


# CIRCA 127

CONTEMPORARY VISUAL CULTURE IN IRELAND  
SPRING 2009 | €7.50 £5 US\$12 | ISSN 0263-9475



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New Work Commission by MCAC

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# Conflicting Account — New Work by Paul Seawright

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26 March —  
30 May 2009



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Millennium Court Arts Centre  
William Street  
Portadown  
Co Armagh  
BT62 3NX

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Telephone  
0044 28 3839 4415  
Facsimile  
0044 28 3839 4483  
info@millenniumcourt.org  
www.millenniumcourt.org





New Work Commission by MCAC, Glucksman Gallery,  
National College of Art & Design and the University of Ulster

# Guerrilla Girls All-Ireland Tour & Commission of New Work

March 2009 /  
Oct 09—June 2010

**Guerrilla Girls All-Ireland Tour:**  
A series of Performance Gigs

**31 March**  
Belfast University of Ulster  
lunchtime chat

**31 March**  
Millennium Court Arts Centre  
Portadown 7:00pm

**1 April**  
Glucksman Gallery Cork

**2 April**  
National College of Art & Design  
Dublin

**3 April**  
Butler Gallery  
Parade Tower, Kilkenny Castle

**Millennium Court Arts Centre**  
Guerrilla Girl Mini-Retrospective  
Contextual Exhibition

1 April—30 May  
MCAC Portadown  
Opening Night Reception  
8:00—9:30pm  
Gig / Performance  
7:00—8:00pm

**Exhibition of New Work  
by the Guerrilla Girls**  
October 2009—June 2010

Contemporary  
visual culture in  
Ireland

 ISSN 0263-9475

**circa**



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**Contacts**

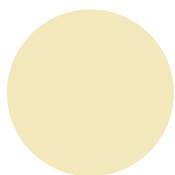
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***Editorial 14 | Update 17 | Features 20 | Reviews 54 |***

(front cover)  
Gareth Kennedy  
*The Future of ice*  
2008  
event with vocalist Dorothy  
Murphy  
digital video still  
courtesy artist



# CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

## Artists' Residency Programme

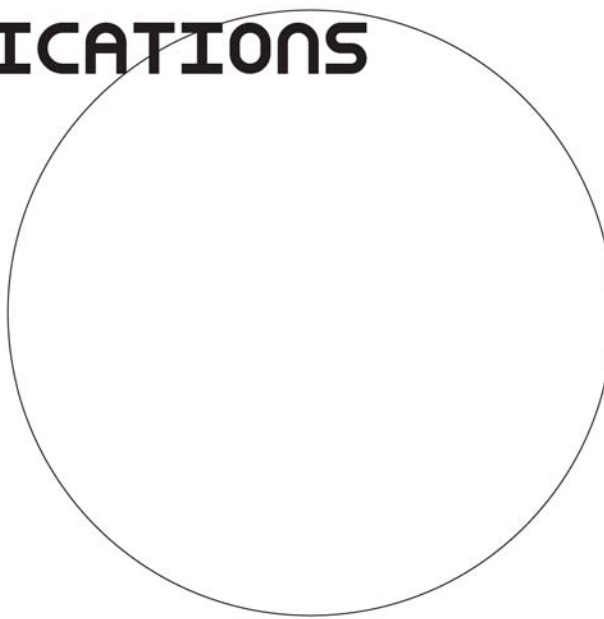
The **ARP** at the Irish Museum of Modern Art has two application deadlines:

**31st March and 30th September yearly**

Applications are welcome from both national and international art practitioners. Successful candidates will receive a free studio and accommodation along with a €400 per month bursary. All residencies range from two to six months in duration and are programmed a year following the application deadline.

For further information on ARP or to download application forms please go to [www.imma.ie](http://www.imma.ie) or email [arp@imma.ie](mailto:arp@imma.ie)

**IMMA**, Royal Hospital, Military Rd, Kilmainham, Dublin 8, Ireland  
T. 00 353 | 612 9900 F. 00 353 | 612 9999 E. [info@imma.ie](mailto:info@imma.ie) W. [www.imma.ie](http://www.imma.ie)



## BUTLER GALLERY

### CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

for 2010/2011 programme

- Submissions to include a concise, clearly written proposal & CV with labelled documentation in CD, DVD, slide or photograph format.
- A short artist statement should also be included.
- Address submissions to:

THE DIRECTOR  
Butler Gallery  
The Castle  
Kilkenny

**CLOSING DATE FOR SUBMISSIONS MARCH 27TH, 2009**

For further information & floor map visit [www.butlergallery.com](http://www.butlergallery.com)  
[info@butlergallery.com](mailto:info@butlergallery.com) tel +353 (0)56 7761106

## BREAKING GROUND

**BREAKING GROUND IS THE BALLYMUN  
REGENERATION LTD PER CENT FOR ART PROGRAMME**

**CURRENT AND FORTHCOMING PROJECTS BY**

**KEVIN ATHERTON, CECILY BRENNAN,  
JOHN BYRNE, CARL DORAN,  
JOCHEN GERZ, PAUL MCKINLEY**

**NEW PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE ON**

**ADAM CHODZKO, JOYCE DUFFY,  
MICHAEL MCLOUGHLIN, SEAMUS NOLAN**

**[WWW.BREAKINGGROUND.IE](http://WWW.BREAKINGGROUND.IE)  
[INFO@BREAKINGGROUND.IE](mailto:INFO@BREAKINGGROUND.IE)  
+353 (0)1 883 2173**



Comhionann, Oidhreacht agus Rialtas Áitiúil  
Environment, Heritage and Local Government



Dublin City  
Baile Átha Cliath



B  
G  
I  
2



**BUTLER GALLERY**

March 14th - April 26th

# BARRIE COOKE PORTRAITS

April 3rd

# GUERRILLA GIRLS GIG

May 2nd - June 14th

# TIM DAVIES



**Opening Hours:**

March 10am-1pm, 2-5pm  
April 10am-1pm, 2-5.30pm  
May - June 10am - 5.30pm

The Castle, Kilkenny, Ireland  
tel; + 353 (0)56 7761 106  
info@butlertgallery.com  
www.butlertgallery.com

## An Exhibition of Portraits of Irish Writers "THE HERO WITH A THOUSAND FACES"

March 6 - May 30, 2009



*Portraits of Joseph Brodsky and Seamus Heaney, London, 1991*  
John Minihan, Collection Crawford Art Gallery, Cork



**ABBAY THEATRE**  
Amharclann na Mainistreach



**Crawford Art Gallery**

Emmet Place, Cork, Ireland  
+353 21 4805042  
www.crawfordartgallery.ie



### Open Call for Studios Programme 2009

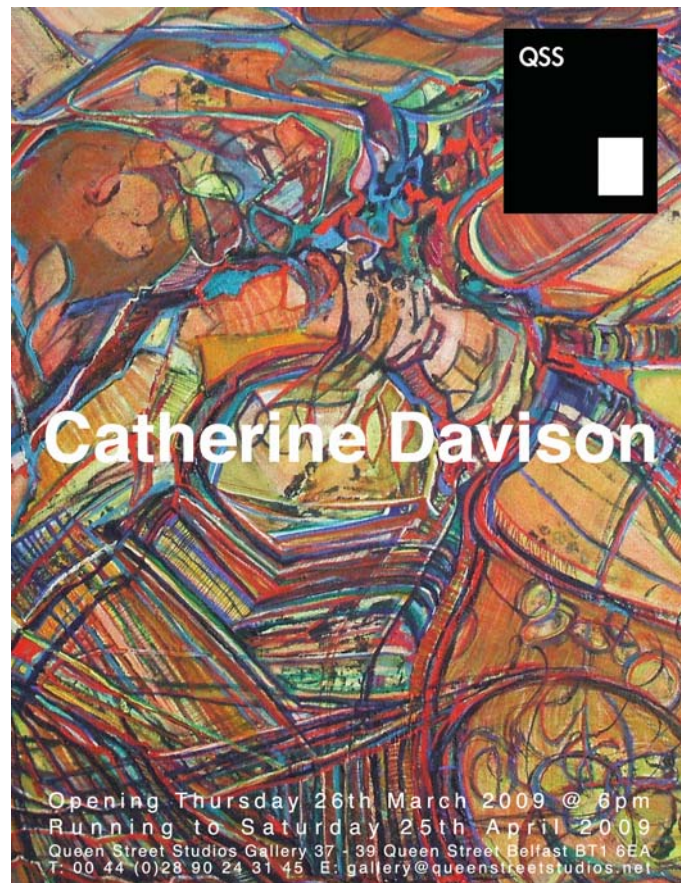


Centrally located in Dublin's cultural quarter, **Temple Bar Gallery & Studios** is one of Ireland's leading contemporary art venues.

TBG&S wishes to inform artists that a number of studio spaces will become available for occupancy over 2009-2010. We are now inviting applications from Irish and International artists for use of **Project and Membership Studios**.

Closing date for receipt of applications is **5pm Friday 17 April 2009**

Download an application from [www.templebargallery.com](http://www.templebargallery.com) or contact:  
Claire Power, Studios Development Officer, Temple Bar Gallery & Studios,  
5-9 Temple Bar, Dublin 2, T. + 353 1 671 0073 E. [info@templebargallery.com](mailto:info@templebargallery.com)

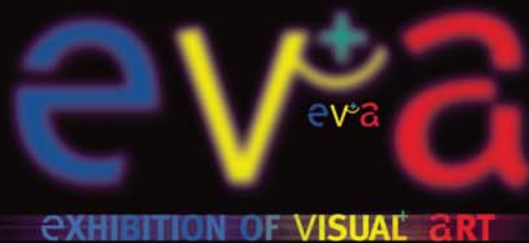


# Catherine Davison

Opening Thursday 26th March 2009 @ 6pm  
Running to Saturday 25th April 2009  
Queen Street Studios Gallery 37 - 39 Queen Street Belfast BT1 6EA  
T: 00 44 (0)28 90 24 31 45 E: [galler@queenstreetstudios.net](mailto:galler@queenstreetstudios.net)



IRELAND'S PRE-EMINENT ANNUAL EXHIBITION OF CONTEMPORARY ART



# OPEN e v+ a 2009 Reading the City

MARCH 14TH TO MAY 24TH  
LIMERICK CITY CENTRE VENUES

**OPEN e v+ a 2009**, now in its 33rd year is Ireland's pre-eminent annual exhibition of contemporary art, continues as an open submission exhibition, open to all artists world-wide, working in all media, materials, styles and genres

CO-CURATORS:  
ANGELIKA NOLLERT / YILMAZ DZIEWIOR  
[GERMANY]

The 33rd annual **OPEN e v+ a** will in 2009 for the first time since 1978 be a co-curated exhibition. The two curators, who have worked well together in the past, will share the responsibilities for adjudicating the submissions, selecting the works and venues, designing the exhibition and its budget allocations, determining the **OPEN e v+ a** awards and contributing their thoughts to the catalogue essay.

**Angelika Nollert** (b 1966) worked on exhibition projects at a number of museums, including the *Sculpture Projects in Münster 1997*; as Curator of the *Portikus Frankfurt/Main* (1997-2000); as Project Manager for *Documenta 11* (2001); and Project Manager, Visual Arts at the *Siemens Arts Program*, Munich (2002-2007). Since 2007, the Director, The New Museum for Art and Design Nuremberg.

**Yilmaz Dziewior** (b 1964) Independent Curator, critic and catalogue essayist; published regularly in *Artforum*, *Camera Austria* and *Texte zur Kunst*; Freelance curator, Museum Ludwig, Cologne (1997, 1999-2000); Director, Kunstverein Hamburg (2001-08); Professor of Art Theory (2003-2009), Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Hamburg

The Co-Curators have selected the work of the following artists for **OPEN e v+ a 2009**:

Nevin Aladag (Turkey); Andreas Bunte (Germany); Lynda Devenney (Ireland); Willie Doherty (N.Ireland); Andrea Faciu (Romania); Andreas Fogarasi (Austria); Jan Freuchen (Norway); Garvan Gallagher (Ireland); William Hamilton (Ireland); Diango Hernandez (Cuba); Michele Horrigan (Ireland); Florian Hüttner (Germany); Luis Jacob (Peru/Canada); Daniel Knorr (Romania); Jakob Kolding (Denmark); Nicky Larkin (Ireland); An Te Liu (Canada); Sean Lynch (Ireland); Eduardo Daniel Navarro (Argentina); Vulkasin Nedeljovic (Serbia); Seamus Nolan (Ireland); Isabella Oberländer (Austria); Eoin O'Conaill (Ireland); Siobhan Ogilvy (Ireland); David O'Kane (Ireland); Eamon O'Kane (Ireland); John O'Reilly (Ireland); Alan Phelan (Ireland); Marjetica Potrč (Slovenia); Gavin Redmond (Ireland); Tom Ryan (Ireland); Jochen Schmith (Germany); Donal Sheehan (Ireland); Nicole Six/Paul Petritsch (Austria); Stefanos Tsivopoulos (Greece); Olaf Unverzart (Germany)

## 2009 e v+ a Colloquies on Contemporary Art and Culture

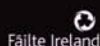
15 - 17 May 2009 Limerick City Gallery of Art

A weekend programme of informal, even intimate, discussions and friendly comment and argument among returning past **e v+ a** adjudicators, invited guests, artists and audiences who endeavour to the make and share sense and meaning out of how contemporary art and culture interact in the present generally, and as they are exemplified in the works that constitute **OPEN e v+ a 2009**.

Contact [www.eva.ie](http://www.eva.ie) / [info@eva.ie](mailto:info@eva.ie)



LCGA

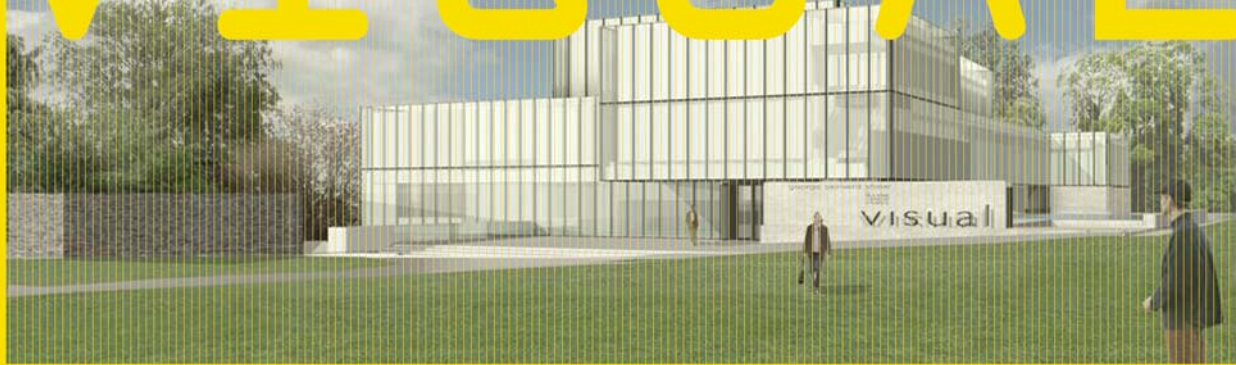


BELLTABLE

RTÉ lyric fm



# VISUAL



opening september 2009 [www.carlowarts.ie](http://www.carlowarts.ie)



**“Listen – it’s not a war where you’re driving and shooting the whole day. It’s sort of relaxed. Some days you do nothing. You do twelve hours and then go to sleep in your room. Not every day you’re there something happens. Not every second is there something happening. Sometimes you’re just there. Sometimes they put you somewhere for nothing. Once they positioned me behind a tree. We’re being shot at and there’s nothing you can do. You’re positioned behind a tree. For nothing. Because certain people felt good about it. About your being there. You understand? They put you in all sorts of places: Dangerous places. Not dangerous places. As long as you’re doing something.”** Omer Fast, *A Tank Translated*, 2002

## Signals in the Dark: Art in the Shadow of War

The Model Arts and Niland Gallery

15 March to 3 May 2009

**The Model Arts and Niland Gallery**  
at the Model Satellite, Castle House  
9 Castle Street, Sligo, Ireland

web: [www.modelart.ie](http://www.modelart.ie)  
phone: 071 91 41405  
Free admission to all events.

**Opening Reception**  
Saturday, 14 March, 5pm  
Tour with curator Séamus Kealy

Tuesday – Friday, 12 – 6pm  
Saturdays & Sundays, 12 – 4pm  
Open late Thursdays, until 8pm

**Public Curator Tour**  
Wednesday, 29 April, 5pm





# GALWAY ARTS CENTRE

is now inviting proposals for  
Artists' studios August 2009  
Gallery exhibitions 2010

Deadline 30th April 2009  
Postal Applications only  
Galway Arts Centre  
47 Dominick Street  
Galway

Please refer to [www.galwayartscentre.ie](http://www.galwayartscentre.ie) for further information  
or ring 091 565886 for an information pack

Image: Andrew Kearney 'Title:Unknown' 2008



## national irish visual arts library

Public Research Library  
of 20th Century  
Irish Art & Design

National College of Art & Design  
100 Thomas Street  
Dublin 8  
T: 01 636 4347

[romanod@ncad.ie](mailto:romanod@ncad.ie)  
[www.ncad.ie/nival](http://www.ncad.ie/nival)



**nival**  
NATIONAL IRISH VISUAL ARTS LIBRARY



# draíocht

Ronan McCrea  
New Town Centre (Extract 1)  
January 30 - April 4 2009

Ross McDonnell  
the new brilliant  
January 30 - April 4 2009

Sounds Like Art  
Group exhibition featuring work by  
David Bickley, Jenny Brady, Maeve  
Collins, Michael Doocey, Amanda  
Dunsmore, Aileen Lambert, Paul  
McAree & Fiona Reilly  
April 17 - June 27 2009

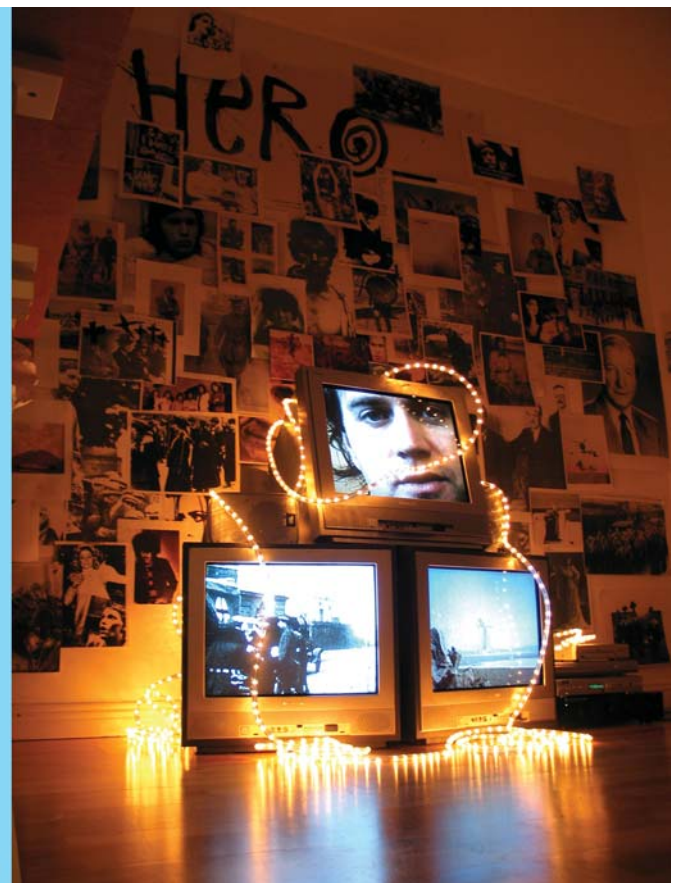
Mary Noonan and Marie Connole  
The Habit of Remembering  
April 17 - June 27 2009

Artist in Residence  
January - June 2009  
Mark Clare

Draíocht,  
Blanchardstown  
Centre  
Blanchardstown,  
Dublin 15.  
Tel: 01 8852610  
Fax: 01 8243434  
[www.draiocht.ie](http://www.draiocht.ie)



Image: Paul McAree 'Crow's Nest (work in progress)', 2009





## Master of Art in Public (MA | part-time / full-time)

The Master Art in Public has evolved from current complex concerns for the role of art / artists in a changing so-ciety. It is based in Belfast, where engaged art practices have been developed in various "contested spaces" for many years. The programme seeks to develop testing modes of working that are dialogic, participatory, interventionist or collaborative in intention and structure.

Throughout the programme students will work with formal / informal external partners and be expected to develop self initiated, innovative practice based approaches.

Contact:

**Susanne Bosch**  
**Dan Shipsides**

**s.bosch@ulster.ac.uk &**  
**dj.shipsides@ulster.ac.uk**

## Master of Fine Art (MFA | 2 years full-time)

The MFA has been successfully delivering an ambitious and challenging studio based programme for over twenty-five years.

We invite applications from students with outstanding creative ability, who are highly motivated and committed to developing their art practice to a high standard of professionalism. Working with tutors who exhibit and publish internationally, you will be encouraged to develop your practice in a supportive and rigorous studio environment.

Contact:

**David Campbell**  
(Course Director) or  
**Alistair Wilson**  
(Admissions Tutor)

**d.campbell@ulster.ac.uk**  
**a.wilson1@ulster.ac.uk**

University of Ulster, Belfast campus

**- applications will be received until the end of May 2009 -**

[www.uupadb.com](http://www.uupadb.com)



## the first circa salon

an evening coinciding with the launch of the spring 2009 issue of the magazine bringing together artists, writers, curators, collectors, musicians and circa-lovers for a celebration of contemporary art and culture.

////// the sugar club \\\\\\\ 05 march 2009 \\\\\\\  
7.30 until late \\\\\\\



# CIRCA



(Donde vas amor, voy; amor mio con el aire en un vaso y el mar en un vidrio? 1987 © Ouka Leele

## Affinity Paths 10 Spanish Photographers 2 April - 23 May 2009

**Exhibition Room, Instituto Cervantes Dublin**  
Lincoln House, Lincoln Place, Dublin 2  
<http://dublincervantes.es>

**Opening Hours:**  
Monday to Thursday 2-8 pm, Saturday 10 am-2 pm  
Closed on the 13th of April and 4th of May

Organized by:



In association with:



# Highlanes Gallery

## McWilliam at Banbridge: a selection An exhibition of work by F.E. McWilliam

Curated by Dr. Denise Ferran

26 February- 21 April, 2009

Highlanes Gallery, Laurence Street,  
Drogheda, Co. Louth, Ireland

Open: Mon-Sat 10.00am-6.00pm, Sun 12.00-5.00pm

T. 00 353 (0) 41 9803311 W. [www.highlanes.ie](http://www.highlanes.ie) E. [info@highlanes.ie](mailto:info@highlanes.ie)



F.E. McWilliam with *Man and Wife*, cast stone, 1948, h. 112 cm, Collection, Ulster Museum. Photograph © F.E. McWilliam Estate



Department of  
**Finance and  
Personnel**  
[www.dfpni.gov.uk](http://www.dfpni.gov.uk)



**DSD**  
Department for  
Social Development  
[www.dsdni.gov.uk](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk)

## Design Contest – Notice To Artists

### Fountain Street Public Artwork

Central Procurement Directorate on behalf of its client DSD, Belfast City Centre Regeneration Directorate wishes to commission an outstanding artist to design, and arrange the production, delivery and installation of a major piece of public art to be located in Fountain Street, as part of the Belfast Streets Ahead project. The commission is to create a permanent contemporary landmark as an integrated part of the refurbishment of the Fountain Street area.

Budget for the project is £100,000 GBP with the possibility of an additional £50,000 GBP being allocated.

It is intended that the project shall be completed by November 2009

Artists wishing to participate in the contest must submit a Pre – Qualification Response document. The selection of a minimum of five and a maximum of eight artists shall be invited to prepare concept sketch designs on the basis of the information given in this document.

Pre – Qualification Response documents can be only obtained and submitted electronically using Central Procurement Directorate's e-sourcing system, e-sourcing NI. If you are not already registered to use e-sourcing NI and wish to obtain these documents you must do so. Please register at <https://e-sourcingni.bravosolution.com> The Pre – Qualification Response documents may be found by following the link to the current opportunities page.

The latest date for receipt of completed Pre-qualification Response document is 20 April 2009.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

[www.dfpni.gov.uk](http://www.dfpni.gov.uk)



# Phil Collins

**zasto ne govorim srpski [na srpskom], 2008.**

INAUGURAL EXHIBITION  
**6 March - 24 April 2009**

Monday - Saturday 10am - 5pm  
Admission free

**National College of Art and Design**

100 Thomas Street, Dublin 8. Tel: 01 6364261.







# SIM BODIES & NO BODIES

Christine Borland

13th February - 25th April 2009  
[www.ormeaubaths.co.uk](http://www.ormeaubaths.co.uk)

THE GLASGOW  
SCHOOL OF ART





# THE ARMORY SHOW 2009

EWAN GIBBS, NEW YORK (2008, DETAIL) COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND TIMOTHY TAYLOR GALLERY, LONDON



**NEW YORK CITY MARCH 5 – 8, 2009**  
**WWW.THEARMORYSHOW.COM**

**THE ARMORY SHOW –  
MODERN  
PIER 92 MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART**

AMERINGER & YOHE FINE ART, ARMAND BARTOS FINE ART, BONNI BENRUBI GALLERY, NIELS BORCH JENSEN, GALERIE BOULAKIA, BEN BROWN FINE ARTS, VALERIE CARBERRY GALLERY, ALAN CRISTEA GALLERY, DANESE, MAXWELL DAVIDSON GALLERY, KEITH DE LELLIS GALLERY, TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY, CECILIA DE TORRES, LTD., EDELMAN ARTS, FAURSCHOU, PETER FINDLAY GALLERY, FLEISHER/OLLMAN GALLERY, FORUM GALLERY, FRIEDMAN BENDA, GANA ART, JAMES GOODMAN GALLERY, JAMES GRAHAM & SONS, HOWARD GREENBERG GALLERY, HACKETT-FREEDMAN GALLERY, HIRSCHL & ADLER MODERN, LEONARD HUTTON GALLERIES, DAVID KLEIN GALLERY, SABINE KNUST GALLERY, MICHAEL KOHN GALLERY, ALAN KOPPEL GALLERY, STUDIO LA CITTÀ, GALERIE LAHUMIÈRE, GALERIE LEVY, LOCKS GALLERY, MAEGHT GALERIES, MARLBOROUGH GALLERY, LAURENCE MILLER GALLERY, ROBERT MILLER GALLERY, YOSHI MILO GALLERY, EDWARD TYLER NAHEM FINE ART LLC, O'HARA GALLERY, FRANKLIN PARRASCH GALLERY, GIORGIO PERSANO, RICCO/MARESCA GALLERY, NICHOLAS ROBINSON GALLERY, ROSEGALLERY, MICHAEL ROSENFELD GALLERY, JULIE SAUL GALLERY, GALERIE MICHAEL SCHULTZ, MARC SELWYN FINE ART, SICARDI GALLERY, BRUCE SILVERSTEIN GALLERY, SPANIERMAN MODERN, SPRINGER & WINCKLER GALERIE, GALERIE DANIEL TEMPLON, GALERIE THOMAS, VADEHRA ART GALLERY, MEREDITH WARD FINE ART, WASHBURN GALLERY, WETTERLING GALLERY, AMY WOLF FINE ART AND ELRICK-MANLEY FINE ART, WORTHINGTON GALLERY

**THE ARMORY SHOW – THE INTERNATIONAL  
FAIR OF NEW ART  
PIER 94 NEW ART BY LIVING ARTISTS**

303 GALLERY, AIDAN GALLERY, GALERIE AKINCI, ANDRÉHN-SCHIPTJENKO, ANGLES GALLERY, THE APARTMENT, THE APPROACH, ARARIO GALLERY, ARNDT & PARTNER, ART:CONCEPT, ART IN GENERAL, BARONIAN FRANCEY, BELLWETHER, PETER BLUM GALLERY, BODHI ART, BOERS-LI GALLERY, MARIANNE BOESKY GALLERY, TANYA BONAKDAR GALLERY, BORTOLAMI GALLERY, ISABELLA BORTOLOZZI, BROADWAY 1602, CANADA, CEREALART, CHEIM & READ, CHERRY AND MARTIN, GALERIE CHEZ VALENTIN, MEHDI CHOUAKRI, JOHN CONNELLY PRESENTS, CONTEMPORARY FINE ARTS, GALLERIA CONTINUA, CORKIN GALLERY, CORVI-MORA, GALERIE CRONE, SORCHA DALLAS, D'AMELIO TERRAS, MONICA DE CARDENAS, GALERIA MASSIMO DE CARLO, ELIZABETH DEE, DEITCH PROJECTS, DIEU DONNÉ PAPERMILL, INC., DVIR GALLERY, GALERIE EIGEN + ART, GALERIE FRANK ELBAZ, DEREK ELLER GALLERY, ENGHOLM ENGELHORN GALERIE, EXHIBIT-E, RONALD FELDMAN FINE ARTS, ZACH FEUER GALLERY, MARC FOXX, HONOR FRASER, FREDERICKS FREISER, FRITH STREET GALLERY, GERING & LOPEZ GALLERY, GALERIE LAURENT/GODIN, THE GOODMAN GALLERY, GREENBERG VAN DOREN GALLERY, GREENGRASSI, JACK HANLEY GALLERY, HARRIS LIEBERMAN, HAUSER & WIRTH, ERNA HÉCEY GALLERY, HERALD ST, RHONA HOFFMAN GALLERY, HOTEL, GALERIE HUSSENOT, I8 GALLERY, IBID PROJECTS, IN SITU FABIENNE LECLERC, INTERNATIONAL SCULPTURE CENTER, TAKA ISHII GALLERY, ALISON JACQUES GALLERY, CATRIONA JEFFRIES GALLERY, JOHNEN GALERIE, JULIETTE JONGMA, K20 K21 KUNSTSAMMLUNG NORDRHEIN-WESTFALEN, GALERIE KAMM, GEORG KARGL FINE ARTS, GALLERI MAGNUS KARLSSON, PAUL KASMIN GALLERY, GALERIE BEN KAUFMANN, SEAN KELLY GALLERY, KERLIN GALLERY, ANTON KERN GALLERY, GALLERY DENNIS KIMMERICH, NICOLE KLAGSBRUN GALLERY, LEO KOENIG, INC., ANDREW KREPS GALLERY, GALERIE KRINZINGER, KS ART, KUKJE GALLERY, YVON LAMBERT, LAYR: WUESTENHAGEN CONTEMPORARY, SIMON LEE GALLERY, LOWER EAST SIDE PRINTSHOP, INC., LISSON GALLERY, LOEVENBRUCK, STELLA LOHAUS GALLERY, LOMBARD-FREID PROJECTS, GALLERIA LORCAN O'NEILL ROMA, GALLERI CHARLOTTE LUND, MAGAZZINO D'ARTE MODERNA, MAI 36 GALERIE, MARY MARY GALLERY, KAMEL MENNOUR, GALERIE MEYER & KAINER, MILLIKEN, VICTORIA MIRO GALLERY, MITCHELL-INNES & NASH, MIZUMA ART GALLERY, THE MODERN INSTITUTE, MONITOR, MURRAY GUY, GALERIE CHRISTIAN NAGEL, GALLERY NATURE MORTE, NEW MUSEUM, CAROLINA NITSCH CONTEMPORARY ART, NOGUERAS BLANCHARD, GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA, GALERÍA OMR, PACEWILDENSTEIN, THE PARAGON PRESS, PARKER JONES, PARKETT, PILAR PARRA & ROMERO, PERES PROJECTS, GALERIE EMMANUEL PERROTIN, PIEROGI, PKM GALLERY, PLAN B, PRAZ-DELAVALLE, PRODUZENTENGALERIE HAMBURG, RATIO 3, GALLERIA RAUCCI / SANTAMARIA, REGINA GALLERY, DANIEL REICH GALLERY, RIZZOLI, GALERIE THADDAEUS ROPAC, LIA RUMMA, GALERIE THOMAS SCHULTE, SCULPTURECENTER, SFEIR-SEMLER GALLERY, JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, STUART SHAVE / MODERN ART, SIES-HÖKE, SIKKEMA JENKINS & CO., FREDRIC SNITZER GALLERY, SOCRATES SCULPTURE PARK, SOMMER CONTEMPORARY ART, SPROVIERI PROGETTI, STANDARD, MICHAEL STEVENSON, DIANA STIGTER, JACKY STRENZ, JIRI SVESTKA GALLERY, SWISS INSTITUTE, TIMOTHY TAYLOR GALLERY, RICHARD TELLES FINE ART, TILTON GALLERY, TWO PALMS, GALERIE BOB VAN ORSOUW, MARTIN VAN ZOMEREN, SUSANNE VIELMETTER LOS ANGELES PROJECTS, VSA ARTS, WALLSPACE, GALERIE BARBARA WEISS, WENTRUP, WESTERN EXHIBITIONS, WHITE CUBE / JAY JOPLING, MAX WIGRAM GALLERY, WILKINSON, GALLERY CHRISTINA WILSON, HIROMIYOSHII, ZENO X GALLERY, DAVID ZWIRNER

 14 *Editorial*





Well, that happened. This issue was going to have an in-depth look at the art-college experience in Ireland, from a student perspective. Now it doesn't. We're looking into the legalities of the situation, because there is a story to tell about art education here, both positive and negative. In the shorter term, not all is lost; Amie Lawless has put together an online overview of what the Students Unions at the different colleges can offer art students; it is at [recirca.com/SUs](http://recirca.com/SUs)

These are changed times. Change can be good, and there is a phrase in an article in this issue which stuck with me; it talks of the rural as being "... also ... a space where different forms of communities survive, which could be drawn upon to re-think our being in the world." This is from Michaële Cutaya's text. By coincidence, we also have a second article dealing with art in a rural context, Bryonie Reid's analysis of three projects in Co Leitrim. Both texts discuss how specific artistic interventions can disrupt, with good intention, our reception, or the local residents' reception, of the landscapes in which they live.

