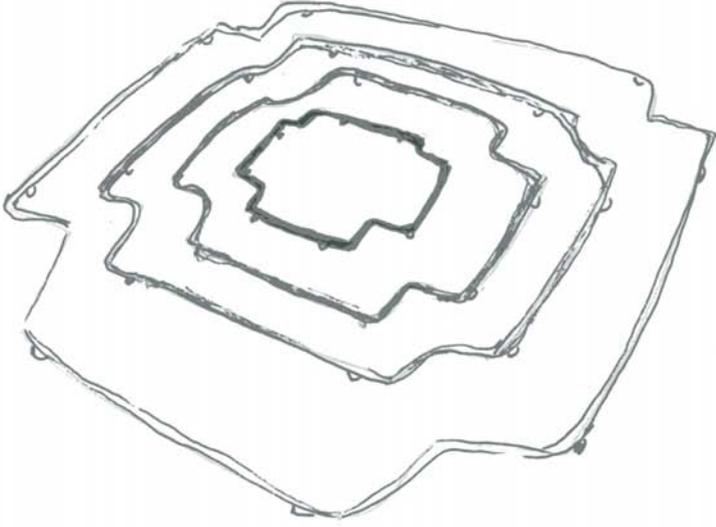
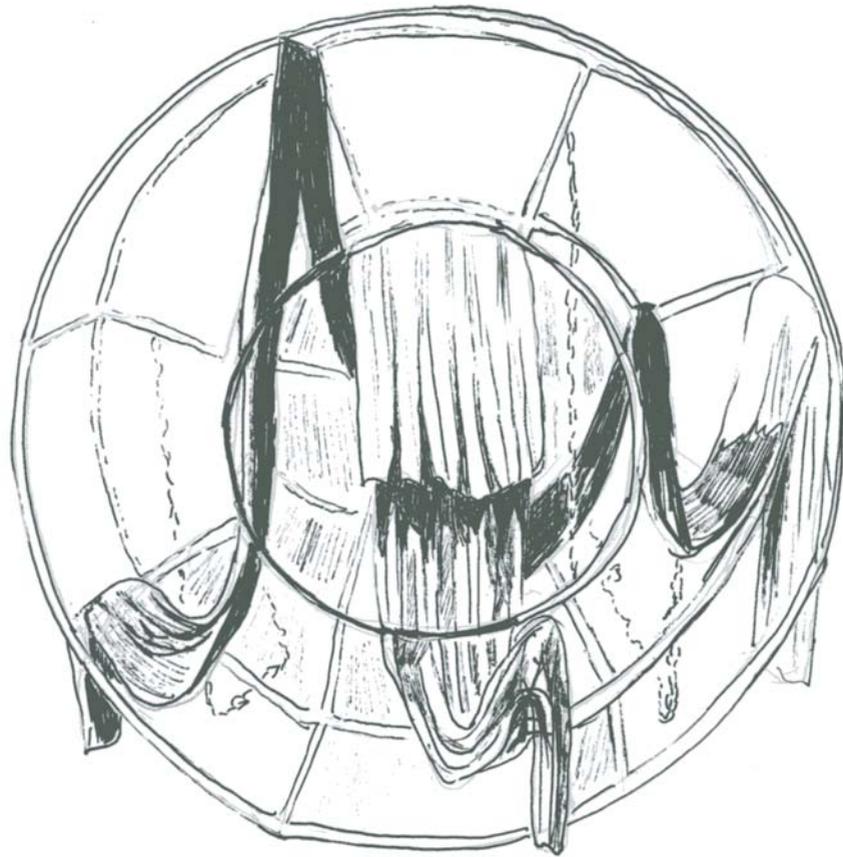




~~Critical~~  
~~Analysis~~  
Issue 15



Issue 15  
Bilocation



Critical Bastards Magazine is an Irish magazine of creative art criticism that engages with national and international contemporary visual art.

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*Shivering Sands forts – WWII Anti airfield forts & site of Radio City Pirate station.*

*Located in international waters 10 miles off the coast of Whitstable, Kent by Laura Smith*

Illustrations by Suzanne Walsh are from the exhibition: *Calling On Gravity* by Isabel Nolan in The Douglas Hyde Gallery Dublin, Ireland from July 28th until September 30th, 2017.

# Phone Call Pages A Future An Archive All The Same

*"The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible."*

– Michel Foucault<sup>1</sup>

This issue of Critical Bastards Magazine (CBM) stands out from recent issues, or perhaps more appropriately it stands *in*. All texts in some way respond to a presentation of art - shortening CBM's typical criteria of including stand alone fiction in addition to creative art criticism. Here we have a temporary tightening, whilst CBM editors are spaced out across two places.

Here also, CBM is harnessed as another place that is randomly populated with reviews of public presentations of art in New York City and Ireland. Bilocation is more of a consequence than a theme. Fellow CBM editors and I happened to be in New York, to work, see and be buoyant in a place that is both veneered and relentless.

Bilocation by definition is a phenomenon of simultaneously being in two places. I say "here" when I refer to Ireland during a phone call with a family member or friend residing in Dublin. I say "here" because it's kind of where I am when I am talking to them. In real time, it is the place known by myself and whom I am speaking with. A phone call becomes a place. I know the interiors of my brother's car and kitchen.

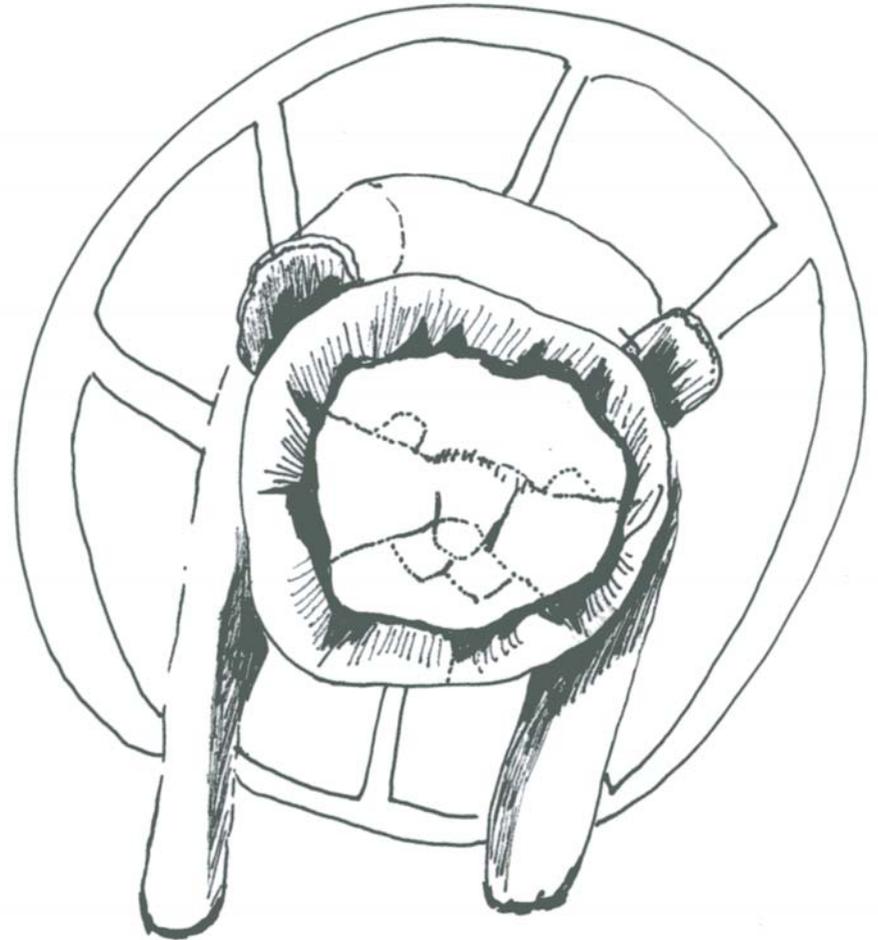
1. *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* from *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* October, 1984; ("Des Espace Autres," March 1967 Translated from the French by Jay Miskowiec)

# USALES Archive Jennie Taylor

I know what the light is like when he makes his way into work. My knowing it, and him being there creates a proximity that temporarily rises above a physical proximity to where I am in flesh. He doesn't know my walk from the subway to my apartment. The corners and tree-framed lights I wrap around in Ridgewood, Queens. A present geographical context collaborates with a place you knew before. Especially when you are on the phone. You're in both, and through that you create more places. You, where you are, where you are talking, where you are, you, whom you are speaking with, continuously rotate and take charge at different points. All of them become places.

