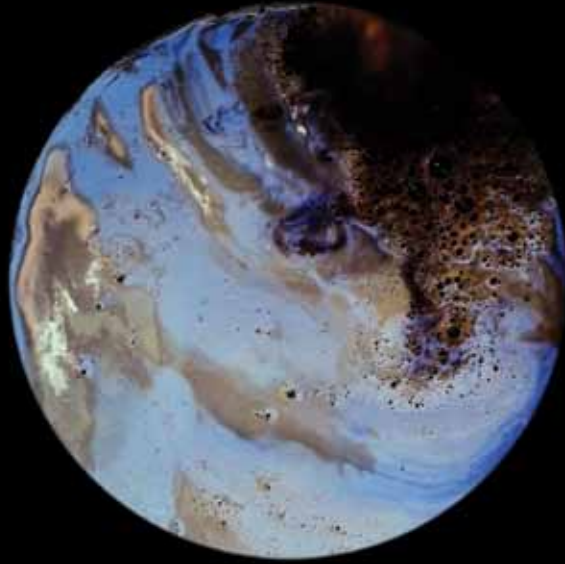


Conor McFeely: Weathermen

Abridged 33 -- Undercurrents



Abridged 0 – 33: Undercurrents

*When the Wind Blows:* A volcano erupted and it became a different world. Suddenly getting from A to B became interesting and very difficult. The 2010 eruption of Eyjafjallajökull in Iceland which, although relatively small for volcanic eruptions, caused enormous disruption to air travel across western and northern Europe over an initial period of six days in April 2010. We suddenly couldn't trust our technology to perform in the face of something so apparently innocuous as a dust-cloud. It had been as people always informed us 'a small world'. Except suddenly it wasn't; there was a rapid expansion of time and space and the world was big again – distance suddenly appeared in the forefront of consciousness again – to the horror of many either too young to remember when journeys actually took days and were expensive or too complacent in their trust in modern convenience. History and Geography suddenly intervened in (literally) an explosive manner. Maps had to be looked at again, routes considered; for many lost to conscious forms of transport (buses, trains and boats) had to be taken.

*You Don't Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows:* During the 2010 Eyjafjallajökull eruption there were comparisons made with a previous Icelandic eruption in 1783/84 which had caused food shortages in Europe and may have been a contributing factor to the environment which spurred on revolutionary activities. The original idea of a project that forced us to consider the fragility of contemporary technological dependency originated during the Icelandic volcanic hysteria. As with many Abridged projects it evolved and took in other contemporary paranoia. We decided that Conor McFeely's Weathermen project could be tied into a project exploring sudden and unexpected violent interventions in our complacency. In Weathermen the artist investigates a US based anti-imperialist terrorist organisation originating in the ferment of the 1960's which aimed to shake through violence the (in particular) white American public out of what they considered complacency in regard to the Vietnam conflict, American imperialism as well as what they thought of a class-based racist and sexist society. Unexpected and violent interruptions both natural and man-made have become a regular if none the less shocking occurrences in our lives. Abridged is not focusing upon the scientific causes of or political/religious/social ideologies behind these interventions but rather our interest lies in the response to them, the hysteria, suspicion and paranoia amongst those participating and from the media and public in their aftermath. Abridged in this instance would like to thank the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, The British Council, Franklin College, Lugano, The Golden Thread Gallery, The Verbal Arts Centre as well as Gabriel Gee and of course the artist, Conor McFeely.

