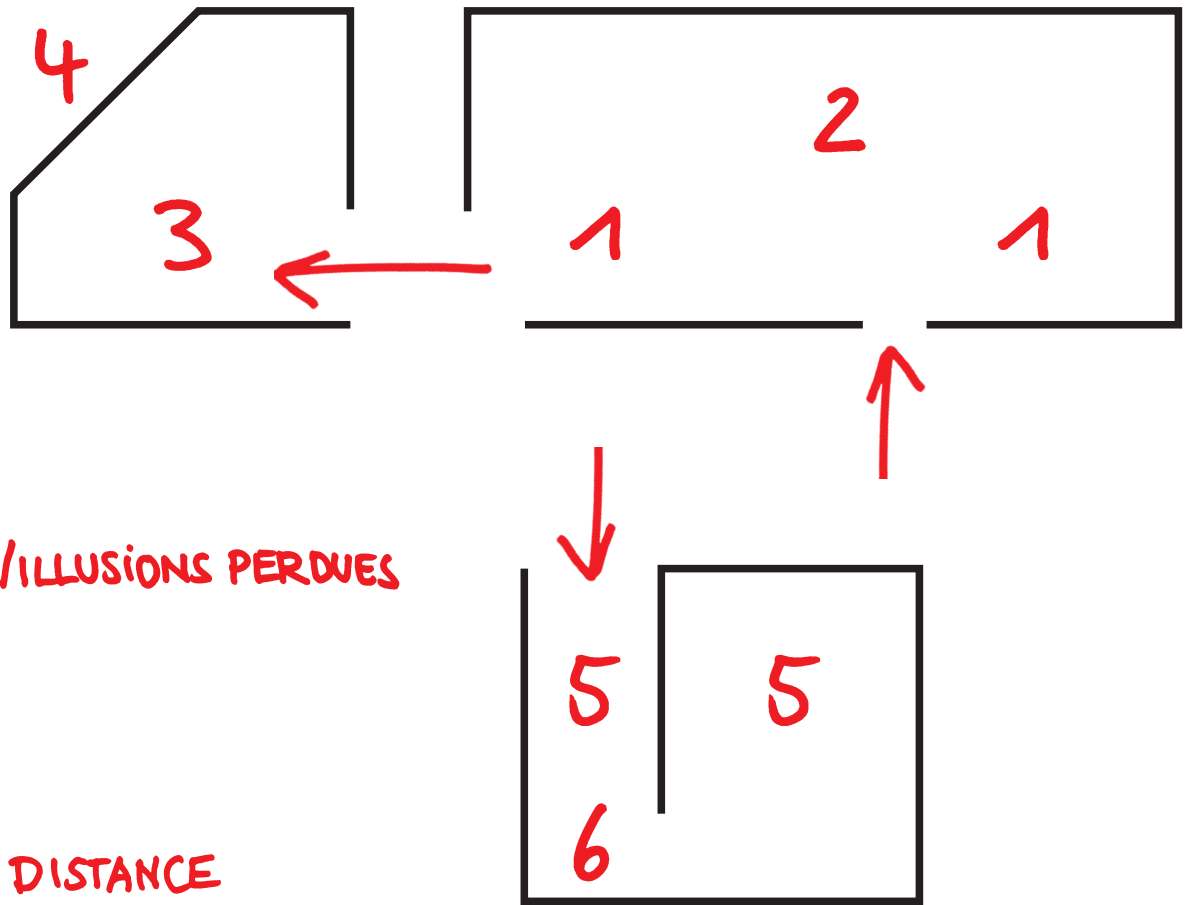




Sarah Pierce
Scene
of the Myth

John Hansard
Gallery
Southampton

5 October 2024 –
11 January 2025



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Introduction

The title of Sarah Pierce's exhibition, *Scene of the Myth*, conjures intriguing notions of storytelling and history – history which evolves and is re-shaped through its re-telling. The title is taken from a text by the artist herself in which she refers to social infrastructures, such as academies and museums, as conduits through which the narratives and conventions of a historical past are recreated in the present. So too this iteration of the exhibition offers opportunities for re-telling and re-shaping; not only of Pierce's work itself, but through the personal reflections and resonances it provokes in ourselves.

This is the third iteration of this exhibition. It spans a broad period of Pierce's practice but is not intended as a retrospective. It is an exhibition structured around specific ideas, themes, and the interrelationships between works. *Scene of the Myth* started its journey as a larger selection of works at IMMA, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin. It was then reconfigured in a condensed form at GfZK in Leipzig and has now culminated at John Hansard Gallery as a concise collation of six works. Each iteration spans common themes and ideas but has been re-worked in accordance with each space and location. This particular selection has arisen through conversations between Pierce and guest curator, Rike Frank, in collaboration with ourselves at JHG. We are so grateful to both Sarah and Rike for the care and generosity with which they have shared their thoughts and so carefully reflected on this new context.

The six works have been structured into three pairs, each occupying one of the gallery spaces. As well as utilising the physical qualities of the spaces, these works (and indeed Pierce's work overall) have a very marked and intrinsic connection to JHG's own institutional history, context, and programme. Our University of Southampton setting resonates closely with Pierce's own work as an educator. Not only providing an interesting background against which to view works such as *Campus* for example, but also prompting us to reflect on ideas of education and learning.

JHG has also often looked to artists who examine archives and histories, questioning those received histories and offering alternative perspectives. Additionally, we have always sought to highlight the means and processes by which artists make work, for example, the history of performance and the ways in which artists integrate performativity within their work. Experimental performative practices can be very collective endeavours, and Pierce's work is often highly collaborative in nature. As an organisation we continue to build upon an ethos which champions collaboration in all its forms, advocating for the richness and value that cross-disciplinarity and collaboration can offer. Pierce's commitment and openness to those she works with demonstrates the generosity of spirit necessary to create a truly shared and valued experience for all involved.

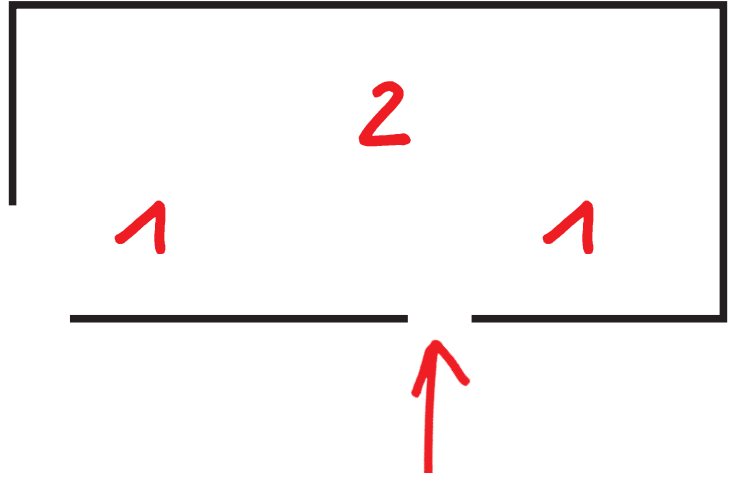
Similarly, exhibition-making itself is a highly social and shared undertaking and this project has benefitted from many hugely valuable contributions. Most importantly, we would like to offer our heartfelt and genuine thanks to Sarah Pierce for her dedication and creation of such an incredible and important body of work. We are also greatly indebted to Rike Frank, for her invaluable role in shaping each exhibition with such intelligence, care, and insight. Deepest thanks are due to Yvonne Quirnbach for her valued collaboration and incredible design work for the exhibitions and accompanying zines. Sincere and special thanks are due to Annie Fletcher, Rachael Gilbourne, and all the team at IMMA, who initiated and invited us to be a part of this project and who have been wonderful partners throughout. Many thanks to Franciska Zólyom, Vincent Schier and colleagues at GfZK for their valued help and cooperation. Grateful thanks also to those who have taken part as performers and participants with such enthusiasm. Finally, immense gratitude must go to all those within JHG and the technical team for their good humour and tireless dedicated hard work throughout.

by
Ros Carter
Head of Programme (Senior Curator)
John Hansard Gallery

1 LOST ILLUSIONS/ILLUSIONS PERDUES
2 CAMPUS

Lost Illusions / Illusions perdues and *Campus* continue Pierce's longstanding interest in the figure of the student, particularly the art student. Both artworks draw on unofficial archives, including ceramics, letters, and newspaper clippings and include chants and gestures. The exercises are built around repetitive acts such as teaching and learning, instituting and protesting, both implicating and questioning the legacies we inherit and the narratives we reproduce.

At intervals throughout the exhibition, demonstrators, recruited through an Open Call, will openly rehearse, and perform around the galleries amongst the visitors.



Each video presents documentation of a day-long workshop with art students, set within an exhibition. The students act out and perform choreographed chants and gestures derived from moving around the space and interacting with the works on display. Eleven ceramic pieces in the work come from a vast, unofficial archive of pieces made and left behind by artists visiting the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity in Alberta, Canada. These are shown with documents belonging to the Centre that refer to an incident in 1989 when a group of artists visiting the Centre vandalised an artwork by Canadian artist Mark Lewis.

The documents include an Open Letter by Lewis to the artists where he criticises the act as a form of censorship. A duplicate set of ceramics was made by Sarah Pierce, who worked with an assistant over the course of one day, using a photograph as reference to remake each piece. The doppelgängers are shown with letters written in 1994 that belong to the not-for-profit gallery Mercer Union in Toronto. The letters refer to a solo exhibition at the gallery in 1994 by artist Eli Langer, who at the time was 26 years old. In a series of remarkable events, Langer and Mercer Union's then Director, Sharon Brooks, were accused and tried in court for violating Canada's child pornography laws.

Two single-channel videos (no fixed duration) with synchronised sound. Eleven original ceramics and eleven replica ceramics with archival documents on refurbished plinths by John Hansard Gallery.

Commissioned in 2013 by curators Jesse McKee, Georgina Jackson, and Pip Day for the solo exhibition in three-parts, *Lost Illusions/Illusions perdues* at Walter Phillips Gallery in Banff; Alberta, Mercer Union in Toronto; Ontario, and SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art, in Montreal, Quebec. Titled after the epic novel by French writer Honoré de Balzac, *Illusions perdues*, originally published in three parts between 1837 and 1843.

Featuring students from the Conceptual Art Club from the Alberta University of the Arts, in the exhibition *Skirt the parlour, and shun the zoo* (2013) at Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff; Olivia Simpson and Kayla Kirsche from the College of Arts at the University of Guelph, in



LOST ILLUSIONS/ILLUSIONS PERDUES



→ the exhibition *Push and Pull* (2014) at Mercer Union, Toronto; and Thomas Dalbec from University of Quebec in Montreal in the exhibition *A Problem So Big It Needs Other People* (2014) at SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art, Montreal.



Selected unfinished works left behind in the ceramics workshop by visiting artists at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Canada, displayed on refurbished plinths.

Walter Dexter (Canada)

White vessel and base with blue spots and sgraffito, c. 1979/80

Courtesy Estate of Walter Dexter and Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Canada.

Shahadat Hossain (Bangladesh)

Spherical vase form, narrow mouth.

Blue and white oxidation, c. 1990

Spherical vase form, narrow mouth.

Dark stoneware and oxidation. c. 1990

Courtesy Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Canada.

Katsue Ibata (Japan)

White and black ladle with handle, 1989

Courtesy the artist and Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Canada.

Jihye Kim (South Korea)

Spiky blue-green form, porcelain-oxidation, c. 2000

Courtesy the artist and Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Canada.

Elsa Naveda (Mexico)

Four-pointed pyramid with crackle glaze, c. 2008

Courtesy the artist and Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Canada.

Elizabeth Ross (Mexico)

Two pieces, salt glazed (part of a 'Gang of Olotes'), 1999

Courtesy the artist and Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Canada.

France Trépanier (Canada)

Blue wax bowl, 2005

Courtesy the artist and Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Canada.

Anne Marie Wasshede (Sweden)

Colourful abstract form, slender.

Clay glaze-oxidation, c. 1985

Colourful abstract form, wide.

Clay glaze-oxidation, c. 1985

Courtesy Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Canada.

Artist unknown

Small, ridged test form. Blue and white metallic glaze, clay-oxidation. Date unknown.

Courtesy Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Canada.

Administrative materials related to vandalized Mark Lewis photograph, 1989, courtesy Paul D. Fleck Library and Archives, Banff Centre, Alberta: Security Occurrence Report, Leslie Sampson, 18 October 1989 (2pp)

Damage Report, Mark Lewis - "She Will Ride Her Skirt Up High Over The Slippery Surface"

Letter from Mark Lewis to Helga Pakasaar, October 1989 (3pp)

Request for Capital Expenditure, 2 January 1990.



Replica ceramics by Katie Lyle and Sarah Pierce, displayed on remade plinths.

Fired clay, unglazed, 2014.

