of years of his life, looms regularly in the exhibited artworks.

The drawings are dominated by images of growth, of flowers reaching maturation and fleshy fruit sprouting. One piece sees flowers alluding to a face, with two weary eyes stuck on, peering out exhaustedly, but mostly the organic forms suggest lungs. While portraying immaculate beauty, these growths inevitably morph into sinister, deadly predators. The sparkle of ruby red glitter that is scattered across some works draws you close, only to quickly repel, while others use more overt techniques to spell out Breakwell's circumstances, by utilising shadowy smudges and blood red ink splatters.

Letters and words spill over into the drawings too, at times forming witty but chilling sentences – 'Home to roost' is stamped



Ian Breakwell
Diagnosis Drawings 2004

repeatedly across one work – while in others they overlap illegibly from new shadows and growths. One sentence, 'the shadow knows', is traced in the diary to both a song by The Coasters as well as Breakwell's visit to a Ray Charles concert in the 70s, a fairly bland affair until an unexpectedly poignant moment occurs. 'He runs seamlessly through the whole repertoire, and even throws in a medley of Paul McCartney compositions, which I'm thinking "these I can do without". Then, midway through *Yesterday* he suddenly hits the line "There's a shadow hanging over me" with such perfect intonation and anguished soul that the hairs stand up on the back of my neck.'

Breakwell creates a similar effect himself with the final diary entry that is offered here, which is also stencilled large on one wall. It sees the artist coaxing himself out of bed in his bleakest moments, by listing 50 things that are worth getting up for. Some, like 'Sunset on the cricket field after the last match of the season. Mist drifting in' are nostalgic, some personal – 'Memory of the first time I saw Felicity laugh' – and many drinks-based ('Earl Grey Oolong', 'Gin and tonic', 'A dry martini', 'Lapsang Souchong'), but virtually all are achingly everyday. The piece is reminiscent of the interview with playwright Dennis Potter, conducted not long before his death from cancer, where he speaks of the sharp clarity with which he sees the simple beauty of life, in his case the spring blossom outside his window, while facing death. Yet any sentimentality that threatens to rise is swiftly shut down by Breakwell who, on completing the list of 50, describes in raw terms the physical difficulty of standing up.

Alongside the series of drawings, the exhibition features one other work, a black and white photograph of Breakwell with a growth formed on his chest. From a distance the growth seems floral, yet close examination reveals it to be part crustacean, part fossil. Like all Breakwell's works, it faces you square on and invites you into his world, without requesting sentimentality or pity, and instead provokes a dialogue, a rare achievement in contemporary art. ■

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