



Installation shot of **Orrery**, Golden Thread Gallery; foreground: Mike Hoog; Orrery (detail); background: Darren Murray; photo Ian Charlesworth; courtesy Golden Thread Gallery



Amanda McKittrick: from **Heavenly Bodies**; black-and-white photograph; courtesy Old Museum Arts Centre



above: Frances Hegarty and Andrew Stones: **Overnight Sensation**, installation shot of eight-minute-long site-specific video projection (7.7m width, 4.3m height) with two-channel sound for evenings and overnight screening, St. George Market; above right: video still from **Overnight Sensation**; images courtesy the artists

### Belfast I: Not 'between' but 'merging'

At the Golden Thread Gallery Darren Murray's evocation of Chinese and Japanese modes of painting merged seamlessly with western ornithological studies of common garden birds. In a kind of friendly co-existence Mike Hoog's **Orrery** gave the title to the exhibition as well as to three metal mobile sculptures. Rooted in the invention of George Graham and named after his patron Charles Boyle, Fourth Earl of Orrery, small and large models of the solar system, more or less complete, became popular at the same time as chinoiserie in Western painting. The two artists shared the combination of a revived concept (colour field and constructivism respectively) with a small detail (birds studies, found objects), whose narrative force dominated over the scale. The whisper of the screen-wiper motors and pulleys imbued the structures with a connection to the 'music of the spheres'—about which we know nothing.

*The idea that artists have a special secret knowledge to give is still an evergreen meme. I prefer to interpret the knowledge which art can give as a help in ferreting out, interdependently with the viewer, the essential keys to knowing. This neatly shadows the process between a medical professional and a patient, one of the themes at the Old Museum Arts Centre. Instead of caring, nurturing and encouraging*

trick as an artist connected back to her art practice, and exhibited nine black-and-white photographs of her ill daughter: Aoife lies in her cot, moves her head, copes with a ventflow, wears mum's wedding dress, dances with Hamish, her little brother, is lovingly carried by her father, and jumps the stairs in front of her grandmother.

It could have been another 'confessional' artwork. Thankfully it is not. The artist 'knowingly' explored not just the given and the lived (i.e., life-threatening cancer) but, significantly, aimed at giving imagination equal opportunity. This is difficult to perceive—the 'documentary' aspect of any photograph allows an assumption that we know what we are looking at. The imagined, be it a person, a world, a feeling, pain, despair or hope, is visible only through fragments of the known, which re-enforces the assumption. McKittrick found an elegant solution for how to subvert this. She blurs what her lens is directed at. Denying perfection to the 'document' opens up imaginary trajectories. Importantly these are anchored in an unshakable premise: the stationary lens cannot capture the movement. The blurring is a strategy to forge uncertainty—visually.

Aoife's mother is nowhere to be seen. Yet she is inside each frame as the author. Compared to the other cultural constructs of the subject, the Mother-Daughter relationship is shifted to the so-called second creator: Her absence indicates separation, her authorship appears as creative co-operation. A survival skill.

The new number one survival skill, after the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2001, is interpretation. Modern neuroscience proposes consciousness as dependent on the connectivity of the brain.

Andrew Stones wrote to me about the work he and Frances Hegarty made for Belfast:

*[We were] simply to make a public artwork...A general theme of 'let there be light' had been proposed for the*



Aoife's growing independence, Amanda McKittrick had to collude with the medical profession to hurt her daughter: "I have to give over her body to be examined, touched, probed and poisoned."

She could not stay in between the two worlds and the two roles, she had to find a way of soothingly merging them. In addition, McKit-



*Festival as a whole. However, as always we were primarily concerned to develop a satisfactory relationship between (shared) personal language and intentions and a given site. We proposed the market hall... We were commissioned in early August, installed the camera and collected the footage the week beginning 20 August. We edited together intensively for a period of 3-4 weeks... We had to oversee the design of the screen and order a custom made surface from screen specialist in England; and make sure that the projector would be adequate. We also designed publicity...<sup>2</sup>*

