

Contents

| | |
|----------|---|
| Foreword | 9 |
|----------|---|

| | |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Notes on The Artist as Wanderer | 13 |
|---------------------------------|----|

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| <i>I Went to the Woods</i> : overview | 21 |
|---------------------------------------|----|

I Went to the Woods: artist information

| | |
|-----------------------------|----|
| Anna Bak | 30 |
| Brendan Earley | 32 |
| Fiona Kelly | 34 |
| Juha Pekka Matias Laakkonen | 36 |
| Richard Long | 38 |
| Helen Mirra | 40 |
| Ria Pacqu  e | 42 |
| herman de vries | 44 |
| Walker & Walker | 46 |

| | |
|------------------|----|
| Acknowledgements | 52 |
|------------------|----|



Foreword

Curated by Chris Clarke and Pádraic E. Moore, *I Went to the Woods: The artist as wanderer* explores poetic responses to the natural world by artists who shape their work through walks and keen observation of the landscape. The exhibition brings the wonder and sensitivity of their gaze into the gallery spaces and encourages us to review our relationship to nature as we set off on our own wanderings.

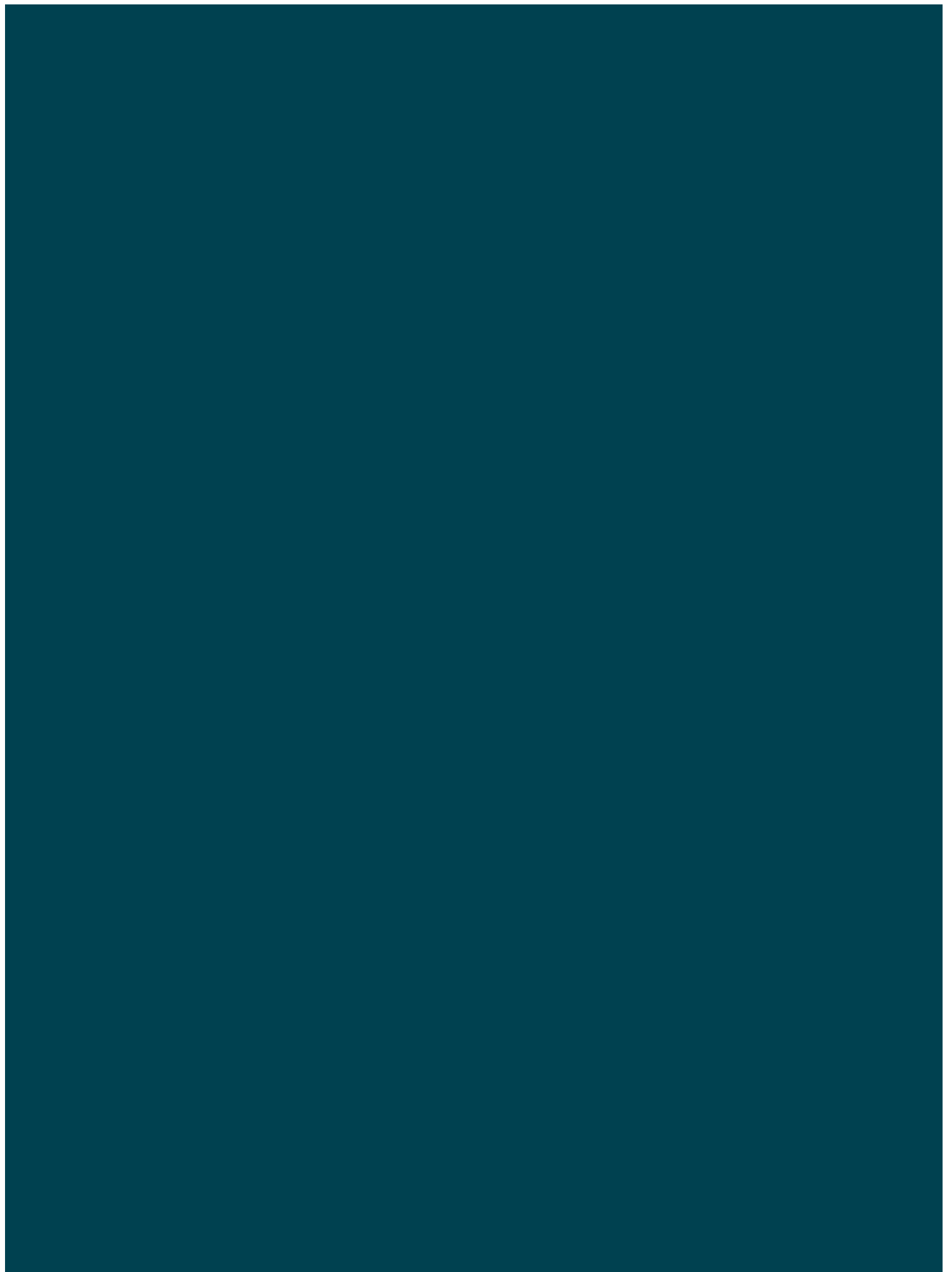
This guide provides a reflection on the research themes that guided the curators, as well as an introduction to the artists selected for the exhibition. Support for *I Went to the Woods* and the accompanying programme of artists' talks, workshops and curatorial events has been generously provided by University College Cork, the Arts Council of Ireland, Embassy of Denmark, Ireland, Danish Arts Foundation, Flemish Agency for Art & Heritage, and private philanthropy through Cork University Foundation.