Gregory McCartney



ART..LINK



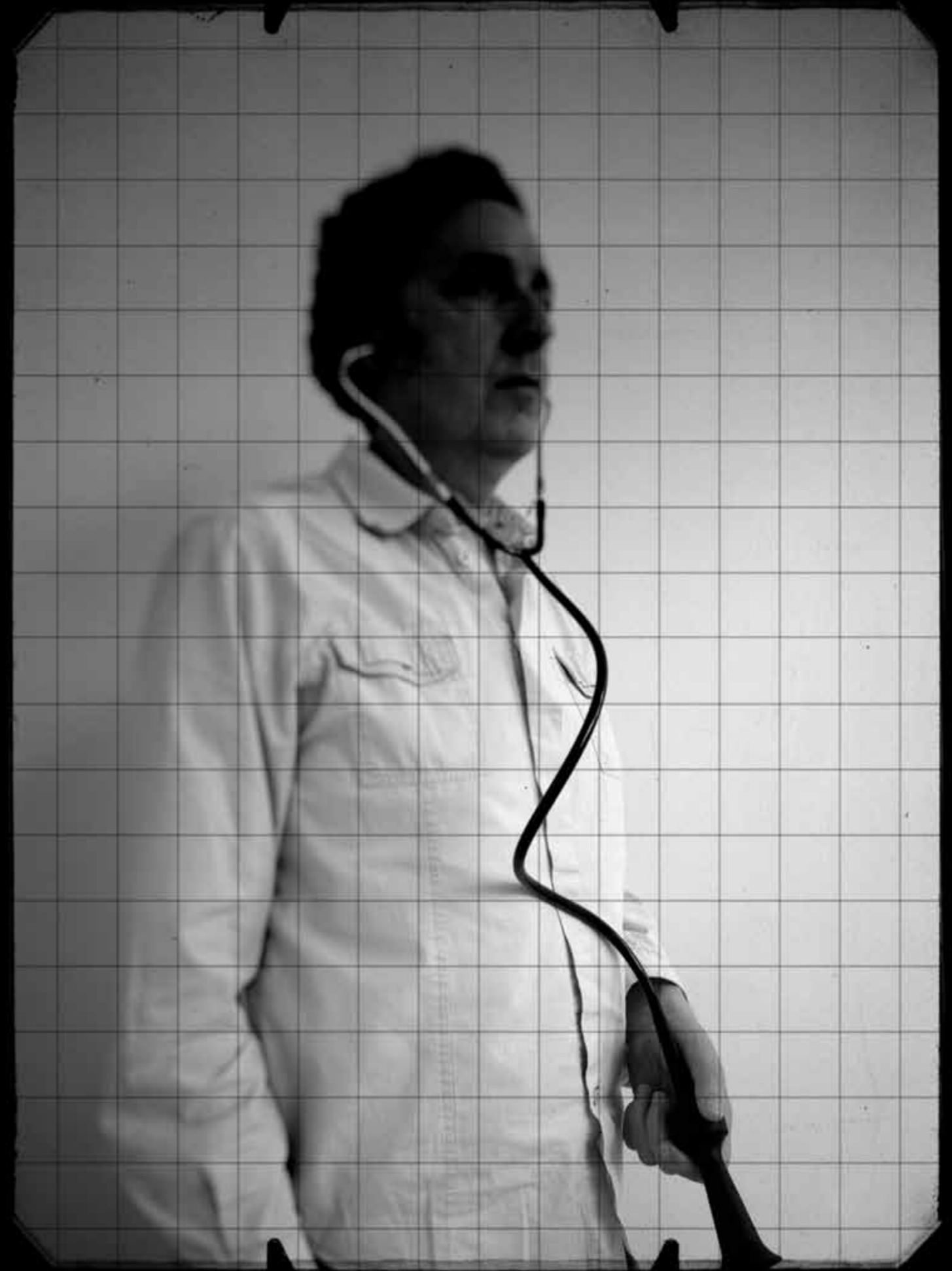
*'And if you analyse the human body, all you're left with is water and a few dozen little heaps of matter floating around in it.'* (Robert Musil, *The man without qualities*, Picador Edition, Pan Books London, 1979, p.72)