The glacial timescale which is summoned up by both Reid and by Gareth Kennedy in his Co Leitrim project, described by Reid, reminded me of a quote attributed to Zhou Enlai, former leader of the Chinese Communist Party: when asked about the impact of the French Revolution, he famously said it was too soon to say. In Ireland we've gone through almost two decades of rapid, disorienting change. Much of it has been good, but it has been uprooting. As the Cutaya and Reid articles remind us, there are spaces and timeframes that are different and may be better; and the current changes may give us time to focus on these alternatives, and to rediscover some of our inventiveness.

At least we're not Thailand. There's a law there which would be the despair of any art critic, as Brian Curtin describes in his 'Letter from Bangkok' in this issue. Bangkok summons up for me a host of associations, many of them troubling; the reality may be just as dodgy but, the text would suggest, there is still a lot to play for.

We know art is about seeing differently. Inevitably, this fact implies boundaries, edges to one way of thinking and insights into other ways of doing things. In a practical way, Orla Barry's work pushes at the limits of what we can understand, even while seducing the viewer in with an initially more straightforward framing of her works. Isobel Harbison takes up the story in this issue. Crossing boundaries is also a theme in Jessica Foley's text here. She is looking at the art/ science crossover, with two strands to what she writes. First, what happens when science is taken as story, not 'fact'; and what happens when we think of curation as research? Second, she looks at two artists whose work plays with the art/ science boundary, Mark Cullen and Ryan Gander.

2009 is going to be tough. At Circa we want to try new things, not retrench. And so we will launch each issue this year with a bit of a bash. But there's many a serious purpose behind the fun. First and foremost, we want to bring the visual-arts community together to chat, survive, cross boundaries, be fearless, and think about thinking fresh.



## Ursula Burke State of Grace

Friday 6th March – Saturday 4th April  
 Preview: Thursday 5th March 6pm-8pm

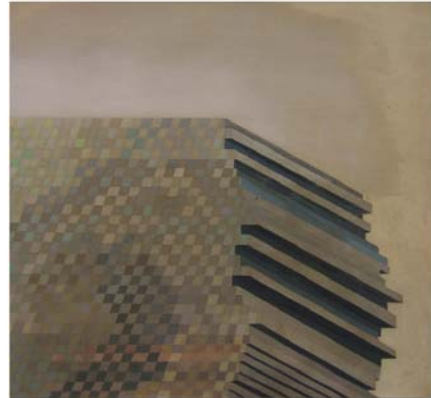
**Gallery Opening Hours**  
 Monday-Saturday 11am-5pm  
 to 9pm first Thursday of every month

**Catalyst Arts Gallery**  
 2nd Floor 5 College Court  
 Belfast, BT1 6BX  
 (+44) 28 9031 3303  
 www.catalystarts.org.uk



THE DOCK

The Dock, St George's Terrace, Carrick on Shannon, Co. Leitrim  
 Email: info@thedock.ie Website: www.thedock.ie Tel: +353(0)71 965 0828



Gillian Lawler, *City Stack* 2, 2009, oil on canvas, 75cm x 80 cm

*Feb 14th '09 – April '09 - LOVE:*  
 Finola Jones, Joann Jones, Atta Kim, Orla McHardy,  
 Alanna O'Kelly

*April 24th - June 19th - The Dock Presents Two Solo Exhibitions:*

*New Paintings* by Gillian Lawler  
*New Work* by Denis Farrell

The Dock Galleries are open from 10am-6pm Tuesday to Saturday.

## WEST CORK ARTS CENTRE



Amanda Coogan, Friday Night Youth Arts Group, work in progress, 2009, Youth Exhibition and Event

### **Degree Show – BA in Visual Arts, Sherkin Island**

1 March – 21 March  
 Opening Sunday 1 March at 3.30pm  
 An exhibition of work from the BA in Visual Arts, Sherkin Island by the seven degree students who will be the first cohort to graduate from this exciting and innovative programme.

### **Children's Exhibition and Event**

28 March – 15 April  
 The exhibition will draw from the Classroom-based Primary Schools Programme (involving over 20 Primary schools in the West Cork region), based on a theme from the WCAC exhibition My Space and I: A selection of work from University College Cork's Collection.

### **Youth Exhibition and Event**

25 April – 16 May  
 Opening 24 April  
 Workshops, performances and an exhibition of work by young people from schools and youth groups in West Cork. Includes a new commissioned artwork by Amanda Coogan in collaboration with the Friday Night Arts Group.

### **Bealtaine**

23 May – 6 June  
 Opening 23 May at 3pm  
 Highlights from WCAC's Programme for Older People.

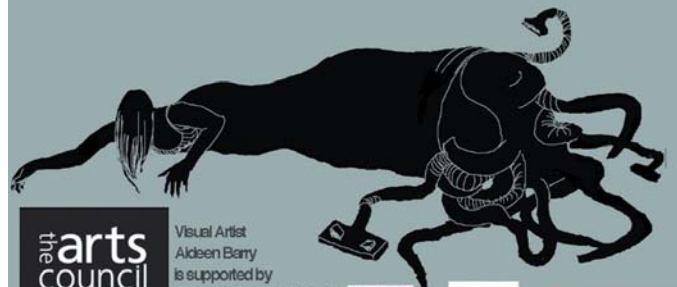
**West Cork Arts Centre**  
 North Street,  
 Skibbereen, Co. Cork  
 Tel: + 353 28 22090,  
 W: www.westcorkartscentre.com  
 E: info@westcorkartscentre.com  
 Open: Mon - Sat 10:00 am - 5:00 pm



## Aideen Barry

Galway Arts Centre  
 05/03/09-09/04/09

of hypothetical  
 evolutions of [an] other



the arts council  
 chomhairle ealaíon

Visual Artist  
 Aideen Barry  
 is supported by  
 The Arts Council of Ireland  
 Projects; New Work Award  
 2008-2009.



### Critical-writing winner

Aideen McCole is the winner of our competition for undergraduates to write a text on contemporary art or visual culture. She is studying History of Art and Design and Craft Design (BA) in NCAD. Her article, 'Something rotten in the state of Denmark?: An analysis of the *Canon of Danish Art and Culture*', will appear shortly on *recirca.com*. Many thanks to all who took part in the competition.

### Not happening

According to a recent report, the mildly controversial Anthony Gormley statue, intended for planting in the Liffey in Dublin's Docklands, is not to go ahead. No dosh.

### Tower folk

Void in Derry is collaborating with Bill Drummond in relation to the Curfew Tower in Cushendall, Co Antrim, and the first set of artists for the residency in the tower have been chosen: Belfast-based artist Emma Berkery will be followed in late February by artistic team Sibyl Montague from London and Sarah O'Brien from Dublin; in March comes London-based collaboration Lenka Clayton and Michael Crowe, followed by Cork-based artist Angela Fulcher. According to the press release, the majority of the selected artists have stated that it is their intention to make work which engages the people of Cushendall.

### Arts Council restocks

New members have been appointed to the Arts Council/ An Chomhairle Ealaíon. They are Louise Donlon, Paul Johnson, Fiona Kearney, Sheila O'Neill, Orlaith McBride, Caroline Senior, and the new Chair, Pat Moylan. Maurice Foley, John Crumlish, Philip King, Aibhlín McCrann, Alan Stanford and Colm Tóibín remain on the Council.

Fiona Kearney is the new member most closely related to the visual arts. She has been the inaugural Director of the Lewis Glucksman Gallery at University College, Cork (UCC) since 2003.

### Guest Editor

The open call for a Guest Editor for the autumn 2009 issue of *Circa* brought in a very strong entry. In the end, we chose *three* Guest Editors, for these issues:

*Autumn 2009:*  
IM Projects. This is a London-based collective consisting of Yannis Arvanitis, Ilaria Gianni, Nazli Gurlek, Isobel Harbison, Rosa Lleo and Gaia Tedone

*Spring 2010:*  
Declan Long + Francis Halsall, both of whom lecture at NCAD.

*Autumn 2010:*  
Padraic Moore, the independent curator.

### Winners

- The inaugural Davy Portrait Award has been won by Dublin-based artist Joe Dunne, a graduate of NCAD, through his painting of his fifteen-year-old daughter Cara. He scoops a cool £10,000. Martin Wedge took second prize, and Gary Coyle third. The show of the finalists' works was at the Naughton Gallery in Queen's University, Belfast, until 31 January 2009. It then moves to Farnleigh Gallery in the Phoenix Park in Dublin.
- Vera Klute, a Dublin-based artist, has won the 2008 Wexford Arts Centre prize for an 'emerging artist'. She pockets €8,000 and gets a solo show in the centre.



### Bursary booty

The latest round of Bursary decisions for individual artists was released in January by the Arts Council/ An Chomhairle Ealaíon. The big winners are Stephen Brandes, Bea McMahon, Alan Phelan and, top of the list, Joe Walker, who will be getting €40,500 over three years. The full list of awards is below, in a table borrowed from the Arts Council website. (The Arts Council got 350 applications and offered a total of 67 awards.)

Recipient	Description	Location	Amount Awarded
Bolger, Aisling	Annual Bursary	United Kingdom	€6,420
Brandes, Stephen	Multi-annual Bursary (2 years)	Cork County Council	€26,500
Clare, Mark	Annual Bursary	Dún Laoghaire Rathdown	€14,000
Clarke, Declan	Annual Bursary	Dublin City Council	€14,000
Cotter, Maud	Annual Bursary	Cork City Council	€15,000
Garry, Mark	Annual Bursary	Dublin City Council	€10,000
Godbold, David	Annual Bursary	Dublin City Council	€13,000
Gogan, Susan	Annual Bursary	Dublin City Council	€10,000
Gunning, Stephen	Annual Bursary	Dublin City Council	€6,847
Lahart, Nevan	Annual Bursary	Dublin City Council	€14,000
Larkin, Nicky	Annual Bursary	Offaly County Council	€14,000
Mackey, Christine	Annual Bursary	Leitrim County Council	€14,000
McMahon, Beatrice	Multi-annual Bursary (2 years)	Dublin City Council	€26,500
McMenamin, Deirdre	Annual Bursary	Donegal County Council	€14,850
McNulty, Dennis	Annual Bursary	Dublin City Council	€14,000
Nanigian, Theresa	Annual Bursary	Dún Laoghaire Rathdown	€3,730
O'Callaghan, Liam	Annual Bursary	Dublin City Council	€14,000
O'Donoghue, Augustine	Annual Bursary	Dublin City Council	€7,000
Phelan, Alan	Multi-annual Bursary (2 years)	Dublin City Council	€27,500
Quigley, Una	Annual Bursary	Galway City Council	€3,162
Stalling, David	Annual Bursary	Dublin City Council	€14,000
Walker, Joe	Multi-annual Bursary (3 years)	Dublin City Council	€40,500
Welch, Lee	Annual Bursary	Dublin City Council	€10,000
Whelan, Michael-John	Annual Bursary	Germany	€10,000



# ART SALE

## Ballina Arts Centre Redevelopment

Later this year Ballina Arts Centre will be undertaking a substantial redevelopment, which will incorporate a second exhibitions gallery; a 240-seat theatre space; a dance studio; coffee shop and dedicated printmaking room and other education/workshop spaces.

As part of the Redevelopment fundraising campaign, the Centre is presenting an art sale featuring work by many of Ireland's leading artists. Works on sale will include paintings, prints, drawing, sculpture and photography.

The Art Sale will take place in Ballina's luxury 4 star Ice House Hotel, The Quay, Ballina, Co. Mayo on Friday 24th & Saturday 25th April.

For further information, please contact:  
Ballina Arts Centre  
Tel: 096 73593  
e-mail: [ballinaartscentre@eircom.net](mailto:ballinaartscentre@eircom.net)  
[www.ballinaartscentre.com/redevelopment](http://www.ballinaartscentre.com/redevelopment)



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To find out more about the Circa Friends Scheme, please visit

[www.recirca.com/friends](http://www.recirca.com/friends)

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## Features

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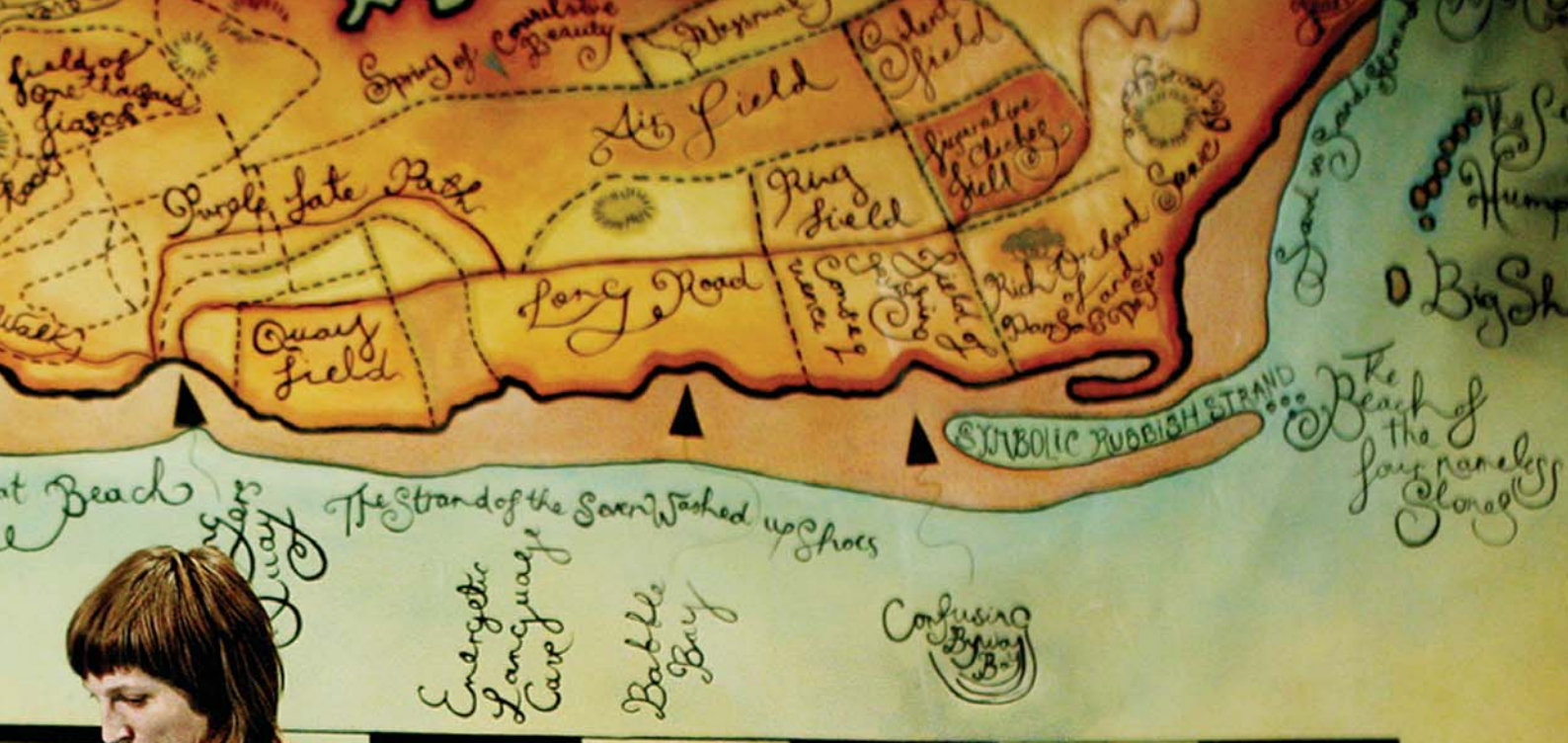
Adventure to the stars... telling tales of science and art **Jessica Foley 22** |  
Situating art: For a rural context **Michaële Cutaya 30** | The conceptual  
scavenger: Interview with Orla Barry **Isobel Harbison 36** | The territory of  
art and the territory underfoot: A reading of three artworks from Leitrim  
**Bryonie Reid 44** | Letter from Bangkok **Brian Curtin 50** |

[background]  
Orla Barry  
*The Scavenger's daughters*  
2008  
installation shot, UBS Openings:  
*Saturday live*, Tate Modern  
photo Sheila Burnett  
courtesy the artist



C







# *Adventure to the stars... telling tales of science and art*

22

(opposite)  
Ryan Gander  
*A sheet of paper on which  
I was about to draw, as it  
slipped from my table and  
fell to the floor, 2008*  
photo Andy Keate  
courtesy the artist



The night...was always an enigmatic book of which certain people – as always happens – proclaimed themselves to be the licensed interpreters. They transformed this vault of truth into a simulacrum, an illusion. Being distrustful of those who persistently deceived us, we developed the habit of also distrusting the night, which enshrouded us, or so we thought, in gloom and illusion. We put our faith in light alone. *Please, Mr. Einstein, Jean-Claude Carrière.*<sup>1</sup>

I'm inclined to think that most if not all of the difficulties that have in the past puzzled and deceived philosophers and blocked the way to knowledge are entirely of our own making. We have first raised a dust, and then we complain that we can't see. *The Principals of human understanding, George Berkeley.*<sup>2</sup>

This year, 2009, is being celebrated worldwide as The International Year of astronomy, under the theme *The Universe, yours to discover*. The President of the International Astronomical Union, Catherine Cesarsky, in her welcome address on the official website, explains that 2009 marks the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first astronomical observation through a telescope by Galileo Galilei, saying: "It will be a global celebration of astronomy and its contributions to society and culture, with a strong emphasis on education, public engagement and the involvement of young people, with events at national, regional and global levels throughout the whole of 2009." Cesarsky acknowledges astronomy to be one of the world's "oldest fundamental sciences" which has impacted profoundly on world culture, and which is "a powerful expression of the human intellect."<sup>3</sup> Astronomy, there is no doubt, has fuelled the imaginations of many individuals, since ever the human being cast her eyes heavenward, taking in the light of the cosmos. Astronomy, and specifically science in general, methodologically speaking, is based largely upon making observations, summarizing those observations, setting up experiments to test those observations and consequently interpreting the perceived

outcomes of those experiments, with a view to claiming those summarized observations (aka hypotheses) to be true or false. Traditionally speaking at least. This is according to scientist Paul Grobstein, who articulates another approach to the methodology of science, and it is one based firmly on revising how science is itself articulated. Grobstein proposes developing "a story of science as *story*" in an effort to "encourage the same kind of critical evaluation of our understanding of science that science itself promotes in its examination of other phenomena"; not a philosophy of science exactly, but perhaps a *meta-science*. Telling *the story of science as story* is a fairly vague notion – what does that mean exactly? Grobstein argues that:

Science has the potential to be what we all collectively need as we evolve into a world wide community: a nexus point that encourages and supports the evolution of shared human stories of exploration and growth, an evolution in which all human beings are involved and take pride. For this to happen, we all need to work much harder to not only reduce the perception of science as a specialized and isolated activity of the few, but to make it in fact the product and property of all human beings.<sup>4</sup>

What Grobstein promotes is dissolution of the perception that science is an exclusive field, which often has been overly conflated with the field of mathematics. Science has historically been set up as a specialist and exclusive discipline, as have most academic disciplines. Grobstein believes that through the *science as story* approach this *misnomer perception of exclusivity* will dissolve, and in so doing, will invite more participants, more contributors to the field of science, thereby increasing the possibility of becoming "progressively less wrong" in forming accurate, yet mutable, understandings of the universe and our place in relation to it and each other. As opposed to the traditional methodology of science: *hypotheses – experiment – conclusion (true or false)*, Grobstein operates an expanded methodology, which incorporates subjectivity, in a (presumably) critical manner (see below right, in a figure taken from Grobstein's article):



Figure 1. Schematic illustration showing more traditional (left) and more contemporary (right) ways of describing the "scientific method" (Grobstein, 2005a)



Hypothesis, Grobstein argues, is effectively a 'summary of observations' which leads to new observations through the experimentation process ("An experiment," Grobstein explains, "is nothing more [and nothing less] than the making of a new observation to see whether it matches predictions made by the previously existing summary; in short, skepticism is a requirement of the scientific method.) and from these 'new observations' come further 'implications', from which one can infer whether or not the *summary* observations still hold true, or whether they need replacement. If a contradiction/ paradox/ problem seems implied then one must pursue a revision of the 'summary of observations' through what Grobstein calls "the Crack." This pursuit and exploration is (or should be, in Grobstein's view) undertaken with a consciousness of the *cultural background, personal temperament, and individual creativity* of the inquirer. In this conception, the scientist has turned, again, explorer, treading back over old ground into uncharted territory, so to speak, and the story of that exploration, however abstractly put, narrates a story of adventure and peradventure. Not that the scientist wasn't always necessarily exploring and observing, but in the story of science past, the exploration *process* was left out of the methodology, whereas in Grobstein's schema, the adventure begins at the end so to speak...or at least, the adventure never ends (or begins for that matter)... as Grobstein says: "There is no conclusion in science; it is a continual and recursive process of *story testing*."<sup>5</sup> (emphasis added)

### **Experimental storytelling...**

"Physical concepts are free creations of the human mind, and are not, however it may seem, uniquely determined by the external world," said Einstein, as if to torment his predecessors and rob Newton of his Laws.<sup>6</sup> It seems to me that the explorations of science, despite perhaps their efforts not to be, are full of mystery, revealing more and more the infinite complexity of the Universe, and less and less any unified theory of *life, the universe and everything*. The 'stories' of the universe told by science are certainly multifaceted; complex in their narrative, neither continuous nor discontinuous, and told, relatively speaking, by a very small number of individuals who form the scientific community. What Grobstein seems to be suggesting, in a way, is that *all* humans have the potential to be scientists (a Beuysian echo?)...It's simply a matter of summarizing your observations, making new observations through experiments, interpreting their implications and relating them back, through a kind of critical subjectivity, to the summary in an ongoing adventure of discovery. The more of human kind that gets involved in this adventure, Grobstein suggests, the deeper and wider our understanding of the universe and our place in it could be, regardless of whether the experience of discovery ever ends. "There is always more than one possible summary/ story that will fit any given set of observations. And so there is always a choice

(conscious or unconscious) to further pursue one or another way of several alternative ways of making sense of the world,"<sup>7</sup> Grobstein suggests. Rather like a 'choose your own ending' storybook, except of course here it's more a case of 'choose your own trajectory'. Reading through Grobstein's paper, it is not long before one begins to align his attitude and methodology within the unfolding story of contemporary art.

In the 'Introduction' to their book *Exhibition experiments* (2007), Paul Basu and Sharon MacDonald trace a lineage between the break in the 1660s with 'Aristotelian epistemologies', and the beginning of the 'age of science', and developments in exhibition practices and contemporary art practices. The New Academicians of the seventeenth century, armed with the motto *nullius in verba* – 'on the word of no man', made a commitment to establishing truths through experiments.<sup>8</sup> The word 'experiment', meaning 'from trying', became synonymous with scientific method. Basu and MacDonald reveal that experiment is often regarded as a "knowledge generating procedure," "the creation of phenomena" and the "systematic production of novelty." They quote Bruno Latour as saying that "experiment can be seen as a transformative process – for the people as well as the materials involved," and they illustrate this by saying that "the experimenter is transformed by the experiment into an expert." The authors draw comparisons between the experiment and the exhibition, revealing an argument that "the purpose of scientific apparatus is 'to make visible the invisible' – in other words, to exhibit, to 'hold out', to display"; and they make the connection to the seventeenth-century figure of Robert Hooke, who was appointed the Royal Society's first *curator of experiments*. (The word 'curator' was, they note, first used around this time to refer to an officer in charge of a museum collection.) Thus, Basu and MacDonald draw together their 'summary of observations' wherein the exhibition is "conceived as a kind of laboratory, in which, to use the language of actor Network theory (Law and Hassard, 1999), various 'actants' (visitors, curators, objects, technologies, institutional and architectural spaces, and so forth) are brought into relation with each other with no sure sense of what the result will be."<sup>9</sup> For Basu and MacDonald, and the other contributors to the book, contemporary exhibition practices "cannot be conceived merely as means for the display and dissemination of already existing, preformulated knowledge (the scientific model rejected by the scientific experimentalists)," but that instead the contemporary exhibition should be understood as "an experimental practice" which is a site for "the generation rather than reproduction of knowledge and experience."

The exhibition, Basu and MacDonald explain, is a site where 'experiments in meaning making' can take place, but also a site where transparency of method is central. The authors acknowledge also a 'performative turn' in exhibition practice, where the site of representation becomes usurped almost by "a medium for 'enactment'":

Rather than making complex realities more vividly simple, patronizing audiences and perpetuating illusory securities, the issue has more often been how to engage with complexity, how to create a context that will open a space for conversation and debate, above all how to enlist audiences as co-experimenters, willing to *try* for themselves.<sup>10</sup>

This conviction seems to echo that of Grobstein's call for science *as story*, and story as meaning-making. Visitors to exhibition environments, Basu and MacDonald believe, "must play an active role as navigators, way-finders and meaning makers; drawing their own observations and conclusions without the reassuring presence of an 'authority' to defer to."

### ***Cosmic annihilator + other systems...***

Allow me to introduce a story of my own...Not so very long ago, one cold winter's evening, I strolled down North Brunswick Street and onto the lower Grangegorman Road, and, meeting there the large, faded-red metal doors, I pounded upon them, softly beating out a long dull ringing. When that didn't elicit any response, I took out my phone, and fumbling through my mittens, dialed the number to stir the individual inside whose attention I was after. Access was granted at last, and in from one cold to another, I was warmly welcomed. Cups of tea were quickly made, and in no time the pair of us were comfortable, he in a rocking chair and I on a swivel chair, and both of us pulled, as close as is polite, around the small oil heater, doing its best.

We begin to talk: I say that I am interested in his work because I think it relates to something mysterious, something that could lead one beyond the apparent rigidity of the world, of how one thinks about it and one's place in it; something that could loosen possibility, perhaps; a kind of feeling that relates to what it's like when one manages to lever open the lid of a paint can that has lain untouched in a shed for decades, only to find a usable pigment inside. But really, I don't say all of this. I simply say that I am interested, and that I can't quite articulate why, and graciously, the artist takes over, and tells me about his work, despite the aimlessness of my approach...

Mark Cullen  
*Bellows composite*  
2004  
from *Cosmic annihilator*  
photo Alex McCullagh, composite  
the artist  
courtesy the artist



Mark Cullen has been, for some time now, on an adventure into the cosmos, the big black anti-matter surrounding all the little white dots of  $E=MC^2$ . *Cosmic annihilator* was an immersive installation which took place in Pallas Heights, a handful of abandoned apartments within a social housing, low-rise tower block, which Dublin City Council donated to Mark Cullen and Brian Duggan, both founders of Pallas Studios and most recently of Pallas Contemporary Projects. Pallas Heights was established in 2003 as a “temporary solution to the steady trend of diminishing creative space for artists” within Dublin City.<sup>11</sup> In her essay ‘Ready-made darkness: notes on *Cosmic annihilator*’, which accompanies the retrospective publication *Cosmic annihilator + other systems* (2005), Sarah Pierce references Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s experiment in vision. This experiment required that an observer, enclosed in a darkened room, would look for a short time at a small hole through which light is intensely shining. The hole is then closed, and the observer is required to look to the darkest corner of the room. Goethe describes that:

... A circular image will now be seen to float before him. The middle of the circle will appear bright, colourless, or somewhat yellow, but the border will appear red...

