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The Middle Kingdom

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THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

Killian Dunne

INTRODUCTION

In 2018, I entered the final year of my Master of Fine Arts in Visual Communications at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). During this period, I was still trying to define what a self-directed design practice could be. I had come from a fine print etching background and any design work I had done in my life had been design solutions for clients. Self-directed design seemed to be a practice that resided somewhere between these two spaces.

Exactly 20 years previously, I had completed my end-of-school examinations in Ireland. I received my six exam results on a small piece of printed paper. Despite the huge amount of pressure put on students regarding these exams, this small piece of paper never did me any good; over the past 20 years, it had only brought negativity. I felt I had left school knowing more about football (the local obsession) than the six subjects I had studied (English, Irish, art, history, maths, and music). For my SAIC Graduate Show project, I decided to redesign my small exam results page, transforming it from something with negative associations into a series of artists' books that would have a positive function in my life. Each book would explore one of the six subjects and be based on a real game of football from history. Each book would examine the original school subject through the lens of the real game from history, but in a manner that would be beneficial to my creative practice. They would have the dimensions of the football match day programmes I had grown up reading. They would use the same page grid system, the same exam-like paper stock, the same book cover styling, and the same type of faces but would be completely different books in their visual languages.

The following digitally printed artists' books were presented at the SAIC Graduate Show in the Sullivan Galleries, Chicago 2019.

MUSIC EXAM: ENGLAND 3-0 SCOTLAND, 11 NOVEMBER 2016

My music exam was reimagined as a photo essay artist book that explores the 2016 World Cup qualifier at Wembley Stadium between England and Scotland. Before the game, both sides had decided to defy FIFA rulings regarding political symbols by insisting that their players wear poppy emblems on their armbands. Football Association Chief Executive Martin Glenn declared, 'Our moral position's certainly right' (Gibson, 2016) while the players' poppy armbands ironically covered the UEFA 'Respect' badges on their jerseys. An objective of the 'Respect' programme is to 'support local communities, tackle social issues and work towards unity and respect across gender, race, religion and ability' (Chaplin, 2016).

This topic was chosen for the music exam as the poem 'In Flanders Field', which inspired remembrance poppies, went through several evolutions, most notably its early transformation from poem to song (from artwork to propaganda tool) in 1917. The simplification of history and the more recent transformations of the poppy into poppy pyjamas, poppy football mascots, and nationalist banners are explored in this book.

ART EXAM: IRELAND 1 - 0 WALES, 24 MARCH 2007

For this artist book, I wanted to explore ideas regarding political art and audience by using football stadiums, football players' identities, and football news media as a contrasting lens. 'Art Exam' examines the highly unusual connections between the Irish artist Patrick

Ireland and Irish footballer Stephen Ireland. Using the 1920 Bloody Sunday and the 1972 Bloody Sunday as a starting point for the two men's strange bond, this book contrasts the often unsuccessful intentions of artists to raise political awareness through artmaking and the footballers' unintentional raising of political issues through the inherited narratives found in international sports competitions.

In 1972, to protest the events of Bloody Sunday in Northern Ireland, the Irish artist Brian O'Doherty adopted the name Patrick Ireland, an artistic act that 'not many people notice' (Kimmelman, 2008). In 2007, the Gaelic games stadium Croke Park opened its doors to soccer for the first time since the 1920 Bloody Sunday massacre took place there. The hugely symbolic winning goal in this historic game would be scored by Ireland's exciting new young player, the appropriately named Stephen Ireland.

The book uses a wandering, farce-like storytelling narrative to present the real-life events that connect the artist and the footballer. The authenticity of the book's biographical narrative is thrown into question by photoshopped photographs that support the written narrative. These photoshopped images act as a play not only on the age-old romantic biography of the artist in art history but also on the narratives so often placed on international football matches, spaces where 'symbolism is discursively constructed in dramatized, mediated narratives' through 'rulebound measurement of visible, bodily achievements' that creates 'dramatic immediacy' and a 'veneer of authenticity' (Free, 2005, p. 266) (Fig. 1).

