

Modern Painters

July - August 2006

DUBLIN

MOTHER'S RUIN

**DANGEROUS OBSESSIONS
AND THE CULTURE OF EXCESS**

MOTHER'S TANKSTATION

6 APRIL - 13 MAY

Hard to resist, presumably, this title, which reinforces the unorthodox, kooky brand of this latest Dublin gallery, while hinting at some cool, Victorian steam-punk backbone. But creating a group show that hangs, sits or, in the case of Icelandic contributor Margrét H. Blöndel's work, lolls around the floor in a coherent or productive fashion is a trickier business by far than thinking of a good gag for the title, else I would be a billionaire art dealer.

The new space, created by the artist Finola Jones, has already welcomed to its precincts a younger generation of Irish and international artists, alongside a number of others who, while hardly famous names, must count as veterans of a sort. So, alongside the work of recent graduates, we have more mature practices, albeit largely ones that favour an abrasive, outsider texture, seeking validation from graphic design, graffiti and urban ephemera. Mother's Tankstation, according to its own manifesto, intends to focus on 'difficult-to-collect' art.

All the same, the impact of Nina Canell's looped DVD, despite depicting a figure in grubby overalls, is clear and almost stately in its precision. The artist's grandfather is seen balancing on a plank, with only his backside touching its surface, his torso, chest and arms constantly adjusting and re-setting to maintain his position, his set of human systems - everything from his inner ear to his twitching muscles - enlisted in a fierce tango with the forces of the cosmos. The big show-off.

Alan Phelan, too, seems to be worrying about global issues, in a bright floor piece in which a shiny exhaust system suddenly and



unexpectedly sprouts small, spiky wooden flowers, while Garrett Phelan shows some graphic work, in brute black marker, derived from his perplexing Black Brain Radio project, a Cocteau-esque voice from the underground broadcast into the Dublin air earlier this year.

David Sherry, generally best known for his performance works, takes the whole 'difficult-to-collect' notion a little more seriously. He calls up a variety of urban psychological chimera using spidery, annotated cartoons on feint lined paper, and a claustrophobic video of puppets in conversation with the artist, that calls to mind *South Park's* Mr Hat as much as it does Beuys chatting to his deceased hare, albeit here overdubbed in a squeaky, Northern demotic.

Mother's choice of work certainly succeeds in fulfilling its own aims - what we see here is undoubtedly itchy enough to attain the status of 'difficult to collect'. But with that itchiness comes a certain antipathy towards everything declamatory that can, on occasion, look like an unwillingness to come out and play. The works that avoid this trap, notably Canell's, also seem the more developed, the more nuanced, the more insistent that Mother's must be only one station on their journey.

LUKE CLANCY