

BRIAN MAGUIRE

War Changes its Address and Other Border Stories

January 13 – February 13, 2021

To ensure the safety of our guests, the gallery will admit a limited number of visitors at one time. Reservations can be made through Tock (exploretock.com/rhonahoffmangallery).



Brian Maguire. *Aleppo 3*, 2017.
Acrylic on canvas, 83 x 67 inches.

Rhona Hoffman Gallery is pleased to present *War Changes its Address and Other Border Stories*, a solo exhibition of recent paintings by Brian Maguire (b. 1951, Dublin, Ireland). Spanning depictions of Aleppo, South Sudan, and Juárez, Maguire engages with the currency of conflict images.¹ Through large-scale paintings, whose surfaces are as luminous as they are sullen, the urgency within Maguire's work often stems from the context and histories his sources portray. From bold depictions of landscapes in the aftermath of massacres, to seemingly innocent and banal interiors, the artist brings the weight that images of war and injustice impress upon our visual lexicon into attention.

Coming of age in Ireland during The Troubles, a period of tumultuous sectarian conflict that lasted nearly three decades from 1969–1998, Maguire's work reminds us that the consequences of an ethno-nationalist agenda then are not so different from the unrest and civil disobedience faced in the United States today. As this text is being written, far-right rioters storm the Capitol, breaching the House and Senate; the President refuses to concede to a peaceful transition of power. Like the exhibition title suggests, 'faraway' trauma can find itself at the doorstep of our lived experience just as quickly.

Though Maguire's work is derived from the photographic, painting is of course another language. The artist's approach to the horrors of injustice strays from journalistic endeavor, which relies upon access, closeness, and precise reproduction, toward translation—which is to say, loss. Though Maguire has traveled extensively to bear witness to conflict firsthand, it is the distance achieved through his paintings that allow the work to register differently in relation to the constant image stream of catastrophe that consumes our media-centered world. In doing so, they empathize in place of desensitize. In *Aleppo 3* (2017), a specter of a building rises from a cascade of haphazard brushstrokes, feverish marks that join in the allusion of an architectural ruin. Though, as Maguire points out, the subject could just as easily be described as "a carcass." As critic and curator Lilly Wei writes, "There are no bodies depicted. None are needed; the city itself is the corpse."² Set against an unmarked sky—cloudless, timeless, made grey by either fog or ash—this 'building' could be anywhere, or anyone.

¹ Research in Bentiu Camp South Sudan in 2018 was supported by Concern International.

² Catalogue, *Brian Maguire: Without Borders*, American Museum of Art at the Katzen Arts Center, Washington DC. 9.

Measuring nearly 13 feet across, a companion painting from the same series, *Aleppo 4* (2017) situates the viewer within its architectural field, a site of lingering trauma. Expanses of concrete are punctuated by various marks of black pigment—a hand holding a brush to kiss the canvas once, whose gentle gesture that signals either bullet holes or shrapnel from bombs. The image comes into focus in the midfield of the image: balconies, windows, and other details of residential life fade into abstraction near the horizon in the distance. The ground closest to us, the entrance to a street, dissolves into streaks of pigment, dripping from the wreckage. It is a road we have no choice but to face.

Throughout Maguire's practice, images of the past come up to meet the present; historical conflicts come to have new meaning within the context of current events. In *Grow House 2* (2015), originally completed in Juárez following Maguire's work with an NGO that represents the families of victims to femicide, the artist took up a residency with a local newsroom, which provided him access to archives of images used by the press surrounding coverage of the events. Emanating from a field of brilliant yellow light, marijuana leaves rise from the bottom edges of the painting, like stocks of bamboo. Yet while sensuous and warm, the tranquility of the composition is challenged in the face of our knowledge of how the War on Drugs, an operation of institutionalized racism masked as a global campaign, withstands even more strongly in the carceral system of the US today. A disproportionate disruption wrought on communities of color that Maguire believes rivals the impact of the world wars.

The psychology of Maguire's paintings envelops viewers with a familiarity of violence that urges to be salvaged. Their central claim remains: art has the potential to exceed the care and attention necessary for change than that which is delivered through journalism alone.

This is the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery; Maguire was previously included in *Part 3: Political* (2017) as part of the suite of exhibitions *Rhona Hoffman, 40 Years*.

—Stephanie Cristello