

Chantal Joffe

Private View 6 – 8pm, Thursday 21 January 2016

Exhibition runs 22 January – 24 March 2016

Victoria Miro Mayfair, 14 St George Street, London W1S 1FE



Victoria Miro is delighted to present an exhibition of new work by Chantal Joffe, in which celebrated writers keep company with the artist's friends and family members. Practising painting and drawing as the loving collection of subjects, people met in the flesh and on the page, Joffe prompts a re-evaluation of notions of self-disclosure and intimacy in the making of work.

A long-time observer of her immediate surroundings, Joffe's practice springs from the non-transferable nature of experience; a recent strain of her work places her commitment to the sensing, fleshy place from which a painter paints in relation to confessional poetry. Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath and Robert Lowell, among others, introduced to their work in the second half of the twentieth century the texture of lived experience, loosening formal strictures as they complicated, rather than collapsed, the relationship between personality and creative output. Joffe has painted these writers, who performed the endlessly fraught interdependency of creative practice and everyday survival, from photographs reproduced in biographies. Composed mistresses; men with their second and third wives, and various offspring; couples absorbed in a world of their making; mothers and daughters embracing: these chaotic lives were only momentarily organised by the camera lens, with its split-second testimonies to the mundane efforts of those who seem to meet the world with some kind of vital layer less to function within it as best they can. Joffe handles these photographs with the ardour of the avid reader, and fan; far from forensic examinations, her act of painting the faces and bodies

of people who worked from the inside out is suffused with an almost palpable empathetic warmth, which moves perpetually towards what seems at once painfully present and endlessly unknowable.

A sense of moving things held temporarily together, whether in a line of poetry or a family photograph, is present equally in recent portraits of loved ones in the throes of various transitional phases. Moon-faced new mothers and the sidelong glances of almost-teenage girls are depicted with a characteristic combination of psychological precision and formal ease that fluently conveys the unnameable, yet invariably utterly specific, flavour of relationship that might bind the subjects of group portraits, or remain implicit between sitter and artist. Together, their effect is one of an attentive mapping of the shifting human connections that make up the affective fabric of the world in which the self is caught.

A group of new pastels is collectively titled 'Family Pictures'; Joffe has described the mesmeric and physical, arm-straining experience of their making, the thickly applied chalk accumulating with a dusty, luminous purity. There is a sense of democratic, mobile immediacy about these sticks of pigment, the looser strokes they occasion turning clothes, or the stripes of a beach hut, towards abstraction even as they retain the sense of gesture and place of their making. Here again, experience and artistic form, emotional connection and representation, are suspended in lively, irresolvable association on Joffe's picture plane, which accommodates all manner of psychological and spatio-temporal complexities.

Born in 1969, Chantal Joffe lives and works in London. She holds an MA from the Royal College of Art and was awarded the Royal Academy Woollaston Prize in 2006. Joffe has exhibited nationally and internationally at the National Museum of Iceland, Reykjavík (2016); National Portrait Gallery, London (2015, two person); Jewish Museum, New York (2015, solo); Cheim & Read, New York (2015, solo); Jerwood Gallery, Hastings (2015, solo); Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia, Italy (2014 – 2015, two person); Saatchi Gallery, London (2013 – 2014); MODEM, Hungary (2012); Mackintosh Museum, Glasgow (2012); Il Capricorno, Venice (2011, solo); Turner Contemporary, Margate (2011); Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, New York (2009); University of the Arts, London (2007); MIMA Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (2007); Royal Academy of Arts, London (2005); Galleri KB, Oslo (2005) and Bloomberg Space, London (2004).

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue featuring a newly commissioned text by art historian Gemma Blackshaw.

Image: Chantal Joffe, Robert, Harriet and Elizabeth, 2015

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