

CAREER DEVELOPMENT



Blaise Drummond *Flowers of Field and Stream (Black Mountain)* 2005
Oil, collage and ink on canvas 127 x 167.5 cm

Peaks and Troughs

BLAISE DRUMMOND CONSIDERS THE DYNAMICS OF HIS ART CAREER

I didn't exactly plan to be an artist. I went to university in Edinburgh to study biology and ended up graduating in philosophy and classical art four years later. I didn't have much to do with art when I was younger. My dad was a doctor and the Christian Brothers in Birkenhead didn't have much to do with art either. After university I spent a summer in Dublin on the dole and a bicycle - afternoons in O'Neills of Suffolk Street with the Irish Times, a pint and sandwiches of white bread and orange cheese.

Later on I was working in landscaping in Boston and had a mind to return to Dublin, but had no excuse. I loved the band The Stars of Heaven, but they were over - their residency at the Baggot just a memory by the time I got there. Then someone gave me the address of NCAD and I applied with some photos and film things I'd been flirting with. I graduated in painting in 1994, grateful that it was something I could realise on my own. Too shy and unassertive to command a film crew. People can tire you out. Being an artist is a good career choice if you like your own company.

Everybody's creative life has its peaks and troughs. You're lucky if a deadline coincides with a peak. I hit a stride I think with my degree show of bricolage made up of fruit crates, paint, stickers, rubber stamps and veneer. After all that I had little idea what to do. I went to New York and saw a million shows and worked in a gay porn video shop.

Back in Dublin I was lucky to get a place in a subsidised studio. Back then there weren't a lot of spaces around. Its accumulated dusty burden of the abandoned oeuvres of former inmates has left me with an abiding fear of overproduction. Or put another way, a taste for the concise - fitting the maximum in the minimum; and trying not to fill up the world with too much more stuff. It also gave me an awareness of how readily an artwork can slip between worth and worthlessness.

I made my first solo show out of that space. It was with the Rubicon Gallery in 1996, mostly because I used to play football in Herbert Park with some of their artists and Peter McKenna who was a partner in the gallery then.

While I loved living in Dublin through those years I never identified much with the prevailing mores of the Irish art world. I still can't quite fathom why so many students I speak to only seem to think of art in terms of Ireland. The issues of identity and gender politics of the time meant little to me. A show of Jimmy Durham's at the Douglas Hyde in 1993 or 1994 offered a world of different possibilities. An art that was funny and stupid, seemingly offhand yet lyrical and concise. It came at the right time. The arrival of David Godbold in painting at NCAD probably helped too. It's important to be able to at least imagine an audience when you are trying to make something.



Blaise Drummond *Tree (Repaired for Autumn)* 2004
Stick, Leaves, Electrical Tape & Blu Tac 38 x 39 x 38 cm approx. (detail)

I did an MA at Chelsea in 1997. My arrival on the course coincided with the inclusion of a piece of mine from my first show in the John Moores, a biennial survey show of contemporary painting in Britain held by the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. It was their 20th anniversary and a big deal. The award ceremony dinner at St. Georges Hall (where Echo and the Bunnymen played and across the road from the Empire where I'd first seen the Undertones) attended by the Brit-art world - Tracy Emlin, Jarvis Cocker, Sam Taylor-Wood, Gary Hume. Strange to find oneself from Dublin amongst all that - and a thrill. Then Charles Saatchi approached me to buy the painting. Sentimentally I had agreed to sell it instead to the Walker Art Gallery. A mistake I can repent at my leisure. But it was a laugh. My flatmate telling me on the way out to the pub that there was a message from the Saatchi Gallery on the phone for me. I assumed he was kidding 'til I heard it in the morning. We danced and cheered around the living room in our shorts. There were visits to my studio from Saatchi, The British Council and the Ikon Gallery. And I did a show with Andrew Mummery in Clerkenwell, whilst still on the MA. Suddenly there were other horizons. It was only a few years later when a friend said something elliptically but pointed about second chances that it really dawned on me that I'd blown my first.

London was great. I saw a lot of shows and heard heroes like Ed Rusha and Alex Katz talk. I didn't find the course at the time to be particularly rigorous or dynamic. Goldsmiths seemed better and certainly produced a far more successful crop of artists that year. I did meet Robert Sherratt there though, who is one of the real artists I know and we still talk.

