Chapter 6
Art and Archaeology: The *Ábhar agus Meon* Exhibition Series

Ian Alden Russell

> *"The freedom and range of modern art has increased our understanding and appreciation of the arts of the past. The confrontation of early Irish works and modern ones will further illuminate and augment the appreciation of the ancient art of Ireland."*
>
> *Michael Scott, Rosc '67*

In the summer of 2008, I curated a series of contemporary art projects entitled *Ábhar agus Meon* as part of Ireland's hosting of the Sixth World Archaeological Congress at University College Dublin (UCD). The projects were placed in the shared spaces between the contemporary arts, archaeology and heritage in Ireland. This article is a reflective statement and contextualisation of the projects and their outcomes. Full information and images of all the works are available at: www.amexhibition.com.[1]

Ábhar agus Meon

Both artists and archaeologists are skilled in interpretive and expressive work with materials and things. Each in their own way stewards, provokes and subverts ways of encountering and making sense of the world. Over the last two decades, increasingly dynamic relationships are developing between artists and archaeologists (see Renfrew 2003; Renfrew et al. 2004; Cochrane 2013; Russell 2013; Bailey this volume). In response to this, the *Ábhar agus Meon* exhibition series was conceived to

[1] Portions of this text were originally published in Russell 2008.

I. A. Russell (✉)
Department of Archaeology and History of Art, Koç University,
Rumelifeneri Yolu, 34450 Sariyer, Istanbul, Turkey
e-mail: ian@aldenrussell.com

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celebrate, interrogate and explore new and longstanding relationships between art and archaeology through the practices and processes of contemporary arts.[2]

The project was initially inspired by the collaborative exhibition of contemporary art and archaeology established by the *Rosc* exhibitions (1967, 1971, 1977) in Ireland in the 1960s and 1970s and more recently seen in *Beyond the Pale* (1994) at the Irish Museum of Modern Art. It also drew motivation from the excavation and reconstruction of Francis Bacon's studio in at the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin in 1998 as example of the collaboration of archaeological and artistic practice (see Campbell 2000; McGrath 2000; Wilson 2000; O'Connor this volume). In all of these projects, divisions between the methodologies and sensibilities of the disciplines still remained, however, largely unquestioned, untested and uncriticised.

To challenge such prevalent distinctions between the ways humans encounter things, *Ábhar agus Meon* turned towards the rich etymologies of the Irish language to explore ways of negotiating, mediating and translating the relationships entwining humans and things. 'Ábhar' carries meanings of not only materials and matters but also subjects and themes, while 'meon' hints at mentality, ethos, spirit and temperament. Rather than merely asserting polarisations of mind and body, the theme *Ábhar agus Meon* suggested a multiplicity of relationships between mutually indistinguishable conceptions of things and thoughts.

Ábhar agus Meon occurred in spaces throughout Dublin in the summer of 2008 and was organised as part of Ireland's hosting of the Sixth World Archaeological Congress at UCD. Local and international contemporary artists offered new and previous work in exhibitions, installations and performances on UCD's campus, in Newman House on St Stephen's Green and at the Irish Museum of Modern Art.

The Project's Design

As the project developed, it took the form of a series of off-site contemporary art projects. Three case studies, or sites, were selected: Newman House, St Stephen's Green, the Irish Museum of Modern Art/Royal Hospital Kilmainham and the Health Sciences Building, UCD.[3]

In establishing platforms for the artists to present their work, it was not simply the structures, surfaces and objects which were critical. It was the lived relationships and conversations of those involved in constituting these spaces that was sometimes more important. Relationships with Ruth Ferguson of UCD, Jerome O Drisceoil of

[2] For more information on the *Ábhar agus Meon* exhibition series, please see: http://www.amexhibition.com, or for the Sixth World Archaeological Congress, please see: http://www.ucd.ie/wac-6.

[3] Additional events featured work by experimental archaeologists, artists and performers as part of the conference proceedings and exhibition displays of the Sixth World Archaeological Congress under the banner of the World Archaeological Congress Fringe. More information on these events and those involved can be found at: http://iarchitectures.com/amexhibition/wacfringe.html. Accessed 8 July 2013.

the Green On Red Gallery and Christina Kennedy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art were core to the curatorial conversations with the artists. The process of building these relationships was in many respects similar to the development of relationships with local communities in heritage areas or near archaeological excavations. The role of social partnerships in the realisation and constitution of rich and supportive workspaces for the artists was fundamental to any success for the project.

