

Aideen Barry

*Listen.Liquid, the syllables; the echo, luminous*

The title of the work -of the exhibition too- is taken from a verse of *At Bridget's Well*, poem by Doireann Ní Ghríofa dedicated to this female personage who moves between history and legend. Bridget is one of the triad of patron saints of Ireland, where from ancient pagan times it was the custom to designate wells to certain gods or saints, attributing them healing properties for the body and the soul. This sacred nature of the wells is shared with other country places like woods or springs. Many of the wells and "sacred" places that lay along the pilgrim ways marked out by the Celts are dedicated to Bridget, Brige, Bride or Brigid. In addition, from the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the feminists have made this woman an icon for their movement. Saint Brigid was an independent woman of strong character, defender of the freedom and rights of herself and of the other women she lived with in the religious community she founded, which gave name and relevance to the county and the city of Kildare.

During the enforced restrictions of movement caused by COVID 19 the artist suffered a great deal of tension. Her home was in a isolated part of the west of Ireland. On the one hand, this allowed her to walk freely in the surrounding countryside when the weather permitted but this was not always possible in the winter. The isolation and worry about what was happening took their toll in the end.

Reading poetry by young Irish writers she discovered this poem and one thing led to the other. Aideen Barry whose work is extremely committed to gender discourse, was fascinated by the verses and by the personage, seen now from a much wider perspective. She immersed herself in this world of liminal spaces, between sleep and wakefulness, reality and fantasy, the subjective and the objective; windows, doors or thresholds, areas of transit towards a state of quietude and calmness allowing her to distance herself from the situation brought about by the pandemic.

The following images corresponds to the second installation of this site specific work, who was exhibited for first time in 2021 at Glebe Gallery (IE), institution that commissioned it for the group exhibition Turas. For the present occasion the work has been designed specifically, in a largest size and a broader version, adapted to the plan and the elevation of the gallery in its three exhibition spaces.

#### Artist Statement:

During the numerous lockdowns I really found my anxiety was completely out of whack. I turned to ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) videos to help me sleep, it became my digital pilgrimage, I would play nature sounds and digital audio-scapes to help stave off the waves of insomnia that plagued my world. I also found much solace in gardening and going out on nature walks. Listening and reading poetry also helped me to feel kind of grounded when things became overwhelming. I set myself the task of undertaking these virtual, physical and metaphysical pilgrimages each day to keep my panicky brain stimulated but not overly so.

My pilgrimages were both physical and digital. It was the commitment I made to myself each day to keep the black dog of depression at bay. When I considered what

*Turas* ( the Gaelic Irish word for pilgrimage) is now I had to make a kind of unattainable image of respite. This mixed media work is a digital "copy" or manifestation of nature, it is a bricolage of hand drawn representations of nature, then reassembled digital collages of moving images of nature, hand drawn digital animations replete with an audio score made up of my own sensory sounds that I found helped to trigger that tingling experience that would eventually lead my body to a sense of calmness and eventual sleep.

Poetry was a material I returned to a lot over the course of this plague year. It expanded my hypothalamus to picture materials and fluid in-between spaces and allowed my racing mind to rest. The poem by Ní Ghríofa is an ode to Bride, an Irish Saint associated with healing, but whose wells are held as holy sites of pilgrimage and liminal dreamy in-between spaces of reflection and respite. In Ní Ghríofa's poem she too sees nature as a potent material, it raises the reader to a kind of astral plane beyond a place of pain and suffering. As an artist you can only hope to achieve such distraction to the complexity and anxiety that this world seems to mete out at times.