

## **Time Out**

### **Reviews**

'Tim Shaw'

Kenneth Armitage Foundation

Five stars

By Francis Gooding

At the top of the staircase is a framed poem by Seamus Heaney dedicated to the artist Tim Shaw. Though not part of the show, the poem is apposite; it is one of the series in which Heaney meditates on those extraordinary archaeological finds, the 'bog bodies'; preserved Iron Age corpses discovered buried deep in Danish peat bogs. Hooded and bound, their throats slashed, they were thought to have been sacrifices to the earth goddess, a guarantee of future good harvests. Interred in peat that was also cut for fuel, these victims ensured the living would prosper.

Fast-forward to 2003 and the invasion of Iraq, a war fought partly for oil, the subterranean bounty that assures the continued security of the current world order. The powerful set of sculptures that Shaw assembled here suggests his recent attempt to guarantee future prosperity came with a list of sacrificial demands not dissimilar to those of the long forgotten past.

This sense of the archaic suffusing the modern is most intense in the show's major installation, 'Casting A Dark Democracy'. To the sound of a rhythmic double beat – heart, drum, or the steady glug of oil from a barrel – one enters a large space, lit by a bare bulb. The walls are smeared and marked with oil; the floor is covered in sand. Towering over the viewer is a vast hooded figure, its ragged cloak exposing a barbed-wire armature, its shadow a black slick of oil. It is the torture victim from Abu Ghraib, balanced on a box, wires attached to his fingers. Shaw's sculpture restores to the now famous image all the horror that repeated production has leached from it, making of it an archetypal figure, redolent of ancient rites, prices paid, and damage done. Upstairs, next to Heaney's poem, is a group of eight 'Fertility Figures', stoutly virile, winged, horned and defiantly pagan: old gods of increase. This impressive and moving show reminds us that they are in no mood to give up their due.