

Bulletin



THE ROBERT McDOUGALL ART GALLERY

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Superman at Backbeach, 1995, Graham Kirk.

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Christchurch City Council



The Robert McDougall Art Gallery
P.O. Box 2626 Christchurch
Fax (03) 365-3942
Telephone (03) 365-0915
Botanic Gardens Christchurch



Elizabeth and Goldfinch, 1994, Kees Bruin.

Two Real Kees Bruin / Graham Kirk

25 April - 4 June

For more than a century, photography has exerted an important influence on imagery associated with perceived reality. Often however the use of the

camera by artists as a preparation for a painting has aroused considerable condemnation from traditionalists. For some artists however photography is still a very valid process in the realisation of a work.

Two New Zealand artists, Kees Bruin and Graham Kirk use the camera in the

preparation of their imagery. Both are what could be broadly called 'realists' but, whilst their work shares some characteristics, it is distinctly different. Both construct their paintings from a collage of images but their inspiration springs from contrasting origins, and they have different backgrounds and training. The coming together of the work of these two artists in **Two Real** is as poignant as the juxtapositions they have made within their imagery.

Kees Bruin has been an active artist in Christchurch for twenty years. Born in Roxburgh in 1954, he studied at the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts, where he graduated with honours in painting in 1977. Since then he has been the recipient of several awards and has exhibited regularly. Bruin has work in local collections and in Australia, Europe and the U.S.A.

Bruin has termed his work 'visionary super-realism' rather than 'photo-realism'. The photographed image is manipulated, reinterpreted and combined with images from memory or studies from life which are selected to fit the initial vision. As a result he often merges the seen and the unseen. These

combinations of imagery are presented via the super-real to heighten the viewers' perception and are, in a sense, metaphors for ideas that can have immense spirituality.

Frequently there is an underlying symbolic message which the artist says is not always realised but for which he is ever searching.

By contrast, Graham Kirk who was born in Hawera in 1948, where he also grew up, developed an early interest in comic imagery and photography. He began exhibiting as a photographer in the 1970s and was included in the 'Active Eye' photographic exhibition. He also drew comic strips, including the Dick Sargeson strip which ran in the 'Listener' from 1984 to 1988. In these works, photographs of acted scenes helped the artist create the final images. This merging of comic and photographic imagery was more completely realised in 1989 when Kirk stopped making comic strips and started painting.

Kirk's concern has always been for achieving a 'truth' in his painted imagery which is similar to that developed through the camera lens and in the

juxtaposition of images. The Taranaki landscape, an environment with which he is very familiar, is also a constant element in the background of Kirk's paintings.

The works selected for **Two Real** have been produced over the past five years. Some feature comic book characters and other recognisable identities from popular culture. Fred Dagg and Elvis Presley are presented as faces on postage stamps to place them in an historical context and, as in the works of Bruin, the images are intended as metaphors with an underlying meaning.

In the setting up of an exhibition, images may be sourced from a number of destinations in New Zealand and beyond and often the juxtaposition of the work by different artists helps to heighten the statement. **Two Real** is an exhibition of work by two artists who use photography as an initiation process for their painting but who differ in the images they produce. In a broader sense therefore **Two Real** emphasises how 'photo realism' offers more than one dimension for two artists who refuse to be slaves to the camera image.



They don't make mirrors like they used to, 1995, Freda Brierly.

U.S. & Us Textile Art From New Zealand and America.

16 April - 1 June

Organised by the Otago Embroiderers' Guild this touring exhibition of 20 contemporary works displays how embroidery arts in both the United States and New Zealand have developed over the past 30 years. Reflecting many of the styles and trends seen in

contemporary painting these recent works by internationally recognised embroiderers or textile artists illustrate how contemporary embroidery has developed a wit and a bite sometimes unexpected in such a medium.

Embroidery is a very ancient art form and one which, in many cultures, has played a significant role in the rituals of church, state and society. Once it was an essential skill for the 'marriageable

ladies' of prosperous families. It has also borne the scorn of being dismissed as one of the frivolous, repetitive and less useful crafts.

