

Twilight Time

ANN QUINN OUTLINES HER RECENT RESIDENCY AT THE RAGDALE FOUNDATION IN LAKE FOREST, ILLINOIS, USA.

IN SPRING OF this year, I returned to the Ragdale Foundation in the United States for a residency. This was my first residency in five years, and the timing was perfect for me to step back from my practice, as I had been intensely working towards my forthcoming solo exhibition at Taylor Galleries. These new paintings are based on locations in East Donegal and parts of Dublin, where I have spent time over the past two years, and films that I have watched. Most of the paintings are set at twilight.

This was my second residency at Ragdale. After I finished the first residency in autumn 2016, I hoped to return some day to see the prairie in a different season. I got to fulfil my wish by returning in spring when all four seasons could be experienced.

The Ragdale Foundation is a non-profit artists community located on the former country estate of architect, Howard Van Doren Shaw, and poet and playwright, Frances Wells Shaw. Howard designed and built the house in 1897. It was established as an artists' community in 1976 by Shaw's granddaughter, poet Alice Judson Hayes. Ragdale offers 18-day residencies for visual artists, writers, poets, composers, dancers, and performers. It is situated close to 50 acres of wild prairie, is a 15 minute-walk from the town of Lake Forest, and about an hour by train to downtown Chicago, where I made several trips to visit museums and galleries.

I found the light blinding when I arrived in Chicago from Ireland in late March. It felt like I had been transported into the coloured Land of Oz. Stepping back into the prairie for the first time in nearly seven years was very powerful. I had made so much work about this place from 2017 to 2020; it was like meeting a long-lost love.

During my recent residency at Ragdale, I was given the Meadow Studio, a magnificent huge studio situated in the prairie and built on the grounds of the original Meadow Studio of the sculptor Sylvia Shaw Judson, daughter of the Shaws. I came across a small enigmatic tombstone near the Meadow Studio, marking the grave of a much-loved pet belonging to the Shaws, a fox terrier that was buried there in 1909. I saw all kinds of birdlife through the studio windows while I worked, and during my walks through the prairie – cardinal, bluebird, American robin, tree swallow, red winged blackbird, and the Canada goose. I also saw deer regularly at dusk. Packs of up to nine coyotes have been seen on the grounds of Ragdale, and some of the other residents heard their strange cries at night. I was not lucky enough to see or hear a coyote, but I was always aware of their presence.

There were eight writers and one poet/dancer in residence with me; we had amazing dinners together every night, cooked by the wonderful chef Linda. Each bedroom and studio has a stack of blue notebooks in which each resident writes something about their time at Ragdale before they leave. I slept in the Yellow Room, where

the oldest entry in the notebook was dated 1981. It was very moving to read through the entries of so many creative people that stayed in this room over the past 40 years.

While I am on residency, I do not work from my surroundings, but spend a lot of time outside taking hundreds of photographs to use as source material for possible future paintings. After each residency, I put this source material away and forget about it. At least a year has to pass, before I can look at it, but once I begin revisiting this source material, I might be making work from it for a number of years.

I look for atmosphere and story when I am out walking with my camera. I might see an animal or there might be something about a human figure in a setting that interests me. For example, my painting *Halloween Boy* from 2018 was based on Halloween night during my time at Ragdale in 2016. The staff arranged for me to go to a suburb where hundreds of children were trick or treating so I could take photographs, wearing a witch's hat to blend in with the crowds. I took about 80 photographs but used only one of them – of a boy dressed up as The Joker. For the painting, I placed him standing in a swamp in the prairie.

On my last night at Ragdale this year, two of the resident writers modelled for me in the prairie at sunset. A red-tailed hawk landed in front of us; I will never forget the loud thud it made as it touched the ground. I will let my time there settle and see what paintings unfold in the future.

Ann Quinn is an artist based in Donegal. Her solo exhibition, 'Twilight Time', runs at Taylor Galleries from 5 to 28 October.

annquinn.org



Ann Quinn, *Blue Cadillac*, 2022, oil on panel; photograph by Daniel Lipstein, courtesy of the artist.



Ann Quinn, *Twilight on Harrington Street*, 2022, oil on panel; photograph by Daniel Lipstein, courtesy of the artist.



Ann Quinn, *Meadow Studio at the Ragdale Foundation*, 2022; photograph by Ann Quinn.