

## ARTS

MUST  
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□ **FESTIVAL:** poet and novelist Adam Thorpe, author of *Ulverton*, reads at Poetry Now, Dún Laoghaire County Hall, 5.30 p.m.

## Cutting edge of mult-culturalism

**A**S Salah Hassan relates it, the invitation to select and adjudicate *EV+A 2001* presented him with an interesting problem. Hassan, an associate professor at Cornell, and a curator, writer and editor, is Sudanese by birth, and has been based in the US since the 1980s. "I was surprised to be invited," he recalls. "I knew nothing about the art scene in Ireland." And, as an African curator practising in the West, he is wary of curators passing judgment on art works without adequate knowledge of the local context.

"On the other hand, I've always had great sympathy for Ireland. There was the colonial experience but also, one legacy of the British colonial system in Sudan was our exposure to British literature in the educational curriculum, and the best of that was in fact Irish literature." In the US his instinctive fellow-feeling with the Irish received something of a jolt with the reception he received when he went into a pub in an Irish neighbourhood in Pennsylvania to ask directions and use the phone. In time he read Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White*, which detailed how despised Irish immigrants in the US moved up a step on the social ladder by learning to despise, in turn, their closest competitors, "free Northern Blacks."

In any case, once it became clear that the whole rationale of *EV+A* is based on the notion of the vertical invader, the outsider who drops in cold, Hassan's doubts were substantially dispelled. Still, he admits, with a sheepish smile, to taking a crash course in contemporary Irish culture.

Once here, he found himself facing a submission of some 500 works in every kind of medium imaginable. For budgetary reasons, from year to year *EV+A* alternates between having and not having a large *Invited* section in addition to work selected from open submission. While this is not an *Invited* year, Hassan felt it important to specifically invite some artists of non-Western origins, and the organisers responded enthusiastically. So the addition of five invitees account for the amended title *EV+A 2001 expanded*.

There is a generous tone to the exhibition he has come up with from the open submission (he acknowledges the close assistance of a friend, the Pakistani artist Muhammad Iftikhar Dadi, who went through the submission with him). Distributed over three main venues, and some 14 subsidiary venues, it is a substantial affair, but it was not difficult, he says, to find 80

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economics. Two of his invited artists, Franco-Peruvian Jota Castro and Argentinean-Scottish Carmela Uranga, went straight for the economic jugular, making a work that addresses the role of multinational corporations in Ireland (company names potato-printed onto a tricolour).

While Castro's solo piece is about EU agricultural policies — decided before the foot-and-mouth crisis impacted on *EV+A* itself, forcing the postponement of the full-scale opening. Castro and Uranga's work may be a little heavy-handed in its approach, but in a way the point about it, and Hassan's reason for including it, is its willingness to engage fully with the issues. More subtly, Catherine Rannou's clever video within video piece, *Les petits hommes verts* graphically personalises the issue of maritime despoliation in Brittany.

One of the best pieces by an Irish artist, Brian Walsh's video installation *Ground Zero*, certainly has a political edge. With its genesis in the TV footage of smart bombs in the Gulf War, his work combines grainy images of a B-52 bomber with eerie, ground-skimming aerial views of a city. The city is not some remote, unfamiliar place, though, but Cork, embodied in a huge architectural model. The short-circuited combination of distance and immediacy make this a complex and compelling work.

Walsh is one of a strong quartet of award winners. The others are Susan MacWilliam, Ann Marie Curran and David O'Mara. MacWilliam's *Experiment M* is a creepily atmospheric recreation of a series of experiments conducted by a Belfast academic into mediumistic phenomena conjured up by Kathleen Goligher. The work captures the oddly eroticised procedures and paraphernalia of the ritu-

