

MAIREAD O'HEOCHA

LIGHT SPELLS ENTER

26 February — 29 April 2023

Tuesday–Saturday
10.30am–1.30pm / 3–7.30pm

P420 is pleased to present the first solo show in the gallery by the Irish painter Mairead O'hEocha (1962, Dublin, IR)
Light Spells Enter.

Mairead O'hEocha presents an unprecedented series of nocturnal still lifes created during the lockdown, when the artist was shut away in a Georgian house in Dublin: a reflection on the contemporary gaze now accustomed to a light source coming from behind the screen. As O'hEocha herself states: "This new series of paintings feature transparent objects on tables and like a glass calendar are inspired by events in my life in the years 2020–22. A time when global mobility was suddenly paused and my dining table and the optics of small objects replaced all of my horizons. The consolations of digital technology brought comfort but also dissolved the distinctions between appearance and reality. The somewhat larger-than-life scale of the objects and their luminous back-lit scenes frame domestic confinement through a digital screen."

Through her careful manipulation of the oil, O'hEocha's compositions each contain an element of ambiguity: the subject shrouded in darkness takes on a new, unexpected and magical appearance.

"The thing about Mairead O'hEocha's still lifes is that they are very reluctant to stay still," writes Ben Eastham in the text accompanying the exhibition, "The longer I look at them, the more restive they become. [...] They all take place in a more-or-less ghastly dark and are lit by the unnatural light that springs from the glass vessels at their centre. These contain or connect the viewer to some discernible form of life (nocturnal creatures flit and skitter around these paintings) and suggest (to me, at least) the electric force that through the fuse of the body drives all living things. If the appearance of this light suggests some kind of commune with the spirit realm, then its ghostly glow also conjures the backlit screens through which we communicated with other living beings through the lonely nights of the pandemic. O'hEocha describes her experience of that period as 'triple-glazed', and the phrase suggests the way that screens distort our worlds in ways consistent with the often monstrous proportions of objects in these paintings. Yet it also conjures the sense of being caught between panes of glass, trapped in the airless and claustrophobic space between two worlds. And here all order breaks down, as I consider where the light of these paintings comes from and what it might entail. Am I on the outside looking in, or on the inside looking out?"

Mairead O'hEocha studied at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin, and completed her MA at Goldsmith's College in London.

Her solo shows include: *Tale Ends & Eternal Wakes*, Temple Bar Gallery & Studios, Dublin, IR (2020); *Irises in the Well*, mother's tankstation, London, UK (2018); *Blackbirds in the Garden of Prisms*, mother's tankstation, Dublin, IR (2016); Gallery 2, The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, IR (2014); Art Statements: Art 44 Basel with mother's tankstation, Basel, CH (2013); *The Sky was Yellow and the Sun was Blue*, mother's tankstation, Dublin, IR (2012); via An Lár, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, IR (2011); *Whisper Concrete*, Butler Gallery, Kilkenny, IR (2011); *Co. Summer*, Angles Gallery, Los Angeles, US (2008); *Home Rules*, mother's tankstation, Dublin, IR (2008).

In 2020, O'hEocha's work *Orangutang*, *Natural History Museum* (2020) was purchased by the National Gallery of Ireland for its permanent collection and included in the *New Perspectives* exhibition, which opened in June 2021.