



THE LIST AND THE LINE

AN LIOSTA AGUS AN LÍNE

Alan Phelan  
Mark Swords

CASINO MARINO  
13TH APRIL - 29TH JULY 2024



...the history of things to come... Sarah Connor, *The Terminator: Judgment Day*, 1991

This is not a catalogue essay, or a history lesson. It is a critical confrontation with a question I have on the occasion of an exhibition at a Dublin heritage site by two artists, Alan Phelan and Mark Swords:

What does it mean to make, place and be solicited by contemporary art in a heritage site (i.e., history)? Is this an occasion of contemporary art, or merely decoration?

The heritage site in question is named the Casino at Marino, a Neoclassical temple designed in 1759 for James Caulfield, 1st Earl of Charlemont by Sir William Chambers, doing what postmodern architecture has been doing for the last 50 years, borrowing the culture of the past, augmenting it, and putting it back onto the present, like Doric columns and golden eagles on a 1970's semi-detached.

And yet we have been postmodern ever since the Roman rebooted the Greeks. That fact is not in question. The question in question is: Is something lost in the translation, what some call the original context, motivation, passion, soul of cultural production? And if so, what is lost in the shuffle of past and present?

Words like "shuffle" come easy when discussing a building named Casino ("Little House" in Italian; "gambling establishment" in English). The cards shuffled in this pleasure house during its colonial conception were dealt by the lords if not ladies of the manor. The Casino Marino provided R&R for the few who ruled and harvested the resources and cultures of others, reified in the Casino's five-pointed star parquet floor (presented in the Casino as facsimile lino), but underneath made from marquetry and now extinct wood colonised from the near and far reaches of the British Empire.

The so-called "little house" built on the big house of colonialism seems like the biggest excess. From a distance the Casino Marino is modest relative to the mother that gave birth to it. But this is an illusion; an aesthetic indulgence of the privileged. Up close the devil is in the unfolding detail. The little house becomes (pick your Empire metaphor) a Tardis, a Matryoshka, a star-spangled Pentagon. What looks like one grand door fitting of the rhizomatic roots of colonialism, is in fact a small door within a big door. What looks like one storey with one room, is in fact three stories and sixteen rooms. If there is anything functional here, like the column drain pipes, it is disguised by the decorative.

Yet beyond the leisure and pleasure economy of the colonial class, far, far away from the Little House on the Prairie, the modern English word 'casino', located underneath its idyllic and modest Italian etymology, interests me most in respect to the two artists, Phelan and Swords, who are partly responding to this building with its architectural slights of hands. If we dramatise the clandestine and subterranean gambling activity that might take place in such an establishment, *casino* in today's parlance suggests a den of possible iniquity. The modern casino spins on a die.

If we use "cathartic effect" to question Phelan and Swords' proposal to exhibit in this space, not just as an opportunity to carefully curate work within the display constraints of a heritage site, but to conceptually and aesthetically reflect and interrupt the socio-historical mythology that eminent tour guides will surely perform during the summer months run of the exhibition, we might get a little closer to why institutional constraints and limits lead us to produce and experience aesthetic catharsis.

Speaking with the artists, who are responding to the Casino Marino with both existing and new work, they talk of history, mending and repair. The artists, wrapped up in their own personal histories and contemporary anxieties, have been invited to transpose onto this jewel in the crown that casts colonial shadows in all directions, a building celebrated today for its architecture and survival of wars and rebellions that transitioned this country from colony to independence.

