

# Strands 1

# Time out of Mind

Information and ideas to explore the exhibition  
Prepared by artist **Christine Mackey**

## Introduction

*Strands* is a series of information booklets devised in response to IMMA's exhibitions where an artist is invited to develop a range of responses to works selected from the exhibition. The purpose of this series is to provide information and ideas in response to works from IMMA's exhibitions – from the Collection, temporary exhibitions and loans – to encourage observation, discussion and making.

This booklet has been developed by artist Christine Mackey in collaboration with IMMA's Education and Community Department. She has drawn out *strands* from the exhibition which reflect her particular interests and responses. They are not intended to be comprehensive, but to prompt further enquiry and response from individuals and groups and adults and children of all ages before, during or after a visit to the exhibition.

Lisa Moran  
Curator: Education and Community Programmes

### Christine Mackey

Christine Mackey is an artist and independent researcher who employs diverse disciplines, subject matter and tactics in devising works that can generate different kinds of knowledge of place – their hidden histories and ecological formations. Using diverse graphic sources and quasi-scientific methods, her work explores the interactive potential of art as a research tool and its capacity for social and environmental change.

She has a BA in Sculpture from the National College of Art and Design, Dublin, an MA in Time based and Performance Studies from Dartington College of Art, England and was recently awarded a practice based PhD from the University of Ulster, Belfast.

<http://christinemackey.com>  
[www.leitrimsculpturecentre.ie](http://www.leitrimsculpturecentre.ie)

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*Untitled (Vegetation Room X)*, 2002  
resin and bronze powder  
dimensions: 250 x 230 x 245 cm  
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art

# Cristina Iglesias Untitled (Vegetation Room X)



*Untitled (Vegetation Room X)* belongs to a series of works titled *Vegetation Rooms*. These large-scale environments are constructed from numerous segments cast from the same mould, to resemble various types of vegetation and biological matter, arranged either to line passageways or to create enclosures (or labyrinths). Some works are conceived for the gallery, while other works from this series are sited in public spaces. Each of these 'rooms' are uniquely formed and express a range of textures, colour and light depending on the quality of materials and how they are situated in a space. *Untitled (Vegetation Room X)* is an example of one such constructed space, whose walls, in this instance, are decorated with casts of repeated motifs of marine matter, bamboo, eucalyptus, decaying leaves and octopus tentacles. These decorative forms are magnified to create the illusion of an underwater landscape that the viewer can walk in, whilst almost touching the work as they pass through the space. This installation recalls the dramatic ornamentation of Baroque architecture that plays tricks with perspective. In Iglesias' installation, often what you see is not what it appears, particularly in terms of materials. For example, this installation work might appear as bronze but is actually made from a much lighter substance – resin, which has been lightly covered with bronze powder. Resin is a manipulative material that can mimic the visual properties of other materials and objects. In these ways, organic and architectural references create complex spatial illusions that blur the distinctions between natural and constructed space.

**Cristina Iglesias**  
b. 1956, San Sebastian, Spain.  
Lives and works in Madrid

Cristina Iglesias is preparing a project for the 2012 Sydney Biennial and a large travelling retrospective exhibition, which will debut at the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid in January 2013. She is also working on two important commissions: a garden labyrinth for INHOTIM (Institute for Contemporary Art and Botanical Garden) in Minas Gerais in Brazil, and a work for the city of Toledo in Spain, which will celebrate the city's Christian, Jewish and Muslim cultural traditions, in collaboration with the public art commissioning agency Artangel. She has participated in a number of international exhibitions and represented Spain at the 1986 and 1993 Venice Biennales. She has had solo exhibitions at the Kunsthalle Berne (1991); the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (1994); and the Guggenheim Bilbao (1998). She has exhibited in various international art shows including the exhibition *Metropolis* at the Martin Gropius-Bau, Berlin (1991); the Carnegie International, Pittsburgh (1995) and SITE Santa Fe's 2006 Biennial.

## Background to Cristina Iglesias’ process

Working primarily in sculpture and installation, Cristina Iglesias’ practice also encompasses printmaking, photography and video.

Her practice evolved in the context of developments in sculpture in the 1970s and ‘80s where greater emphasis was placed on the site and context in which the art work is presented. Iglesias draws on a wide range of influences from architecture, literature and theatre. Other influences include *Arte Povera* and the *Trompe l’oeil* of Baroque Architecture.

Drawing on such influences, Iglesias’ installations make use of a range of industrial materials and techniques, such as textured concrete, cast iron, glass, resin and braided steel cable. Once cast and moulded, these materials are forged into architectural components, such as decorative facades, screens and walls. Physical structures magnify abstract patterns and textures found in nature, such as plant motifs.

Recurrent themes in her work include water, mirrors, labyrinths, lattices, geometric structures and the representation of artificial topographies (arrangement of natural and artificial features) which are reconfigured in the construction of ‘spaces’ within a ‘space’. In the gallery space this takes the form of a room within a room, often constructed like labyrinths, with walls masquerading as forests and hanging canopies. These maze-like structures direct the viewer to follow a path that enables them to walk around, under and sometimes through the works.

## For discussion

What do you first notice about the materials and scale of this installation?

Are the materials natural or man-made?

How are materials used in this work?

Is the artist appealing to senses other than sight with these works?

What is immediately recognisable in these works?

What is made different by the choice of scale of this installation as you walk through the space?

What types of natural objects are referred to here?

How has the artist used methods of display to enable us to experience the artwork?

## Key words

### ARTE POVERA

Literally meaning ‘poor art’, Arte Povera is a term coined by Italian critic Germano Celant to describe the work of a group of Italian artists in the 1960s who adopted an experimental, anti-establishment approach to their practice, reflecting a broader radical tendency in art in the late 1960s. Their approach involved working with raw, organic and found materials, employing a highly experimental, open approach to process and technique, dissolving the boundaries between the exhibition space and the world outside.

### BAROQUE

(1600–1750) an historical period and artistic style in sculpture, painting, architecture, literature and music spanning the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Baroque painting and sculpture used elaborate ornamentation, movement and energy to express emotion and tension.

### CASTING

Refers to the processes for reproducing individual man-made objects, found objects or objects moulded from clay and/or wax. A mould or impression is built up around the original form and used as the pattern into which the new material (such as bronze) is set. With some methods, such as the use of hot metal, the original work perishes during the casting process.

### CONSTRUCTION

Refers to the process of building a whole sculpture from various components, which may be all the same or of different materials.

### MINIMALISM

Is an abstract art movement developed in the USA in the 1960s which rejected the emotional and expressive tendencies of Abstract Expressionism, emphasising the use of simple, geometric forms and modern materials drawn from industry.

### MOULDING

Refers to the process of taking a mould or negative from an original work or object and then casting a reproduction of the original from the negative mould. Moulding can also refer to the manipulation of pliable materials such as clay and wax to hand-build a form.

### TROMPE L’OEIL

Is an artistic technique, usually associated with the Baroque period, which involves creating an illusion of three-dimensional space, often in the form of a mural, on a two-dimensional plane using perspective and foreshortening.

## Activities

### *Recording Material Play*

Create playful artworks that explore the relationship between nature and our everyday environments. You could experiment with a range of natural materials and everyday objects that you find in your home and outdoors. For example, you can create wallpaper from cabbage leaves or lampshades from orange peel stitched together. Record in a sketchbook all of the different processes involved in making these pieces, and note the sensory differences made to them over time as they decay (their smell, what they look like or feel to the touch).

### *Edible Textures*

Iglesias uses a range of techniques to create her installations such as **construction, casting and moulding**. These are very old techniques, which can be explored through a range of inexpensive materials.<sup>1</sup>

#### Relief Textures 1

Collect a range of natural materials such as twigs, leaves, stones, flowers, etc. Make a very basic pastry mix. Roll out the pastry to one or two inches in depth. Arrange your materials onto the surface of the pastry and when satisfied with your composition, gently press down your collected material into the pastry. Once you are sure an impression is made – lift the materials from the pastry. Bake in an oven. When cool eat and enjoy your edible landscape.

#### Relief Texture 2

Follow the same steps as above, but this time substitute clay for the pastry. Modelling clay can be purchased in small bags from art shops around the country. Roll out the clay similar to the pastry. However, this time you are going to build a wall of clay – perhaps two to three inches in height with the clay. You can support this wall by adding extra bits of clay at the back of the wall. Again arrange your objects to create a composition, press gently into the clay – making sure you have an impression. Lift the objects out – careful not to destroy the original impression. You are now going to mix up dried Gypsum plaster or Plaster of Paris. Follow the instructions on the pack. Once mixed to the right consistency, pour your mixture into the relief – careful not to go beyond the height of the wall. Leave to dry overnight. Remove the wall of clay and turn over the block – with the clay side facing up. You should be able to peel back the clay, revealing an inverted or hollow impression of the objects you cast. Seal the clay with a light wash of PVA glue. You can now play more with your relief cast by either painting it with acrylic

paint and/or coating it with glue and sprinkling a range of powered paints or glitter – similar to the way Iglesias’ sprinkles bronze dust onto to her works.

