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FILE NOTE

Edited by Jennie Guy

1 In 2017, I remember a Fire Station practice-awarded artist stating that nobody was writing about their work. It was less a complaint and more a statement of fact. The conversation took place after they had presented a new work in the sculpture bay, and I remember being surprised to hear this. From conversations like that, the concept for File Note took form — as a space to bring writers and artists together to reflect the diverse practices evolving at Fire Station. From humble beginnings as a fragile document with an uncertain future, File Note grew through four editions in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021, each printed in different colours, gingerly folded and distributed with our annual publication, the Fire Station Newsheet. Many of these were delivered by hand, stacked in arts venues around Ireland (and occasionally further afield) to ensure this writing would find its way to a wide readership. This current bumper edition is a celebration of five years of File Note. It presents an accessible compilation of all four previous editions alongside new texts commissioned in 2022. As writing is a central element of my own work, editing File Note and supporting this ongoing activity of pairing artists with writers to encourage longer cycles of conversation and observation has been one of the most satisfying endeavours I have been a part of within my role at Fire Station. It has unfolded as a vibrant collaboration with graphic designer David Joyce, and led to a constellation of texts that speak to Fire Station's ability to champion and support new forms of practice. I am grateful to the writers, artists and everyone on the Fire Station team who have contributed to these first five editions of File Note, and I look forward to reading what comes next. **Jennie Guy**

What a wonderful collaboration this has been! I remember the early conversations that lead to where we are now with this project. The FSAS New Views had run for a number of years and it was time for a change. The format had become ubiquitous in the public spaces where it was freely available and it had begun to merge with other similar sized booklets. We wanted to make a publication that stood out, was purposeful and impactful with high production values, all within a modest budget. Size was important so the new FSAS Newsheet became a broadsheet and File Note was distributed inside. The Newsheet was printed full colour plus a spot colour which allowed us to keep the same grid structure and change the colour to identify a given year. This colour was used in File Note and across ads and other FSAS collateral and became a dynamic element of the visual identity system that was developing. In many ways File Note and the Newsheet became an integral part of the visual identity for FSAS, reflecting a dynamic organisation in a constant state of flux. The intention was to make File Note and the Newsheet available and accessible to as wide an audience as possible. This is at the core of FSAS's practice — social connection with the outside, with the community — with people! This also meant thinking about accessibility within the design of this book. Making it easy for people to read and digest the content. I look forward to having more vibrant conversations and seeing where this project goes. **David Joyce**

File Note collected essays reflect a period for Fire Station Artists' Studios (FSAS) that is immensely rich and layered: it is that deep dive into how artists are working, what their concerns are around materiality and medium, along with their hopes and dreams for the stories their work will tell of our age and times. The original intention with File Note was to allow a writer and an artist reflect and commit to text some of the concerns that, through their awarded time in the Sculpture Workshop and Digital Media Resources, they explore and experiment. The intention was — is — to enable critical reflection during experimentation. As the File Note big picture emerges, so too does the range of what was at the heart of FSAS during those years.

So File Note becomes something of a template for FSAS itself into the next five years and indeed as File Note continues to engage in a profound and reflective way on how artists work, inevitably this picture will show how FSAS will work into the next undoubtedly challenging few years, after the pandemic and into a chaotic and fast paced society. What are FSAS technology challenges, what are the concerns around space, what are the possibilities that the virtual world throws up, how can artists coming from a range of backgrounds and training be supported by FSAS — who is doing the critical writing and reflection? This will become clear as we commission further File Note publications. **Helen Carey**

3 **Helen Carey** is Director of Fire Station Artists' Studios (FSAS) where the core mission is development of new platforms for Visual Arts, most particularly in Digital Media, in Sculptural material experimentation as well as in Curatorial partnerships and thinking, working with national and international partners, both in new technology and the Visual Arts landscape. She was previously Director of Limerick City Gallery of Art and inaugural Director of the flagship Centre Culturel Irlandais, Paris. Also an independent curator, with research interests including post-colonialism and its manifestations, recent curated exhibitions include MATERIAL STORIES for FSAS in Galerie Michaela Stock in Vienna (2022), the international group exhibition **Deep States** for Tulca (Galway 2020), **EMBODIMENT** for Galerie Michaela Stock, Vienna, (2019) for FSAS supported by Culture Ireland, and **Crystalline by Siobhan McDonald** (2018) exhibited in Ireland and France. She has also completed public art commissions for public and private clients in Ireland, France and the UK. Awards include the Arts Council Open Call Award in 2016 for **The Souvenir Shop by Rita Duffy** as part of National Commemorations of the 1916 Rising. She is a member of the Expert Advisory Committee for Culture Ireland since 2021.

Jennie Guy is a curator, artist and writer based in Dublin. In conjunction with her independent practice, she is the manager of programme and operations at Fire Station Artists' Studios in Dublin. Jennie's practice explores new contexts for artistic production and experimentation, rooted in the potential of collaborative enquiry. She is the founder and director of **Art School**, an experimental framework that explores strategies for placing artists within sites of education, and the editor of **Curriculum: Contemporary Art Goes to School**, a new volume of essays published by Intellect Books. Alongside her work with art and education, Jennie curates and consults on a range of major public art commissions, including **Island City: Cork's Urban Sculpture trail (2022-2023)**. As curator in residence at Rua Red, she presented the two-person exhibition **Field Recording** with Mit Jai-Inn and Sven Anderson (2018) and the group exhibition **It's Very New School** (2017). Other selected projects include **I Sing the Body Electric** (2018), an education programme presented by EVA International and **Artists' Exercises** (2016), an online platform for distributing artists' educational strategies with contributions from artists all over the world. Through her artistic practice, Jennie has realised films, performances, installations and texts including **Hackers** (2017), **Hop Step Back Side Front** (2017), **Before the Flood** (2015), **How to See Clearly from a Distance** (2014), **Reading Ensemble III** (2012), **Life is Beautiful** (2012), **Selected Crônicas** (2011) and **Melancholy Park** (2010). She is the recipient of an Arts Council Visual Arts Curatorial Bursary (2021, 2022)

David Joyce is a graphic designer, educator, founder of the Outside Press and director of Language, an independent research, design and campaign consultancy based in Dublin. His work encompasses several activities including art & design, teaching, exhibiting, curating and publishing which overlap to form a multidisciplinary creative practice that is always changing. As an independent producer the Outside Press publishes self-initiated projects, promotes lectures and workshops and collaborates with artists, designers and writers to make work that is playful, challenging and inspiring. This often means focusing on manual and analogue making methods and embracing unconventional ways to produce the work — emerging digital print processes, recycled materials, collage and handmade elements. The Outside Press is about making something out of nothing. Language's creative work has given colour, energy and expression to social change, equality and advocacy in Irish society over the past thirty years. Working with our client partners, we create engaging, purposeful work and design solutions to complex problems resulting in a more effective voice across many issues in culture, business and society.

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Adam Gibney

FILE NOTE 2018



Doireann Ní Ghrioghair

Practice award — Sculpture

Deflated Capital III 2016, Plaster & pigment; 90 x 30 x 20cm

The Headless City, curated by Daniel Jewesbury

Tulca Festival of Visual Arts, Galway city (2016)

Adam Gibney

Practice award — Sculpture

Synthesiser 7 (un)Certain, dimensions variable, 8-channel live sound composition, ultra-sonic sensors, Arduino, speakers, neon, mdf, paint, conduit, electronics

RHA Dublin (2014)



Áine McBride

Practice award — Sculpture

Research image, off-site, Douglas Hyde Project, Trinity College Dublin (2017)



Mark Clare

Practice award — Sculpture

La Fontaine du Réalisme, installation, Irish Cultural Centre, Paris (2013)

2019

Nathan O'Donnell is a writer, researcher, and co-editor of Paper Visual Art. His work has been published in several literary and visual art journals, and he has been awarded bursaries and commissions from IMMA, Ormston House, Dublin City Council, the Arts Council, and South Dublin County Council. He had his first solo exhibition at the Illuminations Gallery, Maynooth University, in 2020. He has edited and produced several project-based publications, often in collaboration, and in 2020, he co-founded **Numbered Editions**, an experimental imprint for artists' writing. He was writer-in-residence at Maynooth University, 2020–21. He lectures at Trinity College and on the MA/MFA Art in the Contemporary World at NCAD.

Doireann Ní Ghrioghair graduated with an MA in Fine Art from Chelsea College of Art & Design, London in 2010. She completed a long-term residency at Fire Station Artist Studios, Dublin from 2014-17. Solo exhibitions of her work have been held at Pallas Projects, Dublin (2019); MART Gallery, Dublin (2017); Platform Arts, Belfast (2017) and Eight Gallery, Dublin (2016). Notable group exhibitions include **Home**, Glucksman Gallery, Cork (2021); **Urgencies**, CCA Derry-Londonderry (2019); Klimaweschel – MKH Biennale, Germany (2018); **Fatal Attraction**, Thames Side Gallery, London (2018); **We Only Want The Earth**, Adobe Backroom Gallery, San Francisco (2018); **The Headless City, Tulca** curated by Daniel Jewesbury (2016); **After the Future**, EVA Art Biennial (2012) curated by Annie Fletcher, Limerick.
www.cargocollective.com/doireann

Adam Gibney is a Dublin based artist who graduated from IADT, Dun Laoghaire. His solo exhibitions include **Projective Verse 9: Deep Breadths** (Daegu Foundation of Culture, South Korea, 2017) and **Euclid, I miss you...** (Artbox, Dublin, 2016). Other notable exhibitions include **Scaffold** (The Bomb Factory, London, 2019), **The Voyage** (CB1 Gallery, Los Angeles, 2016) and **Futures** (Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin, 2014). In 2016, Adam represented Ireland in the V Moscow Biennale for Young Art — Deep Inside. In 2019, Adam launched his first public art project, **Your Seedling Language**, curated by Jennie Guy in St. Catherine's National School, Rush, Co. Dublin. In 2021 he exhibited his exhibition **Can you breathe for me?** at the Oonagh Young Gallery, Dublin. Adam is currently working on a public art commission for Fingal County Council's Infrastructure programme. He is currently undertaking a practice-based research masters funded by the Technological University of Dublin.

Áine McBride is an Irish artist working in the field of sculpture. Their work is materially driven and makes manifest considerations of site and the situated body via staged sculptural arrangements. Recent exhibitions include **From Here to There**, a three person show at The Douglas Hyde Gallery; **point of fold**, a solo show at mother's tankstation gallery; **Feeling of Knowing** at The Complex Gallery; and a commissioned body of work, **and/or land**, for EVA International 2021/2020. Upcoming work includes a solo show at The Regional Cultural Centre, Letterkenny; and a group show at The Glebe Gallery, Co. Donegal. Recent residencies include those at The Foundation Boghossian, Brussels; FLACC, Genk, Belgium; and The Darkroom, Dublin. McBride recently published BIT FACADE, a 224 page photobook. McBride is represented by mother's tankstation Dublin | London.
www.motherstankstation.com/artist/aine-mcbride

Mark Clare graduated Central Saint Martins, London with a BA (Hons) Fine Art Sculpture before completing an MA in Fine Art at the University of Ulster. In 2019 he was selected to participate in the art and biodiversity research residency An Urgent Enquiry in Wexford. National and international solo exhibitions have included; **The Little Things Matter** — Pro Arts, Oakland USA 2019; **If Not You** - Sirius Arts Centre, 2017; **Que sais-je?** — Centre Culturel Irlandais, Paris, 2015. Recent group shows include **The Border**, Deutscher Künstlerbund, Berlin 2020, The Kaunas Biennial — National Museum, Lithuania 2017. www.markclare.net

The sculpture workshop at Fire Station Artists' Studio is full of noise, banging and sawing, when I arrive to meet Doireann Ní Ghrioghair for a conversation about her work. There is a quiet office upstairs where we could sit but we decide to stay in the artist's berth, with some of the sculptures and the detritus of her work around us. On a table lies a long spool of resinous material, latex, a remainder from the cast of a capital at the head of a Corinthian column in Dublin Castle. **Doireann Ní Ghrioghair — DNíG**

Around us, the sculpture workshop is strangely quiet. Áine McBride is working in one of the last booths in the row; the rest are, on a Tuesday afternoon, unoccupied. In the few months of visits, I never get a clear sense of when the place is empty, when full; seems arbitrary. I remember wondering if there is in fact some rhythm to this place or if it's as unexpected to the artists as it seemed to me. **Áine McBride — AMcB**

Mark Clare spent his two months in Fire Station producing a single porcelain work. In his studio at the NCAD Annex on James's Street, I get to see it, a complex assemblage of geometric porcelain pieces balanced on a wood and copper frame: a reconstruction, in this delicate material, of a Siberian fur trap. Scattered around its base are a few stray porcelain bits; at first, I don't realise that these bits of jetsam are also part of the work. **Mark Clare — MC**

Adam Gibney I meet, not at Fire Station, but at a coffee shop. He is not long home after a three-month residency in South Korea; he spent some time in Fire Station prior to this, and will spend time there again soon, but for now he is in between. This is a state — of mind and being — which he seems to find fruitful. **Adam Gibney — AG**

McBride says, during this first meeting, that she is interested in making work that, when encountered, seems like it might always have been there. On the screen of her laptop she shows me a photo of a previous work, a cast concrete bench she installed in an alcove on 'Red Square' at NCAD, a bench I have walked past many times in the past year, on my way in and out of the Visual Culture building, innocuous and unremarkable: I had never enquired into it, I hadn't noticed when it appeared. Had I been asked I'd have said I thought it had been there for years.

She talks about 'seepage' between the work and its environment, as if her sculptures might simply dissolve into their surroundings. I am reminded, incongruously, of Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*, in which cyclists and bicycles are gradually — out of sheer inertia — beginning to merge. **AMcB**

The latex spool is a remnant of Ní Ghrioghair's process. On the floor between us stands an example of the finished work, a waist-high, sagging, punctured pillar, white mostly but with daubs of lurid colour streaked along its length. This is one of a series of casts she has created — then deflated — from columns in two sites in Dublin Castle: George's Hall and Bedford Tower. Bedford Tower is a piece of original Georgian monumental architecture, the centrepiece of the castle's courtyard. George's Hall was built later, for the visit of King George V in 1911, a symbolic tribute to imperial power in an Ireland under British rule; it has also been the site of some of the controversial corruption tribunals of the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries, the Moriarty Tribunal and the Garda Tribunal, most notably. George's Hall has hence been an emblem of contested authority, a kind of fault-line for tenuous power structures, for more than a century.

This is reflected in Ní Ghrioghair's sculptures, which play out this contestation and disruption at a material level. Her series of 'deflated capitals' are mocking distortions of one of the standard forms of classical architecture, the capital (or chapter), the topmost segment of a column or pilaster, itself so often revived and pastiched over time now as to have become a kind of cipher or shorthand for power. These are playful ripostes to the formalised pomp of authority. To create them, Ní Ghrioghair creates casts of the capitals in unsupported latex; the resulting plaster works are wilted, flaccid distortions of the originals. They look like organic objects from which the life has gradually drained.

These works respond to a particular philosophical lineage: the belief, reiterated many times over the last few centuries, in the ‘classic’ as the embodiment of a set of universal values and standards, and therefore somehow **timeless**. Ní Ghrioghair restores time to the equation, presenting the results of accelerated decay, collapse, disintegration. **DNÍG**

Deadfall will be exhibited as part of Clare’s solo show at Sirius Arts Centre in Cobh, a month hence; it fits within a body of the artist’s work focused upon ecological disaster. Previous work has been engaged with systems of exchange value and the nature of a shared public space, whether real or imagined; Clare is a pointedly political artist. He has also always had a very multiple, open approach to the disciplines and media through which he makes work: animation, video, photography; public intervention; collaboration; site-specific sculpture. What unifies his work is a set of ongoing preoccupations with the economic interests that underpin how we interact and co-exist. As he explains to me, his is not a materially-driven practice, or at least it hasn’t been, up until now, though it seems what he’s developing for Sirius may mark something of a departure. Still, as he makes clear, it is the idea that comes first. The material matters, but only insofar as it serves or relates to some conceptual framework.

The materials in this case have particularly rich resonances; they have been assembled in part because of their commodity value. There is, of course, the fragile preciousness of the porcelain itself, though Clare’s use of copper — a stock market basic material — is also pointed. The form of the work, too, plays upon connections between natural resources and the unnatural voracities of international capital; the Siberian fur trap is a traditional device of a particular region of northern Russia, but it is also connected to an enormous, stratospherically lucrative global market for Siberian furs, sables mostly. In this way the work alludes, gently, to how folk tradition can be co-opted by global capital. **MC**

McBride is preparing work for an exhibition, in the new year, at mother’s tankstation. When I meet her first she is thinking about this show though there is no material made yet. She shows me some ceramic objects, like freestanding clips, which will join works together — a material she has been experimenting with at Fire Station. It is one element of a material register — she mentions concrete, lino, tiles, raw timber, sand, gesso. At the same time she does not want to talk about material. She wants to talk about resonance, context, staging. She mentions theatricality; she does not want to create work that is ‘theatrical.’ (I am not sure what she means by this; it seems at odds with the idea of the ensemble.) It is hard to talk in this abstract way about work that is still hypothetical. But I get the sense that this difficulty is part of the process, for McBride. She seems to want to resist any resolution for as long as possible. In some ways, she says, she doesn’t want to know what she’s doing until she’s actually installing the work, in the gallery, the week before the show opens. **AMcB**

In the coffee shop, Gibney talks about Charles Olsen’s 1951 manifesto, ‘Projective Verse’, a text which has had an influence on his thoughts on writing. This curious document, first published as a pamphlet but later quoted — with full approbation — by William Carlos Williams, outlines an approach to poetry that constituted, when it was written, an alternative to received poetic traditions. Olsen argued for the poem as a ‘field of action’; he argued for a conception of the ‘breath’ as an alternative to the ‘ear’, imagining a kind of poetry based not upon metre and syllable but upon the physiology of the poet, rooted, that is, in the ‘heart’ instead of the ‘head’:

the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to
the SYLLABLE

the HEART, by way of the BREATH,
to the LINE.

His interest in this connection of breath and line, of body and word, fed into the work he made during the residency in Korea, as part of the Gachang International Residency Programme in Daegu. During his time here he worked on an installation, **Projective**

7 **Verse 9: Deep Breadths** (2017), which was exhibited at a gallery in Daegu at the end of his three-month tenure. For this work, he created a computer programme which used a number of algorithmic rules to disassemble and disperse a single poem across a series of concrete-embedded transistor radios around the gallery. The lines of poetry — meditations upon space — were themselves cast around and reconstituted in the space of the gallery, full of hesitations and gaps, mimicking for Gibney the action of the breath. The result was a near-abstraction of articulated sounds; a poetry that bordered on illegibility.

He has not been home long from Korea when we meet in the coffee shop; not long enough to have begun any new work. Instead he is still musing over the Daegu show. He wants to inquire further into the extent of his control over what he makes. He talks about making the work larger, about breaking up the space. I'm not sure what he means by this; I gather it's a personal shorthand, a way of thinking about his work which I cannot understand. **AG**

Earlier this year, as part of the Douglas Hyde Gallery's series of installations around the Trinity College campus ('Gallery 3'), McBride installed a series of objects around the concourse of the college's Arts Block: an assemblage of low-lying, innocuously-clad units, suggestive of storage units or tables, mimicking functionality, yet subtly resisting utility. They melded with such strange ease into the brutalist surroundings that it felt strange, one afternoon during Spring term, to stand and 'look' at them. Students flowed around them without noticing any distinction between these objects and the mass-produced furniture surrounding them.

Unlike the cast concrete bench, however, McBride did not want them to be used. The units were out of reach of any bench; the surfaces were not laid out for people to leave down books or cups of coffee. These were not to be mistaken for 'usable' objects.

McBride talks to me about the language of 'affordance,' the idea that a well-designed object should furnish the user with a sense of how it is to be used. These objects both invite and frustrate. They take the language of affordance, that is, and subvert it, suggesting use where there is none. In our conversation, McBride quotes Morgan Quaintance's critique of the Turner Prize-winning architectural collective Assemble; in an article for e-flux in December 2015, he set out his critique of the award committee, arguing instead for the need to safeguard some 'radical uselessness' for art. She also mentions Pierre Huyghe, whose approach to creating landscapes she admires. She wants her assembled elements to work as a group in articulating something. She is interested in the idea of the ensemble; the interrelation of objects as well as their relationship to what's outside the group. The context is as important, for McBride, as the objects themselves; she wants an assemblage that extends into the world around it, a whole environment, the distinction between the work and its environs, blurred. **AMcB**

Gibney has been working with technology and language for some years now, though this has not always been the kind of work he's made. It seems, as an artist, that he pursues philosophical questions through whatever media might provide a solution.

