The dark arts

An Exhibition of Responses to the Gothic

Fine Art Year 3 students
Limerick School of Art and Design
Introduction

The Gothic is a broad church. Although frequently conflated with definitions of terror and horror, in its simplest state, Gothic is the narrative of engagement with otherness, with that which is liminal, marginalized, uncanny and unspoken. It is subversive, subcultural; it is historical yet resolutely contemporary.

The dark arts is an exhibition of varied interpretations to the Gothic where artists were challenged to consider their own reactions to the Gothic through their studio work, to make an artifact that responded to this and to contextualize the resulting work within the Gothic canon. What emerged from this was a diverse and rich body of work, an array that spans many different media including drawing, painting, photography, film and printmaking. The invitation to respond to the Gothic genre provoked very different responses from the participating artists, though several strong themes began to emerge from the work.

Trauma and transformation are key themes within the Gothic. In this show, Masterson, Cahill and Tierney, in different ways explore the idea of apocalyptic destruction. Masterson’s Destruction series juxtaposes images of past and present destruction, Cahill explores the dark mirror of dystopian consumerism in CHANEL and Tierney portrays a post-apocalyptic world of outsiders and the undead in Storyboard No. 1.

Central to this exhibition is Freud’s notion of the unheimlich¹ the idea of the ‘ unhomely’ or uncanny; something which was once familiar grown unfamiliar and the sense of unease that this brings. Burnard, in her video piece Holly and Sebastian presents us with the classic doppelganger, cleverly utilizing a created male double to provoke an uncanny counterpart to her female presence, while Forde, in The Silence draws upon similar notions of doubling. As Alexandra Warwick has commented - “It is the unheimlich manoeuvre, familiar from the Gothic, in which the position of the subject collapses from the illusion of coherent dominance into fragmentary dissolution.”

The sense of the self and body as vulnerable, fractured and grotesque proves a fruitful subject for several artists. Geagan’s Liminal (Image #1) provides a dreamy meditation on the liminality of the body and its boundaries, while its latent monstrosity is considered by Nolan in Bound. Nolan also explores the potential of fetishism to inspire ideas of constraint and distortion, a theme also usefully visited by Slevin in Jelly Smash, as she contemplates the interplay of repulsion and fascination. Murphy’s Les Tissus Macabre offers a contemplative look at the relationship between sex and death played out in the site of the pierced body.

However, it is not only the fractured body itself that appears as a subject, but also the idea of what happens when this body loses its corporal identity. Both Bartlett and O’Reilly offer two very different takes on Victorian mourning rituals; while both utilising the Gothic trope of the abject, with hair as mourning object, Bartlett’s Battleground is intentionally designed to provoke confrontation with the physicality of mourning, while O’Reilly’s video piece, The Locket based on her grandmother’s keepsakes, relates to, in the artist’s own words ”the uncanny, the abject and the beauty of death.” The loss of a grandmother also runs as a theme through Hilliard’s Kitty, an affecting contemplation of memory, loss and decay.

¹ Freud, S (1919) Das Unheimlich
Loss of self, identity and the notion of what is left behind are explored in this show. Remains are the part of the past that persistently lingers. Curran’s Merridith explores ideas of transience and decay, through a compelling series of images, a story of three structures.

Gothic as historical, faux-historical and post-modern is the theme for the collective project A Haunting under the umbrella identity of Gothicise. The Gothic, as Punter suggests “offers a space in which the past can persist in a modified form.” This site-specific project in the People’s Park, Limerick took as its starting point an interpretation of the past of the park, at the crucial festival of Samhain or Hallowe’en, giving the piece an added liminality. Although a collective piece, artists worked on individual projects from a costumed promenade to a Victorian song and dance event, allowing for individual interpretations of the core theme of spectral persistence and alternative histories.

The idea of the Gothic as not only post-modern but post-structural, existing as gaps in the text appears in Walsh’s The scientists hope one day to raise Henrietta… a reflective piece on codes, blanks, entropy that overtly opens the piece up to a multiplicity of viewer interpretations that lead inevitability to Gothic conclusions—“The gaps in the fading text are substantial and offer no concrete answers, though they suggest the possibility of something dark and sinister.”

This is a very brief summary and exposition of the main themes of ‘the dark arts’. What is perhaps most extraordinary about this show is that the work was created by students -third year fine art students in Limerick School of Art and Design, as part of a seminar series in Gothic in Contemporary Culture. Although the work was produced as a result of a student brief, the images, intelligence and authenticity of the responses make a professional, colourful and rich addition to the canon of contemporary Irish Gothic art. It has been a great pleasure to work with all the artists involved, and to see their work emerge from the dual contexts of their critical and contextual seminar and their studio practice, restoring a sense of integration to the sometimes artificial division between theory and practice that can exist within fine art education.

The different themes addressed – loss, mourning, remains, gaps, identity, dystopian imaginings, body vulnerability - and the skilful and potent use of Gothic motifs to address these in a contemporary manner, echo Gilda Williams’ comment “The Gothic remains, in sum, as an enduring term particularly serviceable in times of crisis – today as it did in the late 18th century, as an escape valve for the political, artistic and technological crises underway”.

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Artists featured in the catalogue;

   Kathleen Bartlett
   Holly Burnard
   Mella Cahill
   Lara Curran
   Amy Forde
   Catherine Geagan
   Melissa Hilliard
   Barry Masterson
   Jacintha Murphy
   Ciara Nolan
   Katie O’Reilly
   Eibhlis Slevin
   Aoife Tierney
   Isabella Walsh

Other participating artists

   Cliodhna Barry
   Jack Sullivan
the dark arts
Kathleen Bartlett

Battleground
Human hair, glass, water, rubber bands, satin cushion.
Holly Burnard

Holly and Sebastian
Still from video piece
Mella Cahill

CHANEL
Photocopy of original print
Lara Curran

Merridith
Still from video piece
Amy Forde

The Silence
Original print altered digitally
Catherine Geagan

Liminal (Image #1)
Photograph
Melissa Hiliard

Kitty
Series of prints
Barry Masterson

Destruction series
Prints
Ciara Nolan

Bound
Still from video piece
Katie O’Reilly

The Locket
Still from video piece
Eibhlis Slevin

Jelly Smash
Still from video piece
Aoife Tierney

Storyboard 1
Gouache, ink, on canvas
Isabella Walsh

The scientists hope one day to raise Henrietta...

Photograph
Gothicise (Holly Burnard, Eibhlis Slevin, Barry Masterson, Cliodhna Barry, Ciara Nolan, Catherine Geagan, in collaboration with Tracy Fahey, Aoife Cox, Josie O’Connor, Ciara Farrell)

A Haunting
Collaborative site specific work
Gothicise (Holly Burnard, Eibhlis Slevin, Barry Masterson, Cliodha Barry, Ciara Nolan, Catherine Geagan, in collaboration with Tracy Fahey, Aoife Cox, Josie O’Connor, Ciara Farrell)

A Haunting
Collaborative site specific work
the dark arts
artist
profiles
Kathleen Barlett was born in Killarney, Ireland. Presently completing a Degree in Fine Art Painting from Limerick school of Art and Design, as well as holding a Diploma in fashion. She was a finalist on the 'Late,Late,Fashion Show' and has twice been invited to showcase her work at 'Taispeantais', Ireland. Group exhibitions include the recent 'Fiach/Hunt' 2011. Her work features in many private collections. She currently lives and works in County Clare, Ireland.

Holly Burnard was born in Wales and enjoyed a colourful childhood as a new age traveller, hippie child. She travelled around the British Isles as a child, with her mother. Holly spent her teenage years draped in black, and obsessed with vampires. She has always had a fascination with the gothic, finding the darker things in life to be infinitely more beautiful. She is now currently studying in LSAD. Her previous work involves cling film dresses of her friends which were suspended from trees, they were unearthly and haunting, fitting in with the gothic theme.

Mella Cahill is currently studying Printmaking and Contemporary Practice at LSAD. Her interest currently lies primarily with the uncanny in advertisements and consumer imagery. Her previous work has dealt with the disfigured or monstrous body as a result of cosmetic surgery.

Catherine Geagan is currently studying painting at LSAD. She has previously shown work in Limerick and Moate, Westmeath. Catherine is interested in the 'other-ness' of the Gothic, in particular, how adapting your own Gothic title can automatically place that which is unfamiliar alongside the familiar, if only for a short while. She hopes to continue her study of Gothic on completion of this project.

Melissa Hilliard is currently studying Sculpture and Combined Media at LSAD. She works with mixed media sculpture, photography and animation. Her work investigates some of the most basic inner functions of the human mind. She aims to explore how the brain can act as a storage box for human memories, dreams and fears. The artist explores how some of the most important functions for our human existence can be performed by an organ which at times can be delicate and vulnerable. Melissa has a love of gothic histories, early gothic novels and takes inspiration from gothic visual art. She is intrigued by the parallels between these early gothic themes and how they can still be so powerful in today’s modern world.

Barry Masterson is currently studying Printmaking at LSAD. His interest in the Gothic relates mainly to horror films. He has previously explored themes such as pattern and behaviour in nature as well as the destructive nature of humans, and has had work displayed in the LSAD Drawing Awards. You can see some of his work at http://www.randowm-friend.deviantart.com.

Jacintha Murphy is a student of Fine Art Painting at LSAD. Hailing from Bunclody, Co.Wexford, she has displayed her work in numerous local establishments as well as participating in group shows in Limerick and Quimper, France. Last year, 2011, she received the purchase prize in the ‘Fiach/Hunt’ exhibition and her work is currently on display in the Hunt Museum, Limerick as part of their collection. Through the medium of oil paints, she explores the material and the bodily with a focus on the mortality of the flesh.

Ciara Nolan is currently studying Sculpture and Combined Media at LSAD. Her interests in the Gothic relates to art and the unnatural body. She has previously explored themes such as the disfigured body due to external pressures.

Katie O’Reilly is currently studying Sculpture and Combined Media at LSAD. Her interest in the Gothic relates to the Victorian era, and hair that was used in memorial jewellery, to preserve those that have passed, and to keep them living on.

Eibhlis Slevin is currently in her 3rd year of Sculpture and Combined Media in LSAD. She considers herself as part of the Gothic community and subculture due to her love of Gothic and eccentric fashions. Her other interests include her love of the spooky and the bizarre. Her current work practice is based on how the Gothic preys on exaggerating the fears of present-day life.
the dark arts essays
Battleground

Kathleen Bartlett

Bartlett's sculptural piece consists of a glass sphere filled with liquid, bookended with ropes of hair, laid on a satin cushion. The plait comprises cast-off cuttings collected from the hairdresser's floor, woven into a braid. The liquid in the glass teardrop is pure water. On closer inspection we perceive that the globular glass is in the definite shape of a teardrop and that it is bounded by a thick plait on the slim end and a narrow braid on the bulbous end. Both ropes of hair are fashioned from human hair. The liquid filled glass has been placed on a bed of satin. The viewer is at once fascinated and repulsed by the mixture of materials and the hank of real hair.

Bartlett's work to date has been about connection. Recent research led her to the Victorian cult of mourning where she was drawn to creating a piece from human hair. Further exploration led to articles on Victorian post-mortem photography and death relics such as hair jewellery and hair wreaths. These hair wreaths were usually displayed in shadow boxes in the home.\(^4\) The Victorian cult of mourning and mourning rituals were a particular pull, as her on-going interest lies in absence, loss of connection and traces left behind. Here Bartlett noted the enduring need to create a tangible presence through a keepsake.

Formal Victorian rituals of grief precluded the wearing of decorative jewellery in the first year but it was acceptable to wear a keepsake of the deceased. This keepsake was usually either a locket holding a lock of hair, or a bracelet or watch-chain woven from hair. The memento gave the bereaved a feeling of psychic connection and active remembrance. This ornament was a very public yet discreet and private way of showing your grief in a society where death was an everyday occurrence.

Victorians appeared to be comfortable dealing with bereavement but Bartlett considers that their obsession with ritual was a way to control their feelings about it and ameliorate their societal anxieties. Death was a constant in people's lives. Mortality rates were high, and ritual helped to ease the pain of loss. Victorian women were restricted more by the mourning clothing ritual than men. A widow was expected to be in mourning for two years, wearing black clothing for at least a year. For women, it was unacceptable to go out socially in the first year, except to visit relatives or go to church.

Queen Victoria made the wearing of black a fashion as she wore black for forty years after the death of her consort Albert. Death became fashionable with black wreaths hung on doors, mirrors covered in black crepe, and even servants often dressed in black. Funerals became elaborate affairs, usually with horse drawn carriages: the horses wearing black plumes and having muffled hooves. Fabrics used in mourning clothing were often crepe or other non-shiny materials. A superstition arose that clothing worn for one period of mourning should not be worn again.

Bartlett's piece incorporates the Gothic, and in particular the abject, through her use of human hair. The abject in this instance refers to anything cast off by the body. She explains that when we are faced with the reality of seeing a human corpse, in particular a friend or family member,

\(^4\) Not all hairwork was associated with death; some items were created as keepsakes for absent loved ones.
it is our own eventual death which becomes real. The teardrop-shaped glass half-filled with water symbolises both the human body and the containment of same.

The abject is almost always something loathsome,\textsuperscript{5} and human hair in particular is an unusual substance, being dead when a person is alive—but alive when a person is dead. Citing for instance the infamous rumour of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his dead wife’s hair, seven years after her death:

In 1869 he decided that he needed his poems back, so Siddal was disinterred, with a notorious art dealer called Charles Howell as witness. When the coffin was prised open Howell claimed that she was perfectly preserved and her hair had continued to grow, the curls filling the wooden box, as red as ever, glinting in the moonlight.\textsuperscript{6}

Our connection to the person gives an object meaning and if we love someone we do not consider their hair to be repulsive. In this way the meaning conferred creates the context, with the idea that when someone dies, we can somehow preserve our attachment to them by retaining a personal keepsake. Critical Analyst Julia Kristeva associates the ‘abject’ with our rejection of death’s physical reality:

The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part. From which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.\textsuperscript{7}

The Victorian cult of mourning deals not only with grief and loss, but also communicates connection and the pain of absence. It deals with the prospect of death being the ultimate other, the void, the unknown; the place where no-one can follow. The Victorian mourning ritual seems creepy and disturbing to us now because it is out of context. But if an object is precious to someone it loses its abject status through the personal connection. Hair from a hundred years ago seems sinister now because the people connected to it are gone, and that changes the context.

The abject as a subject has fascinated other contemporary visual artists such as Mona Hatoum and Alice Maher. Bartlett’s work shares a thread with Hatoum and Maher as this piece encompasses the relationships that women have with their hair and their bodies.

Mona Hatoum lives and works in London:

A Palestinian sculptor, performance and installation artist, Hatoum is active in England. Hatoum’s art, as the work of a Palestinian woman in an initially involuntary exile in London, transformed from confrontational performance in the 1980s to a more reflective engagement with a minimalist and conceptualist heritage in the 1990s. By working with a variety of media Hatoum criticizes the boundaries of traditional art practice and evokes the danger and threat of authoritarian politics.\textsuperscript{8}

In ‘Pull’ Hatoum has created a piece that involves her own hair being pulled by the viewer. The realisation that she is actually physically attached, rather than just a video, has a visceral effect on the reaction of the observer. In this way she forces the viewer to deal with notions of


\textsuperscript{8} Article: John-Paul Stonard From Grove Art Online Oxford University Press 2009 \newline \url{http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist_id=7447} Accessed on 06/12/2011
public/private. In ‘Recollection’ hundreds of balls of human hair produce a feeling of repulsion in the viewer. She confronts society’s abject fascination with hair as attraction/revulsion. These balls of hair also form the basis for Hair Necklace.  

