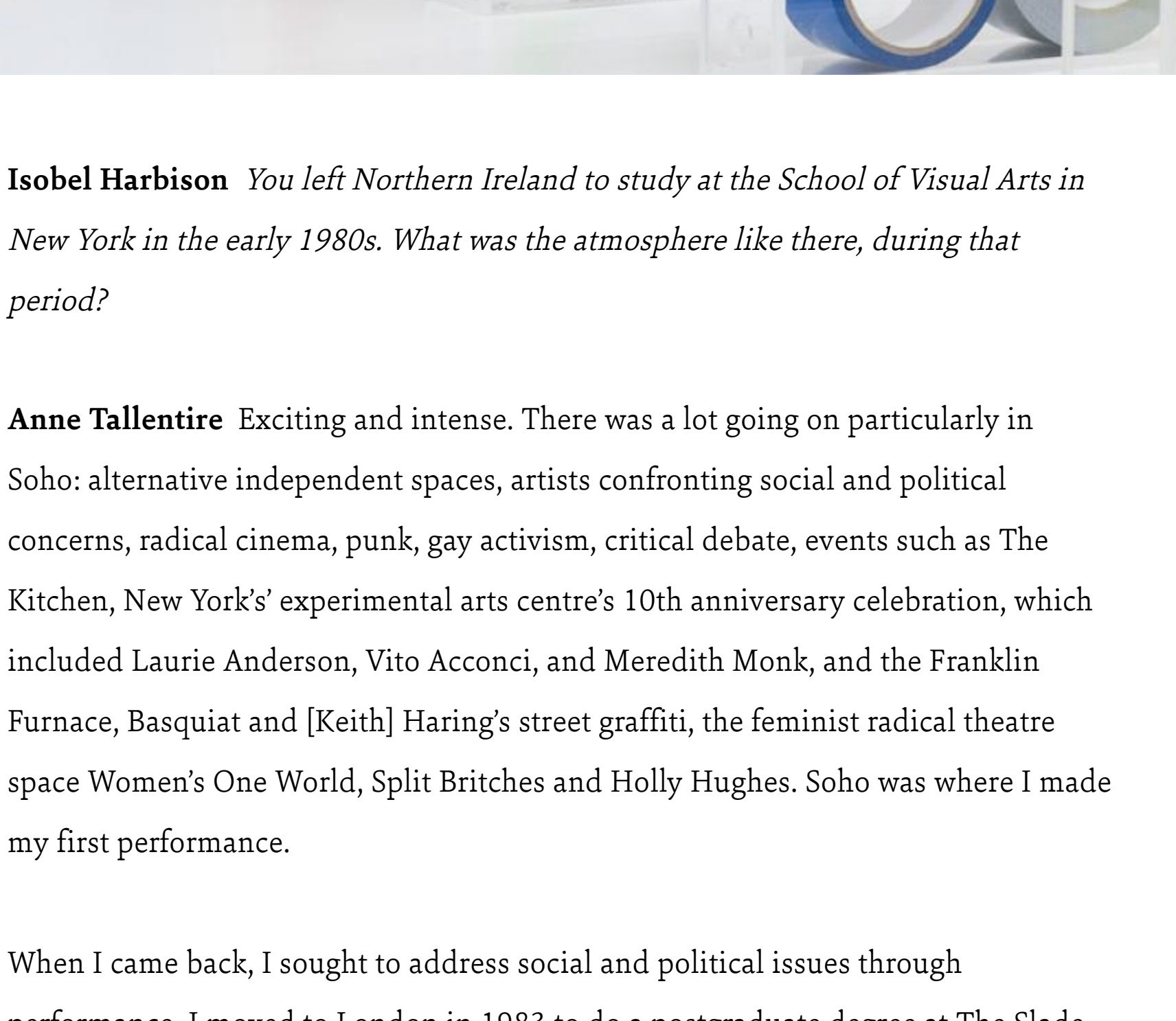


'80s New York, Thatcher's Britain, Northern Ireland Now - Anne Tallentire's Life in Art

With a show opening at Hollybush Gardens tomorrow, the artist discusses her career addressing social and political issues through performance

