



Meditations On An Ideal Home

Eamon O'Kane



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An Ideal Home**
Eamon O’Kane

Galerie Schuster, Berlin
September 5 – October 25, 2008

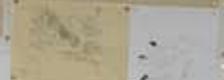
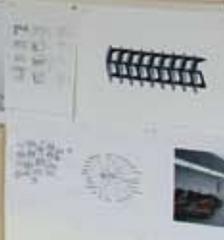
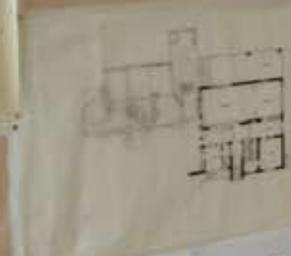
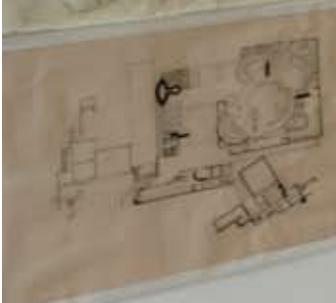
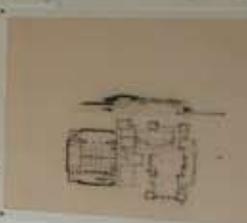
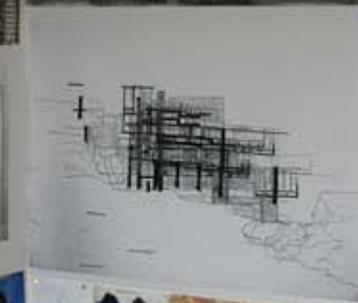
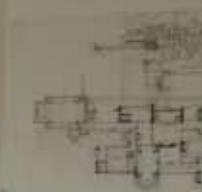
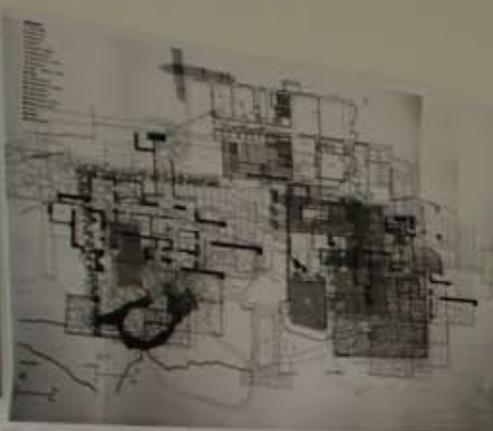
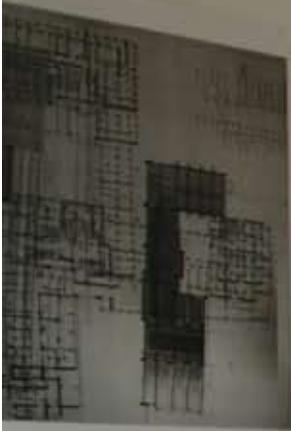
Meditations On An Ideal Home - Eamon O'Kane

