

MAIREAD O'HEOCHA

The Pane Fly's Tune

13 April – 20 May 2023

Mairead O'hEocha is arguably one of Ireland's best-considered figurative painters, certainly one who uncompromisingly demands the maximum from her audience, with works now deservedly held in the permanent collections of Dublin's three major museums¹. *The Pane Fly's Tune* represents the fifth solo exhibition with *mother's tankstation*, the second in the London gallery, but first in the Three Colts Lane space, and yet another shift in a painter's searching investigation of *subject*, the theoretical reasoning behind paintings and how they communicate to the viewer.

Seen in retrospect, O'hEocha's career as a painter² has blocked out (I use the determination purposely as there was initial training as an architect, and it's a *slip* that has always subtly shown) into specific and highly distinctive phases, architectonic sections almost; reflected in each of her *mother's* shows and through the three notable, solo, Irish institutional exhibitions; The Butler Gallery, The Douglas Hyde and Temple Bar Gallery (2011 and 2020 respectively). Not forgetting the beautifully *understated* Art Basel 'Statement' of 2013, with seven paintings that [de]constructed journeys, walks (night-and-day), to-and-from her Dublin studio to home (whatsoever that is)...

O'hEocha's *walks* were a conceptual expansion, yet simultaneously a personal contraction of the parameters of her previous series, that explored driving, or rather drive-by encounters with semi-anonymous sidings of the N11: In this instance from 'home' to 'work' (teaching art in this instance) – Dublin to Wexford and back, tangentially revealing aspects of Irishness, culture or history, (*Home Rules*, *Whisper Concrete* and *Via An Lár*). At said juncture, O'hEocha had given up teaching to paint full-time, so her 'work' changed, her world changed, so consequently must the paintings. As ever her practice closely charted and refracted personal experience...

All O'hEocha's shows have had extraordinary titles, a habit not broken in *The Pane Fly's Tune*, coming from a poem of lost love by Thomas Hardy³, and all being indicative of an artist who thinks deeply, genuinely trying to explore around all the dark corners of intuition. The rigorous conceptualism inherent in her work and mirrored by her chosen venues of study, notably the demanding Goldsmiths' M.A, should not come as a surprise to those at all familiar with the artist, or indeed more generally be seen under a common misconception as an assumed disparity to the work of a 'painter'⁴ – painters think, and O'hEocha certainly does - as although distinct, all her un-official, un-formalised groupings of subject, within the overarching frame of a greater oeuvre, are all linked by extensive studio research and intelligent, organically evolving comment on their respective purpose. I shall try and expand and proffer evidence...

A substantive link between *groupings* lies in O'hEocha's fascination with the optical and colour theories of the Swiss expressionist painter, writer and theorist, closely associated with the Bauhaus, Johannes Itten, whose work, in all its forms, explored the impact of fractal light on the centres of the brain. Itten identified seven fundamental categories of contrast; hue, light-dark, cold-warm, complementary, analogous, saturation and extension, and the 2016 Dublin gallery show, *Blackbirds in the Garden of Prisms*, O'hEocha with characteristic idiosyncrasy, applied 'Ittenism' to the experience of outdoor light as filtered through the poly-domes of garden centres. Just brilliant. Following on, still lifes started to slowly emerge, retaining Itten's colour wheel, but re-addressing the rather lost art historical genre of 'flower paintings' as the "appropriate subject matter for women painters". Heroically gothic and moving closer to expressionism, the re-envisioned stilled lifes muted into the "Dead Zoo", multiple painted and drawn studies of the fanatical display of taxidermied specimens at Dublin's famous National History Museum – a perfect match to O'hEocha's practice in terms of museological adhocacy; unexpected examples, conjunctions of colonialism and Nationhood...

The series, appropriately, prophetically, titled *Tale Ends and Eternal Wakes*, was exhibited at Dublin's Temple Bar gallery, with its opening on the eve of the strictest of COVID lockdowns, that slowed and shuttered the world, confining us to our homes, were we lucky enough to have one...

The Pane Fly's Tune, an ode to things lost, is O'hEocha personal response... Endearingly the artist writes of her current work and its refraction of isolation, a lock-in-love-letter:

"I made these paintings between 2020-23. They are part of the same series as the exhibition *Light Spells Enter*, recently exhibited in Bologna⁵. I was living on the fourth floor of an old Georgian building, in Dublin [an earlier painting depicts its exterior –its up high] and little by little I was feeling more like Rapunzel. I saw a lot more of my apartment. As I stayed busy on my phone I got that bit more triple-glazed. The internet allowed me to keep in touch with the world, it also confirmed my reliance on technology for social connections. The phone was not so much a fifth limb, more like an internal organ. The over-looked and everyday took on a new presence and a lot more of my attention. The edges of my dining table and the optics of small objects had replaced all of my horizons.

The titles of individual paintings coincide with personal events through a semi-seasonal palette. The events of this period played some part in their making. These include visits to my dying father and the early loss of another family member. The paintings themselves show glass objects [or objects imaged as glass] on tables and provide a sort of glass calendar of the good and the bad of these two years. The sensory facts of our lived existence, the weight of the glass, the surface temperature of the steel spoon, are not always available or apparent to us, as technology brings new levels of distraction to domestic life.

Radiant beings are a feature of the history of painting, usually registering a divine presence. They of course predate the contemporary luminosity effects of digital image display. Museums are even re-designing their lighting and painting their walls dark colours to catch the viewers with a backlit digital panel effect. From Early Renaissance and its *Geometry of Haloes* to Vermeer's camera obscura, creative methods of describing light are a fascinating way of charting new optical inventions and how they reflect the historical shifts in religious and secular beliefs. I think light is a verb, noun and everything in between..."

Mairead O'hEocha, in a continuing, restless investigation of everything in between, is currently living and working in Paris...

¹ The National Gallery of Ireland, The Irish Museum of Modern Art and Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, respectively.

² O'hEocha studied sculpture (treated performatively) at the National College of Art and Design and only came to *pure* painting (with indicative self-determination and somewhat against the grain, of her M.A. at,) Goldsmiths' College, University of London.

³ Thomas Hardy, *At an Inn*
<https://allpoetry.com/At-An-Inn>

⁴ *As stupid as... etc.,*

⁵ P420, Bologna