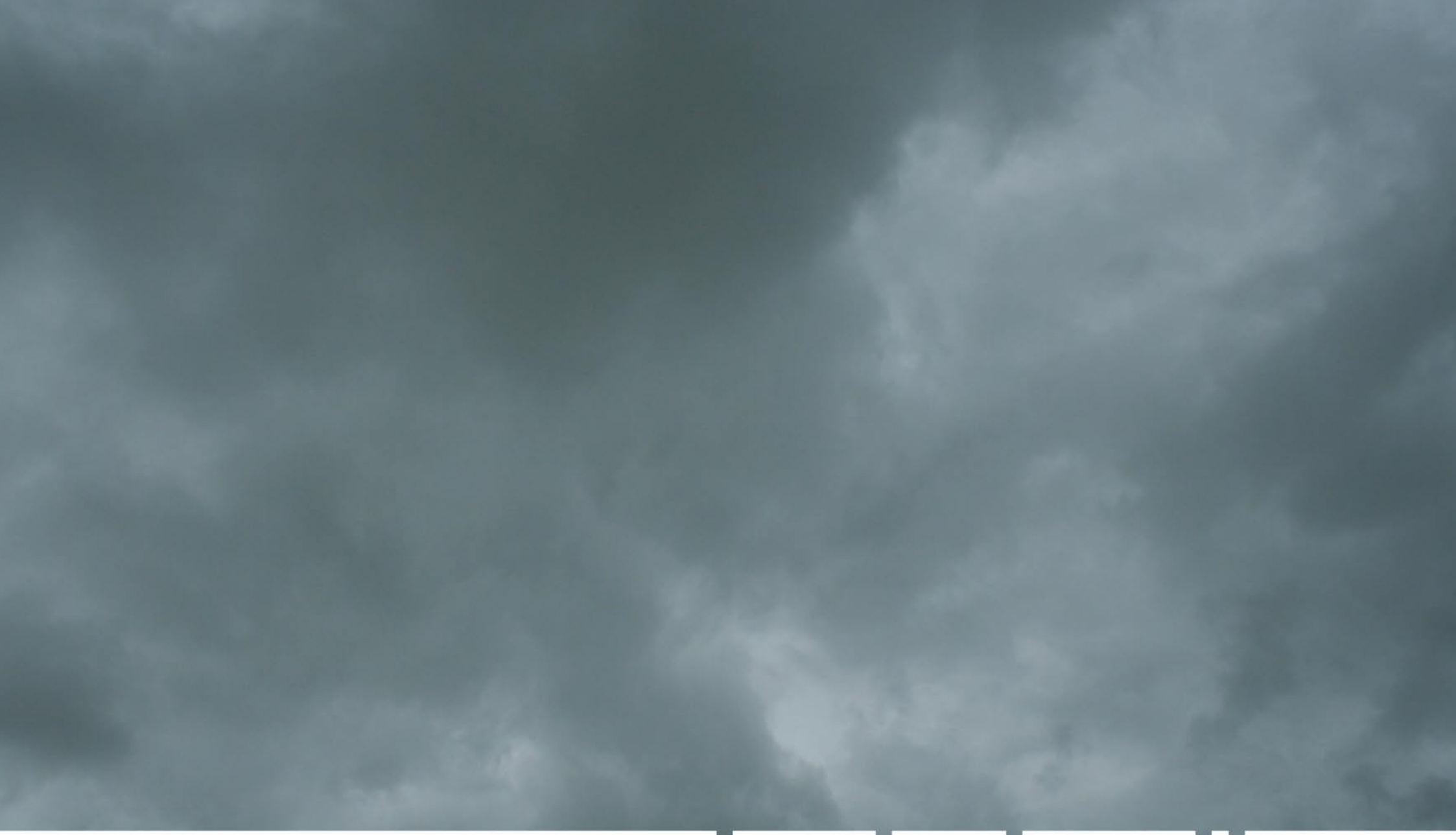


# celestial salt

## the good hatchery

# . project

Celestial Salt is a visual art project that was curated by Ruth E Lyons and Carl Giffney, directors and founders of The Good Hatchery.

Following an open call and evaluation of proposals, six artists were selected to bring an artwork that was originally created in an art context, or for an art audience, and re-present it in the rural environment surrounding The Good Hatchery Studios. The art contexts in which these works were originally shown included museums, college institutions, urban public space and white cube galleries. Celestial Salt took place in December 2009 and January 2010, during a winter period of short hours of sunlight, few people venturing outdoors and harsh and changeable weather conditions - conditions not typically chosen for outdoor exhibition. Teamed with a lack of shelter and the facilities associated with the most rudimentary of institutions, this setting turned out to be a very challenging and very influential one.

Celestial Salt investigated how artworks can function without their original infrastructures of support and the influences that a radical change of context can affect on them. Infrastructure in this sense covered basics like electricity, security and lighting but more importantly it included the label of 'art' and the prescription of an audience through supporting texts, directions or promotion. In doing so it was hoped to allow artworks to exist in a new space, a space where chance punctuated the everyday and where the option of pigeonholing an experience was kept to as minimum as possible. In short we hoped these six artworks to exist, for a time, in a place that they were not intended to be in. This incongruity of site and the challenging conditions that typified them were at the core of Celestial Salt as an investigative project.

Photographic documentation of the installation of six artworks alongside six pieces of writing are compiled within this document. Six writers from various backgrounds were invited to create a new text: two artists, a creative writer, a sociologist, an art theorist and a curator. Out of a desire to retain an authenticity of experience and not to privilege certain audiences we asked each writer not to describe the works, but rather to take inspiration from the artworks, putting no constraints on their creative outcome. From the documentation or fragments of the artworks we hoped that the core idea or idea seed might resonate beyond and become evident in the subsequent texts as an essence of the whole.

. 6 artists
. 6 sites
. 6 writers
. in offaly

# . mark clare

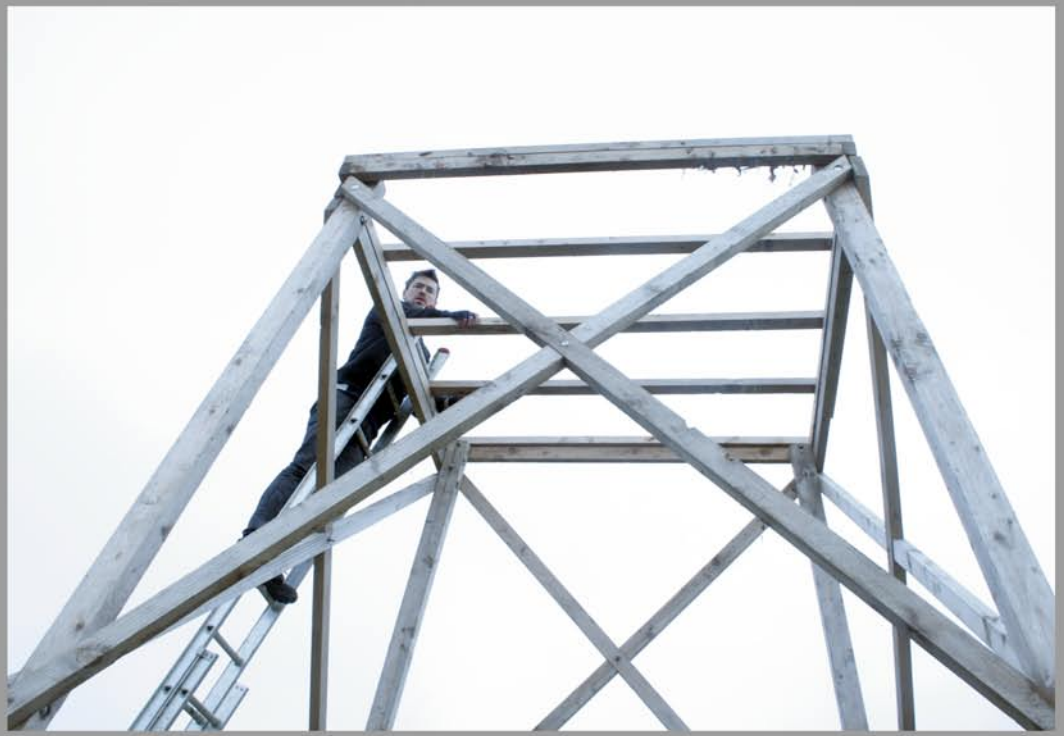
Mark Clare first created and exhibited *Splendid Isolation* in the Irish Museum of Modern Art while on residency there in 2008. It has since been exhibited in Ev+A (Limerick, 2009), City of Ideas (Galway, 2008) and in The Riga Sculpture Biennial (Latvia, 2009).

*Splendid Isolation* is a life size replica of a watch tower used by military and paramilitary groups in Israel to contest land. It now stands amongst cows in an agricultural field that was once the grand entrance lawn of the former Clonearl Estate.

Mark Clare graduated from St. Martins College of Art & Design (1992), London with a BA (Hons) Fine Art Sculpture before completing a MA in Fine Art at the University of Ulster (2004).

Images below (left to right): *Splendid Isolation* in Ev+A, IMMA, City of Ideas, Riga Sculpture Biennial.



**Dial M for Monument: Mark Clare's Splendid Isolation at The Good Hatchery**

**by Claire Feeley**

*Claire Feeley is assistant curator at the Serpentine Gallery, London.*

One of the more perplexing news stories to break in late 2009 reported the theft of a 40kg metal sign that spanned the entrance of former Auschwitz concentration camp. On the night of 18th December, thieves scaled the modest wrought iron gate, unbolted the iconic 'Arbeit Macht Frei' sign, and absconded leaving behind nothing but a stray letter 'i' and an imprint of the sign in the freshly fallen snow. 50 criminal investigators and a sniffer dog were sent to the grounds of the camp to search across the scattered barracks, ruined gas chambers and watchtowers that together constitute the greatest physical reminder of industrialized slaughter in the 20th century. The theft sparked global outrage with the Polish government declaring a state of emergency and Israeli president Shimon Peres demanding the culprits be brought to justice. In Brussels, the European Parliament president Jerry Burzek appealed for 'the sign to be returned', whereas a longtime worker at the camp museum, Mr. Mansfield, exclaimed 'who would have thought that the banner would be stolen?'

Yet stolen it was, and the ensuing uproar only served to confirm the sense that some great taboo had just been broken. The thought of this sign stowed in the back of a hi-ace van or stashed in someone's bed-sit was an affront to the well mannered rituals of remembrance that ensure that objects of our collective history are presented and preserved in their proper place. The 'authentic' memorial, it would appear, must be kept on the original site of its production and the logic of 'x marks the spot' places a silent injunction on anyone insensitive enough to dare disturb it. But what happens when these objects become misplaced, stolen, or simply moved to a different context? Can a monument, a sculpture or even a symbol be transported elsewhere and if so, in what signifying system does it then circulate?

Such questions steered the thinking behind the relocation of Mark Clare's Splendid Isolation (2008), a replica of an Israeli watchtower, to a stretch of cow grazed field in the Irish midlands. The sheer incongruity of approaching a militant structure in a pastoral setting is perhaps the first clue that something here has been taken out of context. The construction of the tower came under the aegis of Celestial Salt; a Good Hatchery programme where pre-existing artworks were 'misplaced' in the environment that surrounds the Daingean sculpture centre.

Indeed, Daingean itself has been in a state of geographical disorientation since the popular seaside town of Dingle was renamed An Daingean, causing post destined for Daingean, Co Offally, to be rerouted to An Daingean, Co Kerry. Consequently, people who had lived in Daingean for generations suddenly found themselves bypassed by the postman (also the subject of a Good Hatchery project in 2009). A similar set of circumstances drives the narrative of Don DeLillo's much celebrated Valparaiso; a play in which the lead character, bound for a business trip in Valparaiso, Indiana, finds himself on his way to Valparaiso, Florida and then Valparaiso, Chile. DeLillo's accidental tourist is not unmindful of his misadventure. He recalls feeling 'intimidated by the systems' that choreograph his movements between metal detector and departure lounge; 'the revving engines...the sense of life support...the oxygen in the oxygen masks...' all of these infrastructures allowed him to reach his assigned seat and he feels compelled to submit to 'the enormous sense of power' all around him. Like the diverted post in Daingean, DeLillo's protagonist is at sea amid the boundless flows of energy and information that together are creating new maps and isolines upon the landscape. Both the Valparaiso and the Daingean affair tacitly signify the manner in which place is increasingly reliant on its connectivity to elsewhere for definition. But what's more, such conceits strike at the very heart of the notion of site specificity and how, in turn, these specificities are subject to a steady erasure by information systems for whom place is nothing more than a fleeting string of characters on a digital display.

Sculpture, too, has its own life support systems - secondary industries that connect and communicate artist to audience. Art's connectivity to elsewhere is incumbent on infrastructures that streamline our access to a work. That an eflux announcement often outstrips the average artist fee in Ireland is fairly indicative of an attitude where 'being seen to be seen' mitigates any actual need to make something. As a title, Splendid Isolation reads as a provocative counter-narrative to the insistence on visibility and audience engagement that today's culture a la policy documents would have us believe is a good idea. Sited in the midlands, beyond the pale of a traditional gallery going community, Clare's sculpture truly is isolated. These same policies imagine the content of public (or at least publicly funded) sculpture to be identical to the audience for it, leading to a 'mirroring effect' whereby sculpture and audience swing dance in mutually affirming circles. Audience-centered or site-specific sculpture of this sort is alternatively described as democratic, communicative or grassroots, depending on whether you are a habitué of Mouffe, Habermas or Marx. Although this breed of 'New Genre Public Art' has fallen out of favour in Ireland's larger cities, it is still very much de rigueur in regional art centers as well as per cent for art commissions where sculptures are expected to perform as local logos. But instead of using artists to channel and monumentalize the attitudes of communities, wouldn't it be better to acknowledge that it's the tension between these attitudes and the propositions put forward by an artwork that makes a project worth pursuing in the first place? Doesn't the notion of incongruity condition our experience of place as much as anything else?

Splendid Isolation was originally produced while Clare was on residency at the Irish Museum of Modern Art and relates to themes of architecture and surveillance. Since then, it has been located at the entrance of a self-storage unit in Galway, in the keep of a thirteenth century castle in Limerick city and adjacent to a public bus stop in Riga. It's currently sited on the erstwhile front lawn of Clonearl estate, the one time epicenter of the Magan's sprawling network of land that stretched a path all the way from Galway to Dublin, and as such, a site through which one could telescope a lot of the bad conscious of the Irish toward land and land ownership. Quiet a long list of destinations for an Israeli watchtower and one that throws up more associative trinkets than a bar brawl throws up loose teeth. So what to make of all these citations? Whereas once sculpture could be said to make 'sense' only as a function of concept, audience and location, we are now witnessing an unprecedented level of cultural collage where seemingly disparate references are brought into unlikely relationships with one another. As early as 1931, film director Sergei Eisenstein published his theory of 'intellectual montage': the film cut as a collision of pictures that produces meaning not contained in any of these pictures on their own. Similarly, Clare 'edits' his sculptures, cutting and pasting in and out of different contexts: surveillance/museum, architecture/urbanism, Israel/land-ownership. In this montage machine, the facticity of the sculpture as a watchtower quoting a specific architectural moment in the Middle East is somehow less important than the conflicts it occasions when it context hops to its next destination.

