

# The Metropolitan Complex

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No. 2

## Roundtable Discussion

**Grace Weir, Jacinta Lynch, Mark O'Kelly, Patrick Murphy, Paul O'Neill, and Sarah Pierce.**

On Tuesday 21 October 2003, the following conversation took place in the Royal Hibernian Academy's artist studio in Dublin. The participants are artists, curators, or both, who at sometime or another have lived and worked in Dublin. Pierce invited them to have an informal discussion. There was no audience present.

**Sarah Pierce** Charles Esche describes curating as a secondary activity, a responsive and in many ways bureaucratic activity. At the same time, he has questioned the bureaucracy of existing institutional structures. How are the relationships between curators, artists, and institutions understood in Dublin?

**Mark O'Kelly** I've never heard of Charles Esche, but I think this is interesting. When he talks about curating as a secondary activity, what's the primary activity?

**Sarah Pierce** Making art.

**Paul O'Neill** In what context was he saying this?

**Sarah Pierce** He was part of a roundtable conversation, much like this one. It interested me because I see Esche as someone who actively worked with artists at Tramway, and later at the Modern Institute, in ways that weren't at all bureaucratic. Yet at the end of the day, he admits that as the curator, on a certain level he is a bureaucrat.

**Grace Weir** Murph, I remember you saying one time that there are two types of curators, one that responds to what is around and the other that seeks things out and enables them to happen.

**Patrick Murphy** Charles Esche is speaking from a different place. In the Edinburgh-Glasgow corridor, you had the establishment, you had the spike of Glaswegian artists in the eighties, you had the ICA and CCA, and Tramway was seen as innovation on top of innovation. In Dublin we don't have that deck to play with. What we are doing here, we are doing under the most difficult of circumstances because we are not innovating off of anything. We lack an establishment, and I say this coming from an established institution. A lot of what happens tends to be on the edge, but edges only make sense if you know where the centre is.

**Mark O'Kelly** This idea of the centre and the edge reminds me of Declan McGonagle's model of a centre and periphery in relation to Irish art in a European context. Ireland being the periphery.

**Patrick Murphy** My take would be more parochial than Declan's. If you go to a place like Antwerp, which I would also consider a periphery, there is a lot of innovation, and there are also strong establishments that take care of another kind of work. That allows the edge to float. It makes more sense to have an active edge when there is an active centre. In Dublin we've only had places like IMMA for the last ten years.

**Grace Weir** Isn't that a relief though? We don't always have to take a stand against the establishment, which means we can do other things.

**Patrick Murphy** Sure. What I am seeing out of people like Grant Watson, although he is in an institution, and Sarah, is an attitude that says, "Let's just get on with it."

**Paul O'Neill** I guess I wasn't aware this discussion was going to be so Dublin centred.

**Sarah Pierce** It doesn't have to be.

**Paul O'Neill** Then I'll come back to Charles Esche's idea of a secondary activity. Curating can also be understood as a post-productive activity that isn't necessarily lesser than the primary activity. Distinctions between production and post-production are so entangled within artistic and curatorial practices that there is no longer a necessity to establish those differences. Once you start making these distinctions you get into problematic discussions about which kind of linguistic systems and lexicons to follow.

**Jacinta Lynch** No centre ever generates anything. It is fed from the outside.

**Paul O'Neill** Exactly. Ultimately what happened in Scotland worked because places like the Modern Institute and Transmission were looking beyond what was happening in a perceived centre and they weren't hung up over definitions.

**Patrick Murphy** On the mechanics of centres and peripheries, centres by their nature don't care about peripheries, peripheries care about centres. Peripheries are largely self-defined. Perhaps it's down to a search for identity. I don't find that within Dublin there is a seriousness about being in Dublin, and about Dublin being a centre.

**Grace Weir** How do you mean?

**Patrick Murphy** One of the things that strikes me about the Metropolitan Complex, is that it is saying that we need to create mechanisms within this community right here to make it better, because it's too fractious, it's not cooperative, and it's no longer small enough for you and me to just meet in a bar and have a row, and then meet next week in the same bar and have the same row. We need to create mechanisms here where critical, good, mind-opening exchanges occur between people who are living their life in the same area.

**Paul O'Neill** It depends if you are looking at a self-generating model, or a model that is fed, like Jacinta says, from the outside.

**Mark O'Kelly** To talk about London is just to follow a market.

**Sarah Pierce** It is important that we don't just play into an English market.

**Jacinta Lynch** You will end up with your back against a wall if you compare Ireland to London or New York.

**Grace Weir** Around the country there is this great will to bypass Dublin. Look at Carlow, which is operating internationally and not through Dublin. It's funny too, when the context shifts

and suddenly Dublin is the perceived centre.

