

Arts

'There's no way we'll ever try to replace Dolores'

A year since the death of their lead singer, the three remaining Cranberries tell *Hugh Montgomery* about their imminent final album

It could be as tender as an open wound – and as untamed as a lion. In the whole of pop history, there have been few voices as distinctive as that of Dolores O'Riordan. As the lead singer of Irish rock group the Cranberries, her aching sincerity on tracks such as *Linger* and *Dreams* gave solace to a generation of angst-ridden youth.

Just what O'Riordan meant to the world was made clear on January 15 last year. That was when she was found dead in a London hotel room, aged just 46. An inquest later ruled that O'Riordan had drowned in the bath after drinking heavily.

Thirteen months on, and I meet the Cranberries' three remaining members at their record label offices, as they prepare for the release of their eighth – and final – album *In the End*. Guitarist Noel Hogan, who was the group's co-songwriter with O'Riordan, acts as their de facto leader, while bassist Mike Hogan, his younger brother, and drummer Fergal Lawler chip in here and there. But the absence in the room hangs heavy. "It hasn't really sunk in," says Lawler, staring blankly ahead. "You'll be driving down the road and see someone and go, 'Oh, that's Dolores' – and then 'No, it's not her.'"

In the End consists of 11 songs that O'Riordan and Noel wrote during the second half of 2017. A few weeks after her death, in the daze of grief, the Hogan brothers and Lawler set about going through the vocal demos she had already recorded. They were against releasing any kind of

gratuitous "tribute" album – "we had said from the beginning if this isn't strong, we'll just leave it on a hard drive for ever and forget about it," Noel assures me. But, after liaising with her partner, musician Olé Koretsky, they were genuinely shocked by the amount of material she had left.

O'Riordan had had a lot to get off her chest after a difficult few years. In 2015, she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, following an incident, the year before, in which she assaulted an attendant on a flight back to Ireland.

That came in the wake of the breakdown of her two-decade marriage to Don Burton, a former tour manager to Duran Duran, and her move to New York from Canada, where she had been living with him and her three children. "I think she was champing at the bit because she always said she wrote better when she was in that darker place. It just seemed to flow better," says Noel.

The lyrics carry some of the weight of that personal tumult: "Ain't it strange when everything you wanted was nothing that you wanted, in the end?" she sings on the title track. It was the song that most stopped them in their tracks while recording: "She sounds particularly lost... you can hear how vulnerable she is," says Noel.

Going back into the studio was tough at first – though in one sense, it was business as usual. For a long while, O'Riordan laid down her vocals separately at night. In the early days of the Cranberries, says Noel, when she did record with the group, she



One of a kind: Dolores O'Riordan with the Cranberries in 1994. Below: band members Mike Hogan, Noel Hogan and Fergal Lawler

'She always said she wrote better when she was in that darker place. It just seemed to flow better'

hated having to sing her parts over and over "to the point where she'd only mumble and it was actually throwing you off".

From the bandmates' knowing smiles, it's clear O'Riordan was always her own woman – right back to when, as a shy churchgoing girl from a small town outside Limerick, she decided to audition for a local rock band, in

need of a new singer after their original frontman had quit.

That voice immediately stood out, of course. "I knew, that the minute I opened my mouth that they were going to be impressed," she once recalled of their first meeting, with a gratifying absence of self-deprecation. But she was also trained in classical piano, and had taught herself guitar – so while she used to joke that she was the "country bumpkin" of the group, "musically she was way ahead of us," says Noel.

While the Cranberries went on to become one of the biggest rock groups of the Nineties – to date, they have sold more than 40 million albums worldwide – things were nearly very different. When their debut LP *Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We?* was first released over here in March 1993, it flopped, and a demoralising UK tour

followed. It was America that saved them, a few months later, after *Linger* was picked up by college radio. As time went on – in part, perhaps, because of their perceived gaucheness – the band also found themselves incurring the disdain of the British music press. And by the band, one



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really means O'Riordan: as one of the few women in rock, and outspoken to boot, she was very much the focal point of criticism. "You wouldn't hear about the hundred great things that she had done, but the one time she messed up with something, that would be everywhere," says Noel. Some of the coverage was downright vicious. One particularly spiteful piece in *Melody Maker* listed eight "reasons to hate the Cranberries", including O'Riordan's "preaching", "dress sense" and "pinched little face".

