

Re_sett_ing_s

JOHN GRAHAM REVIEWS THE JAKI IRVINE AND LOCKY MORRIS EXHIBITION AT THE COMPLEX, DUBLIN.



Jaki Irvine and Locky Morris, 'Re_sett_ing_s', installation view; photograph by Kate-Bowe O'Brien, courtesy of the artists and The Complex.

"WE THINK IN a world of inscriptions already there", writes Jean-François Lyotard in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*.¹ In other words, for many of us, thinking involves rethinking the same stuff over and over again.

In his introduction to this two-person exhibition, curator Mark O'Gorman describes his intuition of "hidden connections" between the practices of Jaki Irvine and Locky Morris. The exhibition title, in turn, refers to, *Setting Out 3* (2021), an artwork by Anne Tallentire shown in 'But This Material...' – her exhibition last year at The MAC in Belfast.² This other connection, which Irvine and Morris respond to in the formation of their own show, is an unusually direct tribute to a fellow artist and mutual friend, and also, perhaps, a way of working together that avoids simple binaries. Thinking with the thoughts of others, then, might be a way of escaping the self-perpetuating habits that Lyotard describes.

In his review of the Tallentire show for *Paper Visual Art Journal*, Francis Halsall writes how the artist's beautiful work "neither asks for nor requires redescription", and yet, here we are, considering an entire exhibition that does just that.³ It's not that simple, of course, and Irvine and Morris extend their mutual starting point in directions and alignments more distinctly their own.

I remember seeing Irvine's 8mm film, *Eyelashes* (1996) sometime in the late 1990s. With its distinctive voiceover and self-conscious performances, it was like watching an anthropological documentary by Chris Marker, with subject matter reduced to those tiny body parts. Mesmerised by its strange opacity, I was enchanted by something I didn't quite understand. Something

similar happens when I look at images by Locky Morris. Their subject matter can seem odd or incidental, but the artist has the canny knack of imbuing his material with a playful profundity. Working together within the crucible of The Complex, this peculiar magic seems freshly compounded, with the dividing lines of the different practices all but eliminated.

The exhibition presents a panoply of looping images and sounds; a discursive array of interacting elements that, while tightly constructed, feels enjoyably lawless. The moving images – short sequences of raw footage, and footage combined with digital manipulations – appear on floor standing and wall-mounted monitors, the latter like animated windows to some quotidian beyond. There are no individual titles, no demarcations to suggest this or that. Weaving between the works, the overlapping sounds seem only loosely connected to the visuals, their idiosyncratic rhythms like an orchestra warming up – a subdued rehearsal of extended notes and short, percussive blasts. Some of these sounds appear diegetic upon closer listening, directly linked to specific images, and underscored with the hums and ruminations of some undisclosed machinery.

A metal strip chimes and tinkles against an elevated, steel framework. A shutter bangs and resonates inside a large, illuminated container. Emerging from some hidden depth, animated lines whip and writhe in the overcast air. A loop of cabling drops slowly onto a corrugated sheet. The metal is impossibly blue. The pulse of the landing repeats itself within the wider cacophony, the sounds softened as though transmitted from somewhere faraway. There are no people here, except for us, riding on the coattails of temporal ghosts who

play the landscape like a giant musical instrument.

On Luke Clancy's *Culture File*, Locky Morris talked about the joy of being freed from the white cube gallery space, and how the work came alive in the more characterful setting of The Complex.⁴ On the same programme, Jaki Irvine spoke about "yearning for the world", before quickly adding, "for something more than the world". The world and its supplements are all around us, but how are they gained?

"In what we call thinking", Lyotard writes, "the mind isn't 'directed' but suspended. You don't give it rules. You teach it to receive."⁵ Perhaps that chiming, tinkling sound is not coming from that wind-blown metal strip. Rather, it emanates from the rigging of a vessel about to set sail – a vessel loosened from its moorings without thought, or compass, or map.

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¹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (first published Editions Galilée, 1988), English translation (Polity Press, 1991) p 20.

² Anne Tallentire, 'But This Material ...', The MAC, Belfast (8 September – 21 November 2021).

³ Francis Halsall, 'Anne Tallentire, 'But This Material ...'', *Paper Visual Art Journal*, Vol 13, 2021, p 53.

⁴ Luke Clancy, *Culture File*, RTÉ Radio Lyric FM, 7 November 2022.

⁵ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (first published Editions Galilée, 1988), English translation (Polity Press, 1991) p 19.