



Rosy Naylor, curator & founder Art Walk Projects, in conversation with artist, Iman Tajik:

RN: Iman, we're very excited to have your 'Where the Body Meets the Land' project coming to Portobello this year as part of our 'All At Sea' programme. Your durational performance taking place on 26th and 27th September (12-4 pm) I understand will involve you walking backwards and forwards from your installed flagpole on the beach to the moving shoreline, to mark those lives of refugees and migrants that have attempted to journey to UK shores. It seems very potent to have this work situated by a shoreline, and to consider the sea, reflecting on the nature of many such perilous journeys. I wondered how important such a location was for you, what the sea evoked for you, and what you hoped for it to bring to the work?

This location is a symbol of liberty to express bodily movements by walking freely in that space on earth. When I walk from the installed flagpole to the shoreline I contemplate, in an act of border marking, the people who left this country for a better life and when I walk from the shoreline to flagpole it represents refugees and migrants who wanted to come to the UK for a better and safer life. I walk to mark refugees and migrants who lost their lives, especially those who wanted to come to the UK by the English Channel but who unfortunately drowned in the sea.

The sea always evokes thoughts of the refugees and migrants who have had to cross these deep seas in the most unsafe way to reach the UK to find safety and in search of a better life. The sea also makes me think of the many British/Scottish people who also left this land by the sea for a better life or they were mandated to leave according to the history of the Highland Clearances.

The repetition of the walk makes line marks on the ground, The lines which draw the maps then become walls and fences. The borders divide us and this performance interacts with the flag and space, earth and sea as I create a border with all its rules.

RN: Line marking features a lot in your work. How does the physical act of making a line inform your thinking about borderlines; and all kinds of lines and divisions, between countries, peoples, social backgrounds, political systems, or perhaps in this case, of international waters, territorial areas, or maybe, the line where the sea meets the land? What will you be thinking about as you tread the beach creating your line in the sand?

As I mentioned previously, the lines which you can find drawn on maps often become walls and fences. Borders divide people. The line is a mark to divide one side from the other in the same place. Within my work, I often investigate the notion of borders and explore it in any form or format. It also represents my personal experiences with these borders. In researching for this performance I often thought about how, on the news, we are constantly seeing the same stories repeating themselves throughout history and it is deeply heartbreaking and confusing.

RN: For your installation on Portobello Beach, the temporarily installed flagpole with an emergency blanket, will also serve as a powerful visual statement, to generate conversation perhaps about the increase of nationalistic movements globally or to make a growing sense of emergency we see taking hold. What are your thoughts behind choosing the flag as a means for activating social change?

The temporarily installed flagpole with an emergency blanket is situated to mirror the dialogue with the performance but also as a statement in itself: to create a conversation about the flag and the worldwide growth of nationalism. The increase of nationalistic movements in the world sees the flags of countries become hailed and enforcers of the borders but in reality, they are all just man-made. The extremity of nationalism take us to the point of not welcoming each other and more importantly to not welcoming refugees and migrants.

In terms of the political climate in the world and issues around climate change in addition to this pandemic, we all face a need for an emergency state.

RN: The lockdown period seems to have been very different for many people. It seemed to show up many inequalities, from front line workers having to go to work, to those being able to work from home, to afford to slow down, and to those that couldn't. How was it for you? Did you find you could continue to create work during what was quite isolating and distracting times?

It was a very strange time for me as some of my shows were cancelled or postponed and the situation of the pandemic, as well as the lockdown, was very emotionally heavy as I couldn't and didn't want to do any creative work. In respect to the people who died and our frontline workers especially the NHS workers, I wanted to truly understand the situation and make sure that I did - and continue to do - the right thing for everyone's safety.

I was supposed to be at an art residency at Deveron Projects in Huntley at the time of lockdown, however, after about a month in lockdown, I started doing my residency digitally. It was a very weird and interesting experience but everything went very well.

RN: More and more through this time arts organisations are talking about a shift; a shift between how things need to change, for programmes to reflect current moods about the neighbourhood, collaboration, of inclusivity and creativity for all in a way they haven't before. I wondered how that resonated with your own practice, and whether you felt there was a chance for change towards art as collaboration, art as conversation, art as activism, with that having a greater visibility going forward?

Yes! there is definitely a shift there as we are thinking more about programs, artwork, inclusivity and activism activity without involving the crowd or being limited in numbers of physical attendees. We are also using more digital and online programs, artwork and activism activity. It is good practice for us to try to adapt to the current situation. However, for me, these changes are new possibilities to be involved with the audiences in alternative ways. It also provides the prospect of being more global but I do hope that this current format will not be a permanent one as my work benefits from being involved and interacting with people in the real world.

RN: Can you tell us something about the future projects you are working on? What's next for your flag based works?

Working on my project for Glasgow International 2021, which this flag is part of it too. I will also be having a solo exhibition at Stills Gallery in Edinburgh as part of their Projects 20 initiative. One of the pieces for this exhibition will be a series of performative photographs in which I respond to this emergency blanket flag.

Rosy Naylor & Iman Tajik October 2020