

## TULCA 2017: They Call Us The Screamers

Galway City

Michaële Cutaya (<http://enclavereview.org/writers/michaele-cutaya/>) ER16

(<http://enclavereview.org/issues/er16/>)



This year Tulca curator Matt Packer's choice of title – if not quite theme – attracted some controversy, which may have skewed the reception of the exhibition. In referring to Jenny James' eponymous book on the commune of Atlantis, which resided for a few years at Burtonport in County Donegal, Packer wished to examine the 'broader framework of practice-related ideas that develop from the countercultural psyche of the 1970s', as Tulca's publicity put it. During the curator's tour, he further talked about how he felt that hippie culture has generally been neglected if not downright dismissed by the contemporary artworld. But the trauma still lingering in the wake of the Atlantis commune, as well as the showing in Galway Arts Centre of Bob Quinn's fascinating and disturbing film *The Family* (1979), with the charismatic yet disquieting James as its lead, seem to have focused much of the attention on the 'screamers' rather than the utopian impulses driving 1970s communes in general.

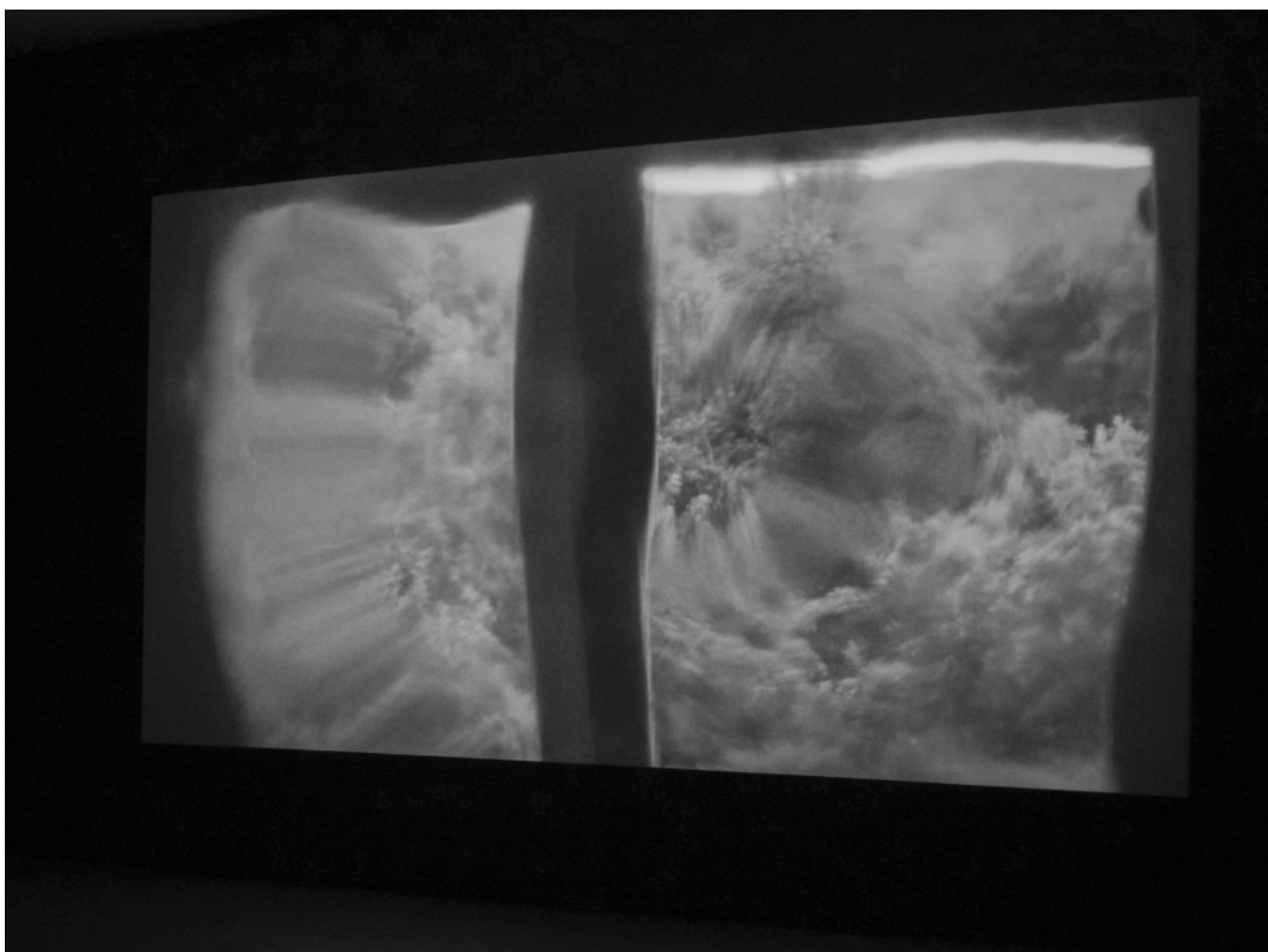
Some of the featured works did indeed engage with specific aspects of Atlantis, but the majority explored ideas of being in the world and being together in an open-ended way. This year's Tulca was characterised by a reduced number of artists shown, with a majority of works specially commissioned – those of 13 out of the 17 artists and collaborative groups featured – offering a particularly rich interplay between curatorial propositions and artists' imagination. The Atlantis commune earned its nickname from its practice of Primal Therapy which, by encouraging the practice of 'primal screaming', unsettled the commune's neighbours. The scream motif was picked up in several intriguing ways: Yoko Ono's *Voice Piece for Soprano* (1961), for instance, was an instruction to scream, printed as a facsimile on a postcard available in the waiting room of the University College Hospital. To scream against the wind, the wall, the sky, felt quite apt on a bleak November day in Galway. Presented one floor above Bob Quinn's film – which gives the screamers their due – was Fabienne Audeoud's *Practice* (1997) a three hour-long video of the artist in her studio making non-verbal sounds. The artist also vocalised on the closing weekend which quite literally entranced the audience.

