



Dispersed Presence

O'Beirn, A., & Krenn, M. (2018). Dispersed Presence: CCP5 Exhibition. Exhibition, PS2 Gallery.

[Link to publication record in Ulster University Research Portal](#)

Publication Status:

Published (in print/issue): 13/09/2018

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Krenn & O'Beirn, 'Dispersed Presence' installation shot, PS² Gallery, Spencer House, Belfast, 14 September - 6 October 2018
Photo Simon Mills

The exhibition '**Dispersed Presence**' is a result of 'Transforming Long Kesh/Maze', a collaborative social sculpture by artists Martin Krenn and Aisling O'Beirn, exploring the future of the Maze/Long Kesh prison site beyond its current state of limbo. In thinking of the former prison as a dispersed presence the artists focus particularly on archaeologist Laura McAtackney's concept of the 'distributed self' from her key text on the prison, 'An Archaeology of the Troubles', (McAtackney, 2014, 244-265). The former prison has both a physical presence and conceptual importance. Indecision about its future at government level says much about the political climate of a 'post-conflict' society. Given this, the artists are interested in how one can think beyond the site's legacy and to its future.

Ongoing dialogue with McAtackney during the course of the research also provided invaluable contacts with many people who had 1st hand experience of the prison allowing the artists to develop their approach. The artists invited individuals and groups, with a first-hand experience of the prison, such as ex-prisoners, former visitors, ex-prison staff and community museums from across the political spectrum to partake in the project. They then worked with those that joined the project, to collaboratively photograph existing prison artefacts or to co-create unique small sculptural objects to reflect their personal experiences of this site. Techniques for creating the new objects include methods traditionally used in making prison art.

Three principal dialogical methods for working with diverse participants were devised specifically for this project: *restaging* (whilst occasionally repairing), *reappropriation* and *retelling*. The aim was to avoid negatively dwelling on the past or the reiteration of previously rehearsed and ideologically overdetermined narratives.

As part of the exhibition there was a public In Conversation led by art theorist and curator Suzana Milevska and PS2 curator Peter Mutschler with artists Martin Krenn and Aisling O'Beirn. They discussed dialogical art practices in relation to the Dispersed Presences exhibition with opportunities for questions from the audience.

There was a tour for students from Ulster University led by O' Beirn. The exhibition also featured as part of Culture Night and Late Night Art.

