ENCLAVE REVIEW

Crawford 100
andesford Quay Gallery, Cork
Fergal Gaynor

This exhibition, celebrating 100 years of education at the Crawford College of Art and Design building on Shandon Street, is a quiet affair, contrasting with the grandeur of the building. Recent activities from the college (Tina Darby O’Sullivan, Don Dalton, Lina Shires and Raphaël Lévy) were given the opportunity to put together a show in the gallery’s two main exhibition areas. This is the third time I’ve encountered her work, the first being at the Darnell’s hugely successful show in 2008, but this time, the second, at this year’s edition, was suddenly much needed for me to be active in my thinking, it is intriguing stuff, one of the best exhibitions of digital video that I’ve seen in a long time. The capacity for image manipulation and collage runs the risk of producing a new literalism - fantastic and hallucinatory scenes that merely reinforces ingrained, prosaic understandings by extending it out to uncountable experiencences. This is the weakness of much of Gill’s painting (when it isn’t being out of action or out of action) - a fluffy woof or matching body firmly in place, it simply adds the diversion of the disturbing mirror to its perception and raises the result to the status of the truly reimagined. Ni Bhriain’s work has more in common with pre-war de Chirico (via the closing sequence of Tatovsky’s Nostalgia, perhaps), those paintings which justify the epithet ‘metaphysical’, and cast the viewer back on a consideration of temporality and spatiality.

As de Chirico different experiences of space are combined in the same image, each being given discrete zones (bordered by a curtain, screen, corner or horizon – this is clearer in Ni Bhriain’s Great Good Places), sometimes gently transgressed (e.g. water laps from behind a screen through which the open sea can be discerned). The addition of motion to Ni Bhriain’s images brings in another kind of zoning – layering. Drifting minutiae on the image’s surface, for instance, give the impression of underwater currents, though the objects behind belong to an indoors scene and may be disturbed from time to time by what appears to be a breeze. The juxtaposition of different spatial experiences places emphasis on the image’s ‘temporal’ – a slow duration that includes motion, but not change, a kind of extended pause between acts (Virginia Woolf’s intermediating section in To the Lighthouse comes to mind). In contrast to post-Newtonian concepts, time is understood by Aristotele to be a function of the innate changeability of the various beings. Such a way of thinking raises the question whether without change there could be any time. In Ni Bhriain’s digital videos such an impossible, ‘timeless’ universe is made apparent.

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10 x 10: See You There
European Culture Congress, Wroclaw, Poland
Klára Kemp-Welch

Wroclaw (formerly Breslau) is a city in Lower Silesia that stands on the crossroads of central Europe, ruled over the centuries by Poles, Bohemians, and Prussians; it eventually became a stronghold of the Nazis and the last city to surrender for the Soviets in 1945. 70% destroyed by war, the city was returned to Poland, and, following Poland’s annexation to the Soviet bloc, hosted the 1948 World Congress of Intellectuals for Peace, famously attended by the likes of Bertolt Brecht and Pablo Picasso. An extraordinary historical melting pot, it is much smaller that Wroclaw is scheduled to be European Capital of Culture in 2016. The three-day European Culture Congress, held at the partially revamped site of the 1948 Congress, attracted thousands of visitors with an ambitious programme of events designed to interrogate what it means to be European, today, and to propose culture as a key agent of social change.

The visual art component was largely overshadowed by the Congress’s music and theatre programmes (Poniedz and Bauman, respectively, both packing thousands into the enormous Jahrhunderthalle - a landmark of Modernist architecture designed in the 1910s by Max Berg). Nevertheless, the exhibition section, a project entitled 10 x 10 in which ten young curators were each asked to show work by ten artists, yielded an understated gem of an exhibition. See You There, curated by Ivana Komandarka, from Kolka.

See You There explored contemporary cultural economies in relation to giving, taking, and responsibility. Komandarka asked important questions about the vulnerability of art and artists, particularly in post-socialist Central Europe. It was therefore fitting that the exhibition was installed in a precarious non-place of sorts, one that, at first glance, would seem to be a curator’s nightmare: a passage with a staircase, a corridor, and four doors leading off, and a continuous stream of cultural tourists passing through. Through a series of interventions, Komandarka transformed this transitional space into one where passers-by paused, congregated, and engaged in discussion.

A short, intense man with long hair and a beard set aside, smoking. He invited all and sundry to rummage through the contents of what looked like an open coffin - a car door full of letters and magazine clippings outside a dilapidated pavilion. People took whatever they liked, musing into vultures feasting on his precious yellowing documents, not without a discernible sense of unease as their once-owned, Milan Adamík, watched this shifting through his of theirs’ desire for this detritus, which, only a few years back, had been strewn across the main square of a Soviet village, following its owner’s eviction from temporary accommodation. But he seemed like a man who has
Kasper König (curator): Before the Law: Post-War Sculptures and Spaces of Contemporary Art

Museum Ludwig, Cologne
Mia Lern Hayes

Kasper König is retiring following a career as one of the most highly regarded European curators. He was co-initiator of Münster Sculpture Projects, which takes place every decade and has revolutionized our ideas of sculpture, public art and the monument since 1977. It is, therefore, not surprising that the focus of this swan song is sculpture, and that Penelope Curtis (former director of the Henry Moore Institute) is one of the authors of the catalogue. The post-war theme is also understandable when König’s associations with Münster are brought to mind, but probably owes more to the function of the show as summary of a curatorial lifetime.

