

Ideas of family are relative

Alternatives to the traditional model are explored in new show, says Tina Darb O'Sullivan

MODERN Families: Relatives and Relationships in Art is the new exhibition at the Lewis Glucksman Gallery at University College Cork. Curated by Chris Clarke and Matt Packer, the exhibition investigates the meaning of family.

Among the artists is Mark O'Kelly, who presents two works from his 2010 solo exhibition, 'Leaders and Followers'. O'Kelly's paintings reference cults, within the sphere of family groupings. The landscape painting 'Heaven's Gate' refers to the 1980 Michael Cimino film and to the cult whose members committed mass suicide in 1997. It is surreal and plays with the notions of acceptance and docility.

"Painting something like all these big cactuses is a mad thing to be doing," says O'Kelly. "The images I was working with didn't look very real. Sometimes, people will accept the way something looks, at face value, because it is a photograph or because it is printed. I'm thinking very much about the paintings forming, about the installation, and the nature of the way they're painted being almost a performance, because they contradict certain conventions or perceptions about how a painting is supposed to operate."

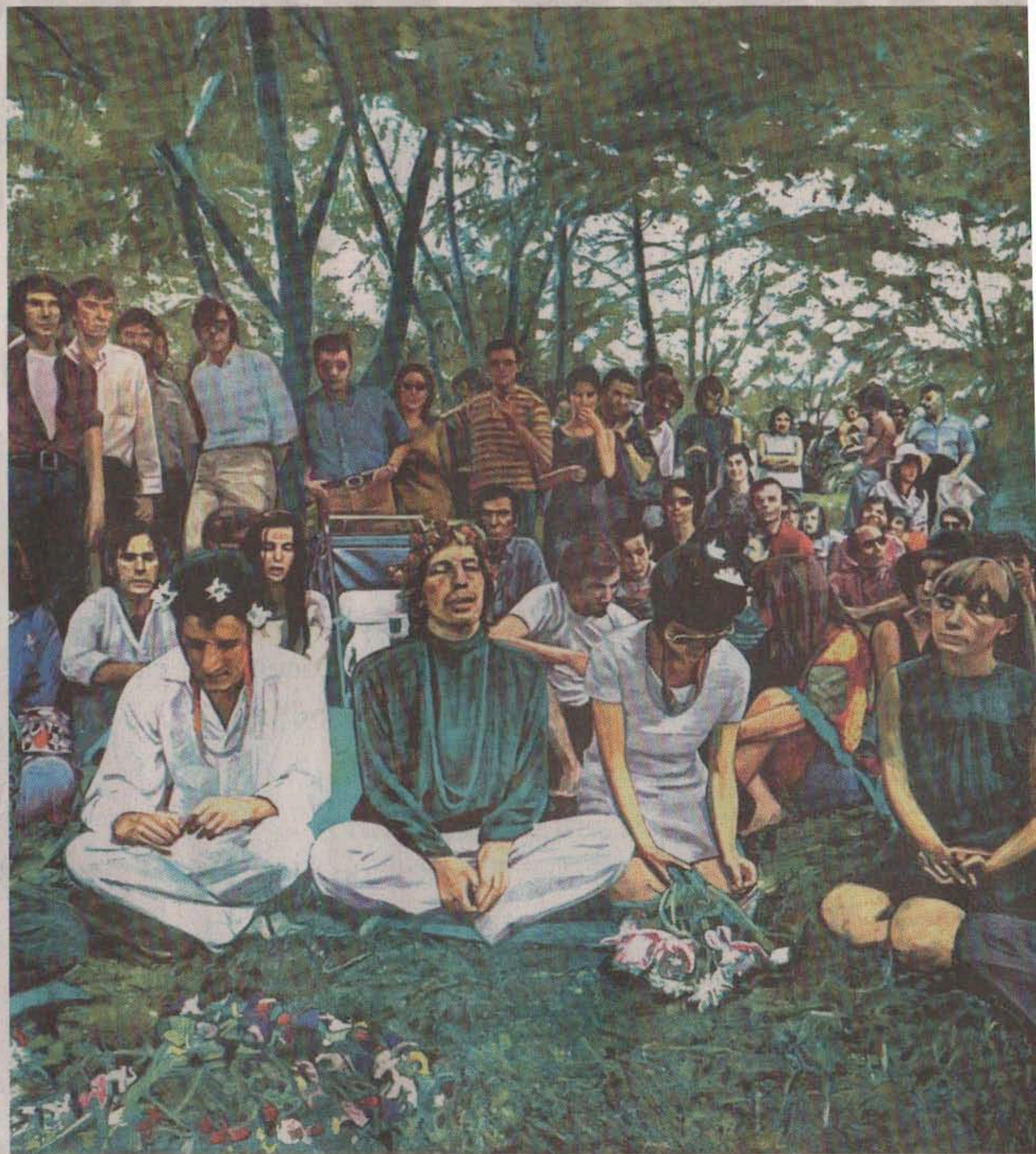
O'Kelly's second painting, 'Leaders and Followers', examines the dynamic of group portraiture. The viewer focuses on the central figure as the leader, without the artist's guidance. These hierarchies exist in families, whose members often fall into a natural, self-imposed ranking.