I think of this issue of CBM as having similar properties to that of a heterotopic phone call. Lined up texts and filed voices are distilled and ready. These sides of the conversation are rooted and resting in a placeless place of pages, the other side is from you, the reader. To read one review or response is to temporarily dislocate a strain of this mosaic, talk feminism, until you turn a page, talk painting, pause to switch ears, talk migration, mesh the texts again, talk rocks, combing each part into a travelling saddle stitched space.

Jennie Taylor  
September 2017



# Thunder, Chatter, and Lines of Flight

Philip Kavanagh

Cécile Babiole's installation *Air Corridor*, as part of the *Glitch Festival* at Rua Red, detects real airliner flight paths overhead the gallery, transposes the accompanying noises, and amplifies their thunderous passings unapologetically within the space.

As effective and commanding as this action is, the work's accessibility lies in its humble means of communicating these flight detections visually, and, as this process of sonic commandeering is not a constant feature in the space (contingent as it is on actual air traffic), it is this visual element that is most likely encountered first.

En route to the main gallery space, a matte-black monitor screen sits mounted on the wall, encased in a boxy white frame, with a black antenna peaking from its top. On screen, non-alphabetic keyboard characters converse together, roughly depicting (with slight difficulty) an airliner from a frontal view. A similar constellation underneath spells out the work's title, whilst underneath both of these groupings of characters are regimented categories by which the actual flight paths can be described in real time – flight no., altitude, speed, latitude, longitude.

The monitors formal presentation, in all its protrusiveness, doesn't suggest actual air traffic utility. It does however conjure up a sort of 1980s sci-fi vision of technological progress, far more at home on the set of *Escape from New York* than at JFK international. The same can be said of the actual graphics on screen. These characters reluctantly

depict image, title, and data, and yet more pressingly, they allude to a charmingly naive vision of a cyberspace, but one not yet utopian or dystopian in resemblance. An embryonic vision, almost teething on the screen.

All of a sudden, along comes the thunderous advent of flight EZY54KB, and over this invasive sound, a rattling that almost seems to make teething pixels chatter.

EZY54KB crescendos, and the score reads: Altitude 7272, Speed (km/h) 792, Latitude 53.157 and Longitude -6.150.

And then, the sound dissipates and all that is left is the screen. The conditions are just as they were, but after this sonic trauma, it seems harder to consider the airliner as a coherent image at all. Nothing is moving, or has moved, yet the characters seem to want to break apart from what little cohesion they shared. With an imaginative push, they split, forming little splinter groups of lines and dots, and this airliner becomes a mass of unassigned coordinates. Post thunder and chatter, we're left with skeletal forms, floating like little emoticons, although what it is they might be expressing remains enigmatically distant. Origin unknown. Destination unknown.

*Air Corridor* ran as part of the *Glitch Festival* at Rua Red, Dublin, from May 13th until June 10th 2017.

Image: *Air Corridor* at Villa Arson 2017, installation view, courtesy of Cécile Babiole.



# Alex Kwok's Land's End

At Rubber Factory

Seung Hee Kim

The necessity of looking at photography, physically, in person, is particularly pertinent today when it is readily consumed digitally. Alex Kwok's series of sculptural pieces incorporate photographs of the earth's geography in which the relevance of physically being in front of the works on paper, and the inherent objecthood of the viewer's bodily presence are prioritized. The most immediately visible motif of *Land's End* is geography and textures of rocks. The exhibition, however, is not about the Earth or the environment. It is about Kwok's timid experimentation with paper and its role in the photographic medium.

Instead of shying away from the inherent fragility of paper, on which physical copies of photographs often exist, Kwok places the tenuous nature of paper at the core of his presentation. The set of nine photographs each have corners that organically fold in, showing the backside of the colored-paper. The trace of what is behind the photograph is a tenacious reminder of the paper's materiality, as it co-exists with the photograph. Kwok was not concerned with preserving his photographs in the traditional sense. None of the photographs are framed and many of them have been pre-damaged - crumpled and soaked in seawater. The small and big wrinkles of the photographs provide a firm reminder of the objecthood of printed images. They stimulate a satisfaction in their invitation to imagine a tactile experience of crunching paper.

One work in particular makes apparent the physical effect that the viewers have on the work. Above a white platform, small, rectangular photographs of a landscape delicately hang on wires. Kwok utilizes the sensitivity of lightweight paper as an opportunity to engage the viewer, whose slightest motion around the installation will generate enough air movement to activate a hanging hybrid of paper and image. Such a direct relationship between the viewer's body and the mobility of the paper makes it tempting to categorize the installation as a quasi-participatory work. The installation, however, does not require a conscious participant. A disinterested body that strolls through the gallery will also mobilize the paper. It is as if the paper nods to a body's presence.

The playful exploration of material in *Land's End* clandestinely wonders why we make images and put them on paper. The human desire to document only partially answers this inquiry. The installation of a real rock in the exhibition is peculiar because, although rocks are the subject in Kwok's photographs, the real rock does not quite read as the prototype. Further complicating the identity of the rock in relation to other works is a photographic sculpture that mimics a real rock. Notably, the two works are not adjacent; the real rock is in the front gallery and the sculpture is in the back gallery. The separation of the two objects addresses the inherent difference between the thing itself (subject) and the photograph, which becomes its own thing itself.

The exhibition is not an elaborate attempt to redefine what photographs can be. It is a discreet, yet confident statement on what photographs often already are—ink on paper—and a plea to viewers to acknowledge and experience the three-dimensionality and vulnerability of the paper, when looking at photography.

The exhibition *Land's End* by Alex Kwok took place in the RUBBER FACTORY, New York City, May 13th - June 21st, 2017.

*Land's End* by Alex Kwok, installation view. Photo credit: RUBBER FACTORY courtesy of Alex Kwok.



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# We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-1985

Dominic Paul Miller

After its pioneering exhibition, *Global Feminisms*, in 2007, the Brooklyn Museum has returned a decade later with a more focused survey on black women artists from the mid-1960s through to the mid-1980s. Senior curator, Catherine Morris, and Rujeko Hockley, now assistant curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art, have selected works to bring forward the important artistic networks and exchanges that developed across that time. The exhibition's disparate and in many ways textual organization challenges us to look beyond the dominant narratives of art history towards the hard won achievements among black women artists to create their own means of expression.

Encountering video footage of Blondell Cummings' *Chicken Soup* (1981), makes for a memorable visit. This stage performance was registered as an American masterpiece by N.E.A in 2006. Her choreography of daily household activities blends with a staggering range of emotion and depth, underscored by the nearly cinematic warping of time in her movements. We feel the impact of these shifts as though they are traveling along the scales of passing seasons. Also featured in this part of the exhibition is the sculptural and performance work of Senga Nengudi. A stunning black and white photograph documents her performance, *Rapunzel*, in an abandoned school from 1980. Although Nengudi was part of the collective, Studio Z,

she also worked collaboratively both with Cummings and the installation artist, Maren Hassinger.

The loose constellation between the three is one of many inspiring exchanges gathered by the show. Starting from the beginning of its historical scope, we see painter, Emma Amos, working as the sole female contributor in the collective, *Spiral*, which included more established artists such as Romare Bearden and Norman Lewis. Meanwhile, Faith Ringgold is shown as both a political activist and organizer along with Kay Brown and Dindga McCannon, who collectively developed *Where We At*, an important exhibition of black women artists in the West Village in 1971. In all these actions there was an evident response to the limitations of white, second wave Feminism, which could not account for their experiences as women of color, particularly as artists attempting to gain visibility in a male-dominated system.

