

in the ink dark

*These are some words to wander with
as part of In the Ink Dark a project
from Luke Pell and collaborators*

**NIC GREEN & RUAIRÍ DONOVAN,
D'TÚS MAITH
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PODCAST 8 TRANSCRIPT

“ I am remembering the piece we made. A collaboration of various bodies. In the piece there were two human bodies and two, or maybe I should say four, wooden bodies. They were what used to be chairs, hand sawn down the middle. I say used to be chairs as I suppose when an object loses its functionality or use it returns to its material name. Like when you smash a bottle it is no longer a bottle, but glass.

Our performance was collaboration between the human bodies, and the wooden bodies, which used to be together to make two chairs. In the performance we negotiated the precarity of the two wooden bodies, attempting to use them to support us, as their former chair selves would have. We figured out ways to use our own weight or strength to apply the right pressure to the right parts in the right directions. We tried to hold it together, so it would in turn hold us. It was a mutual effort, between all bodies.

Sitting, standing, lying, carrying, turning, pressing, leaning, dragging, falling. Because of the inevitable dysfunctionality of our objects, when just to sit, or to stand on the former chair takes such an amount of attention, practice and risk, the idea of success was reframed in this work.

We performed it on a raised platform, upon the wooden bodies. An island on an island. Or sometimes I thought a raft on the sea, or other times I thought it was like a strange and dysfunctional meeting room, where things fall apart, or maybe things were never together they just looked like they were. An illusion, a trick of the eye, a really good bluff, a wolf in a sheep's clothing.

We made this piece in response to the then impending Brexit deadline on the 29th of March 2019. You from Ireland, me from Scotland, we wanted to collaborate. We felt the best thing we could do in this situation was be together, while we considered things split apart.

We cut a lot of things.

We thought a lot about lines, walls, about the water between us, and all the talk of the time about drawing lines in the sea, through the water.

We thought of broken homes, of wooden and human bodies battered by seas, washed up.

Of driftwood, drifting people, drifting lines.

We thought about the house on the Irish border famed for being built on the perceived line between north and south,

We thought of a domestic world conceptually and actually cut in half.

I think there was something about the unfixed, unpredictable nature of the had-been chairs, which could hold all of the stuff we talked about and felt and heard.

The feeling in the ribcage.

The feeling of loss sometimes.

Other times, on carefully manoeuvring, and applying pressure and weight in just the right ways, the chairs would make the most amazing creaking sound.

These sounds reminded us of a boat straining under the forces around it. It is the sound the my boat, makes when the ropes wound around the metal cleat tighten as the wind forces it from its mooring

In this piece, that I'm remembering, the dance of the human bodies was made through what could and could not be achieved in relation to the wooden bodies. We wanted the wooden bodies themselves to have agency alongside the human bodies, to be lively and active in and of themselves. The human bodies wound around and between, perched on top, held their shapes, dragged their own weight, all in relation to what the wooden bodies would allow, and at times entering into what they wouldn't. In this collaboration the wooden bodies were the choreographers and the artistic director, was the handsaw.

I am speaking this from the pontoon I mentioned, earlier where my boat that I live on is moored. It is on the very west of the Forth and Clyde canal, where it meets the brackish water of the Clyde River via a sea lock.

Lines drawn in water.

From here I can look out along the river towards the estuary, towards where you are. It's sunset now and the dusk chorus is happening. Maybe you can hear it?

You can probably hear some motorbikes as well. They always seem to come out at this time. They drive along the A82. I always hear them next to the birdsong.

Just now the dandelion seeds are floating through the air, parachuting down onto the water. The canal surface is covered in them, like looking at the reflection of a clear, starry sky, even though it is daylight. I suppose the little parachutes will get carried towards you, depending on tides, weathers and the weights. They don't recognise the borders, or as you said many times:

The animals don't recognise the borders,
The animals don't recognise the borders,
Animals don't recognise borders

I am remembering the performance we made, where we split bodies in two.

This is a conversation split in two, separated by a body of water.

Who holds who?

What do you do when the thing that is supposed to support you is broken?

Bodies split in half

Houses split in half

A house divided against itself

All at sea,

all at sea,

all at sea.

Atlantic field recording by Seán Ó'Dálaigh

It takes a certain effort to keep this all together. You can adjust and find a place of equilibrium even after all that has happened. All the deterioration. The accumulation of time. This is a conversation about effort. In order to stand I must first be in balance. I remember checking and the sound of wood pressing into wood. Adhmadh. The slight shifts and cracks beneath me like the wooden door downstairs expanding in the late August heat. honestly it excited me. Its materiality and my own negotiating for stillness, togetherness, agreement. I position my feet on opposite corners of the seat using gravity and pressure to press the two halves together. Working my hands up the back posts. Finger tips. Crossing broken slats. my trainers. Without warning everything gives way and seeks to find a new integrity. The sound is like a tooth breaking and it is like the whole room collectively takes a sharp breath in. We are floating, just for a moment or two. This Elm and me and you. Erect. But where do we go from here?

