

**THE  
DOCK**

**WRITING  
COMMISSION  
2018**

**EOIN MCNAMEE**

**ESSAY # 2**

A response to  
'HOW WE ROAM'  
Alison Pilkington  
&  
'SILVERFISH'  
Marcel Vidal

by Eoin McNamee

14 APRIL - 02 JUNE 2018  
WWW.THEDOCK.IE #THEDOCKARTS

I'm down on one knee taking a photograph of marcel vidal's *duet* when a man comes into the room behind me

the room carpeted in black artificial grass iridescent there is black paint going up the walls like an emanation of the grass, matt, light-absorbing, black paint

when I entered I felt a line of poetry just out of reach

he has a kind of caged energy moving quickly about the room he asks me what I'm doing I say I am going to write about the show and am taking photographs for reference when I'm writing

that won't be easy he says meaning writing about the art

he moves quickly around the room, bearded, northern accent-he seems to have a kind of authority-impatient, brusque-in this space but I'm not sure what that authority is. He seems worried about

how hard it will be to re-cover the black paint with white when the show is over

*which is hardly the point* what are these rooms for unless to have sooty paint on their walls and have their floors covered with black grass the rustling cabbala of it under your feet, the kinetic whisper

he walks quickly out of the room and I go back to photographing although I'm left with the feeling that I've let somebody down

*only doing my job guv*

sarah had earlier mentioned saint sebastian when we were standing beside the solid white mass of plaster pierced with steel and I remember the photograph of yukio mishima as saint sebastian martyred the writer lost since childhood in the erotics of that image the milk-white torso pierced with arrows

and I remember the line of poetry-its from heaney and he is talking about his wife undressing *stirred by the sootfall of your things at bedtime*

I want to call the bearded man back and tell him how sensuous this room is st.  
sebastian and the sootfall of underthings I look in the other room of the gallery but he  
is gone

the utilitarian materials-palleting, rebar, ratchet straps-anchor the emotion in the room  
weigh it down there are two small leaf painting and laurel leaves outside the windows  
opposite edges of the american and chinese flags on the fireplace I can't work out  
how they fit but trust that they do

you can't escape the black the interior of the kaaba must be like this

my camera is having trouble with the contrast between the white/black walls and the  
black floor and keeps adjusting the light so that the hides goatskins maybe heaped on  
a rebar stand becomes in the later photograph a temperate animal summoned by the  
framed hands on the front wall a yeti or some other shy mythological beast.

A plaster boulder holds feathered antennae, banderillos, what signals it picks up what  
last messages

I'm told there are allusions to the wild west in alice pilkington's work is it the colours  
the baked textures of the sonoran desert or monument valley the blazing sun the  
gunshots echoing in the space

deadmans gulch theres a bit of the cowboy gunslinger's bow-legged swagger in the  
figures if figure is the right word

the west of john ford or the west of cormac mccarthy the west as painted backdrop to  
the spirit or the west as void into which the spirit empties a little of both I think

at home I listen to the audio of the interview with alison she wants these works to be  
like 'nothing in the world' you get the point that these works are about nothing except  
themselves

susan sontag: *interpretation is the revenge of the intellect on the world. To interpret is  
to impoverish, to deplete the world-in order to set up a shadow world of "meanings"*

but in Narcissus a figure or abstraction in the foreground looks into its reflection and there is a small weebegone abstraction in the background and are you intended to think that there are relationships, consequences?

I'm starting to feel like the man troubled by how the black walls will be painted over and restored to the original pristine white

I go back to the work trying to be beyond meaning I'm always quoting frances bacon saying that the job of all art is to deepen the mystery

although I keep thinking about the huge iron famine cooking pot in the workhouse at dromore west an iron shard broken from it though it isn't so much the potbelly shapes as the colour in the paintings that correspond to the cooking pot the textures the rusts the ironbound state of being of this world

alison talks about creating her own light sources there are suns just out of shot

ernest hemingway said to never forget about the weather in your writing by which he meant not only weather but light, temperature, how you are in the world

if the shapes could move it would be in a kind of edging away out of the frame the geometries of the apertures and motifs are tilted to one side

even though no-one comes in you're left with the feeling that you are not entirely on your own

the shapes are handled sassy in places sombre in others

*I am a teapot short and stout*

or lugged

*lift me up and pour me out*

they're about the self and there's a bit of sly humour going on a bit of psychic slapstick  
an elbow in the ribs

there are sharp-winged moths in formation or pennants

red and yellow is the international maritime signal flag for man overboard there's a red  
and yellow flotilla on a black ovoid against an infernal red background it's the sombre  
tone of these pieces which move

in one piece there are dark openings-lidded I think, doorways, portals, hanging chads-  
there was a dovecote in a house I lived in once a gable wall with individual openings  
for each dove but here you're looking at the flown self or the self about to land in the  
darkness

rubens is an influence an underlying fleshiness overlaid with tilted geometries

later that day on the street I saw the bearded man getting into his car he showed no  
sign of recognising me I wanted to explain to him that seeing in terms of difficulty is  
missing the point, you can ease into the work, open up to it, there are times you're  
blown off course, knocked sideways, there are fluctuations, undertows, there are often  
parts of art that you don't get but that is not always important the point is to tell you  
that there *are* other things to be got even if you haven't quite arrived there yet and that  
the artists job is to frame the infinite with paint or feathers whatever is the right  
material to tell the viewer that

the artist has seen something or is in the act of seeing or is about to see something  
and believes that it should be brought to their attention whether it is

william carlos williams red wheel barrow

or the bearded man driving off in his blue mercedes

## 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 'HOW WE ROAM' Alison Pilkington and 'SILVERFISH' Marcel Vidal

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.

Our writing residence programme is designed to support research and offer writers time and space to develop their practice in the privacy of their studios.

For further information or to apply please contact Laura Mahon:

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Gallery Opening Times:

10:00am - 5:30 pm Monday to Friday

10:30am - 5:00pm Saturday.