

THE LIVING MIRROR-WORLD

By Theo Dorgan

How do we know that a thing is living? We know this when it speaks to what is living in us. Walk out into the Cahya Mountains, as Mieke Vanmechelen does every day of her life, and if your heart is awake inside you, then you will find yourself quickening to rock, stone, tree, stream and every living thing in the plenum through which you walk. More, if you are patient and willing to learn, if your heart is humble and attentive as well as quick, you will learn that everything in this plenum is a living thing — not just the birds, the humans, the animals and insects but the very streams, trees, stones and rocks.

Buried deep in the noise and pandemonium of cities, as most of us are, most of the time, it is easy to lose touch with this living, breathing world — the world that is sufficient to itself, the world that is all that is the case. What we need is a witness, someone to lose herself in this world in order to find what is living in it, and bring it back out to us. Mieke is such a witness.

We remember that Fionn Mac Cumhaill was asked, in the legend, what the most beautiful music is. And we remember his answer, the Zen bolt and impact of it: “The most beautiful music is the music of what is.”

There is a music in living things, and in these paintings. Colour hangs in the air, colour drapes rock and stone and tree, in the living world as in these living paintings. There is truth and meaning in the world as it is, and in the music of what is. Truth and joy, the same truth and joy that we find in these breathing, luminous, paintings and drawings.

Mieke, to be sure, lives in a beautiful place; you might think that all she has to do, surely, is paint and draw what lies before her and there’s an end to it. Ah but life is not so simple. It takes great skill, great art, to draw from the living world paintings that mirror the world not in the simple sense of reflecting it back to itself, but in the sense of responding in true measure, as one voice echoes to another across a deep valley, from cliff to cliff. In Mieke’s paintings and drawings we find the world given back to itself by human agency, by gift and study and work; a mirroring that embodies what happens when we love, when the self becomes other, and the other becomes ourselves. In the presence of this work we enter the world as the world enters us, and we find ourselves at home, mirror flashing to mirror, on into endless time.