Today however, as **U.S. & Us** demonstrates, embroidery is claiming a place among the significant textile arts. Barbara Lee Smith, a well-known American embroiderer who has taught and exhibited in the United States, Britain and New Zealand, is the curator of this touring exhibition. She was asked to select 10 works from the States and 10 from New Zealand. Lee Smith explains that for this selection she was looking for compatibility and for examples which reflected the range of current American approaches. As a result the works she chose were all conceived and executed with a vigour and expertise we may not normally associate with the art.

Of the New Zealand selection, which includes the work of the Christchurch embroiderer Marianne Hargreaves, the curator said she selected works which, "*engaged my heart and mind, that seemed new and fresh and were lively expressions of the best of New Zealand embroidery.*"

Engaging, witty and sharp many of these works tell personal stories related to the lives of the women artists. They also display their wide range of styles, materials, stitches and techniques and the fascinating deployment of thread and needle in non-traditional ways. **U.S. & Us** also illustrates a freedom in the approach to materials with the artists refusing, like many contemporary painters, to be labelled or categorised. "*When you embroider,*" a leading American textile artist Maria-Theresa

Fernandes says, "*you have the contrasts of surface textures and you can take the work so much further.*"

U.S. & Us is brought to the McDougall with the assistance of Air New Zealand, Creative New Zealand and Bernina New Zealand Ltd.

A special programme is running in conjunction with **U.S. & Us**. On Sunday 18 March at 11 am Margery Blackman, the honorary Curator of Ethnographical

Textiles from Otago Museum, will speak at the Gallery on "**Embellishments in Thread. Examples of fine embroidery through the ages and across several cultures.**"

There will also be a special **Textile Art Workshop on Saturday 24 May**. "**Contemporary Threads**" will discuss current trends in embroidery overseas. For information or to enrol please contact Ann Betts on 272 2973.

Art Annex

Into the Storm flew Biggles and Ginger, 1996, Malcolm Harrison.



Exquisite Mysteries

Works by Malcolm Harrison

2 May - 1 June

Nineteen handmade tapestry works, with all the delicacy, complexity, and rich colour of medieval illuminated manuscripts, will adorn the walls of the McDougall Art Annex during May in an examination of the New Zealand psyche by Wellington fibre artist Malcolm Harrison.

No stranger to the Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Harrison held, in 1987, an exhibition of South American inspired doll-like figures entitled **The Family**, and in 1994 his heroically fantastical 'Magic Picture-Book' was one of the highlights of the extremely successful **Child's Play** at the McDougall Art Annex.

The title of **Exquisite Mysteries** reflects Harrison's incredulity at the structure and operation of New Zealand society, and he uses whimsical and often playfully satirical scenarios to send up and re-evaluate our sense of cultural identity. Attacking the much-publicised myth of a Kiwianically cuddly society, full of blokes and buzzy bees, the artist contends that it is not a depiction which holds true when related to the lives of most New Zealanders. More real perhaps, is the

possibility that we may soon be smothered under our own political correctness, a sinister development which Harrison believes "*takes the life and guts out of everything*", smoothing out what have the potential to be our most revealing and refreshing characteristics.

Dismissing the well-recognised 'tall poppy syndrome', Harrison believes the greatest threat we face in New Zealand is that of 'the long knives' which, hidden and anonymous, reach out to stab in the back anything which is different and unusual. This is work that rewards the second look - it contains many different layers that offer a multitude of possible interpretations, dependent on the experience, background and mindset each viewer brings.

Some of the works find their source in the red tape of political and bureaucratic life. 'It Looks Like Upside-Down to Me' explores the ways in which different cultures view one another and is related to Harrison's recent experience in making two large works for the new Galleria in Parliament House. Over one thousand people were involved in the project, and despite frustration at official hold-ups and machinations, Harrison received new insights into the varied, and often polemic approaches any group of people can bring to a single work.

