

Tomorrow Interview with author Michael Morpurgo

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The Arts

Space for communication



Tulca's focal point is a collaboration between an artist and a prisoner who was in solitary confinement for 34 years, writes Aidan Dunne

Inevitably, the centrepiece of this year's Tulca, Galway's season of visual arts, is Jackie Sumell and Herman Wallace's *The House that Herwan Built*. It's an unusual collaboration, to say the least, in that one of the partners, Wallace, contributed to it from behind bars, in the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola (US). By happy coincidence, just prior to the launch of Tulca, a judge ruled that there was sufficient evidence to overturn Wallace's conviction. Mind you, he had by then served 34 years, most in solitary confinement, for a crime he didn't commit.

This means that he spent at least 23 hours a day in a six-by-nine foot cell. To mark the occasion, the Galway Arts Centre incorporates a full-size plywood mock-up of the cell.

Sumell became aware of Wallace's plight when she attended a public talk given by Robert King who, with yet another man, Albert Woodfox, had been incarcerated for the same crime as Wallace, and had finally been released after serving 29 years.

She began a correspondence with Woodfox and Sumell. Four years ago, she put a question to Wallace: "What kind of house does a man who lives in a six-foot by nine-foot cell for over 30 years dream of?"

From that question sprang a four-year exchange, the fruits of which make up the elements of what we see, including the mock-up of the cell, a virtual reality tour of Wallace's extremely detailed ideal house, an architectural drawing, on his correspondence with Sumell.

In many ways, this latter is the strongest and most informative part of the project. We get a sense of the fallible, faltering progress, the all-too-understandable doubts and hesitations along the way. Even more, though, we get a mercifully oblique insight into the fiercely punitive conditions against which Wallace and his companions struggled to survive over a period of decades.

Those conditions are really quite shocking and so explicitly designed to destroy any sense of individual integrity, and the will to survive, that one can only feel humbled, and awed, at the resilience and fortitude of anyone who could endure them for so long.

FOLLOW THAT, as they say. Well, the strength of Sumell's project lies in the space for communication it opens up and develops. The house she builds with Wallace is not so much a castle in the air as a wooden house that penetrates the ramparts of the prison system. It's not that the house is particularly interesting in itself, in the sense that no individual part of the project is as strong as the concerted effect of the whole. The opposite is true of Tulca overall, which is after all not a festival but a season.

A season is a more diffuse concept



The Tulca tour, clockwise from above: Jackie Sumell at *The House that Herwan Built*, in the Galway Arts Centre; *Fathma 500* by Ben Ricks at the official opening in the Fairgreen; Tom Flannery's school house; *Folklore* experiments by Aidan Barry and Rosie Lynch. Photographs: Joe O'Shaughnessy; Gerry O'Leary

than a festival, and perhaps by now we're all a little tired of arts festivals. At the last count there seemed to be one for every man, woman, child and sheep in the country. So a season it is.

What is Tulca about? At this stage, it is about generating energy and a sense of possibility, and that it aims to do by infusing Galway with a cross-section of contemporary arts activity. There is a buzz among the art community in the city. People speak with particular enthusiasm about the launch at the Fairgreen Gallery. The Fairgreen is not exactly a gallery. It's a big, as yet unoccupied commercial building, borrowed by the Arts Festival during the summer as a venue for Hughie O'Donoghue's large-scale paintings.

For Tulca, it features a group show which spills on down to the cavernous basement.

In truth, the "horror kitsch" installation in the basement, by Paul McAree and Mossa Gray, looks distinct-

ly improvised and overextended, but there is great drama in the space, and clearly it provided local artists with that much-desired sense of possibility that the provision of a large exhibition venue would bring to the city. Surely it could be

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done, and it should be done around about now, when the going is good. In the meantime there are developments on a smaller scale, including the now consolidated Ard Bia Gallery, which is as lively and adventurous as one could wish.

