

The ‘Speedie’ Telstar Tour ; A Trip from the analogue to the digital

Hello and Welcome to The Speedie Telstar Tour. Before we leave, we would like to give you a little information about this *gezamkunstwerk* – or total artwork. The term simply refers to the fact that it is difficult to say what is not the artwork, and what is framed by it. This is more than a sculpture, an installation or a tour but is a project considered within the expanded field of art today. Your journey today starts here and takes you on a simple orbit of Galway to arrive back here in around 150 minutes, or 2 and a half hours.

You will be aware that for those of you who own smartphones, you are being traced through this orbit by a series of Global (or Ground) Positioning Satellites orbiting invisibly above us, a technology whose pervasive presence is able to draw upon years of research by the military industrial complex to allow the latest publicly available versions of the Geo Information Service to pinpoint your location. Your digital presence in your own pocket speaks of the advances since the launch of the first global communications satellite in 1962, the Telstar, which is where we will start.

Here we see a sculpture of the Telstar. Whilst not being a replica of the Telstar, you nonetheless get an idea of its scale, with the original being only 2 inches larger than this. You will see references in the sculpture to the mechanical engineering that went into its realisation, powered by solar cells and rotating on its axis by tiny jets. However, you might also note that as a contemporary artwork, the *speedie* Telstar has been manufactured from not only upcycled parts of aluminium taken from computer frames, but by the latest digital technology, with the use of archival quality inkjet printing and hundreds of custom manufactured 3d printed screw heads. However, it also includes the pre-digital, with hand painted solar panels and hand tooling.

This satellite clearly does not use solar power as an energy resource, but instead draws power from very local energy sources; the enthusiasm and labor dedicated by the volunteer whose passions produced a different kind of value from that described in techno-scientific terms, something more akin to what we might call ‘love-value’. First used by Hal Foster to describe the artist engagement in the archive, this term can also be used to describe the work of Galway’s very own volunteers who over recent years have built the outstanding ‘Computing Museum of Ireland’, which will be the other key landing point of this tour.

Your host for this leg of the tour will be Brendan ‘Speedie’ Smith, who as a founding member of the Museum, has we believe provided the essential vision and ceaseless energy to power the transmission of passion for technology and computing. This ‘enthusiasm’ (itself an identifiable dimension of ‘love-value’), has been shared not only amongst his colleagues, but by the visitors and children who are able to make use of this extraordinary local facility. Providing remarkable social value, we felt that the authenticity of the labor put into the Museum by Brendan ‘speedie’ Smith was worthy of a personal tribute, and so we have built the *speedie* Telstar. This gift to the Museum, powered by love value and enthusiasm, does not however exist as a stationary singular entity, it is twinned to a similar replica in Bell Labs Museum in Dublin, and as such is a symbol of the vision of Brendan Smith to create a network of similar facilities that might at some point lead to the establishment of a National Museum for Computing and Technology in Ireland. As you will see in the tour, an incredible array of examples, made in Ireland and available to the public since the early 1980’s, have shaped our current technological landscape. That these are available not only to look at but in some cases to use, is a testament to the work of Brendan Smith and his colleagues.

Please take some time before boarding our terrestrial vehicle to have a look around. In particular, we draw your attention to the archival films that not only show the manufacturing of the Telstar by an International Consortium including Bell Labs, AT&T, NASA and European partners such as BT, but the inaugural television broadcast using the Telstar made

by John F Kennedy in 1962. You may also see and hear further footage of the developments of satellites in recordings played on our spatio-temporal axis as we move from the artistic into an orbit occupied by the enthusiast, the amateur technologist, the part time engineers with a passion for knowledge outside of the institutional.

Finally, we would also like to encourage those of you who have brought your smartphones, to use the QR code on the wall, which will allow you to track in real time, the actual position of the Telstar satellite today, as it speeds defunct through what must be a near perfect archival space, a distant but original museum of Space Technology, spread across the edge of the void in a dust free vacuum, polluted only by the debris of other satellites in a vast spatial field. This specimen is itself a time machine that links the instantaneity of the global and digital now with the pre-digital vision of a better future. As the original Telstar now glides across time zones to move from tomorrow's dawns into today's dusk and back again as it orbits the earth, we hope that our terrestrial gift speaks to the enthusiasm, community and shared vision of a simple humanity that those who claim to speak for us seem to have forgotten.