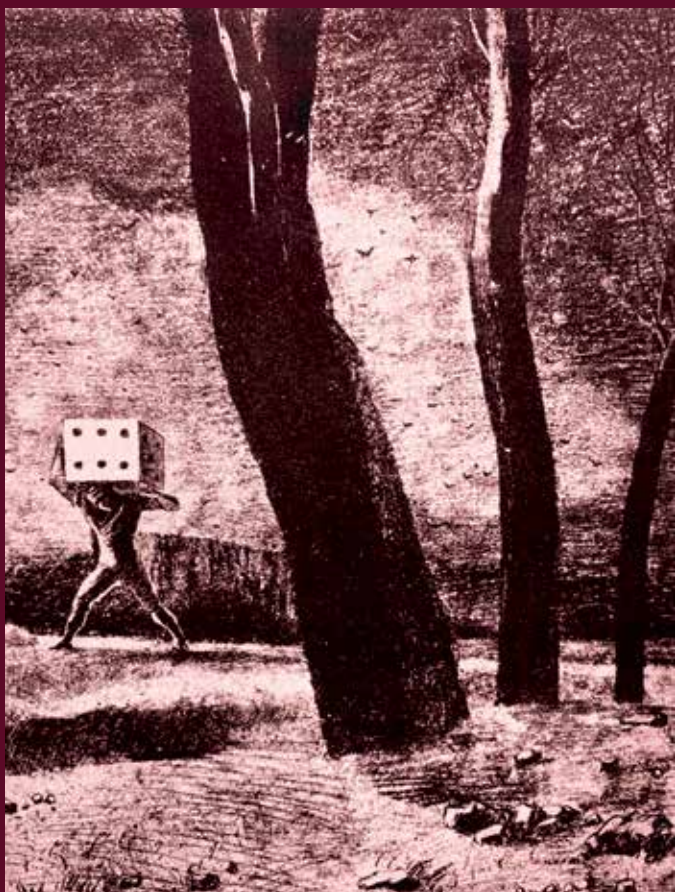
The shadow of the history is deepest outside the exterior walls of the building. Inside the Casino is the soft underbelly of Empire; a dollhouse interior held fast in a fist of stone. Stripped of its exterior stone walls and pillars, we are left with a house linked by winding stairs and secret doors. Without walls we can navigate the claustrophobic colonial history of the building. To move on, it almost seems necessary to burlesque and Barbie the Casino Marino's historical heft and architectural excesses.

This is not the building's fault, its very survival tells us so. The Casino Marino is innocent under the cover of its facsimile lino, designed by a lively imagination that, in a leisure-class induced frenzy, eliminated all right-angles and shadows from his fretwork and plasterwork empire.

The artists also play innocent. Like all artists, Phelan and Swords have to navigate institutional space, its socio-political histories and market affiliations. In their works they respond to the Casino Marino setting in words and a

panoply of forms. Their response, especially existing works, is formalist and curated. Art objects—from paintings to pebbles—catch your eye on the floors, sills, corridors, secret rooms and vitrines that can easily be missed at first glance. This can all be read and appreciated as a fairytale romance; Phelan and Swords and the third wheel—house of imperium excess. And we can enjoy the formal invention of the past, alongside the present inventiveness of its current inhabitants.

That said, culture doesn't sit comfortably within a civilisation of discontent, no matter how pretty that civilisation became to be under its ruling class. Yet the ruling class, in their moments of R&R, have an eye for art. Art and the ruling class go jewelled hand in jewelled hand. Phelan and Swords' artworks sit well here. So well they have to be discovered, inset as they are in a setting so replete with detail and decoration that it becomes a treasure hunt of ah and oh interpolation.



Odilon Redon  
*The Gambler (Le Joueur)*, 1879  
Lithograph,  
10.6 in. x 7.6 in.  
From the album *Dans le Rêve*

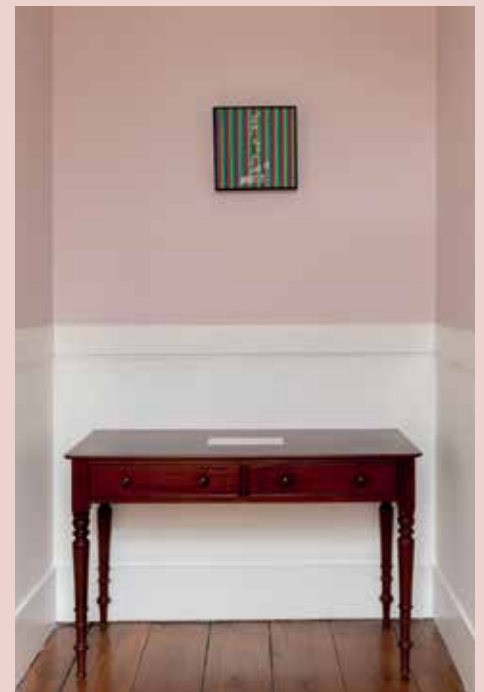
What cathartic effect or aesthetic of arousal undergirds Phelan & Swords' motivation to exhibit work at the Casino Marino? Is it significant that both artists are represented by commercial galleries, where other display constraints present objects for sale in a white cube? Is the Casino Marino a novel opportunity to display work in a setting that is not refrigerated from the outside world, but comes with its own aesthetic? And more generally, what pleasure does the artist get from the public display of their work in either commercial or heritage spaces?

