



Clive Murphy: *Inflatable Cardboard Boxes*, 2002, City Hall, courtesy EV+A

Limerick: EV+A 2002

As curator Apinan Poshyananda worked on EV+A 2002, he found himself in the familiar position of wondering what art can 'do' or 'be' in the aftermath of mass trauma. The title **Healers and Holies** evolved out of the process, exploring the idea that artists can perhaps offer us a "glimpse of the present that reflects the horror and happiness to be found in today's troubled world." It is a huge show with 73 artists, and this is necessarily a partial response.

At the Limerick City Gallery of Art Aileen Kelly's *Clowning around* is a memorable and humorous opener. Nine crudely formed, four-legged beasts form a circle; their 'coats' are brightly coloured, patterned cloths. Their feet are useless flaps of material and their necks end abruptly. The headless lead the headless, trapped in an unmoving, unending loop. It's quite depressing and bleak, but funny with it. Their predicament is a familiar one to many of us, which endeared them to me greatly; I longed

to be a hero and to rescue them, to save them through relocation or rearrangement; anything to break the cycle. However, to do so would individualise them and create hierarchies; as obtains next door. Ali Omer Krsma's projection, (*Untitled*), features another group of unfortunate ensnared creatures that metaphorically reflect a 'human condition'. The cycle begins with an image appearing in the centre of the wall. It is a man on a TV screen. He is spinning on the spot. Gradually more screens appear until

the entire wall is occupied by 21 people of all ages and a dog. Each is alone on their screen spinning at varying speeds throughout their short audio-visual existences. It reflects a contemporary take on the family unit, in that although their connectedness is apparent, nowadays their individuality and distance from each other is even more striking.

Next door again is Marina Abramovic's beautiful video projection *Hero*. She sits proudly astride a white horse holding a large white flag. It is as though Joan of Arc decided to surrender; it is a lonely and ambiguous image, an admission of defeat made with defiance and accompanied by a song/anthem (?) sung with great feeling. Abramovic is perhaps suggesting that the hero is the person who knows when to give up.

In Iftikhar and Elizabeth Dadi's huge canvas 'billboard', hung on Bridge Street, it seems unlikely that anyone will ever surrender. The painting is literally of the eponymous text 'Clash of Civilisations'. The text, painted to look like it is carved in 3-D from rock, towers over the landscape; it is sunset and at the base of the giant letters a fierce battle (cowboys and Indians?) takes place. The image looks like an old movie poster which evokes romantic notions of 'worthy' wars with 'good' heroes, but the letters will endure long after the warriors are dead, another rift will replace the last, and only prejudice and time will decide who are the 'goodies' and 'baddies'. Cultural conflict is written in stone and civilisations are doomed to war. It is a powerful, witty and acerbic image of the contemporary landscape.

The chief criticism I would have with the exhibition on the whole, is

that there are too many pieces that lead you by the nose; heavy-handed works that have a tendency to overwhelm you with their literalness. Paolo Carnevari *almost* ruined what would have been a perfectly wonderful intervention (a gleaming white lambretta scooter parked in a chapel of



Peter Johanssen: installation; photo the author

St. Mary's Cathedral), by placing tyres extending from the bike to make a cruciform. A succinct comment upon the notion of the sacred in society today: but no trust is placed in the viewer. In contrast, across the cathedral is a touching leap of faith, where Araya Rasdjarmreansook reads poetry to corpses in a morgue. Unfortunately the sound wasn't working when I visited; nevertheless the beauty of the idea has stayed with me. By offering unrequited companionship to dead strangers one wonders is she trying to comfort them or herself?

The daddy of the heavy art is Vasan Sitthiket whose paintings of famous men from Hitler to Bin Laden to Van Gogh emerging fully grown and garbed from their mothers (hairless?)

vaginas shout at us: "Is 'genius'/'evil' nature or nurture???" Peter Johanssen's impressive but over-the-top installation is another contender: Set in heavy, dark-wood, museum-style cases are over a dozen items of clothing: nazi uniforms, doc martens, bomber jackets and a balaclava all heavily decorated with colourful embroidery, tassels, baubles, brocade and painted flowers. The work relies solely on the unusual juxtaposition of fascism and folk (though arty/hippy-chick flower-print docs have been around a long time). It is interesting because the additions didn't really subvert the power of the Nazi regalia *as museum pieces*; if anything I felt their malevolence shone through; the other gear that is more quotidian looked ridiculous and nonthreatening. An effective action and simple point is driven home with a sledgehammer.

