

# A voyage to inner space



Visual Arts

Aidan Dunne

## Reviewed:

*Dissecting Solaris*, Bill Albertini, Temple Bar Gallery until April 13th (01-6710073); *Origin*, Cléa van der Grijn, Cross Gallery until March 29th (01-4738978); *Love Bites*, Bongli MacDermott, Kevin Kavanagh Gallery until March 29th (01-8740064); *Works on Paper*, Ashford Gallery until March 28th (01-6617286)

THE late Andrey Tarkovsky is one of a small number of film-makers who have had a major, disproportionate impact on fine artists. Among these artists we can surely number Bill Albertini, who has built his entire exhibition at Temple Bar Gallery on his response to Tarkovsky's extraordinary sci-fi epic, *Solaris*. The Russian writer-director's psychologically intense, visually striking films have won him a devoted following, but Steven Spielberg he ain't. As film director Scott Hicks said of his later films recently, they "do have enormous power to mesmerise, but they also require a deeper kind of patience on the part of their audience, a willingness to be taken on that journey".

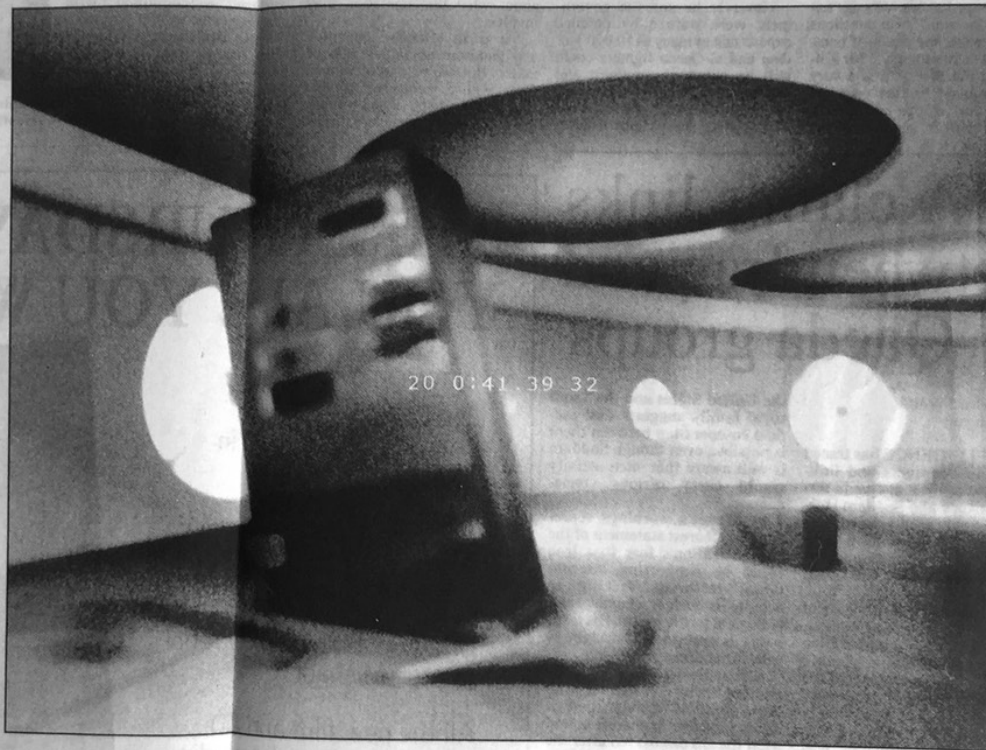
Some people do not want to go. In his ill-tempered response to *Solaris*, for example, it seemed as if the highly respected film writer, David Thompson, was personally affronted

by it, and could not for the life of him see the point of it at all.

At the heart of *Solaris* is the powerful image of a planetary intelligence which materialises the memories and imaginings of the astronauts in orbit above it. The main protagonist, sent to decide whether the orbiting space station should be closed down, finds himself revisiting the guilt, pain and regret surrounding his wife's suicide and faces the existential dilemma of possibly reversing the tragedy. The trip to outer space becomes a trip to inner space.