Correspondence related to raid on Eli Langer exhibition and court case, 1993-94

Courtesy Mercer Union, Toronto, Canada:

Letter to the Board of Directors from Max Allen, 18 December 1993.

News Release, Censorship News, 19 December 1993.

Letter to the Board and Staff of Mercer Union from Toshiya Kuwabara, 20 December 1993.

Correction Notice, Toshiya Kuwabara, n.d.

'Dear Ben and Mercer Board Members' letter from Wayne Baerwaldt, 21 December 1993.

Letter to the Board of Mercer Union from Bob Murphy, 22 December 1993.

Letter to Mercer Union, "To Whom It May Concern" from John Marriott, 2 January 1994.



LOST ILLUSIONS/ILLUSIONS PERDUES



➤ Letter to the AG of Ontario from Steven Schechter, 10 January 1994.

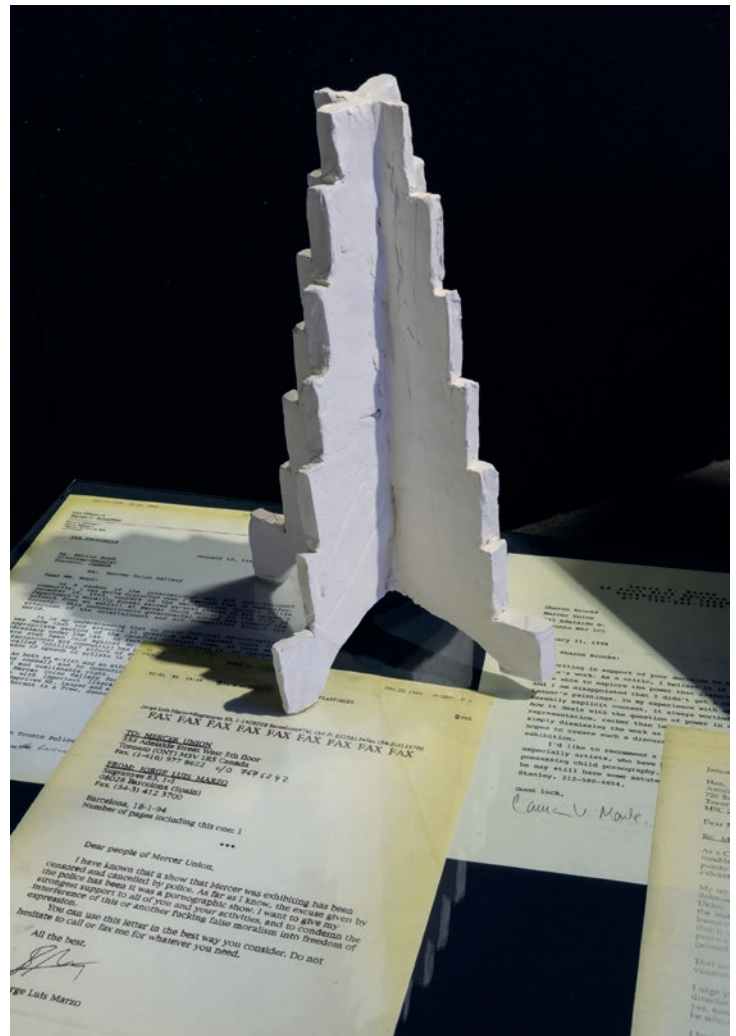
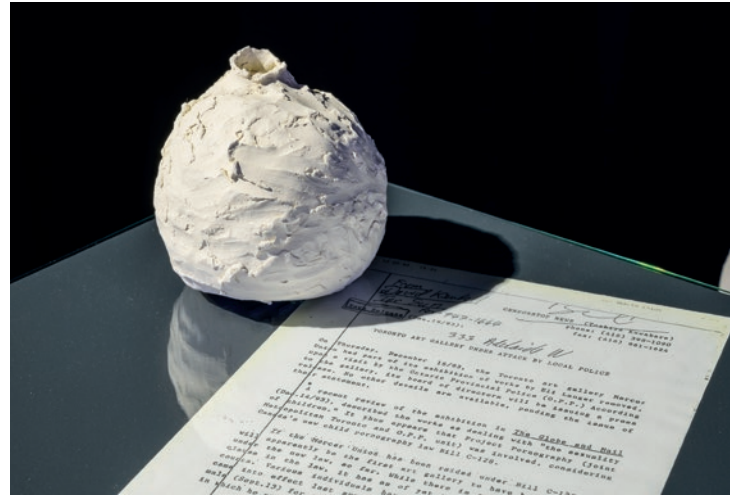
Letter to the AG of Ontario from the Ukrainian Women's Association of Canada, 12 January 1994.

'Dear People of Mercer Union' letter from Jorge Luiz Marzo, 20 January 1994.

Letter to Sharon Brooks from Laura Marks, 21 January 1994.

Letter from Toronto Arts Council to the Board of Mercer Union, 24 January 1994.

Letter to the AG of Ontario from Lisa Nabieszko, 31 January 1994. 📧



Campus emerges out of Pierce's ongoing interest in the college campus. To develop the work, she focused on the University of Pittsburgh, looking into the decade of transition between 1959 and 1969, when the Civil Rights movement in the United States merged into the anti-Vietnam War movement. The emergent politics of white students who opposed the war overshadowed and even clashed with the activism of Black students who wanted to transform the University. Selected newspaper clippings from the University of Pittsburgh's Civil Rights Archive report events that led to the establishment of the Black Action Society (BAS) and the rift between the two radical student movements. Five suspended red panels are a stage for a series of performances that draw on this material. The script pairs gestures from political protests with instructions from a studio art class, given by a teacher to her students as they engage in making 3D works.

Group performance with red fabric panels and archival documents.

Commissioned in 2011 by curator Georgina Jackson for the exhibition *Neighbo(u)rhood* at the Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh. Research support from the U Pitt Civil Rights Archive. Original script by Sarah Pierce adapted from a live studio art class by art teacher JoAnna Commandaros at the University of Pittsburgh.

Featuring performers recruited through an Open Call. Performances will take place on scheduled dates throughout the exhibition.



➤ Xerox copies of newspaper clippings.
 Courtesy University of Pittsburgh, University Archives
 Information Files, Civil Rights Archives.

‘Black and White: Is It that Plain?’ by Paul Stoller,
 Ed. *The Pitt News*, 9 September 1968.

‘Black Rebels End Pitt Sit-In’ continues, ‘Blacks Get
 Pledge’, *Pittsburgh Press*, 16 January 1969.

‘Something Black Is Coming’, *Pitt News*, 21 February
 1969.

‘Pitt Students Awaiting Fast’ continues, ‘49 At Pitt In
 Protest Fast’ *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 12 March 1969.

‘Sitting Room Only’. Photo: *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*,
 12 March 1969.

‘Pitt Protesters Move To Another Building’, *Pittsburgh
 Post-Gazette*, 13 March 1969.

‘Pitt Fast Due To End At Noon’, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*,
 14 March 1969.

‘The Sit-In At Pitt’, *Pittsburgh Press*, 19 March 1969.

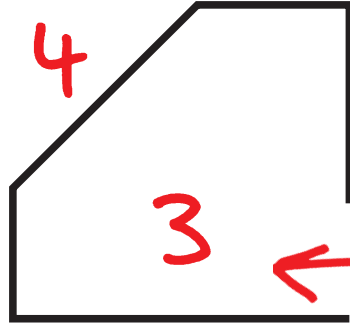
‘Protest Steps Out On Best Foot Here’, continues,
 “Protest Puts Best Foot Out”, *Pittsburgh Press*,
 15 October 1969.

My Cousin Went’. Photo: *Pittsburgh Press*,
 15 October 1969.

‘Pitt Students Plant White Crosses’. Photo: *Pittsburgh
 Press*, 15 October 1969.

“Blacks Jive At Talent Show”, *Pitt News*, 13 November
 1970. 🗨





3 PATHOS OF DISTANCE 4 SHELTER BREAD & FREEDOM

Over the past few years, Sarah Pierce has developed a concept she refers to as the “community of the exhibition” to describe how exhibitions have a particular ability to hold us, and works of art, in community. We enter the exhibition with others – other audiences, across generations, geographies, and times. The works bring to the fore Pierce’s ongoing and discerning attentiveness to community’s tenuous and unavowable bonds, whether it is the community of diaspora to be found in *Pathos of Distance* or the community of readers in *Shelter Bread & Freedom*.

Secondhand domestic furniture gathered locally around Southampton accompanies 42 images, along with a set of wall texts on nationhood, cultural identity, homeland, and hybridity.

The large window façade overlooking Guildhall Square features a German forest school in 1904, re-photographed by Pierce from its digital form. A set of shibori-dyed panels and support structures lean against the wall. During an afternoon of live readings, short texts will be read in languages spoken every day by people who live in Southampton.

Each photograph is a digital copy of an original work created between 1813 and 1912. Sourced from countries around the world, the works depict subjects and communities outside of Ireland associated with 100 years of a historic Irish diaspora. Domestic secondhand furniture sourced locally around Southampton accompanies the 42 images, along with a set of wall texts on nationhood, cultural identity, homeland and hybridity.

Forty-two digital photographs with various secondhand furniture. Laser-printed wall texts on paper. Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art, purchased 2021.

Commissioned in 2015 by Donal Maguire for *Visualising the Irish Diaspora*, an ongoing research project he initiated and developed at the ESB Centre for the Study of Irish Art at the National Gallery of Ireland. With research and writing by Kathryn Milligan, ESB CSIA Research Fellow (formerly).



>Platform 1 Portraits

Secondhand, domestic furniture, 20th and 21st century
Dimensions variable

Artist unknown

Miniature Portrait of James Miranda Barry
Oil on ivory, c. 1813–1816, private collection
5.6 × 6.5 cm

Samuel Calvert (1828–1913)

‘The Sandhurst Impersonator – Mrs Edward De Lacy Evans’
Illustrated Australian News, 15 November 1879
State Library of Victoria IAN01/10/79/14
21.94 × 31.06 cm

Robert Tucker (1807–1891)

‘Mrs. Sophia Bryant, Doctor of Science of the London University’
Illustrated London News, 19 July 1884
15.01 × 20.56 cm

Artist unknown

Catherine Hayes, ‘Irish opera singer and prima donna’
Lithograph with facsimile autograph, c. 1850
London: Cramer, Beale & Co., Regent Street, n.d.
23.79 × 32.15 cm

Wallace Morgan (1873–1948)

Miss Leonora O’Reilly, ‘American suffragette and trade unionist’
Pencil on paper, 1912
Courtesy National Portrait Gallery Smithsonian Institution
19.73 × 21.2 cm

James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903)

Jo
Drypoint on laid paper, 1861
Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
31.12 × 45.09 cm

Artist unknown

James (alias Yankee) Sullivan
Print, c. 1846
Library of Congress LC-DIG-pga-04356
31.66 × 45.5 cm

Francis Charles Needham (Viscount) Newry (1842–1915)

‘O’Farrel in Darlinghurst’
Pencil on paper, 1868
National Library of Australia NLA.PIC-an6332101
28 × 37.66 cm

Artist unknown

Admiral Guillermo (William) Brown (1777–1857), ‘Father of the Argentine Navy’
Postage stamp, Argentina c. 1956
3 × 3.8 cm

Artist unknown

Miniature Portrait of Daniel Florencio O’Leary (1801–1854)
Oil on ivory, n.d., collection unknown
6.9 × 7.87 cm

Artist unknown

‘Brig. Gen. Michael Corcoran, of the Irish Brigade late Colonel of the Gallant NY Sixty Ninth’
Lithograph, hand-coloured
Currier & Ives, New York, 1860s
Library of Congress LC-DIG-ppmsca-08409
29.5 × 38.6 cm

Gustave Courbet (1819–1877)

Jo, La Belle Irlandaise
Oil on canvas, 1866
Courtesy Nationalmuseum Stockholm
54 × 65 cm

Thomas Eakins (1844–1916)

The Veteran (Portrait of George Reynolds)
Oil on canvas, c. 1885
Courtesy Yale University Art Gallery
56 × 42 cm

Samuel E. Chamberlain (1828–1908)

The Great Western as Landlady
Depiction of Sarah Borginnes aka Sarah Bowman aka The Heroine of Fort Brown
Pencil and watercolour, c. 1846
12 × 14 cm

Platform 2 Fighting Irish

Secondhand, domestic furniture, 20th and 21st century
Dimensions variable

Samuel E. Chamberlain

Execution of Legion of San Patricio before Chapultepec
Watercolour on paper, c. 1846
San Jacinto Museum of History, Texas
8.25 × 18.25 cm



> Louis Lang (1812–1893)
Return of the 69th (Irish) Regiment, NYSM, from the Seat of War, 1862
 Oil on canvas, 1862–1863
 Courtesy New York Historical Society
 Photography Williamstown Art Conservation Center
 355.6 × 225.24 cm

