

LABOUR

A LIVE EXHIBITION

PERFORMANCES BY IRISH FEMALE ARTISTS
2012

Michelle Browne
Chrissie Cadman
Amanda Coogan
Pauline Cummins
Ann Maria Healy
Frances Mezzetti

Áine O'Dwyer
Áine Phillips
Anne Quail
Elvira Santamaria Torres
Helena Walsh



LABOUR

A LIVE EXHIBITION

PERFORMANCE SPACE, LONDON. 09.02.12

THE VOID, DERRY. 25.02.12

THE LAB, DUBLIN. 10.03.12

curated by Chrissie Cadman, Amanda Coogan and Helena Walsh

PREFACE

RAY YEATES *City Arts Officer*

We are delighted that the LAB is hosting LABOUR in Dublin along with the critical symposium for International Women's Day.

The LAB is Dublin City Council's Arts Office and houses gallery, rehearsal and incubation space for a range of art forms. The Gallery shows emerging artists and emerging ideas and is committed to creating a range of ways for audiences to engage with critical. We are based on Foley Street in Dublin's historic Monto where the curatorial concerns of LABOUR have a very real resonance.

Dublin City Council Arts Office has been proud to support Anu Productions's award winning *World's End Lane*, at the LAB, and *Laundry*, a production that invited audiences into the Gloucester Street Magdalene Convent around the corner on a challenging, harrowing and thought-provoking journey. We are also delighted to support Performance Art Live and Performance Art Network for the projects they are undertaking in Dublin this year.

LABOUR's Dublin tour has also been generously supported by The Arts Council. The symposium curated by Sheena Barrett and Amanda Coogan with the support of MAVIS, GradCAM and University of Ulster provides an opportunity to provide a platform for the research currently taking place in the area of live performance and an important space in which to contextualise the live exhibition itself.

Although all artists and arts organisations are coping bravely with diminishing funding there is also a new appreciation of what experimental collaborations like this mean and this project is a pathfinder for many others. We are delighted to be able to produce this publication which we hope will contribute to the legacy of the live group exhibition and celebrate the work of these 11 powerful female artists.



INTRODUCTION

SHEENA BARRETT *Curator/ The LAB*

Amanda Coogan first approached me last year to see if The LAB might consider hosting LABOUR in Dublin. At that stage she had already developed the idea with her co-curators Helena Walsh and Chrissie Cadman to tour a live exhibition to]performance space[London and the Void in Derry. The curatorial concerns along with the opportunity to celebrate the vibrancy of emerging performance art practices in Dublin seemed most appropriate for the LAB. All three curators are artists and PhD candidates and the exhibition and associated events provide an important opportunity to contribute to the discourse on performance art in Ireland.

Live Performance from the visual arts in Ireland is currently a vibrant practice, grounded in responding with the physical body and psychological self. The specificity of context for this exhibition - historical, geographical and political - is potent. We are situated on Dublin's historic Monto, a place where women have endured and shown immense courage despite hardship, exploitation, brutality and inhumanity, often at the hands of other women. At the time of writing, the exhibition has yet to take place but the issues addressed by the artists' works are poignant, vital and in some cases very raw.

It is a privilege to host this exhibition and in doing so mark International Women's Day. The exhibition provides audiences the rare opportunity to engage with the diverse practices of 11 female performance artists in the context of a group exhibition. The tableau vivant installation will see the artists perform over an eight hour period, in itself an embodied act of endurance and physical labour. The Arts Council of Ireland's generous support of the live exhibition at the LAB has allowed us to extend our resources to produce the symposium and publication.

This publication maps the trajectory of the exhibition through its curators' perspectives, the three venues and the practices of the 11 women artists. LABOUR is hugely significant and timely and we hope the audience's experience of the exhibition and the critical discourse of the symposium contribute to the legacy of performance art in Ireland.

CURATOR'S ESSAYS

CHRISSIE CADMAN

EPHEMERALITY & LABOUR. A WO+MANIFESTO.

