



REVIEW

Tattered Outlaws of History Skerries Martello Tower

MICHAEL SEAVER

CHOREOGRAPHER FEARGHUS Ó Conchúir's first visits to Fingal's derelict Martello towers often involved a certain amount of breaking-and-entering.

Visitors to his installation, created with artist and architect Dan Dubowitz, will feel a similar sense of adventure.

The towers were built in the early 19th century for protection against a Napoleonic invasion and were based on the near-impenetrable tower at Mortella Point in Corsica. The two artists have cracked the hard shell of Skerries' derelict tower to reveal a gooey interior: rotting wooden ceilings, crumbling walls and water dripping down from the roof.

After entering the dark musty entrance way, ducking past low beams and climbing the musty semi-circular stairway, the viewer arrives at a small platform where 12 screens project shifting images of the 12 towers in Fingal. These are in various states of repair and use – from derelict landmarks to comfortably renovated family homes – and are united only in their original short-lived and unnecessary function. A single motorised camera mounted on the top of each tower rotates through 360 degrees, rather like the original mounted cannons, and records not just the exterior landscape, but the interior function.

Tom Savage is seen reading a book on his Portrane tower, the late Dorothy Doolan proudly recounting the Rush tower's history, and Joe Dillon with his amateur radio set-up on the Howth tower.

On the derelict rooftops Ó Conchúir, dancer Bernadette Iglich and children Eva and Zach Dubowitz provide the physical presence, humanising the weed-strewn and graffitied floor and walls. It's a strategy at the core of Ó Conchúir's social choreography: placing (and

mostly replacing) the human body in the build environment in order to re-articulate the building's relationship with society outside its walls.

Two centuries on, Martello Towers remain fortresses, hulking monolithic lumps of granite whose interior form and social history remain unknown. Although the artists refute the popular belief that they are in line of sight of each other, they have visually restored communications onscreen, helped by the sounds of Dillon's constant Morse code. This Per Cent for Art Scheme commission from Fingal County Council has not just re-opened the Skerries Tower to the public, but given an important context for deciding its future. Every Saturday and Sunday 2-5pm until August 30th.