

## JOHN KIRBY *PLAY TIME*

5 SEPTEMBER - 4 OCTOBER, 2014

PRIVATE VIEW  
THURSDAY 4 SEPTEMBER 6 - 8PM

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*Playtime*, 2013, Oil on canvas, 100 x 70 cm, 39 1/2 x 27 3/4 in

British painter John Kirby tackles the complexities of gender, sexuality and race through arresting and unnerving portraiture. Whilst many of his works are sublimated self-portraits, others nod to religious and cultural iconography, or act as coded memories of his own family. Kirby's surrealist style has drawn comparisons to Magritte, Hopper and Balthus.

Flowers Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of new work by this celebrated painter, 5th September – 4th October at our Cork Street Gallery. *Play Time* includes a series of figures interacting with toys or in solitary poses reminiscent of forced childhood portraits. The doll-like expression of these youthful figures recalls Victorian family photography, endowing the subjects with an eerie stillness which is unsettling for the viewer.

All sense of a youthful spirit and of the enjoyment of play is superseded by the darker anxieties of childhood. The normally unselfconscious exuberance of infancy is replaced by the reality of growing up, a period in which we must all come to terms with a confusing, frightening and alien world. These difficult internal conflicts are conveyed in the stiff body language and empty facial expressions of the artist's figures, nodding to Kirby's fascination with the paradoxes of the human condition.

As is typical of Kirby's style, the majority of the artist's solitary figures are set against sparse backgrounds, evoking a sense of loneliness and melancholy. These isolated hybrid child-adults and transgendered, doll-like figures, point out the flaws in our rose-tinted view of youth, and suggest that the child inside us may not be such a carefree spirit after all.

John Kirby has spent his artistic career stripping away the defences behind which adults have learned to hide. His paintings describe, allegorically, the suffering of people squeezed into the straightjackets of religious, sexual and social norms. This new exhibition continues to explore these themes through menacing and hauntingly beautiful work.

## ABOUT JOHN KIRBY

Born in Liverpool in 1949, Kirby was raised Catholic and served as an altar boy before spending a stint as a shipping clerk. He then travelled to Calcutta to work in a children's home run by Mother Teresa. Upon returning to England, Kirby settled in London where he found employment first as a social worker and then as a probation officer. It was not until the 1980s, when he was already in his thirties, that Kirby decided to attend art school - enrolling first at Central Saint Martin's School of Art and then at the Royal Academy of Arts. John Kirby has been exhibited internationally and his works are held in several public collections including the Tate Gallery, London, the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and the private collection of David Hockney. A major retrospective of the artist's work was held at the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, in 2012, the city of his birth.

## NOTES TO EDITORS

Opening Hours: Tuesday - Saturday 10am - 6pm

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For further information and images please contact Hannah Hughes - [Hannah@flowersgallery.com](mailto:Hannah@flowersgallery.com) / 0207 920 7777



*Playtime*, 2014, Oil on canvas, 121.9 x 91.8 cm, 48 x 36 1/8 in



*A Doll's House*, 2014, Oil on canvas, 152.7 x 122 cm, 60 1/8 x 48 1/8 in