



Merciful Hour





‘MercifulHour’ an evening of experimental film and moving image artworks created in Ireland in reaction to the limited studio space and lack of funding available to artists, to which neither the cause nor the answer is single faceted. The event comprises a 50 minute screening of shorts that do not necessarily offer a solution or address the crisis directly but give an insight into the artist’s everyday struggle to maintain a practice, creating a sense of solidarity in a shared experience, showing that creativity does prevail in a bleak situation. The event will conclude with a 20 minute chaired discussion.

Co-curated by Steven Doody, Sarah Edmondson, Andrej Getman, Niamh McGuinne and Aidan Sharkey.

Hosted with The Darkroom, North Brunswick St, Dublin 7 in conjunction with NCAD.

Screening order:
Niamh McGuinne, ‘Peripheral’. 2019 (03:23)
Sarah Edmondson, 'The Making of XXXII', 2018 (11:30)
Mella Travers, ‘5 frames’, 2019 (05:00) Laura Fitzgerald, 'Portrait of a Stone', 2018 (11:54)
Ella Bertilsson and Ulla Juske, 'Beyond the Sandy Suburbs (|,||,|||)', 2018 (13:05)
Aoife Desmond, 'Interior Exterior', 2017 (03:00)
Ara Devine, 'Terry and Long', 2018 (05:33)

Discussion:
Chaired by Dr. Sarah Durcan
Aoife Desmond, Ara Devine, Steven Doody and Sarah Edmondson

Ella Bertilsson & Ulla Juske

ellabertilsson.com
juske.net



'Beyond the Sandy Suburbs (I)', 2018, 03:23, colour, sound
'Beyond the Sandy Suburbs (II)', 2018, 05:29, colour, sound
'Beyond the Sandy Suburbs (III)', 2018, 04:13, colour, sound

BIO:

Ella Bertilsson (SWE/IRE) and Ulla Juske (EST/IRE) met in 2013, during their time as MFA students in the National College of Art and Design, Dublin. The artist-duo have been using conversation as the generative ground for their multidisciplinary work; using storytelling, symbolism, staging and sound to produce a mood of absurdity, disquiet and unresolved suspense within their installation-based practice. Recent and current achievements include; ARRANGEMENTS, 'Orphans' conceived and produced by James Merrigan (Pallas Projects/Studios, Dublin, 2019). Recent solo exhibitions: 'Beyond the Sandy Suburbs' (Pallas Projects/Studios, Dublin, 2018), 'Carrier of Memories' (Dráiocht Gallery, Blanchardstown, 2018), '11.9 km Northwest of the City Centre' (Hobusepea Gallery, Tallinn, 2018), 'The Waiting Room' (Artbox, Dublin, 2017), 'Uncertain Matter' (Outvert Art Space & ArtsIceland, Isaffjordur, 2017), 'Uncertain Matter' (Deiglan Gallery, Akureyri, 2017), 'Uncertain Matter' (Nordic House, Reykjavik, 2016), 'Time is what happens when nothing else does' (Office of Public Works in association with the Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin, 2015). Recent performances: 'Deconstruct to Reconstruct' (Pallas Projects/Studios, Dublin, 2018), 'Mother of Birds Taxi Service' (Dublin, Blanchardstown, 2018), 'Mother of Birds BBQ and Sljatlana's Karaoke' (Art Carboot Sale, Russborough, 2018). Residencies: Fire Station Artists Studios Digital Resource Centre Residency (2019) Peer Residency, Royal Hibernian Academy (2018-2019), Nordic Artist's Centre, NKD, Dale (2018), Dráiocht Incubate Residency, Dublin (2017), Process Residency Artbox, Dublin (2017), The Association of Icelandic Artists, Reykjavik (2016).

STATEMENT:

Themes of domesticity, paranoia and displacement is evident in the videos of 'Beyond the Sandy Suburbs (I,II,III)' which also invokes power dynamics and the urban environment more directly. The three videos have been defined by the use of fictional characters, we see a non-verbal, animalistic and hyper-human duo and their confusing yet focused actions. Engagement with life is no longer through dreaming or remembering - i.e. through the building of psychic worlds - but instead through direct engagement with the physical world. In the video work comfort is found in a repetitious action - one that seems to make little sense to an outsider, but which has the gravity of ritual to those who perform it. The ritual becomes what is real, all the while treading the line between power and protection.