As a strategy, setting up in London and capitalising on this interest made sense. Instead I went to Liverpool for six months to work on a public art project with industrial slag heaps. Then my wife Siabhra and I bought an old farmhouse in the middle of nothing back in Ireland and buried ourselves for the next years in renovating it. It's the anti-manual of artistic success.

On coming home Charlie Cullen got me in to cover for David Godbold's sabbatical year from NCAD and from then on I took on a rash of teaching around the country. At one point working on Monday in NCAD, Tuesday and Wednesday in the Crawford, Thursday in the Burren College of Art and Friday in DIT. I gave up all that in 2002 for one full-time position at Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology. Looking back that my CV - they are pretty lean years artistically.

Without much expectation I put together a show 'What to Look for in Summer' in 2003 in the Rubicon. In the way you'd hope from a body of work, it seemed to offer afterwards other possibilities. I was in the midst of exploring these in the studio when the chance came up to do a solo show at the Brussels Art Fair in April 2004.

Again I think I was lucky. It was good work as it goes and a lot of people saw it. Art fairs are like that - numerous small stands piled high with work, but the whole artwork scouring through them - a specialist sort of jumble sale. Offers flowed in from galleries all over. I had to get out an atlas. I guess this was my second chance.

I chose the most immediate and specific offer, with a gallery that seemed good - a solo show that September with Galerie Loevenbruck in Paris. Herve Loevenbruck is well connected in the French art world and does a lot of curating, so various group shows followed also. On the strength of the show in Paris the curator of a museum of contemporary art in the west of France invited me to do a show in his space, the Musée de l'Abbaye Sainte-Croix. It was the biggest thing I'd undertaken to date and involved a lot of borrowing back of existing work from collections, a couple of months leave from work and a lot of travelling back and forth to France. When the show closed in June some of it travelled to Paris to form the basis of 'A Field Guide' a show at Loevenbruck; and some went to make up the 'Sous Le Soleil Du Nord' this year at the Butler Gallery in Kilkenny (24 June - 30 July), my first solo show in a public space in Ireland.

Between these things I followed up other requests to do shows with Alice Day in Brussels and Biancpain Stepczynski in Geneva. I've just finished preparations for a show in September with a gallery in Padua. The guy, Andrea Perugi, is very funny and a great enthusiast and proposed that the show comprise "just wan verry beeg painting" in his pristine hanger-like industrial space. I'm making a sort of wall installation of various different elements and creeping out across the floor. An expanded painting, if you like. I started fooling around with the format in the show with Alice Day, prompted by a suggestion of Siabhra in the studio - and I have made a couple since, one currently in the Loevenbruck show and one in *The Commoner's Fish Pond* in a group show about drawing in Düsseldorf.

Next spring I have a show scheduled with a gallery in LA that I've done a couple of group shows with already and I hope to get another together with Alice Day in Brussels.

