

A watercolor illustration of a park scene. In the foreground, a grey path curves from the bottom left towards the center. A large, leafy tree with a white trunk stands prominently in the middle ground. To its right, another tree with a dark trunk is visible. The background shows more trees and a green lawn. The overall style is soft and painterly.

FIONNA MURRAY  
**BLOW UP**  
and Other Stories

"We know that under the revealed image there is another one which is more faithful to reality and under this one there is yet another and again another under this last one down to the true image of that absolute mysterious reality that nobody will ever see or perhaps not until the decomposition of every image, every reality."

Michelangelo Antonioni

FIONNA MURRAY  
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## Fionna Murray : *Blow Up and Other Stories*

The main character in Antonioni's film, *Blow Up* (1966), is a restless creature. Thomas is a successful photographer typifying London's swinging 60s. His quest for meaning and value is focused on his social realist photo-essay documenting the lives of London's homeless and not to his financially lucrative fashion shoots. Drawn to a park where its tranquil setting affords him freedom for his eye to roam, he photographs a couple of lovers who offer a dramatic contrast to his brutal images of poverty. They are to function as a seemingly perfect narrative closure to the realist demands of the photo-essay ('very peaceful, very still'). Of course, this is not to be. Instead, the experience brings on a neurosis that can only be resolved in the last scene of the film when he throws back an imaginary ball to mime artists playing on the tennis court. In this way, he finally relinquishes and partakes in a communal fantasy of what is real.

We have been here many times before. Thomas' journey repeats the dynamics of the pastoral retreat which has long governed the western landscape tradition. The lure of a peaceful resolution in nature's fecundity is to be thwarted. The pastoral vision is shadowed by themes of longing and displacement. Desire and its unfeasibility are held in tension as a means to frame our longing for tranquility. It thrives on the dramatic contrast between an 'imaginary realm of perfect bliss' and the spectre of death. The tragic plight of the individual is subsumed into nature's overall harmony. Likewise, Antonioni's Thomas relinquishes control to the supremacy of the Fates and so his path to enlightenment is revealed.

Antonioni absorbs these pastoral tensions into his realist concerns. The veracity of the image is repeatedly called into question. The blow-up photograph of the body, a central image of the film,



promises revelation but becomes increasingly blurred and indistinct upon reproduction. Antonioni also extends the fictive structures of the pastoral to include the city. In one scene, Thomas drives down a London street in which buildings have been obviously painted deep red for aesthetic effect. Indeed, Deleuze has noted how the characters in *Blow Up* are absorbed into its visual architecture. He suggests that Antonioni's concern is with filmic space as 'productive of meaning' in and of itself.

These elements are at the heart of Fionna Murray's work. Scenes from *Blow Up* have been isolated and painted with the figures removed. The park, the studio, the antique shop and street scenes have been depopulated. They are spaces to be valued in and of themselves. At the same time these small water colours become ghostly scapes for the knowing eye. They are cut loose but never free from their origins. The eye traces the wavering line of a rooftop and chances upon the draw of pigment to what was the water's edge. It is taken to the minor detail and the quirk: a smudged pair of boots in a shop window, the black eye of a bulldog clip or dappled leaves on nearby trees. It falls upon those abstract sites built-up from thin washes layered over each other. Here is a world of our own where we can drift through its space and take pleasure in the chance encounter.

Murray speaks of her work as a 'metropolitan pastoral'. Born of Irish parents, she grew up in London and now lives and teaches in an art college in the west of Ireland. It is not lost on her that the London art scene would play a central role for a generation shaping its culture in the 60s. For it would shape her too. As indeed the diasporic draw of Ireland would colour her ideas of home over time. To render the spaces of *Blow Up* then is to summon a double nostalgia. They become enchanted places long since passed and

now viewed from a place that once held an imaginative charm of its own. The destinations vanish the closer we look. Home is harboured from afar. It finds its place between here and there, between desire and its unfeasibility.

To render the spaces of *Blow Up* is also a retreat into another realm. It is to temper displacement and desire through the process of washing again and again new fictions into being. This contemplative space draws the tranquil life that bit closer. It is to make those impossible worlds – those imaginary realms of perfect bliss – more real, if only on paper. This is the charm of Murray's exhibition and this is its gift. For to be awash with a sense of the ineffable, if only for a fleeting moment, is to be truly alive in the here and now.

Gavin Murphy is a writer based in Galway













## List of Works

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <p>2 <i>Blow Up 17</i> 2015<br/>watercolor on paper<br/>14.7 × 21 cm</p> <p>4 <i>Blow Up 11</i> 2015<br/>watercolor on paper<br/>14.7 × 21 cm</p> <p>7 <i>Blow Up 38</i> 2015<br/>watercolor on paper<br/>14.7 × 21 cm</p> <p>8 <i>Blow Up 2</i> 2015<br/>watercolor on paper<br/>14.7 × 21 cm</p> <p>9 <i>Blow Up 12</i> 2015<br/>watercolor on paper<br/>14.7 × 21 cm</p> <p>10 <i>Blow Up 19</i> 2015<br/>watercolor on paper<br/>14.8 × 21 cm</p> <p>11 <i>Blow Up 3</i> 2015<br/>watercolor on paper<br/>14.7 × 21 cm</p> <p>12 <i>Blow Up 28</i> 2015<br/>watercolor on paper<br/>14.7 × 21 cm</p> <p>13 <i>Blow Up 29</i> 2015<br/>watercolor on paper<br/>14.8 × 21 cm</p> <p>14 <i>Blow Up 31</i> 2015<br/>watercolor on paper<br/>14.7 × 21 cm</p> <p>17 <i>Blow Up Photo 1</i> 2015<br/>photograph on Ilford<br/>Multigrade FB Classic<br/>50.5 × 60 cm</p> | <p><i>Blow Up 9</i> 2014<br/>watercolor on paper<br/>14.6 × 21 cm</p> <p><i>Blow Up 18</i> 2015<br/>watercolor on paper<br/>14.7 × 21 cm</p> | <p><i>Blow Up 5</i> 2015<br/>watercolor on paper<br/>15 × 21 cm</p> <p><i>Blow Up 26</i> 2015<br/>watercolor on paper<br/>14.7 × 21 cm</p> |
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## Fionna Murray

1995 BA Hons Chelsea College of Art, London

1997 MFA University of Ulster, Belfast

### Solo Exhibitions

2016 *Blow Up and Other Stories*, Eagle Gallery, London

2009 *Wildlife*, Metis NL, Amsterdam, Netherlands

2008 *Night Wind*, The Mermaid Arts Centre, Bray, Co. Wicklow

2007 *A Real Corner of the World*, The Dock, Carrick on Shannon

2001 Rubicon Gallery, Dublin

2000 Galway Arts Centre, Galway

1998 Rubicon Gallery, Dublin

### Selected Group Exhibitions

2014 *Some of My Colours*, Eagle Gallery, London

2013 *Panel Paintings*, Eagle Gallery, London

*RHA Summer Exhibition*, Dublin

*Claremorris Open Exhibition*, Claremorris, Co. Mayo

*Ruth Borchard Self Portrait Exhibition*, Kings Place, London

2012 Castlefield Gallery, Manchester

*Artspace at The Shed*, The Docks, Galway

*126 Annual Members Show*, 126 Gallery, Galway

2010 *Daily Truths*, Duende Studios, Rotterdam, Netherlands

*Claremorris Open Exhibition*, Claremorris, Co. Mayo

2009 *Image Surface Event*, Standpoint Gallery, London

2008 *By Invitation*, Paul Kane Gallery, Dublin

2007 *Artspace 21*, Galway Technical Institute, Galway

*Fear Not*, Invited Artist, Iontas, Sligo Art Gallery, Sligo

2006 *126 Presents*, Galway Arts Centre, Galway

2005 *Remote Access*, Flix Artists, Rubicon Gallery, Dublin

2004 *Four Painters*, Catherine Hammond Gallery, West Cork

*Boyle Visual Arts Festival*, Boyle, Co. Roscommon

2002 *Art Futures*, Contemporary Art Fair, London

2001 *Focus on Drawing*, Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin

2000 *Art 2000*, Contemporary Art Fair, London

*Emerging Art*, OPW Collection, Kilkenny

### Collections

Office of Public Works, Ireland; University of the Arts, London; KPMG; National University Ireland, Galway; Centre Culturel Irlandais; Merrion Inn; Ballinglen Arts Foundation, Ireland



