

**Up Against the Wall: *A Journey in Culture, from Resistant to  
Dynamic, Encountering the Limit in the Process***

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This thesis represents partial submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art.

I confirm that the work presented here is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis. During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.





## List of Works:

### ***An Ocean Refuses No River***

<b>What Happened</b>	November 2018, Moone handball alley, Co. Kildare, Duration: 1 hr
<b>Éire</b>	November 2018, Campile handball alley, Co. Wexford. Duration: 1 hr
<b>Export Pain</b>	December 2018, Cullenstown Beach handball alley, Wexford. Duration: 2hrs
<b>Big Stone</b>	January 2019, Big Stone handball alley, Co. Carlow, 2hrs
<b>Border</b>	January 2020, Carrickasticken Road, Forkhill, Co. Armagh. Duration 1 hr
<b>Swallow</b>	February 2020, Shellinghill, Co. Louth. Duration: 1 hr
<b>International</b>	March 2020, Passage East, Co. Waterford. Duration 1 hr
<b>(Un)Monumental</b>	August 2020, Pigeon House Road, Dublin Port. Duration: 1 hr
<b>Halting</b>	December 2021, Clondalkin, Co. Dublin. Duration: 1hr
<b>And Elizabeth</b>	August 2021, Ballygunners Temple graveyard, Co. Waterford, Duration 1 hr
<b>Fire Field</b>	January 2022, Clondalkin, Co. Dublin. Duration: 3hrs
<b>Uncomfortable</b>	January 2022, Royal Canal, Lough 12, Duration: 2hrs





## ***An Ocean Refuses no River***<sup>1</sup>

Each of the works presented here have overtime found breath in the live moment, being in a place, occupying space and listening to echoes of cultural memories. In some cases, lasting only as long as it takes the physical residue of materials to be rubbed out by the scouring agents of wind and rain. To take nothing away, these are drawings and actions that hold close that which is lost to us.

In the stories of the women that I have encountered, the images created, have the capacity to leave traces of the artist inhabiting sites and contexts of interest, excavating meaning from the inner reaches of works made live. Texts and poetics of language sign and seal landscapes of loss. Where stories have the power to get our attention, it is in the image that the senses touch us. Here presented in the photographic moment, it is the sensuous elements of this afterimage that haunts.

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<sup>1</sup> An Ocean Refuses no River, Lyrics from, Ever So Lonely, on Third Eye album by Monsoon (UK: The Mobile Suit Corporation, 1983)





## What Happened

Next to a phone box in the village of Moone, in the southeast there is a plaque inscribed with the words: *What happened to Her?* This work draws on a material relationship to dried orchids as memorial and action in a process uncovered to think about the disappearance of Jo Jo Dullard, one of a number of young women in the 1990's, who vanished from the roadside without a trace















## Éire

In the dry summer of 2018 sites made barren along the east coast of Ireland began to reveal large signs made of light stones packed into trenches spelling the word Éire. These were made to signal to German bombers in World War II that they were off target. In the late summer of 1940 a lone German bomber dropped four bombs on Campile's local creamery Co-op. Three women working in the canteen were killed. More deaths were narrowly avoided as most of the workforce had finished their mid-day meal and left the co-op restaurant.

















## **Export Pain**

Using poetics extended as a bridge from beginnings of work to actions activated by water. A washing away of collective pain drawn in the sand and a corner of sport tucked into the edge of the island at a point where the generations migrated in the hope of a better life. An action with water collected from the Celtic Sea beside erases the traces.









EXPORT PAIN









## Big Stone

The name of the local townland 'Big Stone' denotes the marking of the parameter with kerbstones at passage graves and burial mounds. Inspired by spiral rounds of neolithic art, most notably the entrance stone at Newgrange burial mound in the Boyne valley. Patterns that link past, present, future, like wormholes or *Thunderwords*, loops of time that eddy and flow. The entrance chambers of great burial mounds designed to entice the light to open up its secrets below.









