

Cattle seem to hold a strange attraction for artist Dermot Seymour, as Alison Healy found out when she visited his recent exhibition.

A fascination with cows

THERE is something surreal about walking into an art gallery on a busy Dublin street and being surrounded by cattle gazing dolefully at you from the walls. That's the scene which greets visitors to the Kevin Kavanaugh Gallery on Great Strand Street.

And if the artist Dermot Seymour had his way, he would have filled the room with real cattle. "I like the idea of people walking in off the street in Dublin and seeing cows. I'd love to drive a herd of cattle through the streets of Dublin into the gallery."

Dermot Seymour is intrigued by

the whole urban/rural divide. He was born on the Shankill in Belfast and when he moved south he was astonished at how strong the divide was.

The 'culchie' thing!

"There's an arrogance from people in Dublin towards the country. There's the whole culchie thing. Yet how many people in Dublin are from the country? The urban/rural thing is not as strong in Belfast." But then neither is the art scene.

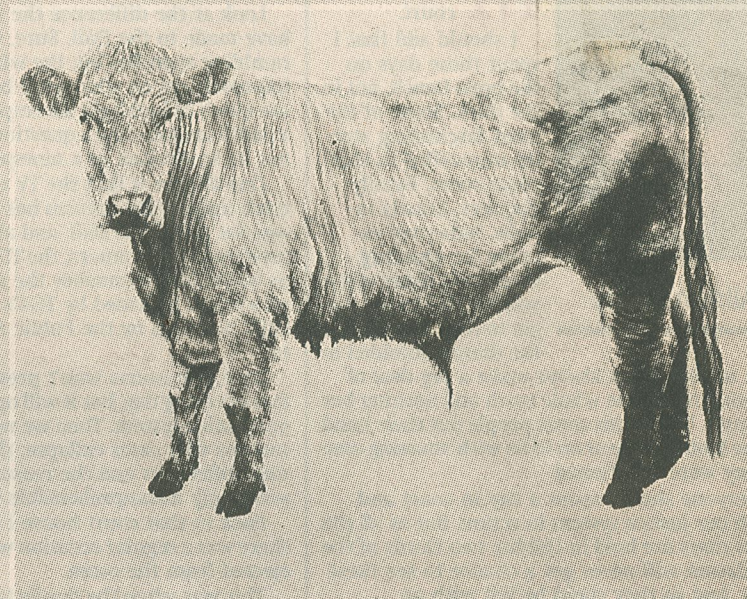
He feels that people in the Republic are more encouraging of art than in Northern Ireland. "That's why 80 per cent of my contemporaries are living in the South." Dermot now lives in Leitir, outside Westport.

Earlier work

Cattle have always featured strongly in his work, many in incongruous circumstances. One earlier work features cows grazing beside two beheaded women with arabic graffiti on their chests while army helicopters hover above.

Another features a cow sticking its head through a hole in a wall which is covered in loyalist graffiti while a Scottish bandsman sits dejected beside an ostrich. But for this exhibition, the animals are alone on the canvas, standing defiantly against a blank background.

Some observers have seen the cattle as observers of society, others see them as symbols of sickness and plague. Dermot Seymour prefers to



'Consumed unit of silver' by Dermot Seymour.

keep it simple. "People keep asking me why paint cows? But cows have always figured a lot in my work because they are everywhere you look. Look at the population of cows in Ireland.

"I see them everywhere, staring at me, staring back at them. Because something is so obvious, people are often blind to it."

In the show, he describes the animals as Consumed Units - a term he took from the EU term - grain consuming units. The exhibition has received great critical acclaim

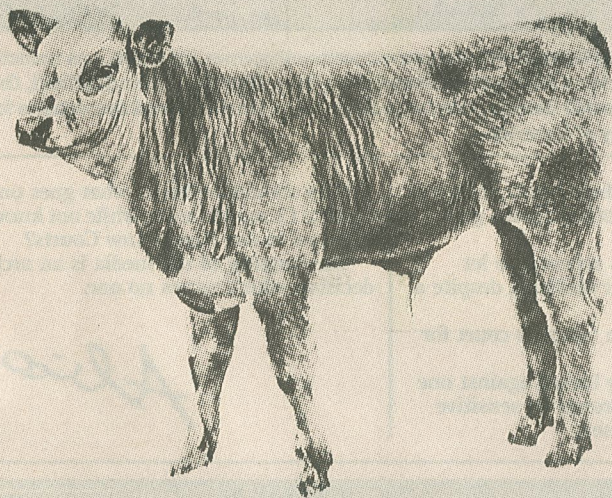
and many of the paintings are already sold, one to Seamus Heaney. The Nobel Prize winner has already written an essay on the artist.

Derry exhibition

The exhibition closes on February 5th and then moves to the Orchard Gallery, Derry for a month.

The Derry exhibition will include some of his previous work from the past five years.

Dermot Seymour's work can now be seen on the website (www.dermotseymour.ie)



'Consumptive Unit 1' by Dermot Seymour.