**HISTORY EXAM: SERBIA 3 - 0 ALBANIA, 14 OCTOBER (OFFICIAL RESULT 14 OCTOBER 2014 - 10 JULY 2015);
SERBIA 0 - 3 ALBANIA, 14 OCTOBER (OFFICIAL RESULT 10 JULY 2015 - PRESENT)**

Through raw data visualisation, 'History Exam' examines how we record and document political histories through the lens of an abandoned football game. On 14 October 2014, a highly tense football game was held between Serbia and Albania. The game was abandoned in the 42nd minute after a drone lowered a flag bearing the insignia of 'Greater Albania', resulting in a pitch invasion by Serbian fans. Although the game's score was 0 - 0 in the 42nd minute, Serbia was awarded a 3-0 victory after UEFA ordered Albania to forfeit the match. Eight months later in 2015, the Court of Arbitration for Sport reversed this decision, resulting in Albania being awarded a 3 - 0 victory (The Guardian, 2015).

For my history exam, I wanted to explore these alternative and temporary recorded histories by documenting the resulting data in printed matter, especially concerning Charles Joseph Minard's iconic printed matter information graphic, the map of Napoleon's Russian campaign in 1812-13.

Explaining the events through the game data taken from the UEFA website ironically resulted in the production of two different history books. The first, 'History Exam: Serbia 3 - 0 Albania, 14 October (Official Result 14 October 2014 - 10 July 2015)', contains three chapters. Chapter One documents the events of the game for the first 42 minutes, Chapter Two documents the rioting, and Chapter Three explores UEFA's decision to award Serbia a 3 - 0 win. The second book, 'Serbia 0 - 3 Albania, 14 October (Official Result 10 July 2015 - present)'



Figure 1

Figure 1: Art Exam

contains the same three chapters and a fourth additional chapter

that explores the Court of Arbitration for Sport's ruling to reverse the result to Serbia 0 - 3 Albania.

Despite being constructed from raw data taken from the game, the end products are complete contradictions in their functionality. They record 48 minutes of game time, three goals by unknown goal scorers, and histories that were invented in offices and then changed into completely new events months later. The data collapses in on itself and the books are most functional when interacted with as sculptural objects (Fig. 2).

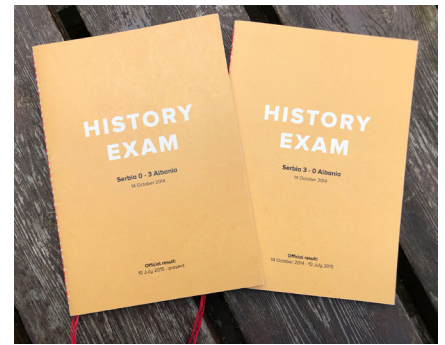


Figure 2

MATHS EXAM: GERMANY 3-3 ENGLAND, 25 DECEMBER 1914

For the 'Maths Exam' artist book, I wanted to use a Cartesian coordinate system to collage two different ideas regarding the passing of time. I wanted to collage football's X-dimension of time presented by philosopher Simon Critchley during his football and phenomenology lecture 'Working Class Ballet' with the Z-axis of time found in the churned layers of soil visible in World War One trench walls.

Critchley's X-dimension of time (Critchley, 2016) creates a suspended present for the player or viewer, while the Z-axis of World War One soil breaks with traditional archaeological timelines in the soil. The constant shelling bombardments of the Western Front moved, mixed, blended and churned the soil's timeline and contents. This timeline, disrupted and accelerated through contemporary technology, protruded from trench walls, visible to the soldiers. In the artist book, these X- and Z-axes are combined and explored through the football games that were played on no man's land during the Christmas Truce of 1914.

