

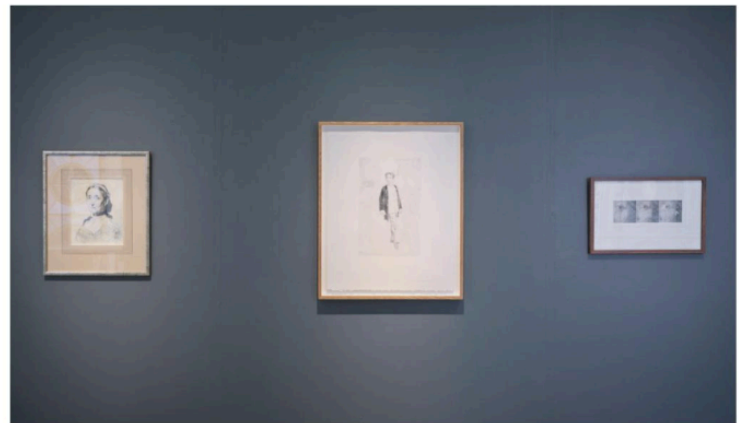
Brian Fay 'The Most Recent Forever'
 Limerick City Gallery of Art
 1 December 2022 – 12 February 2023



Brian Fay, Vermeer *The Geographer Crack drawing*, 2012, pencil on paper, installation view, Limerick City Gallery of Art; photograph by Ros Kavanagh, courtesy the artist and LCGA.



Brian Fay, *MJ 16*, 2020, pencil on paper (on loan from the Collection of The Arts Council of Ireland) installation view, Limerick City Gallery of Art; photograph by Ros Kavanagh, courtesy the artist, Highlanes Gallery, and LCGA.



Brian Fay, *Three Stages of restoration Vermeer in non-chronological order*, 2011, pencil on paper, installation view, Highlanes Gallery; photograph by Ros Kavanagh, courtesy the artist and Highlanes Gallery.

DRAWING IS THE opening of form, in the sense of a beginning or a departure.¹ Jean-Luc Nancy has put this concept forward not as a means to an end, but as a process with many junctures. The ideas underpinning award-winning artist Brian Fay's survey exhibition, 'The Most Recent Forever', generously give viewers a gateway into multiple temporalities, primarily through the medium and action of drawing.

This touring exhibition is supported by the Arts Council of Ireland Touring Award. The three-part series commenced in the Highlanes Gallery (8 October – 12 November 2022) and is due to finish at Uillinn: West Cork Arts Centre (18 February to 25 March). Works from the Limerick City Gallery of Art permanent collection by John Cage, Willem de Kooning, Andrew O'Connor, Ann Brennan, Janet Mullarney and Mainie Jellett are also showcased within the second iteration of the exhibition.

Fay interprets existing collections and responds to contexts derived from specific venues, which in turn result in situated responses. The artist offers the viewer multiple processual and research-led returns which draw special attention to time, materiality, and the problematisation of restoration. This is achieved through the adroit referencing of existing artefacts and objects. The body of works are spread across four of LCGA's gallery spaces and reflect Fay's invested engagement with sites and context. This is also evident in his recent residency at the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation in Connecticut, and his involvement with the Vermeer collection for the National Gallery of Ireland project, 'After Vermeer', in 2017.

His investigations are not premised on the initial intentions or undertakings of the creator but from the

"...process of removal and addition that the restorer enacted on the surface of the original painting."² This effort is clearly articulated by Fay in *Three Stages of Restoration Vermeer in Non-Chronological Order* (2011), a series of three graphite renderings of a section of Vermeer's *The Girl with a Pearl Earring* – one of many highlights within the exhibition. Drawings based on existing and erased works by Rembrandt, Courbet, and Van Eyck validate Fay's practice as one which does not recoil from self-insertion within the fiction of our chronological art histories and historiographies. Fay's concern is critical readings of conservation and restoration practices and the unpacking of multiple levels of intention and authenticity, especially in relation to temporal representations.

Restoration is described as 'a compensation for losses' by the Art Conservators Alliance.³ Fay's work acknowledges such losses through the use of graphite, line, and hand-rendered representations of craquelure. This technique is most notable in *Vermeer The Geographer Crack drawing* (2012) and in his pencil drawings of nitrate film damage in *Beyond the Rocks 1922* (2010). Fay's cartographic-like compositions of damaged surfaces can be understood as further incisions on already damaged works; as representations of compromises and conflicts between time and materiality.

This engagement is most apparent in the works shown within LCGA's South Gallery. The inclusion of *Abstract Composition* (n.d.) by Irish modernist artist Mainie Jellett along with five of Fay's works provides a platform for a visual and linguistic dialogue between Fay's graphite portrait of Jellett, *MJ 16* (2020), and abstract renderings which Fay derived from deterioration, perceived as flaws caused over time. Fay's position

shifts slightly in these more recent works, where the cubist tool of translation and rotation (used by Jellett) is present. Through abstraction, distortion, rupture, fragmentation, and disjunction, imperfections are not only apparent in the materiality of the work but are also perceptible in the history of Jellett's short life and career.

The impeccably curated exhibition and Fay's meticulous explications on the opening night in conversation with Alice Maher, prompted the audience to consider the works in depth. Fay's utilisation of historical artworks as a primary source resists the dangers of periodisation by focusing on "...what is still taking place, even though it is supposed to be in the past."⁴ This interrogation of chronology through the lens of restoration ignites a conversation on traces – a vestige that, according to Nancy "... must always be discovered again – opened up, opened out, initiated, incised."⁵

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¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Pleasure in Drawing* (Fordham University Press, 2013)

² Brian Fay, *States of transience in drawing practices and the conservation of museum artworks*, Doctoral thesis, Northumbria University (2014) p 164.

³ Caitlin O' Riordan, 'Art Conservation: The Cost of Saving Great Works of Art', *Emory International Law Review*, Vol. 32, Issue 3 (2018) p 410.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Die Frage nach dem Ding* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1975) p 33.

⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Pleasure in Drawing* (Fordham University Press, 2013) p 2.