**Sarah Pierce** One reason to have a Dublin-focused conversation is to look carefully at what is going on here, in order to figure out where we are fed from the outside and where we are self-generating. A lot happens in Dublin under the rubric of curating. Is this activity at all specific to Dublin, or is it borrowing from the outside? Is it random activity or is there a critical point of reference?

**Mark O'Kelly** It's interesting to talk about primary and secondary relationships in Dublin, because they speak about management and the dynamics of organisations. It brings to mind the work of Peter Haley. Everything is a cell, a conduit to something else. Another model might be to see ourselves in anthropological terms, as specimens of artists that co-exist in studios, like Foucault's idea of the cell. Or like the exhibition Permaculture, that talks about networking structures. The bureaucracy at work is an endless image of exchange.

**Paul O'Neill** Like that, I would say that a primary and secondary activity can equally dissipate and fracture into different forms. One of the difficulties I have with contemporary curatorial practice, and I will generalise to make this point, is that there isn't a notion in being a curator that involves a critical discourse about what one does when one is mediating systems or mediating strategies in terms of working with artists.

**Sarah Pierce** The curator as mediator, facilitator, organiser. This has opened up how curators work, but it has also led to confused or generalised notions of the curator's role.

**Patrick Murphy** I think of curating as the custodial handing over of keys. It's not a bad place to begin. One of the most important things I do is honour the trust of people lending me things. Before getting into the theoretical level of what you are doing, you are a house-keeper. That is important to understand, because it is how material can move around, and how things that are owned in private can be seen in public. It's all based on trust.

**Jacinta Lynch** That's the nuts-and-bolts of it.

**Paul O'Neill** I think that is an incredibly well-informed position, to be aware that you have a custodial responsibility towards the work. It is a complicated space to arrive at when as a curator you don't understand what it is to be a curator, historically, as a construct. It's the reason why there are now so many MA courses in curating. There is a necessity to readdress a kind of non-history, or lack of history of curating.

**Patrick Murphy** Curating as a vocation is much more developed in the States. If you are a curatorial assistant in a major institution in New York, you are so far down the ladder, and your job is to get up that ladder to Assistant Curator and then Associate Curator, and then Curator, and then you begin to develop a voice. It's a hierarchical, career-based structure. Here it's so flat. There is no hierarchy, no structure. People don't think about where they will be in five years.

**Sarah Pierce** I'm interested, Paul, do

you think that with the pervasiveness of artist-curators, that an historical perspective has been lost in relation to what it means to curate.

**Paul O'Neill** It's easy to blur the boundaries between what an artist and what a curator is, particularly if you don't know what the boundaries are in the first place. If that's your starting point then it's already blurred.

**Grace Weir** Here the notion of an artist-curator may be relatively new, but for example in the UK it's not new. It depends on what you are familiar with.

**Sarah Pierce** I wonder if it is new here? Or have we just started to call a certain type of artist's activity "curating" as a way to name something that has always been around us? Project is opening a show next month called Artists/Groups, which begins with the founding of Project by artists in 1966. Grant was describing to me how shows then were put together and it sounded just like Artists Space in New York, which was founded by artists in 1972. Artists hanging shows together, saying these are the people who are going to be here, it's us, we make this place active, isn't a new idea. We just call it something else, something that collapses two different professional practices, curating and art-making, As a result this clouds histories. I think Grant is reminding us that artist initiatives have specific histories, that are often related to specific spaces and circumstances.

**Patrick Murphy** The insufficiency here has not been on the side of artist activism, that can actually be historicized back to this institution in the 19th Century. I would say that Declan McGonagle's background, which is from a practice tells a lot about the way he programmed the Orchard in the eighties and IMMA in the nineties. The artist has led here, whereas in other centres like London and New York, institutions have been the driving forces.

**Sarah Pierce** A lot of the initiative taken by artists is less about their artwork and more about administrating, keeping things going that wouldn't happen otherwise. Doesn't that imply complacency on the part of those responsible for the arts? If artists will work without funding or a salary, that isn't activism, that isn't organised. Jacinta, I feel like you have been catapulted into situations where you are taking responsibility as an artist, but is it by choice?

**Jacinta Lynch** It's not by choice. The reason I set up Broadstone was not to be an administrator. I came back after 12 years in London and wanted to continue my own visual arts practice and was appalled to discover what I found here. If you arrived into Dublin in 1995-96, there were no organised studios. Today, artists are still the way forward and the bureaucracies are still really out of touch.

**Paul O'Neill** If you look at what has happened in say, Northern Europe, in relation to a DIY artist/curator/artist, it was largely a response to there being no art market. The artist-curator is a natural progression in Dublin too, there being no art market, and that includes no curating or curatorial market.

**Mark O'Kelly** There is an art market

in Dublin. There are private galleries that sell art and show Irish artists. There is an economy.

**Grace Weir** There is no way you can say there is a market here compared to London. And unfortunately, what we see here is often defined by that market.