Nail-house monuments that hunker in our townships like lazy behemoths may soon be assigned to the scrapheap of cultural anachronisms. Staying still strikes a blow against our modern fixation with speed and mobility. A few years after Eisenstein expounded on his idea of 'montage' in film, the urban historian Lewis Mumford was decrying the notion of 'modern monuments' as a contradiction in terms, saying that the idea of a monument was completely at odds with modernity's bottomless appetite for constant change and renewal. If the idea of monumentality was old hat then, think what a generation who grew up with wikipedia and Ryanair would make of it? With the increased mobility of images, bodies, information and commodities, an understanding of place must necessarily incorporate aspects of the virtual and the transitory. For a wiki-drifter, a news story on fortified housing in Israel may well be the first link in a chain that connects up disparate continents and cultural eras, creating communities of interest unbeholden to nation-state boundaries. A firewall poses a greater infringement on freedom of movement than its physical counterpart ever could. In this way, the 'referential collage' that Clare's Splendid Isolation brings into play is very much in keeping with today's cultural logic with its emphasis on mobility over fixity and associative drift over sustained engagement.

So where is the ‘proper place’ for public sculpture? In a way, all sculpture has a perambulatory nature, in so far as there are movements between conceiving a work, finding the cash to produce it, releasing it into the world and finally witnessing it slip out of public memory, fall into decay or be definitively removed. Sometimes this lifecycle is interrupted by surreptitious twists of fate, as happened to the now properly infamous empty plinth in Letna Park, Prague (Clare’s 2009 video work From Left to Right is also a excellent example of ‘misused’ public sculpture). This massive concrete pedestal was once footrest to the world’s largest representation of Josef Stalin towering an impressive 15.5m in height. Shortly after the monument’s unveiling by a rather nervous Otakar Svec in 1955, a process of de-Stalinization was spreading across the eastern bloc, leaving the colossus as an unwelcome guest in Czech’s ensuing revisionist-history party. It was destroyed in 1962 and, brilliantly, by 1996 the remaining plinth had found itself a new lease of life supporting a 10.1m tall temporary statue of the king of pop, Michael Jackson, the bitter irony being that Jackson’s promotional stunt epitomized the precise personality cult that the architects of the original Stalinist monument were condemned for.

A more recent and critical chapter in the history of moving monuments took place in Tallinn in April 2007. The offending statue in this instance was a grave marker to Red Army soldiers who fell during WWII - a sore spot for re-independent Estonians but also a positive signifier of Russian identity for the large numbers of ethnic Russians who remained in Estonia after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Amid political controversy, the newly elected Ansip government relocated the Bronze Soldier and exhumed the buried bodies from a square in the center of the Capital to a military cemetery in the suburbs – literally marginalizing an already precarious community in the city. This mismanagement of symbolic capital resulted in two nights of rioting in the streets of Tallinn and a string of reprisals from the Russian and international community. Closer to home, the flatlands of Daingean have also suffered their share of iconoclasm. When ‘William the Bad’, heir to the Magan dynasty, burnt down his Clonearl estate, the stones of the house were sold off to the Christian Brothers to build the nearby college of Roscrea, as if to ritually cleanse the landscape of so much bad blood and ill-feeling. Symbolic acts of this nature are necessary steps in the ideological reclamation of a place, and likewise, the removal of sculptures and monuments serve as poignant reminders of how quickly cultural and political attitudes can change.

Mark Clare’s sculptural works stake out a space in which to question pertinent issues relating the role of monuments in contemporary culture. Monuments are seldom passive, nor are the social meanings ascribed to them. They commemorate events that should not be forgotten and celebrate heroes that a nation can collectively respect. Central to this project is the ability of a physical object to convey historical or political information, and more often than not, this is achieved through systems of symbols, citation and reference. Clare’s Splendid Isolation layers reference in a way that highlights the unresolved nature of what constitutes an appropriate monument to a past that nevertheless bears heavily upon our political present. Similarly, in other works, whether explicitly examining the performativity of statues in public life (From Left to Right) or simply throwing a spotlight onto the lesser regarded trivialities of common culture (The Politics of Small Things), Clare’s studies seem invested in this emblematic potential of an object. Since the 60’s, artists have consistently worked alongside or against the monumental residue that runs through artworks placed in the public sphere. Claes Oldenburg, for instance, played a decisive role in elaborating an antiheroic approach to monumental sculpture. His proposed ‘Underground Memorial’ for the tomb of President John F Kennedy, had it been completed, would have involved burying a statue-of-liberty sized president head down in the ground, turning the very idea of a memorial literally on its head. Similarly, Clare’s delirious structures reform traditional attitudes towards public sculpture and its relation to place. If the monument is to continue as a valid cultural form (in an age when unilateral opinions are not very much appreciated), then it looks as if turning history on its head might be a good place to start.

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Notes

# .alex conway

*Sound Suit* was originally performed on Thomas Street, a busy thoroughfare in Dublin City centre that runs past the National College of Art and Design. Alex Conway created this work while completing an MA programme in the college.

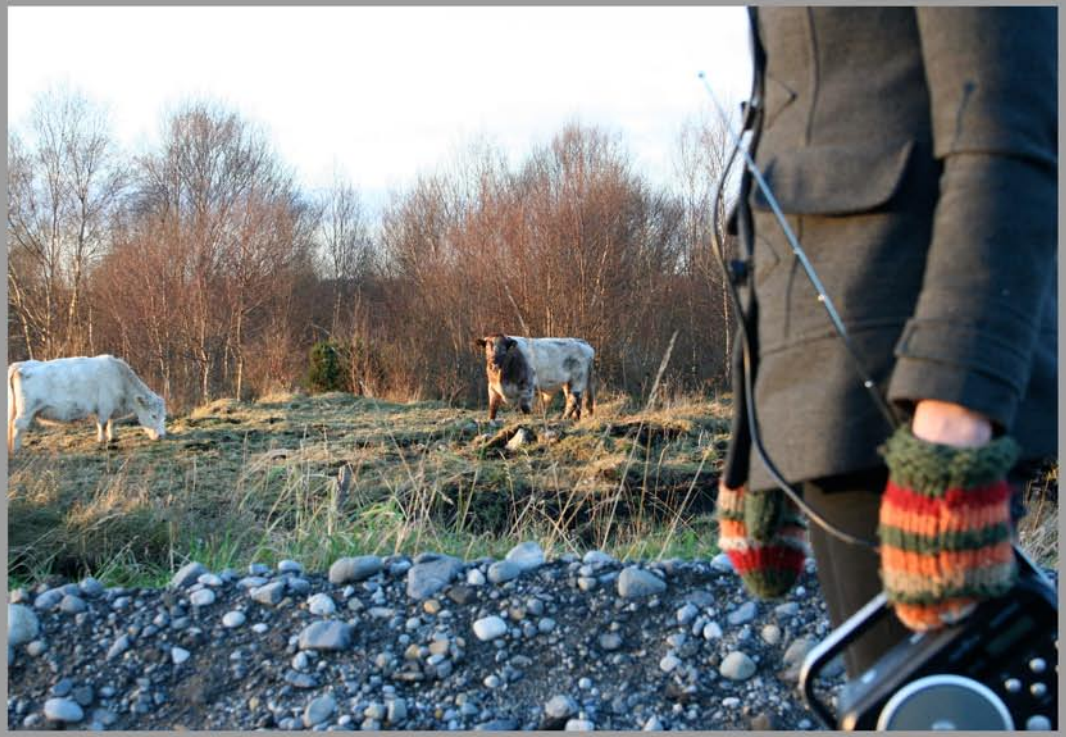
For Celestial Salt, *Sound Suit* was performed at three different locations: firstly in an ash forest in the Clonearl Estate, then on a bog rail track used for transporting turf and finally underneath a concrete overpass on the M6 motorway. During the performances the artist was creating live sound compositions that were generated by physical contact with the surfaces of the environment that surrounded him with the aid of contact mics, mixers, loop stations, tools and pick-ups. Using the array of technology incorporated into the suit Alex Conway both recorded and transmitted sound via speakers and by radio transmitters.

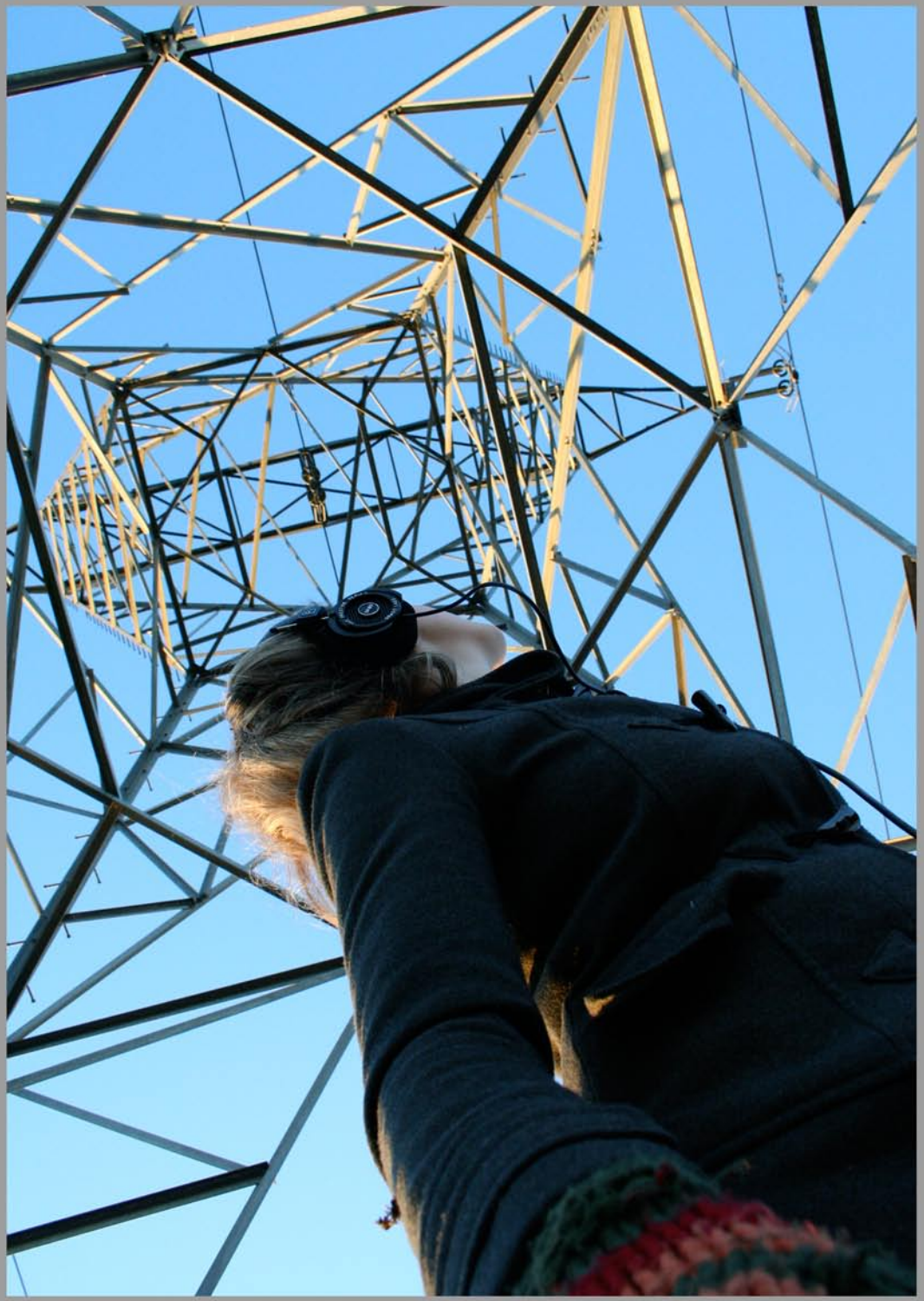
Alex Conway graduated from Limerick College of Art and Design with a BA (Hons) Fine Art Sculpture (2005) before completing an MA in Fine Art at The National College of Art and Design (2008).





BOSS
Synthesizer
SY-1





**Site and Suitability: Reflections on Alex Conway's Sound Suit Performance**

**by Jennifer Fitzgibon**

*Jennifer Fitzgibbon is an art historian based in Dublin. She is currently completing a PhD at Trinity College Dublin, examining the emergence of a mobility culture amongst artists in Ireland in recent decades.*

In a project facilitated by The Good Hatchery in 2009, six artists participated in an outdoor exhibition exploring the relationship between art, context and presentation. Collectively titled Celestial Salt, the work variously addressed issues of site and suitability. Celestial Salt engaged debates about the practice of re-siting art from an urban to rural context and it prompted us to reconsider how art can be viewed outside of the conventions of a rarified white cube. This exhibition also examined how artwork which has undergone multiple installments or adaptations elsewhere retains an element of its original incarnation. Furthermore, this project brought six artists together who had previously exhibited their work in various locations at home and abroad, reflecting the geographic diversity of contemporary artistic practice in Ireland.

Artists now operate within and between multiple locales and it is not unusual for artists to travel as much as their work. As Miwon Kwon suggests, site is now conceived as a series of locations, one place after another. Alex Conway's performance titled Sound Suit echoes Kwon's conception by treating site as a series of mobile and temporary engagements. This performance had a previous incarnation in the urban environs of Dublin's Thomas Street and it was subsequently modified to incorporate three different locations for The Good Hatchery in County Offaly. The performance resembles a journey that begins in a forest, followed by scenes at a motorway overpass and ending at a disused railway track. Conway's relationship with site is inherently mobilized; he performs a series of ritual sampling and testing actions at each place before travelling forth to the next location. This itinerancy between sites is further emphasized by the artist's suit of speakers, microphones, branches and ribbons, which bears a resemblance to a peripatetic nomad or homeless wanderer.

This is a low tech but conceptually sophisticated performance. Chunky radio transmitters strapped to the artist's body with gaffer tape emit their hypnotic rhythm while he performs a series of experimental actions using objects attached to his sound suit. These objects appear to be collected from heaps of human detritus; a plastic spoon, a wire brush and rubber gloves gain a second usage for this cosmic explorer. His actions are precise as he adjusts dials on the sound equipment strapped to his arm and moves his body robotically. He appears to be testing for something, running his instrument up and down a forest branch in single sweeps. Who is the figure in this performance and what type of data is he searching for? Conway uses audio to emphasize his dimensional environment; synthesized sounds rise and fall on the ear and the rhythm beats like a pulse sending waves out into the atmosphere. Sound typically bears a natural connection to its environment, yet at first these sounds do not seem natural. These are not the sounds of nature in their pure form, although they bear an associative resemblance to the ripple of water down a rocky gully or the clipped calls of birds in a morning chorus.

As well a various locations in the performance, there is also a marked sense of narrative transition as the artist travels between sites. This is subtly expressed in the careful editing of footage, with shots of Conway walking towards the viewer and then away, thereby placing our gaze behind the lens. At the second location of the overpass, the artist stands aloft a grassy verge looking down at the road snaking into the horizon. In the next scene, we see him crouching under this imposing concrete structure as traffic zooms past. It is not an elegant manoeuver, his branches getting stuck and scrape against the overhanging beams. Once inside, he scours the underside of the bridge with a wire brush, as if detecting energy levels within the material. The sun, iridescent in the glow of late evening fills the concrete chasm, casting Conway's figure into a dark silhouette. In the final location, the disused bog rail provides an expansive space to end his narrative journey with a closing shot of the artist walking between the tracks where two lines meet in the distance.

