

# Art Review – Anne Tallentire ‘Shelter’

Anne Tallentire’s ‘Shelter’ is currently featured at the Ulster Museum with the Creative Centenaries #MakingHistory 1916 Exhibition. The exhibition continues until 18 September 2016

*‘How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs everyday...How are we to speak of these ‘common things’...What’s needed perhaps is finally to found our own anthropology, one that will speak about us...Not the exotic anymore, but the endotic.’* **Georges Perec 1973**

*Shelter* is a major new project by Irish artist Anne Tallentire, with three of the seven sculptural works created currently showing at the Ulster Museum. The project began in June 2016 in an Open Studio at the Nerve Visual Gallery in Ebrington Barracks, a former military base now used for business and cultural purposes (it housed the Turner Prize in 2013). *Shelter*, a Nerve Centre and 14-18 NOW First World War centenary co-commission took as its starting point a consideration of the architectural legacy of the Nissen Hut (the curved structure invented during the First World War to house soldiers and supplies). The work explores material and conceptual relationships between the historic Nissen Hut, invented for the mass mobilisation of troops stationed across the continent 100 years ago and how contemporary modes of ‘emergency architecture’ respond to the precarious and humanitarian crisis of the ‘mass movement of peoples’ in Europe today’. In her essay on *Shelter*, Claire Feeley observes of the artist; ‘Through this project she draws a distinction between two forms of life: that of the legitimized migrant-workers deployed across the globe in the service of industry and the military; and other forms of forced displacement – those fleeing cultural or religious persecution, war, environmental catastrophe or destitution’ (2016). Although analytical and critical this is very much a felt mode of artistic production. The artist is aware of the emotional charge of the theme that is examined. *Shelter* reflects a singular creative journey. A nomadic enactment and attendant transience in the structure and methodology of the project is evident in the movement and deployment of the assembled materials, the contemporary equivalent of those used to build the Nissen Hut. Sourced locally these materials and stored in the gallery then used to make seven flat material diagrams on Ebrington Parade Ground, for one day only. Dismantled at the end of each day these configurations are condensed into three dimensional sculptural works exhibited in the Nerve Visual Gallery space, later constrained further in terms of scale to occupy a smaller exhibition space as part of the Making History exhibition at the Ulster Museum. The materials are ultimately destined for Calais where they might eventually become a ‘shelter’ for refugees. The journey of these materials is defined by a restless movement, adaption to space/requirements and an uncertain fate.

Tallentire’s recent artists’ book *Object of a Life* (Copy Press, 2013), encapsulates this working method. The book’s description



reads; 'Oscillating between depiction and description, *Object of A Life* addresses Georges Perec's question: How are we to speak of common things? Making an inventory of things that come to hand in the course of daily life, playing with ideas of contradiction, categorisation, improbability and speculation, this book offers an articulation of the space produced between language and drawing'. Tallentire invites us to look at the overlooked. Her writing challenges our perceptions and encourages us to consider the creative process tangentially. Her approach is at once instructive and enlightening. It draws the viewer in and it does this in a new light. It takes some time to fully appreciate the artist's intention but when the realization is felt and understood, the effect is strong and the work will not be quickly forgotten. *Shelter* is contradictory; the component parts of the built shelter structure are both the subject and material of the work. However these parts will not be constructed to provide a place of refuge, at least not yet, rather as art works they operate as a provocation to consider wider issues related to the humanitarian need.

The grey floor of the gallery is akin to a blackboard where lines indicate the limits of the stacked materials. The notion of a blackboard ground emphasizes the process-driven formation of the seven stacks. These function as deconstructed metaphors for shelter, habitation and the architectural fundamentals of human living. These stack constructs are very strongly linked to 'process art' in terms of the primacy of method of development and resistance to any conventionally predictable end result. Therefore, what is most important is the motivation and the artist's actions, method, and rationale. This intentionality has informed a complex plan, drawings, schematics, and these strategies for ensuring considered delivery have, in turn, informed thoughtful sourcing of materials, gathering these,



sorting these, considering the aesthetics of these, creating associative relationships between these, and configuring patterns between these materials.

Considering these works are composed of everyday building materials, it is remarkable how inherently sculptural they appear. They have been thoughtfully constructed, often symmetrically composed. One stack is composed entirely of wood and a layering is achieved through the combination of timber beams and sheets of oriented strand board (similar to plywood). It is defined by the natural colour of the simple materials and by light and shade. Equally aesthetically powerful is another stack that comprises of sheets of corrugated iron interspersed with scaffolding poles and lengths of wood. Highlights are made through the yellow caps on the ends of the pole lengths, three at the lower end on either side and one a little further in on either side. The entire assemblage sits on 5 larger timber beams. The stacks reflect a contemporary archaeology of placement and the layers of process. There is a sense of mindful construction and thoughtful identification (the artist worked in consultation with architect Grainne Hasset) and sourcing of materials. Construction materials become beautiful in themselves. This beauty is surprising to the viewer but not the artist; Tallentire has always appreciated the potential of found and everyday materials. The work, and indeed the artist's method have a meditative quality. Artworks are constructed through slow deliberate movement. The process itself is a respectful act. *Shelter* sees art highlighting the inequalities in the provision of habitation and the habitual nature of the process highlights the denial of the everyday rituals of family life to those people who have been displaced. ○

**Marianne O'Kane Boal**