



The AIB Prize

The AIB Award embraces a progressive spectrum of art media and provides crucial support to emerging artists, writes MARIANNE O'KANE BOAL



Established in 2000, the AIB Award is the most substantial and prestigious visual art prize in Ireland. Now in its seventh year, the award's importance resides in a number of factors: it is a comprehensive accolade, artists must be nominated by the country's publicly-funded visual arts venues, who later show the artist's work if successful. The winner receives 20,000 towards the creation of a new body of work and a significant monograph catalogue to accompany their exhibition. Venue-based nomination ensures sufficient interest and investment of the gallery in an artist's work. The adjudicated award is acknowledged as a progressive mode of recognition for a broad range of contemporary media; photography, painting, sculpture, textiles, performance, installation, and new technologies. Past winners include:

Caroline McCarty, Katie Holten, Dara McGrath, Amanda Coogan, Paul Doran, and Linda Quinlan. Dara McGrath, the 2003 recipient, was nominated by Draíocht Arts Centre, Blanchardstown. McGrath believes; 'It is a good platform to boost your practice in an Irish context. There is a lot of publicity surrounding the award and this helps with profile.' Moreover, the award leaves an important legacy in terms of the publication of an artist's catalogue. Last year's winner, Linda Quinlan sums this up: 'This award offers a very valuable experience in terms of the freedom and opportunities it presents, especially with regards to the time it offers an artist, enabling a period to focus on a new body of work. The publication ensures longevity and provides valuable entry points to understanding the work and methodologies inherent in an artist's practice.'

Linda Quinlan's AIB exhibition takes place at nominating venue, the Crawford Municipal Art Gallery in October 2007.

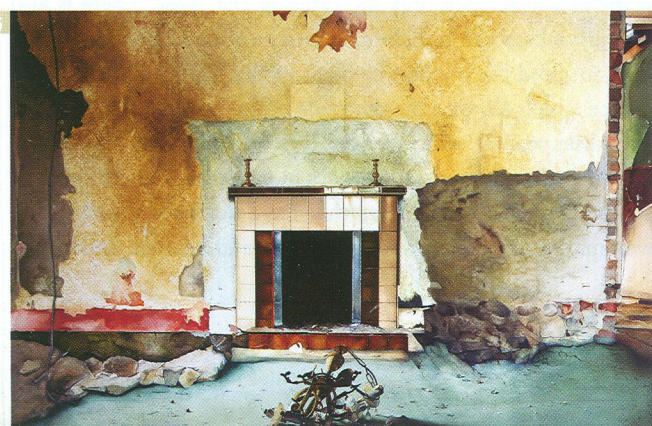
The artists short-listed this year from a large number of candidates are; Alan Phelan, Jennifer Trouton, Diana Copperwhite and Sean Lynch, all practicing in paint, mixed media, photography and new technologies. Each short-listed artist receives a bursary of €1,500 and their work on display at the Royal Hibernian Academy for the award ceremony. This year's AIB Award Winner, selected by adjudicators Aidan Dunne, Gemma Tipton and Frances Ruane, is Limerick-born painter Diana Copperwhite who was nominated by the West Cork Arts Centre, Skibbereen.

Diana Copperwhite is a graduate of NCAD and Winchester School of Art, Barcelona (Fig 2). In the recent past Copperwhite has won prestigious awards for painting, including the Charles Brady Memorial Award in 2004 and the Stokes Kennedy Crowley Award in 1994. Copperwhite adopts the role of detective when researching her painting: filling bulletin boards with news clippings, old photographs, postcards and magazine imagery. Impersonal media remnants are intermingled with her own family photographs and memorabilia. Copperwhite makes no effort to differentiate in either her source material or the painted representation. Any perceived boundaries between appearance and reality



are consistently blurred or rejected by the artist. Consequently compositions are characterised by their layers – of paint, subject, memory and meaning (Figs 1 & 3). According to art critic Jacqui McIntosh, 'How we see, how we remember and how we know, are the themes which weave through her work - her paintings revealing a glimpse of a parallel universe balanced between the remembered and real, the abstract and representational.'

Belfast-based artist Jennifer Trouton, like Copperwhite, produces artworks where personal and universal elements collide (Fig 6). Her mixed-media renditions again portray layered subjects. In 'Looking at the Overlooked,' old photographs of her relations combined with painted surfaces depicting text, portraits



1 DIANA COPPERWHITE
Globe 2005 oil on
canvas 90 x 90cm

2 Diana
Copperwhite
Photo: Fennell

3 DIANA COPPERWHITE
Parallel Universe
2006 oil on canvas
50 x 50cm

4 SEAN LYNCH
*You really should go
there* 2004

5 ALAN PHELAN
*Michael should have
learned to blend in
better* 2006 Papier-
mâché, wood 36.5 x
43.5 x 39.5cm

6 JENNIFER TROUTON
Tomb 2006 oil on
board 122 x 92cm

and domestic objects to create an intriguing narrative. Trouton's recent work depicts empty interiors where the memory of human presence is all that remains.

Alan Phelan differs in his approach to the creation of art interventions. He produces work that rejects any personal narratives and instead makes social commentaries of a thoroughly contemporary nature on subjects as varying as the 'plight of ultra-nationalist memory, masculine car culture and environmental or engineering motifs'. Through combining new technologies in conceptual experiments, Phelan fabricates a fantastical future-based realm of illusion, that features sculptures such as, *Michael should have learned to blend in better*, 2006 (Fig 5).

In line with Phelan's approach, Kerry-born artist Sean Lynch (also shortlisted for the AIB Award last year) focuses on process, audience participation and documentation, when producing photographs and installations (Fig 4). His recent exhibition 'Retrieval Unit' at Limerick City Gallery of Art, invited gallery visitors to create subjective interpretations of history based on artefacts gathered and presented by the artist.

The AIB Award's significance lies in its critical engagement with all aspects of contemporary visual arts practice, and its acknowledgement of key emerging practitioners who make a significant creative contribution nationally. Diana Copperwhite's recognition in 2007 continues this tradition and also highlights the continued importance of painting in the realm of present-day practice. ■

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