

ÁINE MCBRIDE

point of fold

28 October – 4 December 2021

sets of [approximate] accruing episodic texts

Episode i

Never be confined by the footprint... [piloti]

In advance of Áine McBride's forthcoming, second solo show at mother's tankstation, Dublin, *point of fold*, we are sitting in the gallery office talking through potential ideas. As Áine opens a laptop, the screen idles on a famous photograph of the German modernist architect and designer, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, seated in one of his MR10 chairs, smoking a cigar in his 1964 Chicago apartmentⁱ. It's a man'sⁱⁱ photo of a 'real' man's man, in the time of men, which even fifty seven years later... is still predominantly a mans' world – its hard to escape or overstate the backwards draw, the societal undertow, of Afghanistan... We are seated in 'Eames' chairs, LCW's to be specific, around a Molded Plywood Coffee Table (wooden legs) – one can sense McBride absorbing 'plywoodness' - all of a certain vintage that their identifying labels only bear a male name – "Designed by Charles Eames" - and with absolutely no mention of the crucial input of his constant partner, wife and collaborator Ray (Bernice Alexandra Kaiser), until her death, ten years after him in 1988. When did Vitra and/or Herman Miller begin to properly split the credit for their work, I wonder?ⁱⁱⁱ Google doesn't easily provide me with the answer. Plenty of nice, shopping opportunity photos though.

What ignominy women face, have faced, will continue to face: Presently news carries the incredibly disturbing reporting of the murder trial of Sarah Everard, the Me Too movement, Wokeism^{iv}, has progressed awareness, remarkably the Irish women's football team have successfully negotiated the same terms of pay as the men's... Little by little – never be constrained by the footprint, pilotis^v allow the free circulation of air after all. It's Áine McBride's intent to try and do something, little by little, something subtle, about the male hegemony inherent to architectonics... Think of the incredible supine line of the MR10, without its relationship to male creation, perhaps... 'femininity' would be only that? A perception/an observation of curves. It makes perfect sense that the last article published on McBride, should be in a rather dry and rather manly [another stereotypical cliché] architecture magazine, rather than a softer/more female conscious art journal (?). The article on the EVA^{vi} commission nestles amongst schematic drawings of municipal buildings, drainage systems, photographs of award-winning neo-modernist homes and ads for architectural products and services. Like the artwork itself, an adapted access ramp to a building and a modified hoarding, it is so particular, exacting, specific, that you could entirely miss it as conspicuous 'art'. Essentially, this expresses pretty well what McBride's work is and does – it is both finicky and relaxed at the same moment, at many times almost invisible.

There's a space, while we attend Frieze, London.

On return, installation has now begun and there is an evident set of relationships to plug sockets, two concealed, one has been accrued as an element of the sculptural composition. A floor work sits purposely opposite a fourth – that's all of them accounted for. The tonalities of the floor assemblage are almost those of Braque and Synthetic Cubism (more maleness – but less than Picasso's)... We are talking...Áine stands in the space, slightly distracted, looking up at the odd bits of our architecture – the junctions of things. We are after all, for those unfamiliar with the anatomy of the space, a converted, former light industrial building, constrained by its footprint. They are knocking down the grumpy building opposite, so the environment is permeated, coloured by drilling, the noise of unspecified machines. The large wall work [mirrors] is currently covered in brown paper while the wall is repaired around it.

I still cannot find any photos of Eileen Grey or Charlotte Perriand smoking. TBC.

NB: In an attempt to follow Áine McBride's approach to process, increment and the establishment of approximate 'sets' of objects, moods, tones, purpose, as well as a proposed understanding the artist's ongoing [process] participation in the Douglas Hyde Gallery project; David Lunney, Áine McBride, Katie Watchorn, *From Here to There: Art in Process*, (20.09.21 – 05.02.22), a series of short texts, mounted weekly will build to a complete essay around the experience of the planning, installation and aftermath of the *point of fold* exhibition. It has, however been pointed out to me that plans are one thing, but they will have to be followed.

ⁱ Coincidentally, the text for Áine McBride's 2019 solo show at mother's tankstation, London, sort-of ends with both a quote from Mies Van der Rohe and a mention of cigars... "If architecture is a language, when you are good at it you can be a poet." <http://www.motherstankstation.com/exhibition/set/text/>

ⁱⁱ Photograph of Mies Van der Rohe by Werner Blaser.

ⁱⁱⁱ We have a later piece that still ambiguously simply says "Designed by Eames"

^{iv} **Wake:** Old English (recorded only in the past tense *wōc*), also partly from the weak verb *wacian* 'remain awake, hold a vigil', of Germanic origin; related to Dutch *waken* and German *wachen*; compare with watch.

