

Holly Márie Parnell
May 3 — Jul 26, 2025



Cirrus

Western Front is pleased to present a solo exhibition by the Irish Canadian artist-filmmaker Holly Márie Parnell. Rooted in a documentary approach and shaped by personal encounters, Parnell’s work explores ideas around connection and estrangement in our present moment. The exhibition features the debut of *Cirrus* (2025), a new two-channel video work.

Named after the slender sensory appendage found on various animals—used to grasp, feed, anchor, or navigate without sight—*Cirrus* traverses an interior landscape shaped by the perspectives of artists Min Kim and Mia Wennerstrand. Set between two European capitals hollowed out by late capitalism, *Cirrus* immerses viewers in the affective atmosphere of today. It asks: What does it mean to be an artist in a time of economic disparity, cultural malaise, and political impotence?

As cityscapes shift like changing theatre backdrops, a quiet dialogue emerges between screen and spectator—where the simple acts of watching, listening, and waiting create a subtle architecture of connection. In this space, Min’s intimate

correspondences reveal stories of mysterious creatures—moles, lemurs, pink fairy armadillos—tracing her own animal attunement around a felt absence. In contrast, Mia’s voice arrives as a spectral transmission: a fragmented lecture broadcast across an empty theatre, deserted dance floor, abandoned theme park, and classroom, asking: “Who talks anymore? Who listens anymore?”

Cirrus is thirty-three minutes in duration played on a continuous loop. Visitors are welcome to enter and exit the gallery at any time.

On the opening night, Parnell will present a live video performance which continues her *Desktop Compositions* (2014–) series. A recorded version of the performance will play as an installation in the Grand Luxe Hall during gallery hours from May 7 to 31.

To accompany the exhibition, Western Front invited poet Lotte L.S. to creatively respond. The commissioned text, titled “Useful Creature” (2025), is included in the pages following.

USEFUL CREATURE

by Lotte L.S.

I will call the years that come after this
by the names of the years that came before:
little violet sadnesses freaky easterly wind
its tender caresses
when «the family» made some kind of sense,
or at least pretended to (a secret in which, *like*, well, *you know*;
marbles rolling down an uncarpeted stairwell).
In the Premier Inn it is dawn again.

(*thud thud thud*)

I told you I needed you to be a mother
and to care for me and in 1976 you replied by saying,
“I can’t be that person all of the time.”
In 1962 we dutifully scanned each QR code, we woke
calmly in the middle of the night, we called every relative
to tell them the terrible news.

In actual fact this has never been the case:

I remember this now to unfasten meaning.

Back then no-one could tell us
we were part of something bigger
than the family.

(*Shhhhh.*)

REMEMBER : work is night too—)

Somewhere below ground something is burrowing,
arriving to the surface only after a rain,
protected from the desires of another remorseless sunset, another sunrise
(no way to know whether it is morning or night
on the surface of the earth)
no need to be in / want to be with / long for “the light”.

Somewhere above ground velvet scraps
are being collected in a dark wooden box,
somewhere something is slotted into the mind
for safekeeping—
somewhere «vision» begins to happen.

The animals were trapped alive and taken to the laboratory.

The cirrus sac is long and narrow, unarmed and slightly coiled, stained in celestine blue
and mounted in balsam.

Spires of green seaweed gather in the glovebox of a small car
in an anonymous Parisian suburb.

Clotted saliva hangs off a single bare fluorescent bulb.
We bite our tongues to keep
 from whispering,
 fingers quietly pushing—
each sinking back into our childhood, unable to distinguish muscle from bone.
The brain sits within the dark insides of a jar in formaldehyde, inside a box,
in a storage cupboard, in the basement of a university
 kept lit 24/7 by bare fluorescent bulbs. *The animals*
were trapped alive and transported to the laboratory.
The brain a “bodily feature” that positively identifies «her»
 in lieu of fingerprints in an unfurnished apartment, in a room above a shop,
at the top of the stairs, a corridor kept lit 24/7 by bare fluorescent bulbs.
Regardless of whether it was morning or night
 on the surface of the earth,
 I thought you said you
 had somewhere to be?

Because the sunrise is not mine
it is by definition beautiful—
 arriving to the surface only after a rain,
no need to be in / want to be with / long for “the light”.
Cruelty is unchosen, but
 violence can be anything:
soil remorselessly probed 275ft underground,
fingers grasping an unripe peach from a tree; believing
 a hushed rumour
whispered through a hurried window
in houses always owned by someone else
 slivers of dirty light
 grazing somebody else’s emotions,
chasing the corridors of this so-called ‘democratic’ state.
This song, these intolerable headaches, these biopsies stained
 in celestial blue—they were all for you,
whether or not you noticed the weight of earthworms
 pushing upwards through the soil
 in the bottom-right hand corner of the frame:
not very «official» information,
but did you know their movement is equivalent
 to the global rates of tectonic uplift?
Have you tasted the dark surface of solid earth?
«Vision» begins to happen, and then one “night” the body morphs
 into a biological hazard, a semi-autonomous organ,
 unable to distinguish muscle from bone—
« singing giggling shouting asking playing »
Not sprung from history but sunk within it.
 I thought you said you
 had somewhere to be?

Her brain sits within the dark insides of a jar in formaldehyde, inside a box,
in a storage cupboard, in the basement of a university
 kept lit 24/7 by bare fluorescent bulbs.
Bright illuminators of the corridors of this so-called ‘democratic’ state.