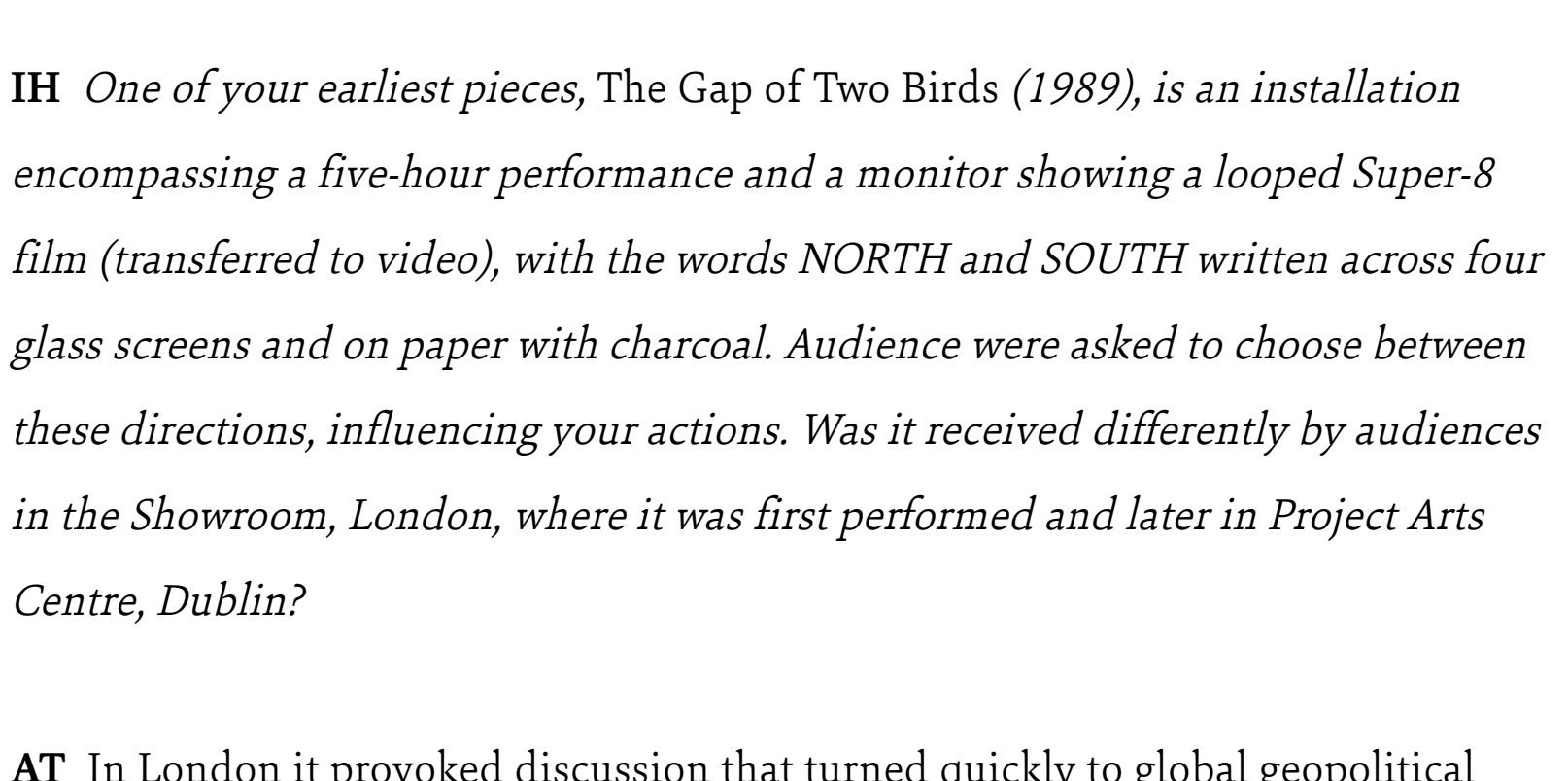
BY ISOBEL HARBISON IN INTERVIEWS | 21 NOV 18



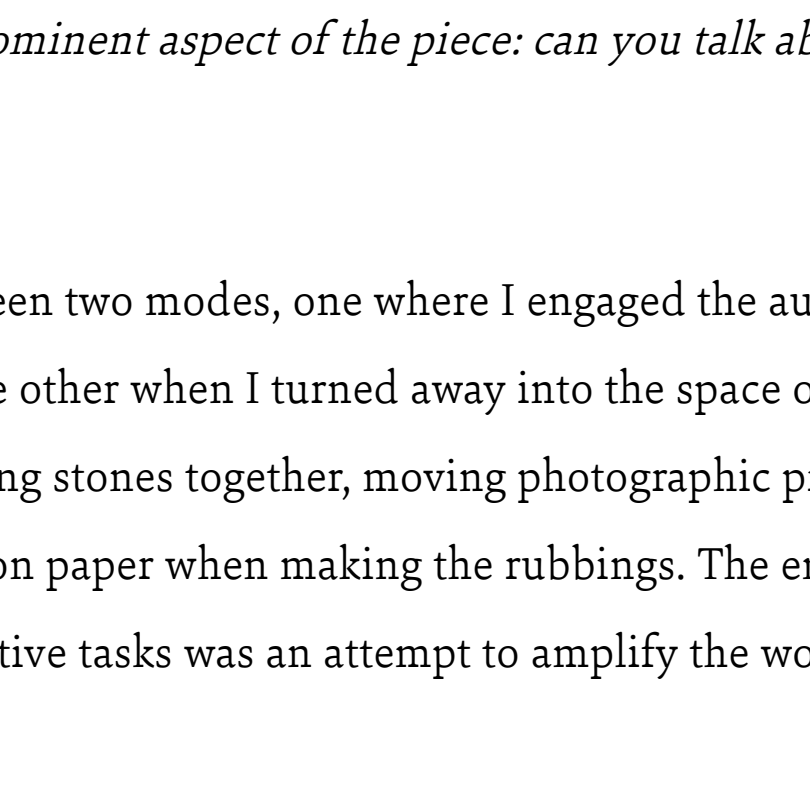
Isobel Harbison You left Northern Ireland to study at the School of Visual Arts in New York in the early 1980s. What was the atmosphere like there, during that period?