Mona Hatoum’s entire body of work invites viewers to experience anew the cultural intersections that link our identities with the physical and perceptual world. Through the use of a wide variety of media and techniques, Hatoum’s unique style is characterized by forms and materials that evoke feelings of intimacy and familiarity, while simultaneously suggesting the possibility, whether real or imagined, of physical danger.  

Born in Co. Tipperary in 1956, Alice Maher was educated at the University of Limerick and Crawford College of Art Cork, later receiving an MA in fine art from the University of Ulster, and, in 1987, a Fulbright Scholarship to San Francisco Art Institute. She lives and works in Ireland.  

Alice Maher works in a range of media, as a painter, sculptor, photographer and printmaker, with some of her work overlapping between these categories. Some of her earlier work explores human hair. ‘Ombres’ is a large charcoal drawing, and ‘Talking to my hair’ an aquatint. Her work could be considered quite gothic in nature.  

This is not a self-portrait, but at the time of making the etching I was very interested in the language of hair, its meaning in history and culture, and most particularly its place in the formation of the female psyche. Many stories and fables refer to the monstrous growth of hair with its power to both fascinate and repulse.  

She has a tendency to use materials which "carry their own history", particularly materials associated with rural labour or holding strong cultural significance, and issues of feminist concern arise through much of this work.  

Bartlett’s recent excursion into sculpture will come as a surprise to those who are familiar with her landscapes, but this is in reality a continuation of her earlier work with connection. Seeing Victorian hair wreaths simply compounded and provoked her growing fascination with using different materials. The richness of her landscape has been notable for her sculptural approach of building layer upon layer in paring back and abstracting the essence out of landscape.  

Her ongoing interest in connection found an echo in the Victorian attempts to connect through a physical keepsake. This sculpture seeks to express rather than represent the modern metaphysical disconnect that we experience, where we have become abject in our own eyes and fall easy prey to being moulded and manipulated by media driven rampant consumerism. To quote Kristeva: “I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which “I” claim to establish myself”  

Battleground at one stroke recalls not only a Duchamp readymade, (pared down as it is to essentials), but also the voluptuous decadence of Manet’s Olympia. As Bartlett stated in 2011:

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Battleground is confrontational. You stare at it, and it holds your gaze. My intention was to open a discussion with the viewer, to create a moment of ceasefire in the ongoing internal battle, a laying down of arms.

Bartlett has sustained an impressively uncompromising and articulate flow of work while playing a vital role in the current direction of contemporary art. Her connection with the richness and abundance of the Irish landscape while evident in her painting, may yet find expression in sculpture. In the finest sense of the Gothic abject this work is beautiful in its repulsiveness.
Holly and Sebastian

Holly Burnard

The origins of the piece stem from the artist’s lack of knowledge of her father. She has never met him or even seen a photograph of him. The knowledge she has of him comes from bits and pieces gleaned from her mother. These bits of information are scant and hardly enough to quell her curiosity of her other biological parent. The pursuing of her male alter ego or animus is an attempt to catch a glimpse of her father. Animus comes from the psychologist, Jung. It is the theory that females have an inner male called an animus, males have an inner anima. ‘As the feminine aspect of man and the masculine aspect of women, they function as a pair of opposites in the unconscious of both, profoundly influencing the relations of all men and women with each other.’

Sebastian ‘is a discovery of someone whom she rightly identifies as someone other than herself but also somehow essential to the definition of that self.’ Sebastian has been explored through dressing as him, trying to find his own unique style, he is pretty trendy. Holly has also been reading and watching what he would watch. Sebastian is currently reading Jack Kerouac’s ‘The Road’, and he read ‘Snuff’ by Chuck Palahniuk previous to that. Holly has been photographing Sebastian and acting like a guy, paying particular attention to the physicality of a male. Sebastian had the pleasure of being photographed with a bright yellow rx7, the only one in Ireland. The yellow sports car seemed to fit in seamlessly with Sebastian’s character. Holly also dressed as Sebastian and arranged to get his hair cut at a barber’s. Holly is now walking around with Sebastian’s hair! The latest video shows the artist in her usual attire and sex sitting on a sofa with Sebastian, the video is awkward, uncanny, you get the sense that they are in an uneasy relationship with each other.

The gothic themes explored in this piece of work are clearly visible, the gothic body, the other, the uncanny and doppelganger to name but a few. At the start of the piece we just see two headless bodies, this leads to eventually seeing them with heads, but the brief lack of heads brings to the fore the notion of the gothic body and the fact it is usually in pieces, not whole. The gothic body is explored in many movies and books, covering themes of vampires, monsters, werewolves and zombies. The body is usually harmed or maimed to evoke a visceral response from the audience. There is none of that violence in Holly’s piece, yet the lack of heads at the start is unsettling and confusing. It brings to mind the practice of beheading zombies and vampires to make sure that they do not rise again. It provides an uneasy start to the video piece.

The other is evoked through being confronted with Holly and her other, Sebastian sitting with her on the very same sofa. Her other is inescapable and very much there in full view. It is interesting to see the other so blatantly on full display, yet the full disclosure almost hides the other in plain sight. You may not notice on the first watch that Holly and Sebastian are actually the same person.

The realisation that one is other is not necessarily a nice one. It unsettles your view on the world and your grasp on reality. Sebastian is something other to Holly, he is alien yet strangely familiar.

In Catherine Spooner’s book on the gothic, she talks about ‘the construction of peoples or individuals as monstrous or ‘other’. This is exactly what Holly is doing, she is purposely creating an other and developing that other. She is not trying to hide it away, she is feeding the other’s desires and interests by encouraging Sebastian to take more of an active role in her life. She is slowly developing Sebastian, providing him with a passport and student card. She has started to introduce him to the outside world; he already has an email account and Facebook profile. These are essential contemporary tools to confirm that one exists and is a real individual.

The video piece Holly and Sebastian openly explores her ‘other’. This cultivation of the artist’s other is profoundly gothic, instead of shying away and ignoring the other, she is actively searching it out. In the video piece she is even interacting with her other and acknowledging him in a small way. Holly smiles at Sebastian and looks at him as if trying to engage and start a dialogue. Sebastian in his turn takes note of Holly too and observes her, sometimes in a creepy manner. That weird manner is especially evident when Sebastian is standing up, with his back to the camera, watching Holly while she is asleep. It evokes feelings of unease, and asks some awkward questions. Sebastian could be doing a number of things and your mind wanders to these as he stands there, there is almost a sense of relief when he just sits down.

The uncanny comes into play when watching the videos you realise that this is almost a private relationship within the artist that you are almost spying on. ‘The uncanny has to do with the sense of a secret encounter.’ There is something intimate about the videos, and yet they are there for all to see and view and judge. The sense that something odd is going on is present all throughout the video. The apparent normality of the scene before you is the perfect setting for the uncanny, it’s something familiar but ‘the ghostliness of the uncanny creeps, slowly but irrepressibly, into the common light of day.’ The scene looks familiar and normal enough on first glance, man and woman sitting on a sofa, but the normal quickly flies out the window once you realise that the person is the artist repeated, yet in different identity and gender. The video shows ‘divided nature of the self’. Holly and Sebastian are one and the same, yet they are divided. They are split in two in the video piece, two halves of a whole, sliced for your viewing pleasure. There is almost something vulnerable about the two being separated, perhaps they need each other to function properly in the real, normal world.

An uncanny event happened when researching for this essay, the book titled ‘The Uncanny’ had a dedication in the front. The dedication was ‘For Sebastian’ perhaps Sebastian existed before Holly and was leaving discreet messages. It looks like Sebastian has been around for some time, and Holly is only just becoming fully aware of his existence. The book really did live up to its title.

The belief that everyone has a double somewhere is wide spread. People mostly see other people’s doubles; it is rare that the person in question comes face to face with their own. This is exactly what happens in Holly’s video, it is eerie to realise that they are the male and female versions of each other. They are there and they are observing each other. Doubles or doppelgangers usually imply that one is good and one is evil, or else there are two conflicting sets of desires. That is the case in many movies and books dealing with the double. Movies like Fight Club, where it has been played out by Tyler Durdan and the unnamed protagonist. The video that Holly presents to us tells the same story, two individuals, two agendas, yet they are

20 Royle, *The Uncanny*, p.23
21 Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic*, p.8
22 Royle, *The Uncanny*
23 Fincher, David, *Fight Club*, 20th Century Fox, 1999
the one and the same. Holly’s actions and gestures are so different from Sebastian’s that we get a sense of two very distinct personalities.

They both, however, have to cohabit and use the same form. This could lead to complications, each on striving for dominance, very much like Tara in *United States of Tara*. Tara is a mother who has multiple personalities and the show is about her dealing with them and her family. Some of Tara’s alter egos are funny and helpful, yet others are malevolent and harmful. They are distinct from each other and do not merge. Eventually one of the scary alter egos ends up murdering and destroying the other alter egos.24 It will be interesting to see how Holly and Sebastian work out their power play. They may be struggling forever for the reins, or perhaps like in Fight Club, Holly will own Sebastian and fully accept him in herself. It would be a positive conclusion to this piece of work.

In conclusion the video work, Holly and Sebastian, is suitably gothic and dark in theme. The starkness of the room, the dull lighting and subject matter all lead back to gothic. Holly explores her other side and makes it ‘visible to others as well as to’25( metamorphose) herself. The other is explored, the doppelganger is looked at and the uncanny is realised. It is a perfect example of the contemporary gothic artist at work with gothic themes.

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**CHANEL**

*Mella Cahill*

The image 'CHANEL', is a dark reflection of current luxury advertisements. These type of advertisements use models who embody the western idea of beauty. By portraying this culturally constructed absolute beauty in their models, the companies are linking their products with that absolute beauty. Simultaneously promising that absolute beauty is available if you could afford it, and planting dissatisfaction in the viewer. Just as it's referential image (the unaltered advert) portrays the absolute, 'CHANEL' portrays it's opposition.

The processes by which 'CHANEL' was created, were all attempts to destroy and erase the image. An inevitability of any created object is decomposition, which the artist has accelerated. Normally the job of time and nature, decay has been mimicked by artistic processes, both handmade and mechanical. Decay and decomposition are at times purifying. Destroying or erasing the image are attempts to cleanse and return to nature.

Painted over and scraped back, what is left are the persistent remains. By trying to destroy the original image, its dark reflection is created. 'CHANEL' is the photocopy of these remains. Photocopying an image creates a machines double of the image. Although the copy is simplified—digital noise, dust and other uncontrollable elements cause the copy of the image to deviate and deteriorate. Ultimately, the copies will be the destructive double of the original. This degradation in replication is seen in Richard Prince's work. Although not traditionally visually Gothic, Prince's work seeks to expose the apocalyptic underpinnings in consumer imagery. Both Prince's work and the image 'CHANEL' re-contextualize consumer imagery to create an uncanny double, a strong element in the Gothic cannon.

*Interviewer: Is there a current-day equivalent to the Marlboro Man?*

*Prince: I would have to say probably certain designers—Ralph Lauren, who shows up week after week in the same section of the Times Magazine. Abercrombie and Fitch- their catalogues have an art look. I could actually see Man Ray or George Platt Lynes or Robert Mapplethorpe photographing them. I kind of like Marc Jacob's campaign; it almost doesn't look like advertising.*

In Prince's works 'Untitled (cereal)' and 'Untitled (kool-aid)' there is a sense of foreboding, the uncanny, the tragic and the dark which comes through the apparent lightness of the ad by re-photography. The process of re-photography brings to light what is seductive or weighty in the ads content.

In his work, Prince re-photographs accessible pictures from mass-cultural magazines and 'travels the psyche of America in the two-dimensional space of the reproduced images it consumes and is consumed by: representations of American lifestyles, objects of desire, and blurred characters in a sort of fictional world.'

This ability to bring to the fore elements which are not intentionally shown, echoes Schelling’s definition of the uncanny as ‘something that should have remained hidden and has come into the open.’

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In Prince's work, the simulation (the re-photographed copy) of the image goes hand in hand with the violence of dissimulation. Again, his unmaskings and dismantlings expose the vacuity that lies behind the consumer image. When we think of images in terms of what they represent, we think primarily about their content. But in Prince's work, the image is shown to have no content, here we see a representation that is somehow suspended from what it represents.

As the postmodern nature of his work articulates the lightness of the consumer image it also simultaneously sees the image as a kind of shell without a living centre or, a shell that comes into being in order to destroy its own content. Every time he copies or re-photographs, a kind of death of the original is the ultimate outcome. Here is the similarity between re-photography and photocopying: degradation in replication.

The photocopy creates an imitation of its original. The photocopy creates tones, shades and in some cases colours which do not exist but are detected and exaggerated by the photocopier. Equally, the photocopy erases and consolidates planes of texture and individual marks to stream-line the image. In this way, the reproduction will both gain and lose qualities which the human hand would not create of its own volition- it is entirely a machines interpretation. This produces an uncanny double of the image. The uncanny double that is 'CHANEL' appears almost like a shadow of the original ad.

Utopias and Dystopias are fertile ground for the fears and desires of humans to be played out. Imaginary cities can be both simultaneously utopian and dystopian depending on the observers point of view. The image ‘CHANEL’ is a remnant of a familiar life made uncanny by decay. In this way the image ‘CHANEL’ is a dystopian artifact.

Arguably the popular utopia (or dystopia) of contemporary culture is to be found in the imagined world of aspirational media. It is in billboards and magazines that windows exist into a collective utopia. Modern advertisements seek not to sell a product, but a lifestyle. They sell ambition and aspiration to an alternate reality. This is a fantasy world where people are confidant, comfortable, wealthy and healthy, where everything is beautiful and plentiful. However idyllic this vision seems, it also holds some of the hallmarks of a traditional dystopia. Marketing strategies surrounding products are cunningly designed by corporations. Six main corporations control the majority of media today. This notion of near totalitarian control is echoed in seminal science fiction novel ‘1984’.

Postmodern society is one that can be defined by its blanks and its absences. In a world so fragmented, it is not hard to see why utopian hopes and dreams are becoming less likely. Consumer capitalism is a major part of postmodern society and is said by many to be at its centre, particularly in America. The gaps and silences that postmodern society attempts to fill through consumer capitalism achieve more similarities to an anti-utopia or dystopia than to a utopia. At the heart of consumer capitalism is the idea of telling people what they need, and once provided with these needs, individuals may feel a certain sense of satisfaction and happiness and the hope that a utopian society could exist. But because of this process, real or true needs are being overlooked.

Bret Easton Ellis best explores the duality of utopia and dystopia in contemporary wealthy America. Easton Ellis is a postmodern gothic author. He exploits modern anxieties of identity loss to create terror. He utilizes horror to juxtapose against the sterility of not only the corporate world (American Psycho) but of a desensitized society.

The lifestyle of his characters superficially imitates that of premium brands and magazine spreads. However, their luxurious lifestyle breeds grey morals. Relationships, specifically parent/child, break down. It is quickly revealed that these lives are not what they seem and that the characters are not happy or satisfied, but are in fact, fearful and surrounded by a world rife
with fragments, gaps, codes and consumerism. Inside the utopian aspirational world of Easton Ellis there is hedonism and nihilism, and between these two is where dystopia is found.

Much like the models in advertisements, Easton Ellis's characters are generic and interchangeable. The reader loses track of similar names and genders blur (The Informers). The casual interchangeability that was a key feature of American Psycho is constantly reiterated. Characters' names recur through the stories, but you rarely feel that this 'Tim' or 'Graham' or 'Martin' is the same as the last one you read about. They do the same things, but so does everybody else.

