

*In Course Of Rearrangement: Material Speculations on Absent Histories.*

A mess of advertising banners, signs and till rolls obsessively reconfigured into slogans and motifs that point to failed retail enterprises in a half-abandoned shopping centre.<sup>[i]</sup> A drawing of a lost Neapolitan pleasure garden re-imagined from a fifteenth-century French poem, laboriously rendered with a three-millimetre rubber text stamp.<sup>[ii]</sup> Wisps of wool gleaned on walks in Connemara, dyed with local plants, collated, ordered, spun and woven into a tufted rug.<sup>[iii]</sup> These are some of the artworks made by Marielle MacLeman over the past decade in response to human and non-human encounters in different sites. Her most recent work, *In Course Of Rearrangement*, expands this research in response to the industrial and natural heritage of The Liberties in Dublin's inner city.

This is an area that was at the heart of the city's textile manufacturing trade, central to the economic development of the area. Changing fashions and the removal of protective trade tariffs led to its collapse in the eighteenth century and with it, the once prosperous houses of the Liberties' craftsmen, declined.<sup>[iv]</sup> MacLeman deploys her practice as a maker and her experience and knowledge as the daughter of a weaver to unpack narratives of progress and modernity within the history and heritage of The Liberties; the structure of the loom's carding mechanism is used as a motif to think through the history of the trade and its material trace. Dublin City Council has a new greening strategy, part of a policy to redress poor urban planning and a lack of natural amenities in the area. This involves the creation of new urban parks on the sites of two demolished flat complexes. Weaver Park was opened in 2017 and further plans include Bridgefoot Street Park, currently the site of allotments and a community garden established by local residents. This will include space for a cottage market, new allotments and a play space. The greening strategy is a step towards addressing this problem of natural amenities as well as increasing biodiversity, creating spaces for recreational and social activities and improvements to water management.<sup>[v]</sup> These plans, while welcome, have been regarded with a certain amount of anxiety by the Bridgefoot Street Community Garden, a grassroots initiative that is sensitive to the needs of local communities. There are concerns that, having made space for the new developments by re-locating, the plans may not be implemented and other priorities may supersede the enterprise.<sup>[vi]</sup>

*In Course Of Rearrangement* addresses this complexity. MacLeman describes it as "teetering between celebration and decline", using the tropes of modernity to question the way that human and non-human co-exist in the area. These material investigations bring our attention to what it means to be open and vulnerable to encounters between humans and non-humans, one world and another - Anna Lowencroft Tsing's idea of multi-species entanglements.<sup>[vii]</sup> Working with the butterfly bush, *Buddleja davidii* - a ubiquitous coloniser of empty spaces, car park walls and tarmacked sites - serves as a reminder of nature's presence in the ruins of post-industrial cities, in the kind of empty spaces that once presented possibilities for transforming communities like Bridgefoot Street. Working with a master papermaker in Glasgow, grass cuttings gathered from the first mowing of Weaver Park are made into paper and printed with text for posters. Unpredictable and tricky to manipulate, nonetheless it is also used to make meticulous prints using a "couching" process to embed the grass pulp into the paper felt. Buddleia collected from waste ground and derelict sites was used to hand dye wool, an agricultural by-product that has little or no value in today's globalised economy, for a tufted woollen rug. Buddleia collected from the Bridgefoot Street site was also used to dye bunting made with visitors to the community garden during The Liberties

Festival in Summer 2018. Seeds and plant materials are embedded in resin, transformed into possibilities for social enterprise in the promised community market. Banners, reminders of the once powerful Weavers guild, are constructed from black builder's mesh- the stuff of urban regeneration is woven with geometric shapes and the dyed wool, traces that connect the present moment with the idealism of constructivism. The formal elegance of MacLeman's making process demands the viewer's attention, the materials performing a kind of resistance to the limited attention span of the digital age in keeping with Richard Sennett's ideas of craftsmanship:

Getting something right, even though it may get you nothing, is the spirit of true craftsmanship. And only that kind of disinterested commitment -or so I believe- can lift people up emotionally; otherwise, they succumb in the struggle to survive.<sup>[viii]</sup>

MacLeman's attention to the logic of the work extends into her relationships with collaborators and the complex assemblages interwoven in her artworks, following the thread of production to its ethical conclusion. She does not relinquish the utopian aspiration of modernity but rather frames it within the unstable world of her material investigations, the melancholy beauty and unstable colours, a reminder to attend to the polyphonic, multiple rhythms of a fragile world.

In the grass that has overgrown  
causes and effects,  
someone must be stretched out  
blade of grass in his mouth  
gazing at the clouds.<sup>[ix]</sup>

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[i] *Final Reductions*, made for *Tulca* 2011, *After the Fall* See <https://www.mariellemacleman.com/final-reductions/>

[ii] *Poggio Reale* exhibited in Galway Arts Centre 2010 See <https://www.mariellemacleman.com/poggio-reale/>

[iii] *Dangan For Gropius* See <https://www.mariellemacleman.com/dangan-for-gropius/>

[iv] In a report on the silk trade to parliament published in 1832 John Sisson described the collapse of the textile industry and the effect on the area. "Some gentleman in this country who owned property in the Liberty walked up lately to see where it stood but he could find no vestige of houses whatever. I possess some property there and I began to tremble even for the ground *rents*; I believe it would be as valuable to the Earl of Meath, who is the owner of it if it were growing grass". Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee on the Silk Trade, *Report from Select Committee on the Silk Trade*, 1832 pp 838

[v] Tim Brown, "The making of urban 'healtheries': the transformation of cemeteries and burial grounds in late-Victorian East London", *Journal of Historical Geography*, 42 (2013) 12e23 pp 12.

[vi] Tony Kennedy, "Bridgeford Street Community Garden", *Fountain Resource Group* Oct 18 2017, <http://www.frg.ie/local-news/bridgefoot-street-community-garden/>

[vii] Anna Lowenkroft Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World – On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. (Princeton: Princeton U.P.) 2015, pp 62.

[viii] Richard Sennett *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (Yale UP: New Haven and London) 2006, pp195 - 196

[ix] Wislawa Szymborska, "The End and the Beginning " from *Miracle Fair*, translated by Joanna Trzeciak.