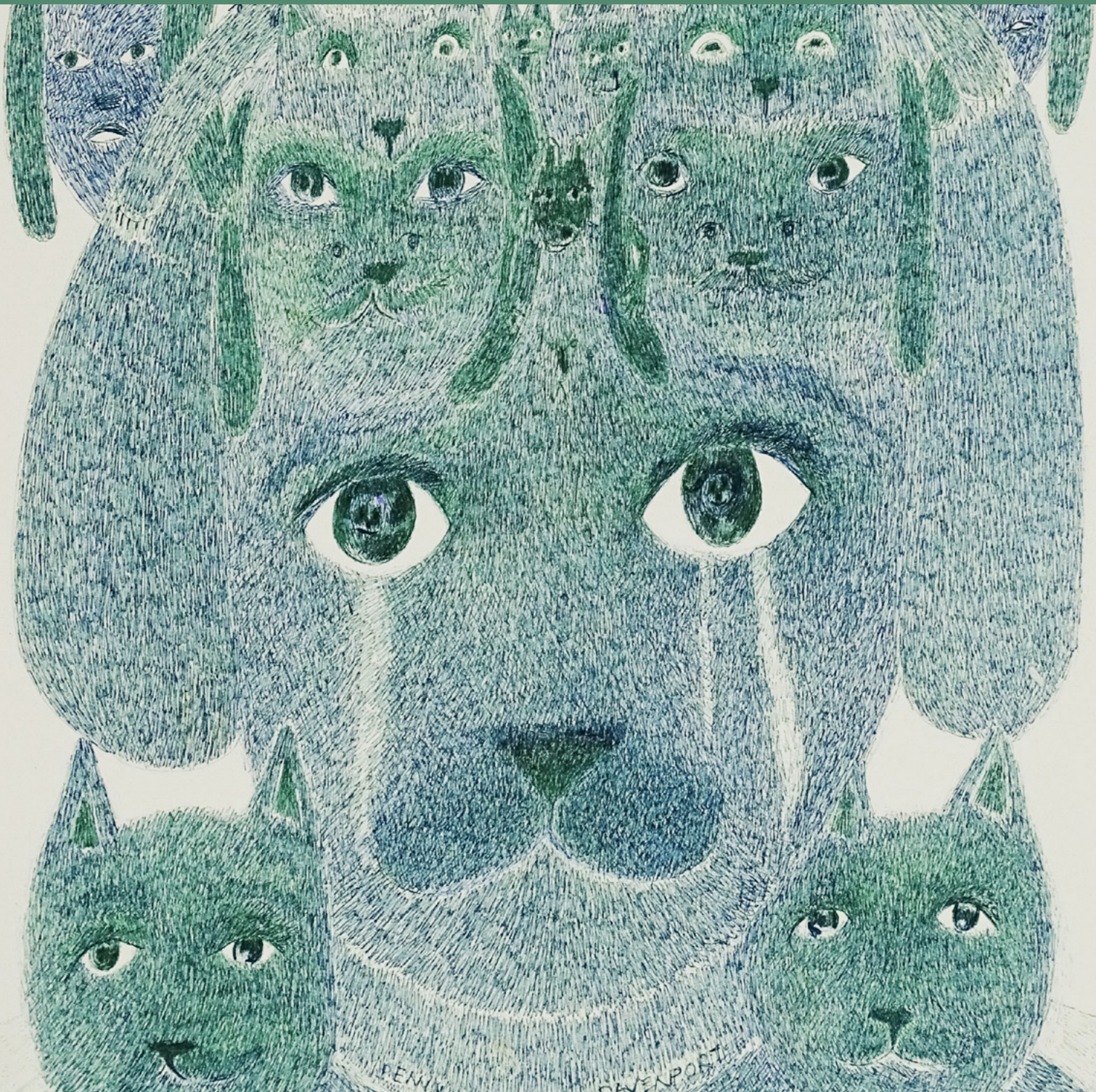




# Mirror Lamp Press

*June 2023*

No.7





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@mirrorlampress

EDITORS

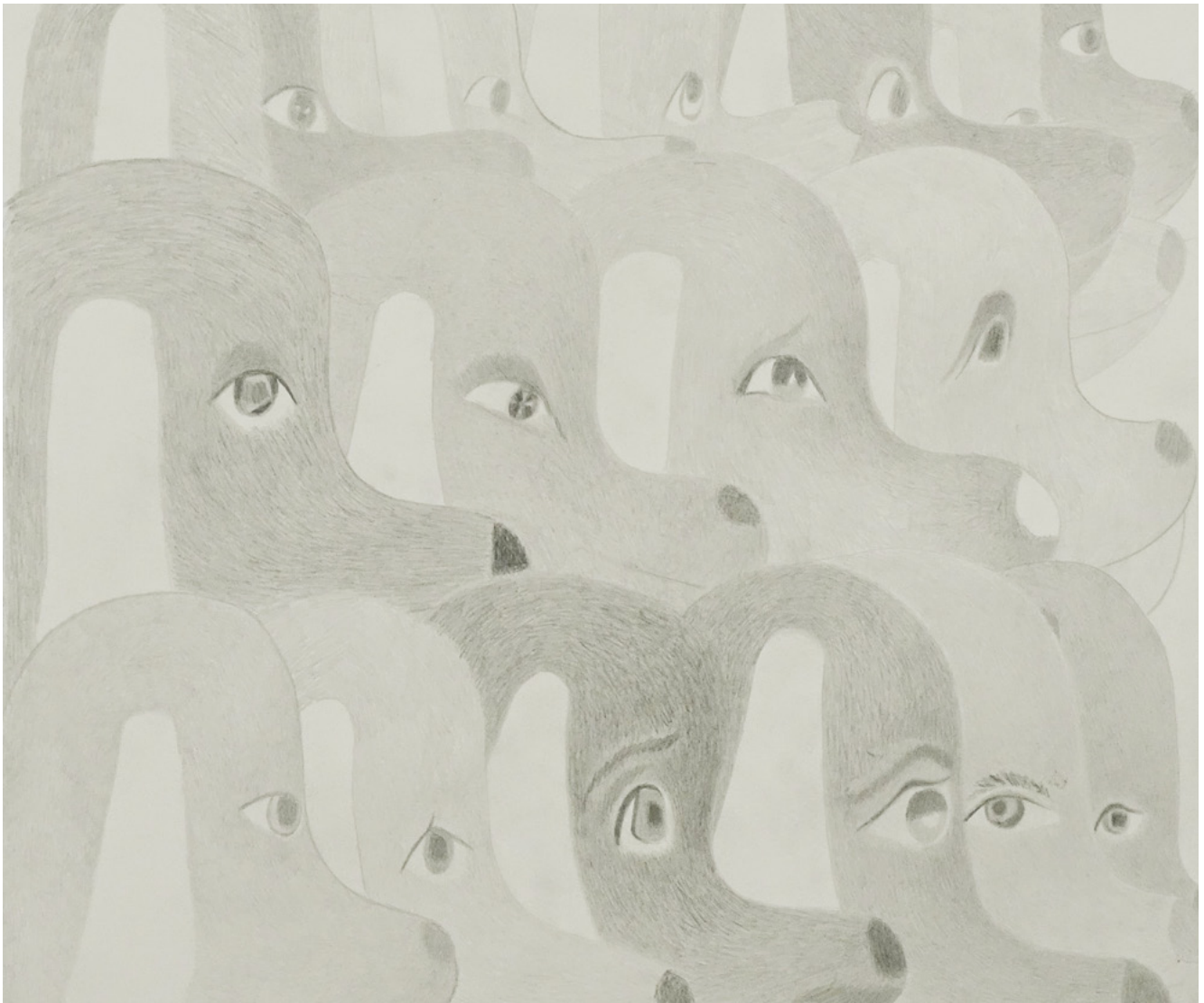
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## Naoise Dolan

