Ireland at Venice 2005

Artists
Stephen Brandes
Mark Garry
Ronan McCrea
Isabel Nolan
Sarah Pierce
Walker and Walker

Commissioner
Sarah Glennie

Installation view Scuola di San Pasquale,
Ireland at Venice 2005

Foreword

This book is an overview of Ireland's participation at the Venice Biennale, specifically in the context of Sarah Glennie's commissioning of the 2005 Irish Pavilion. It is a critical endeavour that does more than document 'Ireland at Venice 2005'. With essays by Sarah Glennie, Declan Long and Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith, this publication offers a unique insight into the history of Irish artists at Venice and situates the national pavilion in the wider context of contemporary Irish art. In addition, texts on the artists Stephen Brandes, Mark Garry, Ronan McCrea, Isabel Nolan, Sarah Pierce and Walker and Walker, provide a valuable appreciation of the different practices that represented Ireland at the 51st Venice Biennale.

The assured work of these artists reflects the confident mood of contemporary art in Ireland. One of the hallmarks of Sarah Glennie's approach as commissioner has been to involve a wide range of organisations, each providing expertise and support for Ireland's participation at Venice. From the core funding granted by Culture Ireland/Cultúr Éireann and the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon, to the Sculptors' Society of Ireland's special issue of Printed Project, to the contributions made by the Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology, the Irish Museum of Modern Art and the Limerick Institute of Technology, Glennie has drawn on the strengths of the burgeoning visual arts culture in Ireland to create a remarkable presence for the pavilion both in Venice and in Ireland. As collaborating partner, the Lewis Glucksman Gallery is delighted to work with Sarah Glennie and the selected artists to create an opportunity to exhibit 'Ireland at Venice 2005' in an Irish venue. This is the first time that the pavilion will be shown in Ireland. I hope that the presentation of the work in Cork will enable more viewers to explore Glennie's curatorial process, to reflect on the individual contributions of the participating artists and as a result to consider issues of national representation in an increasingly globalised cultural arena. 'Ireland at Venice 2005' raises significant questions about the direction and understanding of art in contemporary Ireland. It is a vital discussion and one that should be held in the public domain. This thoughtful and timely publication will guide and provoke that debate.

Fiona Kearney
Director, Lewis Glucksman Gallery
Cork

Sarah Glennie has been working as a curator both in Ireland and internationally for over 10 years. She moved to Ireland in 1995 to work at the Irish Museum of Modern Art where she curated a number of projects including solo exhibitions by Olafur Eliasson, and Shirin Neshat and the major public art project *Ghost ship* by Dorothy Cross. In 2001 she moved to The Henry Moore Foundation Contemporary Projects where her curated projects included 'Paul McCarthy at Tate Modern', and 'Stopover: Graham Gussin, Hilary Lloyd and Richard Woods' at the Venice Biennale 2003. She recently co-curated 'Romantic detachment', a Grizedale Arts project at P.S.1/MoMA and is currently working with Tacita Dean on a major new commission for Cork 2005. She was recently appointed Director of the Model and Niland Gallery, Sligo.

Ireland at Venice 2005

Sarah Glennie

The exhibition 'Ireland at Venice 2005' includes the work of seven artists; Stephen Brandes, Mark Garry, Ronan McCrea, Isabel Nolan, Sarah Pierce and the collaborative partnership Walker and Walker; this is the largest number of artists to represent Ireland in the history of the country's participation at Venice. The inclusion of this number of artists was envisaged as a reflection of an increasingly confident, diverse and engaging Irish contemporary art community. All the artitsts live and work in Ireland, although not all are Irish, and they are representative of the strength and vibrancy of the work currently being made within the Irish visual arts community.

The exhibition was housed for the third time in the Scuola di San Pasquale next to the church of San Francesco della Vigna in the Castello district of Venice. The Scuola is a meeting house attached to San Francesco della Vigna, and although unconsecrated bears many of the architectural features of a church, including an altar painting of the Virgin Mary and Saints Pasquale and Francesco. It is a distinctive and unique space and and the exhibition was conceived and realised as a collaboration between these six independent practices and the particularities of the Scuola and it's garden. In particular the work of the three artists exhibiting downstairs, Stephen Brandes, Mark Garry and Isabel Nolan, created a delicate dialogue between the contemporary, largely intimate nature of their work and the architectural complexities and grandeur of the ecclesiastical space.

Stephen Brandes made two new large drawings for Venice, *Becoming island* and *Der Angstlustbaum*. Both of these works are executed on 'Italianate' vinyl floor coverings that are contemporary distant cousins of the marble floor of the Scuola and introduced a strangely domestic, DIY note into the grandeur of the authentic Venetian interior. The vinyl was installed on freestanding wooden frames that created a sculptural dynamic with the architecture of the building and allowed the viewer a close physical engagement with the detail of the drawings.

Brandes' intricate and complex drawings interweave a personal family history of Eastern Europe, real and imagined, with source materials as diverse as, in this instance, Darwin and Böcklin. He uses a pictorial language that fuses contemporary and historical references from medieval cartography to American underground comics, resulting in fantastical, unsettling landscapes that suggest the imagined places of history and fairytales, yet all from a distinctly suburban viewpoint. In *Becoming island* hoardings for 'BRITNEY LIVE' and a 'GARDEN CENTRE' emerge out of the dysfunctional landscape that combines factory buildings reminiscent of the industrial north of England with the forests and mountains of our childhood fairytales all under the shadow of a disturbingly toxic plume of yellow smoke. The large mythical tree in *Der Angstlerbaum*, inspired initially by Darwin's *Tree of Life*, maintains the evolutionary references of its source, with apes taking their place at the top of the tree – all gently parodied by the inclusion of pop references such as 'Bono has left the building'. Meanwhile an intricate mechanical system weaves it way through the structure of the tree with no evident productive purpose, and an aesthetic closer to a mad inventor's laboratory than the realities of industry.

Mark Garry's installation, *How soon is now*, spanned the Scuola in a playful and provocative relationship with the architectural and decorative features of the space. The installation, utilising a range of mainly craft based materials including acrylic and cotton thread, beads and resin, consisted of three sculptural, spatial and acoustic elements that each responded to and articulated the space in different ways whilst encouraging shifting spatial, imaginative and physical responses from the viewer.

Central to the installation was a spectrum constructed from coloured thread, skirting above the viewers' heads and connecting with the architecture at four points between the windows and columns. Its full extent was not fully evident to the viewer on entering the Scuola but like an elusive rainbow it slowly revealed itself as the space was fully negotiated and the descent from upstairs afforded a complete perspective. Three resin rabbits on the alter, blindfolded, adorned with plasticine and tethered to the pillar with glaring pink plastic thread, sat with apparent disregard to the religious scene played out in the painting above their heads. The final element of the installation added a tentative soundtrack. However this soundtrack was reliant on the viewer's physical engagement with the componium, a manually operated music box mechanism. Stripped of any outer decorative cover the componium combined with it's MDF stand to add a formal counterbalance to the visual refinement of the spectrum and the rabbits.

Isabel Nolan showed a number of works throughout the downstairs space on the walls and laid on tables belonging to the Scuola. The works, primarily small scale and in drawing, painting and animation, were selected from a larger, diverse group of works that combine together to tentatively convey the artist's uncertain and shifting relationships to her real and imagined surroundings. Nolan's work employs a wide visual vocabulary including pencil portraits, painted words, an array of simple motifs and images of commonplace phenomenon – a spider, the sea, a holly branch, a sleeping dog. The work describes intimate moments – the intensity of longing, the anxiety of isolation. Underlying it all is a desire by the artist to capture and convey feeling and sincerity, whilst avoiding sentimentality and cliché.

A number of drawings laid under glass on a large oak table belonging to the Scuola set up complex narratives between intimate portraits, abstraction and drawings of the natural world. The seemingly disparate elements all connected and given temporary significance by the artist's quest through drawing and text to define her situation and position in relation to others and her surroundings. Interspersed through the installation snippets of text combine with the images to confront the viewer with moments of stark honesty and frankness. In the animation *Quiet, please?* an alien phenomenon poses the difficult and fundamental question 'Do you think you are free?', whilst a small drawing hung on the wall by the stairs contains the stark statement 'between you and me sometimes it feels like there is just too much space' – a simple sentence that encapsulates the complexity of human connectedness and isolation.

Upstairs the Scuola is a more architecurally simple space, darkended for the exhibition to house Ronan McCrea's photographic slide installation and Walker and Walker's film and sculptural works.

Ronan McCrea's recent work is concerned with the space between collective modes of memory and remembering as a private act. This is the basis of the ongoing work *Sequences, Scenarios & Locations* which has evolved in various manifestations since 2000. His installation for Venice included three chapters of this project: *Part I – After Hänsel and Gretel, Part II* and *Part III – The lost photographs of Albert H.* Taking the form of a photographic slide installation, *Sequences, Scenarios & Locations* employs both personal documentary material and fictive narratives. All the photographic sequences follow a teenage girl, the artist's daughter standing in for the artist, acting out a motif from the Grimm fairytale where Hänsel unsuccessfully uses a trail of bread to find his way home through the forest.

In *Part I – After Hänsel and Gretel*, 'host-like' paper fragments, cut from a drawing based on post-mortem photographs of the artist's father, stand in for the bread dropped by Hänsel. The drawing is one of a series entitled the *Correction Drawings*, made in 2000, which involved a process of trying to 'correct' the discrepency between the photographic image and the artist's memory of his fathers features. This resulted in the selective erasure of the pencil marks and then cutting out sections of the paper itself – the 'hosts'. In this chapter the teenage girl drops the 'hosts' through various Dublin locations associated with McCrea's father's history. *Part II* follows the girl to Venice where she walks through the city picking up a trail of photographic fragments, that, when reconstructed, make up the source post-mortem photograph of the artist's father used for the drawing featured in *Part I. Part III – The lost photographs of Albert H* uses as it's source an archive of family photographs belonging to the unknown 'Albert H' found by the artist in a flea market in Berlin. The girl returns to the flea market and then walks through Berlin dropping a trail of almost three hundred photographs of the unknown family.

The collaborative partnership, Walker and Walker have continued their exploration of representations of the sublime with their first film project *Nightfall*, shown in Venice with a number of sculptural works. The film uses three formal devices to address it's central theme, the idea of the sublime in nature; firstly the echo, provided by the film's location Lake Konigsee in Bavaria which is famous for it's echo; repetition, as the protagonist is shadowed at moments in the film by a doppelgänger that repeats and adds to his monologue; and finally the passage of day into night which in this instance evokes both the allegorical opposites of darkness and light and the Romantic interpretation of the sublime as a passion best aroused by uncertainty and the darkness of the night.

The 16mm film follows the central protagonist through the landscape of Lake Konigsee, a setting that immediately brings to mind the ideals and aesthetics of Romanticism. The film opens with the protagonist arriving at the edge of the lake and he stops to examine two pebbles' similarities and differences. As he rows across the lake the protagonist continually comments on the passing of the day and the journey away from light repeating the phrase 'Beyond which lies darkness' to which his doppelgänger on the shore replies 'Beyond darkness the other side of light'. By the end of the film he floats in confusion surrounded by the darkening landscape as his monologue evokes the encroaching darkness as a powerful, mysterious presence; 'a darkness so close it can only be likened to skin, beneath which is the internal space peopled by ourselves alone...'; but tempered by the awareness that 'tomorrow will bring a new light'. As the film closes he shouts 'in which whatever falls continues falling... falling...' as his words are echoed back to him.

Two of the sculptural works accompanying the film and installed at opposite sides of the darkened space spelt out in white neon *Dust veil* and *Dark again*, echoing in light the evocation of the passing of light into darkness. Leaning against the wall *Bridge* took the form of a continuous ring of neon framing a circle of darkness, while the *Ghost of Andre Cadere,* a replica of the French artist's *Barre de bois ronde*, casually lent against the wall evoking his practise of introducing often uninvited disruptions into the art world.

Since 2003, Sarah Pierce has organised an art practice involving a number of strategies collectively termed The Metropolitan Complex. Central to this practice is an investigation of the local as a discourse articulated through institutions, artists, art schools, and bureaucracies and a particular focus of her Dublin based practice has been an articulation of the psychological, social, and often incidental relationships that form a local scene. Pierce's project for Venice, *Monk's garden*, was sited in the small garden next to the Scuola, as an experiment in nationality, history and finding one's place.

Monk's garden is a multilayered work that developed both in response to a site visit to the Scuola in April 2005, and out of the artist's awareness of the particularities of her position as an American artist included in this representation of Irish culture. The garden is not usually open to the public but it was made available to us to use as part of the exhibition after negotiations with the Fathers of San Francesco della Vigna. A banner attached to the metal shed in the garden laid out in text the complex web of relationships, associations, geographies and networks that each informed the project in different ways. An ongoing relationship with Dublin based activist Dunk led to a consideration of the nature of green space in Venice and an introduction The Forgotten Zine Library, founded and maintained by an activist group in Dublin. After a thorough archiving by Pierce, the Irish section of the library was brought to Venice to be housed in the garden for the duration of the exhibition and presented by the artist as a 'sort of pavilion'; a record of an underground Irish culture brought under the banner of 'Ireland at Venice 2005'. An edition of The Metropolitan Complex's ongoing series of papers, freely available in the garden, further articulates through recorded discussion both the history of The Forgotten Zine Library and individual memories of the 80s Dublin punk scene – the spirit of which informs the young zine writers. Pierce's own generational and cultural reference points were represented with a recreation in the garden of Smithson's *Mirror displacements*, installed following the artist's original documentation from the original manifestations along the Yacutan. Different geographies, histories and cultures were appropriated into the Scuola's small garden, as the banner stated; 'Incidents of travel arrive in Venice in the *Monk's garden*.'

An additional element of 'Ireland at Venice 2005' was the launch in Venice of Printed Project's fifth edition, Another Monumental Metaphor, curated/edited by Dublin based artist Alan Phelan. Printed Project is a journal published by the visual arts organisation, The Sculptors' Society of Ireland, and this edition, commissioned on the occasion of 'Ireland at Venice 2005', took the themes from various world biennials as titles for contributions by a wide range of practitioners. This was one of a number of institutional collaborations that linked the Irish art world to the international platform provided by the Biennale, and for the first time following the exhibition in Venice the project will travel back to Ireland and will be shown at Lewis Glucksman Gallery in early 2006.

The exhibition 'Ireland at Venice 2005' brought together these six independent practices, as well as the many more artistic, curatorial and critical practices that contributed to Another Monumental Metaphor. It was not the intention of the exhibition to make links across the work, its aim instead was to present a group of artists whose practices are located and active within Irish visual arts, and which combine to offer an insight into this growing community. It is important to remember in this situation that this is not a definitive group, there are many other shows that could be made, this is the group that worked for this context and time. Similarily this exhibition does not represent the full extent of these artists' practices, it is their response to the situation presented by the Biennale and Scuola. However, through the process of realising the project connections and commonalities emerged. Underlying all the work is an engagement with subject and an engagement with experience, although addressed in very different ways. This level of difference and individuality is to be expected in an Irish visual arts scene that is more united by attitude than aesthetics. A further commonality between these six intriguing practices is a strong sense of focus and direction and the capability to continue to make major contributions to the vibrancy of the visual arts in Ireland.

Sarah Glennie
Commissioner

Isabel Nolan
Between you and me
2004
Pencil and watercolour
on paper
29.5 x 42 cm

Spaces between and beyond

Declan Long

My subjectivity
is not fixed but is
continuously
being formed
through the history
of my encounters
with others in
the world, which
provides my
ethical ground.
– from *Conversation Pieces*
by Jean Fisher[1]

In a small work on paper included in the Irish exhibition at the 51st Venice Biennale, the following handwritten confession could be found: 'between you and me sometimes it feels as if there is just too much space'. Read one way, this somewhat ambiguous sentence could be understood as having entirely 'private' significance: it has perhaps, the appearance of a fragment from an intimate conversation, a moment in a tender discussion about the limits of a relationship – the extent of the space *between* two people being anxiously acknowledged. Yet at the same time the words might be understood as a confidential aside ('between you and me…') regarding a more general 'spatial' uncertainty. However unspecific, the text in this sense seems to register some degree of fear or frustration about the enormity of whatever 'space' there is that surrounds or lies beyond each of us.

Such interplay of possible meanings, such to-ing and fro-ing between referencing close relationships and scrutinizing the condition of 'space', circumstantial reality, the world around us, is characteristic of the artist behind this particular piece, Isabel Nolan. In Nolan's work we come into contact with subjects that at times seem part of a 'closed world that is open to the world' (to borrow a neatly paradoxical idea valued by Stan Douglas)[2], her diverse images and texts as often being concerned with evoking the privacy of mental life as they are with contemplating proximity to others; they dwell on isolation and affinity in equal measure. As such, of course, work of this kind is likely to have additional resonance when it is itself in the company of others. Nolan's allusions to spaces between and spaces beyond, to complex relations with other people and with the everyday world, have an extended associative effect when considered within the matrix of a group exhibition. To encounter within the shared environment of the Irish exhibition at the 2005 Biennale a text that begins 'between you and me' and ends with 'just too much space', was to suddenly feel one way in which, as Edward Said has written, 'the closeness of the world's body to the text's body forces us to take both into consideration.'[3] Yet rather than being an effect peculiar to Nolan's practice, this implied suggestion of the value of addressing or discovering relations between people and places is more generally of special importance to Ireland's representation at this Biennale. For in planning a group exhibition, and in bringing together the practices of Isabel Nolan, Stephen Brandes, Mark Garry, Walker and Walker, Ronan McCrea and Sarah Pierce (along with the Sculptors' Society of Ireland's Printed Project magazine), Ireland's commissioner Sarah Glennie aimed to do more than promote well-established or currently on-form individual artists. In a vital way Glennie's selections are influenced by an interest in something much more 'conversational' and contextual: a priority has been to offer, through the juxtaposition of these remarkably wide-ranging artistic identities, an insight into a 'community' of activity, highlighting practices which, however individual in their forms and interests, have occupied valued positions within a local network of artists, curators and critics. In some respects like Isabel Nolan's work, therefore, the exhibition emerges out of an attempt to reflect on affinity and proximity.

It is interesting, in passing, to note how other works included in the exhibition construct scenarios or deal with spaces in a manner appropriate to Glennie's emphasis on the relation of individuals to a broader scene. Ronan McCrea's slide projections, for instance, include antique photographs of unknown families as well as images of the artist's daughter negotiating her way alone through city spaces; 'closed' worlds are here opened to the world in a manner that recalls the merging of private and public histories in Gerhard Richter's *Atlas* or in the writings of W. G. Sebald. Stephen Brandes also positions the individual in a complex relation to history and geography, his elaborately mapped imaginary territories combining the detritus of twentieth century history with aspects of the artist's personal background. In Walker and Walker's film *Nightfall*, the self's relation to 'space beyond' is studied through a portrayal of one man's encounter with his double in a 'sublime' natural setting (somehow, on this occasion, 'too much space' is identified not 'between you and me' but 'between *me* and me'...).

