

*Dip, Dip Dip*

Eileen O'Sullivan

*anything that is filled with memories*

*Learned Faces I* describes time spent relaxing with a friend, enjoying her company and observing her character through the ease of her body language. Loose gestures in this painting consider the traits we observe in others that are distinctive and descriptive – like a gait or stance that is unmistakably theirs. O'Sullivan's intention is seemingly to imbue this painting with compassion and the experience of their relationship – to remember subtleties beyond physical features, incidents or events. The will to realise and remember a dynamic. This painting was preceded by a number of painterly sketches that each contributed to a better knowing, each iteration more confident than the last until observations were assimilated and expressed in satisfying gestures and confident flourishes. *Dip, Dip Dip* incorporates a number of approaches in discovering the capacity of the medium of paint to describe memories and thoughts associated with people and places in the artist's life. In this exploration, O'Sullivan refers to a variety of sources to consider the relationship between photography, painting and drawing.

In *Camera Lucida*, the French literary theorist and philosopher Roland Barthes examines the tension between conveying information and conveying a feeling, through the medium of photography. He uses the terms *punctum* and *studium* in his observations of this dichotomy. *Punctum*, he defines as the sensory, intensely subjective effect of a photograph on the viewer: "The punctum of a photograph is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)." He contrasts its effect with that of the *studium*, which he describes as denoting a general approach to a photograph that is conditioned by historical and cultural experiences.

Throughout these works, O'Sullivan considers this dynamic through the medium of paint, highlighting moments in both photography and painting where crossovers and slippages occur. *A Room of Possibilities* and *Men Making Things*, each hold within them traces of the artist's reckoning with *punctum* and *studium*. Referring to found images and her own photographs of a domestic space, she blends the impersonal and the personal to consider disparities between depiction and description.

*Is that Dress Comfortable?* focuses on the textural and tactile quality of fabrics, as they enfold and shroud the monarchical-looking subject. A *Hynes* manual found in the glove compartment of a

friend's recently acquired van provides the source material for a series of diagrammatic painterly sketches on canvas. And in some cases, as with *Chapter 1 Engine*, O'Sullivan has used the manual itself as a base for a series of painterly sketches to look at the structure and workings of something in gestural but schematic representations.

The reference to diagrammatic images alongside more dreamy and ambiguous works like *The End of the Garden* indicate a revelation in the artist's personal credo. There is a sense that honouring the subject matter will fix, mend, transform or repurpose things disintegrated, broken, flawed or malfunctioning. There are echoes and traces of reckonings with grief, fragmentary recollections on her personal history and reflections on the history of western painting. The work feels into the internal strategies we employ to come to terms with events in our lives that will change us.

There is a feeling of generosity and candour about the process of absorbing and then expressing visual information through the act of painting. Maybe similar to a warmup before exercise, she welcomes the viewer into a preparation that is usually private. The works in *Dip, Dip, Dip* act as portals, guiding the viewer through a thought process that is both analytical and intimate. In these works Eileen O'Sullivan often tempers the quotidian strain with pragmatism and practicality, using layers of paint as a means of conveying and working through waves of thoughts and emotions that might be inexpressible through verbal articulation. The paintings here show the capacity of paint as a medium to stimulate efforts that can help an individual grapple with life experiences. A choreography of loose and tighter movements to generate movement of the body and a shift in the inner state of mind. They oscillate between figuration and abstraction in gestural painting, eschewing finesse in favour of gaining an understanding.

Each time we tackle something with joy, each time we open our eyes toward a yet untouched distance we transform not only this and the next moment, but we also rearrange and gradually assimilate the past inside of us. We dissolve the foreign body of pain of which we neither know its actual consistency and make-up nor how many (perhaps) life-affirming stimuli it imparts, once dissolved, to our blood!

- Rainer Maria Rilke

There is a spectral presence, an oneiric atmosphere in some of the paintings too. Palimpsestic marks tarry in fragmentary form, later layers do not completely obscure the marks and gestures

from these under-layers. In *Generational Knowledge*, a mosaic of new images is placed over a pre-existing composition that might recall the memory of a person. *A Room of Possibilities* also has this feeling, where the space may have been the site of sad experience but is now renewed in a cheerful way.

The paintings *Tour of a Circus, I Win* and *What's that about?* each have a sense of removal and distance, as O'Sullivan places herself outside moments of group bonding as a spectator. They are reminiscent of British painter Cecily Brown's *All the Nightmares Came Today* (2012/2019), sharing its sense of being overwhelmed by the frenzy of life moving on as normal, after being unmoored in the wilderness of loss for a time. Furthermore there are parallels in the passing of time within the strata of mark-making, where gestures relating to thoughts are plotted down and reorganised over months or even years. As O'Sullivan moves through the temporal dislocation and fragmentation of the images she creates, we can see affinities and sensibilities in the way paintings such as *Cave* and *The End of the Garden* evoke compositional assonance with her peopled paintings.

In *Two weeks on the Job* the viewer can glance into the back of a van, stacked with materials and equipment for painting a house, and *Spectrum of Comfort* gives us a glimpse into a wardrobe of silken robes. These two paintings are also connected in their handling of the medium of paint. There is a certain amount of abstraction, but there are also details that identify the objects for those that work in the trade. A brand of Hoover, a fabric weave, the trim of a cuff or bristle of a brush. Such details disclose a preoccupation with specificity within gesture and abstraction. Here O'Sullivan has emphasised elements of the composition that are connected to the transformative nature of mending and fixing.

Throughout this exhibition, O'Sullivan draws on a variety of source materials, to pose questions on the nature of transformation through process. She does this by cyclically sundering and reassembling images gleaned from a range of material, and in so doing, she plots a constellation between memory and Barthes' *punctum* and *studium*. She identifies paths between experience and growth, allowing the mark-making in the work to imply epiphanies that are both personal and universal.