PREPOSSESSION

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CCAP — Centre for Contemporary Art and Politics   ARTS COUNCIL of Northern Ireland   UNIVERSITY of ULSTER   IVAN DOUGHERTY GALLERY   COFA UNSW

FOREWORD

Prepossession is a collaborative project between the UNSW Centre for Contemporary Art and Politics and the School of Art and Design, University of Ulster, Belfast. Both these institutions have a continuing research focus on politics and trauma in contemporary art, and the CCAP has also established research links with South Africa in this regard.

Focusing on photo- and video-based work, *Prepossession* brings together prominent artists from Northern Ireland, South Africa and Australia, whose work intersects with key debates on the representation of trauma and the effects of political violence, racism and colonisation. Although each of the works included reflect distinct social and political conditions, the exhibition seeks to find resonance between them, opening up a triangular dialogue, which we anticipate, will unfold quite differently in Sydney and Belfast.

Australian audiences, familiar with local work produced in the context of Reconciliation politics, will no doubt find points of connection and contrast in the South African work. They will also see for the first time in Sydney work by Frances Hegarty; Willie Doherty's new video work makes its Australian debut in Sydney and will subsequently be shown at this year's Venice Biennale, concurrently with the exhibition of *Prepossession* in Belfast.

While these works address a unique social context, they nevertheless evoke emotional and affective experiences that translate across national boundaries to create interesting conjunctions. Major works by Destiny Deacon, Tracey Moffatt, Darren Siwes, William Kentridge and Jo Ractliffe will be shown for the first time in Northern Ireland in the context of this exhibition, hosted by the Golden Thread Gallery.

The Golden Thread Gallery is a neutral venue for the presentation of high quality contemporary visual art and associated activities, located on an interface between the loyalist Shankill and republican Ardoyne communities of North Belfast, an area subject to much violence throughout the political troubles.

The exhibition is hosted and supported by Ivan Dougherty Gallery, UNSW College of Fine Arts. Research at the CCAP for this project has been supported by a Discovery Grant from the Australian Research Council. The exhibition catalogue is co-funded by UNSW and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland – National Lottery.

We are very grateful to Professor Abigail Solomon-Godeau, who has contributed a wonderful essay to this catalogue, extending her research on the nature and politics of haunting in contemporary photography.

Finally, thank you to the collectors who've lent works for the exhibition, to Matt's Gallery, London, Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney for lending and sourcing works for the exhibition, and especially to all the participating artists for their enthusiasm and support of the project.

Jill Bennett, Felicity Fenner and Liam Kelly
Exhibition co-curators

Jo Ractliffe *Vlakplaas: 2 June 1999 (Drive-by-Shooting)* 1999-2002 (detail) © the artist

A CONCEPT OF PREPOSSESSION[1]

Prepossession is an exhibition about a condition: the state of being pre-occupied or pre-possessed. Specifically, it considers how this condition arises in disputed territories, where a history of dispossession and trauma continues to haunt the present. It focuses on human experience: on what it is like to live with a haunting presence or preoccupation. But above all, *Prepossession* makes an argument about art. It proposes that by exploring the manner in which we inhabit and experience spaces and places, visual art makes a particular kind of contribution to the study of culture and politics.

If the works in *Prepossession* can be characterised as 'political', they exemplify a shift in the register of political art from the didactic to the experiential, sensory and affective. Far from propagating a message in the manner of didactic imagery, these works incline toward the expressive in the way that they play on a certain affective quality of space and objects to evoke modes of subjective experience: of loss, trauma or of a past that continues to haunt the present. Yet, at the same time, they resist any kind of personalisation of history. The affect embodied in the desolate landscapes and environments of Willie Doherty, William Kentridge and Jo Ractliffe is not expressed by an individual, nor is it representative of a particular experience. Such affect is very often a property of the space constituted by the image, and thus a means of exploring the relationship of subject to ground: the experience of inhabiting space.

Doherty has evoked the traumatising space – the place in which fear and other negative affects arise and attach themselves to subjects – in works such as *The Only Good One is a Dead One* (1993), where the human figure is an absent presence, evoked but not seen. *Non-Specific Threat* reverses the terms of this same thematic, focusing intently on the figure haunted by a threatening presence in the surrounding place. This time, it is the environment beyond the subject's immediate body space that is the absent core of the image, which remains concerned with the idea of enduring inhabitation.

Doherty's work is both "Non-Specific" and specific. That is, it deals with a general condition; a condition that arises out of a specific set of social and political circumstances, pertaining to Northern Ireland. Similarly, Kentridge's *Felix in Exile* evokes the psycho-social history of a particular place through the play of characters 'in exile'

and bodies that literally haunt the landscape of the East Rand, the desolate mining country outside Johannesburg, in which there are few tangible markers of past violence. His work, like Jo Ractliffe's, is 'post-apartheid' in its direct concern with the psychology of transition, and the question of how one inhabits a terrain that has witnessed the barbaric excesses of the apartheid regime. Their work does not simply uncover the true stories of past inhabitants; it is neither reconstructive nor historical in this regard. Indeed, it resists the notion that art can serve as a simple corrective by unveiling the truth, opting instead to confront the more difficult question of the limitations of vision.

Ractliffe's *Vlakplaas: 2 June 1999 (Drive-by-Shooting)* is exactly about the failure of the image, and of the place itself, to signify. Vlakplaas is a former South African government secret Death Squad training facility – a place with murderous associations that is now a farm garden. Nothing registers its past in the images Ractliffe captures in a literal 'drive-by' shooting with a disposable camera. Vlakplaas is, of course, emblematic of the horror of apartheid, and hence, of the limits of signification. It denotes a horror that can never truly be apprehended or understood, even as it is revealed in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. And it is this unknowability that makes it a haunting image: haunting in Maurice Blanchot's sense when he says, "What haunts is the inaccessible which one cannot rid oneself of, what one does not find and what, because of that, does not allow one to avoid it. The ungraspable is what one does not escape".[2] In this regard, the exhibition explores the tension between the battle to grasp, understand or possess, and the sense of being inescapably possessed.

In many ways, the 'horror' signifiers of Australia's colonial history operate in a similar register. The truth of the Stolen Generations of Aboriginal children removed from their parents has now passed into official history and is publicly lamented and widely represented (notwithstanding the inevitable 'deniers'), and Australian law now acknowledges the Aboriginal Land Rights claim; that is, a form of pre- [prior] possession.[3] Tracey Moffatt's *Up In The Sky* references this history in a kind of expansive allegory, set in a cinema-inspired, mythic Australian outback. This surreal, but palpably Australian, backdrop is populated by a series of dramatic actors: rednecks and Aborigines; a mother and baby; a spooky posse of nuns. These

overdetermined symbols have no specific meaning; although Moffatt's photographic series seems to tell a story, it is impossible to make sense of the narrative. The black-draped nuns taking possession of a baby certainly conjure the Stolen Generations, but they are invented archetypes, generic spectres haunting the landscape.

In Destiny Deacon's video *Over d-fence*, a funny, understated suburban backyard drama, such signifiers emerge in the most subtle, eminently missable form: a looped cord, reminiscent of a noose, dangling next to a black doll. If Darren Siwes imagery of haunting denotes an incontrovertible presence in the landscape or urban environment, this is the kind of poignant detail (an echo of deaths in custody to a local audience) that is submerged – often invisible - within the benign domestic environment.

This is, of course, the point. We do not live in the past, but in a present space that bears the marks (indelible and ephemeral, visible and invisible) of its history. As much as we occupy places, they have the capacity to pre-occupy us. Yet as Deacon in particular demonstrates, preoccupation as an everyday condition does not imply a melancholic or humourless disposition.

In invoking this phenomenon of prepossession (earlier possession/ ghostly possession), these works do not look back at history, or attempt any revisionist narrative – nor do they repeat the clichés of trauma and angst in art. They are, rather, active interventions into a cultural politics – a regional politics, but also a global one in as much as they constitute an aesthetic of the political that is generalisable, and potentially transnational.

