

## Maud Cotter: a solution is in the room

CIT Wandesford Quay Gallery, Cork

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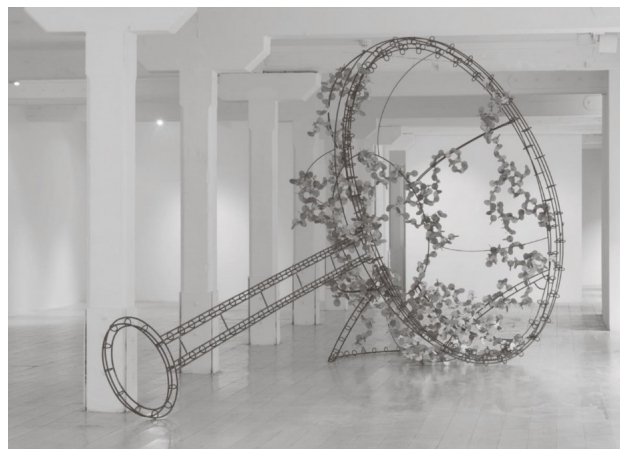
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*a solution is in the room* was, essentially, three sculptural pieces – two of them quite large, all made in the last three years, and each given ample space in the main exhibition room of Wandesford Quay Gallery. The larger pieces, *sieve* (2012-2013) and *Just Now* (2011), were clearly related, with both setting erratic lattices of little wooden discs against open structures of steel rods, but all three employed a variety of materials, mainly industrial, and were polychromatic.

Around the turn of the decade Cotter's work seemed to be progressing along two separate lines. On the one hand, in pieces like *Garden* (2010, at the Dept. of Defence in Newbridge) asymmetrical, spreading lattices made up of small flat units, usually white – not unlike parts of a child's construction set – were attached to interior architectural spaces, giving a sense of vegetative growth generated somehow out of the building. I wasn't convinced by these: they seemed to fall between the two stools of being a spatio-material concept, applicable to any interior, and being an intervention in a particular architectural space, without either the concept or the installation quite holding its own. On the other hand there were almost surrealist pieces using ornate domestic items and pieces of furniture, like the overturned tower of china tea cups, held in place by stalactites of plaster, of *Waiting for the Future* (2007), or the undulating tables, with their elongated, unmatched and extravagantly turned legs, of *More Than One Way Out* (2009). What was peculiar about these latter pieces was the fact that, despite their use of recognisable objects, it was their formal and material effects that held attention. The marvellous sense of wateriness in *More Than One Way Out*, for instance – dripping, beading, lapping and pooling, without any recourse to clichés of melting – seemed to call for a further transmutation into a more purely formal object.

With *a solution is in the room* these two lines seem to have converged, and the results are consummate. What strikes the viewer is the tact, light economy and sensitivity to material of these pieces, as well as their capacity to suggest effects in the real world without abandoning their artificial terms. There was nothing demonstrative in *Just Now* to suggest an apple-tree trunk with blossom unfurling from its top, but the association remained, despite the piece consisting purely of a perpendicular, thin steel frame supporting a stream of holed, interslotted wooden discs, off-white with hints of rose. The same frame supported some found objects – a plastic cup and plastic shade or dish cover, both in delicate artificial colours, and a globe made of corrugated cardboard. The whole airy assemblage bafflingly, precariously cohered, a refashioning of that fundamental modernist trope – a formal extensive structure triggering informal, irreducible particles – in terms of the contingent, intimate world of a modern kitchen or garden. In *sieve* the 'formal structure' clearly referred to a kitchen implement: a comically giant sieve that also brought 1960s' images of space stations to mind. Around its edge the disc-units clustered, both reminiscent of a twining vine with autumn leaves, and of some shaken foodstuff clinging to its mothery distributor. Abstraction unable to shake off naturalistic reference, recognisable referents unable to keep a grip on an autonomous object, and all done without strain, and with the minimum of means. I was reminded a few times, despite the airiness of Cotter's pieces, of the space of Analytical Cubism – a space that integrated geometry, sensitive localised treatment of colour, and quotidian reference – before encountering the brown, cardboard fetish of *settlement* (2013). The shelly light strength of PVA-coated corrugated board, a cousin of basketry, had dictated this piece's more tightly packed form, which included a bowl, tea-tray and clothes brush made of a lacquer-like bakelite. Perched on its unlikely base of wire frame, lopsided aeroboard hemisphere and compensatory white aeroboard wedge, the composite form with its circular 'head' had something primitivist about it: an irreverent revival of Cubist assemblage meeting African idol.

All in all, a coup for the Wandesford: possibly its best exhibition to date.



(<http://enclavereview.org/wp-content/uploads/gaynor-cotter-2.jpg>)

Maud Cotter: *sieve, or points of decision in redistribution* (2012-2013) Steel, birch ply, 570 x 250 x 90cms. Installation shot at Wandesford Quay Gallery, Cork. Photograph by Roland Paschhoff.

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