

Laura Buckley, 'Painting with Light'
Galway Arts Centre
10 February – 30 March 2024

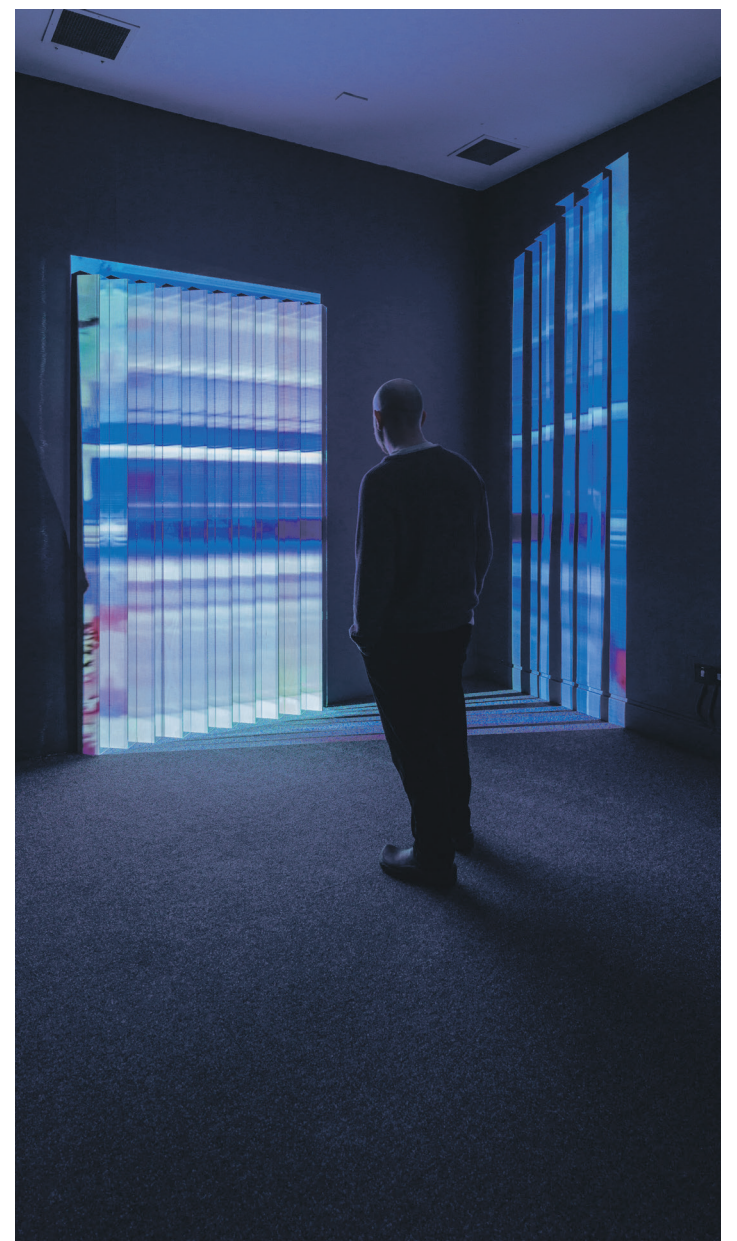
DURING HER TOO short lifetime, Laura Buckley developed a distinctive body of work that quickly gained international recognition. However, she has remained little-known in her own country, having only had one solo show in Ireland: 'Waterlilies' at mother's tankstation in 2010. 'Painting with Light', curated by Eamonn Maxwell, then set itself the dual task of being an homage to the artist – the opening coincided with what would have been her 47th birthday – and bringing her work home, so to speak. The exhibition includes four of Buckley's sculptural projections and nine framed digital prints.

Upon entering the first-floor gallery, even during the busy opening night, the visitor felt swept in by the visual movement of the projections and the electronic soundscape. The effect is all the more powerful on a quiet day, when one can examine the projection set-ups and take in the layers of sounds composed by Andy Spence, which are at once elegiac and tense. In an interview for *Bomb Magazine* in 2014, Buckley mentioned the importance of showing the technical apparatus of her artworks to make "technology more personal and handmade."¹ And it is part of her work's appeal to be both dazzled by the effects and intrigued by the processes.

In each of the three gallery spaces, there is a projection, each with its own set-up. In *The Magic Know How*, the projector has been fixed sideways, halfway up the right-hand wall. Neatly framed by the projected image on the back wall are nine triangular prisms set vertically. Their faces are alternately made of plain birch plywood and mirror. The film is perhaps the most abstract presented here; a flickering grid-like arrangement of colour, not unlike a TV screen test pattern at times, is held in a state of tension and simultaneously refracted by the mirrored surfaces as an arrangement of straight, long strips onto the adjacent wall. This tension, combined with the constant electronic drone, provokes in the viewer a suspended sense of self.

The set-up in the front room reuses the angled projection on a structure of alternating plywood and mirrored surfaces, but from the floor and onto the shape of a fan in the middle of a large conic projection area. The images are sometimes abstract and at other times recognisable as the blue tiles of a pool, perhaps an aquarium, undulating with the movement of water. The fan-like form with its three-dimensional rays disrupts the image, while its mirrored surfaces disperse the light and movement across the walls, ceiling, and floor into static, distorted, triangular fragments. Their distortion is a reminder that no matter how straight a ray of light might look, it can always throw a curveball and create the strangest shape.

The title of this piece, *Attract/Repel*, is an apt characterisation of Buckley's work. Her home videos that constitute much of the raw footage pull the viewer in, suggesting intimacy, only to then be pushed away by the splicing and scanning processes and the configuration of apparatuses that variously obstruct, refract, distort, fragment, and displace. This is perhaps nowhere more so than with *KZN Grounded Hexagon*. In the middle room of the gallery, the projector is set on the floor and projects through a rotating Perspex hexagonal prism – a recurring form across Buckley's wider practice. The film is a montage of images taken in a garden. We see flowerbeds and garden furniture, and little hands playing with a rotating stand. The camera is constantly moving, and the footage is often blurry, but we can figure things out. The rotating hexagon almost creates a blind spot in the middle of the projection; we can see through it, but just about. The reflective Perspex shifts this subtracted image around the room, creating a kaleidoscopic dance of colour and movement like a magic lantern. This sense of magic is all the more poignant when the fitting shadow of the artist filming is captured and refracted throughout the gallery.



The posthumous moment of this important exhibition imbues some pieces with a haunting sense of loss. In the most straightforward of the projections, *Shield*, scanned images of colour and texture are moved around by a cursor. The fact that we are looking at a filmed computer screen is confirmed by our occasional glimpses of Buckley, who is sitting at a desk beside a video camera on a tripod. This double screen barrier between us and the artist imparts, under the circumstances, a very different emotional response; a sense that the screens could no longer shield her. The exhibition carries such a vivid sense of ongoing creative processes, ceaselessly inventing new ways to work with moving images, that one can't help wondering what might have come next.

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¹ Rob Sharp, 'Laura Buckley: Technological distortion, motherhood, and painterly approaches to video', *Bomb Magazine*, 19 November 2014 (bombmagazine.org)

All images: Laura Buckley, 'Painting with Light', installation view, Galway Arts Centre, February 2024; photographs by Tom Flanagan, courtesy of Galway Arts Centre.