

Bulletin



THE ROBERT McDOUGALL ART GALLERY

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Wedding gown and skirt with phoenix and unicorn motifs, Baba Chinese, Malacca, Malaysia.

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Christchurch City Council



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Dragon and Phoenix Textiles from Southeast Asia's Chinese Communities

18 March - 18 May

Drawn largely from the extensive collection of Southeast Asian costumes and accessories in the Alice Smith collection at the National Gallery of Australia, this exhibition also includes pieces from an important private collection in Kuala Lumpur. **Dragon and Phoenix** highlights the pervasive Chinese influence found in the textiles and ceremonial objects of Southeast Asia.

For over a thousand years there have been strong land and sea contacts between China and Southeast Asia. Visiting adventurers and traders stayed and centuries of intermarriage created communities that drew on the ritual and art of both the Chinese and the local traditions. Spectacular Chinese costumes were highly regarded by many Southeast Asian communities, so Chinese textiles and metal ornaments were incorporated into their own ceremonial dress. Their ceremonies have been marked by remarkable displays of textiles incorporating imported Chinese elements with the local Asian fabrics.

Dragon and Phoenix covers two interrelated themes - the embroidered wedding costumes and accessories of the Straits Chinese communities of Malaysia and Singapore, and the ceremonial and everyday batik textiles of the Peranakan Chinese of the northern coastal towns of the Indonesian island of Java.

Some pieces were made in China, others in Southeast Asia. Amid the splendid textiles and decorations are bridal regalia such as necklaces, shoes and ties, altar cloths and other sumptuous ceremonial furnishings. The "cloud" collars and a Malay-style ornamental kerchief in this exhibition are amongst the finest examples of these spectacular embroideries ever publicly exhibited.

Included too are several large embroidered garments, resplendent in brightly coloured silk and gold thread, which were worn as ceremonial costumes. Fabrics displayed as hangings and furnishings at weddings in the Chinese communities of the Malay peninsula, and batik altar cloths and related textile hangings used in Indonesian wedding ceremonies are also displayed.

The Indonesian cotton textiles of the Chinese communities living there are

closely related to the Baba-Nonya blend of the Chinese with the Malay silk tradition. Hand drawn wax-resist batik was adopted by these Chinese for their ceremonial clothing, their everyday textiles and the Javanese-style garments like the wrap-around kain panjang and the tubular kain sarong.

The images depicted however remained distinctly Chinese. Whatever the decorative medium - silk embroidery, gold thread couching, stump work, beadwork, batik or gold leaf glue-work, these forms all display the distinctive Chinese motifs. From Chinese mythology came fanciful beasts like the dragon and phoenix, the dog-lion and the 'qilin' unicorn. Joining them were creatures like the deer, aquatic life including goldfish and lobsters, birds, floral emblems with peonies and lotuses, and the Chinese symbols for luck and wisdom.

Dragon and Phoenix is a National Gallery of Australia Travelling Exhibition programme and has been kindly supported by Australian Air Express. As well as giving a fascinating insight into traditional Chinese

decorative motifs, it brings to Christchurch a unique opportunity to enjoy a rich array of exotic Southeast Asian fabrics and accessories.

Robyn Maxwell, lecturer in Asian Studies at the Australian National University, Canberra and the exhibition's curator, will be assisting with this exhibition, and, while in Christchurch, will extend our understanding and appreciation of these works with a public lecture at the Gallery on Sunday 16 March 'Dragon and Phoenix: Chinese influences on the textiles of Southeast Asia.' She will also address the Friends at the 19 March Speaker of the Month on 'Dragon and Phoenix: realistic and mythical creatures in the arts of Southeast Asia's Chinese communities'.

Also visiting is Sim Tan, a Southeast Asian art historian from Kuala Lumpur and a major textiles collector, who will speak on the textile arts of Southeast Asia at the Gallery on 20 March at 6pm.

The Robert McDougall Art Gallery acknowledges the generous support of the Asia 2000 Foundation of New Zealand towards the visits to Christchurch of these speakers.



