

PROJECT PROFILE

Daily Devilment

SARAH LINCOLN WRITES ON 'HOPE INHERENT' A PROJECT RUN BY TARA KENNEDY AND JENNIE MORAN OUT OF A KIOSK ON GRATTAN BRIDGE IN DUBLIN



Hope Inherent. Tuesday: Haystacks.



Hope Inherent. Tuesday: Anti City



Hope Inherent. Friday: Hopscotch

THE two attractive and identically clothed ladies stationed behind the counter of a kiosk on Grattan Bridge throughout August were not running an up-market chipper, nor were they employees of Bord Failte. Extravagant as they may have appeared through the August drizzle, artists Tara Kennedy and Jennie Moran were intent on administering practical services to the passer-by as part of their project, Hope Inherent. On various evenings over the month the two urged drenched pedestrians to accept ingredients for an evening meal, or gave them the opportunity to write and send a postcard from their kiosk. More fanciful offers followed, from dancing on the bridge to taking a rest on sofas made out of bales of hay. This playful and interactive project was supported by Dublin City Council through an arts bursary, and had a deceptively simple premise – its ambition was to offer the passer-by a service.

On certain days a small payment was required to avail of the services. A recipe for Spanish tortilla and bag containing the ingredients cost the people €5.00, while the supply of blank postcard, materials with which to decorate it, and the postage cost €1.00. The passer-by had the opportunity to communicate a message to another person in the city free of charge using the poster site on the outside of the kiosk. The opportunity to make sandcastles on the bridge was another complimentary service offered. The appearance of the Hope Inherent kiosk; with its bright colour-scheme of orange and white, its proximity to other retail outlets and simple marketing ploys to attract pedestrians walking by, all contributed in making it recognisable as a shop. The exchange of money for a service compounded this sense of ambiguity as to whether the project operated in the space of retail or art. Any attempt to brand it either one or the other was purposefully frustrated by the creators of the project.

The title Hope Inherent states explicitly that there is a positive sentiment at the heart of the project. I wondered were the two artists responding to a perceived need within the populace of Dublin City for hope? Kennedy felt that Hope Inherent was a way of dealing consciously with a feeling of alienation, “it was a way of engaging directly in a small way with people”. Moran made reference to Michel de Certeau's text *The Practice of Everyday Life* and in it his focus upon the creativity involved in negotiating and partaking in the ordinary activities that are carried out everyday like walking, shopping and reading. De Certeau has written that “the grid of discipline is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it” and suggests that this grid of discipline elicits a reaction in the populace: “that there is an increased deviousness, fantasy, or laughter”⁽¹⁾. While convenient systems exist for communicating with each other, for accessing information, for moving through spaces, there lies parallel to these systems the inventive and creative means with which people access these systems, be it, taking a short cut or using slang.

Hope Inherent set about acknowledging the playfulness involved in negotiating our social and physical spaces. Moran was particularly interested in de Certeau's reference to “the creativity of the non-cultural producer in society”⁽²⁾. She spoke of appealing to and acknowledging the particular energy and spark within people who “find ways of producing culture in their lives, in how they negotiate their way around and within institutions and other unyielding systems. I felt that we were trying to embrace that and appeal to that in people.” By facilitating an alternative means of communication within the city, by temporarily using the kiosk's poster site as a playful alternative to telephone and email as the typical means of

communication. Receiving (for a small fee) a package containing the recipe and ingredients for your evening meal, was certainly an alternative to the supermarket, or take-away experience. However, rather than initiate a didactic project, or attempt a gesture at charity, Hope Inherent sought to acknowledge and diversify the existent creativity, or inventiveness involved in carrying out ordinary tasks in our everyday lives. The ‘hope’ that is referred to in the title is a salutary and complementary reference to the way we each negotiate ourselves in and around systems, or ‘nets of discipline’, while also seeking to diversify that space through small positive and playful actions.

Hope Inherent exists in a very particular space within the visual arts, being neither gallery-based, nor identifiable as community art. Moran and Kennedy are artists with experience in both studio based and community art, yet they doggedly referred to Hope Inherent as simply a ‘project’, as opposed to an art-project. Despite its Dublin City Council arts office funding there is an effort within the project to distance itself from being identified as ‘art’. Moran and Kennedy felt that identifying what they were doing as ‘art’, through titling and location was extraneous to the spirit of their project. Adopting the prefix of art and locating themselves in relation to a gallery would have confused the intention of the project and prescribe the types of people engaging with it. Moran states that “we wanted people to be able to engage with the project, without them feeling that they had been selected and put into a group or category”. Kennedy goes on to explain that “it was our aim in Hope Inherent, not to target an audience”. Here there is a clear sense that it was of vital importance that those engaging with the project were unable to find an immediate interpretation of it through association with an institution, or through the means of engagement. The intention was that those approaching the project did not feel like the recipients of charity, or unwilling to engage due to the presence of a weighty institution. When confronted by the project, one could only take it at face-value.

In retrospect both Kennedy and Moran felt that the more successful types of encounters with people were quick ones. Rather than having people spend time carrying out activities, the two felt that having people double take, or simply notice information in the kiosk's poster site was as effective as having them partake in the activity. Kennedy states, “that was what was nice about those split-second engagements, was it often was not so much about us then, yet the spirit of the project was understood”. It became apparent that the project could be ‘read’ on many different levels and that interacting directly with the project was not a pre-requisite to engaging with it. There are many examples of relational art, where human interaction is placed at the centre of the project. Moran and Kennedy cite their presence within the project as being problematic. The two felt that if there could have been “less chat and less human interaction and more of an emphasis on the administration and receipt of service, then the intention of the project could have been clearer”.

The Slovenian artist Marjatica Potrc has stated, “I don't think utopias make sense today. For me, the present time is about self-reliability, individual initiatives and small-scale projects”⁽³⁾. An initiative like Hope Inherent can be regarded within these terms. Rather than calling for a radical change of being, this project located itself within the urban fabric and through modest service provision, suggested a slight shift in mindset.

Hope Inherent acknowledged the necessity for systems that require citizens to behave in a uniform manner, whether it is queuing for a bus, obeying traffic lights, or moving through a crowded corridor. What was encouraged in the project was a broadening of the scope for creativity in the personal adaptation to these systems. Integral to the project was the belief that each individual has a creative spark that is used to negotiate these structures on a daily basis. One person stopping to take the time to send a message in a bottle from a city centre bridge is a small gesture – but one that articulates the space in which people's sense of inventiveness, or streak of ‘devilment’ can be found.

NOTES

(1) Michel De Certeau *The Practice of Everyday Life* (California, University of California Press, 1984) P. xiv

(2) De Certeau, M. P. 13

(3) Potrc, M. *Marginalia and Architecture* (Valencia, IVAM, 2003) P. 198