No sooner, however is the whole circle red than the edge begins to be blue, and the blue gradually encroaches inwards on the red.<sup>12</sup>

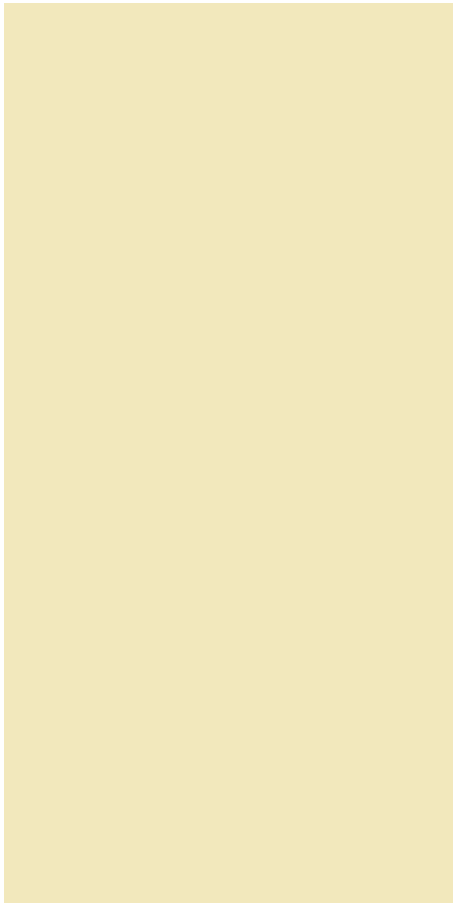
Pierce uses this reference to illuminate the idea that “Without light there is vision. There is colour and depth,” introducing, through Goethe’s experiment, the “notion of subjectivity, where what is seen is not directly observable in the room.” Thus, Pierce acknowledges the importance of the “subjective vision of an observer” within Cullen’s work, and infers the observations of the scientist; to “make the invisible visible.” “Throughout *Cosmic Annihilator*,” Pierce says,

Cullen directs his observer through periods of extreme darkness, preceded by moments of intense light. This action begins from the moment visitors step into the flat from outside. Playing with the eye’s inability to adjust quickly after exposure to light, Cullen shrouds the flat’s entryway with black curtains that close-off the space to the outside. This causes immediate disorientation. The impulse is to move forward, to seek light and recover one’s vision. In doing so we move deeper into the flat.<sup>13</sup>

The absolute darkness of the space which Cullen creates, preceded, as Pierce describes, by momentary intense light, could indeed be interpreted as a metaphor for human kinds great quest for absolute knowledge; the moments of

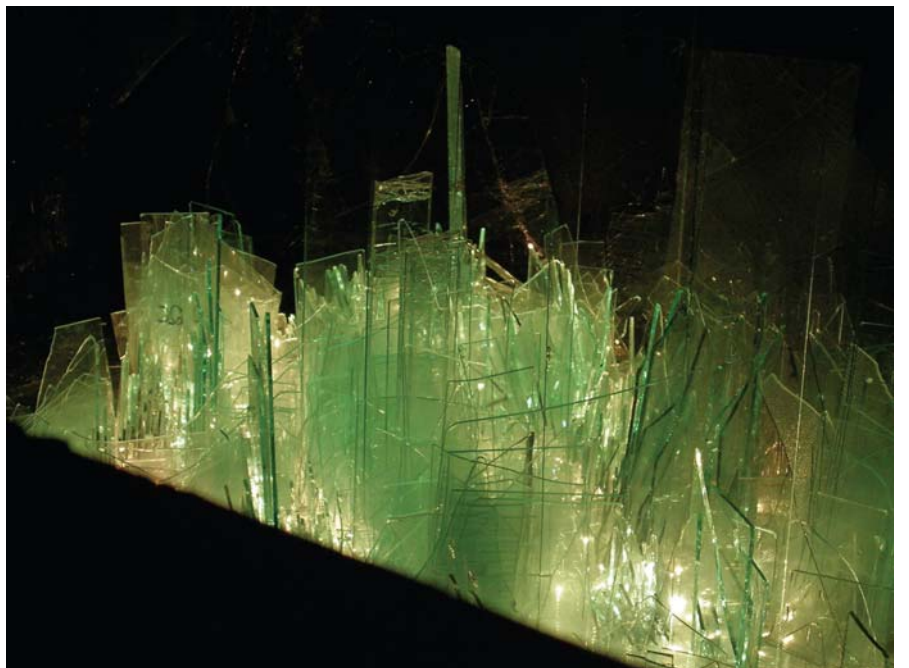
illumination followed by a consuming darkness, as new observations give way to fresh skepticism. Within the publication is also printed a copy of an excerpt from *The Sun* newspaper, dated 7 February 2003. The article’s headline reads “The New Blackest shade is 25 times darker” and opens with the lines “Scientists have created a new black which is blacker than the blackest existing black,” referring to the development of *Super Black* for use in optical apparatuses in the study of astronomy. The phrasing of the article plays up the tautology of creating a ‘black that is blacker than black’, but nonetheless, the simplicity of the explanation only veils its expansive implications for astronomy: “The darkness of black is measured by how much light it absorbs. Super Black retains more than any other and is therefore *the least reflective surface on Earth*.”<sup>14</sup> In Cullen’s work, the use of darkened spaces is important. He tells me that in his installations he makes attempts to engage the observer, “altering people’s general perception of how they’re going to experience an art work...I’ve used a lot of darkened-down spaces, making corridors, so there’s a sense of channeling...into a new experience, or a new frame of reference.”<sup>15</sup> In his installations, he attempts to suspend observers’ expectations so that they can attune more to perceive and experience, and imagine. For Cullen, it is important to take time, to allow the time for the light from the distant stars to reach the eye and the mind, to ‘slow down experience’ so that the work is revealed, and emerges through experience rather than through rough representation. Cullen’s most recent work engages with astronomy in a very direct way, he having spent time in Argentina observing the constellations in the relative comfort of a 60 km light-exclusion zone. His residency there was spent observing the constellations, meticulously transcribing their locations from the heavens to paper. The paintings developed from these observations formed something like a daily practice for Cullen, subsequently resulting in his most recent installation at G126 in Galway, *BlackFlash*. The work seems to fuse observation with imagination, leading Cullen to develop science-fiction-like trajectories, both through the individual paintings and through their installation within the gallery space. Cullen tells me that “a lot of the work is about working out, in a way, your place imaginatively in relationship to the world,”<sup>16</sup> a world in a constant state of flux. Grobstein argues that “Science is not about change in general, but about a particular kind of change, the kind of change that results from making observations, cataloguing them in a way that makes them publicly available, creating individual and collective stories about those observations, and then using the stories to motivate the collection of more observations, that in turn alter both the stories and the way they are told.”<sup>17</sup>





(above)  
Mark Cullen  
*CASLEO*  
oil on board  
30 x 30 cm  
courtesy the artist

(below)  
Mark Cullen  
*Cosmic annihilator*  
2004  
installation shot (detail)  
courtesy the artist



## Storytelling or just loose associations...

The room on the other side of the door was in darkness and smelt musty and damp. When Erno closed the door behind them, the room was in complete darkness, at which point Tom began to get a bit frightened. He didn't like the dark at the best of times, and it was so dark in here that he couldn't even see his own hand in front of his face. Then with the flick of a switch hundreds of bright neon strip-lights slowly began to flicker and flash high above their heads. At first just one or two lit up, then as time passed more and more came to life. Tom covered his eyes with his hands. It was hard to see because everything was so bright after staring into the darkness for so long.<sup>18</sup> Excerpt from *The Boy who always looked up*, by Ryan Gander

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A couple of summers ago, I went to visit Ryan Gander in his studio in London, to ask him about his TV script *Appendix appendix*, which I was hoping to write a part of my thesis on. I had been exploring scripts and the use of scripts within contemporary art practices and discourse in general, but that's another story. It was a terrible interview by journalistic, or even academic, standards, I'm sure – I had only vague notions and expanding theories, and nothing succinct and simple really lined up to ask him. (It was my first interview, after all.) However, we had an interesting conversation, which he kindly recorded on his computer for me, as neither of us was really convinced that my Dad's old Dictaphone was going to pull through. *Appendix appendix* is a TV script, as yet unproduced, as far as I know, and a further translation of Gander's practice as was its predecessor *Appendix*, both made in collaboration with designer Stuart Bailey. The television script is certainly one of the most involved pieces of text I have yet read, and it is not that it is illegible, it simply requires that one takes their time with it; articulates all the parts in one's mind, has a good think about what is being said, how it is described, the order that it unfolds in...put simply, the basic requirement of the reader is to *slow down* the text, to think about it, and try to *imagine* it, effectively taking on the role of TV producer and director – the TV programme thereby comes to life in your head rather than on any TV screen, that I'm aware of at least. One thing I do remember Ryan Gander saying in that interview was "Everything does connect...everything can connect... it's a way of thinking."<sup>19</sup> I was reminded of this utterance as I explored *The Flight of the dodo* exhibition held at The Project during the summer, curated by Jonathan Carroll and Tessa Giblin.<sup>20</sup> It was that exhibition which started me thinking back over Gander's work, and which compelled me to explore some aspects of the nexus of ideas therein: received 'knowledge' vs observation and

experiment; the nature of the exhibition and museum and its colonial genealogy; those early adventures through books and stories of conquest and discovery; the nature of space and time and the universe, and our place in it; thoughts of extinction and demise.

Early in 2008, Gander's *Heralded as the new black* installation was held at the IKON Gallery in Birmingham.<sup>21</sup> His work within the installation slipped in and out of institutional dependence, as in the case of the white Adidas tracksuits, which the invigilators were required to wear. These uniforms, seemingly innocuous, make certain demands of the viewer, of bringing their own subjectivity to the interpretation of their meaning. Embroidered onto each of the tracksuits is a 'splash of red', and it is this signifier which has the potential to trigger in the observer a thought experiment (stimulating a kind of forensics/storytelling), raising questions of 'how things come into being' and challenging the viewer to reconsider, perhaps, the apparent stasis of the exhibition space. Gander's work sets up a space wherein the viewer must become observer, and prepare to take time to engage with the works, to slow down and let thoughts form a nexus of 'loose associations'. Basu and MacDonald write: "Experimentalism is not just a matter of style or novel forms of presentation. Rather it is a risky process of assembling people and things with the intention of producing differences that make a difference. In their production of something new, experiments seek to unsettle accepted knowledge."<sup>22</sup>

Discussing his art in a short video on the IKON website, Gander postulates: "We have cinema and we have decoration, so art doesn't need to be entertainment and it doesn't need to be decorative. But we don't have something that discusses really complicated relationships that are in the world and we see all the time around us, if we look hard enough, so art has a good place, or a good reason to exist..."<sup>23</sup> Currently participating in *Life on Mars* at the 55<sup>th</sup> *Carnegie International*, Gander's most recent work presents the visitor with 100 crystal balls, dispersed throughout the gallery space, in apparent random order. The piece is titled *A piece of paper on which I was about to draw, as it slipped from my table and onto the floor*. Inside each of the crystal balls is etched the image of a piece of paper, as if in suspension, paused at the moment of its drifting away. In much of Gander's work, there seems to be a quiet attention drawn to the moment where routine, quotidian narratives diverge. By freezing a representation of that piece of paper slipping from his table, just at the moment when the artist was about to draw upon it, Gander puts a macro lens upon that fragment of space-time, highlighting perhaps that it is just at those moments when everything seems to be slipping away that the greatest possibilities exist.

But of course, this is my interpretation, a part of my larger story, which conflates the methodologies espoused by Grobstein and other scientists with the adventures of artists, within the fragmented narratives of the contemporary art exhibition, where the viewer is encouraged to turn observer.

### **Believing the story...or not?**

Walter Benjamin observed that post World War I, there seemed to be a silencing of “the securest among our possessions,” which he deemed to be “the ability to exchange experiences.” “The Storyteller,” wrote Benjamin, “takes what he tells from experience – his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale.”<sup>24</sup> The scientist Paul Grobstein argues that there is a need to tell the story of science *as story*, and in this way activate and encourage a promotion of science’s methodologies in a more accurate way, stimulating observation and thought. Science, Grobstein believes, can best contribute to culture “by providing stories that may increase (but never guarantee) human well-being, by serving as a supportive nexus for human storytelling in general, and, finally, by exemplifying as an available alternative for all humans in their own storytelling its most characteristic value: a commitment to skepticism and a resulting open-ended and continuing exploration of what might yet be.”<sup>25</sup> The kind of storytelling which Grobstein is promoting may indeed be characterized as a scientific methodology, but it resonates far beyond that discipline alone, and this is evident, I feel, very much in the contemporary stories of exhibition and art practice, of both Mark Cullen and Ryan Gander, and within such curatorial practices as that of Project in Dublin. Grobstein acknowledges that no theory can, or should, claim to be “the view from no where” as early scientists did, in their quest for pure objectivity. “Science,” Grobstein argues, “is much better off aspiring to the *view from everywhere*, to stories that make most sense of the widest array of observations and stories made from unique and different perspectives.”<sup>26</sup> The questions this raises are many, and it is perhaps here that the experiments of artists and exhibitions become relevant to this scientific hypothesis. After all, it is perhaps artists, curators, writers, and *cultural practitioners* (to borrow a phrase) who enter into the privilege and responsibility of one kind of storytelling in our time. Then again, as IYA2009 confidently declares, experience, adventure and discovery are within the reach of all – *The Universe, yours to discover*.

- 1 Jean-Claude Carrière, *Please, Mr. Einstein*, Harvill Secker, London, 2006, p 53
- 2 George Berkeley, *The Principles of human knowledge and three dialogues*, Howard Robinson, Oxford University Press, 1996
- 3 [www.astronomy2009.org/general/about/welcome/](http://www.astronomy2009.org/general/about/welcome/)
- 4 Paul Grobstein, 'Revisiting science in culture: science as story telling and story revising', *Journal of research practice*, Vol 1, Issue 1, p 2
- 5 Grobstein, op cit, pp 3-7
- 6 Grobstein, op cit, p 7
- 7 ibid
- 8 Paul Basu and Sharon MacDonald (eds) 'Experiments in exhibition, ethnography, art and science', *Exhibition experiments*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, pp 1-22
- 9 ibid
- 10 ibid
- 11 Mark Cullen and Brian Duggan, *Pallas Heights 2003 – 2006*, [www.pallasprojects.org/publication/publications.htm](http://www.pallasprojects.org/publication/publications.htm)
- 12 Sarah Pierce, 'Ready made darkness: notes on *Cosmic Annihilator*', in Mark Cullen (ed), *Cosmic annihilator + other systems*, 2005
- 13 ibid
- 14 'Super Black' – reproduction of article from *The Sun*, in Cullen (ed), op cit
- 15 Jessica Foley, 'Audio transcription of interview with the artist Mark Cullen, Dec 2008
- 16 ibid
- 17 Grobstein, op cit, p 13
- 18 Ryan Gander, *Appendix appendix*, excerpt from *The Boy who always looked up*, Christopher Keller Editions, 2007, p 53
- 19 Jessica Foley, 'Audio transcription from an interview with the artist Ryan Gander', July 2007
- 20 [www.projectartscentre.ie/index.php?option=com\\_contentand-view=articleandid=182:the-flight-of-the-dodoandcatid=15:archive-visual-artsandItemid=27](http://www.projectartscentre.ie/index.php?option=com_contentand-view=articleandid=182:the-flight-of-the-dodoandcatid=15:archive-visual-artsandItemid=27)
- 21 [www.ikon-gallery.co.uk](http://www.ikon-gallery.co.uk)
- 22 Basu and MacDonald, op cit
- 23 [www.ikon-gallery.co.uk/programme/past/gallery/201/heralded\\_as\\_the\\_new\\_black/](http://www.ikon-gallery.co.uk/programme/past/gallery/201/heralded_as_the_new_black/)

- 24 Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', in *Illuminations*, Pimlico, London, 1999, pp 86 – 87
- 25 Grobstein, op cit, p 14
- 26 ibid

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<sup>30</sup> *Situating art* For a rural  
context



(opposite)  
Deirdre O'Mahony  
*X-PO Kilnaboy Cultural Exchange*  
2008  
courtesy the artist

There are some questions that need to be repeatedly asked however vain they may sound. "What is art?" is one of these. It needs to be asked so that art remains pertinent, but also that it remains art, retains its specificity however fluid the concept. "What is art?"; "what is it for?"; "what form?" are all questions, blessedly without consensual answers but nevertheless essentials to keep thinking art afresh, challenging preconceived ideas about it and to keep art in the here and now.

So what is art in this early twenty-first century? As Paul O'Brien suggested in his article 'Art, politics, environment', it seems that it will be difficult not to acknowledge in some form or another the looming 'ecological apocalypse'.<sup>1</sup> The ways art can engage with such issue will widely differ. It could be argued, for instance, that the environmental problems that are presently multiplying stem from the manner in which we inhabit the earth, which in turn mirrors our being together. Thus art practices engaging on the relational can be just as relevant to environmental issues as they are to social or political ones. Either way, art should not be confused with ecological or social activism. That art does not pretend to provide readymade solutions may be crucial here; its locus of action could be thought of as creating the possibility of alternatives rather than alternatives themselves.

The growing concern over our relationship to the earth ecosystem seems to have been the main drive behind a renewed interest for the rural. Several ambitious public art projects have, over the last few years, addressed the rural context with intentions far removed from the picturesque mould.<sup>2</sup> The rural could be relevant to contemporary public art practices as the site of production of food or preservation of natural habitat but also as a space where different forms of communities survive, which could be drawn upon to re-think our being in the world. The recent completion of two public art projects in County Clare, *Ground up* and *X-PO Kilnaboy Cultural Exchange*, is the occasion to look at some of the possibilities offered by a rural context.

The publication, last October, of *Ground up, reconsidering contemporary art practice in the rural context* brings a sort of conclusion to a public art project that developed over three stages of commissions between 2003 and 2007, and gives it some visibility. The project, initiated by the Clare County Council Arts Office and led by the visual-arts officer Fiona Woods, aimed to generate "debate and discussion amongst practitioners and the rural constituency" as well as "to research ways in which contemporary art can be relevant and accessible to rural audiences without compromising the art."<sup>3</sup> Thus a particular emphasis was laid on the research stage to respond to the specificity of the rural context in which twenty-two artists took part:

Within the discourse of contemporary visual culture the rural context is relatively invisible or largely viewed as a cultural void, an absence. *Ground up* set out to challenge that discourse, proposing the rural as a distinct type of public sphere, and exploring how contemporary art practice might relate to the full cultural complexity therein. Art in public was understood as both a process of research and a mode of dialoguing between artists, rural communities and the wider cultural discourse.<sup>4</sup>

Over the four years of the programme, eleven artworks were commissioned encompassing a large variety of forms of engagement.

Fiona Woods' own contribution, *Pink sheds*, took place over four weekends in February 2005. It consisted in lighting up with pink light small working sheds in the Burren from dusk to the running down of the batteries. The project aimed at challenging the picturesque perspective on the landscape in highlighting its productive functions as well as transforming those sheds into small monuments for a few hours, thus drawing attention on the 'aesthetic of make do' which Woods sees as characterising many rural activities.<sup>5</sup>

The work functioned at different levels depending on the audience; it disrupted the bucolic integrity of the landscape of the visitor's vision by pointing out the articulations of its working functions, thus mapping out another reading of the rural space. This transposition is particularly relevant in a place like the Burren, which is intensively visited and where touristic representations threaten to annihilate the agricultural pattern.

For the local audience, the pink light may fill the poetic function of introducing the uncanny into something of the everyday and maybe initiate a form of reflexivity on their own practice and way of life. The status of *Pink sheds* of temporary public artwork necessarily raised the question of reception and audience. As remarked by Alan Phelan, “it’s never just about numbers”:

Quantitative statistics provide bureaucrats with data that shows apparently tangible results. But art can rarely be accounted for in such a way as it needs to have a qualitative relationship with its audience.<sup>6</sup>

If temporary artworks in a rural context are confronted too, a much more dispersed audience than an urban one, they benefit from a lower level of exposure, thus possibly gaining in quality what they lose in quantity, to put it roughly. Months or years later, the memory of the illuminated sheds continues to circulate and has become a story of its own which continues to work at what Woods termed a microlevel.

Another artwork commissioned for *Ground up* had a more visible impact on its audience, but may also prove to be more problematic in its reception. Áine Phillips’ *Shelter* consisted in the installation of three wooden shelters on the sites of children’s burial grounds, known as cillins or kyles. These ancient burial grounds were used until recently to bury unbaptised or miscarried babies who where refused entry into Roman Catholic cemeteries. Phillips’ initial idea was to create a symbolic but real space for the memory and commemoration of these children, with the shelters serving as little sanctuaries or shrines.

In my work I wanted to specially honour and recognise women’s history as these events (the death of children) are deeply interwoven with women’s experience and the issues of infant death, stillbirth, miscarriage and abortion were often silenced.<sup>7</sup>

The cillins are both a survival of ancient rituals – a continuity – and the site of a hidden story, repressed by the official narrative – a disruption. The *Shelters* project inherits some of this ambivalence. While commemorating the death of children, it also gives visibility to the interrelation between death, religion, procreation and women, hence disrupting a homogeneous representation of rural communities. However, they could also serve as signs for a pre-Christian identity and a reminder of the community history.

The shelters drew a lot of interest and, following local public demand, remained on site. One of them is now listed as a local site by the East Clare tourism office. Thus instead of challenging the representation of a rural identity, the shelters became a form of authentication of that identity.

The danger of such reification and its subsequent recuperation by the tourism industry is that it could lead to what Hal Foster called “the zombification of the local and the everyday,” transforming it into a theme park.<sup>8</sup>

Urban-based public art practices are not exempt from the risk toward a certain reification of the communities they are working with, but it may be more acute in a rural context which still abounds in picturesque sites and traditions. Furthermore, however averted to the fact the artist may be, the touristic pressure is also stronger than in the city and often called forth by the community itself, thus forming a slippery context to work in.

The project by Vincent Wall also engages with rural identity but to irreverently turn it on its head. A native of Ennistymon and remembering growing up there, Wall aimed his project to the young people of the area:

I wanted to address the situation that I found myself in when growing up here, when everything that influenced me came from far away – films, comics, music, etc. There was very little in the local area that would have stopped me in my tracks and inspired me.<sup>9</sup>

Thus *Immature fluke* is a graphic novel set in the town with local people playing fictional characters. The novel transports the town and its people into a dark and gothic tale of revenge and transforms the local into a strangely surreal place. The project could find some interesting resonances with the ethnofictions of anthropologist and filmmaker Jean Rouch. Working in Africa, he developed a collaborative form of filmmaking, which had every participant as author and actor of their own part – thus performing their own identity and, in effect, abolishing a pre-supposed distinction between fiction and reality.

The comic, accompanied with badges, posters, postcards and banners, was presented as an exhibition for three days in the Courthouse Gallery in Ennistymon and attracted around a thousand people, mostly young adults. It is tempting to think that the fate of Pious the Headmaster will come to be part of an Ennistymon saga. The public success of the project could have been an ideal starting point for a further engagement with the town’s youths and it certainly shows the limitations to the aims and goals of public art.





Fiona Woods  
*Pink sheds*  
2005  
courtesy the artist

The necessity of a longer engagement with a project to develop public participation was one of the conclusions drawn by Deirdre O'Mahony through her own project for *Ground up: Cross land*. The project was engaging with the impact of regulations on the environment – she cut a large cross through an area of hazel scrub whose recent growth is a consequence of changes in agricultural practices – and sought to initiate a debate around land use in the Burren. To this end she held office in a local pub twice a week over a month, only to realise that the pub was no longer the hub of activity it once was, hence limiting the interactions with the public. The lack of public space to organize meetings or exhibitions was a recurring problem during *Ground up* and drew the attention of the artist to the changing social structure in rural areas and led to her next project, *X-PO Kilnaboy Cultural Exchange*.

The opportunity to rent the building of the Kilnaboy Post-Office, closed in 2003, gave the project its form and its name. The building was renovated and reopened to the public as an art and community space, which could be used as what O'Mahony termed a 'thinking space'. One of the project's aims was to resist nostalgic representations of the West of Ireland and to challenge notions of authenticity.

An exhibition programme was developed, from O'Mahony's initial impulse, with the public's growing awareness as to the possibilities of the place. Thus there were exhibitions by invited artists such as Amanda Dunsmore, Jim Vaughan or Eileen Healy and exhibitions that emerged from the visibility that *X-PO* offered; the Rinnamona Research Group, who have been researching the families involved with the Harvard-Irish Mission in 1930-36, showed their documents for the first time, and amateur photographer Peter Rees presented a selection of twenty-one years of recording of local events.<sup>10</sup>

A particular force of the project was to develop projects and address issues faced by rural communities through the concreteness of the building – its history, its occupants, as well as the memories and stories attached to it – giving them instant immediacy. Its status as ex-post office, for instance, incidentally raised the whole question of the closing down of rural post offices throughout Ireland, the economic logic behind it and the social consequences. The ease with which the people of the area found their way back to the building is suggestive of the social lack that was felt.

O'Mahony's project officially ended in July, but a management team took over to keep *X-PO* open and to continue to host art exhibitions as well as local clubs. The manner with which the *X-PO* project has weaved in its aims within the existing context is suggestive of Lyotard's idea that we should no longer attempt to invent the world from scratch but to use what is already there and inhabit it differently.

The challenges faced by the art projects described above are not dissimilar to those faced by their urban counterparts when engaging with the public, which can be synthesised as having to manage a position between continuity – to involve audience, to get funding – and disruption – to challenge representation, to open imaginations – but the rural context seems to recast these problems with a slant. For instance, urban public projects often address the social remains of postindustrial areas whereas the rural is still an agricultural zone.

If there is a case for a rural context it is not to set it apart, nor to enter it into a binary opposition with the city and still less as a projected other, which would not only be "authentically indigenous but innovatively political"<sup>11</sup> to take Hal Foster's terms. But rather to address the rural which, while intimately linked to the urban, has a distinct occupation of space with its own logic and demands its own mode of interaction. But, crucially, it is a privileged site of action for many of the twenty-first century's issues: going from the way food is produced, how and where, the spatial relationship between habitat and occupation, the dealing with the consequences of urban and rural pollution, the representation of land and identity as a spectacle, to ways of being and inhabiting which are sustainable in the long term.

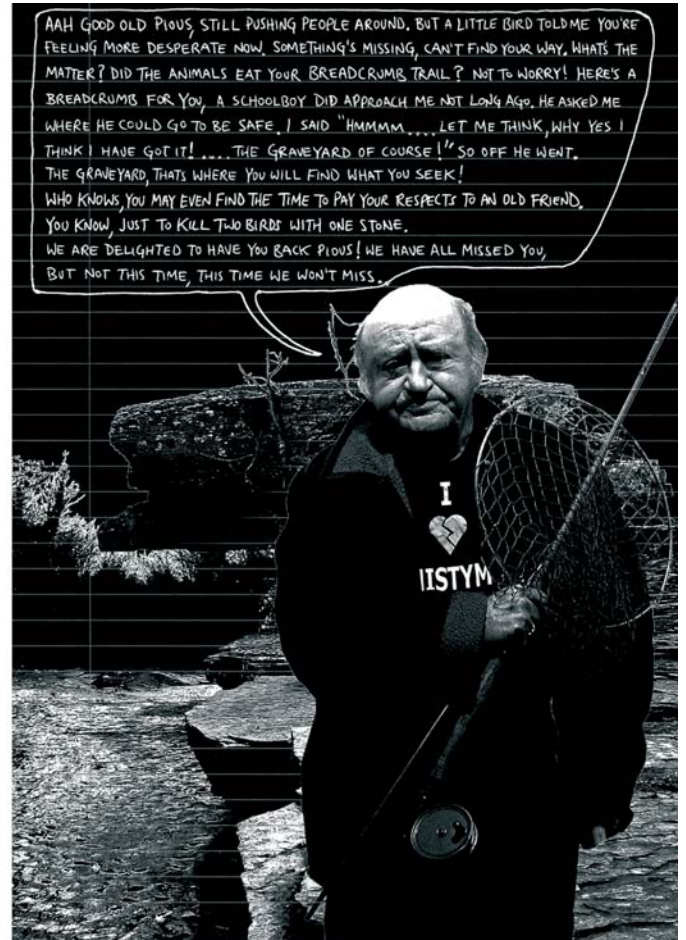
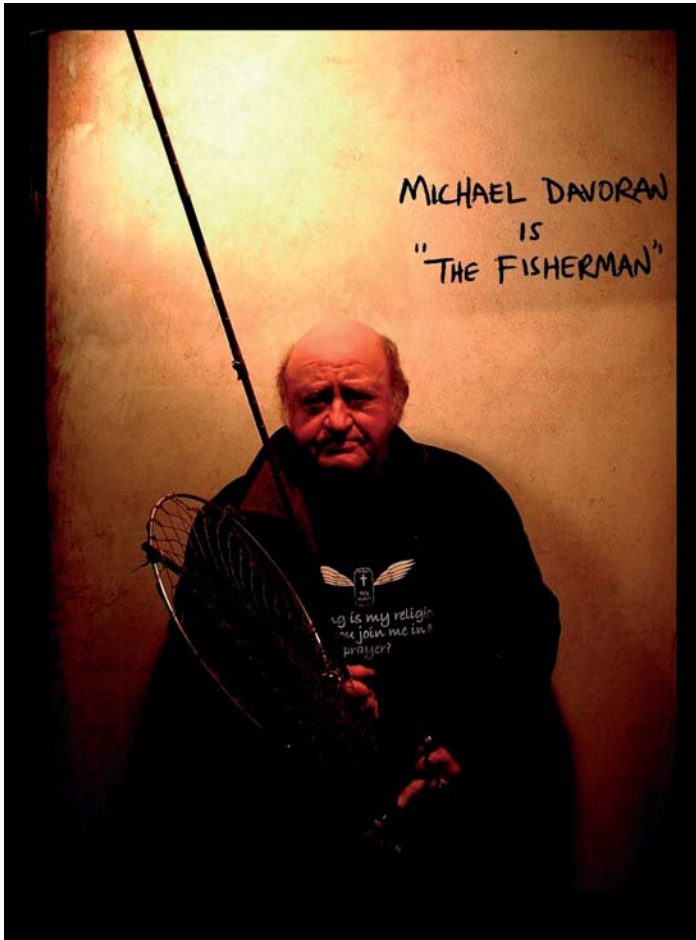
The rural should not be left as a blank to be filled by touristic representations or agricultural and preservation policies, but should enter the realms of imagination to be invented as a site of resistance and experimentation.



- 1 Paul O'Brien, 'Art, politics, environment', *Circa*, No 123, Spring 2008, p 64
- 2 Projects like *AFTER*, *New sites new fields*, *REGENERATE*, as well as the two projects I will be discussing, are some examples of the interest generated by the rural as site. A recent forum of artists involved in those projects and chaired by Daniel Jewesbury at PS2 in Belfast 'Where art grows greener?', had the rural for subject and debated over the specificities of art practices in this context.
- 3 Fiona Woods, from her contribution to 'Where art grows greener?'; [fianawoods.musings.blogspot.com](http://fianawoods.musings.blogspot.com)
- 4 *Ground up, reconsidering contemporary art practice in the rural context*, edited by Fiona Woods, Clare County Council Arts Office, 2008, p 15
- 5 *ibid*, p 53
- 6 Alan Phelan, 'Knowing that audience is not enough', *Ground up*, p 93
- 7 Áine Philips, *Ground up*, p 34
- 8 Hal Foster, *The Return of the real*, Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996, p 197
- 9 Vincent Wall, *Ground up*, p 147
- 10 More information on the *X-PO* project can be found on the Shifting ground website at [www.shiftingground.net/kilnaboypostoffice.htm](http://www.shiftingground.net/kilnaboypostoffice.htm)
- 11 Hal Foster, *op cit*, p 183

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(below)  
Vincent Wall  
*Immature fluke*, 2007  
poster and graphic novel  
courtesy the artist



# *The conceptual scavenger* Interview with Orla Barry

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(opposite)  
Orla Barry  
*Foundings*, 2001  
installation shot  
courtesy the artist

Orla Barry's central concern, like her primary material, is language. Scripting printed matter, video works and live performances, Barry's poetic narratives are rarely univocal or conclusive. Her journals, monologues or experimental scripts contain several concurrent narratives, further jostled by playful contradictions and structural conceits, whose harmonies and collisions are impossible to predict.

Visually, Barry's direction, choreography and set design comprise primary movement, colours and materials, the economic arrangement of which complements her carefully encoded written compositions. In an earlier performance and video, *Wideawake* (2002), a woman finds herself in a vacant auditorium. Mounting its stage, she finds herself at the base of another elevated platform, this one smaller, red and rectangular. Again she mounts, and around it she paces, all the while propounding a self-evaluating monologue with a mixture of desperation and fury. The rectangle, originally a space upon which the character and her voice are projected, becomes a vacuum inside which she is trapped, and the echoing auditorium becomes, paradoxically, unforgiving in its emptiness. Barry's works deftly explore language's inherent failures, extending beyond their many conceits into generous and well-crafted observations of social misrepresentation and ontological despair.

In December 2008, Barry's most recent work, *The Scavenger's daughters*, was produced with three actors, Kate McIntosh, Ineke Lievens and Miles O'Shea in a theatre-style auditorium in Tate Modern.<sup>1</sup> Like other works, the performance developed not through ongoing dialogue, but by the impact of one – often isolated – monologue upon another. Between two sisters, a male Chairmaker moves around the stage, re-arranging a mess of mis-matching chairs on which he encourages, provokes and forces the sisters to be continually re-seated.

Sister 1: Sister, please bring me an alternator if I am to continue producing a voice with him around. At this altitude my attitude to him becomes aggressive... let's try to assimilate the subject of our conversation audibly for a while. Our assignment is to try to speak to one another about an assortment of issues surrounding sisterhood and to use association to bond them.<sup>2</sup>

**Isobel Harbison:** This speech (above) by Sister 1, arguably, introduces many of the play's concerns but also its central conceit: using words beginning with the letter 'a' to begin and develop the play's fractured narrative. Appearing as a sort of word game, this conceit within the script creates a playful layer between its audience and its issues. 'A' words are brought together and reused at intervals, uprooting logical narrative developments, a movement that resembles the Chairmaker's ceaseless rearrangement of chairs and sisters. Can you begin by telling me something about your writing process?

**Orla Barry:** Yes, the writing process began with A, which was a way to begin somewhere, to throw a word out into the world...

The text is called *The Scavenger's daughters*, referring both to the main characters in the performance but also to the process of writing, the process of beginning somewhere and ending somewhere. I consider myself a scavenger, a driftwood collector, as someone who creates images from debris. I pick up stuff from the world's word rubbish dump as I walk along. By this I mean that the words are scavenged not from literary texts but from writing made for less artistic reasons, like the back of a milk carton or an instruction manual. A few words from these stimulators and I am sent in one direction or another. When I am writing something I am thinking about it all the time and that informs what I pick up from the world around me.

I also take a lot from speech. People talk, they talk a lot. My 'sketch book' fills with these scavenged words. They become enclosed in sentences depending on the subject I wish to convey. I write around these scavenged morsels. Sometimes these wanderings transform the subject or corrupt it, hence the scattered feeling in my writing, a feeling I nurture as a direct reflection on the world we live in. The way I write is like walking, sketching a path through whichever landscape my speaker inhabits. I transform this into a kind of convoluted speech that mimics speech yet stays in the realm of recital. It sounds like the sisters are saying one thing while in fact they are saying another. It sounds like a conversation, but it floats in a land of monologue. I do not tell stories to say what I want to say but rather I give a series of images to the viewer that can be shuffled around like a pack of cards. The metaphor is open-ended and the process of interpretation and re-interpretation is very important in my work.



IH: Some of your words are familiar (“we are agreeable agoraphobics from an agricultural background” from *Foundlings* (2002) and “I am dreaming wideawake” from *Wideawake*); is *The Scavenger’s daughters* an amalgamation of previous scripts?