Another piece also dealing with World War 2 is David Dunne's *The Memory of Water*. In addressing the Holocaust, perhaps still the 'ultimate' topic, one operates in the wake of many extraordinary and famous cultural moments, in literature, film, TV and in the visual arts—for example, the series *The World at War*, and Christian Boltanski's trademark use of discarded clothing. Hence a wardrobe opening into a larger, but still cramped 'hide-out' space with a monitor showing stock WW2 footage, which is always horrifying, seems a touch second-hand. For me the piece is too illustrative to capture the imagination. The artist does a disservice to his own sincerity because the potential to be moved by works is often deadened by any feeling of familiarity. Moreover the piece would have worked much better if the structure of the 'hidden' space accessed through the wardrobe had been concealed behind a proper false



Clockwise from bottom left: Chio Jeong Hwa: *Funny Game*, 2002, City Hall, installation shot; Aileen Kelly: *Clowning Around*, 2002, installation shot, Limerick City Art Gallery; Torbjorn Rodland, Church Gallery; Iftikar Dadi: *Clash of Civilisations*, 2002, installation shot, façade, Bridge Street Motors; photos the author

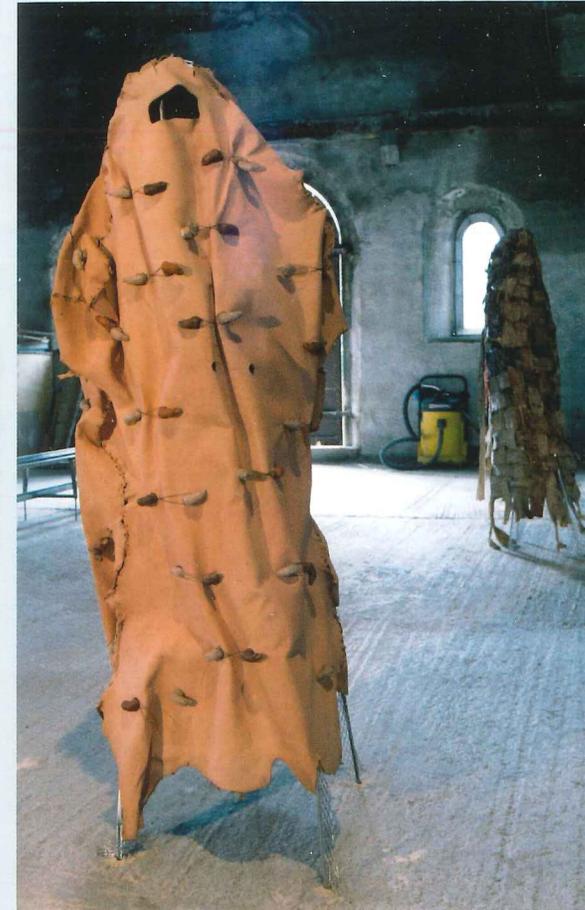
wall rather than being visible *in* the gallery space: all sense of surprise was lost.

The aesthetics/appearance of good and evil, and more pointedly a collapse or ambiguity in the distinction, is a recurring feature of the show. Martin Healy's handsome triptych, *Little Devils*, is of child actors from horror movies. They chart the way in which the aesthetics of a decade dictate how an 'evil' child looks; inevitably 'evil' children are good-looking, their appearance reminds us of our natural proclivity to think of children as innocents and to rationalise their behaviour in terms of external forces,

the devil or aliens. Breda Lynch presents two quite beautiful and interesting drawings that are markedly different in the way two pairs of young twins are depicted: two girls whose faces are blurred and barely articulated seem both sad and defiant, and two girls with distinctly drawn, happy, cheeky, uncomplicated expressions. A relationship between being unhappy or troubled and being withdrawn is posited. The piece is either complicated, unchanged or over-simplified by the fact that the former two girls are black and the latter are white.

In City Hall two very different guards are on view: Chio Jeong Hwa's

huge identical policemen are dotted around the hallways. Their uniform, stature and indifference puts one in a totally powerless position; you cannot ignore their hulking officious presence; their weight and their objecthood is almost akin to early minimalism. Helen Killane's security guards couldn't be more different or rather more human. She brings to our attention the names and faces of a profession we often fail to register while passing in and out of buildings. In the top row they pose straight-faced, in the bottom row the same six men smile, or at least they try to: it is odd to see how some of them seem *unable* to smile and others fail to look serious.



Anti-clockwise from bottom right: Mella Jaarsma: 2002, performance, St John of the Cross Church, St John's Square; Apinam Poshyananda: *Paying homage to artists*, 2002, performance; Mella Jaarsma: 2002, performance, St John of the Cross Church, St John's Square; photos the author

In one respect the fun of EV+A is that you get to see so much art, some of which one finds exciting and some dull; some of which shines in the larger context and some of which gets lost. It is always a sensory overload. One could endlessly find connections between the various works and the exhibition had many more interesting pieces than I have space to mention. Overall, I left Limerick with the impression that EV+A 2002 is a strong and stimulating exhibition that is very broad in its scope: when you're thinking of 'happiness and horror' in the contemporary world almost anything can seem relevant.

The experience of the opening and the following day was marred slightly by the absence of wall labels in many of the venues; apart from knowing who made what, titles are often an important part of a piece. On the other hand, one of the best things about EV+A this year is the palpable sense of excitement in the curation which makes for an interesting and enjoyable experience. This enthusiasm is reflected in the hang/layout which in general is tight and coherent, with interesting relationships and juxtapositions in most of the rooms, and a discerning use of the differing atmospheres of the various venues.

Isabel Nolan is a writer and artist based in Dublin.

EV+A, venues around Limerick, March-June 2002



Ronan Sharkey: Billboard, corner of O'Curry/Henry Street, March-June 2002; courtesy EV+A

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