Yvonne Rainer
Interviewed by John Douglas Millar

Hand Signals
Laura McLean-Ferris

Lonely Arts
Ajay Hothi

Liverpool Biennial
Bob Dickinson
onto a two-dimensional carpet, becoming abstract and gaining painterly qualities. Blending the fictional and the real, the physical and the virtual, movement and stasis, the artists enhance viewers’ experience of both on- and off-screen images. The smooth waxy objects positioned in both spaces, originating as simple painted lines (drawing and animation’s basic element), an evolution represent of the artists’ object-based work and a consideration of the diverse possibilities for the formation and transformation of objects and perceptions.

Immersed in Crabtree & Evans’s installation, one cannot miss the artists’ intimate dialogue with the gallery’s spaces or the effects of transformations of cinematic or digital imagery. The duo prompt us to think of what is gained and lost in the digital age, particularly the myriad experiences off-screen, perhaps inspiring alternative ways of enriching our experiences of images and objects beyond those found on two and three-dimensional flat screens. II

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Magic Touch
CCA Derry – Londonderry 2 August to 20 September

As you navigate your way through ‘Magic Touch’, an exhibition of contemporary art that explores the imprint of the human body on objects and technology, a series of hanging sculptural planes intermittently disrupts your passage. Strung from horizontal steel cables along the gallery ceiling, Jesse Flood-Paddock’s Nude Wood, 2014, consists of several gently sloping vertical panels, their white surfaces mottled with specs of gray, teetering on the edge of the floor and, in places, nearly brushing against each other, like a pair of inverted brackets. In these works, the artist appropriates the logo of Nude, a natural, ethical skincare company: each formula is a force of nature, boasts Nude’s website. In some ways, the sculptures share that firm’s aesthetic aspirations – pure, organic, an idealised classicism denoted in its name and in the marbling effect of Flood-Paddock’s column-like structures – while, at the same time, undercutting the brand’s stated values through their formation from mass-produced polystyrene packaging material. Yet, despite the work’s conceptual provenance and the back-and-forth interplay of art-historical connotations and market-driven manifestos, subsequently reinfused into what are essentially formalist configurations, Nude Wood is primarily a spatial intervention. The component parts push the viewer in particular directions, into unanticipated trajectories, shading into the gallery’s adjacent – and permanent – architectural pillars, leaning too close at some places, pulling away at others.

This awareness of one’s physical proximity to the work often overspins the typical boundaries between spectator and object. The effect returns throughout ‘Magic Touch’ and, as such, occasionally resists encounters where the balance shifts unsteadily off-centre, where artworks cram too close together or invade each other’s ‘personal space’. While this may be precisely the point, in Padraic Spillane’s Spine, 2012 – a photographic print of a naked back, mounted on the floor and punctured by an upstanding, vertical rod – the puncturing of the gallery space and of Flood-Paddock’s installation by this anomalous, unsettling object works to the detriment of both. The formal coherence of Nude Wood, and of the nearby accompanying wall-based sculptures which rework the logo in red or black strokes against undulating, irregular plaster slabs, is momentarily broken by a gesture of sudden violence, while the impact of Spillane’s piece is conversely diminished by its impingement upon an organised and integrated body of work.

Ironically, Spillane’s other work here, Trans., 2014, seems to embody this imbalance in its representation of an individual undergoing stages of mirror therapy, a medical process of re-establishing the relationships between different limbs. Sliding effortlessly across images of the nude figure to empty fields of grey or black to a photo-negative portrait, the sequence recedes into an actual mirror, reversing and replaying itself in its reflection. The apparent symmetry, however, is distorted through both the perpendicularly angling of the mirror into the gallery space and the requirement of the viewer’s intrusion into the frame in order to ‘complete’ the composition.

A sense of asymmetry also marks a rather dramatic shift within the exhibition towards works that explore the ramifications of technology on human touch and tactility. Kaja Novitskova’s 2013 ‘Shapeshifter’ series retains a sense of the physical imprint by implanting broken silicon wafers into resin moulds that bear the outline of the hand’s grip. These forms are crossed with finger marks, deliberately placed where the material has been squashed and compressed, and are presented in display cases as if they are museum artefacts rediscovered from a long-lost civilisation. At once archaic and advanced, the inserted computer chips are rendered inert, useless. One sees a similar preoccupation with the physical, even primitive, gesture and its articulation in the present day in Arie Vierkant’s video work Fingerprint Wednesday 9 July 2014 155PM (Magic Touch, Vierkant, CCC Derry – Londonderry, Matt Packer, Regular Speed), 2014. Using digital fingerprint techniques and gesture recognition software, squiggles and signatures appear across the screen, detached from the hand of the writer. Like Novitskova, the artist appears to be focused on a particularly rudimentary version of digital technology, with the neon turquoise and pink scribbles reminiscent of early paintbox applications; but his video lacks the otherworldliness, the explicit fascination with obscónescence and outdatedness, conveyed through her assemblages.