OB: In fact it is not that they come from *Wideawake* or *Foundlings* into *The Scavenger’s daughters* but the other way around. I wrote *The Scavenger’s daughters* in 1997 as a sound work that never really found its final form. As I was never sure how it would end up, I scavenged from it and took parts out of it that fitted into other works. I kept going back to it and I did this for the last time this summer which was a really interesting process for me, returning to rework a text I had written ten years earlier. It was like going back to a bar where you once spent a lot of time. Some of the characters you spent time with are still sitting around, yet they have changed. They are wearing coloured contact lenses. They have dyed their hair and they have wrinkles around their eyes when they smile, wrinkles that don’t disappear any more when they stop smiling. There are some new people at one table. Some people have died, others have moved on. The air seems to have cleared; everyone has given up smoking. They have started drinking cocktails instead of beer. As you sit down on the bar stool you always sat on, you realise you are no longer part of it. The barman interrupts your thoughts and says “hello, I am the Chairmaker, what would you like to drink?”

My writing is very image-orientated; it tells more about life as a still life, as a series of pictures. The structure of the performance set is also built up like this with three layers: the backdrop, the mid-field and the front. I guess the meaning in the text is also broken in this way and the relationship between the voices/ speakers. I try not to refer to them as characters as they are not, they don’t have a psychological background; they are voice and body. They are text projectors. I like to use the microphones as a prop and also because it forces the actors to use their voice and body in a particular way.

I believe as a visual artist, I have a spatial relationship to language or words because I consider them physically; I think about the sound they will make and the actors’ bodily movements as they say them, and the silences they create after they have disappeared. The nonlinear aspect of my writing reflects the disjointed world we live in. In *The Scavenger’s daughters* the physical side of the writing comes out, the exaggerated use of alliteration, the pauses, the speed, the dyslexic falling-apart of meaning. Certain parts of the text are said in such quick succession that each sentence obliterates the one before.

IH: Will *The Scavenger’s daughters* become a video work? Is there a distinction for you between making live work and recording work?

OB: I have been toying with the idea of making a video work out of it and I shot for two days during the rehearsal period. On viewing the rushes I think I will not make a video from it, like I did with *Wideawake*. If I do make a video work from it, I will rethink the whole thing.

I prefer to play this performance live and making it has allowed me to experiment with something fragile and very frontal. The difference with film is you have all these different angles to things and a different proximity to the actors; you can be inside their heads, in front of them, behind them. I built the set for *The Scavenger’s daughters* like a painting – somehow it has no perspective, the sisters exist in a flat image, their voices exist in real time (I use a lot of voiceover in my films, which places the voice in a zone off-screen). When all the moving of chairs is over and the actors have settled into their place for however short a time, a very balanced image is produced, like a still life. Then the chaos and the moving around begin again.

There is also a balance between the two ‘sisters’; like a weighing scales, they are constantly guided by the Chairmaker, giving him some sense of control in the piece; he sets the scene for their picture-making and storytelling. He allows them comfort, until he has hatched another plan to disturb their efforts at conversing. I like this simplified one-set film, each scene created by a new constellation of chairs. A lot of people mentioned after the performance that they felt it like a film. I felt it more like a live painting. Jackson Pollock crossed with Edward Hopper and a bag of words!

IH: Can you mention any other painters that have influenced you, or feel might have a similar approach?

Painters who have influenced me – not really. That description was more like an analogy to describe the interior energy or formalism at play in my work. Alternatively, it could be like Ellsworth Kelly (formalism) crossed with Caspar David Friedrich (romanticism) crossed with Barnett Newman (humour). The painters I am interested in have a strong interest in colour and in the formal aspects of their work. These, I would call my subconscious grandfathers along with grandmothers who are not painters, such as Eva Hesse and Hanne Darboven and Anna Oppermann. And great-grandfathers such as Georges de la Tour.



Orla Barry  
*Wideawake*  
2003  
video still  
courtesy the artist

**IH:** You mentioned that you found your words in haphazard places, but I wonder if you have taken inspiration from previous or contemporary directors or choreographers?

**OB:** Yes, I would say I have been inspired and moved by the work by many people: Samuel Beckett, Trisha Brown, STO Union, Gertrude Stein, John Cassevetes, Ingmar Bergman, Robert Bresson, Pedro Costa, Gerard Manley Hopkins, William Blake, Miles Champion, ee.cummings, Paul Celan, 16 Horsepower, Robert Smithson, Joelle Tuerlinckx and Matt Mullician, Dirk Braekman, Rui Chafes. But, more importantly, I have been inspired by the landscape and the banter and the psychological movements that went on around me; the language of real life, like that of my grandmother, inspired my greatly.

**IH:** Why chairs? They are, ideally, a support for seating but can also be uncomfortable and awkward. On several occasions, your female characters are subjected to uncomfortable seating. I am not sure if you are aware and it may be entirely unintentional, but *The Scavenger's daughters* is also the name of a medieval torture devise that squeezes a seated subject into an inhumane position, eventually suffocating them. I interpreted the chairs as a metaphor for language, which can either enable or violate its user, depending on its height, material, mass, etc. Language as being potentially violating is often taken up in late-twentieth-century feminist critiques. Do you think the legacies of feminism need to be readdressed and do you do so intentionally within your work?

**OB:** I consider myself an underhand feminist. This more has to do in my work with never defining roles, allowing both men and women to slip from one stereotype to the next, constantly evolving without ever fully forming, an undefined sexuality floating between male and female, opposing, melting, confining, redefining. I think my work will grow in this respect in the future. Family ties also remain undefined. I grew up in an agricultural environment where the male voice was often held inside the body, the female voice spoke a lot but sometimes without any purpose, just filling the silence. I like to play with this in my work. I think that adoptive techniques might work in my performances, men adopting female language traits and women adopting those of men in order to underline the differences in how male and female use and abuse language.

The chairs and the microphones are props; they support the voice and the body just as the backdrop creates the picture into which the 'whole' fits. The chairs represent comfort and discomfort, the place from which we talk, in which we are interviewed, on which we relax. In this performance, they are the space from which the voice is projected (that is clear in the last scene, where you no longer see the actors but only the chair and the voice). It is the male character that offers this space of comfort

and also the one who removes it. In this way he exercises a certain power over the sisters, yet they resist. They use the chairs for their own ends. They use them as a stage from which to perform, to taunt. They reverse the Chairmaker's efforts at controlling them. He is never allowed the space of comfort. He stands throughout the whole performance. The chair is a way of joining the body to the voice. Allowing the physical to be very present beside the writing, allowing the physical to direct the speech, to make pictures from the speech. The chairs become the room, the landscape, the train, the rock, the beach, the love triangle! They become a complicated messy choreography and in turn they create order when it is time to have order.

**IH:** Monologues, voiceovers and sound effects – these seem very important to you. Many previous video works have been very attentive to the voice of your performer, constructed with monologues (*Wideawake*) or with voiceovers (*Portable stones*, 2005). There is fracture throughout; with the monologues we are addressed yet not in conversation and with the voiceovers the characters do not address us nor their counterparts on screen, they remain silent throughout the performance and in both *Wideawake* and *Portable stones* this allows for the isolated characters' further detachment. In *The Scavenger's daughters*, the actors' voices were often interjected by landscape sound effects or popular music. This again created a fracture. Can you talk to me about your use of sound(s) and voice(s)?

**OB:** The voice is the path to the soul. To me it is something that seems to tell us about an inner landscape. I am interested in inner landscapes. I like to listen to the timbre of somebody's voice, how they physically manipulate it, how they breathe. I have made many sound works; in fact *The Scavenger's daughters* started life as a sound work. I think that voice and sound are my favourite tools. I love radio as an art form. I like to listen to someone like Alistair Cook (*Letter from America*), who once said he wrote "for talking, putting writing on a page with the same syntactical break-up and normal confusion that is normal talk." I think I also write for speech.

I am interested in a voice aging; think of Leonard Cohen's voice now and his voice in his twenties. It's the same with Alistair Cook or when you listen to Johnny Cash's breath in his last recordings; it makes you think of the fragility of life and somehow you can see into his physical state. I think of my grandmother's voice and breath as she whispers lucidly in an effort to speak after three weeks not eating, as she tries with pleasure and on her own terms to let go of life.





My use of monologue has to do with performance itself. A monologue implies the performing speaker, performing for effect, speed, clarity, and drama. It is a form that can be removed from life, so it allows the distance you so rightly underline in your question. These voices speak about emotion, yet seem removed from the emotion they are speaking about. In *The Scavenger's daughters* I use multiple monologues, or you could see it as a triangular monologue, a monologue with three corners. Sometimes this speaking verges on conversation, yet the subject seems to slip enough to never allow any kind of real conversation to take place.

The voiceover in my video work also has many functions; first of all it allows me to work with people who are not actors. It allows me to choose faces from real life and give them remote-controlled detached voices. I am interested in giving a person a written personality that is not their own, without them having to act. One of the people I worked with a few years ago said to me, "I feel like a prop," and it was a good observation. They are a prop for the attached voice, a decoration for the voice, something the eyes can think about as the voice enters the ear.

In both performance and video the use of the microphone as a musical instrument with which to work on the voice is really important. As I do a lot of voiceover for my own work, I have found that my voice becomes someone else's voice through the microphone and I can then manipulate it both in recording and in editing afterwards. I have so much to say about voiceover and monologue that we could make the whole interview about only that. Think of the voice over in *Casino* shared by Ace (Robert De Niro) and Nicky (Joe Pesci), or a real voice such as at Charles Bukowski reading; even if I am not a big fan of his poetry, his voice offers an incredible view straight into his soul. It was great to work with Kate, Ineke and Miles on the rhythm, speed, loudness and intonation of their voices: that's my music.

**IH:** You say that the performed work allows a fragility that perhaps a video work might not and also an open-ended process of interpretation and re-interpretation. Reading the script after seeing the work live, I was more conscious of the structure of it and of your writing process, whereas initially I had to intuit the whole work together. Would you consider publishing the script of *The Scavenger's daughters* and how would you feel about its production by other artist/ directors?

**OB:** Yes, I will publish *The Scavenger's daughters*. I am starting work on a book at the moment with all my texts. There will be sound recordings with it, so there will also be both the written and the physical experience of the voice but with no images.

I don't know how I would feel about somebody else directing my work. It would be a strange experiment, one I would not be opposed to trying...

**IH:** In some of your more recent works, such as *Portable stones* and *Bastardstown blagger* (2007), the rural (or coastal) and the urban were shown in contrast to or in conflict with one another. In *The Scavenger's daughters*, the backdrop of the stage was a map of a fictional land, and I wondered whether this represented a reconciliation of the two?

**OB:** It is a fictional island, an island away from the city. I think there is no reconciliation to be had between urban and rural. They will always clash.

- 1 With previous and future instalments taking place at STUK Arts Centre, Leuven and de Appel Arts Centre, Amsterdam, respectively.
- 2 Orla Barry, *The Scavenger's daughters* (2008)

Isobel Harbison is a writer and curator based in London.



(previous spread, above)  
 Orla Barry and Rui Chafes  
*UNSAID*  
 2001  
 installation shot, SMAK, 2005  
 sculpture and sound  
 courtesy the artists

(this page and previous spread,  
 below)  
 Orla Barry  
*The Scavenger's daughters*  
 2008  
 installation shot, UBS Openings:  
*Saturday live*, Tate Modern  
 photo Sheila Burnett  
 courtesy the artist





*The territory of art and the  
territory underfoot* A reading of three  
artworks from Leitrim<sup>1</sup>

(opposite)  
Gareth Kennedy  
*The Future of ice*, 2008  
event with vocalist Dorothy  
Murphy  
digital video stills  
courtesy of artist

## Introduction

Irish landscapes have played a crucial role in the construction of Irish identity. From the time of conquest and plantation, Roy Foster suggests, “[English authority] was opposed by the very lie of the land,” with “wood, bog, lake and mountain conceal[ing] and sustain[ing] resistance,” and rebellious natives being figured in terms of their recalcitrant landscape.<sup>2</sup> When cultural nationalism flowered in the late nineteenth century, Irish landscape was conceptualised more romantically by Irish as well as British thinkers and writers as sublimely beautiful rather than bleak and inhospitable, and importantly, as an irreducible sign of difference which prevented Ireland’s neighbour from assimilating the island wholesale. In the age of industrialisation, with its increased stirrings of anxiety over displacement and loss of tradition, supposedly untouched West of Ireland landscapes became what Luke Gibbons refers to as “a primitive Eden, a rural idyll free from the pressures and constraints of the modern world.”<sup>3</sup>

With the onset of political and physical struggle for Irish independence, that notion of the landscapes of the rural west of Ireland in particular as representing ‘true’ Irishness did not lose its usefulness; rather, it became part of the (perhaps necessarily) crude project of recuperating a coherent identity for the island and its people after the psychological ravages of British rule. Again, the intertwining of topography and identity was reinforced by the positing of the Gaeltacht as “‘real’ nature,” and its (Catholic and Gaelic-speaking) inhabitants as the ‘real’ Irish.<sup>4</sup> Throughout the twentieth century, the West as the pure site of Irish Otherness was enshrined in public consciousness in Ireland and abroad; today this imagery is deliberately perpetuated as a marketing tool by the tourist industry, and it retains some of its cultural and political strength nationally.<sup>5</sup>

However, this was always a simplistic and superficial appreciation of the character of Irish landscapes, ignoring Ireland’s urban and industrial geography as well as the poverty and environmental degradation that contributed to the visual and material character of the rural West. It is

even less tenable an idea of Ireland today, in the light of the rapid economic, social and cultural changes of the last twenty years across the island as a whole, and not least in the very rural landscapes once held to be timeless and inviolable in their appearance and moral significance. A recent project from the Leitrim Sculpture Centre, *New sites – new fields*, took the idea of Irish landscapes as always-already diverse and protean as its starting point, and commissioned twelve artists to reflect on multiple aspects of place in Ireland.<sup>6</sup> I have been involved in the project as a cultural geographer with an interest in the relationship between Irish landscapes and Irish identity, and I wish to discuss the works of three *New sites – new fields* artists here from that academic perspective. Each of these artists interrogated their chosen landscapes in relation to narratives of people and place marginalised in traditional or populist discourses of Ireland and Irishness. I read these pieces as engaging with the themes of topography and climate, migration and belonging and energy and industrialisation; they offer satisfyingly complex and oblique approaches to what landscapes in the West of Ireland mean, historically, presently and even in future terms.

## The artworks

The glacial landscape of Glenade Lough in north Leitrim forms the backdrop for Gareth Kennedy’s *The Future of ice*. Glenade’s distinctive U-shaped valley is the result of glacial retreat at the end of the Ice Age, and Kennedy’s piece both refers to this and offers a doubled and ambiguous vision of a future Irish climate in which ice could play a large part or no part at all. The artist had two tonnes of water from Glenade Lough frozen in one-tonne blocks; one of these was installed in the gallery space and one formed the basis of the work as event. Kennedy placed the ice block on a wooden platform on a pier at the lough; it sat there for some fifteen minutes while improvisational vocalist Dorothy Murphy sang a wordless lament. The ice was then launched into the lough by the artist and helpers and allowed to drift and slowly melt. The performance took place before a local audience.

My interest in this piece focuses on its approach to Irish landscape as topography and climate, its temporal scope, which encompasses prehistory, the present moment and an unknown future, and its juxtaposition of the exotic with the familiar. A nationalist iconography of landscape is important to concepts of national identity, and in Ireland as elsewhere, this iconography depends for its power on projecting a sense of distinctive national landscapes as timeless and unchanging. Paul Gilroy argues that this allows “nation and citizenship [to appear] to be natural rather than social phenomena.”<sup>7</sup> *The Future of ice* refuses this view from the outset. It refers to a point in space and time where and when the concept of Ireland had yet to be formulated, and draws a direct connection between that point and the present space and time. Thus Kennedy neatly sidesteps both entanglement in those histories of conflict, exclusion and oppression that weight Irish landscapes and particularly the landscapes of north Leitrim, and a simplistic and ahistorical notion that this landscape has always appeared and signified in the same way. Rather, he points to “the process by which [it was] created,” reinstating the material alongside the cultural shaping of place.<sup>8</sup>

However, the piece also resonates in a cultural-geography context through its enlisting of the cultural connotations of ice. Presently, ice is foreign to the temperate climate of Ireland. It derives from this an exotic status, enhanced by its siting in Kennedy’s work as anomalous, lonely and lamented, an emissary from either the past or the future, but out of context in the present. Kennedy achieves a doubling of meaning here. The ice block invokes a polar climate and terrain and thus defamiliarises the Irish landscape framing it, enshrining the literally outlandish in a domestic setting. Nonetheless, since the ice is intimately connected to Glenade, being composed from the very water it floats in and referring directly to the valley’s glacial history, it takes its rightful place at the heart of the scene and threads together that landscape’s distant past and possible future, simultaneously confounding the presumption that its present character is stable.

Sarah Browne’s *A Romantic interlude* reflects on the disjuncture between the idealisation of Leitrim as unspoilt rural landscape in the (Dublin-based) Irish press, and the reality of moving to live and work in such a place.<sup>9</sup> The artist enlisted the help of eight people living locally (including myself) to construct and raise an eight-metre-by-four-metre rainbow, made by the artist in painted sections of sterling board, on a hill overlooking Glenade in north Leitrim. The process was filmed on super 8 cameras by Julien Dorgère and the artist, and the rainbow stood in position for three weeks before succumbing to wind and weather and collapsing. Browne exhibited the broken pieces of the rainbow alongside an eighteen-minute super 8 film depicting the day’s work in the gallery in October.

Key to my interpretation of the piece’s wider significance is Browne’s staging of work at the centre of her piece, which she views as “structure, object, event and film.”<sup>10</sup> Attention to work performs a doubled critique of conventional ideas of Irish landscape and its relationship to people living in Ireland. Not only does Browne hint at the “guilty and gritty” process by which place is shaped, refusing the ahistorical and apolitical view so important to nationalist ideology, but she points to the ways in which human attachment to place is shaped rather than given.<sup>11</sup> Like the artist, many members of the building group had moved to Leitrim as adults from elsewhere, and the term ‘blow-in’ is used commonly to describe such migrants, implicitly positioning them outside communities of belonging. The symbolism too is clear; ‘blow-ins’ are expected to pass through a landscape leaving no mark and forming no meaningful or lasting connection with it.

Browne offers an alternative view in *A Romantic interlude*. The film emphasises that the rainbow came into being through collective physical labour, unsettling the traditional landscape narrative in which place is “believed to possess a reality surpassing that of the process by which [it was] created,” enabling its transition from messy materiality to polished iconography.<sup>12</sup> Further, the rainbow is exhibited in its shattered and marked state, not as a pristine object without a history. As Ingrid Pollard’s work, “deliberately misplac[ing] Black subjects in traditional pastoral settings,” has shown in England, exclusion from national identity often entails exclusion from its iconic landscapes.<sup>13</sup> Daniel Corkery claimed that “all the Gaels... were one... with the very landscape itself,” contrasting this naturally inherited relationship with the transplanted status of seventeenth-century settlers and offering a limited definition of belonging.<sup>14</sup> Browne takes a more open-ended and inclusive view, synthesising through *A Romantic interlude* the notions of migrancy and resettlement and engagement with place through labour, and suggesting that attachment to and belonging in place accrete through time and work and are tied to socialisation and collective action as much as individual feeling. The use of cine film inflects the documentation of the day’s work with a nostalgic visual quality which temporally dislocates the piece, imbuing it with a sense of the past and puncturing easy assumptions about incomers’ shallow relationship to place.



Sarah Browne  
*A Romantic interlude*  
2008  
still from super 8 film  
transferred to DVD  
courtesy of artist



*I always wanted to be a windmill* by Elaine Reynolds addresses Ireland's landscapes of industry and energy production, focusing on the abandonment and demolition of the former coal-fuelled ESB power station at Arigna in the 1990s. Reynolds conceived of a foot-driven electrical generator which was co-designed and built by engineer Conor McNamee. The generator was installed in a rowboat and used to power the projection of a locally produced film (edited by the artist) of the dismantling of the station, from the lough onto the gable wall of one of the station's remaining structures.<sup>15</sup> The projection was viewed by a limited audience, and Reynolds' interactive gallery installation included the demolition footage itself, a film of the projection of the footage, and the generator, which gallery visitors were invited to use to light a bulb.

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*I always wanted to be a windmill* explores a rural landscape which lends itself to being represented conventionally as lonely, picturesque and relatively timeless; however, Reynolds approaches her subject from an alternative perspective, choosing instead to look at its historically and geographically specific industrial character. As mentioned, the idea of Ireland as quintessentially rural and agricultural, Gaelic and Catholic hardened in the early twentieth century, in the search for cultural distinctiveness. The overtly industrialised landscapes of the North presented particular challenges to this notion, and Clare O'Halloran shows that from the time of partition, nationalist rhetoric in the South became almost schizophrenic as it simultaneously sought to claim the whole island as inherently Irish, and rejected certain urban and industrial centres (such as Belfast) as inherently un-Irish.<sup>16</sup> Poet Derek Mahon believes that this bias has contemporary currency, pointing out in relation to "the Protestant suburbs of Belfast" that it is difficult for many in Ireland and elsewhere to accept "at an aesthetic level" that such landscapes have equal claim to represent Ireland as the depopulated and sublime stretches of mountain, coast, bog and lough found in the west of the island.<sup>17</sup>

Reynolds' piece refuses this neat categorisation of landscape as discretely agricultural and Irish *or* industrial and un-Irish; rather, the artist exposes the always-already interwoven and interdependent nature of such groupings by siting the obviously industrial firmly within a pastoral context, and in making explicit the connection between industry and natural resources points to agriculture's industrial status. In the demolition footage the crumbling power station, with its heaps of brick, scaffolding and machinery, is repeatedly viewed against its rural backdrop. The artist's film, silent, made at dusk, and with an elegiac quality, shows the projection of the demolition footage against one remaining ESB building, visible only from the lough shore and framed poignantly against water, trees and sky. The piece layers visual representations of mechanised energy production as enmeshed in a bucolic and largely

agricultural landscape; emphasis is put on the diverse and complex, and importantly, changing nature of this site. Reynolds' work may be read as a remembering of an integral, but often neglected, element of Irish landscape, and in its recognition of the area's successive industrial histories, makes contemplative space for its creative future uses.

### Conclusion

I believe that the potential exists for a very productive relationship between visual artists concerned with place and cultural geographers; my own educational background spans the two disciplines and practices, and I have found that at best, each feeds and challenges the other, melding creative and innovative approaches to understanding and imagining place with intellectual rigour. Gerry Smyth argues that the foundational importance of place derives from its position as "one of the two existential coordinates (the other being time) regulating human experience in and of the natural world."<sup>18</sup> For this reason and for specific historical, geographical, political and cultural reasons in an Irish context, narratives of place continue to be significant, and dominant narratives generally seek to exclude as much as include, to secure national identity and belonging for certain groups and to deny them to others; my research career has focused on complicating and disrupting these narratives, and I have drawn fruitfully from thoughtful and critical visual art which I construe as pursuing a complementary, if not identical, path.

Each of the artworks discussed here is much richer, conceptually and visually, than I have had space to represent. The three pieces constitute multilayered representations of, and interventions in, their respective landscapes, but as a cultural geographer with an interest in the relationship between place and identity in Ireland and an incomer to north Leitrim, I have drawn out what I read as the pieces' critiques of limited and limiting imaginings of Irish landscape. They deal with themes of topographical history and climate change, migrancy, settlement and belonging and industrialisation and resource landscapes; this text aims to explain the consequence of these themes to discussions of space and place in Ireland, and in the case of each artwork, its nuanced and astute contributions to such discussions. Further, the artworks assume a sharp contemporary relevance in the light of substantial changes in Ireland through the last fifty years in terms of its climate and environment, its ethnic, religious and cultural makeup (always already more diverse than portrayed) and its production and use of energy and other resources, although this neither encompasses nor exhausts their import. For me, they offer a glimpse of the beneficial role that visual art may play within cultural geography; I hope that cultural geography may play a mutually constructive role within visual art.

- 1 The title paraphrases American writer Wendell Berry, who contends, "The test of imagination, ultimately, is not the territory of art or the territory of the mind, but the territory underfoot. That is not to say that there is no territory of the mind, only that it is not a separate territory. It is not exempt either from the principles above it or from the country below it." (Wendell Berry, *What are people for?* New York, North Point Press, 1990, p 84)
- 2 Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972*, London, Penguin, 1988, p 6; see also Sabina Sharkey, *Ireland and the iconology of rape: colonization, constraint and gender*, London, University of North London Press, 1994
- 3 Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons, and John Hill, *Cinema and Ireland*, London, Routledge, 1988, p 194
- 4 John Wilson Foster, 'Encountering traditions', pp 23-70, in John Wilson Foster (ed) *Nature in Ireland: a scientific and cultural history*, Dublin, Lilliput Press, 1997, p 25
- 5 Rockett, Gibbons and Hill, op cit, p 194
- 6 The project took place over 2007 and 2008, culminating in an exhibition (sited in the gallery and the surrounding landscape) of the artists' works in October 2008. See the website for further details [www.newsitesnewfields.com](http://www.newsitesnewfields.com)
- 7 Paul Gilroy, 'Diaspora and the detours of identity', pp 301-341, in Kathryn Woodward (ed), *Identity and difference*, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, Sage Publications in association with Open University, 1997, p 331
- 8 Jonathan Smith, 'The lie that blinds: destabilizing the text of landscape', pp 78-92, in James Duncan and David Ley (eds) *Place/ culture/ representation*, London and New York, Routledge, 1993, p 81
- 9 Sarah Browne, artist's statement in exhibition material, 4 October 2008
- 10 Ibid
- 11 Smith, op cit, p 80
- 12 Ibid, p 81
- 13 John Dixon and Kevin Durrheim, 'Displacing place-identity: a discursive approach to locating self and other', pp 27-44, in *British journal of social psychology*, vol 39 no 1, 2000, p 34
- 14 Daniel Corkery, quoted in David Lowenthal, 'Past time, present place: landscape and memory', pp 1-36, in *Geographical review*, vol 65 no 1, 1975, p 8
- 15 The film, *Arigna Power Station 1958-1993: historic landmark comes tumbling down on January 15th 1999*, documents the passing of the Arigna coal mines and the power station, protests against this process in Dublin and the actual demolition of the station. It was found by the artist in the Local Studies Archive of Leitrim County Library (personal communication from artist, 22 October 2008).
- 16 Clare O'Halloran, *Partition and the limits of Irish nationalism: an ideology under stress*, Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1987, p 9
- 17 Derek Mahon, quoted in George Watson, 'Landscape in Ulster poetry', pp 1-15, in Gerald Dawe and John Wilson Foster (eds), *The Poet's place: Ulster literature and society – essays in honour of John Hewitt, 1907 – 1987*, Belfast, Institute of Irish Studies (Queen's University), 1991, p 11
- 18 Gerry Smyth, *Space and the Irish cultural imagination*, Hampshire and New York, Palgrave, 2001, p 2

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Elaine Reynolds  
*I always wanted to be a windmill*  
2008  
video still by Ruth Duignan, 2008  
courtesy of artist



Elaine Reynolds  
*I always wanted to be a windmill*  
2008  
photo kDamo  
courtesy of artist



<sup>50</sup> *Letter from Bangkok*



(opposite)  
Maitree Siriboon  
from *Isarn boy dream* series  
colour photograph  
courtesy the artist

During the time of writing this article little-known Australian writer and Thai university lecturer Harry Nicolaides began his three-year sentence in a Bangkok prison after pleading guilty to a charge of *lèse majesté*. *Lèse majesté* is a local law that renders negative representations of the Thai monarchy a criminal offence and punishable with up to fifteen years in prison. Nicolaides had self-published a novel with a passage that reportedly defamed the Crown Prince, and he was arrested while about to leave Thailand. The details of this case are so well publicized I don't need to repeat them here.

Thailand's *lèse majesté* law has existed since 1908. Efforts to preserve tradition are pervasive in Thailand, however uncomfortably certain traditions fit with notions of modernity or the contemporary. Cultural production in Thailand by and large does not question such efforts. With the exception of a couple of very isolated examples, the deliberate provocation or deconstruction of state-mandated understandings is notably absent in even the most avant-garde of art circles. In fact, much of the most notable art being produced here dovetails with the sense that the kingdom's traditions and visions of itself are in need of protection, continued recognition and/ or preservation.

The Bangkok Art and Culture Center (BACC) opened in 2008 after over a decade of stops and starts due to the competing interests of different administrations. Originally titled 'Bangkok Metropolitan Museum of Contemporary Art', the lack of a center for contemporary art had long since been noted by interest groups given the size and international significance of Bangkok, yet "we" remain unsure if BACC will deliver as expected. BACC's first major exhibition was of photographs by HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn. This was followed by the amorphous *Traces of Siamese smile: art + faith + politics + love*: a 'catch-all' and open-ended show of established Thai artists and foreign artists with some connection to Thailand. Future shows include an exhibition of portraits of HM the King Bhumibol Adulyadej by a variety of artists.

One can only wonder how BACC will eventually proceed if it is required that all exhibitions thematically address Thailand.

Thai artists with major international reputations, such as Udomsak Krisanamis, Surasi Kusolwong and Rirkrit Tiravanija, tend to be relatively less known within this country, though this is partly due to the scarcity of major venues and events here. However, Tiravanija was a co-founder of The Land Foundation in the northern province of Chiang Mai during 1998. The Land is an ongoing project that facilitates dialogue and collaboration between local and international artists in terms of ideas about community and self-sufficiency. Artists live and work in specially designed huts around two rice fields, which form the focus of the project's aims. Irish artists Aoife Desmond and Seoidin O'Sullivan were resident there during 2008 and created *Trespass*, a photography- and book-based project that critically explores tensions between land use and land ownership in urban areas. Their use of the methods of conceptual art fitted well with the philosophical and theoretical leanings of The Land as a whole. Resident artists are trained in the traditional meditative process of *vipassana* in order to gain insights into the value of being as an issue of self-control and the acceptance of difference. For international artists seeking a genuine encounter with cultural difference, here is definitely one place to visit.

It is a curious fact that Tiravanija is regularly accused on home soil of exploiting Thai culture, as if his multi-national background renders his relationship to his ethnic upbringing inauthentic. Tiravanija, as we know, initially gained attention in the early '90s with relational work where he created environments for the production and consumption of Thai food.

Questions of the 'ownership' of references to Thai culture are surely moot though such references abound in the work of artists who live here and the revered Silpakorn University has a thriving Thai Art department. Much of the art that addresses Thai culture is interesting at the level of form, from the variety of Buddhist art shown at spaces such as Bangkok's Number 1 Gallery to Chusak Srikwan's cowhide cut-outs inspired by *nang talung*, the shadow-puppet tradition of Southern Thailand. Angkrit Ajchariyasophon's widely shown *The Perfect English gentleman*, 2007, works across installation and performance to parody colonial models of conduct, while Maitree Siriboon's *Esarn boy dream*, 2008, series of photographs cheekily relay stereotypes of Thailand as a sexual playground for foreigners.

Conceptually, however, these works tend to reiterate received and/ or conservative ideas or understandings. While critique is evident, it seems in defence of a prelapsarian past, or more 'pure' culture. Srikwan's caricatures of contemporary Thai politicians as animals, for instance, inadvertently mask the historical and social conditions that produce the corruption he attacks. Comparably, Ajchariyasophon and Siriboon offer mere indictment; in these examples, an indictment of 'foreigners'.

Precedents for the thinking among these artworks are clear. Explicitly political art in Thailand follows a similar line and two recent exhibitions – *The Art of corruption*, 2007, at the gallery of the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, and *Neo-nationalism*, 2005, at the Art Center of Chulalongkorn University – are testament to this. Both exhibitions included such politicized stalwarts as Vasan Sittthiket, Sutee Kunavichayanont, Sakarin Krue-on, Manit Sriwanichpoom and Ink K. Examples of the work on show included Kunavichayanont's wallpaper installation of the word 'cheat' blended with traditional Thai pattern and Sriwanichpoom's photographs of children affected by industrial pollution. Sittthiket included a rogues' gallery of Thai political figures alongside a video of himself repeating the statement "I am not Thai." While such efforts are necessarily welcome in a country that militates against critical thinking, a sophisticated understanding of the terms by which corruption and nationalism become pervasive was notably lacking and, moreover, all the artworks fell short of agitprop.

Bangkok's full Thai name is the longest place name in the world. It translates as, 'The city of angels, the great city, the eternal jewel city, the impregnable city of God Indra, the grand capital of the world endowed with nine precious gems, the happy city, abounding in an enormous Royal Palace that resembles the heavenly abode where reigns the reincarnated god, a city given by Indra and built by Vishnukam'. Anyone who is familiar with the city and, by extension, the country, will inevitably become enthralled. Thailand has much to offer and provides grist to the mill for a range of considerations around globalization, cultural identity and art production. Engagement, however, should not preclude critical understanding.

