

Cathy Wilkes

13 February — 12 April 2025

Press Release

Cathy Wilkes presents a new series of paintings, marking her first exhibition in Brussels to focus almost exclusively on two-dimensional work. Wilkes' paintings, sculpture, and poetic writing sit precariously on the edge of legibility. The artist describes aspects of her work as a mediation; the work feels humane and commensurate with a level of intense introspective concentration. Wilkes has referred to the presence and proximity of the dead in her work, as well as the influence of her children and her own childhood in Northern Ireland.

In relation to the sculptures, *How It Was* and *I can hear the tick of your watch*, Wilkes refers to reincarnation. These works, like 'the play where nothing happens', show us a place of waiting or a moment after departure. Her notes read: "We called in at a farm in Crossnacreevy. We had tea in mugs that weren't too clean. I looked at the chairs, thinking if maybe Joseph or Jesus might have made them. Without transmigration, we would all be thin and insubstantial, like ghosts, I thought."

Combining celestial sparsity with the textures and colours of elegiac landscape, her paintings express loss and the repose of souls. While their titles—*Rivulet*, *Hillside with Thorn Bushes*, *Dormition of Mary*, and *Harbour in Al Sham*—imply a poetic biblical illumination, they remain hypostatic and delicately iterative in themselves. Wilkes finds a correlative to the interior relationships of her installations in their careful negotiations of space and placement on the painted surface.

In these new paintings, the soft, blurred hues of earlier works give way to an almost unprecedented sparseness. Working with pigment and gum arabic on silk and linen, the fabric, its threads and weave, take on a more active compositional and symbolic role. Collaged shapes and isolated painted gestures, stars and tiny swatches of cloth engage in a formal and symbolic interplay. In *Leaving and Coming Back*, for example, the circles of paper hover between surface and substrate; they are like bandages or patches covering wounds.

"The paintings are made and repeated until they are finished. After a while I know what should be there; I start again over and over. I can feel the speed of each action, which is fast and has no real duration—just the briefest moment compared to long periods of waiting and looking. It doesn't feel like production; production is too aggressive—it feels like continuous preparation, and then eventually recognition when I see it."

Cathy Wilkes (b. 1966, Dundonald, Belfast; lives and works in Glasgow) represented Britain at the 58th Venice Biennale in 2019 and was the inaugural recipient of the Maria Lassnig Prize in 2016, which was accompanied by a solo exhibition at MoMA PS1, New York. Wilkes' work is held in numerous collections and was the subject of a major touring exhibition by Tate Liverpool in 2015. Selected solo exhibitions include: The Hunterian Art Gallery and St. Aloysius Hall, Glasgow, Scotland (2024); Yale Union, Portland (2018); MoMA PS1, New York (2017-18); Tate Liverpool, touring to LENTOS, Kunstmuseum, Linz and Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach (2015-2016); Tramway, Glasgow (2014); The Renaissance Society, University of Chicago, Chicago (2012); Gesellschaft Fur Aktuelle Kunst, Bremen (2011) and the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh (2011).

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