In the works I've previously seen, both exhibited as part of the RHA's Futures exhibitions, technology has been the medium. For his contribution to **Futures 14, Synthesiser 7:(un) Certain** (2014), Gibney assembled a pulsing circuit of large black ten-sided speakers on the gallery floor, each one lit by a neon ring and connected by a large snaking black tube, through which a babble of language was channelled, erupting from one speaker after another. For his contribution to the **Futures: Anthology** the following year, **Affirmation 3: understand(ing)** (2015), a microphone was hung over a speaker, dropping (it seemed to be dropping) isolated sound bites, the decomposed elements of a single word, into what felt like a void. The speaker was embedded in a stack of papers on which were reproduced lines of text, quotations from Heidegger. The result was a sparse, introverted work that seemed to suggest an inescapable philosophical quandary, as if querying the very possibility of meaning. A sense of its disquiet resonated across the crowded gallery, casting a strange unsettling pall. **AG**

In 2013, during a residency at Cow House Studios in Co Wexford, Clare made work out of the landscape; he took a bundle of large twigs, leftover from woodland maintenance and path-clearing in the forested stretch of the farm, and used the industrial-level pencil sharpener in the studio to sharpen them. He returned the resulting piles of sharpened twigs back where he found them, a kind of absurdist, menacing intervention — **Anthropocene Marker** was the name he decided upon for this work — in the regulated wildness of the woodland. **MC**

Ní Ghrioghair first started working with architectural elements while living in London some years ago, studying for her MFA at Chelsea College of Art and Design. Previously she had created sculptural work out of food; in a 2009 work, **Untitled (Block)**, she introduced organic food components — cabbage leaves and Cheerios and sloppy cooked spaghetti — into a large concrete block, mirroring and undermining the aesthetics of **béton brut**. (This work was made in response to an exhibition of the work of David Chipperfield, an architect who works with what Ni Ghrioghair calls ‘the aesthetics of austerity.’) She is interested in countering the purported ‘impersonality’ of this kind of architecture, its purity and abstraction, with the organic mulch of decay, the reality of exhaustion. She mentions exhaustion, more than once. She is often exhausted, she says. ‘We all are. It is a part of the contemporary condition.’ This is something her work reflects: the sagging column, for instance, in the artist’s booth at Fire Station, lolling, like the air’s been taken from it. **DNÍG**

Provisionality is an important part of McBride’s work. There is a deliberate refusal of the machine finish. She wants things to appear make-shift, precise in some ways, certainly, but not extremely well-made.

This tendency in her work relates, as she sees it, to the provisionality of the contemporary moment — the demands upon new generations, artists and otherwise, to be ‘flexible’, to be ‘lean’. She is responding to the discourse of precarity. She is working with modular forms and cheap materials, making work that is movable, durable, unprecious. She is operating in accordance with current conditions, but deliberately; her work is also a very clear riposte. **AMcB**

Clare talks to me about the show for which he’s preparing. The body of work to be exhibited at Sirius will attempt to reckon with multiplying threats of environmental devastation, dangers that have been amplified for the artist — as for all of us — by alarming political developments in recent times. Clare wants to pursue and illustrate some of the invisible ecological processes through which habitats are being destroyed, the pressures upon the polar ice-caps but also less widely-known natural systems that are under threat, as for instance the channelling of algal dust along an aerial wind tunnel between South American and the Amazon basin, a natural (and endangered) valve for the rebalancing of the earth’s resources, essential for life to continue. Sitting in his studio we talk about the Paris agreement, which Trump has recently repudiated. We talk about the irony of this situation, how all criticism of the Paris agreement is apparently being washed away in a gesture of strategic retrenchment: in the face of a radically re-energised right, the previously-compromised middle ground of political centrism — as represented by suddenly-glorified statesmen like Macron and Trudeau — suddenly seems like ‘enough’. There is little awareness, in the commentary on Trump’s actions, of the fact — previously widely agreed — that the Paris agreement was itself an unsatisfactory compromise, a political fudge calibrated to appease industrial lobbyists while simulating ecological ‘progress’. The economics are inescapable. **MC**

I ask McBride again about ‘theatricality.’ She says these works are not immersive. She wants a proximity to the real — a recalculation of the urban environment or the gallery environment or the otherwise shared public space. She wants the work to be unnerving, uncanny; she does not want it to be ‘transportive.’

This question of theatricality comes up again the next time we meet, a month or so later. (The workshop now is thrumming with activity. Every booth is occupied.)

9 For this second meeting, some more work — a mould with which she is making bollard-like concrete objects. More importantly, she explains, she has worked up a series of drawings. These are no more than crude sketches, tacked to the wall; she laughs at how unfinished they look. But this is how she works, allowing looseness, resisting fixity too early in the process. Alongside the sketches are some photos of the gallery space itself, and a floor map, on which she has started to make marks. In particular, she is considering the introduction of some partition walls, to rearrange the space. These would be self-supporting, she says. They are not architectural interventions. Again she mentions their ‘untheatricality.’ She does not want any of the apparatus concealed. No trickery. No moment of revelation.

She goes further this time; her intention, in this, is to level the dynamic between maker and viewer. She does not propose to illuminate anything with her work. She does not want to assume some position of superiority. She is modest about her aims, to choreograph a group of objects. It is the materials, she says, which articulate something. Her practice is simply an investigation. The work figures itself out. The most she can make, with a show, is a proposition; each show builds upon the last only in the accumulation of technical skills. **AMcB**

When we do finally meet at Fire Station, Gibney has begun making work. Beside his desk a waist-height metal stand is lit with what seems to be an LED strip. From it, a wire dangles. On the ground beside it is a small speaker and a Pepsi bottle half filled with liquid and electronics. Gibney’s laptop is open on the desk; the coded instructions of a computer programme are laid out on the screen like set of unintelligible diagrams. This is Gibney’s work in a rough, unfinished state. I sit down next to him, hardly knowing what to expect.

Before he shows me the work in action, he fills me in on what he’s been reading: a book of essays by the late-Victorian philosopher William James, on ‘radical empiricism’. Gibney runs through a rapid gloss of a philosophical concept with which I am utterly unfamiliar. He mentions, at one point, ‘uninterrupted experience’. I know a little about James, a philosopher whose influence on literary modernism has been widely acknowledged. Still, though I don’t want to say so, sitting with Gibney in his booth at Fire Station, I am slightly disorientated.

We proceed to talk, again, about the work made and exhibited in Korea, with which, he says, he now realises he went as far as he could in one direction. He used the radio receivers to enact a kind of contemplation of space. But ‘space’ remained a subject, an abstraction. What he wants now is to find a way to allow space **itself** to play a role in the work.

Hence the work he has been doing since, he says, indicating the various objects on the floor beside us. He plugs and unplugs two cables, then leans over and clicks a few buttons on his laptop.

‘Just wait and listen.’

The speaker on the floor produces a single guttural syllable. Then another. Another. As it gasps its way through a set of isolated sounds, the bulbs in the Pepsi bottle light up; the liquid begins to bubble and steam. Another sensor is designed to react to this steam, to convey this information back to the computer programme, which will process it and translate it into its alphabet of sounds, to be reproduced again by the speaker. I realise I am looking at a kind of circuit board, controlled by a series of sensors; a self-generating work, making use of organic and digital flows to perpetuate itself, creating an unscripted sequence of unforeseeable sounds.

The work operates in fits and starts, giving the uncanny impression that it is communicating with itself. **AG**

Ní Ghrioghair talks me through some of the parameters and references in which her work is embedded. In particular she mentions two French historical figures. Etienne-Louis Boullée was a French neo-classical architect, notable now mainly for those of his works that went unrealised — many of them, like his ‘Cenotaph for Newton’, ludicrously impractical, involving severely inflated classical forms, domes, columns, designed to convey what he described as an emotionally ‘committed’ classicism. Marie-Antoine Carême, on the other hand, was a chef who worked with architectural forms to create extraordinary decadent set-pieces, often based on architectural structures and drawings; also the originator of many of the tropes of French haut-cuisine. Carême cooked for the King Of England and the Tzar in St Petersburg, creating fantastical facsimiles of famous buildings, an absurd historical amalgamation of architecture and food, verging on the kitsch in a way that seems particularly appealing to Ni Ghrioghair, whose work is anything but ‘tasteful’.

This term, ‘taste’, with its gastronomic connotations, is of some interest here. First usage of the word to describe aesthetic appreciation in the 1670s; it was Joseph Addison, however, who did more than anyone else to popularise the idea of ‘taste’ as a mark of cultivation. A coffee-house intellectual in early eighteenth-century London, Addison was a quintessential Enlightenment figure, expounding in his famous periodical, **The Spectator**, a decorous internationalism, an idea of ‘civilised’ society founded upon canons of taste, culture, and gentility. In his disquisitions on ‘taste,’ Addison configured a common metaphorical language drawing upon references to food and consumption; this metaphor was conjoined with strains of Enlightenment thought, founded upon the works of the classic philosophers, as well as a particular neo-classical style of art and architecture.

Ní Ghrioghair works against this tradition of ‘enlightened’ civilisation, opposing the tasteful, implicitly male, western ideal of the ‘classic’ with her use of impure materials, collapsed forms, and lurid colours. She is interested in exploring this fault-line, exploring what might be considered ‘tacky’, and asking why. Ni Ghrioghair plays with the bleached artificiality of the classical tradition, the false classic ‘impersonality’ or ‘purity’ of white marble. Her work is a riposte to such seemliness; she wants to include impurities in it, to provoke with it distaste, revulsion, disgust. **DNÍG**

McBride talks about how, for this exhibition, she might try to extend the work beyond the physical confines of the gallery, the way the concrete bench in Red Square tethered her degree show to the outside world. This could be as simple a thing as putting posters up in the vicinity. Or perhaps there will be some human aspect to the work in the gallery itself? Not a performance, though: she is very clear about this. Her work is not performative. It is not ‘durational’, she says. She mentions duration specifically; that is the word she uses. Consequently I think of Michael Fried’s famous opposition — outlined in *Art and Objecthood* in 1967 — between visual art and theatre, in which he mounted a critique of Minimalism on the basis of its theatricality, its foregrounding of process, duration, and context (‘objecthood’) over the sacrosanct integrity of the art work. I ask McBride about this, if this is what she means when she talks about untheatricality. Does she want to retain the work’s material integrity, its existence outside of time? But this isn’t what she means either. This isn’t ‘static’ work. She doesn’t want it to read like a tableaux. Rather, it is not ‘durational’ in that it does not — she does not want it to — ‘start’ or ‘finish’. She wants the work to be continuous, in time as well as space; for there to be no clear sense of where the work ends, no limits upon its extendability. She wants the work to be continuous with its surroundings.

Continuousness rather than duration; another fine distinction, an important one too, I realise, beginning to think through its implications, beginning to share in the rumination.

For a while we stand there silently, peaceably, separately thinking things through. **AMcB**

Continuousness: this is a quality in Gibney’s work too, the creation of feedback loops, digital circuits, increasingly refined devices for the removal, wherever possible, of the artist’s hand.

11 I confess to Gibney that I haven't read William James. I know of him as the person who first theorised the 'stream of consciousness,' a concept applied (in very different ways) by writers like Proust, Woolf, and Joyce. 'Radical empiricism,' as Gibney explains, is a related philosophical model of experience, encompassing in its terms both the onslaught of immediate sensory data as well as the abstraction of logical hypotheses. It is an idea of the world that embraces discontinuity, complexity, the ineffable. I'm reminded, now, of the work of Henri Bergson, who — around the same time — articulated a philosophy of 'flux,' a theorisation of unconstrained subjectivity, an idea of relativity in the field of philosophy that seems connected to ideas of relativity in other fields, a refutation of empirical notions of order and rationality; a philosophy of 'vitalism.' This seems an apt association, talking to Gibney: about his proposed removal of the human agent from the work, his devolution of control. **AG**

In the 1920s this idea of 'flux' became a point of debate in England. Wyndham Lewis argued that it represented the apotheosis of a kind of 'time-cult,' a glorification of pure relativism in science and business and art, an idea of unimpeded subjectivity which, in fact, eroded the stable bases upon which critical interrogation — of the iniquities of global capitalism, for instance — once stood. I talk to Ni Ghrioghair about this: her work makes a critical virtue of a precisely opposite principle, re-inserting time (age, decay, impurity) into the purportedly timeless. **DNÍG**

Free-standing, unattached, modularisable, 'lean,' transportable, extendable: these are words that have come up in the conversation. McBride does not want to disguise the work's 'objectness'. She wants it self-sufficient, its supports showing. She does not want it to melt seamlessly into its surroundings. Yet she wants it to be 'continuous'. By this, I realise, she doesn't mean it should be physically continuous, like Martin Creed's 'protrusions', say. Instead she wants the work to feel like it could be anywhere, that it could extend, repeat, duplicate; that there is no clear distinction between the work and another ordinary object in the world. **AMcB**

One of the points of origin for **Deadfall** came from watching a Werner Herzog documentary, **Happy People: A Year in the Taiga** (2010), which focuses upon the lives of Siberian trappers in a village on the Yenisei River: their interactions with his environment, the traditions within which they work, living in line with the land, yet connected, umbilically, to the fur trade, dealing in the exchange of a luxury good within a complex network of global commodity capital, with all the fiction and risk that entails.

Clare remembers being fascinated with the portrayal of this way of life; nevertheless, it has taken a long time for **Deadfall** to develop. For two years now he has been making these small traps, working on the form, making sense of it. And at the end of this long painstaking process, the work in the gallery may simply break.

For Clare, it is important that this work is breakable — that it might actually crack and collapse in the gallery. He hasn't yet worked out how this aspect of the work will be conveyed to the viewers. Will its breakability be announced? Or will this alter public interactions with the work? And if it does fall and smash, what then? Will it be cleaned up, removed, or just left on the gallery floor, an illustration of its own fissure? At this stage, he hasn't decided. He only knows that the gesture must be sincere. If this is a work about commodity systems — the impartation of value to materials — then the possibility of its breakage, its loss, must be genuine. **Deadfall** is a work imbued — like the financial superstructure of which it is a metonym, like the natural environment from which it derives — with risk. **MC**

We go on to talk about language. (The conversation is headily, enjoyable nebulous — not unlike Gibney's work itself.) Gibney is interested in biolinguistics, in the sources of language. We talk about the sound script for this work. For now, he is using the same lines of his own poetry used for the work produced during the Korean residency. I ask him whether there is some way of generating language that could be as reactive and organic as the other elements of this work. He smiles. He has been thinking about this very question. **AG**

The other word that comes up — the word that comes up more than any other — is banality. McBride's work is an exercise in the banal. It fades into its surroundings. When she says this, I think of Robert Wasler's writing, his soft plod through the banalities of service and bureaucracy, with prose apparently designed — in W.G. Sebald's words — to 'dissolve upon reading'. McBride's work seems to operate on something of a similar register. I think, too, how Walter Benjamin's described Wasler's writing (a description which could, I feel, with some slight adjustment, equally apply to McBride's work): 'each sentence has the sole purpose of rendering the previous one forgotten'. **AMcB**

Ní Ghrioghair's works are named according to a definite schema: capitals and deflated capitals and the smaller, more abstract-looking 'shafts'. When we meet in Fire Station, I see only the one 'deflated capital' in the workshop, but later I will see others at MART, bent and folded in unpredictable ways, their particular deliquescence unforeseeable, surprising. The capitals and shafts bend and spool around the two adjoining galleries. One of them looks like a coiled turd on the concrete gallery floor. **DNÍG**

II

Annemarie Ní Churreáin

Marcel Vidal

Myrid Carten

Jane Fogarty

Laura Kelly

Emma McKeagney

Paul Gaffney

Tamsin Snow

Barbara Knezevic

FILE NOTE 2019

Marcel Vidal
Practice Award — Sculpture

Balcony
Expanding foam, spray, paint, wood, watercolour on paper,
framed with glass, bitumen, zinc fittings, castor wheels,
animal hooves, glue, twine, linen, plaster (2017)



Myrid Carten
Practice Award — Digital
Study for Fox Cry 2
Donegal (2017)



Jane Fogarty
Practice Award — Sculpture
Paperwork #3 Paper, crepe paper,
wallpaper paste, plaster of Paris
(2016)





Laura Kelly
Practice Award — Sculpture
Edgelands
Mixed media drawing installation
126 Gallery, Galway city (2017)

Emma McKeagney
Practice Award — Sculpture
Installation, graduate exhibition, IADT (2017)



Paul Gaffney
Practice Award — Digital
Perigee #7. Archival Pigment Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag Baryta (2015)





Tamsin Snow

Practice Award — Sculpture

Showroom, Tamsin Snow, CGI video animation, 3.30 mins (2017)

Barbara Knežević

Practice Award — Sculpture

Tools for wellbeing, digital image (2017)



Annemarie Ní Churreáin is a poet from the Donegal Gaeltacht. Her publications include **Bloodroot** (Doire Press, 2017), **Town** (The Salvage Press, 2018) and **The Poison Glen** (The Gallery Press, 2021). She is an Arts Council recipient of The Next Generation Artist Award and a co-recipient of The Markievicz Award. Ní Churreáin is a previous literary fellow of Akademie Schloss Solitude, Germany, and The Jack Kerouac House, Florida. Ní Churreáin is the 2022 Guest Editor of The Stony Thursday Book Issue 44. She lectures at the Yeats Academy of Arts, Design and Architecture, IT Sligo. www.studiotwentyfive.com

Marcel Vidal is a former member of Temple Bar Gallery and studios (2017 -2021) Vidal was a recipient of the Art Council of Ireland's Visual Arts Bursary Award (2020-2021) and was awarded; The Hennessy Craig Award for painting, The Golden Fleece Award and The Arts Council's Next Generation Award (2019). Vidal's solo exhibitions include; Stuck on dawn, Kerlin Gallery, Dublin (2021) and **SILVERFISH**, The Dock Arts, Carrick on Shannon, Ireland (2018). Selected group exhibitions include; **Wayward Eye**, Temple Bar Gallery (2021), **Dubliners**: 6th Biennial Of Painting, Zagreb (2021), **Everybody Knows** Paul Hallahan and Marcel Vidal, The Complex, Dublin (2020), The Hennessy Craig Award Exhibition, Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin (2019), The Zurich Portrait Prize at National Gallery of Ireland (2019), 189th RHA Annual Exhibition, Royal Hibernian Academy (2019), **WHITE NOISE, FUTURES**, Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin (2018); **Syntonic State**, Tulca, Galway Curated by Linda Shevlin (2018) and **STREAM** Limerick Curated by Paul McGrane and Mark O'Gorman, The Sailors Home, Limerick (2018). Vidal's work featured in the book; 100 Sculptors of Tomorrow, published by Thames & Hudson (2019). His work is included in public and private collections including the Arts Council of Ireland and The Office of Public Works. He is represented by the Kerlin Gallery. www.marcelvidal.net

Originally from Donegal Ireland, **Myrid Carten** studied at Goldsmiths University of London and Central Saint Martin's UAL. Her work has been commissioned and broadcast by the BBC, funded by BFI and NI Screen and screened internationally. Recent exhibitions: **Preta (Hungry Ghost)**, Mother's Tankstation, Dublin (2022), **My Body is an Exhibition, Sadler's Wells London** (2021), **The Yalta Game, RCC Donegal** (2020), **Urgencies**, selected by Willie Doherty, CCA Derry (2019). Recent residencies: ISCP NYC 2020-21, Hospitalfield Scotland 2020-2021, Artlink Dunree Ireland 2020 and British Council's and ACNI International artist residency in India 2017-18. Recent awards: TBG&S Project Studio Award 2018-19, Fire Station Artists' Studio Digital Media Award 2018, and the Arts Council of Ireland's Next Generation Artist Award 2018-19, aemi Commission Award 2021. Myrid is currently in early production on feature experimental documentary **No Place Like Home** supported by Screen Ireland production funding and DocsIE Pitch Award 2019. The film was selected for IDFA Forum 2021. Her work is in The Arts Council of Ireland Collection and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland Collection. www.myridcarten.com

Jane Fogarty graduated with a degree in Fine Art from the Dublin Institute of Technology (2010). She has been included in many national and international exhibitions including; **Assemble**, Atelier Maser, **Futures, Series 3, Episode 3**, the Royal Hibernian Academy Gallery, **slow motion**, MART Gallery and **Dearly Beloved**, VISUAL Carlow. Selected awards include: the Bursary Award from South Dublin County Council (2016); the most Promising Graduate Award from The Talbot Gallery (2010); the RDS Lewis Crosby Award for Painting (2010); Arts Council Project Award (2012); Arts Council Travel and Training Award (2015). Fogarty's work is part of the OPW State Art Collection, Acrylicize London and in private collections. Fogarty will have her first solo exhibition in Canada in 2022, kindly supported by Culture Ireland. www.janefogarty.com

Laura Kelly uses a layered investigative and process-led approach to create an expanded form of drawing which references landscape, surface, materiality and illusion. Kelly currently has four intersecting areas of interest: mark making; perceptual processes; modes of viewing (panorama and vista) and, perspectival systems. Her work ranges from small wall-based pieces to large site-specific constructed drawings and, more recently, experimental animations. In 2022, her fifth solo exhibition **Shouty Snow Echo** was held at Mermaid Arts Centre, Bray, Co Wicklow. Recent awards include an Arts Council Covid19 Response Award (2020) and Arts Council Agility Award (2021) www.laurakellyartist.com

Emma McKeagney is an artist, researcher and event coordinator. McKeagney graduated in 2017 with First Class Honours from a BA in Art at Dun Laoghaire IADT, Dublin. During her BA in 2016 she attended an Erasmus term at The Academy of Fine Art (KUVA) in Helsinki. From 2020-2021 she completed an MA in Irish Studies; Literature & History in NUIG. She has received an Arts Council Agility Fund to develop her MA thesis on the Irish Bungalow into a photography project. www.emmamckeagney.com

Paul Gaffney holds an MFA in Photography from Ulster University and his current research explores how the act of image-making can enable a sense of connection with one's surroundings. He was awarded the Arts Council's Next Generation Bursary Award and Visual Arts Bursary in 2017, and has been nominated for both the Prix Pictet and Deutsche Börse prizes. He is also a recent recipient of a Strategic Projects Award from Wicklow Arts Office. His publications have been nominated for the Photobook Award at the International Photobook Festival Kassel (2013 & 2016) and shortlisted for the European Publishers Award for Photography. www.paulgaffneyphotography.com

Tamsin Snow's works derive from her ongoing investigations into the legacies of modernist architecture. She constructs large-scale built environments, sculpture and CGI animations to raise questions about the political and ideological underpinnings of architecture and social spaces. Her previous solo exhibitions include **On Ice**, Temple Bar Gallery + Studios, **Like, Flesh**, AtelierFrankfurt (2019), **SpareFace**, Block 336, London (2018), and three collaborative solo exhibitions with Sarah Tynan at Oonagh Young Gallery, Dublin (2014-2015) and Mermaid Arts Centre, Bray (2017). Snow holds a Three-Year Studio Membership in TBG+S (2021-2024). www.tamsinsnow.com

Barbara Knežević is an artist and educator living and working in Dublin. Recent exhibitions include **Pleasure 'scapes**, RHA Dublin; **Woman in the Machine**, VISUAL Carlow; **Immurement**, STATION Gallery Melbourne; The MAC, Belfast; Temple Bar Gallery + Studios, Dublin; EKKM, Tallinn; Gallery Augusta, Helsinki; HIAP, Helsinki. She has been commissioned for public art projects at the GPO Dublin, (2016), Cabra Library, Dublin (2020) and a major per cent for art project, **Collective Energy** at Kingswood Community College, Dublin (2020). Her work features in national and private collections such as the Irish Museum of Modern Art and the Arts Council of Ireland. www.barbaraknezevic.com

Syntax is complex, but the complexity is there for a reason. For our thoughts are surely even more complex, and we are limited by a mouth that can pronounce a single word at a time.