One aim of this project is to explore the nature of the links between these works from Northern Ireland, Australia and South Africa, three utterly distinct locations. International exhibitions always have potential to reveal new and unexpected points of resonance, although formal echoes and thematic overlaps can, of course, gloss over significant cultural difference. *Magiciens de la terre* (Paris, 1989), the first major international exhibition to include contemporary art from radically diverse cultures, initiated a vigorous debate on the problems of promoting panculturalism on the basis of aesthetic resonance alone, alerting curators to the dangers of reading too much into incidental similarities. In the light of such debate, it would be spurious to posit superficial connections between the experience of Reconciliation in South Africa and Australia, or between the nature of race relations in South Africa or Australia and sectarian violence in Northern Ireland. But on the

other hand, there has been no serious consideration of resonating approaches to the political per se. Amidst all the politicised rhetoric of contemporary art, little attention has been given to the specific way that art contributes to political and cultural analysis; to the (political) significance of aesthetic process itself.

Confounding old style notions of political art, the works in *Prepossession* neither propound a pre-given theory, telling us what to think, nor retreat into subjectivism (telling us what other individuals think). They often deal with the traumatic, but they move our conception of trauma beyond the realm of the interior subject into that of inhabited place, where it is rendered a political phenomenon.

In this context, affectivity in art is not a description of another's feelings. I have argued elsewhere that although art can always move us, it can never succeed in moving us into the position of another.[4] Rather than allowing us to share the feelings of a traumatised subject or aspiring to condense such personal feelings into a communicable form, affective imagery, of the kind in this exhibition, might better be understood as an aesthetic form that operates by engaging different modes of sensory and bodily perception as a means of shifting perception and engendering new ways of thinking. Instead of simply mediating what is *pre-thought* or *already thought*, affective art deals directly with a form of *unthought knowledge*[5] - the kind of knowledge that is mediated through body, affect, emotion, rather than cognition alone. Trauma is emblematic of this kind of somatic experience, but the work in *Prepossession* covers a range of related affective states: anxiety, fear, even forms of joy. It is in this affective vein that visual art can be properly political, rather than didactic: productive of new ideas and insights rather than merely illustrative of a given theory or proposition.

One way of expressing the rationale of the exhibition is thus to say that it looks at the political not in terms of thematics or 'messages', but as something that emerges from the distinctive way in which visual art operates: from the kind of affective engagements that can be activated through visual forms alone.

Rather than imposing an arbitrary theme, *Prepossession* brings together works with political resonance within quite distinct local communities, not simply to ask what they might tell us about those communities, but to consider aesthetic strategies – or politics in art – more generally. There have, of course, been innumerable international exhibitions with a political inflection, particularly since September 2001. But the question of how art engages the

political is always at issue. Critics are generally wary of art with an agenda, as if politics might distract from the core business of form – and they are probably right that didacticism mitigates against aesthetic interest. But these objections hold only when politics is reduced to a question of content, a theme extraneous to art itself.

The political isn't a topic that one may or may not cover (when confronted with this formulation, artists like Moffatt will often say that their work is not concerned with social or political issues). Rather, the political may be understood to arise *from* or within art, as much as it emerges from philosophy or written forms; but it does so in a distinctive aesthetic form. Visual art, in other words, generates concepts, but these concepts look and feel very different to those emerging in social science or philosophy, for example.

This exhibition advances a particular concept: *prepossession*. It plays on the multiple associations of the term (to land, to ownership and dispossession, to haunting, to self-possession), but specifically it traces the way in which this concept is dynamically extended through visual art. The works in the show approach prepossession as a phenomenon, an experience, a sensation, a mode of being, and as emblematic of the kind of constraints produced by conflict, violence and trauma. What we end up with is a richly textured and invigorated understanding of inhabitation, enacted quite differently across three unique locations.

Jill Bennett
UNSW

Willie Doherty *Non-Specific Threat* 2004 (still from video)
© the artist. Matt's Gallery, London and Alexander & Bonin, New York

1   The arguments briefly outlined here are more fully developed in Jill Bennett *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005)

2   Maurice Blanchot, *The Gaze of Orpheus*, trans L. David, (Barrytown, N.Y: Station Hill Press), 84

3   The Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission report *Bringing them Home*, tabled in the Australian parliament in 1997, documented a long-term plan, enacted by previous governments, to assimilate Indigenous people into white European culture by forcibly separating children from their families

4   See Bennett, *Empathic Vision*

5   Christopher Bollas coins the terms the "unthought known" to refer that which is perceived through the senses but cannot be grasped by rational thought; Christopher Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987). This concept is developed by Mieke Bal to describe a mode of thought in art and literature; Bal, *Traveling Concepts in the Humanities*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 10, 92

JO RACTLIFFE

*Vlakplaas: 2 June 1999 (Drive-by-Shooting)* 1999-2002

This work was originally commissioned for *Truth Veils*, an exhibition mounted at the Gertrude Posel Gallery, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in 1999, which explored the impact of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It was presented in relation to *Prime Evil*, a documentary film about Eugene de Kock, commander of Vlakplaas, the former government Death Squad training camp (de Kock, nicknamed "Prime Evil" is now serving multiple life sentences for murder).

My first visit to Vlakplaas undid me. I was utterly unprepared for what I saw – or rather, didn't see: that the 'Vlakplaas' I was looking for was nowhere to be found. What there was, was nothing but a seemingly innocuous farmhouse, surrounded by a country landscape, next to the Hennops River. I went back and shot it with my Holga camera, in one continuous strip of black and white film, on the day of the country's second democratic elections.

The original photographic strip was filmed onto video and overlaid with sound footage from Dirk Coetzee's testimony during the TRC hearings and excerpts of an interview between F. W. de Klerk, and television host Max Du Preez.

Jo Ractliffe *Vlakplaas: 2 June 1999 (Drive-by-Shooting)* 1999-2002 (detail) ● the artist
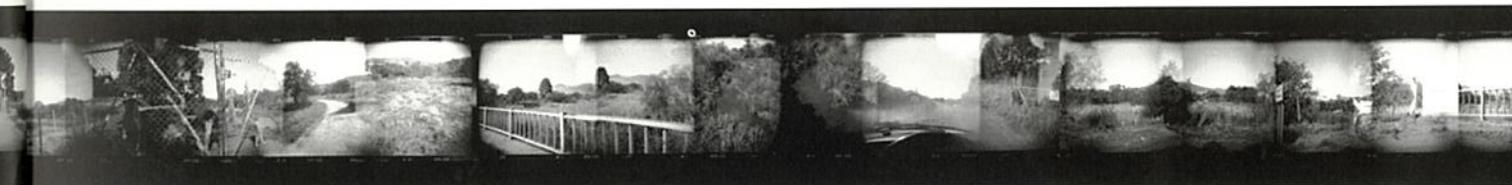
WILLIAM KENTRIDGE

Felix in Exile

This film was made between September 1993 and February 1994, in the period just before the [South African] General Election.

The landscape of Felix in Exile is that of the East Rand – the mining areas near Johannesburg. Virtually all the mines in this area are now derelict...it is an area that has nostalgia built into it...

The landscape hides its history...I am really interested in the terrain's hiding of its own history and the correspondence this has, not only with painting, but with the way memory works. The difficulty we have holding onto passions, impressions, ways of seeing things, the way things that seem so indelibly imprinted on our memories still fade and become elusive, is mirrored in the way in which the terrain itself cannot hold onto the events played out upon it.

Sites of events, massacres, battles, celebrations retain scant record of them...

