

The end is nigh... again

TERROR and the Sublime, which runs at the Crawford Art Gallery in Cork until February 27, takes as its starting point Edmund Burke's influential essay of 1757, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of the Sublime and Beautiful.

Our perception of what is sublime and beautiful today differs somewhat from Burke's, as does our understanding of what constitutes art.

Terror and the Sublime includes much that would no doubt have baffled Burke — indeed, many of today's gallery-goers have difficulty in believing in films, photographs or installations as works of art. The beauty of this exhibition is its insistence on showing work in these media alongside more conventional works in oils on canvas.

The inclusion of work from the past three centuries makes explicit the idea of terror as a universal human concern. The sub-title of this exhibition is Art in an Age of Anxiety, making the case that while other eras and movements have come and gone, the age of anxiety endures. Today, our sense of terror stems more from the prospect of an environmental apocalypse than the threat of divine retribution for our sins, but the idea of the world ending in a bloodbath seems to have been with us forever.

Samuel Forde's The Fall of the Rebel Angels — a painting the artist left unfinished on his death, aged 23, in 1828 — demonstrates how great the terror of God's wrath was in his day. The Fall, as imagined by Forde, is an awful event, and represents what the artist and his contemporaries must have imagined Judgement Day would hold in store for humanity. To Forde, hell was an eternity of suffering.

That dread is echoed in James Arthur O'Connor's A Thunderstorm: The Frightened Wagoner of 1832, which shows a wagon illuminated by a flash of lightning above a forest; the wagoner and his horse are dwarfed among the trees, vulnerable to whatever missiles the heavens might fling at them. It is made more explicit again in Francis Danby's The Deluge, in which human beings and animals are swept away in a flood that may be apocalyptic, or may just be a weather event, as our recent dramas have demonstrated.

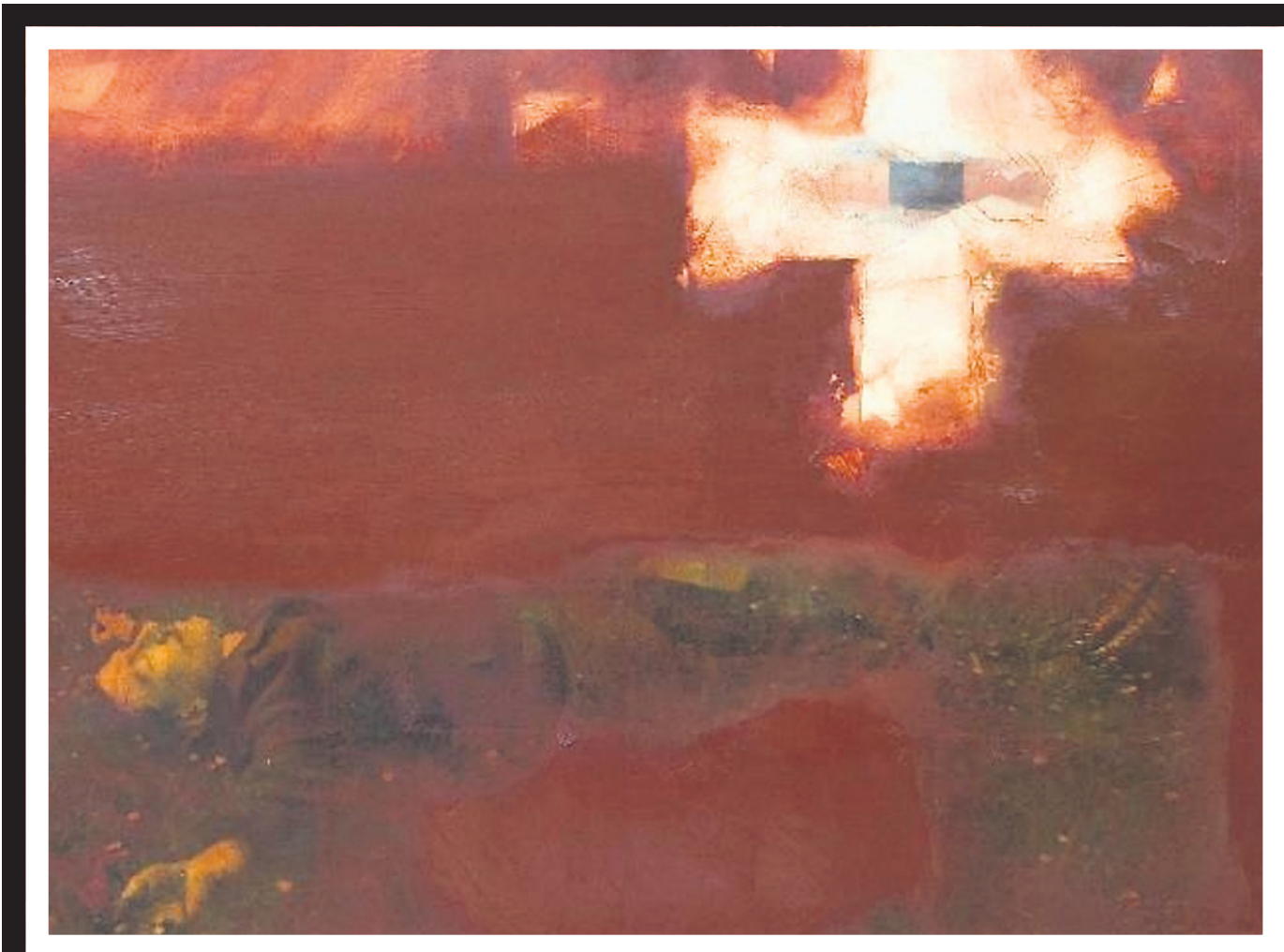
The idea that all is not quite right is conveyed in Oliver Comerford's contemporary painting, I Can See Your House From Here..., in which a blanket of fog rests beneath a mountain, above a scattering of houses in a boggy landscape. At first glance, the image is sublime, but spend a little time in its presence and it is difficult to ignore its sense

