

The Parted Veil

Commemoration in photographic practices

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The **Glucksman**, University College Cork, Ireland

Tom Molloy's series *WAVE* consists of 44 found snapshot photographs of individual people waving at the camera. Dating from the 1930s to the 1990s, and including colour, black-and-white, and Polaroid images, Molloy's installation presents a scattering of different moments of greeting or farewell. Images that would have been personal mementoes or memories, here become a shared social history of the Western world. The work points to the wider history of photography, its beginnings as an amateur pursuit and its function of recording instances of personal significance. We view these images

Roseanne Lynch's *Untitled (Stella)* refers to the pet name given to Ester Johnson by the writer Jonathan Swift. Their relationship was ambiguous, with various suggestions that the two were lovers, spouses, half-siblings, or uncle and niece, and this uncertainty extends to the provenance of the skull. Lynch was initially told that the cast had been given to Swift as a 'Memento mori' but subsequently discovered that it was Oscar Wilde's father, Sir William Wilde, who had gained permission in 1835 to have plaster casts made of both Swift's and Johnson's skulls: the now-discredited science of phrenology believed that the shape of a skull revealed a person's intelligence. The photograph is taken in Marsh's Library in Dublin which houses rare and fascinating books. The visual translation of this history by Lynch suggests a role for photography in the preservation and transmission of knowledge.

Amelia Stein's black-and-white print *Laundry* stems from the relentless media coverage of Pope Francis' visit to Ireland in 2018 and its coincidence with the recent births of children to the artist's stepdaughter and her two friends. In the juxtaposition of these events, one is reminded of the not-too-distant history of Ireland, its state-sanctioned religious shaming of women and their enforced subjugation in the Magdalene Laundries, workhouses run by the Catholic Church. From this, Stein was compelled to take a photograph of all of her bedsheets, creating a monument from the most humble of materials, acknowledging the female labour within the laundries, as well as the need for these traumatic histories to be seen and remembered.

John Halpin's *Joanna* and *Sisters* were created by scanning actors in a spherical dome of cameras that can capture minute levels of detail and then replicating the subjects as 3D models. His actors are unable to see the camera, unsure where to look and gaze off into the distance. Halpin situates these figures in deliberately artificial contexts that challenge our understanding of scale and reality, as well as setting up a tension between imagined worlds and the domestic objects and suburban architecture that populate the images.

In **Ailbhe Ní Bhriain's** *The Muses (1)*, archival photographs of early colonial exploits are collaged with images of rock surfaces and geological strata. Ní Bhriain notes an affinity here: the legibility of both cultural and geological histories require the very destruction of those same histories. The artist's use of fabric also points to this idea, with various veils and drapes often employed in staging such depictions of the orient. The series *Inscriptions* similarly employs techniques of collage as a means of uncovering the past. Referring to the 16th Century author Samuel Quiccheberg's text 'Inscriptions of the Immense Theatre' thought to be the earliest published writing on museology, Ní Bhriain collapses established categories into new and unfamiliar arrangements, suggesting the contingency of all description in a museum context.

Women of Ireland - Stories We Share, a project by **Lisa Butterly and Lisa McCormack**, presents a new and updated version of Cathleen Ni Houlihan, a personification of Irish nationalism found in art and literature (most notably in the 1902 play by W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory). Through photographic portraits of contemporary Irish women, the series explores issues such as voting rights, religion, emigration and the role of women in the workplace, with different settings and scenarios devised to emphasise the significance of their chosen subjects. Their subjects are both notable and unfamiliar, from all levels of society, with each portrait acting as a record of the lives of Irish women and as an agent of change and encouragement for future generations.

The experience of day-to-day life in rural Ireland informs **Miriam O'Connor's** practice. In 2013, she returned to her family's farm after the death of her brother, who had managed the business for almost three decades and whose responsibilities were passed on to the artist, her sister and their mother. O'Connor explores these events in her series *Tomorrow is Sunday*, a project incorporating photographs, texts, logbooks and inventories, which examines the ways in which grief is processed through both artistic and agricultural labour. The work also captures the role of women in a fundamentally male-dominated industry, illuminating their often-unacknowledged contributions to the running of a farm.

Alan Phelan's work revives an obsolete method of photography in order to explore ideas of image circulation and political activism. The Joly Screen Process was invented in Ireland in the 1890s by John Joly, a physics professor at Trinity College Dublin. His technique, which used different screens to expose and view the image, was deemed commercially unviable compared to the Autochrome process of the Lumière Brothers and ultimately fell into obscurity. Phelan's renewal of this process – realised as unique photographic prints displayed in light-boxes – both honours Ireland's forgotten role in photographic history and questions the dominant narratives that seem to shape its national identity.

