

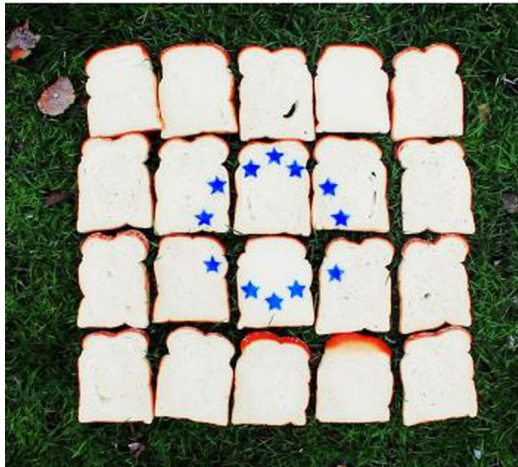
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Video art and birds without borders get Brexfast done

Art: What Lies Beneath: Kevin Gaynor 'Brefast'



'Brefast' was born out of the 'buzzing reality of living withing the 24-hour news cycle of Brexit'

Niall MacMonagle

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Dubliner Kevin Gaynor manoeuvred his way though school "holding on to as much creativity as I could", studied cinematography at Ballyfermot College of Further Education, graduated from NCAD two years ago - and was recently honoured with an Arts Council 'Next Generation Artist' award. And though he wears his Irishness on a chain around his neck that holds a beautiful old punt coin (featuring a red deer from Killarney National Park), his artistic vision is Irish, European, global.

Like most 'arty' kids, Gaynor had been drawing "since I realised that was something I could do" but was "never one to draw landscapes or still lifes, focusing more on what I could get away with".

When he saw Pinocchio as a child, "the animation, music, story or all three" left him with "a lingering, unsettling feeling that someone's artistic expression could travel to my TV and leave a lasting impression on a stranger".

From then on, film was his medium and obsession. It was a way, not only to express a thought but he knew "its immediacy would reach as many as possible". For Gaynor, the screen "was the last barrier between the art and audience" - so he removed it "through the sculptural practice I use today".

Gaynor is a brilliant constructor of ideas. He takes an upright piano from London, builds a wooden wall with wood bought on both sides of the Irish Border. The wall divides the keyboard at middle C. Now it can only be played

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on one side. The tune? The EU anthem, Beethoven's Ode to Joy. Have a European immigrant play it and Gaynor's powerful, memorable Ode Two Joy captures social and political distancing.

Or take Brexfast - a work "born out of the buzzing reality of living within the 24-hour news cycle of Brexit, while the Border that contested it seemed unmoved by the global dynamics it was the centre of". Slices of bread, placed in regular square formation on the Northern Irish Border, are overlaid with the EU flag - and during the active sculpture film, birds come from both sides to "unmake" the work. Meanwhile the camera cuts to images of the European Parliament.

Gaynor chose a bird's eye view because "Brexit is a momentary shift in the much longer timeline on this island. Having this aerial view gives it a contemporary and historic quality, being both about right now and Ireland as a whole."

The Brexfast soundtrack, at first, is babel babble. Gaynor took over 20 speeches from the European Parliament, "each one layered on top of the other" and created "an unintelligible mumble". Against this, the hungry birds rush about, squawking. Is he sure they come from both sides of the Border? "I can safely say each bird had their passports checked and had both northern and southern accents."

Eaten bread, in this instance, is not forgotten and the film ends with the sound of bird song played over a final image - one of unity: members of the European Parliament on their feet applauding.

Gaynor's original, conceptual, active sculpture and video work is of our time. He doesn't dismiss tradition, but "the work I love today strays far and away from the Grand Masters". Oil on canvas once dominated - but for artists today "it's the art that uses everyday mediums, that uses the world that surrounds them that is the most relevant. Like singing in your own accent, those that make art in their own accent create work that's not only relevant but needed.

"I'm just trying to use my practice as a prism to reflect and translate the movements happening globally and the ripples they cause in our daily lives. By reflecting the world in this way, it has the possibility for an audience to reassess their views."

For Gaynor, all work is personal and becomes a selfie of the artist - but he doesn't make work based on his own life. "I'm really not that interesting."

It's a solitary life. He's spent "a long time thinking of the long times I've spent on my own thinking" - but next up are two solo shows in Galway and Belfast, then a residency in Berlin. He'll also be travelling to the European Parliament "to study it and give a talk on Ireland and its artistic landscape in the EU".

And all the while, that Irish punt around his neck will "keep me grounded and remind me of the lasting effects of power and geography".

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