

MARY MARY

The stairs that lead to Lorna Macintyre's solo exhibition at Mary Mary are brass-bashed, chipped and disheveled. They remind me of a photograph of Walt Whitman and his well-worn pock-marked features, whose poetic line forms half of Macintyre's exhibition title 'All Truths Wait In All Things'. In the picture, Whitman the poet stares blankly out at the viewer in dead, sanguine silence, in contrast to this countenance my head tremolos with Whitman's and now Macintyre's precursory lines. Annoying as they are adroit, they seem to foreshadow both the exhibition and the experience of ascending through the gallery building itself, which currently lies under the uncertainty of a planning decision to demolish the premises to make way for a new luxury hotel.

The exhibition starts with a dreamlike photoscape of beach dunes extending into a far off distance, the trope of a cinematic opening scene, which floats surreally in a sea of dried abstract material residue from the developing vats. Emerging from behind the curtain of this alchemical process, Macintyre's reference to Whitman becomes more apparent. Ideas begin to emerge from the other works in the exhibition, notions of material and immaterial, or the soul verses the corporal, the inherent truth of a physical material verses its illusion as image.

Whitman of course was no stranger to these ideas in his poetry. He was well versed in the precarious balance between realist and transcendental traditions, a line now delicately retraced in the fleeting apparitions that burn in and through Macintyre's spasmodic groupings of photographic works. This is most evident in the grouping 'Night Works' a series of photograms produced by folding fabric and exposing it directly onto photosensitive paper. The effect is a series of floating ethereal masses drifting between the photographic allusion to the immaterial and the indexical presence of the artists hand, which although absent from the photo itself is implied through the physical manipulation of the crumpled fabric.

However, the real strength of Macintyre's exhibition comes through the artistic restraint of the work, presented in curated clusters around the second room of the gallery. These works explore the material, physical and animal world in groupings of logical and illogical couplings, in a pared back, almost monosyllabic visual language. There is real beauty to the restrained austerity of the vocabulary, a challenge to the dance we are used to playing out in the gallery space. Macintyre's images are cinematic but they don't move, they are printed well but simply, the glass panes framing the photographic works remain just that, rather than becoming a sculptural imposition.

And yet they sit uncomfortably as photographs too. As I wander amongst the images of ruins, sea shores, cabbage fields and triple exposed living rooms, I become distinctly aware that I 'want' more. Specifically, I want the cat that hovers curvaceously still in a sunny concrete underpass (in 'Little Cat' 2009/14) to move, pausing for a second in the heat, hair flexing, red, tabby and mottled before moving off out of shot. I need the man in his walking trousers and rucksack (in 'Neil' 2008/14) to continue his trajectory and slip off into the undergrowth before another shot captures him turning, framing his eyes between an outstretched palm frond. But more than cinematic movement I want the semblance of a cohesive narrative and/or the tactility presented by the definite sculptural form.

The discursive space that this minimalist reduction leaves, through its unwillingness to pander to the viewer's want for a more saturated consumable media, creates an anxious, reflexive awareness of the viewer's own relation to these works and to art in general. We are used to being played to in the gallery, having our intellect pricked but not really challenged, bemused rather than enthused, our presuppositions affirmed rather than confronted.

Arguably the exhibition is minimalist language at its best. It inspires us without resort to decoration or 'style', or the creation of simple pleasing consumable forms. What we get instead is a cluster of knowingly restrained half-articulated 'things', whose status, material and meaning is genuinely up for discussion. 'Material Languages, or All Truths Wait In All Things' is ultimately a command to think abstractly, a provocation that not only thematically holds Macintyre's work together but also provides the nuanced brilliance of the exhibition as a whole