

# ISABEL NOLAN: THIS TIME I PROMISE TO BE MORE CAREFUL

KERLIN GALLERY, DUBLIN  
17 FEBRUARY - 17 MARCH



There is more than a hint of the adolescent bedroom to Isabel Nolan's work, but for the Irish artist the bedroom is a space that opens up directly onto the universe, negating the need for jet propulsion and spacesuits, or the manly evils of the military-industrial complex, in her exploration of the hallucinatory enormous and angrily complex.

In *Everything I said let me explain*, Nolan's 2005 show at Dublin's Project Arts Centre, the business of sleep, and the half-conscious imagination, was foregrounded; here we are awake, mostly, but sharp focus is every bit as elusive, as fugitive as a dream when its details begin to slip from the waking mind.

Nolan's is an art of resistance, despite its relatively cute, folksy surfaces. It is one that attempts to close its eyes to the daily tide of image in the hope, perhaps, of discovering if there is a self to be found – or even built – somewhere outside all that static. And so collages with cotton, linen and silk – such as *Is this the end of our expectations?* (2006) or *The day of the weakening* (2007) – take centrestage: incongruous astral structures neatly embroidered, or hacked away; shockwaves and prismatic forms patchworked in rough stripes, prog-rock sci-fi filtered through pious needlework.

Alongside the dominant fabric pieces sit some smooth sculptural works with overtones of stargates (*Portal site*, 2007) and planetary systems (*Is it cold out there?* 2007), op art watercolours with more planetary hints, and Frank Stella-like constructions – though Nolan is, of course, the kid who refused the authority of the protractor, preferring softer, freer, watercolour rainbows.

The exhibition's sole video piece, an animation of various watercolours by the artist, intercut with transcripts from what seems to be an IM chat session, apparently concerning a faltering, Luddite experiment, seems to make the resistance explicit, to give a figure to the struggle: 'This evening is the first time I've been on the computer in 79 days. In the early stages of purging the house of all text, I painted over the characters on the keyboard...'

Irony seems out of place here, and instead an almost utopian zeal drives the project, as the disembodied, absent typist explains his or her project. Rather like Liam Gillick's recent projects, it seems as though the exhibition must first conjure up the figure of the artist, the manufacturer of all we see, and only then deliver the works themselves.

The figure Nolan conjures up in this manner is busy using him/herself as a kind of philosophical test bed, performing auto-invasive experiments as surely as Chris Burden does with a gun or a live wire. Here in Nolan's work, however, there is little chance of blood being spilled, since the artist, the owner of the writhing fingers at the computer keyboard, is fictional, a textual experiment itself.

Luke Clancy

*Is it cold out there?*, 2007,  
polyethylene, fibreglass, paint,  
18 x 36 x 38 cm. Courtesy Kerlin  
Gallery, Dublin