

Almost Tribal.

There is something deadly in the work of Sibyl Montague. It's a quiet sensation of threat dabbling between precarity, vulnerability and material seduction. Montague's work tends to look, at first glance, benign enough. Look a second more and it grows wildly beautiful – in a wabi sabi way – or mesmerisingly slick. It is within these subtleties, running just under the work's wiry grip, wherein lies lethal potential.

The exhibition *Beyond Violet* at Wexford Arts Centre is set across two floors. The floors are worth mentioning. Downstairs the floor is polished and oily-black, its bitumen surface having been known to sink and morph under the weight of particularly heavy artworks in the past. It makes a perfect stage for Sibyl's uneasy assemblages.

Enter the viewer.

Here lie a luminous series of something approximating car mats, inverted and pale, with edges and patches blushing in soft fluoro hues. Clustered in heaps, these impossible plaster mats are parked in rows, all facing the same way like a body of praying pilgrims. All are frayed or frazzled to some extent, all absolutely unfit for purpose, but all doing their best to continue being what they are. These mats, in their traffic jam stasis, greet you like a crowd of spectators when you walk through the gallery doors. What is notable is their calm, collected individuality. Some are bent or cracked or folded, others are stacked or touching or fully detached. Apprehended as singular entities, it seems as though they have come together just for the show, for a limited time, like a swathe of yoga students or a team of sports fans, in this strange and anonymous assembly: a community of interest – stationary, expectant.



Direction (2016) Installation view, Wexford Arts Centre.

The floor is where everything begins. From there, from around this mass of misplaced onlookers, you follow the hum of the room to the walls. In the corner, a snow screen in negative, with black flakes fluttering on uncertain shadows, seems to flow listlessly like a view from a falling car. On the floor – bottled water, water in bottles, and bottles of water. All around they pepper the room. The two-litre kind, mass-produced in clear toxic plastic. Quite beautiful in form, when stripped of their branded packaging. These are the kind of water bottles you take with you on a long car journey. The kind that, a while back, were reported to carry increased risks of cancer (due to chemical contamination from the plastic) should they be left sweltering for too long in a hot backseat. Something about one of these vessels on the loose, rolling about the floor of the car until it sneaks up under the brake pedal jamming your chances of stopping and impeding your ability to drive, scares me.

The bottles reappear in the form of a group of sculptural towers, this time filled with black liquid. The sculptures are fat-bottomed and mono-pedal, with a smooth plaster cast supporting the transition from oil-black Coca-Cola base to perforated bamboo steeple. They are confusing to look at. They register, visually, somewhere between a toilet brush and a totem pole. The bases remind me of



Legendary Mimikry (2016) Coca cola, Sparkling water, Black Indonesian Bamboo, Plaster, Fleece.

diesel siphoned or a petrol bomb waiting to be thrown. Their darkness let's them disappear into the floor, leaving their stalk tops hover like a forest of newly scorched trees. Nearby, three isolated lens discs, removed from sunglasses, dangle as pendants on a coarse string.

One more element reigns down at intervals on this glorious floor. UV light.

Two vertical, wall-mounted light bulbs are flanked by lengths of bamboo. Each hollow shaft of black Indonesian bamboo is bored with circular holes. The wall sculptures are tight, upright, and timed. The UV light blinks on and off like a slow-motion strobe, setting the rhythm to which the meditating car mats, rolling water bottles, and bamboo stilts perform.

