

Better Words

A Field Guide
to Contemporary
Art and Culture

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Art and Culture**

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Matt Packer
& Eimear Redmond

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Introduction

Matt Packer

Director, EVA International

Eimear Redmond

Better Words Programme Coordinator

Better Words: A Field Guide to Contemporary Art and Culture proposes an experimental vocabulary for contemporary art and culture. It contains a selection of new words and word-forms developed by 8–12 year olds in Limerick that have emerged from classroom workshops and through direct encounters with artists, writers, artworks and art galleries. A selection of these words are presented here with editorial notes by Chris Hayes. The book also features an accompanying text by Kevin Barry and notes on the workshop process by Maeve Mulrennan.

EVA has a long-standing commitment to the idea of making contemporary art both accessible and engageable to the broadest possible public. This task is not always easy when so much contemporary art seems to be communicated through specialist vocabulary and art historical reference. It can be difficult to reconcile the complexities of language that are often so essential to the way that contemporary art is made and intended.

Better Words: A Field Guide to Contemporary Art and Culture operates precisely within this conundrum. It foregrounds language and creative description as key tools in the way that we make, see, and understand contemporary art and culture and the world around us more generally. It empowers the idea that culture is not something that has to be 'liked' or 'got' in order to be made sense of; it's there to be responded on terms that can be made and re-made for each and every one of us. As the contents of this book make clear, young people are curious, open, and assertive about the culture that's in front of them.

When Words Move

Kevin Barry

Years ago, back in the 1990s, I used to work some shifts as a reporter for the *Evening Echo* newspaper in Cork. I'd start at about half past six in the morning and work through until two in the afternoon. It was a very busy shift, ringing Garda stations, going to City Council meetings, and filing lots and lots of copy. I'd write up my stories for two or three hours before clocking off and going home for a well-deserved siesta...

...but as soon as my head would hit the pillow, all the words from the morning would start to simmer and fizz up again, and I vividly remember lying there, with the curtains drawn against the afternoon light, lost somewhere between sleep and wakefulness, and the way that strings and jumbles of words kept on rising up from me and forming into a noiseless babble.

What I started to realise is that we are all essentially made out of words. Everything that we are — every feeling and every memory and every sensation — can be put into words.

Maybe the words of our lives don't come easily sometimes. Maybe it takes a while for the sentences to re-arrange and form themselves, just as our lives can seem to take so long to take form and take shape. But all of our experience presents itself, eventually, as language.

The fact that we are composed of words means two very important things: it means that we can control them, and we can make them work to our will; it also means that we need to be very careful with them.

In this project, we see that younger people have such a natural capability for word-building and for word-manipulation.

Look at these lists of compound words and slangy words, look at all of these freshly-made formulations — these are new and vivacious words, words that can describe new worlds and new sensations, and that can open up worlds that might seem to have been closed off.

Weirdly, the older we get, the more self-conscious we get about our words — we don't let them come as freely or as naturally; we become more guarded; we try to sound clever, or cool, or wise.

But language must be kept fresh and alive. It needs to be constantly changing to keep pace with the very rapid changes that are occurring around us every minute, every day.

Young people are more in tune with those changes than anyone else, and they are the ones who make our language new, again and again and again. This project channels their energy beautifully in ways that are fresh, vital, and gloriously mischievous.

Better Words: A Field Guide to Contemporary Art and Culture

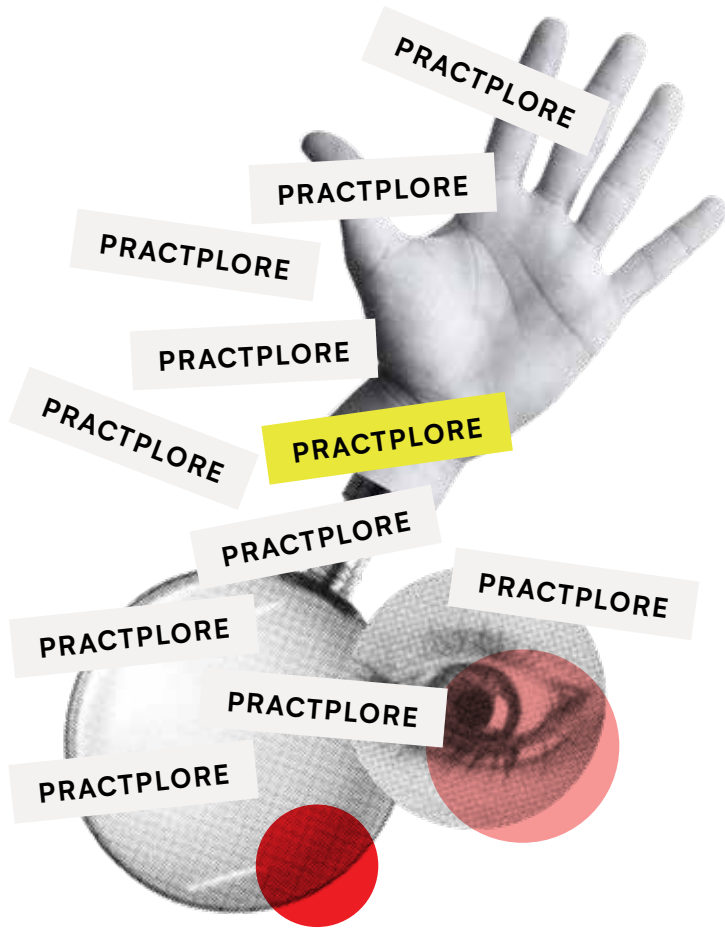
This section of the book contains words and word-forms that variously refer to what contemporary art is, how contemporary art is made, and its relevance in the wider world. These words offer an alternative and experimental vocabulary for contemporary art and culture, whether encountered in exhibitions, biennials, at artists' studios, online, and elsewhere. These words are also creative language experiments in their own right, demonstrating the cultural articulacy of the children that participated in the project.

