

MAGGIE MADDEN

SOMEWHERE in the MIDDLE



LIMERICK CITY GALLERY OF ART
25th November 2016 - 29th January 2017

SOMEWHERE in the MIDDLE

Sara Baume

Picture everything you've ever carried in a plastic bag. Ten thousand frozen peas, one hundred apples, fifty bars of soap – likely. Two dozen souvenir fridge magnets – possibly. One tiny goldfish swimming awkwardly in a pint of cloudy water – certainly.

Now try to picture every plastic bag. Clear, opaque, black, striped, azure – probably.

I can conjure up the taste of the most recent apple, the smell of the current bar of soap; recall the name of the tiny goldfish and how long she survived.

But it's practically impossible to remember any bag in particular.

They were so nondescript, so transient; existing only to contain and convey other objects, to facilitate other tastes and smells and recollections. They only delivered – and then, almost immediately – were disburdened, discarded.

Vessels emptied, skins shed.

Plastic bags (without a burden), phone wires (without a voice), timber frames (without a picture), insulation board (without a wall), willow rods (without a tree) – the matter of Maggie Madden's practice is drawn from the no-man's land between function and waste.

On a bus journey in the direction of home, staring into the gallery of my smartphone, studying the photographs I took on a visit to the artist's studio. Squinting to distinguish between artworks and the surfaces to which they are secured. The finest pieces have become livid – only their fixtures and shadows remain visible.

Above the bus roof, the slow-swaying phone lines; beneath the bus wheels, subterranean cables. Wires inside wire – strands of silica glass inside the wires inside the wire and inside the glass; voices spoken, letters typed. A system of communication as abstruse as the shadows in my photographs.

In the studio, there was a Tupperware lunchbox filled with fluff, collected from the artist's jumpers and the jumpers of her loved ones. Madden frowned when I mentioned it, explained that this was only the failed fluff – a batch of bobbled fibres lacking the correct consistency and buoyancy to be serviceable as art.

There are rules only she understands. Where and how to cut, join, place. Reasons only she can determine. Just look, look closer, look again.

Switching from bus to van for the last leg. Home to a landscape not unlike the one Madden was raised in, the one which ghosted contours onto her preconscious. A shroud of diaphanous mist. Fields fenced by wiggly stone. Branches and foliage – jittering, rustling. A slick of freshly laid tar, a powdering of cow-nuts – spilled, smashed, smoothed. A stash of bright shells in a pocket in the sand.

Vessels, skins.

And back again in the kitchen, a drawer glutted with used bags. Crumpled into submission – wrinkled, aged. Handles overstretched, bellies slit by cardboard corners, linings slicked by condensation, the soured yoghurt of a carton which popped, the disseminated poppy seeds of a long-eaten loaf. Here are the things you have carried and expect to.

The slow fill.

The artist sits in the studio amongst her materials. Still, silent. Until they start to speak – a pilgrim watching for a statue to move. Only she can hear their speech – in the same way that nobody but the addressee receives the communicate of the addresser in a strand of silica glass. Only the artist can accurately classify fluff.

The shades of heather and ocean, the small houses on tall sticks of a “floating village” in the Mekong basin, the ware stored inside her father’s shed and the marks he makes while unaware that he is mark-making all together protracting the contours of consciousness. Look closely enough, look again, and every intercession – however incidental or slight – has been considered, and every consideration has left its ghost.

An exacting palette of matter and means, elastically employed.
A process of arbitration.

Madden’s pilgrimage always leads her here – to the no-man’s land between forms.

Sara Baume is a writer based in West Cork.

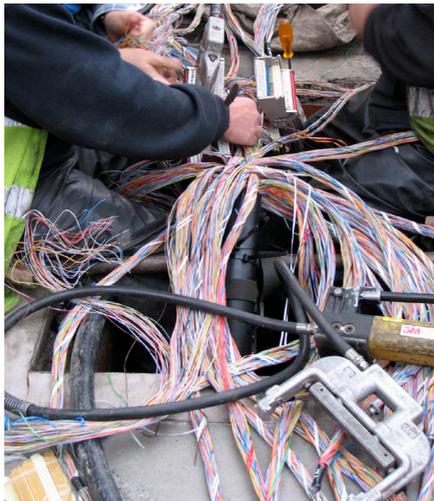
About the Artist

Maggie Madden (b.1976) is from Connemara, Co Galway and currently living and working in Dublin. She completed a Masters in Fine Art at NCAD in 2006 and B.A Fine Art Painting from Limerick School of Art and Design in 1998.

Solo exhibitions include *hardly audible*, mother's tankstation, 2016, *Field*, RUA RED Gallery 1, 2015, *Far andWide*, The Dock, Leitrim, 2014, *Site Line*, The LAB, Dublin 2012, *Fading Not Ending*, Roscommon Arts Centre, 2010.

She has participated in group shows including *Futures Anthology*, RHA, 2015, *Tulca*, Galway, 2015, *Persona*, Art Box Projects, Dublin, 2015, *Re-Framing the Domestic in Irish Art*, Highlanes Gallery, 2014, *Pallas Periodical Review*, Pallas Projects, 2013, *Futures*, RHA, 2013.

She has received grants, awards, residencies and recently completed a one year Project studio at Temple Bar Gallery + Studios.



Repair work, Dublin City Centre, 2005

Foreword

LCGA is delighted to present the first solo exhibition of Maggie Madden in Limerick. Madden's appeal for me lies in the exquisite beauty and delicate quality of her work which is equalled by the resilience and confidence of her work.

