

Genevieve Figgis is a consummate storyteller. Using paint rather than words, her deeply narrative works—often conjuring characters and settings out of the Edwardian age of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy—fit snugly within this long tradition of Irish cultural production. While it may seem essentialist, if not a political minefield, to overemphasize national identity in critical discussions of Figgis’ work, it could be argued that what distinguishes her use of figuration from the slew of contemporary painters is a distinctive translation of the Irish “blarney” into a pictorial form. What theorists such as Eagleton wrote of nineteenth century Irish writers such as Oscar Wilde’s ambivalent relationship to Britannia could easily be applied to Figgis’ own work: both conjure Anglo-Irish society at the cusp of Irish independence. A world that is infused with qualities of “violence, travesty, affection, complicity, mimicry, subversion, mutual mystification.”

- Text by Alison M. Gingeras

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