

# The Arts

## A blown-up examination of a walk in the



**Visual Arts**  
**Aidan Dunne**

### Reviewed

**Farewell Chestnut Avenue**, Paul McKinley.  
Royal Hibernian Academy, Gallagher Gallery, 15 Ely Place, Tue-Sat 11am-5pm, Thu 11am-8pm, Sun 2pm-5pm. Until Apr 22. 01-6612558

**David Crone**, paintings. Hillsboro Fine Art, 49 Parnell Square West, Mon-Fri 10.30am-6pm, Sat 10.30am-4pm. Until Apr 7. 01-8788242

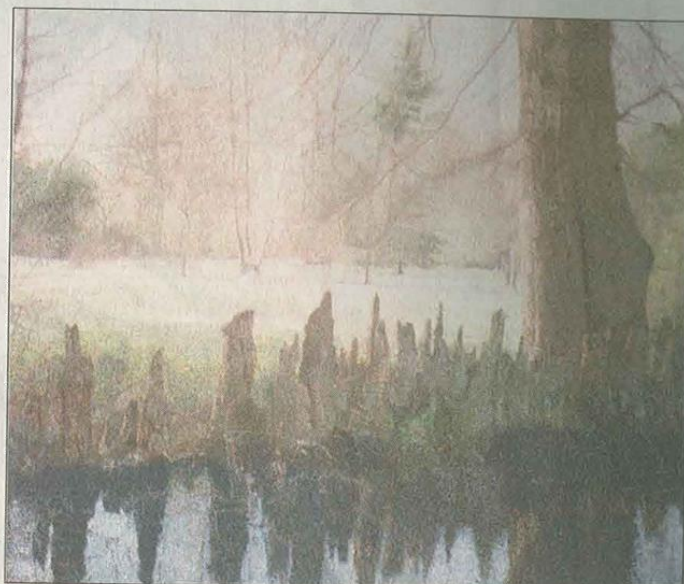
In its latest incarnation, the Nissan Art Project is sponsoring a series of exhibitions by emerging artists at the Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA). First off is Paul McKinley, whose show *Farewell Chestnut Avenue* anthologises and expands on the series of paintings and drawings he has been exhibiting piecemeal in various solo and group outings in the recent past. All of the works are meticulous transcriptions of photographs of urban parks. Different scenes in different seasons, but all parks, all deserted, with no creature of any description in sight. They

differ as well in scale but not in format; all are square.

McKinley was born in Birmingham and is now based in Dublin. It emerges that the photographs that served as his source material were all taken by an Australian temporarily resident in London (his girlfriend's aunt, in fact), who got into the habit of documenting the same piece of terrain, the Chestnut Avenue of the title, in Bushy Park. There are many paintings and drawings in the series, and they are exhaustively made, painstakingly rendered in myriad individual marks in an intuitive but also mechanical way, in the sense that each image spreads "like fungus across the canvas". The effect is akin to George Seurat's pointillism, but if you look closely at the surfaces of McKinley's paintings you will see that the pigment is thick, with something of the texture and consistency of icing on a cake.

While the images are straightforwardly representational, the technique of their making imposes an all-over texture like an optical filter, something that is more pronounced in the paintings than the drawings. We're aware of the pigment as a physical thing, and one effect of this is that it does something like dramatise the act of looking. The word "forensic" has been frequently used in relation to the work and it's apposite in the sense of a measured, methodical examination, with every square millimetre of the image receiving the same level of intense scrutiny.

In conversation with Patrick Murphy, McKinley notes obliquely that, in excising all signs of animate presence from the images, he is framing them as sites for potential narratives, inviting us to populate



'Painstakingly rendered in myriad individual marks in an intuitive but also mechanical way': Detail from *Park Series No 10* by Paul McKinley. Photograph courtesy of the artist

them with our own stories, associations or memories. It's almost as if he is contriving a conscious riposte to one of the most celebrated pointillist works in art history, Seurat's *La Grande Jatte*, which is a park scene on the banks of the Seine, positively chock-a-block with people engaged in recreational pastimes, strolling, taking the sun, picnicking, boating, walking their

dogs. There's even a monkey.

A park also plays a central part in Michelangelo Antonioni's cult film *Blow-Up*, which is partly about the ambiguity of images. In it, a photograph of an apparently deserted park turns into an examination that probably harbours evidence of a murder. Antonioni remarked in an interview that what is interesting about imag-



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es is always what is behind them. The film features an exchange between the photographer protagonist and a painter friend who makes pointillist abstracts.

It's only when the paintings are finished, the painter explains, that "I find something to hang onto". McKinley wants to place us in that position, of finding something to hang onto and leaving things open enough for it to happen. At the same time, he is setting a representational scene or, in this case, lots of representational scenes, all idyllic in mood.

One of the shows leading up to *Farewell Chestnut Avenue*, which is installed in a very large gallery indeed, took place in a very small gallery, the Old Museum Arts Centre in Belfast.

Strange as it may seem, the show in the single, small room was more effective than the collected works assembled in Ely Place. From the point of view of the spectator, being restricted to a single painting means that McKinley's intentions are far more likely to be fulfilled. This is really unfair, in a way, but there's no doubt that it is true. En masse, the work runs off in lots of other directions.

It can look alarmingly like a show comfortably contained within the idiom of chocolate-box, jigsaw-puzzle images. But McKinley is, it should be emphasised, an artist of real ability and potential.

**THERE IS A CERTAIN** overlap between McKinley's work and David Crone's paintings at Hillsboro Fine Art. Crone's main source is his garden but his paintings are painstaking in quite a different way to McKinley's. They are built up not in one layer but in several and often, one sus-

pects, many layers, with much consideration lavished between them.

There is a meditative, ruminative quality to the eventual images, which are compounded of several intersecting and overlapping planes of incident. Crone enjoys the multiple and fragmented views set up by chance and design: framed through windows, reflected in glass and water, glimpsed piecemeal through intervening vegetation.

The views are also conceptual, though, as in his morphological descriptions of plants, itemising comparative stems, leaves and seed-heads. *Waterlog* relishes the ambiguities of a flooded piece of ground, with interlocking patterns of water, reflected sky and plants. Here, as elsewhere, Crone feels free to embark on a fascinated examination of the structure of a particular plant or other detail, so that our own reading of the painting is shifted into another mode, removed from the simple apprehension of an image, per se.

Crone has a distinctive and by no means obvious colour sense. He favours a range of muted tones, of subdued blues and greens, plums, earths, but, just in case we are tempted to typecast him, he will also readily inject electrifying bursts of brilliant orange, yellow, green or scarlet. He allows radically divergent colours to sit, one against the other, without feeling any compunction to mediate between them, relishing the apparent awkwardness of the marks. But the awkwardness is apparent: with familiarity, the sophistication of his eye becomes clear. The capacity only to do what is necessary, not to gild the lily, is one of the marks of a really good artist.