Fiona Kearney

Director, the **Glucksman**
University College Cork, Ireland







Notes on The Artist as Wanderer

Pádraic E. Moore

The process of co-curating *I Went to the Woods: The artist as wanderer* enabled me to bring together and interrogate, via dialogue with several artists, strands of research I have been preoccupied with for some time. The notes that follow offer an insight into some of these divergent strands. These are intended to suggest and encourage other potential readings of the project in terms of its philosophical and historical influences. One of the core ideas which interests me is that of the artist's movement through a landscape; while this subject as a conceptual practice is long established, the exhibition registers the fact that recent decades have seen an unprecedented rise in the idea of the artist as cultural nomad. Motivated not just by wanderlust but also by necessity, many contemporary artists are engaged in peripatetic post-studio practices.

Back to Nature

Another idea fundamental to the exhibition is that of the artist going 'back to nature', retreating from what might be seen as the oppression of urban life. During the industrial revolution of the late 18th and 19th century, technological, social and scientific developments constituted the beginning of an ongoing process of environmental degradation. 'Wild nature'

seen as something to be dominated, controlled and exploited; it was viewed merely as a system of processes and resources submissive to the needs of humankind. The Romantic movement represented an aesthetic and intellectual retort to this attitude, with the paintings of this period depicting bucolic landscapes and idealised representations of the natural world. Rural living came to be viewed as somehow wholesome and restorative by predominantly urban audiences. Artists began to seek out rural idylls, forming colonies in isolated outposts.

Source of Revelation

The American writer Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) wrote in *Walden* (1854): "We need the tonic of wildness...at the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be indefinitely wild, unswayed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We can never have enough of nature." The sentiment expressed in this quote epitomises the essence of 19th century Romanticism, which portrayed nature at its most sublime and awe-inspiring, something one might escape into as a means of escaping oneself. Thoreau's writing was significantly influenced by the philosophies of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) who viewed nature not only as a means of refuge but also as a direct source of revelation. Emerson's book *Nature* (published anonymously in 1836) reads as a manifesto of pantheism, arguing that nature is a direct manifestation of the divine. The Romantic view of wild nature as valuable and vital has remained consistently present throughout the history of art, albeit in a variety of manifestations.

The Greenest Branch

The 11th century visionary, composer, writer and proto-feminist Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179) believed in the potential of the earth as a garden where humanity could converse with the

divine. Although she wrote many books on subjects ranging from philosophy to natural healing, Bingen's spirituality is rooted in her concept of Viriditas or 'greening power'. This is the belief that the life-force animating the natural world is visible in the greenness of every leaf and blade of grass, which is the same life-force infusing all creation (including humankind) with vitality. Although her writings are generally dense and cryptic in tone, her mind was undoubtedly that of a radical. And despite being ostensibly devoted to the Christian cause (she is also known as Saint Hildegard), her focus was not on theology or scriptural study so much as the pantheistic appreciation of the natural world. Essentially, the idea of Viriditas is a specific type of vitalism that connects divinity to nature through the appearance of colour. In her hymn *O Viridissima Virga*, Hildegard writes of "the greenest branch" as not only beautiful, but sacred - and worthy of worship - because it is a manifestation of the life force that unifies and animates all living things. In connecting the degradation of 'mother earth' with the oppression of women, Bingen also reveals how gender roles have shaped our view of the environment. However, instead of linking the female and the natural together in subordination to a patriarchal culture, Hildegard should be seen as a kind of proto eco-feminist, through her assertion that the 'mother earth' has the capacity to resist or retaliate via some form of environmental crisis. As Bingen writes: "the elements are complaining with strident voices to their creator. Confused through the misdeeds of humans, they are exceeding their normal channels, set for them by their creator through strange and unnatural movements and energy currents."