- LABOUR compares the ephemeral nature of performance art to that of women's labour, and questions how one quantifies the work that women do.
- LABOUR facilitates and enables a platform to examine 'artist as performer'.
- LABOUR is a cultural contribution to our own standing and strength, which critiques the objectification of women's bodies as a cultural product.
- LABOUR is one of multiple voices, a step towards a 'wo+manifesto'.
- LABOUR offers a possibility to interrogate a contemporary Irish cultural position from an historical perspective whilst developing ambitions for the future.
- LABOUR offers an alternative to the exchange of capital, including that of bodies, opening and maintaining a self defined women's space.
- LABOUR highlights the diversity and complexity of multiple stances of experience through initiating and sustaining a group dialogue between multiple geographies, individuals and practices.
- LABOUR investigates the socio-political and economic situation in an Irish context, examining the delivery of cultural production within the visual arts in 2012.
- LABOUR provides unprecedented exposure of women's experiential reality in Ireland
- LABOUR explores audience participation and agency within Irish Performance Art.



'performance (is)...a concrete social practice that continues to redefine the meaning of the visual arts through ways in which the presence of the body in real events provides a paradigm for social action'¹

Performance Art is contingent on the presence of the body. The body, the site, the audience and time are its four pillars. Corporeal action is at the center of this axis. Our body is one of the foundational filters that make up our experience of the world, and, is the sign through which we are perceived. LABOUR brings together eleven female bodies and, inevitably, questions the current place and history of the Irish female body.

All of the works in LABOUR are solo practices with the artist's body-as-medium. The artists communicate through their own embodiment. Each iteration of live performance is unrepeatable, sites, context and audiences change, but LABOUR places the artists' bodies as the (unstable) constant through its tour to London, Derry and Dublin.

This live exhibition explores the female body as a political site. Constructing an exhibition that exclusively contains female bodies from or of Ireland poses a multitude of questions, not least, the relevance, in 2012, of an exhibition of only female embodied practitioners. It is not a question this live exhibition answers, but through its works and the sum of its parts, it offers paths of exploration. It is because the artists perform themselves, inhabiting the same place and time as the audience, LABOUR forces a reading of these Irish, female bodies from both an object and subject view. When a live body is placed in front of you for consideration, the mind oscillates between cool observation and personal empathy; it is an inter-subjective experience.

LABOUR is a group show, simultaneously showing ten live performances from eleven artists, providing multiple viewing experiences as individual works collide and speak to each other. In this tableaux vivant form, the performance frame is sharply set; the artists are present before and after the audience, allowing the liminal space of the live performance to be held in the minds eye of the audience, proposing an infinite loop.

'Performance's only life is in the present!'²

The artists' step into this performance frame and attempt to be present to the moment. This present moment is in constant flux, it is beyond our grasp; the moment of my writing this very word has now past. Durational performance attempts stillness against the ever-shifting tide of everyday time. The artists are alive and concentrated; 'thinking in action',³ creating their work grounded in the moment. LABOUR's duration, the 8-hours of a working day, is an extended period of time which comes with it a taxation on the corporeal body, forcing the artist to shift outside of the physical self.⁴

This 'manically charged'⁵ moment for both performer and spectator calls for the active participation of the audience in the liminal space of the present. The medium of live embodied practice can, we suggest, be a powerful tool for change. LABOUR is about transformations.

1. Stiles, Kristine, *Performance and its Objects*, Arts Magazine 65, No. 3, November, 1990 p.47

2. Phelan, Peggy, *The Ontology of Performance, Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Routledge, 1993, p.146.

3. Weaver, Lois, description of this form of practice, as witnessed at LABOUR's long table discussion, Queen Mary, University of London, 10/2/2012

4. What I have previously referred to as petite endurance, See Coogan, Amanda, *What is... Performance Art?* Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2011 p.10

5. Phelan, Peggy, *The Ontology of Performance, Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Routledge, 1993, p.146.

LABOUR: PRODUCING POTENTIALS FOR EMPOWERMENT

As is the case in many cultural contexts women in Ireland have fought for political autonomy. They have struggled to gain presence and occupy space outside of the limited positions designated to them by dominant patriarchal norms. Yet equally, within an Irish cultural context there are specific circumstances, conditions and ideologies that impact on issues of gender and labour. There is a force of live artists working within an Irish context who give body to these issues.