Naoise Dolan is an Irish writer born in Dublin. She studied at Trinity College, followed by a master's in Victorian literature at Oxford. She writes fiction, essays, criticism and features for publications including *The London Review of Books*, *The Guardian* and *Vogue*. Naoise's debut novel *EXCITING TIMES* was published by W&N in the UK and by Ecco in the US in 2020. Her second novel, *THE HAPPY COUPLE*, was published in May 2023

## Sara D. M.

Born in Transylvania, Romania, Sara is a curator and writer. Currently a curatorial assistant at IMMA, she spent three years as a teaching assistant in the department of Philosophy at Trinity College Dublin. As an independent curator her commissions attempt to establish new ontologies relating to contemporary practices in sculpture, performance and interactive media. She is the recipient of Black Church Print Studio Emerging Curator Award 2022.

## Claire McCluskey

Claire McCluskey has a multidisciplinary visual art practice, predominantly incorporating sculpture, image-making and installation. She has a BA in Fine Art from TU Dublin (2012) and an MFA Digital Art from NCAD (2019). She is an ambassador for eXXpedition, a not-for-profit seeking solutions to the crisis of ocean

plastic pollution. Claire is based between Monaghan and Dublin where she also works part time as a lecturer and technician at NCAD.

## Pádraic E. Moore

Pádraic E. Moore is a curator, writer and art historian.

## Julie Morrissy

Julie Morrissy was the first Poet-in-Residence at the National Library of Ireland. Her project *Radical! Women and the Irish Revolution* comprises a poetry pamphlet and a podcast series. Her work has been supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Newman Fellowship in Creativity, the Arts Council, and the MAKE Theatre Award. She holds a PhD in Creative Writing, and separate degrees in literature, and law. [www.juliemorrissy.com](http://www.juliemorrissy.com)

## Michelle Doyle

Michelle Doyle is an artist and musician based in Ireland, working through sound, performance and moving image. Her work is concerned with politics, technology and ecology. She uses automatic writing as part of her practice; including collected data, manifestos and other written ephemera in order to create new work. Doyle is a resident artist in Fire Station Studios in Dublin and is supported by the Arts Council of Ireland.





EMMY DAYENT



# Penny Davenport

Penny Davenport (b. 1979, Inverness; UK) is a visual artist based in Liverpool (UK) whose depictions of anthropomorphic animal characters and daydreamed

landscapes explore the psychological nuances of bodily experience and complexities of interpersonal relationships.









Welcome to the seventh issue of Mirror Lamp Press.

For our ‘verb’ section Sara D.M. explores the influence of Evangelical ideology on her personal life, and how it has seeped into a broader mainstream visual culture as well as art. Critiquing minimalism as a lifestyle and art movement, Sara draws a line between Romanian Pentecostal congregations in atypical religious spaces, the German Sociologist Max Weber and the White Cube.

Pádraic E. Moore considers the remains of *The Cloon Project*, an unrealised land artwork conceived by the Irish artist Brian King. Moore examines Irish sculpture during the late 1970s, with an emphasis on failure, psychological states of collapse, and theories of entropy, shedding light on the unfulfilled land art project’s potential significance within the broader context of Irish art history.

Claire McCluskey responds to the term “circular,” an important concept in the fields of sustainability and design, particularly in relation to ideas like



the circular economy. Drawing from her firsthand experience on a sailing voyage dedicated to researching the devastating impact of ocean plastic, McCluskey explores how the concept of circularity can serve as a model for understanding ecology and regeneration.

Naoise Dolan delves into Vladimir Nabokov's time living in Berlin through the novels he wrote there, drawing comparisons between Nabokov's Russian emigré perspective and her own experiences as an Irish person living in 21st century Berlin.

Julie Morrissy examines the house that she grew up in, drawing out the fear she associated with the house itself, while drawing reference to Adrian Duncan's recent book *Little Republics – The Story of Bungalow Bliss*.

Penny Davenport is our featured artist, whose delicate, pale-toned paintings and intricate drawings give life to anthropomorphic creatures against haunting landscapes. The apparent 'cuteness' of the work is imbued with an underlying sense of menace.

Our commissioned video essay; *Living truthfully under imaginary circumstances* by Michelle Doyle, is a risible and unsettling acting lesson from AI generated actors. Using ‘the Meisner technique’ – training exercises which develop an actor’s connection with their emotions and impulses – Doyle demonstrates the uncanny nature of AI technologies in educational environments.

Enjoy the issue.

*Gwen & Eoghan*









# The Landing

*Julie Morrissy*

It wasn't the staircase that scared me, but the upstairs. The turn at the corner of the *landing*.

When I was very small my room was the largest in the house, but there were *snakes* on the floor at night. Bright colours coalescing in circles, covering the entire carpet. When I looked down from my bed, positioned at the back corner by the window, I saw them. Snakes. In nineteen eighty-eight in a suburb of south Dublin.