Brian Curtin is an Irish-born art critic and curator and has lived in Bangkok since 2000.

(opposite)  
Maitree Siriboon  
*Queen as folk*, 2006  
mixed media on board  
185 x 160 cm  
courtesy the artist





## Reviews

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C.

(background)  
Nevan Lahart  
*UGLY LOVELY*, 2009  
installation shot  
courtesy Kevin Kavanagh  
Gallery







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*Michael McLoughlin*

I only come here

'cos it's free



*I only come here 'cos it's free* is the dryly humorous title of Michael McLoughlin's exhibition in Limerick City Gallery. The title of the show, in rope light on the exterior gallery wall, is reminiscent of the flashy display signs associated with the entertainment sector. As such, this red florescent sign establishes the surface concerns of the show. Using a combination of media, McLoughlin explores various social activities such as hurling, darts and bingo in an effort to eek out some sense of communal experience.

Community engagement is central to this exhibition, and indeed McLoughlin's practice has been preoccupied with the collaborative process among various Limerick based groups and individuals. The active engagement of the community with each other and the formation of a shared experience is demonstrated by *William calling*. This work rests on the first bingo night held in Askeaton in over twenty-five years, organised by the artist in July 2008. The work consists of an audio recording from the bingo event, played through speakers and slowed so that it is indecipherable yet identifiable in its distinct mundane rhythm. The installation is centred around a vintage bingo machine, connected to two lightboxes. Instead of displaying the numbers as they are called, these lightboxes illuminate what look like random permutations, based on the markings made by the players on their bingo sheets. These gestural markings simultaneously indicate mathematical probability and chance permutation. This piece works in a similar vein to *The Numbers are in the stars*, which includes acrylic spheres with blowers that move bingo balls at random, and contains all the ingredients of the social event, apart from the crucial element of the players themselves.

*We are here every Monday night* is an audio and video projection recorded from the Black Swan bar in Limerick.

This piece concentrates on the social engagement of throwing darts. The hazy, out-of-focus dartboard is in multiple with the ghostly residue of men as they throw and retrieve their darts. The conversation makes a background hum, where the words seem to slip just out of hearing. The faded quality of the projection attests to an experience that is increasingly in decline. This focus on the individual within a specific social framework is also picked up in a series of lambda prints, *Place to meet up*. These prints consist of cut-out photographs of women playing bingo on a background of drawn compartments. Each woman is separate, as they play their own individual numbers, yet social engagement is evident in the jovial and informal atmosphere in the bingo hall.

Tackling the more serious aspects of social awareness, McLoughlin presents us with a video projection *Hurling alone*. A young man hurls alone across the length of the screen, moving in and out of shot. A Polish voice narrates his experience of integrating into a new culture and community. The complex issues of immigration and displacement are explored as well as our own social responsibility in facilitating integration and exchange. The pointlessness of the solitary activity of hurling alone highlights a keen sense of isolation, sadness and frustration. In an effort to resolve this, to some extent, the artist presents instructional prints, which were also available in an online Polish forum in Limerick. *How to: Hurling* outlines a step-by-step visual guide to a community-based Irish sporting activity. In doing so, McLoughlin is attempting to turn an exclusive cultural tradition into one that is inclusive, regardless of cultural background.

However, the main *gravitas* of the exhibition rests on the work *It's all about change*. This dual-video installation consists of a small projection of bingo balls dancing

colourfully juxtaposed with the larger, and more sombre, monochrome projection of a character acted by Jon Kenny (developed collaboratively by McLoughlin, Kenny and writer Mike Finn). The character reminisces on some of the changes he witnessed in the city, such as when the Limerick City Gallery was the Carnegie Free Library and, because it was free, was a place of social exchange. However, as the script moves it becomes more evident that we are listening to the nostalgic ramblings of a man who only has his memories left. The sense of melancholy and loneliness is enhanced by the foreboding music, while the projection of bingo balls take on a resonance of solitude only touched on in *Hurling alone*.

Hans Bertens maintains that with postmodernism came the 'aestheticization' of quotidian activities and leisure, and their subsequent construction as experiences.<sup>1</sup> The pluralist postmodern era blurs the boundaries between high art and mass culture, creating an arena for art that is based on social activity. However, McLoughlin goes further than merely highlighting the isolation and displacement that comes with increasing immigration, he presents strategies to effectively counter this problematic issue. In an effort to confront the isolated condition of the individual in contemporary society, the artist unites communities through social engagement, in what can be seen as an emphasis on the collective experience.

<sup>1</sup> Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the postmodern*, Routledge, London, 1996, pp 213-215

**Karen Normoyle-Haugh is an art historian and visual-arts writer.**

Michael McLoughlin  
*The Numbers in the stars*  
(detail), 2008  
lightbox, acrylic spheres,  
blowers, audio Installation  
courtesy LCGA

*No*

*man's land*





Pia Rossi is described in her biographical information equally as “an artist and educator.” This is refreshing in a contemporary art scene where teaching is often regarded as a hindrance to personal practice and a necessary evil. It goes on to outline how her work represents an attempt to engage “with the community; exploring social, economical, political and historical relationships that contribute to cultural production.” While most contemporary artists are primarily concerned with either *craft* or *communication*, with one inevitably being neglected in favour of the other, Rossi seems to be as motivated by the prospect of conversing with society as she is by the physical making of images and objects. In order to unite the two, her practice pivots around participatory installations, drawing collaborators from various fields outside the art world. This allows her to disseminate technical skills and abilities whilst simultaneously incorporating alternative realities and ideas into the creation of fine printmaking.

One such project took place in Dublin in October, when the Original Print Gallery opened its doors to entertain the inexpert creativity of invited individuals from local companies, organisations and businesses, as well as the general public. Rossi’s participatory project, entitled *No man’s land*, began when the artist drew a wavy line around the perimeter of the main exhibition space. Over the course of the next six days, Rossi was in the gallery to demonstrate the traditional printmaking methods of etching, relief print, monoprint, screen-print and stamping. Collaborators were given a brief in advance; outlining the concept, providing some background on techniques and linking to helpful or inspiring websites. Those taking part ranged from excitable children and prudent students of architecture, to innovative graphic designers and meticulous university lecturers.

As each experimental piece was completed, it was affixed to the wall somewhere around the boundary line.

The theme of *No man’s land* proved a good umbrella beneath which to consolidate the ideas and interpretations of individuals from such diverse generations and backgrounds. *No man’s land* is a term originally coined during the First World War to describe an unoccupied territory that, for whatever reason, neither army wanted to be in control of. If it can be defined as a place at all, then it is a place where nobody wants to be. And this has significant metaphorical potential, from civic issues like urban planning, to personal feelings of isolation and uncertainty. Participants managed to stretch the brief in all imaginable directions, from a Trojan Horse to the Berlin Wall. Ellen Rowley, an AAI board member and TCD lecturer, created a triptych of prints representing some of the current problems of the surrounding city, exploring the *No man’s land* experienced by cyclists squeezed between the bus lane and the kerb, and homeless people trapped on the undesirable fringes of society. This is just one example of an individual approach founded in personal experience and raw fabrication, but branching out into broader cultural issues, in much the same way as Rossi attempts through her own practice.

The lack of precincts and continuity that inevitably comes under a flagship like *No man’s land*, or with a venture that involves multiple contributors, resulted in a lack of coherence in the appearance of the finished installation, particularly for viewers who may not have been aware of the project’s concept and providence. Yet there was a certain kind of life to the work – a significant energy and fervour that many traditional exhibitions lack. There is a *forgottenness* about a lot of art, pieces that have been shuttled around from show to storage by

makers who long since don’t care for them anymore. A very different atmosphere is evoked by art made in the same space in which it is exhibited; pictures drawn freely on the walls and printed images impregnated with the wonder and enthusiasm that only an amateur can sincerely achieve.

A small collection of Rossi’s own work was displayed in the upstairs space above the main gallery. While these pieces provided an interesting counterpoint to *No man’s land*, essentially Rossi’s greatest work of art was the process of crafting and communicating that constituted the participatory project itself. The overall significance was not in the finished works or the exhibition they created, but the inherent concept. The participants went home inspired and educated, the gallery were delighted with the opportunity to cross-pollinate and intermingle with their creative neighbours, and the alternative perspectives provided by this interaction brought society, politics and history to a quiescent but loaded art form.

(opposite)  
Ellen Rowley  
*Prospect – real – imagined*  
2008  
monoprint triptych  
courtesy Original Print Gallery

60 *I*  
*AM*



(opposite)  
Sinéad Bhreathnach Cashell  
performance/ installation shot,  
*I AM*, 2008  
photo Catherine Devlin  
courtesy Bbeyond

I find myself standing at the gates of Stranmillis Teaching College awaiting a friend. We're both going to *I AM*, a performance-art event organised by Bbeyond. The event runs from 20 – 27 October 2008 and includes workshops and performances by visiting Polish, UK and local artists. Participating artists are: Birgit Salling Hansen, Leo Devlin, Christoff Gillen, Sinéad Bhreathnach Cashell, Ula Darjeling, Colm Clarke, Paul King, Gordian Piec and Stanislaw Gajda, Anna Syczewska, Mark Greenwood, Dariusz Fodczuk, Stephen Dorothy and Chrissie Cadman, Magosia Butterwick, Wladyslaw Kazmierczak and Ewa Rybska, Artur Tajber, Bartosz Lukasiewicz, Arti Grabowski, Rainer Pagel, Hugh O'Donnell, and last but not least, Przemyslaw Kwiek. The event is split between two venues, Stranmillis College for the first half of the week and the Black Box for the final few days. On paper this is a mammoth event, and the problems of trying to squeeze it all into a thousand or so words for this article are not lost on me as I await my friend.

As we walk up the drive of Stranmillis College in search of the performance venue, which I know is somewhere on the campus, I can't help but think that this is an odd venue for an art event, given how far away it is from Belfast's normal centres of creative consumption. But perhaps it is a case of needs must as the devil drives; for while

performance seems to be readily accepted as an artistic medium beyond these shores, in Belfast performance art still feels like the poor relation: the smack-head cousin that people still feel uncomfortable talking about. As such, finding a home for it in the heart of the city is, I'm sure, not always an easy task.

I eventually found the venue tucked away at the back of the campus, and so began my adventures on the merry roving caravan of performance art that had just landed in Belfast. Given the number of artists that took part in this event, it's just not possible to discuss all their work in detail. What follows is my own recollection of the performances that grabbed me most.

Leo Devlin's work was sited in a small dark carpark outside the main space. Devlin's work put me in mind of a young Andre Stitt, but with more pop and humour in the mix. Any who have seen the book *Homework*, a document of Stitt's early work in Belfast, will understand this reference. Devlin's action explored aspects of childish behaviour through material action processes, producing some beautiful imagery, most notably a mushroom cloud that engulfed the artist, created with a fire extinguisher and an umbrella. Devlin's action implicitly understood that performance is a transaction between performer and audience. In witnessing his work, I felt enlivened by his commitment not only to produce quality work, but also to engage me as a viewer.

Following on from this was the work of Christoff Gillen. For the past several months Gillen has been spelling out a message above Belfast on Black Mountain. The message is simple: 'Imagine a city of Equals'. Gillen's action at *I AM* was an invitation to the audience to participate in this work. He invited audience members to light candles while showing slides of his processes on the mountain. He gave audience members

envelopes and invited them to send him designs that he could realise on the mountain, on future excursions. The work was gently executed, communicating the spirit of what he has been trying to achieve.

Also highly interactive was the work of Sinéad Bhreathnach Cashell. Bhreathnach Cashell's work is primarily governed by play. It is installation in form, a term popularised by Alastair MacLennan, although her work is worlds apart from his in terms of aesthetic. She set up an environment consisting of toys, maggies and lots of leaves. I remember several people burying me in the leaves and someone taking pictures. I remember my child putting funny glasses on me as I lay there. It was like being in a giant playroom.

In stark contrast to this was the work of Polish artist Ula Darjeling, who was lying motionless, covered in a thick blanket of fine dirt. As I watched her lie motionless for some two hours, I became aware of the rhythm of her breathing and the miniature landslides that this caused upon the surface of her body. I realised I was immersed in a truly phenomenological experience, as the form of her body gave way to a vast yet miniature desert landscape, quietly moving and absorbing the focus of all in the room. A very powerful, yet understated work.



The final performance I observed at Stranmillis was something I could only describe as 'huffy'. This description is meant in a way that is as playful as the work itself. Polish artist Anna Syczewska, because of various constraints imposed by the venue, was not able to make the work she had intended. In reaction to this she created a schoolroom environment and enacted the restriction of her physical form. While doing this she played a recording of her telephone communications with Bbeyond organiser Brian Paterson, detailing what it was that she couldn't do in the venue. Her final action of the performance was to change the lighted exit sign above the venue door for another sign that read 'not allowed to make performance'. This work was witty but also acted as a timely reminder of the price paid by performance as it completes the move from underground ad hoc vanguardism to a mainstream, funded medium.

At the Black Box venue the first work that really grabbed me was that of Mark Greenwood. Greenwood's work was perhaps the most tightly constructed of the whole festival. It consisted of an intellectual and visceral exploration of the conditions of masculinity. He played a recorded monologue discussing breeders of male chickens, better known as cocks. While doing this he clutched a plucked supermarket chicken and made a series of cleverly constructed actions alluding to masturbation, rage and the confusion of male identity. This culminated in a ritual attack on the dead bird. Greenwood's performance not only gave the audience food for thought. It also served as a reminder of other ways in which the medium of performance can be approached. This is something largely unconsidered in Belfast where a prevailing aesthetic has been mistaken for the form of the medium.

Equally engaging was the work of Hugh O'Donnell, although for quite different reasons. His performance *Being gay in the GAA* was one of my favourite works of the whole event. A recording of a badly sung and purposely amusing version of *The Match of the day* theme tune was the overture to O'Donnell's actions. He was clad in Gaelic-football gear and clutching a gold handbag; an overt acknowledgement of the contrast between his own sexuality and the all-male persona of Gaelic games, which surrounded him growing up in Dublin. He marked the boundaries between himself and the audience and performed several actions, which were both tragic, humorous and thought-provoking. What was perhaps most engaging about his work was the fact that you could see him thinking his way through the relationship between materials and his subject matter in a way that allowed the viewer to feel very much part of what was unfolding.

The culmination of the whole event was a performance by Wladyslaw Kazmierczak and Ewa Rybska, who are perhaps two of the best-known performance artists alive and working today. It was therefore a real privilege to see them perform in Belfast. They played with the idea of art, fame, money and the poverty of consumer culture in a way that was poetic and humorous. They begged money from audience members by rattling Elvis and Marilyn Monroe tins in their faces. It was fantastic to see them make work live, for while much of the documentation of their work reveals the absurdity of the images they construct, it does not encapsulate the humour and play with which they do this in live performance.

In closing I have to say that I had a phenomenal time during this festival. What was significant about it was not only the work that I saw, but also the communication the event facilitated between local artists and those visiting from elsewhere. This is still perhaps where the most significant value of performance events lie: in the meetings they make happen.

Justin McKeown is an artist, writer and organiser from Northern Ireland.

(opposite top)  
Wladyslaw Kazmierczak  
and Ewa Rybska  
performance shot, *I AM*  
2008

(opposite bottom)  
Leo Devlin  
performance shot, *I AM*  
2008

(overleaf top)  
Hugh O'Donnell  
performance shot, *I AM*  
2008

(overleaf bottom)  
Mark Greenwood  
performance shot, *I AM*  
2008

(overleaf right)  
Christoff Gillen  
performance shot, *I AM*  
2008

photos Catherine Devlin  
all courtesy Bbeyond









# Fergus Feehily *Strange*

<sup>66</sup> *mountain*

*(makeshift)*



(opposite)  
Fergus Feehily  
*Air & mass*, 2008  
oil and cloth on MDF  
30 x 24 x 0.3 cm  
wooden shelf  
44.6 x 39.6 x 6.6cm  
courtesy Green on Red

In 1975, the retrospective exhibition of the American artist Richard Tuttle at the Whitney Museum, New York, attracted a great deal of critical attention. Tuttle's Post-minimal practice included works constructed from bits and pieces of studio debris such as string, wood and even fluff. The show triggered an intense division of opinion and artists and critics moved to defend or attack the validity of seemingly insignificant objects, materials and gestures as works of art. Most famously, the influential *New York Times* critic Hilton Kramer opined that "To Mies van der Rohe's famous dictum 'less is more'" such art "offers definitive refutation...less is unmistakably less." However, Marcia Tucker, the exhibition curator, defended the understated quality of the work emphasizing its provocative slightness. She made the insightful observation that such work often surprises viewers due to "its modest informality" while "the often small size and visual frailty... stubbornly, even perversely commands attention."

It is within this tradition and a similar methodology that Fergus Feehily's exhibition *Strange mountain (makeshift)* at the Green on Red Gallery operates. Indeed, over the past few years Feehily has pursued a practice that consciously references and develops on the visual strategies and conceptual principles pioneered

by Post-minimal artists such as Robert Ryman, Richard Tuttle, Jason Martin and Terry Winters. This manifests itself in Feehily's consistent use of a variety of seemingly insignificant and usually overlooked objects, motifs and patterns as both the tools and subject matter of his practice. To date, the artist has used various everyday items such as paper cups and stamps as painting tools, while the form of numbers, diagrams and grids has informed his subject matter. While the use of such media may suggest a random or accidental process, Feehily balances this with a highly deliberate and meticulous approach to the execution of his work. What seems arbitrary or indeed *makeshift* is often very deliberate and highly considered. This has been particularly apparent in his use of faultlessly prepared MDF panels, on which he creates methodical compositions such as in the intense and yet playfully crude works *Broom anxiety* and *Little northern* in the current exhibition.

While such works emphasise visual qualities such as flatness, design and surface quality, more recently Feehily has applied his approach to the material construction and physical arrangement of his work. The exhibition thus includes a collection of works constructed from a variety of found and ephemeral material. A picture frame is wrapped in a piece of fabric, partially concealing the portrait photograph which it still holds. Another is obscured by a carefully finished and positioned piece of plywood. An empty frame has been filled with a collage of decorative paper fragments along with a page torn from a diary. A series of found illustrations of birds are pinned to the wall, each blinded by a sheet of white paper. However, despite such an assortment of random objects and studio debris, one is not left confused or overwhelmed by the exhibition. Due to the relatively small scale of the work, it has a remarkably docile presence in the gallery while

the mundane, ordinary nature of the material has a familiar almost homemade quality.

On a previous occasion, Feehily observed that he is not always in complete control of the creation of his works, yet there is a process and a peculiar set of procedures apparent. Items are carefully selected, manipulated and positioned based on their inherent or physical qualities or the artist's instinctive response to particular objects and arrangements. In *(Prepared) St Jerome*, for instance, pieces of plywood, cut to random and irregular sizes, have been reassembled, crafted and painted to form a layered collage of panels. The physical gaps and seams between the segments, once rough edges, now form lines that cross, divide and penetrate the picture plane while the inherent minimal aesthetic of the material evokes a sense of emptiness that contradicts the work's diminutive scale. Similarly, in *French rest* a roughly cut fragment of pink cloth hangs loosely below a similarly sized though meticulously prepared and finished piece of white MDF. The sensitive arrangement of two contrasting objects emphasises the previously concealed or overlooked aesthetic qualities of the materials. Most explicit, however, is the work *Open inventory*, comprised of a work desk positioned in one corner of the gallery with a variety of items laid out across it. On closer inspection these reveal themselves to be studio debris, physical fragments that like forensic evidence provide clues and partial insights into the artist's practice; among them a snapshot of an unextraordinary street scene in Japan, a box of stamps and a stack of number stencils, a single cut-off grape branch and a framed piece of paper with handwritten notes that refer to doubt. Their arrangement on the desk forms a carefully considered composition, consistent with Feehily's visual and conceptual interests.



While there is an unexpected elegance and formal beauty present in such work, one that transcends the nature of the material, physical remnants of the process of transformation or of a material's former function always remain. A jagged edge, a puncture-hole or indeed the viewer's unique association to a particular object consistently threaten and inevitably subvert any formal qualities, betraying the previous, more mundane existence of the material. Through this process of combining and manipulating materials and objects the artist continually explores and challenges the viewer's perception of dichotomies such as hidden and revealed, elegant and crude, image and object, meaning and composition, intended and accidental or the extraordinary and the mundane. Such dichotomies are often based on conscious subversions, such as the disruption of the 'specific object' through the introduction of the found or 'readymade', while others are the result of instinctive decisions.

Due to the unassuming nature of Feehily's work, it is only through the active participation of the viewer that such qualities reveal themselves. The act of looking is fundamental and individual works are cunningly structured and arranged to conceal or reveal their physical or aesthetic attributes. While this is particularly conspicuous in the work *Air and mass*, positioned at such a height that the viewer must stand back quite a distance to see it, it is more subtle in other works, which compel the viewer to crouch down, peer over or move to one side in order to examine a particular feature. In *Strange mountain (makeshift)* Feehily extends these interests to the installation and arrangement of the exhibition itself. As with Tuttle's 1975 retrospective, the works are hung a few inches lower than the standard gallery height so that the viewer must consciously, or indeed subconsciously, adjust their position to view the work. Feehily also chose

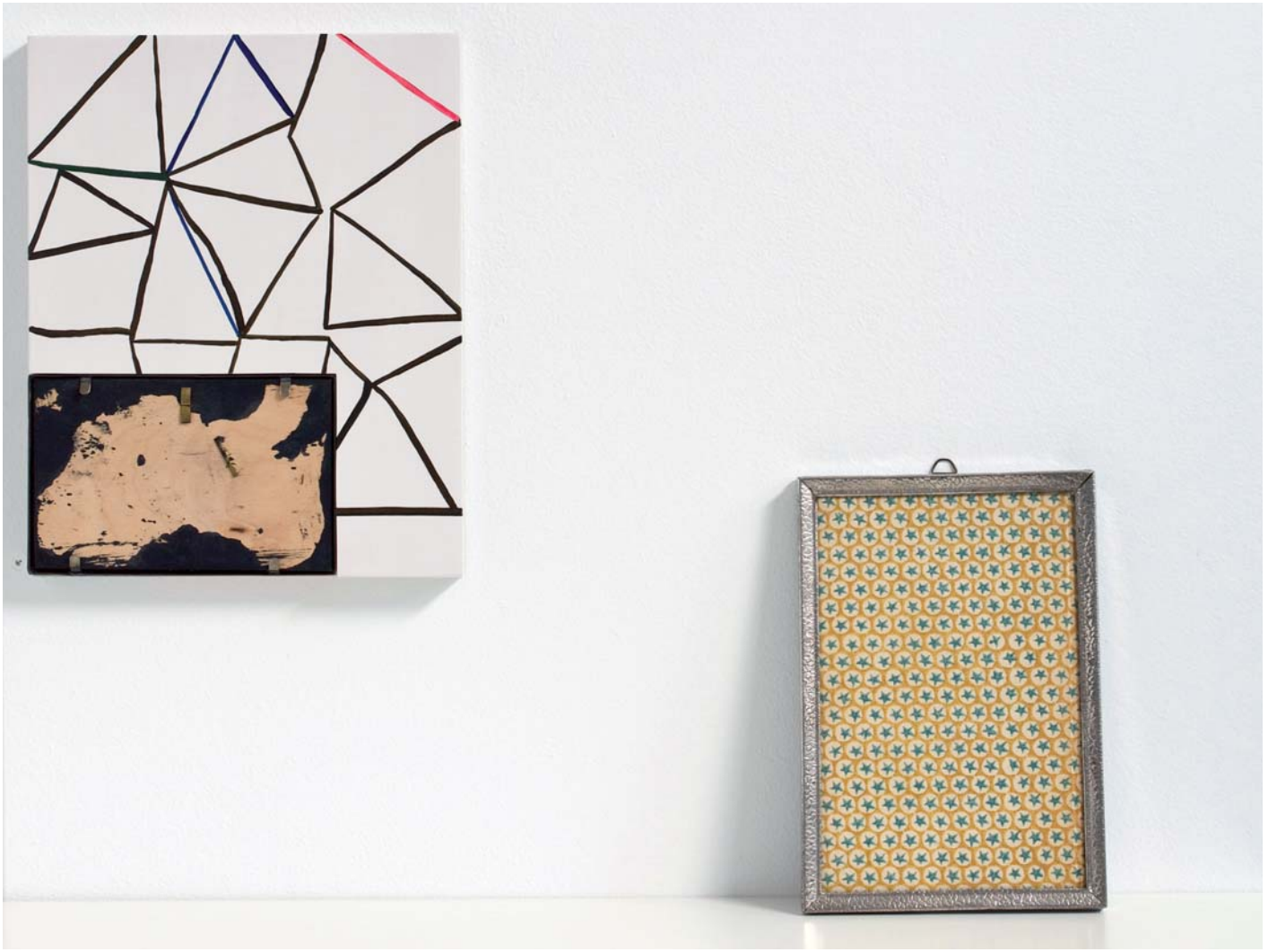
to paint the walls a soft grey, at once both subverting and activating the 'white cube' space.

Such subtle strategies are typical of Feehily's practice and can profoundly influence and alter the viewer's perception and experience of the exhibition. However, on more than one occasion it has also led writers to describe the artist's work as 'quiet' or 'almost not there'. It is, perhaps, fair to say that in comparison to much contemporary media the individual works in the exhibition are certainly not loud. However, when brought together, the simple gestures and statements that comprise *Strange mountain (makeshift)* form a compelling harmony. In our current era of visual excess and artistic indulgence such 'quietness' has a profound resonance.

Donal Maguire is an art historian and critic and works at the Centre for the Study of Irish Art at the National Gallery of Ireland.

(opposite above)  
Fergus Feehily  
*Country*, 2008  
oil on wood and found frame  
25 x 20 x 2cm  
courtesy Green on Red

(opposite below)  
Fergus Feehily  
*Drawings (after a collector)*  
2008  
found illustrations, paper,  
pencil and pen, plywood, screws  
– five parts  
25.8 x 18.4cm each  
courtesy Green on Red



(below)  
Giles Round  
*Pictures emerged from letters*  
2008  
pigment ink, acrylic paint, pencil  
and primer on linen, purple  
heart wood, steel bolts and  
cross dowels  
157 x 157 x 120 cm  
courtesy the artist

70

# Giles Round

*XLOMFCNHNGNCINUDCWGENMMNCH*





During the machine age, photography and film altered the way humanity saw itself. With similar logic but a different typesetting, one could argue that in the graphic-design age, photography and typography altered the way humanity identifies itself. Perched between Giles Round's austere day bed and his cultivated wall lettering, one might identify oneself inside an avant-garde advertisement: angled, poised, reflective. However, subjected between these particular objects and letters, our product remains undisclosed; an obscuration reflected in the exhibition's enciphered title *XLOMFCNHNGNCINUDCWGEN-MMNCH*.

Four Gallery recently opened the doors of its new premises to a solo exhibition by London-based artist Giles Round (b 1976), whose works are spread between its small and naturally lit Victorian rooms. One work is a large freestanding painting, which assumes an entire room. The canvas appears to have been unpicked from its simple wooden frame, swung from a pivot off-centre and fixed at an angle perpendicular to its frame, so it now faces the window. Its composition is modular, containing numerous black shapes surfacing from a white background, often identical and repeated or in some places left blank. These shapes form Round's own typography, marked by the darkened negative space they eagerly abandon. These letters move in and out of intelligibility, at times clear and legible, at others abstract and rhythmical, playing out the work's title *Pictures emerged from letters* (2008) in a range of systems.

Emergence, be it rhythmic or semantic, physical or formal, is a process that underscores all the works in this exhibition and is also evident within the artist's broader practice. Previous solo exhibitions and collaborations (with Mark Aerial Waller on their ongoing *Wayward*

*Cannon* screenings or his sculptural installation with *Assume Vivid Astro Focus* in 2005) have revealed Round's capacity to radically alter environments by using neon or strobe lighting at unexpected times or in unorthodox locations, or by configuring trashy lo-fi props, alongside highly crafted objects which make formal reference to minimalist sculpture and modernist interiors. However, *XLOMFCN...* shows Round's mediated installations move away from a hyper-colour-magic-eye brand of emergence, or deliverance, towards a more self-conscious variety, where the work allows and encourages pause and reflection.

In the other room, *Day bed* (2008) is laid in the centre. Supported by a simple stainless steel frame with an unadorned cushion upholstered in a taupe-coloured linen, the bed sets a somnolent environment to both observe and inhabit. *Rise & fall* (2008) hangs above it, a lightbulb dangling from an electric flex, which has been threaded through a series of pulleys fixed alternately to the ceiling and floor, in an extended W-shape. Beside its source, *Pictures emerged from letters, wallpainting* (2008) has been painted on the wall. Still modular, this composition is articulated in a similar scheme to the previous canvas, but here a grey spiked shape appears repeatedly between each black form and white background to spell out the exhibitions' long title. The meticulously calculated lettering provides an experience more visually mesmerising than semantically rewarding, a conceit which extends into our physical space by the illuminated W above us. Sitting on the daybed, the obscuration of the letters' identity and collective meaning is perhaps a conscious gesture by the artist to provoke an interesting, if unusual, obstruction between the act of seeing and the habit of reading.

Round's articulation of this muted, mini-chromatic typography and his ascetic arrangements of domestic objects pay formal tribute to work produced by the early avant-garde. Modernist designers such as Ernő Goldfinger and Eric Gill are explicitly cited in his previous works, designers who proposed a synthesis of graphic design and spiritual life, personal hypotheses that were later, and quite publicly, debunked. In a vein that echoes these original beliefs, *XLOMFCN...* uses the gallery space to its best potential, touring the works from pristine exhibition conditions to a seemingly domestic setting and so allowing its various nuances unfold. The installation appears set in the early 1920s before any debunking, before the divergence of design from contemporary or fine art, when architectural and typographic designs held the same clout artistically as they did commercially and politically. Round is one of a generation of artists revisiting the histories of graphic and interior design; however, his exploration seems more consumed with the reiterations of its various surfaces rather than in the exploration of its subsequent impact and for that reason the purpose of these letters' semantic obscuration is somewhat unclear.

Despite these loose ends, *XLOMFCN...* is by no means unsuccessful. The works are finished with a sophisticated and often playful economy, encouraging questions about a point in history worthy of revision, and arranged in a manner that both inspires and encourages it. In Four's new space, at Round's new juncture, this advertisement remains gratifyingly undefined.

Isobel Harbison is a writer and curator based in London.

## *Inhabit*

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*Margaret O'Brien* I live in the cracks  
in the wall

*Vanessa Donoso López*

Mysteries of contemporary inspiration  
and other wonders



"The banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the background noise, the habitual ...How are we to speak of these common things?" wrote George Perec in *Species of spaces*. Three decades later, the language that loops around and between the three exhibitions reviewed is the voices of making art out of and from the everyday, domestic world.

For the Christmas exhibition at Draocht, eleven printmakers from Black Church Print Studios were asked to develop work based around the word 'inhabit' and to "showcase the diverse technical vocabulary of printed matter." As the fetishistic obsession with property prices fades, the primal need for humans to have a shelter, a home, is paramount; the artists in *inhabit* raise questions about the changing state of occupying space in a global environment which is prescient.

Daryl Slein's *naïve* monoprint *Untitled* subverts the Yuletide lure of hearth, home and family by presenting the Madonna in a Santa hat with a very disgruntled-looking Jesus perched on her knee. Far from Beatrice Elvery's *Éire* (1907), a Mother Ireland that called for independence and a new dawn, Slein's palette of dull disillusionment suggests an Irish Church-State nexus that has been replaced by capitalism gone awry.

In stylistic contrast, Caroline Byrne's exquisitely drawn *The Hunt for Red Riding Hood* places the big bad wolf off-centre, leaving an expansive space for the viewer's curiosity to imagine why the wild beast has stopped, with a wisp of blood-red ink at its feet, to stare back into the void. The rituals of oral storytelling are in danger of obsolescence, just as wolves are threatened with extinction – yet the constant need to retell, to 'hunt' down these myths, albeit by new media, appears to parallel the human desire for the need for 'home' and similarly, the desire by artists to

pursue process in their art, which is especially true of the print medium.

This omnipresence of the cinematic and media in our scopic memory is captured dexterously in Colin Martin's two brooding etchings *Day sleeper* and *A Minor place*. Compositionally, both these works create complex readings as the open narrative leads the viewer into a North American suburban landscape that seems oddly familiar but is charged with an ominous atmosphere, created by an 'in-between' moment which is, literally, 'framed' in the present.

