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Sophie Behal
Alisha Doody
Evelyn Broderick
Catriona Leahy

FILE NOTE VI

I arrive at Grangegorman campus on a bright, hot, afternoon. It's become familiar to me of late as I sometimes walk my dog up here. Sophie comes out to beckon me over to the new glass and gold East Quad building. She is here because she was one of the group of artists evicted from Richmond Road Art Studios earlier in the year, an event that gained visibility due to artists' protests. TU Dublin subsequently offered a temporary residency here to the evicted artists, a shiny refuge for the summer months.

This eviction topic drifts in and out of our conversation, we talk about the precarity of being an artist in Dublin right now. We observe how Fire Station Artists' Studios is one of the few solid ships in a sea of vulnerable art spaces. Her current studio is high up so we look through a large glass balcony across the city and discuss how many artists have lived in this locality, and how I can almost see the back of my house, and how she saw a rottweiler chasing a man, another day.

Sophie talks about her Sculpture Practice Award at Fire Station Artists' Studios, earlier in the year — 'I had a bazillion ideas' — and how she finally decided to learn how to weld while she was there. She created a work by welding two words in stainless steel, with rusting mild steel reflections, that says 'Pure Verb'. This is taken from a line in a Seamus Heaney poem 'Oysters':

'Leaning in from sea. I ate the day
Deliberately, that its tang
Might quicken me all into verb, pure verb'

She'd come across this line during lockdown, responding to it as the antithesis of that time, where, limited as an artist-maker, the active force of a 'pure verb' was tantalising. I find it interesting that she then chose to form the words out of immovable steel, and yet, the shadowed rusting reflections do show the slow metallic passage of time.

Sophie was dissatisfied with the outcome, even though this was the first result from a new skill. She felt that when she took the idea of the 'pure verb' line into material form that the original impetus then disappeared. It took her a long time to realise that this translation was too direct. She is already dreaming bigger. She made another structure from steel 'U's' connected into a circle. These extend upwards into thin rods, antennae-like, with sparklers attached. While exploring steel she found it to be a mercurial material, both in its ability to catch the light, and in its energy as it vibrates when in contact with wind or touch. Along with another performer, she made a small test video lighting the structure out on the beach, sparks reflecting in beach puddles on Sandymount Strand. For Sophie, it isn't just the structure which interests her, but this celebratory act of igniting it, imaginings of 'replacements of rituals that went on before', in times past. I imagine her working on a larger scale again, in public sculpture, for example, although we discuss its limits, and the risk of diluting ideas. She talks about how she might like to make a public work that slowly destroys itself through time, someday.

Celebration and remembrance comes up often, and a kind of remembering through material. She talks about the river Blackwater by her homeplace in Kilmacow. It had previously been re-routed through a canal that powered her father's hydroelectric turbine, creating power for the village. In 2018, a storm caused the river to change course. It no longer flows through the canal, nor powers the turbine. She made a series of works about it, including a sculpture, *A Complicated Entanglement*, made with paper, glue, steel, and clay, that looks like a dark undulating rip from the memory of the water.

Now Sophie is preparing for an exhibition in the Chocolate Factory, on the top floor. One of the works she will show is a 'sun print'. This is a kind of slow photograph, a photogram, where a piece of newspaper slowly receives the imprint of a window through direct sunlight, like when you leave a newspaper out in the sun and it turns yellow. She can't make sun prints in this current studio, as it's north-facing and there's no direct sunlight. And because the show will be short, there won't be time to make one in the Chocolate Factory itself, but she is bringing one she made in her home in Kilmacow. I like this idea of bringing the light-ghost of one space to haunt another, one window to another, a solar portal. Most of her larger sun prints got lost during the Richmond Road Studios eviction, when the leaving date was unexpectedly moved up. 'So much got left behind', she tells me.

She shows me casts and moulds of crow shapes she is making, also for the exhibition. These led on from a casting workshop she also undertook while on her FSAS Practice Award. I say the moulds are like Egyptian tombs. 'I wanted them to be ambiguous, birds but a little fishy,' Sophie replies. She is going to make 'multiples and multiples' in clay that won't be fired, the air will dry them out to a brittleness that will later crumble. The birds are earthy and heavy, the opposite of birds' feathery boniness. These are very human objects, totemic; she is especially interested in the maker's mark, thumb prints along the edges. She likes how work self-destructs, but at the same time, she is currently drawn to its opposite, the metal that stays pristine. I mention this element of time in her work, but also how everything is slowly changing, even if we cannot perceive it. I think of the sun, imprinting itself, and the air slowly drying out the birds to fragment, and fall apart, in the upcoming exhibition.

