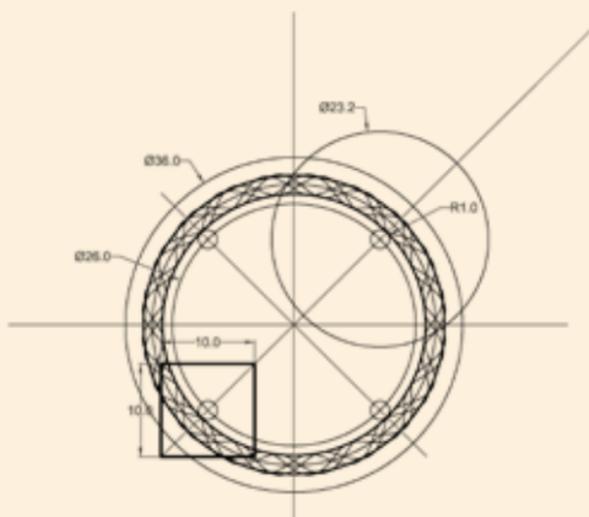


a line in space

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A TEXT IN RESPONSE TO
A STRUCTURAL FORCE, AN EXHIBITION BY SIOBHAN O'CONNOR
OONAGH YOUNG GALLERY



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ROSCOMMON VISUAL ARTS

WRITER IN RESIDENCE 2018

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In Renee Gladman's Ravickian novels, the invented city-state of Ravicka is governed by an inexplicable physics. This physics exerts itself according to rules both uncertain and specific: The city is 'a strange unknown body' that shifts and alters 'in conversation with its inhabitants'¹.

Its buildings, rather than stable and steady, are migratory and mutant. They respond to the movements of human bodies passing around and through them.

Siobhan O'Connor's practice calls to mind Gladman's fluctuating structures; through sculpture and drawing, she also reinterprets the materials of architectonic construction. Keeping close to the specialised methods of the building site - steel fixing reinforcement and rebar - she tampers with the 'natural' inclinations of wood, steel and concrete, recalibrating their behaviour so that they percolate with implausible potential. They become rich with imagined impulse.

I needed to consider a structure that does not exist.

I needed to ascertain its magnitude and its radius, its component parts and its internal force.

I needed to know how it would live stout in a room and tall on a street, and the sounds it would make if I were ever to break it.

To begin: I drew a line in space.

I looked at the line and attached a unit, and then another and another.

To these units I made amendments such as 'perpendicular' and additions such as 'suspension'. They began to gather themselves into a geometry. Into a hypothetical but graspable form.

I began to tell this form about the weight it would soon be bearing.



O'Connor's process, then, is one of reconfiguration. Slow, intricate work which compiles and considers non-existent and dormant properties:

What is latent inside of these materials?

What unlikely colours and textures?

What unheeded dispositions and proclivities?

What are the weaknesses, for instance, inside of concrete?

Or: how can concrete be prevailed upon so that it becomes weak?

Did you know, at any stage in the construction of a geometry, you can explode it into its individual parts?

The explosion is formative. It serves to tighten and compound.

My body became subsidiary to the construction and explosion of this geometry.

My body became, first and foremost, a device of scale.

Through its proportions I envisaged how this non-existent structure would conduct itself in space. Its proportions aided me in conceptualising the labour required in my structure's assembly.

When the time comes for assembly, no element of my structure will take me by surprise: even those behaviours such as precarity, intolerance and imbalance I will have carefully and strategically inserted.



She begins with moulds filled with dye, auto cad drawings, and small architectural models made from coloured concrete and metal. Each is an unlikely hypothesis, a document for future use and activity. These are not empty speculations; they follow the logic of engineering and ask what internal forces might a structure be subjected to? What do we learn when we apply
shear
tension
torsion?

I will know the precise moment at which it will yield because I will have co-ordinated its buckle and break. I will have designed the point at which the weight it bears becomes intolerable, unbearable.

I will have fabricated its
topple
come asunder
its too thin stretch.

The finished works retain this speculative element. Though they are emphatically physical before us, like Ravicka's urban-scape they nonetheless exude a "strange fictive materiality"².

What they propose is palpable, but the precise terms of their existence remain uncertain and inherently unlikely. We are so accustomed to parsing concrete in terms of strength, after all, it seems like an endeavour in alchemy to render it weak.

And why would we want to lessen the strength of something, besides?

Why insert imbalance, where we can have stamina?

Why inject precarity into what has proven durable?

And what happens, thereafter, inside this altered status?

Is it still concrete, when this process is done?

The dilemma is to induce a *desire* to *subvert* at the level of function. To make the structure *desire* to behave subversively, to desire it *inherently* because its temperament has altered so *entirely*.

So entirely, in fact, that it is no longer subversion.

The dilemma is to eradicate the capacity for subversion.

In short, I need to know *how one threads a bar through with strain so that it wishes to bend*.

I need to know what a structure learns about itself at its extremities.

I need to know how a material function at its edges, as opposed to its centre.

I need to dispel the myth that an object possesses only one centre.

I must corrode the centre entirely.

Gladman writes, 'As long as there is scaffolding to provide form for the emerging structure, one should be able to stand onsite and watch a thing grow'³. Interjecting at the level of 'scaffold', O'Connor grafts new terms and supplants new connotations. Her material, epistemological pursuit is fuelled by conjecture, and it is conjecture that has seeped deeply and pervasively into these substances at a foundational level.

The finished works carry the reverb of this resignification.

They are the next stage in a destabilised, mercurial vein of inquiry.

I need to know the point at which all co-ordinates are zero.

1 Renee Gladman, *Houses of Ravicka*, Dorothy, a publishing project, 2017

2 Phoebe Clarke, *Renee Gladman's 'Houses of Ravicka'*, thewhitereview.org, October 2017

3 Renee Gladman, *The Ravickians*, Dorothy, a publishing project, 2016

About Roscommon Arts Centre's Visual Art Writer In Residence

Visual Art Writer's Sue Rainsford and Joanne Laws are the Roscommon Arts Centre's Visual Art Writer's in Residence for 2018. During this time, Joanne & Sue are invited to write critical texts on selected exhibitions and projects happening across the county. The intention of this residency is to allow writers to experiment with their writing style and explore new ways of disseminating their work. Their writings will be available at Roscommon Arts Centre and online as they are published.

Sue Rainsford is a writer & researcher based in Dublin. Her practice is concerned with hybrid, lyric and embodied texts, and explicit fusions of critical and corporeal enquiry.

She is a recipient of the VAI/DCC Critical Writing Award and the Arts Council Literature Bursary Award. Recent projects include The Freud Project Residency at IMMA, where she collaborated with Bridget O'Gorman to respond to Lucian Freud's assertion 'I want the paint to feel like flesh'. Her debut novel, *Follow Me To Ground*, is available from New Island Books, and she was recently awarded a fellowship at The MacDowell Colony, New Hampshire.

Biography

Siobhan O'Connor graduated from Dublin Institution of Technology in 2017. In June 2016 she was presented with the Fire Station Sculpture graduate award which granted her a studio (from September-December 2016). She was recently shortlisted for the Visual Arts Award 2016 and selected to exhibit in the RDS along with 12 other artists in October 2016.

About the RAAF Award

The Roscommon Visual Artists Forum supported by Roscommon County Council Arts Office & Roscommon Arts Centre was established in 2015 to provide visual artists based in or from the county with a platform to develop their practice. Artists supported previously through the award include Siobhan McGibbon (2015), Vida Pain (2016) and Naomi Draper (2017).

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