In different ways these artists are all concerned with plotting co-ordinates for themselves in the world. This is a connecting thematic thread that is also highly relevant to Mark Garry – for whom of course, threads are crucial physical components in fragile site-sensitive installations. By creating delicate links between points in space, Garry's works subtly transform our relation to architectural environments, encouraging us to continually shift location in a space, to draw links between disparate forms, to look around in all directions. However differently manifested, there are related tendencies in the work of Sarah Pierce's Metropolitan Complex, whose projects involve looking around in several directions at once, seeking enlivening points of connection, whether historical, cultural or social. (In Venice, for instance, an archive of Irish fanzines could be found alongside a re-creation of a Robert Smithson land art project.) Again and again, therefore, the group of artists selected by Sarah Glennie return us to a process of thinking through the relations between things; and, given Glennie's curatorial ambition of capturing a fleeting sense of certain tendencies within the visual arts in Ireland at the present time (in particular drawing attention to the importance of a certain dynamic within Dublin), we might choose to read this recurring fascination with such variously defined 'relations' as symptomatic of more broadly prevailing concerns. Certainly, for instance, it is worth noting in this context the fact that Mark Garry and Sarah Pierce also serve as a relevant examples of practitioners who have regularly placed high value on prioritizing collective interests over an 'individual' practice, though to different extents and often with different agendas. So, while Mark Garry has recently focused on developing intricate associative networks as installations, he has over recent years also been widely credited as a key figure in the development of networks of emerging artists, initiating a number of independent group projects that sought to promote the work of younger artists in a manner that (for a time at least) did not seem possible within local mainstream art institutions[4]. Garry's group projects in Dublin have been characterized by a confident commitment to the work of his peers and by the intuitive approach and licensed freedom from convention that are often remarked-upon characteristics of 'artist-curator' practices.[5] In Pierce's case, The Metropolitan Complex has emerged as a committed collaborative endeavour; expansive in its interests, varied in its methods. Central to its contribution has been a determined effort to facilitate conversations that might involve interrogation of naturalized, 'common sense' relations, attitudes and practices within a local scene, an aim which has been pursued by (among other things) the staging of informal roundtable discussions addressing such subjects as activism, art and politics, varieties of curatorial practice, and constructions of the 'local' in relation to the 'international'. The published transcripts of these conversations are widely acknowledged as a significant, independently produced, record of recently shared pre-occupations regarding the conditions for contemporary art practice.[6]

Through collaborative ventures of this kind, The Metropolitan Complex has succeeded in creating much needed space for productive, critically-reflexive, encounters. The identification, examination and transformation of shared circumstances has been fundamental to many such local interactions and collaborations in recent years, and another representative Metropolitan Complex project in this respect would be 2003's 'Affinity archive'. This took the form of an open-ended exhibition of eclectic ephemera and marginalia relating to the practices of a diverse group of artists, curators and writers. The creation of this archive of unlikely material began with an invitation being offered to twenty-four local and international figures (among them Ronan McCrea, Grace Weir, George Baker and Matthew Buckingham) to contribute something – *anything* – that bore a significant, if not perhaps immediately apparent, relevance to the circumstances or tendencies of their work. The underlying aim was, as Pierce has noted, 'to see if there was a way to make a collection out of the communal, conversational, and incidental – the affinities or sympathetic moments of interaction that take place in and around art.'[7] The collection was, therefore, a compendium of the miscellaneous materials that have a bearing on cultural production – assorted texts, photographs, drawings, even a recording of a Thin Lizzy track – all of which were placed on public display in Pierce's Dublin studio. This decision to use the studio space as a situation for alternative forms of 'making' implies, of course, a critique of romantic models of solitary artistic process (challenging the traditional 'function of the studio' as, in Daniel Buren's formulation, 'a unique place where the work originates'[8]) and, furthermore, Pierce has suggested that the project evolved 'into an analysis of the ways that works of art are handled and displayed'. But the 'Affinity archive' is arguably most memorable for its having, as Pierce terms it, 'tested the affinities that exist within a local situation' – and in this respect it can be viewed as a part of a loose continuum or broader pattern of exhibitions, practices and artistic programmes which have had a similar investment in 'testing affinities' in a variety of 'local situations'.

Affinity archive
The Metropolitan Complex
Broadstone Studios, Dublin
2003
Installation view

These contemporary interests were perhaps most directly registered in the 2003 exhibition 'Permaculture' at Project Arts Centre in Dublin. Devised by Project's visual arts curator Grant Watson, with additional input from independent curator Vaari Claffey, 'Permaculture' was, in terms of its approach to engaging with local conversations and contexts, a largely unprecedented undertaking. Almost thirty artists who were (or had recently been) Dublin-based were invited to show work in the relatively confined space of the Project Gallery – Watson's apparent objective being to design an exhibition which would show practices overlapping and intersecting, allowing for radical juxtapositions and 'intimate' arrangements of heterogeneous styles. The horticultural allusion of the title played on the notion of 'diverse species co-existing in close proximity'[9] and suggested eco-centric theories of dynamic interconnectedness, the exhibition augmenting this impression on a formal level by blurring divisions between individual works. A photographic work by Bernard Smyth, for example, wrapped itself around a plywood arc that had been constructed to house a series of videos by other participants. Similarly, Karl Burke contributed structures that acted as supports for sculptures by Caroline McCarthy and Robert Carr. Another artist, Slavec Kwi, went so far as to create kinetic artworks that had an actively 'parasitic' relation to neighboring pieces. Overall, as a curatorial articulation of an attitude towards the 'local situation', 'Permaculture' brings to mind the idea of the 'situation' as defined by philosopher Alan Badiou: it was a 'presented multiplicity'.[10] Still more accurately, perhaps, (again following Badiou) we might categorize the exhibition in terms of 'multiple multiplicities' in so far as it also made room for collaborative contributions and further internal curatorial interventions. Mark Garry, for instance, chose to use his invitation to take part as an opportunity to organize a microcosmic exhibition-within-the-exhibition, intricately fashioning a system for displaying the work of a further eighty emergent practices.

Permaculture
Project Arts Centre,
Dublin
February/March 2003
Installation view

It is worth noting that Mark Garry was not the only artist included in Ireland's representation at the 51st Venice Biennale to also feature in 'Permaculture'. All, in fact, took part in the earlier show and this overlap is an importance instance of how the distinctive formal relations set up by 'Permaculture' are analogous to the ongoing intersections of practices and programmes that have been an often-cited characteristic of Dublin's 'local situations'. 'Permaculture' remains an important point of reference for the artists selected by Sarah Glennie, and certainly in the time since their eyes met across the crowded room of the Project Gallery, they have been involved in (what Douglas Gordon has called elsewhere) 'a promiscuity of collaborations'.[11] Sarah Pierce's Metropolitan Complex has, for instance, developed something of a long-term relationship with Project, producing papers and developing archives in relation to particular aspects of programming. The Metropolitan Complex also joined Mark Garry, in the guise of the Mongrel Foundation, as participants in 'Artists/Groups', a series of short exhibitions at Project by a number of artist-led initiatives. Grant Watson has referred to 'Artists/Groups' as a kind of 'sequel' to 'Permaculture', encouraging the perception that the forms and concepts of different exhibitions might intersect with one another, though significantly, 'Artists/Groups' extends the previous consideration of local affinities to take into account historical precedents and geographical points of connection (the series featured work by, among others, Constance Short, one of the founders of Project, as well as Belfast collective Factotum and London-based artist Amy Plant). Ronan McCrea too has been active in pursuing joint ventures, one pertinent instance being his collaboration with Grant Watson and Vaari Claffey on a contemporary art programme for Dublin's Goethe Institut – a series of exhibitions and events which involved working closely on projects with Walker and Walker and Isabel Nolan. More recently Claffey and Nolan have worked together, co-curating an exhibition at Temple Bar Gallery, which featured among its local and international selections both Mark Garry and Ronan McCrea. Amid the somewhat dizzying proliferation of partnerships, this Claffey-Nolan collaboration is an interesting case in that an undoubted anxiety at the heart of the exhibition was the difficulty of making connections between one person or one place (or even one cherished moment in time) and another. Entitled 'No-one else can make me feel the colours that you bring' (originally a line in a somewhat deranged love song by Minnie Ripperton), this absorbing encounter between highly disparate art practices featured earlier versions of the contemplations on memory and space that Ronan McCrea and Mark Garry, respectively, would develop for Venice, as well as prompting the publication of a book of typically understated drawings by Isabel Nolan, many of which would also come to form part of the Venice representation.[12] 'No-one else…', as its title indicates, often evoked a liberating, almost psychedelic 'space beyond' that might be reached through contact with a desired 'other', but the oblique references to the disappointments of sought-after intimacy created an abiding sense that 'between you and me' the space may ultimately remain 'just too great'.

Artists/Groups
Project Arts Centre,
Dublin
October/December 2003
Installation view

Though the compelling mixed messages sent out by 'No-one else…' can hardly be considered a commentary on the conditions of art practice in recent years, the impression gained of a restless unpicking of the implications of certain kinds of 'relations' has an indirect relevance to those broader tendencies that have been, however loosely, sketched here, and which to some extent have a bearing on the direction taken for the 2005 Irish exhibition in Venice[13]. If there is in Dublin (in particular) at the present time a vitality in art practice it is, as Sarah Glennie has suggested, partly owing to the increasing readiness of artists to remain based in Ireland – the Venice selection represents, for her, 'the first generation to stay' – and this phenomenon has, perhaps, necessitated what is a prolonged, productive and strategically diverse testing of affinities in local situations.

No-one else can make me feel the colours that you bring
Temple Bar Gallery and studios, Dublin
2004
Installation view

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1 Jean Fisher, *Conversations Pieces* in The Vampire in the Text: Narratives of Contemporary Art (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2003), p.277.

2 Stan Douglas quoted in Scott Watson et al., Stan Douglas (London: Phaidon Press, 1998), p. 28.

3 Edward Said,*The World, The Text and The Critic* in The World, The Text and The Critic (London: Vintage, 1991), p. 39.

4 As well as undertaking a number of independent projects Mark Garry was also Visual Arts Curator for the Dublin Fringe Festival from 2000-2004. Of the other independent, artist-initiated curatorial projects in Dublin in recent years, the opportunities offered by Pallas Studios' Mark Cullen and Brian Duggan have also been widely appreciated by emerging artists.

5 See Teresa Gleadowe, *Curating in a Changing Climate* in Gavin Wade, Curating in the 21st Century (Walsall: New Art Gallery, 2000), p. 36

6 The Metropolitan Complex papers are available online at *http://www.themetropolitan complex.com*
Issue one is perhaps most relevant to the contents of this essay in that its list of contributors included artists/curators discussed here such as Sarah Pierce, Mark Garry, Grant Watson and Vaari Claffey; as well as Alan Phelan, a Venice participant as curator/editor of Printed Project and Annie Fletcher, former curator at IMMA, whose 2002 group exhibition 'How things turn out' (which included Isabel Nolan and Walker and Walker among others) is regularly cited by artists in Dublin as one of the most significant of recent years.

7 From an email interview with the artist, July 2005. Responding to questions about recent practice in Dublin, Pierce stresses the importance of international contexts – a subject which, due to limited space, is insufficiently discussed here: 'A small group of people working in Ireland right now realize the importance of establishing networks outside of Ireland as a means of working locally. While this might sound contradictory, it acknow-ledges that the "local" is often played out through strong, ongoing connections to other places. This has perhaps changed art practice indirectly, because one effect of this dialogue is an increased awareness of *how* artistic practices, including institutional practices are radically changing elsewhere.' (A practical consideration in relation to such developments is the fact that air travel has become increasingly affordable for young artists, both as a result of the Arts Council of Ireland's Art-flight scheme and following the emergence of low-cost airlines in the 1990s.)

8 Daniel Buren, *The Function of the Studio* in Claire Doherty (ed.) Contemporary Art: From Studio to Situation (London: Black Dog Publishing 2005), p. 16. Originally published in French in Ragile, Paris, vol. III, September 1979 and in English in October 10, 1979.

9 Adapted from Project Arts Centre statement, available, July 2005 at *http://www.project.ie/cgi-bin/eventdetail.pl?id=3&event db=archive*

10 Alan Badiou, L'Etre et l'évènement (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1988). P. 32. The terms appear translated in this form in Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens' *Introduction to Alan Badiou's Philosophy* in Alan Badiou, Infinite Thought (London: Continuum, 2005), p. 7.

11 Douglas Gordon in Hans Ulrich Obrist and Thomas Boutoux (ed.) Hans Ulrich Obrist: Interviews, Volume One (Milan: Charta, 2003), p. 325.

12 Prior to the Venice exhibition a number of these drawings also featured in the solo exhibition 'Everything I said let me explain', curated by Grant Watson at Project in March/April 2005. Given the emphasis on proliferating partnerships it should be said that Nolan has also twice participated in group exhibitions which were co-curated by Stephen Brandes ('Superbia', curated by Stephen Brandes and Brigid Harte, Dublin 2003; and 'Superbia2', curated by Stephen Brandes and Darragh Hogan, Cork 2005).

13 The examples used here are, of course, far from definitive in terms of 'current tendencies' and, no doubt, mask as much as they reveal. Nevertheless in terms of the interests of the selection of artists showing in Venice in 2005, they offer a fleeting glimpse of some valued projects and presences. In addition to those individuals and institutions already mentioned, however, the following are among other locally-specific suggestions that have been offered: the IADT MA in Visual Arts Practices (pioneered by Mick Wilson and based at Temple Bar Gallery and Studios) which, with its work-in-progress exhibitions, constitutes an enlivening 'closed world that is open to the world'; the energetic commitment to contemporary art debates shown by Christina Kennedy of the Hugh Lane Gallery; the vital presence of the Kerlin Gallery and its associated local artists (including Jaki Irvine and William McKeown); the invaluable critical internationalism provided by Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith; and, above all, the sophistication, breadth and intellectual seriousness of John Hutchinson's ongoing programming at the Douglas Hyde Gallery.

Stephen Brandes

Stephen Brandes interviewed by Sarah Glennie

Stephen Brandes was born in Wolverhampton, UK in 1966 and now lives and works in Cork after moving to Ireland in 1993. He has exhibited extensively in Ireland and internationally including 'Ways of escape' a solo show Temple Bar Gallery and Studios, Dublin in 2004 and recent group exhibitions, 'Necessary journeys', Temple Bar Gallery and Studios, Dublin 2003, 'The retreat', City Limits, Melbourne 2004, 'Live', Interim-Projekte, Offenbach-am-Main 2005, and 'Eurojet futures 05', RHA Gallery, Dublin 2005. His work is represented in the Irish Museum of Modern Art Collection, and the Office of Public Works, Ireland. He has worked as a curator of inde-pendent art projects, most notably 'Superbia', an exhibition situated in in a semi-detached house in Ballymun, Dublin and 'Superbia2', at St Columba's Boys' National School as part of Cork 2005 – European Capital of Culture. Stephen Brandes is represented by the Rubicon Gallery, Dublin.

Sarah Glennie: You have previously said that this work originally started after a journey to Eastern Europe to retrace your family's escape from the Pogroms – to what extent is this personal history contained in the work now?

Stephen Brandes: To be more precise, this body of work was originally inspired by the story surrounding my Grandmother's passage from Romania to Britain; in 1913 a young woman in her mid-late teens escaped certain execution by the local authorities, after allegedly thumping a militia guard. Her father owned a timber yard on the Romania/Ukraine border. It was Pogrom time and they had come to deliver a possession order. Within hours the whole family had fled in different directions. The young woman travelled to Vienna and then on to the port of Hamburg via Prague and Berlin. After leaving Hamburg and on rough seas, Grandmother nursed a young man being sick over the side of the boat. They docked in Hull and married in Leeds. Four children later, Grandfather – a painter and decorator went out for a packet of cigarettes and never returned. They think he went to Dublin.

This story, while essentially factual, is a fiction that I formulated and changed over many years – formulated because I was never told the real details and I never asked. It somehow filled a hole in my understanding and the understanding of others as to why and how I got here. I have since discovered however that my Grandmother only had one leg – the other was ceramic.

In 1999, I decided to make the journey that my Grandmother made, not only to satisfy a curiosity about my family history, but more importantly to feed my imagination. Whilst travelling I made hundreds of very economical observational drawings of all manner of things. These still infest my current practice; however my experience of growing up in the Black Country in England and of living in Ireland for twelve years is of equal value to my work. I am essentially trying to create a perpetually developing fictional world – one that references a vast terrain, both geographically and chronologically. My work is indirectly informed by my family's history, but in no way does it attempt to illustrate it.

There is an aesthetic that is strongly reminiscent of Eastern Europe (both in the work real and imagined). There is also an historical aesthetic (Bosch, fairytale illustration) which jars with some of the grimmer elements of suburban shopping mall culture described – the result is imagery that is non specific to any time or place but which references many difference geographies, histories, cultures, is this deliberate?

There is a wonderful sense of barbed magic prevalent in many Eastern European art-forms that I aspire to emulate in my own work, be it the large graphic pieces or the small paintings. But the influences are fairly wide-ranging; from medieval cartography to American underground comics and children's book illustration to inter-war poster design. I try not to adopt a singular way of working, but recognise in these art-forms an accessibility that encourages an engagement with the darker and more cryptic elements in my work.

I am drawn to a number of Russian writers such as Mikhail Bulgakov and Avram Terz for their ability to employ the folk or fairy story to satirize contemporary life or articulate otherwise inaccessible areas of the human condition. Both possess a gallows humour which they seem to deploy as a powerful weapon against adversity.

Another thing that I greatly admire is the ability to be highly inventive in spite of 'lo-fi' production values, and this is something Eastern Europeans have turned into a speciality. I remember a theatre company from Krakow performing at a small arts centre in the West of England, where I was resident for a year. All of their props and equipment arrived in three boxes and resembled the contents of a car boot sale – what seemed like a completely random arrangement of objects was appropriated into a magically inventive narrative performance. It was amazing, their aesthetic sensibility and working process has stayed with me.

Having said this, there is much in Irish literature and humour, British comedy and various forms of alternative popular culture that is visible in my work, but the contemporary references to suburban life – or 'mall culture' as you call it – place the strangeness and absurdity back in the realm of everyday experience and vice versa.

All the contemporary references in this mix come from suburbia; this is something that has also informed your curatorial practice. What is it about the suburban that continues to hold such fascination for you?

Not all the references are suburban, but you are right, it does keep a persistent profile in my practice. I grew up in suburbia though I'm not sure that I'd ever like to return there, it's a bit like James Joyce and Dublin. But the funny thing about Ireland is that suburban house-styles crop up all over – even in the wildest and most picturesque places.

Suburbia created me so it's only natural that I feel some attachment to it and still do something with it. I think suburbia spawns a lot of creative activity as a reaction to its conformity – as a means of escape. The exhibitions I have organised, entitled 'Superbia' (a comment on estate agent jargon), attempt to jolt ones experience of this part of the city.

