Transforming Long Kesh/Maze

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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.

'Transforming Long Kesh/Maze' Martin Krenn and Aisling O'Beirn

'Transforming Long Kesh/Maze' is a collaborative social sculpture by artists Martin Krenn and Aisling O'Beirn, exploring the future of the Maze/Long Kesh site beyond its current state of limbo. 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 archaeologist Laura McAtackney, during the course of the research, provided invaluable context and contacts with many people who had 1st hand experience of the prison allowing the artists to develop their approach and invite individuals and groups, such as ex-prisoners, former visitors, ex-prison staff and community museums from across the political spectrum to partake in the project. The artists 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.

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.

Krenn and O'Beirn worked with participants to photographically *restage* objects from the prison, which they made, own, or are caretaking for the future. With the participants playing an active role in the task of image making, each object was placed in a mobile photo studio and a draft of the accompanying statement, outlining their relationship to the object, was recorded. The "naming process" was spontaneous as participants were then asked to title and date the respective artefact, for a label made on site with a small portable labelling machine. The label was placed within the image frame, before photographing the object. Thus, naming became as integral as the object to the restaging process.

The next method, *reappropriation*, addresses lost objects and images and was tailored to point to the temporal nature of remaining prison artefacts and the time limits on 1st hand testimony. Here the artists employed materials and methods traditionally used in making prison art to create new artefacts which echo participant testimonies.

The third method, *retelling*, is based on a long-term collaboration with the 50+ Group. This group of women meet weekly under the umbrella of Tar Anall, an organisation dedicated to the welfare of republican ex-prisoners and their families. The women were politically active as well as visiting their republican prisoner relatives. Krenn and O'Beirn not only photographed their extensive private collections using the *restaging* method, but the group also made new objects with the artists. They employed methods traditionally used by prisoners as a way to testify their experience of prison visits, thus *retelling* an "other" story of *Long Kesh/Maze* from their unique female visitor perspective.

This set of 64 postcards are one outcome of the project and designed to form a touring exhibition which can be shown in various public venues such as libraries and community centers. The postcards with dialogical photo of the artefact on one side and participant testimony on the other, have been shown as part of Peace and Beyond Arts Fringe, which accompanied the Peace and Beyond conference marking the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, organised by the British Council. Postcard layout Tonic Design https://nireland.britishcouncil.org/about/press/arts-fringe-marks-anniversary-good-fridaybelfast-agreement

They were also shown as part of Féile an Phobail, 2018. 2nd - 8th August 2018, St Mary's University College, Belfast. Féile an Phobail is Ireland's largest Community Festival. It was established in 1988 as a direct response to the conflict in the north of Ireland so as to celebrate the positive side of community, creativity, arts and sport. This Féile was the 30th year of the festival. http://feilebelfast.com/feile_belfast_2018_full_programme/Feile_2018.pdf

In Jan 2019 a set of 32 of the postcards were exhibited in Contentious Objects/Ashamed Subjects, Curated by Suzana Milevska (TRACES WP1 Principle Investigator) Politecnico di Milano – Italy http://www.traces.polimi.it/2018/12/16/traces-final-exhibition-contentious-objects-ashamed-subjects/

In March 2019 the cards were shown as part of IMAGINE CREATE AND CRITIQUE_Arts Education Trans Europe Halles ARTS EDUCATION SEMINAR organised by Beat Carnival at the Spectrum Centre on the Shankill Rd. Belfast. https://www.beatcarnival.com/news/3-january-2019/imagine-create-and-critiquearts-education-seminarmarch-2019

The exhibition 'Dispersed Presence', curated by Peter Mutschler, took place in PS² Spencer House, Belfast 14 September - 6 October 2018. During the run of the exhibition a workshop using the edition of 64 cards 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.

The artist book from the project *Restaging the Object:* was launched in 2019. Krenn, Martin & O'Beirn, Aisling Eds. 2019, *Restaging the Object: A Participatory Exploration of Long Kesh/Maze Prison*. Berlin: K Verlag. ISBN 978-3-9818635-6-7

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.

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.