Anne Tallentire Exciting and intense. There was a lot going on particularly in Soho: alternative independent spaces, artists confronting social and political concerns, radical cinema, punk, gay activism, critical debate, events such as The Kitchen, New York's experimental arts centre's 10th anniversary celebration, which included Laurie Anderson, Vito Acconci, and Meredith Monk, and the Franklin Furnace, Basquiat and [Keith] Haring's street graffiti, the feminist radical theatre space Women's One World, Split Britches and Holly Hughes. Soho was where I made my first performance.

When I came back, I sought to address social and political issues through performance. I moved to London in 1983 to do a postgraduate degree at The Slade where there was great teaching, classes were still relatively small, and studio space generous. However, the detrimental impact of Thatcher's policies to housing, unions, education and the arts focused minds and many artists sought to address this hostile environment. It felt different to New York, the impact of this political shift was deep and visceral.



Anne Tallentire, *The Gap of Two Birds*, 1989, Super-8 film transferred to video. Courtesy: the artist and Hollybush Gardens, London

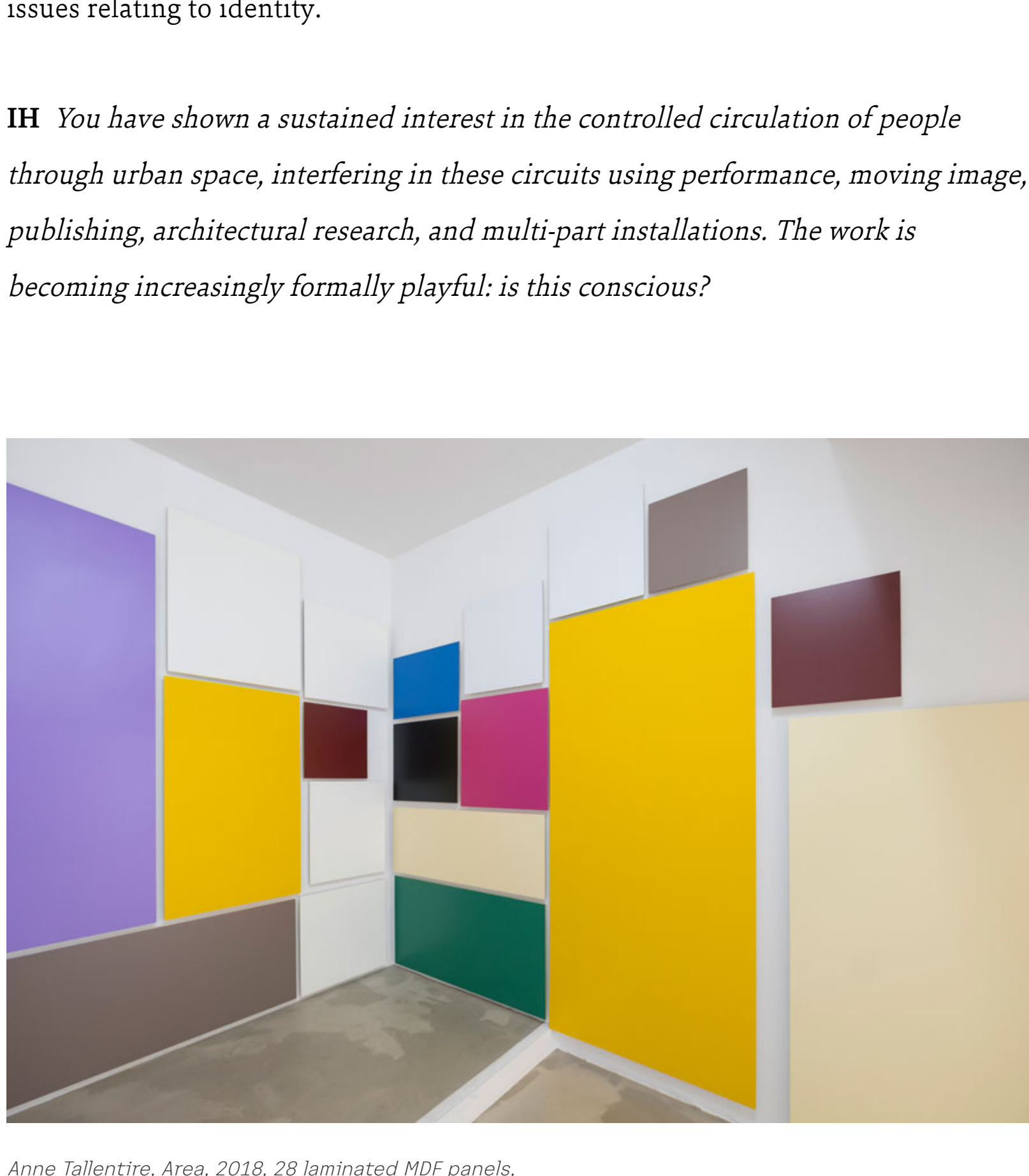


IH One of your earliest pieces, *The Gap of Two Birds* (1989), is an installation encompassing a five-hour performance and a monitor showing a looped Super-8 film (transferred to video), with the words *NORTH* and *SOUTH* written across four glass screens and on paper with charcoal. Audience were asked to choose between these directions, influencing your actions. Was it received differently by audiences in the Showroom, London, where it was first performed and later in Project Arts Centre, Dublin?