In the speech sound wave, one word runs into the next seamlessly; there are no little silences between spoken words the way there are white spaces between written words. We simply hallucinate word boundaries when we reach the end of a stretch of sound that matches some entry in our mental dictionary.

— Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language* (William Morrow, 1994)

How is the work of artists, emerging or established, developed in the context of designated time and space? What were the experiences of the 2018 recipients of the annual Sculpture and Digital Media Awards at Fire Station and Artists' Studios (FSAS)?

Over several weeks in Dublin during Autumn 2018 I held a series of conversations with the most recent awardees. The questions I posed were primarily around impact, experience and outcomes. Yet as a poet by trade few things are more alluring to me than the pursuit of source. What — like a thing buried deep in the earth — lies beyond the sound our mouths can make? What is it that a tongue can never fully uncover or retell? In studios and cafes, across tables and desks, and at in-between hours, I posed questions knowing that of course source cannot always (or perhaps ever) fully be known, but one can — through the act of listening — hope instead to encounter a sense of essence. This text is ultimately a translation, which is to say that it is an attempt to reimagine some part/s of essence out of the language of materiality & making, via speech, into the form of written word.

I NOUN

**a part of speech inflected for case, signifying a concrete or abstract entity
i.e. sausage, boulder, feather**

'I don't see always the necessity for the artist statement or even for titles. I tend towards text that is simple, sometimes playful... mostly I try to call things what they are.'

Marcel Vidal is a 2009 graduate of the National College of Art and Design. He opens his laptop and we begin to flick through images of his April 2018 solo **SILVERFISH** at The Dock Arts Centre in Leitrim. Glue, flags, taxidermy, expanding foam, feathers, a pile of water-coloured sausages... The show was, he says, 'quite organic but also very manufactured'. I find it terrifying 'like a sort of half-burned down future or past'. A flameless hearth framed by black-splayed walls evokes rupture — what has happened and what has still to occur. The end is in the beginning Beckett said, 'and yet you go on.'

Vidal's sculpture and a chaotic, often combative mode of assembly, is strongly contrasted by refined oil and water-colour paintings embedded into what he defines as a 'traditional approach' i.e. under-painted, glazed, on linen. A still-life rose faces away from the viewer, an extended hand is depicted from an obscure angle, a sharp white dress flaunts a nuanced crease. This skewing of the expected or assumed narrative appears in Vidal's verbal speak too. When, for example, he talks of spikes and chains, his choice of word is, interestingly, 'protective'. This suggestion of a distortionist sensibility rooted in obsession is one that I typically associate with poets and poems that seek to explode. Vidal's boulder **Nightcrawler** occupies a central space in an exhibit the same way that a dark-minded question sets itself apart in a Dave Lordan poem:

"Who is the god of this ring? / The god of the ring is unknown. / Jack O the Lantern maybe / or the scarecrow with the two axes or a wailing midnight wind / or a sack of smashed glass."

— Dave Lordan, *The Boy in The Ring* (Salmon Poetry 2007)

How did audiences respond to **SILVERFISH**? Some inclined toward the terror and violence of it — to the sense of the work as apocalyptic. Others experienced it as a dream sensation. Vidal himself thinks of it as a nightscape. ‘But the work often doesn’t speak to me until it’s installed, which is why openings are so weird for artists, why you wallow after. The thing in your head no longer exists’.

Vidal’s words are often staccato-like, delivered in sentences that burst and bound. It is both a conversation that we are having and a crashing around. Always, he talks through the images as if the image itself on screen tells me everything I need to know.

Commuting daily from Wicklow, Vidal was at FSAS up to 8 hours each day, sometimes 7 days per week. He describes the focus of his engagement with FSAS as specific and goal-orientated. In the run-up to **SILVERFISH** there was, he says, ‘no trial and error. It all happened the way it was meant to. Though it’s all an experiment in the sense that of course that approach can fail. I suppose my process is built on risk anyway. If I make the mould and it turns out incorrect, then that too becomes part of the work.’

Today Vidal is in another intense rush. He’s prepping for a children’s art workshop at Temple Bar Gallery and Studios. We chat for a bit about the challenges of working with children (I know the perils only too well, having found myself during a recent reading trying to explain the history of the Irish mother and baby homes to a group of ten-year-olds). Ultimately however, I imagine that what Vidal has to offer, young people are going to want. In fact some shy weird kid is going to have an absolute eureka moment when he realises what art is **not**. Vidal himself is unsure but up for the challenge.

So, what about the FSAS award did Vidal find most useful? ‘The space to use dirty materials — cast plaster, concrete, aero-board. Very few spaces of that type exist in Dublin’. How would he describe his time at FSAS? ‘It was good. It was cold’. Is it his style to always **hurtle** towards deadlines? ‘Yes.’

II PRONOUN

a part of speech substitutable for a noun and marked for a person

i.e. she, we, they

In an upstairs FSAS room with Myrid Carten I notice a long-bodied dark cat slink down a stairwell and out of view. A 2014 Fine Art graduate of Goldsmiths University London, Carten is from the same remote part of Donegal as I, a place where random encounters with wildness are everyday and inescapable. In the preamble to our chat about her recent short film **Wishbone**, and her plans at FSAS to create an art response to the film, we reflect upon the type of silence that often exists in rural communities, how that silence manifests, and the ways in which it can sometimes obstruct healthy conflict resolution.

Selected by Northern Ireland Screen (NIS) for the 2018 New Shorts Focus Scheme, **Wishbone** is a film based upon real-life events. Carten describes it as a film that ‘explores the complicated relationship dynamic between three young women’ (on the NIS site the same film is blurbed more specifically as a film that ‘subverts the cultural fascination with the emaciated female body’). On screen an actress plays Carten, a real-life friend plays herself and a second real-life friend has prepared an actress to stand into her role. This tricky constellation, and the mirroring within, sets a surreal and foreboding tone.

‘The most difficult thing for me was depicting female relationships that are hard and strained — these are people that I love, and yet this narrative drama is conflict driven’.

In the **Wishbone** trailer the lead actress is wrapped in a pink fur coat, suggesting a tinged or unnatural hide. In one of the film scenes, she is erased completely from a witchy tableau of the three women sleeping side by side. I watch this scene several times, unsettled not simply because I am being invited to bear witness to an eerie sleep but because I’m being invited to stand by whilst she — who cannot in her unawake state help herself — is disappeared.

15 Is it a particularly sensitive time in Ireland to be making this work? Carten does not respond directly to the question — in much the same way that the characters on screen protest and defy, refracting clear or linear resolution. ‘The film is about how strained the simplest things can be in very good relationships, maybe because you’re forcing solutions you wish to find in yourself. I’m interested in those moments of truth and merging personality’.

Nearby Carten has constructed for this project a number of latex screens. As standalone objects, I find them deeply peculiar and not for the first time during these conversations I marvel at how the blank screen does not function in ways that perhaps, most of the time, the blank page does. ‘Shooting on latex creates this strange effect whereby the image becomes transparent, and two people can become overlaid. I wanted a screen that you can basically run into. I wanted it to be skin-like... I went down this weird road, going into Radical Rubber explaining that I wasn’t making a sex film. The latex produces an embryonic blur. Images become tactile. People merge... as in an image bath’.

Carten, who also received a 2018 Next Generation Artists Award from the Arts Council, plans over the next few months to bring **Wishbone** and the art response to a conclusion. ‘I always felt odd about this film because I had to go through conventional film-making avenues to get it made. I did manage to finally make the film I wanted, but this response gives me more authorship over it’.

Having only commenced at FSAS two weeks ago, what so far are her thoughts on the award? ‘The thing you miss when you leave an educational institution is having everything in-house. I have that here, with all the equipment I need. Plus, someone like John [Beattie] really understands my process — how practical work and ideas happen in tandem’.

III VERB

a part of speech without case inflection, but inflected for tense, person and number, signifying an activity or process performed or undergone
i.e. shred, soak, drain, sieve

Jane Fogarty is often looking at ‘the various ways in which we interpret and understand the passing of time and how this in turn can be translated into a visual language’.

Fogarty, who is originally from Dublin, finished her FSAS residency in May 2018 and remains based in the city centre. The stairwell I climb up into her new loft studio space feels both fixed and insecure. Inside I find her at a desk surrounded by a series of piled-up structures that, for the purpose of this text, I will call ‘mounds’. Positioned on plinths, or directly on the floor, each mound is constructed through a layering process of tongue-like shapes made of dried-out paper-mache pulps. The pulps vary in colour from those of a pastel nursery shade to those of the more excretory ilk. It feels true to say that the more I look at these mounds, the more sinister they become. On a back wall hang the paintings Fogarty makes as the sculptural pieces dry.

‘Shred, soak, drain and sieve’: this is how Fogarty describes the step-by-step process of making wet crumbs out of paper for the individual pulps (although she will use any paper, and is currently using lined fax paper, blank white is her preference.) ‘Each pulp is twisted into shape with a wringing action’ she says, making two fists and churning them in opposite directions to explain. I think immediately of so-called ‘women’s work’, of heavy water-sodden cloths, of residue. Yet, these easy domestic labour associations imply a two-part hand action: a twist and untwist of a thing i.e. a tightening and untightening. In actuality the pulps are formed with a **singular** hand action: a once-off wring. One twist and the individual shape is in itself complete (and placed delicately, like a broken-necked bird, onto the growing tower of the mound). The cumulative effect is, I think, one of memorialisation.

‘The space in my previous studio had been very small, so the FSAS award allowed me to start making larger pieces, to create something of human proportions, more relatable

in a body sense... But if you're not using wire or some kind of internal skeleton, it's difficult. So I did a lot of problem-solving, using heaters and trying to suck the moisture out of the material'.

At FSAS Fogarty also reconsidered the use in her practice of plinths. In exploring the idea of spillage (via paint on floor and wall surfaces), the plinth as an insertion began to feel like an interference in the work's narrative. 'I've since decided to try and manipulate the form of these structures a bit more, to create something that might respond to the architecture of the room and/or address the space that they sit in. I'd like the structures to be a little less autonomous'.

Fogarty, who has been making this work since 2015 says that her time at FSAS was 'all about making' and also the 'space to experiment with resins and materials, to explore collaborative relationships and to host studio visits (and display work in the context of these visits). I had a lot of material discussions at FSAS. It was a great space for stop and chats. But crucially, maybe most important of all, was the opportunity to sit and really look at the work I was making'.

IV ADJECTIVE

a part of speech that modifies or describes a noun or pronoun

i.e. wild, rigid, loose

'I've been thinking a lot about gardens and the organisation of wilderness into islands'. Laura Kelly cites an article from The Guardian **'Crisis in our national parks: how tourists are loving nature to death'** and briefly we discuss the tourist spectacle that has become deer feeding in The Phoenix Park, Dublin. Where once a person could from a distance observe the magnificence of creatures in a natural habitat, one sees now mostly tourists holding camera-phones high with one hand as they offer pieces of food with the other. According to the article, people no longer visit parks for solitude and among the concerns being raised is that of what happens when nature goes viral?

Kelly's practice is drawing-based, evolving out of considerations of the space between material presence and suggested illusion. Referencing natural and cultural landscapes — and using materials which include paper, thread, wire, graphite, wood and tape — she constructs work that moves between the two and three-dimensional, varying in scale from installation size to smaller wall-based pieces.

'I don't think of myself as a sculptor (I studied painting originally) and my work has always been more concerned with surface and fragmentation. I spent a lot of the FSAS residency trialling ways to make sculptural surfaces'.

Kelly, who is concerned with developing a language of line, colour and surface, lost all of her work in a 2018 studio fire prior to her commencement with FSAS. She seems remarkably reconciled to the impact of this relatively recent disaster. Unpacking pieces made at FSAS, she describes them each as 'semi-loose' or 'semi-rigid' and tells me that she moved around a lot as a child. Today she does not experience landscape in a 'rooted' or 'fixed' way. How prospect is viewed is of particular interest and she mentions prospect-refuge theory:

"...humans seek out to satisfy an innate desire when reviewing a space — to have opportunity [prospect] whilst being safe [refuge]. This stems from evolutionary survival, where the predator must be able to see their prey without being seen."

— Jay Appleton, *Experience of Landscape* (John Wiley and Sons 1975)

Obscured horizons, wind patterns in desert sands and landscapes disappeared under swathes of snow: we spend an easy hour talking about the changing physicality of various environments. Kelly asks me about the nature of my relationship with the earth and I tell her that I grew up in northwest Donegal, hemmed in on one side by the Atlantic Ocean and on the other by a border with Northern Ireland. I recall a recent

17 journey through Yorkshire, the sheer panic that surged through my body as I drove down from a height into the vast unfolding and seemingly edgeless terrain of the moors. 'I didn't want to work with flat surfaces. And I wanted to make distressed pieces'. The works Kelly hands me are each partially crumpled, noisy to the touch, intact despite some implied notion of disregard. I am moved to think about how work survives and how in one moment it is scrapped and in another, sometimes as an afterthought, rescued. I have in the centre of my mind a picture of the studio fire now, flames in intense disarray. In several slate-grey earth-coloured pieces, the drawing is criss-crossed with the neon hi-vis orange line of emergency.

'I was interested at FSAS to see how different materials performed in combination with on another. For example, I didn't want to work with stuff that was toxic, so I began using Jesminite — a composite material consisting of a gypsum-based material in an acrylic resin. FSAS provided a great opportunity to have a raw work area, one in which I could be messy and experiment with plaster, foam and wood. I was also able to advance my woodwork skills there. A sculptural approach involves a lot of tacit knowledge — you need someone to show you how it's done and that that was available which was great. The results of this experimentation have given me much wider scope for planning future work'.

V ADVERB

**a part of speech that modifies or describes a verb, an adjective, or another adverb
i.e. gently, extremely, carefully**

"We are much better at admitting that humans infect nature than we are at admitting that nonhumanity infects culture, for the latter entails the blasphemous idea that nonhumans — trash, bacteria, stem cells, food, metal, technologies, weather — are actants more than objects".

— Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*
(Duke University Press, 2010)

'Everyone has had that experience of picking up a rock and feeling a response to it'. Emma McKeagney is keen to talk about New Materialism.

McKeagney, a 2017 IADT graduate, is primarily interested in the relationship between artist and material, how this relationship develops through process and how this development can be brought into exhibited work. In a busy city centre restaurant, amid the din of cutlery, plates and trays, she explains that 'as humans we are not separate from environment'. We're part of an interconnected system in which every thing possesses energy. 'For me, rocks are at the centre of that idea'.

In February 2018 McKeagney began work at FSAS and 'straight away my hands started making'. As an art college graduate the space felt familiar '...high ceilings, concrete floors, noise in the background'. She smiles when she recalls the clanging of copper made by an artist next door. 'I loved that sound. It stops you overthinking'. We banter back and forth about different types of noise, the interference of conscious thought during the act of creating, and the hypnotic effects of radio. She remembers one particular day spent attuned to a West Cork podcast on the murder of Sophie Toscan du Plantier and how the hours that day at FSAS seemed to pass as if in a disorientating dream. Arriving from her part-time job each afternoon, McKeagney was at FSAS from lunchtime, often staying until 9pm. Winter was cold and she was sometimes exhausted. 'Of course there were times when I asked myself does it matter? Is it relevant? Who cares? But it's on days like those that the material drives you'.

'Slipcasting, trimming, drying, heating up and cooling down, cleaning... If you act too quickly the pieces may melt or burst'. There is a strong sense of rhythm and ritual to the intensely physical nature of firing that McKeagney outlines. She describes with excitement the process of glazing, of waiting weeks, of opening the kiln to finally remove the fired thing. 'With makers, it's like you're an addict. It's like your obsessed'. Revelation

and the slow intuitive unfold of ideas is central to her practice. It was a ‘relief’ to discover that concept was not something she had, by design, to consciously engineer into the work. Most recently the material has thrown up questions around ‘the divide we make between naturally formed and human-made objects’.

Given the eco-sensibility of McKeagney’s approach, how to limit wastage and the use of toxic materials is often on her mind. ‘It’s a challenge. Some artists can plan meticulously for no mistakes, but I don’t work that way’. At FSAS she began using Polymorph — a material comprising beads that when combined with hot water produces a hard, stiff playdo-ish material, which can later be melted and reformed. Another important consideration for her is that of object display. ‘When, for example, I make small ceramic things I don’t want to just put them on a plinth. Really, my work is always an attempt to equate materials, artist and the exhibition’.

McKeagney created over sixty rocks at FSAS. Truly, it’s odd talking about rocks in this way. It’s a bit like talking about air. I’m suddenly aware of — and frustrated by — my empty palm. What was the biggest outcome of the FSAS award? ‘The biggest outcome for me was being able to work towards my first solo show **Unstable Categories** which ran at Pallas Studios in June 2018. I was also selected by FSAS to participate in a partnership with MART Rathmines. But really, the physical things I made on site are the embodiment of my time there’.

VI PREPOSITION

a preposition is a word placed before a noun or pronoun to form a phrase modifying another word in the sentence

i.e. by, with, until

‘Part of the attraction of remote landscapes at night is the heightened sense of awareness. I’ve worked in totally dense forests with a full moon and had to find my way around by touch. Sound seems to travel differently at night. Foxes, for example, make a sound not unlike that of a child’s cry. With long exposure in particular or video, you have to stand very still and wait. You have to work harder for the visual’.

Drawing on Arnold Berleant’s theory of a participatory approach to landscape, in which the artist, environment and viewer are considered to be in continuous dialogue, Paul Gaffney’s practice seeks to communicate an experience of immersion in nature to the viewer. Gaffney meets me in a city centre coffee shop and we launch into a conversation about mystery, surprise and the process of attuning to what cannot be fully known by daylight. ‘If I enter a forest now today, I know what I’ll get on camera. But at night the camera sees things that your eye will not’. At an early career juncture Gaffney made a conscious decision to pursue photography over music. Still, he explains, many of the same skills apply. ‘With sequencing images, the composition is all about pacing, cadence, momentum. It’s not dissimilar to the structural process of writing a song’. But these days a sound recorder is ‘...an excuse to stand still, observe, be careful’.

Gaffney is the author of three photography books: **We Make the Path by Walking**, **Stray** and his latest **Perigee** made in the Ardennes in Luxembourg. He recalls the FSAS period as a time of preparation, of set-up, of experimentation. Given that much of his work depends on favourable weather conditions, his practice tends to happen in a cyclical way. ‘Usually my imagery is captured during the winter months and the residency took place in the summer. I took short journeys into the mountains to test things of course, but really my focus was one of upskilling, problem-solving and trialling software etc’. Of particular interest to him was the exploration of photogrammetry — taking measurements from photographs and creating 3D models. ‘There were lots of chats with John [Beattie] around the challenges of filming in a low light setting, and how I might approach recreating the physical sensation of being immersed in the landscape’.

Both Gaffney and I have worked with wild sites in County Kerry and I tell him that one sound, above all others, has lodged itself in my memory — that of animals at night in unlit fields. The distant nowhere sound against a moonless sky always seemed to me

19 like a poem recited in a dark room. Is poetry or text part of Gaffney's practice at all? 'Not really' he replies before going on to cite two references in quick succession. For **We Make the Path by Walking** he included a poem from which the following line provided inspiration for the title of his own work:

"Caminante no, hay camino, / se hace el camino al andar."

— Antonio Macdao, *Caminante, no hay camino* (Planeta 1998)

For his most recent book **Perigee**, Gaffney repurposed a line from a song:

"But the darkest of night, in truth, still dazzles".

— Bill Callahan, Jim Cain (*Sometimes I Wish We Were an Eagle* 2009)

What's it like being out there at night? 'It's a pleasure. It's magical. I've discovered wildlife in those settings that I've never seen before... And I feel safer than I do when I'm close to urban landscapes'. Regarding the technical side of Gaffney's projects 'there's a lot of waiting around, and it can be difficult to stay motivated. But it's worth it when you're out there staring up at the sky, and the clouds begin to part'

VII CONJUNCTION

a part of speech binding together the discourse and filling gaps in its interpretation i.e. and, but, or

"Transhumanism is a class of philosophies of life that seek the continuation and acceleration of the evolution of intelligent life beyond its currently human form and human limitations by means of science and technology, guided by life-promoting principles and values".

— Max More, 'Transhumanism: Toward a Futurist Philosophy' (*Extropy: Journal of Transhumanist Thought* 1990, 1994, 1996)

Tamsin Snow serves me a cup of tea with almond milk and we begin at the beginning. The focus of her practice is an engagement with architecture, often looking at legacies of modernist architectures and considering how new architectures might evolve according to new technologies, including those arising from the discourse around transhumanist theory.

On first impression, Snow's work strikes me as... bodily and **un**bodily, beyond disquiet and yet also strangely **vowel**. The smooth, sleek surfaces both seduce and repel in much the same way that, by design, the personalised technology we hold so closely seems often to want to slide from the hand, to leave the physical self, to be gone. **Oh...! Ah...! No...!** It is the extreme lucidity of curves and edges, the brightly lit **exactness** of detail, that evokes for me a particular post-death and pre-grief moment, the one in which world is made too clear, too fully clarified, alien even. It is a moment full of weight and devoid of emotion.

Briefly we discuss Snow's artist statement. In my notes I have circled a single word: 'immersion'. Snow clarifies that the word 'refers to the experience of seeing the work installed in exhibitions. The large scale architectural works are full scale — lighting, sound and atmosphere also play a role in the experience of viewing these works in life'. I suggest that the work evokes a strong sense of the (sur)reality of presence 'and/or absence' Snow adds, 'there's no figure in these works, the implication is that only you, or maybe nobody, is here'.

Snow's engagement with FSAS was largely desk-based but the opportunity for making in that environment — surrounded by material, mess, physical endeavour — is one that she feels helped shape the work, in specific a new video piece titled **Spare Face**. In it the viewer is lead into a fictional medical processing plant, a space that seems charged from

the inside out with a controlled yet never fully defined narrative. For this work, Snow wanted to ‘push what CGI could do to the viewer’. In an attempt to continue the logic of hyper-real surfaces and shining rooms, and using the camera to manipulate, distort and disorientate, she created an experience that feels at once masked and unmasked, outside logic, invulnerable. Returning to the post-death moment, I counter that it feels shocked, out-of-body. ‘Yes, you’re moving through and moving within... Are you being guided or are you implicated in the narrative?’

Spare Face features the use of text as subtitles. In a previous video, **Showroom**, Snow created a montage of text-to-speak language, copying and splicing from various locations — media articles, specialist papers, internet discussion board and platforms etc. This use of found text is especially intriguing to me and further to my meeting with Snow I disappear into a cryogenics chamber of the internet for which the entry point was this chat-room post:

“Death is equal parts make-believe, coping mechanism, and ritual-holder. So deeply embedded within the human experience, it is a construct...”

— Chitchat, CR Society Forum (crsociety.org/forum, 2018)

At FSAS Snow also continued her on-going collaboration with Irish visual artist Sarah Tynan around the production of a new sculptural work for an exhibition at the Highlanes Gallery, Drogheda. Snow and Tynan were invited to re-present a work exhibited in 2015 at the Royal Academy, London titled **Multifaith**. This work was later redeveloped for an exhibition in London where Snow used a shade of grey specific to unrendered CGI models. This emergence of technological language ‘coming back out into material objects’ is a development that began to occur during her FSAS residency.

We end our conversation by reflecting upon the mysterious currency of arts residencies, the true value of which can only become known over time. I think of all the poetry I’ve failed to persuade onto pages during residencies and how, as if by some prank of the muses, the lines have fallen deftly into place once my interface with ‘normality’ is resumed. A lot of thinking about making takes place on arts residencies — a lot of setting-up, making room, clearing space. And perhaps it’s not said often enough that much work does not actually get **made** on residency at all.

Snow, originally from Dublin, returned from London only two years ago. The FSAS award was a chance to continue, in a real and practical way, her re-orientation back into the Irish arts landscape. ‘The physicality of the studio... the openness to experimentation, mess, scale... the outdoors space, the studio visits and events, and the expertise of someone like Mick [O’ Hara] who offers technical explanation and support... All of that makes FSAS a very special place’.

VIII INTERJECTION

a part of speech used to express emotion

i.e. Oh! Wow! Eek!

‘It’s hard to say what an artwork is doing. It’s not a spade with a nominated purpose. There are moments when you can’t linguistically articulate what’s going on and it’s a frightening moment. You can’t speak it. It doesn’t happen very often but when it does it’s profound’. Barbara Knezevic and I sit opposite one another in a very white studio and begin to discuss language, translation and how it becomes necessary sometimes to abandon one’s own ordinary lexicon — to go beyond what is ordinary — in order to better understand or express the world. Personally, I like the idea that it takes a good lie sometimes to tell the truth. Knezevic nods in agreement. ‘In a way that’s what I’m doing, constructing fictive spaces to get to the heart of what’s going on...’

Knezevic’s sculptural work is concerned with how objects function materially, philosophically and economically in the world. ‘The idea that other things have a life or agency, that they’re not dumb mute objects, is really important to me’. For **Lithophone**

21 Knezevic developed an interest in naturally resonant stones i.e. ancient stones found in wild landscapes that, when struck, produce sound. Out of marble she created a stone object — albeit one that produces no sound — and in an accompanying speculative text she posed the questions: If this object was the last piece of marble to be pulled out of the earth how would we treat it? What things would be important to do with it? How would we demonstrate human skill?

Knezevic's **Lithophone** was '...quite ugly, ungainly. It looks like a thing developed by committee'. My thoughts drift to the studio window where outside the landscape is urban, constructed, a meld of pigeon blue and gun-metal greys. 'But its ugliness is what's interesting about it' she adds.

At FSAS Knezevic brought the final iteration of **Lithophone** to conclusion by creating a video work of the stone. 'It was really intense. I ended up forming a scheme for the editing process that revolved around the audio. We used a sound recording of the object and three separate sound channels. It was weird, unsettling not comfortable'. As part of the project Knezevic also started to consider the implications of visual screens, calling attention to the physical nature of the apparatus and equipment that displays work. She is interested in the same kind of thin-edged, shiny design that Grayson Perry describes as 'sexist'.

“Up until recently, most designers were male and tended to suffer from self-as-user syndrome; that is, in a typical masculine way they lacked empathy for an average user, especially if she was female.”

— Grayson Perry, *The Descent of Man* (Allen Lane, 2016)

On a nearby table a selection of rose-quartz pink crystals of various sizes are laid out. At FSAS Knezevic delved into Shutterstock, an online site that provides stock photography, footage and music along with editing tools. She describes it as a 'hellscape... a glut... too much'. In the same breath she also mentions Western capitalist mining of the earth's resources, the aggressive and exploitative nature of it and yet, how a whole industry around 'healing stones' continues to exist. 'These self-created things, formed under huge geological pressures and unimaginable spans of time, are so overloaded with meaning, so aesthetically full.... How do you work with things that are way too full already?'

Knezevic responded to the rose quartz crystals in a way she defines simply as 'bodily'. 'I'd been reading the feminist theorist Elizabeth A. Grosz and I'm interested in what she has to say about intensification and about the relationship between art and excess'. I browse the resulting medley of pink serpentine extrusions that bring to mind a jumble of unfitted jigsaw pieces. There is something irresistible, and also sickening, about the endless tangle of narratives that this pink suggests, and its currency in the market to drive health and beauty 'campaigns' for women. (Side note: Mamie Eisenhower was a supposed cultural champion of this pink, which — incidentally — was worn fashionably by boys and men up until the 1920's). Knezevic's work **Scapes: Rose Quartz** is currently on show at Berlin Opticians Gallery.

For Knezevic, who was during her FSAS engagement preparing for a solo exhibition at The Oonagh Young Gallery, the award was 'pivotal'. Providing essential access to technology, space and support, it was a productive and very busy time (there was 'a lot of loud cursing'). 'I'm not sure how I could have produced this work without the FSAS award. Without FSAS, a lot of art in Dublin would simply not get made'.

III

Robert Herbert McClean

Ella Bertillon & Ulla Juske

Neil Carroll

Michelle Doyle

Helen Hughes

Alan Magee

FILE NOTE 2020



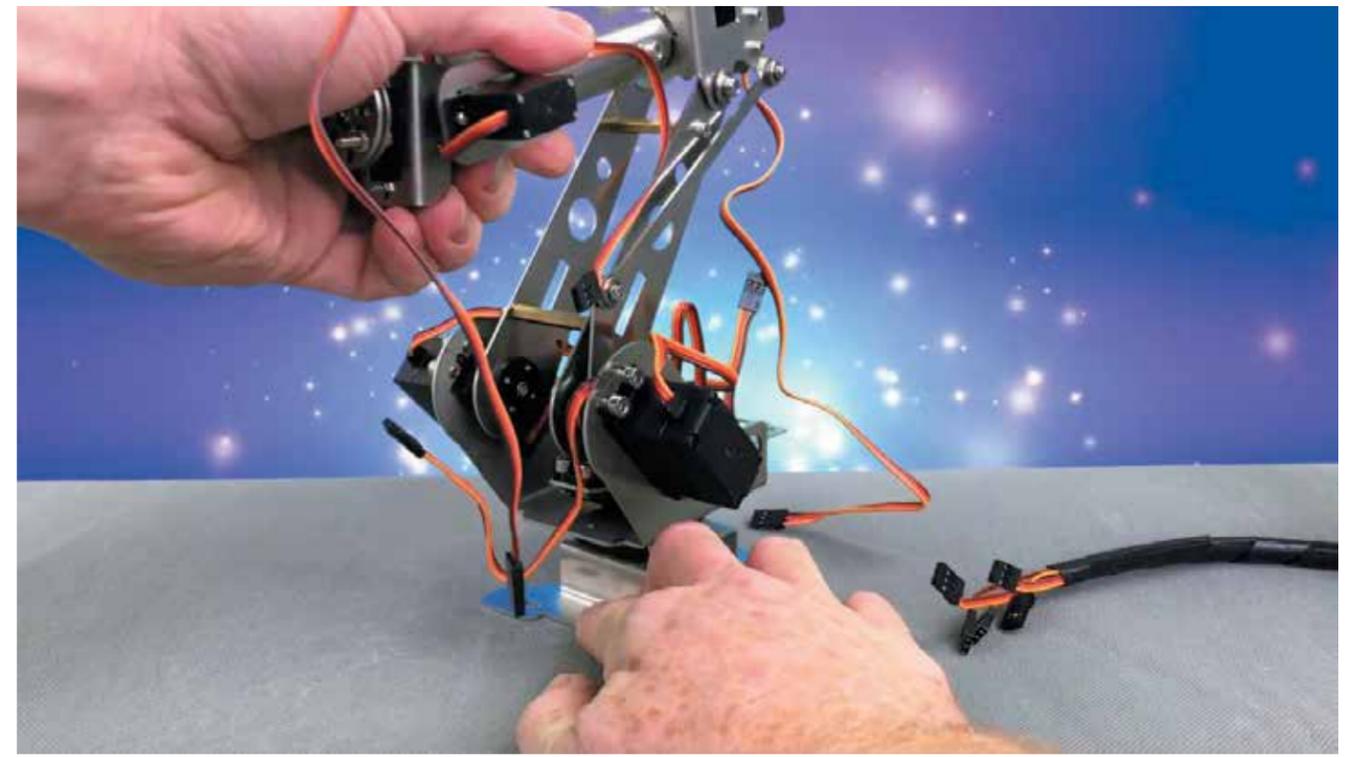
Neil Carroll
Practice award — Sculpture
Emulsion Paint, Plaster, Paper,
Wood and mixed media on steel
mesh. 3metres x 2.5 metres (2018)

Ella Bertilsson & Ulla Juske
Practice award — Digital
Beyond the Sandy Suburbs, HD video still (2018)





Michelle Doyle
Practice awardee — Digital
Distance From Stone, Video still, 10 mins, Tulca Festival of Visual Arts (2019)



Alan Magee
Practice award — Sculpture
Data Dust, Dust Data, Castor Gallery, London (2019)

Helen Hughes
Practice award — Sculpture
Nothing but sure (detail). Mixed media.
Tulca Festival of Visual Arts, Galway city (2018)



Robert Herbert McClean is an Irish writer and audio-visual artist. His debut book **Pangs!** was published by Test Centre in 2015. In 2016, his debut album, **Infinity**, was released by Blank Editions. He has been artist-in-residence at Forum Stadtpark, Belfast Exposed, and The Curfew Tower. **Skrubolz Garbillkore**, was commissioned by Maria Fusco and published by Book Works in 2018. He was a finalist for the Arts Foundation Futures Awards for Poetry in 2019. Songs for Ireland was published by Prototype in 2020. www.robertherbertmcclean.com

Ella Bertilsson is currently a studio artist at Rua Red until 2023. She is a recipient of the Visual Arts Bursary Award 2021-2022 and the Project Award 2022 from the Art Council of Ireland. She has a first class honours in Fine Art Print (BA) and MFA awarded from NCAD (2009, 2015). Forthcoming solo exhibitions at Ballina Art Centre (2023) and the Complex (2022). Selected solo shows: **Beyond the Sandy Suburbs***, Pallas (2018), **Carrier of Memories***, Draíocht (2018), **11.9 km NWOTCC***, Hobusepea Gallery, Tallinn, Estonia (2018) *produced as a joint practice with Ulla Juske. Recent group exhibitions: **Periodical Review 11**, Pallas and **Double Estate**, Pearse Museum, OPW State Art Collection (2020-2021). www.ellabertilsson.net

Ulla Juske is an Estonian artist working in drawing, video and installation. Collaboration, discussion and public engagement has been the heart of Juske's practice; most of her projects have been done through collaborations with artists, composers, writers and local communities. She has completed a postgraduate studies in the Media department at the National College of Art and Design (2014) and has an undergraduate degree in Sculpture at the Estonian Academy of Arts (2011). Currently she is enrolled in a postgraduate programme in Semiotics in Tartu University, where her research is focusing on the social function of absurdity. www.juske.net

Neil Carroll is an artist based in Dublin and London. He received his MFA from the Ruskin School of Art, Oxford University (June 2016) and his BFA from the National College of Art in Dublin (2010), achieving Distinction in both. Since 2010, Carroll has been continuously exhibiting in solo and group shows. He was selected to exhibit as part of New Contemporaries 2017, showcasing the best of emerging talent from UK art schools. In the summer of 2015 he was the recipient of a fellowship to the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine, USA. He was awarded the Hennessey-Craig scholarship for painting at the Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin in 2012. He has also received artist's bursaries from the Arts Council of Ireland (2018, 2017, 2015). www.neilcarroll.ie

Ella Bertilsson (b. Umeå, SWE,) and **Ulla Juske** (b. Pärnu, EST) were an artist duo that started to collaborate during their MFA studies at NCAD in 2015 and continued to produce multidisciplinary work in Ireland, Estonia, Iceland, Norway and Sweden until 2019. Most recently; a trilogy of exhibitions at Pallas Projects/Studios, Draócht Art Centre and Hobusepea Gallery, Tallinn, EST (2018) and **Mothers of Birds Taxi Service**, a performance in a Fiat Cinquecento at various locations, Dublin (2018). Together they received FSAS Digital Media Bursary Award (2019), Culture Ireland funding (2018) and Nordic Point Mobility Funding (2018) and undertook a number of residencies including; Pssquared Belfast, Northern Ireland (2019), The Peer Residency at the RHA (2018-2019) and NKD: Nordic Artist's Centre, Dale, Norway (2018).

Michelle Doyle is a visual artist and musician from Wicklow, who creates work exploring culture, space and politics. For the last ten years, Doyle has worked across art, design, writing, and music. This sculptural practice includes pirate radio, performance, digital reproduction and video compositing. Doyle's work is experienced in institutional and extra-institutional spaces and questions the power dynamics found within them. Doyle's recent research centres on music communities that self-build and operate rehearsal practice spaces. Selected projects during 2022 include **Models of Practice** as part of the Engine of Hell in Ormston House; **Ohmydemigod**, curated by RGKSRGKS at Temple Bar Gallery & Studios; Artist Initiated Projects, Pallas Projects. Doyle is supported by the Arts Council of Ireland. www.michelledoyle.xyz

Helen Hughes is a process based sculptural artist living and working in Dublin. She is a graduate of Chelsea College of Art and Design, London (BA Hons Fine Art) and IADT, Dublin (MA Visual Arts Practices). Recent shows include a solo exhibition at Roscommon Arts Centre (2022), Periodical Review #9 at Pallas Projects, Dublin (2019), **Dearly Beloved...VISUAL**, Carlow (2019), **Syntonic State** TULCA, Galway (2018) and **A Bounce Borrowed**, The Dock, Carrick on Shannon (2017). Helen's upcoming projects include solo exhibitions at the Customs House Gallery in Mayo (2022) and at Ballina Arts Centre (2025).

Alan Magee was born in Ireland and lives and works between Dublin and London. He holds an MA in Fine Art from Central Saint Martin's College of Art and Design, London, and a BA from TU Dublin (DIT), Ireland. Awards include; Arts Council Ireland and Culture Ireland awards, The Performance Corporation's SPACE Programme 2022 residency, Fire Station Artists' Studios practice award for sculpture, and Florence Trust studio residency. He has exhibited at White Cube, London; Castor, London; Xi'an Academy, China and LCGA, Limerick. He is a PhD researcher on the C.o.A.T. scholarship, exploring the existential implications of technological advancements as the dominant mediators of human experiences and practices in the workplace. He is an occasional lecturer at UAL and is represented by Castor (London). www.alan-magee.com

NOTIONS OF A QUASI-MYSTIC COMMUNISM

'Let us return to detective novels.' — Bertolt Brecht

Something like a shop front window being bricked

I heard someone call my namesake, I swung around in the mizzle to see Helen Hughes had found me in the grounds of DIT Grangegorman. Thankfully, I was not as lost now as the memory of the multi-story car park in which I'd abandoned my whip.

As we entered Summer Studios, the **bon vivant** brightness of Helen's aura became pleasingly apparent as we sat down on a few fold-up chairs in her allocated, obliquely defined space.

Helen seemed to revel in an air of mischief, when considering the various angles that viewers may take of her art. At her most recent group show, a child punched a hole in one of her contributions.

As much as Helen's previous work has disrupted industrial processes as we commonly perceive them, the works in progress that surround us resemble glossy ornaments, but they're too uncanny, fancifully disturbing at the same time, like that Chris Cunningham video for Aphex Twin's **Windowlicker**, where Richard D James' skewed grimace is transposed onto the big booty bodies of a troupe of beautiful twerkers.

