

The Arts

New genres

Reviewed:

Nick Miller: **genre** Butler Gallery, until December 5th (056-7761106)

Nick Miller's *genre* shuffles through several painting genres and unifies them within one specific sense of the term: "Painting that depicts scenes or events from everyday life, usually realistically." The show incorporates portraits, still lifes and landscape - various genres that, for Miller, collectively come under the umbrella of genre painting: scenes from his everyday life. Domesticity, the studio, family, friends, the landscape. And he has perhaps established another genre of his own, in the form of the postcard painting, which have a ubiquitous, almost talismanic presence in his work.

As his exhibitions at the Gallagher Gallery and elsewhere over the last few years have shown, Miller's landscapes are exceptional. They are made out in the landscape - he works from the vantage point of an adapted truck, a mobile studio with an open back, open to both the visible subject and the damp chill of the Irish weather. But plein air painting, even with that twist, is not his invention. Something else sets his work apart: the incredible proliferation of detail, and the



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way it is configured in a material medium. It is as if paint is not so much colour for Miller as substance, providing a concrete equivalent of the visible world.

His sustained, attentive and meditative engagement with the landscape generates works with the visual density of medieval painting, so it's no surprise to see Breughal's *Hunters in the Snow* as one of the postcards propped against the easel in the studio. In a way, the detail is overwhelming, but we can cope; it's just that the paintings demand to be looked at as paintings and not glanced at as images. There is a vivid sense of the insane profusion of nature, the massive, cyclical gen-

erative effort that might envelope the countryside in wet organic greenness, obliterating all traces of the human presence, the power lines, roads, isolated houses.

To Sligo; Wall, lane; and Lake rain are outstanding, but there isn't a below par landscape in the show. The studio still lifes, in which dying flowering plants are arranged on the easel, usually with postcard reproductions, have become something of a Miller staple. It could be the shape of the easel that prompts crucifixion images. Then there are brooding portraits, stubbornly uningratiating works that centre on heads and often leave the bodies curiously ethereal, or structurally disjointed and hence immaterial. Miller probably won't be invited to make flattering portraits of public figures, but his subjects are flattered by being treated as essential and real, individuals involved in a strange, uncertain artistic transaction.