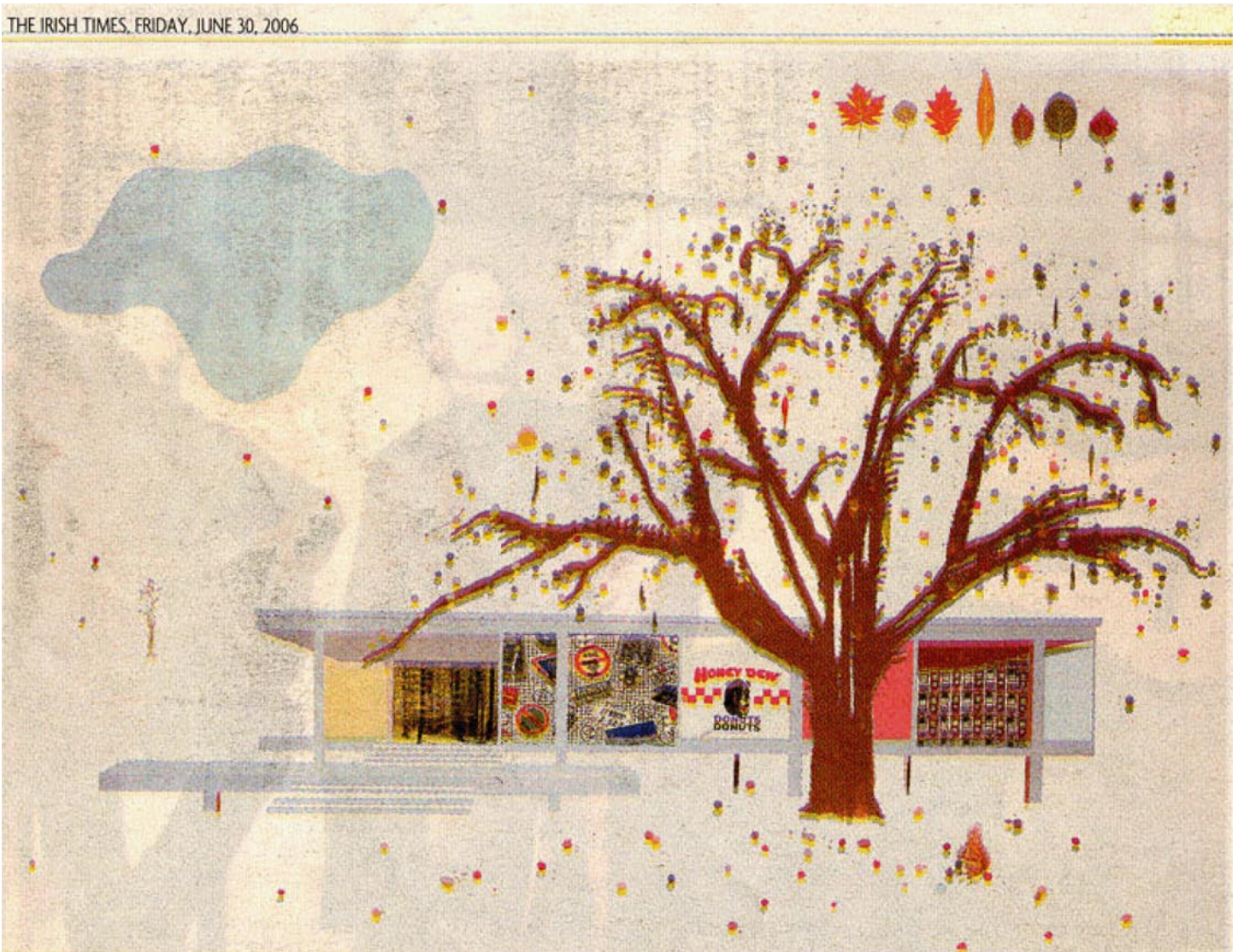
I guess I am travelling a lot now, though I'm not that big on travelling. Sometimes I am lucky that trips co-incide with shows that I might not have otherwise seen (gone are the days with the luxury of time to fly especially to Copenhagen just to see a Robert Smithson show) - like a huge Friedrich show I caught in Essen recently. Unfortunately time constraints often mean that I see little more than the insides of the galleries I am working with, which is less than ideal. On the other hand our children Sonny and Bee have sampled the playgrounds and cuisines of Europe and I am getting to see things sometimes at first hand that hitherto I'd only seen in the pages of books. This autumn we are all going to be actually living in Le Corbusier's *Maison Radiance* in Nantes on the back of a show at the Musée Des Beaux Arts there that I am taking part in about the influence of Le Corbusier on Contemporary Art.

With all this I am beginning to have to think about how my time is divided - between family, teaching, the studio and the garden. In the short-term, an Arts Council bursary will allow me to take a day off a week the art school for a year and we'll see how that helps redress the balance.

Blaise Drummond

www.rubicongallery.ie
www.aliceday.be
www.loevenbruck.com

THE IRISH TIMES, FRIDAY, JUNE 30, 2006



SOUS LE SOLEIL DE NORD

Works by Blaise Drummond, drawn from his show at the Musée de l'Abbaye Sainte-Croix in France. Butler Gallery, The Castle, Kilkenny Until Jul 30 056-7761106

Over the years Blaise Drummond's work has taken the form of an extended meditation on nature and culture. Ah, that old chestnut, you may think. But Drummond has a distinctive sensibility and a specific line of enquiry. He approaches the issues with some practical experience, as a country dweller keenly aware of just how unnatural our notions of nature can be. The landscape often taken to be

synonymous with nature is actually shaped by human beings over many centuries. Latterly, the utopian ideals of Modernism have interested Drummond, and he has introduced archetypal architectural forms, together with patterns relating to a specific era of design, into his paintings. The paintings themselves play on the idea of the blank canvas: another strand of his concerns relates to style in art, and he is wary about falling into any existing stylistic category. There is an analytical quality to his careful approach to both his subject matter and his way of presenting it. Can nature survive culture is perhaps the question he asks. **Aidan Dunne**

