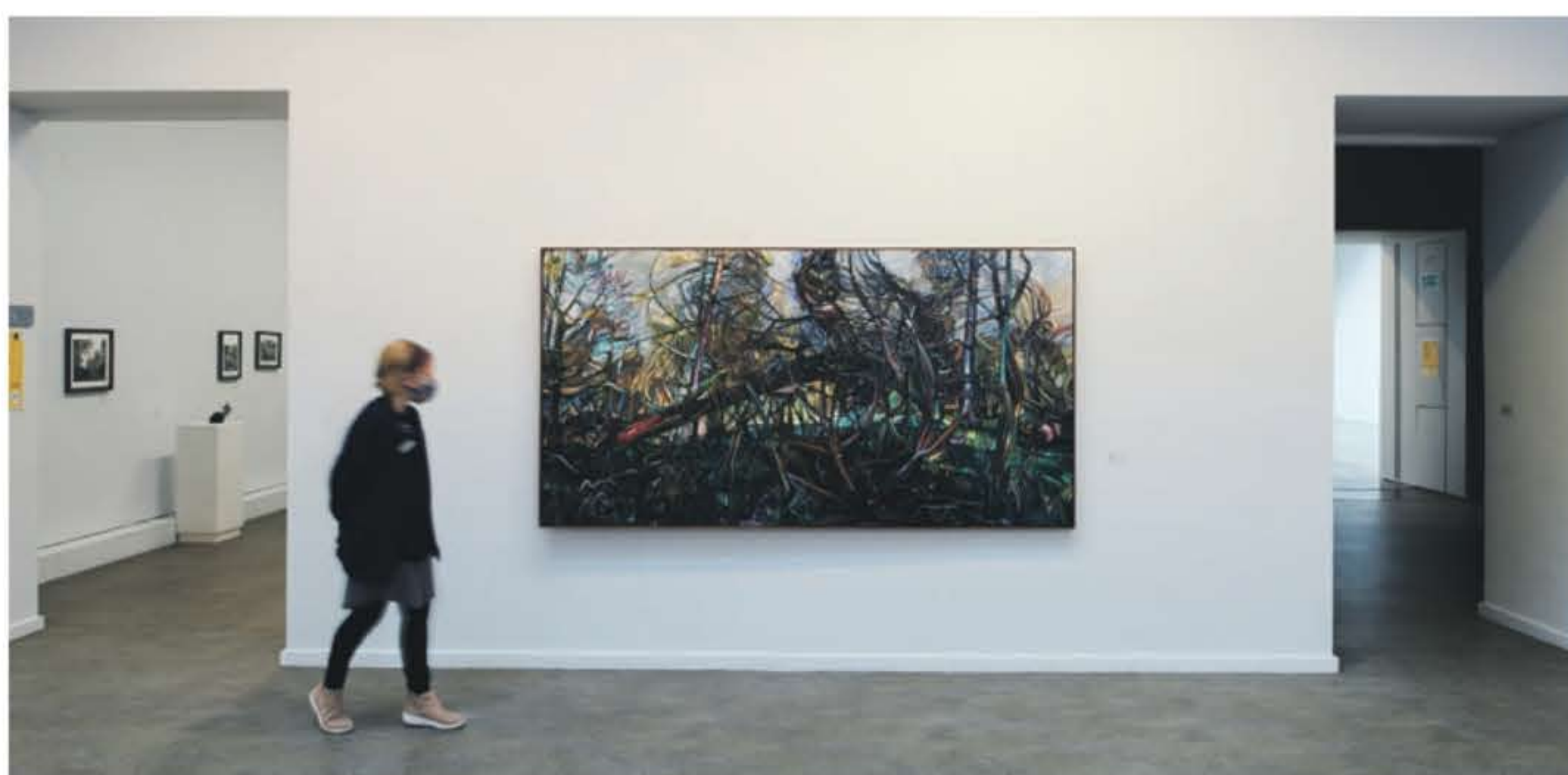


## Thomas Brezing & Vera Klute, 'The Loneliness of Being German'

### Limerick City Gallery of Art

9 July – 12 September



Vera Klute, *Frizz*, 2020, oil on linen; all images by Studioworks Photography, courtesy the artists and Limerick City Gallery of Art.

