



None Went Mad None Ran Away

Rowan Sexton

21 Jan 2012 - 18 Feb 2012

In 1989, Angus Fairhurst wrote an essay titled "Some went mad and some ran away, the great majority stayed faithful until physical death." Fairhurst's text resonated with Damien Hirst, as he adopted part of the title in 1994, for the exhibition he curated at the Serpentine Gallery, London, Some Went Mad... Some Ran Away. The exhibition investigated themes of fear, loss, hope, death and fantasy, in response to the bleak early 90's in London. It also happened to be an exhibition of enormous significance, as the selected work was from a group of artists known as the Young British Artists (YBAs). Many of the artists had studied together previously at Goldsmiths, and some had participated in Freeze, an exhibition organized by Damien Hirst and Angus Fairhurst in 1988, which was also a pivotal point in the formation of the YBAs. Michael Craig-Martin, artist and tutor to the YBAs described their success at the time as "... a combination of youthful bravado, innocence, fortunate timing, good luck, and, of course, good work."

It seems especially fitting at this present time in Ireland, to look back at how artists of the time in London countered the situation in which they found themselves. Following a surge of positivity and optimism, the artistic response captured a snapshot of a moment in time. With so many factors at play in social, economic, and geopolitical contexts currently, we are seeing more of a dejected, despondent and uneasy population in Ireland. Low morale is abundant, and as times are getting tougher, more people are choosing to leave.

Asserting self-confidence and a shared sensibility in an effort to capture the same sense of defiance displayed by the YBAs, and their determination to overcome the situation they found themselves in, during the mid-90's - a group of artists have been invited to examine a statement by Fairhurst, subverted to read "None Went Mad... None Ran Away", and address the same prevalent themes explored in Hirst's exhibition. There is a need for reinvention, vigour and a phoenix-like renaissance in society. There is a history of resilience here. It is simply a matter of finding that inner strength, looking forward and creating a future.

Peter Burns' work has a tactile and textural quality, often incorporating materials to the paint that produce a clotted consistency to his finished pieces. The immediate knotty and gnarled surfaces of his paintings camouflage the elegant, considered and delicate touch Burns applies to his work. He wandered in contemplation, lingering amongst the fragrant shrubs, of the garden's far recesses, 2012, is no exception. This dark composition depicts the protagonist suspiciously ambling through the garden; pondering, hands clasped, deep in thought. The sombre background is contrasted by the heightened colour of blossoming flowers and foliage, and the pale outfit of the character. Burns' intentional faux naïve style is present in this piece; furnished on the individual's elongated, exaggerated and stylised caricature. A sense of foreboding pervades the work, the solitary figure lost in thought, on the cusp of something. . . Burn's paintings are often playful re-workings of romantic themes, with allusions to faraway places. This piece invites the viewer to contemplate, like the subject, the fears, anxieties, or simple thoughts that preoccupy the mind; which lend this mysterious man a certain pathos.

Mark Clare presents a photographic print, DreamHouse, 2011, an image of a modest geometric building, which he constructed and exhibited in Georgia, USA, 2011. The simple structure was informed by vernacular shotgun housing, common in the Southern States until the 1920's. Initially seen as a middle-class abode, these houses became the residence of a poorer population. Historically, these structures were a simple and affordable solution for housing, which over time degenerated into slums, on account of the cheap materials used to build them. Clare used nondurable, cheap supplies to make the piece, such as plastic and tarpaulin; as a critique of modern sculpture, yet referencing the architectural legacy. The vivid, cerulean-blue twilight sky in the print, focused alongside the illuminated rooftop and windows, and striking yellow door, allude to Mondrian; an iconic Modernist, in conjunction with the geometric structure itself. The warm, welcoming glow, emanating from the DreamHouse, offering comfort, contrasts deeply with the stark and bare geometry of the building. The equilibrium of the utopian ideal espoused by Modernism is left wavering, as a result of the choice of disposable materials, the transitory nature of the work, and the collapse of the contemporary property market. The tongue-in-cheek title of the work addresses weighty concerns about the capitalist dream imploding, as global financial meltdown takes hold, yet offers potential solace to those in emergency zones in need of quickly assembled, inexpensive, shelter.