**Paul O'Neill** Considering the Frieze Art Fair was set up to acknowledge there has not been a sufficient art market in London since the YBA, I think it would be impossible for us to say there is a market here.

**Patrick Murphy** On a point of accuracy, there is money buying art in Ireland, and that money is buying Irish art. When I arrived at the RHA to an auction three times a year, I thought get it out, it is part of the mess. At the end of five years, I feel we should leave it in. People come into the auction who would never come to see a show. Some of these auctions clear over 1 1/2 to 2 million. There is money being spent, but it is spent on pictures. Until there is that critical mass of people collecting, you won't have a percentage of that mass saying, I should collect video. The money is here, the adventurous collectors aren't. What we are lacking is that 5% of the wealth that will support innovative, crazy, off the wall projects. In the states you have that 5%.

**Sarah Pierce** Grace, you primarily make video and installations...

**Grace Weir** And I absolutely do not live off selling work. I actually don't even think about selling. I don't even address it. I negotiate funding to do shows and to make work. In some ways, my fee is reflected in the good relationship I might have with a curator or the experience I might have with the gallery. To my mind, there are no major collectors here. There are certainly no collectors creating the sort of impact that Saatchi caused in the UK. Again, that is possibly a good thing. Do we want collectors influencing major institutions?

**Patrick Murphy** Jacinta, what happens in Roscommon?

**Jacinta Lynch** Very strange things happen. One of the reasons I'm there is because I felt Dublin had flattened out. As one artist said to me, we are sick to the teeth of going around to the same five bloody galleries. My gut instinct is that we have to become more nationwide. I would agree with Pat, if you are talking about art on the edge you need to know what the centre is, and that centre is not always Dublin. In a way, you can see types of art practice as a centre. As for the market, we did two invited shows this year to break ground with people. There were prices on the wall of 8,000 euro and people's mouths just dropped. They thought, "My God, people charge this amount of money for an artwork?" On the other hand, people came out of the woodwork and said, "I'm a collector and I'd like to find out more about that work."

**Sarah Pierce** How does the discussion of centres and peripheries get played out in Roscommon?

**Jacinta Lynch** I am creating a situation where people can come in the door and see art, see a film, where before they would have had to go into Dublin, into the IFC. People are interested, are becoming more aware. But there is a bureaucracy at work. There's game

plan with Local Authorities, the Arts Council, and new art centres in which capital investment is thrown at Local Authorities to build a building in a rural area, simply because it is a building a so it's worth something. Then they throw someone like myself in and say, "Here's a building, now make an art centre out of it." And all the problems you are dealing with are around the fact that you have this building.

**Sarah Pierce** Do you ever see it as your role to agitate that bureaucracy?

**Jacinta Lynch** Like Mark's example, I am in between being a conduit and undercover agent. I listen to a lot of rubbish, and I nod, and tick the boxes and in the meantime, I put through as many projects as I can. I heard you say Patrick, after you got the job here, that you wanted to create the RHA as a platform for artists to bounce out from and that you'd do it until they stopped you doing it. I feel the same way in Roscommon. I will keep hammering at artistic policy until that brick wall is right in from of my nose. And it's coming...

**Grace Weir** We are all too preoccupied with buildings. Money goes into buildings and there is no money left for programming. It's not hidden, it's a problem we all know and see. You go to the Model, a stunning building in Sligo with fabulous galleries, and they have very little money to actually get together shows. This happened in Dublin with Temple Bar's development. How many buildings have closed?

**Jacinta Lynch** That is the politics. These spaces are made to earn a profit on the investment. When there isn't that profit, people perceive failure. The problem is a complete lack of investment in curating, in exhibitions, in special events...

**Paul O'Neill** If there is an audience out there waiting to engage and be critical, does it necessitate a building, an institution, to facilitate or produce that?

**Jacinta Lynch** Not necessarily to facilitate or produce, but to localise it yes, to create a point of reference. The forethought is rather crude, but at the same time buildings shine a light on a big area of darkness, and that allows people to focus in.

**Grace Weir** Right, and when three of the buildings in Temple Bar as cultural institutions are closed, are not in use even, that light is gone.

**Sarah Pierce** Perhaps what Declan McGonagle is asserting with City Arts Centre is the need for a more organic space. Whether this means surrendering the building or not seems to go back-and-forth for him. There are pressures associated with a building that Declan understands. To always have the lights on, the doors open, an audience coming in.

**Patrick Murphy** It takes time to build an institution to build trust and for people to understand what changes are taking place. The debacle of two or three years ago was dreadful for everyone. The institution that everyone saw in a starry light all of a sudden became a grimy, tough, political proposition. But that's what institutions are.