Each site's case study had a specific research theme and focus which formed a point of departure for the artists' work. Newman House was approached as a heritage space whose architecture and temporal relationships could be recalibrated through contemporary art. The Irish Museum of Modern Art and Royal Hospital Kilmainham were approached as an opportunity to undercut temporal divisions in space. While both institutions inhabit the same building and grounds, one half is for modern art and contemporary arts practice while the other is for the presentation and reception of heritage. The Health Sciences Building at UCD was established as an inverted white cube where artists' work could address the conceptual architectures and conventions of archaeology, heritage and contemporary art.[4]

Recalibrating Heritage Spaces: Chronoscope, Newman House, 85–86 St Stephen's Green

The theme of *Chronoscope* at Newman House was the recalibration of temporal expectations in a heritage space (Ábhar agus Meon 2008). Composed of two houses and a Victorian hall, Newman House is an example of a preserved heritage space.[5] Number 85 was built in 1738 in the Palladian style and was the first stone-faced house on St Stephen's Green and has some of the finest examples of stuccowork by the Swiss Lafranchini brothers in Ireland and stunning examples of high-relief plasterwork, such as the Apollo Belvedere in The Apollo Room (see Fig. 6.1). Number 86 was built in 1765 and is known for its fine stuccowork by Robert West. The houses were also home to many well-known narratives and histories. Richard Chapell Whaley, who built No. 86, was the father of Buck Whaley, the notorious nineteenth century gambler. The Catholic University of Ireland was established at the houses in 1854 under the direction of Dr John Henry Newman, which would become the home of UCD. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins died there in 1889, and James Joyce attended lectures in the houses when he attended UCD from 1898 to 1902.

Ruth Ferguson is curator of Newman House, and she had been involved in conversations around the development of the exhibition series early on. Ruth presented the possibility of engaging Newman House as a venue. She was interested in a series of installations to engage with the fabric of the houses.[6] An interesting dimension

[4] For an excellent discussion of the impact of the heritage paradigm in Ireland see Brett (1996).

[5] For further information on Newman House see: http://iarchitectures.com/amexhibition/newmanhouse.html. Accessed 8 July 2013.

[6] A previous contemporary art project occurred in the Salloon of No. 85. It was curated by Gavin Delahunty as part of a Gallery 3 project of the Douglas Hyde Gallery in 2005.

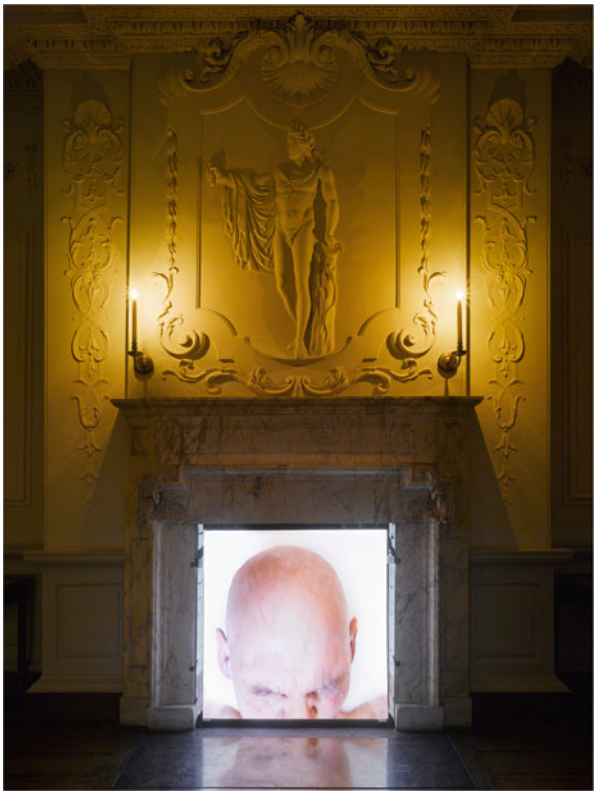

Fig. 6.1 Nigel Rolfe, *Inversion*, 2008. DV projection, endless loop. The Apollo Room, Number 85, Newman House, St. Stephen's Green. (Photograph by Ros Kavanagh)

was added to the project when it was then brought to Jerome O Drisceoil of the Green On Red Gallery. It was thought that an off-site gallery project would illustrate the possibilities not only of artists working in heritage spaces but also of arts institutions transposing themselves to other sites. With O Drisceoil's partnership, a selection of artists represented by the Green On Red Gallery were approached: Alice Maher, Bea McMahon, Dennis McNulty, Paul Mosse, Niamh O'Malley and Nigel Rolfe. The initial site visits were conducted as informal tours of the house by Ruth Ferguson allowing the stories and heritage dimensions of the house to give rise to curatorial conversations. This conversational process allowed for the free response of the artists to the spaces while also being guided and informed by sensitivity to the heritage dimensions of the spaces. The result was that each artist was drawn to a different room in the house.

