

¹¹⁰ FRANCES HEGARTY
AND ANDREW STONES:
TACTICALLY YOURS



When a rock is lifted the earth is lighter and the hand that bears it heavier.¹

There was an ominous and serious atmosphere to this exhibition. There were numerous monitors in the basement spaces, their content the repetitive throwing of a stone in a forest by actors (the two artists), one after the other as in a competition. The image of stone throwers in a fire break of a commercial forest would seem to offer Hegarty and Stones an ambiguous iconic and cinematic/televsual image. The insistence of the image in three of the gallery's spaces left the viewer in no doubt as to its significance for the artists who wanted to focus on their personal and collaborative partnership. The female actor (Hegarty), dressed in dark clothes, throws with her left arm; the male actor (Stones), also in dark gear with a hat, throws with his right. The length/ ordnance of the throw is beyond the focus or detail of the camera and monitors and the source of the ready supply of stones is not revealed. All distinguishing information about the location is hidden. The intense, layered audio in each gallery hints at passing traffic, so one can speculate that both actors are not lost. The opportunity for a psychoanalytical narrative following a kind of Victor Burgin approach are not taken up, although the formalism of the display in the spaces reminded me of his work. There could have been a language play on the name of Andrew Stones. The muteness of the image, the excessive neatness, the foreshortening of the frame and the frontality of the arrangement to each space (almost like altars) seemed to suggest some religious echoes, as in 'he who is without sin etc'. But the reference seems a bit faint.

A stronger interpretative link comes from the specific location of the Butler in the theatrical presence of Kilkenny Castle; it suggests that *Tactically yours* aims to contemplate

rebellion and insurrection, of making an assault. Stone-throwing is an apprenticeship position in many a freedom fighter's biography. Collaboration in the context of a castle in Ireland speaks of informing and betrayal, and tactical loyalty is what court life was/ is all about. The artists are placing themselves in a forest to throw stones along an axis; it's a safe place for a rebellion that is collected and presented as CCTV/ formal art installation. The monitors' brands are neatly taped over, and the steel stands and black DVD players with neatly coiled cables are all spotless and sterile. The pristine display is overshadowed by the Castle environment; the summer audience would have a large number of tourist visitors and this, I believe, is acknowledged in the ambiguity between cultural and military manoeuvres in the forest actions.

The final space at the Butler presented a colour video projection of rapid drawings on paper by enlarged right-handed male and left-handed female hands. Thirty-two charcoal drawings appear in the frame, completed simultaneously as in an accelerated game of hangman or noughts and crosses. There is a distinct aggression in this work, accentuated by the staccato tick-tack sound of the charcoal sticks hitting off the page. Why this piece is so fast is hard to discern. Occasionally, the charcoal stick falls or the paper tears, and this adds to a sense of improvisation in the hit-and-miss battlelines that are in contrast to the more formal forest work. There is a compelling interactive quality to the work, as scattered marks, curlicues and dashes are scribbled over or underlined. Is the viewer's role to adopt a graphologist's approach and assign value to the gender battle or referee who started a scribble and who stopped first? *Tactically yours* obviously signals something quite personal between

these collaborating people at a specific stage of their partnership; a critical weakness can sometimes occur in this scenario in that those immersed within the collaborative relationship presume that a viewer will be automatically responsive to such reflexivity. *Tactically yours* avoids this pitfall, in my opinion, because it strains to address the viewer openly as a co-conspirator, if that's not too much of a paradox. The drawing video follows a trajectory from a concern with representation or identity to one of social interaction or a social demonstration that anyone couple could try. Hegarty and Stones have created at least six large collaborative pieces over the past decade; a critical research project might investigate how these works can be periodised and related to other collaborative practices in these islands.

Do you see how an act is not like a rock that one picks up and throws and its hits and misses, and that's the end of it.²

1 Ursula K Le Guin, *Earthsea trilogy*, Penguin, London, 1979, p 361
2 Ibid, p 361

Brian Hand is an artist and Programme Leader of the BA (hons) in Fine Art at the Wexford Campus of IT Carlow.

Frances Hegarty and Andrew Stones
Tactically yours, 2007
installation view
© / courtesy the artists