William Kentridge, "Felix in Exile: Geography of Memory", *William Kentridge,* Société des Expositions du Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles, 1998, 93-7

William Kentridge drawing from *Felix in Exile* 1994 © the artist

HAUNTED HABITATS

If, as many art critics might argue, there has been a discernable shift in the way the 'political' is currently manifested, this comes in the wake of decades of rethinking the political both inside and outside traditional political formations.[1] In this respect, the lessons of feminism, poststructuralism, critical theory, and identity politics are variously mustered or in play; collectively, these have focused attention on the politics of representation as well as the issue of representability itself. Such a shift is also a consequence of the enlargement of the artistic pool both geographically and demographically. This pool has itself profited from an increasingly global perspective fostered by international art exhibitions and by more inclusive curatorial practices. Thinking here of the two previous *Documentas*, as well as examples provided in a spate of biennales from Istanbul to Sao Paolo, there would seem to be a renewed exploration of the ways in which artworks can reflect upon the social and historical specificities of their own production, an exploration that itself prompts a search for formal and affective languages adequate to such ambitions. These exhibitions have additionally served to make viewers aware of the range and breadth of art practices that do not refuse the designation or even declare themselves openly as 'political.' Even in the U.S., where the bogey of political correctness is regularly brandished, artists such as the South African William Kentridge or the Australian Tracey Moffatt have achieved significant recognition.

Consequently, many observers would acknowledge that the most important art made today is critical, historically reflective, and at the same time, unmistakably local, specific to its terrain. As has long been the case with most art recognised as postmodern, such art is not medium specific and typically involves hybridised forms. To define Kentridge's protean work (film, puppetry, opera, shadow plays, graphics, etc,) in medium-specific terms would make no sense of his project. Whether in the dematerialised form of 'stone age cinema' or in the form of cast bronze homunculi, as puppet theatre or as mammoth etchings, the individual works are rarely autonomous; they read as elements of an ongoing and open-ended work. Despite their formal diversity, they are works generated by an overarching engagement with historical circumstance and determinations as they have shaped the past and the present in a specific place and time, on subjectivities that are fully collective even when figured through and represented by an individual. The

Felix Teitlebaum who appears in Kentridge's film series may well perform as alter ego (even to the point of physical resemblance), but Felix's representational function exceeds the personal circumstances of his creator. Similarly, the work of the Australians Destiny Deacon, Tracey Moffat, and Darren Siwes (who appears in his own pictures) are to greater or lesser degrees informed by their own ethnic identity, which is itself the legacy of colonial conquest and dispossession of Australia's first peoples. Nonetheless, 'Aboriginality' exists in their work more as a theme or problematic than as a personal attribute although it is, of course, both. Grouping together artists from three countries (Northern Ireland, Australia, and South Africa) the choice of which is itself significant, *Prepossession* focuses on artistic practices whose affective register is that of collective haunting. As Jill Bennett remarks in her essay, "*Prepossession* is an exhibition about a condition: the state of being pre-occupied or prepossessed. Specifically, it considers how this condition arises in disputed territories, where a history of dispossession and trauma continues to haunt the present."[2]

Rooted in the photographic, televisual, or filmic image, that is to say, the image bank of the already-seen, the mass media forms from which certain of these artists draw are subjected to techniques and interventions that recast them and as apparitional forms and charge them with the work of haunting. Moffat's *Up in the Sky* mimics b&w film stills from an enigmatic narrative of violence and generalised menace; Siwes appears in his own photographs as a disembodied phantom; evoking the conventions of the ghost movie; Deacon's nightmarish doll pictures use the degraded material of mass culture itself – kitschy black dolls – and Kentridge's film, *Felix in Exile* situates the protagonist in the despoiled landscape of the East Rand where he is haunted by the unreachable black woman Nandi. In all instances, what is at stake is a reckoning with a violent historical past whose legacy in the present remains variously that of racism, exclusion, alienation and political conflict but where the historical evidence cannot be directly represented.

It is in this sense that one has recourse to the notion of haunting, and to the evocation of the ghost, the apparition, the spectral which is so evident in the art of *Prepossession*. Insofar as the notion of haunting turns on what is obscene/off-scene, it operates between the states of visibility/invisibility, and absence/presence (photography has thus a quasi-ontological relation to our notion of haunting and is similarly linked to the uncanny). But equally, the notion of being haunted turns on what is hidden, unsaid; it involves the presence in the present of the unredeemed past, a past that refuses to be done

with or surmounted. Psychically related to Freud's concept of the uncanny and the return of the repressed, haunting in the sense I use it here is less to do with individual subjectivity and the vicissitudes of the individual unconscious than with the collective unconscious and its historical determinations. 'Haunting,' as Avery Gordon writes in her extraordinary study *Ghostly Matters*, 'is a constituent element of modern social life. It is neither pre-modern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a general social phenomenon of great import.'[3] In fact, the notion of haunting is one that has an interesting legacy in modern theory and philosophy; from Adorno and Horkeimer's 'On the Theory of Ghosts' to Nicholas Abraham and Maria's Torok's discussion of the phantom, to Derrida's *Specters of Marx* and countless other texts.[4] Although such philosophical or psychological considerations of ghosts and haunting hardly constitute a unified field, and are theorised very differently, what is significant here is that the interest in spectrality appears to have a new urgency in contemporary thought. This is not motivated so much by an interest in the occult as such, as is it by a concern with the modalities of historical memory and historical trauma as political agents in the present. As Warren Montage poses the question, 'What exists between presence and absence that prevents the non-present from simply disappearing?'[5]

Walter Benjamin famously remarked of Eugène Atget that he photographed the streets of Paris as though they were the scene of the crime, the photographs thereby 'acquir[ing] a hidden political significance.'[6] In these artists' work, however, the scenes of crime are neither European nor necessarily urban; they are, in the case of Australia and South Africa, spaces and places far removed from the Western metropolis, the past-haunted cities Benjamin walked. The crime scenes here are from the East Rand of Johannesburg, the 19th century architectural remnants of Melbourne or Perth, the mythic outback, the no-places of colonial ancestry. In some instances these crime scenes depict neither criminal nor victim; rather, they are merely habitats in which the traces of catastrophe and trauma have been apparently eradicated. They remain nevertheless haunted spaces, and thus it can be said of the artists in *Prepossession* that they seek in their work to mobilise the haunting, to conjure up the ghosts, for as Gordon argues, ghosts and apparitions are social figures; sedimentations of historic repression and unresolved conflict. The very language of haunting refers to what comes back again; the revenant is she who returns; hence it marks the return of the repressed. 'The ghost,' writes Gordon, 'is a crucible for political mediation and historical memory; the ghost story has no other choice then to refuse the logic of the unreconstructed spectacle.'[7]

Darren Siwes *The Black & White Manor of Mrs Jenny Ticks* 2003
© the artist and Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide

William Kentridge drawing from *Felix in Exile* 1994 © the artist

(consider Jo Ractliffe's work in this regard). It is surely not accidental that with the exception of Kentridge, the work in *Prepossession* is photographic or filmic, for in some respects photography itself has been long linked with the uncanny and the spectral. Like the melodrama, the novel of sensation, the Gothic, the horror movie, or, for that matter, pornography, the uncanny operates viscerally insofar as it excites an embodied response.[8] In this respect, Bennett's brief for a political art adequate to the experience of historical trauma insists on the bodily registration of affect; a form of intrasubjective communication between artwork and viewer that is both empathetic and conducive to critical thought.[9] Rejecting 'crude empathy,' Bennett affirms an art practice that 'by virtue of its specific affective capacities … is able to exploit forms of embodied perception in order to promote forms of critical inquiry.'[10]

Siwes' pictures are obviously the works that most clearly (indeed literally) make reference to the ghostly, and equally literally present the haunted aspect of those places in which he stages his apparitions.[11] And although it is American racist slang that designates blacks as 'spooks,' Siwes' (dis)embodied self representation is relevant to all other 'white' cultures where people of colour are at one and the same time hypervisible (as racially 'marked' others) and invisible, an invisibility explored, for example, in Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man*. But it is no less the case that the other artists in *Prepossession* conceive of their respective habitats as haunted, and it is thus the intention of the work to make the viewer aware of why these places are haunted on a level of perception that is distinct from cognitive forms of historical knowledge. Tracey Moffatt's *Up in the Sky* which depicts enigmatic and menacing 'scenes' staged in a desolate desert environment re-deploys the by-now clichéd notion of the outback as haunted territory. This re-deployment contains hints of the reasons the country is haunted; the sinister nuns and the black baby are surely allusions to the 'lost' generation of stolen Aboriginal children. All of which is to say that the *Prepossession*

artists' various invocations of haunting seek to address what is otherwise unrepresentable, either because it occurred in the past, has been repressed, or is of an enormity (i.e. genocide, apartheid) that is not amenable to conventional orders of representation. It is here where the uncanny, and its strange forms of recognition, joins with the empathetic to produce a particular kind of knowledge that links the viewer in her own space and time to these other spaces and times that have been summoned, quickened, and animated by the artists who bear the burden, as do we all, of our haunted histories and habitats.

