

TIME-BASED ART

Time-based art refers primarily to practices involving media such as 8 mm or 16 mm film, 35 mm slide projection (sometimes combined with audio tape) and video. In Ireland, these media have generally been employed since the late 1960s as part of a broader practice encompassing performance, sculpture and photography, or newer technologies. Often defined by ephemerality or by an exploration of site and space, time-based works have been presented within a range of contexts beyond the gallery, including radio, television and, in some instances, theatre. The Project Arts Centre in Dublin, established by a group of practitioners following a festival held at the Gate Theatre in 1966, has offered a particularly important platform for Irish artists interested in temporality. At the Irish Exhibition of Living Art in 1972, the Project served as the site of a performance, in which the US-based Irish artist and critic Brian O'Doherty (qv) undertook to sign all his artworks 'Patrick Ireland' until the removal of the British military presence from Northern Ireland. While this work, entitled *Name Change* [505], did not involve the use of film or video, O'Doherty's fusion of ritual with conceptualism drew attention to the potential of time as medium. A conclusion to his gesture was provided in 2008, when *The Burial of Patrick Ireland* was conducted at the Irish Museum of Modern Art.

A focus on performance is also apparent in James Coleman's exploration of temporality but, significantly, the artist does not himself take on the role of performer. Instead, he prefers to work with actors, both in performed works such as those developed with Roger Doyle and Olwen Fouéré as part of Operating Theatre during the 1980s and in installations involving 'projected images.' In early slide-tape works, such as *Slide Piece*, 1973, Coleman combines a static projected image – a photograph of an ordinary Italian urban streetscape – with an evolving audio commentary, in order to explore the dynamics of

perception and reception. In later works, such as *Box (ahhah-urnabout)*, 1977, his investigation of embodied perception is complicated by the introduction of references to historical events and their representation. *Box* incorporates fragments of a film documenting a famous boxing match between American Jack Dempsey and then world heavyweight champion Irish-American Gene Tunney, with strobe-like light effects and a breathless voiceover that could be imagined to emanate from Tunney. It is no coincidence that the film dates from 1927, the moment of transition from silent movies to sound, because Coleman has often employed media technologies – and associated conventions of representation – that are (or will be) technologically obsolete.

By the mid-1970s, many artists in Britain and the United States were developing projects for television as part of a critique of commercial media, or employing closed-circuit video feedback loops to explore themes of representation and identity. But in Ireland, despite initial aspirations to set up a co-operative at the Project Arts Centre in 1976, artists had limited access to audiovisual equipment, commercial sponsorship and distribution structures. Nonetheless, the period was marked by formal innovation and political critique in the work of independent film-makers Bob Quinn and Cathal Black, and in a number of important early films by art-school-trained practitioners financed through the British Film Institute Experimental Film Fund (such as *Down the Corner* by Joe Comerford, 1978; *On a Paving Stone Mounted* by Thaddeus O'Sullivan, 1978; and *Maeve* by Pat Murphy, 1981). During the 1980s, British production schemes such as Channel 4's 'Experimenta' season and the BBC/British Arts Council One Minute Television Series, continued to offer an important public platform for Irish artists working with the moving image, most notably Vivienne Dick.

While Ireland failed to develop an experimental film scene comparable to that found in Britain or the United States, the political situation in Northern Ireland provided an important point of connection both between Irish artists and film-makers

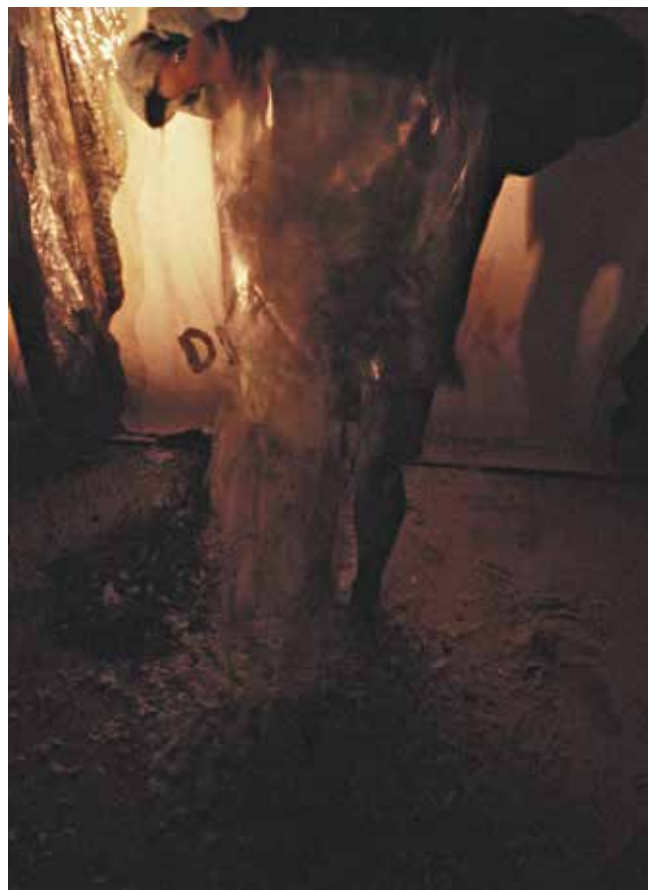


505. Brian O'Doherty/
Patrick Ireland, *Name
Change*, 1972,
documentation from
performance at Project
Arts Centre, Dublin

