

## *HOMO LUDENS (Man at Play) Accompanying text*

Sara Muthi

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Hal Foster opens up his book titled *Return of the Real* with a situation that undid his perception of sculpture. In the midst of conversation with a fellow art critic, a little girl skips past him playing amongst the installed wooden beams, at which point he realises that a six-year-old understood something about the work that he did not. Her actions revealed, among many things, new interventions in space and alternative viewing realities.

In the midst of my conversation with exhibiting artist Daire O'Shea, a guy, unmeaning to, steps onto O'Shea's sculpture located centrally on the floor. His footprint smeared the turquoise gel alerting nearby gallery goers of the sin that had just occurred. The stained-glass appearance of these square structures had been shattered by an accidental disruption. The gel-reality had simultaneously made it abundantly clear where the fresh pungent scent in the space was coming from. No, not from a previous mopping of the gallery floor as you would imagine would happen prior to an opening, but the shampoo from which these sculptures were comprised.

New Babylon, as imagined by Constant Nieuwenhuys, was a space undefinably large or small. A city for spontaneous interaction and moveable architecture. A playground enabling a diversity of behaviour, an environment which follows the activities of life, not vice versa. Imagine such a city. It's inhabitants free from imperative labour due to automated systems taking initiative over their fundamental needs, a people whose sole purpose would be constant discovery, a man at play, a *Homo Ludens*. Navigation itself then develops autonomous purpose, as is the experience of Cará Donaghey's prints. Two prints, *Tree* and *Mute*, initially made in response to one another now speak from across the space. The copper plate etchings are separated creating a subtle continuity with the room, one in which navigation through three-dimensional sculptures becomes the activation of the two-dimensional conversing prints. An acute awareness of two-and-three-dimensional space also occurs amongst the distinct relationship Margot Galvin's prints share with O'Shea's *Lost in the Sauce*. Sharing hints of materials, colours and abstract forms, each print bounces off O'Shea's infrastructural materials that are echoed back within Galvin's *Untitled*, *Bunkers* and *Regeneration*.

Such fluid spaces of navigation as imagined in New Babylon would alternate concepts of getting lost from negative to positive. Going astray would then be desirable, truthfully, such a concept would no longer exist. Isabel English's sculptures sit in such a space. These functionless objects have no destination, they're essence lies in a coming into being, whose 'coming into' could last an eternity. The pallets on which the sculptures sit gesture to potential imminent movement. Leaning at a pause, the architect of these casts could return at any moment to collect the dishevelled sketches that sit at the foot of *Hyperobjects iii* and retract their placement. Such is the spirit of New Babylon, an unprompted possibility of shift.

Babylon was a city famed for its magnificent culture. The new vision of Babylon, as conceived by Constant would be non-hierarchical, a city of collective nomads. In today's increasing globalised society this isn't too hard to imagine. Constant's utopia may not be as far off either. Considering our virtual realities on social media we know we are the architects of this virtual platform, we create the content we see as we scroll through our devices. We build our own communities, exhibit in our own space and communally share and enjoy our own connected corners of the internet. Perhaps no better example of New Babylon exists in our society than that of Instagram and no better work illustrates such concepts than that of O'Shea.

We are familiar with the Helvetica annotated boxes we scroll through, such are the Helvetica inscribed squares mimicked in O'Shea's work. The virtual-space of copy, paste, delete is the subject matter of *Memeopocene* and *Lost in the Sauce*. Referencing an ever changing, fast paced scrolling interface, O'Shea gives us primal opportunity to pause and engage with memes, which many times are genuine reflection of a global condition. This opportunity of engagement stalls our attention before disappearance occurs again for the hundredth time this week. Contemplating the rate by which we devour and replace content, a repetitive cycle that is perpetuated by social media is mirrored in the repetitive working process of Irene Whyte's series of prints. These delicate monoprints on carbon paper consist of documentation of the shadows in the Black Church Print Studio building, an architectural element subtly echoed by each artist. A communal comic experience such as memes surely does not belong to any one person. Presented in a tongue-in-cheek manor that Instagram has made us all too familiar with, O'Shea creates a sensory experience separate from the virtual while paying homage to the digital. This is achieved through the joyous shampoo scent whose subtle architectural structure remains playful and relevant to a contemporary imagining of New Babylon.

Constant continually emphasized that it would be the New Babylonians themselves who would ultimately decide what this utopia would look like, whether that be an online space, or a space activated by navigation. While we are far from being a machine-catered society, we can still enjoy the possibilities of change and shift present in the imminent objects of this exhibition. A New Babylon is beginning to take shape one way or another in which the *Homo Ludens* are the artists and gallery visitors alike.

**Sara Muthi**, born in Transylvania, Romania, is a Dublin based writer and curator. Muthi is currently undertaking an MA in Art in the Contemporary World at NCAD, where she is also a graduate of Fine Art Painting & Visual Culture there. She is currently the Managing Editor of in:Action, an online platform for live art reviews and responses by Irish and Ireland-based artists, and also has an independent writing practice with a particular focus on ontology of performance and its materials.

[www.saramuthi.com](http://www.saramuthi.com)