I first encountered Maggie Madden at Roscommon Arts Centre where she was preparing for an exhibition and subsequently saw her work again in The Dock Gallery and RHA, Dublin. When appointed Director of LCGA last year I approached Maggie with an invitation to have an exhibition here. I was thrilled when she agreed.

LCGA has always been committed to presenting work by new and emerging artists and I like to think that this exhibition will give visitors the opportunity to see the inspirational work of a young artist who has already garnered much critical acclaim and notice.

I would like to thank Sara Baume for her "other-worldly" essay which flows as effortlessly as Madden's work and extend my thanks to Patrick Murphy for his perceptive words and the positioning of Madden's work in a bold art-historical context. Both essays throw light on the work and I hope they will illuminate your enjoyment of Somewhere in the Middle

Úna McCarthy
DIRECTOR/CURATOR
LCGA

Maggie Madden Whispers....

“How beautiful it is and how easily it can be broken”

The Glass Menagerie, Tennessee Williams

With so much of contemporary art brash and branded it is a relief to come across an art that asks you to reach out. It requests, politely, one's attention. Maggie Madden's sculptures exist at the edge of perception; they could easily be missed in the clamber of a group exhibition. That is a rare enough quality these days, a modest proposal that suggests the primacy of the eye followed by a rigorous intellectual engagement. As Madeline Grynzstein says of Richard Tuttle's audience *he let's them trust in the visual durability of physically slight things.*¹

And indeed it is in the artistic strategies of the 1970s that one finds the antecedents for Madden's delicate constructions. At that time sculpture was wrestling away from form and volume to attempt to sculpt space itself. Eva Hesse experimented with materials, latex, cheesecloth, softer more malleable elements. Tuttle got even more casual introducing into the gallery space a quiet abjection. Fred Sandback opted for string to draw dimension into the air. And on the west coast, Bob Irwin and James Turrell worked with light itself to create illusionistic and optical spaces.

Aspects of this hard won license are still prevalent in three-dimensional work today but the subtlety and gentility of that earlier decade seems lost. Maggie Madden boldly takes on this mantle in her source of material and the delicacy of her interventions. Though typical of American minimalism at the time was its insistence on the inability of the object to carry meaning beyond its formal description, her post minimal works not only carry allusions but encourage them.

Upon encountering Shelter, 2014, one's initial response is that of protection, the work appearing vulnerable and delicate. And it is from this unusual custodial role that we depart into our engagement with the piece. Shelter is formed by two supports of slender willow rods protruding from the wall. Upon them is placed an open cube made by a light blue fine wire. The lines of the wooden rods, like the worked wire, are irregular, imprecise and organic. The wire is familiar, the fine grade we see in the multi-coloured world of telephonic cables. It is a basis of communication. The willow similarly resonates with its ability to conduct information albeit in the more ancient art of divining -each material capable of pulsing with an energy that transitions into meaning.

Madden likes to work with found materials - scouring the streets for the discarded or uncovering unseen potential in some ubiquitous item. Her discovery of discarded telephone cable and the palette of colours offered by its inner strands immediately proposed themselves as a way of creating coloured line in space. More recently she has utilized fibre-optic cable whose properties, equally as colourful, contain even more opportunity for imaginative associations. The colour casing of the cable protects a miniscule strand of silica glass through whose internal reflection information is transmitted at high speed. Unlike the malleable alloy of telephone cable fibre optic can be snapped, broken, its glass brittle. Yet we now depend on this vulnerable material for global digital communication .

In *The Weight of a Shadow*, 2016, a large open cube drawn in orange telephone wire sits on a cube of orange stained wood of equal portion. The definition of shadow seems to oscillate between them. The work flickers with associations between volume and line, history and information, patina and absence. Like a haiku, the seemingly contradictory image of line and solid unravels into a third possibility, full of potential.

In *Rolling Out (Kompong Khleang)*, 2013, again we are first struck by its rickety nature, an almost comic capability to collapse. The long slender willow rods support a complex open structure made from red and orange telephone wire. The jointing in these works is imperceptible achieved by the artist through using pinpoint of surgical glue. The *Kompong Khleang* of the title refers to the Cambodian village built on spindly stilts to cope with the seasonal high waters of the lake. If some of Madden's work is a reflection on our culture's dependency on electronic communication in these more elaborate pieces, also *High Rise (Tonlé Sap)*, 2013, she seems to be reflecting on notions of stability and adaptability. How indigenous architectures can eschew Western ideas of durability and create adaptable structures for their own environment.

This cultural commentary is emanating from objects that are almost self-effacing in the gallery space. Her recent installation *hardly audible*, 2016, utilises the banal plastic shopping bag as the core component. Collected over time and continents these indestructible containers are chosen for their translucent qualities. They are patchworked together using glue or parcel tape to create a

curtain wall and canopy to diffuse and tint light in a beautiful and seductive way. Emblematic, they can stand as allegories for our pollution of the environment- around us and above us. Flimsy yet durable they signify the very real threat that our consumerism is having on the planet.

So Maggie Madden's progeny are slight, delicate, formal and whispering and it is in this latter quality that they capture our attention and reverse their audibility to a scream of associations both poignant and relevant.

Patrick T Murphy
DUBLIN, 2016

1. Madeline Grynsztejn, *The Art of Richard Tuttle*, SFMoMA, 2005

Exhibition runs at Limerick City Gallery of Art
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Opening Hours
Mon/Tues/Wed/Fri: 10am - 5:30pm
Thursday: 10am - 8pm
Saturday: 10am - 5:30pm
Sunday: 12 - 5:30pm
Closed on Public & Bank Holidays
FREE ADMISSION

Image credit: *out of focus, blue plastic bag, brown telephone wire*, 2016, 48 x 63 x 5cm