As the show moves nearer to the present, we see elements from Carrie Mae Weems' *Family Pictures and Stories* (1978-84), a remarkable photographic series which candidly documents rare moments of her family life in Portland, Oregon. While the images function well with Lorna Simpson's conceptual photography, it becomes difficult to stay in pace with the rougher video works that surround them. Both contend with racial experience among black women, yet it is hard to know if



the combination of artworks evokes a completed framework, or merely an array of examples. We are then left to wonder, perhaps necessarily, of the many works that come next in more recent history. Altogether, the Brooklyn Museum's exhibition has a particular power as it recovers quieter moments of artistic exchange and exploration that now resound in our present landscape. Through their own means the featured artists engaged in a unique process of critical aesthetic expression at a time when it was widely unaccepted. The very conditions for its visibility did not exist until together they constructed them.

Image: *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-1985*, installation view including works: *For the Women's House*, 1971; oil on canvas, 243 x 243 cm.; copyright Faith Ringgold and Leaning, 1980; wire and wire rope, 40.7 cm x variable width and depth; copyright Maren Hassinger.

Photo credit: Jonathan Dorado.

*We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-1985* took place in the Brooklyn Museum, New York City, April 22nd - September 17, 2017 and is on show in the California African American Museum (CAAM) from October 13th - January 14th 2018, Los Angeles.

# In conversation with Jessamyn Fiore

**Jennie Taylor**

For you what's place?

**Jessamyn Fiore**

What is place?

**JT**

Yes

**JF**

Well this is something I actually think about a lot. Place versus Space.

**JT**

Right

**JF**

The space is physical of course – immediately to me I see in my mind's eye the spaces in which I have created exhibitions.

But these are not just mere spaces - they have a placeness inherent to them which is based on the relationships of those who form them - that is my relationship to the artist and also the relationship to audience. It can expand outward from there - taking in the past, laying foundation for the future - the placeness is relational, interpersonal, creative and it is that essence that creates impact; the sum of all parts linked to the physical but so much more.

**JT**

Do you see these places' foundations to be temporary?

**JF**

Yes and no. They are temporary in terms of existing in time as some definable entity.

**JT**

If the placeness of the spaces you create are founded upon conversation with artists and works produced, is the foundation in a shifting state because of the nature of its starting points (bodies and speech for example), or have you ever toured an exhibition, forged a foundation and then experienced the same characteristics of its placeness in a different location?

**JF**

I think the characteristics of placeness can absolutely transcend not only specific spaces but also time. It will not be an exact replica of course - but can retain some of that original essence, evolved necessarily in order to be inclusive to a new audience - but still present. I would like to give an example:

A great deal of the work I have done is around the first alternative art space in Soho, NYC called 112 Greene Street that opened in 1970. The physical space was that of an old factory building taken over by a group of artists who were making works the likes of which had not been done before. They responded directly to the space itself, making it part of the work and they built a vibrant multidisciplinary community in and around it. It was actually through interviewing Richard Nonas and talking about space

versus place in regards to 112 Greene Street that I began to understand what placeness is. Although 112 Greene Street with its original core group of artists lasted only a handful of years, its impact was enormous.

And that impact was not just in terms of the work made and some kind of art historic trajectory, it was more than that. It functioned as an ideal for many, this proof that one could DO something - something outside of the traditional gallery/institutional system, that one could come together and as an artistic community make art that transforms the world - or at least aspires to make a change for the better.

And so I curate exhibitions 40 years later that include the work of these artists and their stories. The spaces the work is placed in are utterly different – even the countries (I just did one in Dubai for the Jean-Paul Najjar Foundation) but still when you bring these pieces together sometimes it's like tuning in a conversation. As if I have my hand on a radio dial and if the works can be placed together in such a way you can hit that frequency and the conversation comes flooding in: the ideas, the energy, the love, the competition, the vision, the frustration, the idealism – it's all there but transported, evolved into a new place and time for new participants.

**JT**

Yes. That is how I would imagine a mobility of placeness. Do you ever find it challenging to avoid new presentations of work that is from 40 years in the past, to be read as archival? Or would that not be an issue for you?

**JF**

An artwork can never be archival because art is always present.

Go to a museum and stand in front of a work from a few hundred years ago, or a few

thousand, it is present. So bringing together a group of artworks from 40 years ago is just marking when they were created - but as artworks they are existing in front of you and you are involved in an embodied relationship to them.

And when you leave that may become a part of your past - but they remain, present.

**JT**

Yes. Would you ever present archival documents from Greene Street?

**JF**

Oh of course.

Yes archives can be a huge part of any exhibition and extremely important.

But there is a difference between archive and artwork. I think archives give the context – set the stage, introduce the characters, give you bits of scenes to play through your mind, to relate to and spark imagination.

But the artwork is the thing itself. It is present, immediate, in front of you - its ideas blossoming in your mind, its state affecting your body, that electric connection - which is not archival. As it was the day it was created so it is before you now. Which goes to why I think a great deal about how art is a form of time travel.

**JT**

Very much so!

This says something about how we encounter art. In company with it rather than looking at it.

**JF**

Yes. And that is what is so important about the work created in the 1960s and 1970s. The artists decided to address directly that relationship - or rather the multidimensional experience of being with a work of art - not

merely observational but embodied, phenomenological, social, etc. They raised the stakes.

JT

I recall hearing that Merleau Ponty's "Phenomenology of Perception" was passed around amongst artists in 1960s NYC.

JF

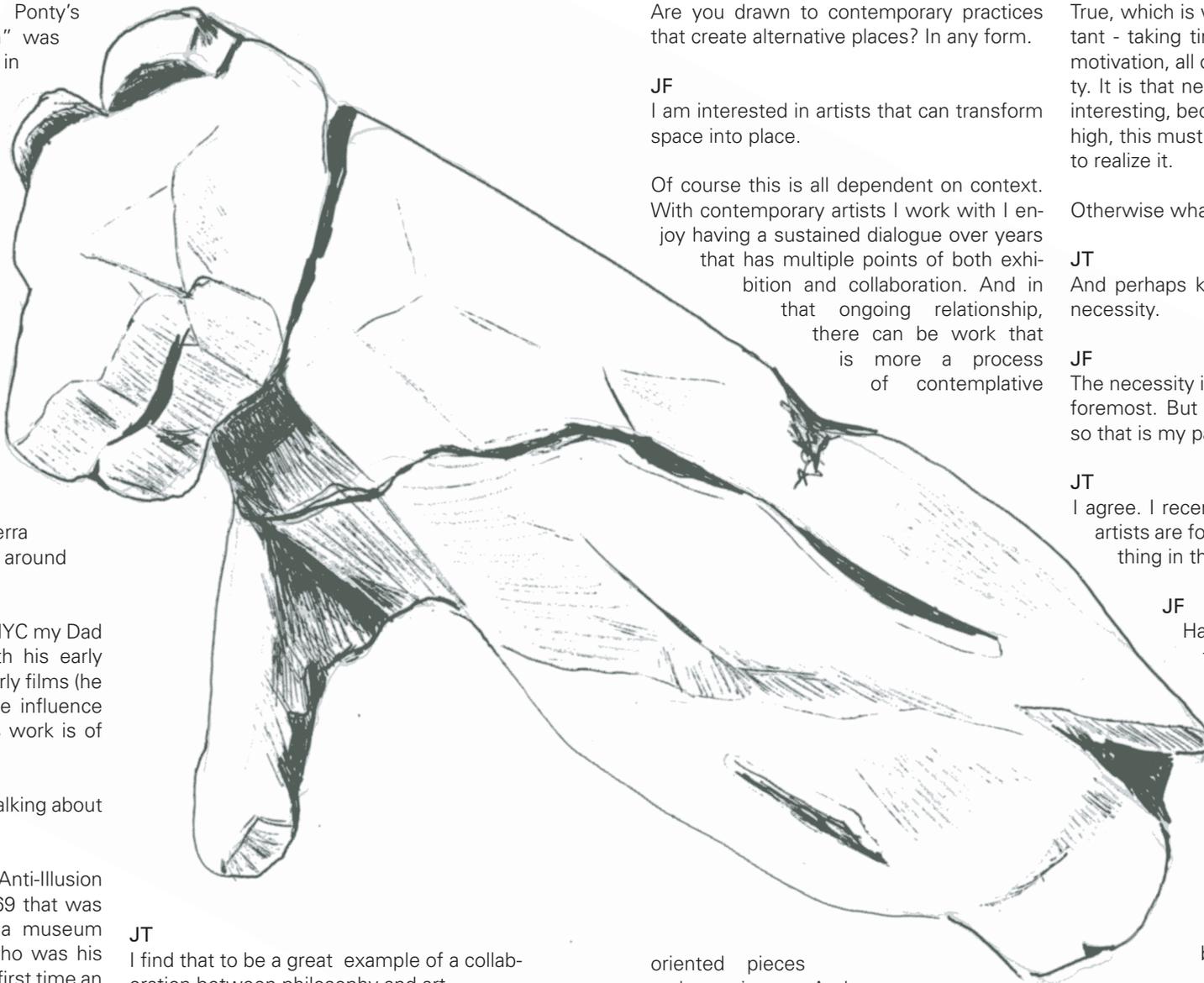
Yes it was. My father, Robert Fiore, was actually one of the people who passed it around. He studied philosophy at Yale and had a professor who was new at the time and introduced this work. He then got a Fulbright to go to Paris and study at the Sorbonne with Ponty. Unfortunately it turned out Ponty died a couple of years before-hand - but he didn't tell the Fulbright committee and stayed, there he became friends with Richard Serra and Philip Glass. They all hung around together.

