

**Art, archaeology and the contemporary:** The *Ábhar agus Meon* exhibition series  
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*In the summer of 2008, I curated a series of contemporary art projects entitled *Ábhar agus Meon* as part of Ireland's hosting of the Sixth World Archaeological Congress at University College Dublin. The projects were placed in the shared spaces between the contemporary arts, archaeology and heritage in Ireland. This article is a reflective statement and contextualization of the projects and their outcomes. Full information and images of all the works are available at: [www.amexhibition.com](http://www.amexhibition.com).*

**Art and an archaeological sensibility:**  
*Disciplinary contexts*

Our world is a palimpsest of temporalities, of traces and residues both of things from the past and phenomena of today but also possibilities for the future.<sup>1</sup> Through the layers of our palimpsest percolate a constellation of things – a cobblestone from a 19<sup>th</sup> century Dublin street, a topography of a medieval street-scape, flints from a Mesolithic archaeological site or a ticket-stub from this past weekend's GAA match at Croke park (see Witmore 2006; González-Ruibal 2008). As part of our methods of coping with daily life, we ascribe order to these occurrences – a temporal structure which allows us to rationalize the contemporary appearance of these things today (see Thomas 2004).

This archaeological sensibility has a specific history and modern context of development, and whether or not these things are evidence, traces or residues of pasts, the engagement, negotiation and mediation of relationships with these things is decidedly contemporary (see Shanks 1992; Latour 1993). Archaeology is not simply about the past. It is more about a hope for a past – a dream of a past. The performance of archaeology is an attempt to realize these dreams, these pasts, but to control and structure their appearances through rationally manifested knowledge and information, but to focus only on the scientific aspects of archaeology is, however, to only tell half of the story. The narrative of archaeology is as much, if not more so, about the fascination of encountering and mediating things today whose stories one is compelled to construct or reconstruct from traces and residues, absences and presences. It is a curiosity about things and a drive to mediate the experiences of things to render the world intelligible today which underpins the archaeological sensibility.

Institutionally, archaeology owes its genesis to art historical traditions as it shares a common history in the modern development of strategies of seeing, viewing and visualizing (see Molyneaux 1997; Moser & Smiles 2004; Thomas 2004; Russell 2006). Augmented by the scientific revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, a disparate collection of professionals began to articulate, in their leisure time, a sensibility towards those traces and residues of bygone eras witnessed in the world around them. Broadly described as 'antiquarians', these passionate individuals amassed extensive collections

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the term 'thing' in this mode of argumentation is a reference to the more philosophically rich, German word 'ding' and its association to the potentially radical phenomenological theories in the early works of Martin Heidegger. For a more in depth discussion of these theories and their application to contemporary mobilizations of phenomenological approaches to experience, see Latour & Weibel 2005.

of curious objects and artifacts and produced a large body of publications which in time would become the foundation of a new discipline of archaeology – founded on modern scientific principles of depth, linear time and comparative analysis (see Thomas 2004). It was during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century that disciplinary specialization led to the development of archaeological methods and practices of discovery, documentation and interpretation distinct and separate from those of art history (see Russell 2006; Jorge & Thomas Forthcoming). Due to this separation between art historical and archaeological scholarship, the development of archaeology was not directly subject to the criticisms of and commentaries by other disciplines relating to visual and material culture. While the archaeologies of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century served to articulate and embed ethno-nationalistic narratives in the physical objects and landscapes of European nation-states, movements in the arts were deconstructing the authoritative potential of art objects as sources for knowledge or essentialised truth.

At the same time as archaeology's role in articulating truth-claims to ethnic identities in Europe was being developed, art movements such as Futurism issued manifestos violently calling for the end of past-oriented societies.<sup>2</sup> Artworks from later movements, such as Marcel Duchamp's 'Fountain' (1917) (Dadaism) and René Magritte's 'The Treason of Images' (1928-9) (Surrealism) questioned and undermined the ability of the object, the image or text to represent or convey authentic meaning or 'truth'. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century European political movements' use of archaeological information was, however, unaffected by these movements, and the burgeoning discipline of archaeology lacked intensive external or internal critical debate on the issues raised in the arts. Instead, politicians aided by prehistorians utilised archaeological artefacts through 'cultural historical'<sup>3</sup> models of the past to represent and bolster ethno-national identities and claims to territorial regions such as in the Irish Free State (Cooney 1996; Crooke 2000), Falangist Spain (Díaz-Andreu 1993; 1995; Díaz-Andreu & Ramírez Sánchez 2004), the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Klejn 1993; Shnirelman 1995; 1996) and National Socialist Germany (Arnold 1990; Arnold & Hassmann 1995). It is especially problematic that archaeological artefacts and monuments are still understood as manifestations of

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<sup>2</sup> *The Futurist Manifesto*, written by F.T.E. Marinetti, appeared in *Le Figaro* (Paris) under the heading 'Le Futurisme' 20 February 1909. This was a violent declaration of fear of the stagnating affect of a overly past-oriented society: 'It is in Italy that we are issuing this manifesto of ruinous and incendiary violence, by which we today are founding Futurism, because we want to deliver Italy from its gangrene of professors, archaeologists, tourist guides and antiquaries. Italy has been too long the great second-hand market. We want to get rid of the innumerable museums which cover it with innumerable cemeteries.' This sentiment is also articulated in the thought of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) and echoed by Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) and Theodor Adorno (1903–1969). Marinetti saw it as the charge of the Futurists to deliver Italy from this past-oriented society by using poetry as a means of moving society forward. For Marinetti, 'poetry must be a violent assault on the unknown'. In subsequent years following Marinetti's manifesto, other Futurists manifestos were articulated relating to specific fields of human endeavour (e.g. painting, music, sculpture, architecture, feminism and lust). For further details see Cochrane & Russell 2007, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Cultural historical models of the past were originally developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and were based on the premise that it was possible to identify the locations, territories and movements of groups of people based on the material remains of the past. This methodology led to the de facto assumption that certain types of material remains represented cohesive group identities and that the depositional patterns of these material remains could, if identified through archaeological practice, document the territories and movements of these peoples. For further discussion see Trigger 1989, 148 and Gamble 2004.