My imagination was adamant, insistent. I moved to a smaller room and eventually to the other side of the house. The room-switching happened frequently in our childhood. My parents switched rooms with my brother, he and I switched—this went on until we were teenagers. The rooms were not known by their dweller. Instead, they each had a name: the spare room, the pink room, the studio...

As a child I was afraid I would be trapped in my room on the far side of the house, away from my



parents and my brother. I used to ask what would happen in a fire—how I would get across the landing to the stairs, how I would get out.

*If the house is on fire, my mother would say, the neighbours aren't going to watch it burn down. But I didn't really know the neighbours and I didn't think that they would rescue me.*

In March, I stand in the backyard of the Irish Architectural Archive with a small crowd viewing a full-size timber roof frame of a model bungalow by Adrian Duncan<sup>1</sup>. The roof sits flat upon the concrete tiles of the yard, pointing upwards, aware of its own gaps. I imagine the missing house beneath it, the Bungalow Bliss<sup>2</sup>. The exhibition reminds me of my childhood pledge that I would live in a bungalow when I got older. I thought it would be safer, easier to escape.

I regularly begged to sleep beside my mom, so scared I was of our own house. The *snakes* were bad, but when I moved around the corner on my

own, the night terrors arrived. I became trapped in my dreams: I couldn't move, could not open the dream-door from inside my dream-room. If I did manage to open it and make it to the other side of the dream-upstairs where my mom and dad and brother slept, I would lose my voice. In my dreams I screamed, deafening, but no sound came out. And I could not wake myself up.

I tell Adrian about my fascination with the scenarios in his book: how these self-made houses delineate a set of hierarchies. How the youngest children typically have bedrooms furthest away from the central heating system. How the oil has the longest distance to travel, creaking through the pipes before it arrives like a slow clap in the room of the youngest child.

In my early twenties I suffered with depression. Every evening after work I would go upstairs to my childhood bedroom and sit on the floor with my back against the radiator. I soon went to see a therapist. The prescription was direct and explicit: I must move out of my childhood home. I did and the night-terrors, for the most part, stopped.



I became less afraid of houses and less afraid of being alone in them.

Then I suffer a relapse. For several weeks I end up alone in Northern Indiana in a sprawling bungalow with floor to ceiling windows and a forest in the back. I try to make myself comfortable with its structure—the walls, the doors, the hidden wardrobe spaces, the creaks, the noises, the air vents. But the moment I retreat for the night to my bedroom, a dull, familiar anxiety sets in. A throbbing in my brain and gut. The windows in the house do not open. My bedroom is at the end of a long hallway, and I become aware of the distance to the front door. One night, I imagine an intruder. In my exuberant panic, I make an accidental SOS call that alerts my partner on the other side of the Atlantic. I am so afraid that I get on my bike at four thirty in the morning in the Midwest winter and cycle for thirty-five minutes to my friend's house. I knock on the door, and he finds me sitting on the step wearing pyjamas under a tracksuit. I stay with him for the rest of the year.

Duncan describes a collective spirit in building these rural bungalows. The materials could be bought easily and locally. The house could be built by a few people. He identifies the activity as a kind of *meitheal*, the Irish word for neighbours coming together to share labour. There was also a certain agency to the bungalows. These do-it-yourself homes allowed people to circumvent the usual ways of acquiring property in rural Ireland, namely inheritance or the housing list. Taken together, these elements offer control over one's situation, the opportunity to take one's future into one's own hands, quite literally, but with the support of others.

I stopped living at *home* at twenty-three years old. When I go back to my parents' house, I never sleep in my childhood bedroom. The wardrobes have a few odds and ends of mine, but mostly harbour my father's suits and extra blankets. The walls are adorned with things chosen by other people, things that remind them of their version of me. There is a narrow cabinet by the radiator



stuffed with my belongings, haphazard. Every so often I lift the items in my hands one by one, consider whether to take some with me. Instead, I replace them on the shelf, open the door and scurry back across the landing.

1. Duncan, Adrian. Little Republics. 12 Jan–3 Mar 2023, Irish Architectural Archive, Dublin

2. Duncan, Adrian. (2022) *Little Republics: The Story of Bungalow Bliss*. Lilliput Press Ltd





PENNY DAVENOR



# Cloon

*Pádraic E. Moore*

Cloon is a sparsely populated townland in Wicklow, on Ireland's East Coast.

No signposts demarcate this hilly territory which is transected by the L1011, a meandering byroad connecting Enniskerry to Glencree. In a field high up on the side of a valley, where the invisible county border with Dublin lies, one can see – with considerable effort – a cluster of almost imperceptible depressions and mounds. These undulations are all that remains of The Cloon Project; a complex of earthworks conceived in the late 1970s by artist Brian King (1942–2017).

The only extant photo-documentation of Cloon is contained in a 24-page publication that accompanied a solo show of King's that took place at Dublin's Project Arts Centre in 1980. Seeing this publication in 2008 is what first drew my attention to Cloon and eventually led me to initiate contact with King. I found the visual qualities of the images in the publication