The message of the art in Terror and the Sublime is that our collective sense of doom is timeless, says **Marc O'Sullivan**

of deep unease. Hughie O'Donoghue's painting, Flanders and the Narrow Sea, is also a contemporary work, but reflects on one of the terrible conflicts of the 20th century, the Great War. A male figure lies prostrate on his back, presumably dead. A cross burns above him on the right. There is no indication of which side the victim might have been on; his anonymity makes the image all the more harrowing, as if his sacrifice, like that of Christ, is one that should remind us all of our humanity.

The notion of sacrifice is picked up in Jim Sanborn's Critical Assembly, which gathers the components of the atomic bombs that exploded over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945; the components look innocuous in a corner of the gallery, where a sign warns visitors not to trip on the cables on the ground. A nuclear explosion is described in Robert Longo's graphite drawing, Untitled (Zeus), in which the beauty of the mushroom cloud is undermined by our knowledge of the destruction wreaked by its creation.

Much of the modern work is minimalist. Seán Shanahan's painting, Crow, is a large plane of a single colour, that peculiar blue/black of a crow's plumage. But that alone is quite enough to conjure up thoughts of death. Similarly, Gary Coyle's photographic work, Lovely Water, limits a swimmer's view from the water to churning waves and an ominously clouded sky, enough to convey that sense of dread one associates with being out of one's depth. And Mary Fitzgerald's



Hughie O'Donoghue's contemporary work, Flanders and the Narrow Sea, (left), and Samuel Forde's The Fall of the Rebel Angels (below, right): the two works are separated by almost 200 years, but share a sense of dread.



Cecily Brennan's Unstrung (centre, left) conveys a personal terror, while Francis Danby's The Deluge (circa 1840) is perversely relevant today, in this time of unprecedented flooding.

paintings, ...-... (i) and (ii) do not just bear esoteric titles, they depict what at first appear to be foggy landscapes, which might well, on reflection, turn out to be the vision of a person suffering from impending blindness.

The two video works on the third floor are concerned with personal terror. Cecily Brennan's film, Unstrung, depicts her standing in an otherwise empty room and being suddenly, and repeated-

ly, drenched in a black liquid. She flops about on the floor, soiled and helpless as a seabird caught in an oil slick. It is the helplessness that strikes us most. No matter which way she turns, she is vulnerable to attack.

Nigel Rolfe's Dust Breeding also makes use of repetition. The artist faces an unseen antagonist who flings dust in his face. He exhales quickly, to clear the dust from his nostrils and mouth, and

turns his head as if to evade another blow. Then, the dust is flung at him again. Both films personalise the terror of pollution that is such an over-riding human concern today.

Terror and the Sublime brings together works from vastly different traditions to demonstrate how humanity has had the same concerns for centuries. It demonstrates admirably how artists are not quite the aloof figures we of-

ten assume them to be, but are more often fully engaged with their times and more anxious to express their fears and those of their contemporaries that we give them credit for. The exhibition also reveals how even the most innocent vistas may suggest the prospect of destruction. To quote Burke: "How closely allied are terror and sublimity we may judge from the Greek language, which has but one word for 'fear' and 'wonder'."

New darling of the Irish theatre world

CORK writer and actor, Jody O'Neill, has just been awarded the second Pat Murray Bursary, sponsored by Thomas Crosbie Holdings, Cork City Council, and the Everyman Palace Theatre.

O'Neill says the award will make a huge difference to her career. Worth €14,000, the bursary was created in memory of the late theatre designer, who died in 2007, and as a link to a new generation of theatre practitioners. O'Neill will use the bursary for a mentorship with Graham Whybrow, former literary manager of the Royal Court. It will allow her to travel to international theatre festivals and to spend time writing at the Tyrone Guthrie Artists' Centre, in Annaghmakerrig.