Identity loss and assimilation are key features of Ellis's narrative. What he is reiterating is at least partly the Gothic anxiety about the loss of subjectivity, about the ways in which people can become monstrous - but in these cases without anybody (except of course, the reader) noticing. Despite their graphic quality, in one sense the reverse of melodramas, Ellis's novels feature deranged or psychopathic heroes whose activities go entirely unnoticed because they are so indistinguishable from the general texture of contemporary urban life.

The monstrous is also represented in the image 'CHANEL'. The model, once a figure of the absolute, has been subverted into a faceless automaton. The human quality of the model is gone and what is left is a monstrous replicant body made to sell. The decomposition of the face in the image 'CHANEL' suggests a loss of individual identity, a common element not only in Easton Ellis's work but in most Dystopian literature.

Models in luxury advertisements serve to embody all the qualities which the brand wishes to project. By corrupting the model, the artist can change the brands entire doctrine. At first using the model to manipulate the viewer, the model is now used as a weapon to manipulate the brand. These models are people who have been placed at the service of the commodity. They have been given the vampire treatment, had the blood sucked out of them by capital to become vampires themselves.

As a method of manipulation, Naomi Wolf, in her book The Beauty Myth, has this to say of the use of absolute beauty:

'We are in the midst of a violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement: the beauty myth.'

As to how powerful a commodified female beauty as seen in advertisements is:

'The beauty myth tells a story: The quality called 'beauty' objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it... 'Beauty' is a currency system like the gold standard. Like any economy, it is determined by politics, and in the modern age in the west it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact. In assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is an expression of power relations in which women must unnaturally compete for resources that men have appropriated for themselves.'

Models are used like tools to meet the ends of business corporations manipulative intentions, in 'CHANEL', the model is transformed from absolute beauty to a monstrous body to subvert the control of corporate branding.

That the word 'CHANEL' is still emblazoned below the figure, which is supposed to embody all the brand wants you to want, is important. To wear designer clothes and accessories involves identifying with brands. The logo or name becomes as important as the design of the object, while the use of the object- watch, bag, belt, pen, cigarette lighter, whatever - is, most likely, totally irrelevant. To accessorize is therefore to identify with the commodity precisely in its

‘postmodern’ character as pure image. Objects in advertisements have a certain gloss, an allure, which suggests that, as opposed to the objects, images are what they truly are. The actual objects would only be a weaker token of their perfect image.

The image ‘CHANEL’ contains many of the tropes of the Gothic cannon. It subverts the authority of the advertisement through replication and decay. It expresses the duality of Utopian aspirations and Dystopian undercurrents in contemporary consumer imagery. And it addresses the subtext of manipulation in the media by corrupting the absolute beauty of commodified female beauty.
Lara Curran’s video piece *Merridith* is an intriguing video which deals with issues of time, along with various other themes.

The video presents us with a short story of 3 structures- the ruin of an old landlord’s house (abandoned since the famine days), a broken-down caravan, and a construction site abandoned for over 10 years. All are within 20 feet of each other (the caravan and construction site are in fact housed within the ruined walls of the landlord’s orchard.) Beginning with a slow pan of the old ruin and guiding us slowly through an abandoned and abused caravan, through an abandoned building site, *Merridith* tells a story. There is a narrative, and a strong sense of the passing time which draws the viewer in. This is a common occurrence in gothic themes-the notion of the past being ever present, as seen in the idea of the haunted house.

Ruins are a common theme in gothic literature and art, appearing in most gothic stories, from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. In Edgar Allan Poe's *The fall of the house of Usher*, the ruin is described in the bleakest of ways. "I looked upon the scene before me – upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain – upon the bleak walls – upon the vacant eye-like windows...with an utter depression of the soul."30

*Merridith* presents us with a view of the castle that, though not as dramatic as Poe’s, is in ways just as bleak. The opening scene is a slow, curving shot of the landlord’s house and its walls. The ruin instantly brings to mind thoughts of the past, of times gone by. It draws the viewer in, as people are innately attracted to ruins.31 Author Charles Merewether states that “ruins collapse temporalities”32 – the past is present, but the future is also anticipated in the ruin, and this is part of what makes ruins powerful. This scene sets our minds in the past.

The camera then cuts to what appears to be a close up of grass before zooming out to reveal that it is in fact moss growing on the mattress inside an abandoned caravan. The camera zooms out quickly revealing the dilapidated walls of the caravan. This is in stark contrast to the slow pace of the ruin footage.

Speed plays an important role in the depiction of time in this piece. The opening scene of the ruin instantly brings to mind ideas of the past, and the slow moving shots further reinforce this idea of times gone by. As the piece progresses, there are moments where the camera slowly pans a room or scene, often followed or preceded by seconds of sped up footage, giving the sense that you are moving quickly through time, for example, when the camera speeds through the caravan, then slows down to show us the water gathered in the stove-top or the piece of grass hanging from a spiders web. Similarly as we move through the house the camera slows to survey the scaffolding, and speeds dramatically when moving down the corridor. Regularly, the video will cut back to the slowly moving footage of the ruin, re-iterating the sense of the past.

2 Rose Macaulay, Pleasure of Ruins, Walker, (University of Virginia), 1953
These moments of still slowness remind us of the past, whilst the faster, more chaotic scenes bring us back into the present.

As we are guided through the ruin of the abandoned construction site, we are presented with images of decay and ruin at every turn. Beginning with a view of the abandoned scaffolding, we are instantly presented with an image of time stood still. The scaffolding stands, rusted and dripping with recent rain water, one can only assume exactly as it was the day it was left. As we move through the house we see piles of concrete bricks in corners, pipes, buckets of paint, sheets of plastic strewn across the floor – it all suggests a place where time stands still. Like a ghost ship, it is as if everyone just up and left one day. Once again we see the scaffolding, this time layered with more footage of the scaffolding, looking like ghost images, as though traces of the past have been left behind.

There is a similar sense of time-stood-still in the work of Belgian photographer Gilbert Fastenaekens. His night-time images of abandoned structures are hard to place, and feel as though they could be from any time gone by. “Night is a moment prolonged over several hours, but freed of the weight of minutes, of the passage of time.” Gilbert Fastenaekens. 33

At the same time however, this sense of frozen time is challenged by the evident take-over of decay and nature. The floor in one room of the house is covered in a pool of water in which grows some unknown substance. From the ceiling above hang stalactites of some other unknown substance. There is a feeling that nature is slowly, slowly reclaiming the structure. The stalactites also give an idea of just how long the building has been abandoned for. This idea of nature taking over can be seen elsewhere in the piece also, for example in the caravan, with the moss growing in the bed. It is also suggested in the shot of the cooker top covered in water in which is reflected the trees outside. This subtly suggests the future in store for the caravan, as the trees inevitably take over.

The piece also speaks of the transient nature of man and his creations. Georg Simmel in his essay ‘Ruin’ speaks of how, in ruins and abandoned structures, “Merely natural forces begin to become master over the work of man: the balance between nature and spirit, which the building manifested, shifts in favor of nature. This shift becomes a cosmic tragedy which, so we fell, makes every ruin an object infused with our nostalgia; for now the decay appears as nature’s revenge for the spirit’s having violated it by making a form in its own image.” The depiction of nature creeping back into these structures speaks not only of the passage of time, but also of the temporary nature of man and all things man made, a notion that is becoming more and more valid as our economy sinks further into depression.

It is worth noting that nothing has been taken from either the construction site, or the caravan, despite the amount of materials available. No scavengers have called by to avail of the wood, the bricks, the scaffold. For over 10 years these sites have gone virtually undisturbed. Certainly one can assume that there were a certain number of visitors, but nothing has been taken. It is as if these structures have been left to decay as they will, to be taken over by nature as they inevitably must be.

The work speaks volumes of the recent housing boom and the even more recent economic crisis. Beginning with the landlord’s house, an old symbol of wealth and prosperity, then moving on inside its orchard walls is the abandoned structure of an enormous house not even halfway built, abandoned when the country fell into economic uncertainty-abandoned houses

have become the ultimate symbol of Celtic tiger greed and ignorance, with more and more estates falling into ‘ghost’ status as the months pass.\textsuperscript{34}

The work questions the societal need to own a house, buy a mortgage. The semi construction of this house has surely left the owners in debt, with nothing to show but a decaying unfinished structure.

\textit{Merridith} is similar in ways to the work of Aideen Barry, who also looks at people’s need to take out mortgages and own their homes and end up in debt, but where Aideen looks at the lifestyle these people lead in pieces such as \textit{Levitating},\textsuperscript{35} Lara focuses more on the aftermath – what’s left over when people abandon their attempts at achieving this social norm? Here we are presented with this aftermath - an abandoned house, decaying, materials going to waste. It is a sobering reminder of where our greed can take us, and of the condition of our country today.

\textit{Merridith} is a piece with a somewhat surreal sense to it. There is an eerie lack of human life present, as the structures have sat empty for so many years. Since the landlord’s house began to crumble, the only human intervention was the construction in the orchard, which disturbed the peace for a short while before leaving the land in eerie silence once more. Left to the devices of time and nature, it is as if no human life can be sustained here.

\textsuperscript{34} Mail online, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1331380/The-ghost-estates-exactly-Ireland-went-boom-bust.html, November 2010 (Acc. 09/12/2011)
In 'The Silence' artist, Amy Forde deals with the idea of the uncanny double. The two faces which are a mirror image of each other, are also the one person, and represent two worlds within that person; one is a face which is for show, and the other represents a deeper side of an uncanny nature. This evokes the idea of a double personality, an illness maybe, but also stands for a less extreme notion of the inward person and outward person in us all. There are two sides to everyone; one side is deeper and less exposed than the one on the surface.

The artist has put this piece together by two processes, printing the image of the two heads and then altering it in Photoshop. She used thick acetate to carve into it to create a printable matrix and printed it on etching paper. She deliberately made the left side darker, by scratching into it more to catch more ink than the right side to emphasise the two opposing sides. Then she took a photo of the work and altered it in Photoshop. She added colour, changing the left side to a blood red, and also adding faint red drops which look like blood splattering to create a more ominous character. She changed the right to a light grey to portray that head as a more open character. She also added text to it for a more effective piece. Using text highlights the opposing personalities within this person. It shows the contrast which is between the two essentially different people.

We see both the heads presented in different ways. The head on the left is the ‘double’ life lived by most of us, the under layer that is masked from reality. We all have two sides in a way so we can relate to this piece. One of the heads has the word ‘silence’ written across it. It is a side which is usually kept to ourselves. The other head is the side that is shown to everyone. This side is on show for society, hence the word ‘surface’ written across it. A lot of the time we put on this outer shell for the society we live in and try to portray the person it expects of us. It is society’s influence on us as human beings. This is the message that is being portrayed through the differing words; ‘Silence’ and ‘Surface’.

This piece is influenced by modern day living and this notion of the uncanny double is quite a gothic theme and prevalent in a lot of modern TV shows and movies. This idea of the double identity is well demonstrated in the TV show ‘Dexter.’\(^{36}\) The main character is a man called Dexter Morgan who is living a double life, and tends to refer to his other side as his ‘dark passenger’ throughout the series. He works in forensics in a police department and then there is his other darker side; the serial killer. Both sides are dramatically different. His desire to kill was brought about by a traumatic experience as a child. He witnessed his mother’s murder so he has been emotionally and psychologically scarred and gets his revenge through the killing of people who have done wrong.

The introduction to each episode starts off with Dexter’s morning routine\(^{37}\). It shows him going about his daily routine, but it has a very sinister side to it. Mundane activities are portrayed in a menacing light as everything he does has a double meaning. For example while he is shaving himself it gives viewers shivers. Its shot close up to the subject matter, and the noise of the blade is dominant. He also nicks himself with the razor and blood trickles down his throat in an ominous fashion. Even eating his breakfast seems to give connotations of a menacing nature in

\(^{36}\) ‘Dexter’, 2006, television broadcast, Showtime, 1 October.

\(^{37}\) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qj8-Rqo-VT4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qj8-Rqo-VT4)
this man. He stabs and cuts his breakfast before eating it leaving us with notions of violence and murderous actions.

In this series, one gets to see the two halves of this person, the murderer within and the outward, social man who works a normal day job in a police station. This idea of the uncanny double is evident here. Dexter battles with this sinister side, but feels good with each kill as he feels he has done something good for society and his mother’s murder’s kind is being brought to justice.

In *The Silence*, we see this menacing side. The murderous side to Dexter’s personality can be identified in the character on the left side of the artist’s piece above. There are faint blood splatters on the piece to demonstrate a menacing nature. The deep red colour also is an indication of an ominous nature. The right side may signify the side of Dexter that is on show to the general public. Also the two faces are not very clear they seem to be in a foggy light, which could symbolise the unknown. The word ‘silence’ on the left head is a direct reference to the way the figure is an unknown character and is the one that is concealed from society, very similar to that of Dexter’s ‘dark passenger’. It could also stand for the other side of each one of us, as we all have some sort of inward personality, things that we keep to ourselves. The other head with ‘surface’ written across the face is the person which is on show to the world around us, be it a true character or a fake one. This in relation to Dexter is his standardised job in the police stage and ‘normal’ life that he lives around friends and family. The heads appear to be coming through a head of flowers. They seem quite ominous as we can’t see the rest of their body. This adds to the uncanny nature of the piece.

A film that also deals with this notion of the dual personality or two opposing sides is *Memento*. The main character, Leonard, has short term memory loss and is living a new life each day. His past life was a different life. He battles each day in trying to remind himself of the happenings around him. He does this by tattooing himself with facts. This act alone is quite gothic. His body is covered with tattoos at the end; ‘memos’ to remind him about what happened that day.

The writing on each face in ‘The Silence’ could resemble a ‘tattooed’ face reminding each one of us of this dual personality, just as the tattooed body in ‘memento’ reminds the main character ‘Leonard’ about his other life that he is living and of which he is practically unaware of. People around him see him as a normal standing citizen of society but what people do not realise is that he has lived an ominous past, one in which a murder had taken place in; his wife’s. The twist to the movie is that he in fact has killed his wife but he is now trying to cover up this heart wrenching fact by making up another killer. He purposely makes himself forget that he has done the horrible act himself by creating a character ‘Sammy’ who takes his place. Sammy’s life is in fact the protagonist Leonard’s past life. This plays on the idea of the uncanny double; Sammy is Leonard’s creation and uncanny double.

In the ‘Silence’ there is a strong female presence, the character is female and in general flowers are quite feminine objects. The artist could have made this intentional. It could be a play on society’s influence on women today. They are consumed by our society’s media and popular culture. The mass media plants ideas in their minds about certain plush products which are portrayed as ‘necessities’ or implies a way of living that is of a high standard which is to be attained for a better life. This in turn brings about the questioning of being ‘normal’ and if you do not own these goods or this way of living you may be questioned as being abnormal. Thereby brainwashing people into this cultish way of living. The idea of being any way different is shunned on in our modern day culture, even though it has improved a lot since many a year ago. These two faces in the ‘Silence’ could stand for how women feel. On the surface trying to attain

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38 Memento, 2000, motion picture, Summit Entertainment, USA
this certain way of living which is expected in a modern day life and beneath it all finding it hard to cope with it all, and yet remaining silent.

A gothic example of a woman finding it hard to deal with society's norms is in the book 'The Yellow Wallpaper' by Charlotte Perkins Gilmore. The main character is a woman suffering from depression. Her husband is reluctant to let her out of the house due to the stigma which society's set norms has about such an illness as depression and she is left to her own thoughts most of the time. She worsens due to emotional neglect and in a way entrapment of her own home. Her husband doesn't let her out into the surrounding area and doesn't allow her any stimulants. Her mind takes over and she starts imagining the patterned wallpaper in her room is starting to move and suddenly starts thinking there is a woman trapped inside it. She goes insane and starts to rip off the wallpaper trying to set the woman free. It turns out the woman in the wallpaper is a metaphor for her trapped self and wants to set her free. Once again there is that notion of the uncanny double. This woman grew sicker from society's impact thereby causing her to envision this other person who looked for freedom from the walls around her; her other self.

