

Notes on the 'Exhibition of Eyes' by Mike O'Donnell, Court Artist

The Power of the Eye

The eye is experienced as the animation of the mind, at once a reflector of its activity, a transmitter of meaning and intention, an agent which conceals the inner life and its secret thoughts, a respondent to outside world, an engager with the object of attention, a witness and reflector of the outside world, a transmitter of emotion bright and dark and also perhaps a manipulative device. It attracts attention from all and signals connection with the world around. Its importance in human relationships is inestimable, in love, in war and in all relationships between.

The eye is a precious jewel; often holding divine beauty. Its visual power is such that, when depicted by the artist, the staring eye follows multiple viewers to multiple places simultaneously.

Contradictory Notions of the Eye

Two contradictory notions of the eye exist.

On the one hand there is the instinctive tendency of people to judge the mental life and character of a person through the eye. This tendency is perhaps best expressed in the view that the 'eyes are the mirrors of the soul' and that the body can never conceal the truth.

Conversely there is the opposing view that one can never determine one's character by reference to one's eye or indeed whole countenance. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Duncan says '*there's no art to find the mind's construction in the face.*'

However compelling these opposing arguments are we are instinctively drawn to the eye.

Why the 'Exhibition of Eyes'?

In this exhibition, I try to explore the psycho-visual power of the eye.

I offer depictions of the eyes of many individuals from all walks of life to the viewer. These I hope are attractive in various ways. Each offers its own visual statement.

I challenge the viewers to determine 'who's who?' Which of the eyes belong to convicted criminals I have encountered in my work at the Criminal Courts of Justice in Dublin and which belong to the innocent?

My hope is that through the 'Exhibition of Eyes' you are challenged, enjoy and above all, your appreciation of the eye is heightened even further.

Mike O'Donnell

