

Ramon Kassam

Paintings from The Last Gallery ☿ Studio

Ramon Kassam's self-referential attitude to painting includes third-person narratives and thematic world-building. His artworks are permeated with tactics and tropes that enliven storytelling through painting and display. In his most recent work, Kassam indulges an appetite of painterly fantasy, dreaming up a contemporary Irish painting folklore that connects reality with a fictional analogous universe.

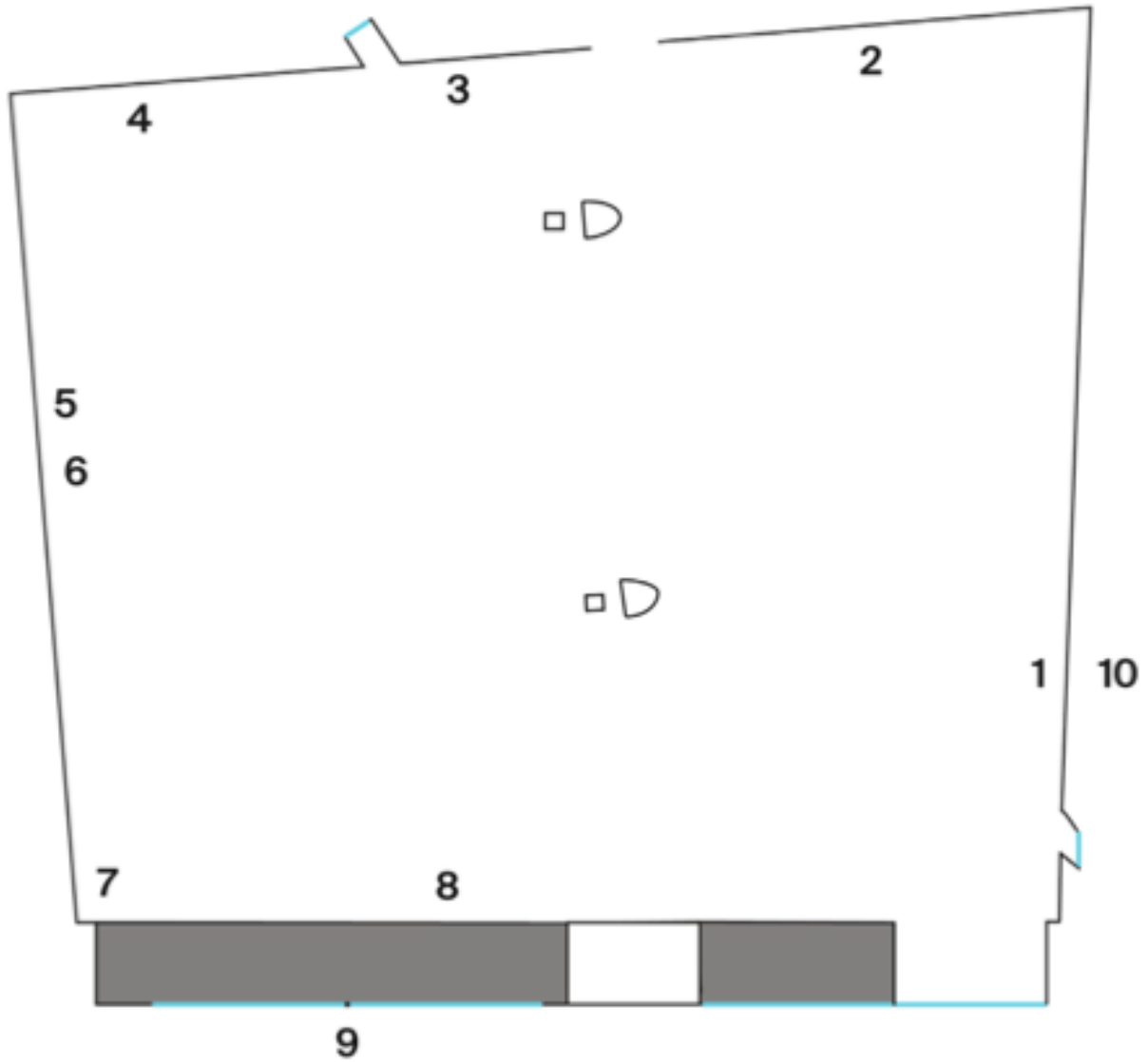
The unmediated, occasionally unruly visual language of cities, suburbs and rural towns allows Kassam to mirror certain aspects of local and national identity within his own artistic vocabulary. It is not only the aesthetics of these chance juxtapositions that excite, but also the way a cultural style or character can be formed by the clash of heritage with branding, and artistic trends with legacy. Strategically combining colour, abstract forms and sometimes figurative imagery, Kassam creates arrangements that at times replicate studio accidents and experimentation. Each painting is also ingrained with its own individual history of failure, revision and resilience, with elements and layers added, removed, repainted, adjusted, and ascertained until it is brought to life.