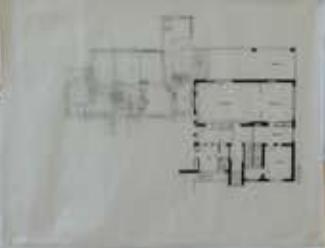
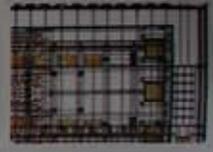
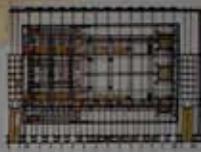
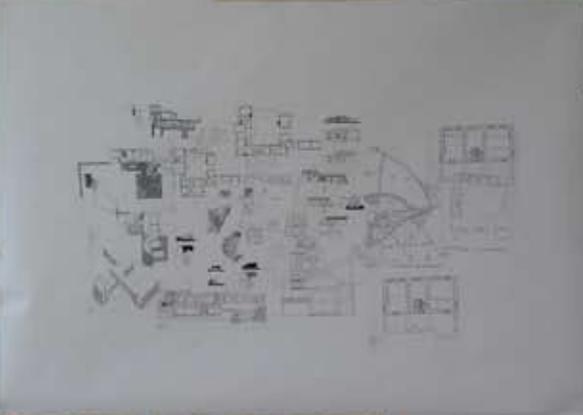
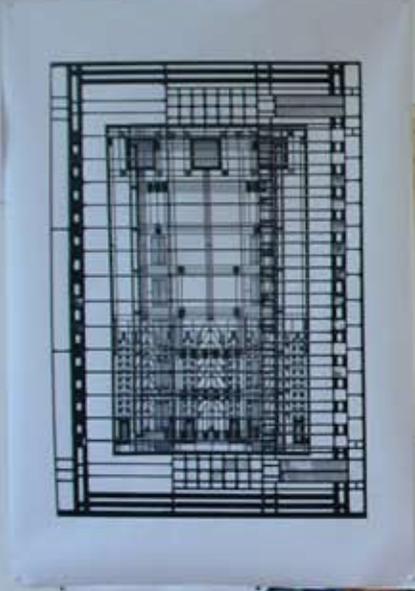
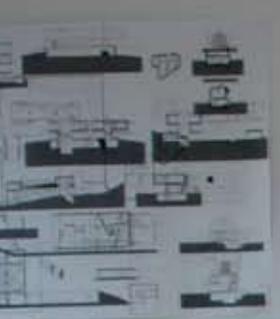
In this new series of paintings Eamon O'Kane considers ideas of a perfect home surrounded by a perfect environment for living. In the paintings the artist imagines an architectural utopia where life and the production of art coexist in perfect harmony. O'Kane constructs paintings of seminal buildings from the history of architecture and imagines them situated within the grounds of his parents house in rural Ireland. The imagined utopia ends up a type of dysfunctional architectural theme park where the overload results in dystopia. The paintings also include remixes of buildings by famous modernist architects where O'Kane creates new surreal architecture from multiple buildings.

