

Feeling Things Out

EVGENIYA MARTIROSYAN REPORTS ON HER RECENT RESIDENCIES IN THE TYRONE GUTHRIE CENTRE AND PRAKSIS, OSLO.



Evgeniya Martirosyan, *Release*, 2018, mattress frame, rope, wallpaper paste, wood, 300 × 100 × 100cm approx., installation view and details, Felleverkstedet, Oslo, Norway, September 2018; photographs by Sayed Sattar Hasan

RECEIVING THE 2018 VAI Residency Award at the Tyrone Guthrie Centre was a precious opportunity for me to spend a week in this renowned artist's retreat. I planned to explore the natural surroundings of the centre, observing the water, earth and changing atmospheric conditions. This research would continue my interest in working with ephemeral materials and notions of chaos and transformation. I was particularly interested in observing various growth patterns and finding signs of order within entropic natural processes. In August 2018, I was invited to partake in the 'Monumental/Temporal' programme with PRAKSIS Oslo, Norway (praksisoslo.org). As I travelled from central Oslo to rural Ireland in September, this contrasting experience, in many ways, shaped my stay at the Tyrone Guthrie Centre. It became important for me to spend some time processing the unexpected outcomes of my residency with PRAKSIS.

Tyrone Guthrie Centre was established in 1981 as a residential workspace and a creative retreat for artists of all disciplines. Situated in the tranquil setting of Annaghmakerrig, County Monaghan, the centre faces its own lake and is surrounded by farmland laced with drumlins. Until 1971, the estate was the family home of the theatre director, Sir William Tyrone Guthrie. Upon his death, Guthrie left the property to the Irish State, as a dedicated retreat for artists. The main accommodation for residents is in the Big House. It is also possible to stay in one of the five self-catering farmyard cottages. The facilities include seven art studios, a music room, darkroom, rehearsal space, print workshop, dance studio and a library.

The programme at the centre doesn't set any expectations regarding the outcomes of residencies. The centre provides a tranquil environment for research and creation, but just thinking or recuperating is considered equally as important. However, there is one ritual that needs to be observed on a daily basis – dinner at 7pm in the Big House. This tradition follows Tyrone Guthrie's wish that all artists should come together in the evenings to share a meal. Artists residing in the self-catering cottages are welcome to join the meal once a week. The after-dinner party can unfold in unpredictable ways. On one occasion, we were treated to a Debussy concert by a resident musician. A spontaneous field walk in absolute darkness was the outcome of another evening's gathering. The residency programme can be accessed in different ways. Art-

ists of all disciplines are welcome to apply directly through the Tyrone Guthrie Centre website. Admission criteria varies for different artforms. Applications are reviewed by the selection committee every four months. Local authority bursaries or special bursaries from partner organisations are other ways of accessing the programme.

On my arrival at the Tyrone Guthrie Centre in late September, I needed to reflect on my recent experiences, while on residency in Norway. The 'Monumental/Temporal' residency was developed by PRAKSIS in collaboration with the German sculptor Gereon Krebber and Felleverkstedet (felleverkstedet.no), an organization providing access to the production facilities in Oslo. This programme, advertised through an open-call, brought 11 emerging and established international artists together for an intensive period of hands-on, three-dimensional construction. The artists were provided with a workspace and a range of materials, but were responsible for covering the costs of travel and accommodation. My participation in this programme was made possible through the Arts Council of Ireland Travel and Training Award.

Over a four-week period, the artists were asked to create new work and set up a showcase in response to the 'Monumental/Temporal' theme. The task pushed me out of my comfort zone, as I had never made anything on such a large scale or over such a short period of time. My work up until this point had been relatively modest in scale and took many months to develop, due to its complicated technical nature. There were many other unknowns during this residency, such as the space, tools and materials. We were given free access to the old Felleverkstedet facilities – a slightly dilapidated warehouse in central Oslo. This massive industrial space presented some technical challenges, but it was ideal for creating ambitious large-scale work. Looking for inspiration, we were brought to a local dump and had to improvise with what was available to us. Not really knowing what I would make, I picked up some used mattresses as my starting point.

My initial vague idea was to use the mattress frames to support an organic form growing through it. Some other artists were building large-scale columns on the floor of the workshop, and so I decided to create something that would grow in the opposite direction – from the top down. Looking for inspirations in nature, I thought about stalactites and chose rope as my main material to create these forms. The

making of the work required repetitive gestures, knotting and weaving the rope through the frame. I experimented with solidifying the rope by dipping it into various solutions, such as concrete and filler paste. Although this didn't work the way I expected, the mattress frame reacted to the wetness of the rope and created interesting rust patterns on its surface. As the sharpness of the metal kept cutting my fingers, the making process quickly became quite intense. The finished piece was a surprise and left me in a perplexed state of mind, by the time I arrived at the Tyrone Guthrie Centre.

At the centre, I was allocated one of the self-catering cottages and a big bright studio. The relative isolation of the cottage suited my need to spend some time thinking. Over the course of the week, I did lots of walking around the estate. I would sometimes veer off path and venture into the woods near the lake, and I even got lost on one occasion. The recent storm brought many trees down, uplifting and turning huge layers of the earth. I took lots of photographs of the fallen and broken trees, as I was captivated by the energy and power of the storm. The trees' exposed roots reminded me of my recent work with rope and I became interested in the tangled organic masses around me. I could see how it might be possible to capture this entanglement and chaotic natural energy with the use of simple material.

I have decided, at this point in time, to simplify my artistic process, so that I don't always need to rely on complex engineering to activate my pieces. I feel the need to regain the tactile connection with my work and I plan to spend some time experimenting with very simple or reclaimed materials, in order to do this. I am interested in continuing to use repetitive gestures as the basis for building large-scale forms. I hope to bring all these thoughts and ideas together in new work for my upcoming solo exhibition in Triskel Art Centre, Cork, in 2019.

Evgeniya Martirosyan is a Cork-based artist with a background in philosophy and design, who works primarily in sculpture and installation.

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