

ISHBEL MYERSCOUGH UP CLOSE

September 8 - October 15, 2016

Opening Reception Thursday September 8, 6 - 8pm

529 West 20th Street
New York NY 10011

T: + 1 212 439 1700

F: + 1 212 439 1525

newyork@flowersgallery.com
www.flowersgallery.com

Flowers Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of paintings by British artist Ishbel Myerscough, drawing together meticulously observed paintings of friends and family, self-portraits, and domestic still life arrangements.

Myerscough is known for her precisely rendered and frank portrayal of her subjects, which over the past three decades have included herself, her close friend and fellow artist Chantal Joffe, and their families. Curator Sarah Howgate has described Myerscough's paintings as demonstrating a "*clear, forensic vision*", capturing her own reflection in the mirror with unflinching honesty.¹ Within her painstaking attention to detail, Myerscough sees, as she puts it, "the wider things reflected in even the smallest life you lead".

The present selection of paintings can be seen as containers for an intensely personal experience of womanhood, beginning with images of childhood and culminating with recent self-portraits, interspersed with grouped or paired figures that address the relationships between family, lovers and friends. Myerscough's particular inquiry of the nude has charted an evolving idea of self through the contemplation of form, evoking the longings and anxieties of female experience through discreet observations of physicality and gesture.

In several portraits of children, often viewed from the back, the level of scrutiny applied to each flyaway strand of hair and wrinkle of clothing suggests the intimacy of the maternal gaze, and yet there is also a sense that the subjects are resisting the discovery of their inaccessible, private worlds. In two paintings in which the back of the head is the focal point, *Plaits* and *French Plait*, the braids after which they are titled are unevenly woven, snaking haphazardly, with wisp-like tendrils unfurling as though making their escape from orderliness.

Hair in Myerscough's paintings can be seen to hold symbolic value, invoking the essence of the individual, or offering refuge and disguise. Often wayward and unruly, such as in the self-portrait *Long Hair*, the labyrinthine entanglements shield the self from others. This is taken further in another painting titled *Self Portrait*, in which the pelt-like shock of auburn hair, streaked with silver, is ungroomed and worn overly-long, almost entirely covering the face and body. Myerscough examines the intricate details of each strand with the same focused attention paid to the nuances of flesh tone or gestures of the body, as though following the thread of a story to unravel the personal narrative.

The recent painting *Untitled (hairbrush & comb)*, in which residual knots and tangles of hair appear disengaged from the figure, draws associations with loss, anxiety, ill health and aging. This focus on shedding or casting off of bodily matter can be seen to be rooted in the traditions of abject art, addressing the relationship between the public and private presentation of the body. In other still life arrangements, a goldfish floundering on a plate, and a spider spinning its web hint at the traditions of memento mori on a domestic scale. Despite the typically sparse composition, Myerscough pays equally lavish consideration to the fading whorls of woodgrain on the tabletop, as to the metallic sheen of the goldfish's gills; similarly the shimmering light tracing the strands of a delicate web is balanced with the fibrous silhouette of the attendant spider, as though searching for meaning in the slightest of details.



Plaits, 2015, Oil on canvas, 24 1/8 x 17 7/8 in



Lily and Quaye, 2016, Oil on canvas, 48 1/8 x 62 1/4 in



French Plait, 2016, Oil on wood panel, 7 1/8 x 5 1/8 in

1. Sarah Howgate, Contemporary Curator, National Portrait Gallery, London. Introduction to the catalogue *Friendship Portraits: Chantal Joffe and Ishbel Myerscough*, 2015, published by Flowers Gallery & Victoria Miro in association with the National Portrait Gallery, London.

ABOUT ISHBEL MYERSCOUGH

Ishbel Myerscough studied at Glasgow and the Slade Schools of Art; she won the National Portrait Gallery's annual BP Portrait Award competition in 1995 and as a result was commissioned to paint Helen Mirren's portrait for the collection and subsequently Sir Willard White. Her portrait *Two Girls* (1991), was displayed in the exhibition *Self* at the Turner Contemporary, Margate, UK in 2015 and is on display at the National Portrait Gallery, London, until November 2016. Her work was also recently presented in a joint display *Friendship Portraits: Chantal Joffe and Ishbel Myerscough* at the National Portrait Gallery in 2015, capturing their very particular artistic collaboration.



Untitled (hairbrush & comb), 2016, Oil on board, 8 x 10 in