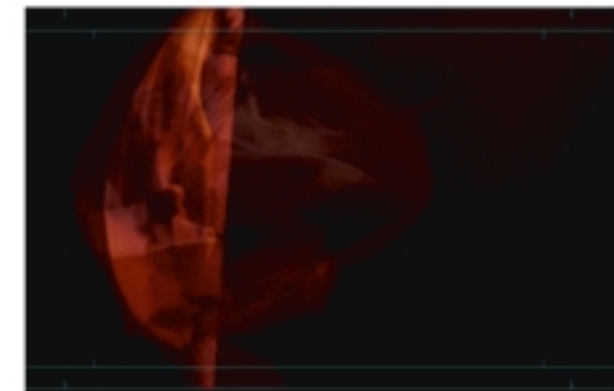
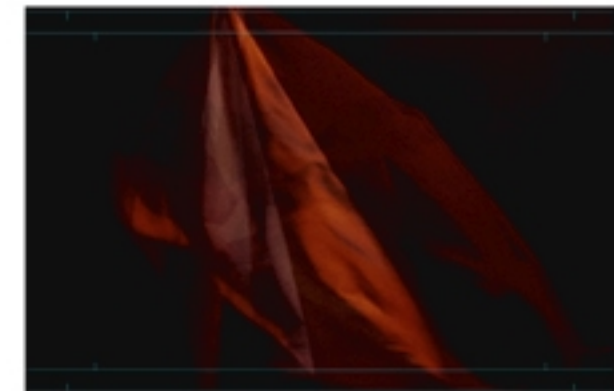


# MATERIAL AUTHORITY

2011 - 2013

FERGUS JORDAN: MATERIAL AUTHORITY



Shadows, 2013 (Video Stills)

Material Authority: *Minutes and Seconds of Territory*

Walking through Belfast in the middle of the night often I would find myself becoming quickly dislocated, wondering around a nocturnal no-man's land on a darkened narrow street usually somewhere between the north or west of the city where the patchwork territories collide. In this situation I would find myself looking for flags, murals or sectarian graffiti, any tell tail sign that could help identify the political geography the landscape I was in or the one that I might be about to enter. In the absence of these contentious symbols I would myself being overcome with anxiety caused by an uncertainty of not knowing. I came to the realisation that in a bizarre kind of way, throughout the years of walking around Belfast the presence of these signs has provided me with a relative form of comfort. At least I know what to expect when they are in full view and I can easily measure the sense of threat by the acknowledgement of these symbols. Yet it was only in this space of temporary absence did I fully acknowledge the durable presence of sectarian iconography in the landscape.

In I similar vein the absence of the union flag was clearly noted as came down over Belfast city hall on December 3<sup>rd</sup> 2012 after a democratic decision was passed to limit the number of days when the flag can fly. Yet its presence over city hall was of only peripheral concern for most citizens in the city. Preceding this decision, anxiety surrounding symbolic forms of national identity would have been considered to be a source of deep division only associated with the sectarianism of Northern Ireland's troubled past. However its sudden disconnection caused up-roar, seen as an attack on cultural boundaries and a marginalisation of the loyalist community. In response a wave of violence and protest has continued, revealing the tenuous physiological bond that still remains between the flag and the physical spaces in which they are placed.

As protests started to develop momentum once again flags have reappeared on the streets of prominent loyalist areas re-affirming old territorial boundaries. With the rising number of flags new tensions have quickly escalated, particularly at the interface points of the city. A distinct sense of hostility is permanently in the air, while the serious violence has been contained to just a few streets, around the corner within my own community away from the ruthless protests a general sense of unease continues to blanket the community. Even the local newsagent has become a point of symbolic contention, covered in red, white and blue paraphernalia with a collection bucket at the till to support the flag cause.

For decades the wide spread use of iconography has been an established mechanism to re-affirm territorial control. Flags in particular, establish a spatial anchorage holding a greater sense of authoritative weighting than other forms of territorial display. The flag has emerged as a permanent method to stabilise the sense of identity within the landscape, fending off the fear for both loyalist and republican communities as becoming "anonymous as any other"<sup>1</sup>.