Dramatically, *Solaris* is either hypnotically or boringly slow, depending on your point of view. The first 20 earthbound minutes or so are visually brilliant, and both the run-down space station and the planet surface, seething and amorphous, are superbly visualised. Albertini's *Dissecting Solaris* is clearly a homage to the film, but it is more than that as well.

He has made several groups of still images, and a number of digital animated videos directly related to the source. One set of five still images is called the *Storyboard* series, although the *Memory Index*, a huge grid of images, is more like a storyboard. Except that none of the works is actually a storyboard in the practical, workable sense of the term. Albertini's work is more about the way the film persists in memory and, more generally,



about how we remember things in quirky individual, fragmentary ways.

While he has quoted directly from the film, in terms of both images and words, for the most part he seems to have imaginatively reconstructed images from memory. In addition, what he has reconstructed is not so much a storyboard, not a narrative synopsis with likenesses of the characters, but the film as a narrative space with its own particular flavour, one that we can, perhaps, inhabit ourselves. Putting us in the picture, one of the animations

takes the form of a tracking shot along the deserted circular corridor of the space station, littered with technological debris and bizarre-looking instruments. In all of this Albertini is referring to one of the main themes of the film, and the work in his show is, like *Solaris*, an engrossing meditation on memory and reality. One that, incidentally, refers us back to the original, which was recently released on DVD. There will be a screening of *Solaris* at the IFC next Saturday, March 23rd, at 11 a.m.

Cléa van der Grijn's paintings in *Origin* at

the Cross Gallery ignite terrifically dark deep blues and earth colours with brilliant flashes of gold to produce a body of lively, persuasive work. It is, explains a brief accompanying statement, informed by travels in Sri Lanka and Cuba. While the paintings are not in any obvious way representational, you certainly do get a sense of dark shadow and strong sunlight.

While the work heads in a decorative direction, it is never purely decorative. A certain toughness of pictorial intelligence comes

A still image from *Memory Index* by Bill Albertini, part of his *Dissecting Solaris* show at the Temple Bar Gallery

through, particularly in the stringently spare visual vocabulary. There is a strong horizontal emphasis in most of the compositions. Although van der Grijn has proved that she is well able to work on a large scale, the larger works here are the most uncertain, the medium-sized ones the most assured.

BONGLI MacDermott, whose show, *Love Bites*, is at the Kevin Kavanagh Gallery, is as ever a painter with a tremendous sense of attack. Her work is vividly, vigorously all there. The rawness of her boldly painted bodily fragments, culled from photographic illustrations in magazines, counterparts the rawness of emotional life that lurks behind the romantic ideal. Although she may be alluding to a narcissistic cult of the body in the way she sometimes frames body details as though they were jewels or trophies, that doesn't seem to be her primary intention.

There is a feeling, in her work, that people do consume each other, that there is real ferocity in relationships. The violence of her imagery relates to the ruthlessness of the emotions, the way feeling cuts through reason and propriety.

Her incisive view of the fragmented body also recalls the unintegrated infant: a scattering of limbs and bits, sensations and desires. It is, in all, striking, lively work, provocative and engaging.

There is a distinctly Eastern feel to many of the pieces in *Works on Paper*, featuring three artists, at the Ashford Gallery. The practical and philosophical influences are there in the form of a strong emphasis on gesture throughout, in Jane Proctor's use of black ink and gold leaf and in Gerard Cox's fine ink drawings. These circular drawings build their unified motifs from a plethora of individual, rhythmic marks, in a way reminiscent of minimal music compositions. Their overall calmness emerges from the flux of detail. The best of Proctor's diverse pieces are her two *Black Drawings*, which take a simple idea and develop it beautifully. Joanna Kidney also strikes out in several different directions, most successfully in a series of relatively conventional landscape studies which have great spontaneity and a nice touch.