





UTOPIA LTD.

INTRODUCTION

Utopia Ltd. explores the relationship between utopian ideas and commodification, bringing together artwork by Blaise Drummond, Brendan Earley, Pil and Galia Kollektiv, David Mabb, Lizi Sanchez and Mary-Ruth Walsh. The seven artists' work opens up a debate on the utopian within painting, sculpture, architecture, design and video.

The works in *Utopia Ltd.* represent modernist architecture and design in its various mutations within a spectacularised, commodified 20th century consumer society. In these works, the utopian dream seems to burst through again and again, despite rather than because of the permutations of commodity culture. By picturing the past, present and possible future the works destabilise fixed linear time. By rescuing, reclaiming and re-picturing, *Utopia Ltd.* suggests that utopian ideas persist in contemporary art, making a provocative demand on the viewer's capacity to produce utopian dreams of their own.

The exhibition's title *Utopia Ltd.* is a satirical echo of an operetta by Gilbert and Sullivan, *Utopia (Limited) or, The Flowers of Progress* (1893), in which a utopian colony is turned into a joint stock company.

The curators:

David Mabb lives and works in London. His work investigates the social and political implications of the textile and wallpaper designs of 19th Century interior designer, writer and activist William Morris.

Mary-Ruth Walsh lives and works in Wexford and Dublin. Her work explores the heroic ideals of modernism through an investigation of the way people move, behave and inhabit architectural space.

Notes on the works in Utopia Ltd. follows:



BLAISE DRUMMOND

In Drummond's paintings the utopianism of Corbusian modernist type buildings is made visible again, but in the context of unsettling surrogate nature.

Asked to supply a text about his work for Utopia Ltd Blaise Drummond suggested one "by an American critic called Josef Woodard. It's actually a review of an installation I did in Santa Barbara. ...I really like it as a very succinct summation of the work I make".

"Nature meets ersatz nature, and an unsettling, mutant identity is the upshot. Such is Drummond's MO. For Drummond, iconography of nature becomes both a topic of concern and a post-modernist plaything. The artist deals, coyly and concurrently, with actual nature, sentimental imagery of nature, and our

genuinely conflicted relation- ship with the natural world, when even the most eco-conscious among us grapple with hypocrisy.

Drummond's scattershot text cascades diagonally down the wall, and fittingly grows evermore dour as it descends, moving from a dream of nature to a realization of the prevalence of rubbish and pollution. It ends with the fatalistic line, "I wondered how we might stop its waters being polluted upstream, though I didn't really think we could." While there are certain serious, cautionary aspects to Drummond's messages, not only the specific text but also the whole conceptual approach to his art, the cheeky and fragmentary quality of his presentation keeps it from being merely glum or preachy eco-art. In a way, his art brings awareness to the barriers and misconceptions we encounter while trying to come to grips with the incredible tension between humanity and its habitat.

In another way, though, he's a deft juggler of light and dark, a deadpan entertainer with a half-serious sermon to deliver."

Josef Woodard "Nature Boy Revisited" Santa Barbara News-Press (June 27, 2008)

La Façade Libre (Live Forever in Perfect Health and Happiness), oil, acrylic and collage on canvas (2011)

BRENDAN EARLEY

In Earley's sculptures, the casting of polystyrene waste packing material is reborn into idealised model modernist architecture forms. Earley's sculptures "explore inventive ways to address and re-invent high modernist solutions within contemporary conceptual practice. Temporal slippages (generational relationships moving in forward and reverse motions) forge reconsidered conceptual landscapes that house literal and historical (real and fictional) buildings and structures – for example; re-inventions of Wittgenstein's Vienna house, or half-realised 'future perfect' (and now nostalgic) housing





projects from Communist China. Similarly, Earley's recent aluminium cast works have also sought out fragments of lost, recent history. Packaging from analogue electrical devices, were once so particularly designed that combinations of pieces could easily form 'faces' reminiscent of Pac Man aliens. Earley has been *capturing* examples of this transient moment in incidental modernist design and has frozen them in the permanence of the *lost* aluminium castings, where like is replaced with (un)like, permanence for impermanence, lightness for weight, for-today for forever.