Woke: contemporary/urban; 'being woke means being aware... knowing what's going on in the community...'

^v The essay '*Les Cinq points d'une architecture nouvelle*', 1926, by Le Corbusier focuses on questions that are raised within architectural design. The five points are as follows: pilotis, the roof garden, free plan, free façade, and the horizontal window. The first point is the *piloti*, which are columns or piers that elevate a structure off the ground. The fact that the structure is lifted provides many functional advantages; it allows circulation beneath the house, which frees the building site, and allows a driveway, parking space, or a garden to be placed beneath.

^{vi} **and/or land** – *On the intersection between art and architecture*; Banbha McCann MRIAI, Architecture Ireland, no.318, July-August, 2021. pg.92-93

Episode ii.

Seen from above: *The roof garden*.

I've spent a considerable part of the last week (a bit longer actually – as this has taken more time than I wanted to get it out; the frustrations of *real life*), thinking about conspicuous 'art' and *fault lines* in architecture (or anything real) by manifesto/hypothesis. It also helps to not get too over-whelmed, or completely depressed, about the willful and possibly unstoppable destruction of our pinkening blue planet: The subject of all the current news broadcast surrounding UN COP26; and the consequent pronouncement of eternal prosaic governmental manifestos (hypothetical intentions), that will probably come to [what's the technical term?] *bugger all*. At least, not enough... Sorry for being cynical but... *Go Greta*... "Blah Blah Blah"... More 'targets' for deforestation – *just stop it*. No planting, no cutting – fine the *fuck* out of anyone who does. More methane 'limitations' – sure, we should shift our diet – more plant based foods, grains and greater care with herd management, but let's keep *that* in perspective too, it's not *all* the cows' fault – primary urgencies include: *not* fracking for natural gas, for example, as well as coal mines, burning forests (see above and forever shame on you Bolsonaro – *****, you didn't even show your face.) There's also the *leakage* from landfill... Speaking of faces, and leakage. I'm stuck with the vision of Boris Johnson sleeping through manifestos, *sans mask*, beside the must-be-at-least-a-bit-vulnerable-ninety-five-year-old-miracle-of-the-planet, David Attenborough. By trickledown, however, we called a solar panel engineer today, to see what we might do with our naked south facing gallery roof. A pending *roof garden* of carbon-neutral electricity-rending black glass and circuitry? Expensive and a small grant, but it might add to our doing just a bit. Although we have great and pretty constant supply of wind coming at us down the River Liffey, it seems that the technology for domestic scale wind turbines, is not "worth it" – what-so-ever that means – more to do with insurance, I think, than ecology. The very idea of generating our own carbon neutral electricity is however tinglingly exciting. Electric van next? Grant-aid them up the wazoo [informal: in great quantities *or* to a great extent], please, to make necessities so affordable that we don't have to think twice/remove the *luxury* from *no* choice. The practice of everyday life, as De Certeau would have it.

Áine McBride's, shows at mother's tankstation (solo) and the Douglas Hyde (group /process) are both now, up and running, so to speak, pre-cursored by *Feeling of Knowing*, a group show at The Complexⁱ, in elegant trifold, collectively forming a great example of making, without destroying. Doing without undoing. It was McBride's intention that the entire *set* of projects, three related but discrete exhibitions, should accrue, build collective meaning, while making the smallest footprint, the merest carbon dent possible. Nothing was 'shipped' or flown, other than the artist in a small van, Berlin to Dublin (and back, eventually), acquiring used [pre-loved?] items, some on the journey – a minimum of intrusion. McBride, to complete the payload and help fund the endeavor, also transported additional artworks for other people. Mirrors acquired from a roadside market, as suggested by the artist, due to a slightly furtive manner of the *deal* conveyance, emitting from the seller, left a feeling that a small hotel somewhere was denuded of all its reflective surfaces. Equally I have a sense that another is missing its sink tops – one reflects the other in *node*. 3. Another establishment is perhaps void of onyx ashtrays – outdoor use only. Similarly, John Graham in his review of *Feeling of Knowing*ⁱⁱ, notes; "Fixed to one of the steel columns opposite, a printed record of on-line transactions reveals the ironically complex escapades behind the acquisition of low value objects..." The viewers', feeling and knowing, is inveigled into the conversation surrounding, identity, meaning; the history and future of *stuff*.

