

Just as he loves playing with references to classical and modern art he likes tinkering with perspectives of scale and the paradox that the ubiquitous and mundane materials that society rejects can carry serious messages about the state of that society. When building his sets, often in derelict buildings or abandoned houses, he can mix painting on cardboard, sculpture, collage and found objects, incorporate something of the place itself and then make a detailed record of the event that he has just caused to happen. This sense of an active happening is stronger than any sense of recorded stasis, due to his use of what we normally consider as disposable materials plus the nice line in throw away jokes that are like a dig in the ribs that leaves bruises. Even the permanent record of the photograph fails to undermine the sense of impermanence.

Through half closed eyes the exhibition might be of late Baroque paintings; the colours are rich, textures painterly and the compositions seem vaguely familiar. Many are like bizarre blown-up still lifes others are surreal tableaux. "The great thing about looking through the lens of a ten by eight camera under the black cloth is it's like looking at TV - anything can happen." As it can in cartoons and TV adverts.

Of *Nuclear Wasties* he says "Nuclear waste is a big problem and so my idea to give it to a conglomerate like Kellogg to turn into a breakfast cereal sounded like a good capitalist move. You get rid of the nuclear waste plus you make a profit and get a free radiation sticker". Despite the wit it is an apocalyptic scene made all the more emotive by the very ordinariness of the objects that litter the table round which sit three helmeted figures draped in bin liners. The eye roves from charred newsprint to crumbling ceiling, to painted flower pot on painted window sill in front of painted hills, back to a crushed McEwans can and cheese biscuits dusted with ash. Snap, Crackle and Pop with a vengeance.

"If you paint a sauce bottle now it looks a bit naff", he says, and he is right. Cultural conditioning as unremarked as the sleep-teaching in *Brave New World* gives us all irrationally acquired definitions of what constitutes proper subjects for art in general and painting in particular. However liberated we consider our aesthetic to be we hesitate to accept an instant coffee jar or cereal packet as a proper subject for paint on canvas. In a collage by Picasso or Braque yes, or kitchen-sink school paintings from the sixties maybe, but in the post-modernist nineties, not really. The same stimulating frisson of discomfort at being confronted with the unavoidable debris of reality occurs in most of the works. The painted cardboard *Orange Tree* has a back drop with a lurid sunset dripping down towards cut out hotels and grows out of a beach littered with the rubbish he found nearby. The actuality of the crushed drink cans, plastic bottles and litter locates our responsibility very precisely.

One of the funniest works is *The Expulsion from the Garden* in which battered suitcases flee from a burning forest. The materials he uses have symbolic meanings which affirm the serious discourse that runs through his work, despite its jocular nature. So, another Adam and Eve, he covered with photocopied money, she, a lingerie mannequin pasted with autumn leaves, convey notions of nature versus commerce as well as the temptations of lust now satisfied by consumption rather than a search for forbidden knowledge.

Although it might appear perverse to make a three dimensional installation with a floor area of

several square feet, and then reduce it to a two dimensional image, O'Donnell is in there with the cubists when it comes to talking about space in art and out there with the surrealists when it comes to strange juxtapositions, fantasy and an almost hallucinatory quality of images. At this point in the century, with the problems the world is facing and O'Donnell is confronting in his art, it is a small sacrifice to set aside prejudices about media or semantic quibblings, in order to take his message to heart. □

The last most recent thing that happened was at the Terrace Gallery, Harewood House, Leeds, March - June; & The National Museum of Photography, Film & Television, Bradford until 14 August.

NEW WORK BY NICK MALONE: THE EARTH MOVED!

by Libby Anson

The striking thing about Nick Malone's work is how focused it has become in such a short space of time. Painting did not become his major concern until 1985 when, in his late thirties, he began studying for a degree, "To rearrange the way I was thinking". His work already has both the zeal of youth and the conviction of maturity. Prior to his 'conversion', he was a published writer, his books illuminated with his own wistful, Blakeian illustrations. Themes prevalent in his writing translate powerfully into fine art media, extracting elements from the land and the human psyche. Significantly, Malone was inspired practically and spiritually while under the tantalisingly brief, but cathartic tutelage of Miles Richmond (himself a student of Bomberg). His subsequent, early responses to the living forces at work within landscape reveal an unrestrained, raw energy and an uninhibited ability to animate the bulk of the earth's body. His search for a way to deal with the metaphysical aspects of his subject, to recreate it in a less literal, less referential sense had begun.

Malone's work has developed into images that are assured and strong, with landscape persisting as the major motif. He is interested in the tradition of English landscape painting and the notion of the genre as a

Nick Malone,
Installation of
new work,
Summer 1994.
(Photo: Courtesy of
artist.)



