

# HELEN O'LEARY REFUSAL

featuring work by Eva O'Leary  
Curated by Catherine Bowe and Anya von Gosseln  
Artist and lecturer (Dublin Institute of Technology) Brian Fay will open the exhibition on Saturday 19th October at 4pm.

Helen O'Leary is a highly imaginative artist who has been exhibiting for over twenty years. Her new work for Wexford Arts Centre delves into her own history as a painter, with both subject matter and raw material rooted in the ruins and failures of her studio. By taking apart canvases, wooden stretchers, panels and frames she turns the conventions of painting literally inside out. Humorous and enigmatic, these fragments that make a new whole, bare their histories as well-worn objects while at the same time are infused with newfound energy and dynamism. Through the language of paint, O'Leary's work offers a glimpse into the irrational resistance and refusal to accept convention still very present in the human psyche, and the ever-present humour necessary to survival everywhere.

Helen O'Leary grew up in rural Wexford in the 1960's through the 1980's. It was a life of survival, where industriousness and invention born of need were placed on equal footing with rich literature, music, language and personal narrative, and has said of her work: "I use history as armature for my own stories; I drape them over it, casually, stories of absurdity and making do, survival and the marvellous. I work from memory, stories of growing up on

the farm in Wexford and my life now in the United States, short stories that I then fashion from the archaeology of my studio. I work the studio as my father worked the farm, with invention out of need, using my own displacement as fodder for meaning. I take things apart, forgetting conventions and reapply my own story to the form. I revel in the history of painting, its rules, its beauty, its techniques, but fold them back into the agricultural language I grew up with. I'm interested in the personal, my own story, and the history of storytelling."

In *Refusal*, O'Leary's works explore the notion of lament and survival, the space between remembering and forgetting, and the poetic perception of returning to something which has been forgotten or overlooked.

Running in tandem with *Refusal* will be a showcase of recent work by Helen's daughter Eva O'Leary. In this exhibition; *Extra*, Eva O'Leary employs photography to investigate issues such as identity formation and human behavioural patterns on the backdrop of wider social, cultural and philosophical implications. Using the camera as a tool for psychological amplification, this project examines memoir through a winding personal narrative - set



**ARMOUR, 2013**  
silverpoint on panel

against the backdrop of global change and uncertainty. The project blurs the boundary between the personal and universal narrative, using the transformative possibilities of the photograph to amplify every day efforts of resilience into aesthetic gesture. Eva O'Leary seeks out the uncertainty which exists in the corners of rural college towns, and landscape, the suburbs and sheltered communities across the United States and Ireland.

Occupying the space between innocence and experience, here uncertainty thrives. *Extra* presents "those coming into adulthood, met with the effects of collapsing emotional, economic, and physical systems of support of what was promised and what is".

Helen O'Leary was born in County Wexford. She studied at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin and then went on to study at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago, receiving her B.F.A. in 1987 and her M.F.A. in 1989 with further studies at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. She joined the faculty of the School of Visual Arts at Penn State in 1991, where she is currently a Professor of Art. Participating in many group exhibitions around the world, O'Leary had solo exhibitions



**IRREGULAR ACTIVITY, 2013**  
encaustic, pigment on wood

at the Zolla/Lieberman Gallery in Chicago; the Kerlin Gallery, Dublin; the Michael Gold Gallery in New York City; the Sanskriti Foundation in New Delhi, India; the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne, Australia; The Beverly Art Centre in Chicago; Central Irlandais, Paris; the Coleman Burke Gallery, New York; the Butler Gallery, Kilkenny; and most recently the Catherine Hammond Gallery, Cork.

O'Leary has received many prestigious awards including the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship (2010-2011), the Institute for the Arts and Humanities fellowship, Penn State University, 2013, the Pollock-Krasner Award (1989 & 1996); a Joan Mitchell Award (2000); numerous grants from the Arts Council of Ireland; residencies at the Tyrone Guthrie Centre and the Fundacion Valparaiso in Almeria, Spain; and most recently the Culturel Irlandais Fellowship. She has also been a visiting artist in Ireland, at the National College of Art and Design in Dublin, GMT Galway, and the University of Limerick; in Scotland, at the University of Glasgow; in Australia, at Edith Cowen University in Perth and Victoria College of the Arts in Melbourne; as well as at several universities in the United States.



**A SMALL PLACE TO DO NOTHING, 2013**  
encaustic, pigment on wood

**IRREGULAR ACTIVITY - REPRIEVE, 2013**  
encaustic, pigment on wood

"Helen O'Leary's work is fearless. She continually challenges form in painting, defying convention and linearity, and has put together a body of work that has deep contemporary relevance. For over two decades, she has approached painting with ruthless reinvention, through a sustained engagement with art history, literature, poetry, and mundane moments from her life. Her work is fresh and distinctive. It situates itself with irony within an art-historical context and at the same time is prescient and incisive in its themes."  
Mary Cloake, former Director - Arts Council of Ireland

Wexford Arts Centre are delighted to present *Refusal*, an exhibition of work from Wexford born, US based contemporary artist Helen O'Leary, to coincide with what has become widely known as one of Ireland's most remarkable arts experiences; The Wexford Opera and Fringe Festival.

