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ANNA CHAHOUD

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DOCTOR IN SCIENTIIS

PETRUS PERONA

Oculorum acies vel maxime fidem excedentia invenit exempla.
(Ex Plinii Secundi Naturalis Historia)

Scientiae, sive rationes naturae rerum indagandae, a rerum contemplatione originem trahunt atque impetus; unde homines curiosissimi instrumenta sibi paravere quibus etiam atque etiam acriores fierent facultates videndi, ut illud mirabile de quo Galileus, Patavini Gymnasii Publicus Mathematicus haec dixit in Nuncio Sidereo: “eo a me devenit est, ut Organum mihi construxerim adeo excellens, ut res per ipsum visae millies fere maiores appareant ac plusquam in terdecupla ratione viciniore, quam si naturali tantum facultate spectentur.” Nonne ‘visae’ ‘appareant’, ‘spectentur’ verba clarissime monstrant aciem atque vim instrumenti novissimi quod Graece τηλεσκόπων dicimus? Ut olim ille magister, sic hodie hic alumnus universitatis Patavinae vetustissimae celebratur per orbem terrarum. PETRUS PERONA mira instrumenta computatoria instruxit, natura videndi acerrime ac diutissime indagata primo apud Berkeleianam Universitatem, deinde apud Californiae Collegium illustre Technologicum, ubi clarissimum lumen enitet in vertice artis ingeniariae ac computariae earumque connexionibus menti humanae. Ingenium quidem mihi deficeret enarranti quae et quanta hic mathematicus fortissimus invenerit, sed quaesita satis intelligo: quo modo ac ratione instrumenta computatoria, oculis quibusdam adhibitis, intelligi possint imagines rerum a mente humana in ordine compositae. Quae omnia eloquenter exponere solet candidatus noster, exemplis nonnullis ductis a sua ingenua curiositate. Nam haec atque huiusmodi solitus est quaerere: “Quo nomine dicuntur flores, qui pulcherrima varietate adornant Alpium loca amoena?” vel “hic fungus bicolor, utrum dulcis est an veneficus?” vel etiam “quid est quod lente ego sorbeo potionem matutinam, cum avis quaedam micas mordere festinat? Utinam quiddam construi posset quod res ab imaginibus agnoscat!” Illud (incredibile visu) factum est. Tantum valuit huius viri doctrina in arte mathematica atque ingeniaria ac in illa novissima, quae dicitur intelligentia artificialis, ut instrumenta computatoria ut fierent ita dicam oculata. Quo illud factum sit, si forte quaesiveritis, paucis dicam. Quindecim abhinc annos ipse libellum edidit de imaginum encyclopaedia paranda, nomine *Visipedia*, cui operam dare hortabatur qualibet disciplina deditos imaginibus naturalibus photographice reddendis. Non iam frustra quaeremus quae forma, quae species sit haec aut illa, nam instrumenta faciliter interrogata celerrime responsa reddent. Mirabilius etiam est hoc, quod pari pietate ac virtute, doctis collegis ac discipulis adiuvantibus, instrumenta illa fecit incorporea et liberalia. Aspicite, sodales, quemlibet florem, arborem, animal vel cantu volucrum pascite aures: creaturas omnes ab imagine luce expressa sonituve impressa cognoscebit sodalis computatorius peritissimus historiae naturalis. Tantae virtutes non solum iuvant, sed etiam magnopere adiuvant investigantibus mutationem caeli varietatemque vitae. Candidatus noster feliciter temptavit hanc opinionem Plinii physici illustris, animantium naturam nullius prope partis contemplatione minorem esse, etsi ne hic quidem omnia exsequi humanus animus queat. Virum sapientem summo studio plausuque sonorissimo facite accipiat.

DOCTOR IN SCIENCE

PIETRO PERONA

Keeness of sight has achieved instances
transcending belief in the highest degree.

