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Willie White interviews artist

Andrew Cross

Whatever happened
to looking out the window?



Andrew Cross

Untitled (Georgia, USA/Harz, Germany), 2004

Whatever happened to looking out the window?

Willie White, Artistic Director, Project Arts Centre interviews artist Andrew Cross

The thrill has gone from travel. While we may fancy ourselves to be Born to Be Wild, congestion, fuel prices, pollution, and talk radio conspire to degrade our daily journey to an ordeal to be endured rather than an adventure to be embraced. Over the long haul, if the terrorists or the DVT don't get you the airport departure lounge will numb you into hopelessness. Yet there must have been a time before this when travel promised better things.

The work of English artist Andrew Cross allows for such a possibility. A self-confessed trainspotter, his interest in trains does not tally with the popular image of a nerd with a notebook recording engine numbers. He is more interested in the mechanism for travel and where the tracks might lead to. In his digital film *Foreign Power (Parts 1,2,3)* 2002-2004, which was short listed for the Becks Futures prize, the central section features a static shot of a railway crossing in the US. The shot is allowed to establish and the viewer becomes aware of an almost meditative atmosphere with a light wind and sounds of insects and birds. Slowly the noise of something approaching grows in intensity until a mile long freight train crashes through the frame from left to right. The horizontal lines of the corrugated steel carriages and the uprights of their frames stream past, creating a stroboscopic effect, amplified by the rhythmic clacking of wheels crossing the junction. After a minute or so the train has passed but we are left with a distillation of the magnitude and purpose of its journey.



*Andrew Cross
DIRFT (An English Journey), 2004*

Cross acknowledges that it is not as easy to get excited about the trains close to home “The great thing about those American freight trains is that you don't know where they're coming from and you don't know where they're going, which is very different from watching the train to London Bridge from my local railway station. South London commuter trains don't do it for me,” he jokes.

Nonetheless his curiosity about travel and transport inform another work with just such an apparently banal setting. *3 hours from here* (2004) is a 108 minute film shot mostly from the cab of a Scania truck making the journey from Southampton Container Terminal to an industrial estate outside Manchester. This journey is overlaid on previous historical attempts to frame and document the English landscape and discovers a contemporary terrain that unfolds across an orderly road network punctuated by junctions, long low industrial buildings and intriguing places such as DIRFT (Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal), positioned within four and a half hours of 85% of the UK's population. These physical artefacts are also part of a cultural landscape of globalisation and suburbanisation, the logistics of how people live, work and consume now.

‘Much of what I do is rooted in something from my childhood. It is very much about being in the back of my Dad's car going up the new motorway near Birmingham and being fascinated by power stations, factories and coal mines. They've all gone and now I have a new curiosity as I'm travelling through the country. I want to see what places are like and why they function that way’.



Cross' work negotiates with and is sympathetic to the world as it actually exists, rather than harking back to an idealised landscape that is beyond reach. His is not so much a defence of suburbs and development as scepticism towards commentary from a haughty metropolitan position which implies that the further away you are from the centre, the unhappier and less relevant you must be. To live in Croydon or Milton Keynes is equated with membership of a lower caste. But does the centre exist any more? Recent development has seen a proliferation of centres, often coalescing around sprawling retail campuses rather than the traditional infrastructure for settlements. The centre circulates and multiplies and old hierarchies are confused. Nonetheless individuals have a need to read their environment and themselves in relation to it. Where are we?

"I am fascinated by an almost blind obsession on the part of some people that they need to know where the centre is and have to be there whatever being there might mean. Traditionally it was far easier to identify a centre. It might be a market town, a junction, an industrial town where there was a factory or a coal mine and it would have a topographical character to it. All that's gone but you still think of somewhere like the City of London, of course it's still a centre, for all its major financial institutions, their central administration function and their mainframe computers are in Swindon. You can't look at an urban landscape and say 'That's where it's happening.' Those invisible things I find interesting."

It is that quality of paying attention to what is around us that has been engineered out of our experience of travel. Relying on newspapers, magazines, portable DVD players, iPods and so on we are encouraged not to observe the landscape we are passing through. A journey becomes attenuated into beginning and end with no middle in between. With few exceptions, those roadside interventions in public art intended to prettify or elevate the experience of travel resort to the literal or perplexing. "Sometimes you don't need art," Cross provokes "Because its already there in these big sheds. They're not designed by architects and they don't qualify as buildings in the eyes of some people but in a way they're kind of subversive." He admires their conciseness, a kind of outsider architecture.

What of our own Irish suburbs, which have sprawled so extensively in the past three decades bringing Per Cent for Art schemes in their wake? A place like Blanchardstown, which grew around a village is now large enough to be a town in its own right and does not rely on Dublin city centre to explain its existence. Joyce buffs have attempted to navigate the city using Ulysses his "A chaffering, all including most farraginous chronicle", but his Dublin and that of Behan, O'Casey, even Roddy Doyle, can largely be contained within a few square miles. Who will make our new maps?

Andrew Cross
3 hours from here, 2004
Digital video, 108 mins
Commissioned by Film and Video
Umbrella and John Hansard Gallery

Artist Andrew Cross is a panel member of Suburbs and Cities, Sept 6, 4pm at Draíocht, Blanchardstown.

Welcome to the first edition of Create News

Create News is published twice a year in March and September. It is sent free of charge, features a guest writer and offers the latest information on Create events and services.