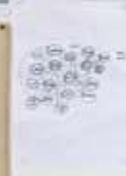
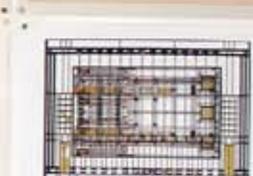
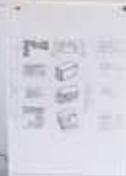
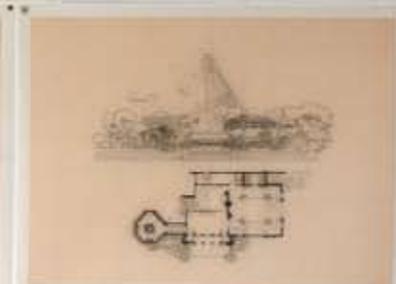
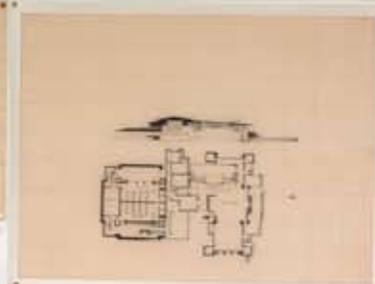
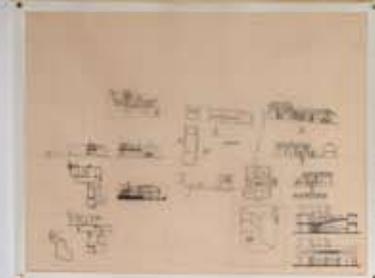
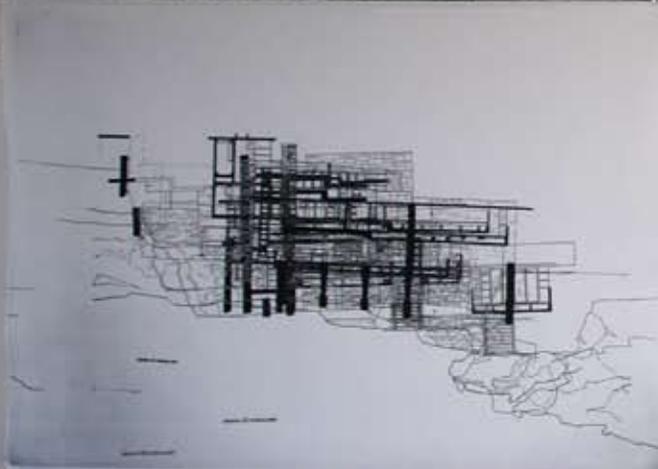
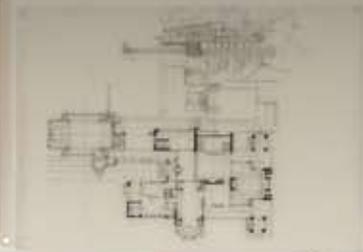
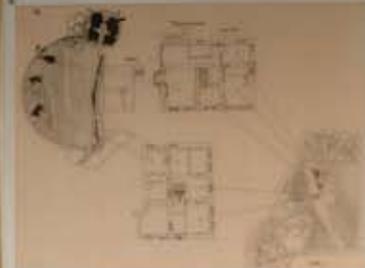
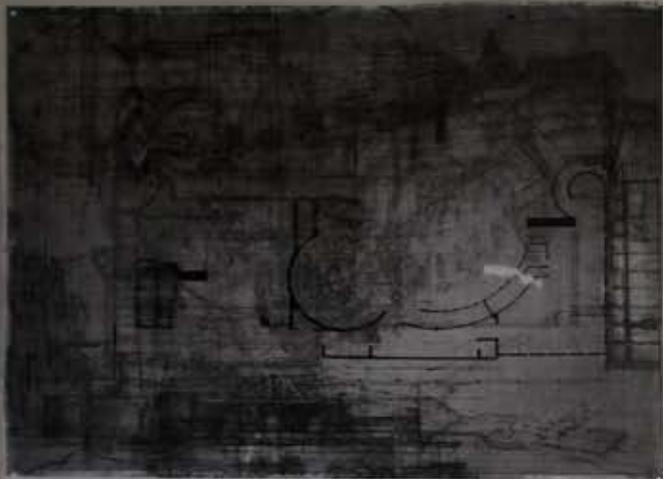
The paintings are installed in the main gallery space whilst an installation work which resembles an architect/designer's studio is situated in the backspace. The drawings in this installation include fictional buildings invented by the artist as well as merging existing buildings from many styles and periods from the classical to the modern. The piece also includes photographic works, which combine different styles of architecture, interior design and furniture design. For example a Barcelona stool by Mies Van De Rohe is merged with an Arne Jacobsen egg chair to create a new hybrid object. These items lose their functional role and take on a new surreal sculptural quality.

