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All Culture

Grand gestures and a forbidding landscape | Visual art round-up

Michael Coleman puts on an almost perfect show; a piece of Birmingham moves to Temple Bar; and Amelia Stein goes close to the edge

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Aidan Dunne

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Precipice – *Amelia Stein*

Oliver Sears Gallery, Dublin



The vertiginous coastal views of tumbling headlands in Amelia Stein's *Precipice* were inspired by the work of local historians Treasa Ni Ghearraigh and Uinsíonn Mac Graith. They researched and collected the Irish names of locations on a remote north Mayo peninsula, a Gaeltacht area renowned for its spectacular walks, and published *The Placenames and Heritage of Dún Chaocháin*.



Directly translated, the names are vividly allusive and informative: the Ledge of the Cormorant, the Three Hags of the Promontory, the Fool's Hollow. Such names, steeped in lore, provide a direct link to the meanings of the terrain for the people who lived there. More often than not, that historical

connection between people and places has been lost.

It's a process explored in Brian Friel's play *Translations* and Hughie O'Donoghue's series of paintings, *Naming the Fields*, based on the north Mayo landscape where the artist's mother grew up. His starting point was a hand-drawn map made for him by an elderly aunt. When he researched documented maps of the area dating back to the 16th century, none of this local information was recorded. It was part of an oral archive that progressively disappeared as the people disappeared.



There's nothing of John Hinde's Ireland in Stein's photographs. They are in moody black-and-white – actually, they are mostly in deep, dark, lush tones of grey. Grandeur doesn't take away from the fact that it's a hard, unforgiving environment.

Stein frames each image so that there is little in the way of foreground, emphasising the dramatic, dizzying nature of the topography. To do so entailed an element of risk that was occasionally frightening: she had to keep asking herself if she was “just a breath of a footstep too near to the edge”.

That may account for the brooding, uneasy quality that characterises the images, but it also energises them, making them both sombre and lively.

Until July 31st, oliversearsgallery.com

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