



The World As Yet Unseen
Women Artists in Conversation with Partou Zia

6 April – 15 June 2019

Gillian Ayres, Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, Sandra Blow, Eileen Cooper, Tacita Dean, Penny Florence, Naomi Frears, Barbara Hepworth, Rose Hilton, Lubaina Himid, Winifred Nicholson, Aimée Parrott, Bridget Riley, Nina Royle, Veronica Ryan, Devlin Shea, Lucy Stein and Kate Walters, Partou Zia.

This exhibition reveals a world both intimate and outward looking seen through the eyes of eminent women artists, based in or connected to, Cornwall.

At the centre are the paintings and poetry of the artist and writer Partou Zia (1958-2008) who was born in Iran but came to England in 1970, settling in Newlyn in 1993. Partou sadly passed away at the height of her artistic career. In 2003, she was the first recipient of the Porthmeor Studio residency awarded by Tate St Ives in collaboration with the Borlase Smart and John Wells Trust. Her residency culminated in an exhibition at Tate St Ives entitled *Entering the Visionary Zone*. The artist herself has been described as a 'true visionary'.

Falmouth Art Gallery in collaboration with curators Dr Penny Florence, Professor Emerita, The Slade School of Fine Art, UCL and Clare Cooper of Art First, London, have arranged this exhibition to celebrate the gallery's pleasure in accepting a powerful self portrait by Partou Zia on long term loan. Recalling the 1996 exhibition staged by the then curator, Catherine Wallace, called *Women Artists in Cornwall 1880 – 1940*, Henrietta Boex the current Director, suggested a sequel to feature women artists in Cornwall *post 1940*.

Penny writes: '*The idea of 'The World As Yet Unseen' is to invoke both the visionary, which is essential to Partou's work, and the collective vision of significant women artists. Partou was very clear about "what art is". It is a joyous act of the imagination that garners all experience and time into a vibrant present. It affords a glimpse of the world as you've never seen it before; a glimpse that changes that world. This alchemy is the first thought behind this exhibition*'.

'There is another.....It is the world, and art, as seen by women, not as individuals, but collectively. You might call the show feminist; but the art is not feminist or anything else-ist. It is art. It is art by women who have a genuine relation to Partou - and to Cornwall.

Cornwall holds a special position in modern and contemporary art in Britain, and Partou's dual heritage as Iranian-British is an essential part of how we seek to understand place in the 21st Century. It is arguably only now that diaspora as an experience is beginning to be seen and understood. Cornwall, of course, has its own diaspora, in the form of the engineering, mining and scientific expertise it has accumulated and continues to export. On the other hand, its geographic qualities, above all, its extraordinary light, have attracted artists not only for the last century, but also beyond.

This heritage has enabled us to assemble an outstanding collection of works by women artists, all of whom have time and place in common. The list exemplifies the strength of British modern and contemporary art, with an extraordinary variety of styles and approaches. Their ages span the decades of this century and the last, going right back to Barbara Hepworth (born 1903), and most of them are active now. Because Cornwall has impacted on them all, we are at least able to begin to ask some new questions.

The exhibition offers an opportunity to open wide the doors, to pick up once again on a lively dialogue between Partou and a wide ranging group of influential women artists with links to Cornwall. We have included as many, but certainly not all, those wishing to be a part of this dialogue, and it is our wish that this is a beginning of something which may continue far beyond the time and place of the exhibition itself.

Partou knew several of the participating artists but some she never met, Barbara Hepworth being one of them, as her dates indicate; equally, Aimée Parrot and Devlin Shea, whose early careers did not bring them into direct contact. Wilhelmina Barns-Graham on the other hand, was familiar both because of her long tenure as a senior modernist painter based in St Ives since 1940, and because she and Partou were represented by Art First for a brief overlapping period, making it possible for them to see and to learn about each other's exhibitions at close quarters.

Eileen Cooper was the principal artist Partou wanted to meet and engage with at Art First, because their powerful, figurative, expressive work shared a pre-occupation with the self-portrait as universal, or as archetype. The central themes of lover and dreamer or of the alert, playful, creative central participant predominate their art and their narrative styles each defy traditional perspective, acknowledging Chagall, as well as a range of liberating non-European models.

The illustrated catalogue (available online) and the exhibition itself explore the vibrant dialogues – poetic, visual and emotional – between the distinguished participants. There are surprises, it makes you stop and think or look again, and above all, it is inspiring and inclusive.

Events and workshops will take place throughout the exhibition - please visit the Falmouth Art Gallery website to find out more: www.falmouthartgallery.com

Curated by Clare Cooper and Dr Penny Florence

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