Abigail Solomon-Godeau
U.C. Santa Barbara

[1] See in this respect, Jill Bennett 's "A Concept of Prepossession", in this catalogue
[2] Bennett, *Prepossession*
[3] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 7
[4] "On the Theory of Ghosts" is a two-page note in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, trans. John Cunning (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972); Jacques Derrida. *Spectres of Marx: the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans., Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994); the discussion of the phantom is in Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Nicholas Rand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994)
[5] Warren Montag, "Spirits Armed and Unarmed: Derrida's *Specters of Marx*" in Michael Sprinkler, ed., *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx* (London: Verso, 1999), 71
[6] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 226
[7] Gordon, 18
[8] Unsurprisingly, it has long been associated with femininity and its accompanying excess
[9] Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005)
[10] Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 10
[11] See in this respect, Ian Maclean's excellent discussion of Siwes work in "Uncanny: Darren Siwes's *Just Is* series of photographs" *Darren Siwes: Just Is* (Adelaide: Greenaway Art Gallery, 2004)

Destiny Deacon *Being There* 1998 © the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

Tracey Moffatt *Up in the Sky #9* 1997 © the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

SITESEEING: TRAUMA AND PLACE IN THE WORK OF DESTINY DEACON, TRACEY MOFFATT AND DARREN SIWES

In Australia, controversial and contested issues about place and authority primarily revolve around the rights to and connection with land by Australia's Indigenous people. The three artists in the Australian component of *Prepossession* are of Aboriginal descent, all acutely aware of the political role their practice plays in redefining Australia and the world's attitude to this country's original inhabitants and their place in a postcolonial world.

The artists are linked by other factors that underlie the political resonance of their work. They were all born in the decade spanning the late 1950s to late 60s, a period of immense social change in Australia, when European migration was at its height and the plight of Aboriginal people at one of its lowest ebbs. Yet it was also the era of a burgeoning Aboriginal voice, when claims to land, to the vote, even to one's own children, were heard for the first time in the political and public arena. Activist Charles Perkins, inspired by the example of black America, embarked on the Freedom Rides across rural New South Wales in 1965; in 1967, when Destiny Deacon was ten years old and Darren Siwes getting ready to be born, a national referendum declared that Aboriginal people be accorded equal rights.

The three Australian artists in *Prepossession* share elements of autobiography in their work, if not in their individual stories, in the experience of ongoing racism in contemporary Australian society. Unlike many Aboriginal artists from remote regions of northern and central Australia that have gained international artistic reputations (from the men of Papunya in the 1970s to the women of Utopia in the 1990s), Deacon, Moffatt and Siwes are city dwellers, living in Melbourne, Brisbane/New York and Adelaide respectively. Whether raised in a white foster home or on the edge of town in an Aboriginal community, they have lived on the frontline of racism in Australia's so-called 'multicultural' urban centres, denied the experience of belonging, instead having to deal with being treated as 'other', of being forced to assume an identity based on socio-political strategies of assimilation, or, as Destiny Deacon aptly describes it, "forced into images".[1]

The political content of their art, therefore, is neither objective nor didactic: like the best art produced anywhere and at any time in the world, it is born of deeply felt visceral and emotional

Darren Siwes *The Tangled Skeins Of The Hoi Polloi* 2004
© the artist and Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide

experience. Their work is, in other words, *possessed*, not by the traditional Aboriginal spirits that sometimes haunt paintings by their desert colleagues, but by the spirit of lived experience, of injustice and oppression. And it's a spirit characterised by feelings of anger, tempered in these artists' practice with irony, wit and a wry intellectual approach to negotiating the conflicted intersection between black and white social territory in Australia today.

Unlike the artists in this exhibition, Aboriginal artists in remote regions of Australia re-instate an Indigenous presence through artistic continuance, specifically in their use of traditional visual lexicons rendered with western (in place of traditionally ephemeral) painting techniques. For those artists, tradition-based painting is a method of keeping alive cultures otherwise threatened by assimilation.[2] Conversely, the practice of Deacon, Moffatt and Siwes charts new territory, directly addressing some of the most confronting issues that have hampered and haunted the Aboriginal population since British colonisation – including poverty, alienation and invisibility. Their practice is based in photo-media (Moffatt extending this to film, Deacon to video and installation), its immediacy and documentary capacity enhancing its political agency. While their work still tells the traumatic stories of Aboriginal Australia with the sense of 'authority' often credited to the best of Aboriginal painting, it evades ethnographic pigeonholing by embracing the visual language of international contemporary art. These are overtly figurative images, narratives informed by a deep understanding of white Australia's largely racist perceptions and treatment of Aboriginal people. The images are menacing in tone and subversive in their storytelling. It is these artists' focus on both individual and generic stories and renditions of 'sacred sites' (whether domestic, geographic or cultural) that locates this work in a global contemporary art context.

Another common feature of the work here is not only that the images are figurative, but that they are unabashedly stage-crafted. Each is a theatrical vignette starring 'actors' (often the artists and their friends or family) in situations that range from the banal to the surreal. The performative aspect of the work is crucial to its interpretation, making the point that these are not random snapshots, but carefully planned images, executed and edited for maximum dramatic effect.

While Moffatt and Siwes employ new and old photographic technology to achieve poignant and polished final images, Destiny

Deacon is deliberately low-tech both in means and presentation: Polaroid snapshots are transformed into large digital prints, sacrificing sharpness of image in favour of a blurry, amateur finish. In a perverse way, the simplicity of the artist's technical means heightens the 'authenticity', a slap-in-the-face gesture to the hordes of sightseer collectors wanting to buy into 'authentic' Aboriginal culture. Deacon reveals Aboriginal life as it really is, living in suburban Melbourne with working class friends and family, a penchant for Aboriginal kitsch collectibles and a keen awareness of the pervasive, insidious nature of racism. The portrait she presents of contemporary Aboriginal life, once we see past the veneer of tragic-comical humour, is disconcerting: by apparently ridiculing the plight of urban Aboriginal life, is she in fact subverting the racist nonchalance (complicity) of non-Indigenous Australia? As Christine Nicholls wrote in response to Deacon's 2004 exhibition at the Salzburger Kunstverein, "Deacon takes an ironic stance where 'performing the subjugated and compliant native' becomes a position that is in fact the opposite of submissive or yielding".[3]

Deacon's work is part fiction, part autobiography. Her carefully choreographed backyard photographs and lounge-room videos are like the raw and ratbaggy plays that children perform for their parents, characterised by garish homespun costumes, precariously placed props and meandering, seemingly under-rehearsed dialogues. For non-Indigenous audiences, the dolls that the artist often substitutes for real people serve both to depersonalise and globalise the significance of Deacon's project. The artist believes that audiences are more receptive to Aboriginal people if they are represented by dolls rather than the real thing[4] - the sightseers prefer the 'other' as inanimate entities, because, in Destiny's words, "they don't answer you back"[5]. Ever compliant, Deacon's long-suffering dolls are degraded, shoved unwittingly into uncomfortable scenarios, even mutilated and amputated in order to fit in.

