



## Art & science

**WHERE THERE IS HAIR  
THERE IS HAPPINESS**  
**Bluewall Gallery,**  
 Corracanvy, Co Cavan  
 Tues-Sat 11am-5.30pm,  
 Sun 2.30-5.30pm Oct 2-27  
[bluewallgallery.com](http://bluewallgallery.com)  
 049-4361627

Vanessa Donoso López is one of the most intriguing people to have studied at the NCAD in recent years (she also studied at Winchester and Barcelona, and is, as her name might suggest, Spanish). López adapts systems of knowledge, information, learning and classification – the various means we use to formulate, promulgate and often impose our understanding of what exactly the world is and what exactly we are, and what on earth is going on anyway. And

she does this from, essentially, a child's perspective. From, in fact, her own reimagined childhood perspective. As López puts it, "I play to be scientific, I play to be a chemist, I play to be McGyver, I play to be an artist. Pure fun."

López throws herself into her projects with energy, and skill. They suggest tremendous faith in methodology and also, with a certain humour, a skepticism about our ability to understand anything at all.

**AIDAN DUNNE**

**CAN'T SEE THAT?  
CATCH THIS:**

**Watercolour Society of  
Ireland Annual Exhibition**  
 Concourse Arts Centre, Dún  
 Laoghaire County Hall,  
 Co Dublin Oct 4-16

c Jane Humphries

Draíocht  
Blanchardstown

Pallas Contemporary  
Projects  
Dublin

Stone Gallery  
Dublin

November 2008 –  
January 2009

October – November  
2008

October – November  
2008

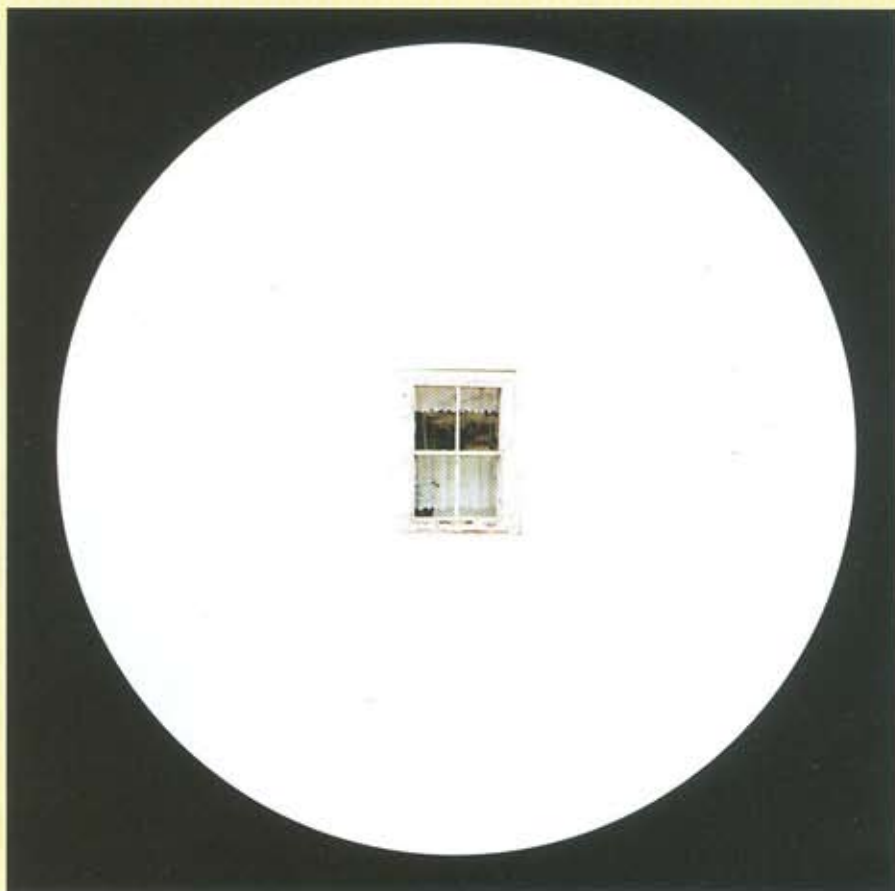
## *Inhabit*

*Margaret O'Brien* I live in the cracks  
in the wall

72

*Vanessa Donoso López*  
Mysteries of contemporary inspiration  
and other wonders

Mary Frazer  
Is anyone there?  
digital print on archival paper  
courtesy Original Print Gallery



"The banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the background noise, the habitual ....How are we to speak of these common things?" wrote George Perec in *Species of spaces*. Three decades later, the language that loops around and between the three exhibitions reviewed is the voices of making art out of and from the everyday, domestic world.

