

All about EV+A

ON the opening night of EV+A '94, a double-decker bus filled with guests pulls up at the gates of Arthur's Quay Park in Limerick. The bus has been touring some of the 20-plus sites in the city that make up this year's exhibition, and has now arrived at the centre piece of the show, Luc Deleu's *X Construction* (For 9 Containers).

Although Deleu's work, a monumental piece built from bolted together Bell cargo containers, was just installed that morning, the locals have already put the sculpture to use. A remarkably orderly (if not particularly friendly) cider party is under way beneath the crux. Some 20 or 30 ravers stand around smoking and drinking from brown plastic flagons, staring out from under the structure as the art groupies brave the drizzle, circling in chatty admiration of the Antwerp artist's work.

According to Jan Hoet, the Belgian curator of the show, this year's EV+A festival had made a special effort to integrate itself with the town, and from the first night it was clear that the town was not going to ignore the exhibition this time.

"When I came to Limerick I noticed that people walked around all the time, that they never stood in one place," says Hoet. "The city lacks a centre. It is very fragmented and as I walked around Limerick I decided that I wanted the exhibition to explore that. Deleu's construction looks at one aspect of this, the relationship between the town and the port."

As well as being a centre for late-night meetings, Deleu's sculpture was the focus for one of two minor incidents which are as close to controversy as the show has so far come. This big art piece attracted the attention of local Democratic

Left councillor John Ryan. According to Ryan, the piece is "disgusting, not in the Catholic sense, but a disgusting waste of money. And most people I meet seem to think the same thing. We're being taken for fools. I've heard people say 'it gets people talking', but that's the biggest cop out of all."

In fact, Deleu's piece was mostly funded by sponsorship in kind, with only the artist's travelling expenses coming out of EV+A's cash funding. Of the £200,000 that the complete exhibition cost, just £60,000 was contributed in cash, including £42,500 from the Arts Council and £10,000 from Limerick Corporation. The remaining resources were do-

'I think people are beginning to look at things differently'

nated with reference to specific needs: a local firm offered the use of two cranes to install Deleu's sculpture, and the nine Bell containers were also a donation.

While maintaining a robust position on funding, Ryan also seems to feel that some things that the organisers say about the project have some validity: "I suppose it is true that it has changed our way of looking at the city, given us a different view of our spaces. I mean, there were never as many people in Arthur's Quay Park."

In daylight hours, a couple of weeks after the opening, an English tourist was playing with a toddler under Deleu's structure and Mary Gough was sitting on a bench staring at it: "I think it's just brilliant. You

walk out and see it there, and it's just so strong it really hits you." Gough works as a hairdresser in Cats' salon in the Arthur's Quay Centre. She thinks that EV+A is a great idea, which will hopefully fight the prejudices about her native city. "I'm just sick of going to Dublin and when I say I'm from Limerick people say 'Oh, Stab City, hah, hah, hah.' Limerick is a great place to be, with loads going on, and when people from all over the country come to see this exhibition, they might begin to realise that."

IN THE end, the Deleu fans seemed to be in the majority, and Ryan's forthright views failed to unite Limerick's dissenters. Neither did the people of the city seem particularly unsettled by the reaction of Dr Ken Holmes to the work of American Bad Girl painter Kathe Burkhart.

Burkhart's work is a type of violent, post-feminist protest art. She exhibits at two sites in Limerick. At St John's Castle she shows a series of pictures of implements of torture, named after her ex-lovers. At Dr Holmes's surgery on Barrington Street, she briefly showed a picture, featuring a figure in medical garb preparing to give an injection to Elizabeth Taylor, who reclines on a bed with a thousand-yard stare in her eyes. Along the top of the picture in large letters was written the word "PRICK".

Dr Holmes was not willing to discuss why he had decided to ask the EV+A committee to remove the billboard-sized painting from his surgery. "As the picture is not on show here any more, all questions about it are irrelevant," he said.

When I meet Hugh Murray, chairman of EV+A '94, I tell him that I have been asking Limerick people what they think of the exhibition. "Was

there good brand recognition?" he asks. Yes, there was. But not much brand loyalty. Murray laughs. "Yes. I suppose that doesn't surprise me. I know that contemporary art is a minority interest. I mean if you walk about the streets of any big city, be it Dublin or Edinburgh, you will find that most people are not that interested in modern art. But we have tried to overcome

that and to integrate this year's show with the city much more than we ever did before. I think people are beginning to look at things differently."

