TERMINAL CONVENTION
CORK, IRELAND

Protracted experiences comprising wonder, confusion, loss, discovery and rediscovery pervaded *Terminal Convention* [Cork International Airport, March 17—27, 2011]. Set in the former terminal building of the transport facility, the exhibition temporarily revived the abandoned structure with a host of site-specific installations produced by an international roster of artists, effectively converting this aged point of transfer into a destination of consequence. Its brief reopening also attracted a broad cross section of people. Unhindered by access restrictions, current airport staff, tourists, and local citizens who last entered the building five or more years ago mingled with artists and art lovers in the exploration of its interior. In passing through the former departure lounge, retail spaces, and customs clearance area, they encountered a heady mix of art making reference to air travel, the history of the site, events of local and international importance, as well as the evolution of technology and security requirements.

Curated by Peter Gorschlüter, Deputy Director of the Museum für Moderne Kunst (MMK), Frankfurt am Main, the exhibition formed the core of a project whose scope encompassed a symposium offering a penetrating look at the "Global Art Industry," an art fair, and an independent music festival. Produced in cooperation with Cork's National Sculpture Factory, the project was developed by Paul Sullivan, the Director of Liverpool's Static Gallery, whose interest in the site stems from his visits to the airport in 2005, when the building was operating, and after its decommissioning in 2006. The apropos title, which tersely references the event's location, also implies juncture and culmination. Though several contributions take up the subject of impending finality, much of the work firmly counters the notion of cessation.

The eye-catching yellow-orange glow of Shane Munro's *Cc*, 2011, welcomed viewers to the exhibition. Set just inside the entrance, the illuminated sculptural monogram created out of dismantled signage speaks literally of the facility's closing. It evokes absence—the letters derive from the English and Irish names of the city that graced the roof of the building—and nostalgia. Suggesting something between museum artefact and junkyard find, the ambiguous status of the letters also begot a subtle tension. Expressions of vacuity also occur in the work of Rosa Barba and Seamus Nolan. In Barba's *White Museum*, 2011, a transparent 70 mm film loop runs through a large Cinemeccanica projec-

tor directed out of the window to the tarmac below. But, outside of the white quadrilateral outlining the shape of the anticipated image, there was nothing—in daylight—to be seen. Nolan's contribution, on the other hand, had been intended to contravene the basic purpose of air passenger transport by block-booking a flight that no one would take. But a recent air tragedy caused the temporary suspension of the Belfast to Cork route and Nolan to modify his work. On March 18th announcements on the building's PA system directed viewers to a point in the departure lounge where the non-arrival of the empty flight could be witnessed.

