

Associated Talks and Events

Thursday 25 January 2018, 6.00pm, Johnston Suite, IMMA

Artist Conversation & Preview / Brian Maguire & Sarah Glennie

Artist Brian Maguire discusses the IMMA exhibition, *War Changes its Address: The Aleppo Paintings* with Sarah Glennie. This talk explores Brian Maguire's research and recent visits to Syria, as it relates to the artists ongoing interests in social and political situations and approaches painting as a gesture of solidarity.

Thursday 1 March 2018, 6.30pm, Lecture Room, IMMA

Seminar / *Civil War – Historical & Contemporary Perspectives*

Speakers include Giath Taha (Photojournalist, Syria); Paddy Woodworth (Author, Journalist, Irish Times); Colm Laigneach (Member of Hidden Voices, an international conflict resolution body based in Ireland) and others.

Friday 16 March 2018 – 1.15pm, Meeting Point - IMMA Main Reception
Curator's Lunchtime Talk Series

Ben Stafford, Assistant Curator: Exhibitions, IMMA presents a gallery walk through of the exhibition Brian Maguire, *War Changes its Address: The Aleppo Paintings*.

Friday 27 April 2018, 2.30pm, Johnston Suite, IMMA

Seminar / *Bearing Witness – Creative & Critical Practice on the Frontline*

Speakers include Brian Maguire (Artist); Lara Marlowe (Author, France Correspondent, Journalist, and Irish Times); Elisa Perriguer (Film maker and Activist, Paris) and others.

Visit www.imma.ie for a detailed public programme of talks, seminars, curatorial responses and blogs that offers a cross discipline of perspectives in association with the exhibition.

IMMA would like to thank Brian Maguire for his commitment and dedication to this exhibition.

Thanks to Maguire's galleries: Kerlin Gallery, Dublin and Fergus McCaffrey, New York and Tokyo. Thanks also go to Elisa Perriguer and Dan Reed of Amos Pictures, for sharing their film 'Calais, The End Of The Jungle'.

IMMA would also like to thank Matheson for their ongoing and visionary support of new work at IMMA, and our invaluable IMMA Members and Patrons, all of whom have made this exhibition possible.

Exhibition curated by Sarah Glennie, Director, National College of Art and Design and Rachael Thomas, Senior Curator: Head of Exhibitions, IMMA.

Exhibition supported by:



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Front cover:

Brian Maguire
Aleppo 2, 2017
acrylic on linen
200 x 160 cm

Image courtesy the artist and Kerlin Gallery.

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IMMA
EAST GROUND GALLERIES
26 JANUARY – 6 MAY 2018

Brian Maguire *War Changes Its Address: The Aleppo Paintings*



IMMA presents *War Changes Its Address: The Aleppo Paintings*, a new body of work by Irish artist Brian Maguire.

As with all Maguire’s work, this exhibition emerges from a considered engagement with the political and social complexities of place and people. Maguire has previously worked over long periods of time with prisoners in Portlaoise Prison, and in prisons throughout Europe and the Americas, and with families of femicide victims in the city of Juárez in Mexico.

***War Changes Its Address* can be understood in the context of an earlier exhibition, *Over Our Heads the Hollow Seas Closed Up* (Kerlin, 2016), which examined the refugee crisis then hitting Europe’s shores.**

In March 2017, Maguire travelled to the Syrian cities of Damascus and Aleppo. The paintings in this exhibition are a result of Maguire’s observations and photographs of the destruction caused by the struggle for control of the eastern and central areas of Aleppo. Earlier in 2016 he travelled though France, Italy, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Austria, visiting many of the cities on the overland journey from Greece to Germany, familiar to so many Syrian refugees.

As reflected in both exhibitions, Maguire sees the war in Syria and the refugee crisis as being intricately linked. In looking at how to engage with these events, Maguire identifies a sentiment expressed in Primo Levi’s *If This Is a Man*: to privilege people more than things. To not do this, Levi says, is to encourage spiritual collapse. Maguire sees this demand - to privilege people

over things - as essential to the way in which Europe should respond to these events.

Taken collectively, these exhibitions bear stark witness to the destruction of a city, and the human displacement caused by such destruction; manifested in the waves of Syrian refugees crossing into Europe.

This exhibition includes new, previously unexhibited works. All sharing the title *Aleppo*, these paintings are made in a washed-out palette of browns, greys and blues, with the occasional small burst of colour. The uniformity of colour reflects the wiping out of detail and design caused by widespread destruction of the city’s architecture, and the seeming total removal of life from these streets. Rather than a vibrant colourful city, one of the oldest in the world, the viewer is left looking at a place that has been stripped of identity, as well as physically destroyed. The paintings call to mind a stage set, empty after the spectacle of war. The occasional small burst of colour speaks to the determined urge for life to continue, even among the most unpromising of settings. It is tempting to consider this city completely desolate, and yet signs of life remain in the destroyed apartment buildings and streetscapes, and a single lone figure is visible in the ruins.

While in the city, Maguire engaged with the remaining local population and was struck by the fact that life there had persevered throughout the war, and in its aftermath was beginning to re-emerge.

