

Ailbhe Ní Bhriain

Butler Gallery. Until June 15th.



Ailbhe Ní Bhriain, 'Perimeter #2', C-Print, 2007. Courtesy Domobaal Gallery, London

Dare say the 's' word in relation to contemporary art today (that's surrealism, folks) one hopes to get something in the vein of classic Dali or Ernst but worries that what will transpire will be a pocket of new age alternative therapy where dream imagery has a concrete list of imagery and literal meaning.

Despite using some surrealistic tropes, Cork based artist Ailbhe Ní Bhriain skilfully skirts around the area with a selection of strong images in photograph and on looped dvd. The seven screened dvd piece 'Palimpsest' features treated images, landscapes and interiors, which are manipulated altering specific planes. For what could be described as 'interior-landscapes' in this piece

and her photographs, Ní Bhriain uses the framework of a horizon line or a vertical wall line as a demarcation to change information. Floors become liquid or desert sand, curtains are the outside as well as that which screens the outside, a horizon line is inverted with watery sky. Scale too becomes an element within the work. In her 'Untitled' diptych, beached fish become enormous in scale compared to foregrounded deckchairs. Heavy cloth or mattress slumped on floors takes on the image and proportion of islands.

Much of the landscape imagery and colour would be accepted as conventionally beautiful despite the unsettling alterations, however Ni Bhriain also inputs altered motion on her moving planes. This

gives an allied sense of foreboding to the pieces with viscous skies and snaking smoke adding menace. Most of the pieces remain empty of life, although details like the smoke, the cloth, or a distant boat suggest recent absence or life out of reach. Three pieces, bookending the exhibition, are linked in imagery. The first two 'Aftermath' consisting of two nine panelled pieces are layered images of the artist, skin becoming rock-like; the final 'In Memoriam', a face liquefying under water. Although removed from the other pieces, they represent the intangible present in the whole exhibition. Ní Bhriain's work exists just outside of the concrete but not fully within the dream. ■

Brendan Maher