DUBLIN

SHIPS

Contents

Dublin Ships is a temporary public artwork commissioned by Dublin City Council as part of the Dublin City Public Art Programme.

The artwork is generated via a live electronic information system (an Automatic Identification System, or AIS) which tracks the locations of ships. The names of the most recently arrived and most recently departed ships from Dublin Port are output to two large LED screens sited at the Scherzer Bridges beside the Samuel Beckett Bridge.

The artwork is concerned with the meanings and poetic qualities of ship names. The ship names include allusions to maritime trade, cargoes, historical figures and distant places. The juxtaposition of the two ship names generates a form of poetic writing. The work also attempts to interrupt the speed of instantaneous data and returns it to the speed of movement of real entities in space.

pwc

VESPERTINE

ULYSSES

500 EDEN QUAY

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Dublin Port "The sights of ships entering and leaving the port day and night throughout the year spark the imaginations of most people, but unless you go far eastwards along the quays or out along the coast, the movement of ships will be unseen by most."

Eamonn O'Reilly
CEO Dublin Port Company

When *Dubliners* was published one hundred years ago, James Joyce described a typical scene of dock working in the following terms:We came then near the river. We spent a long time walking about the noisy streets flanked by high stone walls, watching the working of cranes and engines and often being shouted at for our immobility by the drivers of groaning carts. It was noon when we reached the quays and, as all the labourers seemed to be eating their lunches, we bought two big currant buns and sat down to eat them on some metal piping beside the river. We pleased ourselves with the spectacle of Dublin's commerce...

With the change in activity since Joyce's time, the important historical and cultural link between the port and the city which it spawned and nurtured has been, to a great extent, lost. This has happened in cities across the world. In some cities the port has been forgotten altogether and has been gentrified as cargo handling has moved to new locations. In other cases, notably in Northern Europe, the link has been maintained and strengthened in many different ways; sometimes by innovative urban design, sometimes by cultural and heritage initiatives.

Although the link that existed in the past between Dublin Port and Dublin City has been weakened, the redevelopment of the Docklands has created an opportunity for the port and the city to be re-integrated. If the concept of Dublin in the public consciousness as a port city has dimmed, the importance of

Dublin Port to Dublin City and to the country as a whole has grown in the decades since Ireland shed its insular aspirations of self-dependence and, instead, looked internationally for opportunities to trade.

The importance of Dublin Port can be described in statistics which, while capturing the scale of port activity, are unlikely to stir the imagination: how many tonnes, how many containers, how much fuel, how many passengers. The sight of ships entering and leaving the port day and night throughout the year do, however, spark the imaginations of most people but unless you go far eastwards along the quays or out along the coast, the movement of ships will be unseen by most.

A century ago, astronomical measurements at Dunsink Observatory timed the daily dropping of the timeball on the top of the Ballast Office at O'Connell Bridge to give a visual signal to ships to synchronise their chronometers with Greenwich Mean Time, thereby enabling them to determine longitude and plot their positions far at sea.

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This daily spectacle was there for Dubliners to see in the heart of the city andJoyce captured it when Leopold Bloom remarks that it is "After one. Timeball on the ballast office is down". The timeball is no more, the ships are mostly unseen and the link between the port and the city has stretched to breaking point. But yet, the port and its activities still stir the emotions and the imagination.

Cliona Harmey's Dublin Ships installation on the Scherzer Bridges on North Wall Quay uses the modern manifestation of astronomy and the timeball to display to Dubliners close to the new heart of the city the name of each ship as it arrives or leaves the port. A modern reminder of Dublin's timeless fascination with trade and travel.

How it Works

Ships transmit their location through an Automatic Identification System (AIS) using their callsigns as identifiers. Two receiving antennae have been set up on land stations in line-of-sight with Dublin Bay and Dublin Port. The information gathered by the antennae is exchanged in real time with an online database, Marinetraffic.com, which parses the information and gives us the names of the vessels.

This information is processed via the internet and output to the screens in public space.