I'm on my way to Fire Station Artists' Studios. The area hums as always in its intensity. This was once my home for three years and returning evokes many memories. Alisha finds me at the door and brings me up to the editing room, where the light from the window is so bright, we have to draw the blinds. We sit instead in front of her bright projected images. In contrast to this quiet corner, her practice is lively and expansive, connecting many people.

We immediately fall into conversation about what it's like being an artist from a rural community, and then to leave, and return again later, and how that also intersects with queerness. Currently, she lives a hybrid life, flying between Roscommon and Dublin. We talk about how Dublin could, in the future, become more of a hub for artists, and how art projects are starting to decentralise, which can be a positive for rural cultural life. But not if it's because artists are being simply pushed out of the city. Alisha's practice is wholeheartedly social, so much so that we have to keep stopping because somehow I am the one talking, and she admits that's a skill she has, to draw others out.

Alisha mostly works with installation, photography, and moving images, and she most often makes work with other participants. This includes 'Tribe', exploring urban and rural lesbian communities, and The 'Stairlings Collective', an intergenerational project, which explores living histories through the experiences of LGBTQ+ people. I ask whether the name 'Stairlings' came from starlings, because a starling murmuration has no leader, and anyone can be the one that changes the flock's direction. She replies that one of the members of the collective suggested it, because a starling murmuration 'can cause real damage', an intriguing provocation. We talk about her approach in working with others in a socially engaged art practice. I'm curious, is she the director of the projects? She says she is uncomfortable in leadership, but she agrees there still needs to be someone who ignites the spark.

Recently, Alisha created an artwork on her own, a film called *How to Live Here*. This explores her aforementioned return to the countryside, and muses on how to be a queer artist in a rural setting. The film, in black and white, moves through imagery of rural landscapes, and rolling clouds, and garden plants, with a voice-over describing the process of journeying away from home and countryside, and yet finding something missing, and returning again to reconnect, then moving forward yet again.

How to Live Here has inspired a new work, again with others, a short film that she's working on during her Digital Media Practice Award at Fire Station Artists' Studios. The film is also about the idea of 'home', but this time on a collective level, and is focused on the queer female experience in particular.

Alisha joined the MA Gender studies group at UCD to deepen her research. She compiled a group from people she worked with previously, as well as inviting new people she felt would be interested in the topic. The participants, who are all queer women or non-binary people who identify with being female, are a varied group, including a social care worker, a poet, an academic, and one participant who works in science, who is also a mother.

The text in the film is structured in the form of an 'aisling', the Irish for dream, which is also the name for a vision poem, a concept developed in the late 17th and 18th century in Gaelic poetry. They often include the appearance of a woman from the otherworld, and reflect on political ideals, including Irish emancipation. Alisha's group's *aisling* reflects two sides she says, 'the real and the unreal,' and her group members are dreaming up an *aisling* of the perfect home, something precarious in contemporary Ireland, in particular for those who have been marginalised.

The group have mapped out ideas together online, using a website as a portal for sharing ideas. I see the origins of the *aisling* in process, research notes and thoughts on the idea of 'home'. There are also poems, pictures, questions, and a suggested bonding ritual. We also look at the *aisling* itself in its edit form. I'm intrigued, as a writer, in this process, who decides what text makes it in, who is the ultimate author? Miraculously, slowly, it seems they all are. The poem already flows lyrically in this early edit. 'Everyone wrote their verse one', says Alisha, 'each verse will represent a room of a speculative 'house''. She assembled them into tables, but the process from then on was collaborative. 'That's the welcome,' she says, 'everyone has a bit of it in them, it's hard, but everyone is represented.'

There is something hopeful about the text, but there are shadows too. Its invocatory nature draws on the collective power of the group to envision this ideal, and how that sits within the queer experience, with both its richness and challenges. We discuss oral history in Ireland, its bardic past, and how the text may be read aloud for the film. Alisha mentions one group member who is experienced at spoken word, and how she is working with a less experienced member, who will hopefully voice the text; 'it's about lifting each other up'.

Alisha ponders the imagery that will go with this text, still in process, a delicate time. They are thinking possibly about a journey home, without being too illustrative. We imagine how it could be an endless dusk roving through the countryside without resolve. I sense, even as we're speaking, her participants' activity in other parts of the country, editing, researching, dreaming up this work.

Since talking to her I'm sure the film and its *aisling* have leapt forward many times in its evolution. It's getting dark in the room because we pulled the blind and now the autumn light is dying, I can just see the halo of Alisha's hair.

