

## *Within and Without*

*Ingrid Lyons*

Hands Laid On | Kathy Tynan & Aileen Murphy | 07.01-30.01 2016

“I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life.”

-F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

In response to a question regarding the limitations of paint artist Ellen Altfest previously remarked ‘Looking over a long time is like an attempt to merge with something outside of oneself. The dense accumulation of visual information, which is the product of this kind of looking, is different from how the lens and the eye usually see the world.’ The hands on approach that the medium of paint entails does, however inspire a number of thoughts on the significance of images as they are absorbed by the painted surface.

Through the activities of walking and looking Tynan identifies alternative landmarks in the city, places to rest the eyes that give rise to contemplation. She observes and informally records visual quirks in her surroundings and such vagaries are later bestowed with temporal emphasis through the medium of paint. In the cracks of a pebble dashed wall and across a layer of uneven plaster, real world surfaces and textures appear elevated through keen observation. She focuses on time-ravaged parts of the city that maintain a patina of the past through neglect. Slogans and symbols scrawled or sprayed across gable ends, crows looking on, trinkets in a stranger’s porch; all distract from the path ahead. She transforms the world into signs and symbols in the search for pattern and meaning. Intricate meshing of woolen yarn forms a pattern that draws the eye downwards into a stare, a puddle in the footpath interrupts the Moroccan motif and in its reflection spring buds sprout from bare branches.

In Italo Calvino’s 1985 novel, *Mr Palomar*, the eponymous protagonist wanders, giving thought to details in his surroundings. Calvino, via Mr Palomar, suggests that this tendency evolves from a psychological urge to make meaning. Everywhere there is the potential for philosophising and Mr Palomar appropriates the most mundane aspects of

his daily routine to pose questions on the nature of being. In his musings on a rooftop terrace he considers the aspect from which birds view the ground, noting how unforeseen fragments and wholes that can be observed from above 'It is only after you have come to know the surface of things,' he says out loud, 'that you venture to seek what is underneath' then he adds 'but the surface is inexhaustible'. Similarly Tynan responds to the possibilities of the surface texture of paint, its ability to mimic real-world surfaces. Like Mr Palomar, Tynan looks for clues in unlikely places - the most trivial encounter has the potential to announce the most profound epiphany.

In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* Carl Gustav Jung writes informally about the impulse to apply or deduce meaning through analysis and interpretation, he suggests that to western man the idea of a merely static universe is unbearable-he must assume that it has meaning. In a polarizing statement he advocates that 'whereas the Occidental feels the need to complete the meaning of the world, the Oriental strives for the fulfillment of meaning in man, stripping the world and existence from himself.' He closes the chapter *On Life After Death* by concluding that meaning is both within and without and 'the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being'.

Samual Beckett's 1972 play *Not I* is known for its simple yet evocative production. A stage in total darkness save for a mouth illuminated by spotlight appears floating in the void- the vast blackness of the stage intensifies the feeling of frenzy and breathless panic that the mouth conveys through fragmented orations ' . . . . out . . . into this world . . . this world . . . tiny little thing . . . before its time . . . in a godfor- . . . what? . . girl? . . yes . . . tiny little girl . . . into this . . . out into this . . . before her time . . . godforsaken hole called . . .' It is a short dramatic monologue where the words are spit forth in quick succession with no face or body adding context-only hovering orifice of lips, teeth, tongue and gums. Murphy's paintings often feature singular body parts that hover and dance. The organs and body parts that grope and fumble evoke a nervous angst. Energy takes precedence as the painted image is contained but always threatens to breach the border of the canvas. They are 'feeling' rather than 'thinking' paintings that are concerned with human emotion and the human condition.

Murphy's painting *A Mouth that Pines* pictures a face, flushed and blotchy - the eyes appear to be glazed maybe with tears. Two strategically placed blue dots on each eye

suggest a glassy twinkle. It might be the moment before a torrent of briny water bursts over lids and spills onto molten cheeks. In *Mildred Rasber Bean* two fists push upwards defiantly against a bean shaped head – clenched fists meet the receptively soft flesh of the face. Mouth agape and bellowing, the eyelids recede into the depths of the eye sockets encouraged by a small hook. There is a sense of anticipation, tension and a growing mania. Murphy's large-scale compositions seem to capture the point at which these figures reach a fit of pique then fragment.

In a 1973 film production of *Not I* actress Billie Whitelaw allowed herself to be strapped into a chair, clamped by the cheeks and swathed in a black cloak so that only her mouth remained visible in the darkness. The wet sheen of lips and gums flash between gnashing teeth and the floating piece of anatomy seems far more disturbing in its isolation - it dominates and mesmerises. In addressing the staging of *Not I* Beckett explained that he intended it to 'work on the nerves of the audience, not its intellect'.

While Kathy Tynan looks outward at the houses on her street, gable ends and city architecture, Ailenn Murphy peers inwards at the anxiety and strife of human relationships. The combination serves to present a meditation on meaning both without and within. Murphy and Tynan paint in a way that is frank and full of integrity, in which humour alternates with genuine pathos. *Hands Laid On* comprises of paintings that relate to one another in a manner that is both reciprocal and divergent.

1. 8 Painters on Painting, Ellen Altfest, *Frieze Magazine*, issue 160, January 2014.

2. *Mr. Palomar*, Italo Calvino, Vintage, London, 1994, p51.

3. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Carl Gustav Jung, Fontana Press, 1995, p358.

4. *Not I*, Samuel Beckett, Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center, New York, directed by Alan Schneider, with Jessica Tandy (Mouth) and Henderson Forsythe, 22 November 1972.

5. Beckett to Jessica Tandy. Quoted in Brater, E., 'The *I* in Beckett's *Not I*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 20, No 3, July 1974, p 200.