



Catalyst Arts February-March 2021
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Day Magee, Jennifer Mehigan, Pdraig Regan, Yarli Allison, Richard Martin, Claire Biddles, Bassam Al-Sabah, Phillip McCrilly, Ben Malcolmson, Richard O'Leary, Ruth McCarthy, the LGBTQIA+ youth Steering Committee at Ulster Museums and Shy Bairns.

by Thomas Wells

Sam's Eden brings together a collection of queer writers, artists, poets, printers and programmers working internationally within an exhibition in printed matter. The project responds to the continuing effects of Coronavirus restrictions adapting to new spaces to engage audiences and to promote the work of practitioners.

Sam's Eden is a physical artefact of queer practice in 2021. Running in conjunction with LGBTQ+ History Month, Sam's Eden focuses on methods of communication and the occupation of space, from the use of coded language before decriminalisation, to the navigation of virtual realms, and through to the layered symbolism of contemporary art and literature. All contributors to Sam's Eden are part of the wider LGBTQIA+ community and through their work continually ask questions about Queer occupation of 'Straight' space, in music, art, literature, and beyond. It is a pleasure to ask each and every one of these individuals to contribute to this 'snap shot' of queer history following in the *printsteps* of Belfast's Pink Press pioneers. I have had the pleasure to either know or work closely with all of them and am honoured to be able to bring them together as part of my final project with Catalyst Arts.

Sam's Eden has facilitated the collaboration of queer artists to create six individual projects; the aim was to introduce and pair together practitioners who work with similar

themes and to hopefully cultivate new friendships in the midst of a global pandemic. The project will be working closely with Ulster Museums *Reimagine, Remake and Replay* project on the formation of an LGBTQIA+ youth steering committee who will work on BIG QUEER PLINTH an engagement project looking at visible queer history in museum collections.

As part of the project there will be a number of virtual events; an original performance from storyteller Richard O'Leary, and screenings of work by Day Magee and Yarli Allison. Follow @catalyststarts on Instagram and Twitter for more details, or visit our website at www.catalyststarts.org.uk/whatson

Day Magee is a genderqueer performance and visual artist based in Dublin. Much of their work has concerned the developmental role of shame-based trauma in relationship to the queer, sick body. Shame arising from queer subjectivity as navigated through evangelical Christian upbringing makes the body the site of experience as well as



the instrument of articulation. Taking the form of performance-centred/performance-initiated multimedia, the work hinges on the disbelief between creator and

audience, rituals reflect the processes of the creator's self-mythology.

Since 2011, Day has performed with live art organisations such as Livestock and the Dublin Live Art Festival, and is currently pursuing a BA in Sculpture & Combined Media in Limerick School of Art & Design. In 2019 they appeared at *Tactical Magic* (TULCA Festival of Art, Galway, Ireland curated by Kerry Guinan) and have exhibited widely in Ireland and the USA, in 2020 they have been nominated for the Future Generation Art Prize 2020 by platform Pallas Projects Studios.

Initially trained in graphic design and art education, **Jennifer Mehigan's** work spans multiple platforms, mixing together 3D modelling, found objects, stock images, text, textiles, video, painting, sound, scent, and installation. Recently her practice has expanded to

include workshops, graphic collaborations with friends, growing flowers and working at FRUIT SHOP. She is currently a PhD researcher at the Belfast School of Art, with a project engaged in West Cork graveyards, queer Irish garden histories, and inter-species/dimensional/planetary communication.

Padraig Regan is the author of two poetry pamphlets: *Delicious* (Lifeboat Press, 2016) and *Who Seemed Alive & Altogether Real* (Emma Press, 2017). Selections of poems have been published in *The Future*

Always Makes Me So Thirsty: New Poets from the North of Ireland (Blackstaff Press, 2016) and *New Poetries VIII* (Carcenet, 2021). In 2015, they were a recipient of an Eric Gregory Award, and in 2018 received a grant from the ANCI's Artist's Career Enhancement Scheme. They are currently one of the Ciaran Carson Writing and the City Fellows at the Seamus Heaney Centre, QUB.