The therapeutic sessions found a troubling echo in Liz Magic Laser's video, *Primal Speech* (2016). A soft spoken Certified Professional Life Coach enjoins us the viewer and the participating actors to reenact scenes from the past, and to 'locate the pain'. The twist here is that the repressed feelings are political rather than individual, these are activists expressing their frustration at the political traumas of 2016. The video was played in the TV room of the Barnacles Hostel, with large comfy armchairs that matched the all-soft therapy room in the video.

It was the cultish side of Atlantis that inspired Lucy Stein. The first movement for many visitors on entering her installation *Inflating The Goddess* (2017) might well have been one of recoil. Mud-spattered bedsheets, baby blankets and Y-fronts are hung on clothes lines crisscrossing the first floor front room of the Galway Arts Centre; the walls have been smeared with graffiti. The reddish colour of the unfired clay can bring to mind menstrual blood – the bedsheets, the artist's previous work and the graffiti deciphered as the names of goddesses written in reverse lead in that

direction – but, in an Irish context, the thickness of the material (and the Y-fronts surely!) is more likely to summon the memory of the 'Dirty Protest'. After the initial unease, however, it's the humour in Stein's work that comes to the fore, with a large, pink, scallop-shell inflatable pool, reminiscent of the vessel that bore Venus to the shore in Botticelli's painting, propped up on one side and an equally inflatable swan living up to its ubiquitous mythological incarnations at the centre of it all.

On the top floor, Vicky Langan and Maximilian Le Cain's performance and films were an altogether more intimate exploration of interactions between human beings. The two artists performed at the opening weekend in front of a projection of *Play Ground*. Beautifully shot in black and white, and providing the only source of lighting for the performance, the film examines a relationship with sadomasochistic tendencies between two protagonists, while also evoking performance work from the 1970s – a scene where Langan crawls on gravel was particularly painful to watch. The live performance played off the actions on screen and added sound effects with Langan rubbing a small microphone against the fabric of her dress, her skin or through Le Cain's hair. For the rest of the festival Langan and Le Cain's first feature film, *Inside* (2017), was viewable. Taking place in and around a wooden cabin in the countryside, the soft focus cinematography and palette of gentle greens (it is shot mostly in colour) has a very different feel to *Play Ground*. Here, the female character and her perceptions take centrestage, with the male protagonist quite possibly a figment of her imagination. The film has beguiling visual moments – such as Langan immersed in a blanket of ferns – but at times over-lingers, seemingly in love with its own effects – longueurs that ask for an indulgent audience.



(<http://enclavereview.org/wp-content/uploads/Cutaya-image-1.jpg>)

Vicky Langan and Maximilian Le Cain: *Inside* (2017). Still. Digital film, 70 mins. Installation view, TULCA Festival of Visual Arts 2017. Image courtesy of the artist. Photo: Jonathan Sammon

At 126 Gallery, Richard Proffitt set up a shrine for a cult of one in the installation *The Short Cut: Don't Follow The*

*Black Dog* (2017), another instance of the artist's interest in connecting personal narratives to the collective imaginary. Here, the title evokes both a mythological creature and depression – Proffitt's dark temple with its odd charms and imagery may be meant to ward off both.

In the Connacht Tribune Print Works, apart from Yvette Monahan's photographic quest for traces of the Atlantis commune in the landscape of Inishfree in *Beyond the Ninth Wave* (2017), the other works explored various modes of being and communicating: from the elective mutism of the youth with whom artist Florian Roithmayr worked; or the self-help audio recording encouraging the listener to venture down the path of inter-species development (while contemplating a fountain in the shape of some hybrid species) of Siobhan McGibbon and Maeve O'Lynn's *Xenophon: Re-Birth and Re-Verse* (2017); or Oisin Byrne's costume for a new self (*Then Yourself* [2017]).

