

SUBMARINE

Ben Reilly

Published to coincide with the exhibition SUBMARINE
by Ben Reilly

at Galerie R31
Reuterstr 31 • 12047 Berlin Neukölln

Art may associate itself in our minds with beauty, yet at the same time can have strange ways of admitting it. But then isn't comedy at its most powerful in the company of tragedy, and doesn't light rely on dark to show its brilliance to best advantage? From early on, Ben Reilly has pursued such an ambiguous vision, exploring in medieval fashion his conceptions of Life chain-dancing with Death. Each image he makes reveals different layers of reality, strata at conflict with one another, casual about their historicity. He juggles backwards and forwards in time, always capturing a note of the contemporaneous, it might be a television character, or a piece of art, or whatever. An artist from an artistic background, he gathers visual material from wherever he looks. The Jewish term 'midrash', imaginative exploration of what has hitherto been accepted in order to extract its nuances, might well be applied to his equivocal expression of the reality with which he engages.

Danish and Irish bog bodies in particular fascinate him, and he has had close hand experience during archaeological digs in medieval Cork. The 'body thing', he says, his interest in the decayed skin, the rutted surfaces, isn't morbid. Such texture appeals to his creativity, and he embroiders on what he has observed directly, using pins and twigs to enrich his effects when casting. The results are horrific and at the same time inspirational. Somehow spirit has returned to the maimed remains.

Large photo etchings have grown out of his half-length waxes of striated torsos and heads. The mordant technique teases reworking of the originals, highlighting scraps of surfaces, losing areas into opaque shadow, letting images slip and blur, the sparseness of the two dimensions reducing tangible splayed mutilated bodies to hovering androgynous crucifixions. Themes can be ambiguous, *Bandit* referring in part to one of the thieves on the Cross, the titles of *Pearl*, *Beano* and *Blister* emanating from their patinations.

Translating images with touches of colour from three dimensions into flat monochrome can add new ambiguities too. *Side show*, taken from a wax sculpture of the same name – a pathetic head with vacant mouth and red bulb nose – sinks back desperately into darkness, then rises up with clown like buoyancy. A metal mask on the wax head, *Balaclava*, has blended with the face in the corresponding photo etching as an integrated and significant shadow. And the larger figures, powerful silhouettes, proclaim the triumph of shadow, resilient beyond the body's transience.

Having for years converted sculptural images into etching, Ben Reilly has now returned to making solid objects. His obsession with 'medieval stuff' now visibly appreciates the actual tools of the age of chivalry – the riveting, stitching and old weldings that have created the elaborately worked surfaces and elegant details that add grace and beauty to the 'memento mori' – and broadens his approach to his own materials. He carves wood with tear-drop shapes and striations, adds lead finials, and combines velvet, and goldleaf with wood and wax.

Old and new are bound together with increasing overt wit. A sun fish hovers over a barge bearing a glowing skull. The hand and foot, modelled on those of bog bodies, have been bandaged to medieval timbers, with touches of silver and gilding referring to their former grandeur, his typical hallmark a 'paradox which comforts while it mocks'. The stride through time in these works might appear irrational and the issues are certainly disturbing, yet through the surrealist images seeps a resident light and irrepressible optimism.

Hilary Pyle
March 2009



1: Studio view, 2009.



2: Studio view, 2009.



3: Submarine:
photo Intaglio / spitbite
print, 60 x 90 cm, 2009.



4: Babe:
plaster, pigment, Gold leaf,
steel, rubber and wood,
274 x 164 x 22 cm, 2008.



5: Bandit II:
photo intaglio / spitbite
print, 160 x 76 cm, 2009.



6: Bandit I:
photo intaglio / spitbite
print, 160 x 76 cm, 2009.



7: Beano:
photo intaglio / spitbite
print, 160 x 76 cm, 2009.



8: Angel:
photo intaglio / spitbite
print, 160 x 76 cm, 2009.



9: Butt:
plaster, pigment, wood,
velvet, wax and rubber,
60 x 22 x 22 cm, 2008.