In *Melancholy* (2000), the doll has been decapitated so that it fits into the exotic framework of a watermelon skin. Set on a cheerful gingham tablecloth, the little black doll has been sacrificed in the quest to satisfy non-Indigenous perceptions of the how the domestic and exotic might co-exist. In reality, children of the Stolen Generation were made to fit into an ideal vision of white society ("forced into images"), until the practice of child removal was finally ended just a generation ago. They were educated in western ways, dressed in western clothes and denied access to (in some cases even knowledge of) their Aboriginal heritage.

Destiny Deacon *Over the Fence* 2000 © the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

The psychological trauma of assimilation policies is still being felt, here as a menacing undercurrent cleverly invoked in much of Deacon's imagery. As Marcia Langton has commented in relation to her work: "The tension between assimilating Aboriginal people by extraordinarily brutal means in reality and yet at the same time depicting them as fascinating primitives reflected the need of the older colonists for security and for emblems of cultural uniqueness and difference from Europe".[6] In *Being There* (1998), for example, the two little dolls seem perfectly at home playing with matches in a grubby interior on their "street of dreams". They are of course, playing with fire, living on death row, their innocence (as dolls) contributing to the pathos of the image. An Australian audience recognises the likelihood of adult crime and incarceration, a common enough scenario that conjures the traumatic reality of Aboriginal deaths in custody.

Deacon's recently completed video work, *Over d-fence* (2004), also makes reference, again using dolls, to deaths in custody. The human protagonists stumble through their dreary day in the shabby backyard and adjacent suburban streets, their black dolls/babies pushed around in toy strollers and subjected play/torture that includes hanging by the neck. The fence divides individuals from their pesky neighbours, while also suggesting a better place within or beyond. Though there is little dialogue, the few words spoken are on territorial themes: a little boy looks longingly through the gap in the fence and says that he wishes he could be in there; the bossy woman next door orders the children out of her backyard.

The fence in this work is both a symbol of escape and a barrier, representing both possession and exclusion. In Tracey Moffatt's *Up in the Sky* (1997), the image of the window has a similar symbolic function. The black baby is inside and the nuns outside, yet from a colonialist point of view, the nuns represent the mainstream (inside) and the child, because of its colour, exists on the periphery (outside).

In contrast to Deacon's grungy and earthbound melodramas, Moffatt's images have an otherworldly, ethereal quality that distances them from real-world narratives. Moffatt has consistently eluded categorisation – whether artistic, theoretical or political – pursuing instead a cinematic and universal aesthetic that crosses cultural borders. In a similar way to much of Willie Doherty's work, in particular the new work in this exhibition, *Non-Specific Threat* (2004), the narratives in Moffatt's oeuvre are enigmatic in content, brimming with familiar motifs and feelings, yet defying articulation.

In both artists' work, there is an interest to describe the psychological rather than factual nature of traumatic experience. Whether on the streets of Belfast or in an outback Australian community of misfits, a feeling of malevolence prevails. Similarly, in Moffatt's video *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (1989), an oppressive threat of danger and impending tragedy overshadows the entire drama. These works are possessed by the histories of the place in which they are enacted. Narrative scenarios are implied rather than described, conjured as much by viewers' imagination and association than any significant signposts planted by the artist (in contrast to the loaded symbolism in Deacon's work). While *Up in the Sky* invokes horrific stories from the Stolen Generation, the status of the woman, the baby and of the feral characters playing peripheral roles, is uncertain. The historic, the universal and the specific overlap and intersect, creating a psychological tension that, like Doherty's work, is more closely linked to artistic poetry and cinematic thrillers than didactic or political art. We've all experienced the sense of fear in Hitchcock films and the menacing anxiety that imbues George Miller's *Mad Max* series, just as we know that danger lurks in areas of Northern Ireland and, as construed mythologies of the land have ensured, unknown forces inhabit outback Australia, so these images are familiar because they lie somewhere in-between knowledge and imagination, between history and fiction.

"The *Up in the Sky* pictures look a little like photo documentary, but there is still a surreal quality. Some of the images are in fact what I saw and photographed but most are staged up, set up. I like that people can't tell which is which, I like that there is an 'in-betweeness' about them".[7] This 'in-between' quality that Moffatt refers to, which infuses all the work in *Prepossession*, conveys the affective – emotional and psychological – impact of traumatic histories connected to place and circumstance. These images are haunted, not only by the fact of what may or may not have happened in the locations or situations they depict, but by the audience's existing knowledge of the context.

This possessed knowledge relates to cultural preconception: while Deacon plays on and exaggerates white perceptions of urban Aboriginal existence, Moffatt makes cynical reference to the colonialist mythologising of Australia's desert interior as a harsh and barren land of potential danger. Darren Siwes' settings are those created by the colonists – neo-classical architectural spaces in Adelaide, Perth and London. These urban landscapes are haunted, quite literally, by the ghosts of Indigenous inhabitants.

Tracey Moffatt *Up in the Sky #1* 1997 © the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

As the youngest artist in the exhibition, Siwes has a slightly different approach to the politics of place with regard to land rights and reconciliation. His work is, according to Ian McLean, concerned "with the themes of philosophy, history, colonialism and a type of post-Aboriginal identity that seeks to move beyond the colonialist essentialising of identities and towards more complex and nuanced postcolonial frames of reference".[8] Born in 1968, Siwes has Aboriginal (Indigenous) and Dutch (immigrant) heritage. *Just Is* (2003-04), a play on the word justice, which in the context of Aboriginal Australia is a politically loaded concept, is a phrase that implies compliance – the situation, no matter how wrong, 'just is'. Thus Siwes' project relates to Deacon's, whose compliant dolls are as silent in their protest as Siwes' Aboriginal ghost sentries.

The series was made in Australia (identified by the protagonist/artist standing in the foreground) and England (in which the male figure is in the background). Standing like guardians of an Indigenous presence on sites of historical significance, Siwes' ghosts inhabit a nocturnal slippage zone, in a state, to borrow Moffatt's term, of 'in-betweenness'. They are neither historic nor contemporary figures, neither real nor imaginary. In their translucency (in the tradition of the best ghost stories, we can see straight through them), they subvert photography's rhetorical capacity to infer factual documentation.

Aboriginal culture is revered for its spirituality: while in Moffatt's work the spirits of the land appear, ironically, not to be of ancient Indigenous heritage, but white-skinned nuns (quite likely of Irish heritage), in Siwes' work they are contemporary young men and women wearing the uniform of anonymous city workers – they are dressed for business. In some, the eyes are masked, a theatrical strategy that heightens rather than diminishes their presence: despite their accoutrements, they are no more anonymous than they are invisible. In contrast to the protagonists of Moffatt's and Deacon's vignettes, these characters are not embroiled in vagarious dramas of their own, but insist on an unimpeded visual conversation with us, the viewers. They stand, stiff and still (for metaphoric as well as technical reasons, given that Siwes uses old-fashioned long exposure times to achieve his effect), staring straight into the camera with a quiet determination that is as confronting as it is unnerving. Siwes' figures are prepossessed: they are neither victims nor are they overwhelmed by circumstance, like those in Deacon's and Moffatt's work can be, but standing their ground, watching and waiting.

The waiting continues. Despite increased pubic support and intermittent political attention, forty years since Charles Perkins' high-profile launch of the Aboriginal rights movement, very little has changed in terms of Indigenous standards of living: poverty and disease remain rife, children are under-educated, Aboriginal employment rates and life expectancies are alarmingly lower than those of non-Indigenous Australians. Aboriginal art, ironically, enjoys a high profile internationally, providing a boost to the tourist industry by attracting sightseers from around the globe. However, as the work of Deacon, Moffatt, Siwes and many others reveals, it is the Aboriginal artists themselves who are the authentic site-seers, who have the inside story on Australia's contemporary socio-political landscape.