and with critically engaged practitioners working elsewhere. This is apparent in the programme of *A Sense of Ireland*, a major festival of Irish art and culture held at over forty venues in London in 1980, which featured screenings of radical political films such as the Berwick Street Collective's *Ireland: Behind the Wire* (1974), in addition to a broad range of literary events, theatre productions and visual arts exhibitions. *Without the Walls*, curated by Dorothy Walker at the ICA, featured works by Nigel Rolfe, Alanna O'Kelly (qv), James Coleman and Noel Sheridan and, while many of the contributions were not 'time-based', the exhibition aimed to highlight a shift away from traditional fine art media in Irish contemporary art. Walker had previously been instrumental in bringing Joseph Beuys to Ireland for a series of lectures, intended to form part of the Free International University. His visit to Belfast in 1978 contributed, among other factors, to the establishment of Art & Research Exchange (ARE), an artist-run space that included a darkroom and studios. Initially home to *Circa Art Magazine* (before it moved to Dublin in 1992) ARE raised the profile of performance and time-based practice through a programme that included projects by Willie Doherty, Frances Hegarty, Alastair MacLennan (qv), John Carson, Helen Chadwick, Barbara Kruger and Mona Hatoum.

Frances Hegarty, who has subsequently worked extensively with Andrew Stones, presented one of her first works at ARE – *Ablative, Genitive, Dative*, 1984 [506], consisting of a performance with 16 mm film and pigmented screens. Willie Doherty initially became known for a series of photo-text referencing the visual language of surveillance, but soon began to develop a more direct engagement with narrative form and the conventions of film and television in time-based works such as the slide/tape installation *Same Difference* (1990). His first video installation, *The Only Good One is a Dead One* (1993), is a double projection in which one screen depicts a car journey at night, filmed with a hand-held camera, while the second presents a stationary view from inside a parked car. The content and form of the voiceover – an interior monologue of a man who shifts between the imagined positions of victim and assassin – situated the work in relation to both the genre of *film noir* and locally specific hybrid media such as the advertisements for the confidential telephone line.

Alanna O'Kelly also came to prominence during the 1980s as one of a number of women artists working with time-based media. Her practice, which encompasses performance as well as sound and video, often involves the incorporation of Irish folk traditions – such as keening – that are specifically associated with women. Her audiotape *Carry Greenham Home* (1984/85) was included in *Divisions, Crossroads, Turns of Mind – Some New Irish Art*, an important exhibition curated by the critic Lucy Lippard, which toured to several North American venues, 1985–87. O'Kelly's early video works include *Dancing With My Shadow* (1988), and *No Colouring Can Deepen the Darkness of Truth* (1990), a three-monitor piece exploring the history of the Famine from a perspective shaped by feminism and the experience of motherhood. Pauline Cummins (qv) also developed a feminist critique of aspects of Irish culture in the slide/tape installation *Inis t'Oirr/Aran Dance* (1985), which explored sexual desire and its repression. Cummins was one of a number of artists working collaboratively (for political or practical reasons)



with time-based media during this period and in 1992 she and Louise Walsh (qv) presented *Sounding the Depths*, a collaborative installation at IMMA. Consisting of back-projected video, and a series of images on light boxes, accompanied by a soundtrack, this work explored attitudes toward the representation of the female body. In 1987, Cummins, Walsh, O'Kelly and others formed the Women Artists' Action Group (WAAG) in order to achieve greater recognition and support for women artists. One of their first initiatives was an exhibition later that year at the Project Arts Centre, taking the form of a slide show of works by women, later expanded into an extensive slide bank maintained by the group.