For the Christmas exhibition at Draocht, eleven printmakers from Black Church Print Studios were asked to develop work based around the word 'inhabit' and to "showcase the diverse technical vocabulary of printed matter." As the fetishistic obsession with property prices fades, the primal need for humans to have a shelter, a home, is paramount; the artists in *inhabit* raise questions about the changing state of occupying space in a global environment which is prescient.

Daryl Slein's naïve monoprint *Untitled* subverts the Yuletide lure of hearth, home and family by presenting the Madonna in a Santa hat with a very disgruntled-looking Jesus perched on her knee. Far from Beatrice Elvery's *Éire* (1907), a Mother Ireland that called for independence and a new dawn, Slein's palette of dull disillusionment suggests an Irish Church-State nexus that has been replaced by capitalism gone awry.

In stylistic contrast, Caroline Byrne's exquisitely drawn *The Hunt for Red Riding Hood* places the big bad wolf off-centre, leaving an expansive space for the viewer's curiosity to imagine why the wild beast has stopped, with a wisp of blood-red ink at its feet, to stare back into the void. The rituals of oral storytelling are in danger of obsolescence, just as wolves are threatened with extinction – yet the constant need to retell, to 'hunt' down these myths, albeit by new media, appears to parallel the human desire for the need for 'home' and similarly, the desire by artists to

pursue process in their art, which is especially true of the print medium.

This omnipresence of the cinematic and media in our scopic memory is captured dexterously in Colin Martin's two brooding etchings *Day sleeper* and *A Minor place*. Compositionally, both these works create complex readings as the open narrative leads the viewer into a North American suburban landscape that seems oddly familiar but is charged with an ominous atmosphere, created by an 'in-between' moment which is, literally, 'framed' in the present.

David McGinn's *Bomber & stairwell* recreates his childhood memories in the now-extinct Ballymun flats. Built as a modernist utopia, the flats' demise signifies the end of the architectural dream that became the unliveable urban nightmare, yet McGinn's work captures the fascination of the space from a child's perspective. This phenomenological use of space nods to Gaston Bachelard's philosophical ideas, as does Catriona Leahy's work, which implements the mnemonic tools of old photographs, wallpaper and maps to create work built from family memories. Layered with rituals of traditional rural Ireland, the work reminds the viewer that 'ordinary life' is itself an evolving concept.

The emigrant experience of searching for 'home' by metaphorically associating identity to the house form is evoked by Piia Rossi's work, while Mary Frazer's *Home sweet home* and *Is anyone there?* observe this everyday space from outer space to highlight the minutiae of existence. A closer field of enquiry is taken by the contemporary urban *flâneuse* Jane Garland, who contests the traditional gendered relationship of inside and outside space by traversing the streets of Dublin to photograph the personal assemblages framed in living-room windows.

A Jules Verne-like vertiginous lift aspires to raise the everyday beyond the bounds of the real into a sense of journeying in Janine Davidson's *Ascension 1*, as small, repetitively sketched caravans are liberated from *terra firma* by way of hot-air balloons. By closely observing the domestic space, Aoife Dwyer's opaque works capture the fragility of existence and the beauty of the banal by focusing on the overlooked marks that are naturally made from the detritus of daily life, whereas it is the compositional space of the paper itself from which Mary A Fitzgerald, in *Cloud chair* and *Mobile*, whimsically and intelligently interprets the brief.

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Three-dimensional space has been worked as a material in Margaret O'Brien's site-specific installation *I live in the cracks in the wall*, where a kinaesthetic viewing experience has been created by the construction of a narrow corridor and the placement of a small lamp in an inner room. The spectator is lured into this chamber by the light which casts shadows on flock-patterned wallpaper, a material that usually signifies domestic comfort. On first viewing, it is a space which evokes a jarring psychological tension. O'Brien's fastidious regard for process and the domestic associations of her simple material choice, wallpaper and sewing pins, create an intense and satisfying sensory effect by fusing the psychological tension of a Hitchcock film to the aesthetics of an eighteenth-century conversation piece.

