

The Day-Crossing Farm . Marie Brett . Cork Midsummer Festival 2021

The Day-Crossing Farm is a multi-sensory art installation by visual artist Marie Brett, with live performance in a secret Cork City location, exploring issues of human trafficking, modern-day-slavery and drug farming. Commissioned by Cork Midsummer Festival and created over a two-year project period (2019-2021) in dialogue with human justice, advocacy and support organisations, scholars, gardeners and persons with lived experience of trafficking and forced labour. The art piece incorporates live music and performance, interactive sculpture, moving image, plant-life, sound and lighting design and was produced in collaboration with filmmaker Linda Curtin, composer /sound designer Peter Power, and lighting designer Sarah Jane Shiels. The work was funded by The Arts Council, the Creative Europe programme of the European Union, Cork Midsummer Festival and Cork City Council.

This is a photographic documentation of the installation event with an audience member commentary



'The Journey'.
I'm directed to a taxi having been told it'll drop me to the venue. The driver is sitting inside speaking an Arabic /Hebrew blend on a mobile, and gestures for me to get in, then pretty much ignores me for an uncomfortable period. He gets out and hurriedly asks you to follow him, and walks briskly down side-streets to a steel gated back-entrance to a row of tall houses. He fails to make the key-code work, and beckons me to follow him around the corner to a run-down Georgian building's front door. He says 'ring the bell' and leaves me at a short flight of steps.



'Security and Rat Run'. I ring the door bell unsure if it works. After a while, a security guard opens the door and gestures to enter. I walk in through a steel fenced walk-way that zig-zags up steps. It's narrow, tight, dark and spot-lit and there are surveillance cameras mounted on the fence tops. There is a rumbling atmospheric sound. The security person leads me towards a large door and on opening it, gestures for me to enter.