(Pliny, *Natural History* 7.85)

Science always begins with observation. The invention of tools capable of expanding the human power of sight always marked a historic progress in our knowledge of the world. If I may recall one such moment, I will quote the proud words of the Professor of Mathematics at Padua in 1610: “I succeeded in constructing for myself an instrument so superior that objects seen through it appear magnified nearly a thousand times, and more than thirty times nearer than if viewed by the natural powers of sight alone” (Galileo, *Sidereus Nuncius*, Ch 11). Note that three words for ‘vision’ are used within that short description of the Galilean telescope (itself a word containing the Greek verb for ‘seeing’). No less revolutionary or less universally acclaimed are the discoveries in the field of Vision by this alumnus of the same Italian university (one of the oldest in the world), who proceeded to a PhD at Berkeley and to a brilliant scientific career at the California Institute of Technology. It is a privilege to introduce PIETRO PERONA, Allan E. Puckett Professor of Electrical Engineering and Computation and Neural Systems at Caltech, pioneer and world leading expert in Computer Vision. The mathematical basis of his science is extremely complex, but the principal research questions are clear: how does the human brain code what it sees, and how can we train machines to ‘see’ as humans? He, a wonderful communicator, explains the origin of his scientific questions in terms of curiosity for the world around him. What is the name of those beautiful flowers he sees every summer on his beloved Dolomites? Is it safe to eat that colourful mushroom? What is that bird pecking at breadcrumbs as he drinks his cappuccino in an Italian piazza? These questions would be easily solved if machines could be programmed to perceive the three-dimensional structure of the world with images. And here comes the encounter between this scientist’s pioneering work on visual categorisation and the affordances of Artificial Intelligence: with adequate observation and algorithms, human observations can enable machines to recognise an enormous amount of data. In his 2010 paper *Vision of a Visipedia* he proposed that the collaboration of “users, experts, editors, visual workers, and machine vision scientists” would gradually produce a digital tool capable of answering queries on images just as fast as the now familiar tools on textual searches; and he was right. Anyone of us can freely download the smart device apps that he and his collaborators developed: all we have to do is take a picture of what we see, and *iNaturalist* identifies its species; all we have to do is record a bird song, and *Merlin Bird ID* recognises it. These freely available tools not only satisfy the curiosity of everyday users, but assist the development of science, for example monitoring wildlife populations. The impact of his work on biodiversity studies alone is immense. He has both proved and disproved the ancient belief that “the nature of the creatures contained in the world is no less important than the study of almost any other area of knowledge, albeit here the human mind is not capable of exploring the whole field” (Pliny, *Natural History* 7.1). Let us welcome this visionary scientist with our warmest acclamation.