A good suspense narrative is one in which the characters investigate the sinister goings-on when anybody in their right mind would leave. O'Brien's installation evokes a similar curiosity in the viewer to venture forward. Despite the title being far from comforting, unlike the cosy traditional family portraits which inspired polite 'conversation' in eighteenth-century homes as part of conversation pieces, even though no overt familial pictures are obvious in O'Brien's work, the suggestion of family dialogue is implied, if rather more sinisterly. The audience have also become contemporary Pandoras who are not content with merely opening the box, but wish to inhabit the box to satisfy their curiosity no matter what the consequences are.

The overall effect creates a sense of domestic disturbance, as if the domestic space, which we consider to be safe and secure, has been rendered uncanny. This Freudian idea of the *unheimlich* is one that

was coined in modernity, but O'Brien's space does not allow for such a reductive reading – when we find ourselves in the inner room, the aesthetic quality of the materials, created by light reflecting on the dressing pins, is quite simply beautiful. In his book, *In praise of shadows*, Jun'ichiro Tanizaki writes about the everyday pleasure derived from looking at shadows, and the static materials of pins and paper, as we move in and around the space, change and form to give the illusion of passing clouds, or forests, a metaphysical landscape of our own imagining.

An awareness of time is also suggested, as each pin has been individually placed by hand. The tedious repetition and discipline required by the artist to create such work reflects the monotonous nature of domestic chores, which can create a trance-like state. O'Brien has been described as an "emotive minimalist," similar to Eve Hesse, and due to the use of

humble materials and spatial aesthetics, it is a good, if not an entirely accurate, appraisal.

[below left]  
Margaret O'Brien  
*I live in the cracks in the wall*  
2018  
installation shot (detail)  
courtesy Pallo Contemporary  
Projects

[below right]  
Vanessa Dorcas López  
*Mysteries of contemporary  
inspiration and other wonders*  
2008  
installation shot (detail)  
courtesy Stone Gallery



# Drawing out an inner Alice

## FESTIVAL

**Vanessa Donoso Lopez:  
Establishing A Mission** ★★★★★

Plunging head-first into a rabbit hole need not be an unpleasant experience – especially when careering into Vanessa Donoso Lopez's weird and wonderful wonderland. The Spanish artist has recreated a Victorian play-parlour of sorts at the Ashford Gallery; an eye-catching and mind-boggling magic toyshop dedicated to themes of childhood, nostalgia and sexuality, which boasts the best titles since sliced bread: *Taking For A Walk My Butterflies*, for example.

If Lewis Carroll, Angela Carter and Neil Gaiman had swapped pens for paintbrushes, this is what they might have created. Setting the scene is a series of wax dolls suspended in lanterns and embellished with everything from electrodes (*Electronics Make Us Look Beautiful II*) to feathered plumes (*Last Weekend In Paris Was Wonderful*). In one corner

sits a magnetic toy made up of pins dancing across a wooden chest, and in a glass case, an array of rotating paper dolls with tissue tutus pirouetting in teacups. In a similar fashion, handmade snow-globe-like toys waltz and whirl, while paper butterflies shimmy from the hands of clocks. Timepieces loom large, their symphonic tick-tocks appropriately resembling the din of insects beating their wings against a glass jar. Elsewhere, there are rows of doll heads, intricate paper collages of people on Penny Farthings and painstakingly carved playing cards.

La Lopez may not change your life, but she'll shake it up for a while. Linger a little too long in this exhibit and, like Alice, you'll soon be asking yourself, 'Was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I remember feeling a little different...'

*Lucy White*

*Until Aug 1, Ashford Gallery, RHA, 15 Ely Place D2, Tue to Sat 11am to 5pm, Thu to 8pm, Sun 2pm to 5pm, free. Tel: (01) 661 2558.*

[www.royalhibernianacademy.com](http://www.royalhibernianacademy.com)



*Tea dance: installation from the Spanish artist's studio on show at the Ashford*