In the solo exhibition 'Beyond the Sandy Suburbs', the artists used video installation, sound, construction materials and discarded mattresses to portray the reality of living in Dublin right now which is: crowded apartments and houses, short-term leases, the power of the landlord class, skips and cranes and scaffolding. To live in Dublin is to live precariously and tentatively, facing the sibling situations of housing crisis and building boom (excerpt from Catherine O'Keeffe press release, 'Beyond the Sandy Suburbs', Pallas Project/Studios, 2018).

Aoife Desmond

aoifedesmond.com BIO:

Aoife Desmond is an interdisciplinary artist, recent screenings/exhibitions include; 'Walking in the Stones' at Cornwall Film Festival and Plymouth University, 'RetroReflection' in the Cork Film Festival, Crawford Art Gallery Cork, 'Irish Artists & Experimental Film' Irish Museum of Modern Art and solo exhibition 'Something Momentous Germinating' Galway Arts Centre 2017. She exhibits both in Ireland and internationally, other exhibitions include 'Wildscreen' Inagh Valley Hatchery, Connemara, 'Landing Place' Pigeon House Precinct, Dublin, 'Insertion' Fragil, Madrid, 'Conquered' Temple Bar Galleries, Dublin, 'In dessous du visible', Galerie Fin Avril, Paris and 'Holding Together' Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin.

STATEMENT:

'Interior Exterior' is a short film sequence shot on Super 8 film in 2014. It consists of a series of mainly still shots moving between an interior makeshift studio space and the overgrown garden space outside. The filmed scenes depict small actions of inhabitation, drawing and clearing, and relate to a time when the artist was starting to re-inhabit her family home.



'Interior Exterior', 2017, 03:00, colour, silent, super 8mm



'Terry and Long', 2018, 05:33, colour, sound

Ara Devine

aradevine.com

BIO:

Ara Devine is an artist, filmmaker and PhD researcher at Belfast School of Art, Ulster University. After graduating from NCAD in 2017, his film 'The Irish Question' was shortlisted for the RDS Visual Art Awards and exhibited nationally. His practice is concerned with borders, boundaries and national identity and how visual art responds to these constructs. Isabella Djalili-Devine is a filmmaker and editor. She holds an MA in Documentary Film from University of the Arts, London. She works as a freelance editor in Belfast.

STATEMENT:

Two friends from very different cultures who now call North Dublin their home reflect on life, friendship and the role of the arts in connecting ourselves to the society around us.

Sarah Edmondson

sarah-edmondson.com



‘The Making of XXXII’, 2018, 11:30, colour, sound

BIO:

Sarah is currently undertaking an MFA Fine Art at the National College of Art and Design where she graduated with a BA (Hons) Art and Design Education, 2012. She also holds a BA (Hons) History of Art and Sociology from University College Cork, 2007. Since graduating Sarah has participated in many group shows both nationally and internationally. Her performative video ‘Survival of the Fittest’ was recently selected to be screened as part of Homeland 2019 at Damer House, LOOP festival, Barcelona and the Instituto Cervantes. In 2018 she was awarded The Progressive Vision Curtin O'Donoghue Emerging Photographic Artist Award, as part of the 188th RHA Annual Exhibition. Her work is conceptually driven with a focus on contemporary sociological issues and anthropological research. Through a variety of mediums, including video, photography, and installation, she makes work that questions the validity of certain information presented to us by the media and state. In her video and performative pieces, there is an interest in habitual practices and rituals, especially those performed by women. She questions the origin of these habits and traditions, confronting the viewer with fictitious information or staged scenarios in order to highlight the ambiguity of our learned reality and accepted behaviours.