During the scheduled times the work was seen from inside the market or through the gates from the street. Some complained that the street lights bleached out the light leaking through the metalwork. I saw it only when the gates were open. Standing in the dark hall, empty but for a stall with leaflets, the screen and those present, I experienced a rare aesthetic pleasure. I felt the work was beautiful and puzzling. We laughed when we recognized a known figure. The tempo of the stop-frame technique added gentle grotesqueness. The cries of the sellers connected to practical life: e.g., "here's the last two bunches... eight pounds worth of flowers for three pound." Kitty, the seller nearest to the digital camera, placed above the May Street entrance, was 'legible' because she was always in that space. Another person, a black-attired nun, escaped fragmentation because she stood motionless for some time. The two interest me as contradictory cases of visibility: one because she moved all day within the same distance she did not move and was there only briefly. In both cases the visibility is facilitated by continuity, either of space or of time.

The continuous fragmentation

by stop-frame of the space and people connected the images to the instability of existence, to 'memento mori'. The vivacity of the market became undermined. The relentless work turned on itself. When the market ended and the laden stalls were covered like shrouded corpses, the sound evoked the nearby sea. Clouds of smoke and blue light entered the hall. The power of nature entered.

"How did you make the morning light...?" I asked. Stones answered:

*In terms of colour and light this is a 'day for night' effect achieved by processing a very bright, accelerated sequence collected during the day prior to the market day. You do*



Willie Doherty: from **Double Take**; black-and-white photograph; courtesy Ormeau Baths Gallery

*see part of the market actually being set up but the manner of its appearance is altered. We combined a number of mattes and colour treatments to create this sequence although all are choreographed around... mid-day sun...<sup>3</sup>*

Oh—what of truth? The Friday market is never so pretty, so mysterious. The unexpected use of light, fragments, rhythm, reality and invention, connects ordinary life to the cosmos of visual beauty—a convincing lie. Contemplative and intoxicating, this is an autonomous work of art that respects its sources and the audience, while it

changes substances like an alchemist.

Willie Doherty attracts some expectations. However, the work is heavily contextualized. Watching, what I wished for was some creative editing. The voice-over becomes irrelevant to those of us who do not share the secrets of accents aligned to sectarian beliefs.

Doherty has had a respected involvement with words all his creative life; now, however, his black-and-white photographs do not have a verbal element. Trusting the visual did not extend to the video *How it was*, 2001.<sup>4</sup> Again, a two-screen projection, the same takes, unsynchronised, with voices of male and female actors. The panning and

I deeply respect, allows him to flirt with some surfaces as if they provided in-depth analysis. *The Drawer* is a successful application of this: most of the photograph is blinded by black colour; light makes visible two handles. Yet they are so far apart that one's attention has to oscillate from one to the other. Doherty's concern with how we see, how we look, continues in several other images. In one, the flora turns into a wild boar's snout, the impression of a tyre in mud looks like a landscape seen from miles away, the number plate weeps raindrops.

By subverting the apparent documentary role of the visual, Doherty contemplates the intertextuality of seeing, thinking and knowing. That's a very welcome call to individual responsibility.

<sup>2</sup>The Golden Thread Gallery handout with artist's statement

<sup>3</sup>E-mail from Stones to author, 29.10.01

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. There is a good website:

<http://www.brighter.org/hegartystones/pages/ovsnsBDY.htm>

<sup>5</sup>See also interview with Willie Doherty, pp. 17-19—Ed.

PS. It is wonderful to explore the website of artist Beverly Hood who had an exhibition at the Proposition Gallery, Belfast, from November 8 to December 13, 2001. I strongly recommend a visit: <http://www.bhood.co.uk>. It makes up for not catching the gallery open.

Darren Murray and Mike Hoog:

**Orrery**, Golden Thread Gallery, November/December 2001

Amanda McKittrick: **Heavenly Bodies**, Old Museum Arts Centre, December 2001/January 2002

Frances Hegarty and Andrew Stones: **Overnight Sensation**, St. George Market Hall, Belfast, October 26-28 and November 3-7, 2001

Willie Doherty: **Double Take**, Ormeau Baths Gallery, October-December 2001

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