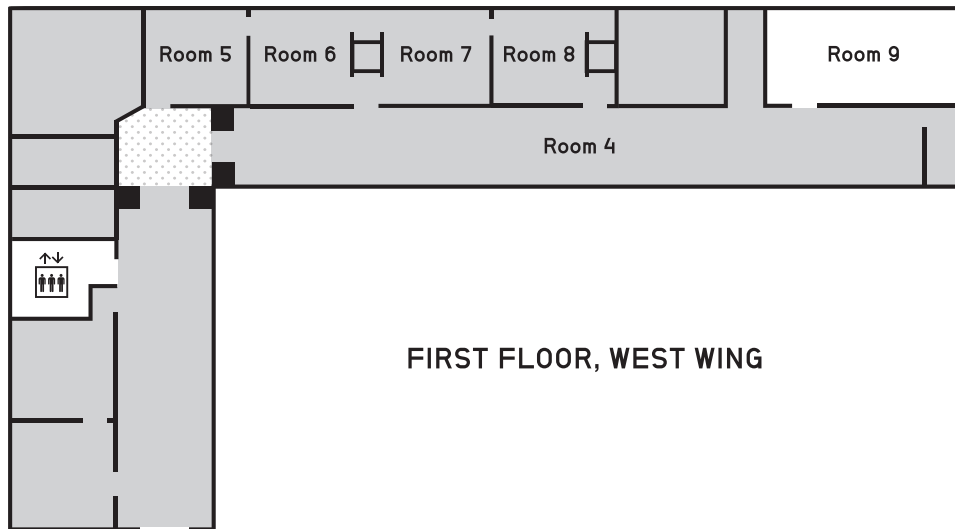For more information on Les Levine's work and a full listing of IMMA talks and events programmed in association with this exhibition, please see the IMMA website www.imma.ie

IMMA wishes to express deepest thanks to Les Levine for his ongoing support. We also wish to sincerely thank Amy Plumb Oppenheim for generously donating *Resurrection* by Les Levine to the IMMA Collection in honour of Dennis Oppenheim. Les Levine would also like to acknowledge Amy Oppenheim for her generous support of the work, David Kronn for their many discussions and Catherine Levine for her help on the ground during the production of *The Troubles* in 1972. We would like to thank our invaluable IMMA Members and Patrons.

The exhibition is co-curated by Christina Kennedy, Senior Curator: Head of Collections; Johanne Mullan, Collections Programmer and Claire Walsh, Assistant Curator, Collections: Care and Access.
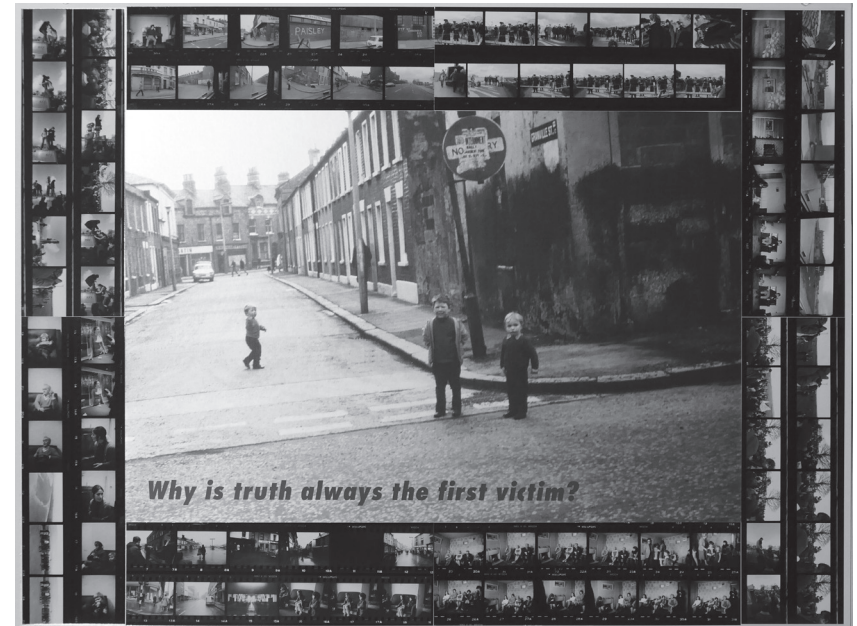
Have a question about an artwork? Want to know more? Ask any member of our Visitor Engagement Team, easily identifiable through their blue lanyards.

IMMA Collection: Les Levine, Resurrection 1972-2016

Why is truth always the first victim?

FIRST FLOOR, WEST WING

Room 5 · Room 6 · Room 7 · Room 8 · Room 9

Room 4

IMMA is pleased to present *Resurrection (1972-2016)*, by the celebrated artist Les Levine, regarded as the founder of Media Art. This suite of 13 new photographs was generously donated by Amy Plumb Oppenheim to the National Collection in 2018 in honour of the American artist and close friend of Levine's, Dennis Oppenheim.

The Museum has a longstanding relationship with Levine dating back to 1994, when one of the artist's billboard campaigns, *Blame God*, was displayed throughout the city as part of IMMA's *From Beyond the Pale* season of exhibitions. In 2010 the artist donated an 80-piece photographic work entitled, *The Troubles: An Artist's Document of Ulster* (1972), in memory of his parents Muriel McMahon and Charles Levine, as well as other suites of work including *Using the Camera as a Club* (1979). This most recent acquisition will significantly enhance IMMA's existing collection of Levine's work.

