

conceit. After Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Art & Language and Conceptual Art in general, it is surely irresponsible to encourage students to accept that visual works 'speak for themselves'. A nod, too, to Susan Sontag's notion of an 'ecology of images' (see her *On Photography*, 1977) would also have been welcome, since 'Say Less' might 'say more' by 'saying more', not 'saying less' and hoping that no one notices the inescapable presence of a complex linguistic apparatus tethering images to meanings, galleries and curators to professional status (ie more meanings held in place through closely controlled words) and, not least, the presumably much-desired critical review.

Depending on how you count them, there are a dozen or so artists in the exhibition, about half of whom employ photography, while the remainder use paint, wool, cotton, found clothing, paper bags, wire, cellophane and other gratuitous 'stuff'. There is one plinth-mounted video, by Hanna and Klara Lidén, and two other plinths which hold small works by Celia Pym, and by the anonymous figure of the Philadelphia Wireman. Pym's pieces combine rescued paper or plastic food bags with wool or cotton appendages in an act that both preserves and modifies containers that may otherwise have been destroyed. This theme of repair and reconstitution works well with the sculptures by the Philadelphia Wireman, whose compact assemblages of city detritus are reminiscent of Pablo Picasso's table-top works such as *Glass of Absinthe*, 1914, or miniaturised futurist sculptures assembled from industrial and domestic scraps. Twisted wire, plastic mesh, newspaper, toys, coins and batteries are stuffed into cylindrical frames, looking both 'primitive' and futurist at the same time. Apparently 1,200 of these amazing 'outsider' constructions were discovered in a Philadelphia alleyway in 1982, though the name of their author has never come to light. Eight such works are on show at Herald Street; from across the room they look like small birds momentarily frozen during a frenzied act of hopping and twittering about.

Social documentary photographs are prominent in 'Say Less', with several works each by Chris Killip, Paul Graham and, surprisingly, gallerist Anthony Reynolds, whose small but intriguing pictures of anonymous individuals snapped in a Newcastle pub in 1969 reminded me a little of photos by another curator-photographer, Vince Rea, who ran Jarrow's Bede Gallery for many years. In both cases, a strong curatorial engagement has positively affected their photographic observations. Reynolds has five photographs here but it would be fascinating to see a larger solo presentation of his work. The pictures by Killip and Graham also offer a lingering look at working-class life in the north of England, with Killip's 1981 photograph of hundreds of tins of Heinz Baked Beans in a North Shields supermarket inevitably alluding to Andy Warhol, but it also points to recurrent poverty and contemporary food banks, too.

London is such a snazzy and expensive place now that photographs of working-class people getting on with their lives well away from the UK's official centre of culture are a necessary reminder of how divided British culture actually is. None of the images of working people in this show patronise them, whether the photos are carefully staged or discreetly and rapidly snapped. Justine Kurland's recent collages of sliced-up pornographic pictures take photography in another direction, turning sexually explicit images into semi-surreal, abstract entanglements and act as

a welcome foil to the assertive realism that is so prominent in this exhibition. The mood is shifted again by Simon Evans's oddly beautiful autobiographical drawing or chart, which looks as if it has been dipped in dust. Ari Marcopoulos's photographic diptychs operate somewhere in the middle of the realistic-aesthetic spectrum along which 'Say Less' is aligned, while the alleged narrative loop is closed by three 'sublime' landscape paintings by Joan Nelson from 2011.

To consciously misquote Ludwig Wittgenstein, whereof one cannot remain silent, one must speak. However, the next time I have to write about a show that advocates a joyful freedom from all linguistic constraints, I'll see if I can manage an entirely blank script.

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Kerry Guinan: The Red Thread

The Complex, Dublin, 4-10 May

It is just past eight in the morning and we are in Smithfield navigating our way around crates of fruits and vegetables being loaded out of warehouses. We are looking for the entrance to The Complex art gallery in time for the opening of Kerry Guinan's installation performance, *The Red Thread*. Once there, we pass a few people being served a selection of Indian teas and enter the main space in which are arranged six new-looking identical industrial sewing machines in three rows of two. Aside from the daylight coming from the doors, the only illumination comes from the standard light bulbs fitted above the needles and the small LED torches added beneath the worktop pointing to the foot pedals. The machines themselves have been pared down to the minimum; there is no web of threads and spools on top, no stool placed in front nor any other tools that would distract the attention of the viewer from the moving pedals and the rhythm of the whirring needles which are the focal point of the installation.

We already know from previously released information or by the video documentary screened in the entrance that the sewing machines are connected in real time to those of textile workers in the Pretinterpret Clothing Factory in Bengaluru. The time of the performance in Dublin is aligned to the working hours of the factory, and the movements of the pedals and needles respond to the actions of the workers.



