

Phoebe Tohl  
Protopia Exhibition Review  
February 4th, 2023

The moment I stepped into the BCA gallery, located in the middle of the mystical valley of Ballyvaughan, a molecular shift transformed throughout my body. It felt like I had entered an altered existence. *Protopia* was successful in establishing a strong sensory response. Walking through the space left me feeling isolated and removed from the environment I had known before entering the gallery. The windows were covered further pushing the notion that the viewer has entered a new reality. From a curatorial standpoint, there were elements of the show that were lost due to technical challenges presented by the space.

From each entrance of the gallery, the work of Catherine McDonald captured immediate attention in its innate ability to transform the physical space. Rock-like structures emerged from the gallery floor transporting me into a new realm, one that has not existed before. The subtle decision to extend these forms onto the floor was incredibly successful. McDonald incorporated a mesmerising blue lightscape onto the paper mache rock-forming pedestals which displayed more intricately formed meteor sculptures from clay.

Lindsay LeBlanc invites us into her world of gothic eco-horror woven with the complex history surrounding Victorian plants. The viewer stands with a regal couch, that has been mounted and tilted at roughly a 45-degree angle, taken over by an intricately designed glass root system. I advise getting up close to this section of the work to fully admire the beautiful details of the installation. The play with shadows LeBlanc utilised alluded to something grander emerging from behind the walls. However, I felt the glass details were lost in the kaleidoscope of the wallpapered panels. The level of attention given to the hypnotic, hand-made and designed wallpaper is to be admired, drawing attention to the mutations that exist within nature by creating designs spotlighting foraged leaves which surround Formoyle Cottage, the setting for LeBlanc's narrative research.

On the peripheral walls display the work of Amelia Rafle whose artistic practice is grounded in disseminating statistics of birds through print. I admire the playful experimentation with Rafle's shadow prints. This series can be explored further through scale having the potential to evolve into a strong body of work. The artist etched images onto six 60x76cm plexiglass panels, and with a work as simple as this every detail must be accounted for in the installation. The visible fingerprints were distracting, potentially taking away from the strong work. The experimentation with shadow directly connected the artistic expression with the statement Rafle was trying to address, species that are most vulnerable to window strikes.

All works address the need to think speculatively and suggest that what exists within the shadows can lead to a more entangled multi-species reality. The subtle dedication to employing shadows was impactful in connecting with the possibilities that exist in the ambiguity of shadows, pushing forward their Protopia.