

## PRESS RELEASE

Helen Kirwan presents  
a new three-screen video installation  
**Grief-Works**  
at the European Cultural Centre, Venice  
in parallel with the 59th Biennale Arte 2022



Image: Grief-Works (2022).

Helen Kirwan unveils her new immersive three screen video *Grief-Works* (2022), at the European Cultural Centre, Venice in the *Personal Structures* exhibition curated by the Global Art Affairs Foundation in parallel with the 59th Biennale Arte 2022.

Kirwan's quiet, meditative performances and multi-channel video installations are characterised by explorations of concepts of memory, loss and time; also *journeying* as the poetic and metaphorical construction of memory. *Grief-Work* continues her meditation on these themes but this time, she has specifically taken inspiration from the mourning traditions of ancient Greece and the Middle East: also instead of performing solo as she usually does in her videos, she has included additional and diverse live elements such as nine actors, a choir and even an animal, a Cypriot donkey.

Kirwan's installation will take up the entirety of a large room on the main floor of Palazzo Bembo, a restored 14th century palace on the Grand Canal. Upon entering this room, visitors will be immersed in the video's large screens with a soundscape composed by Tom Lane. The building's Venetian- Byzantine architecture, with influences from Moorish Spain and the Gothic style of mainland Italy, echoes the confluence that is present in Kirwan's work.

*Grief-Works* shows the artist as a character on a metaphorical journey encountering performances by others of rituals inspired by the funerary scenes depicted on white-ground *Lêkythoi* vases. Popular grave gifts in Athens in the 5th century BCE, these are known for a delicate painting style depicting rituals such as dedicating gifts, pouring libations and decorating graves combined with emotional expressions of sadness and of mourners nourishing the deceased and their memory.



Image: Grief-Works (2022).

Kirwan also draws on her own experience of mourning the loss of a loved one, the seemingly endless journeying in her work evokes a form of searching and acts as a metaphor for wayfinding and mapping and attempts at navigating the wilderness of bereavement. Walking is also a form of marking time and travelling through time. Grief-Works explores temporality and our perceptions of time as Kirwan walks across landscapes echoing the mythological narratives of epic journeys which she fractures through the film's montage.

The character oscillates in a multiplicity of existences and experiences, seemingly teetering on the edges of two spheres as if enacting her own transition from life to death. Although she appears to be on a chronological journey- and this illusion of linearity is reinforced by the time-based media- her simultaneous encounters are boundless, endlessly taking place, unfettered by time and space. Lêkythoi vases depict also changing Greek attitudes towards dualistic notions of time: *chronos* being the ordered, measurable and uniformly flowing time, and *kairos* being its qualitative counterpart, signifying not just any time, but the fleeting instant of the now. The character is epitomising the empirical and tangible nature of *kairos*, informed by human experience and subjectivity.

The outdoor scenes, filmed in the foothills of a remote part of the island of Cyprus punctuated by material filmed in the studio are synthesised into a fragmented but interwoven repetitive structure. Grief-Works repetitive variations and sense of infinite motion are echoed by the inclusion of chant performed by the Byzantine choir of the Holy Metropolis of Limassol, Cyprus, 'Romanos the Melodist' under the direction of Nikolas Lymbourides. Chanting echoes many mourning traditions around the world and its continuous rhythmic flow has been skillfully integrated into the overall soundscape by Dublin based composer Tom Lane which accentuates the complexity and sense of poetic gravity of Grief-Work.

Grief-Works is underpinned by Kirwan's inquiry into the German Romantic philosopher Friedrich Schlegel's radical concept of the fragment as a dynamic practice which aims at fragmentation for its own sake. Intrinsic to Kirwan's reiterations is an essential incompleteness which is itself the mode of fulfilment. Her work draws also on the Hegelian concept of memory as repetition that constantly reinvents itself as a permanently recreating and re-enacting loop.

Grief-Works echoes Kirwan's performances in earlier projects, especially her film installations in the Memory Theatre Trilogy: Fragment and Trace, (2015, Memory Theatre, (2017 and perpetuum mobile (2019), and live performances on beaches in the UK and Cyprus.

The artist will also present a series of live performances in Venice during the biennial, details of which will be announced soon.

**- END -**



Image: Grief-Works (2022).

