



International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpdm20

By Slight Ligaments

by Aideen Barry, Limerick: Limerick City Gallery of Art, Ireland 16 December 2021-13 February 2022. https://www.aideenbarry.com/byslightligaments

Kate Antosik-Parsons

To cite this article: Kate Antosik-Parsons (2023): By Slight Ligaments, International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media, DOI: 10.1080/14794713.2023.2170628

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14794713.2023.2170628



Published online: 30 Jan 2023.



Submit your article to this journal 🕝



View related articles 🗹



View Crossmark data 🗹



REVIEW

By Slight Ligaments, by Aideen Barry, Limerick: Limerick City Gallery of Art, Ireland 16 December 2021–13 February 2022. https://www.aideenbarry.com/byslightligaments

By Slight Ligaments, a multi-media exhibition by Irish artist Aideen Barry, curated by Sarah Searson, provocatively questions the role of art and artists in a time of global existential crisis. The exhibition's title is a nod to Mary Shelly's gothic horror novel *Frankenstein* (1818), referencing the line: 'Thus strangely are our souls constructed, and by such slight ligaments we are bound to prosperity or ruin.' Indeed, the deep burgundy walls (the colour of dried blood) and the yellow wall text and QR codes throughout the exhibition (reminiscent of the yellow signage of the Irish health service during the COVID-19 pandemic) signals the motivation for this body of work.

The backbone of this exhibition is *Oblivion / Seachmalltacht /* ${}^{6}b P L b R^{a} \dot{\sigma} {}^{6}b C$, a multimedia performance, moving image and sound installation that originated as a commission awarded by the Irish Traditional Music Archive (ITMA) and Music Network for the Bunting Harp Archive (see Figure 1). Inspiration was drawn from Edward Bunting (1773–1843) whose archival efforts in transcribing oral Irish harp music preserved this valuable cultural heritage before it died out. *Oblivion* centres on Fomorian Balor's monstrous third eye that leaked out toxic poison when opened, calling attention to the poisoned inheritance of the Anthropocene, and the urgency of the climate crisis. The moving image of a central object, shard-like and dangerous, mesmerises as it rotates and revolves, morphing into different incarnations: it is Balor's eye, a covid ball, a meteorite, and a poisoned sinkhole.

In *Oblivion*, electronica artist RIIT prophesizes: 'Our eye was supposed to make us all-seeing / but we rammed it deep within this land / And made it barren, now this toxic drain will make everything forgotten'. Poignantly, this is voiced in Inuktitut, a minority language, which, like the Irish language, borders on extinction due to colonisation. The full text of the spoken performance is written in Inuktitut, Irish and English at the installation's entrance. From Turlough O'Carolan's 'The Lament of Owen Roe', arranged by Cathal Murphy and Stephen Shannon, RIIT's primal Inuit throat singing, Aisling Lyons's resonant harp strings and the performative costumes of Margaret O'Connor, Barry generates a gothic electronica anthem and immersive installation that is a chilling and deeply moving call to action. Documentation of a recorded performance of *Oblivion* is available here.

Monachapsis, from the Greek words *Monahus* (being alone, solitary) and *Opsis* (foresight, prediction), are 52 digital drawings displayed together in individual frames. These were completed daily by Barry during the first lockdown in Ireland when people were restricted from travelling more than 2km from home. In *No. 5,* a black bird perches atop a fleshy red liver, recalling the punishment of the mythical Prometheus who brought fire to humans. His sentence was to endure a never-ending, torturous cycle which connects to the elasticity of time in the pandemic's early days underscored by the endlessness of uncertainty. In *No. 35,* Barry's tongue is pierced through with a selfie stick rendering her unable to speak. In *No. 13,* a guillotine poises precariously, ready to chop off a hand that dares to grab the mobile phone beneath it. Barry explores our fraught relationships with mobile devices as an extension of the body, both how they offer an infinite digital connection outside our immediate surroundings and the possibility of experiencing touch through haptic technology in the absence of physical human contact. Nearby, two distinctive yellow 320 degree viewing vitrines are socially distanced, one of which is accessible for wheelchair users, providing a solitary, yet totally