Two years later, a politically engaged artists' group with a specific focus on time-based art emerged in the form of Blue Funk. Its members (Evelyn Byrne, Valerie Connor, Brian Cross, Tom Green, Brian Hand, Jaki Irvine, Kevin Kelly) had recently graduated from NCAD and were specifically interested in exploring questions of identity in relation to gender, class and nationality, using media such as film, video, sound and slide. Blue Funk exhibited in New York, Arnhem, Perth, Brisbane and Dublin in the early 1990s and produced a number of collaborative projects, including *A State of Great Terror* at the Douglas Hyde in 1992. By the mid-1990s, however, a broad range of artists was beginning to integrate sound, video and (to a lesser extent) film into their practices. Daphne Wright's (qv) works from this period often combine sculptural installation with audio, typically vocal narration. So in *Lot's Wife*, 1995 [507], for example, an older man's voice emanates from among a cluster of

506. Frances Hegarty, *Ablative, Genitive, Dative*, 1984, performance with 16mm film projection and constructions

tinfoil pear trees, muttering the words 'April Fool, you're only an April Fool'. Dorothy Cross (qv), predominantly known for sculptural works, also began to make video works, including *Teacup*, 1997 [87], in which a group of men – extracted from Robert Flaherty's film *Man of Aran* – appear to row across the surface of the liquid in a delicate china cup. Siobhan Hapaska (qv) also produced a series of sculptures entitled *Hearts* (1993, 1995, 1997) incorporating audio. But for many practitioners, video continued to be strongly linked to performance, the exploration of sites beyond the gallery and also the possibilities of new communications technologies.

Based outside Ireland, Anne Tallentire explored the use of ISDN transmission technology in two related works – *Inscribe I*, 1994 and *Inscribe II*, 1994. In the first of these, ISDN transmission was used to relay live actions and pre-recorded video material shot within the square mile of the City of London, from the British Telecom offices in London to video screens and projections in the Telecom Éireann offices in Dublin. For the second work, audiences in an empty office building in London and in the Orchard Gallery, Derry, could watch Tallentire performing an action – washing a white wall in the gallery – and also communicate with each other. For artists working in Ireland, the

mid-1990s was also marked by debate and discussion around site-specificity and the potential of new media. Several members of the Sculptors' Society of Ireland (SSI) (qv) formed the group Random Access (later changed to Critical Access) during this period, with the aim of developing new contexts for time-based and site-specific projects. The SSI, which had commenced in 1980, began to advocate a broad definition of sculptural practice encompassing object-making, lens-based media, digital arts, installation and performance, in contrast to the narrower focus on traditional media favoured by many members of the Artists' Association of Ireland. In 2005 the SSI changed its name to Visual Artists Ireland (VAI), to reflect its members' broad scope of activity.

These shifts in art practice contributed to the establishment of Arthouse in 1995, a purpose-built facility located in the newly designated cultural quarter in Dublin's Temple Bar. Arthouse aimed to support artists working with new media practices. During its early years, Arthouse provided much-needed access to media production and training resources and developed a programme of projects and commissions which included the Audio Artists Radio Transmissions (AART), curated by artist Garrett Phelan and involving live radio broadcasts by art practitioners working collaboratively over four days in May–June 1998. In 2002, however, Arthouse closed abruptly and the building was later reassigned by Temple Bar Cultural Trust to Filmbase, a resource organization for film-makers. The Project Arts Centre, however, remained central to the production and exhibition of time-based art in Ireland. The redevelopment of the East Essex Street venue in 1998 provided the impetus and context for an ambitious off-site programme curated by Valerie Connor. The programme included *Trailer*, 1998, by work-seth/tallentire [508], a series of daily actions by John Seth and Anne Tallentire carried out over a fortnight at locations around Dublin. These actions were not witnessed at first hand, but instead were experienced as moving images presented at other locations, or in the form of a selected still image posted on a website each day. Daniel Jewesbury also used the web in a two-stage work, with the first part *mirage.htm* (1999), presented online and the second, *Mirage* (2000) taking the form of a three-screen video installation for the new gallery. This exhibition was preceded by 'Somewhere Near Vada', curated by artist Jaki Irvine and installed across all Project's spaces. Featuring works by Bas Jan Ader, Marcel Broodthaers, James Coleman, Tacita Dean and Gary Hill, among others, the show drew attention to both the history and significance of the moving image within contemporary art.

The late 1990s and 2000s were marked by the emergence of new opportunities for the commissioning of time-based art and by the broad acceptance of media such as film and video within a range of institutional contexts. Artists working with video, in particular, began to show more widely in commercial galleries and the Darklight Festival, Dublin, established in 1999, fostered the development of new audiences for media art, through screenings, discussions and exhibitions. Film, video and audio also emerged as more viable media for public art commissions, most obviously in the case of *Breaking Ground*, the Per Cent for Art Scheme of Ballymun Regeneration Ltd, which included works by Grace Weir (qv), Cecily Brennan and desperate optimists (Christine Molloy and Joe Lawlor). Time-based practices

