

brian

duggan:

we like it

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Image: PT Kereta Api 2012 screen shot youtube 03 nocomment 2012.

International Studio & Curatorial Program (ISCP)

Brian Duggan:
*We like it up here,
it's windy, really nice.*

July 24 - August 23, 2013

Foreword

This publication accompanies the exhibition Brian Duggan: *We like it up here, it's windy, really nice*. ISCP began an initiative in 2011 to commission new work twice a year for a solo exhibition by an ISCP resident. This exhibition series not only gives the selected artists the space, time and support needed to produce new work, but it also allows the public to view artistic production not previously seen in New York City, furthering our mission to foster international exchange.

Duggan's work reveals the massive networks that propel human activity, and how these networks are often inequitably produced. The (almost) to scale immersive installation that makes up *We like it up here, it's windy, really nice*. allows visitors an experiential moment of conviviality with train riders in Indonesia, ten thousand miles away in New York. Through this, Duggan creates a space to make the not-so-ordinary quotidian events of life known; and we are grateful for the opportunity to share this with him.

I would like to thank Brian for constructing this exhibition shortly after his arrival at ISCP; Kristen Chappa for her catalog essay; Shinnie Kim, ISCP Programs Manager; Bex Davis, ISCP Intern; and Will Sieruta, ISCP Facilities Assistant. We are also thankful to Arts Council of Ireland and Culture Ireland, who generously supported Duggan's three-month residency at ISCP.

Kari Conte, Director of Programs and Exhibitions



Brian Duggan, *We like it up here, it's windy, really nice*, 2013, Mixed materials, wind and sound, Installation view, ISCP

A Lethal Logic

Kristen Chappa

Dublin-based artist Brian Duggan takes crowd control tactics on Indonesian public transportation as the point of departure for *We like it up here, it's windy, really nice*. With not enough trains to meet demands, riders in the country often overflow onto the rooftop and sides of train cars. Duggan excerpts the exhibition's title from an interview with a rooftop train rider on the railway system PT Kereta Api Indonesia.

In Jakarta, this state-owned company has experimented with drastic and somewhat absurd deterrents to thwart passengers from riding on the exterior of overcrowded trains, including spray-painting riders and threatening them with dogs, offering free music concerts as an alternative activity, and most recently, lowering power lines to increase the threat of electrocution. These so-called solutions implemented by PT Kereta Api fail to address the underlying problems of overcrowding and poverty. Duggan's installation engages with the 2012 introduction of concrete ball barriers hung at head-height, intended to knock passengers off of the roof of train cars.

Through video, sculpture, and audio, Duggan addresses this specific situation in the gallery context at ISCP. Projections onto walls display videos of media footage showing the public transportation problem in Indonesia, culled from the internet and re-edited.

A large, concave structure in the center of the space mimics the shape of a train roof. Visitors can walk onto the sculptural form, allowing for different vantage points. Black and yellow painted bars stretch horizontally across the walls, and simulated concrete balls hang from them by chains at head-height, recalling medieval torture devices. Recreated in the gallery, the barriers become neutralized, but also carry the associative power of their original intention—to maim or kill upon impact. Electric fans add an ambient sonic and tactile element to the immersive experience turning the gallery into a wind tunnel.

Duggan’s current work raises questions about what choices are presented and available to the public in everyday life. Who has access to safe travel to and from home and work? What happens to those who are not accommodated, either because of lack of space or financial resources? Here, the train is a public and political space, where a commuter’s right to ride becomes a matter of life and death. Divorced from its original setting, this work functions on one level in the vein of awareness-raising art projects. However, with this installation, Duggan also offers a repositioning and change of vantage point, inviting viewers to briefly live in another place and time. The work thus adopts a strategy of empathy, encouraging active engagement and operating against escapism or passive viewing of news media. With this, Duggan gestures toward alternative ways of connecting with screen images in our contemporary globalized moment.

With this installation, Duggan exposes the contradictory logic of a state-run company taking measures to “protect” its public by increasing the risk of injury and harm. Duggan’s project actively



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engages audience members, aiming to communicate this tension between governing bodies and lived human experience, as well as how publics respond and navigate systems of organization and control. Indeed, PT Kereta Api's position stands in sharp contrast to the attitude of the riders. One 27-year-old shopkeeper, Mulyanto, who relies on the dilapidated railway system to get from his hometown of Bogor to Jakarta for work, responded to the lethal deterrents to roof riding as such: "I was really scared when I first heard about these balls. It sounds like it could be really dangerous...but I don't think it'll last long. They've tried everything to keep us from riding...in the end we always win. We like it up there, it's windy, really nice".¹ The shopkeeper's contention is that the pleasant breeze atop the trains is preferable to overcrowded cars, and he sees the company's interventions as restrictions to be resisted.

Reinforced by mixing media footage and a new audio track from Jakarta with scenes from the New York City subway system, Duggan's strategy of transposing a series of events from one place in time onto another prompts a consideration of the situation in contrast to the exhibition site. Unthinkable in the local setting, this divide addresses the precarity of life.² Why some lives are guarded against injury and treated as valuable, while others are seemingly considered more disposable is an ethical problem that remains, hanging in the air.

¹ Quoted in "Headache Awaits Indonesian Train Surfers," *The Guardian*, last modified January 17 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/17/headache-awaits-indonesian-train-surfers>.

² See Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), 3–4.



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Image: Screen-shot-01-19-2012-at-1.43.08-PM.

Brian Duggan lives and works in Dublin (born 1971). His work is included in the permanent collections of the Hugh Lane Gallery, the OPW national collection and the Irish Museum of Modern Art. He has undertaken residencies in IMMA, CCI Paris, Project 304 Bangkok and ChangMai Thailand. His recent solo exhibitions include *They Have Tried Everything to Keep Us From Riding...but in the end we always win*, Limerick City Gallery, 2012; *Everything Can Be Done, In Principle*, Visual, Carlow, 2012; *Three Lives*, RUARED, Dublin, 2012, and *It's Too Late Now*, Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2011. His selected group exhibitions include *A Terrible Beauty, Art, Crisis, Change*, Dublin Contemporary, 2011; *Supernormal*, Braziers UK, 2011; SUB:URBAN, Rotterdam, 2009 and *I'm Always Touched By Your Presence, Dear.*, Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2007-2008. Upcoming projects in 2013 include *One foot in the real world*, Irish Museum of Modern Art and a digital film with John Hurt, the *Last day Diary*, based on the diary of Nate Champion from 1892.

Kristen Chappa is currently the Assistant Curator at SculptureCenter in Long Island City, New York. She holds a MA from Columbia University's Modern Art History: Critical and Curatorial Studies program and a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design. Before relocating to New York, Kristen was Co-Director of The Lab, an interdisciplinary arts space in San Francisco, from 2005-2009. Her writing has appeared in print and online publications including Art in America, Frieze, and Performa Publications.

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