



Waterfall of Energy, Cristina Popovici, 2003, oil and acrylic on canvas, 1800 x 2000mm.

Abstract Expressionism and concrete faith

Picasso once said, "Art is a lie that helps us to understand the truth." The 'lie' is a bending of what is 'real' (realism or naturalism), what is seen, to understand a wider truth, to embrace broader and more complex perspectives. So it is with parables - Jesus' preferred medium of communication - the use of an 'untruth,' a fiction, to convey a greater message that transcends the finite reality of what lies in front of our senses. For example, do we believe for one minute Jesus is Himself a literal door, a lamb, that the Kingdom of God is a pearl, a wedding banquet, a field of wheat, that evangelism is an act of fishing in a lake with nets? Yet without these fantasies grounded in the finite realities of our earthly everyday life, we cannot begin to comprehend Jesus' message of heaven and other worlds.

So it is with art. Art is a mechanism for and of human feeling, a vehicle to unlock and convey emotions - incongruously in a tactile way - presenting the discerning viewer with a broader unseen truth (the abstractions of invisible human emotion). At the vanguard is Abstract Expressionism, described by arts writer David Anfam (1990) as, "a landmark in the general history of art...(opening) perspectives that enfold the present."

The great attraction of Abstract Expressionism to many, is its ability to connect the internal, abstract, unseen in a direct unaffected way. It has a purity of function and purpose being unencumbered by symbols (such as Pop Art), collectively agreed images or distracting naturalistic capture. At its best Abstract Expressionism communicates spirit through pure form, colour, pattern and composition. People view an abstract expressionistic work and are immediately attracted, repulsed, confused or uplifted by it. Viewers are agreeing that something of or in the painting touches their spirit. It would be puerile to engage the genre purely from the analysis of technique, whether dribbling or splattering paint from above (Pollock) or applying oil on canvas against a wall (Neil Frazer). This would miss the point altogether, a bit like viewing Masaccio's *Expulsion from the Garden*, or a Christ passion, from the sole perspective of surface pigment, layers and composition. The art is about emotion! and seeks to stir us.

Yet there would be little consensus about meaning or what is actually 'seen' in any given Expressionist work. This was parodied by the great American conservative realist Norman Rockwell in *Abstract and Concrete (The Connoisseur, 1962)* where a respectable gentleman dispassionately reads a huge

CS NEWS

Who we are

Founded in 1998 the Chrysalis Seed charitable trust serves a growing number of contemporary artists. Our mission is to 'help resource the arts community from a Christian perspective.' We meet regularly to encourage each other and participate in a range of activities designed to support artists and their profession. We operate a resource centre in the heart of the Arts Centre, where all are welcome to explore, read and relax, or try creative therapy by appointment.

CS News

Our main publication, which goes to artists, galleries, poets and supporters around New Zealand and overseas. Designed for the wider arts community, it engages with current art issues, events and artists.

We have a number of groups and collectives with regular events. The two main artists collectives are for visual artists (Seven Plus) and contemporary poets (CS Poets).

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Kia ora!



This issue's focus is on Abstract Expressionism. Any style can be a vehicle for the spiritual. Kandinsky in his famous *On the Spiritual in Art* suggested that the abstract was especially conducive to

evoking the spiritual in art. We celebrate a diversity in style and expressions in the 7+ network of artists. This is an expression of the the endless creativity of the Creator. Over September /October there have been several exhibitions by Canterbury artists of faith. These have included Jessica Crothall at the Left Bank (Greymouth), Tim Brown's installation of his latest work at the Polytech, Helm Ruifrok's *Multiplicity of Angels* in Wellington at the Janna Land, Darryn George's *Tipuna* at the Brooke Gifford, Maria Park at Gallery 'O', Sue Spigel at the Christ Church Cathedral, Yong-Hyun Kwon at the Salamander as well as Allie Eagles' exhibition in Titirangi at the Lopdell gallery and of course Cristina Popovici's exhibition at the Arthouse in August. The finalists in the Cranleigh Barton award show in Te Puna Waiwhetu, included Julie Ross, Helm Ruifrok and Claire Beynon (Dunedin), whose work is reproduced here. This is all in the wake of the seminal exhibition by Colin McCahon in Wellington, Auckland, now in Melbourne, heading for Sydney as more artists realise that McCahon did indeed engage in 'a question of faith'. John Stringer in his article reminds us that McCahon himself was directly impacted by the New York pioneers after his visit there in the late '50's.

