

Cúram

CHERRY DOWLING

Cherry Dowling is a visual artist whose creative pieces always begin with a photograph. Her two-person exhibition - 'Resonance' - ran at the Hyde Gallery in 2018, and illustrated her layered technique.

Drawing, painting, printmaking and sculpture enable what is for Cherry "*the magic in constant reproduction of an image*" until it is stripped back to the minimal information required to convey character or feeling. Branching into digital art has, she feels, added significantly to her work. For this exhibition, Cherry has chosen to create work that links her daily occupation to her own art. In her role as the support and companion to a family friend named Rosaleen, she connects with this former artist and creates a vision of the fullness of her earlier life. That earlier life has informed and inspired Cherry in the current pieces she is creating.

"When people have a craft or skill into which they have put their energy, I can feel a connection to them, a way to care for them..."

At our meeting, Cherry had brought along samples of work in progress for the exhibition, her artist's pad filled with fine line drawings of the subject of her exhibition, her friend Rosaleen.

"Rosaleen was a poet and a painter, the daughter of a woodturner and a milliner, she was wife to an artisan carpenter - there were multiple layers of care and creation to her life, including the creative work of raising a family..."

In Cherry's drawings we see Rosaleen as a little girl, a teenager, a grown woman and a proud octogenarian.

"I used advertising campaigns of Rosaleen's era as a guideline for the graphic drawing style in these images..."

There are ink drawings also of Rosaleen's parents, sourced from black and white photo images pared back to delicate representations of light and shadow

The father's thin, handsome face is a tiny cameo at the centre of a large page, the mother's round laughing face another cameo; her parents' faces close together in line drawings of varying patterns and shades, and a very strong, stylish ink drawing of a group of Rosaleen's youthful contemporaries clustered in a group of young women typical of those times, in a dancehall...

"I see families as knit together, full of dropped stitches, cast-ons and unconscious pattern work. I suppose the crafts that people engage in could be likened to different colours or weights of wool, that add texture and interest to the overall production"

Nostalgic items representing the life of a little girl will be included in Cherry's exhibits – there's something haunting about a tiny hand-stitched silk frill-edged christening cap, it's pearly sheen...

"As our world moves away from the handmade, we lose some of that individual stamp on our own lives, and I think that's why people are so keen to wear an identity these days, as it's no longer shaped or assured by our occupations..."

The colourful knitting dolly with its continual inward turning tubular snake of wool might suggest the calmer occupations in a little girl's daily life, the potential for creativity which surrounded her through the skills of her parents – he a worker with wood, she a seamstress....

The chronological endpiece is an exquisite portrait made by Cherry in water soluble colours, of Rosaleen today. The smiling subject holds a round bowl and spoon... there are potted summer flowers in the background, her artist's hands are prominent in the foreground,

"I often look at the hands of people as mini portraits, as they are so shaped over time by the actions of the maker..."

her beautiful face creased in a smile, two frown lines at her brow....

"I see this work as a portrait of Rosaleen, mirrored by my own recollections and history, as my own ancestry was also full of creative people, finding practical ways to express their care for materials and for their surroundings..."

and slightly fainter, a second image of what I had seen as a younger self floating behind her left shoulder - but is, in fact, an image made at the same time as that in the forefront... testament to the play of light and colour in what the observer sees at any given moment.

"It is also a portrait of what identity may once have been – hopefully some essence of that identity will permeate through this family lineage of busy hands"

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Maura Gilligan September, 2019.