



Morwenna Morrison, *The Ties That Bind*, 2020, Oil on canvas, 70 x 120 cm

## **Fixing Eyes With The Unseen**

**02.07 – 25.07.2021**

Drawing on a rich array of art historical and contemporary images, as well as personal narratives and philosophical ideas, *Fixing Eyes With The Unseen* invites us to explore our complex relationship to individual and collective pasts in a series of striking oil paintings that epitomise Morwenna Morrison's mesmerising aesthetic.

Explaining her work as 'an analysis of today's social, psychological and political issues, set within historical context,' Morrison fuses historical landscape painting with contemporary images and influences—from the haunting, ethereal photography of Francesca Woodman to Derek Jarman's 1986 film, *Caravaggio*. Creating a multi-faceted, nostalgic and yet challenging interrogation of what it means to create our own histories and mythologies, Morrison's latest works invite a deep introspection into the visual material of our lives, and the connected construction of our identities, underpinned by a radical questioning of what it means for some images and memories to resonate and persist, as opposed to others. What has been erased, or forgotten? What lurks beneath the surface of seemingly calm, romantic beauty and familiar mythologies; what is 'unseen'?

Exploring, in particular, the notion of time itself as an 'unseen' but objective measure of a subjective temporality, or 'lived time' as she puts it, Morrison's paintings use collage and layering to reveal, exquisitely, the ways in which we, as individuals and societies, construct and deconstruct the phenomena of life cycles, ageing, and even the specter of death, in order to anchor ourselves to the world, history, and each other.

Morrison's interest in nostalgia and romanticism, referring to a bittersweet 'hankering after a time that doesn't exist apart from in our minds', is especially pertinent for our current moment of such intense social upheaval. By using

classical imagery and familiar photographs, Morrison recreates a time we are far removed from, underlining the feeling of loss and mourning that accompanies all nostalgia and dwelling on the past. By combining classical and contemporary eras and memories in a harmonious and yet probing manner, the artist speaks to our own lived experience of consciousness itself, in which the 'past is present', and we live in many times, all at once.

Morrison compares and connects the past and the present from her own subjective Western, feminist standpoint on history, furthermore, to reveal the ways in which history is defined in favour of the most powerful, and therefore how certain voices and images are lost. In so doing, she invites us to think about not only the way in which our own perspectives have been determined, but to better see the perspectives of others. Morrison opens up these 'unseen' pasts and present, through this bold visual excavation.

Philosophical and yet deeply emotive, Morrison's complex, conceptually layered pieces ultimately speak to a common desire to understand ourselves and our place in society and history. What are we made of, and how does this both connect and disconnect us from the world we perceive around us? How much of life is make-believe? How can we know ourselves, and connect to one another with integrity in that context?

By using experimental techniques rooted in collage, Morrison builds fascinatingly complex pieces that materially juxtapose the past and the present. By first experimenting with sound editing and the moving around of projected images within a space, Morrison creates an atmosphere, or setting, for the act of painting itself. What emerges from this experimental, explorative practise is a series of final works whose striking cohesion and fluidity are the culmination of many layers, tints, and disruptions, and a thought process marked by analytic strength as well bold experimentation, and a striving for harmony and clarity ultimately.

By so thoroughly and thoughtfully delving beneath the surface of things – from art historical narratives to personal memory – Morrison invites us all to reflect on the transience of visual material life, of beauty, and of memory itself, and in so doing creates a space in which we may find a deeper understanding of who we are and what the world is, beyond the superficially known or seen.

*Based in Penzance, Morwenna is a graduate of the Exeter College of Art and Design's Fine Art programme (1988). She has exhibited extensively across the UK in both solo and group exhibitions.*

Text by Christiana Spens