



Pavilion Commissions Programme 2007

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"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1:1

The commissioned series will address the emergence and formation of religious identities, formed particularly through the use of prescribed language and performance. As in previous work, I will continue to work with adolescents and young children, to explore the ages at which 'rites of passage' rituals and ceremonies are performed.

The focus for the development centres upon the moments at which children adopt forms of religious language, prayer and ritual, as part of public ceremonies, transcribed through a series of staged photographic and moving image works. These moments have been specifically chosen as I feel they contribute towards the development and shaping of young people's collective religious identities.

In speaking the word of God, the speaker proclaims his or her identity, and commitment to a communal ideal; it is a 'proof of belonging' to a religious community, a verbal and physical demonstration of faith. Equally, for the congregation, it is through this structure of formal language and ritual that they accept the novice into the community.

As a model of identity, it is one that answers the questions 'who am I' and 'where do I belong', but only within the security of a communal framework. When people speak rituals of religious identity, they are subject to the words of others, words whose formalism often expresses the character of the institution over that of the individual. These are public, joint performances by both speaker and audience that cement an ideal of communal unity.

It is the encounter between the collective identity and performance of religion, and the individual who takes this identity on, that I wish to explore. It is, in short, an exploration into the relevance and meaning of prescribed language and ritual within religion, as utilised by contemporary youth.

The subject of religion has long occupied a pre-eminent position in art history, yet today the two subjects seem incompatible. Indeed there is so little evidence of religious exploration within contemporary art, unless used for shock-value or to criticise, that one might suspect the subject has become a taboo.

Given the current re-emergence and importance of religion on the world stage, and it's complicated, yet still significant presence in our lives and culture, its non-status in contemporary art is becoming increasingly incongruous. Art professes to challenge, debate and strengthen society's choices and freedoms; if that is so, then there is a place for work that addresses religion in a contemporary art context.