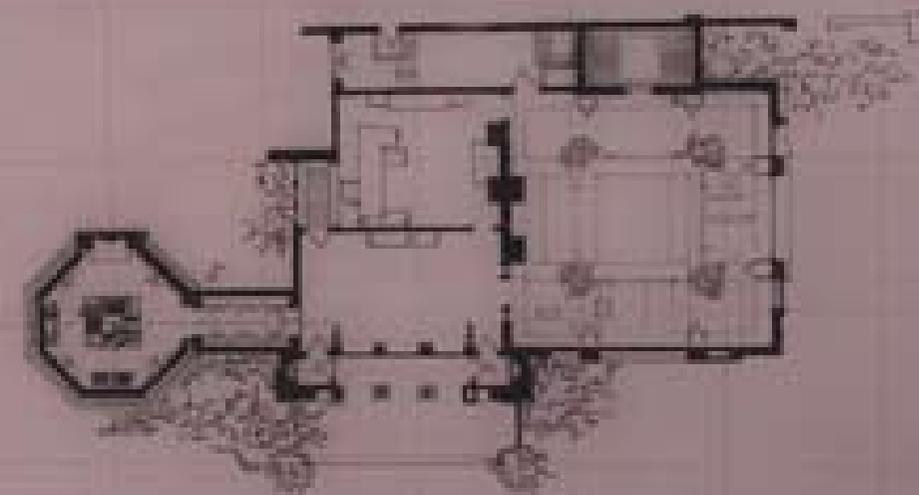
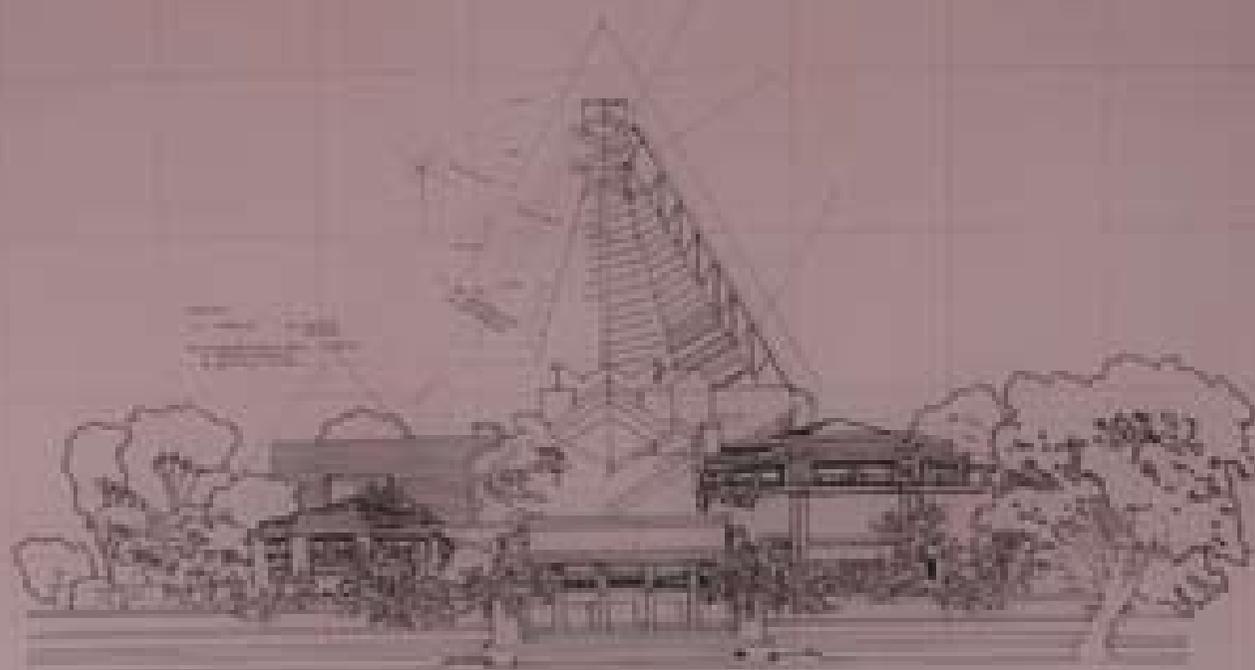


