

Of mentoring, foiled and fragmented women

An interview with sculptor Anna Korver

Fragmented women and the tones of autumn is what emerging fulltime sculptor Anna Korver of Christchurch is hammering out. This New Zealand representative sabre and foil fencer is chipping away at male-centric preoccupations; literally carving out an exciting niche for herself in the contemporary New Zealand art scene. And people are starting to take notice. She shares an art studio with fellow wood sculptor Paul Deans, in the Heathcote Valley of Christchurch.

JS: How do you find sharing a studio with an older artist? Is that inspirational?

'It's really good working with someone in the same medium. You have knowledge you can share, and you feed off each other. There's good energy and it's a great space.'

How many sculptural symposiums are you involved with now?

'I did eight last year, Auckland to Southland. Stone mainly, there was a wood one in Auckland [Takapuna's *Wood Sculpture Live*]. So far this year I have been involved in three and I have been invited to one in Costa Rica in April (2006). This will involve working on a 6 foot piece of marble and creating a sculpture for the town of Puntarenas, which is a tourist resort in Costa Rica, so it should be very challenging but lots of fun.'

With the symposiums, do you find a strong mentor element present at those; are you drawing from the other artists?

'I do. I wouldn't go as far as "mentoring" – it's sharing really, experiences and knowledge of tools and techniques. It's such a change from working in the more solitary space of the studio. You need to get out and get refreshed, explore new ideas, learn about new tools, it's really necessary for a sculptor.'

What sort of new things have you picked up?

'(Especially at the wood ones) the way people use wood and the effects they create, like colouring it. People have such different styles, and do things I would never have thought of.'

Originally from Nelson, graduating from Ilam School of Fine Art in 2003, Korver's first solo show at Creation, Cathedral Square, followed a year as a dedicated professional artist with a growing list of commissions and group shows. She was first exhibiting as a student artist when I noticed this new talent. That led to a guest appearance in the Chrysalis Seed Trust group exhibition at CoCA, Easter 2003, and an invitation to appear in the 2004 Nelson Arts Festival outdoor *Mac's Sculpture Symposium* with eleven other national sculptors.

Korver's sweeping, sensuous nude forms in wood, metal and mixed media demonstrate a mature control of materials and a vibrant creative talent unafraid to express itself. Her works are edgy, confronting, dynamic, and yet peaceful and in complete harmony with the flow, texture and imperfections of her materials. Her art declares a minimalist beauty and sophistication that goes well beyond the crass provocation of so much modern student art. Korver conjures up an ironic paradox of a sensuous femininity

born of hammer and chisel, forged metal, muscle and brute force that redefines traditional notions of women in art/sculpting.

People love to touch her work. Rails Mackey owns *Fragment 3*, 'a beautifully shaped bottom in my foyer. As people come in they surreptitiously wipe along each side of the bottom. It's tactile and sensual artwork. I wish I had a bottom like that.'

The wood in both *Fitted Skin* and *Autumn* is slightly mottled, there are cracks and bumps, and the toning is not perfect ...just like human skin or rotting autumn leaves, which the artist exploits. Korver is able to delicately force a piece of wood to fall like fabric, drawing near to Michelangelo's ability to create the illusion of body warmth in cold marble.

Her *Fitted Skin* exhibition was about New Zealand women not fitting into traditional roles. She is exploring personally where her generation fits. 'It's partly about being uncomfortable, the whole traditional thing not being accepted by modern society,' she says. 'Female roles don't have a place, because there's no monetary value on them.'

How do you use your forms to explore the concept of women being valued less?

'By using fragmentation a lot. I've been distorting images over the last four years. The rabbit skin work *Skin Dress* (rabbit skin, glass, electric lighting) is tied to childhood, the opposite to mine. I was never into dolls; it's about how we're expected to grow up, the skin we're expected to fill. Rabbit skin is close to a person's skin, another mammal. The work is also about wildness. It was created from road kill, which is about women being tossed aside, run over, crushed, destroyed.'

'Wood is my favourite medium. I work it maybe nine months of the year, get a bit sick of it, and try something else. I do stone at symposiums, a bit of metal, some resin. I'm trying to merge some of that into mixed media.'

What got you into wood originally?

'My Dad carves as a hobby. He taught me from four years old and is in the Wood Workers' Guild (where he met Paul Deans). At university they weren't teaching a lot of technique, so I had to call on things I already knew.'

You use a lot of power tools to cut the form...

'I use a chisel if I want a chisel finish, but I've got to the point now, time-wise, where I use power tools a lot. Constraints mean I have to work quickly.'

You do a lot of work in lime wood. What are the main woods you select?

'You can always get macrocarpa. It's a really under-rated wood, it's nice, but splits sometimes. The harder woods are not as easy to come by. I'm going to get some willow. When I was up north I saw artists using kauri and I was given some. It was great; I'd love to work more with kauri and other native timbers.'

John Stringer

Anna Korver in her studio. Photo: Joanna Osborne



Female roles don't have a place because there's no monetary value on them