

Shrine For Girls, Dublin Patricia Cronin

16 June to 20 August 2017

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MISERICORDIA Making 'Maternal Emotions' Manifest with Patricia Cronin's Shrine for Girls TINA KINSELLA

Brilliant cloths cascade in luminous abundance to issue a bejewelled invitation into the space of installation. To the sides, two further mounds of fabrics are piled in seemingly casual disarray. Their muted colours and gentle contours recollect the quiet, unthoughtful rituals and banal rhythms of mundane domesticity. On closer inspection, these mounds of materials reveal forms of feminine drape — saris, hijabs and aprons — which have been draped in sculptural assemblage on sturdy shipping crates stamped with the markings of cargo.

The saris are placed here for the two female teenage cousins who were gang raped, murdered and strung from a mango tree in the Uttar Pradesh region of India in 2014. The hijabs act as placcholders for the 276 Chibok schoolgirls who were kidnapped by Boko Haram in Nigeria the same year, some of them pressganged into marriage with their abductors. The aprons are for the young women who were involuntarily incarcerated and forced into unpaid labour in the Magdalene Laundries in Ireland. Patricia Cronin has diligently researched the textiles these garments have been manufactured from, sourcing the fabrics as close as possible to the regions where such violent acts were committed.

The shipping crates upon which these garments are arranged were also specially commissioned by the artist. Stamps of arrows, umbrellas and wine bottles are clearly visible alongside inked squares bearing the word “fragile”. These emblems are a generative insignia of paths for the Indian, Nigerian and Irish girls and young women us of the multitudes of girls and women who continue to be abused, killed, go missing, abandoned fabrics she has attentively displayed on shipping crates also serve to remind us of the multitudes of girls and women who continue to be abused, killed, go missing, made invisible or trafficked across the globe every day. Suddenly the stout wooden crates appear too frail to support their cargo.

In the catalogue produced for the first iteration of this artistic project in the Chiesa di San Gallo for the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015, Maura Reilly observed that since the history of Western art is already ‘filled with images of torture, raped and brutalized women’ how can an artist:

... depict a widespread epidemic like the global violence against women? How can one represent kidnapping, rapes, lynchings, murders and other atrocities without embracing age-old stereotypes, which some might find titillating?

Her role was as protector of the community, for she would intercede on behalf of the people to plead for mercy, for those from all social classes, as she was the mother of all and made no distinction between the rich and the poor, the sinners and the saints.

But it is to a much earlier genre of maternity that I wish to draw attention, the *Madonna* *della Misericordia* who is prone in paintings and sculptures of the Medieval and early Renaissance period of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and depicted in works by artists such as Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi, Andrea di Bartolo da Jesi and in the Virgin of Mercy as the word *misericordi* derives from the Latin words *misericos* (mercy, compassion), *miserere* (to pity), *miseriae* (mercy), but also *cor* or *cordis* (heart), perhaps a more literal translation would be my lady of the merciful heart.

Other than the representational violence enacted through feminized, or otherwise vulnerable, bodies depicted in historic and contemporary visual technologies, another iconographic and symbologenic trope of femininity gained currency in the canon of art history, that being the figure of the mother which relies and at the same time problematizes discrete divisions instituted between the sacred and the profane, the universal and the particular, the imagined and the actual. The history of Western art abounds with images of mothers: Renaissance Madonnas offer the maternal breast to the infant Jesus while breastfeeding mothers of the new bourgeois class are prevalent in post-revolutionary French painting. Intimate portrayals of the maternal sphere appear at the beginning of the 20th century in the works of painters such as Mary Cassatt, Berthe Morso, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Paula Modersohn-Becker.

Deploying the *Madonna della Misericordia* as a figure of mercy, love and compassion which precedes any notion of charity, which is given and can be taken away, my aim is to develop a line of thought that enables us to reapproach both individual and collective empathic *responsivity* to those who are still living, or dead, with respect to the unique conditions of their suffering outside of any given interpretation that might be offered from the perspective of any particular, religious doctrinal context. As mother to all, the figure of the *Madonna della Misericordia* turns our attention away from the inevitability of death which beckons from the horizon of our own, personal, future realities, towards the *only other ontological occurrence that all womb-born creatures share*, which is the

immemorial co-emergence into life that occurs in pregnancy and birth.

Deploying the *Madonna della Misericordia* as a figure of mercy, love and compassion and a politics of mercy, compassion, mourning and grief for the dead, disappeared and invisible young women in Patricia Cronin's *Shrine for Girls*.

