

Panel 22

Ekphrasis and the Pictorial in 20th-21st Century Fiction

Reading Sara Baume's *A Line Made by Walking* as Endurance Art

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Sara Baume's *A Line Made by Walking* (2017) draws both its title and structure from Richard Long's 1967 conceptual artwork. While some critics interpret the novel as a literary reenactment of conceptual art, this paper proposes a complementary reading through the lens of endurance art, since Baume's engagement with Long's work demonstrates a self-reflexive appropriation that reorients the conceptual gesture toward the protagonist's agonizing experiences amid depression. In the novel, the phrase "a line made by walking" surfaces twice (99, 301), each highlighting a specific experience of enduring pain over time. First, in reference to the twenty-nine hours between Van Gogh's self-inflicted gunshot and his eventual death; and second, to the months-long walk that an uncontacted tribe takes to the modern world. For Frankie, the depressed artist-narrator, these references do not invoke the brief episode of Long's walk back and forth across a patch of grass, but instead a prolonged and suffocating duration that reflects her own depressive temporality, in which the lived present feels unbearably long and seemingly endless. Examining Frankie's artistic practice throughout the narrative, including her frequent use of ekphrasis to evoke contemporary art, particularly endurance art, and her photographic project of documenting dead animals with forensic captions, this paper argues that these intermedial techniques are self-consciously used to register her affective and physical labor over time while living with depression. In doing so, the narrative itself self-reflexively becomes a form of endurance art, as if she were practicing Long's *A Line Made by Walking*, but over a vastly intensified and extended duration. Furthermore, the reader is drawn into a similarly prolonged and unsettling encounter, evoking the unease and discomfort typically associated with witnessing endurance performances.

Biography

Li Ye is a PhD candidate at Nanyang Technological University. Her research explores the aesthetic and formal functions of artist-narrators in contemporary Anglophone fiction, with a particular focus on Irish literature. She has published her research in *Critique* and *English Studies in Africa* and one short story in *PR&TA*. She can be reached at liye0011@e.ntu.edu.sg.