

Unnamed Things of Beauty

Regina Gleeson

Written in response to Niamh O'Malley, Gather, The Model, Sligo, March 2023

**We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.**

T.S. Elliot

A tall column of wooden curves on elongated lines.
A series of negative spaces melting from their flag poles.
A conglomeration of glass shards ribboned with leading to form a whole.
The suggestion of a breeze carrying air from somewhere else.
A memory of water in a rain drain on a massive scale.
A shrunken semicircular canopy resting on a triangle of space above a brittle circle sitting with a corner of strength.
Another elevated semicircular canopy fanning out in a mathematically squared sequence of measurements.
A bird's eye view flipped upside down.
Fronds so high they position you and I as small as the bird.
A mountain in relation to a fixed point on the move.
Warm wood encasing a conference of convex stones in cahoots with another conference of paler plump stones.
Two stones slanting into a welcome.
Warm green glass leaning with intent to shelter.
A non-handrail.
A decisive moment on a shelf of curves and corners.
A family of open oblongs threaded together on a slender loop.
And a query about gathering.

We're not culturally predisposed to precision in Ireland. There's often a comfort with estimation and an itchiness with precision but when it comes to identifying something, we like to place it, tame it, name it. Niamh O'Malley's exhibition Gather offers that single title for its collection of nameless installations*. Abstract painter Agnes Martin observed that we accept pure emotion from music but when it comes to art, there's a demand for explanation. Had these precise and peculiar communities of objects and videos been individually titled, that very act of naming them would have narrowed the relationships between the whole and its parts and me on my wheels and you on your heels.

Settled into their own spaces without hierarchy of perspective, these nameless structures spoke about the shape and space of nameless places. The suggestion of a breeze blew through the gallery with the air of some other place. What corners had these gathered corners seen? They whispered something about water and they spoke about shelter. They told me about what they saw from above and I told them what I saw from below. With folded wings, the black bird told me of his relatively huge pond beside a relative jungle of surrounding shrubbery. He asked me about my wheels and I told him that they're actually my wings. I shrank under the right-angled negative space beneath the flattened fronds in the same proportions as the bird amongst the leaves.

A spatial percussion sounded in a vacant space that spoke of a space occupied. Traces lingered of someone having seen something beautiful and leaving this unnamed sculptural message that you and I could relate to from our own perspectives. My lower eyeline afforded me the extra extension of elevation on this column of displaced curves that offered a repeated invitation to hang my coat up and stay a while. My spine lengthened in response to its towering height and that air from someplace else inflated my lungs behind their stretched sternum.

Looking out towards the Garavogue, the enlarged granite rain drain spoke of how we re-route water and told me about the different rain it knew that fell into the canals of Venice and the river Liffey and then it spoke of the rain that she knew around the wandering Deel. She conferred with Copernicus on perspective in considering a mountain by following a fixed point on the move.

A non-handrail bid me good day and spoke about being shaped for a different place. The low-slung window in turn reframed the non-handrail by suggesting it might one day rise as a cornice. We lingered in conference for a while considering our unique ways to encounter the world, me from my lower eyeline on wheels, the non-handrail from its introversion and then it introduced me to a community of curved contented stones nestled into the warmth of wood that lay on the floor.

A thin metal loop threaded itself through a choir of hollow glass oblongs that were formed around precise spaces, both occupied and vacated. Each translucent shape unified to suggest a clear note like fingers summoning sounds from wet-rimmed glasses. Outlines described internal breathing spaces, their side angle revealing a united description of the same angular lung of air.

The silent sneak of my wheels threatened the precarious rest of a circle much wider than its supporting corner, a corner freed from the rest of its cube. Without the shackles of attachment clips, this glistening round of embossed amber glass rested in the shoulder nook of the tall metal corner, both just lightly breathing together.

What, one wonders, would these gathered elements look like if one piece was removed, their grouping so finely tuned their rhythm could hardly sustain. All that was left out held a power as much as what was included. The negative spaces describing an occasion that had been, or could be, only this time with me in it. And a place for you beside me. Alone. Together. A space for all of us without requirement to bend and with new eyes on the shape of air between us.

Without utility, the form and focus of these nameless things hold a suggestion of mingling and a vague memory of functions in their slivered echoes of other places. The positive charge of the negative space, our individual space in this collective place. The feeling of belonging among these familiar materials in precisely measured unfamiliar forms holds an invitation to gather. I accept the invitation and move in a slow-motion glide around these unnamed things of beauty.

Shelter. Move. Rest. Breathe. Gather.

Regina Gleeson is a writer on art with an interest in human rights. She is a former winner of the Arts Council of Ireland Critical Voices Award, as well as a recipient of a number of Arts Council bursary awards. Gleeson has represented the interest of Irish artists at pan-European conferences, guest lectured on critical analysis in contemporary fine art practice and has written for art publications in Ireland, New York and Berlin. She is a graduate of the Limerick School of Art and Design and TU Dublin.

* Niamh O'Malley often refers to that fact that her works have 'names' rather than titles that generally references the form or suggested functionality of the work: eg. Drain, Shelter, Covers. She believes the work does not require the foregrounding of this information in order to experience the exhibition. As such her 'titles' are displayed discreetly in each room of the exhibition.

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