The three exhibitions have resulted from the assembled materials that collectively reveal the intelligence and range of inventive solutions tucked into McBride's armory. A stated intention; was that nothing should be the same, repeated or overlap, yet everything should make sense, one against the other, everything should form "approximate sets". The delicate curves of the interlocking, back ceramic tiles of a floor work at the DHG, are mirrored by the indelicate, 'clunk of the black ceramic roof tiles, mounted to the walls at mother's. Surfaces have been *re-aligned* across two venues – floor become walls that become roofs. *Gardens* situated/seen, from above, sideways, straight on, or from below. The jackets, supported by handmade steel folded constructions at mother's, are amplified by those of a pre-existing steel structure at DHG, namely, a rather fine but neglected coat rack from the gallery's office. Now *inconspicuous* as

'art'. The steels in mother's have had their paint removed, the coat-rack, conversely, sports a subtle but original – or not recent - 'coat' of paint. The artist has promised to *loan* me the leftover paint stripper, so I can clean off a couple of painted door hinges, that have been bugging me at home, for a decade. The low-hanging coat and steel structures at mother's are countered by a wall-mounted wood-slat and tweed assemblage, floated high on the DHG wall. Even the standard wall colouration of *our* entrance space has grown, amplified, diversified into variants, elaborations at the DHG – moody tonal mutations. McBride's, *Node 6*, is a formal roof garden, seen from above, a floor work at mother's tankstation that pre-supposes all the tones of the Hyde's latterly, partially painted walls.

While installing, Áine lent me a small but intriguing volume, a short essay by Beatriz Colominaⁱⁱⁱ that argues that the fundamental propositions of radical, early modern architecture were largely expounded in manifestos that made the 'modern' male, *hero* architects, Loos, Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, etc., *famous*, notorious, before they even built *stuff*. Or, that things they latterly become *enshrined* for, were essentially exhibition buildings (sets / pavilions), rather than livable structures. Colomina beautifully points out that the difference between 'pavilions' and *buildings* is that the former is devoid of the inconvenience of plumbing, storage, or humans. To be developed in episode iii – if and when I find my notes.

It brings to mind some differences between, say Le Corbusier's *Le Cinq points...* (sorry 1923 not 1926 as erroneously footnoted in *ep.i*), and the empirical realism of Eileen Grey's quiet architectural masterwork, E1027, built considerably to the principles espoused by Le Corbusier, but hardly ever realized, but Grey's house was constructed and entirely thought through, as a 'living', breathing, building. The cupboard was designed with the acknowledgement of how light fell upon objects, the water tanks sheltered the roof garden, the tea trolley had a cork surface to limit the rattle of tea cups, and if my memory serves me right, the necessarily narrow stairs – now lost - had indents cast into the risers to allow sufficient depth for little feet to comfortably fit on the step. Wonderfully, one of the icons of E1027, Grey's universally approbated and ever-copied adjustable glass and curved chrome side table (designated with the same name E1027), was designed to solve the intimate practicalities of her sister's penchant for taking breakfast in bed, and thus to limit crumb-fall onto the sheets. Or again as de Certeau indicates, *things exist, because they emerge*^{iv}. Le Corbusier, it appears was madly jealous that a "mere" woman could build something based on his writings that arguably profoundly surpassed anything that he had made, to that date. His obsession with E1027 knew no limits. Staying there against Grey's wishes as a guest of Badovici, after, like Elvis, she had left the building (and her former lover); Le Corbusier is photographed (not just *smoking*), but naked, painting garish third-rate 'modern' murals on E1027's nice clean off-white walls. Le Corbusier, even died on the beach below the house (freak swimming accident, probably...) Some shout loudest, others listen and whisper back miracles.

This is of course what McBride's work does, so cleverly, and on so many levels, it creates room, comfort, ease and the grace of emergent, whispered dialogue: Discussions orbit the realities of how and why things actually happen, rather than the hyperbolic declamation, the abstract pronouncement of how or why things should.

ⁱ *Feeling of Knowing*, The Complex Dublin, 16-28th October, 2021. Curated by Mark O'Gorman and Paul McGrane, featuring Aleana Egan, Áine McBride, Dennis McNulty, Connor O'Sullivan.

ⁱⁱ John Graham, *Felling and Knowing*, Visual Artists' News Sheet. Nov-Dec 2021, pg.27.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Manifesto Architecture, The Ghost of Mies*, Critical Spatial Practice 3, Nikolaus Hirsch & Markus Miessen (Eds.). Sternberg Press, Berlin. 2014.

^{iv} Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of the Everyday*, University of California Press, 1988. Paraphrased from pg.98.