



HUDDLE TESTS

RHONA BYRNE

Temple Bar Gallery + Studios

11 September – 7 November 2015

I visit *Huddle tests* on a Monday, the only day of the week the gallery is closed. All the hoods and hats perch on their hooks, the cloaks and capes droop down the walls. They are puppets with their strings cut, pantomime animals locked away in a storage cupboard in the wardrobe department, only allowed out for a brief run in winter. I think of my sister's wetsuit when we both lived at home. She used to hang it by the kitchen stove to dry and I'd come down in the night for a glass of water and startle at the sight of a body-shaped thing hovering in the dark.

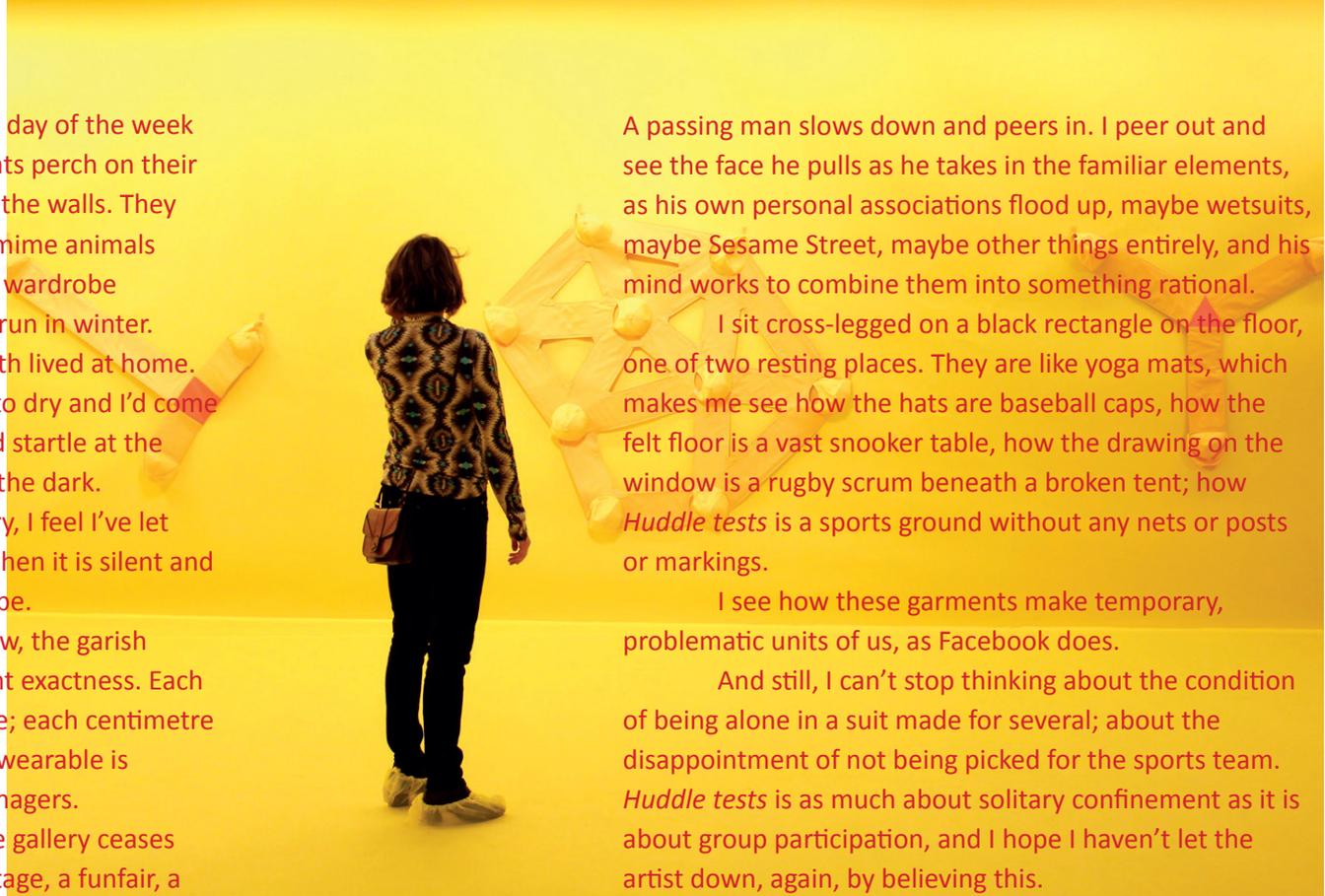
Standing in my socks in the gallery, I feel I've let the artist down by visiting *Huddle tests* when it is silent and immobile, the opposite of how it should be.

