

**Alison Green, *Vitamin Ph*, Survey of International Contemporary Photography, Phaidon Press, 2006**

For several years Trish Morrissey used her parents' house in Dublin as the location for her photographs. At first, she investigated the house itself. Her mother and father were in some pictures, but they might have their back turned, or be partially obscured by a door. Then Morrissey turned more explicitly to the inhabitants of that house, and enlisted her brothers and sisters to appear in photographs that restaged family events. In the end, one sister became half of a double act with Morrissey herself in a series of photographs entitled "Seven Years" (2001-2004), which refers to the age difference between them. Of course neither of them lives at home any more, and the scenarios they played out were only partially based on their family's history. But the photographs from 'Seven Years' have the haunting, stilled (or stultifying) quality of one's own memories of privately painful experiences of ordinary events. As in a more recent series of work, 'Front' (2005 to present), taken on British beaches where Morrissey inserts herself into other families, the image she makes is never the one that would go into the family album. She courts the awkwardness, unhappiness or anguish displayed on the body in spite of the smile fixed for a conventional 'happy' image.

There are important doublings and displacements that go on in Morrissey's photographs. She and her sister play men in some, or people of different ages. Clothing and hair—usually self-determining markers of character—function here to take us back in time, but also make identity fluid and unreliable (Morrissey first used actual clothes from her parents' attic, then got a stylist to add more). In the series 'Front' Morrissey doesn't merely sit for the picture, but takes on the persona—mother, sister, friend—of one of the group's members, who herself becomes the photographer. These photographs become at once ordinary holiday snaps and very strange exchanges between public and private spaces (she usually tried to borrow an item of clothing from the woman she replaced). In a sense, Morrissey's motivations are dual: she wants to bring photographic clichés into high relief, but also to open these dramas up, to create more play within them to counter the ossifying effects both of memory and group dynamics.

Morrissey's practice can be described broadly by the term "documentary aesthetic". In some regards this is verging on becoming a genre of photography that courts the real by staging pictures. Such artists as Jeff Wall and Cindy Sherman are cited as precedents, and the theorising inevitably gets tangled up in photography's historical relationship with 'truth' and its postmodernist critique. With Morrissey, however, staging is more than an arch gloss on the impossibility of representation; it is a door left open to let us view her in the act of constructing photographic meaning—imagining, remembering, planning, staging, acting, looking, deciding. It is her way into the heart of such issues as family experiences and national identities, pastimes and fashion, Irish middle class values, feminine and masculine roles, and relationships between strangers. Her work does not so much define these subjects but uses photography to probe their boundaries, often left intact in every day life

Trish Morrissey