

Ballymoon Castle



The gate at Duckett's Grove

Wilkinson at the Norman Gallery

REVIEW BY TOM MOONEY

CURRENTLY AT the Norman Gallery, Monkgrange, Rathnure, is the first exhibition in Wexford of wet plate collodion photographs by Carlow-based Gwen Wilkinson, which was opened last Sunday week by Ian Mitton, Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology.

The photographs, the majority of them conceived in miniature, have an unsettling potency about them, partly because they are time tolerant, and the endemic skill of Wilkinson is a rare thing to behold.

The endemic core of the work is not

alone the execution of those photographs by a Gandolfi half-plate camera from 1870, or thereabouts, but in Wilkinson's time consuming dedication to capture a sense of the age and decay of her subject, often ruins, facades, towers or the rusticated masonry of a wall devoid of its original purpose, using archaic methods, like the albumen print.

The collection conveys a mood that death, and the scything effect of the passage of time, is the archaeologist of absence, and the albumen process binds the photographic chemicals to the paper, fixing the print's exposure, so I imagine.

Wilkinson's eye is never concerned

with the bathetic, is never wylaid by interpretation and, refreshingly, in an age of incessant editing and trickery, her work is outside the orbit of digital manipulation.

Consider the gate at Duckett's Grove, gnawed by ivy and almost garlanded by skeletal branches, but in the context of the exhibition, it can be viewed as a portal between the ages, such as the abandoned Ballymoon Castle, steadfast in its refusal to succumb to decay, and Huntington Castle, manicured and perfect, linear order imposed on a wilderness which, as other photographs in the exhibition testify, is relentless in its refusal to be timed.

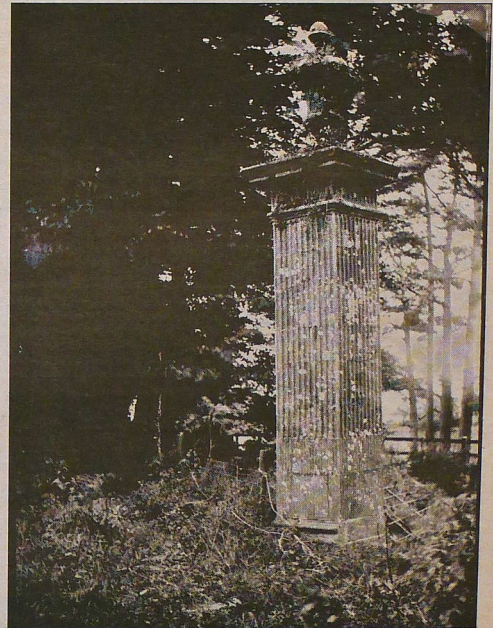
Because of the collodion essence of the work, the photographs can mirror the ambience of the Pre-Raphaelites, particularly the direct and uncomplicated depiction of the world as they wished to view it, and as they took their influence from before the Renaissance, it is no surprise that Wilkinson is attracted by classical styles of archi-

ture, such as Gate Lodge Ruin III, with the pediment, colonnade and sanctuary perfectly delineated by the light blackness.

Her work revives a deep feeling for the archaic in the committed viewer, and why this is so is often beyond our ken but not, fortunately, for the direct eye of Gwen Wilkinson.



Huntington Castle
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Pillar at Borris Castle