The piece 'The Silence' demonstrates the gothic theme of the 'uncanny double' through the contrasting characters which it presents. Yet these two characters are clearly the same person; a mirror image of each other. They are representatives of two differing ideas or worlds. One is of a darker, uncanny nature, representing the 'silence' within us all; secrets which we may attain and the other stands for what is shown on the 'surface', what is shown to the people around us. Society's influence on humanity is a major theme also. It has brought a bought this split way of living through high expectations of a certain standard of living and a set of norms which are to be followed if one does not want to be deemed as abnormal. The TV show Dexter, the Film 'Memento' and the gothic novel 'The Yellow Wallpaper' all deal with this notion of the 'uncanny double'. They revolve around people's lives that have been put in a position to conceal their true identity. In 'Dexter' due to the monstrous murder of his mother he conceals this other dark side of revenge. In 'Memento', the accidental act of killing his wife causes him so much pain that he has to resort to making up an uncanny character which takes his place in his mind. Suffering from short term memory loss he is capable of making up a character that has killed his wife and forcing himself to forget the truth. In the gothic novel 'The Yellow Wallpaper' the main character is forced to also create this other ominous character which lurks in the wallpaper. The woman in the wallpaper is her uncanny self, needing to be set free. They are prime examples of one person splitting their lives into two separate people to resolve their internal issues, which is the main theme of 'The Silence'.

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Limbinal (Image # 1)

Catherine Geagan

It was the German philosopher Freidrich Nietzche who first defined the terms Apollonian and Dionysian as tendencies in the human personality. According to Nietzsche, Apollonian Characteristics are focused on reason, order and clarity, while Dionysian traits revolve around excess, frenzy and imagination. Nietzsche considered the ideal person to be one who existed somewhere in-between these polar opposites. Although it is a philosophical stance, Nietzsche’s theory of placing oneself on the border between the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ could also be considered a gothic stance. This is because borders and boundaries, whether they are physical or metaphysical, have long been represented within the gothic tradition. Often in the case of gothic artwork, these boundaries are not instantly visible. They are instead represented as liminal and barely perceptible. This work entitled “Limbinal” (Image #1) by the artist Catherine Geagan could be considered an artwork which aims to address the gothic notion of fluid and uncertain boundaries.

When you first view the image, your eye is immediately drawn to the relationship between the hand and the strange waxy surface which it is partly encased in. This initial division within the work could be seen as the starting point from which to begin an analysis of the image. Technically speaking, this section of the photograph has been given a sharp focus. Both the textured, slightly creased skin and the off-white, bulbous surface of the wax are both quite clear to see. However, what is not clear to see is the part of the hand that resides within the wax. You cannot see it now, nor will be ever be visible to you from looking at this image. This can evoke in a feeling of uncertainty and even unease in the viewer. You are not quite sure what it is that is happening, if anything is happening, underneath the cloudy, almost opaque surface.

At this border between the hand and the wax, it could be suggested that the introduction of a hint of reddish-pink around the rim of this border also heightens this tension between what you can and cannot see. In the context of this image, the color red could be seen as a suggestion of flesh. It poses the question as to whether the space within the wax which is not visible to us is occupied at all. Is it hollow? If this is the case then the wax may be acting as some sort of bandage for an amputated wound. Because the shape of the wax holds traces of the shape of a hand we the viewers may instinctively assume that the unseen space is occupied. However, the issue of secrecy has always been of great concern within the gothic tradition; “You may go anywhere you wish/ except where the doors are locked, where of course you will not wish to go.” It could be said that unseen space is the best place for keeping secrets. In the case of “Limbinal”, it is possible that the artist deliberately wants the viewer to question whether the thing they are looking at is empty or occupied.

Another uncertain element to this particular boundary within the work is the question of whether the hand is emerging from the wax or immersing itself in it. From the image, it is ambiguous. It could be going in either direction and this action alone questions the permanence of the current division between the two things. One potential way of looking at the relationship

40 This stemmed from the Greek Gods of Apollo and Dionysus, who represent the polarities of the human personality, http://www.csun.edu, accessed 01/12/11
41 http://www.historyguide.org, accessed 01/12/11
42 Ibid, 01/12/11
44 Ibid. p213
between the hand and the wax is to view it as a sort of chrysalis. Transformation is a distinctly gothic theme with possibly the most extreme form of transformation resulting in total metamorphosis. If the hand is emerging from the object it could be considered to represent a kind of birth or even rebirth? A much more gothic notion however, lies in the possibility of the hand going in the opposite direction. For this action would suggest a horrifying transmutation from human being into something vastly different, a concept which does not sit easily with the viewer. That is because for us as human beings, the possibility of an unconscious metamorphosis into something unfamiliar is a terrifying prospect. In “The Metamorphosis” by Franz Kafka, Kafka describes the experience; "When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin. / His many legs, pitifully thin compared with the rest of him, were waving helplessly before his eyes."

A Gothicized blurring of the line between the human and the monstrous is something which people have been trying to come to terms with for centuries. This can be seen as far back as pre-historic rock drawings of human hands merging into animalistic shapes. In these pre-historic images, the outlines of the hands seem to have an ethereal quality to them. It is as if they are losing their substance to the much more boldly outlined animal drawings. In pre-historic times, it was believed that external forces were what caused life in human beings. Therefore, ‘souls’ were often depicted going from one body to another, regardless as to whether that body was human or animal. It is possible that when Catherine Geagan creates her work what she is trying to represent is a loss of human substance. Trying to emulate a less conscious state or even a more primitive time when boundaries were naturally fluid and uncertain. The second fluid boundary within “Limbinal” is not as instantly recognizable as the first. Although the fact that it is less visible to the viewer does not necessarily render it any less fluid than the first border. In the photograph, there is a strong contrast between the foreground and the background. The foreground is in sharp focus, with that focus rapidly decreasing towards the background. This is most noticeable in the upper part of the image where the shadow on the skin appears to leak into the background. This distinction between what is seen and what is unseen has its roots in the gothic notions of terror and horror. The writer Anne Radcliffe talks about terror and horror respectively as; “So far opposite; that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates them.”

Beginning with the unseen element of the work, it could be argued that the artist deliberately omitted light from the background of this image in order to convey a sense of the unknown. There is an inky blackness on the periphery of the image, the contents of which are unseen. This total blackness creates a sense of claustrophobia around the illuminated objects in the foreground. In a similar way to the unseen space within the mass of wax it leaves the viewer wondering about the contents of that darkened space. It could be argued that this reliance on the viewer to draw from their own imagination rather than present the information on a plate results in a changeability within the work. As they stare into the abyss, each viewer will perceive something different and possibly something terrifying from the darkness. It could be

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46 Ibid, p286
47 Gen Doy, Picturing the self-Changing views of the subject in visual culture, (I.B.Tauris, 2005) p65
51 Andreas Lommel, Prehistoric and Primitive man-landmarks of the worlds art, (Hamlyn, 1966) p8
53 http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu, accessed 09/12/11
argued that this element of changeability may not have occurred had the artist simply filled the image with oddly shaped pieces of wax.

Within this work, the relationship between the foreground and the background relies on varying degrees of focus along with a carefully selected color palette in order to relay the notions of terror and horror against each other. However, it is near impossible to create a terror/horror play-off without including something horrifying, something that simultaneously draws you in and repulses you back. "A darkened space is where the spectacle of illumination can happen"54. In this instance, it could be said that the artist utilizes the relationship between the hand and the wax to create something grotesque. In "Limbinal", the thumb of the hand and the piece of wax closest to it appear to be almost fused together.

Comparisons can be drawn here from the work of Catherine Geagan to the work of the artist Rebecca Horn. Horn's work consists of numerous prosthetic sculptures, which aim to extend, enlarge or narrow the body by applying masks and other attachments to it55. One such piece is her 1968 performance piece entitled, "Arm Extensions" (image #3). This particular piece of work actually doubles as both a performance and a body-related sculpture. This image shows Horn with both her arms imbedded in thickly wadded stumps, which act as balancing props for her body. Initially, the distinction between body and 'extension' is quite obvious to the viewer. However, after viewing the piece for some time, it eventually appears as though her arms are elongating and slowly getting closer to the floor, rooting her in place. They become 'isolated columns', fixed to her body56. The gothic has always dealt with the corruption of flesh and the distortion of beauty57. Therefore, while it is not an outwardly gothic piece, the work of Rebecca Horn could still be considered as a gothic distortion of the body. The same could be said with regard to "Limbinal". This is because while the image is lit with a soft light which suggests beauty and radiance, the flesh of the hand in the image is distorted almost beyond recognition. It is gothic, but not overwhelmingly so.

The third and final border which can be found in "Limbinal" is possibly the most gothic of all. It is the border which runs along the very edge of the photograph. For this is the boundary that contains the work, with all of its gothic notions and uncertain boundaries inside of it. It could be argued that the artist chose the medium of photography specifically for this reason. For the very nature of photography is to create a distance from reality by capturing it and transforming it into a hard-copy. It is a snapshot, a glimpse into the world of its creation. For the viewer, this glimpse into someplace 'other' than their comfort zone is substantial enough that they can take it all in, yet distant enough that they can put it out of their mind should they choose to do so; "Photography is my skin. / as membrane separating this from that, it fixes the point in between, establishing my limit"58.

It has been argued that in recent times the gothic, in particular gothic film and literature, has evolved as a method of holding all that is uncanny or 'other' at a safe distance59. From examining the other gothic themes and notions within this work, it is very possible that the artist chose to present this image through photography in order to continue gothicizing her work.

Traditionally, the gothic has been associated with a questioning, transgressing, or dissolution of boundaries60. In the work of Catherine Geagan, there is no clear distinction made between the

54 Gen Doy, Picturing the self-Changing views of the subject in visual culture, (I.B.Tauris, 2005) p107
55 http://bodytracks.org/2009/06/rebecca-horn-arm-extensions, accessed 01/12/11
59 http://records.viu.ca, accessed 12/12/11
self and the ‘other’, between empty or occupied space, or even between appearance and reality. 
By relating her work both the gothic tradition and contemporary notions of the gothic, she 
addresses the fluidity of boundaries which we commonly perceive to be set in stone. She does 
this through a variety of mediums and it could be said that her work has a certain hybridism 
about it. She utilizes sculpture, performance and photography in her work in order to pose a 
multitude of questions for whoever is viewing her work, questions which will no doubt shake 
the viewers’ pre-conceived boundaries.
Kitty

Melissa Hilliard

Our identity is created through our life experiences; it reflects and shapes who we are. Melissa Hilliard’s work deals with this idea of personal identity and what it is through the exploration of her grandmother Catherine Hilliard, or Kitty for short. She is seventy nine years old. She has dementia and lives at home with Melissa and her parents. Her work focuses on the loss of Kitty, as a person and her loss of identity.

Kitty’s life, history, stories, memories and past have been taken from her. And the process is unstoppable. The memory loss is inevitable; it will happen and get worse. It is hard to pinpoint and catch the start of this disease. It can be mistaken for general aging. But how must it feel for the person themself. How and when does the confusion start? One can only imagine that it would be like trying to remember a person’s name who you have only met a few times. The name just does not come to you, it is impossible for it to manifest itself in your mind. There is just ____________ blank. It is as though you have never even heard this name before, it’s gone, was it ever there? You begin to doubt yourself, feel embarrassed, ashamed, confused because this has never happened to you before.

Melissa has searched old documents and certificates looking for information, but this only takes her so far. Looking over old photographs some people can be recognised, but other people and places are unknown to Melissa as her grandmother cannot recall them. One piece of information in the old certificates is particularly interesting. Kitty was baptised Catherine Patricia Keogh, but later on her marriage certificate she is known as Catherine Veronica, formerly known as Catherine Patricia. Why did this name change take place? For what reasons? It seems strange for a person to change their middle name. But Kitty cannot remember. Melissa is asking questions and is trying to capture this disappearing past. She wants the viewer to feel the same confusion and loss as her grandmother. Melissa’s work explores the exposes the darker side of aging, decay and dying. Her work reflects her grandmother in a beautifully poetic and sentimental manner. Her work goes beyond the merely personal and pushes the viewer to face the fleeting quality of life and accept that we all face this fearful aging process.

The work she makes blends into the melting pot of contemporary gothic culture. Today more than ever we as a public are more interested in gothic themes. There are endless amounts of television programs, films, books, music, news and general media filled with gothic notions, both obvious and inconspicuous. We are filled with a desire to seek out these morbid tales, maybe as a reassurance that our lives are not that bad and the notion that, things could be worse. Melissa’ work shares these notions.

Her work deals with the uncanny; to Melissa her grandmother is mysterious and inexplicable. She is delving into someone else’s world, exploring someone else’s memories. The work arouses a fear and dread of the unknown, as Kitty becomes unknown to her own self. This idea that she cannot remember herself is uncomfortably strange and beyond the ordinary. There are similarities between notions of the gothic body and the physical disease that Kitty has, it is affecting her brain and is making the owner unfamiliar with its own body. There are parallels between the beauty and innocents of Kitty and the way in which the gothic identifies a dark beauty with the notion of death.

Melissa’s study of her grandmother’s aging process reflects the futile nature of this fight on aging. Aging is a natural process. It is also beautiful. With age we grow wiser as a person, we share more life experiences and learn more about our world and our place in it. To Melissa
aging is also a beautiful process. We may become more wrinkled and grey but this is natural beauty, our faces and bodies tell a story, it shows a life lived. Why then is there this uncanny desire created in our society of wanting to live forever? We are obsessed with the notion of dying, and avoiding it.

“Biologically speaking, dying only takes a few precious seconds. The physical process of dying usually begins in one failing organ of the body and then simply spreads itself, meticulously switching off the lights as it leaves each room of the body. The tissue and then cellular shut-down turns everything to mush, then gases, then dust. For you and me this is not the ‘dying’ we observe and experience as people. This is not the ‘dying’ that we see, caress and talk to. This is not the ‘dying’ we live through or live with as survivors or as people with failing health... The dying that I discuss concerns the life we live in that urgent space created by the awareness that death is soon to engulf us.”

In today’s contemporary culture and society aging is now feared. We look around us every day and are surrounded by the media giving us solutions to stop and defy the aging process. Women in today’s society are particular targets of this anti-aging campaign. We can buy anti-aging face creams and dye away our greying hair. On television, in movies and in fashion magazines we see young woman at the forefront of imagery. This has become the ideal, the preferred and desired look for women to be and men to want. Only recently the fashion world came under scrutiny for using a ten year old model for a photo shoot in an edition of Vogue. The little girl was dressed like a woman aged between 18 and 28. Why did they just not use a model of appropriate age? Do today’s women want to look as young as a ten year old? This exercise just seems to be doing the opposite of stopping aging, but instead is stealing youth from children.

“Just as a desire to predict death encourages greater observation..., so the complementary defensive desire to ward death off when it nears encourages technological innovation”.

Women now take more drastic measures in their battle on aging and decay. Many turn to plastic surgery in an attempt to stop the process. We are changing our bodies beyond recognition. Do people who undertake this process still recognise themselves? Are they losing traces of their identity? They may be removing facial features they shear with their other family members, their mother’s nose or their father’s eyes. Yes they may still feel like the person they always were but we were all created in unique ways with defining features, do we all want to look like that girl on the front of the fashion magazine? Do we all want to look the same?

“As many of us feel increasingly swept away by screen images, we construct science fiction narratives around the loss of self. The films The invasion of the body snatchers (1956) and The Night of The Living Dead (1968) could be read as prescient allegories of the intensification of the culture of celebrity, whereby we are all taken over by the exact same iconic movie stars”.

