

# Irish art on Berlin's blank canvas



**Derek Scally**

'Neither Here Nor There', an Irish art show in Berlin, turns nowhere into something

It is not for nothing that Berlin has been dubbed a graveyard for ambition. The German capital has a particularly impressive record of attracting those eager to make a living as artists, many of whom succumb to the many initiative-numbing charms and morph into *Lebenskünstler*, making an art out of living and devising projects that are for projecting, not realising.

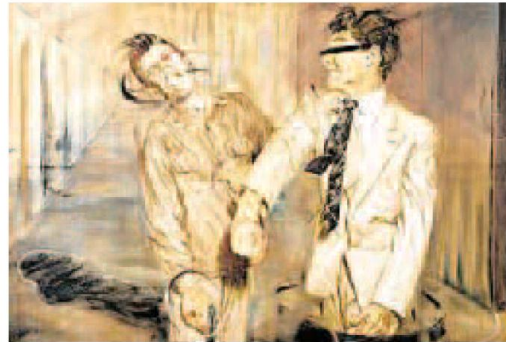
These days, the enthusiastic action of leaving to pursue artistic ambitions in Berlin can, at home in Ireland, prompt an

equal but opposite eye-rolling reaction. Look beyond the *Lebenskünstler* surfers of the current Berlin wave, however, and you will find many interesting artists who have developed an immunity to Berlin's all-you-can-eat procrastination buffet, and created their own structures for creating interesting work.

Ten artists with Irish passports but international ambitions are currently presenting a show of their work in Kreuzberg's Grimm Museum, *Neither here nor there*. Co-curated by Jane Hughes and Enda O'Donoghue, the title and concept is a clever nod both to the artists' adoptive home and the works created in what is indisputably a great urban limbo.

For O'Donoghue and Hughes, the idea of showcasing Irish artists' work in Berlin had been germinating since 2009, but has now come to fruition through Culture Ireland as part of Ireland's EU presidency cultural programme.

"We're very delicate about using the 'Irish art' title. It's purely there as a selective restriction, otherwise we looked for work that conceptually worked together," says O'Donoghue, a Limerick-born artist who has curated six shows since arriving in Berlin a decade ago. He joined forces with



■ *Fight Scene III - Study for Two Figures* by Eoin Llewellyn

Hughes, who divides her time between Berlin and Finland, and they spent months visiting more than 40 Berlin-based Irish artists in their workshops before beginning the process of whittling down the selection to 10 artists.

The works were selected as variations on a theme, questioning binary models that infuse so much of our everyday thought and life, from day/night, rich/poor or traditional/contemporary. Some of the show's subversive pleasures are oil works

by Eoin Llewellyn, which subvert unspoken audience expectations of raw Berlin art by delivering controlled, painting cock-tails: energetic fight scenes, pensive portraits and a bucolic scene of unfinished mountain lodges, unknowingly about to fuel a forest inferno.

Two large-format charcoal works by Jane Hughes from her *Urban Foxes* series combine close encounters with urban foxes and the expressions of friends testing the binary boundaries of pleasure and

pain. "It was a strange incident where I saw one grown man bite another and he was howling in pain yet weirdly enjoying it," she says. Enda O'Donoghue's perspex panels, *Quantization #1-#3*, apply a programmer's pitiless gaze to break down images using what he calls "manual algorithms" to produce a multicoloured take on digital painting-by-numbers.

In *The Liquid Modern I*, photographer Mark Curran casts a cold eye on Berlin's Potsdamer Platz, where the cold war ceded seamlessly into a corporate no man's land of anywhere architecture. The photographic series *Edificio Recife*, by Benjamin de Burca and Barbara Wagner, juxtaposes art works in Brazilian apartment blocks with their doormen's critiques – a subtle study in post-colonial servility.

David Hedderman's intense works straddle the painting-drawing divide in what he calls "the emergency of drawing from life", while Sophie Iremonger's three works are iridescent urban jungles where animals struggle between Darwin and David LaChapelle.

David O'Kane, who studied under German artist Neo Rauch in Leipzig, is represented with *Gaseous Exchange*, a ponderous grey diptych of three professors at a

blackboard. In his video installation *Stuck in the Avant Garde*, Maurice Doherty is weighed down by time in a mobile-phone video, recording his own three-hour captivity in a toilet at a exhibition opening. *Infinite Loop Surveillance* by LiFeLooP, also known as Séamus O'Donnell, uses reel-to-reel tape machines to replay the audience's own looped, distorted noise.

As well as the exhibition, the show will include readings and performances in the coming weeks. All in all, *Neither here nor there* is a lively overview of Berlin's effervescent artistic scene – one the curators warn that audiences and would-be artistic arrivals should explore with caution. "People come dreaming of the great escape in Berlin and they get just that – endless freedom," says Jane Hughes. "That swallows up a lot of people. If you don't have inner drive and structure it can be a battle to make things happen." Berlin is neither here nor there but, with an inner drive and outsider eye, these Irish artists succeeded in turning nowhere into something.

*Neither here nor there* is at the Grimmuseum, Fichtestr 2, 10967 Berlin, until May 5th and from December 5th at the Galway Arts Centre. [grimmuseum.com](http://grimmuseum.com)