In the seven book spreads, quotes from Simon Critchley's 'Working Class Ballet' regarding the X-dimension of time were taken out of their everyday football game context and placed in no man's land on Christmas Day 1914. The Cartesian coordinate system then visually responded to these ideas when placed in this new tragic environment where time is at its most vulnerable. Phrases used by the professor such as 'where one is lifted out of the everyday into something ecstatic' (Critchley, 2016) and 'with the future open and uncertain' (Critchley, 2016) hold a completely different weight and resonance when placed in this horrific space, a space caught within the suspended present for one day and one game of football.

To explore the suspended present X-dimension of time in the book as an object, the book's square grid system is affected by this change in time perception. The squares from the book's grid system that sat on either side of the X-dimension line from the Cartesian coordinate system were changed to rectangles to reflect this change in the experience of time. This change to the grid system in turn subtly affects the construction of the book and its composition. While the soldiers are absorbed in this suspended present X-dimension of time, their game of

Figure 2: History Exam

football is played on a no man's land 'pitch' of razzle-dazzle camouflage designed to confuse when it cannot hide (Kiger, 2019). This camouflage pitch for one day covers the churned Z-axis time beneath (Fig. 3).

IRISH EXAM: IRELAND 1 - 0 ENGLAND, 12 JUNE 1988
ENGLISH EXAM: IRELAND 1 - 0 ENGLAND, 12 JUNE 1988

The 'Irish Exam' and 'English Exam' works were the final pieces I made for my graduate show project. While the previously made artist books had been extremely structured, these final works offered an opportunity to be far more experimental and abstract concerning the projects' original questions regarding what could be defined as self-directed design.

Ireland's 1 - 0 victory over England at the 1988 UEFA European Football Championships was viewed as a shock but also as a hugely symbolic moment. It was a game where personal family narratives of migration to England could be reflected on by Irish fans, as only four of the eleven Irish players had been born in Ireland. For this reason, I decided that I would make my 'Irish Exam' artist book and my 'English Exam' artist book into a wall installation that would blend both books into one. The physicality of the deconstructed books connected as a wall installation would be a play on physical movement between spaces while also being a reference to the two teams playing off against each other. The page count of the books is defined by the number of players who entered the play space, and the point at which one book blurs into the other is deliberately undetermined.

The text in the book is the 733-word sentence spoken by the character Lucky in 'Waiting for Godot'. I chose this sentence because, like the symbolism of the game, it was very much open to interpretation for each viewer. While it is an open-ended text, it also hints at an Irish origin in Connemara and a potential migration to London. Such themes in the play were reflected in the BBC's rejection letter for the script, which they claimed contained 'too many Irish inflections and idiom[s]' (Bloom, 2017). To echo live performances of the monologue, the words from the sentence drip and flow from each page onto the next. While Beckett included no punctuation in the 733-word sentence, various sections of the text are broken up with photo intervals. These photo intervals respond to the sentence with themes of migration and places of origin.

Many of the photos used are of my father's family, who emigrated from Dublin to England in the 1950s. Other photos include 1930s photos of Irish scouts and scout leaders wearing their uniforms and white neck ropes. Like a pagan changeling, Lucky moves through the pages, photos, and landscapes as different people, navigating 'the great cold' (Lawley, 2013) identifiable by his signature white neck rope (Fig. 4).



Figure 3

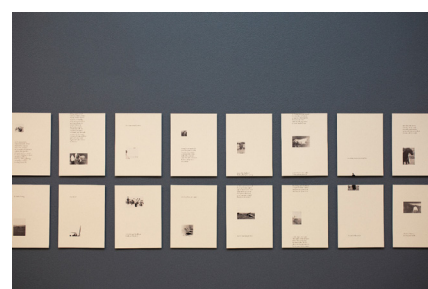


Figure 4

CONCLUSION: PRESENTING THE BOOKS AT THE SAIC GRADUATE SHOW 2019, SULLIVAN GALLERIES

Once the production of the books was completed on Adobe InDesign, they were printed on exam-like French paper, and the book covers were printed on exam-like card. After this, the books were beautifully hand-bound by Ross Press and Bindery in Chicago. Each book was bound with uncropped red tread, a nod to the red pen of exam marking.