We look forward to seeing Don Binney's retrospective exhibition at the Brooke Gifford in late October, when Mark Lander crosses the

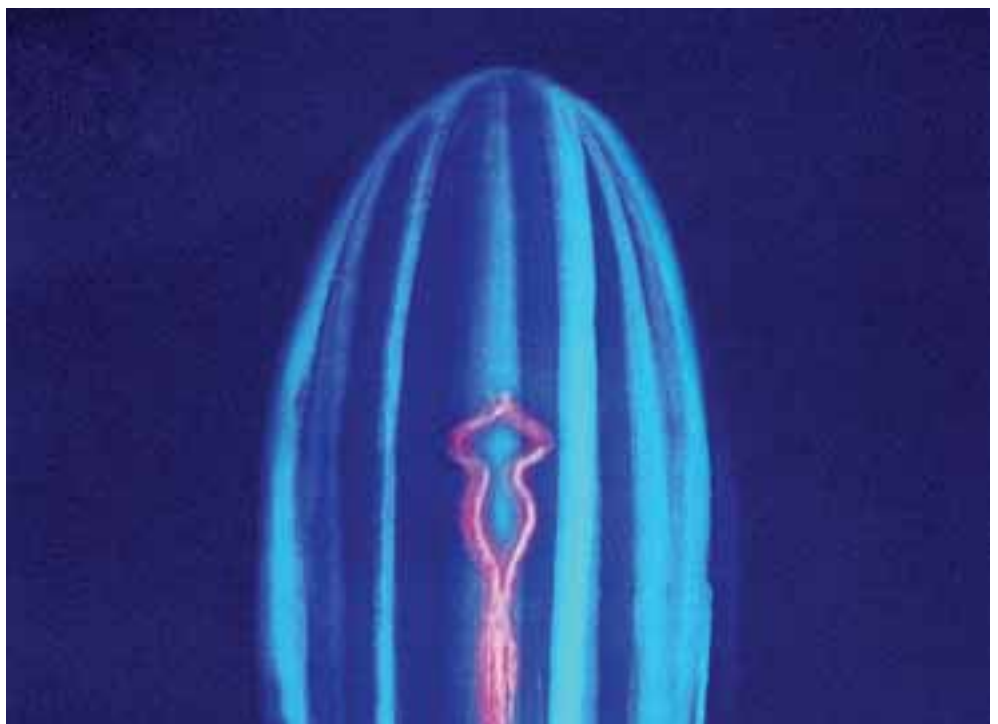
ditch again to do more workshops in Australia. While these efforts encapsulate a range of styles, its interesting that many of them contain elements of abstract expressionism, with Cristina's being the most exuberantly rooted in this tradition. Reviews and interviews of some of these artists are included in this issue, others will appear in later editions. Damien Skinner's book on Don Binney is reviewed as a reminder to not miss the October show. A chance to get your book autographed at the Don Binney painting workshop coming up on the 17th and 18th of October at Hanmer Springs. As I write, Phillipa Blair our famous established abstract expressionist, has another show currently on at CoCa(Christchurch), as a reminder of the continuity of this tradition directly imparted from Europe through Rudi Gopas at Canterbury School of Fine Arts in the '60's and '70's.

We welcome back Mike and Rosemary Riddell and cast after their sojourn with James K Baxter in the UK with *Jerusalem, Jerusalem*, and are sorry to farewell Cristina Popovici and Valentin Tinc as they plan to move to Auckland towards the end of this year. Christchurch's loss will be Auckland's gain, but hopefully lots more exhibitions and colour still exploding in the mainland.

Who needs fireworks?

One of the things we seek to encourage wherever possible are mentoring dynamics, so its especially encouraging to acknowledge the launch of a new collection of poetry by John O'Connor and Eric Mould, *Working Voices* which has emerged out of their involvement in the Canterbury Poets Collective.

Peter Crothall



Stella (detail), Andrew Clarkson, Waveney Warth, Alan Joyce, Tanya Pauling, 1998, Mixed Media, Montana New Zealand Wearable Art Awards 1998. [See review of this year's Awards on page 12].



Letter With Words Hidden in Colour (9 panels), Cristina Popovici, 2002, plaster, oil and acrylic on board, 1680 x 1900 mm.



John Stringer

Abstract Expressionism and concrete faith

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abstraction, and a New Yorker cartoon of 1964 depicting a couple perplexed by a sunset in the form of a famous Rothko-style work (1964), "now, there's a nice contemporary sunset." Senior curator at Te Puna o Waiwhetu Neil Roberts, prefers Expressionism as an art form because it conveys something of the spirit or passion of the artist. "Expressionism is a movement of the inner spirit and that is what attracts my eye."

As such, it can be a great herald of spirituality, "shifting positions about an unknown center" (Seitz 1955). Of the two Abstract Expressionists surveyed for this article, Cristina Popovici of Christchurch [see interview] and Lillian Carland of Melbourne, both spoke of an inner life force, feeling or faith (I would say artistic spirit), pushing out against words and other concretions to express and communicate abstract notions in a tactile medium. Quiltist Sue Spigel (p. 10) also expresses this sentiment, as she turned her art away from the commercial to the more inner and reflective. In 1945 the great pioneer of Abstract Expressionism, Rothko, said, "[we are] finding a pictorial equivalent for man's...consciousness of his more complex inner self." Gottlieb called it 'the beginning of seeing.' Both are deeply spiritual statements.

