

The darkness behind Atsushi's latest bunny boiler



Visual Arts Aidan Dunne

Reviewed

Bunny's Darkness and Other Stories,
Atsushi Kaga. Mother's Tankstation,
41-43 Watling St, Ushers Island Thurs-Sat
noon-6pm Until June 30 01-6717654

Somehow Atsushi Kaga found his way from Japan to the NCAD in Dublin where he graduated in fine art a couple of years ago. In his degree show he came across as a bright spark with funny-sad works featuring an animal alter-ego, a bunny rabbit, drawn and painted in cartoon style. Having grown to like Dub-

lin, Ash, as he was known in college, decided to stay. As the title of his solo show at Mother's Tankstation suggests, the alter-ego is still at the heart of what he does. *Bunny's Darkness and Other Stories* marshals a formidable array of works, from tiny to huge.

Atsushi's bunny is a hapless, put-upon character, though not at all pathetic or sentimentalised. There's a touch of Woody Allen's comic persona about him, though on numerous levels he relates more obviously to Japanese art. From brush drawings to woodblock prints to Manga comics, a Japanese artist inherits an amazingly strong graphic tradition. What's more, several contemporary Japanese artists have shown an ability to take a childlike, cartoon idiom and invest it with real emotional weight and complexity. For example, the outstanding Yoshitomo Nara paints and sculpts doll-like protagonists who are surprisingly empowered and slyly subversive of the given order of things.

Similarly, Atsushi's Bunny represents the individual struggling to come to terms with the ordinary things in life, growing up in the midst of a perplexing network of rules and relationships, from immediate family to friends and the wider social framework. There are other consistent presences in the work, including a storybook princess and a one-legged bear who might be related to Winnie the Pooh or Paddington. Recurrent themes include wry considerations of troubled father-son relationships and other areas of mutual incomprehension between individuals.

By displacing strong feelings onto fantasy characters, Atsushi is able to main-

tain a lightness of tone, though it does falter - by design - in his vast eschatological drawing *Purgatory*, which brings to mind the grandiloquent delivery of Manga illustration combined with the rhetorical excesses of European Romanticism.

Atsushi makes cartoon doodles on scraps of paper and cardboard, more finished drawings and paintings on conventional supports, simple computer animations, and sculptures. His show is strong and it's excellently installed.



Atsushi Kaga's
20 yen, please