There, Thorunn Eymundsdottir's (*skeltur*) a sacred space continues the

gallery's fruitful Icelandic dialogue with a series of pieces about the need we have to find a safe or special place.

Eymundsdottir lives in a small town in north-east Iceland where she comes across as a vast landscape that dwarfs the human presence. She seems to have a penchant for building ramshackle cabins of the kind made by children - something we can all relate to - and they provide a framework for and link the various parts of her show.

Tulca sees the inauguration of a new space as well, g126 at Ballybane Beg off the Tuam Road is compact, but not as compact as the previous 126, a small domestic living room. The new gallery

emerging artists, thus fulfilling an obvious need.

The first show in the new space, *7% Fire*, is a multi-strand installation by Benjamin and Miriam de Barra, takes its title from slowed down footage of a July 11th bonfire in Belfast, counterpointed with screened, projected and drawn accounts of the build-up to the fire, references to their experience of living adjacent to one of the city's interface areas and their survey of plants that sprouted from the earth scorched by the blaze.

It would be hard to get a handle on all this without an accompanying written account, which seems fundamentally wrong for a work that meanders, taking its time, and ours, with abandon. A frame indicates a lack in the internal system of a painting, Deerrida argued.

Now installations are routinely framed by accompanying texts in a similar spirit. The de Barraes are not at all alone in think-



a textual supplement: it's a syndrome. The unlikely and most strikingly situated new venue (in that it will be used regularly as such from now on) is the Fisheries Tower set dramatically above the fast-flowing Corrib off Wolfe Tone Bridge.

Approached across a wooden walkway at twilight, the tower houses Fisheries *Experimentation in contemporary art* in thing. Among the other highlights are Ruby Wallis's photographs, *Other Madonnas*, searching accounts of mother-daughter relationships in images; Anita Delaney's video *December*, featuring what might be described as a demented dance troupe; Vera Klats's fan-pack video *Purpleback*; Nicolas Fere's photographic

MUCH OF TULCA consists of mixed, extended group shows, geographically dispersed. If something doesn't appeal you can quickly move on to the next thing. Among the other highlights are Ruby Wallis's photographs, *Other Madonnas*, searching accounts of mother-daughter relationships in images; Anita Delaney's video *December*, featuring what might be described as a demented dance troupe; Vera Klats's fan-pack video *Purpleback*; Nicolas Fere's photographic journey around Orney island; Pierre Hargreave's quirky puppet musical based on Le Galvani's encounter with Harvard University.

By Tulca, it's worth pointing out that Kenna's has a show by an outstanding young Galway playwright, Jennifer Cunningham, whose work combines psychological insight with tremendous technical facility.

It was disappointing that the university's Anis Maxima, notionally the venue for Tom Flannery's *Sleeping with Narcissus* was simply closed for a few days - out of a two-week run.

This account doesn't encompass all of the Tulca season, including talks and other events. And still to come, for example, is the second part of the highly promising live and performance strand, Tulca live, curated by Aine Phillips, one of the overall curatorial team with Clodhna Shaffrey and Sarah Seaton.

How to summarise a season? A qualified success, perhaps. Lots of bits, some of it too bity, much of it interesting in a low-key way. The one real lack might be that of a concentrated focus, a must-see show that would draw in the wider audience. But then, it's been a steep learning curve.

• Tulca continues until Nov 26. Full details and programmes available from The Galway Arts Centre

Reviews, page 2

Jazz with the

Songs for Europe (part 1) Joachim Kuhn performed at Festsaal

Hamburg's Laeiszhalle, Festsaal finally had its world premiere with the NDR Pop Orchestra, conducted by Jörg Achim Keller, with jazz soloists Joachim Kuhn, Bill Landgren, Klaus Doldinger, Markus Stockhausen,

wouldn't end in Germany, for example. And the way Michael Gibbs did it, I like it - he's the kind of writer and arranger that has his eye in the song, and arranges the song in their own way.