



HELEN O'SULLIVAN-TYRRELL

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Tara Murphy
requests the pleasure of your company
at the private view of

HELEN O'SULLIVAN-TYRRELL
TRIBE

to be opened by
Diarmaid Ferriter
Professor of Modern Irish History, University College Dublin

on Thursday 11th February 2016
from 6pm to 8pm

at
Solomon Fine Art, Balfe Street, Dublin 2

THE SHOW CONTINUES UNTIL SATURDAY 5 MARCH 2016
OPENING HOURS: Tuesday to Friday 10am – 5.30pm / Saturday 11am – 4pm

Artworks may be viewed prior to the opening by appointment or online at www.solomonfineart.ie

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or email info@solomonfineart.ie

Front cover: ST PATRICK'S DAY, oil on canvas, 50 x 60cm

Then and Now

Our childhoods we carry with us. And our experiences and understanding from that time, our accompanying memories, sometimes unique, sometimes collective, can enliven, nourish, sustain or darken our adult lives. Anita Brookner's observation, in her novel *Look at Me*, that 'Once a thing is known it can never be unknown. It can only be forgotten.' rings true. But Helen O'Sullivan-Tyrrell, in her work, has not forgotten. Revisiting childhood, she recognises and captures in the lives of others, in all our lives, happiness and sadness, ease and anxiety, moments from a past that is itself never past.

Many of these paintings focus particularly on that first public, significant occasion in an Irish Catholic girl's life. Young, innocent and vulnerable, it is a time for being singled out as special, it is a time for being part of a group. We are told that it is the age of reason. And it is always summer. Nuns, the Brides of Christ, lead little veiled girls all in white, little miniature brides, in procession. A communicant on her own stands tall, hands clasped, in short sleeves and knee-socks. We look at her; she looks at us with a serious, intelligent expression. Another girl stands alone on the church step before a darkened doorway in her white Mary Janes; another reflective face. Though her snow-white dress is lit by a yellow sun that same sun casts a shadow to the girl's left on a bright and happy image. Or the girl smiling and prayerful, outdoors, trees in the distance. She stands on a grassy stretch that becomes something floating, shadowy, almost eerie. Indoors, a smiling girl, on her big day in a casual and charming image is surrounded by flowers; the painting is both ordinary and extraordinary at once.

On Corpus Christi, older girls process with baskets of rose petals, diaphanous, shimmering figures, almost ghostly, in bright sunshine. Behind them, and just within the frame, an adult, darker presence. A Communion class image of eighteen rosette-wearing boys in short trousers is one of frozen happiness.

These works with their architectural features or conventionally wimpled nun returns us to another time. An older girl in a doorway observes and with that simple detail O'Sullivan-Tyrrell invites the viewer to shape a narrative. Younger becomes older. For these girls, the world is all before them: what will become of them? What will they become?

In her story *Child's Play*, Alice Munro says that 'Every year, when you're a child, you become a different person.' For O'Sullivan-Tyrrell, institutionalised, organised childhoods give way, in some images, to something freer and freeing: two lads with ice-cream cones. One is about to enjoy that taste forever, the other holding his treat with calm contentment. Or, in another work, girls, in their best dresses, stride by holding aloft bunches of balloons. In these happy paintings it is forever summer, forever ice-cream, forever balloons.

Like so many of O'Sullivan-Tyrrell's work, the portrait of a family against a five-barred gate of a uniformed man with his wife and two children, an image that is both formal and relaxed, is sepia-tinged. Yet again the viewer is prompted to ask and to wonder where are they now, to wonder if between that moment, from a bygone age, and the very moment we stand before it, has death been there? Have they since become dear shadows?

In contrast, the midwife, another institutionalised figure from long ago, starched, capable, smiling, life-giving, against hospital green, presents us with a sense of what a girl could become. But this exhibition also brings us contemporary images of teenagers and women. A girl in bed strokes a cat; a girl gently holds her cat, their eyes deep, mysterious, arresting. And the head and shoulder portraits of women, brunette and blonde, tell their own story, their expressions reflective, confident, assertive. In a still life, gladioli blaze softly and flame in a glass vase and will never wither.

