



DUBLIN CONTEMPORARY 2011
DUBLIN, IRELAND

It's been a long, rough road, but Dublin Contemporary 2011 finally became a reality [Earlsfort Terrace and other locations; September 6–October 31, 2011]. Following years of planning and billed as Ireland's first major international contemporary art event, the exhibition now joins the global fray of major surveys probing the latest developments in contemporary art. Conceived and founded many years ago by Oliver Dowling and Rachel Thomas, the exhibition was finally announced in Dublin at the beginning of July 2010. Thomas would be its Artistic Director. Dowling, Gerard Byrne, Okwui Enwezor, Enrique Juncosa, Christine Macel, and Hans Ulrich Obrist contributed as curatorial and artistic advisors. Hopes of creating a buzz around the event were fuelled by launches in London, New York, and a second time in Dublin. The exhibition was to focus on silence; at the same time, it promised to lure visitors through the city on a *Ulysses*-like odyssey. This two-pronged theme proved quite confusing. Everything went strangely quiet until the middle of January 2011, when news of Thomas' sudden departure hit the airwaves. A new curatorial partnership and theme were announced two weeks later. With just six months left to go, Christian Viveros-Fauné and Jota Castro began work on *Terrible Beauty—Art, Crisis, Change & The Office of Non-Compliance*, whose title equates W. B. Yeats' poem "Easter, 1916," a response to the Easter uprising, with art's ability to reflect on current events. The results of their effort—however imperfect—comment on recent developments in Ireland and the world, attempt to buck the traditional notion of the biennial, and work to engage local history.

In some respects, Dublin Contemporary 2011 recalled *Terminal Convention*, which took place at the decommissioned Cork International Airport in March 2011. Anchored in Earlsfort Terrace—a mid-nineteenth century exhibition space that was later converted into a university campus and then abandoned twelve years ago—Dublin Contemporary 2011 offered viewers much more than the mere rediscovery of another defunct but historically significant site. Presented in the main stairwell, in lecture halls, in a medical library devoid of books and shelves, and on a former indoor tennis court, the heterogeneous and frequently captivating artworks mitigated the experience of obsolescence. Many were made in response to the venue, drawing strength from the existing signage, ghosts of missing fixtures, cracked walls, peeling paint, lengthy corridors, and cramped office quarters. Though

it proved tedious to navigate in and out of these small rooms, they provided numerous one-on-one encounters with the works. Alain Declercq's *War Games*, 2006, a meeting table for the viewing of sensitive information, fits perfectly here, as does Jeanne Susplugas' *La Maison malade*, 1998–2011. Papered with medicinal leaflets and filled with packaging, the claustrophobic space carries an aura of toxicity and abuse. Other works evoked manmade and natural disasters, mental breakdown, and the confrontation of physical challenges. Some works were outstanding. David Zink Yi's *Untitled (Architeuthis)*, 2010, features an immense ceramic squid stranded in a large redolent puddle of ink. Bjørn Melhus' five-channel video installation *This is my Home*, 2011, juxtaposes fictional settings with perplexing excerpts from a handbook on post-traumatic stress disorder designed for US veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts. The disadvantages of Corban Walker's short stature inspired his *Untitled (door handles)*, 2011. Positioned slightly lower than the average man's knee, these wall-mounted promises of access take us nowhere.

Pairings and immense installations occupied the handful of large spaces, helping to break the ennui created by the building's regimented layout. In some pairings, such as those of David Adamo's and Jannis Kounellis' work, the artistic conversations pitted young against old. In the presence of Thomas Hirschhorn and Dan Perjovschi, the discourse turned into a harangue on the economy, politics, and the media.

Though the exhibition was billed as an international event, Irish artists made up a third of the participants. The upshot of the venture not only presented visitors a raft of homegrown talent, but also a highly diverse survey of intelligent work. Stand out contributions included Ciara Scanlan's karaoke installation *Hungry Again*, 2011, performance artist Amanda Coogan's startling *Spit Spit, Scrub Scrub*, 2011, Mark Cullen's wonderfully eerie installation *Ark, I could sleep for a thousand years*, 2011, and engrossing sculpture/installations by Brian Duggan, Ella Burke, Liam O'Callaghan, and Mark Clare.

Dublin Contemporary 2011 featured some initiatives that go against traditional notions of the biennial: it incorporated street art in gallery and exterior locations and provided a free public zone. This free zone held works like Cleary and Connolly's movement activated *STUDIO 1 Plus/Minus*, 2006, and Eamon O'Kane's *A History of Play: Froebel Studio*, 2011, which invited children's par-

ticipation. The classroom and lecture hall designated as The Office of Non-Compliance also embodied this non-conformist spirit. Located at opposite points in Earlsfort Terrace, they offered space for the generation and transmission of independent ideas and opinions. Beyond Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin Contemporary 2011 spread into neighboring Iveagh Gardens and included compelling surveys of the work of Willie Doherty, Alice Neel, and Lisa Yuskavage at Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane, Douglas Hyde Gallery, and the Royal Hibernian Academy. A group exhibition at the National Gallery of Ireland (NGI) traced a unique trajectory by proposing shared influences and sensibilities among work by Alberto Di Fabio, Jorge Tacla, Ishmael Randall Weeks, and graffiti by an anonymous group of street artists. It also initiated a debate around the NGI's history and purpose.

