

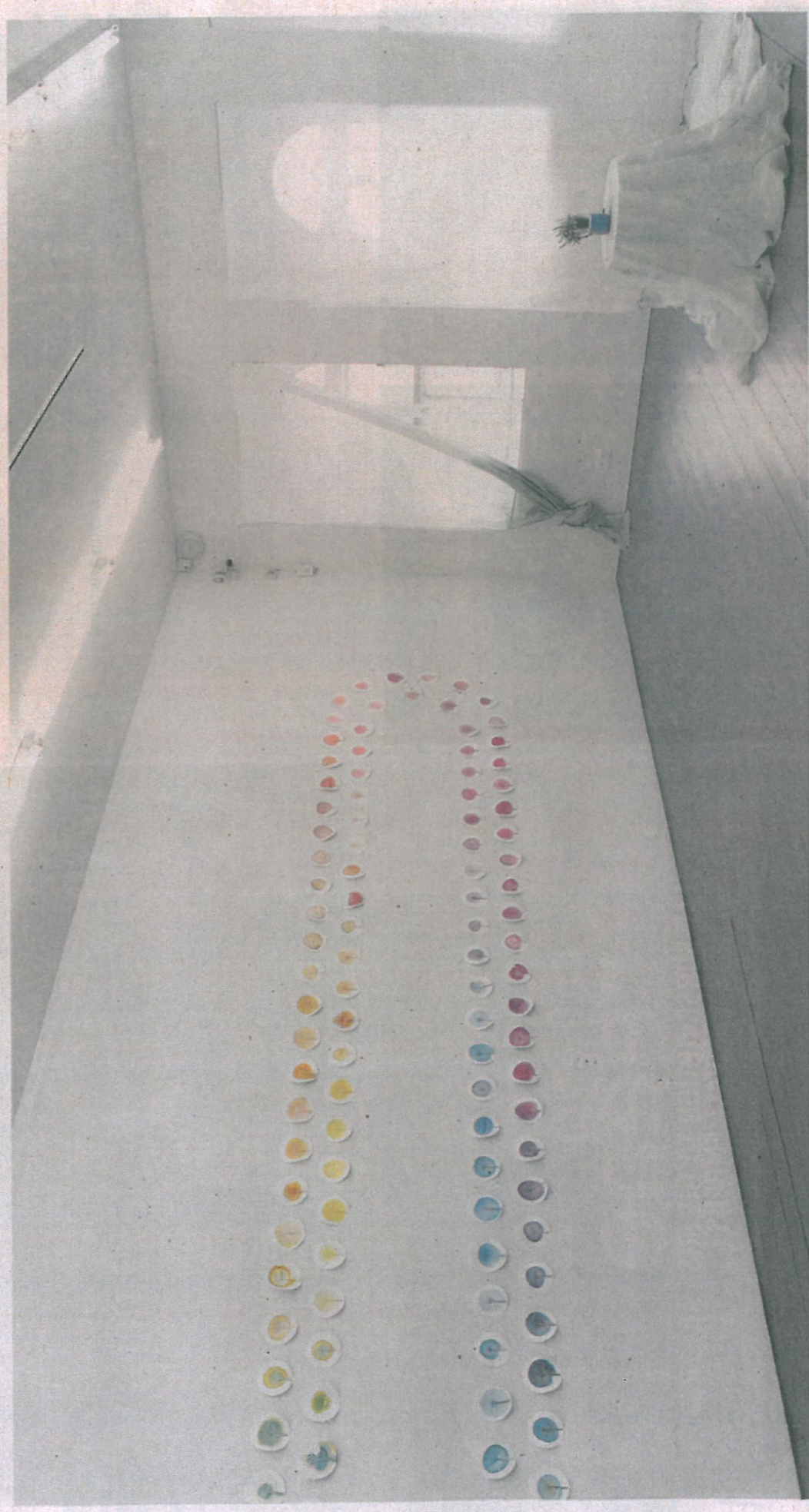
HOW IS IT MADE? BRONZE ART LINE ART FOUNTAIN



Vanessa Donoso Lopez, Eye before e except after see, Limerick City Gallery of Arts, 2011, installation shot