O'Kelly challenges convention, both in the subjects of his paintings and in their creation. "Of the two paintings in the show, one is very green and one is very red," says O'Kelly. "They're opposite, in terms of the palette, and that produces a difficulty in the studio. When you think of Monet, or someone working in traditional painting, they're working with a similar palette within a body of work. In paintings like 'The Poplar Trees' or even 'Rouen Cathedral', even though he's analysing the effects of light, every day, on the cathedral, there is also some sense of relationship between those tones and colours. I'm doing a lot of things in my paintings, in terms of the technical. The things that I do precede any sort of subjective interpretation, to some degree. I'm working according to all sorts of formulas and, in doing that, I'm trying to show the way in which reality or history is presented."

The notion of what constitutes a family has changed in the past couple of decades. Isabel Nolan, in her abstract sculptures, examines the different definitions of family. The curving, yet stark lines of her work are an expression of containment and expansion, a comment on the fluidity of the modern family.

Marko Mäetamm puts his finger on family dynamics beyond the public gaze. His 30 works in blue ink are hilarious, illustrated cartoons featuring long dialogues of text. He portrays tired couples acclimatised to the daily grind of tensions and resentments.

In her photographic series, 'Front', Trish Morrissey poses



“ The notion of what constitutes a family has changed in the past couple of decades... it's more fluid ”

with families to which she does not belong. All the shots are taken on a beach. The neutral, relaxed background exaggerates Morrissey's rigid pose, as if she is trying on families while searching for the right fit. Morrissey takes the position of the mother, donning clothing, or a wedding ring, that belongs to the person she has replaced. This ejected person is then instructed to take the photograph. Despite the

presence of families, the photographs are lonely.

A *Playboy* magazine transcript is re-enacted by familiar Irish actors in Gerard Byrne's videos and photography installation 'New Sexual Lifestyles', from 2003. The theme is based on a 1972 issue of the magazine, in which sexual freedom and liberal marital arrangements were debated. The photographs are the set for the video, a modernist summer house designed by Scott Tallon Walker and built in Co Wicklow in 1972.

Groupings of mirrors are used by Nevin Aladag to replicate the family unit. The mirrors are set up for visiting families to interact with, and measure how they fit into the ideal family dimensions. 'Family Portrait: Daughter, son, father, mother, dog (2007)' is the first work that greets the visitor

Detail from Mark O'Kelly's *Leaders and Followers* which features in the Glucksman Gallery, UCC.

Picture: courtesy Mark O'Kelly

on arrival at the exhibition and is a comment on the modern preoccupation with analysis and the imprint of family on oneself.

■ Runs until Nov 3.

Mark O'Kelly is the curator of 'Starting Over', at Temple Bar Gallery and Studios, Dublin, until Aug 17, and has work included in 'Partition', By Static & Void Galleries, Derry, part of the City of Culture programme, until Aug 31.

Grow Your Family Tree free drawing workshop in Lewis Glucksman Gallery, 1pm, Saturday, Aug 17 as part of Heritage Week.