MODERN PAINTERS

INTERNATIONAL ARTS AND CULTURE FEBRUARY 2005

Paris

**Blaise Drummond:
Garden City**

Galerie Loevenbruck

20 SEPTEMBER - 31 OCTOBER 2004

Nature is a controlled substance in Blaise Drummond's landscapes. From the smooth AstroTurf green of their cricket fields and poolside lawns to their sparse snowbound suburban backyards, Drummond's scenes are lonely and unpopulated, but the mark of human intervention is everywhere. His latest series of mixed-media paintings, *Garden City*, comprises winter arabesques of nothingness: a glacial pool of water, oddly budded and blossoming young deciduous trees, a conifer, a green woodpecker, a tidy pile of logs, a nest of eggs, the pathos of a single delicate fern leaf. Positioned amid these disparate elements are some epic man-made monuments, such as the Alvar Aalto sanatorium in *Feel Better* (2004) and Le Corbusier's Villa Stein-de Monzie in *Adventures in Contentment (Part 1)* (2004). Another Le Corbusier building, Villa Savoye, is featured in *Towards a Unified Theory of Everything* (2004), painted sky blue, with a forest of trees reflected in its strip windows. Like alien spaceships, the Corbusier buildings contain 'the whole of everything in the world', says Drummond. 'The only life is inside the building. There is nothing outside but a few seedlings.'

The arctic blankness of his work, punctuated here and there by evergreens and scattered blades of grass, has several wintry ancestors. By Drummond's own admission, Caspar David Friedrich's *Winter Landscape with Church* (1811) and Pieter Bruegel's *The Hunters in the Snow* (1565) are influences. But where Friedrich's fervent landscapes thrum with religious intensity and searching, Drummond's are cool and prosaic. They are, in fact, less landscapes than scenes set outside buildings; architectural renderings surrounded by naturalist doodlings, like a crosshatched rock cut out of graph paper or a broad

green felt lawn sewn onto the canvas, their arts-and-craftiness poking fun at the abstract precision of modernist architecture and art.

And whereas Friedrich saw nature as redemptive, the motor of Drummond's work is the back-and-forth fear of and longing for Eden. He works from the assumption that nature is technologised: that's the joke in *Some Mild Peril* (2004), a collaged island composed out of packaging for frozen peas, and even his paint-splatter blossoms are what

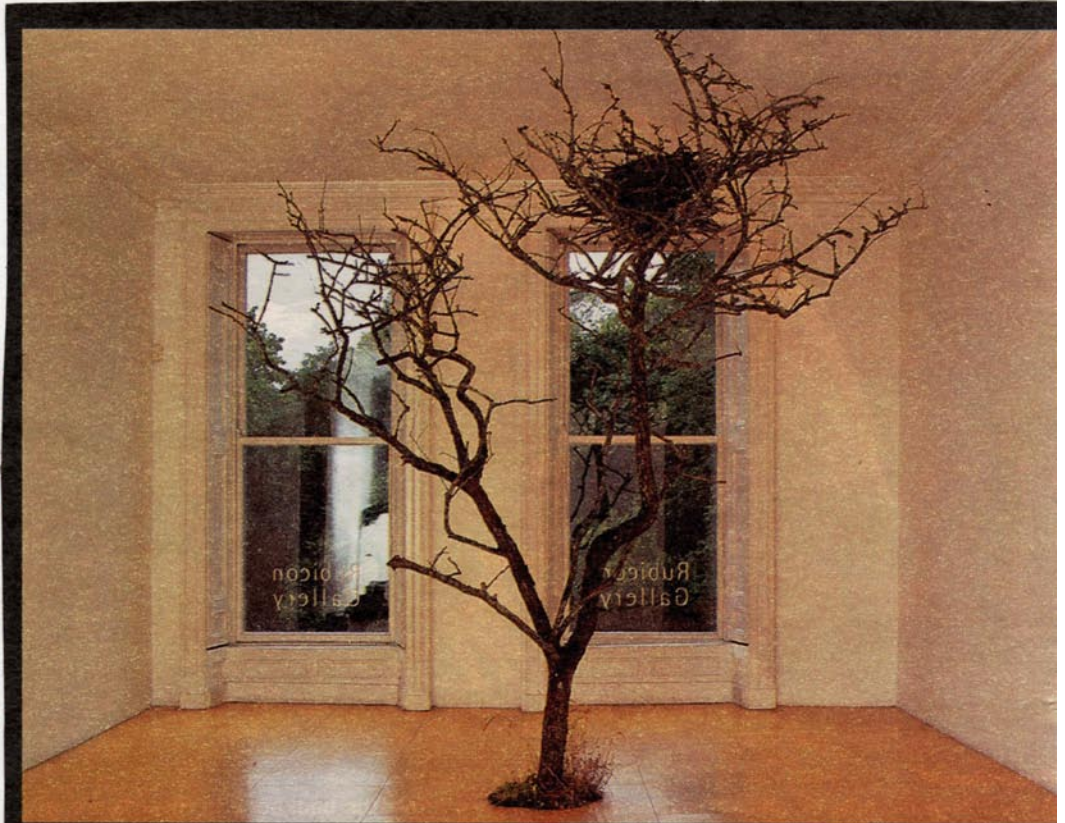
he calls 'secret bits of fakeness'. They have the accidental shape of paint that has been thrown onto the canvas, but their strangely stencilled quality hints that these are premeditated drips; splotches that have been carried out elsewhere, then copied and transferred onto the painting.