Although the flags are physical objects mostly designated to the lampposts of main roads, its presence becomes the denotative signifier for territorial authority across the landscape. However this is a relationship that remains in a continual state of oscillation, flags shift with the wind and rain, they appear and disappear depending on darkness, light, shadows and colour cast. The legibility of the symbol is vulnerable to the varying environmental conditions in which they are placed.

In the process of photographing these transformations the camera itself becomes embroiled into this relationship, through taking multiple exposures in a single frame, long exposures, using high iso

values and with the intentional softening the focus, I begin to analyse how these durable signifiers of territory begin to mutate, dilute and dissolve. Using the lens I manipulate these imposing symbols that cannot be otherwise touched or tampered with.

Dim streetlights stage the flag providing the partial visibility necessary to expose the camera film over time. As large shadows project downward on to the streetscape below the cloth takes on a multitude of forms and colour overlapping again and again, slowly the camera records the obscuring symbol as its significance begins to erode. This approach has evolved from Hiroshi Sugimoto's method "twice infinity" used in his Architecture series where he uses the onslaught of blurred photography to strip back the values of imposing modernist buildings such as Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim. Sugimoto's soft black and white photographs, permits the viewer to step back from these imposing structures, viewing them in a whole new light. In a corresponding manner I use these methods to dissolve the value of the flag revealing its authoritative control as cosmetic, a material authority. While the physical boundaries of territory fortified by these symbols appear to shift, changing every minute and second, in a state of continual flux commanded between vision and the camera.

*Fergus Jordan*



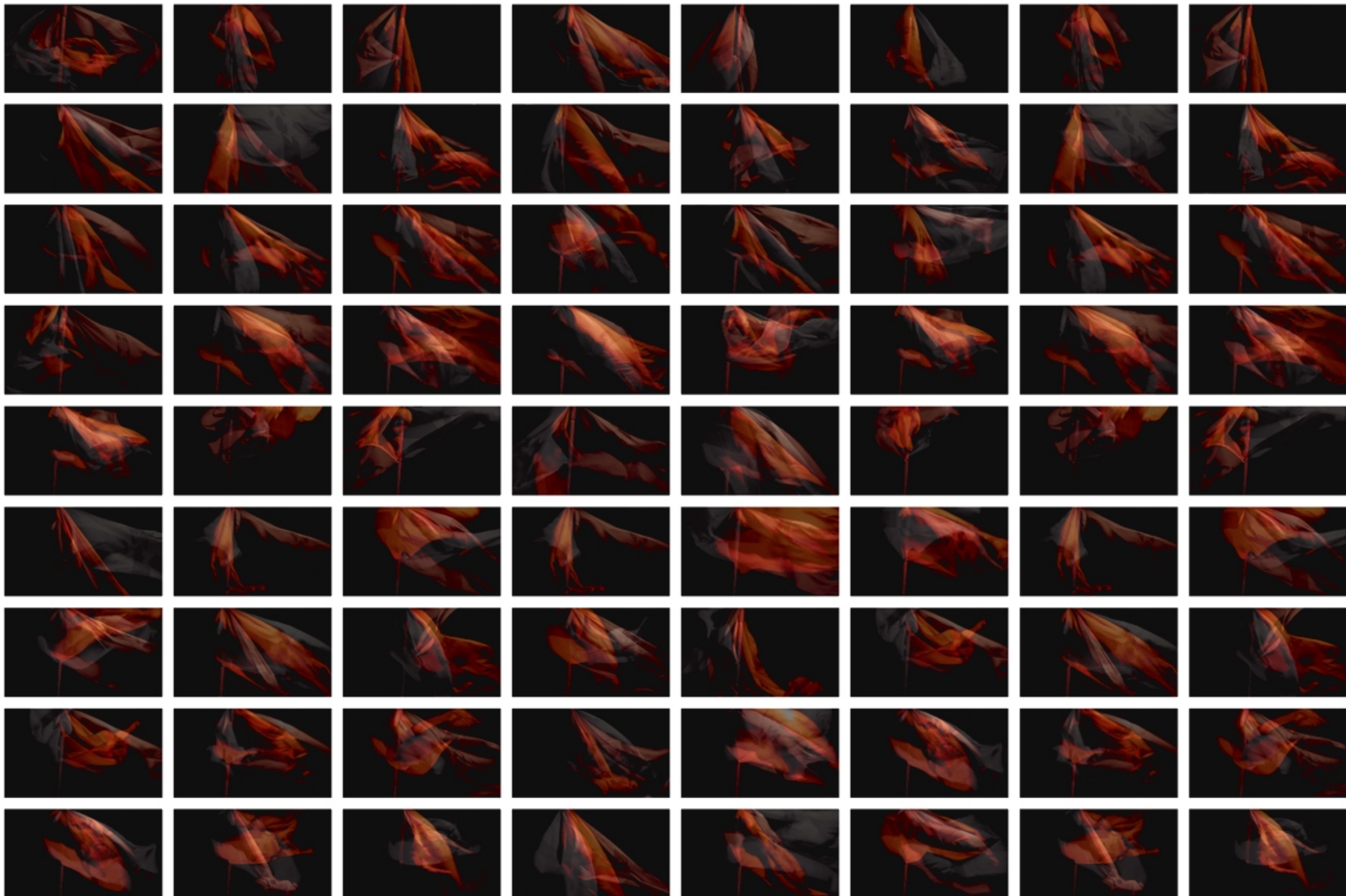
Loyalists and nationalists clash on the Albertbridge Road, near the Short Strand on 12 January 2013 during a flag protest. Video still taken from BBC News. [<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-20999949>]

