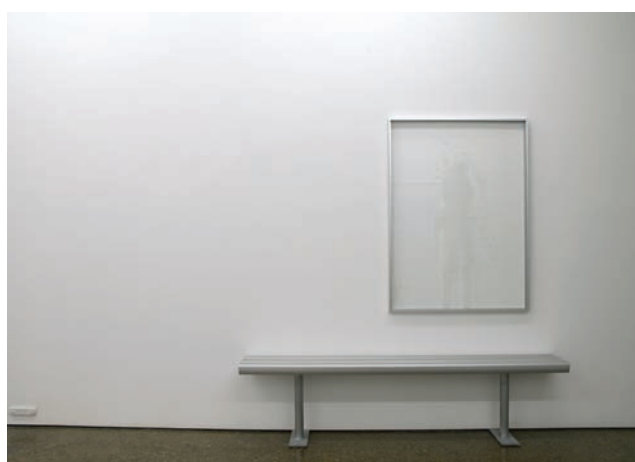


## PROFILE



Pat Foster &amp; Jen Berean 'The Doing and Undoing of it All', ACCA, 2009



Pat Foster &amp; Jen Berean 'Untitled from the series 'On Public'', Ryan Renshaw, 2009



Pat Foster &amp; Jen Berean 'Unwavering Support (for the first time, absolutely)' Detail, Pallas Contemporary Projects 2010



Pat Foster &amp; Jen Berean 'The Doing and Undoing of it All', detail, 2009

## Responding to Dublin

AUSTRALIAN ARTISTS PAT FOSTER AND JEN BEREAN DISCUSS THE OUTCOME OF THEIR PARTICIPATION IN A RESIDENCY EXCHANGE BETWEEN PALLAS CONTEMPORARY PROJECTS; THE FIRE STATION ARTISTS STUDIOS, DUBLIN AND GERTRUDE CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE, MELBOURNE.

AT the end of December 2009 we (Pat Foster and Jen Berean) began a two-month residency at Fire Station Artist's Studios in Dublin. Despite the common reaction of the Irish people we have met – exclaiming we “must be crazy” to leave the heat of the Australian summer to come to a city paralyzed by an unprecedented deep freeze – we were excited to remove ourselves from the familiar territory of Melbourne. Our residency at the Fire Station was part of an ongoing exchange between Gertrude Contemporary Art Space and Pallas Contemporary Projects (PCP) – where we exhibited at the end of January.

The focus of our work is the structures, both physical and ideological, of the built environment. So we had very much looked forward to having the opportunity to make work through researching and responding to alternate yet related urban context of Dublin. Our collaborative practice dates back to an exhibition at Bus Gallery, a Melbourne based artist run initiative, in 2001. It is one of the many artist-run spaces in the city, which have played an important role in fostering an active and diverse art scene. Many of Australia's established artists have built their careers within the culture of similar initiatives. Similarly, the studio complex and gallery, Gertrude Contemporary Art Space, has played a vital role in so many artists' careers. GCAS and Fire Station are very similar in terms of their commitment to supporting artists and their ties to the community.

The exchange programme began when the director of Fire Station, Clodagh Kenny went to Melbourne and Sydney for a conference organised by Res Artis in August 2004. Clodagh told us that Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces was one of the main venues that she visited and straight away had drawn comparisons with Fire Station. Both organisations subsequently agreed on a format of offering artists the opportunity to meet and collaborate with their peers and develop their practice in an international context. Alicia Frankovich was the first artist to take part in the exchange programme at Fire Station in March 2008 for six weeks and Jesse Jones went to Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces in Melbourne in June 2009 also for six weeks. This year Pallas Projects joined the partnership and agreed to offer the visiting artists an exhibition, which gives great focus and networking opportunities to the visiting artists.

We had a studio at GCAS from 2007 – 2009. During this time we were introduced to countless influential curators and artists. It was

through this community that we were able to develop ambitious projects and were invited to take part in many shows. Along with exhibiting in many of Melbourne's gallery and museum spaces, we have also realised many projects outside of the traditional institutions, developing works in a range of spaces such as libraries, hotel rooms and public areas.

Regardless of the contexts within which our projects have been presented, our ongoing and consistent concerns are with what cultural theorist Mike Davis has referred to as “the architecture of anxiety”. According to Davis, contemporary architecture is not solely concerned with the making of functional and utilizable space, but crucially, the determination of how, and by whom such space is used and for what purpose. Our work aims to encourage audiences to question these functions of architecture – in terms of both the physical environments and psychological structures buildings can represent.