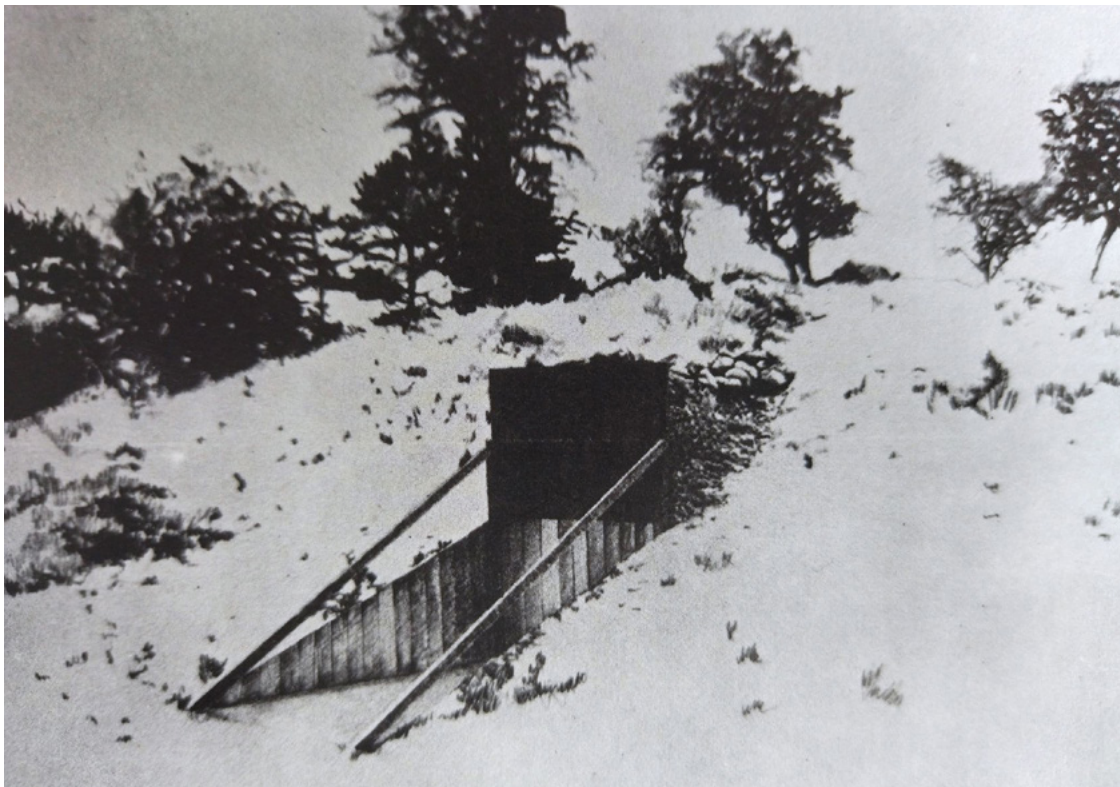
fascinating. While the black and white drawings portray the ideal of how King imagined his interventions would look and function, the photos of the unearthing process evoke an archaeological site or grave exhumation. In an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of King's work I visited him several times at his home in a south Dublin suburb. We discussed the sculptural language he cultivated in the late '70s and our shared interest in the megalithic sites of Ireland.

As I learned more about Cloon – and how the project had unravelled – my fascination deepened. During a visit in the autumn of 2009, King explained the extent to which Cloon was ill-fated and had been aborted before it could be completed. Despite high ambitions and clarity of concept, the realities of working with – and in – the Wicklow terrain proved more challenging than predicted.

Cloon is a common place name in Ireland. Its etymology derives from the Irish *cluain*, meaning meadow or pasture. Some dictionaries give the definition as a 'dry boundaried area' which is ironic, since the main problem besetting King's plan was relentless flooding. Weeks of labour were



undone in a few hours of heavy rain, as the deep trenches filled with water and everything turned to mud. Other factors also hindered the project: funds, willpower and capable workers diminished as the winter drew in. By the end of 1980 it had become evident that realising the project would be far more expensive and technically complex than had originally been anticipated. With considerable reluctance – and Sisyphean efforts – it was accepted that the project was no longer tenable. After all the salvageable materials had been extracted, the site was abandoned and, in a few months, the elemental forces had restored it to its former state. By the following spring, grass had begun sprouting from the refilled craters.



**Proposal  
for  
Levelled  
Hill, Brian  
King, 1979**

On my final visit to King's home, he showed me a work he had made thirty years previously. It combined stencilled text with black and white images of sea stones he had photographed on nearby Shankill beach. He smoked silver Silk Cut cigarettes throughout the conversation and a Roomba circled blindly around the adjoining room, occasionally bumping into furniture.

It felt like an apposite time to reflect on failure, hubris, and physical disintegration; a febrile atmosphere hung over Ireland, as the magnitude of the fallout from the Great Recession became apparent and the nation moved into a state of suspended ruination. Edifices like the Anglo-Irish Bank HQ and the Elysian Tower<sup>1</sup> stood unfinished or unoccupied and the term 'ghost estate' entered common parlance. At the time, there was considerable controversy surrounding the construction of the M3 motorway near the Hill of Tara and the resulting destruction of sites of major archaeological and mythological significance. A not-insignificant number of protesters argued that 'the curse of Tara' was at the root of economic meltdown and the related tribulations.





**Proposal  
for Six  
Foot  
Deep,  
Brian  
King, 1979**

It is worth noting that even if Cloon had been completed as had been planned it would look much as it does today, indistinguishable from the surrounding landscape. For each part of the intervention was conceived to collapse on itself and disappear over time. In a drawing for one work entitled ‘Six Foot Deep’, a deep cavity is sealed by a sheet of steel upon which a mound of gravel and loose stones is then piled. In theory, the sheet would abrade and eventually give way and the cavity would once again be filled. This and the other elements of the project were conceived to be gauges of entropy, evocative of Robert

Smithson's 1970 'Partially Buried Woodshed'. 'Six Foot Deep' is also redolent of 'Perimeters/Pavilions/Decoys' by Mary Miss; two images of which feature prominently on the second page of Rosalind Krauss' 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' which was published in October Magazine in 1979. But other influences also permeated, particularly Irish prehistoric stone structures and more broadly, a preoccupation with death, burial, and bodily internment.

King's foray into land art was influenced by the cultural context of the late 1970s but it was also shaped by personal circumstances. The project betrays a yearning to go 'back to nature' and engage in physical processes of sublimation with the earth; a desire to extricate oneself from the claustrophobia of Dublin and the routines of teaching art<sup>2</sup>.

A significant event prompting a shift in King's work was the unexpected demolition of his studio and the resultant loss of its contents. One bank holiday weekend in 1978 several old stable buildings off Dublin's Baggot St were covertly razed to make way for an office block. Upon arriving at the site of his former studio, he was



met with a pile of rubble in which could be seen large fragments of sculptures. The artist was given no forewarning and lost fifteen years' worth of documentation, drawings, and a substantial amount of equipment. In the decade leading up to this, King had become known for making modular geometric forms in wood and steel, one of which (dating from 1975) can still be seen on the campus of National University of Ireland in Galway<sup>3</sup>. Although traumatic, the catastrophic loss of the studio and its contents was also a liberation, creating a tabula rasa that prompted new beginnings.