**Paul O'Neill** The political climate in London is as bad if not worse in terms of publicly funded spaces. The

Arts Council of England has become completely centralised. The people you are getting money from are no longer the people sitting across the table from you. If you do get the money there are certain boxes you have to tick. I've just finished working as a gallery curator in London Print Studio for the last three years. We did an interesting programme, but we had much more interesting discussions about what that programme could potentially be. You end up with diluted versions because you haven't got the money or the energy.

**Jacinta Lynch** The business of momentum and of how much energy you can sustain depends on how much you get out of it. There is no salary, there is very little funding, there is only the love of it. You can feel like you are doing a lot and other people are feeding off of it, and you are not really getting the response you had hoped for. You realise you can't keep that going, it's someone else's turn.

**Patrick Murphy** That is the youth of this country. We have to find way that we can all continue to do it. I mean that in the most boring professional, salaried way. It's no use to have things happen for two years, five years and then go.

**Sarah Pierce** Paul, how does this sense of the potential versus the actual affect how people in London feel about the present moment?

**Paul O'Neill** One of the advantages that I find in London is that there is this unpredictable sense of the present moment. I curate something in London and it is reviewed, then some one might call me up who hasn't even seen the show to invite me to do something else, then someone else sees that and there is a momentum. A cynic might say it is fickle, which it is. An optimist might say it is interesting which it also is. There is a curiosity and an ambition expressed openly there.

**Sarah Pierce** Mark and Grace, how important is it for you to be in Dublin? When you go to art shows, meet other artists, in your studio, do you say to yourself, "It's good here. This is where I want to be?"

**Grace Weir** For me it was a very deliberate decision to be in Dublin at a time when it wasn't easy to be an artist here. After doing PS1 I considered staying in New York, but I came back to fight for my studio. I was about to say I've been lucky, but I spent 7 years in a legal battle to keep my space. I'm there 17 years and it's so imbued in me in terms of who I am. It's strange, after Venice a number of people asked me "Are you still living in Dublin." They were surprised I wasn't in London or other places.

**Sarah Pierce** Did they assume that if you were at a certain level of international success, you must not be in Dublin?

**Grace Weir** I think so. And I thought, well why wouldn't I be?

**Mark O'Kelly** My main focus when I am not teaching is to be in the studio. That's where my conversations with other artists take place. Physically it is a community, you exist together, there is a lot of respect. There are eleven artists in New Art Studios where I am, and that makes it a tenable situation. The studio has existed since

1982. It was founded by Mary Burke and some people from NCAD. We are very concerned about space, because you need physical space to make the sort of work I make. It's all a bit odd and archaic. I am a painter and in terms of Dublin being a centre, for me it really is. I am in Limerick half the week, but first thing tomorrow morning I will bring 40 -50 students to the RHA to look at the Barry Cooke show. It might not be cutting edge, but it is an important exhibition. Not just in the way the paint is put on, but because it's a big show. It surveys a career. That provides a context for me. It is interesting for all sorts of historical reasons. I am particularly interested some of his drawings to do with 1916 that I have heard about from conversations with other artists.

**Sarah Pierce** So locating your studio in Dublin is important to you, it provides the context for a career?

**Mark O'Kelly** You are trying to build a career that goes on for a long time and it's okay if it moves along slowly. I would be a conservative, not in a political, social sense, but in terms of this idea of conservation, in terms of a tradition having some sort of continuity. I understand where Grace is coming from when she talks about fighting for the preservation of a studio. I don't have a relationship with the Arts Council, because with all due respect, these people come and go. There is very little concern with preservation. The plans, the budgets, the policies also change, and there is this insistence on innovation, which I find quite euphemistic. There isn't a lot of clarity from the leadership as to what that might mean in the face of certain practices that are physically quite cumbersome. It leaves things vulnerable.

**Sarah Pierce** Jacinta, in setting up Broadstone were you thinking about this kind of slow growth or consistency, in terms of the artists you selected?

**Jacinta Lynch** My role there is akin to Pat's idea of a custodian. It might appear from the outside that artists are scrutinised and then invited in, but at the end of the day, I am trying to fill the space, pay the rent, make the place work. I am there to protect what is in my care. While I've taken a sojourn out of Dublin because there is something I am curious about in Roscommon, there is no way I could do Roscommon if I wasn't still fully involved with Broadstone. When I need someone to feed me, Broadstone is that connection.

**Sarah Pierce** Paul, does Dublin enter into your identity in London?

**Paul O'Neill** It does. It is my network for want of a better word. Representing myself as an Irish artist-curator I am doing myself more of a service by not being here. And I am doing the artists that I work with more service by working with them outside of Ireland. Ultimately, the reason why I make work, the reason why I write, the reason why I curate, the reason why I teach is because I am interested in a critical discourse around what I do. If the same people are writing about my work and having the same conversations, I get bored. Boredom is sometimes a good thing if you can stay with it. But I know I couldn't.