Resurrection (1972-2016) is a reconsideration of Levine's earlier work *The Troubles: An Artist's Document of Ulster*. These 13 new works of children taken during the conflict in Northern Ireland carry texts and are framed by black and white contact-sheet images from the original photographs taken in 1972. As an early conceptualist, imperative language has been an integral part to Levine's art practice and each of the works contains a question. Many are supposed truisms from the commentary of events at that time and still resonate in media coverage of events today.

Levine has written the following insightful text offering his novelistic view of the questions contained in the work:

This work contains 13 questions. Most viewers will probably arrive at their own excellent answers. But somebody had to ask the questions. Art often produces more questions than answers. Perhaps the questions in the age of media reveal more truth than the answers. For the most part the answers are implied by the questions.

For many years now, the language in my work has been predominantly imperative.

I've always felt that language is a call to action. No matter how abstract the image it always offers a permission to do or participate in something whether that something is simply in the mind or physical. You can't look at an image without it evoking a question. It's also possible that in each of *Resurrection*'s questions there is an implied imperative.

In 2015, looking through my archives in preparation for *The Bio-Tech Rehearsals* show at Columbia University in 2016, I was struck by the large number of children on the contact sheets of *The Troubles* in Northern Ireland from 1972. Looking back on these images of children resurrected many strong feelings I had while documenting the troubles. The photos of children sent my mind racing through a variety of memories. I decided to surround the large photos that have questions with contact sheets of all the photos I took in 1972 during the troubles. In that way I feel that the viewer has a more substantial context for considering the questions.

What effect on the future lives of these children does growing up in an atmosphere of war have on them? In some sense children become our own most obvious future, and the big question that seems constant is, how much truth do children deserve?

Why is truth always the first victim? On the ground in a war zone all sides struggle to get their story out first to make it the prevailing truth, the truth as a weapon killing off other truths. So, a more accurate question might be, whose truth is this? And why do they want us to have this truth?

Are we everything we see? Does the imagery we grow up surrounded by eventually affect who we are as adults and the kind of world we make for ourselves? And if we were looking at different things, would we become different people?

Is our home truly our castle? Will we remember the bombed-out homes we turned into our castles as kids? Does anyone know what the meaning of such memories is in the future? If a house is a home, then what is a bombed-out house? We can pretend it's a castle, but we know no one can grow up there.

Is there compassion in assuming a fixed position? When we look at a photograph we realize that the subjects have stopped all movement in order for the photograph to be taken in a fraction of a second. Is it possible that all sides in a conflict expand that fraction of a second into months and years by stopping any movement or compassion so that the conflict and the picture remain the same?

Are we turning every corner? What are the options for a young boy or girl in the middle of this conflict? Are we making any efforts to give him or her a sense that their life will be normal? Are they capable of keeping their mind intact outside of the conflict?

Can we move forward together? Can we realize that the lives and concerns of all sides are the same? As people our human needs are probably not that far apart. Love and hate, pain and suffering are not permanent.

Will the blast stay in the past? Does the memory of bombings continue to persist in shaping our attitude towards the bombers? Can such an activity ever be truly mentally overcome? Can we forgive our enemies? Can we forgive ourselves?

What should we believe? Why does belief become such a weapon? Why are people willing to commit atrocities in the name of belief? What should the onlookers believe? Is it true that belief can kill?

Would unity join or divide us? If nationalism is taken as a positive trait can it also have quite the opposite effect? Are we absolutely sure of who we want to be in the future?

Is there a boundary to forgive and forget? How many times can you forgive and still forget? Is it possible that as the conflict continues with more bombs and death, the ability to forgive and forget is blocked by a mental barrier? Is there then a way to arrive at non-violence?

Are we ready to stand alone? Can children identify themselves as independent entities in the middle of a conflict? Or is their safety and wellbeing by necessity attached to one side or the other? Would a child risk the possibility of isolation through individuality in such conflict?

At what point does hate turn into love? Do children who jeer each other grow up to fall in love? Is love the answer? Is no love the problem? What effect does it have on children to grow up in a world without love, where instead of love, hate is continually espoused?

Could this be the end of the line? Not the image in the picture, rather the place we find ourselves in childhood. The images we have consumed and absorbed. Do the permissions given by the images created in our childhood make us capable of moving beyond how our childhood has informed us? Are we capable of recognizing the future is not the past? Can we have a fresh vision of ourselves that we still have to imagine?

Now viewers may have this question: **Who are you to be asking all these questions?**

The simplest, to-the-point answer: *I am an artist.*

© Les Levine 2018

Artist Biography
Born in Dublin in 1935, Les Levine moved to Canada in 1958 and has been based in New York since 1964. One of the first artists to work with video and television he coined the term Media Sculpture and is responsible for the terminology Software Art, Disposable Art and Camera Art. In his prolific career he has produced major series of works about the manifold effects and functions of the media and information systems. His work is in many international collections.

Image credit
Les Levine,
Why is truth always the first victim?
Photograph (Fuji crystal),
62.55 x 83.19 cm,
Donated by Amy Plumb Oppenheim in honour of Dennis Oppenheim.
Image courtesy the artist.