

**Footfalls**

Bassam Issa Al-Sabah. Laura Gannon. Lauren Gault. Alan Magee. Alice Maher.  
Laura Ní Fhlaibhín. Mairead O'hEocha. Niamh O'Malley

A thread difficult to string together is this selection of works. All created by artists sharing the fact of being Irish, either by birth or adoption. Despite our increasingly digital realms, nationalities still reflect political structures ruling societies and agglutinating feelings of belonging. Revolving it all<sup>1</sup>, revealing the intervening tensions between attachment and identity, beauty and evil of a land, memory and dreams, light and shadows, artistic practices can question these structures. In a quiet gallery space, domestic while alien, shuffling footsteps are heard. By pacing through it, the audience is invited to sense the comings and goings, the impressions here proposed by the artists. And to choreograph a rhythm of their own through the fragmentation of voices present in the exhibition.

The gallery rooms give a pause, to hold off administrative time and space, providing a sort of limbo. In its shadows, Bassam Issa Al-Sabah's built environment offers a landscape reflecting the dissonant nature of recollection and the processes of self-reconstruction. A few steps away, the sequenced fields of Niamh O'Malley wave while being walked through them. And Laura Ní Fhlaibhín's nourishing pastures grow at a lick of distance. Consciously caring, to be cared about. Pause. A glimmering way of fogged, wrinkled mirrors, rhythmically placed by Laura Gannon, treads towards mythic sceneries and rustles. Pause. Bodies of water, shaped in coloured wood by Alice Maher dance in silence, their kidnapped voices at their feet. While Lauren Gault's underwater void is the vortex of expanding echoes. Revolving it all. It all ends where it began, in a domestic while alien room. Inside out, Alan Magee works on the skin of the vital forces displayed in traction but still, in a familiar room, distorted by Mairead O'hEocha's dreamy and luminescent inner visions. Hold ten seconds. Fade out.

Through the exhibition itinerary, as in Samuel Beckett's Footfalls, the mother(land) voice comes from the dark, off-stage, out of sight but thickly present. A voice of command, incessant, longed for, caring and imprisoning, driving a fragmented proposal that might eventually fall into rhythm. An exhibition proposal waving, from the artists to the viewer and return, echoing across borders and lands and corridors and rooms.

Yara Sonseca Mas

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<sup>1</sup> "Revolving it all", "Pause", and "Hold ten seconds. Fade out" are direct quotes freely used from original Samuel Beckett's short play Footfalls: Beckett, S. Collected Shorter Plays. London: Faber and Faber, 1984. P. 237-243.

### **Niamh O'Malley**

Grasses (2019) is a silent video shot with an iPhone in a field in Wales. It captures long slender summer grasses whipped back and forth in the wind. The footage was shot using the iPhone's 'live' function, which creates a 3-second moving image that captures details before and after a typical single-shot moment. O'Malley has screen-recorded herself swiping through hundreds of these images. The recording does not picture the artist's fingers, but tracks the uneven pace and rhythm with which she swipes. O'Malley intentionally used this 'live' function, an odd development in digital image gathering, because of an interest in how it exaggerates, and perhaps reminds us, of the magic of capture. She is also interested in the effect of the final video being, 'fidgety and distracting – even a little violent within what is otherwise a very still exhibition space.' Significantly, this excess of images, gathered, captured and edited on a pocket-sized phone, are transposed in the gallery to an imposing vertical screen. The grasses appear to align with the verticality of O'Malley's surrounding sculptures arranged in pairs around the room. While still and solid in their compositions of wood, and glass they have a similar restlessness and poise. Glass lengths hang from delicate pins and simple wooden panels become weighty in the pencil marks and time they hold, their potential images layered, obfuscated and eradicated in their making. In the exhibition the audience is invited to experience intervals, rhythms and movement pacing through O'Malley's present landscapes.

### **Laura Ní Fhlaibhín**

This series of work takes as its point of departure the nurturing relationship that develops between the artist's cousin Róisín, a teenager with autism, and Róisín's equine therapy horse, Silver. Their group therapy session is recorded in the lenticular print, 'Róisín, Silver, Flips'. The sculptural works pivot upon the horse saltlick, contextualised within Ní Fhlaibhín's expanding view on who/what constitutes sculpture/artist, and critically challenging human-centred modes of engagement within our world. She gifted horses in therapeutic settings in Ireland with horselicks, a compressed salt block blend of key minerals for healthy equine hydration, in gratitude for their therapeutic services to humans. The licked salt blocks serve as evidence of the horse's agency in sculpting a new form, horse sculptors at work. The sculpted (licked) salts are presented here, embedded within ash supports and grounded, or earthed, in Connemara marble. Ash is regarded as a sacred tree within Irish folklore traditions, and Connemara marble is a stone particular to the west of Ireland. The sculptural works playfully contextualise the traditions and lineage of sculptural language; in which to test and build sculptural systems of support, assemblages to host the saltlicks, and to centre the horse as artist. In the context of this exhibition, this presentation, reflecting on key categories of care, invites the audiences to connect as a symbiotic material, through movement, touch and emotional interaction.

