

Suddenly. But then. Emma Dwan O'Reilly

Shadows dancing.

Snapshots only. A flicker book. A still. Frame. By. Frame. A held breath. Fragments. Stilted. Suddenly but. Then. And words missing. Punctuation disrupted. A collage. Disjointed. And. Suddenly. But. And then but suddenly. Suddenly but then. But.

Suddenly.

Then.

Words without letters.

A jug of water sits. Upon the table top. Punctuated stillness. An indeterminate format. A misplaced means to an end. A drip. And then a splash. Sense disrupted and challenged. But maintained. In part.

A ribbon blowing in the wind. The rattle of breath.

A history determined by an aftermath. A creased napkin shrouded in speculation. A creased napkin. Past tense. Present tense. Tense. A tension. A napkin. A word. And then but suddenly. Suddenly.

The rattle of breath. A cloud of condensation on a window pane. Erasure. Disappearance. Fading. A word transformed. An action. A movement. A flicker.

A flicker. Hesitant. Audible.

A trick of the light. A sound in the dark. A sense of something but increasingly nothing. A flicker.

Snapshots. A world put on pause. That moment before.

That moment after.

The content erased. A cloud of condensation on a window pane. A sense of something but increasingly nothing.

Hesitant. Tense. A hesitant tense. A snapshot and a faintly audible rustle. A ribbon blowing in the wind.

The spaces between. A tense between tenses. The folding of the napkin.

A pause.

A flicker.

But then. Suddenly.

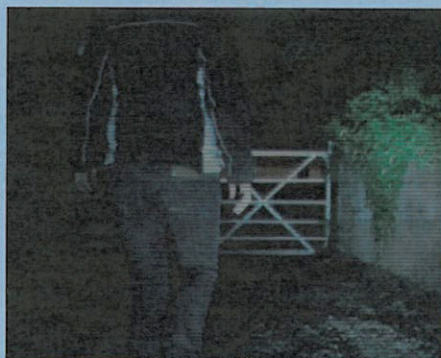
Emma Dwan O'Reilly is a writer with particular interest in language and its limitations and the peculiarities of the interdisciplinary crossover between language and art. She is a recent MA graduate from the National College of Art and Design in Dublin.

riverbank arts centre newbridge co kildare
(045) 448330 / www.riverbank.ie

experiments in the persistence of vision

an exhibition by oonagh o brien

1-30 september 2009



Oonagh O'Brien is a Kildare based artist. She is a graduate of *Painting and Art History* at NCAD and recently completed an MA in *Art in the Contemporary World*, also at NCAD. She is a recipient of Kildare County Council's 2009 Tyrone Guthrie Bursary Award. Right now, O'Brien's work concentrates on the moment when an image becomes a moving image. The basis for this lies in early visual experiments such as those by Eadweard Muybridge in the nineteenth century. It is interesting to note how such moving images blur the lines between artwork and experiment. Such investigations form a recurring pattern in her practice.

www.oonaghobrien.com
oonaghobrien@gmail.com
086 8975414

*advisory warning: part of this exhibition may contain strobe lighting

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experiments in the persistence of vision

oonagh o brien

A Figure in the Distance. Caught Between Flashes of Light. Kitty Rogers

The figure moving in Oonagh O'Brien's videos, in and out of trees, along the railway tracks and over the gate, lit only by strobe light or a flying luminous Frisbee, is demonstrating the history of the moving image. The moments and interludes of light reveal to us what is there in the darkness, but also the ways in which light and the lens create and record a sequence of moving events.

These visual experiments undertaken by Oonagh are investigations into the technical parameters of digital technology and their relationship with the very beginning of the concept of film. Eadweard Muybridge undertook similar experiments in the nineteenth Century. Leland Stanford, engaged Muybridge to photograph his trotting horse, resulting in a complete reversal of what was the established opinion of how a horse moved – proving that there was a moment where the horse had all four legs off the ground- suspended. His experiment produced a series of photographs capturing the sequence of the horses movement. Muybridge continued with his visual experiments often displaying the results on a zoopraxiscope, an



instrument which creates the illusion of movement. This was achieved by spinning silhouetted images painted on a glass disc, the images were derived from his sequence photographs. The zoopraxiscope later found a home as a parlour toy, perhaps the first domesticated piece of moving image technology. Muybridge's work was a forerunner to EJ Marey's Chronoscope and the early films of the Lumiere Brothers – essentially the advent of cinema.

The strobe light that illuminates the moving figure in a number of these works, is not just a feature of the disco or nightclub, it too has a history within realm of photography. However its history does carry a hint of danger – it was used in the photographs of Edgerton during the 1930s in order to capture objects moving at speed – a bullet being one such object. The strobe pumping its light into Oonagh's video works is the instigator of motion as it captures and holds the figure in an interlude from the darkness. The figure is moving and is captured by digital video, which struggles to hold the image and to adapt to the changing light conditions. The challenge and the experiment is to maintain the clarity of image and to carry the sequence of events being played out.

The image we see in these works appears as though animated, but jarring in its action, stunted when held in light. The after image, the hue that proceeds from one image to the next continues this persistence of vision, yet we are forced to jump dramatically filling in the intervals of darkness. The frisbee thrown by the figure and chased along the railway tracks in *Experiment: Frisbee* is ultimately a demonstration of the longevity of our vision and the means by which the eye tracks and fixes upon a moving image articulating a preservation of one moment in order to conclude another. Our eye catches the light, and holds it as it moves. The concept of 'persistence of vision' is contentious, as it assumes that the eye is working like a camera lens, reading frame upon frame not taking into account the methods by which the mind

processes and assesses that information. Quantifying the image as what it is and is not. Descartes observed:

Considering that light of a luminous body must be regarded as being not so much its movement as its action, you must think of the rays of light as nothing other than the lines along which this action tends. Thus there is an infinity of such rays which come from all points of a luminous body towards all the points of the bodies it illuminates (1)

implying light as an initiator upon the human senses but also essential to optical knowledge and process.

The Owl in *Experiment: Owl Face* who surveys us from a lofty height, twisting his head, to account for all he has seen, his pupils focusing and refocusing, interrogating the camera lens as he himself is watched. He seems to ask the question - how can you know what I see? How can you know what you see? The digital image created by the video camera is forced to reflect upon the significance of its analogue descendants in the strained conditions of these rigorous visual experiments, Oonagh is forcing one technology into conditions of vision which are part of another previous age yet are perpetuated in our understanding of the way the moving image works.

Using what are the objects of mass production and contemporary culture, the strobe and the opulent flashing light of a flying frisbee, the digital video camera and the reflective jacket of the figure – Oonagh interrogates the darkness around her and the camera, in such a way that the darkness is as important as the light. The two maintain the illusion of the moving image, swinging two and fro in our minds' eye.

(1) Rene Descartes. Optics. Discourse One – On Light. In Mirzoeff, Nicholas. (ed.). (2002.). *The Visual Culture Reader*. (2nd Ed). London: Routledge.

Kitty Rogers is an artist living and practising in Dublin and is interested in histories and memories embedded within cultures of ornamentation, motif and pattern making.