AT In London it provoked discussion that turned quickly to global geopolitical issues, whereas in Dublin the focus was on specific historical references in the work, such as the Irish place names written on the walls of the installation. They had been Anglicized based on how they sounded rather than what they meant, so they had frequently lost their original meaning. I discovered some time later that the work had resonated in Ireland for young radical artists interested in making critical and political work.

IH Silence was a prominent aspect of the piece: can you talk about the decision to perform it that way?

AT I switched between two modes, one where I engaged the audience in conversation and the other when I turned away into the space of the work to repeat three actions; grinding stones together, moving photographic prints around and scratching charcoal on paper when making the rubbings. The enactment of such mundane and repetitive tasks was an attempt to amplify the work of the work so to speak.



Anne Tallentire, *Inscribe 1*, 1994. Made in collaboration with Sirah Izhar and commissioned by Living Art, Dublin and Strike, London. *Inscribe 1* consisted of a series of actions performed live to camera in a British Telecom Building in London. A sequence of pre-recorded video sequences were transmitted via ISDN to an audience in the Telecom Eireann Building, Frederick Street Dublin. Courtesy: the artist and Hollybush Gardens, London

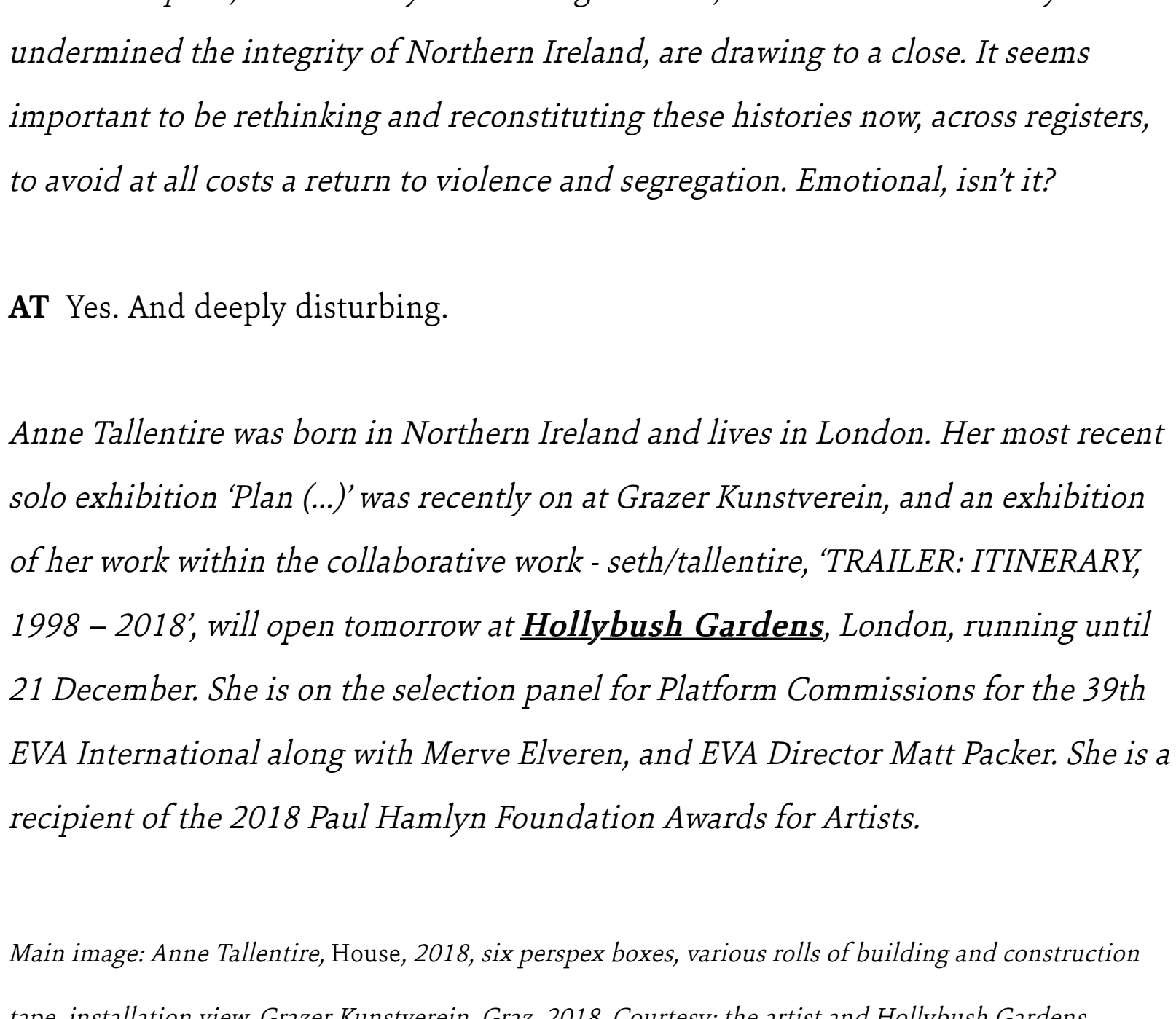
IH *Inscribe 1* (1994) was made in collaboration with Sirah Izhar, commissioned by Living Art, Dublin and Strike, London. In it you performed a series of gestures, transmitted from actions performed to camera in a British Telecom Building in London and transmitted via Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN) to an audience in the Telecom Eireann [Irish Telecom] Building, Dublin. How did this project come about and why did you use ISDN? Were other artists you knew using it at the time?

