

Cobh: Hendrikje Kühne and Beat Klein at Sirius

What would it be like to collect places? And if so what about swapping these places with other collectors? The Cobh and Cork Sticker Book Project went some way to answering these questions. The project was set up by the Swiss and German artists Hendrikje Kühne and Beat Klein as a collaborative, interactive, multi-site art project based around the swapping of stickers of Cobh and Cork. For me the project brought back memories of classroom squabbles over stickers of second-division footballers. But here the artists have created micro archives of the everyday which subtly question our relationship to the places and spaces of our lives.

In 2004 the artists spent two months in residence at the Sirius Arts Centre, Cobh. They used their time there to catalogue their immediate surroundings with photographs and writings. This was a collection of snapshot memories intended to reflect the local environments of Cobh, Cork City and the animal park on nearby Fota Island. The artists then, working in collaboration with Sirius, produced sticker books and stickers based on their collections. These were designed specifically to be collected and swapped. This meant that visitors to the organised swapping days became part of the network of participants emerging from the project. For a week in June swapping meetings were organised at galleries and arts centres around Cork at which free sticker books were given out, stickers could be bought (for 10 cents for a package of five) and then swapped. There was a genuine feeling of excitement at the events which brought to mind an enjoyable synthesis of record fair and gallery opening. As the artists were present at the events, the pride of many people's collections was a completed sticker book signed by the artists.

What's interesting about the project is why anybody would want to collect images that are so ordinary-looking. Kühne and Klein observed a Cork of building sites, unoccupied benches, shopping centres, fire exits and car parks. Grey skies and empty cafes had replaced the usual tourist-brochure images of lush sunsets and picaresque buildings. There are no landmarks sticking out here. These are, like Martin Parr's Boring Postcards, records of anytime, anyplace, anywhere. But this is why the project works. It is the seemingly inconsequential details that make up the life of a community. These are places of self-representation, those areas by which we come to know ourselves and our surroundings.

However, the intimate scale of the project belies a conceptualism which the artists have explored elsewhere in their work. This has involved the manipulation of photographic images, such as postcards and holiday brochures, to explore how places and spaces are represented in a way that recalls the photographs of the Bechers or Andreas Gursky. And the questioning of art's relationship to its immediate public recalls the interactive projects of Rirkrit Tiravanija or even the more politicised interventions of Hans Haacke.

The overall success of this work lies in how conceptual issues are balanced with the immediacy and intimacy reflected in the user-friendly feel of the project. The Sticker Book gently brings together a number of very different questions about what a place is, how art relates to that place, and how an audience might engage with that art. Here Kühne and Klein cleverly foreground these questions by bringing out a shared need to come together to reflect and collect.

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