Marinetraffic.com is “part of an open, community-based project with antenna base stations around the world. It is dedicated to collecting and presenting data which is exploited in research areas” and it provides free real-time information to the public

about ship movements and ports across the coast-lines of many countries around the world.

Anybody with a PC and an always-on internet connection can set up a base station and can receive and exchange data with an AIS service. For our base stations we used an AIS internet base station and dedicated AIS antennae, although you can also use a VHS antenna.

Our Antennae:
Station #2134

Systems at Sea: on Cliona Harmey

The container ships that frequently dock in Dublin Port are representative of the biggest moving objects that humans have ever produced. Yet despite the almost sublime mass of these ships, in general they are but tiny elements in much bigger systems.

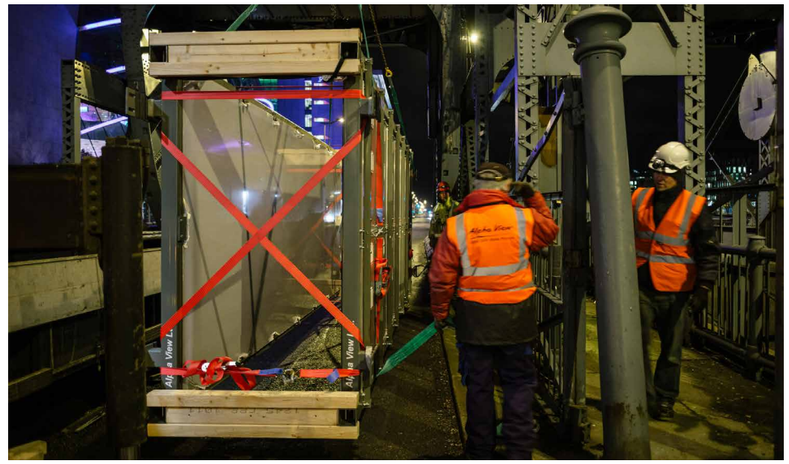
They provide the necessary physical connections in the virtual networks of global communication and control. Without these ships the world system would stutter and atrophy. Without the objects they transport modern environments and lifestyles would be untenable.

As Rose George puts it, "nearly everything" comes to us by sea: "Sometimes on trains I play a numbers game. A woman listening to headphones: 8. A man reading a book: 15. The child in the stroller: a least 4 including the stroller.

The game is to reckon how many of our clothes and possessions and food products have been transported by ship.

The beads around the woman's neck; the man's iPhone and Japanese-made headphones. Her Sri Lanka-made skirt and blouse; his printed in China book. I can always go wider, deeper and in any direction. The fabric of the seats. The rolling stock. The fuel powering the train. The conductor's uniform; the coffee in my cup; the fruit in my bag. Definitely the fruit, so frequently shipped in refrigerated containers that it has been given its own temperature. Two degrees Celsius is 'chill' but 13 degrees is 'banana.'"

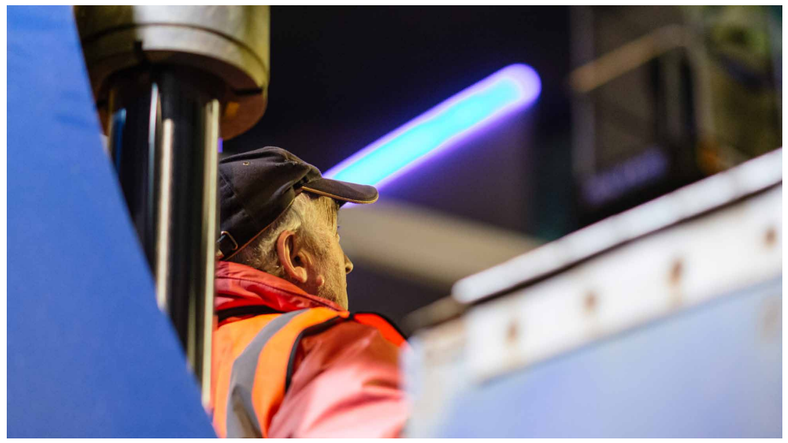
There are two often repeated commonplaces about the conditions of contemporary capitalism: its virtuality and its speed. This is understandable. In general the move to a post-Fordist economy is explicable as the shift from manufacturing to information; that is, from infrastructural to informational systems. Now a lot of communication takes place in spaces that are de-materialised; online. Interactions are often performed rapidly in which vast global spaces are collapsed with either a swipe/click or another plane journey.



It's easy, therefore, to assume that the two icons of the world system are the tokens of this virtuality and speed: the screen and the jet-plane. Yet just below the surfaces of the swiftly digitised world a lumbering mechanism of docks, cranes, containers and vessels grinds and shudders.

The modern container was invented in 1956 and adopted in the subsequent decade. It standardised shipping according to a module that could be easily transferred between ships, trains and trucks. Before then it didn't make sense to manufacture things in other places to avail of cheaper resources and labour. Containers rendered everything transferable in a global system: raw-materials; products; people. The container ship made capital truly migratory on a global scale. But these massive ships are weighty, cumbersome and slow. The immediacy and speed of day-to-day living is only guaranteed by the irresistible inertia by which these ships move. The container ship is, in short, both the necessary mechanism and emblem of post-war capitalism. That which lies manifest within their manifest is the very apparatus of our lives.

Relations that were concrete and human, he feared, were being effaced by the immateriality of economic ones. But, it transpired, all that is solid didn't melt after all but was instead broken down to its component parts, boxed up and shipped out in container ships. These behemoths criss- cross the planet drawing their own occult patterns. The intricate traces they leave in the foam of the sea only hint at the mostly hidden migration of capital in the global system.



Yet the systems which the ships move within are only part of larger and more general systems within which we are positioned. The objects they deliver are also part of these systems. And systems are everywhere; inescapable. For example: Adidas offers a "Torsion System ® for midfoot integrity" on its running shoes; L'Oréal markets a shampoo as the "EverSleek Sulfate-Free Smoothing System™ Intense Smoothing Shampoo" that will control "frizz" and "smooth" the hair; Benecol makes a "smart chew" to be eaten alongside meals in order to help "block cholesterol from being absorbed into the digestive system." And at Amazon.co.uk for under €10 I can buy a "True Utility TU245 KeyRing System" to organise my keys. Systems are everywhere; they're all around us. Banking systems; health-care systems; furniture systems; air-conditioning systems; clothing systems; we are surrounded by them.

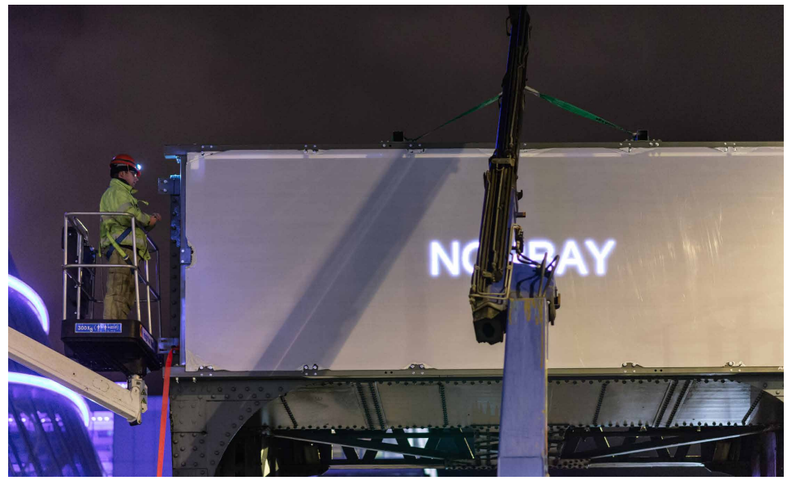
In the summer of 2013 Edward Snowden revealed that the communication systems that are too easily taken for granted were being monitored by the National Security Agency on behalf of the United States. In the following December 2013 he began

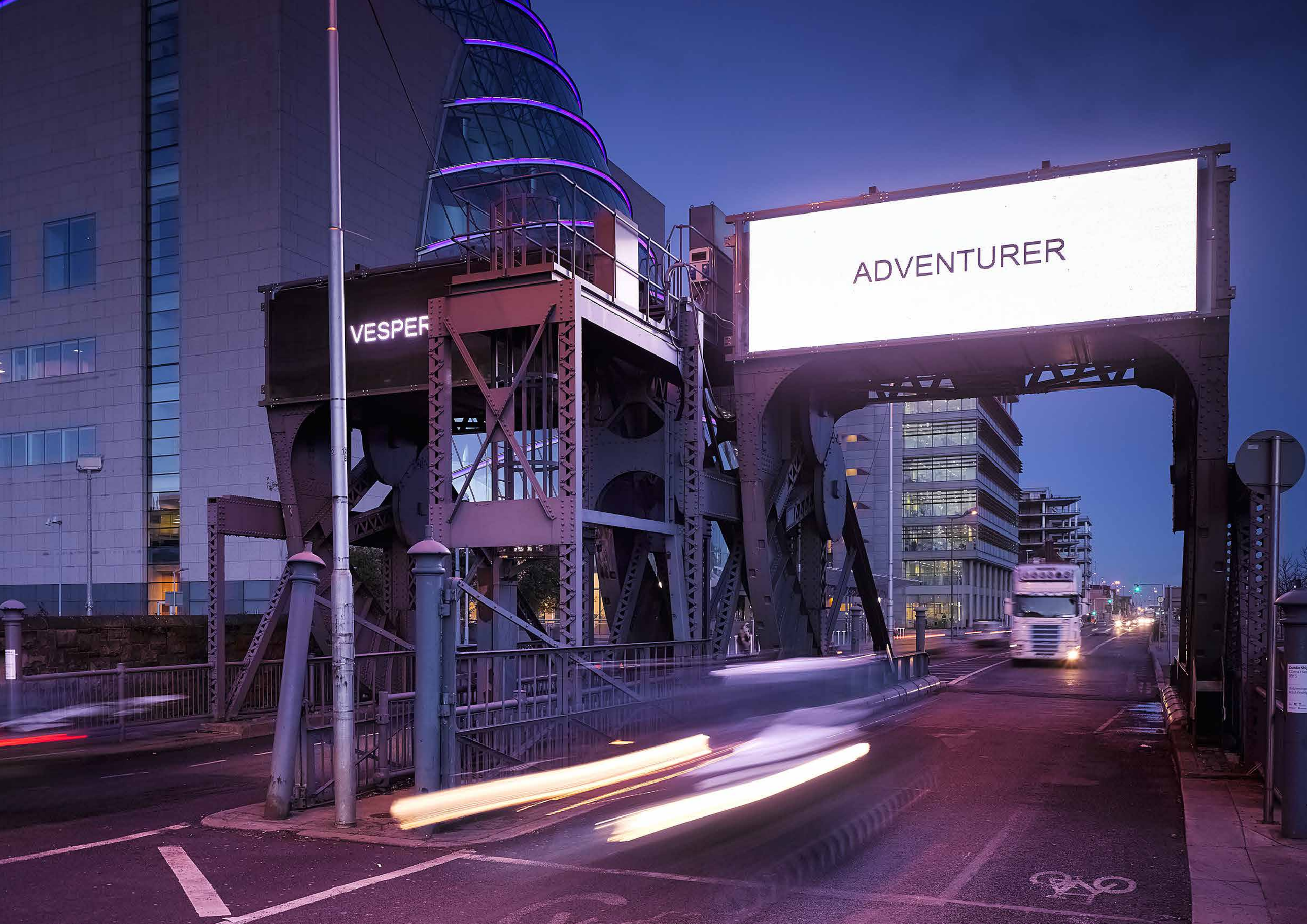
his open letter to the Brazilian people with an explicit appeal to "systems": "Six months ago, I stepped out from the shadows of the United States Government's National Security Agency to stand in front of a journalist's camera. I shared with the world evidence proving some governments are building a world-wide surveillance system to secretly track how we live, who we talk to, and what we say.

Systems are everywhere; they're all around us, we are surrounded by them.

I went in front of that camera with open eyes, knowing that the decision would cost me family and my home, and would risk my I was motivated by a belief that the citizens of the world deserve to understand the system in which they live." Clearly, then, these systems are not neutral. They are inseparable from how life is lived today.

A lot of Cliona Harmey's art is about engaging in these ubiquitous systems. Her own smaller works are jerry-built improvisations with circuits, wires sensors and screens. The information they capture and present is not private, per se, but it is often hidden or overlooked. She offers sketches by which that unnoticed data is made physical; and the informational becomes aesthetic.




VESPER
ADVENTURER

So for the Dublin Ships project, Harmey placed two relatively stark screens on the Scherzer Bridges, to display the names of the most recent arrivals and departures at Dublin Port. Names such as Coronel; Jonathan Swift; Desert Star; Epsilon; Atlantic Comet are ones to conjure with. Yet to most visitors, although they probably won't mean all that much, they nonetheless evoke allusions to history, travel or maritime themes.

Often Harmey's constructions have the style of amateur experiment; of something D.I.Y, off-grid, perhaps. The technology feels cheap, borrowed or hacked. But it would be a mistake to think these are ramshackle propositions. Instead, with odd elegance and a seductive modesty, her work declares something of its own haphazard provisionality. This contingency is not a failure of her own networks to function or communicate.

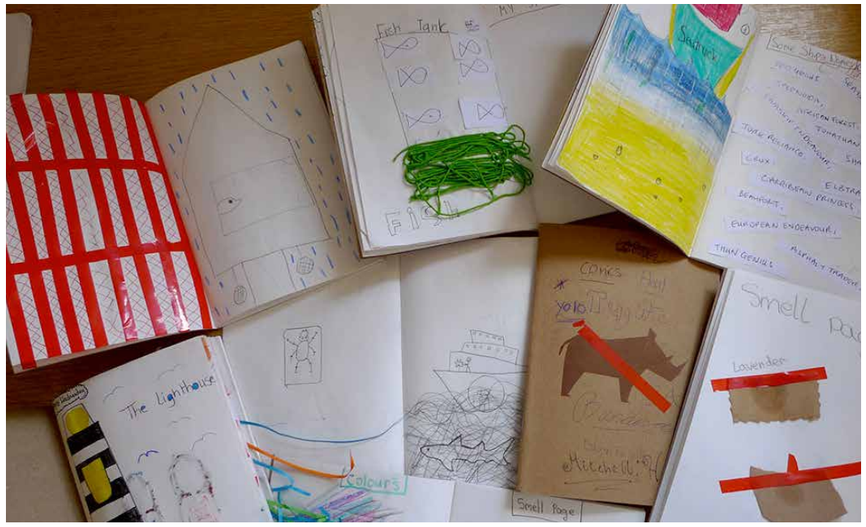
Names such as Coronel; Jonathan Swift; Desert Star; Epsilon; Atlantic Comet are ones to conjure with. Yet to most visitors, although they probably won't mean all that much, they nonetheless evoke allusions to history, travel or maritime themes.

Instead their provisional nature becomes a way by which anxiety is introduced into them. And with this anxiety comes a humanity. We are shown that systems are, ultimately, not only ones with humans in them but also that they could be organised differently. With a sense of awkward refusal Harmey suggests her own aesthetic of systems. Through subtle ways she shows how the ubiquitous systems of contemporary life might be intercepted, interrupted and irritated.

Francis Halsall
www.alittletagend.blogspot.com

Engagement In Spring, 2015, Dublin City Council and Dublin Port invited children to go on a journey.

Fourth and sixth classes from St Lawrence's Girls National School, St Lawrence's Boys National School (Sheriff Street), St Joseph's National School (East Wall) and St Patrick's Girls National School (Ringsend), questioned, explored and responded to Dublin Port as a fascinating area of Dublin City and to how Cliona Harmey developed the public artwork Dublin Ships.



The children, as active researchers, were mentored by a team of professional creative practitioners. Cliona Harmey, visual artist and author of Dublin Ships, Katy Fitzpatrick, art educator, Dr Aislinn O'Donnell, philosopher, and Martina Galvin, visual artist. Each shared their unique practice and some creative strategies with the children. This supported new questions and new understandings to emerge about contemporary art and its close connection to children and their everyday lives.

