

Dennis McNulty: Prototypes

Limerick City Gallery of Art 17 July to 14 September and 17 July to 19 September

Also showing at LCGA, 'PROTOTYPES' is Dennis McNulty's first solo exhibition at a public institution in Ireland, and presents new and existing works. Like Partum, McNulty's use of letter sequencing examines textuality as an embedded linguistic domain, with these signs and symbols functioning as gatekeepers of knowledge across the fault lines of history. Red neon lettering is a particularly prominent format within the exhibition, as in seven-segment LED displays, reminiscent of outmoded electronics, space-shuttle countdown clocks and explosive devices. The intermittent on/off flashing of the luminous letters relays existential messages, such as: 'Maybe everything that dies some day comes back.' Concealed within the sculptural prism *And you may ask yourself...*, 2014, a singular display spells out Talking Heads song lyrics, with the mirror-boarded veneer prompting self-reflexivity within the viewer. On closer inspection, the illuminated glyphs are elongated hexagons, constituting a recurrent geometric form across the exhibition, appearing in a neon-blue hologram projection, wall-mounted technical drawings and a number of structural elements such as *Portal Fragment*, 2012-14 – a reclaimed dropped ceiling, composed of tessellating hexagonal tiles, installed within LCGA's foyer. Such spatial interventions prompt reflection on the ceilings' former functions as acoustic and cosmetic barriers within modernist industrial settings. Subsequent references to sci-fi literature, orbital charts and space travel found in accompanying artworks reframe these ceilings as celestial

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thresholds, and hexagons as futuristic symbols of cosmology and sacred geometry. The disruption of fact and fiction is confounded in McNulty's compelling new film *The Archivist*, 2014, where a future archivist recounts the introduction of a telepathic operating system with an Orwellian-sounding title: 'The Interface'. Punctuated with unfamiliar terminology, such as 'memory compositing software' and 'brain partitioning', her monologue could be the stuff of alien abduction, *Flash Gordon* delirium or a schizophrenic episode. Shot in the Ohio History Center and a high-density book storage facility in Brown University, Rhode Island, the film fluctuates between these two locations, contrasting exterior modernist architecture with interior archival vaults and museum displays. A digital-chip soundscape of 'plinky-plonk' notes from 1980s video games situates this work in the 'cloudy borderline' between past and present. Whether in the assemblage of 'Untitled' archival artworks, or in the dematerialisation of electronic letters as they carnivorously consume their own meaning, the exhibition considers outmoded formats, artefacts and ideologies as precursory 'works in progress' while acknowledging the complexity of preservation. From the expansiveness of popular culture movements to the particularity of the singular letters that constitute a song, 'PROTOTYPES' is executed with just the right amount of nostalgia, and hits all the right notes. ■

JOANNE LAWS is an arts writer based in the west of Ireland.