

All That Was Jim Smyth

The paintings and ceramics in this exhibition reinforce the truth that an artwork, in an attempt to conquer empty space, is, at best, doomed to heroic failure, for there is always more empty space, and then, if Epicurus is to be believed, the void.

Yet this failure, if it can be called that, is part of the human condition, and how the artist deals with it is the measure of their ability. The very act of pointing towards something or nothing that cannot be depicted shows the limits of language, art and indeed of science. Ludwig Wittgenstein writes in the *Tractatus: Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.*

This contradiction lies at the heart of the idea of the Void which is a presence and an absence simultaneously. Cosmologists, since Einstein's General Theory of Relativity know that the matter in the universe, in the form of atoms, makes up a mere 4% of the mass and this is simply not enough to hold everything together: not enough gravity. The absence of anything else that science can find is, paradoxically, in itself a proof of a presence: the elusive dark matter invisible, ghostly, and passing through us undetected. The ancient Greeks, both Aristotle and Epicurus, might have agreed that the void is an intangible, perhaps immaterial, entity which both yielded to and somehow stabilized the solid world of atoms, an explanation as plausible as the best modern physics can come up with.

We can perhaps think of the void as the space between objects, or just the space between. The notion of absence dominates much of modern art, from the canvases of Malevich to the work of Yves Klein. Klein's work, *Le Vide*, an empty vitrine, attempts the impossible task of depicting the void by enclosing it.

Alacoque Davey confronts the problem on a number of interlocking levels, through the structure of the works themselves, their use of space, colour, and historical references.

In this exhibition simple objects and shapes, both timeless and specific, float in a plasma of subdued colour the tonality of which can suggest the faded frescos of Heracleum and Pompeii or the vision of a cosmologist dreaming of the missing mass of the universe.

In both cases, the existence of a very small amount of matter fuels our need to know more but if the past is a foreign country, then dark matter is co-terminate with the void.

Floating shapes, discs and bowls, remind us of the human desire to both mould the world and placate it. Discs give homage to the sun and moon, an empty bowl contains nothingness, a void but one that we can fill but never change its potential for nothingness, a true *Ding an sich*.

What remains when a civilization dies and collective memory fades? Ruins, shattered masonry and shards. Acts of nature can destroy civilizations and acts of men are no less destructive. The Roman cry *Carthago delenda est* was realized in 146BC when the city was razed and much of its masonry transported back to Rome. But shards always remain, returning to the earth from whence they came, indestructible pieces of memory awaiting resurrection. In the Archeological Museum of Athens, there is room after room of reconstructed pottery, a visual history of Ancient Greece recreated from abandoned shards. The artist Edmund de Waal writes of the trade in shards in the Chinese city of Jingdezhen, the historic home of porcelain production, piles of shards, separated and zoned by size, by dynasty and by colour. The value of the shards lies in the knowledge embedded in them: the knowledge of the past is incised and burned into its fragments.

Alacoque Davey knows this. From the beginning she has made multiple journeys between ceramics and painting and back again and the dialectic between the two art forms characterizes her work. Early work fused painting and ceramic techniques, with abstract motifs fused into flat surfaces interacting with paintings and drawings, showing the influence of ceramic techniques combining incisions, discs and ceramic shapes with dreamlike domestic and semi-abstract themes.

The works in this exhibition show a distillation and concentration of the artists concerns with space, the process of looking, and the endless search for meaning. Evocative objects float against a subdued background of historically infused colour, less empty space than a search for guidance in a universe of which we know nothing.

Jim Smyth is a cultural commentator living in Belfast.

Alacoque Davey lives and works in Belfast. A graduate of John Moores University Liverpool (BA Hons Fine Art) and University of Ulster (MA Applied Art) she has been a member of Queen Street Studios since 2003 and divides her time between studio practice and teaching.

Mimesis Alacoque Davey

Crescent Arts Centre
8- 24 April 2016
Opening 8 April, 7-9pm

Mimesis: Ancient Greek: 'to imitate', is a critical and philosophical term that carries a wide range of meanings, which include imitation, representation, mimicry, receptivity, the act of resembling, the act of expression and the presentation of the self.

In Ancient Greece, mimesis was an idea that governed the creation of works of art in particular with correspondence to the physical world understood as a model for beauty, truth and the good.

In this exhibition Alacoque Davey takes this as her starting point and looks to the view held by the philosopher Epicurus (341- c.270BC) that the universe has two real constituents: body and void space.

Seen as a context within which to explore the notion of absence that which is present assumes new clarity. Painting and object play with the elements of positive and negative space seeking a balance between the formal composition and it's emotional intent.

The work seeks to draw a circle connecting our world with that of antiquity and suggests that the philosophical complexities and questions articulated in ancient times remain the same today.



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