perpetuum mobile

perpetuum mobile is an immersive three-screen video installation showing her live performances in the ancient cedar forests of Lebanon and on the Ustyurt plateau and Aral Sea regions of Uzbekistan. These, synthesised with her performances under water and other imagery, form a complex montage which- through its fragmented but interwoven, repetitive structure- expresses a poetic, metaphorical approach to a meditation on memory and memorial.

Kirwan is interested in the question of what is memory and how might it function and be visually represented. She explores also the metaphorical construction of memory through travel and it's textual and visual narratives as expressed by Proust, Walter Benjamin and others. This inspires her performative commitment to long journeys undertaken in Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Middle East.

Kirwan's work is mainly inspired by Simon Critchley's Memory Theatre. Critchley admires Hegel's proposition that memory is a dynamic process akin to transportation or endless motion. Rather than a dull recitation of the past on the contrary, memory is ' A wheel that turns, returns and turns again...'a kind of perpetuum mobile, a permanently recreating and re-enacting loop.'[1]

Repetition evokes also the ceaseless journeying and yearning which some psychologists consider intrinsic to the bereavement process. Thus the sensorimotor, haptic elements of Kirwan's performances become metaphors for wayfinding and mapping; feeling literally, the ground and the way through the wilderness and bewilderment of bereavement.

Intrinsic to Kirwan's performances is an essential incompletion which is itself the mode of fulfilment. This stems from her interest in Friedrich Schlegel's concept of the philosophical fragment as a dynamic, creative practice of fragmentation for its own sake in which totality is both finite and plural at the same time. Thus, memory is a totality, endlessly creating novelty out of itself and opening up questions about the relation between the finite and infinite, unity and chaos.

[1] Simon Critchley, Memory Theatre: (Fitzcarraldo Editions, London, England 2014) p.74.

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