DOCTOR IN LITTERIS

CATHERINA PRENDERGAST

Carmine ab heroo liceat mihi exordium sumere, quo facilius argumentum colligatur huius orationis. Aeneas, fato saevoque bello profugus a patria, traditur forte venisse ad fores aëneas cuiusdam templi, quod peregrina in urbe ingens aedificabatur. “Sub ingenti lustrat dum singula templo,” ut ait summus poeta Vergilius “artificumque manus inter se operumque laborem / miratur;” cum repente id comprehendit, fulgidas effigies reddere ipsius res gestas fatales. “Constitit et lacrimans, ‘hinc etiam,’ inquit, ‘sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt’.” Numquam tam memor fuerat, numquam tam motus, quam illo die, cum oculos adiecit rebus gestis suis alieno opere caelatis; unde “animum pictura pascit inani / multa gemens, largoque umectat flumine vultum.” Haec enim sunt praecipua artis, oculos pascere, animos movere cordaque funditus flectere. Quibus virtutibus praedita est artifex illustrissima Dubliniensis CATHERINA PRENDERGAST, princeps artium Hibernicarum, sodalis Regiae Societatis Sculptorum Britannicae. Studiis feliciter excultis apud Collegium artium elegantiorum et Dublinense et Londiniense, discipula virtutem suam primum exhibuit opere plastico mirae novitatis, in quo tres mulieres videbantur apud murum ornatum lineamentis vestium chartaceis assidere, expectantes si aliquando, potestate sibi concessa foras egrediendi, vestes illas demum induerent. Cum ingenium artificis fecisset mater peritissima arte vestifica, opus manifeste significavit virtutes, artes et spes mulierum diutius more iniquo domi secluserum. Ita puella invenit genus suae propriae artis, qua subtiliter sensus excitat ad percipiendum atque motus animi ostendit hinc adumbratos, hinc sculptos, hinc varie compositos ex variis rebus cottidianis. Naturales quidem materias diligit, ut lanam filis capillos, lapides calculos globulos, flores siccatos, rescultas neglectas, sed tabulas praediligit quae Graece dicuntur topographicas, quia finibus omnibus deletis, quibus imperia definiri solebantur, lineis coloribusve additis, tandem a vinculis liberantur loca atque itinera uniuscuiusque propria ac singularia. Sed heu, impar est eloquentia mea huius mulieris ingenio; simulacra ipsa loquantur, quae decorant Museum Hibernicum artis hodiernae, ubi capita nationum universarum contemplamur adeo adumbrata, ut urbes non iam aedificatas, sed quasi anima spirantes videantur (quod maxime placuit ludis sollemnibus Venetianis). Quid dicam de tabulis viarum Europaeum, Indico atramento tam sapienter obfuscatis, ut sedes hominum solae relinquantur micantes ut astra in caelo nocturno? Pulcherrime ostendunt, credo, quo modo societas hominum inter se libere et pacifice possit coniungi. Ad maiora etiam tendit artifex optima. Nuperrime enim figuris expressit fallacem tranquillitatem saeculi nostri in caelo periclitanti, ut monstrant montes igniferi in tabulis depicti imminentes rebus vitae cotidianae per arva aspersis; aptissime vero ambigua vox Graeca στάσις nomen dedit operi magnifico. Sapienter dixit Ivanna doctissima arte Hibernica hodierna, hanc artificem non iudicem esse, sed ducem, immo comitem nobis in incerto itinere vitae. Arti tam iustae quam venustae debentur summi honores ac plausus effusissimi.

DOCTOR IN LETTERS

KATHY PRENDERGAST

Let me tell you an ancient legend. A survivor of war and exile, named Aeneas, found himself standing in front of the magnificent bronze doors of a temple in a foreign land. “He scanned each object,” the poet says (Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.455–6), “while he marvelled at the artists’ handicraft and the work of their toil”, and suddenly realised that the friezes were engraved with episodes of his own life of suffering and loss. “Here, too,” he cried, “are tears for misfortune and human sorrows touch the heart”. The man had lived those events, and yet it was not until he saw them transfigured in art that he allowed himself a deeply emotional response: “he feasts his soul on the unsubstantial portraiture, sighing oft, his face wet with a flood of tears” (465–6). The story teaches us an important lesson on the power of art to open the eyes and the heart to the meaning of our journey as human beings. This is precisely the power of the evocative, enigmatic, and empathetic art of KATHY PRENDERGAST, Member of Aosdána and Fellow of the Royal Society of Sculptors. She was born in Dublin and obtained her BA in Fine Art from our National College of Art and Design, before moving to London for her MA in Fine Art at the Royal College of Art. She was still a student when she created the masterpiece, held in the Hugh Lane Gallery, entitled *Waiting*: three sculpted female figures sit by a wall covered with tissue-paper dressmaking patterns, as if waiting to be invited to dance. This homage to her mother (“a fantastic dressmaker”) and to a generation of women whose creativity was confined to the home prompted the discovery of an artistic language. Individual experiences and personal perceptions of places and our position in them are recurring motifs in this artist’s work, expressed in the juxtaposition of different techniques – drawing, sculpture, installation – and deliberately non-precious materials—wool and yarn, stones and rocks, desiccated flowers, found objects, and, most importantly, maps. Since the early 1990s she has worked with the surface of maps, including the humble *AZ* maps, and, suppressing boundaries or dragging fine lines, she has transformed those symbols of collective identity, exploration and control, into an *Atlas* of “emotional and personal artefacts.” My words are apt to do justice to the creation of this woman’s concept and craft. Visit the Irish Museum of Modern Art and you will be stunned by *City Drawings* (awarded a prestigious prize at the Venice Biennale in 1995), where the fine pencil lines make the world’s capital cities similar to living organisms, all in the same size. In *Black Maps* she used Indian ink to reimagine the AA Road Atlas of Europe into a hundred and more black skies dotted with constellations of urban settlements. In her recent *Stasis Field*, with its reinvention of cartographic images of mountains and volcanoes, she explores the state of suspension in time and space that we, inhabiting the earth, experience when we remind ourselves that beneath our inhabited lands lie dormant forces waiting to erupt. In the words of our distinguished Art historian, this exceptional artist “offers discovery rather than judgement, process rather than completion, the journey rather than the destination” (Yvonne Scott, *Irish Art*, November-December 2025, p. 69). This is the ethical dimension of this artist’s unique creation of aesthetical experiences. Let us express our admiring recognition, as we bestow on her the University’s highest honours.