The Sound Suit performance prompts us to consider the relationship between site and suitability. Conway's futuristic attire seems completely out of place in a terrain of ubiquitous concrete flyovers and boggy green fields. However, the artist creates a highly specific response to these tactile features within the landscape. Conway creates an audio palette of sounds by recognising the sonic potential of elements such as wood, water and concrete. The artist responds specifically to the locations in and around The Good Hatchery. However as the premise of Celestial Salt suggests, art works can have many incarnations in multiple locations and so the works in this exhibition call for an inherently more fluid conception of site, placement and presentation.

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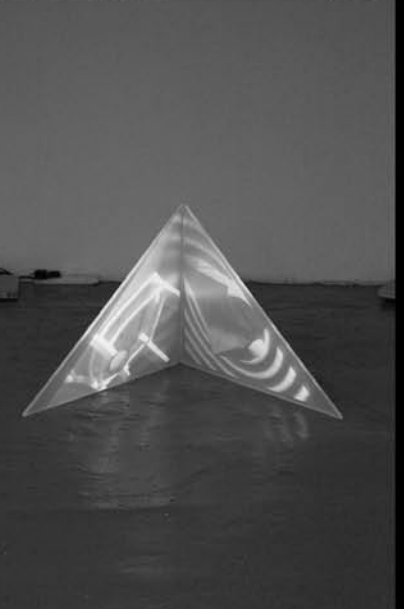
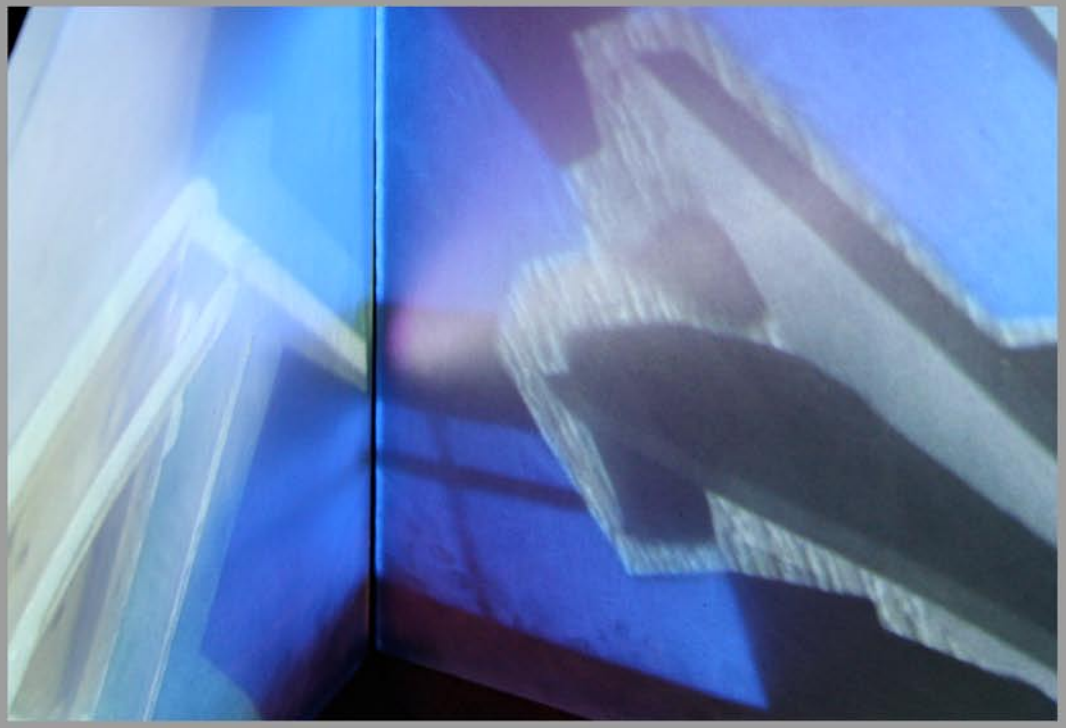
# . anita delaney

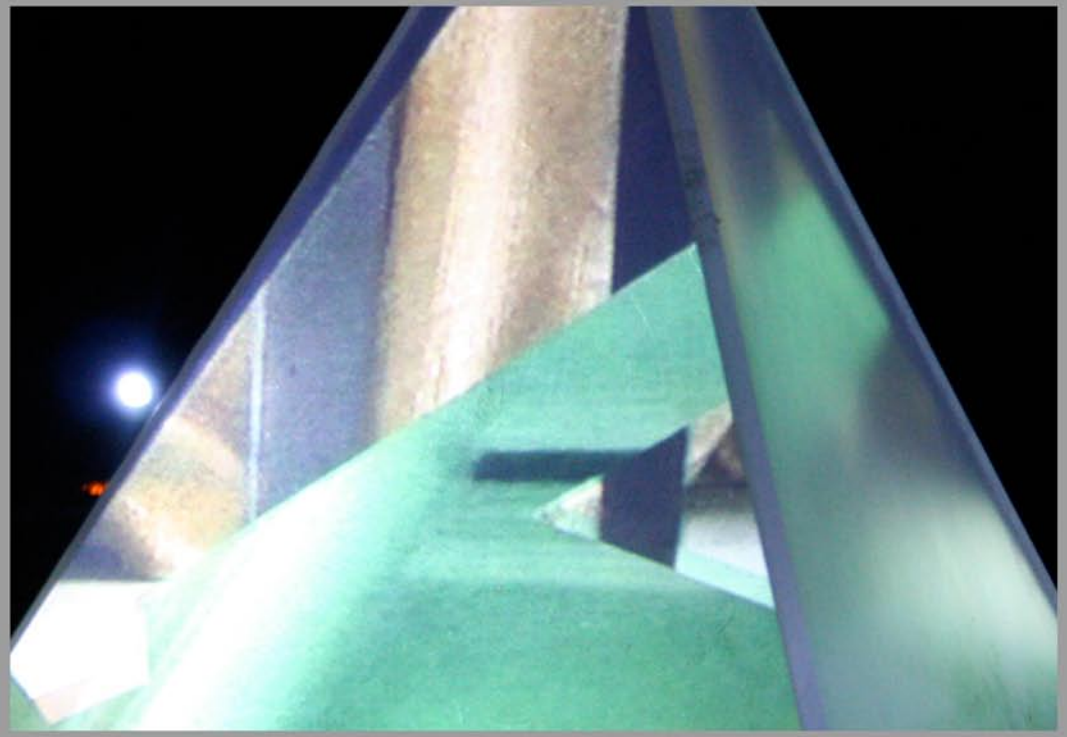
*Pyramidal* was first exhibited in Pallas Contemporary Projects, in Dublin 2009. It took the form of a video installation that consisted of two videos projected onto a sculptural form of frosted perspex that sat at one end of the white gallery space. *Pyramidal* speaks of scientific instruction and experiment.

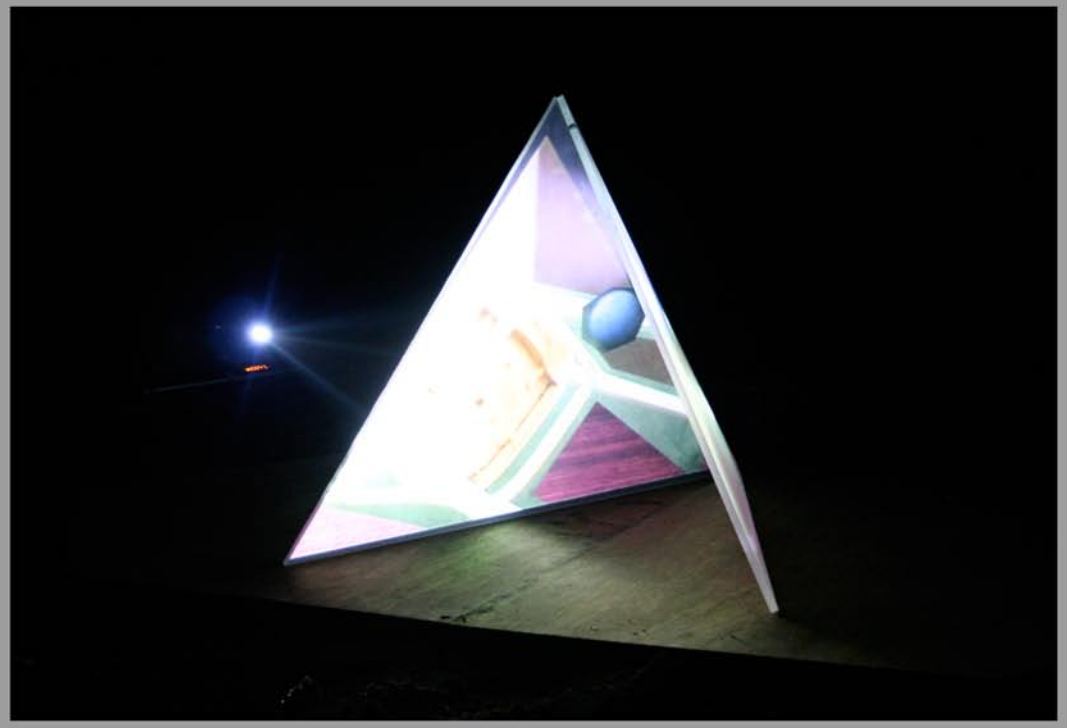


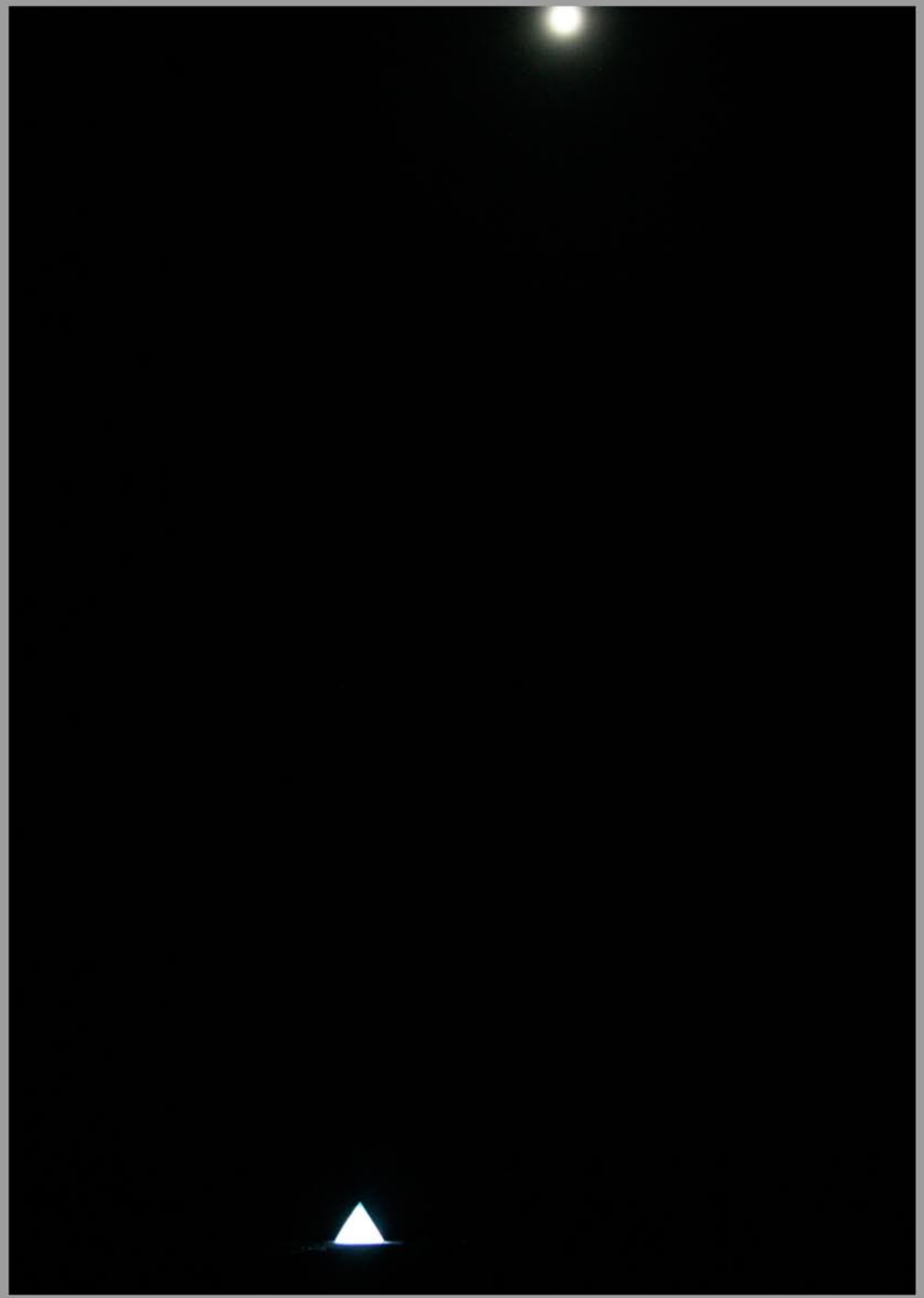
For Celestial Salt, *Pyramidal* was sited on the frozen flats of an industrial roadside bog.The installation took place during the dark hours of a winter night and was powered by a portable generator.

Anita Delaney graduated from IADT with a BA (Hons) in Animation (2005) and Fine Art (2006).









**A place in the sun**

**by Paul Murnaghan**

*Paul Murnaghan is a visual artist and independent curator based in Dublin.*

Wet nosed, dark flat bog. Full moon. Thin dry crack underfoot, seeing breath, the smell of cold air. Vague shapes in the low light. The sound of earth displaced from its chosen shape. A low vibration, erratic bass spreading evenly across the rough shadow. Sound travels well out here, sound that is not of here. I am not here. This is a memory, not mine but others'. We talked in a room in the city centre, for about an hour, about a place and how it may be changed by things put in it. And things, changed by where they are placed.
All this is secondhand, second viewed, rumored fact remembered.

One thing that I am sure of is that there are reasons for the placing of forms in the landscape, many of these are forgotten though their echoes are still present. Some star alignment, eclipse, sacrifice, deity, protection, a foreign thing sacred to early breathers of cold bog air.

You wanted this here because it would not normally be here. Now that it is, what have you done?

Tony drives for a living, long hours, seated, smoking, all escapes are one now. Living on automatic takes a toll. Extended periods of abstracted thought while a separate body reacts to light, sign, and instruction. The truck cab smells of human occupation. The Star, Mars bar looks down on small cars. Taken to the odd amphetamine to pay for Christ's coming, always expensive this time of year. Nearly home. Country roads, too small, too curved, surging and slipping toward a static place. To be still.

Even in his favourite chair, always in the same position, always in front of the T.V. It takes a day before the feeling of motion starts to subside. Driving through Corrie, through football, through the private rooms of willing celebrities. The history Channel, Hitler or Egyptians, Egyptians or Hitler, always the same deal. A well-dressed man communes with the dead while the studio audience applaud. Something catches, a catalyst, jerks a stored image, a light, a form, a pyramid. Recently seen in the wrong place. Small pills and long hours explained it well enough but still, something was there for sure. Close by in a familiar nowhere, covertly viewed from a discreet distance.