Felicity Fenner
UNSW

[1] *Forced into images*, 2001, by Destiny Deacon and Virginia Fraser (9 minute video)
[2] For a more detailed discussion on the contemporary role of tradition-based Aboriginal painting, see Felicity Fenner, "Thinking Beyond Abstraction", in *Talking About Abstraction* (Sydney: UNSW, 2004)
[3] Christine Nicholls, "aboriginalism in europe: on the way out?", *Artlink*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2004, 71
[4] the artist re-quoted (from Virginia Fraser, *Photofile* 40, Nov. 1993, 11) by Natali King, "Episodes", *Destiny Deacon: walk and don't look blak* (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004), 19
[5] ibid
[6] Marcia Langton, "The valley of the dolls: Black humour in the art of Destiny Deacon", *Art and Australia*, vol. 35, no. 1, 1997, 100-107
[7] Tracey Moffatt in interview with Gerald Matt, *Tracey Moffatt: Free-Falling*, Lynne Cooke (ed.), (New York: Dia Center for the Arts, 1998)
[8] Ian McLean, "Uncanny: Darren Siwes's *Just Is* series of photographs", *Darren Siwes: Just Is* (Adelaide: Greenaway Art Gallery, 2004)

MARKING TIME AND PLACE:

Liam Kelly interviews Willie Doherty and Frances Hegarty

LK   I would like to begin our discussion by considering your work in relation to the general theme of the exhibition - the relationship between place and trauma. With regard to the importance of location it seems to me that the basis of Fran's work was uprooting, if you like, and that's where the trauma springs from. Whereas you Willie, in a sense, are more rooted, you've got an allegiance to a particular place and aspects of associated memory arising from particular events.

WD   Your suggestion that places are important in my work arises from the decision that I made to continue to work in Derry or even to start making work in Derry. At that time there was a very direct relationship between that place and my work. I used very particular locations like the river and the border, until at a certain point I became slightly dissatisfied with that because I felt that to read the work fully required a certain amount of local knowledge, or at least some knowledge of the history of Derry and its politics. I decided that I would make a change within the work, to play down the references to specific locations that I felt inhibited the reading of my work in some way. More recently, I've used the relationship that I have with particular places and locations as a kind of a starting point in the work and more and more the specifics of place may not be fully evident in the finished work.

LK   But nevertheless I would imagine that viewers elsewhere would pick up the general sense of anxiety and tension in your work. It comes out of place but it moves beyond it as well.

WD   I guess that was the kind of shift that I decided to make within the work. I tried to make visible some of the latent feelings of anxiety or paranoia that I might associate with a particular place. It was through this that I became more interested in the moving image and the possibilities presented by narrative. I tried to use cinematic conventions as a way of both unearthing and visualising some of the anxieties or paranoia I experienced around particular places. Some of the first videos that I
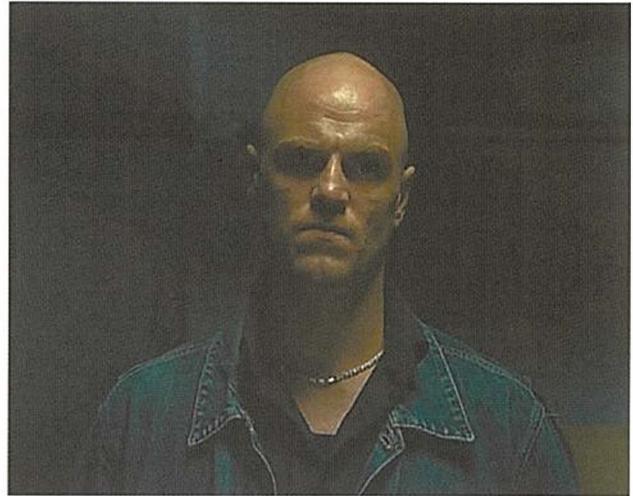
Willie Doherty *Non-Specific Threat* 2004 (still from video)
© the artist, Matt's Gallery, London and Alexander & Bonin, New York
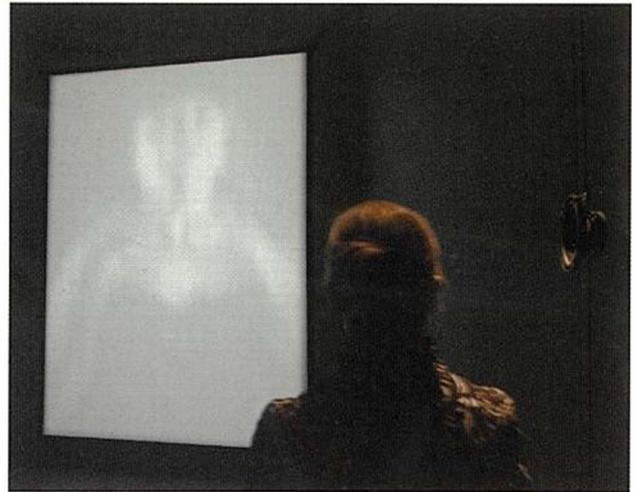
Frances Hegarty *Auto Portrait #2* 2001 © the artist

made were shot at night, so underlying everything was a reference to our fear of the dark, as something that is often used within conventional cinema as an indicator of being in another kind of space or another kind of frame of mind.

LK But the dark neutralises the space as well; it makes it less specific.

WD That was to my advantage, but also I was thinking about this really in terms of the audience and how the audience might read the work.

LK In his essay 'Troubled Memories' for your exhibition at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith, and its not a critical comment that he makes, but he says: "…there is no going forward without going back"[1], meaning that particular locations still inform the work somehow.

WD One of the things that has been happening within my work, as the body of work develops, is this idea of going back or retracing footsteps, of going back to different locations repeatedly. For example I've made a number of works on Craigavon bridge in Derry and I've made a whole series of works in and around the border. I revisited border roads both when they were closed for security reasons and then when they were re-opened. I've also made a number of works in Belfast on the Westlink dual carriageway. The issue of memory, of unearthing or retracing became an important aspect of the work, but as something develops things come in and out of focus. At one moment your attention is on a very specific set of issues and other things take a little bit of a back seat, then other things are fronted again. I guess one of the things that has been recurrent is the idea of particular places and specific locations acting as kind of trigger for a piece of work and initially that's because of some personal associations with a place. I am also concerned with how particular places have a similar role within the public imagination as well as the private imagination. So I try to embrace both possibilities within the work. I'm very conscious of audience and my desire is not to close the work down. So it will be interesting when this work is shown in Australia.

FH I think, Willie, it's really interesting that you mention filmic tropes in your work because I think that gives people another kind of access to your work... and also the high production values are very evident. It's through this really high technical quality that you also make the relationship to film. There is also something in the fractured narrative that is particularly challenging to your audience. We know you are not telling the whole story and we have to use our own recollections, sometimes from film, to fill in. I've often come out of your work where I've continued the narrative.

WD It's encouraging to hear that. Our knowledge of film has been something that I have really tried to use as a strategy within the work in order just to do that very thing. I want to facilitate the audience in having a relationship with the work that is both personal and also allows viewers to enter into this larger idea of a shared cinematic experience. The fact that we are able to share a kind of common memory bank of cinematic images has been really useful to me in terms of being able to create space for the audience to continue the narrative and develop the story.

LK Returning to this aspect of location in your work, Fran. The uprooting that you experienced as a child was what brought the trauma - the problematics of alienation in another country and living in another value system. That sense of loss and confusion, linked to cultural and geographical change, has underpinned your work, I would suggest, all the way through.

FH I suppose in my late teens I was aware of what had happened (being taken as a teenager to live in Scotland) as quite a traumatic experience, but I didn't know how to use that until the late 1980s when the political situation in Britain was so charged it made me re-look at my own identity and my own cultural position. However, that same political situation did allow me to speak about the initial rupture and I was able to use the trauma of my own experience in the work *Voice Over* (1996), which I made in Croatia with refugee women from the former Yugoslavia. I felt I could better identify with their psychological sense of otherness and loss and their isolation in a culturally alien place. The *Auto Portrait* works (2000-04) and latterly *Intent* (2005) certainly deal

between two cultures at the same time. My parents thought emigration was the best thing to do for us, but it meant leaving place and language behind, for themselves too.