### *Arte Povera Research*

Arte-Povera (1962–1972) may provide a starting point by delving into the various works and artists involved in this movement, their witty and often political constructions and their use of ‘everyday’ materials and craft techniques such as knitting and sewing – emphasising the hand-made. Suggested artists to explore include: Luciano Fabro, Pier Paola Calzolari, Jannis Kounellis, Giuseppe Penone, Mario Merz, Alighiero Boetti and Marisa Merz. Interestingly, this movement, originating in Italy, emerged during a recession (not unlike today) as the promises of commodity capitalism began to falter. Affected by this shift, these artists moved away from the slick, commercial language that typified American art at this time. The historical context of any art movement more than likely has its roots with the prevailing social and economic order at that time and may provide a starting point in terms of understanding how philosophical, political and cultural contexts affect art and can become a source of inspiration for artists.



## Further Explorations

Allusion to nature, whether real and/or imagined, is a repeated motif in many of Iglesias' works, whereby thick patterns of flora and fauna cover a range of architectural elements such as walls, screens and ceilings. These elements, when forged together, allude to, or suggest, a 'green space', whether they are constructed as an enclosed garden, forest path, suspended canopy, or as plants found floating in river beds or contained in boxes. This is the case in her more recent installation, *Jardin en el Mar* (2012), which was installed on the sea-bed in the Gulf of California and documented over a four-year period by the film-maker Thomas Riedelsheimer.<sup>2</sup>

As well as applying a range of sculptural techniques to create these vast and intricate 'walks' through public and exhibition installations, Iglesias has also made films and presented photographs of miniature models and serigraphs (or screen prints) evoking similar themes. For example, *Diptych (XV-XXII)* (2005), are works based on models of sculptures and constructed from paper, cardboard, tape and photographs. These montages are re-configured as landscapes, which Iglesias then photographs. These images are enlarged and screen printed onto copper panels. Together with the sculptures themselves, the photo-silkscreens create an illusion of spatial depth and help to blur the distinction between natural environment and constructed space even further.

*Pozos I-V* (2011) consists of five large cubes of metal to create a series of 'wells'. The sculptures bring to mind Minimalism, however, as the viewer comes closer and looks over the sides of the squares, deep cavities lined with tangled roots and ropey vines are found within each structure. Water swells and settles as if each cube was an actual well. The sound of the water produces a sense of awareness of the present. In *Pozos I-V*, time follows a circular movement, created by the repetitive cycle of flowing water. Aljibes (wells) and fountains were important elements in traditional Spanish and Moorish architecture. They were usually located in outdoor courtyards, surrounded by the inner walls of the building, a practice also prevalent in houses in Latin American and Caribbean colonies. With this reference in mind, *Pozos I-V* blurs the margins between sculpture and architecture, as is often the case in many of Iglesias' installations.

*Garden Piece* (2010) is a variation on the cube concept. In this public art work the piece is located in a landscape and, similar to many contemporary buildings, is covered in mirror-like reflecting glass. The mirrored walls reflect the surrounding landscape. Some of her recent projects in public spaces include the *Hanging Ceiling* that she made in the Conference Centre in Barcelona, a reflecting pool at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp and the new entrance doorway in the Museo del Prado in Madrid, 2006-07, made in collaboration with the architect Rafael Moneo.

<sup>1</sup> Barry Midgley, ed., *The Complete Guide to Sculpture, Modelling and Ceramics: techniques and materials*, Chartwell Books, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> See [www.dokfest-muenchen.de/filme\\_view\\_web.php?fid=5119&lang=en](http://www.dokfest-muenchen.de/filme_view_web.php?fid=5119&lang=en)

## Further reading

### publications

*Cristina Iglesias*, La Fábrica, 2012

*Cristina Iglesias*, Ediciones Polígrafa, 2010

DC: *Cristina Iglesias*, Köln: Walter König, 2007

Iwona Blazwick, *Cristina Iglesias*, Polígrafa, 2003

Javier Maderuelo, *Cristina Iglesias: Cinco Proyectos (Escultura)*, T.F. Editores, 1996

### websites

[www.mariangoodman.com/artists/cristina-iglesias/](http://www.mariangoodman.com/artists/cristina-iglesias/)

[www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/cristina-iglesias-8673](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/cristina-iglesias-8673)

[www.whitechapelgallery.org/exhibitions/passports-great-early-buys-from-the-british-council-collection/cristina-iglesias](http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/exhibitions/passports-great-early-buys-from-the-british-council-collection/cristina-iglesias)

*Parachute*, 2005  
parachute and gannet  
dimensions variable  
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art

# Dorothy Cross Medusae & Parachute

*Medusae*  
Collaborators: artist Dorothy Cross and Professor Tom Cross, zoologist.  
Project: research into the life of Irish naturalist Maude Delap (1866–1953) and analysis of the biomechanics of the box jellyfish *Chironex fleckeri*.

In 2001 Dorothy Cross received a SciArt Research and Development Project Award, which enabled her to develop a collaborative project *Medusae* with her brother Tom Cross, Professor in Zoology at University College Cork.

*Medusae*, 2000  
Dorothy Cross with Professor Tom Cross  
video  
duration: 30 min  
courtesy Kerlin Gallery, Dublin and Dorothy Cross, 2012

Cross focused her research on the life of a Victorian amateur naturalist, Maude Delap (1866–1953), who succeeded in collecting and breeding jellyfish in captivity on Valentia Island, off the coast of County Kerry. Tom Cross investigated the swimming techniques (biomechanics) of a deadly species of jellyfish known as the *Chironex fleckeri*. Both subjects were not well-known before Dorothy and Tom began this journey of discovery.

They travelled to Australia to net a selection of the jellyfish alive, which they then brought into a science laboratory. They made a number of plexi-glass tanks in which the jellyfish were placed to record their movements using underwater cameras. Tom Cross succeeded in taking the first ever DNA fingerprint of the *Chironex fleckeri*.

The resulting 30-minute film, titled *Medusae* (the Latin term for jellyfish), captures the movements of the jellyfish, interspersed with graphs, notes, drawings and charts of Delap's historical experiments. The visual style of the film changes between the art and science-based sections. In the artistic segments, the camera zooms in on the jellyfish accompanied by the eerie sounds of the glass harmonica. Then the camera pans out for the laboratory-science shots, including segments with the scientists coaxing the lethal box jellyfish to perform for the underwater camera in the laboratory pool. Narration of their respective art and science sections by Dorothy and Tom lend the piece a documentary feel, yet the central sequence of Fiona Shaw's reading of Delap's research notes, accompanied by the flickering eerie movements of the jellyfish, unites *Medusae's* art/science divide.

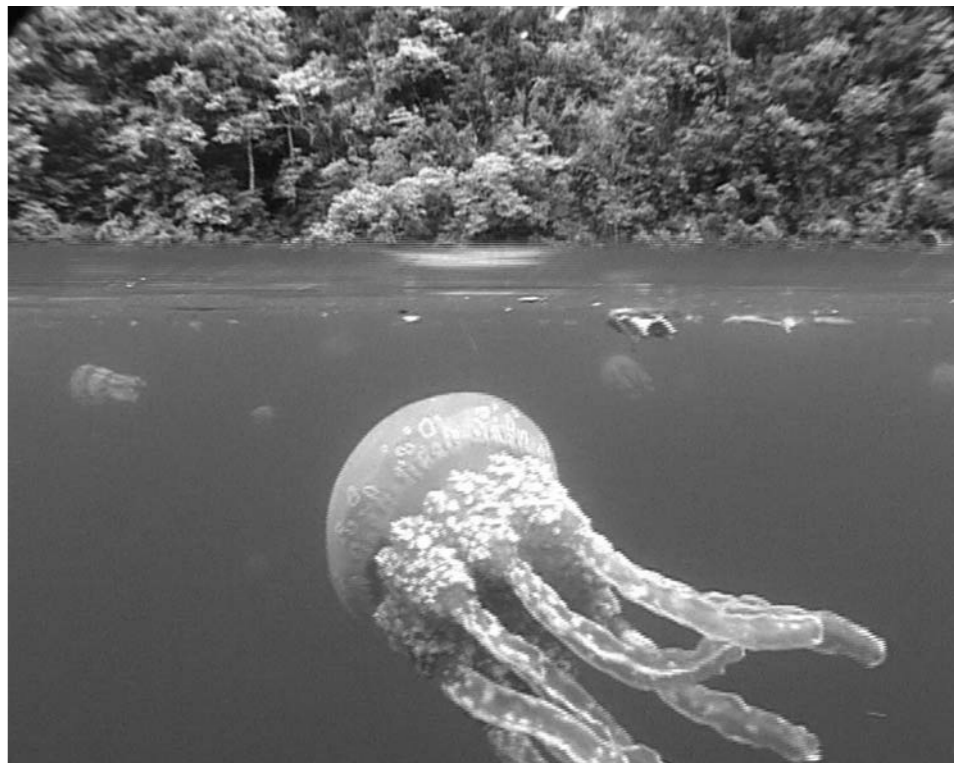
### *Parachute*

This work was made in response to a gannet found on the seashore, which Cross subsequently had preserved by a taxidermist. The gannet is attached to a blue parachute (the army use blue parachutes because they are invisible during flight on a clear day) and his beak is pointed downwards, just inches from the floor. In this work, Cross explores the territory of flight and human entrapment – the collision between our inability to fly in relation to the flight of birds.