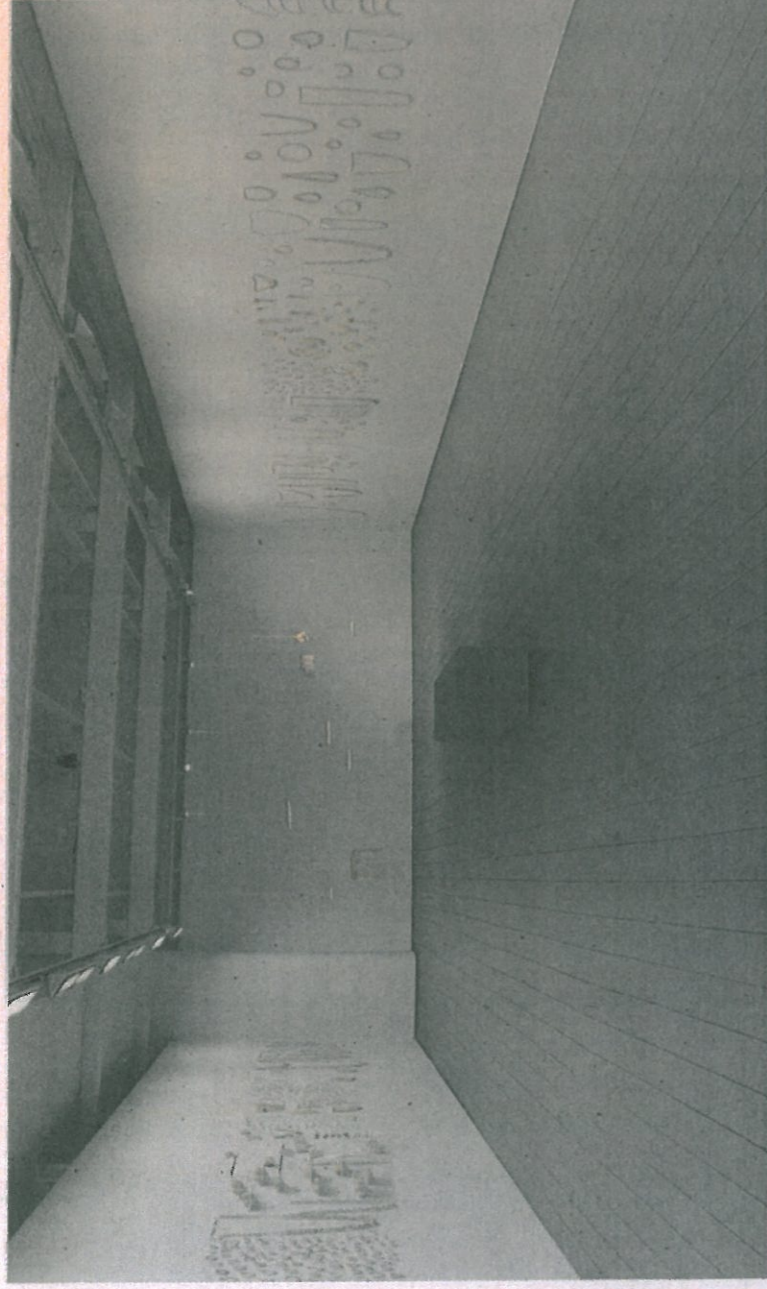
Unpolluted Language

VANESSA DONOSO LOPEZ DISCUSSES THE WORK BEHIND HER EXHIBITION 'EYE BEFORE E EXCEPT AFTER SEE' WHICH RAN AT LIMERICK CITY GALLERY OF ART, 16 JULY – 28 AUGUST 2015.



Vanessa Donoso Lopez, Eye before e except after see, Limerick City Gallery of Arts, 2015

HOW IS IT MADE?



Vanessa Donoso Lopez, Eye before e except after, see!, Limerick City Gallery of Arts, 2015