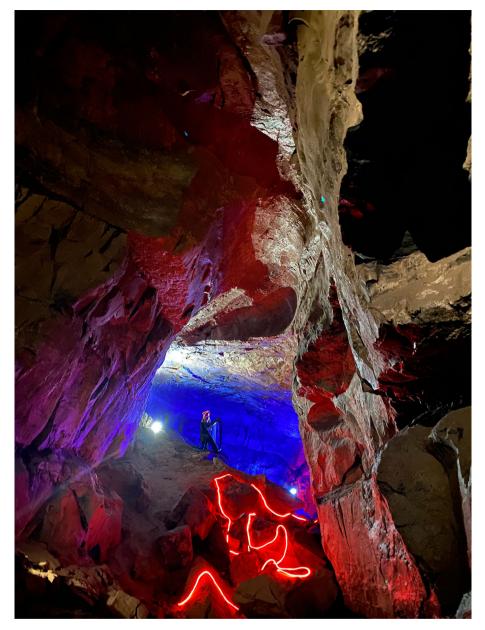


Figure 1. Aideen Barry, Oblivion/Seachmalltacht/^sbシトレットペーヴ^c, 2021, Multichannel video installation with 4.1 sound, Duration: 15'40", Commissioned by the Irish Traditional Music Archive & Music Network for the Bunting Archive Award 2020, Image courtesy of the artist: Aideen Barry (c) 2021.

immersive experience of the animated *Monachapsis* illustrations. Inside, ten miniature projectors with accompanying sound activate disturbing hybrids of insects and severed body parts that scuttle their way across one's field of vision.

Béal (all silent but for the buzzing), an innovatively reimagined catalogue essay by writer Sinead Gleeson and composer Stephen Shannon, is a 2-channel audio installation in which a yellow vinyl record playing on a bright red turntable is amplified by two slick red lacquered speakers. Barry located this behind a specially designed Schüfftan wall by master carpenter Charles Perpoil, inspired by Eugen Schüfftan's (1893–1977) cinematic special effects process. An angled circular opening channels immersive sound, bringing it into conversation with the *Monochapsis* drawings. In the Irish language *béal* means mouth, and the stereo equipment acts as tongue and voice box, prompting contemplation of contagion, isolation and our implicit desire for human connection. The joining together of analogue and digital technologies carried throughout the exhibition alludes to the hybrid futures we must imagine for ourselves.

Self Portrait, a dislocated body across nine flat screens, plays with the cropped view of the body offered by video-conferencing adopted during the pandemic. As the body inhabits rooms in a cardboard house, it overwhelms the structure meant to offer respite. Barry's dark humor seeps into the work, her breasts appear in the kitchen while in the sitting room a small couch rests on her buttocks. In *Self Portrait*, the body made strange cleverly articulates embodied experiences of this type of digital technology and it simultaneously evokes that what is lost and gained as we fathom our new post/pandemic realities.

By Slight Ligaments prompts questions about how the body inhabits place from the micro to the macro. The collaborative element at the heart of this exhibition signals the need for a critical re-thinking of society's interdependency with the wider eco-system. It is precisely in times of crisis brought on by disease, war, food and energy shortages that art is needed to help us grapple with the critical and moral implications of the Anthropocene. Work from *By Slight Ligaments* will be included in Format Festival, Derby, UK (16 March – 9 April 2023) and in a solo exhibition at Salzburg Kunstverein (Salzburg, Austria, July 2023). Barry's work asks us to consider the transformative possibilities of collaboration for imagining our hybrid futures but it comes with a warning: the future is not far off in the distance - the future is now.

Kate Antosik-Parsons School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland antosik@tcd.ie (b) http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1609-6372

> © 2023 Kate Antosik-Parsons https://doi.org/10.1080/14794713.2023.2170628

> > Check for updates