

Cathy Wilkes

September 9–October 22, 2022

Ortuzar Projects is pleased to present an exhibition by Cathy Wilkes, the artist's first presentation in New York since her acclaimed solo exhibition at MoMA PS1 in 2017. The new installation combines subtle paintings, objects, and Wilkes' characteristic papier-mâché figures. Inchoate visions of landscapes and interiors from her childhood are often recognizable in the work, collapsing and reforming time and space repeatedly. Employing what the artist has called "hypostatic abstraction and intense social realism," the exhibition conveys themes of separation, suffering, infancy, and fragility.

Wilkes grew up in Northern Ireland. Her new work contends with the lingering after effects of her childhood, meditating on brutality, loss, and continuity. The softness of her presentation creates a zone of eerie uncertainty, anxiety, and empathy—a space of contemplation in which viewers are invited to look and look anew. Quietly preternatural objects—modestly intimate in their presentation—gradually accumulate in "a process of open concentration and waiting."

Evoking the banalities of a lived life and the pathos inherent to it, Wilkes builds an enigmatic language told through objects and the oft-unperceived emotional states that accompany them. The evocative assemblages give access to a fiercely private inner world, disturbing and reassigning the relationship between subject and object.

The smallest particle of suffering is the object, and I, the subject who acts upon the object, am every atom unfolding from the womb. An atom here among us and another atom in a far away galaxy are inseparable epitomes of the same.

I solemnise and dignify the ghosts of interference which proceed from their origin and whip themselves up before me. I observe, they nucleate and propagate. If I could disappear, how fluid, how graceful and unending, how undisturbed and unpredictable would be the changing patterns thereabout.

On both the left and on the right there is nothing worth seeing and nothing worth hearing. I return home to wait in place and draw forth what is yet to come.

In proximity to so much violence and death, propinquity resulted in introversion. So much talk on that line and all the worry about it buried us all. We weren't used to looking at things in what you would call, the light.

We lived hoping nothing would happen. I was the oppressor, how could I be the liberator? We associated resistance with violence and destitution. Nobody resisted if they could help it. We were hiding, believing erroneously that nothing could be done. In a blockade of inimical forces, one moved quietly and carefully so as not to disturb anything. As a child I wanted to be as small as an atom, even a lepton or a quark. I am an epitome and a subsistent operator.

Wilkes (b. 1966, Belfast) has been the subject of solo exhibitions at The Modern Institute, Glasgow, Scotland (2021), Xavier Hufkens, Brussels, Belgium (2021); BQ, Berlin, Germany (2021); Venice Biennale, British Pavilion, Venice, Italy (2019); and MoMA PS1, New York (2017). Select group exhibitions include One is always a plural, Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich, Switzerland (2021), Psychic Wounds: On Art & Trauma, The Warehouse, Dallas, Texas (2021), and The State We Are In. Collection of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw at the Galeria Labirynt in Lublin, Galeria Labirynt, Lublin, Poland (2018). Her work is in the public collections of the Royal Ulster Museum, Belfast, Northern Ireland, Tate, London, England, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland, Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York, among many others. She lives and works in Glasgow.