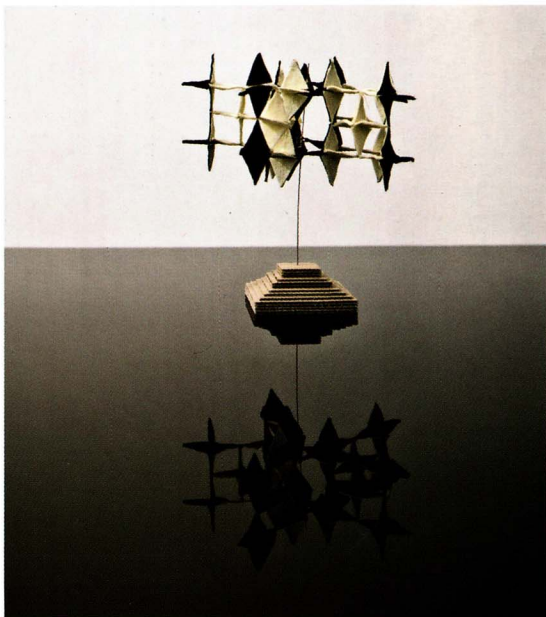


City Report: Dublin

Despite the decline of Ireland's 'Celtic Tiger' economy, Dublin's artist-run and institutional spaces are thriving

by Brian Dillon and Maeve Connolly



Lyndsay Mann
Animal: Object (Small)
2009
Aluminium,
polycarbonate, brass,
felt, cardboard
30x30x30 cm



James Coleman
So Different ... and Yet
1980
DVD on LCD screen
Installation view, Irish
Museum of Modern
Art, 2009



**Anne Cleary and
Denis Connolly**
Moving Dublin
2009
DVD still

Brian Dillon

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How to write about contemporary art in Dublin and not couch it all in terms of Ireland's precipitous economic rise and spectacular Daedalus fall? I'd almost determined to skirt the subject of recession entirely when, days before I left for Dublin, the Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman informed readers of *The New York Times* that the 'worst-case outlook for the world economy' was that 'America could turn Irish'. That's to say that the USA might respond to the drastic overexposure of its housing sector and the attendant banking plunge by raising taxes but cutting spending, effectively freezing policy for the foreseeable future. Krugman's speculations aside, almost overnight Ireland has turned into the direst image of what austerity is going to look like in the coming years, if not decades.

But it's only possible to be aghast at the recent job losses and desperate cuts to health care and social welfare in Ireland - there are shades here of the slump of the 1980s, when the already vulnerable poor were made to suffer in the name of our coming national recovery - if you truly thought that the whole country had attained some class of bootstrapped and bourgeois immunity in the last decade and a half. It seems many Dubliners cosseted themselves in exactly that fantasy as they drove home to the new suburbs and refurbished commuter towns, oddly oblivious to what their city was becoming, and how vulnerable it might yet leave them. Post-boom, Dublin threatens to overtake Los Angeles for sheer size, while its population density is roughly a quarter of LA's (or about one seventh that of Paris). The USA might fear becoming Ireland economically, but Dublin is already an American 'edge city', with all that implies in terms of stranded anomie in straitened times.

The intimate effects of this urban expansion are outlined in Anne Cleary and Denis Connolly's *Moving Dublin* (2009), an hour-long film that opened in late April at Broadcast, the gallery of the Fine Art Department of Dublin Institute of Technology. Cleary and Connolly trained as architects in Dublin before moving to Paris in 1990, where they began to imagine city films inspired by Guy Debord and Michel de Certeau. *Moving Dublin* is both theoretically astute and winningly quotidian: a study of everyday movement in the city's suburbs, the artists convinced that 'few places reflect so completely the forces of capitalism and ideology that have gone into moulding urban space in the 20th century'. Cleary and Connolly depict a centrifugal Dublin 'almost paralyzed by its own hyperactivity', a place where the children she interviews cannot believe that Cleary (in her early 40s) rides a bicycle in a city so clearly in thrall to the car.

Cleary and Connolly reconfigure Dublin as a system of movement and energy - much of it stalled, frustrated or exhausted by ill-thought-out infrastructure and deadening sprawl - that is the automotive mirror of the circulation of capital at the heart of the city. It's no surprise to say that a newly cosmopolitan Dublin is mapped according to the garish towers of the financial district and the apartment blocks that lined the River Liffey from the mid-1990s onwards. Galleries and other institutions in the nightlife hub of Temple Bar - Project Arts Centre, Temple Bar Gallery and Studios - have weathered the stag-night excesses of a decade ago. Their established programmes now encourage gallery-goers along the river to the newer artist-run spaces, so that a sort of archipelago of small galleries now links the city centre to the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), half-an-hour's walk to the west. (At the time of writing, IMMA was one of three venues, along with Project and the Royal Hibernian Academy, hosting an ambitious James Coleman retrospective.)

Among the most audacious of the projects to spring up in the interstices of Dublin's doomed economic restructuring was Pallas Heights: