

1. Mark Garry Musicker, interview, *VOLUME, Revue d'art contemporain sur le son*, December 2013, pp. 130-140.
2. Guy Brett (ed.), *Hélio Oiticica*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 1969, non-paginated, artist's text in the end matter.
3. *Experimental Workshop. Japan 1951-1958*, Annely Juda Gallery, London, 2009, non-paginated, reproduced in "A Chronological History".
4. Mark Garry. *Revoir un Printemps*, Galerie du 5e/ Galeries Lafayette, during the Printemps de l'Art Contemporain, Marseille, May-July 2014.
5. *Symphonie Printanière* (Henry Valensi's 'Cine-Painting' with works by Cécile Dauchez, Bernard Pourrière, and the publications *Récits d'Hospitalité de l'Hôtel du Nord* by Christine Breton and éditions commune), Galerie Hors-Les-Murs, Marseille, May-July 2014.
6. Mike Weaver, "Henry Valensi and Symphonie Printanière", *Image*, October 1965.

"Life is a lot like jazz... it's best when you improvise."

George Gershwin

Mark Garry's generative, process-based and space-sensitive work finds its tempo in intuitive improvisations with sound and space. Fabricated or found, natural or manufactured materials are transformed through often slow, repetitive and nearly ritualistic haptic processes and consolidation. His drawings replicate geometric systems. The moment of making activates the frequency of future artworks and energises the spaces Garry intervenes in. Whether they are ephemeral or become permanent works, the plants, feathers, wood, steel, metal or cotton thread, plastic or vinyl he uses take on their rhythmic tonality and meaning. Some of these processes are based on learning and practicing traditional crafts such as carving, origami, weaving, engraving. Others employ more modern or contemporary techniques and technologies such as musical mechanisms or instruments, or creating music and producing records. A late 1970s and 1980s RTÉ documentary series by David and Sally Shaw-Smith on Irish crafts called *HANDS* was one of many great early sources of information and influence. The importance of respecting the inner sap and specificity of organic materials is widely discussed. Garry hears these internal logics to which he applies poetic disruption or assemblage. One key stated reference in terms of sculptural materiality and finding balance in allowing different elements to relate in order to activate a space is Michael Warren's work and installations, in interior spaces in particular. Their vocabulary and appreciation for materials have deep-rooted connections though their artworks could appear diametrically different considering density vis-à-vis weightlessness.

Garry borrows cultural musicologist Christopher Small's term "musician" to describe his role and activism between art forms.¹ It implies a multi-tasking involvement in all aspects of music-making and every detail of its diffusion and reception. His work is fundamentally inspired by music, its openness and accessibility. He identifies it as the most democratic art form and hails its fluidity, with a particular fondness for radio broadcasting and its capacity for propagation. Projects regularly integrate the various stages of music development: rehearsals, composition, performance, recording and sharing. This collaborative work has led to ambitious projects and sonic events such as *Sending Letters to the Sea*, a Fingal County Council commission in 2010, *A Generous Act*, an exhibition at The Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh in 2010, and *Drift* at Horseshoe Bay in West Cork in 2012. He researches music history and its links to

religious or regal power and world migrations. Popular, classical and folk music as well as jazz and its countless offshoots are essential to his broad repertoire. Interested in jazz in particular, and its defiance towards the Western classical music canons, Garry seeks to emulate its process-based chance-determined creative modes.

Interactive creativity finds its extension in his site-specific installations that intersect or occupy spaces. Variable two or three-dimensional elements are combined in ambient arrangements, in relational dialogues between each other and the viewer. These tangible, textural, linear, flat, sequential, audible notes tend towards minimalism. The spaces in-between are animated or vitalised to vibrate and visually exist. The rainbow spectrum of multi-coloured threads reverberating through space is his most well-known device. *How Soon Is Now* was installed in the Irish pavilion at the 2005 Venice Biennale, curated by Sarah Glennie in the Scuola di San Pasquale. In 2008, *Being Here* operated its magic at The Mattress Factory Art Museum in Pittsburgh. The titles speak of simultaneity and direct experience. The viewer is drawn into a visual *carpe diem*, which unashamedly strikes emotional chords. Garry often employs sailing vocabulary and notably the verb "to navigate". *Wave* (1943–4), Barbara Hepworth's inspired masterpiece in the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art collection in Edinburgh, with strings connecting the concave carved wood volume, also slips between reality and abstraction. The air, the absence, the void is materialised to full effect, the articulation pulsating like sound waves would.

These works share formal and conceptual connections with an international web of Kinetic or Op art which began in the mid 1950s. Julio Le Parc, Hélio Oiticica, Jesús Soto, Victor Vasarely could be mentioned for example for their interest in psycho-physiology, perception and illusions, movement and the environment. The experiential, all-embracing walk through Penetrables similarly operated high demands of the viewer's senses and physical presence. In 1969 Hélio Oiticica wrote: "I consider as simple 'sensorial' problems those related to 'stimulus-reaction' feelings, conditioned 'a priori', as occurs in Op-art and those eras related to it (either those with mechanical stimulus, or natural stimulus as in Calder's mobiles where natural physical laws determine its mobility and affect the spectator sensorially). But when a proposition is made for a 'feeling-participation' or a 'making-participation', I want to relate it to a supra-sensorial sense, in which the participator will elaborate

within himself his own feelings which have been 'woken-up' by those propositions."² The Brazilian Neo-Concrete and Tropicalismo movements appear as useful comparators for Mark Garry's multi-disciplinary practice bridging between music, poetry, and the visual arts. His phenomenological approach veers from celebratory to melancholy, encouraging a contemplative mood.

Parallels could equally be drawn with the Fluxus movement and here I would like to mention the *Musique Concrète / Electronic Music Audition* organised under the auspices of the Experimental Workshop (Jikken kōbō) at Yamaha Hall, Tokyo, February 1956. They were merging events, happenings, art exhibitions in concert venues, including Katsuhiro Yamaguchi's ropes which aimed "to turn exhibition space into environmental art"³

Mark Garry was commissioned by The Thomas Devlin Fund to make a monumental permanent thread-piece in the central atrium space of the MAC, a new arts venue in Belfast. *The Permanent Present* (2012) stretches in different directions across the space, simultaneously connecting it and opening it out, sometimes disappearing from view depending on the viewer's position. Garry described it thus: "I wanted to create a work that is both positive and hopeful. I hope that it engages with and activates this space in the MAC in a manner that is both generous and spectacular. My motivation stems from a desire to articulate artworks that foreground empathy and a search for universality."

Aware of Garry's fascination for hip-hop and the non-hierarchical nature of his practice, I invited him to investigate a gallery in a department store in the French Mediterranean city of Marseille in 2014. The title of this solo show, *Revoir Un Printemps*⁴, referred to the title of a song by the famous Marseillais rappers IAM in 2003, translatable as "seeing spring again". The lyrics describe harsh living conditions and the hope emanating from children's smiles. Searching to lodge his work in local materials, Garry was introduced to the peripheral Northern districts of Marseille by urban designer Imke Plinta, where they collected the urban weeds growing in the rubble at the foot of housing estates. Thus nature filtered into the cultural/commercial context of the gallery sprouting up like two islands from the parquet floor—at first freshly green, then slowing and yellowing during the show to introduce the summer bake. *Rise and Shine World* (2014), this installation of wild flowers and plants,

created a resonance with the lively view of the rooftops from this fifth floor space. A minuscule fluorescent pink hand-cut vinyl silhouette of the shadow cast by one of the plants seems to grow from the bottom corner of a wall in a gregarious thrust for survival: *A Beckoning to the Self* (2014) speaks of vulnerability and force. An abstract geometric design with stretched thread, *It Echoes* (2014), pays an ecstatic homage to the four members of the band; and in a dark adjacent room, visitors could activate Garry's specially dedicated punched paper composition through a componium and listen to *More Hand Habits* (2014). Imagined as a portrait of the song, levels of visual and sonic interpretation and re-interpretation loop and abound, reality and fiction alternate. In the chillingly titled *Some Stories Persist* (2014), Garry pinned a found piano paper roll into draping folds cascading down a wall. The printed content consisted of American Plantation songs such as *But is it so*, composed by Scott-Gatty.

In direct dialogue with *Revoir Un Printemps*, I simultaneously curated another project entitled *Symphonie Printanière 5* with the eponymous thirty-five minute long silent cine-painting by French artist born in Algeria Henry Valensi, made between 1936 and 1960. Thousands of celluloids went into the composition of this nearly psychedelic motion picture. It is possible that Walt Disney saw early versions of this animated painting (based on an actual oil on canvas by Valensi dated 1932) prior to making *Fantasia* (1940). Inspired by, or parallel with, movements such Cubo-Futurism, Orphism, Simultaneism and Rayonism for instance, Valensi was one of the founders of Musicalism, which was mostly forgotten until the Centre Pompidou devoted a room to Valensi's work in their collection display last year to great acclaim. The manifesto published in Paris on 4 March 1932 by Valensi and Charles Blanc-Gatti, Gustave Bourgogne and Vilo Stracquadini and then reproduced in *Comœdia* (17 April 1932) included the following statement: "But, the art which offers the most dynamism, rhythm, harmony, science, synthesis... is Music". An article in the 1960s states that "The term 'musicalism' was derived from the adjective, not the noun, and was intended as descriptive of the impulse towards actual visual rhythm."⁶

Earlier on in 2014 a long residency at The Model in Sligo enabled Garry to build up towards his exhibition "A Winter Light" and research their collection. Mainie Jellett's *The Assumption* was

painted in 1937 in a Cubist style adapted for the Irish context with Catholic subject matter. This oil on canvas and its palette gave the tone to the thread piece Garry made for this project. The free interpretation of a painting of major importance in a country whose art history is still mostly unknown beyond its shores signals culturally engaged interrogations. What first appears as an abstract gesture stems from art historical and contextual considerations. Garry articulated his concerned observation of the general carelessness between the people of Ireland and their complex relation with their heritage since their independence in the 1920s. *History Windows* (2014), installations comprising a frame with threads and beads instead of canvas, have roots in numerous crafts, including needlework or decorative textile arts carried out by upper-class Anglo-Irish women in the 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as in the American Indian dream-catchers with reference to their specific symbolism. It's as if he was searching to capture the disappeared histories of a once dispossessed people, reconnect the dots, fill in the gaps, suspend disbelief and reconstitute awareness of the firmly embedded and existing cultural wealth and common creative terrain. Beyond the apparent lightness of touch, Garry's works exude emancipatory socio-political undertones that recall his active involvement as a unifying cultural programmer, producer and curator in Dublin in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Functionality is an essential texture in his quest to allow viewers to imagine and forge actuality through a different prism.

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Mark Garry

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