

Patricia Cronin: 'A silent protest can be quite powerful'

The artist talks about Shrine for Girls, her installation at the Venice Biennale that commemorates three girls raped in India, 276 schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram, and the women of the Magdalene laundries, and what compelled her to speak out



Gang rape and lynching; kidnap; forced labour: throughout history, women and girls have been subjected to terrible violence and repression around the world. More shockingly, in many places, it still goes on today. In her site-specific installation *Shrine for Girls*, New York-based artist Patricia Cronin (b1963) commemorates three such cases: the rape, murder and hanging from trees of three girls in India in June 2014 (the “mango tree rape case”); the kidnapping of 276 female students by the jihadist militants of Boko Haram in Nigeria in April 2014; and the many young women pushed into forced labour in the Magdalene asylums and laundries in Europe and North America from the late-18th century to as recently as 1996. These are represented respectively by piles of saris, hijabs and grey aprons, one on each of the three stone altars in Chiesa di San Gallo, Venice’s smallest church, now deconsecrated and serving as a cultural space.

Three shrines, each accompanied by a framed photograph, offering space for reflection, contemplation and remembrance; space for learning lessons; space for lamenting wrongs done and recalling these – and many other – young girls, whom Cronin considers to be secular or gender martyrs, since, unlike religious martyrs, they receive no otherworldly triumph.

Interview by ANNA McNAY

Filmed by MARTIN KENNEDY