

Exit Limerick

Exit Review context

When Static first carried out *Exit Review* in Liverpool in 2003, the project was conceived as a rapid and small response to the difficulties fine art students encounter as they move from art school to life beyond college. The project selected eight writers to cover the 84 graduating fine art students from the three courses in Liverpool (Liverpool John Moores, Hope University and Wirral Met). Each artist received two reviews so opinions could be compared. Each reviewer was required to write approximately 100 words, written swiftly so the emphasis was on informed opinion rather than perfect prose. There was a tight deadline as the work had to be published weeks later at the *Exit Review* debate before the students disappeared.



Reviewers

Aileen Burns
 Helen Carey
 Mary Conlon
 Michaële Cutaya
 Aoife Flynn
 John Gayer
 Fergal Gaynor
 Georgina Jackson
 Joanne Laws
 Pippa Little
 Johan Lundh
 Caoimhin Mac Giolla Leith
 James Merrigan
 Dobz O'Brien
 Aislinn O'Donnell
 Séan O'Sullivan
 Curt Riegelneegg
 Eilish Tuite

Exit Limerick Review Special
Supplement in The Limerick Leader
June 14, 2012



Exit Review 2003 was also developed as a response to a perceived crisis in the then British art school education system, namely the inadequacy of conventional studio models of teaching which left students unprepared for contemporary practice. It also focused on the problems of the degree show format in that not all students' work was appropriate for a mini-gallery set-up and that those students who did work off-site or in a relational context usually suffered in marking.

Exit Review was designed in part to provide visibility to early career artists. It was also by definition a work of institutional critique. Furthermore, it was a work that challenged the power relationships in the then rigid hierarchies of Liverpool's cultural catenaccio. By asking a series of Liverpool's leading gallery and biennial directors and curators to write for *Exit Review* under a contract of £10 per review, Static had become the freelance employer rather than the employed. It's worth noting that many reviewers offered to waive their fees due to the 'worthiness' of the project. Offers that were rejected.

Static on one level were interested in writers that we felt were shackled by their respective institutions, and on another level we were interested in the senior positions held by some of the writers as much as their ability to write. We were also interested in the tension that could be set up between the artist and the critic through the conduit of the artwork. The perception then, and to a large extent now, is that *Exit Review* provides some kind of 'valid service', and many of the writers who agree to become Exit Reviewers are aware of the power relationship between the reviewer and the reviewed, in particular as it is a project that normally offers critique to graduating students. However, the perceived power relationship can all too obviously implode when a reviewer stands in front of the work and struggles to say anything in the knowledge that there is a very narrow word count and tight deadline looming. This transitory moment of truth becomes a long-standing and indelible reference on the writers' abilities when the print machines start to roll a short number of days later.

The construction of the project is therefore deliberately set up to investigate a series of relationships between the main protagonists who will come into a form of contact through the actual review, but also through the *Exit Review* debate where the reviewer and the reviewed are invited to participate in a discussion about the project. The choreography and architecture of the debate are also key to this element of the project in that the debate takes place immediately after the reviews are either posted on the wall of the debate space, or the corridor outside the space, or as an insert in the local newspaper that is distributed prior to the debate (but very often already purchased).

The debate element is therefore the most highly-charged period of the overall *Exit Review* construction, as reviewed artists take stock after reading their reviews and come face to face with the reviewers in the architecture of the forum.

The forum is not the only architectural typology or reference in the project, as *Exit Review* is also an investigation into the threshold between public and private space, a recurring motif in Static's projects. On one level there are the more obvious thresholds between artist and reviewer and the critically reflective threshold that occurs between the two separate reviews given to each artist. However, the threshold or point of interest between public and private space in *Exit Review* is the fact that for 50 weeks of the year the art school is a private space, yet for two weeks of the year it is a public space as it opens up for the degree show.



Giambattista Nolli
The Nolli Plan of Rome 1748
www.deconcrete.org

This public/private slippage allowed Static to use Giambattista Nolli's 1748 figure ground plan of Rome as an urban and social cartographic reference point to speculate on a modern day public moment, namely the public art show. *The Nolli Plan* is widely regarded as the first figure ground plan that sets out to articulate the difference between public and private space by showing the inside of all public, religious, civic, and academic spaces in white, just as with the urban streets, courtyards, piazzas and parks. All private buildings are shown in black. The Nolli plan of course is a utopian illusion. The idea that social and physical barriers suddenly evaporate in white parchment is akin to saying that the public today can enter so-called public buildings without an a priori set of entrance criteria being present, such as social, physical or surveillance barriers and thresholds.

Exit Review, however, uses Nolli to take advantage of when the black space becomes a temporary white space on the cultural map of each city that the project takes place in as the art schools open their electronic doors for two weeks for the graduation shows. As the thresholds and barriers are withdrawn and as the private space is now considered public space, Static do not seek permission to carry out *Exit Review*, a decision that was to develop into a much wider debate about invitation, permission and hospitality.



Exit Review
Publication, Static, 2003
ISBN 0-9546498-0-X

The first *Exit Review 2003* publication was therefore designed in black and white in order to make reference to the urban and social ideas at work in the project. In Liverpool in 2003, the fact that Static didn't ask permission to enter and review an art show in a public space was declared a "violation" by one university, the same institution that considered disciplining one of its members of staff for participating in the project. As *Exit Review 2003* emerged as an online publication just a few weeks after the project started – to coincide with the debate – the gathering storm of institutional objection was publicly aired as staff and students alike got into online slanging matches on the Static Pamphlet website. But when a number of weeks later Static published the hard copy Nolli B+W version of *Exit Review* with its own ISBN, the real political ramifications of the project began to unravel as students – who had received low degrees but had been given positive reviews by directors of biennials and leading contemporary art centres – began to appear at tribunals at the Education Department, carrying a copy of *Exit Review* under their arms and demanding an upgrade in marks.

