

DUBLIN

Brian Duggan

RUA RED, South Dublin Arts Center

A simplified, skinless, and scaled-down model of a zeppelin hovered in the upper register of RUA RED'S voluminous exhibition space. Confronted by enshrouding darkness and strains of sinister music, most viewers failed to notice its presence. Busy studying the walls of a maze that occluded vision and delimited movement, they found that they had to choose from four points of entry. Whereas two paths led directly into the maze, the other routes seemed to trace its periphery. Yellowy-green bulbs mounted atop the walls of the makeshift labyrinth provided the only illumination. Their hue and weak glow only enhanced the eerie character of the music. But uncertainty soon dissipated, as exploration ultimately turned into a voyage of discovery laced with astonishing vistas and deadly conclusions.

"Three Lives," the title of Brian Duggan's exhibition, refers to the world of video games, and taking either of the pathways into the maze soon brought us to videos showing death, in its simulated form, in many guises. If you encountered *you lose*,

a laughable, then mind-numbing survey of more than 200 game over screens, on the way in, then *Non standard chain reactions*, a scrolling list of alternate endings from games like System Shock and Final Fantasy X-2, greeted you on the way out. Further in, viewers were treated to stellar scenes of a zeppelin floating toward a florid sunset and close-up views of the Hindenburg slipping through puffs of cloud. As the music hit a crescendo, a spotlight briefly brought the overhead model to attention, before dimming again. The rumble of a powerful engine and the crackly voice of a panic-stricken announcer interrupted the music. The confluence of images and sounds engendered conflicting emotions. Eliciting the glory of flight, they also instilled a potent sense of dread. Transcendence occurred at the end of a ramp leading up to a small platform. Suddenly elevated, we experienced a sense of elation as we looked across the installation from the far side of the space. From this perspective, the planar disposition of the lights that guided our passage resembled an illuminated airfield stochastically presided over by the zeppelin. Turning back also revealed scenes

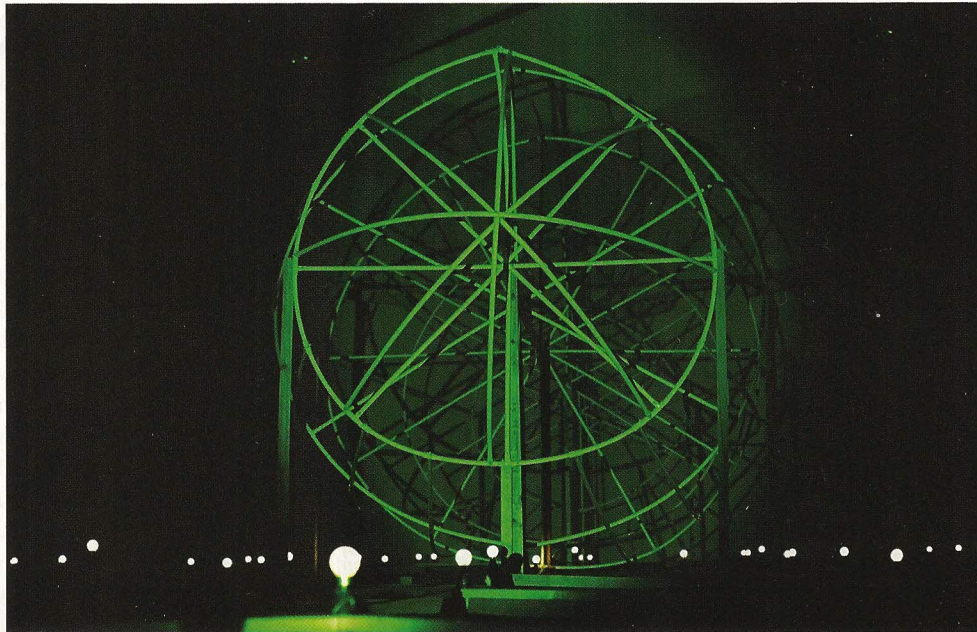


of the Hindenburg's catastrophic demise and textual excerpts from Herbert Morrison's dramatic eyewitness report of the event.

In recent years, Duggan's immersive installations have focused on

themes drawn from circuses and carnival sideshows, his process of dissecting thrill shows emphasizing their clichéd and veritable aspects. Here, he took a different tack by structuring a participative environment that placed the viewer between two very dissimilar kinds of technology, periods of time, and forms of calamity. The intriguing juxtapositions subjected us to conflicting types of horror that blended in the mind and left us feeling quite tentative about what is simulated and what is real.

—John Gayer



Above: Brian Duggan, *you lose*, 2012. DVD, 224 game over screens, ongoing collection, 9:11 min. Left: Brian Duggan, *I leave to the various futures (not to all) my garden of forking paths*, 2012. Wood, lights, cable, pipe, fittings, cable ties, glue, projector, 5 DVDs, 2 televisions, 2 mini-screens, and sound, dimensions variable.