The vinyl used for the two large works in Venice is a DIY interpretation of Italianate flooring and so is brought back to its source – it is as if the suburban has snuck into Venice.

Plastic aspirations of grandeur! It took a long time to find the right stuff. I never meant to use it as a snide attack on aspirational middle-class taste – as floor vinyls go, both are fairly unobtrusive. I wanted to use vinyl for the work that reflected the surroundings and yet didn't deny where it was conceived or made.

There is an element of the 'eccentric doodler' in the works laborious execution – meticulously creating an imaginary world removed from reality. Is this something you are interested in?

It would be disingenuous to say there was a conscious 'outsidery' thing going on. Making the work is a form of escapism for me and always has been, but at the same time I try to acknowledge my own failings whilst creating a world where I can vent some spleen or become wilfully obscure – I think this is healthy, (my wife might disagree) – but it is not so personal as to deny access to the viewer.

'Fragments' are an important part of your practice – the drawings move across different surfaces – walls, small pieces of paper, vinyl floor coverings – it seems perhaps that the drawings are all part of an ongoing narrative that spreads across different situations?

The objects or motifs in my drawings act as props; I use them again and again as well as adding new ones. They are the product of a kind of cerebral attic clearance. I then improvise with these props to produce either singular works or accumulative episodes, I'm always thinking of how they might interrelate. This scatological approach could lead to accusations of having a lack of focus – but I am comfortable with that. In fact it's this lack of focus that stops me getting complacent. The larger works are different; they are the result of moments of focus – they take a very long time to make and demand a lot of self-discipline.

above:
Der Angstlustbaum
2005
Oil and permanent marker on vinyl
230 x 297.4 cm
Installation view Ireland at Venice 2005

opposite:
Why there's no 's' in Utopia
2005
Oil and permanent marker on canvas
61 x 76 cm

How planned are the larger works? Do they evolve in the making or do you start with a fully conceived idea?

The ideas for the larger works happen over time. The basic idea for *Der Angstlustbaum* came about after seeing an illustration of Darwin's *Tree of Evolution* in a history book of world science, while *Becoming island* evolved from a small painting I made four years ago, which in turn came from a tiny drawing I made of Arnold Böcklin's *Isle of the dead* in a Berlin museum. The ideas set the schemata, but from then on the drawings develop in an unplanned and organic manner.

Is it the visual or the conceptual that you take from these sources? These are fairly weighty references.

Darwin's *Tree of Evolution* is such a powerful image, that it begged for parodic treatment, visually and conceptually open to improvisation.

The visual and the conceptual work side by side to create magic in some images, that's what makes them stand out above others. *The isle of the dead* is a painting that has held my imagination for years, ever since I saw it in reproduction. Seeing it for real was like a religious experience, I can't articulate why it had this affect on me.

Becoming island – from a distance – offers up this promise of mystery and enchantment, and this is directly related to Böcklin's painting being a template for this kind of message. How many of the more successful photos of Greek Islands in holiday brochures remind you of it?

Does the detail come from the larger picture or does the detail create the larger picture?

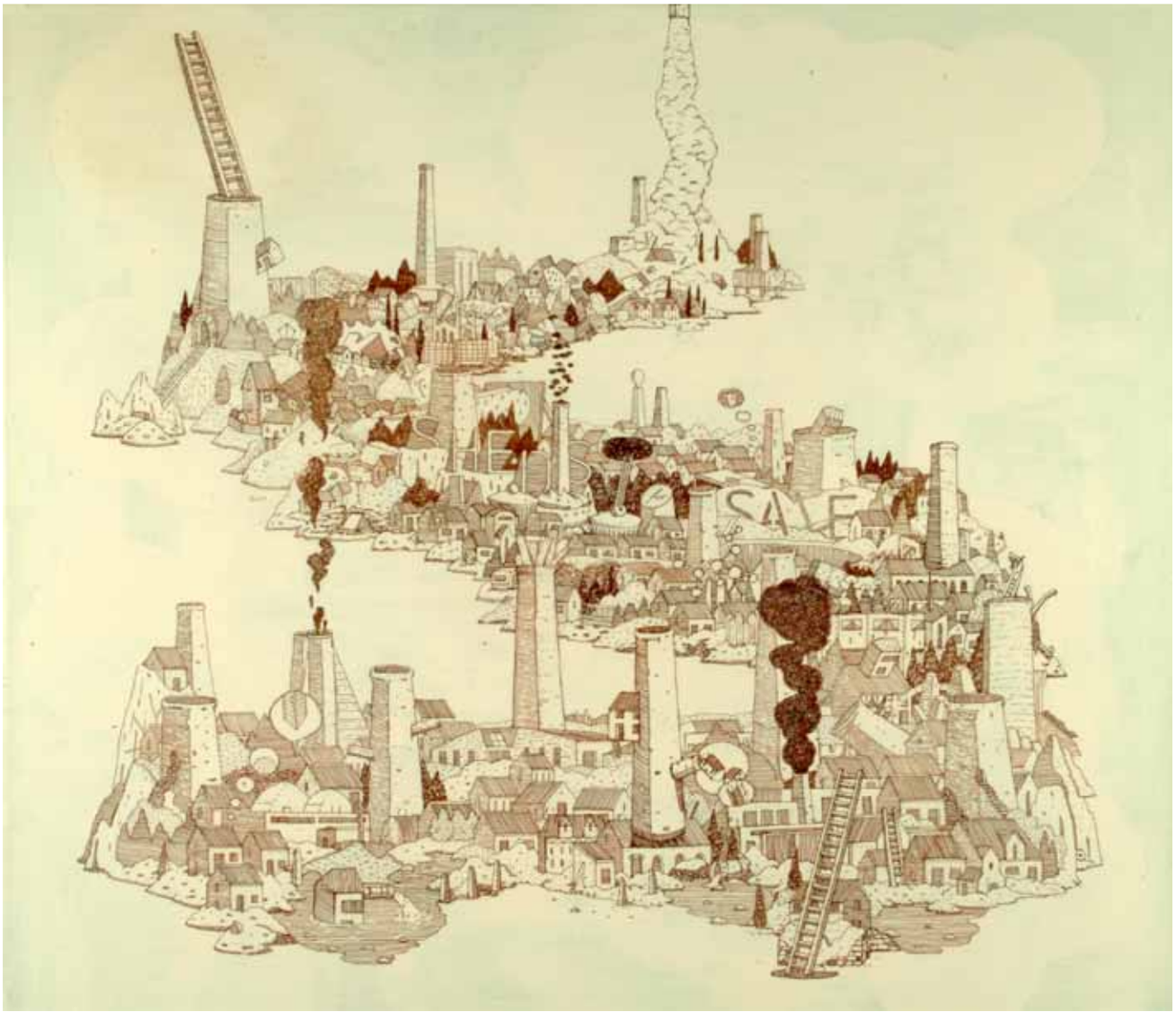
Its swings in roundabouts, but more often than not the detail mushroom's into something much larger.

There is a dark humour underlying the works – humour of the mundane combined with an overactive imagination – how important is this?

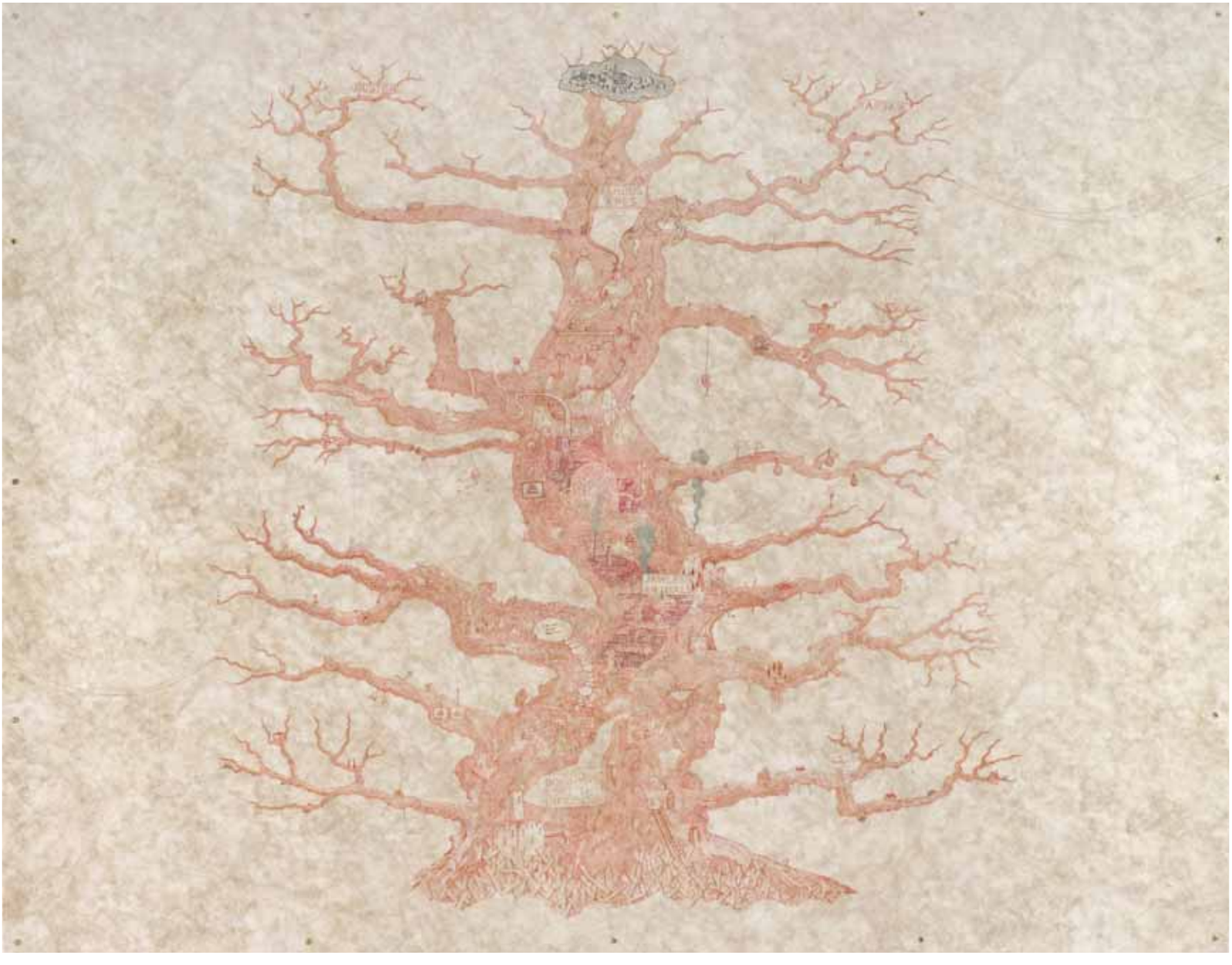
Becoming island is probably one of the darker things I have made recently – it's a sea-bound landscape littered with dysfunctional objects, nothing works, any sign of human or animal existence is only visible from random speech bubbles and there are little chains of narrative that suggest a larger impending catastrophe. What is crucial though is the fact that I constantly try to counteract the potentially abject misery with moments of comedy, beauty or just strangeness. When I set out to create this fictional world, I didn't necessarily want to make it a better place – but I hoped to populate it with scenarios that trigger a variety of emotional responses.

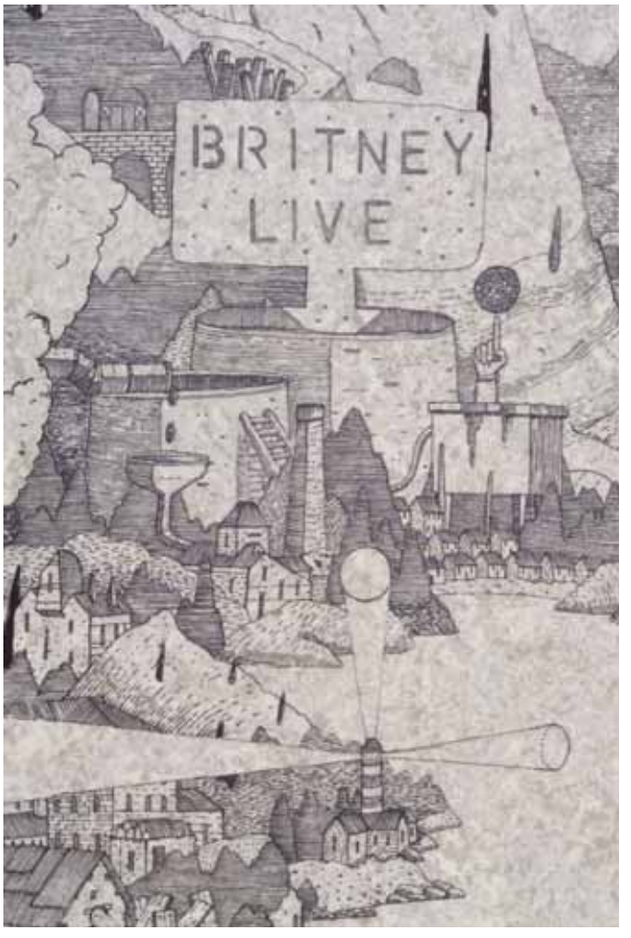
Imagination helps marry the fantastical with the worldly – often the best comic moments occur when the mundane is juxtaposed with the irrational. Generally, different degrees of dramatic effect are often accomplished by placing both side by side.

What I essentially aim to achieve, is to provide for multi-layered and contradictory set of responses to the work – this is something that I never got from Lord of the Rings as a teenager. In fact, I never really got far past the map.



this page:
Der Angstlustbaum (details)
opposite:
Der Angstlustbaum
2005
Oil and permanent marker on vinyl
230 x 297.4 cm





this page:
Becoming island (details)
opposite:
Becoming island
2005
Oil and permanent marker on vinyl
229 x 301.5 cm


GARDEN
CENTRE
BRITNEY

...
and threading through, stops for a moment, then continues

...

Mark Garry was born in Westmeath Ireland in 1972 and now lives and works in Dublin. He has exhibited extensively in Ireland including 'Eurojet futures' The Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin 2003; 'Permaculture' Project Arts Centre, Dublin 2003; 'No-one else can make me feel the colours that you bring' Temple Bar Gallery and Studios, the Kerlin Gallery, both Dublin 2004 and 'I'd rather dance with you' a solo show at The Workroom Gallery, Dublin 2005. He also works as an independent curator and writer and was the Visual Arts Curator for the Dublin Fringe Festival from 2000 to 2004.

This is an edited transcript of a conversation between the artist Mark Garry and Mick Wilson which took place in the early summer of 2005.

Mick Wilson Perhaps I can begin by asking you to describe the characteristic features of your practice?

Mark Garry In essence I make works designed to intervene in spaces. I use thread, beads and a range of materials and methods many of which would have close associations with craft traditions... It's a site specific installation practice concerned with bringing viewers through the spaces by arranging different elements that intersect the space and relate to the physical properties of the site and each other.

MW This would suggest that the space, the original particular site that you intervene within is ultimately more important than your intervention, which doesn't seem to gel with the fact that the interventions themselves employ specific use of colour and other material elements that seem to operate in excess of a simple navigation of space. I am thinking particularly of the piece with the rabbits in Venice which does more than simply re-structure or re-describe spatial relations.

MG It's about a journey or narrative that I devise in each space. I make a lot of decisions beforehand, but once I go into a space and start dealing with materials and with the light and the space, I have to make decisions there and then. Decisions that may work in the studio become clearly unsuited to the space. The interventions that I make in a space are broken up with a number of different perceptual elements. I suppose they're a kind of very short novel (laughs). It is important that as you move through the space you have a series of encounters that are layered within the physical space of movement.

MW So then, say the occurrence of music as an element within the work… does that become simply something that animates or articulates a particular point in the space? Or does it not change the actual space as a whole because of the way in which the sound echoes? It reveals the acoustic quality of the space…

MG I have been dealing with how you physically perceive a space, how you travel through that space, so…I decided to bring sound into the work because the aural qualities of the space are of equal significance in the journey. I wanted this to be another of the senses activated in the work. I composed a melody for a componium, a mechanism that, in order to actually experience the sound piece, you had to stop and operate it. This sound mechanism became a device to get people to stop and to, I suppose, encourage a slower interaction.

MW Perhaps you could describe the nature of the three works constructed in Venice? There are three works as I remember it: the sound piece we have mentioned so far, the rabbit objects placed on the altar and the spectrum-coloured thread piece taken through the space at an elevated level.

MG The installation is called *How soon is now*, it is one piece made up of three elements. The spectrum piece is a series of parallel threads that twist as they traverse the space and connect with the room at four points. It is perhaps the piece that is most typical of what I do: the stretching and consolidating of very simple craft materials and the transformation of these elements to a sophisticated level of refinement so that one becomes less aware of what their original function was and it becomes something visually very beautiful and difficult to quantify simply. This piece then becomes the central element in relation to the other two elements. The componium and its stand are physically quite formal and I wanted to interrupt its relationship to the spectrum with something that made a little less sense emotionally. The rabbits are a newer development. When I originally went to visit the space in Venice, because of the scale of the space and the restrictions in relation to working on the walls I felt I had to make something less intimate than before, otherwise the work may have been overpowered by the space, and been lost within it.

MW So, just this issue of showing in Venice, how important is this for you? What does it mean to you?

MG Well, it's a great honour to represent your country in any capacity, and it's one of those opportunities that's never going to come round again. At the same time it's just another show. I treat them all equally in this sense. All opportunities get the same kind of effort put into them, though I did feel pressure in Venice.

MW And did you find that this pressure made it harder, or easier to complete the work? Did it make it easier in the end to deliver the work because it was being valued in a particular way by the context?

MG I don't know really. Every project I do has this element of pressure. I make a lot of decisions beforehand, but once I go into a space and start dealing with materials and with the particular light in a space and the particular ergonomics of the space, you have to make decisions at that time, there and then. Decisions that may work in the studio become clearly unsuited to the space. So in this respect they are all a little pressured but I find this pressure stimulating.

MW Are there artists, not necessarily showing in Venice, but artists, contemporaries, peers, whose work has a more significant relationship with your practice?

MG Absolutely. I am curating a show in the RHA[1] next year, and it's about people in whose practice I see similarities – with which I feel a certain sympathy; Karl Burke, Christophe Newman, Michael Warren, Maud Cotter…

MW … some of a very different generation?

MG Yes and there would also obviously be people like Fred Sandbach, Donald Judd and Tom Friedman…

MW Actually, if we could consider Fred Sandbach a little more, it would seem that there is both significant relationship and significant difference in the comparison of your practices. For instance there is a much more reduced, rigorous and immediately recognizable geometry in Sandbach whereas in your work…well it's almost baroque in comparison…there seems to be much more ornament or something of that nature. There is a greater emphasis on play.

