

In Pieces

Navigating the body in contemporary Irish art

The Glucksman

University College Cork

Artists: **Bassam Issa Al-Sabah, Aideen Barry, Amanda Coogan, Léann Herlihy, Riki Matsuda, Pádraig Spillane, Corban Walker**

Curated by **Chris Clarke**

In Pieces looks at how Irish contemporary artists have explored the body as subject, material and medium. Its representation can signify identity and sexuality, vitality and illness, wholeness and disintegration, and, through works in various media, the exhibition addresses the ways in which we perceive ourselves. In emphasizing the fragmented body, the partial glimpse or reflection, ***In Pieces*** also recognizes the diversity of these representations.

The exhibition challenges traditional ideas of the body as gendered, stable or singular. In **Riki Matsuda's** *Wearable Objects*, the sleeves of woolen garments are stitched together, bonding two individuals into a distinct entity, while her series of paintings present stylized variations of couplings, threesomes, and groups. In **Léann Herlihy's** filmed exploration of trans* identities, the artist sits in a van, presses down the clutch, ignites the engine and throttles the accelerator. Taking two large rocks, they replace the pressure enforced by their feet with solid rubble. Stepping out of the van, the ghost engine roars while their fleshy body emulates the reverberations. In **Bassam Issa Al-Sabah's** video, a floating animated figure acquires new, unanticipated features: flowers bloom from their head, bubbles or pins attach themselves, and prismatic light springs out from their body. A new sculptural configuration of oversized, 3-D rendered limbs reveals discontinuities in proportion and arrangement, a familiar yet re-arranged representation of human anatomy.

The instability of the body is also captured in **Pádraig Spillane's** photographs, which explore desire through the intersection of mass-produced cultural imagery. Legs, arms and hands entwine to the point that specific limbs – and elements collaged from other sources – become indistinguishable, rearranged beyond their intended meanings and functions. **Aideen Barry's** *Monocopsis* series of digital prints, produced during the Covid-19 lockdown, envisages technology as an extension of the body. The digital screen of a mobile phone becomes an artificial eye or prosthetic limb for accessing and exploring our surrounding environment.

The body also serves as the medium and material for artistic exploration. In **Corban Walker's** work, he uses his own height and dimensions to determine the life-size scale of his steel sculpture, fracturing the modernist grid into something more irregular, while his *Ambidextrous Drawing* emphasises the slight deviations between drawn lines. **Amanda Coogan's** performance-based artworks use the medium of her body to challenge social and political structures. In her triptych of photographs, her head (with miner's headlamp attached) breaches a sheet of taut, blue fabric, dives underneath the surface, and ploughs a path through a new and unfamiliar environment.

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