Building upon her experiences of displacement, **Yarli Allison** embodies 'emotional geography' to compose fictitious scenarios that are seemingly hopeful and functional, yet on the verge of falling apart. Often interacting with personas or creatures, these imagined worlds consist of her invented *survival tactics* and *coping mechanisms*. Yarli utilises the process of *cognitive restructuring* and *belonging remapping* to play with the sense of futility and the uncertain future of 'what if'.

Yarli's recent virtual reality generated work, referencing her early age refuge-seeking experiences with '*digital gamification*' in cyberspace. They pose questions on sculpture's physicality, mobility, and its preservation in the



posthuman and *dematerialised* conditions to come. Despite this, she constantly returns to her sculpture-installation background, leaving strong raw-handcrafted traces in her work that emphasise accidents caused by human errors in the making.

Richard Martin is a Glasgow based multi-disciplinary artist, working with collage and print material being a focus of his 2D work. A some-time collaborator with Belfast artist Sighle Bhreathnach-Cashell, he recently completed his masters degree at Glasgow School of Art.

Claire Biddles writes about pop music,



film and fandom with a focus on feminist/queer readings and the politics of desire. She is a regular contributor to *The Wire*, *The Line of Best Fit* and *The Singles Jukebox*, and her writing has appeared in publications including *MAP*, *Little White Lies*, and *Dazed*, plus a number of zines, indie publications and exhibition catalogues.

She edits the pop star crushes zine *Fuck What You Love* and lives in Glasgow, Scotland.

Bassam Al-Sabah lives and works in Belfast and Dublin. He completed a BA in Visual Art Practice from Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology in 2016, and was awarded the RHA Graduate Studio Award (2016-2017) and the Temple Bar Gallery + Studios Graduate Residency Award (2018-2019). Recent solo exhibitions include *Dissolving Beyond The Worm Moon*, Solstice Arts Centre, Navan (2019); *Illusions of Love Dyed by Sunset*, The LAB, Dublin (2018); and *The dust carried me into the watchful summer*, Eight Gallery, Dublin (2017). Recent group exhibitions include *A Fiction Close To Reality*, Irish Museum Of Modern Art, Dublin, *Pallas Periodical Review*, Pallas Projects, Dublin; *Futures, Series 3, Episode 2*, Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin, and *Syntonic State*, Tulca 18, Galway.

Phillip McCrilly is a Belfast-based artist, curator and chef. Interested in the transgressive and interdisciplinary possibilities of food, hospitality and education, his work explores the idea of threshold in often collaborative forms. Combining somatic learning with haptic processes of making, food is frequently used as a conduit for the transference of knowledge and skills.

Recent food-based projects include *Spiral Jetty Sauerkraut* at CCA Derry~Londonderry, *Dance Food* at Project Arts Centre, Dublin, and *Kombucha Bar* at Catalyst Arts, Belfast. As a Co-Director at Catalyst Arts, Belfast (2013-15), and whilst at Golden Thread Gallery (2015-16) he curated a number of projects with artists such as Ericka Beckman, Amanda Beech,

Duncan Campbell, Vivienne Dick, Simon Fujiwara, and Seamus Harahan. In 2015 he worked as part 'Adventure Capital' Sean Lynch's project at the Irish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale - the 56th



International Art Exhibition. He was the recipient of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's Career Enhancement Scheme for Curatorial Practice (2016-17), receiving mentorship from the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin.

He is also a member of FRUIT SHOP, a collective of Belfast-based artists considering the city's ecosystem as a fertile site for research. Working within a suburban residential café, they merge food production and grassroots growing initiatives with local food histories.

Ben Malcolmson is a photographer born and based in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Ben works with photography, video and sculpture exploring alternative processes with relation to one's land and identity. His practice further deals with the communication of the landscape, looking at the familiar and psychological complexities of the self with performative-based elements as an undertone.