LK But there is an attempt in your work all the time to re-engage with that loss and that disconnection and somehow you can never manage to bridge it and it's the disconnection and the continuous desire to attempt to make that closure that sustains the work in many ways.

FH Yes, Yes.

WD I found interesting your describing that kind of innate understanding of language.... you'd forgotten rather than completely lost it; in other words it was possible to retrieve it. I'm interested in that process as well, although I've tried to look at it in broader and more public terms rather than through the private and personal. The work that I had an opportunity to make a few years ago in Chicago, *True Nature* (1999), was made in collaboration with a number of Irish Americans whom I managed to track down in Chicago. Specifically I tried to find people who were second or third generation Irish Americans or who would describe themselves as such, but who had never been in Ireland. I had some very interesting conversations with these people about this place that they had never been to and how they formed and understood their identity as Irish. It was interesting just hearing people talk about the various ways in which Ireland is represented; whether that's through cinematic representation or through the news media, but also through family histories and stories that had passed through several generations about the place they had left behind. Some of it was tinged with romanticism and nostalgia. But most of the people that I spoke to had very specific information that appeared to be intact through generations about a particular house or a particular town. So it was intriguing that these people wanted to try and visualise that in some way. I was interested in the process of how some of that family memory had been mixed up with cinematic images or something that they might have seen in a book as a child and that they remembered very vividly. So all of that layering of information came together. What impressed me most was that these people

had never been to Ireland but they had this very strong sense that they were Irish.

LK There is a parallel strategy in the work that you did on Bloody Sunday, *30th January 1972* (1993). It also deals with the problematics of memory and media coverage of that event.

WD Yes, the difficulties of remembering that specific event. I actually made that work in 1993, predating the subsequent enquiry, which is still ongoing as we speak. And at that time I was really interested in the way in which an event like Bloody Sunday, which was obviously traumatic for the whole community here, how something like that is remembered. So again, I did some interviews on Rossville Street in Derry, where some of the shooting happened. I asked passersby, from a variety of age groups, if they had been there on the day could they tell me what they saw, or if they weren't there, if they could describe a televised or photographic image that they remembered. And again what was interesting was the crossover between the two. Some people who were actually there, when they told me about what they saw switched into describing how they saw it on the television. And people who hadn't been there talked about it as if they were there. It was so real for them. The image itself became some kind of surrogate for the actual experience. That crossing over and blurring was kind of interesting in relation to memory and trauma and the attempt to deal with trauma and the desire not to loose a collective memory of the event. I didn't actually make the work as a contribution to the documentary material that surrounded Bloody Sunday. It was more about this problem of trying to remember a tragic and traumatic event.

LK Fran, Willie has just described those perceptions of Irishness by way of Chicago. Immigration and post colonialism was a feature, among other things, in that particular work *Gold* (1993), linking Derry and Australia.

FH *Gold* came out of a residency I did at the Orchard Gallery and from a specific experience when walking through the security checkpoints in Derry. Coming from Donegal, Derry was a point of origin for that geographical

diaspora and I was familiar with stories about going out through the Foyle by boat for America or Britain. It was always somewhere that held this possibility for me, the possibility of freedom. Whilst in the city itself I realised that these checkpoints where actually paradigms of a certain kind of colonialism that still persisted. I knew this theoretically, but almost needed the experience of going through one in order to think seriously about the idea of how colonialism operated and how a lot of my own people, a lot of Irish people, were to some degree agents of that same colonialism. Australia was probably the furthest point of the diaspora in my own family and on my first visit there in 1992 I shot a lot of footage in the desert and *Gold* now contains some of those sequences as well as the original walk through the Derry security checkpoint.

LK   There are two images from the Australian sequence which stick in my mind and one is of the woman standing on the rock, replacing the usual male figure who looks upon the landscape as if it were a trophy, conquering and owning the landscape somehow, or acquiring it, but this time it's a woman surveying that landscape. The other image is of a woman dipping her hands into the sand and scooping the sand into her skirt.

FH   The image of the woman on the rocks is one of surveying an ostensibly empty landscape. It came from the archive research I did through the British Geographical Society where early explorers so manipulated space that they wholly eradicated the presence of the Aboriginal people. I also traced letters sent by immigrant men and women back home and the tone of voice in those letters was quite different. The men were concerned with this search for material wealth and the women were simply concerned with keeping food on the table and the snakes out. The two concerns seemed totally different. I subsequently videoed the sand sequence in the desert landscape around Uluru, which early settlers had referred to in their letters as the 'dead heart' of the continent, as being empty of any Aboriginal presence. The sequence performed with the ochre sand is an attempt to acknowledge that landscape as in fact an essential part of the cultural map of the 'other'.

Frances Hegarty *Auto Portrait #2* 2001 © the artist

LK   Turning then to the use of the figure or the use of the body in both your practices… with Willie the figure is someone else, as it were, and in more recent works or in all the works actually it's a figure of every man. Willie, your early works were non-figurative. But there is always the sense of personal detachment with regard to the deployment of the figure in latter works, whereas in your work, Fran, your body and indeed your personality are powerfully present, very emotionally present and I was just wondering, Willie, if you could maybe say something about the way that you gradually brought the figure into the work and maybe in particular the work you are showing in the exhibition *Non-Specific Threat* (2004).

WD   I think my first attempts to deal with the figure really came out my desire to replace a voice that had been denied or taken away. And that was really in relation to the implications of the broadcast media ban in the North of Ireland where the voices of a number of organisations were prevented from being heard on television and radio in the attempt to, I think Margaret Thatcher said, deny the terrorists the oxygen supply of publicity. So I made a number of works that used the face or the image of the terrorist, or the person who was designated as a terrorist. These were images that I had sourced from the media, from television or newspaper sources. *They're all the same* (1991), looked at notions of the terrorist as the 'other', being demonised but also inextricably linked to ideas of the landscape and the land itself. At the time, one of the things that I was looking at was an old tourist guidebook to Ireland that was written in the 1930s. It was a companion book for travelling round the country, county by county, and the author actually described 'the natives' of each county as being inextricably linked to the physical nature of the landscape. It was an amazing diatribe of cliché after cliché. So I incorporated some of that into a monologue, describing this face, the face of a terrorist that became a kind of foil for talking about other kinds of issues. So from that desire to replace a forbidden voice, I developed the possibilities of using voiceover and narrative within the work.

The Only Good One is a Dead One (1993) which was the first video work that I made, had two sequences, one shot from a driving car and the other from a static car. What I wanted to do was something that doesn't really happen within conventional cinema or drama, that is to make the perpetrator and the victim the same person. Normally, they never meet and they are certainly not embodied within the same person and so that was an attempt to talk about the complexity of both victimhood, blame and guilt and all of those major issues that continue to dog us here.

From that possibility I saw the opportunity to use the human voice but also these characters that began to emerge as a means of trying to forefront some of those issues. At the time that I made *The Only Good One is a Dead One*, the Northern Ireland Office were running a series of advertisements on television, public information films, designed to ask the population to help the police with any information they had on murders and other kind of violent incidents. But what began to happen at that time, a year or so before the IRA ceasefire, was that through these advertisements you could see a process in which the population was being primed for negotiation. In the first series of ads the figure of the terrorist wasn't ever visible, we only ever saw the victim and the consequences of terrorism. But the terrorist began to emerge as a kind of character within these advertisements until finally this shady figure was shown as having a family and having a place within society.

LK   And is there a connection there with *Non-Specific Threat* that we are going to show in the exhibition as well?

WD   Yes, there is. I was reminded of the Irish context with the post 9/11 attempts to again close down language and close down possibilities of discussion around Islam and around the reasons for a war, the reasons for a conflict. The work *Non-Specific Threat*, although the figure is a white western male as opposed to someone from an Islamic country, references the way that language has been made part of the arena again. And it foregrounds some of the same issues. It was interesting having lived through the troubles here to see many of the same issues and dilemmas being replayed again in another kind of conflict.