Working in a heritage space comes with limitations, particularly in respect to the integrity and fabric of the building's architecture. Interestingly, many of the artists noted that instead of feeling constrained by the limitations of the space, they felt liberated. By working in a heritage space, they felt they were freed from the pressures of being 'contemporary'. Working in a white cube, every aspect and trace of agency can be scrutinised as part of the artist's work—the artist in effect becomes

a specimen in a lab (see O'Doherty 2000, p. 14). But the more dense, chaotic and complex materials of the house allowed the artists to place work in such a way that it was less possible to discern where the artists' agency began and ended. They could live into the house, allowing their works to take up residency in an organic fashion rather than an overly exacting process where every possible residue of artistic efficacy need be considered.

Parallel to the liberating experience of the artists, the activation of the spaces through contemporary creativity brought new energy to the house, bringing contemporary art audiences to a heritage site, creating new stories and providing new and alternative ways of accessing older or forgotten stories.[7] Although it might have appeared at first that placing contemporary artwork within a heritage space might be disrespectful or intrusive to the site, the sensitive way in which the artists executed their works revealed striking similarities. The consideration and care found in the execution of contemporary works complemented the care and attention evident both in the eighteenth and the nineteenth century artisans' and architects' work as well as the contemporary caretakers of the house.

Nigel Rolfe noted the need to complement the house in realising work during one of the tours. 'If you go up against the house, the house will always win,' said Rolfe.[8] The intensely rich surfaces and fabrics of the house were not something one could either ignore or mimic without going so far as to either destroy the house entirely or build another house anew. In Rolfe's work *Inversion* (2008), he chose to complement the space of the Apollo Room in No. 85 by responding to the dynamics of the high-relief plasterwork (see Fig. 6.1). Remaining submerged in over 100 litres of milk until the surface was perfectly still, Rolfe emerges from the absence of the white screen confronting the visitor with his filmed presence. By placing a looped video projection of Rolfe's performance playing alongside the reliefs of the nine muses and the Apollo Belvedere, the space of the Apollo room was activated, perhaps suggesting something of the spatial dynamics intended by the plaster workers—who may have experienced their high-relief works by flickering candle-light (replaced here by the flickering of a digital projector).

Echoing some of Rolfe's sentiments, Alice Maher found when visiting the house that to present work which simply emulated the form or style of the house would pale in comparison and fail to work.[9] Maher hoped instead to offer works which would live into the fabric of the house. She placed *Les Jumeaux* (2008) [two ostrich eggs etched with references to Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1503/1504)] on the table of the Bishops' Room of No. 85 in an antique vitrine on loan from the Office of Public Works (see Fig. 6.2). The placement of the work was so effective that many visitors were unsure whether the installation had always been there or not. By complementing the aesthetics of the house, Maher was then able to offer cutting criticism and commentary on the stories of the Bishops' Room. Placing eggs etched

[7] For a discussion of the role of artists in place-activation, see Warwick (2006).

[8] For more information on Rolfe's work, please contact the Green On Red Gallery, Dublin.

[9] For more information on Maher's work, see http://www.alicemaher.com or contact the Green On Red Gallery, Dublin.

Fig. 6.2 Installation view of Alice Maher, *Les Jumeaux*, 2008. Etching on ostrich egg. 15.2 × 15.2 × 12.7 cm each. The Bishop's Room, No. 86, Newman House, St. Stephen's Green. (Photograph by Ros Kavanagh)

Fig. 6.3 Paul Mosse, *Untitled*, 2007. Mixed media. 56 × 151 × 180 cm. Room 9, No. 86, Newman House St. Stephen's Green. (Photograph by Ros Kavanagh)

with references to Hiernoymus Bosch's depiction of Genesis in his work *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1503-1504) in a glass case on the table which was the location for the meetings of the heads of the Catholic University and later UCD, Maher placed feminity and the mysteries of Genesis as specimens and objects to be controlled and inserted into a chauvinistic structure of knowledge. Working through these stories rather than against them, Maher's installation presents something comforting and celebratory of the heritage of the house while simultaneously suggesting a satirical reading of modern dreams and desires for such spaces.

For Maher and Rolfe and many of the other artists, it was important to work with the house, allowing it to bring an equal presence to the artists' processes. Paul Mosse's works were an example of this (see Fig. 6.3).[10] The topographical qualities of his works and the intense rendering of depths through gouging out, digging and building up its surfaces echoed in form and flow the intensity and palpability of the high-relief

[10] For in-depth discussions of Paul Mosse's work, see Marshall (2007) and Mosse (2007, 2008).