Press release from mother's tankstation (2010)

Image previous page: Brendan Earley
Workbench. Aluminium, plasterboard and workbench (2010)
Parallex 1,2,3,4 and 5, mixed media (2010)
Courtesy the artist and mother's tankstation

PIL AND GALIA KOLLECTIV

Co-Operative Explanatory Capabilities in Organizational Design and Personnel Management. DVD, 23 min. (2010)

Based on an online image archive documenting the construction and history of an early computing company, the fictional story of "Co-Operative Explanatory Capabilities in Organizational Design and Personnel Management" follows the development of an experimental approach to worker productivity into a religious cult. The project investigates the place of creativity in efficiency management and the operation of bureaucratic systems in a post-industrial work environment.

Images form the following archive:
Rutherford Appleton Laboratory and the Science
and Technology Facilities Council (STFC).
<http://www.chilton-computing.org.uk/>



The Future Trilogy

Upper Gallery

In November 2005, IKEA announced a new store opening in Edmonton to be accompanied by an offer of a significant price reduction on leather sofas. When 6000 people arrived to compete for the discount, a riot ensued, injuring 16 shoppers. *The Future Trilogy* takes this event as the starting point for a speculative history of a fictional future. *The Future for Less* (2006) imagines the consumer riot as the foundation of a new totalitarian state religion imposing the tenets of modernism on the masses. In *Better Future, Wolf-Shaped* (2008), a rural cult perverts this official creed through pagan rituals of architectural worship performed at Celtic burial sites in

Cornwall. The final installment, *The Future is Now* (2009), similarly shot on 16mm colour film, stages the triumphant conquest of the industrial wasteland surrounding IKEA Edmonton as a popular uprising, revisiting the original riot as a future reenactment.

The Future for Less, 2006

Super 8mm and 16mm transferred to DVD, 10 min.

The *Future for Less* is a futuristic b-movie about a post IKEA riots society where art and high Modernist design have triumphed and Sunday DIY rituals are an underground cult. The film explores a dystopian vision where Xerox drones (dressed in white suits and caps) patrol brutalist urban landscapes searching out high modern dissidents (in this case, dressed in a black suit with ziggurat-shaped shoulder pads). The suited rogue is stripped of the boxes of flat-pack furniture he was carrying and led into a den covered with constructivist sculpture. Supervised by the limb-less High-Priestess, the drones work with the furniture to imprison the man in his own geometrically spaced cage. *The Future for Less* presents an idiosyncratic mythological parable where the aesthetics of modernism form the foundation stones of a totalitarian religion. The film presents a vision of a world where individuals who choose to erect Ikea DIY furniture are thwarted by an omniscient regime that insists on, and forcibly oversees the appropriation of these materials for use in only "good" modernist sculpture. The dominant governing forces in this world dispatch uniformed drones to enforce radical self-expression amongst the general populace. Here, the rhetoric of subversion and homogeneity are equated as a cultic-revolutionary B-movie farce, ironically transfiguring the operation of an ethics of freedom into a violent miasma. Amplifying this irony, the film self-consciously utilises a suitably 'grainy' film stock, and a provisional aesthetic for its mise en scene that mimics early twentieth century avant-garde film and theatre, reworking the Constructivist idealism of a collective imagination to produce a renewed bureaucraticised utopia of weekend flat-pack construction. *The Future for Less* was produced as part of the

Cocheme Fellowship at Byam Shaw School of Art.

Better Future, Wolf-Shaped, 2008

16mm transferred to DVD, 15 min.

In *Better Future, Wolf-Shaped*, a peripheral cult of worshipers fashions its own offerings to their Modernist ancestors in the form of architectural models of their great monuments made of corn husk. These are ritually constructed and burnt against the background of Celtic sites in Cornwall, as the group dons makeshift salad bowl and lampshade helmets, leading up to a choreographed homage to the square, a short dance routine juxtaposing Beckett's television plays *Quad I* and *II*, Bruce Nauman's *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square (Square Dance)* and industrial German band Die Tödliche Doris' song, *Tanz im Quadrat*. The transition between these two modes of sacrament sets up an aberrant chronology, destabilising the temporal cohesion of the narrative as past utopia or future event. Bringing together pagan ritual, the anti-traditions of modernism and popular film and music interpretations of the cult as a social unit, *Better Future, Wolf-Shaped* aims to trace connections between historical moments as much as write its own chronology of an alternative future history. The appropriation of consumer culture and the relationship between the mass produced and the hand made and customised becomes a field for questioning the potential of art as political action. Like the previous film, for which Quebec band Les Georges Leningrad were commissioned to make a soundtrack, the film is sound tracked by a specially composed musical score by Steven Kado. *Better Future, Wolf-Shaped* has been produced with the support of Film London and the London Artists Film and Video Award.

