

Cléa
van der
Grijn

SHIFT

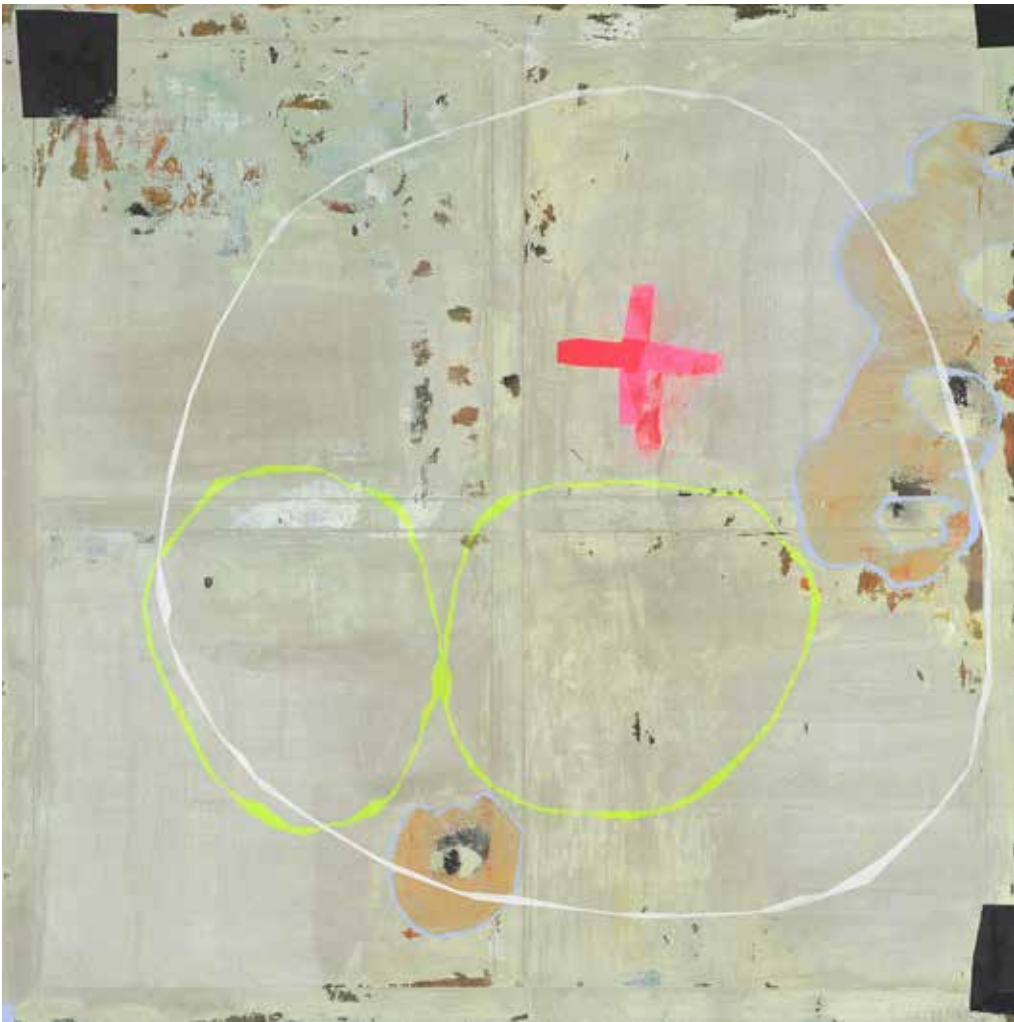


Cléa van der Grijn

SHIFT, 28.10 – 20.11, 2021
Solomon Fine Art, Balfe Street, Dublin 2, Ireland

Cléa van der Grijn is an international award
winning filmmaker and visual artist
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Cover Image: "White Rabbit"
(Jefferson Airplane, White Rabbit)
Mixed media on linen
104 x 104 cm



"How long is forever? Sometimes, just one second"
(Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*)
Mixed media on linen
104 x 104 cm

FOREWORD

Dr Marie Naughton, MRCPI, MRCPsych, MSc MD
Consultant Psychiatrist

I was truly honoured to be asked to contribute to Cléa van der Grijn's exhibition of SHIFT. I see this as an important role for me and indeed all who work in mental health; that role of advocacy and helping to reduce stigma. As some may be aware, I have come to know Cléa in a different context and in more difficult times. Now to be a part of this celebration of her work and her talent is allowing access to a different dimension to this wonderful person. It is a Cléa demonstration that illness is a part of life but not the only part. People do get well, people do recover.

