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THE BELFAST MAZE

Photographs by Donovan Wylie
Film by Amanda Dunsmore

Temporary exhibition
15 February – 23 July 2006
Free entry

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With the support from the



THE BELFAST MAZE

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1 - THE BELFAST MAZE

The Maze prison is situated 15 minutes south of Belfast. Built in 1976 and closed since 2000, it came to symbolize the conflict in Northern Ireland. As yet, no decision has been made on what to do with the site, evidence of Northern Ireland's difficulty in coming to terms with its recent past.

Because of its repetitive design (eight H-shaped buildings) and sheer size, the prison had a disorienting effect on those who passed through its gates. The fact that it was known by a word meaning "labyrinth" was nevertheless coincidental; the prison in fact took its name from a small neighbouring town, Mazetown.

The construction of the H-Blocks in 1976 reflected a new hard-line attitude towards those detained during the Troubles, who were then treated as common criminals. The Maze became a physical-political labyrinth, a microcosm of the conflict being waged outside. The republicans and loyalists locked up face-to-face inside reproduced the conflict's patterns in a world in which violence and idealism resulted in extremes of behaviour. The Maze may have been a high security prison, but it managed to telescope every aspect of the troubles within its walls. Following these setbacks, internal regulations were eased, making it possible to lay the groundwork for a dialogue that furthered the peace process.

The parties had opposing points of view of the nature of the conflict – war or internal unrest. More and more acts of violence – hunger strikes, killings, suicides – concerned the question of the detainees' status, an issue that was hard to resolve and hard to accept.

Since the events of 11 September 2001, the struggle against terrorism has heightened public awareness of the issues relating to a prisoner's legal status. Guantanamo illustrates to what extent the legal grounds for detention can be circumvented in situations outside the bounds of international law and the Geneva Conventions.

The IRA recently lay down its weapons in favour of political action. The British Government has declared its willingness to close its military bases in Northern Ireland and normalize its presence in the province. However, the situation remains tense, as witness the violent clashes between the forces of law and order and the Orangemen in September 2005.

With **THE BELFAST MAZE**, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum takes visitors down the tortuous path followed by a process of reconciliation in the heart of Europe. Our aim is to place what happened in Northern Ireland in perspective, and thereby to show what can go wrong in any conflict. In fragile or ill-defined contexts, our only hope for lasting peace lies in knowledge, tolerance and perseverance.

Loa Haagen Pictet
Curator



2 – A RATIONAL LABYRINTH

“The Maze was a prison version of a Russian doll : a small enclosed space is encased by a slightly larger one, then that too is encased by another, then another and another.”

Louise Purbick, *The Maze*, 2004

The famous **Maze Prison** was aptly named. A gigantic, 145-hectare site, the prison was both rational in its repetitive design and labyrinthine in that people lost their bearings in it. Built for security, it imposed a form of systematic isolation on those held within its walls.

Inside the prison, just behind the perimeter wall, were wide, 4.5-meter areas called ***Inertias***. The Inertias were divided into 36 numbered sections and had floor-level motion sensors, enabling the guards quickly to pinpoint the location of anyone trying to escape.

There were only two gates leading to the prison core. The gates opened onto a network of roads, each of which could be closed at any time and thereby seal off a section of the prison if needed.

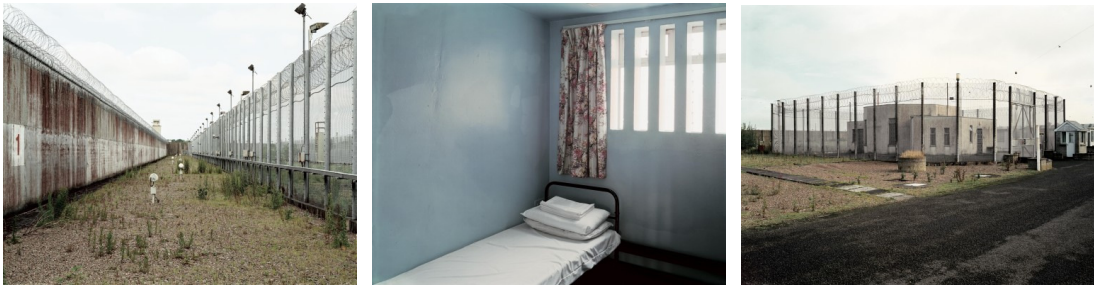
The Maze was also set apart by its eight buildings, all in the form of an “H”, which were known as ***H-blocks***. Each H-block had 96 cells measuring 5m². At times there were two detainees to a cell. Up to 900 guards were employed to keep watch over the prison.

Everywhere on the site, a system of cables strung above the ground prevented anything from attempting a landing. Two chapels had been built to allow the detainees to worship. The H-Blocks were surrounded by numerous, closely observed yards in which the detainees took exercise. The premises also had two sports grounds.

3 - DONOVAN WYLIE

Donovan Wylie was born in Belfast in 1971 and has been a member of the Magnum Agency since 1997. He currently lives and works in London.

