

Caesurae

Transfixed by an open embrace, by playful lines that enfold my gaze, I am drawn along a gently undulating road, along the course of two lines and a meridian, apparently converging, whose abrupt end marks the horizon. Of the very many roads in 'Crossing', that of *Path 3* is most direct in its address, inviting me toward a future horizon and into the imaginative space of the paintings. Through its wide embrace I am en route, participating in a journey between here and there.

Roads enable our journeys, smoothing the passage between here and there. And roads mark our journeys, tracing the contours of the paths we trod, the connections we have established. The immediacy of enabling is intimated in *Path 3*, but it is the contemplative distance of marking and re-marking the passage that is explored in 'Crossing'.

The crossings of Groener's work are complex and diverse. Roads connect place to place and in *Journey* myriad tiny cars, lorries and vans travel back and forth across precarious roads that seem to be suspended above a ground of gently surging brushstrokes. Viewed from afar, the journeys being pursued have an idling and whimsical quality. Origin and destination are wilfully ambiguous; some roads cross between two panels of the triptych, none traverse all three, disappearing instead into vertical borders marking the inner edges of the painting.

The relationship between road and place is a complex one. Roads connect place to place, their patterns are intimately connected to the particularities of a place, and yet a road speaks always of elsewhere. In *Tracks* it is the distinctive pattern of roads that suggests a connection between the painting and an actual place, a material geography – a short stretch of the south Dublin coastline, perhaps, where solid residential suburbs line-up along the bay. And yet these roads sit awkwardly within and across the three parts of this painting, joined more securely to each other than to the territory they abruptly dissect.

The cartography of *Tracks* is not sophisticated, yet it marks another important crossing within this body of work; that between real and imagined, between a geography of place and a geography of mind.

In *Tracks* the distinctive pattern suggests the particularity of place but its wilful simplifications refuse specificity, moving instead toward something beyond the literal. Within the film *Arrow*, this crossing is marked by the transition from a birds-eye view of the bold directional arrows of three converging traffic lanes to the lost-in-thought blur of gazing absently out a car window at a rush of hedges and houses. Roads, junctions, boundaries, and journeys become figures of mind rather than of place, wholly open to metaphorical reading.

The tracks to be mapped in a geography of mind vary from the well-worn paths of memory to the fresh impressions of the recently encountered. That Groener is exploring the relationship of past and present, remembering and making sense of the roads taken in the past and the shape they have given to the present, is particularly evident in her *Excavation* paintings. In *Excavation 3* layers of paint roughly encircle our view of the roads beneath, as if, by a vigorous rubbing, a lens has been cleaned through which a fragment of all that has gone before can be discerned. In *Excavation 8* it seems that it is the process of forgetting rather than the effort of remembering that is explored. What has gone before – connections and disconnections, patterns and disruptions – is gradually occluded through the uneven settling of cumulative washes of paint, delicate veils of forgetfulness laid down over time.

By contrast, the clarity of *Excavation 6* suggests that past and present are enmeshed. With its layers of densely ordered roads that are intermittently interwoven *Excavation 6* looks like an archaeological dig and represents the criss-cross of past and present; the effects of the past in shaping the present, and the coherence imposed on the past by the structures of the present.

This play of past and present, and their entanglement in the imagining of the future is echoed in Groener's film works. In *Polder Road*

the viewer stands between two flat, empty roads each stretching toward a wide level horizon. Looking one way we travel with the camera along a steel-blue road, flanked by a flat green landscape sparsely punctuated by modern windmills, road markers and trees. Looking the other way, we are standing still, buffeted by the gusting wind that blows in both films. From the perspective of the present, are we moving toward the future whose shape can be discerned up to a certain point and looking toward a past beyond reach that nonetheless calls loudly. Or, is it the future that cannot be penetrated and the past that is a fertile land through which we journey again and again in our attempts to arrive at understanding. Either way, the impossibility of the journey is treated with humour in *Groundhog*. To a radio soundtrack that promises 'a trip to paradise' we head for a gap in the horizon beyond which all might be revealed but on this short trip we never get to the horizon, we never come to know the shape of future or the meaning of the past, and it seems we are destined to repeat this gesture endlessly.