AT I was not aware of any other artists using that specific technology at that time in that way. Had there been the communication technology we have today I would have used it but then ISDN was all that was available and affordable. The work began with a discussion around labour and action in relation to cultural dislocation. The physical gestures I was communicating in the work were fairly undetermined, such as endlessly ordering pen nibs, covering my face with my hands, filming a drive through the empty streets of London's Square Mile, or reading texts from industrial instruction manuals. These were separate segments edited from material gathered over weeks wandering and filming in the city. The political climate between Ireland and the UK was bad then and the daily news commentary of events especially in the UK polarized, distorted and generalized. To some extent, the work was an attempt to fracture a dominant representation, and to argue with the instrumentalization of technology in this process, though a presentation of seemingly disparate and pointless activities that required various registers of interpretation in a space of transmission and reception.

IH You had an ongoing collaborative practice with John Seth. What did this conversation introduce to your practice?

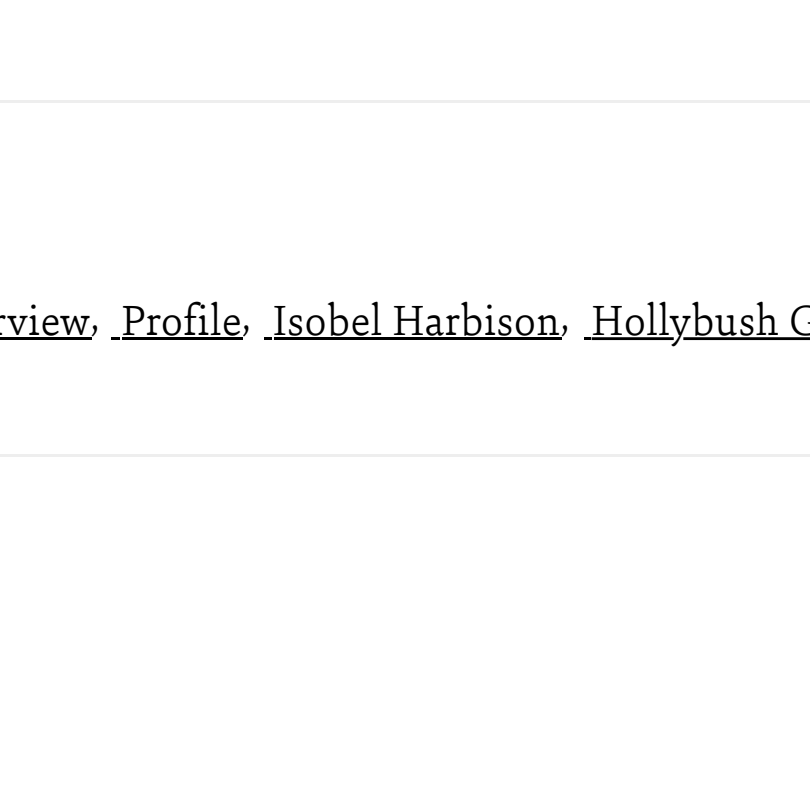
AT We met at The Slade when we were students there. Conversations with John introduced me to philosophical ideas usually concerning postcolonial discourse and issues relating to identity.

IH You have shown a sustained interest in the controlled circulation of people through urban space, interfering in these circuits using performance, moving image, publishing, architectural research, and multi-part installations. The work is becoming increasingly formally playful: is this conscious?



Anne Tallentire, *Area*, 2018, 20 laminated MDF panels, dimensions variable. Installation view, Grazer Kunstverein, Graz, 2018. Courtesy: the artist and Hollybush Gardens, London; photograph © Clara Windberger

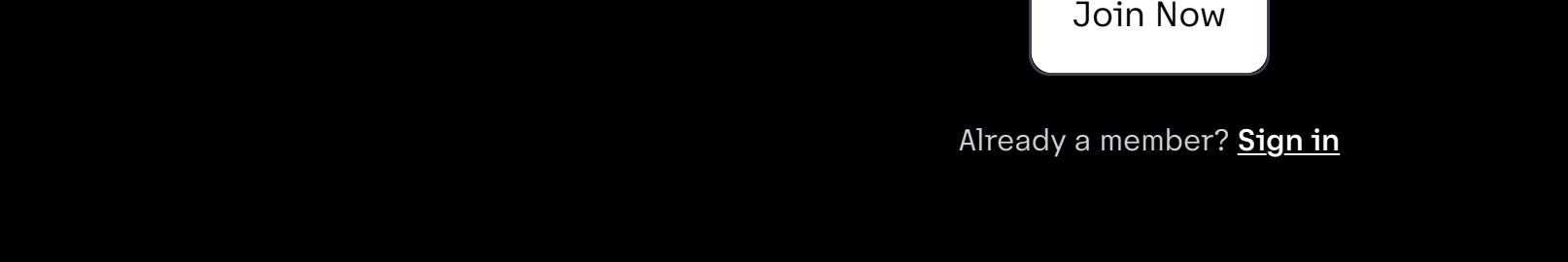
AT I constantly try to stretch the conceptual and formal parameters of what I do through experimentation both in the studio and during gallery installation.



