



## **SCRIOBH 7 - CONFINEMENT DOSSIER - 2020**

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*"The artist always precedes the psychoanalyst"* J. Lacan

In times of confinement and restriction of social interaction, we invited several artists from a diversity of fields to tell us about their experiences during the confinement measures at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. We put to them the following questions:

**Q1** - *What is your experience, as an artist, of the impossibility to carry out cultural and artistic events 'in the flesh'? What is different when the audience / spectator is 'virtual'?*

**Q2** - *In your particular form of art, what are the effects of the exclusion of the body in the encounter with the body of the other, i.e. what is different / new?  
Can you relate this to the notion of 'presence' (can you -as an artist- do without physical presence?)*

We aim at learning from them, since we believe that their experiences and know-how can contribute to our thinking about subjectivity and about the analytic encounter.

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## **M É A D H B H O ' C O N N O R**

Méadhbh O'Connor (b. Dublin, 1984) is a visual artist whose work consists of an extended exploration of our relationship to the natural world through the lens of art, science and the poetic. She works through sculpture, installation art and multimedia. She has shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions in Ireland and abroad. Recent shows include the *57th Venice Biennale of Art*, Italy, 2017; *Climate Simulator* (solo), Earth Institute, University College Dublin, 2018; *Eco-connectivity*, Humboldt Universität, Berlin, Germany, 2018; *What is Life? Schrödinger 75*, Wexford Arts Centre and Trinity College Dublin, 2018; and *Sustainable Futures*, Sirius Art Centre, Cork, 2018. She was awarded the position of Artist in Residence in the College of Science at University College Dublin (UCD) where she taught interdisciplinary modules of her own design to undergraduate science students from 2015 to 2019. She regularly delivers and participates in discussions which bring together artists, scientists and environmentalists on shared, common ground. She has since returned to education and is completing a Master of Fine Art at the University of Oxford, U.K. (2020) and is a member of the Royal British Society of Sculptors.

<http://www.meadhbhoconnor.info/>

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## Q1

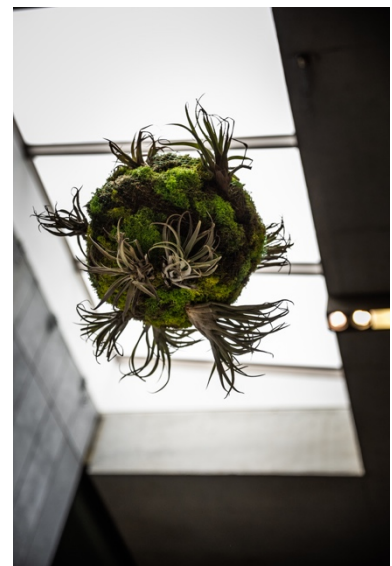
Like most people I have been forced to adapt, very quickly, to the new conditions in which we find ourselves. Until now, as a 'visual' artist, my work generally would manifest 'materially' whether through sculptural or multimedia forms. To be bodily present with the work was to experience it in a 'complete' way—in space, time, sensorially and dynamically. The photographs afterwards were always a disappointment as they could never recreate this experience and instead seeded their own fiction around the event.



By sheer chance, recently my work began to evolve more performative elements through the written and spoken word. This was a new departure and a means by which I was trying to extend an experience of the natural environment by constructing landscape vignettes through the use of the written and spoken word as a kind of 'sculptural experience.' The freedom that this new form enables has proven to be something of a lifeline now, as the only limits are the imagination. I do feel increasingly disconnected from others under these circumstances. By trying to create these spaces for the imagination to share with others, I hope in a sense, that we can meet in this kind of psychic space.

During the lockdown, I have found the urge has increased to create even more expansive landscapes using words and the interior imagination. I am now also creating virtual worlds using software I am teaching myself how to use in an effort to, somehow, travel vast distances. Before the spread of the virus, I was in the middle of producing work for a show in the summer. My plan was to stage a mixed experience of sculpture, projection, installation and performance; all of which would rely significantly on the presence of the body—both mine and that of the audience. This was to culminate in an address to the audience through an array of speakers which would channel pre-recorded, disembodied voices (the technological 'body'). These were to join my 'present,' bodily voice in performing a spoken word piece.

Now, strangely, disembodied voices (and furthermore, disembodied images) are the main means of contact for many of us in our daily lives under this new confinement. I am continuing to grapple with this triad of the voice, the body and technology as three points amongst which the ideas of the work—namely the bodily and psychological experience of landscape—are passed. This is all motivated by a powerful desire to translate or reconstruct the experience of the body in landscape upon the event of its absence, as the paths to these fundamental experiences are now so obscured in our techno-industrial culture that to experience it must be enacted by other means.



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Art: *Biosystem V*, 2018. Detail of an installation of multiple living orbs made using air plants, soil-based plants, preserved and live mosses, wire. Ranging from 30 – 50 cm in diameter. (Work and photo: Méadhbh O' Connor)

As above. Detail of installation. (Photographed here by Brian McDonald)

## Q2

I close my eyes to this world and wake up in another. Faint sounds of murmuring, familiar voices emerge out of the blackness:

‘There is a tree that always trembles,’ I hear one say,

‘Even when the air is still.’

Huddled together in the dead of night, we make our way down the rocky path that flows like a dusty stream into the base of the sleeping valley. Particles of ancient silica kicked up by our feet hang in the air, illuminated by the stony light of the moon like clouds of cosmic dust. We laugh and talk at the top of our voices until we are bathing in the deep sound of the heavy, black water that gushes under the wooden bridge we cross.

We make our way through the last leg of the journey, the path darkening as the thick firs narrow the way. The awkward patter of our living feet fades as we leave the pebbled path onto the soft ground of the field, as if lifted out of bodily presence.

The dry-stone ruins sit before us under the brilliant moonlight, clinging to the ground as years of roiling weather gradually dissolves them from above. She points her finger toward eleven o’clock and the tree stands before us—its quivering, silver leaves

‘carrying the spirits of the dead’

as their grief travels silently through time. We stare at the stricken tree before turning to leave, as the amber cinders of the August Perseid meteors expire above our heads.

Méadhbh O’Connor, *The Aspen Tree*, 2020.