507. Daphne Wright, *Lot's Wife*, 1995, tinfoil, wire, cement, audio



were also prominently showcased in Irish representations at numerous international exhibitions, such as the São Paulo Bienal (Alanna O’Kelly in 1996, Clare Langan in 2002, desperate optimists and Dennis McNulty in 2004) and the Venice Biennale (Jaki Irvine in 1997, Anne Tallentire in 1999, Grace Weir and Siobhan Hapaska in 2001, Gerard Byrne in 2007). The collection of IMMA also expanded during the same period to include a broad range of time-based artworks by younger Irish artists and an important trilogy of projected image works by James Coleman, *Lapsus Exposure*, 1992–94, *INITIALS*, 1993–94 and *Background*, 1991–94, purchased with funds from the Heritage Committee of the National Cultural Institutions. But even though works realized in film, slide-tape and video since the late 1960s can now be found in several Irish public and private collections, many forms of time-based practice are not easily represented in this way, to the extent that communicating any sense of the breadth of artists’ engagement with temporality constitutes a significant challenge for both museum curators and historians. MAEVE CONNOLLY

SELECTED READING Luke Gibbons, ‘Narratives of No Return: James Coleman’s GuaiRE’, *Transformations in Irish Culture*, Cork, in association with Field Day, 1996, 129–33; Martin McLoone, ‘The Commitments’, *Same Old Story*, exhibition catalogue, London/Derry/Colchester: Matt’s Gallery/Orchard Gallery/Firstsite, 1997, pp. 8–16; Shirley MacWilliam, ‘Sound, Sense and Sensibilities’, *Circa*, 83, Spring 1998, 30–34; Shirley MacWilliam, ‘Screen and Screen Again’, *Circa*, 100, Summer 2002, 42–49; Caoimhín MacGiolla Léith, ‘Troubled Memories’, *Willie Doherty: False Memory*, exhibition catalogue, London and Dublin, 2002, pp. 19–25; Katy Deepwell, *Dialogues: Women Artists from Ireland*, London and New York, 2005.

WAR MEMORIALS

The two violent conflicts that affected Ireland in the early twentieth century, World War I and the War of Independence, were commemorated by sculpture. These memorials also reflected the political division of Ireland by the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 and the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. There was substantial Irish participation by both unionists and nationalists in the armed services in World War I. The tenth and sixteenth divisions were mainly Catholic and the thirty-sixth division was Protestant. After the war there was great disparity between Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State in the construction of memorials to the dead of the war. In the North, for the government and the unionist majority of the population, the memorials served as a celebration of unionism and of the sacrifice of Ulstermen at the battle of the Somme in 1916. By contrast, in the Free State the construction of war memorials was often viewed as an embarrassment and a disloyal gesture against the prevailing nationalist orthodoxy.

Thirty-eight public war memorials were erected in Ireland, leaving aside those indoors or in private grounds. Of these, twenty-four were in Northern Ireland, with ten in County Down, five in County Antrim, three in County Derry and two in County Armagh. These locations reflect the reality that the



508. work-seth/tallentire, *Trailer*, 1998, still from video performance cycle

monuments were commissioned by the mainly Protestant communities in the north-east of the country, with the co-operation of the local authorities. The speeches delivered by establishment figures at the inauguration of these memorials had a unionist message. In visual terms, the memorials in Northern Ireland are similar, but less varied, than those in the rest of the United Kingdom. The figure of the common soldier, naturalistically modelled, was the preferred form of commemoration in Enniskillen, Coleraine, Derry, Banbridge and Bushmills. Personifications of Victory can be seen in Derry, accompanied by a soldier and a sailor. Likewise, outside Queen’s University, Belfast is another Victory with a youth. Lisburn, Lurgan and Armagh, too, have Victory figures. Bangor has a stone obelisk with a figure of Erin and a lion, attesting to the British connection. The Newcastle memorial is a stone lion. These monuments were the focus of Armistice Day ceremonies and the laying of poppy wreaths every November.

The sculptors were mainly British. Sir Alfred Brumwell Thomas designed the Belfast cenotaph between 1925 and 1927 and the ‘All Ulster’ memorial by Morris Harding (qv) was part of St Anne’s Church of Ireland cathedral, giving it a Protestant stamp. Leonard Stanford Merrifield (who was responsible for the Carson memorial in front of Stormont) made the memorials at Holywood, Comber and Lurgan. T. Eyre Macklin sculpted that at Bangor [509] in 1927, but it was an Ulsterman, Francis Wiles (qv), who received the commission for the memorial at Newcastle, Co. Down. The most controversial memorial turned out to be that in Enniskillen, a mainly Protestant town in predominantly Catholic County Fermanagh, where, on 8 November 1987, during Armistice Day celebrations, the IRA detonated a bomb, killing eleven and injuring sixty-three people, epitomizing the republican attitude to commemoration of the dead of the Great War.

In the Free State the government took no part in initiating war memorials. However, Armistice Day ceremonies took place in Dublin during the 1920s, not without friction with republicans. There was a desire by groups of ex-servicemen to