The Pursuit of Happiness (2006) at Dublin's Douglas Hyde Gallery offered the audience the opportunity to take something material from the work (as was the case with *The Gap of Two Birds*). This began with discussions with museum staff who gave me titles of books they were reading. These titles informed works produced on paper that visitors could keep. *From, in and with* (2013–15) also came out of an exhaustive gathering process, finding form in a multi-faceted structure that included architecture-responsive texts in the exhibition publication, taking the work into modes of distributive publishing. Perhaps this could be read as playfully mixing conventions of form and context, but it is also about attempting to speak to the accidental, the disparate and fractured elements of life today and the frequently hidden determinates that affect and shape experience.

IH *In BACK* (2018), a recent performance in London, you read aloud a screenplay, including the camera script, of an imagined film based between the dark streets of a troubled Northern Ireland during your schooldays and a deserted factory in Northern Italy. It was profoundly moving. Is it a work you'd been considering for a while?

AT I've been working on this on and off for years. At one point I was thinking it might become a book or a film. When the invitation came to read a text, I decided to use both my speaking voice and an element of autobiography. The work seeks to addresses the tension between institutional structures and a desire for social equality. The derelict factory I described was in Reggio Emilia, Italy, and was used in 2008 as a living space by displaced migrants, as determined by state policy. It was a situation that brought to mind a precarious time in Ireland and the events shaped by class and religious difference.



Anne Tallentire, *MATERIAL CONDITION PART 1*, 2016, tarpaulin and pallets, 1 x 1.2 x 1 m. Courtesy: the artist and Hollybush Gardens, London; photograph © Andy Keate

IH Northern Ireland has been consistently present in your work, through abstract explorations of language, circulation and freedom, and in your collaborations with different artists approaching postcolonialism. In this new performance, the encounter with the land is literary and figurative. Was the adjustment conscious?

AT Well, yes, Northern Ireland is a place of profound complexity and the experience of being brought up there has informed my thinking. The registers of figuration in my work involve performance, a range of time-based technologies, and found materials that are put to use in what I think of as acts of resistance and critical delineation. This recent change of register was indeed conscious and risky, encouraged and abetted by Yve Lomax and Vit Hopley of Copy Press.

IH As we speak, Theresa May's Brexit negotiations, which have consistently undermined the integrity of Northern Ireland, are drawing to a close. It seems important to be rethinking and reconstituting these histories now, across registers, to avoid at all costs a return to violence and segregation. Emotional, isn't it?

AT Yes. And deeply disturbing.

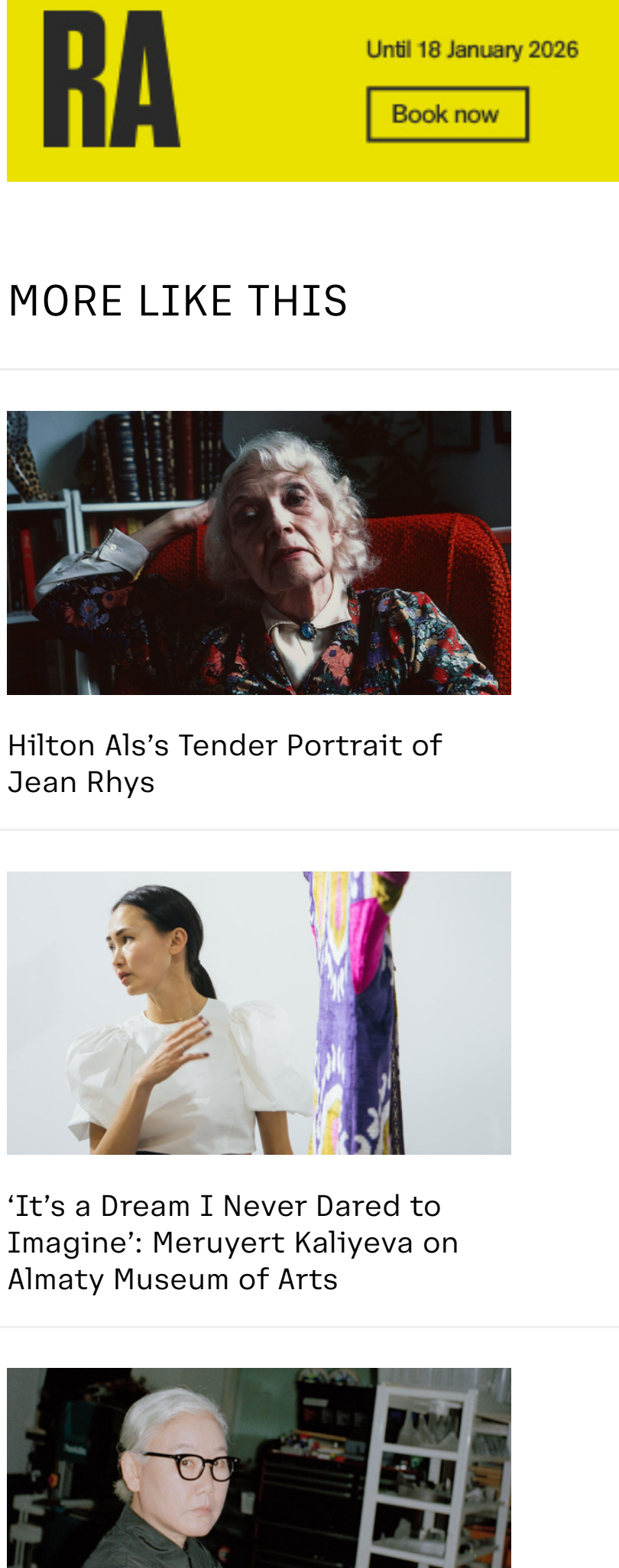
Anne Tallentire was born in Northern Ireland and lives in London. Her most recent solo exhibition *Plan (...)* was recently on at Grazer Kunstverein, and an exhibition of her work within the collaborative work - seth/tallentire, TRAILER: ITINERARY, 1998 – 2018, will open tomorrow at Hollybush Gardens, London, running until 21 December. She is on the selection panel for Platform Commissions for the 39th EVA International along with Merve Elverlen, and EVA Director Matt Packer. She is a recipient of the 2018 Paul Hamlyn Foundation Awards for Artists.