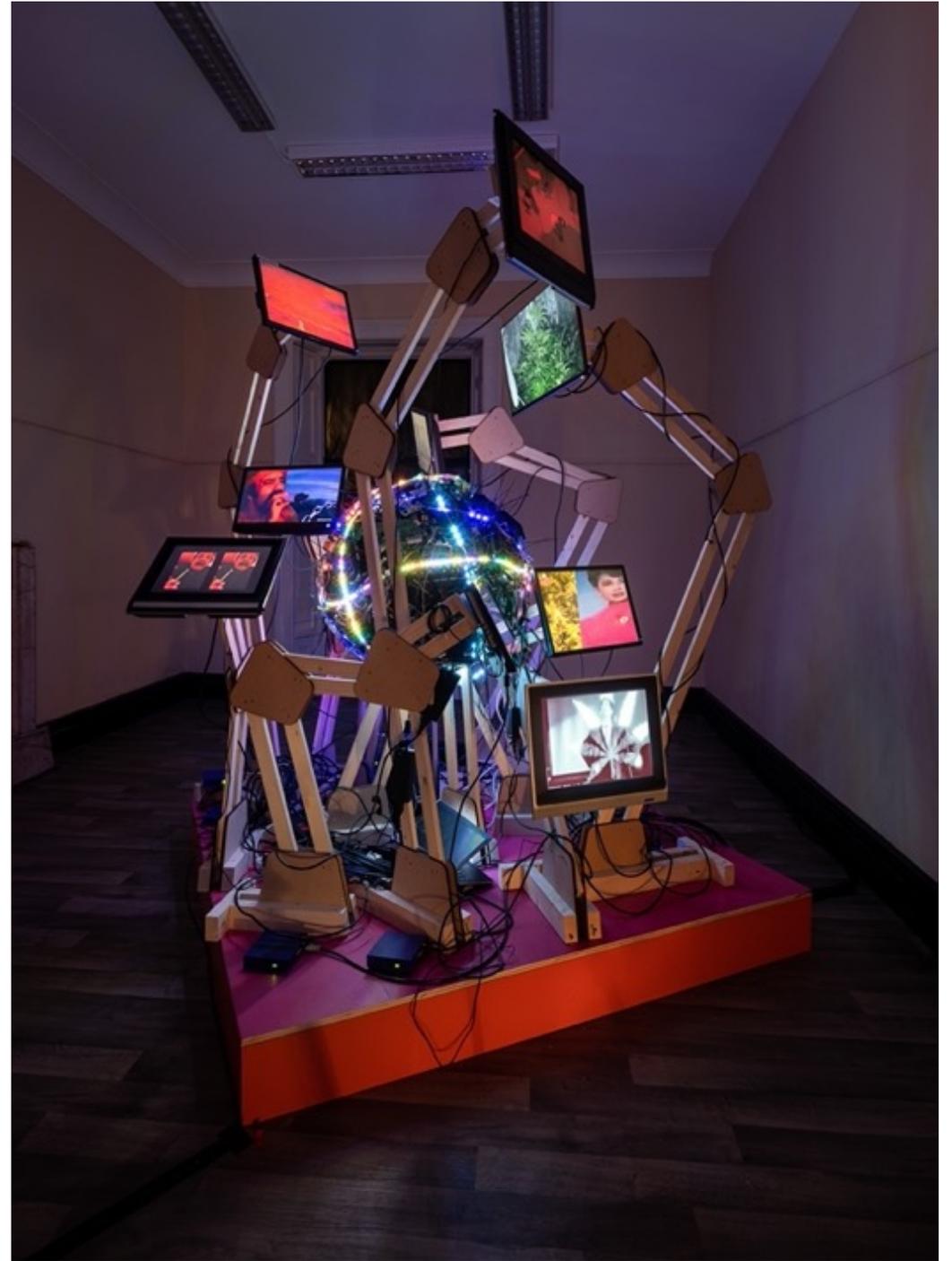


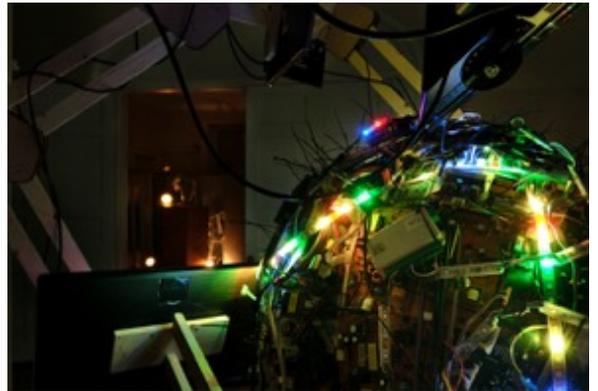
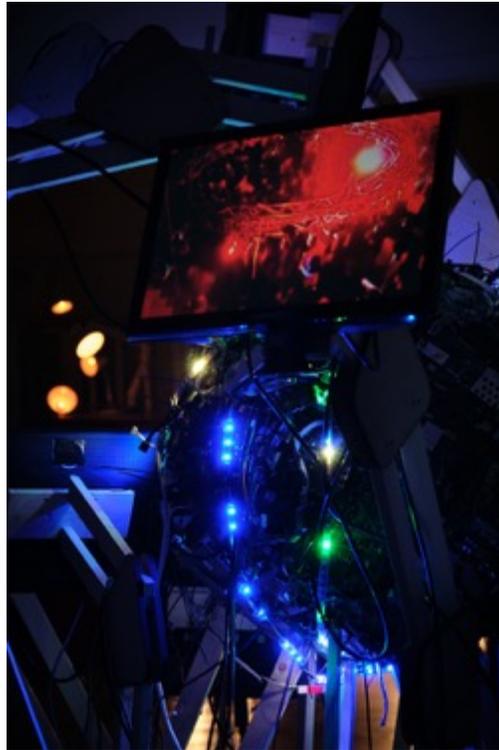
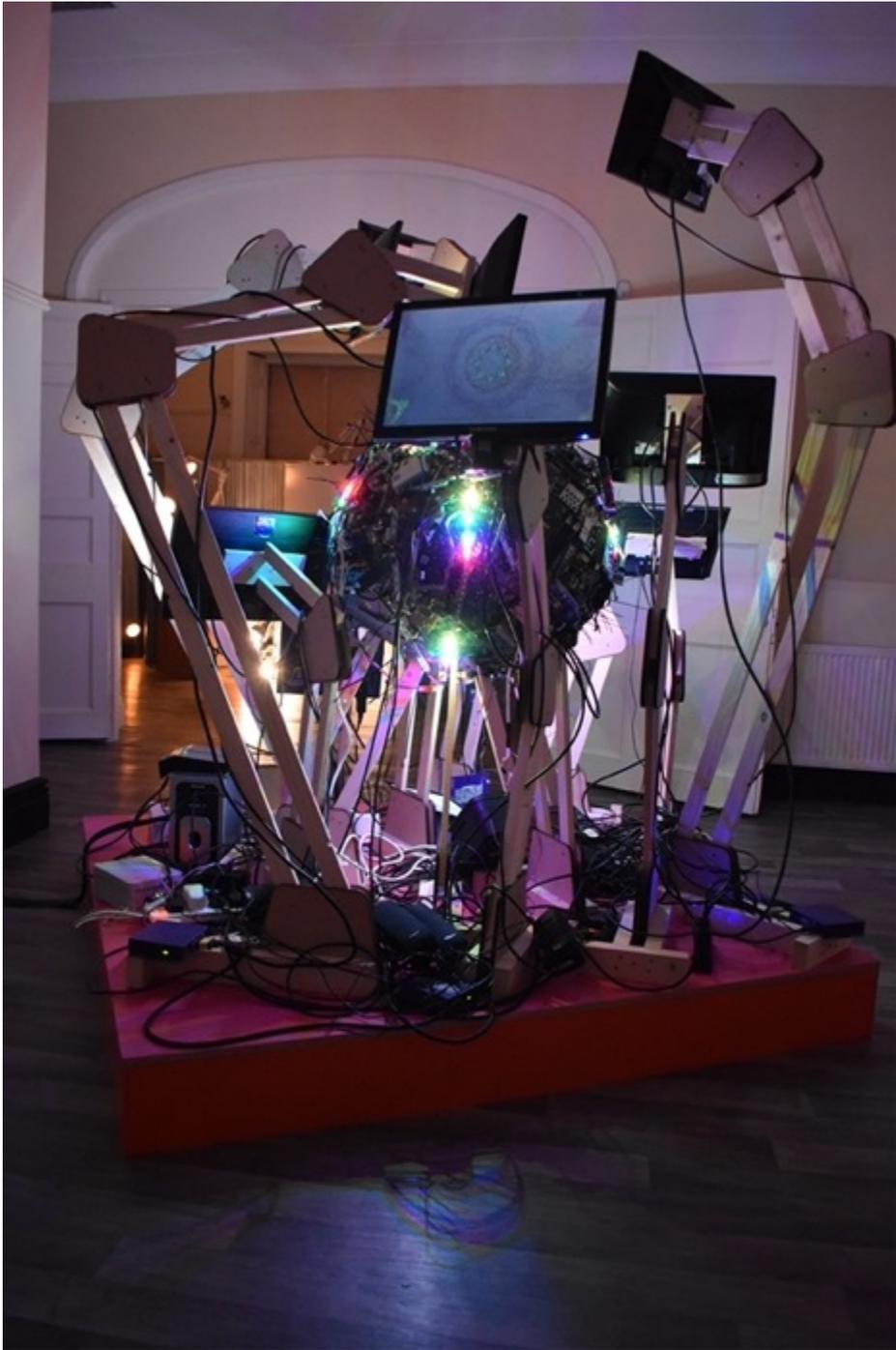


