

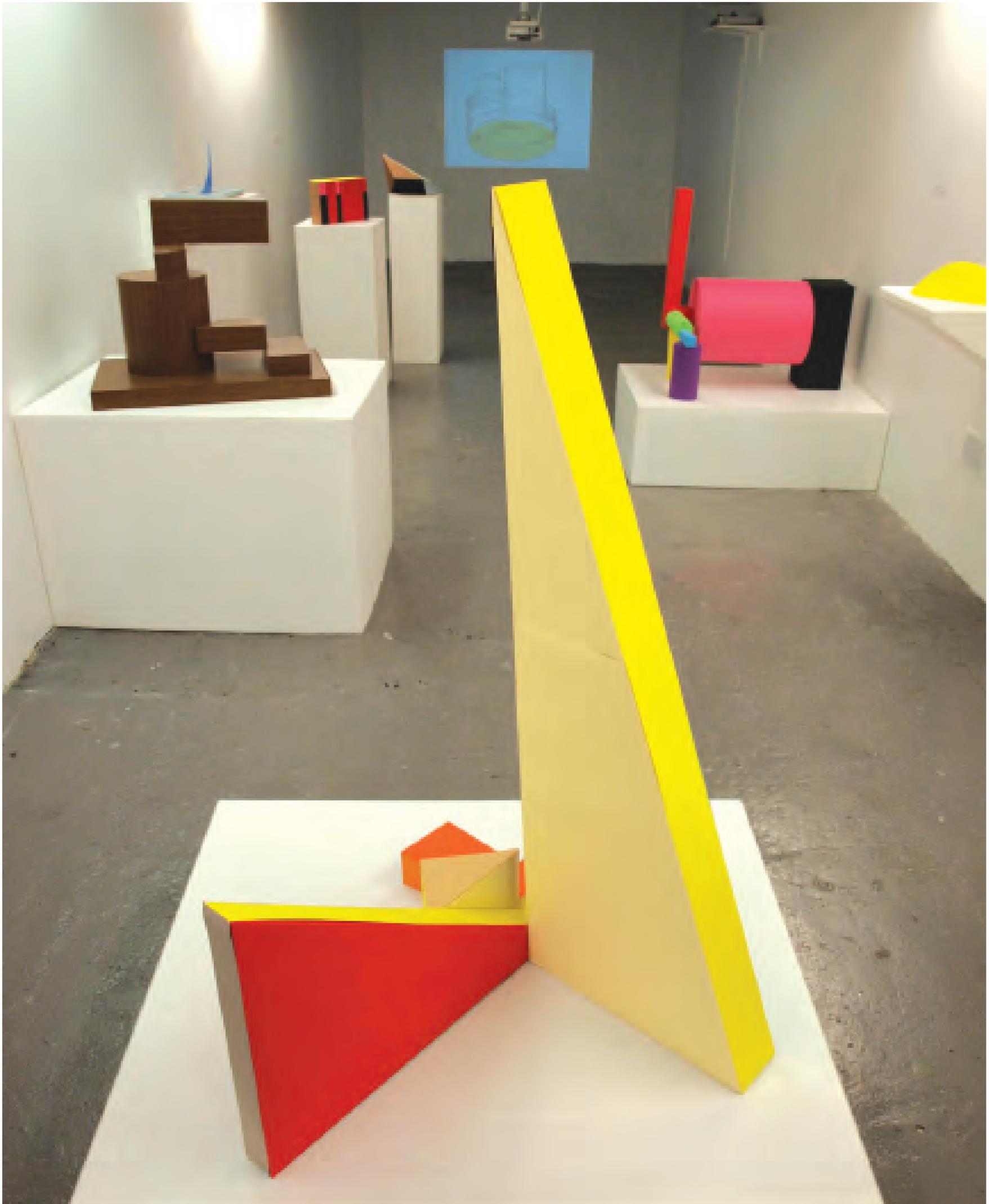
The Visual Artists' **News Sheet**

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PROFILE



Stephanie Syjuco, 'Unsolicited Fabrications: Shareware Sculptures', 2009. Installation view.



