

The Model



EPISODE 2: GO WEST

[Audio of soundtrack to podcast series]

Isabel Claffey: Hello, and welcome back to The Model, home of the Niland Collection in Sligo and to the second episode from the series of podcasts celebrating the life and work of the artist, Jack B. Yeats. In this episode, artists, Ruth Clinton and Niamh Moriarty present GO WEST - a short story set on a west bound train, where two strangers share a cabin and outside the window, a magnificent round tower appears in the distance, as the train crosses the sea to a remote island.

This work was inspired by another ghost story, one told by Jack B. Yeats at the annual RHA dinner about his 1927 painting, 'Man on a Train, Thinking.' Jack's story tells of a man who slits his own throat upon hearing that the lottery ticket that he had given away, was in fact the winning ticket.

[Audio begins: GO WEST – a radio play written and produced by Ruth Clinton and Niamh Moriarty]

[Audio of ethereal music]

Narrator(s) [Double voices]: We set our scene at twilight on a west bound train. From the window, the faint outline of a round tower can be seen as the train approaches its final destination, a remote island. A passenger who has been lost in reverie for much of the journey tries to strike up a discussion with the person sitting opposite him. This is the true story of their conversation.

[In the background - the sound of a train rattling along on its tracks]

Artist: Not let the eye of a red-haired woman rest upon you.

Bureaucrat: Excuse me?

The Model



Artist: [Chuckles softly] I'm sorry, I couldn't resist. You must hear that all the time. It's just so striking. Your hair, I mean. Is it real? In fact, would you mind if I took your picture? I'm an artist, so don't worry, it's not creepy [chuckles softly]. You are probably wondering what I am doing all the way out here, aside from meeting lovely lassies on the train? [Laughs heartily]

[The sound of a camera clicking several times]

I have come such a long way, but I just have to get to it. The island, I mean. My grandmother talked about it constantly when I was little. The bog, the field and the stones, oh the stones, not to mention the utterly charming people, of course. Would you tilt your chin toward the light for me?

[The sound of a camera clicking – and then rapidly in succession]

It all really resonates with my work right now. I feel like I have reached this point in my practice where I just need to let the spirit of the place take complete possession of me and I of it. Does that make sense? I adore this island.

Bureaucrat: Ah, so this is not your first visitation?

Artist: Don't you mean visit? No, it is my first time, but anyway, I know that I know the island already, you know. My work is really grappling with issues of like... ancient versus modern, life versus death, time versus space, west versus further west. See, take the round towers for example - they're an amazing metaphor for all those things because ever since the druids used them as giant sundials, they've been a symbol for a new dawn in Ireland. They are like the unchanging thing around which everything, even the sun moves. I honestly think that I might be the first person to use the round towers as a medium in all of art history. But how about you? What's your story? What do you do?

Bureaucrat: I'm no artist anyway. I can tell you that.

Artist: I bet you could be if you wanted to? I know loads of red-haired artists.

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Bureaucrat: I am working on a project of national significance.

Artist: Mmmh?

Bureaucrat: You asked what I do? I represent the citizens of this great Republic. You, as an artist might be interested to know that I work for the Bureau of Tourism, Culture, Linguistic, Historical, Rural, The Unexplained, Islands and Miscellaneous Affairs. Some call me a humble Civil Servant and certainly I believe it's my mission to serve the people. I make it my business to figure out what is in the public's best interests. Who are they? What are their hopes and dreams? What moves them?

Artist: I have to know your name.

Bureaucrat: Oh, I am glad you asked. I may not be an artist, but I can get creative in naming my projects. This one is called ARIS, expediting relocation of ancient stone edifices.

Artist: Hey, did you just say? Arouse ancient round objects, uncannily standing erect.

Bureaucrat: No.

Artist: Oh my god, that's amazing, because I actually know loads about the history of round towers in Ireland. Did you know that they were first built by a group of phallus worshipping druid monks who were cast out of the east for being, just like too intense? So, these guys came all the way to Ireland and built round towers across the country in a pattern matching the constellations in the night sky. So magical, but also really smart because it helped to harness the cosmic energy of the stars using the towers like giant stone antenna. The monks could transmit radio signals from one tower to the next to warn each other of potential attacks by the native peasantry who also found them really intense. Those guys died off eventually or whatever. But the towers remained in use for hundreds of years and were later widely used for hiding from the Protestants. Your project sounds really interesting though.

The Model



Bureaucrat: It is all of our project. But thank you, yes, it was my idea. You have accidentally hit on my expert subject actually. Not unlike yourself, I too am captivated by the round tower we are rapidly approaching. However, we at the Bureau, see it as somewhat unmoored in its current location or to use an official term, out of context. Wouldn't it be much more effective, I propose, to behold such a unique piece of architecture inside a museum where you can really appreciate its historical context and value? You see, back in Dublin we don't have many good examples of monuments like these left. What we do have, is a higher population and many more visitors to appreciate such things... and now, I know what you're going to say? Once it is moved - it will be changed, changed utterly... but we really have thought of everything. The tower will be carefully removed stone by stone and resurrected precisely as you see it now, only it will be at the capital.

Artist: Huh...?

Bureaucrat: Yes, yes, again I know what you're thinking? I've heard every argument. 'But it's standing where it was built.' That may be so... but is it standing when it was built? No. Whenever a great tower, such as this, just rises out of the land to greet some misguided tourist; they are overcome by want and ideas and fantasies about its origins.

Artist: Such a thrill when you see it rise out of the ground like that.

