

## Death Drive

(interrupt the circular logic of re-establishing balance because he is the lowest outcast), 2009

**Fragile Absolute #12**  
plywood, metal, varnish, flock

When modified car enthusiasts get together they sometimes turn into boy racers. The showmanship of this pastime is pretty central to the owners of these glammed-up, pimped-up cars. It's not just the bodywork that gets modified, however, but also sometimes the engine. Some meet late into the night for private races on public roads. These also include burnout sessions which leave behind circular patterns of rubber on the road surface called 'burn-outs'. Freud's 'death drive' postulates a drive leading potentially towards death, destruction and non-existence, although Lacan resolved this in a different way.

*"Pardon me, Judy. I'm trying to articulate something here and your cuts aren't helpful. Every drive is a death drive for Lacan because it's excessive, repetitive – even destructive. It's no accident that we're playing with the sound-sense of the boy racers' "driving" and the "drives" as over a century of psychoanalysis has it. These are important signifiers. And, it's no accident that many people hate boy racers at a gut level. It's almost primordial, that disgust, so we have to ask why. Something else is going on ..."* Charlene Hume-Berkeley, from the essay 'Speaking of drives... routes and meanderings', by Medb Ruane.

## Bent (striking at himself), 2009

**Fragile Absolute #15**  
archival paper, EVA glue, metal exhaust,  
balsa wood, cocktail sticks  
(papier-mâché made from articles from the  
Ross O'Carroll-Kelly column in the weekend  
Irish Times)  
65 x 95 x 140 cms

These athletic muscular legs are supported or rather impaled by an exhaust pipe which is disguised with pine clusters – a wooden version of those on *Goran's Stealth Yugo* in the Formal Gardens. If this work is representative of a possible supreme manhood, the content of the paper legs says otherwise. The legs are made of copies from the column by fictional Irish rugby jock Ross O'Carroll-Kelly, written by his creator, journalist Paul Howard. Ross represents the worst excesses of Ireland's recent Celtic Tiger with his dim-witted, self-obsessed antics that continuously back-fire yet forever leaving him the perfect antihero for our times.

## **Scent of Orange Rim Cleaner (object petit object), 2009**

**Fragile Absolute #4  
scent, delivery system  
developed by Demeter Fragrance Library**

The Lacanian term *petit objet a*, sometimes known as the O-object stands for the unattainable object of desire. As Slavoj Žižek says, it “condenses the impossible deadly Thing, serving as its stand-in and thus enabling us to entertain a livable relationship with it, without being swallowed up by it”. This specially commissioned fragrance is reminiscent of a strong orange scented degreaser used by some modified car enthusiasts to clean their wheels in preparation for a Show & Shine event organised by Phelan in Portadown in 2006 at MCAC. As Arthur Griffith says in Medb Ruane’s essay: “That they are always partial and unsatisfiable. You lose your o-objects, don’t you dear? Losing them mobilises your desire so they’re causal from the moment they’re lost. O-objects are primordial provocatives!”

## **Fino’s manifold blended-in as a branch, 2007**

**Fragile Absolute #5  
metal exhaust, balsa wood, cocktail sticks, varnish,  
paint, polish  
25 x 64 x 44 cms**

Fino is the on-line nickname of a modified car enthusiast who donated a disused high performance exhaust system for this piece as well as for *Bent*, 2009 in the previous room. He responded to a request for exhaust parts posted by the artist on the website [www.manicmotorz.com](http://www.manicmotorz.com). The website is a communication forum for car enthusiasts, many of whom dislike the term ‘boy racer’ as it is mainly used by alarmist tabloid media who see them as perfect examples of anti-social and generally reckless behaviour. Much of their activities involve the modification and display of cars and not covert road racing as many assume, although this does indeed occur.

**Clubbed Baby Seals (he is not aware how Jews really seem to him? this is not how things really seem to you), 2009**

**Fragile Absolute #8**  
archival paper, toner, EVA glue  
15 x 107 x 95 cms  
(papier-mâché made from articles from the **Wall Street Journal**)

This sculpture is based on news photos in which PETA protesters staged a mock seal slaughter by clubbing papier-mâché seals filled with red paint. The re-enactment took place outside Canada House in central London on 28 March 2007 to protest the mass slaughter of baby harp seals on the ice floes of Newfoundland. During the annual seal massacre, hundreds of thousands of baby seals are shot or have their skulls crushed, to provide fur for the commercial purposes, mainly fashion. The papier-mâché contains many names involved in business over the past 6 months. This is the odd but useful index on page 2 of the newspaper, which lists many of the key players in the current world recession.

**Mosquito Man Arthur, 2007**

**Fragile Absolute #6**  
archival paper, toner, EVA glue, balsa wood, cocktail sticks, aluminium, plaster, metal pipe, plastic  
82 x 80 x 80 cms  
(papier-mâché made from articles from the **Daily Telegraph**)

This work is based on Arthur Griffith, the propaganda officer in the early IRA. The British called the underground press he produced during early 20th century *the mosquito press*. This was major irritant to the British as guerrilla printing presses moved locations constantly. Griffith, like many nationalist heroes, has had a disputed position within popular memory as after the Civil War he was essentially airbrushed from Irish history, despite being President of Dáil Éireann from January to August 1922, and heading of the Irish delegation at the negotiations in London that produced the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921.

