



Wednesday, 26 April 2006

Painting with a marker, sculpting from the discarded, finding a place for the modern within the natural. Billy Leahy Brendan Earley's exhibition

Towards a Large White Building By Brendan Earley. Temple Bar Gallery and Studios until 27 May

One imagines Brendan Earley must have been the scourge of his elders with permanently indigo-inked fingers as a child. But now, at the ripe age of 34, the Dublin-born artist is showing what can be achieved with the humble marker, producing drawings of great detail and tonal variation employing a standard black, alone, as his chosen colour.

The marker drawings form one half of Earley's recent artistic practice and play a large role in his exhibition Towards a large white building, currently being housed at the Temple Bar Gallery & Studios. The show centres on Earley's continuing fixation with modernist-informed art, philosophy, science and most notably architecture – a theme displayed repeatedly in previous exhibitions such as Arrival at Pallas Heights just over two years ago and in a two-person show at the TBG&S in 2004.

Arrival and the subsequent TBG&S show provided a critique of the modernist movement, especially in the architectural realm, exposing its failures as well as achievements, whilst evaluating its aspiration to create a utopian living environment. Towards a large white building sees Earley further this artistic study.

A marker sketch, 'Dead Tree', opens the exhibition, demonstrating Earley's light-handed style and clever use of his preferred tool (the shadow cast by the tree is perfectly-weighted, thicker and lighter line, for instance). The artist's architectural fascination is quick to arrive, however, and a small LCD screen, which fronts a wires-and-all DIY engineering project, beams out images of modernist constructions.

It transpires that these forms – which seem to be pulled from a 'Design like Ludwig Mies van der Rohe' instruction manual – are actually made from found building materials. Stumbling upon Styrofoam, Earley carefully assembled a mini building complex on the top floor of a multi-storey car park, changing it each night for six days. Despite being located in a public place, his fragile sculptures remained untouched for the entire time.

The title of the exhibition comes from a musical piece of the same name which gently serenades the public as it delicately wafts around the main space, while a neatly executed marker and paint drawing, 'A large white building', suggests we may be arriving at what we have been moving towards.

But the central image of the show is the poured-concrete observation tower that despite having an everywhere-anywhere feel, is actually from Loughkey Forest Park in Roscommon.

Earley takes this modernist construction and places it in the middle of nature, with the two juxtaposed elements seemingly at odds with each other – that is, until we discover that the woodland was actually part of the state-sponsored forestation of the 1970s and is as planned and constructed as the tower erected to survey it.

Playing off the disciplined lines of Tower 1, 2 and 3 is 'Complex 1', a sculpture assembled from building site detritus that willingly sheds the clean-lined formality of the sketched buildings. Perhaps here Earley is purposely opposing the modernist fetish with material and, in doing so, literally putting down another marker for further discussion on his chosen study, where the chance and accidental seem to play an increasing role.