The Future is Now, 2009

Super 8mm and 16mm transferred to DVD, 23 min.

A lone insurgent is pursued by a representative of the state as she tries to assemble the multitude for a post-soviet mass spectacle.





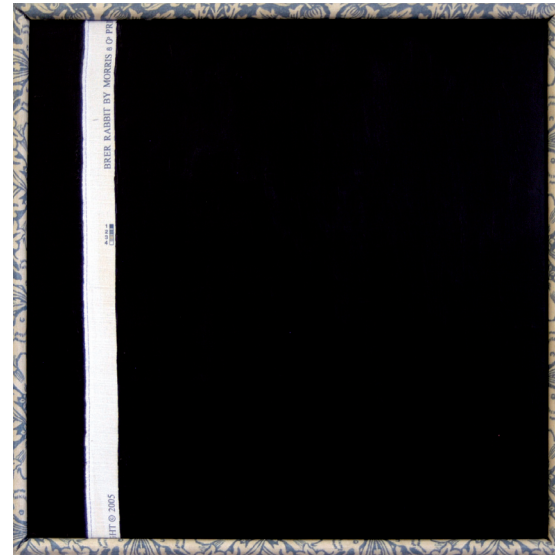
Hunted through the concrete cityscape of a multistory car park and the brutalist architecture of the Barbican complex, she arrives at Edmonton with the motley crew of would be consumer revolutionaries, who come together to perform choreography derived from footage of the original riot. Dressed in monochrome neo-constructivist Dada costumes, they form groupings, pushing boxes and gesticulating at fellow 'shoppers'. Their repetitive movements converge in an ultimate confrontation with the uniformed police, which ends with the triumph of the flatpack utopia as the opposing forces join in a tableau of frozen victory. Exploring the possibility of collective action emerging from the Capitalist relations inherent in the consumer riot, the film forms an epic finale for the Future trilogy. Featuring music by Laibach. *The Future is Now* was commissioned by **Collective Gallery, Edinburgh**.

DAVID MABB

In David Mabb's paintings, William Morris patterns and Minimalism are juxtaposed. Morris' utopianism is buried beneath twentieth century commodity capitalism's appropriation of minimalist sculpture.

Mabb has been working with the designs of 19th century designer and socialist William Morris for the past decade. William Morris thought that interior design had a fundamental role to play in the transformation of everyday life. This essentially political motivation - a commitment to the radical potential of design - is behind much of his work as a designer, a craftsman and the setting up of Morris & Co.

Morris' designs constituted a radical break with the orthodoxy of neo-Gothic of his time. They are highly schematised representations of nature, where it is always summer and never winter; the plants are always in leaf, often flowering, with their fruits available in abundance, ripe for picking, and with no human labour in sight. This is a Utopian vision, an image of Cokaygne. Mabb's paintings, photographs, textiles and videos all, in different ways, work with



and against Morris' utopian designs by contrasting them with other forms of modernist production, including Malevich, Rodchenko, Stepanova and Popova paintings and designs, modernist architecture and photographs of industry. Mabb never simply paints or covers over the Morris pattern with another image: elements of the Morris pattern always poke or burst through. This combination produces an unstable picture space that is never fixed, where the contrasting images are never able to fully merge or separate.

Two Squares (Morris Fruit Relief) consists of two square canvases, one white and one black. On closer inspection both canvases' Malevich-like appearance is disrupted by a painterly relief of fruit, flowers and leaves. This interwoven cornucopia

of seemingly natural profundity is Morris' "Fruit" pattern, the antithesis to Malevich's Suprematism. *Two Squares (Morris Fruit Relief)* hovers between cool minimalism and superabundance.

In both *White Square (Willowboughs Minor)* and *Black Square (Brer Rabbit)* a sheet of William Morris patterned fabric is glued to a canvas. The fabric has then been painted over, obliterating any trace of the pattern, leaving only the selvedge with information about the fabric printed on it. The painted surface is reminiscent of Malevich's Black or White Square or later minimalist painting. Both paintings have then been framed with the same Morris fabric that has been painted over.