Helen's sculptures are clever enough to converse with the creepy umbra of capital and come out not as the butt of the joke, but as the trickster telling the joke who has since shifted dimensions, is there but isn't, isn't there but is, leaving an ethereal, will-o'-the-wisp effect of cheek and knowingness, that only serves to endear the viewer to enjoy the joke afresh in admiration of the attitude.

Helen encourages the viewer to relish a hopefully revelatory moment, a moment taken to participate and engage with capitalist concepts and constructs differently. Desire is distorted in a voided modality, permitting us to consider consumerist driven, digitally hosted, financial markets defaulting, in a melting prism of irreconcilable glitches.

I imagine Helen inversely scaling up with showrooms that are like temporal theme parks, like IKEA on acid; shiny, reflective fluorescence, pastel paint, elegant metal sheens, useless decorations that dupe you by sheer virtue of their inventiveness; a false exchange-value by proxy of any purchase, as deterioration of the object was deliberately set in motion from the outset.

These objects are devoid of any possible misconception of potential functionality, they have absolutely no obvious utilitarian use, not even a hint, instead they prompt hilarity, acting as levelling devices, bringing an equality to all who wonder bemused at them, in befuddlement at their intangible eloquence, they act up, all goonish, like a mute pulling a funny face.

Thinking about that famous scene from **Modern Times** by Charlie Chaplin, where the protagonist can't keep pace with the production rate of the conveyor belt, I consider Helen working with her materials and I feel a comparison is apt. Helen must work quickly against the rate of production set by her materials. It takes only four to five minutes for resin to set, so in effect, Helen's process is a perpetual experimentalism, in which (she admits) there is lots of wastage in the wreckagees she manufactures in the wake of her beautifully disarming sculptures.

Helen is interested in who has the authority to make the absolute decision as to how these materials, ingratiated in industrial processes, can be used outside of their original design and purpose. Helen disrupts the diktats of the capitalist narrative with her tragi-

comic deconstruction of the factory with the incisive cleverness of the cultural critic. I don't think Helen has been averse to traditional sculpture techniques of production per se, but she has been maybe more reticent to use them than most in her field. Helen is driven by a more immediate conjuration of the art object, embracing being baffled herself by unexpected mistakism, a prominence for objects cast out of the normative order.

Helen's impetus to produce appears dynamic and improvisational, but she did invest her time at FSAS to enable a transitional praxis in her work; moving from wooden frames or resin framing for her sculptures, (when she felt they necessitated it) to that of metal frames produced at FSAS using once avoided, traditional sculptural techniques.

I get the impression Helen will continue to sample techniques of traditional sculpture after this reassessment of their potential in her work, maybe like DJ Screw would if he had been a sculptor. In fact, Helen's sculptures do have that sort of quality an object might take on if observed through the prism of a sizeable cup of **sizzurp**.

Helen shows me a piece of non-descript pink plastic, she says she can't ever part with it and that she returns to meditate on its existence, often. I suggest to Helen that this sounds like she nurtures a talisman, that she is pronouncing a sentiment of protectionism, an authentic tenderness towards a fragment of disposable packaging via her own anthropomorphic projection.

Like a vase with its centre of gravity smashed out, the studio suddenly becomes a fashion retail outlet, an alive exhibition space of **faux** commodity fetishism, wherein Helen and I are waiting for a phantastic model to come out of an adjacent inter-dimensional changing room, wearing one of Helen's sculptures like a scarf. I can't remember who said it, whether it was me or Helen; a good joke that's hard to get is difficult in its telling.

Punk is dead, long live punk!

My whip abandoned in a multi-story car park on the outskirts of the city centre, I begin my walk to Belvedere, specific location; Jigsaw Collective, to meet Michelle Doyle.

Michelle comes down after a text alert to meet me at the entrance. The ground floor space is amazing, like a cavernous, furniture free, open plan living room, complete with bar and kitchenette, a place where underground noise musicians and leftist activists mix and measure progressive concept and prepare for protest. After an upstairs tour of the Dublin Digital Radio studio, (from which Michelle had just hosted and broadcast her radio show, named the same as her solo noise project, **Rising Damp**) Michelle informs me that certain circumstances mean that the collective are soon to lose this hub of radicalism. She brews me a coffee as I offer my sincerest sympathies.

Michelle is currently interested in the relationships between technology, innovation and capitalism in contemporary Ireland, considering ancient Ireland as being perpetually present in the Celtic psyche. Pronouncing itself in Irish culture today, often commodified by the tourist industry, but often as contrary to commodification, that is if it is utilized as a temporal device to reconnect to our pagan ancestry. Conceptually here, there may be some mining of ideas that embody a not-for-profit intellectual currency, presenting historical precedents as potentials perhaps, for a fresh, radical subjectivity, founded on empathy and trust.

During her residency at FSAS Michelle took the opportunity to become accustomed to Adobe After Effects and Blender 3D modelling software. Michelle sees these two programs as digital collage applications in which she can use and develop open source, pre-built assets in her future video work. Michelle is thrilled at becoming adept in using these applications, in which she believes; you can virtually build anything; a digitally confined type of nanotech for the virtual. She is also thrilled to be awarded an Arts Council Next Generation Award of €20,000. We discuss remaining in Dublin with this award and the probable decimation of the funding in rental payments to landlords.

Michelle also used the time at FSAS to produce her **Sleep Concert**. The opportunity for her to have access to great microphones and top of the range sound editing software in the HD suite, has given us as an audience, a tremendous soundscape to tune in, zone out, and tweak our ideas to. If Mark Fisher had finished **Acid Communism**, Michelle Doyle's **Sleep Concert** might have been the perfect ASMR background noise to get reading to, to go psyche tripping in. It is available to listen to on the Dublin Digital Radio website archive.

Michelle was recently artist in residence at Cork Sound Fair 2019, along with Coilin O'Connell at which they curated a fascinating piece of art. Michelle gifts me a copy of the artwork, of which there has been a limited production run. The artwork is called **Data Dump**.

The work is essentially a zine but not as we know it. This zine questions the zine format as it is not paper printed, but USB stored, and more than that, it is a USB covertly designed as a debit/social security identification card. The production of this art object, mixtape disguised, communication and storage device, is not just an inventive mode of distributing a zine, it is a pertinent, contemporary political statement for modern Ireland, in relation to data ownership, the anti-democratic resonances of which can be transposed to any state apparatus involved in data harvesting and compartmentalization of citizens' profiles.

We must learn to omit as much as we declare, to know where the power lies in the dynamics of social activity as the gamification of politics continues with servicing and selling data as the fundamental, base currency of capital exchange and propagation.

Michelle's art mocks and challenges the itineration of everything, how our everyday experiences are being choreographed holistically in their differing and separate circumstances by an omnipresent hierarchy of managerial systems, of which capitalist and neoliberal ideologies are the base foundation and building blocks of our purported source of limitless human progress. But we all know the planet as a biosystem has reached a limit.

As I watch Michelle's **Distance from Stone**, I see a gem of a lampoon of the quintessential, educational visitor attraction video, beautifully rendered in pink hues and floating pebble dash masks that suck you into the joke, blind to the bombastic conceit that your participation and interaction is the obvious punchline. The pebble dash is a reference to inner city Dublin social housing and in turn the ongoing housing crisis, and furthermore perhaps to Pierre-Joseph Proudhon.

As we riff another dialogue, distracted from the images of the video streaming, Michelle urges me to consider Wi-Fi and the internet in terms of property, land grabs, the colonialization of the virtual, the imminent arrival of 5G. We can both still hear, though in a state of cognitive dissonance to it, the soundtrack to **Distance from Stone**, battle drums syncopate a rhythm that calls subliminally for an uprising, questioning; do we want authentic socialism or neo-barbarianism? Using maybe logic; the choice is ours if we have the courage to take it. I'm erring towards a quasi-mystic communism focused on the four-fold breath.

Uncanny comrades

My meeting place was prearranged to be Simon's Café. I arrive and get debriefed on how the artist duo; Ella Bertilsson and Ulla Juske, initially met. Through aleatory conversations and some clandestine and rebellious printing operations by Ella of Ulla's drawings for her then pending MFA show, the beginnings of their collaborative output manifested mischievously, on its own terms, at an appropriate time in space.

Isolated Pockets of Memory, Gazing at a Cosmic Map of the Past and **Uncertain Matter**, a series of works in both audio and video installations, evolved out of a three-month SÍM research residency with The Association of Icelandic Visual Artists in Reykjavík. The works taken together, shape a studied stillness, conveyed from their documented footage of vantage points from the observatory in Seltjarnarnes, Iceland. But this meditation is blasted by poetic litanies of subjective deep space perceptions and statements of scientific fact, informed by members of the Seltjarnarnes Amateur Astronomy Society. These collected expressions clash in a cosmic assimilation, feeling like offerings of counsel, projected by outer space bodies without organs; a polyphonic disembodied extraterrestrial poet society with a non-linear understanding, contemplating this surplus, universal knowledge collated **Gazing at a Cosmic Map of the Past**.

The Hut Project — Time is what happens when nothing else does, a narrative-driven installation, also focuses on tangential meditation. This work, initiated by the Office of Public Works (OPW) in association with the Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA), resonates with me, as I myself worked as a hotel night porter while a postgrad. The work is a collage of experiential accounts, based on numerous conversations with security men and attendants, focusing on the separateness of custodians and their considered thoughtfulness towards human relations, solidarity and to the contrary; alienation. Both antithetical considerations are cognitively incentivized by the worker's conditions. The artwork positions its subject(s) as the mindful measurers of time, in shifts that speculate on unexpected interventions in processes of being and security.

Interventions are another feature of the dynamism at play in Ella and Ulla's art. They were involved in tactically ferrying willing voters to polling stations in a Repeal the 8th decorated **Fiat Cinquecento** on the day of the referendum. This admirable and conscious act for parity and the recognition of essential human rights in the Republic of Ireland was instigated by Ella, Michelle Hall and Sophie Lynch. The same **Fiat Cinquecento**, though this time without any decoration, was used in Ella and Ulla's **Mother of Birds Taxi Service** escapade, this time ferrying members of the public to view an exhibition of theirs in Blanchardstown. This participatory happening, documented in a series of videos, is truly hilarious, spontaneous and full of improvised jouissance.

Carrier of Memories, in its soap opera style was instantly reminiscent to me of Kalup Linzy's early works, especially **All My Churen** (2003). The tone of irreverence here though is wonkily different, the deadpan but deftly emotive humour, of both Ella and Ulla, is black metal black, but oh so sincere, because the stories the pair tell are human, all too human. Anecdotes of making a house a home against the current economic and ecological crises, are shared through familial working class, uncanny, outcast subjectivities, who are sometimes docile, sometimes paranoiac, always embedded by displacement, their territories both physical and temporal, but no matter what never guaranteed secure.

Co-dependency is explored in the work, **Beyond the Sandy Suburbs**, which I found to be more than its immediate allusions; precariousness via the housing crisis, the unbalanced relationships between landlords and tenants, the question of whether shelter and privacy are even still connected when everything is so interconnected and surveilled. This video installation is about more than those apposite themes, it is about the relationships we make in the madness of civilization, relations that enable our survival in a support network built on solicitations of each persons need and ability. They call it solidarity, comrades. Perhaps think of the odd couple of the deep sea: the Goby Fish and The Pistol Shrimp.

The relationship of the artists themselves was the focus of their residency at FSAS. The project they were working on there, and at RHA and PS2, Belfast, is an exploration of the pair's WhatsApp messages over a four-year period of texting each other daily. This accounted for 750 double-sided pages when printed out, to edit down into short script formats, to be read as monologues by one person. This confuses the duality of the

expressions into a consolidated shared experience, birthing a verbal symbiosis of narrative.

“The themes we picked were: sex, periods, pregnancy, deaths, breakups, makeups, extremely boring stuff (which we excluded), drugs, drink, dysfunctionality and fights...”
— Extract from an email from Ella Bertilsson to me

The project remains unfinished, but the pair used their time at FSAS to learn how to use Da Vinci editing and post-production software, as well as Reaper, a virtual studio technology software program, with an exciting sound design functionality for devising surround sound installations. The duo could avail of the state of the art audio-visual recording equipment at FSAS, to document rehearsal performances of some of these short WhatsApp scripts. Now the duo is on hiatus, who knows what appropriate time and space will forge further collaborations in the future? I hope they soon make art again together that celebrates this friendship, the scripts I read conveyed in their relatable drama of cosmic domesticity, a spy camaraderie.

Autonomy and the art of altered deconstructions

I’ve arranged to meet the painter, Neil Carroll, in his residency studio at FSAS. I arrive, unannounced at the front entrance and press the buzzer. There is no response. I press the buzzer again, no response, then again and still no response. I email Neil, because I’m down from Belfast and it costs a small fortune to make or receive calls, south of the border with a UK number. As I press send, the door opens and a kind, welcoming FSAS representative grants me access.

I walk into the studio space and Neil is on the phone, conversing, so I’m guessing he won’t yet have seen my email, an email suggesting that I’m not actually stood before him, but outside stranded on the street.

Neil explains how he is working towards a show, for the RHA to be exhibited in February 2020. What I can see on the workbench before us is the makings of the process towards that exhibition. What I look at on the bench is not the partial, material fragments of what will become the collage elements of a series of ‘constructed’ paintings, but instead, what I look at on the bench is the purest representation of the noumenal chaos of Neil’s process as the thing-in-itself. Neil seems not to be so sure what this process is, not so sure what is happening, not so sure what he is even doing from one moment to the next. Neil suggests that he is not sure what is happening, that he is not sure what he is doing, that he can’t and doesn’t want to define this process, to deaden somehow a supramystery.

The workbench is strewn with a collection of what look like various remnants of construction refuse from a demolished building. These, what will be eventual segments of an assemblage painting, (“a diptych, maybe”, Neil thinks out loud) these fragmentary objects already define themselves in their scuffed, contrary finery, the cement grey is the prominent feature, but beyond the simple reduction of colour and material, this prominent cement grey seems like a pulse, a pulse that is present in all Neil’s paintings, irrelevant of what colour it might eventually become when painted. This pulse, when Neil lifts and lays the pieces on the bench into different collaged arrangements, seems vulnerable to elemental collapse, as if the entirety of the cement grey is threatening to dissipate into dust, serving only to be difficult, inversely there are moments where it seems that everything is in its right place and rendered, but remaining susceptible to reassessment and reassembly.

Neil recounts, that yeah, sometimes the materials like to do their own thing. Though, the plaster, cardboard and mesh have proven to be gracious in their malleability to affective aesthetic ends, especially when coloured effectively, as in Neil’s 2018 painting **Fissure**. This painting is absolutely startling in its vivid eminence of dust pink and complimentary emanations of pale blue grey’s, the total image is mesmerizing, as if a helicopter’s perspective overlooking an urban sprawl that has just suffered an earthquake, your

mission as witness is scoping out survivors. If you were down below and alive, you'd be orienteering by emotion, your recognitions altered by unexpected transformations in the landscape as a fractured urban space.

Neil is tremendously grateful for the residency at FSAS, as he had been stuck to secure a studio space to work on the forthcoming RHA show, FSAS also offers him access to site-specific techniques and open, critical conversation with other residents.

Neil explains to me how his fascination with landscape art developed, from an appreciation of formalist landscape painting in the Irish Tradition, into the type of work that he is making now, work that garnered his inclusion in **Bloomberg New Contemporaries** 2017.

When he left his first stint in art school, he went to work in the construction industry. On-site he would see how buildings emerged from architects' brains to confront civilians in social space. Sometimes as a haven, sometimes as an imposition. As well as the whole construction process, he could also see how there would be lots of leftover materials on-site that he mulled over might be interesting to make something out of.

Years later when he'd returned to art making, Neil was invited on a residency in the States. He arrived skint, so for materials he went to the local skip. He appropriated some detritus that he could further damage and deconstruct into fresher, newfangled fragments, reconceptualising the chance forms of found objects and material, into a sculptural, collage format, the makings of a painting he thought, so he bought the cheapest paint he could at the local hardware store and gave this structural form a simple coat. This practice evolved into the vitalist paintings, Neil is now producing. We talk of our shared interest in a third space, the space between art and the artist and what can or does inhabit this unknowable space in flux? Bataille's 'Base Materialism'? What William Burroughs and Brion Gysin called 'The Third Mind'? There is part of me that thinks maybe I wasn't even there, conversing with Neil Carroll, and maybe I'm still standing outside FSAS awaiting entrance, on Lower Buckingham Street, the whole city and me, myself and I, atomized.

Fully automated luxury communism or digital death drive moronathon, you decide

What happens to our ideas of what constitutes work, if labour becomes totally automated? If we consider this rupture in human history as a potential neo-genesis of radical collectivism, can we imagine a place where we might ensure the rights of each other to a universal basic income, food, shelter etc. as a direct result of automation? Could we co-opt our social media addictions to help us connect in a radical empathy, entering new cognitive spaces of ontological freedom, all at our socially acceptable leisure?

Think of it in terms of the Google (Deep Mind) AlphaGo Robot beating the world's best known Go players, then a year later AlphaZero beat the world's best chess playing computer program, after learning how to play chess with a mere four hours' practice. Now, imagine an AI robot that can program, then an AI robot that can program the original AI robot. The question begs asking; are we totally doomed or primed for emancipation?

Alan Magee's art reconceptualises the everyday tactile experience of material existence to establish its potential for agency, but undermining it at the same time, it's essentially a feedback loop, he conveys. So, we're totally doomed then?

The work he produced during the residency at FSAS, he calls, **Celestial Machines**, is pretty epic. It was exhibited at Castor Gallery, London, 2019, under the title: **Data Dust, Dust Data.**

The work comprises a kind of roofing panel that you would find in any modern office, which has dislodged itself from the ceiling and hangs, suspended on chains. A video

monitor encased in transparent plastic, wires, circuit boards and LED displays visible, onscreen plays a YouTube style tutorial. You soon realise this instructional video is edited out of sequence, corrupting the utility of the tactility being illustrated. From the underside, from the surface of this industrial style roofing panel, reaches out an artificial limb, a robot arm, like the video monitor, stripped of a metaphorical skin. Again, wires, circuit boards and the beauty of human ingenuity and engineering takes precedence over flesh and bone.

Alan triggers the conceptual artistic contraption and I'm given the illusion from its movements that the robot has agency. In problematic reality, the robot has no agency but the mathematical parameters of its randomized code mean it is highly improbable that the robot will ever perform the same two gestures in a row, even over the course of a thousand years, if left to its own algorithmic devices. The robot is controlled by the artist's designation of abilities, as to what individual movements it can perform, but the random variations in series of movements do appear in an aleatory order, this is what gives this unsettling illusion of an agency apart, an agency at work, an agency in competition.

The mathematical and randomized coding of the robotic arm, was worked on with a systems designer, Christopher Steenson. The arm, the video monitor, the whole sculptural ensemble including the associated video works and terracotta ceramics of 12 bodily organs were all produced at FSAS. Alan spent half the time in the digital media lab getting to grips with VR, and the other half in the sculpture studios working with ceramics. He has managed to merge a cutting age art of immateriality with the history of art and traditional sculpture techniques, fused through the acts of his own bodily functions.

The human organ replicas made from terracotta are stunning. Another video monitor illustrates how, like doing a blind contoured drawing using a VR headset, Alan negotiates the disconnect between what he is seeing in the headset, (virtual 3D image representations of each individual organ he eventually replicated) and what he was forming with the clay material he moulds in his hands. (The 12 bodily organs, heart, intestines etc.)

Essentially, Alan is trying to actualise the immaterial object into a material replica just through the sense of touch. There are many creation myths I could refer to that promote this articulation of our human genesis. The **Immaterial Organs** were then hand painted and glazed afterwards, when he could examine the articles as serious achievements of his devised estrangement.

Then there is the **Handmade Hand**, five disconnected fingers; a palm to hold them together and enable movement and functionality has seemingly vanished, or was never there in the first place. Rather than a cast, the five fingers and thumb are sculpted life size using polymer clay. The dialogue between a hand making a hand, that is recognisable as a hand, but useless as one, offers us at least what Alan refers to as a set of relatively well made fingers. One of the digits is detailed with a sticking plaster, mooting hazards of labour.

This **Celestial Machine** is letting you understand that there is something beyond what you know, but referencing the fact that you can't really figure, absolutely, whatever that is out. This **Celestial Machine** symbolises the threshold between two situations or worlds; management/staff, the noumenal/the phenomenal, human/machine, all these permutations evoke the complicated pathos of our current predicament. If we err on the side of doom, should we be bricking it enough to start throwing bricks? Or are we, ourselves, bricked? Like another dud smartphone in landfill?

