

# Places, Histories and Other Matters

Jane Hughes

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Ashbourne Library & Cultural Centre  
Killegland Street, Ashbourne,  
Co. Meath, Ireland

*Places, Histories and Other Matters* is a solo exhibition by Helsinki based Meath artist Jane Hughes. Originally from Navan, Jane has worked internationally as a visual artist, curator and educator in Germany and Finland for more than a decade. Hughes work relates to social history often depicting old pastimes, historical occurrences and past cultural events and is largely researched from old photographic sources. The artist paints from images collected in libraries, encyclopaedias, historical books, flea markets and newspaper archives; taking disregarded photographs and reincarnating them as paintings. The artist states:

'I have a deep fascination for discovering old abandoned photographs from different parts of the world and rescuing them from obscurity. I collect random images from a multitude of diverse sources. The photographs I choose to paint from create multiple narratives and tend to lead me down various obscure paths.'

It is in travelling down these obscure pathways that themes begin to naturally emerge and images slowly take on new meaning as series of works develop. Hughes most recent paintings depict an eclectic mix of source materials and subjects. The artist's own fascination with history: cultural, social, personal and collective is the charge behind the work. Representing an assortment of images depicting such diverse subjects as her family homestead in County Meath to performing television monkeys, 1970s Americana and Soviet nuclear power plant workers, the resulting body of paintings form an interesting smorgasbord of social scenes and cultural commentary. Linked together by the artist's recognisable espousal of a murky pallet and feathered paint application; the uniformity in size, structure and material help present this assorted array of imagery, timelines and depicted customs as an unmistakable and cohesive collection of paintings. The completed series of work in *Places Histories and Other Matters* is presented here in Toradh Gallery, Ashbourne for the first time. Speaking about her art Hughes says:

'I am interested in the traces of historical documentation, the invented or distorted image, the banal and the iconic. I am attracted by the layers of history found in images; the parallel lives of people who once lived and the places they inhabited'.

'Some images depict scenes from cities that no longer exist, where borders have shifted or regimes have ended, such as Stalingrad on the border of Germany and Poland. Others are from my personal connection to Meath and the River Boyne. Each one reference some cultural occurrence or story and illustrate these past narratives.'

Hughes works come together to form a collection of visual ghost stories featuring faceless figures in shadowy landscapes. An eerie wraithlike quality accompanies the images although punctuated with strong colours and compositions. The artist's ability to maintain an ethereal quality in the strongly executed paintings displays not only an unique style but remarkable ability.

Hughes also describes an interest in photographic composition and in particular, how old photos were orchestrated and used for political purpose.

‘I am intrigued by the way certain images were fabricated and often manipulated to translate a certain message’.

‘I am interested in how the meaning of images can change over time. How the same image can have multiple meanings and readings. For example, an image that was once intended to inspire hope can now be a reminder of oppression’.

Hughes states that she is also curious about printed images that were once iconic but have since been forgotten. The artist believes the current digital era has much to do with images becoming disposable and forgotten, stating:

‘as we are saturated with a daily onslaught of digital imagery we view everything from trivial cat videos to gruesome political beheadings and mass shootings in quick succession and, dangerously, too often with the same level of de-sensitivity.’

When it comes to photography today, there is a flippancy in how an image is captured, what is captured and indeed what is shared out amongst the world. This is an affliction of convenience. The prevalent use of mobile phones with image making tools to surpass those of high spec cameras have led to a culture of quick capture and consume. Hughes’ images remind us of when photographs were precious, considered, orchestrated and special. When visual documentation was a purposeful, thoughtful pursuit.

The artist also reminds us of strange occurrences in history, curious customs no longer practiced and cultural peculiarities from around the world. Times when chimps provided family entertainment, Nazis hosted the Olympic games, showbands provided distraction from the devastation of war and an iron curtain separated Europe. In resurrecting old archival images and re-animating them as paintings, Hughes creates an artistic method of visual production that is both interrogational and conceptual.

The artist produced images for this show in her studio in Helsinki, and during her productive residency at the Heinrich Böll Cottage on Achill Island in Summer 2019.

Jane Hughes’ work is truly unique in theme and execution. Her subjects are provocative and nostalgic and will hopefully inspire debate and conversation amongst its audience.

Jane Hughes is a visual artist working with painting, drawing, animation, installation and collaborative projects. She graduated with a BA in Fine Art Painting, from the National College of Art & Design, Dublin in 2006 and completed an MA in Environmental Art, at Aalto University, Helsinki in 2012. Recent solo exhibitions include “Architecture of Emotions” in Custom House Studios & Gallery, Westport in 2018 and “Gods & Demons of the Forest” at the Embassy of Ireland, Berlin in 2015. She has taken part in several residencies, most recently at Heinrich Böll Cottage on Achill Island in June 2019. [www.janehughes.ie](http://www.janehughes.ie)

Meath County Council Arts Office is delighted to present Places Histories and Other Matters by Jane Hughes in Toradh Gallery Ashbourne as part of the 2019 visual art programme. For further information on this exhibition, queries relating to sales, and details on the access and education programme, please contact the arts office directly on 0469097414 or email [artsoffice@meathcoco.ie](mailto:artsoffice@meathcoco.ie)

Text by Curator and Assistant Arts Officer, Meath County Council, Aedin McGinn.