

AIDEEN BARRY

Flight Folly

1 April 2011

If there's one thing that immediately springs to mind with the work of Aideen Barry, it might have to be her apparent desire to defy the earth's most basic natural law, gravity. This significant metaphor in her performative practice has manifested itself in her illusions of levitation, in such works as her 2007 film, *Levitating*, and (perhaps anecdotally most compelling) in her experimentations with zero gravity while undertaking astronaut training at NASA, Kennedy Space Centre – now there's something that not everybody can say without blatant lying or overplaying chat-up lines.

In 2010, Barry was invited to participate in the performance project for LISTE 15, Basel, wherein she formulated a new work, *Flight Folly*, which she re-performs for mother's tankstation.

Flight Folly combines the essentially escapist signifier of freedom from the fetters of earthly things, with the knowing distraction of performance as spectacle, or novelty (air)show, common to the world of expos and trade fairs throughout the anticipatory and formative years of modernity – from airships to *Red Arrow's* fly-bys and aerobatic displays. Here, Barry conflates a *show-off*, technological marvel and the theatricalised suspense of a professional illusionist with the simplest narrative reveal of the artist as real-world documentarian, designed to pique expectation with the inevitable (deflationary) reality of a return to the everyday – a coming down to earth.

The construct of Aideen Barry's finely-wrought ten-minute performance balances anticipation and expectation, alongside references to mediated memory and childlike wonderment, filmicly slapstick humour, and the ludic and foolhardy, to pose broader questions of purpose, logic, normalcy, certainty, reliability, standing against the more challenging and threatening forces of anxiety, fear and uncertainty.

Looking both gracious and glamorous, at the helm of her performance, Barry centred in the gallery space is also very much centred in and by her remarkable dress, posited halfway between parachute and Marilyn Monroe's iconic billowing, silk meringue, from the 1954 movie 'The Seven Year Itch' – you know what happened to that. Attached to the dress are sixteen buzzing, remote-controlled helicopters, in anticipation of 'lift-off'. With her hand on the remote control of her own destiny, Barry balances motion and stasis, poised and statuesque, secure in inactivity, she stands at the threshold of an unknown potential, a physical updraft and a bitter-sweet excitement tinged with the fear of the unknown.

Aideen Barry has performed and exhibited her practice extensively both in Ireland and internationally, with recent solo shows at the Butler Gallery (2010), the Mermaid Arts Centre (2009) and Ard Bia (2006). Significant international projects and group exhibitions include: LISTE, Basel, (2010), *Futures*, RHA (2009), Musée des Beaux Arts, Lyon (2009), The Wexner Center, Ohio (2009), Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2008) and Artscene, Shanghai (2005). In 2007 Barry was Artist in Residence at the Banff Centre in Canada awarded by The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon.