

# CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Alice Black Gallery



47 Berwick Street

Brian Maguire

~

Matt Symonds

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Brian Maguire

2019

ALICEBLACK

Encountering Brian Maguire's art for the first time, with its unswerving focus on personal disaster and systemic negligence, can feel like a forced march from the safe central confines of contemporary visual art, towards something we might have forgotten that art can achieve.

What, in the end, makes this march a voluntary journey, through images of decapitated narcos, fascistic police cadets, murdered young women, displaced peoples, drowning migrants, and drugmoney laundering household name banks, is the pervasive disjunction in Maguire's paintings between the gravity of the substance and the haunting beauty of the style. A body of work in the tradition of Goya, Gericault and Manet through his contemporaries Borremans, Dumas and Tuymans, asks us to look through the atrocities and to see the human plight behind them, with an unvoicistic and compassionate eye.



**Citizens of the Newest  
Country in the World**  
2018, 46.2 x 61 cm  
Acrylic on Linen

This is in fact the eye of Brian Maguire, a man who spent time living in one of the world's most dangerous cities, and to paint from their photographs portraits of the victims of the feminicidio, to give to their families. When you see him in Mark McLoughlin's documentary *Blood Rising*, on the sofa of the mother of a Juarez victim, both of them rendered wordless as Maguire then passes to her his portrait of her dead daughter, you yield to the recognition that this might be an artist who exists off the grid as it's habitually understood.

Maguire has said that "Drawing is an act of love", and that "The aesthetics are a means to an end", a revelatory end. His work is no painterly version of Cormac McCarthy's surgically brutal and hyperreal prose, bears no kinship with Tarantino's *Grand Guignol*; nor does it attempt the psychological freeze-frames of Francis Bacon. It only reveals, tells, and gives a voice, often a posthumous voice, to the incarcerated, the dispossessed, the displaced, the murdered. It renders darkness visible, and it knows while eschewing knowingness.

“If you want to be an artist, you have to work in the art world, to function within the system. But I do what I want and only what I want, and sometimes one is isolated.”

~

Brian Maguire



Mr William Earles,  
Sudan 1880  
2018, 120 x 92 cm  
Acrylic on Canvas



**War Changes Its Address: Aleppo**  
2019, 100 x 81 cm  
Acrylic on Linen

I first encountered Brian before I first encountered his art. We met at a dinner in Paris a few years ago, and subsequently as I spent time with him in his two principal worlds of Paris and Dublin I had a chance to understand something of the man who would undertake such an extraordinary artistic endeavour, with its global reach over the decades through Brazil, Kenya, Ireland, Mexico, South Sudan, and southern Europe. The conversation is both learned and emotive, high-brow and street, personal and political, with hints of long past acquaintance with gangland and armed Republicanism, and contentment in the time he has spent at institutions helping and connecting with prisoners.



**Nature Morte**  
2014, 110 x 220 cm  
Acrylic on Linen

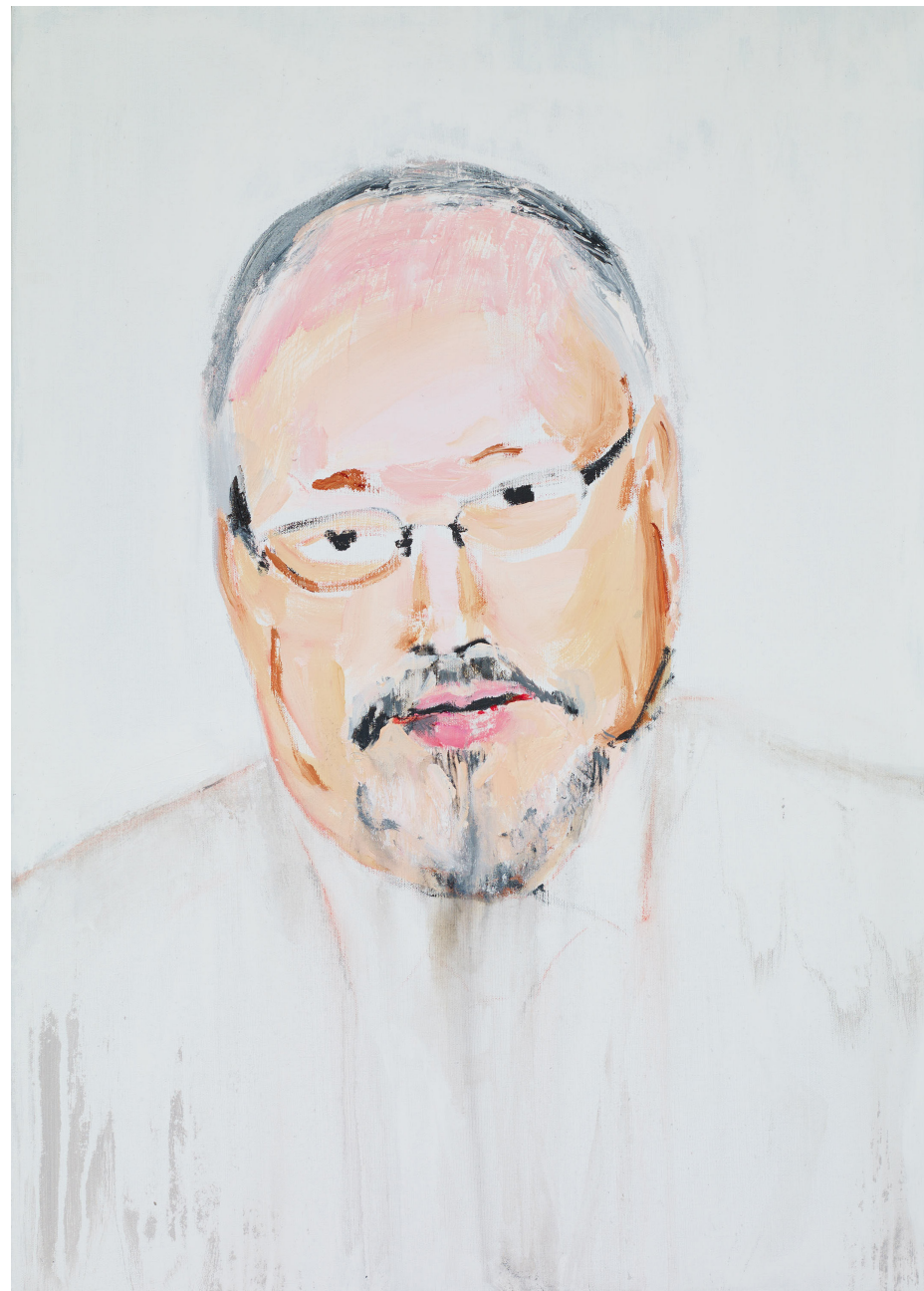
All of which makes Brian an outsider insider artist, who will happily chat with his friend Michael D Higgins, President of Ireland, at a Royal Hibernian Academy opening of Maguire's body of South Sudan work, but says that "If you want to be an artist, you have to work in the art world, to function within the system. But I do what I want and only what I want, and sometimes one is isolated." And so later the same evening he might also head for dinner with some old underworld friends at a Chinese a few blocks into Dublin's hinterland.



**Cocaine Laundry Series**  
2015, 46 x 38 cm  
Acrylic on Canvas

Brian is perhaps most fundamentally a teacher, by nature at the grassroots level but also by broadcast to a wider audience that includes but transcends the art world. After his father's death in 1997, Brian found himself in his late 40's in a unique position to turn his energies outward, and to teach in Irish and Brazilian prisons, as well as at the Sao Paolo Centro Cultural, and at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin where he was Professor of Fine Art from 2000 to 2009. His students have called him a magician.

It is the duality of his roles as teacher (to both the criminally marginalised and criminals at the margin) and artist, as well as the more than challenging content of his work, that have made Brian an acquired taste, a painters' painter with a specialist market, a tightknit group of passionate collectors and museum curators who see his long term and unique role in art history. His name is known by perhaps a third of the people who could facilely roll off the names of dozens of artists of, generously, a third of Maguire's importance. And so only now is Brian's work being shown for the first time in London, notwithstanding his representation by two elite galleries, in Dublin Kerlin Gallery and in New York Fergus McCaffrey.