STATEMENT:

‘The Making of XXXII’ is a video piece in which the artist, dressed in the likeness of Jesus as seen in Caravaggio’s ‘Supper at Emmaus’, continuously blows out candles on her 32nd birthday cake, her last birthday still “younger than Jesus”. Her frustration visibly increasing as the candles continue to relight is a metaphor for the pressure she feels due to the age expectations placed on her by society; success, motherhood, income etc. Inspiration is drawn from the term, the ‘social clock’ coined by the American psychologist Bernice Neugarten who debunked the idea of a biological clock determining age. Instead, she theorised that there was a social clock determining the “correct” time for marriage, childbearing and academic success.

The artist shows the unsuccessful filming of ‘XXXII’, including the accidental interruption of the performance by her boyfriend. The inclusion of their conversation gives an insight into the artist’s domestic life and the many roles that she plays, allowing them to seep into the frame. It is a raw account of the reality of life as an artist, the vulnerability and frustration that are often experienced through the making and showing of work, and the many failed attempts that are endured during the process.

Laura Fitzgerald

laurafitzgeraldfrominch.com



'Portrait of a Stone', 2018, 11:54, colour, sound

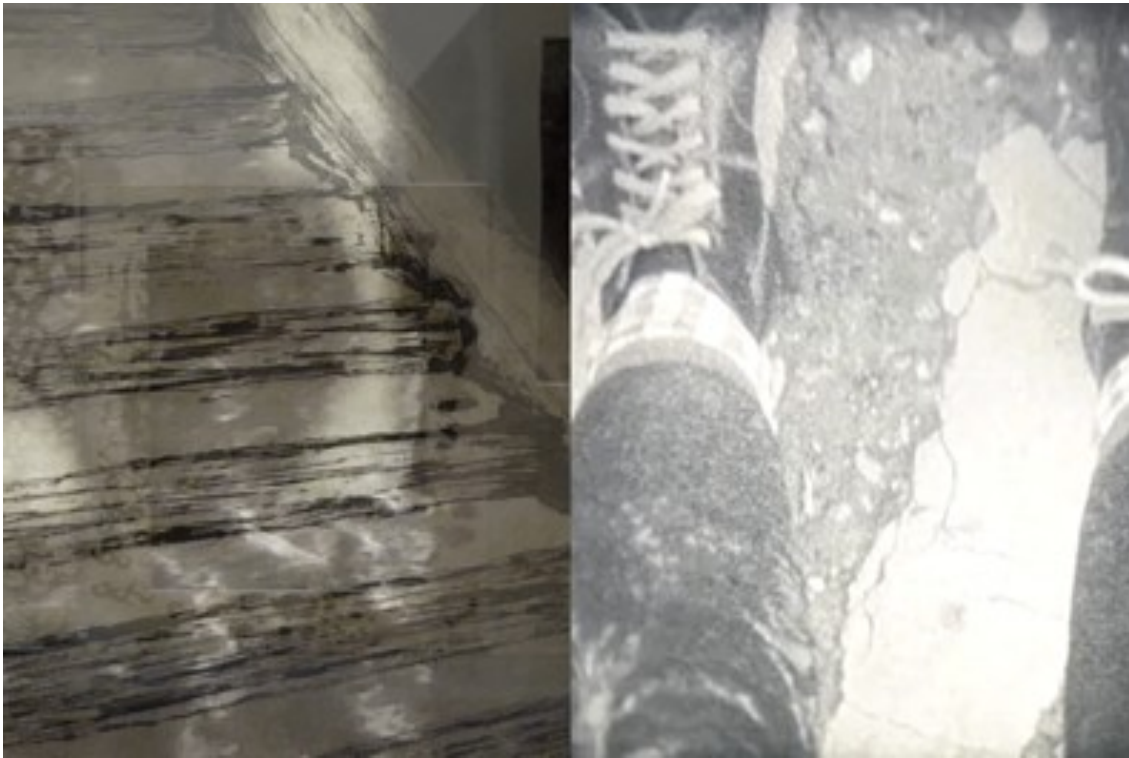
BIO:

Laura Fitzgerald is a visual artist from a small mountain farm in Co. Kerry, working across drawing, painting, text & video. Her work focuses on the rapid changes she and others are experiencing in the modern world. She frames these experiences from the viewpoint of a stone. A stone can be submerged, half-submerged, it can rocket through the air like a scud missile or a meteorite. She is trying to tell stories from these different vantage points, trying to make herself as stone-like as possible. In this sense, she is telling it like it is, as influenced by writers such as Lydia Davis and Donald Barthelme.