Jessica Conway investigates language, narrative, and the voice in her practice. Particularly intrigued by speech, she plays with basic structures and syntax; deconstructing and amplifying language conventions, the voice's various inflections and the ways in which they destabilize the word. Laughter is something difficult to re-enact and contain. With minute shifts in speed, duration or context it can vary drastically in its connotations. With Conway's composition, 100 Bits of Laugh (1 about every 5 seconds), 2012, short snippets of laughs are released into the space every five seconds. Some are evidently laughter, others more like a scream - there are also sections where all one hears is the taking in or releasing of a breath. The literal title and the rigid organisation of exactly 100 bits (1 almost every five seconds), presents the gestural laugh in an absurdly particular and restrained manner. There is a playfulness to Conway's work, that is taken into account in this exhibition. It is realized in the dual sense of both its musical connotations, and it's understanding of the brief. She toys with the notion of laughter, tying in closely to the exhibition title; None Went Mad... None Ran Away. Conway's distorted sound bites of laughter flirt with the listeners perception, by manipulating and editing voices to a point where the remaining sounds may occasionally be seen as evocative of someone on the verge of madness.

There is an association with form in the work of Niall de Buitléar, his work is highly focused, with meticulous attention to detail. De Buitléar's abstracted, biomorphic compositions, both Untitled, 2011, feature respectively, a monochromatic, white on black, negative ink drawing, and a hand-crafted, circular, black paper lattice. The semantic construction of the drawing features numerous, identical, hand-drawn, white ink squares on black paper; collated to form a larger disc-like shape. From a distance the work is indicative of the formalist structure of the grid, however upon closer inspection minute details emerge; the idiosyncrasies of the work and the slight imperfections; highlighting the individual nature of each component in the larger field of squares. Both pieces are suggestive of multiplying cellular components, evocative of a mitosis induced replication of forms. The post-minimal aesthetic, and geometric concerns in de Buitléar's practice, stress the methodical procedures behind each work, in this case, drawing the viewers attention to the voids and spaces in-between.

Gabrielle Dunne uses the romantic landscape and its sublime qualities to critique the marginalization of animal spaces, often reinventing found imagery to complement his imagined narratives. In his present work, his painting The Passing of MacTire, 2011, abstractly depicts bringing the last wolf slain in Ireland from its dying place in Carlow, to find a possible paradise in the islands of Svalbard, on the islands untouched arctic wilderness. MacTire is the Irish term for wolf, which directly translates to mean- son of the land. Dunne's lupine concerns continue in Leaving Dublin Zoo, 2012; as he portrays the moment when in 2011, wolves at Dublin Zoo dug a series of tunnels in close proximity to the perimeter fence, with an apparent intention to escape; foiled by the packs

disappearance from their enclosure, which drew attention to their actions. These works look at the historical plight of the Irish wolf, now extinct, and the allegory of the wolf, or 'son of the land' applicable to contemporary society, as the rise of Irish emigrants acts as a real reminder of the long-term implications that stretch ahead of us all.

A number of things led Caoimhe Kilfeather to work with coal. The elemental and simple qualities of the material, composed of long-extinct plants and shrubs – a physical manifestation of a geological period of time which no longer exists. Coal is traditionally burned in a fire, and is also associated with forms of labour and production very different to that of Kilfeather's use. In plain existence, 2011, exploits the material potential of the substance through the work – perhaps a somewhat romantic interaction with a material usually overlooked for its aesthetic potential. The form itself is somewhat allusive or enigmatic - difficult to gauge what it is exactly; artefact, prototype, copy, replica, a scaled down model of something, or a fragment? Kilfeather hopes that the duplicity of form and function invoke a sense of intrigue and inquiring. The coal sculpture is a handmade, carved object; the result of a particular period of labour, and time spent with a material, almost futile to work with. The painstaking process of cutting, sanding and polishing is apparent in the completed work; the sheen of the surface perhaps synonymous with a more precious stone, contrasting the exposed, un-manipulated areas which reveal the poverty of the material.

Barbara Knezevic's sculptural and installation works are posited as a means of testing the viability of ideas. Minimalist in style, these objects are self-defining. There is a sense of fortitude, prevalence and triumph present in these formations, yet they depend on the meaning and feeling that is directed towards them for their vitality. The act of transformation these objects have undergone, is derived from a convergence of materials and meanings, where 'things' have the potential to become something other than themselves. Inevitable Tension Device, 2012, is a sculptural work, composed of an entwined ball of rubber pallet bands and a cast concrete sphere, placed opposite each other with a remaining pallet band stretched between them. The durability of the concrete, and the elasticity of the rubber pallet bands act in opposition to one another, creating a tentative effect on the single band stretched tautly between each orb. How long before the stress of this structure causes it to snap? Is this an analogy of the pressured situation people are currently in? And if so, how long before we all reach breaking point?

