

curatoronabike

Passages – Ailbhe Ní Bhriain



Passages | Ailbhe Ní Bhriain (in collaboration with Linda + Irene Buckley | Bonded Warehouse, Cork

First, some background. In September 2015 Cork was transformed into a city wide celebration of music, art and conversation as part of the inaugural Sounds From A Safe Harbour (SFSH). Curated by Bryce Dessner, from alternative rock band The National, with Mary Hickson, from Cork Opera House, the festival consisted of 70 events, with 450 artists over 4 days, which mainly focused on music but included some amazing international visual artists Matthew Ritchie, Ragnar Kjartansson and Marcel Dzama (who presented an incredible show at Lismore Castle Arts).

SFSH commissioned Ailbhe Ní Bhriain to make a new piece of work, in partnership with Linda and Irene Buckley, sisters who have garnered a substantial international reputation as contemporary composers. *Passages* was staged in one of the bonded warehouses (B9, to be exact) that greet visitors arriving to Cork over the Michael Collins bridge. These warehouses once served as a central location for the storage of goods being shipped in and out of the city, giving these spaces a rather unique presence.

In *Passages* Ní Bhriain is playing with the idea of these now empty spaces and creating a narrative around other locations that one bustled but now lie empty. Using film and constructed imagery, stitched together with digital collaging, this short work creates a sense of time and place that are static, yet shifting, dynamic and fluid. We see flesh coloured curtains, abandoned check-in desks, vertebrates, desolate furniture and reflective, shimmering surfaces.

These dreamlike, almost hallucinogenic, scenes allow the viewer a chance to be led on a journey, or even the passage of the title, to another realm evoking a sense of early sea travel for which Cork was once synonymous. The fact that segments of this work were filmed at the old airport in the city adds to the sense of what one was but no longer remains.

The accompanying soundscape is immersive and again evokes a sense of journey and the mystery of the sea, which surround the warehouse. Whilst Passages is a collaborative work, the soundtrack was not composed to fit the each scene in the film – rather it creates a shifting aural resonance that perfectly fits the imagery that Ní Bhriain has constructed.

Often in festivals the visual art element can feel tacked on. But in the case of Sounds From A Safe Harbour the team behind the festival ensured that the exhibitions were given as much care and prominence as the music. That premise has led to Ailbhe creating her strongest work to date and for me was a real highlight of the festival, as I'm sure it was the large amount of people who saw the work. There's a possibility this work will be shown in USA as part of another festival that Bryce Dessner curates. All I can say is that audience are in for a real treat.

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