

About the Artist

Duncan Campbell was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1972. He completed his MFA at Glasgow School of Art in 1998 and received a BA in Fine Art at the University of Ulster in 1996. He lives and works in Glasgow and is represented by Hotel in London. Solo exhibitions include Ludlow 38, New York, NY (2009); *Bernadette*, Hotel, London, UK (2008); *Sigmar, 0-60*, ICA London, London, UK (2008); *The Unnamable*, Lux, London, UK (2006); *Falls Burns Malone Fiddles*, Galerie Luis Campana, Cologne, Germany (2004); and *Falls Burns Malone Fiddles*, Transmission Gallery, Glasgow, Scotland (2003).

Campbell has been featured in a recent acquisitions exhibition at SNGMA Edinburgh (2008). He has shown in group exhibitions including *A Rictus Grin*, Broadway 1602, New York, NY (2008); *After October*, Elizabeth Dee, New York, NY (2008); *You have not been honest*, Museo D'Arte Contemporanea Donna Regina, Naples, Italy (2007); *Art Now Lightbox*, Tate Britain, London, UK (2006); *Archaeology of Today*, Els Hanappe Underground, Athens, Greece (2005); *Revolution is Not What it Used to Be*, S1 Artspace Sheffield, UK (2004); Manifesta 5, European Biennial of Contemporary Art, San Sebastian, Spain (2004); *Emotion Eins*, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany (2004); *Fresh and Upcoming*, a project with Luke Fowler at Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany (2003); and *Old Habits Die Hard*, Sparwasser HQ Berlin, Germany and Norwich Gallery, Norwich, UK (2003).

Related Public Programs:

Thursday, May 21, 7PM, Bartos Theatre

Film Screening and Artist Talk by Duncan Campbell

Thursday, June 18, 7PM, Bartos Theatre

LVAC Film Night Screening:

Le Mépris (Contempt), dir., Jean-Luc Godard (France, 1963, 102 min.)

**Duncan Campbell:
Bernadette (2008)**

**Color and black-and-white
16mm film transferred to DigiBeta, 37 min.**

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MIT LIST VISUAL ARTS CENTER

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Duncan Campbell

Bernadette (2008)

Color and black-and-white

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*Devlin is a figure in whom the politics and history of this very particular time and place seemed to distill, and through whom they seemed to pass. ...Bernadette is my portrait of her.*¹

In Jean Luc Godard's film *Le Mépris*, the camera sensuously traces Brigitte Bardot's nude body as she asks her screen husband, played by Michel Piccoli, if he finds various parts of her body appealing, provoking him into a *blason* (a poetic catalogue of a woman's admirable physical features). Duncan Campbell's *Bernadette* features a similar cinematic blason: languidly, the camera moves from a woman's naked toes, feet, and ankles to her right hand and the crown of her head. When it lingers lovingly on her eyes and gap-toothed smile, it is possible to recognize that all, presumably, belong to Bernadette Devlin McAliskey.

During the Troubles of Northern Ireland, Bernadette Devlin was one of the founding members of the People's Democracy Party; in 1969 she became, at the age of twenty-one, the youngest person ever elected to Parliament at the time. A firebrand and provocateur, she campaigned under the slogan "I will take my seat and fight for your rights" meaning that she would not, like others before her, use abstentionism to signal resistance. Campbell's ardent and intimate footage of her seems as shocking today as Godard's must have seemed in 1963.

In *Le Mépris*, important actions take place off camera and the viewer afterward must infer what has happened from the characters' dialogue. In Campbell's *Bernadette* many of the acts that made Devlin McAliskey (in)famous also mostly take place off-camera. That these events happened is deduced through Campbell's use of vintage photos and film

footage, including snippets or out-takes of interviews; in one scene Devlin is "interviewed" by a newscaster in absentia.

In 1969, Devlin served a six-month jail term for incitement to riot for her role (on the side of the residents) in the "Battle of the Bogside" in Derry. When Mayor John Lindsay awarded her the keys to the city of New York in 1969, she promptly passed them on to the Black Panther Party; and in 1971, she was one of five Northern Ireland MPs that took part in a hunger strike in front of the Prime Minister's residence at 10 Downing Street in London.

Devlin was in Derry for a Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association march in the Bogside on January 30, 1972, an incident known as Bloody Sunday. Members of the 1st Battalion of the British Parachute Regiment shot twenty-seven protesters, including seven teenagers, some in the back. Thirteen died. Devlin should have been allowed to speak in Parliament about this event (it is parliamentary convention that any MP witnessing an incident under discussion be granted an opportunity to speak) but was denied this right. When she struck Reginald Maudling (Secretary of State for the Home Department in the Conservative government) after he stated to Parliament that the British Army had fired in self-defense, she was temporarily suspended.

What is not included or hinted at in the film is what happened to Devlin McAliskey after 1972. We do not learn of the assassination attempt on her and her family in 1981—when she and her husband were shot by Ulster Freedom Fighters paramilitaries as British soldiers were watching their home—or of her continuing dedicated work on behalf of migrant workers in Northern Ireland.

As the film progresses, it is as though we cannot get enough of these mediated images of a young woman who was burdened by both celebrity and enormous responsibility at

a very young age. Campbell stitches his historical footage together by inserting blank sections, animation, and various sounds. At one point in the film a female narrator begins to read sections of Devlin's autobiography, *The Price of My Soul*;² but she soon interrupts herself and begins to interrogate and upbraid herself. Here, as in the blason at the beginning, Campbell moves seamlessly from the authentic to the imagined. In this section of the film, the archival is abandoned for the artistic; Campbell's poetic prose is voiced over manipulated images of Devlin and her birthplace, County Tyrone. The artist both employs and spurns narrative story telling, and his method of working deliberately frustrates any attempt to own the truth about Devlin:

*I wanted to faithfully represent Devlin, to do justice to her legacy. Yet I worked with mediated images of her and writings about her. What I produced can only ever be a selection of these representations, via my own obsessions and my desire to make winning art of her.*³

Jane Farver, LVAC Director

¹ "Duncan Campbell—Bernadette," International Film Festival Rotterdam 2009, in <http://www.filmfestivalrotterdam.com/professionals/programme/sections...awards-competition-for-short-films/duncan-campbell---bernadette.aspx>

² Devlin published her autobiography *The Price of My Soul* in 1969, which she claims to have written to "put the real flesh-and-blood Bernadette Devlin on the record" and because her mother, whose life she said was much more worthy of being recorded than her own, had hoped to write her own autobiography under that title.

³ "Irish born Artist Duncan Campbell Presents Film Bernadette at Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art" in *ArtDaily.org*. http://www.artdaily.org/index.asp?int_sec=11&int_new=27385&int_mod=1