And when they moved back to NYC my Dad and Philip assisted Richard with his early works - and my Dad made his early films (he was a cinematographer) and the influence of Phenomenology on Richard's work is of course pronounced.

They were all thinking about it, talking about it.

My father also helped with the Anti-Illusion exhibition at the Whitney in 1969 that was the first process art show at a museum co-curated by Marcia Tucker (who was his girlfriend at the time). It was the first time an entire exhibition was created in a site-specific process oriented way and they did not

have images of the work to put in the catalogue before its installation which was very interesting. The ideas behind that as well were influenced by Ponty.



JT

I find that to be a great example of a collaboration between philosophy and art.

JF

I agree. Also then, curators were not trying to be both.

JT

Are you drawn to contemporary practices that create alternative places? In any form.

JF

I am interested in artists that can transform space into place.

Of course this is all dependent on context. With contemporary artists I work with I enjoy having a sustained dialogue over years that has multiple points of both exhibition and collaboration. And in that ongoing relationship, there can be work that is more a process of contemplative

oriented pieces and experiences. And then moments of total transformation - creation that is transcendent, that evolves space into place.

JT

That takes time. I would imagine it is a matter of being available to that point of total transformation.

JF

True, which is why taking the time is important - taking time involves intention, work, motivation, all of which is driven by necessity. It is that necessity that makes the work interesting, because it means the stakes are high, this must be done, and we must strive to realize it.

Otherwise what's the point?

JT

And perhaps keep track on what makes a necessity.

JF

The necessity is driven by the artist first and foremost. But I am an artist based curator so that is my particular point of view.

JT

I agree. I recently heard someone say that artists are fortune tellers. I can see something in that at times.

JF

Haha I like that. I think it is the fact that artists have vision of what does not yet exist and they bring it into existence. So much of our world right now is geared to confirm and reflect what we already know. Mainly to sell us something and keep us docile. Contemporary art introduces not only new ideas but new ways of thinking, of being.

It makes you think new thoughts.

JT

John Berger talked about Mark Rothko's paintings as light for something that doesn't exist yet.

JF

"Doesn't exist yet" is an interesting phrase - because it implies a recognition of what is to come without knowing its definition, and that is potentiality. A recognition of our potentiality, and yes I do believe great art can show us this, because it inspires the new and the new breaks with the old. It can be a kind of freedom, an evolution - which in our current state is an act of rebellion in and of itself.

JT

Yes. And finally, back to place - you could say the more you know a place the more definition-less it can become. Or perhaps there are defining features of a place that are fixed and can be recognised when thought of in comparison with another place. You've worked between Ireland and New York for several years now, has knowing two separate places and the art made in each, offered any definition in either?

JF

Absolutely. On a personal level the act of creating and journeying between the two countries has come to define my understanding of art. But the importance really is introducing the artist and work to a new audience - audience being one of the key elements in place - so bringing an artist out of their home environment and presenting their work in this foreign context is always exhilarating. I am going to speak quite broadly now so I hope I do not offend, but I find that Irish artists create many layers, often textual to some degree, to their work - and this depth is considerate and illuminating - allowing for a kind of conversational intimacy that can often lack with some American

contemporary art. However I have also seen works where these layers can obscure or detract from the work itself - its being in a space with audience does not resonate on par with its intention. Whereas a number of American contemporary artists I work with have a very acute sense of their work in space, in context, its visual and visceral impact. But when it comes to delving further into its foundation, these types of dialogues can sometimes veer towards the superficial in its presentation. So it is exciting to cross those two sensibilities, to have them inform each other, encouraging the audience to participate in a way that perhaps they are not normally used to. And for the artists to enter a conversation with this new audience that is in the best circumstances inspiring and fulfilling.

There is a book called *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962) by the American horror author Shirley Jackson (b.1916, d.1965). It's about two isolated sisters (and their uncle) living in a house near a village. The sisters are isolated because one of them may have murdered the rest of the family six years previous and the villagers don't like them, or that, but let's face it they were really just looking for an excuse. Here is a quote:

"I shall commence, I think, with a slight exaggeration and go on from there into an outright lie. Constance, my dear?"

"Yes, Uncle Julian?"

"I am going to say that my wife was a beautiful woman."<sup>1</sup>

I saw Canadian artist Moyra Davey's (b.1958) solo exhibition *7 Albums* at the now closed Murray Guy gallery in Manhattan's Chelsea last summer - 2016. This short text will not mainly be about that show. It will predominantly be about American artist Kaari Upson's (b.1972) solo show *Good Thing You Are Not Alone* (which I initially misread as 'Good Things Are Not Alone' - a societal lesson I appear to have internalised) at the New

1. Shirley Jackson, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, Viking Press, 1962.

2. T.S. Eliot, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, 1919.

3. Derek Jarman died of an AIDS related illness in 1994. His final film 'Blue' (1994) was titled thusly as he said it was the only colour he could see after he went blind as a result of his illness. Moyra Davey is blind in one eye

Museum in Manhattan's Lower East Side this summer just gone - 2017. The text will be to do with women's bodies, how they are perceived and how women can use these perceptions to produce, act and subvert. In relation to these topics I am discussing both of these artists because of the way they utilise their corporeality in their works: they use their bodies to disturb not lure, which is of course breaking Woman Rule 101. "The progress of an artist," said T.S. Eliot, "is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."<sup>2</sup> The same could be applied more generally to a process forced upon women in order to be acceptable. With these artists and these works I believe that process to have been temporarily ruptured. I will isolate two video works, one from each show, and will not be paying attention to the rest of the exhibited works in either.

Moyra Davey's video work *Notes on Blue* (2015) is to do with the British filmmaker Derek Jarman<sup>3</sup>, mortality, seeing and production. Davey is accompanied by her dog in an otherwise unoccupied apartment. She is pacing around and speaking in front of a camera, reciting a monologue that is prerecorded and playing in her ears as a prompt. There is no softness in her presence. If you

due to Multiple Sclerosis. It is important to note here, as I will be discussing Davey's physicality, that though addressed at the beginning of *Notes on Blue*, her illness does not overtly manifest itself to the viewer via physical symptoms. It is not her illness I am discussing but her womanhood. Whilst acknowledging these things to be of an intersecting nature, for the purposes of this writing and its subject matter, they are distinct.