The project 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. The published book received funding from the Art and Design Research Unit at Ulster University.. http://www.traces.polimi.it
The views expressed here are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

Krenn & O'Beirn, 'Transforming Long Kesh/Maze', touring exhibition, 2018

Documentation of edition of 64 postcards in 'Peace and Beyond Arts Fringe' an arts event coinciding with the 'Peace and Beyond International Conference' to mark the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. The conference, which ran from the 10th - 13th April 2018, was organised by the British Council. Photograph Simon Mills

Krenn & O'Beirn, 'Transforming Long Kesh/Maze', touring exhibition, 2018

Documentation of edition of 64 postcards in 'Peace and Beyond Arts Fringe' an arts event coinciding with the 'Peace and Beyond International Conference' to mark the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. The conference, which ran from the 10th - 13th April 2018, was organised by the British Council. Photograph Simon Mills

Krenn & O'Beirn, 'Transforming Long Kesh/Maze', touring exhibition, 2018 Documentation of edition of 64 postcards in 'Féile an Phobail' Ireland's largest Community Arts Festival. Photographs Krenn & O'Beirn

Krenn & O'Beirn, 'Transforming Long Kesh/Maze', touring exhibition, Féile Invite 2018

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, *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

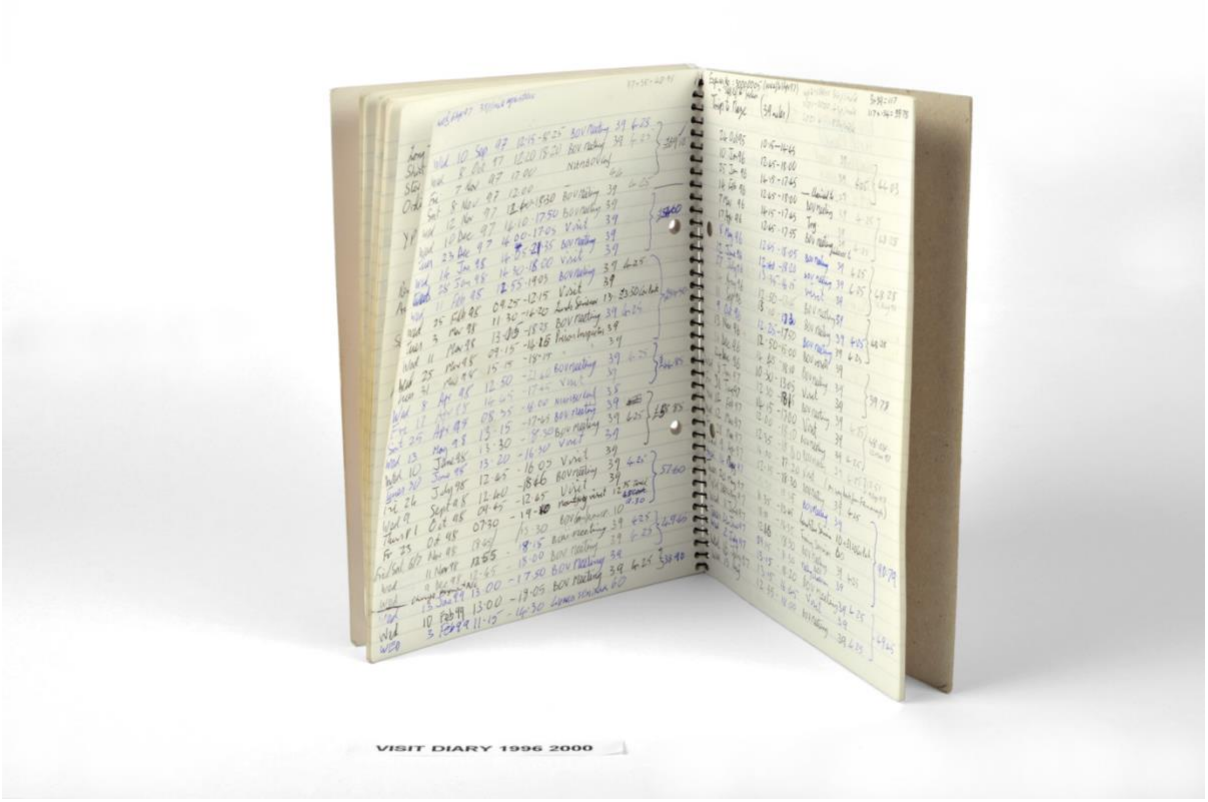
Materials: Ballerina doll, blue velvet, brass fittings, chess pawns, clothes pegs, mirror, music box mechanism, paint, and varnish.

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.