The extension of motherly love to a community beyond sanguineous family bonds is what interests me in these images. In this way, the *Madonna della Misericordia* does not necessarily provide a symbolic placeholder for one's own mother, for any cultural construction of motherhood, or bear any necessary relation to some essentialised ideal of maternal function. Rather she can work as a prism by which to unpack an ethics of the maternal function.

Refracting visual and spatial access to the brutalised female corpus, Cronin's sculptural installations artfully avoid the circuits of gendered violence informing art's representational and signifying economies. This palpable representational refusal not only provokes us to ponder why the art history canon is so utterly perched by visual imagery, iconographic devices and semantic practices that solicit spectral desire to participate as witnesses to, and inquisitors of, the entanglement between desorous depictions of violence in historic and contemporary visual technologies and the systemic, structural global pandemic of gendered, sexual and reproductive violence inflicted upon women that continues to be tolerated, whether explicitly or by complicity, to the present day.

The LAB

The LAB Gallery is a platform for Irish arts practice, showcasing emerging artists, encouraging risk taking and collaboration while developing innovative learning and research programmes. The LAB and the LAB Gallery are programmes of the City Arts Office a section of Dublin City Council providing a citywide service developing the Arts in Dublin through partnership and collaboration. The Lab Gallery and Dublin City Arts Office are supported by The Arts Council.

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www.shrineforgirls.org

Artist's bio

Patricia Cronin's work examines issues of gender, sexuality and social justice and has been exhibited widely in the U.S. and internationally. *Shrine For Girls, Venice*, curated by Ludovico Pratesi, premiered as a solo Collateral Event of the 56th Venice Biennale then traveled to The FLAG Art Foundation, New York, NY. Other solo exhibitions were presented at the Capitoline Museum's Centrale Montemartini Museum, and the American Academy in Rome Art Gallery, both in Rome, Italy; Newcomb Art Museum, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY and her acclaimed sculpture “Memorial To A Marriage” is permanently installed in Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx, NY. Cronin is the recipient of numerous awards including: the Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome, Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Grant, two Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grants and a Civitella Ranieri Fellowship. Her works are in numerous museum collections, including the National Gallery of Art and Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, both in Washington, DC, Perez Art Museum Miami, FL and Gallery of Modern Art and Kelvingrove Museum, both in Glasgow, Scotland. She is the author of *Harriet Hosmer: Lost and Found, A Catalogue Raisonné* and *The Zenobia Scandal: A Meditation on Male Jealousy* and is Professor of Art at Brooklyn College of The City University of New York.

www.patriciacronin.net

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The always, already prior event of birth has been almost universally excised from phisosophical and other theoretical approaches to the production of subjectivity, with the result that early natality is not generally considered as constitutive of being. Given the fact that each and every one of us — regardless of sex, sexuality or gender — all emerged into life under these conditions of vulnerability and corporeal assailability, it is curious to note that those prior events of pregnancy and birthing have yet to be subject to persistent epistemological enquiry: an enquiry that could contribute to an expanded understanding of the intersections between ethics and politics. This is not to suggest that we could remember the event of our own birth, even if we wanted to, or point at stake here. Rather, it is a call to question why the *culturally* indicated abys or amnesia surrounding the event of birth itself has been so universally accepted to the extent that we fail to seriously re-consider the fact that we all emerge from a birthing body and that we are, henceforth and forever more, bearers of a body which has been subject to pregnancy and birth. Can we consider the conditions of vulnerability and corporeal assailability that this event reminds us of as a starting point from which to re-consider compassion, mercy and love as constitutive of the condition of being womb-born and, thereby, as a model by which to rehabilitate our ethical sensibilities and reimagine an ethics of care that could be extended towards our broader, global communities?

This line of thinking draws strongly on the work of artist, psychoanalyst and theorist, Bracha L. Ettinger, who has developed a body of work entitled Matrital Theory which conceptualises the late stages of pregnancy and the fraternal encounter between becoming-mother and becoming infant. For Ettinger's theorisation of maternity see "From Proto-Ethical Compassion to Responsibility: Beginnings and the Three Primary Mother Phrases of Not-Encroachment in Athena, 2006-2, and for an introduction to her Matrital Theory, see *The Matrital Encroachment*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Maura Reilly, 'Patricia Cronin's Social Sculpture: Shrine for Girls', in *Patricia Cronin: Shrine for Girls*. Milano: Silvana Editore, 2015, p. 40.

