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108 Amanda Dunsmore
Mr and Mrs
Krab's
Utopia



Views of Amanda Dunsmore
video installation, *Mr and Mrs
Krab's Utopia*, in Kilnaboy X-PO;
courtesy of the artist

Amanda Dunsmore's latest video installation, *Mr and Mrs Krab's Utopia*, was presented in a cottage in the midst of the Burren which, up to 2002, had been Kilnaboy Post Office. The two main rooms of the building were renovated in 2007 by Deirdre O'Mahony for the *X-PO* local exchange project, to become a space for contemporary art and community activities.

Dunsmore's work was installed in what used to be the office's public room. The original shelves retained some of their content and the counter was recreated as a setting for the video monitor, thus preserving some of the functional look of the place.

The installation is predominately an audio piece, as underscored by the modest size of the monitor screen. The sound track is the edited recording of interviews by the artist of a Dutch couple who came to live in Co Clare about ten years ago, *Mr and Mrs Krab*.¹

Complementing each other's sentences as in a two-part score, *Mr and Mrs Krab* first talk of their impressions upon arriving in Ireland on holidays and how it changed their life; how it came to be their dream place and led to their permanent installation in the country. Then they talk of the changes they have witnessed happening around them and how these changes relate to what they knew back in Holland.

In a press release, Dunsmore stated that she was "looking for an outside and informed opinion on social issues found in contemporary rural Ireland," hence her interest in the Krabs' experience. They offered a layered view of Ireland, through their idealised outlook as an antidote to their previous life, and an appreciation of socio-economic issues that they were able to compare with what they had known.

The visuals accompanying their words are composed of a series of one-minute shots, which Dunsmore describes as loosely related to the details taken in by her drifting consciousness during the interviews. We follow successively shots of a door opening onto a garden path, a misty country road, raindrops on leaves, horses grazing in a field, rain beating on a window pane, the sun playing in the branches, pheasant passing by or smoke coming out of a chimney.

No signs here of the most recent, maybe less savoury, developments that have altered the Irish countryside. Mostly shots of nature or of a well integrated architecture, the images seems to respond to the imaginary Ireland that the Krabs have reconstituted for themselves, exhibiting their *Utopia* and maybe partaking of it.

Mr and Mrs Krab's Utopia video installation is consistent with Dunsmore's previous works, pursuing her interest in the oral expression of an individual's memory, best exemplified by her work with Billy Hull in *Billy's museum* and *Strikers narrative*. It is also inscribed within a very specific socio-political context.²

The contextualisation of her work has always been a key issue in Dunsmore's approach. Whether it was the tense situation of the Maze prison, where she was artist in residence, or Weimar in Germany, where she tracked down traces of the political changes through the discarded street signs of ex-East Germany for *Plan*, her work has continually drawn its energy from its location. Having lived now in County Clare for a number of years, it is only fitting that this new situation has come into her art.

Mr and Mrs Krab's Utopia was commissioned by Clare County Council as part of the *Rural vernacular* project. The curator,

Fiona Woods, identified the key goals of the project as establishing a dialogue "between artists and the rural communities"³ and, confronting the lack of public space, "to develop contexts for the presentation of art in the rural environment."⁴

Therefore one of the key issues for Dunsmore was how to reach the desired audience. After having abandoned the idea of using podcasting, in the face of the limited broadband availability in the area, she turned toward the idea of using post-office spaces, thus coinciding with Deirdre O'Mahony's own endeavours at re-creating a community place in the old Kilnaboy Post Office.

Whether institutionally or artist-led, a number of art projects have of late attempted to engage with the rapidly changing rural environment, effectively raising the issue of the part the artist is to play in re-inventing rural communities within a changing socio-economic context. Encouragingly, the opening of *Mr and Mrs Krab's Utopia*, on a wintry Saturday afternoon, was attended by individuals from both the art world and the local community and it did conjure a congenial atmosphere.

1 "The participants of a series of interviews were asked 'Why did they relocate to start a new life, in Ireland. Were they looking for a kind of Utopia?'"

<http://www.lit.ie/Sculpture/asite/VIDEO/utopia.htm>

2 "I am interested in art as a means of archiving and documenting places or events of historical social/ political significance."

<http://www.lit.ie/sculpture/lecturers/amanda.htm>

3 "Relating to the complex, rural context is central to this project; public art is understood as both a process of research and a mode of dialoguing between artists, rural communities and the wider cultural discourse."

http://www.shiftingground.net/www.shiftingground.net02/projects_ruralvernacular.htm

4 <http://www.shiftingground.net/collective.htm>