

Michael Moore 'New Departures'

Millennium Court Arts Centre, Portadown. 5th February 2009 – 21st March 2009

Michael Moore's 'New Departures' could be cut from the cloth of a Milano catwalk, a sublime lesson in how to exhibit. It was slick, atmospheric and intimate; every plinth, shelf, light, curtain and hue of paint worked together in elevating Moore's work.

On entering Gallery 2 of the Millennium Court I was immediately wowed by a simple wall mounted piece. It was slender and completely engaging, wearing a softly shimmering coat of pewter; I thought 'Yes!' happy that I was in the throes of seeing a new departure for Moore's ceramics. Walking on through the main space I was met by a succession of nineteen pieces, each similar to the next and best described as being typical Michael Moore, each domestically scaled with a dry white(ish) 'ceramic' surface, curving walls and tops and all sitting on their flat bottoms, waiting to be admired.

The individual works in this collection look as though they've had a dysphoric upbringing. It's something about the way they look, their subtle but important variances in finish. A few have, obviously, been revisited and reworked either too soon or too late, throwing up the question of an uncomfortable relationship between maker and process, and with it concern about their authenticity. If one is going to expose and celebrate the nature of pure raw 'ceramic' then for goodness sake do it properly. We, the audience, should not be privy to joints where slabs of clay had began the process of separation, where bodies carry evidential repairs and where the uneven, and I would assume, unintentional variant finishes flaunt sponge marks, over sanded surfaces and textile indentations created whilst rolling slabs of clay. There were plenty of intended qualities that worked but unfortunately many of these were married to areas that simply did not, presenting an unprofessional handle on technique and a disregard for appropriate finishing. I came away craving the touch of at least one piece by Martin Smith, if only to get a 'fix' of how raw ceramic surface should be extolled.

Consciously, I did not engage with any of the literature that accompanied this exhibition until after writing my review. Having read through the catalogue since I have no doubt that it will serve to inform Joe public's appreciation of this 'new departure' and what Moore is trying to achieve. However, arguably, from my perspective this work becomes less relevant when distanced from the catalogue and the general life-support of the slick, atmospheric and intimate exhibit space, a fate that could have been avoided through a simple respect for process and quality of finish.

Stephen Farnan