Recent shows and screenings include: Futures, Series 3, Episode 2, at the RHA Gallery, 'Brief Encounters between Structure & Agency', at the Irish Film Institute & 'Lucian's Neighbours', at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin. Fitzgerald will develop a new film for EVA Platforms Commission 2020 and is in receipt of a bursary award from the Arts Council to support her work in 2019 - 20. She is a recent recipient EMERGENCE Visual Art Award 2019. She is currently in residence at the Firestation Artists' Studios until late 2020.

STATEMENT:

Laura Fitzgerald's work is trying to be useful. And while she is worried that making art is – in fact – useless, she seeks solace in the notion it can be so radically useless that it can resist the profit-driven impetus of modern life. In a sense the work is sincerely absurdist in own endeavours. While looking at ideas relating to the neoliberal turn, she concentrates on using humour as a tool; an antidepressant and a coping strategy to everyday lived experience.



Niamh McGuinne

niamhmcguinne.com

BIO:

Niamh McGuinne is a Dublin based artist, currently completing an MFA in NCAD. Her work practice combines print, sculpture and film elements. The embodiment of physical, psychological experience and the nature of somatic response is an underlying theme in her work. She is a senior paper conservator in the National Gallery of Ireland. With this background, mechanisms of deterioration, permanence and notions of perfection intermingle with questions regarding deviance, acceptance and distorted perception.

STATEMENT:

‘Peripheral’ refers to a nebulous entity, a phantom presence just out of vision, a form which defies capture. The protagonist in ‘Peripheral’ is the artist who is continually searching for a sense of place, physically and metaphorically, often on the fringes of society. Being of no perceived economic value or use to the majority, but instead considered surplus to requirement, the artist abides.

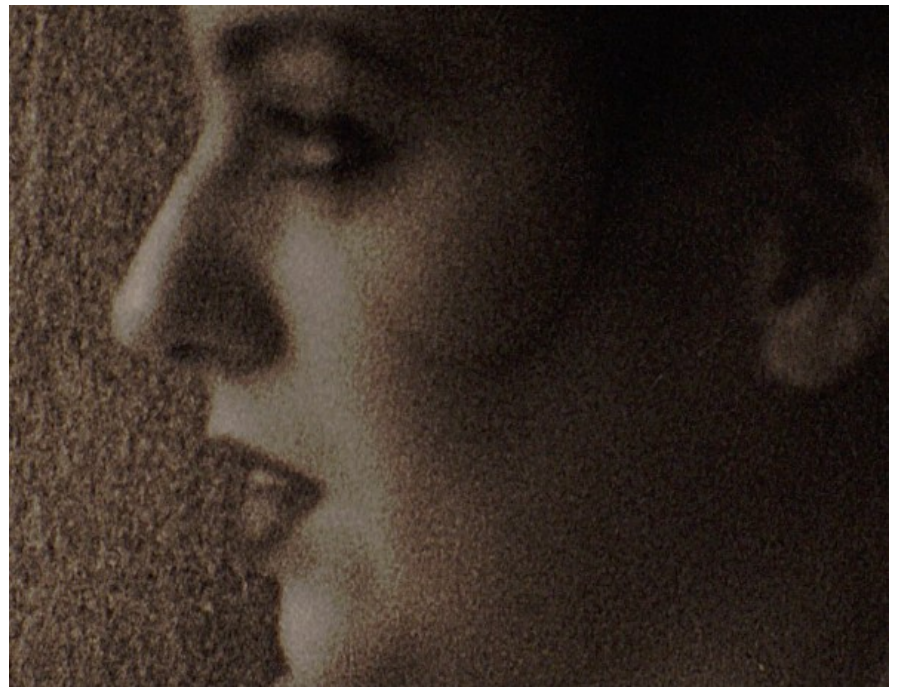
Mella Travers

mellatravers.com BIO:

The Darkroom was founded in 2010 by Visual Artist and Photographer Mella Travers. Mella began her photographic career in the 1990s, working on many prestigious fashion publications, while also maintaining an extensive personal practice. Her work has been exhibited internationally and widely in Ireland, including VISUAL Carlow and RHA Dublin. Most recently she has exhibited work alongside artists Wendy Judge and Niamh McGuinne, which explored innovative analogue techniques and modes of presentation.