Main image: Anne Tallentire, *House*, 2018, six perspex boxes, various rolls of building and construction tape, installation view, Grazer Kunstverein, Graz, 2018. Courtesy: the artist and Hollybush Gardens, London; photograph: © Clara Windberger

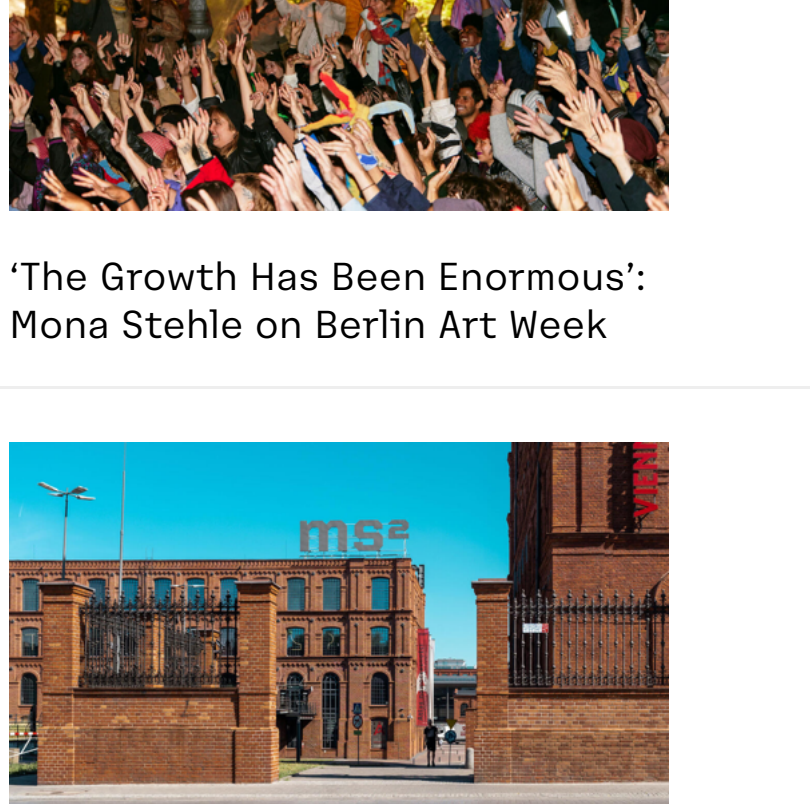
ISOBEL HARBISON
Isobel Harbison is an art critic based in London. Her book, *Performing Image*, will be published by the MIT Press later this year.