It remains to be seen whether Dublin Contemporary 2011 will be hailed as a success—or whether it will ever have a sequel. Given the collapse of the Celtic Tiger and the current threat of global economic collapse, the fact that it even happened demonstrates that much can be done with a paucity of resources. Viveros-Fauné and Castro came across as two crazy guys—Castro once referred to himself as one such type—who obviously enjoy a challenge, know how to negotiate, and are skilled at cultivating intellectual curiosity. How else could one explain the fact that only the Irish artists received a fee for participating in a 100-plus artist exhibition? Their efforts and those of the organization show that many possibilities exist. Though this exhibition is not the first to be mounted on a shoestring budget, it may well be the largest. Ultimately, it incites excitement and commands more than a modicum of respect.

—John Gayer

PAGE 1 + OPPOSITE, TOP, RIGHT: installation view of Dublin Contemporary 2011, front to back: David Zink Yi, *Untitled (Architeuthis)*, 2010, burnt and glazed clay, dimensions variable (courtesy of the artist, Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, London, and New York, and Galerie Johann König, Berlin); Monica Bonvicini, *Add Elegance to Your Poverty*, 2011, black spray paint on wall, dimensions variable (courtesy of the artist and Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin); OPPOSITE, TOP, LEFT: Jeanne Susplugas, installation view of *La Maison Malade*, 1998–2011, at Dublin Contemporary 2011, medicine boxes, dimensions variable (courtesy of the artist); OPPOSITE, MIDDLE: Jota Castro, *Us*, 2011, mixed media, dimensions variable (courtesy of the artist in collaboration with Gordon Ryan and NOJI); OPPOSITE, BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT: Corban Walker, installation view of *Untitled (Door Handles)*, 2011, at Dublin Contemporary 2011, aluminum door handle, stainless steel plate, dimensions variable (courtesy of the artist and The Pace Gallery, New York); Alain Declercq, installation view of *War Games*, 2006, at Dublin Contemporary 2011, desk, seats, DVD players, LCD screens, headphones, dimensions variable (courtesy of the artist and Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris) (all photos: Renato Ghiazza)

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The Celtic Tiger, as the Irish so unaffectionately describe the economic boom of the last decade, has left the country in a pile of debt and its cities littered with "For Let" signs on half-built business blocks and cookie-cutter condos. However, this downturn in the economy has paved the way for a period of introspection and debate, inflecting the much-anticipated Dublin Contemporary 2011 [September 6–October 31, 2011]. While developers and prospectors are faltering during the economic crisis, artists are empowered to move into uncharted territories. Established collectives like Temple Bar Gallery and Studios and Palace, as well as the newer Exchange Dublin and Block T and such commercial galleries as Mother's Tankstation, Cross, Sebastian Guinness, Green On Red, and Rubicon are testaments to a vibrant artist community in Dublin. Aptly titled *Terrible Beauty—Art Crisis, Change & The Office of Non-Compliance*, the exhibition, curated by Christian Viveros-Fauné and Jota Castro, took into account this vibrant artist community and showcased the work of over one hundred Irish and international artists across five venues. The scale and breadth of the exhibition is unprecedented in Ireland. What's more, the exhibition both highlights Dublin's own history of artmaking and opens the doors to the international art community.

While Dublin has a long history of artistic and cultural activity, this is the first time that the city has supported a multi-venue exhibition of contemporary art showcasing local, regional, and international artists. In the vein of PS1's *Rooms* exhibition, 1976, and MoMA PS1's subsequent series of Greater New York shows, Dublin Contemporary temporarily transformed the enormous Earlsfort Terrace into a kunsthalle. This building once housed University College Dublin and was the setting for much of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artists as a Young Man*. Dublin Contemporary 2011 occupied eighty-four of its neoclassical rooms, nooks and crannies, and two theatre-style lecture halls to display works that attempt to stretch the bounds of the conventional art experience.