national and ethnic identity and are used to market national heritage and tourism industries while works of Duchamp, Magritte and others (e.g. Joseph Beuys & Andy Warhol) are popularly appreciated as comments on the inability for cultural objects to embody authoritative truth, knowledge, meanings or values (see Russell 2006).

Instead of engaging these criticisms, archaeological institutions chose to garner power, clout and influence through the explication of romantic narratives of embedded national identities and ethnic claims to lands as ancestral territory – as heritage (Kohl & Fawcett 1995; Díaz-Andreu & Champion 1996). In the wake of the tragedies of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, rather than review the epistemological underpinnings of the discipline, archaeology would still advance some ‘cultural historical’ strategies (e.g. Childe 1947), develop ‘processual’<sup>4</sup> methodologies based on the rigorous application of the scientific method (e.g. Willey & Phillips 1958) and rely on positivism and scientific objectivity (e.g. Binford 1965) as a means to control and structure the narratives of the past.<sup>5</sup> This turn towards object-oriented interrogation and argumentation did help build archaeology as a respected discipline or ‘soft’ science with some ‘hard’ methodologies. It did, however, also allow for the creation of essentialised truth claims for the construction of modern national identities made evident in material culture and heritage – critical components for the justification of contemporary heritage and roots tourism (see Kaplan 1994). This process of reifying contemporary identities through objects and artefacts reinforced divisions between archaeology and contemporary artistic engagements with the things of our shared world. Over the last fifteen years, movements within archaeology and the arts have, however, begun to undercut the divisions between specializations (see Shanks 1992; Pearson & Shanks 2001; Renfrew 2003; Renfrew *et al.* 2004; Pearson 2006; Witmore 2006; Ingold 2007; Russell 2006; Cochrane & Russell 2007; Russell forthcoming). It is in the spirit of these possibilities of collaborative exchanges between the arts and archaeology that the *Ábhar agus Meon* exhibition series was positioned.

### ***Ábhar agus Meon:***

#### *A brief statement of purpose*

Both artists and archaeologists are skilled negotiators, mediators and translators of things. Both have opportunities to steward, provoke and subvert our ways of being in the world. Today, increasingly dynamic relationships are developing between artists and archaeologists. In response to this, the *Ábhar agus Meon* exhibition series was conceived to celebrate, interrogate and explore new and longstanding relationships

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<sup>4</sup> Cultural historical approaches to the past generally assumed that artefacts could only be documented, recorded and catalogued, producing timelines and the ‘archaeological record, but had no further use in the study of past peoples. Processual archaeology asserted that through the rigorous application of scientific method to the study of artefacts in all the qualities, constructive statements could be made about the lives of past peoples. As such, processualism is built upon to the anthropological theory of cultural evolutions and the assumption that culture is outside and separate to the body and is a means for humans to adapt to environments (e.g. White 1959). Thus the study of the material culture remains of past peoples (which survived these peoples) could provide factual information about the lifeworlds of people who had once lived. For a discussion of this movement in archaeological theory, see Trigger 1989 and Gamble 2004.

<sup>5</sup> For an introduction to these and other movements in archaeological theory, see Gamble 2004. For an in-depth history of these movements, see Trigger 1989.

between art and archaeology through the practices and processes of contemporary arts.<sup>6</sup>

The project was initially inspired by the collaborative exhibition of contemporary art and archaeology established by the *Rosc* exhibitions (1967; 1971; 1977) in Ireland in the 1960s and 70s and more recently seen in *Beyond the Pale* (1994) at the Irish Museum of Modern Art. It also drew motivation from the excavation and reconstruction of Francis Bacon's studio in at the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin in 1998 as example of the collaborative of archaeological and artistic thought and practice (see Campbell 2000; McGrath 2000; Wilson 2000). In all of these projects, divisions between the methodologies and sensibilities of the disciplines still remained largely unquestioned, untested and uncriticized.

To challenge such prevalent distinctions between the ways humans encounter things, *Ábhar agus Meon* turned towards the rich etymologies of the Irish language to explore ways of negotiating, mediating and translating the relationships entwining humans and things. 'Ábhar' carries meanings of not only materials and matters but also subjects and themes, while 'meon' hints at mentality, ethos, spirit and temperament. Rather than merely asserting polarisations of mind and body, the theme *Ábhar agus Meon* suggested a multiplicity of intra-relationships between mutually indistinguishable conceptions of things and thoughts.

*Ábhar agus Meon* occurred in spaces throughout Dublin in the summer of 2008 and was organised as part of Ireland's hosting of the Sixth World Archaeological Congress at University College Dublin.<sup>7</sup> Local and international contemporary artists offered new and old work in exhibitions, installations and performances on UCD's campus, in Newman House on St Stephen's Green and at the Irish Museum of Modern Art. Through their work, *Ábhar agus Meon* explored the materials which constitute things, the tempering of materials through artistic and archaeological processes, the shared subjects of artistic and archaeological inquiry, the collaborative spirit of artistic and archaeological endeavours, the ethos of artistic and archaeological mediations, and the mentalities represented, constructed and subverted through artistic and archaeological expression.