This does not equate to religion however. (How would one paint a 'religious' abstract expressionist work?). From the early days, many of the Abstract Expressionists rebelled against conventional religion, dabbling instead with Theosophy, Krishna Murti and pantheism. McCahon, that great soul painter (who has been placed on the same level as Jackson Pollock 1)

is said to have been influenced by the American Abstract Expressionists during his tour of the U.S. in 1958. Certainly he shouted very loudly (and awkwardly) with his paint, but he was not captured by the external style of the genre, rather it liberated him somehow to be more himself. Immediately afterward his tour, he launched into his spiritual journey of the Elias series (1959-) which communicated his disquiet about religious belief and his beginning of spiritual doubt. His spirit was at work.

In one of her largest, and least 'colourful' works (*Floating Hours*, hanging in the Anthony Harper building, Cathedral Square), Popovici says the work is like a husk and should be seen as transparent, yet 'read'. Peering through the layers we discover the seed (or kernel of truth). Popovici seeks a 'radiography of seeing,' "99% of my painting is 'underneath' or 'within' the surface." Her layers of colour are seen as the pages of a book, and we are called upon to consider the testament and the message, rather than merely perceive words typed on a printed page.

In his deeply disturbing, yet arrestive, recent exhibition (*Set Fire To Self - Drown*, 2003) James Robinson assaults the calm, collected, respectable everyday beings of routine (Rockwell's Connoisseur in his pressed suit, holding umbrella and natty hat). He allows his angry, psychotic spirit to express itself in an orgy of Breugel or Bosch-like imagery woven as an abstract whole, like an "angry monster art that refuses to doze quietly on a gallery wall." Described variously by reviewers as, "nightmarish," "confrontational," "anarchic", John McDonald, director of *new contemporaries*, concludes an artist 'expressing a vision that no one, having seen, is not stirred and impressed by.' 2. The essence of Robinson is his spirit and his passion.

By its nature Abstract Expressionism is not narrative or literal. It cannot 'preach' as such, yet its unashamed vibrancy and emotional connection convey an immediate sense of spirit. Spirit is a much more powerful communicator, and like music, we capture a sense of the creative divine within us all through the medium of Abstract Expressionism.

From the earliest beginnings the human spirit and art have been entwined together. Abstract Expressionism is a yelling telling of the inner soul, combining spirituality with an abstract genre to express fictions that help us understand ourselves for the complex beings we are. Picasso was right.

John Stringer

BA art history, MA classics (Victoria)

1. Marja Bloem, Martin Browne, Colin McCahon *A Question of Faith*, 2002.

2. John McDonald, *new contemporaries emerging Art in Australia catalogue*, Feb. 2003.



Cristina Popovici - as vibrant as her paintings

Gonna change my way of thinking,
Make myself a different set of rules.
Gonna put my good foot forward,
And stop being influenced by fools.
So much oppression,
Can't keep track of it no more.

Bob Dylan

Slow Train Coming, 1979.

Interview

The visual language of Cristina Popovici, Abstract Expressionist

CS News: words are very fashionable in paintings, and you used them McCahon-like in a recent painting *Manuscript of Love* (2003). Is there an important crossover between words and paint for you?

I hate words, they are sad, because they disappear almost as soon as they arrive. I always struggled as a child to communicate with words, I was always visual, preferring a different 'language' to express my ideas and feelings. Words are the most common form of communication, but visual was better for me. I drew through all my words. Every time I had an instrument in my hand, I attempted to communicate with it, in pictures. I still do.

After emigrating [from Romania with husband Valentin Tinc and their two daughters, in January

2000] the only way to communicate with family back home was through letters. I was impressed with words for the first time when my mother wrote about how she felt. Words showed me for the first time a different person, my mother in a different frame - as a lonely woman. I translated those words into a picture (of myself) as my mother led me on a journey of self discovery. It is her picture of me, through words.

[The work that resulted was the nine-panelled *Letter With Words Hidden in Colour* 2002, (after nine letters from her mother) which collectively built a self portrait of Cristina]

You're a professed Christian. Is there any significant intersection of art and faith for you?

I come from eight generations, 400 years, of priests in Romania. My Popovici [Popo-veech] grandfather was a painter/priest of neo-Byzantine churches. My father was part of the revolution against Ceausescu. He encouraged the people terrified by the blood in the streets and, in one very romantic moment, came between the guns and the people with the cross in one hand and the Romanian flag in the other. His Christian faith was very apparent in that selfless act. So I believe very strongly, but because I studied art so intensely and professionally I developed like any other person simply following their heart. I didn't see faith or art as the same thing.

After many religious experiences (including a trip to Jerusalem, that most religious of places) I became critical of the church where I could not discern the presence of God, just fear, tension and conflict. After a deep personal journey, I now see God within us, as unconditional love. The Orthodox tradition and other Christian experiences led me down a different path, and I became judgemental, even hated churches. I'm redeeming those attitudes now. My belief draws me closer to God. I don't imagine God, I feel Him. I try to capture the beautiful feeling - the presence of God - and put it on my canvases.