Depression, anxiety, grief and trauma are a feature of many peoples lives. Sadly, despite its frequent occurrence, attempts to destigmatise mental illness has been slow and many still find it difficult to discuss psychological distress and suffering. But mental illnesses are treatable and involve recovery through guiding that person towards wellbeing and resilience. Despite the difficulty for many to develop a language of understanding around

mental illness, we know that for centuries, the darker and more complex parts of our psyches – from generalised low spirits to more pervasive and impairing diagnosable mental illness – have served as an inspiration to artists who have depicted human emotion and experiences with sensitivity, nuance and empathy. Art, the creative expression of the mind, provides a window into the human condition, into mental illness and recovery.

In my view the only thing that measures success is the way we live our lives. Spending time looking at Cléa's works affirms that it is her talent that marks her out. For Cléa, living this life with all its dimensions; art, suffering, caring, and the unique way she has of expressing and making visual difficult emotions, is Cléa's way of living a good and successful life. It is Cléa that her illness does not define her; it is the way she lives her life that does. With suffering comes recovery; the body and the mind always moves towards healing. In this healing she makes her mark and makes mani-

fest in art the emotions of that experience.

I have the privilege of working in Psychiatry in St Patrick's University Hospital, Dublin. The foundation of St Patrick's Hospital was brought about by the will of Jonathan Swift, satirist, patriot, and artist. Swift was a pioneer in recognising that people suffering from mental health conditions required a specialist service to provide care, treatment and, most importantly, a voice. One year after his death in 1746, St Patrick's Hospital was founded, not only the first psychiatric hospital to be built in Ireland but one of the very first in the world. Indeed, in his day they said he was unwell with mental illness but just look at his legacy. Over the centuries, St Patrick's University Hospital has helped countless people recover from mental illness. It has provided a safe sanctuary for the distressed, where overwhelming emotions, negative thoughts and, at times, destructive behaviours are contained, eased and brought towards healing. This safe space gradually enables the person to make sense of their suffering for themselves.

Art has always been considered an important part of the hospital's ethos and we place a lot of value on its role in recovery. For those who have walked around St Patrick's will appreciate the fine collection of paintings and art works that surround the walls. They really came to be through the vision of Dr John Cooney, a consultant psychiatrist and a predecessor of mine, who developed one of the first alcohol recovery services in the country at St Patrick's Hospital. Not many people know this, but a good deal of those paintings on

display at St Patrick's Hospital were done by artists with difficult and traumatic pasts who were in recovery from ravaging addictions.

The acknowledgment by Cléa that some of the works in this exhibition were done when she was suffering is a testament to her determination but also makes one wonder if aspects of mental illness and suffering are necessary to be able to produce such great work? A contentious concept, I know, but looking towards great writers such as Hemmingway or musicians such as Amy Winehouse, one



does have to wonder. But does it have to be that way or are we just living in a world where creativity is defined by how much pain you go through and is that a misinterpretation of artistry? I don't have the answer for this; I think we need to look towards the art for the answer to this...

To conclude, I was truly humbled to be asked to be involved to Cléa van der Grijn's exhibition and to acknowledge publicly in words what a doctor sometimes has to quietly acknowledge to themselves; that they are overwhelmingly proud. Maternalistic as it may sound, I am so proud to see someone, who, for a while in their life, was down, despondent, suffering, but has now risen above it all, is now soaring high, beaming wide and truly being their authentic self. In that true way of being, there is Cléa's connection to others, a presence, and most importantly, a connection to themselves. It is in this space that art can flourish as an expression of that truth. This is what I can see happening for Cléa - with the profound pieces in this exhibition.

One of Jonathan Swift's quotes was "Vision is the art of seeing what is invisible to others". Artists see things that we cannot see. Artists visualise recovery and help us all see recovery. Cléa embodies recovery in how she lives her life and in her works of art. She shows us that suffering can pass and that passion and talent can shine on. I am deeply relieved that some of the suffering has passed but more than anything, I am happy and joyful to see recovery represented so visually here in SHIFT.