Through her juxtaposition of simplicity and complexity, Groener suggests another crossing: that between order and emergence, and vice versa. The structural clarity and regularity of paintings such as *Labyrinth 5* or *Excavation 7* echoes that gained with contemplative distance, whereby events, experience and ideas are re-viewed and rendered coherent through critical reflection. By contrast, the bounded chaos of *Juncture* and *Joint 5* reflects the sense-making that happens in the moment, as events unfold. The intensity and tone of emergent sense-making varies widely, from the fraught energy of *Juncture*'s writhing tangle of

roads to the calm curiosity of *Joint 3* where a single strand reaches out from a floating knot of road. The works in 'Crossing' do not specify a precise relationship between order and emergence, they rather explore them as two moments in thought that one moves back and forth between; from the grid of prediction and planning, to the meandering tangle of day dreaming and endless possibility, and back

An interesting and complex negotiation of emergence and order may also be discerned in the crossing between immediacy and distance within and across the paintings. Groener describes the small paintings as documents, immediate explorations that sustain and enrich the extended enquiry and investment of the larger paintings. And yet, the presentation of these small paintings, densely hung on a single darkened wall in an otherwise empty space, turns from this immediacy to embrace instead the distance of overview. A turn from moment to sequence wherein the eye flits from painting to painting, sent hither and thither by connections and disjunctions, tracing trains of thought; and thence to discerning the intersections and divergences of such trajectories within the work.

Perhaps idiosyncratically, this installation then refigures my experience of the shimmering exchange between the silver-white dashes of the meridians of *Excavation 7*. Having zoomed out from the individual moments of the small paintings to the diverse trajectories of their installation, in *Excavation 7* it is as if we have zoomed out again to reflect on the passages of a whole lifetime or to explore the arbitrary relationship of multiple individual trajectories.

From moment to sequence, and from sequence to caesura; the stable grid of Groener's four-panel paintings suggest taking stock, a pause that allows sense to be made and rhythms to be discerned. The horizontal and vertical mirroring from which a grid structure emerges is reflected in the road patterns of works such as *Viscera 3* and *Frequency*, although in the latter the reflection runs along the vertical axis only. Significantly, in each of these works, this mirroring is only approximate; there is always a divergence – a resistance or development.

In *Frequency*, the energy and potential conveyed through this a-symmetry is also played out across the painted surface, in the relationship of paint and canvas. Across most of the painting a smooth ground, built up from thin layers of paint, follows the contours of the roads, but there are sites resistance. In one corner the surface across which the lines of road travel is a rebellious swish of brush strokes. Along the lower edge, the process of painting breaks through – as their number decreases, the canvas is exposed beneath shifting layers of paint and the drips and splatters from above.

Along the upper edge of *Frequency* the effects of light are rendered at the point where its road-waves converge and pierce the horizon. A thinning of the layers of paint and a faint green-brown line along the horizon combine to give the effect of breaking or fading light, that illuminates the waves' uppermost roads. This faint

presence of light in *Frequency* is echoed within the wider body of work. For the most part, there is no light in the works of 'Crossing' – even within the videos the effects of light are subdued – and yet these are not dark works. The absence of light speaks of interior spaces and an inwardly focused enquiry. The roads – by turns calm, coiled and chaotic – speak of the untangling and tangling of the human heart and mind, and the puzzle of relationship. Being between origin and destination is the being of exploration, of reflection, of change. Groener's roads map the contours of a space that is between origin and destination, the space of coming to know.

Dr. Siún Hanrahan
Research Coordinator
School of Art, Design and Printing
Dublin Institute of Technology