

Thresholds

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Sonia Boué

Lindsay Duncanson

Catriona Gallagher

Curated by Aidan Moesby

Foreword

Six months ago, working life was punctuated by stations and cities on the rail network. I stared out of the train window, resting my eyes on the middle distance. This thinking space has been replaced by days staring into a screen interspersed with the occasional cup of tea in the garden. New Year working in Finland, listening to World Service reports about infections in China seems a lifetime ago. Each of us continues to have to adapt, renegotiate and redefine our relationship to home, work, and the transitional spaces in between.

I remember my first Tuesday at MIMA in January: anxious excitement at being the new boy. I rapidly felt included and one of the team. The year stretched out in front of me with plans and schedules, meetings and introductions, so many options and so much potential. March 17th was my last day in the MIMA galleries. A period of uncertainty followed; how can I do a residency when I cannot physically be ‘in residence’?

Working with Elinor Morgan, Head of Programme, I stayed with the uncomfortable feelings, the not knowing. We deliberately did not rush to respond. We thought, reflected and talked ourselves into the future. It seemed natural to want to explore experiences of lockdown and the easing of restrictions. My mode is conversation and I began to see that it was central to my curatorial methodology. The exhibition *Thresholds* comes from talking with artists, writers, designers and curators and I hope it will trigger many new discussions between friends and strangers.


Introduction

Thresholds explores the impact of Covid-19 on our relationship to home. This online exhibition of three new commissions responds to the current crisis, using the digital landscape as context and medium. Situating the exhibition online was an active choice that influenced the production and presentation of the project.

Artists Sonia Boué, Lindsay Duncanson and Catriona Gallagher have developed intensely personal work. Evocative and redolent, these films and photographs speak about our often conflicted and complicated relationship with home under the current circumstances.

Boué documents her move to a new studio, occupying the space with one object after another. Often cherished since childhood, the objects have acted as an emotional anchor through these unsettling transitional times. Duncanson contends with a massive shift in scale, exchanging vast rural landscapes for the domestic spaces of her home. Gallagher attempts to navigate towards her homes in Greece and Northumberland while stuck in a hinterland between both.

Each commission began with a conversation between curator Aidan Moesby and the artist about how the period of lockdown and the easing of restrictions had impacted their lives and practices. These exchanges continued throughout the commissioning process as a source of provocation and reflection.



Sonia Boué

Sonia Boué

Safe as Houses, 2020

Photographs

In this series of 12 photographs, artist Sonia Boué responds to the transitional period between the Covid-19 lockdown and the easing of restrictions, during which she moved to a new studio. The objects pictured hold emotional significance for the artist, often relating to childhood. Through playing with, and photographing, these items, Boué attempts to make sense of the present and draw herself into a future.

Boué's wider practice focuses on a world revolving around home and the domestic, as metaphors for exile and displacement. In this series, Boué uses windows as a motif to suggest an awareness of a world beyond the immediate. Pyjamas tailored for Boué connect to her grandparents' experience of the Holocaust. A copy of the book *Marianne Dreams*, and a doll's house serve as reminders of childhood bedtime stories and play. The combination of these objects with architectural features and windows link the inner emotional dream world and external physical world.