Though Maguire’s process shares much in common with that of a photojournalist, his works contain more layers, and

are more complex, than that of simple documentation. These paintings were developed over a number of months in Maguire’s studio and so, like the viewer, are removed from the situation of the Syrian war. They show the streets of Aleppo, but also the interpretation and reflection of the artist; beautiful in their gestural paint strokes, yet also terrible in the realities they contain. The painterly depiction of the stark subject matter creates a tension that can at once both attract and repel the viewer. Unlike many journalists, Maguire is not bound by an attempt to portray the situation dispassionately, and his subjective response to the situation as he experienced it is at the core of the work.

The research done by Maguire involves more than photography; he also undertook workshops with children affected by the conflict and talked to people living and working there about their experiences of living at war and under siege.

Maguire’s socially engaged work sits within a tradition of Irish artists and writers documenting political and violent upheaval across the world, and in the process acting as witness to history. William Orpen’s paintings of the battlefields of the First World War are, in their almost peaceful depictions of the landscape void of people and ravaged by war, a direct forerunner of Maguire’s work.

In another vein, there is the precedent of the social engagement of Irish writer Hubert Butler, (Maguire’s exhibition *Not An Island*, Butler Gallery (1998), was an homage to Butler) in both writing about the atrocities in Europe under the Nazis, and in his private actions in which he helped scores of Jewish

individuals and families escape Europe for Ireland and the United States, in the face of entrenched anti-Semitism in Ireland at the time.

As with these antecedents, there is a hope that this work, and art, will outlive, and have a more lasting or universal impact than the 24-hour news cycle, the effect of which can be to overwhelm the viewer. In an age with constant digital access to news and opinion, detail, nuance and consideration can be lost. Maguire’s paintings can act as a tool for a quieter and more considered engagement with the impact of war on a place and people.

Maguire has spoken of a desire to “Tell something of the life of the place.”¹ There is the temptation, when viewing these works, to consider Aleppo as destroyed beyond hope of rescue, and to consider that life in this place is finished. However, no matter how widespread the destruction is, there is also the potential for life to start again, and to flourish. An earlier work by Maguire, *Stephen’s Soap (Aleppo)* (2016), simply depicts a bar of soap made by Mamoud Zinanele, assisted by Hanan, from laurel and olive oil using a 3000-year-old process. An ancient local product still made today, it has survived war and speaks to the longstanding cultural and social traditions present in the region.

Maguire works partly in Paris, which plays host to a global armaments fair in which heavy-duty weapons are presented in the manner of luxury goods; clean, well-designed, desirable. Maguire’s concern is that war is perpetuated by the global arms trade, indifferent to the suffering caused

by their commerce and industry, the constant victim being the global poor, unrepresented in the media, and unseen by the majority of people in the West.

The phrase ‘War Changes Its Address’ speaks to the never-ending cycle of war, constantly ongoing somewhere in the world, perpetuated for profit and power, at the expense of communities, countries and human lives.

Artist Biography

Brian Maguire has shown extensively in Europe and the US, participating in shows in Korea, China and Japan. Recent solo exhibitions include *Over Our Heads the Hollow Seas Closed Up*, Kerlin Gallery, Dublin (2016); *J’accuse*, The Void, Derry (2015–2016); *The Absence of Justice Demands This Act*, Fergus McCaffrey, New York (2015); *Seed Corn is Not for Harvesting and Other Works*, X Espacio de Arte, Mexico City (2013); *Femicide/Juarez: paintings by Brian Maguire*, European Parliament, Brussels (2012) and *Brian Maguire Paintings: 2002–2012*, Cultuurcentrum de Werfft, Geel, Belgium (2012). In 2000, *Inside Out*, a major retrospective, toured from Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane to Crawford Art Gallery, Cork and the Contemporary Art Museum, Houston.

Group exhibitions and biennales include: *Rhona Hoffman 40 Years, Part 3: Political*, Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, USA (2017); *Collection - The Artist as Witness*, Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, Dublin (2016); Ram Foundation, Rotterdam (2016); *Conversations*, Irish Museum of Modern Art (2014); *Return to Sender*, WIELS, Brussels (2014); *Remembering Them*, Victoria Gallery and Museum, Liverpool

University (2013); *Changing States: Contemporary Irish Art & Francis Bacon’s Studio*, BOZAR Palais des Beaux Arts / Paleis voor Schone Kunsten, Brussels (2013); *Panchaea: In Search of an Equal Utopia & a Willing Suspension of Disbelief*, VISUAL, Carlow (2013); *An Oasis of Horror in a Desert of Boredom*, Visual, Carlow (2012); Dublin Contemporary (2011); the 3rd Beijing Biennale (2008); *Race-Face*, National Gallery of Contemporary Art, Korea (2002); the 24th São Paulo Biennale (1998); *A Century of Modern Painting*, Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art, Japan (1997).

Maguire’s work is held in numerous public collections including the Museum of Fine Art Houston, USA; Irish Museum of Modern Art; Museo de Art de Rio – MAR, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane; Trinity College Dublin; Gemeentemuseum, Den Hague, Netherlands; Juvasklya Taidemuseum , Finland; Wolverhampton Art Gallery, UK; and Crawford Art Gallery, Cork.

¹Brian Maguire, in conversation, December 2017