Drummond's faux naturalism has a double source: the notion of manufactured naturalness which finds its apogee in the quintessential English garden as envisioned and created by Capability Brown, and the contemporary suburbia that grew out of Ebenezer Howard's Garden City proposals, Utopian green suburbs as panacea to sooty Victorian English cities. Nature has been irremediably compromised, Drummond seems to say, but it leaves us with ersatz options that are rich conceptual terrain. **CY**

Below
Blaise Drummond, *Feel Better*,
2004, oil & glycéro on fabric
167 X 142CM
© F. GOUSSSET. COURTESY GALERIE
LOEVENBRUCK, PARIS, RUBICON GALLERY,
DUBLIN AND BLAISE DRUMMOND



THE SUNDAY TIMES
Culture
JULY 31, 2005

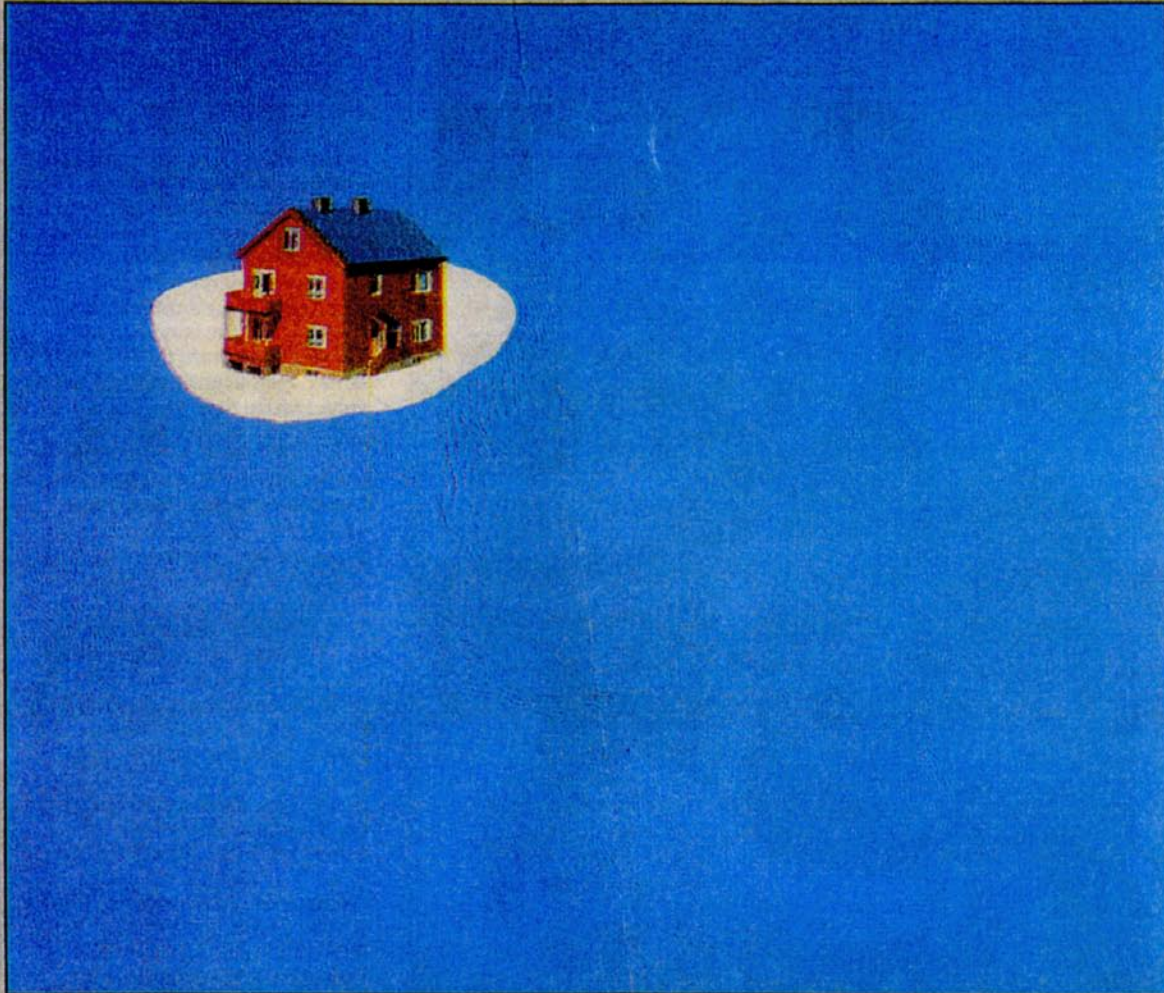


Blaise Drummond: It's So Hard to be a Saint in the City

In his book, *A Portable Hedge and Other Modest Proposals*, Blaise Drummond outlines projects that blur the lines between contemporary urban spaces and nature. His latest show takes this plan further, with the white-walled, wooden-floored Rubicon gallery becoming a modern environment for three new installations: a large, lichen-covered tree (above), a pot of planted grasses and a moist, mossy rock. Drummond plays on the way in which urban societies look to nature for escape, mimicking the twig-and-grass styles interior designers use to soften minimalist architecture. But things aren't quite what they seem: the bird's nest that tops the tree has sweet wrappers, twine and dirty sheep's wool woven into its structure; the potted grass is growing sideways, blown by a small electric fan. Drummond skilfully subverts expectations to produce modern reworkings of art's long-running love affair with the notion of the sublime.