10: Side show:
photo intaglio / spitbite
print, 60 x 75 cm, 2008.



11: Crash:
photo intaglio print,
60 x 75 cm, 2007



12: Peace:
wax and pigment,
40 x 22 x 20 cm, 2007.



13: Balaclava:
wax and pigment,
40 x 22 x 20 cm, 2007.



19: Barge:
wax, pigment and wood,
200 x 60 x 20 cm, 2009.



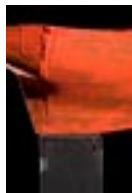
14: Gannet:
wax, pigment, steel and
rubber, 50 x 18 x 9 cm, 2009.



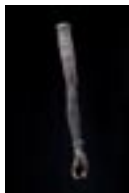
20: Red Barge:
steel, wood, wax and
pigment,
160 x 50 x 20 cm, 2009.



15: Flak:
wax, pigment, silver leaf,
steel and rubber,
110 x 63 x 13 cm, 2009.



21: Detail Red Barge.



16: Stump:
wax, wood, lead and rubber,
62 x 10 x 6 cm, 2009.



22: Blackhead:
photo intaglio / spitbite
print, 110 x 60 cm, 2008.



17: Fog:
wax, pigment and wood,
160 x 22 x 24 cm, 2009.



23: Pearl:
photo intaglio / spitbite
print, 110 x 60 cm, 2009.



18: Untitled:
wax, gold leaf, wood
and rubber,
80 x 28 x 9 cm, 2009.



24: Balaclava:
photo intaglio print,
110 x 60 cm, 2009.

Ben Reilly

benreilly@gmail.com www.corkprintmakers.ie www.backwaterartists.ie

Education:

Winchester School of Art, U.K (MA Fine Art Sculpture Distinction) 1998-1999.
University College Cork (B.A degree Archaeology, Single Honors) 1991-1995.
Crawford College of Art, Cork (Diploma Fine Art, Distinction) 1983-1987.

Solo / Group Exhibitions and Events:

2009 Submarine: R31 Gallerie Berlin.
2008 Balaclava: Limerick printmakers Gallery.
2007 Group show: Horace Mann Gallery New York.
2006 Clo in China: touring print show Hong Kong& Beijing.
2004 Frau Von Havel: Short film (with Conor Casey) Cork Film Festival.
2003 Cinema Caradiso Cork Art Trail, Wansford Quay.
2002 Claremorris open: Group show Claremorris Co Mayo.
2001 Culvert 16mm film project with Cork Film Centre.
 Quiet: Exhibition with Marc Reilly, Paul Kane Gallery, Dublin.
 EV+a: Group show Limerick city. Curated by Salah Hassan.
2000 Body: Sirius Art Center, Cobh, Co Cork.
1999 Bingo: Group show Sculpture trust Gallery Winchester U.K.
 Asleep: Installation project. City Morgue White Street Cork.
1998 Group show: Korner Park Gallery Berlin.
1997 Blimp: Touring show Garter Lane Arts Centre, Waterford.
 Triskel Art Centre, Cork.
1996 Gob: Touring show
 Linnenhall Arts Centre, Castlebar Co, Mayo.
 South Tipperary Arts Centre Clonmel, Co, Cork.
1995 Relief: Café Paradiso Cork.
1994 Perigrinatio: Siamsa Tire Gallery, Tralee, Kerry
1993 Recent work: Beltable Arts centre Limerick.
1992 Recent work: Aula Max University College Galway.
1991 Recent work: Triskel Art centre Cork.

Awards:

Department of Education Scholarship, Greece 1988/89.
New contemporaries award Triskel Art Centre Cork 1991.
Arts Council bursary 2000.
Arts Council materials grant 2001.
Claremorris Open Adjudicators prize 2002.
Selected for Peripheral Visions Video Art exhibition for Cork City of Culture 2005.

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Dedicated to B.K.R, Dec. 1925 / Oct. 2007*