As soon as we landed in Dublin we quickly started researching the city; through walking around; talking to locals and digging through images – attempting to get a grasp on the dense and complex environment of the city and also its significant history. The Fire Station connected us with Terry Fagan, a local historian who took us on an insightful tour of the area that really helped us to start to understand the layers of history relating to Dublin and specifically the immediate area around Fire Station Studios. Unavoidably we were drawn to the social and economic changes that have occurred in the city during recent times; along with the ways in which the boom times and economic downturns have shaped the physicality of the city.

Developing this work in Dublin led us to an increased awareness of how the depth of history shapes the built environment. Our time in the city has furthered our researches into redevelopment and how environments are reshaped, demolished or merged with the new. This type of layering was very apparent to us in Dublin – where we paid attention to the different architectures clustered together in relatively small areas. Indeed the city proved to be a perfect place for our research through photographic documentation. We only had to look out our studio window; or walk a few minutes into the Docklands area, to see pertinent examples of significant social and physical shifts. What we could see from our studio was a view of the old washing halls; bordered by the relatively new buildings indicating the recent

prosperous times; along with somewhat derelict housing that alluded for us to both the areas past and possibly hinted at problems to come.

Within our research, we are also particularly interested in crime and how social behaviour shapes a city. It is interesting to consider how Dublin has been reshaped through planning, that has in part been concerned with attempting to remove or shift crime, violence and disobedience. This encompasses a broad field, ranging from minor delinquencies and acts of physical violence to collective forms of violent protest and disobedience such as foot riots, labour unrest, or protest marches and revolutionary uprisings. This is of course by no means unique to Dublin, but we found the city a very interesting case study.

The work we made for our exhibition ‘The Problem with Stability’ at Pallas Contemporary Projects (30 Jan – 13 March 2010) was both researched in Melbourne and in Dublin and produced during our stay at Fire Station. Over the past few years we have sought out images of aggressive and destructive acts, many of which include protest marches and riots found on the Internet, in newspapers and books. The actual motives behind the riots or scenes of political unrest are not specifically what interests us, rather it is the act in and of itself, as a pertinent example of the public interacting with and challenging the function of urban space. Although we do not actually use this imagery in our finished work, it often informs our sculptural work. The exhibition at PCP included the sculpture, *Unwavering Support (for the last time, resolutely)*, (2009). The sculpture is based on steel crowd control barriers, continuing our use of objects that are universally recognizable urban forms. Splicing through the barrier is a plane of glass. The glass and the barrier appear entwined and reliant upon each other for support. On the wall at the rear of the gallery was a framed piece, *Unwavering Support (for the first time, absolutely)* (2009) within the frame rests a section of steel removed from the sculpture, partially covering two images, one being a black and white banal street scene, the other a man walking across hot coals. The third work exhibited, *Untitled from the series The Problem with Stability* (2009) is a pane of smashed safety glass that has been enamelled black on the rear, creating a highly reflective and seductive surface. This work takes as its impetus the broken store windows that are ubiquitous in the urban environment and attempts to reframe how they are read and understood as objects.

In relation to this it could be argued that, violence or a fear of ‘misuse’ can be thought of as being embedded in the way that public spaces are designed and managed. Thus urban architecture can often be read as concerned with facilitating particular functions, along with protecting and upholding them. This might be seen as the dark side of notions of ‘collaborative’ planning – albeit one where the public is taken into account, but only in terms of threat, fear and anxiety.

The aesthetics of crime and antisocial behaviour have both universal qualities and local idiosyncrasies. The exhibition at Pallas projects was not an attempt to present work that is directly about Dublin per se, but rather it was part of our broader research into the understanding of the function of urban spaces. None the less in Dublin, we found it had generated its own nuanced aesthetic – one that reflects the specific socio-economic shifts that have taken place across the city.

Our experience of working and exhibiting in Dublin has been very positive and productive. Any concerns we had about sourcing materials and the logistics of exhibiting in a foreign city quickly disappeared when we met Gavin Murphy from PCP, Clodagh Kenny and all of the staff at the Fire Station. The support we received from both organisations surpassed our expectations and made our experience in Dublin very rewarding.

Pat Foster & Jen Berean