

It begins here!

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[STILL \(THE\) BARBARIANS: EVA INTERNATIONAL 2016](#)

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22 April 16

Still (the) Barbarians: EVA International 2016

EVA International; Limerick; Koyo Kouoh; biennial;

EVA International 2016 is Ireland's Biennial; this year it is curated by Koyo Kouoh.

Venue

A number of sites across Limerick City

Location

Ireland (<https://www.a-n.co.uk/locations/ireland>)

On my way to Limerick for the opening of EVA International 2016 I had with me *Zone* the 2008 novel by French author Mathias Énard; I was reading this (in translation) on the plane without knowing how it would be echoed by the content and themes of *Still (the) Barbarians* Koyo Kouoh's curation of EVA. In *Zone*, the narrator, a member of the French secret service, is travelling through Italy by train; he is in one space, physically transported through places and landscapes, and his mind travels to other places in his past, in the past of his family, and into other historical and geographical situations. Some of these arise through echoes of place names, through recollections, through accidental associations, and take the narrative into Classical history, into myth, into stories of atrocity and oppression across centuries in Europe and beyond. The narrator is carrying a suitcase with him, it is chained to the luggage rack to prevent someone stealing it. Its contents are documents, archives, and photographs that record these atrocities; photographs of mass killings, lists of summary executions, records of displacements, dispossession. This has become his project, our storyteller's, a project to gather evidence, evidence he will sell when he arrives in Rome to gain his freedom from his previous life, and allow him to move on into a new assumed identity.

The artworks assembled by Kouoh, gathered from disparate places, brought by various means to Limerick operate in territory linked to that of Énard's novel. They document historical and current situations of oppression, they gather and present evidence, they connect places by association and by allusion, creating new maps or challenging old boundaries. Across a number of sites and venues the art works are distributed into and on and through the city; they arrived in vans and on trucks, by air or by sea, bringing stories of other places and other peoples to this port city. But there is a sense in which these works are familiar, like a set of gears they mesh with stories and situations that the city offers to them. These works operate in a porous way with the city; here is a relationship of content and context, of materials and stories and place, that feels closely concerned with this city, and with this place and time. Koyo Kouoh has taken a strongly and boldly political stance in putting together this exhibition selecting works that resonate with or comment directly on historical and contemporary issues in Ireland in 2016, and with an overt awareness of the centenary of the 1916 Rising.

This sense of an artwork meshing with the fabric of the city is played out in *This beautiful striped wreckage (which we interrogate)* ... (2016), Michael Joo's intervention in The Sailor's Home. Joo's work resituates elements of the building's fabric, door and window architraves, subtly shifting them to produce a sense of displacement, of something being askew. Joo brings found objects into the building, displaying them or inserting them into the space, objects from the nearby river and docks area, objects that speak of trade, of exchange, of movement of people and goods, or of people as goods. The third element of the installation is a double projection of a bronze head of an ascetic Buddha, filmed in the British Museum. Projected into an inaccessible upper floor, the image of this figure links the accumulation of cultural spoils at the heart of the British Empire, with the artist's Korean heritage, and with aspects of resistance to oppression that have posited individual sacrifice against the oppressor's gluttony. This was part of the Hindu nationalist myth-making in India, and some Irish nationalists proposed connections to early Christian ascetic saints to underpin their myths of sacrifice.

At The City Gallery, Kapwani Kiwanga's *A Memory Palace* (2015) operates as a sort of inversion of Michael Joo's intervention. Into a white cube gallery, Kiwanga gathers a number of objects, images and sound. She distributes these to suggest the aftermath of an event, a grand building now deserted, a site of historical importance now wiped from the map. The viewer is offered glimpses and traces of this other space, the slide projector clicks through its carousel, periodically casting an image of a conference room onto the underside of an old dining table; a monitor propped in the corner sometimes shows the corner of a disintegrating palatial room; roughly printed and torn images allow

At the derelict Cleeve's Condensed Milk Factory a number of spaces of different character and scale were given over to works in different media, including a number of live performances on the opening weekend. Among the installations was Public Studio's *Road Movie* (2015). Public Studio (Elle Flanders and Tamira Sawatsky) developed the material for this project while living in Palestine. The installation is presented on three specially-constructed walls, ranged diagonally across a large ex-industrial space, with projections on both sides. When watching one side, the viewer is aware of, but unable to see the images playing on the other. A cluster of megaphones is suspended from the roof in one corner of the space, these broadcast sound gathered on site in Palestine, which complements and conflicts with the audio linked to the screens. The video material documents parallel but separate road systems in the West Bank and Occupied Territories of Israel, where one set of roads is open to use by Jewish-Israelis and settlers, and one set is restricted to use by Palestinians. This system recalls *The City & The City* by China Miéville, where two cities occupy the same territory with severe strictures regulating any contact between them. The set up of the screens performs this splitting in the space, a viewer cannot occupy both positions at once, cannot be on both sides. The narrative describing the complex and protracted negotiations involved in moving between towns and villages in Palestine plays as surtitles over images of free-flowing highway traffic in a zone inaccessible to the drivers, translators, or villagers being quoted. Again questions of borders, of restrictions, of the cumulative effect of everyday oppression are articulated in the work, linking to other pieces in the exhibition that function very differently but enter into some of the same debate and exploration.