FECK THE QUEEN  
2011

D.F. Shearing  
JAD

PENIS  
HOW ARE YOU

MHAULLA  
CRIS







PENIS

HOW  
ARE  
YOU

ET

MHAU LAGE

SCRAIG

not

CHECK

L.T.D





## Border

In 1970 *an Taoiseacht* Jack Lynch said 'Partition is a deep, throbbing weal across the land, heart and soul of Ireland...' at the beginning of what was to be a violent troubled period in Irish history between north and south.<sup>2</sup> Drawings and markings made live continue in this work, a brief moment of intersection between a road less travelled and an inscription in Ogham text underfoot trail in the dust, time travelled yet still the border wound remains.

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<sup>2</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Border* (London: Profile Books Ltd., 2018) p.75.



















## Swallow

Tracing a lonely trail into the isolated dunes of Shelling Hill Beach on the east coast of Ireland. There was the sound of the river as it joins the sea and a solemn walk into the territory of disappeared souls and the last resting place of Jean McConville. Buried in a shallow grave, it took over thirty years for her remains to be found and the true nature of her violent death exposed.

From drawings with words to the spoken word itself. Speaking the unspoken of written poetics, words of the air like gatherings of birds, overlaid, words on words, becoming gatherings. One, two, three, four layers, repeat and overlay: a loop, a cacophony, a harmony, a dissonance. All these.

A peep of Chickens. A herd of Cranes. A kettle of Hawks. A wake of Buzzards. A spiral of Creepers. A charm of Finches. A wedge of Geese. A parliament of Owls. A murmuration of Starlings. A lamentation of Swans. A murder of Crows. A gulp of Swallows. I swallow orchids.





























## International

Under universal conditions of social distance, by Hook or by Crooke. A drawing made at the southernmost coast of the Island of Ireland. Engaging Bernadette Devlin's fire. Like Machiavelli's prince she is both the lion and the fox armed with both strength and cunning. Drawings and materials carry deeper meaning in gathering momentum and a waiting for the tides to swing in our favour. It is not the land that belongs to us but we that will return to the land. Throwing stones not at the rising tide but into the void.



















## **(Un)monumental**

(Un)monumental is a work that continues and extends the theme of neolithic markings here to engage with the use of large concrete barriers to stop nomadic communities from gathering; a physical and brutal message of exclusion. This performance work was made in the shipping area of Dublin port, at a time of migration in an uncertain world, actions made to inscribe the discarded blocks of concrete that pave the road to the city.



















## Halting

Among the relics and the broken are the shadows of failure and hope. This is the entrance to an abandoned halting site on the outskirts of Dublin city. The passage of travelers who once call this place home, now blocked. A transition, from the livable to the unlivable, a struggle as ancient as Greek athletes, from discus to satellite dish, we are all merely moving through.



















## **And Elizabeth**

For all children who died young. In poverty's embrace, from disease and famines cause. In Ballygunners Temple, the untended graves of many. Written in stone, carved in memory, the record of a complete families passing and brought together there. A skin of paper and charcoal is actioned on the slab beneath. Drawing attention to the lost poetry of sorrow and celebration of life lost, too soon, out of step with the ages. Forgotten, hidden by time and natures growth taking back what man had marked, doing its job. I perform a minor revision, notes on a return for ages long past.

And for Elizabeth who died young...









D.V. GAFFNEY  
THOMAS GLEEVY AGED  
AND JOHN WILLIAM YOUNG  
AND ELIZABETH  
THEY REST IN PEACE











## Fire Field

As Neolithic kerbstones mark the parameter of passage graves across Europe, decorated with highly elaborate geometric markings. The burnt out shell of a joy ridden car dumped at the city's edge mark the edge of the wild. A signifier of violence and crime. To action a temporal impermanent process of drawing to transform its surface. These wasted relics put to new purpose and possibilities. Made able again in some way. Burnt steel as renewed canvas, white foam an ephemeral counterpoint. Unmonumentalising the monumental, the car becoming the uncar.



















## Uncomfortable

Reminder or forget-me-not, '*mememormee*', it is not the earth that belongs to man but man that is bound to return to the earth. Uncomfortable is a conversation with the surface of all things. White foam on core steel, an unspoiled canvas primed by the years. This work is situated by the Royal canal bank and an old stable where cart horses came to be refreshed. Nothing changes but is transformed by the flow of all things, as Joyce's river runs. "Yet is no body present here which was not there before. Only is order othered. Nought is nulled. Fuitfiat!"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, (Wordsworth Editions Ltd. (1939) 2012) p.613 (l.13-14).



