When I came to New Zealand the freedom of expression I enjoyed after totalitarian rule allowed me to choose a church where I could experience the presence of God, in happiness, peace and harmony. So, I've changed my way of thinking. I'm not looking for the negative in things (which is how I used to view). I try to view God's essence inside things, the positive and good. You could say my paintings are about expressing the presence of God as I perceive Him.

What is a New Zealand influence that inspires you?

Romania shares New Zealand's convention of an earth palette, but I wanted to move away from the earth and soil. For me, New Zealand was about sky and water. My early New Zealand paintings expressed aqua, blue and green tones. One of my favourite painters is Neil Frazer. I adore his use of colour and texture - his 'language.'

JS

From the Te Puna o Waiwhetu collection

***Ruby Rose Black*, 1992**

One of the most luminous and colourful works in the contemporary collection, Neil Frazer's large *Ruby Rose Black* has been described as "spectacular, exuberant and seductive." Frazer builds up a wonderful tactile depth of coloured blobs, strips and oozings of oil paint that create a multi-layered plain of cavorting contrasting colours. His blues interwoven through the yellows and reds of 'Ruby Rose' are particularly beautiful, like the petal spots of a prize orchid. It is a piece in the best tradition of Abstract Expressionism. The dimensionality, and that the

medium is all oil on canvas rather than coagulated house paint (as used by other artists), is indicative of the technicality and integrity of a quality artwork celebrating painting in its most raw and innocent sense.

Frazer is Canadian, born in 1961, but achieved his Bachelor of Fine Arts from Canterbury University in 1985 before studying at the New York school of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture. He first exhibited in 1984, and views himself as a third generation Abstract Expressionist moving on from the 'action painting' laid down by pioneers Rothko, Pollock and de Kooning. Rather than a 'splatterer' or 'vertical dribbler' Frazer works upright, applying thick oil directly onto the canvas.

JS



Ruby Rose Black, Neil Frazer, 1992, oil on canvas, 227.5 x 342 x 7.5 cm (Used with permission of Christchurch Art Gallery).

Review

***Wrapped Feelings*, Cristina Popovici**

The Arthouse, 29 July - 24 August 2003

Inspiration and innovation it seems come naturally to Cristina Popovici. As if an intercessor between an intuitive expression of emotion and the pure pleasure of artistic technique, Popovici communicates in this new body of work an explosive and euphoric world of movement, colour and reflection. The power of paint to evoke intensity is a hallmark of this artists work. Since arriving in New Zealand in 2000, Popovici has seduced audiences with her irrepressible artistic process. Recent winner of

the CoCA Annual Art Award, she is garnering much attention both nationally and internationally for her painterly dexterity.

An abstract expressionist painter, Popovici is unafraid to work on a large scale - both metaphorically and literally. Her paintings confront the viewer with energetic colour and form achieved through a variety of techniques such as pouring, dripping, spraying paint and collaging, shaping and cutting canvas. Aptly titled, *Wrapped Feelings*, these paintings variously combine alternative materials such as fabric towelling with cut outs to create a layered structured effect, while others revert to the familiar Popovici style of psychedelic bursts of



Sonnet: the beauty of the World Within the Flight of the Butterfly, Cristina Popovici, 2003, oil and acrylic on canvas, 1600 x 3200mm.

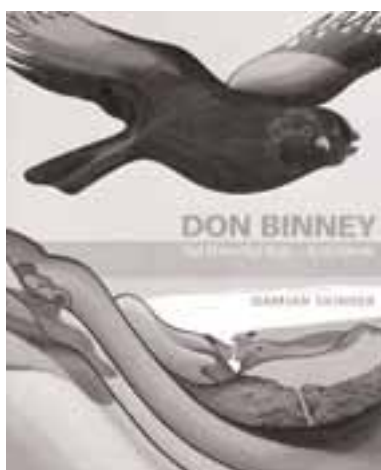
colour on PVC and canvas as seen in *The Orange Tunnel*. A largesse of expression is particularly redolent in *Waterfall of Energy* a musical composition of blue, white, grey and yellow, that conveys an elemental dynamism of water over rock and sky reflected. It is the collaged works though, shifting away from the formulaic expressionism of her earlier style, that make this exhibition so successful.

Taking the complicated and at times overwhelming emotion of LOVE as her muse, Popovici has layered jewelled colours of magenta, burgundy, cobalt, emerald and amethyst in a matrix of rich rainbow patterns to communicate memories, savoured moments, beauty, sorrow, light and dark. The eight panelled work *The Beauty of the World Within the Flight of the Butterfly* evokes the ephemeral wonder of a fragile butterfly in flight on a summer's day. Almost cubist in the overlapping panels articulated in expressionistic brush strokes, this work transports the viewer to

another landscape, familiar yet dream like and lyrical. *Fingerprints of Love* seems to glow with an inner luminosity as light refracts off the white textured surface. *Wrapped Signs II* similarly plays with light that dances off corrugated edges within the composition.