Fig. 6.4 Dennis McNulty, *displaced strata/great expectations*, 2008. Mirrors, sound, wood and metal. Dimensions variable. The Iveagh Room and Back Garden, No. 86, Newman House, St. Stephen's Green. (Photograph by Ros Kavanagh)

stuccowork in the houses. This juxtaposition of the heritage and contemporary art presented an aesthetic tension that celebrated the presence, attention and care required of an artist to realise the work for such elaborate spaces. Dennis McNulty noted this as a point of departure for his contribution *displaced strata/great expectations* (see Fig. 6.4).[11] Quoting Kevin Lynch, 'We preserve present signals of the past or control the present to satisfy our images of the future. Our images of the past and future are present images, continuously re-created. The heart of our sense of time is the sense of "now".' (Lynch 1972, p. 65) McNulty's installation of mirrors (after Robert Smithson) in the back gardens of the house allowed for the incorporation of the modern architectures of the house often hidden from view—drain pipes, fire escapes, iron window grates. These additions or functional embellishments of the building tell the story of the shifting contemporary needs and expectations of public buildings. Viewed from the Iveagh Room of No. 86, McNulty enveloped the visitor within an omni-directional recording of himself walking a loop of the rooms of the house (after Janet Cardiff). The climax of the acoustic loop occurred as he entered the Iveagh Room, encountering a half-speed replay of the soundtrack of a televised series based on *Great Expectations* which had been filmed on location in the house. Declaring the material evidence of the changing stories of the space and wrapping them in a fleeting acoustic documentation, McNulty collapsed the constructed distance between the 'now' and 'then' of heritage spaces, re-presenting the house as a multitemporal and multisensory experience.

Appreciating the contemporary qualities of heritage space Bea McMahon offered her own meditations on the ideas of science, light and mathematical knowledge through her *States of Wonder* (2006/2008), seamlessly referencing the scientific deliberations and discussions of the drawing rooms of learned societies and eighteenth and nineteenth century households (Fite-Wassilak 2008, p. 40). Other works such as *Stairwell* by Niamh O'Malley initially were seen as interventions into the spaces of the house, but through the residency of the work they became as much a part of the

[11] For information on McNulty's work, see http://www.dennismcnulty.com or contact the Green On Red Gallery, Dublin.

Fig. 6.5 Niamh O'Malley, *Stairwell*, 2008. Acrylic on wall, lighting. Dimension variable. The Stairs, No. 85, Newman House, St Stephen's Green. (Photograph by Ros Kavanagh)

house as any other piece of the building's fabric (see Fig. 6.5).[12] The piece occupied the closed-off Venetian window of No. 85 which, before the construction of the Aula Maxima had looked out onto a formal garden. With an installed lighting unit and black paint playing out a juxtaposition between absences and presences of light and sights, O'Malley activated the stories of the conversion of spaces within the house, directing the visitor's sight towards absences of what once could have been viewed, what views may still be possible. Perhaps, the outcome of the exhibition was as simple as this: sensitive contributions to the story of the house through a balanced application of artistic, archaeological and heritage sensibilities.

[12] For more information on O'Malley's work, see O'Malley (2008) or contact the Green On Red Gallery, Dublin.

Undercutting Lines Between Art and Heritage: The You That Is In It, Irish Museum of Modern Art

The You That Is In It by Fiona Hallinan presented an effort to undercut the perceived divisions between contemporary art and heritage spaces. Its intent was to both constructively subvert the traditional dominance of sight in the visual arts as well as rupture the 'fourth wall' of museum and gallery spaces. The site for the project was the grounds of Irish Museum of Modern Art and the Royal Hospital Kilmainham. The two institutions occupy the same building and grounds, but their separate and distinct remits for modern and contemporary art and heritage, respectively, have developed a subtle network of divisions both institutional and physical. The Royal Hospital was first sited at this location in the seventeenth century and was home to retired soldiers for almost 250 years.[13] In 1984, the building was refurbished and redeveloped as public heritage space, and in 1991, the Irish Museum of Modern Art was opened. The grounds shared by the institutions consist of an eighteenth century garden, two cemeteries, nineteenth century stables now occupied by police barracks and the reconstructed West Gateway formerly from St Jame's Gate.

Christina Kennedy, Senior Curator and Head of Collections at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, was instrumental in developing the project. She had been working on the curatorial programme of the *Self as Selves* exhibition (2008) which was based in the Gordon Lambert Galleries, and in conversation, she reflected on her interest in commissioning new works by artists which would take place outside of the traditional gallery spaces at the museum. Kennedy studied archaeology while in university and the opportunity to commission an artwork with an archaeological sensibility to achieve a step outside of the gallery attracted her, as it would also convey a sensitivity to the palimpsestic heritage spaces of the Kilmainham grounds.