Man and Mirror, Arthur Tress 1980.

Fantastic Voyage The Photographs of Arthur Tress

14 February - 13 April

This major touring exhibition of the works of the veteran American photographer Arthur Tress comes to Christchurch on its world tour through India, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Mongolia and Australia. After leaving New Zealand it will continue on to Canada. It was developed and funded by the Arts America Program of the US Information Agency as a tribute to over 36 years work by one of America's most

prodigious and diversified photographers. Richard Lorenz, an independent curator from Berkeley, California selected the 100 images for this major retrospective of Tress' career. Dating from 1956 to 1992 they provide a fantastic voyage through the major concepts, concerns and individual preoccupations of this artist.

Works from each series chart his path from real life images of primitive African societies to the recent manipulated images of futuristic timetravel. What appears to be documentary reportage can be so subjective or so fabricated that it subverts the genre and generates a visual world in which the incongruous dualities of beauty and violence are seen to coalesce.

Gradually Tress' work changed from the anecdotal to the universal as he "strove for theatrical metaphors for the dark mysteries of life". Using still-life assemblages he tackled issues thrown up by the intimations of destiny. He examined Western economic and scientific culture and its struggles to enter the next millennium without destroying itself, and the inner space of mind and body as related to the quantum energies of distant galaxies.

Fantastic Voyage also takes us through Tress's narrative serial images which are

often based on the creation myths, into eroticism, the nature of the artist, ecology and the universal search for enlightenment.

Arthur Tress was born in 1940 in Brooklyn, New York. He began photography as a youth and after graduating from college in 1962 travelled widely photographing cultures and customs in Egypt, Mexico, India and Europe. Tress returned to the United States in 1968 and during that year had his first solo exhibition in New York. He has published ten books of his photographs. The most recent was the 1990 "Requiem for a Paper Weight" which is the final part in his trilogy on one man's journey towards enlightenment, told in a fascinating neo-surrealistic spectrum of stunning photographic images.

On 1 March we will hold a one day photographic seminar **Frozen Dreams: Contemporary Photographers Discuss Current Issues and Practices**. Contributors will include Dave Wethey the Illustrations Editor for the Christchurch Press, and leading New Zealand photographers Glenn Busch, Margaret Dawson, Peter Peryer, Lloyd Park, and Murray Hedwig. For further information on this seminar please phone 372 2973.

W. A. Sutton

8 February - 13 April

On 1 March the Canterbury artist W.A.Sutton will reach his 80th birthday. For almost forty of those years he has been a real friend to the McDougall having served as a member of the Art Gallery Advisory Committee in the early 1960s, and since 1985, as a patron of the Friends of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery.

Over the years he has not only been generous with his time but also has enriched the gallery's collection in more tangible ways with many gifts of work, not only by his own hand, but also by other artists.

Such benefaction is born of commitment to the place in which he lives and is a measure of the man who has lived almost all of his 80 years within Canterbury, honing his skills as an artist in the face of the challenges of the Canterbury landscape.

If there ever emerged such a thing as a Canterbury School in the 1930s and '40s, W.A.Sutton was at the centre of it and has rightly inherited the mantle of such eminent Canterbury artists as Archibald Nicoll and Cecil Kelly.

He has, over the past six decades, adapted the best of traditional values developed in painting since the time of the Italian Renaissance, and utilised and extended them to give new identity to the imagery of the Canterbury landscape.

Over the years Sutton has been both a studio painter and a plein-air watercolourist, often the latter being the basis of the former. Just as frequently however his watercolours have been totally complete works.

From his studio some remarkable series of works have emerged since the 1960s, giving rise to a reassessment of the essential special

characteristics of the Canterbury landscape and its weather which is such an important regional feature.

On this special occasion the Gallery salutes W.A.Sutton with an installation from the collection which presents his activity as both a studio and a plein-air painter. Included are works from the Grasses, Landscape Elements, Threshold, Landscape Synthesis and Plantation series as well as watercolours of the Port Hills and Italy.