'Filing Cabinets & Information Storage'. On entering the dark room through a high wooden door, I see filing cabinets plus wooden and metal storage cabinets and more steel shield fencing. Numerous angle-poise lamps peep out and turn on and off randomly with an atmospheric sound-scape of clattering.



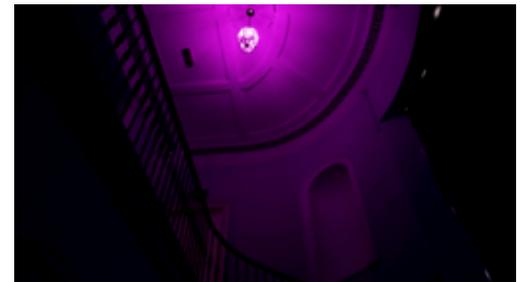
'Sputnik (data overload) Haemorrhage'. In an adjoining dark room, there's a denseness of flickering lights. A cluster of nine monitors are playing different videos and CCTV footage. Each is mounted at various angles on timber crane-like structures, on top of a stage. Suspended in the centre is a sphere of electronics, pulsing. The videos are playing multiple views of drug culture including news-footage, fly-on-the wall drug busts, retro propoganda, cultt films and cartoons. Their sound-tracks over-lay with a central spoken voice as an undercurrent. There are a great number and tangle of power leads, speakers and media players.



