

Art in Focus: My Magnetic North, Gary Coyle



[Aidan Dunne](#)

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What is it?

A photograph that forms part of Gary Coyle's forthcoming performance piece incorporating still photographs, moving images and the spoken word – the words written, and performed, by the artist.

How was it done?

It's not the first time that Coyle has taken on the challenge of, one could say, making a work in the form of a commentary on his own work, and the various aspects of his history, experiences and insights that inform it. A superlative draughtsman, his lens-based work and his writing are equally impressive.

Where can I see it?

Coyle will perform *My Magnetic North* – direction is by Gina Moxley – in the Cube at Project Arts Centre, East Essex St, Dublin at 7.45 each evening from November 20th-24th with a preview on November 19th (Tickets €14–€16, €12 for the preview, booking at projectartscentre.ie, by phone at 01 8819613 or in person at 39 East Essex St, Temple Bar, Dublin).

Is it a typical work by the artist?

Sort of. While he has worked very effectively with quite a range of media and forms, a seam of autobiographical reflection runs through almost everything he has done.

He was born and grew up in Dun Laoghaire, a son of the painter John Coyle. But Gary inclined first towards sculpture, studying at NCAD, then The Art Students' League, New York and finally at the RCA in London. Though one can imagine him settling easily into London, which he did, for a time, he gradually gravitated back towards Dun Laoghaire, which has been a rich source of inspiration for him in many ways.

At Sea: The Daily Practice of Swimming developed from his diary documenting year-round swims at the Forty Foot and formed the basis for another performance piece at Project.

Humour is always present in his work, but humour with an edge to it. *Death in Dun Laoghaire*, built around a set of vividly concise accounts of growing up, delved further into Coyle's past and the darker side of his hometown.

"All my life I have been fascinated by death, in all its guises," he explained. *Southside Gothic*, the title of another show, aptly describes the morbid twist of his imagination.

That show, and several others, demonstrated his extraordinary mastery of drawing with charcoal on a large scale, an unusual choice of medium but one he made his own, ideally matched to the density and darkness of his images.

In many of his drawings, Dun Laoghaire and its hinterland merged with the iconography of horror films: the trope of the final girl; the brooding loner in the woods. Earlier on, he'd made charged images of ominously empty spaces, scenes of crime and the sets of porn films.

With *My Magnetic North* his enduring preoccupations remain; how places are absorbed into our inner lives and can shape us, the fact of mortality, how the flow of time in itself changes everything. His observations keep pace with his own life.

"What's the fallout when you lose your magnetic north?" He asks. "And you find yourself directionless?"

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