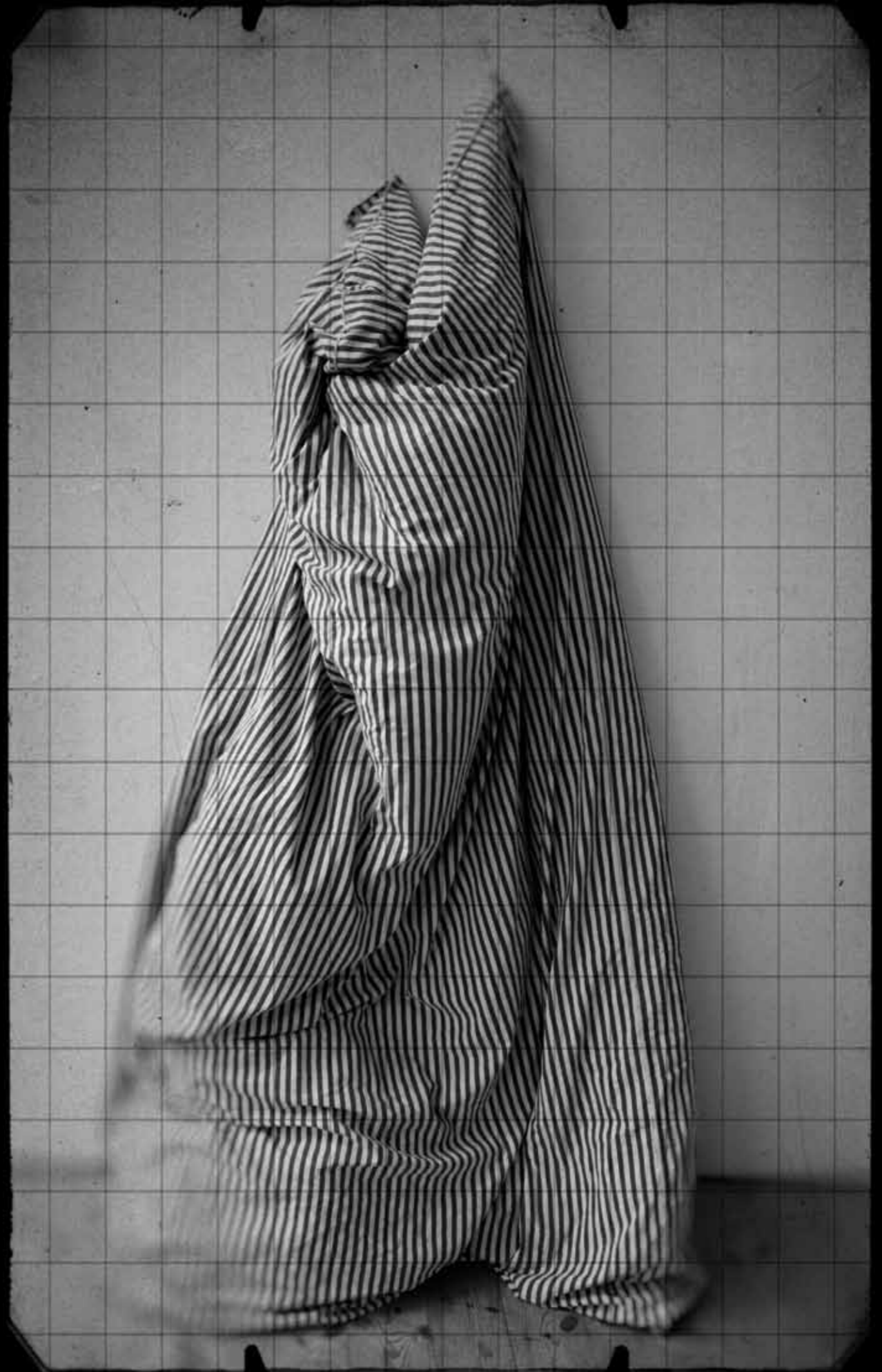
On a pitch black background, a perfect circle of light. In the circle, extraordinary changes of textures and colour take place, alternating rapid fluctuations with moments of relative plenitude. The changes often arise from within, while an external force also appears to exert pressure from above. Is there a God-like figure whose omnipotent silhouette might be seen reflected in the moody surface of the world? Is God, if it is him, one? Or has he got an assistant? Is he a he, or a she, or perhaps given the obscure nature of his reflection a it? The ring of atmospheric change is elusive, it alternates contemplative mood with furious activity. If there is a supernatural force, standing out of the ring in a very similar position to that of the observer perusing the unfolding events, it remains unclear whether it has effectively any control over the tumults underneath. It might well be, as the 12th Century medieval scholar Thierry de Chartres argued, that following the creation of the world, the divine entity no longer plays a role in the subsequent unravelling of the world. Once matter (earth, fire, air and water) was created, it turned into the heavens from which emerged an autonomous causal sequence leading to the formation of life on earth.

