

EVA's brawn feels familiar in Limerick

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EVA INTERNATIONAL HAS gone through several phases of rebirth and reorganisation since it was established in 1977 as EV+A. The plus sign was there at the suggestion of founder member Paul O'Reilly. It signified that art addressed other faculties and senses than just sight.

At that stage, EV+A was a provincial usurper to the Dublin-based Irish Exhibition of Living Art, then the leading annual exhibition of contemporary art in Ireland. But it also aimed beyond the Living Art, at the international territory staked out by the Rosc exhibitions. And it's maintained these dual aims even since.

Each year a different curator, more often than not from overseas, put together an exhibition from works drawn from open submission and by invited artists. EV+A took a sabbatical in 2011 for some major reorganisation and has returned as a biennial, EVA International, under the directorship of Woodrow Kernohan. This year's curator, Annie Fletcher, is Irish but based in the Netherlands where she works at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven.

Over the last decade and more she has built a considerable reputation. Her projects typically involve webs of international cooperation and address questions of identity and geopolitics, via exploratory ways of mediating and presenting work.

She's taken her theme and title for EVA International from Italian media theorist Franco "Bifo" Berardi's *After the Future*. He advocates an alternative to relentless progress and ever increasing productivity. We should instead reclaim "pleasure and time" for ourselves, he argues.

In practical terms, Fletcher looked for work that addresses the present moment in ways out of the ordinary, by artists with nothing less than an "uncanny and visionary capacity . . . for thinking about things differently". She also linked in with some other, autonomous projects, including a sequence of shows drawn from the archive of the Israeli Centre for Digital Art in Holon, at the Belltable in Limerick.

The first stage of the latter, curated by Kate Strain, is a fairly packed show of – inevitably, given the source – video works. There's wit and humour on offer, but in all it feels like quite an intensive primer on nuances of Middle Eastern life, culture and identity, striking a pedagogic note that is echoed by a significant proportion of the work in the main EVA venues in the City Gallery, 103-104 O'Connell Street and Riverpoint.

A significant proportion of that work also takes the form of video; there is so much of it that you would have to invest an unrealistic amount of time to see everything. Of course no one does. Rather, video forms the visual and physical texture of the exhibition. People graze, and linger with whatever catches their attention.

It's well worth lingering with a few video installations in the City Gallery. Pilvi Takala records her experiences as a non-participatory trainee in the marketing department of Deloitte. Her passive indifference speaks volumes about office life and corporate culture, although it's interesting to note that Deloitte was a collaborator and facilitated the project.

Adrian O'Connell's Library sees people gleefully throwing books into the atrium of a library. It's an allegory about the decline of the book and traditional reading habits in an online world of capsule information and social networks. As with Takala's work, O'Connell's would be better concentrated into one piece instead of spread over several overlapping segments. In her videos, Priscila Fernandes demonstrates that the notionally free pursuits of play and dance are actually directing participants towards conformity and obedience.

In the other main venue, 103-104 O'Connell Street, a vacant, unfinished commercial property, Ailbhe Ní Bhriain's four-screen video creates a space of reverie and dreaming, drawing us into an impossible, though beautifully engaging patchwork world of overlapping and intermingled realities. Across the way, Mark O'Kelly's work is a rare instance of painting in EVA, although it is about representation as a construction, a principle extending through painting, photography, mechanical reproduction and digital reproduction. Never trust an image, might be his motto.

You can't help but notice, scattered throughout the exhibition, crumpled pieces of red paper. They are the work of Sanja Iveković making up a new instalment of her 1998 Shadow Report, which used an NGO report on the infringement of women's right in Croatia. The papers we encounter, and indeed brush aside in EVA, are leaves of an Irish report provided by the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC), detailing information "on marginalised women, poverty and violence against women in Ireland". Inevitably we both notice and ignore the report in the context of the exhibition, as in life. In the exhibition it also fulfils a curatorial function as a leitmotif that runs throughout and ties everything together, providing a formal coherence.

In 1994's EV+A, Luc Deleu devised a site-specific sculpture, Construction X, in which nine shipping containers form a giant X by the side of the Shannon, a simple and spectacular work. Fletcher decided to invite Deleu to recreate it this year and it's there in Arthur's Quay Park. It's good to see it back in the city and it's a great, iconic work.

Those very qualities, however, underline the fact there is no new piece that competes with it in terms of the wow factor. Maybe that's fine because this is EVA picking up the story, moving on to a new chapter, finding its feet. All of which it does, very effectively.

EVA International essentials:

If you weren't around to see Luc Deleu's vast open-air sculpture Construction X when it originally appeared beside the Shannon as part of EV+A 1994, you should make a point of seeing it now. Nine shipping containers form a giant X in Arthur's Quay Park. It may redefine your ideas about what public art can, and should be.

Ailbhe Ní Bhriain's four-screen video, Great Good Places, Parts I-IV , at 103-104 O'Connell Street, is a beautiful, meditative work that is accessible and hypnotically involving. It's also a useful reminder that video is a creative medium as well as a purely functional one. Ní Bhriain has caught the eye of curators already – she featured in the RHA Gallery – and this is an ideal opportunity to catch up with what she's doing.

Much of EVA International 2012 suggests that video is now the dominant documentary form in art, because more often than not the point isn't the quality of the video but what it documents. Besides Ní Bhriain, another of several exceptions to this rule is Pilvi Takala's composite video installation The Trainee, in the Limerick City Gallery, an engrossing account of contemporary corporate alienation.

Keep an eye out for curator Padraic E Moore's contribution to a trio of projects at Belltable. Moore's segment runs from July 14th to August 12th, and the featured artist is Marcus Coates. The programme doesn't stay specifically which work by Coates will be showing but you can bet it will be worth seeing. His post-Joseph Beuysian work draws on shamanism and is usually surprising, unexpectedly revealing and oddly moving.

Eva International 2012: After the Future, eva's inaugural biennial, is centred on the Limerick City Gallery, Pery Square. Other venues include 10th Floor Riverpoint, Bishop's Quay, 103-104 O'Connell St, Arthur's Quay Park, Faber Studios, 19 Henry St and Belltable, 69 O'Connell St. Until August 12