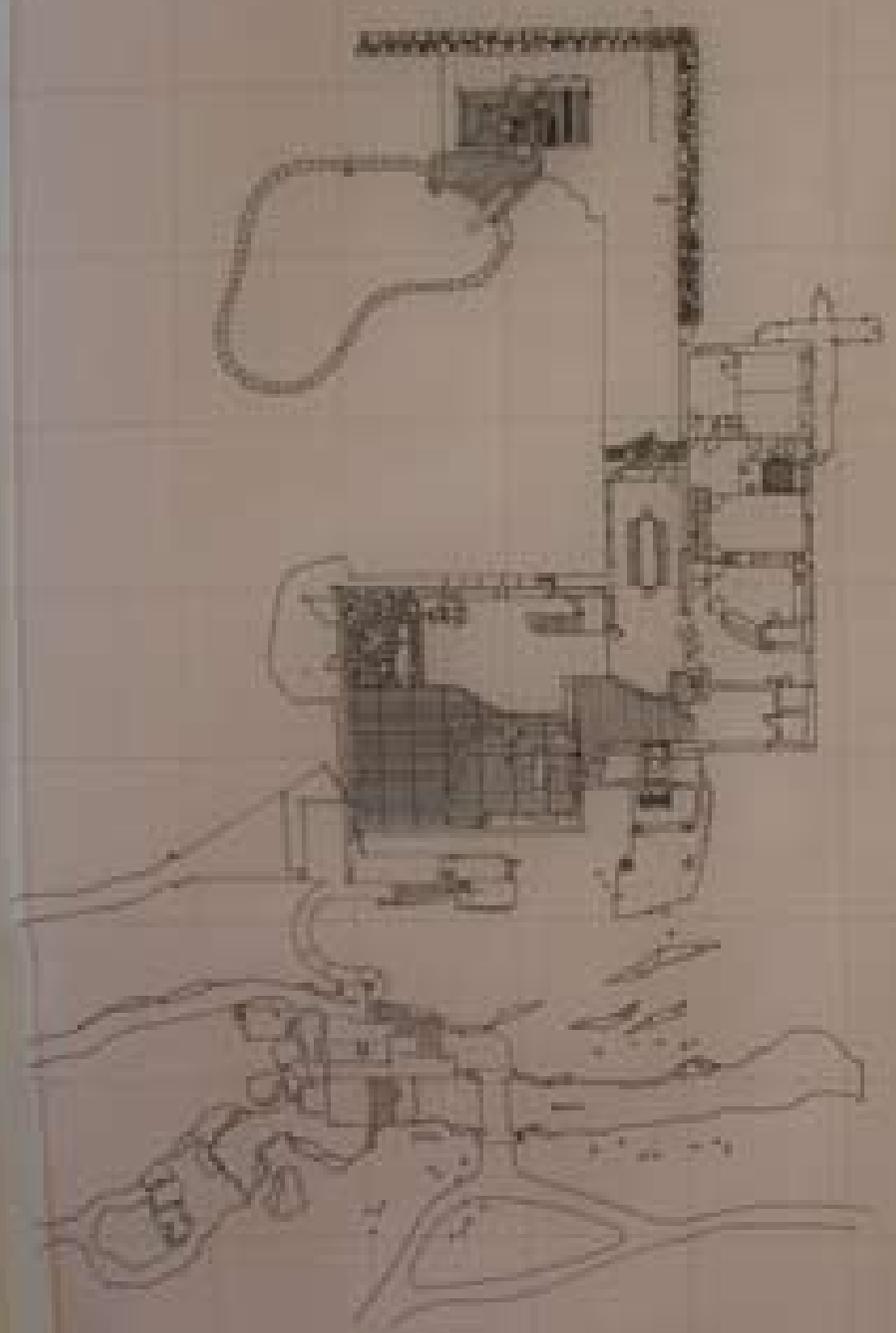














<
'Pool East View Midday'
oil on canvas
120x150 cm

2008

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'Alvar Aalto Remix (painted whilst listening to
Substance by Joy Division)', o
il on canvas,
153x213cm,

2008



REMIX

In an art world dominated for decades by conceptual work, painting continues to exert a fascination. And what is more quintessentially painterly than landscape? Yet, taking the historical view, landscape is a relatively recent development, having leapt from the background of religious and genre paintings to become the main object of the artist's attention only in the 18th century, as the Industrial Revolution gathered pace.

Painters' fascination with landscape is bound up with our growing distance from it in the modern world, so it is refreshing to find a group of young artists at a fashionable gallery exploring ways in which landscape can interact with modernity " either in the subject matter, its treatment, or both.

Eamon O'Kane's paintings place the angular forms of modern houses in woodland settings. The buildings are not merely modern: they are bold statements of Modernism. (One, seen through a spring-green haze, is actually Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater in

Pennsylvania.) Electric light spills out into the wooded depths, and although humans are absent, the paintings suggest the playing out of some enigmatic human narrative.

O'Kane is an artist not used to restricting himself to one medium. Painting, installation, photography, and drawing are all areas that he has worked widely in. Even within single works there is often a crossover between disciplines, with stop motion animated paintings projected onto sculptural objects and large scale installations that combine drawing, man made objects and organic materials. The themes that he returns to and continues to expand are concerned with the relationship between nature and civilization, our connection to place, to architecture, and the aspirations that we project onto those spaces. In his series of paintings, Studio in the Woods, O'Kane examined the utopic ideal of the isolated retreat.

These imaginary studios, inspired by modernist structures, real and imagined, at first hold the allure of a secluded hide out away from the demands of the everyday. But O'Kane's paintings suggest that architecture will fail us, that the fantasy is just that,

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'Eames Le Corbusier Remix'
acrylic on canvas, 200x310 cm,

2008



and what's more, the reality may do us more harm than good.