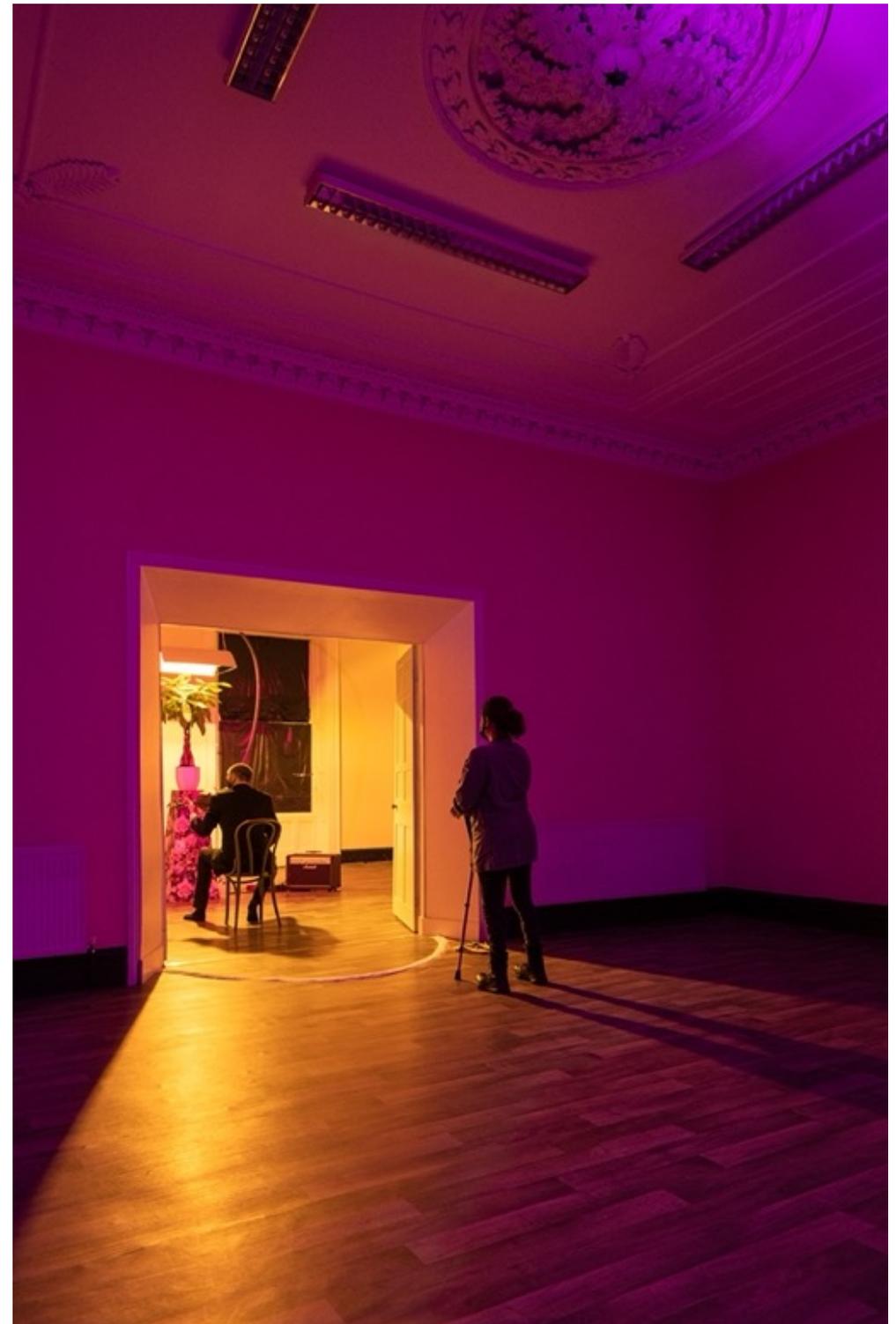




'Follow Security'. The security guard knocks on the door and shines a torch light out of the sputnik room, encouraging me to leave. He points towards a big curved staircase to climb and then disappears. The stairs are curved and grand. I can hear the multiple videos downstairs and what sounds like a live violin being playing upstairs. I climb the stairs and land on a balcony with three doors, one open, with a pink light inside. The security has unexpectedly appeared at the opposite end of the balcony. The violin sound is loud now, coming from inside the room, and I enter.



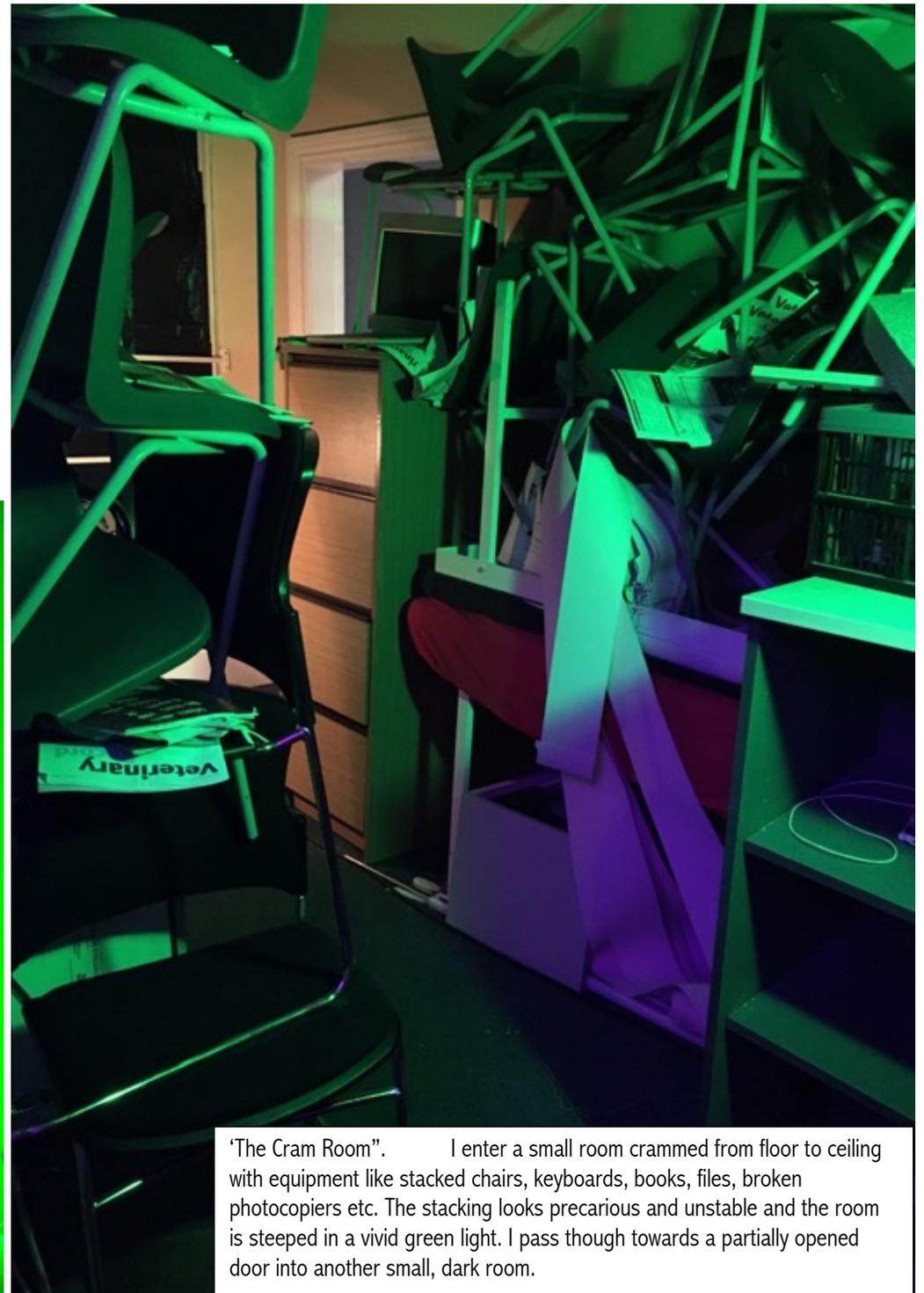
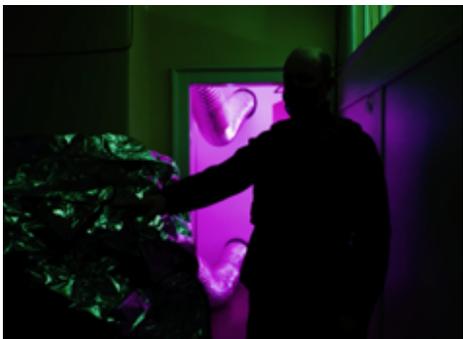
'The Shrine'. I enter a large empty, high ceiling, Georgian style room and hear a buzzing sound, plus a violin being played. A pair of wooden doors are partially open onto an adjoining room with a semi-circle of salt drawn at the threshold, with a pair of flip-flops outside. Each room's tall windows are blacked-out with builders plastic. A man is sitting on an café chair, with his back to me, playing a violin. It's a familiar classical tune. Infront of him is a big plinth, wall-papered, with a huge curved steel arm suspending a large grow-light which floods a bright light over a Mexican Fortune plant which has a platted trunk. The musician is wearing black tails and is barefoot. He plays to the plant, walking steadily around it, looking into its canopy. A drone hovers close-by, flying around and near the plant and musician. After encircling the plant the musician presses a peddle loop and picks up a water spray bottle and sprays the plant while encircling it.



