ARTS REVIEW
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CLIFFORD RAINEY
The Piccadilly Gallery

Born in Northern Ireland Rainey carries forever within himself the seeds of Celtic mythology and legend, whether he be executing a monumental sculptural commission in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, or an etched glass wall at the Lime Street Station, Liverpool. Symbols which are part of the collective unconscious can be applicable equally to the Irish as to the North American Indian. A spiral connection the guts to the brain, the seat of feeling to the seat of thought, is present in a drawing of a naked man inverted within the outline of a map of Ireland (which he call ‘Dog Island’ because of its shape) as well as in both a drawing and a copper sculpture of Man trapped in an Idaho Potato, a reference to the Red Indians whose land was wrested from them by the French and turned into vast cropping fields of potatoes.

Rainey has traveled extensively, in North America, Scandinavia, the Middle East, the West Indies and Africa, absorbing the flavour of the countries he visited but always retaining in his work his essential vision. Clearly as much concerned with ecology as mythology he fuses the two in his sculptures. Africa, a large construction of wood, recycled glass bottles, canvas, oil paint and glass objects, is made in a cruciform of a totem pole, atop which is a vast coca cola bottle, representing both American colonialism and the way in which Africans re-use objects of domestic utility. There is besides a forked branch like a divining rod bearing a white rag, signaling to the weary traveler the presence of water. A canvas curtain soaked with red paint symbolizes hope, but it inevitably has overtones of death and blood.

The human figure constitutes part of several sculptures, in particular that of the ancient Irish warrior chieftain Cu Chulainn, sometimes in glass, sometimes in bronze. He is never whole, however, but sliced horizontally like the coca cola bottles, or pierced with an arrow like Saint Sebastian, carved into with symbols reminiscent of Egyptian tomb paintings. He carries on his shoulder the skull of a sheep, suggestive of carrion for the ravens which are supposed to be his attributes. Rainey’s visual language is complex but consistent and, if one is unable completely to penetrate the mysteries of his drawing and sculptures, close study is amply rewarded.