Published on the occasion of Fionna Murray's 2016 exhibition  
*Blow Up and Other Stories* at the Eagle Gallery, London

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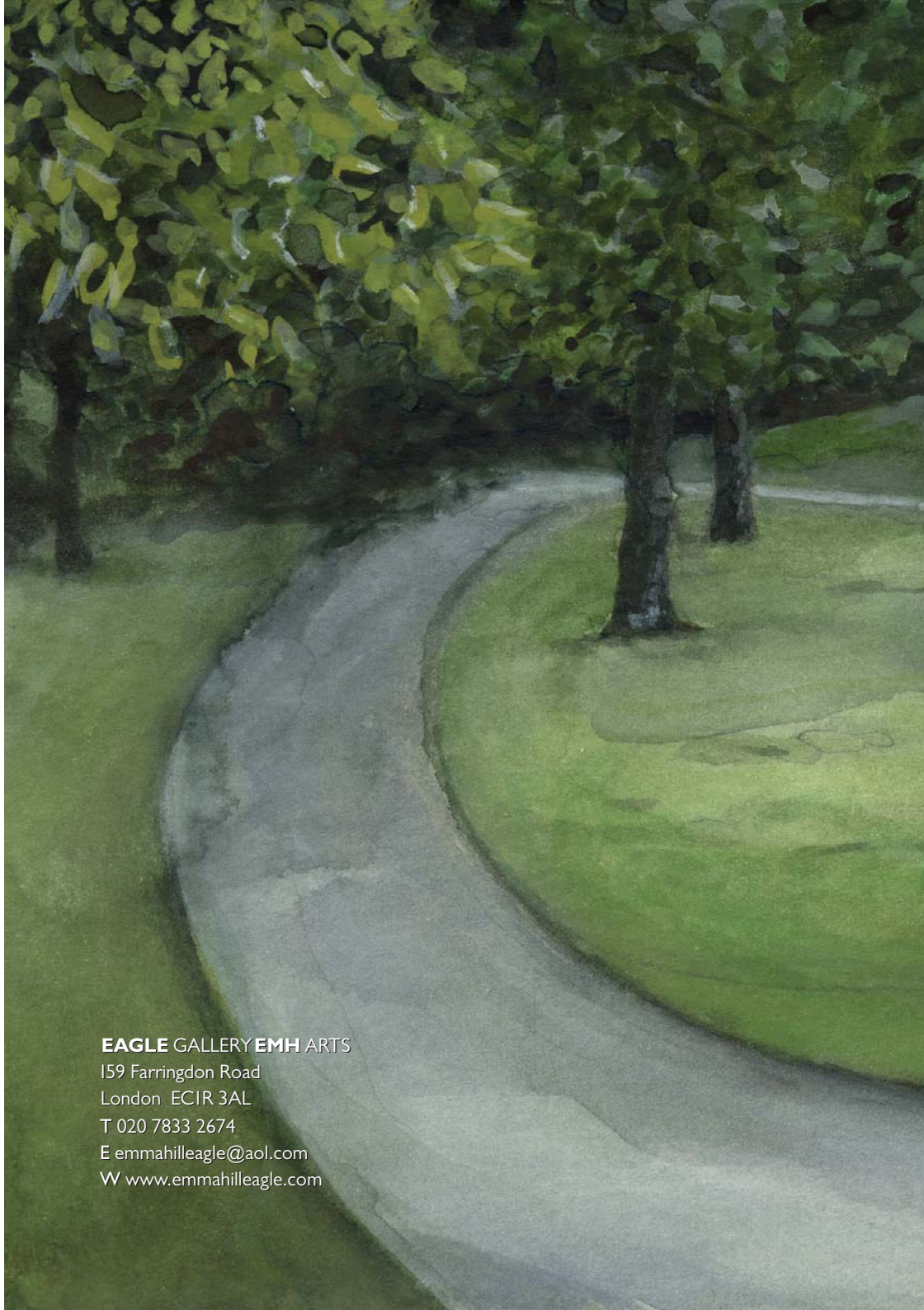
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