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ROISIN AGNEW INTERVIEWS VIVIENNE GRIFFIN ABOUT THEIR RECENT EXHIBITION AT BUREAU GALLERY NEW YORK SUPPORTED BY CULTURE IRELAND.

For **Vivienne Griffin**, Ireland's susceptibility to extractivist uses of technology can be traced back to its Catholic roots. "I realise I'm sitting here wearing this giant fucking cross," they laugh, "but I do believe that. Technology is entering the last frontier - our psyche, a colonisation of the mind, your spirit or your soul. I think in Ireland we're vulnerable to these things." The act of 'profanation' is one way to think through Griffin's sprawling 'anti-disciplinary' practice, one that in recent years has gravitated towards sonic works that pair AI and coding with motorised harps and national-religious iconography. Central to it, is a movement between registers, a "passage from the sacred to the profane by means of an entirely inappropriate use (or, rather, reuse) of the sacred: namely play," as Giorgio Agamben defines it. But when this passage from the sacred to the profane arguably involves the tools of your own self-dispossession, what then?

Play and its derivatives are conceived of by Griffin as part of the importance of the artist-as-beginner, pointing to *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (a 1970 book of teachings by Sōtō Zen monk, Shunryu Suzuki) as a recurring influence. "The minute you start becoming an expert, you start narrowing and reducing the possibilities, whilst the beginner is always open," Griffin says. It's unsurprising, then, that when Griffin was offered the opportunity to collaborate with a researcher at the Turing Institute as part of their current residency at Somerset House Studios, they saw another opportunity to begin from the beginning. "I was learning about algorithmic processes, but I was really interested in them with regard interpersonal and social issues," Griffin says. Collaborating with researcher Cari Hyde-Vaamonde, a former lawyer and current researcher in algorithmic governance and the carceral system, Griffin began to "build a visual world and visual metaphors that [Hyde-Vaamonde] uses in judicial/judge decision-making contexts." The visualisation came out of Hyde-Vaamonde's perceived need to make her research legible and counter a type of jadedness around algorithmic bias in relation to recidivism (the predicted likelihood of re-offending) and the main algorithm used for this calculation in the American carceral system, Compass. "I got stuck at one point; it's not like my other work," Griffin admits. "Direct political work - there's no kind of other 'read' you can have on it."



Vivienne Griffin, *Heavy Metal Incense Burner*, 2024, Pewter, steel, incense; photograph by Charles Benton courtesy the artist and Bureau.

Understandably suspicious of politically frontal art-making, Griffin is nevertheless wrestling with some of the bigger dilemmas at the heart of contemporary art practice, as their recent show, 'The Song of Lies' at New York's Bureau Gallery, makes clear. In the same video work that encompasses their collaboration with Hyde-Vaamonde, (aptly named *MERCY*) Griffin employs a techno-textual cut-up technique, suggestive of what they term 'the collective unconscious nervous breakdown'. "I was writing from the perspective of lots of different voices and they all did merge into one, into this character - racing thoughts, fragmented sentences, spewing poetry, thoughts about the apocalypse," they say.

But what are the origins of this nervous breakdown? This seems to be answered by Griffin's other recent work that has seen them employ AI model Runway ML on datasets of their own drawings to create large-scale pieces. "I draw all the time, but I was experiencing burnout. I thought it would take [the AI] a long time, but it only took ten minutes" they say. "I felt defeated as an image-maker. I just thought, we're done for. But then I went back to these images - they are so vacuous. A lot of my drawings have text and political content, and the machine learning ones had done this thing, where they interpreted words as shapes." The result is disorienting - a meditation on the post-post-post instability of contemporary (dis)reality and the role of language as a placeholder, a meaningless shape, emblematic of the disinformation age. "I was trying to mash together the man and the machine; it felt like a self-annihilating technology."

But Griffin is no techno-pessimist. Their faith in art's ability to adopt and adapt technology, and their determination to put themselves in the novice seat, has brought them to work increasingly with sound and coding in their capacity as an 'antidisciplinary artist'. "I found the term in a job advertisement that went out from MIT. They were looking for people that could bring together disciplines that aren't usually put together," they say. "Others understand it as 'anti-formal disciplines.'" Subsequently, during their PhD in Queen's University Belfast's Sonic Arts Research Centre (SARC), Griffin learned simultaneously to code and to gain more formal understanding of music that let them hear new sounds, learning to use Max MSP, with support from Pedro Rebelo. "I've tried to do a linear course with coding, but what you end up doing is being on YouTube a lot of the time, copying things other people have made and putting them together in lots of ways that you want."



Vivienne Griffin, *The New Note*, 2024, Cláirseach Harp, pewter, motors, 3D resin print, 3D bamboo print, Bela board, power supply, computer fans, DI box, speaker, harp pick-up; photograph by Charles Benton courtesy the artist and Bureau.

A bricolage-like methodology seems to steer Griffin towards materials and assembly, techniques of demystification where everything is ‘technology.’ “A lot of my work is around technology but a lot of it is also around old traditional ways of working with materials,” Griffin explains. This pull between the technics of the new with technology of tradition means they could be said to be involved in a form of technological interpellation. In a recent collaboration at Somerset House with Belfast harpist Úna Monaghan, a motorised robot was placed on one harp, with the performance turning into a duet between robot and harpist. In another piece, *A Heavy Metal Incense Burner* (2024), a hand sandcast incense burner connected to a chain, whose every link was made by Griffin, is discovered to have been originally a product of a 3D file they bought online.

If profanation is play as method, then Griffin employs it as an act of enquiry and demystification – an encounter with breakdown and self-dispossession that is not without hope. One can always begin again from the beginning. They admit owing to the Arts Council of Ireland their ability to keep training and learning new skills. “The funding models provided by the Irish state are incredible and fantastic. It’s a model that other countries should be looking into.” What is next? A work on sixteenth-century ‘harp burnings’ that Queen Elizabeth carried out on Irish harpists, Griffin says. “I’m calling it ‘postcolonial psychosis.’” A perfect metaphor for one’s drive to self-destruct and start over.

Vivienne Griffin is a Dublin-born visual artist currently based between London and New York. Their solo exhibition, ‘The Song of Lies’, ran at New York’s Bureau Gallery from 11 July to 16 August 2024 and was supported in part by Culture Ireland.

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