In *Brutal Silences*¹, a study guide on live art in Ireland I co-authored with Ann Maria Healy commissioned by the Live Art Development Agency, I selected a range of performances from female practitioners. These performances provocatively interrogate dominant cultural constructions of femininity and subvert the moral regulation of female sexuality in post-conflict Ireland. I contextualize these varied performances in relation to Southern Ireland's Magdalene Laundries, institutions of immense significance to contemporary discourses around gender and labour. Since the closure of the last Magdalene Laundry in 1996, the women detained in these Catholic-run, for-profit, industrial laundries have battled to gain redress. The Irish state has been reluctant to acknowledge the injustice and trauma endured by these women forced to labour unwaged as a form of penance for their supposed moral impurity. Following the intervention of the United Nations Committee Against Torture (UNCAT), the Irish government, in June 2011, initiated an independently chaired inquiry into these institutions.

In bringing together a diverse group of female live art practitioners working within or native to Northern and Southern Ireland, across three sites of geo-political relevance, LABOUR offered a timely platform for expanding explorations of gender and labour in an Irish cultural context. Participating artists were invited to explore these themes in the broadest sense. Significantly, I suggest, the diverse considerations contributed by the eleven artists participating in LABOUR open up possibilities for directing the traumatic histories and realities embedded in Irish culture towards the development of empowered feminist discourses.

LABOUR did not shy away from the traumas embedded within an Irish cultural context. Nor did it neglect the weight of oppression experienced by women historically. Those who trudged through the snow in London to experience the first live exhibition of LABOUR at]performance space[were not greeted with warmth. They were confronted with shivering, soaked, soiled and stained bodies. They encountered bodies engaged in restrained and regimented actions, as if endlessly caught in a repetitious grind. Amidst the harshness of this grating atmosphere, however, there also emerged moments of lightness and points of connection. The peaks and troughs in the communal energy during the eight-hour duration sparked occasions of loud connectivity through escalating sounds, yet at other times, instances of collective silence. Within both the rising momentum of rhythmical rallying calls and the sharp falls into silent stillness the potentials for developing communal strength and dialogue across the successive live exhibitions were ignited. In activating multiple and new forms of expression and resistance, alongside potentials for the production of empowered discourses from and between live female bodies LABOUR gains its performative power.



VENUE 1

BENJAMIN SEBASTIAN -]PERFORMANCE SPACE[- LONDON

]performance space[does exactly what it says on the tin. We continuously strive to maintain space where things can be performed: gender, politics, art, emotions, critique & life. We are sensitive not censored.]performance space[acts as a point of synthesis & exchange, inviting, encouraging and nurturing those visual performance practices that may often find themselves outside-of, left-out-of or in-between other mediums, formats, dialogues and visual arts institutions. We are a space where those who (may or may not) find it difficult to have their work programmed, due to issues of duration, size, status, action(s) or politics, may take the time & space to create and explore their artistic endeavours. We do not ask permission. We are a space for process, a place for difficult, unresolved and evolving work.

Coming from a (post)colonial heritage myself (& the personal is important here) and maintaining active solidarity with Feminist, LGBTQ & Occupy movements, I have been greatly influenced and moved by visual performance emerging from an Irish cultural context. As Assistant Director at]performance space[such influence has afforded me the pleasure of co-curating artists such as Helena Hamilton, Dominic Thorpe, Alastair MacLennan, Hugh O'Donnell & Sinead O'Donnell, while at the same time insisting upon an observation of the artist initiatives such as Bbeyond, The Performance Collective & Platform Arts along with institution such as Catalyst Arts, PS2 & Golden Thread Gallery.

After reviewing the force of practices presented at Right Here, Right Now: Kilmainham Gaol, Dublin (Curated by Dominic Thorpe, Amanda Coogan & Niamh Murphy) I felt compelled to engage the practices, politics and emotions being emitted from this cultural setting. Through meeting Helena Walsh at various performance platforms - and again at]performance space[for an enactment of the installation by Alastair MacLennan (BEYONDNECESSITY)- I was directed towards *Brutal Silences: Live Art and Irish Culture* and experienced an instant affinity not only with the melancholic mood represented through documented photographs and film, yet also with a sadness and frustration at the apparent and profound occupation of womens bodies, time and space within many positions of an Irish historical context.

It was at this point imperative for me that a focused attention was drawn more closely towards such practices. Through a meeting of minds and hearts, the curators and myself were able to devise and implement a touring exhibition offering unprecedented exposure to some of the most dynamic and thought provoking live work, made by women, coming out of an Irish cultural context. I am honoured to have met the force of women involved and proud to have produced the touring live exhibition: LABOUR.

