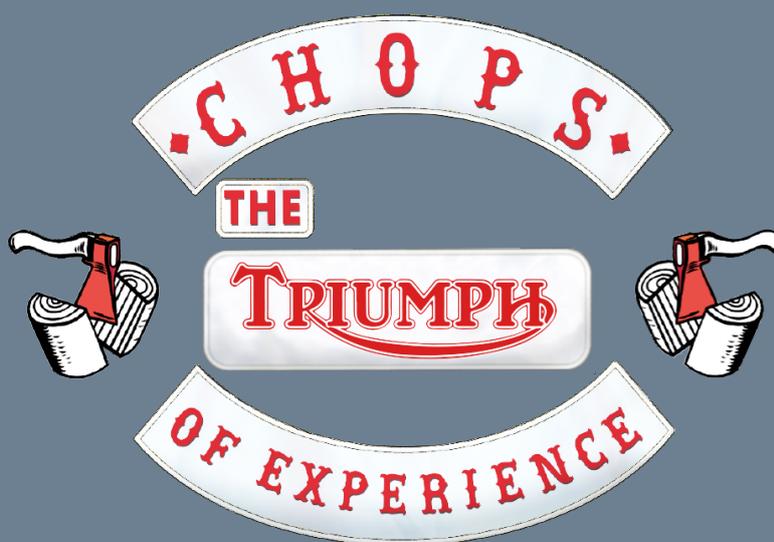


Nuala Goodman

At Home and Away



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I would have liked to call this Chop *'An Innocent Abroad'* but Mark Twain got there first.

The pioneering spirit of being curious to discover new places which many people have isn't mine. I was never much of a traveller, I am interested in any number of things but on holiday can be surprisingly passive for an energetic person. So it is sometimes still surprising to me that I am here - in Italy - and not there - in Ireland.

Causes

It was the summer of 1984 when I arrived on an Italian Cultural Institute scholarship to work at Sottsass Associati in Milan. Ettore Sottsass had co-founded the ground-breaking Memphis design movement. That was all I knew about Italy. Having just spent a three month period studying in an art college in Winchester which had not been easy, I had no expectations whatsoever. So of course I was completely enchanted by everything: the warm weather, the beauty everywhere, the warmth and vitality of the people, the fresh food, the wine, all those things everyone knows and loves about Italy.

In Dublin at that time it was rare for people to praise or encourage one another (with the exception of Mr Chops himself), so as an artist I felt quite isolated there. Attitudes have changed thank goodness.

In Italy on the other hand, there was appreciation of what I was doing and that felt fantastic. In Italy it was okay for a creative person to paint, make ceramics, design objects, clothing, buildings or packaging, there were no hard and fast rules and categories like at home. That suited me well.



'Enchantment is a useless thing but as indispensable as bread'.

- Giò Ponti

So there was partially an enchantment with the place and I was perhaps too passive about travel to move ever since - even home.

But there are possibly other motives and I wonder whether people who move away from their original home and make a home elsewhere share these.

There is definitely a lot to be said for staying put. There is the knowledge of shared cultural baggage, a feeling of connection to other people surrounding you. You don't have to explain certain things. On the downside, when I was younger at least, it could seem overly predictable. Cushy. There can too be such a connection to others as to be irritating as you realize just how very un-unique you are.

Effects

At home you are known as someone's daughter, sister, cousin, friend, girlfriend, partner. That is nice, it is protective.

Then you move away and that is gone. There is the liberty of standing alone, without a support system. You stand alone, with that comes a certain freedom and with freedom comes risk. I must have been destined to be a risk taker without intending to be, nor having ever been encouraged to be, nor maybe even really wanting to be.

There is now the mysteriousness of the unknown ahead, a world in which people are 'other'.



You probably have to perhaps work harder, because you don't have a protective backup system behind you. And because you don't know how things work. Especially bureaucracy. But you are on an international stage, this is exciting, in the middle of things. Growing up I always felt that Ireland was cut off from the rest of the world, as indeed it was. That's no longer the case of course, but I do like living in a place where traveling to several other European countries is a few hours by car or by train.

Suspended Reality

For me, as for many friends from different places who live in Italy there is a sense of living in a suspended reality, the real world is elsewhere - for me probably Ireland - my true home. I don't know whether this sensation is more accentuated in Italy which sometimes seems to be a large theatrical set. This couldn't possibly be real life, it's far too absurd! If you live in Germany, or Australia say, maybe you have another sensation though.

This sense of suspended reality was much stronger before the euro when relatively small amounts of money in Italy were hundreds of thousands and often millions of lire. Real money was pounds and pence. It even sounds more solid, less frivolous than the frilly '*lira*'. Sweets would be given as small change in the shops. I mean, come on!

Some comparisons

There are many differences between our two cultures, many of them clichéd. Italians are noisier, traveling as I do now to Rome every week the Romans are much noisier than the Milanese.

And a lot of other petty things... such as sometimes a maddening unselfawareness, for example a large group of people walk together spreading over the entire width of the pavement so no-one can get by.



But on the other hand they seem somehow very alive.

I read recently about somebody visiting a place where they said

‘the people don’t just look at you, they SEE you’.

I think this of Italians, they almost all have incredibly highly developed powers of intuition.

As an aside: men here tend to really appreciate women’s femininity, not just the young and beautiful either.

Results

I like my life. Whether living in a suspended reality or not, I like it.

I have three beautiful, lovely bi-lingual children, they look very Irish but a little exotic too.

Living and working in a very international city is stimulating.

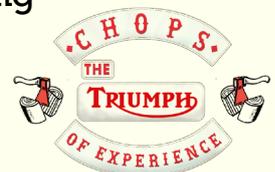
As a teacher I am in demand, as many foreign students are coming to study art, fashion and design in Italy. Many friends who’ve lived in Italy for the same length of time as me are in the same position: we are bi-lingual and have a good knowledge of those creative industries, so these students are being taught Italian know-how by us. That is good and makes me feel like a part of the fabric of the country.

Small things

Small things are important. Being able to live in sandals for more than half the year is a small luxury.

Arriving in Dublin Airport, and smelling the air and thinking *‘that’s my air!’* feels wonderful.

Seeing the low and high tides on Sandymount Strand is a daily miracle.



I could go on...

It does seem to be true that once you have left a place you never go back to belonging completely as before. Your sense of belonging grows to encompass more places, just as your heart expands to love more people if - for example - a new child is born, or a new circle of friends or colleagues is made. With a friend from Dublin who lives in Milan and is married to an Italian we had a (very Irish!) conversation recently about where we would want a funeral to be held when we died and where we'd want our ashes to be scattered. The conclusion we reached was that we'd each like two funerals and for our ashes to perhaps be scattered in two places. But the send-off proper should be in Ireland. I guess that says something after all.



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Nuala Goodman is an Irish artist who lives in Milan. She is Professor of Project Methodology and of Textiles at NABA (Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti) in Milan and in Rome. Her work is in Palazzo Fortuny Venice and Farmleigh House, Newman House and the U2 Studios in Dublin as well as in other private collections.

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