

Limerick: *ev+a*

Zdenka Badovinac invited fifty-two artists to 'Imagine Limerick' on the basis that Limerick, in terms of mediated international profile, is an unknown. And it is because of this, because Limerick is uncluttered with preconceived images and expectations, it can serve as a placeholder – the temporary reference X, for the imagination.

ev+a infiltrates the city, overflowing established gallery spaces, to occur in secret places, so that even the viewer familiar with the area is occasionally surprised by location.

Acutely aware that the act of curating is to create an artwork in itself, Badovinac has carved the exhibition into four themed subsections: *Imagine realities*, *Imagine signs*, *Imagine traditions*, and, encouraging play on the act of designing a show to explore these categories, *Imagine curating*.

Rising to the challenge of *Imagine curating*, and acknowledging the subjectivity of interpretation, Alan Phelan provides a textual tour-guide service, diplomatically negotiating an acceptable position in relation to the work he comments upon.



Sarah Browne: *The gift*, 2003, mixed-media installation; courtesy the artist

Superficially resembling standard support panels, these comments, at first glance, appear authoritative. The writer is confident with facts, offering a brief bio of the artist, a description of the work...and then there is a kink in the delivery, suddenly the viewer collides with uncertainty in phrases such as, "I guess..." or "possibly referring to..." Phelan makes no grandiose claims, nor does he leave us a-swim in the sea of all possibilities. His work, without sounding pompous or pedantic, extends a hand and inclines to gently guide, a useful function given the scale and diversity of the show.

Imagine traditions examines not only religious/cultural traditions, but traditions within the institution of Fine Art itself. (Many works herein slip categories and could happily reside within *Imagine realities*.) With the exception of Anton Vidokle and Julieta Aranda's newspaper publica-

tion, *Popular geometry*, which is circulated throughout the city, the artists in this category exhibit in Church Gallery, nested in the body of Limerick School of Art and Design.

Several of these works explore traditional method and practice in art,

and propose alternate approaches. In an examination of drawing, Christine Mackey's jam-jar jetty, an arrangement of three thousand glass jars salvaged from rubbish tips, donated by friends and neighbours, juts into the gallery like large crystalline growth. The taut cellophane lids flex and snap lightly under ambient conditions, producing a random pattern of sound, a slight signal suggesting life, akin to the experience of looking into a rock pool excited by the occasional burp and pop of life below the surface.

IRWIN, a five strong group of artists, exploit the tradition of documenting artwork, producing large-scale colour photographs representing reconstructions of performances executed in the 1960s in Slovenia. Paul McAree lazily gestures toward painting styles with particular reference to early twentieth-century Irish work. And Sarah Browne presents two of a range of specially

covered sofas offered to friends and family as art gifts, accompanied by a series of video interviews with the recipients of the artworks. The overwhelming scene references layouts in interior-decorating magazines. Perhaps, on this anniversary of contemporary art, these conversions of the everyday have become modus operandi rather than the exception and the act of framing the domestic is now old enough to be criticised as tradition itself? Against this in-house critique, Maja Bajevic recites terse fragments of a routine of religious observances and violent actions. The first part-factual statement, the second a response or reaction to the fact: "My religion doesn't allow me to sleep with women; so I sleep with boys." In each sequence, the impact of the second half shatters the neutrality of the fact, indicting a religion complicit in rape, drug abuse and murder. The accusatory tone hovers dangerously on the verge of rage, multiple iterations of each phrase implying that these are not the sins of one, but the crimes of many. As a woman, Bajevic is essentially distanced from executing any of the listed offences; she could not, with ease, be a perpetrator. Against these odds, while remaining defiantly female, she assumes a host of male characters, spitting out patriarchal atrocities against her sex. Bajevic, brave and uncompromising in her performance to camera, compels the viewer to stay. It is not a pleasant stay, but to leave would be inexcusable.

