



FIONA CRANGLE
LOOK OUT/LOOK IN

March 10 - April 8

Opening Saturday March 10, 2-4pm

LOOK OUT / LOOK IN

Essay by Sandy Saad, Curator of Exhibitions and Education,
Visual Arts Centre of Clarington

Fiona Crangle's figurative paintings explore the portrayal of women in both a contemporary and art historical context. Her painting practice directly quotes art historical canons produced by male artists looking at female subjects. By re-appropriating the paintings and replacing the historical characters with real, contemporary women, she offers a counter-narrative and raises questions about the male gaze, the way in which women are portrayed historically and in the present day, and the scrutiny by which we view them.

Look Out/Look In is an exhibition that features two bodies of work from Crangle's painting practice: portraits referencing Baroque paintings of female saints, and a series of paintings directly quoting Johannes Vermeer's portrayal of women in the home, engaged in household chores. Her work is both familiar and foreign, appropriating classical tropes and motifs, while embedding subtle traces of modernity to signify its contemporary framework. Some of her models look at you, returning the gaze of the viewer, while others look away, occupied in their tasks. There are moments of tension and ease while experiencing Crangle's work. In some instances, the viewer is in a stare down with the subject and in others, the ease of looking is made possible through the far off daydream of the model, unaware that she's being watched. This tension and ease is at the crux of Fiona Crangle's work.



Above from left: Installation shot of *Rufina, Lucy, Apollonia, Margaret*, 2011 - 2012, oil on canvas, sizes variable.

The small gallery is painted in a deep museum blue and lined with portraits of teenage girls occupying Baroque portraits of female saints. Paintings originally made by Francisco de Zurbarán, Francesco Guarino and Diego Velázquez feature models in proper Baroque attire, fiercely staring at the viewer. Each of the saints portrayed in the Baroque originals were teenage girls martyred for adhering to their beliefs, all of them recognized for their unwavering ideals and virtues. Crangle connects this historical notion of virtue with the stubborn idealism she observes in the teenagers who model for her. Her renditions align and diverge from their original counterparts. The saints' original costumes are modified with the addition of Girl Guide badges, signifying the contemporary iconography of today's dogooder. The Baroque classics conceal the suffering of



Above: *Agatha*, 2011, oil on canvas, 30" x 40"

enduring excruciating pain. One of the most highly venerated virgin martyrs of Christian antiquity, Saint Agatha experienced many tortures, including the cutting off of her breasts with pincers. In Guarino's original, there is only a subtle indication of pain, leaving an idealistic image of a glowing woman firm in her ideals and beliefs. Crangle's *Agatha* is a teenager whose pain is veiled by her powerful stare. Her nose ring and sash hint at her being from the present moment; looking both familiar and foreign, the painting prompts us to reassess our reading of Agatha.

In the main gallery, Fiona Crangle engages with the work of Johannes Vermeer. This time, rather than portraits, she looks at his portrayal of women at home. Vermeer is known for painting Dutch upper class women engaged in elegant pastimes and household chores. This was a reflection of seventeenth century



Above: *Madeleine, Potato Peeling*, 2017, oil on canvas, 36" x 60"

each saint, portraying well-dressed, beautiful, glowing women. Crangle's paintings feature her daughter and her friends, who provide selfies to the artist as a reference for her paintings. The incorporation of selfies alludes to the practice many teenage girls engage with today who post images of themselves, often seeking affirmation of their beauty. She takes historical works with carefully composed visual narratives of virtuous young women and inserts real, young women who fiercely return the scrutiny of the viewer. By looking at them, we enter a confrontational engagement.

Agatha is painted in a dark palette that is as bleak as the arduous afflictions she has endured. Her pensive facial expression becomes an indication of her strength when one realizes that she is pressing a bloodied cloth covering a severe injury on the left side of her chest. Her seventeenth century outfit also includes a Girl Guide sash with a series of badges laying against Agatha's right arm, each badge is a symbol that parallels the traditional iconography of Agatha's story. Fiona Crangle's rendition is almost identical to Francesco Guarino's seventeenth century painting of Saint Agatha, a young woman stoically

Dutch ideals, in which the man was the breadwinner and the woman was the dominant figure in the home, responsible for household management, child rearing, and domestic order. From early girlhood, women of the Dutch upper class were coached in the polite manners and refined accomplishments that constituted an exemplary model of womanhood.