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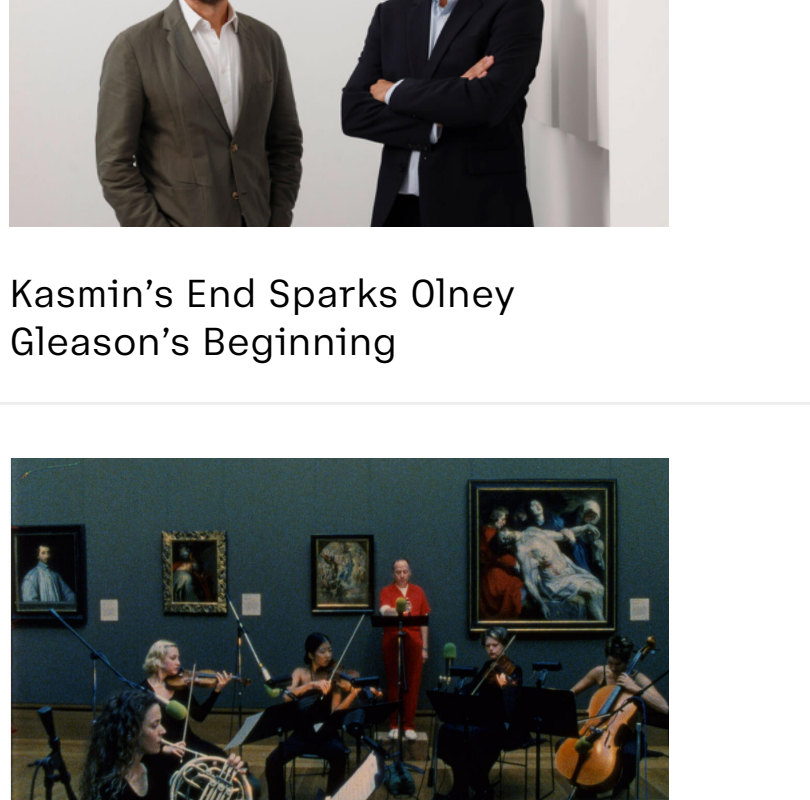
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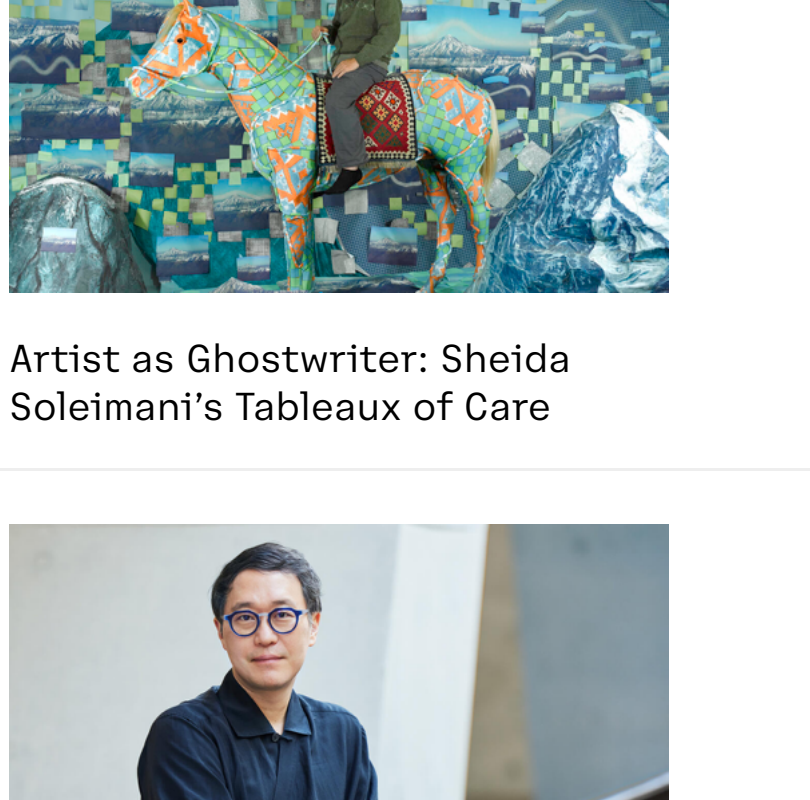
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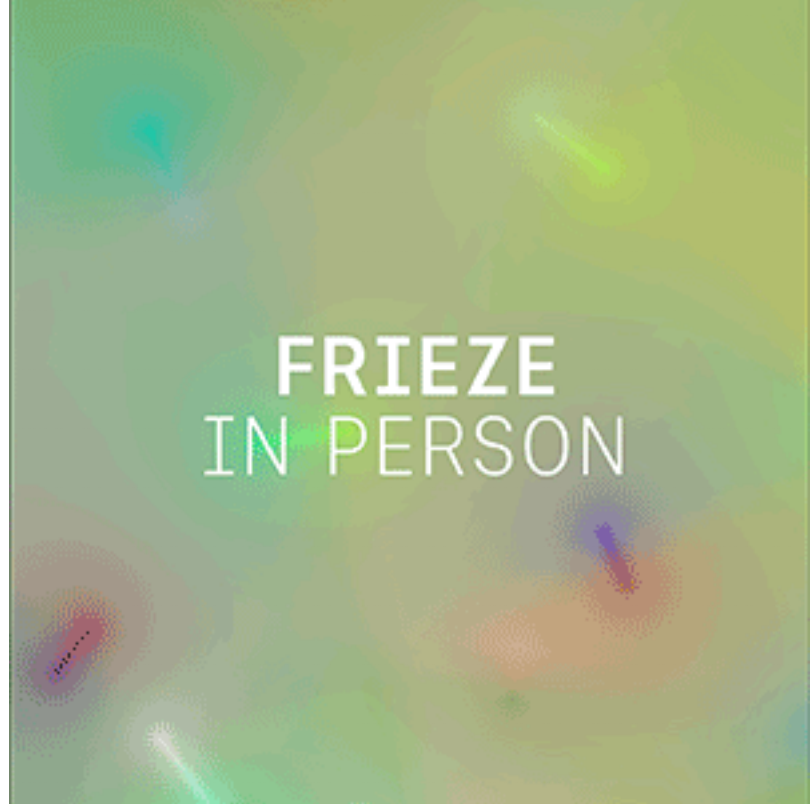
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