**Sarah Pierce** Did Multiples grow out of this boredom?

**Paul O'Neill** The reason Ronan McCrea and myself set up Multiples in 1997-98 was because we couldn't find space to do an artist-run project. So we reduced the idea down to Multiples, which was not an economic venture contrary to how it's often been miscomprehended. It gave me an opportunity to work with an awful lot of artists, over a short period of time, so it immediately expanded my network being able to ask someone like Jeremy Miller to curate or Matthew Higgs.

**Sarah Pierce** I wonder if the reason people noticed the price tag on Multiples was because it was a price they could afford. The same person might walk into Marian Goodman and think what an amazing show, because the prices are not relevant to them there, they aren't shopping.

**Patrick Murphy** That's important, this idea of shopping. American collectors are great shoppers. I don't mean that only in terms of what art they collect, but also the car they drive, what clothes they wear. They are shopping all the time. They are making decisions. There making aesthetic judgements with consequences. Ireland has the wealth now to be a materialistic society. The job is how good a materialistic society.

**Paul O'Neill** I think one criticism of Multiples is by artists who weren't selected in. Another is from public funders who felt it was a commercial proposition. Financially, if Multiples succeeded it was when we could produce the next catalogue.

**Sarah Pierce** To me Multiples no different than spaces like Printed Matter in New York, which are built around a type of commerce that I enjoy. It's slightly reductive to say that because something costs money it is a commercial venture. Especially if that exchange allows things to circulate that normally wouldn't.

**Mark O'Kelly** It's important to note the sophistication of Multiples. The piece by Tacita Dean, Looking For Spiral Jetty, was first shown at the Kerlin gallery, and it's now being shown at the moment at Temple Bar Gallery in a wholly different context. The fact is this piece is distinct in her work. It is a taped piece and I would associate her work with ambitious, large scale, filmic installations that are part of a very particular visual culture. We are talking here about a sound piece and so it can be shown in all these different contexts. There is a curatorial prowess behind what Multiples does, which is to restyle a perception of Tacita Dean that repositions her economic value as an artist. So that if someone sees that piece in Multiples, that was available for...how much?

**Paul O'Neill** 35 Irish punts...

**Mark O'Kelly** Right...that skews a perception of Tacita Dean as off limits. It's like when comics came with a free gift, I would consider the version of her work in Multiples to be like a free gift in the face of the physical, organisational, financial enormity of her project.

**Paul O'Neill** I absolutely have to disagree. It's a really important piece for her practice that was part of an installation and we requested it be made into a multiple. If you want to buy it and create the whole sound installation in your domestic space, you can go ahead and do that. We aren't

going to sell you the speakers and the hi-fi systems etc., and that makes it affordable.

**Mark O'Kelly** I don't mean it as a negative. It's that flexibility of approach that allows someone to afford a Tacita Dean which I am saying is good, and that flexibility also raises interesting questions.

**Grace Weir** I don't think people make work for Multiples to be sellable. It's to play with the idea of the multiple.

**Patrick Murphy** Again, it comes down to a sophistication of collecting, of realising that if you buy a Dan Flavin you are not buying the bulbs you are buying the plans, the diagrammatic drawings. That concept is so far away from the Irish market. People acquiring work here simply do not know the fabulous range of what you can do as a collector. It takes material vision.

**Mark O'Kelly** One of the best things I've seen in Ireland in terms of production was Temple Bar Properties' presentation of Matthew Barney's Creamaster cycle last summer. Everything about it was great. The weather was great...

**Sarah Pierce** Wow, such a good artist!

**Mark O'Kelly** ...the atmosphere was perfect!

**Patrick Murphy** If you have the ambition there is an incredible seduction about this country, and you can get major artists to do big projects. When I came back, I found that people were only interested in getting major artists to do big projects. They weren't interested in doing projects with people living here. So from side stepping New York, which was 100 miles away, and creating an international programme, I came back to Dublin to become the most provincial curator, because no one else was doing it. For us to miss doing a major retrospective of Barry Cooke in his lifetime to me would have been a real indictment of me and my curatorial colleagues. I would say that about all my senior shows. No one else is doing them - presenting and documenting our history.

**Paul O'Neill** What was good about Vaari Claffey's programme at Temple Bar Gallery was that she decided to work with Irish artists who were based in Ireland, like Katie Holton, Susan Phillipz, Phil Collins. She said very categorically, "I am going to work with what is local to me."

**Patrick Murphy** To me that is absolutely no different than what someone does in midtown Manhattan.

**Paul O'Neill** Or in London.

**Grace Weir** What Vaari did was so needed. It raised Temple Bar Gallery's profile or meaning for artists who live here.

**Mark O'Kelly** I don't know Phil Collins, but to contest this a little, when he was showing at Temple Bar, he was also at the Kerlin and in the Square. It's not fair to talk about one person, but it shows a bit too much synchronicity, or duplication, and that suggests things are really closed.