In *Madeleine, Potato Peeling*, Crangle references Vermeer's *Woman with Pearl Necklace*. The original depicts a young Dutch woman, caught clasping her pearl necklace together as she seems to be finishing up her morning routine. She stares blankly and almost vainly ahead of what appears to be a window or black-framed mirror. In Crangle's version, the sitter, Madeleine, has her hair up in a bun and wears a dress shirt over a tank top, but the composition is very much a direct quote from Vermeer. Madeleine also stares out the window while engaged in the repetitive task of potato peeling. The daylight hits her face as she is lost in her meditation, inwardly focused and completely oblivious to the viewer's intrusive gaze. In this series, Crangle's daughter and her friends are slightly older; they have transitioned from being teenagers



Above: *Maia, Typing*, 2015 oil on cradled panel, 18" x 24"

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to women in their twenties. Rather than giving Crangle selfies as references, these models perform the tasks she paints them engaged in. Over and over, they repeat the same gestures, losing themselves in the meditation of the task at hand and ignoring the stare of the viewer as they occupy their own space in their minds.

In his 1972 book, *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger unpacks the politics of painting and looking; he states: "Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object -- and most particularly an object of vision: a sight."^[1] By reclaiming the process of painting the woman, and positioning contemporary women in the place of historical ones, Crangle becomes the actor and raises questions about the ways women are scrutinized in painting. How are we looking at them today? Our confrontation with these women in a way becomes a confrontation with our own perceptions as we are forced to assess our projections on her protagonists. Our perception of history frames our relationship with past and present, and as we engage with a work that marries both past and present, our relationship to what we see is mediated by our own experience and interpretation of that history and of the present moment.

The exhibition ends by positioning the viewer as the object. In the loft gallery, Crangle creates an installation replicating a set from a Vermeer painting. Complete with black and white tiled floors

[1] Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. 1972, Penguin Books. London, England



Above: *In Camera*, 2018, installation (loft gallery). Below from left: Installation shot of *Madeleine, Potato Peeling*, Copy: *Woman with Pearl Necklace, Maia, Typing*, 2015 - 2017, oil on canvas and cradled panel, sizes variable.

and updated Delft tiles, the installation prompts the viewer to sit and perform a mundane task. A camera installed nearby transmits the scene in real time to a television monitor in the main gallery.

The roles become reversed and the observer becomes the observed, leaving one to either become acutely aware of their position as object, or to lose themselves in the meditation of the task and forget the presence of the camera lens. In both cases we are confronted with an awareness of our position as the observer and the observed. Fiona Crangle's practice makes us think about the ways we look at women and the way our own biases and perceptions affect our interpretations of both historical and contemporary images.

BIOGRAPHY

Fiona Crangle graduated from York University in 1990 with a Bachelor of Fine Art and a Bachelor of Education. Her career as an arts educator has spanned over two decades and informs her practice. She explores subject matter that parallels the interest of her students examining themes of adolescence, self-portrayal, and the interiority of women. Crangle has shown her work in solo and group exhibitions in various commercial and community galleries.



PLEASE NOTE: The camera installed in the loft gallery (third floor) as part of the exhibition installation. The camera transmits the scene onto a television monitor in the main gallery in real time. Nothing is archived or recorded.

We encourage visitors to take photos of themselves in the Loft Gallery installation and tag the VAC on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.



Above: Installation shot with *Maia, Tattooed*, 2017, oil on canvas, 40" x 48"
Cover image: *Maia, Ironing I*, 2016 oil on cradled panel, 18" x 24"

EVENTS PROGRAM

Artist Talk: Sunday, March 25, 2018, 1 - 3pm.
This is a free event, please email your RSVP response to communications@vac.ca.



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GALLERY HOURS

Monday: **Closed**
Tuesday - Thursday: 10am - 9pm
Friday - Sunday: 10am - 4pm

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