The exhibition of the books at the SAIC Graduate Show was titled 'The Middle Kingdom', a reference to Simon Critchley's writings on football, which had influenced me massively for this project. Critchley described the football stadium experience as the 'realm of the in-between' within which space we are in the 'Middle Kingdom' (Critchley, 2016).

For the installation of the work in my exhibition space, I wanted to create a middle space between the reading room and the football pub. The wall space was painted a dark navy blue, and the deconstructed books floated on the wall. A shelf was installed to place the remaining books on, and four pub-like high stools were also added to invite readers to sit.

Finally, floating on the wall by itself away from the books sat a replica of the original exam results page from 1998, the small piece of paper that had inspired the project before its redesign (Fig. 5).

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Figure 5

Figure 5: The Middle Kingdom at SAIC Graduate Show 2019

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Killian Dunne (Born 1980, Ireland) is a Lecturer in Printmaking, Publishing, and Editions at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee, Scotland. In 2009 he completed his BFA in Printmaking at The National College of Art and Design, Ireland. Upon graduating he won the Black Church Print Studio Student Award. In 2011 for his etching series "Unknown Superheroes", he won the Prix Invitation Award at the 7th Biennale internationale d'estampe contemporaine de Trois-Rivières, Quebec.

Between 2012 and 2017 he worked as a Printmaker, Illustrator, and Designer in Vancouver, Dublin, and Berlin. In 2019 he completed his MFA at The School of The Art Institute of Chicago, USA, where he was awarded The SAIC New Artist Society Scholarship 2017 and The SAIC International Graduate Scholarship 2018. During his time at SAIC he worked as a teaching assistant in advanced typography and identity system. From 2019 until 2020 he was a professor of printmaking at the Universidad Central del Ecuador in Quito, Ecuador.

