

At the Heart of Chance
by Orla Whelan

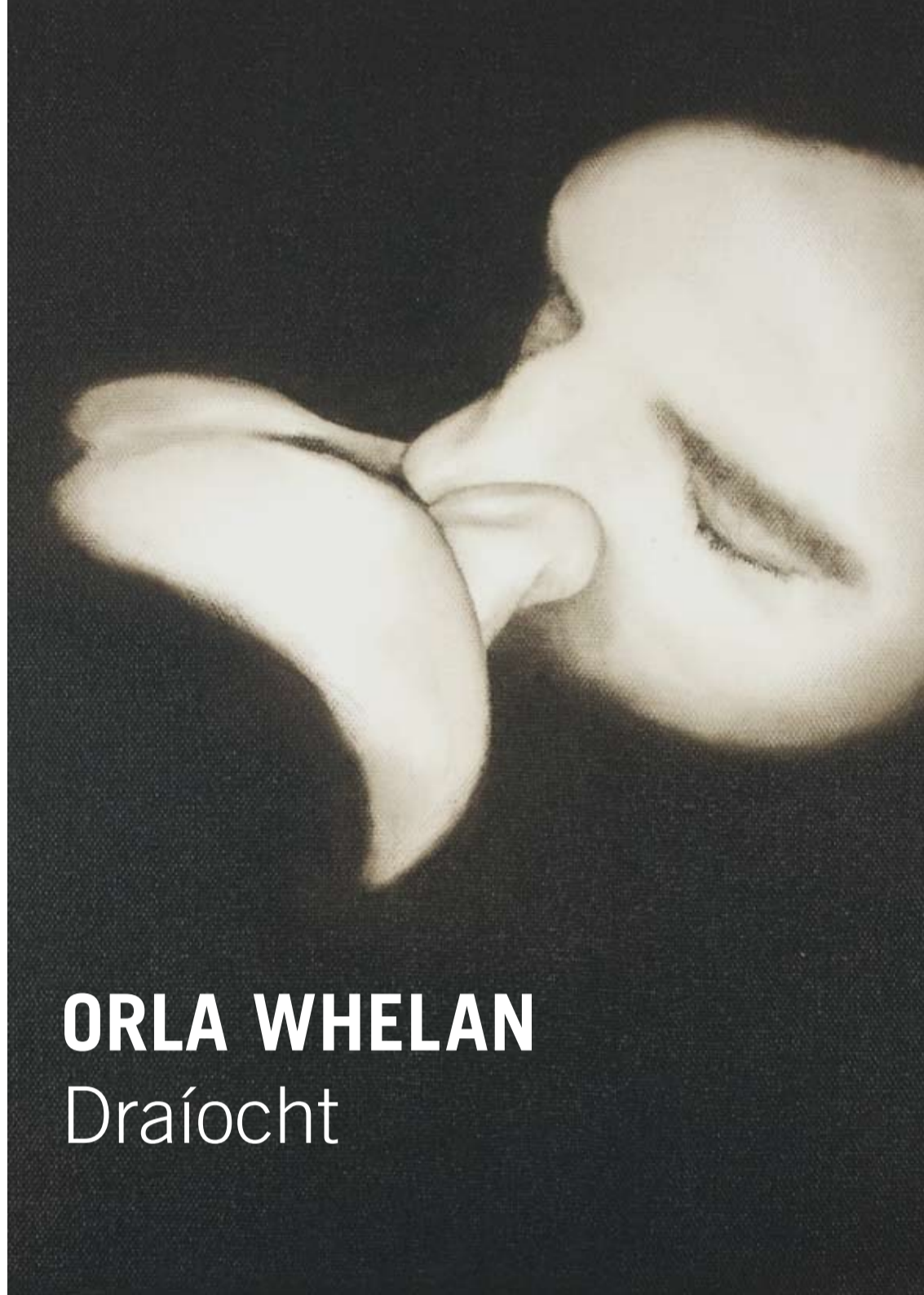
To be opened by Patrick Murphy, Director, Royal Hibernian Academy
On Thursday 27 November 2008 at 7pm

Exhibition continues until January 17th 2009

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Cover: *Air Kiss*, 2008, Oil on canvas, 30 x 25 cm



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This Page:
Love Triangles 1, 2008
Oil on canvas; 160 x 130 cm

Opposite:
Love Triangles 3, 2008
Oil on canvas; 160 x 130 cm

Overleaf:
Moth, 2008
Oil on canvas; 160 x 130 cm

Love Triangles 2, 2008
Oil on canvas; 130 x 160 cm

We Have Secrets, 2008
Oil on canvas; 30 x 25 cm

I am reminded looking at this body of work, or work of the body, of an installation from 2001 at the 49th Venice Biennale. It was a collaborative piece by the Portuguese artist Julio Sarmiento and the Canadian filmmaker Atom Egoyan, entitled *Close*. The artist had utilised 90% of a long narrow room to create a giant back projection and one viewed it with one's face almost pressed against the screen. In there it was all flickering cinematic light and huge swags of flesh. The voice over of female whispering accompanied images of a female mouth, thigh, back, and foot. So immediate and gigantic were these images that one was equally assailed by its sensuality and a self-consciousness, the latter from experiencing of such voyeuristic intimacy amid a crowd of strangers.

Intimacy is not a comfortable subject for contemporary art. Its vulgar debased end, pornography, has inspired a number of contemporary artists such as Marlene Dumas, and Thomas Ruff, but for rendering physical intimacy we have few examples. Whelan's paintings occupy a non space, just an area composed by light and shadow. It is as if the interplay of white and black echoes the binary of gender itself. Her subjects are exposed through light, almost a theatrical light, which bleaches out individuality and renders them not dehumanized but symbolic. The focus of this work constantly changes from the full figured embrace of *Love Triangles* to the tippy-toed feet of *We have Secrets*. At times the artist cajoles us into a voyeurism as we witness the physical engagement of a couple, and at other times, we are implicated as a partner as we contemplate the beauty of the nape of a neck or the underside of a jaw.

These works are both sexy and smart, and afraid to be neither. They gently evoke our own memories and experiences and interrogate our position as viewer. They are coy and explicit, compelling and political.

Patrick T. Murphy, Dublin, 2008