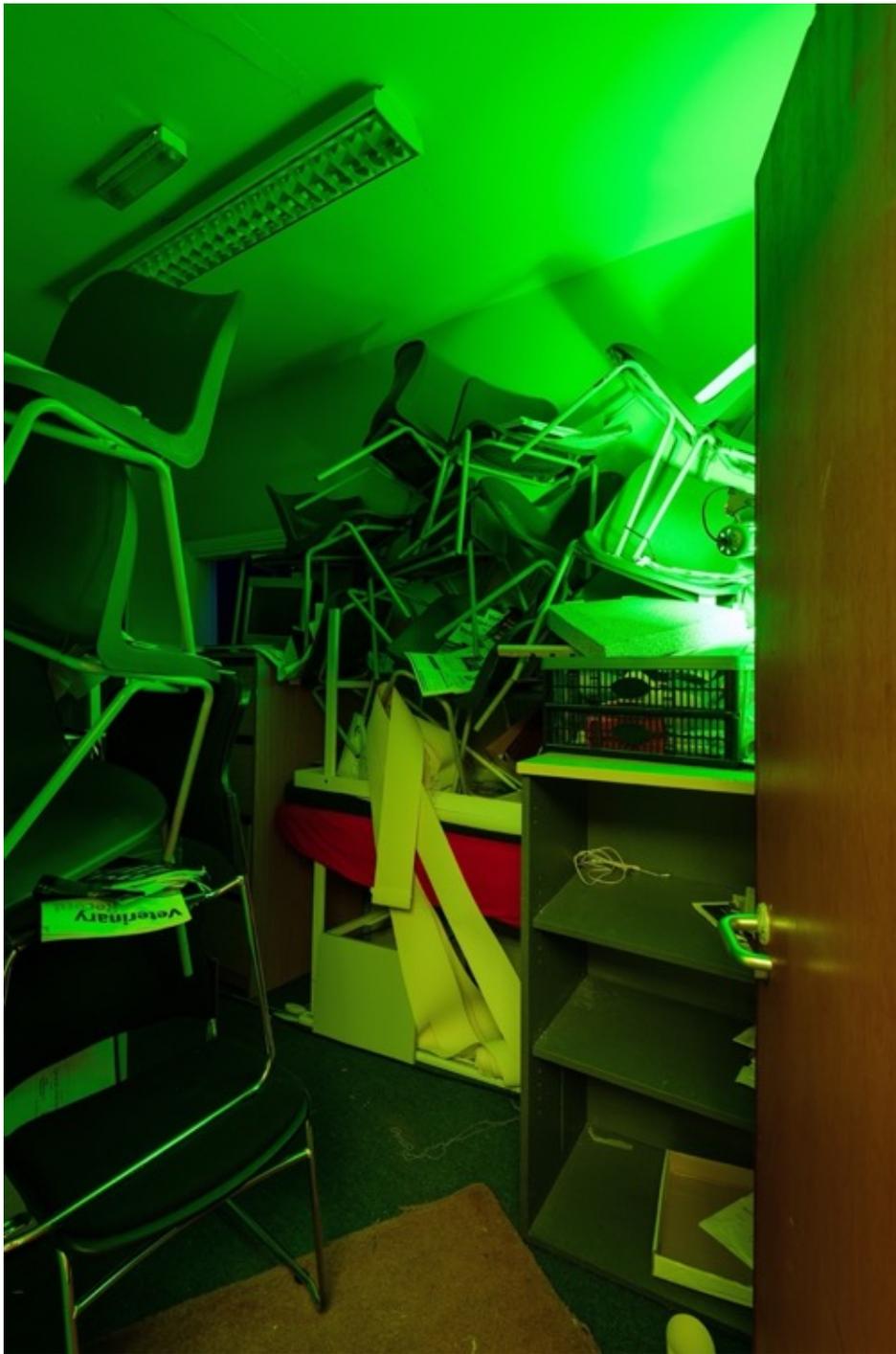




'The Rave / Building Site Staircase'. The security person comes into the room and signals me to follow him back out onto the landing, through a door and up a flight of stairs. The architecture is smaller, tighter, scruffier. I am led upstairs and see his shiny black boots ahead of me; he's wearing a stab vest, is tall and is carrying a heavy torch. I am led up to the 2nd floor and there is a huge drop-away view over the stairwell. Ahead is a vivid pinkly lit room with sci-fi like silver ducting. The security guard bodily blocks the corridor towards this room, so I turn into the nearest doorway.