The Studio in the Woods, 2003, is a series of paintings, which betray in lush colour a sense of fantasy, taking a cue from reproduced images of renowned designed examples. These explore the desire to find the perfect space in which to work creatively: a place that is frustratingly impossible as the aura of that ideal can rarely translate into the quotidian requirements of an artist's studio.

These particular paintings where the man-made meets with nature, the intellectual artifice intersects with the 'natural' world, reflect a growing maturity in his work. These works further draw out O'Kane's conceptual concerns considering these noble iconic architectural interventions from some of the world's leading architects including, Frank Lloyd Wright, Lacaton Vassal, Alvar Aalto and Elam & Bray.

In these meditations O'Kane appears to query ideas of space, connectivity and engagement with society and the environment that are suggested

in the paintings. It also brings forth ideas of the aestheticized space, the artist removed, alone. As the Irish Times critic Aidan Dunne commented "the remote, at times forbidding settings of these prototypical studios also raise the question of whether the artist is better placed in an ivory tower or in the midst of social space". These forms of engagement concern and perplex him – he employs an act of visual description using the traditional artistic tools, the quasi direct drawing and painting approach with its lineage of apparent perceptual honesty and responsiveness wrapped in the non-sureness of artistic subjectivity side-by-side with the post-modern awareness of the complexity and compromised nature of visual representation.

Every now and then we pause (or a writer, an artist, a filmmaker gives us pause) to look again, to try to find the reality that lies behind the way we live, behind the dreams we sell ourselves. And while some works of art and literature are pure escapism, others are like windows or refining lenses; drawing our attention to those things seen so often that we often forget to look at them properly at all. Eamon O'Kane's work

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**'House Morning West View',
oil on canvas, 200x300 cm,**

2008



has previously explored the realities behind some of the architectural and artistic myths of making, and of the dangers of trying to turn your dreams into reality, of believing in perfection. The Studio in the Woods series and Overlook draw out the idea that retreating to the ideal of the isolated studio, to the purity of the Modernist palace set in some rural refuge, might actually drive you mad. The slightly sinister nature of these paintings make the white walls of the studios seem like the perimeters of lurking brooding prisons, beautifully designed and elegantly executed perhaps, but prisons nonetheless. Here, alone with himself, the artist may discover disturbingly unexpected consequences.

It is this conjunction of isolated beauty and impending danger that lies at the heart of the work of Eamon O’Kane.

O’Kane recognises the forest or wood as a space which has been historically formulated as a place of mystery, outside culture, and thus, a figment of our imagination. Cultural theorists have long recognised the forest as a potent metaphor for the antithesis of civilisation. In Grimm’s Fairy Tales, it is the forbidden

territory. In Marx, it is the politically contested boundary between the lords and the common Volk. As A.S. Byatt recently suggested, “The fairy tale journey into the woods is a movement inward, into the lands of the soul. The dark path of the fairy tale forest lies in the shadows of our imagination, the depths of our unconscious. To travel to the wood, to face its dangers, is to emerge transformed by this experience... Italo Calvino has made the inevitable connection between storytelling and the forest... “He sees a light in the distance, he walks and walks; the fable unwinds from sentence to sentence, and where is it leading?”¹

O’Kane’s series of large-scale oil paintings Studio in the Woods oscillate between this fiction and reality. The architectural visions of Wright, Alvar Aalto and Elam & Bray are glimpsed through the trees, the buildings’ lights flickering in the dim distance. Most recognizable is Frank Lloyd Wright’s Falling Water, an iconic American retreat, built in 1936 for Pittsburgh department store magnate, Edgar Kaufman Sr. Owned and now by Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (a US state-run version of the National

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Alvar Aalto Remix
(painted whilst listening to Unknown Pleasures by
Joy Division)
oil on canvas, 153x244 cm,

2008



Trust). The house is of course now dominated by tourists. In O’Kane’s vision, however, these real and invented buildings are devoid of occupants. His soft brushwork, the unnatural skies and picture-postcard framing serve to heighten the sense of the buildings as models or stage-sets, devoid of inhabitants and set outside society.