The emergence of land art was driven by a desire to place art in dialogue with nature and history<sup>4</sup>. Achieving this entailed moving beyond the confines of museums or galleries, then considered moribund and inherently stultifying environments. And yet paradoxically, it was through artworks displayed in such venues and via images in publications that most people became aware of land art. This is certainly the case with Cloon which, although unfinished, was the subject of a family of artworks that ended up in public and private collections. One particularly elaborate piece combines photos, maps and solar

charts mapping out the movement of the sun in relation to the earthworks<sup>5</sup>. King also produced a series of elegant pencil drawings; idealistic renderings of how the completed project would appear. The contrast between what is represented in these compositions on paper and what physically occurred is loaded. For here one sees the difference “between the idea and the reality; between the conception and the creation”<sup>6</sup> that all of us grapple with.



**Excavation  
of Cloon,  
Spring  
1980.  
Photo  
by Brian  
King.**

In Joel Fisher’s 1987 essay ‘Judgement and Purpose’ he discusses how artworks that are deemed to be failures often end up being more revealing and illuminating than if they



had succeeded as originally intended. His words resonate with King's unrealised venture; particularly the lines "sometimes the failures of the big ideas are more impressive than the success of the small ones" and "where failure occurs there is a frontier. It marks the edge of the acceptable or possible, a boundary fraught with possibilities"<sup>8</sup>.

Cloon was a singular event in the history of Irish art; an attempt to cultivate a vernacular of land art that chimed with sacred ancient sites. The fact that it was ill-fated does not detract from the importance of the endeavour. It is the disintegration of this undertaking – and its resultant incompleteness – that makes it so tantalising. For this is also a story of nature winning; of an artist's elusive vision being prematurely entombed in mud. That the ruins of Cloon are imbued with disappointment and dashed expectation only adds further to the mythos of those hard-to-find remnants, buried somewhere up there in the Wicklow hills.

1. An Irish Times article that year described the latter building as a “Mary Celeste” adrift after the recession.
2. King was head of sculpture at NCAD from 1979 to 2004.
3. In 1969 King represented Ireland at the Paris Biennale and won an award with one such sculpture.
4. Lucy Lippard’s 1983 book *Overlay* expands upon this.
5. This work is held in the collection of the Irish Museum of Modern Art.
6. Roughly quoted from T.S. Eliot’s *The Hollow Men*.
7. Le Feuvre, L (ed). (2010) *Failure: Documents of Contemporary Art Joel Fisher: Judgement and Purpose*. Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press. Page 118.
8. *ibid.*









# Circular

*Claire McCluskey*

The circular form is ubiquitous, and essential. I love its roundy geometry, its infinite symmetry. The mathematical precision of a perfect circle is not readily – if ever – found in nature, and I love this fact too; the wobbly iterations available to us perform their roles well, yet sounding in chorus they direct us towards an ideal, archetypal form.

Rounding, rotating, revolving; the circle's ingenuity and usefulness to us humans is its capacity to roll. Its shape is the basis of that most essential machine, the wheel. With no corners to interrupt, top rotates through to bottom, and back up to start again; repetition creating rhythm. Different circumference sizes create different frequencies of oscillation; various combinations contribute to complex systems of gears, wheels within wheels, capable of performing tremendous work.

Every 365 days, 6 hours, 9 minutes, the earth completes a large circular orbit around the sun.



All this while, like a cosmic spirograph, our planet rotates about its polar axis every 23.9 hours, creating the local transitions we navigate through night and day. These movements and the specific axial tilt ( $23.5^\circ$ ) have the effect of directing a higher quantity of light from the sun along the Earth's equatorial band, defining a tropical circumference of 40,075.017 km. It is this seam that joins the hemispheres; where the negotiation between daylight and darkness varies little throughout the seasons, and twice a year – at the equinox high noon – you lose your shadow. Understandably, the air is hotter here, and so it rises, flowing up and away from the equatorial surface. Warm air drifts towards higher latitudes where it cools and flows back to where it began, like a global conveyor belt, replacing the warming air rising in its wake. If you can visualise it, the rotation of the earth on its axis pulls on these circulating cells of air, in a phenomenon known as the Coriolis effect, deflecting the atmosphere to spiral leftwards across the southern hemisphere and to the right in the northern. This waltz of air movements and gravitational forces precipitates our global wind patterns and prevailing weather systems.

As the Earth spins, the air circulates, and so too swirl the oceans (which by the way, account for 70% of the planet's surface). The Coriolis effect bears a similar impact on large bodies of water as it does on air. Imagine you are Coriolis, and you have the ability to stir the ocean (clockwise in the northern hemisphere, naturally) to create directional currents and flows. As you do, a centripetal force begins to draw energy towards its centre. This is how we might visualise the oceanic gyres (of which there are 5 dispersed through the major pelagic volumes); central pivots of rotating ocean currents. Gyres are also known as accumulation zones; as they exert a pull towards their centre, they collect and retain debris, most notably, particles of plastic.

I had the fortunate experience of being able to visit the South Pacific Gyre once, accompanying a research mission collecting data on plastic pollution.<sup>1</sup> Being in a small sailboat in the remote ocean is a striking experience in itself; the unbroken ring of horizon defines a vast blue circle (with a radius of approximately 4.8km for a person of average height standing at sea level), the centre point of which is perpetually *you*. Sometimes other elements pass through this



circular landscape; other vessels on their way to distant, far-flung places; squally clouds trailing gusts and sudden downpours; the sparkling (and tremendously exciting) charm of the occasional pod of dolphins. But by and large, the ocean is an empty and vast expanse. It can feel almost as if the laws of motion have reversed; that instead of traversing along the surface of the globe, making incremental progress further away from one place and closer towards another, the round emptiness somehow imprints the strange sensation that you are stationary as the world moves through, past and beyond you.

Every day on board the mission we sieved the sea water using a variety of scientific apparatus designed to capture material particles. What we found, to our initial relief, was fairly tiny; 4 maybe 5 pieces of plastic at a time, each no bigger than a grain of rice. We dutifully logged everything we found. As our collection of samples grew, a nauseating realisation settled in around me; if *every* trawl had this yield, and if we extrapolated the results of one trawl across the vast surroundings, then that was actually quite a lot of displaced material, considering we were in one of the most remote (non) places in the world. As we

approached the centre of the gyre, our yields grew bigger, inferring the accumulative effects of the currents beneath us. When we arrived at our destination on Rapa Nui, the island bore stark evidence of this accumulation over time; every wave onto its beaches brought a fresh wash of microplastic. I could pick it up by the handful.

