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ENCLAVE REVIEW

EV+A

Various Venues, Limerick

David Brancaleone

I agree with Jas Elsner: art history and criticism translate objects into words, a rhetorical effort called *ekphrasis*, which assumes that the spirit of an artwork can be translated between media, a tendentious undertaking, always. But, then, this EV+A is “very eclectic”, as curator and architect Elizabeth Hatz admitted at *Species of Space* at LSAD on 12 May, (so pick and choose). Well, what would it be like if your local library shelved books by colour, say, in gradations of green (Wang Ruobing, *Eat Me*)? Or if we removed all the logos from sight in a Legoland of cardboard packaging (Leo Fitzmaurice, *You’ve changed and grown in so many ways*)? What if the anonymous Viewer’s Gaze into the frame were returned by the contemplative stare of an owl (Oonagh O’Brien, *Owl*)? What if you were a naked male, performing repetitive gestures in a gloomy video of a post-apocalyptic space (Kaspar Aus, *Lost Space*)?

The title of this year’s EV+A is ‘Matters’. Hatz’s “red thread” turns out to be ethical concern: “how can we cope with this situation? We have to do something about it.” Liu Wei’s documentary *Hopeless Land*, wit-

nesses. It is both exotic and disturbing: impoverished farmers close up, making a living as gleaners in the landscape of rubbish-tips on the outskirts of Beijing. You stand and watch the waste and the working day of pre-industrial China whose state capitalism we love to hate. It reminds me of Agnès Varda’s *The Gleaners and I*, 2000, with the difference that Varda engaged with all her strangers and interviewed them two years later. A closer comparison would be Wang Jianwei’s *Living Elsewhere*, seen in the Glucksman, recording the everyday of Chinese squatters. Both turn the real (and its people) into an iconic moving image for silent reflection.

Also in the same concrete, unfinished offices (a Creative Limerick space at the centre of this EV+A) with their Banham-style Brutalism, Loretto Cooney’s delicate oil paintings (*Did you mean fir tree*), their imagery sifted from the Web, echoed the desaturated hues of Simon English’s Klee-sized *Untitled Scenes from a Journey*.

Actually, the entire Catherine Street and Faber Studios (another new Limerick art space run by graduates) were at the centre of many events organized by Spiritstore’s *Culture Dig Weekend* which transformed an anonymous street into relationships between people, with flamenco, astronomy talks, ghost walks, poetry readings, street theatre, film shorts, and an *Art in The Making* do, where Limerick and Crawford art students met for Kevin Flanagan’s talk ‘Copyleft and Creative Commons’ and to plan ahead.

Finally, the LSAD Church Gallery exhibited Shin Egashira’s *Beauty of our Pain*, a set of wooden sculptures whose ancient craft shuns screws or nails. Monumental objects that would look more in a place at a siege than at a work-out, these full-size fitness machines were complemented by a video showing them in use in a real fitness centre next to modern day contraptions. The accompanying isometric drawings take the medieval association further, suggesting that what people accept in trying to conform to contemporary norms of alienated beauty is tantamount to torture.

Surplus Value

Occupy Space, Limerick

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Curated by Michelle Horrigan, *Surplus Value*, was hosted by Occupy Space, one of the many new art spaces in empty shops and offices, made available thanks to Creative Limerick. Technically, surplus value is what is left over after the worker has been paid her wage in the capitalist mode of production, in which labour power becomes a commodity with an exchange value. To me, the phrase ‘surplus value’ brings to mind the consequences today of the logic of profit: for instance, the madness of tough love capitalism and a thirty-year headlong plunge into financialization (speculation on derivatives, hedge funds, and profiteering from interest on debt). In today’s context (economic

meltdown), only the risk of impending bankruptcy makes imaginable that privately owned banks can be purchased by public funds (and somehow, it is All Our Fault).

Playful irony issues from Sean Lynch's *The Bandits Live Comfortably in the Ruin*, 2006, which appropriates vintage footage of the failed demolition of a Limerick mill in the 1980s – and puts it on a loop. So it keeps failing. The value of Hayek's and then Friedman's Chicago School neoliberal economics are also on a loop and keep failing; meantime, speculation replaces production (here) and exploitation of manual labour has mostly shifted to where we cannot see it (the Majority World). In the West, following the downsizing, restructuring and collapse of manufacturing, white collar surplus value is extracted increasingly (but not exclusively) from social communication or 'immaterial labour'. Its exploitation is much harder to measure, because it always exceeds the working day.

As for exploitation, Mike Fitzpatrick's *Dealer Ties* (1996-97), a rack of sixty white ties, each sporting the photograph of a New York art dealer, brings to mind greedy gallery takings and Anglo Saxon 'club ties', thus conjuring up the intimate atmosphere of the art market – with an exception, a homeless woman slightly set apart. Perhaps what the clique excludes is her value. That concept of 'exclusion' was a (moral) fallback position in the 1990s, after any notion of

(social and political) emancipation had been abandoned. For *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2005), the 'artistic critique' of capitalism has always hinged on consumption and alienation, but *Surplus Value* draws my attention to the 'social critique' also discussed by Boltanski and Chiapello, aimed at production, labour and exploitation.

Angela Fulcher's *Hurry On Sundown* is an afterthought on such matters. It hangs from above, making a second ceiling out of what looked like a large multi-coloured kite, stretching from white wall to white wall, stitched together from after-the-event tents, leftovers from a music festival. Some circa '68 music festivals reclaimed public space, but then business got in on the act and something bigger than just the show was suppressed. An afterthought. In many ways, theory is also just that: an afterthought, a fidelity; what still needs to be said (and done) after the event. It thinks again, suggesting the possibility of intervention, not nostalgia.

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Angela Fulcher: *Hurry on Sundown* (2010). Installation shot courtesy of the artist.