

Nick Miller keeps on truckin' to the Limerick City Gallery of Art.

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For those of us unable to make it to Paris to see Nick Miller's exhibition, *Truckscape: Drawings from a Mobile Studio* at the Centre Culturel Irlandais last year, Limerick City Gallery now offers a chance to view this impressive body of work chronicling the artist's unique relationship with his mobile truck studio.

It was 1997 when Nick Miller decided to act upon a notion he'd had to try painting from a mobile observation platform which could be constantly on the move. He eventually settled on a six-wheel, 13-foot box truck which had previously been used to repair telephone lines. It was to be the beginning of a long and intimate relationship which would facilitate the making of some of Miller's most powerful work to date. His exhibition is a homage to his truck.

Leaving England for Ireland in 1984, it was 1992 before Miller left the Dublin art world behind for the bleak beauty of County Sligo. "The shock of nature is a powerful thing if you've grown up in a city," he explains, "but living in the countryside for 15 years, you realise what nature is – it gets into you." Prior to acquiring his truck, Miller spent his days tying easels to barbed wire fences and developing a tolerance for watching his work being blown off cliffs or splattered by flies and rain. His truck thus provided him with "an extraordinary liberation" by enabling him to paint *en plein air* while remaining protected from the unpredictable elements. "You are in the landscape but you are not – it's a strange combination."

Truckscape is a selection of drawings in Chinese and Indian ink executed between 1998 and 2007. The first work in the accompanying catalogue is "Beehive Head", the very first drawing Miller ever completed in his truck. Most of the other drawings are scenes from around his former home in Kilmactranny of entangled hedges, trees and shrubs from the Sligo landscape. Although they're pared back to a predominantly black and white palette, Miller has an uncanny ability to make these landscapes writhe with an organic life of their own. He credits his ability to respond "to the energy of all that detail" to his practice of Chinese tai chi. It enabled him to open himself to the landscape and let the energy of what he sees enter the painting.

Mostly famed nowadays for his large oil landscapes, it is interesting to hear Miller describe himself primarily as a drawer rather than a painter. He does not consider himself a colourist but rather an artist who views landscape "in a very spatially graphic way". The "linear entrance into distance" that he sees is what pulls the viewer's eye in, encouraging it to lose itself in the detail. A desire to lend the black and white drawings the same intensity as the oil paintings led to the introduction of power tools. The use of wire brushes and grinder pads to pull back light into drawings that had become too dark allowed for accidental things to happen. "Strangely, it's more like nature than the way I can draw it," facilitating exciting "controlled accidents".

Miller has recently sold his countryside home in Kilmactranny and moved with his wife, Noreen, and children to Rosses Point by the sea, on the outskirts of Sligo town. Although he has felt the sea begin to creep into his psyche and make its immense presence known, it has not yet appeared in his work. It will be interesting to see how it does appear in time. For the moment, Miller has his trusted truck parked facing the mythical mound of Ben Bulbin. Up until now he had avoided its presence and majesty, soaked in the weight of Yeats and Irish mythology, in favour of the less glorified aspects of the landscapes of County Sligo. But today, when he opens the studio door of his truck, Nick Miller is looking straight at the mountain.



Truckscape runs at Limerick City Gallery, Perry Square, Limerick from January 17 – February 27 in conjunction with a parallel project at the Rubicon Gallery, 10 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2 from January 19 – February 16.