The words that are featured here are a small selection from over 300 words that emerged through a series of 25 workshops with over 150 children. The words have been selected by writer and editor Chris Hayes into thematic sections — Practice, The Institutions of Art, Spectatorship & Criticism, Technology and Society & Politics — together with accompanying notes. The words included here point to many of the things that are relevant to contemporary art today from the perspective of the artist and audience, emphasising the important role that language plays in new ways of seeing the world.

1

Practice

A 'practice' is often the way an artist's ongoing work is described. An artist's practice not only includes producing finished artwork, but it can also refer to other things that are happening in the background and over the longer-term, such as research and experimentation with a particular idea. The word suggests that an artist's work is an ongoing process and more than the sum of individual artworks.



: To practice and explore.

The creative process is both a physical and emotional process. Hope, frustration, disappointment, joy, and pride are some of the common feelings that arise during the development of an artwork.

HUNGURAGE

Hungurage:

The urge to create
something, analogous
to a feeling of hunger.

blankworrying:

ANNOYINGISM

•
•

A feeling of frustration
when initial ideas that
sparked excitement do not
turn into reality.



Doubtstarting:

The lack of
confidence to begin
any creative work.

Tiry
/ Frustired
/ Madcast
/ Bmada
/ Smod:

**When an artwork
clearly didn't turn
out the way the
artist wanted.**

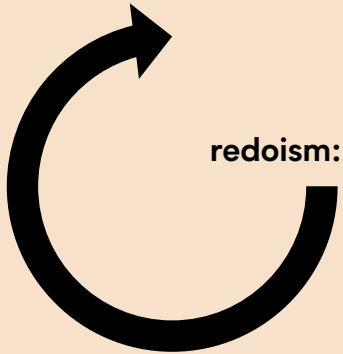
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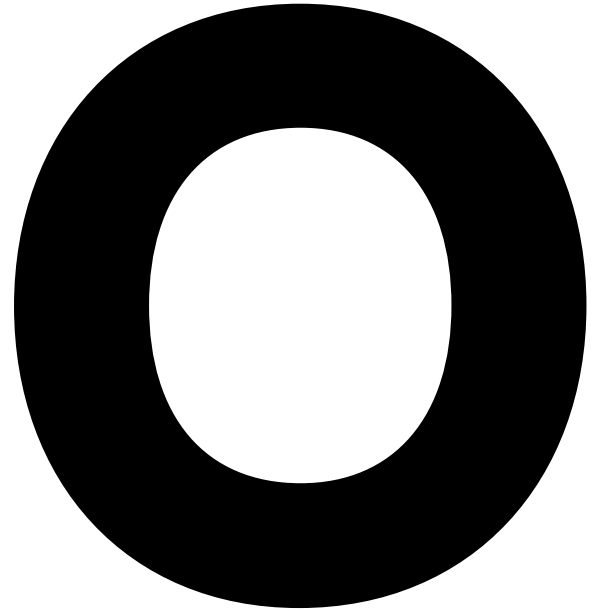
: An artist's pride in the work that they've produced.

The creative confusion and false starts that happen when making artwork.

R



The impulse to
give up on the
creative process
and start again.



Okayism:

Coming to terms with the
completion of an artwork,
despite being aware of
criticism and doubt.

FLOWISM

Flowism:

To be 'in the flow' is a sense of being fully immersed in a creative task, often marked by an increased drive and sense of purpose.

**Criticiceanxiety
/ Stopbeforeitsruinedism**

**Criticiceanxiety
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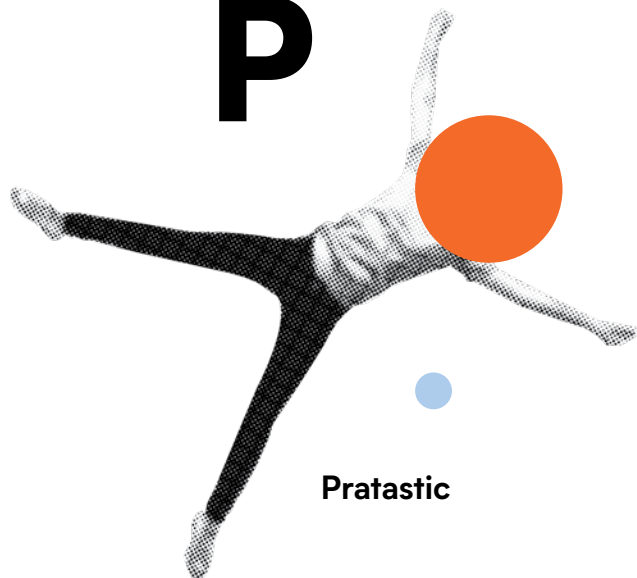
**Criticiceanxiety
/ Stopbeforeitsruinedism**

: The emerging sense that artists have when they realise that their work-in-progress is getting worse, and not better.

Privatepictureism

: Artwork that acquires its value through the learning experience of the creative process.

P



Pratastic

: A combination of practice and fantastic, a deep sense of elation that comes from making artwork.