Imagine realities, the largest subset, embraces one of the most outstanding contributions to the exhibition as

a whole. Anri Sala presents a documentary of an extraordinary city mayor who uses his municipality, a small Albanian city, as his canvas. With all of a painter's formal consideration for colour, composition, form and harmony, he proceeds to paint the town



Anri Sala: *Dammi i colori*, 2003, video still; courtesy Limerick City Gallery of Art



Maja Bajevic: *Double bubble*, 2001, DVD still; courtesy Limerick City Gallery of Art

red...and blue, and green, and yellow...

The camera pans the townscape like a Mondrian in three-dimensions. As arch-designer, he contemptuously considers unauthorised extensions to properties as aberrations of design. He is pained that people have brutalised form by building crude additions, and, in ordering the painting of dwellings, aims in some way to amend this problem, to heal

structure and satisfy his formal artistic concerns.

This mayor is so passionate about colour that his very vocabulary is saturated. Discussing his aesthetic choices, he uses the full weight of his mayoral office to exempt him from apology for exercising such authority, claiming that, if it were to be done democratically, they would arrive at "a golden mean, which would be gray." Colour is an animate force active in this community, a political issue – not in any representative or symbolic way, but literally.

The mayor points out that colour is a heated topic of debate, lining conversation in every home, bar and coffee shop in town: common to all, the question, "what are the colours doing to us?"...

He wants The Colours to be an integral part of the physical and social architecture of the city and, in

this way, make it a place one elects to be, rather than a place one is fated to end up. However, behind this expression lurks a darker suggestion that The Colours might not be quite so benign – for, presumably, monies that could be redirected to improve some public facilities, namely, drainage and infrastructure

(residences rise colourfully from rivers of mud and water, provisional wooden walk-ways and makeshift bridges straddle open gutters) are funnelled into funding the painting. And perhaps, in some ways, this is the tragedy: At what social cost is the mayor achieving his artistic vision?

The true story of the fairytale mayor-artist is a delightful and fascinating film.

Emilia and Ilya Kabakov present an elegant dilemma in polite society: *20 ways to get an apple while listening to the music of Mozart*. In an airy room, a large white table is set, a wax-apple poised centre-stage, ready for dinner to begin... Rotating anti-clockwise around the table, the appetent guest becomes a genius, inventing increasingly elaborate schemes that collapse



Emilia and Ilya Kabakov: *20 ways to get an apple while listening to the music of Mozart*; installation shot; courtesy Limerick City Gallery of Art

the distance between self and apple to capture the prize. With each reading, the apple grows more massive, more desirable, the guest more ambitious. And strategies range from enlisting the help of one's fellows in co-operative attempt to achieve the common goal (painfully conscious of all attendant risks taken by Von Neumann's Prisoner, of course!); outsmarting one's neighbour with trickery; creating a dramatic diversion; prayer; seeking comfort in delusion (feign nonchalance – you don't *really* want the apple); or invoking some quirk of Eastern mysticism in an attempt to transcend desire itself.

But the responsibility to listen to the music of Mozart, while doing so, imposes a demand to observe certain social mores, obliges the tempted to exercise some restraint (this is not

Eden; you can't just hop up and grab the thing when you *think* nobody's looking, dammit!). It is a tiny, magical theatre, a flight of fancy, for one (and imaginary friends), and the invitation to join the party stands until 23 May.

I do not think that it is possible to cup *ev+a* in the palm of one's hand and

appraise it from such perspective – it has grown too large for that. Rather, I believe, to evaluate *ev+a* is to necessarily acknowledge the satellite nature of the exhibition and admit that it is beyond the scope of a single review to adequately address all its parts.

Badovinac's careful selection rewards the viewer who makes the journey and

Imagine Limerick honours the *Exhibition of Visual+ Art's* reputation, in this, its twenty-eighth year, as an important annual contemporary art event.

Ciara Finnegan imagines that she lives in a sunny place, where the air is loud with birdsong and artists earn a respectable income... (she *actually* lives in Limerick).