

Labyrinthine Mind

BRENDA MOORE-MCCANN OUTLINES SOME OF THE NEW WORKS COMMISSIONED BY SIRIUS ARTS CENTRE AS PART OF 'ONE HERE NOW: THE BRIAN O'DOHERTY/PATRICK IRELAND PROJECT'.

MIRANDA DRISCOLL, DIRECTOR OF the Sirius Art Centre is to be commended for her inspired project to restore Brian O'Doherty's wall painting *One, Here, Now: The Ogham Cycle* (1996), hidden behind wallpaper for twenty-two years. Having seen the original wall paintings, the restoration has been a great success, with the artist declaring that it looks even better now than he had remembered. The nine panels sit on the walls as if they were made for the beautifully-lit central gallery, with its wonderful views out to the shimmering sea. Each individual panel of Ogham vowels or the words "One, Here, Now", is bound by a coral-coloured band that gives a visual unity to the work. Inspired by the composition of Giotto's fourteenth-century fresco cycle in the Arena Chapel in Padua, O'Doherty's contemporary Ogham Cycle is made from house paint, using a lovely range of colours (greens, purples, reds, blues) from the company Colourtrend, one of the sponsors of the restoration project.

The project, which is presented at Sirius Arts Centre until April 2019, has been richly enhanced by a series of well-judged commissions and supporting exhibitions across several venues including Crawford Art Gallery, the Glucksman Gallery and the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) [see VAN Issue 3, 2018]. While Crawford concentrated on the film work of O'Doherty, including the prize-winning *Hopper's Silence* (1981), both the Glucksman and IMMA developed mini-retrospectives of O'Doherty's work. Both venues exhibited the series of 'Rotating Vowels' prints (2016), made with Stoney Road Press, and the installation *Flipped Corner, Rope Drawing # 129*. IMMA also showed the latest print edition of *Structural Plays* (1967–70), made by master printer, James O'Nolan, at Stoney Road Press in 2018.

At the opening in IMMA on Friday 27 April, O'Doherty – who was born in Ballaghaderreen – was awarded the Freedom of Roscommon. Responding, the artist declared that he was stunned at this unexpected gesture, adding that the unexpected had always been a part of his life. The event was convened by Christina Kennedy, Senior Curator and Head of Collections at IMMA, along with Professor Luke Gibbons, another esteemed Roscommon man. Gibbons gave a delightful talk which linked O'Doherty's labyrinthine mind to that of Chevalier O'Gorman (1732–1809), who cracked the code of Ogham in the *Book of Ballymote* (Royal Hibernian Academy). O'Gorman also makes an appearance in O'Doherty's latest novel, *The Crossdresser's Secret* (2014).

Another group associated with the Sirius Restoration Project was Gare St. Lazare Ireland, internationally acclaimed Beckett interpreters, run by artistic directors Judy Hegarty Lovett and actor Conor Lovett. They performed *Here All Night*, a hybrid collaborative production, on 23 April in the Everyman Theatre, Cork. The connection to the project is a Beckettian installation which O'Doherty made at the National Gallery in 2011 as part of Dublin Contemporary, titled *Hello, Sam Rope Drawing # 126*. Since 2016, this work has been included as the visual art element of *Here All Night*, which has been performed in London, Boston, Cork and Dublin. The Liz Roche Dance Company also presented a new commission, *Pilgrimage*, in response to *One, Here, Now: The Ogham Cycle* at the Sirius Art Centre on 24 June. This immersive dance and music installation was a collaboration between composer Linda Buckley, the Sirius Centre and Cork Midsummer Festival.