RETRYSTARTING

: The continuous
loop of artistic
beginnings

A continuous, single-line drawing that meanders across the page, creating a series of overlapping loops, swirls, and elongated shapes. The lines are thin and black, set against a plain white background. The overall effect is one of fluid, uncontrolled movement, reminiscent of a child's doodle or a spontaneous gestural sketch.

Pencilpurr

**: The pleasure of
drawing aimlessly
over blank paper.**

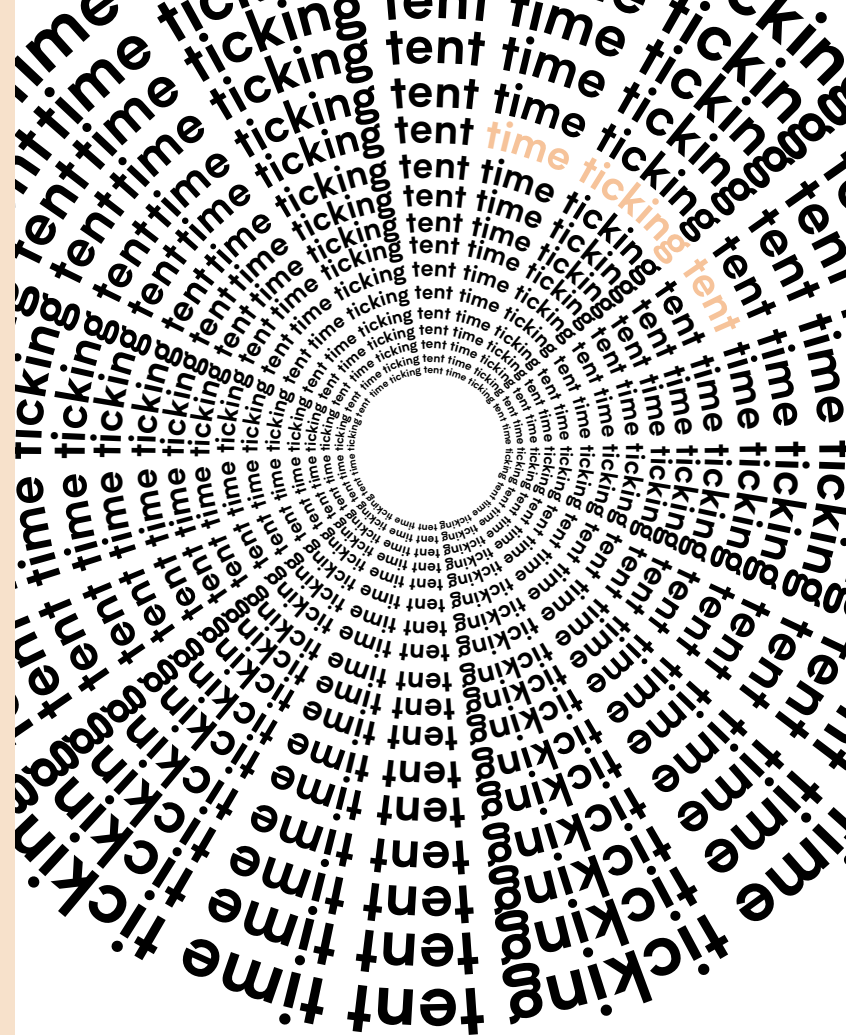
2

The Institutions of Art

Art may be made by artists, but their work is regularly organised by professional art institutions such as art schools, galleries, museums, biennials, and festivals. There are a great variety of art institutions around the world, each with their own particular agenda. Artists often have a love-hate relationship to art institutions because of the opportunities they offer and the limits they impose.

**Paint Palace
/
Print Patch
/
Sculpt Spot
/
Photo Palace
:**

An affectionate way
to describe the
different specialisms
of an art school.



The time-pressure condition of
an art class, art college,
or studio space.

H

happy hut

: Art institutions that

S

/ sad sanctuary

encourage emotional self-expression.

Picasso Pants:

Art students
that attempt to
be fashionable.

school is
school is
school is

The uncomfortable feeling of art class.

Hung on the white walls of a gallery space monitored by security guards or installed in a grubby old shop front, the way that art is presented can change the way it is seen with new value and meaning.



Artcar

: An alternative word for the art gallery, recognising how art moves through different places, such as from the studio to an institution and even through an international network of buyers and sellers.

Interestism:

The act of being
interested inside
an art gallery.

[illegible]

The act of being
totally cool in an
arty environment.

