

66 *Tulca*



Rosie Lynch and Aideen Barry  
*Folklore experiments*  
courtesy the artists

When asked to be this year's Tulca Thinker, one of a number of residencies attached to the season, I have to admit to having had huge qualms about the title and what it might convey (I preferred the less subjective 'Thinking Tulca'). It conjured up images of a pompous critic representing the external judgment of the Kantian subject or a Dr Seuss-like Cat-in-the-hat court fool ('Oh the thinks I can Think!'), perhaps required to wear identificatory apparel like Hans Ulrich Obrist and the *Chapeau-vie* which he wore for an entire year.

Assured by the curators (Cliodhna Shaffrey, Sarah Seanson and Áine Phillips) that their intentions were far more radical and less prescriptive, I decided to approach the process employing a strategy of 'dissensus' in order to avoid, in Guattari's words, any 'besotting mythology of togetherness' which seeks out similarity rather than difference. This new residency was established by Tulca to kick-start a different model of relations between thinking and art, one which I hoped to give a Deleuzian twist; not 'applying' philosophical ideas to each event or debate but rather attempting to formulate questions based on 'resonances and interferences', an attempt at an 'underground aesthetics' whose function would be to challenge the role of 'common sense' and habitual circuits of classification and appraisal and attempt to identify 'zones of problematisation' for future analysis. In other words, I attended everything and started arguments.

Tulca's 'open curatorial subtext' was identified in the programme as 'within/ without', so inevitably ideas relating to spatiality and interiority/ exteriority came to the fore, albeit often in a very elliptical form.

With artists such as Vitto Acconci turning towards architectural practice as a natural extension of his

desire to "turn art into a verb," and a marked shift towards the architectural in recent artistic culture, it was interesting to see an intense level of engagement with Architectural theory and form throughout Tulca. Nowhere in Ireland could this be more pertinent or appropriate – the use of architectural ideas as filtered through art being used to stimulate broader intellectual discussion around public space and urban development in Galway.

Two works which dominated the season were Jackie Sumell's *The House that Herman built*, an installation in the Galway Arts Centre, and Pierre Huyghe's *This is not a time for dreaming* at NUIG, both confrontational yet emerging from very different aesthetics. *The House that Herman built*, with its ideological foundation rooted in the campaigning spirit of Sumell, captured the Galway public's imagination in a major way based as it was on a five-year dialogue between Sumell and Herman Wallace, imprisoned for over thirty years in the notorious Angola prison in Louisiana, more for his Black Panther allegiances than the trumped up crime he was convicted of. Rarely has a work such as Foucault's analysis of penal technologies in *Discipline and punish* seemed more relevant than in the manifestation of disciplinary power filtered through the techniques of 'panopticism' found in this project. Sumell constructed an exact replica of Wallace's 9ft x 6ft cell in GAC accompanied by a projection of an architectural program giving life to Wallace's imagined response to Sumell's question, "What kind of house does a man who has lived in a 6ft x 9ft cell for over thirty years dream of?"

His astonishingly developed sense of space, articulated in long letters read for the installation by his fellow (recently released) inmate Albert Woodcox, show an intense preoccu-

pation with the same structural and spatial problems of the institution oppressing him. His fantasy house, a combination of seventies kitsch interior and security bunker, tells us more about the psychology of internment than any political statement.

Huyghe's video installation (a huge coup for Tulca given his status worldwide at present) couldn't have found a better location than the subterranean gallery of NUIG, given the work's link with Le Corbusier and the ongoing architectural work on campus by Scott Tallon Walker (a company itself influenced in its infancy by Le Corbusier), and in its echoing of its original display conditions in a specially constructed pod lodged in the foundations of the Carpenter Building in Harvard. Huyghe would be pleased with the levels of interplay conjured up serendipitously by Tulca.

Huyghe is known for producing layered worlds of simulacra intended to open up multiple meanings through repetition (his fondness for French philosophy has often been noted). He creates a web of narratives only to expose the entangled network of relationships which constitute those narratives. *This is not a time for Dreaming* is a film of a puppet show created by Huyghe as a commemorative commission from Harvard University to mark the anniversary of the Le Corbusier-designed Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts – the only Le Corbusier building in America. The artistic conflict at the time between the architect and the administrative system of the college becomes in Huyghe's puppet-show a conflict between modernist idealism and intransigent bureaucracy. The work manages to be charming (we see the Le Corbusier puppet tap-dancing to Charles Trenet), insightful, and barbed in its inclusion of Huyghe himself as both puppet and puppet master involved in his own intellectual battle with his commission.