A video installation by US video artist Bruce Nauman nestles under the stairway in the County Courthouse. Outside, small knots of children, in sports casuals or baggies, stand around and smoke. Inside, on the tape, two

American voices compete with each other, going through some weird conjugations. "I am a virtuous woman, you are a virtuous woman, we are virtuous women; this is virtue... I live the good life; you live the good life; we live the good life; this is the good life... I piss; you piss; we piss; this is piss... I don't want to die; you don't want to die; we don't want to die; this is fear of death..."

A garda walking through the hallway, scanning the people waiting silently for their call, clicks his tongue. The tape is on a loop of five or six minutes. The scatological section comes around only once in that circuit, but those are the words that seem to echo around the hallway.

Jan Hoet says that the piece "confronts people with the idea of judgment". The garda doesn't want to talk to a journalist about art, but basically he thinks that *Good Boy Bad Boy* is "plain stupid".

A man in a dark raincoat with a leather flat cap comes up to have a look at the video screens. His name is Stephen Fitzgerald. He is involved in a case today. He is fairly sceptical about EV+A. He doesn't have much time for that sort of thing. We watch the Nauman video together in silence for a few minutes. What does he think the tape is doing here? "It's talking about bad things," he says without taking his eyes off the screen. But what is it doing here? "Well," he says turning to me with a big smile, "a lot of bad things happen in Limerick. There's a trial going on there, a fella was stabbed, paralysed from the waist down. Two fellas attacked him, balaclavas and all. That's not even in the paper. Them lads wouldn't have much time for art. I don't have much time for it either. Anyway I've to go into court, me case is going on."

IN THE Gallery of Art in Pery Square, 14-year-old Majella MacNamara and Roseanne Ross, a social worker, have come to see what's going on. "It's not that I'm particularly interested in art, but we've just been seeing the posters everywhere and we thought we'd come in and get a map so we could walk around the sites," says Ross. "I think they should tell us what it's all about, though," says Majella. "I mean I don't understand anything about that," she adds, indicating Kevin Kelly's pithily titled installation, *Image of the Forces Occupying Space Or The Idea That Space Is a Passive Receptacle*.

In Joseph Slattery's pub at tea time, local coach-firm owner Joe Sciascia is unwind-

'Art is supposed to be something that you like to look at'

ing on one of the long benches which line the walls of the narrow lounge. On the small, round Formica-topped table in front of him is a copy of the day's *Limerick Chronicle*. The top of the page story bears the headline "RTE Apologises Over Stab City Remark". At the bar, two or three more men are sitting silently, looking at the drink in front of them.

Slattery's pub, which has been involved with EV+A since the early days, this year hosts an exhibit from neo-conceptual sculptor Dorothy Cross. Cross's work at the moment is all about sexual identity. At the moment she is taking much of her inspiration from cows' udders, sometimes in combination with pieces of table ware, sometimes topped off with glass phalluses,

and sometimes — when she is in a milder mood — in combination with Guinness bottles. The Guinness bottle piece, an empty Guinness bottle with a preserved cow's teat tied onto its neck by a piece of string, is called *Pap*, and this is what rests on a shelf in Slattery's.

Sciascia eyes the sculpture up suspiciously, and adjusts the position of his glass on the table. He's not a fan of neo-conceptual sculpture. He's not a fan of EV+A. Like Councillor Ryan, he worries that too much money is spent on it and he worries about the type of art it seems to bring to Limerick.

"They could only justify spending the amount of money that they do by explaining to people what this type of art is all about — educating people. Art is another lifeform. We do things now that we wouldn't have dreamed of 20 years ago, like using computers, but everybody had to be taught how to do that and it's the same with art."

Sciascia expresses the views of many people about contemporary art, even the distinctly approachable type that dominates EV+A '94. He doesn't think of his favourite painting being "about" anything. When faced with work by Dorothy Cross, or Bruce Neuman, or Luc Deleu, however, he is sure there is a meaning to which he is not privileged with access.