Contemporary art is built upon both a rejection of the institution and its acceptance. Artists, like the masochist under the whip of the hired dominant hand, are contractually obligated and aesthetically motivated by the constraints and limits of the Law. The fleeting moment of art needs a house, a home, a museum to protect it from here into perpetuity. But what is art after the event of its lively and public intrusion upon the world? What does art become? An object? A memory? An artefact that represents a time, a people, a place, a class, a race, a trauma... When the artists speak of mending and repair (we can include 'reparation' here) in the colonial context of its display, would a more felt cathartic effect and response be the razing of the Casino Marino out of existence?

Culture's conservation as dusty civilisation, or civilisation's subjugation as lively culture? In an imaginary sense, the word "casino", presided over by the uptight and tightlipped functionary of the eighteenth-century Casino, versus the gasping heart and sweaty brain of the modern casino goer and gambler, summons time travel. The casino of time's past and present brings to mind the risk and radicality and catharsis of the gamble of contemporary art. To gamble the present and the future on the throw of a dice, or on the flip of a card, is a radical act; to make art in the present without distance, reflection and history on your side is also a radical act. There is nothing to lose: the present is all that matters; the future reception of art by the public is speculative at best in the artist's absence. Artists are forever throwing dice. What sign the die lands on is dependent on where you stand in relation to where the die lies.

James Merrigan emerged as both an artist and art critic during the 2008 financial crash amidst an efflorescent blog culture. He continues to write under the frequency and critically confessional definition of an art blog. He cut his critical teeth as an independent, with a DIY back catalogue of online and printed identities, including +billion-journal and Fugitive Papers. He teaches at Gorey School of Art, and lectures in Psychoanalysis and Art at Trinity College Dublin.









# AN LIOSTA AGUS AN LÍNE

Roghchlár / Menu

Alan Phelan (AP) Mark Swords (MS)

## BASEMENT RECEPTION

(room on entry)

Dot Banana, 2021 (AP)

Lily Reynaud Dewar as Twister Morph 2015, when sitting was dancing, 2019, and when she didn't know what a conceptual artist looked like.

Dot Pineapple, 2021 (AP)

Dot Bird, 2020 (AP)

Joly screen photographs in large display case. Each one comprises of toned gelatin silver sheet film (reverse processed), duraclear c-print screen, acrylic panels, LED panel, MDF support, electrics, archival paper tape, insulation tape, steel and rubber profiles, (some with coloured paper), each 25.3 x 25.3 x 5.5 cm

## OLD SCULLERY

(with cased model of former estate)

Special Offer, 2018 (MS)

acrylic on canvas, 71 x 47 cm

Word Wall, 2020 (MS)

Tipex on A3 hardback notebook, 30 x 42 cm

## CORRIDOR

(in front of door to Butler's Room/Office)

Dot Satellite, 2020 (AP)

Joly screen photograph in display case on metal box

## MAIN OLD KITCHEN

(with copper pot display)

Dot Oranges, 2020 (AP)

Joly screen photograph in display case on metal box

Zig Zag Girl, 2024 (MS)

various materials on painted bedside lockers, approx 180 x 50 x 50 cm

## PANTRY

(room with sink)

Three primary forms 1919-1933, does this point more clearly to the fourth dimension, or just the end of the world? (rose) 2019 (AP)

Joly screen photograph in scale display case on metal box

Boardgame, 2024 (MS)

various materials, 2 x 29 x 29 cm

## PANTRY

(room with fire extinguishers)

Ted's House, 2019 (MS)

various materials on canvas, 139 x 166 cm

## VARIOUS LOCATIONS

(throughout the building)

