

EPISODE 4: THE UNDERCURRENT

[0:05 Narrator:]

The Law is a White Dog is a podcast series developed for TULCA Festival of Visual Arts 2020. Made during a global pandemic, the series places, artists and artworks in dialogue with lawyers, advocates and activists. As a festival of visual art produced in a time of confinement and restriction for many, the podcast series explores unseen dimensions of the artists' work.

Rory Pilgrim is an artist from the UK, based in the Netherlands. In an age that increasingly relies on technological interaction, Rory's work creates connections between activism, spirituality, and music. The work explores how we form community locally and globally from both beyond and behind our screens.

This episode of *The Law is a White Dog* focuses on 'The Undercurrent', a film by Rory Pilgrim made in 2019 in collaboration with a group of youth climate activists in Boise, Idaho, in the USA. Significantly, the young people involved are excluded from many democratic processes (such as voting) because of their age, their status as 'minors'. Here they are shouting from a mountaintop in Idaho:

[01:26]

How far can your voice carry?

[01:38]

How far can your voice carry?

[01:50 Narrator:]

Issues of climate justice flow into other aspects of the young people's lives, including family, religion, friendship, and struggles for gender recognition. Here is Claire Earl:

[02:02]

Animals lose homes, and like plants lose life and stuff, and people aren't like relating their own loss to like the loss of the climate... which they should be because you know, it's still loss. Still loss of life, still loss of homes, and it's not different just because it's not like happening to you, you know? Yeah.

[02:25 Narrator:]

In this episode, we hear two songs from *The Undercurrent*, sung by Declan Rowe John. And We also hear Rory reflecting on how they work with music, speaking to us from their home in the Netherlands.

[02:36 instrumental music; Declan Rowe John sings:]

Baby...

[4:06]

It's so close you can feel it, catch fire when you breathe in. No way to escape it... So tend to me fast but stop if I'm bleeding, a hole in your heart but you can't even feel it.

[04.39]

But it hurts... It hurts.

[04:52]

Backwards, forwards, greenwards. Backwards, forwards, greenwards.

[instrumental music]

[05.23]

There's a hole in your heart, there's a hole in this engine, baby. There's a hole in our heart, there's a hole in this instance, baby. Baby [instrumental music]

[06:00]

There's a hole in our heart, drive away and go to the water... Drive away, drive away.

[06.27]

Drive away, drive away.

[06:44]

So tend to me fast but stop if I'm bleeding, a hole in your heart but you can't even feel it...But it hurts... It hurts.

Backwards, forwards, greenwards. Backwards, forwards, greenwards.

[instrumental music]

[07:43]

Bring a towel, bring a towel to the water. Bring a towel and keep it dry. Bring a towel, bring a towel to the water. Bring a towel and keep it dry.

[08:17 Rory Pilgrim:]

Music for me is, I think one of the most important foundations for my work as an artist. I learned music classically as, as a child, playing piano and clarinet and then went on to play and pop bands. And although I went to study visual arts, I kept writing music. Because I think for me, it's perhaps the most intuitive way to work things through emotionally. So I'm always working on a series of songs, or melodies, and also song lyrics, because I think song lyrics for me are a space in which words can also be transformed. And through writing this music or having an ongoing practice of songwriting, it often is that material from that informs the work I do in a much more in socially engaged way, whether it be words, which start conversations in workshops, or words, or images, which might also become the titles of works themselves.

And then through working with others or being quite collaborative, through workshops or conversations, it's often that that sculpts the music as a secondary stage. So for music that you will hear in this podcast, the one you just heard, The Towel, came from a songwriting session I did in Berlin, the week before I left for Idaho. I had this very quick window of an afternoon to work with Robyn Haddon, a singer from Sheffield. And we spent the afternoon just sitting down at the keyboard and, and just thinking what words came, or moving not so much the practice of thinking, but just letting the words in the melodies for flow from our subconscious. And the result of our afternoon was The Towel. And another song, Three Waters.

[10:31]

And I took those songs to Idaho as almost these sort of shell or skeleton-like forms to then develop, and be influenced from what I encountered there. And I found an

incredible singer on Soundcloud called Declan Rowe John, who was 13 at the time, and there was a contact to her music teacher on the SoundCloud and I wrote, and luckily, she wanted to collaborate. So we spent several afternoons in very hot weather of Idaho, going through the songs, and just developing them to her voice. And also, I asked her to write song lyrics, which fitted to her.

[11:22]

And we also developed the song from scratch called MC– MC, which you will later on hear in the podcast.

[11:33]

But in trying to process into words what we were thinking or dealing with, with the climate crisis, maybe one recurring refrain, which originates from that first session in Berlin, is this phrase, 'the towel' in the song you heard.

[11:53]

And listening back to the session, I heard this kept hearing this refrain we use, which was bring a towel, bring a towel, bring a towel to the water. And I realized that that must have something to do with the phrase to throw in the towel, which I think comes from boxing, but is used as a phrase to indicate giving up or surrendering, and with the climate crisis, of course, that is not even a question. So we bring the towel instead.

[12:27]

And, yeah, I suppose the songs had quite a transformative life as, as the process of The Undercurrent went on, which is through editing and gathering the material. The final stage was to write the arrangements. And I decided that it felt right to give these almost like campfire-like songs, quite an orchestral sound, to get this balance between fragility, and the first sort of monumental or overwhelming scale of this situation that we face is.

[13:10 instrumental music, Declan Rowe John sings:]
Cause I wanna feel, I wanna feel, I wanna feel
[13:16]
Cause I wanna feel, I wanna feel, I wanna feel
[13:20]
Cause I wanna feel, I wanna feel, I wanna feel
[13:27]
That everything matters
[13:30]
Maximum crisis...Maximum calm
[13:37]
From maximum recover...to the earth our mother [instrumental music]
[13:59]
It might feel too easy to say, but I'm gonna... Cause it's all that I can say, and I
wanna.
[14:13]
Maximum crisis, maximum calm. Maximum recover, to the earth our mother.

[15:00 Narrator:]
'The Law is a White Dog' podcast series was commissioned by TULCA Festival of
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Editor Alan Meaney
Music by Rory Pilgrim
The Towel is co-written by Rory Pilgrim and Robyn Haddon
MC - MC is written by Rory Pilgrim
Both songs are performed by Declan Rowe John
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Strings and Woodwind recorded with the Up North Session Orchestra at Airtight
Studios, Manchester and mixed by Emil van Steenwijk at Studio Charlatan,
Rotterdam.