**THIS TWO-PERSON SHOW** is posed as a dialogue between artists Vera Klute and Thomas Brezing and pivots around the 2004 essay, 'The Loneliness of Being German', by Irish novelist, Hugo Hamilton, which also provides the exhibition title. In this essay, Hamilton distils connections with nationhood as it impacts identity. He draws together potent nostalgia and guilt within German society and explores how denial and the sensations of displacement, longing and identification of 'self', as it is intertwined with landscape, are juxtaposed with the Irish experience.

The artists are both German-born and now long-time residents in Ireland, with the actions of placement and displacement offering prominent rhythms across the presented artworks. Brezing declares himself as self-exiled in Ireland, and actively moves into a space of displacement. Whereas Klute, rather than identifying with the exilic condition or a specific sensation of loneliness, articulates the sense of solitude that she finds in her dual experience. It is this space of solitude that allows her distance to clarify her thoughts, allowing the familiarity of childhood to act as a ripple of nostalgia, especially within her prints and painted works. This liminal placement of the 'self' interconnects both these artists in their othered or transient state occupying both cultures.

On entering the exhibition, one is first greeted by two large paintings, mixed-media works, and frenetic landscape scenes, expanding the length of the atrium wall in the form of Vera Klute's painting, *Frizz*. But it is through the titling of Klute's sculptural work, *Putting Down Roots*, that the tone of the exhibition is set, encapsulating the sense of identity that comes from exploring one's cultural zeitgeist, and the othered nature of occupying the collective psyches of two different countries.

In the Ante Gallery, the sound from Klute's video, *Falling down*, punctuates the space, creating a haunting rhythmic backdrop. The video loops in a three-minute vignette and is treated compositionally by the artist as an extension of a painting. Falling objects are depicted disrupting the landscape, the tiers of exposed land reveal layers of geology, each an element of physicalised time, unearthed and interrupted by the repetition of objects dropping from above. An embedded skeleton undulates between layers, slowly moving towards the surface; the sound acts as a catalyst for the movement, as the piece builds, breaks, and loops again.

The video is placed near a dimly-lit sculptural installation by Brezing, created from stuffed rugby balls. Titled *There Will Be Singing in The Dark*, it features leather bodies hanging, resting, and waiting in the threshold space of the door-

way, to greet the viewer's body. Brezing's second sculptural installation, entitled *The Numbers Don't Add Up*, is tucked into the corner of the cavernous South Gallery. When considered on their own terms, the sculptural works begin to perform the sensation of time passing through their spinning motion; hypnotically you feel the bodies forming themselves. Coiled vessels are woven out of stacked rulers, with increments of measurement forming the object's body.

In the main gallery, Brezing's large-scale paintings hang low and invite the body to move in close to examine these constructed environments. In *Perhaps The Future Doesn't Need Us*, the undulating surface and the spectral sense of features articulated, pulled and erased by brushstrokes, cause the identity of the depicted figures to hover between surface and memory – on the precipice of recognition and the loneliness in misidentification.

Another room is dedicated to Klute's mono-prints, with small sculptural works displayed on low plinths. The indexical nature of the mark-making in the prints distils formed and unformed identities. Rural landscapes and figurative pastoral scenes act as signifiers of the traditional German experience from the artist's childhood, which underpin her German culture and heritage.

Across the exhibition, the recurrent motifs of the human figure and landscape are used as a visual language to explore place-centred identity. This mapping of personal relationships to land also feels like a topical response to the global pandemic, with over a year of restrictions confining people to their locality, creating introspection and a palpable awareness of our habitual environments. In addition, the feeling of *Heimat* – or 'home' as it loosely translates from German – denotes a state of being, either individual or collective, which interconnects with a physical place. Indeed, *Heimat* is a half-veiled figure occupying its own space within this exhibition.

The exhibition contains a multitude of individual experiences which articulate the impact of heritage and identity, locality and nationality. Nostalgic, geographic and familial patterns of life are shown as shadows, hovering across the surface of narrative. The presented artworks convey the artists' positions as liminal observers with dual traditions, territories and identities – an increasingly common yet complex experience within contemporary global citizenship.

**Theo Hynan-Ratcliffe is a sculptor, critical/creative writer and founding director of Miscreating Sculpture Studios, Limerick.**

@theo\_hynanratcliffe\_