



GALLERY OF PHOTOGRAPHY

IRELAND'S LEADING CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY



Dawn, Limerick 2007
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a Invasion Prague 1968

n in the Gallery space and outdoors on Meeting
dark.
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Arles Projection Home Economics

Group projection exhibition at the International Rencontres in Arles,
France. +Solo presentations by Noel Bowler, Eoin O Conaill, Simon
Burch and Jackie Nickerson. La Roquette, Arles, France 10 July.

n Lance Armstrong: Tour de Force

9

Eoin O Conaill Common Place

3 September – 4 October. Artist's Talk: 29 September at 1.15pm

OGRAHY, Meeting House Square, Temple Bar, Dublin, Ireland. +353-1 6714654 www.galleryofphotography.ie

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Photograph taken at Rediffusion TV studio, 20/10/1967, showing Dafydd Glyn Rowlands, Vivian George Davies, Dennis Coslett and David Frost (holding microphone). Courtesy of the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth



Vivian George Davies, photograph by Dyfed Powys Constabulary of Free Wales Army Manoeuvres, 1968. Courtesy of the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth

Enemies of the State

Photographs of the Free Wales Army
John Hansard Gallery

Hidden Country was curated by Russell Roberts, currently Reader in Photography at the European Centre for Photographic Research, University of Wales, Newport. He made his reputation with *In Visible Light* (Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, 1997), one of the great exhibitions of recent years that dealt with the classificatory urge in historic and contemporary photography. From 1998 to 2006 he was Head of Photography at Bradford's National Museum of Photography, Film & Television (now known as the National Media Museum) and was responsible for diverse exhibitions that included surveys of William Henry Fox Talbot, Tony Ray-Jones and Luc Delahaye. His interest in vernacular photography was revealed early on in *Memory and the Archive* (John Hansard Gallery, University of Southampton, 1995) and the same gallery commissioned this show.

New prints were made from copies of photographs in the Crown Court files that are now in the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth. The files register the response of the British state to the threat supposedly posed by the Free Wales Army (FWA). The latter was a paramilitary nationalist organisation, launched in 1963. It first gained significant public attention in 1965 when it contributed to protests against the construction of the Llyn Celyn reservoir, a project to supply the English city of Liverpool with water that involved, amongst other things, the complete flooding of the village of Capel Celyn and surrounding farmland. Nine members of the FWA were arrested and put on trial in Swansea in early 1969. The timing of the prosecution was significant, with British authorities wanting to forestall disruption of the investiture of Prince Charles as Prince of Wales, due to take place at Caernarfon Castle in July 1969. There were half a dozen convictions and little subsequent

activity, although a recent academic study on the FWA by John Humphries (*Freedom Fighters*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2008) has a time-span from 1963 to 1993.

Some of the exhibits in *Hidden Country* are official police photographs of arms caches, bomb making equipment, uniforms, and the like, cumulative evidence of paramilitary subversion. Others show how the FWA sought to court the media to advance its cause, such as a still of the guest appearance of FWA members on The David Frost Show in 1967, or photographs of military manoeuvres in the woods, staged for a picture story in the sophisticated London magazine *Town*. The photographs are from different sources, but share certain common features. Many have numbers on the image; many show signs of hole punching or stapling; most are seriously deteriorating, not because of age, but because they were produced cheaply and quickly. Continuously, one is reminded that these images were collected and filed for one reason: to contribute to a successful prosecution of alleged enemies of the British state.

The investiture of Prince Charles was choreographed by Lord Snowdon (given the additional, preposterous title of Constable of Caernarfon Castle for the occasion) who brought his experiences as a professional photographer to an event that was designed to be televised and viewed by a global audience. In effect, Snowdon was providing a bridge between old and new media, creating a telegenic spectacle that had direct links with, say, the photograph of Queen Victoria being proclaimed Empress of India by the Viceroy, Lord Lytton, at Delhi in 1877. During the Victorian era, images of imperial pomp and ceremony were complemented by others that showed the consequences of defiance, such as Felice Beato's photographs of the public hangings that followed the so-called Indian Mutiny of 1857-9. There were no comparable photographs of FWA leaders who were more discretely punished with terms in prison. However, I was struck by the parallels between the television still of FWA members with David

Frost and a famous photograph of onlookers around the demolished Vendôme Column, during the Paris Commune of 1871. Post 1871, such a photograph was used to identify and punish Communards and their sympathizers, and one can assume that the presence of the television still in the Crown Court files was for similar purposes.

The faded imagery of *Hidden Country* encourages reflections on 19th Century precedents, but the FWA's tentative foray into image-politics also has contemporary resonances. From the seventies onwards, aeroplane hijacking by PLO sympathisers and others was a tactic that anticipated the world media's appetite for images of mayhem, a theme memorably explored by Johan Grimont in the film *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* (1998). A comparable awareness of the news value of violent actions informed the widespread use of the car bomb in the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1991), a phenomenon evoked in *My Neck Is Thinner than a Hair: Engines* (2000-3), an imposing grid of one hundred archival press photographs by Walid Raad and The Atlas Group. *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (2005) is a suggestive manifesto by Retort, arguing that the 2001 attacks on the Twin Towers were undertaken by a group that profoundly understood spectacular politics and sought to defeat the United States in the realm of images. Finally, Boris Groys' recent book *Art Power* (2008) contains the rich essay 'Art at War' in which he makes the important point that contemporary Jihadists like Osama bin Laden are also keen to represent themselves, with video art as the preferred medium. Clearly, Al-Qaeda and the FWA are worlds apart, yet there is a shared fascination with the power of the image. In this respect, *Hidden Country* is a modest reminder that the British state deals swiftly with those who threaten its monopoly of spectacle.

David Evans