**David Lilburn**

Like ripples in water, the work in David Lilburn's *Home Ground* radiates in a series of concentric circles from a specific centre. That centre is the given fact of the arrival and presence of his young son Caspar who is one-and-a-half years old now, though the earliest piece in the show recalls his birth and, prior to his birth his gestation in the womb of his mother, Romanie.

Caspar features in many of the monotypes but, more than this, his presence has, as the presence of children does, largely dictated the ambit of his parents' roving. Lilburn's images record his workaday world, one dominated directly and indirectly by Caspar, exploring it with a close, domestic fondness and ease. Briefly stated, the monotypes encompass the family's erstwhile home in the countryside, sprawling Mill Cottage and its surroundings, their present home in Limerick City, holidays at Wine Strand, a visit to Jill Dennis's home, the minutiae of babyminding, and, last but not least, cats, each of these subjects forming a circle of imagery linked to all of the others.

Lilburn's work has an informal, intimate quality. Plethoras of fast lines and smudges of colour leads us into comfortable, familiar-seeming spaces. Flexibility rules and no view lays claim to being exclusive or definitive. A sheet devoted entirely to cats offers a panoply of views of the animals disporting themselves in a variety of activities, most of them, cats being cats, of a sedentary nature. No vision is left unqualified by an instant revision. The artist homes in on an elusive reality with speculative bursts of line.

Even more than all this however, he takes post-Cubist liberties with perspective. Assembled in composites of two, three or more sheets joined together in single works, his images further exploit the elasticity of space by moving around the object, be it house or river, and offering us discrete, incremental views, letting us build up our own picture of what he's describing, letting us, in fact, take a stroll around the place ourselves.

Not always, mind you. Sometimes he opts for a commanding, authorial version, more in tune with classical convention, suggesting that this is the way we should look at some particular scene, more or less. Which is what happens in the airy, atmospheric *Wine Strand* landscapes, even though they display his typical reluctance to pin down the subject too definitively. Or in *After Breakfast*,

which hangs the composition on an anecdotal peg, the remains of the alfresco repast, while dogs loiter hopeful of scraps.

His exploration of various related alternatives to conventional perspective brings to mind David Hockneys photographic ‘joiners’ and his related paintings, inspired, Hockney has pointed out, by Cubism and by traditions other than the Western, like Chinese scroll painting. Hockney's work is a persuasive bid to demonstrate that we can imaginatively depict a space by means other than the conventional and still - or perhaps more vividly - evoke a sense of its reality.

The same holds true for Lilburn's monotypes. He first tried the idea of multiple viewpoints and moments in pieces made about the circus two or three years ago. Now we are invited to wander around the garden in which his older son, Joni, sits, and we can do so easily enough. Sometimes the disjuncture is more extreme, as in *Streetwalker*, a ramble around the dockland haunt of prostitutes and their clients, close to the artist's present home, which shuffles a jumble of views in unreconciled fragments.

What is strongly suggested here is not only a spatial disruption but also a temporal one, something characteristic of several other pieces and exemplified in *His Hour*; which, with all the informality of a doodle, offers a kaleidoscopic view of sixty minutes in the lives of Lilburn and baby Caspar: feeding, changing, playing, smoking, just getting through the day.

There's more, of course: what we get as well is a spatial view of time, as elsewhere we get a temporal view of space, the quality of duration that Hockney is so enthusiastic about, the difference of pace that distinguishes painting and drawing from the instantaneous photograph. Space and time as structured elements that can be taken apart and analytically reassembled in images. And sometimes parts of the picture are inhabited by ghosts, as if to say: there was a swan here, but he moved. Nothing stands still, everything changes. There is as well a sense of the importance of individual objects, animals and people, a bemusement that things are just so, at the randomness of the world, with matter distributed here and there.

Yet there is an order in the randomness, if only the casual order of Lilburn’s perception. Often he feels free to dispense with the conventions of scale, concentrating on something that has attracted his attention, but by and large, like Hockneys, his images areeasily read in conventional terms, we can follow their logic without much difficulty. They are, with their schematic elements, as much like personal maps as pictures, something like a diary of spaces and objects, a world shaped to accommodate us, the viewers.

In studying animals, naturalist Jacob von Uexkull developed the concept of the *Umwelt*, the self-world. That is, as each species possesses different organs of perception, and depends to greater or lesser degrees on different aspects of perception, they embody perhaps radically divergent views of the same terrain: any environment consists of many complementary *Umwelten*. Combine this line of thought with the geographers’ notion of ‘mental maps’ and you have something close to a description of Lilburn’s exhibition.

Mental maps are the maps we each carry around inside our heads, accumulations of our knowledge of our immediate world, be it urban or rural, bringing together masses of different classes of information and memory. A mental map is another sort of self-world, the individual in a context. Lilburn’s monotypes build a cumulative guide to his contest and also, in terms of emotional context, to himself.

The monotype comes somewhere between painting and print, being easily classifiable as neither. Though the proofs are indirectly produced each of Lilburn's finished works is essentially unique. Another artist, the expatriate Russian Oleg Kudryashov, has used drypoint in a roughly comparable way, making composite, unique images. There are other correspondences worth pointing out as well. While much of Kudryashov’s output seems to fit in with the Russian Constructivist tradition - an interrupted tradition - the main thrust of his work is intensely autobiographical.

He has described how even pieces that look at first glance completely abstract are in fact topographical landscapes, drawings-cum-maps of the Moscow he remembers from his childhood. With other, more overtly anecdotal images they make up an *Umwelt* that has as it's still centre a childhood refuge beneath the family's dining table. Closer to hand, Joe Wilson's more recent drawings and paintings have consisted largely of a leisurely, sustained exploration of the overgrown garden of his County Wicklow home, work that in turn recalls the impression we sometimes get in Jill Dennis’ paintings of finding our bearings in familiar, enveloping places.

Lilburn's work is personal, but not private. He invites us into his world, invites us to notice what he notices. While he wryly observes that the baby, Caspar, has inevitably tied he and the rest of his family down, he does so matter of factly, without implying any resentment. Caspar has also, to judge by this work, engendered concentration. Lilburn has been drawn to look closely at his surroundings, and has found there something if not quite universal (a vague and overused term) then certainly typical, a domestic world that will be familiar to many, a physical world sensitively and affectionately depicted, and one that it is a pleasure to encounter.

**Aidan Dunne**