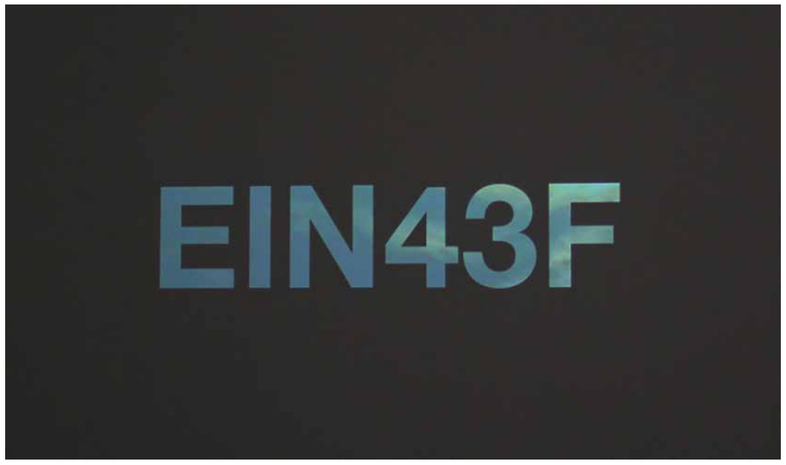
The Scherzer Bridges on the North Quays, one set at Custom House Quay, the other on North Wall Quay, near the Samuel Beckett Bridge, serve as a reminder of the industrial past of the area. These were constructed to a design patented by William Scherzer of Chicago and installed in 1912.

The bridges were built to allow water-based traffic to access the Royal Canal and Spencer Dock, and operated as lock gates between the River Liffey to keep seawater out of the docks and canal.

No longer in use due to the removal of their diesel engines and their roadway surfaces, when operational traffic could be stopped; bridges lifted to allow a ship through and closed again in four and a half minutes. The Scherzer Bridges are a form of

bascule bridge (from the French term for “balance scale”) which uses counterweights to lift the bridges quickly and with the use of relatively little energy. In this case the counterweights are the large rectangular structures (on which the LED signs for Dublin Ships are displayed) and these were filled with water, enabling the bridges to lift.

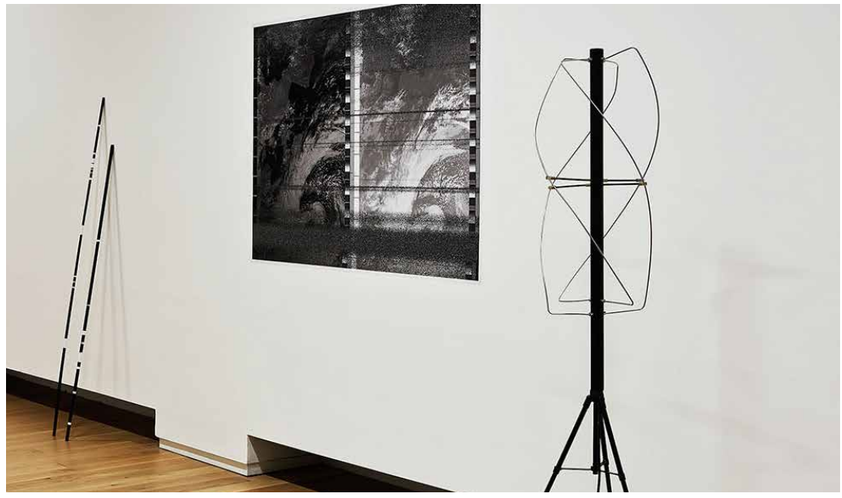
Cliona Harmey has been active as an artist since the mid ‘90s. She studied sculpture at the National College of Art & Design, did a one-year residency at Arthouse Multimedia Centre, a HDip in Computer Science at UCD and has an MA in Visual Art Practices from IADT. She works in the Fine Art - Media Department at NCAD and is based at Pallas Projects/ Studios, Dublin.



