Press release

GRIEF-WORK
Chapter Two, The Cypress Tree

Helen Kirwan presents her second live broadcast performance of grief-work online at performanceartinthevirtual.com on Friday, 12th of March at 6pm GMT

Image: video still from *Fragment and Trace* (2015).

Currently artist in residence with the Cyprus Academy of Arts Residency Programme, Kirwan proudly presents the second in her new series of online performances to be broadcasted live to a global audience.

Grief-Work, is a new development in Kirwan's *Memory Theatre* series and her direct response to the poignancy of the global pandemic and the new reality which we humans find ourselves in. She has introduced this innovative, virtual approach to the experience of performance art so as to reach out to audiences around the world. During this period of much grief and death, her performances allow a space and time for moments of contemplation.

Kirwan is known for her quiet, meditative performances and moving image installations on the themes of memory and loss; and journeying as a metaphor for loss. Her most recent work exploring these themes, includes her trilogy of videos collectively known as *Memory Theatre* which were each unveiled at the European Cultural Centre during last three editions of the Venice Biennale.

Image: video still from *Fragment and Trace* (2015).

Grief-Work is part of Kirwan's ongoing inquiry into mourning and loss. During her second performance of ***Grief-Work***, Kirwan will pick stems off fallen branches of Cupressus sempervirens. Viewers will become immersed in a compelling, absorbing experience as they watch these seemingly endless repetitions. Kirwan regards these repetitive tasks and absurd processes as metaphors for the mourning process and as a medium for the metaphorical construction of memory.

Cypress trees have many symbolic connotations with death, immortality and mourning in cultures around the world. In Greek mythology, Cyparissus was a young boy who accidentally killed his beloved tame deer in a forest. He was so grief stricken that he asked to weep forever; instead, he was transformed into a Cypress tree with the tree's sap as his tears. Cypress trees are associated also with the underworld because they do not regenerate when cut back severely. They often stand as grave markers and traditionally, branches were brought into the homes of deceased persons.

Kirwan's work draws on her own experience of mourning the loss of a loved one. In The Tragedy of Hamlet, Shakespeare powerfully expresses how difficult it is for Hamlet to explain the depths of his personal, singular experience of grief and for others to understand it. And yet, as Derrida points out, death takes not only a particular life within the world but each death, each time, will have opened up a world of other deaths in a both finite and infinite way.[1] Essentially, grief is indescribable to others and in Western cultures especially, 'Grief is a Mouse'[2], hidden and quiet. Kirwan thinks that grief needs attention and respect; it's due time and expression; especially now, when over 2.5 million people have died during the pandemic and countless more are in mourning.

The necessary measures to overcome the pandemic have complicated and intensified grief through the restrictions on contact with the dying. The basic human need and desire to touch has often been denied and being unable to touch and hug a dying loved one must be one of the most unutterably painful and poignant features of the pandemic across the globe. Kirwan's

performances attempt, for fleeting moments, to give grief expression and to open up spaces and time for quiet moments of contemplation of grief and mourning.

During her residency with the Cyprus Academy of Arts Residency Programme, Kirwan will undertake further performances of ***Grief-Work***, from her studio and on location, bi-weekly until mid-April 2021 and further details will be announced approximately five days before each one.

1 Jacques Derrida, The Work of Mourning, eds., Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
2 by Emily Dickinson (1830-86)

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For images and press enquiries please contact studio@helenkirwan.com

The first performance in the Grief-Work series; Chapter One, Pomegranate, is now available to view on performanceartinthevirtual.com

Notes to editors
Performance dates: bi-weekly, 26 February - 23 April 2021
Date of next performance: 12 March, 2021
Time: 6 p.m GMT
Location: https://performanceartinthevirtual.com

About Helen Kirwan

Helen Kirwan is an Irish-British conceptual artist. She practised law as a barrister in Dublin and London for nearly twenty years before becoming an artist full time. She has a B.A. (First Class Honours) in Fine Art from the University for the Creative Arts Canterbury (2000), an MA in Fine Art from the University of Middlesex (2002) and an MA in Aesthetics and Art Theory (2004) from the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy, London.

Kirwan's videos, video installations and performances which include 'Memory Theatre' (2017), 'Fragment and Trace,' (2015) and 'Image of the Road,' (2013, with Simon Pruciak) have been exhibited internationally including at the European Cultural Centre during the 56th, 57th and 58th Venice Biennale.

Other recent exhibitions, festivals and screenings include: Bermondsey Project Space, London UK (2020), Experiments in Cinema Film Festival, Albuquerque, NM, USA (2020), Pie Factory Margate, UK, (2020), European Cultural Centre during the 58th Venice Biennale Festival Internacional De Videoarte De Camagüey, (2019) & (2017), Cuba; Tbilisi Art Fair Georgia (2019); Space Arts Centre London (2018); Close-up Cinema (2018); 'Thread of Light,' (2017), P-21; London and Sussex Open, (2017), Rapid Pulse Festival, (2016), Chicago USA, Fonlad Festival, (2016), Coimbra, Portugal, International Festival of Projections, with Simon Pruciak (2016), University of Kent, UK, Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne; 'East Sussex Open', (2016), Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne; 'October 15 Ceremony', (2016), Gallery Çenkaya, Ankara; Bodrum Biennial (2015); Bodrum, Turkey. During 2019 she was artist in residence at Arts-Iceland/ Outvert Art, Iceland and the Sirius Arts Centre, Cobh Ireland; and in January 2020, at the Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Annaghmakerrig, Ireland.

Kirwan has worked for many years with the award-winning Dublin-based composer Tom Lane and cinematographer Simon Pruciak. She conducts live performance- experiments, including an outdoor performance on a beach and in the sea during the Folkestone Triennial Fringe, UK (2017), and a performance with live sound by Tom Lane and a five- channel-video installation at The Space Arts Centre, London, UK (2018).Kirwan has contributed papers and film screenings to a number of interdisciplinary conferences and has lectured and taught contemporary fine art criticism and theory at UK universities including the University for the Creative Arts, Canterbury, UK.

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