

Portraiture, meanwhile, is addressed in the works that bookend the exhibition. In the reception area of the gallery, two long rows of black-and-white photographic images traverse the wall, nine per row. The top row features indistinct images of a face at various angles; the bottom shows different sections of a body, blurry under water, its curves and indentations abstracted to evoke a watery underworld landscape. The title of the top row is *Aftermath (self-portrait) series one*, and the bottom row is *Aftermath (self-portrait) series two*. In a sense, these images encapsulate the essence of Ni Bhriain's practice, for it could be argued that the fluidity of self is at the core of her work. In her photographs and videos, the self is always both present and absent, suggesting something yet revealing nothing; her work is seeking, somehow, to represent the self yet acknowledging, too, the impossibility of achieving such an aim.

Perhaps, more precisely, her work involves the questioning of what it is that defines the self or, indeed, the inevitable inability to define selfhood. Instead, all that can be aspired to are versions of a self, a series of inconclusive images that can only capture certain angles or sections, images which are themselves rendered in such a way as to be vague, blurry, inconclusive. The self is thus in a perpetual state of becoming and, simultaneously, of dissolution. The titles of her works are, in this context, revealing: *Aftermath (self-portrait)* underscores the impossibility of rendering the self in portrait form – all that can be achieved is an aftermath of a moment, a trace of something fluid and liminal. Titles such as *Palimpsest* and *Perimeter* likewise underscore this sense of liminality and contingency.

In the last room, at the end of the Butler Gallery's colonnade of spaces, the exhibition concludes

with *In memoriam*, playing looped on a small television screen placed in a modest position on the floor. A face gradually emerges from opaque, lapping water, merging in and out of visibility with the ripples of the water: but although appearing to be submerged, the face is in fact projected onto the water's surface. The chimerical visage is both present and absent; it is a vision that hints at hidden depths – but only on the surface. These depths take on added complexity when one knows that the projected face is the artist's portrait, and the water onto which it is projected was the site of a drowning. Thus *In memorium* becomes a translucent, ephemeral memorial – to a lost life, to a past time, to a contingent self – rendered infinite by the ever-looping video.

Eimear McKeith writes on visual art for the *Sunday Tribune*.

**C** Karlijn De Jongh

Green on Red Gallery  
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# Sonic

# youth

The title of Green On Red Gallery's exhibition *Sonic youth* plays with the visitor's expectations and anticipations in relation to a performance by the famous rock band at this Dublin gallery. The invitation card contributes to this: it shows the image of the group's well-known album *Goo*. On the way to the event, the steep stairs and narrow entrance of the gallery leave visitors in the dark for a final moment. Turning the corner at the end of the corridor, however, visitors suddenly find themselves in a white exhibition space surrounded by eight television screens: *Sonic youth* is a group exhibition and shows work by seven young video artists who have a love for music and sound in common.

Curator Mary Cremin's play with the visitor's expectations gives a first indication of what this exhibition is all about. *Sonic youth* addresses a crossover between popular culture and video art and deals with the appropriation of icons and the sampling of other worlds into visual art in order to form an identity of one's own. All artists on display use music to give an impression of a person, either themselves or someone else. At the forefront are themes such as one's expectations of the future and the exploration of and confrontation with one's physical and cultural limitations.

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The most engaging work in the exhibition is Kate Murphy's *Britney love*. *Britney love* highlights the life of the English girl Brittaney; the exhibition shows the first two parts of this triptych in the making. In the first video (2000) we see the chubby eleven-year-old Brittaney giving seductive performances in her parent's living room, dressed in shiny dance costumes. Extremely self-confident, the young girl talks about her future and the difficulties of deciding what to do when you are good at everything. The one thing she is sure of is that she wants to be a singer and she demonstrates her skills by singing *Crazy*, one of the hit singles by her great idol Britney Spears. The second video is shot seven years later, when the girl is eighteen. Here we see a young woman in an elegant black dress, seemingly practicing for an audition for a girl band. The differences between the two videos are striking: sweating and fidgeting, Brittaney has lost most of her self-confidence and her hesitation and choice of words seem to indicate she already assumes that she will fail.

A more physical struggle is presented in William Hunt's *Even as you see me now*. This video documents and investigates his attempts to test his own limits. The video shows Hunt in a room with a piano; his per-

formance exists in moving the piano around until he lies on the floor with the piano on top of him, having his hands free to play the instrument. The screen is displayed vertically through which the viewer peeks into Hunt's life. Interesting in this respect is that at the start of Hunt's performance the piano is only visible for the viewer when s/he turns his/ her head. The moment Hunt covers himself under the weight of the instrument, the object is turned so that it looks horizontal again - how it is 'supposed' to be: the easier it becomes to see and understand the video, the bigger the struggle for the artist, who - despite the weight - is still well able to sing about how "nothing can hold him back."

Yvonne Buchheim's video *Herder's legacy* presents amateur singers from different countries. Inspired by the song collection of the eighteenth-century philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, Buchheim's work investigates the visibility of cultural identity within songs. People of various ages and cultural backgrounds sing a song they are familiar with. Buchheim shows the struggle that the singers have with themselves and with the song: a 70-year-old woman wanting to sing an Elvis Presley song cannot remember anything but "you ain't nothing but a hound dog"; a younger woman sings *Over the rainbow* while being constantly aware of the presence of the camera. Because the screen is divided into four parts that are not in sync, the singer sings in canon with himself; continuity is presented by cutting the next singer in the screen, giving the impression of an audience.

Although all screens in the show display singing figures, the use of headphones prevents the presence of sound. The strange atmosphere that is created by the absence of sound is intensified by Cremin's decision to place all works at the same height

and at about the same distance from each other. Apart from the videos mentioned above, Johanna Billing's *Magical world*, *The white and black minstrel show* by David Blandy, Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard's film project *File under Sacred Music*, and Ben Kinsley's *GESICHTSMUSIK* surround the visitor. Standing at the centre of the exhibition space, the moving images all face our direction. Our position becomes ambiguous: we are both audience and centre of attention at the same time.

*Sonic youth* is an intriguing exhibition that raises questions about life and identity. The video works in the exhibition demonstrate different approaches to these questions. Through the combined play of the artists' different approaches on the one hand, and the visitor's double function on the other, the video works do not only show us other people's reality; they offer us the opportunity to reflect upon our own reality, too.

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Kate Murphy  
*Britney love*  
2000 - 2007  
video stills  
courtesy Green on Red Gallery