DOCTOR IN UTROQUE JURE

IFRAH AHMED

Natura enim iuris explicanda,
nobis est eaque ab hominis repetenda natura.

(Cicero, *De legibus*)

Mores maiorum sunt qui arbitrentur colendos esse velut leges sanctissimas ac vincula humanae societatis. Quid vos, sodales piissimi? Iustumne videtur mores ac consuetudines a maioribus acceptas tamquam rectas regulas sustinere? Romani ipsi, qui antiquitatem institutionum firmissime defendebant, quascumque non satis comprobata iudicavissent iu dubium vocavere reiecendas. Quod testatur Tacitus scriptor acerrimus rerum gestarum, nam “Hi ritus quoquo modo inducti antiquitate defenduntur,” inquit, “cetera instituta, sinistra foeda, pravitate valere.” Mulierem impavidam in conspectu habetis, quae voce vehementi prima ausa est damnare pravissimam consuetudinem circumcidendae partis muliebris. IFRAH AHMED Hiberniam petivit profuga ab oris pulcherrimis Africae Orientalis, cum in patria Somalia insaevisset crudelitas belli civilis; mulier Mogadishu urbe nata, nunc civis est Dubliniensis (ipsa autem festiviter dicere solet se oriundam vico venusto Droim Conrach!). Hic animo tandem refecto, nulla mora interposita virtute atque eloquentia iustitiam ac leges defendere coepit in Hibernia et in patria sua. Sed obstinati sunt mores antiquissimi. Feminarum circumcisionem Aegypto ortam esse tradit Strabo geographus, cum de moribus Aegyptiis haec scripsit: “τοῦτο δὲ τῶν μάλιστα ζηλουμένων παρ’ αὐτοῖς τὸ περιτέμνειν καὶ τὰ θήλεα ἐκτέμνειν.” Apud scholiastas hodiernos adhuc legimus puellas nihil mali pati mutilatione. Quod false atque improbe dictum testatur candidata nostra, quae ipsa mutilata est media in pueritia, quae vero puellas mutilatas vidit multo cruore perire aut in ipsa sectione aut in partu. Quid ad mores, quid ad humanitatem, inquam, attinet vis secandi? Taeterrimo verbo iure utitur candidata nostra, ut decet intrepidam vocem, non victimam exterritam; voce enim clarissima denunciavit se vim atque iniuriam subisse. Auxiliantibus societatibus primoribusque, ad consuetudinem eradicandam institutum suo nomine quindecim abhinc annos conditum adeo augebat, ut paulo post principes Hibernici legem ratam iuberent. Cum deinde ad patriam animadvertisset et ad ceteras partes terrarum, ubi (vix credimus) fere omnes puellulae adhuc mutilantur, tantum patriae profuit ut iam innumeri parentes sponderent se libenter praeservaturos natas innoxias integrasque atque ut leges vetarent pravae consuetudinis in duabus regionibus Somaliae confoederatae. Nonne haec praedixit ac promisit candidata piissima? Gratulanti igitur acclamatione accipiamus patronam fortissimam femineae salutis dignitatis aequitatis, quae re vera illud consilium repraesentavit viri Aegyptii iustissimi. quodam Procuratoris Consociationis Nationum Foederatarum:

Maxime defendenda causa mulierum, nam causa est totius humanitatis.

DOCTOR IN LAWS

IFRAH AHMED

It is our duty to explain the nature of justice,
And this must be sought for in the nature of humankind.