Artists today dealing with gothic themes reflect similar ideas to those explored by Melissa Hilliard. Tip Toland is a sculpture who deals with “the unseen, ineffable aspects of the human psyche that are universal amongst us, allegorical and dreamlike, her work is extremely contemplative and intimate”, Toland’s work reflects visually the fragility of aging and shows its reality. We are hit in the face with our society’s biggest fear and forced to accept it. “My work is an attempt to give voice to inner psychological and/or spiritual states of being. What is of primary importance to me is that the figures contain particular aspects of humanity which they can mirror back to the viewer. It’s the vulnerability of humanity I am after.”

Visual artist Jeffrey Wang combines this notion of identity loss with the phenomenon of society’s obsession with staying young. His images portray the fear of losing one’s identity today. The young beautiful girls in his images may be just that, but at what cost. He shows the feeling of being trapped and lost, unable to capture who you were. “It’s hard to be yourself when you are under the constant attack of all kinds of influences. It’s a way right to the loss of identity. Using the body of a woman, the artist represents the intense process that happens through the most diverse interferences in order to form an individual”.

The Hollywood movie Memento (2000) brings to a reality what would happen if you or I did lose the person that we are. The movie synopsis tells of a man, suffering from short-term memory loss, who uses notes and tattoos to hunt for the man he thinks killed his wife. What would any of us do in this horrifying situation? The film is permeated with a feeling of being utterly lost, mentally as well as physically.

Melissa’s series of monoprints- ‘Kitty’ - are a result of the study of her grandmother. The prints reflect many aspects of Kitty’s identity. They show how her past reflects and layers upon itself to create her identity. They also show how Kitty’s identity is now muddled and confused. Kitty has lost her precious memories and so has lost herself. Her world has become distorted.

In addition to the prints Melissa created matching video pieces. These video pieces consist of the monoprints being recreated in sand and plaster. The image is not fixed down, it is still for a time but then blown away. The image is suffering the same fate as her grandmother. Like her memories, the image is swept away by uncontrollable forces, leaving little or no traces behind.

Kitty is no longer who she was before. Not because she has changed thought her own continuous decision. But she has been taken away from herself by this disease. Her mind is not what it was. She once had a life, likes and dislikes, desires, passions, dreams. It is not a case that she does not have these feeling any longer but they have become more simplified. Her life does not look towards any particular goals but lives in the moment of now, this hour, this day. She cannot recall her past, or as well as anyone would hope to be able to look back on their past in their old age. She can remember snippets, places and people, but only briefly. The memories come and go again as quickly as they came. They are like flashes of light. It is as though she is shining a torch around the dark room of her mind, struggling to pick out images, shapes and figures in the dim light. They are just out of reach, fleeting and too hard to hold onto.

The idea of a person not being able to recall their life and who they were in it fascinates Melissa and informs her work. Melissa has always listened to stories her grandmother told but they have been gradually becoming less detailed and fewer in number in the past few years. Melissa can recall the stories she has heard but can now no longer gain any more detail about them as Kitty’s memory has gotten worse throughout 2011. Now Melissa is at an age where she wants to gather as much information about her family’s past as she can but as this is her last living grandparent this is a difficult task.

There is such a large chunk of her life closed off to Melissa. She cannot work out who her grandmother was in her past. What was she was like when she was young? What was she was like when she was a child? What was she was like when she was the same age as Melissa?. What jobs has she worked over her life time? What did she do for fun? What kind of clothes did she like to wear? Melissa feels she is missing all the stories and chats a granddaughter would have with her grandmother. She is missing out on the closeness that would be shared. Of course there

http://obviousmag.org 13/12/2011 17.16
http://www.imdb.com/ 13/12/2011 17.46
is a closeness between Melissa and her grandmother, but in a different way to what might be normal.

It is hard to hold on to life, it is fleeting and impossible to capture. Melissa’s exploration of her grandmother’s life and decline of her memories is a touching reminder to all of us, that we all face the same end. Death will come, it is how we fill and live our lives that matters, and of course the memories we leave behind no matter how many or few.

“We should understand that the reasons we choose to live at all often reside in this precious handful of human intimacies, and as companions, may take to the same wind and eventually disappear with them”.68

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Destruction series

Barry Masterson

Barry Masterson’s art work revolves around the theme of destruction, as well as apocalyptic scenes. He conveys the devastation that humans can wreak upon one another, and the power that they have to instantly transform the lives of others for the worse. In the below four pieces which constitute a series, we see a lot of imagery that obviously hint at the happenings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II. However, it goes further than that. Every conflict is like any other, be it 1,000 years ago or yesterday. Man’s potential to destroy one another grows and grows, the reasons and weapons may be different but the intent is always the same. This piece tries to highlight the human’s potential for cruelty. The artist tries to do this without directly showing something as obvious as corpses to depict death, as it is implied throughout the work in other ways.

The theme of death and decay is decidedly Gothic. In Masterson’s pieces although something dying is not directly depicted, death is always there looming in the background. You could argue that showing a bomb or a mushroom cloud itself is depicting death, and in a sense you would be correct. They can be considered the bringers of death, but people now more than ever are quite desensitized to such imagery. This reinforces what the artist is getting at. Violence is everywhere, it’s a part of life we all seem to accept now, and the true horror of what people actually go through is not really recognized by the vast majority of people, unless they have experienced a similarly horrific happening themselves. ‘Robort Longo’ makes similarly apocalyptic art in that he often creates images depicting scenes such as explosions, so shares the same undertone of death and decay that Masterson does. Longo’s pieces are often derived from photographs taken by the media. His works are beautifully drawn, with deep areas of darkness, which enhance the strength of the structure of the mushroom cloud, highlighting its ferocious power. One example of this would be his untitled piece (Fig. 1) which is a charcoal drawing based off a photograph taken of the bombing of Nagasaki Japan in 1945. Although rather realistic there is still something unreal about the images. Similarly, Masterson’s depictions of mushroom clouds although recognisable for what they are, there has not been a concerted effort to make them hyper realistic. They are about as real to the viewer as any news story we see in the media. We see something bad happening, but do we really understand the gravity of the event, or even care?

There is another point which can be addressed within the motif of the mushroom cloud or explosion that is the idea of transformation. Robert Louis Stevenson’s ‘Strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde’ is a classic example of a gothic transformation from good to evil. Dr Jekyll’s transformation from man to monster could be equated to a transformation which the bomb creates. In the moment of the explosion that enormous surge of energy forever transforms all that lay in its path, be it the landscape directly affected, as well as people who lose their lives, or the countless others it indirectly effects. The explosion creates an irreparable transformation

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brining death and pain upon others. ‘Takashi Murakami’ is another interesting example of an artist using the Mushroom cloud/mushroom motif to convey death and Transformation. While Longo and Masterson’s work mainly incorporates use of darker colour, which could be considered more traditionally dark and gothic looking imagery. His work is on the face of it very different to Longo’s and Masterson’s work in that Murakami uses a lot more colour in his imagery. Being Japanese, Murakami like all of his countrymen and women would obviously have been affected by the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. His work “Super Nova” depicting a huge forest of small mushrooms, in the centre stands an enormous mushroom towering above all else in the piece, this is to signify the huge impact the bombings have had in Japanese culture, like a Giant Spector lurking ever present, the past is something that no one can escape. His piece “Time Bokan” hits a similar topic, this time in a slightly more obvious fashion, where he depicts a rather basic and cartoonish like Mushroom cloud in the form of a skull. This again touching on the same subject matter as all the pieces I have mentioned before. The idea of the explosion creating a transformation as far reaching as it has, is a very interesting one for Masterson and the work of Longo and Murakami can be seen to have influenced this heavily.

In his work, Masterson also heavily employs the usage of aeroplanes; he looks at the aeroplane in two ways, firstly it can be looked upon as something which has undergone a gothic transformation. Similarly to how the bomb which the plane carries is abjected from the plane, and therefore human before it explodes, it creates an irreparable transformation. The plane in some instances has gone through the same transformation. In the beginning the plane was created as a means of transport, but over time man has shaped its use, and has now created some form of monster, which humans use to do their bidding. The human has created this Frankenstein like monster, which they wish to control and utilize for their own evil work. Although Masterson’s work is world war II based he chose not to include the “Enola Gay” in his imagery, instead choosing to pick at random, a plane used in another conflict, to show that these type of monstrosity’s have happened on numerous occasions and will happen again. A very recent example which would also tie in the idea of a planes transformation from good to evil would be 9/11 where passenger planes, built to protect, were instead used to create death and destruction. His work, without directly referencing, is intended to subtly hint at all types of plane related massacres throughout the years, be it accidents or otherwise. The plane can be seen as this demi god like creature, men control it but it is also somewhat untameable, once this creature has you in its sights there is no escape. It’s not like most other weapons especially land based, as at least there you have a possibility to seek refuge, but if you are beneath a plane, there is nowhere to hide, equally if its collision course is set and you are a passenger you are left powerless, these pieces underline both the power and fragility of the human condition.

In summary of what has been written before the narrative of the linked pieces could be construed as thus. Throughout mankind’s past we have a history of violence, be it warranted, or otherwise. The reasons pale in comparison when you actually think of some of the horrible acts which have been carried out in the past. Masterson has chosen to the Hiroshima/Nagasaki incident to highlight this, with the mushroom cloud and aeroplane used in conjunction with this to display both how some acts are carried out, as well as to hint at other events. Figure 2, is a good example of a very obvious narrative, reading from left to right, on the left there is an image of an aerial view of Hiroshima city before it’s bombing. Following this we have an image of the

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76 Frankenstein (1931) Film directed by James Whale, USA
mushroom cloud over Nagasaki; this is the product which has been created by humans. Dropped from that monstrous plane mentioned earlier, created by the monstrous human. Neither they nor the bomb need to be shown, the explosion is enough to suggest their part in the story. And finally on the right following the explosion we have another aerial view of Hiroshima. This section displays the aftermath; it displays the transformation and death that the explosion has brought upon the land. There is very little remains from the previous image, no sign of human life, displaying both the strength and frailty of man.

Figure 1, is much the same image but excludes the explosion the transformation between both images is more effective when positioned side by side you get a better impression of just how much an effect the explosion has had. The “before” image across the top is so busy and full of life while the lower “after” image is a stark contrast, it looks lifeless and empty, as if its soul has been torn out, barely any remnants of the past can be seen, all that remains is a scar that no one can ever forget.

Figure 2, then actually depicts an explosion, bomb and plane all in the same image, telling the narrative of the plane abjecting the bomb and creating the transformation and death which has been alluded to earlier. Masterson has also produced other related work in this series He takes the now quite iconic image from Abu Ghraib of a prisoner being tortured by soldiers and transforms it by tying in elements of the past and present conflict. This is yet another example of human cruelty; someone commits an atrocity, which causes others to retaliate. This man would not be in the situation he finds himself in, but perhaps for his own actions, but also the actions of those before him who would have been an influence. That however, does not excuse the torture he is subjected to. The image itself is overlaid atop an over etched image of an old war plane. The plate of the planes drawing was etched to the extent that the plane seems to have eroded away, decaying over time showing that sometimes damage over time can get worse. Time does not always heal, and the scars are there for all to see and to be opened up if provoked. It’s also interesting to juxtaposition a weapon from the past with something from quite recently. It highlights the point that no matter where or when, pain and suffering is being inflicted by humans on someone or something else. All pieces in the series touch on this fact.

Humans are powerful but so very fragile at the same time; we wreak havoc and suffering on others in an endless cycle, without seeming to really care all that much unless we are directly affected, thus nothing changes and the cycle goes on. If we are directly affected we retaliate creating more hate and violence, it’s a sad fact of human nature which most likely cannot and will never change.
Les Tissus Macabre

Jacintha Murphy

Images of Death abound in art. Humans have always had a morbid fascination with death, and art, as always, has reflected this reality. From the Medieval memento mori, to the Dutch Vanitas paintings of the 17th century and even modern day examples such as the works of Damien Hirst, Ron Mueck and Joel-Peter Witkin; Death has both inspired and horrified artists and audiences alike. It is this tradition that Jacintha Murphy continues in her latest endeavour, a piece titled Les Tissus Macabres. The name itself is a double-entendre of sorts, a play on the fact that the French word tissu translates both as flesh and fabric-her chosen support. The fragility of the fabric echoes that of the flesh and it is slashed to reveal minute glimpses of the grotesque reality of bloody viscera that lurks beneath the skin. It is a work of Manichaean contrasts; delicacy versus coarseness, light versus dark, exterior versus interior, appearance versus reality, life versus death. These contrasts are further enhanced by her use of combined media. Diaphanous layers of watercolour paint and inks have been built up to reveal a faint, almost dreamy image of a figure shrouded in darkness. This softness is literally ripped asunder by the tears in the fabric which expose the harshness of the photographic image beneath; that of the bloody entrails of some deceased creature.

The past is an ever present feature in Jacintha’s work as is indeed the case in Les Tissus Macabres. It is a continuation of not only the Vanitas and Memento Mori traditions but also the greatest tradition in Western Art; that of the nude. From the Venus of Willendorf to Velasquez’s Venus At Her Mirror to Manet’s Olympia, it is this which she plays homage to in Les Tissus Macabres—a rather Gothic interpretation of the nude. Indeed, her work over the past year has primarily been focused on the play of shadow and light on the flesh of the female figure, usually in poses reflecting those found in the works of the Old Masters from whom she draws so much inspiration. This connection to the past is very important to her practise and you will always detect a reference to it in her work. Le Tissu Macabres is itself a continuation of this theme; the pose being a reference to that in David’s The Death of Marat and the omnipresent shadow, a tribute to Caravaggio. It is also, upon first glance, a piece that revels in abject imagery; a shocking reworking of David’s political Gothicism that honours not only to the great painters of the past but also ‘artists’ in more notorious fields of study.

Here is a piece that demonstrates as well as any Dutch still-life that beauty is not eternal and the light of life can be extinguished at the whim of Death, or, in this case, at the hands of a sadistic killer. The sombre tones of the composition add a distinct Gothic atmosphere to the piece; ‘a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space’77, a stifling sense of dread. It is shrouded in shadow adding an eerie romance to the scene making the death seem almost beautiful. Indeed, to some, death is a thing of beauty, and a skilfully executed murder a work of art.

The image of the corpse, such as depicted in Les Tissus Macabres is one that naturally evokes fear and disgust. ‘The corpse’, as Julia Kristeva stated, ‘seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject’78. People have a morbid fascination with images of death. Though the cadaver, ‘the most sickening of wastes’79, is something that

78 Julia Kristeva Powers of Horror: An Essay On Abjection (from lecture notes)
79 Ibid.
should induce horror and abjection, there is none the less a seemingly ingrained appeal to our imaginations. 'One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it. Violently and painfully.' It is this very human reaction to death that makes it such a fascinating subject for works of art. There is a very strange, uncanny appeal in photographs or paintings of corpses such as those of Joel-Peter Witkin—an obvious reference to Victorian death photos—an appeal that sends almost joyous tingles up our spine though our minds tell us that it is morally wrong to revel in such macabre imagery; it is a primal fascination, one that we all have, thus the lure of such works as this. Indeed, this particular piece is a manifestation of the artist's own interest in forensic pathology and accounts of notorious, sadistic killers, most notably Jack the Ripper.