It was artist Fiona Hallinan who was approached to begin an interrogation of these spaces. Her series of 'Audio Detours', done in collaboration with Maebh Cheasty, had presented Hallinan as a successful negotiator of complex urban spaces.[14] These audio tours invited participants to move through selected spaces and streetscapes and use sound and voiced text to heighten the participant's exploration of the spaces. Hallinan piece begins with multiple walks of the area under study complemented by research, both of a traditional scholarly manner but also utilising informal conversations with the residents of the spaces. Her intention was to draw out those unique residues and traces which suggest a more complex temporal situation, something which is more than present. Hallinan usually collaborates with sound designers in the realisation of these works, to develop a synaesthetic immersion where experience is not reduced to one single sense (e.g. the visual) but is a complex mingling of the senses of the participants. This is a critical aspect of Hallinan's work. To be successfully realised and completed as a work, it requires participation.

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[13] For a history of the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, see Childers and Stewa (2003).

[14] For more information on Hallinan's work, see: http://www.notalittlepony.com.

One of Kennedy's (2008) curatorial themes in the *Self as Selves* exhibition was the multiple ways in which the relationship between artworks and people manifest themselves. No two engagements with an artwork are ever the same. Some works in the exhibition declared this literally as the works would change with every step you took (i.e. Maud Cotter's *One Way of Containing Air* 1998) or would continually move due to the subtle flows of air generated by movement and breathing within the space (i.e. Julio Le Parc's *Continuel-Mobil Argent* 1967). Hallinan's work followed this theme to an extreme since it is not complete in any sense until someone chooses to participate both physically, aurally and visually in the manifestation of the walk. In a very literal sense then, the visitor becomes a part of the artwork, and the work has as many iterations and forms as there are people willing to participate.

Hallinan chose the title *The You That Is In It* to highlight the placement of the visitor at the centre of the experience. Subtly, the title suggests that without 'you' the work would be lessened or perhaps would cease to exist at all. Hallinan presents her work as a gift to those who take part, for she (the work) needs them. She realised the work with the help of sound designer Caoimhín Ó Raghallaigh, working with him to map the route of the tour and to develop a sound design which both complemented and undercut the experiences of the spaces at Kilmainham.[15] The work brings the visitor on a walk from the Gordon Lambert Galleries, through the quad of the Royal Hospital and out around the building and through the formal eighteenth century gardens. At various points during the walk the participant's gaze is directed at things (a drainpipe, the sky, a small cobblestone) and the script and sound design of the work echo a sensation of those things or events or people which the discrete traces reference. By drawing the participant into a space where temporal distinctions between past and present are not as firm, Hallinan composed a series of intimate moments shared between those walking the grounds today and the many who had before. Throughout the tour, the visitors are invited to carry a work-on-paper by Hallinan which they can fold into a small pyramid just large enough to prevent it from being put into a bag or a pocket. The gifting of a two-dimensional drawing, which the visitors can make into a three-dimensional sculpture and carry with them, heightened the undercurrents of participation and performance within both contemporary art and heritage spaces which Hallinan wished to expose.

Critiquing Concepts and Conventions: Glass House Stone, Health Sciences Gallery, UCD

The theme of the group exhibition *Glass House Stone* was to interrogate our engagements with things and more specifically, the way archaeological sensibilities have affected interactions. Locating the exhibition in the Health Sciences Building at UCD, the exhibition's theme departed from the foundational role of scientific

[15] For more information on the work of Caoimhín Ó Raghallaigh, see http://www.stateofchassis.com.

Fig. 6.6 *Glass House Stone* installations featuring Andrew Burton, *Things Fall Apart*, 2008. Brick, glue, cardboard and metal. Dimensions variable. (Photograph by Ken Williams)

objectivity in the development of archaeological process. The development of archaeology into a fully fledged university discipline was paralleled by its increasing adoption of scientific methodologies and technologies of viewing and visualising (see Thomas 2004; Jorge and Thomas 2008; Cochrane 2013; Russell 2013). Such developments facilitated the work, methods and techniques of archaeologists and have had profound effects on interpretive relations between humans and things. A propositional question that instigated curatorial conversations with the artists was how a discipline so concerned with materials and materiality renders these things as inert, fixed and unchanging in the discipline's visual culture and representation (see Jorge and Thomas 2007, 2008; Cochrane and Jones 2012). It is as if the after-effect of archaeology is a 'fourth wall' between humans and things—most literally manifested in the museum display case.