Out in the true wilderness of the open ocean – an environment that is utterly inhospitable to human life in every way – what struck me about this insidious colonisation of human detritus, was how utterly banal it is as a material. The main sources of ocean plastic are land-based, largely down to inadequate waste management of stuff we use and discard of thoughtlessly. Aside from the obvious choking hazard posed by plastic to all manner of life, out in the sea, UV and mechanical wave energy disintegrates the material down to tiny micro-pieces. When extracting our samples, we were finding particles mashed in amongst organic matter including plankton, the diverse gooey lifeforms that live on the surface of the water and provide a crucial source of nutrition to a diverse array of aquatic organisms. So embedded, the plastic pieces would be impossible for larger fish to discern. This is one of the means



by which plastic enters the food chain, ingested by bigger and bigger fish, until we humans consume it as well. Thus the associated chemical constituents spread, seep through, and accumulate; to what end has yet to be fully determined, but early evidence has shown these chemicals to negatively impact immune and endocrine systems, among other ill effects.

Scary stuff to dwell on, surely, but more often I am compelled to find it wildly absurd. The global current of material flow is decidedly linear, often catchily described as a 'take-make-waste' approach. This format has become the standard because it serves convenience, efficiency and capitalist-oriented profit margins, but the problem with the bottom line is that it takes an exceptionally blinkered perspective on the interconnectedness of global systems of exchange. For a wheel to work it, the bottom must become the top, the end must connect back to the beginning, to keep the cycle going, to regenerate. To fail to consider how the end point can begin anew, is to unfurl the circumference of a circle and to lay it flat; sooner or later, the track runs out.

There must be something in the remote waters to really draw one's mind to the global patterning of resources, their impact and their scarcity. I think it has to do with the closed circuit system of life on board – all your resources are all that you have, all your waste must travel with you. It's not just me – in 2005 Dame Ellen MacArthur completed a record-breaking, solo circumnavigation of the globe, harnessing all of the aforementioned circulatory systems of wind and water to her advantage. Of her 71 day voyage with limited resources she reflected “no experience (...) could have given me a better understanding of the word finite.”<sup>2</sup> On her return she established a foundation dedicated to the advancement of the global Circular Economy; an alternative model for reimagining how the world's resources are managed, one in which materials are kept in a loop, perpetually valuable.

To me a circular mode of thinking goes beyond economics, materials and trash in the sea. It presents an opportunity to reflect on how systems intersect, how equilibriums are balanced. It reminds me to an extent of the overview effect, the transcendental cognitive shift felt by astronauts when they reach the outer limits of orbit and



look back upon the blue marble of the Earth, and realise that everything they know, everything we have, is all in this one, round place.

1. <https://exxpedition.com/expedition/round-the-world>

2. <https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/about-us/ellens-story>









# Working class Romanian Pentecostals in Ireland

*Sara D.M.*

I was raised in a household who unknowingly chose to other themselves. Working class Romanian Pentecostals in Ireland. Moderately Eastern European but extremely Protestant.

The effects of being working class or being an immigrant will have wide-reaching implications on anyone's character. The influence of Evangelicalism in my life has reached far wider than class or ethnicity. Evangelicals are those fundamentalist Protestants who put Christ at the centre of their lives, insisting a believer must be 'born-again' and baptised as an adult if they are to make it to Heaven. This has been the core teaching I have internalised for twenty-six years. It's difficult to broach a lifetime of affect through language. It is a veil that stretches so far, and so tightly over every imaginable detail of my daily life. The following 800 words examine how Evangelicalism has (1) played out on me and how it may have (2) unwittingly played out on you.

## 1. Me

From the age of four, until maybe four years ago, my family and I frequented three separate Romanian Pentecostal congregations in Dublin. The culture in each differed slightly. Long story short, one church split into three because, Protestants being Protestants, they found *minor* ideological differences amongst themselves and could no longer worship in the same room. One thing they all had in common, however; every church convened in 'odd' places. Catholics in Ireland have no shortage of places to gather for Sunday service: a supreme excess of space. There is a beautiful church on every corner which sit largely empty, Sunday after Sunday. In turn, predominately non-English speaking, immigrant religious communities, like mine, congregate in the gaps of suburban or metropolitan infrastructure. Community centres, hotel convention rooms, renovated warehouses or a rented room above a chipper in an industrial estate (ie the last of three churches we frequented). My eldest brother and his wife attend a church that convenes in a cinema, early in the morning before business hours. On the surface this may seem like the result of Dublin not



being accommodating to non-English speaking places of worship, but in my 20 years' experience, living in the gaps of society is an important element of Protestant faith. It requires faith from the congregation that God will provide. Most importantly, it parallels the experience of Christ; "The foxes have holes and the birds of the heaven have nests, but the Son of Man does not have a place where He may lay His head" Matthew 8:20.

My family have maintained an austerely isolated lifestyle. They have never entered the workforce, never learned English, never made friends or any attempt to assimilate into Irish society following our arrival in Ireland in 2000. For much of my life I put this down to an anxiety around illegal immigration; wanting to hide, be unseen. But neighbours often waved and made efforts to make us feel welcome, make conversations, invite us to their home. Remembering this now I realise that my household was under *self-imposed* exile. As my mother used to say, 'we have no business with these people'. Back 'home', Protestants make up 6% of the religious population of Romania. We never stood a chance, isolation was our fate. I have not begun to scratch the surface to the consequences of such an upbringing on me. The

Evangelical veil through which I've experienced the world has affected my psyche in ways I'm still not ready to unfold. I don't know how many years it will take to build a functioning social, ethnic, emotional identity following twenty-six years of stunted growth while committing to the role of the other.

## 2. You

On the surface, it may seem incidental that these immigrant-Protestant spaces of worship would be undecorated. As these spaces are rented they are predominately used for other purposes; there is no time or room to make these spaces work for these communities beyond its primary purpose to congregate for a few short Sunday hours. For the Pentecostal services I attended, these are all features of the space, not flaws. Protestant churches are known for intentionally lacking decoration, rejecting iconography and crucifixes. They only hold space for that which is absolutely necessary, rituals and sacraments are nothing more than a nice afternoon activity. Internalising fundamentalism leads naturally to minimalism. This minimalism being an important distinguishing factor between



Protestant's Catholic counterparts who partake in pageantry in hopes to signal at the glory and other-worldliness of Heaven. Minimalism is an important cultural foundation for Protestants who in turn exhibit their ideology visually through bare walls, plain clothing, straight neatly-combed hair.