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### **Notes to editors**

### **Exhibition Details**

23 April - 27 November 2022

Preview dates: Wednesday 21 and Thursday 22 April 2022

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

CLOSED Tuesdays

Free Entry

Location:

Palazzo Bembo, Riva del Carbon,  
4793-4785, 30124 Venice, Italy



Image: Grief-Works (2022).

## About Helen Kirwan

Kirwan is a conceptual and interdisciplinary artist, born in Ireland and now living in Cyprus. Her videos, installations and performances including 'perpetuum mobile' (2019), 'Memory Theatre' (2017), 'Fragment and Trace,' (2015) have been exhibited widely internationally including at the European Cultural Centre during the 56th, 57th and 58th Venice Biennales. She has also exhibited video installations at the Bermondsey Project Space London (2020), Pie Factory, Margate, UK (2020), Festival Internacional De Videoarte De Camagüey Cuba (2019, also 2017), Tbilisi Art Fair Georgia (2019), Close-up Cinema London (2018), P-21 Gallery London (2017), Towner Gallery Eastbourne (2017 and 2016), Bodrum Biennial Turkey (2015). Her multi-channel video 'Image of the Road,' (2013) with Simon Pruciak has also been shown widely internationally including in India and France.

February 2022 saw her first solo exhibition in Cyprus at the Noise Gallery, Nicosia and the same month she participated an exhibition by the Arboreal Collective at NeMe Arts Centre, Limassol.

In 2021 during her residency at the Cyprus Academy of Arts and in response to the global pandemic, she broadcasted seven regular live virtual performances which can be seen online at [www.performanceartinthetvirtual.com](http://www.performanceartinthetvirtual.com). During 2020 she recorded seven micro-documentaries on some of the theoretical and philosophical issues which inform her work.

Kirwan has participated in many media and performance art festivals, including the VR exhibition with ECC Performance Art (2022), Experiments in Cinema v15.1 Albuquerque USA (2020), Rapid Pulse Festival Chicago (2016), Fonlad Festival Coimbra Portugal (2016), International Festival of Projections University of Kent UK (2016). She was artist in residence at Arts-Iceland/ Outvert Art, Iceland, the Sirius Arts Centre, Cobh Ireland in 2019 and in 2020, at the Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Annaghmakerrig, Ireland.

Kirwan conducts also live 'performance-installation-experiments' such as the performances and multi-channel video installation together with composer Tom Lane at Palazzo Tiepolo Venice during the 58th Biennale (2019) and at The Space Arts Centre, London, UK (2018); also she undertook outdoor performances on a beach and in the sea during the Folkestone Triennial Fringe, UK (2017). Kirwan has worked for many years with the award-winning Dublin-based composer Tom Lane and cinematographer Simon Pruciak.

Kirwan practised law as a barrister in Dublin and London for nearly twenty years before becoming an artist full time. She has a B.A. (First Class Honours) in Fine Art from the University for the Creative Arts Canterbury (2000), an MA in Fine Art from the University of Middlesex (2002) and an MA in Aesthetics and Art Theory (2004) from the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy, Aesthetics and Art Theory (2004) from the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy, London. She has contributed papers and film screenings to a number of interdisciplinary conferences and has lectured and taught contemporary fine art criticism and theory at UK universities including the University for the Creative Arts, Canterbury, UK.

More information about her work can be found at:

[www.helenkirwan.com](http://www.helenkirwan.com)

and

[www.performanceartinthevirtual.com](http://www.performanceartinthevirtual.com)

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Facebook: @KirwanHelen

LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/in/helen-kirwan](https://www.linkedin.com/in/helen-kirwan)

Twitter: @hahkirwan

## About Tom Lane

Tom Lane is a composer and sound designer based in Dublin. He studied composition at Balliol College Oxford, the Royal Academy of Music, and the Berlin University of the Arts. He recently received his PhD in site-specific composition from University College Cork. Tom creates music for theatre, dance, opera and concert performances. Recent work for stage includes composition for the Olivier Award nominated *The Tragedy of Macbeth* at London's Almeida Theatre directed by Yaël Farber and starring Saoirse Ronan and James McArdle.



**PERSONAL  
STRUCTURES**  
Reflections

Art Biennial  
Venice 2022

Palazzo Mora  
Palazzo Bembo  
Marinaressa Gardens

Reflections  
**23.4 - 27.11**  
**2022**