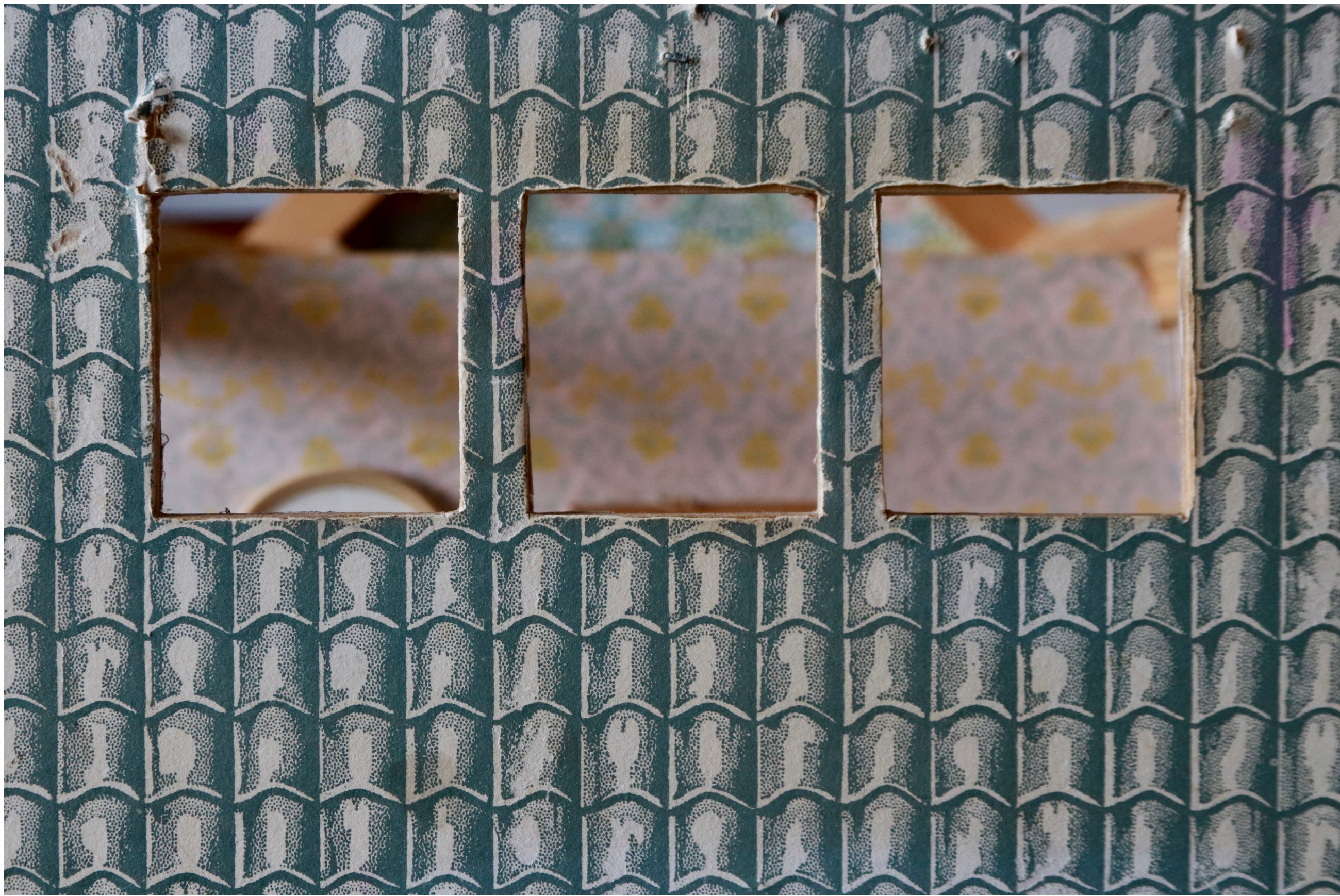








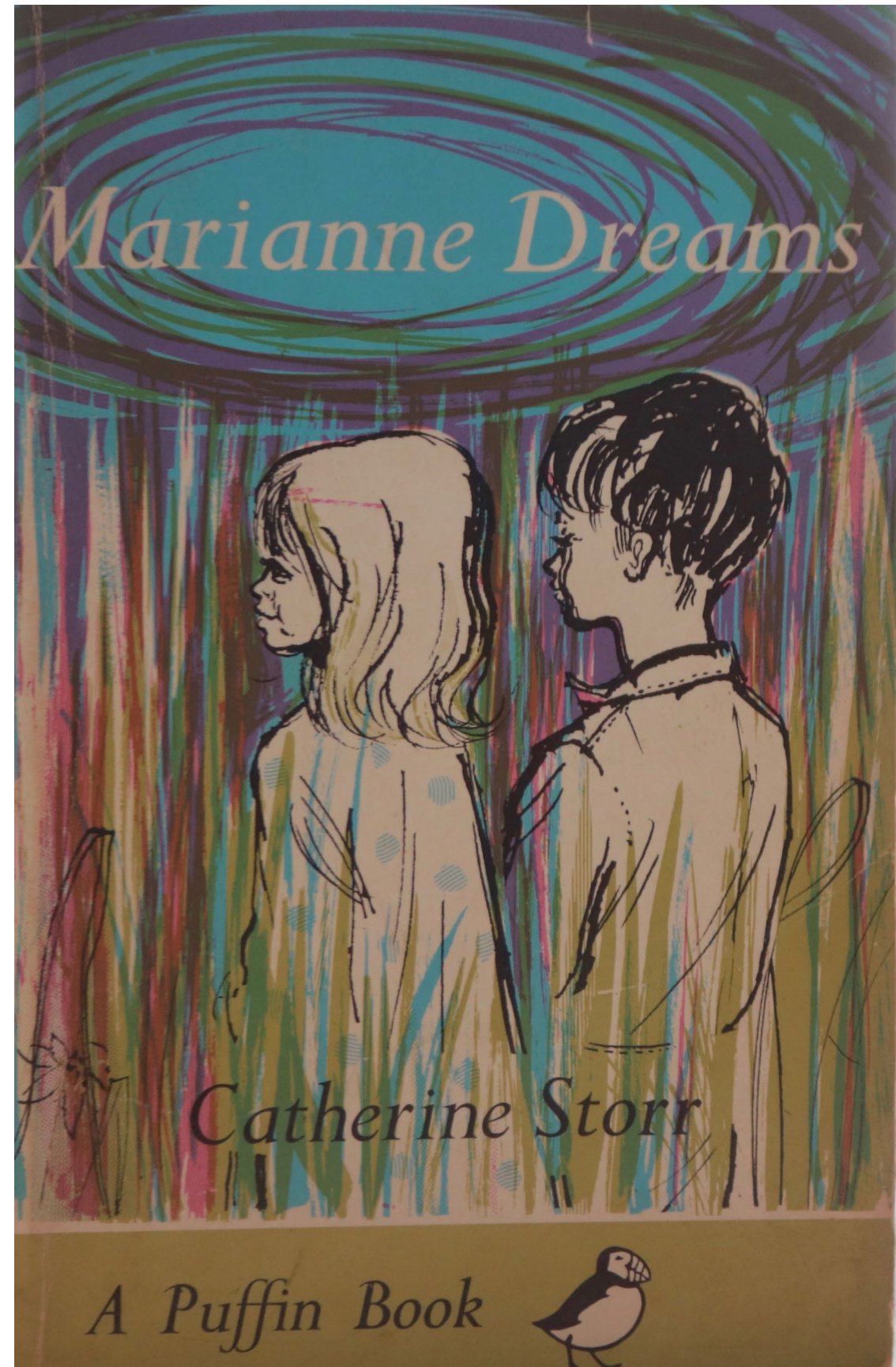














Lindsay Duncanson

Lindsay Duncanson

Brief Loss, 2020

3-channel video with sound (4:56)

Brief Loss depicts Lindsay Duncanson's confinement to home during the Covid-19 lockdown. This piece contrasts with the artist's other works made in vast rural settings. Her family regularly feature as part of her nomadic practice which explores connections between body and landscape.

In *Brief Loss*, Duncanson, wearing pyjamas, sits centre stage between table and bookcase. To either side in the video triptych, her partner and son appear in scenes of domesticity. The three figures, occupying separate spaces, are connected on screen. These snapshots of everyday activity are accompanied by ambient sound and the repetitive rhythmic ticking of the wall clock, indicating the passing of time.

In the doorway of each room, projections show water, pond skater insects, reflections and foam. This 'outside coming in' seems a welcome transgression of her domestic threshold. Through combining sound and film, Duncanson explores physical and emotional experiences of lockdown.



An audio described version of this video is found [here](#). A subtitled version [here](#).



