

## Talks

---

### Curator's tours of the exhibitions

Wednesday 20 May, 1.15pm: Karen Sweeney  
Friday 24 July, 1.15pm: Rachael Thomas

Booking is essential for all talks.

For a full programme of talks, free tickets and to listen to past talks on the IMMA Soundcloud channel, please see [www.imma.ie](http://www.imma.ie).

For further information contact :  
Sophie Byrne, Assistant Curator, Talks and Lectures, IMMA, phone +353 (1) 6239913.  
email: [sophie.byrne@imma.ie](mailto:sophie.byrne@imma.ie)

*Karla Black* is curated by Rachael Thomas, Senior Curator: Head of Exhibitions, with Karen Sweeney, Assistant Curator: Exhibitions

A fully illustrated, 20 page publication accompanies this exhibition, including an interview by Rachael Thomas with Karla Black and an Artist's Statement. Available in the IMMA bookshop and from the website [www.theimmashop.com](http://www.theimmashop.com)

IMMA Exhibition Team  
Rachael Thomas, Senior Curator: Head of Exhibitions  
Karen Sweeney, Assistant Curator: Exhibitions  
Hugh Woods, Exhibitions Assistant  
Cillian Hayes, Head of Technical Crew  
Jason Murphy, Lead Technician

Irish Museum of Modern Art  
Áras Nua-Ealaine na hÉireann  
Royal Hospital  
Military Road  
Kilmainham  
Dublin 8  
Ireland  
telephone: + 353 1 612 9900  
email: [info@imma.ie](mailto:info@imma.ie)

(front cover) Karla Black, Exhibition view, Modern Art, 13 October – 8 November 2014.  
Photographer Robert Glowacki.  
© Karla Black.

IRISH MUSEUM OF MODERN ART  
FIRST FLOOR, SOUTH EAST WING GALLERIES  
1 MAY – 26 JULY 2015

# Karla Black



GALERIE GISELA CAPITAIN David Zwirner Modern Art



Exhibition Supported by  
**dylan**  
OFFICIAL HOTEL  
PARTNER  
[www.dylan.ie](http://www.dylan.ie)

Karla Black is regarded as one of the most pioneering contemporary artists of her generation. Educated in Glasgow, she is one of the artists who helped energise that city’s vibrant art scene from the late 1990s. Practising a kind of autonomous sculpture, Black has created a personal vocabulary inspired by ideas about psychoanalysis and about feminism and its impact on visual art. While her work draws on a multiplicity of artistic traditions, her sculptural forms themselves are, as she states, ‘physical explorations into thinking, feeling, communicating and relating’.

For this, her first solo exhibition in Ireland, Black takes advantage of the particular spaces at IMMA to present a dynamic new body of work. In the corridor, Black works for the first time with the artistic device of vertical supports, comprising a row of 20 plaster casts of thin tree trunks placed in a line which somehow emphasises the free, experimental way that she works. The artist swathes, balances and binds large bunches of cellophane to these supports to create a sort of spatial expansion – a panorama of transparent material, highlighted with traces of daubed-on colour, is extended so that it glides across the viewer’s visual plane. Each of the four adjoining rooms contains a further new work – a hanging sculpture tailored for the space and hanging at eye level.

Black is constantly preoccupied with trying to find ways to float material, form and colour at eye level, as is evident in *Prospects*. Over the years, she has improvised sculptural solutions that allow this to happen, while actively avoiding traditional tropes. Black’s interest in process has led her to expand the possibilities of the materials she employs, be they traditional art-making supplies, insubstantial materials (e.g. chalk dust) or non-traditional art materials (e.g. Vaseline, body paint and bath bombs). They are chosen for their tactile or aesthetic appeal, rather than for any specific cultural connotations. Although this

experimental use of materials corresponds with trends in the 1970s feminist movement in which women artists worked with non-traditional materials to eschew art-world hierarchies and patriarchal traditions, in Black’s case it is to allude more broadly to art’s ability to create an escape. Her working process is intense: physical – almost performative – and experimental, involving focused periods of assembling and reassembling her meticulously executed sculptures, which slowly reveal themselves in delicate yet vibrant forms.

The artist cites the object relations theories of Austrian-British psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1882-1960) as a contextual source. Klein developed play technique – a method used to analyse infants through their negotiation of the world through play rather than language. Black’s works shares with Klein’s theories a prioritisation of material experience over language, as the artist asserts: ‘To me, for all its obvious accomplishments, language is an inadequate and primitive tool.’ (Artist’s statement, 2015). What interests Black is the state of potential, prior to any construction of meaning or structural rigidity. For her, these non-verbal associations echo the subconscious decisions, physical actions and reactions artists recurrently make while absorbed in their creative process.

Karla Black invites us to think about art as an escape, not just for herself, but for the spectator. Seduced by material, form and colour, we are left to ponder whether we are entering a place of enchanted refuge where strange things may occur – a chance at adventure or something more disarming. Black’s work compels us to linger awhile to inhabit, possess and become engulfed in these liminal spaces rather than merely pass cautiously through.

