TRANSFORMING MAZE / LONG KESH PRISON: The vital role of contemporary dialogical art and architecture in dealing with contentious heritage

MAC Belfast | Metropolitan Arts Centre, Belfast
10 Exchange St, Belfast BT1 2LS

15. March 2017, 10am – 6pm

Organised by Aisling O’ Beirn and Martin Krenn, Ulster University, Belfast / TRACES - Transmitting contentious cultural heritages with the arts, Horizon 2020

Transforming Maze / Long Kesh is a one-day conference about the difficulties in dealing with contentious heritage by focusing on the Maze / Long Kesh former prison site. The conference addresses the special possibilities of Arts and Architecture to initiate a productive debate and new forms of engagement with such a site.

TRANSFORMING MAZE / LONG KESH Art project

The conference takes place at the mid-point of the three-year art project Transforming Maze / Long Kesh. The project artistically investigates the material culture of this site, based on collaboration and dialogue. The artists Aisling O’ Beirn and Martin Krenn work with participants such as ex-prisoners, ex-prison employees and ex-visitors from Maze / Long Kesh prison to produce an art project, which opens up multiple new perspectives from key individuals who have had direct contact with the site. The artists will conduct a series of workshops in which the participants’ experience of the physical reality of the prison is central. The participants will be invited to create objects related to their personal experience and memory of the site using various materials and techniques that would have been used by prisoners making objects whilst in jail. Examples of techniques could include, string art, images on handkerchiefs, objects made from lollypop sticks etc. The aim is to give insights into everyday aspects of the prison that could easily be overlooked. A traveling exhibition, displayed in various public locations, as well as a publication will show these objects together with copies/images of real artefacts from the jail. These exhibits will reveal physical traces of the material culture of Maze / Long Kesh.

TRANSFORMING MAZE / LONG KESH Conference

Local and International speakers will discuss artistic, archaeological and ethnographic approaches to investigate contentious heritage such as the Maze / Long Kesh from a broader perspective.

Fred Caulfield, the Executive Director of the Prison Arts Foundation (PAF) will speak about his organisation and his involvement in the art project Transforming Maze / Long Kesh Prison. The mission of his organisation is to inspire creativity and encourage personal and social change in offenders within the criminal justice system, through the arts.

http://www.prisonartsfoundation.com
Martin Krenn and Aisling O’Beirn will present of their artistic research findings to date related to their art project Transforming Maze / Long Kesh Prison.

http://www.martinkrenn.net and http://www.aislingobeirn.com

Archaeologist Laura McAtackney, who conducted an independent archaeological investigation of Maze / Long Kesh prior to its partial demolition will give insights into her research methods. In her book An Archaeology of the Troubles: The Dark Heritage of Long Kesh/Maze Prison (2014) she reveals the seminal role of material culture in understanding the prison. Her analyses moves from traditional use of solely documentary and oral evidence to exploring the full range of material remains from the prison as they have been abandoned in situ or been dispersed and re-contextualized into wider society. McAtackney creatively provides a unique interpretation of the Northern Irish Troubles and the continuing destabilizing role of material remnants of the conflict in the peace process.

https://kilmainhamgaolgraffiti.com

TRACES project coordinator Klaus Schönberger, professor of Cultural Anthropology and chair of the Institut für Kulturanalyse at Universitaet Klagenfurt is the scientist responsible for the research topic 'Performing Heritage: Creative Everyday Practices in Popular Culture'. "His opening statement "Agonism and Contentious Cultural Heritage" will outline the general frame of TRACES.

Artist Tal Adler from the Humboldt University of Berlin will present this artistic-research practices based on long-term collaborations that engage with difficult, contested or conflicted narratives. For the TRACES project he developed creative co-productions in which artists, researchers and institutions develop sustainable ways to work with, and disseminate, contentious cultural heritages.

https://www.euroethno.hu-berlin.de/de/carmah/people-1/researchers

Art theorist and curator Suzana Milevska will give critical insights into the methodology of contemporary participatory art, the role of dialogue as well as the possibilities and limitations that may arise when artists collaborate with non-artists. She analyses a “paradigm shift from Objects to Subjects” through participatory art, because such art aims at the “deconstruction of the renowned hierarchies between ‘high’ and ‘low’ art or culture”.*


Architect Christina Varvia, researcher and project coordinator at Forensic Architecture will present the work of the Forensic Architecture team. She has graduated from the AA School of Architecture with a previous degree from Westminster University. Her previous research includes studies on digital media and memory as well as the perception of the physical environment through scanning and imaging technologies, research that she deploys through time-based media. After having worked in architectural practice, Christina joined the Forensic Architecture team in 2014, where she developed methodologies and undertook extensive analysis that lead to the Rafah: Black Friday report. ***

http://www.forensic-architecture.org

The Keynote will be given by Mary Jane Jacob, a curator and writer who pioneered public, site-specific, and socially engaged art in the US as a shared practice and public discourse. Her landmark
projects include *Places with a Past* in Charleston, South Carolina, *Culture in Action* in Chicago, and *Conversations at the Castle* in Atlanta. She holds the position of Professor and Director of the *Institute for Curatorial Research and Practice* at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Jacob will frame the conference by outlining her theoretical thoughts on social practice art and aesthetic experience, informed by the ideas of American philosopher John Dewey for whom theory and practice knew no separation. The aim of her presentation is to provide a foundation for social practice art. Thus she reveals the social use of art and how art enhances empathy, allowing connections with others. She will highlight the characteristics and importance of the invisible groundwork necessary for a social art project to engage and to be an instigator of change, contextualising the ambitions of Krenn’s and O’Beirn’s project on Maze / Long Kesh.

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www.traces.polimi.it

With thanks to Development Arts and Culture, Ulster University
Part of the Ulster University Festival of Art & Design
https://www.ulster.ac.uk/festivalofartanddesign


** http://martinkrenn.net/thepoliticalsphereinartpractices/?page_id=1878

*** http://www.forensic-architecture.org/case/rafah-black-friday/