

ADJUSTABLE ART - BANGKOK POST - Kaona Pongpipat

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The exhibition title "Adaptation" applies not only to its subject matter, but also to French artist Lili Heller and Irish artist Ben Readman. On the second floor of Toot Yung Art Center, it's evident that while the resident artists are very content with all the time they have to work on their art, they don't yet feel completely at ease in the studio, the types of chairs and tables, the light, the air and the smell, and maybe with Bangkok as a whole.

But perhaps it's a good thing, how it's supposed to be. Apart from the work they brought with them from previous shows, many more on display at the exhibition are new, inspired by experiences during their one-month residency programme in Bangkok.

As directors of non-profit art centre Block T in Dublin, Ireland, it's been a while since Heller and Readman have had much time to work on art of their own.

"This is amazing to get back in to the routine of painting for one month," said Readman. "Some of [the works] I have brought are done already. Some are in the middle stage. And there are paintings which I've done entirely here.

When interviewed, the pair were in the final stages of finishing the works they plan to display. Readman was working on a painting of stray dogs he had seen outside the city, while many of Heller's pieces were very much influenced by urban areas of Bangkok.

"I was really amazed by that particular light you have at night time," she said, referring in particular to a painting she calls *Some Connections* (Bangkok). "The wires are everywhere and the plants everywhere. And the wires become one with the plants and trees and the streets. And there's that yellowish kind of light you have."

She was so impressed by the city's light that some of the works she had started in Dublin are being given shades of colour inspired by it.

Heller's paintings are hard to classify – they straddle reality and fantasy, yet it's easy to see they draw inspiration from nature in everyday life. It's one of the most important roles of her art, making things that viewers wouldn't normally notice visible.

She has also completed over 40 small drawings. One her first sketches she drew in the city was the seed of a big tree in the gallery's backyard.

"I was really amazed by that tree, in the way Thai people respect trees," said Heller. "For them it's full of spirits and you have a different spirit for each tree and they put gifts on it and ribbons. In Europe, if the tree is in your way you can kind of chop it down. It's completely crazy."

Although Readman's technique is quite different from Heller's – he draws slowly, with small pencil marks, in a series he calls *Vibration* – his subject matter is very much drawn from nature as

well. Take *Veins*, for instance, an image that simultaneously looks like the inside of the human body and a pathway into a dense forest.

"It's hard to pin it down exactly what category to put [my works] into," said Readman. "I suppose they are figurative. They are personal paintings. I try to make them look like finished objects at the end. I like when it looks like something more than a painting. I know it's not sculpture, but I think it has some sort of three-dimensional quality."

Another piece by Readman worth checking out is a small painting from a previous exhibition. Entitled *Volume*, Readman says it's "an impossible waterfall".

"It could be a relief, as well. It could look like a shell. It's very roughly and quickly painted. I suppose that's my style. From a distance maybe it could look quite photographic but when you go close you can really see that the marks are made very quickly," he said.