By the time of their third album in 1996, *To the Faithful Departed*, O'Riordan was sick with stress, and anorexic. "It was hard to watch. We should have taken a break, but we did the albums 'bang, bang, bang'. You can even see in videos from the time how thin she'd become," says Noel. They cancelled their tour six months in, so she could recuperate; two more albums followed, to diminishing sales, before, in 2003, they went on a six-year hiatus.

The real tragedy, though, is just how well O'Riordan had been doing in recent years. The medication for her bipolar condition had stabilised her moods, and, after problems with alcohol in the past, she had been sober for three years. "I knew in my heart and soul she didn't do this deliberately because she wasn't in that place at all," says Noel.

'You wouldn't hear about the hundred great things she had done, only the one time she had messed up'

He had last spoken to O'Riordan three days before she died, when she was in Ireland, visiting her mother and checking in on a house she was building there. They had discussed recording the new album, which she was excited about, as well as her children, whom she missed a lot. She was considering going back to live in Canada to be near them again – certainly, her mind was fixed on the future.

The group as a whole had also found a groove: they had imagined they would "always come and go... like the Irish Rolling Stones," says Noel. Now, instead, the Cranberries really are no more. "We're not going to be getting another singer and doing the Queen thing. No way. No way," says Lawler, appalled at the very thought.

But there's no danger of them being forgotten. They continue to be a favourite of film and TV soundtracks – most recently appearing in Channel 4's glorious sitcom *Derry Girls* – while O'Riordan's grave in Ballybricken has become something of a pilgrimage site. And just as they were never tied to any musical scene, so those early hits remain curiously ageless. Noel agrees:

"When Dolores passed away, the songs like *Linger* and *Dreams* were everywhere again and I started to realise – and I don't mean this in a cocky way – that they sound like they could have been recorded six months ago."

In the End is released on April 26

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Gormley's virtual flight to the moon is no giant artistic leap

