

Tribes and Tribulations



This week I visited Helen Merrigan Colfer's *Tribes and Tribulations* exhibition at the Strule Arts Centre in Omagh, and I was wowed by it. Helen's sculptures explore the emotions and stresses modern life generates, using a combination of realistic detail and clever symbolism.

One of the recurring themes is that we can project a calm exterior while inside we are churning, like a serene swan frantically treading the water beneath the surface of the lake. She illustrates this with masked sculptures whose faces somehow capture the emotions evoked by the situations they find themselves in. I was awed by the skill it took to depict it, and I found myself carefully studying the detail in each one. On several sculptures, the bellies open to reveal (both figuratively and literally) what is going on inside.

The exhibition includes the sculptures, a recorded interview with the artist, and excerpts and illustrations from diary entries she made while she was caring for her mother-in-law during the Covid lockdown. Each time I went back to a sculpture I had already viewed I noticed something new, yet I still left feeling I hadn't seen everything. What an amazing exhibition.

Dianne Ascroft

Noelle MacAlinden writes:

It's been a privilege to curate and collaborate with Helen Merrigan Colfer in the Touring Exhibition Tribes & Tribulations, which has toured initially Flowerfield Arts Centre, Portstewart, and Island Arts Centre Strabane, before Strule Arts Centre, Omagh. We have been overwhelmed by the phenomenal response to the Touring Exhibition. The dedicated Tours and Talks have provided insights into the Artists Practice alongside sources of Inspiration and

development.

The exhibition continues in the Alley Theatre, Strabane until 21 April.