Indeed, while the changes might be taking place on the macro-level of cosmological entities (the heavens, the earth, the moon, the universe), they could also well be grounded on a much more modest scale. If stuff is being poured into the world, the world may well be a mouth, swallowing the weather conditions, and, seemingly, evacuating it somewhere beneath the surface of visible things. Yet be it from the heavens above to an invisible belly below, the material world is composed of components that adhere, slide and fold into one another. Leucippus and Democritus had called them atoms, describing them as being always in motion. From a bubbling darkness to golden hues, the ring displays an ever-changing world not too dissimilar from the 5th century BCE conceptions of Heraclitus. True, this world is moved not so much by fire, but by a combination of the four elements, within which water has the upper hand.

*"Non datur tertium sive medium inter duo contradictoria; in plain English: the individual is either capable of acting contradictory to the law or he is not, for between two contraries there is no third or middle term."* (R. Musil, p. 287)

A stern character dressed in a white medical robe is seen from beneath in three-quarter view, holding a stethoscope. Its pendant stands immediately across the room: a bust of a face cryptically wearing black sunglasses and adorned with an iron cross imprinted on its forehead. The man's gaze is hidden from our inspection, and so are any of the thoughts it might have reflected. But there is a beer in front of him. A glass full of dark stout with a shimmering layer of foam at the top. And there is the cross of course, a reminder of men's mortal condition, and an indication, perhaps, as to the combustible nature of his body.







*"And Pray to God to have mercy upon us*

*And pray that I may forget*

*These matters that with myself I too much discuss*

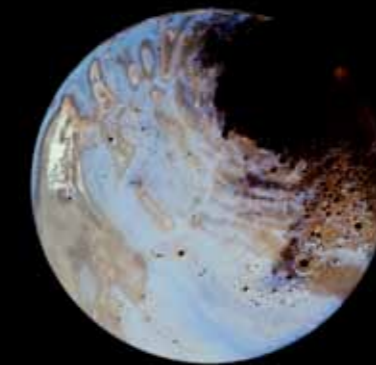
*Too much explain*

*Because I do not hope to turn again" (T.S Eliot Ash Wednesday 1930)*

The stoic necrophilic aura of the redeemer is contrasted by the healing halo of the medicine man. He bears the instrument of his trade, which will enable him to probe beyond the silent surface of things and unveil the truth therein. Except that the contours of his garment and his features do seem slightly blurred on the edge. Not quite unlike those of his impenetrable nemesis in front of him. Is this doctor really the man he claims to be? When you think of it, is there not something sinister to his appearance? Both figures are seen through a geometrical and regular grid pattern. The use of such grids had become popular more than five centuries ago when painters strived to depict the world perceived through the eyes 'truthfully' onto the two dimensional surface of the canvas. Alberti first described a 'veil' used to construct the pyramid eye in *Della Pittura* (1435), while we have knowledge of various perspective machines devised by Albrecht Dürer through the publication of his 1525 treatise on measurement. In the 19th century, John Lamprey developed a similar grid pattern to be used by the growing scientific curiosity of anthropology and the nascent photographic medium. This "method of measuring the human form" (1869) inherited from the humanist Renaissance frames the photographic revelation of the scientist and the redeemer. It echoes the attention of the circular eye-shaped video projection encountered above. And yet the grid struggles to ascertain precisely the differing nature of these two figures. Between what is seen but hidden by the sunglasses, and what is heard as a profoundly internal and personal experience, the gap is not as wide as might have first appeared. Indeed, there is a also a pint arranged for the doctor, though it lays above him rather than in front of him, as a material idea to be grasped not so dissimilar to the high principles that might or might not determine the patterns of the world (*The oak Tree*, Michael Craig Martin, 1973).

"There was a depression over the Atlantic, it was travelling eastward towards an area of high pressure over Russia and showed no tendency to move northwards around it" (R. Musil, p.3)

A view over the rooftops. The shot is mostly static, with occasionally short and brisk accidents, and a notable inversion with an upside down view of a graveyard. Over the rooftops, one sees the rapid and distant fluxes of vehicles, the still landscape of Northern Ireland and the changing patterns of cloud formation in the sky above:







*No wonder the storm clouds, so fast and thick,  
Darkening field and sea, slide up so quick  
Since from the blow-holes of the outer spheres,  
As in our own windpipes, our glands and pores,  
The elements come and go, mysterious and opaque,  
Through ducts and channels, rooms and corridors,  
As if in a house of opening, closing doors.” (Lucretius, *On clouds*, translation by Derek Mahon, *Harbour Lights*, Gallery book 2005)*

How Irish is this weather? The coastal conditions depicted by day and night are openly placed under a dual aegis: the weathermen and the opening lines of *The man without qualities*, Robert Musil’s 1930s unfinished exploration of essence, alteration and communication. The weather, as Lucretius put it, connects the outer spheres with the microscopic division and aggregation of bodies. Conduits lead from one scale to another, and from Derry to the United States, across the ocean wide. The title of the installation refers specifically to the 1960s and 1970s American clandestine revolutionary group, who aimed to topple the exiting political regime to replace it with the dictatorship of the proletariat. It would be in a “house of opening, closing doors”, underneath the rooftops, beyond the wall in the back garden, that hidden from the surveillance radar, plotters could devise the paths leading to combustion. A calm, albeit perhaps moody day, and then suddenly, perhaps, a force for change.

In the great scheme of things that connects the cosmos to the liquid flexibility of terrestrial bodies, the weathermen observe the weather, whose future they will try to inflect. The depression over the Atlantic lingered for a decade before reaching its climax on the eastern shores. Musil however, was thinking of another historical momentum when setting the stage for the reflections of Ulrich. The reader first encounters the man without qualities as he stands behind the window of his living room, looking at the circulation of people and vehicles in the streets of Vienna, “estimating the speed, the angle, the dynamic force of masses being propelled past”. This gauging of volumes in movement takes place on “a fine August day of 1913”. Periods, as scalar configurations, overlap each other. The history of eventful narratives (the wars) mingles with the imperceptible transformations of a given milieu (changes in the atmospheric pressure), and it is those moments of transition that *Weathermen* attempts to capture, in all their mercurial quality.

Gabriel Gee















IT WAS EIGHT OCLOCK ALONG THE GREENWICH MERIDIAN.

IN ENGLAND THE WINTRY SUN OF 7TH JANUARAY WAS JUST RISING.

HE WENT BACK TO THE BLACKBOARD AND WROTE

MASS OF CLOUD  
1.3 X 10 GRAMS.....

COMPOSITION OF CLOUDS PROBABLY HYDROGEN GAS FOR THE MOST PART IN NEU-  
TRAL FORM

I AM MADE OUT OF WATER. YOU WOULDN'T KNOW IT BECAUSE I HAVE IT  
BOUND IN.

MY FRIENDS ARE ARE MADE OUT OF WATER, TOO. ALL OF THEM. THE PROBLEM IS  
THAT NOT  
ONLY DO WE HAVE TO WALK AROUND WITHOUT BEING ABSORBED BY THE GROUND BUT  
WE ALSO  
HAVE TO EARN OUR LIVINGS.

POLICE HAVE MADE EXHAUSTIVE INQUIRIES ABOUT STAFF AND  
GUESTS AT THE HOTEL. THEY HAVE  
ESTABLISHED THAT SOMEONE WHO STAYED IN ROOM 629 FOR THREE DAYS ABOUT TH-  
THREE WEEKS BEFORE  
THE EXPLOSION HAD GIVEN A FALSE ADDRESS.

INQUIRIES TO TRACE HIM AND OTHER INQUIRIES RELATED TO ELECTRONIC DEVICES  
RECOVERED FROM THE HOTEL  
ARE CONTINUING.

