

Áine McBride

Áine McBride's works often draw attention to the material vocabularies of public space, but never by making something articulate of them. The opposite might be true: her sculptures are somehow clammed up. The noise of signifying forms is hushed. The urban environment, of walls, steps, and doorways; façades, screens, platforms, bins and pillars; everything which determines our pathways, our capacity to access or not, is by her hands transmuted into something oblique.

It is as if the world is seen out of the corner of the eye; recognisable forms collapse or fold carefully into themselves. Mysteries are made of mundane materials, drawn frequently from the builders yard, or DIY stores, but crafted with finesse and careful attention to combinations of finish and colour. The sculptures shrug off any kind of usefulness or direct references; eschew any desire to make grand statements. Occasionally vertical but largely horizontal they are objects that fail to resolve into familiarity no matter how hard we look at them.

A recent poem by Paul Batchelor, 'A Form of Words' (2019),¹ is a report on downbeat times, negotiated, if only barely, with wit, wry insights and carefully chosen words. Intellect and imagination never quite ground down by the texture of twenty first century life, when, sadly, getting by can be counted a triumph. Spaces in this poem are never private, even when they should be; senior colleagues, racist neighbours, shitty landlords, or the irritating husbands of other people, impose their relentless opinions on everyone within earshot. McBride's works feel like both an antidote and a riposte to this world: public spaces in hard times made

newly available for the contemplation of privacy, secrecy and silence.

A world available to all, where the noise of endless demands to work, to progress; the constant chivvy to move one way, and not another, is sublimated into something strange. Surfaces of the works can appear unfinished; or, oddly, they seem to ache to function: an empty form wants for something to contain. Raw cast concrete planes, pieces of timber, are held in place by ceramic elements that look like steel. Often, areas of odd pastel colour soften hard surfaces. The sculptures have an arresting slowness and wit. Both the images printed on perforated surfaces and her sculptures play with our experience of urban flatness, and exploit our tendency to see certain kinds of surfaces or finishes as use-oriented. It's a sideways look at the anonymous richness of a concrete world.

In one of the few buoyant passages of 'A Form of Words', the narrator/poet recounts a small but satisfying victory yanked from the jaws of infuriating defeat (an episode involving a New York snowstorm, a pending flight and kicking in a locked door), which concludes with the lines,

'I felt imbued with possibly dubious agency
I now suspect my silences contain the best of me.'

Even in the afterglow of success a sense of agency is questionable. If it is in silence that he shines, it seems the capacity to find 'a form of words' to describe the event, or, more ambitiously, to describe 'becoming part of the immense indifference of the world', may be of indefinite consequence to the author. Here, I think, there is a peculiar resonance with McBride's brooding works, in which colour, organic shapes, and fabric only make fleeting appearances amidst a repertoire