Gallery view, Pallas Contemporary Projects



Candice Jacobs Wood, 2007. Berndnaut Smilde Conditioner, 2009. Installation view 'Automatic'.

PCP

SEÁN O SULLIVAN PROFILES PALLAS CONTEMPORARY PROJECTS.

PALLAS Contemporary Projects (PCP)⁽¹⁾ was established in 2007 and is located on the site of a disused milking parlour on Lower Grangegorman Road, Dublin. The gallery is an offshoot of Pallas Studios, a venture founded in 1996 by artists Mark Cullen and Brian Duggan. It comprises an oblong shaped space, 54 feet long, and 10 feet wide. Its closely-knit walls have been no stranger to capacity opening night crowds and unpredictable assortments of work. The premises also incorporate a series of artists' studios. New visitors to the space are frequently directed to a neighbouring building, which features a massive neon sign reading 'Italian Restaurant'.

Throughout their history Pallas Studios have occupied a number of spaces around the city. These have ranged from the former Pallas Knitwear factory, which gave them their name, to a municipal housing block that hosted studios and exhibition spaces under the name Pallas Heights. Thus far PCP has been most regular and stable environment that the group has inhabited throughout its 14-year history.

Pallas might be best thought of as 'the thing that couldn't die', like a B-Movie monster it can pitch itself up from the earth, over and again, ready for the next round. Pallas co-director Gavin Murphy has described their operating methods as having "involved morphing with changes around it, and maintaining a level of originality."⁽²⁾ An example being the way in which Pallas Heights utilised a number of flats as gallery and studio space in a dilapidated housing-block on Buckingham Street. This venue hosted 18 exhibitions between 2003 and 2006. It was a challenging context; Mark Cullen recalled, "The project was highly site-specific. You couldn't get away from the fact that you're working in a domestic environment; you had failed social housing and a ghettoised area of the city. These were all concepts that you'd actually have to deal with, or ignore." Public access was permitted only at predetermined times each week. Eventually, after a number of extensions to their temporary tenure from Dublin City Council, Pallas Heights was torn down; the building had been long-scheduled for demolition.

Mark Cullen and Gavin Murphy are the current directors of PCP, and work alongside studio-gallery manager and artist Fiona Chambers. Both Murphy and Cullen recall the months following the departure of founding member Brian Duggan as a difficult period, having worked together across 49 exhibitions each had learned to do the other's job. They had progressed together from working low-paid jobs—Cullen in a restaurant and Duggan in a building site—to running PCP full-time. Brian Duggan now sits on Pallas' board of directors, but mainly pursues his own artistic endeavours.

PCP also employs seven interns, and since 2007 has seen 28 come and go in a consistent yearly turnover. Most have proceeded to either postgraduate studies or further work in the visual arts. Cullen, Murphy and Chambers divide what should be one person's wage three ways. The gallery itself is a not-for-profit, and has received support from the Arts Council. The directors note, with no small measure of gratitude,

that their Arts Council funding has stayed roughly in line with inflation.

In curatorial terms, PCP focuses on three interrelating strata of art practice: established, emerging and international artists. A good example of this was their recent exhibition 'Paper Work' (4 – 19 December 2009). This show featured work by both established and emerging artists, from Ireland and elsewhere; the press release explained that the exhibition explored "the primacy of paper as a fundamental medium, [and] a celebration at the core of the transformative essence of artistic production."⁽³⁾

PCP definitively situates itself as a non-commercial artist-led space. Its yearly programme consisted of exhibitions of serious experimental endeavour—only once a year does it venture to deliberately produce a commercial show, which is designed as a fundraiser for the venue.

Nonetheless, Cullen and Murphy don't see a massive schism between commercial and serious contemporary galleries. Murphy feels that "Irish art needs more of every stratum of art initiatives, to build up the whole landscape with quality—as well as quantity." Both Cullen and Murphy noted Dublin's Mother's Tankstation as a commercial gallery that offers a particularly strong and nurturing foundation for its artists.

