

Sinéad Ní Mhaonaigh
“Structure”
4 May – 4 June 2022

Chelsea, New York: 532 Gallery Thomas Jaeckel presents “Structure,” Sinéad Ní Mhaonaigh’s first solo exhibition in the United States, featuring new paintings by the Dublin-based artist.

Writing in 1957, the critic Meyer Schapiro identified “two universal requirements” for abstract art. The first was

that every work of art has an individual order or coherence, a quality of unity and necessity in its structure regardless of the kind of forms used; and, second, that the forms and colors chosen have a decided expressive physiognomy, that they speak to us as a feeling-charged whole, through the intrinsic power of colors and lines.

Schapiro’s dicta make for an illuminating entry point into the work of Irish-born abstract painter Sinéad Ní Mhaonaigh, whose suite of seventeen new paintings are currently on exhibit in *Structure* (through 4 June 2022). These paintings display the unity and necessity that Schapiro described in abundance, and their forms and colors have a robust gestural energy that is expressive indeed.

“Structure” is the latest in a string of solo exhibitions Ní Mhaonaigh has presented over the past two decades, whose titles comprise singular words, derived from the Irish language, that describe the lived environment. These include *Struchtúr*, *Cnuasach*, *Imlíne*, *Eatramh*, *Imeall*, and *Ardán*—which translate into English as Structure, Cluster, Contour, Interval, Margin, and Platform. In the words of the critic Joanne Laws, Ní Mhaonaigh “gathers a vocabulary akin to visual poetry, which draws inspiration from the immeasurable beauty and profound strangeness of the Irish language.”

This litany of nouns serves to emphasize Ní Mhaonaigh’s primary aesthetic concern, which is the organization and ordering of objects in space. In this sense, her paintings are more akin to architecture than they are to straightforward abstraction. Many of them feature a central object — a square or latticed block — which lends a formal unity to the surrounding field. The blocky, unipolar structures

of *Stack* (2020), *Landscape* (2020), and *Midday* (2020), combined with their fluid and sculptural facture, is pleasingly reminiscent of the mid-1960s work of Philip Guston, another painter with a robust relation to space, landscape, and buildings. As the critic Tom McGlynn wrote in the *Brooklyn Rail*, Ní Mhaonaigh's "paintings reference vernacular architecture in profile ... Her work is quite sculptural in its feel," and the paintings' "virtual physicality is how they are in-formed."

Structure (2020) epitomizes the architectural essence of Ní Mhaonaigh's work. A house-like shape is displayed as a sequence of planes or facets, with the flatness of the surface suggesting a three-dimensional object represented in two dimensions, as in a drawing. The three *Vessel* paintings, likewise, enact the concept of contained space with a ghostly cylinder sketched suggestively and loosely over a thickly impastoed ground.

In this respect, Ní Mhaonaigh's paintings execute a meta-commentary on the idea of drawing, of built objects, and of space; the paintings are "about" drawing — their flatness performs the flatness they document in the architectural depiction of a blueprint or plan. The painting is the key to the (imaginary) drawing, just as the drawing is a key to the (imaginary) building or container.

Ní Mhaonaigh has spoken of the need to "learn not to interrupt or interfere with the surface of the painting," and it is this sense of a surface as an almost mystical, self-generating field with its own agency and teleology that gives her paintings their mysterious power. The results do indeed, as Schapiro put it, "speak to us as a feeling-charged whole."

Sinéad Ní Mhaonaigh (b. 1977) graduated with a BA in Fine Art Painting from Dublin Institute of Technology in 2001. In 2010 Ní Mhaonaigh was recipient of the Hennessy Craig Scholarship and was awarded The HOTRON Award 2019 by VISUAL Carlow for outstanding work. She was shortlisted for the Marmite Prize for Painting in 2016, and the John Moores Painting Prize in 2018. Ní Mhaonaigh's paintings are held in many important public collections, including the Centre Culturel Irlandais (Paris), Ernesto Ventós (Barcelona), Luciano Benetton Collection (Treviso), O'Brien Art Collection (Chicago) and The Arts Council of Ireland (Dublin), as well as private collections in Ireland, across Europe, and in the United States.

For further information or to schedule an interview with the artist, please contact 532 Gallery Thomas Jaeckel by e-mail at info@532gallery.com

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