### Dorothy Cross

b.1956 Cork, lives and works in Connemara, Ireland

Dorothy Cross received a BA from Leicester Polytechnic, England in 1979 and an MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute, California in 1982. Solo exhibitions include: *Stalactite*, Frith Street Gallery, London (2011); *Comma*, Bloomberg Space, London (2009); *Antarctica*, Wolverhampton Art Gallery (2008); *Land Scape*, Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, Dublin (2008); *Sapiens*, Kerlin Gallery, Dublin (2007); and *Dorothy Cross*, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2005). Selected group exhibitions include: *Underwater*, Towner Gallery, Eastbourne (2010); *POOL*, Kerlin Gallery, Dublin (2010); *Boule To Braic*: Curated by Richard Wentworth, Lisson Gallery, London (2009); and *A Duck for Mr Darwin*, The Baltic, Gateshead (2009). She is represented by the Kerlin Gallery in Dublin and Frith Street Gallery in London. Awards include the SciArt Project Award for a collaborative project *Medusae* with her brother Tom Cross in 2005 and the Gulbenkian Galapagos Award in 2008.



## Background to Dorothy Cross’ process

‘Making strange’ is a term that Dorothy Cross often uses to describe her practice, stating that ‘the value of art making should be in its very “strangeness” in order to engage fully with an audience.’<sup>1</sup> This notion of the ‘strange’ or the **uncanny** has historical precedence in contemporary art practice from Dada (1916–1922) to Surrealism (from the 1920s) and in the work of Sigmund Freud (1856–1839), who founded the discipline of psychoanalysis. These combined literary and visual practices experimented with the unconscious mind through new modes of expression in response to the social and political affairs at that time. They introduced a range of new techniques such as **frottage** (rubblings of textured surfaces on paper), **automatism** (spontaneous activities such as painting, drawing and writing without conscious thought or intention), and the **readymade** (the use of everyday and common objects, such as an iron or a shovel, which challenged conventional art making). The most famous example of the readymade is Marcel Duchamp’s (1887–1968) *Fountain* (1917), which was a porcelain urinal signed under the fictional persona of R. Mutt.

These practices attempted to challenge the prevailing order or ‘world view’ of conventional reasoning and logic. This is called a **paradigm** – which can mean that we take as a given certain cultural beliefs, values and behaviours as ‘true’ and the ‘norm’.<sup>2</sup> ‘Making strange’ is a creative and philosophical strategy that Cross applies to her practice which comprises a range of media, including sculpture, photography, video, installation, musical performances and public work. Her practice involves the manipulation of materials through different kinds of processes, such as casting and the re-use of ‘found’ objects, be they personal (family heirlooms), domestic (tables) or even things she finds washed up at sea, all of which are transfigured into new contexts. Her motivation lies in the belief that objects can hold more than one meaning and that these meanings change over time and/or in combination with other objects.

**Bricolage** is a term used to describe this process, whereby works constructed from a combination of various materials can inspire new meanings. For example, during the 1990s, Cross produced two extended series of sculptural works, using cured cowhide and stuffed snakes, which drew on these animals’ rich store of symbolic associations across cultures, to investigate the construction of sexuality and subjectivity. More recently, she has developed large-scale public events and

projects, most memorably *Ghostship* (1998), which was a commission of the Nissan Art Project in association with the Irish Museum of Modern Art. For a number of weeks, a decommissioned light-ship, moored off Scotsman’s Bay, was illuminated through the use of phosphoros paint.

Since Cross’ move to Connemara in 2007, the sea and its inhabitants – such as sharks, sea-birds, whales and jellyfish – provide much inspiration. These aquatic creatures are creatively juxtaposed with human beings, which has the effect of crossing social and political boundaries between nature and culture by ascribing new meaning to things we overlook or take for granted. In this respect, many of Cross’ works take on an ecological role by creating a platform that examines the place of human beings within the natural world.

## Some questions to consider

What are your immediate reactions to the film *Medusae*?

Is it shot in colour or black and white?

How does the soundtrack relate to the visual imagery?

What sorts of film techniques does the artist use (e.g. close-up views, awkward angles, slowing down the frames, dramatic lighting)?

How long is the film?

What do you think this film is about?

What particular issues is the artist concerned with?

What does the work make you think about the sea and jellyfish?

How does the work *Parachute* make you feel?

Is there a relationship between the actual parachute and the bird?

What is the role of colour in this installation?

## For discussion

*Medusae* and *Parachute* are very different works, partly because of the materials that they are composed of. They do, however, share a thematic link – that of the sea and our connection and/or disconnection with nature.

How do these works draw out such ideas and what role does the material, both man-made and natural, play in these works?

How do you feel about animals as material used in an arts context?

Do you think this is art?

Remembering the early discussion on Cross’ practice in relation to the ‘uncanny’ and the ‘strange’, what do you think about manipulating dead material into an art object?

Dorothy Cross describes her art objects as characters – animate (filmed jellyfish) and inanimate (dead birds). The term character is suggestive of a play. These characters/objects she uses are acting out a different kind of story in relation to us.

What do you think the artist is trying to communicate to us in relation to nature and our role in and with nature?

Do we have a role?

*Parachute* is a good example of bricolage in practice: an artwork composed of different and unusual materials, materials that may be considered old, useless, devalued and of no particular value. Why does Cross overturn these conventions by reclaiming the useless and creating unusual juxtapositions of objects in new and different ways?

What ideas do you think the artist is trying to communicate to us in relation to the animal kingdom?

Do you think there is a connection between us and them?

Are there other themes or elements in these works that Cross explores?

How does Cross draw from history in relation to Maude Delap and the materials she uses to construct her works?

Having viewed *Medusae* do you think that there is a relationship between science and art?

Art, like science, can be about revealing new thoughts, ideas or researching the unknown. This suggests that image making can also generate new knowledge. What have these works revealed to you that you may not have known before?

Can collaboration increase and/or strengthen the work of an artist?

## Key words

### AUTOMATISM

A term appropriated from psychiatry by the Surrealist artists to describe a technique to access the unconscious, which involved automatic actions and involuntary gestures to produce spontaneous drawings, writings and/or paintings.

### BRICOLAGE

A technique where a variety of materials (found objects, waste materials, etc.) are combined to construct an artwork.

### CHIRONEX FLECKERI BOX JELLYFISH

A venomous specious of jellyfish found in the south eastern Indian ocean.

### CYANOTYPE

A form of photogram which produces a cyan-blue colour due to the chemicals used. This process was favoured in the production of technical, architectural and engineering drawings, also known as ‘blue prints’.

### FROTTAGE

A technique which involves taking rubbings of textured surfaces on paper using materials such as pencil, charcoal, crayon or pastel.

### MEDUSAE

Plural for Medusa, this is the Latin term for jellyfish and refers to a form of jellyfish, also known as cnidarian, which is characterised by an umbrella-shaped body. In Greek mythology, Medusa is one of three Gorgon sisters. She had snakes for hair and anyone who looked at her was turned to stone.

### PARADIGM

A pattern, model or framework to understand experience.

### PHOTOGRAM

A process of photographic printmaking without the use of a camera by placing an object on light-sensitive paper and exposing it to direct light.

### READYMADE

A term used in manufacturing to distinguish between handmade and manufactured goods, appropriated by French artist Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) to describe the selection and modification of a manufactured object by an artist to create an artwork.

### UNCANNY

A term associated with Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and the discipline of psychoanalysis (Ger. ‘Das Unheimliche’ – unhomely) to describe how something familiar can simultaneously appear strange.

## Activities

### *Walking the landscape*

Although Dorothy Cross travels to far and exotic places, her connection to the place she lives provides the background and stimulus to much of her work. As a starting point, and by way of familiarising oneself with the methods and tools that Cross applies in her practice, specifically her relationship to the landscape she inhabits, consider taking a walk in your locale – whether that be in a street, on the seashore, by a river or in a forest. Bring a bag and collect a range of materials that you find en route – both natural and man-made materials. Take these home and look at each object one at a time. While looking at these objects – consider their size, texture, what they are made of, colour and possible use. Use these materials as they are and construct a three-dimensional object (or character) by combining/attaching these materials together, using glue, string or nails. Alternatively, if you would prefer to work on a flat sheet of card/paper (this is technically called a collage), arrange the various objects that are suggestive of the place where you have been.

