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**Mark Curran** / The Market

October 2013

Interviewed by **Sarah Marie Allen**

[Mark Curran](#) lives and works in Berlin and Dublin. He completed a practice-led PhD at Dublin Institute of Technology, lectures on the BA (Hons) Photography programme, Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dublin and is Visiting Professor on the MA in Visual and Media Anthropology, Freie Universität Berlin. Curran has undertaken a cycle of long-term research projects over the past 15 years which critically address the predatory context resulting from the migrations and flows of global capital. Curran has presented widely on his research most recently at The Photographers' Gallery, London (2012) and Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2013). He has also published articles on his research and is included in a forthcoming edition entitled *Photographies* (Routledge) edited by Liz Wells and Deborah Bright. [www.markcurran.org](http://www.markcurran.org)

Below, [Sarah Allen](#) discussed with Curran the background to his most recent project, *The Market*, which is being concurrently exhibited at Gallery of Photography, Dublin, until 1st October, and at Belfast Exposed until 11th October, 2013.

**Sarah Allen:** *How long have you been interested in the subject of the economic market, is it something that crystallised with the crisis?*

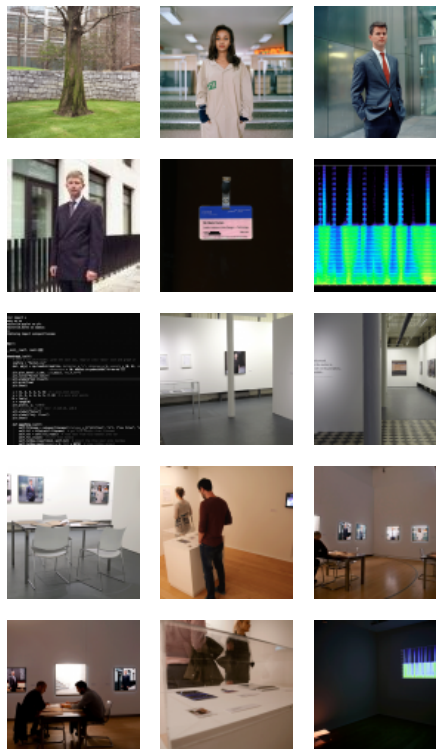
**Mark Curran:** My interest in the market predated the economic crisis as well as the so called Celtic Tiger. *The Market* builds on a cycle of other work which has engaged in different ways with the subject of the market. *Southern Cross* was executed at the height of the Celtic Tiger, followed by *The Breathing Factory*, then *Ausschnitte aus EDEN/Extracts from EDEN* which focused on the unevenness inherent in the functioning of globalisation and the movement of global capital. *The Market* was about returning to the site which frames all these previous projects. I think it's also important to note that a lot of visual art relating to the crisis has focused on its aftermath, but without meaning to sound egotistical I would say that my previous projects – as well as those of other photographers – were raising critical questions relating to the so called Celtic Tiger as it was happening.

**SA:** *What are the project's ties with the centenary of Dublin's 1913 Lock-out?*

**MC:** The project is curated by Helen Carey, Director of Limerick City Gallery and one of the central goals of the project is to explore the significance of the Lock-out in the present. Helen has done a fantastic job in bringing different bodies together to collaborate on the project, among them, The Gallery of Photography in Dublin, Belfast Exposed and CCA Derry-Londonderry. The concept of the market is becoming more abstracted and resists simple explanation; this feeds into the notion that we are essentially 'locked-in' to a particular narrative with regards to the market.

**SA:** *You mention the market is becoming more abstracted. What struck me is that portraiture forms a large component of the project which in a way gives a face to what is at times an abstracted, intangible or 'faceless' entity. Is this something you considered?*

**MC:** Definitely. When we think of 'the market' we might have a mental image of some trading floor thronged with bankers. However I take a much more subjective approach and the final images are a result of a certain level of co-authorship. My use of portraiture also has a resonance within the context of the market as we so often hear that at some point in



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the future there will be no human trading. Asking people to present themselves to the camera is an approach which stretches back to photographers such as August Sander, Milton Rogovin and in particular the early work of Lewis Hine. So yes, I am engaging with the idea of 'giving face' to something and making something visible; yet at the same time remaining mindful that while using photography to reveal something there exists the probability that certain layers of meaning will always remain hidden. An awareness of this layer of invisibility was a motivating factor in opening out my practice to encompass text, audio, video and artifactual material for this specific installation.

**SA:** *Some of the portraits are shot from a low vantage point and the subjects appear quite dignified and empowered, could you comment on your technical approach to portraiture?*

**MC:** Some of the portraits are shot from a low vantage point and this has the effect of making the subjects seem quite tall. However the subjects are not intended to be iconicised or heroised as this would be quite patronising. The prints are almost life-sized so they have quite a strong presence – one which is intended to confront and engage the viewer.