The first in the series of new commissions was *One, Here, Now: A Sonic Theatre*, composed in response to O'Doherty's *Ogham Cycle* paintings, by composer Ann Cleare, and co-produced with the experimental music, vocal and performative group, Tonnata. Cleare – who is Assistant Professor of Music and Media Technologies at Trinity College Dublin and Associate Lecturer at the University of York – has an impressive track record with her commissions being presented by the BBC and RTÉ, among many other broadcasters in Europe. This new piece was a completely immersive, uplifting sonic journey in which Tonnata singers Emma Nash, Michelle

O'Rourke, Robbie Blake and percussionist Alex Percu, translated through sound and movement, the complex layers of O'Doherty's marriage of the archaic and the contemporary. It was an unforgettable experience! Prior to this, Tonnata performers devised a 'prologue' performance, inspired by the musical contents of O'Doherty's issue of the experimental magazine/box, *Aspen 5+6* in 1967, using extracts of works by John Cage, Morton Feldman and Irish composers Garrett Sholdice, Sarah Wentworth and Conal Ryan.

The first of the commissioned visual artists to respond to the restored wall paintings was Brendan Earley, who had previously worked with O'Doherty on his retrospective exhibition at Dublin City Gallery, the Hugh Lane in 2006. Moving through the two adjacent galleries at Sirius was like stepping into two different universes. O'Doherty's *One, Here, Now: The Ogham Cycle*, is full of exuberant colour, line and pattern with a power that envelopes eye, body and mind. Earley's 'Present Perfect' exhibition in the adjacent gallery strikes a much quieter note, with discrete works on walls and floor that encourage consideration one by one. There is also the contrast of a pale palette using emulsion and markers in some works and stainless steel, ink and embroidery on linen, in others. Using textiles and embroidery in his drawings and sculptures, Earley provides a meeting between the pictorial and the tactile to consider the conceptual implications of the woven structure and its relationship with time. By doing so, he aligns the work with some spatial experiments undertaken by minimalism and some forms of conceptual art, of which O'Doherty was a leading exponent. The process of textile-making alludes to the present moment – it becomes, through its own manufacturing, an embodiment of time itself, whether the accelerated pace of industrial linen production, or the deliberate pace of the hand-embroidery. Process, as a medium in itself, has always played a central role in Earley's work. This element, allied with the language of assemblage, seeks to explore the uneasy relationship we have now, between objective form and early visionary experiments in Modernism.

At first sight, it would seem that these two artists from different generations do not have a lot in common. The key, however, is drawing. As Earley outlines in his exhibition statement, he considers all of his works to be drawings "with a longing to form a bond between the process of drawing and thought, freedom and place..." creating a "restless reality" in the "search for present perfect". Here again, we can see direct affinities to O'Doherty's work since time, space, line and drawing have all been stable elements in the work of O'Doherty (and Patrick Ireland) for decades. Aptly, in an echo of O'Doherty's archaic references, through use of the Ogham language, Earley invokes the myth of Ariadne's thread, which led Theseus out of the Minotaur's labyrinth. Like O'Doherty's labyrinthine works, that lead us through space and time so that we can create a fully inhabited place physically and psychologically, Earley searches in his work for his own thread into the present moment of 'One, Here, Now'.

In an allied event, American artist Dan Graham worked with O'Doherty on *Aspen 5+6* in 1967, and the two subsequently became friends. Graham's *Schema* (March 1966), which succeeded in breaking away from the art object, was first included in *Aspen 5+6*. Graham will present his first solo exhibition in Ireland, 'beyond walls', at Sirius Arts Centre from 7 July to 2 September. The exhibition, curated by Eamonn Maxwell, will feature two of Graham's important early film works and will examine the artists' shared interests, notably their use of text in art.

Brenda Moore-McCann is the author of O' Doherty's first monograph, *Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland: Between Categories*, published in 2009. She is currently editing a book of selected letters by O'Doherty from the 1970s to the present day, which will be published by Smith + Brown, London, in September 2018.



Top: Brendan Earley, *Bits of Me* (tent, coat, pillow case, sleeping bag), 2018, textiles and stainless steel, 155 x 80 x 30 cm

Bottom: Brendan Earley, *The Runner*, 2018, aluminium wire, cast aluminium and pen on cotton; photographs by Ros Kavanagh, courtesy of Sirius Arts Centre