Artist unknown
 ‘The Great Suffragist Procession’
Illustrated London News, 20 June 1908
 29.5 × 40 cm

Artist unknown
 ‘The Riots at New York – the rioters burning and sacking the colored orphan asylum’
Harper’s Weekly, 1 August 1863
 Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-106376
 46.6 × 36.27 cm

Artist unknown
 ‘Draft Riots in New York, The Mob Lynching a Negro in Clarkson Street’
Illustrated London News, 8 August 1863
 31 × 44 cm

Artist unknown
 ‘Draft Riots in New York, Destruction of the Colored Orphan Asylum’
 ‘Draft Riots in New York, Conflict Between the Military and the Rioters in First Avenue’
Illustrated London News, 15 August 1863
 31 × 44 cm

Artist unknown
 ‘Charge of the Police on the Rioters at the Tribune Office’
 Wood engraving, 1894
Harper’s Pictorial Record of the Civil War, Volume II.
 Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-47037
 25 × 15 cm

Artist unknown
 ‘Home Rule Riots in Glasgow’
Illustrated London News, 22 August 1880
 44 × 31 cm

Artist unknown
 ‘Attack on the Prison Van at Manchester and Rescue of the Fenian Leaders’
 ‘Fenian Prisoners at Manchester Conveyed through Mosley-Street on their way to the Bellevue Prison’
Illustrated London News, 28 September 1867
 60.5 × 44 cm

Artist unknown
 ‘Enlisting Irish and German Emigrants on the Battery at New York’
Illustrated London News, 16 September 1864
 44 × 31 cm

Eastman Johnson (1824–1906)
The Girl I Left Behind Me
 Oil on canvas, c. 1872
 Smithsonian American Art Museum
 Museum purchase made possible in part by Mrs. Alexander Hamilton Rice in memory of her husband and by Ralph Cross Johnson
 88.7 × 106.7 cm

Eastman Johnson (1824–1906)
The Fugitives
 Oil on paper board, c. 1862
 Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Gwendolyn O. L. Conkling, 40.59a-b
 35.24 × 42 cm

Platform 3 (5 pieces) Everyday
 Secondhand, domestic furniture, 20th and 21st century
 Dimensions variable

St. Patrick’s Day in America (pinxit John Reid)
 Duval & Hunter, Philadelphia
 Colour lithograph, 1872
 Marian S. Carson Collection, Library of Congress
 79.48 × 65.07 cm

Artist unknown
 ‘Irish Protestant Benevolent Society – Île Ste-Hélène’
Canadian Illustrated News, 5 September 1874
 Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec, BANQ
 Vieux-Montréal. Collection Édouard-Zotique Massicotte, P750, album de rue 6-59-a
 40 × 29.5 cm

Artist unknown
 ‘Montreal – Arrival of the Irish Canadian Pilgrims from Rome. Father Dowd Addressing the Multitude From the Rectory of St. Patrick’s Church’
Canadian Illustrated News, 25 April 1877
 Library and Archives Canada / Bibliothèque et Archives Canada; nlc-66011
 29 × 19.4 cm



>L.H. Beauvoir

'Quel evenement joyeux ...'

Voyages autour du monde: Australie, Java, Siam, Canton, Pékin, Yeddo, San Francisco, Paris 1879

Bibliothèque Nationale de France

29 × 19.4 cm

Artist unknown

'New York City, Irish Depositors of the Emigrant Savings Bank withdrawing money to send

to their suffering relatives in the old country'

Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 13 March 1880

Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ds-01486

26.25 × 20.39 cm

Matthew Somerville Morgan (1839-1890)

'New York City - Among the Poor - A Summer Evening Scene at the Five Points'

Frank Leslie's Illustrated News, 26 August 1873

Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-122335

35.79 × 44.25 cm

Frederick Burr Opper (1857-1937)

'The Irish Declaration of Independence that we are all familiar with'

Chromolithograph

Puck, 9 May 1883

Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-28386

29.18 × 36.07 cm

Artist unknown

'Concejo a Los Gringos'

El Mosquito, 13 October 1889

National Library of Argentina

40 × 28 cm

Artist unknown

'De Inmigrantes ...'

El Mosquito, 29 September 1889

National Library of Argentina

40 × 28 cm

Artist unknown

'The Chinese Question'

Harper's Weekly, 18 February 1871

Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-53346

26.67 × 40.64 cm

Augustus Earle (1793-1838)

'A Government Jail Gang, Sydney N.S. Wales'

J. Cross: London 1830

State Library of New South Wales

31 × 38 cm

D.E. Wyand

The Squatters of New York - Scene near Central Park

Holzstich, 1869

Wood engraving, 1869

Harper's Weekly, 26 June 1869

Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-106378.

36 × 44.8 cm

James Pattison Cockburn

Long Island on the Rideau Canal (Irish Labourer)

View near Manotick, Ontario

Watercolour, pen and ink on paper, 1830

Courtesy Royal Ontario Museum

26.95 × 35.81 cm

William Clark (1803-1883)

'Cutting the Sugar Cane'

Aquatint, coloured, 1823

London: Infant School Society Depository

JCB Library Brown University

39.5 × 27.3 cm

Thomas Eakins (1844-1916)

The Swimming Hole

Oil on canvas, c. 1885

Amon Carter Museum of American Art


92 × 70 cm

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877)

Le Sommeil

Oil on canvas, 1866

Petit Palace Paris, Musée des Beaux-arts de la Ville de Paris

200 × 135 cm 

A concrete shelter in Dublin's Phoenix Park is the prompt for an expansive artwork that asks us to consider our collective and sustained connections to public space. The large window façade of John Hansard Gallery facing the public square below features a German forest school in 1904, re-photographed by Pierce from its digital form. A set of shibori-dyed panels and support structures lean against the wall. The panels were sewn by Aoife McLaughlin and dyed by Cliona McLoughlin, both former students from the National College of Art and Design in Dublin who graduated during the pandemic. Scaled to the interior of a public structure (a concrete shelter in Phoenix Park, Dublin), they mark out a site of community, study and care. A community of readers, comprised of individuals who have migrated to Southampton, will present short texts, read aloud in their home language, as part of the Gallery's public programme. The audience is invited to gather and listen, without (necessarily) understanding the languages spoken every day, by people who live in Southampton.

Digital print on muslin with oak rods and rope. Shibori-dyed fabric panels with copper, oak rods and rope. Mounted on stained plywood. With public readings in languages other than English and a limited edition zine.

Commissioned in 2021 by Michael Hill and Clíodhna Shaffrey for the exhibition *Wayward Eye* at Temple Bar Gallery + Studios, Dublin. Titled after a speech given to the labour exchange in Saint-Étienne by French philosopher Albert Camus (1953). Patterns, cutting and sewing by Aoife McLaughlin. Shibori dying and fraying by Cliona McLoughlin. *Shelter Readings* in the People's Flower Garden, Phoenix Park, with texts in Arabic, Bhojpuri, Creole, Danish, Greek, Hindi, Kinyarwanda, Norwegian, Polish, Slovene, Spanish, Swiss German, Telugu, Vietnamese, chosen and read aloud by Anh Ngo, Anistah Jugnarain, Devi Chakouree, Embla Müller, Jaime Luján Alarcón, Laura Twagirayezu, Maria Maarbjerg, Nishta Sarathee, Simone Stolz, Stavi Mitsu, Tuqa Al-Sarraj, Visnou Chakouree, Žiga Kelenc, and Zuzanna Przybyla. Special thanks to Nasser Aidara. The Shelter Bread & Freedom zine with texts by Donna Rose, Grace O'Boyle and Sarah Pierce is available to read online at www.themetropolitancomplex.com. 

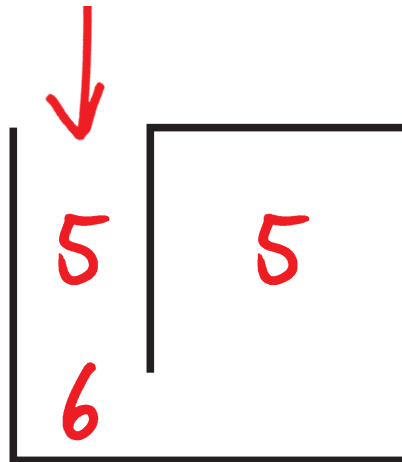


5 NO TITLE
6 THE SQUARE

As with other works in the exhibition, *No Title* and *The Square* have conversation, collectivity and communality at their heart. The range of media, materials, and references opens up relationships between art-making as material action, such as painting a black square, and the space within it for reflection to take place.

The Square is a play without a script, performed by staff members of John Hansard Gallery using methods from Bertolt Brecht's *Lehrstücke* (learning- plays).

In *No Title*, two partners are guided through a series of table-top exercises, responding to each other and alternating roles. In the process, body knowledge and habitual gestures mix with laughter and the experience of loss. Dementia is highlighted as a condition that affects everyone involved.



No Title considers the condition of dementia in relation to the protocols of art-making. Anchored in a series of modestly produced videos, the work bypasses the limitations of clinical discourse to re-think personhood around dementia. Filmed in her family home, and assisted by her niece operating the camera, Pierce intimately guides her parents through a series of table-top exercises she developed that speak of art-making, habitude, domesticity, and also unflinchingly of memory, loss, and familial love.

Six single-channel videos on flatscreen monitors, with workshop materials. Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art, purchased 2021.

Commissioned in 2016 by Sara Greavu for CCA Derry~ Londonderry in Northern Ireland as part of the *Our Neighbourhood public programme*. Featuring Anne and Russell Pierce. Titled after paintings c.1987-1997 by Dutch-American artist Willem de Kooning following his Alzheimer's diagnosis. With thanks to project participants from Creggan Day Centre and Alzheimer's Society, Foyle, Derry. Workshop facilitation in Derry by John Beattie, with filming by Sean Mullan. Production assistance and filming in Maine, USA, by Josie Pierce. The book *No Title* co-edited by Sara Greavu and Sarah Pierce, published by CCA Derry (2017), is available in the GfZK exhibition. With writing by TJ Clark, Karl Holmqvist, Mason Leaver-Yap, Roy Claire Potter and Jacob Wren.

Exercise 1 Found/Object:

8 minutes, 14 seconds. Objects on fabric.

Exercise 2 Muscle/Memory:

6 minutes, 34 seconds.

Exercise 3 Mirror/Tracer:

12 minutes, 3 seconds.


Exercise 4 Ghost/Image; Exercise 6 Still/Life:

7 minutes, 5 seconds; 7 minutes, 13 seconds.

Exercise 5 Figure/Ground:

23 minutes, 32 seconds. Felt, rope, rods, blocks, and paper on fabric.

Exercise 7 Shape/Shift:


Eight drawings, ink on paper. 

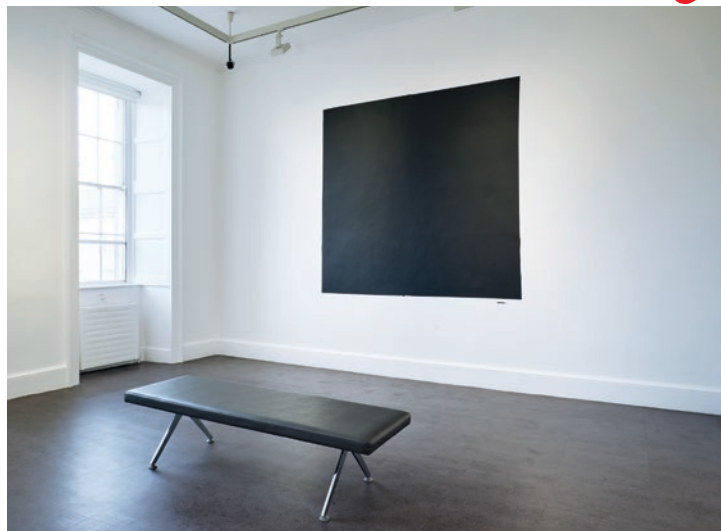


The collective action of painting a square on a wall is the starting point for developing an experimental “play without a script”. Each new set of actors results in a re-scripted set of chants and gestures that make up the performance. Over a day-long workshop, the actors use Bertolt Brecht’s *Lehrstücke* (learning play) to transform their group action into a social commentary. There are no characters, no plot or other narrative devices.

Group performance with painted black square.

Commissioned in 2015 by curator Jennie Guy for the artist-in-residence programme *Playing* at Blessington Community College. Preliminary workshop in 2015 at the 4th Moscow Curatorial Summer School led by Paul O’Neill, Mick Wilson and Janna Graham. Evolving script developed by Sarah Pierce with the performers.

Performed by staff members of John Hansard Gallery. 