The artists in *Glass House Stone* were selected to offer works which would undercut this 'fourth wall' of archaeological objectivity. The realisation of the works all stemmed not from a desire to represent abstract information or knowledge but from lived responses to encounters with things. The artists drew attention to qualities of archaeological things often overshadowed by the need for scientific objectivity—fascination, confusion, delight, inspiration and flawed attempts to understand or share these responses (see Shanks 1992).

The exhibition housed work from 15 artists within the Health Sciences Gallery which separates the main building from the Health Sciences Library (see Fig. 6.6). As a glass box at the heart of a science building, the show acted as a cabinet of curiosities

Fig. 6.7 Installation of Andrew Parker, *Ulex Europaeus*, 2008. Watercolor on paper, cardboard, bulldog clip. 65 × 85 cm each. (Photograph by Ken Williams)

within a scientific institutional space. Within the case, a long white monolith was constructed, presenting an inverted white cube. The conceptual conceits of the 'blank slate' of philosophical enquiry and the 'blank canvas' of artistic enquiry became the subject of curiosity within the glazed architecture of the space. Encountering a contemporary art exhibition was not something many who worked in the building were familiar with doing on their way to conduct research in the library. Many visitors were drawn into the space by their curiosity having seen 'odd' installations from outside the glazed space. In some ways, the exhibition played on this curiosity, suggesting one of the sensibilities of scientific objectivity is the rigorous study and engagement of those things which confound, are curious or do not fit.

Andrew Parker's *Ulex Europaeus* (2008) series of watercolours of gorse—presents one of the more intimate strategies of science—naturalist painting (see Fig. 6.7).[16] The works are demonstrations of the subjectivity of hand-drawn depiction and startlingly complex and potentially accurate studies of the plant. In antiquary traditions, this tension between subjectivity and objectivity in illustrations of sites is all the more evident. Caroline McCarthy's *The Grand Detour* (2006) both sympathetically and ironically explores the antiquary tradition (see Fig. 6.8).[17] A set of 55 watercolours set against a grid-plan create a chorography of detritus and forgotten things from around Brooklyn. After touring the works you were invited to

[16] For more information on Parker's work, see http://andyp.co.uk.

[17] For more information on McCarthy's work, see http://www.carolinemccarthy.net.

Fig. 6.8 Caroline McCarthy, *The Grand Detour: Vedute And Other Curious Observations Off The Grand Route*, 2006. Pencil and watercolour on paper, painted wall with pencil grid, t-shirts, caps, mugs, pens, display case. 530 × 290 cm. (Photograph by Ken Williams)

Fig. 6.9 Adam Burthom, *Panoramic Field*, 2007. Turf on canvas. 122 × 807 × 3 cm. (Photograph by Ken Williams)

visit a purpose-built gift shop featuring souvenir t-shirts, hats, mugs and pens of the artwork. Playing with the antiquarian tradition of bringing distant landscapes to urban centres for the enjoyment of colleagues as seen in McCarthy's work, Adam Burthom's *Panoramic Field* (2007) transported worked surfaces of the turf fields of his home in Sligo (see Fig. 6.9). Referencing the modern project of the panoptic gaze, the seven turf-on-canvas panels in *Panoramic Field* confront the viewer who may be more accustomed to viewing panoramas of landscape as all encompassing, painted representations with a present land, filling the entire frame.

An underlying theme for many of the artworks was archaeological fascination and the application of archaeological observation to engagements within the world. Two photographs from Gerard Byrne's *In the News* sequence (2001), one of the Natural History Museum and the other of the rebuilding of Archer's Garage of Fenian Street by public order after its illegal demolition in 1999, offer a perspective on archaeology's application of photography as a means of inscribing the past within an image.[18] In Dorothy Cross' *Endarken* (2000), a looped video of a derelict cottage, iconic of western Irish heritage, is repeatedly obliterated by an expanding black

[18] For more information on Byrne's work, please contact the Green On Red Gallery, Dublin.