"The Cram Room". I enter a small room crammed from floor to ceiling with equipment like stacked chairs, keyboards, books, files, broken photocopiers etc. The stacking looks precarious and unstable and the room is steeped in a vivid green light. I pass through towards a partially opened door into another small, dark room.



'Opera Singer 1'. I wander into a dark velvety room (painted grey). A ladder leans forward, suspended, and an antique Victorian projection screen sits on a metal modelling plinth. There is a video projection of a silhouetted opera singer, whose walking while singing. There are subtitles describing her being held captive and growing plants. She sings the narrative and sounds a familiar operatic piece. After a period of time the security opens a door at the other end of the room and instructs me to leave. On leaving, outside in the corridor there is shelving full of growhouse equipment and plant growing chemicals. Further equipment spreads out along the corridor.







'Garda Growhouse Equipment'. On the shelves and floor are lots of lamps, bulbs, tents, poles, fans, chemical fertilizer etc. They are arranged in groupings and spread out across the floor leading to the next room. The security guard pointed to go inside this room and gestures/says 'go to the back' (or something similar). This is the pink room I'd seen earlier. (An Garda Síochána donated a huge amount of equipment and materials into the art piece, which they'd seized during Irish growhouse busts).

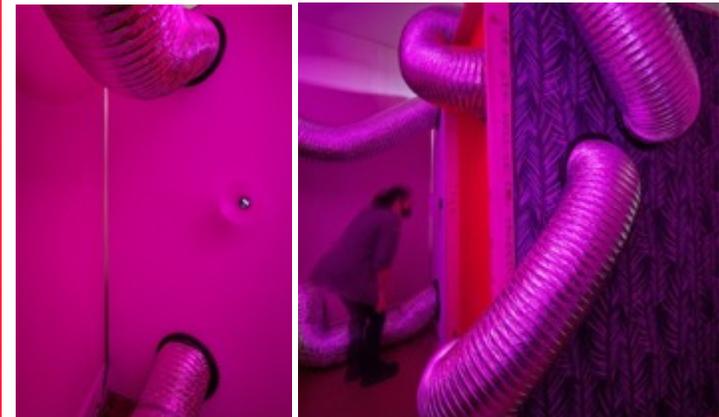


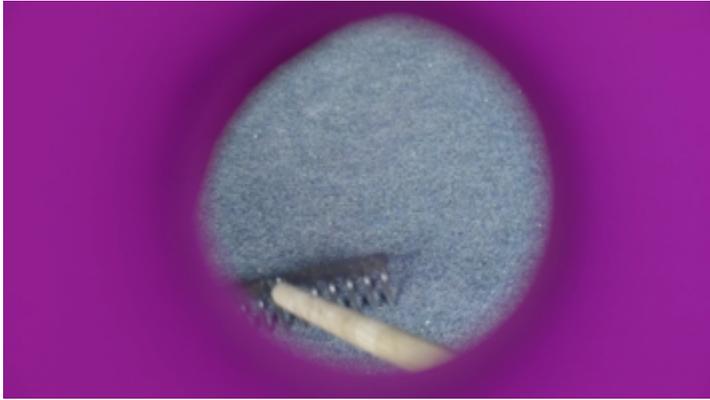


'The Growhouse'. Outside there is a huge crumpled silver grow-tent at the doorway, and inside a series of tall vivid blue walls with sci-fi like silver ducting. A small 'peep-hole' has a flickering light inside it. The door is ajar and the security guard assertively instructs me to go inside.



'The Peephole'. There is an opaque plastic funnel with a circular hole cut through the wall, joined by a thick rubber seal. When I bring my eye into the funnel, I can see a video playing. It's a young Asian looking lad gardening in an attic room, surrounded by TV monitors sat in piles of soil. The room looks like a bed-sit with a kitchen and a disheveled bed. There is a buzzing insect like sound. The lad re-pots tomato plants, rakes the carpet, plants the TV monitors and fiddles with the microwave and oven controls.







'The Growroom Box'. Sturdy wallpapered walls almost reach the tall ceiling and big ventilation pipes spring out from the walls with huge rubber seals. The 'box' dominates the room which has a fireplace and loads of Growhouse equipment piled up. The security guard appears and tells me to 'go around the back' (or something similar). There are tropical forest like sounds and an electric fan blowing cool air. On the mantelpiece is a man's wallet. There is fresh moss on the floor at the back of the room and I walk over it, turning the corner and enter the inside the growroom box.





