



ENCLAVE REVIEW

Uri Aran: *Ones*
Mother's Tankstation, Dublin
Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith

When Uri Aran came to Dublin for his first solo exhibition at Mother's Tankstation in 2010, the Jerusalem-born artist was relatively unknown, having graduated only three years earlier with an MFA from Columbia, the prime forcing ground of the recent art scene in New York, the city he calls home. Things have moved on briskly since then. This time around he arrived back in Dublin the veteran of a slew of Biennials (Venice, Whitney, Liverpool) as well as substantial solo exhibitions at the well-regarded South London Gallery and Kunsthalle Zürich. While critical exegesis has struggled to keep pace, the last of these exhibitions had the benefit of generating an inaugural monograph from JRP Ringier. This features a typically sidewinding imprimatur from Liam Gillick, a former teacher of Aran's at Columbia, in tandem with a more conventionally theorised overview by Walker Art Center curator Fionn Meade. That said, the most useful introduction to Aran's work to date is a *Frieze* essay by Declan Long from last year, which focuses on what have become, for the time being at least, his trademark works. These are the wooden 'work-tables', a series of display units of idiosyncratic design, their surfaces crowded with arrangements of incongruous objects and amorphous materials whose purposive but hermetic configurations Long aptly likened to 'inconclusive investigations' or 'abandoned experiments.'

For his second show at Mother's Tankstation, *Ones*, Aran opted to sideline the work-tables in favour of a two-part presentation, the first element of which the viewer encountered immediately on entering the gallery. The 40-minute long projected film *Documentation, Circle Relieve*, 2014, was shot over several days and nights in high summer in the Roman Amphitheatre at Arles, as artists gathered and workmen laboured in preparation for the group exhibition/event *vers la lune en passant la plage (to the moon via the beach)*, 2012. The film is an oblique, protracted rumination on doubling and divergence, repetition and difference, circlings, disruptions and returns, which exhibits a number of characteristics familiar from previous films. The most notable of these is the structuring principle whereby the off-screen, but audible 'director' instructs his sometimes bemused 'actors' to deliver short scripts or act out brief scenarios. He regularly interrupts them, compelling them to repeat their words and/or actions with minor variations, the significance of which can seem as elusive to them as it is to the viewer. Following a typical bit of 'business' involving the marking of 'scene one, take one', the film's opening lines are as follows: 'Two friends flying together, two friends watching movies, two friends drawing, two friends in a car...', portentously delivered into a hand-held mic by one of the 'twin friends' who are the film's protagonists, as if he were launching into Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, this litany subsequently diverts, from time to time, into sequences of oppositions. These are sometimes contrastive, 'two friends: one is good, one is good for nothing', sometimes complementary, 'two friends: one knows what makes the other feel better'. Soon enough a second litany is threaded into the textual fabric in the form of an intermittent list of 'famous friends', which includes historical and Biblical figures alongside fictional and cartoon characters: 'Bagheera and Baloo, Nureyev and Balanchine, Salt 'n Pepa, Oliver Twist and the Artful Dodger, George Lucas and Steven Spielberg, Beavis and Butthead...' Among the numerous artists - in the broadest sense possible - who make the grade, pride of place inevitably goes to 'local boys' Gauguin and Van Gogh.

The handheld camera drifts, jerks or zooms with casual abandon and the occasionally muted soundtrack is punctuated by sudden (largely diegetic) irruptions of music performed on a variety of instruments (drums, guitar, piano). As the film unwinds with a distracted languor, mostly against a sundrenched backdrop of busy workmen and idling onlookers (there is one night-time segment), the rhythms and repetitions of the spoken word continually reassert themselves, offering the most promising purchase on thematic meaning. The arcane taxonomies of the work-tables are very occasionally suggested, e.g. 'Girls have long hair, boys have short hair, but within that paradigm each have different hairdos, haircuts and styles...' Aran's mischievous attitude to language in general, and to English

as a global lingua franca in particular, is evident throughout. It is epitomised by an amusing riff on international *cuisines / kitchens* during which the Francophone director's Anglophone 'spokesman' seems unsure whether what is being referred to is a style of food or cooking environment. It is at this point that one wonders if the entire set-up is not intended as an elaborately literal incarnation of the linguistic phenomenon of faux-amis.

passport-sized mugshots, glyph-like markings and fecal smearings, recur across the seven works displayed. Given this fact, it is remarkable how efficiently each of these tableaux asserts its individuality, although the variation in size and format helps, of course. Identity, it seems, matters to Aran even as it risks being subsumed into matter. (Place is another matter for this impresario of displacement.) Friends, twins, doubles, relatives, fellow travellers, brothers-in-arms, small gatherings, micro-communities, odd assortments: these proliferating configurations in Aran's work conspire to confound a sense of unique identity and autonomous subjectivity that can never be entirely suppressed. Such that, faced with the typically enigmatic title of this latest solo exhibition, it is tempting to ask: if these are the *Ones* should one assume there are *Others*?

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Uri Aran: *Ones* was on view 18 February – 28 March 2015.



Uri Aran: *One (Photograph)* (2015). Oil, wood stain, acrylic, pigment dust, mixed media on paper. 74.5 x 56.5 cm.
Image courtesy of the artist and Mother's Tankstation.

The main gallery space, in contrast, featured a selection of wall-hung, multi-media works of varying sizes, which recalled the work-tables in numerous ways while clearly belonging to the category of painting. As such they rehearse, within the dynamics of Aran's evolving oeuvre, that movement between the horizontal and the vertical so crucial to the history of twentieth-century painting. This definitive displacement has been theorised in different ways over the years, from Leo Steinberg's 'flatbed picture plane' to Rosalind Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois's 'abased' re-reading of modernism in light of Georges Bataille's notion of the 'formless' (*l'informe*). Familiar elements from Aran's compositional lexicon, such as circular drill-holes,