As each environmental crisis arises and then fades into the background of day-to-day life – being too far away, too slow, too far gone, everyone’s and no-one’s fault – our position with regards the natural world becomes loaded with a latent collective unease. Choosing detachment from nature is a form of self-preservation, a guard against a problem for which we have few pragmatic answers; and yet this detachment is also inevitable in the contemporary world, the alternative being difficult to even quantify beyond various clichés of self-sufficiency.

We are more comfortable with superficial gestures and temporary arrangements. Even aspirational culture, reborn in the one-upmanship of pictorial social media and slow-living blogs, finds in its roots an apparent re-connection to nature. Hikes in the forest, tertiary colour schemes, and handcrafted items are recorded industriously, perhaps to appease a kind of urbanised guilt – no matter if that particular forest was planted into cartographic quadrants.

As a product of human individuation, the gallery is a representative site of environmental detachment – unable to bridge the rifts, but aware of them, able to play with them. *Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain* embraces our now-alien nature, reveling in our ability to pick and choose from the natural world, to intercept its processes, to harvest and apply from it what we want and need – the decorative, the functional, the recreational, the excitement of uncanny and unknown things. Immersive environmental installation this is not; the combined, limited experience of each artist’s work is key to achieving this exhibition’s ultimately standoffish effect.

There are, however, arch little touches of installation. Stickered IKEA plants dot the space around Melanie Bonajo’s films, succulents that recall waiting rooms but also the cliché of the modern cultural workplace. It brings to mind the way in which a vase of cut flowers works in a domestic setting: the plants fit in within the white walls in such a way that, when considered, feels absurd.

The films themselves are two narratives told by a personified nature and a multiple-perspective ode to hallucinogens, mixing new age-style spirituality with self-aware irony. *Night Soil: Fake Paradise Part 1,* based upon the effect and ceremony surrounding the ayahuasca plant, appears to show something between the drug in action and the representation of its effect or perception. It is an information onslaught: plants talk, vacuous women in spoof tribal dress drawl into mobile phones, iPad cameras split the forest ground into the compositional rule of thirds. A blindfolded woman feels her way around the city, and tanned, thin young people walk around with the kind of painted faces associated with very earnest performance art. A woman poses against a tree while a goat eats vegetation from her clothes. There is a merman.

Something jars about this film – whilst not documentative, it feels strangely disingenuous. The power constructs, faith elements and money in circulation around the ritualistic culture of ayahuasca are briefly referenced; whilst praise is heaped and stories divulged it seems as if an accumulative rift in representation is going on. The film feels somewhat frustrated by the limitations of the medium, reliant on descriptions of past events to an audience presumably ignorant of the culture. Real life disappoints the transcendent as people are wilfully reduced to caricature, the shown humans a corporeal weight that contrasts to a speaker’s metaphysical narrative.

The viewer judges the film as a stream of dissonant contextual information, and in return the film seems to close off to those that don’t “get it”. Is this scripted, testimonial, or both? Could this be where ancient practices and contemporary culture genuinely coalesce; perhaps this appropriated, spiritualized process is all that remains for inhabitants of the developed western world to “really” reconnect? Am I, in fact, closing myself off? And, bearing in mind we are not here to be impressed or convinced by a lifestyle choice, do these questions matter - are they part of the work?

Ciarán Ó Dochartaigh works with similar subject matter in his wall-mounted structures, made using perforated steel supports, flecked polystyrene insulation and corriboard-printed photographs that sit adjacent to the wall. The images show plants known for their hallucinogenic and delirium-inducing properties, set against a sickly, chemical purple backdrop. Each shot is a detail of a larger set-up: a stem flows across the image plane in one, whilst a heat lamp on trumpet-shaped blooms occupies another, used for the photo’s lighting as much as for the plant’s growth.

As living, cultivated photographic props, the nature of these illicit plants is interesting; their purpose has shifted. Amongst the obvious synthetic materials of this work, the plants themselves sit as unreal components that supersede their status as living things as their long-standing cultural weight is imbibed with a new and very specific significance. *Vico’s Vapor ’98* references a long-gone Belfast nightclub; in the next room is *Point Douglas Rehab*, named after a Canadian care facility. The “up” is followed by the “down” in a detached detail of ecstasy, and rather like Bonajo’s film, is abstracted far from any human experience of consumption.

Whilst Bonajo and Ó Dochartaigh use the loaded cultural frameworks of certain species, Veit Laurent Kurz works with ecology in a more general sense, employing highly sculptural processes and more traditional aesthetic references. In doing so the artist plays on our relationship to natural beauty and its derivatives. The lurid diorama-like ecosystems, with fake grass, fabric flowers, circuit boards and switches, have complicit gendering – the platforms sit precariously on long, ornate legs, with tall magenta orchids sprung from jewellery imbedded dirt. These details turn the piece into a feedback system of twisted, make-do-and-mend replanting, an interpretation or inspiration of the gendering of form. Souvenirs of humanity condense into new and exalted representations of life, each displayed as a dystopian specimen, curiosity, or perhaps decoration.

The work of Karl Blossfeldt presents an unexpected and quiet foil to the overall thrust of *Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain*. The black and white macro photography of botanical details, first published 87 years ago, shows a number of plant forms, removed from any natural framing. They are unspecific, bloated and unfurling bodies, hairy and a little uncanny to see. Around the size of a cigarette card, they would perhaps be a little out of place in a biology textbook, but only a little.

Their presence is a constructive reference point amongst the other, larger-scale works in the exhibition, where searing colour and fictitious representation is heavily employed. Whilst this show finds its basis in our perception and relationship to the natural world, the more understated format of Blossfeldt’s work, perhaps even photographed as a mere curiosity, undercuts the gloss and headache of the exhibition’s dystopian edge.

The parallels between a simultaneous consumption of culture and nature are marked in *Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain*. Vested interests in both are exposed. Nothing is exactly inspired by the natural world but is instead appropriated by the artists, each using nature’s social and ethical plasticity, co-opting it in the service of unabashed human self-interest that comes with personal and collective provision. As a result the cultural sanitization of our embraced nature has been mixed around a little, allowing for bleed-out. But whilst we may experiment with the ecological, it must still, ultimately, be contained; the once-personal means to our survival is reduced to our own preferences of intervention and framing. Nature remains of us and at arm’s length, just the way we like it.