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were at a talk that she was speaking at, you would whisper to your friend - 'My god, I'd say she's hard to deal with'. She was so contained in her composition, lilt-less in her delivery, that it halted me. That's all I have to say about this video as the only thing of relevance for this piece of writing is that I found her way of being disturbing, her body bothersome in a way that's lasted and I wanted to know why and now I think I do. She was still in my brain upon viewing Upson's video more than a year later.

Kaari Upson is also physically present in her work *In Search of the Perfect Double* (2017), kind of playing her mother, dressed like her mother, in an outfit her mother apparently continuously wore some version of in order to de-objectify herself. She is closely inspecting tract houses built as part of developments in the 70's and 80's ostensibly to be exactly the same but the previous occupants have left their mark and these human stains are what Upson can see, obsessively, all she can see. The houses are not the perfect squares anymore, they have been corrupted by their occupiers. Upson doesn't seem like a hoot either. Incoherent, a hysterical woman, she rubs her body against and around the house, trying to physically feel its perfection or flaw, she appears to have lost touch with reality completely ("Ow. Can you hear it. That's the asbestos. This is definitely asbestos. Can you hear that can you hear it that's for sure asbestos OWWW ow-www."). She hurts herself whilst working herself around the rooms with her back to the wall, opening cupboard doors to press against the insides ("The house is the colour of my skin OW").

At one point Upson acts like a malfunctioning robot walking back and forth banging into doorways saying something incomprehensible. In her quest to find the perfect double, her sense of self erodes to the extent that the character ends up with a dummy dressed in the same outfit as her, which is the same outfit as her mother in

real life, each version a lesser quality of the original. She kicks the legs of the dummy in front of her as if it's walking, instead of just dragging it, and walks it around the house from behind, face pressed against its dummy neck. She crawls into a fireplace, closing the grates behind her, and says "Don't touch anything out there." Making a grand proclamation about the tract house she is assessing - "All this is original and none of this has been touched", convincing herself, selling the house as women do themselves.

When he was alive, the American artist Paul Thek (b.1933, d.1988) visited the Capuchin Catacombs in Palermo. Apparently, "Thek fell into a macabre exhilaration, wandering through the 8,000 dehydrated bodies on view through windowed caskets. He described his encounters with the embalmed population as being unsaddled by feelings of morbidity or dread". Thek himself said "I opened one [coffin] and picked up what I thought was a piece of paper; it was a piece of dried thigh ... It delighted me that bodies could be used to decorate a room, like flowers. We accept our thing-ness intellectually, but the emotional acceptance of it can be a joy..."<sup>4</sup>

Women's bodies, their thing-ness, are with great frequency used to decorate rooms. This is not a rarity. Davey does not decorate the room she occupies. She festers it up with her rigidity - like ivy crawling under the house and up through the floorboards in the sitting room - "Get rid of it before it crawls around my neck!". She appears as an embodiment of female trauma, nothing has been softened for the viewer, there is no charm here. Upson is searching for exact replication; there is obviously no room for decoration within replication, no beguilement. These artists, through disparate subject matter, are both hitting on issues

4. <http://www.art-agenda.com/reviews/paul-thek/>

of female control, presentation and how they are, or become, both second nature and obsessively, compulsively, consciously enacted.

In their solitary occupation of the domestic space (Davey is physically alone except for the dog and there is a sense that she is truly alone with her thoughts - that the recital isn't really for us at all, Upson mentally so - being seemingly disconnected from reality in her lone, obsessive looking) both artists raise disquieting issues of womanness, performativity and what our priorities are and who made them thus. The onus is on being attractive to potential buyers at all times, as good things are possessed, as good things are not alone. These women possessed themselves and it was this act of horror that disturbed me so.

The exhibition: *7 Albums* by Moyra Davey took place in Murray Guy, New York City on April 16th - May 21st, 2016 and the exhibition: *GOOD THING YOU ARE NOT ALONE* by Kaari Upson took place in New Museum, New York City, May 3rd - September 10th, 2017.



## Barry Kehoe

Upon the ramparts of Elizabeth Fort there is a panoramic view of a city. Looking out across the skyline the houses huddle upon hillsides that slide down to the dark waters of the river Lee as it flows out into the shuddering depths of Cork harbour. Below the Elizabethan stronghold, just off Barrack Street, are the 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings of the now abandoned Garda station lying derelict and decaying since its closure in 2013. The works of several artists from the Blackwater Artists Group occupy the dishevelled spaces of the former barrack houses and unleash a fleeting breath of new life into their stale, damp rot.

I had already been to the first half of the exhibition in the CIT Wandesford Quay Gallery where the ceramic works of Luke Sisk, made with river water from specific locations, had painted an imagined map of my youthful summers spent playing along the banks of the Lee. The works of Megan and Cassandra Eustace, installed in the vaults of the gallery had transported me to the crypt where it seems those childhood memories had taken refuge. I fell into a similar reverie up in the old air-raid shelter of the Fort. It was the first space I had entered where the work of Johnny Bugler *Bombers and Birdsong* was to be found. In the darkness of an underworld populated by a field of suspended blue sea urchins, the air is filled with beautiful birdsong recorded by the BBC in 1942, but there is also a constant low thrumming drone. It's the sound of 197 Wellington bombers that inadvertently flew over during the nature and wildlife recording. The planes

were flying overhead en-route to a bombing raid in Germany. In the ominous presence of the incidental sounds of such terrible mechanised destruction, surrounded by the birdsong, standing amid the magical glowing sea urchins, I felt disturbed and troubled in my thoughts.

Moving through the abandoned buildings several of the arresting artworks added to the ghostly presence of the empty houses and buildings. In particular the depopulated paintings of otherly spaces by Gerard O'Callaghan, such as *Phonebox* and *Behind the Petrol Station*. The light boxes of painted, screen printed and sandblasted, flashed glass by Peter Martin nostalgically recalled the previous residents of these dishevelled rooms. In a similar way the paintings by Tracy White Fitzgerald gave me a strong feeling of looking into private moments of past lives. All were images and sensations of elsewhere.

As I climbed back out onto the walls of the fort I felt as if I was coming up for air and I recalled the book of that name by George Orwell. In it the main character has a thought. "The past is a curious thing. It's with you all the time,..." I could sense the past of this place and the "elsewhere" towards which the artworks were teasing me. I recalled the inevitable looming threat of war in Orwell's book as he sadly looks out over the rooftops imagining them destroyed by falling bombs. I too looked out once more at the roof tops of Cork City as they sprawled up the hillsides before me. My imagination was full of what

I had just experienced and I looked upon the city as if I was far away. As if I was looking back from elsewhere. In my heart I felt the distant threat of our troubled times with our unknown future and I remembered another quote from Orwell's book: "Perhaps a man really dies when his brain stops, when he loses the power to take in a new idea."

*Elsewhere* was an exhibition of work from the Blackwater Artists' Group, curated by Helen Farrell, that took place in CIT Wandesford Quay Gallery and Elizabeth Fort, Cork City between April 28th – May 20th 2017.

Image: *Bombers and Birdsong*, mixed media, by Johnny Bugler 2017.

Photo credit: Dan Thorn.

# Mark Swords The Living AND The Dead

## Davey Moor

Before visiting *The Living And The Dead*, I heard it discussed by two artists, both of whom work in paint. They talked about the show with the kind of passion-of-reaction reserved for cultural output, which stumps the barometer of our personal taste – an excellent sign that something significant was going on. Neither was quite sure where they stood between the poles of love and hate, and if the latter, whether this antagonism was, in fact, the blossoming of a deeper appreciation. There were no other shows in the city at that time which could have provoked such a guttural reaction. Here was an exhibition of rejection, willing and calculated. Rejection of craft, of design, of compositional ideals and – to a degree – of some romantic concept of good taste, however shy and retiring that is these days.

