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ENCLAVE REVIEW

Maddie Leach: Evening Echo
Shalom Park, etc., Cork
Ed Krčma

The constituent parts of Maddie Leach's public artwork *Evening Echo* are inconspicuous but several: three faux-Victorian park lamps added to the six existing ones in Cork's Shalom Park; a small notice published in the *Evening Echo* reading, 'Sunset tonight * Shalom Park, Gas Works Road & Albert Road * 1 Tevet 5772'; editions of a poster consisting of found text concerning the alternative temporality of the Jewish religious calendar plus a schedule for 50 subsequent annual events; and a catalogue containing images of the park's 1989 opening ceremony accompanied by two essays (by Mick Wilson and Matt Packer).

The three lamps added by Leach are identical to the six existing ones except that one is a full metre taller than all the rest. While the other lamps will function in accordance with the City Council's public lighting schedule, for the next 50 years at least the tall lamp will be illuminated for just 30 minutes annually (it is however hoped – quixotically to be sure – that the project can continue into perpetuity). Governed by a complex remote timing system, the tall lamp will be illuminated at sunset on the last day of Hanukkah, the eight-day Jewish Festival of Lights. Given this specification, the correspondence between the nine lamps and the Hanukkah menorah, or nine-branched candelabrum, becomes clear, and Leach's project is revealed as a spare yet powerful public testament to Cork's dwindling Jewish community.

While on a residency at the National Sculpture Factory in 2008, Leach had stayed across the street from Cork's only synagogue (on South Terrace). Noting its apparent dormancy, she began to take an interest in further evidence of Cork's precarious Jewish community, which, settling around Albert Road in the late 19th century, afforded the area the colloquial and now rather jarring name 'Jewtown'. That community was constituted mostly by Lithuanian Jews fleeing persecution, and fairly soon its numbers began to wane; while in the 1901 census 55 Jewish families were recorded in the area, even by 1939 that figure had shrunk to eleven. The community today has declined to only a handful and for some time its leaders have signaled the likely need for the cessation of the Hebrew Congregation in Cork.

The *Evening Echo* lamps were first illuminated at about ten past four on 27th December. Rather green and dim to begin with, they shone into the evening more strongly after a minute or so. The tall lamp was first; the others followed unevenly as their individual sensors responded to the light levels as they fell. The end of 'act one' so to speak (the gathering crowd lent this minimal event a certain drama) was more abrupt: the tall lamp was suddenly extinguished after about 30 minutes, its bulb holding just a faint glimmer of orange light for a short while.

The work's lack of rhetoric (of pathos, of redemption, of mourning) allows it a conceptual mobility that avoids any mooring to a familiar emotional freight of melancholy and remorse. Although not absolutely separable, *Evening Echo* has little to do with the necessarily unyielding austerity of the monuments of Rachel Whiteread (Vienna) and Daniel Libeskind (Berlin) to the horrors of industrialized genocide. (It is clear, however,

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Maddie Leach, *Evening Echo* (2011), installation shot. Photo by Clare Keogh. © NSF

that the artist is not innocent of the coincidence of 'Shalom Park' and 'Gas Works Road' in the newspaper notice). Where there is emphasis here, it is as much upon contingency and provisionality as it is on the work of mourning. Instead, it is not at all clear whether this work is oriented toward the past or toward the future; whether it is a marker of pathos (in its modesty and brevity) or a lightning rod for future gatherings. That emotional ambivalence (rather than indifference) lends the work more not less potential, allowing it to operate in different registers at once and for different people.

That the work is constituted by several very different parts means that it does not fully 'reside' anywhere. In this, Leach continues to work within the tradition of Conceptual Art's 'dematerialization' of the art object, which need not signal the abandonment of art's material aspect, but suggests rather that the identity and cohesiveness of the work is not given by its location in any one place. Operating on a vastly dilated timescale, that identity will be formed over the decades in the minds of its viewers via numerous acts of reception, and the network of meanings, experiences and associations into which those acts fold. Who, after all, will see this ninth lamp during its brief periods of illumination? Will it be recognized? What will it trigger? How will it be understood? To those that only know about it and do not see it, the work can operate (or perhaps rather echo) as an idea and can be dwelt upon in the absence of any direct experience.

The perceptual effects of *Evening Echo* are indeed slight – an inconspicuous newspaper notice, a small number of unemphatic posters, three extra park lamps that could easily be overlooked or misrecognized as a small effort at urban regeneration – but the conceptual reverberations, when attended to, are potentially very powerful and far-reaching. In line with a religious tradition of resistance to 'graven images' and an emphatic prioritizing of the word, the work moves quickly from an everyday visual object to the symbolic space of language; that is, to the domain of history, memory, social conditions, expressive conventions and emotional experience proper.

The work is certainly not all openness and indeterminacy, however. The history, traditions and experiences to which it makes oblique but insistent reference are concrete and specific. Indeed, part of the aspiration of

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the artist would seem to be to augment an awareness of Cork's minor histories among the local community, albeit from a viewpoint not often considered and from one which will reveal the city differently. Or, more openly: to deliver a rebus-like object, at once slight, enigmatic and compelling, which would encourage curiosity about that to which it refers.

Maddie Leach's adjustment of an apparently unremarkable public space, then, demonstrates the power of the addition of a frame. What happens to our familiar reality when it is designated differently in language? *Evening Echo,* as its title suggests, is firmly embedded in the specificity of local history; but just as the threads of that historical fabric themselves unwind into the macrocosmic narratives of world-historical processes, so the reverberations of this public artwork extend into artistic and philosophical territory which travels beyond the local and particular. A largely invisible community given visibility; a communal space animated by new meanings; our time punctuated differently.

Ed Krčma is Lecturer in History of Art at University College Cork, and is founding editor of *Enclave Review*. *Evening Echo* is presented by the National Sculpture Factory, Cork City Council and Board Gais; the lamps were first lit on 27 December 2011, and City Council have agreed to maintain the lamps for the next 50 years. It is hoped that the project continues beyond that date.

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