MG It's interesting. I have thought about this lately. I only actually saw Sandbach's work for the first time last year in Berlin, in the Hoffman Collection, and then subsequently because of the piece in DIA Beacon there has been so much more reference to his work, and of course, unfortunately, because of his recent suicide. He was the first artist where it was obvious that our practices had much in common, and this inevitably prompts the question as to what similarities or differences there may be… He uses material to negotiate space, he does so in an incredibly refined way, but Sandbach and many others seemed to have believed it was enough to simply navigate space and that was fine. But I think that I wanted something more, I wanted a story, a narrative of some sort. I think that Fred Sandbach's work is beautifully simple. But I wanted a more complex discourse to take place…something that would be harder to define. Basically, I find Sandbach's work completely rationalizes the space. What I wish to do is to go someway along this path of rationalizing the space, but then to throw this off, and undermine this clarity, so that it is never totally or easily simplified or reduced. I think this is the opposite of Sandbach's practice. So although we are working in very similar ways, there is a basic opposition as to how we characterize our geometries and the specificity of a given space.

MW There are a number of issues that have emerged so far that I would like to consider further. Firstly, you mention that you are active as a curator also. In fact, I first became aware of your work as a curator, as an independent cultural worker organizing events, exhibitions, off-site projects largely outside the institutional frameworks of the mainstream art-world, often with a cross-disciplinary mix involving music performance and so on. I wonder what relationship, if any, there is between your practice as an independent curator – enabling and facilitating others – and your installation practice as an artist.

MG Weirdly, perhaps, I do see them as completely different things…

This and following pages:
How soon is now
(installation detail)
2005
Installation view Ireland at
Venice 2005

MW ... and yet you do mention an overlap when you speak of the show next year in the RHA?

MG Yeah. But this will be the first time that they so clearly and specifically cross-over. I saw them as quite separate. I was asked to be in a show 'Permaculture'[2] in the Project where I asked eighty people to give me a small piece and those eighty pieces became my piece... I actually understood this as simply an act of curation. I did not see it as my art practice at all. I totally separated these two activities.

MW Perhaps, I could go back to a second point arising from your earlier answer. You mention a whole series of artists whose work might be characterized as formalist, but a formalism which never quite engaged the end-logic of minimalism, and didn't abandon the formalism or broad sensibility of say Anthony Caro. I wonder could you consider this in relation to the question of narrative and the symbolic elements which come into play in your work. On a related note, you mentioned 'Permaculture', and one of the dominant pieces in that show was Corban Walker's tensioned steel cable piece which coordinated the whole space by griding off areas and defining access...

MG Actually, a very important piece in that show for me was Christoph Newman's work with plastic bags, also threaded through the space above Corban's work.

MW Could you talk about any relationships here, and again the points of difference?

MG For me the fundamental difference is one of time, of duration. I am looking to construct works which develop over the duration of viewing, and which in turn prolong the process of viewing. I believe a lot of these other works disclose themselves fully almost immediately. This seems to be their basic principle, the declaration of the simple reduced bare geometry in the first take. My practice is about something else, where time becomes more critical and protracted. The work is basically contemplative in a very different manner. There are other people like Eva Hesse whose work appears initially to be fully given, but they are not. There is more going on. There is more to find out. There are layers of things going on, and here the symbolic issues come into play. The key issue however is a priority of contemplation over formal unity. There is much more metaphor at work in my practice.

MW Well this is a matter I would like to tease out. On the one hand you would say that you don't want the work to be reduced to a text, to a statement of intention, or to an explication of meaning, but when you talk about narrative – when you speak of metaphor – it does seem to suggest that there is some kind of relationship, some kind of meaning to be read off from the work, or some kind of code at work.

MG Yes, but I think that that code is irrelevant in a way. I am interested in subjectivity, in the spontaneous encounter with a system of objects in a space. Ones mind naturally constructs a narrative to link impressions together and I have come to accept that I can never control what that narrative may involve for another person.

MW This suggests that there is an important role for intuition. I know that you have used the word 'instinct' sometimes in relation to this. Can you say a little about this?

MG In the contemporary moment though, all you have as an artist is your instinct, and if you don't trust it, and if you don't let it be the major force in your practice then you have got nothing. You are just going to slip into history...

MW By slip into history you mean...

MG Dissolving, falling back into...

MW Do you mean you become a generic instance?

MG Precisely... when I decided to be an artist, that wasn't good enough for me. I wanted a mechanism that would be dynamic, interesting and which would not simply be a moment of art-historical self-consciousness. I know that this idea of instinct is overplayed, and used as a means to evade defining what one does. It can be used as an alibi for being lazy or inarticulate but I firmly believe that unless you rely on, and trust your instinct you have nothing nowadays.

MW Thanks for talking to me. I look forward to your next work.

1 Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin
2 'Permaculture', Project Arts Centre, Dublin, 2003

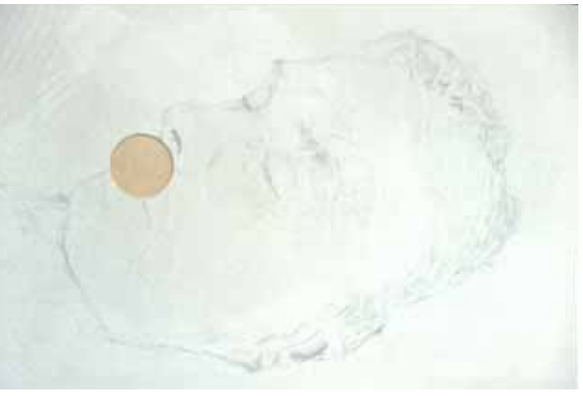
Mick Wilson, writer, educator and artist is currently Head of Research & Postgraduate Development at the National College of Art & Design, Dublin.

Ronan McCrea

Source material

Ronan McCrea asks himself some questions…

Ronan McCrea was born in Dublin in 1969 and continues to live and work there. He has exhibited extensively both in Ireland and internationally, including solo exhibitions *Sequences, Scenarios & Locations* and the *Correction Drawings I-IV*, Galway Arts Centre 2004; 'general – specific' Project Arts Centre, Dublin, 2003; 'Seminal' Glassbox, Paris, 2002. In 2005 he completed *The Twentieth Century* a public art project for Dublin City Council. Recent group shows include 'Red White Blue', Spencer Brownstone Gallery, New York 2005; 'La La Land', Project Arts Centre Dublin 2005; 'No one else can make me feel the colours that you bring' Temple Bar Gallery & Studios, 2004; 'Permaculture', Project Arts Centre, Dublin, 2003 and 'Greyscale/CMYK' Tramway, Glasgow, 2002. He has also worked as a curator and was a guest curator at The Return, Goethe Institut, Dublin in 2003, and currently lectures in photography at Limerick School of Art & Design.



Correction Drawing III
2000
Pencil on paper
70 x 100 cm

Ronan McCrea's artistic practice encompasses a broad range of media such as sculpture, drawing and photography and is concerned with the space between collective modes of memory and remembering as a private act. This is the basis of Sequences, Scenarios & Locations, the on-going work, which has evolved in various manifestations since 2000 – at the Venice Biennale 2005, he showed three parts of this work. In the following 'self-interview' McCrea outlines his thinking for this new work and situates it in the context of his recent practice.

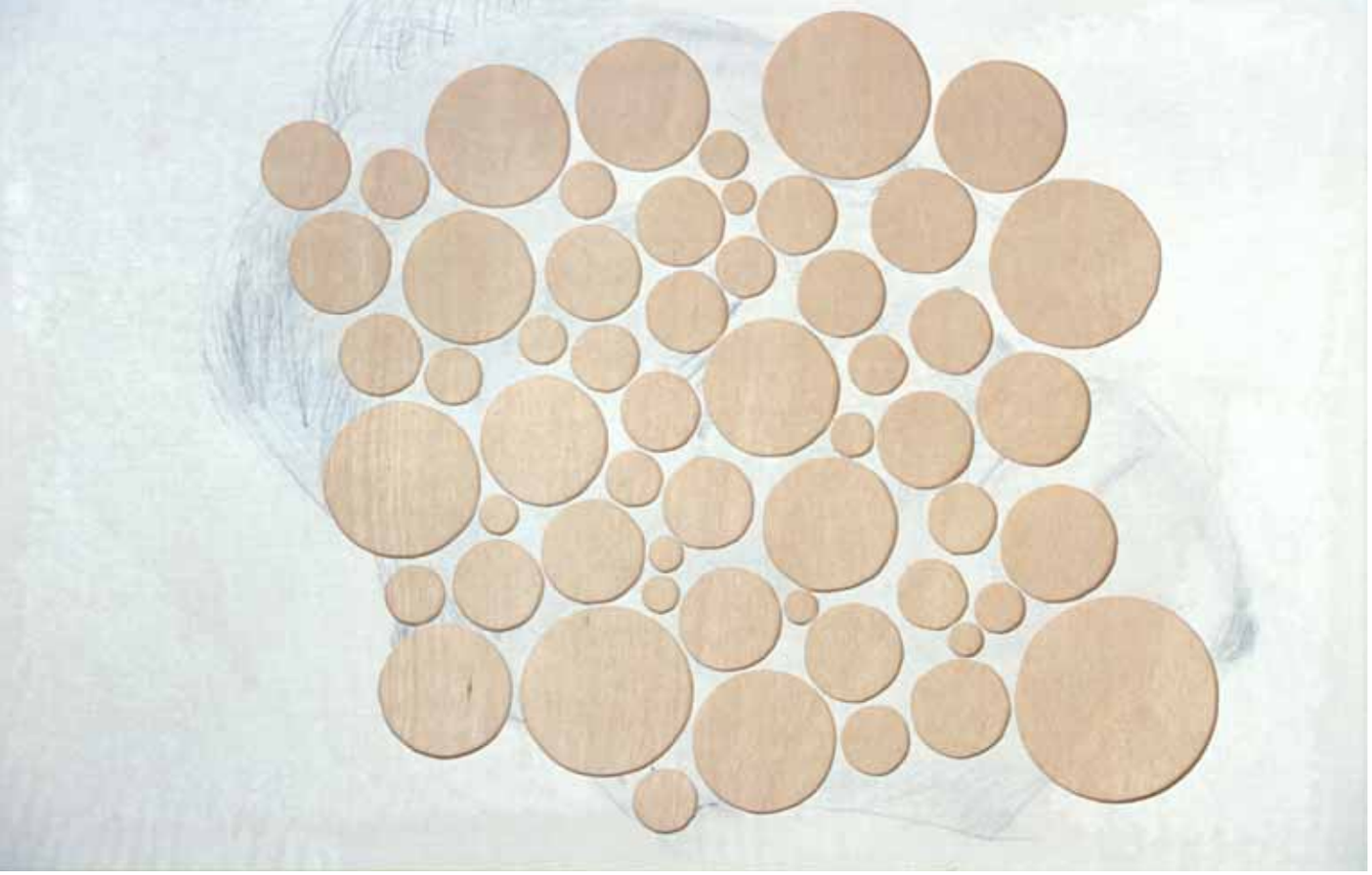
Ronan McCrea What is the starting point for this work you are showing in Venice?

Ronan McCrea The starting point for *Sequences, Scenarios & Locations, Part I – After Hänsel and Gretel, Part II* and *Part III – The lost photographs of Alfred H* is a series of drawings entitled the *Correction Drawings*. I was on a residency in Hanover in 2000 and I had brought away with me some slides I had shot of my father laid out at his 'wake' two months previously. I wasn't sure why I'd taken the photographs in the first place or brought them with me.

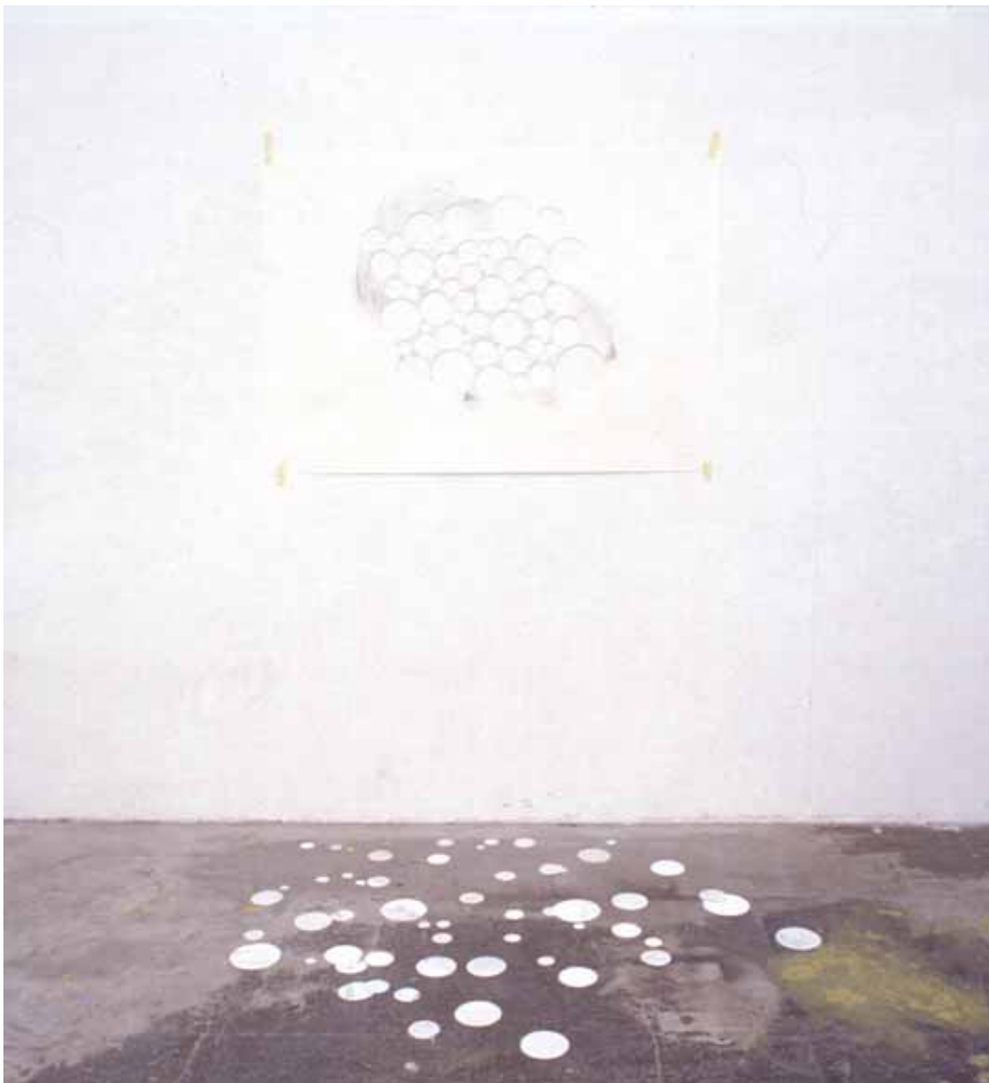
Laying out the body at home after death, as is the tradition of the wake, had the very useful function of allowing me time in the material and physical presence of the body and of death. It was a sensual perception of the materiality of death over three days: looking, touching, looking again. It allowed me to process the reality of death through the senses over a period of time. After that there was no sensual aspect, only consciousness and memory.

Having time away alone after the intensity of grief at home, gave me space to look at the images from time to time. Among other things the images raised for me, is the issue of photography's indexical link to the world: its documentary 'truth' when at odds with one's memory: or more forcefully, what one considers one's 'knowledge'. This is a common theme in portraiture – both manual and photographic – how much the representation conforms to the viewer's supposed knowledge of the person. In the studio in Hanover, when I viewed the images as representation of the person I knew, they seemed 'wrong' in physiognomical terms. Some of this is down to the embalming techniques of the funeral directors who prepared the body. For instance, the line of the mouth looked 'wrong' – as if it were a ham-fisted portrait painting. Perhaps embalmers and portrait painters work in much the same paradigm?

The *Correction Drawings* then, were based on my pencil tracings of the projected slide onto sheets of paper. In particular areas I tried to 'correct' the representation of the facial features. I worked from memory rather than other photographs of the man. I wasn't satisfied with these drawings, and so a more self-conscious process developed: rubbing out or erasing the areas that seemed wrong. This in turn led to cutting out pieces of the actual paper, thereby evacuating nearly the entire drawing. To borrow from Roland Barthes (Camera Lucidia, 1980), the incorrect line of the mouth was the 'punctum' in the 'studium' of the image of my father's death.



top:
Correction Drawing IV
2000
Pencil on paper
70 x 100 cm
right:
Studio installation view



Looking on it now, these images – the photographs and the drawings – were bound up in the fact that for me this sudden and violent death overshadowed the life lived: a reversal of the idealised model of remembrance, where one expects to remember the life, not the death, of a person. This was a very particular working out of the problems of memory and the photographic image. Despite the self-conscious processes I used, the drawings were not planned or specifically made to be shown as artworks. I always thought of myself as an artist who worked in the public sphere, rather than one who brought the personal explicitly into the art practice. However, this was the starting point...

But you did end up showing the drawings in an exhibition?

Eventually, they did in fact find an appropriate context to be shown in. In 2003, I was preparing a show, 'general – specific', at the Project Arts Centre in Dublin and working closely with the curator there, Grant Watson. It was as part of that process that the *Correction Drawings* became the central point of that show, alongside some 'date works' and a slide installation.

While preparing 'general – specific' I was working on a final batch of neon sculptures, that I had being doing for some time. Titled *Decade-ism (early & late)*, that new work consisted of sculptures of 'empty' neon signs – that is, script made from bent glass tubing by a neon craftsman, but not filled with gas or lit up. I showed *Decade-ism (early & late)* consisting of three metre long scripts of the consecutive eras: *late fifties-early sixties*; *late sixties-early seventies*; *late seventies-early eighties*; *late eighties-early nineties*. I also showed *Decade-ism*, empty 40cm high numerical renderings of all the decades of the 20th century and *Years*, which dealt with three specific years – my father's birth and death years, and my birth year in 20cm high script.

These empty neon signs were a development of the neon 'date works' that I had produced over the previous years. Eras, decades, years rendered in this form were language made 'material', one 'looks' or 'views' them as well as 'reads' them. The light emission gives the sculpture a real presence – we are attracted unconsciously to light. It is also an obvious play on 'the sign' in both Barthes' semiotic sense and the street furniture sense. *Everything (multicoloured neon version) boxed*, 1998–2000 came from the observation of decades as cultural signifiers, more than temporal experience (i.e. the quip that the 60s ended in 1972 or whatever), and the shorthand and re-hashing of decades as signifiers in design, fashion, style and increasingly in art. The neon decades 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s jumbled up in a box were also the decades currently in (re)use in the culture, but also covered my life (born 1969).

Further, *Everything...* covers a period where neon as a medium entered art practices and the periods of art production that were influential to me as an artist starting out: the late sixties and early seventies. Another piece, *Scenarios*, also used dates that were the titles of cultural products: 1984 (novel), 2525 (pop song), 2001 (film) and 2000 (a comic). *Everything...* was shown quiet a lot in group shows and I got to observe how the piece was read or 'used', by both curators and audiences. I learned that it can be productive to make an artwork 'open', that is, one that allows conceptual space for the projection of the viewer's perception or experience or memory of what is rendered. It worked with the idea that two people can have a long conversation relating, for instance, to the seventies without pinning down what the seventies were, each having quite a different conception of the seventies, but the dialogue still functioning quite well.