A Cultivated Wilderness

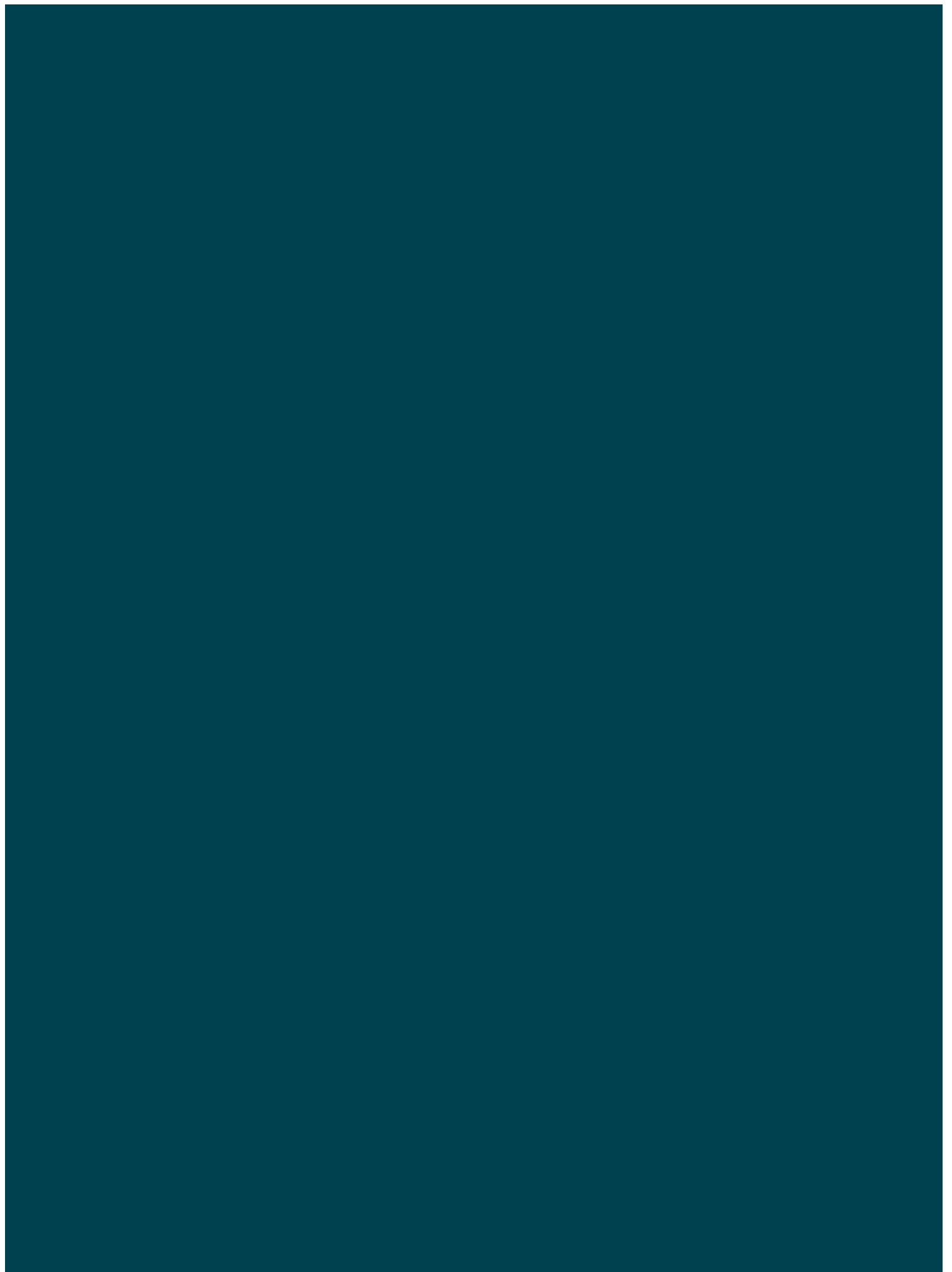
Time recently spent in the Netherlands has made me more acutely aware of aspects of my native country. There is still a wild ruggedness to the landscape of Ireland that is missing from North Holland - especially those areas which were 'reclaimed' from under sea level and designed to accommodate human habitation and industry. Here, one can travel for miles

