

Nick Miller

Rootless

new paintings

22 February - 29 March 2019

Private View

Thursday 21st February, 6.30pm



Culture Ireland
Cultúr Éireann



Flowering and Seeding | 2018 | Oil on linen | 214 x 184 cm

We live our lives inscrutably included within the streaming mutual life of the universe Martin Buber "I and Thou" (1923)

Of Nick Miller's new body of paintings Martin Gayford has written in the exhibition catalogue:

*These large, ambitious paintings have altered the way he works. ...The problems, you could say, became his subject, and the implied message – far from being a reminder of mortality – seems to be about complexity, interdependence and burgeoning vitality. They are among other things, a demonstration in the 21st century that painting – even in this time honoured way, **sur le motif**, as the French say – remains capable of bursting into vigorous, ebullient life.*

A genre of painting that stretches back over the centuries, Still Life might seem tame, sedate, decorative even; and yet in Miller's hands, it is anything but. The artist has turned, repeatedly, to this simple engagement with nature, because it encapsulates nothing less than our own daily struggles with the transience of life, and with death.

By cutting flowers, weeds and branches, and placing them in vessels in his studio Miller sets up a daily encounter with impermanence. It is a race against time. Fruit, flowers, blossom, leaf or branch become subjects for a day. The vases, jars and bottles provide a temporary holding ground for this meeting, while studio interiors - materials, easels, ladders, patterned cloths and other canvases - provide a half-seen backdrop to the moment. What matters in this practiced encounter is the opportunity it offers to pay attention, and forge connection for the briefest time, to a passing moment in the life of the universe. As Miller works to capture and hold the life of a gently wilting plant in all its fragile vibrancy, he offers us the illusion of permanence in paint for these rootless plants, while attempting to find a way to ground his own sense of rootlessness through the act of painting.

This exhibition follows Miller's "Vessels : Nature Morte" shown at Art Space Gallery in 2016 which marked his return to the Still Life genre. Those earlier works emerged after a four year collaborative arts residency at North West Hospice in Sligo, where he began to paint flowers again as a route to engage with patients, often leading to remarkable conversations and portraits. As that project grew, the loss of Miller's own parents mirrored the process in the hospice, and the paintings became a way to connect to his mother during her terminal illness.

In "Rootless", the artist continues to evolve the genre, but has begun working on an increasingly large scale where the encounter with nature is more complex. The singular 'portrait' structure of the earlier paintings was rooted in a strong personal connection. In the new work more complex interactions begin to occur between plants, vessels and the structure of the paintings. They open towards a sense of chaos, as Miller's encounter with and between different plants and vessels tries to find a way to ground. The results are testaments to resilience, fragility and beauty, allowing the unruliness of the world to be momentarily stilled, creating a pause to the inevitability of decay.

Alongside Still Lives, Miller is known for his intense portraits, and various situational painting projects, such as the groundbreaking "Truckscapes", landscapes made over 15 years from the back of a truck converted into a mobile studio. The artist's particular approach to observational painting began to evolve in the late 1980s, responding to the writings of the influential existential Jewish Philosopher, Martin Buber. In Buber's seminal work "I and Thou", Miller found a useful creative and personal framework for understanding how he might engage the world. Over subsequent decades he evolved a way of working with people, landscape and still life that relies on a practiced attention given to the lived encounter. The paintings are, for the artist, just the material remains of this process. For the viewers they are the evidence of his highly charged, extraordinarily engaged meetings with his subjects.

Nick Miller was born in London in 1962. Graduating in Development Studies from the University of East Anglia, he moved to Ireland in 1984, working first in Co Clare, then in Dublin. Since 1992, he has been largely based in Co Sligo. Miller pursues different genres and modes of working that allow direct engagement with subjects: portraits, landscape or object. He was elected as a member of Aosdána in 2001 in recognition of his contribution to Arts in Ireland. He is the recipient of the inaugural 2014 Hennessy Portrait Award at the National Gallery of Ireland. Miller has exhibited widely including solo shows at The Irish Museum of Modern Art, the RHA, the New York Studio School, Centre Culturel Irlandais, Paris. In 2017 He was guest curator of the RDS Visual Art Awards exhibition.

His work is held in many private, Institutional and public collections Nationally and internationally including The National Gallery of Ireland; Irish Museum of Modern Art; Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane; The Arts Council (Ireland); The Niland Collection, The European Investment Bank, Luxembourg.

The Exhibition is accompanied by **ROOTLESS | new paintings**, a 48 Page Hard back publication with an essay by **Martin Gayford**. It is available from the gallery and to view online at www.artspacegallery.co.uk

