



The Thelma Hulbert Gallery

Elmfield House,
Dowell Street, Honiton
Devon EX14 1LX
Tel: 01404 45006

19 May – 23 June 2001

Tuesday – Friday 10am–4pm
Saturday 10am–2pm

Admission free



Drawings and larger works by Paul Gough

BACK TO THE FRONT

After it rains on the wide open fields of the Somme you can smell the rust in the soil; during each ploughing hundreds of artillery shells are drawn to the surface – an annual ritual known as the ‘iron harvest’. In 1998, eighty years after the Armistice, some 250,000 kilos of grenades, shells and mines were retrieved from the old Western Front around Ypres. Safely detonated by the Belgian military the explosions punctuate the placid landscape around this tragic city.

Memory of the Great War, 1914 – 1918, is deeply etched in the landscape; trench lines and craters are still clearly visible in the woods and forests of the French and Belgian countryside. But, to the pilgrims drawn to these silent landscapes it is not only the sites which attract, but their associations, for this was, and still is, a landscape of the imagination. Paul Gough has been drawn to this terrain many times and most of the images in this show are reflections on the funerary landscape of the Somme and Flanders; a place where the dead occupy a lot of space.

These are not, though, pictures of abject dependency. As the Official War Artist

Paul Nash discovered in 1916 there were moments of extraordinary beauty in the midst of such desolation – birdsong and wild flowers were everywhere, in the Spring shattered trees sprouted with new life. ‘Ridiculous mad incongruity’ wrote Nash in utter astonishment. Such dissonances are the trademarks of Gough’s work: icons of death co-exist with the images of peace, we witness a landscape of rejuvenation as well as one of remembrance.

Amongst the images in this show there are many other references: some are drawn from the aftermath of the Gulf War – bleak deserts and oily skies – and from the medieval allegories of Italo Calvino whose ‘Cloven Knight’ and ‘Baron in the Trees’ are key texts in Gough’s work. In this show we can see a progression from the testosterone-depleted warriors of the mid-1990s to the more recent emptied landscapes littered with trenchlines, modern earthworks and obelisks. To my eye, the abiding sensibility is one of loss and pathos articulated with a practiced hand in this absorbing suite of drawings and large works.

P.Burbage