

80 The Important thing
is that tomorrow
is not the same as
yesterday

A photograph of a blue ball on a yellow string and a large orange funnel on a grey surface. The blue ball is on the left, and the orange funnel is in the foreground, partially obscuring the text. In the background, there is a small yellow table and a white object on a stand.

David Beattie
Das Lichtquant (Light quantum)
(detail), 2007
lightbulb, solar panel,
portable radio, speaker,
copper piping, funnel
courtesy Pallas Contemporary
Projects

Beattie's *Das Lichtquant* (2007) sets a tone for the three works comprising the show as a sort of small, spacious, lo-fi science-fiction laboratory, a testing ground exploring presence and experience working towards the modest proposition of time travel.

The rhetorical mouthful of *The Important thing is that tomorrow is not the same as yesterday* takes its curatorial impulse from the writings of American architectural critic and self-styled urban planner Lewis Mumford. Mumford's writings from the '20s to the '60s dealt largely with the social impacts of urbanisation, calling for a more humanistic use of our growing technological resources and criticising the emphasis on production and profit under the guise of progress. Curator Gavin Murphy cites a section of Mumford's *Technics and civilization* (1934), in which he traces the development of the clock from the Middle Ages to being the defining invention of the Industrial Revolution, in turn contributing toward the anxiety of being 'out of date' and the arbitrary updating of products. Murphy is quick to cast this as a take on the word 'contemporary', claiming the work by David Beattie, Gillian Kane, and Paul McAree gathered in the exhibition as an "antidote to a *contemporary* that is a ceaseless *becoming*, and which is increasingly becoming the vital realm of contemporary art practice." It seems, then, that we are not simply presented with the 'poison' of the contemporary as an ongoing, relative present moment, but also as the label that has come to be inherited as an art-historical adjective following 'modern' and 'postmodern'.

The works themselves, however, both understate and exceed these constructs with a fragile immediacy that doesn't hold any apprehensions of appearing dated. They instead show an awareness of their own material placement in time, using that to perform different forms of inti-

mate re-encounters. The fraction between the light and sound in Beattie's *Lichtquant*, for example, becomes more pronounced as you follow the trail from the light bulb, as it shines onto a solar panel beneath. A set of wires lead beneath a red stand cupping a hard, bright-blue plastic sphere, the copper pipe starting from its apex. Once close enough, the simulated breathing sound is recognisable as a short burst of static, a portable radio briefly sounding with the power provided by each pulse of the naked bulb. The work derives its title from Einstein's original term for what we now know as photons, and whose development of the concept led to most modern electronics.

Lichtquant provides a simple exposition of this, but its cartoon-like contraption that mediates between the linked elements is self-evident – it calls more attention to our own sensory experience. Its ongoing, offset rhythm attests to the presence of technology in our lives, while emphasizing the primacy of perception by dislocating the activation of the bulb into two experiential events.

Gillian Kane's mural *March 23, 2007* (2007) stretches along the wall, depicting a scene from Dublin's Dodder river. A photo-based image in its awkward detail, the piece is done in life size with quick pencil strokes, positing the gallery floor as the waterside walkway. A duck dips its head serenely into the water, though within this fake pastoral scene the surrounding banks are covered with an undifferentiated tangle of foliage and rubbish, where bottles, boxes and wires weave and confuse with grass and ferns. The title assumedly marks the date the original photo was taken, setting out a growing distance between its inception and every encounter with the fading work. A temporary monument to this seemingly innocuous setting, its elegiac re-enactment of the photo resounds with the viewer's corresponding stroll.

The room is breathing. A light blinks on, illuminating the entire space, followed shortly after by the sound of exhaling air being emitted from a red funnel at the end of a trail of copper piping. The light extinguishes, the sound ceases. The process repeats, an alluring audiovisual rhythm being created by what looks like a home-made science experiment. The phenomenon of David

The far end of the gallery hall is cut off by a plywood barrier. Squeezing by, it boundaries off a small room, its facing side covered with a collage of over twenty photos, creating an intimate sort of planning space somewhere between a photographer's studio and a war room. This is, as Paul McAree asserts, *My wall* (2007). In one image, a decrepit boat sits landlocked on a marsh, other sailboats coasting by on the open water in the far distance. Typed in white in the centre of the image is the sentence, "Fuck the pain away." The images, largely of the Irish countryside, each contain a superimposed phrase derived from songs by bands such as Sonic Youth, the Jesus and Mark Chain, Sisters of Mercy, and Peaches. McAree uses a formal juxtaposition of image and text to create a set of mini-narratives that are humorous, evocative, and temporally unstable.

Each suggests a moment in which the relationship between the song and the picture beneath could be of concurrent experience, memory, or a forceful association of two unrelated times, wavering between shallowly emblematic and deeply personal.

The artists in *The Important thing is...* do more than simply represent the 'today' implied by the title of the exhibition. Their take on the 'contemporary' is personal rather than social, creating simulated displacements of our own experience of the present, unfettered by trend. The works also share an undertone of ecological concerns, touching on energy supply, pollution, and the unchecked expansion Mumford attempted to address over fifty years ago, tracing a tomorrow that most certainly will not be the same.

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[below]
The Important thing is that tomorrow is not the same as yesterday, 2007
 installation shot
 courtesy Pallas Contemporary Projects