

Eye of the Storm

Siobhán McDonald

Eye of the Storm
Galway Arts Centre &
The Dock, Carrick-on-
Shannon

For Patsy and Rose

(opposite)
'Journey to the Epicentre of the
Eyjafjallajökull volcano', 2011.
Digital print.
Photo: Siobhan McDonald,
Iceland, 2011.



Siobhán McDonald

The invention of the seismometer in Ireland, and how I found myself working with an active volcano in Iceland, (1929 – 2012).

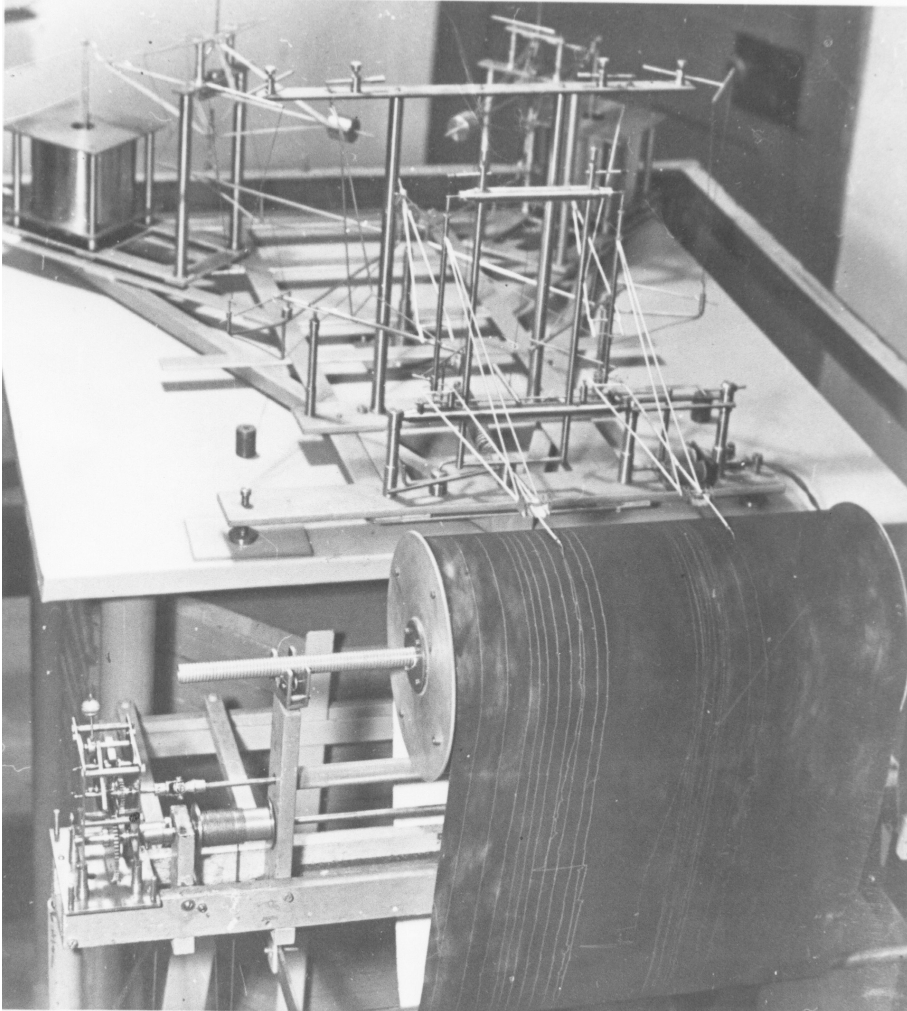
The invention of the seismometer by Irishman Robert Mallet, was initiated by his study of earthquake processes by detonating explosives on Killiney beach in 1849. To satisfy my curiosity on how to understand the deep structure of the earth, I sought out Tom Blake, Director, Irish National Seismic Network (DIAS). We met regularly and discussed the study of earth processes and how they influence the geological evolution of our planet. Our conversations soon revealed a mutual interest in looking at how to represent and record these earthquakes from all over the world. Buried in the Antiquities Department of DIAS lies an immense collection of early seismograms made by the Jesuits in the early 1900's, which have never been on public view until the occasion of Eye of the Storm.