Benjamin Sebastian is an artist-curator based in London. He is assistant director at]performance space[- the UK's only performance specific art space.

performancespace.org

VENUE 2

MAOLIOSA BOYLE - THE VOID, DERRY

Derry has had a long and interesting history of female labour starting from as early as the 1750's when the majority of the city's female population were employed in the flax and linen industry. Women were the dominant force, the key drivers behind the industrial development of Derry, building in particular a renowned reputation for their skills in needlework and sewing.

In the 1870's the women in the shirt factories worked long and arduous hours producing a shirt every 2 minutes, with the industry reaching it's peak in the 1920's employing 18,000 people, the majority of which were women.

Despite a decline in the industry during the second half of the 20th century due to work being outsourced to other countries, the memories and stories of the factories lived on and now form a massive part of the identity and female history of Derry. Most families have had a mother, sister, aunt or grandmother who worked in one of the 25 factories in and around Derry's City Centre.

With these facts in mind, when Chrissie Cadman approached Void to host the LABOUR project we believed it fitted perfectly, given that the space's previous function was that of a shirt factory.

In 2004 when Void located the space in the City Factory the last remaining workers were still in situ and the store room, now Void's gallery spaces retained large rolls of fabric, vestiges of another era.

On Saturday 25th February, the history of the space was given life with the LABOUR performances, the energies of the women who once occupied the rooms became real. The previous life-force of the factory shone through as the building became part of the activity injecting its own female experience.

The response from the Derry audience was overwhelming with many of the audience members commenting on the intense power and energy that the performers exuded.

Thank you to all the artists involved and in particular to Chrissie Cadman. Void is delighted to be a partner and associated with LABOUR.

derryvoid.com



A SYMPOSIUM ON LIVE PERFORMANCE FROM THE VISUAL ARTS FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

FRIDAY 9TH MARCH 2012, THE LAB, DUBLIN

Co-curated by Amanda Coogan and Sheena Barrett

Kindly supported by Dublin City Council, the Arts Council, GradCAM and MAVIS/iadt and the University of Ulster.

This symposium was held in conjunction with the Live exhibition, LABOUR. Among the issues addressed were the formal strategies and the conceptual themes of Performance Art practice from an international perspective and an exploration of the form as practiced in Ireland. The presentations and discussions also explored themes including Identity, Duration, Remembrance and Repetition.

SESSION I - Chaired by Amanda Ralph

Keynote Address – *Some Girls Are Bigger Than Others* (with thanks to The Smiths and Áine Phillips), **Lois Keidan**

Short Presentations

The female body as a political site, views from the practice of Live Art - **Caitriona Reilly**

Performing Processes: Live art and Irish culture - **Helena Walsh**

Beckettian echos in Irish Performance practice - **Brenda Farrell**

The Magdalene Laundries - Research becomes practice - **Evelyn Glynn and Aine Phillips**

Glynn and Aine Phillips

'World's End Lane' Live Art; Reading into the Site - **Ciara Murphy**

SESSION II - Chaired by Sheena Barrett

Keynote Address - : *'Nice work if you can get it?'* *Thinking about Women and the Global Labour Market*, **Ailbhe Smyth**

The Guerilla Girls in Ireland - **Kate Antosik Parsons**

Workshop – Abramovic/Rainer/LA MoCA - Precarity and women's work, Performance Art and work. Workshop groups facilitated by Sheena Barrett, Amanda Coogan, Lynnette Moran and Liz Burns with reportage from MAVIS

Live Performance from Tanya O'Keefe and Olivia Hassett

SESSION III - The Three Curators

Helena Walsh - *Labour; History, Action, Identity.*

Chrissie Cadman - *Labour; remuneration and the Art market.*

Amanda Coogan - *Labour; Duration and Endurance.*

Amanda Ralph is an artist whose practice is based on ideas generated through consideration of material in the public realm. Amanda is Programme Director of the MA in Visual Arts Practices at Dún Laoghaire IADT. She holds an M.Sc. from Trinity College Dublin, an MFA from the University of Arizona Tucson.

Lois Keidan is the co-founder and Director of the Live Art Development Agency, London which offers a wide range of Resources, Professional Development Initiatives, and Projects for the support and development of Live Art practices and critical discourses in the UK and internationally. www.thisisliveart.co.uk

Caitriona Reilly is currently a first year PhD candidate in Drama Studies at Queen's University, Belfast. Her PhD thesis aims to identify how performance, theatre and culture reflects the current postfeminist state and concerns of contemporary and globalised Irish and American societies.