David McGinn's *Bomber & stairwell* recreates his childhood memories in the now-extinct Ballymun flats. Built as a modernist utopia, the flats' demise signifies the end of the architectural dream that became the unliveable urban nightmare, yet McGinn's work captures the fascination of the space from a child's perspective. This phenomenological use of space nods to Gaston Bachelard's philosophical ideas, as does Catriona Leahy's work, which implements the mnemonic tools of old photographs, wallpaper and maps to create work built from family memories. Layered with rituals of traditional rural Ireland, the work reminds the viewer that 'ordinary life' is itself an evolving concept.

The emigrant experience of searching for 'home' by metaphorically associating identity to the house form is evoked by Piia Rossi's work, while Mary Frazer's *Home sweet home* and *Is anyone there?* observe this everyday space from outer space to highlight the minutiae of existence. A closer field of enquiry is taken by the contemporary urban *flâneuse* Jane Garland, who contests the traditional gendered relationship of inside and outside space by traversing the streets of Dublin to photograph the personal assemblages framed in living-room windows.

A Jules Verne-like vertiginous lift aspires to raise the everyday beyond the bounds of the real into a sense of journeying in Janine Davidson's *Ascension 1*, as small, repetitively sketched caravans are liberated from *terra firma* by way of hot-air balloons. By closely observing the domestic space, Aoife Dwyer's opaque works capture the fragility of existence and the beauty of the banal by focusing on the overlooked marks that are naturally made from the detritus of daily life, whereas it is the compositional space of the paper itself from which Mary A Fitzgerald, in *Cloud chair* and *Mobile*, whimsically and intelligently interprets the brief.

Three-dimensional space has been worked as a material in Margaret O'Brien's site-specific installation *I live in the cracks in the wall*, where a kinaesthetic viewing experience has been created by the construction of a narrow corridor and the placement of a small lamp in an inner room. The spectator is lured into this chamber by the light which casts shadows on flock-patterned wallpaper, a material that usually signifies domestic comfort. On first viewing, it is a space which evokes a jarring psychological tension. O'Brien's fastidious regard for process and the domestic associations of her simple material choice, wallpaper and sewing pins, create an intense and satisfying sensory effect by fusing the psychological tension of a Hitchcock film to the aesthetics of an eighteenth-century conversation piece.



A good suspense narrative is one in which the characters investigate the sinister goings-on when anybody in their right mind would leave. O'Brien's installation evokes a similar curiosity in the viewer to venture forward. Despite the title being far from comforting, unlike the cosy traditional family portraits which inspired polite 'conversation' in eighteenth-century homes as part of conversation pieces, even though no overt familial pictures are obvious in O'Brien's work, the suggestion of family dialogue is implied, if rather more sinisterly. The audience have also become contemporary Pandoras who are not content with merely opening the box, but wish to inhabit the box to satisfy their curiosity no matter what the consequences are.

The overall effect creates a sense of domestic disturbance, as if the domestic space, which we consider to be safe and secure, has been rendered uncanny. This Freudian idea of the *unheimlich* is one that

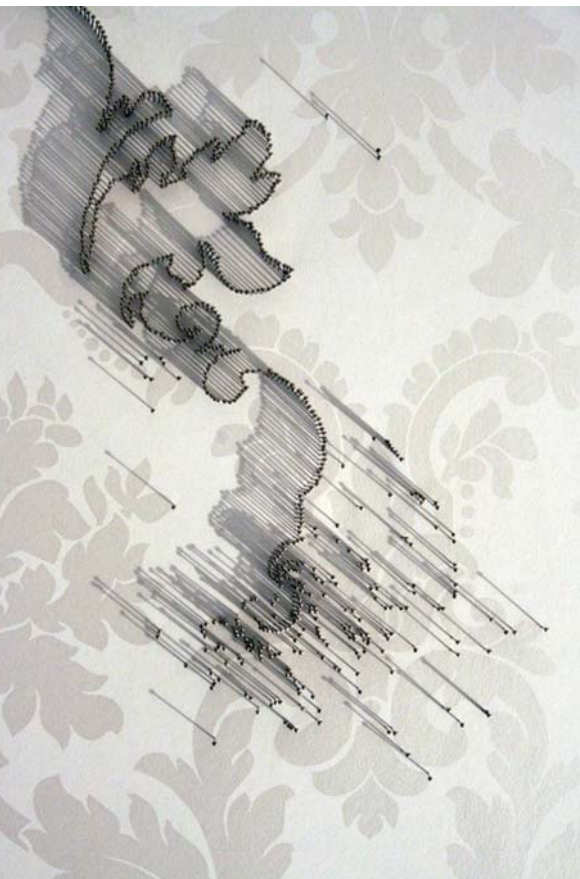
was coined in modernity, but O'Brien's space does not allow for such a reductive reading – when we find ourselves in the inner room, the aesthetic quality of the materials, created by light reflecting on the dressing pins, is quite simply beautiful. In his book, *In praise of shadows*, Jun'ichiro Tanizaki writes about the everyday pleasure derived from looking at shadows, and the static materials of pins and paper, as we move in and around the space, change and form to give the illusion of passing clouds, or forests, a metaphysical landscape of our own imagining.

An awareness of time is also suggested, as each pin has been individually placed by hand. The tedious repetition and discipline required by the artist to create such work reflects the monotonous nature of domestic chores, which can create a trance-like state. O'Brien has been described as an "emotive minimalist," similar to Eve Hesse, and due to the use of

humble materials and spatial aesthetics, it is a good, if not an entirely accurate, appraisal.

(below left)  
Margaret O'Brien  
*I live in the cracks in the wall*  
2008  
installation shot (detail)  
courtesy Pallas Contemporary  
Projects

(below right)  
Vanessa Donoso López  
*Mysteries of contemporary  
inspiration and other wanders*  
2008  
installation shot (detail)  
courtesy Stone Gallery



The wit and irony conveyed in the title of Vanessa Donna López's *Mysteries of contemporary inspiration and other wonders* underlines an artistic practice which is based on 'playing' – be that playing with ideas, material, or poking fun at over-intellectualised readings of her work. López has written that “the figure of the child in her work is a metaphor for the adult/ artist who leads a life of imagination.” When walking into the cabinet of curiosities that is López's work, perhaps because of its childlike freedom, albeit a precocious child, it takes the viewer back to the 'wonderment' of childhood. However, the artist is also very aware of the historiography of art, and in unravelling that childhood wonderment there is an awareness of a modernist attention to form and a postmodernist attention to content. López's art practice has moved into a new dimension which, for want of a better term, could be termed 'post-postmodernist'. By diligent process, her everyday materials have been transformed into aesthetic objects, which emote an alchemical, sensory magic.

The artist painted and decorated the Stone Gallery, to change it from a white-cube space into a hybrid space of science laboratory meets domestic science, as ordinary materials like paper, found objects and everyday ephemera are transformed into fantastical narratives. There is a touch of humour in this alteration as the anti-modern domestic makes its mark on the sanctified interior of the gallery space. Her stock hybrid animals have also been freed, running along the upper beam of the gallery, or captured repetitively on digitalised wallpaper, or as fine drawings where the paper has been folded to give the impression of the 'grid'. The pink walls, which are candy striped, take the form of a sweet shop, and an old Singer sewing machine, proud as a peacock, occupies the central position.

Rozsika Parker's seminal work *The Subversive stitch* and Judy Chicago's *Womanhouse* (1972) act as historical reference points but it is Louise Bourgeois, an artist who spun her own artistic language in the face of Greenburgian dictates, whom the artist cites as an influence.

Beside the sewing machine that acts like a metaphorical mother-object, there are ink containers and cut-out hybrid animals which are in continual evolution, much like ourselves, and the interactive nature of the work calls for the audience to keep these “absorbing animals and absorbing trees” (which form the corralled pictures of modernism or the freed landscape of a mural on the wall) alive.

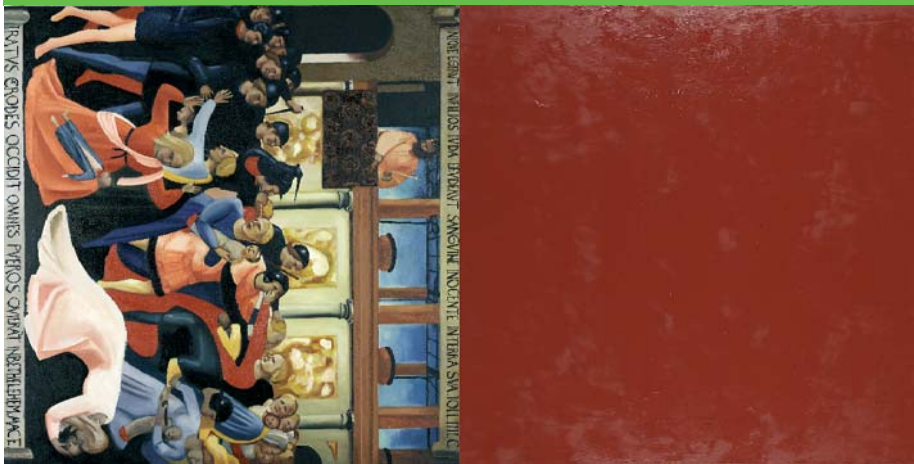
The postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha writes in *The Location of culture* that the state of the immigrant is in a “non-space” as neither here nor there, occupying a kind of schizophrenic existence. As a Spanish artist living in Ireland, the awareness of dual cultures may have led López to the creation of her fabulous double-headed creatures. Also, the idea of home as exploring the mnemonic associations of domestic skills and objects recalls Walter Benjamin's ideas of “the trace.” However, it is López's ability to make such innovative and superbly 'fine art' works that make her work so pleasing to encounter. Her *Ballerina dancing in Barcelonian saloon sculpture* is an example of the intelligence of her work: mounted in a found light container, this pseudo musical box contains a ballerina, made simply from folded paper decorated with the pattern of Barcelona tiles, metaphorically alluding to the artist's childhood home, and representing a dancer/ artist who is trapped and having to perform.

López really is an artist whose work creates a 'synaesthesia', and the most enchanting work, *Understanding the rainbow through 20 tiny people*, places tiny androgynous dolls inside test tubes to form the colour spectrum of the rainbow. This natural wonder has inspired scientists, artists and children alike, and the evolutionary responsibility to protect the environment referenced by López in the interactive art piece *absorbing animals and absorbing trees* is a reminder of our responsibilities to agency.

It would appear that Julia Kristeva's ideas of *l'écriture féminine* unapologetically underline the maternal language that is the base of López's and O'Brien's art. In 1978 Lucy Lippard wrote: “... before the idea is no longer to make nothings from somethings, but to transform and give meaning to all things. In this utopian realm, Good Taste will not be standardised in museums, but will vary from place to place, from home to home.” In response to Perec's question, contemporary art has moved into the utopian quotidian space of the domestic, unafraid to use the material language to observe everyday life.

Jane Humphries is a writer who is researching 'the domestic' in contemporary visual culture in the Department of Art History (triarc), University of Dublin, Trinity College.

<sup>76</sup> *Mary Theresa Keown*





(opposite above)  
Mary Theresa Keown  
*Fra Angelico*  
diptych  
oil on canvas  
100 x 200cm  
courtesy Mullan Gallery

(opposite below)  
Mary Theresa Keown  
*Anna*  
diptych  
oil on canvas  
100 x 160cm  
courtesy Mullan Gallery

This exhibition has no title. All twenty-two paintings are in diptych format. Keown paints a copy either of a photograph or of a painting and hinges it to an abstract field.<sup>1</sup> Fields aver themselves to be gray, blue, black, red etc. On closer observation murmuring layers of tones both do and do not submit to the dominant hue. The abstract field in turn issues out of the figurative part of the diptych, eg the field attached to Fra Angelico's *Massacre of the innocents (1451 – 53)* is the colour of the dresses of two mothers whose gestures are highly evocative. In *Constable* the grey is that of a small cloud, in *Victoria* the grey on her shoes transfers to the abstract painting, etc. Those are subtle and sophisticated acts of reverence to the power of a detail, destined to be easily overlooked by a viewer in a hurry. Indeed, these are communicative paintings: they silently greet you, invite you to stay, to look, to gaze, some hold their breath before they scream.

As I write, I read an e-mail from a friend about the death of Grace Hartigan<sup>2</sup> (1922–2008). She also re-visited older paintings. Her *Grand Street brides* (1954) depicts a bridal shop window with mannequins in a composition copied from Goya's *Royal family*. In her later work she incorporated images taken from colouring books, films, advertising and older paintings, eg the Pre-Raphaelites.

Keown meets a similar challenge. An inspired catalogue essay by Ciarán Bennett embraces most of the points her paintings raise, including the “emotional longing.” For it, Bennett invented an aesthetic category of ‘langour’ and connected it in some oblique way to Frederic Matys Thursz (1930-2002). I looked at Thursz's *Vermilion Diary no 4* (1983-84). Thursz distributed light over each hue so that it lost its power to modify depth. Keown places hues and tones that way too, but in several abstractions she layers them like a cake under see-through icing; the eye cannot be sure how deep. She reminds me of Rembrandt's late period, his red, clearly visible, appears as being under miles of brown. As shown above, the hue for the Keown's abstraction is chosen with care from the range in the adjacent figurative part, eg Osborne is paired with velvety blue, Pissarro with wintry blue, de Kooning with blue of a sunny day. The tonality assists the meaning of the narrative part, sometimes entering a paradox: *Hermes* is paired with earth warm grey whereas *Little Ireland* is hinged to grey mixed with evening-sky blue. The myth is thus earth-bound, whereas the snapshot of real life connects to reverie.

In a denial of the expected, Keown turns the figurative images 90 degrees. Subversion of ‘normal’ viewing aids the foregrounding of painted surface and not the painted appearance and/ or story. If Magritte can have stones flying, Keown has a hairdo (in *Victoria*) that defies gravity. Moreover, one of the diptyches slips her rule completely: *Anna* is also not the right way up, yet appears to be so. In a disobedient illusion, the stretched leg suggests that the model is sitting up, and not lying down.

Contemporary painting faces the challenge of making both light and profound connections, and has to keep them spontaneous without

pretending that art is simple. Discussions led by Jan Verwoert in Berlin in November focused on painting, and specifically on “how the act of making references to art history in a work could be conceptualised – contrary to common opinion – as being more than just a strategic move destined to situate, position and hence legitimise the work.”<sup>3</sup> Verwoert proposes that for any inspiration by the older art the paradigm of pan-demonium (opposite of pan-theon) is more fit for the purpose. Keown presents older art not as a citation, quote or coded suggestion. Rather she makes a temporary assembly and tests its values. In homology with the spiritual secrets of abstract space and narrative stories, the diptyches forge a socio-political context framed by iconophile and iconoclast attitudes (eg Catholic and Protestant cultures). Her nineteenth-century examples connect nature and the narrative power of significant detail. A group of diptyches touches upon the melodrama of the ‘end of painting’ when challenged by photography, while Hockney stands for adoption and adaptation of lens-based media.

Keown's inspiration grows deep in the investigation of painterly force and its connectivity to the world obsessed with ideologies and celebrities.

<sup>1</sup> All paintings reproduced on [www.mullangallery.com](http://www.mullangallery.com)

<sup>2</sup> For more see Sharon L Hirsch, Grace Hartigan, *Painting art history* (n.d) and Robert Saltonstall Mattison, *Grace Hartigan, a painter's world*, 1990.

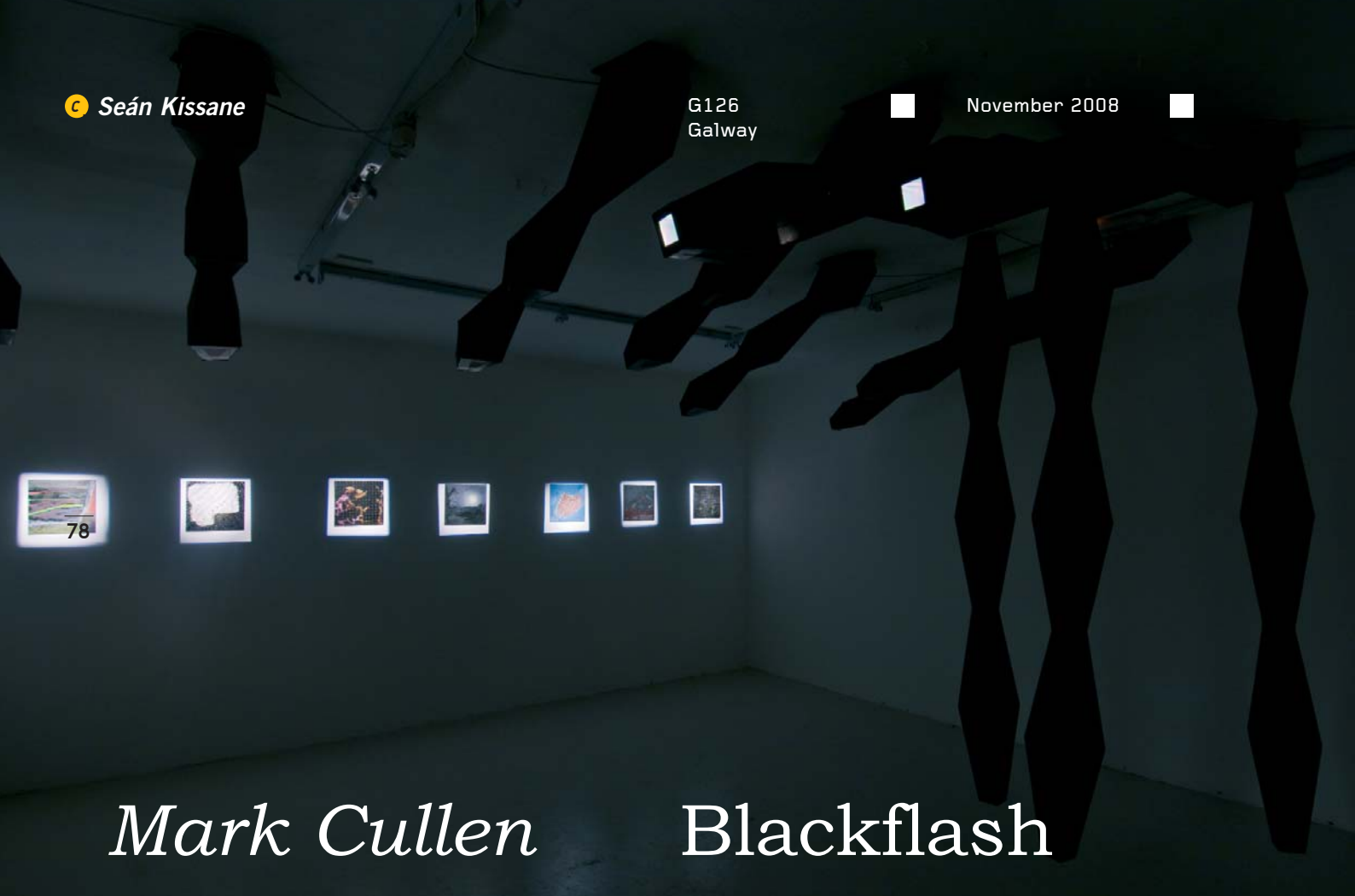
<sup>3</sup> E-mail from [edu-news@mailier.e-flux.com](mailto:edu-news@mailier.e-flux.com)

Slavka Sverakova is a  
writer on art.

Seán Kissane

G126  
Galway

November 2008



*Mark Cullen*

Blackflash



In Renaissance painting, *chiaroscuro* was a technique in which contrasting areas of light and dark paint would allow for the modelling of figures, and bring the protagonists of the scene into stark focus. Much more than a mere optical or technical device, it also served a metaphorical and symbolic function – dark and light being synonymous with good and evil, knowledge and ignorance. One only has to think of where the light falls in Caravaggio's *Taking of Christ* (1602), or which figure is left in shadow in Leonardo's *Last Supper* (1498), to see how fundamental it is to our understanding and reading of painting.

Mark Cullen's recent work draws on some of these histories in *Blackflash*, shown as part of *Tulca 2008*. The title *Blackflash* suggests a scene which has momentarily been flooded with black light – but is that just darkness? Is darkness merely the absence of light, or like dark matter, does it have its own character or existence? Dark and light, chaos and cosmos, are some of the fundamental dialectics with which Cullen engages. In mythical eschatology, the order which was created out of chaos at the beginning of time breaks down at the end of time. Universal laws and the pure order of things are established as the cosmos, but eventually law and order decay and degenerate into chaos.

Cullen's *Blackflash* presents an installation of nine paintings and suspended sculptural objects in a darkened space more typical of film and video presentations than an exhibition of paintings, but as Mark Garry points out in his essay on *Cosmic annihilator*, "the prevailing references in ... Cullen's work are cinematic." Indeed the current work resonates strongly with the sense of a cinematic moment stilled in time, specifically that moment in sci-fi B movies in which the alien spaceship first appears in the sky to the shock and consternation of the earthlings

below. Indeed the publicity poster for Don Siegel's *Invasion of the body snatchers* (1956) features searchlights descending from the sky, strongly reminiscent of Cullen's sculptural structures.

Paul Valéry tells us that 'the eyes are organs of asking'; physiologically, sight is based on the action of visible light falling on the retina – yet Cullen's 'alien' structures invert this act of seeing; casting light rather than absorbing it. He has said that this work concerns itself with the "modernist utopian project and its dystopian endgame," and this is a vision of a macrocosm in which the future of the very act of seeing appears to be subject to deconstruction.

While the leap from mythical eschatology to B movies might appear excessive, it does in some small way point to the manner in which Cullen collates diverse references within a nonhierarchical structure. He weaves histories both sculptural and painterly, historical and contemporary, through his juxtaposition of simply made oil paintings alongside objects which formally might appear to reference 1960s minimal sculpture. Cullen's attempt to document the night skies links his work to that of artists as diverse as Van Gogh, Vija Celmins or Jimmy Durham; yet his contingent visualisation of an epic future in which biospheres float in clouds in the sky would place his endeavour within the framework of Kubrick's *2001: a space odyssey*, (1968). Unlike Kubrick, however, Cullen does not fix a timeframe on his vision; neither does he envision a Hal-induced apocalypse. Cullen presents images of future systems of life floating between the clouds and the stars, biospheres which would suggest that life in darkness is not an oxymoron, but neither is it a vision of life in the Platonic shadows. These are hopeful images of future utopias – complex ecological

structures articulating new possibilities of existence. Terrestrial activity is continuing even if it would appear to concern itself primarily with looking at the stars – this is hardly surprising considering the astonishing new structures apparent in the night skies.

Cullen's paintings describe constellations ordered in perfect grids almost like an Agnes Martin drawing – but of course Martin's drawings are never 'perfect', the frailty of the human hand, combined with the bumps and flaws in the canvas, hamper her own quest for an ordered image. The beauty of Martin's work is almost certainly contained within these moments of failure – and perhaps it is also here that we can read Cullen's work. He has lofty ambitions for mankind, yet it is man's capacity both for destruction as well as regeneration which defines us. As in the study of astronomy and particle physics, the terms, 'dark matter' and 'dark energy' are the current measure of human ignorance – much like the term 'terra incognita' on medieval maps. *Blackflash* suggests that perhaps it is here in the obscured rather than the enlightened that the future lies.

Seán Kissane is Curator of Exhibitions at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin.

(opposite)  
Mark Cullen  
*Blackflash*, 2008  
mixed-media installation  
with painting and sculpture  
photo David Ruffles  
courtesy the artist



80 *Gavin Murphy*

Moving deaths



(opposite)  
Gavin Murphy  
*Moving deaths*, 2008  
installation shot  
courtesy The Lab

Gavin Murphys' exhibition *Moving deaths* sits more comfortably than most in the set of architectural constraints in The Lab. The space has provided a forum for some of the most interesting emerging practices, fulfilling the remit its name suggests. However, the space itself is awkward and institutional. With few walls and large expanses of windows, it presents a challenge to artists to grapple with its anti-white cube.

The first work encountered is *Muss es sein? Es muss sein!* The back-lit text is reminiscent of the signs laid out at airports, symbols which guide and direct along the correct path. It is an apt introduction to the rest of the work, a playful inversion of form and text but with intent – the viewer is encouraged to relate to the objects in the space in a particular way, to confront their duplicity, and to question their authority. There is also a suggestion that the viewer should engage with the limitations and constructs of knowledge.

Emerging from the main gallery space through the vast windows is the totemic pyramid form *Light cares can speak but heavy ones are dumb*. The radiant construction of fluorescent light tubes beams impressively out of the gallery and into the street. When encountered close up, the piece confounds any grand ambitions of the form by revealing its construction in its

minutiae; every fuse, plug and connection is visible to the viewer, and forces a confrontation with what we knew (but may have forgotten): that this is a construct, not a fantastical mythical object.

Throughout the work is the sense of the theatrical and the cinematic, like a failed utopia of a big studio production. The collective tableaux created in the gallery gives off the air of an abandoned film back-lot – curious collections of objects which once held different meanings, but which now speak of a collapsed narrative.

In *The Slipping of the World* there is another textual marker, 'S=KlogW', for the viewer to decipher, placed along with foil reminiscent of a faux-futuristic space pod and a single bulb illuminating the two. This is inside the guts of a constructed stage, the anatomy of which is revealed – its stage-left is effectively exposed to the gallery. Remnants of the construction, large lengths of 4x2, are stacked beneath the floor.

The formula 'S=KlogW' describes thermodynamics and entropy. In a literal sense this formula echos the use of materials, listed in the text as heat-resistant foil, but also seems to be a code for expressing the struggle between order and disorder. It describes the relationship among the objects presented here; they oscillate between cogent and ruptured connections. The exhibition text informs us that there is no attempt at didacticism, but there is the sense that the viewer must commit to some form of research to decode these signifiers.

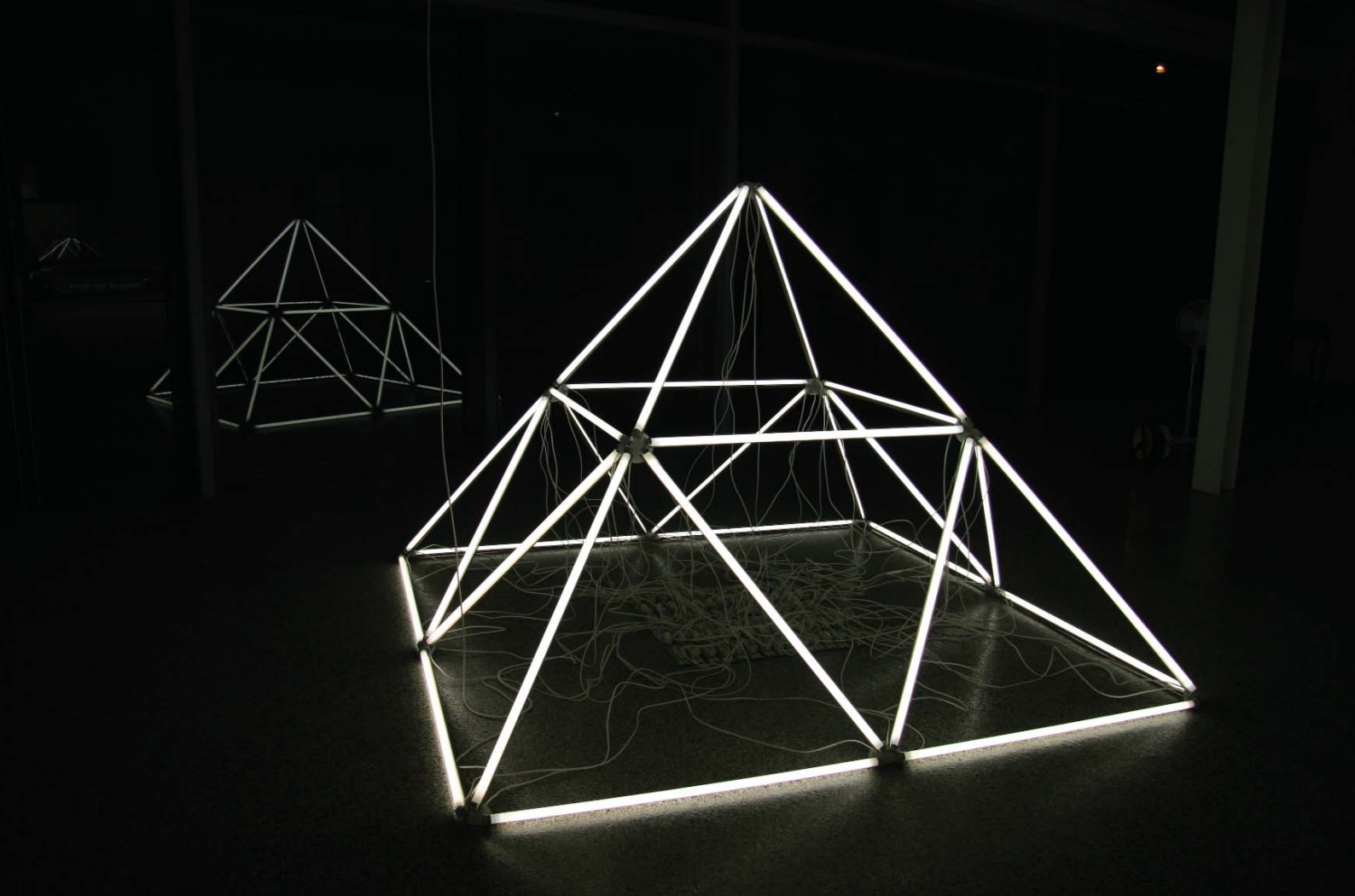
The objects are unrelenting in their frankness about their assembly. Again and again there is a confrontation with the honesty of their manufacture, thoroughly demystified in a kind of Brechtian pursuit – a rupture of theatrical devices and visual artifice. Like in Brecht's *Epic theatre* the

viewer cannot be deceived into believing, or into emotionally connecting with the work. With the objects' construction laid bare, a form of alienation takes place.

*Again, suddenly I could see us* points to the mechanics of video. The transition of each frame is jarred and delayed, and punctuated by a thumping sound. There is a denial of the seduction of the moving image which constructs such plausible reality. *Nature mortel the kind of motion we call heat* is a replica of the natural environment, complete with heat and wind. Like the other works, it is a simulation that does not at any time seek to be convincing. Rather it seems to point out the absurdity of the attempt.

*Monument to W.W. Hodkinson*, produced in collaboration with Sinéad Gray, hangs forlornly on the outer ribs of the stage of *The Slipping of the World*. This is another clue for the viewer, a direction to the filmic. It is a homage to the Paramount studios founder, and a reproduction of the studio logo, but curiously the familiar stars are absent.

Just prior to leaving the space, the street outside the gallery darkened and my companion observed that the totemic light pyramid was now visible in the triplicate; in the gallery, reflected in the window, and in the shiny marble of the building opposite The Lab. Turning to leave, the final impression was of meanings that ricocheted between the real, the reflected, the knowable and the imagined.



Barbara Knezevic is  
an artist and Circa's  
adminstator.

Gavin Murphy  
*Light cares can speak but  
heavy ones are dumb, 2008*  
hardwood, fabricated plastic,  
fluorescent tubes and fittings  
courtesy The Lab



# 50 moons of Saturn T2 Torino Triennale

"This is an exhibition about transformation, digestion and defiance," according to curator Daniel Birnbaum.<sup>1</sup> Birnbaum sets the course of the exhibition by Saturn, a planet orbited by 60 or so moons. Birnbaum has created a triennial in which literal stargazing and the less specific saturnine disposition are bedfellows, the latter identified as gloomy, surly, melancholy yet productive.

The planet's moons, a clutch of bodies of very different sizes in orbit together, introduce the exhibition's structure of fifty artists showing in the magnificent Castello di Rivoli, the Palazzina della Società della Promotrice delle Belle Arti and the private Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo. While all moons may be equal, some moons are evidently more equal than other moons, and Paul Chan and Olafur Eliasson are said to present solo shows, while the remaining artists make a group exhibition.

(below) Lara Favaretto  
installation view, Castello di  
Rivoli Museo d'Arte  
Contemporanea  
photo Agenzia  
Fotogiornalistica Reporters  
courtesy T2



To be fair, the first *Triennale* in 2005 had a similar format, but Eliasson is capable of awe-inspiring installations and the single work at the Castello di Rivoli scarcely deserves solo positioning. Format aside, Chan and Eliasson offer cogent lenses through which to consider the exhibition's topic. Eliasson's rotating Perspex loops throw magical rings of refracted colour around a cavernous darkened room, to make plain our insignificance as pimples on the surface of a speeding planet. Chan's animations are skillful yet crudely drawn, and while difficult to like, they challenge confidence in linear time, enunciating how de Sade's spectres of the unimaginable have become reality, and how horrors Goya recorded in the early nineteenth century have a ring of currency.