Le Corbusier pops up again in another architectural installation in NUIG – this time as a mischievous subtext in the Danish artist Kasper Pederson's slide installation, *Untitled Schindler/ Gray*; an attempt to rethink the histories of two important and controversial buildings of the 1920s – Eileen Gray's *Villa E1027* (in which Le Corbusier painted his notorious graffiti murals) and Rudolf Schindler's radical experiment in domestic space in his King's Road House. Pederson's slides establish these two buildings as 'fields of discourse' and he asks us to conceive of them as 'palimpsests', whereby one text is erased to allow for the writing of another. It was hugely significant to see work exploring such architecturally sophisticated ideas in a Galway and NUIG context, given the absence of an architectural school in the city and the urgent need for a more evolved level of public debate around issues relating to public space and urban development locally.

Other works in Tulca which play explicitly with the vocabulary of urbanism include Maggie Madden's *Miniature city*: a delicate construction in GAC, bordering on the organic but containing a structural logic that betrays a frenzied architectural impulse. The multi-coloured bits of telephone wire it was made from suggest an urban virus with its own DNA frantically duplicating itself.

Thórunn Eymundardóttir's exhibition at Ard Bia Gallery is part of an ongoing relationship being fostered with Icelandic artists. In (*Shelter*) a sacred space, Eymundardóttir explores her preoccupation with a 'paradise lost' in north-east Iceland, with an installation based around the theme of habitation and shelter. Rather than a Waldenesque preoccupation with survival in the wilderness, she displays an Icelandic take on Heideggerian concepts of 'home' and 'embodiment' with her

images of previous attempts at building makeshift huts, and in her glowing tent pitched in a darkened room with a projection of her prostrate body inside.

Rosie Lynch and Aideen Barry's collaborative *Folklore experiments* in the Fisheries Tower demonstrates the new level of confidence in local artists engaging creatively with the idiosyncracies of some of Galway's architecture. Their felicitous use of this highly atmospheric building involved the creation of a series of 'curious happenings': staged encounters between two normally oppositional knowledge systems, that of scientific rationality and the poetic narratives of folklore. Both artists share an interest in subverting Enlightenment categorizations relating to knowledge and culture, and through a combination of carefully choreographed photographs, lightboxes and an animation and sound installation on the upper floor succeed in drawing the viewer into a seductive, melancholic space. The sampling of a Maria Callas aria to accompany the short Gothic animation (reminiscent of the Quay Brothers or Jan Svankmajer) projected on a suspended screen at the top of the spiraling staircase, and shown only at twilight with the fast-flowing Corrib audible in the background, made a convincing argument for making buildings like these available for artistic projects. Roisin Coyle's use of another well-known local building, a small asymmetrical house on Henry Street, in which to unfold her dark world of childhood fears in *Number 9*, was another welcome addition to this trend.

The Fairgreen Gallery – a commercial space 'lent' to Tulca for the season – was an added bonus in that its huge dimensions and gritty minimalist atmosphere allowed for the display of ambitious large scale installation and sculptural work such as Jim Ricks' *Fortune 500* – an

exploration of imperialism in the new millennium. Whereas his giant house of cards marked with dollar signs and his chaotic photographic collage of American culture provided a high level of drama which worked in the space, his tower constructed of blocks of military and financial acronyms was perhaps too similar to territory already explored by Langlands and Bell in their Turner Prize show of 2003.

Following the 'Within/ without' theme, the chilling exploration of just what territorial obsession can lead to in Anthony Haughey's *Men Digging Kosova 1999* was shown alongside the delicate glass micro-worlds of Kaija Poijula's *Memento mori*, with their suspended fragments from the natural world.

The small-scale, Fluxus-like video *Against god video* by South Korean artist Moon Na is a visual haiku with the accompanying explanation: "On a day of heavy rain I shoot a water pistol into the sky"; as much a gesture against the military posturing in the area as an existential gesture against the transcendent.

Pierre Huyghe  
*This is not a time for  
dreaming*  
2004  
video still  
courtesy Tulca



Theresa Nanigan's video piece *Two weeks and Sixteen Sundays in-between* also sets the intimate and everyday against the sensationalist vocabulary of world politics, with her images of a changing skyscape and cloud formations as seen from a domestic garden ruptured by the superimposition of a series of newspaper headlines fostering a teleological hysteria which makes even the sky a threatening space.

A significant element of Tulca which distinguishes it from other Art Festivals/ Seasons is its commitment to the debate and discussion of contemporary artistic practice in all its forms. This year saw a day of presentations at Nuns Island Studio, beginning with *Fragmented talk* by Emma Houlihan, Tara Kennedy and Jenny Moran: an informal, loosely structured introduction to the artistic ideas and practices they developed at an experimental residency they participated in at the Fondazione Antonio Ratti in Italy, led by artist and architect Marjetica Potrc. A series of subtle and playful artistic interventions seemed to emerge from their three weeks of collaborative strategizing about art and urbanism, undercut with a hint of political idealism.

Jason E Bowman, the guest speaker at Tulca, brought his incisive and acerbic Scottish wit to the proceedings with a highly structured and often self-critical account of his curatorial practice and co-directorship of the organization Midwest – established to promote artist-led culture. His combative style gave a much-needed edge to the debate around art and the community, reminding us that as much work emerges out of a confrontational dynamic as out of utopian aspirations.