The following texts are previously published writings which are manifestations of the conversations, encounters and readings that inform, feed into, and become part of the works in the exhibition. They highlight patterns of making and thinking that define Pierce's art practice; a practice which is deeply invested in what it means socially and politically to make art.

Scene of the Myth, the title of the exhibition, is taken from an essay of the same name written by the artist.

SCENE OF THE MYTH

Sarah Pierce

I.

*The event? And had it taken place?*¹

Maurice Blanchot

In 1963, in response to an invitation to participate in a group exhibition of former students of Hans Hofmann,² Allan Kaprow constructed two rooms in a warehouse: one brightly lit and decorated with mostly yellow furniture and objects, arranged like a small bedroom; the other dim, lit by a solitary lightbulb, and filled with "junk"—ladders, boxes, stacks of paper, plastic wrap, etc.. This room's walls were covered in dark paper and the objects within appeared more stored than *arranged*.

Kaprow provided a lengthy set of instructions to accompany the work, in which the artist laid out his plans for visitors to remake the rooms after him—choosing the furniture, exchanging it between the rooms and adding their own "interpretations" of the environment. Each day the rooms would change through the efforts of someone coming in and rearranging what someone else had left behind.³

Kaprow embellished his instructions with recommendations. These he wrote as a direct address, in which he urges visitors to consider various formal and aesthetic relationships between the objects, the rooms, and, significantly, people. Try, for example, contrasting "positive and negative" elements; place a "sunset-colored" room against a "blue-Monday one." "Do you like candy-canes? Then why not paint everything in stripes?" He goes on to encourage visitors to produce new compositions even after they leave. "Consider whether or not you're a red-head and dressed in Kelly green. Are you fat, fatter than the table? In that case, quickly change your clothes if the small chair's color doesn't correspond; and also lose some weight." In places, the instructions adopt a pseudo-philosophical tone: "How long does it take to develop artistic senses? Why not ask an interior decorator? [...] Instead of 'forms' try simply an idea like rooms full of people versus empty rooms. [...] If form is too much for you why not chuck it all and take the pure leap? What is a 'pure leap?'"⁴

The instructions are part of the work, and the address treads a line between judgement and charade, affect and lousy taste, where participation is more a result of cajoling than open systems, cast and yet unbound by the space of the artwork or exhibition, where "anyone can find or make rooms of any shape, size, proportion, and color," and "everyone else can change them."⁵ The delivery brims with absurdist logic, and one can hear Kaprow, the student, poking fun of Hofmann, the teacher. The latter would often paint as he lectured, in order to demonstrate his famous push-and-pull technique of moving pigment around a canvas to create abstract works. Hofmann's aesthetically charged language translates into a joke among his students, and yet there is more at stake Kaprow's "furniture comedy" than just parody. As Kaprow's Happenings evolved from once-off events into socially charged environments capable of expanding (in theory) beyond the specifics of space and time, his instructions for *Push and Pull* prepare us



→ for a work that hinges on its own exhibition—on the moment when it is most exposed, and therefore most conditioned by and co-dependent upon a *community of the exhibition*.

In writing about community, Jean Luc Nancy describes a scene of transmission where people gather to receive narratives he names *myths*. Unlike other stories, the myth includes the scene of its invention and recital—a scene connected in space and across *times*. He writes: “With myth, the passing of time takes shape, its ceaseless passing is fixed in an exemplary place of showing and revealing.”⁶ The community of the exhibition is not simply present to receive the artwork (as narrative or myth). It is initiated into the *scene of the myth*, as Nancy writes, “if myth is primarily defined as that with which or in which time turns into space.” The Museum of Modern Art in New York’s original press release for the show took considerable care to relate the parameters of Kaprow’s contribution, to describe the objects and rooms *and* the instructions, and to indicate that the work would not tour with the other artworks, but that other exhibitors “can stage an environment in the spirit of a text provided by the artist.”⁷

Crucially, the community of the exhibition is as dispersive as the work, perhaps initiated, but a community nonetheless of “anyone.” This is not to say that Kaprow’s *Push and Pull* is an open system where the viewer completes the work, nor is it conceptual (formed as instructive text), nor is the claim that through compliance everyone is an artist. And despite multiple re-stagings in recent years by artists, curators, and even dealers, the work is not *contingent* (as with relational aesthetics). It is *dependent*, wholly and completely, upon the community of the exhibition. A community, if you will, that does not refer to a particular set of individuals bound to a particular origin, but rather a community that traverses the event—appearing and dispersive—anyone and no one.

If there is any doubt as to whether or not Kaprow expected visitors to carry out his instructions, it is worth noting that he added an amendment to “the exhibitors,” which was never meant to be read by the public. The original show, “Hans Hofmann and His Students,” was held over one day in a warehouse in Manhattan, organized by MoMA before traveling to various venues in the United States. The plan for the tour, as mentioned, was to send Kaprow’s instructions only, along with the works by other artists in the show. However, at a certain point Kaprow realized that his intentions for the work were not happening (so to speak). The amendment attends to this problem:

Implied here, and of course in the actual Environment-Happening, is the wish to by-pass the habit of ‘ssh, don’t touch,’ useful with respect to older art but an impediment to understanding certain traditions that have recently begun to develop. I am most interested in the handshake between the artist and others. The museum or gallery director can now be instrumental in bringing this about.

In parentheses Kaprow adds: (From reports, I gather that this arrangement has not worked out optimally. In an exhibition atmosphere people are not geared to enter into the process of art. Hence, this kind of work is much better off away from the habits and rituals of conventional culture. A.K.)⁸

This is a subtle clause, an additional directive for the exhibitor to be instrumental in the work, taking on a special role in its repeated and restaged transmission by demonstrating how to move the objects, touch them, drag them, and arrange them. A momentary defeat, perhaps, but revealing of Kaprow’s ambivalence towards this abdication of the work to the “scene” of the exhibition. He acknowledges that the museum or gallery director carries or conveys the special connection between the artist and “others”—whom I am naming the community of the exhibition. Nancy describes the speaker who delivers the myth this way: “We do not yet know whether the one speaking is from among them or if he is an outsider. We say that he is one of them, but different from them because he has the gift, or simply the right—or else it is his duty—to tell the story.”⁹ It is not the speaker’s story; it is the community’s. The myth is not authored; it is *held* and sustained.¹⁰ Kaprow’s ambivalence expands to the curbing effect of the exhibition on an audience that is unsure (or unwilling) to exceed convention and, in turn, onto an artwork that refuses to be avowed as such.

II.

Allan Kaprow’s instructions for *Push and Pull* include a large, cumbersome wooden crate that houses a numbered series of cardboards onto which Kaprow painted (using heavy black paint) his original set of instructions. Like an Ark and its tablets, the crate and its contents are safely stored at mumok in Vienna as part of the museum’s permanent collection. In 2010, curators Barbara Clausen, Achim Hochdörfer, and Catherine Wood invited me to make a new work for a group exhibition at mumok, which would travel to Tate Modern. The exhibition was called *Push and Pull*, after Kaprow’s work (and not, ironically, after Hofmann’s technique).

Future Exhibitions (2010) is a performance that takes place in the midst of the environment of Allan Kaprow’s *Push and Pull*:

A Furniture Comedy for Hans Hofmann (1963). The performance takes place in two rooms connected by a large opening; one room is white, the other is black. The white room is evenly lit. The black room is rigged with theatre spots and colored gels. Each room consists of materials gathered from around the building: shelves, tables, rope, a television monitor, a fan, scraps of timber, boxes, frames, cardboard tubes, used carpet, packing materials, and pedestals. It is the generic material found in and around cultural organizations, in offices and storage spaces—the stuff of past exhibitions, relating to the administration of artworks, their display, as well as the physical managing of the institution.

When the performance begins, the white room contains only black or white materials, arranged in geometric configurations around the room. The black room holds all the remaining objects, set up in discrete combinations that loosely resemble artworks by known artists. For example, a pair of wooden crates placed side-by-side (Donald Judd), a piece of carpet carefully folded into a symmetrical lump (Robert Morris), low-level static on a TV (Nam June Paik), or a set of transparent pipes leaning against the wall (Eva Hesse).



→ The audience gathers inside the white room and a speaker, standing on a plain chair, announces the “first scenario”:
This is a photograph of an exhibition. In it there are several canvases hanging on the walls with paintings of geometric shapes, circles, squares, crosses and similar compositions. The paintings are numbered 1 through 39 with bits of paper tacked to the wall. The paintings are hung in groups, salon style. The photograph is oriented to the corner of the room. Hung in the upper corner, near the ceiling is a black square on a white canvas. On the floor, placed next to the wall is a modest black chair. It is *The Last Futurist Exhibition*.¹¹

The speaker gestures to the walls, pointing at paintings that are not present, describing how they are hung, and finally gesturing to an empty corner where the walls meet near the ceiling. After each scenario, there is a scene change witnessed by the audience, made by specially prepared demonstrators who move the various items between the rooms, dismantling and rearranging the objects. These changes are long and drawn out and the audience members view them from where they stand in the room, so that at times the demonstrators’ actions are difficult to see depending on one’s vantage point. The performance continues in this way, with the speaker moving back and forth between the black room and the white room, and the audience following, crowding into the space, as the demonstrators rearrange the rooms until finally the black room is completely empty and the white room is dense with materials.

Each scenario in *Future Exhibitions* relates to a historical exhibition, but not necessarily a historic one. Beginning with the famous photograph of Kazimir Malevich’s installation of thirty-nine Suprematist paintings and ending with a letter written by the director of an art space in Dublin to a student whose work was damaged by a drunkard who “went berserk” at the opening when asked to leave. The documents (a photograph, a calendar, a newspaper article, and several letters) form the script, so that each scene works as an intensification of both the act of making something public and visible (the act of exhibiting), and its documentation (the archive, exhibit, or evidence). “Future exhibitions” is a category: it is how institutions anticipate “the work” before it arrives in the exhibition and how publics prepare for what comes next. The intersection of references, past and present, present and absent, continues throughout the performance, as the speaker moves back and forth between the white room and the black room, joined by the audience. With this movement, the objects shift as well, as the demonstrators carefully and methodically take the installation apart and remake the next scene. These changes happen while the audience watches, and over the course of the performance the rooms change as a result of materials being dragged, rolled, disassembled, pushed, and pulled between the rooms. Each carefully prepared interval re-situates a respective document in space and time, literally performing the spaces between times, between documents as a fluctuation of objects, people, and narration. The space is difficult to navigate physically, as the audience, demonstrators, and materials move around, crowded in, cutting across the two rooms.

If we pause for a moment and think about the object of the curatorial—and in this moment, this hesitation, if we shift slightly to ask, what is the subject of the curatorial—we may begin to distill the *community of the exhibition*. A subject produced at the moment of exposition, beyond the display of artworks (and beyond the necessary, usual or coerced participations, interactions, and gatherings that arise out of the moment of exhibition). Things like: knowledge, encounters, gatherings, economies, exchanges, careers, experts, territories, and so on. If we think of an exhibition as an end, a destination, something we move towards, then the curatorial is only an organizing function, a process, how we get there. However, returning to Nancy, the exhibition is also a mythic scene (not to be confused with myth itself):

“It names things unknown, beings never seen. But those who have gathered together understand everything, in listening they understand themselves and the world, and they understand why it was necessary for them to come together...”¹² Like the gestures and interruptions that Walter Benjamin cites in epic theatre that run *through a moment of exposition*, beyond the event and around it, the curatorial takes place in intervals, so that in fact, the curatorial sustains the scene of the myth, and turns the exhibition into something held, temporarily and less bracketed in terms of a beginning and end.

III.

For Hannah Arendt, the nuances that link action to freedom and plurality, speech and remembrance, distinguish political action as a mode of human togetherness on the one hand, from prescriptive political agendas on the other. If we consider the meaning of politics as described by Arendt, rather than presuming there is a consensus around the political, we can find ways to address “those enduring elements that are worthy of being remembered and are revealed only in our living and acting together politically.”¹³ Paul O’Neill describes the curatorial at its most productive, as the prioritization of “a type of working with others that allows for a temporary space of cooperation, coproduction, and discursivity to emerge in the process of doing and speaking together.”¹⁴ For O’Neill, the curatorial involves a constellation of discursive forms and processes, of varying degrees of publicness, that at times disrupt or, at the very least, remain unreconciled within an exhibition. Without fixating on process or any semblance of medium, and without setting up an opposition between the publicness of the exhibition and the less, or not-at-all, public activity that runs through all exhibition-making, we can pick up O’Neill’s inference of a temporary space of doing and speaking.