Catriona Gallagher

Catriona Gallagher

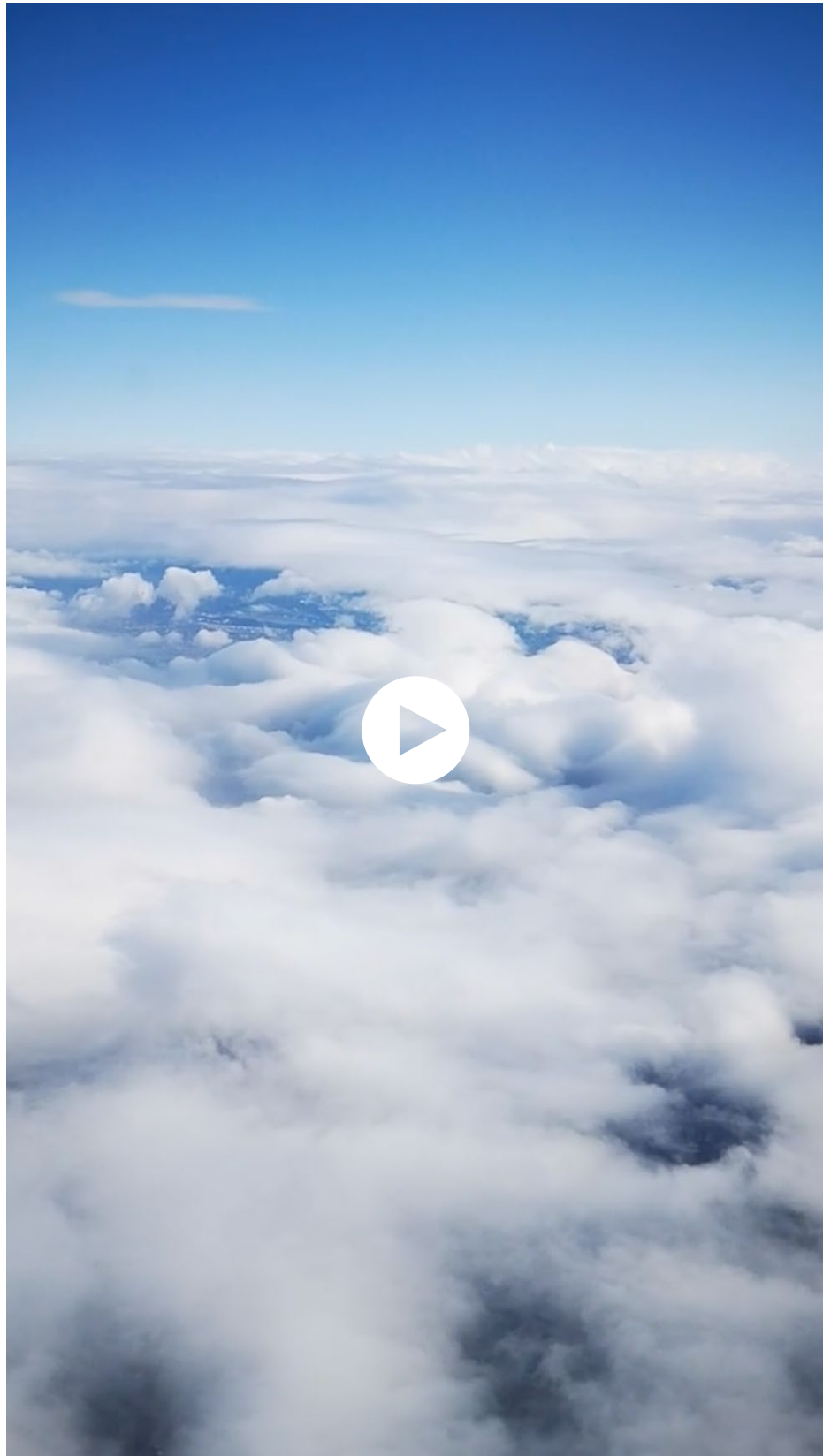
Video Villanelle (for distance), 2020

Video with sound (17:00)

Catriona Gallagher weaves together an assemblage of films, creating a narrative through repetition. This piece documents her experience of being caught between Athens, Greece, and her new home in Northumberland, UK, via a period of ‘uncertain waiting’ in the South East of England.

Gallagher explores her sense of dislocation by organising footage from her phone into a visual villanelle, a poetic form with a strict rhyming structure and repeating lines. Her footage shifts between presence and absence, movement and stasis. Between the sodium glow of the Athens street lights and the iconic bridges of the Tyne punctuated by sunsets and deluges of rain, we keep returning to a shoreline in Greece.