The moon was distracting, bright pockmarked circle with a halo of soft gray. Host on high. The bog is flat, low lit and deserted, though not quite. Something is moving in the middle distance, silhouettes, bodies absorbed in some kind of ritual. They are humming, it's hard to hear over the engine. The truck restrains inertia, firmly guiding each cog into place, slowing towards a better view. Window down, lights off. Bodies part, there is an object on the ground, triangular, bright, moving and full of colour. It's hard to perceive but something is caught inside of this object. It morphs and loops, offering sporadic sights from domestic to geometric. It seems as if it has witnessed these things and now turns them over in it's own mind. Curtain, wave, flight, ball, colour, cone, an erratic waltz, a jostle for place in equilateral windows. This thing is alien here, unnatural but somehow precise at this moment in time. Take in the whole view, bright circle, a line, and bright triangle. A child's toy, a puzzle, beacon, message, siren. Who is this for? Is it for me? Tycho Brahe sends his best. One of the forms moves behind the object, a face partially lit from below. It stares straight this way.
Gun the engine. First, second, third, gone.

So he comes home Friday night, plonks his arse in front of the telly as usual, not a word, silence, caveman. I try to make conversation, " How was Belgium, anything exciting, did you get me something nice, y'know, a surprise"?

Usually takes him a few hours to come up out of the mute stage. I suppose it must be the long hours without conversation, lulled into a sort of vegetative state by the repetition of the engine. Actually, the washing machine can be a little like that sometimes, kind of hypnotic, repetitious, comforting. I'll even light a fag and sit with my eyes closed on the powdered floor of the warm utility room.
Quite pleasant really.

Anyway, next day he's back to his old self. I wake to the smell of bacon frying, recent shower and too much deodorant. It's the weekend, a breather between work and more work, words are back on, he hugs me as soon as I enter the kitchen, and he even fried for two. After the usual catch-up he falls silent again, an ominous sign. He looks up with an odd expression on his face. Stares at me intently as if he doesn't even know me. I'm waiting for it, something major, next bloody thing to bring the world down on us. But then his face visibly softens, lifts mug, slurps tea, toast chaser and swallow.

"I think we should go to Cairo".

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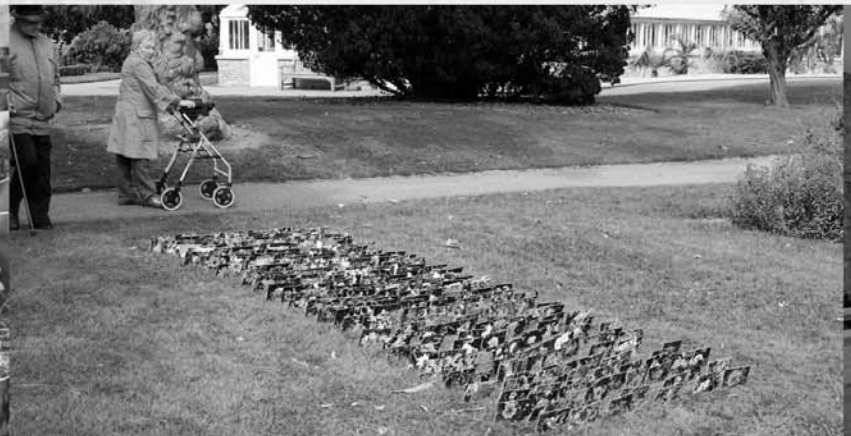
# . doreen kennedy

*Flower Bed* was originally created for Sculpture in Context (2009), an annual outdoor summer exhibition that took place in Dublin's Botanic Gardens.

*Flower Bed* is an artificial flower bed, made of glossy photographs of flowers in full bloom that can be found growing in the Botanic Gardens. For Celestial Salt, the work was sited in the centre of Daingean town. On an island of grass central to this small rural town, the flower bed remained untouched for five weeks right through the coldest and bleakest weather of the winter. Its location is now unknown.

Doreen Kennedy studied Editorial Photography at the International Centre of Photography, New York, graduating in 2005.


STOP


FIRE STATION

**The Bear**

**by Luke Sheehan**

*Luke Sheehan is a writer who lives in Dublin.*

In the country near Kilclonfert, by the estate of the Magans of Clonearl, Muriel Kearney was born; by her eighteenth year she was working in her uncle's house, pulling at the udders of cows and goats in the morning and combing the manes of her uncle's horses in the evening. The white of her knuckles was as delicate as the pure skin of her knees and calves, which were themselves whiter than the milk that sprayed from the beast above her into the pail held clutched between her legs. Married and unmarried men selected routes that would enable them to glance at her through the gates of the house. It was sometimes mentioned that the horses would skitter and butt each other, just to be the first to be combed by her clean white hands. It was reported that she had such a taste and stomach for drink that she could stay in the shebeen for as long as any man, shoving back the water jug when it was proferred her and rocking on her stool so gamely that often the thing was balanced, for much of the evening, on just one leg. She would laugh, with a straight-backed laugh, when the shebeen-keeper rapped the wood at closingtime, and demand that he pour out a last round of drinks for all present. Even if the man was obdurate as the timber in his snug, he would soften quick if she only leaned in close and asked him to put a last brick of turf on the fire, for wasn't it terrible cold out, and hadn't she a long walk home ahead of her?

This perfect creature, pursued so often and in so many ways, always managed to evade her suitors. In time so much bitterness was laid between friends on her account that some men took to looking to their toes and tilting back their caps across their eyes as she came past, making private signs to ward away the bad luck that she was supposed to carry. They came to avoid making glances at her delicate eyes and tapered feet. Then, in the spring of 1871, she wed a bachelor from Cappanrush whose land and livestock were three towns over the county border. Forty-nine summers old, he was considered a man not to be trifled with: key to his reputation was the notoriety he retained from having killed, with a turf shovel at the age of 19, an army deserter from Devonshire who had broken into the family cottage and brandished a knife at the young man's enfeebled and bedridden grandmother, a pious lady not long recovered from a spell of bronchitis. At the wedding feast in Philipstown he sat, his work-swollen hands in his lap, pressed into the seat of an old wicker chair with his cup and plate on a round, unsteady table made from an old forge-door. It was on a bright and cool Sunday morning: his head, exposed and combed, went beetroot with joy as his new bride whispered in his ears, tugged at his forelocks and fat grey muttonchops, filled the pipe which had been gifted him that day and brought him unceasing refills of porter and whiskey.

His name was Patrick Colgan. His parent's names were Jarlath Colgan and Magdalene Waterman, both of whom were from Croghan.

Together Patrick and Muriel had four children: Conall, Aodhán, Brenda and Barry. The Eldest, Conall, was twenty-four when his father died. His younger brother Aodhán, who sought out quarrels with other men incessantly, was twenty-one. In faction fights, in duels with rivals for girls he never bothered to pursue, with his brothers in the back yard, Aodhán could be seen, roaring and shoving. In the same square where his proud father had sat on the morning of his marriage to Muriel Kearney, Aodhán could be found any day of the week, brawling and nose-breaking, arm-twisting, butting and head-squeezing every chance he got. When he was not advancing on another opponent, Aodhán was hunting with horses, shooting at the flickering shapes of partridges and pigeons in the woods on Croghan hill or poaching inside the demesne beneath a full moon, tramping about with hidden snares and lamps, one or two loyal friends and a lurcher named Setanta. Other Sundays found him setting hares to run from hounds, or badgers and dogs to fighting with each other.

One evening in Philipstown Aodhán walked up to his brother Conall in the street and hit him a belt in the face. The two fell to the ground, smashing at each other with all the strength they could muster. The cause of it was Conall's refusal to apologise for killing with an axe-handle Aodhán's lurcher Setanta, which had bitten, outside the gate of their house on a warm evening in March, a girl named Josephine Mitchell whom Conall had been walking out with. With no living father to restore the peace, Conall and Aodhán carried on their war until Conall left on a boat from Kingstown to join with Queen Victoria's gallant fighting men: he died with sand in his eyes and a rifle in his hands in the battle of Maiwand, and Aodhán left Ireland to become a touring prize fighter in England and Wales. It was Barry Colgan that remained to inherit the farm in Cappanrush. Aodhán, tall and curly-headed, was watched by eager crowds of Irishmen and women who travelled to see him fight: before the roaring of old and young he beat down barrel-shaped miners from the valley collieries, Yorkshire farmer's sons and ponytailed sailors from the Isle of Man with arms and backs like piles of rope.

With the money he gained from his prizefighting Aodhán returned to Ireland and bought a sizeable cottage with two acres of land near Croghan Hill. He married a woman named Aoife Nolan, and with her had five daughters and one son, Tiernan. Aodhán, his knuckles fused together and hands chronically painful from repeated injuries, was unable to work his land and drifted into a life of drunken dissolution and minor mischief around the area. He was remembered with some fondness, however, for his pugilistic victories and his manifest pride in his offspring, all of whom were wed in as much style as the diminishing family fortunes would allow. Tiernan Colgan married a girl from Meath named Graínne Power, and remained in Offaly, dying at the age of fifty-five from gangrene after being shot while poaching around Clonearl. Tiernan's son Patrick, who married a local woman named Ruth Malone, fought and died for an Irish republic, never living to see the hair on the head of his only son Bernard, who would later become a barowner, a breeder of greyhounds and a much loved TD in four Fianna Faíl governments. Bernard Colgan was known to close friends, family and acquaintances alike as 'Ber,' or 'The Bear.' With his wife Brenda, Bear Colgan bought a bar in Daingean, the former Philipstown. While maintaining it and beginning his political career, he brought forth three sons: Aodhán, the eldest, who would become an Offaly County Councillor; Brendan Junior, who would become the 12th Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland, and Cormac, who was known to all and sundry as the 'Cub.'

*

The day of the meet the Cub was up before his only boy. The Cub watched the boy, waiting for enough feeling to return to his feet to allow him to strike: the boy, Michael, was dredging the fabric of his duvet with his tongue and lower lip, dreaming, as like as not, about that Hispanic hooer from Desperate Housewives. A pellet of snot like a contact lens was frozen on the end of his nose; despite this he was enjoying a basic form of happiness. Then he felt his father's hardshelled boot aggress his legs, and the terrific roar of:

– Up!

And then the boy was up, helping the Cub Colgan into his corset. The Cub had worn it since being shot in the belly with a low-calibre shotgun by a Bed and Breakfast owner in Clare. It was understandable, in a way: she was a nervous woman, and she had just mistaken him for a traveller after he had wandered into her kitchen looking for ice-cubes or a bag of frozen peas to make a press for his two black eyes. The shiners had been gifted him by a Romanian hairdresser's boyfriend in the course of a stand-off at a wedding that he and the boy had drunkenly gate-crashed that evening in Spanish Point. "I'm so sorry!" She had said as the Cub whinged on the floor. "It's my husband's! I didn't mean for it to go off!" The woman had been generously paid and it never made the papers – but now his midriff was vulnerable to cold and to injury.

The window that illumined his impressive flanks, which were almost maternal, even with their roundness constrained by the corset, was open. When the boy had cinched his father's ropes and tied the little pink string, the Cub went over to the source of the fresh air that caressed him. The day was intruding in bright refreshing beams upon the cover of mist that swathed the fields around Croghan Hill.

– Fuck off, said the Cub to the entire world.
The coursing meet was over by the Wood of O: he, the Cub, had not got up himself to help flush out the hares, essential work to the success of the meet, and each and every other man, with or without dogs, would know it. It would be no surprise; the Cub was not, after all, shy about his responsibilities.
He walked right up to them and told them to fuck off.
He would blame it on the lad, who was not only lazy but known to be lazy.

The Cub and the boy, Michael, moved about downstairs and put their waterproof things on, the jackets and their wellies and caps: woollen flat for father and baseball for boy. The hallway smelt of a damp dog's pelt. The Cub checked his hair in the mirror and lickspittled his forelock back into place, then went to the hiding hole in the wall behind the fusebox and, for no reason at all, took out his gun and checked each of the barrels. He fingered the other hiding hole and took out a green cartridge.

He went across the yard then, with dog-noises shuttling everywhere, while the boy ate cereal or checked his wee fecking phone for the text messages, or whatever he did. Then the Cub was before his dogs, and he said: "O my lads! Today is your day." The Cub had six dogs: he would bring two; the grey-brown, Tonto, and the grey-black, Ranger. The Cub had the cartridge in his hand. It was rolling in his fingers. He penetrated the sky with an angry look, to warn away the gathering clouds from his meet... only two or three wee rainbags were there, on the north end of the yonder, but they could well heel about and soak the meet, alright. They looked not to have come from the west: English clouds, then. Michael appeared and sat on the front step. "Get the beasts in the vehicle, will you?" said Cub. Then the boy and the beasts were in the van; the Cub started the engine, stopped it, heaved out, walked into the house, re-emerged with a bag, opened the boot, put the bag in it and thumped it shut. Inside the car the boy Michael's cap – of course – was pulled down like a clown's to hide his eyes: he was trying to sleep; he was not getting into the spirit; he was a treacherous pup. The Cub wheeled about and slapped one of the dogs, and on the way back clipped the boy around the ear.
– Hey, you. Wake up and roll us one.
The boy picked his nose then rolled a cigarette as slowly as he could.
The roads and the boreens swooped by the vehicle: the auld roads.
A scorch-faced, half-drunken man in an unspooling red jumper was walking by them: his upper body moved in a way that was disconnected from his legs, which seemed to totter and clatter like a broken puppet's. The Cub waved, and the man upraised a blackthorn and waved it in greeting at the same time.
The boy Michael said the man's name, and so did the Cub.
– Donal Cassidy.
– Donal Cassidy.
Then:
– Why do you hate him again?
The boy Michael handed the cigarette lit to the Cub, and began to roll his own.
–He owes me a sum of money he could well give back to me this day, but that's the only excuse I've got. I hated him before, and I'll tell you: there's not only one reason for it. He's a trick-of-the-loop, a failed farmer, a known sinner and a terrible alcoholic.

The white soft hair on the back of Cassidy's head was the object of the last statement. The head diminished, in the rearview, to pixie-sized, and was gone. Michael knew Cassidy's son and always avoided him – he was the sort of cunt to invite you for a drink and then torment you for two hours in front of his friends. Cassidy Senior, meanwhile, always moved about with a huge effort, showing his pain to the world outside. This made him weak in the eyes of many of his countrymen, most of whom concealed their pain as a matter of pride.

Since being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer he had begun to mope about drinking twice as much, lapping up all sympathy that was proffered him; despite all that, he could not face his death with equanimity. He told the company in every bar that he was "Sure he would pull through." The Cub had no need to pity the rickety-legged fool; he saw him as a time waster.

– Is he going to pull through then? said the boy Michael obediently.
– He will not pull through, and that's the truth, said the Cub.

The boy felt a stab of wonder for that contempt. The Cub said nothing, and bled the rolly of all life by his needful sucking as the van gunned on, the silvery grey-brown dogs yap-yapping, jawing at each other's heads, peering about with indecent expectation and shredding a bit of carpet in the back.
– Already they can smell the fucking hares.
The hares. What were they all about? They were on the boy Michael's mind as they pulled up at the gate of the field on the south tip of the Wood of O. A new cottage had been built by the field: an American or something was talking to an Asiatic woman in the front room of the house; the man was there with his hands outflung, as if to say, "Hey, be reasonable, baby." The woman was there with her arms a-flailing as if to say, "No fucking way, mister." The Asian bird was well hot, a cute wee angry fissóg on her under the locks of jet-black hair. The Cub looked over the window and saw this sight, and the boy waited, expecting a remark, but it did not come. They got out the dogs and muzzled them, and put the leads on. They took the bag of spare slips and muzzles from the boot as well, and a plastic carrier with a two-litre bottle of poitín. Then the Cub took out a longer bag and slung it on his shoulder: his gun-bag.
– What's the plan for that? The boy Michael said quietly.
The Cub slapped his forehead.
– Second fuck up of de day! I've no feckin' cash on me. I've to pay Martin Malone for a draw of pedigree semen that he gave me last month. I brought the homebrew for him, here, but no fucking cash. Have you any spondoolicks on you?
The boy dug: 25 euro.

