

Ciara Roche is a painter based in rural County Wexford. Current exhibitions include *of late...*, Mothers Tankstation Gallery, Dublin (2021), *HOME*, The Glucksman, Cork (2021) and *MEET*, Periphery Space, Gorey, Co. Wexford (2021). Recent exhibitions include a solo in the Lab Gallery, Dublin and shows in VISUAL Carlow, Lismore Castle Arts, Sirius Arts Centre and the Royal Irish Academy. In 2020, Ciara won the Éigse Graduate prize with Carlow Arts Festival, and she has been recipient of an Arts Council Bursary, and Creative Ireland and Artlinks Awards. As part of a collective of three artists, she was awarded a Wexford County Council Per Cent Per Art Commission which resulted in a community-based postcard project in Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford in 2019.

Emma Roche is a painter living and working in Wexford. She is a recipient of the Visual Arts, Arts Council Bursary Award, 2020, Creative Ireland Bursary Award, 2020 and was shortlisted for PLATFORM 31 Bursary, 2021. Upcoming and recent exhibitions include *SPIDERS AND CHEERLEADERS*, Ground Floor Gallery, The Complex, Dublin, (2021); and *Forward Slash*, LAB Gallery, Dublin (2018). Selected group shows include VISUAL Carlow (2020 and 2019); Turps Gallery, London (2018); and *Green On Red* Gallery, Dublin (2018).

Maeve Connolly co-directs the ARC MA programme at IADT. She is the author of *TV Museum: Contemporary Art and the Age of Television* (Intellect, 2014) and *The Place of Artists' Cinema: Space, Site and Screen* (Intellect, 2009). Her recent publications include contributions to *Expanding Cinema: Theorizing Film Through Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam University Press, 2020), *Everything Is Somewhere Else* (Paper Visual Art, 2020) and *Artists' Moving Image in Britain since 1989* (Paul Mellon Centre and Yale University Press, 2019). Her writing on art and media practice also appears in magazines and journals such as *ArtMonthly* and *Frieze*.

Wexford Arts Centre is pleased to present an exhibition of new paintings by Ciara Roche and Emma Roche titled *Ochre*. The exhibition will run in the lower and upper galleries from Monday 14 June to Saturday 7 August 2021.

Pigments & Proper Names

by Maeve Connolly

Co-director of the Arc MA programme at IADT

I remember when I first heard the word *ochre*. Used by my art teacher to describe a specific shade of yellow, ochre was the gateway to a completely new world of knowledge. All of the familiar colour words I had absorbed since childhood were suddenly revealed as nothing more than general categories. My new collection of colour words, including Burnt Sienna, Cobalt Blue and Yellow Ochre, seemed much closer to proper names, attached to specific places or chemical components, such as the earth-derived matter that links many types of ochre. Yet even these names are insufficiently precise when indexing art materials, and each colour must also be coded with a combination of letters and numbers. Coding systems, which promise consistency and compatibility, are also widely used in design, fashion and media industries. Some are even proprietary, with specific brands authorised to regulate the use of colour.

In reconfiguring their shared surname as the title of their exhibition *Ochre*, Ciara Roche and Emma Roche signal a shared attachment to the matter of colour. But their work also engages with systems of classification and valuation that operate well beyond the domain of art. Many of Ciara Roche's paintings, for example, highlight the commercial and symbolic force exerted by proper names in retail. Names transformed into brands, either fairly recently ('Charlotte Tilbury') or many generations ago ('Chanel') figure prominently in many of her paintings of department store interiors. These brand names function as signposts, directing movements of the eye and body within environments that are deliberately disorienting. Some of Ciara Roche's paintings are even titled with minutely altered versions of designer's proper names, such as *TOMFORD* and *YVESSAINTLAURENT*. In these particular works, language functions as something to be manipulated like paint, rendering the familiar strange, heightening the oddness already integral to these painted worlds.

Emma Roche's work is equally attuned to the power of the written word, and the potential of language as a material. Her paintings are often titled to evoke either the informality and intimacy of speech (*Explain it to me slowly?, But you would have known?*)

or the studied neutrality of bureaucratic communications (*Applicant 1, Applicant 2, Meeting, Unqualified*). These titles contextualise depictions of actions and situations that are often visually ambiguous yet charged with emotion. Many of Emma Roche's compositions incorporate purposefully simple forms, sometimes evoking children's drawings, but also suggesting a high degree of control over her materials. She arranges thin strands and chunky curls of paint, meticulously assembling woven sections that sometimes bear deliberate finger smears.