The combination of the specific Liverpool political context and the wider concerns in *Exit Review 2003* in turn gave Static, through a reputation economy, some cultural collateral and was a key moment in giving the organisation a wider international visibility.



Exit Limerick Debate
Limerick School of Art and Design
June 15, 2012



Exit Limerick Debate
Limerick School of Art and Design
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John Byrne Co-Director of Static &
Aislinn O'Donnell
Exit Limerick Debate
Limerick School of Art and Design
June 15, 2012



Exit Limerick

1 Paul O'Sullivan
(Director of Static)
speaking at the Exit
Limerick debate at
LIT, 15 June 2012

"This is quite possibly the first and last review that most graduates here will receive" ¹

2 John Byrne
(co-director
Static Gallery
and Programme
leader Fine Art at
Liverpool John
Moore's University).
Text for Exit
Limerick debate at
LIT, 15 June 2012.

"Art Criticism is an act of framing, an act of complicity and an act of rebellion. The role of the critic is never simply that of passing an opinion. Criticism enables us to identify what a work of art is and also what a work of art can be. From the time of Vasari onward, this act has also been one that is taken largely in absentia – in the absence of the artwork and in the absence of the audience. It strives to unite a memory of responses to an artwork with an audience that may never see that work in its physical form. Criticism disperses a desire for presence, a longing for authenticity, across a discursive network of fictive possibility. It concerns the impossibility of reconciling objectivity with taste, of setting up circuits of power which enable the establishment of quality. So what are the points at which criticism both enables the artwork to have a form whilst, at the same time, suggesting a set of physical, aesthetic and theoretical parameters which can be transgressed?" ²

3 Exit Liverpool
2003/06 and Exit
Cork 2005/6

In 2012, Static were invited by Annie Fletcher to carry out the *Exit Review* as part of eva International. The project was called *Exit Limerick*.³ The key difference to the previous incarnations of *Exit Review* was that the context of eva International allowed Static to develop a project that not only reviewed the graduating students of Limerick School of Art and Design, LIT, but also the eva International artists.

Although the specific political concerns of the original Liverpool review do not exist as the project travels, the project as a construction still allows for a number of tensions to be played out, not least the issue of Static being seen as the outsider coming in to cause some form of critical upheaval, or to disrupt the normal flows of how critique is organized in the places where the project is undertaken. That said, it is also true that, due to the very nature of the critical and political design of *Exit Review*, the project evolves and reappears, by invitation, due to the fact that it will trigger a critical dialogue and debate. In this sense the project is a kind of ready-made, a buy now art franchise that can be carried out in any part of the world.

For *Exit Limerick*, the investigation of the threshold between how the reviewers would tackle the comparative situations of both the graduating artists and the eva International artists, was an obvious concern. What tactics would the reviewers use? Would it become apparent that there were two sets of reviews written for two sets of artists - operating at potentially similar levels in some cases - but categorised in two different brackets: graduates v international artists?

The other significant difference to previous *Exit Reviews* was the fact that, rather than choosing reviewers principally from the city the review was taking place in, during the build up to the project a series of in-person and email discussions with a network



of contacts that forwarded tips on writers (together with Static's own contacts in Ireland). By inviting this national framework of reviewers we were attempting to offer a snapshot of the state of contemporary critical writing in Ireland.

That said, there were writers invited nationally who had to decline for institutional reasons, as it is still evident that any form of critique coming from within the sector - even if it is commissioned as part of a public biennial of art - is still regarded as too precarious to contemplate, and demonstrates the paradoxical and schizoid rhetoric of many arts institutions that proclaim and brand themselves as 'cutting edge' and 'progressive', when really there is a fundamental conservatism that controls behind the sheen of the public façade. A harsh review of a graduate's work, and in this case also that of an eva biennial artist's work, can be, and is often seen as a critique of either the academic institution and its teachers and the biennial curator and organizers. Therefore, the decision by Fletcher to commission *Exit Limerick* was to a large extent high risk given some of the conservative fears outlined, and the fact that there would inevitably be varying reviews of the artists that she had commissioned.

Exit Limerick was therefore an attempt to offer an alternative system of critique outside of the conventional systems of review and distribution. In many ways it was an invitation of expediency as *Exit Limerick*, to all intents and purposes, looked like the epitome of the democratisation of critique, that is, by inviting written critique rather than waiting for it - from a national pool of writers who ranged from established to emerging - eva International 2012 had already positioned itself as a project that had developed external critical engagement and discourse within the body of the biennial, rather than organising the standard symposium that sits on the margins of the overall spectacle.

It can also be said that the risk involved in inviting the project was offset by one of the main use values of *Exit Limerick*, namely that it was a project that not only invited and carried out critique as part of a wider set of related concerns - embedded within its own conceptual narrative - but it also provided a digital trace as well as hard copy publication, as it was both published online and as an insert in the Limerick Leader newspaper, an idea that attempts to broaden the readership and distribution of an art project to a wider public audience via a mainstream newspaper publication. An insert that if not chip paper the following day would certainly be in the recycling bin come collection time of most, apart from the people involved in the project.

Chip paper or not, *Exit Limerick* instigated a large series of writings on the subject of art that took place in Limerick and in doing so ensured that the biennial would have an in-built set of reviews, a close reading of the event and a body of work that would not only have a local, national and international audience through its digital legacy, but would also allow future readers to have some form of experience of a biennial that they didn't see or, for the more specialist reader, a document that, when examined, demonstrates and unpacks a number of techniques and tactics that are employed by the reviewers of both the LSAD graduating show 2012 and eva International 2012.

Paul O'Sullivan, Director of Static