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'The Visible and the Invisible: A Partial View of Open EV+A 2005', *CIRCA* 112, Summer 2005.

In his review for *The Irish Times*, Aidan Dunne notes that this year's Open EV+A seems less widely dispersed than usual, suggesting that curator Dan Cameron runs a particularly "tight ship". The vast majority of artists (57 out of a total of 72) are exhibiting in just three venues, Limerick City Gallery of Art, the Old County Council Buildings on O'Connell Street and the Belltable Arts Centre. All three spaces are located within a few minutes walk of each other, so should in theory be easily accessed. In fact, on my weekend visit to Limerick, I was unable to gain entry to the Belltable because it is actually closed all day Saturday and Sunday.<sup>1</sup>As a consequence, my review excludes discussion of a number of works that I had specifically hoped to see.

Other elements of EV+A proved elusive for different reasons. Nancy Hwang's *Host* (2005), one of a number of 'off-site' projects, is marked on the official map at a site somewhere near Cathedral Place. But there are no visible traces of an artwork at this location because Hwang's project involves a relatively intimate encounter between artist and Limerick residents. During the course of the exhibition, various guests (a total of about ten in all) are stepping out of their usual routine to stay with Hwang in an apartment on Cathedral Place. Nothing is demanded in exchange for this hospitality but Hwang hopes that guests may offer her some insight into the city from a local perspective. For many, this performance of hospitality will recall various international models of 'relational' art practice, but *Host* seems productively attuned to a certain tension particular to an exhibition such as EV+A, between tourist and resident constituencies.

In terms of its emphasis on interpersonal exchange, *Host* also echoes projects developed under the auspices of Young EV+A, such as the collection of stories told to Aileen Lambert and Michael Fortune by local children, and archived in a DVD entitled *The*

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<sup>1</sup> According to the organisers of EV+A, the Belltable Art Centre was chosen specifically because it is also open during nighttime performances (approximately 20 per month) and therefore offers access to the exhibition at times when other venues are closed. This is all very well, but no details of these evening open hours were listed on the exhibition brochure, or available at the other venues.

*Banshee Lives in the Handball Alley* (2005).<sup>2</sup> Although recorded within the relatively mundane settings of primary school classrooms and playgrounds, these narratives produce a sense of place that is both strange and familiar. The mythical ‘Handball Alley’ is never shown and instead is envisioned as a site of imagination, constructed from fragments of rumour, everyday life and popular horror (most notably the *Candyman* films). The stories continually evolve before the camera, as the children borrow from their immediate surroundings to embellish their accounts of the Banshee. In one final sequence, for example, a particularly accomplished storyteller glances around him for suitable props, before pointing out that the Banshee appeared in a nearby field, combing her hair with fingernails “as long as crayons”.

Like Hwang, and Lambert and Fortune, Martin Shannon plays with questions of visibility and address in *Taint*, an ostensibly promotional billboard located on Bridge St. When viewed from a distance, this advertisement for a “dynamic, educational economic social and recreational base” is revealed as the carrier of a hidden, but all too familiar, message – a less than flattering colloquial name for the city. Printed text is also a feature of several works at the Old County Council buildings and of the site itself, which retains remnants of its earlier bureaucratic identity in the form of fading signage. The majority of the former office spaces are used to house several moving image works, linked by an emphasis on textuality, and low-fi technology. These include Conor McFeely’s exploration of science-fiction conspiracy and Karl Hunter’s unashamedly lowbrow homage to the Queen Mother, entitled *The Very Thought of You* (2004). This latter piece employs crude animation to re-edit snippets of tabloid news, while in a neighbouring work Tim Elford develops a less flippant exploration of news discourse, papering the walls with a catalogue of textual evidence entitled *The Site of Iraqi Resistance* (2005). Paul Rowley and David Philips also explore interconnections between conspiracy, archiving and low-fi technology in *Microfiche* (2004), but their focus is historical. They rework fragments of the news coverage generated by the 1974 Russborough House robbery, raising questions about the origins of the Byte Collection, and the status of fine art as a precious commodity. The decaying Georgian plasterwork provides an appropriate setting for *Microfiche*, and also forms the raw material of Chris Sauter’s ambitious installation project, *The Nature of Culture* (2005). Almost hidden behind a blandly functional reception desk, Sauter’s piece inverts the usual hierarchy of structure