With the exception of *Tapestry* – a sort of exhibition composite hanging isolated on white opposite the gallery entrance – the show fills the space's two unbroken walls in parallel, with scatter-hangs of variously sized paintings upon stitched-together fabric backgrounds. This wallpaper comes in darkly subdued over-painted imagery, and sharp, multicoloured stripes and segments, the effect of which is both jarring and jelling. The aim is a holistic experience, and although this succeeds – by creating an initial, instinctual resistance to the idea of dislocating works from the ensemble; a dichotomous effect of harmony from dissonance – there are individual victories here too. One such, *The Play*, has audience and actors enveloped

in a colourful kaleidoscope of concentric lozenges; at home in its surrounding assemblage, but more than able to decamp to a white wall somewhere, should the opportunity arise. Swords has often crafted his paint in elegant symmetries and this is foregone here in the individual pieces, almost wholesale. Even a work called *Pattern* – featuring objects including turds and fish heads over a black background – sports a design, which is somewhat irregular and repeats prettily unfaithfully. The visuals of our everyday lives are by-and-large not constructed with the consideration of neat design principles and it is these quotidian arrangements that Swords has said he was particularly inspired by for this series of works.

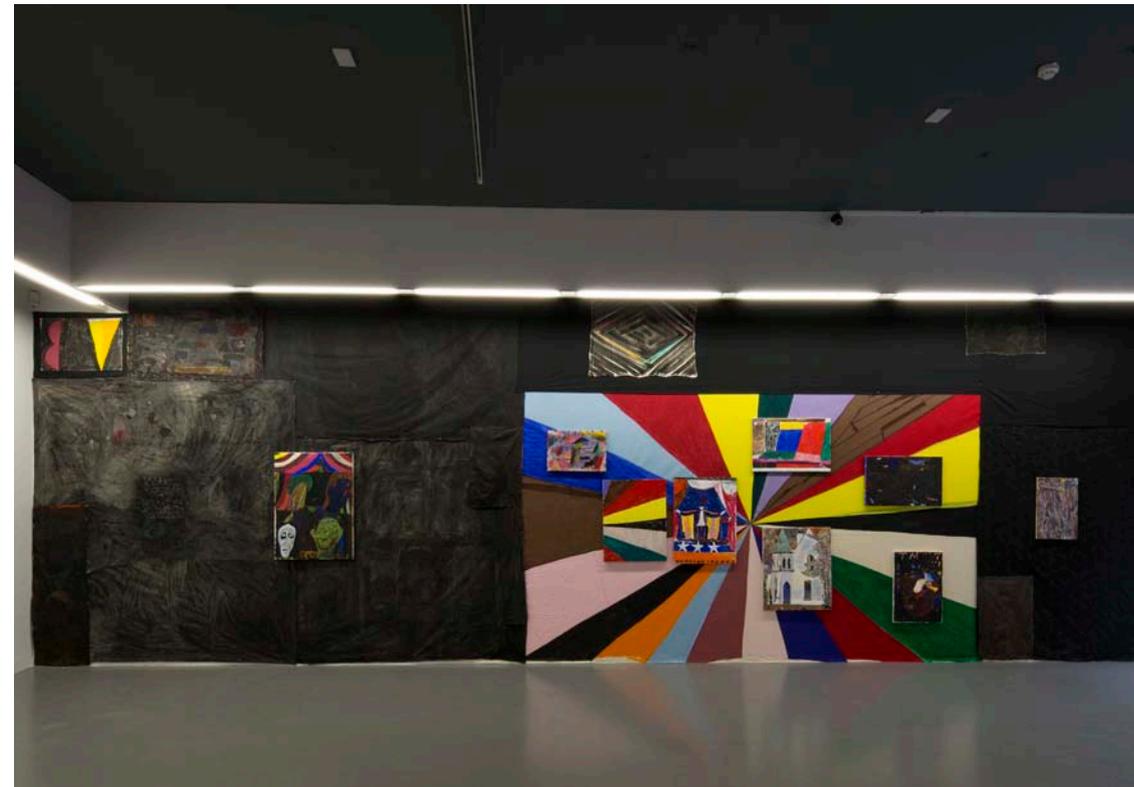
Swords' mash-up style of constructing paintings (reworking, collaging, overpainting, augmenting) displays an intriguing balancing act between representation and (the seemingly) abstract in the thirty paintings here. With the work *Glenside Road*, I thought the artist was showing me a lonely house on a (curiously straight) boreen, until in an optical switch, I saw the road and house for what they really were: the horizontal rail of a sash window, with a pasty view of the real Glenside Road under a layer of pale paint above and below. However, along with this suburban (or surural?) quietude, the dominant theme is an air of the theatrical, the carnivalesque, or at the least, that of the staged public

spectacle: *Puppet Theatre*, *The Wrestlers*, *Family Magic Show*, *Handball Alley*. For all the drama, Swords' titles are characteristically matter-of-fact and essential, but visually these stories intertwine, like tangled small-town narratives of characters on a stage.

*The living and the dead* is a teasing of the boundaries to which Swords can push his broader working method within the framework of a new aesthetic; positioning his work between the edifice of received artistic wisdom and the chance encounter of the badlands beyond. Between this is a restlessness, bounded by artistic intention and the chance occurrences that take such preconceptions and happily corrupt them. With any luck, this tussle has only just begun.

Installation view, *The living and the dead* by Mark Swords, Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin April 15 - June 17, 2017.

Photo credit: Peter Rowan



# Becoming Christina

## Adrian Duncan

*Becoming Christine*, an extensive exhibition at the Galway Arts Centre, of self-portrait photography and an audio work followed County Galway resident Christine Benyon's twelve-year transition to becoming a woman. The photographic works are large framed digital prints on paper, each one consisting of "selfies" (either by hand or with a self-timer) taken by Benyon over this period of time. Some of the images are small and at times pixelated and often placed in consciously off-centre ways on the paper. Some are made up of two of these small digital selfies. Over the course of the show, the images grow in size and the expanse of paper surrounding each image moves from a sense of detachment to a mode of fixity.

Amanda Dunsmore and curator Liz Burns handle this material with particular care and consideration. The fabric of Benyon's life echoes out beyond the documentary elements of the exhibition, allowing the unseen traces between the artefacts on show to appear in a convivial and moving manner.

In the ground-floor front gallery, a single work titled *The loneliness of it ... before transition* (2007/8) shows Benyon, wearing a wig, make-up, a dark skirt, and a peach-coloured shirt, hunkered down into the corner of what looks like a bedroom, gazing sadly back at us. In the middle gallery – *Practice Selfie – I was self-medicating then, that's why I've boobs* (2004) shows Benyon in a similarly styled blonde wig, in a kitchen it seems, taking a selfie from above. Her face and torso fill the image; she looks forlorn and serious. And

to the rear of the gallery space a two-image work with the more glamorous *Taken in the dress service, 1st time I ever dressed away from home* (2006) and *Chrissy in the corner. I still have those shoes and that wig* (2008). This is an image of Benyon in the same corner as *The loneliness of it ...*, but here she is wearing a longer glossy ginger wig, a dark dress, and brown cardigan; she looks less sad, appears more comfortable in her skins and it becomes apparent, despite all of these early photographs being set indoors, that Benyon's second skins – her clothing, her make-up, her material expression of herself – are of elemental importance to her identity. As the show proceeds on to the upstairs galleries, the images, initially covering secretive and domestic ground, begin to incorporate everyday outdoor activities like sightseeing, shopping, and house repairs. The photographs make up fragments of a fraught but positive journey of development. The titles are fascinating things, that sound like fragments of casual conversation, and they often refer to the clothing and fabrics that appear in the images and that are still in Benyon's possession: *I still got that top I wear it for knocking about the house*.

In the back gallery on the first floor, a four-channel audio work, *I had a pink dress at eleven* (2017) plays from four suspended speakers, each spotlighted in the half-dark. In the middle of the space, is a large circular boudoir-like purple couch with grey cushions thrown on top where the viewer is invited to recline and take in the work. Though Benyon is originally from London, the voice from the



speakers is Northern Irish. The script, a series of transcriptions from conversations between Benyon and Dunsmore, is recounted with a playful sensitivity by the actor John Nee. The work's narrative unfolds, often in whispers, about various scrapes and near-misses Benyon encountered while cross-dressing in secret, long before she came out. We are told also about her problems at work when she did eventually come out and we are advised, for example, where not to sit on public transport, so as to avoid confrontation or over-exposure. 'Confidence' is a word that appears regularly, and it is poignant, after a while, when you realise that the confidence Benyon seeks is not to exude some other version of herself, but she seeks mere confidence just to be herself.