### **The project's design**

As the project developed, it took the form of a series of off-site contemporary art projects. Its realization had qualities of an archaeological research design. Taking the archaeological paradigm and the heritage gaze as surfaces throughout Dublin upon which to work, three case studies, or sites, were selected: Newman House, St Stephen's Green, the Irish Museum of Modern Art/Royal Hospital Kilmainham environment? and the Health Sciences Building, UCD.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For more information on the *Ábhar agus Meon* exhibition series, please see: <http://www.amexhibition.com>.

<sup>7</sup> For more information on the Sixth World Archaeological Congress, please see: <http://www.ucd.ie/wac-6>.

<sup>8</sup> For an excellent discussion of the impact of the 'heritage' paradigm in Ireland see Brett 1996.

Spaces were then identified in which artists would be able to interrogate, explore and create. As curator, I saw my primary roles as instigator and facilitator.<sup>9</sup> My main intention was to create spaces in which artists could work, support the realization of the artists' work and design the structures and relationships of the spaces to encourage a rich fabric of temporalities and concepts to which the artist could respond.

In establishing the spaces, it was not simply the structures, surfaces and objects which were critical. It was the lived relationships and conversations of those involved in constituting the spaces that was sometimes more important. Relationships with Ruth Ferguson of UCD, Jerome O Drisceoil of the Green On Red Gallery and Christina Kennedy of the Irish Museum of Modern Art were core to the curatorial conversations with the artists. The process of building these relationships was in many respects similar to the development of relationships with local communities in heritage areas or near archaeological excavations. The role of social partnerships in the realization and constitution of effective workspaces for the artists was fundamental to the success of the project.

Each site/case study had a specific research theme and focus which formed a point of departure for the artists' work. Newman House was approached as a heritage space whose architecture and temporal relationships could be recalibrated through contemporary art. The Irish Museum of Modern Art and Royal Hospital Kilmainham were approached as an opportunity to undercut temporal divisions in space. While both institutions inhabit the same building and grounds, one half is for modern and contemporary practice while the other is for heritage. The Health Sciences Building at UCD was approached as a case study of object-oriented thought where artists' work could illustrate, in an almost Brechtian fashion, the 'fourth wall' of scientific objectification and offer possibilities of other ways of engaging things in the world.<sup>10</sup>

### **Recalibrating heritage spaces:**

#### *Chronoscope, Newman House, 85-86 St Stephen's Green*

The theme of *Chronoscope* at Newman House was the recalibration of temporal expectations in a heritage space (Ábhar agus Meon 2008). Composed of two houses and a Victorian hall, Newman House is an example of a conserved heritage space.<sup>11</sup> Number 85 was built in 1738 in the Palladian style and was the first stone faced house on St Stephen's Green and has some of the finest examples of stuccowork by the Swiss Lafranchini brothers in Ireland and stunning examples of high-relief plasterwork, such as the Apollo Belvedere in The Apollo Room (see Figure 1). Number 86 was built in 1765

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<sup>9</sup> For a good discussion of curation and curatorial strategies see O'Neill 2008 & specifically Pierce 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Bertolt Brecht's (1898-1956) 'epic theatre' strategies developed to 'break' the fourth wall of theatrical convention. The 'fourth wall' refers to the absent wall in a three-sided theatre. This absent wall separates the audience from the action on stage, and the maintenance of the 'fourth wall' is a critical component of the illusory nature of traditional theatre as simulacrum. Notably, this convention has continued in the new media of digital computer games where the 'fourth wall' is not immaterial but is the computer screen itself. For a more extensive discussion of Brecht's 'epic theatre' and his relationship to the 'fourth wall' see Meech 1994.

<sup>11</sup> For further information on Newman House see:  
<http://www.amexhibition.com/newmanhouse.html>.

and is known for its fine stuccowork by Robert West. The houses were also home to many well-known narratives and histories. Richard Chapell Whaley, who built No 86, was the father of Buck Whaley, the notorious 19<sup>th</sup> century gambler. The Catholic University of Ireland was established in the houses in 1854 under the direction of Dr John Henry Newman, which would become the home of University College Dublin. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins passed away in the houses in 1889, and James Joyce attended lectures in the houses when he attended University College Dublin from 1898 to 1902.



*Figure 1. 'Inversion' (2008) by Nigel Rolfe in The Apollo Room of Number 85, Newman House, St Stephen's Green. Photograph by Ros Kavanagh*

Ruth Ferguson is curator of Newman House, and she had been involved in conversations around the development of the exhibition series early on. It was she who presented the possibility of engaging Newman House as a venue. She was interested in returning to the potential for a curated series of installations to engage with the heritage fabric of the houses.<sup>12</sup> An interesting dimension was added to the project when it was then brought to Jerome O Drisceoil of the Green On Red Gallery. It was thought that an off-site gallery project would illustrate the possibilities not only of artists working in heritage spaces but also of arts institutions. With O Drisceoil's partnership, a selection of artists represented by the Green On Red Gallery were approached: Alice Maher, Bea McMahon, Dennis McNulty, Paul Mosse, Niamh O'Malley and Nigel Rolfe. The initial site visits were conducted as informal tours of the house by Ruth Ferguson allowing the stories and heritage dimensions of the house to give rise to curatorial conversations. This conversational process allowed for the free response of the artists to the spaces but guided and informed by a sensitivity to the heritage dimensions of the spaces. The result was that each artist was drawn to a different room in the house, offering work to take up residency in spaces long unoccupied.