### *Printing, and drawing ‘characters’ from the landscape*

As discussed previously in relation to Cross’ practice, many of her projects develop from and expand on existing works. For example, she made a series of prints from jellyfish by laying these characters on linen. An interesting way of making prints directly from the objects that you have collected is to develop a series of sun prints. This involves using paper which has been coated with light sensitive materials.<sup>3</sup> When this paper has been exposed to the sun it produces an imprint of the object that is placed on the paper. This particular process is technically called **cyanotype** or **photogram**. It was developed in the early nineteenth century by the English scientist and astronomer, Sir John Herschel; however, it was the botanist Anna Atkins who introduced this technique to photography. She created a limited series of cyanotype books that documented ferns and other plant life from her extensive seaweed collection. The procedure works in the following way: specimens/objects are placed on top of the coated paper and exposed to sunlight, where the exposure to the sunlight creates a blue silhouette effect on the paper. You will know when it is ready because the paper will change to an odd, dull grey colour. Bring the print inside and wash it in a bath of cold water. Place the print between sheets of paper with a heavy object to hold it in place so that it dries flat. Alternatively, why not use vegetable and fruit matter to create a series of prints? To achieve this, slice some tomatoes, onions, pears, etc., in half and lay these down on sheets of paper for a short period of time.

### *Frottage*

Using the same material that you found on your walk, consider drawing these objects using the frottage method as discussed in relation to Dada and Surrealism. Frottage is a method whereby you place a sheet of paper over the object and, using a 3B graphite pencil or darker, you rub the pencil directly over the paper which covers the object. Alternatively, wrap the object in paper and make rubbings of the object. Unfold the sheet – does your drawing resemble the object? Experiment with different paper and drawing materials. On your next walk bring some sheets of paper and take rubbings of the various objects you encounter on route. Consider texture and try to make as many rubbings as possible of the textures you find in your environment.

### *Water pools and jars*

Although most of us do not have access to underwater camera equipment, this should not prevent us from exploring water, water pools, rock pools, rivers and the sea. And, if city-bound, fill jam jars with tap water. Place different objects in these jars. How do these objects appear? Are they stretched or do they look smaller than normal? Does the colour of the object change? Place a variety of objects in jars with water and take photographs of these things or, if you have access to a video camera, record how the light falls and animates both natural and man-made materials.

### *Historical, domestic and human artefacts*

Maude Delap proved to be a fascinating and rich character who inspired Cross to make a variety of work in response to her life, her work and her research on jellyfish. Perhaps there is a historical character or even a person in your family history that inspires you or someone you would like to know more about. For a family member, ask relatives for information, photographs or materials associated with this person. The Internet, public libraries and National Cultural Institutions, such as the History Museum and the National Archives, are good sources of historical information. Questions that will prompt further investigation may include: Is the person male/female? What century did they live in? What was going on at that time? Where did they live? Construct a story for this person using both visual and textual information that you will have gathered. This could be a group activity – whether with family, friends or school mates. Use your local library as it may have information related to the person you are investigating or specific to the time this person lived. Another approach would be to find a disused/abandoned building in your locale in order to discover who may have lived there and what kinds of activities were carried out in this place in the past.



## Further Explorations

Dorothy Cross tends to develop work as a series of related productions expanding on a theme or idea. In this respect the sea, its creatures and, in particular, the jellyfish have inspired a range of other works combining different media. One of the first videos that she made in relation to the sea was *Teacup* (1996). Using a family heirloom, in this case a teacup from her grandmother's collection, Cross borrowed footage from the Robert Flaherty film *Man of Aran* (1934). This film was an ethnographic study of fishermen and the local community surviving on the Aran Islands. Cross selected three minutes of footage from the original film, which showed the fishermen in a currach boat crashing against the waves in a storm. She projected the footage inside the teacup so that it appears as if the men are rowing against the inside of the cup. In this respect, she juxtaposed raw footage of survival against the civility of a domestic object – the teacup – and its association with British colonialism.

*Chiasm* (1999) was an ambitious multi-media performance work sited in two disused handball courts. Cross recorded video footage from Poll na bPéist (The Worm Hole), discovered at the base of the terraced cliffs off Inis Mór. This rectangular pool periodically fills and empties with water in response to the tidal system. Film footage of this rare phenomenon was projected onto the floor of the handball alleys accompanied by the live performance of two opera singers, one in each handball court. The music they sang comprised phrases from operas that focus on love, loss and unrequited relationships.

*Jellyfish Lake* (2001) is a short film of Cross swimming in a lake in Palau, Micronesia, with hundreds of jellyfish. An underwater camera records the movements of swimmer and jellyfish united in their physical experience of being at sea together. *Drying Jellyfish* (2003), *Jellyfish Drawings* (2003) and *Jellyfish Pillowcase* (2004) are the physical manifestations of jellyfish that Cross made by collecting compass jellyfish and laying their remains on linen sheets and napkins belonging to her grandmother. She describes these works as 'nature drawing itself'.

In 2001, while visiting the derelict house of Maude Delap (1866-1953) on Valentia Island, Cross discovered a grotto containing statues of the Virgin Mary and Saint Bernadette and also a remote slate quarry. In collaboration with James Conway from Opera Theatre Company, she developed the work *Stabat Mater* (2005), as a live performance of Giovanni Battista Pergolesi's seventeenth century arrangement of the *Stabat Mater* (about the Sorrows of Mary). The work

constitutes a live performance of two opera singers and a baroque chamber orchestra, costumed in dirty overalls and safety helmets. The combination of nature, industry and religion amplify complex connections with living and inert material by reconnecting history and memory to the present day.

<sup>1</sup> MIT, MA, Guestbook Lecture: Dorothy Cross, April 29, 2009 – access: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQqZenW6rvY>

<sup>2</sup> Suzi Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art*, Thames and Hudson, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> See [www.sunprints.org](http://www.sunprints.org) for further information.

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*Dust Defying Gravity*, 2003  
16mm film transferred to DVD  
dimensions variable  
duration: 4 min  
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art

# Grace Weir Dust Defying Gravity



### Grace Weir

b. 1962, Dublin, Ireland. Lives and works in Leitrim

Grace Weir studied at the National College of Art and Design, and has an M.Sc. from Trinity College, Dublin. She co-represented Ireland at the 49th International Venice Biennale in 2001 with her video installation *Around Now*. In 2006, she was awarded a residency at St. John's College, Oxford, where she spent time researching ideas which culminated in the solo exhibition *In my own time* at the Science Museum, London. Forthcoming group shows in 2012 are at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, USA; Kunstlerhaus Berlin, Germany and Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

This work was filmed at Dunsink Observatory, Dublin, one of the oldest scientific institutions in Ireland. The work consists of a single four-minute long shot that tracks through the rooms at Dunsink, revealing the ageing telescopes and measuring instruments used by previous scientists displayed throughout the building. The camera moves continuously, slowly passing over a mechanical model of the solar system called an *orrery*. Such models were used in science to illustrate the position and movement of the planets and moons in the Solar System. Gradually, light reveals dust in the air, making visible the invisible and drawing us into a world of micro-phenomena normally undetectable to the human eye. It is perhaps at this point we become conscious of looking as these micro-worlds of dust revealed by mechanical means – in this instance film. This moment of enhanced perception links to the value of the orreries and the people who once inhabited and worked in these rooms. The sound accompanying the film is of a ticking grandfather clock which was added after the film was shot.

## Background to Grace Weir’s process

Grace Weir works primarily with the moving image, combing cinematic works with experimental videos and installations. Her practice is concerned with our experience of the world as it is lived and known on a day-to-day level. However, she opens this daily ‘reality’ onto new levels of experience by utilising and applying scientific knowledge and philosophical theory to question what we know and how we come to know it? Weir is also concerned with the notions of ‘reciprocal action’ or the relationship between the ‘knower’ and ‘knowing’. This process of enquiry is activated by Weir through a playful questioning of existing beliefs or knowledge systems, usually by initiating conversations with other people. She achieves this by spending time researching other disciplines and working with scientists, moving easily between disciplines.

In this respect, scientists such as Robert Boyle (1627-91) and Albert Einstein (1879–1955) have influenced her work: Boyle because he believed that all experiments, regardless of discipline, should be exercised and witnessed in public. This introduces other complex notions such as ‘agent’ and ‘agency’. Agent, simply put, means one who acts, while agency is the quality or mode of an activity. These activities can be as far reaching as digging, painting, bird-watching or reading. However, what is of interest is the context in which these activities take place and how they are influenced and controlled within different kinds of social, cultural and political environments and from different viewpoints at any given time. Weir has a particular interest in scientific practice because science, as a specialised model of practice, operates from factual evidence and/or proofs and relies on mechanical models that test out various theories under a controlled laboratory environment.

Since World War II, the emphasis in science has shifted from the hard science of physics to biological science, expanding the focus of scientific entities to *relationships*: determinism to *indeterminism* (or chaos); linear causality to *circular causality*; reductionism to *holism*; programming to *self-organisation*; and realism to *constructivism*.<sup>1</sup> The issue at stake was not so much the data being used but the use of appropriate models to visualise the complexity of science.