Engrossing suppositions of transience, transformation, and continuation traversed the show. Ross Dalziel appropriated a portion of the viewing area for *Viewing Area*, 2011, a two-day session of talks linking art and plane spotting. Juan Cruz's *Perpendosi*, 2011, described as a tragic-comic fading away of music, laid claim to existing airport signage. The resuscitation of old photographic material left in the terminal absorbed Peter Norrman and Hanna Pierce. Taking the airport as image-maker, Norrman's *RETAIN*, 2011, combined a group of cine-sculptures breathing life into x-ray images and a compilation of digital portraits originally used for ID badges. Norrman's interest in recent history contrasted with the social focus of Pierce's ongoing piece *Lost & Found*. Utilizing newspapers, websites, and social media, the artist continues to seek out the rightful owners of pictures developed from two boxes of lost cameras. Without doubt, Martin Healy's *Last Man*, 2011, offers the most poignant—and poetic—meditation on the past, present, and potential future of aviation. The film, which was shot in the terminal and approaches science fiction in its combination of isolation, austerity, and sense of dislocation, depicts its lone caretaker, a man charged with an impossible task, who sits down at the end of the day to work on his model aircraft, daring to dream of that machinery that permits or may have permitted flight.
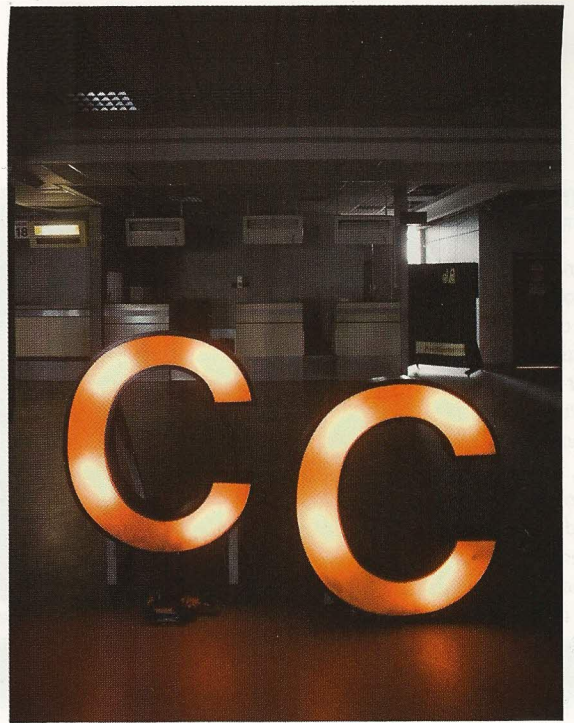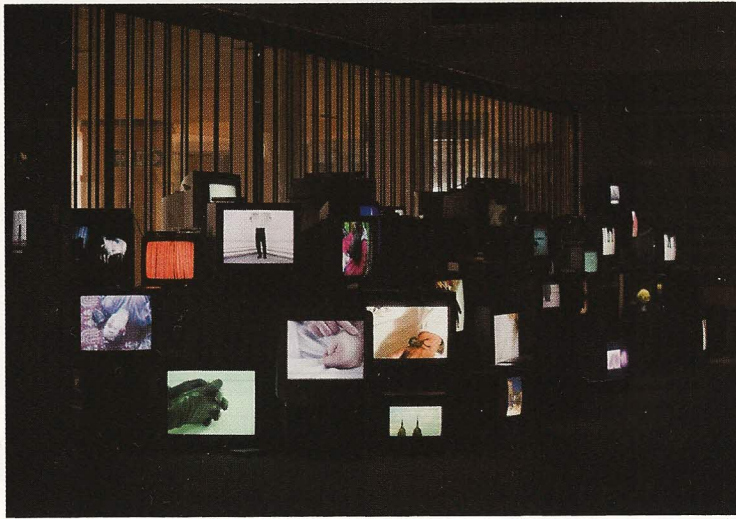
The heterogeneous onslaught of sound and images from Douglas Gordon's extraordinary video mosaic *Pretty Much Every Film and Video Work from 1992 Until Now to be Seen on Monitors, Some with Headphones, Others Run Silently and All Simultaneously*, 1992–ongoing, could be said to have depicted the multifariousness of airports. As platforms through which beings of every continent are channelled, airports offer an overwhelmingly dense congregation of

trivial glimpses. Viewers could concentrate on specific aspects of this work or appreciate its cumulative presence from a distance. In certain respects Le Pavillon's *To Name a Day*, 2011, a sequence of sound pieces haunting many parts of the structure, paralleled Gordon's presentation. Ghost-like qualities also surfaced in Imogen Stidworthy's sombre *Untitled*, 2011. Pairing large backlit images from a Liverpool demolition site with a recording of textual fragments read by a Bosnian war veteran and an aphasia sufferer, the installation equated deprivation in the built environment with psychological trauma and the loss of cerebral function.

Visits to art events naturally arouse musings regarding their failure or success. Even the best intentions can produce uneven results. Take, for example, the reception of Diane Guyot's work on Cork's Beamish microbrewery, which involved changing the closed firm's slogan from 'Beamish Be Irish' to *Beamish/Be Amish*. Some of the former employees simply abhorred it. Or take the paltry response to the art fair, summarily reflecting Cork's art center status, Static Gallery's visibility/invisibility within the art system, and the predilections of the art market. Of the nearly thirty international galleries invited to participate in this component which, according to Sullivan, "sought to open up more sophisticated territories for the production of subversive contemporary art," only Static and two local galleries took part. Finally, the art faced tough competition from the site itself. Though the terminal's attributes frequently distracted visitors away from the art, some of the work was able to puncture such lapses. Periodic shifts in lighting delivered by Munro's *Striplight White*, 2011, effected such transitions; as did the incessant ringing that emanated from an empty inspection booth, an unmarked work by Adrian Williams that raised a host of questions and induced a notable sense of urgency. The unsettling presence of these works altered the viewers' relationship with their surroundings and, together with the other artists' contributions, visually and intellectually reconstituted the structure. Despite a modicum of drawbacks, *Terminal Convention* did provide a wholly provocative set of experiences.

—John Gayer

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The online introduction to the symposium component of the Cork Terminal Convention professes a lackluster view of the state of art today. After a paragraph of grim exposition, the uncredited text prescribes a "Napster moment," wherein "artists, critics, curators, writers, thinkers, and radicals need to find new forms of autonomy within the structures of a globalized art industry, to carve out spaces which will allow us to rethink ourselves radically, imagine ourselves differently and re-configure our collective futures."

Fair enough, but the wisdom of holding a three-day convention in an old airport terminal becomes disputable once the fervor dies down and the iconic allure wears off. The remoteness, the conditioned sense of pensiveness, and the awkwardness of getting around don't really register until you've made that tenth trek across the premises to investigate the whereabouts of that tucked-away artwork you've realized you missed.

