



Review of Radical Conservatism at Castlefield Gallery, Manchester

Castlefield Gallery in Manchester is an organisation whose ethos is rooted in the development of emerging contemporary artists and their practice. Their latest exhibition offering, *Radical Conservatism*, has been curated by London-based artist, curators and writers, Pll and Galia Kollektiv. An exploration of the pair's interest in the relationship between art and politics, it examines in depth our definition of the terms radical and conservative to define if they are in fact opposing or equivalent terms.

The exhibition opens on the first floor with a selection of Oscar Nemon's busts of Margaret Thatcher; one of which still resides in Tory HQ. Classical in their technique and material, it's Thatcher and her policies that, even after her recent death still cause controversy, a sign perhaps that conservatism can be a radical stance in itself. Further exploring this idea is a video interview with Walid El Kafray, Chief Executive of an Egyptian construction company by artist Chris Evans. As Kafray explains plans for new 'utopian' communities in the Egyptian Desert, it's evident how a concept so conservative in its approach can actually be a radical transformation. But Pll and Galia are not looking to define the two terms in a literal way; they are looking for something a little more instinctive.

Moving down to the lower gallery, the mood changes with lower lighting levels initiating the feeling of a small religious chapel; the ornate images and objects around the room highlighted only by bright spot lights. At the very end of the space copies of the metal zine *Buried* are propped open at specific pages for our viewing. A 'zine that rejects Xerox', *Buried*'s pages are more reminiscent of an ornate Bible or medieval script than your regular independently published zine.

Around the rest of the room sit a selection of Joseph Lewis's positiv churches, in the form of a hurdy gurdle, a church tool box and a church library. Created using intricate ancient craft traditions, they are a celebration of English heritage but also speak of the way the tourist industry markets our heritage for consumers. Near by hang a selection of IRWIN groups framed icons. Paintings that would not look out of place in a church, they use a familiar language but their underlying aim is in fact to re-frame the Dada movement as a modern accepted belief.

Pll and Galia Kollektiv's immense knowledge on their subject is clear. For visitors to be fully absorbed into Pll and Galia's theories, an open and alert mind is most defiantly a must. An exhibition conservative in its curatorial approach, the selected artists work is an examination of how the conservative can, in many ways, actually be a radical approach.

Emma Sumner

Radical Conservatism, 30 November until 2 February, Castlefield Gallery, 2 Hewitt Street, Manchester, M15 4GB. www.castlefieldgallery.co.uk