Samuel Erenberg's *mementos* (2010) is presented at the City Gallery, a series of small canvases, each inscribed with a place and a date. These quietly commemorate some event of US military intervention; simply stated without interpretation, their repetition of form and nature is emphasised by their display around the narrow corridor above the central atrium. Nearby Willem de Rooij's two batik works, *Blue to Black* (2012) and *Black to Blue* (2016) condense a dispersed and layered narrative of colonial exploitation, slavery, exchange, into two fabric runners, strips five and a half metres long, which in their colour shifts present an abstraction of a complex system of trade and influence between the Netherlands, Africa and Indonesia. Jeremy Hutchinson's *Fabrications* (2013) uses the presence and disappearance of the colour indigo, to present a story of the erosion of autonomy and economic independence in Palestine. Installed at Cleeve's Factory, the work includes a small text panel that tells the myth of a land of indigo mines, presents a number of photographic images that appear to document these stocks of raw pigment, and a video filmed in a denim factory in Nablus. Also displayed in the space are a number of distorted or traumatised jeans made by the workers in the factory to represent their experience of functioning under constant surveillance and threat.

In her introductory talk during the opening weekend, curator Koyo Kouoh listed three specific lines of enquiry or threads of interest that guided her selection and assembling of the works in EVA International 2016. She mentioned architecture, migration and language. The works on show engage with these threads in distinct and diverse ways, from direct intervention and adaptation of the material of the buildings they occupy as in Michael Joo's installation, to *A History of Stone, Origin and Myth* (2016) by Tom Flanagan and Megs Morley, a visual essay that considers the use of stone as part of the fabrication of the Irish national story. Koyo Kouoh's third thread 'language' is strongly evident in the show, in the number of works using printed text, or including narration, or using linguistic strategies and structures. It is also evident in her demand that the exhibition catalogue be published as a bilingual document, in both Irish and English, a parallel text where the questions of boundaries, of the post-colonial, and of communication are activated in the turning of the book's pages. *Nice Screams – A Citizens' Anthem* (2016) by Deirdre Power and Soft Day raised some of these questions through a public competition for a new Irish anthem, which was then translated into an ice-cream van chime, and a performed by a choir at the exhibition opening. Using both languages, the project mirrored a failed competition of 1924 to create an anthem for the newly liberated Irish state, and using social media, online voting, and the distribution of free ice-cream, suggested how a modern public vote might arrive at a solution to a problem of expressing identity.

Transits and shifts of people and ideas, of things and of bodies, are evident in works such as Pio Abad's *The Collection of Jane Ryan and William Saunders* (2014-16). This project documents the accumulation of artefacts, antique silverware and European Old Master paintings, by the Marcos regime, in a post-colonial mimicking of Western capitalist aesthetic values at a time when they were misappropriating Philippines public funds. The installation of Mary Evan's *Thousands are Sailing* (2016) on the walls around Hera Büyükaşçıyan's *Destroy your house, build up a boat, save life* (2014-15) very explicitly comments on the transit of populations across the Mediterranean in recent years. These two works become a combined installation in their shared space, and the decision to use no wall labels or information throughout the exhibition allows for such a blurring of boundaries and blending of works. The exhibition is navigated using maps with keys to individual works, encouraging interaction between works, and facilitating connections and interrelations. In its distribution across the city, its variations in scales and media, and in the different ways the works orient themselves to the audience, EVA International 2016 offers an exciting cross section of contemporary art practice, it tells a story of the making of this selection of work here and now, and offers a multiplicity of stories to the audience, while being mindful of its location and the context of this city. To return to Mathias Énard's *Zone*, the exhibition opens the suitcase of evidence, the archives and documents have been carried here, remade, reorganised, and made available for perusal by a new audience, stories to be retold, to be put into circulation, crossing boundaries of language and building connections.

<http://www.eva.ie/home-2016> (<http://www.eva.ie/home-2016>)



Mark Leahy (<https://www.a-n.co.uk/person/mark-leahy-1/>)



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MARK LEAHY is a writer, artist and teacher operating among textual practices, performance, and live art. Live work includes 'his voice' (commissioned by Counter Plymouth Art Book Fair, Oct 2015), 'flat-head self-tapping' at Barbican, Plymouth (Jan 2015) and Chelsea School of Art (May 2015) and 'answering machine' for Experimentica14 at Chapter Cardiff (Nov 2014). Other works have been presented in Bristol, Plymouth, London and Liverpool. He has been commissioned to write texts to accompany work by artists including Nathan Walker, Katy Connor, Steven Paige, and Low Profile. His critical publications include essays in C21 Literature, Open Letter, Performance Research Journal and The Journal of Writing in Creative Practice. He was MA Programme Leader at Dartington College of Arts (2007-2010) and teaches part-time at Falmouth University and Plymouth University.