*Becoming Christine* by Amanda Dunsmore in partnership with Christine Benyon, curated by Liz Burns, took place in Galway Arts Centre, Galway, May 27th - July 9th, 2017.

Photo credit: Paul McCarthy.

A handsome clothbound publication titled *Becoming Christine* (published by Outside Press) accompanied this show. Within were texts from Dunsmore, Burns, a Q&A between Benyon and Alan Grossman, and an informative essay by Laura Finlay giving an overview and context to Trans rights in Ireland.

# Female Bodied Melancholy

## Pat Riarchy

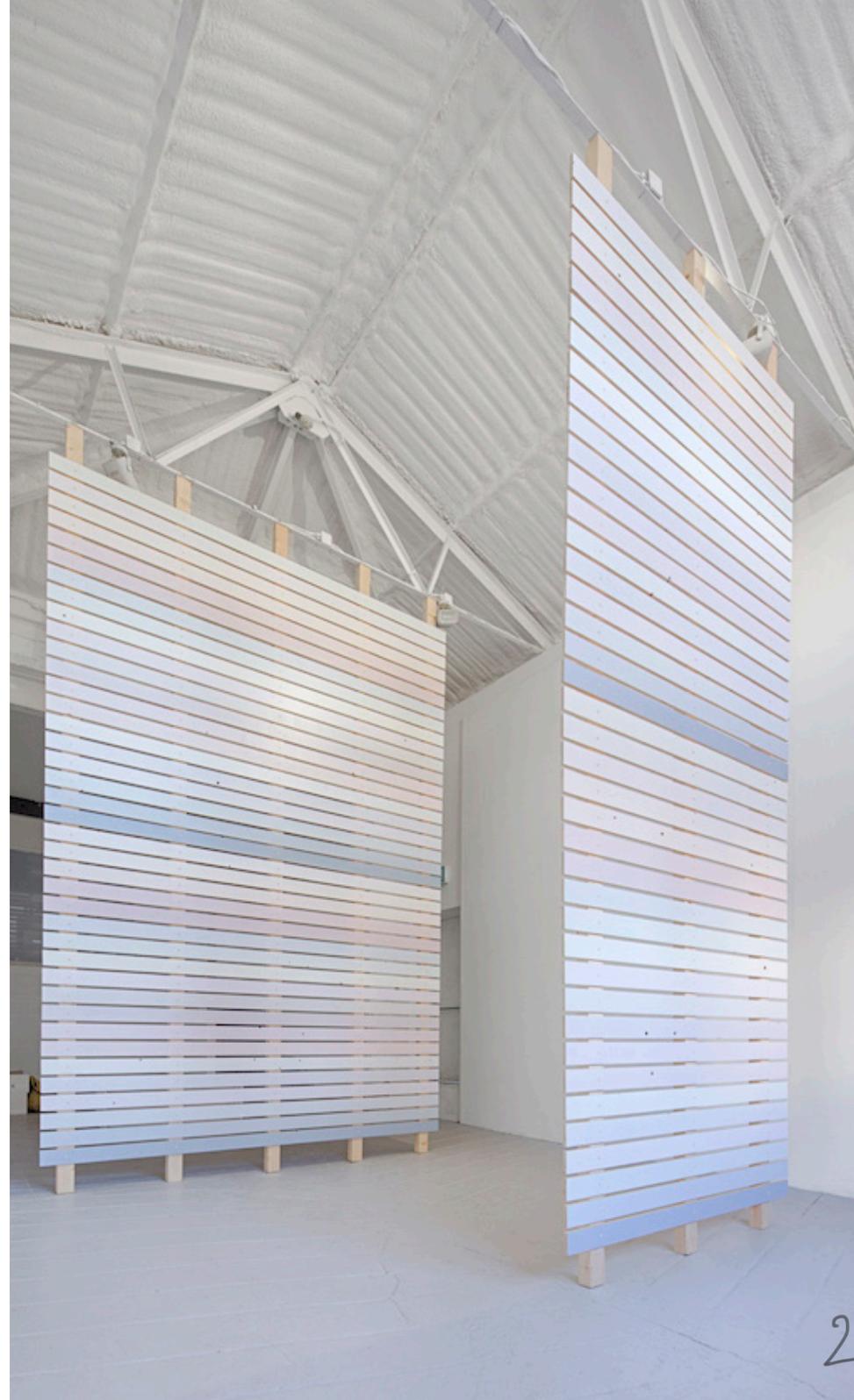
Finally, I will fling open up my oeuvre to you: *Female Bodied Melancholy* is an essay in my forthcoming collection *Assaying my Maleness*. To assay is "the testing of a metal or ore to determine its quality" while to essay is to try to write an essay. I assay my maleness by rigorously writing about art. Essaying whilst assaying, I willfully confuse my vowels: what is the big difference between vowels anyway? We all toil in the traces of Derrida's shadow. You are probably already struck by how I am able to evoke theory and my earnest subjectivity simultaneously. My maleness is vulnerable and my maleness is intelligent. I feel so emancipated from the capitalist regimes of genre and gender. I feel emancipated, but also pretty sad. Nicholas Bourriaud makes the point that, "the modern emancipation plan has been substituted by countless forms of melancholy." Classically, the melancholic suffers from having too much dark, cold bile. I was really darkly bilious in late October 2016 when I went to see *all shimmers here* an exhibition of works by Ali Kirby and Clodhna Timoney.

In the front room of MART, I talked to Kirby about her piece *Plan A* that consists of a pair of attractively tall, wall-like walls. Using a digital photograph of the gallery, Kirby zoomed in on a patch of sunlight, and from the pixels gleaned the palette. Each plank of the wall-like walls is painted in one of these colors, which Kirby mixed herself with painstaking accuracy. Nearly reaching the ceiling, the painted planks of *Plan A* vividly ascend towards their origin, the Light. Kirby's labored translation of Light into perfect

structures makes me really miss the Enlightenment. Was the Enlightenment even that bad? I can't remember.

I walk from light into darkness, Timoney's installation is low lit: the lights are low in brightness and in their nearness to the floor. I crouch to observe the painted, clay-ish objects, which are displayed on a black tarp. The amicably-thingly objects are hanging out in distinct groups. Could the groups be defined as families or fictional Species? No, because these almost familiar objects are actually wildly unknowable! Bourriaud got it right when he said, "modernity cannot be reduced to rationalist teleology."

I again long for the teleology of the Enlightenment. I want to go around naming and ordering all the good looking objects. I cannot and am left with the sad-awe of a Melancholic. In Albrecht Dürer's woodcut *Melancholia I*, Melancholy herself sits with her face rested on her fist, a couple of discarded tools at her feet. This is what it is possibly like to be a female-artist-person. I imagine Kirby or Timoney also sitting pensively, in their studios. I do not know if they do this, but females are more predisposed to melancholy because they have more bile than males. Assaying myself, I determine that I write about art so well because of my bile.



# Dennis Dinneen at The Douglas Hyde Gallery

A feeling of déjà-vu grabs you as you enter Gallery 1 of the Douglas Hyde Gallery. The work of Dennis Dinneen (1927-1985) adorns the walls; encapsulated within these frames is a lost Ireland - and one that we have recently begun to yearn for more frequently. The déjà vu stems from attempts to join the visual memory dots between the scenes and photographs displayed and a familiarity that exists within our own personal memory of our Ireland. While there's no question it's Macroom, Cork, it could as easily be Cashel, Bundoran or any other town in mid-twentieth century Ireland; Dinneen's inward facing scenes are devoid of recognisable landmarks or buildings, further enhancing this. This familiarity warms the heart before saddening it, and eventually consoling it. Dinneen, who operated out of studio adjacent to the bar he and his wife ran, captured intimate and important moments within the lives of his townsfolk. His practice was often accompanied by a jovial humour, evident in the approach he brought to his compositions and framing.



