



Moving Through Things

Elaine Grainger

What can I give you?

At what point of this journey did my pride fall away?

When I started drumming, the self consciousness of how good the performance was superseded the necessity of the rhythm to me. There was no love or presence in the act, only a rigid nervousness.

What can I give you?

When did the ache in my muscles supercede the precociousness?

What can I give you?

I have been the pilgrim,
one of the women running towards you,
the timekeeper,
the innkeeper.

In each role I have been humbled by something greater, reduced to be rebuilt, a muscle rejecting death.

What can I give you?

Failure is a moment of almost total attentiveness. When my ankle gives way beneath me, when I stumble on a beat, there is a split second of total awareness of where I am, amongst who, within what.

The mountain is a lesson in humility.

What can I give you?

That these cursús rise so high into the mountains suggest kinship in not only ritual but in struggle. A willingness to feel that sensation of failure in commune, to fall into that same rhythm of moving upwards- a synergy with the earthly in efforts at understanding the divine.

What can I give you? When I began typing this,

the software I was using wanted to autofill in a response-

'What can you give me?'

What can I give you?

It is becoming easier to view our lives and the connections that they exist upon through the lens of consumption. Ours is a world increasingly typified by transaction. We regularly tap our cards into spaces, opportunities, moments where we can gather and meet other people- how could this way of paying into being in the presence of others do anything but impact the ways in which we attempt connection? Now there is an expectation that when a social or emotional energy is inputted, we are entitled to a specific output- sensation becomes concrete. I initiate a conversation on Hinge, thus any outcome less than a date is a rip-off. I demonstrate a certain level of vulnerability in a conversation in a way that I expect buys trust.

What can I give you?

When talking about her practice, designer and researcher Mindy Seu describes herself as a gatherer;

*'Gathering is, in this way, not the act of aggregation alone. It is not an automated collection or the formal acquisition of works for an institution, nor is it the plundering or extraction of resources from a neighbouring region. It is the tender and thoughtful collection of goods for your kin, and a moment for reunion, for celebration, and for introspection around those goods'*¹

What can I give you?

When I drum, the memory of it will live in my body for days afterwards. How I sat at the kit will dictate how my muscles hum and heal. The songs will drift through me like floaters in my eye after looking into light. These sensations and this knowledge of a moment in time cannot be packaged and disseminated in a clean, coherent manner. What is left to share is rhythm, a universal language which has existed long before me, something that will continue to tick away long after I have stopped playing, dancing, talking.

What is gathered from the walking is not a tangible thing that can be exchanged for something of equivalent value. What I am given is mine- the resonance in my body, the transformation- that is not something I can give.

In each of these acts of embodied presence and haptic learning is a potential for communication over consumption. Failure is built into kinship and the moments of attentiveness this entails are vital- to ritual, to connection and to humility. We stumble upwards together in acknowledgment of the fact that this is how we break down; this is what

will remain from such dissolution. *I cannot sell or speak what I have gathered- let me show you instead in the stumbles in my dancing.*

What can I give you?

Irish composer Áine O'Dwyer has referred to listening as 'both an instrument and a compositional element'.² I recall this reflection whilst sitting in Elaine's studio and listening to her describe walking- it is the work and it is the work. The distance between, and assumption of, inputted effort to outputted result disintegrates in a way; the result is a haptic knowledge that is impossible to commodify and trade.

What can I give you?

When the work lives so indelibly in movement, when its essence lies in a synergy between my body and space?

What can I give you?

Grainger's work in this exhibition reveals the inherent loss in thinking of oneself as singular and one's transactions with the environment around them as isolated. Moments of confession become public. We move through the space clumsily in the shadow of the metronome's hypnotic, steady tick. That which is gathered here cannot be hoarded- the mountains melt away, the sheets rise above us. The memory of the steps existing in the heat of the muscles and the change in surrounding. This is the work

this is the work.

What can I give you?

I can give you my word as it seeps through my feet and my hands, into the earth, out to the people around me.