These days, Sutton does not paint so much in the studio but still, when health permits, he gets out into the Canterbury landscape to find something new, and we hope that he will continue to do so for many more years yet to come. There is still much out there for a painter like Sutton.

Congratulations W.A.Sutton on your achievements and Happy Birthday from us all!

Art Annex

Mua/Muri

21 February - 23 March

Combining traditional referencing with current issues, **Mua/Muri** (Behind/Forwards) is a selection of contemporary Maori art from the Gallery's collection. It brings together works of diverse age, appearance and content, and features both paintings and sculpture.

One of New Zealand's most respected artists, Ralph Hotere is represented by work which embraces universal, rather than specifically Maori, concerns. Although he does not view himself as a political painter, he frequently voices concerns about the human condition and the environment. Hotere has said, "*I am a Maori by birth and upbringing. As far as my work is concerned this is coincidental.*" By contrast, the issues surrounding art and culture are central to the work of Peter Robinson. His "percentage paintings" contain references to Maori genealogy, and explore the way some artists can be seen as "cashing in" on the current demand for fashionable and bankable Maori Art. Robinson works within established European artistic traditions whilst also exploring both contemporary Maori issues and those personal to him.

Robyn Kahukiwa is well known for her series of paintings celebrating the



Untitled. Peter Robinson (Ngai Tahu) 1993.

essential female element in Maori mythology which formed a touring exhibition. Kahukiwa combines traditional Maori patterns, motifs and subjects with the Western materials of oil on canvas, saying, "*There's still a place for the traditional art in the meeting house, for example, but to say things about being Maori now I've got to use today's medium.*" Kahukiwa's 'Tena I Ruia', which represents a women's haka, articulates and celebrates the strength of women within the Maori culture.

Robert Jahnke's German/Samoan/Maori/Irish ancestry makes him a personification of the Pacific/European mix that is 1990s New Zealand. Although an advocate of bi-culturalism, he explores concerns about the injustices done to Maori in his work. His sculpture 'For

King and Country', makes use of the political, spiritual and practical significance the axe has had in both the Maori and the European tradition, as a weapon of war, of settlement and of protest. He reimagines colonial relationships in a way which is dramatic, yet enigmatic; unstable, yet full of possibilities: "*I provide the metaphors and, I hope, enough ambiguity and interplay to allow for rich interpretations. If other meanings are brought to the work then that's an added bonus.*"

With these, and with other Maori art works from the collection, **Mua/Muri** aims to examine the range within the Maori art in the McDougall collection, looking back with respect at the work of the past, and ahead with anticipation towards the art of the future.

Things to Come Works by Rudolf Boelee

28 March - 27 April

With **Things to Come**, the McDougall Art Annex presents works by Christchurch based artist Rudolf Boelee, who came to New Zealand from the Netherlands in 1963. It is an exhibition intended to continue and build upon the themes explored in Boelee's recent travelling show, 'Visions of Utopia', which has toured between many galleries in the North and South Islands. Boelee describes his work as "history painting"; an attempt to seek social significance from events and situations from 1950s New Zealand, and to relate them to present conditions.

Things to Come was designed especially for the large, open Annex space, and consists of work on paper, on canvas, and on painted and silk-screened panels. Each piece is completed with the addition of simple geometric shapes which are painted directly onto the wall, in colours which

were influenced by those of 1950s ceramics.

Drawing from sources as various as science fiction, 'Vogue' and 'Popular Mechanics' magazines, the Grecian Acropolis and New Zealand's racing icon Phar Lap, Boelee examines the way daily life of the 1950s and 60s was affected by popular culture. Each image presents visions which are comfortably familiar, but which can carry a multitude of other connotations. What happens to an image when we suspend the naive belief in a perfect future which abounded when it was first published, and regard it now with the jaded and jaundiced eyes of the late 1990s? Some of the works, which are collages made up of solvent transfers and laser prints, are especially conducive to this treatment. Take for example, the image of "Rebecca and the Maoris" - when initially presented, this picture of a young Maori girl as an exotic and friendly ambassadorial native seemed appealing and positive, but many will now regard it

as distasteful, oversimplified and patronising.