Working in a heritage space comes with limitations, particularly in respecting the integrity and fabric of the building's architecture. Interestingly, many of the artists noted that instead of feeling constrained by the limitations of the space, they felt liberated. By working in a heritage space, they felt they were liberated from the pressures of being 'contemporary'. Working in a white cube, every aspect and trace of agency can be scrutinized as part of the artist's work – the artist in effect becomes a specimen in a box (see O'Doherty 2000, 14). But the more dense, chaotic and complex material and temporal fabrics of the house allowed the artists' to place work in such a way that it was less possible to discern where the artists' agency began and ended. They could more freely live into the house, taking up residency rather than be overly concerned with possible residues.

Simultaneously for the House, the activation of the space through contemporary creativity brought new energy to the house, yielding new audiences, creating new stories new accesses to older or forgotten stories.<sup>13</sup> Although it might have appeared initially subversive or oppositional to place contemporary artwork within a heritage space, the sensitive way in which the artists executed their works revealed striking similarities. The passion, focus and care to execute contemporary works complimented and indeed celebrated the care and attention evident in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century artists' and architects' work.

Nigel Rolfe noted the need to compliment the house in realizing work during one of the tours. 'If you go up against the house, the house will always win,' said Rolfe.<sup>14</sup> The intensely rich surfaces and fabrics of the house were not something one could effectively subvert or indeed mimic without going so far as to either destroy the house entirely or build another house anew. In Rolfe's work 'Inversion' (2008) then, he chose to compliment the space of the Apollo Room in Number 85 by physicalising the dynamics

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<sup>12</sup> A previous contemporary art project occurred in the Salloon of No. 85. It was curated by Gavin Delahunty as part of a Gallery 3 project of the Douglas Hyde Gallery in 2005.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the role of artists in place-activation see Warwick 2006.

<sup>14</sup> For more information on Rolfe's work, please contact the Green On Red Gallery, Dublin.

of the high-relief plasterwork (see Figure 1). Remaining submerged in over one hundred litres of milk until the surface was perfectly still, Rolfe emerges from the absence of the white screen confronting the visitor with his physical presence. By placing a looped video projection of Rolfe's performance playing alongside the reliefs of the nine muses and the Apollo Belvedere, the space of the Apollo room was activated and enlivened perhaps suggesting something of the intended dynamics of the plasterworkers and the experience of viewing their high-relief works by flickering candle-light (replaced here by the flickering of a digital projector).

Echoing some of Rolfe's sentiments, Alice Maher found when visiting the house that to present work which simply emulated the form or style of the house would pale in comparison and fail to work.<sup>15</sup> Maher hoped instead to offer works which would live into the fabric of the house. She placed 'Les Jumeaux' (2008) (two ostrich eggs etched with references to Bosch's 'Garden of Earthly Delights' (1503/4)) on the table of the Bishops' Room of Number 85 in an antique vitrine on loan from the Office of Public works (see Figure 2). The placement of the works was so effective that many visitors were unsure whether the installation had always been there or not. By complimenting the aesthetics of the house, Maher was then able to offer cutting criticism and commentary on the stories of the Bishops' Room. Placing eggs etched with references to Genesis in a glass case on the table which would have been the location for the meetings of the heads of the Catholic University and later University College Dublin, Maher materialized the feminine and the mysteries of genesis as specimens and objects to be controlled and inserted into a chauvinistic structure of knowledge. Working through these stories rather than against them, Maher's installation presents something comforting and celebratory of the heritage of the house while simultaneously suggesting a satirical reading of modern dreams and desires for such spaces.



*Figure 2. 'Les Jumeaux' (2008) by Alice Maher. Photograph by Ken Williams.*

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<sup>15</sup> For more information on Maher's work, see <http://www.alicemaher.com> or contact the Green On Red Gallery, Dublin.



*Figure 3. Untitled (2007) by Paul Mosse in Room 9 of Number 86, Newman House St Stephen's Green. Photograph by Ros Kavanagh.*

For Maher and Rolfe and many of the others, it was important to work with the house, allowing it to bring an equal presence to the artists' processes. Paul Mosse's works were an example of this (see Figure 3).<sup>16</sup> The topographical qualities of his works and the intense rendering of depths through gouging out, digging and building up its surfaces echoed in form and flow the intensity and palpability of the high-relief stuccowork in the houses. This juxtaposition of the heritage and the contemporary yielded not conflict but mutual celebration of the presence required of an artist to realize quality work. Dennis McNulty noted this as a point of departure for his contribution 'Displaced Strata/Great Expectations' (see Figure 4).<sup>17</sup> Quoting Kevin Lynch, 'We preserve present signals of the past or control the present to satisfy our images of the future. Our images of the past and future are present images, continuously re-created. The heart of our sense of time is the sense of "now".' (Lynch 1972) McNulty's installation of mirrors (after Robert Smithson) in the back gardens of the house allowed for the incorporation of the modern architectures of the house often hidden from view – drain pipes, fire escapes, iron window grates. These additions, or functional embellishments of the building tell the

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<sup>16</sup> For in-depth discussions of Paul Mosse's work, see Marshall 2007 and Mosse 2007 & 2008.

<sup>17</sup> For information on McNulty's work, see <http://www.dennismcnulty.com> or contact the Green On Red Gallery, Dublin.