**Patrick Murphy** It's actually quite difficult to get that level of cooperation here between institutions. To sit down and plan together, with the artist, and say I'll do this piece,

you do that, then we can show more. For a moment, everything you wanted to know about Phil Collins you could. The problem is we may never get to see it again.

**Grace Weir** Murph aren't you working with other places?

**Patrick Murphy** I talk regularly to Sligo and Limerick. We bitch about everything and we are working up some programmes together.

**Grace Weir** And that means you can generate greater amounts of funding for a project, which is crucial to the artist.

**Patrick Murphy** It's also about seeing where there are gaps.

**Mark O'Kelly** There are people outside of publicly funded spaces who also take this work on. I work with Kevin Kavanaugh and the three shows I've had with him in the gallery have been the primary ways I've communicated with the public. That is due to a commitment from him. My studio is just around the corner so there is a daily routine, where we are really in touch. It might be misunderstood as a commercial relationship, when actually it is about sustaining a dialogue, a way of working together.

**Grace Weir** It's interesting. Paul mentioned how difficult it can be for public institutions in the UK. I've just shown at Corner House, who managed to get a grant from the Arts Council of England to fund the production of new work. I realised when I was there what a tough time they have, and that here public institutions have a much bigger budget per show. It struck me that Dublin is a good place to be when you are making a show that involves the production of new work. It's getting the show in the first place that is hard here.

**Patrick Murphy** The sustaining motivation of an artist cannot be where do I have my next show. The motivation should be what do I want to do next.

**Sarah Pierce** Don't you also need to be working it, making contacts, schmoozing?

**Patrick Murphy** No, no, no. I would steer away from that artist... Put it this way, good ideas are cheap, but to develop a great idea is something the artist has to do all the time. That is their work. It's not easy. It doesn't happen very often. For those ideas to manifest in a contemporary show can be very difficult.

**Grace Weir** There is a balance. I have a studio and the work I do there predominates 80% of my thinking. But Sarah has point in that having a studio can start to backfire if you have no avenue out of it. A lot of people here suffer from that frustration. Their contemporaries from other places show in IMMA or the Douglas Hyde. Meanwhile their work is on an equal level and it's never seen here.

**Sarah Pierce** To be Irish in those contexts is somehow always highlighted.

**Grace Weir** Right, who wants to be that artist, curated in that way? Why does being Irish need to enter the equation at all?

**Mark O'Kelly** Perspective is important. I have lived in New York and London,

but Seattle was the most like Dublin. There are artists in Seattle no one else in the world has ever heard of. They work there and they show there. It's somewhat uncalled for to speak about New York and London, which are so different from Dublin, and that have such powerful art markets. We are here during the inauguration of the Frieze Art Fair in London, which is such an aggressive attempt to bring in collectors. Dublin will never do that, but what you will find here are very local, very adventurous relationships between people.

**Grace Weir** I agree. The Greyscale show by Network North linked together artists in different cities and that creates a sense of location that completely bypasses London.

**Mark O'Kelly** Exactly, why not talk about Seattle, or loads of other places where things are going on?

**Grace Weir** As an artist there comes a point where you have to start working internationally, wherever you are. You can't just have a dialogue with people who live in your city, who live in Dublin. I have regular correspondence with people who live abroad, and I have found these conversations incredibly useful to my practice. You have to see what you are doing internationally to understand it. You don't have to live abroad, but you need to have some kind of discourse with other places.

**Patrick Murphy** You have to say you're serious and then the art world will be serious about you. I may have networks all over the world, but this is where I live. This is where I make my meaning. If I feel the scene is in New York, then I should go and live in New York. The challenges and the paradoxes of being here are my paradoxes. We need to be very careful. Dublin is a precarious position right now, where it has to be serious about itself. This is not going to be appointed from abroad, we have to assert it.

**Paul O'Neill** I think you can say that Pat because you've spent time being away from Ireland. Everybody has a number of life projects that they go through, and obviously this is one of yours, being director of the RHA. That involves staying here, and representing your relationship with the art world here. But there's a danger that what you've presented becomes an inward looking model. I was in the Fire Station for 3 years and 7 months and 90% of what I did there was outside of Ireland. And since leaving Ireland two of the very few invitations I have received to come back and take part in something were from Sarah, who is American, and Grant Watson, who is from London.

**Patrick Murphy** I am very lucky in that I have staked a claim. It's important to do, but only in the context that other people are doing other things. I don't want everyone to do the same thing, because then we're not getting different stories. We don't want simplification. We want sophistication.

**Sarah Pierce** I agree, it would be over simplistic if we were all doing the same type of activity, no matter how radical or alternative. I have strong ideas about what should happen here and why. I want more complication. As an artist it is also important to stake a claim, and doing that doesn't necessarily mean composing your output to fit a general idea of what being an artist is. Then again, staking a claim sounds very territorial, doesn't it?