(Cicero, *On the Laws* 1.17)

Is it true that traditions define who we are? Is it right to uphold inherited customs and practices as valid norms of social justice? Even the Romans, who firmly believed in the value of their ancient institutions, questioned and rejected those which did not seem just and proper: “Whatever their origin, these practices are maintained by their antiquity; other customs are base and abominable, and owe their persistence to their depravity” (Tacitus, *Histories* 5.5). We are honoured to welcome a woman who has raised her voice in condemnation of one such practice in our times. IFRAH AHMED has dedicated her life to eradicating that terrible form of gender based violence which is female genital mutilation. She came to Ireland as a refugee from Mogadishu, a beautiful city in a beautiful country on the Indian Ocean, destroyed by a cruel civil war. She is now a proud Irish citizen (when asked where she comes from, her answer is “I’m from Drumcondra”). Our country gave her the opportunity to share her painful personal experience and to fight for legislation in Ireland and in her native Somalia. Female genital mutilation is a practice that goes back to the ancient Mediterranean. Two thousand years ago Strabo recorded that “One of the customs most zealously observed among the Egyptians is this, they circumcise the males, and excise the females” (*Geography* 17.2). If you read a modern edition of this ancient text, you will be astonished to find the modern editor’s note to the effect that for women “the operation is harmless.” It is not. Our candidate testifies to this unspeakable fact. She suffered it on her own skin, for the first time when she was merely eight years old. She saw young girls bleed to death during the procedure, young women bleed to death during childbirth. What is cultural, what is human about ‘cutting’? Her choice of a simple verb is a striking indictment. This courageous woman was the first to speak openly and publicly about her experience: “I want to be the voice, not the victim.” She has worked with organisations and governments, and, fifteen years ago, she established a Foundation in her name that now counts hundreds of community activists. She regarded it as her greatest achievement when the law banning FMG in Ireland came into effect in 2012; but she went further, knowing that what is needed is a change of mentality in countries such as her own, where 98% of women were still subject to mutilation. The figures from African and Asian countries are staggering, and emigration exported the practice to Europe and the rest of the world. Her most recent “Dear Daughter” campaign in Somalia now counts over a hundred thousand pledges from parents to protect their children. Laws banning the practice in two of Somalia’s Federal States of Somalia were passed in 2024 and 2025. Her goal is to eradicate the practice by 2030. This woman has beyond doubt succeeded in her mission to “stop the fear, the pain, the shame.” Her contribution to the defence of human rights deserves our highest reward and deepest gratitude.

Today, more than ever, the cause of women is the cause of all humanity.

(UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali,
Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, 1993)