The apparent openness of Kaprow’s invitation carries a set of expectations, forms and traditions. The work can be reproduced, possessed, and imposed, and *equally*, dispossessed, disavowed, and discharged. This is the seed of Kaprow’s instructions—they can be *not followed* without interrupting “the work.” The work’s exhibition is a return to the awkward scene of the myth—a work that never actually *happened* to begin with. The folly of each restaging of *Push and Pull*—and there have been many—is the appeal for curators and artists alike that these scenarios can stand-in for a community that may or may not



arrive, a conversation that never takes place, but an artwork that can be attested to nonetheless.

The community of the exhibition is flawed by the very temporalities that accompany remoteness, distance, invariable failures, and the impossibilities of duration as a mode of being together. Nancy writes that the structure of *being exposed* involves being, “posed in exteriority, according to an exteriority, having to do with an outside in the very intimacy of an inside.”¹⁵ The community of the exhibition involves what is made manifest and exposed, temporarily and incompletely—keeping in mind that “what takes place” is not always in the realm of the visible, and that all displays, even ostensibly “permanent” ones, eventually recede and disappear.

Nancy also writes of the scene of the myth which, when interrupted, renders the myth of community impossible. To interrupt the scene of the myth is to intercede in a legacy of discrete and enduring narratives contained within a metanarrative. The community of the exhibition contains grammars that reproduce universalizing narratives as well as other, “localized” stories, subjectivities, and identities.¹⁶ The temporality of the moment of exposition, including the repeated disappearances, interruptions, and intervals between exhibitions, comprises what it means to be the community of the exhibition—to be narrated, transmitted, and received as such. Rather than bound in a state of togetherness, exposure in exhibition leaves us vulnerable.

It is because both the exhibition and the art it contains arise out of plurality that I am seeking to characterize the community of the exhibition through a politics that coincides with entering into an “address” with others through acts that present, demonstrate, reveal, invoke, make manifest, and, importantly, expose. Exhibitions summon and gather artworks and artists, audiences and narratives, and even when they prepare us to receive counter-narratives to unravel the scene of the myth by correcting the past or taking stock of the present, exhibitions reinforce a consensus, whether new or “renewed” that this is *the moment*. But regardless of claims and narratives, meta- or counter-, there is a quality of coming together that has to do with what it means to enter a community that precedes the moment, and extends beyond. A community that is not circumscribed by the event, and is unavowable through works of art. We know how to perform Kaprow’s instructions. The tradition has been absorbed. With allegiance, the community of the exhibition returns to the scene of the myth we have sworn to uphold.

¹ Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community* (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill 1988), p. 31.

² “Hans Hofmann and His Students”, 18 April 1963, presented by the Museum of Modern Art at Santini’s Warehouse, 447 West 49th Street New York.

³ Allan Kaprow, “Instructions: Push and Pull: A Furniture Comedy for Hans Hofmann”, *Assemblage, Environments, and Happenings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1966).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Jean Luc Nancy, “Myth Interrupted”, in *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 44.

⁷ Press release, Museum of Modern Art, 18 April 1963. The exhibition travelled on to Colorado, Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana. https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/3139/releases/MOMA_1963_0051_48.pdf (accessed February 11, 2019).

⁸ Kaprow, op. cit., “Amendment to Instructions”, 1963.

⁹ Nancy, “Myth Interrupted”, p. 43.

¹⁰ Nancy writes: ‘In the speech of the narrator, their language for the first time serves no other purpose than that of presenting the narrative and of keeping it going. It is no longer the language of their exchanges, but of their reunion – the sacred language of a foundation and an oath.

The teller shares it with them and among them.” From “Myth Interrupted”, p. 44.

¹¹ *Future Exhibitions* (2010). Installation and performance. Original script by Sarah Pierce. Commissioned jointly by mumok, Vienna and Tate Modern, London, for “Push and Pull”, curated by B. Clausen et. al.


¹² Nancy, “Myth Interrupted”, p. 44.

¹³ Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken 2005), p. 199. Arendt’s theory of action comes into play here, as she states, ‘The goal is not contained within the action itself, but unlike ends, neither does it lie in the future...’

¹⁴ Paul O’Neill, “the Curatorial Constellation and the Paracuratorial Paradox,” in *The Exhibitionist* no. 6 (San Francisco: CCA Wattis Institute 2012), pp. 56–57.

¹⁵ Nancy, “Foreword,” in *The Inoperative Community*, xxxvii.

¹⁶ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, reprint 1997), p. 156. Lyotard’s idea of ‘grand narrative’ is the story that is considered common to all. He proposes a move to small narratives—*les petit récits*—as a way to break up or unravel the metanarrative’s dominant stream.

[Sarah Pierce, “Scene of the Myth”, in Beatrice von Bismarck and Rike Frank (eds.), *Of(f) Our Times: Curatorial Anachronics* (London: Sternberg Press, 2019), pp. 9–22.] 

SARAH PIERCE

Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity,
18 January–9 March 2014

Befitting its dyadic title, Sarah Pierce's exhibition "Lost Illusions/ Illusions perdues" prompts two possible interpretations: one based in denotation and the other in connotation—although trying to untangle one from the other is not so simple. Forming something akin to an institutional memory-based scatter piece, Pierce's recent work taps into the Banff Center's varied history, with its assortment of ceramics from former artists-in-residence, kept by instructor Ed Bamiling, and a four-channel video displaying students participating in Brecht-like learning plays. Meanwhile, copies of archival material, placed casually throughout the space, track correspondences between artist Mark Lewis and the institution following the vandalization of his photograph in 1989. The unearthing of the imbroglio over Lewis's piece, which was allegedly attacked by a group of women because of its perceived pornographic content, is almost institutional critique; it implicates the center in political discourse, countering its image as an idyllic alpine retreat, removed from the art world.

While looking at the exhibition as a literal portrait of an institution raises rewarding questions, this perspective alone hazards reducing the show to a litany of overt references while failing to account for its aesthetic presence. It might be precisely what Susan Sontag, in her 1964 essay "Against Interpretation," deemed "the revenge of the intellect upon art." More rewarding is when viewers take in the exhibition as a mixture of seemingly unrelated materials, discourses, and ambiances. The totality becomes an ephemeral landscape of form and content that provides space for viewers to experience place in its rich complexity, where meaning is not prescribed by the artist, but becomes an active agent—unsettled and unsettling.

Zachary Cahill

[Zachary Cahill, "Sarah Pierce", *Artforum.com*, 25 February 2014.] 

LEARNING PIECES

AN INTERVIEW WITH SARAH PIERCE BY CLAIRE POTTER

Roy Claire Potter

[...]

SP Yeah there is, but actors also have a different ethical code in relation to the script. When I did *The Artist Talks* performance at The Showroom in London, a year before I did *Campus*, that also happened with MFA students from Chelsea and Goldsmiths, and I started to realise that there was a certain demand in the work as it moved away from working something out together and more toward me directing the action. The actors in Eindhoven had to memorise the dialogue phonetically, and for a Dutch speaker who has never even heard spoken Irish, that's quite a demand. It was probably the first time Irish has been spoken by Dutch actors in the Netherlands! But in most of the performance works I've made it isn't until the third or fourth time it is performed that it really forms into a work and I know it's not really going to change that much. And so the more it's performed, the more I can understand what it is, and how to perform it again. By the time we performed *Campus* at FlatTime House in London it was already quite structured, so I could impart my confidence to the group, and be more of a guide to performing the nine exercises that form the script. The bits between the nine exercises, for me that's where the performance is, when the group is relying on each other and figuring out how they get from one exercise to the next.

RCP That's the thing that strikes me when I remember participating in *Campus*, the feeling that the work was most active within that group. I remember thinking at the time: who is this audience following us from room to room?

SP I know—and there is an exercise in the middle when one of the performers chants directly to the audience, 'You don't have any structure!' When I did it at VOX in Montreal the audience was much more frontal. So if you imagine a big room where the entrance is at one end, and the audience were all gathered at that end, and the red curtains the group pulls back and forth during the latter half of the script were hung in the other half of the room. So we walked in doing the entrance chant and moved toward the curtains, and the audience stayed where they were and watched the performance. This audience watched us rehearse three times and then the final performance, and they really got that it was about the group-body as a connected, learning thing. I heard later that while I was working with the performers between each rehearsal there was another artist, a teacher, who was talking with her students about what had just happened. I wish I had that as a recording! So at the same moment that I was instructing the performers she was saying things to her students like, OK, so what just happened here? What did you see? Is this a typical performance? Etc...

RCP Ha-ha! And *Campus*' chanting comes from an art class too...

SP Yeah, exactly!

RCP I find it interesting that the performance also doesn't come at the end of the rehearsal period, but is constituted by the preliminary elements; reading the script, talking, trying things out among the group...

SP ...and the audience—their learning curve is important to what is happening. In this way it relates to the content. The script isn't developed from that part of art school teaching that is about grading students 2:1 or 2:2, but those moments when something is being developed, and more than that, it's about taking that moment when something is being tested out and saying that is actually *something*. It's like what you were describing with the redaction performance, when you the writer, reader, and performer are struggling with the words, which is very different if somebody else occupies one of those roles. So it's about paying attention to those moments and not calling them process, or rehearsal even, or test—all these words imply some future realisation, and that's not at all what interests me.

RCP And as *Campus* continues to be performed and the script becomes inevitable, does that mean we move away from the work? Or, to put it another way, is the emergence of the script at the detriment of the performance?

SP That's a really good question and I wonder the same thing. I was in Moscow last summer with curating students making gestural and chanting performances, undocumented and it sort of doesn't exist, and I wonder about that relationship to what a 'final work' is because on one level the script crystallises something but each version of the performance is never going to be realised fully, and that's where it becomes an analogy for me, for the art school as an ever-changing and replenished community. But it's also administrative. The script is just administration in a way; think about it in relation to the bureaucracy of a campus or a school. There is always someone who can perform it. Last year, when there were student protests in the National College of Art and Design, and I said this to you before, the administration was counting on the fact that there will always be a community, there will always be a present student body, and it will not be this student body. It is cynical. But in a similar way, the script is anticipating that there is always going to be someone there to make it happen. The script can be really, really passive. And that's what I like and don't like about the idea of a script. It's not that the script is my writing or the artwork, it's more like an inventory—and then, because I'm interested in archives, I want to analyse those moments that aren't 'the work'. The instruction that *Campus* is based on is totally connected to the repetitions and protocols of administration, of administering instruction through spoken word.

RCP And the verbal instruction that the teacher gives her students, the recording which *Campus*' script is developed from, within that are the echoes of her teacher and earlier administrations.

SP Exactly, and it's not what we think is happening when we're in the position of the student, when we think we're in this relationship and the instruction is for *me*, about *me* and *my work*—I mean this sounds really jaded...

RCP Ha-ha! No, it's completely true! But also: Oh my god! No! I really loved being in *Campus*!

SP Ha-ha. I know! I know, and you enjoyed it in the way we all do when we are students and when the experience is all-encompassing.

RCP And perhaps that's why process is such an unsatisfying word to describe something like this. What terminology would you use, if we aren't using rehearsal, or process, or test?



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SP I often use the words 'exercise' and 'demonstration' to describe the performance, because that is how it comes together. Each exercise is a break in the performance, so to call them scenes or acts would be misleading. There is no narrative. This helps the performers understand that they are not acting or performing. It is them, as they are, demonstrating a set of exercises. It is not nuanced. I've learned a lot from Brecht's *Lehrstücke*, or *Learning Pieces*, and the exercises he made with his company in order to allow the actors to reflect on their role. He framed learning as something other than betterment. So for the demonstrators in *Campus* or *Gag*, it is not about blind participation, and it is also not about just doing something for the experience.

RCP It seems that is a correlation between how I would describe the spectral definition of reading and writing, with how we are relationally defining 'passive' and 'active,' or what it means to participate?

SP There is an idea of interactivity in art that getting the audience to do stuff means it makes them less passive. But when we just do what we are told we are passive. For Brecht participation is not about just switching places, the audience taking the stage for example. It is about the audience and the actor reflecting on their role. In the exercises I am continually reflecting on my role, as the artist, as the guide, and this calls attention to the role of the students or actors as demonstrators. The point of Brecht's Epic Theatre was not to subvert the form, but to allow space within it for reflection to take place.

[...]

[Roy Claire Potter, excerpt from "Learning Pieces, An interview with Sarah Pierce", *gorse* no. 5, March 2016, pp. 40-44.]

3

NOTES ON MAKING PATHOS OF DISTANCE

Sarah Pierce

Sometimes we feel we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools.

— Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-91*

In 2014, I began work on an invitation from the National Gallery of Ireland. The proposal was to enter into a project with the ESB Centre for the Study of Irish Art based on research already underway at the centre, involving historical representations of an Irish diaspora. For over a year, Donal Maguire, Kathryn Milligan and I collaborated on an endeavour framed by questions: is there a visual culture of diaspora, what types of images might it include, who created them and for whom? The guiding principle for the project was to make a new artwork to discover what it might mean to present this material in the context of a national, historical art museum. I have made a series of 'hybrid' interventions installed on platforms in the three rooms that comprise the Print and Drawing gallery of the National Gallery of Ireland. Each piece combines items of used furniture sourced in Dublin with digital images sourced from collections around the world.