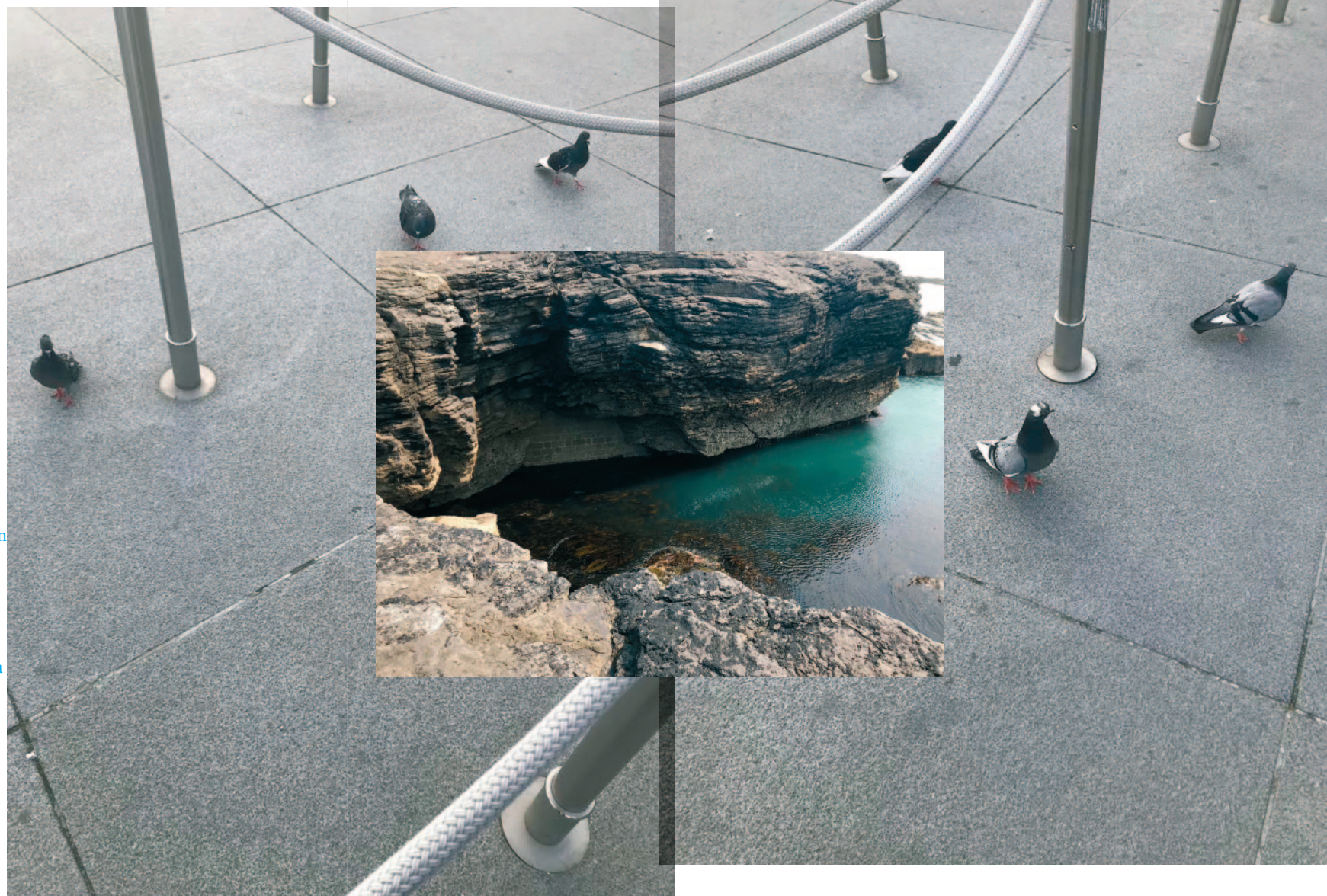
Áine McBride is an artist based in Dublin working in sculpture and photographic form. Recent solo exhibitions include *~set at mother's tankstation* London (2019), *work suite at mother's tankstation* Dublin (2018), and *habitat hq*, a site-responsive set of works at Trinity's College's Arts Building as part of an off-site Douglas Hyde project (2017). Other recent group exhibitions include: *Periodical Review 2017*, Pallas Projects, Dublin

of flatness, layered structures, and enclosed expressionless forms. Similarly gentleness and kindness feature in the poem but they are communicated on the 'quiet', in 'unregarded acts'. Repeated pleas are made to imaginary saints, patrons of everyday friendship that trade in small, shared fictions, walks, and attention to the multifarious textures of the physical world.

McBride makes of a hard world, a beautiful array

of works, elegant, restrained and resolute. Indifferent to our desire to make sense of them, their agency is plain to see. But charged with a generous sense of possibility, like Batchelor's poem, they offer ways to negotiate public space, to inhabit hard times, with a lightly perverse pleasure and a distinctive, slightly distancing wit.

Isabel Nolan



(2017); *NEU-GEN 2017: Towards Both the Parts*, NCAD Gallery, Dublin (2017). McBride will produce new work for *EVA International 2020 (Platform Commissions)* and is currently a resident artist at *Fire Station Artists Studios* (2018-2020). McBride graduated with a BA in Fine Art Sculpture and Visual Culture in 2016 (NCAD) and with a BEng in Structural Engineering in 2010 (DIT). She is represented by *mother's tankstation gallery*.

¹ Paul Batchelor, 'A Form of Words' (2019), *London Review of Books*, Vol. 41, No. 8, 18 April 2019 pp. 32-33

Áine McBride
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