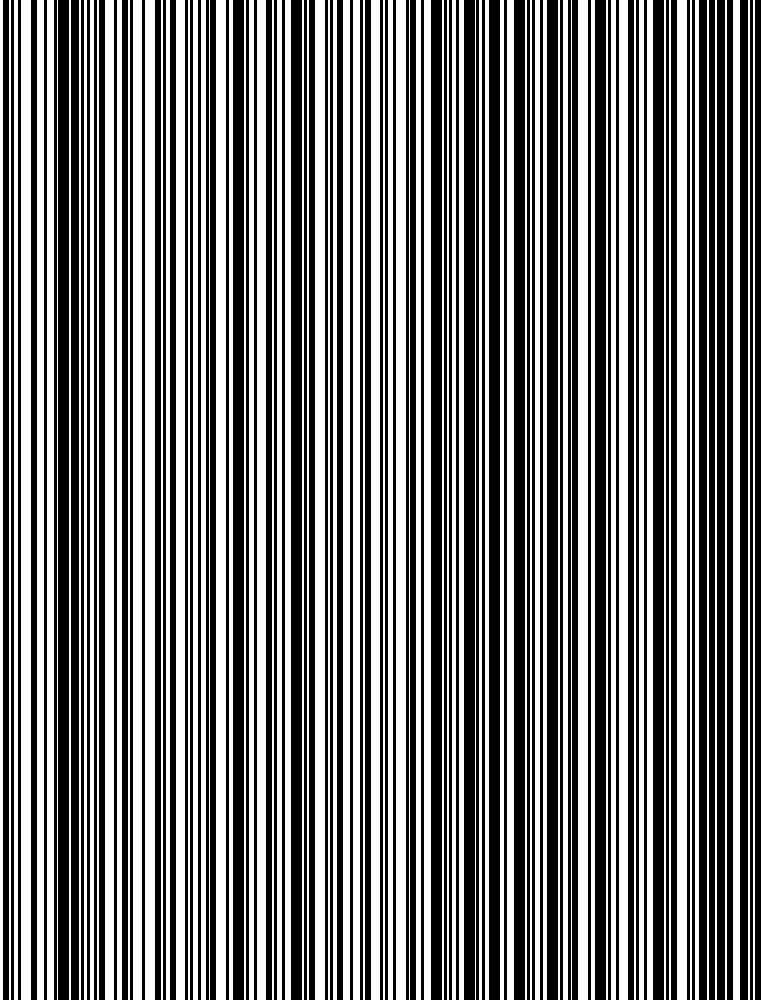


INCATOCHE

: The urge to touch
an artwork on
display.

touchless

: The state of artwork
when monitored by
security guards.



ImaginationIncorporation

: When personal creativity gets
mixed with big business.

3

Spectatorship & Criticism

Looking at contemporary art is simple, isn't it? However, different people can arrive at very different interpretations of the same artwork depending on a wide range of factors such as their own personal background or beliefs. Societal changes, technological developments and historical events can also change the way that art is seen and understood

tastewise
tastewise

: A person who
thinks they have
good taste in art.

‘Taste’ is often used to describe the personal preferences and values that people have for particular aspects of culture, whether an artwork or choice of shoes.



Smetch

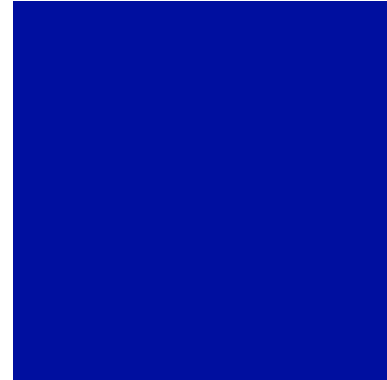
: An artwork that is too good
or too bad to explain.



: The tendency to complain without doing anything to change things.

groses

: Artwork that is so ugly and repulsive that it becomes attractive.



Fakey Bading

: Artwork that intentionally looks like it's a failure, and becomes interesting because of this.

DisKardashian:



TO UNDERMINE

SOMEONE

/ A RIVAL

Example:

'Kim disKardashianed
Taylor Swift'

The opposite of this
is to ReJenner.

A *Arty Bandit*

: A rogue artist that
breaks the rules
and is not afraid to
be disliked.

Fraudiossaur
Connoisseur

: Someone that
pretends to be an
old-fashioned art
expert.

WHIESY

: When an artwork
doesn't seem quite
right, for reasons that
can't be explained.

4

Technology

Technology has come to effect many aspects of our lives, and art and culture is no different. There is a common belief that art is all about instinctual and natural skills, but in fact technology has always played an important role in the way that art is made. This is as true for the production of colours that we see in common paints and crayons, as it is for an artwork that is made using computer software.

Futurism

: Art that imagines a future where life is transformed by new technology. This was also used by Italian thinkers in the early 20th century to describe similar conditions.

iPhoneism:

iPhoneism:

iPhoneism:

The cultural importance of

iPhoneism:

individual gadgets, which can be

iPhoneism:

a subject of art, a tool for making artworks,

iPhoneism:

or a way to view them.

iPhoneism:

iPhoneism:

TVism:

TVism:

TVism:

An artwork or exhibition that

TVism:

involves many TV screens.

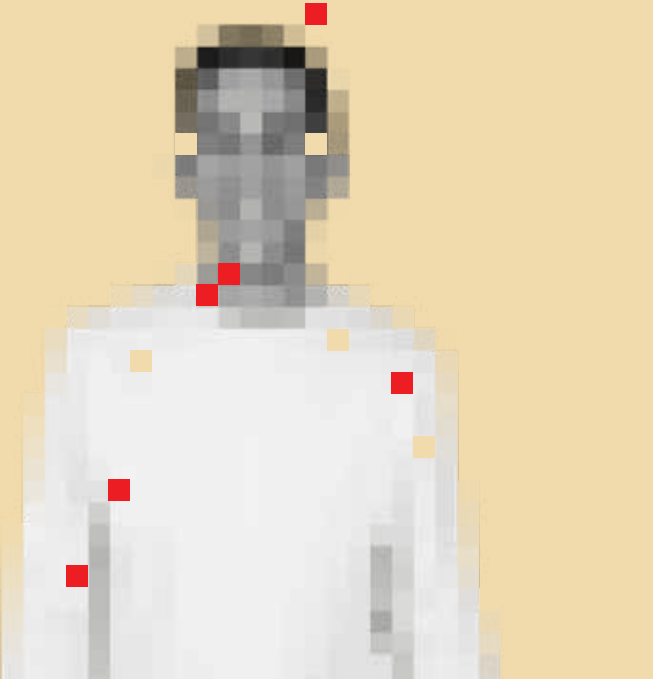
TVism:

TVism:

TVism:

TVism:

Sluper



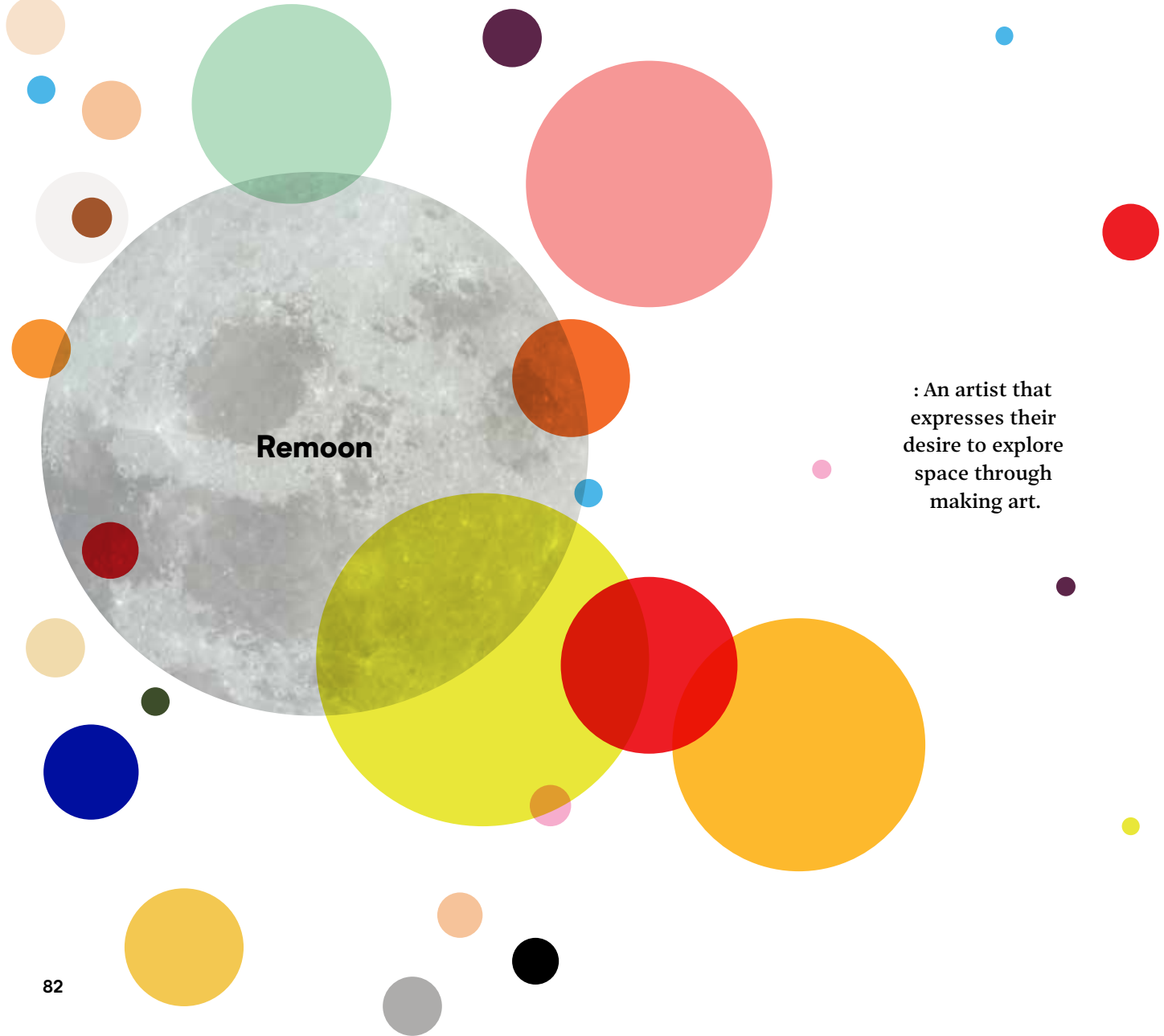
**: An artist that prefers
playing video games to
making art.**

Social media is a technology that relies on people being producers and consumers of the culture that surrounds them. It has redefined the relationship between our public and private lives, therefore changing what it means to be involved in today's culture.

Selfiesteem

: The use of the self-portrait (or 'selfie') to boost self-confidence and social profile.