The Jesuits first began recording earthquakes in Ireland at their colleges in Mungret, Co. Limerick and Rathfarnham, Co. Dublin in 1929. By measuring the recorded vibrations, and comparing the data on a world map, it was possible to locate the tremor and the approximate time of activity. Very specific techniques, using kerosene

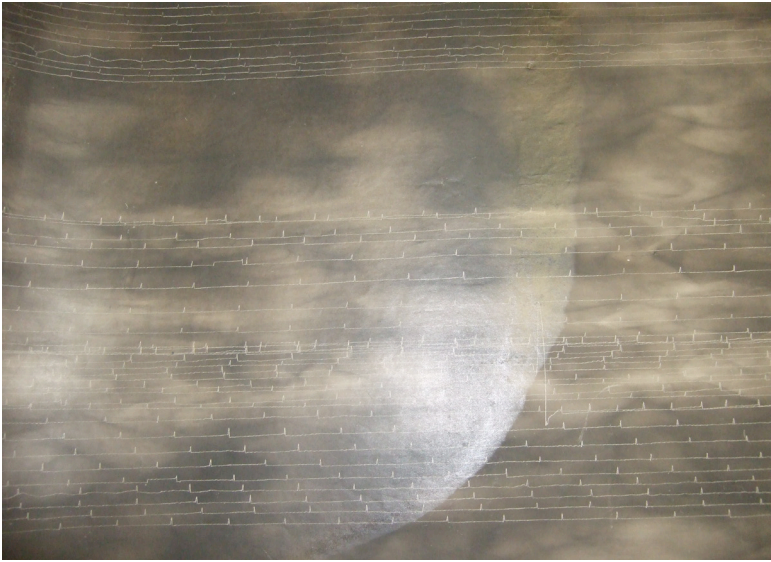
were required to blacken the recording paper, in order for a glass prism to scratch out traces of the seismic signature of the earthquake, to make what are called seismograms. This intricate process of creating smoked paper – now virtually forgotten and undocumented is still in operation at The Historical Seismic Station in Germany, the only remaining place in the world reproducing this technique. Later on this year, I will be completing a residency there, where this traditional process will be passed on to me.

For this project, my research has taken me as far afield as Iceland, where I studied the diverse volcanic and glacial environments. The experience of working on site with an active volcano, and scientific expeditions to the core felt like travelling to the centre of the earth, and I subsequently discovered, that Jules Verne based his novel, *A Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, (1864), on the local terrain Snæfellsjökull, close to where I was based.

(opposite)
'The O'Leary
Seismometer',
Rathfarnham Castle.
Courtesy of The
Dublin Institute for
Advanced Studies,
(DIAS).



(opposite)
'Seismogram',
Rathfarnham Castle.
Courtesy of The
Dublin Institute for
Advanced Studies,
(DIAS).



Tim Robinson

Seism

Essay written for Siobhán McDonald on the occasion of *Eye of the Storm*.

Somewhere on the further side of the globe, two of the tectonic plates that make up the Earth's crust and that carry the continents and the oceans are locked against one another, unable to move in response to the slow convection currents in the magma on which they rest. Tension builds, for decades, for centuries. Then great thicknesses of rock rupture and the plates lurch onwards, accomplishing a few more feet or yards of their blind journey. The shock generates pressure waves that radiate through the interior of the Earth, where they may be reflected off or pass through the inner core, a solid sphere of iron and nickel some 1500 miles across. There are sheer waves too, that shake the rock from side to side like a dog with a rat; they cannot pass through liquids such as the molten rock of the outer core, so take their way through the crust and the plastic but near-solid magma of the mantle. Both types of waves also travel around the surface of the globe, causing the ground to roll like a slow-motion ocean and to shudder laterally

in a way that near the epicentre of the earthquake can topple cities. These various waves interfere with one another and sound out the earth's fundamental frequencies, and are eventually attenuated by distance until only the most delicate of instruments can detect them. Before electronics, seismographs used to be elaborate constructions of balanced levers, as poised and focused and skeletal as a praying mantis, that translated the relative displacement of a weight and the casing from which it was suspended into the oscillations of a beak-like pen across the moving surface of a roll of smoked paper; thus an earthquake in Chile or China could inscribe itself into the scientific record by displacing grains of soot a world away. Perhaps an artist, decades later, will transpose the fragile roll into a context that licences new interpretations of its obscure earth-script.