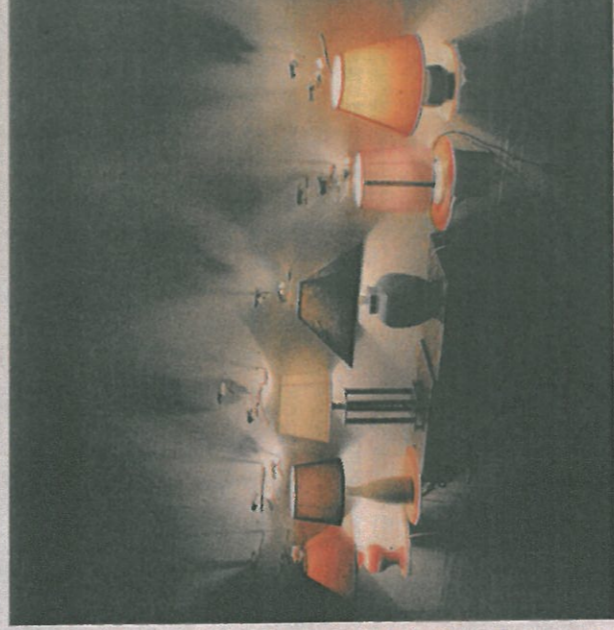
GROWING up in Spain when it was emerging from a 35-year dictatorship, my experience of diversity was very limited. The country at that time was overtly homogeneous, but this sparked my inquisitiveness about alternative ways of achieving things. Seeing my older sister, now a doctor of anthropology, travelling the world also fed my curiosity and gave me an insight into other cultures.

After a revealing trip to Sweden in my early twenties, I decided to learn English so that I would be able to communicate better with the world. I applied for an Erasmus grant at the Winchester School of Art and ended up staying for two years to finish my degree. Life in the UK was very different. The cultural shock was massive. Huge. Ginormous. The mundane became dramatic and the familiar became terrifying. But as Lacan would have described it, it became a real *jouissance* experience; it felt so pleasurable that it hurt.

Living in a foreign land, the limitations of oral communication became more obvious. I often find myself inadvertently rescuing unusual words or inventing new ones when I am unable to express my thoughts with the relatively limited English at my disposal. These attempts at expressing myself, which might be incomprehensible to some, could be understood as an 'unpolluted' form of language. Perhaps this alternative manner of speech is in fact more authentic, as it emerges organically when you have not yet learnt to manipulate a language, to shape its appearance or to form lies, sarcasm and puzzles. But it is sometimes sad to think that I might only be enjoying a watered-down version of the relationship I could have with someone if we shared a mother tongue. I also risk saying something that might be misunderstood or hold unintentional weight.

Learning English was only the beginning of a much longer journey towards understanding the culture of my new home. On completion of my art degree, I was selected to do a residency at the Cyprus College of Art. Interaction with some Irish artists during my stay turned my interest towards Ireland. Dublin seemed like a comfortable place to live and an ideal base from which to work. In 2004, I undertook a nine-month work placement at IMMA, which fully seduced me into moving permanently to this green island, where I have lived ever since. This new culture fuelled my interest in language, cross-cultural identities, acculturation processes and other issues related to inhabiting another culture. In 2012 and 2013, when I was selected to show at Ormston House in Limerick, I met Helen Carey, then director of Limerick City Gallery of Art (LCGA). Over the following months, we had some interesting conversations about my work, followed by studio visits, and a year later Helen offered me a solo show at LCGA. I was thrilled. This gave me the chance to evaluate and analyse the work I had produced over the past 10 years.

At the time I was particularly focused on ideas surrounding adult homesickness and acculturation processes. The title of the show, 'Eye Before E Except After See', is a play on the common rhyme used to assist with English spellings. It reflects the constant misunderstandings that occur when you are learning a language, which often lead to a



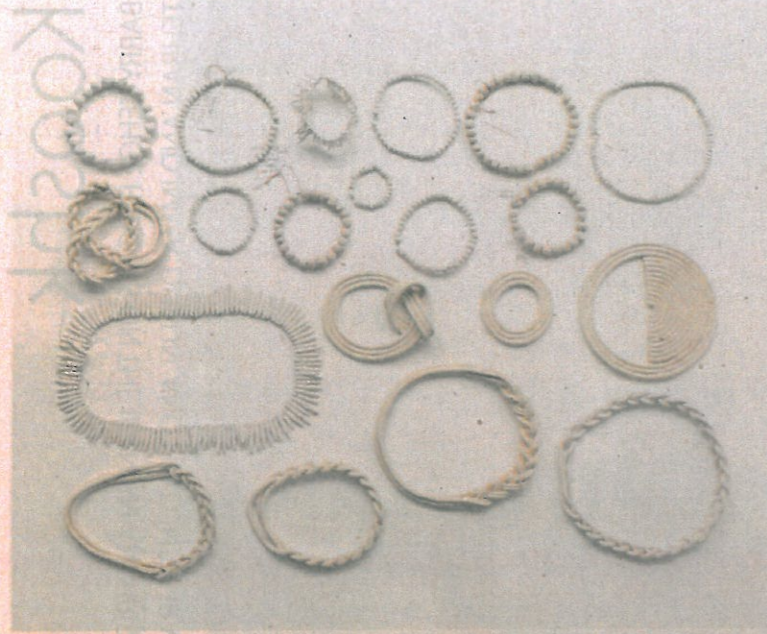
Vanessa Donoso Lopez, Eye before e except after, see!, Limerick City Gallery of Arts, 2015