O'Neill says the award will help her to develop a practice. "As a freelance artist, you can end up with a haphazard lifestyle, where you don't really have a clear sense of goals or aims or possible outcomes. That's because you're, literally, trying to make work and money where you can. The bursary will allow me to look at where I am and where I want to go. It will be great to see what companies are doing internationally. It can be quite limiting if you only experience work that's being made in your country," she says.

In 2003, O'Neill graduated with distinction from the now defunct bachelor in acting studies at Trinity College. As an actor, she has worked with many companies, including Rough Magic, Pan Pan, Graffiti Theatre Company, Barnstorm Theatre Company, Theatre Makers and Asylum productions, as

Actor/writer Jody O'Neill will use Pat Murray Bursary to hone her craft, says **Colette Sheridan**

well as producing her own work. She has appeared in a number of independent short films and also featured in the RTE series, The Clinic.

As a writer, O'Neill's first play, Lament for Joseph, was produced by Fishamble Theatre Company. It received the Judge's Special Award at the Irish Times Theatre Awards in 2007. Her second play, They Never Froze Walt Disney, was performed at the Cork Midsummer Festival and the Dublin Fringe Festival, and was nominated for the Fishamble New Writing Award in 2008. She is under commission by Asylum Productions and Graffiti Theatre Compa-



<< SHOW BUSINESS: financing is crucial for a freelancer like Jody, so the €14,000 bursary is invaluable in allowing her to develop new work.

ny, and is developing a piece through a New Work Award from the Arts Council, aimed at 18-25 year olds. This piece looks at how online social networking can be re-integrated into live performance. "This is where an actual theatre performance takes place and is supplemented online, where some of the action takes place. It's a good way of getting young people into the theatre," she says.

O'Neill is co-curator of Project Brand New, a platform for new

work at the Project Arts Centre. She is one of six playwrights taking part in the inaugural New Writers' Programme at the Abbey Theatre. Aged 29, O'Neill originally wanted to be a dancer. "I auditioned for a dance school in Britain, but didn't get the funding, which was fortunate in the end. I think I'm better off where I am now. I studied ballet and contemporary dance. When I went to TCD, to study acting, there was a lot of stuff I had to unlearn, such as posture and all the ballet tech-

niques. But... there's a rigour and discipline attached to ballet that always stands to you."

For O'Neill, theatre is in the blood. Her mother, Geraldine, works as a director at Graffiti Theatre. "While my mother didn't try to put me off a career in theatre, she let me know that it's a difficult path," she says.

Three years ago, O'Neill started writing. "I had been out of acting college for a while and was spending a lot of time working in restaurants. It got to the point where I decided not to do that anymore, and to try and find a way of paying my rent without waiting tables. I was on tour with Barnstorm Theatre Company when I wrote Lament for Joseph. From there on, I took writing seriously," she says.

O'Neill describes her writing as "darkly comedic. Sometimes, I read something in a newspaper and it sparks off an idea. Or somebody tells me a story that inspires me. I'm not of the school of thought which says you can only write about what you know," she says. Commentators bemoan the absence of new voices in Irish theatre. "It has been said that there don't seem to be any writers apart from the generation that gave us the likes of Enda Walsh, Mark O'Rowe and Marina Carr. I don't agree with that. There's people like Abbie Spallen, who won the Stuart Parker Award last year, and Elaine Murphy, who wrote Little Gem, which was a huge success. There are new voices emerging," she says.

review

Live Music

Fred

CORK OPERA HOUSE
★★★★☆

FRED's long slog from anonymity to cult status is testimony to a steely determination belied by their amicability. That they have achieved so much without the support of a record company is all the more remarkable. Their latest album, Go God Go, has sold over 10,000 copies, and the use of one of its stand-out tracks, Damn You Hollywood, on a recent episode of über-cool TV series Gossip Girl will surely push that figure further. They've toured Canada and America, again under their own steam, and in doing so have proved that the DIY ethic is perhaps the best one to nurture as the record industry melts down around them.

Fred's gig at Cork Opera House towards the end of their most successful year to date was therefore greatly anticipated. The removal of the venue's seating, a veritable light show on stage, and the presence of a brass and string section all added to the sense of occasion.

And Fred didn't disappoint. Relentless gigging has ensured they are one of the tightest bands on the circuit, with Jamie's guitar and Carolyn's keyboards very much to the fore. Joe is a witty and engaging frontman, and Justin even emerged from behind his drum kit for a cover of Springsteen's Hungry Heart.

What Fred need more than ever now is an epic hit. Their strength as songwriters has been amply demonstrated by such radio-friendly fare as Good One, Skyscraper and new single The Lights, but their next step must surely be to craft a monster.

Marc O'Sullivan