In its third year we are proud to commission and publish new writing by Robert Herbert McClean, and platform our 2019 FSAS awardees Ella Bertilsson, Neil Carroll, Michelle Doyle, Helen Hughes, Ulla Juske and Alan Magee.

IV

Julie Morrissy

Katherine Sankey

Elaine O'Dea

Helena Gouveia Monteiro

Eimear Walshe

FILE NOTE 2021

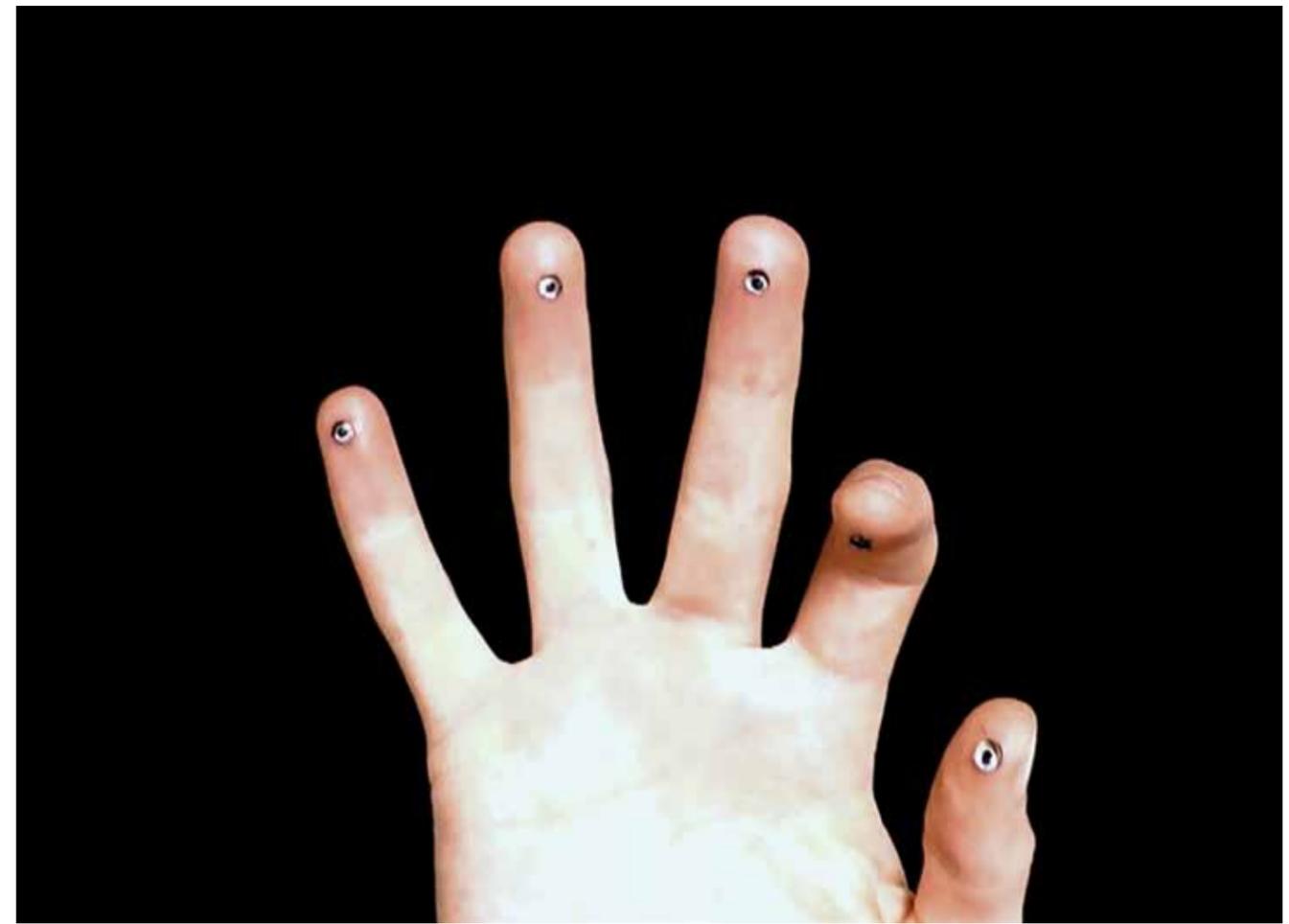
Eimear Walshe

Practice Award — Digital

Jolene — performance, vinyl, resin coated steel, 2019.

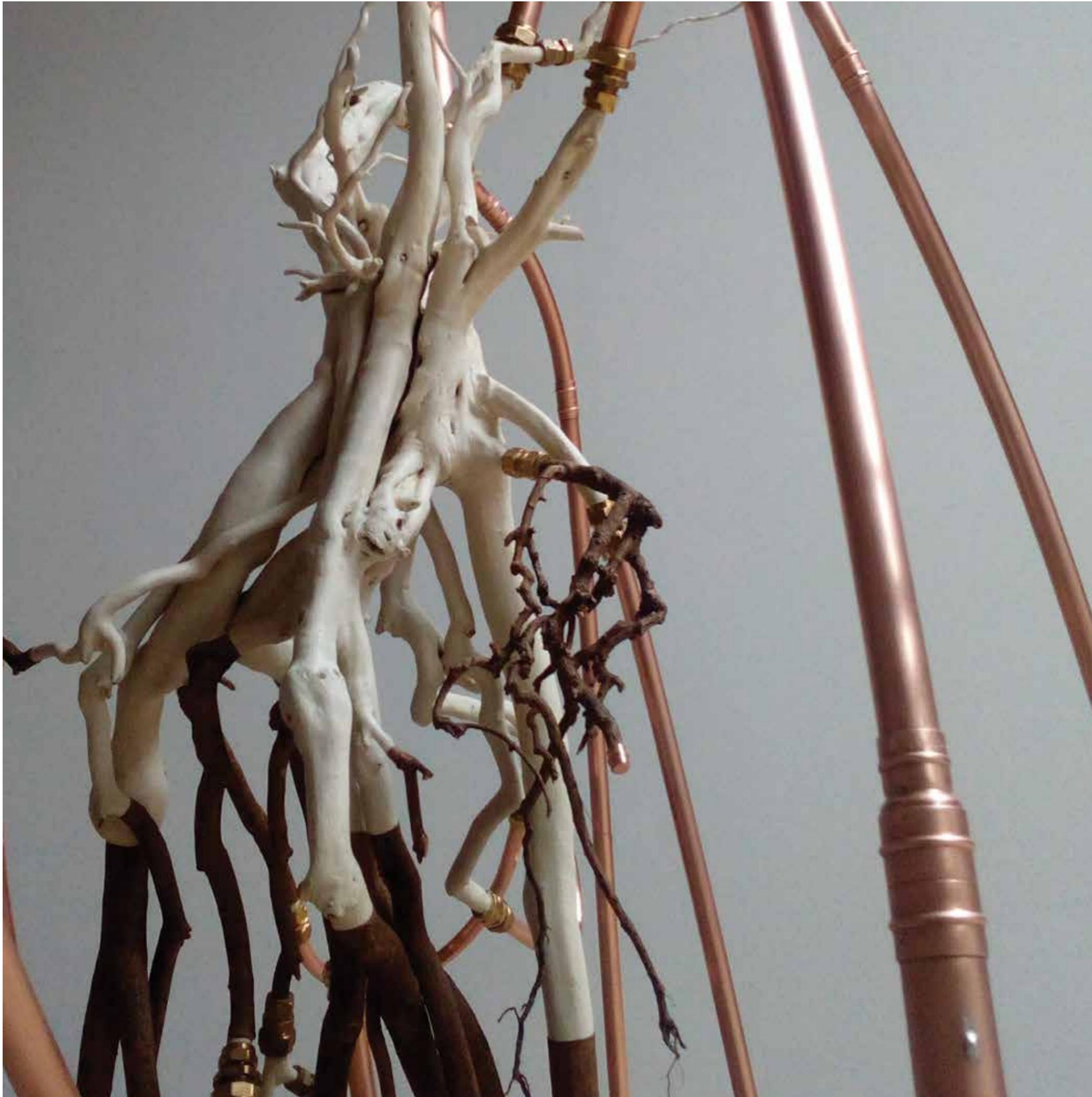
Photo: Richard John Jones





Helena Gouveia Monteiro
From Eye to Hand and Back Again, still from stereoscopic video installation.

Elaine O'Dea
Practice Award — Sculpture
Upstand/Overcome/Underpin (detail), plaster, mild steel, (2019)



Katherine Sankey
Desmosome (detail), wood, copper, glass,
electrical component, sea water, (2019)

Julie Morrissy is the first Poet-in-Residence at the National Library of Ireland in the Decade of Centenaries programme. Her project **Radical!: Women and the Irish Revolution** comprises a podcast series and poetry pamphlet, forthcoming in June 2022. She is a National Endowment of the Humanities Fellow at the Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame. Her work has been acquired for the OPW State Art Collection, exhibited in the TULCA Festival of Visual Arts, and collected at The Burns Library at Boston College. She is a recipient of the MAKE Theatre Residency Award, and the Arts Council 'Next Generation' Award www.juliemorrissy.com

Katherine Sankey is an Australian Irish artist born in Paris and is based in Dublin. She employs sculpture, video, drawing and painting in her installations. Her sculpture uses living plant tissue and human supply lines to engage in the geo-feminist conversation about what we gouge and suck out of the planet. It examines mutation and the human extractive machine of supply and power in a multi species context. Whilst investigating adaptation, colonization and power, Sankey's art works also explore structure, supply, and degradation; asking questions about nature, the natural, the body, and function. Abstract, cerebral, visceral and immediate, her art practice expresses both stagnation and catharsis.

She uses natural and human-made media – whittled tree-trunks, polished and re-used plumbing pipes, discarded medical and electrical components, porcelain. Her sculpture is sprawling and minutely-detailed. She works with waste materials and detritus to produce unique creations, technically finessed termite mounds of piping, wood and minerals; supply systems that begin underground and replicate in unforeseen patterns, parasitically invading the host space.

Sankey's current projects seek to challenge assumptions about both the boundaries of the human what constitutes a 'natural' object. They hold a grimy, distorted mirror to 'the real'. In its uncanny representations of embodied experience, it is about disease, disturbance, anxiety, illness and repair. www.katherinesankey.com

Elaine O'Dea is a visual artist who works predominantly in sculpture and photography. Hers is a physical practice that involves construction and manipulation of natural and man-made materials such as steel, aluminium, wood, plaster and plastic. She questions boundaries — Her work challenges both the tangible and intangible, the physical and cognitive barriers that confine us and questions the divisions that are created and continuously perpetuated between one and other, subject and object, human and non human. Elaine graduated from NCAD in 2019 and is currently studying for an MFA in NCAD. Group exhibitions include, **Fragility - Delicate Aspect and Precarious Presentation**, BKB Visual Arts Studio, 2020; Sculpture in Context, National Botanic Gardens, Dublin, 2019 and 2018.

www.elainodea.com

Helena Gouveia Monteiro is a visual artist and experimental filmmaker from Portugal, living and working in Dublin after receiving her MFA from the ENSA Villa Arson in Nice in 2015. Her films have been shown internationally in both cinema and gallery spaces, are distributed by Light Cone Paris and supported by the Arts Council of Ireland. She is the co-founder of Stereo Editions, an independent publishing collective of artists' editions and currently co-directs the LUX Critical Forum Dublin. www.thesocietyofspectacles.com

Eimear Walshe (1992, they/them) is an artist and writer from Longford. Their work is made public through video, publishing, performance, sculpture and lectures, often in synthesis between these forms. Their practice is based on research in fiscal and sexual economies and histories, working to reconcile the aesthetics, values and tastes of their queer and rural subjectivity. They are currently a project studio member at TBS&S, and Research Associate at CCA Derry~Londonderry. Their work is held in the collections of The Arts Council and IMMA. www.eva.ie/thelandquestion

STUDIO VISIT WITH KATHERINE SANKEY¹
24 JUNE 2020, NORTH STRAND

I arrive a little late to Katherine Sankey's studio, after fumbling with coins at the parking meter for the first time since the beginning of lockdown. Turns out, this very material start to my visit connects perfectly with her work and her concern with the materials and unseen mechanisms and systems that surround us. I am left alone to explore her sculpture, which is in various stages of completion and in various forms. Sankey's art incorporates patinated copper and dead trees. Her materials are connected to one another with piping, nuts, T-junction fittings and other joints. Oftentimes the tree bark is sliced and pared back using a French Opinel knife. I am struck by the physicality of the work, both in its final form and in its making. Huge hunks of trees and branches take their place in Sankey's studio, and her shelves are filled with Band-Aids, varnish, tape and lighters.

We talk about materiality, French feminism and Hélène Cixous, with whom Sankey has studied. As we talk and I circle the studio, my attention to roots, movement and transfer is heightened. I examine Sankey's sculpture, and I think about the networks and processes that connect us to the living and non-living objects around us and to our bodies. These ideas have come up in my own work of late in relation to new materialism, and in my daily life through a new interest in yoga. We discuss a lack of awareness towards our own, human bodies, and the reality that many of us (myself included) are somewhat ignorant about the processes happening at all times under our skin. In the days after the studio visit I find myself turning the taps in my bathroom more purposefully, feeling that connection to the metal and thinking about the network of pipes that sit behind the slightly damp walls of our flat. I am intrigued about the logistics of her practice, and I ask where she gets the trees and branches that become part of her work. She describes how, recently, she has been working with a haulage company to move the roots from Fairview Park to her studio. Again, I am reminded of the physical nature (and the natural aspect) of her work, as she describes finding her materials, often in the aftermath of climate-related weather events that knock trees, unearthing the roots.

Sankey's work asks important questions about how we connect to the unseen and to the mechanisms that we take for granted in the small, routine moments of our lives. Her sculpture gestures to the delicate balance of our ecosystems (in the strict sense of the word but also our own personal systems, both constructed and natural).² Her practice also alludes to the sometimes awkward or precarious quality of these systems, brought to the fore in the manner that the artworks are made, balanced and suspended. Every detail is thoughtfully considered, and this deft attention makes her art all the more powerful. She explains the 'rules' of one particular artwork, telling me that there should be no more than one joint on the branch between two T-junctions, but then shows me places where she has broken that rule. All of this demonstrates the ways in which her materials exercise both self-determination and flexibility. The work inhabits both its own rules and the rules of the systems it engages. I find the benevolence of the work striking and unusual. Sankey's deep commitment to process is notable both in the artworks themselves and in her making practices. I love her willingness to embrace the unpredictability of process, and the ways that vulnerability is allowed to permeate the work.

I leave Sankey's studio and, for some reason, I go to the beach. I sit in front of the sea with my sandals off, digging my hands and feet into the sand.

¹ In some places this writing amalgamates snippets of my conversation with Katherine Sankey and may include some of her phrasing.

² 'An ecosystem is all the plants and animals that live in a particular area together with the complex relationship that exists between them and their environment.'

She shows me another artwork that gives way to leakage (some of Sankey's branches and connective structures allow water to drip through), turning my attention to the excess produced in our systems and the manner in which things quietly escape our control. Water is a central force in Sankey's work, connecting to that notion of movement and transfer but also subtly reinforcing the connection between human and non-human bodies. In mentioning the sea, she remarks that human tears have the same percentage of salt as seawater. This again makes me think about the ways in which matter is distributed in the universe, and one of the prominent questions in her work concerns that continuity between systems. I am drawn to the ways that these artworks allude to time, in that their energies and flow are open in terms of direction, again representing a crucial focus on process rather than on a decisive beginning or end. My attention is fixed on the variety of ways that phenomena move, reaching beyond usual hierarchies and understandings of chronology. For me, this challenge to time acts as an important intervention in our accustomed modes of living **with** and being **in** the world.³ Strangely, during our conversation we discover a mutual inclination to set processes in their opposite motions. Sankey tells me that she reads the newspaper backwards, and I share that I sometimes watch television series in the reverse order, starting with the last episode and moving back to the beginning. Sankey's work, too, calls for a reconsideration of the order of things and of what we think we know about the forms of life that surround us. I reconsider these processes again when listening to a podcast conversation between writers Deborah Levy and Lauren Elkin.⁴ Elkin mentions a connection in Levy's work to circuits and Cixous, and my interest is piqued. It's the word 'circuit' that catches my awareness. I had been thinking of Sankey's work in terms of processes, and I quickly google 'circuit'. The first result from **Oxford Languages** defines it as 'a roughly circular line, route, or movement that starts and finishes at the same place'. Part of the intrigue of her practice is the ambiguity of those starting and finishing points, but all the while maintaining the idea of a purposeful 'route' and 'movement'.

STUDIO VISIT WITH ELAINE O'DEA 3 JULY 2020, FIRE STATION ARTISTS' STUDIOS

As the lockdown restrictions continue to ease and Ireland enters Phase 3, I visit Elaine O'Dea in her studio at Fire Station. O'Dea is a recent graduate of NCAD, working primarily in sculpture. I am immediately drawn to her materials, which include plaster, steel, copper, aluminium, wood and bicycle tubes. Of particular interest are the bulbous figures that she casts from balloons, sometimes in plaster form and sometimes in resin. She chooses balloons as her casting method because it allows differentiation in each mould, though the balloons present their own challenges in the process of making. Her practice is a fine balancing act between what she wants from the materials and what the materials will allow her to do. Like Sankey's, O'Dea's is a physical practice that involves construction, and she talks about 'battling with' her materials. For example, making her piece **Upstand** involved her holding the bulbous figures in place on the steel pole for periods of twenty to twenty-five minutes. This pitching of hard and soft materials together is central to the work. Again, in **Overcome** the bulbous materials ooze over a grid-like metal structure, posing questions about which object is dominant as she coaxes her materials and the materials, in a sense, battle with each other. There is a subtle but impactful gesture towards societal structures and the ways in which we move against and within those frameworks. The bulbous entities, especially, possess their own agency. On a close view of O'Dea's new work, in which resin bulbs are encased within stacked steel cages, I notice tiny protrusions from the brightly coloured pink balloons. These small nodes, which could perhaps be viewed as imperfections, prompt a dialogue about the focus on women's bodies in society and culture, aligning with her own strongly feminist politics.

³ Reminding me again of new materialism, including Karen Barad, Erin Manning and Rosi Braidotti, among others.

⁴ 'Hot Milk: Deborah Levy and Lauren Elkin'. London Review Bookshop Podcast, 25 June 2020, <https://play.acast.com/s/londonreviewbookshoppodcasts/hotmilk-deborahlevyandlaurenelkin>

An exciting part of the visit is when O’Dea shares her research notebooks with me. The notebooks reveal a depth and range in her practice and allow me to see her thoughtful mind at work. The research materials include photographs of O’Dea’s own body, folded over itself in such a way that, depending on the angle, the body is not necessarily immediately identifiable. I am taken in by the folding of flesh in this manner, which places an entirely different and untypical focus on her body. I can see the connections between her research and the bulbous figures that feature across many of her artworks. As I think again about the relationship between hard and soft, or between the human body and object, O’Dea shows me photographs of her engaging with objects and landscapes in her locality. Some photographs depict her draping her body over steel bicycle racks. In others she crouches down, holding tightly to a large rock. She tests the dynamics of balance and grounding in a manner that brings forth the complex layers of her work, again probing the boundaries between human and non-human beings but also, perhaps, the expectations of how she uses her body as a woman and in what locations and contexts. I am reminded of nibia pastrana santiago’s exhibition at the 2019 Whitney Biennial, which included “‘choreographic events’...in charged spaces, often outdoors... that implicate both the gaze and the body of the viewer”.⁵ Although for O’Dea the events depicted in her research journal are not performances per se, in that an audience is not intended or interpellated, she remarks that her ‘research events’ (if I can call them that) are witnessed by people passing by, and in that sense, an engagement takes place with the work. I am drawn to the way in which her practice plays with performance at this research stage, and that vibrancy thoroughly makes its way into her artworks.

After seeing the research material, I am spurred to ask about new avenues that her practice might explore. She discusses a recent engagement with digital technology in her new piece with the steel cages, mentioned above. This artwork incorporates QR codes, and we talk about how in both of our practices we engage with new modes in order to move our respective materials in new ways. I examine another artwork, made from winding copper and bicycle tubes, which occupies space in a much more fluid manner than **Upstand**. This outward movement seems important to her practice as it develops, representing the confidence and ambition of her work. We begin to talk about fabric and whether that might feature in the future. O’Dea shares vivid memories of her mother, who was a seamstress, and the ways that she would hold, crease, test and manipulate fabrics to decipher what would work for a design. That tactile instinct is very much present in the work, and O’Dea strikes me as someone who is unusually attuned to our material and sensory world. Her work is imbued with a striking and vibrant curiosity, and she considers a variety of implied permissions when it comes to our own bodies and the forms and structures that we encounter and sometimes have to battle against.

