

Sam Keogh

Kerlin Gallery, [Dublin, Ireland](#)



Sam Keogh, *Mop*, 2013, laminated vinyl floor, found objects, handmade objects, dimensions variable

Sam Keogh's installation at Kerlin Gallery was an antidote and a rejoinder to Dublin's famously pitiful weather. Outside, the clouds loomed over shopping bags, coffee cups and a litany of other urban realisms, while inside the breezy white-walled gallery, a colourful new world order was underway, built from cultural leftovers and exhausted objects like flotsam on a toxic sea. There were eyeballs, enlarged apple cores, children's toys and containers caked with pastel-coloured substances – a flaccid, cartoonish re-order of things too numerous to mention.

'Mop' might have been the Irish-born London-based artist's first solo presentation at Kerlin, but there was one other character responsible for the deliberately lumpen mess. Oscar the Grouch, from the long-running American television show *Sesame Street* (1969–ongoing), provided both the subject and governing logic of Keogh's installation. Developed by Jim Henson to introduce young children to people living beyond the bounds of polite society, Oscar is the bright green monster who lives in a bin. With his uniquely developed relationship to detritus, he might represent a perfect ideological monster and a suggestible avatar for the artist at large (or at least a well-worn version of one): a semi-coherent yet loveable heckler, festering among remnants and rubbish.

Keogh's installation consisted of a vinyl of digitally composed crayon drawings of Oscar, which covered the entire floor of the gallery. Upon this were a number of haphazard sculptural arrangements, along with laminated reproductions of paintings by Hieronymus Bosch (details from the *Garden of Earthly*

Delights, 1503–04), a painting by Matthias Grünewald of The Temptation of Saint Anthony, depictions of Diogenes of Sinope, and other art-historical representations of beggars, hermits and cantankerous outsiders. These sat together with other images connecting Oscar to concurrent cultural moments such as the emergence of punk (a young John Lydon), an overweight Elvis Presley, and documentation of the so-called Winter of Discontent in 1979. These references might have been an attempt to shore up Oscar's broader cultural significance, but in their cheap wipe-clean lamination and props of plasticine, the stretch of these references seemed like slack mannerisms.

There were also punkish riffs in the sculptural arrangements and in some of individually titled works composed within the larger installation. Keogh's *Untitled (coke with froth lump)* (all works 2013) comprises a can of Coca-Cola topped with a large plaster cap, while *Untitled (big apple)* is an enlarged apple core made of papier-mâché. These works operate like quips or Oscar-style retorts to self-satisfied good taste. In other instances, arrangements of upscaled refuse and discarded objects (banana skins, a pen holder) faced off with downscaled others (toy animals, a model New York City taxi). Certain found objects had grown ears and eyes, while others spewed extraneous material that was difficult to define. Throughout 'Mop', there was the sense that reality itself is a cartoonish affair, soft-edged and deflatable. Keogh's objects come close to the saturated condition that the cultural critic Bill Brown once described in Claes Oldenburg's work: 'If these objects are tired, they are tired of our perpetual reconstruction of them as objects of our desire and of our affection. They are tired of our longing. They are tired of us.'

Given that many of the cultural and televisual references employed in the exhibition dated from the 1970s, and Keogh was born in 1985, 'Mop' was also concerned with how to orientate a practice through a set of inherited materials and borrowed voices. This question found a neat response in the inclusion of the exhibition's only video, *Taking from / Put in Oscar's bin*. Presented on a floor-mounted domestic television set, amongst a clutter of other objects, the video was a crude documentation of Keogh performing a text from memory: 'Fuck you Oscar bad project. All you're good for is absorbing my lazy half-baked notions.' The video shows Keogh performing this reading at an opening in London, visibly struggling with his memory of the text and the distraction of the crowd. In an exhibition full of loose associations and refusals, it was perhaps here that Keogh came closest to embodying Oscar's significantly marginal place in the world.

Matt Packer