STATEMENT:

Mella has pushed the boundaries within her work through using experimental process and techniques. In this new work she is using 5 Super 8 films, shot 5 years ago cutting them up and putting them back together again to create a short film of rambling awareness.



‘5 frames’, 2019, 05:00, black and white, silent, super 8mm

There are currently a range of models for provision of creative spaces in the country. No single solution will cater for the diverse range of visual art practices.

It is this diversity, constant change and flux in which the creative space exists which helps to maintain a vibrant socially engaged community of visual artists.

Some of the collateral damage of Gentrification and precarious work spaces. Ranelagh Arts Centre, Complex, Block T, Moxie Studio, Steambox, Ja Ja Studios, Rubicon Gallery, The Squat, Biospace 033, The Shed, Seomra Spraoi, Exchange Dublin, The Barricade Inn.

The Cycle - Low rents, Artists move in - Area becomes fashionable, Rents go up, Artists move to less affluent areas of the city with lower rents - Repeat.

The danger of the creative space.

Allowing numbers of creative like minded persons to congregate in one place for periods of time does not suit the narrative. Leopold 1 wrote to his cousin, Victoria "Beware of artists. They mix with all classes of society and are therefore most dangerous."

The constant flux in which the artists finds themselves prevents organisation, Rising. Precarious living conditions, Precarious work conditions, Precarious life conditions, but still we do.

As long as the creatives are focused on feeding themselves, funding themselves and placing themselves on the outside as observers rather than being involved in direct action, the status quo remains.

Creative spaces evolve, bloom and flourish linking people to a place and point in time. Then gone.

Perhaps this is the mistake, the social cleansing. Perhaps this push of the artist out of the creative space, out the fence and into the city will instigate change, prompt Organisation. The creative space, constantly in change. Commonly located in buildings more than half a century old.

The creative space, A refuge, A sanctuary, The Atelier, A space necessary. A space, if for nothing else, but for an Artist to exist in. Past lives, factories, warehouses, tenement homes, Stains of these memories erased, covered and Daubed from this existence with buckets of "Exhibition space white " A white, whiter than all the other whites, a new improved white. Perhaps from this new white space will emerge a new movement, one which will organise and become physically active and provoke change in mindset and practice on a social level.

(msd19)

‘Merciful Hour’

‘Merciful Hour’ an evening of experimental film and moving images, created in reaction to limited studio space, took place at the Darkroom in Dublin 7, on Tuesday the 10th of November, 2019. The event was held in conjunction with the National College of Art and Design and seven shorts were screened by the following artists: Niamh McGuinne, Sarah Edmondson, Mella Travers, Laura Fitzgerald, Ella Bertilsson & Ulla Juske, Aoife Desmond and Ara Devine. Whilst none referenced the dearth of support and space for artists in an overt or literal manner, themes of precarity, gentrification, domesticity and coping ran throughout.

The opening piece by Niamh McGuinne ‘Peripheral’ revealed a split screen shot in grainy black and white textures. On one side we look through a series of windows some of which are overlaid with tie-dye like fabric and patterns. The other side of the screen shows the artist’s feet as she walks along the edges of a street. She follows the street markings which merge and diverge at certain points whilst she stays true to her course: perhaps a metaphor for the ongoing search for a sense of place. The soundtrack was performed, composed and recorded by Lisa O’Neill and Christophe Capewell.

This was followed by Sarah Edmondson’s ‘The Making of XXXII’ which presents a beautifully lit kitchen table upon which sits an archetypal pink and gaudy birthday cake. Edmondson’s careful placing of and repeated attempts to light the candles meet with frustration and interruptions which she voices to her partner. The candles spark and hiss and we are reminded of the difficulties of working in the domestic setting and the need to act immediately when time is limited but we are left with a beautiful changing light albeit with a melted cake.