What can I give you?

Listen, aggregate, fail.

I stretch out my heart and my hands, to mountain, to kin.

¹Mindy Seu, 'On Gathering', *Shift Space* <https://issue1.shiftspace.pub/on-gathering-mindy-seu>

²Aine O'Dwyer, Liner Notes for *Turning in Space*, 2023,
<https://blankformsedititions.bandcamp.com/album/turning-in-space>

Elaine Grainger's art is full of very specific things. They might be constructed or found, organic or inorganic, useful or useless. There can be things that help to make or support other things: threads, cables, metal frames, lumps of rock. And there are objects that seem resolved in their purpose, sure of their place in the world: a chair, a vase, a cardboard box. Some such objects might be directly meaningful — part of a story the artist wants to tell, relevant to something precise in the artist's experience — or maybe not, instead aligning and accumulating as one enigma after another. For a complementary tendency of Grainger's sculptures, installations, performances and more, is a commitment to combining materially definite components — real, solid things, right there in front of us — with a sense of the world as ineffable and ungraspable. Each object opens a space of uncertainty or expanded possibility around itself — like vibrations and reverberations as a drumstick hits a drum.

Writing about the poet Elizabeth Bishop, Colm Tóibín wrote of how her art begins from "the idea that little is known and much is puzzling" and so the effort to "make a true statement in poetry — to claim that something is something, or does something — required a hushed, solitary concentration." Comparing Bishop's poetry to Dutch Golden Age painting, Tóibín draws attention to the ways that in these forms of art "something is made that is both real and filled with detail, but, in the play of light and shadow, in the placing of people and things, in the making of figures, it is also totally suggestive, without any of the suggestions being easy or obvious." Bishop herself, writing to fellow poet Robert Lowell, suggested that "since we ... float on an unknown sea ... I think we should examine the other floating things that come our way very carefully; who knows what might depend on it?"

Perhaps in similar ways — with a related, muted interest in an approach to art that feels, variously, from one moment to the next, both grounded and 'afloat' — Grainger's contemplative piecing together and picking apart of disparate things would seem to come, as Tóibín says of Bishop, both "from what is said and what lies beneath," using "exact detail to contain emotion, and suggest more."

— *Declan Long*

Julie Landers is a writer and artist based in Cork. Their practice centres around performance, sound art, writing and alternative research practices. They are a drummer and vocalist in I DREAMED I DREAM and they occasionally work under the name D.OTU. They completed their MFA in Art in the Contemporary World from NCAD in 2024. Their work has been published with *Bloomers*, *Circa Art Magazine* and *Bandcamp*. They are a curatorial assistant and have previously lectured in History of Art at University College Cork.

Declan Long is a critic and lecturer at the National College of Art & Design, Dublin

Elaine Grainger is a multidisciplinary artist based in Dublin, Ireland. Her practice incorporates sculptural interventions, performance, drawing, moving-image and sound. She holds an MFA from NCAD, Dublin (2018). Elaine was shortlisted for RDS Visual Arts Awards (2018) and was winner of RDS Centre Culture Irlandais Residency Award (2018). Other awards include; Royal Hibernian Academy, Peer Residency Award, Dublin, Ireland (2019) and the Casa Wabi x Art Forum International Residency Award Mexico (2025). Selected Exhibitions; *Echo Mapping, PINK*, Manchester (2025); *Holding on Lightly*, The LAB Gallery, Dublin (2023); *You observe, I observed*, Juxtapose, Aarhus, Denmark (2023); *Undone*, Körpasstradir Gallery, Reykjavik (2022); *Visible Island*, Dublin (2021); *The possibilities of place*, CCI, Paris + TBG&S, Dublin (2019); *The gap between noise*, The Complex, Dublin (2019).

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15th November - 19th December 2025

Events

Opening reception - Fri 14th November, 6-8 pm

Performances - Sat 15th and 22nd November, 1pm

STAC Chapel - Tues 18th - Fri 21st November, 11am - 4pm