Towards the end of the visit we discuss her artwork **Colour is Dangerous**, exhibited in NCAD in 2018. The piece consists of aluminium cages suspended from the ceiling on a metal chain so that the cage hangs in the middle of the space. Each cage holds a series of bulbous objects, coloured pink or blue. O’Dea also spontaneously worked with the lighting in the room in order to accentuate the role of the shadows. Given that this work plays with weight and balance, the density of the shadows generates another intriguing element, with the pink and blue bulbs gesturing to constructed notions of gender. The grid of the cages reflects onto the gallery walls and floor, heightening a sense of confinement that lurks in this work. The movement of the shadows encourages a reconsideration of ideologies and practices that have become fixed in society, allowing the artwork to occupy new and generative imaginative space. The slippage in O’Dea work, in pieces like **Overcome** and in the resin protrusions, demonstrates a persistent spirit and a willingness to push the limits both of the materials and of her own practice in a manner that inspires a stubborn but complex optimism, always reaching further into what might just be possible.

⁵ ‘NIBIA PASTRANA SANTIAGO | WHITNEY BIENNIAL 2019’,
Whitney Museum of Modern Art, www.whitney.org/media/42878

I return to FSAS, this time to the editing suite. My visit is with Helena Gouveia Monteiro, a visual artist and experimental filmmaker whose practice also engages photography, publishing, literature and installation. Originally from Portugal, she studied in Nice and continues to work with international artistic communities. Her next Light Cone Atelier 105 Residency will bring her to Paris, where she will complete post-production on her short film-in-progress, **Purkyně's Dusk**. It is very exciting to be in the editing suite with Gouveia Monteiro, and I am thrilled that she is sharing a rough cut of her film with me. She explains the film and its context. **Purkyně's Dusk** is a Super 8 film, which is colourised in processing and reworked with chemicals, and which also involves digital colour work. This intersection between digital and analogue is a prominent feature of her practice, as is her exploration of alternative procedures in bringing photographs into film and digital modes. She describes the process of making this particular film, revealing that she does almost everything herself, including processing the black-and-white footage. The only task she doesn't do is the colour processing, which takes place in the lab. I immediately get the sense that materials and her engagement with them are the driving force of her practice. She mentions that her work is based on experimentation with the materials and medium, rather than relying on a pre-determined concept or narrative. She also emphasises the relationship between editing and conceptualisation, which is the point at which her projects hit their stride and begin to come into their own as artworks. **Purkyně's Dusk** is based on a theory of colour by Jan Evangelista Purkyně, a 19th-century Czech physiologist who asserts that our perception of colour is dependent on light conditions. Gouveia Monteiro plays off his theory throughout the film, which is filmed at dusk and progresses from the yellow colour of the original footage through to blue light and then to darkness. This progression is achieved through tinting and digital manipulation of the digitised footage. Her edit then emphasises this process of desaturation.

A few elements of the film are immediately striking. Firstly, as a poet with a sharp orientation towards language, I am interested that the film is silent. However, the most intriguing part of that silence is the fact that the two human figures speak to each other throughout (though we cannot hear what is being said). The choice to omit sound heightens awareness of an inside/outside sense in the film, in that the viewer witnesses the human interactions but has no context or understanding of what is happening between the two figures. Equally, and as Gouveia Monteiro points out, the viewer has only a visual insight into the workings of the non-human figures in the film, which takes place in a garden setting. The film is full of events that the viewer is not given full access to, both things that happen between the human figures and things that happen with the flowers, bees, bushes and other figures of nature that feature prominently. Gouveia Monteiro notes that the humans in her films are not cast as characters per se and are not actors, so there is a balance built into the film between human and non-human subjects. In filming, this equivalence is enacted in her equal attention to both human and natural subjects, as she films both at the same time. By removing the sound, our ability to analyse based on narrative and psychology is also removed, and so the viewer's attention is more keenly focused on colour, gesture and movement in the film. The cuts and the unstable or shifting movement of the camera add to this sensory experience, further unsettling a sense of continuity that might also be associated with narrative and a human urge towards reason and logic. These techniques reinforce an equilibrium between humans and non-humans and, in a similar vein, the closing credits include the names of the plants and flowers that feature centrally in the film, in addition to the names of the human figures. The credits particularly caught my imagination and made me think about the whole film again. In reconsidering the flowers as central figures, one of the most arresting parts of the film comes in the first few minutes, with red geraniums as the focus. For a period of approximately fifteen seconds the geraniums pulse in and out of split seconds of darkness, with the colour of the flowers and the background desaturating each time. She explains that this part draws on the flicker trope in experimental film, again heightening the sensory experience and giving way to feeling rather than reason.

The pulsing flowers certainly had that effect on me as a viewer, connecting me to the bodily experience of a heartbeat but also to sight, as the film interjects into and troubles the persistence of vision.

Towards the end of our visit, we talk about some of Gouveia Monteiro's other projects, including her new film **Sweeney**, influenced by the Buile Suibhne myth, and her publishing collective Stereo Editions. I ask her a little bit more about **Sweeney**, as I am interested to learn how her process of making begins and how her projects tend to develop over time. She talks about collecting ideas with photography and film, and she shows me some of the footage she has taken for **Sweeney** – all birds, in a variety of places, filmed sometimes with her phone, sometimes with her camera, resulting in a mix of quality and resolution. We discover that we work in a similar manner, in that we each collect ideas through notes or images, allowing those ideas to sit and permeate over weeks or months until they become realised in more concrete ways and form part of larger ideas or projects. It makes sense to me when she says that the moment of recording is completely distinct from the moment of conceptualisation, which comes through editing, and I agree that each of those acts involves very different types of attention and engagement. Materials are at the forefront of all of Gouveia Monteiro's work, and her publishing venture is no different. Through handmade publications, Stereo Editions demonstrates a notable concern with sensory experience, object and literary form. As I watch, see, hear, and discuss her artworks, I am struck repeatedly by her unique creativity and her ability to bring that so seamlessly and imaginatively across a variety of mediums. She has deliberately and carefully deciphered a process for making that allows her to break open her subjects in truly exciting and unique ways. Gouveia Monteiro is the kind of artist who can turn her hand to anything, and I leave the editing suite enthralled by **Purkyně's Dusk**, eager to see the final cut and the projects that will follow.

STUDIO VISIT WITH EIMEAR WALSHÉ 10 AUGUST 2020, TEMPLE BAR GALLERY + STUDIOS

I spend a captivating hour with Eimear Walshe in their studio at TBG+S. They have sent materials in advance of our meeting that I am really excited to talk about, and we are joined by Lord Leitrim in the form of a paper puppet. Walshe's practice draws on academic discourse, particularly in the fields of queer theory and feminist epistemologies, and they are currently making work for EVA International 2020. Walshe puts forth 'the libidinal economy' as a framework for this project-in-progress. We start with a conversation about the relationship between sexuality, land and housing, and the contexts in which sexual desires arise. I find their framing of the housing crisis really striking, and Walshe illuminates vital concerns in a manner that I have not previously encountered. We talk about the conditions people need for comfortable and safe sexual intimacy, which, as Walshe points out, are very similar to the conditions required more generally for personal intimacy: physical and auditory privacy, space and some sense of security. However, many people's current housing situations do not afford these basic conditions, and Walshe's practice considers how public sex connects to the very significant limitations of our current housing systems. We also discuss the correlating impact on the emotional landscapes of our lives, with many people living in less than ideal housing situations where numerous aspects of their lives are curtailed due to a lack of secure, personal space.

Walshe's current project has three components. The first is an online artist talk delivered and recorded in the artist's parents' garden in Co. Longford. This is where figures such as Lord Leitrim, Charles Parnell and Michael Davitt come in. The talk explores the Irish Land Wars, a significant moment in Irish history that seems to garner little attention in comparison to other historical events in the life of the State. Walshe crucially revives the history of the Land League and its objectives to achieve fair rent, fixity of tenure and free sale. The Land League was an unprecedented movement in its impact and ambition, and we talk about the fact that this radical reform has not carried through in contemporary Ireland. Walshe's contribution in this artist's talk will be of vital importance in developing understandings of the kinds of change that are possible when

we dare to think ambitiously about land and housing. The talk is made all the more poignant by its setting in an outdoor, residential space.

The next two parts of the project are video artworks, the first of which is titled **Trade School**. Before our visit Walshe sends me a short trailer for the film, which explores conflicts between notions of respectability and sexuality through its main character, a fictional TD named Puppy. In a tour of infidelity and sexual scandal, Puppy is taken on a journey of self-discovery by his two masters. I am immediately struck by the soundtrack to the trailer, which begins with unsettling, discordant sounds that I cannot quite identify. I learn that the fragmented sounds are uilleann pipes, played by Ian Lynch throughout the film. At first, these sounds are accompanied by a somewhat shaky or jerking camera movement. However, as the trailer progresses the uilleann pipes become more melodic and the perspective changes to a car driving through a series of rural landscapes. Though there is a playful tone to some parts of this artwork, the music adds a plaintive atmosphere and, taken together, all the elements of the film — the camera angles, the movement and dress of the characters, and the landscape and buildings — culminate in a textured narrative that is deeply compelling and curious. Its mode of dissemination adds to the intrigue: **Trade School** will be distributed on a USB through the post.

A second video, titled **Land Cruiser**, completes the project, engaging a sort of quest narrative as it follows a couple who leave the constraints of the Dublin housing market to embark on a road trip across Ireland to find a private place for sex. Restrictions allowing, this video will be installed at EVA International in Limerick, and the soundtrack, developed with Cork imprint The Department of Energy, will have its own separate release. It is these types of details that give Walshe's work a very unique energy. Their attention to the possibilities of exploration and presentation in a project continuously brings new and original contexts for the work. This expansive approach is evident in the range of work that Walshe makes. We also spend time talking about their publication **GRETTA**, a mixed-genre book commemorating Margaret (Gretta) Cousins, described as 'a pioneer suffragist, a nationalist, a theosophist, a writer, a publisher, a teacher, a musician, and a vegetarian'.⁶ The book comprises a play by Walshe, a text by Maisie Gatley (Walshe's grandmother) and an academic essay by Dyuti Chakravarty. **GRETTA** demonstrates one of the many strengths of Walshe's work, in that it is multifaceted, thoughtful and deeply considered, while at the same time being imaginative and entertaining. The play **I Know Why Women Cry At Weddings** is a conversation between the artist and Margaret Cousins across their separate eras, with the artist speaking from the present day to Margaret in the summer of 1900. The text is enlivened by its shifting language register ('God Margaret, or can I call you Gretta? Anyway you're literally such a Scorpio').⁷ In one part Margaret describes an incident in which she is punished for unladylike behaviour in straddling a donkey, to which the contemporary character responds, 'It sounds like your father was acting out his own unprocessed trauma onto you...I have found that the notion of straddling itself draws up such an anxiety in people'.⁸ I was enamoured with this play and its voices. I have rarely read a text so vibrant but that also possesses such depth, and at each stage of learning about Walshe's work I find myself wanting to know more. Their work connects to pressing issues in our present moment in a manner that inspires true engagement and attention. Their artwork challenges the ideas that circulate around us on a daily basis, sometimes possibly even going unnoticed. We talk about their sculpture **Middle Spoon**,⁹ which I am reminded of later that month when I see a promotional video in which the subjects are asked whether they are 'big spoons' or 'little spoons'. I smile to myself, thinking of Walshe's sculpture and their wonderfully incisive practice which challenges the overt and subtle ways that our surrounding frameworks attempt to bind us to one way of seeing and being in the world.

6 Eimear Walshe, 'Preface', in **GRETTA**, p. 4. Available to purchase from Temple Bar Gallery + Studios' online bookshop.

7 Walshe, p. 91.

8 Walshe, p. 95.

9 2018, Galway Arts Centre.

V
Anneka French
Mieke Vanmechelen
Aideen Farrell
Isadora Epstein
Deirdre O'Mahony

FILE NOTE 2022

Mieke Vanmechelen

Practice Award — Digital

Suspension, film still, **Home from Home**,
Irish artist's responses to COVID-19 restrictions,
The Glucksman (2020)





Aideen Farrell
Practice Award — Sculpture
Untitled film still, artist walking through clay and wire models (2020)

Isadora Epstein

Practice Award — Digital

Ruan van Vliet, Conor Lumsden performing in **Pretty Feelings**
at Kevin Kavanagh Gallery for 2019 Dublin Fringe Festival

Photo credit Caít Fahey



Deirdre O'Mahony

Practice Award — Sculpture

Sustainment Experiments: Fundamentals, photograph (2020)

Anneka French is a writer and curator based in the Black Country in the English West Midlands. Recent experimental writing and poetry commissions include those for Photoworks+, Grain Projects, DreamsTimeFree, Axisweb, Creative Black Country and Living Memory. She writes regular journalistic reviews and essays for publications including Art Quarterly and Photomonitor. Anneka is a curator currently working with Coventry Biennial, having worked internationally in Aarhus, Denmark and Madrid, Spain, as well as on multiple projects in the UK. She recently spent four years as Co-ordinator and then Director at regional visual arts network New Art West Midlands (Contemporary Visual Arts Network) and spent six years as Editorial Manager of contemporary art magazine this is tomorrow. Anneka has worked with art galleries including Tate Modern, Grand Union, Ikon, The New Art Gallery Walsall, Wolverhampton Art Gallery and Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery
www.annekafrench.wordpress.com

Mieke Vanmechelen's film practice involves an embodied investigative process. Her work often looks at the ordinary and brings to the fore perceptions and perspectives that challenge normative assumptions. Born in Antwerp in 1974, she lives on a hill farm in Co. Kerry. Recent screenings include CutLog Moving Image, SSA+VAS, Royal Scottish Academy (2022) and Home: Being and Belonging in Contemporary Ireland, Glucksman Gallery, Cork (2021). Vanmechelen is a recipient of an Arts Council Film Project Award (2021) an Arts Council Film Bursary (2020) and an Arts Council Professional Development Award (2020).
www.miekevanmechelen.com

Aideen Farrell is a Dublin-based installation artist. She creates objects and structures that act as models, parts of construction, and fragments or ruins of spaces. Aideen has a BA in Fine Art and Visual Culture from NCAD and is a member of A4 Sounds Studios in Dublin. Solo exhibitions include **A Weight of Windows** at Pallas Projects(2019) and **Showroom** at Linenhall Arts Centre(2018). In 2021 she was a recipient of the Fingal County Council Artist Support Scheme, the Arts Council Visual Arts Bursary Award, and the Fire Station Artists' Studios Sculpture Award.
www.aideenfarrellartist.com

Isadora Epstein writes and makes performances from her research of art history and mythology. Her work brings together an ensemble of artists working in visual art, experimental music, and dance. The activities of her practice include three distinct processes: research, script writing, and collaborative rehearsals. Her performances are joyful acts of remembrance which offer up the ridiculous fantasy of immortality through the making of temporary fictional worlds.

Deirdre O'Mahony is a visual artist interested in farming and food security. Recent work includes **Model Plot** for Field Exchange Creative Ireland Climate Change Project, **Sustainment Experiments** (2021 – 2024), **The Plot 1&2**, VISUAL Carlow & Gangwon Triennale, Korea (2021), EVA Biennale (2021) and PhotoIreland2021. Awards include bursaries and agility awards from the Arts Council of Ireland and a Fire Station Artists' Studios Practice Award for sculpture (2021). Her work is in the collection of the Arts Council of Ireland. **www.deirdre-omahony.ie**

Introduction

The conversations that follow — with artists Mieke Vanmechelen, Aideen Farrell, Isadora Epstein and Deirdre O'Mahony — have unfolded digitally via email, WhatsApp and Zoom conversations throughout the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic in 2021. The materially physical studio time afforded to these artists, all at differing stages within their career and with a clear spread of research interests, is critical to the development of their work. The preparations for each of the four artists' IRL residencies at Fire Station Artists' Studios (FSAS) have been equally digital, necessarily flexible and a long time in the making. The time to use equipment, facilities, to have face to face conversations with FSAS staff and others, and to be on site(s) itself is all the more precious a prospect amid the fluctuating contexts and restrictions that we have all grown used to.

These dialogues with Vanmechelen, Farrell, Epstein and O'Mahony took place at the tail end of winter prior to each residency and during high summer while each drew to a close. The weather and the times of year involved affected mood, conversation topic, access to place and the artworks in development. These texts trace the ways that I have tried to connect with the artists through my own experiences of observing, gathering, storytelling and growing — all strategies for learning, coping and for hope. These were dialogues between creative minds but also between the liminal spaces of digital technologies and contrasting real places, including my home in the Black Country, a post-industrial area of the English West Midlands just outside of Birmingham, the city of Dublin and other rural locations in Ireland. These very different landscapes and artistic practices are here set in relation to each other, affording glimpses of process, material, home life, community, intention, ambition and ultimately, the resilience of four incredible artists.

Observing: Mieke Vanmechelen

When I speak to Mieke Vanmechelen in February 2021, I am sitting in what will be my new baby's room, feeling his strong kicks and flicks from the inside and through my skin. This is apt because Vanmechelen describes her practice as being informed by intuition, intimate knowledge and grounded in place. Working with film, she deploys performance and people, usually family, those she knows or sometimes herself, as embodied investigative tools.

Ahead of our conversation Vanmechelen shares a selection of films including older documentary-style works focussed on rural and agricultural subjects. These are typified by practical, necessary farming processes — the milking of dairy cows and the shearing of sheep — whose emotional and ritualistic qualities are revealed and heightened by subtle, unexpected, audio visual choices. She tells me that making the work is 'partly the way I connect to and belong to my environment. It is a profound attachment to nature or put very simply, the inspiration for what I do'.

Other works are more overtly narrative-driven. The short film **The Goose and the Fox** (2020), for example, feels very much like a fable and was made in the summer lockdown of 2020, capturing her grown children on film when they returned home to their farm in Kenmare, south west Ireland, where Vanmechelen lives. The work is shot in a commercial forest and is an attempt to capture her children while they were present as well as the forest before it is felled. I am struck, watching Vanmechelen's films unfold, by the elegant, dream-like quality in which she handles human forms moving across mountains, through forests and through water.

'I'm Flemish and still feel a cultural connection to Flanders' Vanmechelen tells me. 'A text called the **Ysengrimus**, a beast epic from the twelfth century, is important to my work. I am intrigued by the anthropomorphic and by animal/human/environmental interdependence. These themes run throughout my practice, alongside intergenerational connections and history. I am trying to hold on to things that are about to disappear' she confesses.

In other works, we see men in vests working up a sweat doing farm work. Despite their masculinity and power, however, there's incredible softness and feeling there. This comes as something of a surprise to me, a naïve English urbanite. In **Ritual** (2020), for instance, Vanmechelen points toward an unspoken language between shearer and sheep, toward tenderness, care and trust. This is relevant to the consideration of family and the maternal, to unbreakable connections between individuals. It is an unsettling experience watching cows give birth on screen while I am 33 weeks' pregnant.

The artist was born in Belgium and lived in Holland on a farm in a nature reserve, coming to Dublin when she was six years old with her brother, shepherd father and theatre costume maker mother. 'Part of the reason my parents came here' she notes, was 'nostalgia for what they remembered in their youth. Coming here was an escape, I suppose. I still live near where I grew up and the whole way I live is my practice'.

Sound plays a key role within Vanmechelen's works and is often ethereal and complicated. The soundtracks are not clearly one thing or another yet they drive forward the narrative. She works with sound artist Tony Langlois frequently and the experimental sound devised is designed to provoke and stir, explicitly setting her films apart from formal documentary film. A recent bursary from the Arts Council has enabled Vanmechelen to further research sound within her wider practice and is something she has been keen to explore.

Any clear distinction between the documentary-style works and narrative-oriented works that make up her practice, however, is dissolved in the new work being made during her Digital Residency and with the additional award of her Digital Media Bursary at Fire Station. In this, she is examining two prominent park squares in Dublin: the vibrant but neglected Mountjoy Square north of the river, and the more affluent, well maintained Fitzwilliam Square south of it. Both are soaked in political history; both marked by architectural and socio-economic contrasts. Vanmechelen tells me that this city-based research is a departure for her and that she has come into this project as an observer, as an individual attempting to minimise any preconceived notions of these two areas of the city.

The part-private Fitzwilliam Square has a tree-lined perimeter, with distinct acoustics and atmosphere in comparison to the more open, grass-worn, well-used Mountjoy Square. The economic repercussions of Covid-19 have impacted both locations, changing the domestic, leisure and business usage of both parks but Mountjoy Square remains a back garden for people that live nearby, a place for community and diversity. In Fitzwilliam Square, business use has declined as people work from home and companies fold. Vanmechelen's work in development is a study of two places that are shifting, becoming. We discuss the potential for revisiting the square in a year or in five years' time. We discuss her feeling that it is difficult to own an opinion on these places because she is not originally Irish.