The three paintings in *Utopia Ltd.* set up dialectical relationships between minimalism and decoration, illusion, surface and object, painting and frame, everything and nothing.

***Two Squares (Morris Fruit Relief)*. Paint on fabric mounted on canvas (2009)**

***White Square (Willowboughs Minor)*. Paint on fabric mounted on canvas (2010)**

***Black Square (Brer Rabbit)*. Paint on fabric mounted on canvas (2010) Picture on page 6**

LIZI SÁNCHEZ

In Sánchez's sculptures, formal urban monuments and the transient paraphernalia used for shopping display are combined to create a 20th century dictators authoritarian dream.

"Scrutiny of high and low culture takes another turn in the sculptures and collages of Lizi Sánchez. Sánchez's sculptures possess an unashamedly frivolous quality. The weighty materials





traditionally associated with sculpture are, more often than not, eschewed as Sánchez is drawn towards cheap materials such as those commonly found in hardware and haberdashery shops. Nevertheless, her constructions, using veneers, pom-poms, ribbons, fabrics, bathroom tiles, cardboard and polystyrene, possess an authority belying the tackiness and lowly status of her materials. Are they sculptures, models, facsimiles of monuments?

The rigorous construction and attention to detail evident in this work may go some way to explaining the contradictory impulses they induce, as might the apparently formal appearance. Though eschewing the 'serious' materials of sculpture and attendant associations of grandiosity and solemnity, as works of wit and great ingenuity, Sánchez's sculptures still demand to be read 'seriously'.

These hybrid forms are reminiscent of various types of design, which not only occupy a particular physical space within the city, but also particular places within a hierarchy of design. The seeming disparity between form and content can be partly attributed to Sánchez's fascination for making links between disparate forms of ornamentation, from those found in architecture – façades of buildings, urban monuments and parade grounds – to the sort of paraphernalia used for shop displays. Where the former alludes to a civic identity (and by association tradition and history), the latter suggests something altogether more transient, such as the act of shopping (or consuming). Though seemingly worlds apart, one is rarely experienced without the other. Walking through the city, we invariably pass by shops, and when out shopping we cannot avoid a notion of the civic"

Richard Hylton *Once Removed* Unit 2, London

Blue Savannah Song, MDF. Plastic fern, self adhesive film and vinyl, leatherette and pom-pom (2007)

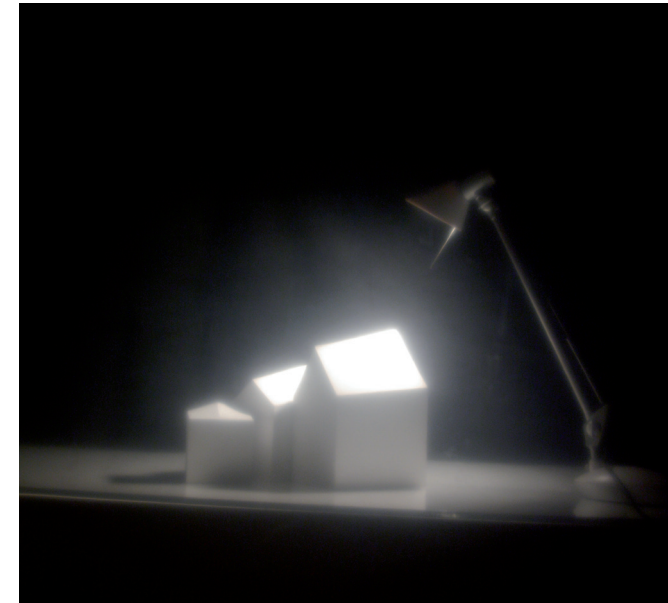
He Believes in Beauty. Wood, cardboard, MDF, fabrics, self adhesive vinyl, pom-poms and plastic pearls (2008)

MARY-RUTH WALSH

"...The way I'm using lens-based work, I think, articulates aspects of this debate. The presentation or mediation of objects through film reminds me how Le Corbusier used or, I should say, misused photography. He realised, as I had, the potency of lens-based presentation of his buildings, he, for promotional purposes, me, for a 'double-take' effect and to question who writes and draws the historical records?"* "What happens in that gap between the object and their two-dimensional representation is full of promises and denials, of realities and unrealities. The photographs and objects are a deliberate exercise of improbability and possibility."*

