

Nick Miller: Closer / Art Space

Outside Ireland, where he has made his home since the early eighties and where he exhibits regularly, London born artist Nick Miller is little known. This is surprising, for Miller's work is powerfully intense, acutely raw in its portrayal of the human subject, and, beneath the smudges and smears of charcoal and occasional spillages of red wine, beautifully executed. For once, the title for this exhibition is apt. For these drawings, Miller has abandoned orthodox portrait sittings, whereby an artist is comfortably distanced from his subjects behind an easel, and where the relationship between artist and sitter is necessarily that between knower and known. His 'sitters' do not, in fact, sit at all; Miller actually gets them to lie down on the large sheet of paper on which he is to draw, and, looking at the video still at the front of the catalogue which shows him at work, literally sits astride them while making his marks quickly and directly, adjacent to their heads. Often naked, stripped of their protective carapace, they appear by turns vulnerable and slightly awkward or calmly passive and subdued. Tellingly, the eyes of the men are often averted, unable or unwilling to look directly ahead of them, perhaps needing to avoid the awkward clashing of eyes, whilst the women are often seen staring coolly ahead. It is clearly crucial to Miller that he capture something of the individual's expressive energy, that force or impulse which begins

communication and is the starting point for all interaction. Thus he chooses to draw only those to whom he has already an established bond: friends, his parents, his wife, his two young sons. He concentrates on heads, these dark, overworked masses of heavy matter, and on faces. Their bodies are mere atrophied flimsy outlines. Miller has stated that this compulsion to get "closer" to his subject matter is a direct result of his time spent drawing corpses at the Royal College



Above: *Anatomy Drawing I, 1993*; Left: *Reuben, 1996*

of Surgeons in Dublin in 1993. He talks of those smaller drawings - which are also displayed here - as "a big black hole in my mind." The subsequent life drawings of those close to him have managed to throw Miller a "life-line of energy out of the void."

In Miller's intensity, in his stark honesty and in the integrity with which he treats his subjects, there are clearly direct echoes of Freud. This is no mean compliment. *Ends*
May 13
Fisun Güner

