

Gerard Byrne

Case Study: Loch Ness
(Some possibilities and problems)
2001-2011

14 January – 3 April 2011

In Conversation
Gerard Byrne and Maeve Connolly
26 March, 3pm
£3, £2 concessions

Gerard Byrne discusses *Case Study: Loch Ness* with
Dublin-based writer, lecturer and researcher,
Dr Maeve Connolly. Refreshments will be provided.

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Admission
Free



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guide is available
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Desk.

Irish artist Gerard Byrne (born 1969) works with film, photography, installation and text to explore iconic moments in our recent history. These events or conversations, touching on subjects as wide-ranging as Samuel Beckett, *Playboy Magazine* and Minimalism, are often re-staged in a contemporary setting in order to explore the effect that time plays on our understanding of the world.

Over the last ten years, Byrne has been visiting Loch Ness, photographing and filming its environs, in search of traces of the famous monster. This exhibition brings together an overview of his findings for the first time, as well as archival material related to original eyewitness accounts of the monster, which allegedly date back to the sixth century.

In the Cube Gallery, a black and white film titled *Figures 1–28* (20 min.) is composed of Byrne's recent footage of the flora and fauna around Loch Ness, accompanied by the voice of an actor reading extracts from descriptions of historical sightings of the monster. Byrne has frequently superimposed found material on new footage in his work, revelling in the disjunction between past and present, documentary and fiction, to explore a form of distancing that recalls German playwright Bertold Brecht's theory of theatre. In re-staging historical material in a contemporary context, the artist playfully challenges the viewer's experience of that material, casting doubt over its accuracy and authenticity.

Figures 29–30 in the Middle Gallery, comprises photographs and a monumental, gnarled tree stump, cut in cross-section to show its growth rings. The tree stump is accompanied by a wall drawing, in which Byrne has reproduced the exposed rings to create a visual timeline with short descriptions of the Loch Ness Monster dating back to 1527. In the Long Gallery, *Figures 31–62* includes over forty of Byrne's photographs taken around Loch Ness over the last ten years. Beautiful shots of a sublime landscape contrast with evocative images of curves, bends and ambiguous forms, whether in road signs, swimmers, animals or driftwood. Seen together, these fragments of evidence build up into an elusive 'portrait' of the monster.

While visiting the site of this popular legend, Byrne's focus also resides elsewhere. Intrinsic to any account of the Loch Ness Monster, is a story of make-believe, fabrication and hoaxes, as represented by the famous historical photograph of the monster which turned out to be an altered toy submarine. As a result, Byrne's project in many ways encapsulates debates around 'photographic truth', the viability of documentary material and, by extension, how history itself is recorded and viewed.

For Byrne, tracking down the Loch Ness Monster becomes a useful metaphor for the problems of representing the slippery nature of reality. In some ways, the real subject of Byrne's project is the process in which mythology, or reality, are constructed.

By including photographs of newspapers in the exhibition, Byrne draws direct parallels between one of the world's most enduring myths and the rise of commercial mass media. Intense curiosity around the monster developed in the 1930s, with newspapers including the *Inverness Courier* fuelling a frenzy of interest in order to sell papers. A famous big game hunter, for example, named Marmaduke Wetherell, was hired by the *Daily Mail* in 1933 to track down the monster, although the enormous footprints 'discovered' leading into the water of the loch turned out to be of his own making.

In this project, Byrne also plays with modes of presentation in recent art history, engaging with the conventions of Land art, a movement in the 1960s and 1970s renowned for its use of natural materials and interventions in nature. Byrne's travels and photos around Loch Ness themselves recall the walks of British artists Richard Long or Hamish Fulton and are a pastiche of their earnest and heroic photographs of remote landscapes. Byrne continues to play with the intricacies of museological displays as photographs in the show are variously mounted with vinyl photo corners, window mounts or hinged, for example, in recycled aluminium, wooden or perspex frames.

For this project, Byrne follows in the footsteps of big game hunters, famous hoaxsters, zealous hacks and canonical artists, humorously begging the essential question: is it possible to photograph the unphotographable?

Gerard Byrne lives and works in Dublin. In 2010, he featured in exhibitions at the Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art and at Lismore Castle Arts. He currently has an exhibition at the Renaissance Society at The University of Chicago, while a forthcoming survey will be presented at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin this summer.

In 2007 he represented Ireland in the Venice Biennale. Other major presentations of his work at international biennials include Gwangju and Sydney in 2008, Lyon in 2007, the Tate Triennial in 2006. Solo exhibitions of his work have been presented at the ICA Boston and the Statens Museum für Kunst, Copenhagen (both 2008), Düsseldorf Kunstverein and the Charles H. Scott Gallery, Vancouver (2007). In 2006 he was a recipient of the Paul Hamlyn award. A recipient of a Fulbright Scholarship (1994), Byrne was awarded the prestigious PS1 studio award in 1997–98 and graduated from the Whitney Independent Study Programme in 1999.

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