Saturated fields of paint in *Andante* recall stained glass windows in a palette of satisfying richness. Savouring a slower relationship with a work, unveiling then veiling it again, exploring inner feelings and dimensions, has reaped for Popovici, it would appear, a very considered and dynamic series of work. She says of the series, "I tried to give a visual sense for my working with feelings. I look at feelings as layers of fragile curtains..." The robustness of these paintings belie this sentiment, yet Popovici's ability to explore deeper levels found within a spontaneous stroke of bravura presents the viewer with a rewarding experience of indeed being wrapped in LOVE.

Jennifer Hay, July 2003



From the resource centre

Don Binney:
Nga Manu/Nga Motu - Birds/Islands
by Damian Skinner, Auckland University Press.

Nga Manu/Nga Motu prefaces Don Binney's major retrospective "63-SixtyThree" at the Brooke Gifford October 14- November 8, 2003. The artist is 63 this year and his first solo show (at the Ikon gallery) was in 1963, the year I was born.

81 pictures, mostly colour plates, are wrapped within 130 pages comprising a wide arching introduction to Don Binney's life and thought, the transcript of an interview, and a detailed

chronology. Damian Skinner's writing style is crisp and expressive without being 'quagmired' in art speak (hooray) allowing us an uncluttered view of Don Binney as artist. A strength of the book is the extended interview which allows Binney to speak for himself. In 2003 he remains one of those rare recyclers of the richness and eloquence of the English language; each thought well considered, almost poetic in its delivery (in the tradition of Maori orators); a last Mohican trudging across the bleak scoured word-plain of post-modernity eroded by television, the glib, political correctness and superficiality.

"...unmysteriously, I am compelled and driven by the sense of mystery that much Maori lore and legend carries with it. I have always, as a pakeha citizen in this country, been just naturally, easily aware of the Maori social,

mythic, tribal, legendary, poetic, artistic presence...when I talked about the early stage of my life, about the self-conscious use of nationalism or self-conscious symbolism and that sort of thing, I too have always cringed at the, what you might call, plastic tiki abbreviation or legacy, the cheapening and short circuiting of ancient and revered imagery and belief."

Skinner tackles the hard stuff - the years of isolation under the 'regionalist' straitjacket, treating us to rare insights into some of Binney's photo montage work during this time, well outside the canon of his, now, iconographic painterly signature.

While not exhaustive, *Nga Manu/Nga Motu* is a valuable tome on the life and work of one of New Zealand's key painters, leading us to "reevaluate a major artist." It is certainly a valuable visual survey. For those coming to Don Binney for the first time, a contemporary photo of the artist to complement the Marti Friedlander image of Don in his twenties on the back cover, would have been informative. My only criticism - I was left wanting more.

A recommended Christmas present for anyone interested in the arts.

Reviewed by John Stringer

Rat Tickling

poems by James Norcliffe

Published by Sudden Valley Press
Christchurch, 2003

At first I was too busy and could only peek between the pages, but eventually I sat and read *Rat Tickling* in one sitting, a smile forming across my face, which remained even when the final poem was completed. This selection of eighty-four poems is not hilarious, or even rib tickling, but it does reveal the disposition of a writer who loves life, people, creatures, human happenings, even trees.

With the title poem, 'rat tickling', "this is a twitchy shifty world ... it looks at you / sideways offering small pleasures", a curtain is lifted on Norcliffe's world. The reader is introduced to delicious curiosities, generally unseen "grace notes the colour of autumn" and the "heave of grey fur / the near-silent rapture of a rat". From that fine starting point Norcliffe shares his familiarity with everything his gentle eyes and ears have recorded. Lizards look with "eyes like emerald pinheads / hard as knowledge / dark as forever // believe me". A pianist strums at a piano as if it were, "an eighty-two string guitar". A carrion hawk killed by a car has "feathers splayed like a winning hand". And mudfish sport "elbows in their legs". Norcliffe dialogues with a cabbage tree, "don't you rattle your / dry swords at me". And while eating, in 'Julia's fish', his "mouth sucks into joy".

The poet knows his world, and through well honed craft, passes on compassionate observations – because they give him pleasure. These are poems to read at leisure, their empathetic original phrases stay in the mind, like

welcome echoes.

Norcliffe's poetic touch is as sensitive as a Seurat painting, each word like a paint dot, considered and essential to the whole. Such excellence creates smiling delight.