Since the founding of artists’ colonies in the 19th Century such as Barbizon in the Forest of Fontainebleau, the notion of Villegiature (literally meaning ‘deprived of the city’) has impelled artists and writers to seek out the rural idyll as a site of creativity. Worpswede can be understood as a sequel to Barbizon, as can the Academy Schloss Solitude: a Baroque castle which houses an academy on the edge of the Leonberg Forest. The association of rural isolation with creativity has persisted today with models such as the established Banff creative residencies in the Rocky Mountains and even the conversion of the Taransay pods from the BBC Castaway TV series into an artist retreat park.

Seen alongside his unnerving, video compositions and digital invocations of the uncanny, however,

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‘House Morning Northwest View’
oil on canvas
152x213 cm

2008

O’Kane’s paintings of the ‘ideal studios’ seem to resist the romanticism of the rural residency movement or artists’ colony. The forms of the architecture cut across the trees and vegetation suggesting an unwelcome and unyielding intervention. They recall that first glimpse of The Overlook Hotel: the brooding presence of an exterior, emptied of its human occupants.

As an accumulation of modernist propositions or hallucinations, the paintings (like O’Kane’s manic sequence of Monday Through Sunday) suggest the tension that underlies Jack Torrance’s own psychosis in *The Shining*. They reside at the uneasy encounter between artifice and nature. Far from being the ‘ideal studio’, such places are isolated from the social environment, suggesting a stymied creativity - the ultimate gothic nightmare of the unremitting writer’s block.

A remix of texts by Chris Schuler, Jacqui McIntosh, Mike Fitzpatrick, Claire Doherty, Aidan Dunne, Gemma Tipton and Niamh Ann Kelly

¹ A.S. Byatt, “Happy Ever After”, *The Guardian*, January 3 2004





>
'House West View Afternoon'
oil on canvas
100x100 cm

2008

>
,Alvar Aalto Remix (painted whilst listening to
Substance by Joy Division)
oil on canvas
152x213 cm

2008





>
Ideal Studio Complex II (after Bates Maher)
oil on canvas
39.4 x 39.4 inches (100 x 100cm)

2008



>
'Pool South View Mid Afternoon'
oil on canvas
120x150 cm

2008



<
Museum West View Midday'
oil on canvas
120x150 cm

2008

>
Ideal Studio Complex I (after Bates Maher)
oil on canvas
39.4 x 39.4 inches (100 x 100cm)