Brenda Farrell completed her MA. in Twentieth Century Irish Writing and Cultural Theory in NUI Maynooth. Her dissertation title was *The Horror of Nothing to See: Beckettian Echoes and Performing the Corporeal Body in Amanda Coogan's Art*. Her research areas are: Women and Ireland in Beckett's late works, site-specific performance art, eco-criticism and cultural landscapes.

Evelyn Glynn completed an MA in Fine Art at Limerick School of Art and Design in 2011. Her research focused on the Good Shepherd Magdalene Laundry in Limerick.

Ciara Murphy studied English and Drama at undergraduate level in UCD and is currently studying the Drama and Performance MA in UCD. Her areas of interest are: Performance and Theatre Space, Gender Theory and Theatres of War.

Kate Antosik Parsons has just recently completed her PhD entitled *Remembering and Forgetting: Memory and Gender in Contemporary Irish Time-Based Art* in UCD. Kate has published essays on memory and gender in Irish performance art and on representations of Northern Irish Masculinities. She is on the editorial committee of *Artefact: The Journal of the Irish Association of Art Historians*.

Ailbhe Smyth has been active in feminist, LGBT and radical politics for many years. She is currently co-convenor of Feminist Open Forum, chair of the National Lesbian and Gay Federation, and national convenor of the People Before Profit Alliance. Formerly a senior academic at UCD, Ailbhe co-founded the Women's Education, Research and Resource Centre (WERRC) 1990. She has published widely on feminist, political and cultural issues.

Sheena Barrett is an Arts Officer with Dublin City Council and Curator of the LAB Gallery. A graduate of UCD, she has previously worked at Breaking Ground art commissioning programme, the National Museum of Ireland, the National Gallery of Ireland, Artworking, Temple Bar Gallery & Studios and in the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice.

Lynnette Moran is a Creative Arts Producer and Director based in Dublin. She is founder of Live Collision and co-curator of Project Brand New, co-director of mouth to mouth | international performance collective and Lead Research and Development Producer for Create.

Liz Burns curates the visual arts programme for Fire Station Artists' Studios. She completed her MA in Visual Arts Practices with IADT Dublin 2008/9. In November 2011 Liz took part in a curatorial intensive with ICI (Independent Curator's International) in New York, focusing on curating performance.

Tanya O'Keefe & Olivia Hassett are currently MA students in the Sculpture Department at the National College of Art and Design and participants in the GradCAM's Performance Research Seminar.



MICHELLE BROWNE

Michelle Brown is an artist and curator based in Dublin. Her practice both for galleries and public spaces is fundamentally performance based. Her gallery-based performance often deals with the position of women in society and how societal, personal and natural phenomena come to bear on how women are treated, perceived and represented.

WORK TITLE: 'THE GRACE OF GOD'

My grandmother was a dressmaker. She supported her family through sewing. To sew in my family is to be mother, provider and carer. Many women during my grandmother's lifetime were putting thread to needle in Magdelene Laundries as an act of penance, forced labour for the sins of the female: vanity, 'a love of dress', display of sexuality or being an unmarried mother. During this performance I sew uniforms over the course of the working day. Evoking the 'children' who were locked up and called the 'fallen', I work with the elements of dressmaking to consider the plight and situation of the women in these institutions. Through my performance work I am interested in exploring the female body as a site of meaning in society, as an object that is bestowed many social and biological functions, and how these can often come into conflict.

michellebrowne.net

The Grace of God, 2012
The Void, Derry
photo: Pavana Reid



CHRISSIE CADMAN

Born Derry, Northern Ireland. Graduated with Masters Degree 'Art in Public' from the University of Ulster 2009. I studied and received BA Fine and Applied Arts Degree in 2005-2007. In 2005 received 'Freddie Clifford Sculpture Award' from the Context Gallery Derry as a reflection of the HND/BTEC Studies in Fine Art from the North West Institute of Higher and Further Education. I am a PhD candidate at the University of Ulster.

STATEMENT

I am currently a member of Bbeyond, a performance platform that supports performance art and artist in Belfast at local, national and international events. My work is based within the experiential process of living. The semantics of the various languages held in political, social and cultural ideologies are the contested metaphors I like to navigate. My focus is on specific activities related to the ordinary and the extraordinary in the everyday. Finding ways to explore, engage and open discourse and dialogues in the shifting environments of society. Philosophical and scientific states influence the methodologies considered in the processes and delivery in my approach to this nomadic sculptural practice, which is embraced in different performative styles suited to its conceptual context.