Reviewed by Peb Simmons

in the letter

there was nothing
of the tall ice floes
the beautiful bruise of sky
the potted meat still edible
after all these years

in the letter there was
the ineffable sadness
of French horns
on an imaginary
journey to the Faroes

there was the sadness
of ink fading I suppose
the sweet symmetry
of the folds your fingers
would have pressed
all weather out of

there was in the letter
little of my hopes
only the cursive slope
of how things were

and your small hand
movements frozen

James Norcliffe

Rat Tickling,
Sudden Valley Press 2003





Detail of Paul Dibbles' "Heartland" (a land form within a heart aperture), 1800 x 600 x 460mm, cast bronze, framing his tableaux of sculpted bronzes behind, "Down the Line", Brooke Gifford, Sept. 16 - Oct. 11, 2003.



Darryn George at his opening of *Tipuna* at Brooke Gifford Gallery talking to Jonathan Mane-Wheoki (Dean of Music and Fine Arts at University of Canterbury).



Hohua/Joshua, Darryn George, 2003, oil on canvas, 40 x 40cm.

Review

***Tipuna*, Darryn George**
Brooke Gifford Gallery, 16 Sept. - 11 Oct. 2003

Maori are known to symbolically represent their ancestors on woven tukutuku panels and carvings in meeting houses on maraes, to make their past present within whanau. Ngapuhi Christchurch painter Darryn George (HOD Art at Christ College) does just that with his exhibition *Tipuna* which opened at the Brooke Gifford alongside Paul Dibble's sculptural show "Down the Line" (the latter opening simultaneously at the Gow Langsford, Sydney).

In a series of 13 square canvases (nine 40x40cm and four 80x80cm) Darryn George evokes the names of *Tipuna* from his chosen Christian heritage (*Haka/Haggai*, *Maraki/Malachi*, *Rahera/Rachel*, etc) in contemporary rectilinear meanders appropriated from his Maori art heritage. The images, in a variety of primary colours including fluorescent yellow dominated by black, are analytical, almost mathematical, to a pakeha eye, but hold more significant meaning to Maori understanding. As well as meaning, Darryn George demonstrates his concern for surfaces, technique, colour and contrast in a style similar to that of Gordon Walters.

Gallery director Judy Gifford describes the show as a "very elegant exhibition, beautifully considered with references to the marae. The

artist is definitely exploring his Maori background with this show," to which could be added, 'his Christian life,' following the clear allusion to Biblical characters as 'ancestors.'

The most sophisticated work for my taste, is *Meri Makarini/Mary Magdalene*, one of the four larger works. The panel is split vertically between black and black/purple surfaces emerging left/right from the patterned Maori meander. The whole work is framed in white, perhaps symbolic of the redeemed Magdalene. The black left side speaks to me of her darker past. The emergent black/purple right side of the painting could be symbolic of her later communion with Jesus as divine royalty. The larger works, all named after Biblical matriarchs (Mary, Esther, Mary Magdalene, Ruth) parallels the Maori tradition of emphasized matriarchy.

Tipuna is not as animated or dramatic as his last exhibition at the Brooke Gifford (*Expedition 2002*) or his quirky take on Rorschach psycho-analytical inkblots (*UpDownUp* also 2002). While continuing his strong graphic and textural journey in painting, *Tipuna* is perhaps more concerned with hidden meaning as the artist goes internal and more reflective.

JS

Kotuku

You were there on Monday
& in the same place on Tuesday,

under the macrocarpas, in the watercress
& mud of Wyllie's Creek.

You must be the same bird

I remember
seeing a kotuku further down the creek.

It was April,

when we were digging nadines.

*

Egretta alba modesta

modesta,
I like that
some sort of Renaissance Virgin,

though you seem
more of an angel.

alba,
feminine
some sort of white order

your neck shrouded in a wimple
& fish on Friday.

Egretta,
your generic name.
You're so Italianate, Kotuku –

poised,

standing in the creek above the watercress.

Eric Mould

Working Voices, J. O'Connor / E. Mould,
Hallard Press, Auckland

The man who dreamed mountains

They were his songs.
Places where he could be.
The only wrongs

the weather, or rockfall
or avalanche. On Sundays
he'd bike out all

the way to
Porter's from Linwood to climb
Torlesse; who

with his young wife
(soon to sicken) would then turn
home again – rife

on the easy slope –
wind at their backs. Everything
seemed like hope.

John O'Connor

Working Voices, J. O'Connor / E. Mould,
Hallard Press, Auckland

When it doesn't pass you by

it's a day in March
hot dry heat
the earth burning
he's walking up this road
like up a river
the current against him
he calls out in a loud voice why
but it doesn't pass him by
not the way maybe he'd hoped
there are rocks in the river
uprooted trees
broken bridges
he turns and says yes
he doesn't fight the current
not anymore
he lets it take him
cut
bleeding
and dying
he lets the river take him
into the light

Kathleen Gallahger

With Our Eyes Open, Chrysalis Seed Trust 2002



Turn, Claire Beyon, 2003, charcoal and pastel on paper, 57 x 80.5cm, finalist in Cranleigh Barton Award, 2003.

