



Sinéad Ní Mhaonaigh, *STRUCHTÚR XI*, 2021, oil on panel, 30x40 cm; image courtesy of the artist and Kevin Kavanagh Gallery.

Beyond Language

SINÉAD NÍ MHAONAIGH AND DOMINIQUE CROWLEY
REFLECT ON THE NARRATIVES OF PAINTING.

Dominique Crowley: I think you resist being prescriptive and literal in your paintings, which also extends to talking about your work. In some ways, I think you'd rather leave it open and let the works speak for themselves. Would you agree?

Sinéad Ní Mhaonaigh: Oh, a hundred percent. Methodology is hugely important; we're process-based – it's everything. But if you and I were to sit down as contemporary painters and discuss methodology now, in my opinion, it doesn't seem to be enough.

DC: Painters often find it difficult to talk about their work. There's something about painting that resists being put into words. It's beyond language.

SM: Absolutely. Going forward, we can't forget that. We don't have to commit or over explain. I'm very interested in the chronology of the work; how I work in seriality. It's about our day-to-day commitment in the studio – how your relationship with those four walls exists and why. Even sitting and doing nothing – that's actually important too. When you learn not to interrupt or interfere with the surface of the painting. There's an awful lot of silence in my studio. References have to be kept to a minimum because there's a tsunami of images and information around us all the time. To excessively discuss the essence of painting or to over analyse it – this is symptomatic of having too much information around you.

DC: I've recently realised that writing about the *ideas* that influence the paintings can stand on its own. For me, this avoids my compulsion to explain the paintings. You have a strong relationship with text and language in your practice. Take for example, the title of your recent show, 'STRUCHTÚR', in Kevin Kavanagh Gallery (3 – 26 February).

SM: *Struchtúir* is a visual word; it means structure in Irish, and that's what

these paintings are. They're semi-industrial. I made a commitment to that title. The Irish language is wrapped up in my identity. I use canvas as a vehicle for research but also use those words to describe my place in a known world, or even beyond that. I'm only in the business 20 years, but I'll look back and examine those words as recurring motifs and vessels, to revisit the pictorial matter and narratives in those works.

DC: I have been making a series of paintings about our relationship with nature, involving several connected but different approaches. I like the idea of creating a set of coordinates to use as a jumping off point. Ultimately though, the painting process is hugely important.

SM: I'm constantly mining my materials and resources. For me, visual progression has to happen. It's not a static thing; if you're led by materials, things will evolve. The first time I saw your work was in the RHA Annual exhibition in 2020. I was particularly struck by your unusual composition and also your use of resin.

DC: That six-panel painting, 'Telemorphosis', was very much the backbone of my MFA research. It was made as a frieze around the walls of my studio in NCAD. I was researching the Anthropocene and wanted to make a panorama of people in nature. All the figures are seen from behind or the side, as if unaware of being closely observed. I got to have fun using photography tropes, such as cropping and focus. I also added swipe arrows as digital icons. In the end, I decided they weren't screen-like enough, and poured a resin coat over each one, which made them highly reflective. I was delighted that the work was bought by an international collector based in New York.

SM: What interests me is why you would leave one established career to begin another. The career path of an artist is not very clear or obvious. You've come from something very structured, reasoned and science-based to something that is almost the opposite.

DC: I'm still adjusting. I enjoyed my previous career, but I couldn't do either art or medicine by halves. Peer support is very important in medicine. Painting is a solitary pursuit, but there is connection and an outward perspective too.

SM: It's part of an international language – there's a big world out there. One of the best things about social media is that we can connect with people beyond the island.

DC: That's what I love about Instagram; you can see other people's work. It's not the same as seeing it in the flesh but

you can discover new approaches, processes and ways of representing.

SM: It's like window shopping with something more emotional attached to it. That's only going to enhance the visual arts community. Artists are becoming more independent of gallery structures. I thought the Artist Support Pledge was also very positive; galleries were closed but artists worked together.

DC: It's probably going to change the relationship with galleries. Our relationship with social media is also going to evolve.

SM: I'm not that curious as to where it goes at the moment. I'm only curious about what's on my easel, or what's in front of me when I'm revisiting my questions about landscape. I'm worried about how I'm going to archive my work and where it sits in the canon of semi-abstract landscape paintings. And yes, it's Irish but I'm alongside other artists as well. There are different conversations now. Things are freer.

DC: I am interested in the environment and focus my research on mapping the cultural conditions that have brought us to this point of multiple crises. Would you consider yourself in conversation with any specific artists at the moment? Have you been inspired by specific abstract landscape painters?

SM: I don't think too long. Joanne Laws was discussing my painting as a sort of deep mapping, in that they're being etched or re-shaped. When people bring conversations to the work, that's relevant.

DC: When you think of the map, you think of time as well as space, and the charting of a journey. You recently launched another two volumes of *Sinéad Ní Mhaonaigh* in print, which is also a form of archive. These publications will be a fantastic way to chart your life through your paintings.

SM: Yes – I love printed texts. I think they're important. I printed a selection of work – nearly 300 paintings published across four volumes. It's a kind of chronology from 2004 to 2020, but again, it's only a small sample. The work has a different life in print, and I love that.

DC: It's interesting that you consider not just the present, but how your bodies of work will exist in the future. I'm interested in that too. We both use formats that have been around for centuries and that will endure.

SM: Yes, it has a beauty that drives us to connect with it. I connected with your use of materials in your screen paint-

ings. They have a tension to them. It possibly comes from using these traditional materials in response to contemporary technology.

DC: The surfaces are braced wooden panels which I make myself, so they are a bit primitive looking. In my mind, they look like future artefacts or relics. I love how Brian Dillon speaks of our future as ruins. Then there's the digital image, which is a powerful subject in itself. Someone somewhere discovered that humans have an involuntary physiological response to looking at onscreen images. At some point in the future, people will identify this era as a cultural turning point. My paintings try to reflect this point in time.

Sinéad Ní Mhaonaigh's next solo show will take place in Rathfarnham Castle later this year, followed by an exhibition in the Custom House Gallery in County Mayo in 2023.

sineadnimhaonaigh.com

Dominique Crowley will have an exhibition with her mother, artist Vicki Crowley, in Kenny's Gallery in Galway in September 2022, followed by a solo show in Hillsboro Fine Art in Dublin.

dominique-crowley.format.com



Sinéad Ní Mhaonaigh, *STRUCHTÚR III*, 2021, oil on panel, 35x46 cm; image courtesy of the artist and Kevin Kavanagh Gallery.



Dominique Crowley, *Capitalocene*, 2020, oil, acrylic, and acrylic resin on paper; image copyright and courtesy the artist.