They crossed the damp rise of the brown, greenish field and were caught up right away in a conversation with Martin Malone, who had been sitting on a rock, and his son Alan. Cub and Martin talked about hares, dogs, money and poitín, and Michael and Alan, falling behind, talked of ecstasy tablets. As they walked Michael passed the Cub 25 euros, which the Cub passed to Martin, along with the plastic bag with the Poitín inside it. "Between hoppin' and trottin'," said the Cub to Martin,
– I forgot to get your money. But here's half.
– No bother, Cormac, said Martin.
Behind them Alan said, to Michael, "The pills would be down in the car. You can get them yourself, Mick, when we're down there."
– How many hares? said the Cub to Martin.
– There's a good lot penned in, I don't know. You made no friends for yourself this morning, Cub, said Martin. Then: "Have you heard about the spoilers?
– What spoilers now? I don't know what that is, Man.
– What about you, young Cub?
– No, said the boy Michael.
– Wait'll you see! said Alan.

They were rising up again on the same hill, on the far side of the hedge, towards the treeline: after the treeline was the slope down to the coursing spot. They could hear a commotion: as commotions went, thought Michael, it sounded promising. He might get a bit of a laugh out of this sorry shitehorse day. They came to the crest and looked down, and what they saw caused the Cub to say, "Arrah, Fuck off," and the boy to shout, "Hoo-hoo!" and give a little lep, and the two dogs to near garrot themselves on the leads. There were four or five vans down there, with dogs in them going all psycho, their energies leaping like invisible beams of hate to the triangle-shaped pen with the hares inside. Between these focal points were the other coursing men. The usual suspects were there, and all seemed in place: what was odd was a few hundred metres away. Across the way on the far side of a hedge, looking ready for a bust-up, was a twelve-strong clutch of crusties: dreadlocks, crazy looking tie-dyed hoodies, woollen hats. They had reflective vests, and a small pile of equipment.

Some of the crew of coursers were wearing dark jackets and hats. Some had reflective gear on, and some carried walkie-talkies, which were crackle-popping out across the hills: Aodhán, the Cub's older brother, had his back turned – not uncoincidentally – from his approaching sibling, and was talking into his walkie to someone, while the other men, including English Pat, the chief beater, had seen the Cub and were waving and halooing him to get down quick. The voices of the little group popped out of the walkie that Martin was carrying. In the mess of the crackle Michael heard a man say, "Little Cub is with him."

–What the fuck is disruptin' our meet? said the Cub.

–Saboteurs, said Martin.

–Are they from England? Said the boy Michael.

–Some may be from England. I think one is German. Seamus doesn't want to get started until they piss off. But Aodhán doesn't want him to call the guards.

No surprise there, then. Michael turned to his father. The Cub was saying nothing, but his face had darkened visibly. He was managing the rumps in the land as well as he could: the corset made it seem like he was injured in the back. Seamus Barrett, who was meant to be judging the meet, had a face equally dark as the Cub's as he came near.

– Where were you Cub?

– Mister Barrett, said huff-puffing Cub.

– The day is nearly fecked with these hippies chasing after the beaters and you were what, humping the duvet?

– It was the boy humping the duvet, and that's the truth, said Cub.

There was audible swearing. Aodhán turned around and greeted his brother by frowning at him hatefully. As they neared the vans the Cub said, "Aodhán, what in the name of fuck is disrupting our meetin'?"

– John, said Aodhán into his handset, staring at the Cub while he spoke. Come in John, will you come and talk with us instead. The Cub is here.

Across the way John Spollen, wearing a politician's look of reason and concern intermixed, was negotiating with the hippies, pointing like a traffic warden the black wand of his walkie hither and thither, to all points of the compass, Tullamore and Carraroe and the far shores of Lough Neagh – doing everything, in other words, to get the eco-warriers to feck the fuck off. There had been some sort of confrontation already; everyone was on edge.

"Will you call the Taoiseach and get him down, Cub?" said some fool, and the company laughed automatically.

Then the men were ganged together by the madly screeching pups, heads all close as in a rugby scrum, discussing what to do. Michael moved near the yellow car, which was Martin Malone's. Alan Malone, standing behind his father, lifted his face up and nodded; the boy Michael went in under the dashboard and rooted out the pills. The little baggie was full of large white tablets, powdery looking and fresh. The dash was loaded with a jumble of eccentric medication, empty tobacco pouches, a few issues of the Sacred Heart Messenger and a copy of the Parish Newsletter. Malone had had a religious relapse since his wife left him. Michael began to make a wee joint.

*

After graduating in Art History from Berkeley, Elizabeth Chang stopped being a vegan and became a vegetarian. There was just so much good stuff to eat in the world, after all, and as she was hoping to find work in Paris with Tim, she wanted at least to be able to try the cheese. Tim was from Ireland. Elizabeth's mom did not approve of him, but seeing as after thirty years in the United States she could neither read nor write in English nor drive a car, it was sometimes hard to take her totally seriously. When Elizabeth had informed her mom that she and Tim would be renting a place near his family in Ireland after the New Year she freaked out yet again and asked if that was the place with all the terrorists.

Tim was the most patient guy ever. But now, at the end of their first week in Ireland, they were having their first major fight. Tim had come back from the store with the papers and told her that there was a group of guys across the hill that were planning to spend the afternoon getting dogs to chase after poor little hares. He didn't like it either, he kept saying, but it was the worst idea to get involved in local politics if you wanted to settle down.

– But we're going to Paris! We're not settling down!

– Well, I might want to come back here. Do you want some coffee? I got you coffee.

Elizabeth checked out this "Coursing" thing on the Internet while Tim made breakfast. It was weird: even in the greyhound racing at the stadium they made the dogs run after little motorized hares. They must have bred them to hate the poor things, just like the dogs in South Africa that were trained to attack defenceless black people. What was it about men and their dogs? It was like some caveman-pact between them: especially men from the countryside, they always had scary dogs. What about the hares? She looked at a page run by an Irish hare-conservation society. There was a video of an abandoned leveret – its mother perhaps thrown to the dogs – being reared by the kind hands of an unknown Irishwoman.

"Oh my god," said Elizabeth out loud. "This one is being fed with a bottle. I can't stand it!"

– What's that? said Tim, as the steam from frying meat filled up the kitchen.

Elizabeth scrolled down the page:

"The Irish hare, Lepus timidus hibernicus, possesses a unique morphology, ecology and behaviour... these seem to be the result of genetic adaption over a period of 30,000 to 60,000 years, from before the end of the last ice age... Irish hares exist as local populations, some of which have now become extinct... their persecution for sport has had a major impact."

She read on. There seemed to be two completely different species of hares in Ireland. Weird.

"After being introduced by English landowners in the 19th century, the brown hare, Lepus europaeus, has survived in local populations in the North of the country, but in such small numbers as to make them extremely rare. There is no evidence to suggest that brown hares are a threat to the habitat of Irish hares, or that they interbreed."

*

– We should call Sergeant Cartan, Jim Cartan, down in Daingean, said Cartan's cousin, Sean.

– We should call Lieutenant Foley in Tullamore, said Padraig Philips.

– We should just get on with it! said English Pat.

– Maybe, said Alan Whyte, whose family had never run anything more important than a chipper, We should call the Taoiseach, ha lads?

With Aodhán in proximity, no-one laughed. The Cub pulled Aodhán aside. "Who owns the land?" asked Cub.

– Donal Cassidy owns it, said Aodhán.

– Who's calling him?

– John is calling him now, or he's meant to be doing it.

– John is chatting up them hippie young ones, said the Cub.

– Well you can't call him, boy. He's no friend of yours.

– I waved at him this morning. Didn't he wave back?

– I don't know if he did. I wasn't there.

The Cub raised his voice.

– Is there no-one you can call?

– I'll call that crowd a shower of shites. There'll be guards here at some point, anyway. You'd better not be waving that bloody gun around when they get here. What possessed you to bring that down?

– I want to run around to the Woods after, with de dogs. Catch a pigeon.

– You'll catch a fecking fine, most likely, said Aodhán, and spat.

In his right hand pocket, the Cub's fingers gripped the cartridge hard.

*

The boy Michael's right hand was rubbed, grimed, chipped at the nail, pinkish-red around the fingerjoints and fingertips, and brushed with engine oil across the knuckle of the thumb. The skin was puffy and white on the back of the hand, like part of a boiled hen. It had been chewed at lovingly by dogs, hooked painfully on barbed wire, splintered by raw wood from posts and pallets, and sliced accidentally by steak knives used for cutting blocks of hashish. It had seen more interference, his hand, than Michael's own cock, at which it clutched at in the mornings while the Hispanic one from Desperate Housewives bent over and upped her plush skirt, pressing herself to Michael in the only place she ever would: in Michael's mind.

Now Michael was awake, but stoned as a ferret, and his hand was resting on the dashboard of Martin Malone's car. Loose raindrops skipped on the windshield.

His own hand he looked at, while a small joint fumed in the crook of the index finger, which was deformed to a shape and colour like the fag-rest in an old pub ashtay. There was no bother him skinning up in the car: Michael liked Martin Malone and Malone liked Michael. There was more than an understanding between them: there was mutual respect of the sort that Michael did not find with the Cub, for the Cub respected not one single living member of his own species. Michael rattled through Malone's dashboard and found ingredients for another smoke, and a strange white pack of tablets: over-the-counter, they were. Xanax, it said. "Fucking weird," said the boy. The boy Michael had always tried to show a good and decent head to Malone the elder. He had felt double guilt over the whole mad night in the woods with Margaret, Martin's daughter, when Sam Bannon had chased her with a potato, pretending that he wanted to shove it in her gee. They had all been smoking skunk and Michael, though he had always liked Margaret and would have gladly sprung from the car to clock Sam Bannon with a branch, was unable to do anything more than lift his right eyelid. Margaret hadn't really minded, on the night, and someone else who fancied her had given Sam Bannon a scotch with a hurl and forced him to bite off half the spud, but afterwards down the pub everyone called Margaret things like "Twisty fries", and she ran out of patience with their crowd and wouldn't come out anymore when they called her.

The more he thought about that the more pissed off he got: Margaret Malone was a good woman, really, too good for Offaly; she was runner-up in the young scientist competition two years in row, got eleven As in her Leaving and still she had no high opinion of herself, she could drink seven shots of tequila and still beat her own brothers at arm-wrestling after.

She was good for a laugh, like.

Michael pulled out his phone and dialed Kieran, his friend. He told Kieran he was at the meet, that he had a few pills handy and that he was in Malone's car while the men wound up the business with the hippies.

– No sign of a spare spud there. Ha? said Kieran.

– No sign.

– 'Tis a pity. I'm hungry.

– Do you know what Xanax is? There's a rake of it here.

– I think it is a downer, like. It calms you down.

– There's another bag. Lorezepam.

– He's getting them on the sly, I'd say, said Kieran laughing.

The boy Michael phoned Margaret Malone. There was no answer. "Fuck this," he said, and got out of the car. The Cub was already coming towards him, the dogs cracking down on each other's muzzles, carrying his gun bag at his side. The Cub took the joint from the boy's fingers and drained from it what was left. Michael asked what was up.

– There's half of them want to call the Guards. There's Aodhán that wants to herd the hippies off with threats, but they are hiding on a field that's Donal Cassidy's. And only English Pat that's running the card wants to get crackin'. The dogs will be ragin'.

– The dogs are ragin' alright.

The dogs were contorting their very souls trying to get free of leash and muzzle and fly to the hare pen.

– They can smell the hares, said Cub for the somethingth time that day.

The Cub threw down the roach and went back up to the Van. He threw the gun-bag in the front seat and put the dogs into the back. From below the boy Michael watched his father grunting about at the top of the hill: he was certain someone else would appear there soon, if not the Guards, then some other tribe of interfering fuckers.

The Cub had best not be waving a gun about when they arrived.

But the hares: was nobody keeping an eye on them?

*

– We are not here to disrupt your activities, said the tall German hippy, blond dreadlocks swinging by his waist. We only wish to ensure the welfare of the hares.

– Can you guarantee that the dogs will be muzzled? said a woman from Dublin.

– 'Dis is an illegal meetin', said a man from Tullamore who was there for the craíc and probably cared as much for the happiness of hares as he did for the hourly fluctuations in mood enjoyed by his mother in law.

– Let me assure you this is an authorised meet, lied John Spollen, smiling and laughing.

– But can you guarantee that the dogs will be muzzled? said the woman from Dublin again.

– Absolutely, said John Spollen, they will all be well muzzled.

*

Aodhán watched John Spollen assuage the crusties. His thoughts turned to the boy Michael; he should be there with his father, the useless pill-struck gossún. His own eldest, Peadar, was on the county squad for football. Only as a sub, but it was still a sight better than smoking a pipe all day like the fecking caterpillar in wonderland.

And as for his father. Well, there had better be a serious solution for him quick, especially after that episode in Clare. It was no wonder at all the wife took flight on him so early, with the quantity of mischief that man got into – did he think he was a traveller, streeling in and trespassing in people's kitchens, poaching and pilfering whatever wasn't nailed down?

That was the type could bring the whole show crashing down tomorrow.

*

The boy Michael moved to the pen where the hares were kept. It was true: often, when the Cub talked to him Michael was away in wonderland, flying on a wave of smoke to a plush never-never where he lounged about on a silk settee with Margaret Malone or a Desperate Housewife. The hares were like that, happiest off doing their own thing, having a laugh, forgotten about by the bullies off the bog. They liked the long grass, so they did, and stony hills and forgotten places. It was to Donal Cassidy's credit that he let them multiply on his land; perhaps he had told the hippies because he liked the hares, or perhaps because he was sick of his excommunication by the bigger men in town.

The hares were stepping about, looking up and down, eating nervously from the ground some seeds that had been scattered for them. There was one enormous fellow, an alpha hare with a plush silver coat. He raised and peeked at the boy as the boy looked at him. The ears were long and pointed forward. The teeth, inside the spray of whiskers, were sharp, with a divot between them like a gunsight. At the back, two of the beasties were making dashes at each other, lifting up and swatting with paws out stiff. Michael liked to watch them box. Michael was fried on Malone's dirty hashish. He looked down and saw the hearts inside the hares, beating double-time. Behind him the dogs were pranging at the metal of their cages. They could smell the hares and the hares could smell them. Michael sat on the grass and slowly began to crush up the all the happy dancing pills on a stone.

*

One night, thirty years before, as they walked home from a public house in Daingean, the Cub had hit Aodhán smash-bang in the face with his fist. The cause of it was something that Aodhán had said about a woman that the Cub had met in a dance at the Tullamore Harrier's social club the previous

Saturday. They fell into a ditch together, broke through a hedge, splashed into a bog-pond and fought in the bog shin-high till both got tired. As they stumbled in the front gate of their home then, the Bear Colgan appeared in the light of the doorway and saw them. At first, he said nothing.
Once inside, he summoned them both into the kitchen where a turf fire was lit.

