

David Fox A road less travelled

'A road less travelled' is an exhibition of recent works by Irish artist David Fox. The exhibition showcases a selection of the artist's current painting practice over recent months and it comprises of works that explore the notion of a journey that is without end, as depicted by these desolate motorway and road scenes. The artist uses modern cinematography as a major influence for his work, particularly being influenced by the methods used by a number of directors in the introduction of space to their audience - the audience's understanding of space is dictated and limited by a set number of camera angles and lighting which make up a film's image stream, which is a composed experience similar to that of a painting. He takes inspiration from film stills associated with a suspense being created by the cropped symmetrical compositions set by the cinematographer which in turn work to create a thrilling atmosphere. Looking at these cropped compositions they construct, Fox makes paintings which work to charge space with a sense of suspension and the unknowing. For this exhibition, Fox has taken a particular interest in the road and motorway scenes witnessed in various iconic modern movies from thriller and horror movie genres. Specifically, Fox has taken inspiration from the well shot, camera work of such directors as Stanley Kubrick and also working directors such Steve Queen and the Coen Brothers.

From this scrutiny of the moving image, Fox uses the stillness of the photographic image to capture settings that suggest these cinematic merits of suspense and tension. He uses the photograph as a tool, or as map, to provide the setting, which he then translates into paint. Through the process of applying paint, the artist charges works with atmosphere which seek to describe, and yet limit, the materiality of the space itself.

Fox takes artistic influences from painters such as, American realist painter Edward Hopper, and also contemporary painters such as Peter Doig and Wilhelm Sasnal who use photography as source when painting. These artists break down the information provided in an image to create works which are now charged by the excitement in the process of applying paint in a loose and carefree manner, creating layers and generating atmosphere. Although lacking in the realistic qualities of the photography they have sprung from, the paintings give the viewer enough information to relate to these vacant motorway spaces Fox is depicting, whilst continuously seeking to limit this by thwarting the desires of his audience to see the human presence who have clearly helped to form the structure of these spaces depicted and whose presence echo throughout. Using this, at times loose and care free draughtsmanship the artist seeks to create a sense of unease in the rendering of the spaces. The deliberate mistakes result in a sense of unease. The artist has also found the works of Irish artist Willie Doherty a major source of influence. Doherty use photography to capture urban scenes in his native City of Derry, using only the cropped image to create a sense dark narrative and tension without the presence its inhabitants.

The obstruction of the natural world caused by human constructs and man-made architectural elements are common themes in this exhibition. The artist seeks to push further the notion of human construction by focusing on the 'man made' objects such as roads and bridges that tend to cut through the landscape and obstruct the natural world. These Roads, bridges and roadside objects not only form key landmarks within the landscape but also form essential constructing elements of the landscapes themselves, further emphasising the intrinsic link between man and the word he lives in. Landscapes have increasingly become more than a place touched by human presence and more places which are the creation of human presence. They have become somewhat, unnatural.

There is a sense of ambiguity created in the juxtaposition of the mundane and the 'everyday' road scenes with a stark emptiness working to create uncanny representations of these chosen spaces. The absence of human presence also creates an atmosphere of apprehension and a further sense of the unknown. We don't know if these are real or fictional

destinations that the artist has created as there is little or no sense of direction in which we may be heading. There are no humans present, no roads signs or even recognisable landmarks as an indication of a destination. Therefore, the very existence of this journey is uncertain and it creates a sense of mystery, we are left disoriented by it and intrigued by this journey, - will it ever end? The element of expectation in this absence of human presence provokes a thought, one where you may anticipate that something is about to happen, something has already happened or maybe that something is missing from the composition.

Now, the viewer is forced to focus on the linear 'man-made' construction of the artificial space. This is a deliberate attempt by the artist to focus the viewer's attention on these human constructs that form the composition, and it sharpens the attention on the physical absence of actual human presence, creating a feeling of uncertainty and apprehension. The regimented lines of the bridges and road markings, of the buildings and street lights focus the viewer's attention on the absence of the free, chaotic curves and wildness of nature. The viewer is alone travelling in a state of unknowing.

"If we know exactly where we're going, exactly how to get there, and exactly what we'll see along the way, we won't learn anything."

— M. Scott Peck

David Fox

Tullamore, 1987

In 2011, David Fox has completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts at Galway's School of Art followed by a Masters in Fine Art at Belfast's School of Art, graduating in 2013. The artist now lives and works in Belfast and is increasingly becoming well established locally as an emerging artist, having recent and ongoing participation in both solo and group exhibitions. This is Fox's second major international solo exhibition.

Fox has exhibited in many group shows throughout Ireland including *Group show*, at Queen Street Studios/Ulster University, Belfast (2016); *Imago Mundi Exhibition*, 140 artist project for Luciano Benetton (2016); *Degrees of Separation*, at The Engine Room, Portview Trade Centre, Belfast (2015); or *Foundation 14*, at Offaly Arts centre, Tullamore, Offaly (2014).

Among his most recent solo exhibitions, we should bring into focus *Echoes of absence*, at Galería silvestre_Tarragona (2015); or *Absence/ Presence*, at Mullan Gallery, Lisburn rd, Belfast (2013).

In 2010 and 2011, he obtained the support funding for individual artists "Aras an Contae" awarded by the Offaly County Arts Office (Ireland).

In 2012, he was awarded by GMIT, Galway, to the current president of Ireland. President Michael D. Higgins for his private collection.