

Stefana McClure
Whatever You Say Say Nothing

September 6 - October 13, 2018
Opening Reception: Thursday, September 13, 6pm to 8pm

Somewhere beyond the scorched gable end and the burnt-out buses
there is a poet indulging
his wretched rage for order –
or not as the case may be; for his
is a dying art,
an eddy of semantic scruples
in an unstructurable sea.

—Derek Mahon, *Rage for Order*, 1979

Josée Bienvenu is pleased to present *Whatever You Say Say Nothing*, Stefana McClure's fifth solo exhibition with the gallery. Taken from a poem by Seamus Heaney, the title originates with the secretive activity of Northern Ireland's rebel paramilitary that admonished its members with this demand.

The exhibition navigates the relationship between art and politics, interrogating the nature of artistic responsibility, the clash and blend of different traditions, the endless interaction, for better or worse, of past and present, the dangerous undercurrents of injustice and resentment, complacency and discontent, while also pointing to memory as mutable, prone to the passage of time and the vagaries of the imagination.

Explosions were everyday events in the Belfast of the early 1970s where McClure grew up and they figure largely in a series of new Teflon drawings. Taking the form of open notebooks, each is a rendering of a protest poem "typed" on a sensitive Teflon surface by typists and stenographers wearing special gloves that have been modified to bear an IBM Selectric golfball at the end of each finger. Rich with imagery of drums, bombs, banners and sectarian graffiti, as Heaney put it, these poems strive to "grant the religious intensity of the violence its deplorable authenticity and complexity."

Eight small jackets (the size worn by first grade elementary school students) are hung low on pegs, their pockets groaning under the weight of the hefty poetry-wrapped stones that they accommodate. Often displaying a reckless courage, children from Catholic ghettos grew up throwing stones at police vans and army vehicles, taunting soldiers as they hauled off fathers and brothers in dawn raids. The text of a single "troubles" poem is divided between the two stones, one for each pocket, ready to be thrown. The words of the poems gain literal weight and even the anticipation of action and violence from their supports.

Hand-knit reconstructions of vintage Snakes and Ladders boards, presented both on the wall and on a shelf, are a reminder that, born in another place or at another time, some of those same six-year-olds might have engaged in more innocent forms of play.

Deconstructed and reconfigured as a continuous ball of string, *The Fortress of Solitude* by Jonathan Lethem stands as a single sculpture, a complete world unto itself. The shape-shifting demons of racism haunting Brooklyn in the 1970s have an obvious parallel in the themes of sectarian division and intransigence, the fear, suspicion and violence that Irish children are heir to. Translating, transposing, and decoding the synesthetic structure connecting text and image, McClure unveils the layers of embedded information to which we are constantly subjected and brings to light the complexities and the aftermath of violence on societies.

Born in Lisburn, Northern Ireland, Stefana McClure lives and works in New York. She has exhibited extensively at museums and galleries internationally. McClure's work was recently exhibited in *White Covers-Private Choices*, curated by Carine Fol, at CENTRALE for Contemporary Art in Brussels. In 2017, she was a Frank Williams Visiting Artist at Wellesley College, MA. Select exhibitions include: *Die Frick Kollektion: works from the Kunstsammlung Mezzanin, Liechtenstein*, curated by Arno Egger, Kunst Palais Liechtenstein, Feldkirch, Austria (2017); *Deep Cuts: Contemporary Paper Cutting*, curated by Samantha Cataldo, Currier Museum of Art, Manchester, NH (2017); *The Times*, The Flag Art Foundation, New York, NY (2017); *What's Yours is Mine*, Bartha Contemporary, London, UK (2017); *Format: 35 Jahre Sammlung Schroth*, curated by Juliane Rogge, Museum Wilhelm Morgner, Soest, DE (2017); *The Siege of the Flying Mermaids*, Josée Bienvenu Gallery, New York (2015); *Possible Side Effects*, Arróniz Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City, MX (2015); and *Terrible Beauty: Art, Crisis, Change & The Office of Non-Compliance*, Dublin Contemporary Biennial, IE (2011). Select public collections include: The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, NY; The Museum of Fine Arts Houston (MFAH), Houston, TX; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT; Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, MA; Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR; Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA; Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart, DE; Kunstmuseum Bonn, Bonn, DE; The Machida City International Print Museum, Tokyo, JP; and Hood Museum of Art, Hanover, NH, among others.