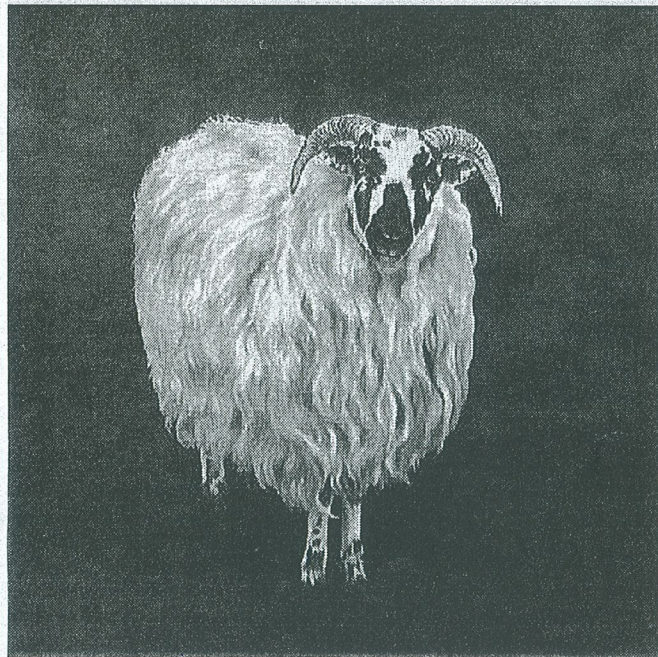


thearts

■ After years of rejection slips from publishers, British author Michelle Paver (pictured) is now being touted as the next JK Rowling. Her novel, *Wolf Brother*, had remained unpublished since it was written in 1982, but when she rewrote it as a children's book, the publishing rights were sold internationally for a \$5 million advance — the highest price ever paid for a debut British children's book.



'Bog Ewe' by Dermot Seymour: his animals are wonderful

The surreal world of Dermot Seymour

art

Retrospectives seem to be the order of the day at the moment. Catherine McWilliams is in the Naughton Gallery and now the Millennium Court Arts Centre in Portadown is having, what they call a 'mini-retrospective' of the work of Belfast-born Dermot Seymour.

The strange title, *The Bloated Inability to Eat Flags*, makes a rather obscure connection between political debate, cattle and fertiliser bags — all important elements in Seymour's painting.

Although this exhibition is looking back at Seymour's

work, it is actually part of a much larger concept. The project has a dual purpose — to challenge people's perception about contemporary art and the creative development of Northern Irish artists.

It's all about appreciating what's going on around us, encouraging new audiences for contemporary art and giving the freedom for an 'anything goes and anything is possible' approach to creativity.

This, the first exhibition in the series, looks at Seymour's work between 1983 and 2004. Always somewhat controversial in both his imagery and his philosophy, he has been quoted as saying, "We are all sick in Northern Ireland and we don't even know it".

Seymour's paintings may often seem bizarre, but the truth is indeed often stranger than fiction. He brings together seemingly random objects — a cross, a fox, a cow and a flag or perhaps a frog, a chicken, two policemen, a hare and a headless man — yet it all seems to make perfect sense to Seymour. "Cows always seem to be watching," he says, or "Being a Protestant, for me, is like having no head", or even, "The hare, you know, is a symbol of doom." Everything has its place, apparently, and everything is exactly where it should be. Seymour's world is a surprisingly ordered one.

As a draughtsman he is

extremely talented with the ability to produce work which is almost super-real, yet at the same time disturbingly surreal. His animals are wonderful and as the years have progressed he has focused on them more and more.

There are pieces like 'Blackfaced Malignancy', painted in 1996, 'The Mistrust of Matter' (1998), or, as recently as last year, 'Border Cross' — all with the image of a single animal in the centre of the canvas. Always the touch of black humour, so very Seymour.

Running until October 16, it really is a fascinating, and intriguing 'must see'.

Liz Baird