

Festival Forfest XXVI – Colloquium



From the Stone Age to the Troubles

By Tommy Barr (Northern Ireland)

From the engraved stones found at the many pre-historic sites to the highly charged graffiti reflecting the recent political troubles, Ireland has a rich and potent artistic heritage. Perhaps more so than in other countries, symbols and visual imagery are woven into the fabric of society. They are central to the people's sense of identity, their spirituality and their place in the community.

Tommy's lecture took us on a 5000 year journey through this artistic landscape, signposting important highlights along the way.

Eternal Circle

Tommy's colloquium lecture was enriched by an exhibition entitled "Eternal Circle" which was presented in two parallel editions in Gallery U Artuš and Chateau Kroměříž.

Having created a series of contemporary icons, drawn from the prehistoric legacy of Ireland, an earlier invitation to work with the Bulgarian National Museum's Academy of Science and Arts had allowed Tommy to build on that body of work.

His invitation to participate in Festival Forfest provided an ideal space in which to re-imagine and extend the project. Introducing the motifs from this third, Czech legacy further opened up the theme and the artifacts introduced enriched the pool of source materials.

As the earliest settlers moved across Europe, Tommy believes their many and varied visual motifs seeped into the artistic vocabulary of the existing cultures, creating a sense of underlying familiarity. Certainly there is evidence of these migratory exchanges in decorative artifacts found in Ireland which date back to long before the arrival of the Celts. By contrasting motifs from both Irish and Czech legacy Tommy's exhibition celebrated a shared heritage and provided a bond joining our two communities.

Festival Forfest with its spiritual orientation provided an ideal platform for both the lecture and the exhibition. The early art of both countries, Ireland and the Czech Republic, has deep rooted origins in the people and is drawn from their spirituality, and from their sense of place and belonging. The lecture and exhibition provided a fascinating exploration of this commonality.

One of Tommy's exhibition paintings remains in the permanent collection of the Muzeum Kroměřížska.