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Dublin

Declan Clarke

Mother's Tankstation

*We'll Be This Way Until the End of the World*, 2008, the eponymous work of Declan Clarke's recent show, is a 16mm film (transferred to DVD) featuring details of a monument dedicated to Daniel O'Connell, an Irish political leader and celebrated orator active in the first half of the nineteenth century. Unveiled to the public in 1882, and located on the Dublin street now named after O'Connell, the sculpture incorporates four winged female figures representing the virtues of courage, fidelity, patriotism, and eloquence. Projected onto a large free-standing screen, Clarke's film consists entirely of elegantly composed details of the faces and upper bodies of two winged figures, each marked by a bullet hole. There is no indication of the city center location and the only movement is provided by a bird passing briefly across the grey sky above. These bullet holes date from the Easter Rising of 1916, an insurrection against British rule initiated by the proclamation of an Irish Republic. One hole is jagged but the other is so smooth and round that it might have been added on purpose and, in an extreme close-up, it even resembles a navel. Multiple time frames seem to collide in this work; a monument to a nationalist leader also preserves the traces of a latter battle, deliberately timed to coincide with a religious holiday celebrating resurrection.

The idea of a monument was also evoked in three earlier video works in the show, modestly displayed on small monitors stacked into a simple pyramid. In *Declan's Pillar*, 2000, Clarke seems at first to be standing nonchalantly in front of a suburban house, as if perhaps waiting for a bus. A wide shot, however, reveals that his feet are actually on the pillar of a gatepost, at least four or

five feet above the sidewalk. *Willingly Done*, 2002 opens with a shot of a nineteenth-century obelisk in Dublin's Phoenix Park, built to celebrate the victories of the Duke of Wellington (including the defeat of Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo) the structure then seems to disappear inside an upside-down wellington boot carefully lowered, close to the camera. Finally, in *Washing's Done*, 2003, the setting changes from Ireland to the United States: Clarke stands between the camera and the Washington Monument, stepping onto a soap box so that he is tall enough to obscure it from view. Considered together, these works offer a counterpoint to the formalism of *We'll Be This Way Until the End of the World*, playfully displacing historical narratives with the gestures and journeys of an artist.

But a different perspective is developed in *I Went Toward Them, I Went Directly Toward the Lights*, 2010, the most recently completed work in the exhibition. Shot in Bucharest, it depicts a variety of abandoned monuments, among them a sculpture of Lenin face down in the snow. The mix of digital video and 16mm film makes the footage difficult to date, and the locations difficult to identify, so that the smallest details seem to acquire significance: the words ISUS VINE (Jesus is coming) spray painted onto a plinth, for instance, or a street sign marking the date at which Romania began the long process of entry into the European Union. These fragments are never resolved into a coherent whole. Instead, this work ultimately communicates only the sense of uncertainty and emptiness produced by the dissolution of any historical narrative, however contested.

—Maeve Connolly