

The Dock New Writing Commission 2018

The Dock Writing Commission aims to expand ideas around writing about art by inviting Irish authors to create a series of pieces inspired by the exhibitions at The Dock. In 2018, The Dock has commissioned Eoin McNamee to write a piece of short fiction inspired by each of the exhibitions in the gallery programme. This piece was written in response to *Like Me* exhibition with artists Alice Hanratty, Kian Benson Bailes & Eleanor McCaughey

Eoin McNamee lives in County Sligo. McNamee's novels include *Resurrection Man*, *The Blue Tango*, *The Ultras*, *12:23*, *Orchid Blue* & *Blue Is the Night* which won the 2015 Kerry Group Irish Novel of the Year. He has also written *The Navigator trilogy, for children - The Navigator*, *City of Time* and *The Frost Child*. The film version of *Resurrection Man*, for which he wrote the script, was released in 1998. McNamee also wrote the script for *I Want You*, a film directed by Michael Winterbottom. Under the pseudonym John Creed, he has written *The Sirius Crossing*, *The Day of the Dead* and *Black Cat Black Dog* all of which feature intelligence officer Jack Valentine. He was awarded the Macauley Fellowship for Irish Literature in 1990.

THE DOCK Writing Commission 2018

Eoin McNamee

Essay #1

A response to 'Like me' by Eoin McNamee

THE
DOCK

 Comhairle Chontae Liatroma
leaders in arts development



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Eleanor McCaughey Kian Benson Bailes Alice Hanratty

theres a bit of the hut about McCaughey's build, a bit of the den, offcuts assembled, a ply-built, dog-legged structure, the accompanying text says there's a nineties fun feel to it but you're not sure about funtime perhaps fun in that there's a carnie thing going on with it and not in a good way

you photograph your wife on her way into the exhibit, she's in the foreground and there's a white head just over her left shoulder it looks like one of those cloud-like heads that old mapmakers used to show the wind mouth pursed to emit little puffs, little zephyrs except that this one is mouthless and there is some kind of affright attached to it, Marie's figure is blurred in the photograph demateriality at work, the whole thing not as innocent as it seems the colours are bright and there is

the beautiful is not always lovely

this white mouthless invite into in a carnival freakshow, something the crowd is only shown after dark, there'll be a whimpering thing in the straw, an affront to God

instead there are heads and you have the feeling that they are outside looking in at you that you are the exhibit not them

one is black-glazed, a molton look of fresh-set tar has you thinking

of Shirley Eaton in Ian Flemings Goldeneye nude and gilded, gorgeous and dead

a black head, pitch-capped, laquered it could be monstrous from another angle takes on the look of a horse's head some kind of nostrils flared, eye-rolling war-bred horse

a head (desexed but you think this one a woman) with marcelled hair the texture of her flesh turned to stone a kind of volcanic rock, pumice-surfaced with pyrites glittering in the surface

a photograph of a hand holding crumpled tin foil cushions in my grandmothers house had that satiny fringe there'd be antimacassars, doilies, household objects got up in lace, they went for that fussed-over look, domestic baroque you'd wonder what unhappiness they were hiding

Marie says it might be something you'd see in a truck or a bus in Karachi some teeming city, cheerful cab ornamentation, minor deities, elephant gods

the heads based on photographs of post-war diplomats found in a flea market

metropolitan ghosts from cities now lost to us

Benson Bailes large canvas is supported by a complex timber frame, the construction angled to the south as you remember it

you walk around it looking at the clean lines fresh-planed timber, a purposeful temporary structure like a scaffold, there's an ipad embedded in it at the back, you're thinking is there to be a hanging Rhona put this in your mind when you met her in the foyer *its hard to believe they used to hang people in front of this building*

but it fits your mood or perhaps the idea of transgression isn't far away from it's like a lovers lane or something more sinister that poem

soldiers were standing grim and tall round a scaffold built forenst the wall and a man stepped out for death

the monochrome background of bare winter trees and those pinks like used johnnies discarded in lay-bys places you wouldn't want to be

after dark, there's a crime scene aesthetic the ground combed for clues, spillages over the top, emulsified colours, organo compounds against displaced ferns both belonging and not belonging

right and wrong at the same time, the synthetic posed against the real like

Damian Hirst's cover for Gordon Burns Happy like Murderers, a yellow smiley face button against asphalt, the subject of the book murderers Fred and Rosemarie West

there's a fetish figure in the foreground it looks like there might be an unseen hand holding it up behind the scenes

you photographed it and took the photograph home and now you don't know what to make of this blackened imp with its gingerbread man head

the video on the ipad shows the same work in motion the planes slip away, they are looking for other dimensions or they are looking for the dimensions they came from

the details graffito'd in, images tumbling into fractals and imagined geometries

a kind of tape tumbles down the painting in folds a colour spectrum worked across it, there is something of the texture of old-fashioned dictaphone tape about it voices recorded on it my father had one of the machines it doesn't play anymore can you hear voices whispering whispering

you're starting to find the correspondences that flesh-coloured latex coming up in McCaughey's work and Hanratty's painted people could be faces in the crowd at a hanging indistinct, whispering

Hanratty's ghost profiles, slightly washed-out, in a kind of promenade around the first floor terrace of the building, placed high on the wall, floated above the eyeline they'll always be out of reach

they're turned into profile as though they're in a line-up an historic charge sheet they are usual suspects

in their own incorporeality

just on the other side of the definition which might allow us to know who they are

you know one is the Duke of Urbino because we're told that in the gallery material you go home and look up the famous portrait of the Duke and his wife facing each other in profile he is showing the left profile unusual but one side of his face was ruined in a jousting accident

they say the white-gray pallor of her face is the pallor of death she was sick and died afterwards

still photographs have an affinity with memory.

the profiled people are whispering in the gallery usually who has taken a lover who had fallen out with who all the scandal of the day but now the only topic is that the duke's wife is dying

you keep looking at the pieces and coming back to colour, the profiles, the half-seen, are what strikes you first but the colour have the whispering dead kept you from this

if ghosts came from the palaces of their haunting bearing such colour we would not fear death as much

one's a troubador or some '60s imitation of a troubador you know the way they adopted foppish clothing velvet and lace at the cuffs all in self-adoration

that red if blood were a colour like that we would not fear it as

colour flows like poetry south in the valley of its saying leave it to the experts and look at those spectral trees that seem apparent in the background, these paraded ladies

whispering about Sontag's *usually shady commerce between art and the truth*

these men and women dowagers of the shadows, the pale generals, just people really but why do they stand like that

why does it look as if they hold their arms stiffly by their sides out of frame

some face each other they don't look each other eye to eye but look past each other towards lost realms

they're generals perhaps aristos of some kind you met some minor european royalty years ago in the cathedral in Monaco they weren't unkind exactly just that their concerns were not ours you could see the breeding the high flared nostrils centuries-old primogeniture they could hardly help themselves

their lost realms are the colours just out of frame Sofia Gubaidulina said she wanted to imagine sounds that did not exist there are

darts of yellow in the background there are

faces in the crowd at a hanging can you hear the voices