

## ORGANISATION

# Everywhere Yet Nowhere

CO-DIRECTOR OF BASIC SPACE, DUBLIN, DANIEL BERMINGHAM, DISCUSSES THE EVOLUTION OF THE ORGANISATION AND ITS FUTURE TRAJECTORY.



Kian Benson Bailes, *Untitled, The Present Is Not Enough - Part I*, CCA Derry-Londonderry, March 2017



Joanne Reid, Paul Hallihan, Lee Welsh, David Beattie and Linda Quinlan, *INFRA* installation view, Eight Gallery, September 2016

**BASIC** Space is a contemporary art organisation which operates from a gallery and studio space in Temple Bar. The current co-directors (myself, Bassam Al-Sabah and Kim Gleeson) run a programme of residencies, exhibitions and educational events in collaboration with institutions throughout Ireland and the UK. As it enters its seventh year, Basic Space continues to evolve in response to changes in place, community and purpose, through ongoing re-evaluations of institutional practices and stratagems of survival.

The conditions that were present at the founding of Basic Space in 2010 echo a history of artist-led responses to crisis and systemic change. Following the economic crash of 2008, the Irish arts ecology saw a fundamental shift in value systems, resulting from the aggressive neoliberalisation of public and domestic life. This necessitated a phase of readjustment aimed at institutional survival for both new and existing arts organisations. Among the artist-led spaces and collectives established at this time, a shared interest in experimental modes of production, collaboration and dissemination marked a distinctive shift in the art-institutional landscape.

This period saw the re-emergence of horizontal institutional methodologies, with Irish and international organisations pooling their resources to work together, crafting a valid response to the failure of conventional vertical models in addressing the needs of artists and audiences. Some of this activity was showcased in an exhibition at NCAD Gallery in 2012 entitled 'New Ecologies of Practice'. As part of the exhibition, Basic Space presented a shop (selling mementoes from artworks and performances, limited edition collectables and exhibition memorabilia) alongside the work of three other artist-led spaces: Catalyst Arts (Belfast), Occupy Space (Limerick) and The Good Hatchery (Offaly). According to the exhibition press release, each of these organisations display "strategic ideologies [that] argue for a reconfiguration of inherited thinking about the nature and purpose of art and institutional practice".

With the decimation of public funding and a glut of vacant commercial premises, this period saw a re-evaluation of how art is produced and disseminated as well as a reimagining of the modes of collectivism and the role of art and its spaces. However, as the 'economic recovery' continues, a new set of circumstances has emerged. Substantial challenges now include a severe shortage of affordable spaces (particularly in urban centres), ongoing displacement and public arts funding that is apparently undeserving of restoration. This has again necessitated strategic institutional responses from artist-led initiatives.

In April 2016, we lost our main studio/gallery space on Marrowbone Lane in Dublin 8. This marked the latest in a series of changes in circumstance that forced us to explore alternative models of programming. Basic Space could no longer be what it had been, nor

could it adequately serve the same community or produce and disseminate the same type of work. As a result of this displacement, a new organisational structure and programme emerged – that of a multi-purpose and collectively-owned 'multiuser centre'. Basic Space realigned its resources towards external institutional collaboration, residencies and education, in an effort to establish sustainable strategies that can support the ongoing research, production and dissemination of contemporary art and its discourses.

In June 2016, Basic Space moved into Independent Studios on Eustace Street in Temple Bar, which allowed us to recommence our exhibition and residency programmes. We opened with 'Illusions of Beloved Objects', which featured work by Barbara Knezevic, Christopher Mahon and Sibyl Montague. The space has since hosted two Basic Space residencies: our Artists' Residency with Joanne Reid and our current Research Residency with Paper Visual Art. Education and research has become an integral part of Basic Space's activities. Our 'BASIC TALKS' education programme, kindly supported by Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane, has allowed contemporary practitioners (including artists, curators, writers and researchers) to create discourse around their work through lectures, workshops, presentations or performances. Previous participants have included Michelle Hall, Fiona Hallinan and Nathan O'Donnell, while upcoming speakers include Aoibheann Greenan, Ali Kirby and RGKSKSRG.

Unable to support the large studio practices of the past, Basic Space has adopted a more facilitatory role in 'making public' contemporary art practice. In our recent collaborations with museums, galleries and spaces throughout Ireland and UK, we have attempted to make institutional space more accessible to the practitioners and associated communities, enacting what Pascal Gielen describes as 'institutional mobilism'. Institutional mobilism is, in part, a response to current modes of urbanism and the hyper-competitive occupation and privatisation of space. Artistic acts of production and display are forced to occupy space in unconventional ways, raising questions around ownership and the uses of public space. We began to see Basic Space as a dematerialised entity, visible as a set of reproducible ethics, rather than a geographically-fixed architecture. With this new institutional methodology, Basic Space observes, accommodates and responds to a range of different communities and their socio-geographic interests.

This new phase commenced in September 2016 with 'INFRA', a group exhibition presenting the work of David Beattie, Simon Cummins, Paul Hallahan, Linda Quinlan, Joanne Reid, Suzanne Walsh and Lee Welsh at Eight Gallery on Dawson Street, Dublin. From this first collaborative 'occupation', a series of performative and pedagogical projects were subsequently developed. In March 2017, Basic Space presented 'The Present Is Not Enough – Part I' with Kian Benson Bailes and Olivia Sparrow's 'Queer Day School' at CCA Derry-Londonderry.

Selected by Sean Lynch for CCA's exhibition series 'The Edge of Things', this one day exhibition occupied CCA as an "ephemeral community centre" for the LGBTQ+ community. This provided a platform from which to engage in a series of social, political and artistic actions, including artistic display, workshops and archival research.

These temporary institutional acts mirror initiatives such as 'No More Fun and Games' by Jesse Jones at the Hugh Lane and to some degree Emma Haugh's 'The Re-appropriation of Sensuality'. By occupying host institutions, Basic Space aims to redefine the communities such institutions traditionally welcome and accommodate. Providing space for the public to engage with artistic, social and political acts expands the role of the art institution and its purposes.

Basic Space continues to evolve in terms of management and policy. From summer 2017 onward, programming will involve collaboration with a broader range of international institutions and practitioners. This move is, in part, a response to limited space and funding in Ireland, but also provides us with the opportunity to expand and diversify the discourses in which we engage. In supporting artists and practitioners through studio and exhibition opportunities, Basic Space looks to continue its legacy as a vital space for the production and display of contemporary art. This includes our current research residency with Paper Visual Art, which will see the production of a number of publications in Autumn 2017.

Basic Space is honoured to welcome Martin Creed for a series of gigs and subsequent talks in Dublin and Limerick in May 2017. Projects such as these allow us to support international artists in presenting work in Ireland by connecting them to institutions and communities across the country. Concurrently, we aim to reconnect with independent and artist-run spaces across Ireland and elsewhere, to reaffirm the solidarity that is so central to our survival in this challenging era.

Through the enactment of various methodological approaches – including institutional mobilism, expanded institutionalism and international collaboration – Basic Space can continue to support the production and dissemination of contemporary art and its discourses. We are conscious that, in the context of such precarity and instability, this approach represents a retreat from the idea of a fixed or tangible space for artistic production and display. It is a strategy of survival; a response to crisis, deficit and structural failure. Although operating in unstable conditions, this is a valuable opportunity to re-imagine and construct methodologies that ensure an adaptable longevity. Basic Space invites artists, practitioners, institutions and the community at large to contribute to a prolonged dialogue in this process of change and experimentation.

**Daniel Bermingham is Co-Director of Basic Space, Dublin.**