



Mary McIntyre: *An Interior Landscape*. Installation shot, VISUAL Carlow (2014). Works featured: *Within without* (after Vito Hannibal Acconci), various photographic prints. Photo Ros Kavanagh.

Paul Hegarty teaches cultural studies and philosophy in the French Department, University College Cork. He performs in the bands Safe, Trace and the Phil Collins Project. His book *Rumour and Radiation: Sound in Video Art* is out now with Bloomsbury. *Maria Park: Composition* was on view 11 September – 18 October 2014.

Mary McIntyre: An Interior Landscape

VISUAL, Carlow

Emma Dwan O'Reilly

To lose yourself: a voluptuous surrender, lost in your arms, lost to the world, utterly immersed in what is present so that its surroundings fade away. In Benjamin's terms, to be lost is to be fully present, and to be fully present is to be capable of being in uncertainty and mystery.

Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (2006).

Mary McIntyre's photographs at VISUAL, previously shown as part of an exhibition at the MAC, Belfast, offer the viewer an opportunity to become lost in stark trees, impenetrable fog, swirling mists or thick green algae on water. The photographs, framed and of variable size, were both hung singly and grouped in sets of three or four on the four walls of VISUAL's main gallery. In this considerable space, there was a feeling that the vast landscapes captured in the photographs were, to some extent, tamed, contained inside frames and hung within the controlled white interior of the gallery: huge landscapes reduced to a fragment, small against the enormity of the place of display. The viewer is held at arm's reach from the cold grey skies and the mysterious, dark, mist-shrouded forests. However, standing in front of each of the photographs in turn, I became lost in the tangled reaching branches and enveloped in the thick mists. My reflection in the glass of the frame, like a shadowy Caspar David Friedrich wanderer above the sea mists, reminded me of my ultimate detachment from these landscapes and the moments in which they were captured. In the moment of my experience, past and present co-exist. I am lost in a fog of the past, a fog captured and suspended in time, gnarled branches at once inviting in and pushing away, barring the way forward and beckoning deeper into the picture.

Echoes of art history, of the tradition of landscape painting in particular, are apparent in the composition of the photographs and are referenced directly in some of the titles, for example, *Forest Entrance (After Jacob van Ruisdael)* (2002) and *Flooded Tree (after Jean Baptiste*

Camille Corot) (2006). This awareness of legacy and direct art historical referencing underlines McIntyre's conscious dialogue with painting. As Suzanna Chan, in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, published by the Belfast's MAC, notes: "[a]t times McIntyre's images can be considered the fruits of a practice of painting through photography".

McIntyre's work treads a line between the beautiful and the sublime. There is an awe-inspiring vastness to the landscapes captured, a boundlessness. The uncanny too plays a role in her work, with things not always what they seem. The photographs, particularly those set in a dense fog, left me with the feeling that there was something just beyond the fog, something that I could not see, could not quite make out, something intangible: suddenly, under a blanket of fog, all that might have been familiar became unfamiliar. Such a feeling serves to unnerve the viewer, inducing

an anxiety that is borne of a fear of the unknown, the vulnerability that comes from not knowing what potentially treacherous eventualities lie outside one's line of vision, within the fog. Frustrated with this barrier, I found myself peering uncertainly, squinting beyond the pictorial foreground as though this might assist me in seeing just beyond it, to what was obscured from my view, only to be jolted back to the present by my own reflection. The photographs are, at once, aesthetic objects to be admired in their frames and a suspended present, live with possibilities for the viewer to become lost in, fighting their way through the thick fog, searching for what is beyond.

Two installation pieces also sought to elicit this feeling of being enveloped, overwhelmed by nature. A thick green drape hung on a circular frame, the only part of the exhibition in the centre floor of the gallery space, entitled *Within without (after Vito Hannibal*

Acconci), playing with interiority and exteriority and provoking a feeling of confusion and being lost when encountered. Alone in the space, I tried to find a way inside the drape, an opening which might reveal what was concealed inside, and doubted myself as I failed to find one. Fumbling among the thick, heavy folds of cotton, I grew increasingly frustrated and exasperated and eventually dropped to my knees and peered under the bottom of the drapes only to have the spell broken, and to be left with understanding. There was nothing beyond the thick drapes, nothing beyond the veil except emptiness and the mechanics of the installation. Here again, things were not what they seemed.

The title of this piece engages the viewer in further art historical dialogue, acting as a joint of different artistic presents – between Acconci's work and its relentless questioning of the dichotomy of interiority and exteriority; and (with the inclusion of 'Hannibal', Acconci's middle name) the sublime, in the form of Turner's *Snow Storm: Hannibal and his Army Crossing the Alps* (1812). The associations generated by these references became ever more palpable as I became lost, enveloped in the thick folds of McIntyre's drape, searching for a way in or through.

Another curtain (*Another Quality of Melancholy*, 2014) hung at the other end of the exhibition, against the gallery wall, and concealed nothing except a blank wall, an empty space. Staring at the expanse of this grey curtain, my thoughts, having been in and out of each of the framed landscapes of the exhibition, became tangled in the folds and overwhelmed by the sheer height and width of the drape when viewed from close quarters. I was again reminded of the strong connection of McIntyre's work to the sublime. The scale of this huge grey curtain is emphasised by it being hung after the smallest photograph in the exhibition (*Withdrawing Veils of Sound I*, 2010), a small image contained within a mount and a frame, unlike the others in the exhibition.

Having peered into each of the frames, and fumbled in the folds of the drapery, I sat on the floor in the middle of the space and let the stillness and beauty of McIntyre's work wash over me. The frustration of only being able to go so far into an image lifted, I became content to remain lost in the fog, lost in my thoughts, lost in the trees, lost in the heavy drapes, and yet found as I caught sight of my reflection in the glass holding the image, conscious of the act of looking.

Emma Dwan O'Reilly is a writer and researcher based in Tipperary. She is assistant editor of the *Irish Journal of Arts Management and Cultural Policy* and one of the founding editors of *Allotrope*. *An Interior Landscape* was on view 12 September 2014 - 11 January 2015.



Maria Park: *Bookends Set 4* (2014). Acrylic on plexiglass cubes and 5 books on shelf. Cubes 17.75 x 17.75 cm; shelf 4 x 91 x 20 cm. Books: Chris Kraus, *Where Art Belongs* (Semiotexte 2011); John Muir, *All the World Over* (Sierra Club 1996); John Muir, *Mountaineering Essays* (Peregrine Smith Books 1984); Joseph Conrad, *Tales of Unrest* (Penguin Modern Classics 1977); R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience* (Pantheon 1967). Image courtesy of Margaret Thatcher Projects, New York.