Her current work often combines sculpture with live data from transport or communication infrastructure. Recent work has harvested both open satellite and real-time airline information to create works that engage with notions of time and information space. You can see some of her current work in Phoenix Rising, Art and Civic Imagination at Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane until 29 March 2015.

In April 2014 she had a solo show, Troposphere, at Pallas Projects, an exhibition of systems-based sculptural works which were concerned with spatial, broadcast and environmental phenomena (flight data, light, atmospheric pressure).

The works in the show combined sculpture, object hacking, D.I.Y/enthusiast electronics and live transmission. The main projection work in the exhibition used a live-transmission of callsign information received from passing planes — combined with images of the sky — as a form of live electronic writing, updated each time another plane entered the range of the receiver.



Recent work shown at Sirius Arts Centre in Cobh, Co. Cork was made after a visit to Haulbowline Naval Base and explored maritime flag signalling. Other areas of production include smaller scale sculptural work that is often inspired by artefacts of early technological inventions and communication technologies. Other exhibitions include Last, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Into the Light, The Model, Sligo, The Golden Mountain, Tulca 2013, We All Live on the Same Sea, Sirius Arts Centre, Cobh, Unbuilding, Mermaid Arts Centre, Bray, Quantified Self, The LAB, Dublin, The Last Blue Sky, mother’s tankstation, Dublin.

For more information on the artist’s work visit
www.clionaharmey.info

Dublin City Council's Public Art Programme offers opportunities for artists to engage with the city, making new work that responds to the context of Dublin as the capital of Ireland, both an international city and one of communities and localities. The Programme intends to create connections and collaborations between different areas of Dublin City Council's work as well as interconnections between art, city and the public.

www.dublincitypublicart.ie

Curator
Ruairí Ó Cuív is an independent curator and arts consultant who is working as Public Art Manager for Dublin City Council.

Commissioner
Dublin City Council Dublin Ships was commissioned by Dublin City Council as part of the Dublin City Public Art Programme – Strand 2 – Interaction with the City, under the Per Cent for Art Scheme with funding from the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and in partnership with Dublin Port Company and the Dublin Docklands Development Authority.

Programming
Ruadhán O'Donoghue is a web and mobile developer and consultant, based in Berlin and Dublin. He graduated from UCD Computer Science in 1998, and is currently editor and contributor of mobiForge, a developer site focussing on mobile web technologies. Previously he worked at dotMobi as Head of Engineering, creating mobile solutions for companies worldwide. Before that he lectured in Multimedia & Internet Programming at IADT.

Thanks to...
Ruairí Ó Cuív and Niamh O'Doherty at Dublin City Public Art Programme / Dublin City Council / Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government / Ruadhán O'Donoghue for programming / Daniel Cussen at TOG for help and advice re AIS / Przemek Gorzelanczyk of Alpha View Signage / Demitris Memos and Savvas Kampouridis at Marinetraffic.com / Gráinne Shaffrey and Eamonn Kehoe at Shaffrey Associates / Architects Tim Murnane, Hopewell Kawonza and Ross Somers at Punch Murnane Consulting Engineers / Eamonn O'Reilly and Charlie Murphy at Dublin Port Company for support/ Paul McAdam, Paul Cooper, Andrei Katsko, Anthony Rogers, Gary Keville at Traffic Management Limited / Paul Clegg and Clara Hickey at DDDA / Michael Kenny, Senior Engineer / Dublin City Council Waste Water Treatment Plant for hosting an antenna / Matthew Harmey and Patricia Spillane for hosting an antenna / Francis Halsall for writing text / Liz Coman / Brian, Kevin and Johnny at AAD / Feargal Fitzpatrick and the Fine Art - Media Department / David Lacey and the artist's friends and family for support and encouragement.

Vist our website dublinships.ie
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Comhairle Cathrach Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City Council

DUBLIN CITY PUBLIC ART

Comhshaol, Pobal agus Rialtas Áitiúil
Environment, Community and Local Government

COMHLACHT CHALAFORT ÁTHA CLIATH
DUBLIN PORT COMPANY

MarineTraffic