

○ Dublin

Haroon Mirza

24 February — 27 March

Mother's Tankstation

Anthemoessa, the title of Haroon Mirza's exhibition, is named after the island home of the Sirens who, according to Greek mythology, lured sailors to their deaths on hidden, jagged rocks. Responding to the gallery as 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, 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, 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, the video opens with a shot of a domestic space containing a small retro-style Fender amp, the likely source of an audible hum. On screen there's also a quaint radio on a sideboard, a desk lamp and a kind of electronic timing device. A television monitor on the floor displays an edited and looped clip of a young Cat Stevens (pre-Yusuf Islam incarnation). 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.

But the words of the song are never heard. 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 and radio etc. She listens intently before responding and is joined by another performer, credited as the 'Muezzin'. He places a light bulb into his mouth, which then blinks intermittently, as though communicating a signal to some interior world. Music over, the video cuts to a white screen. Silence, and then the sound of a film projector, somewhere in the main gallery, jumps into action.



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 Andersson) 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, leaving a white screen. The images are projected onto a tilted framed screen, propped against the wooden surround of a record turntable, on which a small radio rotates 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 duet, with the entry of a third component. This theme is also developed in 'Birds of Pray', with Mirza's display of technology and in the appropriation of *Persona*, a film that makes visible the apparatus of projection both cinematically and psychoanalytically. In the process, however, the very impulse to reveal the truth, or visualise that which lies behind consciousness, is called into question. 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). In *Anthemoessa*, the Siren's song is reconfigured as a continual pull between these two forces and the attentive viewer is sent wandering back and forth through the gallery, mirroring the semi-conscious movements of Elisabeth as she drifts through a luminous space that might be someone else's dream.

Maeve Connolly is a writer and lecturer based in Dublin