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VAN Critique July/August 2014: Nickey Teegan and Conor Mary Foy at NCAD Gallery, Dublin

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Nicky Teegan and Conor Mary Foy 'At dawn we will stand in a circle, as the sun rises it will renew the souls of the pure' installation view. NCAD Gallery, Dublin, photo by Barry Keogh

**Nicky Teegan and Conor Mary Foy
'At dawn we will stand in a circle, as
the sun rises it will renew the souls of
the pure'**

NCAD Gallery, Dublin

11 April – 15 May 2014

Nicky Teegan and Conor Mary Foy have worked as collaborators on other projects and *At dawn we will stand in a circle, as the sun rises it will renew the souls of the pure*, their show at NCAD Gallery presents some of these collaborations re-worked.

Nature and rituals, folk imagery and

science fiction blend and overlap to create a body of work from artists who are in an intriguing dialogue with each other.

Both artists' work seems to obliquely reference the nineteenth century occult movement The Golden Dawn through their explorations of rituals, masks and occultism. (1) The circle is also frequently employed as a symbol and runs throughout the work, which could also be interpreted as a metaphor for cycles in nature and in rituals. Meaning in the work is tantalisingly elusive and both artists give little away with regards how they intend meaning to be registered with their viewers. For me the work tries to express the difficulties that simple communication between individuals can present, especially in a world where everything is now so hyper-mediated.

The darkened space within which the viewer must navigate the objects is theatrically lit, giving the objects both a sacred and a museum-like reverence. The artists have created a series of repetitions for the viewer to navigate the space with. Objects are interspersed between the large screens that show the video pieces

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interperiod between the large screens that show the video pieces.

In Teegan's work material objects are given particular significance; objects and materials are re-employed as a series of re-worked circular shapes. Teegan's sculptural pieces punctuate the gallery space and create a powerful physical counterpart to the video pieces. The materials she uses are interesting for their symbolic meaning: glass spheres, perhaps like crystal balls or other psychic communication devices, are counterbalanced by objects made with woven magnetic tape, a near-obsolete communication medium. The sound of tape static from one piece, *I'm blindly crawling through the chaos*, suggests the sound of 'the other world', that psychic place we can never fully comprehend and that some believe it is possible to commune with.

In Foy's video pieces rites of passage and rituals are again employed but this time within the narrative structure of fiction. '*What folk get up to in the woods*' has arguably become a well-worn trope in the horror film genre and there are echoes here of the work of British filmmaker Ben Wheatley's films *Kill List* and *A Field In England*. Foy presents four video pieces, which are linked thematically by group of masked individuals who enact strange and sometimes unsettling rituals in remote woodland locations. The obscurity of the titles give little away; each piece is short, no more than eight or nine minutes.

The video pieces have high production values; they are well shot and edited, which adds to the viewing experience. Foy utilises this to particularly powerful effect in the piece *Bastion*. Two figures walk slowly through darkening woods to a clearing where one stands against a tree and removes his outer layers of clothing. The other figure stands in front with a bow and arrows. He raises the bow and fires four arrows one after the other at the other figure. As with Foy's other pieces, meaning is ambiguous, but there are allusions to the ancient rites of communing with nature and to a loss of or end of innocence. Both artists created a powerful sense of melancholy and otherworld-ness in their work, which resonated with me after leaving the exhibition.

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In *The Society of the Spectacle* Guy Debord (1967) uncannily pre-empted the image-saturated and mediated world that has become familiar to most inhabitants of contemporary society when he wrote: “In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all life presents as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into representation”.

Perhaps then it is no surprise that contemporary artists are frequently searching for ways and means to subvert and challenge this “accumulation of spectacles”, to engage with a lived world and through material making or through use of the body to find meaning in how we inhabit the world. Foy and Teegan’s work poses questions around how we communicate with each other and with our own psyche. No easy interpretation is to be found in the work but perhaps that is the point: as we navigate both the physical and the virtual world – now as real as each other – points of resistance to ‘the spectacle’ can be found in material making.

Alison Pilkington is an artist based in Dublin and currently completing a practice-led PhD at National College Art and Design.

Note:

1. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was an organisation active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that engaged in paranormal activities such as séances and other forms of communing with the dead and became highly influential on later twentieth century ‘new-age’ religions and cults. Irish Poet WB Yeats was a prominent member and introduced many Irish literary and society figures in Ireland to the ideas and philosophies of the movement.



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