

BUTLER ■ GALLERY

AUSTIN MCQUINN

LAMMERMOOR

October 11 – November 23, 2008

Austin McQuinn's *Lammermoor* is a multi-media installation specifically conceived for the Butler Gallery and Kilkenny Castle and is inspired by the Donizetti opera "Lucia di Lammermoor" (1835), which in itself was adapted from a Sir Walter Scott novel and set in 17th century Scotland.

The tragic drama of Lucia di Lammermoor tells the story of a young woman who falls in love with her family's enemy. The Ashtons and the Ravenswoods have long feuded over property and social position in the bleak Gothic moors and misty woods of Scotland. Although Lucy (Ashton) and Edgar (Ravenswood) are very much in love, Lucy's hateful brother Henry, for his own political advantage, forces her to marry Lord Arthur Bucklaw. Lucy descends into madness, and on her wedding night, while the festivities are still being held in the Great Hall, she stabs her new husband Arthur in the bridal chamber, goes insane and dies. After learning of her death, Edgar commits suicide. Deeply moving in its pathos and unbearable sorrow, *Il dolce suono* ("The Sweet Sound") is the aria best known as the "mad scene" sung by Lucia. This aria demands an intense physicality from the performer to access the extreme emotion conveyed, a practice McQuinn can relate to as an artist that has demanded much of himself in his past performance works.

Donizetti originally scored the mad scene for a glass harmonica, a popular and controversial instrument of the period. Displayed in one of the galleries as part of this exhibition, is an original glass harmonica (c.1760), a type of musical instrument that uses a series of blown glass bowls graduated in size to produce musical tones by means of friction. The Irish musician and inventor Richard Pockrich (c.1690-1759) is typically credited as the first to create and play the instrument composed of glass vessels by rubbing his fingers around the rims. By the 1740s, he had performed all over Ireland and England on a set of upright goblets filled with varying amounts of water.

Lammermoor is led by McQuinn's simian alter ego who directs this interpretation of the classic opera on the site of Kilkenny Castle. The high art/low life inversions are robust and expand to include a meditation on the nature of human and non-human animal cultures, on love, and on madness. The mimicking ape "ars simia naturae", the monumentality of opera, and the joining together of these cultural phenomena are all addressed in this interpretation.

The magnificent Long Gallery of Kilkenny Castle is situated directly overhead the Butler Gallery, which in itself inhabits the former servants quarters, adding to the 'inverted madness' of this staging. A long velvet-covered bench has been borrowed from the Long Gallery acting as a touchstone of the castle history over time. The fountain in the Rose Garden and the exterior of the castle feature in the video work interpreting the story of Lucy, the narrative of which is repeated and constantly present in the gallery. McQuinn uses an eclectic collection of mid-Victorian figurines, the kitsch of their time, other market finds and quirky fabric, which all find allegorical roles in a series of photograph prints. In addition, the installation includes optic graphic panels, sculpture and the glass harmonica that is incorporated in a live performance conducted during the exhibition opening from 3-5pm on Saturday, October 11th.

While paying homage to Donizetti's opera, McQuinn considers the opera itself a "found object" to be transformed and made contemporary. In doing so, the work appropriates, cajoles, and illuminates, *forging glitter from dross in an attempt to make 'Opera' from the quotidian*¹, and in *Lammermoor* creates a singularly compelling new work of art.

Austin McQuinn was born in 1967 and graduated from the Crawford College of Art, Cork, Ireland in 1989. McQuinn works in a broad range of media: painting, sculpture, photography, video and live art performance and has had several solo shows in Ireland including three at Project, Dublin. McQuinn was commissioned to produce a major site-specific installation for Cork 2005: European Capital of Culture. He was Irish artist in residence for the World Expo 2000 in Hannover and has been invited to participate in several Irish and international group shows and festivals in Spain, France, Korea and China and the US. Invitations to participate in selected group exhibitions include Dearcadh at Kilmainham Gaol, International Dance Festival Ireland, Shanghai Short Film Festival and more recently at Salamanca Arts, Hobart, Tasmania. He recently had his second solo exhibition in the United States with David Cunningham Projects, San Francisco.

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¹ David Cunningham, San Francisco, November 2007