2008





'Pool North View Night'
oil on canvas
100x100 cm

2008



'House South View Midday (after Aalto)'
oil on canvas
100x100 cm

2008



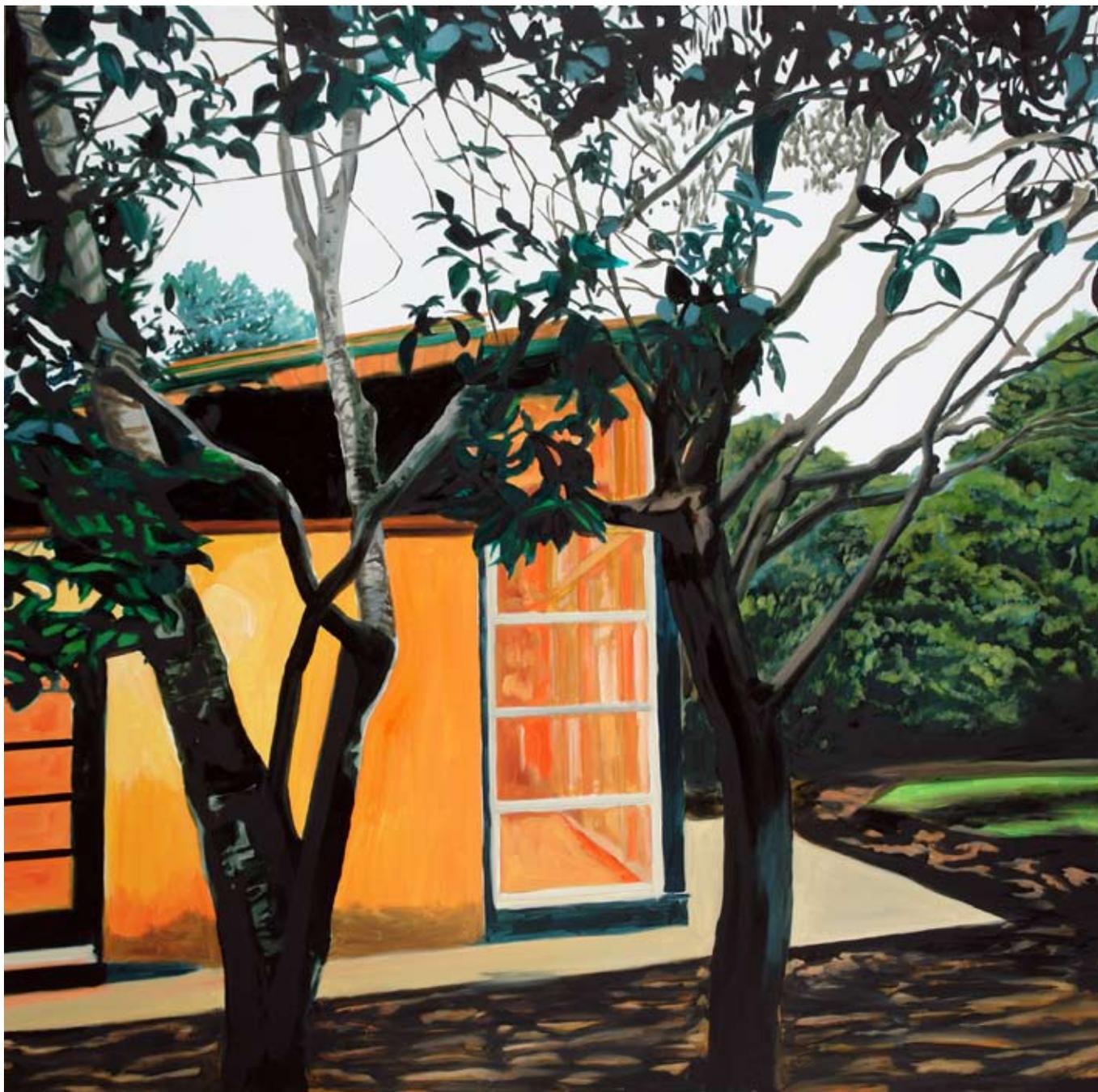
'Storage Building West View Morning'
oil on canvas
100x100 cm

2008



'House East View Early Evening (after Eames)'
oil on canvas
100x100 cm

2008



>
'House North View Evening'
oil on canvas, 120x120 cm,

2008

Eamon O’Kane (b. 1974) is a practicing artist who has studied in Dublin, Belfast and New York. He has exhibited widely and is the recipient of many awards and scholarships including the Taylor Art Award, The Tony O’Malley Award and a Fulbright Award. He has shown in exhibitions curated by Dan Cameron, Lynne Cooke, Klaus Ottman, Salah M. Hassan, Jeremy Millar, Mike Fitzpatrick and Apinan Poshyananda. He has taken part in EV+A, Limerick, Ireland six times including 2005 when he received an EV+A open award from Dan Cameron. In 2006 he was short-listed for the AIB Prize and received a Pollock Krasner foundation grant. O’Kane has had over forty solo exhibitions including shows in Berlin, Frankfurt, Dublin, Zurich, New York, London and Copenhagen. He was short-listed for the Jerwood Drawing Prize in London in 2007. His artwork is in numerous public and private collections worldwide including Deutsche Bank; Burda Museum, Baden Baden, Germany; Sammlung Südhausbau, Munich; Limerick City Gallery; FORTIS; DUBLIN 98FM Radio Station; Microsoft; Bank of Ireland Collection; Irish Contemporary Arts Society; Country Bank, New York; Office of Public Works; P.M.P.A. and Guardian Insurance; Donegal County Library; UNIBANK, Denmark; NKT Denmark; HK, Denmark; Den Danske Bank, Denmark; Letterkenny Institute of Technology; University Of Ulster, Belfast; Aspen RE, London; Rugby Art Gallery and Museum Collection. Eamon completed a three month residency at Centre Culturel Irlandais in Paris in 2008. O’Kane is currently Visiting Research Fellow in Fine Art at UWE in Bristol, UK.

www.eamonokane.com
eamon.okane@gmail.com