In 2002, Donovan Wylie received exclusive and unprecedented permission to take pictures unsupervised in the Maze. He spent over 100 days in the deserted prison between November 2002 and October 2003.



“From the first visit I made to the Maze Prison I knew what it was I wanted to convey: scale and repetition. I wanted to create long sequences of pictures that would replicate my experience of walking through what felt like endless spaces that only fractionally changed, that in the end left you feeling completely disoriented. It took time to understand the prison's different phases and stages and sections and divisions; there is nothing more conceptual than a prison. I was keen to retain the idea of the prison not as a relic, as if the conflict was something of the past, over and resolved, but instead to give the idea of the place being ready for use. This was so as to mirror Northern Ireland's current state of political limbo, and uncertain future.” [...]

“The Maze was designed to contain and isolate. Its geography is clear and functional, but also repetitive and confusing. There are eight H-blocks within its seventeen-foot-high concrete perimeter wall which stretches for two and half miles, also taking in the Long Kesh site.” [...]

“If you walk from the perimeter wall towards the centre of the prison, as if breaking into the prison from the outside, it becomes clear how Inertias lead to Steriles, and Steriles lead to roads that lead to the blocks. [...]. This sense of repetition is intensified once inside a block. For example, if you leave H-block 1 at the very east of the complex, and enter H-block 4, almost a mile away on the north side, it is impossible to distinguish, even remember, which of the two you are actually in. The result is a feeling of complete disorientation. I photographed the Maze over a period of twelve months and this feeling never went away.” [...]

“The land has been given to the Northern Ireland Office. As I write, the future of the site remains uncertain.”

Donovan Wylie, *The Maze*, Granta Books, 2004.

4 - AMANDA DUNSMORE

Amanda Dunsmore was born in England in 1968 and studied at the Belfast College of Art. Today she lives and works in Ireland.

In 1999, Amanda Dunsmore worked as a resident artist in the Maze prison. In 2004 she produced *Billy's Museum*, a film in which Billy Hull, for 25 years a prison warder, retires and shows us objects confiscated from the prisoners and secretly kept inside the prison. Through these objects, which were never displayed in public and of which there are few records today, the film provides a contemporary account of the harsh reality of life in the Maze.

Billy's Museum is the central component of Dunsmore's *Keeper- the Maze/Long Kesh Archive Project*. www.lit.ie/dunsmore



"In his daily work, Billy Hull was confronted by escape attempts, the smuggling of goods and information, and by illegal public agitation. The conflict in Northern Ireland's society, concentrated in this prison, was his field of inquiry. Hull's illegal archive of the political and technical "tools" used by his prisoners and the aesthetics of their opposition, was his attempt - over a period of twenty years - to use a collection of objects to bring order into the constantly present conflict and its violence." [...]

"They included homemade tools and weapons (including guns), tunnelling equipment, photographs, home-distilled alcohol, records kept by the prisoners detailing guerrilla tactics and command structures and histories of their paramilitary organisations." [...]

"Billy's Museum, a multimedia work in progress, which shows a now retired prison warder's effort to arrange confiscated court exhibits and other found objects from a high-security prison in the manner of a museum, so making them historically comprehensible for both himself and coming generations." [...]

Amanda Dunsmore, 2005

5 – ONE ISLAND, TWO STATES, A CONFLICT

1169	Ireland is occupied by Henry II, King of England.
17th century	Scottish and English Protestants start to settle in northern Ireland.
1800	Act of Union between Ireland and the United Kingdom. Ireland becomes a British province. Union of the Church of Ireland and the Church of England. Emergence of Irish nationalism as a result.
1916	<i>Home Rule</i> , the Irish independence process, is delayed by World War I. The British repress an uprising of Irish nationalists. Many civilians die in what becomes known as the <i>Easter Rebellion</i> .
1919	Catholics take to the streets. War of Independence between the republicans of Northern Ireland and the British Army. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) is founded.
1921	Anglo-Irish Treaty: Ireland is partitioned between the sovereign State of the Republic of Ireland, in the south, and a northern province called Ulster which remains a part of the United Kingdom.
1968	The Catholic minority in Northern Ireland accuses the pro-British Protestant majority of discrimination. Renewed strife between the two religious communities.
1969	The British send troops to Northern Ireland to deal with the growing violence.
1972	The British Army shoots dead several people during a march in Londonderry by peaceful demonstrators from the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association. The incident, which came to be known as <i>Bloody Sunday</i> , sparks retaliation by the IRA. Northern Ireland is placed under direct rule from London.
1974	In five years, the number of detainees in Northern Ireland quadruples. The province has the highest per capita rate of prisoners in Europe. The state of emergency is declared.

