

Lismore Castle Arts is delighted to present *GLUE*, the first feature-length film by Irish artist Oisín Byrne, with artist and collaborator Gary Farrelly. Told through manic and confessional monologues and dialogues, Gary – a cross-dressing narcoleptic – delivers a comic insight into our shattered subjectivity.

As Gary comes off the mood-enhancing drugs used to treat his narcolepsy, time and identity are dislocated between places real and imagined: Gary's flat in Brussels, a disintegrating Irish country house, the 'floating train' in Wuppertal, Gary's own grave, and a maternity ward. Gary himself is linguistically pyrotechnic, quick-witted, and provocative, but it is the hesitations, slow-time and the intimate space of filmmaking that produce a portrait which is both tender and brutally touching.

The film articulates Byrne's ongoing interrogation of identity formation through linguistic models of naming, shaming, interpellation and performativity, particularly in relation to queer experience. In Farrelly's dextrous performance, at turns good humoured and desperate, we see the shuttling of subjectivity between belonging and alienation, identification and wilful refusal of categorisation. The psychic rupture caused by these breaks is palpable.

Long term collaborators Byrne and Farrelly periodically placed themselves in proximity to each other, inventing and instituting game spaces and terms over a period of five years. These itinerant meeting-places provided a series of elsewheres from what Samuel Beckett describes as 'the danger [of...] the neatness of identifications'.

St Carthage Hall is open Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays 12 - 5 pm.
Admission free.

This exhibition is funded by the Arts Council.

OISÍN BYRNE FEAT. GARY FARRELLY: *GLUE*

8 - 22 September 2019

Homoludens

‘Are you question or answer?’

- Amanda Lear, *Enigma (give a bit of mmh to me)*

In 1978, Guy Hocquenghem, the father of queer theory, and camp disco diva Amanda Lear, called for an end to stable identities, genders and sexualities. Hocquenghem’s book *Race d’Ep* argued that coming out as gay was just another way to be narrowly defined and contained by society: a form of oppression in disguise as tolerance. The more upbeat Lear would sing about the seductive powers of becoming mysterious and opaque, in her camp hit ‘Enigma (give a bit of mmh to me)’. Her deep voice led to rumours that she had undergone gender reassignment, paid for by Salvador Dali no less. The song aptly appears on the soundtrack for Oisín Byrne’s film *GLUE*, which joins a number of recent queer memoirs – notably Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts* and Juliet Jacques’ *Trans* (both 2015) – in grappling with how to represent someone who refuses to cohere into a single self. The subject in question is Byrne’s friend Gary Farrelly, an artist and performer playing an eponymous character. He won’t even admit to being human. Instead he insists: ‘I don’t think there’s one me ... I’m a federation of opinions’. And like a combination of Hocquenghem and Lear, he is half political thinker, half indulgent starlet.

By all standard measures the character Farrelly plays is hopeless: past 30 he has no job, no partner, no fixed abode. Yet it’s precisely such norms that he rejects. A mouthy misfit, he has developed an anti-state and anti-masculine philosophy to oppose a society which doesn’t accept him. ‘If utopia doesn’t exist outside of the body’, he proclaims ‘I sincerely hope you can construct one based on your own delusions, in your own mind’. Fantasy is chosen over reality. His solution for name calling and attempts to corral him into a more conventional life is to become elusive by following his changing whims and desires. He even refuses the fixity of a single gender for his multiple selves, appearing in mumsy dresses and pearl brooches, but with five o’clock shadow and male pronouns. Unconsciously echoing Hocquenghem, Farrelly argues that having just one name is a symptom of patriarchal ownership. Or as he puts it: names are handed out by the ‘Lord of the Penis Universe’, to which he retaliates by indifferently calling all straight men ‘Igor’.

But memoirs demand a singular subject, just as film conventionally requires continuity. Even stories of coming out or transitioning require a shift from only one self to another. Such conventions are at odds with queers who see

identity as a muddier affair. Byrne’s response to this multivalent persona is a similarly hybrid mix of documentary, fantasy and pastiche. It’s a method that flags up the contrived nature of each genre – confessions are filmed in ornate settings, against chinoiserie wallpaper, indicating the theatricality of filmic truth. Farrelly certainly acts out an exaggerated version of himself. Yet a later scene imitating a dating profile wittily signals that all identity is a mixture of performance and confusion – ‘I like dirty weekends ... I like clean weekends’. This conflation of styles also shows the cracks in his carefully constructed delusions. At one point Amanda Lear’s ode to being a glamorous enigma ironically plays as Farrelly prosaically shaves his arse. It’s hard work to be your selves.

Indeed, *GLUE* obliquely refers to a difficult transition both in Farrelly’s life and that of the Ireland in which he grew up. He reveals that for years his judgment and ability for self-reflection have been impaired by the medication he was prescribed for his narcolepsy, making him extremely reckless. No longer taking those pills, he is for the first time encountering himself, considering his actions and working out who he might be. This comes at a time when Ireland – which only decriminalised homosexuality in 1993 – has popularly embraced LGBTQ rights and gender equality, with votes for gay marriage, against discrimination and legalising abortion. If queer culture has been shaped in response to condemnation – as Didier Eribon argues in his *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self* (1999) – social acceptance may leave many similarly wondering who they are and what their community might become.

At one point in *GLUE*, Farrelly meets a friend’s new born child – an encounter between an outsider and a subject who has a chance of full state recognition. Upon greeting the infant he notes the number of official tags she’s wearing and ambivalently christens her a ‘barcode baby’. Perhaps Farrelly is right to be suspicious of state recognition. Recent progress in sexual politics, such as marriage equality, closely resemble the pseudo-tolerance Hocquenghem warned against: you’re free to be yourself, so long as you and your relationships look just like ours, and we can keep track of them. The question remains whether the cost of the freedom to be enigmatic or incoherent – the toll of being misunderstood, reckless, out of control – is one queers can bear.

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