The Earth's crust is currently unzipping itself, and has been doing so for over a hundred million years, as the plates bearing Europe and the Americas move apart and allow lavas from deep in the mantle to well up and solidify between them, creating the mid-Atlantic ridge. Iceland sits astride of this nine-thousand-mile-long submarine mountain range; hence the island's hot springs and volcanoes. Near one of these volcanoes lies the husk of a crashed 1950's Dakota DC3. Over the years it has been layered with volcanic ash; it is on the way to being fossilized. The DC3, once the workhorse of the air transport industry, has been described as 'a collection of parts flying in loose formation'. Here the formation is slowly degraded as parts drop off, building up a two-dimensional reduction of their previous three-dimensional order on the frozen ground. Corrosion has opened up numerous piercings in the pitiful hulk. The sun, millions of miles away, blasts forth unimaginable numbers of photons in all directions, enough of which pass through these

holes to let it leave its thumbprints on the interior of the plane. As the world turns, these wafers of light creep along the empty fuselage, fade, and are dispensed again with the next unclouded morning. The weightless parade is fractionally different every day as the sun's track arches higher in the sky with spring and shrinks down again with the coming of winter. The artist observes, records, relates. Since the Cosmos and all that's in it were born of a singularity, all things are related. The task of the artist is to trace the lines of this universal cousinage.

(overleaf)
'Dakota DC3 abandoned
aircraft, Iceland'.
Digital photo.
Photo: Siobhán
McDonald, Iceland, 2010.







(above)
Interior of 'Dakota DC3 abandoned
aircraft, Iceland', 2010.
Digital photo.
Photo: Siobhán McDonald, Iceland, 2010.

(opposite)
'The Pearl I', 2011. Digital photos.
Filming of light projected through holes
in the aircraft on a 5 metre roll of water
colour paper attached to the cock-pit,
August 2011.





(above)
'Fractal', 2012.
Installation, tracing of holes
in abandoned DC3 Dakota
aircraft made by erosion.
Graph paper, sun burns and
light projection. Dimensions
variable.

(opposite)
Interior of 'Dakota DC3
abandoned aircraft, Iceland',
2010.
Digital photo.
Photo: Siobhán McDonald,
Iceland, 2010.



(opposite)
'Readymade', 2012.
Series of DC3 Dakota
abandoned aircraft
pieces collected on site in
Iceland since June 2010.





(above)
Installation shot,
Eye of the Storm,
Galway Arts Centre 2012

(opposite)
'Readymade', 2012.
Series of DC3 Dakota
abandoned aircraft pieces
collected on site in Iceland
since June 2010.









(previous)
'Rhythm', 2010.
Video still, 1 min looped,
Speaker, sound wave from
the Eyjafjallajökull volcano,
tree branch and Indian ink.
Film: Frank Delaney.

(above)
Installation shot,
Eye of the Storm,
Galway Arts Centre 2012.

Aoife Tunney

Portal

The project *Eye of the Storm* exhibits archival material, such as seismograms from the early 1900s, and relics of a crashed 1950s Dakota DC-3 plane, alongside the contemporary work of artist Siobhán McDonald. Archives are the outcome of scientific study and Siobhán's work explores experimental research as a process. The practice of science and art share a similar desire: to mine information and experiment with matter towards some outcome. Science being empirically based and art being more speculative- but the underlying desire in both is to change our present conditions. This show allows the artist, curator and the audience to think about the historical in and through present art practices.

The stem of this work is the volcano, Eyjafjallajökull, in Iceland and the ways and habitat around its eruptive cycle. The work looks at how human life can survive within the reach of such natural occurrences and tries to understand the mechanism of the Earth's core by measuring, recording and testing its data.

We live on a gaseous planet, Earth, whose nature can support human life and volcanoes.

