



Episode 1: The Body Electric

[Audio from the soundtrack of *The Body Electric*]

Emer McGarry: Hello and you're very welcome to the first episode of The Model's *Body Electric* podcast series. In this episode I'm joined by the writer, Tara Bergin and Tara wrote *Object Theory* in response to the work of visual artist, Marie Foley especially for this project. She's a writer with a particular interest in visual art and especially the area where different artforms come together and create something new. So, before Tara reads *Object Theory* and tells us a little about the background and inspiration to it, I began by asking her, if she could explain to us what exactly ekphrasis means to her?

[Audio of a typewriter]

Tara Bergin: E. K. P. H. R. A. S. I. S... ekphrasis. Ekphrasis is a term that Microsoft word still refuses to recognise as part of the English language and suggests I might have meant 'emphasis' instead, which is actually not too far off, however, the term 'ekphrasis' is quite commonly used by poets to describe a type of creative practice or process when they write a poem in response to a work of art, so the poem I wrote for this exhibition is an ekphrastic poem, because it was made in response to Marie Foley's work, *Portrait*.

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A dictionary will tell you that the word 'ekphrasis' comes from the Greek word meaning description. A Greek person will tell you that ekphrasis or ecphrasis is a word used every day to mean 'expression.' I think that if you put these two things together, description and expression, you have the ingredients for an ekphrastic poem. Of course, no sooner do you come up with a definition for a writing practice, than you have to start pushing at it and subverting it. What about a poem about a painting you've never seen or a poem about another poem - could they be ekphrastic? Once you start thinking about it, you start to see the opportunities that 'ekphrasis' as a practice offers a writer.

The artwork in The Niland Collection that I responded to, is - Marie Foley's *Portrait*. What first struck me about this piece was how like a poem it was – contained, condensed, constructed. A combination of the found and the made. Of violence and beauty.

I wanted to respond to *Portrait* by making a poem that was constructed object too. My poem uses material from various sources: overheard voices, found texts; that when placed together on the page might suggest new interpretations. It is also an object in the sense that it was put together non-digitally, typed with an old Underwood typewriter onto a disused piece of very thin Japanese paper, which I found in my husband's print studio. Working in this way seem to give my poem a new dimension. It gained a tactility and uniqueness on the one hand while acquiring a functional, reusable, almost throwaway quality on the other. All of which questioned in exciting ways my ideas about ownership and the singularity of the author.

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Portrait by Marie Foley (b.1959)

Tara Bergin

*Portrait by Marie Foley*¹

Object Theory

The found object is a lesson in metaphor.
It is found then named e.g. the fountain.
It is shifted to a context where it evokes new meanings.

next slide please.

The found object hungers after life.
It seeks out positional truth.
It must not break away from danger.

next slide please.

The open eye.
The iron mouth.
The breakable cheekbone.

next slide please.

The artist builds a little chamber.
Light is admitted through a tiny hole.
Everything you see will be upside down.

¹ *Portrait* by Marie Foley. Medium: Found objects - wood, porcelain, and metal (1990-2000). Provenance: Acquired from the artist by Jobst Graeve.

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[Audio of birdsong]

Tara Bergin: As a poet of course I would like to be like Keats, listening to the nightingale and poems coming to me as easily as leaves on the tree, but this is not the case. There's a very short song by the White Stripes, it's only one minute long, in which the whole arc of the creative process takes place in a room. First a small room and then a bigger room, where the artist wishes they were back in the small room.

[Audio of Jack White singing the lyrics from *Little Room*: 'Well, you're in your little room/And you're working on something good/ But if it's really good/ You're gonna need a bigger room...'].²

Tara Bergin: I like this song because it conveys that mixture of intensity and at the same time total ordinariness and solitude of a person trying to write - desperate to write. As a poet, it can sometimes feel like you have to go to great extremes to get a poem while just sitting in a room and as an activity, it can be complicated by uncertainty and disruption and often misplaced disappointment. You look too soon or too eagerly for some sign of conclusion.

[Audio of Jack White singing the chorus from *Little Room*:
'Da, la-la, la-la, la-la, la / Da, la-la, la-la, la-la, la...']

² *Little Room* by Jack White from the White Stripes.

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Tara Bergin: But when I worked on this project, I felt like I was collaborating. I felt like I was working with another artist who had loads of ideas that I found fascinating and that brought out my own ideas. I was responding to something outside of myself. The singularity of the author was no longer the central concern. I felt like I was working within a group, even though physically I was still alone at my desk. Once I started to apply thoughts about the found object to the poem as object, my role as a poet became much more playful and less bound by expectations - the page became more immediate and real, and not at all precious.

[Audio of Jack White, singing the chorus from *Little Room* –
'Da, la-la, la-la, la-la, la / Da, la-la, la-la, la-la, la...']

Emer McGarry: And that was Tara Bergin discussing her ekphrastic approach to the work of the visual artist, Marie Foley. I hope you join us next week as we continue our conversation with Tara and we're also going to hear a new piece by the multi-disciplinary artist, Suzanne Walsh, created especially in response to the artworks of AE Russell. For credits, bios, and further information, please see our website www.themodel.ie

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[Running Time 6:43 minutes]