

VISUAL ART: Marianne Hartigan on three new exhibitions in Dublin

Natural instincts

Ronnie Hughes

Rubicon, Dublin

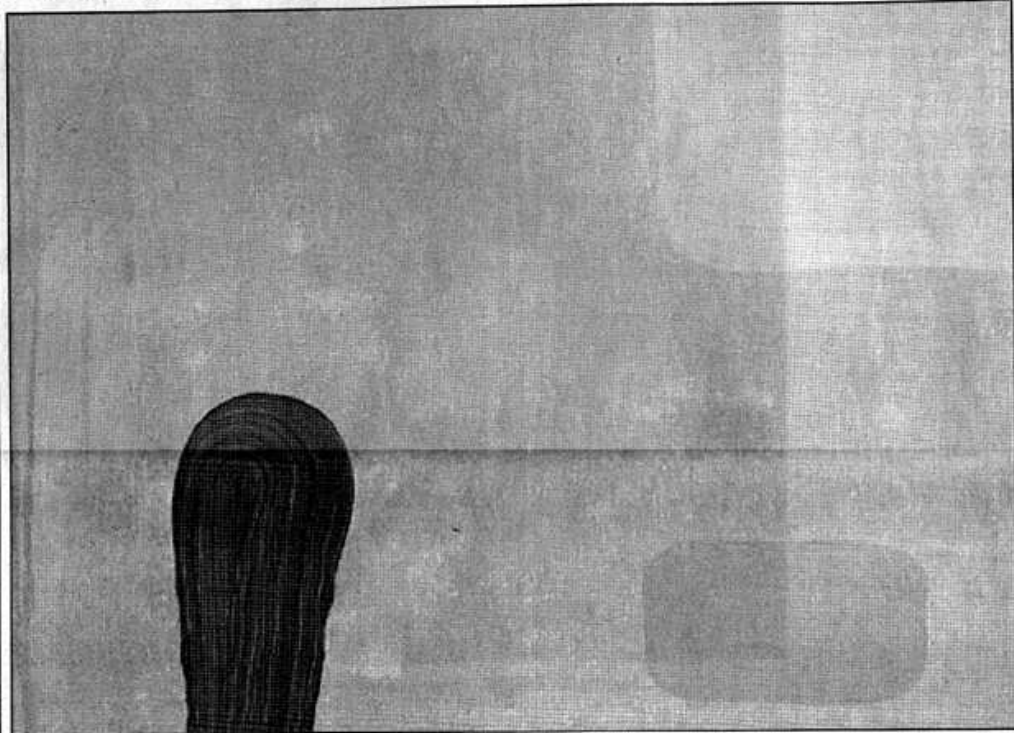
Belfast born Ronnie Hughes has an MA in fine art from the University of Ulster, has had several solo shows and participated in group exhibitions in the US, Canada, Germany, Poland and the UK. Awards include a one year residency in New York, and three-month residencies at Banff Centre Canada in 1994 and Bemis Arts Centre Nebraska 1997.

Since his graduation his work has gone through immense changes, reflecting his immediate environment and the issues and challenges thrown up by it. The early 1990s saw him create large scale installations dealing with issues pertaining to Irish immigrants abroad and other people's expectations of what they considered to be stereotypical Irish. He subsequently concentrated on a very interesting series on urban renewal, combining super realism or print-like figurative images with faded patterns and layers of dense rapid brushwork - ghostly remnants of the past.

Around three years ago, he changed direction and began to create very large abstract paintings in muted colours in which float a myriad of related ovoid shapes, blobs, rings, chain links, figures of eight - which appear like something you'd see under a microscope. The artist himself suggests these could be: "surfboards, prozac, remote control buttons, amoebas, tic-tacs, traffic congestion and the stuff that appears when you stick your finger in your eyes"

His present show at the Rubicon, (until 23 October) shows strong links with the latter works, although on a much smaller scale and with the painterly application reduced further so that in some instances he is painting directly on to an unprimed base, in this instance unbleached linen which gives a beautiful warm textured backing.

The majority of these abstract works are neutral in tone, although one or two are startlingly bright in contrast. In places the paint is scraped back and almost bare, in others it is thick and viscous in appearance. Nature is the dominant theme in this show with titles such as Spruce, Woodland and Reservoir, reflecting perhaps, his Sligo environment.



Paul Berg

The Bridge Gallery
Paul Berg graduated from the College of Art, Rotterdam, and travelled widely in North Africa, and the Middle East before settling in Co Clare where he has lived for the past eight years. Whether it is to do with that formative experience abroad or simply his own individuality, he certainly has an original viewpoint. His latest exhibition of paintings and furniture at The Bridge Gallery,

Ormond Quay, Dublin, is a quirky humorous show with brush paintings executed in raw colour - including a strangely sympathetic Co Clare Landscape. The figure of The Happy Reaper and the boot-clad feet sticking out of huge bales of hay in another picture, are reminiscent of kids' comic books, bringing to mind characters from *Beano's* Bash Street Kids - but it is nice to see a bit of fun seeping into art which can occasionally take itself far

ABOVE: 'Pilgrim' by Ronnie Hughes, and LEFT: 'Sleepwalker' by Rosie McGurran

too seriously.

His furniture and wooden sculpture - also quirky and highly individual - are beautifully crafted. As a furniture maker he is looking afresh at everyday objects and materials and considering all the possibilities. There are cushioned, moveable stools with big red-hubbed agricultural wheels, there are ingenious-looking but impossible-to-play games such as Game of Square Pegs - in a table with round holes - or Game of Round Pegs - in a table with square holes; each complete with mallet. There are attractive, very tall, watery pink and green, octopus-legged, ladder-like shelves, free standing sculptures which you could possibly use to display small items. Some of the octopus legs are low and splayed others are raised up 'en point' or on tip toe. And there is an amazing chair with an ornate three-dimensional wooden flower as the back stressing not only the organic nature of the medium but also the sheer fun that can be allied with practicalities.

Rosie McGurran

Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin
Belfast painter Rosie McGurran studied at the

University of Ulster and now works at the Queen Street Studios. She has exhibited widely, won a number of awards and is well known for her temporary mural projects in Belfast, generally representing women's places in historical events.

Sleepwalker at the Temple Bar Gallery is a new series of large scale paintings on canvas. Each of the works is figurative and concentrates on one particular female, seen in profile or with one side of the face obscure. The figure is solid, weighty limbed with heavy features, her face almost expressionless, caught up in the somnambulant state and disjointed dream-like atmosphere that pervades these works. The scale is the unnerving scale of dreams; tiny objects, disproportionately large figures. There is a lot of domestic symbolism, cascading cups with tongues of fire, a tiny welcoming house with golden, illuminated windows and door, a similar house with forbidding, alienating, blacked in windows, or another house where the roof has blown off and flames leap forth. In the background, the richly patterned sky burns with colour and movement in contrast to the rather static sleepwalker caught in her domestic turmoil.