- 1984** IRA attack in Brighton. Margaret Thatcher, the British Prime Minister, narrowly escapes with her life.
- 1994** The IRA declares a cease-fire. The British Government and the republican party Sinn Fein meet officially for the first time in 70 years.
- 1998** 10 April: the *Good Friday Agreement* is signed.
15 August, Omagh: an IRA splinter group claims responsibility for an explosion that kills numerous people.
David Trimble, who had come to symbolize the Ulster Unionist Party, and John Hume, leader of the nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party, receive the Nobel Peace Prize for their work towards reconciliation.
- 1999** The Northern Ireland Assembly is given powers of government, marking the end of 27 years of direct rule from London.
- 2002** Protestant leader David Trimble threatens to resign if Tony Blair does not bar the republican party Sinn Fein from the Assembly.
- 2005** The British Prime Minister officially acknowledges a miscarriage of justice, 25 years after the death in prison of Irish republican Giuseppe Conlon, falsely accused of having taken part in an attack.
The IRA lays down its weapons and asks its members to fight for Irish reunification by political means only.
Ian Paisley, the radical Protestant leader and big winner in the legislative elections, deplores the IRA statement's "*lack of transparency*".
11 September: violent clashes break out between demonstrators and the forces of law and order during the traditional Protestant loyalist march to mark the victory of William of Orange over the Catholics.
26 September: the disarmament commission confirms the effective destruction of the IRA's arsenal.

6 – THE MAZE, THE HISTORY OF A PRISON

- 1972** Fresh wave of violence.
Almost 1,000 people are interned in buildings not at all suited to the purpose on a former Royal Air Force training ground in Long Kesh, near the village of Mazetown.
- The term “special category” is used to define the prisoners’ status. The prisoners are allowed to move freely about the prison, and are granted extensive visiting privileges and the right to wear their own clothes.
- 1976** End of “special category” status: all prisoners arrested and sentenced are henceforth considered to be common criminals. Construction of the eight new H-shaped blocks that make up the Maze, next to the former Long Kesh buildings. Response to the massive increase in the number of detainees.
The ICRC, which started visiting Long Kesh in 1971, pursues its activities in the Maze; it will continue to do so until 1999.
- 1978** Numerous prisoners refuse to follow the new prison rules. Start of *the Blanket Protest*, during which 300 detainees wear nothing but a blanket.
Struggle for political prisoner status.
- 1981** A hunger strike is launched within the prison. Bobby Sands, leader of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), and nine other prisoners die.
- 1983** 38 detainees escape.
The British Government separates the loyalists and the republicans within the prison. Some of the prisoners are granted political prisoner status.
- 1997** Loyalist leader Billy Wright is killed in the Maze by a republican prisoner.
- 1998-2000** Over 400 prisoners are released under the 1998 *Good Friday Agreement*.
- 2000** The last prisoners are transferred to other prisons in Northern Ireland. The Maze is officially closed. Discussion starts on the site’s future.

7 - NORTHERN IRELAND

1,702,628 inhabitants

Religious affiliation	CATHOLIC About 43% of the population.						PROTESTANT About 54% of the population.
Political persuasions	NATIONALISTS REPUBLICANS						UNIONISTS LOYALISTS
Goals	The incorporation of Northern Ireland into the Republic of Ireland.					Maintaining the union between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom.	
Political parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SDLP – Social Democratic and Labour Party The biggest Irish nationalist party. Leader John Hume, who resigned in 2001, is the Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1998. ▪ Sinn Fein – “<i>We ourselves</i>” Republican party founded in 1905. Sinn Fein and its emblematic leader, Gerry Adams, represent the political wing of the IRA. 					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ UUP – Ulster Unionist Party Conservative, and the leading unionist party in Northern Ireland. Headed from 1995 to May 2005 by David Trimble, Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1998. ▪ DUP – Democratic Unionist Party Party of hard-line unionists. Founded in 1971 by the Reverend Ian Paisley. 	
Paramilitary groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ IRA Irish Republican Army 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PIRA Provisional Irish Republican Army 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ INLA Irish National Liberation Army 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ UVF Ulster Volunteer Force 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ UDA Ulster Defence Association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LVF Loyalist Volunteer Force 	
	Military organization founded in 1919. Northern Ireland’s largest paramilitary group. In favour of the limited use of force.	Clandestine republican paramilitary organization founded in 1970 following a split in the IRA. Has established a broad network going beyond national borders. Gives priority to the armed struggle.	A PIRA splinter group founded in 1975. Never observed a ceasefire before 1998.	Loyalist paramilitary group founded in 1966 and based in Belfast.	Founded in 1971 in Belfast working class neighbourhoods. Refuses to surrender its weapons until the IRA does.	Loyalist paramilitary organization. A UVF splinter group founded in 1996.	

The sole aim of this table is to define a number of terms, trends and acronyms. It in no way reflects the complex nature of the conflict.

8 – AROUND THE EXHIBITION

Guided tours for groups

Information and reservations call +41 22 748 95 06

School visits

Information and reservations call +41 22 748 95 06

Public guided tours (free)

Sunday at 2:30 p.m. on 19 March, 2 April, 7 May and 11 June 2006.

General information

Open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day but Tuesday

Shop - Restaurant

From Cornvavin train station : bus 8, stop Appia

Disabled acces

The full programme of events organised around the exhibition is available on our website www.micr.org