

We are hurtling into the future,

*by Maeve Mulrennan, Head of Visual Arts, Galway Arts Centre,
for the catalogue accompanying We are hurtling into the future Solo Exhibition, Galway Arts Centre,
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Joanna Kidney's solo exhibition, *We are hurtling into the future*, comprises of a series of encaustic paintings; *Metamurmuration*, a monumental site specific installation and *Skimming Stones*, a collaborative video work with dance artist Liadain Herriott. The title suggests an uncontrollable fast movement towards the unknown. This lack or loss of control contrasts with the process of the artworks in it. The paintings are made with layers of encaustic paint (pigmented beeswax) which require method and order in its preparation and layering application. However, the speed at which the artist needs to work and the ability to scrape away, as well as to add, provides a pressure-release valve to the order.

Order and chaos, or the potential for chance, create a tension in Joanna's work that is played out over three distinct mediums and two galleries in Galway Arts Centre. The series of paintings that occupy Gallery 1 have auras of authority and presence. The back room houses paintings upon a grey wall, which add further gravity to the hang and create a warm ground upon which the encaustic pigments glow. On close inspection, each painting is another world where marks upon marks build and surge to create an image that almost vibrates on the wall. Joanna is able to embrace the sometimes limiting factors inherent in painting: the rectangle of the canvas or board, the medium of paint and its own limits and subvert them, so that these same limits underpin the energy and dynamism between the adding and scraping away of paint. The starting point for Joanna is often the paint itself. Although informed by research into particle physics and the dynamics between time and movement, each painting is a conversation between artist and medium. The process, rather than the concept, is the starting point. Repetitive actions of line are something that is seen throughout the exhibition. The often unconscious repetition of line is, for the painter, as much about muscle memory as it is for the dancer. As the dancer in *Skimming Stones* transitions through repetition, so does the artist with the paint. These are more than visual echoes in this body of work. The distillation of complex systems – in Joanna's context, the gap between space and time – is in this exhibition fragmented down to the point where each element, or particle, can be studied. When systems are then brought back together, one can see both the individual particle and the overall system simultaneously. This can be seen in *Metamurmuration* quite distinctly but also in the video and paintings. Scientific exploration through the visual is an essential method of research, and is something that can be illustrated by looking at the invention of the chronophotograph.

Etienne-Jules Marey (1830 – 1904, France) was a scientist, physiologist and chronophotographer. He observed and analysed the rules that governed bodies in motion through the complex actions such as the flapping of a bird's wings by breaking down these actions into precise, frame-by-frame data through the process of chronophotography, or 'photographs of time'. His 'chronophotographic gun' could shoot 12 consecutive images a second in one frame. As well as animals he also studies more abstract forms such as smoke trails. Marey's connection of science and nature, and the micro to the macro inform how we

understand things today: particles are building blocks to something bigger. This something bigger can be understood by the fragmentation and simultaneous observation of all particles at once, much like Marey used photography to understand the process of movement. Joanna's *Metamurmuration* is this same fragmentation at play: a static image of something that is usually defined by its movement; a representation of something that is usually invisible. The deconstruction seen in *Metamurmuration* is not just to divide and isolate; it allows for the discovery of pattern. Pattern is not solely repetition, but allows for change and development; something that is integral in nature in order for survival. Beginning at the front door and overshadowed by the distractions of the building's entranceway, the murmuration of particles changes and develops as it moves upstairs and in through the gallery space. Throughout the changes of relative density and composition, the pattern of the particles is still visible and its presence instructs the particles not only in how to be but what they could *become*.

Skimming Stones is the artist's first foray into video. The process of working collaboratively with an artist from a different art form allowed the artist to further extend the lines and boundaries of drawing and into a time based medium. Just as the stillness of *Metamurmuration* allows the audience to contemplate movement, the movement and sound of *Skimming Stones* allows for contemplation of emptiness and silence. Negative space between sculptural form and dancer becomes space for the audience. This world does not spin as fast as ours does; it moves at the same speed as we do and when we are still, so is it. The addition of the figure into Joanna's usually abstract work also gives the audience permission to see themselves within this slowing down of time, just as their movement through *Metamurmuration* does. The installation awakens the audience's kinaesthesia, encouraging the exploration of time and space. *Skimming Stones* hints at an 'other' space, where the de-composition of drawing through movement encapsulates the essence of drawing and mark-making rather than seeking to impersonate it. Transition occurs through repetition of gesture. Pattern is created in such a way that it is ever-expanding. The hidden order of things: of complex physics of time and space, is revealed, layer by layer through similar compositional methods used in dance: repetition, accumulation and inversion.

This ambitious exhibition marks a point in Joanna's practice where anything is possible. She has successfully worked in different mediums to explore a complex idea, reaching a point where there is potential for further development rather than a finishing point. Her work across three mediums do not imitate each other, they bring the work to a new place. The intertwining of the scientific and the visual, plus the artist's trust in process mean that anything is possible.

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