Without the *pathos of distance* ... that other, more mysterious pathos could not have developed ... that longing for an ever-increasing widening of distance within the soul itself, the formation of ever higher, rarer, more remote, tenser, more comprehensive states ...
— Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, 1885

Nietzsche's philosophy of self formation involves a conviction that one's place in the world rests on unstable foundations. Places change and these changes act on our bodies, our needs and desires, our pleasures and discontents. Identity marks differences passed between generations and across distances. The corporeal and social constitution of who we are involves a pathos, our pathos, where the self is distant to others, and yet longs for connection. A real and imagined diaspora subject arises out of similar (trans)formations. Diaspora refers to movements of large populations of people, away from an original homeland. On a fundamental level it is a material shift from one place to another. It is also a scattering; less a geographic zone than a zone of displacements, dispersals and imagined returns. A diaspora identity is dislocated, marked by 'a widening distance,' which contains, always, a secondary, affective dimension of losses and intimacies that summon a remote place.

It is here the artworks of *Pathos of Distance* begin — by looking at the rhetoric of diaspora, produced visually as much as through any other narrative form. Following on the work of theorists such as Edward Said, Stuart Hall and Irit Rogoff, the exhibition is itself an allegory for conditions that involve fluid and unfixed subjects not easily categorised, that in turn challenge what it means to *be Irish*. For Hall, the diaspora subject corresponds to a hybrid identity that



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works in two directions, on the one hand defined by a common, originating culture that prevails despite mass dispersals around the globe, and on the other, a complex and dislocated sense of self. The *distances* that emerge through experiences of migration constantly produce and reproduce a conception of identity that is neither pure nor essential, but rather constituted by transformation and difference.

The exhibition design involves three adjoining rooms, each offering a set of images displayed among pieces of innocuous furniture culled from the stocks of second-hand suppliers in Dublin. Hybrids. Displacements. New arrangements. Items bought and sold to furnish houses, apartments and bedsits, where occupancy and ownership shift according to one's changed status in the world. They represent a national collection of sorts, a projection of collective preferences and a reminder of the role material culture plays in processes of representation. The dismantling of clear distinctions between what is and is not worthy of representing the Irish nation, asserts an irreducible present — or presence — where the appearance of regular, everyday items in the National Gallery of Ireland fundamentally reorders a shared national culture.

The research is ongoing. Each artwork is a pause — a moment of gathering that features a core set of historical images selected from a vast assortment of digital material, purposefully drawn from collections originating outside of Ireland. They appear in the exhibition as copies that exist (or *belong*) elsewhere. Their presence is completely reliant upon technologies that make an image reproducible — *and this changes everything*.

Despite links to nation, diaspora is not a call to nation. The diaspora is an experience of leaving combined with the experience of *having left*. For this reason, the diaspora subject is never identical to the subject who leaves, because they are never in the same place. Having lived most of my life outside the country where I was born, when I am 'home' I am often identified as being 'from' somewhere else. This is not a unique condition, but it is not exactly shared. It shapes how I view cultural identity and national representation, and why I identify more with the paradox of living out the conditions we inherit beyond the communities to which we are born, beyond nation, beyond tradition and beyond the imaginaries of a 'homeland'. *Pathos of Distance* is one such paradox.

[Sarah Pierce, "Notes on making *Pathos of Distance*", exhibition text for *Sarah Pierce: Pathos of Distance*, curated by Donal Maguire, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, 2 December 2015–6 May 2016.]

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SHELTER BREAD & FREEDOM

Sarah Pierce

Que préfères-tu, celui qui veut te priver de pain au nom de la liberté ou celui qui veut t'enlever ta liberté pour assurer ton pain?
— Albert Camus (1953)

The pandemic radicalised us. As if overnight, we became historical subjects. Aware of our times relative to a past whose lessons eluded us and a future destined to judge us. Technology was our boon, and our limitation. Photography was all the rage. Cameras everywhere. On us, always. Images revealed our world to those we'd never meet. Not because we were in different places, but because we are in different times.

A 1904 photograph of a group of schoolage girls seated around a table in the middle of a forest depicts a *Waldschule*, or 'forest school,' established in Germany at the turn of the century to educate sick children. Posed, poised, the girls are reading and studying. Radical pedagogies. Remote learning. It is the advent of photography. Two 'world' wars are on the horizon. *Who knew?*

HISTORY.COM

The shelter in the Phoenix Park is a place I've driven past hundreds of times, but I recall my first encounter with it was walking and spotting it hiding in the pine trees located at the north end of the People's Flower Garden, sometimes called the People's Park. This in itself was curious to me. As an American, I was enchanted by the idea of a Victorian era when parks were designated 'for the people.' I liked the proletariat tone implied by the name, though I was way off. The association isn't accurate. When I suggested to an acquaintance that I might do field recordings there in the evenings, he warned me about visiting after dark. The park isn't safe then, I was told. Be careful.

Later I learned that this part of the park and to the west by the Magazine Fort, is known for cruising and public sex. A pleasure sphere that exceeds the park itself. In a chat room Love2cruise asks: Anyone know glory holes around Dublin? Jhonnyy41624 wonders: Anyone around on mornings about 8.00am? Brooke is feeling horny: is there cruising anymore in the Phoenix Park and before judge and jury comes on and starts telling me I'm mad to even consider cruising I'm aware of all that but I do get a buzz about parking up and meeting strangers and having a bit of fun.

🙄 BigBoi wants to know: is cruising no longer acceptable in the gay world? Is it a reflection of gay political correctness? Websites like squirt and gaydar and here seem to have killed off the casual gay cruise.

😞 Beanjuce96 answers: Ask Emmet Stagg, he knows the good spots.

😁 be careful. be safe. 🙄 Love2cruise replies: Thanks guys. Tried the car park at military road but nothing there. Guess internet killed the cruising scene.

A photograph of the People's Flower Garden at the turn of the 20th century, shows men in top hats with walking sticks seated on benches along the park's perimeter. Out for the day. In the background a statue is in place, where today there is an empty plinth. It was



blown up in the 1950s; a gesture that echoed the murders in 1882 by members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Under British rule the park had always been administrated by the Chief Secretary of Dublin.

Years ago, Colm Tóibín, the author, sat across from me at dinner after an opening, and I found myself realising I'd never read his work. I was sure he'd not seen mine. We relied on others for conversation until we reached the part of the dinner when the meal is over and the wine isn't. Someone received a text and someone else joked that it was a message on Tinder. Tóibín leaned in and explained the protocols of using the app to arrange casual sex during the day. I resolved to read at least one of his books.

THE MASTER

By January 2021, the tyranny of an education system based on containment, with no radical recourse, no imaginative solution, was upon us. Remote learning left children and students bereft and isolated without the regular, intimate, collective experience of learning together. A significant part of what it means to teach, research and gather with students includes being in each other's company. Over the last three years I'd structured my teaching as space to share, laugh, read, write and talk. Lots of talk. We grew potatoes and learned to crochet, we decolonised, rebelled and pedagogged. Then COVID-19 hit.

I commissioned Grace O'Boyle and Donna Rose, two researchers whom I've worked with on projects with students over the last few years, to carry out a period of research on the park shelter. Something I'd always found curious is that the structure seems to have no place in Dublin's nomenclature. *What is it called?* I'm still not sure.

The park shelter was built in 1956 at a time when the city was morphing, though it seems Raymond McGrath, the architect who designed it, was disinterested in social transformation. Born in Australia, McGrath lived in London before emigrating to Ireland in 1940 for the position of Principal Architect at the Office of Public Works. After the war, McGrath resisted a tendency among colleagues in Europe to rebuild capital cities as architectural flagships. Instead, he affectionately rendered drawings of Dublin city, "in all its magnificent and shoddy detail."

During his time at OPW, McGrath proposed aspiring but mostly unrealised public projects, including an elaborate John F. Kennedy Memorial Hall at Beggar's Bush. His plans were often stilted by the type of myopic political vision that makes ambitious, long-term planning impossible. New governments reneged on promises made by their predecessors. McGrath redirected his focus accordingly and began working on the interiors of existing structures. He refurnished embassies and State houses, and designed vast traditional carpets using Donegal's textile mills for the production, ostensibly keeping them afloat.

McGrath's proposal for the park shelter came sixteen years after he emigrated to Dublin. A Dáil debate at the time offers a sketchy rationale: inadequate changing facilities in the park for sports teams and a lack of protection for school children visiting the park from Ireland's inclement weather. The fact that the proposed location, far

from playing fields, and its open design foiled these actual uses is not mentioned. The location alone only a senior civic architect could pull-off. To place a new building within the historical boundary of the Victorian garden, with no apparent meaning as a monument or landmark is a master stroke by McGrath, who wanted to try a new technique based on Scandinavian ideas. It has no precedence or place in a local vernacular. Strangely, these qualities, along with McGrath's own biography as the foreign-born son of Irish immigrants, makes the shelter a uniquely Irish example of modern architecture.

PEDAGOGY IN REVERSE

On a clear Sunday in March I visit the park shelter. It is unusually warm and people are eager to be outdoors despite the lockdown. A woman with a stroller sits down on the odd bench McGrath designed to run along the structure's inside walls. She adjusts her hijab and lifts a child onto her lap. Beside her a congress of teens crowd into the edges of the shelter's curved roof, passing their phones between them. A man of about forty walks past, beer in hand. He settles near the pines that frame the shelter. It is a scene enacted for me only. A play. The shelter is a stage, oriented outward to an audience. The people.

I look to past students, recent graduates, to help me make a set of banners, scaled to the dimensions of the shelter's back wall. The centre banner is a re-photographed image from 1904 of the girls in the forest. They showed me what to do. Aoife McLaughlin prepared the patterns and sewed curved hems indicating the shelter's roofline. Cliona McLoughlin dyed the finished pieces in organic madder, logwood and tea using Shibori techniques and fraying the edges. Later, Nasser Aidara and I will bring the panels along with a group of readers to the park to what I'm now calling the People's Shelter. I've asked each reader to choose a text written in their native language to read aloud. Languages spoken in Dublin every day by people who live here. Nothing will be translated. Those gathered will hear the words and witness the readings, without necessarily understanding what is being said. Sometimes it's okay to not know and to listen all the same.

[Sarah Pierce, "Shelter Bread & Freedom", in *Shelter Bread & Freedom* (Dublin: The Metropolitan Complex, 2021), pp. 1-3.]

'NO' TO DAYS, DATES, AND PRESIDENTS

Mason Leaver-Yap

On arriving in my friend's kitchen one afternoon a year ago, she turned and said she was going through a mourning process for me. I remember this incident with clarity, not least because the beer I was opening at the time irrepressibly foamed up and out of the neck of the bottle, soaking my shirt, but also because I couldn't quite understand what she was saying. I felt embarrassed about the spillage that had darkened my t-shirt and made me stink in the hot apartment, and by my simultaneous failure to comprehend what sounded like a prepared confession.

As I mopped myself up and asked what she meant, my friend tried to explain that she was mourning me in relation to my recent first person name change. She was referring to the fact that I had, over the past year, shifted my name from an explicitly female-sounding proper noun (one that my immigrant father had, admittedly without knowing the gender usually given to that name, first spotted on a reusable internal mail envelope at work) to a gender non-specific noun that I had appropriated from my maternal grandmother's maiden name without much consideration.

I didn't finish the beer or the conversation, and was left feeling my lack of continuity disturbed my friend, and possibly others—embarrassing them and, consequently, embarrassing myself. My natural instinct was to withdraw from confrontation—one made up of emotions to which I had difficulty relating but had, nonetheless, been responsible for inspiring.

Up until that point, I felt the name change was simply a publishing exercise in relation to the by-line of my writing, which had become increasingly intimate. The publishing was an attempt to match something I believed was personally obvious. But this change had seemingly produced a rupture in the security of an external idea of what or who I was to others. After leaving the apartment, I realised I had difficulty participating in—and no desire to recognise—the modest grief resultant of me circulating a noun perceived as significantly different to that which had gone before. This new noun had replaced and, to my friend, seemingly destroyed its precursor. This grieving was less to do with loss and more to do with the anxiety about the explicit emergence of realities that had always existed.

A couple of years ago, my maternal grandmother was beginning to forget people's names, including some vagueness about my birth name too, but she frequently and with enthusiasm said she liked my purple and black muscle t-shirt. She mentioned this on a twenty-minute loop, so I would wear it whenever I would see her, partly because I knew she liked it but also because I enjoyed receiving her clockwork compliments about my dress sense. Praise like this had previously dropped out of our conversations around the time I was eight years old, when I started dressing myself in boy's tracky bottoms, oversize t-shirts and, later, unisex or male perfume. Now, however, she seemed to like the look and smell of me, and the ambiguity of names was less important than her interest in deep purple—a colour she had previously protested as ugly.

