TEMPLE BAR GALLERY + STUDIOS WRITING COMMISSION 2024

Cathy Sweeney
Lantana

Written in response to **Morgan Quaintance**, *I'll Always Remember...*

Cathy Sweeney is a short story writer and novelist. Her fiction has been published in The Stinging Fly, The Dublin Review and Granta, and has been broadcast on BBC Radio 4. In 2020, her collection of short stories, Modern Times, was published by The Stinging Fly Press, Dublin, and by W&N, London. Her debut novel Breakdown was published by W&N in January 2024.

In 2026, she works on a novel based on the months Oscar Wilde spent in Naples following his release from prison in 1897.

The **Temple Bar Gallery + Studios Writing Commission** aims to expand ideas around writing about art by inviting Irish authors to create a series of pieces inspired by the exhibitions at Temple Bar Gallery + Studios. In 2024, TBG+S has commissioned Nidhi Zak/Aria Eipe to make a piece of writing inspired by each of the exhibitions in the gallery programme.

Over the last twelve years Temple Bar Gallery + Studios has commissioned ground-breaking Irish writers to write on the gallery programme. Previous writers include Sara Baume (2015), Claire-Louise Bennett (2016), Gavin Corbett (2017), Doireann Ní Ghríofa (2018), Annemarie Ní Churreáin (2019), and Ian Maleney (2020), Nicole Flattery (2021), Thomas Morris (2022), Padraig Regan (2023), Nidhi Zak/Aria Eipe (2024), and Gustav Parker Hibbett (2025).

The texts are available to download from www.templebargallery.com and printed copies are available in the gallery.

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Lantana

Dusk falls on a park in the city, and in that brief transition from white to black, a red line appears in the darkening sky. Talking and laughing, two people, sitting on a bench, notice the red line It is a symbol of something but they do not know what. While they are laughing and talking, they do not hear the warning. The gates of the park are being locked with metal chains and metal padlocks. One person takes a phone from a pocket but the battery is dead. The other digs in a tote bag, but finds nothing, only a penknife, a lighter, a pack of menthol cigarettes. Darkness changes everything. The lake, the playground, the sand where old people play boules, the coffee truck, the skate park, all contort and dissemble in the thin light of a thin moon. Can it be possible that if a person takes off a hoodie and gives it to another person who is cold, that the world can break? Can it fall off its axis with such a gesture, break through barriers, fall and fall, break into a million pieces, reform again on a new axis, become a new world? In the time that it takes for night to replace day, an elaborate set is taken apart, another is constructed. But look on the bright side! There is a water fountain in the park and small mammals and water fowl and – what luck! – chestnuts. Plus, all those trees for firewood, all those lamp post wires that can be cut down, repurposed. Also, in the centre, there is a small fenced off area containing fun sculptures made of steel and wood and a small wooden hut that serves perfectly as a shelter, and, when summer comes again, as it always does, and the sun lifts the symbol from the fabric of the hoodie – an elongated tick – and the two people, for a reason they do not understand, hang it on the wall of the hut which has become quite cosy. So cosy, in fact, that slowly, slowly, over time, they stay there more and more, within the safe boundary of what they have come to think of as home. Only leaving to hunt, forage, fetch water. After all, someone must tend the fire. But, also, at night in the darkness, strange sounds infiltrate from beyond the outer boundary, sounds that are not animal or bird or the susurration of trees, but something else, something non-natural, a dysregulated hum, hostile, a noise both people are determined to always forget. So instead, in firelight, they talk and laugh about the red line they saw in the sky once – a symbol, with some forgotten meaning, like the elongated tick on the wall, like those flowers – what was their name? – Lantana – those bright yellow flowers their mothers used to water with metal watering cans on warm summer evenings a long time ago.

Note: Lantana (Lantana camara) is associated in folk traditions with energy clearing, setting strong personal boundaries and transformation.