The Ripper case was the first major incident where grisly illustrations of the murdered victims were circulated to the masses through the modern phenomenon of the tabloid press (a trend that has all but numbed us to such imagery, a strange reality exemplified by Warhol's Death and Disaster series). Another interesting case that influenced this particular piece was that of the infamous Black Dahlia murder; the tragic case of an up-and-coming actress whose body was found grievously mutilated and brutally hacked in two; another image that has haunted the public's memory. Indeed, in Les Tissus Macabres the artist makes the lower half of the body deliberately unclear, it is in effect severed by the shadow; an allusion to the 'work' of the Black Dahlia murderer. Certainly, this leads one to consider, as Thomas De Quincey did, that murder itself may be considered an art-form. 'Through this great gallery of murder, therefore, together let us wander hand in hand, in delighted admiration.' This likening of murder to fine art is, albeit disturbingly, understandable. Not just to 'Murder-Fanciers' but even the common person must see the difference between a brutal, savage beating and the 'old honest way of cutting throats', the skilful wielding of a knife such as displayed by the aforementioned killers. 'Murders have their little differences and shades of merit as well as statues, pictures, oratorios, cameos, intaglios, or what not.' Perhaps this is the secret to people's fascination with murder; a sinister respect for good craftsmanship and originality for indeed, the most infamous murders, as is the case with the most renowned works of art, are those that display an originality and skill in their execution and are those that have the greatest psychological impact in the public; those that linger long in its memory. It is this position of murder in the public's imagination that the artist toys with in Les Tissus Macabres; it lures the viewer, preying on their morbid fascinations, feeding them the shocking, gruesome images that they by now crave and admire and yet simultaneously abhor.

One cannot, of course, overlook the other inescapable lure of this work, that all too familiar tool of the media; eroticism. Le Tissu Macabres is a piece that is awash with Gothic titillation. It is a horrifyingly sensual image. This sumptuous nudity which contrasts with the severity of the bloody gashes is an echo of 'Delacroix's fascination with the violent in the erotic' as seen in his painting The Death of Sardanapalus. It is a subversion of the typical sexualised nudes of classical paintings. In it, we see 'that familiar Freudian paradigm of sex and death'. This figure, in its pseudo-sexual pose, disturbingly allures, even in death. She seems almost as if she is sprawled in a post-orgasmic stupor—or, as the French so aptly call it, le petit mort: the little death. Indeed, in Freudian terms, the act of stabbing could be construed as symbolising intercourse; the phallic

80 Ibid.
81 Thomas De Quincey, Murder Considered As One of the Fine Arts, from Project Gutenberg (http://www.gutenberg.org/files/10708/10708-8.txt) date accessed: 29 November 2011.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
knife penetrating the flesh, violating the body in the most horrific way imaginable. Her corpse is languidly draped across the bed—the traditional site of intercourse—after this twisted “sexual” encounter with a knife. It is an unsettling notion to say the least, one that adds to the overall sense of unease about the work.

One must also consider that eroticism, by its very nature, is a liberation of the body, an eschewal of repression87, an indulgence in sexuality and carnal desires. This however is at odds with that of murder; the greatest repression of the body that is possible88. This theme of repression is, of course, one that is essential to the Gothic89. Indeed, one could only but describe this piece as a continuation of the Gothic tradition. The eerie atmosphere, the subversion of the nude and eroticism, and the looming presence of Death are all distinct characteristics of Gothic art that this work upholds.

Without doubt, *Les Tissus Macabres* is a substantially multi-dimensional work of art. There are many readings to be made of the work, so many allusions that the artist has made but, of course, it would be no surprise if an individual were to unravel an altogether different interpretation of the piece. This work, by its very nature, evokes a very personal response in the viewer; a reaction that reflects the viewer’s own personal opinions on death and mortality. Some will be horrified and think that it is a “sick” image, others will be enthralled. Perhaps, as is evidently the intention of the artist, it will open people’s eyes to the elegance to be found in the most unlikely of places; in death, decay and abjection—to see *les fleurs du mal*—the flowers of the bad and evil. For is this not the point of art? To derive some aesthetic value from that which is most ugly and terrible. To perceive beauty in the grotesque. Imperfection is the essence of the ugly and grotesque, does not the very greatness of their imperfection become their perfection90? *Les Tissus Macabres* has achieved this feat, it is at once alluring and abject; simultaneously drawing the viewer in and pushing them away. The artist has seen the beauty in that which is most abhorrent; she has unearthed the allure of the Gothic.

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87 Bruhm, *Gothic Bodies*, p.xiv.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 De Quincey, *On Murder*
The work of young artist Ciara Nolan is an extensive exploration of the human body. The body in recent years has come into great speculation to artists. It is becoming more profound as science delves deeper under the skin of what and who we are. Boundaries are being broken and limits pushed in an attempt to express new ways of communication. People are transforming and manipulating the body in strange and wonderful ways to present new ideas. Thinking of the body as a material, it is easily accessible carrying its own connotations depending on the owner. Flesh is what is seen and what is manipulated. It is easily transformed, and once modified it holds the memory. Ciara is intrigued by the notion of the fragmented body, threatening the integrity of the whole. In this way the flesh presented is objectified and abstracted. It becomes a surface, a landscape on which to create. She draws inspiration from pressure, be it external or internal, and how it affects the body. As pressure builds it eventually comes to a point of saturation. This built up energy has to break free of whatever constraints in place. Through the body Ciara explores this point of saturation, a point of immense pressure before breaking.

The artwork presented here is a video piece called 'Bound'. The piece is a close up mirror image of a nude figure experiencing a body bind. The image of a body as a whole is clear. The viewer is invited into this magnified private experience. The figures’ skin is adorned with blemishes, accentuating the fact that flesh is vulnerable and easily hurt. This adds to the tension of the wire being pulled taut around the body. As the video goes on the images become like geometric abstracted line drawings with the notion of the body becoming less obvious. There are images created that look like swellings or bulging sexual organs playing with visual ideas of fetishism. This is presented along with a strange creature-like image of the mirrored hands binding the figure appearing as some sort of spider or obscure life form. The overall image shows a body in close scrutiny undergoing an uncomfortable, unnatural experience. Force is being exerted through a tight bind of a harsh man-made wire, which digs into the skin. Beneath this wire is a writhing figure, bulging abnormally under the pressure. Coinciding with this visual piece is the sound of the wire as it is being unravelled and pulled. It is an abrasive sound that when added to the visual effects should add to a sensation of recoil.

When editing the piece, it was important to keep it dark and bleak, in a macabre tradition, which is characteristic of the artist’s work. Contrast and shadows were increased and a dark blurring of the screen edges, in attempts to take away from the realist setting. In this way it is seen in a dream or nightmare like quality reminiscent to that of monstrous imagination and the horror film genre. The image has been cropped in order to lessen the details of the figure’s sexual preference. Androgynous figures are another characteristic of Ciara’s work. In this way she steers clear from specific gender nuances. Hopefully the viewer no matter what sex will encounter the work the same way as everyone else. The reasoning for the image mirrored on itself is to show in one way a body collapsing in on itself but mostly to increase abstraction of the body. Through this mirrored effect, new images could be created. A sense of increased unease develops with this strange imagery. The piece has been sped up quite a lot and so this imagery is also a by-product of that fact. What is created are strange pictures, bulging dark shapes which when looked at clearly have sexual connotations to them.

The origins of the idea of pressure and its effect on the body sprouted from an illness in the family. Her father was experiencing hardships. The stress of work life and pressures placed upon him was proving too much and causing a state of confusion and loss of identity. Diagnosed
with depression he began taking medication. Unfortunately what was seen as an illness from external pressures was in fact coming from inside. The pressure built so much resulting in a seizure. This concluded in the discovery of a brain tumour. The tumour has since been removed and he is now recovering. The build-up of pressure on the brain had caused all of the problems he had been experiencing lasting over two years. Strange visuals were occurring in the morning, confusion with equations, and a complete loss of identity. He had lost control over who he was. The tumour remains of interest to the artist as this unknown mass of cells, a parasitic creature feeding off the personality strengths of her father. It was gaining power until its life force could no longer handle its containment. This idea of the parasite, alien creature is specific to many alien horror films. ‘The Thing’, ‘Alien’. The creature in these films feed off its life force until its eventual discovery. The fear of the other invading the self will always be a manifestation of our nightmares. Losing control to the unknown and change in personality traits is a dreadful feeling and realisation. Once the tumour was removed Ciara's father gained back the person he had lost. As the loss was gradual it was only in the recovering stage that the loss of his identity became truly apparent.

The notion of the monstrous and grotesque body is a vital factor in the video piece ‘Bound’. Monstrous bodies in the Gothic serve as an indication of symbolic crisis. Inner turmoil represented by outwardly physical change. The monstrous being, goes against the norm and resists understanding. The piece that contains this monstrous quality is the deformed shapes made by the mirror image. The crab or spider like image of the hands moving across the body, gives a sense of invasion. The control lies in this strange form. The grotesque body suggests both physical distortion and interior disruption. It does not necessarily mean a misshapen or disfigured body. It is also linked to distortion and perversion. Both of which are evident in ‘Bound’. The deformed body is a physical manifestation of an internal rupture. The contorted figure shown is a metaphor for hidden trauma. The element of the grotesque body relies on the reaction of the viewer. What is happening onscreen relates to an anonymous body so that the onlooker can transcribe it to their own body. A feeling of unease is felt with the thought of the unwilling bind. The unnatural bulging flesh, perverse notion of the bind and the deformed line images all add to the quality of the grotesque body. Looking at the grotesque body in the Gothic, there is generally knowledge of relief from this body. A lot of the time this is the release of death. Here however, there is no evidence of a release. The video is on a continuous loop, without a beginning or end. The figure is doomed to struggle in this bound condition evermore. The narration of the figure becoming unbound is never suggested. The idea is to leave the viewer with the suggestion that there is no escape from certain pressures. Victim to this force, the only thing to do is endure.

Visual inspiration has come from fetish styles of bondage and tight-lacing. Research into the tight-lacers of corsetry brought to light the extremes of body transformation. Waist lines of thirteen inches were seen as attractive but in fact were and are horrific body disfigurements. The notion of the extreme tie in order to change the body was used in ‘Bound’ to manipulate the flesh. In stages of experimentation for the video piece, sensation in the artist’s legs was lost due to the pressure of the bind. In the artist’s quest to transform the body she interrupted internal systems, which in turn adds to the piece. Further research was done into the fetish practice of bondage. Ciara began looking at the Japanese tradition of body binding called Shibari. This is an S&M practice of domination and submission. Intricate knots are used to tie a person up in different contortions. The person inflicting force feels power and gets a thrill from being in complete control over another person. The person being bound is completely submissive, giving up complete control. There is a thrill of the unknown, increased pressure can result in a feeling of fear which can induce adrenaline. Ciara’s artwork draws on these notions of domination and submission however not in a sexual manner. There is a victim, a victimiser, and a torment. The nude figure suggests a level of invasion and humiliation, which are key factors in S&M practice.
An artist that draws great inspiration for Ciara’s practice is the work of Berlinde De Bruyckere. Bruyckere creates haunting wax sculptures of figures, which give the impression of being in a state of distress. The figures have been meticulously created in wax using different pigments in order to achieve a life-like quality. They appear vulnerable enduring some immense pressure causing their deformities. There is a sense of shame about them. They are depictions of the grotesque body. Through their pale flesh-coloured bodies she contorts the image of the figure. In ways it is frightening, yet comforting, horrific, yet beautiful. They can be seen as uncomfortable states of being, enduring a hard life that caused their disfigurements. She explores themes of life and death, suffering and solace, exploring issues of vulnerability, personal responsibility and human contact. The body seems to be growing out of control it cannot be contained. Body parts morph into branches, fragmented pieces are distorted almost beyond recognition and other pieces appear as hanging slabs of flesh. She wants to show how helpless a body can be. It is nothing to be afraid of it can be beautiful. Although the piece we have discussed above is a video piece, there are ties between the subject matter of Bruyckere’s work and that of Ciara’s. Represented through different media both artists deal with similar matters and are drawn to similar issues. Ciara’s work has taken the literal body in which to transform, through her manipulations of image a vulnerable body in a state of distress.

The fragile body will always be key to Ciara’s practice. Through video, photography, drawing and sculptural pieces she has always used the inspiration of the figure in relation to life and how we struggle to accommodate this life. Each of us is firmly fixed to a specific body and lie in compliance to its strengths and weaknesses. When confronted with ideas and imagery of the deformed body we recoil. The reason being it is unnatural, unknown. This frightens us. Through her work, Ciara wants to push the boundaries of the deformed figure to question notions of the fragility of the self and test the limits of the body. Without question there are Gothic undertones to her work. The colours she is drawn to remain bleak, lifeless, never containing vitality. These colours seem more permeable and in a raw more organic state. The way she frames the images she creates in photography and video is done to accentuate a more grotesque being. This allows fragmentation of the body and obscurity. The viewer questions what exactly they are seeing. The visual aspects that seem sexual in an S&M nature bring along different ideas of each piece adding to a state of somewhat visual confusion. The idea of an unknown controller of pressure brings about the theme of a parasite. The loss of control and identity to an alien object is new subject matter of late that the artist is beginning to explore. As her work is progressing this parasitic theme is becoming of increasing interest with many creative possibilities. All of the above are strong characteristics of Ciara’s work that predominantly lie in the Gothic. There is no doubt that contemporary Gothic is and will remain of key inspiration to here artwork. Subconsciously the work always veers to the dark side.
The Locket

*Katie O'Reilly*

‘Embrace death and you can truly live’.91

Elements of the gothic, is a core theme in the work of Kerry born artist Katie O’ Reilly. It was in Limerick School of Art and Design that she took an art history class entitled “Gothic in Contemporary Society” lectured by Tracy Fahey, where she first rightly understood the theme of the gothic, and recognized that, without knowing it, elements of the gothic had been appearing in her work for years previous. Therefore she decided to embrace it, and since then, has been producing a body of work, containing a very strong element of the gothic.

Following the death of her grandmother in September 2011, O’ Reilly was helping to go through her belongings. Her grandmother was, it transpired, an avid hoarder, with all sorts of everything stuffed in the back of wardrobes and in bottom drawers. This got O’ Reilly thinking about things we leave behind. We all leave things after us, whether intentionally or unintentionally, which can identify and distinguish us as individuals. Ornaments, old lace table-clothes, jewellery, a rib of hair, a fingerprint, or even a sample of handwriting perhaps? And then how do we preserve what is left behind? What do we hold sacred, and what do we discard? Exploring different methods of preservation is a key interest of Katie O’ Reilly.

Working with film, O’ Reilly created a piece in late 2011, where she attempts to marry two methods of preservation. In this piece, the artist stands in soft lighting, against a black background, appearing from the mid waste up, wearing nothing but a black bra, and a heart shaped, ice locket around her neck. The locket hangs from a piece of invisible string, and is made completely from ice. Encapsulated in the ice however, is a lock of hair. As the film progresses the ice begins to melt. This video piece by O’ Reilly is somewhat reminiscent of the famous piece of performance work, by another Irish artist, Alice Maher, titled ‘collar’ 2003, where the artist stood, with a chain of sheep hearts around her neck.

The gothic theme is very strong in this piece of work. The locket itself originates form Victorian times, when a family member or loved one died, a lock of their hair was taken from their head and put into a locket, to be worn around the neck. The sentiment behind this act, is that a piece of the deceased would stay with the loved one, and so live on with them, When ladies of the Victorian times were in mourning they would wear a “Victorian mourning gown”. A gown made entirely out of black with lace and other fabrics, this dress would have been very in keeping with the gothic theme and is mimicked even today in some gothic fashion trends. Victorian times had many customs and traditions for mourning. The Victorian people shared the gothic belief that death is beautiful and should be celebrated.