"cultural, metaphorical and mythological construct". In conversation he refers reverently to Turner (of course), and to Michael Porter and Terry Setch. About his own work, Malone quotes Morris Graves, saying that certain forms can heighten one's sense of "walking through the stuff that we are". Considering the positive force and dark, surging vitality that dominates his painting and drawing, I know what he is talking about. The works suggest a realisation of personal history leading to a present moment, or the visualisation of life's events, illustrated like milestones along the way of his own journey. Like an episode of travel, all the layers of time, sights and experiences are piled on top of one another, as paint from a loaded brush, then scraped back to lose some of the memory and inscribed with charcoal. He shows a need to search out and establish form while simultaneously acknowledging the autonomy of paint, or material on surface; abstraction meets figuration, meets manipulation. His dense blacks can be either positive or negative elements, becoming megaliths or chambers, and colour has to force its way through from where it was buried, nurturing the promise of revealing its own history; sometimes it doesn't succeed. The space surrounding these amorphous structures is not vacuous but active, buzzing with a palimpsest of marks. Here, the subterranean and the celestial merge.

Paint occasionally looks as if it has been applied with implements for working the earth rather than medium on canvas. *Megalith 2* appears like the inverse of *Rising*, the former plunging beneath the no-man's land of a war zone, fiery colour and gold punctuating the humus. The whole vision has in common with other canvases (*Tumulus* in particular), the construction of shapes slotted together, slipping and sliding over one another like plates of the earth's crust in a state of flux, searching for a place to rest. In the acrylic works, the manipulation of pigment makes for a rich and interesting complement to the Franz Kline-like statements dominating each painting. In his paper pieces, the frenetic chattering of the charcoal amid the bareness of Fabriano is reminiscent of Cy Twombly's wiry, graphic hand-writing: lines of communication, fizzing with impulsivity. *Cutting 2* looks like the cross section of a pore and subcutaneous layers, an image recalling the show of the artist's work in 1988, entitled *Excavation*. The archaeological urge and hunting instinct is still very much in evidence in the digging, the quest for a personal Holy Grail, perhaps, for what is veracious.

The archetypal, fundamental forms which emerge, time and again in Malone's visual vocabulary, come from working to establish a tension between what is recognisable as landscape and what is more abstracted, coupled with a sense of humanity becoming a physical part of it. The forms impose themselves as symbols for an internal landscape and for something deeper than what we know of things seen. What is tangible appears and disappears, being solid here, fragmented there, and there's the suggestion of metamorphosis, of monoliths taking the place of mythical heroes, petrified and stripped of characterisation, generalised and denied a personal history.

Anthropological symbolism presents itself in the recurrence of the cross and the fish, and the recent emergence of the ram in drawings harks to a demonic counterpart. Pagan imagery abounds too in the runic characters and the shapes undeniably reminiscent of those constituting Stonehenge.

Malone suspects his work will become greater in scale. In this show some of the larger paintings already suffer for lack of space and visitors have, sadly, been denied the pleasure of viewing the artist's more intimate, often more colourful smaller studies, still bound in sketchbooks. The artist will continue to rely on his painting to take him in a direction he feels is beyond his control. Figures, shapes, colours and positive spaces come and go, breathe and suffocate. Pictures are lost and caught several times during the physical work of structuring each composition, mark-making and establishing the motif - a difficult process which he relishes. □

The Nick Malone exhibition was at Raw Gallery, London, during April - May and at Raw Gallery at Clove II during June.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF LANDSCAPE: IAN McKEEVER, NEW GUINEA GOUACHES AND 'WOODCUTS'

by Paul Zoller

Ian McKeever and his work seem better known on the continent than in his native Britain. However pointless this statement may appear, the fact remains that Ian McKeever is definitely a major presence in Germany and Switzerland. The Morat-Institut in Freiburg recently fitted up an extra gallery for the *New Guinea Gouaches*, which number just under a hundred, with the intention of keeping the series for some time, and the Galerie Elisabeth Kaufmann in Basel showed the most recent woodcut series, on four floors. Both exhibitions were admired and praised by the public. That may well not be enough as a judgement on their quality. But may I repeat, euphorically and perhaps unduly naively: they simply are good! So all that remains to be cleared up is why.

There is usually a distinction between distance and proximity. They are opposites, but they are interdependent. Distance begins where proximity ends, and vice versa. McKeever's current gouaches and woodcuts work on this basis. He has no difficulty in avoiding rigid schematisation, however. The pictorial content of the two series no longer permits unambiguous localisation, even though geographical identification would not be difficult.

For example, the ten-part woodcut series showing at Elisabeth Kaufmann's gallery is called *Hartgrove*, after the place where McKeever lives. Thus immediate proximity is indicated. But elements from the *New Guinea Series* on show in Freiburg crop up again as casual references in this series and in the dozen or so large-format sheets that follow it. To continue this comparison: the *New Guinea Series* is not motivated by spatial or temporal distance, but by the intimate culture of these people on the other side of the globe, a culture they have to live out in a new way each day. It seems that McKeever travelled into the distance to get closer to certain things. But he does not get closer to things as an explorer would. He does not dissect a strange place,