# INTER ALIA
# TRANSLATION

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN DAN HOWARD-BIRT, LIVIA GRAVIL, CATALINA MARIA UNGUREANU AND ELIZABETH LANGLEY

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**DAN:** The project that you've initiated collectively on the Painters Network South West (PNSW) Instagram feed already presents an obvious translation – from physical painting to virtual exhibition. Let's talk about the journeys between the physical and digital that you have experienced in making this show. I'm thinking about the ways you have curated images of your work for it, or perhaps made new works as stand-ins for the old. What changes were you were forced to make when you thought about a physical object that would no longer have a physical presence?

**LIVIA:** I had already travelled back to my parents' home before 'lockdown', so I didn't have a lot of my work with me. Most of it was left hundreds of miles away in the studio at Falmouth. All I had were dodgy-looking phone photos of my paintings. I was forced to use these as my material. I ended up discovering that there was a lot I could do with the photos that I couldn't necessarily do with my physical paintings. They're much easier to crop, rotate, manipulate. You can also play around with making the photos pretend to be something else. A small painting can pretend to be a big painting for example. In the photos there is also extra information that becomes part of the image, like the stuff surrounding the painting.

**DAN:** That sounds full of possibility then! The dodgy phone photos that were relics, or aide memoirs, of paintings have enabled a departure from your normal ways of working. What did you actually do with these photographs?

**LIVIA:** I mostly used them to collage bits of different paintings together. Come to think of it, the images in my paintings have always in a way been collaged, because they depict impossible, composite landscapes. But the process of collaging within them was always something that was more unconscious or instinctive. So, making collages from phone photos does fit my practice and its interests.

**DAN:** I'm fascinated by collage – particularly those from the analogue era of the early 20th Century, where collaging meant something very physical. Now we're talking about collage in a digital realm, which could involve manipulating layers and superimposition… Catalina, you are often moving between printed and painted languages. When you were making work for the PNSW show were you conscious of additional translations occurring between the physical and digital?

**CATALINA:** Physical work placed online becomes a representation of the real. Something I noticed in the process of translating my work for online content was the battle I had trying to edit a photograph to make it look like the real thing, without editing it so much that the photo ends up looking worse, or better, or completely different from the original. In my paintings I use a very specific pink pigment that can't be rendered in any reproduction. So, on Instagram or in photographs, the paintings always look completely different. This is important because the digital never completely translates a physical object; the pink means you have to see the paintings in the flesh.

**DAN:** I'm intrigued that when editing a photographic document of a painting you walk a tightrope between value judgements; you edit a photo despite knowing that it can never match the painting.

**CATALINA:** Yes, it's a conundrum. Editing a document of an existing work is not like making a new work, which has no limits to what it can be. Sometimes I have to stop myself from putting an image up online, because it looks fake.

**DAN:** We're talking about truth, and a responsibility that the maker has in the relationship between 'a work' and its documentation. What you are describing is a sliding scale of options for manipulating truth.
Elizabeth, in the last conversation we talked about a connection between the image and object in your work and how its installation in physical space is necessary to the works understanding. Is there more you can say about what gets lost and gained in its translation to photographs uploaded to a virtual non-space?

**ELIZABETH:** I find so much about the material quality of a physical work doesn't come across in a photograph – its tactility, weight, and the intricacies of the artist's gestures that go into making it – the emotion or personality. The thing I gain through translating my work to fit an online framework, is the sense of reflection it enables me to have on my physical works. The digital version becomes a related but new work, which I can use as a tool for comparison.

**DAN:** From what you and Catalina have both described, it sounds like the authentic and untranslatable part of a painting might be tied to its materiality. Which means the translatable, mobile or anarchic element of a painting is perhaps the image.
Let's go back to the idea of a physical exhibition, which you are not making and the online show which you have made. Is the conversation around not creating a physical show, one of loss? Or are there elements about the process that you've found empowering?

**LIVIA:** At Falmouth I specialised for three years in making material, tactile objects. In switching to this digitised way of working, I suddenly feel untrained – like I can't fully speak the language.

**CATALINA:** I think and make in an analogue way, so I'm really missing the physical show.

**ELIZABETH:** Something that might happen as a result of this moment is that galleries and universities could run two versions of the same show – a digital and a physical one. This will allow the benefits of both to exist – the geographical reach of a digital show and the intimacy of a physical one. Speaking from our perspective as graduating students, I think its spurred lots of us on to create our own collectives and shows, rather than rely on givens. The loss of a physical show has also made me realise the importance of it. I've spent much time during lockdown considering how I would approach constructing a future physical show, using photoshop to play around with mock-up exhibitions, to imagine how they might look in the real.

**DAN:** It is fascinating that this moment has nurtured a hunger for a physical exhibition, which you've been exploring digitally in order to later translate back. I want to pose one last question to you all– about translations in your work on a more personal level. You have each moved to study in Falmouth from a place outside of Cornwall. Do you feel this re-location brought about a different translation of yourself in the works you make?

**CATALINA:** My work has perhaps become more 'Romanian' since being in Falmouth. When you're immersed within your own culture and surrounded by people already familiar with it, the need to describe it is less. It's complicated though. In the art education I received at home, I was always given traditional 'Romanian' subjects to paint from, which used to tire me. Here, I feel there is more importance to show people around me things they might not know about, so I've unexpectedly been drawing from this education again. In Romania it was incredibly restrictive though, so I've found a sense of liberation in my work by being at a distance from it.

**ELIZABETH:** I'd also say 'yes', the move has been liberating, but in terms of what I make, I've ended up painting images of my home and childhood. I've pulled out all this 'personal baggage' to show everyone at Falmouth! Despite still being tethered to where I grew up, it is the distance that has ultimately made me willing to expose and process these intimate moments.

**LIVIA:** I'm from Doncaster in North Yorkshire, where the landscape is totally flat –a bar of land and sky. I came to study at Falmouth for the landscape, particularly the sea. The imagined landscapes I paint have certainly been affected by, and reflect, what I found in the Cornish landscape. The contrast has inspired a third thing.