

# The art of empowerment

A unique exhibition at Belfast's Catalyst Arts has provided a creative outlet for trauma sufferers. **Luke Ryan** met the exhibition curator to find out more

**T**RAUMA is a notion often said to be un-representable, but an exhibition now showing at Belfast's Catalyst Arts looks at ways in which artists can use visual and acoustic elements to give shape to the 'Felt Experience'. The project features international artists who, rather than simply reporting events, use video works to generate a space for dialogue and interaction and create a language to express people's experience of trauma.

As part of the show, artist Yoshiko Shimada of Japan and exhibition curator Angie Halliday from Belfast have produced documentary video works featuring footage of their time spent working with children survivors of trauma in the Philippines last summer. Nurtured by the non-governmental organisation 'Creating Responsible Infants By Sharing' in the Philippines, the children are survivors of rape and incest. The artists attempted to intervene and empower the children, by designing workshops to help to affirm their creativity.

Video works at the exhibition feature the children painting their hands and creating different characters from art materials. "The idea of the Felt Experience comes from a workshop module that I did in Manila," Angie said. "I had been invited there through my own art practice to participate in an exhibition and to do workshops with children from CRIBS. Basically I wanted to design a workshop that would in some way deal with their sort of trauma, because all the children in that home have been abused.

"So I wanted to think of an idea for a workshop that would help them in



■ **A SPACE FOR DIALOGUE:** Artist Yoshiko Shimada from Japan produces video art with trauma survivors

some way, or let them have a creative outlet. I use video in my own practice and I thought I'd do some kind of video workshops. When I got there I couldn't film their faces so hence I used their hands and the characters stood for themselves – so they acted as alter-egos.

"The Felt Experience comes from my research and from that workshop in trying to find ways of expressing the felt experience. Rather than simply reporting a traumatic event and just showing what that looks like again, because that can increase the trauma, the idea was to look for works that engaged with what it felt like and were a bit more ambiguous as to

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what the trauma was or the experience, and to find people who express what it feels like to the body.

"I have been doing research into film and stuff, and found that the conventional rape scene for example in movies, when it is heterosexual rape, the woman is always shown objectified; it is always from an objective point of view, it's never shown from her subjective point of view. So you don't know what that experience feels like for her.

"And I began looking in my own practice at how you could express something subjectively, without just showing what the event looks like." Each work in the exhibition uses a different strategy to express some kind of aspect of trauma, and Angie has deliberately selected pieces to show a range of different elements. One work by Yaron Lapid from Israel features murky footage of a building exterior with the voice of a man calling out for his mother.

"All of them have a sound element," Angie said. "I was particularly interested in a limited-optical visibility and what I call a haptic visibility which is something I have been looking into as well. The way I think of it is where you're optical vision is limited, sound completes the picture – where you hear sound, you feel it more in your senses. Some of the works are quite visceral

and they can be heavy, but at the same time you don't know exactly what the traumas are in some of the cases. They are ambiguous and you don't necessarily know at is wrong but it's obviously a very distressing situation the man is in, and the darkness emphasises that."

Other pieces include Irish artist Hugh O'Donnell's work *Bucket Bark* which shows a disturbing close up of a human mouth making a guttural noise whilst submerged in water, and *Me Taken Out*, a split-screen work by Miriam de Burca, also from Ireland, showing the view from the artist's lens as another camera tracks her in the act of filming. "With Miriam's piece there is a triangulation of observation going on and I think that's a really good way of expressing the experience of being surveilled, living in Northern Ireland near an interface. I like the way she tried to express that by involving the viewer and implicating them in some way," said Angie.

■ **The exhibition runs until January 27. Gallery Hours: 11am-5pm Tues to Sat. Official launch Thursday January 11, with Round table discussion at 6pm with artists Siobhan Mullan, David Stalling, Yaron Lapid, Hugh O'Donnell, and Miriam de Burca. For further artist information visit [www.estrellatuoreja.cl/works/felt\\_experience/](http://www.estrellatuoreja.cl/works/felt_experience/)**

## happenings

### Disney artist at Portadown

By Jenny Lee

**A**CCOMPLISHED animator Graham Toms is hosting a mini retrospective of his work at the Millennium Court Arts Centre in Portadown. A former instructor at the Disney Institute at Orlando, Florida, Toms is an inspiring and highly skilled artist. The exhibition will be divided into four sections consisting of drawings, paintings, animation and clay models. The animation process is a painstaking and slow process that requires skill, precision and patience. Not many people realise what goes into the creation of our favourite animated characters and stories.

This exhibition reveals to the viewer the entire world of Graham Toms with all of its surrealism, technical expertise and magical originality. Character Building: A Mini Retrospective by Graham Toms continues at MCAC until January 20.

### Hendrix prints go on display

RONNIE Wood, guitar player with the Rolling Stones, like many of the musicians of his era, started life off in art college. But again like so many of them, the music got in the way.

Back in the late sixties the guitar greats Jimi Hendrix and Ronnie Wood crossed paths in a very significant way. Not only sharing the stage and their music, but even a flat.

This relationship of reverence, lives on in Wood's recent work, best reflected in the eyes of his young self watching with sheer admiration from the stacks as the maestro plays on.

The Tom Caldwell Gallery will present new work from Ronnie Wood, reflecting on his historic friendship with Hendrix, with the digital screenprints *Jimi and Me at the Scene Club NY*.

For further information contact the gallery at 429 Lisburn Road.

# Contemporary twist on traditional ceramics

By AP Maginness

**A**LTHOUGH Asian expertise in ceramics is recognised throughout the world it is rare that you get to see Asian ceramic art in a gallery in Northern Ireland. It must be even rarer than that you get the chance to view a large exhibition of Korean ceramic artwork. However, The Ormeau Baths Gallery is hosting a huge exhibition of Korean ceramics entitled *Tradition Transformed: Contemporary Korean Ceramics*, which will open next week with 87 works from 29 Korean artists. The exhibition is part of a

push by Korean governmental organisation, The Korea Foundation, to show Korean work throughout Europe. The idea originated from an exhibition that toured the United States four years ago. Marlene Rothacker of the Washington DC based group International Arts for Artists, who are putting together this exhibition, explained how *Tradition Transformed* came to fruition. "Our organisation, International Arts for Artists, started an exhibition in 2004 called *From the Fire: Contemporary Korean Ceramics*, that is still on the

road now and will travel until 2008," said Rothacker.

"One of the underwriters for that show was The Korea Foundation, which is part of the Korean Government's Culture Department, they contacted us after the show and said they would be interested in funding a show that would be taken to Europe.

"So what we did was take 29 of the artists that were involved in that original show and we asked them to make several original pieces for a new show that would be taken to Europe. Some of the works that we will have in Belfast were created

especially for the show and some were just part of the artists ongoing work." Rothacker also explained that the exhibition would be travelling around Europe for the next two years at least, although details had yet to be confirmed.

"This is the opening venue for the exhibition but it will eventually be travelling throughout Europe, we are hopeful that it will be travelling to Germany, France and Spain as well as southern Ireland but we have to wait to see what the exact details will be." Rothacker believes that this kind of cultural exchange is



important not least because many of the artists were educated in Europe.

"It is important to share that 5000 year-old tradition but the point is that everyone knows about Japanese ceramics but the Korean tradition is often overshadowed. What is most interesting is that a lot of these artists came to Europe and the United States to study their art and so it is now coming full circle that they are showing their work here."

■ **Tradition Transformed: Contemporary Korean Ceramics runs at the Ormeau Baths Gallery from January 13 until February 24.**