

There are certain things I miss about the time when I made art; one of them being that almost delirious self enclosed state, which accompanies the physical and intellectual process of making. I remember, at one point, sewing buttons into my skin for a particular project; on another occasion, having a barbecue on Thomas Street. Both acts, because my work dictated it, I could explain reasonably, as inevitabilities almost. More worryingly perhaps, when I explained them to fellow students, they didn't even blink. Outside of artistic discourse, you're simply eccentric, unhinged even. But by virtue of their attribution to the platform of 'art' these acts can be justified, rationalised, sometimes even celebrated. And so it is that complete self assuredness that I yearn for most, that totalising drive to give idea form, regardless of appearance.

Jane Fogarty's work reminded me of this exciting, almost fugue-like state. On seeing it for the first time I was startled by her zeal and certainty, having forgotten its distinctive contours. Lumps of pigmented plaster, like traces of mnemonic form, lay huddled in small groupings on the floor. A quadrangle of shabby totem-like poles, cast roughly in masonry plaster, stood solemn yet delicate at the other side of the room. It was clear that I had interrupted her work.

This body of work, as I see it, seems to concern itself predominantly with the physical and material process of making; more specifically, a process of making that is in synchrony with the materials chosen. To such an extent, Fogarty attempts to remove every extraneous factor that might overshadow or impede upon the work's bare materiality. The work is centred on an almost ascetic removal of self: Fogarty makes every effort to subtract herself and her choices from the act of creation, instead allowing the form of the work to be dictated by material or temporal prerequisites. For example, the forms of her sculptures – their physical mass, their level of finality – are dictated not by personal concerns – taste, most crucially – but by the amount of plaster within a bag, the length of a day, or the amount she can physically exert herself without pause. These arbitrary parameters of restraint serve to stifle her own voice within the act of making, in so doing permitting time and the specific material demands to make themselves heard. This, however, is still her choice. The work appears to acknowledge this, yet wilfully persists in attempting to circumnavigate this arguably insurmountable challenge. By setting up a scenario that aims to omit the choice of the artist, Fogarty inserts herself within a lineage of precedents that have attempted to do just that, but failed. For to decide to make no choice is still a choice, and essentially an act of taste.

One of the most enduring of Fogarty's concerns is that of time, more specifically what she terms the 'temporality of material itself.'^[i] This presents itself in the work as a system of control, a limiting device if you will. All the materials used have a very definite relationship to time, and this foreshadows physical actualisation of the work itself. For example, plaster remains malleable for only a short period of time; after it sets further manipulation will not only demand a new mode of working, other tools and methods, but will also result in a different aesthetic. To remain fidelitous to the natural traits of the material, she must work in sympathy to its specific temporal demands. Fogarty does not fight their temporal limitations, but rather works in harmony with them. But to accept these limitations is to negate the concept of longevity; these are not precious objects but ones that were created, allowed to form, and consequently must be allowed to degrade also.

A group of sixteen small plaster forms punctuate the intersection of two walls; a wash of flat azure pigment on each of their faces. Their number, their individual size, and also to a certain extent their form, are dictated by the materials chosen. Each one took a day to create, and the constellation in sum total encompasses the mass of one bag of plaster. Here Fogarty seems to be playing not only with the idea of time, but also of surface. For although the works I saw are indeed all three dimensional, it is with regard to the vocabulary of painting that her work holds most resonance. The plaster forms seem wholly self-aware; by fusing flatness and colour, in the form of pigment, they belie their debt to painting of a specifically modernist variety. For the plaster – its material support – appears to be toying with contrary notions of flatness i.e. the pigment. In so doing the work asks: how can colour or flatness be used *without* having to adhere to the weighty lineage of art historical discourse i.e. the language of colour, painting, flatness, and Modernism? The debt to Modernism is great, and by colliding notions of flatness, colour and three-dimensionality together, Fogarty tackles the question of artistic lineage in a direct, intelligent and self-conscious manner.

A subsequent nod to painting involves the insertion of a painted line onto the gallery wall. In front of this are situated four sinewy plaster forms, which lie on the crumpled form of some plastic sheeting, as though still in the process of being formed. And they are; every viewer who views them, engages with them, sees them alongside this wholly painterly intervention. This creates a plane of vision not dissimilar to that which is created through the illusory motivations of painting. The eye is directed from the four sculptures to the back wall, the line, and this creates a plane of depth akin to that of traditional painterly perspective. It is, self consciously and directly, painting, only by other means. By setting up this scenario, Fogarty points to these erroneous conventions of painting, which can be neither ignored nor forgotten, only challenged.

The question of illusion runs throughout the work also; more accurately, the drive towards a breed of work that is anti-illusion, more honest in its intent and formulation. Hence the use of devices – temporal, material, productive, economic even – that all aid in ensuring the work is as immediate and explainable as possible. The key to the work's form lies in the employment of these devices, which, as previously mentioned, act in such a way as to negate the role of the artist. Their forms cannot be wholly attributed to the choices made by Fogarty, because some of these choices are already made by virtue of temporal or material limitations. When I first talked to Jane I queried this desire for formal transparency, for letting things be. After all, any attempt at subjective distancing from what one creates is essentially impossible; the choice to make no choice remains a choice, no matter how restrained. Why try to be honest at all?

To such an extent, the motivation towards honesty both confuses and intrigues me. Is art not a space where illusion is permitted, where suspension of belief – or perhaps an acceleration of it – plays a central role? Why then attempt to stop this motion in its tracks, when it is ultimately doomed? Every material, no matter how banal, exists within a multitude of intersecting narratives; there are no dumb things. Fogarty's plaster, for example, not only references artistic precedents, but also building, and buildings; places that are built, where things happen, ultimately let to ruin. To use a material, any material, is to open the work up to that material's specific history. Fogarty simply lets these materials speak; her presence is perceived as a sympathetic facilitator, willing them to work for her. It does not really matter that I do not understand the rationale. As mentioned before, this failure to understand is personally, and keenly, lamented.

[i] In conversation with the artist, April 2011.