

Sarah Browne

How to Use Fool's Gold

15 February – 22 April 2012

Ikon presents *How to Use Fool's Gold*, the first UK solo exhibition of works by Dublin-based artist Sarah Browne. Browne uses 'the economy' as the basis for her practice, a metaphor for contemporary politics. Often working with small communities of people, she reflects and documents such resourceful forms of exchange as gifting, subsistence, poaching and subsidies, revealing the hidden social relations that exist in small-scale economic structures. This survey contains film and installation pieces, including Browne's entry for the 2009 Venice Biennale.

On 17 February 2012, during the first week of this exhibition and in the midst of an unfolding European currency crisis, the Central Bank of France will cease exchanging French francs for euros, concluding a practice that has continued since the euro's introduction and marking a final end to the franc itself. The film *Second Burial at Le Blanc* (initiated in 2011 and to be concluded during the run of the exhibition), follows a procession through the streets of Le Blanc, a small French town in which local merchants have continued to accept francs in exchange for goods and services. At the centre of this procession is Browne's bespoke 'ticker-tape countdown clock', a glass-domed mechanism counting down the hours, minutes and seconds to when the last francs will be exchanged, with live currency feed via wireless internet. Accompanying the film are two newspaper publications that are distributed both in the gallery and in Le Blanc. These visual essays weave together historical and anthropological information related to the work.

Several of Browne's works explore redundant technologies and leftover industries. Her *Carpet for the Irish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale* (2009) is made from surplus wool stocks from the Donegal Carpets factory. Once renowned for its hand-knotted carpets adorning Irish embassies around the globe, Donegal now produces carpets by machine or outsourced labour. Browne's carpet, accompanied by a documentary film work, was hand-knotted by two of the factory's previous female employees. The design composition, reminiscent of Irish modernist Eileen Gray (who also had carpets produced there) was actually dictated by the proportions of the surplus wool remaining at the old factory, now converted into a 'heritage centre'.

A Model Society (2007), takes its point of departure from a research study (prior to the recent financial crisis) in which Iceland was declared the happiest nation on earth. Browne advertised for knitwear models in Reykjavik newspapers, then surveyed the respondents about quality of life in Iceland. In a set of 35mm slides, Browne's models appear within iconic Icelandic landscapes, wearing traditional *lopi* sweaters in which selected phrases from their comments, such as 'no war', 'rotten politics' and 'the bank owns us', have been knitted. In works like these, Browne taps

into the personal, emotional underpinnings of both national identity and macroeconomic forces.

Browne's exploration of resourcefulness at the margins is apparent in *How to Make Muscha in Vaasa* (2010), consisting of a homemade still, constructed in Finland, presented on a plinth that doubles as a shipping crate alongside a bottle of moonshine and a set of deadpan instructions for brewing it. Here it is as if art provides a licence for such transgression given that 'heritage' and 'tradition' are deemed worthy.

At Ikon, Browne's exhibition runs parallel with the development of a new project, *Scarcity Radio*, in collaboration with the Ikon Youth Programme (IYP) and *Slow Boat*. Browne will work closely with members of IYP in a number of film-screenings, discussions and workshops that set out to investigate our understanding of scarcity in the current economic context, focusing particularly on the role of radio communication, pirate radio in particular, during moments of social crisis. Looking across a generation gap, the project aims to examine the culture of pirate radio in the 1980s in relation to what may be urgent today. The knowledge produced during this project will inform the 'reception and broadcast' of *Slow Boat's* summer programme, navigating the canal network at its own measured and reflective pace.

A book, *How to Use Fool's Gold*, co-published with CAG, Vancouver, and Project Arts Centre, Dublin, accompanies the exhibition.

This exhibition is supported by Culture Ireland.

Ends.

Note to Editors:

1. A selection of images is shown below.
2. Ikon is open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am - 6pm. Admission is free.
3. Ikon Gallery is a registered charity and receives core funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council. Ikon Gallery Limited trading as Ikon. Registered address: 1 Oozells Square, Birmingham B1 2HS.
4. For more information, high-res images and to arrange an interview with the curator please contact Helen Stallard on 0774 033 9604 or email h.stallard@ikon-gallery.co.uk



Sarah Browne
A Model Society (2005-7)

No War, 35mm slide photograph from the installation, display case with lopi sweaters, artist book and framed works. Dimensions variable.

Courtesy the artist



Sarah Browne
Second Burial at Le Blanc (2011)

Looped 16mm film projection, colour, silent, 8'18". Ticker-tape countdown clock, customised printer with glass dome and ash base, height 66cm, Ø 30cm, length of paper variable (counting down the hours, minutes and seconds to the last francs to be exchanged on 17 February 2012, with live currency feed via wireless internet)

Courtesy the artist



Sarah Browne
Carpet for the Irish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (2009)

Handknotted wool & linen pile, surplus stock from Donegal Carpets Factory. 300cm x 300cm x 2.5cm. 16mm film on DVD, 18'03", b/w, silent.

Courtesy the artist