Finding a Balance, 2012
Performance Space, London
photo: Marco Berardi



AMANDA COOGAN

Amanda Coogan is a performance artist living in Dublin, Ireland. The centrality of Coogan's practice is durational live performance where powerful live events are fundamental to her videos and photographs. Her expertise lies in her ability to condense an idea to its very essence and communicate it through her body. She is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Ulster.

WORK TITLE: BUBBLE UP IN BLUE

Coogan is a formidable practitioner of Live Durational Performance involving elements of endurance. For LABOUR she has chopped off the body from view, allowing the top of the face to protrude out of the mound of costume. Her mouth occasionally comes into vision oozing blue liquid. Costume is a signature of Coogan's work and for Bubble up in Blue she uses a number of high-street winter coats creating an image that allows for a multitude of readings; an animal, a creature, a body, a woman. For Coogan, the moment of Live Performance is one of communication, a place where she invites the audience to construct a personal reading of the work.

amandacoogan.com

Bubble up in Blue, 2012
Performance Space, London
photo: Marco Berardi



FRANCES MEZZETTI

Mezzetti is a Dublin based visual artist and uses the medium of live performance. Her work examines the connection of the human subject with the local environment. She uses common materials and everyday actions, with the personal and local history of a given place. She is a member of The Performance Collective.

PAULINE CUMMINS

Cummins is an artist whose work explores the human condition from a feminist perspective. Her interest lies in performance and video work where she examines identity, gender and socio-cultural relations connected to different communities in society. Her examination of specific locations questions how the self is constituted and how people act within a group either chosen or determined in social situations such as work, education, prison, leisure time, or within the basic structure of the family.

WORK TITLE: WALKING IN THE WAY

This is a series of live performances initiated by Frances Mezzetti and developed and performed in collaboration with Pauline Cummins since 2009.

In the performances they embody certain freedoms of being male informed by local history, the environment and the architecture of the area.

The show LABOUR has included Walking in the Way where the two female artists take on the persona, mannerisms, gestures and physicality of male presence in the public arena. The eight hours of live performances develops from the research and observations of how men occupy streets and local areas. The focus of each piece develops from the general to the particular. An important part of the research process is making a connection with local individuals who have contributed to the life of the community. Their stories and exchanges give the artists an understanding of the qualities of each community and place. In the live performances the artists give a response in subtle unobtrusive ways. Inhabiting a space without drawing attention to the performer is an aim of Walking in the Way. Previous performances have been in locations in Dublin, Belfast and Edinburgh and in the LABOUR show they have been performed in London and Derry. The Dublin Show is the seventh in the series and Pauline Cummins will perform it in Istanbul while Frances Mezzetti's journey will explore the area in and around Talbot St, Dublin.

Walking in the Way, 2012
The Void, Derry
photo: Jordan Hutchings

theperformancecollective.com | paulinecummins.com



ANN MARIA HEALY

Ann Maria Healy is a visual artist based in Galway, Ireland. Graduating from Galway & Mayo Institute of Technology in 2009 with a first class honours in Fine Art, Sculpture, her practice includes live performance, installation and photography. Her work explores the bodies' relationship to space and time, in particular focusing on cycles, how they affect and shape our lives.

WORK TITLE: I DO NOT FEEL ASHAMED

In sociological studies of Ireland the tendency of female workers is still toward occupations that express aspects of femininity such as caring, dexterity and communication skills - this clearly relates to broader gender stereotypes. Although in the last thirty years Ireland has become much more liberated, these stereotypes we grew up with are still deeply ingrained. The contrast of these stereotypes against our new found liberation often causes much confusion. Referencing the Roman Goddess Ceres, the goddess of agriculture, fertility and motherly relationships, 'I do not feel ashamed' explores this area of confusion by juxtaposing the archaic method of wheat grinding with a song from popular culture.

annmariahealy.com

I do not feel ashamed, 2012

The Void, Derry

photo: Jordan Hutchings



ÁINE O'DWYER

O'Dwyer studied Fine Art at the Limerick School of Art and Design, Ireland and completed her Masters at The Slade School of Art, London in 2011. O'Dwyer's practice draws upon her interests in performance, video, film, sculpture and sound based material. She has performed and exhibited both nationally and internationally in Europe and across the US.