**Grace Weir** It depends on people's work, their practice, how they see themselves as an artist, who they work with. I think there is a seriousness among many artists working here and that needs to filter into the institutions.

**Mark O'Kelly** True. Every institution in the country, including the Arts Council, has artists "submitting." Not only does this hurt artists, it is a meagre pragmatics that protects the institution from actually engaging with what is out there. From an artist's point of view, the apparatus of the press, the curator, the funder, the institution, means you have to pre-empt your own work.

**Patrick Murphy** Artists making applications for bursaries have to be at some critical juncture, something needs to be shifting, there needs to be some kind of measurable outcome, when actually all you need is the fucking money to just keep doing what you have been doing.

**Mark O'Kelly** I like the idea that Eurojets here at the RHA is selected. That is putting yourself out there as a curator. It also means you are looking at the studio context. Going there to meet with artists.

**Patrick Murphy** The reason I personally select the Eurojets show is that so many open shows here are selected by people from outside. I walk into the studio and look at the work, talk to the artists and while I don't say, "I'm going to select you. I am not going to select you," it exposes the process, which is a subjective process in many respects. While the show is on I am here. Hate me, argue with me, I am here. I am not back in South America or Costa Rica. It is about authorship, it's about accountability.

**Paul O'Neill** That's fine. I do have a problem with authored shows, but I think that an open show can be mediated and can allow for possibilities. Maybe for authorship, but also for other points of clarity.

**Sarah Pierce** A couple months ago the directors of the Kerlin came to Broadstone to do studio visits. What that leads to is another story.

**Patrick Murphy** I do studio visits all the time.

**Grace Weir** For me that is the best way to see my work, come to the studio.

**Sarah Pierce** Do artists here take the initiative, Patrick? Do they invite you?

**Patrick Murphy** Yes, and I go to every one of them. If someone takes that initiative, I go. And I have seen dreadful studios. In some ways, I am the vulnerable one, not the artist, because I have to talk. I have to learn quickly and respond.

**Mark O'Kelly** Right now though very few curators seem to have that interest, of going out and seeing what is there locally on the ground.

**Paul O'Neill** In some ways there is greater need for studio visits when there is no other form of mediation going on.

**Mark O'Kelly** Artists can make other types of mediations happen. I have two examples from things I have done

with Sarah. When she was the director of Arthouse, the studio group I am in wanted to do something public so we made a film and produced a catalogue and without showing any actual work, we did this public project together which Arthouse hosted. The other thing was Affinity Archive, which was really about the opportunity for artists to show another side to their practice, or the parts of their practice that aren't normally exhibited. This was very interesting because it showed an overlap between artists like me, a painter, and people who use sound, video, installation. We all draw on a background of research. The role of the curator in this sense can be to say, this is interesting, this is worth seeing, it is considered.

**Sarah Pierce** In Affinity Archive, the role of the artist was to make a decision that is usually made by or through the curator. The artist chose how to contribute, what made sense to them in that context.

**Paul O'Neill** That is important. It is an operating system.

**Jacinta Lynch** One impetus for setting up Broadstone was to create a base of visibility. There have been an enormous amount of people through the studios.

**Paul O'Neill** I think it's great to go on studio visits, and to find other forms of mediation etc., but ultimately unless curators from New York, from Manifesta, from Documenta are walking into places like Broadstone, the artist's career is not going to shift. It's great to have a rapport with the director of the RHA, but it is still going to end up imploding unless more people come here from other places.

**Sarah Pierce** The curators from Manifesta did come here. They were navigated through Dublin's art world and they left saying, "What the hell was that?" They felt like Dublin was a mess. That is partly how they structured their time, and they did shitty research before coming. But the question of what to see, depending on one's agenda, and how to see it is a big problem.

**Patrick Murphy** We have to be careful here. Things like Manifesta, I mean four of the last five have been shite.

**Sarah Pierce** Patrick, Manifesta is an important exhibition, or at least it is a good opportunity to get work out there.

**Patrick Murphy** But you shouldn't be inspired by it, you should be informed. If you actually think that a Manifesta curator walking through here is going to do you a favour then you don't know Manifesta. You are not informed, you have no right to be making art.

**Sarah Pierce** Do you want me to underline that last bit, or put it in bold?

**Paul O'Neill** In 1995, I went on a very disorganised residency in Poland. It was extremely isolated, there was no money, no materials, there were 20 artists. From that one residency I have probably done about 20 projects. That wasn't Manifesta, so if it is Manifesta, the possibilities multiply. Grace showed in the Venice biennale, lots of people saw her work there. Now she has just had her first show in London. I just met her at the opening.

