

The New American Gothic

Mercedes Helnwein is one of the most intriguing and prolific young artists in recent years. Besides videos, exquisite drawings and paintings of many solo shows- the last one: "Whistling Past The Graveyard", until April 10th at the Molesworth Gallery in Dublin-, and group shows (April 30th at the Next Art Fair in Chicago), she has just published her first novel: "The Potential Hazards of Hester Day" (Simon & Schuster), "... a road adventure of a witty young girl who runs into all kinds of weird people", confirms the author .

The first thing that strikes the viewer when contemplating any of her pieces, is the mere virtuoso craftsmanship and the actual size. These are seriously astonishing drawings, executed on pencil and with tendency to the monochromatic. Their perfect little expressions, simultaneously knowing and innocent, invite viewers curiosity in a slightly Hitchcockian vein. "These girls take on their own life as soon as I start to put them down on paper and they stare back at me," she says. " They don't really feel that they owe me any explanations."

Surrounded by the Art World since childhood- being the daughter of the renowned artist Gottfried Helnwein- she was planning to be a writer, " only a writer", she explains, "but I was drawing all the time anyway, cause I'm addicted to drawing ". Along with music -above all the blues and the White Stripes, her father is one of her main sources of inspiration: " it may sound weird cause I'm his daughter, but he's one of the most important artists around." "I don't go to him for Art advice, though,. I want to figure things out for myself and maybe it's clumsy at first or it comes about in a strange way but somehow I made it myself."

She didn't have any preconceived ideas for the work, it developed quite organically, but struck a nerve with the audience: "Fine Art is far too visual a process to include much rational thought -and maybe I speak for myself here. In fact, sometimes I feel it's beyond visual – like some organic process in a phantom organ behind my liver".