

Meet the artist: Trish Morrissey

Film Transcript

Produced by Serlachius Museums

Running time: 9 minutes

The exhibition is titled, *Autofictions* and it is a survey show of twenty years of work. The first work in the exhibition is from 2001 and the most recent work is this year, 2022. So actually, slightly over twenty years.

Autofiction, even though it's a term that's normally used in literature, adapts to photography and film very well because, particularly with my work, I'm weaving fact and fiction, a sort of historical fiction almost, as well as contemporary fiction, where I'm using the essence of me and the essence of my life, intertwined with the lives of others and it's hard to know where one begins and one ends, and what is fact and what is fiction, and what is, you know, made up.

The first work that appears in the exhibition is a series of photographs called *Seven Years*, in which I performed a fake family album with my sister and I playing all the parts. We play aunts, uncles, cousins, men, women and children. A thirty-five-year-old as I was then, getting away with playing a seven-year-old, just about.

And then we move onto photographs of me with other families, where I'm in the series *Front*. I approached families on the beach and asked if I could be a part of their family for a moment for a photograph. So, the idea of the border and the boundary around a family is broken through my intervention. First of all, breaking the code of the beach where you can

never speak to somebody, even though they are there, right close to you, and you know, everyone becomes a voyeur and an exhibitionist at the same time. And yet, you kind of try and ignore them. And so by breaking through that barrier, I was crossing that invisible boundary, so using the beach as a sort of metaphor for this crossing the boundary of the family. The women who I replaced in the photographs were very generous and allowed me to be with their family while they became the photographer.

Working with archives has been a really incredible experience, and mostly through look. I've been asked to be artist in residence at the Bohusläns Museum in Sweden and also at the Serlachius Museums here, which is my first experience of visiting Mänttä and working with the museum. I was here at the invitation of Ville Lenkkeri who was putting together an exhibition of work by ten international artists, made over a two week period, here in the town and then exhibited six months later at the Museum, Gösta.

This is an interesting story because I had been through early motherhood and, you know, I had kind of taken myself away from my career for quite a number of years, so when I got the invitation to come to Mänttä and make work, I felt very 'un-match-fit', if you know what I mean. I felt like I wasn't ready and I kept trying to put it off, but with the encouragement of Ville, who actually suggested in the end that I had a look at the photographs that were in the archive that aren't publicly available, and perhaps I could find inspiration from that.

And so, that turned out to be incredibly fortuitous. I just, over several evenings, I poured and poured through the work online and every so often, a certain picture of a certain person would sort of almost hit me viscerally and I would have... I felt a connection coming through the screen. But then, it was much more difficult, to sort of get a coherent series that I could then work with, but eventually, I selected ten photographs to re-enact and then that way, I felt I could get sort of closer to the town itself.

I had to sort of think and research, and plan and really feel into the photographs, really feel into the work. So, you know, I've made all the costumes with Mark Harriott, who I work with in the UK, who make costumes. And also, Tarja, who is from the museum, helped with some of the costumes and wigs as well. And the series became *Ten People in a Suitcase* because I literally brought ten peoples' identities in my suitcase, which was about sort of, I don't know, forty kilos in weight.

The first film I made was 2004 and it was a film that came about because of my frustration with the limitations of photography.

I was trying to make a photograph that was about my mother's wedding dress, which she'd obviously worn in her wedding in 1958, and I wore the same dress to my Debs ball, which is a bit like a sort of American prom, although a lot more basic, in the 1980s. And I just decided to film my mum and myself dancing to a big band, Glen Miller's *Moonlight Serenade*, which was her favourite dancehall track when she was courting my father. It was done single shot twice if you know what I mean. So, my mum dancing and me dancing; single point of view and the music put on afterwards, so it was very rudimentary. But it somehow worked, and it still means a lot to me, that film.

And then over the sort of next few years, I made three more single point of view, almost single shot. There's another film, *Ave Maria Karaoke* film about how the pregnant body becomes possessed by society. Society owns the pregnant body and the pregnant woman is no longer herself. So, that film is kind of an allegory to that. And then I also made a film called *Ideas of Refinement, Principles of Taste*, while on residency in Melbourne, Australia.

Again, a single shot, single point of view film. And then from there, it's kind of taken off again and now, I find that I'm thinking of films more than I am thinking of photography.

“Apnoea, Dyspnoea, Orthopnoea, Hyperpnoea... Breathe in me, Holy Spirit, and my thoughts may all be holy.”

My work kind of is on a thread, if you like, sort of it's on a balancing point between being quite funny at times but also quite psychologically disturbing at other times. So, I kind of purposefully am on that little thread and I'm also on the slight thread of it being slightly embarrassing to the viewer, maybe a little bit cringe. You want to look away, you might want to look back and then... So, I'm kind of using humour as a way to entice people in, a lot of the time, and then I'm hoping that when they stay and look a bit longer, they get a little bit of a psychological disturbance when they have this uncanny feeling of things not being quite what they seem, and not being quite right, to varying degrees throughout the work, I think.

So, I do like my work to have an entertainment element to it. It's not all sort of gloom and doom, even though the recent work, sort of pandemic based, does feel quite dark. Particularly *Self Portrait with Two Snails*, where I am sort of passively allowing snails to sort of slime all over my face and all over my eyes.

So, I suppose, if I was to think, what would I say to entice people to come to the exhibition, it would be that there is quite a lot of humour, and it is an entertainment and it's enjoyable, but hopefully you will come away with a sort of feeling of things not being quite right.

Maybe you'd like to come back and view it again, see it another time.