Perhaps a starting point to understanding these ideas better would be to consider how the *Cartesian* model – defined as a closed system of mechanised parts – considered all biological entities as isolated and closed (a practice of reductionism), whereas modern science is informed by a new model that embodies human and social relationships as relational and connected. In this sense, Weir’s artistic practice opens a dialogue with science by suggesting that knowledge is *relational* and open to discussion.

## Some questions to consider

Why do you think the artist filmed this work in Dunsink?

What kinds of relationships is the artist exploring by filming old scientific instruments, where there is no physical presence of a human being?

Do you think objects can evoke the absence/presence of the human?

How does the artist use light and movement to focus on the minute particles of dust?

What kind of mood is suggested by dust?

The sound in this film has a particular quality – can you describe the sound?

Does it remind you of anything you have heard before?

Is it clear or distorted?

Does it suggest a voice or many voices that have been simultaneously recorded?

Is the artist appealing to senses other than sight with these works?

What kinds of objects are immediately recognisable to you in this film?

Can you tell from these objects who may have worked here and what kind of work they were involved in?

## Key words

### CARTESIAN

Refers to the theories of the French philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650). Best known for his statement ‘I think therefore I am’, in his theories he placed emphasis on reason and the development of the natural sciences. He is also associated with the concept of dualism and the relationship between the mind and the body.

### CHAOS THEORY

A field of study in mathematics which is concerned with the behaviour of dynamic and random systems with a view to finding order.

### DISCIPLINE

Category of learning, knowledge formation or arts practice.

### INSTALLATION

The configuration of objects in a space where the totality of the objects and the space comprise the artwork.

### ORRERY

A mechanical device from the eighteenth century, named after Charles Boyle, the Fourth Earl of Orrery (1674–1731), used in science to illustrate the position and movement of the planets and moons in the Solar System with the Sun at the centre.

### RELATIONAL

Characterised by relations – between individuals, objects, art and audience, etc.

### THEORY OF RELATIVITY

Developed by Albert Einstein (1879–1955), the Theory of Relativity is concerned with the notion that time and space are relative and not fixed. This theory had a radical impact on scientific enquiry in the 20th century.

## Activities

### *Exploring Gravity Through Art*

Gravity is defined as ‘The attraction between objects that have mass’. Isaac Newton (1642–1727) realised that the force of gravity, which pulls an apple from a tree, is the same force obeying the same law as the force of gravity which holds the Moon in orbit around the Earth, and the planets in orbit around the Sun.<sup>2</sup> Exploring the concept of gravity creatively can be considered in terms of how we apply materials to a surface. For example, normally we paint with brushes that have been dipped in to paint. In a sense, the brush controls how we paint – the speed and texture. Why not consider dispensing with brushes altogether and fill various sized containers with watered-down paint or ink, then pour the paint onto a flat surface such as card, paper or stretched canvas. Consider pouring paint from different heights and using different movements. Try walking or running around the surface, pouring paint as you go and looking at the different effects that can be created. Splash paint onto a surface, testing out the distance you stand from the surface and the kinds of marks that can be created using different types of implements.

### *Moving drawings*

Most drawings are made holding an instrument such as a pen, pencil or brush. Why not consider making a device that holds the pen in place. For instance, I have created a series of drawings, which I call ‘spin-top drawings’. I create these works by cutting out a circular form in cardboard. This can be any size – but it does have to be round. Find the central point in the circle and cut a hole through it. Use a short pencil and push through the hole so that the nib of the pencil is positioned on the underside of the circle. Gripping the pencil, flick and spin – like you would a traditional spinning top. Watch as the pencil creates a series of circular looped lines as it moves over the paper. If you have access to a video camera, record the movements of the spinning top as it draws a range of pencil patterns on the paper to create an animation piece. Different lengths of pencil will result in different kinds of lines; however, if the length of the pencil is longer than the radius of the circle the pencil will not spin.

Find or build other devices to make drawings that interest you. The force of gravity and the gentle push and pull of the pencil, paper and card act together to influence the ‘spin-top model’ in very complex ways. It can be very difficult to predict where the ‘spin-top model’ is going to go next. This sort of unpredictable motion is called *chaotic* motion. Scientists try to describe this order using models called strange attractors. Attractors can be strange, chaotic and steady. Diverse phenomena, such as the patterns of Saturn’s rings, measles outbreaks, and the

onset of heart attacks all follow chaotic, or unpredictable, patterns.

### *Model of a Solar System*

Create your own model of our Solar System, picturing the Sun and the eight planets and dwarf planet that orbit it: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto (a dwarf planet). Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543) was a Polish astronomer who developed the Copernican system, a model of the Solar System in which all the planets orbit the Sun. Use card, tape, string, pencils and markers, to represent the Sun and the planets. Cut planets out of card in different circular sizes and colour code them so that each colour represents a particular planet. Make one large circular piece, from which you can hang the planets. (Mercury goes in the inner orbit, Venus goes in the second orbit, Earth goes in the third, etc.) Tape the end of the string to the top-side of the cardboard. After all the planets (and the Sun) are attached, adjust the length of the strings so that the planets (and Sun) all lie in a plane. To hang your model, tie three pieces of string to the top of the cardboard – then tie these three together. Then connect these to a longer string (from which you’ll hang your model). You now have a model of our Solar System.

### *Pin-hole cameras and ‘drawing blind’*

An instrument can change the world and compel us to rethink our place in the universe. The development of instruments such as the telescope, the camera and the lens – all linked to the history and development of scientific practice – did just this. Thomas Harriot (1560–1621) was the first to use a telescope to look at the moon, but he only grasped that it was covered with mountains and craters after he saw Galileo’s rendering of the lunar surface. The reason that Galileo (1564–1642) was more successful is that he brought art to the aid of science.

You don’t need an expensive instrument to view the world differently. You can make improvised cameras, lenses and viewfinders from card and tape. Try making your own pinhole camera out of household items. Pinhole cameras allow light through a tiny hole, making pictures with a soft, blurred, dreamy effect (with practice, you may be able to take sharply focused photos).<sup>3</sup> Using your hand-made view finder or lens finder, create a series of drawings based on looking through the hole and concentrating on particular aspects of an object that you are studying. Another alternative is to get a sheet of card cut to A5 size. Push a pencil through a hole made in the middle of the card so that when you hold the pencil the card lies comfortably flat on your hand. The idea is that the card covers the sheet of paper that you are drawing on. This means that, in effect, you cannot see what you are drawing, so that you concentrate on what you are looking at rather than on what you are drawing.



## Further Explorations

Grace Weir has developed a range of projects in a scientific context, using conversation as a tool to test out existing theories, particularly how knowledge as a process of mutual exchange can be transformative. Shared in context, these experiments dramatise the pragmatic interplay between the 'knower' and 'unknown' as a way of understanding complex ideas. *Bending spacetime in the basement* (2003), shows the artist with collaborator and scientist Ian Elliott setting up a scientific experiment, examining the universal gravitational pull of all objects.<sup>4</sup> They use everyday materials such as tin cans, lead, wood and string. The film reveals the two participants as they discuss the making of the experiment and the issues arising. Their aim is to bend space time as suggested in Einstein's General Theory of Relativity (1915). This theory examines the spatio-temporal properties of physical processes.<sup>5</sup> A previous work *The Darkness and the Light* (2002), also features Elliott. Here Weir documents Elliott entering a small observatory. Walking across the room, he opens the shutters letting the light in and, by doing so, he reveals the various telescopes and instruments that he uses in his work. In a later sequence, Elliott attempts to explain 'superstring theory'. This he does by continuously halving a sheet of paper with scissors until the task becomes impossible. He then projects a sunspot on the paper using a telescope until the paper eventually catches fire and burns away. As a metaphor, this exercise reveals the role and perhaps the value of failure in scientific experiments in general. *Paper exercise* (2003), consists of an unedited conversation between Weir and Elliott, as they illustrate the basis of the Theory of Relativity in a schematic drawing. The film reveals the hands of the two participants, drawing as they discuss the Theory of Relativity. There is a soundtrack, which is a recording of Elliott's voice explaining the basics of relativity, while Weir asks supplementary questions.

<sup>1</sup> Ludwig von Bertalanffy, 1968 *General System Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications*, New York: George Braziller, 1968.