A new rocky planet named CoRoT-7 was discovered in 2010 as it circled a star 480 light years from Earth. It is unlikely to ever support human life because it is so close to its star-temperatures could be above 4,000 degrees F on the surface lit by its star and as low as minus 350 F on its dark side. It is thought that there are hundreds of volcanoes constantly erupting on CoRoT-7.

Eye of the Storm has captured both the dark and light side of the nature of eruptive volcanoes on Earth. The black of the aftermath and the end of one cycle and the cloudy light of the start of a new one as the surface of the Earth re-creates itself. The human memories are in the artworks and traces of the earth as objects sit beside each other in a room. Prodding at the moment of discovery and recreation.

Early science fiction writer and inventor Hugo Gernsback, in his pulp magazines wrote about many characters who made home-styled mechanisms and experimental inventions in order to discover new realities and worlds in the present.

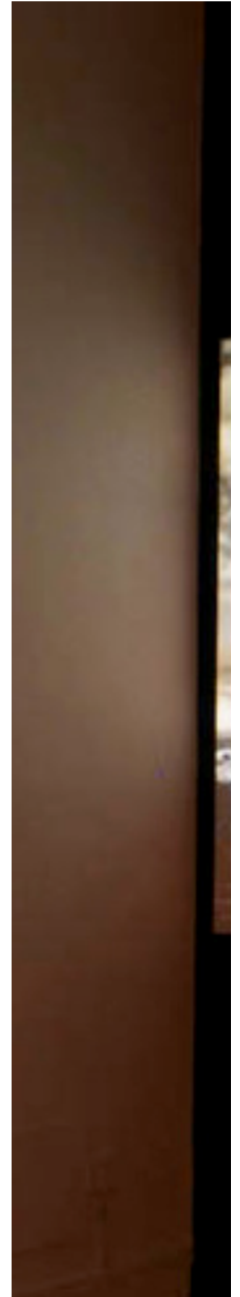
Portal *cont.*

McDonald has developed her own looking apparatus hosting a slice of the Earth's core transferred onto glass, a modern-day seismogram made out of a twig-based on the original-style reading of sound waves, and a light piece made from a simple torch and motor. These intimate self-made discovery machines provide a way to constantly mine our own experience and relationship with nature and the actual make up of our life on this planet- we are encouraged to make our own revelation within these journeys. The artist here has self-styled a way to travel into the moment of discovery- a portal to our meaning in the cycles of nature.

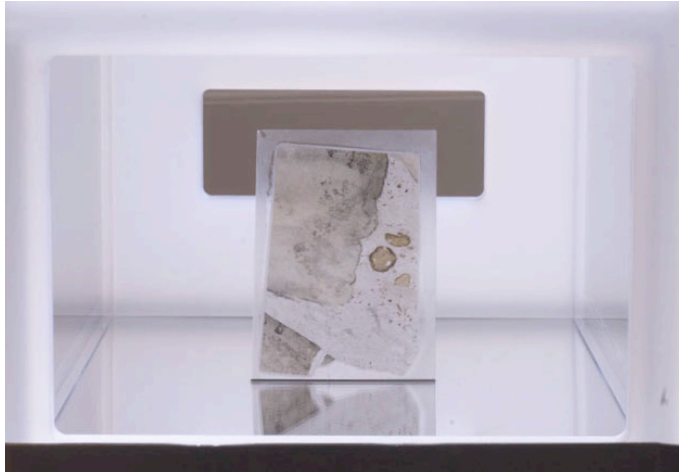
Artist Mario Garcia Torres talks about the re-enactment or repetition of a performance as being the producer of change, because what is being re-created never coincides exactly with what it intends to represent. At the end the re-enactment is simply a way of co-producing meaning and reality.

Eye of the Storm, re-enacts the artists' memories of being in the time and space, of the aftermath and the prelude to the cycle of a volcano- and opens up new readings of this alongside related historical artefacts.

(opposite)
'Eyjafjallajökull 2010',
2012. Time lapse Video,
1 min looped,
With special thanks to
Frank Delaney and Sean
Stiegemier.







(above)
'Inverse', 2012.
.003 section of the Earth
on glass

(opposite)
Installation shot,
'Inverse', 1950's wood
tripod, Perspex and
mirror. 2012.
Galway Arts Centre 2012.