The building has been largely unused in recent years. As such, the curators were able to adapt the large rooms to suit the needs of the works. The old-world features and unfinished spaces seemed to accentuate the resourcefulness of the invited artists and the diversity of their work. Viveros-Fauné suggests that this resourcefulness can be seen as a

model for art's ability to become a "catalyst capable of shaking up the culture" in recessionary times. He goes on to say, "art retains the capacity to analyze, reflect on and even initiate discourse around ideas fundamental to society." Several of the site-specific commissions challenge the very notion of medium. The works of Kysa Johnson, Jeanne Susplugas, and Nevan Lahart exemplify the diversity of approaches mobilized in the show. Johnson transformed one of the schoolrooms into a 360-degree chalk drawing on blackboard paint. Inspired by patterns of the Irish landscape, the drawings depict the abandoned developments known as ghost estates, which have plagued the Irish landscape for a decade. In her ongoing work structured around societal addictions, Susplugas' *La Maison malade*, 1998–2011, fills an entire room with empty pharmaceutical packaging. Visitors are invited to enter the overstuffed room with angular walls through a hole smashed in the entry door. Susplugas creates a fascinating tension between the violence and seduction of drug culture through claustrophobia. Lahart's *Real Politikill*, 2011, is a similarly immersive installation that combines ambitiously sized work in his typical makeshift aesthetic with his wry sense of humor and a critique of art's role in neo-liberalist propaganda. Visitors enter the room by walking under and through the sculpture. They come out the other end, as if they had traveled down the rabbit hole. On one side of the room, Lahart recreates a floor-to-ceiling model of the Hollywood Hills, replacing the letters with "WANKRUPCY," while a time-activated sensor geysers empty beer cans out of the base of the sculpture like old faithful and rockets fashioned from plastic tubing appear to go bursting through the air. On the other side of the room, a larger than life blue furry figure, reminiscent of a giant M&M mascot, stands at attention, strapped like a suicide bomber with fake explosives.

Further down the hall in one of the larger rooms, Irish photographer Richard Mosse's most recent series of large-scale images provides a striking example of the "new normal," Viveros-Fauné's term for artists who are challenging the "post-ideological age." Over the last seven years, Mosse has become known for his photography of postwar ruins in the former Yugoslavia, of cities devastated by earthquakes in Iran, Pakistan, and Haiti, and more recently of the Congolese jungle. His work often challenges the moral

imperatives that, he argues, have restrained photojournalism from being taken seriously as an art form. In this new series, he uses a very unstable infrared film technology as a way to work through his experiences in the Congolese jungle. The unpredictability of the film alludes to the often confusing nature of the Congolese conflict and aesthetically transforms an otherwise grim landscape into an otherworldly beauty.

Part of the exhibition title, "terrible beauty," was taken from Yeats' poem "Easter, 1916." Viveros-Fauné suggests that this reference sites "art's underused potential for commenting symbolically on the world's societal, cultural and economic triumphs and ills." Here, the curators' no-holds-barred attitude led to the inclusion of over a dozen films and videos, ranging from Guy Richards Smit's satirical sitcom pilot *Grossmalerman!*, 2011, to a new version of Omer Fast's *Five Thousand Feet is the Best*, 2010, which debuted at the 54th Venice Biennale. While it is nearly impossible to take in all these powerful films and videos on a single visit, the prominence of moving-image work alludes to the underused potential, relevance, and accessibility of the medium in our TV- and media-obsessed culture.

At the Royal Hibernian Academy, just a short distance from Earlsfort Terrace, a large survey of paintings by American artist Lisa Yuskavage underscored the risk-taking curatorship of the Dublin Contemporary. The exhibition included a selection of her most recent works, which reference historical painting and exemplify her command of the medium while continuing to defy political correctness in the depiction of voluptuous female figures.

A series of extensive programs developed at The Office of Non-Compliance paralleled the citywide, two-month project. Occupying one of the old theatre-style lecture halls of Earlsfort Terrace, the Office was meant to capture the spirit of the exhibition and highlight a series of less conventional, largely artist-led models of art discourse, production, and presentation. The debate and discussion that took place there could be the most lasting aspect of Dublin Contemporary and the impetus the city needs to inspire the next edition.

—William Morrow

OPPOSITE, TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: Cleary & Connolly, *STUDIO 1 Plus/Minus*, 2006, interactive video [courtesy of the artists]; Katie Holten, *On the Nature of Things*, 2011, hand-painted ceramic tiles featuring a series of found texts written on the streets, 4 x 4 inches each, multiple locations in Dublin City Center [courtesy of the artist, assisted by Nicholas Mosse Pottery]; OPPOSITE, MIDDLE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Mark Cullen, *Ark, I could sleep for a thousand years*, 2011, mixed-media installation with plastic, mylar, aluminum foil, and timber, dimensions variable [courtesy of the artist]; Bjørn Melhus, installation view of *This Is my Home*, 2011, at Dublin Contemporary 2011, video installation, dimensions variable [courtesy of the artist and Galerie Anita Becker, Frankfurt]; OPPOSITE, BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT: Eamon O'Kane, *A History of Play: Froebel Studio*, 2011, mixed-media installation, dimensions variable [courtesy of the artist]; Amanda Coogan, *Spit Spit, Scrub Scrub*, 2011, live performers, fabric, sound, dimensions variable [courtesy of the artist and Kevin Kavanagh Gallery, Dublin] [all photos: Renato Ghiazza]