A meditation on loss, State of Suspension, 2012, explores the fragility of the human condition, frozen somewhere between life and death. Shot with a high-speed camera, a human figure and water defy the laws of gravity. The film directly investigates core aspects of physical matter and time. It is set to an original score by Irish-German composer Jürgen Simpson. Much of Clare Langan's past oeuvre has explored the fragility of mankind in relation to nature, with the camera firmly focused on the landscape and the environment. In State of Suspension the camera lens is turned more directly onto the human figure itself; exploring ideas of our existence, our mortality and the spaces in-between.

This shift of focus in Langan's work opens out a new phase in her film and video works. In State of Suspension there is no clear distinction between dream and reality, and the space that the film creates, becomes a submersive world that the viewer is drawn into. In this emotive work, a woman appears to float midair, or levitate upwards, suggesting a transition from one world to another, and is evocative of Ophelia. Flashes of what seem to be memory interject the space in which the woman exists. Rain rises upwards, permeating each film frame. Langan's approach to the filmic image has always been interdisciplinary; taking both from the language of cinema as well as that of painting. Her attention to architecture and space is evident from the films locations, alongside how the work is perceived as a video installation.

Mark McGreevy depicts a stylized landscape with a view of pine trees on the horizon, in a lush palette, echoing hues evocative of Bonnard. The tree as an enduring symbol of nature is addressed, and its broad associative meanings throughout history, in biblical, mythological, and narrative contexts. In Instrumentalists, 2012, these trees are more utilitarian; in direct contrast to the functional, subsidised tree farms that have become a common sight in the Irish landscape, lacking in the historical influences usually associated with trees. In the foreground is a small pond with a reed sticking out of it - something that we would associate as a breathing device. It raises the question of whether there is someone under the surface hiding from something, or taking part in a game. Although no figure is apparent in the landscape, there is a suggestion of human presence, which interrupts the solitude and peaceful rural terrain. McGreevy's colourful composition grasps the natural setting, responding to an evolving landscape that may become unrecognizable over time.

The idealistic imagery found on a typical jigsaw puzzle echoes the escapist nature of its objective. Its construction requires time, and a visual awareness attuned to the specified image. Maria McKinney explores the relationship between the creation of the image and time, challenging the minds perception of the static picture. In this work, Elvis, 2011, a predetermined jigsaw is altered; removing the majority of each piece of the puzzle. Following this process of reduction, the minor remnants of the surviving elements are arranged in a recognisable format. As a result of this dissolution, the viewer's visual and cognitive processes work to reassemble and recognise the initial image. What remains is like an apparition; visible at a distance, but simply a collection of assorted, dismembered jigsaw pieces up close. The vision of Elvis hovers before the viewer, an illusion of the iconic figure – the sporadic dots completed by the viewers familiarity with his image, subconsciously filling in the blank spaces in the frame.

Fiona Mulholland's practice is primarily concerned with examining fragments of everyday life and making visible oppositional elements of urban existence. Currently questioning how we solicit physical and psychological places of retreat, she uses appropriated objects and materials in order to investigate the tensions between dreams, fantasy and the realities of modern living. Are we there yet?, 2011, allows for different connotations to be read depending on the context of the communication. The piece reflects Mulholland's interest in collective memory, and becomes a reflection of universal hopes and aspirations, whether in a social, economic or personal context; simply raising an appropriate question to be asked at this time.

Sharon White's sculptures take the form of conventional everyday items. Through changes in scale and material, the meaning and purpose of these objects changes or diminishes. Her current work explores depression, loss, grief and the complexities of moving on and surpassing this. The work mainly focuses on removing familiar characteristics of the object, or making them unmanageable; thereby allowing them to become dysfunctional and ineffective by distorting their meaning and importance. In the case of Lifebuoy, 2011, the very nature of it as a rescue device calls into question the user's choice to be saved. The piece has been manufactured from materials not suitable for that particular purpose, and the inclusion of barbed wire reminds of the trauma of opening up old wounds or facing up to difficulties in order to surmount them.

The invited artists have individually addressed the selected themes of fear, loss, hope, death and fantasy in the exhibition, *None Went Mad... None Ran Away*, that correlate with their own research interests. The elements from the brief have been interrogated in a range of media, and offer a myriad of diverging responses. The works converge, as the artists' seek a greater understanding of the world around them, the current societal flux, and concerns for what awaits us all in the future. Text by Rowan Sexton, January 2012.

Rowan Sexton is a curator based in Dublin. She has previously worked in IMMA, the National Gallery and the Hugh Lane.