Kerry Guinan, *The Red Thread*, 2022

We have seen footage of these women wearing saris and sandals in the sunlit workshop. We hear that two of the workers are sewing pants, and the others are either affixing labels or appending elastic waist bands. In the dimly lit space, taking in the regular burst of activity of this needle or that machine idly operating, we start conjuring up the gestures being made in India: the handling of the garments, the positioning of the fabric, the adjustment of the labels - the space around the machines seems to vibrate from this remote activity and does not look so grey anymore. The speeches of the opening are scheduled during a break at the clothing factory. The resuming buzz of the machines will bring the addresses to an end.

In her practice, Guinan habitually makes minimal interventions into art and non-art contexts which often require complex logistical and administrative configurations. For *126* © Kerry Guinan, 2014, she temporarily changed the name of a gallery under the terms of a sponsorship agreement, drawing out issues of intellectual property rights. For *Sell Nothing*, 2021, she installed a series of billboards promoting nothingness in Limerick City. For *Portraits*, 2019, a precursor to the present work in its exploration of networked simultaneity, ten people from across the world were paid to pose for a connected live portrait for the duration of the opening hours of their exhibition in Dublin, a web camera on the screen enabled them to watch the visitors in return.

For *The Red Thread*, Guinan speaks of the desire to bring the global production of commodities to a human, intimate level. The project developed through The Complex's Art Factory's open call, which invited experimental projects to be developed within the supported environment of the organisation. Further public support enabled the formation of a production and documentary team and a residency in Bengaluru in February. The film by Anthony O'Connor, accompanying the exhibition, follows the social relationships that developed through the making of the work.

As I'm writing this review, images of Gian Maria Tosatti's installation for the Italian pavilion at the Venice Biennale, *History of Nights and Destiny of Comets*, are circulating online. One of them shows a vast warehouse filled with industrial sewing machines. I'm first struck by the similarities and then by the differences in the manifestation and intention of the two artworks. In collecting materials from closed workshops, Tosatti recreates the experience of a factory floor and plays to the notion that our societies are post-industrial, a notion which Guinan's work necessarily challenges in focusing on the workers and industries that we, in the global north, still rely on.

To understand the complex systems that support how we feed, dress or inform ourselves is one thing, but they feel abstract and out of the grasp of our imagination. Through the transmitted pressure of a foot on the pedal of a sewing machine it is the entire body of a worker making our clothes that Guinan conveys in the gallery. Colloquially, a red thread ties together disparate parts into a common narrative, and one can't help also recalling that it is by following Ariadne's thread that Theseus made it out of the labyrinth.

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Emii Alrai, 'A Core of Scar', installation detail

Emii Alrai: A Core of Scar

Hepworth Wakefield, 7 April to 4 September

Three huge wedges of polystyrene, painted to resemble weathered rock, intersect the gallery space of Emii Alrai's show at Hepworth Wakefield. 'A Core of Scar' was commissioned by Iniva as part of a three-year programme, Future Collect, intended to both explore and increase the diversity of gallery collections in the UK; the work will be added to Wakefield's permanent collection upon the exhibition's conclusion. Alrai's practice has often used effects of weathering and scarification, along with faux-naïve modelling techniques, to bring connotations of immense age and museological rarity to objects crafted from cheap or throwaway materials, such as air-dry clay or polystyrene. The resultant ambience was previously evident in the artist's 2020 show at the Tetley in Leeds, 'The High Dam', where the central, boat-shaped sculpture suggested some fantastical hybrid of global myth and history, a Viking ship burial containing Mesopotamian artefacts.

The present selection of objects does not so much mimic ancientness as assert its own, singular presence: there is a quality of worked-over animation to the huge drifts of plastic that gives them something of the quality of giant talismans or objects of worship. Stuck in the top of each formation are rows of metal armatures supporting glass vessels, each based on a clay prototype moulded by the artist, bearing the marks of its rough-and-ready forebear. The artful vulgarity of form might bring to mind Jean Dubuffet; Alrai's reference points for the work include Ian Auld (1926-2000), a Brighton-born potter who set up a pottery department in an art school in Baghdad and became influenced by Persian ceramics.

The sensory and tactile qualities of the sculpture are given depth and intensity by some awareness of the contexts that gave rise to them. Research undertaken in close collaboration with curator Amber Li - whose work on the show is also supported by Future Collect - took Alrai from a glass studio just south of John O'Groats to Land's End via Gordale Scar in the Yorkshire Dales. This UK-wide tour of jagged rock formations and coastlines, from the abrupt edges of the Scottish north-east to Cornwall's vaulting cliffs,