**Grace Weir** With Venice people see your work, but it's also about being

validated, which for many curators is important before they will even call you. You get access to people. It goes back to the submission thing that Mark was talking about. At a certain point it is about getting beyond submissions. When someone calls you up and asks you to do something it is a relief and you are immediately much more interested because they are interested in you. There is a dialogue.

**Paul O'Neill** And that is why you are making work. You aren't just making it for yourself.

**Patrick Murphy** There is an impatience with Dublin at this stage, I am impatient with it too. There needs to be greater ambition. I just think it hasn't reached its potential and it is going to take time to get there. There are mechanisms like this one that remind us that although we want to run the race we are still crawling. Races have been ran here, but we haven't done it in the visual arts yet. It's all brand new.

**Paul O'Neill** With all that is new, I feel like we are missing the bit in the middle, the core, and that is the cultural aspect. If you look at gentrification in any major city it happens from the bottom up, the bottom being artists, writers, poets, people living in squats, cooperatives, in studios. Then come the graphic designers, then the architects, then the financiers. There is a touristic concept that Dublin is a cultural centre, but when I left only four years ago at the beginning of the Celtic tiger, we were waiting for the benefits. Now I come back and I think, where is the culture here?

**Patrick Murphy** It is in Roscommon and Leitrim. They are our Brooklyn. I remember going to Williamsburg in 1993. You would get off the subway and think, "Where am I?" The directions were like walk ten blocks, turn left at the river, and there was nothing in between. But it was about that shoe leather, the walking to the studio, going in and having a great time before going back out into the desert. As artists disperse, curators have to get out more, to drive more, walk more, see more.

**Paul O'Neill** If it wasn't happening when artists were in Dublin, is it really going to happen when they are outside?

**Sarah Pierce** Unlike Brooklyn, there is no area to point at and say, that is where the artists are, or that is where the alternative spaces are. Artists and spaces are frantically scrambling to be visible, to be stable. Unfortunately travelling around Ireland is not like hopping on the L train. It is expensive. That means that things that should be seen aren't seen for the sole reason that going to Isaac Julien in Cork means spending around 50 euro on the train for thirty minutes in an exhibition. That is only viable if someone else is paying for it, which means artists aren't seeing these shows. Is there really a sense that Cork is connected to Sligo and Sligo is connected to Dublin, in terms of audience?

**Patrick Murphy** We have to create that sense. We have to see this whole space, this whole island. Dublin needs to realise it's no longer an aspirational centre for artists in Ireland. You can be in Cork then Antwerp, Letterkenny then Oslo. It's more to do with Ryanair

than the art world.

**Paul O'Neill** Pat you are in an advantageous position because you are clear about what you do and where it comes from. What I always found missing in Dublin, and that I have found elsewhere, is a sense of curators trying to define what they actually do in relation to history and in relation to existing paradigms and constructs. If you are not aware of how your role is constructed, you will have these slippery lines. Blurry lines are fine, as long as...

**Sarah Pierce** ...as long as there is rigor in that blurring.

**Mark O'Kelly** It must be close to impossible Paul, for a curator to have an overview of that history and for it to enter into ever show they curate.

**Paul O'Neill** Sure. It's about looking at what other curators do, at the history of curating, at paradigmatic exhibitions from the 20s and 30s, and at the evolution of how exhibitions developed. There is an irresponsibility that comes with the curatorial model of simply coming up with a list of names or a theme and then filtering your ideas through works of art because that is all you know. When you talk about your work as an artist, you refer to other artists who have been influential. When I talk to other curators, there is no

concept of curating before say, 1990. They don't talk about their practice in relation to other curators or a history of curating.

**Mark O'Kelly** That limits curating to a world or language of curating. I think that the most interesting exhibitions are looking at culture in general and seeing the relationships between the world of objects, things that are fabricated. The show at the Royal Academy about motorcycles for instance. As an artist most of my influences come from newspapers and magazines.

**Paul O'Neill** Right, and as an artist it is a quite positive thing to be interdisciplinary and to be looking elsewhere for things that inform the critical discourse with which you have surrounded your practice. I think that with curators that is all they have been doing. Looking at other disciplines to define what they do whether it be architecture, or theory, or phenomenology...

**Jacinta Lynch** Sarah, what are you looking for in these conversations?

**Sarah Pierce** On a basic level I want to circulate ideas that arise out of casual conversation. My role as the artist is to set the ground rules. There are limits that I decide, that question a kind of legislative mindset

around what can be said between people. Whether there is any truth here is not what matters. The point is that people think this, they say it to each other, they know it through experience. That creates a situation to project into. The artist reading this can ask, "Where do I fit in to what is being said?" and "What do I have to say about it?"

**Patrick Murphy** It's something to read on the train to Cork to see an Isaac Julien exhibition...

**Sarah Pierce** Exactly!

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**The Metropolitan Complex is a Dublin-based project organised by Sarah Pierce.**

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