

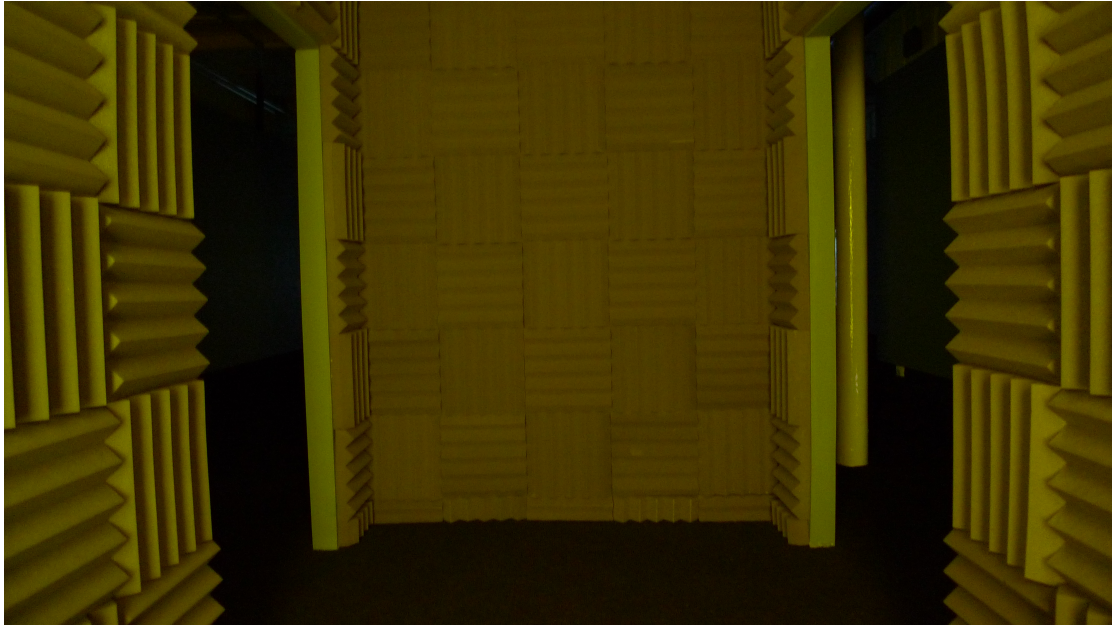
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The phonetic script on the invitation to Michael Hanna's show at Belfast Exposed Gallery instantly offers a simple exercise in the bridging of articulation, symbol and understanding as we endeavour to make sense of what we have been presented with. Maybe less obvious in this interaction is how the body becomes present through the mouthing of the uncommon conjunctions of lettering and punctuation that surprise when voiced, as we hear ourselves create recognisable everyday words; the incomprehensible given meaning.

Started by a group of photographers as a community project in 1985, Belfast Exposed has organised workshops and given access to facilities, allowing people to take their own photos and process them. At a time before mobile phones and digital media, this organisation enabled the people on the inside of a conflict situation to tell their stories and bear witness to events happening in their lives and communities. The work made during these workshops form the backbone of a vast archive¹ alongside the images taken by the BX founding photographers.

Since its inception the organisation has grown through the addition of a gallery and bookshop and continues its programme of photography workshops. Hanna's installation joins a collection of works commissioned by Belfast Exposed, who over the years have opened their doors to artists, including Duncan Campbell and Redmond Entwistle, to use the vast archive of photographs that they house.

Short Films About Learning is a video installation. The fascia of the gallery has been pulled back, the work flexing itself to the limits of its architectural confines; a single screen optimises this space; the bookshop and reception desk relegated elsewhere for the duration of the show. Within the structure of this work Hanna utilises a spatial economy; the navigation of the exhibition becomes a conduit for the transition from the exterior to the interior of the show. The text for the exhibition has been printed on vinyl and covers the windows of the gallery serving a dual purpose of creating blackout for the interior and presenting information on the show. As you walk through the doors of the gallery you enter a small antechamber that serves as a light trap. This space is soundproofed with acoustic foam, creating a buffer from the street and allowing a moment to acclimatise, a pause.



Each of the 4 films use a series of 7 photos and each film is accompanied by an upbeat audio lecture by psychologist Paul Bloom². These lectures lend their titles to the individual films: Spotlight Effect, Habituation, Object Permanence and Subliminal Priming. Hanna takes the articulation of each word as his editing cue, the delivery and length of the word dictating the duration of the image on screen. Combined with the sequential effect of landscape then portrait images this strange syncopation mimics the mouthing of language. The audio is dominant, the images passive, silently stating their own story; a shadow dance let loose in each beat of Paul Bloom's enthusiastic delivery.



Yet the procession of images maintains its autonomy, mute and immutable, the images passively resisting the audio.

Watching the work there is a desire to try and marry the images to the audio. Each lecture imparts a theory of human behaviour that seems relevant to the film images, yet not quite. These two dynamics flint off each other, exciting and pushing apart at the same time. Little sparks occur when a word haphazardly connects with an image...and then gone.

Temporally forced into connection, the effect is to create a diffracting landscape, a geometry of potential connection and the piquing of a process of thought that seeks to understand and mediate the images of trauma that we are presented with: a physical effort akin to placing two magnetic north poles together. A connection thwarted.

In correspondence with Hanna, I asked what his original intention was when approaching the commission "*maybe one thing was, I wanted to make something that was difficult to ignore - I think people can instantly categorise and ignore such familiar, B&W, archive imagery...something that people were forced to have an active relationship to rather than a passive one.*"

This society is still post-conflict, coming to terms with a violent and contentious past. At the same time generations are growing up in the ongoing peace process. There is a friction created between coming to terms with the very present past and an embarrassment of being defined by the past and wanting to park it and move on. However, sitting watching these films and considering the provenance of the photographs, I am aware that some of the people and the events depicted are only streets away and may be in the room with me. I want to write 'context is everything' but maybe that is a bit too black and white.

There is a visceral liveliness generated by the tension in Hanna's Short Films About Learning, where the effort to understand becomes an integral part of the experience of the work: an act of understanding.

After graduating in Edinburgh, Hanna spent time living in Australia and Germany before returning to Northern Ireland.

1. The archive has a collection of around 500,000 images, all have been digitised and around 3000 of these have been made accessible through a portal held at the gallery.

2. <http://oyc.yale.edu/psychology/psyc-110> These lectures are were taken from the Academic Earth website which gives free access to free online college courses.