I am adrift in Rialto on a silvery day, I'm on my way to St. Andrew's Community Centre, where Evelyn currently has a studio. It's housed in a red brick former Methodist church, with a small spire and rounded top windows. The Centre is a busy home to youth and community drug programs, amongst many others.

Evelyn's studio, which she welcomes me into, immediately making tea, is large and warm, it feels like a home. At the end of the room is what looks like a tall fragile shed in the process of construction, a delicate frame in pale wood. Inside are two large high back wooden chairs, although they only have struts at their backs, the space in between is unfinished. It could leave a sitter strangely vulnerable. I ask about the high-back chairs, are they left backless on purpose? She says they are, she wants them to feel 'almost like a stool, where you might sit for a short or long time', and the open back 'leaves an openness for something to happen'. The chair seats are woven with builders' orange twine, in a tight pattern. This was the work that she began during her Sculpture Practice Award in the workshop of Fire Station Artists' Studios, a few months back.

Evelyn likes to experiment with natural, everyday, or thrown away materials. The woven chair seats draw on the tradition of súgán seats in Ireland, wooden structures with a woven seat of straw — súgán, or hemp. She has memories of these stools from her childhood, in her granny's house in Bullaun, Galway, where little súgán stools were made for the grandchildren to sit by the fire. These were made of strong wool, or rushes, but rushes didn't last very long, she says. 'You wanted the wool, sisal rope, you'd be fighting for the good one'.

She has another stool in the studio, made with wool, a sturdy square in a soft jade green, the tight woven patterns are satisfyingly geometrical. I tell her I really would like to have one of these one day, if I ever have my own house. Evelyn likes that making these seats can be a group activity, 'you can have many people weaving from different sides'.

Evelyn came to this residency in St. Andrew's Centre after her Sculpture Practice Award at Fire Station Artists' Studios. Her proposal, 'People's Sheds', was awarded by Common Ground as part of their community based residency award, 'A Radical Imagination', the year before. This project is a social one — Evelyn has a strong socially engaged art practice that sits alongside her sculptural one. She had been thinking about the already thriving 'Men's Sheds', where men, often retired, gather to socialise, and work, usually carpentry, and the parallel Sisters' Shed's projects for women, often centred around textiles. 'You usually think of a particular person that goes to these', she says. But she wondered about those that fell in between, which led to her idea of 'People's Sheds'. She also thought it would be useful to exchange skills between local Men's and Sister Sheds — the women, currently weaving blankets on wooden frames, would like to learn carpentry, for example.

Skill-sharing is important to Evelyn's practice, as well as sharing local knowledge. She often likes to expand skills for her own practice too, and her FSAS Sculpture Practice Award gave her the space and tools to try out materials. She enjoyed the energy and socialness of the sculpture workshop in particular, and the joy of experimentation when making — 'sometimes it doesn't go anywhere, sometimes it goes back and forth, I'm just assembling things'.

I think there is something regal about the two backless orange-twined chairs, 'I like the idea of the 'two', the two being the conversation or the chat, and the tune', she says, chairs presenting an invitation to an interaction. Evelyn would like, in time, to make a film of multiple people wrapping twine to make súgán chairs; there is something performative about the process. I ask her about the wooden shed structure, will it be made more complete, will she eventually exhibit it? She would like to, and to finish the structure by covering it with súgán panels to sound-proof it, and maybe play a recording of a local song inside, like the Inchicore Wake.

She is busy in her socially engaged practice. She teaches tin whistle to the Men's Shed on Mondays. She hosts traditional music sessions in her studio on Wednesday afternoons, a musician herself. We talk about the locality, the women from the Sister Sheds used to work in sewing factories in the area, and she will soon have a local historian in to give a talk. She is starting a pop-up Gaeltacht. You get the feeling that the people that Evelyn is working with are very lucky to have her.

It took me a while in the conversation to realise that when she was talking about a 'People's Shed', it wasn't just the deconstructed shed in the corner, it was also a social project without physical walls.

I ask about the two sheds, the frame and the social, is it a speculative shed? An ideological shed? It can be any structure, but right now this is the space, she says What happens when you go? Another artist comes, perhaps the project ends. But what about the sesiún's, the gaeltacht, the tin whistle lessons, I ask? Maybe they survive, she says, maybe they become pop-ups. We talk about how people, including my mother's family, used to host sesiún's in their houses. Evelyn's great uncle was a known composer, Vincent Broderick. One of his compositions was called 'The Lighthouse', not a lighthouse to guide ships in from the sea, but the idea of a well-lit house welcoming in musicians and neighbours in from the dark. Perhaps a hopeful outcome in work like Evelyn's is that people might continue to host these events in time without an outside facilitator, passing on the inspirational flame.