'Inside The Growroom'. The room has a low ceiling and is lined throughout with silver backed insulation foam. One half of the room has a grow-tent erected and industrial scale greenhouse equipment inside. The floor is lined with fresh moss and there is a foresty like smell. It is warm and there are deep machinery sounds. One of the walls includes a big blocked out window.



'The Head-Space Reveal'. In the middle of the space are beer-crate steps. Above them is a circular hole in the ceiling, lined with a rubber seal. I climb the steps and put my head through the ceiling.

'The Head-Space Reveal'. The hole is perfectly circular and I slip my head through to arrive into a small room with white walls and metal poles; (which I later realise is a grow-tent). The atmosphere is calm and feels distinctly different from the industrial vibe below. There is tranquil orchestral music playing and there are different species of living plants encircling my head. I do not see their roots or soil but do see their lush, healthy foliage; illuminated. I move my feet on top of the beer crates to rotate my head around and go full circle. All sides of the port-hole are filled with plants - long marsh grass, hedgerow flowers and moss; I am encircled by them. I slowly step down towards the lower level grow-tent space, then towards the timber room, then the outer pink space, and then finally into the corridor.

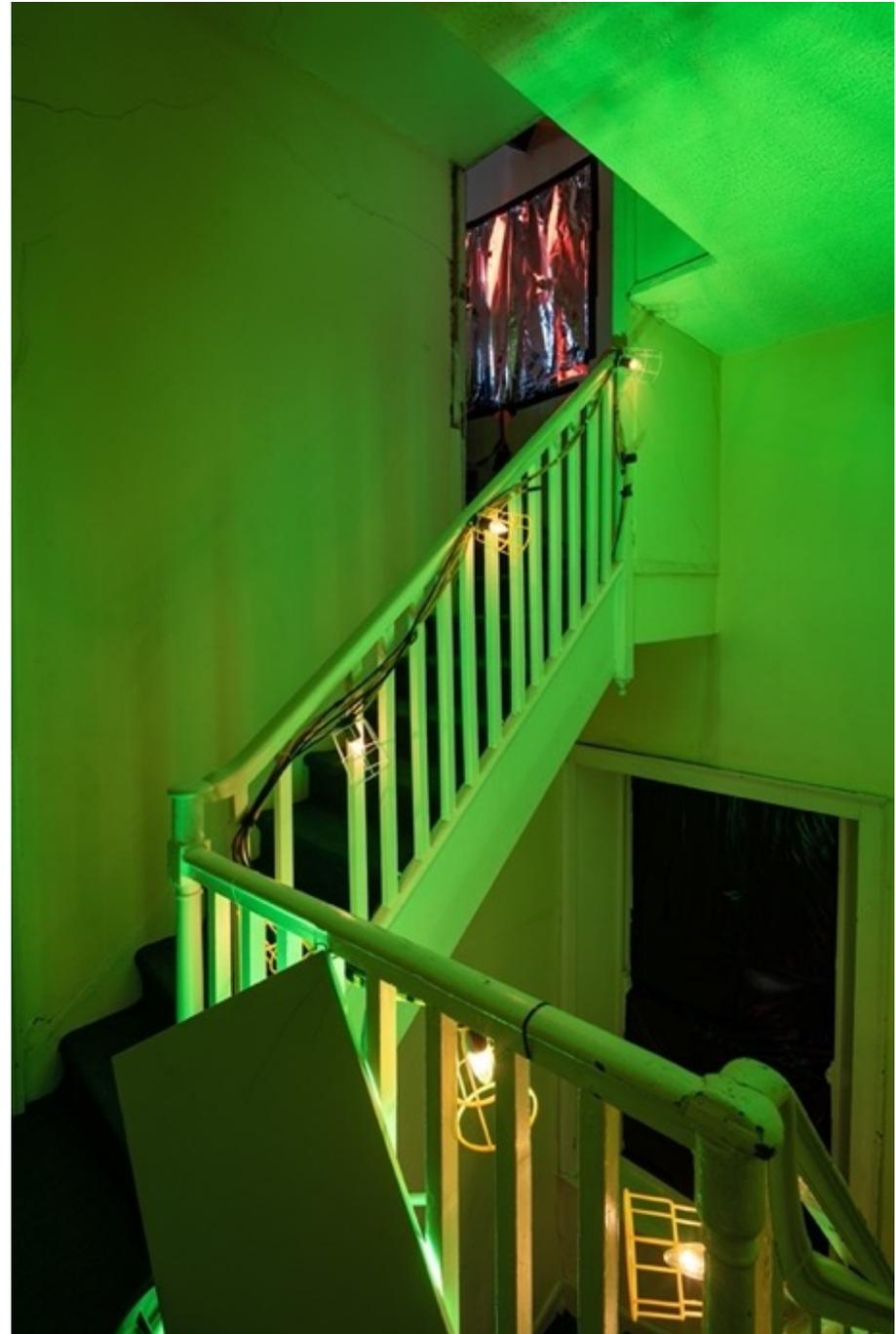
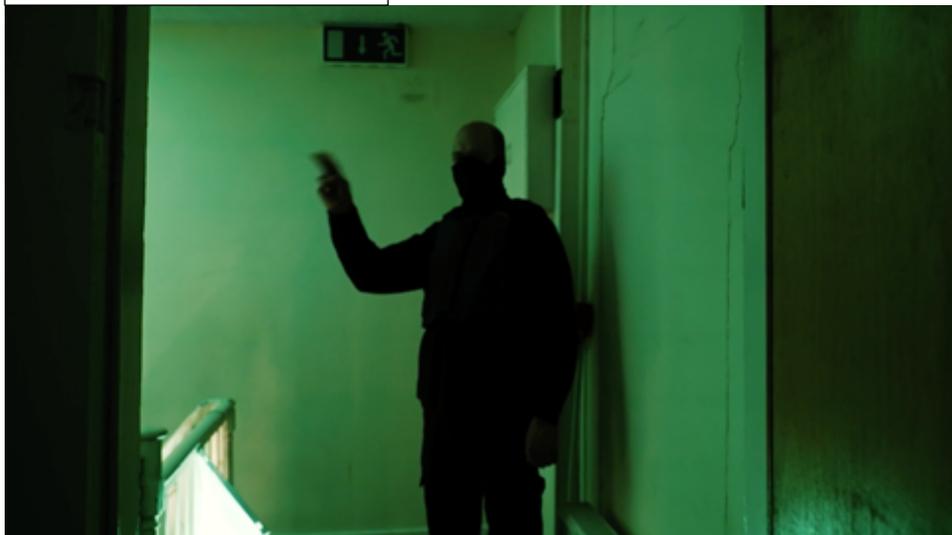