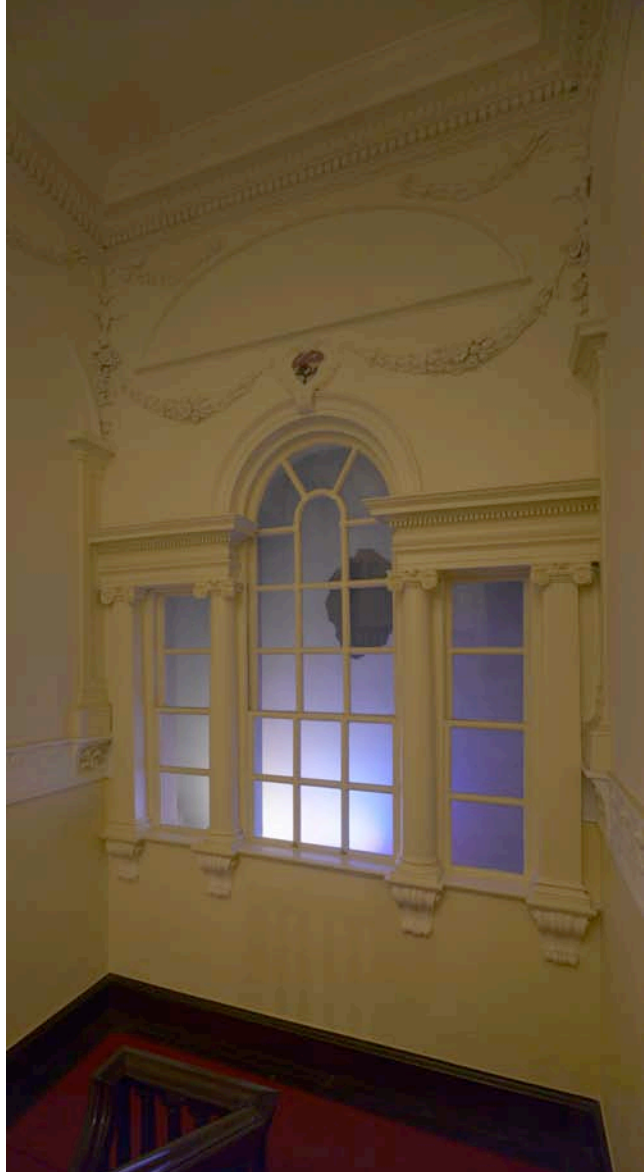
story of the shifting contemporary needs and expectations of public spaces. Viewed from the Iveagh Room of Number 86, McNulty enveloped the visitor within an omni-directional recording of himself walking a loop of the rooms of the house (after Janet Cardiff). The climax of the acoustic loop was as he entered the Iveagh Room, encountering a half-speed replay of the soundtrack of a televised series based on 'Great Expectations' which had been filmed on location in the house. Declaring the material evidence of the changing contemporary stories of the space and wrapping them in a fleeting contemporary acoustic documentation, McNulty collapses the constructed distance between the 'now' and 'then' of heritage spaces, re-presenting the house as an immediately present, multi-sensory contemporary.



*Figure 4. 'Displaced Strata/Great Expectations' (2008) by Dennis McNulty. Photograph by Ros Kavanagh.*

Reconceiving the heritage space as contemporary and realizing the contemporary qualities evident in all the work of the space liberated not only the artists but the visitors to the house from social expectations for the role of the house. Now, it was possible for Bea McMahon to offer her own meditations on the ideas of science, light and mathematical knowledge through her 'States of Wonder', seamlessly referencing the scientific deliberations and discussions of the drawing rooms of such modern houses (Fite-Wassilak 2008, 40). Other works such as 'Stairwell' by Niamh O'Malley initially were seen as interventions into the spaces of the house, but through the residency of the work they became as much a part of its as any other piece of the building's fabric

(see Figure 5).<sup>18</sup> The piece occupied the closed-off Venetian window of Number 85 which, before the construction of the Aula Maxima had looked out onto a formal garden. With an installed lighting unit and black paint playing out a juxtaposition between absences and presences of light and thus sights, O'Malley activated the stories of the conversion of spaces within the house, directing the visitor's sight towards absences of what once was and the presences of what is still possible. Perhaps the outcome of the exhibition was as simple as this: sensitive contributions to the story of the house through a collaborative deployment of artistic and archaeological sensibilities.



*Figure 5. 'Stairwell' (2008) by Niamh O'Malley in the Stairs of Number 85, Newman House, St Stephen's Green. Photograph by Ros Kavanagh.*

### **Undercutting the white cube:**

*The You That Is In It, Irish Museum of Modern Art*

The theme of *The You That Is In It* was to undercut temporal divisions and distinctions between contemporary and heritage spaces. It also was intended to constructively subvert the traditional dominance of sight in the visual arts and rupture the 'fourth wall' of museum and gallery spaces. The site for the project was the grounds of Irish Museum of Modern Art and the Royal Hospital Kilmainham. The two institutions occupy the same building and grounds, but their separate and distinct remits for modern and contemporary art and heritage respectively have developed a subtle network of divisions

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<sup>18</sup> For more information on O'Malley's work, see O'Malley 2008 or contact the Green On Red Gallery, Dublin.

both institutional and physical. The Royal Hospital was first sited at this location in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and was home to retired soldiers for almost 250 years.<sup>19</sup> In 1984, the building was refurbished and redeveloped as public heritage space, and in 1991, the Irish Museum of Modern Art was opened. The grounds shared by the institutions consist of an 18<sup>th</sup> century garden, two cemeteries, 19<sup>th</sup> century stables now occupied by a Garda Barracks and the reconstructed West Gateway formerly from St Jame's Gate.

