

Mark Joyce The Newtonians
Ciarán Murphy March

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(opposite)
Mark Joyce
The Newtonians 8, 2008
ink on Hahnemühle paper
25 x 19cm
courtesy Green on Red Gallery

What can be said of painting's importance in the pluralism of today's art world? In a place increasingly dominated by installation, digital and time-based media, its vigour has steadily diminished. This former mainstay now exists at the periphery. It makes up a smaller and smaller percentage of many group exhibitions and frequently incurs doubt about its relevance. Can it convey pertinent ideas and issues? Technologically, is it out of step with the times? And then along comes not one, but two exhibitions offering proof the game has not yet reached its final quarter, that push doubts about its relevance out of the mind.

Mark Joyce revisits the seventeenth century through a host of striking paintings accompanied by a piano composition created in collaboration with Geoffrey Perrin. Presented under the rubric *The Newtonians*, Joyce touches upon Newton's wave theory of light by means of an introductory group of works executed in ink on paper mounted in the hallway. He then steps up the chromatic intensity with three sets of monochromatic oils in the main gallery that recall the scientist's accordance of musical divisions to the colours of the spectrum. These paintings pulse across the walls. Scaled according to size and number, each panel can be read as a note and each set of panels as a chord; an impression enhanced by intermittent sequences of musical tones that sound out, and then dissipate. The piano's sombre tones balance the buoyant hues. Sound and colour parry off each other to sonorous effect that encourages us to contemplate parallels between music and art.

In contrast to Joyce's tempered exuberance, Ciarán Murphy provides caustic glimpses of nocturnal scavengers, road kill and environs distinguished by desolation and extreme temperatures in March. Possessing an intensity and specificity that lie outside day-to-day experience, his images knock the viewer out of his or her comfort zone. Depictions of searing heat and numbing cold, for example, attract and repel.

At once exotic and virulent, powerful and impersonal, their complexity throws the mind into turmoil.

The near-monochromatic character of several scenes speaks of the use of surveillance equipment, the characteristics of which the artist has successfully transferred to the paintings. They, therefore, embody the contradictions associated with the use of such technology: his dispassionate and frugal visual expressions bring the viewer close to the subject, yet also keep him or her at a distance, a characteristic that engenders a

seemingly irresolvable disquiet.

On the surface Joyce and Murphy's paintings appear to be virtual opposites of each other. One creates abstractions; the other's work is representational. Joyce's exhibition – theoretically and literally – involves sound, whereas silence envelopes Murphy's images. Their work meets through an involvement with optical properties and related issues.

The fact that Newton's colour-music idea failed as a general theory and that colour in light and colour in paint operate on entirely different principles does not undermine the impact of Joyce's presentation. People have and will continue to see relationships between art and music. Joyce's work, for example, recalls the aesthetic and technical importance of musical proportion in relation to architecture during the Middle Ages. The two areas also share a good deal of terminology. Moreover, his painted sequences also intimate movement. In this regard they echo the structuralist films of Paul Sharits.

Colour in Murphy's paintings describes other phenomena, contributes to the ethereal qualities of the images and tests the viewer's responsiveness. Assimilating the appearance of various forms of vision technology – night-vision goggles, for example, which pick up infra-red radiation – his paintings offer another contradiction, that is, images of light-deprived situations. What do they suggest to us? Are we looking at an arctic military facility, a cliff in Afghanistan and wildlife that has infiltrated urban areas? Are they indicative of a siege mentality? In one picture he deploys a lurid yellow, in another a brutal blue, colours intimating toxic radiation and the harshness of extreme weather events.



Mark Joyce
The Newtonians 2, 2008
ink on Hahnemühle paper
25 x 19cm
courtesy Green on Red Gallery

Seen together, these exhibitions underscore the complexity of vision. They make us aware of what we can or cannot see and the ways in which vision can be extended or modified. They remind us of light's physical properties, its ability to be refracted and reflected, transmitted and absorbed. They also point to the influence of temperature or of its analogs with sound. They address vision's dependence on a range of materials and conditions, what are essentially a diverse selection of filters: they include the atmosphere through which we move, various types of lenses, image-capture technologies and the dispersal of pigment particles in medium. The process of seeing comes so naturally to us that we easily forget how and why we see the things the way we do. Joyce and Murphy's work, in effect, reawakens us. It reacquaints us with perception's recent and not so recent past. It draws attention to the ephemerality of appearances as well as the factors that influence them. The consonances that exist between vision and other forms of energy are intensified. Most importantly, the exhibitions encourage us to think about how we see.

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based in Dublin.