

PADDY JOLLEY - Maker of dark and disturbing art films

By Aidan Dunne

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Paddy Jolley known for his dark, visually powerful films, has died suddenly in Delhi, India, aged 47. His work, which ranged across photography, video, sculptural installation and fine art film, won considerable critical acclaim and several awards.

Underlying everything he did was a strong, distinctive personal vision, in which elements of the disturbing, the violent and the uncanny are tinged with absurdity and black humour.

Within the space of a single photographic image or a five-minute film, he had the ability to conjure up an entire inner, subjective world, a world the writer Belinda McKeon described as “deeply unsettling yet never entirely unfamiliar”. He was born in Bangor, Co Down, one of four children. The family moved to Waterford when he was in his teens, and he attended Newtown School. He studied fine art print at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin, graduating in 1989. He travelled and worked in North America, stayed for a time in London and, in 1991, moved to Prague, where he began to concentrate on photography, going on to complete an MA in photography at the School of Fine Arts, New York, in 1995.

From that point on, he worked constantly on a succession of projects, both short- and long-term, and was often on the move. He travelled light and seemed to have friends everywhere.

Location was central to his creativity, and dystopian urban settings feature large in his films. While gravitating towards northern climes – notably Murmansk – he was also drawn to the warmth and light of India. Those who knew him often commented on the contrast between the brightness of his personality and the darkness of his work.

In his films, he resisted conventional narrative structure, preferring oblique, fragmentary sequences and striking vignettes in which isolated figures are entrapped in nightmarish predicaments.

Significant landmarks include his 1996 photographic show *Satellite* at the Gallery of Photography, Dublin, and elsewhere, in which startling images of unexplained menace and calamity sketched out his imaginative terrain.

His 2000 film, *The Drowning Room*, made with frequent collaborator Reynold Reynolds, disconcertingly locates scenes from everyday life in an underwater room. It picked up an honourable mention at the Sundance Film Festival and a best experimental film award in Houston. Scenes of individual calamity in New York feature in another award-winning collaboration, *Seven Days 'til Sunday*.

In *Burn*, made with Reynold Reynolds in 2002, an interior with two figures is progressively engulfed by flames while the hapless protagonists carry on as if nothing unusual is happening.

Set in an abandoned Ballymun tower block, *Here After*, made with Rebecca Trost and animator Lise Inger Hansen in 2004, imagines the discarded furniture and fittings of the flats coming to life.

More recently, *The Door Ajar*, an 84-minute "feature documentary" – Jolley noted that he did not make documentaries, though acknowledged that the film is factually based – premiered at the Jameson Dublin International Film Festival last year. It is based on French writer Antonin Artaud's visit to Ireland in 1937, during which he claimed to be carrying St Patrick's staff with the intention of returning it.

Paddy Jolley suffered a fatal heart attack while filming in New Delhi, experimenting with time-lapse exposures for a project relating to *Finnegans Wake*, a book he believed ideally suited him as it is made up of a prolonged sequence of words as images.

He was married briefly to the artist Clea van der Grijn.

He is survived by his partner Lu Thornely, their sons Edmund (Ned) and Thomas, his mother Dorothy, his sisters Clare and Kerry, his brother Chris and their families.

Paddy Jolley, born December 20th, 1964; died January 15th, 2012

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/maker-of-dark-and-disturbing-art-films-1.457843>