

Sisyphus Rising - A review of the Underground Exhibition at Basic Space Dublin By Francis Wasser

Full Moon. A friend who works on a psychiatric ward in Dublin told me recently that on the occasion of a full Moon, double the amount of staff are employed to work the ward. Such knowing can only be accentuated within the context of an unfamiliar setting. A warehouse full of smoke, light casting uncertainty, silhouettes of groups standing around, hyper stillness and objects. The vocabulary of Myth made 'thing'. From the get go, Underground at Basic Space Dublin shifts any predetermined notions the viewer may bring to an exhibition of work. The Nine Artists involved in this show set the task of creating a site specific piece that engages directly with the underground. The 'unexpected' invigorates the dynamic fabric of this show. Tom David Watt's 'lumps' are positioned around the

warehouse in a seemingly unrelated array. As outlined in the accompanying programme (an aptly produced one by designer Conor Whelan) the sculptures 'aim to catch the viewer unaware and give them a physical experience rather than a visual one.' Either side of the biggest lump are signs stating 'DO NOT TOUCH' and although these alarming signs announce the work needlessly and distract to some extent, they are totally necessary. they declare 'Watch out there is something here'. Andreas Kindler Von Knobloch has utilised a pre-existing hole in the ground at the centre of the space. Blinding light shoots up from beneath the surface that would turn the brightness of the full moon green with jealousy and indeed the vision of a viewer that has looked directly at it. The moment of moving on from one piece to the

next is at times determined solely by that of disorientation. The pace of moving around is cautiously gradual. What could possibly be next? John Ryan has strategically adopted the vocabulary of scale associated with male abstract expressionists such as Jackson Pollock and 'emasculated' the masculine associations with digging and labour commonly associated with excavation. Holes of various colours alongside a heap of empty bottles and mud activate the viewer to re assess a preconceived notion of the art object. Again, Ryan's work is wholly unexpected and exceptionally executed. The entrails of his labour and actions are immediately accessible and leave room for further internal dialogues. There is something uniquely painterly about this piece in an environment that

would seem not to facilitate such characteristics. In a brief conversation with Greg Howie (exhibiting artist and co-founder of Basic Space, Dublin) before the opening of the exhibition, Howie cited Albert Camus's 'The myth of Sisyphus'. Howie states in the accompanying programme that he is interested in 'work and labour and how this can give a piece of art value'. This begs the question, might Sisyphus of ceased his never ending up hill struggle if he was suddenly provided with a snapshot of his work so far or if his struggle was to be rewarded within a system of value? The likely hood is that such value would never suffice. Sisyphus would keep going. Underground as an exhibition is nothing short of a triumph for all involved, particularly the founders of Basic Space, but it should serve as a benchmark and as a catalyst for further critically engaged production of work by young Irish artists nationally. The bar has been raised.