Kate Davis’s video Denkmal, 2013, provides a more intriguing line of correspondence between past and future, analogue and digital, and presence and disembodiment. A blank computer interface fills the screen, progressively overlaid with everyday objects and utensils manipulated by a child’s hands (occasionally directed by another, adult, interloper). As the narrative unfolds, the accumulation of items – calendar, clock, telephone, calculator, paint, radio, camera, typewriter, a street map of Glasgow – provide an analogue equivalent

Kate Davis
Denkmal 2013

video
to the standard applications of the modern personal computer. A commentary, drawn from descriptions by the historians Ellie Herring and Dominic Paterson and the writer Maria Fusco, of the feel and sound of these objects (with each component similarly obfuscate by the catch-all designation of ‘this gift’) is slightly off the mark, reverting to the next, as yet unseen, inclusion – a disorienting tactic borrowed from Hollis Frampton’s 1975 film *nastalgia*, screened at CCA Derry – Londonderry throughout the exhibition’s duration. The anticipation of each subsequent addition is affected through the preceding voice-over: ‘real, real, rule, snot’ recites our speaker and, seconds later, a strip of camera film subsequently unravels across the frame. It is through this delaying tactic that Dave’s work undoes what Lev Manovich terms the consistency principle between the physical object and its realisation on a desktop interface, whereby ‘the user knows that every application will contain a “file” menu, or that if she encounters an icon that looks like a magnifying glass, it can be used to zoom on documents’. The correlation is revealed as imperfect, weighted and skewed. As in several works here, this move from the tactile, ‘tactum’ object to its virtual equivalent is never a seamless transition, but instead always bears the leftover traces of a persistent, physical presence.

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A Modern Panarion: Glimpses of Occultism in Dublin
Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane 19 June to 7 September

At several points during ‘A Modern Panarion: Glimpses of Occultism’ in Dublin, one senses the contributing artists veering off-message. Ostensibly a straight exploration of the wider contemporary significance of Theosophy – that late Victorian meld of crackpot spiritualism and pseudo-science, the influence of which runs through everything from Steiner educational methodologies to children’s television programmes and psychedelic music – the exhibition includes a number of works that exercise a wry scepticism, picking at the frayed edges of a movement that has been tarnished by other, less savoury, associations of racism, anti-Semitism, fraudulently and exploitation. While ‘A Modern Panarion’s eclectic selection and disorienting display of artworks betrays Theosophy’s syncretic, unifying logic, it is this underlying current of doubt that, paradoxically, seems to tie its different strands together.

Ben McMahon’s *Self-Pruning Series*, 2014, for instance, consists of 16 colour-pencil drawings, incorporating amorphous forms, interlocking chains, tendrils, spirals and the occasional recognisable image (of a globe or the profile of a bald, bearded man). Leaving aside the title’s allusions of masturbatory self-indulgence, the implication is that the artist acts here as a cipher for some intangible force or power, with Rosa Akbari’s accompanying exhibition essay reaffirming that these works arrived ‘fully formed as visions before being almost cathetically reproduced in pencil’. However, the same text later attributes the familiarity of their forms to McMahon’s childhood exposure to new-age ideas and iconography, while the exhibition’s own organising principle – of occultism as it has been filtered through popular culture – is similarly critical of such essentialist notions. They may have arisen ‘fully formed’, but one might suggest that this occurs precisely because of the wider currency of such imagery; what the artist is drawing out is her own sublimated, deeply embedded awareness of what visionary mysticism ‘looks like’.

This sense of uncertainty also informs Garrett Phelan’s sound piece *A Voodoo Free Phenomenon*, 2014, accessible only by tuning in to a designated radio frequency. Again, there are two ways to read this: as a meditation on the invisible, yet real, properties that permeate our world or, more cynically, as a demonstration of Theosophy’s own invisible logic, where revelation – and the right to convey these messages – was reserved for the chosen few. The movement’s co-founder, Madame Helena P Blavatsky, whose *Isis* book gives the exhibition its title, claimed to channel knowledge from Tibetan ‘Mahatmas’, and Phelan’s work similarly operates on principles of access to information. For my part, I could only pick up dead air from my radio, which might indicate either a profound psychic lack or an outdated phone model. Phelan’s drawings in the exhibition – photocopied images of radios hovering in an inkly void and connected to floating white blobs by diagrammatical marks – might, as the exhibition suggests, recall ley lines and electromagnetic fields, yet, to me, they speak more of the inherent contradiction of representing sound through visual imagery. Even the collision of white strokes and circles resembles empty speech balloons. In this view, any relation these have to the occult is a negative one: imagined voices, silent in the face of the incommunicable.

In Gunilla Klingberg’s screen-printed vinyl work *Lunar Cycle for A Modern Panarion*, 2014, the moon is portrayed in its successive phases, waxing and waning repeatedly across the gallery walls. The overall effect is mesmerising, even hinting at the transcendental, although this experience is tempered somewhat by the artist’s stated interest in mass media, mechanical reproduction and the apparent status of the moon as ‘democratic, visible to everyone’. But is the proliferation of these lunar cycles actually a gesture of equality or does it repeat a picturing that effaces a deeper meaning, a purely decorative presentation that diminishes the singular relationship of the individual stargazer to the distant, yet perceivable, moon? Although Theosophical aesthetics, demonstrated in Dorje de Burgh’s photographs of murals discovered beneath the wallpaper of its Irish branch headquarters, emphasises the universal and the harmonic through its iconography and content, it is their effect which seems to prejudice more contemporary manifestations.

The latter section of the exhibition reaffirms this tendency. Derek Jarman’s early silent film, *A Journey to Aviemore*, 1971, presents sequences of ancient stone circles and pastoral landscapes, tinged with a palette of golden hues that conjure an eerie, paganist mysticism. The hazy ambience of the work also makes an interesting accompaniment to Richard Proffitt’s Cosmic Drift: *Elevations of a Fried Mystic*, 2014, an installation of totemic sculptures made of feathers and bones, newspaper clippings, dangling jewellery and flickering lights, soundtrack by the drone, looped introduction to Pink Floyd’s

Fieldworks
Animal Habitats in Contemporary Art
Curated by Chris Clarke
1 August – 2 November 2014
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Petrit Halilaj
Ho Rui An
Jochen Lempert
Flo Maak
Chris Marker
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Vanessa Safavi
Julia Schmidt
Sonia Sleigh
Ruth van Beek

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