Elements from a Cosmic Garden, 2024 (MS)

acrylic on found stones, various sizes

## EXTERIOR BASEMENT

(gated tunnel)

The Other Hand of Victory, 2009 (AP)

white marble, 40 x 40 x 60 cm

## MAIN FLOOR VESTIBULE

Two psychic animals, 2012 (AP)

black marble porcupine 22 x 13 x 32 cm  
and red river hog 22 x 22 x 32 cm

## BLUE SALON

Larry Larry, 2022 (AP)

framed screen print on paper, 67 x 56 cm

List, 2022 (MS)

various materials on board 65 x 55 cm

He turned to Joseph and appeared invaluable for once, 2023 (AP)

acrylic and ink on canvas, tray framed, 30.5 x 30.5 cm

Tony says he only knows what he can believe, 2023 (AP)

acrylic and ink on canvas, tray framed, 30.5 x 30.5 cm

Homage to Lost Lids, 2024 (AP)

cardboard lids, papier-mâché, painted printed ribbon,  
25 x 35 x 15 cm

RGBCTB, 2023 (ribbon jacket), 2023 (AP)

acrylic and ink on canvas with painted ribbon, tray framed,  
30.5 x 30.5 cm

Thousand Flowers, 2021 (MS)

various materials on canvas, 163 x 221 cm

## ZODIAC ROOM

Julian's Dream, 2021 (MS)

various materials on fabric, 190 x 190 cm

Archive Fever, 2024 (AP)

boxes of various card stocks, sugar paper, each 45 x 6.5 x 6 cm

## CHINA CLOSET

Second Hand, 2019 (MS)

various materials on board, 93 x 61 cm

Empty Signifiers (grand tour), 2024 (AP)

pizza box cardboard, acrylic paint, metal stand, 64 x 34 x 20 cm

## UPPER FLOOR LANDING HALLWAY

Dead white men mentors falling down the stairs  
of art history, 2023 (AP)

acrylic and ink on canvas, tray framed, 30.5 x 30.5 cm

RGBSS, 2023 (ribbon square) (AP)

acrylic and ink on canvas with painted ribbon, tray framed,  
30.5 x 30.5 cm

## STATE ROOM

(bedroom with pillars)

Happy as Larry he entered Lawrence without resistance, 2023 (AP)

acrylic and ink on canvas, tray framed, 30.5 x 30.5 cm

RGBTB, 2023 (ribbon suit) (AP)

acrylic and ink on canvas with painted ribbon, tray framed,  
30.5 x 30.5 cm

I am the Goat (after Charlotte Devaney), 2024 (AP)

screen print on custom printed ripstop fabric, 200 x 143 cm

Quelle Etoile, 2020 (MS)

various materials on canvas, 224 x 150 cm

## PINK BEDROOM

(the map room)

AI made me do it say it make it love it want it, 2023 (AP)

acrylic and ink on canvas, tray framed, 30.5 x 30.5 cm

Nowhere, 2021 (MS)

various materials on canvas, 150 x 161 cm

## CLOSET IN PINK BEDROOM

Putting pieces together, 2024 (MS & AP)

canvas, paint, paper on PVC, various empty toiletries, printed  
canvas, papier-mâché, painted pebbles, dimensions variable





## ABOUT CASINO MARINO

Casino is one of Europe's finest neoclassical temples dedicated to the Arts. It was designed in 1759 as a Pleasure House for James Caulfield, 1st Earl of Charlemont by Sir William Chambers, one of the finest architects of the time. Charlemont and Chambers created a unique and intriguing Garden Temple from which to overlook the magnificent panorama of Dublin Bay.

The Casino, meaning 'small house', surprises visitors as they discover the remarkable secrets of this architectural gem. The lavishly decorated and compact exterior cleverly disguises an interior of intimate rooms displaying intricately ornate Georgian motifs. Richly patterned marquetry floors and beautifully executed plasterwork act as an historical backdrop to the Casino's past which is lovingly brought to life by our friendly and knowledgeable tour guides.

Cared for by the OPW, Casino Marino is regarded internationally as a building of exquisite craftsmanship and great architectural significance, continuing the legacy of Lord Charlemont's vision and his gift to the nation.