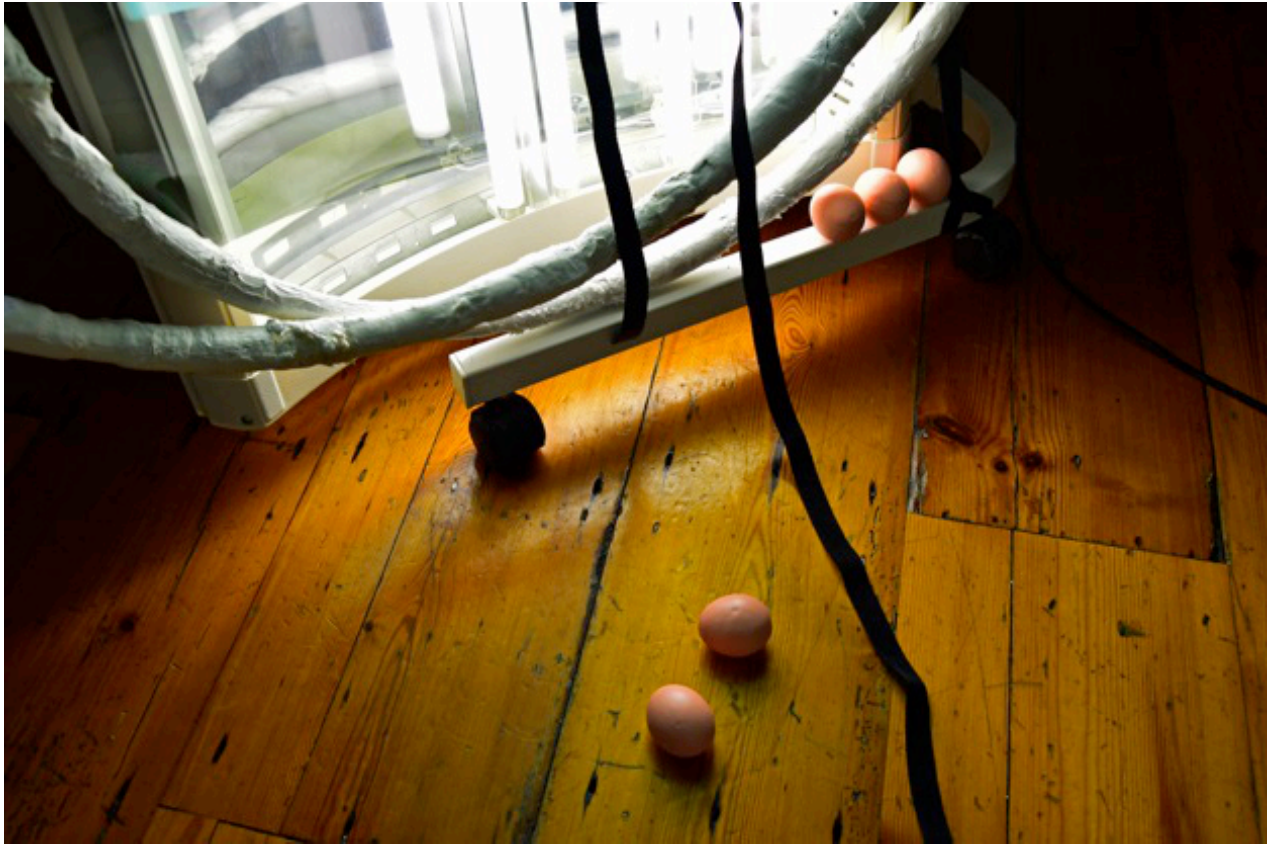
Moving to the gallery upstairs, a whole other atmosphere awaits. Here the vivid soundtrack of American culture is intoxicating. We're at a ball game, on the sidelines, the sound of the marching music thick in our ears.



Violet (detail) 2016 UV Lamp, Black Indonesian bamboo, wood, timer.

Brass instruments, the rattle of drums, whistles, a stampede of cheerleaders. The main event is a large vertical object. Not dissimilar to the monolith from 2001. On closer inspection, you see that it's the lid of a disemboweled tanning bed, removed from its original context, and standing in the throw of a projected image. The projection shows a revolving basketball, endlessly morphing out of shape on the contours of the sunbed's surface. On the other side of the lid, a group of plaster-clad hula-hoops are strapped to the structure like necessary appendages. These hula-hoops, great hulking circles of rough hewn white plaster, are the dummy lungs of this Frankenstein. Behind them, the redundant strip-lights flicker and dance. And towards the floor, eggs. Delicate and pink, they balance and roll out across the floorboards, precarious.

Opposite this nest of materials-made-strange, the eye is drawn to a structure mounted high on the wall. Here two of the circular hula-hoop sculptures are strapped together, self-supported by their own tension and weight. With their surfaces echoing crumbling bone or ivory tusks, they become a kind of warrior trophy – not quite a basketball hoop – presiding over the frenzied hullabaloo below.



Beyond Violet (detail) 2016. Philips Solarium Sun bed, Projection with Sound. Fluorescent bulbs, Gels, PVC piping, Plaster, Jesmonite, Polyester straps

Sibyl Montague's 'Beyond Violet' compels the viewer to attempt to form understandings through visual associations, shifts in surface, and object choreography. Yet there are contradictions throughout that stutter any instant reading. Minimalism is highly textured. Insistent monotone is broken here and there with golds and pinks. Gatherings are infused with a sense of hollow isolation. This culminates in the work's ability to be simultaneously performative and vulnerable. And makes it all a little intoxicating. You watch the interplay between works, the artist's material sophistication, and the thrill of something deadly in her use of cultural/commercial codes.

'Beyond Violet' firmly sets out Sibyl Montague as an artist to return to. This is work that is dark, and dangerously addictive.

RGKSKSRG in response to Sibyl Montague, *Beyond Violet*, Wexford Arts Centre, 2016



Beyond Violet (2016) Installation view, Wexford Arts Centre.



Beyond Violet (2016) Installation view, Wexford Arts Centre.