

New York state of mind

Artist Jeanette Doyle is using her US residency to explore our fascination with celebrities, writes * Gemma Tipton*



From LA to New York: Jeanette Doyle in front of her new artwork, Starline, shot while taking a celebrity bus tour in Hollywood.

Photograph: Ken Meehan

There's something seductive about the idea of celebrities, and something oddly disappointing about actually meeting one. It's more than a question of whether there's truth in the saying "never meet your heroes". As anyone who has ever done such a thing knows, what remains in the mind afterwards is the embarrassing lack of anything to say, and the strangely dispiriting feeling of discovering that these people are human after all. Meeting someone famous whom you actually share a common interest with, however, is a different matter entirely.

For Irish artist Jeanette Doyle, a 10-month residency in New York is an opportunity to explore these ideas in

her work, and to meet some of the important people in that city. The residency, funded annually by the Arts Council here and administered jointly with the Irish American Cultural Institute, is a stint for an Irish artist at Location One in SoHo. "It's very different from other residencies," says Doyle, "because part of their brief is to connect you to the New York art world. That's a very hard thing to achieve without introductions. Claire Montgomery [founder and executive director of Location One] was part of the SoHo art scene at a time when there were only about 30 artists practising there, and those people went on to be key figures in New York, and so she's been embedded in the art world here really before there even was such a thing."

This is the second year that the Arts Council has sent an Irish artist to Location One. Last year's resident, Andrew Duggan, who hails from Kerry, agrees with Doyle. "Debate, facilitation, interaction and great parties were the staple diet of my stay," he says, also noting that while a New York residency has been compared to "stepping on the bullet train" in terms of the development of your work and career, Location One also understand artists so well, that they enable you to work in the ways that suit your practice best.

New York is an interesting place for celebrity spotting. Half the impossibly thin and impossibly glamorous people you see hanging out in SoHo are "nobodies", so it can be hard to realise that the person who just walked by is Uma Thurman / Nicole Kidman / Matt Damon / Leonardo di Caprio and so on. Should seeing

someone famous "mean" anything special? Can it add an extra something to your day? To your life?

Why are so many of us so obsessed with the lives of people we neither know nor have anything in common with? Doyle's latest exhibition, which is being shown at the space in Location One this month, uses these themes as a starting point.

Taking a Star Line tour in Los Angeles, which drives outside the homes of the rich and famous, she filmed what she could actually see, and cut it with the commentary from the driver of the tour bus. "There is the idea," she explains, "that the images of the people described are so available through the media, that we are programmed, in some ways, by the media to know what a 'palatial home' or a particular 'star' looks like, but what you're actually seeing is just hedges and gum on the pavement." She has also used the footage to make paintings and prints.

People in Dublin may have seen Doyle's earlier work in this vein, with her Gawker Stalker series, which was at the RHA in 2005. Here, she painted intriguing little glimpses, like snapshots, of herself standing at various vaguely anonymous places in New York. Underneath each, a text, taken from a celebrity-spotting website, gushed enthusiastically about a famous person just sighted in that very spot. "Another thing that interests me," she continues, "is a false sense of proximity" - that strange sense of being told you are close to something, yet you are actually completely separate from it.

More interesting, from an artist's point of view, is the amazing work you can see in New York. But it's a tough city, too. "It has been a really intense experience," says Doyle. "I made a decision to not really have a life apart from work while I was here. I always work really intensely anyway but here I don't even have a home life. My husband Ken has been hugely supportive and comes back and forth from Ireland all the time, which has taken up a chunk out of his working life but it has been too complicated for me to get back." The hard work has paid off, and in addition to the New York show are more exhibitions around the world.

"Home in Wexford is rural," says Doyle, "but I've been living between there and Dublin, working on an MA at Dún Laoghaire, and on a Breaking Ground Project in Ballymun. About a week after this exhibition opens in New York I have another opening in Beijing that will then travel to Shanghai and Hong Kong. Beijing is very dynamic at the moment, so it's really exciting to be part of what's happening there. Having the exhibition in China is due to the contacts I've made at Location One, so the impact of the residency here spreads way beyond New York."

- / Jeanette Doyle: Starline Tours/ runs until May 25th at Location One in New York, see www.location1.org

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