WORK TITLE: THE CRADLE ROCKS THE LAND

A woman dressed in a white altar boys vestment and red underwear, works the body of a hobbyhorse, grasping onto a white rocker frame. She rocks herself back and forth continuously and each action is measured by a mechanic-like creaking sound. Her face maintains a constant smile and her lips are embellished with red lipstick. She aims her gaze into the eyes of the audience members in between her shunting movements. Her white vestment plays with the wind and bellows with each breath of her rocking. At times, the performance captures a child-like contentment but this image occasionally breaks loose of docile play and shifts into a wild disorder. The rocker becomes a beast with it's own momentum. The woman continues to rock regardless. Her smile is forever fixed on the presence of her audience.

Horseplay, 2008
Firkin Crane, Cork
photo: Bernadine Carol



ÁINE PHILLIPS

Phillips is a visual artist based in the west of Ireland who makes live art and new media work nationally and internationally. Her work aims to link autobiographical themes, actions and images with wider social and political realities. She curates Live@8, a regular performance and video art event in social spaces.

WORK TITLE: REDRESS: EMOTIONAL LABOUR

Redress, a series of performances since 2010 explore and highlight cultures of exploitation and compensation in Ireland in the past, especially in relation to institutional abuse. At the centre of women's history in Ireland are the notorious Magdalene Laundries where countless women were confined up to 1996 and subjected to unpaid hard labour for the crimes of unmarried pregnancy, being in moral danger or precocity. Phillips always felt she would have ended up in a Magdalene Laundry if she had been born some years earlier.

"The stories are now coming out, in parts, as though stuck in a web" writes a Magdalene survivor. Redress retrieves the discarded stories from people on whom silence had been imposed and Áine Phillips carries their stories on her body while she performs their conditions. The listener must come close to her to hear the sound recordings made in collaboration with Evelyn Glynn.

Through actions and performance images Phillips also explores themes of staining (what is hidden is seeping out), crawling (to transform supplication into intimacy) and netting (entanglement and escape). Redress is an attempt to restore dignity and agency and the power of discourse on behalf of women who were denied human rights in the past.

ainephillips.com

Redress: Emotional Labour, 2012
Performance Space, London
photo: Marco Berardi



ANNE QUAIL

Quail is a performance artist living in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Her practice is focused on the improvised action, a working with material as a means to transcend the perceived subject object dialect. It is the subsequent embodied meaning that arises from this communion that we, as cohabiters of the event, engage with.

WORK TITLE: THE GOOD SHE

I work with improvised actions. Not directly focusing on Irishness, but trusting that it naturally comes through in the work. This project offers the opportunity to pay attention to the idea of Irishness, particularly through the use of representation as a means to bring attention to it. It is a challenge to work with an action and with representation at the same time, without one subsuming to the other. We all have our own ideas of national identity; but the idea of a representative Irish female identity takes on a different character when measured against an international audience. Questioning what is perceived as traditional on a national level is different to asking the same question on an international scale. Does the shifting, changing colour of a nationally perceived representation fade to a fixed point when seen from the distance of international representation? It is in the doing of the action, that the symbolic is thrown into relief and enables a direct handling of the questions that arise.

annequail.com

the good she, 2102
Performance Space, London
photo: Marco Berardi



ELVIRA SANTAMARÍA TORRES

Mexico City (1967). Now based in Northern Ireland. She is an experienced Performance Artist. Since 1991 she has presented her performances at different international festivals, public spaces, museums, galleries and theatres worldwide. Since 2000, she has been a member of the performance art group Black Market International.

STATEMENT

“Action art” is a formless form of art of practical existential knowledge, its poetics postulate the self-creation as an endless process. The symbolic act creates important reference points in the evolution of consciousness of the artist, but the non-symbolic one is the true dimension of the present.

My main concern is to underline the changeable, fragile and ephemeral aspects of life in my own work and point fundamental aspects of human acts, behaviour and consciousness-developing in performance art; time, space and presence as a structural trinity of change and transformation; its aesthetics and ethics.

I consider my artwork as action poetry in process. I never repeat a performance, but I explore the possible variations of the same principals, materials, gestures or para-narratives.