Of course, the upsides are clear—plenty of space; physical and thematic quirks for artists to exploit; and the immediacy of mass international transit as a reminder of both the inchoate potential and the inescapability of the globalized sphere. Watching a flight of Aer Lingus, Ireland's national airline, lumber obliviously along the tarmac behind artist Juan Cruz, as he soliloquized on his work, I did feel that disassociative blink that caused me to wonder, momentarily, where I was and what I was doing. When such questions arise so suddenly, especially in the terminal's ambience of perpetual displacement, answering them might not be as easy as you think.

During the symposium, more than one speaker enjoyed chewing on the event's titular double-entendre, foregrounding the discourse around functional radicality. The impetus for the occasion was, after all, ostensibly to move past the old methodologies and to make a clean break with the past. As such, the notion of "terminal convention" as the pathological adherence to tradition would have been hard to resist.

John Byrne, chair of the event and an able moderator, introduced the symposium and its speakers, and explained the intentions and structure of the three-day affair. Annie Fletcher, who spoke first, provoked some kinetic exchanges by describing her work at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven. In the knowingly controversial last chapter of her talk, she introduced the Living Archive of the Van Abbemuseum, with its plug-ins—essentially recontextualizations of work by major twentieth-century artists by way of their unorthodox, if not discourse-altering, installation at the museum. The accompanying PowerPoint images of Donald Judd sculptures tilted sideways and embellished by kitschy plaid wallpaper stirred up some grumbling. Her ethos in taking formal liberties that contradict the dictum of the works' initial arrangements, however, was so precisely articulated that it quietly asserted the subtleties of institutional management while enlivening the broader discussion.

Peter Gorschlüter, the exhibition's curator, spoke next, putting forth a modified version of the explanations of the work he had given a smaller group earlier in the day. The exhibition itself often made heavy but judicious use of the airport venue. Martin Healy's film Last Man, 2011, attractively shot with an HD camera that took full advantage of the mid-morning light streaming in through the terminal's wide windows, follows the sad-eyed and listless routine of a frumpy custodian, as he buffs and mops the barren, dusty expanse of the expired building. In an eerie departure from the physical space, Seamus Nolan booked an entire flight, which was intended to land, empty, at the Cork airport while the event was still taking place. Juan Cruz programmed the LED-tickers at the gates to read "Perendosi", an esoteric conductor's direction. And Peter Norrman's RETAIN, 2011, filtered the serialized identities of air travelers with a set of jerry-rigged apparatuses projecting still and video images of ID-photos and indistinct, pixelated motion.

Symposium keynotes Fletcher and Charles Esche, director of the Van Abbemuseum, loosely book-ended an oscillating, multi-faceted conversation, which also included Village Voice critic and Dublin Contemporary co-curator Christian Viveros-Faune, and Christian Merlhiot of Le Pavillon at Paris' Palais de Tokyo, among others. The tone drifted between academic discipline—with a necessarily insular focus—and peevishly doctrinaire intimations of personal practice. A few apparent polarizations of opinions developed. By day 3, especially, the symposium had turned into a tenuously civilized, scruffy confederacy of thinkers and practitioners, volleying their ideas more than offering them, forming tacit alliances and rivalries that extended from the podium to the snack tray.

Esche was candid and conversational in opening the third day. Self-effacingly setting upon the admittedly futile task of a "history of art and power in brief," he referenced Courbet, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Francis Fukuyama, and Alfred Barr to draw parallels between the spread of democracy and the progress of the institution through modernism and its delineated later developments. Ruminating on his own experiences as director of a pointedly radical art museum, he advocated a kind of temporal leveling, a reduction in the privileging of one period over another. In an intriguing addendum to Fletcher on the Living Archive, Esche showed slides of room-size installations built to the disinterred specifications of Lissitzky and Rodchenko, which he half-jokingly referred to as "belated commissioning."

The ideas of day 2 keynote speaker George Yudice and day 3 participant Stephen Wright established another ideological coupling. Yudice, who is a professor of Modern Languages and Literatures and Latin American Studies at the University of Miami, spoke of art's exceptional kind of capital, which is couched in its anti-systematic valence. He reflected on the propensity of this abstract capital, as with any, to transfer into material capital, and thusly to formulate its own economy. Wright, of the European School of Visual Arts, cohered to the social aspects of artistic currency, lauding the advent of "user culture" and its hopeful subsuming of "expert culture." It was perhaps the most explicit commentary on the proactive democratization of art in society, and the most directly in keeping with the symposium's press-friendly notion of the "Napster moment."

—Curt Riegelnegg