During the summer months PCP's programme operates on an open submission basis. Artists and curators are invited to rent the space in weeklong blocks. The selected events are then managed and promoted by the gallery. Last year this system resulted in 10 exhibitions, three of which received reviews. Cullen remarked that this aspect of their programme is easily one of the most productive, since it allows artists access to a gallery in a managed and prepared way and it exemplifies the collaborative and open ethos that they strive for.

Overall the PCP programme stresses the importance of housing original, experimental work that has been nourished and produced on site. This can include studio space being provided for the artists making exhibitions in the space. Cullen explains, "The concept was developed from Pallas Heights, where two flats were used in tandem, to both show and produce work in situ, while one flat was showing an exhibition the other was been prepared for the following exhibition.

Indeed some of the most successful exhibitions have featured works tailored specifically to the space, and as a result artists being given the time to acclimatise themselves to context of the gallery. Examples would include Stephanie Syjuco's show 'Unsolicited Fabrications: Shareware Sculptures', in which the San Francisco-based Filipino artist worked on site to produce a series of installations inspired by architectural plans sourced from Google SketchUp (2 – 30 May 2009). Hito Steyerl and Manon de Boer's (20th March – 19th April) 2008 exhibition '2 Films From 2 Artists' saw the gallery transformed into two purpose built screening rooms. While Clive Murphy's Mono

(7 September - 13 October 2007) saw the space dominated by a large-scale site-specific inflatable sculpture.

PCP Director Gavin Murphy travelled to Australia on an artist residency. Melbourne takes particular pride in its ARIs, or 'artist-run initiatives'. Connections made by Murphy during this period resulted in a collaborative project between Pallas, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces in Melbourne and the Fire Station Artists' Studios in Dublin. In the past Pallas have forged similar international allegiances, such as their partnership with Auto Italia South East, based in Peckham, London with whom they presented 'Automatic', a group show of International artists and two Irish artists, in 2009. PCP has also worked on an exhibition exchange with Project 304 in Bangkok, Thailand. In addition they have strong national relationships with 126, Galway and The Black Maria, Cork—the latter of which they will collaborate with on an as-yet-unnamed project throughout March and April.

Pallas has produced three publications since 2007. The first, *Pallas Heights 2003 – 2006*, covers the ideologies and critical sensibilities that informed the project, it features essays by accomplished theorists covering fourteen of the exhibitions that took place, along with twenty artworks commissioned specifically for the book. *Pallas Contemporary Projects: Year One*, which, as its name suggests, documents the gallery's first year. It includes an illustrated history of each show, with critical text by Limerick-based artist, writer and Visual Arts lecturer Jessica Foley. The most recent Pallas publication was produced to accompany 'Automatic' and included essays by Gavin Murphy and Chris Fite-Wassilak.

Pallas Contemporary Projects is currently hosting 'The Problem With Stability' (30 Jan – 13 Mar), an exhibition of architecturally influenced sculpture and installation produced on-site by Jen Berean and Pat Foster. The show comes at the end of a collaborative residency award offered in collaboration between Pallas Contemporary Projects, Fire Station Artists' Studios and Gertrude Contemporary Arts, Melbourne (4).

Seán O Sullivan

NOTES

1. www.pallasprojects.org
2. All quotations from a conversation between the author and PCP Co-Directors Mark Cullen and Gavin Murphy, 15 January 2010.
3. The artists represented in Paper Work were: John Beattie, Mark Beatty, Anna Boyle, Gemma Browne, Niall de Buitlear, Karl Burke, Clare Cashman, Aoife Cassidy, Fiona Chambers, Gary Coyle, Mark Cullen, Anita Delaney, Vanessa Donoso López, Brian Fay, Alicia Frankovich, Mark Garry, David Godbold, Helen Horgan, Wendy Judge, Atsushi Kaga, Vera Klute, Nevan Lahart, Áine Macken, Alice Maher, Bea McMahon, Clive Murphy, Christophe Neumann, Isabel Nolan, Magnhild Opdøl, Sarah O'Brien, Garrett Phelan, Ruth Proctor, Linda Quinlan, Gerard Shanahan, Sonia Shiel, Ivan Twohig, Lee Welch.
4. Further details on Jen Berean and Pat Foster's Fire Station residency and PCP exhibition can be found in the article on page 15.