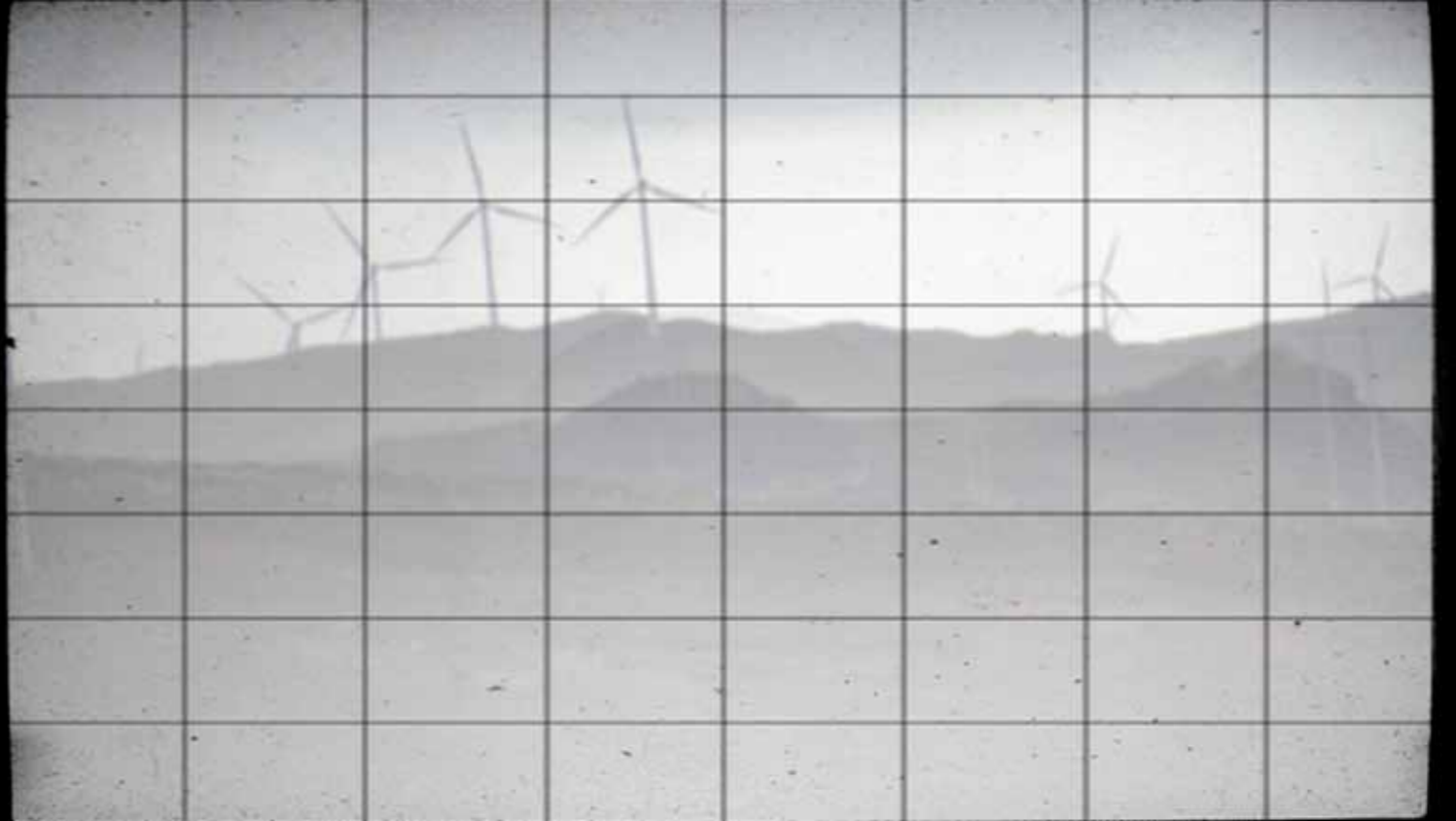
HE FLEW BACK WITH A THREE HOUR STOP AT ORLY. HE HAD DECIDED WHAT HE  
WAS GOING TO DO. HE WAS GOING TO  
REFUND MR GREENS RETAINER, MINUS TRAVEL EXPENSES, AND TELL HIM THE ACTUAL  
KILLERS  
WERE DEAD IN THE PLANE CRASH.