In 2019, Ben was awarded to be a part of 'Making Marks' by the Arab British Centre, funded by the British Council Kuwait. 'Making Marks', explored the impact of

international working on emerging artists. Ben's recent residency to Kuwait was one stage in the 'Making Marks' project. Over several months, Ben worked with Belfast Exposed Gallery on a body of work titled 'Murmur' which was exhibited in the gallery as a solo show during February 2020.



Dr Richard O'Leary is a fairy from Cork. A former Oxford don and Lecturer in sociology at Queen's University Belfast, he has abandoned statistical modelling for the archives and embraced performance storytelling. Richard's fairy stories are true.

Richard made his storytelling debut in 2016 at the tenx9 storytelling nights in Belfast where his performances have become known for his use of personal objects. In 2019 he was made artist in residence at the Outburst Queer Arts festival where he is a regular performer. His solo shows include 'There's a Bishop in my Bedroom' (2017, MAC theatre

Belfast); 'CUT: adult circumcision for the uptight' (2018, MAC); 'Stories for the month of the Holy Souls' (2019, Black Box Belfast); 'Looking for Love during Lockdown' (2020, online for Outburst).

A recuperating activist and recovering academic he is Visiting Scholar at the School of History at Queen's University and is currently employed part-time at HEReNI as Coordinator of Northern Ireland's LGBT Heritage Project.

Ruth McCarthy is Artistic Director of Outburst Arts in Belfast. She has been an LGBTQ+ activist for over 30 years, focusing on art and popular culture as catalysts for new ideas in queer thinking and social justice. She created some of the first queerzines in Ireland (c1995) and co-produced the first alternative queer clubs/ events in Belfast, including HOWL. For the past 13 years she has worked on the development of queer arts and education in the Northern Ireland through the annual Outburst Queer Arts Festival, also working with queer/LGBTQ+ arts producers and activists in the Global South and Caribbean - and more recently in North Africa and Middle East - to support the development of queer arts networks, training, commissions and knowledge sharing. She received a Paul Hamlyn Foundation Breakthrough Award in 2018 and is a steering group member of Alliance for Choice and a Director of the Black Box.

Initiated by **Reimagine Remake and Replay** an initiative to connect young people and heritage through creative media and the latest technologies whilst delving into the museums of Northern Ireland collections in new ways, introduce the **LGBTQIA+ Steering Committee** in collaboration with Catalyst Arts. The

committee's aim is to inform RRR on its impact representing the voices of LGBTQIA+ young people.



BIG QUEER PLINTH is the first project at Catalyst Art which looks at building a contemporary collection of Queer Artifacts that represent contemporary queer experience of young people in Northern Ireland in 2021. The artifacts will be selected through a series of online workshops throughout LGBTQ History Month and be presented in the gallery and included in the publication.

Shy Bairns are an artist collective interested in the intersections of contemporary art and bookmaking, and



the activation of projects within that space. Their practice aims to create more of a conversation between artist/curator, exhibition/artwork, and viewer/reader. Print runs through the core of the practice, utilising zines, print workshops and installations to create collaborative works. They are interested in ideas of identity, community, popular culture, and interactivity, with projects ranging from exhibitions about fan culture (Fanspeak at Castlefield Gallery, Manchester, 2019), to contemplating artist development within collectives (Jerwood Arts, London, 2019). Shy Bairns is the collaborative practice of Izzy Kroese, Erin Blamire, Eleanor Haswell and George Gibson, who have worked together since 2016.

Thomas Wells is an artist from Manchester, they have been working as co-director for Catalyst Arts since 2018. **Sam's Eden** is their final project and is supported by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Art Fund.

This project is dedicated to all our queer brothers, sisters, and 'those smart enough to have transcended gender' (David Hoyle 2016) past, present and future. Best wishes X!