<sup>1</sup> McCormick J., Jarman, N., 'Death of a Mural in *Journal of Material Culture*, UK, Belfast: Institute for Conflict Research, Vol.10 (2005), pp. 49-71

List of works in Order

1. Shadows, Multiple Print (2013)  
124 x 84 cm, Digital C-type Print
2. Sandy Row (2011 -2013)  
101.5 x 76 cm, Digital C-type Print
3. Subversions I (2012)  
101.5 x 76 cm, Digital C-type Print
4. Subversions II (2012)  
101.5 x 76 cm, Digital C-type Print
5. Highway to Holiness (2011 -2013)  
101.5 x 76 cm, Digital C-type Print
6. Shore Crescent (2012)  
101.5 x 76 cm, Digital C-type Print
7. Subversions III (2012)  
101.5 x 76 cm, Digital C-type Print
8. Subversions IV (2013)  
101.5 x 76 cm, Digital C-type Print
9. Subversions V (2013)  
101.5 x 76 cm, Digital C-type Print
10. Subversions IV (2013)  
101.5 x 76 cm, Digital C-type Print
11. Bunch of Grapes (2013)  
101.5 x 76 cm, Digital C-type Print

*Not included in PDF: Shadows, (Video 11.52 min)*

























ENQUIRES :

HELLO@FERGUSJORDAN.COM

WWW.FERGUSJORDAN.COM  
WWW.DUNCLUG.COM

TELE:07889662119

About:

I am an artist based in Belfast, Ireland where I have just completed my doctoral study at the Research Centre of Art, Design and the Built Environment. I have just completed a residency at Digital Arts Studios in Belfast and I also hold a visiting lecturing post at the School of Media, Film and Journalism, teaching Visual Culture Studies on the Interactive Media Arts Undergraduate Degree.

In November 2012 I was awarded the ACES Award 'Artists' Career Enhancement Scheme' by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Belfast Exposed and in November 2011 I was awarded a grant from the Arts and Disability Awards Ireland, This award enabled me to develop the Series, Material Authority.

I would like to give a big thanks to the Arts and Disability forum and Digital Arts Studios for their support!