DeepSouth CS news from Dunedin and beyond

The cast and crew of *Jersualem, Jerusalem* have returned home to Dunedin after taking Mike Riddell's play about poet and Christian radical James K. Baxter from the Edinburgh of the South to the Edinburgh of the North.

What began as a week-long production at Dunedin's Globe theatre ended up just over a year later performing to rapt audiences at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, a success due in no small part to the determined vision of the playwright, and the director Rosemary Riddell.

The trip to the UK served to confirm what sold-out houses had suggested here: that the play's uncompromising witness to James K. Baxter's life and message is impossible to ignore. Despite being one of over a thousand theatre acts performed at the Edinburgh Fringe, *Jerusalem, Jerusalem* played for two straight weeks to good audiences, receiving a four-star review from The Scotsman, which hailed the play as "innovative and provocative". The best audience response came in Belfast, where the cast and crew did two performances, concluding with fantastic audience discussions. The tour was rounded off by a show at the Greenbelt Christian festival. Over-flowing the tent in which the performance took place, the audience gave the players a standing ovation, joining in with the concluding rendition of the hymn *Jerusalem*.

All in all, it has been a remarkable journey for the cast and crew of *Jerusalem, Jerusalem*. Where other productions have undertaken similar projects on a strictly professional basis, this play has been marked from the outset by a strong sense of community amongst those involved, giving integrity to their testimony to Baxter's message of restorative community. With the end

of this production of *Jerusalem, Jerusalem* Mike Riddell is already working on new projects: his novel *Insatiable Moon* is in the early stages of film production.

In response to the proposed development of the Wataki for Hydro-electricity generation, Oamaru artists Sister Mary Horn and John Mitchell invited about thirty artists to submit work that speaks into, and protests against, the plight of the river, its environs and people.

The exhibition features a huge range of visual arts as well as poetry and musical compositions. *Artists Against Aqua* includes Claire Beynon, Nigel Brown, Peter Cleverly, Bing Dawe, Donna Demente, Cilla McQueen, Ewan McDougall, Ken Larryman, Burns Pollack, Michael Smithers, Brian Turner, and Marilyn Webb. The exhibition opened at the Forrester Gallery, Oamaru, on Friday 26th September at 7:30pm, and runs until October 2nd. Also open during the week, the Forrester's weekend hours are: Sat, 10:30am-1pm; Sun, 1pm-4pm.

Mark these dates in your diary: from February 28th to May 16th, the Dunedin Public Art Gallery will host the only mainland exhibition of *Everyday Miracles: The art of Stanley Spencer*. One of the most remarkable religious artists of 20th Century Britain, Spencer's powerful paintings replay Biblical narratives in his native village of Cookham, the local residents taking the place of apostles, saints and angels. His bold, and sometimes controversial approach, fuses the everyday and spiritual. Well worth a trip south to see!

This is the first column of what is hoped will be regular arts news from Dunedin and beyond. If you have news of happenings in the Otago area that would be of interest to CS News, please contact John Dennison: ph 03 477 2339; dennison_john@hotmail.com

//
I'm
rebellious
against
winning
and the
commercial
scene

Sue Spigel, 2003



Interview

Contemporary cathedrals of art, Sue Spigel

Early in 2003 two Australasian artists (a painter and a quilt maker) quite separately approached cathedrals in their respective cities to propose coincidental public art projects. Outside the Anglican cathedral in Melbourne (July - September 03) is a colossal triptych in progress by public landscape artist David Porter called the *Road to Jericho* featuring the good Samaritan story in an Outback context. The artist felt the Biblical message had much to say about contemporary issues of hospitality and prejudice in Australian society. In the Anglican cathedral in Christchurch (12 Sept. - 2 Oct. 03) as a lead up to the annual Quilt Symposium from 26 September is an exhibition of eight quilts called *Sacred Conversations* by Sue Spigel. Two



September 2003: Andrew Panoho lays the foundations for his new studio in Blenheim.

Sue Spigel interview continued

contemporaneous public displays of contemporary art in two major Australasian cathedrals.

Sue has been involved in the Quilt Symposium for eight years, as an exhibitor, teacher and retailer and won best of show during the last two Symposiums. "But I didn't go to the award ceremonies. I'm rebelling against winning and the commercial scene."

After 30 years working in the medium, her work has veered toward the deeply personal, 'art from the heart.' "I now produce my own designs, painting and dying my own fabric rather than using commercial fabric. I didn't want to put 'soul work' in front of judges in a hall with 200 works. My work is about other things now. I wanted my art to be in a sacred space where people could interact with it in a different way." A few years earlier there had been a display of children's art in the Christ Church cathedral, where she regularly worships and Sue approached the church for permission for the exhibition.

Originally from Detroit, Sue moved to New Zealand in 1976. Faith and art are inseparable to her. "I couldn't do my work without my faith, that's where it comes from. Creativity, imagination, being given these gifts, thoughts and ideas and being awake enough to grab hold of them are all important facets of my arts practice." It's a view reiterated by David Porter in Australia. "Like most artists, I'd say that all art is 'spiritual,' but I've never painted anything so literal or literary before."