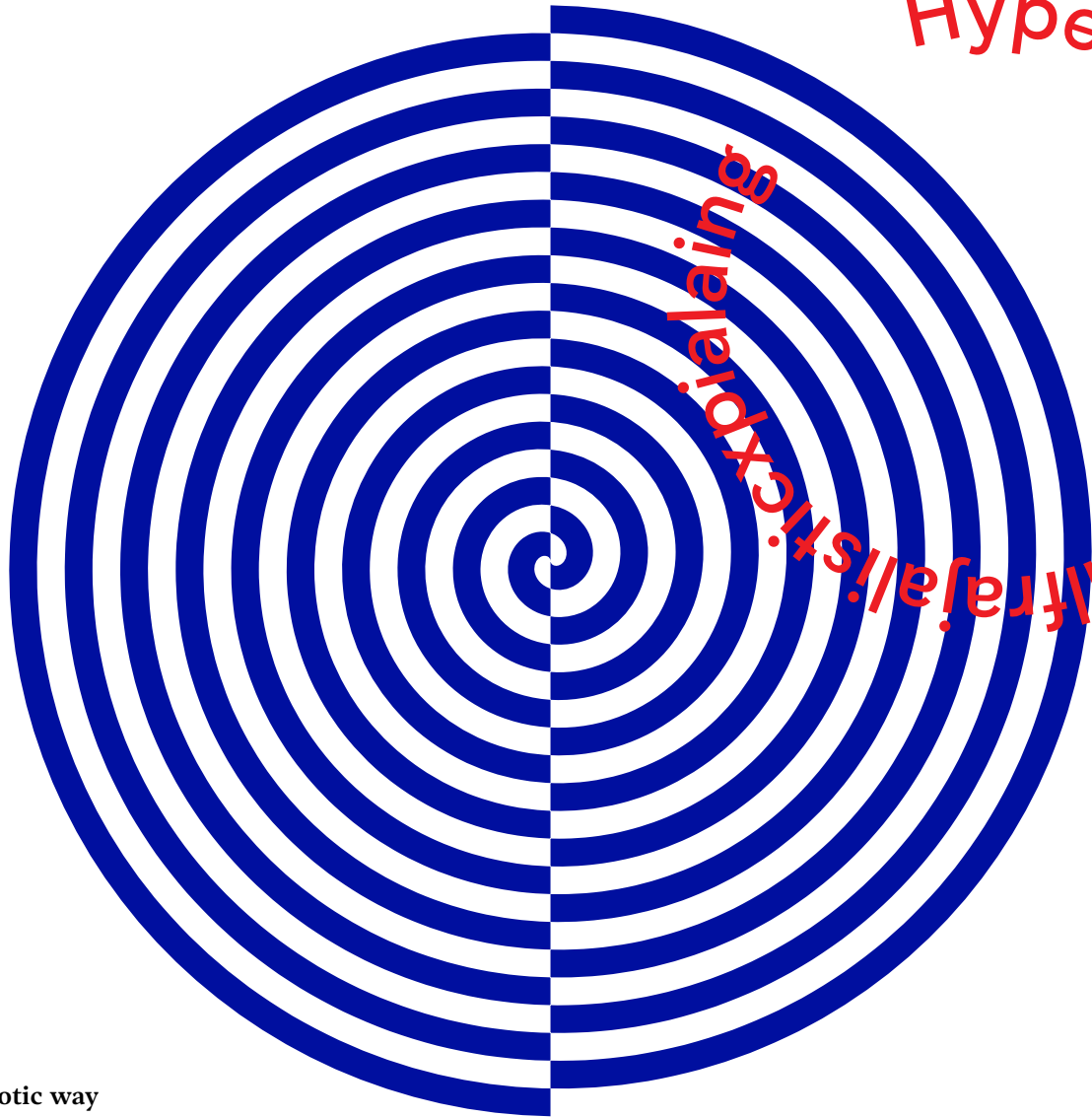


Remoon

: An artist that
expresses their
desire to explore
space through
making art.

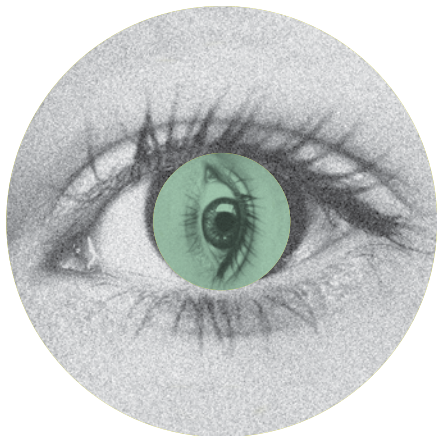
Hyperinvisiblehypnocalfrajalisticxpialaing

: A hypnotic way
of seeing.



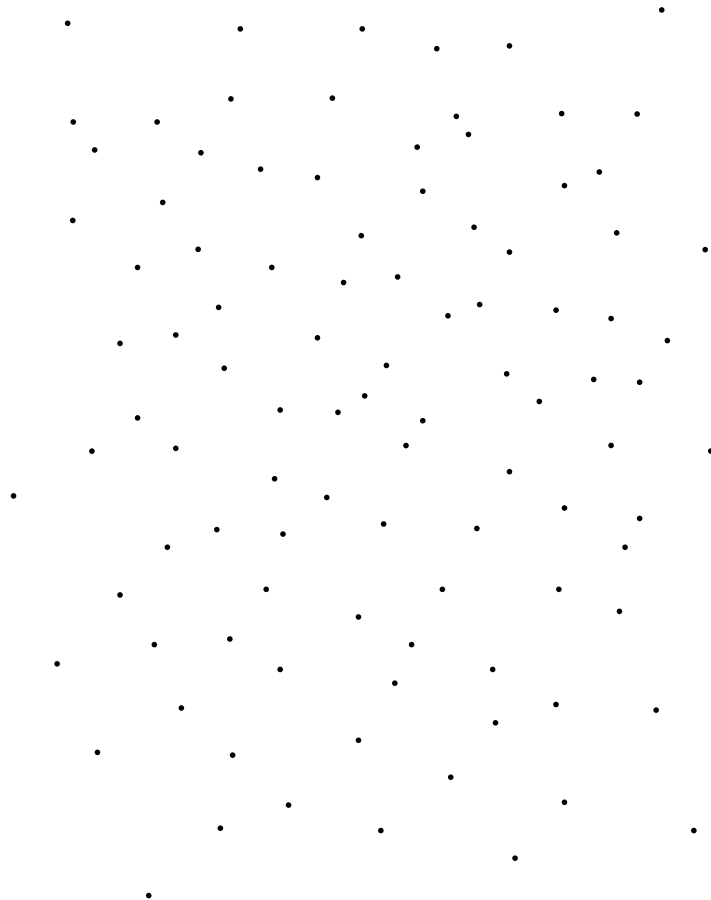
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Hyperinvisiblehypnocalfrajalisticxpialaing



Eyeless

: Imagery that is not produced using the human eye.