Fig. 6.10 Aaron Watson, *Carneddau Pylon Circle*, 2006 and *Stone Circle Sky*, 2006. Digital print on canvas. 150 × 150 cm each. (Photograph by Ken Williams)

dot. The repeated occlusion of the subject of study reminds us of the abilities of technology to both facilitate documentation as well as eradication of those things which fascinate us.[19]

Some works made more direct comments about strategies and technologies of archaeological visualisation. Selections from Sean Hillen's *Irelantis* series (1994), Aaron Watson's *Carneddau Pylon Circle* (2006) and *Stone Circle Sky* (2006) and Denis O'Connor's triptych *Ratchoola Dreaming* (2005) offered differing explorations of the constellation of visual and material traces in compelling collages of representation. Hillen's strategy of juxtaposing visual elements in the development of a fantastic mythical land of *Irelantis* is perhaps a farce of archaeological imagination.[20] The precision in executing the representations is no less considered than those temporal constructions rendered in the nineteenth century by antiquarian societies. Continuing this fantastic theme, Denis O'Connor's (2007, pp. 52–63) physical collage *Rathcoola Dreaming* photographed by Dara McGrath is awash with dense material and visual mnemonics percolating through O'Connor's negotiation of his Irish emigrant and New Zealand heritages.[21] Similar to antiquaries' practices, his process of interrogating landscapes renders a representation of personal temporal reflection made evident in material traces. Aaron Watson's two pieces (see Fig. 6.10) switch the flows of

[19] For more information on Cross' work, please contact the Kerlin Gallery, Dublin.

[20] For more information on Hillen's 'Irelantis' series, please see http://www.irelantis.com or http://www.seanhillen.com.

[21] For more information on O'Connor's work, see O'Connor 2007 or contact the Two Rooms Gallery, Auckland.

Fig. 6.11 Installation view of Bárbara Fluxá, *Paisaje Cultural, Segovia '06*, 2006. Plaster, photographs. Dimensions variable. (Photograph by Ken Williams)

the inter-disciplinary dialogue. As a professional archaeological illustrator, Watson (2004; see also Chap. 13 this volume) has developed an extensive corpus of visualisations of archaeological experience.[22] Interestingly though, his photo-collages are no less-fantastic than the collage work of Hillen or O'Connor, producing photo-real representations of circular horizons but layered under his geometric painting style, perhaps harkening back to the style of the Futurists.[23]

Another of the subthemes of the show was the transformative power of the archaeological gaze. Three of the artists in the show chose to work with loaned museum display cases from the Office of Public Works. Niamh Harte's ceramic *Hand Tools/Doimeog* (2007) when placed inside a case with five glazed sides heightened the formal similarity of her works to archaeological artefacts. Selections from Bárbara Fluxá's *Paisaje Cultural, Segovia '06* (2006) within another case placed at floor level played with similar expectations (see Fig. 6.11).[24] Her practice of finding plastic bottle caps and other discarded pieces of contemporary culture and using the pieces to reconstruct the rest of the vessels' forms from plaster is an intentional mimicry of archaeological processes of discovery, study and reconstruction.[25]

[22] For more information on Watson's work, see Watson 2004 or http://www.monumental.uk.com.

[23] See footnote 2.

[24] For more information on Fluxá's work, see http://www.barbarafluxa.blogspot.com.

[25] The important contribution of the work of Bill Rathje to the consideration of contemporary garbage as a subject of archaeological enquiry should be noted. See Rathje and Murphy 2001.

Fig. 6.12 Installation views of Fiona Coffey, *From the Five Acre to The Haggard*, 2008. Bronze (with traces of clay and horse dung). Dimensions variable. (Photographs by Ken Williams and Ian Alden Russell)

The professional archaeological gaze and its mediation to the wider public through museum displays and exhibitions can be something which exacerbates the separation between people and displayed things. To subvert this, Fiona Coffey presented her *From the Five Acre to The Haggard* (2008) in a display case with its glazed top permanently opened (see Fig. 6.12). A collection of 46 hand-sized bronze sheep were given the freedom to flock throughout the case. Thus, a subtle invitation was extended to visitors that they could play, reaching into the forbidden space of the glass conservation case. Some visitors immediately touched the pieces. Others did not, but a startling number of changes in the layout of the works in the case occurred through the run of the exhibition, allowing for a plurality of curatorial voices.[26]

The multiple possibilities of mediating materials were also a theme in Andrew Burton's *Things Fall Apart* (2008) (see Fig. 6.6). Burton's (2007) site-specific installations consist of thousands of microbricks which he reuses again and again. Mimicking a more traditional way of engaging materials as substances which could be ascribed multiple purposes by subsequent needs, each of Burton's sculptures are unique but reference previous works—residues of paint, cement, glazing persist and index his earlier works. This theme of reuse of material is also expressed in Áine Ivers's untitled work (2007) (see Fig. 6.13). This work presented a selection of discarded artefacts held in a tense mid-air limbo with a rusted set of mattress springs. Ivers salvaged cattle bones found at excavations in Ballintubber, Co. Mayo that had

[26] For a discussion of the limitations of object-oriented curatorial practice in museums, see Cooke (2005).

