

Autumn 2005 - Dublin and Derry: Rhythm-A-Ning at Walton's New School of Music and Context Gallery

CIRCA 113 review



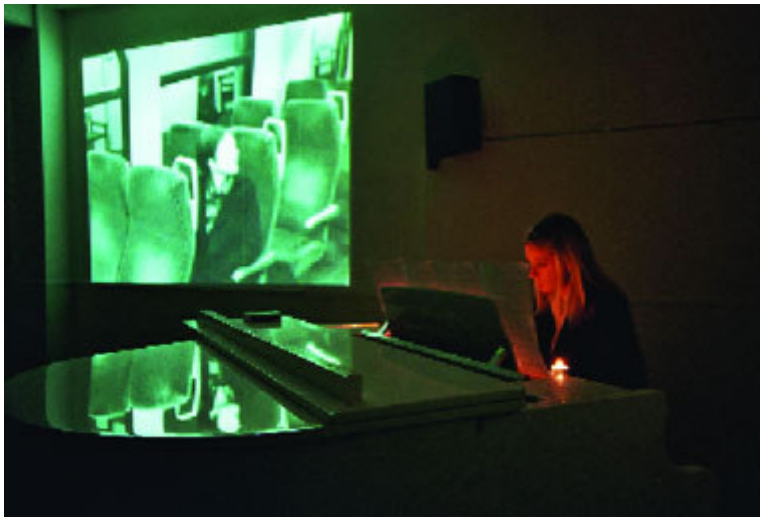
Fintan Friel: *Reign of a perpetual present - 1*, 2005, synthetic polymer enamel and ink with C-prints on card, 65 x 110 cm; courtesy the artist

For the last ten years Walton's New School of Music, 69 South Great George's Street, Dublin, has produced a sometimes imperceptible, sometimes unavoidable soundtrack to Dublin's George's street. This was something that was partially highlighted by Rhythm-A-Ning, an exhibition held in Walton's from 2 to 30 April, 2005. During this time the school acquired the novel role of art gallery for an exhibition of work by Ciara Finnegan, Fintan Friel, Iain Forsythe and Jane Pollard. Walton's is not a conservatoire that provides only classical training but is famed for supporting all traditional and modern music forms including Irish traditional, Latin and music technology.

Declan Sheehan, curator of this exhibition, says that the activities of the school are grounded in everyday lives and that it's "not an exclusive site." The only real hurdle to entry is an interest in learning, teaching or practising music, and the school is very rooted in the urban environment of everyday use, right in the centre of the city. Each in their own way, the artists in this exhibition have created works that bear witness to this unregulated aesthetic of music production.

It is virtually impossible nowadays to have much of an effect on our public visual (or aural for that matter) culture unless one goes through the proper channels. In Dublin, as any small-time music promoter will tell you, posters can only be put up in specific private places and Dublin City Council are fairly militant about pulling the renegades down. The anti-postering argument is often that posters are a form of litter and that those who put them up are not inclined to take them down and dispose of them responsibly, or that if one can afford to pay a company such as the Irish Posters Association then one can have as many posters as one likes all over town (in prescribed positions, that is). Into this situation falls the guerrilla posterer, graffiti and / or stencil artist who seems to be breaking more rules in these regularised times than our average prison inmate. This ephemeral type of work aims to be seen by as many people as possible in as public a situation as possible. Walton's, being a semi-public space, provided Friel with a backdrop for his work that alluded to these issues of regulation and visibility; the visual language used is that of the posterer wishing to promote a band or musician of some

description, but the more elaborate printing methods and the use of collage and photographs mean that formally this work straddles as grey an area as it does in terms of its site. There are references within the work to art history and the link between the classical decorative arts and modern-day graffiti. At Walton's the work was hung in the hallways amongst the practice rooms. *Rhythm-A-Ning* was later re-presented at the Context Gallery in Derry. At Context Friel's works were in a salon-style hang. In neither situation was the work in a truly public space; thus the street artist was drawn in from the cold.



Ciara Finnegan: *Training*, 2005, installation shot, Walton's New School of Music; photo Matthew Gidney; courtesy the artist

Walton's is a hive of creativity and newly composed and published music may be purchased in the music shop downstairs. Ciara Finnegan capitalised on this function of the New School by commissioning three artists to produce musical scores to her silent movie *Training*. *Training* or practice is very important if a musician is to improve and perfect his or her repertoire. The practising musicians constantly serenaded the labyrinthine hallways of the practice rooms. *Training* was a combination of a digital video in silent-movie style of three women getting on the wrong train and three musical scores played by their composers in tandem with the film in three separate rooms. The emotive effect of music was accentuated for the audience by the film's always remaining the same but with the music differing from room to room. The whole work existed on the night of showing only, and survives in documentation form today. At Context, the artist chose to show three photographs, each of them depicting one of the performances, along with a sound recording. She intentionally did not show her film, as this would have detracted from the performative nature of the work. The scores will also be published and be on sale in Walton's music shop.

The final work in the show was also dependent upon the input of others, but this time in the form of audience participation. With *Change my life* Forsythe and Pollard invited the public to swap the most meaningful artefacts of their existences with those of others. Music and books were the obvious choices for most, and the artists requested that you write an anecdote to go with your item to explain how it had an effect upon your life. The concept behind the work was an organic version of the music-swapping that has today evolved into file sharing on the internet. This was the one piece of the three included in *Rhythm-a-Ning* that had to be altered little in order to be reshowed at Context; however, the kinds of things that people brought were different to when it was shown in Dublin. In both situations people brought and took away CDs and books, but in Context the items introduced were more subjective - the key to someone's old workplace, for instance. The way in which we interacted with the work was open to interpretation; we could be interested in something for its own sake or because of the accompanying anecdote or both. Regardless of the motive, however, participation included one in a free and unmediated exchange of ideas, which is after all, our constant daily challenge.

Sinéad Halkett

Rhythm-A-Ning

Walton's New School of Music, Dublin, April 2005, and Context Gallery, Derry, June / July 2005

Important links: www.thiswillchangemylife.com ; www.anyminutenow.com