Gallagher often draws attention to the overlooked, the ‘hidden in plain view’ aspects of life, questioning what we bear witness to and what we choose to ignore. Within the transitional period between lockdown and the easing of restrictions, Gallagher subtly explores emotional connections to home and place, considering what is outside and what we carry within.



An audio described version of this video is found [here](#). A subtitled version [here](#). 24



Thresholds Jade French

Throughout lockdown, through the porthole of zoom, I have peered into the once private and unseen spaces of friends, colleagues, and total strangers. From make-shift offices on sofas, to virtual meetings in bedrooms and gardens (and that one time in a caravan), lockdown has opened up a new kind of access into people's lives. Through a screen I look into your world and you into mine. But as I gaze into the homes of strangers, it often feels like a threshold has been crossed or transgressed. Like the skin of a body, walls of a building, or in this instance, a computer screen, a threshold comes into contact with what lies on both sides of it; linking two environments through the act of separating them.

It is this permeability which forms the subject of curator Aidan Moesby's online exhibition *Thresholds*. Moesby, currently Associate Curator at MIMA in partnership with DASH, is interested in our relationships to home and how they have been redefined by recent periods of enforced isolation. In July 2020 Moesby commissioned three artists – Sonia Boué, Lindsay Duncanson and Catriona Gallagher – to create new work in response to their own experiences of the unprecedented, transitional time during the coronavirus pandemic and the easing of restrictions. Each artist engaged in extended online curatorial conversations with Moesby to develop their commissions and discuss the impact of lockdown on their practice.

Sonia Boué is fascinated with objects. Her work has joyously punctuated my Twitter feed throughout the monotony of isolation. She has shared photographs of makeshift noses

made from bizarre objects pressed against her face. In a similar vein, Boué has playfully drawn together and photographed a mixture of personal objects in her commission *Safe as Houses*. The photographic series captures her recent relocation to a new studio space at the time of lockdown-easing, documenting her ‘personal props’, as they are moved into her new studio. Items include childhood books, a Prairie King rocking horse and hand-held vanity mirror. These objects hold potent memories for Boué and accompany her to each new home and studio.

A pair of pyjamas particularly holds my attention. These quintessential striped pyjamas, reminiscent of those worn by the child in *The Snowman*, were tailored by Ann Tutt. Sleep wear has become a firm fixture of lockdown as we navigate new unwritten dress codes of performing to camera while working from home. However, I learn these pyjamas hold a much deeper, more profound meaning for Boué, whose grandparents were survivors of concentration camps. Home, losing homes and exile are prominent themes in Boué’s work. Through delving into the past, she understands the present.

Pyjamas also appear in Lindsay Duncanson’s split-screen black and white video *Brief Loss*. Filmed during the coronavirus pandemic in her Newcastle flat, it features herself, partner and son reading, working and drinking tea respectively. The vignettes are set against the gentle sound of a ticking clock. These are known, comforting scenes. Yet in the background, there are strange flickering projections of pond skaters, water ripples and reflections that create a dream-like quality to the scenes. While Duncanson often creates work with, and

about, her home and family life, previous pieces have typically been set against vast rural landscapes and not her own living room. Here, there is an interesting tension between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’. By bringing flashes of projections of nature inside the home, Duncanson appears to be seeking to bridge her pre- and post-coronavirus practices.

While Duncanson’s work communicates a certain stillness, safety and belonging that home can provide (albeit with a slightly claustrophobic atmosphere), Catriona Gallagher’s work speaks of a lost liminal space. Gallagher, who splits her time living in Northumberland, UK and Athens, Greece, was left stranded in the South East of England by 2020’s travel restrictions and spent much of the summer trying to return to Greece.

Her commissioned film, titled *Video Villanelle (for distance)*, conveys a sense of being caught between places. Like many of us who were separated from loved ones during enforced isolation, Gallagher experienced a “heightened awareness” of her mobile phone as a lifeline in communicating with her partner, friends and family long-distance. Drawing on this, she made her film using only existing footage from the personal archive on her phone. She repurposed video clips shot for social media or private messages – a gesture akin to turning out one’s pockets or emptying a rucksack. Significantly, this footage was never intended to be used as art, further muddying the waters between private and public roles and communications.