But you have been doing other work, besides the neon 'date works' that explores the cross-over of collective and individual modes of memory and, more particularly, representations of memory?

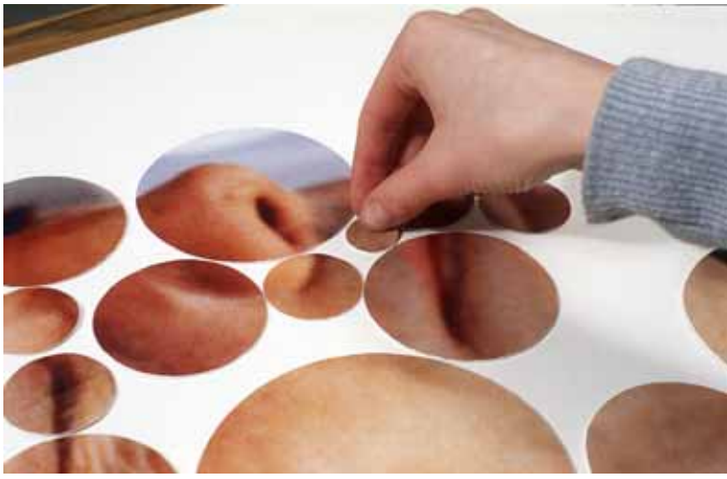
The slide installation in the 'general – specific' show at the Project: *Seminal 1969 (after the year of the artist's birth and 1970 Collier's Encyclopedia Yearbook, covering the year 1969)* looked at this. It formed the third point of the triangle of the show with the *Correction Drawings* and the neon 'date works'. It consisted of all the photographic images from the encyclopedia reproduced as slides on three projectors in continuous loops. Collier's Encyclopedias went from A-Z, but they also produced annual yearbooks that summarised the previous year's news. If you bought the A-Z set, they would send you one each year. In the late sixties, my parents bought the encyclopedias from a door-to-door salesman.

This piece re-used public or collective 'data' in the context of a personal memory, but this time using photography. I had previously worked on re-contextualising data and taxonomies (the branch of science relating to the creation of categories) in architecturally-based, textual installations. The spatial relations between viewer and the information re-configured the frame of the taxonomy. I think the creation of a category is a very interesting process – traditionally an expression of power, a meta-authorship to be able to frame 'nature' or 'culture'.

Previously, in 2000, I had made *Seminal 1969 (after the year of the artist's birth and Six Years: the de-materialisation of the art object 1966 to 1972 by Lucy R. Lippard)* at Glassbox, Paris. This was a text installation of all the captions of artworks in that book from 1969 inscribed on a glass wall facing out into a courtyard. The text was read backwards through the glass, the courtyard inaccessible to the gallery audience.

Corpus (after the P. J. Patton collection of birds killed striking Irish lighthouses 1911–1918), made in 1997, used the names of birds and lighthouses in this collection held at the National Museum of Ireland, in a kind of wall painting installation. The viewer was between these two constellations of names, standing in for Professor P. J. Patton, who created this beautiful and elegiac category. The detail of the timing of his work during the years of World War I adds to this quality (exhibited in 'Permaculture', Project 2003).

Sequences, Scenarios & Locations
Part I – After Hänsel and Gretel
202 colour 35mm slides, 3 projectors



Coming to the work you are now showing in Venice, in the first part – *Sequences, Scenarios & Locations: Part I – After Hänsel and Gretel* – you bring together the elements of slide format, architectural installation and the *Correction Drawings*. It also introduces a new narrative element, a young girl dropping a trail of the cut out discs. How did this come about?

Basically the circular sections cut out from the *Correction Drawings* are used as props in *Sequences, Scenarios & Locations, Part I – After Hänsel and Gretel.* A narrative photographic piece in the form of sequences of slides shows a young girl cutting out the paper discs from the drawings and dropping them in a trail around locations in Dublin associated with my father's life – home, school, workplaces, etc. *Part I* consists of three slide projectors. As well as these images, images of close-ups of the drawing and the source photograph on which it was based are included. In addition, I included images of people looking at an architectural model of a city. These latter photographs serve to emphasise the generalised idea of a cityscape as a site of experience and memory as well as a subject for representation. This seed of an idea is expanded in *Part II* and *Part III.*

When making the *Correction Drawings*, I had, as a result of the process of producing those drawings, a collection of 'host'-like paper discs that had been cut out from the pencil image. This, of course, connected with the idea of transubstantiation: the uniquely Catholic belief in the actual changing of the bread – the host – into the actual body of Christ. I am an atheist, but I was raised with this belief. For believers, transubstantiation is not symbolic – it is the physical changing of one thing into another thing while the appearance remains the same. It is the opposite of image, the opposite of representation, operating on a completely different level. It looks the same, but it has changed into something else.

Next was a jump to the motif of Hänsel and Gretel using bread crumbs to find their way home after being abandoned in the forest by their parents. It was a coincidence, but when I made the drawings I was in the area of Germany where the Grimm brothers gathered their folk tales in the early 19th Century. For instance, I noticed Hamlyn on a map – it's not far from Hanover. I think that put it in my mind. I had long ago read Bruno Bethelheim's The Uses of Enchantment, published in 1975. Bethelheim was a Freudian pychoanalysist who looked at the narratives of fairy tales as the playing out of the profound psychic issues of childhood and offering to children sub-conscious guidance and lessons in their psychological development through repeated telling.

What is the thinking in co-joining these things: transubstantiation, the inhabitation and re-use of a motif from a fairy tale, the photographic image, memory and pscyhoanalysis?

These things can be threaded though with the dual motifs: 'the lost and the found'; 'the whole and the fragment'. In this context, the fragment is important as cultural motif in two interlinking ways. Firstly within Modernism and the art historical figure of the avant-gardist 'fracture'. The fracturing of the picture plane with cubism and the theorising of montage in, for instance, the Soviet *avant-garde* as it related to cinema and photography, are part of a wider dialectical debate on the relationship between part and whole, fragment and totality. Secondly these ideas flowed from Freud's description of psychic life as a series of shifts and displacements – of parts. The nature and type of memory (*déjà vu*, repressed memory, etc) is also central to Freud's relationship between the conscious and sub-conscious minds. The conventions of representing memory in cinema can involve fragmentation of the whole image or disruptions in conventional linear time.

Perhaps Hitchcock brought the language of cinema and psychoanalysis together in the mainstream to the extent that they share a common vocabulary. Representations of memories are often described in cinematic terms, as being 'like in a movie': traumas remembered in 'slow motion', etc. The same goes for dreams, a dream described as being 'like a film', a film 'like a dream'.

I took this as the starting point, but the details of the piece are important to me. The protagonist is my daughter, but could be seen as acting a character of 'me', I 'am' the camera, the subject is my father. In *Part I*, she is younger than *Part II* and *Part III.* Her character, an adolescent between childhood and adulthood, gives a resonance to the set of relationships.

The piece is in the form of sequences of slides. The projected images in a darkened space is cinematic in some senses – a type of film in stills. The abrupt changing of the slides belie any suspension of disbelief and attests to the performed nature of the protagonist's actions. However, the still (rather than moving) image allows the viewer time for details and incidentals in the pictures.

Sequences, Senarios & Locations
Part II
240 colour 35mm slides, 3 projectors

When was *Part II* of this work made?
Part II follows the logic of *Part I – After Hänsel and Gretel.* Here the character follows and picks up a trail of circular images on the ground in Venice. The images are the fragments of the source post-mortem photograph of my father, which I had used as the basis of the *Correction Drawings*. In this chapter, another sequence on a different projector sees an interior scene where the girl sits at a table and lays out all the fragments trying to re-assemble them into a whole image. She does this, then gathers them up and starts all over again and the loop revolves continuously.

Part II also emphasises the idea of portraiture. The man's post-mortem image and the face of the young protagonist share the frame, so to speak. Both are photographic representations, their relationship a pun on the idea of 'generations' of images made through reproductions of reproductions. The intensity of slide film makes the visuality of 'surface' an important element: her skin, his skin and the surfaces of the city.

Originally, I was to set this part in a cityscape without the particular city being important. While simultaneously working on *Part III – The lost photographs of Alfred H,* which involves found photographs in Berlin, I decided to shoot *Part II* in Venice, based on a link with some of the photographs being holiday snap-shots taken in Venice of a family posing in St. Mark's Square.

Locating *Part II* in Venice was also to suggest a move away from the specifics of a biography – that is, my father's life in *Part I.* Venice is such a particular city. It is fantastical on some level – it seems like an idea of a city rather than an actual functioning place – although some images were shot in residential neighbourhoods which have an obvious identity beyond the tourist function. Also Venice is a small place, but a city you get lost in, and the 'trail' as a navigation tool from the folktale motif works well there.

The last part, *Part III – The lost photographs of Alfred H,* is shot in Berlin and involves different source material?

For the chapter set in Berlin, *Part III – The lost photographs of Alfred H,* I have taken the motif present in the other chapter – Hänsel and Gretel's trail of bread to find their way home after abandonment – and extended it into new material. I bought the 274 small photographs at a flea-market in Berlin in 2003. They basically consist of the family photographs covering much of the life of this 'Alfred H' and his family. I was very curious as I had not come across the sale of 'domestic' photographs such as these before. As it turns out they are quite common in Berlin. There are many different types and genres of photographs for sale in flea markets, often the result of clear-outs and refurbishments.

I think it is interesting that a culture which lives with so much angst about the past on one level, has this phenomenon in flea markets with its primary personal histories openly available. Through this process, they are not just 'lost' or 'found' photographs, but re-inserted into the world and re-circulated with new contexts and meanings and use values. The life of 'Alfred H' spans a classic period of 20th century man. For me, this parallels the era of the protagonists in the classic 20th century American novel. The spectre of the terrible history is present in the images, but not pictured per se. 'Alfred H' led a bourgeois life – well-cut suits with a lot of foreign travel – where photography was a suitable way of recording. What led me to use them in this show is the holiday photographs of St. Mark's Square in Venice. There are a lot of mysteries in this collection of photographs, even though it is quite comprehensive – from a young 'Alfred H' and his wife in the 1920s to an older man in the 60s. I considered if this archive I bought had ever been subject to an editing or revision process in later years. In parallel to my own making of photographs of 'family', I thought about what, for 'Alfred H', was and wasn't fit to photograph.

From verso inscriptions to the addresses of the photo labs stamped on the back of the photographs, I speculated for a long time on the photographs, how to 'read' them and what narratives I could extract from them. I am aware of the genres of found photography and the essentially nostalgic or sentimental effect of working with such material, where it is impossible to transcend the voyeurism the images provoke. The story of the loss of the photographs and their journey to a market stall particularly interested me and led me to see them working within the matrix of *Sequences, Scenarios & Locations.*

First published in Source Material, published by the artist, 2005.

Sequences, Senarios & Locations
Part III – The lost photographs of Alfred H
162 colour and black and white 35 mm slides,
2 projectors

Isabel Nolan

Isabel Nolan interviewed
by Sarah Glennie

Isabel Nolan was born in Dublin in 1974 where she continues to live and work. She has exhibited extensively in Ireland and internationally and recent solo shows include 'Everything I said let me explain' at the Project Arts Centre, Dublin 2005 and 'Death creeps in through the mouth' at the Goethe Institut, Dublin 2003 and group shows 'Budget bureau' Centre d'Art Contemporain Geneva in 2005; 'Coalesce – with all due intent' the Model and Niland Gallery, Sligo 2004; the Yugoslav Biennale of Young Artists, Vrsac, Serbia-Montenegro and 'How things turn out' at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin 2002. She co-curated 'No one else can make me feel the colours that you bring' with Vaari Claffey, at Temple Bar Gallery and Studios, Dublin 2004 and her work is in the collection of the Irish Museum of Modern Art.

Sleeping dog
2004
Pencil on paper
29.5 x 21 cm

Why do you draw?

I find drawing is a really good way to concentrate and last year, adjusting to the new studio and even to having more time to work, I began drawing a lot. It is often the means of actually making some sense of whatever is on my mind – catching a thought. Drawing is a great way of describing anything - an object, an idea or a feeling. Aesthetically I like it's variability, it can be hard, soft, cold, warm, really conceptual or very emotive, often it is, or at least appears, very direct and personal – the human touch.

Drawing is a very immediate way of making art that we have all experienced on some level as something that is totally absorbing, and can be rewarding or frustrating depending on how the drawing is going, your work reminds me of that real enjoyment in drawing…

I like it because it is so instant and in practical terms it's a very convenient way to work. Generally as an activity I do enjoy it, however it is really rare for me to know how a drawing is 'going', much less to know whether I think it is good, it can take weeks or even months for me to decide a drawing officially 'works'.

I don't know if rewarding is a word I'd ever use about making any work. Drawing can be really frustrating, like when a line is repeatedly wrong and I don't know why, but I can just get a new sheet if something is really evidently not right, or else I plough along on the same page until I judge that I am finished. Trying to achieve a specific outcome or getting something 'correct' in the mimetic sense is really secondary to making an image that feels or looks, be it intuitively or conceptually, right; and hopefully getting that without losing sight of all the other stuff that those images or words might mean to other people. For me a successful work can subtly hold or contain many 'planes' of meaning or emotion simultaneously.

Anyway my point is that 'success' or 'reward' is a really difficult thing to assess straight away, no matter how immediate your means are. I think most of my pleasure in drawing is simply because it is so absorbing.

Your work moves from the extremely personal images, which are clearly records of those close to you and places around you, to the natural world, observed and imagined, and abstraction – how do all these elements sit together in your practice?

I don't see them as being all that different, they are all strongly narrative and thematically closely connected. Even the more abstract pieces are quite literal to my mind in that they address the same issues of intimacy and distance, isolation and connectedness, difference and sameness that are evident in the more representational drawings.

Some of the drawings of subjects close to you, for example the drawings of your friend, which you have described as 'removed' or 'cold' and not about her, which on one level seems strange as she is your closest friend and someone you have strong feelings about so that apparent distance is surprising:

They can be removed because it is my friend, because I know her so well, and I'm not trying to capture anything about her. Also, quite simply, she's available and very patient and relaxed – it's very convenient and comfortable for me. There is no self-consciousness between us so I don't have to consider 'her' or wonder about 'who' she is in the way that I would a stranger. Equally I don't have to consider myself in relation to her. I take how she looks and who she is for granted and I feel the same when I draw myself – it really is just a familiar face – that's how it's clinical, it's not necessarily a coldness in the drawing.

Sleeping dog is a good example because a dog is quite a sentimental subject, but I wasn't thinking about how much I love my lovely dog. Retrospectively I would say I was compelled by watching her sleeping – this incredibly contained, independent, inscrutable but vulnerable animal. It's a small drawing, she's isolated on the page, there are no lines to anchor her and make her safe, but with that, she is also indifferent to the world, separate from it and me. When I draw my friend sleeping, or even awake, it is the distance between me (or a viewer) and the ultimately unknowable subject that interests me even if the 'mood' of the drawing is quite tender or very detached.

You said to me once that you were interested in trying to convey moments of emotion without falling into cliché, partly in response to what you saw as being a fear of 'feelings' in contemporary art, especially good feelings. This struck me as a brave and precarious thing to try and do – is this still true?

I don't know about brave but I've sometimes made work and felt foolish or exposed, equally people seem to respond to emotion in the work. I don't think that there is such a fear of directly expressing feeling in art anymore but certainly for a long time most of the interesting and not so interesting art I saw seemed to have a certain intellectual disavowal of emotion. Correspondingly, often the very evidently emotive art was reactionary or clichéd. I wouldn't say I was responding to that, rather I had difficulty thinking it was okay to be sincere about 'feelings'.

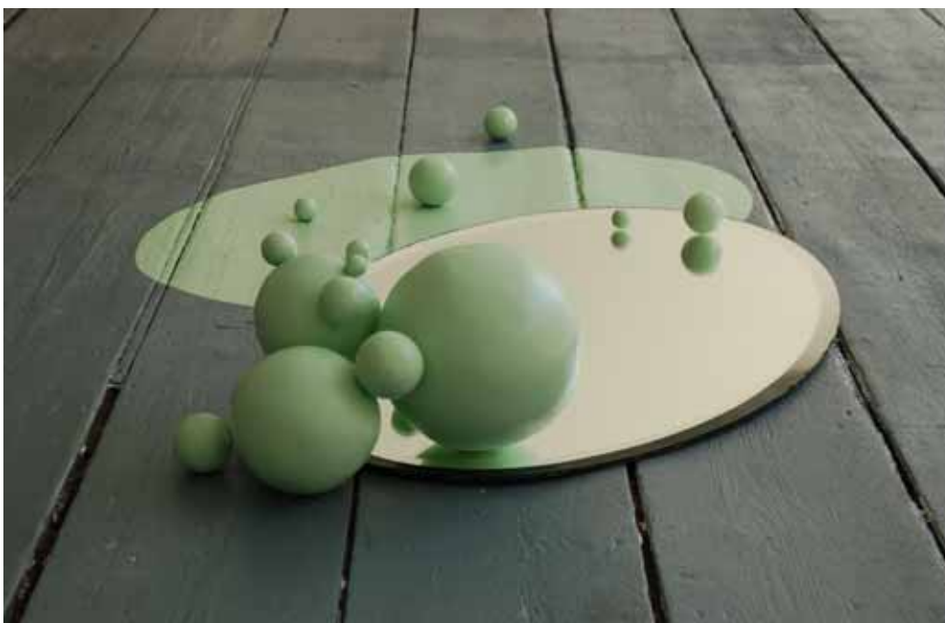
Sometimes it is hard to think that feeling isn't trivial in the broad scheme of things, but to some extent my intellectual interest in an emotional response to life is because that response frequently determines or is determined by your connection to or alienation from society or other people, particularly in a culture that has institutionalised, commodified and valorised individuality really successfully. I don't think that addressing human emotion implies an interest in 'true' self-expression or a belief in the integrity of identity; at the risk of sounding 'philosophy 101', my interest is in feelings in a time where a labile, disconnected 'post-human' subjectivity is normal. I may 'understand' or 'believe' that consciousness is produced by language but I still get anxious and value love and the sea still makes me happy and nervous.

One of the things that strikes me about your work are the moments of 'gut-hitting' honesty that lay bare very personal moments of emotion with no protection of irony or cynicism. In particular I am thinking of the drawing of your husband Darragh with the text 'everything is going to be okay…everything is going to be great…'

The work is often honest and personal but I assume that other people at least recognise if not relate to those moments of confusion, fear or happiness. I can feel embarrassed but these are commonplace moments I'm describing and overall the work isn't revealing or expressing 'me', it's expressing loneliness or intimacy or… The work used to be more strategic, like *Sloganeering 1-4*, it was humorous and even ironic; it sincerely addressed the difficulty I had with expressing feelings of apathy, confusion and alienation but I did it by 'inventing' a foolish, frustrated, contradictory person. Recent work is more direct and not so guarded or so consciously demonstrative. In a way a piece like *Together at last* that doesn't look 'expressive' has as much personal feeling invested in it as the drawing of Darragh; it is just as concerned with feeling kind of desperate and wanting to belong comfortably and meaningfully in the world.

