

Institution: University of Edinburgh		
Unit of Assessment: 32 (Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory)		
Title of case study: Curating and the National Conversation: the Irish Pavilion at the 57 th Venice Biennale		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: November 2016 – October 2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name: Tessa Giblin	Role: Director, Talbot Rice Gallery	Period employed by submitting HEI: November 2016 – ongoing
Period when the claimed impact occurred: May 2017 – December 2020		
Is this case continued from a case study submitted in 2014? study N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Giblin's curation of the exhibition <i>Tremble Tremble</i> for the Irish Pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale, 2017 (approximately 850,000 visitors) and its related events – an international five-venue exhibition tour, launches and book publication – contributed to broader public awareness of the politics of abortion in Ireland and the national conversation on women's rights. Publicity generated through media coverage and visits by high-profile individuals such as the President of Ireland highlighted the power of contemporary art to communicate topical urgencies when experienced alongside important political events.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Giblin's curatorial practice engages with the relation between installation and topical socio-political issues. <i>Tremble Tremble</i> [3.1] was commissioned in 2016 for the 2017 Venice Biennale, following a competitive selection process open to applications across Ireland. Giblin's initial proposal was selected by a panel consisting of Culture Ireland, Arts Council and Government representatives and international experts in the field of contemporary art. She was contracted by Culture Ireland to deliver all aspects of the Irish Pavilion.</p> <p>For this prestigious international platform, Giblin, in collaboration with the artist Jesse Jones, proposed an exhibition about women's rights that would project the issue of abortion in Ireland onto an international stage. The project was presented as an investigation into female oppression through history, with particular reference to the medieval witch trials in Europe. This research also led to Giblin's editorship of an accompanying book, which brought together theorists, historians and practitioners [3.2].</p> <p>Giblin undertook her research following her appointment as Director of the Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh in November 2016. Her research sought to interrogate the contemporary resonance of historical witch trials. By innovating curatorial methods that could bring new visibility to such transhistorical connections, <i>Tremble Tremble</i> revealed the power of contemporary art to intensify longstanding and still topical issues. Giblin drew on staging techniques used in theatre to develop a method she has termed 'exhibition dramaturgy'. This enabled the creation of performative, immersive and multi-sensory spaces, and used</p>		

performance to enhance the exhibition's political content. Thus, *Tremble Tremble* brought emphasis to the subject of women's rights as all-encompassing, dynamic and multi-faceted.

The exhibition was produced as a multimedia installation running on a 25-minute loop. This involved performed interventions by gallery staff, and state-of-the-art theatre programming technology (QLabs) that enabled more control over the staging than is possible with standard multi-screen installations, to produce a sense of simultaneous unfolding of stories and enhance the experience of immersion.

Following the success of the Biennale exhibition, Giblin was invited by 3 major international institutions to tour *Tremble Tremble*: Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore (ICAS) at the LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore; Project Arts Centre, Dublin and Museo Guggenheim, Bilbao. She also staged the exhibition at the Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh. She adapted each installation to its new local context, enabling the broadest possible reach to diverse publics. For instance, in Edinburgh, a Scold's Bridle was included to reference Scotland's distinct history of witch trials. The exhibition in Bilbao incorporated historical objects and documents related to witchcraft in the Basque Country on loan from the San Telmo museum in San Sebastian.

Commenting on Giblin's curation of *Tremble Tremble*, Jones stated that 'Tessa's role as curatorial dramaturg brings new and exciting possibilities [...] through her deep knowledge of the role of spectatorship and craft with theatrical devices', and praised her curatorial process as 'truly collaborative, as artistic vision meets curatorial vision' [3.1].

3. References to the research

3.1. Giblin, T., and Jones, J. (2017-2020) *Tremble Tremble*. The Pavilion of Ireland of the Venice Biennale; Institute of Contemporary Art, LASALLE College of the arts, Singapore; Project Arts Centre, Dublin; Talbot Rice Gallery, University of Edinburgh; Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain (exhibition) (Submitted in REF2) (Includes: statement from Jesse Jones)

3.2. Giblin, T., (ed). (2017) *Tremble Tremble / Tremate Tremate*. Dublin and Milan: Project Press and Mouse Publishing. (English / Italian) (Can be supplied by HEI on request)

4. Details of the impact

The five exhibition presentations of *Tremble Tremble* were major public events, drawing approximately 850,000 visitors in total [5.1].

Giblin selected the topic of women's rights for the representation of Ireland at the 2017 Venice Biennale a year before the Irish referendum on abortion. The exhibition opened on 8 May 2017 and the referendum was held on 25 May 2018, leading to a decision to repeal the abortion ban, also known as the 8th amendment.

