

Stephanie Rowe
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WHAT LIES BENEATH Niall MacMonagle

Last Party by Stephanie Rowe

oil on panel 2013
courtesy of Oliver Sears Gallery

THE work of art that invites the viewer in and allows for an individual and free response makes for the best, most rewarding, kind of interaction. Then the viewer isn't intimidated, but empowered, the imagination is freed, not confined. "What have we here?" becomes the starting point and you take it from there.

Stephanie Rowe, Toronto-born and now living in Ireland, creates tiny paintings inspired by the big screen. An image from a film becomes a little stylish colourful mini-drama. In her new show the eye-catching colour is the red dot accompanying every one of her works. Rowe, at 35, has a busy, busy day job yet somehow manages to achieve a sell-out



show. And not only sell-out. Get this. At the opening, the demand was such that no one was allowed to buy more than one of her paintings. It's vulgar to mention money, but the art world has seen such a dip in sales over the past five years that this kind of success is encouraging news.

Her paintings of intriguing individual situations frequently

contain little tensions. If there were speech bubbles above the figures' heads the viewer could supply a whole range of options. What would the much older man, bald, bespectacled, dickie-bowed, say to the attractive, well-heeled young woman in a brightly coloured dress as they both view a sculpture in Rowe's painting called *Dallas*?

Or in this image, *Last Party*, three well-dressed women, blonde, brunette and dark, are angled and arranged so that they're all looking in different directions. Yet one watches the other two. Are they on the look out? Are they rivals? The criss-crossed fabric design on the nearest figure, the earrings, the bare arms, the drinking glass, their flowing hair, the elegant setting with tall ceilings and white walls and the deep blue abstract painting all add up: we could be in upper-middle-class, Woody Allen territory. Is neurosis lurking just around the corner?

Like the images on a film reel, Rowe's paintings are separate yet they interconnect. The oil paint is handled with watercolour delicacy. Dinky little gems (10.5 x 13 cm), they could fit into your pocket. And you'd want to pocket them.

New World, Old World, new work by Stephanie Rowe, is on view at the Oliver Sears Gallery, 29 Molesworth Street, Dublin 2 until February 13.