The temperatures have recently been low in Dublin. Every day reveals a variation: snow, ice, frosty sticky footpaths on dark streets. The Christmas lights are up already on Talbot Street. I meet Catriona in the Digital space in Fire Station Artists' Studios, where we sit in the darkness to project images of her work.

She explains how she came to be on the Digital Media Practice Award, and how it was an experimental leap for her. She doesn't usually engage with digital media to the extent that she does in this current project; she works with print, images, sometimes moving image, but without large edits. The new project is a progression from a previous series of works on Irish Boglands, called *Metabolic Rift*, developed in 2020 when she was in Temple Bar Gallery + Studios, Dublin, and later exhibited in 2021.

Catriona is interested in architecture, and also rural industries, and their melancholy aftermaths in the landscape. A previous work, *Suspended Temporality* (2014), focused on the landscape around Genk in Belgium, before it was ripped open for coal mining. She finds a temporal dissonance between the slow formation of coal and its rapid harvesting, and tries to introduce these tensions in her prints. When she moved to Kildare in 2018 she was drawn to the nearby midland bogs as a possible subject. She had an interest in the Anthropocene and extraction — 'It's everywhere now, nearly every art practice is doing it,' she told me — but these are the big questions of our time, and perhaps it takes an artist to unravel the complexities within the tangle of environmental and cultural reactions to turf-cutting.

Back in 2011, Catriona was given a medium format camera and began using it after some courses a few years later. She felt it gave her a new tool to think about the bog, and all the things stored in it, carbon, bog bodies, butter, wood, and then reflecting on the black box of the camera, a dark space, latent, capturing a moment and freezing it.

She had been imagining a more immersive experience: 'what would it be like to be beneath the bog, life suspended, but also teeming with other life'. And what would it be like for the viewer to somehow experience the dark room as a kind of bog, as a state of suspension. Dormant but also active. 'It isn't finished, the process, it's still happening,' Catriona says. The bog is a long slow time.

She had thought about VR, but she felt it could be too literal. Then, with help of local funding she bought an iPad with a basic Lidar scanner, a layman's tool for mapping topography, (the professional kind usually uses a helicopter). The process measures the time it takes for light pulses to hit the earth and bounce back, in this case from the body of the bog itself.

I look at images of Catriona out stalking the landscape, screen in hand, through piles of turf stacked for drying, across the cracked surface of where the turf has been dug out. Pale clouds in the sky. She shows me images of bog pine that look like a carcass, raw flailed limbs. They remind me of the stricken casts of bodies from the ashes of Pompeii, although really it's the opposite, a long slow entombment, in a very alive place.

She is now using the Blender 3D imaging software, to edit the scans, and we look at screen grabs. Even though I know these are small sections of the bog, they appear like fantastical maps, and also somehow a larger landscape. I think of fractalization and how sometimes a detail of something resembles itself on a larger scale. Catriona has joined two scans together, to create a shape that now resembles an amphitheatre, which forms the main structure and concept she is currently working with. She mentions that these were spaces where proclamations were performed, or debated, in time's past. It is as though her amphitheatre is to speak for the bog, giving it a voice, instead of seeing it as a site for passive extraction only.

Catriona mentions her interest in Thingviller in Iceland, which was an outdoor parliament from 930 AD to 1798, sitting in a natural rift in the landscape where two tectonic plates are shifting apart, and this idea of human debate connecting to the nonhuman in a space like this. She wants to research corresponding sites in Ireland.

In the Blender videos of the amphitheatre animation, the view pans around the selected shape. You can see where the turf has been cut into, the slices becoming 'cliffs'. Light moves slowly across the landscape, across rust and dark brown walls. We move behind the amphitheatre, uncomfortably close almost. It's like the bottom of a delicate bowl out of a furnace, papery, fibrous. Shadows are moving across ridges as if from some alien sun. It looks burnt, as if it would break when touched. Its rotations in black space are solemn and mysterious.

But these are my own other-planetary reveries. Catriona's vision of this work is grounded in the reality of life in the bog itself, in its inherent contradictions, in its precarity and resilience. Scanning as a technique is an important part of this project, in how the technology is used in helping recreate ancient artefacts. It enables them to be reproduced, or else they can live on in a virtual way. She is continuing to develop this work for now, with a possibility to show it in the future, but 'I don't know if they will be anything'. Work can be slow. I'm so long looking at this rotating bog amphitheatre that I start to feel strangely claustrophobic, like I'm somehow behind it, buried in it, uncomfortably sublime.

And then I'm back out in the Fire Station Artists' Studios yard, where the studio cat, Vanta, whom I named after the blackest paint, comes leaping to say hello.

**FIRESTATION
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