The archive serves as a site of exploration for **Mhairi Sutherland**, whose work delves into the historical papers of Robert Erskine Childers and his family. Despite having served under the British in the Boer War and later the First World War, Childers was converted – largely by his wife Mary Alden 'Molly' Osgood – to the cause of Irish independence and, in 1914, helmed a boat expedition to supply weaponry to Irish Volunteers. His opposition to the Anglo-Irish Treaty and role in the Civil War would eventually lead to his arrest, conviction and execution by firing squad in 1922. Sutherland's image *Re-imagining Treason (Childers)* is a unique cyanotype print made from the artist's drawing of a silhouette found in the Childers family archive.

Adrian Duncan's series *Pyramids* presents a literal mode of celebration: the firework display. The images appear almost abstract, rendered indistinct by both the ephemeral nature of the subject matter and by Duncan's use of an outdated mobile phone camera that is itself already obsolete. However, the images also reference a very particular time and place: taken between 11.55pm, December 31, 2015 and 12.12am, January 1, 2016 at Börnholmer Brücke in Northern Berlin. This location was once one of the main crossing points between East and West during the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989 and, given its relevance to contemporary German history, has since become a site of celebration and revelry, a bridge from one year, one era, into the next.

The relentlessness of the news cycle is expressed in the sheer amount of information published in daily newspapers. **James Parkin's** series *Folding News* captures this sense of abundance and excess, and the ways in which this surfeit of material shapes our attention. Since 2015, he has been selecting, cutting out and folding images from newspapers, date-stamping each example and organising in chronological and categorial orders. Each fold commemorates its moment of production and dissemination, and its contribution to a cumulative, collective knowledge. Displayed as a grid, the selection represents only a fraction of the estimated 40-60,000 folds that Parkin has created in the past few years, and a mere sliver of the number of newspapers printed during this time.

Dervla Baker's still life images capture mundane, everyday objects, assembled into precarious compositions, with ramshackle things perched on chairs and stools, and left discarded in an otherwise vacant building. *Waiting* stems from her research into Cork's now-defunct Sample Studios, a city-centre artist-led space situated in an old FÁS building – the Irish training and employment agency – which housed over 80 artist studios. The site was both the beneficiary and victim of Ireland's economic travails, having been turned over to artists after the recession of 2008 before being privately purchased in 2012 and subsequently demolished. In the weeks following its evacuation, Baker gained access to photograph the remnants. Her images convey an environment of creativity and play, abandonment and desolation.

Lian Bell's *Sum Total (Becoming things again)* addresses her memories of her deceased grandfather Tim through a combination of image and text. In 2002, while on a trip home from London, she began photographing his remaining belongings – a worn leather armchair, liquor bottles, mugs and dishes, a set of false teeth – while conducting interviews with family members about these household objects and their relation to him. Her grandmother Elizabeth, who was living in a nursing home at the time and whose memory was gradually diminishing, contributed to these conversations. This work, which initially informed Bell's 2002 performance piece *Something to do with planes*, is shown here as a series of photographic diptychs, captioned with excerpts from these recordings.

Cáit Fahey's series *Collecting* exemplifies both the annual rituals carried out by her subjects and the artist's own ongoing observation and documentation of these events. Since 2013, she has photographed young people in inner city Dublin gathering objects and materials for their Halloween bonfires, a particularly Irish tradition that has its origins in the Celtic pagan custom of lighting bonfires to mark the beginning of Winter. Fahey's interest stems from her childhood memories of living between two rival neighbourhoods and their annual competition to steal each other's firewood. However, in recent years, these communities have been undergoing redevelopment with numerous families moving to different parts of the city. The images capture the last embers of a tradition slowly dying out.

In **David Creedon's** photographs of a derelict, dilapidated household, the artist illuminates the life of Mary Sullivan of Adrigole, West Cork. She initially left her home in 1913, travelling as a steerage passenger on the RMS Baltic and embarking at Ellis Island eight days later with only 15 dollars. Thirty-five years later, she would return to Ireland and to this same house, bringing with her mementoes and souvenirs of that time in America. Creedon's photographs offer evidence of Sullivan's past, from the United States Lines shipping tags that still hang from her luggage to the bookshelf holding an array of belongings, pointing to the journeys undertaken by untold masses of Irish men and women, many of whom never returned home.

In his ongoing project *Asylum Archive*, the artist **Vukašin Nedeljković** has documented almost 6000 Direct Provision Centres across Ireland, cataloguing a carceral system of over 150 'holding camps' that are situated most often on the periphery of cities or rural towns. Segregated from wider society, asylum seekers are forced to live in overcrowded, unhygienic conditions and according to strict rules of routine, materials and activity. Nedeljković was housed in Direct Provision from April 2007 to November 2009 and this project, which began as a coping mechanism for living in a state of sustained insecurity, has grown into a collaboration between asylum seekers, artists, academics and activists. The images capture the isolation of these sites, often set in former convents, barracks, hotels and holiday complexes.

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