They sat at the table and stared at their hands. The Bear, wearing a thick brown jumper over a grandfather shirt, had his back to them at first. He turned, put down a pot of tea and some biscuits, and three mugs. "I've been waiting up for you both," he said, taking up a poker from the fire and wagging it at their faces. "There's a stink of bogwater on you."
The voice was resonant, moving through the pair like a bassnote that interfered with their very guts.
– We were fighting, said the Cub.
– He's after hitting me a sucker punch, said Aodhán.
– Shut up, said the Bear. I want you two to know something. If there's a rivalry in a house then it falls. And that's a fact. Do you know that your brother has been taking down election posters all this day? The same ones he put up, and not a finger lifted by either of ye.
The Bear paused.
– He wouldn't let me, Da, said Aodhán.
– Quiet, said the Bear. And the votes have not yet begun to be counted. When they are, and we win again – and we will win again – your brother will roll past every house that voted for the other crowd and bawl them out of it with a bullhorn. Even I cannot dissuade him from this course of action, although he is my son. He at least, has some pride. As for the two of ye, quit sobbing and drink your tay, then shower, sleep and be here breakfasted for seven.
The next morning all four Colgan men were in the car.
They drove through the bog of Allen. The car pulled over in the middle of it.
– What do you see there, any of ye? said the Bear.
– Nothin', said the Cub.
– The bog, said Aodhán.
– It is the Mitchells' land, said the Bernard Junior.
– That bog, said the Bear, has most of your ancestors in it.
He had pronounced the word to sound like, 'Incesters.'
– When the English came they thought it was disgusting. Vile. Every traveller's notepad and survey from Mary Queen of Skites to Queen Bacteria herself called it the most unpleasant land in Ireland. But we had always lived beside it. Used it. Lived from it. And what we do? We lured them onto it. We fought them there. And we won.

The Bear swivelled to stare at Cub and Aodhán. "And we didn't do it by fighting each other. You know your enemies. You stick with your family, with the party and with your own people. Is that clear, now?"

*

Ignoring Tim's objections, Elizabeth Chang went down and stood with the protestors to watch the hare coursing. Arriving just as the first dogs were being laced up in the slip, she watched from across the hedge where she was placated by the assuaging John Spollen. "Watch now," said Spollen. "They are well-muzzled."
– So if they catch up to it they will only buff it, like.
– I don't know, said Elizabeth. If you say so.
The course began: the first hare set free by Alan Whyte. The slip was opened.
Before the dogs got near it, the hare had banged off like a bagful of missiles, pelted over the grass and in one lep cleared the hedge onto Cassidy's land where it flashed out of being.
None of them had seen a thing like it.
– What the feck was that? said someone.
– What the fuck did you feed them, Pat? said another.
The boy Michael, watching from the hill, was red-eyed, giggling and biting his hand.
They set up next Ranger and Fionn, Aodhán's dog.
Martin Malone, holding the slip, moved his hand and with a movement unseen by all undid the straps on the muzzles.

The hare was the big silver one. It careened forward and the two dogs were sucked as if by a vacuum towards its heels. The hare was buffed by one dog and the other and it twisted away from them both. The muzzles popped off halfway through the field. The hippies screamed. The dogs jaws clicked. The dogs jumped. The dogs got to the hare. The hare was flipped over. The dog Ranger reared then, howling: the hare had bitten its lip. The dog Fionn clamped on the feet of the hare. The two dogs turned in a torsion of warring neck power and shoulder power, and the hare was finished. The hare's head snapped away. There was a spurt of blood. The head hung on, biting, as the Cub's dog thrashed. The German was running onto the field. The hippies were screaming. Aodhán smacked Martin Malone. The Cub, cartridge in his fist, punched Aodhán in the nose. The German was buffed and dropped by the Cub's dog, the hare's head unfastening and landing in his hands like a cricket ball. English Pat came with gloves on and a short stick, and began to smash at the dog's head while it savaged the German's hands, trying to get at what was left of the hare. Alan Whyte had lifted up a clump of his own comb-over and started saying, "Jaysus Christ, it is fucked."
Elizabeth Chang was saying, "Oh my God, Oh my God." over and over.
At the top of the hill, Michael was shivering gently and singing 'On Raglan Road'.

*

Thirty minutes later: the low, sloped field was resounding with impassioned shouts.
Big, ignorant feckers from Offaly were down there, verbally abusing and damning one another. The sky was turning greyer. The Guards had arrived.
The boy Michael, as high as the Croghan Hill treetops on smoke and pills, watched the lights on the Garda van turn.
His phone rang: Kieran.
– What the fuck is going on down there?
– It is chaos. The whole meetin' was botched by the spoilers.
– Are you coming out tonight?
– I don't know.
– Right. Anyway, Margaret Malone was asking for you.
– O right.
– I think she's bullin' for it, boy.
– Oh yes?
– You love her, boy.
– Oh, do I?
– I think you'd want to bring her to the briar hotel and fecking lash yourself up her.
Would you not? Orgasm the pair of ye back to the future faster than the DeLorean car.
– Jaysus, the DeLorean, I remember dat.
– The DeLorean is the way to go, boy.

They rabbited on like this for several minutes. Out in the field, the German really believed it was about the animals: holding his bitten hand in a bandage, gesturing to the broken hare, he kept trying to get the attention of the Guard, who, in the scrum of roaring men, was trying to keep some peace between old friends who, having passed from their habitual mode of grudging tolerance, were now reduced to dragging up insults, accusations and family feuds from before the founding of the State.

From behind the vans and the steaming heads of the crowd and up the hill towards the boy Michael came Elizabeth Chang. She was carrying something on a towel. It was weird, thought Michael: when she spoke, she still looked Chinese, but American came out of her mouth.
– What's that? said the boy Michael.

– It's the hare that they killed. What's left of it, anyway.

She showed him. The head lay detached on the towel beside the wrecked, stinking body, which was all rank and clotty now with mud and blood. The mouth was open like a pair of pliers, and the front teeth pointed out: the eyeball was half popped out but the eyelid was lowered over it, as in a deep sleep. The ears were long and broken behind the head, like two halves of a farmer's fat, ripped-apart wallet.

– It think it was a male: you can see there.

At the hare's belly was something like a spot of milky water.

– What will you do with it? said Michael. Eat it?

– I think I'll go and bury it, before some dog gets to it.

Michael watched her walk on to bury the two parts of the hare. Aodhán, from the mess of men, shot an evil glance his way. On the way back to the van where his father was waiting with a bloody nose and a black eye, Michael, mind wandering through outer space, thought to himself: if all the hares and beasts around the Wood of O were given graves, and flowers on the graves, then all that there would be would just be rows and rows of tiny graves all over. But no man that went past would ever notice.

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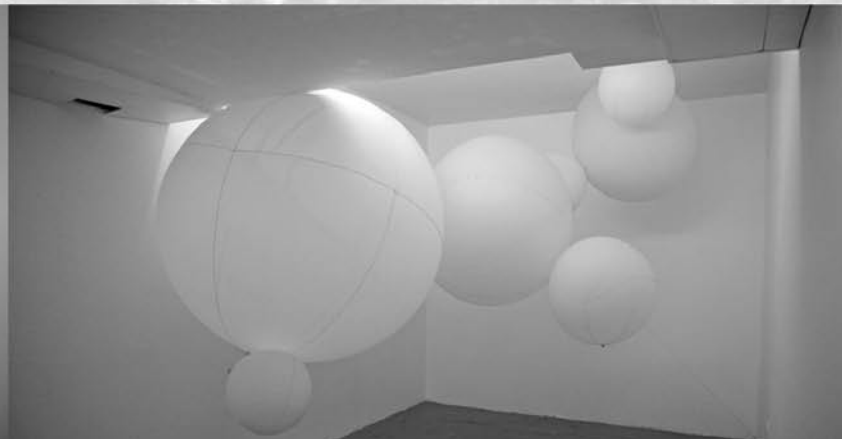
**Notes**

# . barbara knezevic

*Elation/deflation object* was first created for and exhibited in Pallas Contemporary Projects in Dublin, 2009. In the white gallery space, latex orbs filled with helium floated almost still in the air.

Subsequently, for Celestial Salt, *Elation/deflation object* was sited inside the skeletal iron structure of a former warehouse on the outskirts of Daingean town. The warehouse stands beside a working polythene recycling plant, an operating bog rail station and a defunct peat briquette factory.

Barbara Knezevic attended the Sydney College of the Arts where she received a BA (Hons) in Fine Art (2000) and completed her MA in Fine Art at The National College of Art and Design, Dublin (2005).



**Fields of Autonomy: Possibilities for artistic interventions in a rural environment**

**by Darren Barrett**

*Darren Barrett is a visual artist who is originally from Co. Mayo. He currently practices in Dublin.*

This essay deals with some of the possibilities for making and displaying art objects in the countryside. The main area of focus is on the issue of the autonomy of the artworks within a rural environment and the interactive possibilities and limitations of such work. The text is written from my own perspective as a practicing artist with an interest in pursuing work in this vein. In the first section of the essay I outline some of the reasons why an artist would be attracted to making work in a rural context. The second section focuses on Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* and its relevance towards an arts practice based in the countryside. In the final section of the essay I suggest how an artwork can function effectively within a rural milieu, in this part I will make references to the work of Barbara Knezevic to clarify my points.

I would like to begin by discussing what I feel to be some of the main conceptual motivations for making work in a rural context and later on suggest some further possible orientations for such an artistic practice. First of all we must state the most immediate attraction for an artist wanting to make work in a rural context: namely the environment of the countryside itself. For artists normally accustomed to the hustle and bustle of urban cities, the slower pace of life in the country and the visual beauty of its surroundings provides an alternative context in which to reflect and create. Secondly, the countryside can provide an unusual setting in which to display work. Although locations in rural areas are generally remote and uninhabited, there are also a number of benefits to displaying work in such a context. Exhibiting space is not at a premium as it is within urban areas and there are less financial and bureaucratic restraints that can impede a project from developing. Thirdly and leading on from the second point, although the work may be situated in an unconventional context, there is nevertheless the possibility for strange and unforeseen encounters to develop between the work and its potential audience. This element of interactivity is of chief interest to artists involved in the fields of performance and participatory art. Whereas one can presuppose to a certain extent the type of audience that will engage with the work in the standard habitats of the art world (gallery, museum, art college etc), one is considerably less certain of what kind of response the work will evoke in a non-artistic setting, given that the audience will be predominantly unfamiliar with contemporary art practices. While there is a distinct possibility that the audience will be indifferent or even hostile to the work, the countryside also provides a raw context for the work to be experienced more directly and viscerally by the public than is possible within a conventional art space. It is this element of uncertainty and tension that is of interest to many artists.

So the benefits of making art in a rural setting are twofold, on the one hand the environment of the countryside itself provides a stimulus for the artist to broaden their own practice, on the other hand there is the potential for an audience hitherto unfamiliar with the visual arts to engage with contemporary work.

The shift towards interactive based work in general has been one of the most notable features of artistic practice in the last decade, the most influential text on this concept being Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*[1]. In the text, Bourriaud attempts to create a theoretical framework that can adequately encompass the diversity of practices that have been evolving in the fine arts over the last twenty years. For Bourriaud the most prominent feature of contemporary art practice has been a shift towards interactive, process driven work. The conceptual thread linking artists working in a diversity of styles and media, is an increasing emphasis on engagement between artwork and audience. The primary objective of a relational artwork is to prise open potential spaces for dialogue and communication within the increasingly rigid and mechanised patterns of urban life. The central intellectual premise of Bourriaud's text is that form is intercommunicative and dynamic, it is the interaction generated between participants within the space of the work. The bundle of relations created in the exhibition site are thus the essential form of the work itself and not just a subsidiary effect.[2]

For Bourriaud the shift towards interactivity has come about as a response by artists to wider social issues. There is a political and ethical imperative informing the work of the artists mentioned in *Relational Aesthetics*. The political imperative: the creative autonomy of the artist is used to disrupt the regimented flow of contemporary life and open up an interstice within the social field, allowing diverging participants to interact and discourse authentically.[3] The ethical imperative: the denunciation of the Romantic notion of the artist as isolated creator and the necessity of the artwork to interact and engage with its audience, thus blurring the divide between the artistic creator and engaging participants.[4]

However there is a theoretical conflict between the functioning of both imperatives which creates an impasse within the text. If the political function of the artist is to attempt to prise open an interstice within the regulated social field, then the artist is engaged in an essentially antagonistic practice. If the objective is to inhabit a space that contrasts with the rhythms of daily life, then there is a likelihood that the work will not engender itself towards active participation from the audience. While a sense of curiosity and inquisitiveness may attract the public towards the kind of productive interaction envisaged by Bourriaud, there is the equally probable scenario that the public may be indifferent or even uncomfortable with the artist's intervention. The irony of this being that often work in the latter category is more ambitious and daring in scope than work that is amenable to the casual passer-by. However Bourriaud asserts that the primary criteria for evaluating the artwork is its capacity to communicate and interact with a prospective audience. In so doing Bourriaud seems to undermine the autonomy of the artist and emphasise that the ultimate objective of the artwork is that it is user friendly and orientated towards the interests of the audience.

Although Bourriaud's analysis is predominantly focused on artistic practice within an urban context, it is easy to see how many of the facets of the text can be carried over to the types of artistic practice mentioned earlier within the countryside. However when making the geographical translation from the urban to the rural, the dichotomy between the political and ethical imperatives becomes pronounced. While the creative autonomy of the artist is unchanged, the forms of interactivity envisioned in Bourriaud's text are no longer a certainty within a rural context. For in depopulated countryside areas there is no longer the guarantee of an immediate audience with which to interact. By switching contexts we thus assert the autonomy of the work as pivotal, however we take on board many of Bourriaud's concepts regarding the interactive possibilities of the artwork. From this postulation, the question then emerges if there is (potentially) nobody to engage with and witness the work, then what are the specific purposes in creating an artistic intervention within a rural site? The concluding section of this essay will be dedicated to outlining some of the incentives and potentialities for artistic creativity within the countryside with reference to the work of Barbara Knezevic.

In order to provide a response to this question there are two areas of artistic activity that I would like to focus on. Firstly, the potential benefits to constructing and displaying an artwork in a rural context and secondly, the theoretical reasons for pursing this practice.

We will begin by stating some of the most practical reasons why an artist would want to make and display work in a rural milieu. Firstly, the relative isolation of the countryside can provide the artist with more time, space and freedom to execute a project than is normally possible. In addition, a bucolic location can affect our readings and interpretations of the work. A work displayed in situ acquires new levels of meaning, through its connotations or contrasts with the surrounding environment. This is particularly relevant to a work such as Barbara Knezevic's *Elation/Deflation Object*. The piece was initially exhibited within the gallery space of Pallas Contemporary Projects. Seen in its original context the work was an intense study of the materiality of objects. The helium balloons that make up the piece were clustered together at the back section of the gallery. The gravitational pull of the balloons was

limited and contained by the architectural structure of the exhibiting space. The monochromatic appearance of the balloons against the white backdrop of the gallery drew further attention to the physical properties of the work. Exhibited as part of the *Celestial Salt* project in the remains of an old warehouse in Daingean, new qualities and attributes of the work were revealed. The first thing to note was how unfettered the object appeared within the larger, almost skeletal structure of the old warehouse. Whereas the balloons' placement in their original context seemed to highlight the compressed space of the gallery unit, the essential weightlessness and ethereal qualities of the objects were emphasised in its new exhibiting site.