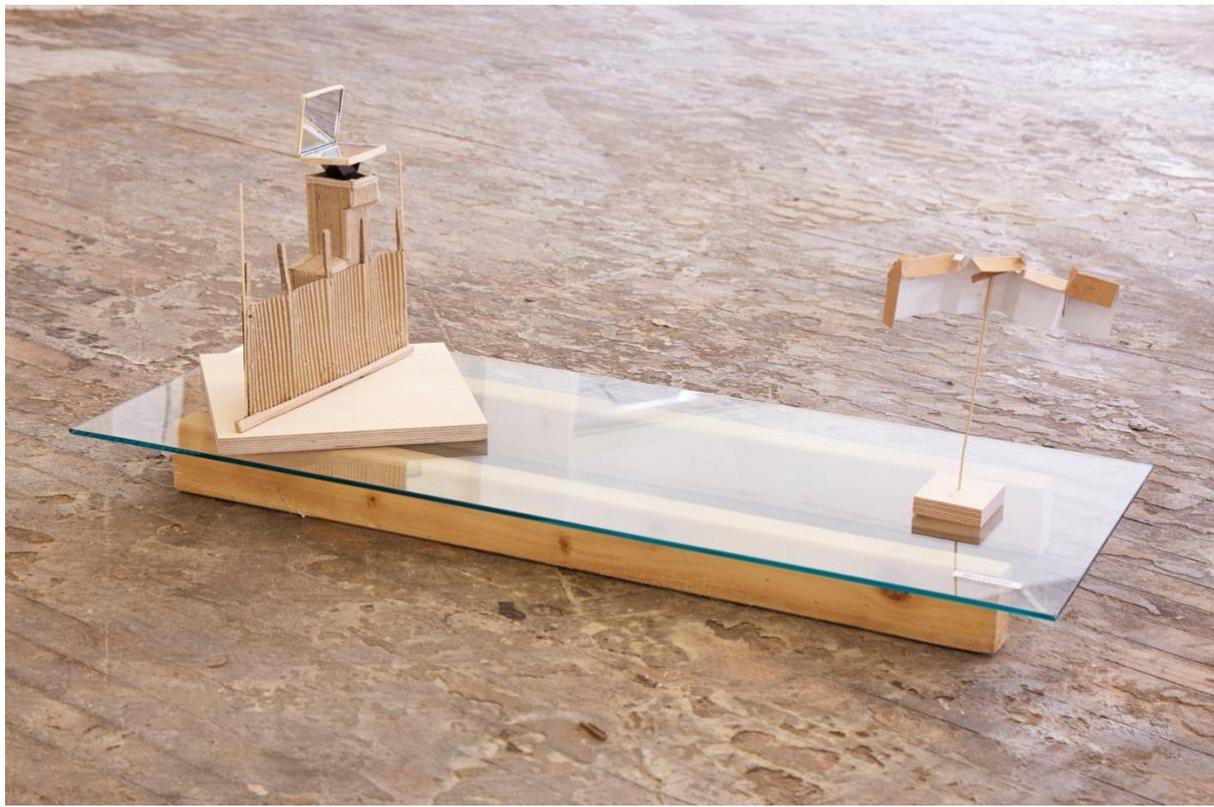
A workshop was also conducted in the gallery by Nora Landkammer and Karin Schneider (TRACES workpackage "education and stakeholder involvement" from the "Institute of Art Education" at the ZhdK) using the set of 64 postcards which were produced as part of the Long Kesh/Maze research process. They worked with 15 educators and PhD researchers during a 3 hr workshop-session and focus-group discussion.

A TRACES Fanzine (no. 06) project has been produced dedicated to the project. Free copies were available in the gallery.

Martin Krenn and Aisling O'Beirn are artists who have worked in the field of socially engaged art for more than 15 years. O' Beirn is based in Belfast and teaches at Ulster University, Krenn is living in Vienna and teaching at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. Their work is being supported by the archaeologist Laura McAtackney.

With thanks to all participants for access to collections & participation: The 50+ Group, David Stitt, The Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre, The Eileen Hickey Irish Republican History Museum, The Roddy McCorley Society Museum, Simon Bridge, Phil Holland, The 50+ Group and various private collections and individuals.