As an adult I would visit her in her house. This was a home my extended family felt had become—within a decade of her declining health—the wrong shape, size and feel for her needs. But she liked it the way it was, as long as someone else was around to keep her company. My visits would not be frequent enough to alleviate my guilt over previous absences, though she didn't seem to notice the difference.

In the afternoons, she would ask me to turn pages for her at the piano. The musical interlude was a way of suspending the need for conversation. She did not seem to relish discussions about shared family events from the past ten years, but would happily play music on my old electric keyboard. Since childhood, I remember she would only play the kind of music that my father privately characterised as "problematic": German interwar music, American cowboy folk songs, and some Austrian romances about purity and the countryside. Given that she couldn't always recall the lyrics in her later life, there had been an unexpected political corrective applied to her amnesiac's repertoire. This was further enhanced by the fact neither of us could figure out how to switch the Casio keyboard preset from anything other than the 'funky clavi' effect. Her renditions of songs like 'Edelweiss' had the feel of an Isley Brothers cover.

A woman has a long scar across her arm. She was injured when she started out doing choreography classes for people with dementia. She calls this early part of her career her 'naïve period'—a time in which she had not yet understood that even if someone can't recall their past explicitly, it is always implicit.

She got the scar when she was teaching a choreography class that got out of hand, and tried to bring it to order. She addressed one of the members of the class and told him to go back to his chair. On hearing this reprimand, he grabbed a walking stick and hit her across her arm. She later found out he'd been previously worked as a teacher. In his act of hitting her, he had meant to discipline her unruliness.

One regime of appropriate behaviour was met with another.

The gaps in her memory, of which there were many, filled up with new narratives that had the feel of autofiction. We talked about things that had been previously off limits. I didn't care whether it was true or not, though occasionally I felt scandalised by the *possibility* of their truth, as well as her newfound trust in me as her confidante. Sitting on a creaking swing chair at the bottom of the garden and staring across the Welsh-English countryside border one summer afternoon, she told me about the first time she ever saw someone have sex and how informative her voyeur's experience had been. She was speaking to me as an adult. This was something rare in our traditional family structures, where the casting of appropriate roles had once seemed the most hardened, and had consequently fled. I told her that she reminded me, in that unlikely moment, of Jack Smith as he wrote, 'all fantasies are valid'. Much later, when I looked up the Smith text again, I realised I had already expunged some detail in my retelling. He actually said, 'all sex fantasies are equally valid'.



Three years ago, I was working through the archive of a retired curator in the Midwest. She had recently donated her correspondence, gifts of art, ephemera and moving image collection to the museum. I was keen to go through some of her correspondence with a number of now-iconic artists with whom she'd worked very early on in their respective careers.

In her work, she had the unique talent of giving many artists their first institutional break—commissioning suites of films, securing locations, funding, exhibition spaces and tours, and maintaining contact over decades, as their practices and audiences grew. With a few of the artists, she moved across the country in order to live closer to them. She had spent much of her life with these people, many of whom had since passed.

She and I met a few times, down in the museum foyer for coffee, or else we would go to watch matinee movies in the museum cinema. She couldn't remember many of the people she worked and lived with throughout her life, nor the day, date or president, and she didn't recognize me from previous visits together. But our afternoons weren't a fact-finding mission. They were about coming to terms with an archive *beyond* its material contents, and establishing recognition of a more emotional knowledge: persona, motivation, impulse, even the voice in which many of these letters and essays had been written. Though admittedly partial, many of the facts were already preserved in the archive (a life's work secured in temperature-controlled, acid-free, systems of encoded knowledge). Her contribution to culture had already taken place: it had been accessioned and ordered. What was taking place between us, then, was an emphasis on the present tense: the way in which a conversation could move in any direction, untethered by memory and convention, yet still marked by emotion.

'We are here under conditions. You either accept them or fight them... but you're not going to change the conditions.' That was Annie Dillard. She is a non-fiction writer who retired from writing a decade or so ago because one day, entering a room and spotting her handwriting on a legal pad, she failed to remember why she had written the note, or the idea to which the writing pertained.

One time, while waiting to enter the cinema to watch *The Goldrush*, a Charlie Chaplin impersonator turned up for the screening. I saw the woman's moment of confusion, hilarity, and uncertainty about this monotone comic figure as he waddled through the foyer, frequently dropping his cane, and finally extending the crook of his arm to her—an arm as an invitation to accompany him into the cinema auditorium.

The normative motivation to fix someone who cannot be fixed (and who may also have no interest in being fixed) has its roots in the desire to propagate reasonableness and remove difference. The unknowability of someone makes us feel uncomfortable. We use our discomfort to validate our correctional impulse to redress gaps, false memories, and give permission to tell someone else's tale as the right version.

But these stories are correct for whom, and to what end? It is the indulgence of a bad listener's sentimentality that legitimises the movement against another's change of character.

While dementia could be understood as a wrecking disease, a disease of lack, it is also a structure through which an author renegotiates and produces narratives unbothered by the limitations of historical accuracy and linear chronology. The value of demented truth sheds knowledge and reveals feeling. Like incantation, narratives are saturated with emotional meaning. Knowing the day, date or president is perhaps not the best criteria through which our humanity should be measured. Fantasy becomes the new guardian.

[Mason Leaver-Yap, "'No' to days, dates, and presidents", in Sara Greavu and Sarah Pierce (eds.), *No Title*, CCA Derry~Londonderry, 2017, pp. 101–104.]

PREPARATORY GESTURES FOR A FUTURE CURRICULUM

Clare Butcher

PROLOGUE

The following text could be read as an analysis of the process around Sarah Pierce's collaborative project *The Square* (2015), gleaned from unpublished video documentation, a few participant responses and in conversation with the artist. While attending to particular materials, methods and bodies at work, the analysis is unfaithful, veering off into reflection and back to description with some misleading cues. Rather than focusing on *what* happens in the process, there is a special interest in *how* it happens and where the frameworks of conceptualisation and instruction become blurred with the performance of everyday personal positions and possible action on a school gymnasium-turned-stage.

PREPARATION

- Gymnasium
- Black paint
- Rollers, coveralls (never enough for every individual in group – always negotiated)
- Stir-stick
- Time (it takes as long as it takes)
- Camera on tripod

INTRODUCTION

In rows. Behaved bodies sit on benches. The stranger stands, facing them. Hands gesturing in circles, over and over, as she describes the way she works. Pointing out the benches. The rows. The postures. The structures at play. The bodies turn to look at the camera. The stranger shakes each of their hands.

And so begins the first of six Tuesday sessions in Sarah Pierce's artist residency at Blessington Community College. The project has multiple frames. One being that it forms Sarah's contribution to the ongoing series Art School initiated by Jennie Guy (Jennie's the one behind the camera). Another frame is that these mornings with a group of Transition Year students take place within the more regular school curriculum,¹ with its disciplinary ideologies and modes of self-regulating, as well as the expectation that engagements with art make students learn 'self-expression'. Each session is recorded on video from different positions within the school gymnasium. The only other witness to this process of producing a play with no audience.

Drawing on the model of the '*Lehrstück*' developed by Bertolt Brecht in the first decades of the last century, the 'learning play' – or as it's sometimes translated, the 'teaching play' – is one in which actors become students of repeated gesture, of the possibilities of improvisation, and spectators of their own process. With the intention of 'showing how things work',² this methodology attempts to make visible the structures in which art and work appear, arguably inspired by the materialist cynicism of Brecht's contemporaneous Russian ex-Futurists. By highlighting the power of interactive forces such as those between labourer-actor and the script, infrastructure and event, the apparatus

of production could be exposed. Confronting entertainment value with a kind of performative pedagogy, Brecht required that participants/spectators in his *Lehrstücke* acquire attitudes rather than aim for a finished, presentable piece,³ in an endless rehearsing of possible responses and relationships. It's said that Brecht would circulate questionnaires following each learning play, and would rewrite the script based on the feedback received.

INSTRUCTIONS

Instructions are given with stir-stick as prop.

A baton to coordinate future gestures.

To be painted: a 2×2 metre square.

No tools of measurement but the body and the space around it.

The form taken by this first exercise gives the project its name, and becomes a catalyst for future actions. Collectively negotiated by the student/actors, some wearing overalls, some not, they teeter on each other's shoulders and find wobbly benches to paint the full height of the shape. Perhaps this interaction is of more consequence than the art historical reference made in repeating the iconic shape. Less consequential but still significant. Malevich's staging of the *Black Square* (1915), was made infamous by a documentation image of the painting presiding over what was deemed to be *The Last Futurist Exhibition*.⁴ I've never seen any of the four originals. And it's not about that.

This, *The Square*, will remain on the wall throughout the sessions with Sarah Pierce and act as a backdrop to other events in the gymnasium: morning assembly, PE classes, after-school activities, the black box performative space of the everyday. As the only evidential 'outcome' of the process, some school staff members reach for the metrics of its possible assessment. An example of 'being literate'? 'Being creative'? 'Working with others'? Skills to be acquired by each student for their Leaving Certificate.⁵ Challenging these assessment criteria, *The Square* insists on its own opacity in terms of what it might *mean*, and offers functionality instead, in terms of what it might *do*.

INTERRUPTION

A different group enters the space.

All heads turn to look.

Outside the camera's field of vision.

In another gymnasium, over the water and within a different kind of institutional *mise en scène* – a school within a school (more on this in a moment) – a group of volunteer student-actor-hopefuls gather for an audition that's not an audition. By pitching up, you've got a part. A mixture of faith and curiosity has brought many there to play the roles of townsfolk in the making of a new city.⁶ The project is part of the School of Missing Studies, a temporary programme hosted within the Sandberg Institute, which is an ongoing curriculum built around responsive approaches to '[calls] for a space to turn existing knowledge against itself to affect our capacity to see things otherwise, to trust that seeing, and to set one's own pedagogical terms'.⁷ Initiated by



artist duo Bik Van der Pol, the space of the school holds inquiries into not only what the structure of an MFA educational process around 'the missing' might be, but also into the deceptively less visible structures that bring us together as citizens, as institution-alised beings, as life-long-learners. Sarah Pierce is here too. In the wings, so to speak.⁸

Based on similarly didactic principles to the *Lehrstücke*,⁹ these actor-hopefuls are working on the script of Brecht's operetta *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*: a story of grand human undertakings and the power of nature (human and non-human) to undo them. Originally staged by its scenographer, Casper Neher, on a boxing ring – another kind of black square – the space of civic negotiation is transposed in this case into the subterranean gym-turned-rehearsal studio/dancefloor, where the student group riff irreverently on the operetta's libretto in front of the camera. 'Every great endeavour has its ups and downs, every great endeavour has its ups and downs ...' And we're reminded that 'quoting a text implies interrupting its context', as Walter Benjamin writes in his analysis of Brecht's 'epic theatre'.¹⁰ Their lifted citations are interrupted by editing later, spliced together with footage of construction sites and blueprints, making words and gestures strange to one another in yet one more recontextualisation.¹¹

CITATION

The figure points to different bodies in the room.

'Say something to the square.'

'What's already been said?'

'Listen to what's been said.'

'You're a flag.'

'You're patchy.'

'You're a rainbow.'

'You're not square.'

Back in Blessington, as students in the group are invited to respond to the form they've painted on the wall. Some boldly, some quietly, they attend to the physical appearance of the form and its imperfections, linking the contrast of colour and minimal shape to complex experiences of body shaming, gender identity, bullying, fear of the other, rejection. Through active listening, the statements get recirculated, repeated, reproduced by other voices in the group. Good body memory skill-development perhaps, but more importantly here is that the responses-turned-citations are transformed into a chorus of shared experience: the beginnings of a collective script.

After reflecting on what was spoken, what was heard, what was done, the stranger invites the larger group to divide into smaller cells and exercise some collective responses. Scattered through the gymnasium. Posing in group formations. Some spin. Some stretch out their arms to touch the other. In these compositions, the citations are workshopped by the groups into scenes. Small tableaux vivants emerge as the student-actors articulate the terms and movements of the process thus far. This articulation is not only a matter of utterance but also a more functional approach in which those terms and movements are divided into joints for further exercise.

EPIC ARTICULATION

'Just try to figure out what's next.'

Mise en scène is limited to ten gestures. Voices mumble, some giggle nervously. In a circle, their backs to the middle. Facing out.

A figure paces the circumference, listening intently, deciphering words from hubbub. The voices of the group rise with each other.

