

Memory Theatre by Helen Kirwan at the
European Cultural Centre at the 57th
Biennale di Venezia 2017



The artist Helen Kirwan will unveil her two channel video installation Memory Theatre at 'Personal Structures - Crossing Borders' a group exhibition at the European Cultural Centre at the 57th Biennale di Venezia 2017. The exhibition is curated by the Global Art Affairs Foundation. This is the artist's third participation at with the European Cultural Centre at the Biennale. A sound piece by the award-winning Dublin-based composer Tom Lane was commissioned for the video, and is the product of a long-standing collaboration between the artist and musician.

Memory Theatre is a series of filmed performative pieces undertaken by the artist while in self-imposed isolation in Merzouga, Morocco, Dúnghness and Joss Bay, Kent and The Burren and Connemara, Ireland. The artist, dressed in black, repeatedly undertakes futile tasks. In Joss Bay, Kent, she attempts to measure the sea with buckets. In the desert dunes of Morocco, she documents the passing of time by pouring grains of sand into the dunes. These endless repetitions express 'the physical traces of mourning, which manifest themselves through absurd and futile activity.' The filmed pieces are a record of the event, shot by the cinematographers Simon Pruciak and Mathias Pilz, and the artist has edited over 27 hours of performance into a 44 minute video installation.

The elements of earth, fire, wind and water are at play in these sites: the hot sand dunes of the desert in Merzouga, Kent's beaches, the limestone pavements of the Burren and the Connemara bog. By engaging with them performatively, Kirwan explores the notion of the haptic: in the fog of bereavement, contact between the body and environment is a form of mapping or re-orientating. The artist's intuitive connection with the soil, stone and sea, conjure up the intensity of grief. There is also a personal significance that stems from the landscapes of Kent, where the artist has lived for 30 years, and Ireland, where she is from.

The journeys that the artist undertook to complete these performances are also central to the work. Repetition evokes also endless searching and yearning which some psychologists identify as intrinsic to the bereavement process. In earlier projects, such as Image of the Road (2013 - present with Simon Pruciak) the artist drove from the UK to the China border with Kazakhstan and back by motor car along the E40 European route.

Memory Theatre is underpinned by Kirwan's philosophical inquiry into the concept of the fragment. The German Romantic philosopher Friedrich Schlegel posited a radical definition of the 'fragment' as a dynamic practice which aims at fragmentation for its own sake. Intrinsic to Kirwan's futile reiterations and journeys is the essential incompleteness which is itself the mode of fulfilment.

For images and press enquiries please contact: info@helenkirwan.com

Notes to editors

Exhibition Details 13 May - 26 November 2017

Preview dates: Thursday 11 and Friday 12 May 2017

Opening times: 10am - 6pm; Monday - Sunday; CLOSED Thursdays

Free Entry

Location: Palazzo Mora, Strada Nova, 3659, 30121 Venezia, Italy

About Helen Kirwan

Helen Kirwan is a British - Irish conceptual artist. Born in Ireland where she lived for many years, she now divides her time between the UK and Brussels. She practised law as a barrister in Dublin and London for nearly twenty years before becoming an artist full time. She took a B.A. (First Class Hons.) in Fine Art at the University for the Creative Arts Canterbury in 2000 followed by an M.F.A. in Fine Art Practice from the University of Middlesex, London in 2002 and in 2004, and an M.A. in Aesthetics and Art Theory (Merit) at Kingston University, London. Kirwan's recent exhibitions include the 'Personal Structures' 2013, Palazzo Bembo, 54th Venice Biennale; Folkestone Triennial Fringe, 2014, Folkestone; 'Image of the Road', 2014, James Hockey Gallery, Surrey; University for the Creative Arts (UCA); 'Personal Structures - Crossing Borders', Palazzo Bembo, 56th Venice Biennale, Bodrum Biennial 2015; Bodrum; International Festival of Projections 2016, Kent; Fonlad Festival 2016, Coimbra, Portugal; Rapid Pulse Festival 2016, Chicago; 'East Sussex Open', 2016, Townier Art Gallery, Eastbourne; 'October 15 Ceremony', 2016, Gallery Çenkaya, Ankara, Camagüby International Video Art Festival 2017, Camagüby; 'Personal Structures - Opens Borders', Palazzo Mora, 57th Venice Biennale 2017; 'Thread of Light', 2017, P-21, London. <http://www.helenkirwan.com/>

About Tom Lane

Tom Lane is a composer, sound designer and multi-instrumentalist living in Dublin, Ireland. Born in Bristol in 1984, he studied music at Balliol College Oxford, composition at the Royal Academy of Music, London, and composition and experimental music theatre at the Berlin University of the Arts. Recent work includes composition for Annie Ryan's new production of The White Devil at Shakespeare's Globe, London, music and sound design for a new production of Giselle at Project Arts Centre, Dublin, and sound design for The Corn Exchange's production of The Seagull at the Dublin Theatre Festival. In 2015 he composed music for Romeo and Juliet at the Gate Theatre and Oedipus at the Abbey Theatre as part of the 2015 Dublin Theatre Festival (nominated for best sound design by the Irish Times Theatre Awards). In 2015 Tom also worked with Rob Moloney to create a new score for Ballet Ireland's acclaimed production of Coppélia choreographed and directed by Morgann Runacre-Temple. His new opera, Front Of House is a site-specific commission which opens at the Cork Opera House, Ireland in June. His collaboration with Rob Moloney was recently described by the Irish Independent as 'Crafting something steeped in tradition while sounding fresh and contemporary... practically flawless.' <http://www.tom-lane.com/>