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# City of Human Resources ideas

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Probably the most intriguing feature of the *City of ideas* show was the setting itself. Barons Self Storage is a functioning storage facility located on the outskirts of Galway city. The inside space of the 100,000-square-foot two-storey warehouse is a tight formation of corridors lined with storage units. The irregular pattern of identical corridors proved quite disorienting and many a visitor was left wandering, in spite of the orientation map distributed at the entrance, giving the visit the feel of a treasure hunt for artworks.

Apart from the cells used for the show, the rest of them were closed and presumably occupied with various cardboard-boxed belongings. The concealed spaces and their

contents suggested a dizzying realm of possibilities to the imagination as well as a potential metaphor for a society continually in transit whose identity could be somehow apprehended through its stored possessions.

The *City of ideas* show was the second collaboration between Barons Self Storage and the artists organisation Human Resources. The organisation was set up by Emma Houlihan and Ben Roosevelt in 2005, while they were both studying at the Burren College of Art, and sprang from their desire to create a platform for artists in Galway. Their first show, *Interim*, in November 2005, came about from Human Resources' interest in nongallery space<sup>1</sup> and a chance encounter with Barons management, a then newly open storage facility. The *Interim* show developed Human Resources' concerns with political economy around themes of transit and exchange.<sup>2</sup>

The *City of ideas* show, while pursuing Human Resources' socio-economic interests, drew more

intensely on both its location, Riverside Commercial Estate in Galway, and its site, a storage facility. This division between location and site somehow recovered the two leading tendencies in the show: one linking up with issues of economic and urban development in the Galway area and beyond, the other engaging in a more intimate relationship with the building and its use.

Characteristic of the first trend was the symposium organized by Michelle Brown which was held on the opening day. The recording of this symposium was then played for the duration of the show in a cell also containing documentation on future urban projects. Also referring to the short-sightedness of the urban developments in Galway was Carol Anne Connolly's fish tank, *A Song for Ackua Glocksway*. It was, however, through her presence as a member of Mantua Arts Project, a rural-based arts centre in Co. Roscommon, that a certain idea of economic development was being more pointedly criticised.

An interesting aspect of the show was the participation of art organisations engaged at different levels with economic alternatives through the work of founders or members, such as Bridget Barnhart with her *DIY football* for the Centre of Urban Deviation, and Russell Hart and his *Strobe lighting effect* for the EconomicThoughtGallery. Their value to the show was not so much in the actual artworks presented but rather through the projects and ideas that each of these organisations perform.

Continuing to tread the line between art and economy was Sarah Browne's swing for *Model for experiencing economic panic/ excitement* and the neon graphs figuring a *Landscape of desires and manias (Tulipmania 1640s, South Sea bubble 1720s, UK railway crash 1830s)*. Also engaging with larger economic issues of exchange and suggesting alternatives was Katya Sanders' pin inscribed with *If you read this, I'll give it to you (but then you must wear it)*, which was distributed at the entrance of the building.

Mark Clare's 22-foot-high surveillance tower, erected in the car park, and Sally Timmons' video using a CCTV format, *The Possibilities that irk me*, were both referring to problems arising with the notion of security and surveillance. Timmons, however, introduced a poetic element in her work through the parade of unlive lives performed and shot in the corridors of the building. The themes of security and control were given a curious historical perspective through the ongoing project by Ulrika Ferm, *Emergency weather*, referring to the weather-forecast censorship in Ireland during WWII.

The themes of bricolage and recuperation, which were already present in the work of the Centre of Urban Deviation, were also developed in Sean Glover's practice of constructing compounds of

turned-on second-hand radios and Andrew Salomone's *Grandfather clock*. Salomone's piece was one of the most successful works presented, engaging simultaneously with the specificity of the place and with larger socio-economic issues through the simplest of means. Salomone built an old clock out of cardboard, presumably from the boxes provided by Barons Self Storage. The clock was quite delicately manufactured, as one would expect an old clock to be, and brought to mind the idea of inheritance. That it was made of cardboard and stood in a storage unit conjured up various suggestions: that of an embarrassing heirloom relegated out of sight, or possibly an attempt at fabricating one's own inheritance out of bland recuperated materials.

Another work which drew from its setting further levels of complexities was Aideen Barry's *Metropolis of compulsion*: installed into one of the small upper cells accessible by ladder and somehow reminiscent of an attic, Barry's piece was an installation of tightly stacked cardboard boxes onto which were projected four animation films dealing in various ways with the compulsive relationships that the individual builds up with his environment. The films pre-existed the installation; however, they took on a particular resonance when set into a storage context, projecting their intense individuality as a hypothetical content to those stored standard boxes stacked into these long rows of uniform cells.

On the whole the *City of ideas* show felt to be more than the sum of its parts and combined two kinds of energy in a satisfactory way – one inducing a movement outward, with works less concerned about resolution than by the potential they opened up toward future projects and connections; and another, more inward movement, with works

developing from the particular poetry of this unlikely place.

- 1 "We have chosen *Human Resources* as the name of our organisation in order to emphasize our engagement with problems of political economy, social space and community infrastructure. We are interested in urban places and communities. In short, we implement art projects concerned with these issues in non-gallery spaces," <http://www.human-resources.ie>
- 2 A good example of which was Emma Houlihan's project, *Special Offer*, which consisted in giving away her personal belongings to visitors in exchange for their contact information so that she could call on them some time in the future to follow the whereabouts of her former possessions. The project is ongoing.

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(opposite)  
Reading row-wise: Russell Hart (EconomicThoughtGallery): *Strobe Lighting Effect*; Clodagh Lavelle: *Birds*; Sally Timmons: *The possibilities that irk me*; Andrew Salomone: *Grandfather clock*; Aideen Barry: *Metropolis of compulsion*; Paul Timoney: *Untitled*; Bridget Barnhart (Centre of Urban Deviation): *DIY Football*; Bill Daniel: *Sunset scavengers*; Ben Geoghegan: *Reconstructed Connemara*; *Inside. Out.*; Michelle Browne: documentation room; Jennie Moran: *A Place that gives you the possibility to think of something else*; Anne Connolly (Mantua Arts Project): *A Song for Ackua Glacksway*; Sarah Browne: *Model for experiencing economic panic/ excitement* and *Landscape of desires and manias (Tulipmania 1640s, South Sea Bubble 1720s, UK Railway crash 1830s)*; Ruby Wallis: *Frustrations*; Mark Clare: *Tower*; image montage/ courtesy the author