<sup>2</sup> John Gribbin, *The Little Book of Science*, NY: Barnes and Noble, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Full details on how to make your own pinhole camera can be downloaded from: [www.diyphotography.net/23-pinhole-cameras-that-you-can-build-at-home](http://www.diyphotography.net/23-pinhole-cameras-that-you-can-build-at-home) and [www.makingyourown.co.uk/make-your-own-pinhole-camera.html](http://www.makingyourown.co.uk/make-your-own-pinhole-camera.html)

<sup>4</sup> For further information on the Theory of Relativity see [www.virtualprofessors.com/8-lecture-course-einsteins-general-theory-of-relativity](http://www.virtualprofessors.com/8-lecture-course-einsteins-general-theory-of-relativity)

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W5 Science Centre, Belfast  
[www.w5online.co.uk](http://www.w5online.co.uk)

# Carlos Amorales Dark Mirror



*Dark Mirror*, 2004-05  
animation and video, two-channel projection on floating screen  
André Pahl (animation)  
José María Serralde (original score and piano performance)  
dimensions variable  
duration: 6:14 min

This work is made in collaboration with German graphic designer André Pahl and Mexican composer José María Serralde. Amorales invited Pahl and Serralde to respond to images in his *Liquid Archive*. Pahl selected specific drawings from the archive, which he sequenced into this silent animation. Serralde, a silent movie pianist, also worked on a selection of images and, without seeing Pahl's animation, composed music to accompany this work. The animation and music were united by Amorales to form *Dark Mirror*. The animation and music combine as a double projection on a two-sided screen – one side is a video of Serralde performing his composition on a grand piano, and the other side is Pahl's soundless animation. Black and white graphics of animals, humans and machinery dissolve from one entity into another, merging and separating, creating a sense of ambiguity, and thereby deliberately thwarting any chance of identifying with one central character or engaging with a linear narrative.

### Carlos Amorales

b. 1970, Mexico. Lives and works in Mexico

Carlos Amorales was born in 1970 and studied in Spain and The Netherlands before returning to Mexico City where he now lives and works. Recent exhibitions include Yvon Lambert Gallery, Paris (2012); Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach (2010); Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel (2009); Sala Verónicas, Murcia (2009); Meet Factory Gallery, Prague (2009); and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania (2008). His work is featured in many public and private collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; La Colección Jumex, Mexico City; Tate Modern, London; and the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin.



## Background to Carlos Amoraless’ practice

Carlos Amoraless’ practice uses drawing as the basis from which to develop performance, video animation, paintings and sculpture, working both in an individual and collaborative capacity. In his multifaceted body of work, he creates phantasmagorical worlds, which are characterised by animated scenes made up of many elements capable of invoking collective experiences of anxiety, fear and fantasy. Amoraless applies a unique visual vocabulary that stems from his expansive and on-going archival project titled *Liquid Archive*, which he began in 1999. This is a digital database of drawings and collected images from books, magazines, the Internet and his own photographs of the urban environment of Mexico City. He applies a technique known as *Rotoscopy*, used in the animation industry and which involves a range of digital and hand-drawn techniques to produce silhouettes and line drawings for live animation. The images in Amoraless’ archives include line drawings of animals, cut-outs or silhouettes of butterflies, birds, machines, geometric patterns and people. Over the years, he has added to this archive, much like we add new words to our vocabulary. Now he has over 1,500 digital drawings. This growing collection of images is the tool that unifies Amoraless’ artistic *œuvre* as its motifs migrate from medium to medium transforming to create unexpected hybrids that are both beautiful and horrific. Hybridity in the context of Amoraless’ work refers to the bringing together and/or distortion of objects in the broadest sense to create something new, different or indeed fantastical. The use of these images might relate to his childhood when he was attracted to fantasy and monster tales from Mexican folklore and, in particular, the role and meaning of costume and masks in which the transformation of human to animal form is common. For Amoraless fantasy is a way of dissolving the lines between art and life.

## Some questions to consider

What are your immediate reactions to this two screen animated installation?

Is it shot in colour or black and white?

What role does light play in these projections?

What role do you think the sound track plays with the animated images in this work?

Are sound and images synchronised (playing at the same time) or are there gaps of time between the sound and the images projected on to the screens?

If so, does this experience heighten or intensify the projection of animated images for you?

What sorts of animated techniques does the artist use (e.g. close-up views, dramatic lighting, block colour)?

## For discussion

What kind of imaginary landscapes does the artist evoke with this work? Are they familiar or unknown to you?

Why do you think the artist has created this installation using two screens rather than using a single projection?

How do these projections relate to each other?

How does the particular use of sound and image make you think about time?

How does the artist manipulate the material?

What kind of relationship do the animated drawings have with sound and video?

Do you feel part of the animation or simply an observer?

What is your experience of being in the space with these two projections?

Moving through the space of the work changes our perspective on the visual and sound project as an installation. Do you think this is the intention of the artist?

Familiar objects have been changed, to create a fantastic or scary landscape where man and machine morph or transform together. Can you identify any of the animals, moving objects, plants or machines?

Are there particular issues that concern the artist? What might they be?

What are the advantages of artists working in a collaborative context with artists from other disciplines? Do you think this adds more value to the working process?

## Activities

*Making your own archive*

Why not create your own archive of visual and textual material that you find around you. This can be achieved by collecting and cutting images and text from newspapers and magazines, taking photographs of things that interest you or even finding things on the street. Some of the images that you collect could evoke a range of strong feelings, such as happiness, sadness or fear, similar to the way that Amoraless’ animations do. Keep your images/data in a folder or scan them (if you have a scanner) and save them on your computer or in a scrap book. Make a record for each image: write the date, where you found them or even describe how you felt or what attracted you to a particular image. Perhaps it reminded you of a place or a close friend or family member. This may be the starting point for you to reassemble these images to develop a series of books and collages of hybrid creatures or imaginary landscapes. Your archive does not have to be limited to the visual. Why not think about recording sounds from your environment. Most mobile phones can record images and sounds these days and there is a range of free and cheap sound software available, such as ‘pyro audio creator’ ([www.cakewalk.com/Products/AudioCreator](http://www.cakewalk.com/Products/AudioCreator)). Or, if you do have a computer, compose your own animation based on the visual and sound data that you have collected. Stop motion animation ([www.stopmotionpro.com](http://www.stopmotionpro.com)) is a great place to start.

*Different ways of drawing*

Experiment with some of Amoraless’ drawing techniques.

*Cut-out or silhouetted objects*

A starting point for creating silhouettes is to cut out a picture of a distinct or clearly visible outline of an object from a magazine. Then turn the image around and paint it black. The history of silhouettes is fascinating. It combines magic lantern projections, shadow theatre and puppets with the advent of optical illusions and the camera obscura. To create shadow plays use a strong light that casts shadows of objects and people onto walls in an enclosed space. You can carry out a range of actions with this activity. For instance if you have access to a video camera (or indeed a still camera) create a film of these shadows – producing your own live animations. Consider adding sound or narrative to add depth to your work.

## Key words

ANIMATION

The suggestion of movement through the rapid projection of still images (16 frames or more per second).

ARCHIVE

A collection of unique records or documents.

COLLABORATION / COLLABORATIVE ART

A form of arts practice where two or more artists, often from different disciplines, collaborate in the creation of an artwork.

HYBRID

Something of mixed origin or composition.

MACABRE

A term associated with ghoulishness and death.

MOTIF

A recurring theme, pattern, form or idea.

ŒUVRE

The total body of work of an artist.

PHANTASMAGORIA

A form of theatre presentation developed in the eighteenth century which involved the combination of live performance and the projection of ghoulish imagery using a moving projector. It is associated with the macabre and with Gothic culture.

ROTOSCOPY

Also known as ‘roto’, this term is used in the animation industry to refer to a range of digital and hand-drawn techniques to produce silhouettes and line drawings for live animation.

SILHOUETTE

From the name of an eighteenth century French finance minister, Étienne de Silhouette, associated with austerity and frugality. Silhouette is the representation of a three-dimensional subject, such as a person’s profile, as a flat, opaque form (usually black), where the outline corresponds with the outline of the subject.

The second activity with this technique is to trace the outlines of the shadows on a wall or large sheet of paper. Paint in the shadows using black paint. Think about how you can arrange or compose your shadows to make a weird or wonderful landscape of distorted and odd shapes.

*Tracing*

Place a sheet of tracing paper (I sometimes use tracing paper that you can buy from supermarkets that come in rolls for baking) on top of an existing image and trace the outline or details that are of particular interest to you.

*Mark-making*

You will have noticed that Amoraless creates a range of wide, thin, crooked and jagged lines combined with a variety of geometric forms or patterns mainly using black on white. Lines of different thickness can be tested using different materials, such as sticks dipped into ink, markers or graded pencils that range from a light grey (HB) to an almost black (9B). Compressed charcoal is also a very good material to create a range of organic lines and marks.

*Stories about real and imaginary landscapes.*

Carlos Amoraless is influenced by the iconography and religious systems associated with his native Mexico. This could provide a starting point to learn about a new country in terms of historical traditions and cultural practices. For example, pre-Columbian Mexico has a long tradition of mask making. The earliest evidence of mask making in the Americas is a fossil vertebra of a now extinct llama found in Tequixquiac in Mexico. This was carved sometime between 12,000 and 10,000 BC and represents the head of a coyote. One of the reasons that this tradition of mask-making continues to the present day is because the Aztecs believed a powerful relationship exists between humans and animals, plants, and natural and super-natural phenomena. Among Mexicans today, there are those who believe each man and woman shares a destiny with an animal counterpart, and whatever happens to one will happen to the other, whether it is illness, hunger, injury or death. This soul companion is called a ‘Tona’.