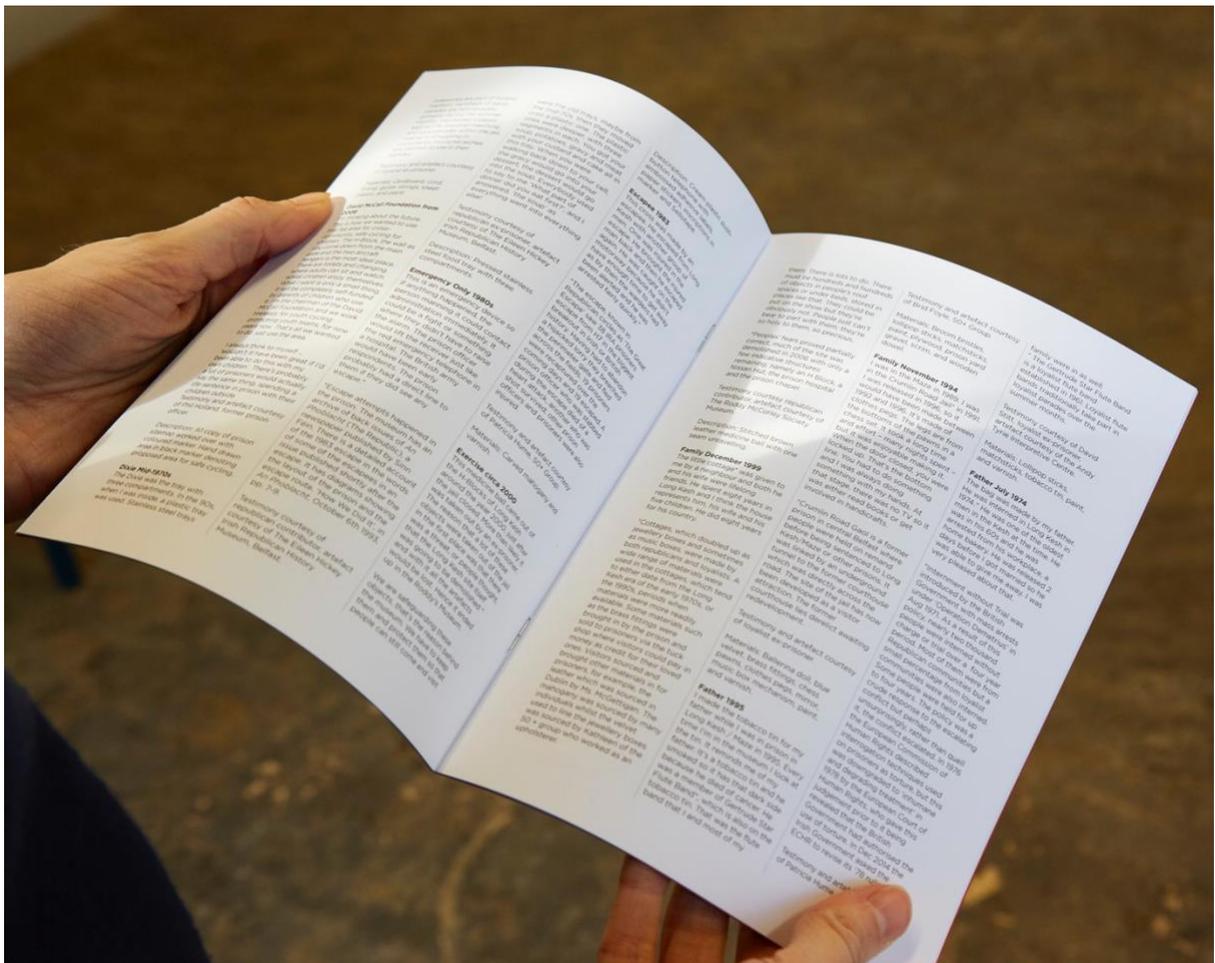
Transforming Long/Kesh Maze is a project by one the Creative Co-Production teams of the research project TRACES- *Transmitting contentious heritages with the arts. From intervention to Co-Productions*, which has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 693857. www.tracesproject.eu
<https://www.facebook.com/tracesproject/?ref=bookmarks>
<http://www.traces.polimi.it/2018/03/23/transforming-maze-long-kesh-ccp5-exhibition/>



Krenn & O'Beirn, 'Dispersed Presence' 'Reflection', Photo Simon Mills



Krenn & O'Beirn, 'Dispersed Presence' exhibition detail of prints and objects, Photo Simon Mills



Krenn & O'Beirn, 'Dispersed Presence' booklet of testimonies, Photo Simon Mills



Krenn & O'Beirn, 'Dispersed Presence' detail of 'Happy Campers' (foreground) and 'Bully Bully Bus' (background) both made with The 50+ Group, Photo Simon Mills



Krenn & O'Beirn, 'Dispersed Presence' detail of prints on table, PS² Gallery, Photo Krenn & O'Beirn

Dispersed Presences

Martin Krenn & Aisling O' Beirn

Preview 13th Sept 2018

Open 14th Sept - 6th Oct 2018

PS²

Spencer House
69/71 Royal Ave,
Belfast BT1 1FE
<https://www.pssquared.org>

Opening: Thursday, 13 September 2018, 6-8pm
Opening hours: Tues- Fri, 1-5pm, Sat 12-4pm
(21 September: Culture Night, 1-10pm + Late Night Art)