We will now confront the second point, the metaphysical issue of why the artist would want to display an artwork in the countryside, given the fact that the work may only be witnessed by a limited audience. In dealing with this query we will refer back to a theory posited in *Relational Aesthetics* that is consistent with the objectives of this essay. For Bourriaud one of the goals of the artwork is to function as an interstice cut off from the conventional patterns and rhythms of contemporary urban life. The attraction of making work in a rural context is that it operates outside the pace of city life, thus it presents the artist with an unusual environment in which to make interventions. However unlike Bourriaud, we do not purport that the primary function of the work is to foster inter-human relationships between the active participants. This may be an effect of the work, but it is not a prerequisite nor is it a barometer of how successful the work is. The overriding goal for the artist is to fulfill the convictions of their work, without ceding to the demands of any particular section of the public. In this way the work is, in the words of the philosopher Alain Badiou 'inflexibly addressed to all'.[5]

With regard to this point, probably the most fascinating aspect of the *Celestial Salt* project as a whole, was how the status of the artworks altered when they were taken out of their conventional context and transferred to a rural setting. This is certainly true of Knezevic's *Elation/Deflation Object*. As stated previously the work was initially exhibited in an art gallery, where its material status as an art object was very clearly demarcated. Relocated to its new exhibition site, the status of the work become much more ambiguous and elusive. The white neutral appearance of the balloons seemed to function as a void against the rusty metallic foundations of the old warehouse and the surrounding landscape. The work's sense of mystery was further heightened by the relative remoteness of the warehouse's location. As a result of this the work was not directly experienced by members of the public. However the work's presence would have been just about visible enough to attract the curiosity of workers in the factories situated nearby. The work's display evoked a desire to make a subtle intervention into the local landscape, rather than an emphatic gesture.

There is one final point I would like to discuss regarding artistic activity in the countryside. Although the artwork may only be a temporal intervention within the landscape, witnessed directly by a small number of spectators, the work can have a fruitful retrospective existence. Documentation of the work, through photography, video and writing can serve as pertinent reminders of the work's existence and also as artistic works in their own right. Documentation has of course long been a common practice of archiving performance and conceptual projects within the fine arts, more recently the technological prominence of the Internet has offered the artist an additional outlet to display their work to a wider audience. So while the work may be situated in an isolated context, documentation and technology allow the work to be archived and exposed to a wider public.

[1] Nicolas Bourriaud, 2002, Relational Aesthetics, Dijon: Les Presses du Reel.

[2] "As part of a 'relationist' theory of art, inter-subjectivity does not only represent the social setting for the reception of art, which is its 'environment', its 'field', but also becomes the quintessence of artistic practice." Bourriaud, 2002, p.22.

[3] "This is the precise nature of the contemporary art exhibition in the arena of representational commerce: it creates free areas, and time spans whose rhythm contrasts with those structuring everyday life, and it encourages an inter-human commerce that differs from the 'communication zones' that are imposed on us." Bourriaud, 2002, p.16.

[4] "The form of an artwork issues from a negotiation with the intelligible, which is bequeathed to us. Through it, the artist embarks upon a dialogue. The artistic practice thus resides in an invention of relations between consciousness, each particular work is a proposal to live in a shared world, and the work of artist is a bundle of relations with the world giving rise to other relations, and so on and so forth, ad infinitum." Bourriaud, 2002, p.22.

[5] Alain Badiou, Manifesto of Affirmation, available at www.lacan.com/frameXXIV5.htm. This essay is a revised edition of Badiou's Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art, also available at this website.

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# . ben mullen

*Bog Bodies* was both a performance and an installation that took place on industrial bog land near to The Good Hatchery. Throughout the daylight hours of a winter's day Mullen dug a hole in which he buried the skeletal structure of a currach, it was then left to rest in the bog indefinitely.

The structure was previously on display in its original site of creation in county Clare. With *Bog Bodies,* Ben Mullen resited a sculptural work from an accessible and visible location to one where it is now hidden from view. The currach remains preserved in the bog awaiting its possible discovery in years to come, by whom it is unknown.

Ben Mullen graduated from NCAD in 2006 with a BA (Hons) in Fine Art Print, before going on to study architecture in Limerick University and receive a BA in Architectural Science in 2009.


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**Delphi**

**by Patrick Bresnihan**

*Patrick Bresnihan is a sociologist currently completing his PhD in Trinity College Dublin and in Castletownbere, Co. Cork.*

'The sanctuary has now fallen into great neglect, unlike in the past when it had been held in great honour.'

Strabo, 1 AD.

After my mum died, over eight years ago now, her various bits and pieces- the objects left on her bedside table, her desk, by her bathroom sink- were separated out amongst her children. My sisters split the only really precious objects, her jewellery. The rest, which didn't amount to much, was shared out without much thinking. In that vague, irrational aftermath I took everything on offer, including her baggy jumpers and an over-washed, woollen hat. One of the few things I kept which lasted beyond those first few weeks was her favourite mug. She had several mugs but this was the one she used most days. I used it everyday, almost religiously. Not long ago I came home to find the mug broken on the kitchen table. On seeing the broken pieces beside the small note of apology from my housemate I was struck by a terrible hollowness. It was one of the few objects remaining that belonged to my world and hers. As time moves further from the point of her death, these overlapping objects, clothing, furniture, a book, an old letter, get lost or broken. For that moment, leaning against the counter, another distance opened up, one that I felt could not be retraced.

I was faced with the practical matter of what to do with the broken pieces. I didn't want to throw them out. I tried gluing them back together, racing into town almost immediately to buy superglue, but there were a few shards that had been lost and it never went back together, not like it had been, so I stopped before the glue set and shuffled the pieces around again. Without knowing why exactly I decided to keep the biggest piece, about a third of the mug. It had a large part of the face, including a black West Highland Terrier- her favourite dog- with a pink bow (once red), nearly the whole of the handle, and most of the base so it could just about sit upright. I threw away the rest, and kept this piece on my desk. Every so often, during the course of a day, when I was bored or distracted, I would look up and see it, always the first object to catch my eye. In many ways it was even more present as a memory. The complete mug, thinking about it now, may have lost its potency for being so functional even after my mum had died.

About three months later, in March of last year, I went to Greece to visit my sister for Easter. I was sharing a room with her three girls. They had already gone to sleep on the evening I arrived so I went quietly into their room to drop off my bag. As I tip-toed around, Sophie, my sister, told me not to worry, that the girls slept through anything. Just a few weeks before the youngest had rolled over and knocked a lamp, a nightlight, against a blanket which then caught fire, or at least started to smoke. Sophie smelt it and quickly took the blanket outside and put it on top of a plastic Fisher Price kitchenette kept on the balcony where the children mostly played. Sophie added that the kitchenette had been a present from my mum, given to the eldest when she had visited Greece the summer before she died. Sophie said, getting back to her point, that in all this time, through the smoke and the cleaning up of the ashes, the three girls hadn't woken up once. I asked where the kitchenette toy was now- we were standing on the balcony and I couldn't see anything besides the few potted plants, laundry lines and table. In her fretfulness Sophie hadn't made sure that the ashes were fully out. They smouldered on top of the kitchenette. By morning it had melted into a puddle of hardened plastic shot through with the occasional suggestion of different items the girls had collected over the past few years: glasses, cutlery, bowls and plates, odd saucers, a salt cellar; all the pieces they had kept in their kitchenette now reduced to nothing. Sophie showed me the place in the corner of the balcony. There were a few black marks, smudges of charcoal that my sister couldn't wash out. Faint and indistinct as they were they resonated. The memory of the kitchenette wasn't mine yet its very absence linked together the broken mug, the memory of my mum and this visit.

I talked to my sister about my mum's final visit eight years ago. She was already quite far into the chemotherapy, weak, tired and dying. During her short time in Greece, and for a short while after she came back to Ireland, she was happier than she had been for months. There is a picture of her in the mountain village in the Peloponnese where my sister's husband is from, a place she had insisted on visiting even though it was hard to reach and not comfortable or easy for someone suffering cancer. She is wearing her preferred purple bandana and a loose, cotton, cream shirt. She is sitting on a chair by a table with Anna, her grandchild, on her lap. The sky is deep blue and the plastic table and chalky ground brilliant white. It would be understandable if she appeared washed out by all that vibrant light and colour. Instead she sits glowing in the middle of it all, her button brown face smiling without the tired marks of illness or the stretched lines around her eyes and mouth, as though genuinely relieved of something. Before she left Ireland there was a sense, without needing to talk about it, that the cancer was terminal. When she came back so healthy and buoyant there was a renewed belief that something could happen- because something can always happen. It was short-lived: very quickly she declined again and died about six months later. But the visit to Greece had at least given some temporary solace, some fleeting release; possibly the effect of meeting and spending time with her only grandchild, being with her daughter, even the weather. I had never thought of why until now. I had never spoken to my sister about it. It had passed me by until we sat down that night, the night I arrived, and she told me more about her visit, resuscitating old, and new, memories.

When I was fifteen we had gone on a backpacking trip around Greece together, just the two of us. It was the only holiday we took together. I was a teenager, staring blankly out of windows, probably monosyllabic most of the time. But we bonded over our shared love of Greek mythology, our shared excitement on seeing the living remnants of imagined worlds. We went to Mycenae and saw the giant walls built of enormous boulders. My mum told me that Heinrich Schliemann, the archaeologist who discovered the ancient city, extending the myths he had been told as a child in south Germany, presumed that the giant Cyclops must have built them. We went to Olympia and Pylos and Epidavros, where we missed an evening play in the amphitheatre because we had to catch a bus. She was annoyed at that. We stayed in hotels and had supper together. She let me drink Retsina and I felt like her escort. In the morning we cursed the tzatziki we loved so much for the raw garlic left haunting our mouths. Something I had forgotten, which Sophie reminded me of, though I still have no recollection of it, was hitching a lift on the back of a tractor on our way to the small, sea side town of Kyparissia where we stayed in Hotel Zoe. I remember the wind on the beach there, my mum struggling with the two day old English newspapers, and the empty shells of unfinished buildings.

One of the places she had always wanted to go to was Delphi, to the Oracle. On her final visit before she died she went with my sister, her husband and baby Anna. They went for two days and two nights. As she folded baskets of washing late that night Sophie told me how in those two days mum experienced some kind of revelation. She went there in great pain, though never complained, hardly able to hold Anna, coughing and pained to speak, yet for the 48 hours or so she was in Delphi was completely different, a new person, 'like mum used to be', she said. She was happier, relieved of suffering, the persistent aches and pains, worries and anxieties. What caused this transformation, a temporary one, my sister couldn't say other than to suggest, only half seriously, that Delphi is known, and has long been known, as a place of healing and energy, one of those places of which people remark that there is some kind of spirit, a spirit trapped, they say, since two eagles collided on the slopes of Mount Parnassus making Delphi the navel of the earth, the omphalos. For my mum who was certainly a spiritual person, somebody who believed in 'those sorts of thing' there is no doubt that she went there believing, or at least

aware, that something could happen. She was adamant, my sister told me. In the searing heat of June, hordes of tourists plaguing the ancient sites and no shade offered by the amputated buildings, there must have been strong desires that convinced her to make the trip.

The next day I got the bus from Athens to Delphi, about two or three hours. I didn't know what to expect but hoped for something, perhaps like my mum had done. It was a mild spring day, the sun muted by a thin haze. The hills were lit up with a yellow flower called sparta which reminded me a little of gorse. I was nervous and hot. I occupied myself with watching the clouds of dust billow from the cars in front and, when that was exhausted, flicking through an old pamphlet I had picked up while waiting in the bus station. It told me that after a small town, about a hundred miles from Delphi, there was a crossroads up on the right, just dirt tracks. This, the pamphlet announced, was where Oedipus, on his way to the oracle at Delphi, met his mother and father. We sped past and there was no sign to mark it; only a few sheep and a man on a motorbike.

Soon the terrain changed, from soft, rolling hills, to taller, steeper, barer ground. The road began to wind and was covered in orange dust. Out of the haze Mount Parnassus emerged, covered in sheen of white-orange snow, a plume of cloud trailing from its edge. The bus climbed up higher into the mountains. Soon the Gulf of Corinth appeared like a distant lake below. At that height there is very little: a few villages clinging to the steep slopes, shops selling rugs, postcards and chess-boards of Greek mythical characters. The Turks used to call the area Agrafa, or 'the unrecorded'.

As the journey went on the brightness of the cloud that had fallen began to hurt my eyes and my throat went dry. It was not the pollen, which I had gradually got used to, but the early signs of a cold. By the time I stepped off the bus in Delphi I was feeling feverish. I had no booking or any idea of where I was to go. It was getting dark. I went to the nearest hotel and went straight to bed. There was a storm that night. I had left the sliding door to the balcony slightly ajar and spent hours in a strange limbo as the wind came swirling in around the curtain and the rain beat on the glass. Even now, with the melding night I can't be sure it wasn't just febrile delusions. When I woke in the morning I still felt wretched. I went out and had some breakfast, some mountain tea, before walking the kilometre or so to the ruins. I convinced myself that something would happen, hoping that this sickness would bring me closer: I imagined that I had brought this sickness on myself in an unconscious effort to walk each step and touch each marble as she had.

I queued up and paid for my ticket. There weren't many there then; it was still early. The Temple of Apollo, the first marked ruin, is made up of several contained spaces, the foundations of various rooms sunk into the crumbling ground. Some of the pillars still stand impressively at about thirty feet, and eight feet round, the rest were broken stumps, overshadowed by the tall, straight cypress trees that come into every view. Two elderly men pointed at one area in the middle of the Temple, cut deeper into the ground. 'That's where she must have sat', they said, referring, I presumed, to the Oracle, the pythoness, Pythia, inhabiting that place long before Zeus and Apollo. Apollo, the books recount, wasn't able to assert himself without the continuing relevance, in some form, of her mumbled words, the yellow smoke, the masticated laurel leaves, the ancient traditions extending their hold through time. And then I imagined the young Alexander pulling her out of her den, beating her senseless until she told him what he wanted to hear.

The Sacred Way traces up Mount Parnassus, tapering all the while, past numerous treasuries, blocks of stone, tributes once containing precious metals and stones. Every rock seemed engraved in script, indecipherable to me except as a pleasure to graze my hands over, declaring the names and dates of those who had come and found meaning, and were grateful for it. The lushness of the land surprised me. Everywhere was green, succoured by the heavier rainfall and less intense heats in the summer. Tall trees grew, not just shrubs, of sycamore, pine, laurel and olive. The path, tended to and stepped on, bisected abundant wildflowers, poppies, buttercups, orchids, harebells, vetch, cow parsley, thistles, even meadowsweet, with its faint smell of piss evocative of childhood summers. At the highest point, where wreaths of cloud were within touching distance, the stadium still had the starting blocks the athletes used to spring from as they ran naked down the hundred yard track before 5000 onlookers.
I had stopped every so often on my way up to look around, to try to see the site from different angles, to recreate it, to see what it might have been like when my mum was there, how much hotter, how many more people, how far she would have got, whether she managed the steps to the stadium. She would have never managed the climb, could never have seen it. I spent little time lingering there, only enough to hear an Australian woman explain to her young son and daughter the significance of the stadium as she read from a guide book. She tried to enthuse in them that it was the best preserved stadium in Greece- the boy picked up a rock and passed it to his sister telling her it was the best preserved rock in the world.
On the way back down I took a side route marked 'No entrance'. It was better shaded and I thought perhaps my mum might have waited there while my sister climbed to the top to see the stadium.