Historical information may provide the inspiration to make your own mask that identifies you with your favourite animal. It can be simply made from re-cycled cardboard boxes and painted using a range of colours. Gluing different materials on to the mask found in the home can create textures. The mask can be worn by attaching string from both sides of the mask making it easy to wear. Make sure to cut out either a hole for the nostrils or mouth so that you can breathe!

*Animating Movement or Processes of Transformation.*

This could be discussed and understood in relation to the life-cycle of a butterfly, which goes through four distinct stages of transformation: egg to caterpillar (or larva), caterpillar to chrysalis (or pupa) and chrysalis to adult form (or imago). This is the butterfly or moth visible during the summer months. Make your own hybrid creatures that merge aspects of machinery with natural objects such as plants and trees. Write a descriptive short story to accompany or animate your hybrid object, asking a range of questions such as:

What does it look like?  
 What does it feel like (soft fur, sharp spikes, etc.)?  
 Where is it from?  
 How does it move (walk, crawl, etc.)?  
 Does the creature have a story to tell?

*Phantasmagorical*

The Phantasmagorical is characterised by the use of fantastic imagery to recreate a personal view of the world in which familiar images and objects are capable of invoking a range of collective experiences of different and contrasting emotions. However, it is not limited just to the visual. Amoraless is equally informed by stories from literature. This includes Edgar Allen Poe’s book *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, a tale of exploration which concerns a fantastic voyage to unknown lands. This work inspired Amoraless to create a multi-media installation titled *Discarded Spider* (2009). Read about this work, focus on the type of horror suggested and have a discussion relating Poe’s works to Amoraless’ works. Discuss what it is in the stories that make them scary and how they compare to Amoraless’ images.

## Further Explorations

One of Amoraless' first animations, *Rorschach Test Animation* (2004), was made from a series of inkblots whose shape changes as the black spots progressively increase and decrease in number, producing new forms against the white background.

The work *Manimal 6* (2005) combines three-dimensional animation techniques with two-dimensional drawings of silhouettes, allowing the artist to produce the effect of a virtual shadow theatre. The accompanying soundtrack by Julián Ledes is characterised by an electric heavy-metal rhythm whose mounting intensity creates a sense of tension as a story slowly emerges. In a post-apocalyptic landscape dominated by barren trees and two glowing moons, a pack of wolves migrates from the wilderness to an urban environment by crossing an abandoned airstrip where several passenger planes are positioned. The only indication of a human presence is the erratic flight of a number of airplanes in the dark sky. Although the elements of a traditional narrative are in place, making sense of the sequence demands an imaginative effort. This is undoubtedly a dark tale, one in which, as the title suggests, man and animal have morphed into one sinister creature. In staging the drama of *Manimal 6*, Amoraless chose for his cityscape adobe-style houses that resemble dwellings in the working-class districts of Mexico City. By choosing a familiar setting, the artist makes the game of free association personal, as aspects of his own life permeate the work.

With *Black Cloud* (2007), Amoraless takes the *Liquid Archive* into the three-dimensional realm, materialising its potential for communicating terror by giving it an overwhelming physical presence. The artist replicates thirty-six types of moths – all culled from his archive – in thousands of life-size, black paper cut outs that are individually hand glued to the walls and ceiling of a space. Multiplied to create a dense mass with both wondrous and threatening qualities, *Black Cloud* becomes a surreal yet sublime gathering of insects delicately poised in sculptural formations that suggest the potential for harm, destruction and irreversible doom. The biblical plagues of the Old Testament come to mind, as two of the ten calamities inflicted by God on Egypt, and recounted in the Book of Exodus, involved swarms of

flies and locusts. The association of such a spectacular installation with a Judgement Day narrative indicates Amoraless' propensity toward ambiguous scenarios where the boundaries between beauty and awe, good and evil, calm and calamity are constantly blurred and where imagination is called upon to mediate between multiple interpretations of the work.

While building this lexicon of the macabre, the artist reveals his personal vision of the world and a profound involvement with the artistic process through which he expresses it. In combining the visual motifs of the *Liquid Archive* and transposing them in various mediums, Amoraless creates new and exhilarating works of art demonstrating not only that a unique visual language can still emerge but also that, as he strongly believes, the artist's critical voice is imperative as the art and the everyday become more indistinguishable.

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[www.vimeo.com/24613759](http://www.vimeo.com/24613759) [*Caca Grande* (Big Poop)]

# Tacita Dean Presentation Sisters



*Presentation Sisters*, 2005  
anamorphic film, optical sound  
duration: 60 min  
loan, Crawford Art Gallery, Cork  
courtesy Crawford Art Gallery and Tacita Dean

In 2005, Tacita Dean was invited to Cork (the European City of Culture) to make a work in response to the city of Cork<sup>1</sup>. Initially she was interested in the Titanic Centre because of her interest in sinking ships.<sup>2</sup> During her time in Cork, she wandered around the city and came across a graveyard, which was of interest because the plots were small and some of the head stones were missing. In response to the site, and before she had even thought about the content of her film, Dean came up with a provisional working title of *The Last Plot*. These details of a specific place intrigued Dean and she decided to further explore this site and the convent on which the remains of this small graveyard stood. On closer inspection, Dean discovered five nun's living in the convent – known as the order of the Presentation Sisters. This resulted in the original work retitled as the *Presentation Sisters*.

The project was curated by Sarah Glennie and over a period of time, Dean came to know and spend time with the nuns in the South Presentation Convent. Using film, she documented their daily rituals of prayer, making tea and scones, cleaning, chatting and watching television. These everyday routines became the main subject of Dean's hour-long film, which explored the life of the nuns and their close quarters at the convent, alongside the broader issue of female domestic labour. Dean decided that the film had to be an hour long because the nuns read hourly and daily from *The Book of Hours* (in the Christian Church this is a book containing the prayers or offices to be said at the canonical hours of the day, particularly popular in the Middle Ages). Dean was especially drawn to the continued presence of these five women in the original building built by the order's founder, Nano Nagle, a local to Cork. The film, made in full collaboration with the sisters, captures the daily life of these sisters and their convent in an evocative series of moving images. The mundane acts of washing, ironing, folding and cooking are recognised by Dean as unique and far from the everyday.

**Tacita Dean**  
b. 1965, Canterbury, England. Lives and works in Berlin

Tacita Dean studied art at the Falmouth School of Art in England, the Supreme School of Fine Art in Athens, and the Slade School of Fine Art in London. In 1998, she was nominated for a Turner Prize and was awarded a DAAD scholarship for Berlin, Germany, in 2000. She has received the following prizes: Aachen Art Prize (2002); the Primo Regione Piemonte Art Prize from the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, Italy (2004); the Sixth Biennale Prize at the 51st Venice Biennale (2005); the Hugo Boss Prize Nomination at the Guggenheim Museum, New York (2006); and the Kurt Schwitters Preis Award, Germany (2009). Dean also participated in the Venice Biennale in 2003 and 2005. She had a solo exhibition at the Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane in 2007 and forthcoming solo exhibitions include *Five Americans* at New Museum, New York (2012) and *Tacita Dean* at Norton Museum of Art, Florida (2012).



## Background to Tacita Dean's process

Originally trained as a painter, Tacita Dean works primarily in 16-millimetre film, but also uses other media such as drawing, sound and photography. Many of her projects are located in and respond to a particular place, story, object or event both from the past and in the present. In art practice we use the term *site-specific*, to denote this way of working. What this means is that an artist will investigate/ respond to their immediate surroundings or to new and strange places. They may have either researched before they get there or decided to lose themselves in a place in order to discover/uncover something new or different. Framed within this context, Dean will often combine historical narrative in a contemporary and/or new context. This is a process of re-telling forgotten stories or indeed stories left out of the canon of history. What informs Dean's work is her interest in people. This has resulted in a series of films described as relational portraits of a person and/or community. Dean is interested in older people as subjects for her films 'because they carry so much information in their bodies and have an incredible grace about them at that point in their lives'.<sup>3</sup>

Dean's principle medium is film, in particular 16mm film which is considered by some to be an out-dated medium because of the proliferation of, and easy access to, digital technologies. For Dean there are qualities to film making that cannot be expressed in digital form. These qualities include rough edges and flickering light, lush colours, the use of shadow and space, silence and filmic time which, in film terms, is known as a 'roll of time'. This process reveals slow panoramic views of a landscape that often capture changes in natural light or subtle shifts in movement, taken from all angles to build up a sense of time passing. The manipulation of film as a physical material revealed in the editing process is essential to the making of her works. Here she cuts and pastes sections of the actual film by hand restructuring the film sequence after it has been shot. She records sound separately from film work and, through an intense editing process, sounds are overlaid onto the final cut of the film. Dean's films are presented using a film projector, which maintains a prominent position in the gallery space. This is a noisy contraption that projects films onto a surface – be it a wall, floor, and/or specific material or built environment designed for each film. The use of the projector is intentional in Dean's work because it creates an atmospheric dimension to the film as it unfolds in real time.

This is due, in part, to the sound the actual projector makes as it reels through the film systematically as a looped installation.