LEFT AND TOP:
from *Temple ward, St. Patrick's Hospital series*
Mixed media on paper
78cm x 48cm



"I do wish I hadn't drunk quite so much"
(Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*)
Mixed media on linen
104 x 104 cm



"The best way to explain is to do it"
(Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*)
Mixed media on linen
104 x 104 cm



Rabbit Hole
Mixed media on linen
104 x 104 cm



"Go ask Alice" (*Jefferson Airplane, White Rabbit*)
Mixed media on linen
104 x 104 cm

THE ARTIST AS CARTOGRAPHER

Veronica O'Neill

SHIFT comes both in the wake of and the process of FLUX—like the climax of a tsunami, FLUX leaves behind an altered landscape. Nothing is the same. With SHIFT, van der Grijn explores this landscape, going to the outer edges of emotions and depicting emotional dysregulation, but as a means of disinterested exploration of what it is to be human rather than just with a focus on the discomfort and challenges it brings. She sails close to the wind rather than on an even keel, leaves the well-trodden path with its clear destination to instead build the way as she goes, both in content and form, genuine authentic exploration with openness to being surprised by the destination.

When Ernest Shackleton was looking for companions to join his expedition to explore the physical outer reaches of the time, he advertised for men for a "hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful, honour and recognition in case of

success". What kind of person would respond to this today? Perhaps, in these days of celebrities, the promise of recognition might be a motivation; but celebrity status is about notoriety for notoriety's sake, and this can be earned in much less strenuous ways. Also, a person driven by fame for fame's sake would be unlikely to go looking for it so far from the source of validation, so-called 'civilisation'. No, this type of call will be answered by those seeking validation in the act itself, explorers moving towards the source of validation: the call of the wild? But what does wild say? What is wild: untamed, nature, naturalism?

As always, van der Grijn is contemporary, not because she is on-trend, but because universal themes are timeless, and so always contemporary. The wild, untamed, is what that call is to. Back to the world before words, without words, back to nameless and uncalled, unknown, that world every individual is beckoned out of in the early days of their lives with calls to 'use your words' and 'contain

yourself'. Some find it harder than others to fit within the limits of tameness (society) and can feel like imposters, alien. But none of us is alien, instead, some have a balance of wildness that is greater than tame. They are subject to 'the call of the wild', and while van der Grijn may not venture to the poles or into outer space, she does venture to the edges of human experience and emotional, psychological and mental endurance and brings back stories without words, stories of the landscape in maps.

SHIFT evokes maps and topography: islands and mountains and wide open oceans, journeys of discovery, new discovery without a certain destination. SHIFT is not a call to anywhere; instead, it is a call to remember and bear witness to what is more to our nature. Just as the explorer of the poles brings back evidence, charts new lands, van der Grijn charts outer edges of ontological extremes, the highs and the lows and the tools, the grappling hook that both hooks and is used to hook, crosses (death) letting go, rebirth, skin-shedding along the way.

The edges are hellish, and often we don't return; whether it is the edges of endurance at the actual edge of the world or the edges of psychological endurance of extreme emotional dysregulation. These are hellish, but only tragic if not embraced, if rejected. Hell takes us to edges, the precipice; and it is only here that an unqualified and unconditional 'yes' to life is possible—no 'ifs' or 'buts'. How many ask that question? To be pushed to the edge of endurance and still say yes is to be asked:

"Do you really want this?" It is ultimately to be pushed to the point of enabling consciousness. Arguably, living without knowledge of whether we would choose to stay no matter what is but a provisional existence. Without the 'dark night of the soul', there can be no dawn (dawning). It is to remain in the waiting room¹. Grace calls us forth, if we are lucky, pulling us there where the limits of endurance are presented, and we are faced with the question, the simple question: do you want to live? Regardless? This is a question that can only be answered absolutely (you do or you don't); and the answer can only be known in an absolute sense when it is given from a position of being 'on our knees'.