Each artist in *T2* enjoys generous hanging space, as befits works that rarely yell for attention. A few gentle but persuasive approaches are evident, firstly the literalists such as Jennifer Bornstein, who stages astral phenomena with *Blue Peter* media. Her short films posit the possibility of powerful dreams alongside kitchen-sink life and look back at eras when science and magic were not easily told apart. Wilhelm Sisnal's paintings on the theme of Saturn are documents of something between reality perceived and the symbolic remembered, and above them hangs Spencer Finch's *Study for outer space*, a truly beautiful light work. Finch is a cultural train-spotter who tracks down the experiences that catalysed great works, such as the dawn described by Homer, then dissects these conditions and attempts to recreate them in new and precisely calibrated light pieces. The reproduction of only one, admittedly complex, facet of the original experience creates poetry out of light measurements, and his *Study* is an invitation to look to the skies for inspiration as one enters the Palazzina.

Nostalgia then surfaces repeatedly: the influences of folklore, games and Eastern European crafts are apparent in Gert and Uwe Tobias' orderly paintings and sculptures; even their goblins seem reassuring when fashioned with a latter-day colour palette. In comparison, Robert Kusmirowski has created a window directly into a fictional time in recent history, his *DATAmatic 880*, a room-sized computer that looks untouched since the 1960s. The *DATAmatic 880* is an invention, but the *DATAmatic 1000* was an important technical reality; Kusmirowski's version aims to realise time travel, but its mysteries remain impenetrable behind glass, and what pervades is longing for the time when the future, understood to be like the present but more so, looked brighter.<sup>2</sup>

Gerard Byrne's installation *Case study: Loch Ness (some possibilities and problems)* uses historical documents alongside contemporary photography of the area as basis of his investigation of the construction of the lake-monster myth, considering the speculative powers of the media and the unfathomable water, perfect matrix for a shadowy legend. It is a reflective work, testament to the power of the imagination, the haphazard nature and inconclusiveness of documents, and to prejudice against Sassenach journalists. He is also one of several artists throughout the triennial who unpick the layers and structure of narrative, such as Jordan Wolfson and Keren Cytter; in the latter's film *The Devil's drivel* protagonists' actions segue into their fantasies, while they commentate their own experiences.

Next to Byrne's measured work is an installation by Lara Favaretto, one of many fatalistic pieces that can be read in relation to cannibalistic Saturn devouring his children, though perspectives on the monstrous act vary from darkly pessimistic to fun-poking. Favaretto creates sculptures from the mundane

medium of car-wash brushes, which are fixed to the wall, each rotating periodically according to a different timer. In rotating they are possessed with energy, and strain at their lashings, but also self-destruct as they scour the plates holding them. While Favaretto's work is aloof and whirrs on intently, Anna Galtarossa's kitsch and absurd mountain *Aconcagua*, which is bedecked with the stringed coins of a belly dancer and other flourishes, wiggles and darts at the visitors in the Castello di Rivoli. Occasionally *Aconcagua* opens and spews forth a cacophonous voice, then lies still and plots its next move. The mountain has taken on both female and male characteristics, is possessed by contradictory identities and yet is at ease in its ferociousness.

The romantics are the most winning artists in the exhibition; their works, ranging from sumptuous to maudlin and beyond, really stick in the memory. Ulla von Brandenburg divides the hall-like exhibition space at the Castello with *5 folded curtains*, a series of bright-red theatrical drapes through which one must wend. The simple props of reality and artifice divide one space from another; von Brandenburg fires up the imagination as visitors find themselves treading the boards behind the dropped curtain before facing another audience beyond. Another case in point is Guido van der Werve, who sets out to realise his dreams of possessing a Steinway grand. The artist is filmed as a lonely flâneur who gazes at the object of his desire, then goes about purchasing the instrument, manoeuvring it into his tiny Dutch flat, where he is joined by an orchestra and conductor to interpret Chopin's *Romance*, before the piano is removed to leave him once more alone.



But the show-stopper is Ragnar Kjartansson's film *God*, the strains of which can be heard throughout the Palazzina. For an hour Kjartansson repeatedly sings the line "Sorrow conquers happiness" in florid style, while behind him brass, strings, percussionist and pianist chime in with ever-increasing intensity. The hot pink satin drapery leaves no doubt that there is irony at play, but the artist's engaging commitment to his role works like several glasses of wine on an empty stomach, and one swiftly finds oneself brim full of sentimentality.

The French actress Simone Signoret wrote an autobiography entitled *Nostalgia isn't what it used to be*, and the same sentiment could apply to *50 moons of Saturn*. According to the catalogue essay by George Baker, nostalgia is enjoying a revival, which I am inclined to think is convenient revisionism to distance

theorists from the slur of vulgarity, but also tells us something about the times we are in, and an inclination to look back when there is little to look forward to. Still, many artists have contributed works that are inspiring, optimistic and powerful. Daniel Birnbaum will have known that the US presidential election result preceded the *T2* opening by only a few days; an explicitly political triennial would have been overshadowed by, and read only in the context of that outcome. Instead Birnbaum chose a quiet, but significant concept equally relevant to the current day.

(above)  
Robert Kusmirowski  
*DATAmatic 880*, 2007  
mixed media installation,  
dimensions variable  
courtesy the artist/ Galerie ZAK  
| BRANICKA/ Leif Djurhuus/ T2

- 1 *50 moons of Saturn*, Daniel Birnbaum ed, Skira, 2008, p30
- 2 *The Culture of denial*, frieze art fair talk, Judith Williamson, 19 October 2008

**Aoife Rosenmeyer is a curator and writer based in Zürich.**



86 *Discussions in contemporary  
sculpture*



(opposite)  
Alistair Wilson  
*Untitled*, 2008  
glass and paint,  
installation shot,  
The Dock  
courtesy The Dock

I was thinking about the title of the exhibition with which Kevin Kavanagh opened his exhibition space in Dublin (having moved from Great Strand Street to a brand new gallery on Chancery Lane<sup>1</sup>). *The World needs a narrative* was a group show of works on paper. Interesting confluences and intriguing disparities naturally emerge from seeing the work of 'outsider artist' Henry Darger beside that of Karin Brunnermeir, Basim Magdy and Guy Richards Smit (for example), especially when placed in context of having storytelling as central to their aesthetic.

The narratives of curation and juxtaposition offer ways in to looking at art, and sometimes the stories they propose overlay what is offered by the works of the artists individually. There is nothing unusual in this; the world may need a narrative, but contemporary curation seems to have inspired a need so strong that we now feel lost without it. Even 'anti-curatorial' strategies, such as that adopted by IMMA in its recent *Exquisite corpse*, reveal a narrative in that they tell personal stories through the idiosyncrasies of selection (both of works, and of those who did the choosing). It may sometimes seem as if galleries have become theme parks, in which the art itself is simply a vehicle for promoting a well

packaged (and hot) new thesis or cool curatorial strategy. Narrativising, particularly in group exhibitions, has become the norm.

So what are we to do when confronted with an exhibition of contemporary sculpture in which each artist has been selected simply because their work is established, strong, and above all (and to use a term not generally accepted in art critical circles) 'good'? This radical (well, it felt radical to me) idea was behind Oliver Dowling's curation of *Discussions in contemporary sculpture*, at the Dock. Dowling, in his exhibition statement, doesn't use the word 'good'; instead he implies the value judgement with the phrase 'serious practice'. Eschewing the temptations of storytelling, Dowling even goes so far as to say that "each work stands as an icon." How refreshing, but also, how unsettling...

The selected artists are Maud Cotter, Dorothy Cross, John Gibbons, Paul Gregg, Fergus Martin, Kathy Prendergast, Grace Weir and Alistair Wilson, and their work (thankfully) does not slip into easy categorisation, neither do they open up to glib comparisons. In fact, it is interesting to be in an exhibition where each object, or set of objects, seems so resistant to dialogue with its neighbours; all of which gives the viewer a lot more work to do themselves.

The first piece you come across, you almost pass by: Gregg's *Amorphous* is a helium-filled plastic sack (sort of like an enormously long saggy seed pod) that floats, in a way that looks more like hanging, in the stairwell of The Dock. It is subtle and mysterious and it lurks like it has a life of its own. Apart from Wilson, who has a room of his own, the other artists are all together in the main gallery. The only information available is to do with title and media, plus some details on handouts about the artists' careers.

This is, at first, a relief. There's something about text that lures the eye, and faced with an A4 page beside an art work, it's very hard not to read it before thinking deeply about what you are seeing and, once read, it's hard to see without some absent curator whispering suggestions into your head. The worst offender in this was the old Saatchi Gallery, when it was at County Hall. I remember a text telling me that a work was funny, and even explaining the 'joke'. That is not to say a little background information is unwelcome, you just don't always want it intruding. Dia solves this, by having handouts that you can pick up, should you require them, but you may also ignore them and come to your own satisfying conclusions about, and relationships with, what you are seeing.

So the works here are left to be unapologetically themselves, and with work this strong that is a very good thing. Martin's *Pipe dreams 4* is an inscrutably elegant floor piece, Gibbons' *A Thousand dreams* an enigmatic metal bundle, and Cross' *Fishing rod* as satisfyingly strange and repellently beautiful as we have come to expect from this artist. Cotter's *Console with objects that are no longer themselves* is as madly fascinating, enticing and oddly unnerving as the best of this artist's work, and if there are relationships to be found in this room, hers is with Prendergast's *Characters from a family tree I and II*; both are 'everyday' objects made mysterious by the artists' interventions, hinting at histories, and crossing an intellectual boundary by rendering the murky reaches of the imagination visible.

The final works in this room are by Grace Weir, and here I would have been glad of a little extra help. First in terms of *Bending space time in the basement*, I always think it's polite to let people know the length of a video work – so you know whether to wait for the loop to start again, come back later to see the whole thing in sequence, or even (in the case of *veeery* long works) to be a dilettante and just dip in. Equally, the science behind *The coffee cup caustic*, which I first saw, with full explanation, at Gallery for One in Dublin, and which shows how shadows and reflections in a cup can be mathematically predicted, is probably the only work in the exhibition that would have benefited from a little more information.

Next door, Alistair Wilson's *Untitled* was another floor piece, or rather series of pieces, glass discs like alien landings, making you aware of the room in a way you wouldn't have been without their presence.

Faced with all these complex and considered works, I began to miss being told what to think, in the manner of one who, spoon-fed all their life, begrudges picking up a knife and fork. My mind was looking for the connections – why these works? Why here? Why now? And why isn't somebody telling me? And at that thought, I let go of my petulant desire for a helping handout, and the works began to sing.

Maybe we *do* need a narrative – perhaps it's inevitable as a function of the way the mind works. Nonetheless, when the narratives are supplied by your own mind, the rewards of doing your own work are often hugely more satisfying than the exegesis of a curator, especially when the curator is simply looking for something to say. Explanation is often the refuge of the insecure, and the well justified confidence of this curation in the selected artists proved that good work does

not necessarily need a curatorial narrative. Whether, as a viewer, you can stop yourself creating your own is another issue.

This exhibition was the second in a series of four *Discussions in contemporary sculpture* at the Dock. The first one was curated in 2007 by Mark Garry, and the next one will be in 2011, curated by Sean O'Reilly, Director of the Leitrim Sculpture Centre.

Paul Gregg  
*Amorphous*  
 2008  
 installation shot, The Dock  
 courtesy The Dock







1 The Chancery Lane space is fantastic.

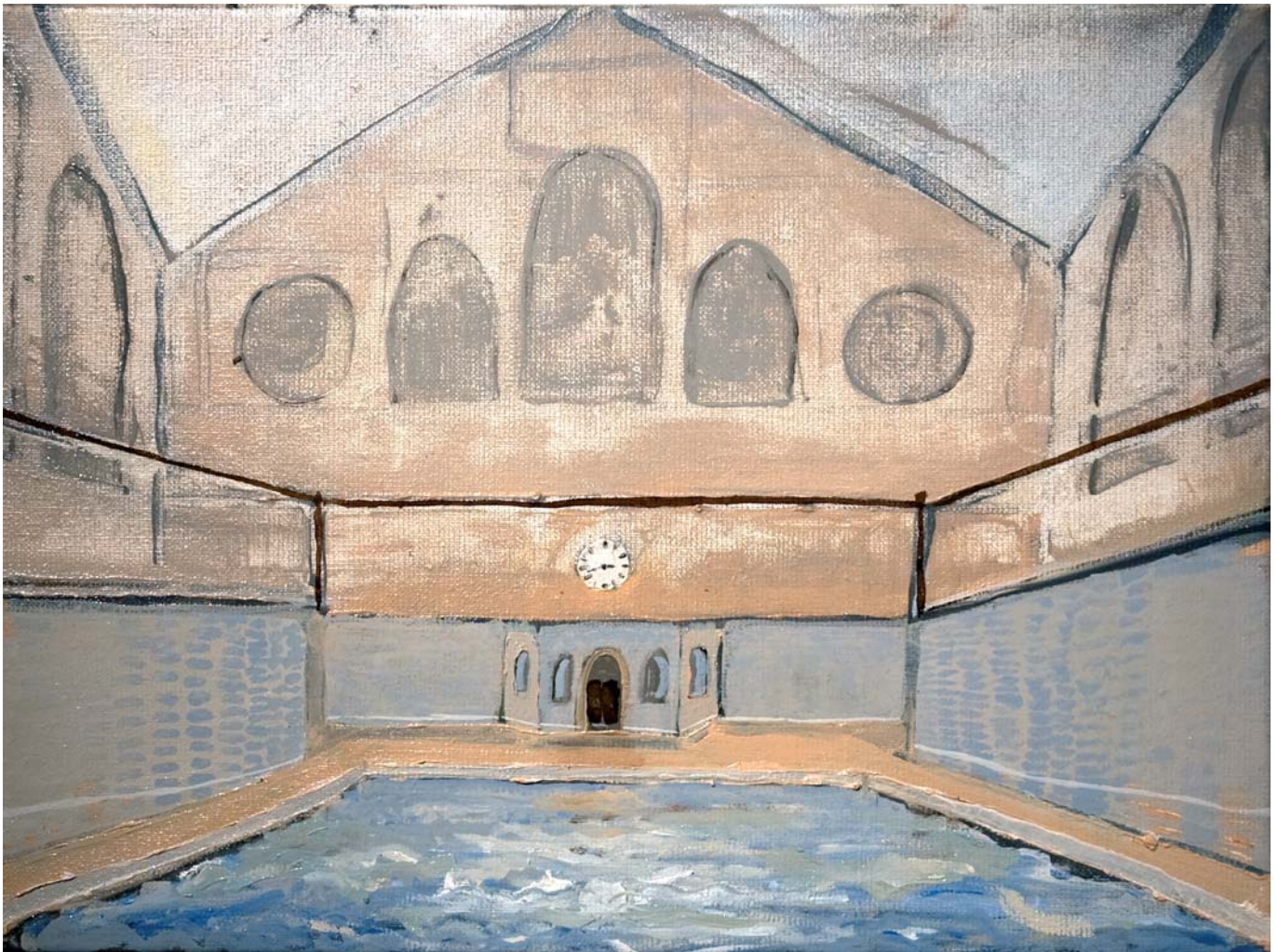
(above)  
Maud Cotter  
*Console with objects that are no longer themselves*, 2008  
console, ceramic and Lafarge model dur,  
courtesy The Dock

Gemma Tipton is a writer and critic on art and architecture based in Dublin.

# *Sonia Shiel*

## The brief tremendous

90



(opposite)  
Sonia Shiel  
Swimming hall, 2008  
oil on canvas  
30 x 40 cm  
courtesy the artist

Man feels an active power within himself, the whole of nature lies before him as a potential element for him to form and shape, and he cannot help but regard her in the first instance solely as material for his purposes. Thus in the very beginning he can hardly recognise any other object of aspiration and imagination than man himself and his manifold states and conditions, and indeed he feels compelled by the vivid force of phantasy to ascribe a human individuality even to lifeless things, and further to divine things as well.

Carl Gustav Carus, 'Nine letters on landscape painting' (1831)

In 'Nine letters on landscape painting', the German Romantic (and friend of Caspar David Friedrich) Carl Gustav Carus espouses an active relationship to nature, through art, in which the painted landscape serves as a reflection of both human and godly creation. The painting and painter are microcosms of an infinite and incomprehensible whole, the work of art testifying to, in Carus' words, "the inner affinity between man and the world spirit." It's a view that has changed somewhat since; from vaguely mystical, yet essentially nondoctrinal strands of environmentalism, to despoliation in the name of

progress and pragmatism. The inner affinity is often weighted to one side over the other.

The Dublin-based artist Sonia Shiel is neither precisely a Romantic nor a crude realist. In her latest exhibition, there's a trade-off between beauty and industry, where nature is remade through its cast-offs and cuttings. In *The Great escape*, a single tree branch has sprouted and stretched from the base of a glass display case to breach the opposite corner. Fragments of ornamental plastic birds are scattered on top, nest-like, as if disturbed by the sudden rupture of the vitrine. The confinement of nature within the fixed parameters of the picture frame cannot help but eventually buckle and break its bonds. There is a tension between the man-made and the natural in Shiel's practice which is epitomised here, in the sculptural works that resemble outgrowths and protrusions from gallery walls, and in the paintings of idyllic landscapes blighted by tunnels and pipelines.

The respective mediums often overlap; pieces of card are tacked onto (and hanging off of) canvas surfaces, while *What have you done with the sun II*, a painting of a woman clinging to a tightrope, is itself suspended between two vertical bars fixed from the ceiling. The image is replicated in its presentation; the rods connecting the canvas to the support are perfectly aligned with the painted rope. This merging of artistic disciplines or mediums is indicative of Shiel's syncretic reconciliation of sublime, primeval nature with mundane, everyday practices. A small appliance of fibre-optics and copper, plugged directly into the gallery foyer wall (as if left to charge during the working day) is titled *Sample of the sun*. A circular racing track of spilled concrete and frayed, battered cardboard appears to have been either scrapped together in minutes or eroded out of solid rock.

*Nocturne* depicts a playing card and a nighttime image of a mountain range, over-painted with thick swathes of blue that drip down the canvas, obscuring and delineating the peaks and troughs of the landscape before sliding off the surface. In the suites of landscape and architectural paintings, one also finds something of an updated, open-eyed Romantic sensibility. Instead of Friedrich's immaculately rendered ruins of abbeys and monasteries overgrown by flora, Shiel squeezes paint directly from the tube, scraping and smudging it into trees and rivers, cement bunkers, steel vats. It is a view from ahead, from another planet even (the paintings bear names of *Mars*, *Venus*, and *Jupiter*, neatly referencing both future exploration and classical history), in which these contemporary eyesores become the monuments to ancient eras and ideals.

There is an acknowledgement of relentlessness in these works, of the passage of time's uncaring obliteration of human endeavor, of all art and architecture. Here, one sees Shiel's application of found materials in a new light, as the fractured, scattered remains of mankind's futile attempts to form and shape nature. Inevitably, these objects, too, will crumble and decay, and perhaps be one day picked up again, by another artist, at another point.





Chris Clarke is an artist  
and writer based in Cork.

Sonia Shiel  
*The Brief tremendous*, 2008  
installation shot, detail,  
with *Miles and miles*,  
oil and card on canvas,  
126 x 90cm, and  
*Non runner*, 2008,  
cement, chalk and card,  
dimensions variable  
courtesy the artist

# *Theresa Nanigian* I will be a Phenomenon

"I will be comfortable with ambiguity. I will not be easily distracted. I will maintain a books-read-to-books-purchased-at-the-Tate-Modern ratio of 3:5." The opening line of Theresa Nanigian's poster, produced as the first project of FLOOD Dublin, offers no preamble to the direct roll-call of resolutions that follows. This beginning intimates the subsequent rhetoric: a repeatedly intoned combination of positive statements, repressive instructions and art-world in-jokes. It is not belittling to reduce the work to a series of coded, and therefore decodeable, fragments. The success of the project lies in Nanigian's ability to simplify a complex range of aspirations and tangential ideas into a grammatical construct whose pattern could be seen to mimic both biblical commandments and domestic shopping lists. Across one side of white A3 paper, a blunt black arial font (free of serifs, parentheses and paragraphs) delineates the personal mottos that coerce a

tangible aesthetic of apparent honesty – an interaction of object and content, embracing the challenge of the FLOOD project format.

Faced with creating a work without a contextualising exhibition space in which to present it, with the remit that it must be able to be posted, Nanigian's adoption of text on paper is hardly a surprising strategy. Blessed with pole position on this inaugural project, she leaves to her successors the difficulty of innovation. The projects from FLOOD are available upon request by e-mail and are delivered in a small handwritten envelope. Rather than a gimmick of online art, the founders of FLOOD, Paul McAree and Rachel O'Hara McAree, aim to provide a new method for the dissemination and interpretation of art. For the audience, this produces an interesting dichotomy: the process suggests democratisation, art for free to all who ask, but it is combined with a

sense of elitism, operating as a guest list for those in the know. In this format, the viewer's interaction with the artwork changes from the physical act of entering a gallery space to inviting the work into your own home, accompanied by the risk that what will arrive might invade your personal space. This intimate relationship forged with the work may also hint at the tantalising realm of ownership, possession over art, which consequently pervades any interpretation of the individual project at hand. Viewing the work free from the baggage of a gallery's history and, in a more traditional space, other gallery artists, is certainly liberating for the artist, but necessitates an awareness of the danger that a lack of grounding poses to a one-off project. The onus is firmly placed on the artist to produce a work which can single-handedly affect the viewer comprehensively and concisely.

In this case, Nanigian's work exploits the personal dialogue with her viewer, laying bare what is presented as a frank expostulation of her desires for the future. At times, this does lean towards an over-eager earnestness, and the flaws in the work are the repeated references to other artists. Those whose names are mentioned are broadly celebrities: "I will make up my mind about Damien Hirst." "I will appear in a group show with Fischli & Weiss." "Matthew Barney and I will appear in the same sentence." Nanigian runs the risk here of appearing precocious, while it does affirmatively draw attention to the importance she places on the artist's self in the artwork. This is particularly interesting given her professional background - before training as an artist Nanigian was involved in management consultancy, and was a Senior Vice-President at American Express – experience that bears a striking resemblance to the early career of Jeff Koons. Although their finished products may contain no similarities, both artists share an understanding of the artwork as commodity and of the market as a context from which to generate art. Previously, Nanigian has explored the notion of re-examining the art world as a financial scheme that can be analysed and predicted,<sup>1</sup> and doubtless this lends to the tone of determination that runs throughout this work and its implication that art is a process with a potential outcome of success.

Rhythmic and engaging, the text of this work, whether accepted at face value as the personal wishes of the artist or not, represents a further development of Nanigian's "affecting and oddly poetic"<sup>2</sup> work. The title and final statement of the work neatly bookend the project, questioning our assumptions about the context which will define the artist's realisation of the declared but ambiguous aim: "I WILL BE A PHENOMENON."

- 1 Theresa Nanigian, *Sector snapshot*, 2008 – see [www.theresananigian.com](http://www.theresananigian.com) for further examples.
- 2 David Barrett, *East International*, *Art monthly*, September 2006

Mai Blount is a post-graduate student at the Irish Art Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin.

(opposite)  
Theresa Nanigian  
*I will be a phenomenon*, 2008  
poster  
courtesy FLOOD

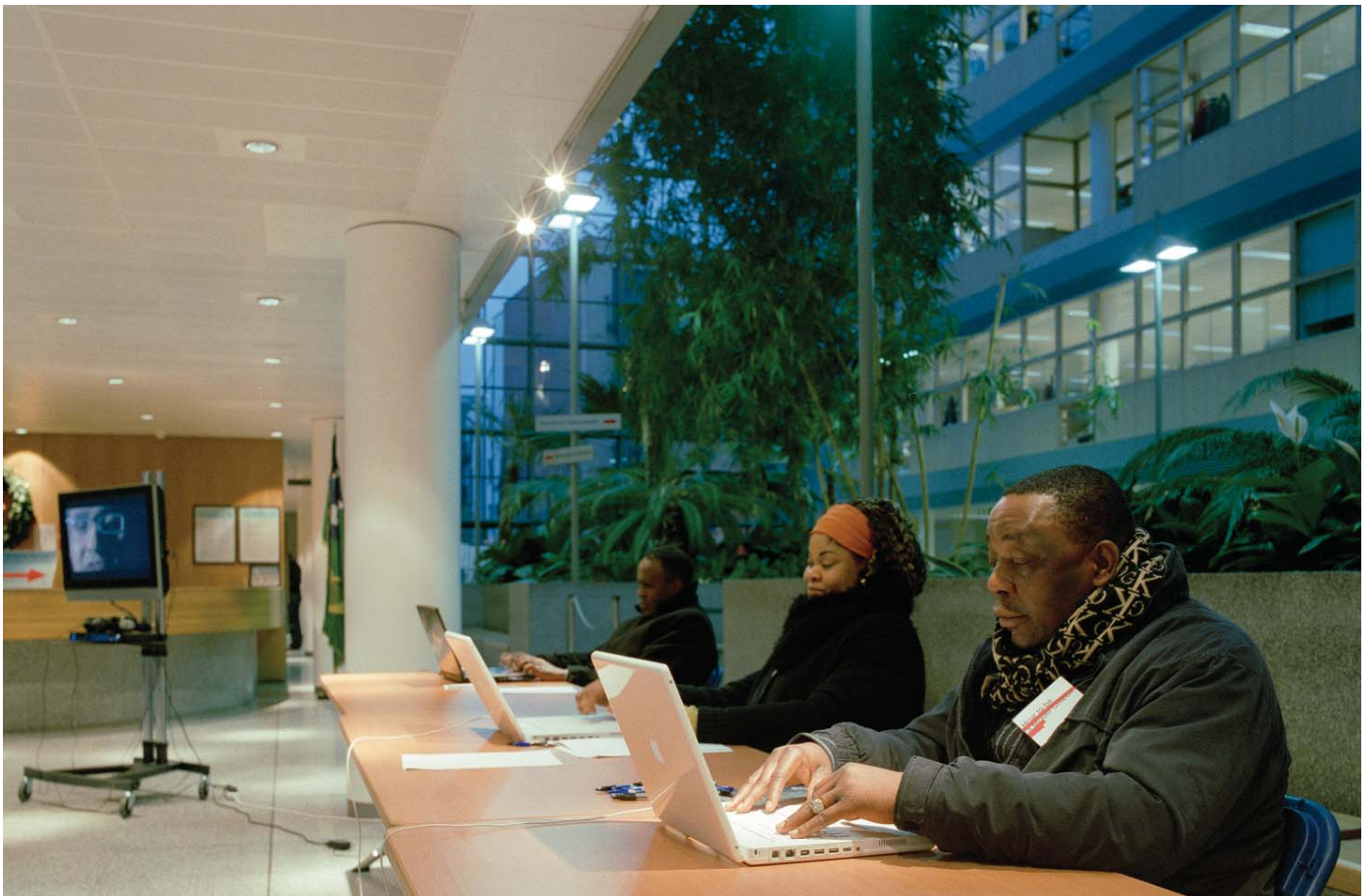


I will be comfortable with ambiguity. I will not be easily distracted. I will maintain a books-read-to-books-purchased-at-the-Tate-Modern ratio of 3:5. I will balance grandeur and intimacy. I will be proficient in Photoshop. I will sporadically appear in mainstream publications. I will stake out my territory. I will nab the domain name [www.myfullnamehere.com](http://www.myfullnamehere.com). I will resist assuming a signature style. I will be asked to select submissions to EASTinternational. I will be fascinated by systems of order and classification. I will exceed a proposal acceptance quota of 42%. I will require two mobile phones. I will stop attending my own openings, eventually. I will not do laundry while working in the studio. I will draw more often. I will take breaks and lead a nomadic existence. I will explore the potential of seriality. I will break even on my out of pocket expenses. I will appear in ArtReview's Future Greats and Power100 in the same year. I will use newfound fame strategically. I will acquire an ergonomic desk chair with superior mid back support. I will like being on my own. I will find my community. I will know when a work is finished. I will not need reassurance. I will be copied by 4th year degree students. I will possess a 30-inch Apple Cinema HD Display. I will create the situations I want to exist. I will exercise my frustration. I will not trust Wikipedia.com. I will have no uniform. I will be prolific. My installations will appear as backdrops in a Tim Walker fashion shoot. I will read philosophy instead of watching television. I will tell stories. I will do the unexpected. Lieutenant Ellen Ripley will be my role model. I will bring something new to the system. I will not be absorbed by the system. I will initiate my own systems. I will spend more time in the European Paintings and Islamic Art departments at the Met than on W22 and W24 Streets. I will approach my studio as a location of desire. I will not be afraid to cultivate pleasure. I will not be in a hurry. I will have grandiose plans. I will have a full centre. I will be google-imaged. I will read all new art-related periodicals within 7 days. I will do intriguing things with gantt charts, cowboys and sales receipts. I will be a savvy operator. I will cross cultural boundaries. I will appropriate. I will be on François Pinault's to-do list. I will seamlessly fuse politics and aesthetics. I will produce striking monuments of our time. I will back up my hard drive. I will know my history. I will know what I like. My work will be sought after by American hedge fund managers, Russian oligarchs and Indian business moguls. I will be autonomous. I will have a philosophy. I will spare nothing. I will locate a reliable source for un-ruled Moleskin journals. I will have no equilibrium. I will make up my mind about Damien Hirst. I will demonstrate virtuosity. I will baffle. I will critique. I will be nominated. I will be pursued by fledgling artist-run Chinese galleries. I will work with conviction. I will have a logo. I will have an assistant. I will have nothing to prove. My medium will not be the message. I will rank between Sophie Calle (136) and Mark Lombardi (1,493). My work will endure. I will stop reading reviews. I will avoid Pearl Paint and Printed Matter. I will use beauty as a tool. I will have a personal connection to the fruits of my labour. I will exude an edgy, maverick image. I will be in the right place at the right time. I will be lured by popular culture. I will exploit the new technology of power. I will seek the transcendental. I will learn how to compress a 30-minute video to a 2 MB file size. I will not over analyze. I will provide a window on the world. I will rise to the surface. I will relinquish control. I will appear in a group show with Fischli & Weiss. I will begin with some vision of the end in mind. I will be open. I will consider using rambling, esoteric titles. I will garner a broad consensus around my work. I will follow my hunches. I will work my ass off. I will start over. Someone else will sort out colour correction. I will distinguish myself from the crowd. I will create highly ambitious and ambiguous narratives. I will not produce goods for the luxury market. I will not accept the taste of my cultural milieu. I will make work for myself. I will be too preoccupied to take part in the P.S.1 artist residency. I will be taken seriously. There will always be something slightly skewed. I will be clinically detached. Emails will arrive with interesting opportunities. I will set my own agenda. I will be obsessed. I will work on an industrial scale. Mathew Barney and I will appear in the same sentence. I will celebrate the glorious failure. I will be ahead of my time. I will be frustrated by the ceiling on artists' resale rights. My work will invite meditation. I will have a lot to say. I will have a lot to ask. I will not participate in stylistic bubbles. I will appear in the next edition of Taschen's Art Now. I will not be subjected to economic, social or political forces. I will infuse my art with ideology. Robert Hughes will still be impressed. I will create my own scene. I will be expected to do great things. I will be unable to control the rumour mill. I will make a site specific work for Frieze Art Fair. I will gather. I will process. I will compile. I will be more socially useful than a commodities trader. I will design an annual report for the Ringier AG Media Group. I will follow no set plan or conventional pattern, and I will figure out where we go from here. I will be busy. I will shake things up. I will remain unscathed. Mark Fletcher will make enquiries. I will not worry about how to seem clever. I will not short-circuit to conventional wisdom. I will not cold call. My work will be referenced by Alain de Botton as an example of how art can alleviate status anxiety. There will be a lot of quiet. I will indulge in what-the-hell experimentation. I will develop a powerful and all-encompassing worldview. I will apprehend my own humanity. I will not forget my initial motivation. I will not believe that I am living in the middle of one of the greatest creative moments in art. I will reinforce my market position and boost my notoriety. I will have a reliable filtering system. I will be relevant. I will be championed. I will listen to the noise in my head. I will create the perfect metaphor. I will be allocated a 5-minute slot on the Astrovision Screen in Times Square. I will emerge. I will create a buzz. I WILL BE A PHENOMENON.