Bureaucrat: Delusions of druids and magicians building these towers are at best nonsensical whimsy and at their worst, dangerous and embarrassing. You mentioned a few such notions in your speech there a minute ago. Let me be clear, round towers are without a single exception found near old churches. We can surmise therefore, as their Irish name, 'cloigtheach,' strongly suggests that their primary purpose was as a bell tower. These towers are an elegant early example of the imposition of time keeping, not unlike the train we're travelling on. The round tower was and still is - a symbol of progress; an arrow pointing triumphantly towards civilization. I think that's beautiful.

Artist: And you would know.

The Model



[The sound of a door sliding over, followed by the sound of wheels from a refreshments cart, squeakily rolling across the carriage floor]

Tea Attendant: [Sighs loudly] Does anyone in here want any tea, coffee or refreshments?

Artist: Yes, I'll take a black coffee and one of those... what do you call them? Scones, yeah... and the lady will have... no, let me guess? Black tea, two sugars, loads of milk. I thought so.

[The sound of tea pouring into a cup]

Tea Attendant: Okay, that will be six euro and sixty-six cents.

Artist: He made a harp with druid applewood that she among her winds might know he wept and from that hour he was watched over none but faithful lovers. Yeats. Love these coins you got here. Hey, keep the change.

[The sound of coins being slid across a table]

Tea Attendant: Thanks, bye.

[The sound of wheels from the refreshments cart, squeakily rolling away]

Bureaucrat: How curious? I was under the impression that the refreshments cart was cut many budgets ago... hmmh?

[In the background - the continuous sound of the train rolling along its tracks]

The Model



Artist: Are you not going to even touch your tea? Figures... that redhead of yours is no lie.

Bureaucrat: As a public servant I can only travel by public transport. In doing so, I have often noted that the service is inefficient, sporadic and interrupted in certain far reaches of the country. For that nothing can be done. Knowing this though, I strongly believe that any intact examples of exclusively Irish heritage will be better positioned in the city, where many more millions of admirers can have access to them. This is all about accessibility and safety. You really never can be too safe.

Artist: That's true, you should be especially careful around round towers. The one on the island has a pretty dark history. It is said that while it was being built a red haired woman passed by it without saying, 'Bless the work.' So, one of the workers let a big stone fall down on her head and she died instantly. The stone is still there, and people say, if you look very closely, you can see her red hair imprinted on it. Isn't that gross? I'm definitely going to use it in my work

[The ongoing sound of a train rolling along its tracks]

Bureaucrat: Yes, I'm glad you appreciate the dangers. On top of all we already know about the towers, they would have been virtual... vertical deathtraps in times of invasion, as much as they are health and safety nightmare today. Don't you think it would make all the sense in the world to display a specimen such as this one, inside a nice big museum behind a velvet rope with guides and audio tours to explain it and security guards to mind it and to take special care that visitors don't trip and fall, or god forbid... climb inside a third story window.

Artist: Rapunzel, Rapunzel let your red hair... [laughs heartily]

[The sound of a door sliding open]

Ticket Collector: Tickets please. Tickets please.

Artist: Here you go my good man.

The Model



[The sound of the click from a ticket punch]

Artist: Wait, aren't you going to ask for her ticket?

Ticket Collector: Ask who?

[Audio of spectral music]

[End of audio of the radio play - GO WEST - written and produced by Ruth Clinton and Niamh Moriarty]

Isabel Claffey: Next week we're back with the third episode in this series to explore the context behind Jack's painting, 'Communicating with Prisoners.' An elegy to the solidarity shown by Irish women during the turbulent times of the Irish Civil War. Listener discretion is advised for this episode as some contents are disturbing. This series of podcasts is kindly funded by the Decade of Centenaries Programme and supported by Sligo County Council. So, until then, take care and thank you for listening. For credits, bios, and further information, please see our website www.themodel.ie

[Audio played from soundtrack to podcast series]

End of podcast

Running time: 14:40 minutes

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SHOW NOTES:

In this second episode from the series of podcasts, 'Encounters with Jack B. Yeats,' from The Model, home of the Niland in Sligo, artists, Ruth Clinton and Niamh Moriarty present GO WEST, a short story set on a westbound train, where a wistful young artist shares a cabin with a stoic bureaucrat. The artist is instantly captivated by the red-haired civil servant sitting opposite him. Meanwhile, outside the window a magnificent round tower appears in the distance as the train crosses the sea to a remote island.

This radio play was inspired by a painting by Jack B. Yeats, 'Man on a Train, Thinking,' (1927) and a grisly ghost story told by the artist at the annual RHA dinner. This surreal comedy plays out between two conflicting projections of Irish national identity as it was being constructed in the early days of Irish Independence. Blending historical research and present-day conspiracies, the train is used as a metaphor for enduring binary debates such as public versus private; progress versus nostalgia; tourism versus conservation and even Dublin versus the rest of Ireland.

Ruth Clinton and Niamh Moriarty are collaborative artists currently living and working between Leitrim, and Sligo. They use performance, video, sound installation and storytelling, along with a detailed research process, to open up spaces of renewed reflection.

Ruth and Niamh's current practice is concerned with Ireland's complicated relationship with its colonial past. In 2021, they are critically examining our struggle for a sense of national identity as we move through times of great upheaval.

They have recently presented work for Solas Nua, Washington D.C.; the Douglas Hyde Gallery, Trinity College Dublin, and Askeaton Contemporary Arts. This year Ruth and Niamh's work is supported by the Arts Council of Ireland, Leitrim County Council and Fingal County Council.

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Episode Credits:

GO WEST – a Radio Play written and produced by Ruth Clinton and Niamh Moriarty

Artist voiced by Peter Broderick

Bureaucrat voiced by Ruth Clinton

Additional voices and sounds by Cormac MacDiarmada and Niamh Moriarty

Music by Aoife Hammond & Ruth Clinton

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