in an effort to seek out some untamed nature but will find only ordered and regulated terrain. However, recently, Dutch authorities have adopted strategies to propagate a kind of man-made wilderness. A National Ecological Network has been established that involves the transformation of more than 50,000 hectares of land into new 'natural' areas. Former farmlands will be left completely undisturbed to evolve into a kind of would-be wilderness. This situation (which is also taking place in parts of the U.S.) represents development in the relationship between nature and human society as a consequence of environmental change, exemplifying how the threat of apocalypse has seen the emergence of a new relationship between humans and their environment. While there is of course a certain irony to the contrivance of a 'cultivated wilderness', this development might also be seen to represent the contamination of the 'nature versus culture' polarity upon which romanticism was based.

Pádraic E. Moore is a writer, curator, and art historian, whose independent curatorial projects include *Now is forever lasting constant in the mind*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; *Ψ (Psi)*, Fokidos Gallery, Athens; *Hot on the Heels of Love*, The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; *The Girl With The Sun In Her Head*, Jan Van Eyck Academie, Maastricht; *A Modern Panarion*, Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, Dublin; *The Temple of Psychic Youth*, Kevin Kavanagh Gallery, Dublin; *As Above, So Below*, G126, Galway; *Luminous Flux: Andreas Kindler von Knobloch*, Oonagh Young Gallery, Dublin; *Conclave: Agne Raceviciute*, Galleria Collicaligreggi, Catania; *Maradona two for four: Cullinan/Richards*, The Lab, Dublin; *Aion Experiments*, Project Arts Centre, Dublin; *Sunday Night: Aleana Egan*, Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin; and *Whispering Pines: Shana Moulton*, Broadcast Gallery, Dublin.







I Went to the Woods

Chris Clarke

"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."

Henry David Thoreau

I Went to the Woods looks at how artists have experienced and portrayed their surroundings in the course of walks, journeys and ramblings. It explores the idea of the drifter, nomad, and traveller, who captures the external environment through the careful observation of their surroundings and the collection of materials, objects and images. In this way, it epitomises an idealised sense of individualism, a deliberate turning away from the complications and comforts of modern life. As in Thoreau's 1854 book *Walden: or Life in the Woods*, which recorded the author's experiences of living in a cabin deep in the forests of Massachusetts, the artists here follow his dictum "to live deliberately", demonstrating a desire to understand and communicate their own position in the world, on their own terms.

Setting Forth

The journey provides an opportunity for contemplation and meditation, a chance to quiet the mind in order to see one's surroundings anew. At the very outset of the exhibition, a pair of walking sticks greets the visitor. In Brendan Earley's *The Cure*, snippets of song lyrics, remembered from the artist's

countryside walks, are etched into the sticks, evoking moments of reflection and reminiscence. The invitation to proceed is countered by Anna Bak's felt flags, embroidered with the ominous message: "All Hope Gone Go Back." This lingering threat is embodied in the artist's sculptural installation *Wilderness Survival*, a ramshackle shelter of piled sandbags and wooden props supporting a tent-like parachute. While alluding to the desolation experienced during an individual's withdrawal from society, the structure also houses a new video work by Bak entitled *Search Party*, a montage of static shots of wilderness settings. The accompanying narration consists of interviews with artists who have undertaken residency programmes in these locales, ruminating on the appeal and impact of such places on their respective practices.

In her *Unusable Monuments* series of prints, Fiona Kelly captures the subtle changes that occur in abandoned spaces, meticulously portraying and preserving sites of deterioration. Her thorough observation of rubble and debris, half-built structures and crumbling edifices, is evident in an unusual framing device: the compositions are presented as if seen through a stereographic viewfinder. Walker and Walker employ a similarly self-reflexive approach to the landscape, aligning a row of photographic reproductions of Caspar David Friedrich's paintings to create an unwavering horizon line. For Ria Pacqu  , travel and wandering are the essential components of her practice, as she collects and arranges images and items according to their formal affinities. Her installation *Pleroma / Playroma* comprises a survey of spherical objects that the artist has found, the culmination of journeys over several years and across different continents.