Christina Kennedy, Senior Curator and Head of Collections at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, was instrumental in developing the project. She had been developing the curatorial programme of the *Self as Selves* exhibition (2008) which would be based in the Gordon Lambert Galleries, and in conversations, she reflected her interest in commissioning new works by artists which would take place outside of the traditional gallery spaces at the museum. As Kennedy had studied archaeology while in university, the possibility of enveloping a step outside of the gallery within an archaeological sensibility seemed a successful way of not only working outside the gallery space but also conveying a sensitivity to the palimpsestic heritage spaces of the Kilmainham grounds.

It was artist Fiona Hallinan who was approached to begin an interrogation of these spaces. Her series of 'Audio Detours', done in collaboration with Maebh Cheasty, had presented Hallinan as a successful negotiator of complex urban spaces.<sup>20</sup> These audio tours would invite participants to move through selected spaces and streetscapes and use sound and voiced text to heighten the physical and visual enmeshment of the participant within the spaces around them. Hallinan's process in realizing one of these works begins with multiple walks of the area under study complimented by research, both of a traditional scholarly manner but also utilizing informal conversations with the contemporary residents of the spaces. Her intention is to draw out those unique residues and traces in the scapes around us which suggest a more complex temporal situation, something which is more than present. Hallinan usually collaborates with sound designers in the realization of these works, working to develop a synaesthetic immersion where artistic experience is not reduced to one single sense (e.g. the visual) but is a complex mingling of senses. This is a critical aspect of Hallinan's work. To be successfully realized and completed as a work, it requires physical participation.

One of Kennedy's (2008) themes in realizing the *Self as Selves* exhibition was the multiple ways in which the relationship between art works and people manifest themselves. No two engagements with an artwork are ever the same. Some works in the exhibition declared this literally as the works would change with every step you took (i.e. Maud Cotter's *One Way of Containing Air* 1998) or would continually move due to the subtle flows of air generated by movement and breathing within the space (i.e. Julio Le Parc's *Continuel-Mobil Argent* 1967). Hallinan's work followed this theme to an extreme since it is not complete in any sense until someone chooses to participate both physically, aurally and visually in the manifestation of the walk. In a very immediate sense then, the visitor becomes a part of the artwork, and the work has as many iterations and forms as there are people willing to engage with it.

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<sup>19</sup> For a history of the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, see Childers & Stewa 2003.

<sup>20</sup> For more information on Hallinan's work, see: <http://www.notalittlepony.com>.

Hallinan chose the title *The You That Is In It* to highlight the placement of the visitor at the centre of the manifestation of visual art experience. Subtly, the title suggests that without 'you' the work could be lessened or perhaps would cease to exist at all. Following this, Hallinan presents her work as a gift or a thank you to those who take part, for she (the work) needs them. She realized the work with the help of sound designer Caoimhín Ó Raghallaigh, working with him to map the route of the tour and to develop a sound design which both complimented and undercut the experiences of the spaces at Kilmainham.<sup>21</sup> The work brings the visitor from the Gordon Lambert Galleries, through the quad of the Royal Hospital and out around the building and through the formal 18<sup>th</sup> century gardens. At points the participant's gaze is directed at things (a drainpipe, the sky, a small cobblestone) and the script and sound design of the work echo a sensation of those things or events or people which these discrete traces reference. By drawing the participant into a space where temporal distinctions between past and present are not as firm, Hallinan enacted a constellation of intimate moments shared between those walking the grounds today and the many who had before. Throughout the tour, the visitors carry a work-on-paper by Hallinan which they fold into a small pyramid just large enough to prevent it from being put into a bag or a pocket. The gifting of a two-dimensional drawing, which the visitors make into a three-dimensional form and carry with them, heightens the undercurrents of participation and performance which Hallinan wished to highlight in the visual arts.

Beginning with the intention of undercutting the role of viewing in the visual arts and highlighting the need for participation in their manifestation, Hallinan's work declared that this is a situation shared by heritage as well. By locating her artwork in the spaces where these sensibilities overlap, the heritage is made contemporary and the contemporary is implicated in a far more complex series of temporal relationships than might originally have been assumed.

**Limits of object-oriented science:**

*Glass House Stone, Health Sciences Gallery, UCD*

The theme of *Glass House Stone* was to interrogate our engagements with things and more specifically, the way archaeological sensibilities have affected these engagements. Locating the exhibition in the Health Sciences Building at University College Dublin, the exhibition's theme departed from the foundational role of scientific objectivity in the development of archaeological process. The development of archaeology into a fully-fledged university discipline was paralleled by its increasing adoption of abstract scientific methodologies and technologies of viewing (see Thomas 2004; Jorge & Thomas Forthcoming). These increased the distance between humans and things in order to create roles for archaeologists and the objects of archaeological interrogation. It is interesting that a discipline so concerned with material culture, through its methodologies and processes, renders the material qualities inert in preference for abstracted visual culture and representation (see Jorge & Thomas 2007 & Forthcoming). It is as if, in performing archaeology as a scientific discipline, a 'fourth wall' is constructed between humans and things – physically materialized as the museum display case.

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<sup>21</sup> For more information on the work of Caoimhín Ó Raghallaigh, see <http://www.stateofchassis.com>.



Figure 6. *Glass House Stone* installations featuring 'Things Fall Apart' (2008) by Andrew Burton. Photograph by Ken Williams.

The artists in *Glass House Stone* were selected to offer works which would undercut this 'fourth wall' of archaeological objectivity. The realization of the works all stemmed not from a desire to represent abstract information or knowledge but from more immediate responses to encounters with things. The artists brought sensibilities to archaeological things long since overshadowed by the need for scientific objectivity – fascination, confusion, delight, inspiration and flawed attempts to understand or share these responses (see Shanks 1992).