JS

Letters to the Editor

Tribute not memorial

7 August 2003

I was interested to read your Director's comment which mentions the sculpture "A Tribute to Firefighters" by Graham Bennett. Could I point out that the work was never intended to be a 'memorial' - in fact we took great care not to use this term at any time during the sourcing, transporting and fabrication of the steel into the art work. Rather than being a 'souvenir' the steel was gifted by the City of New York to the City of Christchurch in the context of the World Firefighter Games held in Christchurch in October 2002 and the subsequent dedication of the newly landscaped Firefighters Reserve adjacent to the Central Firestation. There was always going to be an art work on that site and the relationship we developed with Firefighters, both here and in New York, gave the impetus for the steel and its use as the material for the art work. We also had strict criteria from the Office of Emergency Management in New York for the use of the steel. I have been dealing personally with the employees of the construction company at Ground Zero, the NY Fire Department and members of the Office of Emergency

Management, who have all shown enormous goodwill and interest in the project. There was a great deal of consideration and deep thought by both the artist and the City Council team involved in the Reserve development, considering the sensitive nature of the material.

In order for the true story to be documented I have initiated a book entitled "Journey - The Story of the Steel" by Rosa Shiels. This book is available here at CCC for \$9.95 - proceeds going to the Firefighters Welfare Society and the Burns Unit.

I hope the above brief summary is of interest to you. The project was a unique one and I have been fortunate to have visited New York twice over the last eighteen months and have been able to give books to the above people involved who helped us so much with the steel and its journey. We intend to mount a storyboard on the bridge railing which will give a short summary of the story so that the sculpture will be acknowledged as "A Tribute to Firefighters" and not a memorial of September 11th.

Marlene LeCren

Arts Adviser, Christchurch City Council

Allusive, art, outside the frame (edited)

August 2003

Len Lye is arguably New Zealand's greatest artist. Virtually unknown in New Zealand, he was famous overseas for ground-breaking work in direct-animation film and kinetic sculpture. That's his wind wand on the foreshore at New Plymouth. Recently I finished reading Roger Horrock's biography of Len Lye (a brilliantly easy-to-read, well considered and vibrant book to match Lye's personality.

The book talks about how Lye exercised his sensory skills. On Monday, for example, he would hone in and focus on sound, on Tuesday he would focus on touch, and so on. At the end of each day he would write down his discoveries. What emerged was a keen sense of things – motion, touch, energy, sound and colour.

I found a definition of art recently as I was reading Art and Soul by Brand and Chaplin (essential reading). It was a quote from Calvin Seerveld that emphasised an essential 'allusive' quality to art – art alludes to something outside the frame (of immediate reference) and is quite difficult to put your finger on exactly.

It gets me thinking about exercising my senses, developing an awareness. And when I think about it more, beyond our immediate frame of reference, I think about Brother Lawrence and the presence of Christ. Christ is there alright, but the first step is to notice him. And I remember C.S. Lewis describing Heaven as a place where everything is ultra-real, overwhelming, experienced a million times more than anything we're used to – it's a place alluded to by Earth.

In the end, it's art. I can't quite grasp it, but that's the way I like it.

Andrew Killick (writer and poet Tauranga)



Heaven is
a place
alluded to
by Earth

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Stella, Andrew Clarkson, Waveney Warth, Alan Joyce, Tanya Pauling, 1998, Mixed Media, Montana New Zealand Wearable Art Awards 1998.



Royal Blood, Andrew Clarkson, Rachel Barus, Jo Robertson, 1999, Mixed Media, Montana New Zealand Wearable Art Awards 1999.

Review

Montana World Of Wearable Art Awards - 2003

Trafalgar Centre, Nelson, 18 - 28 Sept. 2003

As a past entrant and ongoing fan, it's been my pleasure to attend most years and so once again feel the gloriously positive vibe of The World of Wearable Art Awards (branded WOW).

This show is as much about the design of its garments as it is the breathtaking awards night performance/s. Seeing WOW on TV or even visiting the WOW museum in Nelson only gives a limited idea of what actually happens on the

night. This years performance was no exception as the Royal New Zealand Ballet added its professional spin (for the first time) to the already superb choreography of previous years by Merenia Gray and Morag Brownlie.

Kudos to all the enthusiastic models who passionately displayed the hundreds of national and overseas designs – a truly visual feast.

Speaking of taste, I always prefer the more 'conceptual' versus the vast amount of 'hippy-art' entered. Unfortunately the judges seem to favour all this earth-mother-goddess-new-age stuff! The show *is* based in Nelson!

Andrew Clarkson

*Necessary Protection -
Black Cross*,
Tim Brown, 2003,
(Christchurch Polytechnic
'X' Block, September 2003),
ceramic and wood,
1.35m high x 1.5m long x 0.25m high.

