

## ARCHITECTURE OF EMOTIONS, JANE HUGHES 2018 AT CUSTOM HOUSE, IRELAND

On the opening night of *Architecture of Emotions*, a solo exhibition by **Jane Hughes** at Custom House Studios & Gallery, Westport, Ireland in May – June 2018 invited Guest Speaker visual artist **Tinka Bechert** gave an introduction to the exhibition. The following is an edited text version of the speech:

By reading Jane's biographical notes, from County Meath to Dublin, to Helsinki, to Berlin and now back living in Finland, we see before us a bright and brave woman who forges her own path. She crosses various cultural contexts with great ease and success. And Jane Hughes, embraces the very notion of dissolving rigid boundaries by the gentle touch of the paintbrush as only the paintbrush can do. I am going to reflect on what Jane has said about the works herself as I am always the most excited, to hear the artist's own voice on their own work first:

*"The imagery is influenced by an interest in the psychology of displacement, memory, and transition spaces. An attempt to dig into transnational perspectives of place and social history. This manifests itself in snippets of remote landscapes, fragmented interiors and mutating structures, through loose lines and melting boundaries, as a strategy to explore psychological states between connectedness and isolation."*

Having a sense of belonging is a common experience. Belonging means acceptance as a member or a part. Such a simple word for huge concept. A sense of belonging is a human need, just like the need for food and shelter. Some see themselves as connected only to one or two people, others feel a connection to all people the world over, to humanity as a shared work in progress. Some seek belonging through excluding others. That reflects the idea that there must be those who don't belong in order for there to be those who do.

Jane talks about displacement a lot and while "internal strife" could be a condition describing both artistic enquiry and also reasons for emigration, we have to remember that while we still have the privilege to choose our personal "in or out" of cultural displacement, many ethnic and other minorities don't have that choice. Cultural displacement is a double edged sword but it can also be a gift, I invite you to take the risk, it is a hugely enriching experience and "more is truly more" in this case, the more you know about other cultures - their cultural codes the richer your experience of life will be. While a majority of Irish Emigration has gone to English-speaking countries, I'd like to bow to Jane here, who is also grappling with not one but two European languages, on top of English and probably some Irish- each of them carrying a rich cultural heritage.

Only recently I was reminded of the fact, that we painters and people of the visual art are very lucky in working with a universal language of pictures. I have some good friends who are writers and it occurred to me that it would have been a much harder task for them to choose a life elsewhere for thinking is embedded in language. And apart from my eternal jealousy of writers going on residencies with a usb stick in their pocket while Jane and I scrape at paint, push and pull at canvas, crate, ship and generally lug around and awful lot of physical stuff. I am glad for the power of pictures and that they don't necessarily need words to explain. Know, however, that painting also carries foreign languages, cultural heritage, that you may not know about as much of European painting has not travelled to Ireland, or is literally lost in translation. And sometimes we can only marvel at the sound of a foreign language, the rhythm, the exclamations that punctuate the perceived babble on a foreign radio station. Music and art can reach further perhaps?

Jane's visual language picks up many clues from European histories, her titles hint at Irish, German, English, French and Finnish histories contained within, and while pictures are universal they are also of a particular cultural background. Jane's work also communicates a rich emotional interiority, in which places and architecture feature as carriers of personal meaning. I feel reminded of the atomic merging of man and bicycle in Flann O' Brien's uncanny metaphors. Yet Jane's interior scenes seem to ooze history and emotion.

A room's walls swerve around us in an unnerving green, immediately invoking a feeling of unhinged gravity and loss of orientation both physically and emotionally.

To us painter's interested in the ancient alchemy of paint and pigments, Jane's witches fever both in title and colour of course refers to the historic use "Scheele's Green", which contained Copper Arsenate, which contains Arsenic. This chemical was widely used for Arts and Crafts wallpapers in England. It was also "all the rage" in Pre-Raphaelite Painting. Arsenic is highly toxic but its toxicity was disputed only after reported individuals, mostly women went a bit cuckoo in their beautiful rooms.

But then William Morris was the son of the biggest producer of Arsenic in England at the time. So they must have been witches going mad inside of those beautiful domestic cages, surely.

And another painting, I love very much shows us an actual cage, a bird cage attributed here to Louis the 15<sup>th</sup> in style, historical clues and riddles throughout, is this a reference to Louisa O Murphy, the reported Irish mistress of Louis the Beloved? Who alongside her sister modeled at the Paris Academy, the petite -maîtresse, the muse who is only allowed entry to the academy via her naked flesh to be gazed at to then become a footnote in history. Who Micheal Farrell from County Meath remodeled in poppy colours as the Madonna Irlanda in 1977?

And this woman from County Meath has picked up a Nordic brightness, is mastering the European expressionist palette which, in Ireland, makes you feel that you want to put on your sunglasses –I have been accused of that in the best possible manner too, as Irish painting often expels in more muted tones. And then we have the very dark German Romantic, a beautifully captured landscape, a nocturne that leaves us no option to either stumble in the dark or focus on the stars above. There are none of Friedrich's figures taking in the sites from a detached height, consuming if you will, the containable, tamed landscape. Jane's German Romantic nature could swallow us whole, if it chose to. The bright path ahead is lit up by the moon perhaps but maybe it isn't a path at all, perhaps its is only thin ice we are walking on. I ask you: And do we need to know all this about Jane's work?

No. Yes. Yes and no. Yes. Now, we do, very much.

We need to know all this because google is not that useful for historic world knowledge, when I tried to look up when Michael Farrell actually painted that painting, and only remembered Irish Madonna, I got how Madonna asked 43,000 fans "Why does it rain so much in Ireland?" at the Aviva Stadium among more classic religious iconographies.

Historical and Cultural Amnesia are upon us now as the programmers are determining what we see and what we get to know while competing with the everyday cacophony of countless media outlets. The traditional libraries are being shut down and we are loosing a lot of broader knowledge, the joined-up-thinking of history in the present. But we, we must remember history. For myself, I feel that we must know the vast history of painting as painters, that is why painting is excruciatingly difficult, as it has such extensive histories. We can, however, also look at painting for itself, formalistically speaking, or from the pure gut-feeling of our own likes and dislikes. Painting has the superpower to embrace all of it!

I myself am very impressed by Jane's paintings, I would just like you to just stand and look, to let the work embrace you, let the folded time and experience unfold for you personally, piece by piece. Bring your own associations from the gut-reaction to the well-educated comment, anything goes, share them with Jane as us artists are hugely enriched by what you, the viewer brings to their work.

Jane is a great painter- yes, she is indeed fluent in the many languages of paint and it's first-hand living history. Her work and embedded experience are an important voice that we can only hope to hear in Ireland more often in the future.