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IMAGE GALLERY

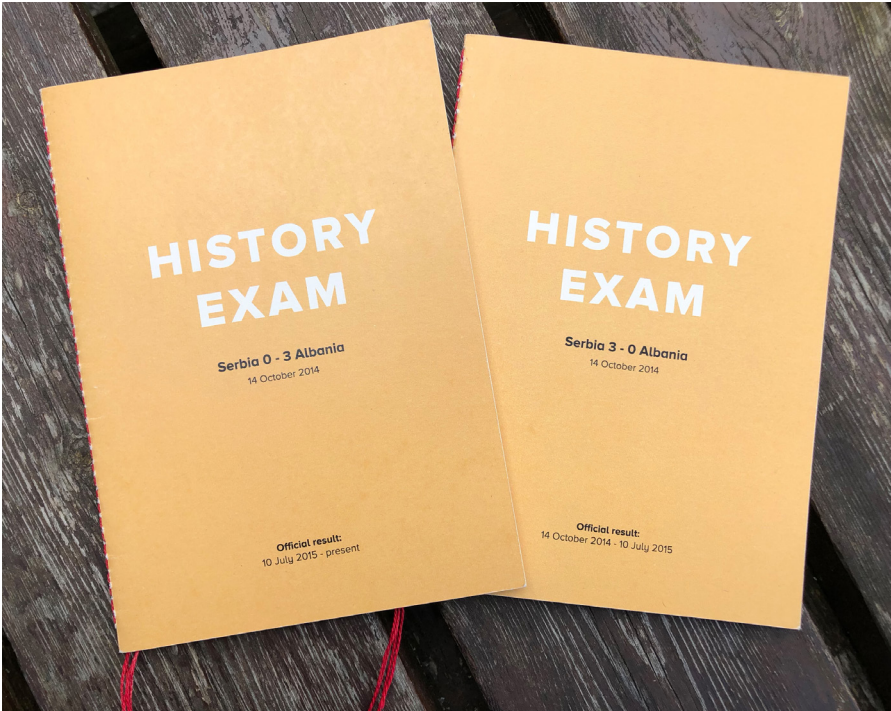


Figure titles and information

Figure 1: Art Exam

Figure 2: History Exam

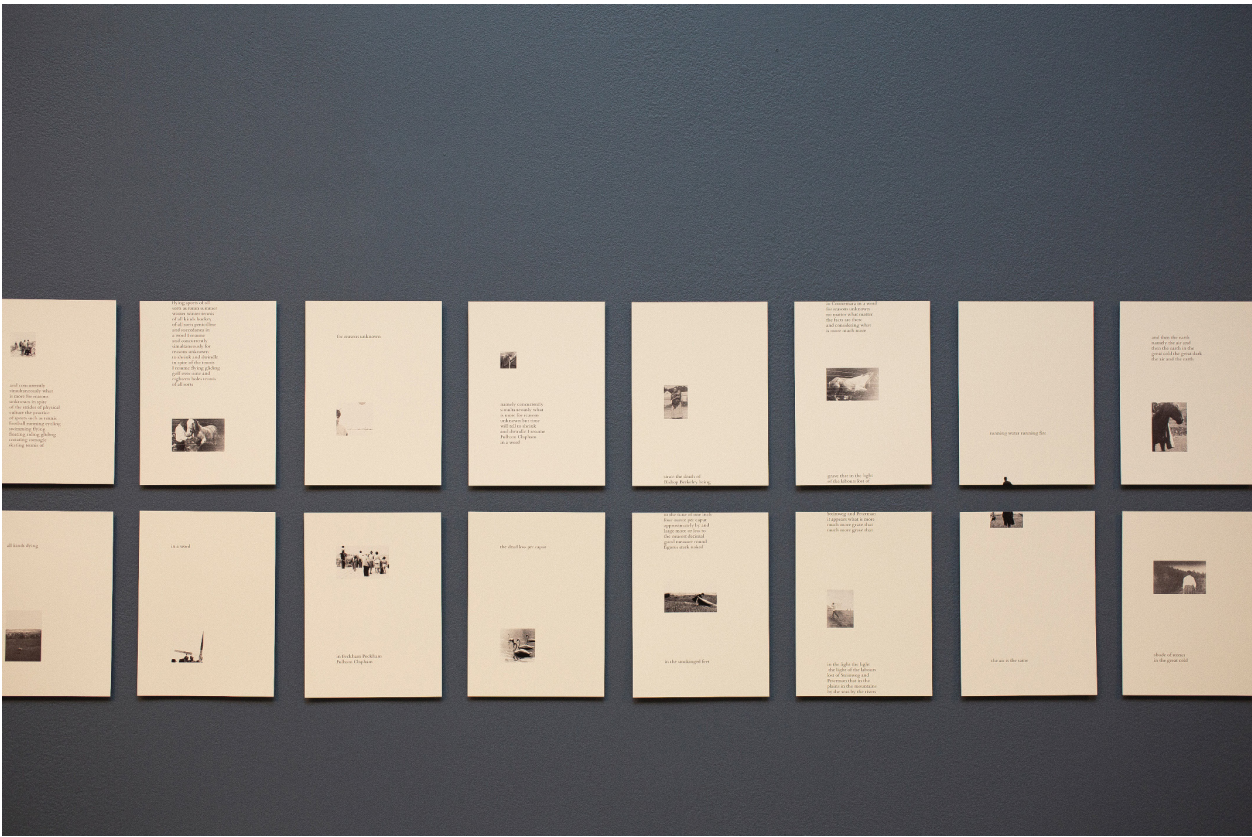


Figure 3: Maths Exam

Figure 4: Irish Exam / English Exam



Figure 5: The Middle Kingdom at SAIC Graduate Show 2019