In this exhibition, Kassam imagines paintings originating from the site of Temple Bar Gallery + Studios in an alternative present-time, where it is no longer in use and is approaching dereliction. Rather than pondering on this motif as something melancholic or pessimistic, Kassam's intent is to romantically honour and celebrate painting and the physical spaces that facilitate and activate it. He is interested in visualising what kinds of paintings would be made or shown in such a place, and this is accomplished through

playful canvases, architectural and digital intervention and a refined approach to presentation.

Ramon Kassam began his art practice in Limerick and now lives and works in Kilkenny. His solo exhibitions include Green on Red Gallery, Dublin ('Study for a Studio by the Sea', 2018 and Works, 2016); Gallery, Limerick City Gallery of Art (2015); 'Portrait Cuts Itself Out On The Floor', Pallas Projects, Dublin (2013). He has also participated in group exhibitions at Edythe Broad Art Museum, Michigan, USA; Glucksman, Cork; EVA International, Limerick. He was awarded the inaugural Next Generation award from the Arts Council (2016), participated in Welcome to the Neighbourhood residency, Askeaton Contemporary Arts (2016), Cow House Studios residency (2020), and formerly held a Project Studio in TBG+S in 2015.

Gallery Map



1 The Last Limerick Painting
2021, Acrylic and digital print on linen

In 2019, Ramon Kassam participated in a discursive series of presentations in TBG+S ('Publication Scaffold', curated by Askeaton Contemporary Arts) in relation to studio provision in his adopted hometown of Limerick, and encroaching neoliberal agendas in the culture sector in Ireland. His talk, also titled 'The Last Limerick Painting', imagined a situation where making artworks was no longer feasible as a result of studio closures and branding/co-opting of visual art and artists by large cultural and capital institutions. Kassam reanimated the 'death of painting' conversation, not in relation to technology or the art-market, but as a result of property crises and lack of access to spaces for artists.

This painting became the starting point for the exhibition, with an intention to create something tired and at breaking point, but still possessing charm and individual agency.

2 The Last Outpost

2022, Acrylic on linen

The idea of a last outpost, or a refuge, for groups or individual artists suggests a community under threat but actively protecting itself. The murky

viewpoint and intense red orbs signal the cusp of apocalyptic future but for now, the landscape offers remoteness and tranquility.

Kassam has used the phrase 'painting in the dark' to describe his process. The end result is not always in sight or precisely planned, and many of his paintings are continuously reworked and remade until they are resolved.

3 The Last Living Painting

2022, Acrylic on linen

This work has metamorphosed in several stages over its lifetime to date. Six months ago it was a tiny canvas with a similarly spontaneous 'doodle' icon, attached to the 'Former town' painting (#7 on this list) using a section of stretcher bar. This initial artwork was retired before being completely remade as a painting-within-a-painting in the exhibition. The piece was also rotated 90 degrees counter-clockwise during the installation, revealing some unintended links with landscape and horizon lines found elsewhere in the show.

