

## Niamh O'Malley

Text by Giovanna Manzotti

Rhythmic arrangements, mirrors and glimpses

From 27.03.2025 to 22.05.2025

**Niamh O'Malley** (Co Mayo, 1975) lives and works in Dublin. "Working with the moving image, mark making and sculptural materials such as glass and wood, O'Malley's work attempts to contain and reflect the weight and wonder of the world in its becoming. It is the act of trying, in the face of predictable failure, that gives way to conviction and a sense of hope within the artist's work. Full of reflection, both literal and metaphorical, filled with absence and framed by negative space, O'Malley's work asserts something unstoppable about the human spirit, something that neither distance nor death can extinguish", writes Kate Strain on the occasion of the artist's solo exhibition at Grazer Kunstverein in 2018. In recent years O'Malley has also exhibited in dedicated projects: in 2019 at the Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin (IE) and Lismore Castle Arts, Lismore (IE); in 2015 at Bluecoat, Liverpool (GB); in 2013 at Project Arts Centre, Dublin (IE); in 2012 at Ha Gamle Prestegard, Neerb (NO); in 2010 at Centre Culturel Montehermoso, Vitoria-Gasteiz (ES); and in 2010 at Centre Culturel Irlandais, Paris (FR). In 2003 she received a doctorate of practical research from the University of Ulster, Belfast (IE). Residency awards include: Funen Art Academy (DK), 2014; HIP, Helsinki & IMMA, Dublin (IE), 2008; Fire Station Artists Studios, Dublin (IE), 2005-8; International Studio Program Residency at PS1, MoMA (NYC), 2003/04; and Northern Irish Fellowship at British School, Rome (IT), 2000. In 2022 she represented Ireland at the 59th Venice Biennale.

**Artopia Gallery** opened in February 2001 with Marzia Migliora's exhibition *In punta di piedi*, curated by Emanuela De Cecco. The gallery promotes emerging and mid-career Italian and international artists with an extensive program of exhibitions, mostly site-specific and curatorial projects. The intent is to offer a critical and innovative reading of the contemporary through the experimentation of multiple languages and practices that include film, digital media, performance and design. In the fall of 2023, the gallery changed locations, moving to the courtyard of the same building that has housed it for more than two decades. The new space, a former late 19th-century workshop in the heart of Milan, was designed by Studio Martinelli Venezia. Since summer 2022, Artopia has been organizing the festival NUCRÉ, sponsored by the Region of Puglia: a set of contemporary art events aimed at enhancing the cultural and anthropological heritage of the Apulian territory.

**Artopia** is pleased to present *holds*, solo exhibition by Irish artist **Niamh O'Malley** (Co Mayo, 1975), which opens to the public from 27 March to 22 May 2025.

Following her representation of Ireland at the 59. International Art Exhibition in Venice in 2022, the artist presents a project specifically conceived in response to the exhibition space and its context: a large courtyard enclosed by a typical Milanese railing house.

O'Malley's artistic practice is often characterised by the search for a compositional horizon line that "holds together" both individual works and their presence in space. As she suggests, "the exhibition space of Artopia gallery is one of circles and ellipses, apertures and reveals. It is an imposing architecture that produces an order and direction on the viewing body while divulging its intimate corners gently."

The artist's works invite movement and communality: they cling to space, support and caress, opening up to a precise exhibition grammar that offers moments of bonding and precarious balance.

For the occasion, a series of newly produced sculptures, some pre-existing works and a video are presented. Materials such as glass, steel and wood are worked into holds in new yet familiar forms. Slivers of the thinnest raw steel rest in layers on the gallery floor, their sharp creases folding and enfolding. On the large wall on the ground floor, a series of three glass compositions within three repeated metal frames echo the gallery windows and absorb natural light from the courtyard. Three ash wood sculptural elements, suspended by steel rods, emphasise the verticality of the architecture. In the video room, the dual channel silent video in black & white *Garden* (2013) is presented on two monitors, filmed in a walled inner city garden in Dublin that evokes the courtyard in which the gallery is located. On the upper floor, a series of wall sculptures are rhythmically distributed, small crystallisations that invite for a slow and close observation.

"O'Malley's sculptural objects are the result of minimal actions that "keep things together": moments of silent coexistence, evoking broken memories and rifts, but also episodes of a domestic and landscape microcosm resurfacing in fragments. These are sculptures that resonate with us because of their shapes and materials (wood, steel, glass), and yet open up to the reflective, powerful void they float inside, aiming to capture an elusive angle, a breath of light or air, a pause in space, a material perception, as well as moments of personal memory." writes Giovanna Manzotti in the text accompanying the exhibition.

Thanks to Culture Ireland for the support on the occasion of the exhibition *holds*.