Photographers catch an image with a mechanical click. O'Sullivan-Tyrrell's brushstrokes take longer. Time is the key here. Not only in terms of subject matter but in the very process where O'Sullivan-Tyrrell creates her layered, blurred, textured images, images that are beautifully sensitive, sensuous, delicate and engaging. In doing so she achieves a distinctive and impressive body of work that speaks to us quietly and silently.

Niall MacMonagle
Writer and Broadcaster



PROCESSION II
oil on canvas
60 x 50cm



SUNDAY MORNING
oil on canvas
50 x 60cm



1963
oil on canvas
60 x 50cm



ELPHIN
oil on canvas
60 x 50cm



THE PROMISE
oil on canvas
50 x 60cm



THE MIDWIFE
oil on canvas
50 x 30cm



PROCESSION III
oil on canvas
50 x 60cm



THE COMMUNICANTS III
oil on canvas
50 x 60cm



THE COMMUNICANT II
oil on canvas
50 x 40cm



THE COMMUNICANT III
oil on canvas
60 x 50cm



BOUQUETS
oil on canvas
40 x 50cm



ICE-CREAM
oil on canvas
60 x 50cm

Helen O'Sullivan-Tyrrell

Born in London in 1968, O'Sullivan-Tyrrell grew up in Bray, Co. Wicklow and later studied architecture at the Dublin Institute of Technology. She was heavily involved in the various campaigns around women's rights and social and education issues and was elected President of USI, the Union of Students in Ireland. Her political background continues to inform her work. In 1995 she moved to Brussels and later studied painting at the Flemish art academy BKO (Beeldende Kunst Overijse). She now paints from her studio in Brussels and lives in the village of Tervuren in Flanders.

While mainly a figurative painter, O'Sullivan-Tyrrell's subjects range from portraiture, still life and landscape and she is currently examining the theme of tribal identities; particularly how the imagery associated with Catholicism is intertwined in what is viewed as 'Irishness'.



SELF
oil on canvas
40 x 40cm

The artist has been exhibiting her work in Belgium for a number of years. She was selected in the regional final of 'De Canvascollectie' (Belgium) in 2012 and was amongst the finalists of the 2014 Belfius Art Prize. In 2013 she took part in the Royal Ulster Academy annual exhibition and in 2014 and 2015 she was selected as one of the 12 finalists in the prestigious Hennessy Portrait Prize at the National Gallery of Ireland. Last year, her portrait 'The Convalescent' made the finals of the renowned BP Portrait Awards in the UK and the painting has since toured the National Portrait Galleries in London and Edinburgh and is shortly to travel to the Ulster Museum in Belfast for the final leg of the tour.

Selected exhibitions

- 2015 Tribe (solo show), Solomon Fine Art, Dublin
Hennessy Portrait Prize – Finalist, National Gallery of Ireland
BP Portrait Award (UK) – Finalist, National Portrait Gallery, London,
Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh & Ulster Museum, Belfast
- 2014 Hennessy Portrait Prize – Finalist, National Gallery of Ireland
Belfius Art Prize (Belgium) - Finalist
- 2013 Royal Ulster Academy Annual Exhibition, Ulster Museum, Belfast
Solo show, Gallery Ontdekking van de Hemel, Halle, Belgium
Group show, Leuven Institute for Ireland in Europe, Belgium
Group show, European Council Language Library, Belgium
Group show, European Commission, Luxembourg
- 2012 Group show, Ville de Bruxelles, Belgium
- 2011 Gallery Charlotte van Lorreinen, Tervuren, Belgium

Collections
Office of Public Works

All catalogue photography by Gerry Blake



GLADIOLI, oil on canvas, 50 x 30cm

HELEN O'SULLIVAN-TYRRELL

Tribe

12 February – 5 March 2016

SOLOMON FINE ART
Balfe Street, Dublin 2, Ireland
tel: +353 (0)86 8142380
email: info@solomonfineart.ie
www.solomonfineart.ie