

Janet Mullarney *Untitled 1987*

Medium: Dancing figure, Tempera on cirmolo wood, lined with dyed jute

*O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?*
W.B. Yeats



Artwork of the Month

Is not dance man's oldest challenge to gravity? Bodily strength in the muscular shoulders and arms, graceful energy contained in bent torso and raised and turning head are in this figure miraculously made light, made fluent, made to rise, to soar up and out from that robust treestump-like cone of garment. It is the force of the dance that bends and wrings the elastic body into flowing, floating movement, movement of strength contained, strength resolved in grace. For the centre of gravity lies in the heart of the dance from where limbs, hands, neck and head are made to move.

Carved out of 'cirmolo' pine, pieced together and nowhere highly finished, the figure is boldly painted in olive ochre and green-blue tints with three broad bands of white across the chest, white also mask-like covering the face. This body-paint reminiscent of tribal dancers together with the ambiguities of gender, age and ethnicity, conspire to downplay the individuality of the dancer, thus enabling the merging of dancer and dance.

It may be said that in a comparable way, the artist here succumbed in transforming herself, without a rest, into her work, as Rilke puts it:

Wie sich der Steinmetz einer Kathedrale
Verbissen umsetz in des Steines Gleichmut.
(... As the stonemason building a cathedral
Tenaciously transforms himself into the stone's composure.)

Dr Joachim Beug, German Department, UCC

Janet Mullarney's sculpture is part of an exhibition of works from the University Art Collection currently on display in the new Cork University Maternity Hospital.