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Participation in the 2014 Dublin Biennial "Intersections between Environmentalism and Contemporary Art Practice"

Kevin Bell

University of Montana - Missoula

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The University of **Montana**

Associate Professor Kevin Bell
School of Art - Painting
College of Visual and Performing
Art
The University of Montana
32 Campus Drive, FA 305
Missoula, MT 59812
406 493-5197
kevin.bell@umontana.edu

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This letter summarizes the results of my University Research and Creativity Small Grant to participate in the 2014 Dublin Biennial, "Intersections between Environmentalism and Contemporary Art Practice." Overall, this experience provided an invaluable catalyst for my professional development.

At the Dublin Biennial, I was honored to show alongside an impressive collection of well-known artists concerned with environmental issues. Participants included Sonia Falcone (Bolivia) and Gavin Turk (UK) who have recently shown at the 55th International Venice Biennale. Also showing were Christina Oiticica (Brazil), Karla Sachese (Germany), Deva Wolfram (Italy) and a dozen artists from the Berlin and Florence Biennials. 25% of the biennial artists have also shown at the prestigious Art Basel art fairs in Miami, Switzerland and Hong Kong.

I was included in the show to represent an American (and specifically a Western American) perspective. The work I developed for the biennial explored the tension between wilderness and human activity, a viewpoint often absent from European and often Asian participants. For this show I explored two new innovations: instead of painting on a flat, 2-dimensional surface, I began "wrapping" land around three-dimensional or angled box-like structures. The disrupted plane prevents the viewer from seeing the composition in its entirety or without distortion, and creates a sense of the incomplete and unstable. Secondly, I also began to work with actual pieces of land, which were cut, varnished, painted, and finally suspended in a white cube. Like pinned, taxidermy insects, this process is simultaneously destructive, aggressive, reverential and conservative.

My work was well received at the biennial. An unexpectedly common comment was that my work was quiet and restrained, in some ways reflecting the taciturn nature of the western American character. A review by Ros Drinkwater in the Dublin *Independent* (June 14th 2014, Fine Arts Section, page 8-10) states, "... on the other hand Bell, an American, doesn't dazzle and flash so much as quietly, but subversively clip and cut with his unusual landscapes. He requires a closer look when all the noise has become enough." Ironically, the understated nature of my paintings drew attention even though contrasting with the many large, loud, raucous art pieces in the show (a trend currently found in the larger contemporary art world). My work created for the biennial has subsequently been shown in Hong Kong, New York, San Francisco and Santa Fe.

The exhibition was widely publicized. A full-color catalogue was distributed internationally to over 1,000 bookstores, museums, critics and academic institutions. The show was reviewed by the *International Herald Tribune*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *Der Spiegel* and the Dublin *Independent* (mentioned above). The exhibition was attended by over 12,000, and an on-line iteration featuring all participating artists was produced. By positioning my work in dialogue with other perspectives from around the world, I both gained insight into my own creative process, as well as realized greater exposure in an important international artistic community. In nearly all instances where my work was presented or discussed (including reviews, catalogue, and other exhibition literature), my association with the University of Montana was also mentioned.

The travel portion of my grant proved even more valuable than initially anticipated. The initial intent was to engage with artists and critic at the biennial. But unexpectedly at the exhibition, I also received an offer to attend an artist residency in at the Ballinglen Foundation. Located in a rural northwest Irish coastal town, this highly competitive residency invites only two artists each from America, Europe and Asia to respond to this stark, isolated environment. Such an opportunity expands my focus beyond issues of land use in the United States to new fertile interaction with Irish environmental topics. It also provides networking opportunities with artists from around the world. By rearranging my schedule, I was able to extend my travel allowance to both meet with biennial artists and attend a month-long artist residency.

This University Research and Creativity Small Grant has proved invaluable to my research. It has accelerated my creative development, increased my exposure at a significant international exhibition, and nurtured meaningful professional dialogue and networking opportunities. As my affiliated institution, this project also raises the profile and reputation of the University of Montana abroad.

I would like to thank the University Grant Committee for this opportunity to further my creative research.

Sincerely,

Kevin Bell