"You can't just plonk down a Guinness bottle inside in a bar and expect people to understand what it's all about. Art is supposed to be something that you like to look at, that enhances life, and that thing there, that enhances nothing."

Despite the impressive way that the exhibition has attempted to have a dialogue with the city, Sciascia, at least, still wants to know what it is saying.



Reviews

Apostle to the lepers

Damien
St Anthony's Little Theatre
Gerry Colgan

AUTHOR Aldyth Morris was living and working in Hawaii in 1936, when the body of Damien, known as the leper priest, was exhumed to be

typed in the isolated settlement of Molokai. Damien had found his life-long vocation.

Frank McDonald plays the part with real authority, getting inside the ordinary man, folksy and without any sense of his own importance. Publicity merely embarrassed and confused him, and he never came to terms with the health and other authorities who

ford Street was an oasis of congenial contentment, consumed in the comfort of authentic acoustic blues.

Responsible for creating such a climate was a man who received the National Heritage Award from Ronald Reagan for his outstanding contribution to America's artistic traditions.

Introduced as a "giant of American folk music", John Jackson took the stage with the quiet dignity and integrity that runs through all his music. In fact, so intimate was the setting that the audience



Shaper of a generation's voices

Charles Acton writes about Hans Waldemar Rosen, who died on Monday

HANS Waldemar Rosen, who died on Monday in his 90th year, played a major part in developing Irish musical life for about half a century.

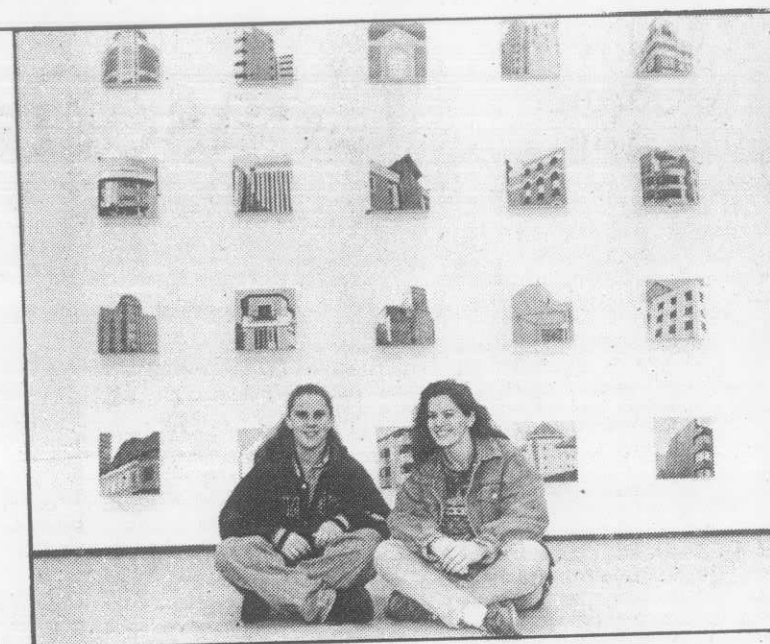
Born in what was then Silesia, he grew up in Breslau (now Wrocław), gaining his doctorate there

Thanks to the sagacity of Fachtna Ó-hAnnracháin he joined what was then Radio Eireann and became for very many years the trainer and conductor of the Radio Eireann Singers. He made that ensemble of 10 voices one of the major parts of our broadcast and live music. Shortly after the foundation of





Luke Clancy asks
Limerick locals what they
think about the cutting
edge of art in this year's
EV+A exhibition



- Above: Majella MacNamara and Roseanne Ross at the Gallery of Art in Pery Square, with Ronnie Hughes's installation, Image of the Forces Occupying Space Or The Idea That Space Is a Passive Receptacle.
- Left: Mary Gough beside Luc Deleu's sculpture Containers for Limerick
- Far left: Joe Sciascia and Joe Slattery in the latter's pub with Dorothy Cross's Pap — an empty Guinness bottle with a preserved cow's teat tied onto its neck
- Below: Kathe Burkhart at St John's Castle with a painting in her torture series named after former lovers. Photographs: Dylan Vaughan/Press 22