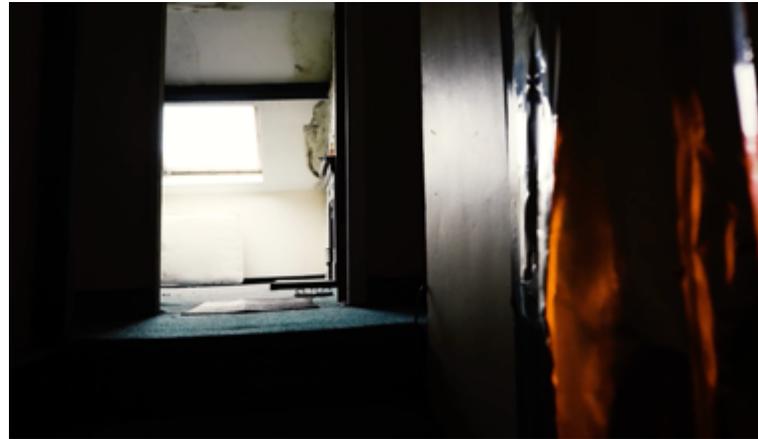


The security guard is in the corridor, blocking the route down the stairs. Another room is lit from inside, but the door is closed. I walk towards the security guard, aiming to leave.



The guard points up a narrow staircase. He directs me firmly to go up the stairs and his arm movements feel abrupt. I climb the stairs and pass by where air blows through a rip in a covered window.





I climb the narrow stairs, and turn a corner to see an attic room. There are flip flops at the door. It smells stale and musty.



'The Attic'. There's piles of soil and semi buried TV monitors / other electrical debris on the floor; a mattress propped against a wall (it's grubby) and another covered with a sheet on the floor. I walk in.



As I enter the attic, a sound piece turns on. It's a male voice saying "It's 4 in the morning and the front door's nailed shut .." and further how debt is their noose while tending the plants. It has a sci-fi echo like effect with drone sound, and it's pace is steady. I walk in amongst the debris towards the bed. There's filth and cobwebs and I can't quite see out of the sky-light windows. In the kitchen area there's glass flasks, funnels and other laboratory paraphernalia, some with liquids inside. There's unopened bags of compost and a green light chasing through the debris. I walk toward the door to leave and see small weighing scales, TV remote controls, a theremoter and a mobile phone. There are huge clumps of marsh grass growing in the adjacent bathroom. The poetic natrritive continues to play.







I leave the attic, and follow the security guard down the stairs in silence. The atmosphere feels sombre and there is a stale smell. As we walk down, I hear the voice of a woman singing 'Growers may work under threat of extreme violence ...' (and more). It is faint, and we head towards it.





'Opera Singer 2'. We reach the (grand) first floor landing and there is a projected image of a women on the huge blacked-out window, singing. Her image is on a long canvas drop and either side is a flickering pinky/red light on black builders plastic. I stand on the balcony and watch/listen as the opera singer tells a story of being 'held captive in an abandoned house ..' and of being forced to work in an illegal cannabis farm. The narrative is factually harsh - in contrast to her lilting voice. I am unsure where the security guard is, but feel him lurking.



The security guard appears from the darkness and bodily directs me downstairs; I circle down past the opera singer, towards the metal shield barriers.





'Rat-Run 2'. Now on the ground floor, I walk through the high steel shield fencing towards the window light above the front door.



The door is opened by the security guard onto the bright street. I am a bit blinded, and step outside. Across the road a taxi is parked with its engine running. It's the same taxi and driver that brought me here; when the driver sees me looking over, he drives away. I walk down the steps onto the footpath.

Photographic credits: Claire Ryan, Clodagh Piper, Jed Niezgoda, Marcin Lewandowski, Marie Brett
Design layout with captions credit: Marie Brett

THE DAY-CROSSING FARM
MARIE BRETT, 2021