The impact of *Tremble Tremble* on public perceptions around abortion rights was quickly registered, as evidenced by speeches and statements by high-profile individuals. The Director of the Glucksman Gallery of Contemporary art in Cork wrote: 'it galvanised those of us who were involved and committed to repeal, by enabling us to envisage an Ireland that chose *Tremble Tremble* for its international representation at Venice, through the confidence of the presentation, the powerful artistic expression and erudition and elegance of the

curating, as a way to feel confident about advocating for the change to come' [5.2]. The curator at Guggenheim Bilbao noted that the exhibition had an 'extraordinary impact on the [local] community': '[t]he fact that present and immemorial past appeared so closely linked was felt clearly' [5.3].

On 21 May 2017, the Irish President Michael D. Higgins visited *Tremble Tremble*, days before his visit to Rome to see the Pope. This was the first time an Irish president had made a public visit to the Irish Pavilion at the Biennale and the media coverage further thrust the exhibition onto the international stage. RTÉ (*Raidió Teilifís Éireann*), Ireland's national television broadcaster, reported on the visit (viewed by 295,000) and commissioned a documentary (viewed by 64,000) [5.4]. There was particular media interest in the visit, since Higgins had opposed the ban on abortion (the 8th Amendment) in 1983. The visit was documented in a YouTube video that drew 1,057 views [5.5]. Two weeks after the outcome of the vote, *Tremble Tremble* opened at Project Arts Centre in Dublin in a charged homecoming. Ailbhe Smyth, co-leader of the YES Campaign to Repeal the 8th Amendment, spoke at the opening of how *Tremble Tremble* inspired voters: 'you knew, in witch-like fashion, you knew exactly what we needed to do, and to hear, and to see and to feel' [5.6].

While there is a history of politically engaged art in Ireland, this was the first time the Irish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale had explored contemporary political issues. High-profile artworld figures commented on *Tremble Tremble*'s timely political content. The Head of Visual Arts at Creative Scotland noted how it encouraged reflection on national politics and their histories and affirmed how contemporary art can 'motivate us to be more active in the social/civic sphere' [5.7]. The Director of the Glucksman Gallery of Contemporary art in Cork commented that 'there was a profound connect through the work and its curatorial contexts that enabled audiences a reflective and imaginative connection with women's rights', and she noted the importance of *Tremble Tremble* 'within the specifics of the abortion referendum in Ireland and the wider MeToo movement'. They stated that the exhibition 'reinforced my belief in the power of contemporary art to shape [national] discourse and connect people to issues in a radically thoughtful way' [5.2]. The Director of Arts Council Ireland noted that the visual presentation 'was both dramatic and visceral and forced the audience to engage with the work and the subject in a very immediate manner [...] *Tremble Tremble* was both a catalyst and influence on the repeal campaign' [5.8].

The positive response within social and print media brought *Tremble Tremble* extensive national and international visibility, impacting international perceptions of Ireland. The Director-General of RTÉ, remarked in an article on RTÉ.IE/culture on *Tremble Tremble*'s 'massive impact', 'very much of the now, given what's going on here in Ireland', demonstrating that 'Ireland is a contender' and central to important political debates [5.9]. *The Burlington Magazine* commented on *Tremble Tremble*'s 'direct feminist message'. *CNN Style* described it as 'a powerful statement about self-determination' [5.9] and for *The Scotsman* it was 'amidst a growing wave of anger from secular Ireland [...] perfectly contemporary.' *Elephant – The Art and Culture Magazine* remarked on the way *Tremble Tremble* emerged 'from the rising social movement in Ireland that calls for a transformation of the historic relationship between Church and state'. Australia's *Daily Review* commented on its 'powerful statement' about 'the right to self-determination'. For the Spanish regional daily paper *Diario de Noticias* (89,000 readers daily), *Tremble Tremble* 'reflects a time of tense debate over the legalisation of abortion in Ireland' [5.9]. Patricia Cronin, an internationally-recognised US-based artist, wrote: 'the exhibition elevated the subject of women's rights on the world's stage', and 'because Ireland chose [it] to represent the

country – it gave viewers the explicit impression of [a] state endorsed and supported exhibition including the content' [5.10].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1. Collated attendance figures for all venues

5.2. Testimonial from the Director, Glucksman Gallery of Contemporary Art, UCC Cork

5.3. Testimonial from the Curator at Guggenheim Bilbao

5.4. Email from the Head of Audience Research at *Raidió Teilifís Éireann* (RTÉ)

5.5. Responses to *Tremble Tremble* by the Office of the President of Ireland

5.6. Ailbhe Smyth, Leader of the YES Campaign (to Repeal the 8th Amendment), speech at the opening of *Tremble Tremble* in Dublin, June 2018

5.7. Testimonial from Head of Visual Arts, Creative Scotland

5.8. Testimonial from Arts Council Ireland Director

5.9. Collated press on *Tremble Tremble*

5.10. Testimonial from artist Patricia Cronin