

BUTLER ■ GALLERY

The Breathing Factory

Mark Curran

February 11 – March 26, 2006

The Butler Gallery, in collaboration with Belfast Exposed Photography and the Gallery of Photography, Dublin is pleased to present *The Breathing Factory*, a multi-media installation by Mark Curran.

In this current body of work, Curran critically surveys the working environment at the multinational corporation Hewlett-Packard Manufacturing and Technology Campus, located on the 01 former site of a meatpacking factory in Leixlip, County Kildare. It is two million square feet in size, with almost 2,500 workers and has a single corridor three-quarters of a kilometre long running through the centre of it. It is HP's only inkjet manufacturing plant in Europe and one of only three global sites. The South of Ireland never experienced the Industrial Revolution and yet is now defined as the 'most globalized economy in the world' and thus has been propelled from an agricultural-based economy to one defined as post-industrial. HP is the largest ICT (Information and Communication Technology) employer in Ireland and by the very presence of such a global company, one of the Silicon Valley originals, is testimony to this impact and transformation.

As one of the most dependent nations on Foreign Direct Investment, Ireland is facing the impact of globalized industrial relations; specifically by being put in direct competition for foreign investment, not with the rest of Europe, but with India and China. *The Breathing Factory* is a compilation of photographs, digital video, and sound archival material taken over a twenty month period, recording both the transient spaces and the workers within this highly policed conglomerate environment.

Curran endured nine months of negotiation to gain access to the Campus. As part of this negotiation, each visit on site was pre-scheduled, cleared by security and required being accompanied at all times. The policing of the project has become an integral part of the project itself – 'evoking' the nature of the space and the policing of global capital investment.

Curran's portraits of white and blue collar workers appear to depict a collective identity; a company's image in which the employees seem to be packaged alongside the product they produce and under the same strict surveillance. Stark minimalist landscapes of corridors and working cubicles mixed with the photographer's procedure regulations stipulated by HP and testimonies gathered from the workers, emphasize the same impenetrability within this industrial space. Throughout the exhibition, Curran's critical documentary approach seeks to unfurl some of the issues surrounding globalization and its highly politicized effects on the transformed social and economic environments.

The photographs in *The Breathing Factory* are simply hung, devoid of expensive production values and frames. The portraits, in particular, draw the viewer in and intimately establish a face to this anonymous workforce. Curran's frank interviews with a cross-section of employees at the plant, which are printed in an accompanying pamphlet, elaborate the unique stories of these workers and sympathetically expose the humanity of this pulsating industrial environment.

Mark Curran originally from Ireland, now lives in Berlin. He has both a Masters of Philosophy (Mphil) through the Centre for Transcultural Research and Media Practice, Dublin Institute of Technology and a Diploma in Photography from the Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology where he is currently a Visiting Lecturer in Photography. He lived in Canada for eight years where he received a BA(Hons) in Sociology and subsequently worked as a social worker. Curran was the recipient of the first development bursary from the Gallery of Photography, Dublin where the award-winning *Southern Cross* was presented as an exhibition and publication in 2002. This work has since been widely published and exhibited internationally. *The Breathing Factory* was recently presented at the Galleria Nouva Icona, Venice (in cooperation with the Gallery of Photography, Dublin) and at Dazibao-Centre de Photographies Actuelles, Montreal. In 2006 the exhibition will travel to Belfast Exposed Photography, Belfast, the Gallery of Photography, Dublin and van der grinten galerie, Cologne, who also represent his work. A monograph of *The Breathing Factory* will be published by *Edition Braus* in Heidelberg later this year supported by Belfast Exposed Photography, the Gallery of Photography and the Butler Gallery.

ADMISSION FREE
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