The format of these elegantly slim horizontal works suggests a series of narratives rather than landscapes, and the intimate scale is conducive to such storytelling. Following the movement of the Western eye, the canvas, cotton and wool constructions read from left to right, gradually unfolding like the lines of a poem as you move around the room.

On **Sunday 4 May** Malcolm Harrison will give a Floortalk on **Exquisite Mysteries** at the Annex.

NEW MEMBERS

Patricia Bendall
Janice Dunlop
Julia Gray
Norma C Jacobs
F Kazukaitis
Nona Milburn
Nola Neil
Sue Reay & John Laird
Sandra Rees
Ruth Schwass & Boris Whelan
Lorraine Sutherland
Nancy & Brian Tichborne
Lesley Weston (Life)
Mrs R E Whyte

The Upgrading of the Gallery

During the second half of last year, teams of workmen began the major projects of upgrading the lighting and installing sprinkler and smoke detector systems throughout the Gallery. Although this was long overdue, it has resulted in ongoing disruption for both visitors and staff and has caused considerable logistical problems for the exhibitions programme. One of the most difficult areas is in the already overcrowded basement where large numbers of fragile artworks, of all shapes and sizes, have to be relocated.

Now most of the exhibition areas have been finished under budget and ahead of schedule, with only the Centre Court and the Gallery Shop to be completed. We also expect the working areas in the basement and the Canaday Wing to be finished by June.

The installation last year of a goods lift in one of the old stairways was another important project and it is a welcome and long overdue facility for the Exhibition and Registration teams who constantly move large and heavy objects between the storage and exhibition spaces. To solve a similar problem the gallery door openings have also been enlarged so that much larger art works and crates have access to the building.

All these improvements mean that at last the gallery meets international conservation and security standards and current health and safety regulations. The improvements to doorways and the new lift will save many staff members from serious back injury.

You may be wondering why all this is being done at the McDougall when a new gallery is planned! The present building is a category one heritage structure and the Council has a duty to maintain it appropriately, whoever the tenant. Obviously this is not only for the present occupants but so it can continue, long into the future, to be a prized and fully functioning historical building enhancing our city.



New lighting track



The new goods lift



Installing the sprinkler system

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

These functions take place on the third Wednesday of each month commencing at 10.30 am with tea and coffee. The charge is \$1.50 for members, \$2.50 for non-members.

On 16 April William Fairbank, English wood sculptor, will present an illustrated lecture on his work - 'The Forest Stations of the Cross.' This will be held at the Gallery.

On 21 May Josie Martin, Akaroa artist and sculptor will give an illustrated talk on her work at the Gallery.

Recent Speakers of the Month

Sean Sweeney - The new Museum of New Zealand: Te Papa Tongarewa.

The first function of the 1997 year started on a high note. Sean Sweeney, Wellington director of the Carson Group and project manager for the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, travelled down to give us a slide presentation on the Museum and the setting up of its exhibits. On the superb harbour site and having large exhibition spaces for both permanent and touring exhibits, MONZ will be a great asset to our country.

What we may lack in ownership of fine art masterpieces will be compensated for by highly innovative displays of all aspects of our arts and natural history. Many of the exhibits will involve active participation, and much thought has gone into making the museum user-friendly. Sean Sweeney's talk succeeded in whetting our appetites for a future visit to Wellington to experience MONZ for ourselves.

We appreciated that Tony Preston was able to be present and give a vote of thanks on behalf of the Friends.

LocArt Visits

On Friday afternoon **11 April** a maximum of 20 Friends are invited to visit the Faculty of Media Arts or Photography Department at the Christchurch Polytechnic where Murray Hedwig will show them around the studios and explain the teaching of art photography. Please meet June Goldstein at 1.50 pm on the ground floor of D Block, Madras Street, opposite the Big Fresh carpark. To book (or cancel) please ring the answerphone on 379 4055.