## Some questions to consider

What are your immediate reactions to the film?

Is it shot in colour or black and white?

Is there a soundtrack? If so, how does it relate to the visual imagery?

What sorts of film techniques does the artist use (e.g. close up views, awkward angles, slowing down the frames, dramatic lighting)?

How long is the film?

What do you think the film is about?

What particular issues is the artist concerned with?

How does the work make you think about time?

Do you feel part of the film or simply an observer?

How does this particular film and gallery space make you feel?

## For discussion

What does this film tell you about Cork?

Why do you think Dean chose the Convent?

What role do the nuns play in this film?

What role does sound play in this film?

Why do you think there is no dramatic action or dialogue?

Is there a story within this film?

In what ways is Dean's film different from a documentary film?

Dean is described as being 'obsessed with time' in her films. How does she convey a sense of time here?

Why do you think Dean slows time down – is Dean making a comment on our overworked and busy lifestyles or is she commenting on how important our daily activities are?

Can you identify with the daily activities of the nuns?

Why do you think she rejects new technologies in favour of analogue filmmaking, which is a much slower and time-considered activity?

## Key words

### ANALOGUE

Something which bears a resemblance to something else. In digital technology an analogue device transmits and encodes sound and imagery as a continuous flow of signals.

### CONCEPTUAL

A mode of arts practice which emphasises the idea or concept over the production of a tangible art object. Conceptual art emerged in the 1960s and has continued to influence contemporary art.

### DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Electronic data storage and transmission technology that enables immense amounts of information to be compressed on small storage devices, such as computers and telephones, that can easily be preserved, retrieved and transported.

### THE EVERYDAY

Referring to commonplace, ordinary or routine events and activities.

### INSTALLATION

The configuration of objects in a space where the totality of the objects and the space comprise the object.

### RITUAL

Activities or tasks which involve repetition, habit and monotony.

### SITE-SPECIFIC

Artwork that is created in response to a specific site with the intention of being located in the site, and where removal from the site would change the meaning of the artwork. Often associated with Installation Art, Land Art and Public Art.

### 16-MILLIMETRE FILM

Film stock developed in the 1920s for amateur and industrial use. Since the 1960s, when it became more affordable, it has been used widely by artists in experimental filmmaking.

## Activities

### *Making films*

This exhibition could be the starting point for a range of film-making activities.

Experiment with some of Dean's techniques such as slow fixed shots, wide horizontal views, collaged sounds and fading light.

Think about your daily activities at home or school by yourself, with family or friends, both visually and in terms of sound. How might you record these events?

### *Stories about places*

Seen together Dean's films create an unfolding story about the nuns in the convent. Develop your own work about a place you know well. Create a story about this place, using film or photography, text and sound.

### *Filming light*

Everyone has tried to capture that special sunset or full moon but how do you really capture changing light, weather and the passing of time? Develop work that contrasts painted and drawn records with film and photography.

### *Symbolic buildings*

What do buildings tell us about past and present times? How does architecture speak to us about social, political and economic history? Develop project work based on the theme of symbolic buildings – churches, town halls, courthouses, convents, etc. – apply a range of techniques such as collage, photography and other mixed media.

## Further Explorations

This exhibition focuses on Dean's response to Cork through her film *Presentation Sisters*. Look also at other works by the artist, such as *Fernsehturm* (2001), which records the nightly and daily activities of diners in the revolving restaurant of a television tower in Berlin. This was Dean's first film shot in Berlin where she has lived since 2001. Also consider *Pie* (2003), based on the view from her studio as well as the sound piece *Berlin Project* (2002), where Dean uses recorded sounds interlaced with radio and other commentaries. See also Dean's Berlin work *Die Regimentstochter* (2005), based on opera and theatre programmes of the 1930s and 1940s. Dean's earlier work was preoccupied with land and sea such as *Disappearance at Sea I* (1996), which focused on the tragic story of the amateur yachtsman Donald Crowhurst who attempted (and failed) to win a round-the-world race without ever leaving the Atlantic. This film features a lighthouse off the coast of Britain. Like *Fernsehturm*, the film records the fading evening light and the gradual shift from inside (the lighthouse) to outside (the vast expanse of sea). See also her film portraits of artist Mario Merz (2003), which she recorded in San Gimignano in Tuscany, motivated by his resemblance to her father. Also consider her collaboration with the dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham (2007), who choreographed and performed a tribute to the artist John Cage.

<sup>1</sup> [www.cork2005.ie/programme/strands/architecture/tacitadean.shtml](http://www.cork2005.ie/programme/strands/architecture/tacitadean.shtml)

<sup>2</sup> See *Disappearance at Sea I & II* (1996/1997).

<sup>3</sup> Tacita Dean in conversation with Robert Ayers, 2008, [www.artinfo.com/news/story/27914/tacitadean](http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/27914/tacitadean)

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## Floorplan IMMA at NCH

### List of illustrations

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Resin and bronze powder,  
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Purchase, 2003

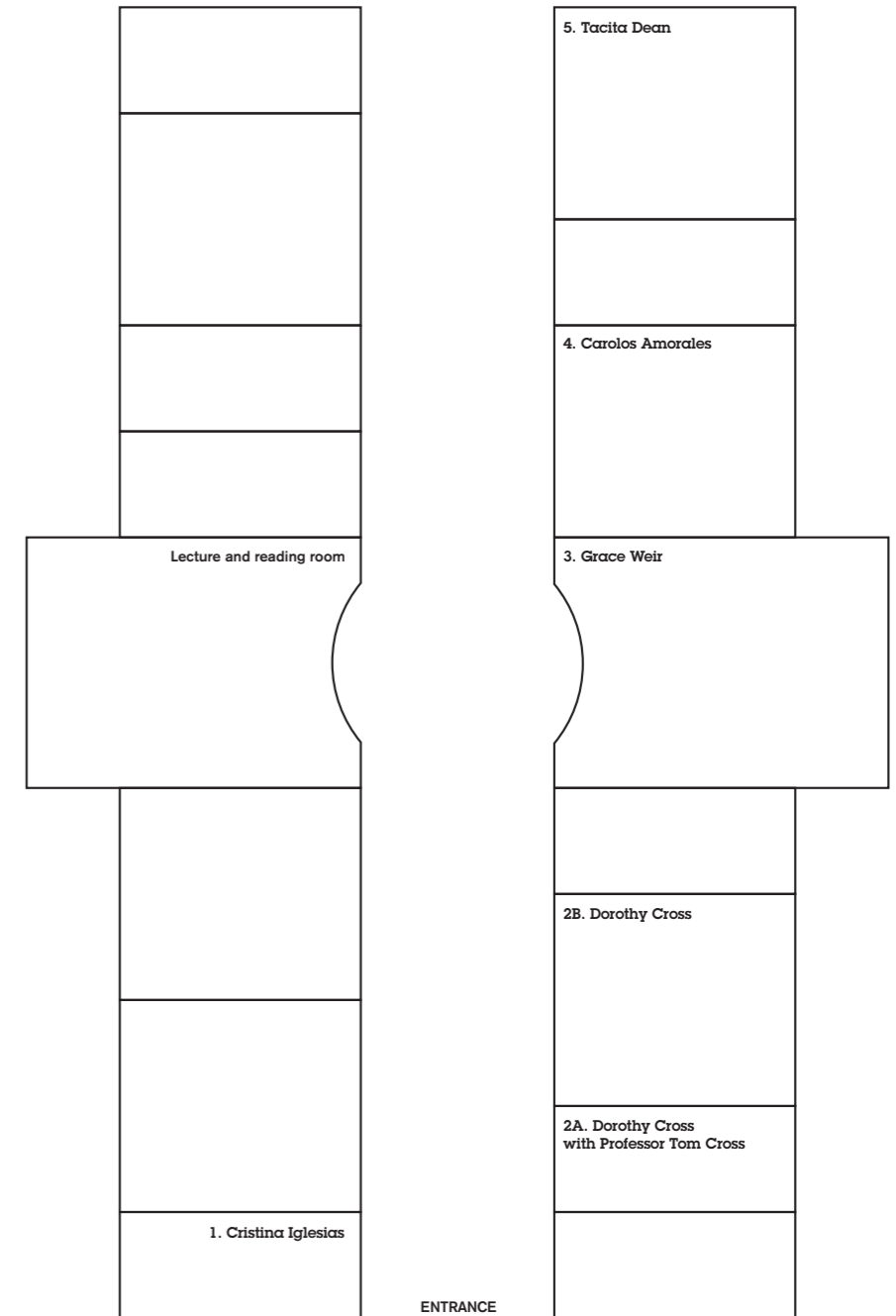
2A. Dorothy Cross  
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4. Carolos Amoraes  
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5. Tacita Dean  
*Presentation Sisters*, 2005  
16mm colour anamorphic film,  
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Loam, Crawford Art Gallery, Cork,  
courtesy Crawford Art Gallery and  
Tacita Dean, Frith Street Gallery, London  
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