

Installations the prominent feature

EVA '91 at Limerick City Gallery

By Brian Fallon

EVA (which stands for "exhibition of visual art") is an odd show in the sense that it is not predictable. That can be a virtue or a fault, or neither; but certainly, most Dublin group shows are all too predictable. You might not recommend EVA to a foreigner as a broad cross-section of contemporary Irish art, since it is rarely representative in that sense, but it is generally an exhibition with a distinct personality.

This year the organisers asked a well-known Italian curator, Germano Celant, to make the choice. The result is very much "his" exhibition, in the sense that a well-known theatre producer creates "his" Beckett, or whoever the relevant playwright may be. Germano Celant took a careful look at the space available, looked at the entries, and made his choice accordingly; he has, in a sense, "produced" the exhibition, with a virtuosity born of flair and much experience.

The day apparently is past or passing when a group show is simply the sum of the better entries submitted; it is now a unity like a stage set. As you might expect, installation pieces and the like feature very prominently, including one of Dorothy Cross's large imaginative installations on her favourite theme of fish. Michael Donaghy's "New Tower for Babel" poses a large, chalice-like shape in iron against an angled wall background, and very effectively.

I liked Martin Folan's witty, well-made large letters in painted wood spelling out "Northern Ireland" and "John F. Kennedy". Michael Hegarty shows two big, multi-angled paintings (one in four

pieces) which suggest a look back at '60s Hard Edge abstraction, but also have something of the nervous rhythms of jazz. Julie Kelleher's two exhibits, in perspex and cloth painted over, have a kind of free-wheeling lyricism and some very lively colour.

Of the "straight" paintings, Gwen O'Dowd has one of her large, uncompromising landscape pieces — at least I presume it to be that, though the title is "Bride's Veil" — and William Kelly's two pictures have an enigmatic, almost surreal quality. But the subtlest of the paintings, I thought, were two canvases by Michael Minnis, in delicately nuanced shades of grey moving into black and white, which hang side by side and complement each other well.

All this, by the way, is housed in the Limerick City Gallery of Art — as usual. Upstairs, there is a show of monoprints by David Lilburn — biggish, sketchy, with a multiplicity of lines, but not avoiding colour. The quality of the drawing is nervous and direct, but also witty and with a certain quality, at once lyrical and zany, which faintly reminded me of early Chagall. At the risk of sounding heretical, I admit that I enjoyed it more than I did a good many of the items downstairs.

"Young EVA" is housed in the Belltable hard by and is the result of a scheme by which three artists, Vivienne Dick, Martin Folan and Catherine Mulvihill, worked with a number of school pupils over a period of months, in a kind of informal collaboration. The result is hardly heavy-weight, but it is good fun in a serious sense — colourful, inventive and uninhibited. Arranged in the limited space of the Belltable, it is packed tight but makes a colourful, eventful "environment" from which it is difficult to single individual items out. And if there is a certain flavour of Arts Ball decor about it, that

is preferable to the glumly portentous kind of installation art which bombards us every day.

Oh, I almost forgot . . . Signor Celant gave a £1,000 award to a rather faded 18th-century landscape by Robert Carver, which usually hangs upstairs in the gallery. I gather this will go towards restoring the picture, though I am not altogether sure that it merits restoration. His reasoning seems to be that history is very important in Ireland, and that a gesture to the past is also one to the present. The rest of the prize money is divided up between the various artists chosen for exhibition.