**SA:** *You mentioned co-authorship; how well did you get to know the people you photographed and do you think investing in a relationship with the sitter is essential to taking a strong portrait?*

**MC:** Personally I believe it's vital for a photographer to get to know their subject. The question of access has become critical within the project and I got to know the people I photographed quite well through gaining this access which took in the region of one to two years. What I have found through this process is that 'power' resists making itself visible. Conversely the working class, the poor or those who are less powerful are available to photography and its gaze; yet it was crucial to my project that the two polarities were represented.

**SA:** *The exhibition communicates information through several mediums: photographs, film, sound and verbal testimonies. Do you feel that this extra material was crucial to demystifying the subject?*

**MC:** I believe the portraits can function on their own but I am seeking to expand the vocabulary of photography through an installation strategy which is born out of an awareness of the historical and ideological role of photography as representation. Historically photography has been employed for its ability to expose and reveal and although I am using photography in this way I also want to open a discourse about photography's limitations with regards to its revelatory function. I want to position photography within other forms of artistic expression. For example when I decided that I wanted to include algorithms in the installation I had to turn to a non visual art form to do this effectively...

**SA:** *...algorithms were the starting point for the sound piece in the show.*

**MC:** Yes, the sound piece was made in collaboration with my brother Ken Curran who is a composer, a musician and a software designer. Simplistically speaking, algorithms are models with the ability to analyse data. Given that future trading relies so heavily on these technologies it was important that they be present in the installation. Their inclusion also ties in with the thesis of the exhibition which posits that the market, in its present form, is both stateless and people-less and seeks everything to be made in its image. Ken designed an algorithm which analysed all the public speeches of The Irish Minister of Finance Michael Noonan, the algorithm identified every time he used the word "market" or "markets". Ken then transformed this data into audio, the idea being to represent the overwhelming sound of the market through the conduit of The Nation State. In Dublin spectrograms are mounted on the gallery wall which are the visual manifestation of the sound piece and which through their design could be likened to the graphs and charts we associate with the market. In Belfast instead of Michael Noonan we have used a speech delivered by George Osborne the British *Chancellor of the Exchequer*. So rather than a soundtrack, the sound piece has a direct relationship to reality and to the Nation State.

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**SA:** *What are your opinions on the art market or the opinion that art is worth what someone is willing to pay for it?*

**MC:** Well something that I would immediately comment on here is that one of the represented spaces in the installation is the Deutsche Börse which funds one of the biggest photography prizes in the world. When I first went to visit the Deutsche Börse headquarters which are just outside Frankfurt I was met with airport-like security after which I was received in a reception area where Andreas Gursky's *Chicago Board Trading* was hanging...I guess what I'm saying is that I don't see a difference in how the art market functions – it's all implicated and in some way it's all tainted. In the past I've been quite interested in the idea of critical representational strategies and ephemerality. For example in the *Breathing Factory* nothing was framed as I thought that this would feed into the notion that the subjects were permanent when they were not. In *Ausschnitte aus EDEN/Extracts from EDEN* the work was projection based hinting at this idea that the subjects had the potential to disappear.

**SA:** *You mention Lewis Hine's early work as a reference point. What is it about Hine that interests you and what other photographers have you found influential.*

**MC:** Allan Sekula would definitely be a reference point. Sekula once described Hine as exceptional which I would have to agree with. I remember visiting the Henri Cartier-Bresson foundation in Paris where a photograph of Hine's was on show. It was an image of a mother at Ellis Island with two children. When I looked closely I could see that the two children in the foreground were actually out of focus. This so clearly revealed that it wasn't Hine's technical know-how that made his images so influential, but it was his vision and the sophisticated means through which he disseminated and presented his work.

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Curated by Helen Carey, *The Market* has been supported by the Arts Council of Ireland and partnered by The Gallery of Photography, Belfast Exposed, The Arts Council of Northern Ireland, CCA Derry-Londonderry and Limerick City Gallery of Art. In addition the exhibition is part of the visual art events marking the centenary of the *1913 Dublin Lockout*, a pivotal moment in Irish labour history. A publication is planned for 2014. Further information: <http://lockout2013.wordpress.com>

[Ed: Please note the full captions to two images referred to above, seen in the selection at right:

*The Normalisation of Deviance I* (Spectrogram of audio generated in one quarter by Irish Minister of Finance, Michael Noonan's application of the words, *market/markets* in public speeches since taking office in March 2011) (Design Ken Curran) from THE MARKET, a project by Mark Curran

*The Normalisation of Deviance II* (Algorithm to identify Michael Noonan's application of the words, *market/markets* in public speeches since taking office in March 2011) (Design Ken Curran) from THE MARKET, a project by Mark Curran ]

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