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<sup>2</sup> *The Banshee Lives in the Handball Alley* is being screened continuously at Limerick City Library and is also available to buy on DVD from the Limerick City Arts Office.

and ornament. Using elements that have been precisely and decoratively excised from the surrounding plasterboard walls, he produces a freestanding sculpture – a kind of miniature architectural ‘folly’.

Mark Cullen’s *Cosmic Annihilator* (2005) also plays with scale, inviting the viewer into a disorienting darkened space before revealing a miniature glass world that suggests a plan for an imaginary city or a fragment of a sci-fi film set. Siobhan Tattan’s slide/sound installation, entitled *The Play: A Meeting of the Storytellers, the Raconteur and the Seanchai* (2005), is equally theatrical but arguably more self-reflexive in its exploration of spectatorship. The work solicits the viewer’s participation in an unfolding narrative complete with props and script and, while it may lack the sophistication and seduction of James Coleman’s slide installations, it evokes a somewhat similar sense of unease. The exhibition at the Limerick City Gallery is less cohesive overall, but some points of correspondence do exist between specific works sited on the ground floor. Andreas Gefeller’s photographs of domestic interiors are simultaneously utilitarian and utopia, suggesting architectural models, children’s toys or even surveillance imagery. Kukuli Velarde’s installation of ceramic figures and Chad McCall’s instructional drawings are similarly open to interpretation, and are equally charming and disturbing. These factors remain in play in Aoife Collins’ assemblages of petals, feathers and other colourful fragments and, elsewhere on the ground floor, recur in Susan Gogan’s slick photographic homage to the zombie film.

The City Gallery also houses a number of video installations upstairs, presented as projections. The most ambitious is *RVB* (2005), a lengthy three-screen installation by Ann Cleary and Dennis Connolly that takes up the play with innocence and darkness evident in other works. *RVB* documents a three-year period in the lives of the couple’s twin daughters and a timeline for this work, indicating key events such as the children’s birthdays, the traumatic experiences of neighbours and the activities of two exotic birds, can be found at the entrance to the installation space. The timeline reinforces the project’s epic scale and also functions as a point of orientation within the narrative for any prospective viewer. Other moving image works in the City Gallery are more directly concerned with the formal qualities of projection and the tension between the still and moving image. Guy Hunderé’s *Impasse* (2001) pre-emptes recent music videos by Michel Gondry, staging a never-ending journey in which a distant object remains stubbornly,

and disturbingly, in the centre of the frame. Niamh O'Malley's *Vignette* (2005), incorporating a projection of a moving image onto a painting of the same scene, evokes art historical rather than pop cultural references. The stillness of the foreground objects (a collection of potted plants on a window sill) is continually disturbed by the play of light and shadow on the glass and transparent curtains. This generates a confusion of spatial and temporal registers, which persists long after the projected image has faded to white and the 'trick' has been revealed.

Open EV+A 2005 clearly does not have the pronounced international address that characterises the biennial 'invited' counterpart. Nonetheless, the organisers have been keen to stress its international dimension, with press releases advertising work from eight countries. The brochure also clearly addresses an international audience, incorporating a map of Ireland and a list of airline websites. But the EV+A website, the most obvious means through to develop this address to a wider audience, has not been used very effectively.<sup>3</sup> The commitment and enthusiasm of all those associated with EV+A is evident and these problems may be due to scarce resources, or the prioritisation of other modes of communication. These issues will need to be confronted, however, if EV+A seeks to fully engage with all of its potential audiences and retain its status as "Ireland's pre-eminent annual exhibition of contemporary art".

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<sup>3</sup> I first consulted the website shortly after the opening of exhibition, on March 12<sup>th</sup> and was unable to download the map or get full details of opening times. My concerns were passed on to the press office, and this problem has now been resolved.