Critic and historian Isabelle Graw has argued that painting, to a greater degree than other art forms, is valued because it appears to 'store' the labour and the 'lifetime' of the painter.¹ Writing in 2016, Graw notes a renewed focus on painting in the contemporary art market and she connects this with an increased commodification of life events in the social media economy (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook etc). Like many artists, Emma Roche and Ciara Roche have shared fragments of their own working processes, including glimpses of their private studio spaces, through social media. Both have developed complex material practices, involving many different forms of research and testing. Ciara Roche, for example, often returns again and again to specific locations, making drawings and taking photographs to be manipulated as references for compositions. Emma Roche maps her knitted paintings on paper, creating detailed grid patterns that partly guide her manipulation of paint.

All of the finished works exhibited in *Ochre* have been preceded by years of experimentation and exploration – they are the physical outcomes of time spent in research and reflection as well as production. Crucially, as Graw points out, paintings are valued

¹ Isabelle Graw, 'The Value of Liveliness: Painting as an Index of Agency in the New Economy' in *Painting beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-medium Condition*, edited by Isabelle Graw and Ewa Lajer-Bucharth, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016, p. 82.

A two-person exhibition by Ciara Roche & Emma Roche

Ochre

14 June – 7 August 2021

not simply as evidence of physical labour, but rather as material manifestations of knowledge – the knowledge of a ‘whole life’.² So the time stored in a painting occupies a kind of exalted status, associated with purpose, focus, and dedication toward a specific goal. In this sense, it differs from more mundane everyday experiences of time. Yet, in different ways, both Ciara Roche and Emma Roche actually engage quite directly with forms of time that are commonly dismissed or disregarded.

Urban shopping arcades, department stores, suburban malls and even the internet have all been characterised as spaces where time is spent in a state of distraction. Forming part of a larger exploration of domestic and leisure architecture, Ciara Roche’s paintings of retail interiors give a permanent form to reflected light, an important characteristic of such environments, recognising the aesthetic force and complexity of what are often temporary arrangements of objects. Many of Emma Roche’s works refer either implicitly or explicitly to parenting, a form of labour that is both time-consuming and generally unpaid, even when it is idealised. The ordinary impossibility of finding or making time as a parent, especially an artist who is also a parent³, is suggested by the title of *WHATCHA DOING (Toilet Painting 1)*. But Emma Roche’s use of weaving also recalls the history of textile piecework, labour that was typically performed by women in their own homes, serving the needs of the textile manufacturing industry.

For many people, the experience of lockdown in early 2020 was characterised by a sudden and unprecedented demand to surrender their own domestic spaces, by making them visible on screen, sometimes in the guise of an office, gym or classroom. Far from being new, however, this reconfiguration of the home

for the camera is merely the intensification of an already established dynamic, whereby both the lived experience of physical spaces and their material characteristics are determined by images. Here I am referring not just to the power of image-based advertising but also to physical simulations of domesticity designed for furniture shops and real estate showrooms. Even when such simulations can only be consumed as images, via the laptop or phone screen, they continue to fuel desire, as evidenced by the continued inflation of the housing market.

Ochre sometimes features among the colours included in a selection of fabric swatches, or paint samples, found in a furniture showroom or DIY store. But even though it may move in and out of fashion, *Ochre* remains bound to a deeper sense of time, rooted in the ancient chemistry of earth. As such, *Ochre* is a fitting title for an exhibition that explores time from multiple vantage points, at a very particular moment. These works came into being during a period of enforced withdrawal from the social world, when the routine of everyday life was dramatically interrupted, and is still being reinvented. Transported from private and separate studios into the gallery, these paintings now occupy the same physical space, as materialisations of time that were made to be shared.

² Graw, 100.

³ See The Mothership Project 2020 report on the childcare needs and responsibilities of Irish-based artists, addressing the impact of COVID
<https://themothershipproject.wordpress.com/2021/01/31/our-mothership-project-covid-survey/>

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