### **Bassam Issa Al-Sabah**

The tone of the film is existential, contrasting with the hyper-concentrated computer-generated visuals. It confronts the audience with a shimmering human representation, within dwellings that cannot be escaped. These dwellings will be set in landscapes that oscillate between dystopian and utopian scenery. Objects pulsate, morph and melt into each other producing an amorphous representation of pain and distress. Mirroring the film, a group of ghostly flowers come out of the projection underlining the world-building aspect characteristic of Al-Sabah practice. In the context of this exhibition, these works function as a revolving door between inner landscapes, recreated by personal memories and perceptions, and the impulse to scape them by a proposal to experience the works in the physical and sensorial way.

### **Laura Gannon**

This series of light but dense works, reflective while opaque, condense the physicality of the process the artist follows during its production. Done and redone, they condense the accidents of time, the gesture and actions of the hands in it, as the reaction of the linen and the strings and the pigments altogether. Time capsules, vortices of sensations, they are displayed rhythmically, pointing a meditative path. In the context of this exhibition, the audience is invited to dive into them, to pace following the interval they create, mirroring the corporeal genesis of each of them.

### **Lauren Gault**

The installation specifically created for the exhibition puts together several elements' characteristic of recent Gault works. Buckets are brightly coloured, multi-voiced characters in the unknown bound of the unit field. An early technology, the bucket is a perfect mobile sculpture and a sign of human presence, even in its absence. Buckets are small islands, carrying element across element, water to land, land to water, minerals to animals. This connective quality is equally present in the cabling that brings speaker and receiver together, all through the sound system which links buckets and their content to the gallery and back. Unlidded, the hydrophobic mineral contents of the buckets are licked and ingested by animals. Here, the aural contents of the room are heard and voiced through the hydrophonic microphones suspended in water. In the lid of the bucket a calendar can be found to register the rhythm in which its content was or will be distributed. Metronomes punctuate time in an attempt to hold the present, as spectral footsteps. The objects reflect each other in their forms and functions, in the gallery and beyond. Collectively, they hold 'Echo' across time and place, evolving with each gallery encounter.

### **Alice Maher**

The prints Vox Hybrida (1&2) make part of a large-scale woodblock print series, existing as a total of 8 different images. The process began with photographs of the artist in movement, variously contorted and extended. From a selection of them she made drawings rendered in silhouette, turning the human shape into abstracted, flattened, dynamic outline forms. Then sheets of rough, low-quality plywood were cut out, printed and then hand-tinted with watercolour. The natural organic patterning of the plywood surfaces, with whorls, grain and knots, strongly evokes without actually depicting aspects of the human body. They relate to Maher's consistently explored female experience, often with reference to history, fairytales and myths. The starting point for the Vox Materia series of bronzes was a remarkable medieval relief carving of a mermaid at the Cistercian Kilcooley Abbey near Maher's home. The mermaid holds a mirror and a comb, but her tail is manacled. Maher looked to Hans Christian Andersen's Little Mermaid who, to become human, was forced to sacrifice her voice – her tongue was cut out. The sculptures are cast from lumps of wax shaped by Maher's clenched hands in gestures of embodied expression. Confronted with the weight of history and silence imposed upon the female condition, the audience is invited to sense both the pressure and the power of the on-going struggle for agency and equality.

### **Alan Magee**

On the table, glazed ceramic pieces are distributed, resting on hexagonal sections of foam as if keeping them from making a sound or movement. This shocking combination of materials condenses the essence of the work, pointing at the disconnect between body and mind in capitalist society. The appealing and disturbing pieces are not only artworks but the result of an action, which is revealed in the video on an iPad at the end of the table. The video shows the making of the works, underlining the contradiction between action and stillness, inner impulse and outside motion, that questions their role as a metaphor for the erratic division between labouring and simply being in the light of the human condition.

### **Mairead O'hEocha**

O'hEocha's paintings are recognised for their contemporary re-interpretations of still life, among other subjects. Her work offers a form of ambiguous time travel to address our relationship with images and painting, while recognising our estrangement from the 'natural'. The two still-lives selected here belong to a series the artist developed during COVID confinement. The importance of digital screens as windows to the exterior world lead her to reflect on the light they expel, in contrast with that of the painted surface. O'hEocha's paintings open the gallery space with their luminescent inner visions of both the familiar and the mysterious.