

Chrysalis #1

By Anne

In Limerick, a series of films play in a basement beneath someone's home, the basement becoming brighter with people and the screen, like watching TV while sitting inside it, a big box TV, with its wires and cords removed and the screen flipped round. There, I watched four films from Shannon Te Ao, Eimear Walshe, Laura Fitzgerald and Christopher Ulutupu, as part of Chrysalis #1, the first film screening by Starling, a new art space in Limerick. Two of those films I want to focus on here.

In Shannon Te Ao's *What Was Or Could Be Today (Again)* (2019), Te Ao records Ngarama Milner-Olsen swim across Aotearoa's largest lake, Taupō-nui-a-Tia. The video is in a romantic black and white that focusses the eye on the movement, on the body, on the cutting of that body through the water. We see shoulders, muscles, hair on skin, waves rolling behind. We see a body moving, tiring, unrelenting. I tend to think about swimming as occupying a space of rigid boundaries: lanes, tiles, concrete edges, 50m lengths. Here, then, I'm struck by the swimmer's infinite stroke. As she swims, we just see water and her body. There are no human structures or landscapes to cut the screen. The film grounds, I think, an intimacy between the body and place. The water engulfs the body and the body moves through it. The two - body and lake - share, together, a lapping of mythology and history and life as Milner-Olsen's shoulders work their way through the water. We see the waves, we see the body, we see night.

In Eimear Walshe's video *LANDCRUISER* (2022), Walshe compresses history and flirting. The video begins with text, a black background and a thumping 3am beat. Subtitles are in digital, saturated yellow with pink and blue blocking. The conversation starts with small talk and then flips to being about the history of the park they're walking in: "Two men were stabbed and five were hung for the stabbing." The two lesbians, who have seemingly just met, are looking for a place to have sex. They walk around, then drive, then ride a horse, then go by boat. They record from the hedge two horses and talk about making a fake stud farm, to have a place to stay, one of them the owner, the other the horse breeder. The soundtrack chops up an advertisement from the Bank of Ireland about getting out a mortgage. The rural landscape, in its emptiness, its dereliction and wide eyed space always hints at the gothic, at the horror that lies around the corner. The magic of *LANDCRUISER* is in its glitchy discordance, overlapping the

history of property rights, of place, of queerness and feeling a sense of belonging to a place that isn't necessarily welcoming to you. One of the speakers wonders: "maybe it's so vast and beautiful because all the lesbians are gone".

The shots of shoulders slipping through water in Te Ao's work and the empty roads with crumbling stone fences in Walshe's are both about movement and change, but they are also about the opposite. They are about fixedness. They are about things staying the same. The journeys that we watch in the films seem like journeys that could have happened earlier, could still happen again later in the same landscape, connecting to and disconnecting from those spaces. The markers of time that populate both Te Ao's and Walshe's works are symbols of permanence. They are reminders of what stays.