

# **Great Good Places I–IV**

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Ailbhe Ní Bhriain's video installation *Great Good Places I–IV* is presented on the second floor of 103/4 O'Connell Street, in a rectangular room painted deep grey. Her four widescreen televisions are neatly mounted to the walls, although not as a quadrant; one wall hosts two screens, another has none. The videos vary in lengths below ten minutes, and repeat without synchrony. They ambiently pulse with an ascetic church-organ hum, a birdsong in deep-freeze that paces through the room.

Each 'great good place' is the deserted scene of a computer-generated building. And in each building, propped against some wall, there is a borderless threshold that peers into a further deserted space. As one scene fades into the next, Ní Bhriain repeats the trick. Her 'further scenes' look like they've been broadcast onto a substrate from some unseen projector. But they are disguised as spectral cuboids, loosely edited into the frame and existing in a surreal architecture where the presence of objects is provided by a hidden existential processor.

In *Great Good Places III*, the camera takes a fixed interior view of a dilapidated cottage overlooking the ocean. The floors of this slack space are textured by the light of a false sun. A rectangular portal stands perfectly upright against the back wall, chopped into the scene to show the statues of a faraway museum. Inside there, Ní Bhriain variously animates a set of visual cues: a dead fox or a taxidermied crow, and striped barrier tape hanging in the air. Her rooms refer to one another recursively. The first film peers into the third, beginning in the museum and compositing a rectangular frame that looks over the ocean. The sea's colour slightly integrates with the museum's carpet, and there are files and folders stacked along a shelf in the background.

In the museum of *Great Good Places II*, a strange object continually makes itself seen. This thing looks like a head-sized opaque light bulb with its tail facing the floor as a balloon would. A sheet of thin transparent plastic encircles the bulb's cap and falls upwards in a rough conical shape. It looks like an exotic jellyfish. The thing floats ponderously through the room, but is static in-itself. Its attenuated tatters infer that the air and motion should cause some visible fluttering, but none is apparent. The mysterious floater is frozen in time, and travels through the space as an oblivious ghost.

There are more of these artefacts interposed wherever Ní Bhriain's computerised screens annex the space-time continuum: floating bags and net curtains that peacefully inhale the wind through the window. These particular objects have a special status, they are able to slightly breach the rectangular threshold and affect the next plane – the beyond. They float right before the portal's entrance, or directly past it. The viewer is made unsure of the distinction, seeing only an unknowable marginal depth, and covetously hoping that the camera's fixed position will shift to reveal the portal's true aspect.

In Henry James' short story *Great Good Place*, George Dane falls asleep after a night's work and is somehow transferred to a new un-reality where he can recover from his exhaustion. The un-reality is a place whose name is out of evidence, and the convention of providing it with one seems redundant. It is not a supernatural world of joyuous epiphany, but a mundane holiday. The droll echo of a month spent in hydropathic recovery. Weeks of 'great good' time pass during this night's sleep. The new place is only part-separate from Dane's real life, and although it might make an acceptable country resort, it should not exist.

Back in the gallery I'm between two minds, one that races along the walls to capture the traces of mimetic transference between the four screens and eight planes. Another that wants to sit on the bench at the centre of the room, absorbing the meandering organ's constant chord, and get a few yards away from the television, which plugs me in like a firefly.

The deserted museum of *Great Good Places I–III* is filled with strange relics, and these incite the best questions. A desk fan swivels from left to right, crossing the path of a sheet that hangs from a nearby ladder. And although the sheet blows in the wind, the source of its fluttering is unidentifiable. The two are positioned together in a spatial collage, but they are deliberately not interrelated. This sheet acts very much like the transcendent ocean-window; it is not subject to the environmental conditions of its place. It half exists on the televised plane, and half exists on some other plane, responding to an unrelated existential architecture. Such architecture is mostly definable by what I know it lacks, for instance, the empty space around a statue is dreamily dotted with reflective molecules of dust. Ní Bhriain's realisation of air is utterly moderated, it only exists as these sparkling particles, and never as the gaseous stuff that connects

each physical thing to the next. The dusty reflectors traipse across the statues, onto the floors, through the portal and into the ocean, but they balance on an unreal ‘air’ substitute, a nothing.

Eventually, the recursive planes ask the viewer to consider the authenticity of their physically existing room, the deep grey gallery on O’Connell Street. There is no plane of superior realness that will allow for an external examination of this already-real building, a plane that is ‘more existing’ than this. The viewer can only envelop their perspective into deeper and deeper tunnels of hallucinatory screens. The tunnel is more than an extension of the original televised space, it is a furtherance of Ní Bhriain’s reality-substitute. Not merely a constructed museological non-place but an imperishable oceanic un-place. And from this second floor room, is there somewhere that we can imagine such tunnels will take us? *On* I suppose... *On*.