

# Vera Klute studies the human animal in its natural habitat

The German-born artist's exceptional show is disturbing and even slightly creepy

## The Grand Scheme – Vera Klute

The Lab, Dublin



The Tapestry 'Commotion' by Vera Klute



The installation 'Move Along' by Vera Klute

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German-born, Dublin-based Vera Klute impressed with her graduation show at Dún Laoghaire IADT in 2006. Not that you could have guessed the route her work would take since. She has been unpredictable in her versatility, but perhaps we're starting to get a more rounded picture of her considerable abilities with *The Grand Scheme* at The Lab, which incorporates two complex animated video projections, an ingeniously elaborate kinetic sculpture, highly realistic wax and polystyrene sculptures, drawings and – oh yes – several tapestries.

On second thoughts, perhaps we're not quite getting a rounded picture. Who knows what she'll do next? From her graduation animation piece, she has displayed an interest in the structure and routine of everyday being and everyday beings, bringing the eyes of specialists to bear on the human animal in its native habitat. Even here, though, versatility applies. At a rough estimate, the specialists might include a social anthropologist, a time and motion expert, a phenomenologist, an engineer and a physicist. The viewpoint is usually that of an intrigued but puzzled outsider trying to make sense of a game that seems to make sense to those involved in it but appears nonsensical otherwise.

Given that her subject could be summarised as the everyday viewed as inexplicably strange – think Beckett – it's hardly surprising that there is something unsettling, disturbing and even slightly creepy at the heart of her work. Look no further than the main sculptural piece at The Lab. It is called *Move Along*, and it does just that, moving you along to the screening room to see a video that you gradually realise, takes a rather harsh view of the herd instinct in humans, although with humour thrown in. Klute has a feeling for slapstick.

*Move Along* consists of a series of arms, with hands attached, precisely sculpted from scored and cut white paper. Animated by lengths of string attached to an electric motor, they usher us through the gallery. They also attract your eye because they are beautifully made and have the uncanny life-like quality of a ventriloquist's dummy.

This is no accident, as the two wax sculptures, *Growth (1 and 2)*, bear out. These disturbing sets of heads are family groupings, a mother and child, and a mother and her four adult offspring. Klute has connected them like conjoined twins – with echoes of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. More, she has an emergent head sprouting from the neck of the mother with the young child. She doesn't prescribe meanings, but the interior of these wax likenesses is polystyrene, perhaps implying some scepticism about individuality and free will. As does *Swarm* and the three drawings, each a layered image of a typical grouping in society: family, school class, sports team.

The tapestries, images of gang violence, are another grouping. But is Klute loading the deck here? She may be understating her own capacity as an independent agent, like those agents of inquiry she evokes through the idea of the notional observer, those who analyse and assess, who may be part of the group but have not surrendered to groupthink. Still, it is an exceptionally good show.