

**Darran McGlynn, Works 2011 - 2015, by Gregory McCartney.**

'There is only ever today' seems an almost wilfully inaccurate statement given the past is all about us and in Ireland generally and in Northern Ireland particularly 'history' is everywhere. But the old aphorism that history is always written in the present is pretty accurate. McGlynn's *Buddha* chilling with headphones on, perhaps listening to something ambient and transcendental signifies a worldliness/other-worldliness that the great religious figures are reputed to have had. It has also the potential of horrifying the believers whose interpretation stops at what was said or written a long time ago. There is of course a darker interpretation of the work in that it comments on the Western appropriation of an Eastern Religion as almost a lifestyle choice. Zizek mentions imaginary cartographies placed upon landscapes of varying sorts by (generally) western consumer led philosophies. The appropriation of the Buddha into alternative lifestyles is one such cartography – you can even buy Buddhas in TK Maxx! – and it fits into a pattern of taking the edge off (usually) Eastern philosophies to fit into a picture of an exotic 'serene positivity' that can (literally) be sold to the young and the hip. If there is one positive to come from the attempted genocide of the Rohingya people in Myanmar it is that it has created a debate into the nature of contemporary Buddhism and taken it (slightly) out of the lifestyle sphere of Yoga and Ti Chi critiquing it in the way that (sometimes) Christianity and (often) Islam is.

What I enjoy about McGlynn's work is its dark playfulness. That annoying Warner Bros. bird seems to have finally got its comeuppance in *Tweety* where we see its skull on a shelf. I can imagine the delight of Sylvester. Post-war Warner Bros. (and other) cartoons were essentially feasts of mindless violence that emphasised how it is in general in the natural world: dogs hated cats, cats hated mice etc, and very probably would not be made now. If so Tom and Jerry, Tweety and Sylvester would be however illogical friends as conglomerates further turn tooth and claw into something sugary sweet and easily consumed. The skull serves as a testament to the anthropomorphism of our environment to make it human and buyable/sellable which clouds over the indifferent nature of the real world. It's easy to understand how we fail to cope when catastrophe reminds us of the coldness and indifference of our eco-system.

There's an obsession with borders that runs through much of McGlynn's work. Not necessarily those of countries, more of personal and societal nature, though living in Ireland, issues of border are never far away. We are 'packaged' as people within blocks of data, processed by our leisure habits and put on lists according to our lifestyle and ability to pay. *Sees the Day, Goes Home* is again a playful mocking of our self-delusions of control. *Bound* does what it says on the tin. Bound by exactly what it leaves somewhat ironically open. McGlynn has always had a way with words. His *Derry is the new London* t-shirt is still

one of my favourite bits of subversive branding during the 2013 Derry-Londonderry UK City of Culture Year.

McGlynn's work is notable in its use of humour to explore our relations with our surrounds. How we create our own little kingdoms. The blocks of life and how we survive (or don't) within them. In *Untitled (Lego)* we literally see these blocks in a carpark of a chateau mocking its pretensions and somehow as modern internet parlance would have it, 'owning it'. The artist is aware of the ridiculous nature of our contemporary society but doesn't take the easy way out and mock those (i.e. most of us) that have little real choice in how we interact with the powers that be. Instead he gently yet somehow quite savagely points out the flaws in a consumerism that mutates and changes even our concepts of society and nature.