

Confessions of a strange mind

VISUAL ARTS

Confession to God, But Not Mine:
Patrick Doherty

Venn Gallery

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In his second show at Venn Gallery, local painter Patrick Doherty again confronts viewers with a whole lot of wickedness.

In *Confessions to God But Not Mine*, good and evil are thrown together, inverted and meshed into some kind of shambolic array. The works are thematically consistent with Doherty's last show in 2012, if leaning more in the direction of religious concerns and less about local issues.

Like skin hung out to dry, big canvases dangle from the ceiling. Their backs become as much a point of interest as their fronts, with suggestive details peeking through. Stepping into the rectangle of such paintings is momentarily disorientating as dizzying sequences spin around.

It is like becoming a player in the twisted scenarios portrayed. Your role is relative to whether you relate more with deities, devils, mutant chimeras, headless bodies, monsters or little people.

From this perspective it becomes apparent that the



Fickle power: Patrick Doherty's works, such as *The Booboisie Bavardage*, have a fantastical feel about them.

compositions portray the story of humanity and all its madness. The narratives of these large canvases and smaller paintings on boards trade heavily on religious, mythological, cultural and historical symbolism.

It is a melting pot with strange regimes of power, sexuality and oppression thrown into the mix. In the painting *Church (Preach)*, St Sebastian writhes on a hillside pierced with arrows while further up Sisyphus edges his boulder along.

A certain degree of flippancy

and humour also characterise the compositions, supported by the proposition that the titles are taken from Peter Bowler's book *The Completely Superior Person's Book of Words*, with an example of a painting title being *The Booboisie Bavardage*.

Nevertheless, the density of references and the layering of ancient and contemporary symbols points to a more careful consideration, arrangement and selection of content. They might be stylistically brash and raw but they are not weak and if there is an attitude of flippancy

it is strategically wielded.

The figure of the superior person is repeatedly toyed with, not only in the so-called superior language of the titles. Figures of power, nobility or deities feature prominently and castles abound.

Yet power in these scenarios is especially fickle and tragedy is never far from striking. If anyone triumphs, it would have to be the devil. Pandora's box has been opened and apocalypse is afoot. A tropical island of refuge, pictured in *Ataraxia* 2014, is a false paradise

deceptively beamed with a golden ray of light from the heavens. The island is about to be hit by a Hokusai-like wave and the four horses of the apocalypse.

Harlequin colours and patterns echo throughout the works, giving them a fantastical and carnivalesque ambiance. This recalls the darker aspects of carnival as described by philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin.

For Bakhtin, the comic and the serious were conjoined in the ritual and excess of medieval carnival time. Grotesquery ruled in a carnival life that operated according to the logic of the inside-out. The bodies painted by Doherty are grotesque, often abused and suffering, living and dying at the extreme end of carnival shenanigans.

These paintings appear as expulsions of a tortured mind in dire need of confession. They are at once prosaic and profound.

They are also the kind of paintings worth owning not only from an investment point of view but because you could spend a lot of time with them, staring into them and wondering about their various possible stories and meanings.

■ *Confession to God, But Not Mine* runs until April 4.