

“SMALL TALKING”

Nicole Ward

Opening: Friday 19 September 19:00

19 September - 12 October 2025 / Thursday - Saturday 13:00-15:00

Centralbanken

Brugata 12, 0186, Oslo, Norway

www.centralbanken.no

12 seconds - 6th birthday:

The daughter participates in a magic routine with the clown hired for her birthday. She peers inside the bag to confirm it's empty. The clown turns to the mother, who's filming, and asks what she sees through the camcorder. The mother blows her daughter an air kiss, right before the camcorder enters the bag. Orangey-red fabric swallows the screen, as she confirms there's nothing inside. The father chuckles close to the mic. The camcorder struggles to focus at such close range, and the screen becomes awash with hazy colours. This is the moment he's taken over filming. The mother coughs, and recognisable forms reappear. The camera lands on the orange of the daughter's t-shirt, then zooms out - the father has found his bearings and continues recording the scene. The mother appears at the edge of the frame, confirming they exchanged the camcorder mid-recording.

5 seconds - 7th birthday:

A year later, a near identical scenario. The daughter stands in the same room, this time with a different clown. He hands her a flower-shaped balloon and appears to ask who she'd like to give it to. She turns shyly and points to her mother, who's holding the camcorder. The clown glances in the mother's direction as the room fills with warm laughter. The mother mutters something, audibly smiling. The clown continues engaging with the daughter. Off-screen, the father speaks, drawing both their attention to the right. The clown responds while passing the balloon to the daughter. She takes it, then looks into the camera as she walks forward. Family and friends applaud, and the mother says, "Bravo". Just before the daughter reaches her, the father says something from offscreen. The daughter hesitates, then turns to offer the balloon to him instead. The camcorder suddenly swerves to the left, removing her from view, and the mother makes a soft sound. Again, the father has taken over mid-filming. The camcorder drifts past the daughter's curly hair, across the red haze of the balloon, the clown's blue and white sleeve, and purple curtains, before zooming out to catch the daughter kissing her mother, now holding the balloon at the edge of the frame.

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On a trip to Athens towards the end of last year, I haggled for six pre-owned MiniDV tapes at a flea market. Bought with the intention that I would record over them, I no longer feel I can. The tapes contain one family's home movies, with a young girl at the centre. School nativity scenes, kitchen table conversations, and snowball fights appear throughout.

Unable to understand the language, I had to watch closely to grasp what was happening. Over time, I began to recognise the key players - daughter, mother, father, grandmother, and grandfather - scrutinising micro-gestures, voices and breathing. I realised only the parents alternate as the cameraperson throughout.

What resonates with me most is a single, subtle gesture - the mother's decision to keep the camcorder rolling as she passes it to the father, instead of cutting and restarting. Watching her physically move from behind the camcorder and into the shot without interruption moves me. I'm fascinated by the attentiveness of the

parents' gaze through the lens, and by how genuinely invested they are, not just in their daughter's world, but in being present *within* it. This small, almost imperceptible act occurs just twice across the entire footage. Filmed exactly a year apart, both clips capture nearly identical moments.

A striking example of pareidolia - seeing familiar shapes, such as faces, in random objects - overlooks my hometown in the North of Ireland. Accessible on foot from my back garden, this imposing profile in the landscape is believed to have inspired Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). It now provides the backdrop to the exhibition, where its features are exaggerated and physically drawn out across the gallery walls.

Expanding on this disorientation between foreground and background, viewer and viewed, a series of baseboards, detached from old photographic enlargers, hang on the gallery walls like portraits. Originally used to make precise adjustments in scale and focus, these boards once invited individuals to lean over them, peering down at countless projected faces on paper. Now, their surfaces are blank. Instead, they're looked over by headless groups, cut by hand from discarded Norwegian yearbooks. These figures, once used to illustrate a national narrative, unsurprisingly feature mostly men.

Nicole Ward (b. Belfast, North of Ireland) is an Irish artist currently based in Oslo. She works with moving image, installation, and writing to help her comprehend why she becomes fixated on unforeseen subjects and individuals. Alongside her solo work, she values collaboration and self-organisation. In 2024, she co-founded *Snails*, a new studio collective and project space in central Oslo. In 2023, she co-founded *Oslo Crit Klubb*, a peer support group that meets regularly in artists' studios to share feedback. Between 2010 to 2021, Nicole collaborated with artist Anna Clawson before relocating to Norway. The two now focus on curating group exhibitions and events that foster energy and community among their peers. They recently curated *Come On In* (2025) at *Snails*, and are currently preparing *Now That We Know Each Other*, opening later this year. Nicole holds an MFA from the Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KHiO, 2023), undertook the autonomous art school School of the Damned (2017), and earned a BFA from University College Falmouth (2009). Her work has been exhibited at venues including Atelier Nord, Kunstneres Hus, Akademirommet, and Interkulturelt Museum in Oslo; Malonioji 6 in Vilnius; CCA Derry~Londonderry and Ormston House in Ireland; Tenderpixel and Guest Projects in London; Arnolfini and Royal West Academy in Bristol; CRATE in Margate; and Glasgow International in Scotland. She has participated in residencies at RUPERT and Nida Art Colony (Lithuania), Studio Das Weisse Haus (Vienna), and KARST (UK). Recent publications include *Silent Photos* and *Landing on a Mole*, both presented at artist book fairs in 2024, including Athens Art Book Fair and Dublin Art Book Fair.

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