feeling of displacement.

Looking at my work retrospectively, I soon identified the three main ways that I cope with homesickness: play, material experimentation and repetition. These three actions determined the physical divisions within the show. In the LCGA's Herbert Rooms, I centred my attention on material experimentation. I explored my chosen materials in a basic and almost infantile way, using a wide range of materials in the installation: paper, dyes, inks, wood, branches, plaster, fabric, glass and live plants from Barcelona. I made works using chromatographic techniques that I learned in school, using absorbent paper sourced in Ireland and Spanish inks, which separate when they are absorbed. The way in which the object is formed in this process symbolises how certain things separate in time and space and are then reunited. It reflects our eternal search for answers by reducing things down to simpler forms.

Within the exhibition, information was carried from one context to another in a very literal way. I wanted to engage with a range of materials from different sources. It became a "direct investigation of the properties of materials" (Robert Morris on Eva Hesse, 1968). In the Dark Room Gallery, I focused on play, using elements from both my culture of origin and my chosen culture. The pieces of small furniture and most of the other objects were gathered or made from materials found in Barcelona or Dublin: collected sounds, gadgets, lights and magnets. I built a transitional space where my inner Spanish reality and outer Irish reality met, inspired by the concept of transitional space defined in 1951 by the English psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott. The audience was then invited, almost forced, to play within this area.

In these two first rooms, I wanted to show the various approaches that I have taken towards my practice over the last decade, and both



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these rooms contained a mix of old and new work. The installation on show in the Carnegie Gallery, however, was a completely new body of work made specifically for this exhibition. Prior to the show, I had received a six-month Sculpture and Bursary Award from the Fire Station Artists' Studios; there, I produced the clay pieces for this room, which became a crucial aspect of the exhibition. As the material was new to me at this time, I started working with industrial clay, which is easy to obtain. After a while, I found ways to manufacture my own. The Wicklow Mountains were the first place I chose to dig. I recovered white and ochre clays, both of which produced exciting results when processed.

In January 2015, Dublin City Council contacted me after hearing that I was working with self-dug clay. I was commissioned to undertake a project on Bull Island, Dublin, looking specifically at its soil, as part of the United Nations International Year of Soils. Following this, the investigation expanded into different areas: Wicklow, Dublin city centre and then Barcelona and Mallorca. Hundreds and hundreds of study pieces came out of the repetitive, labour-intensive method of digging that I developed. They were first placed chronologically along the wall of the studio and later in the gallery space, though only the paler pieces I made were selected to be shown.

The repetitive action of digging was a primal and intimate process. As I dug continuously on my own, I considered clay as a representation of genesis and origin. I deliberately chose manual labour in order to maintain a close and familiar relationship with the works. With this material, I created fired-clay beads, as well as platted and knotted shapes. Many pieces were strung in necklace-like forms, which brought some order and pattern to the clay's organic and somewhat chaotic beginnings. It reflected our journey from the primordial to the comfort of familiarity.

The show was accompanied by a booklet, which I developed with three writers: Dr. Ross Birrell, lecturer at the Glasgow School of Art, wrote a piece in response to ideas around material experimentation. Beatriz Escudero García, curator and friends' coordinator at MACBA Barcelona, focused on play. Finally, Helen Carey, former director of LCGA and current director of the Fire Station Artists' Studios, wrote on repetition processes.

I am currently working on my upcoming solo show at Dublin's Cultural Spanish Institute, Instituto Cervantes, which opens in February 2016. In April 2016, I will be taking part in the Supermarket Art Fair in Stockholm, with Ormston House, Limerick. My solo show at The Lab, Dublin, will open in September and will feature more thorough results from my ongoing research into self-dug clay.

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