In an article subtitled 'Stalking the Politics of the Hidden Curriculum', Henry Giroux identifies a common thread running through various pedagogical inquiries around 'those unstated norms, values, and beliefs embedded in and transmitted to students through the underlying rules that structure the routines and social relationships in school and classroom life'.¹² While the awareness of these conditions is imperative, Giroux argues that to be useful, the concept of the hidden curriculum needs retooling, and should 'link approaches to human consciousness and action to forms of structural analysis that explore how [reproduction and transformation] interpenetrate each other rather than appear as separate pedagogical concerns'.¹³ The *Lehrstück* enters the classroom. Less spotlight, and with more care, the lessons of the teaching play become a mutual unlearning of power structures. Out of the black box and within the walls of everyday institutionalised experience, the claiming of agency becomes more than a performative gesture.

In her project which takes up *The Hidden Curriculum*, artist Annette Krauss investigates the 'unidentified, unintended and unrecognized forms of knowledge, values and beliefs in the context of secondary school education', particularly 'the physicality of education... [and] everything that is learned alongside the official curriculum'.¹⁴ Her project pays particular attention to the coping strategies students develop to subordinate hierarchy and counter the silent violences of every day. Racism, abortion, low income, depression – are just some of those violences named by the students around *The Square*.

REHEARSAL

Act One.

'Square, because of your colour I was scared,' says one student.

'You are a unique shape of square,' observes another.

'Who did this to you?'

'I'm not asking you to become social workers in this moment,' says the stranger who is now not so strange 'It's about giving yourselves time to ask that question.' The power of asking 'who did this to you?' – as one of many questions emerging from institutionalised experience – together with the minimal score of pared-down gestures, expose and propose the mechanisms of rehearsing and preserving the self-in-school. Having gone through a process of identifying, articulating and then sharing these mechanisms, the tableaux of each act around *The Square* could be read as a protocol for maintaining personal dignity and some kind of solidarity within structures of social control and the reproduction of values. Another kind of curriculum perhaps, though placing a name like that on this assembly of intimate proportions seems inappropriate.

But these protocols are not one-size-fits-all. They are situated, interactive. Particular to the idiosyncrasies of the structures surrounding



the bodies who constitute them. This was one iteration of the project, and when Sarah Pierce interpreted *The Square* in other contexts – in an exhibition setting, in a summer school for young curators¹⁵ – the mechanisms had to change. The young curators found some of the methods in the process to be ‘schoolish’, and needed to work through their own emotional experiences of what it is to learn how to do something together. And the Tallaght Community Arts youth group, who usually practise in a theatre context, had to contend with working in an exhibition space for the first time – with all its historical baggage and less obvious forms of performativity. Interestingly, the neighbourhood around that exhibition hosts another ‘The Square’ – a shopping mall and a stage for both coming together as young people but also the last tram stop from the city centre, reminding the area’s mainly newcomer inhabitants of their place on the edge of things.¹⁶

These negotiations and situations are not readily available in documentation, traceable in an artist or academic archive. There is something to be said for *Lehrstück* logic here. As the project reiterates itself, moving through different gestures, different words, different structures, the protocols multiply in different bodies. Those exercises in recognising power and embodying a response to it could become muscle memories in ways that go beyond measurable skills development. One cell, one ligament, one shift in perception at a time. Beyond individual coping mechanisms, the force of such a co-authored curriculum of embodied self-care, rather than a generalised notion of ‘empowerment’, could operate in the understanding that particular conditions are usually symptomatic of a larger complex experienced by many. Ways to meet those conditions for oneself, and together, could be found in these preparatory gestures for a situated social justice.

COLLAPSE

And rise. Collapse and rise. The bodies move through the final acts of their learning play. Huddling, hovering. They link arms and fill the latitude of the space. Finally forming a single row, side by side, down on the floor. They whisper to no one and one another. Their breath hangs in the air. ‘We have no shame.’

¹ Transition Year is an optional one-year program after students in Ireland complete their Junior Certificate. Interestingly, the mission statement of the Transition Year reads as: ‘To promote the personal, social, educational and vocational development of pupils and to prepare them for their role as autonomous, participative and responsible members of society.’ For more details see: ‘Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools, Department of Education and Science, Ireland’, 2004.

² Stanley Mitchell, ‘Introduction’, in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1998), p. xv.

³ Ibid.

⁴ *The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings 0,10* was installed in Petrograd in late 1915. The infamous exhibitionview documentation featured Malevich’s *Black Square* hung in what would usually be the ‘holy corner’ in Christian Orthodox homes. More context around this exhibition and Malevich’s ‘Suprematism’ can be found in Jane Sharp’s essay: https://monoskop.org/images/9/9b/Sharp_Jane_A_1992_The_Critical_Reception_of_the_010_Exhibition._Malevich_and_Benua.pdf.

⁵ See Turlough O’Donnell’s remarks in the context of Jennie Guy’s ‘What’s the Value of Art School?’ in *Paper Visual Art Journal*, Volume 8, 2017, pp. 31–32.

⁶ This audition was part of a film, *Men Are Easier to Manage Than Rivers* (2015), made during my MFA with the School of Missing Studies as a collaboration with BA students whom I was teaching at the time.

⁷ See Bik Van der Pol (eds.), *School of Missing Studies* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017). The School of Missing Studies MFA programme ran from 2013 to 2015 in Amsterdam. More information can be found at: <https://sandberg.nl/temporary-programme-school-of-missing-studies>

⁸ Under the supervision of Sarah Pierce and Ellen C. Feiss, the project culminated in a short musical film and thesis *Prompt Book*.

⁹ See Erika Hugh’s ‘Brecht’s Lehrstücke and Drama Education’, in *Key Concepts in Theater/Drama Education* (New York: Springer, 2011), p. 197.

¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, p. 19

¹¹ *Men Are Easier to Manage Than Rivers* (2015) was my MFA project produced in the context of the School of Missing Studies, under the supervision of Sarah Pierce... where this conversation began. For more on the project see: https://www.academia.edu/15030321/Men_Are_Easier_to_Manage_Than_Rivers_A_Prompt-Book.

¹² Giroux, ‘Schooling and the Myth of Objectivity: Stalking the Politics of the Hidden Curriculum’, in *McGill Journal of Education / Revue des sciences de l’éducation de McGill*, [S.L.], v. 16, n. 003, Sept. 1981, p. 286.

¹³ Ibid., p. 296.

¹⁴ Interview by Hannah Jickling and Helen Reed with Annette Krauss, ‘Documenting Secrets’, *The Pedagogical Impulse*, <https://thepedagogicalimpulse.com/documenting-secrets/>

¹⁵ Exhibition curated by Jennie Guy at RUA RED, *It’s Very New School*, 2017, and 5th Curatorial Moscow Summer School, 2016.

¹⁶ The Square Tallaght shopping mall complex was opened in 1990, and is set to expand in the coming years to 200,000ft² of retail space.

[Clare Butcher, ‘Preparatory Gestures for a Future Curriculum’, in Jennie Guy (ed.), *Curriculum: Contemporary Art Goes to School* (Bristol UK and Chicago USA: Intellect, 2020), pp. 262–270.] □

Biographies

ARTIST

Since 2003, Sarah Pierce has used the term The Metropolitan Complex to describe her project, characterised by forms of gathering, both historical examples and those she initiates. The processes of research and presentation that she undertakes demonstrate a broad understanding of cultural work and a continual renegotiation of the terms for making art, the potential for dissent, and self-determination. Pierce works with installation, performance, archives, talks and papers, often opening these up to the personal and the incidental in ways that challenge received histories and accepted forms. Her interests include radical pedagogies and student work, art historical legacies and figures such as El Lissitzky, August Rodin, and Eva Hesse, and theories of community and love founded in Maurice Blanchot and Georges Bataille.

Pierce's work has shown widely in the EU, US and Canada with major exhibitions at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (2016), CCS Hessel Museum & CCS Galleries, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson (2016 and 2012), and Tate Modern and mumok Vienna (2010). In 2014 she presented a major solo exhibition in three-parts, *Lost Illusions/ Illusions perdues*, developed jointly with Walter Phillips Gallery Banff AL, Mercer Union Toronto ON, and SBC Galerie Montreal QB. Other solo presentations include: *No Title* at the Centre of Contemporary Art, Derry (2017); *The Meaning of Greatness* at Project Arts Centre (2006). She has participated in major international biennials including Glasgow International (2018), Eva International (2016, 2012), Lyon Biennial (2011), International Sinop Biennial (2010), Moscow Biennial (2007), and in 2005, Pierce represented Ireland in a group exhibition at the 51st Venice Biennale.

Publications on her work include *No Title*, co-edited with Sara Greavu, published by CCA Derry, and designed by Kaisa Lassararo with essays by T.J. Clark, Karl Holmqvist, Mason Leaver-Yap, and Claire Potter; and *Sketches of Universal History Compiled from Several Authors*, edited by Rike Frank, published by Book Works, London and designed by Peter Maybury with essays by Melissa Gronlund, Tom Holert, Barbara Clausen, Declan Long, and Padraic E. Moore. Pierce regularly writes and has chapters in many publications, most recently in, *Of(f) Our Times: The Aftermath of the Ephemeral and other Curatorial Anachronics* (Sternberg 2019).

Pierce was born in Connecticut in 1968 and grew up in Ontario and Maine before attending university in Los Angeles. In 1994, she completed her MFA at Cornell University in the School of Architecture, Art and Planning, and in 1995 she attended the Whitney Program in New York. In 2014, she received her PhD in Curatorial/Knowledge from Goldsmiths College, London. In 2000 she moved to Dublin where she continues to work and live.

CURATOR

Rike Frank works as a curator and writer and teaches exhibition histories and curatorial practice. She is Executive Director of the Berlin Artistic Research Programme, as well as co-director of the European Kunsthalle, an institution without a space. Her practice often reflects on temporality, textility as well as instituting and the documentation of curatorial articulations. Past institutional affiliations include Associate Professor of Exhibition Studies at the Academy of Fine Art of the Oslo National Academy of the Arts/KHIO (2014–2018); head of the exhibition space at Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig (2012–2014); member of the Artistic Program team, European Kunsthalle (2010–2012); Curator, Secession, Vienna (2001–2005); head of the Curatorial Office, documenta 12 (2007). Publications as editor and co-editor include *Of(f) Our Times. Curatorial Anachronics* (2019), *Ane Hjort Guttu. Writings, Conversations, Scripts* (2018), *Textiles: Open Letter* (2015), *Textile Theorien der Moderne. Alois Riegl in der Kunstkritik* (2015), *Timing - On the Temporal Dimension of Exhibiting* (2014), and *Sketches of Universal History: Compiled from Several Authors by Sarah Pierce* (2013). www.kunsthalle.eu

PERFORMANCES AND PUBLIC PROGRAMME:

A number of Sarah Pierce's artworks within *Scene of the Myth* involve live elements which will be performed at various points throughout the exhibition's preparation and duration.

The artwork *The Square* will be performed by members of the John Hansard Gallery team during the days leading up to the exhibition opening.

The artwork *Campus* will be performed by participants from the Southampton area who have been selected from an Open Call. Live performances of *Campus* will take place throughout the exhibition at the following times:
Friday 4th October, 7pm (during the exhibition launch)
Saturday 9th November, 2pm
Saturday 7th December, 2pm

The artwork *Shelter Bread & Freedom* will be performed by members of the community living locally in Southampton in their own home language. Date to be confirmed.

The Gallery will also be running its regular extensive programme of activities and events as part of its wider public programme. Further details of all events, talks, workshops and Gallery activity, as well as the performances mentioned above, will be posted regularly throughout the exhibition on the Gallery website, jhg.art, and also promoted via our social media channels.

Colophon

ZINE

Published on the occasion of the exhibition
Sarah Pierce, Scene of the Myth
at John Hansard Gallery, University of Southampton,
5 October 2024 – 11 January 2025

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Rike Frank
Co-ordinated at JHG by Ros Carter, Head of Programme (Senior Curator)

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EXHIBITION

Sarah Pierce: Scene of the Myth is curated by Rike Frank (European Kunsthalle). The exhibition has been organised by the Irish Museum of Modern Art / IMMA Dublin, in collaboration with Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst / GfZK (Museum of Contemporary Art Leipzig) and John Hansard Gallery, University of Southampton.

Co-ordinated at JHG by Ros Carter, Head of Programme (Senior Curator)
Exhibition graphics by Yvonne Quirmbach

John Hansard Gallery Team

Director: Woodrow Kernohan
Exhibitions Team: Ros Carter, Nadia Thondrayen, Jennifa Chowdhury
Technical Manager: Lee Broughall
Installation Team: Emma Osterloh, Josef Hill, Julian Grater,
Ozzy Crawley
Engagement Team: Lynne Dick, Florence Thomas, Bella Gorman
Communications and Marketing: Jack Lewis
John Hansard Gallery is part of the University of Southampton and supported using public funding by Arts Council England.

Acknowledgements

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