

# PHOTO, MEDIA AND DIGITAL ART

Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art  
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Photo Magazine. Visual, Audio and Surround Art Galleries.  
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## PREFIX.

For Immediate Release (August 27, 2009)

### WILLIE DOHERTY EXHUMES THE PAST IN NEW EXHIBITION AT PREFIX

(Toronto) – Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art is proud to present *Passages*, an exhibition of photo and video works by acclaimed Northern Ireland artist, **Willie Doherty**. Curated by Scott McLeod, this exhibition represents the artist's first solo exhibition in a Canadian public art gallery in thirteen years.

Commissioned by the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh, Scotland, and receiving its **North American premiere** at Prefix, Doherty's video installation *Buried* (2009) explores themes of personal and collective memory, repression and loss while maintaining his characteristic concern for specificity of place. The exhibition also includes a selection of large, colour photographs that contrast the bucolic landscapes of Northern Ireland with a dark uneasiness, manifested through a series of roadblocks, barriers and traces of past violence.

Opening with an expansive, peaceful scene of a lakeside clearing, *Buried* depicts what appears at first glance to be an entirely natural, unspoiled setting. As the camera moves forward along a wooded path, remnants from past human activities are gradually revealed: a rope, latex gloves, a piece of fabric, wire tied to a tree. Each item becomes a tiny trace of some unknown, unknowable episode. Eventually the viewer is completely immersed in a dense, dark woodland, peering through a thick web of branches upon the glowing embers of a fire. With no explicit textual information to provide an explanation of events, it is the unknowable yet physically present narrative of the past, its sense of menace heightened by the inclusion of non-diegetic sounds, that provides the work with a chilling, unsettled atmosphere.

Created prior to *Buried*, the photographs in the exhibition demonstrate Doherty's ongoing interest in nearly abstracting the traces of human presence in the landscape and provide an engaging complement to his most recent video installation. In *Buried*, the viewer only has access to fleeting glimpses of the traces of a traumatic past, traces that still mark the landscape. In the earlier photographs, those traces are writ large, to the extent that their mystery and sense of foreboding stem as much from the barely discernable objects depicted as from the works' compelling titles and insistent contrasts of light and dark. Taken together, both the video installation and the photographs speak to the political history of Northern Ireland and its legacy of violence, a legacy that permeates both the landscape and the collective memory of its people.

An **opening reception** with artist in attendance will be held on **Thursday, September 24th from 7 to 10 PM** at Prefix, located at 401 Richmond Street West, Suite 124, Toronto. The reception will be preceded by an informal conversation between the artist and curator at 6:30 PM. The gallery will also be open on Saturday, October 3rd from 7 PM to sunrise for *Nuit Blanche*. The exhibition runs from **September 24th to November 28th, 2009**.

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### About the Artist

**Willie Doherty** was born in Derry, Northern Ireland, where he currently lives and works. His work in photography and film and video installation addresses problems of representation, territoriality and surveillance. As a child, he witnessed Bloody Sunday in Derry, and many of his works deal with the politics and rhetoric of identity, particularly in his native Northern Ireland. Since the mid-1990s, his work has received wide international recognition. Doherty represented Northern Ireland, to great acclaim, at the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007 and has participated in the biennial exhibitions of Berlin, Istanbul, São Paulo and Sydney, among others. In recent years, he has received solo exhibitions at the Irish Museum of Modern Art (Dublin), De Appel (Amsterdam) and the Dallas Museum of Art. Doherty was twice nominated for the Turner Prize, in 2003 and 1994. Willie Doherty is represented by **Alexander and Bonin** (New York).

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### **About the Curator**

**Scott McLeod** is a writer, curator and arts administrator. His work focuses on contemporary practices, with a specialization in photography, media and digital art. Since 2000, he has been the director and curator of Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art, where he also serves as editor and publisher of *Prefix Photo* magazine. McLeod is a member of IKT, the International Association of Curators of Contemporary Art.

### **About Prefix**

Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art is a public art gallery and arts publishing house based in Toronto. A registered charitable organization, Prefix fosters the appreciation and understanding of contemporary photography, media and digital art. Recently, Prefix launched a new division, Prefix Press, and released its first book, *Milk and Melancholy* by Kenneth Hayes.

### **Acknowledgements**

For their support of Willie Doherty's *Passages*, Prefix gratefully acknowledges its Official Catering Sponsor à la Carte Kitchen and its Official Hotel Sponsor the Sutton Place Hotel. Lastly, Prefix acknowledges the assistance of the Toronto Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts.

For more information, print-ready images or to schedule an interview with the artist or curator, please contact:

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