Dispersed Presences is an exhibition resulting from *Transforming Long Kesh/Maze*, a collaborative social sculpture by artists Martin Krenn & Aisling O' Beirn and is part of *Traces* a three-year project funded in 2016 by the European Commission as part of the Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme. Ulster University is a partner in the TRACES project. <http://www.traces.polimi.it>



EMERGENCY EARLY 805

Emergency Early 1980s Testimony courtesy of republican contributor, artefact courtesy of The Eileen Hickey Irish Republican History Museum, Belfast.
Description: Cream plastic push-button telephone with embossed adhesive labels, paper stickers, inscriptions in marker and Sellotape.



Krenn & O'Beirn, 'Dispersed Presence' invitation

'in conversation'

Curators Suzana Milevska & Peter Mutschler
in conversation with artists Martin Krenn &
Aisling O' Beirn

Free discussion as part of *Dispersed Presences*
All welcome, 5 pm, 14th Sept

PS²

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Krenn & O'Beirn, 'In Conversation' invitation



Workshop conducted by Nora Landkammer and Karin Schneider (TRACES workpackage "education and stakeholder involvement" from the "Institute of Art Education" at the ZhdK) workshop-session and focus-group discussion with and on postcards that Aisling O'Brian and Martin Krenn produced for *Transforming Long Kesh/ Maze*



Workshop conducted by Nora Landkammer and Karin Schneider using edition of 64 postcards



Krenn & O'Beirn, Photoshoot with Simon Bridge, 7th April 2017

Photoshoot of objects from the private collection of Simon Bridge who was on the Board of Visitors (1995 – 2000), an independent, voluntary body with full access to visit any part of the prison. Their role was to oversee and monitor conditions in the prison for both prisoners and prison staff.



Krenn & O'Beirn, Photoshoot with 50+ Group, 6th April 2017

Members of the 50+ Group, a group of politically active women who also visited relatives in prison, still meet on a weekly basis. They worked with us during the photoshoot of their artefacts from the prison, which were made and gifted by their imprisoned relatives and friends.



Krenn & O'Beirn, Workshop with 50+ Group, 16th August 2017

Members of the 50+ Group made 4 new objects using techniques traditionally used in making prison art, with Krenn and O' Beirn over a series of workshops, based on their unique experience as female visitors to the all-male prison. They made *Suffering*, a model of an H Block, *Happy Campers* a model of a Nissan Hut, *Bully Bully Bus*, a model based on a minibus used to drive visitors to the prison and *Always There* a model of a Black Taxi used by a community taxi service. Here they are cladding *Suffering*, the model of an H Block, in matchsticks.



Krenn & O'Beirn, Workshop with 50+ Group, 6th September 2017

Members of the 50+ Group clad the gable end of *Happy Campers*, the Nissan Hut, with matchsticks.



Krenn & O'Beirn, *Message, 1981?, 2018*
Photographic print of artefact

Materials: Chalk, found display drawer lined with plum-coloured velvet, fishing line, panel pins.

Dimensions: 42 cm x 59.4 cm

Testimony courtesy of a Loyalist ex-prisoner; object made by Krenn and O' Beirn in response to testimony.

Many years ago there was a particularly strange scenario. I remember kites being flown from the prison. It must have been connected to the hunger strikes, but I'm not sure, it might have been before that. The kites were flown so high that they looked just like very small coffins. They cut them and there was about 200 metres of fishing line on each to launch it into the sky. I remember it well because we followed one of the kites for about two miles from where we lived. We found the kite and it had messages written on it in Irish. I brought it home. My Mum and Dad both worked and when they walked in that night there was a white coffin just sitting on the floor. It was the kite. I've never been able to get an explanation, it was definitely Republican prisoners. I've heard that it might have been the Official IRA sending messages out. I don't know whether that's true or not. It would be interesting to find out what that was all about because it wasn't just one kite—there was a number of them, made from white bed sheets.*

* The author of the statement grew up as a child in a housing estate very close to Long Kesh/Maze. Years later, as an adult, he eventually got arrested and became an inmate of this prison. His experience as a prisoner is described in "Reflection."