#### Corridor

Contrasting large-scale investigations of line and volume with a fragility of form, *Prospects* aspires to the balance of beauty the artist sees in naturally occurring forms. Comprising 20 vertical plaster columns cast from tree trunks installed one metre apart, spanning the length of the floor of the south-east corridor and connected along the tops with cellophane, *Prospects* is imbued with a careful aesthetic judgement paired with a rigorous compositional awareness. Columns converge into a protective, light-intercepting canopy of twisted, painted cellophane, evocative of the ‘thing next most diffuse to cloud’.<sup>1</sup>

Solid gives way to the ephemeral in a sensuous play between industrialism and the vulnerability of the natural world. The material heft is apparently enlivened by some unforeseen force, as if, like a fairytale forest, it harbours the magic of the threshold and of transformation. In working with her series of vertical forms, Black engages with the language and spirit of Minimalism but introduces disorder into the repetition and geometry. We observe from their distinctive notches and chalky, moonmilk-like texture that each support has a specificity, having been individually cast from the natural world, before receiving its distinctive, graffiti-like marking.

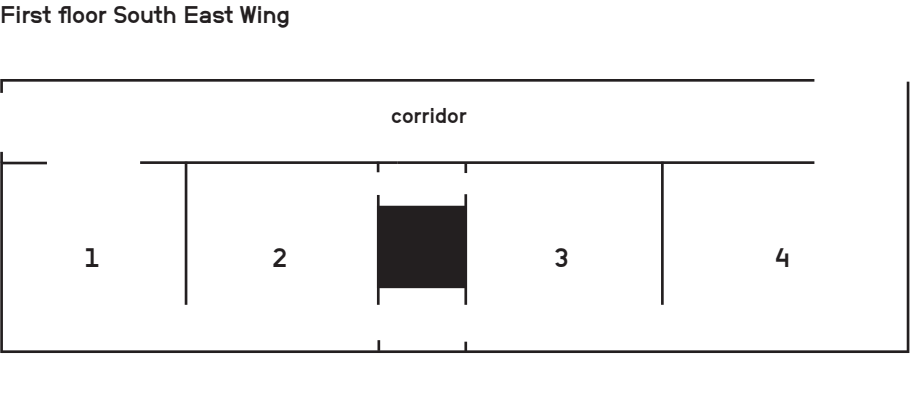
Black’s interest in early art forms is reflected in her aesthetically judged compositions of paint sprayed onto cellophane at specific points of contact for the eye, the effect of which intensifies the work’s floating quality. Common among prehistoric cave paintings are ethereal markings made by spraying a mouthful of paint onto the surface. Just as these enduring personal signatures provide a window into the minds of the Ice Age inhabitants, so too Black’s mark-making, like muted, naturally occurring sediments, breathes new life onto the surfaces of her work and into our experiences of it.

Over the course of the day, sunlight filters in through the windows to illuminate the layers of cellophane, thereby disrupting the visual experience in the space, and the resulting shifts in natural light continuously transform the look and feel of the work. Just as the form of a tree in the natural world is dictated by its location and bound by the light conditions there, so too the contours of the transparent material react to the light and space with a sense of play and indeterminacy.

1. Robert Frost, Tree at my Window

#### Rooms 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ethereal sculptures in the form of polythene sheets lightly dusted with coloured powder paint and plaster powder are suspended into the visitor’s direct eye-line in the first three rooms. Titled *Likeness, To Hand*, and *Until*, the surfaces of each sculpture are attached to thread and stretched between the walls onto the surfaces of each room in which they are placed. 3 cushioned hanging sculptures, titled *Fed, Missed Window*, and *Additional*, comprised of body paint, oil paint, cotton wool and sugar paper, are suspended from ribbon in the final room. These padded paper, cloud-like works mark a move towards a new experimental sculptural process within the artist’s oeuvre.



#### List of works

#### Corridor

*Prospects*, 2015, plaster, cellophane, Sellotape, pencil, lip liner, eyeliner pencil, green concealer, spray paint, soil, 235 x 200 x 1860 cm

#### Room 1

*Likeness*, 2015, polythene, powder paint, plaster powder, thread, 180 x 150 x 110 cm

#### Room 2

*To Hand*, 2015, polythene, powder paint, plaster powder, thread, 125 x 74 x 40 cm

#### Room 3

*Until*, 2015, polythene, powder paint, plaster powder, thread, 64 x 55 x 44 cm

#### Room 4

Clockwise from left on entering from Room 3: *Additional, Missed Window, Fed*, all 2015, 3 hanging works, body paint, oil paint, cotton wool, sugar paper, ribbon 48 x 52 x 16 cm, 42 x 48 x 18 cm, 48 x 54 x 23 cm

#### All works courtesy the artist and Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne

#### Artist Biography

Karla Black (b. 1972 Alexandria, Scotland) lives and works in Glasgow. She attended the Glasgow School of Art (1995–2000 and 2002–2004), completing BA (Hons), MPhil (Art in Organisational Contexts) and MFA degrees. In 2011, Black represented Scotland at the 54th Venice Biennale (Karla Black, Scotland and Venice) and was nominated for the Turner Prize. Karla Black has recently made solo exhibitions at institutions including Kestnergesellschaft, Hannover, Germany; Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, PA, USA, and Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, The Netherlands (2013); Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX, USA; Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin, Germany, and Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow (all 2012); Kunsthalle Nürnberg, Nuremberg, Germany (2010); Modern Art Oxford, Oxford, Kunstverein Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany, and Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich, Switzerland (2009), among others. Her works are held within many prestigious collections worldwide, including the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA, USA; Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich; and Tate Gallery, London.