4 Sign Painter

2021, Acrylic on linen

The pastoral scene framed within this painting is a tribute to an existing piece of vernacular 'siopa' signage in an anonymous Irish rural town. The dreamlike haze feels like a memory of Paul Henry paintings and other artists' works in the early-20th century Irish painting canon. Kassam has noted that while modernism was prevalent in industrialised countries throughout the western world, Ireland was rediscovering its own cultural identity as a newly free state,

in part through the medium of idealistic and nostalgically painted landscape scenes.

5 Untitled, Unknown

2022, Acrylic on linen

Abstraction with a visual relationship to musicality and poetry is also at the core of Irish aesthetic history. Kassam has described 'painting the ground beneath our feet' as a way of getting to grips with identifying a new folklore in Irish painting. His archaeological processes of removing, scraping, sanding and reconstructing, a painting's surface helps to convey feeling and understanding through sensation.

6 The Last Gallery ∞ Studio

2022, Acrylic and tacks on linen

A painting of the future, looked at retrospectively in the present. This damaged or perhaps incomplete painting is retrieved from, and depicts, the fictional site that the work takes its title from.

7 Former town

2022, Acrylic on linen

This painting recalls the peaceful seascape/skyscape room in Dublin's Hugh Lane Gallery. Along the bottom edge of the piece is an unpainted line that

could represent a wall or barrier, like those at the edges of housing estates or industrial areas. The sky beyond is immense and open to possibility, yet is grounded in the roughly textured surface of paint underneath, becoming more like a mural, a more common form of painting found in urban areas.

8 Study for a Murder

2022, Acrylic on linen

The title of this piece is a play on words relating to informal paintings produced in advance of a more substantially scaled artwork, and also the destruction of a painting-in-progress through overworking and not knowing when to stop. The imagery relates to the metaphor of a 'changing landscape', as well as demonstrating an artist's revision, research or archive process, perhaps thumbing through images in preparation for a talk or funding application.

The painting and its title also offer a set of contradictions. The imagery is serene and contemplative but the subtext is dramatic, hints at plotting or revenge between competing artists, or a breakdown in social order during extreme circumstances.

9 The Last Gallery ∞ Studio (detail)

2022, Emulsion on plywood

This large-scale outdoor work is Kassam's second-largest painting to date. The honour of first place goes to a propositional painting of an existing, two-storey, painted facade of a former local business in Askeaton, Co. Limerick (Welcome to the Neighbourhood residency, 2016). Kassam subtly intervened by painting a slim, vertical, white line up the edge of the building's side, with black tacks to give the impression that the existing block-colour grid of the exterior was in fact an enormous photo-realistic, modernist painting of a country shopfront.

The hoarding that covers two of TBG+S' large street-facing windows speaks to the vulnerability of urban texture and culture. Hoardings are used to mask and obscure developments or derelict buildings. Artists are sometimes commissioned to beautify or 'art-wash' an otherwise problematic site, and in turn street artists, activists and the general public also mark and claim these surfaces as part of their civic landscape.

The Temple Bar area is plastered with pop iconography of Irish musical and literary giants, projecting their mythic status and grounding them in our wider cultural folklore. The pubs, tourist gift shops and walking tours reinforce these legends, and Kassam's hoarding will undergo its own narrative within this context, where visual art has less prominence.

10 The Last Gallery & Studio (Reconstruction)

2022, Digitally altered photograph with oil paint filter

An unrealised proposal during the planning for the exhibition involved the temporary removal, dislocation and interruption of the TEMPLE BAR GALLERY & STUDIOS signage facing onto the River Liffey to read THE LAST GALLERY & STUDIO. The proposal sketch was reworked into a detailed digital painting incorporated boarded up windows in the studios and shuttered abandoned shops by the roadside. This eerily realistic and poignant image was then rendered with a digital oil paint filter, to give a sense of artificial authenticity. In Kassam's parallel alternate perspective, this digital reconstruction has generated an impression of what a damaged original painting may look like in a post-painting world.