.....NOTHING FURTHER HE COULD DO

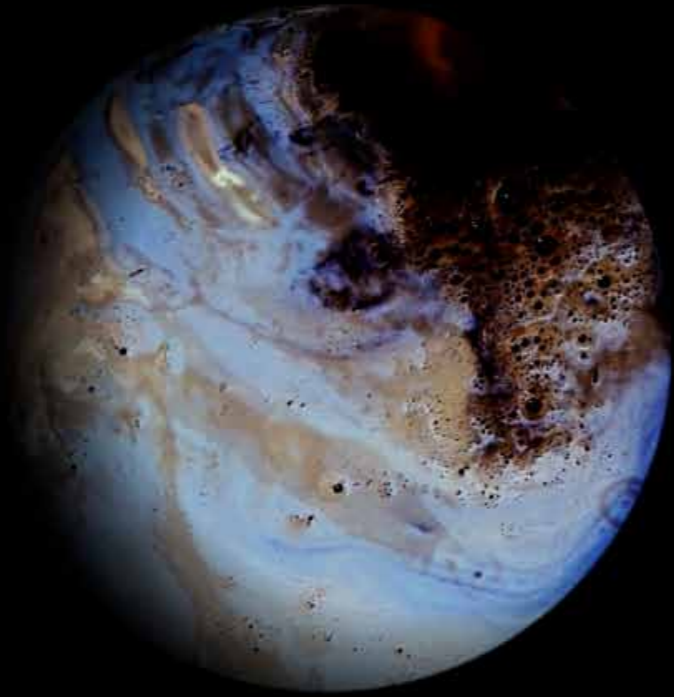
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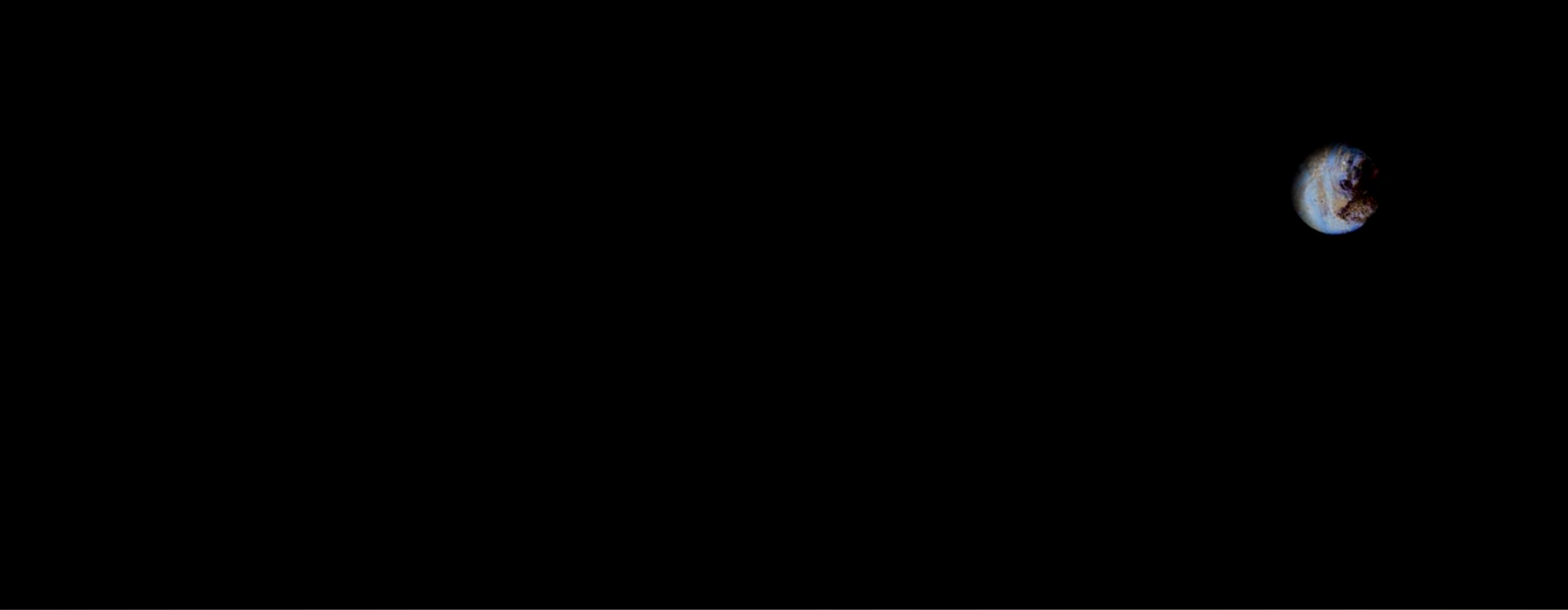


