

**Anthony Haughey**  
**Disputed Territory**  
Gallery of Photography  
8 March – 9 April 2006

Our fear of death is not the fear of the condition of being dead – how could we possibly mind nothingness? – it is more a terrible discomfort at the thought of the continuation of the world that survives us, without the benefit of our perception of its activities. Anthony Haughey's photographs of the existing world highlight the absence of those who have left it. They thus carry with them a pathetic poignancy that leaves us with an emotional response which journalistic imagery of the same subjects denies us.

In *Men Digging*, made in Kosovo in 2001, the six men stand in or around the shallow hole they have made, accompanied by a number of grey plastic sacks. We do not know what the bags contain, whether their contents have been retrieved from the earth or are about to be interred, but there is a clear sense that we are gazing, from a respectful distance, on a ritual with death at its centre. In contrast to this intimate act of labour, the foreground shows signs of leisure, an earlier break from work, with shirts hanging on trees and the skins of watermelon slices scattered on the dry grass – blood-red vaginal forms which make this an image of life from conception to final resting place.

The pattern of life, including the length of its duration, is determined in large part by the relationship between individual and state, through, for example, economic levels, class privilege, health provision and through military conflict. Haughey's landscapes act as memories of these relationships – the scarring of physical territories where conflicts take place and the debris left behind by acts of violence. In *Lightbulb in Field* (1991), the bulb hangs from an overhead cable over the dead and burnt grass of a Kosovo meadow, hinting at a war crime and disturbing the silence of this otherwise innocuous vista. This impact hits all the harder, as one's initial reading is one of Magrittean displacement, our pleasure at its absurdity turning to guilt at the realisation of the sinister reality of the scene.

All that remains of them *Destroyed Files* (1999) is a layer of ash across a large area of a Bosnian field. We know they were files because scattered throughout the remains of the bonfire are numerous levered rings from box files, signs of a state bureaucracy which wishes to hide its ugly truth. Just as the holding of information is an important tool of those in power, its destruction can impede the movement of power elsewhere. Amongst the ashes, a thistle plant grows defiantly, but this is hardly a picture of hope, as the finality of the destruction of historical documentation always denies victims of conflict the conclusions they require for peace.

The removal of evidence in war often includes the denial of human identity. *Class of '73*, a found photograph, is shown twice. The original hangs at one end of the upstairs corridor, while a slide version is projected at the other. As its title suggests, this is a school photograph of children attending Vaso Pashe Primary School in the Kosovo town of Pec, which was used by Serbian troops for barracks. The faces of the children had been scratched from the image, reminiscent, as Haughey observes, of Stalinist airbrushing of dissidents. With the help of the school's teachers and headmaster (who took the original photograph), Haughey unearthed the identity of the schoolteacher and sixteen of the children, while the identity and fate of the other twenty-two remain unknown.

Along the corridor between the two copies of the school photographs are a number of passport photographs of displaced Albanians, whose original passports were confiscated. Commercial photographer Izmai Luta made these photographs as a “symbolic restoration of a stolen identity”.

The box file reappears in the installation piece titled *Resolution*. Two of them sit on a shelf underneath the video part of the work. They are marked UN res 819 and UN res 1004, United Nations Security Council resolutions which assert the independent sovereignty of Bosnia Herzegovina and condemn the ethnic cleansing by Bosnian Serb paramilitary units. The video documents what appears at first to be a piece of seventies performance art, a man dressed in white and wearing surgeon’s gloves tipping from bags articles of clothing onto a white-painted floor. The dirty, crumpled garments are spread out and arranged, often given human form, offering a kind of dignity to what one assumes are the clothes of victims of massacre.

The central section of the installation consists of twenty-four small lightboxes, nineteen attached to the wall, five sitting on the floor. The latter, along with one of the former, contain photographs of scars, permanent reminders to survivors of the massacres they lived through. The eighteen other wall-mounted lightboxes hold photographs of objects removed from massacre victims, placed in numbered evidence bags – spectacles (Number 14871), make-up bag, keys, comb, watch, etc. These bring to mind the huge collections of similar objects removed from holocaust victims, still held in Auschwitz as a poignant reminder of the individuals behind the statistics.

All elements of the installation are tied together with a soundtrack, recordings of the testaments of survivors, with translations voiced by a single American woman. They talk of running, screaming, being shot and of surviving by playing possum or through protection from gunfire through being covered with the bodies of the dead.

The cross-referencing within the installation also provides an informative and emotional context for reading the exhibition as a whole. It’s rare to find a show that approaches political issues in a way that genuinely moves its audience in the way *Disputed Territories* does. This is Phil Collins for grown-ups, producing both self-reflection and consideration of the dignity of human existence in the face of appalling oppression.

Colin Darke, May 2006