Dinneen also served as his town's taxi driver, completing the triad of the local publican, the town photographer for documents and family portraits, and the transport home for anyone who required it. With this he was the town's cultural axis, creating the social environment that put his subjects at ease - and one that sets him apart from other similar cases, notably Disfarmer.<sup>1</sup>

While in the gallery I overhear a group of American tourists, fresh from the Book of Kells, as they meander around enjoying and interacting with the work. They stop at a portrait of two young

women - both in "fancy coats", on the left a short fringe which has recently returned to fashion, on the right a head shawl and curvaceous glasses. Their initial assessment is that the girl on the left is their mother. They analyse the subjects. Encapsulated within this interaction are the layers of recent Irish diaspora: the emigrants of post-Emergency Ireland, the offspring of those emigrants who've returned to explore the homeland of their ancestors, and me - a descendant

1. Mike Disfarmer (1884-1959) was an American photographer who operated a town studio out of Heber Springs, Arkansas. Like Dinneen, Disfarmer has received posthumous acclaim for his portraiture of rural America; unlike Dinneen, Disfarmer's imagery is known for

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# Aidan Kelly Murphy

of those who remained, distant from them and detached. Despite our reliance on tourism as an industry, we regularly, and often in a flippant manner, dismiss our North American cousins. Having remained, we question their desire to reconnect with a land they only recently disconnected with, in a physical sense at least. It is here that the somber and respectful sadness emits. The passport photographs, originally cropped to headshot but here enlarged to show the full scene, speak of a generation of separation. Keepsakes of relatives, soon to be separated by the Atlantic and other oceans, are created and will soon become treasured artifacts. Active through the 50's, 60's and 70's, Dinneen could have photographed a child's christening, communion, confirmation, adventures on Hallowe'en, hijinks in the bar, before eventually sitting them down to create the image necessary to secure their departure from their homeland; he may have even captured one last image for a memento.



In this exhibition these previously personal photographs, be they for official documents or to rest upon the family mantelpiece, are opened up to a wider audience to engage with. While this results in a multitude of

unique interpretations from each visitor, at their core Dinneen's photographs use the power of a mid-twentieth century visual vernacular of emigration and religious rural Ireland to extract and channel a singular overarching story of community and family. Each visitor can then interpret their own place within this story and the role it played within

the shaping of their own personal and familial history. This allows for a connection, and one that ultimately provides us with a context for the long journeys and tough decisions made by our predecessors. It is here that Dinneen's work provides us with consolation.

Installation views: Dennis Dinneen, The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, April 21 - May 27, 2017.

Photo credit: Aidan Kelly Murphy

its removal of emotion and employing a stark realism - something that is attributed to his distance from the local social environment and his lengthy sittings, which were often in silence: the antithesis of Dinneen's approach.

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Several years ago a friend told me about an article he had read about the discovery of a group of cave paintings buried in the mountains in Indonesia, estimated to date from the same period as the oldest cave paintings known to exist up to that point – those in Chauvet Cave in the South East of France, thought to be in the region of 30,000 - 32,000 years old. Historians and archaeologists were fascinated by the fact that these two examples of early human activity – widely taken as evidence of the kind of higher order consciousness that is often used to distinguish the modern human brain – bore striking resemblance to each other. Both sets contained stencils of human hands and depictions of animal-like figures, despite the fact that at the time they were created it was likely impossible that the two groups had had any interactions with each other.

His initial response was to wonder how these individuals crossed such vast distances to meet, what trade routes they followed, what kind of vessels and equipment they used in order to share and spread these impulses and techniques. This line of thinking was predicated on the presumption that direct and explicit contact must have been made. My initial thoughts went elsewhere. It seemed possible – more likely in fact – that despite geographical remoteness and the influence of distinctive climates, terrains and a cluster of factors that we might denote now with the term 'culture', these two groups may have had experiences (what these were is a worthy matter for speculation that I shall not take up here) that, de-

spite these differences, were perceived and processed in a way that came to manifest so similarly in the marks made on the interiors of these caves.

When considering two disparate things or presented with a bi-partite structure as a framework for thinking there is an understandable inclination to begin to compare and relate the two to each other, to make assumptions and extrapolate from the evidence at hand. It is the essence of the school assignment "Compare and contrast...", designed to help students think more deeply and differently about examples in relation to each other without reducing them to the same thing. Such an exercise, or in its more consistent undertaking as a practice, offers a means to consider two otherwise discrete elements in more specific yet alternative, expanded ways and to inform one with the other.

When using two locations as a structure to consider work produced under the collective rubric of art a level of caution is warranted when reading and reflecting upon the results. Patterns and logics of interrelation may be found among the elements that are more a consequence of the terms framing the considerations than a meaningful reflection of – at worst a detraction from – that which is taking place. One could use the mathematical detection of fractals in the random splatters of Jackson Pollack's drip paintings as a prime example of an instance where order was found even though it was not intentionally devised, simply out of

the directed and determined search for its presence.

On the other hand, it is equally possible that similar concerns, material predilections and thematic orientations, might be present and even become more pressing in their duplicity (or potential multiplicity); that such a structure may prove to be revealing and elucidatory through this narrowing of focus that sets particular – even if rather loose – limits for the writer and reader. Take the "Kuleshov Effect" which describes how viewers often find more meaning from the juxtaposition of two shots in a film sequence than from a single shot alone.

The selection of texts contained within this publication do not merely document a random cross section of art that happened in a particular time frame in two different places. These texts are also a reflection of the selections made by those individuals, i.e. the writers, who are already in the practice of surveying the heavily populated territory of

art making and exhibition in these two locations. Much like historians and archaeologists will derive and propose theories from the marks made inside cave walls these writers propose interpretations and attempt to offer perspectives upon the work that they encounter.

The resulting publication then provides a set of propositions that encapsulate a portion of call and responses that exist for further contemplation. It will prompt certain questions and potentially reveal striking resonances but the extent to which these interrelations have weight may only be clearer in time. And this is what collecting a subset like this provides: a tangible artifact to remain within the ongoing and ever-shifting accumulations of practice and discourse in which all the participants are engaged. Like clues they offer pathways to make more sense of the broader landscape, a minor map to be followed, redrawn and maybe even clarified and refined by those that come upon it.

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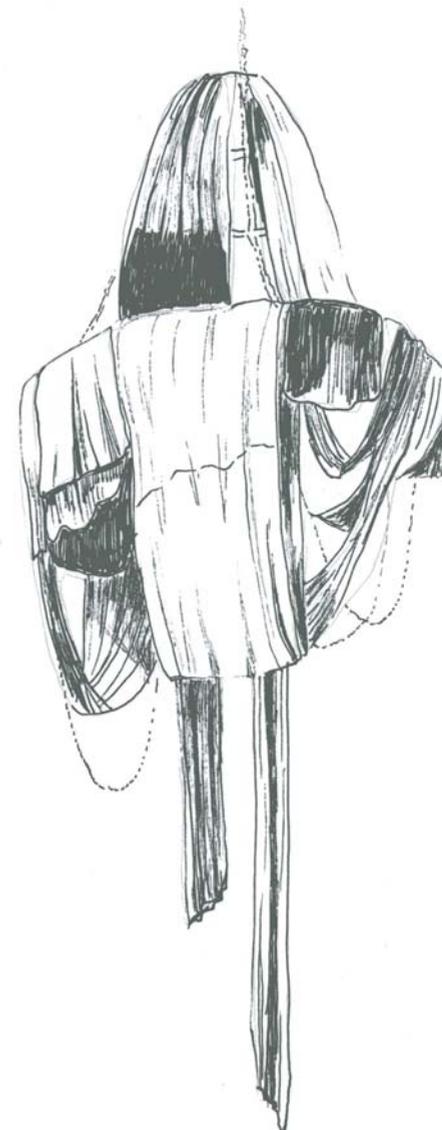
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