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[Features](#) [Reviews](#) **Review: Unlimited: Sinéad O'Donnell's 'CAUTION'**

6 September 2012

Sinéad O'Donnell's Unlimited commission CAUTION explores notions of identity, similarity and difference through journeys, actions and performance in real-time and online resulting in an exhibition of installation and performance. Colin Hambrook took part in the performance in the Royal Festival Hall on 1 September

Of all artforms Live Performance Art is the most likely to take you out of your comfort zone. It is the most challenging medium, in terms of making its audience examine their relationship to who and what they are engaging with.

I've spent several days mulling over the Unlimited commission 'CAUTION' presented by Sinéad O'Donnell with five other international performance artists.

Responding to a space within a function room in the Royal Festival Hall and armed with an assortment of objects and materials the six individuals went into a series of - on the face of it - ad-hoc actions and responses to each other, which outside (and possibly inside) of the performance space would be read as challenges to 'normative' behaviour.

There was a charged atmosphere in the room and a sense of interloping on an intimate journey between six artists. Near the entrance Poshya Kakil was engaged in wrapping a structural



Material Measure made as part of the collaborative process that resulted in Sinéad O'Donnell's exhibition, CAUTION

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letters into a green wooden table while Sinéad O'Donnell proceeded to take a saw and to cut small chunks from the table top.

Mariel Carranza had taken hold of a large chunk of raw meat and proceeded to sew sections of the joint together with needle and thread. In a corner Shiro Masuyama, dressed in a white radioactive protection suit and mask was balancing small square chunks of blue polystyrene material on top of each other to build four towers on the corners of a chair. The sixth artist Sylvette Babin was dressed in a check jacket which she compulsively tore at with a scraper, collecting the large distressed off-cuts of wool into a porcelain bowl.

In trying to make sense of what was happening in front of me brought me in mind of a quote by Quentin Crisp: "Everyone knows the uses of the useful, but nobody knows the uses of the useless". It's an observation that comes to me in moments of nervousness when I feel dislocated and unable to grasp a sense of self. It's a comfort to remind myself that no-matter how useless or incapable I might feel, there is always another reading beyond immediately obvious value systems.

The performance put me in mind of how much of what we do in our everyday lives is ultimately pointless. Whether it is to fulfil a brief, to conceal or control potential for harm or disfavour; whether it is done to serve a rule or enhance a value system, at the end of the journey when the tillerman gets paid, how much meaning is left?

As the actions developed I began to notice clues in the fabric of the room, signs that perhaps I had been invited to stay for a reason. The tense visceral beat of the action continued. Paul took a sheet of ice which he lay on the table. He lay his hand on the ice and proceeded to create an imprint over the next 30 minutes, as Sinéad - her face smeared with red paint - continued to saw bits from the table, doing her best not to rock Paul's concentration. She talked briefly about women in Islamic countries being congratulated on their wedding night, by being told "to paint their faces red".

On the wall were a number of scrawled instructions; potential plans for the performance as it developed. Sinéad wrote a small note: "I am exorcising the rapist from within my heart." After that searing interaction, all the actions appeared to relate to trauma and displacement; and the emotional turmoil it creates. Sylvette continued to tear away at her outer layers adding to the meaning in terms of boundaries, invisible, territorial, physical, geographical.

Mariel lay on the floor and began pounding the raw meat on to her chest. How do you resolve a sense of your own reality when the world continually objectifies who and what you are? More metaphors arose, presenting the impact of distress on the sense of self when your cultural references are pulled apart.

Shiro walked over to a point where a gap presented itself in the sheet covering the entire surface of the floor. He proceeded to force himself under the sheet and to try to work his way

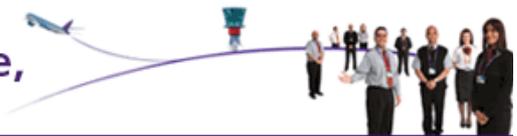
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carrying the meat. Sinéad bared her chest and began to work a sheet of pink plastic into a bridal veil, using pieces of the sawed wood for a makeshift frame for the veil she taped around her head.

The ritual sense of repeated actions, building and transforming slowly, existed in another dimension, somewhere between the coming together of six people from four continents, searching for shared awareness of each others' experience. There were many ways of reading the work, but to my mind the discourse running through CAUTION can be summed up in a quote from Sinead O'Donnell: "None of us are free if we are all not free together."

Sinéad O'Donnell's CAUTION continues on a daily basis in [The Royal Festival Hall](#) until 9 September.

Delivering out-of-this-world service,



aaron williamson / 10 September 2012

Thats a great piece writing Colin.

Sign Dance Collective / 8 September 2012

I wish Id seen this ! It sounds amazing , and , , , , ,

Sue Austin / 8 September 2012

Colin, thank you for this thought provoking and revealing exploration of what you saw and experienced. It echoes much of what I too perceived but it also further elaborates the power and privelege of being able to access work that has time and duration as (what seems to me) an essential element of the work as I experienced completely different actions and interactions when I entered the space where Caution is sited. I felt transported into an ambiguous space that hovered between the external and internal emotional, psychological, conceptual and spiritual dimensions; a space of exploration, expression and becoming.

For me it opened up metaphors of how one engages with and transcends experiences that impact on, traumatise and reshape our identities. Questions then arose, as I watched, about how this event then travels with us out into the world, mediating how I and others then process these dialogues in our own lives. It will continue to live and grow in my memory!

Katherine Araniello / 7 September 2012

Thank you for this good article and placing the work into an intelligent context. I think this work is difficult to comprehend and I feel that on an immediate level it is only too easy to make obvious assumptions with little thought. But once you start peeling back the layers if one can allow themselves enough time to do this then the work is engaging and mentally stimulating. The first feeling I had when entering the room was that I had entered into a mental asylum and this would be the vibe one would experience if they were in a genuine mental asylum. I didn't have a problem with that feeling but there was more than just the immediate feeling. Whilst sitting in the room I felt a sense of relaxation – especially because the room was tucked away in the Queen Elizabeth Hall away from all the buzz and cabaret type entertainment. I liked this experience because it was detached from normative behaviour, the artists do not work to a script and the objects in the room serve as a catalyst as to what may or may not happen next.

I like a sense of unpredictability and zero expectations of the viewer. All boundaries have been removed – we can wander around as freely as we wish – there are no rules and the artists demand nothing of the observer. Being around art that makes you think and analyse is refreshing and liberating. It rejects the normality of life in favour of something else that sits well away from what we are used to – for me it is perfect because I don't and never will sit within the normality of life and to occupy a space in which negates comprehensible rules of existence is a welcoming experience.

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18 February 2013

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