Sloganeering
2001
Digital video on DVD
Duration 3'45"

Together at last
2005
Paint, fibreglass, fabric and mirror
Dimensions variable



right:
Quiet, please (detail stills)
2005
DVD / animation
Duration 5' 30"

below:
Installation views
Ireland at Venice 2005

In Venice you showed a group of drawings on a large oak table under glass and others in small groups on the wall, how do you approach the groupings of the work, are there narratives that you are trying to set up between the works?

The table contains the work in a very different way to walls; the table top is relatively small and the dark wood surrounds and separates the drawings really nicely. I wasn't trying to create a narrative but I was conscious that it needed to flow. On one level it was just about showing an interesting diversity of work. Some drawings need more space than others and some do or don't go together either formally or in terms of content. There are many, probably unexplainable, rules in my head that govern how and where drawings can be, like the cypress sprig, *Tender*, it's always a full stop.

Another aspect of your installation in Venice was the animation *Quiet, please?*, in which an 'alien phenomenon' appears to the subject during the night – where did the idea of making an animation come from?

From several different things. Mainly from the activity of drawing and trying to find new ways of making work about my ongoing interest – borderline obsession in sleep and nightime as a subject.

The phenomenon in the animation asks the subject the tricky question 'Do you think you are free?', and so operates as a device to pose fundamental questions of existence that are difficult to ask – is that motivation lurking at the core of your practice?

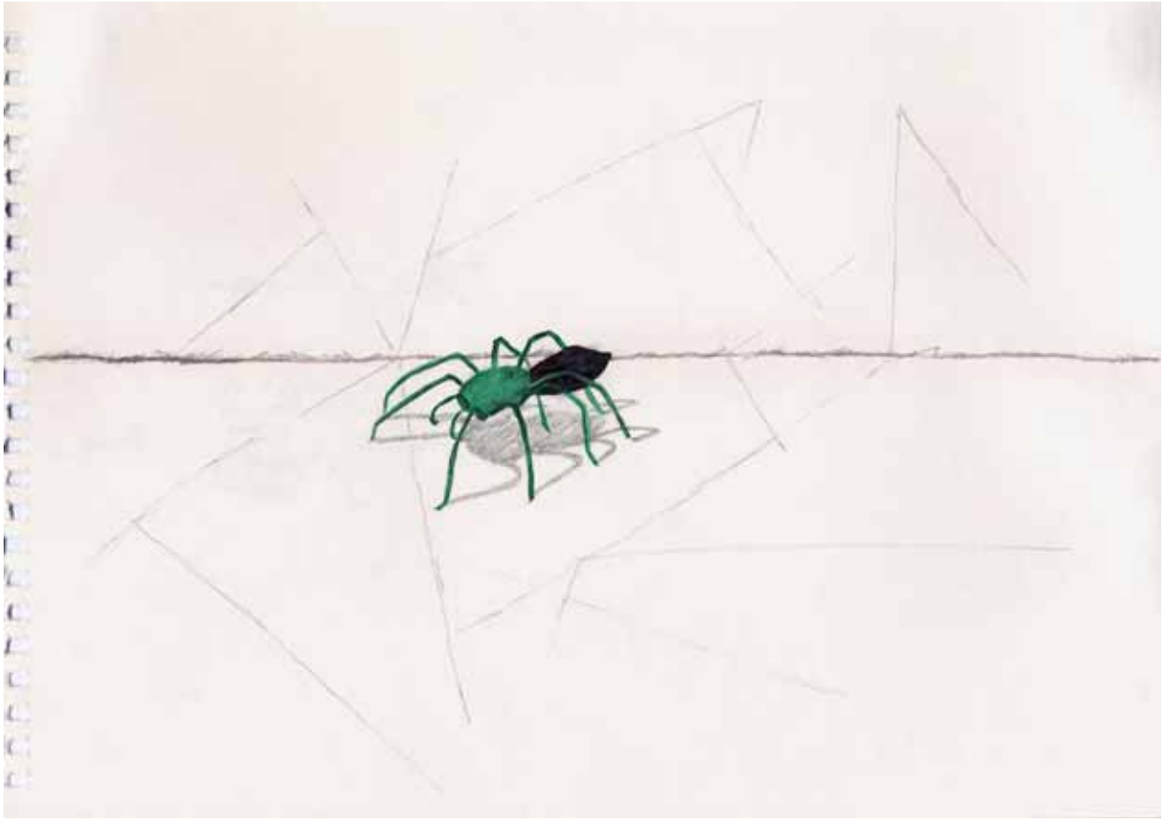
A mysterious phenomenon makes posing a ridiculous if important question somehow possible and apt. I don't think I'd be making art if I believed that there was a purpose to existence; I reckon that's fairly fundamental.

How does the work make the transition from studio to the 'outside world'?

I get very nervous before exhibiting and sometimes it is hard to fathom why one wants to show anything one does to people. When a work is exhibited it's not solely mine anymore – that's good – things go off and have an independent life, physically and hopefully mentally in people's minds. The main thing about the transition is that art venues allow and legitimise any practice however private or esoteric, so it's an odd part of the 'outside world'. If I'm exhibiting in a non-art venue I find it necessary to work differently, I feel obliged to consider context and audience to a greater extent.

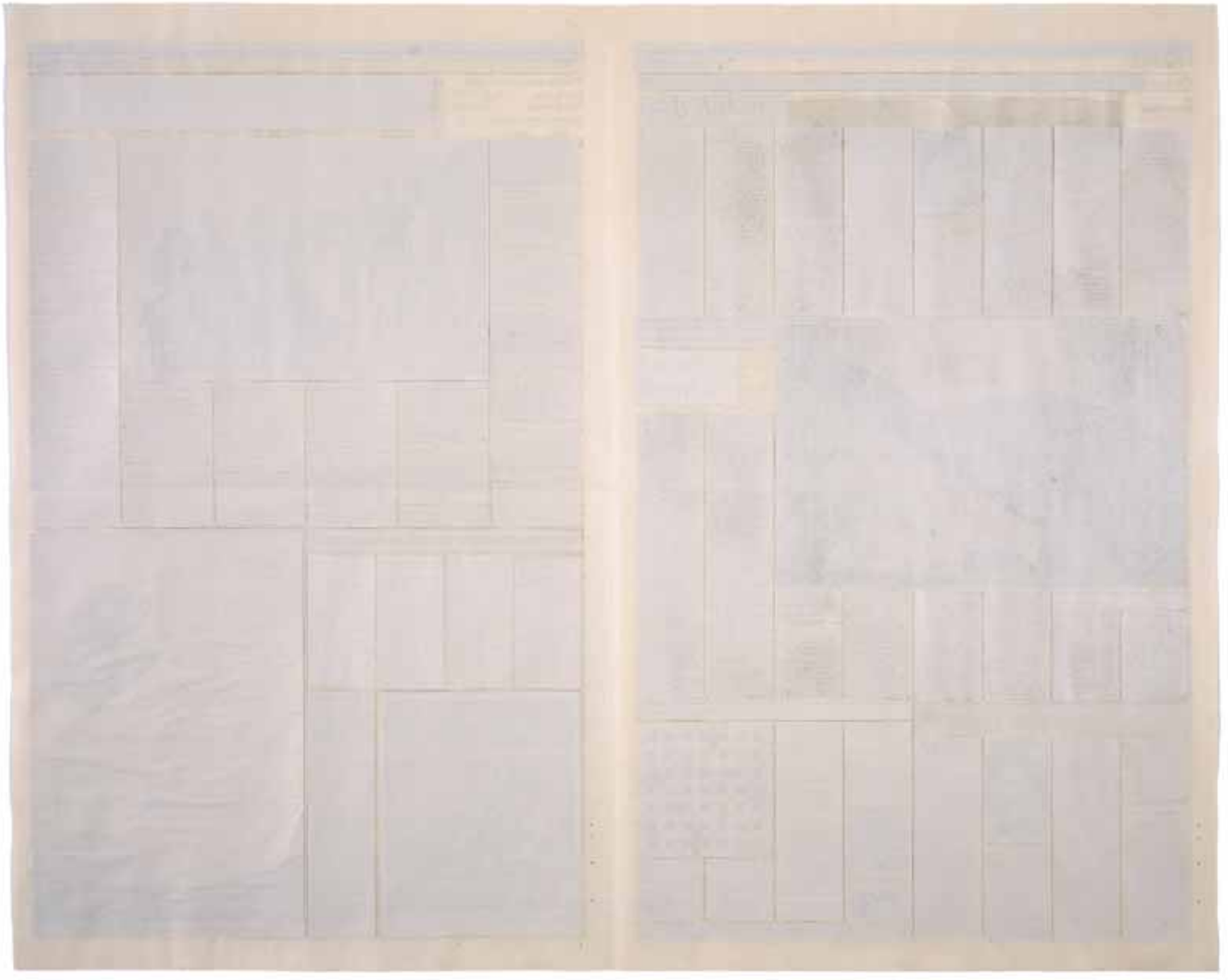
Recently I was reading about Foucault's concept of descended individuality – the lower the strata you occupy in a society the more policed and controlled your existence is; in a sense artists are the ascended individuals who are regulated in a different way, whereby to a great degree you're expected and sanctioned – and thus neutralised – to be as critical or 'crazy' as you desire. It's troubling but it's also just the nature of the beast. My practise isn't engaged with trying to challenge or re-invent what it can mean to be an artist. Equally, however tied to the studio the work is in terms of its production, I just don't see subjectivity as disengaged even if conceptually and emotionally the work is very centred on personal experience. In a way I try not to acknowledge any separation between the studio and an 'outside' world.

Recently I woke up feeling uneasy, a knot of anxiety in my stomach. In the half light of early morning our bedroom was grey. Even though the night had lifted I could see its irregular form in front of me, the faint but unmistakable thickening of space.

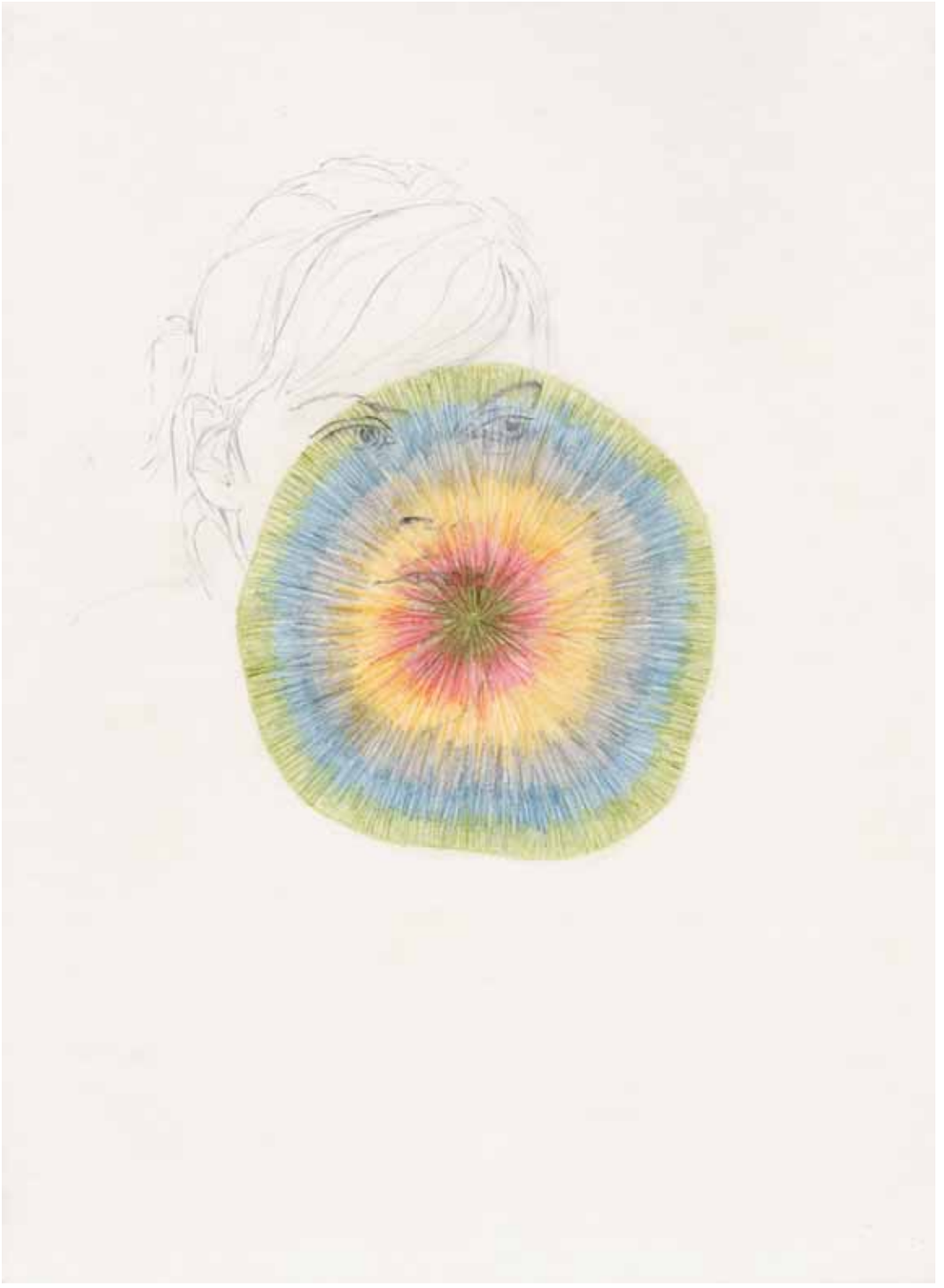


Spider space
2004
Watercolour and pencil on paper
21 x 29.5 cm

Everything is going to be okay
2004
Pencil on paper
29.5 x 42 cm



Available
2005
Newsprint over newspaper
59.5 x 75 cm



Left look
2005
Pencil and
colouring pencil
on paper
21 x 29.5 cm

Sarah Pierce

Sarah Pierce was born in Connecticut USA in 1968. She currently lives in Dublin where she organises The Metropolitan Complex, a social practice that incorporates a range of activities such as talks, publications, exhibitions, and events. Recent projects include *Coalesce the remix (Compilation CD)* Redux, London 2005; *Archivo Paralelo* Sala Rekalde, Bilbao 2005; *You can't cheat an honest man*; *Romantic detachment*, PS1/MoMA, New York 2004; *Paraeducation department* Witte de Witte/ TENT., Rotterdam 2004; *the red archive*, Project, Dublin 2004; *St. Pappins Ladies Club 1966–2003*, Project, Dublin 2003, and *Affinity archive*, Broadstone Studios, Dublin 2003. She regularly publishes The Metropolitan Complex Papers, an ongoing series of transcribed conversations, and collaborates with Sven Anderson on the website *www.themetropolitancomplex.com*

Sarah Pierce
Monk's garden
2005
Scuola di San Pasquale
Castello District, Venice

Partially Unburied Shed (with textual variations[1])

Barbara Clausen

'It's about the moments that relate the social and personal impact of "authentic gestures". Black Sabbath, Robert Smithson, are bootlegged in the same way. I love this idea of dissemination. Copy it and get it out there – pass it to someone and make them listen.'
Sarah Pierce

For Sarah Pierce it is culture's occupation with space that determines our concept of history and belonging. By juxtaposing crucial moments of time, correlating the local and the foreign, she translates the process from a fluid to a solid culture of memory in her work. *Monk's garden* unveils a web of references and fragments rooted in the achievements of the infinite archive of cultural memory. 'It is a folding back of time,' Pierce writes me in an email, 'that I want to explore… how we access the past in conversation and how we make, and produce, and archive.'

'The Forgotten Zine Library', a collection of predominantly punk fanzines, is the vantage point of the installation, shipped from the Grand Canal, a squatting neighborhood in Dublin,[2] to the Grand Canal in Venice. These mostly personal and handmade items take shelter in a little garden, normally closed off to the public. The garden of the Scuola di San Pasquale is used as a storage place and a passage way from the piazza in front of the church to the administrative building, by the fathers of San Francesco della Vigna at the Scuola di San Pasqule in Castello Venice. The space, negotiated between the fathers and the Biennale, enables 429 Irish publications from the Forgotten Zine Library to be on view for passersby, fans, and insiders. Hoping for an exchange with a potential local fanzine scene, the archive is cradled in file baskets, latched to the frame of a table like structure. Protected by a bright blue canopy from rain and sunshine, it looks like an archeological dig of a record collection, unpacked and waiting to return to its (new) home in Dublin.[3]

1 Barbara Clausen asked me to provide the footnotes to her essay. Her proposal struck us both as reflective of the issues at hand, therefore all footnotes to *Partially unburied shed* are mine unless otherwise indicated. – Sarah Pierce

2 When I first visited the library, it was in the warehouse off the North Strand, technically a leased space. A number of zines in the collection belong to inhabitants affiliated with a recently shut-down squat on Leeson Street, which runs over the Grand Canal on Dublin's southside. There are no 'squatting neighbourhoods' per se in Dublin; despite a number of unoccupied buildings in the city, squatter's rights remain notably unrecognised.

3 Initial conversations about bringing the library to Venice involved storage; it was uncertain whether the warehouse's lease would be renewed, and the library would likely be boxed over the summer. A solution would be to house it temporarily in the Irish pavilion in Venice, giving an official place to that which is continually displaced. It is true, there was a hope the archive might grow in Venice, but we soon figured this could be read too easily through relational frameworks, given the context. Zines are dispersive, while at the same time strongly linked to 'place'. The symbolic turn of (re)location and (re)placement in *Monk's garden,* was less about enacting participation in zine culture, and more about claiming a culture of participation which might disrupt official narratives of Irish art.

Walking into the little garden through the stone archway there are tree stumps arranged in little groups.[4] They are resting places for those absent but normally at work. Next to a silver metal shed that houses the garden tools of the Padres, a rose bush is still in bloom. To the left of the entrance there is a circular pattern of mirrors stuck diagonally in the ground.[5] They are treasures of reflection. On the ground a mere stone holds down a stack of papers to be taken along, each double-folded to a bundle of ten pages. It's a new edition of Pierce's artzine[6] The Metropolitan Complex. The issue contains a detailed list of all zines on view, accompanied by an interview with 25 year-old artist Ciaran Walsh, co-founder of the Forgotten Zine Library. Eight additional pages are filled with an interview conducted by Pierce with chroniclers and fans of the 80s subculture punk scene in Dublin.[7]

Pieces fall into place. Pierce's is a gesture of turning back, an appropriation of the collective memory that informs the context of singular art works. A feeling of passing and change emanates from the site, as if there are many layers of time accumulated in this slightly hidden-off site, waiting to be unburied. Pierce literally dug up, catalogued, and now exposes the briefness of cultural history, putting a twist to the complex relationship between personal and collective memory. The 80s punk scene in Dublin, a Petri dish of subculture, is mixed with a flash of the American desert in the 1960s, the birthplace of land art. Reversing the rhetoric of the cultural canon, by speaking it in a fluid tongue, she visually transcribes the hearsay of a whole generation of local subculture. Recollections, micro plots, anecdotes, gossip, and local myths at first blur into a *mélange* and then slowly focus back into a crisp retro-fictive memory. Having been there or not, is not the question. In fact, Pierce plays with the memory of those, like herself, who are a little too young to have been part of it.

