

Tomorrow Dublin Fringe engages with the city

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# The Arts

## Glorious failures in Kilkenny



Was curator Mike Fitzpatrick tempting fate with the title 'Failure at the Kilkenny Arts Festival'? Gladly not, writes Aidan Dunne

**T**empting fate, curator Mike Fitzpatrick bravely if riskily marshalled an array of artists under the banner of *Failure at the Kilkenny Arts Festival*. Creating something entails the risk of failure, he has explained, and many of the artists and works deal with failure on several levels, from Damien Hirst's video explanation of the best way to shoot yourself to Bas Jan Ader's melancholy films of slapstick disaster, all inescapably associated now with his most famous, supposed disaster - his disappearance at sea in 1975 on a foolhardy attempt at a transatlantic voyage.

Fitzpatrick noted that a Google search for the word 'failure' comes up first with the name George W. Bush, and it is hard to see Roman Sigler's extraordinary video of a radio-controlled model helicopter battering itself to smithereens in a dusty concrete enclosure without thinking of the Bush administration's misconceived and mismanaged war in Iraq. The work considerably predates the invasion, but it

new version of Tina O'Connell's bituminous sculpture in slow-motion, there are also notable new projects, including Vito Acconci's contribution. His audio notes of potential commissions that never got off the starting blocks are very eloquent and involving. Martin Healy's *Genesis 28:12* evidences his fascination with the dark mythology of popular culture. He puts the myth that satanic messages are encoded in Led Zeppelin's *Stairway to Heaven* to the test.

Caroline McCarthy's brash installation *Endeavor (1944)* is certainly ingenious but ultimately gets lost in its own labyrinthine logic. An acerbic note of socio-political commentary is evident in the work of Tom Fitzgerald and Nevan Lahart. The former reprises some of his work critical of big business and the Celtic Tiger. Lahart sets his sights on property development and the commodification of cultural identity. His sculpture of "an Irish balcony" - that is, an essentially pretentious non-balcony - speaks volumes about the current building boom.

Nevan Lahart's sculpture of 'an Irish balcony' speaks volumes about the current building boom

is uncannily well-suited as a metaphor. If this all sounds a bit grim, it is.

And it gets worse. Joe Duggan's large-scale staged photographs of family life could be read as a bleak exploration of the hollowness at the heart of idealised pictures of contented domesticity, traversing the ideal of the affluent, nuclear family.

Steve Reinke's hijacking of a National Geographic ethnographic video, so that it becomes a chronicle of disillusionment and failure, is compelling and dark. There are much lighter notes, though, including fairly humorous pieces by Julie Henry and Alex Bag.

If much of *Failure* features reruns, including Gerard Byrne's tweaked version of an oblique film installation, *A Crime Dramatically Reconstructed, Again*, and a

vides intricate, toy-like models of her subjects, but also, working from DNA samples, traces their ancestry back to the particular mitochondrial Eve of each. Such pinpointing is possible because of the several population bottlenecks the early human population narrowly survived. Silverthorne also uses electrical current as a symbol of the continuity of genetic lineage, with phosphorescent cables and fittings coiling their way through the Butler's rooms with an air of playful exuberance, culminating in a laboratory bench that nods towards Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and other narratives about the generation of life, though without the darker overtones. It's a show rich in incidental detail that rewards careful attention.

The title is unwieldy, but the *Ceramics*



Step right up: top to bottom and left to right, bitumen dripping onto a white carpet at Kilkenny Castle by Tina O'Connell, Family Man by Joe Duggan, Endeavor by Caroline McCarthy, a still from a film by Bas Jan Ader, Genesis 28:12 by Martin Healy, and Gladia Daters by Alex Bag. Main photograph: Cyril Byrne



*Ireland International Festival Exhibition*, together with *Emerging Ceramics* at the National Craft Gallery, is a big hit. The two shows, located in adjoining wings of the gallery, juxtapose established international ceramists with emerging talents from Ireland and Wales (the latter marking the start of a long-term collaborative project). The confidence and polish of the veterans is noticeable, but the younger artists acquit themselves well. Among the former, John French, who had a substantial show recently in Kenny's Gallery in Galway, shows a dazzling array of uniformly-sized, brightly-patterned bowls. Very reasonably priced, they sold like hot cakes, as did the exceptionally graceful porcelain pieces by Sasha Wardell.

AN IMPECCABLE SENSE of form is also evident in the more robust, earthy, sculptural idiom employed by Eric Astoul and



ent, whereby you could count on finding substantial examples of the work of a well-known sculptor in the stunning setting of Kells Priory. Barry Flanagan, for example, featured one year, and his harems picked very much at home in various arenas of the landscape. The show is now organised in partnership with the Strata brida Development Group of Wales

it is probably the best in the show in every respect. A ribbed form compounded of two images - a silenced bell and a cloister - it looks terrific in its setting, stately and proud and alive. Also impressive are Michael Warren's welded steel *Reiquary*, with its strong sense of inner contained space set against the vast expanse of the Kells enclosure, and Tom Fitzro-

and windows: the points of demarcation and transition between inner and outer. Now she has taken the idea of hearth and home in pieces that trace the evolution of the domestic fire and fireplace, from the ancient *Vulach Fia* to the microwave. Woodblock printing is at the core of her work, though she takes it in unorthodox directions, mostly using not printed impressions but the wood itself, which is carved, scorched and painted (and textured with hair) to produce boldly stated compositions of great energy and intensity. She has a real instinct for a simplified, almost ideogrammatic visual language, and the stark physicality of the pieces seems to reflect the basic issue of survival underlying her theme. There is a huge volume of group shows and events this year, surely more than ever, which draw on reservoirs of talent and energy from a wide surrounding