

Interview: Anne Fountain Artist, Canterbury

Anne Fountain was born in Surrey and raised in the New Forest area of Hampshire, England. She arrived in New Zealand in 1963 and attended life drawing and landscape classes. In 1967 she married Ross. After raising three girls she resumed painting in 1978 and in 1981 became a working member of the CSA and a founding member of the Canterbury Colourists art group. From 1991-93 she completed a diploma at the Studio Art School, Christchurch, where she discovered mixed media techniques, particularly encaustic, to express ideas. While at the Studio Art School she was influenced by Seraphine Pick, Grant Banbury, Neil Frazer, Shane Cotton, William McAloon and Joanna Braithwaite. Anne is a deacon and her husband Ross priest at St Paul's Anglican church, Tai Tapu, where they reside.

Anne Fountain is a consistent and dedicated artist, one of nine featuring in the upcoming Chrysalis Seed group show *Night and Day*.



(At right) *Light Knight*, Anne Fountain, 2004, mixed media with encaustic, 300 x 300 mm, *Night and Day* Chrysalis Seed group exhibition, CoCA, Christchurch, 9 March – 2 April 2005.



Working again with her signature Lewis Chessmen, her completed two works for *Night and Day* feature knights concealed in an overlaid encaustic circle, intended as a new moon, on a square mount. One 'moon' is dark wax *Light Knight*, the other *Day Knight* is under a white moon/circle, each of which is barely discernible. Celtic uncial-style script surrounds each knight image within their Day and Night circles beneath a patina of cracking varnish.

J.S.: After raising three girls (among them artist Katie Thomas) you got involved in the Studio Art School. How did you first come to painting and your present media (wax encaustic)?

"I had always loved painting at school, and wanted to go to art school in those days, but my parents felt that was not an inappropriate career for a girl, so I did secretarial work. At the same time I never gave up painting. While at the Studio Art School Seraphine Pick did some holiday work-shops, one on wax. She used paraffin wax and turps as thinners and gouged it out with a knife. When I saw all that fluid wax I could see the possibilities of doing many other things with

it as well. So it was Seraphine Pick's little day workshop that got me started."

Your work has a lot of text in it. What is that connection?

"I used words from the beginning. I loved Uncial script (a bit like on the Book of Kells but more legible) attracted by its Celtic swirling, and did work that lent itself to Celtic infiltration."

So your later love affair with the Lewis Chessman married to the Uncial text at an aesthetic level?

"I'd earlier done some work on the Song of Songs, and the Four Seasons and did exhibitions on those themes. They lent themselves to words, as well as music, so I branched out into the music of the Four Seasons. The start of it was the little symbols for the seasons that are Celtic looking images. I haven't been able to trace where they actually come from. They look a bit like writing, so script fitted with those themes very easily. The Kings, Queens and Bishops of the 12th century Lewis Chessmen also have Celtic designs on the back of them."

Where did the Lewis Chessmen theme start for you then?

"I was in a low spot, had a bad cold and one of my commissioned works hadn't been liked all that much. I came home feeling a bit blah and looked up at my Welsh dresser and here were these little replica chess pieces looking down at me. I thought I could work with those, so it all came from a low patch, and I became inspired.

They were found in 1831 but date back to the 12th century. Being hand made they're all individualistic and that gave me liberty to put my own expressions on them and do my own things to them. None of them were the same."

Is there life after the Chessmen?

"In my last show, the Lewis Chessmen didn't appear so much, only in a fragmented and abstract form. I thought I might branch out into something new, but found myself coming back to them. I thought about Bill Hammond and his birdmen thing and other artists' iconography, and there is no real reason why I can't continue to use them if I want to. I can still do anything that excludes them, but if they want to keep appearing, that's fine too."

What are you currently working on?

"My next solo show is 2006 and I'm involved in *Night and Day* before then, so that gives me some time to experiment. I want to do things with rusted tin under various conditions. I've had some ideas about 'moth and rust corrupting, thieves breaking in and stealing', things like that."

John Stringer