All is explained in the banner mounted on the side of the shed. Pierce's text carefully outlines the process of how *Monk's garden* developed and particularly its function as a site of passage and storage, woven into the many references on view. Documenting a narrative herself, it is as she writes about: 'displaced objects, devoid of time'. In other words, Pierce obtains the control over the originals she appropriates, not by a claim of ownership, but through a rereading of their context in popular or sub culture. The metal shed, a prime example for this two way shift, is left on view as an *objet trouvé* appropriation of an art work by Smithson,[8] as well as a comment on the possibility of an art icon to return to its original everyday status. Pierce unravels the authenticity of a past moment, unburying its presence. Gestures, not to be remembered, but rather recognised. The mirrors in the ground, a direct reference to Smithson's travels in the Yucatan peninsula, symbolically mirror one's own fragmented reflection of time.[9] Its value devoid of authenticity and physical presence. The work triggers memories not experienced, thereby questioning the concept of authenticity and immediacy inherent to culture. Envisioning the black and white images that inform the collective imagination, we stand in the desert with Dennis Oppenheim, on the cusp of the *Spiral jetty* with Smithson, and on a highway with Ed Ruscha.

4 The random collection of stumps found in the garden prompted the entry into Smithson's project, as they reminded me of his upside down trees as well as of *Hotel Palenque*'s anonymous 'interventions'. While installing, I tried rearranging the stumps and discovered they could be paired, more or less, according to size, age, shape, or type of tree.

5 In his writings on *Incident's of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan* (1969), Smithson references ancient Mayan tiles, drawing relationships to the land and the passage of time. I used a circle of tiles found in the garden, made of a generic patio stone, as a starting point to locate the mirrors – concentrating on the sky and the surrounding architecture of the church, and pulling these downward into the garden through the mirrors' reflections.

6 It is not unreasonable to read the paper as an 'artzine'. I avoid these terms, mostly because I understand the papers less through the particulars of production founded in zine culture (self-publishing, do-it-yourself aesthetics), and more through particularities of representation founded in contemporary art practices.

7 Fergus Kelly, Dennis McNulty, and Garrett Phelan participated in this discussion.

8 Author's note: Robert Smithson, *Partially Buried Woodshed*, Kent State University, Ohio, 1970

9 Smithson would immediately dismantle each mirror displacement after taking a documentary photograph. Later he recorded the process in writing. The reference to the act of installation in *Monk's garden*, mistaken as a reference to an origin(al), is in fact a quotation of secondary sources.

above:
Sarah Pierce
Monk's garden
2005
Scuola di San Pasquale
Castello District, Venice

below:
Sarah Pierce
Monk's garden
(detail of The Forgotten Zine Library)
2005
Scuola di San Pasquale
Castello District, Venice

Monk's garden is about the gesture of turning back towards history. It takes its references from a continuity of culture, one that is oriented toward the reoccurring cycles of taste and style, emblematic for the writing of art history. The project can be linked to an art history that spans from early 12th century codex illustrations of the Book of Kells from Ireland, to the beginning of art history in the 19th century developing from early archeology, up to Mark Dion's celebrated work of archeological exploration in the Grand Canal at the Venice Biennale a few years ago. Each of them shares a capacity to mark a point in time, which defines the writing of its histories.

In her work as an artist, author, and researcher Pierce consistently challenges the relationship between the spectacle and its mediation, by redirecting the past towards the present. By blending the aesthetic and discursive threads of the past with those of the present, Pierce questions the rhetoric of the canon of art history as well as the responsibility of the cultural producer within this process.

As performative appropriations, cultural icons have the potential to articulate the representational politics of space as well as time. It is the shared challenge of ownership inscribed in the idea of the local – as a site of belonging – that is equally inherent to the culture of squatting and land art. *Monk's garden* is a deconstruction of the desire to turn back within the context of a borrowed site.

The politics of space and the rhetoric of cultural representation correlate in *Monk's garden* through the exposure of a collection of homemade fanzine publications. While reading Pierce's banner text, one wonders how squatting can be permitted in Venice? Probably in exact reverse to how punk has become a sellable icon for the last three decades. Reversing the dynamics of left wing politics, punk has become a crumbling Palazzo in Venice squatted by culture with the permission of those who built it, to be self righteously excavated and re-selected, to be understood and restored by the reminiscent gaze of those who come to see it.

The political and the personal have grown old together while growing apart. A market fueled by culture has made counter culture's past failure one of reminiscent success, indulging its passive viewers with grainy black and white images, revolutionary texts, and long gone manifestos absorbed as entertainment. The cultural industry's production of retro-fictive memory triggers a revival of the performative. A hopeful recovery of the past that enables the individual to turn back in collective spirit as a political subject, without reinforcing the myth of artistic ingenuity, one traditionally focused on the inner and not on the outer world.

In this sense, *Monk's garden* is a resting place for those who have come to reconsider their cultural strategy. Through the import of the 'site specific' and the ambivalent status of what is perpetuated, Pierce challenges and re-evaluates the process and politics of a culture driven by ownership and reproduction. Rather than a chain, her linking and layering create a fabric of events, a net of narrative choices. Where one story gives way to the next.

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American Pavilion
April 2005
Giardini, Venice Biennale
photo: Sarah Pierce

Robert Smithson on the
Spiral jetty
1970
photo: Gianfranco Gorgoni

MONK'S GARDEN

Site : Visit (2005)

A few months ago, a negotiation took place on behalf of the Padres di Convento San Francesco della Vigna and myself, to arrange access to the garden adjacent to the Scuola di San Pasquale in Venice's Castello district, the site of *Ireland at Venice 2005*. The Fathers lease the garden for storage, as well as using it as a back entry to a small office next to the main building. The agreement: To open the garden gate to the public for *la Biennale di Venezia*.

The garden has both changed and retained elements I recall from a brief visit two years ago. Someone has built a corrugated shed in the centre. Three large stumps, placed irregularly, garnish the area. Ultimately, I realise these are part of a collection; 17 stumps of different sizes randomly occupy the garden from beneath fig bushes, beside planters, and along the path that leads to the stairs. This odd intervention evokes Robert Smithson's *Hotel Palenque*, scripted as a lecture in 1972 for architecture students at the University of Utah. The work's accompanying sequence of slides documents the hotel in Mexico and the unsystematic add-ons and repairs that repeatedly reconfigure its grounds. The garden is not one person's vision. It is several, altering, autonomous moments of attention, at varying stages of progress, underway but unfinished. This multifarious involvement can happen where 'site' is available, up for grabs, not fixed historically or contextually predetermined.

Green space is rare in Venice, yet squatting is legal, and I am told by an architect living here that the locals call squats 'community centres'. I wonder what it means to represent Ireland at Venice. I'm not Irish. In Dublin squatting, or the unauthorised occupation of vacant space, is illegal. Along the Grand Canal in Dublin in a neighbourhood called Rialto, Dunk, a young architecture student and activist has started a movement to 'green' the city by planting community gardens in derelict industrial plots. Eventually, these will connect to create a green spine through the city. In recent correspondence he writes, "The Grand Canal is under threat due to recent construction of the Kildare motorway bypass, which has affected the Pollardstown fens water levels, which is the source of the Grand Canal."

Dunk introduces me to a group who occupy a warehouse along the DART, and who organise Sunday bike-workshops, screenings, and Vegan meals. There I meet Ciaran Walsh, an artist and also the co-founder of the Forgotten Zine Library, an archive of several personal collections. We make plans to transport 429 Irish publications, both zines and freesheets, from the library to Venice to announce a pavilion of sorts in the garden. I record the addresses of the people who made them. Most of the addresses are houses in the suburbs surrounding Dublin.

A majority of the zines in the Forgotten Zine Library are made by people in their 20s now, born in the late 70s, and refer to the DIY ethos of punk, anarchy, and eco-living. I wonder about male artists in my generation whose art references a group who came before them. Ed Ruscha, Bruce Nauman, Robert Smithson, Richard Serra, Dan Graham, Gordon Matta-Clark. There is acertain serendipity between the ages we are now, and the ages of these artists in the decade we were born. They are figures in the landscape, in black-and-white photographs taken in the American desert, in dungarees. Ed Ruscha is representing the U.S. this year in the United States pavilion. He describes his work as a collection of facts and readymades. It strikes me how loaded with politics one of his seminal pieces, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* made in 1963, is today.

Inscribed on the exterior of the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin is a work by Lawrence Weiner: *WATER & SAND + STICKS & STONES*.

On my last day in Venice I visit the Giardini. It is April and only three countries have begun work on their pavilions. Some men are cleaning Japan with an industrial machine; Austria is surrounded by stacks of timber; Australia's roof is getting a hose-down. The rest of the place looks like wasteland. Vinyl text on France, leftover from the architecture biennale tells about sustainability and future cities. The U.S. pavilion has boarded windows and graffiti on the entrance.

Around 1969, Smithson did a series of *Mirror Displacements* along the Yucatan. He photographed each one and consecutively documented them in narrative texts. He wrote, "Time is devoid of objects when one displaces all destinations." I often think about this sentence. Try rearranging it.

Destinations are devoid of time when one displaces all objects.
or
Displaced objects, devoid of time.
or
One time, devoid of objects, all destinations.

Incidents of travel arrive in Venice in the Monk's Garden.

-Sarah Pierce

opposite page:
Sarah Pierce
Monk's garden
banner text

this page:
Monk's garden
Ireland at Venice, 2005

Francis McKee

The End *of light*

Joe Walker and Pat Walker were born in Dublin in 1962 and continue to live and work in the Dublin area. They have exhibited extensively both in Ireland and internationally, recent solo exhibitions include the Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin 2004; 'Floating ip', Manchester and Temple Bar Gallery and Studios 2003. Group exhibitions include 'Presence' Gimpel fils, London, 2005; 'Are we there yet' Glassbox, Paris; 'Do something' Floating ip, 2004; 'Arranged marriage outer space(s)' the Contemporary Arts Council, Chicago USA and 'How things turn out' the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin all in 2002.

There is a scene in *The man who fell to earth* in which the main character, the alien Thomas Jerome Newton, is travelling across America in a limousine. At one point he glances out the window and sees 19th century plains pioneers staring back at his vehicle passing through the landscape. This is perhaps the most striking moment of the film, certainly more remarkable and more memorable than the scenes in which Newton recalls life on his own planet. Those scenes are simply fantasy but the incident in the limousine reveals something essential about the medium of film in which Newton's story unfolds.

For Nicolas Roeg, the director of the movie, it was an opportunity to demonstrate that while the physical action of a film is inevitably linear, the medium can travel laterally in time. For a relativist like Roeg (who later filmed *Insignificance* – a story based around Einstein and his theories), this was too good an opportunity to miss. As the character named Newton travelled in a straight line across the country, Roeg allows him to slip in time, experiencing the landscape's past events in the present. This alien concept of time is one we live with daily but it is submerged beneath the consensual illusion of linear time and action that enables us to interact in society.

In Walker and Walker's *Nightfall* time is also twisted. A man descends from a forest to the shoreline of a lake surrounded by mountains. He picks up two similar stones, pockets one and drops the other before climbing into a rowing boat and sculling across the lake. Midway, he pauses and watches as a man, identical to himself, descends from the forest to the shoreline where he was standing a moment before. Continuing an earlier thought on the falling light the rower says 'beyond which lies darkness'. The phrase is echoed by his double on the shore who continues, saying 'Beyond darkness, the other side of silence…' then picks up the rejected stone and drops it into the water. In the twilight, the rower perceives that the figure on the shoreline has disappeared. Shaken by the experience he rows on quickly pausing again only as the darkness closes in. As he continues to meditate on the approaching nightfall, his thoughts are echoed by the mountains before the light and the film fade to darkness.

Like Roeg's movie, *Nightfall* presents a linear scene but with a tear in the fabric of time. The uncanny incident on the shoreline is ambiguous, apparently opening into alternate versions of reality. Whether the rower is looking at another version of himself in a parallel time or whether he is confronting a supernatural doppelgänger in his own time remains unknown. Certainly contemporary physics would seem to allow for the first possibility. In Hyperspace – a survey of recent theories of parallel universes, superstrings and multiple dimensions – author Michio Kaku states that 'it is perfectly consistent with the laws of physics (although *highly* unlikely) that someone may enter a twin universe that is precisely like our universe except for one small crucial difference, created at some point in time when the two universes split apart.'

Nightfall
2004
16 mm film
Duration 7'

Nightfall (installation view,
Ireland at Venice 2005)
2004
16 mm film
Duration 7'

Nightfall also allows for the possibility, however, that the rower has simply imagined what he has seen on the shoreline. Rather than some radical perception of a flaw in the time/space continuum, it may be that the whole episode is illusory. The film is infused with a sense of melancholy that suggests a state of mind open to nightmare or dark daydreams. The twilight setting itself provides a landscape where optical errors can easily occur in the failing light.

Melancholy is often associated with such landscapes and with the onset of darkness. In an essay on the romantic poet Gérard de Nerval, Julia Kristeva, for instance, interprets his metaphor of the 'black sun' as a summing up of 'the blinding force of the despondent mood – an excruciating, lucid affect asserts the inevitability of death.' She goes on to outline a process in which there is a doubling of the self in this melancholy state, a narcissistic development that could be similarly identified in the rower of *Nightfall*. There is, after all, a more mythic reading of the film in which both Narcissus and Echo play a vital role. Certainly, it could be argued that there is a process of internalisation at work throughout the piece. Often this is most evident in the cinematography where the landscape is a filtered, drained blue, contrasting with the more vivid skin tones of the main character and with the sharply defined green wood of the rowing boat that carries him away from the land. It is as if the surrounding world were insubstantial, dissolving in the twilight, leaving the protagonist in the realm of his own imagination.

The spoken thoughts at the end of the film reinforce this feeling as the rower acknowledges abyss of night where only our inner voices and memories survive:

Tomorrow will bring a new light
a light as yet not stained by the warmth of day
translating the world to morning.
But, for now, all is going down.
The day is no more
but the darkness of the night and the silence of the unsayable
have not closed in to deny space itself,
an external space people by others,
a darkness so close it can only be likened to skin
beneath which is the internal space peopled by ourselves alone
and yet within us the beings of our memories.
In which whatever falls continues falling.

The film fades to darkness after these Beckettian words, reminding us that the medium itself is light. The immateriality of the moving image creates a shadow world that parallels our own reality.

The surrealists understood in the early days of cinema that this medium was the one that offered a clear definition of the 'sur-réal' with it easy generation of alternate dimensions. In his introduction to an anthology of surrealists' writing on cinema, Paul Hammond cites several epigrams by the German Romantic poet Novalis which anticipate their explorations:

Dark memories hovering below the transparent screen of the present will project images of reality in sharp silhouette, to create the pleasurable effect of a double world.

Plots without any coherence, and yet with associations, as in dreams.

Directed through the twigs, a long ray entered his eyes, and through it he could see into a distant, strange and marvellous space, impossible to describe.

below:
Dark again
2005
Neon
?? measurements

opposite page:
Dust veil
2005
Neon and perspex
?? measurements
Bridge
2005
Neon
?? measurements
(all installation views, Ireland
at Venice 2005)


DUST VEIL

Hammond uses the epigrams to trace the surrealists' interest in cinema back to an earlier Romantic melancholy and yearning 'for lost plenitude, for setting the revelations of night alongside those of the day.' For Walker and Walker this terrain is familiar and provides, through the work of Caspar David Friedrich, a starting point for several of their other works.
For Friedrich, the journey through night to the light of morning was particularly symbolic, reminding him of the redemptive role of Christ on the Cross – 'at the threshold between darkness and light.' In his own account of his painting, *Cross in the mountain*, he explains the role of Jesus saying

Thus, as herald of the salvation that awaits us, He becomes simultaneously mediator between earth and heaven. And we, we are comforted and rejoice in His message and His works, just as, after a long dark night, we rejoice at the approach of the sun when we observe its illumination and its effects earlier than its appearance. Here I felt the need to celebrate that commemorative rite which, itself a secret, is the symbol of another [secret]: the Incarnation and Resurrection of the Son of God.

For Walker and Walker, the trajectory of Friedrich's journey through the night is inspiring but there is not the same sense of Christian redemption in *Nightfall*. Their final, Beckett-like, observation that 'whatever falls continues falling' suggests a more existential experience of the journey through darkness. Moreover, the doubling of the main character recalls the pagan myth of Narcissus just as Nicolas Roeg's *Man who fell to earth* alludes to the story of Icarus. In a description of Ovid's famous retelling of the myth of Narcissus. Julia Kristeva outlines a situation that could as easily be taken as a critique of the lure of film:

We are here confronted with what we can but call the vertigo of a love with no object other than a mirage. Ovid marvels, fascinated and terrified, at the sight of a twin aspect of the lure that will nevertheless continue to nourish the West's Psychological and intellectual life for centuries to come. On the one hand there is rapture at the sight of a non-object, simple product of the eyes' mistake; on the other, there is the power of the image, 'what you seek is nowhere. The vision is only shadow, only reflection, lacking any substance. It comes with you, it stays with you, it goes away with you, if you can go away.'

This 'world of signs' that Kristeva's Narcissus finally begins to recognise is one that has always been at the core of the process of making art. Recent work by acousticians, for instance, has led to new theories of prehistoric rock art which link the making of images to the echoes found in those caves. The theories point to the various myths surrounding echoes that can be found across the world, each of them linking the acoustic phenomenon to the communication of spirits or to a bodiless voice.

Again there may be a more secular reading of such subliminal mythologies in *Nightfall*. Spirits are translated into the less mystical terrain of personal memory – 'within us the beings of our memories in which whatever falls continues falling.' The emphasis is on the gradual decay – the half-life – of our memories and the darkness that haunts this film is clearly a form of death. And as the medium turns constantly in *Nightfall* to reflect on itself, it also hints at the narcissistic relationship each of us has with works of art.