Gigantable

: Small objects that have the potential to be rescaled using creative software.

5

Society & Politics

Artists are often shaped by the times they live in, often using their work to respond social and political issues and to challenge structures of society. In many examples of art that has been produced in recent years, we can see references to global political leaders and issues such as climate change that directly affect our future.

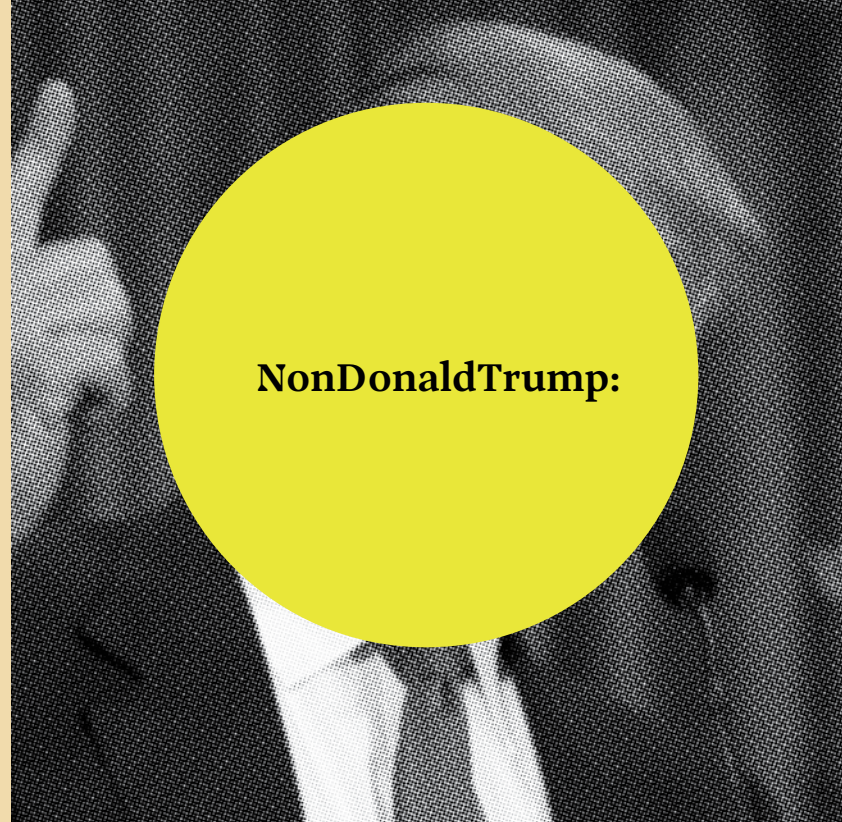
Donald Trump, the 45th President of the United States, is the subject of much contemporary art and cultural debate. His outspoken approach to politics and extreme policy positions have divided opinion, both in the United States and internationally.



:The
phenomenon
of something
happening
that was
previously
thought to be
impossible.

TRUMERATE
TRUMERATE
TRUMERATE
TRUMERATE
TRUMERATE:

Using artwork to
undermine or mock
Donald Trump.



A person or an artist who
makes a significant effort
to be publically critical of
Donald Trump.

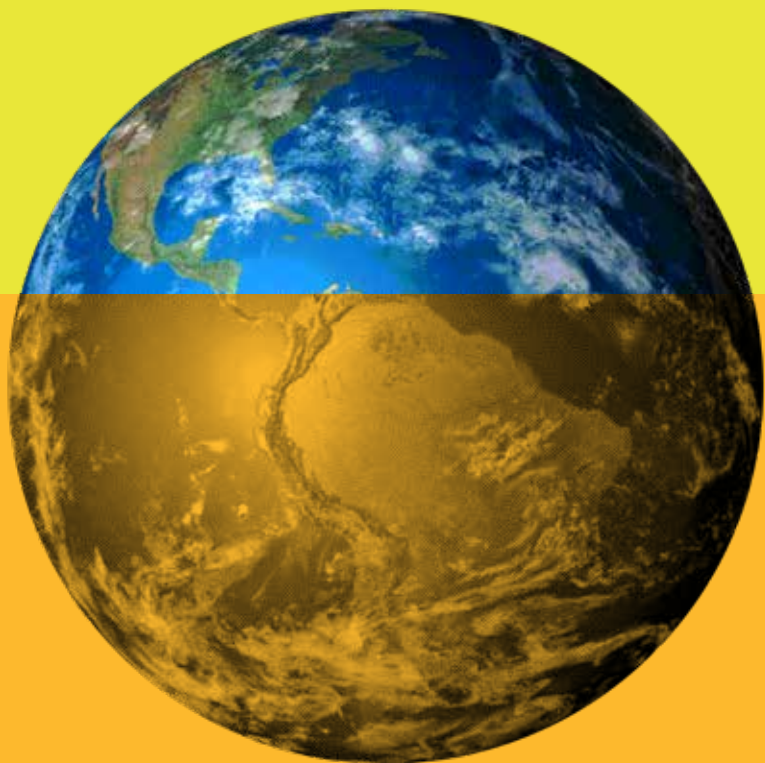
Climate change is an increasing concern for artists, just as it is for the wider public. International organisations (such as the United Nations) and leading activists argue that there needs to be radical change in order to ensure the survival of the planet. Many artists use their work to put forward ideas about how we can improve our relationship to the environment.

