

Into the gravelly ground

Janine Davidson



Friday 9 June - Saturday 8 July 2017

Janine Davidson's practice incorporates sculpture, installation, video and photography. The work is characterised by an interest in projection, framing and screening, through a consideration of the language of optics and seeing. This current body of work observes where artificial and natural worlds collide in an investigation of subterranean landscapes. Janine explores the manifestation of convergence through the projection and distortion of imagery to present a different view. Her work is a transformative process that forms connections between the visible and invisible, the erasure and disclosure, the familiar and the unknown.

The changing contours of memory are of interest to Davidson, amplified by both context and sense of place. Her work draws our attention to what we look at versus what we see, what memories we retain and what we discard, what is obscured and what is laid bare. How an image is framed affects our perception and understanding of how we engage with it. Site and the use of particular architectures both geological and manmade, retain shadows, memories and secrets, in her work we are invited to explore the gradations and balance of both illumination and shadows.

Shadows and Silhouettes, **Séamus McCormack**

Janine Davidson (b.1974, Belfast) is a visual artist based in Dublin. Davidson completed an MFA at NCAD Dublin, 2012 researching the archaeology of optical devices. Selected Group Shows, 2017, RHA 187th Annual Exhibition, Ely Place, DPI, dots per inch, Cork Printmakers, Print Show Room 'Attitude Precedes Form', curated by Dr Hilary Murray, The Library Project, Dublin. 2016, RHA 186th Annual Exhibition, Selected, RHA, Ely Place, Dublin, 6, Ulster Museum, Belfast. Rosebud', curated by Cora Cummins and Alison Pilkington at the Library Project. 2015, Halftone, Print Fair, The Library Project, Dublin, Vue, Artbox, Contemporary Art Fair, RHA, Dublin, 'Anti-room', 3-person show, curated by Dr Hilary Murray, Artbox, Dublin, RHA 185th Annual Exhibition, Selected, RHA, Ely Place, Dublin, 'The Starry Messenger', curated by Declan Sheehan, Experimental Film Club, IFI.

In 2014 Davidson completed an Art, Architecture and Politics workshop at the Fundacion Botin, directed by Carlos Garaicoa in Santander, which was kindly supported by the Arts Council. Exhibitions included 'A Fiction in Reality', Villa Iris, Santander, Spain, 'The Starry Messenger', curated by Declan Sheehan, Void Gallery, Derry, 'The way we live now and then' curated by Mary Conlon, '-Battery+', Tullamore Arts Centre, Offaly invited by Brendan Fox, 'Ile Seguin', The Library Project, Dublin curated by Valerie Connor, 'Underline' at Occupy Space, Limerick and 'Penumbra' at Tactic, Cork in 2014. In 2013 Davidson completed residencies at the Firestation Artists Studios, Dublin, The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Digital Arts Studios, Belfast and Belfast Exposed Photography Gallery. 'DAS Residency Exhibition', Platform Arts, Belfast, 'Access all Areas', IMMA, Dublin, 2013, 'Ouroboros', Occupy Space, Limerick and 'Strange Loop', Tactic, Cork. Her work has also been exhibited in Hong Kong, Johannesburg, New York, Nice, Stockholm and extensively across Ireland, previous residencies include Johannesburg funded by the British Council and Nice.

Reservoir

"What can it mean to them when they have not shared with the author the misery and joy of bringing an image into being?" In this quotation, by the Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky, we are encouraged not to merely rely on what is presented before us, but to hold up a mirror and reflect, consider and muse. Janine Davidson's new body of work for this exhibition draws our attention to what we look at versus what we see, what memories we retain and what we discard, what is obscured and what is laid bare. How an image is framed or brought into being and how this effects our perception and understanding of how we engage with it. Site and the use of particular architectures both geological and manmade, retain shadows, memories and histories, in Davidson's work we are invited to explore the gradations and balance of both illumination and shadows and find our own meaning in the images presented. Her repeated use of contested geographical locations with subjective associations for both the viewer and the artist can trigger and challenge notions of commemoration, familiarity and remembrance through the use of specific sites and locations. The title of the exhibition, *into the gravelly ground*, links to an excavation in both a literal and a metaphorical sense.

The central piece in the exhibition is a film in which the main protagonist is the unique setting of Turlough Hill in Co. Wicklow and the site of Ireland's only pumped-storage hydro-electricity plant. The visuals captured exist as a document of the location, which through extensive research and numerous recce trips, result in an exploration of place. The film continues in the lineage of previous works, where the artist has been interested in exploring interiority versus landscape, and the natural as opposed to the man-made or artificial. The site of hydro-electrical station was designed to have as little environmental impact as possible which may have had an influence on Davidson's initial attraction to it, owing to her continued interests in concealment, artifice and obscuring.

Echoing scenes and images from Tarkovsky's infamous sci-fi picture *Solaris* (1972) Davidson's new film unfolds in a sequence of hypnotic extended shots, where unknown territories are surveyed. Based on a cult sci-fi novel *Solaris* is essentially a cautionary tale about the dangers of venturing into the outer limits of space as a metaphor for venturing to the outer limits of knowledge.