For *Propositional Things*, David Beattie conducted research into orgone energy, a term coined by Wilhelm Reich for a hypothetical life force. Reich devised orgone accumulators intended to improve health and 'orgastic potency': they were box-like contraptions large enough to contain a chair, made up of alternate layers of metal and organic matter to attract and radiate positive energies. Beattie's installation opens up the box to create a vast layered space: sheets of mild steel mark out the floor area, a bed made of wool is slightly off-centre under a screen made of metal and tweed suspended from the ceiling. Around the space clusters of plants, platters of salt, wool blankets, buckets of water and UV lights are disposed, as well as some home-made orgonite, all chosen for their supposed energetic agency. In opening up the space Beattie proposes a more inclusive and diffuse healing process. This treatment of an art environment in terms of esoteric energies has intriguing repercussions for the interpretation of Beattie's previous staging of light and sound interactions.

At the far end of the Print Works space were Kian Benson Bailes' sculptures (all 2017). It's hard not to think of them as creatures, although of an aberrant kind. They look grown as much as constructed out of the assembled materials, objects and digital prints. Each of the five figures has a distinct personality: *no fats / no femmes* is quite square, while *bareback or nothing* is mostly pink. Expanded masses are precariously balanced on impossibly thin legs, defying gravity, and the overlay of actual objects over their printed siblings produces series of trompe l'oeils with rich associations. An urban phenomenon is somewhat horse-like – quite possibly more than one horse – mostly made of expanded foam it slowly drifts over the water of its plexiglas tank. Coming out of the deflated form, mastlike sticks with strings as rigging allude to the possibility of sails and further journeys. The bottom of the tank is lined with digital prints of boxes of prescription drugs, which intriguingly turn out to be treatments for spinal muscular atrophy and opioide overdose. Benson Bailes' creatures evoke life-forms that may emerge out of the mess humanity is leaving behind, the care that hold them together suggests a gentler era to come.

(<http://enclavereview.org/wp-content/uploads/Cutaya-image-2.jpg>)

Explicitly  
taking us to  
a post-  
human  
world was  
Plastique



Kian Benson Bailes: *An Urban Phenomenon* (2017). Plastic, wire, thread, water, plexiglas, expanding foam, wood, string, digital print, paint, varnish, concrete. Image courtesy of the artist. Photo: Jonathan Sammon.

Fantastique's *Futurespast Sound Catcher Repeater* (2017), performed each evening of the opening weekend. A collaboration between David Burrows, Simon O'Sullivan, Alex Marzeta and Vanessa Page, amongst others,

Plastique Fantastique has been producing performances, installations and texts since 2004. Five members of the group took part in Saturday's performance. Based on a post-apocalyptic scenario in which only four life forms survive, the story was told through multiple digital displays as well as by one of the performers. Another stood, covered in glue and glitter and fed some instant stock by the look of it, as a sacrificial victim. The rest, each wearing the mask or probe-head of one of the surviving species, enacted a series of actions, part-scripted, part-spontaneous, while improvising a live electro-acoustic score. The performance was at once humorous and quite serious, while the overall tone perhaps best qualified as baroque, as the title of their first manifesto 'On Baroque Practice' suggests:

Our practice is always one of ritual. We intend a performance that will allow those who dare participate to move from work time (utility) into sacred time (play). Our practice affirms transformation: we are concerned less with mundane consciousness than with cosmic consciousness. We believe in a baroque practice as the only appropriate response to these troubled and terror-stricken times.

As Packer pointed out during his tour of the exhibition, Atlantis was part of a broader yearning in the 1970s for the pre-modern, when the promises of modernity were losing their appeal and alternatives were being sought. Over the intervening decades of frenzied acceleration, these alternative cultures of the seventies were dismissed as backward-looking, but didn't entirely disappear – mutating instead into environmental movements, organic farming (like Atlantis itself once it had relocated to Columbia) and other ecological activisms. Packer maintains that the art-world remains by and large beguiled by techno-progressivism and the culture of competitive innovation, which has kept it away from in depth exploration of that counter-culture that issued from the hippy 'revolution'.

There was much food for thought in Packer's propositions, which were responded to imaginatively by the participating artists. It was not an easy exhibition to experience in full, but it was one that rewarded you for what time you could invest. Thus it was somewhat disappointing that the curator elected to present the artworks in the catalogue with one liner commentaries – in 140 characters or less – as if they had been formatted for the needs of social media promotion. But perhaps we can then take heart in Twitter's decision to double its characters limit: it might yet herald a new dawn in utopian thinking. #280

Tulca 2017 ran from 3 – 9 November. The full text of Plastique Fantastique's manifesto is available at [plastiquefantastique.org](http://plastiquefantastique.org).

---

Michaële Cutaya is writer on art based in Galway.

Text copyright Michaële Cutaya. First published in Enclave Review 16, Winter/Spring 2018, pp.1-2.