

Press Release for If I Show You the Roses

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Mollie Douthit

Nathalie Du Pasquier

Nick Miller

Bridget O'Gorman

Magnhild Opdøl

He said:

"Will you give me your loss and your sorrow?"

I nodded my head, as I lay on the bed

"If I show you the roses will you follow?"

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In Nick Cave's great gothic romance he juxtaposes beautiful blooms, and all their associated optimism and allure with a certain doom. Then, of course Cave would take things to an extreme, that darkness is at the core of his art. Nevertheless, blossoms trigger radically different meanings when used as bouquets (to decorate), garlands (to celebrate), or wreaths (in mourning). To quote my friend the artist and writer Sherman Sam "Flowers are the 'crown' of the life cycle of a plant. They come to be, often briefly, and then they die, but at that very point they also create the possibility of propagation. Life begins again, and the cycle begins anew."

Memento Mori; 'remember (that you) die' has long been an important part of ascetic disciplines; it is a way of cultivating detachment and reflecting on the transient nature of most of "the stuff of life". Importantly for art historians, the term describes specific artistic or symbolic reminders of the above. For Centuries artists have used particular objects in Still Life paintings, most transparently the human skull but also other organic (perishable) elements; animal corpses, fruit, flowers of course, and butterflies; also smoke and flames, which symbolise the brevity of life; and by extension the ephemeral nature of joy.

Many contemporary artists devote time to the contemplation of these same subjects. The works in this exhibition tell stories, particular and personal, which illuminate the terrifically surprising way most of us experience 'living'. Each artist certainly explores the inevitability of endings and the fleeting nature of experiences. They also celebrate the fabulous bursts of beauty and joy that abound, that can be snatched, treasured, just - taken for oneself (albeit without resorting to Cave's dark ways). The inclination to devour positive, life-affirming episodes, hold onto them and crush them close, preserve and remember, is universal. The wonders that living dishes out are not to be taken for granted. Nothing lasts for an eternity - but that does not in any way dilute the delight of an experience - why should it.

Mollie Douthit is a young American-born painter, who lives and works in Ireland. She paints on a modest scale and you might say her subjects are similarly modest. Unremarkable, often discarded, spent, and no longer (conventionally) useful objects are treated uniformly, placed in the centre of a composition with no other context, horizon-line, or background; she paints just the thing itself - naked and inert. These things are personal reminders of people and places. They are fragile in every sense; they have reached their own 'final' state. They are remnants and reminders, ciphers for an encounter or emotion that is finished but one that has left a mark. Douthit sets out to depict truthfully what she sees through colour, shapes, and forms in paint: attempting to rebuild that into an infinite, or locked state.

Nathalie Du Pasquier, is usually more interested in man-made subject matter and so, she has not moved away from her studio while making works for this exhibition. However, instead of focusing on the other "things" in there, she turns her attention towards little plants and solitary flowers, which occasionally happen to be in her manufactured environment, in this case on her work-desk. Now that the seasons are changing and it is deep autumn, winter looming with the promise of shorter days, she "somehow needs to connect with nature". Du Pasquier explains that these natural things are rendered quite fast, they are drawn "during the time you take notice of them". Du Pasquier's work speaks to me about time or timelessness; some things endure, some don't, but they are all waymarks on a life story.

Nick Miller, winner of the inaugural Hennessy Portrait Prize at the National Gallery of Ireland last month, often paints Still Life, or "Nature Morte". He describes this as "to hold static, in paint, some arrangement of objects that resonate emotionally". In 2011, he began working in the North West Hospice. He started each weekly session by painting the flowers he brought in. The session sometimes lead to a portrait of a patient there, sometimes just to a painting of the flowers, but always to a meaningful encounter. The unruly bouquets of flowers and branches in this exhibition are a progression from that experience, they all sit in different vases, bottles and pots from his late mother's eclectic collection. These paintings became remote visits with her while she was terminally ill: a way of attending her, even if not physically, all the time. These paintings inspired this exhibition "if I show you the roses".

Bridget O'Gorman works across a broad array of media, and her subjects address the reality of stasis and decay. She wants to raise questions about memory and imagination, deal with a forgotten past or of potential futures. In Bone Meal, soft fruits and quails are cast in bone china, (which in its raw state contains animal matter/bone), that tableau directly quotes 17th Century Dutch painting. In Gilt, over one hundred butterflies, bred for display and known for their colour and vitality, are locked together, rigid and glazed in gold leaf. In Wet Evening in April the artist literally deconstructs the titular Kavanagh poem, evoking an immersive yet non-specific place: a reminder that we will not always be present as we are now.

Magnhild Opdøl's multi-faceted practice is also influenced by the Northern European tradition of Vanitas paintings. "Opdøl depicts this world as a place of sudden changes, consequences and risk, obsessive habits and misplaced desires, and where our relationship to and understanding of nature has eroded" as succinctly described by writer John Gayer. She confronts the uncomfortable truth that every action has an effect, and that most effects are irreversible - there is simply no way back. Humankind find this fact ever harder to comprehend: loss of control, hardship, death and decay simply fills us with an abject feeling. Opdøl comes from a Norwegian farming background, her work has always shown a keen awareness of the way death is interwoven with life on the farm - that's simply how it is and how it always been. In Opdøl's world there is a very thin line between life and death and there is no line at all between goodness and badness.