



DeMo Reciprocal Residency 2020

Interview with artists Niamh Seana Meehan (NI) and Gintė Regina (LT)

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NSM Niamh Seana Meehan

GR Gintė Regina

Time code	Speaker	Text
00:00:00	NSM	Everything that I have shown for the exhibition is new work. And it was all based on my experience from leaving here to embark on my residency in Lithuania and [?] new language.
00:00:27		The use of the colour white within my practice is extremely important for my work. No matter what object I create, it will all have developed from written matter. I use the colour white to portray the empty page or the empty Word document. Then when you come into the gallery you'll be greeted by a road sign that has been repurposed, and it says, wait here for the future show.
00:01:05		And the concept behind this sign is really to do with the rehearsal process or the space in between or the space before. The thing about this road sign as well was it was created before COVID.
00:01:29		The sign has taken on another purpose because it was literally sitting in an empty gallery with the likes of this anticipation of a future show. And this sign here, again, is a repurposed stop and go sign. Again, with the concept of getting lost and not really knowing where to go and traffic coming from a different way that I was looking at road signs a lot more probably than I would do here.
00:02:04		The text itself on the sign is difficult to read or perhaps challenging for a viewer to read. But again, it's to fit in with the concept of not knowing where to go and getting lost and struggling to understand a language different from your own.

00:02:32	Again, this is a road sign that has been repurposed. I've turned it upside down. And the colour palette for this one, the red and white, is to keep in line with news reports. And obviously, the top of the sign is based on Brexit.
00:02:58	And when we were informed as to what was happening with Brexit, and particularly in response to the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. And then the text underneath, we are holding our breath again, is to do with being in this space of the unknown, being in a space where we don't know what's happening.
00:03:28	Disconnect, mixture of signs. In the first gallery, there's two pieces of work but they have a relationship with one another. And it's an installation with tiny bar stools. And placed on each of the barstools is a different piece of written matter.
00:03:59	And when you're in the space, you'll be able to hear very faint whispers. And in between each of the whispers there's a delay and you'll hear long pausing. And the pausing is to do with the Pinter pause or pauses that Samuel Beckett uses within his work.
00:04:34	And it also takes inspiration from John Cage's <i>Lecture on Nothing</i> , where he talks about a pause being that it isn't an empty pause. That nothing's happening within this pause is a future show.
00:05:00	And this text is about my first few days when I arrived in Lithuania, and it has the image of the road sign as well. And it was to do with getting lost trying to navigate around a new place.
00:05:25	This text here, I talk about some of my encounters I had with the workers at the artists' house and my position as the artist there and what that meant. Maria Fusco 11 statements about art writing were extremely influential for the text and gallery one.
00:05:55	I was extremely interested by the word fulcrum simply because of its performativity as a word. And linking that with J. L. Austin's <i>How to Do Things with Words</i> , and Austin speaks about language being performative and the utterance being performative. I wrote these texts the first week of my residency. And when I was walking to get to my space in the artists' house, I would say these words out loud, that I wrote.
00:06:35	And it was an experiment to move my body and move my mind with the mouth. And there wasn't a starting point. It was preparing for something.

00:06:58	GR	The piece of work that I produced purely during the Residency is a piece of writing which is a short story, really, that is capturing my experiences from when I did the traveling, but also interweaving new things that I discovered during the Residency. And so that work is called the <i>Pain of Youth</i> .
00:07:25		And it's a little booklet that we produced, which is like an echo of Heinrich Böll's <i>Irish Journal</i> , in that it also follows a protagonist travelling through the island. But except in my work, it's a young woman as opposed to an established middle-aged author who's male. And so I guess the concerns are...
00:07:56		The concerns that run throughout the rest of the works and the show and throughout my practice, which is the idea of being unrooted and not tied to any specific place or geographical location. And trying to find some kind of sense of belonging, whether that's physical or more existential, I guess.
00:08:26		And with this particular work as well, I was interested in or I saw parallels between the, I guess, Northern Irish experience and Lithuanian experience in that issues surrounding movement and borders are very much, I think, part of our cultures. And so that was something that was interesting for me to draw parallels with and think about.
00:09:01		The main piece of the show is called <i>By Your Side</i> . And it's an eight minute film shot in London that I actually edited during the Residency. And it shows two Lithuanian sisters who meet in a top floor flat in London overlooking the river for the first time in many years.
00:09:32		And it follows the rekindling of their connection against this backdrop of this idealised version of the city. And there, again, the themes of exile versus belonging or how you relate to a place are also very much present.
00:10:00		And so that connects to the piece of writing. And in fact, the piece of writing picks up where the film ends. It's the most narrative fiction film that I've probably made. And whether I was trying to... I was interested in treading this line between having enough story and emotional content, that it's an involving piece of work on that level.
00:10:29		But also, I was interested in formal elements like lights and colour and how those can be used to create a mood that is equally effective.
00:11:00		[Non-English].