One morning I woke up
and gave birth to no-one: or was it my mother,
my grandmother, my great-great-grandmother?
Fingers quietly pushing—
and suddenly, trees open to
a city / that births a language in which every sentence
must mimic the final vowels of each first word.
Onto which we replaced our own weight
with something heavier, darker, more easy to ripen.
“Dark, dusk, dawn again.”
(*thud thud thud*)
I would eviscerate my own thoughts if it meant I could stop caring,
but let me start

with a metaphor:
When was the last time you—
you—, you—,
you woke up and knew how to begin the day?
What summers do you remember? I’m going
to put a sky in it. The sky gets stuck
and it’s shaped like a moon.
The birds mimic the cave
the woman the light
the legroom the thought—
the one that reaches them first.
The father The family The terrible rain outside.
Night works so hard to make us dream.

One “night” I slept for 31 hours straight—
ribbon-like worms writhing in the gaps
between toes, suddenly accumulating in the glovebox
of a small car in an anonymous Parisian suburb (a thought:
in actual fact
this has never been the case).
«Vision» begins to happen, paper knives are split in two;
the brain still sits
waiting
in the dark.

(*thud thud thud*)

If I could
I would make theory from my defensiveness.
It would become an art I would practice from dawn to dusk.
It would become a velvet scrap concealed in a dark wooden box.
It would be my animal trapped alive and taken to the laboratory.
It would be my reason for loving and not my protection against it.

I would move up
in the animal kingdom:
(studying worms, rats, molluscs, foxes, chickens, cats)
before falling prey to a huge historical neurosis.
Consciousness has no location in the brain.
It is a function of language.
We would become the work of our nights if we let it.

Notes

Some lines have been borrowed from the film *Cirrus* (2025) by Holly Márie Parnell. The line “The animals were trapped alive and taken to the laboratory” is borrowed from the study *On Two New Linstowiid Cestodes from Australian Dasyurid Marsupials* (1977) by Ian Beveridge (University of Neuchâtel). Some lines have been borrowed from the essay “Imprisonment and Excessive Femininity: Reading Ulrike Meinhof’s Brain” (2010) by Amanda Third, and the book *Seule, au fond du gouffre* (“Alone, at the Bottom of the Abyss”) (1989) by Véronique Le Guen.

Biographies

Holly Márie Parnell is an Irish Canadian artist-filmmaker based between the United Kingdom and County Wexford, Ireland. Working in film and expanded cinema, her practice looks at ideas around connectedness and the ways in which fundamental needs are being threatened and eroded within our current economic and institutional frameworks. She is an alumnus of Film London’s FLAMIN Fellowship and an MFA graduate of the Slade School of Fine Art, London.

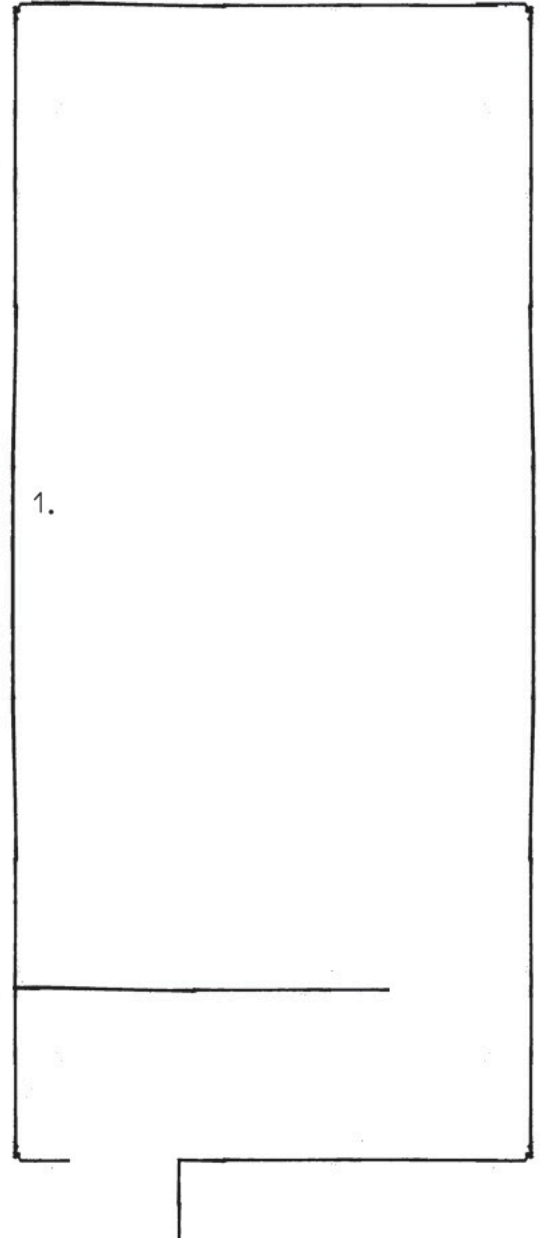
Lotte L.S. is a poet. Her work includes *THIS ENERGY WASTED BY FLIGHT—* (2023), and *A town, three cities, a fig, a riot, two blue hyacinths, three beginnings...* (2020). She was the 2019 recipient of the C.D Wright Memorial Scholarship for Poets to Community of Writers in Nevada, US. She lives in the UK.

List of Works

Floorplan

1. Holly Márie Parnell
Cirrus (2025)
Video, 32 min. 57 sec.
Courtesy of the artist.

Performances and texts: Min Kim and Mia Wennerstrand
Director: Holly Márie Parnell
Composer and sound design: Mia Wennerstrand
Additional sound (bells): Ellen Virman
Advisor: Ane Lopez
Translator: Annika Norvik
Poster design: Panos Barras



Project Team

Curator: Susan Gibb
Copy editor: Trey Le, Kiel Torres
Graphic design: Line-Gry Hørup
Technician: Daniel Pickering,
Ben Wilson

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