But I love it. The entrancing yellow, the garish uniformity, the component-by-component exactness. Each hook is neatly stitched inside a tiny sleeve; each centimetre of floor and wall is carpeted in felt, each wearable is tailored to withstand the rowdiest of teenagers.

I lift a hood from its hook and the gallery ceases to be a storage cupboard. It becomes a stage, a funfair, a padded cell. The heavy fabric softly squeezes me; I think of the velvet drapes in my grandmother's living room. When my sister and I were both children, we used to wrap ourselves up in them, and hide.

But now that I'm inside a wearable, I'm not sure what to do. I pad majestically across the floor. Sweeping, swishing, trailing. Suddenly I remember a film I saw, a documentary about Carroll Spinney, the puppeteer who has operated Big Bird since 1969. I think of this man, being watched by the world, and yet at the same time, alone inside a constrictive, cumbersome costume.

The blinds go up. The street appears, bit by bit, and the gallery appears to the street. An exploded view of the yellow brick road, a beacon in a grey city, a grey afternoon.



A passing man slows down and peers in. I peer out and see the face he pulls as he takes in the familiar elements, as his own personal associations flood up, maybe wetsuits, maybe Sesame Street, maybe other things entirely, and his mind works to combine them into something rational.

I sit cross-legged on a black rectangle on the floor, one of two resting places. They are like yoga mats, which makes me see how the hats are baseball caps, how the felt floor is a vast snooker table, how the drawing on the window is a rugby scrum beneath a broken tent; how *Huddle tests* is a sports ground without any nets or posts or markings.

I see how these garments make temporary, problematic units of us, as Facebook does.

And still, I can't stop thinking about the condition of being alone in a suit made for several; about the disappointment of not being picked for the sports team. *Huddle tests* is as much about solitary confinement as it is about group participation, and I hope I haven't let the artist down, again, by believing this.

Sara Baume



TBG+S Writing Commission 2015

The logo for Temple Bar Gallery + Studios is a black right-angled triangle pointing towards the bottom right. Inside the triangle, the words "TEMPLE BAR", "GALLERY +", and "STUDIOS" are stacked vertically in a white, sans-serif font.

Temple Bar Gallery + Studios (TBG+S) aims to support artists to make new work and to introduce new audiences to contemporary art. As part of this aim, TBG+S is pleased to launch the first year of the TBG+S Writing Commission. The aim of the commission is to both support the work of an emerging writer and to explore different approaches to writing about art for a variety of audiences and media.

In the pilot year of the commission, TBG+S has commissioned author Sara Baume to write a response to each of the five programmed exhibitions in the 2015/16 gallery programme. This series of short essays will be available online, in the gallery and broadcast on RTE's 'Arena' radio programme. At the end of the year, TBG+S will publish a small booklet of the collected essays.

Sara Baume studied fine art and creative writing, and has published both criticism and fiction. In 2014 she won the Davy Byrne's Short Story Award, and in 2015 she won the Hennessy Award for New Irish Writing. Her debut novel, *Spill Simmer Falter Wither*, was published by Tramp Press in February 2015.

You can hear a recording of Sara Baume reading her essay for RTÉ Arena, Radio 1, on the TBG+S Soundcloud page soundcloud.com/templebar-gallery-studio

Photos by Kasia Kaminska