With H.G.Wells' "The Shape of Things to Come", as its starting point, this exhibition aims to contribute to some understanding of contemporary society, locating its disquiet in the here and now. Boelee's stylish constructions present images of the social traditions which encouraged previous generations to believe in an optimistic and uncomplicated life: the symmetrically perfect wedding party, the "Man from Prudential" and the New Zealand Rail teacup. The grimy underside to the prosperity of the 1950s is implied by darker images such as "Mother England", a bleak, Bosch-like portrayal of the realities of industrial Europe. By examining the expectations ordinary people previously had of a "Brave New World" as an affluent and altruistic utopia, we can reflect on how well the future actually measured up, and wonder, perhaps, how accurate our own predictions can be.



E Noho Ra De Chirico, Paul Dibble 1995.

New Paul Dibble Sculptures Outside the Front Door

In mid November Gallery visitors received an unexpected bonus with the appearance on the architectural plinths alongside our front steps of two stunning bronzes. These have recently been purchased by the Art in Public Places fund, and at last complete the 1929 design for the Robert McDougall Art Gallery by the architect Edward Armstrong.

As is fitting after such a delay of sixty four years, the sculpture is a contemporary piece. This work, which is in two parts, is by the New Zealand sculptor Paul Dibble.

Entitled 'E Noho Ra De Chirico' it features a female torso and a leaf. Its title carries the references past the traditional classical torso so significant in Western art, to the influence of the early twentieth century Italian artist Giorgio De Chirico who also revisited the classical torso in his later sculptural works. The surrealist elements also often associated with De Chirico will become plain to all who look carefully at the forms. The Maori words are those of the farewell expressed to the departing person. "Goodbye!" or "Cheerio! De Chirico" is a general translation.

For some years now, the Palmerston

North based sculptor Paul Dibble has been recognised as one of the leading contemporary artists working in bronze. We have one of his works, 'Earth Relics' of 1984 in our collection but now 'E Noho Ra De Chirico' also graces our doorway beside the new banners to give our visitors, both local and tourist, the sense of excitement and anticipation we expect as we enter a vibrant and lively museum of art.

Writing for Interpretation Workshop

On 21 February, in conjunction with the Museum Education Association of New Zealand, we are organising a special workshop for those interested in improving their skills in interpretative writing.

Tutors will be Bruce Morrison, a tutor in the School of Communications, Christchurch Polytechnic and Joanna Orwin, from Landcare Research, who has 25 years experience as the editor for scientific publications, in journalism and as a writer for children.

Lynda Burns, an Interpretation Consultant, will be leading this workshop and all those interested are asked to contact Ann Betts on 372 2973 for enrolments and for further information.

Friends of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery

President—Chris Brocket 355 7133

Vice-President—Mark Stocker 365 3895

Treasurer—Helen-Mary Black 332 7290

Secretary—Ann Watt 379 4055



Speaker of the Month

On 19 February. Sean Sweeney, project manager for the Museum of New Zealand in Wellington, will give an illustrated talk about his involvement with MONZ which includes the development of exhibits and programmes for the new museum.

On 19 March. Robyn Maxwell of the Australian National University in Canberra will speak on **Dragon and Phoenix: Textiles of the Southeast Asian Chinese Community.** The venue for this session will be the Hurst Seager Room, Christchurch Arts Centre.



Pat Unger speaking to Friends

Recent Speaker of the Month

Justin Paton - Don Peebles, The Harmony of Opposites.

It was fortunate for the Friends that Justin Paton, art critic, lecturer and curator of the Don Peebles exhibition was in Christchurch on 20 November.