Hair is a material O’ Reilly is using in her work recently. Through her exploration of different methods and ways of preservation, O’ Reilly has created a number of other works with hair as the main material, including installation pieces, performance works, and other objects of wearable art. Hair is a very gothic material to use. It is cast off from the body, therefore it can be seen as abject. Hair remains, and appears the same, in life and in death, as in death it lives on. Hair was used quite frequently in Victorian times, as many of their mourning customs. Jewellery, lockets, earrings, bracelets were made from hair, or with a single hair of the departed, encapsulated in them, as too were the famous Victorian mourning wreaths, which were also

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91 Fahey, Tracy, Lecture notes, *Gothic in Contemporary Culture* seminar, L.S.A.D. 21-9-11
made with hair. Hair is a very gothic material, as it was used as a means of keeping deceased loved ones, living on after death.

There is something quite abject about the use of bodily cast offs in her work. Hair is expelled by the body every day; O’ Reilly has stated, that to her each single hair rib is a record of the body, as it was at exactly the time it fell off the head.

I see each single rib of hair, as a testament to that person, as they were at the exact moment it fell from the head. Our bodies are constantly changing, to me the single rib of hair, is a catalogue of memories of sorts. It is important to me that I use the body in my work.

When we leave a hair behind, we are leaving a piece of our identity behind also. By taking a lock of hair from a deceased loved one, we are keeping a piece of them with us. When we find a rib of hair in a sandwich we are disgusted, it is after all a piece of a person, it holds their DNA, we don’t know who it came from, or where it has been before this, it can be dirty, unhygienic, and sickly. The same reaction is felt when one sees hair in a drain hole, one is left with an uncanny feeling, and may feel unwell after it. O’ Reilly takes great inspiration from artist Mona Hatoum, who also works with human hair as a material. Hatoum herself has said,

We relate to the world through our senses. You first experience an artwork physically. Meanings, associations and connotations come after the initial physical experiences. Your imagination, intellect and psyche are fired off by what you have seen. I’ve always been dissatisfied by work that appears just to your intellect and does not actually involve you in a physical way. The embodiment of an artwork is within the physical realm. The body is the axis of our perceptions, so how can art not afford to take that as a starting point?

The process of watching the ice melt is also a gothic experience. As we know freezing is a method of preservation. Therefore freezing the hair is a way of preserving the preserved. We are watching the ice melt, at an excelled rate, as the lock of hair is revealed to us. The image is aesthetically beautiful and pleasing to the eye, relating back to the basic gothic belief that death, or in this case dying, (due to the melting ice) is beautiful. As the ice heart melts, and is gradually diminished, we begin to see a red mark appear on the skin in its place. This is due to the cold of the frozen ice burning into the skin. As we watch this manifest, we the audience become unsettled, as there is something uncanny about this image as it appears before our eyes. The ice has melted away, however is has left a red mark and pain in its wake. It is unsettling and gives a sense of unease and eeriness to the entire piece. What we first witnessed as beautiful was concluded in pain.

If we take the image as a whole there is something unsettling and uncanny about that also. The footage is sped up considerably, so that we can see the ice melting rapidly before our eyes. The artist herself, who appears in the piece, is fidgety, blinking, and breathing rapidly, although standing in the same position. This is due to the footage being sped up, however when watching it, the artist comes across as being uneasy and uncomfortable. This could be from trying to stand in the same place while waiting for the ice to melt, or it could be from the pain of the freezing ice against her skin. This entire scene unleashes a sense of the uncanny in the audience, and makes them slightly uneasy. Perhaps the film is a metaphor for the deathbed, waiting patiently and uneasily for a loved one to pass in their last few minutes of life. Watching them anxiously breath, wondering which breath will be their last, not being able to help. Not wanting to watching but having to anyway.

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92 O’ Reilly, Katie, quote taken by writer 1-12-11

'Although I would not be overly familiar with the whole realm of video art, I have been performing art for the past two years and wanted to try something different. The video piece itself is in its own way preserving this performance, and so seemed to me to be a natural progression in my work'.

O’Reilly has through this video work, completed another piece of art with undeniable gothic undertones. Her work deals with the uncanny, the abject, and the beauty of death. She has displayed through her use of material, aesthetic composition, and underlying themes and values, that she is, undeniably, an artist with a tie to the gothic beliefs.

94 O’ Reilly, Katie, quote taken by writer 1-12-11
Jelly Smash

Eibhls Slevin

“Jelly Smash” is a video piece produced by the artist Eibhls Slevin. It was shot in her home in Limerick in November 2011 and is a part of her current studio practice. It is three minutes and thirty two seconds in length. This video piece features Eibhls’ own foot attempting to squash a relatively small mound of gelatine. In the background there is a pale orange, plastic tablecloth. This covers the entire background and also sweeps down onto the floor, in under the gelatine mound and out of view of the camera. Presumably, as she is off frame, she is sitting sideways to the camera, as her foot is perpendicular in view. Her foot also comes into the frame from the right.

Eibhls’ current studio practice, in which this work evolved from, began with her research in fetishism. She was immediately fascinated by, the very common, foot fetishism, which subgenres with shoe fetishism.

Foot fetishism is believed to have started around the 16th century with Chinese foot binding. Chinese foot binding was a practice young girls, around the ages of four to seven, would be forced to partake in. It involved having to bend all their toes, apart from the big toe, back in under the foot. Then the foot was bent back as close to the heel as physically possible. Then the foot was bound in bandages so the forced foot would stay in place. Every day the bandages were removed and tightened more and more until the desired 3-inch foot (commonly known as the “golden lotus”) was developed. This was a painful procedure as bones were broken and walking was severely impaired. But if a girl of this time wished to marry (which they did to gain wealth and social status) a man could refuse to marry her if her feet were not bound. There are many theories as to how this practice came about, one of them being that the in which it caused the girls to walk was thought to tighten the muscles in the vagina. But the men took such a fascination to the “golden lotus” that many played and had sex with the girl’s feet rather than have intercourse with the girl herself.

Shoe fetishism works alongside foot fetishism, usually. Shoe fetishism is in essence, when a person (typically male) can only have sex with their partner (commonly female) when the partner is wearing shoes, which are more often than not, the high heel kind. However many types of shoe have being fantasised about, including the military boot and cowboy boots. The majority of the time the person with the fetish will not feel encouraged to have sex with their partner if the shoes are not worn. They become irrationally obsessed with the shoe. Theoretically, one of the reasons to this allure of shoes is believed that it leads the eye up to the leg towards the genitals. However, similar to foot fetishism, the shoe, as the object of attraction, is played with more so than the wearer. Women also become illogically infatuated with shoes. Both sexes with this fixation love how it looks, that the high heel trusts the body’s posture up into a more alluring shape. The dominance it creates when worn.

Eibhls then began looking at how one person might find something attractive and alluring, when another person would find the same thing disgusting and repulsing. Comparable to foot fetishism, the people who are involved in and/or have a foot fetish enjoy it, whereas some other people find the idea of the foot as a sexual object, completely disgusting as the foot is usually considered dirty in relation to having it in close contact with the mouth. Also its distance away from the mouth on the body increases the mental confusion. She began to play with the idea that one thing could cause both attraction and repulsion. This idea of a binary opposition puts this piece of work into the genre of the gothic.
This is how she came to make the “Jelly Smash” video piece. The video starts off with the artist’s foot tenderly caressing the mound of gelatine, gently pressing against it. The tension starts to build up as the viewer starts to want to see the gelatine being squashed. However this also causes discomfort to the viewer when it does happen as they can imagine the feeling it must produce to compress gelatine against the skin. This is amplified by the noises and sounds that accompany the video, the sound of the gelatine squelching as its manipulated.

The movement of the foot is highly sexualised, its slow tender fondling, teases the viewer, which leads to the penetration of the mound and the beginning of mashing the gelatine to a pulp. The stomping gets faster and more vigorous, almost aggressive as it reaches its climax to the end of the video which finishes with the foot slowly sliding backwards along the ground, out of the frame.

An artist who has influenced Eibhlís to make this work is Mat Collishaw. His work also relates to the gothic, in the binary opposites sense. The most obviously influential piece of his would be “Bullet Hole”. It consists of 15 light boxes and when displayed together they show an up close view of a wound on somebody’s head. This piece is both horrifying and perplexingly striking.

“The artist uses devices creating feelings of both enchantment and disenchantment in the viewer, often by incorporating images from the media in his work that confront the spectator with the reality of his surroundings.”

Another of his works is “Sordid Earth”. This is a piece he created for the Roundhouse in the Tate Modern. It is this large cylindrical projection of a video piece in which there are beautiful flowers growing in a turbulent landscape. However these flowers are developing infectious diseases as they grow in the video, making them rot and decay in front of your eyes. Even without the binary opposite of attraction and repulsion in this piece it is still in the gothic genre. This is due to its darkness, its macabre, its language of death, pain and decay which it translates to us.

Both Mat Collishaw And Eibhlís Slevin have this binary opposition of attraction versus repulsion in their pieces. It shows their role in the gothic genre, treading the very thin border line between something being alluringly transfictional addictive and magnatising in opposition to the same object being revolting, repelling and deterring. The idea behind Eibhlís’ work is to create these emotions and feelings to the viewer. That they feel they should not be watching the piece as it causes them discomfort but that they are unable to peel their eyes away from the horror. In relation to the gothic, her work is ‘the in between’, it has created a void in the middle of two opposing emotions. These binary opposites create a border in which she puts her viewer into. She creates this juxtaposition which makes them cringe yet they want to see more. This line is not a middle ground in the sense that it is neither attractive nor repulsing. It is both these polar opposites fighting and struggling to co-exist side beside each other.

95 (artist profile-mat collishaw)
2 (Tanya Bondakdar Gallery)
3 (Guardian Newspaper)
4 (Youtube)
Aoife Tierney is currently working on a project that involves experimenting and playing with many methods of animation both with different types of computer software such as Photoshop and illustrator as well as more physical technique of stop motion with cameras and other more traditional methods. Her plan is to make her characters come to life whether it’s on computer or on canvass. She is currently working on the idea of playing with moving images around the room or on a canvass, hoping to turn it into a narrative for a story.

She has always had a strong love for animation, and was torn between studying animation in Dun Laoghaire or Fine art in Limerick. Even though she has chosen the more fine art path in her education she still wishes to interpret animation and her stories of comic style character’s into her studies.

The role of Gothic always plays at least a subtle part in some of her work and in other works it is very obvious. Firstly we will discuss the setup of some of her storyboards.

One of the themes she is currently using in some of her work is the theme of zombies and the undead. One of these story boards include a humble character passing through an abandoned city and is ambushed by an un-dead villian.

This is where the Gothic element plays a powerful part in her work. The idea of the Uncanny and how the main character being forcefully cast out of safety into the unknown as the un dead watch in the shadows. Other than the obvious gothic inspiration of the famous flesh eating zombie she explores the idea of someone being the prey, being the hunted and vulnerable. Even in the first scene with no sign of any other life other than the main character there is the sense of being watched. This references the powerful, and recurring story in history of the legend of a beast that brings terror. The artist poses the question as to why we are so fascinated by these monsters that strike fear into our imaginations, why are we so fascinated with these stories? According to Tierney, she likes to incorporate these monsters into her work - as an artist, she claims, there are no boundaries or rules to creating these paranormal supernatural tales, her imagination is let loose and gets carried away. Her influence for this story actually sprouted from a quote from Christopher Landon’s screen play Disturbia (2007). During the first few seconds of the film, the main character’s father says - “No, he can't see us, But trust me, he can feel us watching.” 97

She has also been looking at certain video games such as the very well-known Keiichiro Toyama's Silent Hill and Capcom’s Resident Evil, both of these games were a significant success in the gaming world and gave birth to the name to the genre of survival horror. It’s the landscapes in these games that relate to her images. The artist chooses to create her main character to be frailer than the more traditional action hero character in these video games. She plays with putting certain items in particular areas in the piece to add a sense of chill. The angles in which video games are shot also influence her work. This perspective can be seen in something as simple as a chair in a corner or it could be a lot more dramatic like a crashed fighter plane in the water which is featured in some of her other drawings.

Tierney tries to achieve a particular mood in the background in her stories, without getting carried away with messing with too much detail. In the same story board she has created a very

97 http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0486822/quotes
dark shadowy scene of a citiescape with trees and a vast open plain. Again this work features overpowering shadows are there to suggest something is hiding there. She creates this with a unusual mixture of gouache and ink with acrylic paint. She creates a very barren, apocalyptic style landscape in her work, producing large scale ghost towns. It may appear to be set in the middle of a city but little or no people are present only the main character.

At the same time her palette is not confined to greys and blacks. She also likes to play with powerful colours in the sky like a warm orange sunset to try to make the viewer aware of the vast mysterious world that is happening in the canvas especially in her piece 'Sunset'. It's central message can be read to reveal that no matter how bad humanity turns, nature will always be there, that life will always make its way back and the sky cannot be ruled. She is attempting to create something very colourful and bright, but with a dark twist, combining human nature with Mother Nature. Mother Nature represented with the blasts of bright light and sky causing very bold shadows to emerge from the images that represent human nature and the abolished society. Civilisation has now destroyed itself, so these two now exist in a marvellous anti-paradise. ‘Sunset’ is a work in progress. It is done with oil on canvass. This was inspired by scenes and posters based on the film 28 Days Later (2002), directed by Danny Boyle, where the site of London city is completely deserted, and the scene where the characters are watching a family of horses which seems to act as a metaphor for the father and the young girl who has lost her mother. But it’s the soundtrack in this film that made the scene have even more impact. The song used was by Brian Eno – An Ending. This song is used in a widespread way in the film – the artist considers this an extremely powerful song the combination of the track and the scene has played a massive influence on the inspiration and development of her landscapes and characters.

The characters included in this piece look as if nothing is occupying their minds in this scene. It is clear that disaster and destruction surrounds the two figures. That civilisation has collapsed around them. But they themselves have not fallen. It was the civilised world that labelled them outcasts and now that it is gone they continue on like true survivors. Aoife has described her work as something to "highlight human stupidity in the way the majority judge the minority". The two characters the man and dog, come from disadvantaged backgrounds. The man is homeless. He is forced into the view of a marginalised group by mainstream society. The dog was a stray. The stray is a pit bull, a breed of dog that has been discriminated against and given a bad name by irresponsible owners, and again by society. These strong images come from the artist's personal life and experience in re-homing these breeds of dogs and being judged by passers-by for the ownership of these dogs. Now that society is gone the man and dog are free of discrimination. This painting has an essence of more steampunk gothic, with the theme of the apocalypse and the idea of being a scavenger reusing using old used materials and making tools from scratch, a "Mad Max" themed twist. Another course of inspiration is the film "I am Legend" (2007) directed by Francis Lawrence, the loyal canine is a tribute to this movie.

There are chunks of what appear to be weapons and other war paraphernalia that have lost their use and are now sitting in the back and foreground. The world that created these high tech weapons that now lie there, not making a noise has descended into ruin. The characters use the space in a light-hearted manner. The man dangles a police cap over the dog in a playful gesture; another indication in the painting that the law does not apply anymore.

Her characters seem to be based on an individuals or creatures who are outcast from society, characters who withdraw themselves from society by their actions of drug abuse and bad behaviour as well as characters that are also forced to be outcasts of society like people from disadvantaged areas in cities.
She also puts twists on the characters looks and the 'personalities' for example some of her characters that seem appealing to the eye actually in fact quite evil and cold while her darker creations prove to be more soft and can sometimes appear as innocent or stupid.