There is something about memory and how we shape it. Where we store it and how we attach value to it. This is a conversation in two parts across a divide. We are not together. We are both islands. Sun setting over University and quartz fissures. Resonance. Elm Chapel Chair. And of course so much has been said about the Lord's place in all of this. Wrapped in those soft grey transit blankets speckled with colour. Legs bound with black glossy cable ties. Carried back and forth across borders and security checks. The ease of movement. This is a conversation about movement. Pages 28, 160, 164, 185, 197, 199, 292. This tree was late addition to our alphabet. An aleph, a point in space which contains all others. I think it was the simplicity of the metaphor that transfixed us and the appeal of mastering it. An elm chapel chair sawn in half. Two pieces of a whole. Another archipelago. Ailm in modern Irish taken to be Elm, like Palm and a whole other host of non native species that do perfectly well here on these islands. Birth. Beginnings. Leam. A Jump. Luis. Lyra Mckee. The Belfast Rape Trial. Lakes in Fermanagh. translating a poem in a darkened room. Commemoration. How special our relationship really is. How little we know. An Doire. Corcaigh. Glás Chú. Norman walls. 20 year agreements. Due process. Ár Athair. Our fathers. Labor. Quality jobs. Quality Housing. The North. My North and your North. Up north. Polysituatedness.

Maybe that now is a time for clear actions rather than more empty words. Trust. Brendan. Colmcille and 303 miles. Soft practices for Hard Times. Arlene Foster. Mary Lou MacDonald. We already held a referendum. It was on the 22 May 1998. Watching CCTV footage trying to understand. A crowd of people standing next to a white armored PSNI van. A grey hooded and dark sleeveless puffer jacket. A yellow circle. She raises her camera over the heads of the people in front of her. CCTV camera pans right. A fire comes into shot. A car is burning. Blue circle. Youth. Camera focus. Red emergency vehicle lights. Yellow Circle. Red Circle. Two figures pick something up and then she is gone. Its gone. You can talk about freedom of movement and economic agreement all you want. Saoirse. I think its just an idea we borrowed from our neighbours, the ones we asked to join us in the 90s to help us sort all this out. To hold the chair for us. And sure they dont even seem to believe in it anymore. Its a bad joke that we do all this in the name of freedom.

A photograph of the bruise on your right thigh. Its bigger than my hand. Deep purple Water. Ochre and Yellow edged. A hundred tiny nicks and scratches. Reinforcing joints to support them. Knees and slats. Finding new ways to ask for the things we want. To be clearer. To the point. Surfaces. Weight sharing. Distribution. This is a conversation about weight. In Gaeilge I would say meas. Weight. Respect. Assessment and Estimation. The weight of a lover. Marks of battles hard fought and won.

I am on an island. I have been putting it under me for three years. It is 8 miles off the South West Coast of Cork. Oileán Chléire. On the hill behind the house there is a passage tomb. Well the impression of one. There have been people here for around 11,000 years. Looking out to the Atlantic. Marks in stone. Tree alphabet. Elm. Roan. Basking Shark. Deilf. Sea Pinks.

We are all just learning to talk to each other. Give it time. Hope is the last thing to leave the ship before it sinks. We still have that to look forward to.

Biographies

Nic Green

Nic's work is varied in style and method, with forms often 'found' through collaborative and relational practices with people, place and material. Her pieces have received several awards, commissions and recognitions including A Herald Angel, 'Best Production' at Dublin Fringe, The Adrian Howells Award for Intimate Performance, and a Total Theatre Award for Best Physical/Visual Theatre Edinburgh Fringe. She is the recipient of the Inaugural Forced Entertainment Award, in memory of Huw Chadbourn, 2018, and in the same year was one of four artists nominated for the ANTI Festival International Prize For Live Art. She is thrilled to be Artist in Residence at National Theatre Scotland.

nicgreen.org.uk

Ruairí Donovan is re-imagining himself and the world around him.

Donovan has been making dances in Ireland since 2008. He is a recent Masters in Choreography Graduate from DAS Graduate School in Amsterdam & holds a joint honors B.A. in Drama & Theatre Studies and English from University College Cork. Donovan is from County Cork, Ireland and his choreographic practice is concerned with 'aesthetic practices of care' and queering representations of the dancing body. He is currently living and working on Oileán Chléire, a remote island and Gaeltacht off the south west coast of Co. Cork investigating Gaeilge as a site of queer resistance and new materialist collaboration 'in the wild'.

cargocollective.com/ruairidonovan

d'tús maith is leath na h'oibre | a good start is half the work, was a performance created by Nic Green and Ruairí Ó'Donnabháin for National Theatre of Scotland's Dear Europe on 29 March 2019 Focussing on Ireland's 'special relationship' with the UK, and the role the contested UK / Ireland Border has played in the current debate, National Theatre of Scotland's Artist-in-Residence Nic Green and Irish choreographer Ruairí Ó'Donnabháin unite to create a cross border collaboration exploring the customs of boundaries and lines.