**Jamil Khashoggi**  
2019, 92 x 65 cm  
Acrylic on Linen



Phylis Hyman  
2019, 91 x 61 cm  
Acrylic on Linen

This show at ALICE BLACK, a gallery that Alice and I co-founded in 2017, starts to resolve Maguire's four decade arc from the autobiographical through the biographical to the social, cultural and moral. It is hardly surprising that Brian has tuned in as much as anyone on the planet to the contemporary apostasy from our political and democratic institutions, to the assault on the media and civil liberties, and to the shameless lying and ad hominem attacks that characterise the political climate of the West today. Despite his own lifelong scepticism about the failures and hypocrisies of many of these institutions, Brian professes a sickened alarm at where our political processes are heading, and the deracination of our democracies.

Motivated by this, his London show is Maguire's first to be inspired not so much by places, people and localised events (however reverberating their impact), as by a social climate, a political phenomenon, doublespeak and double standards, and a motherload of memes that threatens to engulf our global sense of decency, fairness, and humanity. And only serendipitously, Conflicts of Interest comes at a time when comparable figures like Don McCullin and Marie Colvin are achieving their own due recognition in major museum shows and films.

In Ed Vulliamy's essay in a superb Brian Maguire monograph published late last year, he recounts how Brian exclaimed one soul searching evening over dinner in El Paso, close to but safely distant from Juarez, "it's worthless, it's meaningless, it's nothing. We are totally ineffective." And in my own interview with him for this show he said "look, in the end they're just paintings". But in a bottomscraping world of multimillion dollar balloon sculptures and dot canvases, it couldn't be clearer that these paintings, these messages from the dark side, just might actually matter.

Matt Symonds, Co-Founder Alice Black  
2019

Maguire has shown extensively in Europe, the US and Asia. Current and forthcoming solo exhibitions include 'Juarez to Aleppo', Rubin Center for the Visual Arts, University of Texas, El Paso; Museo de Arte de Ciudad Juárez, Juárez, Mexico (all 2019) and American University Museum, Washington DC, USA (2020). Recent solo exhibitions include 'War Changes Its Address: The Aleppo Paintings', Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2018); 'J'ACCUSE', Void, Derry (2016); 'The Absence of Justice Demands This Act', Fergus McCaffrey, New York (2015); Other selected shows include: 'Changing States: Contemporary Irish Art and Francis Bacon's Studio', BOZAR Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels (2013); X Espacio de Arte, Mexico City (2013); 'Femicide/Juarez: Paintings by Brian Maguire', at the European Parliament, Brussels (2012); Residency at the Coolmine Therapeutic Centre, Dublin (2009); Fairview Project, solo show at Galway Arts Centre in collaboration with Fairgreen Homeless Shelter (2005); 'Inside/ Out', Solo travelling exhibition at Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Crawford Municipal Gallery, Cork (2000); Representation of Ireland at the XXIV Sao Paulo Bienal, Brazil (1998); 'Irish Art 1970-1995', Fuller Craft Museum, Boston (1995); 11 Cities / 11 Nations, First solo exhibition at Kerlin Gallery, Dublin (1990); Crossroads, Turns of the Mind: Some New Irish Art, first major exhibition of contemporary Irish art to tout North America (1985-87); 'Making Sense', Arts Council of Ireland touring show(1982).

Public collections include: Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland; Dublin City The Hugh Lane, Dublin; Arts Council Collection, Dublin; Crawford Art Gallery, Cork, Ireland; Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, Dublin; National Portrait Collection, Limerick Office of Public Works, Kilkenny Art Gallery Collection, Kilkenny, Ireland; Trim, Ireland; Openbaar Psychiatrisch Zorgcentrum, Geel, Belgium; Trinity College, Dublin; University College, Cork and Dublin; Wicklow County Council, Ireland; Tia Collection, Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA; Museo de Arte do Rio, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas, USA; Gemeentemuseum, The Hague-Netherlands; Jyväskylä Art Museum, Finland; Liverpool University, UK; Wolverhampton Art Gallery, UK.

Exhibition curated by Matt Symonds & Alice Black  
Exhibition coordinated by Marcela Iriarte & Millie Seal  
Special thanks to Fergus McCaffrey (New York),  
Kerlin Gallery (Dublin) and Theo Morgan

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