With the opening of this retrospective exhibition the night before, there was a good attendance in the Hurst Seager Room of the Arts Centre to hear Justin speak on the life and works of one of New Zealand's major abstract artists. Supported by well chosen slides, we were taken through the development of Peebles' work from the early landscapes of the '40s. His fascination with abstraction was evident from 1950.

Being in the vanguard of the New Zealand abstract movement had its difficulties but luckily for us, the artist did not falter in his constant search for new challenges. We appreciated Justin Paton's guidance through the years of development of this fine artist and wish the exhibition well on its national tour. A vote of thanks by Guy Crozier endorsed our appreciation of a most interesting morning.

LocArt Visit to Pat Unger's Studio

Recently a group of Friends met with Pat Unger whose themes were the making of an artist and it's never too late to begin.

She traced her initial Polytechnic training under Barry Cleavin where very careful drawing was emphasised. From there she went to the School of Fine Arts where she found difficulty in making a rough approximation of the image in which freedom and looseness led to the abstraction.

Later visits overseas and the work of James Byrd introduced 'paint for paint's sake'. The lusciousness of paint and the importance of the brush stroke are obvious in her recent Passport series where she has combined the two disciplines.

It was a privilege to view the many experimental works done over the years which trace this artist's changes in approach and dedication to art.

Coming LocArt Visits

On Sunday 23 February Jean and Will Cumming invite a maximum of 40 Friends to view their garden, art collection and Will's studio. Please meet June Goldstein outside 146 Bridle Path Road, Heathcote at 1.50 pm. To book (or cancel) please ring the answerphone on 379 4055.

On Wednesday 5 March Susan Rodgers, model milliner, will show and explain the making of high fashion hats. There will be two sessions, each for a maximum of 10 people. Please meet June Goldstein outside 84 Sturrocks Road, Redwood at 10.20 am, or 5.20 pm. To book (or cancel) please ring the answerphone on 379 4055.

New members

Margaret Abbott
Bertha Allison (Life)
Helen Bain
Joy Collins (Life)
Jessica Crothall
Susan Doyle
Norma Dutton & Peter Gregg
Jo Gregan
Mrs Joan Hamilton
Rosemary Mentink
Emiko Mizukaga
Mrs B A Morrow
Dr & Mrs P I. Munns
Marilyn Rea-Menzies
Mrs C Rice
Earl Tutty
Jeanette & Roy Walker
Gerald Ward
Joanna Wright

LocArt Visit in November

Early in November Jonathan Mane - Wheoki (Ngapuhi), senior lecturer in art history took Friends on a city walk viewing Maori art in public places. His knowledge of Maori and Pakeha history, customs and practice is extensive and he brought alive the ideology and technical expertise of each art work.

Our tour started in Victoria Square with Riki Manuel's Ngai Tahu post and included the law courts, St Michael and All Angels, the Christchurch Polytechnic and the Anglican cathedral.

A tired, happy and appreciative group lunched at the Visitors Centre. We were fortunate indeed in having Jonathan Mane-Wheoki open our eyes to what is readily available for all to see.

Our thanks to Lady McCombs who contributed to this issue

Coming Events

FEBRUARY

Exhibitions

- 1 **Don Peebles: The Harmony of Opposites** - until 2 February
Elizabeth Kelly Portraits - until 13 February
The Virtues. Megan Jenkinson. At The Annex - until 16 February
- 14 **Arthur Tress: Fantastic Voyage** - until 13 April
- 14 **W.A. Sutton** - until 13 April
- 21 **Mua / Muri. Works from the Collection.** At the Annex - until 23 March

Events

Gallery Clubs & Art Appreciation Programmes

- 1 **Saturday 1 Club.** 10.30am. Art appreciation club meeting
- 4 **Mac Club** 10.30am. Art appreciation club for the disabled or differently abled. New members welcome
- 5 **Wednesday 1 Club** 10.30am. Art appreciation club meeting
Wednesday 2 Club 1.30pm. Art appreciation club meeting
- 7 **Friday Club** - 10.30am. Art appreciation club meeting
- 8 **Saturday 2 Club.** 10.30am. Art appreciation club meeting
- 23 **LocArt visit** to Jean and Will Cumming, 146 Bridle Path Road, Heathcote at 1.50pm. To book or cancel phone 379 4055

