

BUTLER ■ GALLERY

Darling

Michael Beirne

April 30 – June 5, 2005

The Butler Gallery is delighted to present *Darling*, an exhibition of new work by Michael Beirne.

Evolving through the chambers of the Butler Gallery, *Darling* is an installation with all the hallmarks of the artist's subversive qualities – especially in relation to gender, conventions and iconic religious imagery. Each room presents an individual tone and inflection, their overall content being fantastic and allegorical in nature. Disorienting and challenging the visitor, Beirne uses materials and skills not usually employed in fine art-making, coupling them with traditional art methods and a rare precision and intensity, to striking effect.

There is a strange beauty to Beirne's unsettling images, and their implications are deceptive. Working with media from painting on canvas, to sculptural pieces of intensely-worked raw silk and felt, to turned and carved wood and assemblage, Beirne employs the humble vernacular of object-making: mementos, religious relics and domestic decorative objects. Paintings of acute detail are beautifully crafted and are alive with intertwined corpuscles and organic intimations. The sculptural works are exquisitely crafted in black organza and pink silk satin, real branches are painted salmon pink with deep red tips. The terrain is a surreal experience.

In the miniature painting *Inside Out*, an homage to a beloved departed dog, a portrait of a man and dog stares back at us while attached to a maze of roots sprouting living organisms of flowers and bubbles. It is a powerful image and one that holds its own in an installation in which a vitrine contains an effigy of the decapitated dog. Michael Beirne has said of these works: "There is a concern with scale – the miniature, as an

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object to be held, a thing of intimacy but with a dark intent, a love token, a memento, the object as a reservoir of multiple and conflicting emotions.”

Another painting is dominated, in the foreground, by a table set with pots of fiery red plants in anticipation of – what? Ms. Havisham and an uninvited guest, or something more mundane? Veils of silk are miraculously rendered, folding over branches that seem to billow lightly in this uninhabited landscape. And looking further into this fantastic, lyrical landscape, knives are surreptitiously positioned in the undergrowth, a black refrigerator sits abandoned, and a power socket hovers in the grasses. Then, one of the chairs included in this painting takes its place within the installation in the gallery, and painting and sculpture merge to become part of the same reality.

Michael Beirne has been making art for the past twenty-five years, the last eleven of which he has spent living and working in Kilkenny.

Solas, a program run by the Butler Gallery, which introduces children to contemporary art, is scheduled for May 8th and May 22nd from 11:00 am -12:30 pm.

ADMISSION FREE

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