*Refusal* is generously supported by the Arts Council of Ireland, the Institute for Arts and Humanities, and the College of Arts & Architecture, Penn State University. The exhibition runs in the lower and upper galleries of Wexford Arts Centre until 24th December 2013.

Photography by Cody Goddard.

Gallery hours from 20 October to 3 November 2013:  
Monday - Saturday: 9.30am - 5.00pm  
Sunday: 11.00am - 4.00pm  
Gallery hours from 4 November to 24 December, 2013:  
Monday - Saturday: 9.30am - 5.00pm

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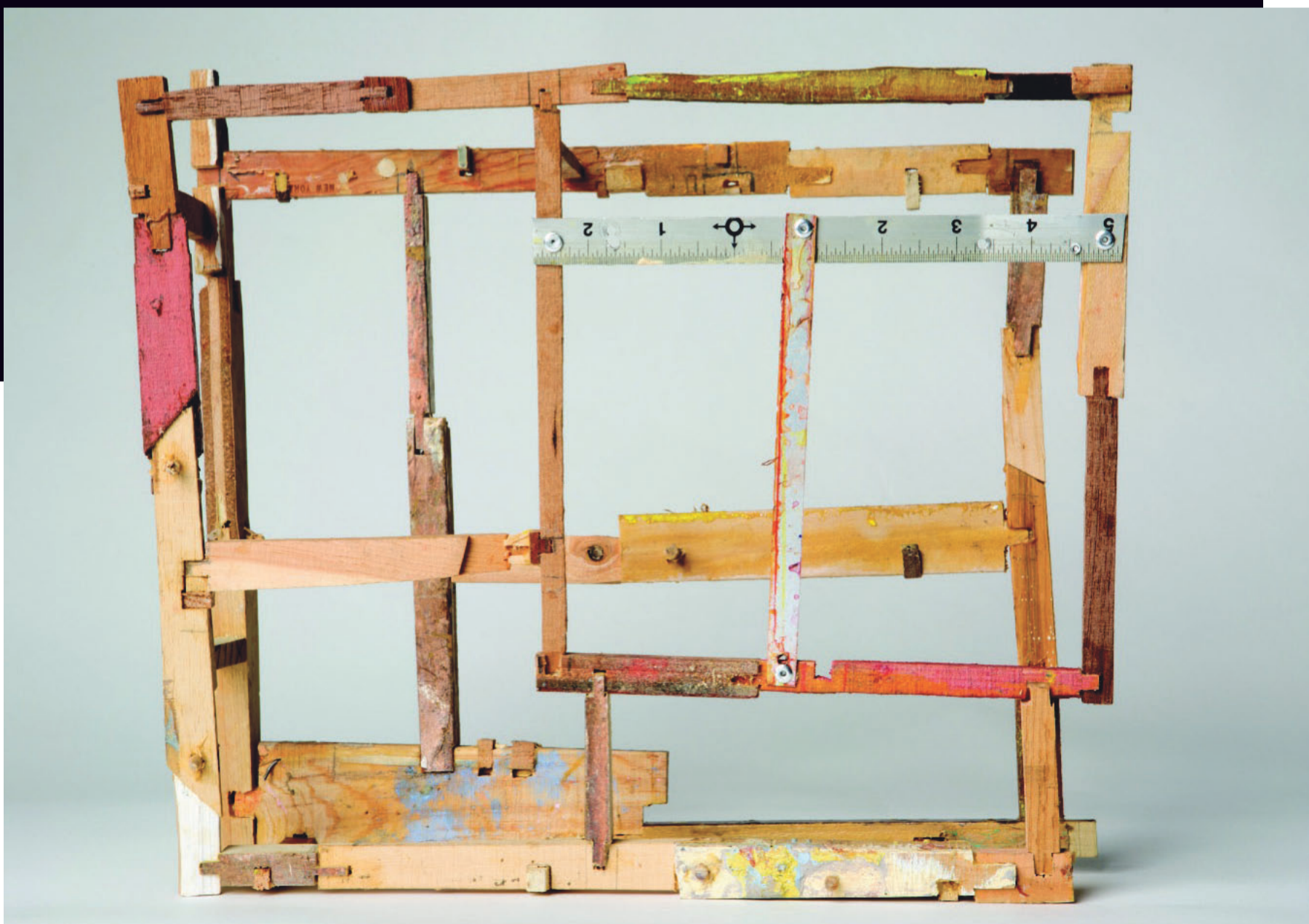


**IRREGULAR ACTIVITY - THE STORY OF SOME, 2013**  
encaustic, pigment on wood

H E L E N

O ' L E A R Y

R E F U S A L



*IRREGULAR ACTIVITY - REFUSAL, 2013*  
encaustic, pigment on wood