## CREDITS

Special thanks to Samir Eldin, General Manager, Grace McMahon, NHP OPW; Siobhán Treacy, Supervisor Guide, OPW; Barry Byrne, BMS OPW; Ken Mooney, NHP OPW and Adrian Kelly, Curator, OPW. The artists would like to thank all involved from the OPW for their assistance on the exhibition as well as Naomi Lowe, Charlotte Swords and Julian Swords; Noel Kelly, ESS Archive, Small Night Projects. All works by Alan Phelan courtesy the artist and The Molesworth Gallery; all works by Mark Swords courtesy the artist and Kevin Kavanagh Gallery; and the lenders to the exhibition. Brochure design: Alan Phelan. Photography: Louis Haugh; Printing: Printrun, Dublin.



## ARTIST BIOS

**Alan Phelan** (b. 1968, Dublin) is an artist based in Dublin whose practice began in photography and has extended into many different media and mediums with a focus on interpretation, language and collaborations with other artists, writers and curators. He studied at DCU (1989) and RIT, New York (1994) under a Fulbright scholarship. He has had significant solo exhibitions at CCI Paris (2021), Void Derry (2020), RHA (2020), Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane (2016) and IMMA (2009). Gallery solos also include the Molesworth Gallery (2021 and 2023), Oonagh Young Gallery (2015 and 2013); Golden Thread Gallery Belfast (2014), The Black Mariah Cork (2011) and Mother's Tankstation Dublin (2007). Group exhibitions/projects include: Self-Determination, IMMA (2023-24); TONE/TOLD/TEXT/TALK (2022-24), EcoShowBoat (2022-23), MOE Communal (2023), CCA Derry (2021), Garage Rotterdam (2020), EVA International (2016), Bonn Kunstmuseum (2015), Treignac Projet (2014), Bozar Brussels (2013), Feinkost Berlin (2007), The Whitney Museum of American Art (2004). His work is included in the collections of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, The Arts Council, Trinity College Dublin, Limerick City Gallery of Art, The National Self-Portrait Collection, the Office of Public Works, Dublin City Council and several private collections. Residencies include: Wilton Park Studios RHA/IPUT, NCAD Dublin, CCI Paris, HIAP Helsinki, URRRA Buenos Aires and FSAS Dublin. Recent awards include: an Arts Council Bursary (2017 and 2021), Creative Ireland MCCC (2019), and the Hotron Éigse Art Prize (2016). Public works include DCC/Sculpture Dublin, the O'Connell Plinth Commission, Dublin City Hall (2021-23); Void Offsites Derry (2022); Kevin Street Library (2016), Fr Collins Park (2011), IMMA Formal Gardens (2009), Dublin.

**Mark Swords** (b.1978, Dublin) is an artist who lives with his family in County Wicklow, Ireland. Although principally a painter, Swords' work also includes sculpture, collage and text. His work is best described as open and unrestricted, incorporating numerous influences and a diversity of interests such as crafts, history and literature. In recent years installation has become a notable aspect of Swords' work such that it often involves the elaborate construction of spaces in which to exhibit his paintings. His artworks and exhibitions include multiple, and often contradictory references, both personal and historical in an attempt to reflect the inherent confusion of contemporary culture. Swords has had significant solo exhibitions at The Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts, Dublin (Tribuna, 2021) and Temple Bar Gallery and Studios, Dublin (The living and the dead, 2017). His recent exhibitions include I must walk toward Oregon at Kevin Kavanagh, Dublin, Portico (2021), with Tanad Aaron at The Complex, Dublin and TAUCHGANG, 2019, a group exhibition at Galerie Christian Lethert, Cologne. Lost Highway Guy, (2018), was Swords' fourth solo show at Kevin Kavanagh, Dublin. Other notable exhibitions include, VOLTA Basel (2014) and I won't say I will see you tomorrow (2013), a group project and multi-venue exhibition based on the writings and architecture of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Swords was the recipient of the AIB Art Prize in 2011 which resulted in a solo exhibition at Wexford Arts Centre titled Mosaic. He has had two books published on his work, Tribuna (2022) and Mosaic (2012).



CASINO MARINO



OPW

Oifig na  
nOibreacha Poi  
Office of Public