DETOUCHED
DUBLIN

Detouched isn't really a word, but if *touch* involves making contact, then *detouched* proposes a reversal of that action. In the context of *Detouched*, which was guest curated by Anthony Huberman for the Project Arts Centre [January 24–March 30, 2013], this nonword carried a slightly different, or perhaps expanded, meaning. Rather than invoking the idea of de-experiencing tactile sensations, the artworks offered something more complex in that they promoted intimacy and forestalled it. Touch operated at a remove through the provision of simulation and filtered or indirect contact, and through the use of machines. These concepts were effectively introduced by the reproduction of a mechanical hand on the poster used to promote the exhibition. Isolated in a white field, this slightly macabre and attention-grabbing image functioned as an appropriate symbol.

In the text accompanying the exhibition Huberman stated that in today's world touch no longer requires being close to objects. He clarifies this shift, in part, by describing how he surveys the morning newspaper. The process has been reduced to turning pages and skimming. The paper is not held and read. He also referenced our use of the Internet to access a seemingly limitless amount of information. In this example, touch no longer necessitates proximity; instead it brings us close to things that happen to be very far away. A.K. Burns' colorful video series *Touch Parade* (2011) underscored these aspects. The artist's seemingly anonymous re-enactments of fetish videos, sourced from YouTube, provided close-ups of Burns' limbs pumping vehicular pedals, negotiating a muddy pond, crushing vegetables, struggling to burst a large balloon, and putting on multiple pairs of rubber gloves. Revealing the physical properties of a range of materials, these captivating demonstrations were at once investigative, humorous, and nonsensical, if not altogether strange. The artist's contact with the materials being manipulated almost always occurred through other materials and exhibited a degree of inquisitiveness, the intensity of which easily

induced apprehension in the viewer. Presented simultaneously on monitors that ring the entrance to the gallery, the videos were visible from the building's lobby and the street outside. This incongruous set of images caused people to stop and look. It also formed a permeable border or threshold through which visitors had to pass to take in the rest of the predominantly colorless presentation.

Negotiating that space provided visitors with a range of halting experiences. The hiss of compressed air emanated from the soundtrack of Dennis Oppenheim's *Air Pressure (Hand)* (1971), an intimate video that detailed the effect this invisible force has on the skin. Seth Price's eerie *Untitled (Masks)* (2006), consisted of four identical transparent vacuum-formed faces. Set one in front of the other, they projected out from the wall. At the same time the multiple layers of plastic took on a hazy cast, and facial features blurred or dissolved into one another. In *Untitled* (2007), Price juxtaposed ghostly outlines of hands with plastic-laminated veneers to negate any directness of touch, and its sense of honesty. Across the gallery's back wall, Sunah Choi's large-scale rubbings, *Abdrücke (Imprints)* (2011–2013), isolated aspects of the local urban environment through the documentation of floorboards, wire mesh screen, tires, and a manhole cover. Forgoing personal interpretation and narrative, Choi's hands were employed in a very utilitarian fashion to record the textures of materials used for travel or on which Dubliners tread. Their presentation not only caused me to take notice of such unexceptional features upon leaving the gallery, I felt it had altered my relationship to the city.

Space, place, and the body merged in Alice Channer's *Amphibians* (2012), an evocative floor-bound conglomeration of materials that referenced an array of production processes and surface treatments. Configured in an undulating arrangement simultaneously indicative of a serpent's movement and an assembly line, the work also alluded directly to the human form

by including aluminum casts of clothing. Moreover, peering down at the broad strips of polished stainless steel revealed the upper echelons of the gallery as well as the viewers' reflections.

In certain respects *Detouched* came off like a series of pseudoscientific demonstrations surveying the physical properties of materials, spatial relationships, and perception. It explored ways in which we comprehend the environment and interface with the evolving world of technology. Although the exhibition did not limit itself exclusively to an exploration of the hand as the principal instrument through which we experience touch, *Detouched* highlighted the hand's changing role. Huberman's proposition that the hand has now merged with the machine referenced a host of developments, examples of which range from keyhole surgery, wherein the surgeon relies on video images to perform intricate procedures from outside the human body, to the prevalence of text-messaging, which demands extensive use of the fingers' dexterity to contact individuals and corporate bodies across vast distances. This inherently contradictory idea made it difficult to know how to relate to the work in the gallery. At once dispassionate and objective, the selections also surprised and bewildered. Their complex and haunting presence not only unsettled me, but also begat ongoing speculation about this state of affairs.

—John Gayer