

Extract from exhibition text by Mary Cremin.

As Foreign as the Same Must Be - Roscommon Arts Centre 15 January – 17 February 2010.

Exhibition series curated by Patrick T Murphy RHA

The text below refers to the first iteration of 'Penumbra' entitled 'And I was happy just to breath'. The three parts were exhibited at different times under different headings before Murnaghan joined them into the Triptych of Penumbra which was exhibited at The R.H.A.

<https://rhagallery.ie/events/exhibitions/penumbra/>

Murnahan's interest in psychoanalytical theory is ubiquitous in his video piece 'And I was happy just to breath'. This video work recalls Freud's writing on the unheimlich translated as the uncanny or unhomley. The otherworldly is manifested through everyday objects and surroundings. This uncanny experience is prompted when what we view as imaginary appears in reality before us. This idea of disruption of our perception of what is real or unreal forms the basis of the piece. The simultaneous existence of multiple levels of realities or reality enclaves is highlighted, creating an awareness that we only have to shift our attention to this possibility in order to experience other dimensions of reality.

The title And I and silence some strange race is taken from Emily Dickinson's poem I felt a funeral in My brain in which she explores the inner workings of the mind. This piece illustrates the presence of the unnatural and spiritual in the natural world and the transient nature of being. In Avery F. Gordon's Ghostly Matters, she posits that "Haunting is a constituent element of modern social life. It is neither pre-modern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a generalizable social phenomenon of great import. To study social life one must confront the ghostly aspects of it." Gordon's primary argument is that "that which appears absent can indeed be a seething presence" The ghost becomes an empirical sign that a haunting is taking place. The ghost for Gordon is a social figure where history and subjectivity make social life.

The core of Paul Murnahan's work can be applied to the individual and the universal nature of existence. What resonates in the works is the notion that belief is inherently flawed but it is from these flaws that we construct the collective. The systematic calling into question of belief systems is fundamental to Murnahan's practice, allowing the viewer to suspend or question the nature of truth.