



Images used courtesy of the Artist

(cover)
HALLOWEEN III, 2016
oil pastel on paper,
47 x 60 in. (unframed)

(back)
CONNECTION, 2016
oil pastel on tracing paper, 13 x 14¼ in.

(interior, left)
CRASH, 2015
oil pastel on paper, 26 x 31¼ in.

film stills from
NURSES, COPS, 2013
films by Mercedes Helnwein
cinematography by Giovanni Ribisi
music by Ali Helnwein

(interior, right)
STREET 2014
oil pastel on paper,
37 x 70 in. (unframed)

LANEY, 2016
oil pastel on paper, 40 x 40 in.



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**Council on
the Arts**



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MERCEDES HELNWEIN

CHAOS THEORY

May 26 - August 6, 2017 at Edward Hopper House

In her recent series *Chaos Theory*, Mercedes Helnwein focuses on suburban American adolescence and family life, sourcing her images from anonymous photographs, or from living room sets she creates in her studio. The original scenes are replicated in oil pastel (a medium the artist feels lends itself to “amplifying the disquiet of the seemingly innocuous moments”), laying bare the angst and tension with which family rituals and youthful endeavors are often fraught.



Helnwein's early years were spent far removed from the typically American lifestyle portrayed in her work. Born in Vienna, Austria, in 1979, she is the daughter of the renowned artist Gottfried Helnwein. They moved to Ireland when she was 14, and since 2000, she has been dividing her time between her family's castle in Ireland and her home in Los Angeles. Gottfried Helnwein didn't push his artistic influence on his daughter, but he did instill in her the notion that “Art is not an answer, it is a question,” and so, question every minute possibility she does, creating numerous versions of a single scene. From trick-or-treating and family gatherings to school dances and class pictures, she returns to her subjects of quotidian adolescent and familial routines over and

over, seeking to escape their claustrophobic effects and obsessively analyzing the many possible interpretations depending on subtle—or not-so-subtle—variations.

Thematically related to the oil pastels are two films Helnwein made in 2014 entitled *Cops* and *Nurses*. Both films are accompanied by the same haunting, suspenseful soundtrack composed by her brother, Ali. Comprised of 20 nurses and 20 cops, respectively, the films present enigmatic, disquieting scenes of mundane workplace interactions, or lack thereof, and challenge gender stereotypes and associated symbolisms, leaving the viewer to decipher meaning.



Helnwein chose not to study art formally, preferring instead to find her own voice. As she says, “I didn't want any interference other than inspiration from other works of art that I admire.” One artist Helnwein gives a nod to is Edward Hopper. From the ambiguous dynamics of the relationships to the slice-of-life drama, her work recalls many of Hopper's iconic masterworks. Hopper once said, “The inner life of a human being is a vast and varied realm, and does not concern itself alone with stimulating arrangements of color, form and design.” Helnwein picks up the challenge of depicting that vast and varied realm, and her explorations will, no doubt, elicit countless new possibilities.

– Carole Perry, Curator

