



Detail: Rita Duffy, *Partition*, 2023, oil on linen, 65 x 90 cm © Rita Duffy

Rita Duffy

PERSISTENT ILLUSION

Leaving Certificate Art: Visual Studies

Today's World *Art as Social Commentary or Commentator*

Devised by Ciara Wall

1. CONTEXT

Growing up within a Catholic family in Belfast, a city which has seen much conflict, has shaped and informed much of Rita Duffy's work. She graduated with BA Hons. and MA in Fine Art from University of Ulster in 1985 and since has worked on multiple projects based on issues she has had first-hand experience of, such as an artistic exchange with Argentina looking at the role of art in post conflict societies.

She is an artist known for her Northern Irish roots and her pervasive interest in social justice. The Thaw Project in 2004 aimed to connect local experiences of colonialism, sectarianism with universal climate crisis and was inspired by the Titanic which was famously built in Belfast.

In this exhibition *Persistent Illusion* Duffy links the stricken ship to her work in '*Belfast to Byzantium*'.



Rita Duffy, *Belfast to Byzantium*, 2022, Oil on linen, 123 x 184 cm ©Rita Duffy

The impact of the Covid 19 pandemic which began in 2020 has also shaped her work here, some of her figures don face masks and she manages to capture the general anxiety our society felt during the many long months of lockdown. Duffy expertly holds up a mirror to reflect issues facing society today, whilst simultaneously mirroring events of the past. She is able to comment on often harrowing issues using a clever mix of stark imagery and satire (the use of humour or ridicule), and asks the viewer to thoughtfully consider each question she poses.

2. ARTISTS AND ARTWORKS

Duffy explores issues of female identity, history, and politics-border contexts. She has been inspired by many artists of the past such as Francisco Goya, William Hogarth, Hieronymus Bosch, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, George Grosz and Otto Dix.



Hieronymus Bosch, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, oil on oak panels, 205.5 cm × 384.9 cm, Museo del Prado Madrid.

Making art has always been my way of surviving, making visual the things I cannot say and giving expression to life - the living, loving, suffering and dying. Memories and trauma emerge from the bog hole of my subconscious and are made visual.

-Duffy 2023

Her childhood is clearly referenced in *Exodus, 12th July, 2023*, where Duffy depicts leaving her family home in Belfast before the marches of the Orange Order begin. She comments on her cultural identity; her Catholic upbringing and the impact that had on her families' life in Northern Ireland, as they leave the city wearing handmade Aran jumpers.

A reoccurring theme in her work, as is throughout Art History, is the depiction of clothing or lack of clothing on her figures, it can be used to comment upon the figures' social standing, morals and occupation etc.

- a) What themes do you think Duffy is exploring in these works by depicting her figures clothed, partially clothed and nude?
- b) Is it important that artists ask questions about societal/political issues, why?



Rita Duffy, *Exodus, 12th July, 2023*, oil on linen, 70 x 90 cm, ©Rita Duffy

3. ANALYSIS

To analyse an artwork is to question it

- a) What is going on in this artwork?
- b) What do you think is the meaning behind this piece?
- c) What topics do you think Duffy is commenting on?
- d) Does Duffy use any **motifs** (a dominant or recurring idea in an artistic work) or (a decorative image or design, especially a repeated one forming a pattern) that you recognise?
- e) How would you describe the **style** of Duffy's work?
- f) What **media** does she use?
- g) What do you see that supports your observation/description?
- h) Can you identify commonalities between two (or more) paintings in the exhibition?
- i) What are the differences?
- j) What is your interpretation of this piece?
- k) Does this painting evoke any emotions or opinions for you?
- l) Do you think that it is important that artists like Duffy make this type of art? Why?

4. VTS (VISUAL THINKING STRATEGIES)

- a) Spend 5 minutes looking at a piece from the exhibition.
- b) What is going on in this picture?
- c) What do you see that makes you say that?
- d) What more can you find?

5. ART ELEMENTS AND DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- a) Can you identify any of the Artistic Elements in Duffy's work? Describe them... i.e. Colour/ Line/ Dot/ Space/ Texture etc.
- b) Can you identify any of the Principles of Design in her work? Describe them... i.e. Balance. Repetition, Harmony, etc.

6. MEDIA AND AREAS OF PRACTICE

In learning how artists use various media in their processes, students can understand how to use media in their own work.

- a) What media does Duffy use in her work?
- b) Why do you think she chooses to use this?

7. INNOVATION AND INVENTION

- a) Do you think that Duffy's work prompts discussion on important issues? i.e. climate change, migration, socio-economic divisions (the interaction between the social and economic habits of a group of people and how they can divide people), borders, etc.
- b) Can discussion of topics such as those explored in Duffy's work implement change in society?

I believe in the power of art to transform, inspire and guide us - it is the only thing we have to stop us destroying ourselves - Rita Duffy, 2021.

- c) How does Duffy use events of the past in her work?
- d) Are the themes from the past still relevant today?

Themes of:

- Migration
 - Irish famine
 - Refugee crisis
 - Ukraine War
 - Politics
 - Global pandemic
 - History repeating itself
 - Female identity
- e) Duffy employs the use of brand symbols such as Amazon's logo in *Belfast to Byzantium*, 2022, how is this positioning at odds with the rest of the scene?
 - f) What is Duffy alluding to?

Art as social commentary or commentator.
- ***Art is seed - Rita Duffy, 2021.***