Fig. 6.13 Áine Ivers, *Untitled*, 2007. Iron spring mattress, bone fragments, silver-plated wire and cotton thread. Dimensions variable. (Photograph by Ken Williams)

been discarded by the excavators. Ivers' intervention in the bones' lives perhaps preserved them from oblivion, but the writhing of the mattress springs being pulled apart by lines connecting to each bone suggests an awareness of futility and lack of resolution in the artist's ability to either rescue or reveal the purpose or significance of the discarded artefacts.

The reuse of materials in a temporally conscious manner is followed in Tom Fitzgerald's *Floor plan of Heaven No 10 & 11* (2008).[27] The two works were a subtle execution of a durational installation which changed over time. The work consisted of a work on paper and an installation of bay leaves with silver leaf drawing. The work on paper presents a mind map or architectural plan for the bay leaf installation. Each leaf had a unique line or mark of silver leaf that when assembled following the plan would present the final drawing (see Fig. 6.14). The bay leaves were attached directly on the glass of the space, exacerbating the leaves' exposure to shifts and

[27] For more information on Fitzgerald's work, see http://www.tomfitzgerald.ie or Fitzgerald (2004).

Fig. 6.14 Detail of Tom Fitzgerald, *Floor plan of Heaven No 11*, 2008. Silver leaf on bay leaves and time. 153 × 87 cm. by Tom Fitzgerald. (Photograph by Ken Williams)

changes in temperature and humidity. As the bay leaves dried, curled and changed colour, the drawing itself moved and changed. Considered with his other installation *Ever this day* (2008) which consisted of gold leaf on oak leaves on trees outside the building, Fitzgerald's installations suggest possibilities for realising art through a humble surrendering of human efficacy to the ecological dynamics within which we are enmeshed (see Fig. 6.15).

Mark Garry's contribution, *Being Here* (2008), was a similar execution of a sensitive and sensible site-specific practice (see Fig. 6.16). Garry creates works that subtly guide the visitor through the spaces they inhabit. Through the work's presence, the space itself is altered, suggesting new possibilities for engagement. The inclusion in *Being Here* of a living plant with its leaves tethered to the white wall by lines of thread heightened the temporality of the work. As the plant grew increasing, the installation constantly changed. The tension evident in the plant's back-bent leaves pulling against the lines of thread suggested a desire for the installation to destroy itself, resisting the manmade constraints of the artwork.

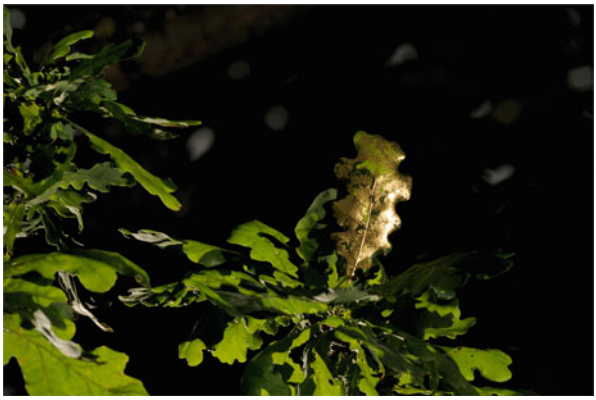

Fig. 6.15 Tom Fitzgerald, *Ever this Day*, 2008. Gold leaf on oak leaves and time. Dimensions variable. (Photograph by Ken Williams)

Fig. 6.16 Mark Garry, *Being Here*, 2008. Thread, pins, beads, plant, wood, contact and work on paper. Dimensions variable. (Photograph by Ken Williams)

In the execution of the exhibition, it was decided not to include title cards or labels and that a map of the space with this information would be provided instead. This was a humble attempt to preserve something of the first encounter with a strange new thing whose presence cannot be immediately understood. This in a sense placed visitors in an oscillation between choices of cartographic orientation and embodied exploration, perhaps playing on tensions between scientific and humanistic modes of encounter.

Afterthoughts

A constant between all the exhibitions and projects in the *Ábhar agus Meon* series was a break with conventional presentations of scientific or archaeological subjects, hopefully offering brief moments where one could linger in the liminal space of possibility before the processing and categorisation of experiences or things. It is

this space, this pause, from which new ideas and insights are flourishing in contemporary artistic and archaeological practices (see Russell 2013). Perhaps, this was similar to spaces where avant-gardist intellectuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries found themselves articulating a shared sense of things and temporalities, and which later became an archaeological imagination. The *Ábhar agus Meon* series illustrated the possibilities that arise from a critically engaged archaeological imagination alongside contemporary arts practice.

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