The exhibition housed work from 15 artists within the glazed space of the Health Sciences Gallery which separates the main building from the Health Sciences Library (see Figures 6-7). As a glass box at the heart of a science building, the show acted as a cabinet of curiosities in a very modern sense. Encountering a contemporary art exhibition was not something many who worked in the building were familiar with doing on their way to conduct research in the library. Many visitors were drawn into the space by their curiosity having seen 'odd' installations from outside the glazed space. In some ways, the exhibition played on this curiosity, suggesting one of the sensibilities of scientific objectivity is the rigorous study and engagement of those things which are curious or do not 'fit'.

Although we may feel we have advanced beyond modernity's grasp through technological enablement and philosophical reflection, the archaeological sensibility harkens back to and carries through to the present many of the strategies of objectification of early modern science. Andrew Parker's 'Ulex Europaeus' (2008) series

of watercolours of gorse – a plant often found overgrowing many to-be archaeological sites - presents one of the more intimate strategies of science – naturalist painting.<sup>22</sup> The works are at once both demonstrations of the subjectivity of hand-drawn depiction and startlingly complex and potentially accurate studies of the plant. In antiquarian traditions, this tensions between subjectivity and objectivity in illustrations of sites of interest is all the more evident. It is Caroline McCarthy's 'The Grand Detour' (2006) which both sympathetically and ironically explores the antiquarian tradition.<sup>23</sup> A set of 55 watercolours set against a grid-plan create a chorography of detritus and forgotten material things from around Brooklyn in New York City, and after touring the works you are invited to buy souvenir t-shirts, hats, mugs and pens of the artwork. Playing with the antiquarian tradition of bringing distant landscapes to urban centres for the enjoyment of colleagues as seen in McCarthy's work, Adam Burthom's 'Panoramic Field' (2007) transported worked surfaces of the turf fields of his home in Sligo. Referencing the modern project of the panoptic gaze, the seven turf-on-canvas works in 'Panoramic Field' confront modern expectations of landscapes executed with realistic perspective with immediately present two-dimensional ground, filling the full scope of the panoptic archaeological gaze.

An underlying theme for the works was archaeological fascination and the application of an archaeological sensibility in engaging the world. Two photographs from Gerard Byrne's 'In the News' sequence (2001), one of the Natural History Museum and the other of the rebuilding of Archer's Garage of Fenian Street by public order after its illegal demolition in 1999, are a literal execution of an archaeological sensibility and temporal awareness, documenting and probing our contemporary relationships to heritage spaces.<sup>24</sup> In Dorothy Cross' 'Endarken' (2000), a looped video of a derelict cottage, iconic of Western Irish heritage, is repeatedly obliterated by an expanding black dot. The repeated occlusion of the subject of study reminds us of the abilities of technology to both facilitate documentation as well as eradication of those things which fascinate us.<sup>25</sup>

Some works made more direct comments about strategies and technologies of archaeological visualization. Selections from Sean Hillen's 'Irelantis' series (1994), Aaron Watson's 'Carneddau Pylon Circle' and 'Stone Circle Sky' (2006) and Denis O'Connor's triptych 'Rathcoola Dreaming' (2005) offered differing explorations of the constellation of visual and material traces in compelling collages of archaeological representation. Hillen's strategy of juxtaposing visual elements in the development of a fantastic mythical land of 'Irelantis' is perhaps an overindulgence of the archaeological imagination.<sup>26</sup> The precision in executing the representations is no less considered than those temporal constructions rendered in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by antiquarian societies. Continuing this fantastic theme, Denis O'Connor's (2007, 52-63) physical collage 'Rathcoola Dreaming' photographed by Dara McGrath is awash with dense material and visual mnemonics percolating through O'Connor's negotiation of his Irish emigrant and New Zealand heritages.<sup>27</sup> Similar to antiquarian processes, his process of interrogating

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<sup>22</sup> For more information on Parker's work, see <http://andyp.co.uk>.

<sup>23</sup> For more information on McCarthy's work, see <http://www.carolinemccarthy.net>.

<sup>24</sup> For more information on Byrne's work, please contact the Green On Red Gallery, Dublin.

<sup>25</sup> For more information on Cross' work, please contact the Kerlin Gallery, Dublin.

<sup>26</sup> For more information on Hillen's 'Irelantis' series, please see <http://www.irelantis.com> or <http://www.seanhillen.com>.

<sup>27</sup> For more information on O'Connor's work, see O'Connor 2007 or contact the Two Rooms Gallery, Auckland.

landscapes renders a representation of personal temporal reflection made evident in material traces. Aaron Watson's two pieces (see Figure 7) switch the flows of the interdisciplinary dialogue. As a professional archaeological illustrator, Watson (2004) has developed an extensive corpus of visualizations of archaeological experience.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly though, his photo-collages are no less-fantastic than the collage work of Hillen or O'Connor, producing photo-real representations of circular horizons but layered under his geometric paintings styles, eerily recalling the style of the Futurists.<sup>29</sup>



*Figure 7. Glass House Stone installations featuring works by (from left to right) Aaron Watson, Sean Hillen, Mark Garry, Bárbara Fluxá and Niamh Harte. Photograph by Ken Williams.*

Another of the sub-themes of the show was the transformative power of the archaeological gaze. Three of the artists in the show chose to work with loaned museum display cases from the Office of Public Works. Niamh Harte's ceramic 'Hand Tools / Doimeog' (2007) when placed inside a case with five glazed sides heightened the formal similarity of her works to archaeological artefacts such as flints (see Figure 7). Selections from Bárbara Fluxá's 'Paisaje Cultural, Segovia 06' (2006) within another case placed at floor level played with similar expectations.<sup>30</sup> Her process of finding plastic bottle caps and other discarded pieces of contemporary culture and using the pieces to reconstruct the rest of the vessels' forms from plaster is an intentional mimicry of archaeological processes of discovery, study and reconstruction but focused on objects usually overlooked by professional archaeological practice.