Museum Ludwig is, of course, rich in post-war art, but the American Pop Art for which it is famous doesn’t feature very prominently, despite the fact that Claes Oldenburg and Andy Warhol were the first two artists König exhibited in the 1960s. George Segal, the most pervasive artist of that generation, is included and sits well in the show. Before the Law’s combination of Modernist with contemporary work is not as unprecedented as the unique occasion would lead one to believe, but this current trend for programmatically electronic exhibitions has found in this instance a steady curatorial eye that combines well the ‘themes’ and evocative tones of Germaine Richier’s Le Gruuf (1952) with Bruce Nauman’s cast cadavers, suspended from a macabre Garzueil (1988) and the support of Zoe Leonard’s Tree (1997/2011). The occasional glimpse out of the building onto Cologne Cathedral and crossing railway line, reminiscent of Germany’s War-time destruction and subsequent – belated, but generally earnestly undertaken – work of mourning, confirm the venue as the ideal site for the show. The earnest tone is obviously one that again resonates with contemporary practice (since the cavernous, fresh, ‘superficial’ air of Karla Black’s work).

The gruesomely powerful Jimmy Durham installation, Building a Nation (2000), which exposes the racist foundations on which the USA is built (doubtless bought by König in order to counter-balance the all-too-unctuous American self-confidence emanating from much of the core of the Ludwig collection), initiates a series of invitations for international and electronic comparison or transferability of issues. William Kentridge expands the topic into the international realm. Far from letting the show become a re-run of Documenta 11, however, the strong presence of Wilhelm Lehmbrock with Sealed Young Man (19/6/17) – here ‘post-war’ means ‘during WWII’ – attempts a reconsideration of the importance of certain enduring, though non-herculean war memorials. The catalogue highlights the failures inherent in post-war sculpture – i.e. its parasitical solidarity, its undermined subversion of sublimation and action – arguing for a renewed engagement with it. Alberto Giacometti has a central role to play in this regard and is present with Le jambe (1956). The viewer may associate that aesthetic, and the post-war theme, with Beckert, but Kasper König’s reference is Kafka.

This is where the exhibition’s surprise may lie. If it didn’t already do enough in intertwining life-, art- and curatorial history as a foreword to and plea for the museum – as site of a public art collection and playing a vital part in recording and forging the cultural memory and identity of a society – it also suggests that König’s brother Willibrord’s bookshop in the same building is not just a coincidental money-spinner for the institution, but a necessity for a museum that understands itself as a driver of discourse concerning important societal issues. That König began his career as professor at Düsseldorf and Frankfurt Academies goes some way to explain his desire to draw exhibition-goers into engagement with various texts. For the present viewer, there could hardly be a clearer ‘case study’ of the currency and strength of the European tradition of ‘literary art’ exhibitions. The Before the Law catalogue is an admirable addition to this tradition, and the beautiful and important volume documenting Paul Chan’s staging of Beckert’s Waiting for Godot in New Orleans post-Hurricane Katrina, on display in the booklet, provided a particularly successful example of the extension of visual art into the realm of the discursive, existing beyond the exhibition.

To include Kafka in a visual art exhibition is point to certain intellectual roots: Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of ‘minor literature’, for instance – immediately political, de-territorializing and community-creating. Contemporary artists have often found this to be a liberating conceptual framework – hence (to put it too simply) their interest in literature and the now obsolete form of the book. Deleuze and Guattari’s terms ‘plateaus’, ‘rhizomes’ etc., have frequently been employed for exhibitions, thought of in Deleuzian terms as a temporary coming together in a thoughtful, rhizomatic knot, only to disperse again. There was even something like an explosion of Deleuze and Guattari references in the mega-exhibitions of 2001. To deploy the intellectual tools of queer-feminism in multi-million euro art events is problematic, of course, and the new, engaged institutionalism characterized by this contribution is also clearly aspired-to here in Cologne. The reference to Kafka, therefore, enabled König to curate a temporary ‘rhizome’ of intellectual credibility, while at the same time taking flight: the Deleuze and Guattari reference is rendered indirect through the foregrounding of Kafka, thus faithfully/insubtletly signaling independence, and possibly re-inventing the ‘minor’, too. Quit a shrewd move!

What is missing from this show? Sculpture (when even remotely figurative) places emphasis on gesture; there is also the reconsideration of an exhibition on the ‘pathos formula’ by the concept’s innovator, the art historian Aby Warburg, to be viewed in Cologne at the moment). One could have imagined performance art as a valid addition and counterpoint
A practice addressing post-war matters - or am following too personal a preoccupation? An artist such as Boris Nieslony comes to mind. In her text, musee Curtis elaborates on the role of sculpture in line, German cityscapes (Documenta 1), focusing particularly on Cologne and Heinrich Boll's keen interest in ruin. She does not, however, mention the city in which some of his novel is set: Berlin. The work of Regina Barzilai has, nonetheless, already been shown in Berlin, at the Berlin Kunsthalle.

To refer to Kafka explicitly in an exhibition is to represent the curatorial undertaking as tentative and probing. This is desirable, despite the logistical and legal manoeuvring needed to bring a large exhibition such as this to fruition. In the final count, this engagement with art can make them to perfect control and comprehension. Art "skims along the edges of what is permissible", as the exhibition guide suggests. In this case, Kafka is a reference of tortuous complexity: on the one hand a humility trope, it becomes a canonical reference on the other, giving the "group show" blockbuster qualities (the English language catalogue has already sold out). It also brings an argument for art's appropriateness and strength in dealing with difficult subject matter, while simultaneously displaying arts productive weakness. It may also be a slightly nostalgic gesture towards the ideals of Königs's youth around 1968. That Kepke König can foreground through Kafka the tentative, unfinished and "wiry" in his last conceptual exhibition honours him, and it is only slightly ironic that - unlike the writer - a curator can never bring to his works to the public posthumously.


**Editorial**

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