It is not incidental that regions with deep Protestant roots, like Protestantism's birthplace of Germany or the Nordic countries, have a culture which champions minimalism's counterparts of efficiency, frugality, brutalism etc. These Western cultures will praise maximising ergonomics and shame you for your disorganised junk drawer. What I'm trying to say is, your Ikea furniture is Protestant.

However, the most egregious, harmful affect Protestantism has had on society is by far its exacerbation of capitalism. We know this best à la German sociologist Max Weber. His seminal text "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" published in 1905, argued that Protestantism provided the cultural and psychological conditions for the development of capitalism in Western Europe and North America.

The doctrine of predestination, held by many (but not all) Protestant denominations, teaches that individuals are predestined to salvation or damnation. To soothe the anxiety produced by this uncertainty Protestants demonstrate their salvation through hard work and austere, disciplined living. This may include forbidding singing and dancing, as well as accumulating wealth as a sign of God's favour. Thankfully, accumulation of wealth was not a trap my family fell into. My parents are many things, but they are not greedy. While the correlation between Protestantism and unfettered capitalism is self-evident and well documented, greed and corruption are not prerequisites to living a Protestant life. Unfortunately, however, that is more common than not. I do not believe it to be too far a stretch to blame Protestantism for the neo-liberal hellscape Dublin finds itself in now.

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I am writing this on the eve of my younger brother's baptism. Believers' baptism: he is 20. I have not attended a church service in four years. I maintain much of the faith I was reared on but I do not desire to be back in those bare walls. I have traded Protestant spaces for the white cube. Safe to say, galleries satiate our culture's desire for minimalism.





# Nabokov's Berlin

*Naoise Dolan*

Officially, there are just over 4,000 Irish people in Berlin. One of them is me. Many diasporic souls never make it through the registration process (two words: 'Kafka' + '-esque'), so I wouldn't be surprised if the real big-Irish-head-count were higher. It's not Dublin levels of Irish people, but it's enough to make a Clonakilty, say, or an Athenry or a Cashel. Still, you can largely do your own thing. I sometimes go weeks without encountering a fellow Irish person here, and I enjoy that feeling of space. I'm happiest when anonymous in a crowd: I love walking around the busy Museum Island, going alone to sold-out Philharmonic symphonies.

Far tighter-knit than today's Irish Berliners were the Russians of 1920s Weimar Germany. At the time there were 350,000 Russian emigrants in Berlin, nearly a tenth of the city's total population. Many of them had fled the 1917 October Revolution for the leafy neighbourhoods of Zehlendorf, Grunewald and Charlottenburg (soon

dubbed 'Charlottengrad'). There were Russian cafés, Russian bookshops, eighty-six Russian publishers.

Vladimir Nabokov moved in this world for fifteen years. From 1922 to 1937, between his early twenties and late thirties, he lived in Berlin, where he wrote eight novels, one play and many short stories.

Since his aristocratic family had lost its fortune to the Bolsheviks, the fledgling Nabokov juggled all manner of odd jobs. He was a film extra at Berlin's UFA studios; his Russian translation of *Alice in Wonderland* won him five US dollars, a tidy sum during Germany's hyperinflation; he taught several languages, also tennis. (He was not an avid tutor. In his 1951 memoir *Speak, Memory* he describes awaiting with dread 'a certain stone-faced pupil, who would always turn up despite the obstacles I mentally plied in his way'.) He even devised crossword puzzles for the émigré publication *Rul*, though the self-starterish pluck with which Nabokov recounts these times is perhaps dampened when one recollects that the paper was co-founded by our scrappy underdog's father.



Writing-wise, Nabokov's Berlin years were prolific, though rarely lucrative. His most significant fiscal injection came when German publisher Ullstein bought translation rights to his 1928 novel *King, Queen, Knave*. The happy author spent his generous advance on a butterfly safari in the Pyrenees.

Nabokov downplayed the importance of Berlin for his first eight novels. The characters could just as easily have lived in the Netherlands or Romania, he said. Six years into his Berlin era, Nabokov himself — by his own account — still 'spoke no German, had no German friends, had not read a single German novel'. (A staggering number of 21st-century Berlin expats equally match this description.) It's possible Nabokov's Deutsch was not so schlecht as he claimed — but he wasn't notably modest about his general relationship with words, so I'm inclined to believe him. When a braggart says they're bad, they're bad.

Why am I bothering to learn German when Vlad didn't? Perhaps that's a silly question. I bother doing many things that Vlad didn't, eg my own laundry.

Besides, Nabokov was considerably more attached to his native tongue than I am to mine. In a 1971 interview he claimed to have feared he'd spoil his Russian if he mastered German. It's impossible to spoil English for me; it was already spoiled by coming from – how to put this? – England.

Moreover, I chose Berlin and Nabokov didn't. Having volunteered to live among Germans, I want to know what they're bloody well saying. I came here simply because I felt like it, a not-uncommon rationale for today's Berlin expats; many of us have EU passports and work remotely. Nabokov, however, would have liked to stay in Cambridge, where he had taken his undergraduate degree after fleeing the Revolution for England via Crimea and Constantinople. During Nabokov's studies, most of his family had moved yet again to Berlin in 1920. Two years later, Nabokov's father was assassinated in the Berlin Philharmonic by, in the son's words, 'a sinister ruffian whom, during World War Two, Hitler made administrator of émigré Russian affairs'. Nabokov's grieving mother wanted her son with her in Berlin. So he went. He stayed for fifteen years, escaping the Nazis in 1937 with his Jewish wife Vera and their son Dimitri.

Nabokov wrote all eight Berlin novels in Russian. (Admittedly I've only read them in English translation. Sorry, Vlad, but at least I didn't read them in German.)

My favourite of these novels is the first one, *Mary* (1926). The main character Ganin and a supporting cast of Russian émigrés live in a Berlin boarding house, rendered in the spine-tingling level of detail that would become Nabokov's trademark. I'll never forget the torn-out pages from a calendar stuck to the doors in lieu of proper numbers, though the obviousness of this liminal symbol would perhaps strike the mature Nabokov as crass (or more likely he'd find me crass for accusing him of liminal symbology). We know everything about this boarding house, its interior, its daily rhythms: the landlady's desultory way with a broom, the bathing arrangements, the old green armchairs, and white wallpaper with bluish roses.

