

NATURE MORT/PEINTRE MORT

Daryl Austin

New sculptures

Richard Arnold

Greenaway Art Gallery

Until October 22

Reviewed by Stephanie Radok

Trompe l'oeil, to deceive the eye, is the mode that Daryl Austin enjoys creating in his paintings. Trompe l'oeil was part of the culture of the Greek and Roman empires, where horses are said to have neighed at a mural of horses they recognised. Is it real? Is it a painted curtain or a painted bowl of fruit? Will birds come to eat these grapes or not?

Austin's work often refers to the accoutrements of his own studio by showing the easel and the tools of trade including his "painting fetish": a fox skin quiver for his brushes. Here, several works include milk thistles, clearly torn up from their places by the side of the road, thus representing a suburban everyday sight. Note that the easel on which they rest has a row of nails hammered into the top of it like the nails hammered into the fetish figure from the Congo which Austin also paints. Each nail represents a signature, a promise, a curse blocked or bestowed. In two smaller works of the Congo figure, Austin even shows impatience with his usual even-tempered and quiet application of paint and breaks into visible brushwork. In a few other places, there are signs that Austin is leaning into thoughts of abstraction.

A series of small pencil, charcoal and ink works on vellum suggest an investigation of history. Austin draws either his own or some found photographs as well as locks of hair held down by drawn sticky tape. Here the relationships in the images are replayed in the knots made by the hair in a most evocative way. The hair of brothers and sisters curve together as their genetic and family inheritance curl within them and their lives. Some people may have seen Maria Kontis' work, also pencil reproductions of family photos, where the hand-drawn mark emphasises the fragility of the movement of time held still by a photograph. To my eyes, the artist's signature takes on an unnecessary prominence in these works. It cheats the sense of reverie they induce and could as well be on the back of the works.

Richard Arnold has been busy with steel making repeat units – either U or diamond shaped and putting them into various configurations. There are wiry cubes forming memory structures, and groups of energetic shiny shapes piled and twisted onto and off the wall. He has had some of the works powder-coated but I think raw looks better. There are definite science references in this work – coronal mass mitosis takes short lengths of steel tubes capped with plastic to make a massive wall doodle that is quite arresting; ganglionic geometry and synaptic geometry look like playing and proliferating staples. ■