In discussing her personalities that appear in her characters, we first focus on the recurring character of the homeless man. This man is the main character in her work including the first storyboard discussed. He is a young man in his early 20's. He looks like any other average male. His style of clothing is hooded jumpers and tracksuit bottoms. His style is one which has been labelled 'chav'. Aoife uses the "chav" look to address some personal experiences. She herself loves sportswear and has often been judged by people passing in the street which is unfair, never would look at another person different or judge until they speak or let themselves down by their actions. Yes scumbags do wear this clothing, sadly that cannot be argued but in her opinion the cheek and personality of one is spotted just as quick. It's still the same labelling that is placed on him that has been forced upon the Goth, and Rave fashion. Society has a bad habit of jumping to a conclusion about things too quickly. Mainstream world casting out those that look "weird" they don't look like everyone else so there is something wrong with them, when in fact mainstream society could not be more screwed up with its obsession with perfection, its frightening subliminal ways of control with fashion,make up, magazine's, and music society etc. The way the press would attack a celebrity wearing a comfy hooded jumper and pants just to go as far as the shop, the exact words used would be OMG how could she! Oh how embarrassing etc.

So this character is labelled by appearance, he also comes from a nasty area, which he escaped from, that's why he is wandering the streets doing his best to survive. He is a completely harmless man. But he has become feral. He has gone back to old methods of survival and has grown strong hate for society. He has minor similarities with some of Tim Burton's characters, such as such as Edward Scissorhands and the nasty bored neighbours that spread rumour and gossip for entertainment that live in the town below his mansion. The harmless young man in Edward Scissorhands is judged heavily on appearance and is deemed weird by those around him. But this young homeless man has been placed in a bizarre fantasy land that has reversed the situation.

Aoife Tierney has explored the gothic genre in many elements of her work instead of focusing only on one. A lot of the fuel for her adding a gothic spark to her work comes from real life experiences of her past and present. In her work Aoife illustrates that the gothic plays a role in every one's life.
The scientists hope one day to raise Henrietta...

Isabella Walsh

'The scientists hope one day to raise Henrietta' is part of a large body of experimental work recently produced by Isabella Walsh. Walsh drew inspiration from the work of Clunie Reid, in particular the tensions and multiplicity of meaning caused by juxtaposition of images and text. Entropy plays an important role in the process of creation for Walsh; it is also evident as a recurring theme in her work. Pages from old National Geographic magazines which were deemed to have potentially interesting combinations of image and text were brought into the darkroom and used as negatives by being placed in direct contact with photographic paper. Through this process the contents of both sides of the sheet are captured, tonally reversed and merged like distant memories, a snapshot of the unconscious mind where eddies of incomplete thoughts momentarily ripple the surface of clarity before slipping back into the depths. The original messages are further obscured and blended by the process of solarisation, thus enhancing the ghostly, dreamlike qualities of the image by confronting the viewer with information that is simultaneously positive and negative, truth and fiction.

There is a strong sense of the passage of time, a feeling that one is staring into the depths of eternity. This is primarily caused by the multiple layering as the information from each side of the sheet vies for supremacy and clarity. The feeling is further strengthened by the degradation of the text, the letters almost seem to burn out and disappear before ones very eyes. The dear division of space between the magazine page and the edge of the frame provide a further separation in time. It is almost as though where traditionally 'photography cuts out a neat slice of time' this image encapsulates all time.

A broken figure occupies the otherwise empty, negative space left by the differing paper sizes. The figure is fashioned from very fine copper wire, roughly wound to create a vaguely human form. Though it is the element most loosely based on reality, it is conversely the most complete set of information given to the viewer, serving to further subvert the boundaries between truth and fiction. As the information here seems relatively clear, the viewer identifies first with the figure before trying to make sense of the more elusive and yet more realistically rendered area. Its position creates an interaction between the two contrasting portions of the image giving rise to new tensions, depths and layers of possible meaning and acts as an anchor point to which the eye keeps shifting back. It seems to sit between the viewer and the rest of the image, as though on the boundary between different worlds, dimensions or realities, neither here nor there.

The figure is lacking arms and hands giving it a helpless, almost hopeless feel which, in archetypal symbolism, suggests loss of control and expression. It seems brittle and fragile, alone in the liminal void surrounding the image as though being broken in two and pushed out.

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During development the print is given a second exposure to light. This results in a partial reversal of tonal values. The dark tones (areas of high initial exposure) are unaffected. The whites (areas of almost no initial exposure) are exposed and turn dark. The mid tones, by curious property of the partially developed silver halide grain in the emulsion, are frozen and become the new highlights in the image. Following the second exposure the print is redeveloped as normal. Another curious phenomenon that occurs in solarised images is what is known as the 'sabatier effect', a glowing halo outlining areas in high contrast.

'tiny hands, tied hands or lack of hands suggests severe constraints on ones autonomy, an incapacity to grasp and claim the world, make ones desires real, form ones matter', Ami Ronnberg and Kathleen Martin (eds.), The Archive for research on Archetypal symbolism, The Book of Symbols, Reflections on Archetypal Images, Cologne: Taschen, 2010, p.380
of existence by the relentless right angle of the corner. It almost seems to recoil from the metallic and razor sharp straight lines. A great hand reaches, its fingers almost pushing through the fluid surface and out of the pool of thought, into the dimension of the wire figure. Is it reaching out? Pulling back or perhaps just passing on through, oblivious?

The arm belongs to the foremost of three semi naked figures who tower, fleshed and godlike in comparison with the wire form. They are truncated below the shoulder by a T shaped layer like a cross section (or X-ray) of a nail, the pointed bottom of which as though it may have pierced the emerging palm. The central figure seems to be rippling through the surface of the head of this nail, extinguishing the fiery text where it breaks the surface. These two seem free, they carry their arms away from their body, palms forwards in very open posture. The figure on the right however, does not. Its arms are by its side. It does not push through surfaces, rather it seems held back becoming sliced and pulled within the surface of the nail head in brightly glowing fleshy fragments, as though dissected and messily strewn across a surface. Behind, a dark shadowy figure leans out and lifts up one of these morsels as if examining it, searching for something. The trio seem otherworldly. There is a stone-like sense of permanence to them given by the stratified texture of the leadership and the strong grey smoothness of their skin. The white glowing line that surrounds them gives them a sense of weightless purity. The background behind them resembles an aerial photograph of rivers, oceans and landmasses. They leave the world behind them and pass beyond mortal time and mortal knowledge.

Except for the one on the right - its static sense is further enhanced by fuzzy soft focus and by being pushed back a layer by a dark, masked figure pushing diagonally into the frame. This figure is quite lacking in detail however a crisply focused insignia hovers below stating "DEEP SEE" hovers below. It becomes clear that the figure is a diver with breathing apparatus. A triangle is formed between the diver, the hole in the palm of the hand and the head of the wire figure. What symbolic connections have these three? Drowning? The wire figure lies in the abyss, perhaps indicating the brittle evidence of life after the spirit has been lifted forth?

The insignia is equidistant between the heads of the diver and the wire figure in the perimeter, strengthening its influence. The spelling on the insignia, in the english language, becomes a play on words implying vision, perhaps asking the viewer to deeper probe their subconscious for metaphor and meaning. Diver suggests ocean, symbolic of the origins of life, of the psyche, an elemental force, powerful and mysterious. What of the title - 'The scientists hope one day to raise Henrietta'? Obviously this comes from the lines of legible text at the top of the image. Could it suggest resurrection? What of the scientific looking figure examining the flesh and the static repressed spirit figure? What of the nail shape and the pierced palm? One of the fixations of western culture is the evasion of ageing and cheating death. Youth is worshipped to the point where people mutilate themselves in order to mimic it. What would happen if scientists were to discover a way of raising the dead or preserving life for eternity? What if we are supposed to grow old and die for a reason? It is part of a universal, elemental truth – all life ends. It is beyond our comprehension to know what lies on the other side, if anything, until we get there. But what if there were some kind of transcendence, a necessary change of state to complete the cycle? What if, by granting eternal life to the body and nailing down the spirit it withers and dies instead, disappearing piece by piece forever? What would remain? Would it still be human? If one could chose to live forever would it eventually become boring? Would one end up wishing for mortality? Is it what makes life worth living? Questions about death, though one of the most basic and universal concepts can be topics of very heated debate in contemporary society, especially when it comes to issues surrounding the preservation of life, for example vegetative states, life machines, abortion, euthanasia, suicide capital punishment, the youth culture that discards the aged, those showing signs of being close to death. Perhaps what the

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100 Ibid., pp. 36 – 39.
image indicates is that we must come to terms with our mortality in order to live fulfilled lives, however and whenever it happens it is a necessity and cannot be avoided.

“(recently exposed, below) where they lie. The scientists hope one day to raise Henrietta M... display it wit... already exhibi... until the Ma...work...measuring a se... of angles ... to reveal ... ture ..... human .... wreck ... erience ... eople actually s... chains, not knowing...”

The gaps in the fading text are substantial and offer no concrete answers, though they suggest the possibility of something dark and sinister. There is no clear signifier of time period in the image. Is it a prophetic message? Some cryptic, garbled warning? C. G. Jung in his introduction to the 'I Ching or Book of Changes' speaks of the importance of the element of chance and the power of the moment in creating patterns that can be read. Could it be the case that the elements of chance involved in creating the prints create some kind of revelation? The decisions made in the dark room must be made quickly, based on both careful observations of the light conditions and intuition when judging how long for and when to make the exposures and re-exposures. Walsh has always stressed the importance of process in her work, and refers to the darkroom as a place of meditation. Has Walsh drawn from the collective unconscious and produced something akin to a reading from the I Ching?

'The scientists hope one day to raise Henrietta' brings to mind the idea of the labyrinth. The smooth and crystal clear image surface entices the viewer to gaze into it. Controlled disorder is assumed. The eye slides smoothly between all the different elements, mesmerised by their fluid form and strongly interwoven composition, somehow certain that there must be meaning, yet uncertain what their precise relationship might be. With perseverance, following one fragment after another through the cryptic net of metaphor, one arrives at a place of clarity with a feeling of release as the core ideas seem to be reached. As David Robey says in his introduction to The Open Work by Umberto Eco

'just as the the detective finds the author of a crime by postulating certain rules concerning the the connections between human motives and actions and physical events, so in the normal processes of communication we find the meaning of a sign by postulating certain rules concerning the relationship between that sign and others. Both cases involve finding ones way through the labyrinth...”

The labyrinth as a symbol is ancient and occurs in many cultures. Frequently it represents a process of becoming lost and confused and with perseverance discovering greater truths and expanding the personality. As a symbol it is profoundly gothic as it contains many opposing dualities – confusion and clarity, loss and discovery, order and chaos. This image can clearly be contextualised within the gothic genre for the questions it poses and the cryptic and labyrinthine language in which they are phrased. There are hints at the abject in the skeletal appearance of the wire figure. Its lack of arms seems to be teased by the giant trio. They themselves are represented, signified by truncated and floating body parts, the whole merely being hinted at. There are frequent references to liminal spaces, borders and crossing boundaries. The other, the spirit world, alternate states of being and planes of existence are all hinted at, suggested by the signs. The process of creation itself could be seen to hold gothic connotations as the originally clear and truthful information of The National Geographic has been systematically decayed, eroded and subverted by entropic processes, leaving only

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103 Ronnberg and Martin (eds.), The Book Of Symbols, p. 714
fragments and grains of truth which must be pieced back together. This new reassembling of the fragments bears little or no resemblance to the original messages intended by the National Geographic. It is no surprise to learn that Walsh spent several years working as an archaeologist, for to find the core meanings in this image one must become like an archaeologist trying to piece together a picture of the lives led by people who died in civilisations long gone by studying the decayed and fragmented traces left behind.

If Walsh's intent was to create a piece that asked deep questions about the world, while at the same time creating something pleasing to the eye and meditative to contemplate she certainly seems to have succeeded as every time one re-consults the image new possibilities and thoughts arise.
A Haunting

Gothicise (Holly Burnard, Eibhlis Slevin, Barry Masterson, Cliodha Barry, Ciara Nolan, Catherine Geagan, in collaboration with Tracy Fahey, Aoife Cox, Josie O'Connor, Ciara Farrell)

A Haunting (2011) is a site-specific piece that took place in the People's Park Limerick on the 29th of October, created by Gothicise in collaboration with Limerick City Council. A Haunting is a simulacrum, a deliberately artificial recreation; the name is a nod to Robert Graves' short story 'A Haunting', based in Limerick in 1919. This was a day-long festival in a Victorian park held in October 2011 that attempted to recreate Victorian events and customs germane to the original park, but translated into a modern idiom - while also emphasizing the grainy, misty quality of memory and the passage of time by using projections, film, sounds and especially the revolutionary new technique of photography from this era. Events included a Costumed Promenade around the Park, commemorating the thin veil between past and present, a Victorian song and dance event, site-specific artwork, a haunted history trail, Victorian-style photography and a Ghost Bus tour of Limerick's spectral history.

The spectral quality of A Haunting came from a reimagining of the past of the Park itself. It alludes to the Irish Gothic tradition in literature and art which is preoccupied with mapping; Irish Gothic is intensely geographical, although the landscapes it maps may be terra incognita, shaped by narratives rather than modelled by geographers. A Haunting is a psychogeographical attempt to re-map a familiar topography – the People’s Park – as a haunted heterotopia. It “...challenges that very process of map-making by means of which we might hope to reduce the world to manageable proportions; while, of course, it remains constantly fascinated by the very impossibility which it so convincingly propounds.”

The timing of A Haunting was scheduled to mark Hallowe'en, itself an echo of the old Celtic festival of Samhain, a festival of the dead. It was believed that this was the most liminal point of the year, a time when the living and the dead could walk side by side, hence the tradition of 'guising', or dressing as spirits and ghosts; thought by some folklorists to be an attempt to confuse the spirits of the returning dead. This links the project with a mixture of Celtic and Gothic tropes, a link originally made by Nathan Drake in 1790 -“Next to the gothic in point of sublimity and imagination comes the Celtic...This superstition, like the Gothic...does not, like most mythological systems, involve every species of absurdity, but floating loose upon the mind, founds its imagery upon a metaphysical possibility, upon the appearance of superior, or departed beings.”

With A Haunting, Gothicise revisits the past, and attempts to reconstruct scenarios from invented visions. It can be relied on to be an unreliable narrator. It delights in recreating, with ceremony and solemnity, sites, episodes and situations that play with the truth and flirt with the ridiculous. However, its activities, no matter how joyful, are tinged with a sense of melancholy at the inevitable passage of time; despite attempted reconstructions, the past and re-imagined

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104 Gothicise is a Limeric-based interdisciplinary collaborative art practice. It adheres to principles of social engagement and is informed by Gothic theory. The membership is a floating one, dictated by the projects engaged in. More details on the Gothicise web-site atwww.gothicise.weebly.com
105 Further details can be found on A Haunting web-sitehttp://a haunting.weebly.com
107 Nathan Drake (1790) ‘On Gothic Superstition’ in The Speculator, April 1790
past alike recede, to create an instant and mournful nostalgia. As Steve Bruhm puts it - "In the psychoanalytic Gothic, we intensely desire the object that has been lost".

This spirit of re-visitation and return is key to an understanding of Irish Gothic art, the ways in which myths intersect; as Irish writer Fintan O’Toole puts it - “Irish culture is sedimentary. By this I mean that things don’t get obliterated, they get buried. They are covered with a new layer of history but they are still down there, like bodies preserved in bogs. They surface in new forms, like holy wells and holy mountains as places of Christian pilgrimage. Or they emerge into wholly new contexts...What Sigmund Freud called “the return of the repressed” is the very stuff of Irish art. It is haunted by ghosts and revenants. Nothing is ever really dead.”

End-note

Gothicise would like to acknowledge the kind support of Ciara Farrell of the Limerick City Council, Fiona Kiely of the Limerick Civic Trust, Martin Corcoran, composer Hannah Fahey and Sinead Boomsma, singers, Jenny Byrne and Mark Orr, dancers, Pamela Dunne of the Limerick Printmakers, Dan Kenny, photographer, Meg Kenny of the Irish Patchwork Society and the many others who helped to put this work together.

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