48... blancos / 48... whites, 2007

Bogota, Colombia

photo: Eduardo del Corral



HELENA WALSH

Walsh is an Irish live artist based in London. Through her practice she explores the construction of gender and subverts the containment of female sexuality. Helena is currently undertaking a practice-based PhD in the Department of Drama, Queen Mary University of London that explores live art, femininity and Ireland.

STATEMENT

Helena Walsh's live art practice is strongly based within a socio-political context and investigates social ideologies that construct gender and limit women's empowerment. Through her practice Walsh positively violates the preconceived systems, borders and rules that impinge on individual identity. Drawing on her subjective and embodied experiences, Walsh uses her body within her work as a communicative force. Her work acknowledges the power of bodily presence in making visible that which is often overlooked within dominant discourses of power.

In a series of new performances devised for LABOUR, Walsh plays with the dominant ideologies and symbolism that restrain women's political advancement in an Irish cultural context. Through her actions Walsh subverts the containment of female sexuality and challenges the ongoing moral regulation of female reproductive autonomy. In doing so, she proposes the assertion of empowered forms of female pleasure as significant to women gaining full rights over their bodies in an Irish cultural context.

helenawalsh.com

Untitled, 2012

Performance Space, London

photo: Marco Berardi

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Edited by Sheena Barrett and Amanda Coogan.

Designed by: Donagh Young | Design HQ

Printed by: Impress Ltd, Dublin.

Dublin City Arts Office/the LAB
Foley Street, Dublin 1, Ireland.

ISBN 978-0-9554281-6-6

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A live exhibition and tour on the scale of LABOUR is not possible without a huge team of assistance. We are very grateful to the following team for supporting LABOUR:

In Dublin: Maura Carty, Maria McKinney, Mick Wilson, Jim Doyle, Ruairi O'Cuiv, Sinead Connolly, Victoria Kearney, Catherine Neville, Jonathan Ekwe, Jiri Nedbal, Annette O'Rourke and Joan McHugh, The Firestation Artists Studios, Sian Cunningham, Mia Lerm-Hayes, Shirley Mac William, Brian Connolly, Jimmy Fay, Sally-Ann Kelly, Ailve Mc Cormack and Ciara Mc Keon, Declan Rooney, Herma Wittstock, Derek O'Connor, Sinead Corcoran, Grainne Tynan, Francis Quinn and all on the MAVIS programme and GradCAM's Performance Research Seminar.

In Derry: Joanna Boyd, Patricia Logue, The Soul Cafe, B&Q, Doherty's Metal Merchants, Createprint, Peter Hamil, Bbeyond, Gang'O'Gals, Caroline Murphy, Brian Patterson, Peter Spiers, Sinead Bheathnach-Cashell, Donna Young, Paul Anderson, Mel Bradley.

In London: Charlotte Bean and all at]performance space[, Lois Weaver, Alfie Jouanneau, Piotr Jozwiak, Rachel Sansom, Vago Tedosio, Edina Husanovic, Kevin Biderman, Sebastian Hau-Walker, Andre Verissimo, Electric Matchbox, Maurys Sewing Machine Company, Hackney City Farm, Tullamore Dew Whisky.



Live Art
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LABOUR IS A TOURING EXHIBITION OF LIVE ART, FEATURING ELEVEN LEADING FEMALE ARTISTS WHO ARE RESIDENT WITHIN, OR NATIVE TO, NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN IRELAND. LABOUR OFFERS AUDIENCES UNPRECEDENTED ACCESS TO A HUGE BODY OF LIVE PERFORMANCE WORK BY SOME OF THE MOST RADICAL AND EXCITING WOMEN ARTISTS EMERGING FROM AN IRISH CULTURAL CONTEXT.

IN EACH DURATIONAL LIVE EXHIBITION PARTICIPATING ARTISTS PERFORMED SIMULTANEOUSLY FOR EIGHT CONSECUTIVE HOURS, REFLECTING THE DURATION OF AN AVERAGE WORKING DAY. LABOUR AIMS TO DEVELOP CRITICAL AND CREATIVE DIALOGUES AROUND THE FEMALE BODY IN AN IRISH CULTURAL CONTEXT AND ITS BROADER GEO-POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE.

'LABOUR is of great historical significance. Issues of labour and gender are particularly critical within an Irish context, and at the same time Irish women artists or women artists based in Ireland are creating some of the most exciting and challenging performance based work of our times.'

- Lois Keidan - the Live Art Development Agency, 2012