Krenn & O'Beirn, *Big Mid's Dart Board*, 1974, 2018

Photographic print of artefact

Materials: Coloured metallic threads, lollipop sticks, green baize, metal chain, panel pins, and plywood.

Dimensions: 42 cm x 59.4 cm

Testimony courtesy of a Republican contributor; artefact courtesy of The Roddy McCorley Society Museum.

This dartboard was probably sent out from Long Kesh in the end of 1974 or 1975. It says at the bottom "From Martin, with respect." He would be among the last few internees to be released because he had such a big name in Republican circles. He and certain other people were let out last, for whatever reason. The British obviously thought that up.*

A guy called "Big Mid" had given the dartboard to us. I said to the person who brought it in, "could you give me an address and Big Mid's name so that I can let him know that we'd received it and put it on show in the museum." But he did not give me the name and replied: "just call him Big Mid." There must have been major security surrounding Big Mid. Apparently, this guy is very well-known in Ardoyne.

* The Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre also has a dartboard made by a Loyalist using the same technique.



Krenn & O'Beirn, *Family Nov 1994*, 2018

Photographic print of artefact

Materials: Ballerina doll, blue velvet, brass fittings, chess pawns, clothes pegs, mirror, music box mechanism, paint, and varnish.

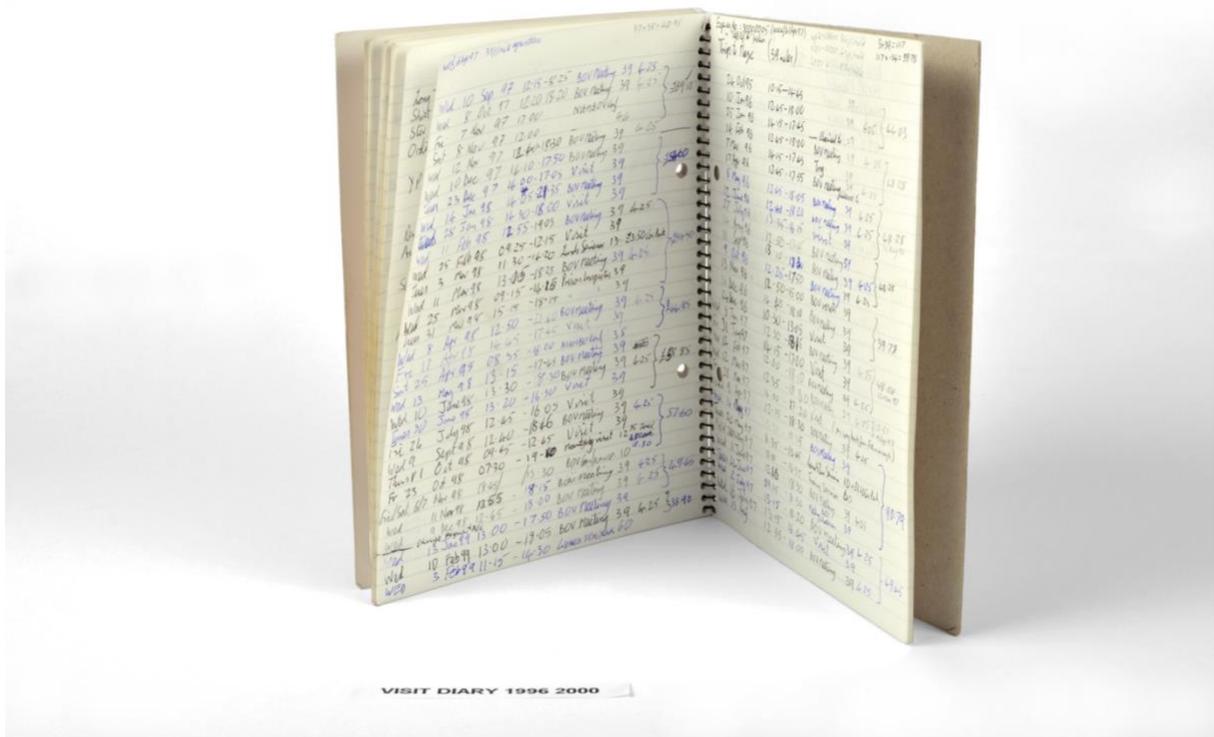
Dimensions: 42 cm x 59.4 cm

Testimony and artefact courtesy of loyalist ex-prisoner.

I was in the Maze in 1989. I was in the Crumlin Road Jail in 1991. I was released in 1996, so it would have been made between 1992 and 1996. It's made of clothes pegs. The legs are from the bottoms of the pawns in a chess set. It took a long time and effort – many nights spent – but it was enjoyable making it.*

When the door closed, you were locked up. That's the bottom line. You had to do something and I was always doing something with my hands. At that stage, there was no TV so it was either read books or get involved in handicrafts.

* Crumlin Road Gaol is a former prison in central Belfast where people were held on remand before being sentenced to Long Kesh/Maze or other prisons. It was linked by an underground tunnel to the former courthouse which was directly across the road. The site of the jail has now been developed as a visitor attraction. The former courthouse lies derelict awaiting redevelopment.



Krenn & O'Beirn, *Visit Diary, 1996 to 2000*, 2018

Photographic print of artefact

Description: Spiral-bound, lined notebook with timed and dated visits to the prison.