To go back to the point that Fran was talking about earlier, characterising your work as being private in a way or coming from a set of personal issues. I've always

understood your work as being that but also about a set of very public issues. In a sense it's about the voice of the Irish in Britain at a time when it was very difficult to have an Irish voice in Britain or just to actually speak with an Irish accent and to be known as Irish or to be visible as Irish in any way.

FH   To be Irish in the 1980s in Britain was very difficult. I suppose what I meant about my work being personal is that it comes from a personal experience of the political and social. Of course, as you say, it reflects public issues as well.

LK   Just to go back to my original question which had to do with, in your case Fran, your personality and the body being heavily involved in your art practice. There is an absorption of trauma into the body as you use it. You continuously harness and register it in your work. You have said "I have to be both subject and object of my text, while recognising that the work is object and subject as well and so may usurp me".[3] Could you just talk a little bit about your involvement of the body and your own predicament?

FH   It's quite complicated. Okay, I think to make a representation of yourself as a woman has been especially problematic as there have been and are so many competing discourses around. I have always been interested in being in the moment, the real time of the work. In the 1980s I made a number of performance works in public, but at a certain point I became uncomfortable with my position as a live presence in the work and realised that the recorded image offered me another type of control and that the initial performance was in itself as structured as any post production editing I might do. This allowed me to utilise technology and start to use it to mediate representations of myself. The temporal element of both forms is crucial, but I would suggest that the technological image that I finally manifest is so manipulated that I feel personally distanced from it. It reinforces what I have actually set up in terms of the real time performance and perhaps allows the psychological dimension to come through. I can't act that state: the technology allows me to heighten what I've set up.

LK   And that brings me to your series of self portraits, and in particular *Auto Portrait* (2000-4), the work that you are going to show in Australia, and the way that there is this condensed personal litany – a personal chronology and that it is paralleled on the screen by this physiognomy of stress and the technology has allowed you to do that.

FH   Yes, that's right. When I started to make the *Auto Portrait* trilogy and was shooting that work I was very aware of myself as an image. I don't go into that space of performance, mental or physical, for therapeutic reasons. I'm watching the monitor and I'm looking at myself. I'm working out how I am going to edit this, how long this piece is going to be. All of those things are playing in my mind as I am making the work. Also to be in the work performatively has allowed some of these aphonic or, if you like, hysterical gestures to happen, in the knowledge that I can manipulate them subsequently through technology. In the installative form of *Auto Portrait #2* the sound track is another element that's physically pulled out from the video image to allow the audience to negotiate the assault. People can listen to what's ostensibly a life history told in minutes in a quiet way or they can stand between the image and the sound and let themselves be assaulted by both. I was aware from the beginning that I was going to implicate the audience between those two elements.

LK   And, of course, for both of you editing and structuring visual rhythm is terribly important as well?

WD/FH Absolutely.

LK   Technology, however, is only as good as the content it supports; it's in the service of ideas and feelings isn't it? It's not necessarily a law onto itself; it's how you deploy it, but it facilitates what you want to do.

FH   I found it transformative. I'm so glad that I have had the opportunity to use video and photography and those processes, because they indicate this temporal immediacy both for me while I am editing it and also for the audience when viewers are engaged in it.

LK   It's the inclusion of time isn't it?

FH
It includes time in a very, very immediate way. It can have all sorts of spatial connotations as well within its installative form, but in itself it has this close up immediacy which suits my work in that I am trying to affect my audience, affect them psychologically and physically in the viewing space. So, the use of technology is a bonus for me in this arena.

LK
Finally to return full circle to the relationship between land and politics. Everything in Ireland comes back to questions associated with the land. In the North of Ireland we mark our streets with territorial signs and symbols, and as such it reflects our insecurities as much as anything else.

FH
One of the things I specifically remember is meeting an Aboriginal writer in Australia, and her asking why do we in the West need to erect statues and plaques to mark history and territory, whilst they the Aboriginal people are so knowledgeable of the history of their landscape that they don't need to mark it in that way. I suppose in a place like Ireland there is an equivalent feeling - families know their land and landscape.

Derry, January, 2005

1   Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith "Troubled Memories", in *Willie Doherty: False Memory*. Merrill Publishers Ltd, London, in association with IMMA, Dublin, 2002
2   Sharon Kivland "Elle vit sa vie (she lives her life)" in *Frances Hegarty: Selected Works 1970-2004*. Gandon Editions, Kinsale, Co Cork, Ireland, 2004
3   ibid

Frances Hegarty exhibition installation

ARTISTS & WORKS IN EXHIBITION

DESTINY DEACON
Born 1957 of Ku-Ku, Far North Queensland
& Erub/Mer Torres Strait Islander peoples
Lives and work in Melbourne

Being There 1998
Light jet print from Polaroid
67 x 100 cm, edition of 15
Courtesy Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

Melancholy 2000
Light jet print from Polaroid
80 x 100 cm, edition of 15
Collection Gregory Woolley, Sydney

Over the Fence 2000
Light jet print from Polaroid
80 x 100 cm, edition of 15
Courtesy Dr Dick Quan, Sydney

Over d-fence 2004
DVD
Duration 9 minutes
Editor: Virginia Fraser, edition of 15
Courtesy Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

WILLIE DOHERTY
Born 1959, Derry, Northern Ireland
Lives and works in Derry

Non-Specific Threat 2004
Single channel video installation with sound
Duration 7 minutes 42 seconds
Courtesy the artist, Matt's Gallery, London
and Alexander & Bonin, New York

FRANCES HEGARTY
Born Teelin, Co. Donegal, Ireland
Lives and works in Sheffield, England
Auto Portrait #2 2001
Video installation with sound
Dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

WILLIAM KENTRIDGE
Born 1955, Johannesburg, South Africa
Lives and works Johannesburg

Felix in Exile 1994
Animated film: 35mm film; DVD/video
and laser disc transfer
Duration 8 minutes, 43 seconds
Drawing, photography and direction:
William Kentridge
Editing: Angus Gibson
Sound design: Wilbert Schubel
Music: composition for string trio by
Philip Miller (performed by Peta-Ann
Holdcroft, Marjan Vonk-Stirling, Jan
Pustejovsky); 'Go Tlapsha Didiba' by
Motsumi Makhene (performed by
Sibongile Khumalo)
Series of 40 drawings in charcoal, pastel
and gouache on paper, dimensions variable.
Courtesy the artist

TRACEY MOFFATT
Born 1960, Brisbane, Australia
Lives and works in New York, USA

Up in the Sky 1997 (#1)
Off set print
61 x 76 cm, edition of 60
Collection Reg and Sally Richardson,
Sydney

Up in the Sky 1997 (#9)
Off set print
61 x 76 cm, edition of 60
Collection Reg and Sally Richardson,
Sydney

Up in the Sky 1997 (#14)
Off set print
61 x 76 cm, edition of 60
Collection Reg and Sally Richardson,
Sydney

Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy 1989 [Belfast
only]
35mm film
Duration 17 minutes
Courtesy Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

JO RACTLIFFE
Born Cape Town, South Africa
Lives and works in Johannesburg

Vlakplaas: 2 June 1999 (Drive-by-Shooting)
1999-2002
DVD with pigment print photograph on
cotton paper (40 x 225 cm)
Overall dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

DARREN SIWES
Born 1968, Adelaide, Australia
Lives and works in Adelaide

*The Black & White Manor of Mrs Jenny
Ticks* 2003
Cibachrome print
100 x 120 cm
Courtesy Art Greenaway Gallery, Adelaide

Just Is Ectothereality 2004
Cibachrome print
100 x 120 cm
Courtesy Art Greenaway Gallery, Adelaide

The Tangled Skeins Of The Hoi Polloi 2004
Cibachrome print
120 x 100 cm
Courtesy Art Greenaway Gallery, Adelaide

Just Is Impoortaintly Too 2003
Cibachrome print
100 x 120 cm
Courtesy Art Greenaway Gallery, Adelaide