In *King, Queen, Knave* (1928) Nabokov assembles an all-German cast of characters – not despite, but because of, his detachment from German culture. He wanted distance, the better to manipulate his chessboard. He dumped his pawns in Berlin



because he happened to know the weather. (His accuracy on this point I would nonetheless dispute. One character, Dreyer, describes Berlin's summer as 'lovely, blue and fragrant'; while the city was cooler a century ago, it was still fundamentally built on a swamp. Implications: 1. stench, 2. flies. That said, Dreyer is a hapless cuckold, so perhaps we see Dreyer's Berlin through hapless-cuckold-goggles.)

A desire to escape Berlin runs through the rest of these novels. *The Defence* (1930) portrays an — I think — autistic chess prodigy, misunderstood by his family and bullied by his classmates, who loses himself in the game. The hero of *Glory* (1932), Martin, gives us his 'childish impression' of Berlin, focusing not on the city itself but on its trains with 'fabulous destinations'. One imagines Nabokov smirkingly aware, though young Martin is not, that it's scarcely a compliment to say the best thing about a venue is the exit. In *Laughter in the Dark* (1932) we glimpse a German-set precursor to *Lolita's* (1955) string of motels: 17-year-old Margot cheats on one older man with another at a remote holiday inn. While *Lolita's* Humbert dissects others' speech habits with misanthropic rigour, *Laughter in the Dark's*

unsubstantiated reference to Margot's 'vulgar Berlin slang' lacks precision. We might have seen this slang in Margot's actual dialogue had Nabokov known enough German to pull it off.

Berlin fades further as a setting in the last three novels, published between 1934–38 as the Nazis neared what Nabokov sardonically termed their 'full volume of welcome'. The narrator of *Despair* (1934) lives in a nondescript 'small but attractive flat', a pale watercolour compared to the baroquely detailed boarding house in *Mary*. There are no explicit Berlin mentions at all in *Invitation to a Beheading* (1936), although a Nazi-era text where a death-row prisoner encounters a German-accented jailer's wife can be seen – to put it mildly – as locally relevant. Berlin returns in the last of these novels, *The Gift* (1938), but Nabokov contends in the 1962 foreword that he 'did not have the knack of recreating Berlin and its colony of expatriates as radically and ruthlessly as I have done in regard to certain environments in my later, English, fiction'.

It's difficult to imagine Vladimir Nabokov making a real attempt to write something but finding himself unable. Did he really lack the 'knack' of

capturing 1938 Berlin – or was it, as with learning German, a case of not wanting to go there?

Nabokov's non-fiction refers occasionally to the Third Reich, always with a certain protective glibness. He jibes in *Speak, Memory* at 'heil-hitlering Berlin'. In the foreword to *Glory* he describes the General whose apartment he sublet: '... an altogether delightful man (later murdered by the Germans in one of their extermination camps), and vividly do I remember the splendid zest with which he slapped his knees before rising from our grim green divan after the deal had been clinched!'; parenthesised slaughter hides between plaudits. A similar strained jollity saturates the 1930s Berlin fiction of Christopher Isherwood — but where Isherwood's British sex tourists are sad that the party is over, Nabokov's Russians stand to lose their lives.

Berlin is also, though, where Nabokov once found a dressmaker's black dummy under a hawthorn bush in the Grunewald forest. It's where, aged eleven, he sat on a Turkish sofa, reading *War and Peace*.

Few physical traces of Nabokov remain in today's



Berlin. His father's grave in north-western Tegel is modest, bearing only the Cyrillic name and '1870-1922'. The tennis court where Nabokov gave lessons is now derelict. At his longest-term Berlin residence, Nestorstraße 22, the Die Kleine Weltlaterne ('Little World Lantern') pub began letting the ground floor in the 1970s. A brass plaque at the entrance commemorates Nabokov, but he's just a name among many; the interior walls are filled with photos of famous guests from more recent decades.

Still, Nabokov's Berlin novels leave their stamp. We've got our differences, Vlad and I, but I think we're kindred spirits. His Berlin informs my Berlin, if only because he's the one who wrote it.



PENNY



# Living truthfully under imaginary circumstances

5:30 mins, HD Video, 2023

*Michelle Doyle*



[Watch Video](#)

The Meisner Technique is a series of training exercises developed by Sanford Meisner, which develop an actor's connection with their emotions and impulses. The activities in this context are primarily centered on the technique of repetition,



requiring the actors to read and respond to each other's emotional cues.

This piece draws a comparison between the emotional limitations of AI and the mechanical nature of repetition, using artificial intelligence avatars that are created using real actors' images and voices, who lease them to video platforms.

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PEPPER  
OF ENGLAND



Cover

Between Creation And Emotion  
ink on paper 28 x 38 cm

Page 02

Moving Above And Below  
pencil on paper 36 x 38 cm

Page 04

Something Left In Other Places  
ink and colour pencil on paper  
56 x 67 cm

Page 06

Giving The Moods  
acrylic, watercolour and colour pencil on  
paper 19 x 27 cm

Page 07

A Meeting Place  
watercolour on paper 28.5 x 33.5 cm

Page 08

To Gather Some For Fun  
watercolour on paper 28 x 38 cm

Page 11

Weak Spirits  
ink on paper 58 x 76 cm

Page 12

Charming Gloom  
colour pencil on paper 19 x 25 cm

Page 19

A Journey That Carried Them Away  
ink and oil on paper 18.5 x 25.5 cm

Page 29

Deliberate Fading Disguises  
watercolour on paper 43.5 x 57.5 cm

Page 30

Mysterious Work In Ways  
ink on paper 28 x 38 cm

Page 38

Fading Fading Hopes And Faces  
watercolour and pencil on paper  
38 x 42 cm

Page 39

Guided By Judgements  
ink on paper 20 x 28 cm

Page 46

Find It  
watercolour on wood 42 x 31 cm

Page 56

Higher Dreams And Walks Between  
watercolour on paper 20 x 28 cm

Page 59

Cosmic Comic  
ink and wax on paper 18.5 x 25.5 cm

Page 61

We Are Here  
pencil and watercolour on oiled paper  
28 x 20 cm





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