

Nick Stewart is well-known as a performance and installation artist. This, his first exhibition of drawings, was shown recently in Dublin's Project Gallery where it met with less than fulsome praise. Having seen it there I would venture two reasons for its comparative lack of success:

Firstly the Projects' bleak interior gave a somewhat dour quality to these black and white drawings whereas the warm spaces of the Arts Council Gallery complement them admirably.

Secondly, unlike the Belfast show, the Project did not present Nick's installational work, thus robbing the spectator of the chance to see the interconnections between installation and drawing.

There are two installational pieces. In one of them two figures (male/female?) are outlined in mud on the wall (shades of Richard Long).

From their outreached hands extend one half of a real spade – literally split down the middle, one half for each figure – and from the bespattered spade run pools and spatters of white candlewax, like concrete from a labourer's spade.

On the chest of both of them is embedded a small 3d spade made out of candlewax and between them, at head height, runs a strip of mirror. It's an evocative image with the mud figures suggesting Adam and Eve, the spade perhaps indicating the value of honest toil (split to suggest the interconnectness of male/female: the need to work in harmony), the candle indicating purity(?) and the mirror – neatly positioned to reflect Bedford Street and oneself – as a reminder of what happens after The Fall.

Most of the drawings tie in with the installational work. In the catalogue Stewart suggests that he wishes to find

'an imagery to explore the relationship between the "traditionally" opposed, male and female, aspects of the psyche, and with the relationship of this to nature

There is a strong interest in pattern (like a subdued black and white Klimpt) with images gradually arising out of the pattern, and a wide variety of drawing styles from neatly stippled pencil drawings to large charcoal works, some of them densely worked, the most successful using an intaglio process where he scores through the charcoal with a biro.

At times the decorative aspects suggest a sixties 'feel' often the imagery suggests the mythological influence of Indian art (though Stewart disavows this notion)

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