

BUTLER ■ GALLERY

PRESS RELEASE

Bernadette Cotter

and the greatest of these

January 29th – 27th February 2005

Life and death, religion and ritual, pain and sorrow are the threads that weave through Bernadette Cotters exhibition '*and the greatest of these*' which opens at the Butler Gallery on Saturday 29th January. At first glance the exhibition is aesthetically beautiful – the meticulous attention to detail, the unusual choice of materials and meditative quality achieved through repetition fill the senses. Those familiar with her work will be aware that outward appearances are often skin deep. Engaging involves stripping back the layers, a process that affects both artist and viewer.

Since returning to Ireland from America the focus of Cotter's work has turned inward, it cuts closer to the bone. The labyrinth like quality of the rooms at the Butler Gallery are an invitation into a sacred personal space. In the innermost room seventy-six net curtain buckets pay tribute to the 76 years of the artists mothers life. The feminine symbolism of the bucket: a container with an endless capacity to replenish, is contrasted by the stark diamonds cut from the coat of her father representing death.

The needle dress and helmet in the adjoining room allude to privacy, secrecy and anonymity. The artist is both physically bound and mentally empowered. Restrained and yet free from outer distraction. Hanging on the wall opposite is a large doorway made of small linen squares with the impression of the artists blood stained tongue. Parallels can be drawn to biblical images of the body and blood of Christ, the attainment of enlightenment through suffering and the physical restrictions imposed on sexuality in a repressed society dominated by the Church.

The impact of a repressed culture is evidenced using thousands of newspaper cuttings documenting war, torture, murder, sexual abuse, disease and famine. The cuttings are laminated, cut into discs and one word 'mercy' is sewn onto each disc using red thread. A stunning visual presence is created by the two thousand discs filling the gallery walls. Their fragile nature reflects the life time struggle between good and evil, pain and pleasure .

The balance to this work lies in the 'mandala' like drawings that repeat the words 'love, hope, faith'. Bernadette Cotters exhibition is a journey from childhood to maturity, a narrative of love and loss, life and death. The exhibition comes full circle with an over-riding message "...faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is ..."

The artist will give a public talk on this exhibition on February 10th 2005 at 2pm.

ADMISSION FREE

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