If you do not wish to receive further editions, please write or email us at: info@create-ireland.ie. You will automatically receive copies unless you ask us to remove your details from the list.

If you would like to receive a personal copy of Create News please email: info@create-ireland.ie and include details of name, address and postcode.

Create

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CONTEXTS Back Issues Special Offer

CONTEXTS was launched by Create in November 2002. A quarterly arts journal, it was designed as a vehicle for debate, discussion, in-depth review and critical analysis.

Under the editorship of Paul Perry and then Gemma Tipton, an eclectic mix of reviewers, critics and artists had their say, unpacking some of the theories and experiences of working collaboratively and in context as well as reflecting on the ideas, inspiration and practice behind their work. Contributors included Alan Phelan, Philip Napier, Belinda McKeon, Daniel Figgis, Christopher Harrington, Constance Short, Louise Walsh, Mary Grehan, Chris Reid, Brian Duggan amongst many others. A number of issues of CONTEXTS are themed:

CONTEXTS 4.4 The Diaspora Issue

CONTEXTS 4.3 The Money Issue

CONTEXTS 4.2 The Art Work Issue

CONTEXTS 4.1 The Political Issue

CONTEXTS 3.4 The Culture Issue

CONTEXTS 3.3 The Regeneration issue

CONTEXTS 3.2 Arts and Health

For a full listing of the back issues, see the Publications section of our website, www.create-ireland.ie/publications

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Please include €1.50 p&p and make cheques payable to Create. For Create members, there is a rate of €3 per issue.

Artist in the Community Scheme Second Round 2006

Create manages the Artist in the Community Scheme on behalf of The Arts Council. In the second round this year, Create received the largest number of applications since taking up the management of the Scheme in 2001.

Panel member Liz Burns, Development Manager, Fire Station Artists Studios, Dublin comments on the difficult task selecting from a total of ninety-one applications for both the Phase One (Research) and Phase Two (Project Realisation) awards "the growth in response reflects the increasing interest of artists to work outside the formal spaces of galleries and theatres in order to test new ideas and push the ways in which art is both understood, experienced, and also created. The quality of responses and imaginative partnerships between artists and communities that were displayed in the applications demonstrates the importance of this award scheme in supporting work that is artistically innovative and socially relevant. Successful recipients of Project Awards all exhibited an impressive quality of dialogue and partnership between artist and communities."

Successful applicants for Round Two in 2006 were:

Phase 1 – Research + Development Awards (artist and community, artform)

Kate Buckley – Oidhreacht Chorca Dhuibhne visual arts; Helene Hugel – Beaumont Hospital, puppetry; Pete Mullineaux – Oughterard, drama/literature; Owen Boss – Roundabout Youth Theatre Ballymun, visual arts; Emma Finucane/Emer O'Boyle – Casadh, visual arts; Mark Keegan – Sophia Housing, video; Sarah Stevens – St. Annes Youth & Community Centre, animation; Fiona Whelan – Kildare Town Youth Project & Rialto Youth Project, visual arts.

Phase 2 – Project Awards (community, artist, artform)

Oige an Deiscirt and Kevin O'Shanahan, music; Rialto Youth Project and Charlie O'Neill, drama; Migrant Rights Centre, Susan Gogan, photography; SPIRASI and Christopher Harrington/John Travers, digital video and audio.

The next round of The Artist in the Community Scheme will be in 2007. For further information or to book an advisory session contact Katherine Atkinson, 01-4736600 or email: support@create-ireland.ie

Create Membership

Jane O'Rourke, who has been with us as our Administrator at Create for three years, is now looking after membership enquiries. If you are currently a member or would like any information about what membership of Create offers, contact Jane at the Create office: 01-4736600 or email: info@create-ireland.ie

Bookmark Create's redesigned website

www.create-ireland.ie for all the latest information on projects and initiatives including international partnerships.

Create and Critical Voices '3'

Suburbs and Cities: Artists' Responses to Changing Urban Landscapes

VENUE: Draíocht, Blanchardstown

DATE: Wednesday, 6 September

TIME: 4pm

Acclaimed writer Iain Sinclair, theatre director Lisa Goldman, sound artist and theatre maker Graeme Miller and photographer / film maker Andrew Cross discuss how their work is informed by the changing urban landscapes of Europe and the US as part of the Arts Council Critical Voices 3 programme.

Chaired by journalist and critic Gemma Tipton, *Suburbs and Cities* explores how artists respond to and engage with the specifics of place including the intangible qualities of location – history, desire and identity.

The panel of invited artists will show examples of their work, sharing insights into their specific practice and drawing connections across art disciplines. *Suburbs and Cities* will shed light on how artists can be effective voices of dissent and collective celebration.

The event is free but it is necessary to book a place in advance. A bus will be available from Nassau St, Dublin at 3pm to take audiences to Draíocht.

To reserve a seat on the bus please email: info@create-ireland.ie or tel: Create 01-4736600. A recent work by Andrew Cross will be shown en route.

The event will be followed by a wine reception. *Suburbs and Cities* is kindly supported by Draíocht and is part of The Arts Council Critical Voices 3 programme.

For more information about the panel please visit www.create-ireland.ie/events



Graeme Miller
Held, 2006



Lisa Goldman
Hoxton Story, The Red Room, 2005