<sup>96</sup> *Anthony Haughey*  
be a model citizen

How to



(opposite)  
Anthony Haughey  
*How to be a model citizen*  
2008  
installation/ performance shot  
courtesy the artist

*How to be a model citizen* is part of a series of work that has been produced by Anthony Haughey and the Global Migration Research Network – a group of diverse individuals who came to live in Ireland (north and south) during the recent economic boom. Over the last three years they have worked together on a variety of projects concerning migration in Malta, North Africa and Ireland. Presented in the foyer of Dublin's Civic Offices, this dialogical or participatory art project presented the viewer with an experiential ethical exchange.<sup>1</sup>

Entering the foyer, I found a series of chairs laid out like any public-service waiting room. Facing forward, these numbered chairs led the eye to a long table, where five 'officials' sat behind a row of laptops. In this distanced position of authority, I found members of the immigrant population of Ireland. This situation created a new dynamic of power, in stark contrast to the normal order of things in such offices.<sup>2</sup> Simulating the procedures that migrants go through while in the asylum process, I as the participant entered a formal bureaucratic setting. As is quite often the case in these situations, I didn't quite know what to do. To begin with, I approached the desk and was immediately told to sit down and "someone would be with me shortly," creating a sharp sense of isolation and discomfort.

Eventually I was presented with a questionnaire to fill out. The questions ranged from subjects relating to the independence of Ireland, Irish involvement in the EU, laws relating to migration and Irish citizenship globally. The questionnaire makes direct reference to citizenship tests that are part of the naturalisation process in other EU states. My own lack of knowledge of Irish law and the extent of the Irish diaspora across the globe had a distinctly unsettling effect. The realisation that there are three million Irish passport holders living abroad (3/4 of the population living in the country) and approximately 70 million who claim Irish ethnicity is staggering. It is in these facts that the space for an ethical response or relationship to this Other, the immigrant, can take place.

Julia Kristeva describes this ethical relationship as "not simply...a matter of our being able to accept the other, but of being in his place, and this means to imagine and make oneself other for oneself."<sup>3</sup> *How to be a model citizen* creates a space where one is this Other. Experiencing being an outsider in the formal setting of the project, and seeing the Irish as part of a vast and global system of migration, opens up a space where an immigrant can be seen as a real person rather than a cipher.

After completing the questionnaire, I was met by one of the five officials, a man from Somalia. In this, a further space for dialogue and exchange was created. Emmanuel Levinas writes of the importance of the face-to-face encounter in the ethical relationship. It is in the presence of this individual face, and their "refusal to be contained"<sup>4</sup> within any one definition, that we experience our ethical relationship to them. Offering a voice to these silenced individuals, presenting a space for dialogue and exchange of stories and experiences, is fundamental to the success of this project.<sup>5</sup> Miwon Kwon, writing in *One place after another: site specific art*

and *locational identity*, highlights the importance of this voice in relation to collaborative or community-based projects. She says "the endeavour to give voice to under-represented and dis-empowered groups, often by engaging them in the very process of creating their own cultural representations is...not simply as artistic experiment but a strategy of political importance." And it is this political potential of that is most compelling. Consequently, *How to be a model citizen* creates in the viewer a new sense of being 'in common'<sup>6</sup> with this Other, as opposed to a relationship based on difference.

Creating an experience, where at once the Irish history of migration and our complicity with a system that allows people to be kept in detention and denied permission to work for a considerable period, poses series questions of the viewer/ participant and their relationship to this 'foreign body'. As Levinas wrote, "The presence of the Other is the equivalent to [the] calling into question of my joyous possession of the world."<sup>7</sup>





- 1 This participative event was accompanied by video works carried out by Haughey and The Global Migration Research Network. A publication of the projects will appear later this year.
- 2 The change in power relations is characteristic of much of the work by the group. In Malta two members took on the role of reporters, interviewing members of the public on their attitude to citizenship and migration. In this role the migrants are immediately given a sense of agency in the discuss around these questions.
- 3 Kelly Oliver, ed, *Ethics, politics and difference in Julia Kristeva's writing*, Routledge, New York, 1993, p 38

- 4 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and infinity* Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, 1969, p 194
- 5 Miwon Kwon, *One place after another: site specific art and locational identity*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. 2004, p 114
- 6 This is a term used by Jean Luc Nancy when discussing terms like 'community'. See Jean Luc Nancy, *The inoperative community*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1991
- 7 Levinas, op cit, p 75

**Michelle Browne is an artist, curator and writer based in Dublin.**

Anthony Haughey  
*How to be a model citizen*, 2008  
 installation/ performance shot  
 courtesy the artist

# *Nevan Lahart Ugly lovely*



Blah Blah Blah  
Circumventing the narrative  
Gobble-d-gook, Gobble-d-gook,  
non linguistic forms of  
Yady, Yady, Ya.  
active forces that  
Blah Blah's  
subjective subliminal  
perception  
yiddy, yiddy, ya  
Contextualises the context  
of underlying structures  
That navigate empathetic  
analoguious analogues  
Ummm.....  
Interesting  
Put simply, Nevan won't stray  
too far from flowers.<sup>1</sup>

Nevan Lahart  
*Tribute tree*, 2007  
oil on board  
60 x 63 cm  
courtesy Kevin Kavanagh Gallery

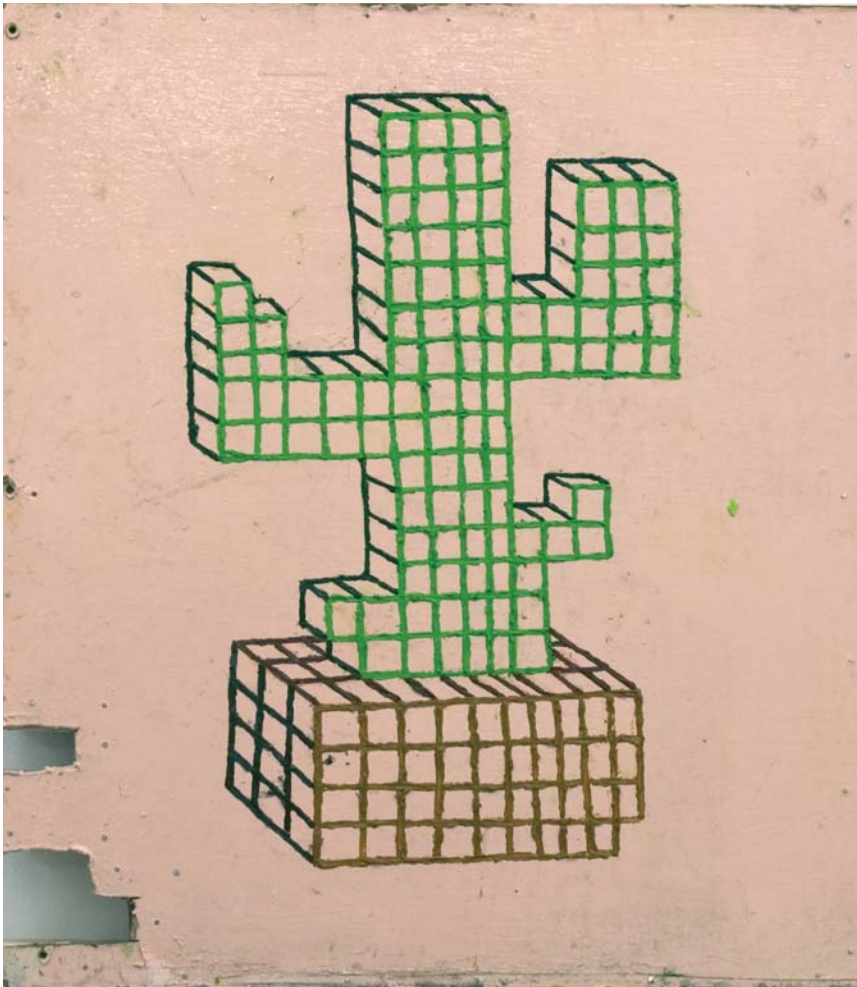
Flowers, plants, foliage and still lifes are done to the death and heavily loaded with a plethora of inescapable references. In that context, Nevan Lahart's *UGLY LOVELY* is, on the one hand, a refreshing approach to the ever-beloved, slightly artistically ignored cactus, and on the other hand a twisted approach to potted-plant fanaticism.

Greeted with a barrage of paintings and representations of potted plants on tacky tiles and dazzling backgrounds, I became hungry for iced biscuits, Party Rings, Café Noir, or just some Liquorice Allsorts. Mustard, pink and neon green assaulted my eyes initially, but after a brief period of adjustment it all brought me back to my younger years. The paintings are giddy renderings of cacti, plants and cages, coupled with a mind-cajoling wonderland of defamed objects. The structures looming overhead or grabbing out from the walls make for a good literal example of giving you a child's perspective.

The language of play and games is evident throughout *UGLY LOVELY* – Tetris, Mouse Trap and Lego – but particularly in some of the free-standing works. These block/netted structures come straight out of an '80s video game. A childlike feeling ensued as I tiptoed around the space with these objects towering over me; they were seemingly unbalanced, with the ominous capacity to topple over at any moment. While thinking about *Darwinian tree of knowledge* (2009), I couldn't but help recollect the board game Mouse Trap; I'm not so sure how Darwin would feel about that parallel being drawn. Then again, how would Moses have felt chatting away to God through a *Burning Tetris bush* (2009)? Would he have ignored God's attempts to impart a task to him, and just become enthralled with getting to the highest level of the game?

There's the sheer audacity of the titles as puns; take for example an object which consists of five 7up bottles, cut up and placed over a piece of strip lighting, so that from the distance it looks like one exaggeratedly long green plastic bottle. Puzzled and unsure, I consulted the sheet.

Ahhhhah...(laughter)...interesting: *10 Litres of electrici tree* (2009). (This is a fine example of an artist using the title of the piece to paraphrase the work, which can be a crutch.) *Wouldn't it be fabulous to have a home that could take it?* (2009) opens up even more dialogue about what we might pay for and bring into our homes. If I had the funds, I *would* take it home for the sheer fact that I laughed so much. I felt sorry for the stag's head reaching out into the space, wanting so desperately the right to grow from its mount or simply be housed.







The notion that a tree is any structure cascading your line of vision upwards is compelling. It is still distracting to have to rely on the literal pun contained within the title to realise that these structures are indeed trees – as Michael Craig-Martin proved, yes, a humble glass of water can be *An Oak tree*. With all of this satire and pun there comes a little parody – *There's a fire that burns in Peat Mondrian's belly* (2004): Piet, peat, pity poor Piet Mondrian. A found firescreen, with a still-life painting of a vase of flowers on the front and a Mondrian-style version of a vase of flowers on the back, stands in the space. This is a relatively tame attack on Mondrian, in comparison to Lahart's other ventures in the same vein. Playing with Mondrian's definitive style, Lahart creates an image of four flowers in a cup, one of which is wilting, possibly from the heat of the fire.

A complete mish-mash of ideas and witty references to popular culture, literature, science, religion and art, the show gave me a sense that it was just dandy not to know exactly what was going on. A freedom that I craved from a gallery space was fulfilled in *UGLY LOVELY*. I came away with my mind filled with the Tetris theme tune, Orwell's *Keep the aspidistra flying*, an idea for RSPCP (the latter 'P' being an initial for 'plants'), dusty cowboy boots and a thirst and hunger respectively for 7up and Party Rings. Oh, and of course all that other deep, profound, arty stuff.

1 From gallery documentation accompanying show

**Amie Lawless is an artist based in Dublin.**

(above)  
Nevan Lahart  
*UGLY LOVELY*, 2009  
installation shot  
courtesy Kevin Kavanagh Gallery

(opposite left)  
Nevan Lahart  
*Uccello's cacti chalice*, 2008  
oil on board  
71 x 61 cm  
courtesy Kevin Kavanagh Gallery

*Mark Joyce* The Newtonians  
<sup>102</sup> *Ciarán Murphy* March



(opposite)  
Mark Joyce  
*The Newtonians 8*, 2008  
ink on Hahnemühle paper  
25 x 19cm  
courtesy Green on Red Gallery

What can be said of painting's importance in the pluralism of today's art world? In a place increasingly dominated by installation, digital and time-based media, its vigour has steadily diminished. This former mainstay now exists at the periphery. It makes up a smaller and smaller percentage of many group exhibitions and frequently incurs doubt about its relevance. Can it convey pertinent ideas and issues? Technologically, is it out of step with the times? And then along comes not one, but two exhibitions offering proof the game has not yet reached its final quarter, that push doubts about its relevance out of the mind.

Mark Joyce revisits the seventeenth century through a host of striking paintings accompanied by a piano composition created in collaboration with Geoffrey Perrin. Presented under the rubric *The Newtonians*, Joyce touches upon Newton's wave theory of light by means of an introductory group of works executed in ink on paper mounted in the hallway. He then steps up the chromatic intensity with three sets of mono-chromatic oils in the main gallery that recall the scientist's accordance of musical divisions to the colours of the spectrum. These paintings pulse across the walls. Scaled according to size and number, each panel can be read as a note and each set of panels as a chord; an impression enhanced by intermittent sequences of musical tones that sound out, and then dissipate. The piano's sombre tones balance the buoyant hues. Sound and colour parry off each other to sonorous effect that encourages us to contemplate parallels between music and art.

In contrast to Joyce's tempered exuberance, Ciarán Murphy provides caustic glimpses of nocturnal scavengers, road kill and environs distinguished by desolation and extreme temperatures in March. Possessing an intensity and specificity that lie outside day-to-day experience, his images knock the viewer out of his or her comfort zone. Depictions of searing heat and numbing cold, for example, attract and repel. At once exotic and virulent, powerful and impersonal, their complexity throws the mind into turmoil. The near-monochromatic character of several scenes speaks of the use of surveillance equipment, the characteristics of which the artist has successfully transferred to the paintings. They, therefore, embody the contradictions associated with the use of such technology: his dispassionate and frugal visual expressions bring the viewer close to the subject, yet also keep him or her at a distance, a characteristic that engenders a

seemingly irresolvable disquiet.

On the surface Joyce and Murphy's paintings appear to be virtual opposites of each other. One creates abstractions; the other's work is representational. Joyce's exhibition – theoretically and literally – involves sound, whereas silence envelopes Murphy's images. Their work meets through an involvement with optical properties and related issues.

The fact that Newton's colour-music idea failed as a general theory and that colour in light and colour in paint operate on entirely different principles does not undermine the impact of Joyce's presentation. People have and will continue to see relationships between art and music. Joyce's work, for example, recalls the aesthetic and technical importance of musical proportion in relation to architecture during the Middle Ages. The two areas also share a good deal of terminology. Moreover, his painted sequences also intimate movement. In this regard they echo the structuralist films of Paul Sharits.

Colour in Murphy's paintings describes other phenomena, contributes to the ethereal qualities of the images and tests the viewer's responsiveness. Assimilating the appearance of various forms of vision technology – night-vision goggles, for example, which pick up infra-red radiation – his paintings offer another contradiction, that is, images of light-deprived situations. What do they suggest to us? Are we looking at an arctic military facility, a cliff in Afghanistan and wildlife that has infiltrated urban areas? Are they indicative of a siege mentality? In one picture he deploys a lurid yellow, in another a brutal blue, colours intimating toxic radiation and the harshness of extreme weather events.





Mark Joyce  
*The Newtonians 2*, 2008  
ink on Hahnemühle paper  
25 x 19cm  
courtesy Green on Red Gallery

Seen together, these exhibitions underscore the complexity of vision. They make us aware of what we can or cannot see and the ways in which vision can be extended or modified. They remind us of light's physical properties, its ability to be refracted and reflected, transmitted and absorbed. They also point to the influence of temperature or of its analogs with sound. They address vision's dependence on a range of materials and conditions, what are essentially a diverse selection of filters: they include the atmosphere through which we move, various types of lenses, image-capture technologies and the dispersal of pigment particles in medium. The process of seeing comes so naturally to us that we easily forget how and why we see the things the way we do. Joyce and Murphy's work, in effect, reawakens us. It reacquaints us with perception's recent and not so recent past. It draws attention to the ephemerality of appearances as well as the factors that influence them. The consonances that exist between vision and other forms of energy are intensified. Most importantly, the exhibitions encourage us to think about how we see.

John Gayer is a writer  
based in Dublin.

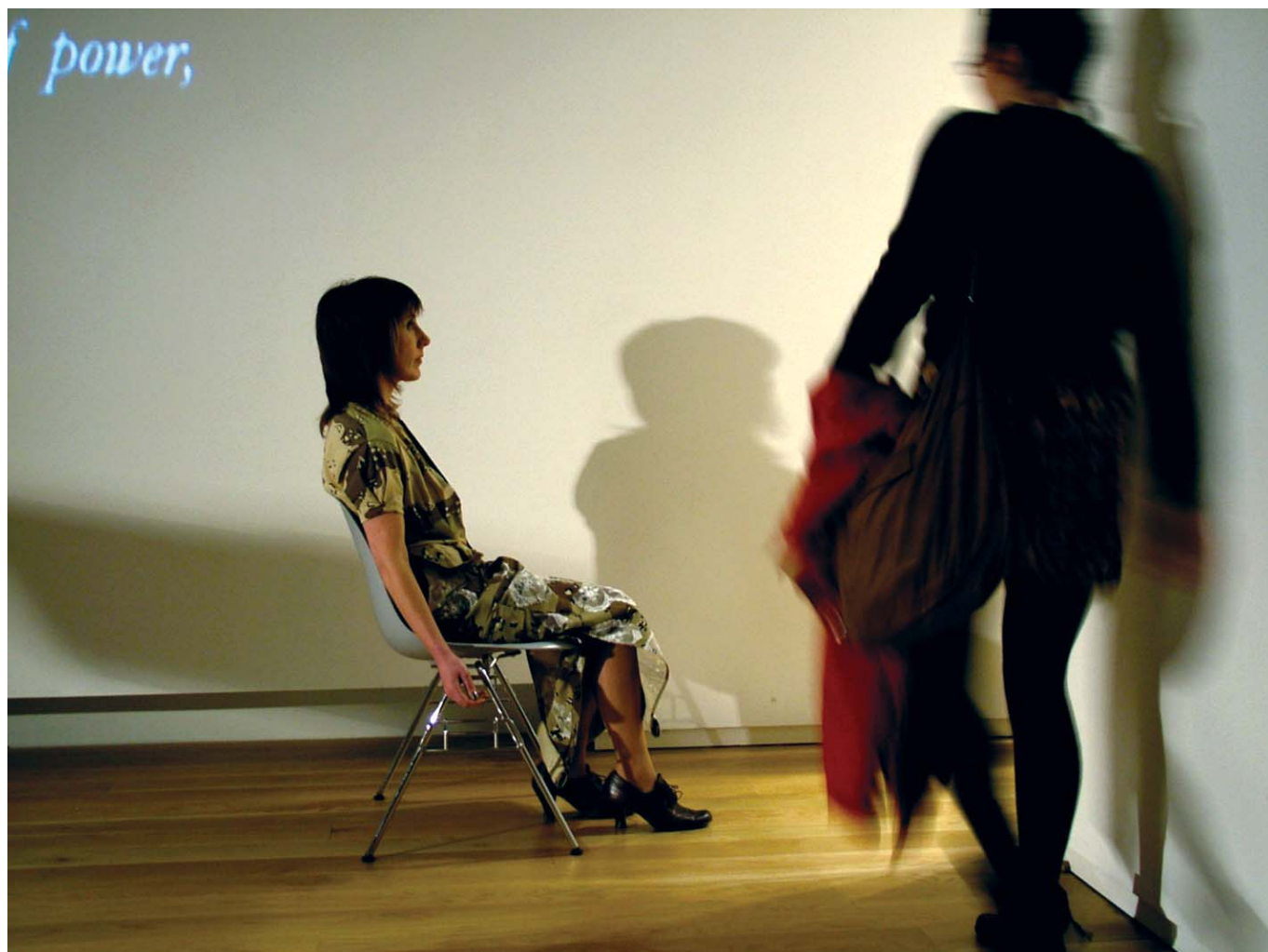


(above)  
Ciarán Murphy  
*Scavenger*, 2009  
oil on linen  
120 x 150 cm  
courtesy mother's tankstation



(below)  
Ciarán Murphy  
*Temperature*, 2009  
oil on stretched paper over  
board  
44 x 49 cm  
courtesy mother's tankstation

<sup>106</sup> *Áine Phillips*      The art of love





(opposite)  
Áine Phillips  
*The Art of love*, 2008  
performance shot  
photo Michelle Browne  
courtesy the artist

*The Art of war*, written by Sun Tzu in the sixth century BC, is one of the most influential books in military strategy and was even used by the Americans in the preparations for Operation Desert Storm in 1992. Áine Phillips has taken this text and adapted it under the title *The Art of love*. Phillips' performance of this text in the Hugh Lane Gallery brought us through the intricacies of passion and seduction with the precision of a military operation.

The performance took the form of a public presentation: more a poetry reading than a lecture. The artist read from a manuscript, accompanied by a (somewhat unnecessary) projection of the text, clothed in the army fatigue pattern of the American soldiers who went to war in Iraq. The garments were embellished with bridal lace and formed into a skirt. As with much of Phillips' work, the performance is based on biographical experience, in this case of a love affair. This was mentioned at the beginning of the performance in an informal introduction and coloured the view of the performance from the outset. Listening to the list of rules in how best to act in situations of the heart, I was bound up in this past liaison. Where did it happen? How did it end? What went wrong? Phillips seemed to be going over what she could have done better. How best she could behave to keep the love alive. I was reminded of Sophie

Calle's *Exquisite pain*, where she recounted over and over the story of how a love affair suddenly ended. How we feel or inflict pain in relationships is exposed. Phillips tells us:

do not swallow your true  
emotion;  
do not thwart a beloved  
retreating home.  
If you surround the  
beloved, leave an outlet;  
do not press a beloved that  
is cornered.  
These are the principles of  
love.  
...  
On the day the beloved  
chooses another, the sitting  
lover's tears will soak their  
sleeves.<sup>1</sup>

This is not the first work that Phillips has made on this theme, with *Re-enactions (of a love affair)* from 2006 recounting specific experiences from her past. For Phillips, the focus on her life is motivated by a desire to make "the personal political and the singular mutual."<sup>2</sup> Her adaptation of a war manual brings an experience that quite often we feel as individual and unique (no-one has ever felt this way before), into the realm of being collective and universal (it happens to us all). I could not help but recognise some instructions I could have taken in certain phrases like "A body can be depleted by love when it has to supply love at great distances," or "If the lover cannot control her longing and rushes to give herself, one third of her hope will be dashed, and the beloved will still not be taken." It is through the identification with these situations that one is drawn in.

At the end of her reading, the performer began meticulously untying her shoes laces. She then slowly unzipped her shirt, revealing underneath the expansion of the camouflage pattern up along her

body. The presence of the fatigues acts as a reminder of the fine line between love and hate. It reminds us that this poetic and beautiful text was originally created as an instrument of destruction and harm. She went to the entrance of the space and sat, hands palm-upwards in an act of submission or exposure. This action is derived from an ancient (Arabic and Irish) female ritual carried out in order to attract a mate. This position acts as the embodiment of this opening up of the self in the search to find love. The artist remained defenceless at the entrance until the audience began to leave the space. She has opened herself up to the audience in the recounting of this text. The action was simple and beautiful and the purity of this gesture compared with the formality of the text might lead us to believe that it isn't that simple, that we are not that rational in our romantic exploits. That we are human beings, of the body, vulnerable and mortal, and to achieve such formality of action is impossible in cases of love. As Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, "The body is a house of many windows: there we all sit, showing ourselves and crying on the passers-by to come and love us."

<sup>1</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of war*, sixth century BC, translated and adapted by Áine Phillips as *The Principles of love*, 2007

<sup>2</sup> [www.ainephillips.com](http://www.ainephillips.com)

**Michelle Browne is an artist, curator and writer based in Dublin.**

# Coalesce

# Happenstance

*Coalesce* is an ongoing curatorial project of Paul O'Neill's, begun in 2003. According to O'Neill, it has "marked a shift in my own curatorial practice towards a more collective curatorial methodology, achieved by working directly with artists on every aspect of the exhibition's production."

The project has been exhibited in five 'episodes', including one at the Model-Niland Gallery in 2004. The exhibitions are made using a layered approach; each newly involved artist presents a work in response to a particular curatorial premise and many of the works might not have been made without this impetus or context. The current iteration at SMART in Amsterdam has been declared the last, and this version feels warmer and has more depth than the previous shows; the works seem to have become closer over the years. The subtitle was provided by Laurence Weiner in a work entitled *Happenstance: with all due intent*.

Designed as a way to engage/employ the artist in a study of the conventions of exhibition making and the management of viewer behaviour, all aspects of the display have been reconsidered by O'Neill and 'interfered with' by the artists. The 'Background', the gallery walls, is painted and postered over, artwork over artwork. These works range in style and intent from Lothar Gotz's graphic and elegant *Boardroom* painting through Todd Hanson's poppy *Trash* paintings to two of Garrett Phelan's *Interruptions*, his now-familiar 'black hole' spray paintings. In *Coalesce*, Phelan's works seem more like a resigned (if heavy) sigh than the roar of frustration and despair they have seemed elsewhere. Scratched into one of them are the words "ain't no pie in the sky when you die."

For the 'Middleground', the gallery furniture has been redesigned in order to rejig the viewers position and status with regard to the rest of the artworks in the show. Clare Goodwin's seats, made from collapsed cardboard boxes taped together, keep you comfortable while you watch the video works, if a little unnerved. Eduardo Pedilha's sleeping bags embroidered with newspaper headlines (a hokey attempt to beautify and add meaning to a hokey thing) encourage you to lie on the floor while watching B+B's collection of videos for *Coalesce cinema*. Richard Venet sneakily adds plushness to his beautiful hexagonal platforms by covering them in a carpet *exactly* the same colour as the plywood they are made from. They make calm and supportive islands on the floor and are used to display the booklets and audio material which might otherwise be scrappy and unmanageable. In the first room, the shape of the chain of hexagons represents the chemical formula for benzene which, as the artist points out, is found in Xanax. Venet was commissioned by SMART as their curatorial contribution to the project.

The publications, which include an edition of Sarah Pierce's *Metropolitan complex* and a series of comics/ zines by David Blandy, form part of the 'foreground', works which have been 'flown-in' and are presented without having been "adapted or changed by curatorial intervention."<sup>1</sup> In a moment typical of David Blandy's problematic relationship with popular culture, one of his comicbook characters asks, "Is something said by Spiderman less real than something said by Plato?" On my way home I idly considered comparing the two. A copy of Plato's *Republic* was available (in the three-for-two pile) in the airport bookshop; Spiderman wasn't.

Elsewhere Nina Canell makes two elegant and gentle interventions: *Score for two lungs* (with Robin Watkins), in which a sheet of A4 paper casually taped to the wall flutters to a rhythm set by the currents made by air rising as it is heated by a mobile radiator, and *Aktis Capsa*, a pattern made by poking a series of little holes into the gallery wall. Isabel Nolan's wall hanging *Sometimes I imagine my love has died* is painfully beautiful. Freee art Collective present a floral tribute to activism (is it dead?) in the photographic billboard poster *Protest is beautiful*. Mick Wilson's *allahoo*, in which his wobbly voice sings a muddle of Celtic chant and Pakistani Qavali, plays out touchingly into another of the rooms.

Each of the video works, again all part of the 'Foreground', presents a short reflection on identity and acceptance. In Blandy's *What is soul ?* the artist, a young, nerdy, pasty-white boy, mimes lovingly and longingly in his bedroom to a recording of *What is soul?* In *Walking like other people*, Toby Huddleston latches on to a series of strangers on the street, falling into step with them for a while and then letting them move on. In Matt White's *Weightless* we see the artist weeping and laughing exaggeratedly at a window. For Oriana Fox's *C.U.N.T.*, she plays all the roles in a highly coloured mime-along re-presentation of early feminist performances. During Judy Chicago's *What is cunt ?* we see four Orianas dressed as cheerleaders wearing 'C' 'U' 'N' and 'T' tee-shirts. General Idea's *Shut the fuck up* sees the artists proclaim their irritation with the media stereotype of the artist as charlatan, illustrated by a scene from *Batman* in which the Joker wins the town art prize, and their own performance *XXX blue*, made in 1984, where they paint three blue Xs on the gallery wall using stuffed poodles.

The 'XXX' could stand for adult content or kisses or signatures, they suggest.

One of the larger rooms in the space is reminiscent of a community hall or "games room," as O'Neill describes it. This effect is added to by Eduardo Padilha's overpainted discarded netting which covers the windows. This room also houses Jonathan Mosely and Sophie Warren's *Rogue game*, which proposes making up teams to play three games at once, as defined by the floor markings in an indoor sports hall. The tension between the possibilities for an intricate choreography with multiple allegiances and signifiers, on the one hand, and a complete and violent breakdown on the other, seemed to reflect the tensions in the exhibition as a whole.

All of this made me think of Artur Zmijewski's social experiment in his work *Them*, shown at *Documenta 12*, in which four groups with conflicting ideologies are invited to make works illustrating a symbolic centre. It is when the participants are invited to engage with and comment upon the work of the others that the workshops break down and a situation of deep and aggressive conflict develops. I wonder what would happen if Zmijewski were to conduct the same experiment on the artists and curators participating in *Coalesce*.

For the moment they are all playing the beautiful game, until Paul O'Neill blows the whistle.

<sup>1</sup> Paul O'Neill, *Coalesce: Making exhibitions with three principal categories of organisation: the background, the middleground and the foreground*, SMART Papers Coalesce: Happenstance, SMART Project Space, Amsterdam, 2009

**Vaari Claffey is an independent curator working in Dublin.**







*Coalesce: Happenstance*  
2009  
installation shot (detail)  
courtesy SMART

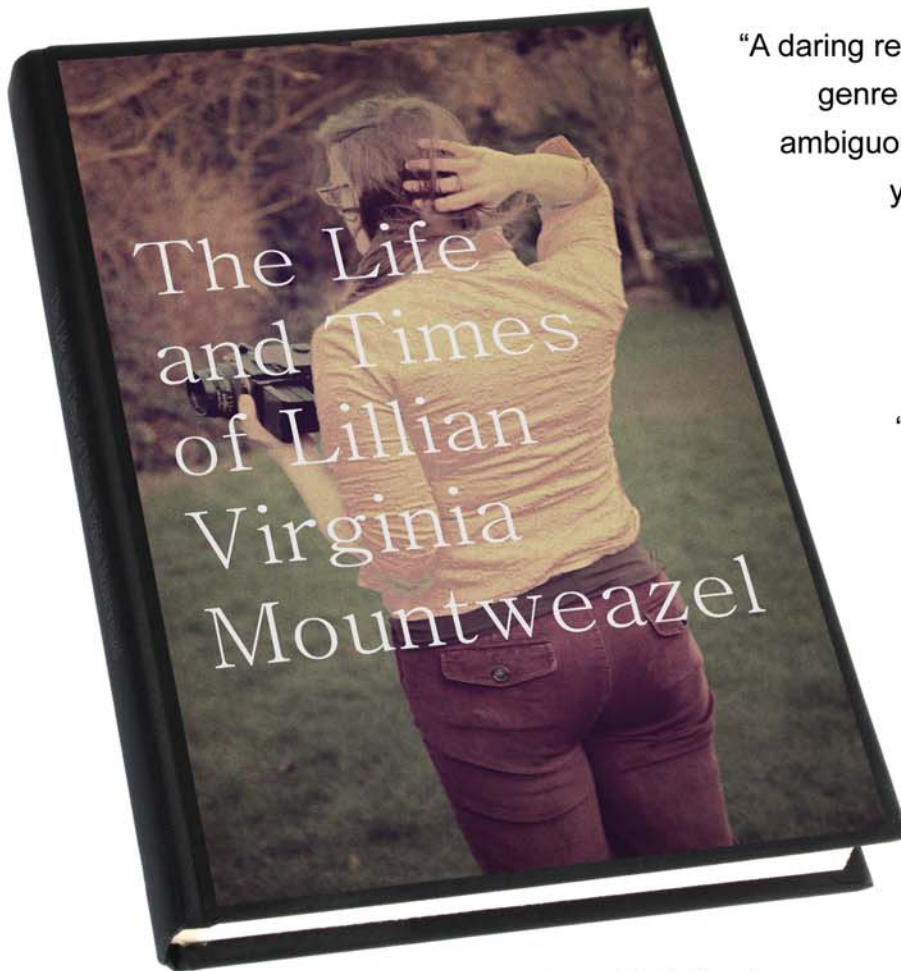


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# JAMES COLEMAN



*Now & Then*, 1981

Image from the Performed Work at the Project Arts Centre, 1981.

On set: Olwen Fouéré and James McHale. Music performed by Roger Doyle.

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## Project Arts Centre

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