Mella Travers’ ‘5 frames’ is another Super8 short with hazy, grainy images this time viewed in silence. Travers’ piece includes glimpses of Dublin city from the rooftop of Block T’s studios in Smithfield, a building which no longer exists. Its replacement will accommodate Grade A serviced offices and the artists have moved elsewhere. Travers’ Darkroom is a fitting location for this discussion of studios and precarity. Originally based in Block T, where she benefited from the support of its collective ethos, she speaks of the community that she has built up in her current location which is centred around the sharing of knowledge and expertise.

The game playing and manoeuvring necessitated by the constant round of applications required for artist residencies and funding is playfully and humorously addressed in Laura Fitzgerald’s ‘Portrait of a Stone.’ A multiple choice format parodies the various options available to artists in the current climate which sees them spending as much time applying for funding as they do making art.

Ella Bertilsson & Ulla Juske in ‘Beyond the Sandy Suburbs (I, II, III)’ is a tripartite short with a B-movie aesthetic. We encounter the two protagonists in a post apocalyptic landscape that could stand in for the neo-liberal nightmare of downturn and new boom Dublin. With colours and hues reminiscent of Vivienne Dick’s Staten Island (1978), we see the characters repeatedly pile up and climb upon a tower of unstable grubby mattresses which call to mind the detritus left outside rental accommodations in the city centre. Frustration and repetition are the themes although the reiteration of the actions builds up a calming rhythm and evokes ritualistic behaviour.

Aoife Desmond’s ‘Interior Exterior’, also on Super8, is contemplative and mellow in tone with a series of still lives showing work spaces, often set against windows: a paintbox on a desk by a window reveals a near tropical overgrown garden. Post-its and sketches sit amongst a space that is both domestic and studio. It looks like a nice place to work!

The programme concluded with Devine’s piece entitled ‘Terry & Long’ which touchingly portrays the friendship between two Dublin-based older men. In-between their sage observations on friendship and life. Long displayed and discussed his paintings of famous individuals. Obviously produced and housed in a domestic setting, his paintings crowd his small kitchen, proving that work can be produced anywhere once the will is there. The joy and solace Long gets from this creative process is evident and it jolts the career artist’s preoccupation with the gallery and conventional ambition. The series concluded with the positive message that creativity prevails.

The screenings were followed by a brief panel discussion chaired by Dr. Sarah Durcan. A manifesto like statement included with the programme provided a backdrop for debate with an outline of the boom to bust to boom cycle and its accompanying art-washing and gentrification. The conversation also explored how artists work: on laptops in cafes; at the kitchen table (as evidenced in several of the shorts); in a studio or at a residency. Desmond, whose work up until recently has been studio based, stated that her studio was a thinking space, a place for preparation, as well as for work.

Contributions from the floor cited the difficulty of sustaining a viable practice after graduation noting that the fall-off is considerable. Who continues to make work and why do others stop? Perhaps, the answer to this question might be class based, an aspect lacking in the evening’s discussions, but one that might have been touched upon

had the conversation continued. Are those with access to Leo's 'bank of mum and dad' or a wealthy spouse better able to weather the vicissitudes of the current economic climate?

Talk followed on of how the Arts Council and funding organisations in general pit individual artists against one another. Thus echoing the individualism of the neo-liberal realm which has caused the spatial inequality at the heart of the discussion and this programme.

Tenacity and resilience were recurring themes and Sarah Edmondson was keen to point out that these were not the sole preserve of artists. The precarious nature of contemporary Ireland extends to all impacting upon work, the environment, housing, education and health. The solution might lie in collective action and a coming together based not on ego but on a shared vision.

All was not doom and gloom. Some felt that instability and change were catalysts for creativity and that such conditions can energise and provoke. Niamh McGuinne highlighted the print community in Dublin as one which has succeeded in organising along collective lines. Moving outside of the city is a solution for some and a critical mass in a rural location can generate a vibrant artistic community. Travers encouraged artists to talk to each other and share. Solidarity amongst artists is necessary and solutions for sustainable work practices and spaces might be found in collective action.

Dr. Orla Fitzpatrick 17th

December 2019