

Cúram

STEPHEN RENNICKS

Stephen Rennicks is an artist and a qualified Carer and Personal Assistant, whose back catalogue includes several major environmental and conservation projects, including *Knoxpark Forever* and *Future Greenway*. The latter is an ongoing project supported by an exceptional photographic archive, which recounts the history of a defunct rail passage in stark, evocative and beautiful imagery.

In his current daily work, Stephen travels to his clients who are located across rural County Sligo. His work for this exhibition is entitled

“Nothing Wild on Your Travels? / On the Way to Work”

“The main title of the project in fact came from one of my clients, who has since died - I noticed that he would almost always ask me the question ‘Nothing wild on your travels?’ when I would arrive each day...

He noted that “People craved local reports from the everyday the stages of nature outside, or had it rained in Ballymote, etc.”

A method of combining this arts in health project with his work routine needed to be devised:

“I initially chose to focus on clients who are largely house-bound. I decided to use photography as I often had to work quickly, on the way to work or between visits”.

When we met in between client visits, Stephen brought along the eight postcards which he has developed from his large portraits. These postcards will be handed out at the exhibition. They will also become a tangible gift to bring back to his clients who are unable to access the gallery due to mobility issues.

“The people I work with would all have free public travel passes but in the main cannot avail of them fully or at all...”

The postcards are diverse and beautiful in the images they have captured - some raw and poignant, others dark, contemporary, dramatic. Still others are luminous and contemplative.

“As I explained the project to my clients and what I was interested in capturing for my own art, my clients began to suggest places that I might visit nearby. At least half of my final selections I would therefore see as collaborative, as I would not have found these locations without their local knowledge”.

Stephen’s photographs include abandoned farm machinery and implements, derelict houses crumbling slowly in the face of the elements and the passage of time, winter trees, icy black winter weather and old narrow-gauge rail tracks that beribboned the west and north-west of Ireland, connecting villages, towns and provinces.

“I wanted to show aspects of the everyday, reflect the depopulated and mostly rural landscape I normally work in, and also try to express how my job has made me feel about my own mortality...”

The artist feels that as the only one walking this particular railway track, he represents several facets of the word ‘carer’ - both in his occupation of qualified carer to those in need, and in his dedicated care of the abandoned spaces in our rural landscape.

“I feel like I’m bearing witness in landscapes where there’s not a car or person to be seen, bearing witness to what once was...”

News from Field and Hedgerow

Stephen focuses upon fine details of the de-populated landscape, the weather and the seasons that surround him on each journey, capturing with great immediacy the story of each unfolding moment. These images he is able to recount to the person he visits,

bringing them up to date with what the landscape is saying on that particular day or week. His clients respond and chat to him, but:

"...there are of course some things I can't talk about or reveal due to client confidentiality. I decided this need not be a limitation of the project but a determining factor, as it reflects the reality of the job".

In telling his clients the 'News from Field and Hedgerow' the artist allows his clients to identify each feature from the memory bank of a lifetime dwelling within these boundaries;

"It is gratifying to see them freely travelling with me in their mind's eye...."

The fact that the Greenways will be created by nature even if local enterprises never get around to developing them is a strong thread in Stephen's thoughts and work - nature is, as he says *"having a great time"* in those abandoned places - yet even in handing them over to the great natural forces, he would like to honour the human endeavour and labour represented by its detritus among the bracken and brambles and ivy and tall grasses.

He encounters the phenomenon of those who are native to a mountain or hill never climbing it for leisure - the associations with farming and bleak weather conditions for working in being too strong to enable them to look upon it as joyful - yet simultaneously possessed of a deep love of the landscape close to them, familiar backdrop to the days of their lives. He experiences the freedom of the artist to allow people re-discover their own locality captured by his lens.

Maura Gilligan,

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