Maeve Mulrennan

A Frozen Moment Inside the Chaos

The future's a blank page

I pretended I was looking at the blank page

I used to look in my mind for the unwritten page

If my mind was empty enough I could see it

Agnes Martin, Writings

Siobhan McDonald's work attempts to recreate the eye of a storm; the controlled, purposeful starting point that effects every chaotic thing that emanates from it. McDonald was first concerned with man's connection to the earth: how both earth and man can read each other and know what their intentions are. Then there was a period of documenting this knowledge: seismograms, maps and drawings describing the effects, or the chaos that surrounds. In her exhibition *Eye of The Storm* however, the viewer was met with an array of carefully constructed narratives that not only show the effects but in their physicality, reveal the Eye of the Storm: the epicentre where meaning is made.

McDonald utilises original seismograms made by a seismometer in the early 1900's in order to punctuate the exhibition *Eye of the Storm*. In exhibiting these alongside her own work the viewer is reminded that this body of work is rooted in the real. The seismograms speak of a darkness underlying what is seen and presented to us in the world: Underneath each beautiful landscape, city, mountain and stream there are dark rumblings of a planet that is alive and unstable. An exploration of mark making similar to that of the seismogram was necessary for the artist and can be seen in the exhibition. However the seismograms give more: they are a visual representation of something that seems overpowering and uncontainable. The seismograms do not draw the devastating earthquakes and volcanoes, but the beginnings of them. They describe what is happening under the earth's crust: they visualize the unseen.

(previous)
'64', 2012. 15 x 4 cm (each section). Graph paper, Oil paint, Sumi Ink and Fire.
A series of paintings made with the process Eninka: a technique devised by John Cage in the 1980's, where fire becomes fossilized in the painting's surface.

“Is the Master out of his mind?” she asked me.
I nodded. ‘And he’s taking you with him?’
I nodded again. ‘Where?’ she asked.
I pointed towards the centre of the earth.
‘Into the cellar?’ exclaimed the old servant.
‘No,’ I said, ‘farther down than that.’”

Jules Verne, Journey to the Centre of the Earth

In her installation *Fractal*, Siobhan McDonald presents a pattern burnt into graph paper. The pattern is made by the sun shining through holes in an abandoned airplane nestled into an ash field. In keeping with Susan Sontag’s *Against Interpretation*, McDonald does not seek to follow a certain line of investigation in order to grandly reveal the true meaning of something. Instead she invites the viewer to see meaning in the actual objects presented. Meaning is embedded in the here and now: the viewers experience. *Fractal* acts as a map. However it is not a map of a place that we can go. It maps time working with space. It maps experience, distance, the root of something and its effect. By projecting light through this map we are at once in the space that it describes. Encountering *Fractal*, the viewer comes into contact with the core of McDonald’s practice: the space where cause and effect intertwine.

64 is a work that was constructed over time, the process of one action identifying the next. The piece is a cross section of the moment where time stops. The intake of breath, the piercing silence before a crash; the feeling that informs the thought. The title 64 comes from the *I Ching*’s sixty four hexagrams that are archetypal symbols for everything in the universe. From looking at other works by McDonald we are aware that the most intense, opaque and fully formed artwork can represent nothing except the moment of experience. 64 roots this in a knowledge that is ancient and pure: something that sits outside of contemporary science. It is the combination of being aware of everything while knowing nothing that something new is created. This something new can be a drawing, a painting, a volcano. Or it can be all of them.

(opposite)
'End', 2012,
60 x 60 cm,
Oil on Canvas.



(opposite)
'Core – Snaefellsjokull', 2012.
41 x 41 cm,
Oil on Canvas.




(opposite)
'Distant Crater', 2012.
20 x 20 cm,
Oil on Canvas.



(opposite)
'Fires of Laki', 2012.
20 x 20 cm,
Oil on Canvas.





Siobhán McDonald is a visual artist working with paint, sound, photography and drawing. Her recording of the earth's rhythms and its ephemeral occurrences explores patterns in nature and reveals realities that are otherwise invisible to the naked eye. Recent pieces develop her preoccupation with transformation in manifestations of the explosive, like volcanoes, and the gradual, like the passage of icebergs.