Vanmechelen shares further clips of the film with me. She appears in the film and has been allowed to enter some of the buildings that surround the squares, revealing marks of lives now moved elsewhere. This has helped her to connect to and to 'feel' the space. She tells me it has been like time travelling. The interiors and exteriors shown are not necessarily from the most historically significant buildings but those that she has gained access to with trust and contacts and hard work within the context of Covid-19. The work has taken its own journey and Langlois' skills have again been utilised via site recording of voice and atmospheric sound.

I find parallels in her approach to observing place with close and sensitive examination to that of Donegal-based poet Emily Cooper. In Cooper's new book **Glass**, she considers architectural dilapidation and the accumulation of time in place through small, specific details that root the reader:

**Though, it is difficult not to feel the presence
of those who left behind traces;
a cameo under two layers of carpet, a thick seam
of dust between the floorboards, stains
on mattresses and this nib protruding
from a green refuse bag full of letters ...¹**

Vanmechelen and I meet again online in July. My dad and my eldest son are painting canvases for my mum in my garden and I watch them from my window. Vanmechelen and I talk about families and sons and partners being home and the enormous difference their presence makes to our lives, especially in times of need. In addition to her film work, from her studio at Fire Station the artist has been making pencil and watercolour sketches of passers-by — a boy in his football kit; two men in conversation with a child riding piggyback. I feel like these drawings bring us full circle to the film work we discussed back in February — to narrative and to family and to layers of story enmeshed in place.

While as yet unfinished and ungraded, I can already see that her film work is going to be beautiful and nuanced. Vanmechelen is still editing and still getting shots with a wide-angle lens capturing additional viewpoints of the two parks from the interior and exterior boundaries of each square. She hopes these will complete the film.

‘Being in Dublin for this extended period of time has been so good for my practice. My work is always made in rural contexts so this is something I’ve not experienced since my MA’ she observes. ‘I have felt like I have been embedded, like I have lived here’.

This autumn the artist will begin work on an ambitious experimental documentary with the help of an Arts Council Film Project Award. It contrasts farmland in the Cahah Mountains on the Beara Peninsula in County Cork with the Drowned Land of Saeftinghe in Holland/Belgium and the Scheldt estuary of Antwerp. Both sites are threatened, and like Dublin’s squares examined here, both are loaded with personal and political resonance. It will be fascinating to see how Vanmechelen develops this work following her experiences at Fire Station this year.

Gathering: Aideen Farrell

In her memoir, the writer and horticulturalist Alys Fowler describes in vivid detail the contrasting landscapes she finds along Birmingham’s canal network as she paddles much of its thirty-five miles in an inflatable kayak. She describes the canal in aesthetic and emotional terms:

**... the buddleja that have rejoiced with butterflies out of the crumbling brick wall ...
those flowering rushes and irises that danced in the pool of a disused boat hull, the
mushrooms that sprouted between crisp packets, the moss-scapes that covered ugly
concrete ...²**

Artist Aideen Farrell is equally fascinated by canals and much of Farrell’s recent work has been centred upon Dublin’s Royal Canal in particular, taking it as a focal point for material and methodological research. From Dublin originally, Farrell has always lived close to this canal, moving inwards over time toward the city centre. This is significant for two reasons. ‘Thematically, I’m interested in the ways our urban spaces are shaped’ she says when we speak on Zoom for the first time. ‘I’m also very involved with community activism and tenants housing organisations. Both find intersections within my work’.

¹ Emily Cooper, **A fountain pen slices my leg through a bin bag as I move into my new house**, from **Glass**, London: Makina Books, 2021, p.6

² Alys Fowler, **Hidden Nature: A Voyage of Discovery**, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2017, p.220

Farrell graduated from a painting degree in 2017 but made a switch to sculpture and installation quickly afterward. Drawing occupies a key role within this three-dimensional practice, as lines, mapping and wire feature heavily in the sculptural work produced. Farrell enjoys working back and forth between pieces and back into the sculptures she makes. Temporary, site-based sculptures which appear fragile and makeshift are typical. Plaster, wire, wood, glass, brick, wood and concrete are prominent and are influenced by the construction industry and by the materials she finds discarded canalside. Farrell frequently uses multiples and component parts that make reference to architectural models, planning development and history.

By way of background, Farrell explains to me that her parents are from Longford, near the start of the canal. 'The Grand Canal and the Royal Canal mark the boundaries of the inner city. The Royal Canal was built to connect the River Shannon to the port' she notes. 'But it was quickly made defunct by the building of the railway and fell into disrepair'.

She explains that the pandemic and associated economic difficulties have left the greenfield development of the stretch of the canal in Ashtown incomplete despite near constant construction there. Building sites stopped work completely during the financial crash and during the first pandemic. These cycles of failed construction provide context and material for the artist's response. Farrell describes this to me:

'The stilled construction turns the landscape into a ruin of sorts, showing cracks in a false vision of capitalist urban progress. I am interested in the question of what might grow out of those cracks'.

Indeed, in the recent periods of lockdown, Farrell took the opportunity to begin experimenting with making works there, walking along canal towpaths collecting gravel and brick in fragments and shards, taking photographs and assembling elements on site. These pieces are made in dialogue with the Royal Canal's construction histories. She has recently been making video pieces from these sculptures, enjoying the futility and humour to be found in materials being affected by rain and blown over in the wind on canal towpaths. The malleability of materials and these processes have been the starting points for the Fire Station sculptural residency.

During our conversations, the artist reflects that a lot of the past year has necessitated working on a small scale, doing drawing, research and thinking. She has spent much of her time and energy on funding applications. Farrell is therefore keen to point out that three months of 'proper' making at Fire Station is proving to be incredibly informative and impactful.

The residency has given Farrell opportunity to return to drawing too, developing ideas to be realised in three dimensions in pencil on paper and on layered masking tape grounds. Lampposts, light bulbs, balconies, hoardings, railings and dystopic cityscapes emerge from the pages tacked casually to the studio walls that she shares with me. Despite this focus on drawing, the residency has allowed Farrell to significantly increase the scale of her works. While they still retain a maquette or model-like aesthetic, sculptures are now beginning to incorporate more solid-looking metal support structures.

We talk about her approach overall:

'I like a constant process of collecting and gathering. I like to have a lot of materials on hand, like a toolkit of options. Sometimes materials are placed back into the sites where they're sourced though meaning isn't derived from this necessarily. Assembling components is partially instinctive and partially planned'.

Farrell fell in love with plaster casting after graduation but during lockdown has become increasingly interested in ceramics and clay — a reaction to having less space to work within. A recent Arts Council Professional Development Award has given her access to a ceramics mentorship with interdisciplinary artist Gemma Dardis and during her time at Fire Station, Farrell has been taking courses in mould making and welding. This upskilling is facilitating experimentation and what she describes as open-ended play. She has been working intensively, for example, with porcelain paper clay, a material that she has never worked with before. We discuss the processes together and Farrell informs me that it is a strong and durable material which can be rewet, extended and reworked. Paper clay sheets are dried upon plaster that removes water content. Underglazes applied to the plaster surface create marks upon the paper clay as well as relief. From the photographs she sends over, they appear like etchings or monotypes in the particular qualities of line that result. In some of the works, lengths of twisted black wire pierce the paper clay sheets. Sometimes the sheets are crumbled and broken, or bent and folded, propped and stacked, creating a distinctly urban tone that brings in socio-political contexts. I am reminded of the barbed wire and anti-theft and anti-homeless strategies found in so many cities across the world — physical markers of the ways space is regulated and controlled, as it moves increasingly away from being public.

‘In my head there’s always been a wee tension between making processes and what it means to be analytical and critical about urban space’ Farrell notes. This tension is a creative catalyst. Her time at Fire Station has provided Farrell with opportunity to critically reflect on her practice, both on her own and through conversation with others. The chance to work alongside other artists, after an isolating year, has been particularly valuable as she now enters an exciting time of possibility for her work.

Farrell plans, for instance, to collaborate with textile artist Emily Waszak on a pop-up site-specific installation canalside. Taking place this autumn, this will mark a culmination of a sort for the residency. It will not, however, be the end of the road for the skills Farrell has learnt, nor for the extensive research or the works themselves. Neither will this be the end of Farrell’s fascination with the canal networks of Dublin.

For as Fowler describes so beautifully, canals are sites that continue to offer inspiration, time and time again:

I was already obsessed with and a little haunted by that landscape. I went back to do the loop again ... It was barely holding itself together: the canal sides were crumbling, the banks bursting with wild things ready to march into the water and claim new ground. The landscape couldn’t quite decide what it was. It was wild, but not natural, it was old but not old enough.³

³ Alys Fowler, **Hidden Nature: A Voyage of Discovery**, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2017, p.29

When we read a story, we inhabit it. The covers of the book are like a roof and four walls. What is to happen next will take place within the four walls of the story. And this is possible because the story's voice makes everything its own ...⁴

The first thing that Dublin-based Isadora Epstein says to me when we meet online in February is 'All my friends and the people I work with think it's funny that I've gotten this Digital Residency award because my work is so not digital' she laughs.

'I tend to write scripts based on art historical and classical mythological research and on personal narrative' Epstein continues as we discuss her working processes. 'I like to work with an ensemble of multidisciplinary collaborators — musicians, dancers, sometimes other visual artists — to respond to the scripts as starting points, bringing people together into incredibly small spaces such as trains, boats and sitting rooms. The shows I make are social and involve hosting, although of course I've not been able to do work like this for some time'.

One of Epstein's recent projects is **Weather Gods — Reprised**. Launched as a radio play in April 2021 but initially conceived as a performance sited on a train for TULCA Festival of Visual Arts, it uses railway archival records and materials from the University College Dublin Folklore Archive. **Weather Gods — Reprised** is connected to superstitious beliefs and notable for what Epstein describes as 'weird playfulness of cause and effect', featuring characters based on classical god/esses and different personifications of weather phenomena. Another key work, **Pretty Feelings**, took place at Kevin Kavanagh Gallery as part of the 2019 Dublin Fringe Festival. Framed as a match making agency set in the gallery, paintings on display became scenarios for romance populated with mythological figures. Cupid and Zephyr, for instance, were musicians working for the agency. A large part of both pieces is Epstein's distinctive sense of humour and these two projects give a good idea of her innovative and theatrical approach.

Our conversation turns toward the impact of the pandemic on her practice. 'I would usually do a lot of my research in libraries and archives which hasn't been possible during this period. Obviously, everyone is trying to figure out how to make work differently in the pandemic context and for this residency award' Epstein observes. 'I almost have a naïve fear of the digital world but over lockdown I've been trying hard to adapt'.

Indeed, just prior to *Fire Station*, Epstein was working on an Arts Council project as artist in residence in the manuscripts department of Trinity College, specifically looking at materials belonging to Evelyn Gleeson, a founding member of the Dun Emer Guild. Gleeson was crucial to the Irish Arts and Crafts movement and the subsequent promotion of lesser-known women artists. The remit of Epstein's residency was to open up access to this archive for artists and in 2019 she held workshop for invited artists in the archive where she developed an initial script. The script was due to become a performance made in collaboration with musician Sinéad Onóra Kennedy and painter Kathy Tynan but was prevented by the pandemic, and while developing this as a sound work was an option for a time, video eventually presented itself as the best option. This is where *Fire Station* comes in — the facilities and opportunity afforded by Epstein's Digital Residency will ultimately result in the project realised as a video titled **The Revivalist**.

In our first Zoom conversation, Epstein anticipates video as a new way of working with the archival materials and with others with some trepidation:

⁴ John Berger, **Keeping a Rendezvous**, London: Vintage, 1992, p.31

45 ‘Capturing any of this for video is going to be tricky. I want to see if I can keep the magic feeling of a live performance while I work remotely and have been looking at nostalgic ways of using performance such as radio. I usually perform, write and direct a piece so I know what’s going on at all times and any previous video editing has been handed over to someone else when required. While I’m at Fire Station, I’d like to build those skills myself and to experiment. I’ll have access to people who can help me learn about audio and video and really articulate myself in the medium’.

We catch up again on a WhatsApp call in August. Epstein has spent July on site at Fire Station, predominantly working in the audio recording booth and video editing suite, having shot her footage in June. She describes her experiences at Fire Station as being akin to attending a summer camp and notes that it’s been some time since she learnt a new skill from scratch. This seems to have been formative: ‘Editing is such a different logic to live performance and the possibilities of video are infinite which is incredibly exciting’.

The archival materials themselves have proven to be rich sources for the finished work, which is still in development at the time of writing. Epstein notes that being in the archive feels special and ritualistic, that every item seems to be filled with innate meaning, allowing her to build a narrative between a scribbled drawing of Gleeson’s house, for example, or a scrapbook or photograph, operating in the role of detective-cum-master storyteller. These manifest directly in **The Revivalist**’s script, which I receive by email as a PDF, as if I am preparing for a rehearsal myself. The script belies much potential:

**I started unofficially working (archival footage)
for the Manuscripts Department
Last January
I am working
so hard to Revive Departmental Material:
Drawings, scrapbooks,
medieval manuscripts
That sort of thing
(hiding behind tree)⁵**

Epstein is particularly keen to emphasise the importance of her collaboration with other artists, mirroring that of the work of the Dun Emer Guild.⁶ She explains that the painted backdrops and score composed of fiddle and theremin provide connections to Irish mythology this time, and, once again, are undercut by absurdist humour. Similarly, the early films of French illusionist, actor and director Georges Méliès have provided inspiration, with Epstein consciously alluding to the history of early cinema and the theatrical gestures and gimmicks employed to build narrative and drama. The small, collapsible worlds created by Méliès’ sets and props, for example, and the ways they appear to be able to fold and unfold at any moment, have a clear impact on the aesthetic of the video. John Berger’s classic text and his 1972 television series **Ways of Seeing** is another key reference point for Epstein, evident within the handful of video stills she shares with me. The influence of the series’ colour palette and formal presentation style is clear to see.

Epstein will return to complete her Fire Station residency in November and December, following a short pause to complete a separate project with the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA). Though I can only imagine the outcome at this stage, I have no doubt that **The Revivalist** will be a compelling watch. Stay tuned, folks.

⁵ Extracted from Epstein’s working script for **The Revivalist** (2021)

⁶ Epstein has worked with the following collaborators on **The Revivalist**: Sinéad Onóra Kennedy, composition and fiddle; Mary Keane, composition and theremin; Kathy Tynan, painter; Caít Fahey, Director of Photography; Liadain Kaminska, Director; Millie Egan, Cinematographer; Anna Heisterkamp, filming of archival footage

Words are worms. Worms pass soil through their bodies, milling it and making it reusable. It is a processing body in that it gets more water and more air into the material. It helps it get to life. But only through a course of digestion, through passing a material down the centre of its moist, muscular body.⁷

When we meet on Zoom in February 2021, Deirdre O'Mahony is at home in Callan, County Kilkenny. O'Mahony turns her camera around to show me scores of tiny green seedlings on her desk and windowsill, just beginning to burst into life. I'm looking out over a newly erected polytunnel in my own garden, plastic winking in the winter sunlight outside my window, and across the sizable mound of my swollen baby belly. The polytunnel is an investment for my family — a chance to teach my sons about care, growth and food — concerns also at the forefront of the artist's mind.

O'Mahony's international multidisciplinary practice of more than twenty years encompasses socially engaged projects, video installation, archival and written work. It is characterised by meticulous, earnest and at times playful research into aspects of the rural. She maintains a strong desire for public engagement with different groups and communities, be they scientific, agricultural, gastronomic, political or otherwise. The artist's work exhibits consummate and wide-ranging material skills although she claims otherwise when we first speak.

'I have a tendency to embrace processes I have not used before or have not used for a long time', O'Mahony tells me. 'When I'm confronted with the reality of trying to realise material objects which don't match my ambitions, that might look clumsy or awkward, the embarrassment of that space keeps me honest and that's really important.'

Her practice is consistently concerned with urgent issues of rural sustainability, particularly food production. O'Mahony worked, for instance, for ten years on SPUD, a complex, multifaceted project that explored food security and Irish identity through a focus on the potato as object, subject and metaphor. She is all too aware that soil ecology, seed ecology, small-scale farming practices and community are critical if we are to address looming ecological disaster. The very act of feeding ourselves is political. Foodbanks, food miles, milk lakes, grain mountains, obesity, soil erosion, deforestation, overfishing — all tangible effects of globalised, industrialised, capitalised food production which impact so many parts of our small, weary planet.

These issues absolutely underpin the work being made within the facilities at Fire Station during this Sculpture Residency. O'Mahony is working specifically with ceramics this time, making an ambitious sculptural porcelain dinnerware service composed of twenty-four hand-painted plates, bowls and cups. These again feature potatoes prominently. She holds up a small, coloured porcelain, handle-less cup to the camera to show me. The cups are still in progress and have been carefully cast from sarpo Blue Danube blight resistant potatoes and are elegant and smooth. She tells me they are very light to hold. The cups will be hand-painted with worms and bacteria taken from scientific diagrams — organisms that are essential to healthy soil ecosystems. A series of plates are to be imprinted on the underside with potato root systems while the other side is illustrated with 'ideal' crops as imagined or chosen by farmers, scientists and food producers in terms of practical attributes, taste and aesthetic qualities. These illustrations will form conversation starters during the meals. The bowls, meanwhile, are being hand-painted with perennial legume sainfoin, a nitrogen fixer with a long flowering season ideal for pollinators. It is a crop with which the artist has worked numerous times.

⁷ Shell Like, WORMS ON THE BEACH, 2020, collaborative audio sketch written and produced by Amy Lay-Pettifer and Fer Boyd

All of this is stage one in a generative process. The ceramic dinnerware will form an integral component within a series of international meal-oriented performative events designed by O'Mahony and taking place in 2022 and beyond. The ceramics are designed as catalysts for conversation and can be reused, exhibited and gifted to those who have invested time in the overall project. Their critical function is as a means to explore the production, ownership and dissemination of farming knowledge, scientific policies and all the subjectivities that lie within this intricate network of human, animal and plant-based labour, consumption and survival. These cups are in many ways incongruous with their source and with the wider, often derogatory or problematic, connotations of the potato that spring to the minds of some. O'Mahony places these contexts up front.

'My work connects practice-based knowledge and intellectual theory' she explains. 'These ideas have governed a lot of the public art projects that I've done over the last two decades, in looking at the relational dynamics that occur within rural contexts questioning whose knowledge of land and landscape counts.'

The artist has been in close conversation with chefs for more than three years, discussing the food that might be served. She explains the significance of the ceramic sculptures themselves to me — their form, material, weight, scale and decoration playing a key role. In her mind, each is a geode, a metaphor to consider farming and climate change. It is something akin to the sack described by Donna Haraway in relation to Ursula K. Le Guin's work: 'a hollowed-out container to hold things that bear meanings and enable relationships'.⁸

'The centre part of the object is smooth, holding theoretical information (and food) and the exterior has tactile qualities that question that theoretical information' O'Mahony notes. 'The particular questions I'm trying to ask throughout the meals is what's the future of agriculture in Ireland? What's the future of sustainable food? The event becomes transformative. It's a huge ask for my little objects!'

She will return to Fire Station at a later date for the last firing of the ceramic pieces. Within the wider, larger, project, the dinnerware sculptures aim to enable meal participants to occupy an 'awkward' space, to undo default responses from those representing different communities and fields of knowledge, and thereby to allow conversations on agricultural sustainability to be genuinely innovative, critical, even radical. The works place questions of value at their heart — bringing historical, embodied, scientific and new forms of knowledge to the table, so to speak. In the longer term, O'Mahony has plans for a fully developed moving image work that brings together the ceramics, the food and the meals — the varying braided strands of her ongoing research and making.

O'Mahony has been living at Fire Station since May 2021. When we speak again online in July, my own produce has bloomed; probably close to a thousand tomatoes are ripening in the polytunnel and my new son is almost four months old. In Callan, meanwhile, Cabbage White caterpillars and birds have been devouring O'Mahony's peas, beans, kale, chard and many other of the artist's plants. She tells me she had to go home recently for emergency watering. Ireland and the UK are having a heatwave and because of her absence, she has had to call upon the help of her Polish neighbour to tend to her garden. O'Mahony has herself been forced from her comfort zone and has started new conversations at home about growing and sustainability that have arisen from particular necessity. This is growth, from the micro, to the macro and back again.

⁸ Donna Haraway in introduction to Ursula K. Le Guin, **The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction**, Ignota, 2019, p. 11

Published by Fire Station Artists' Studios, 2022

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ISBN: 978-1-3999-2053-7

Edited by Jennie Guy
Designed by David Joyce
Copy edited and proofed by Jennie Guy
Alternative text image description
by Hannah Lamont (PDF version)

Edition of 1,000 copies
Printed and bound in Ireland
by Impress Printing Works
Typeset in Work Sans & Franklin Gothic

Fire Station gratefully acknowledges the
financial support of the Arts Council of Ireland
and Dublin City Council

