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Art in the Life World, Review

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Art in the Life World

29 February – 12 April (Wednesday to Sunday, 1- 6pm)

Old Swimming Pool, Ballymun

Artists: Cecily Brennan, Jota Castro, Adam Chodzko, Minerva Cuevas, Jeanette Doyle, Janice Feighery, Stephen Gunning, Jesse Jones, Nevan Lahart, Matthieu Laurette, Ken Meehan, Mark McGowan, Theresa Nanigian, Women of the Star Project, Seamus Nolan, Hugh O'Neill, Abigail Reynolds, The Centre of Attention, Hiraki Sawa, Santiago Sierra,

Breaking Ground is the name given to the Ballymun Regeneration Ltd.'s Per Cent for Art Scheme. Art in the Life World is its latest exhibition and is installed in a disused swimming pool in the middle of Ballymun's radically changing landscape. Ballymun was designed in the late 1960s as a model town in North Dublin, but by the early 1970s was suffering from a lack of adequate amenities and related social difficulties. The regeneration of the area is due to be physically completed in 2012. Central to this plan is the dramatic demolishing of thirty-six apartment tower blocks ranging in height from fifteen-storey to four-storey. In the same decade that Ballymun's troubles became apparent, the Irish Government launched a Per Cent for Art Scheme, allowing one per cent of building costs to be allocated for the provision of art works. Since then, the scheme has adapted to include less permanent forms of public art, such as this latest project in Ballymun.

Set up in 2002, Breaking Ground has fostered both temporary and permanent projects, with considerable emphasis on collaborative approaches between invited artists, performing groups and interested local individuals and communities. To date the visual artists have reflected a wide range of practices and include Jochen Gerz, Cathy Delaney, John Byrne and Janice Feighery. The Art in the Life World exhibition overtly mixes socially collaborative projects with context driven works, art about art and location specific installations. Curated by Aisling Prior, Director/Curator of Breaking Ground, it contains twenty-two separate works by invited artists and groups. This disparity, far from being an impeding aspect, forces the

visitor to question perceptions of community art, public art and commercial gallery systems. Furthermore, peering into a swimming pool full of art, venturing through passage ways, weaving in and out of changing cubicles and walking tentatively into revitalised store areas adds up to an engagement with art that clearly brings into view the excitement to be found outside galleries.

In the airy first room, with the drained pool, Jesse Jones' video installation, *Zarathustra*, reflects an attentive attitude to its subjects and its social and physical contexts through a pensive artistic sensibility. She organised and videoed a musical performance by the famous local Artane Brass Band in the emptied pool cavity. The first phase of the video pans the wall on which the screen is hung, accompanied by what the viewer later realizes is the chatter and laughter of the children's band setting up to play. The musical performance is revealed in the second part of the video. A gently elegiac work, its mood is in keeping with its contemporary context and has a trance-like effect on the viewer.

Upstairs on the viewing balcony are three works that respectively engage with the wider Ballymun area. *Around* is an absorbing video by Adam Chodzko who has built-up a relationship with the locality through a number of recent projects. This coexists with his ongoing and challenging interest in exploring the tenuous line between fact and fiction. In *Around* a fractured narrative presentation follows the 'discovery' of an archive in the basement of a tower-block. Following footage of a tower-block collapsing in demolition, the images and documents contained in the archive are squinted at by a young woman in an office setting. Interspersed between her musings, these traces of the past are acted out in short sequences: runner shoes thrown over telephone wires, the flying of a kite and two girls searching for mystery with divining rods. All these sequences are accompanied by riveting and evocative sounds. Re-inventing the site around the towers as a place of potential historic importance and mythic interest presents Ballymun as a living ground, like any other, brimming with vibrant stories arising from momentary actions.

In the same space, *Portrayals* by Women from the Star Project and *A Day in the Life*, a series of photographic prints by Hugh O' Neill, more directly portray people from the area.

Portrayals is a series of images developed by a number of women in a re-skilling programme facilitated by Jeannette Doyle. In presentation together these two-dimensional wall works function as a group portrait. The diverse media of drawing, photography, collage, text and paint play off each other in a vibrant revelation of ideas, self-awareness and desires. O'Neill's work, like that of Cecily Brennan's sound and image portrait downstairs, *Tony*, reflects a more illustrative artist's interventionist viewpoint. In O'Neill's work there are, among other images, boys and men cycling around the area, posing for the camera and reclining in the grass. Through Brennan's work Tony stoically tells his troubled lifestory as the listener stands in front of his full-length portrait photograph.

Aside from these works are others where the subject is less directly related to the locality. Nevan Lahart's colourful and active installation, *Hello, there's a fool crisis*, allows the visitor to look into it from a couple of different angles, but not enter. It is described by the artist as "made with stuff", and as ever with Lahart, there are several cutting political commentaries at once running through the work. In the swimming pool, Theresa Nanigian has a meticulously inscribed text work, *Case Study*. This plays on the reliability of art information and 'facts' from internet sources. To read it the viewer must walk around that end of the pool, making Nanigian's reconstitution of internet facts a seamlessly physical and singular experience where written information remains at a meaningful awkward distance.

Also on the ground floor is *Parade* by Stephen Gunning. This is an audio visual installation, shot in black and white and shows, on a loop, the feet of marchers and their shadows. The loud repeated soundtrack of music and applause is from a freestyle frisbee championship. In the shadowy setting of a darkened changing-room the work is hypnotically compelling. The lack of obvious clues to the march's location or purpose, along with the jarring lightheartedness of the soundtrack, encourages the viewer to contemplate the paradoxical universality of displays of identity and protest. It suggests that marches all over the world, seeking to define differentiation, are in their form in step with each other.

A similar comment seems to lie at the heart of Art in the Life World. Whatever way 'public art' is repeatedly described, contested and debated, context usually provides the

fulcrum for distinctions between what is 'public' and 'private'. At the Old Swimming Pool in Ballymun the variability between the works and spaces, themes and forms ensures that ideas of context are reinvented at every turn. This blatant re-forming of contextual specificities provides a persuasive link between these works, and many others.

Niamh Ann Kelly