Davidson's film alludes to an unnerving image of depopulation and absence. However, reassuring hints towards the presence of man are visible in the extended shot of illuminated fluorescent lights along the inner tunnel and the scenes of the working but vacant pump-house. The soundtrack of the film is based on actual recordings from the site, which have been manipulated, altered and elongated and when heard alongside the film's imagery further add to a dystopian scene with a sci-fi edge. Panning shots of water's surface underline the complexities of the very particular site. The lower reservoir is formed from the existing natural basin, Lough Nahanagan formed during the Ice Age, while the upper reservoir is man-made. The two reservoirs are treated in a democratic way by Davidson's camera view, asking the viewer to consider questions regarding artifice and how images are treated.

The non-narrative film is typical of Davidson's previous works in its non-sequential, temporal format. The aesthetical choices, such as the framing, the edit and the cut all relate and are suggested by the site allowing the viewer freedom to contemplate the space, its history and context. The work also initiates the drama in the filming process, where the material of form, its nuances and practicalities are exposed. Through editing, looping and repetition, and through the strategies of projection and framing, the work creates an increased awareness of the difference between the passing of real time and represented time.

While watching the film, we cannot help but immediately think of Seán Keating's paintings of Ardnacrusha - Shannon's hydro-electric scheme. However, Davidson is drawn much more to the hidden histories and the subjective connotations rather than the excitement in the engineering feats depicted in Keating's paintings in which these sites became icons of modernity and a maturing Ireland moving on from its colonial past. More recently Martin Gale has been also drawn to the plant in Wicklow who much like Davidson is also interested in creating documents of location and the opposing natural and artificial sites therein.

In addition to the central film in the exhibition, Davidson has become increasingly interested in refraction, mirroring, and projecting on reflective surfaces. In an expanded version of her single channel work, an image of the Túnel de la Engaña a never completed railway tunnel located in Northern Spain is projected on a convex mirror. Abstracting the image, the reflection of the projection beam on the curved mirror creates an infinite passage into another space causing the geographical structure to become an ambiguous vista. It is no coincidence that *engaña* translates as *to deceive a synonym for to obscure*.

Alongside the moving image work are a series of photographic images from the quarry in which the artist makes use of optical devices, both existing and invented, to draw our mind's eye and pinpoint its gaze towards the interface between meaning and perception. Depicting particular topographies and landscapes at Turlough Hill, the image is framed by the repeated presence of obstructions, shadows and apertures. The images are composed of black voids and contrasting scenic and picturesque views. The works remind us of the developing process of a printed photographic image, and traditional pinhole early photography processes. In these images the space between presence and absence constitutes an essential component of the vista. We are often invited to peer beyond the black frames through the gap, skewing, and squinting.

As the production, distribution and deconstruction of images become increasingly sharper, faster and disposable Davidson encourages and places value on the prolonged study of images, be they moving or still. Not necessarily concerned with nostalgia, nor is she against brief and rapid encounters, her work exists somewhere in the middle. In this median an importance is placed on reading images combined with our own subjective experience, closer looking which may persuade us to see again.

Séamus McCormack is an artist and curator based in London.

Tarkovsky, Andrei 'Sculpting in Time - Reflections on the Cinema' (1989), University of Texas Press, Texas. p. 20.

List of artworks

1. **'Gaia'** Framed
€ 595
Medium: Digital Pigment Print on Hahnemühle 280gms.
Dimensions: h 39cm x w 58 cm
Edition 10 of 10, 10 available.
2. **'53012762459'**
Medium: HD Film, projection, 22mins.
Dimensions: variable.
3. **'Sphagnum'** Framed
€ 595
Medium: Digital Pigment Print on Hahnemühle 280gms.
Dimensions: h 39cm x w 58 cm
Edition 10 of 10, 10 available.
4. **'Cornerstone'** Framed
€ 595
Medium: Digital Pigment Print on Hahnemühle 280gms.
Dimensions: h 39cm x w 58 cm
Edition 10 of 10, 10 available.
5. **'Kame'** Framed
€ 595
Medium: Digital Pigment Print on Hahnemühle 280gms.
Dimensions: h 39cm x w 58 cm
Edition 10 of 10, 10 available.
6. **'Kettle'** Framed
€ 595
Medium: Digital Pigment Print on Hahnemühle 280gms.
Dimensions: h 39cm x w 58 cm
Edition 10 of 10, 10 available.
7. **'Natura I, 2017'**
Medium: Digital pigment print, oiled paper.
Dimensions: h 80cm x w 117cm
8. **'Natura II, 2017'**,
Medium: Digital pigment print, oiled paper.
Dimensions: h 79cm x w 115cm
9. **'Tunnel, 2017'**
Medium: HD Film Projection, diverging mirror, birch plywood, galvaband, 7mins loop.
Dimensions: variable

With the kind co-operation of ESB, School of Physics, UCD, Dr Ainhoa Gonzalez, School of Geography, UCD, Parity Studios UCD, John Beattie, Karl Burke, Fergal Ward, Hazel Burke, Dave Mc Ginn, Martin Brennan, Séamus Ryan and the whole Mermaid team.



Energy for generations



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