The day ended with 'Home' a round-table discussion chaired by Gavin Murphy on what that concept meant to the participants: artists whose work has centred on ideas relating to 'home' (Eymundardóttir

and Phillips) and the new breed of gallery owner who at some stage has converted their private domestic space into an arena for artistic display (Finola Jones of Mother's Tankstation, Austin Ivors and Ben Geoghegan of 126, and Justin McKeon of SPART).

Almost inevitably, the discussion was pulled in two different directions with Eymundardóttir and Phillips drawing on a phenomenological discourse to do with the 'poetics of dwelling' as found in Heidegger and Bachelard, and the other participants focusing on the pragmatic details and dynamics of opening up your private space to the public.

The concept of 'Home' has become increasingly prevalent in artistic circles in the last few years, with exhibitions in the Douglas Hyde (*Home*, Gregor Schneider's *Dead house*, and *Huts*) and the exhibition 'Home' curated by Martin Healy for Cork 2005. In a Galway context – an environment where the domestic and the public have a more intimate interface, the discussion provided a welcome starting point for future investigations, where a more fragmented conceptualization of habitable space and spatiality can be explored.

Much has been written recently about the emergence of 'interstitial spatial practices' as a rising category of artistic activity worldwide, as seen in the work of artists such as Michael Sailstorfer with his reconstructed mobile homes, Graham Hudson's *Wanderly Wagon-like Residence* at Tate Britain, and Marjetica Potrc's shanty-town constructions.

Áine Phillips' *Caravan*, moored at Nuns Island for the duration of Tulca, addressed both this preoccupation with the relationship between a temporary structure and its environment and her ongoing performance practice. As with Robert Fillou's *Shed – studio* in the 1980s, the mobile caravan can be

useful structurally for the purpose of disseminating ideas relating to the nomadic or liminal, and for facilitating durational encounters between the public and an artist's process of work. The 'ambulatory' form can facilitate the exploration of tentative identities and narratives, and Phillips used her caravan to question ideas of the 'commonplace', challenging our ideas of interior/ exterior space, and through her interactive performances examining the codes through which personal histories are constructed.

The performance strand of Tulca is a substantial one, curated by Phillips with the intention of presenting work which is provocative and at the forefront of contemporary practice in the field.

Hugh O'Donnell's *I just don't know what to do with myself*, although advertised as an adult performance exploring homosexuality, still led to a few hasty departures, undoubtedly due to its refusal to play with the clichés of sexual behaviour and instead explore the simplified physical circuits of someone's desperate attempt to reconstitute a 'self' using a Freudian oral/ anal fixation as a cathartic ritual. Easy-Singles cheese sandwiches became the currency of choice to invert the conventional paths of oral/anal desire, with O'Donnell 'feeding' the inappropriate orifice in a series of repetitive Artaudian theatrical manoeuvres accompanied by a looped tape of him singing the opening line from the eponymous song.

Richard Dedominici, the artist-residence, described as a "one man subversive think-tank," set about creating a number of perceptual experiments in urban space, encouraging people to test the boundaries of public/ private regulatory codes of behaviour in a series of Tati-esque provocations which were filmed and displayed in a vacant shop made available to him for Tulca.

Local photographer Ruby Wallis, in her show *Other Madonnas* in GAC, builds on an already substantial body of work documenting alternative and tangential communities, on this occasion with a series of photographs of single mothers with their daughters. Avoiding the tendency towards voyeurism or the kind of fetishism of disenfranchised groups you often find with social documentarians like Richard Billingham, Wallis focuses instead on the subtle dynamic which exists between mother and child, allowing it to occupy its own space in the frame. Tenderness, pride, obstinacy, antagonism, all emerge from the sensitive compositional arrangements of her photographs.

Robin Jones' paintings, hung inconspicuously in a corridor in Artspace studios in the Liosban Industrial Estate as part of the group show for Tulca, defy their modest presentation with their insistent attempt to answer that most dogged of questions in contemporary Painting: "Has abstraction become overly determined or can it still formulate visual problems in a stimulating way?" There is something intrinsically philosophical in Jones' struggle with, and denial of, the vocabularies of form as 'givens' to be played with lightly. Without being metaphorical, his paintings are an explication of the incremental dynamic of visual thought – its sometimes-slow, sometimes-violent internal logic which can still be expressed uniquely in the medium of paint. The 'Within/ without' curatorial line is explored as much in work such as this found on the geographical fringes of Tulca as it is in the large-scale installations in the centre of Galway, and it is this capacity – to successfully allow for the work of over ninety artists to achieve a complex balance in a relatively small city – which makes Tulca unique.

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Thórunn Eymundardóttir  
(*Shelter*) a sacred place  
courtesy Tulca