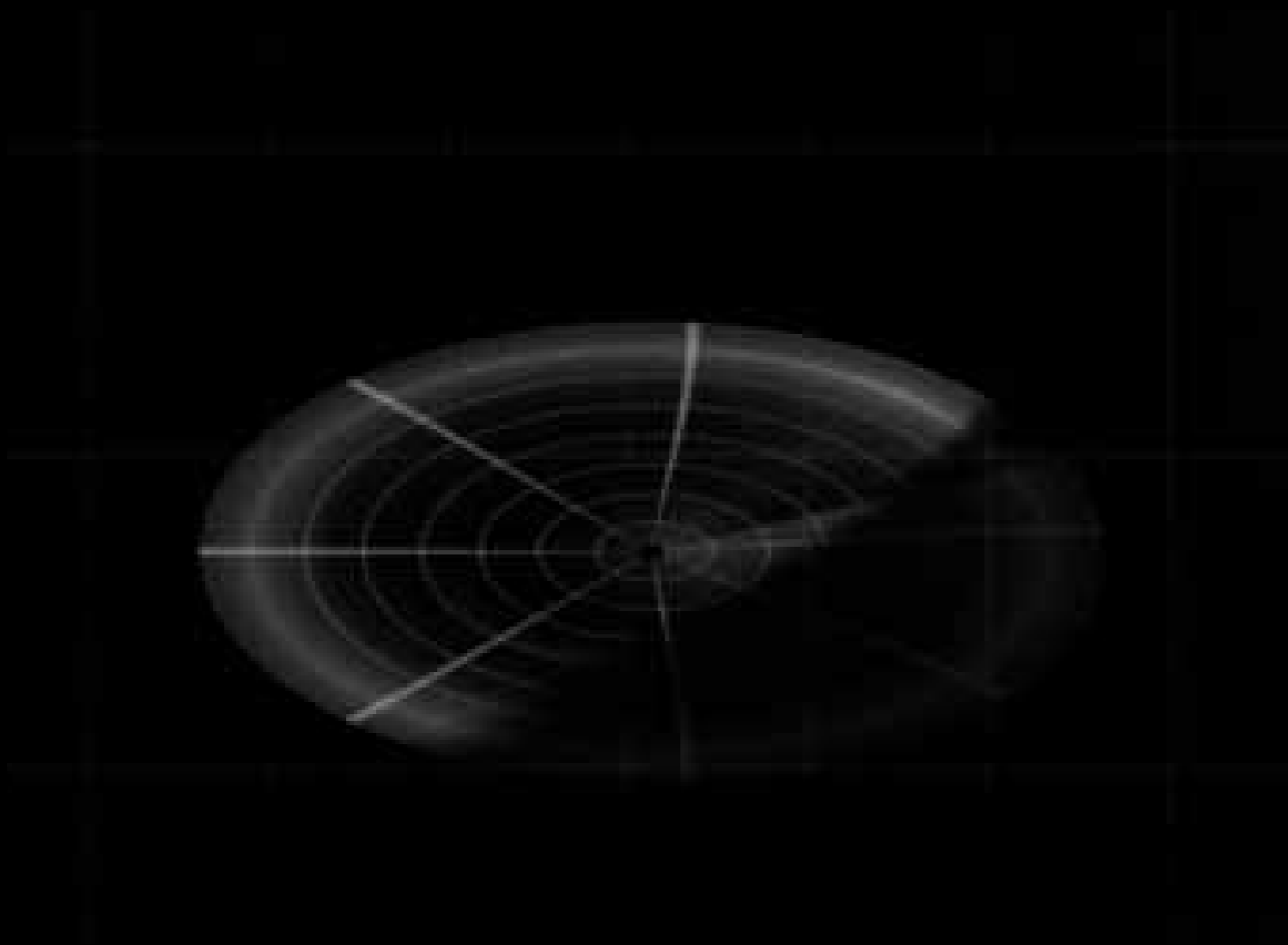
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Weathermen was conceived during a residency at NKD (Nordic Arts Centre) in Norway in 2012 and subsequent versions have since been shown at 126 Gallery, Galway as part of the Tulca Festival, Franklin College Lugano, Switzerland, The Golden Thread Gallery, Belfast and Fort Dunree, Donegal. The artist thanks all of the above for their support in making this possible.

Conor McFeely  
[mentalimage.org.co.uk](http://mentalimage.org.co.uk)