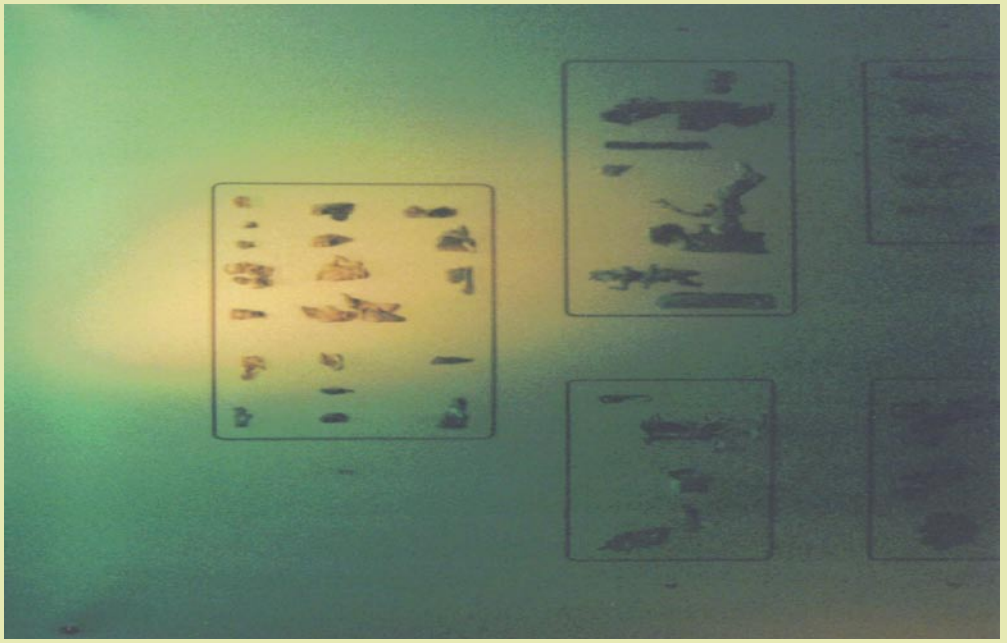
It was where the maintenance shed was, with tools and equipment for maintaining the paths and the odd patches of cultivated grass. From there I stood and watched the people climbing up like ants. From where I stood I could see a number of groups, each one with a guide. They spoke different languages- I could hear German, French, English and Russian as they passed- translating the stone inscriptions and the architectural features, explaining what had happened, when the different levels were constructed and by whom, pointing out features that might have been passed unnoticed.
Taking a break at the bottom of the ruin was an elderly Chinese woman. I sat on the remains of a pillar parallel to hers so I could not see her directly, only out of the corner of my eye, or when she turned to look in the opposite direction and I could make out her back, her legs, the fact that she had a walking stick, and though her hood was up covering her face, the perspiration trickling down her left cheek and neck. Once she lent against the sycamore behind her and the veins in her hand splayed out like the course of a vast delta. She opened and collapsed an umbrella every time the sun came or went. We sat together for ten minutes or so watching groups of school children pass. I wanted to see her face but she left and I didn't go after her.

Springs bound down from the peaks collecting in a small, stone pool where people were supposed to wash themselves, to purify themselves, before going in to see the Oracle. They are fenced off and dry now. A canopy of flowering wisteria hung down, snaking along the shaded, mossy walls at the back. A bus driver was on a break having a cigarette peering over the fence. There was a little shrine to Mary not far away in what looked to be an old alcove, or break in the rocks. From the springs I crossed the road, busy with the coaches coming up and dropping down, and walked further down the hill, maybe a kilometre or half a kilometre. My mum could never have walked that far but I went on anyway this time.

By the grounds of the Gymnasium is the Tholos, a sanctuary of Athena Proneia. It was perfectly 'ruined', as though it had been built to have that effect. All around it, contributing to the sense of artificiality, were waist high flowers, wild mustard, wild rocket, mallow and dandelion, and the constant buzz of cicadas and brightly coloured butterflies in their meandering flights. Even though I knew she hadn't been there, I felt she would have liked it, something about being on the margins, tucked away under the road, and its perfect symmetry, like the burial tombs she visited at Carrowkeel.

I went back up and got lost for a while trying to find the entrance to the museum; a very impressive, newish building. The heat of the day had picked up and my head was still pounding and my throat dry; it was a relief to get in to the air conditioning and on to the cool, marble floors. At the entrance children hovered over a miniature model of what Delphi would have looked like. In that perfect Lilliputian world the strain of recreating any semblance of a living place from the ruined stone and unconnected foundations outside was happily resolved.

Most of the tourists were French (the men who discovered Delphi in 1893 were part of the French Archaeological School) so my experience, like the buzzing of the cicadas in the sanctuary of Athena, was drowned in a flood of French exclamation and whispering. I tried to pick out phrases but soon lost interest and just let myself be led blindly around the exhibits, window displays and cabinets. The exhibits were supposed to be arranged in chronological order, starting with bronze swords, shields, simple pottery bowls and cups, lapus lazuli, bronze and gold necklaces, votive offerings recovered from the treasuries sacked by Sulla and the Celts, the most valuable treasures long since scattered.

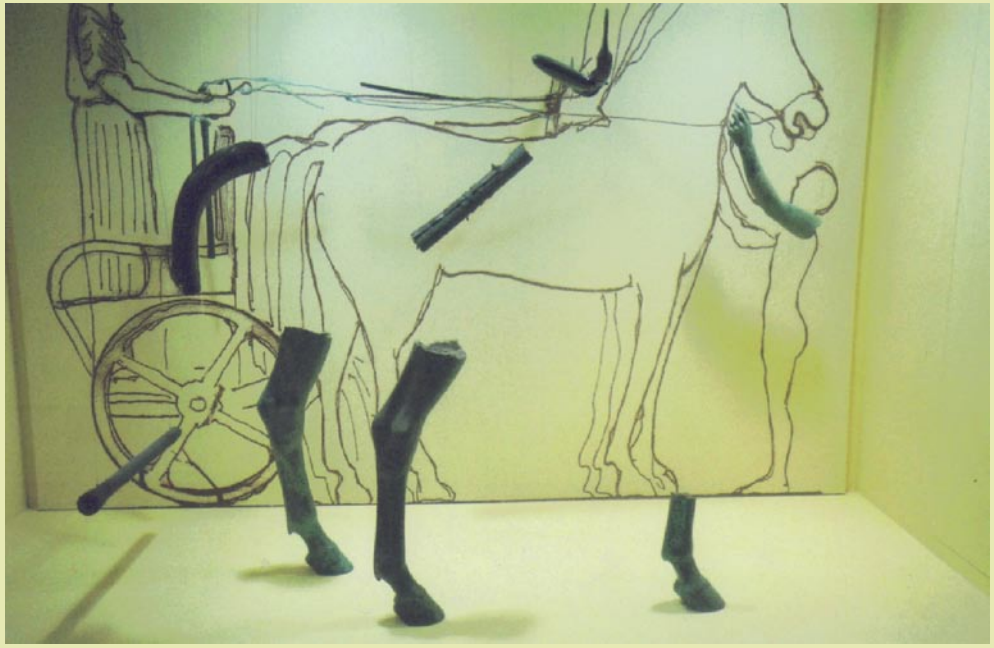


We were forced to look closely at some of the smaller exhibits. The dim light made textures more evident, such as the lines on the tiny coccoli, coiling out from a central depression, growing fainter and fainter but never quite disappearing. There were some wonderful little stamps which I had already seen in the archaeological museum in Athens. Made of agate, sardonyx or amethyst, the size and smoothness of sea-washed pebbles, they were inscribed with very delicate images of lions, griffins, cranes, a man ploughing. One that caught my eye was of a young woman offering lilies at an altar. This image, like all the rest, was only perceptible when pressed on a sheet of illuminated white paper. Examining the stamps themselves it was impossible to tell what the grooves on their underside depicted. It must have been exciting for the French archaeologists knowing that each time they found a well-shaped stone they might see a new image reflected, as though from photos or scraps of film.

I spent a long time in the gloom admiring two Kouri, or statues of Greek men, described as the brothers Kleobis and Argos. These two men, in the absence of oxen, had pulled their mother's cart to the Sanctuary of Hera. Not long after, the story goes, the two brothers returned to the temple. As they crossed the threshold they fell into a deep sleep which they never woke from. They died preserved at the height of their admiration and glory; a miracle considered by all to be the perfect gift.

Perhaps that was what Hadrian and Domitian had in mind when they went about restoring Delphi. They poured money into extended seating for the amphitheatre and stadium, new statues along the Sacred Way, repairs to the temple. Inscribed on a stone in the museum, a stone, the curator tells us, that had been taken from an older monument in a different, less significant part of the site, are the words: 'The emperor Caesar Domitianus, son of the divine Vespasian, Augustus Germanicus, chief priest, three times holder of tribunician power, father of the fatherland, hailed imperator seven times, consul ten times, designated consul eleven times repaired the Temple of Apollo at his own expense, 84AD'. I couldn't help thinking about a sign I had seen earlier. It was hanging by a life-sized bull made out of silver plates. These plates were held in place by silver or bronze nails so the whole beast was more like an armoured vehicle, with gilded horns, ears, forehead and hooves. The sign read 'Although hundreds of fragments of metal sheets have been restored, it was not possible to render either the original plasticity or the volume of the statue.'

I was pushed into rooms, deflecting and rebounding like a ball in a pinball machine, lost amidst fragments of fragments; fragments of bone, ceramic, ivory, bronze, silver shed, broken, decimated, scattered, passed through the digestive tracts of the earth, dug up and re-calibrated behind glass cases, appearing at first as entire from the self-fulfilling texts, the tour guides authoritative explanations, the restorative glue, all the time wondering where my mum had gone, what she'd seen, what she'd made of it all. At last, in the final exhibition room, I came across a ghostly representation of eight fragments floating in mid air, connected by an imagined drawing placed on the wall behind.



I had come to Delphi urgent to experience something concrete and found this image, an image that evoked nothing but a pathetic sense of vertigo. None of it was cohering in my mind, nor would it, because it had never been, not for her, a series of events, a broken mug, a smudge of charcoal, a tortured journey. As I stumbled out of the museum the hope of fulfilling some journey, of retracing my mum's footsteps, disappeared into the bright, grey sky.

Walking back up the hill to the hotel several coaches swept past. At the windows were the many faces looking out on the ruins strewn about the mountain. I thought again about how those same ruins had given my mum meaning, had fortified her, and how she was no less present, present in her infinite ability to resonate anew in strange, unforeseeable moments.

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**Notes**

Growing up on the remains of Clonearl House Estate, a large part of how we used the land and the building for over twenty years was Hanlon's Duck Hatchery. 600 large white Aylesbury ducks occupied the two large stable buildings, 3 Western 10 incubators occupied the old harness and plant rooms, as they had been named in the Magan's time. 1000 day old ducklings per week or 52,000 a year were the end product of all this activity. Apart from this, the cow was milked for the house, sheep were lambed and sheared, furrows were tilled, potatoes picked, corn harvested, hay cut, turf saved and geese and turkeys reared and killed. All the seasons brought the different activities and contractors and hired workers came and went as necessitated by each activity.

The land is still used presently but with the demise of the more self sufficient mixed farm, the variety and diversity of the former years has waned. Cattle grazing and silage making as the main activity don't conjure up the same excitement and mix of people as before.

However, since 2007 the Good Hatchery has risen from the ashes of the stable blocks resurrecting some of this former diversity. Although the artists who use this environment can't be described as farmers, they engage with their surroundings with a similar intensity. Temporary labourers have come and gone with the seasons bringing music, bartering, story telling, painting and film making, as part of a variety of productions and installations.

The marks on the landscape of the estate years; limekiln, artificial lake, and pleasure gardens have been erased by the progress of time. Now, a 25ft wooden tower takes its stance also making its mark in a transient and temporary way.

Four fields away, old Croghan man was found on the tribal boundaries of Tuath na Cruachain and Tuatha na Cille, buried there 2000 years ago as a sacrifice. A new burial has disturbed the peat there recently, a skeletal canoe. It waits there to interact with the land or the people who will discover it in the future, the meaning of its burial waiting for interpretation.

Strange lights from tri-sided video screens have glowed on the foggy night air of a frozen bog, their only competition the giant luminescence of the pitch lights in Croghan.

We have become so used to everyday aspects of landscape; giant pylons straddling the fieldscape poles, wires, lights and watertowers. They make use of the environment just as the farmers use the land and also leave their mark.

These artists of the Good Hatchery give new life and perspective to these everyday features, also connecting directly with their landscape and surroundings, They use this environment in a different way and try to engage the people of the locality to observe and notice the everyday in a new light. The giant weather balloons floating in the skeletal frame outside the old briquette factory or the eerie DVDs previously left inside may only have been noted by a few. The exotic images of plants from the Botanic Gardens transplanted to the middle of Daingean town, may have blended so well as to remain undisturbed for months. It is these interactions by the artists with the locality and its inhabitants that fuels the momentum of the Good Hatchery and brings the spirit of the place to life. It has awoken a wider interest to the richness and potential of Clonearl also, the place itself seemingly responding to the creative input. New labourers are being attracted here. Hedges are being laid by hand, the ways of a generation ago revived. Sweet chestnut and walnut trees are being planted, old favourites of the estate of two centuries ago, planting their roots firmly beside their remaining ancestors. The hands of the stonemason are repairing the old estate wall and the touch of the sculptor conjuring new life into the wind fallen shapes of the sacred yew. Plans for orchards and gardens are being shaped and empty buildings being perused by sympathetic eyes once again.

The pursuit of creativity is fulfilling the soul of a place and its inhabitants.

by Eileen Hanlon

# . background

The Good Hatchery is an experimental contemporary art space in the rural location of Daingean, Co. Offaly. The Good Hatchery was established in 2007 in an attempt to negotiate some of the financial and other obstacles facing emerging artists at the height of the Celtic Tiger. The residential studio is run on a system of salvage and exchange. Both the building itself and all the materials used for its renovation were sourced for free via Internet trade networks. The Good Hatchery has developed by benefiting from online networking and learning opportunities while taking advantage of the space, freedom and rich influences available in rural Ireland.

The Good Hatchery was founded by and is directed by, visual artists, Carl Giffney and Ruth E Lyons. Since 2008, The Good Hatchery has played host to numerous artists, residencies and projects curated by the two. In each of these projects, a relationship between contemporary art practices and overlooked environments are at play.

We would like to extend our warmest thanks to the following, without whom, Celestial Salt could not have taken place:

Eileen Hanlon for making The Good Hatchery possible, Offaly Arts Office for funding Celestial Salt, all 12 participating artists and writers for their work, John Holten for proof reading, Julien Clancy, Andrew Carroll, the good people of the locality and all else who generously helped to realise this project.



Please feel free to contact us with any enquiries regarding this publication
www.thegoodhatchery.wordpress.com