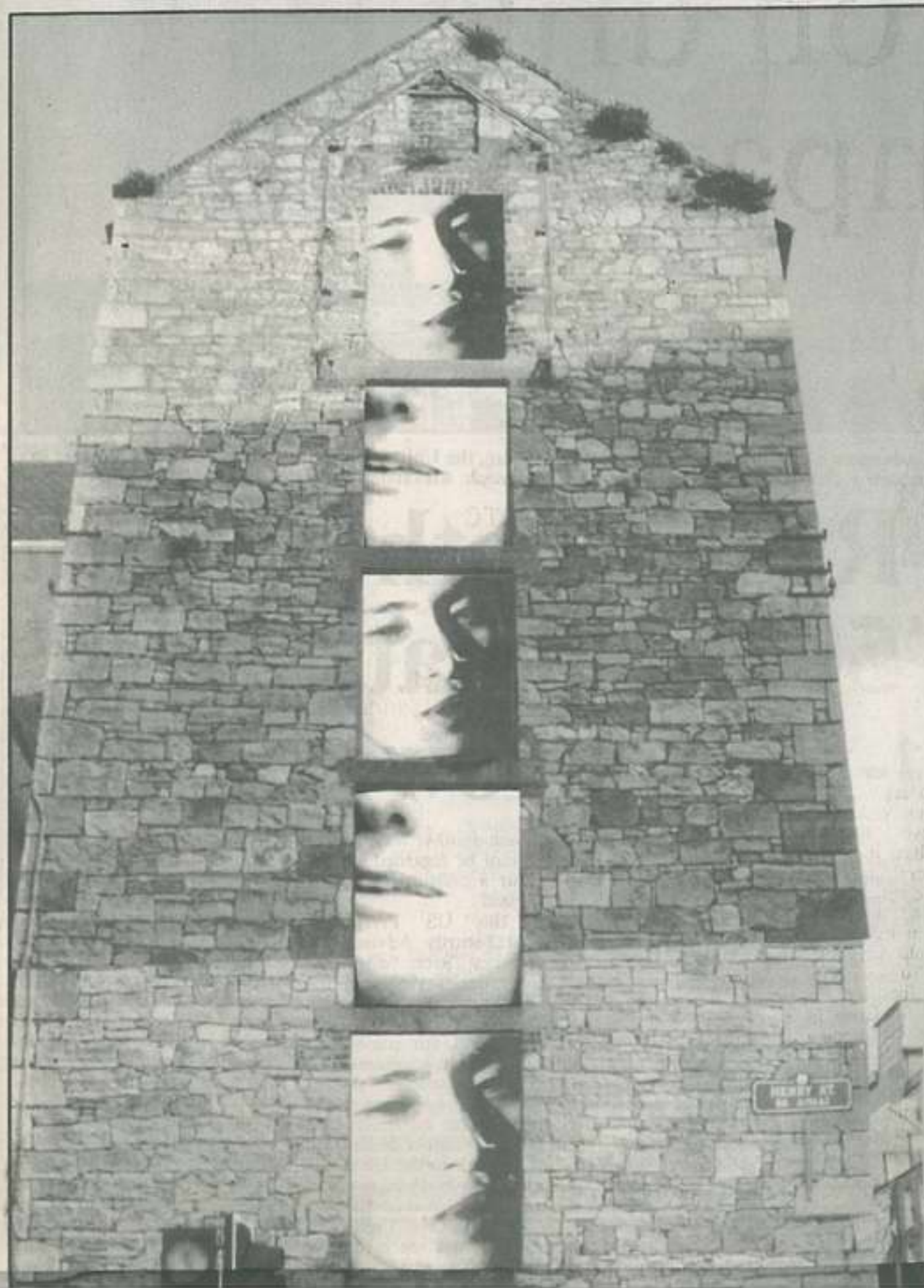
This year's *EV+A*, Limerick's annual multi-venue exhibition of visual art, has been selected by a US-based, Sudanese curator and critic, Salah Hassan. It has been a fascinating crash course for him in Irish culture

cultural mainstream O'Mara generates a lot of interesting questions.

In a noteworthy departure from tradition, Hassan proposed that the *EV+A* awards, rather than consisting purely of cash, should take the form of opportunities to participate in workshops and residencies "in places outside the Western world." With the agreement of the organisers, he turned to a friend, Robert Loder, who is involved in exactly that kind of residency scheme. "It's not just a question of a chance to work somewhere else," he emphasises. "These can be life-changing experiences. In these situations you find yourself in genuine dialogue with other cultures, you forge relationships with people you would not otherwise have met, you may exhibit in places you would not otherwise have done. I think it is so much more effective than merely giving money."

It is worth noting the catholicity of his selection. There is, for example, a great deal of painting of various kinds, from Pat Harris's meditative still lifes to Barry Fitzpatrick's spectral, kinetic figures. Photography looms large, literally so in the case of Peter Richards' huge group figure composition in the form of a negative image apparently obtained with a pinhole camera. Dara McGrath's images of European border posts, and Kate Byrne's work have already been widely seen, but there are interesting surprises from Oliver Comerford, Jack Clarke, Sue Townsin and Ursula Burke. And Katie Holten's incongruously transplanted rock landscape looks terrific in the pristine white cube of the City Gallery extension.

Hassan, an enormously energetic presence on the international scene (he has projects on the go in Rotterdam and for this year's Venice Biennale, and he is a co-organiser as an enthusiastic advocate of *EV+A*).



'Irish society is going through its most important transformation since the Famine'