Dialectics are at play in much of van der Grijn's work in terms of a holding of opposites in tension to frame a window to what is more. Dialectics, not just of content or context, but also of means of representation. Brechtian calling attention to the means of production of the creation of the art is not new for van der Grijn either. In FLUX, perspective is played with in such a way that, while the mechanisms of creation of the scene might not be being shown, the viewer is nevertheless not allowed to fall into a state of Stanislavskian suspension of disbelief. FLUX achieves this through plays of perspective, showing the experience from the inside, the outside, through the eyes of the protagonist, and then voyeuristically and without warning, looking right at him, but blinded by his torchlight shining at us: the viewer is exposed and vulnerable.



Vulnerability is at the heart of FLUX: vulnerability of the boy, the swan, the eggs, but also vulnerability of the viewer. JUMP is psychological, taking the viewer on a journey into the mind, the psyche. FLUX, conversely, is real. While it does jump between dreamscapes—we cannot be sure if it is a dream or reality—it creates a bridge between the psychological and the sensory, the somatic experience of being in the world. Curtains are veil-like, pulling back veils. It is partly set inside a house, a home that is lived in. The boy is dreaming, but the dream is happening in his own home. Mixing realism with magical realism: real life non-actors with magically real content, dream-like, but only to the extent of pushing past the boundaries of the real rather than taking us categorically into the unconscious, FLUX requires us to stay in the dialectical moment, in between the source and the particular, where things come to be, the whirlpool in the stream of

becoming. The boy non-actor cannot quite mask his self-consciousness, the sounds of the toilet, the electric buzz of the fridge in the background in the house could also imply the whirr of a film projector, again drawing attention, if not to the means of production, to the fact of it being a production. Who is doing the watching? It is unsettling, looking at something so deeply intimate, voyeuristic, and then being seen by the torch, the viewer feels like they've been caught doing something shameful, they too are vulnerable, but FLUX wraps its arms around and draws the viewer in. It is a place, a space, for vulnerabilities, humanness, humanity, including voyeurism.

This style breaks the boundary between the artwork and the viewer. It is not possible to anonymously observe. In FLUX, the viewer is seen (or feels like they are), while in SHIFT, by drawing attention to the means of production of the paintings, the viewer is invited (compelled if they refuse the invitation) to



participate in the creation of their experience of (perception of) the artwork. They are part of it, and so, invested in it. Before they know it, they have made it their own.

Falling out of the mind and back into the body is to be liberated from the logical limitations of the mind. It is to fall into a different reality wherein those intellectual rules of logic do not apply in such an absolute sense. Philosophers like Whitehead have called this state 'God', believing in the essentiality of there being agency involved and of giving this agency a name. But he is making the same error, calling it something. There is something that is beyond words, beyond constructs of time and space, and this is where van der Grijn is pointing. Just as it cannot be named/defined, nor can it be depicted definitively. Like Whitehead's 'forms' or 'eternal objects' as potentialities for 'actual occasions', van der Grijn's paintings in SHIFT are potentialities to experiences of the wordless (God in

Whitehead's words, but definitely not in van der Grijn's—she does not presume to name it). The paintings are a means rather than an end. They do not show something, rather they show a way to something. They are maps rather than descriptions, showing the way to look rather than something to look at. They are an invitation to a journey rather than an end point.

With the drawing of this Love and
the voice of this Calling

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning.²

ENDNOTES

1. E. Walsh (2016) *Arlington (a Love story)*, London: Nick Herne Books Ltd.
2. T.S. Eliot (1974) 'Little Gidding,' *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, London: Faber and Faber, pp. 208-209.



"Curiouser and curiouser!" (Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*)
Mixed media on linen
104 x 104 cm



*"It's no secret" (Jefferson Airplane,
Jefferson Airplane Take Off)*
Mixed media on linen
104 x 104 cm



Lovely lick
Mixed media on linen
104 x 104 cm



"One pill makes you larger and one pill makes you small"
(Jefferson Airplane, White Rabbit)
Mixed media on linen
104 x 104 cm



A narrow joy
Mixed media on linen
104 x 104 cm



Feel it
Mixed media on linen
104 x 104 cm



Way to blue
Mixed media on linen
104 x 104 cm



Precarious eternity
Mixed media on linen
104 x 104 cm



EUBPD
Mixed media on linen
104 x 104 cm



*"It's no use going back to yesterday because I was
a different person then"* (Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*)
Mixed media on linen
104 x 104 cm

Back cover Image: Triangle
Mixed media on linen
104 x 104 cm



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