

Mark Granier's "Ghostlight"  
by Katie Donovan

Like the poet-and-painter Frieda Hughes, (daughter of Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath), Mark Granier is that rare creature, an artist adept in more than one art form.

There is a seamless transition between poetry and photography for Granier, indicated by the fact that his photos adorn the covers of his 5 poetry collections. "Ghostlight", the title of this show, is the same as that of his recent *New and Selected Poems*, published in 2017. The choice is apt, given what Granier describes as his "lyrical impulse to haunt."

This is his first one-man show, representing work from the early 1990s through to the present day. Mark's sensibility has always been keenly attuned to the world and its passing scenes. He places himself on the sidelines so that he can catch glimpses of the ever-changing landscape of human life before him. A lost shoe, a snow-covered skip, a fox on a night-time prow, an empty doll's house – each suggests an entire story.

To achieve this vision, you need your five senses on their absolute mettle, along with a whole heap of meditative patience. Granier described to me how, on a moving bus, he managed to snap a charmingly intimate black and white shot of a sleeping man's face, cradled in his girlfriend's hand.

He was in Dublin's city centre just before Storm Ophelia was due to strike, looking for the perfect shot. We have it here, a windblown man and his dog, surrounded by leaves swirling in the gusts, at the junction of Pearse and O'Connell Streets.

Granier is as confident in black and white and sepia as he is in colour, using the range of possibilities open to him. His photographic prints strike a wistful note, such as the silhouette of an old teapot, filled with nails. Framed in the window, this shot confers dignity on a forgotten thing, another highlight of his work.

Intimate, playful, as likely to feature an urban landscape as a rural, Granier's inspiration is often drawn from movement and opportunities for travel, from corridors to cars, roads and trains to the heaving waves of the sea. One of my personal favourites features Granier's foot on the edge of the West Pier as he captures the bobbing heads of two friendly seals in water that I've never seen as blue in real life. This image became the cover for "Taking the Plunge", a recent anthology featuring the work of local writers from the County of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, which is very much Mark Granier's turf.

Two of his photos, the aforementioned "Doll's House" and "Ophelia at 1pm", have been prizewinners at Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown's Open Art Competition, organised by the Council's Arts Office where entrants must address a given theme. "Doll's House" was submitted for the theme of "Home", and "Ophelia at 1pm" for the theme of "Arrival".

One of Granier's images is reminiscent of the absurdist juxtapositions of René Magritte, featuring a sea wall in Blackrock covered with graffiti, over which a white cloud drifts in a blue sky. Another plays with perspective using a shot of the reflection of a flying pigeon, tiny against the large diamond panes of a window.

Lonely valleys, twilit skies, anonymous streetscapes: the work circles back to a sense of absence. As he states in one of his poems, Granier has a "soft spot for absences". His "Diptych" is comprised of the only extant shot of his parents together. In a conjoined but separate shot, Mark's hand holds a picture of himself as a baby. Another artfully composed piece is set in a graveyard, where a mourner shows her wrist tattooed with the name of the dead girl, "Dolly".

His affinity with absence expresses the uncertainties of our increasingly unmoored contemporary existence. These are the shadowy ephemeral moments that will never make it into the history books, but define what it means to be human today. To quote one of his poems: "the universe is utterly/ beyond me, but close. Close."