Artist's Biography

Siobhán McDonald was born in New York and has lived in Ireland since the age of four. She holds an MA in Visual Art Practices at IADT, Dublin and a BA in Fine Art at the University of Ulster.

Selected solo exhibitions since 2010 include: *Eye of the Storm*, Galway Arts Centre 2012; *Rhythm*, The Drawing Project, Dublin, 2012; *Silent Sound*, Catherine Hammond Gallery, West Cork, 2011; and *Alchemical Reserve*, The Joinery, Dublin, 2011. Recent group shows include: *Public Gesture*, The Lab, Dublin, 2011; Group show at The Fenderesky Gallery, Belfast, 2011; and the 2011 Birr Arts Festival.

In 2011 Siobhán participated on the SÍM Residency summer programme in Reykjavik. She is currently working from a space in Temple Bar Studios, and will move to a project space at DIT, Dublin which she was awarded earlier in 2012.

In 2010 and 2011 she received Awards from the Arts Council. In 2010 she received a bursary from Culture Ireland. Her works are in the collections of Allied Irish Banks, Bank of Ireland, University College Dublin, Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Price Waterhouse Cooper, The Office of Public Works and several private collections.

Future projects include a solo show at The Dock, Carrick-on-Shannon in September 2012, and a solo exhibition at the Historical Seismic Museum of Emil Wiechert, Germany where she will also complete a residency in 2012.

www.siobhanmcdonald.com

I would like to express my thanks to the following

Tom Blake, Director, INSN, Irish National Seismic Network (DIAS), for his enthusiasm and for teaching me about the earth.

Frank Delaney for making the films and for his wonderful skills.

Gudbjorg Gudmundsdottir and **Tómas Birgir Magnússon**, Iceland, for patiently waiting for the 2012 thaw and for collecting, documenting & posting exquisite parcels of recently fallen aircraft pieces, following the elemental forces of Winter.

Slavek Kwi for engaging in a 2-year conversation with me about explosions and the wonderful collaborative sound piece for *Eye of the Storm* that evolved from this conversation. *Implodex Tremoranti 20:16*, is based on Eyjafjallajökull data and field recordings by Siobhan McDonald taken in August 2011. Slavek Kwi is a sound-artist and composer. www.artificialmemorytrace.com

Julian Menuge, Senior Lecturer at the School of Geological Sciences, UCD, Dublin, for his support.

Brian McDonald, for endless kindness and friendship.

Aoife Tunney, for curating *Eye of the Storm*.

Magnus Tumi, PhD, Professor of Geophysics at the University of Iceland, for making it possible, against all odds, for me to visit the epicenter of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano.

Maeve Mulrennan, Galway Arts Centre, for her contribution to this project.

Sveinn Ólafsson for his Eyjafjallajökull earthquake audible sounds, created with specially developed software using earthquake sensor data from the SIL network in Iceland. Copyright ©, Sveinn Ólafsson, Iceland. sveinno@gmail.com

And finally, heartfelt thanks to **Tim Robinson** for his wonderful essay and piercing insights.

(opposite)
'New Land Mass', 2012.
20cm x 20cm,
Oil on Canvas.



Curator: Aoife Tunney

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Photography: Ben Geoghegan
& Siobhan McDonald

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Aoife Tunney is an independent curator working in Dublin. She received first class honours in her MA in curatorial practice at IADT. She was the curator-in-residence at Temple Bar Gallery + Studios and sat on the curatorial panel for Temple Bar Gallery. She has curated All humans do, group show at White Box, New York, January, 2012, which travelled to The Model, April 2012, Conquered, group show at The Paper Store, Spencer Dock and TBG&S, Dublin 2011. This year she will curate a solo show with Siobhan McDonald at The Galway Arts Centre, and The Dock, Carrick-on-Shannon and is developing a series of shows to be brought to New York in 2013.

Rowan Sexton is Associate Curator at Rubicon Gallery, Dublin. She has worked at the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), the National Gallery of Ireland and Dublin City Gallery the Hugh Lane.



Siobhán McDonald

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