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Review of Haroon Mirza, *Mother's Tankstation*, published in *MAP* Issue 22, Summer 2010: 82.

Anthemoessa, the title of Haroon Mirza's exhibition, is named after the island home of the Sirens who, according to Greek mythology, would lure sailors to their deaths on hidden, jagged rocks. Responding to the fact that the gallery is also a dwelling place, Mirza imagines *Mother's Tankstation* as another island home and directs attention to its location at Usher's Island, an area of Dublin once surrounded by the River Liffey and the site of an important religious school and library in the 15th century. The exhibition is initially experienced as a sequence leading from the front gallery, through the main space into the back gallery, but Mirza's two major works, 'Adhān', 2009 and 'Birds of Pray', 2010, are timed to intersect so that the visitor (like a hapless sailor) moves continually between them, lured by musical and sonic cues.

'Adhān', a 4-minute video projected onto a screen in the corner of the front gallery, takes its title from the Islamic call to prayer recited by the Muezzin and is structured around the concept of the 'Anthem', defined as a song or passage alternately recited by two bodies. Encountered in semi-darkness immediately after entry from the street, the video opens with a shot of a small retro-style Fender amp in a corner of a domestic space, the likely source of an audible hum. An equally quaint radio sits on a sideboard, along with a desk lamp and some kind of electronic timing device, while a television monitor on the floor displays an edited and looped clip of a young Cat Stevens (before he changed his name to Yusuf Islam). Playing the opening chords of 'Father and Son', Stevens explains that 'the idea' of the song, as distinct from the song itself, 'will go on for a long time', presumably referring to the familial and social power relations explored in the lyrics.

The words of 'Father and Son' are never heard, however. Instead Mirza constructs another piece of music through the interplay between three elements; the opening chords played by Stevens, a musical phrase played by another guitarist who remains off-screen in the edited clip, and a contribution by a female cellist who shares the same domestic space as the amp, radio and monitor, and who listens intently before responding. The cellist is joined by another performer, credited as the 'Muezzin' – a young man who walks to the corner of the room and then places a light bulb into his mouth, which then blinks intermittently, as though communicating a signal to some interior world. When the music finishes, the video cuts to a white screen. There is a moment of silence, followed by the sound of a film projector jumping into action, somewhere in the main gallery.

This sound effect is a trick: the moving image component of 'Birds of Pray' is presented on video, not film. Consisting of edited scenes from Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966), the work focuses on key points in Bergman's narrative, which concerns the relationship between Alma, a nurse (played by Bibi Anderson) sharing an island summer home with her patient Elisabeth, a celebrated theatre actress (played by Liv Ullmann) who has refused to speak since performing the role of Electra. The sound of the projector is heard first in the prologue to *Persona* and again when the image of Alma's face literally disintegrates, so that the celluloid appears to melt away leaving only a white screen. In another scene, suffused with a white ghostly light, Elisabeth wanders into the bedroom where Alma sleeps and drifts towards and away from her, accompanied by the distant sound of a foghorn. These images are projected onto a tilted framed screen, propped against the wooden surround of a record turntable, upon which a small radio lies, rotating slowly.

'Adhān' hints at the importance of the familial home as a site for the transmission of knowledge and construction of tradition. It gestures towards psychoanalytic theory through the form of the duet into which a third component enters. This theme is developed in 'Birds of Pray' by citing *Persona*, a film that makes visible the apparatus of projection in both the cinematic and psychoanalytic sense, and through the overt display of video and audio technologies. In the

process, however, the very impulse to reveal the truth, or visualise that which lies behind consciousness, is called into question. Ultimately, like Bergman, Mirza understands the seductive power not only of oblivion (represented by Alma's loss of self) but also of rationality (represented by Elisabeth's resolute silence and detachment). So in *Anthemoessa*, the Siren's song is reconfigured as a continual pull between these two forces. The attentive viewer and listener is sent wandering backwards and forwards through the gallery, mirroring the semi-conscious movements of Elisabeth, as she drifts through a luminous space that might be someone else's dream.

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