Dimensions: 42 cm x 59.4 cm

Testimony and artefact courtesy of Simon Bridge, former member of the Board of Visitors.

This is my personal log book, which I found useful to record each time I was in the prison; who I'd seen, what we'd done, so I could refer as a reminder for the future. I've got brief notes of all the visits that I'd made and then at the back of the book I'd actually put one line for each visit with the exact time, what it was for and the mileage as a basis of which I could then complete the travel claims. Staff never went into the wings, except when they went in bulk to search, whereas in normal prisons staff would have walked up and down the wings when prisoners are shut in their cells. Here they left prisoners to free range the wings. We as visitors walked into the wings, but the staff didn't.



Krenn & O'Beirn, *Thanks*, 1975, 2018

Photographic print of artefact

Materials: Brass feet, brass and wood trim, tapered wooden legs, reverse painting on a glass disc.

Dimensions: 42 cm x 59.4 cm

Testimony courtesy of David Stitt, Loyalist ex-prisoner; artefact courtesy of the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre.

This is a table donated by the son of the man who drove the bus for the Loyalist Prisoners Association. It was a minibus that took prisoners' families and visitors up to Long Kesh, six days a week, Monday to Saturday. One of the prisoners in Long Kesh made that table for the driver. Whenever he died, last year, his son was in clearing his house out, and that was in his attic. You find these things coming out of people's attics because the armed conflict is finished. All these artefacts are coming to the fore now, with people dying and their families clearing their houses and finding all these things. That's where we're getting most of them.



Krenn & O'Beirn, *Suffering*, 2018

Photographic print of artefact

Materials: Glue, matchsticks, paper tape, wood, and varnish.

Dimensions: 42 cm x 59.4 cm

Testimony courtesy of the 50+ Group; artefact made by the 50+ Group, with Krenn and O' Beirn.

The conditions were very bad. They were all cramped in. They were tortured and then they were on the dirty protest. They used to get big hoses that firemen would use to wash the men down. I think that was desperate.

It was the families who brought stuff up to the fellas because they were getting nothing in there. A lot of the fellas died as a result of the conditions and everything that happened in there. They were spraying CS gas in there and nobody knows what's in that CS gas. It ended up that a lot of them have died young from being in there.