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<sup>28</sup> For more information on Watson's work, see Watson 2004 or <http://www.monumental.uk.com>.

<sup>29</sup> See footnote 2.

<sup>30</sup> For more information on Fluxá's work, see <http://www.barbarafluxa.blogspot.com>.

The professional archaeological gaze and its mediation to the wider public through museum displays and exhibitions can be something which exacerbates the separation between people and displayed things. The display cases can become the physical manifestation of the 'fourth wall' of the archaeological gaze. To subvert this, Fiona Coffey presented her 'From the Five Acre to The Haggard' (2008) in a display case with its glazed top permanently opened (see Figure 8). A collection of 46 hand-sized bronze sheep were given the freedom to flock throughout the case. Thus a subtle invitation was given to visitors that they could play the curator, reaching into the forbidden space of the glass conservation case. Some visitors immediately touched the pieces. Others did not, but a startling number of changes in the layout of the works in the case occurred through the run of the exhibition, allowing for a plurality of curatorial voices.<sup>31</sup>



*Figure 8. 'From the Five Acre to The Haggard' (2008) by Fiona Coffey. Photographs by Ken Williams and Ian Russell.*

The multiple possibilities of mediating materials was also a theme in Andrew Burton's 'Things Fall Apart' (2008) (see Figure 6). Burton's (2007) site-specific installations consist of thousands of micro-bricks which he reuses again and again. Mimicking a more traditional way of engaging materials as substances which could be ascribed multiple purposes by subsequent needs, Burton's sculptures are each radically new but simultaneously tremendously old as traces and evidences of previous works show through – residues of paint, cement, glazing. This theme of reuse of material picked up in Áine Ivers's untitled work (2007). This work presented a selection of forgotten artefacts trapped by the tension and dynamics of the caustic dream of archaeological structures. Ivers rescued cattle bones found at excavations in Ballintubber, Co. Mayo. The artefacts were deemed insignificant and were to be thrown away, but through Ivers'

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<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of the limitations of object-oriented curation in museums, see Cooke 2005.

artistic process the objects were refound, building a present work on the assumed absence of archaeological significance.

These ecological themes of reuse of materials in a temporally conscious manner follow on in Tom Fitzgerald's 'Floor plan of Heaven No 10 & 11' (2008).<sup>33</sup> The works were a subtle execution of a installation which changes over time. The work consisted of a work on paper and an installation of bay leaves with silver leaf drawing. The work on paper sits as mind map or architectural plan for the bay leaf installation. The bay leaf installation, situated directly on the glass wall of the space, was liberated from the conventional white wall of the gallery. By surrendering the surface upon which the work was hung, the composition of the piece was constantly in flux. As the bay leaves dried, curled and changed colour, the drawing itself morphed through durational lived change. Taken with his other installation 'Ever this day' (2008) which consisted of gold leaf on oak leaves on trees outside the building whose traces have remained since the end of the exhibition, Fitzgerald's installations suggest possibilities for a more sensitive and sensible engagement with the spaces and things around us.

Mark Garry's contribution, 'Being Here' (2008), was an execution of this sensitive and sensible site-specific practice (see Figure 9). Garry creates works that subtly guides the visitor through the space it inhabits. Through the work's presence, the space itself is altered, suggesting new possibilities for engagement. The inclusion of a living plant within the installation heightened the contemporary temporality of the work. As the plant grew, the installation constantly morphed and altered. The tension evident in the plant's back-bent leaves as the exhibition continued suggested a desire for the installation to destroy itself, resisting the manmade constraints of the artwork.

In the execution of the exhibition, it was decided not to include title cards or name labels with each work and that a map of the space with this information would be provided instead. This was a humble attempt to preserve something of the first encounter with a strange new thing whose presence cannot be immediately understood. Rather than allow the explication of the thing or work on site through the reading of text, the visitor can only rely on the works' relationships and those stories or thoughts which it evokes in the visitor's own life. This decision also had the affect of people using the map to go and find things such as 'the Dorothy Cross', having to orient themselves to the space through the abstract two-dimensional map and locating works by triangulating their placement to aspects of architecture or other works more immediately identifiable. This in a sense had every visitor relying on archaeological sensibilities to engage with the exhibition.

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<sup>33</sup> For more information on Fitzgerald's work, see <http://www.tomfitzgerald.ie> or Fitzgerald 2004.



Figure 15. 'Being Here' (2008) by Mark Garry.

### Afterthoughts

The main non-thematic link between the exhibitions and projects in the series was that they offered a break from the customary execution of scientific or archaeological process and allowed for a momentary lingering in the liminal space of possibility when encountering things. It is this space, this pause, from which new ideas and insights flourish. Perhaps this was the same space or pause where those passionate individuals of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries found themselves articulating a shared sense of things and temporalities - an archaeological imagination. The *Ábhar agus Meon* series was intended to illustrate the potential for giving voice and presence to this archaeological imagination alongside a scientifically dominated archaeological practice. Through collaborative exchange between artists and archaeologists working together in the present, a more balanced exploration of the ways of being humans in our shared world of things is possible.

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