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MARCIN LEWANDOWSKI

Kevin Mooney: Fragments of San Borodon

On a wooden post bristling with nails, a roughly modelled clay head is stuck through with twigs. Nearby, the scorched and tattered remnants of an unfamiliar flag are tacked to the wall. Kevin Mooney's exhibition reverse-engineers a lost visual culture, imagining the artefacts that might have resulted from Irish immigration to the Caribbean during the 17th and 18th centuries. Mooney's work mines an uncomfortable episode when the Irish were colonisers rather than the colonised, raising provocative questions about encounters between emigrant and native cultures. In this show he pairs his paintings with objects that hint at an obscure, perhaps dark, purpose. Concocting his own mutant folklore, Mooney splices recognisably Irish motifs — snake, donkey and tricolour — with devices associated with ritual imagery or tribal fetishes. Madonna appears as a white hood or veil, pierced with nails through the eyes. Mooney's canvases are finished in a thick, glutinous varnish that glistens unpleasantly, as if still wet, disrupting any reading of them as archaic finds. This is a darkly witty conjuring of a lost Irish art history in a painterly language as inventive as it is distinctive.

Sarah Kelleher

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