	It's trying to balance those two more formal and more storytelling aspects of the film.
00:11:27	I think also generally what connects all the works in the show is this idea of movement because they're all set in different countries, in different geographical landscapes. And they all have these restless female characters that are on this mission to make them their own.
00:12:00	The third piece in the show is called <i>Monika in September</i> . And it's an older film that very much deals with the same themes as the rest of the work in the show. And it's shot and set in Canada.
00:12:25	And it follows Monika, who embodies different characters throughout the film in an exploration of, I guess, the course of a young woman's life. And the inspiration for the film are the short stories of the author, Alice Munro. And what we did was we travelled to places of significance in her work, so to actual geographical locations like the town that she's from or where she lived.
00:13:01	And weaved our own personal loosely scripted narratives with themes and snippets of stories from her writing. And in doing so the film became a combination of documentary elements and more fictional narratives that are interwoven throughout the film.
00:13:29	The film is loosely scripted and that it follows Monika at three different stages of her life, when she's a child, when she's an adolescent and then when she's a young woman. And she's also always herself, so the same actress just embodies those characters, rather than pretending to truly be them. It's a play that the viewers are always aware that it's an enactment.
00:14:00	We start the film by posing this question of, how will our lives be? What are the ways of being that are available to us? And by examining this character of a girl and seeing her through from childhood, adolescence to adulthood, we are trying to unpack those different modes of being. And so the film concludes with Monika leaving the characters that she's been playing throughout and actually addressing the camera as herself.
00:14:34	And so the resolution of the film is that through exploring and embodying these different characters throughout, it ends up altering her own life, and in a way, giving her, her own voice at the end of the film. Fun fact is that we had to do a lot of this quite undercover.

00:14:56	<p>There are scenes in Toronto Union Station, which is a massive big train station, that we'd have to just sneak in and out and try and capture all these things. Whilst we were making a film, it was also very much an experience in itself. Whilst the character was making these journeys, we were also making the journey. I think that also is captured in the film and the line between actual experience as it is documented.</p>
00:15:31	<p>And a fictional scripted experience is very blunt and very close. The way that my films come about or are constructed are through a combination of quite meticulous scripting. But then if it's shot on location somewhere where I haven't been, like <i>Monika in September</i> which was shot in Canada during an actual journey that I did.</p>
00:16:03	<p>Then inevitably, I take surprises or improvise things into account so that in the end, the film is a fusion of things that are scripted and things that are more spontaneous, also documentary feeling.</p>
00:16:30	<p>And for both the films in the show, I actually commissioned soundtracks from the artist and musician [unclear], who I work very closely with in trying to map out the sounds and the pacing for every particular scene or moment in the film. And then I weave the music into a more diegetic ambient sound that's inside the space or inside the film.</p>
00:17:05	<p>The way the films are graded, I spend quite a lot of time colour grading the films. And they tend to have a quite pastel soft palette, which I guess is a colour scheme that I've worked out for myself over some years.</p>
00:17:27	<p>And I guess it's something that, I think, the films have quite a lyrical nature and I think that's something that carries that through.</p>
NSM	<p>It was the process of looking away. I think my studio space was extremely helpful or aided this work, because it was a quiet space and it was a space for reflection.</p>
00:18:00	<p>And it was a space that was used for rehearsals that it presented me with like an environment to really think about making work and thinking about making work for others to read or to activate. But overall, the Residency programme was a great experience for me.</p>
00:18:30	<p>And an experience to learn more about my practice and how I make work as an artist.</p>