This disparate footage is edited together using the arrangement of the highly structured villanelle poem or musical form. Mimicking the villanelle's arrangement – an a-b-a rhyme structure – the film repeats fragments of footage as if reciting lines of a verse. It moves back and forth between the UK and Greece, featuring sweeping rural landscapes, contrasting urban architectures and intimate moments with friends. Gallagher's use of the villanelle structure creates a visual rhyme that enables her to make sense of this incidental footage, and also of this unsettled and fragmented period of her life.

All three artists' exploration of thresholds are interconnected by their expression of felt distortions of time. During quarantine, weeks and months seemed to pass surprisingly quickly, yet simultaneously, hours and days dragged. In *Brief Time*, for example, as the clock sounds the passage of time, Duncanson flips through books without really reading or gazes deep in thought. She seems to feel the pressure of the 'gift of time'. She is contemplative, restive, bored even, contrasting with her partner and son, who, either side of her, continue with their quiet activities, oblivious to her restlessness.

Boué's work acts as a more direct record of time: each object was photographed as she moved it into her new studio. Moreover, the objects themselves act as markers of time through the childhood memories they invoke. Lockdown's blurring of identical days leads us to create fewer new memories which is crucial to our perception of time. In Boué's words, "under stress, the psyche seeks the familiar." Memories, like those depicted in her series, are one of the ways that we judge how much time has passed bringing a certain comfort.

Boué's work is not just about the moving between the thresholds of studio spaces, but also how we are moving through these times.

Gallagher's reassembling of old footage using the villanelle structure reframes and reorders time, moments and memories. The distance referred to in Gallagher's film title *Video Villanelle (for distance)* appears to reference both being geographically distant and also taking a necessary temporal distance from the past two years of her life in order to process and make meaning.

Lockdown has disrupted our homes and the way we experience time in them. As revealed by these artworks, it has also radically reshaped our personal relationships, forcing us to rethink how we live, work and socialise together. Moesby's curatorial approach to *Thresholds* has sought to examine these negotiations alongside embracing the heightened digital realm we have now found ourselves in, questioning how institutions, curators, artists and writers might work together in isolation to make sense of these difficult times.

Biographies

Sonia Boué is based in Oxford, UK. She is an interdisciplinary artist and writer who uses home and domestic settings to explore issues around exile and displacement. Boué created the *Museum of Object Research* and her *Return to Catalonia* featured on Radio 4's *Art of Now*. She writes extensively on Neurodiversity.

Lindsay Duncanson is a filmmaker, photographer and sound artist based in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. Her audio-visual work investigates her relationship to, and interaction with, landscape and location. Through her work *Nuclear Family Project*, she tours UK nuclear power plants with her family. Duncanson initiated Noizechoir, exploring the scope of human voices beyond singing.

Catriona Gallagher works between Athens, Greece and Northumberland, UK. Her practice encompasses moving image, drawing and writing. Focusing on the often overlooked, her work explores the relationships between external physical and interior emotional landscapes. Her film *Perdikaki* premiered at the 58th Ann Arbor Film Festival, 2020. She is a co-founder of A - DASH project space, Athens.

Jade French is based in Liverpool, UK. She is a museum professional and academic whose work examines access and participation within visual arts and museology with a focus on the support facilitation of learning disabled artists and curators. French is currently a Visiting Research Fellow in the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Culture Studies at the University of Leeds where she teaches and has recently published the monograph 'Inclusive Curating in Contemporary Art'.

Aidan Moesby is a curator who explores civic and personal wellbeing through a practice rooted in research, response and conversation. He works in the spaces where art, technology and wellbeing intersect, across mainstream and disability contexts. He passionately promotes diversity and equality within the visual arts.

Aidan Moesby is Associate Curator at MIMA as part of the Curatorial Commissions Programme, in collaboration with DASH. This programme supports Disabled curators to develop their practices and careers through working with MIMA, Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), Birmingham and Wysing Arts Centre, Cambridge.

All works commissioned by Aidan Moesby for MIMA's curatorial partnership programme with DASH. All supplied courtesy of the artist. Essay courtesy of Jade French.

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