

The Ticket, Irish Times, Thursday 22nd May 2003

DOG

Kevin Kavanagh Gallery
66 Gt Strand St, Dublin 1 Mon-Sat 11am-5pm
Until May 31 (01-8740064)

There's nothing cute about Dermot Seymour's Dog portraits in his exhibition at the Kevin Kavanagh Gallery. They are all portraits and they are all of dogs, but they avoid the clichés of the genre. Seymour is known for his paintings of animals, usually farm animals, and notably cows. He paints in a style of hard, even harsh realism and his attitude towards his subject matter could be described as empathic but never sentimental. He is from Northern Ireland and initially in his work animals featured as part of larger, more complex compositions. The surreal drama of these works aimed to point out the everyday surrealism of life in Northern Ireland at the time. The hapless livestock, like sacrificial lambs, could be interpreted as symbolising people forced to deal with events beyond their influence or control. Gradually his focus narrowed to the animals themselves in stark images in which cows are presented in isolation against blank grounds. A view of Ireland teetering at the edge of Europe came through. Now dogs, presented with the dignity and concentration of Renaissance subjects. Do the tacks around the edges of the unframed canvases resemble dog collars? Possibly. Do the pooches resemble specific individual humans of your acquaintance? Probably.

Aidan Dunne