

Making art pay

An interview with sculptor Rob d'Auvergne

None of Rob d'Auvergne's artist friends have full-time creative work. And he asks the question, does the problem lie in the market place or in the minds of these potential artists?

Rob, who left Canterbury University School of Fine Arts two years ago with degrees in philosophy and sculpture, says a "stuff the world" attitude is common among young artists – and not to mention tutors and department heads.

He watched as many students in his class bought into the post-modern way of thinking that art was no more than an exercise in self-expression.

Whether they realised it or not, they had their own set of beliefs impacting their work, says Rob, who last year won a grant from the Canterbury Development Corporation to help get small businesses off the ground. The money has gone towards the first year of his three-year business plan, which includes identifying target markets for his sculptures. He is working full-time on the plan with the aim of making a living from his works.

"Art school is a test tube environment which even tutors get locked into. Students are told that it doesn't matter what the world thinks of their art."

Consequently, they alienate themselves from the real world, diminishing the likelihood of them getting full-time work as artists, he says.

Rob admits he studied philosophy to "keep him sane". "I needed stimulation because without it art can become very empty. Art doesn't come in a vacuum."

In order to make a living from art, he says an artist must realise that they are part of a community and therefore embrace what the critics say.

Rob, now aged 25, went to Rangiora High School and showed promise in both the arts and sciences. He had the marks to continue with sciences but art, being his first love, took centre stage. However, he has never given up on the science world and even today his interest lies in the crossover between science, art and industry.

"I enjoy using modern materials and drawing modern things. My work critiques the relationship between art and technology and I like looking at the way science and industry is borrowing so much from

organic forms. This can be seen a lot today in architecture, appliances and cars. People are starting to make buildings that 'breathe' and 'move' like living organisms. Materials like steel have been replaced by natural and synthetic materials – wood, foam, rubber – materials that move."

Rob has followed the theme of flight for some years and his latest work, soon to be erected in the Art Centre, has been commissioned by the Kauri Trust, which supports artists by lending out art to public places. The Bible College of New Zealand also has one of his works on loan which again was commissioned by the Kauri Trust.

Rob has sold his sculptures at group exhibitions, including one at CoCA in 2001 and another two at the Campbell Grant Gallery. All works were small sculptures made to look like multi-purpose tools taking on animal qualities. Rob shys away from many of the grants available for artists because the nature of the application tends to steer him in a particular social and philosophical direction.

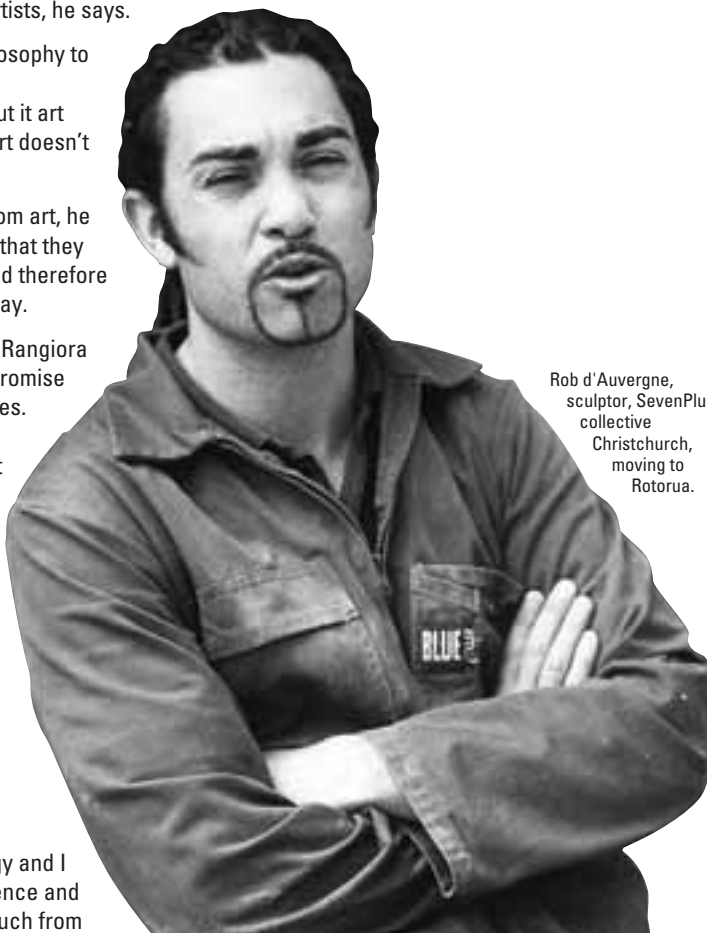
Harriet Jackson

Roman Soldiers

Michael Harlow

With Our Eyes Open, 2002, p. 89.

Conscripts; from the backworld
Of country habits - gossip, rough wine,
Dicing; or in quiet, whittling
A child's flute with notes the colour
Of honey. And they are loyal.
When the clench of the heart is quick,
The Hour is called - orders barked
From tent to tent. They dowse
Their fires; they touch
Each other at the wrist, shrug off
The vague uncertainties that hum
In their ears. With a nudge
They remind themselves that they are
Legion, and they swarm to the foot
Of the tree: juice from the thornberries
Blooding the palms of their hand
They wipe against the sky.



Rob d'Auvergne, sculptor, SevenPlus collective Christchurch, moving to Rotorua.