Cristin Leach

Rubicon, Dublin, Tue-Sat, 12 noon-6pm, free (01 670 8055)

**UTOPIAS**

Early this year, John Hutchinson, director of the Douglas Hyde gallery, asked a variety of artists, both well known and up and coming, to respond to the notion of utopia. Apart from referring to the ideas of Plato and Sir Thomas More, and emphasising both the elusiveness of the concept and the dark side of utopian visions, Hutchinson encouraged the artists to come to their own conclusions, although many connections, intentional or not, can be observed from work to work. Parachutist — After Capa, Brendan Grant's life-sized sculpture of a fallen parachutist, lies in the centre of the gallery's lower floor. Central to the show's concerns, it evokes the idea of falling and rising, and, like many of the exhibits, is extremely theatrical. Other works, such as Eva Rothschild's mixed-media tableau of drawings and photocopies, suggest premillennial tension, here through old-fashioned or surrealist visions of futuristic landscapes. Blaise Drummond's Island series, the only traditional paintings, reflects on the utopian ideal of retreat from society into nature. Drummond's reference to Arnold Böcklin's painting *The Isle of the Dead*, and the artificiality of his pop-like images and vivid primary colours — *Island Painting 3 (Red House)* is pictured above — undermine this idyllic notion, however. The show is refreshingly free of knowing irony, examining its theme from many viewpoints without forgetting to question the desirability of perfection.

Catherine Daly

Douglas Hyde, Dublin, Mon-Fri 11am-6pm (Thu 11am-7pm), Sat 11am-4.45pm, free (01-608 1116)