In my consideration of Patricia Cronin's *Shrine for Girls*, I have been unexpectedly returned to the possibilities for rethinking and redeploying the iconographic paraphernalia and conceptual apparatus surrounding the *Madonna della Misericordia*. Cronin's work leans upon my personal obsession with the operative dynamic between Church and State in Ireland that continues to inform the limitations and restrictions upon access to bodily autonomy, reproductive rights and healthcare facilities for the women living in this island. Placed within the particularities of this precise geographical location, Cronin's *Shrine for Girls* gains a specific resonance. 1996 is the year during which the last Magdalene Laundry in Ireland closed. This Magdalene Laundry is located on Sean McDermott Street, which is located within a stone's throw of The LAB space in McDermott Street, which Cronin's installation is now situated. It is extraordinary to think that it is precisely because these “unmarried” women had either been pregnant, or were considered to be in danger of becoming so in the future, that they were placed in these so-called “asylums”. Some of the Magdalene Laundries were run by the religious order of the Sisters of Charity but as the artist reminds me, some of these laundries were run by the erroneously called “fallen women” who were often forcibly housed within these institutions: living beings who may have been denied love, care and compassion by those they were entrusted to. With Cronin's *Shrine for Girls* installed in this particular place, we are offered the possibility to meditate upon those historical and continuing injustices against women and girls which persist to forge a perpetual scar over maternal and reproductive subjectivity, more broadly understood, here in Ireland. Due to continuing insufferable conditions impinging upon women and reproductive bodies, it seems impossible to create a coherent narrative around traumas that are both past and present, but one can only hope that artistic process, and eventually discussions, may ferment from these spurning beginnings to allow us to collectively, conceptually and affectively re-engage with our histories that hurt us and which continue to press upon the production of the present.

who have been born and for those who have suffered and continue to suffer.

of *misericordia* is by no means the valorisation of any essentialised image of motherhood or of the particular conditions of pregnancy. Instead, what is being suggested is that the notion of *misericordia* can be enlisted to encompass a secular ethics of care for those

Patricia Cronin Shrine For Girls, Dublin The LAB Gallery

June 16 – August 20, 2017

The LAB Gallery is pleased to present, *Shrine For Girls, Dublin*, the first solo exhibition in Ireland of New York artist Patricia Cronin. One of the critically acclaimed highlights of the 2015 Venice Biennale, this site-specific installation is a meditation on the global plight of exploited girls and women.

Moving from the sacred altars and architecture of Venice's sixteenth-century Chiesa di San Gallo to the secular urban gallery context of The LAB Gallery, in the heart of Joyce's Nighttown and built in the shadow of the last Magdalene Laundry to close in Ireland in 1996, Cronin gathers hundreds of articles of women's and girls' clothing from around the world to represent three specific tragedies. Brightly-colored saris symbolize two Indian cousins who were gang-raped and lynched in 2014; somber hijabs signify 276 Nigerian Chibok schoolgirls who were kidnapped by the terrorist group Boko Haram in 2014 (109 of which are still missing); and pale aprons symbolize those worn by “fallen women” in forced labour at the Magdalene Asylums and Laundries in Ireland, the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States to act as relics of these young martyrs.

Shrines, part of every major religion's practice, provide a space for contemplation, petition and rituals of remembrance. In this exhibition, Cronin presents the three original fabric sculptures, here piled on top of their shipping crates to also address human trafficking and act as a metaphor of who or what is valued in our culture. Returning to the neighbourhood where the weight of history inevitably overlays the interpretation of the contemporary, in the historic Monto, Cronin reminds us that we are all complicit in allowing violent abuses of women's rights to become invisible in our society. The histories of the Magdalene Laundries are only starting to be heard.

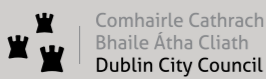
Small photographs of each tragedy accompany the sculpture and a new series of oil portrait paintings, exhibited for the first time, place a human face on tragedy and draw our attention away from statistics to the magnitude of the individual loss and unrealized human potential.

Cronin asks: “What is the role of contemporary art in our 24-hour news cycle society? What can an artist do if they are not a politician, an NGO nor a philanthropist? Hopefully the artist looks out, keenly observes the world, reflects, and responds in a way that shakes us out of our numbness. We cannot be silent.”

Sheena Barrett, curator
Caroline PI, assistant curator

The LAB Gallery, Foley Street, Dublin 1.
t: 353 (0)1 222 5455
e: artsoffice@dublincity.ie
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Opening hours:
Monday – Friday: 10am to 6pm,
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