DOCTOR IN UTROQUE JURE

MEI LIN YAP

“**B**eata est vita conveniens naturae suae,” inquit Seneca philosophus, “Quaeramus aliquod non in speciem bonum, sed solidum et aequale et a secretiore parte formosius; hoc eruamus. Nec longe positum est; invenietur, scire tantum opus est quo manum porrigas.” Sapienter vero ac liberaliter manus porrigebat ad vitam beatam consequendam mulier optima Hibernica quae postrema in podium procedit. Iam agnoscitis dulcere ridentem MEI LIN YAP, praeclaram lucem ac ducem disertam aquae patriae Hiberniae. Bonum solidum et aequale quod dixit philosophus, hoc videbatur puellae, subvenire omnibus animo debilitatis et habilitatibus repertis confirmare. Pulcherrime convenit naturae candidatae nostrae, ut ceteris exemplum esset, primum confirmari educatione, ludis athleticis, orationibus, auctoritate. Duobus officiis fungitur sollerti disciplina, parum afflicta debilitate dicta a Down medico Britannico. Quid enim refert ad virtutem firmasne vires an infirmiores nobis dederit natura? Omnibus constat hanc mulierem praestare egregia virtute. Nam studiis feliciter excultis apud institutum nostrum praepositum educandis discipulis animo quodam infirmiore, cursum honorum adivit in societate illustri dedita cooptationis promovendae, ubi candidata nostra, quondam ministra, hodie procuratrix fidelis spectatur. Eandem saepissime audivimus et cives et principes civitatis eloquenter exhortari, ne iniuria opere destituerent qui, animo affecto quadam infirmitate vel timore alieni iudicii, nihilominus de re publica bene mereri possent. Apud Collegium nostrum legata curationis munere fungitur magni momenti: nunc debilitatis patrocinatur, ut beate agant aetatem ac pericula senectae avertant, nunc eximia pietate praesidet publico concilio dedito curationi. Quo planius pateat mulieris ratio bene vivendi, paucis dicam quam strenue corporis quoque vires firmare soleret. A prima pueritia nandi peritam, iuvenem athletam pro patria Hibernia certantem numismatibus decorabant arbitri Olympici ac ceteri multi. Eamne forte adspexeritis memorabili die, quo ab helicoptero desiluit umbella descensoria? Equidem ex omnium beatissimam eam mirabar ore renidenti per caerula caeli templa volitantem. Nec illud somnium fuit nec cetera alia quae consecuta est; nam, ut dicere solet, non est quin animo quamvis debilitatus ad aethera tolli possit, si modo ad caelum spectet. Iam rationem comprehenditis, sodales, qua eam in exordio laudavi praeclaram lucem ac validam ducem. Maxime digna est quae summa laurea ornetur, nam aetatem suam totam collocavit in aequa societate creanda, ubi nemo neglectus relinquatur, et magnanima docet studium vivendi iuste beateque. Omnibus nostrum spem atque fiduciam accendit, sicut viator benevolus in carmine scaenico Ennii poetae, quod Cicero pertinens putavit ad officia generis humani:

homo qui erranti comiter monstrat viam
quasi lumen de suo lumine accendat facit:
nihilo minus ipsi lucet, cum illi accenderit.

DOCTOR IN LAWS

MEI LIN YAP

“**T**he happy life is a life that is in harmony with its own nature,” memorably wrote an ancient philosopher, and he urged: “Let us seek something that is a good in more than appearance—something that is solid, constant, and more beautiful in its more hidden part; for this let us delve. And it is placed not far off; you will find it. You need only to know where to stretch out your hand” (Seneca, *The Happy Life* 3.1, 3). The remarkable Irish woman who stands before us today has indeed stretched out her hand to attain the goal of a truly happy life, for herself and for many others. By her radiant smile you recognise MEI LIN YAP, inspiring champion of diverse abilities and advocate of a truly equitable Ireland. “My goal in life,” she often says, “is to show the world what people with intellectual disabilities can do.” In harmony with her nature, she has devoted herself to education, sport, public speaking, and leadership, all in the name of diversity and inclusion. She has two demanding jobs and she has Down Syndrome—in this order she always introduces herself, because what defines her is the difference that she *makes*. She was one of the earliest graduates of the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities, and that achievement opened the door for her to the Cpl Recruitment Agency, where she now holds a senior position as People Experience Administrator. She eloquently speaks (and she has spoken to the highest dignitaries in the country) for the right of people with disabilities to contribute to society through full-time employment, remembering that she did not have the courage to approach employers face to face for fear of rejection. Her other job is that of Ambassador Liaison Officer with our very own Trinity Centre for Ageing and Intellectual Disability at the School of Nursing and Midwifery. In that role she promotes well-being and “ageing with pride”, chairing the Public and Patient Involvement panel and contributing to research projects and public awareness. She has been a role model also in the cultivation of her own physical well-being. A keen swimmer since childhood, she attained the status of international athlete, competing in the Special Olympics and representing Ireland in sporting competitions all over the world. We have seen her skydiving, the very picture of serene happiness as she flew over the clouds. This woman calls herself “a big dreamer”, because, she says, “when we dream big and others dream big for us, then we can achieve our full potential.” She is, in fact, a bright star whose light guides everyone around her. We are honoured to celebrate a woman who has invested her life in the creation of an equitable society, where no-one is left behind, who generously shares her love for life and passion for justice, who sparks hope and confidence that everyone’s ability is the ability to make a difference.

The person who kindly shows the way to someone wandering about
has an effect as if she kindles a light from her own light:
it shines for herself no less, when she has kindled it for the other.

(Ennius, cited in Cicero, *On Duties*, 1.51-52)