Exhibition

Antony Gormley and Priyamvada Natarajan, *Lunatick*

The Store X, London WC2

★★★★★

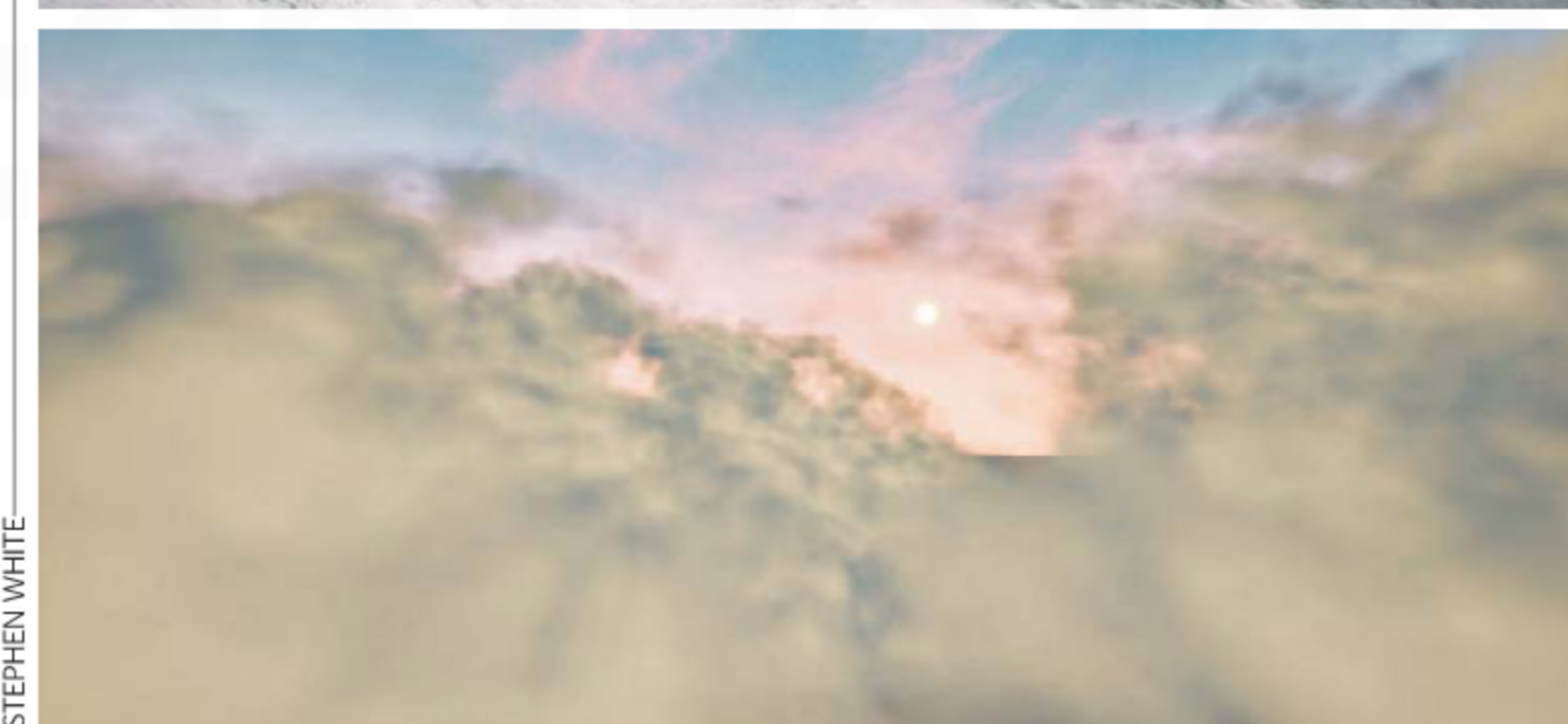
By Cal Revely Calder

On July 20, it will be 50 years since man first walked on the Moon. But only 12 men have ever made those steps, and it's been 46 years since the last one. For most of us gazing up each night, outer space is an inaccessible realm.

Antony Gormley's new artwork *Lunatick*, co-created with the astrophysicist Priyamvada Natarajan, won't let such inconvenient facts get in the way. In designing it, Gormley has set aside the four decades of superb sculptural practice that earned him a knighthood and a Turner Prize, to allow you to visit the moon in virtual reality.

Goggles on, you begin on a tiny Pacific island, alone, as you remain throughout. Press your controller, and off you go, wandering down the empty beach, or through glassy breaking waves. Crane your head, turn around; there's big wide blue on every side. *Lunatick* seems like a game, but Gormley's leash is tight. After a few minutes, you automatically drift up into the clouds, then on to the Moon. Here, the developers have had to cheat. Due to bandwidth constraints, they could only model a limited zone, and rather than force you to wade through gravity, they've granted you the power to hover and fly. All virtual, no reality: your belief is suspended by a pretty thin thread.

What a curious work to make. In the real world, Gormley's sculptures punctuate cities, beaches, all kinds of



Space man: in *Lunatick*, Gormley (below) sends you up through the clouds to the moon

earthly expanse. His figures, cast in fibreglass and iron, give us ways of considering human scale and how lonely or full a space can be. But in outer space, there's no humanity to measure. The island in *Lunatick* is pretty and lifeless; the Moon is lifeless too; the clouds swish lifelessly by.

All this lifelessness may be accurate, but it's unaffectionate, too. As an "experience", there's little here that video games couldn't do better 15 years ago. I felt a twinge of vertigo twice, once when looking down through the clouds, once when dropping into a crater on the Moon. But the resolution of the lunar surface is poor, in

the name of fidelity to existing satellite maps – and even so, the software has trouble keeping up. Every niggle distracts.

Most of the disappointment can be laid at the door of VR. For all its current artistic vogue, the technology just isn't yet there. Gormley's 12-minute work is the fourth such installation I've seen this year, and there wasn't an "immersive" one among them. *Lunatick*, then, is not a giant leap for technology in art. It's no step forward for the artist, either.

Until April 25, Store X, London thestores.com