1
Twilight
2003
Neon reflected in window
Installation view, Temple Bar Gallery and Studios, Dublin

2
Drawing – after Friedrich
2003
Carved resin and paint
35 x 23 x 16 cm
Installation view, Floating ip, Manchester

3
Horizon
2003
Fluorescent light, wood, plaster and paint
Installation view, Temple Bar Gallery and Studios, Dublin

4
Dream machine
2004
Fabricated metal, paint
81 x 30 cm diameter
Installation view, Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin

5
Now
Erased text in King Lear
2004
Altered book

6
Unpainted mountain
2004
Fibreglass, metal, paint, fluorescent lights, dry ice
Installation view, Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin

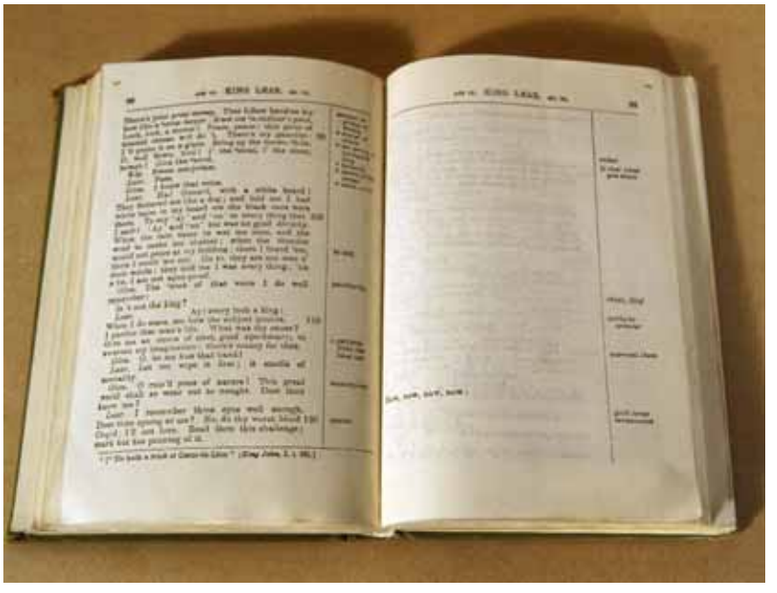
Frances McKee is Head of Digital Arts and New Media at the Centre for Contemporary Art in Glasgow and teaches at Glasgow School of Art. He was co-curator of the Scottish exhibition at the Venice Biennale in 2003 and the curator of the inaugural Glasgow International in 2005.

1

2

3

4



5

6

Works in the exhibition

Stephen Brandes
Der Angstlustbaum
2005
Vinyl drawings
230 x 305 cm
Courtesy of the artist
Rubicon Gallery, Dublin

Becoming island
2005
Vinyl drawings
227 x 301.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist and
Rubicon Gallery, Dublin

An atrocity tourists guide to Eastern and Central Europe
1999–2001
Ink on Fabriano and laserprint and gouache on Fabriano
dimensions vary
Courtesy of the artist and
Rubicon Gallery, Dublin

Mark Garry
How soon is now
2005
Acrylic thread, beads, componium, cotton, mdf, paper pins, resin
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Ronan McCrea
Sequences, Scenarios & Locations
Part I – After Hänsel and Gretel
Part II
Part III – The lost photographs of Alfred H
2004–2005
604 colour and black & white 35mm slides, 8 carousel slide projectors and stands
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist

Isabel Nolan
Strangely hollow
2004
Pencil, acrylic and watercolour on paper
19 x 16 cm
Private Collection

On the 14th of May
2005
Pencil and watercolour on paper
29.5 x 42 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Dog's face
2004
Pencil on paper
21 x 29.5 cm
Private Collection

No one else
2004
Pencil and watercolour on paper
14 x 21 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Together
2004
Watercolour on paper
29 x 43 cm
Private Collection

Spider space
2004
Watercolour and pencil on paper
21 x 29.5 cm
Private Collection

Dream river
2004
Watercolour on paper
10.5 x 21 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Three trees
2005
Pencil and watercolour on paper
29.5 x 42 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Everything is going to be okay
2004
Pencil on paper
29.5 x 42 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Elsewhere
2005
Pencil and colouring pencil on paper
29.5 x 21 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Tender
2004
Watercolour on paper
20 x 18 cm
Private Collection

Between you and me
2004
Pencil and watercolour on paper
29.5 x 42 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Shape sequence #4, #5, #6
2005
Colouring pencil on paper
29.5 x 21 cm (each)
Courtesy of the artist

It can be difficult
2005
Pencil and colouring pencil on paper
29.5 x 21 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Must not come to nothing
2005
Pencil and watercolour on paper
29.5 x 42 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Sleeping dog
2004
Pencil on paper
29.5 x 21 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Quiet, please
2005
DVD / animation
Duration 5' 30"
Edition 3 + A.P
Commissioned by Project Arts Centre
Courtesy of the artist

84 days later
2005
Newspaper and newsprint
59.5 x 75 cm
Courtesy of the artist

8 and 10
2004
Watercolour on paper
14 x 20 cm
Private Collection

Sarah Pierce
Monk's garden
2005
Scuola di San Pasquale, Castello district, Venice
Courtesy of the artist

Walker and Walker
Dark again
2005
Neon
Dimensions??
Courtesy of the artists

Ghost of Andre Cadere
2005
Beach, paint
150 x 3 x 3 cm
Courtesy of the artists

Nightfall
2004
16mm film
Duration 7'
Courtesy of the artists

Dust veil
2005
Neon and perspex
Dimensions??
Courtesy of the artists

Bridge
2005
Neon
Diameter ??
Courtesy of the artists

Printed Project
Printed Project is the bi-annual journal published by the Sculptors' Society of Ireland. A special edition Another Monumental Metaphor was commissioned as part of Ireland's representation at the Venice Biennale. It was edited/ curated by Dublin based artist Alan Phelan.

Installation view, garden, Ireland at Venice 2005 (Sarah Pierce)

Installation view Scuola di San Pasquale,
downstairs, Ireland at Venice 2005,
Stephen Brandes, Mark Garry, Isabel Nolan

Installation view Scuola di San Pasquale, upstairs, Ireland at Venice 2005, Walker and Walker, Ronan McCrea

Ireland at Venice
since 1993

Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith

Ireland had not been formally represented at the Venice Biennale for over thirty years when Dorothy Cross and Willie Doherty were chosen in 1993 to participate in what remains the most prestigious gala event in the contemporary art calendar. The country's sporadic participation between 1950 and 1960 had involved contributions by well-known painters of the time such as Norah McGuinness, Nano Reid, Patrick Scott and Louis le Brocquy (who won the Prix Prealpina Spa at the 1956 Biennale), with Hilary Heron the lone sculptor among them. By 1993 McGuinness, Reid and Heron had passed away and LeBrocquy and Scott were senior figures in the pantheon of Irish painters. The choice of artists for the 1993 Biennale reflected a radically changed social landscape and political climate, both North and South of the border, as well as a notable expansion of the range of media favoured by contemporary artists. It is incidentally worth noting that there were no painters among the Irish representatives in Venice between 1993 and 2003, whereas painting still featured strongly, for instance, at the British pavilion during the same period. The judicious balancing of gender and provenance evident in the choice of Doherty (born and based in Derry) and Cross (born in Cork, but based at the time in Dublin) would set the tone for a number of years to come.

Ireland was a relative latecomer to the Biennale, which was founded in 1895, and it had no permanent pavilion of its own. Cross and Doherty were allocated adjacent spaces in the large but crowded Italian Pavilion at the heart of the Giardini, where all the permanent national pavilions are located. Well-chosen works by both artists ensured that they were not lost from view amid the various surrounding contributions from other small or emerging nations. Cross showed two visually arresting sculptures from her *Udder* series, a series of works using cured cowhide, which commented powerfully and wittily on gender formation: *Virgin shroud* is now in the collection of the Tate Gallery, and *Amazon*, a one-breasted, hide-covered dressmaker's dummy, proved sufficiently memorable to be reproduced in general reviews of the Biennale in the international art press. A classic Doherty photo-work of the time, showing the burnt-out wreck of a car on the side of a border road, was also produced in poster format and pasted up on various sites around Venice. Doherty's characteristic questioning of conventional media images of the Northern Irish 'Troubles' was thus subtly extended in a manner and format that ensured maximum visibility amid the inevitable visual overload of the Biennale.

left:
Dorothy Cross
Virgin shroud
1993
Cowhide, muslin, silk satin and metal stand
201 x 81 x 120 cm
Tate. Presented by the Patrons of New Art (Special Purchase Fund) through the Tate Gallery Foundation 1995
Photograph: John Kellett

below:
Willie Doherty
Installation view, Venice Biennale 1993
Courtesy of the artist and the Kerlin Gallery, Dublin

The Northern conflict in particular, and the politics of territoriality more generally, were addressed once again by Ireland's representatives at the 1995 event. On this occasion the Irish were housed in the modestly sized Nuova Icona gallery, on the island of Giudecca, away from the main concentration of events and exhibitions. The principal body of work presented by Kathy Prendergast, a Dublin-born artist based in London, was a selection from what arguably remains her best-known work, *The City drawings* (1992–1997 ongoing series). In 1992 Prendergast had begun a series of small, exquisitely intricate pencil drawings of all the worlds' capital cities, which were at the time approximately 180 in number. By June 1995 this series was still incomplete, though in a sense it was destined to remain so forever, given the constant appearance and disappearance of capital cities as new nation-states emerge and older ones are dissolved. Prendergast declared the work complete in 1997 and it now forms part of the collection of the Irish Museum of Modern Art. While Prendergast's sensibility differed markedly from that of her co-exhibitor, Shane Cullen, there were intriguing points of comparison between the projects by which the two artists chose to be represented. In 1995 Dublin-based Cullen had embarked on a work every bit as ambitious and obsessive as Prendergast's, one that was eventually to result in a monumental wall of 96 painted panels bearing documentary witness to the 1981 Republican hunger strike, *Fragmens sur les Institutions Républicaines IV* (1993-97), about a quarter of which had been finished by the time of the Biennale. This work involved the artist painting by hand a text of some 35,000 words comprising an intermittent series of letters from Irish Republican prisoners to the external leadership of the IRA. The combined presentation of these two projects offered the international art world tantalizing glimpses of work in progress: interim evidence of an attempt to come to some (necessarily provisional) understanding of the convoluted geography of the contemporary world as well as the contested history of contemporary Ireland.
As it happened, the relative inaccessibility of the venue resulted in modest attendance figures on the press days. This changed dramatically when it was announced that Prendergast had been awarded the prestigious Premio 2000, the award for the best young artist, by the Biennales international jury.

Kathy Prendergast
from **City drawings**
1992 (ongoing series)
Pencil on paper
24 x 32 cm each
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art
Purchased 1996

Nuova Icona was also the Irish venue at the 1997 Biennale and, once again, two artists were selected, Jaki Irvine and Alastair McLennan. While Irvine had first exhibited as part of the collective Blue Funk, whose members had been students together in the National College of Art & Design; by the time of her selection for Venice 1997 she had been living and working in London for some years. She had in fact participated in the 1995 Biennale as one of the artists included in the group exhibition 'General release', the only substantial Venice outing to date of the so-called YBA generation (though it included few of what are now its best-known figures). In 1997 Irvine was paired with Alastair McLennan, a Scot of an older generation, who has lived for many years in Northern Ireland. A legendary performance artist and a highly influential teacher at the University of Ulster, much of McLennan's work at this time took the form of elaborately funereal installations examining issues of absence and remembrance in the context of recent Northern Irish history. The work presented at Venice, *Body of (D)earth*, was an immersive, almost sacramental installation that featured the solemn reiteration of all the names of those killed in the Northern Ireland conflict from 1969 to 1997. Irvine's five-part video installation, *Another difficult sunset*, on the other hand, spun out a beguiling, elusive and meandering narrative featuring the wanderings of an anonymous man and a woman around London, which mixed fantasy and philosophy, the surreal and the mundane, to mesmerising effect.

The modest gallery spaces of the Nuova Icona had strained a little at the seams to accommodate Irvine and McLennan's equally complex installations, not to mention the latter's brooding, performative presence during the opening days. This may have influenced the decision to choose a solo presentation for 1999. Ann Tallentire, like Irvine, was Irish-born but based in London. Like McLennan, she is a committed and influential art-school teacher (at St. Martin's in London) with a history in performance art, as well as in video installation. Her Venice installation, *Instances*, was a work in three parts: a slow-moving video of dawn breaking over a city tower-block, a performance cycle on video showing the artist methodically executing a selection of apparently unmotivated actions, and a single, almost inscrutable photographic image from trailer, a work she had made with her regular collaborator, John Seth, the previous year. The work as a whole was conceived as an invitation to the viewer, in the artists' words, 'to think about life for the restless, the wakeful and the vigilant'. In this particular context this thoughtful and thought-inducing ensemble came a both a welcome relief and an oddly discomfiting interruption of the visual barrage that constantly assaults the committed visitor to any Venice Biennale.

Shane Cullen
Fragmens sur les Institutions Républicaines IV
1993–1997
Text on 96 styrofoam panels, 12 blocks of 8 panels, each block 251 x 480 x 6 cm
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art
Purchased 2000

Jaki Irvine
Another difficult sunset
1997
Video projection
Courtesy of the artist and Frith Street Gallery, London

2001 marked a return to a two-person representation, which suited the new venue at the Scuola di San Pasquale, San Francesco della Vigna, in Castello (where 'General Release' had been six years earlier), in that this church has two floors connected by a double staircase. Siobhán Hapaska, Belfast-born but a long-time London resident, took the downstairs space while Dublin-based Grace Weir was upstairs. Both artists chose to present ambitious, large-scale installations. The centrepiece (altarpiece, in fact) of Hapaska's spectacular topsy-turvy, tree-filled installation was a humorously surreal narrative video, *May day*, featuring a well-heeled couple whom we first see exchanging identical gifts – small, sleekly designed beacons – in the austerely up-market surroundings of a contemporary domestic interior. They end up incongruously lying face down on a beach with the aforementioned gifts clasped between their buttocks, beaming an inexplicable signal into the evening sky. The main work presented upstairs by Weir also looked skywards. *Around now*, was a large-scale dual-screen projection, showing one 360 degree view from inside a cloud and one view from outside it. This powerful, vertigo-inducing invitation to savour the feeling of unassisted flight was countered by a second, monitor-based work, *Distance AB*, which amusingly attempted to bring Einstein's high-flown 'Theory of Relativity' literally down to earth.



Anne Tallentire
Instances
1999
Video projection
Courtesy of the artist

In 2003 Katie Holten became the second artist to represent Ireland at Venice with a solo contribution to the Biennale, housed once again in the Scuola di San Pasquale, which she retitled *Laboratorio della Vigna* for the occasion. Holten's 'solo show', however, involved a notable degree of collaboration with a range of local people, most of whom were not artists. This was in keeping with a freewheeling, nomadic practice that continues to be informed by (or at the very least has strong parallels with) a prominent strain in recent international contemporary involving a high degree of social interaction, which has come to be referred to under the catch-all term, 'Relational Aesthetics'. As part of her ongoing project throughout the duration of the Biennale Holten interviewed local scientists and writers, showed a film by a local filmmaker on immigrants right to work in Italy during the opening, and organised various performances in the Scuola. She also reproduced a selection of disparate texts by well-known authors, with their permission, in a series of inexpensively published 'PAPERS'.

Of the ten artists chosen to represent Ireland between 1993 and 2003, four were based in London at the time, one lives in Derry, one is based in Belfast, and one, Katie Holten, travels constantly and currently lives in New York. At the time of their participation only three of the artists were living and working in the Republic of Ireland. Artists today are as likely as ever to migrate toward one of the larger metropolitan centres, such as London, Berlin or New York, where there is a high concentration of their peers. The fact that six of the seven artists selected to represent Ireland in 2005 are based in Dublin (including the duo Walker and Walker), and the seventh, Stephen Brandes, has only recently moved from Dublin to Cork, may be seen to reflect a growing confidence in the capital over the past few years and a marked increase in activity in the visual arts there, which cannot be entirely put down to the benefits of a burgeoning economy. In 2005, for the first time ever, Northern Ireland was represented independently at Venice in the form of a group show involving more than a dozen artists. This decision was no doubt partly prompted by the successful independent participation of Scotland and Wales at the 2003 Biennale, in addition to the traditional British pavilion in the Giardini. While this increase in participation is likely to test even further the powers of concentration and commitment of the average Biennale visitor faced with the work of hundreds of artists in dozens of shows, it bears heartening witness to the current quality of Irish art and the energy and enthusiasm of those who produce it as well as those who facilitate its wider circulation.

Siobhán Hapaska
May day
2001
medium ??
Installation view, Scuola di San Pasquale
Courtesy of the artist and the Kerlin Gallery, Dublin

Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith is a critic, occasional curator and Senior Lecturer at University College Dublin. His art criticism has appeared in Afterall, Artforum, Modern Painters and Parachute. He is a judge for the 2005 Turner Prize.

Grace Weir
Around now
2001
2 simultaneous films
Duration 5'
16mm film
Courtesy of the artist

Chronology of Ireland's participation at the Venice Biennale

For the 1993 and 1995 Biennale, Ireland's artists were chosen by the Cultural Relations Committee's Visual Arts sub-committee: Cecily Brennan (Chair), Peter Murray (Commissioner), John Behan, Barbara Dawson, Sarah Finlay, Joan Fowler, John Hutchinson, Declan McGonagle, Paul O'Reilly.

1950 — 25th Biennale
Norah McGuinness / Nano Reid

1956 — 28th Biennale
Louis Le Brocquy (*The Family* awarded the Prix Prealpina Spa) / Hilary Heron

1960 — 30th Biennale
Patrick Scott

1993 — 45th Biennale
(Italian Pavilion)
Dorothy Cross / Willie Doherty

1995 — 46th Biennale
(Nuova Icona Gallery)
Kathy Prendergast (awarded the Premio 2000 prize or the best young artist) / Shane Cullen

1997 — 47th Biennale
(Nuova Icona Gallery)
Alastair McLennon / Jaki Irvine
Commissioner: *Fiach MacConghail*

1999 — 48th Biennale
(Nuova Icona Gallery)
Anne Tallantire
Commissioner: *Sarah Finlay*

2001 — 49th Biennale
(Scuola di San Pasquale, San Francisca della Vigna, Castello)
Grace Weir / Siobhán Hapaska
Commissioner: *Pat Murphy*

2003 — 50th Biennale
(Scuola di San Pasquale, San Francisca della Vigna, Castello)
Katie Holten
Commissioner: *Valerie Connor*

2005 — 51st Biennale
(Scuola di San Pasquale, San Francisca della Vigna, Castello)
Stephen Brandes, Mark Garry, Ronan McCrea, Isabel Nolan, Sarah Pierce, Walker and Walker
Commissioner: *Sarah Glennie*

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Ireland at Venice 2005
51st Venice Biennale, Scuola di San Pasquale
(San Francesco della Vigna) Campo della Confraternita, Castello, Venice
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Artists
Stephen Brandes
Mark Garry
Ronan McCrea
Isabel Nolan
Sarah Pierce
Walker and Walker

Commissioner
Sarah Glennie

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Francesca Bonetta	Project co-ordinator
Meabh Butler	Project co-ordinator
Gavin Delahunty	Project co-ordinator
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Paul Mckinley	Installation team
Ronan Smith	Installation team
Peter Maybury	Graphic design
Mary O' Kennedy	Development consultant

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