Making Tracks

The exploration of the natural environment requires a particular sensitivity to the land, as well as the ability to orient and adapt oneself to unfamiliar surroundings. Walker and Walker's *Northern Star* is a single, glowing light, embedded in the wall of the Glucksman and directed towards true north. Their work

The Ghost of Cadere leans against that same wall, a striped cane that refers to the artist André Cadere and his propensity for leaving his similarly stylised sticks in Parisian galleries throughout the 1970s. These subtle interventions into institutional spaces are indicative of the artist's peculiarly nomadic way of exhibiting his sculptural works.

For Richard Long, walking itself is the medium and means of exploring ideas of time and distance. Through journeys across shorelines, snowscapes, fields and deserts, the materials that Long finds are arranged in configurations such as circles and lines, which are "timeless, universal, understandable and easy to make." His 1992 work *Spring Circle* captures a walk through north Cornwall by arranging chunks of greenish-blue slate in a circle on the floor. Slate splits easily into smooth layers, and for this piece, it has been cut to preserve the natural form and presented with the smooth side facing up. A similar impulse to record and register one's travels informs Helen Mirra's work. Her *Hourly directional field recordings* reveal rubbings of oil stick on raw linen, folded and creased from being transported in her backpack over the course of day-long walks in rural Italy. In another work, entitled *Field Index, Emilia Romagna*, a series of typewritten cards mark her travels through poetic descriptions of specific encounters: "Strange Ersatz Trees – Green Steel Trunks, Pine Branches Attached", "Pair of Bites on Jawbone", "No Trail Hot Turn Around."

Crossing Paths

The artist's walk often results in the foraging, collection and selection of materials along the way, with the artwork then serving as a visual record of the experience. Herman de Vries was originally trained as a botanist and his collages of natural elements reflect a long interest in chance, change, and the environment. His journal *knetzberg (winter)* presents leaves, stem, soil, and plant cuttings from the vicinity of his home in the Black Forest. Juha Pekka Matias Laakonnen's sculptural works are also crafted directly from natural materials collected by the artist during extensive forays into the wilderness. Their

immaculate presentation belies the means of production: *Dodo* resembles a smoothly molded brown egg yet is made of bird bones and resin while, in *Visitation Rights*, a small, flat stone-like object is rendered from moose faeces and spring water. These delicate items and their suggestions of travel, nature and solitude reveal a distinctly poetic sensibility.

In Richard Long's *Stone Line*, a footpath of broken pieces of slate exemplifies the artist's direct approach and sincerity to materials. The work also recalls Fiona Kelly's *Dust Breeding*, an image of strewn rubble and cluttered refuse, which has been printed in tar on plywood and presented on a large, free-standing billboard. The gradual disintegration of the built environment in Kelly's work is also evident in the unusual assemblages of man-made objects and natural elements depicted in her *Follies* series. Brendan Earley also combines aspects of the artificial and the organic in his sculptural works and, in his piece *Not on Facebook*, presents aluminium-cast fragments of modern detritus alongside handmade books. As in his work *The Searchers (part two)*, these seemingly discordant parts are displayed, integrated and overlaid, on large blocks of untouched wood. The titles of the books, drawn from fiction and philosophy and psychology, reflect the same restless desire for escapism and transcendence found in Thoreau's writings.

In *Walden*, Thoreau's desire for simplicity and self-reliance leads him to the wilderness, spending two years and two months living by the labour of his own hands and gaining a new insight into his own capabilities. Similarly, the artists in *I Went to the Woods* reveal a comparable need to understand their place in the world, to test their resolve against isolation and the elements, and to "live in each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influence of the earth."

Chris Clarke is Senior Curator at the **Glucksman**, University College Cork, where he has previously curated exhibitions including *2116: Forecast of the next century*; *Everything Must Go: Art and the Market*; *Stitch in Time: The Fabric of Contemporary Life*; *Selective Memory: Artists in the Archive*; and *Fieldworks: Animal Habitats in Contemporary Art*. He has also curated international exhibitions including *Under the Surface: Newfoundland & Labrador* at the 55th Venice Biennale; *WADE IN* at Eastern Edge Gallery, St. John's, Newfoundland; and *The Second Act* at Arts Centre de Brakke Grond, Amsterdam.