

Comments made by *Theo Dorgan* of Poetry Ireland and RTE's Imprint Programme on opening 'Links and Connections' a new exhibition of graphics by *Margaret Irwin* and ceramic sculpture by her daughter *Katharine West* at An Dámhlann in the Spiddal Craft Centre.

One of the things I should say about this show is that it's part of a pattern of repossession, and is part of a pattern of repossession in the simplest sense because it's a mother and daughter show. That is not to suggest, that mother and daughter do not, they do self-evidently do, stand each in her own right, but the show marks a sort of a moment of passage, in the history of the evolution of art, and of art work, in Ireland.

To see Margaret in her late forties(!), still producing work of such vigour, and imagination, and opening up different kinds of areas of the imagination, all at the same time, and to see her daughter with entirely her own language - as it is right and proper - pursuing other studies and other adventures of the imagination, has to remind us that it's about time that half the human race was recognised by the somewhat smug other half. Let me put this in an understated way. This show has a considerable amount to contribute to what we're going to understand of ourselves, as we begin to grow up in our infant republic.

What I really want to say is what an enormous blast of energy there is coming off the work here, on the walls and on the plinths. Margaret's graphic work has a number of distinct thematic preoccupations. I am immediately drawn to what I think is the Japanese work, this piece here on the wall beside us or in the next room the green piece. There is a sense of stillness, a forest stillness, or the stillness of stones, and it is layered all into the picture plane, in such a way that it stops you, and takes and holds and feeds your attention.

In a very different way I was struck by the three pieces by Margaret Irwin drawn from CALDERON DE LA BARCA when I walked in the door. We have a preoccupation with the famous phrase, "life is a dream and dreams are also dreams". I think it should probably be engraved on our coinage, stamped on our passports, and certainly printed on our birth certificates in this country, because the one thing that we have become afraid of is dreaming. We have to think now. We must be terribly rational, as if to be rational is to be grown up, instead of to be lumped into an evolutionary cul de sac. So to see the great silver aged Spanish poet and his insistence on the primacy of dreaming, brought out and challenged in a visual way, is I think a challenge to us, to trust and repose in and be comfortable in our imaginations.

In a very very different way, but yet doing the same thing, Katharine's pieces which again fall into a number of strands offer us a different kind of challenge to dreaming. First of all you have to look at the pieces and be at ease with the discomfort they evoke. They evoke a certain kind of discomfort because they seem to represent parts of the body. They seem to represent things from the organic world.

With a piece like this one here to my right, or this one here to my left, these forms have appeared before in Western art. They appeared in the sculpture of Hans Arp, in a non threatening way because Arp had a sense of what flows and is fluid and rounded and is there forever in its own right, and these pieces have that quality. But they have turned up elsewhere, as nightmare images, twisted slightly in say the painting of Uranus by Bosch. Here there were very similar trumpet shaped and ovular shaped, and ear shaped pieces, pieces that evoked that sense

of the fear we have the shape of the natural in terra incognito inside our bodies. They have turned up as the places of nightmares, so that living with a piece, like this, could be, if you weren't still in yourself, a quite unnerving experience. But I think that's where they take their legitimacy as art objects, and where they draw their power in the imagination from.

These are pieces which have great quality of repose and stillness, but they can't be still in your heart, and they can't be still in your mind, because the dialogue is inescapable. If you look at some of the pieces that Margaret has, there is a piece just around the corner here, where the colours seem alive, they are alive in the way that Matisse meant. Matisse used to say that you must put two colours beside each other, so that each transgresses its own boundary, and then you have living colour. Well you have that all around you here in these works, and similarly in the pieces of sculpture, if we can call these "pieces of sculpture". We can call them many things, but they are temporary labels, for what has to live beyond the boundaries of the space it encloses, or the space it defines.

The real joy of this work, and the reason why with complete respect, and intending no insult, I wish you'd all go away, is, I would love to spend time in an empty room just looking at this work. Now, that's not possible at present because, I got the numbers all wrong on Wednesday so I can't take it all home with me! But some of us are in a position to take some of this home with us. And it's a normal form of politeness opening an exhibition, to say buy everything in sight, you won't regret it. And unfortunately this far from home, I find myself free of the obligation to indulge in any kind of politeness, and I am inclined only to say what I actually think. So, buy everything in sight, and take it home with you, you won't regret it!

I think this is true work, I think this is the real thing, there are pieces on the wall, there are pieces on the plinths, that will repay a lifetime's attention, that will enrich that attention, and that will help us to keep our imaginations alive. It's a pleasure to be the national altar boy as it were, and to behold these mysteries, and they are available unto us. Thank you very much for letting me open the show, it's a pleasure. Thank you.