Walsh's work demystifies the monumentality of architecture. Rather than attempt to recreate Eileen Gray's work, Walsh's work explores the myth Gray leaves behind by photographing found packaging. Questioning our curiosity and desire for real encounters with authentic objects, through the use of the constructed language of the photographic image, these images and objects relate to the lost and unrecorded spaces made by Eileen Gray (her studio work, *Tempe à Piale* and *E1027*). They allude to Gray's simple appearing, space-saving systems, her sliding walls and windows which appear or disappear as necessary; her concealed cupboards, and hidden staircases. Everything folded, unfolded, swiveled, extended or slotted in somewhere. Everything moved.

Walsh's work relates to how art is shown in museums, and the debate on the spectacularisation of museum culture with the resultant immateriality of artworks. "The ideas in the materials like packaging and domestic bric-a-brac explore on some level how we think about architecture. The work is not meant to illustrate but rather to engender ideas of why and for whom the space is created, and contests how space is constructed. The constant dialogue between



idea and object, and the layered investment of ideas in the objects are a continual negotiation." ** In Walsh's work, representations of packing materials echo the dream of modernism's refusal to die.

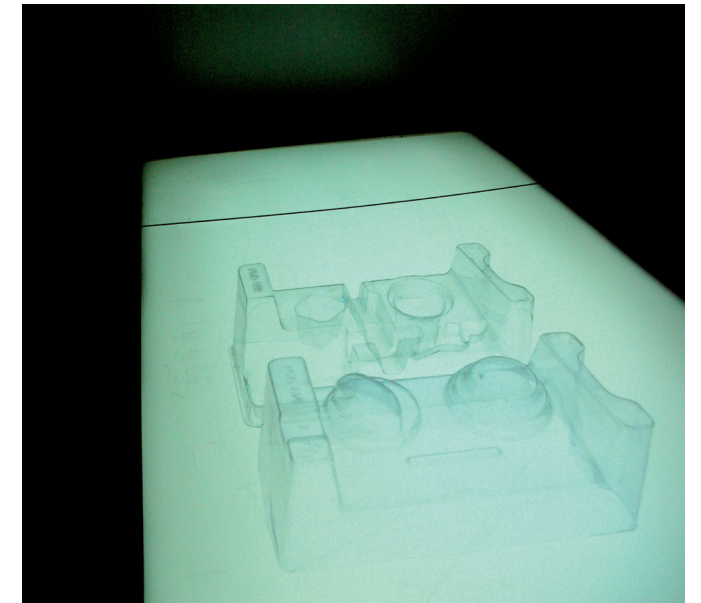
*Walsh interviewed by Rosie Bennett

**Walsh interviewed by Padraic E. Moore, Oonagh Young Gallery

Gray's Studio 1. Giclée print on Summerset paper (2009)

Gray's Studio 2. Giclée print on Summerset paper (2009)

Gray's Studio 3. Giclée print on Summerset paper (2010)



E1027 Studio Model 1. Giclée print on Summerset paper (2010)
E1027 Book Stand. Giclée print on Summerset (2010)
Object'de E1027 – I. Giclée print on Summerset (2009)

Gray's Studio – Untitled objects. Giclée print on Summerset paper (2009)

Gray's Studio 4. Giclée print on Summerset paper (2010)

Strangely Familiar Shades of Gray, Objects d'E1027, plaster, MDF and perspex (2011)





UTOPIA LTD.

The exhibition is presented on the occasion of the annual Drogheda Arts Festival, 2011. It was first presented at Wexford Arts Centre commissioned by Catherine Bowe, Visual Arts Officer. Utopia Ltd. forms the visual arts strand at Highlanes Gallery for Drogheda Arts Festival supported by Drogheda Borough Council and Louth County Council and through financial support of the Arts Council.

Highlanes Gallery Exhibition Team: Aoife Ruane, Director; Patrick Casey, Operations and Security Manager; Ian Hart, Exhibitions and Installation; Siobhan Burke, Administration and Accounts; Siobhan Murphy and Hilary Kelly; Duty Officers.

