

Lisa O'Donnell

Cyclical Narratives

Curators Paula Cruz & Gowri Balasegaram

Preview: 5 September 2013, 5:30-9pm

6 September– 23 November 2013

Lauriston School and A Bigger Picture Project are pleased to present *Cyclical Narratives*, a solo exhibition by Irish artist Lisa O'Donnell at The Art Shed Gallery. The exhibition features painting, Polaroid photography and video animation reflecting O'Donnell's ongoing investigations into the construction of personal and collective memory. Contemplating both the private and the political, the basis of Lisa's explorations is the Irish Diaspora in London, fuelled by her own experiences of an Irish national living and working in the city. This interplay between personal and wider collective memory is a critical aspect of her work, and the viewer is confronted with questions about what gets officialised into—and in turn ratified by—history (indeed, the imagery for her paintings is derived from the image archive of the Irish Post in London).

In *Cyclical Narratives* history is approached as a construction: the sum of lived experiences, reports, interpretations and filtering that misleadingly form the notion of a smooth, intelligible sequence of events. History is apprehended as a linear process, rather than the—somewhat more realistic—chaotic amalgamation of overlapping events. And, quite importantly, history is not always synonymous with the Truth. As demonstrated in the ludic Chinese Whispers game, information gets distorted in the course of time, and by those telling the story.

Lisa reminds us that both in our personal lives and in history books, we constantly select certain rational facts and gradually discard what was left.

What makes these works particularly interesting is the artist's exploration of these concepts in parallel to our process of storage of memories. She looks at historical events as we look at our own recollections—or as they come to us, that is; through the idea that they are interrupted, blurred, blended and increasingly fading pieces of information and feelings stored in our brains. Our minds combine different data to construct our memories, which eventually become substitutes for our experiences. What remains are ideas; intangible, abstract ideas of what we once lived. Lisa deftly hints at this aspect by the use of hazy or dream-like backgrounds and the composition of colour and abstract patterning.

As O'Donnell explores the similarities between the personal and the collective reconstructions of events, she exposes the way in which they mutually shape each other, ultimately becoming inseparable and indistinguishable. Even when the subject matter, the Irish Diaspora, is approached from a collective point of view—through the depiction of public buildings and empty rooms—the interest still lies in the individual, as exemplified by the fascinating painting of the recently married elderly couple. The difference is that in the empty dancehall the viewer is not limited to a single story but is allowed to



Just Married, 2013, oil on board, 24 x 35cm

imagine all that must have passed within those walls, beneath that grand chandelier. Interestingly, that dancehall does not exist anymore, as the building was destroyed. So what happened to those stories, what remains of them today? This analogy between the personal act of remembering and history's selective appropriation of events in turn points to the inaccuracy involved in both processes, and to the fact that neither can ever overcome their condition of inherently failed systems of record-keeping.

Born in Galway, Ireland, Lisa O'Donnell lives and works in London where she has recently finished an M.A. in Fine Arts at Central Saint Martins. Among others, she has participated in shows such as *We Wear Short Shorts*, curated by MART for The Irish Film Festival London, in 2013, besides Culture Cloud, New Art Exchange, Nottingham; *Make The Eighties The Decade Of Endeavour*, KTcontemporary Gallery, Dublin; and *Female Irish Artists*, Five Years Gallery, London, all in 2012. She was the recipient of Galway County Council Tyrone Guthrie Residency Award in 2013, was shortlisted for Culture Cloud Award and received the Arts Council of Ireland Travel and Training Award, both in 2012.

First solo artist of the gallery's joint Big/Little Exhibitions programme, Lisa O'Donnell will conduct workshops together with A Bigger Picture Project for Year 6 students focused in the investigation of issues around the construction of history and the importance of observing different perspectives when considering events around us. At the end of the term, it will be Year 6's turn to put up their own exhibition responding to Lisa's *Cyclical Narratives*. We are very much looking forward to their contribution to the Art Shed Gallery, which has steadily been evolving to being a local art site, as much as a place for the pupils to showcase their own artistic explorations.

The show will run from September 6th to November 23rd. An artist's talk will be offered in September. Free. Booking not necessary but advisable. Please visit www.abiggerpictureproject.com or contact abiggerpictureproject@gmail.com for more information. To contact the artist visit: www.lisaodonnellartist.com.