Antiflatearther:

Artists who are interested in people with strange ideas, such as those who incorrectly believe that the world is flat.



Polutionism / **FIZZYZSEA:**



ARTOCALIPSE / SEADROWNING:

Extreme depictions of the impacts of climate change, including apocalyptic scenes of fires and floods.

Noncats:

The appearance of artwork
on social media that seeks
to engage with serious
political matters.





: When ideas get
lost in shops.



What Happened When: notes on the workshop process

Maeve Mulrennan

Week 1:

- Alliteration name games to get to know one another.
- Text exercises on Roald Dahl's *BFG* (1982), redefining Dahl's made-up words.
- Visual Thinking Strategy (VTS) based on Henri Matisse's *The Snail* (1953) collage that led to animal collages produced by participants.
- Visit to Siobhan McDonald's *Hidden Monuments* exhibition in Limerick City Gallery of Art.
- Talk with artist and curator Michele Horrigan.

Week 2:

- Collaborative installation with artist Rory Tangney.
- Painting portraits with artist Gerry Davis.
- Persuasive writing with artist Lousie Manifold.
- Animal hybridity with artist Siobhán McGibbon.
- Making Origami Story Cubes.
- Reworking existing words, turning verbs into nouns and vice versa.

"We wanted to cater to different learning styles and create opportunities for dialogues with children whose strengths leaned towards the kinaesthetic, the audio, the visual and the aural. We also wanted to incorporate a structure of creative challenge, which led to the development of Origami Story Cubes. All students were given origami paper, and were challenged to fold it into a three-dimensional cube. We demonstrated step-by-step how they could accomplish this, breaking the process down into its component steps. By the end, each child had their own story cube which they could draw 6 story elements onto. This helped the children surmount spatial issues and their preconceptions about their dexterity, while also demonstrating how every story can be broken down into components such as the protagonist, antagonist, the ordinary world, the call of adventure, tests and rewards."

Week 3:

- Fiction and art-writing with writer Sue Rainsford.
- Creative appropriation exercises with artist and writer Gianna Tasha Tomasso.
- Writing and research with writer Dara Waldron.
- Visual Thinking Strategy and Letter Writing based on the work of Yayoi Kusama, leading to clay sculptures produced by participants.

"A series of exercises based on Yayoi Kusama's work presented the students an opportunity to exercise their deductive reasoning skills, while also offering us the

chance to demonstrate how the artist's background can lend form and philosophy to their artistic practice. To begin, we presented them with imagery of artworks produced at various stages of her artistic career, including her pumpkin sculptures, her dot rooms, and her 'infinity room' installations. We then discussed her childhood, and how her family had run a pumpkin farm. Given her age (b.1929), we speculated about how she must have grown up in an era of paraffin lights in rural Japan, pre mass-electrification. We discussed this and other social factors, looking back at her work with fresh eyes as we considered how her background may have influenced her art."

"Sue Rainsford asked the students to imagine that they were an inanimate object, and to write a piece of prose about their existence. There were a range of emotional reactions to this task. The students' empathised with bricks and footballs, balloons and shoes, and wondered why their inanimate existence was subject to children's kicks, or why it was so fleeting, short and vulnerable in comparison to a human lifespan. Experiences and exercises like this opened up a whole new vocabulary, allowing them to synthesise new existences."



Week 4:

- Field trip to IMMA (Irish Museum of Modern Art) to view the following exhibitions: *Doris Salcedo: Acts of Mourning*; *Janet Mullarney: Then and Now*; *Freud Project Gaze*; *A Vague Anxiety*, featuring artists Cristina Bunello, Marie Farrington, Saidhbhín Gibson, Helio León, plattenbaustudio, Brian Teeling and Susanne Wawra.
- Field trip to view *Andrew Kearney: Mechanism* exhibition at Crawford Art Gallery, Cork.
- Field trip to *Dennis O'Connor: Along The Western Shore* / *I gCladach An Iarthar* exhibition at Siamsa Tíre, Tralee.

Week 5:

- Creative language workshops and reflections.

“One of the many highlights of the exhibition visit to IMMA was sitting with a small group around Rebecca Horn’s sculptural work *Take me to the other side of the ocean* (1991), everyone’s eyes focused on a rotating and overflowing funnel of blue pigment and the artist’s shoes. On the return from another field trip, we made a quick stop at a new playground on route — which allowed us to explore the idea of the playground as an artspace.”



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Director/CEO: Matt Packer

Administrative & Operations Manager: Maria Casey

Curatorial Scholar 2018–2019: Sara Dowling

EVA International / Better Words Team

Programme Coordinator: Eimear Redmond

Workshop Coordinator: Maeve Mulrennan

Workshop Assistant: Stephen Murphy

Workshop Contributors: Gerry Davis, Michele Horrigan,

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Programme Consultant: Patrick Burke

(Department of Language and Literacy Education,

Mary Immaculate College, Limerick)

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Proofreading: Kirstie North

Texts

Matt Packer & Eimear Redmond

Kevin Barry

Maeve Mulrennan

Design

Piquant Media

Photography

Deirdre Power

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**Featuring an introduction
by Kevin Barry**

