



URI ARAN
DUBLIN, IRELAND

"I've discovered," claims the haughty voiceover of Uri Aran's video *Harry*, 2007, "I can provoke just a bit, but with a certain charm or grace it will go unpunished." This cheeky brinksmanship runs through the sculptures, drawings, and videos in Aran's exhibition *Doctor Dog Sandwich* (mother's tankstation; September 15—October 30, 2010). Some works are trying, dissipated, willfully obscure or just plain absurd. Yet their playful open-endedness and gentle humor balance, or at least slightly rein in, such acting out. Cumulatively, they manage to construct a comprehensive, if unsettling, sort of nonsense. His recurring use of horses, dogs, and cookies gives a heavy whiff of adolescence—much like the innocuous posters of cute puppies found in a girl's bedroom. But in Aran's work, it's as if someone had snuck into the bedroom in the middle of the night and replaced the poster's "Hang in there!" words of dainty encouragement with random gibberish—something like "Idiot boat turtle"—leaving us as witnesses to an indefinable crime and with a vague sense of violation.

Two desks leave a trail of clues. Wood shavings from repeated holes bored into the furniture are scattered on top, alongside chocolate chip cookies, fake eyelashes, a plastic coin, and a cat toy, all mired in sticky pools of uneven wood varnish. A small black-and-white TV set, the kind that people used to have on top of their fridge, sits on the desktop of *Couldn't be here*, 2010, endlessly repeating the final credits of 1979's *The Black Stallion*, with soaring strings and a boy and his horse frolicking in the sand. These works exude a precise sense of neurotic frustration, an extreme instance of bored pupils etching their criticisms of school into their desks. There's a similar sense of misfiring education coming from the poster *Untitled (By)*, 2010, where internet-sourced portraits of people, horses, and dogs seem to have been arbitrarily assigned a mode of transport. An earnest-looking Labrador is labelled "by boat"; a poodle wearing a beret, "by car"; a studio shot of a German Shepherd, "by train." The careful accumulation of these designations starts to lend each image the weight of a cryptic symbolism, which, you suspect, might be hollow.

The video *The Donut Gang*, 2009, is a montage of voiced-over rehearsals, easy-listening music, and footage of a girl sporting horse-patterned pajamas—of course—trying out different phrases prompted by the camera operator. It is, as the bold introductory title proclaims, "A VIDEO," while the English-accented narrator stumbles over what is seemingly meant to be a joke: "What's round, green on the outside, red on the inside, has pips, and is sweet?" There is no punchline, just its implication, conferred by the structure of the question. Likewise, the video doesn't claim any subject while still playing off the medium's formal foundations as the combination of moving image and sound. The girl waves at you with the arm of an Elmo toy, uttering a high-pitched "Hello!" while the narrator repeats countless times, "We tried to stay awake all night. It was so much fun." The sound patterns from Aran's other works interject and interrupt: *Harry*'s narrator incessantly tries out phrases like "my love," and "my dear"; you hear the low grumble from the crying man embracing a dog in *Untitled*, 2006; and the music from *The Black Stallion* places you in a swirling, never-ending melodrama.

Aran's astute repetition of phrases, imagery, and cultural idioms has a strange effect. It makes these incidental occurrences co-incidental, suggesting an apparent structure or hidden order. Simultaneously, however, like the experience of looking at a word until it becomes unfamiliar, such repetition moves them towards dissolution and meaninglessness. Aran's structures are hollow and his work mines their frameworks to locate and pressure the exact point where their disparate elements provisionally hold together, just on the brink of collapse.

—Chris Fite-Wassilak

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Uri Aran, installation view of *Doctor Dog Sandwich*, 2010; Uri Aran, *Untitled (D)*, 2010, computer drawing, inkjet print, 30.5 x 21.6 cm [courtesy the artist and mother's tankstation, Dublin]