

amount of awareness about the gallery's permanent collection as well as the possibility of international shows coming here for us to see. The relationship between dealer and public galleries is important. Artists have all sorts of perceptions about public art galleries and it's not easy to please everyone. Reputations are often greatly assisted because of what happens in public institutions and it is difficult to balance the variety of voices all expressing different needs about what is displayed. Individual artists often have strong opinions about what does or does not happen. Galleries have to think about broader considerations and that is a complex task involving a lot of skill and awareness about acquisitions.

If you had a free hand, what singular thing, or group of things, would you do in Christchurch to enhance the visual arts here?

More public sculpture! It's a real way of breaking down arts boundaries and building a connection with an audience outside a facility like a gallery. People accept public sculptures. There are always different factions, such as elitist groups, and we need a range of things. Why, for example, did it take so long for Neil Dawson to have a major public sculpture in his own city while gracing various other capitals?

John Stringer

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Things that go "click" in the night

Interview : photographer, Stefan Roberts

stefan roberts beyond, 10-28 February 2004, Campbell Grant Galleries

Bible College and Anthony Harper collections 2003, Kauri Trust

The beguiling thing about Stefan Roberts' work is , people think his photographs are computer graphics, such is his talent with the camera. Overhearing several conversations at the opening of his most recent show, it became apparent several people simply did not believe it was straight photographs they were seeing, such is the surreal and 'other world' quality of his talent for capturing the extraordinary from the ordinary (fence posts at night, an abandoned grain silo, a rotting swamp log).

Roberts' recent work exhibits a continued dedication to traipsing around New Zealand landscapes in the dead of night and freezing in all weathers while his camera takes extremely

long night exposures (the curved lines you see in some of his night skies are actually the track of fixed stars as the earth revolves). During the exposure, the artist moves into frame and 'paints' his main subject with torches and light sticks, and it is this that gives the final product the eerie, surreal signature. The artist describes his work as, "not snapshots in time, rather the folding of time into a visual space. I want to reveal what is hidden, what is unseen by the human eye. The long exposure can often reveal what is not normally apparent." He successfully captures environmental imagery and scenes in a way not conventionally recorded by photography (a ploughed field in *Forgotten Harvest*, 2002, a moonlit track, *Journeys Beyond*, 2003). His works evoke loneliness and isolation; *Untitled 2001* (490 x 320 mm BCNZ) recalls a windswept Antarctic wilderness, *Untitled 2001* (320 x 490 mm BCNZ) resembles rocks or alien life forms on a lunar plain. The choice of subject, framing, and capture of colour in unusual light (moonlight, overcast night light, street lamps, vehicle light) further isolates his material from the everyday.

"For several years I have been exploring the darkness of night; discovering and revealing a world beyond the shadows, a world that



In Rememberance, Stefan Roberts, 2002, giclee photographic print (1 of 5), 1056 x 703 mm, *Beyond* exhibition, Campbell Grant Galleries, February 2004.



At night you lose your sense of place in time ... it could be any year

normally lies hidden. Folding time into one space, freeing our visual perception which is normally trapped in the 'here and now'."

Stefan Roberts was born in Christchurch in 1974. His passion for recording light developed at an early age after being mesmerised by the slide show 'culture' of the 1970s. After years of self-directed experimentation, he gained his formal training in photography at the Christchurch Polytechnic School of Art and Design (1998). Since then he has exhibited in a number of group shows (CoCA, Salamander, Grantham). His first solo show was at the Dobson Bashford Gallery, 2001 and he participated in *Assignment Aotearoa - Your Vision of New Zealand*, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. He currently teaches photography at the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology. His work has gained recognition from Agfa, the Ronald Woolf Memorial Trust and NZIPP.

JS. What is it that first captures your imagination for a picture, that draws you to a subject?

I'm drawn to the abandoned elements that litter our environment. The elements that make me wonder... who made this? Why has it been left here to crumble? They are like the footsteps of history, the remains of a time gone by. Of the multitude of objects that cover our landscape, the ones that attract my attention are those loaded with mystery, the ones that have beauty in their form. Usually they have special qualities that once photographed allow an interpretation on many levels.

Is there something about the night that attracts you, that you are seeking to explore and communicate?

Night attracts me on many levels. Firstly it is a

quiet time where time feels different. At night you lose your sense of place in time (it feels like it could be any year). This sense is heightened by only viewing objects looming out of the dark. Nothing is clear, you lose your reference points. Photographing at night allows me to explore the passage of time (due to the nature of the very long exposures required to produce the images). These elements combine to reveal a world not so much a 'place in time' but a 'journey through time'.

Can you explain the giclee process of photographic reproduction?

My original film is drum scanned by computer that converts the photograph into digital information. This is then sent to a special large roll feed printer loaded with canvas. The printer then applies archival inks according to the information retrieved from the film. The first print (proof print) is examined and adjustments are made to make sure the colours and density are true to my interpretation of the film. Once I am happy, the final image is printed, dried, coated in water proofing lacquer and later stretched over a frame.

What can we expect next from your lens?

Already I have pictures forming in my head, of places I've seen and heard of. I feel a distant quiet night calling me.

To what extent does faith infuse your creative work?

I do not set about to make religious art works, but there is a strong spiritual feel to the works. I do not ask the viewer to respond in any particular manner, each response is personal. How my own beliefs affect my work on a subconscious level is hard to determine.

John Stringer

Necessary Protection: Red Cross (detail),
Tim Brown, 2004, ceramic and wood,
650 mm (wide) x 1400 mm (high) x 135 mm (deep).
Necessary Protection exhibition,
Campbell Grant Galleries, Christchurch,
13 April – 1 May, 2004.