Lectures & Concerts

- 9 **When Will Went a Wooing** - Concert featuring Anne Lamont Low, Dinah Wright and Peter Low. 2pm. Free Admission
- 14 **Cool Nights, Warm Jazz** - Music evening featuring Malcolm McNeil, Julian Lee and Sandra King, 8pm. Tickets 372 2981
- 19 **Speaker of the Month** - Sean Sweeney will speak on the development of the new Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa. 10.30am
- 21 **Writing for Interpretation MEANZ Workshop** - bookings 372 2973

MARCH

Exhibitions

- 1 **Arthur Tress: Fantastic Voyage** - until 13 April
W.A. Sutton - until 13 April
Mua / Muri. At the Annex - until 23 March
- 5 **Works from the Collection. The 1997 selection.** - until 31 December
- 18 **Dragon and Phoenix. Textiles of the Southeast Asian Community** - until 18 May
- 28 **Things to Come: Rudolf Boelee.** At the Annex - until 27 April

Events

Gallery Clubs & Art Appreciation Programmes

- 1 **Saturday 1 Club.** 10.30am. Art appreciation club meeting
- 5 **Wednesday 1 Club** 10.30am. Art appreciation club meeting
Wednesday 2 Club 1.30pm. Art appreciation club meeting
- 5 **LocArt visit** to Susan Rodgers, 84 Sturrocks Road, Redwood at 10.20am and 5.20pm. To book or cancel phone 379 4055
- 6 **Mac Club** 10.30am. Art appreciation club for the disabled or differently abled. New members welcome
- 7 **Friday Club** - 10.30am. Art appreciation club meeting
- 8 **Saturday 2 Club.** 10.30am. Art appreciation club meeting
- 18 **Teachers meeting** - Robyn Maxwell will speak on the arts of Southeast Asia and Dragon and Phoenix 4.30pm

Lectures & Concerts

- 1 **Frozen Dreams: Contemporary Photographers discuss current issues and practices.** A one day workshop. Information and enrolments 372 2973
- 16 **Robyn Maxwell**, from the National University of Australia, will speak on 'Dragon and Phoenix: Chinese Influences on the textiles of Southeast Asia' 11am

- 19 **Speaker of the Month.** Robyn Maxwell will speak on 'Dragon and Phoenix: Realistic and Mythical creatures in the arts of Southeast Asia's Chinese communities'. 10.30am at the Hurst Seager Room, Christchurch Arts Centre
- 20 **Guggenheim Tour to Dunedin** - First preparatory lecture. 7pm at the Hurst Seager Room, Christchurch Arts Centre
- 20 **Sim Tan** art historian and collector from Kuala Lumpur will speak on Southeast Asian textiles. 6pm.
- 23 **Sim Tan** art historian and collector from Kuala Lumpur will give a Floortalk on the exhibition **Dragon and Phoenix. Textiles of the Southeast Asian Community**
- 27 **Guggenheim Tour to Dunedin** - Second preparatory lecture. 7pm at the Hurst Seager Room, Christchurch Arts Centre



Pat Unger, Suzanne Robin, Margaret Beetram, Alan Shadwell and Jenny Shadwell at the recent LocArt visit to Pat Unger's studio

Tour to Dunedin for the Masterpieces from the Guggenheim Museum

During the weekend 5-6 April the Gallery will be organising another of its popular art tours. This time we will be travelling down to Dunedin for an over night stay, and to see the exciting Masterpieces from the Guggenheim Museum which opens in Dunedin in March. As this will be the only southern hemisphere venue, we are organising a trip for the Friends of the McDougall.

The McDougall tour programme will involve two introductory lectures on 20 and 27 March with the Gallery Education Officer Ann Betts who will also lead the tour. Costs will be announced later but please phone 372 2973 and leave your name if you would like to be contacted with further details.