## **Douglas (lacked the dimension of radical Evil), 2009**

### **Fragile Absolute #11**

**archival paper, toner, EVA glue, cocktail sticks**

**34 x 21 x 28 cms**

**(papier-mâché made from pages in jPod (2006),  
Douglas Coupland's novel where the character  
Douglas Coupland appears in the story)**

Douglas Coupland (born 1961) is a Canadian novelist probably best-known for his 1991 novel *Generation X*. He has written many novels which pretty accurately describe the work antics and social networking of young people and their search for meaning in an overly commodified world. His novels are generally quite sharp and witty, representing an ennui that is bleak yet very entertaining. In *jPod*, computer game workers encounter the character Douglas Coupland, appearing as himself, only as a really mean figure, shifting the course of the novel and quite narcissistically or self-reflexively causing mayhem and then saving the day.

## **Bad Glue, 2006**

### **Fragile Absolute #11**

**newsprint, PVA, card**

**41.5 x 30 cms**

While on an artist's residency in Serbia in 2006, Phelan attended the public funeral Slobodan Milošević which was a lot like the stadium *Farewell to Michael Jackson* in LA recently, only smaller and less glamorous. The newspaper clipping is a full page from the Belgrade newspaper *Novosti (News)* with the memoriam page from 16 March 2006. There is a tradition in Serbia to take out many memorial notices in papers for individuals which are also posted publicly, for example on lamp-posts and doorways. These notices are from mourning Milošević supporters and include twisted sentiments such as "Your ideas, your genius mind, energy in fighting for the truth, justice and comfort for your people, have been and will always be a source of utter inspiration for us". The newsprint is deteriorating rapidly as it was exposed to too much direct light and adhered with the wrong kind of glue.

## **Roger should have stayed in the jungle, 2006**

### **Fragile Absolute #6**

**archival paper, toner, EVA glue, balsa wood, rubber car  
tyre, terracotta pot**

**34 x 27 x 27 cms, with pot 54 x 67 x 58 cms**

**(papier-mâché made from articles from the Daily  
Telegraph)**

Roger Casement was a troubled Irish patriot, poet, revolutionary and nationalist hero. Of a Protestant background, he was knighted for humanitarian work in Peru and the Congo, but executed for treason after a failed gun running attempt in a German submarine. His court case for treason was made more controversial by the revelation of diaries containing frank accounts of homosexual activities, it is disputed that the diaries were forgeries.

## **Woman who stole from farmer (it is only truth that matters), 2009**

### **Fragile Absolute #14**

**archival paper, toner, EVA glue**

**77 x 79 x 59 cms**

In February 2009, a story appeared in the Irish national media concerning a *Woman who stole from a farmer*. This work is based on an image from the Irish Times showing the *Woman* covering her head and face with a striped hooded shawl while exiting the court. Kathleen Lewis (55), a mother of 10, was found guilty of stealing or rather extorting through intimidation, up to €0,000 from retired farmer George Berry (88), after an incident in the car park at a Centra store in Killeagh, Co Cork, in March 2006. A car driven by Berry was reputed to have damaged Lewis's car, in which two of her grandchildren were alleged to have been thrown by the impact and injured. In sentencing, the Judge said "This is a particularly nasty and unpleasant crime".

## **Hungarian Italian Abstraction (vertigo blue temporal event), 2009**

### **Fragile Absolute #9**

**acrylic paint and vinyl adhesive on plasterboard**

**painting: 55 x 70 cms**

**plasterboard: 96 x 101 cms**

While on vacation in Northern Italy, Phelan stayed in a hostel run by some Hungarian nationals. The canteen was decorated with some generic abstract paintings, one of which forms the basis for this work. This region of Italy while being quite a distance from Hungary was previously part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, while it still existed prior to World War I. There is something timeless about these modern abstract configurations, which have long since lost their original context or possible meanings.

## **The National Derby, 2006**

### **Fragile Absolute #12**

**DVD video**

**duration: 2:54 mins**

Different types of bravado clash here, where youth culture meets the literary. A pirated video of a Yugoslavian youth cult movie is subtitled by a piece of journalism by James Joyce where he fabricated an interview with one of the aristocratic competitors in a 1903 road race. Floyd is the bad boy of the film, he is attempting to dodge the draft by acquiring a urine sample from a sick friend through a flamboyant gay man. The competition in the Joyce text was the Gordon Bennett Cup Race which was the starting reference point for Phelan's work with car culture over the past few years.

## **The Other Hand of Victory, Hebei version (ontological madness), 2009**

**Fragile Absolute #7**  
**marble**  
**40 x 40 x 60 cms**

After making a sculpture in 2007 called *Pyrrhic Victory* which was based on the *Winged Victory of Samothrace* (c. 220-190 BCE), Phelan finally visited the work at the Musée du Louvre in 2007 having made the previous work solely based on photographs. While there he saw the right hand of the sculpture housed in a vitrine. Phelan rendered the *other* hand of Victory in an iconoclastic manner. He purchased a wooden modelling hand from German mega-retailer Lidl, and reconfigured an approximation of the Louvre hand. This model was then sent to Hebei in China where local craftsmen scaled it up in white marble.

## ***World War 1 in Colour* (the void itself), 2009**

**Fragile Absolute #3**  
**inkjet billboard sheets**  
**each 92 x 133 cms**

The photographs presented here are stills captured from a DVD offered free by *The Irish Daily Mirror* in 2008 from the TV series *World War I in Colour*. The texts on each still are the subtitles already present in the video narrated by Kenneth Brannagh. Television probably offers us many more insights into how things happened, although it is more open to interpretation and far less passive than most would think.

The familiar story of the beginnings of the Great War now seems a world away from the great 'Void' that is Kasimir Malevich's painting *Black Square on White Surface*, as described by Slavoj Žižek in his convoluted discussion on the subject.