

# ER

**ENCLAVE REVIEW**

**Anne Cleary and Denis Connolly: On Sight**  
**Lough Lannagh, Co. Mayo**

**Varvara Shavrova: Untouched / The Opera**  
**Ballina Arts Centre & Civic Offices**  
**Exhibition Space, Co. Mayo**

**Michaële Cutaya**

In recent years Irish public art projects have been at best unexciting, at worst annoyingly obtrusive. There are signs of improvement, however, and Mayo County Council's commission through the Percent for Art Scheme of a permanent work for Lough Lannagh by Anne Cleary and Denis Connolly is both exciting and unobtrusive. Four viewing posts looking like touristic telescopes have been installed along the promenade, but instead of presenting the viewer with a magnified view of the scenery they show two films, one for each eye, shot from where the viewer is standing. The project set out to challenge the experience of stereo vision by

presenting different information to each eye, thus finding out what the brain would make of this contradictory information in its reconstitution of a single three dimensional image. So each eye encounters a variety of scenes, taking place at different times of the year, day and under varying weather conditions. A series of scenes were staged with the help of the students of St Joseph's Castlebar Secondary School, mixing the banal and the eccentric: from the ordinary passer-by or reader on a bench to a teddy bear picnic or fashion parade. Although these little scenes introduce variety and fun, it is at their most casual that they work best. While watching we necessarily try to dissociate the two images, but when viewed together, the resultant familiar-looking space does not obey the rules of physical continuity: figures appear and disappear as if suddenly enfolded in space, or seamlessly overlap without incongruity. In one case two little girls playing on a bench are perceived to climb over a man reading on the same bench: at once there and not.

Additionally, as the four viewing posts are on site, a third scene superimposes itself – one which we cannot help checking, as if to confront the random visual tricks the films play with reality – a change of weather or a wandering dog. As the work is time-dependent it will also offer a glimpse into the past: the fact that a new bridge has been built since the scenes were shot already brings this dimension into play. Beyond the science involved in the project – Cleary and Connolly regularly work with researchers in various perceptual sciences – these unspectacular viewing posts have the capacity to become part of our daily walk, and introduce a somewhat skewed vision of our surroundings (suggesting intriguing potentials in spatial perception, like the ability to travel by 'folding space' in Frank Herbert's *Dune*, perhaps).

As my journey through Mayo took me to Ballina the stereoscopic vision lingered, filtering my impressions of Varvara Shavrova's two exhibitions. For the month of May, the artist presented work in the exhibition space of Ballina's Civic Offices and the Arts Centre's gallery. In the former was shown the film and photographs of *Untouched*, with the black-and-white photographs mounted on board arranged in two parallel rows. The artist drew from her peripatetic existence, between Beijing and Ireland, to compare the

dissolution of the rural village and community of Ballycastle Co. Mayo with that of a working class neighbourhood in Beijing. The film focuses on the people and is a montage of interviews on site, while the photographs focus on the dilapidated walls from both places. Shavrova shows a real empathy for her subject matter, which gives a warmth to the film, and contrasts with the cool black-and-white photographs. That the exhibition is taking place in the civic offices in Co. Mayo extends the underlying sense of community; however, these juxtapositions follow too simple a thread and have little more to say beyond the truism that 'people are people everywhere' – even in China – sharing the same concerns and the same nostalgia for a communality of old – and 'walls are walls', I suppose.

*The Opera* also functions by way of a principle of juxtaposition, this time of art and life as well as of genders, but is more sophisticated in both form and purpose. The film and black-and-white time-lapse sequence show the transformation of two actors of the Peking Opera from their everyday selves to their heavily made-up and accessorized stage personae; and vice versa. Inspired by the Peking Opera's highly artificial forms of costume, singing, dancing and acting, which she describes as 'a world of pure art' (following an art as artifice trope), the film is in two sequences, each following the transformation of an actor/actress into their reversed-gender theatrical persona. What might have otherwise been a concept with predictable outcomes is complicated by the androgynous and almost indistinguishable look of the two actors before transformation – both are dressed in black and have short hair – which contrasts sharply with their stage appearance – endowed with all the stereotypical signs of gender – moustaches, head gear, lace etc. Thus it is the hyper-conventional space of the Opera that allows the undifferentiated, caterpillar actors to become fully expressive butterflies. The film is also made mesmerizing by Lee Welch's seamless editing of overlapping slow-motion images in colour and black-and-white, accompanied by an original score by Benoit Granier mixing traditional Chinese opera singing with electronic sounds.

Interestingly, both Cleary Connolly's and Shavrova's work played on duality and

juxtaposition, but only succeeded when they managed to convey a third dimension transcending dichotomies: *Untouched's* relation to the local authority space in which it was displayed, the undifferentiated genderless world preceding the over-determined stylisation of *The Opera*, and, most intriguingly, *On Sight's* functioning as an artwork embedded in the everyday experience of the passing walker and as a suggestion for alternative understandings of space.

Michaële Cutaya is a writer on art and co-editor of *Fugitive Papers*. *On Sight* was opened on 20 April 2012. *Untouched* and *The Opera* ran from 3 – 26 May 2012.



Cleary Connolly, *On Sight* (2012). Image courtesy of the artists.