Utopia Ltd. opens alongside the main Drogheda Arts Festival at 6.00pm on Friday 29 April and continues until 3 August, 2011

Drop-in sessions for families led by Lynn McGrane
Sunday 1 May 6.00pm – 8.00pm
to coincide with the Boyne 10K Run
Cost: Free, donations of €2.00 are welcome

Curator/Artists' Talk with David Mabb and Mary-Ruth Walsh:
Saturday 28 May 2.00pm
Cost: Free, donations of €2.00 are welcome

Drawing Day Children's Workshop (5-8 yrs) led by Lynn McGrane
Saturday 28 May 10.45am – 12.00pm

Drawing Day Children's Workshop (9-12 yrs)
Saturday 28 May 12.15am – 1.30pm

These gallery-based workshops focus on both the practical and conceptual. All materials are supplied.
Cost: €5.00, booking advised as numbers are limited.



To mark **International Museums Day** and **Bealtaine** on **Wednesday 18 May** at 11.00am, Highlanes Gallery invites older people for a *walk and talk* of the new exhibition and selected works from Drogheda Municipal Art Collection. To finish, there will be tea and scones at Andersons Café.
Admission and refreshments free, booking advised

Share a memory of Drogheda
As part of **Bealtaine**, the festival for older people and the arts, Highlanes Gallery invites older people on Thursday 19 May at 11.00am to visit the current exhibition from the Drogheda Municipal Art Collection which highlights Drogheda and Boyne Valley. People are encouraged to share their stories and memories of Drogheda through drawing and conversation. Tea, coffee and scones will be served in the gallery.
Admission and refreshments free, donations of €2.00 are welcome

Share memories of Drogheda with your grandchildren and draw together

As part of **Bealtaine**, the festival for older people and the arts, Highlanes Gallery invites grandparents and grandchildren to visit the current exhibition from the Drogheda Municipal Art Collection which highlights Drogheda and Boyne Valley at **3.00pm on Friday 20 May**. Tea, coffee and pink lemonade will be served in the gallery.
Admission and refreshments free, donations of €2.00 are welcome

Ongoing Programmes at Highlanes Gallery Primary School and Second Level Programmes

Would you and your class like to visit Highlanes Gallery this term and take part in a guided tour with an optional gallery-based practical activity? View the *Utopia Ltd.* exhibition as well as getting to know Drogheda Municipal Art Collection through the Primary and Second Level Programmes led by Hilary Kelly and supported by gallery invigilators. Second Level students in particular, can also learn about gallery and building management.

- » These special visits are free
- » Available on **Wednesday, Thursday and Fridays** at requested times between 10.45am and 3.00pm (4.00pm for Second Level)
- » Visits can take between 20 minutes and 1 hour depending on the age group (Primary) and between 40 minutes and 1 hour (Second Level)

Highlanes Gallery, an exciting new state-of-the-art facility aims to be one of Ireland's most important visual art spaces presenting a dynamic and diverse programme of temporary exhibitions and exhibitions drawn from the Drogheda Municipal Art Collection. The Collection dates from the middle of the eighteen century and is housed at the former Franciscan Friary Church in St. Laurence Street in Drogheda.

Highlanes Municipal Art Gallery, Laurence Street, Drogheda, Co. Louth, Ireland
The gallery is open 6 days a week, Monday – Saturday 10.30am-5.00pm, closed Sunday



Take a bow!

The arts really matter to us in Ireland; they are a big part of people's lives, the country's single most popular pursuit. Our artists interpret our past, define who we are today, and imagine our future. We can all take pride in the enormous reputation our artists have earned around the world.

The arts play a vital role in our economy, and smart investment of taxpayers' money in the arts is repaid many times over. The dividends come in the form of a high value, creative economy driven by a flexible, educated, innovative work force, and in a cultural tourism industry worth €2.4 billion directly a year.

The Arts Council is the Irish Government agency for funding and developing the arts. Arts Council funding from the taxpayer, through the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport, for 2011 is €65.2 million, that's around 80 cents a week for every household.

So, at the end of your next inspirational encounter with visual arts, don't forget the role you played and take a bow yourself!

Find out what's on at
www.events.artscouncil.ie

You can find out more about the arts here:
www.artscouncil.ie



Highlanes Gallery



www.factorygraphics.ie