On Thursday morning **15 April** Helen Rockel will show her studio and talk about her painting to a maximum of 12 Friends. Please meet June Goldstein at 10.20 am outside 59 Abberley Crescent, St Albans. To book (or cancel) please ring the answerphone on 379 4055.

LocArt Visit in February

A large group turned out in the rain for what was to be a very special visit to the home of Jean and Will Cumming. We were there to tour the garden (the rain stopped), to see their art collection and to spend time with Will in his studio. Will welcomed us in his quiet generous manner to "...poke about in somebody else's home!" And we did.



In the lounge he introduced us to Hotere, Walters, Woollaston, Sutton, Spencer-Bower, Dawson, Brokenshire and Bond, plus two of his own works from the 70s. The hall was a gallery of etchings by Peebles, White, Cleavin and Hotere plus one of Will's adventures into tapestry. The kitchen and the dining room stored even more art works. Out through the window at the end of a walkway through trees stood St Francis, a work of 25 years ago by Jack Laird.

Then to his studio and paper sculptures in the making. They are hand torn, painted, and assembled accordion style in the shapes of land and sea and, maybe,

nikau palms. I asked Will about the new medium and new themes. He suggested that he is what he is, and that the shape of the iris from his work in the 70s was still the shape behind the new work which still had the central divide. I saw it then and had to agree with his thesis.

We toured the large garden which he tends. The theme was still there. On the way home I realised that we were very quiet in that house. It was the collection of art that did the speaking, bringing us quietness and gratitude to the artists, and to Will and Jean Cumming. Thank you. You were gracious hosts. It was a rare treat.

Our thanks to George Sweet who contributed to this issue.

Coming Events

APRIL

Exhibitions

- 1 **Dragon and Phoenix. Textiles of the Southeast Asian Community** - until 18 May
Arthur Tress: Fantastic Voyage - until 13 April
W.A. Sutton - until 13 April
Works from the Collection. The 1997 selection. - until 31 December
Things to Come: Rudolf Boelee. At the Annex - until 27 April
- 16 **U.S. & Us. Textile Art From New Zealand and America** - until 1 June
- 25 **Two Real - Kees Bruin and Graham Kirk** - until 4 June

Events

- Gallery Clubs & Art Appreciation Programmes
- 2 **Wednesday 1 Club** 10.30am. Art appreciation club meeting
Wednesday 2 Club 1.00pm. Art appreciation club meeting
 - 3 **Mac Club** 10.30am. Art appreciation club for the disabled or differently abled. New members welcome
 - 4 **Friday Club** - 10.30am. Art appreciation club meeting
 - 5 **Saturday 1 Club.** 10.30 am. Art appreciation club meeting
 - 5 & 6
Gallery Tour to the Guggenheim exhibition in Dunedin
 - 11 **LocArt visit** to Faculty of Media Arts or Photography Department, Christchurch Polytechnic, D Block, Madras St. at 1.50 pm. To book or cancel phone 379 4055
 - 12 **Saturday 2 Club.** 10.30am. Art appreciation club meeting
 - 12 & 13
Second Gallery Tour to the Guggenheim exhibition in Dunedin

Lectures & Concerts

- 16 **Speaker of the Month** - William Fairbank, wood sculptor, will speak on 'The Forest Stations of the Cross'. 10.30am at the Gallery.

MAY

Exhibitions

- 1 **Dragon and Phoenix. Textiles of the Southeast Asian Community** - until 18 May
U.S. & Us. Textile Art From New Zealand and America - until 1 June
Two Real - The works of Kees Bruin and Graham Kirk - until 1 June
Works from the Collection. The 1997 selection. - until 31 December
- 2 **Exquisite Mysteries. Malcolm Harrison**- at the Annex - until 1 June
- 29 **The Elements of Doubt. Barry Cleavin: Printmaker** - until 13 July

Events

- Gallery Clubs & Art Appreciation Programmes
- 1 **Mac Club** 10.30am. Art appreciation club for the disabled or differently abled. New members welcome
 - 2 **Friday Club** - 10.30am. Art appreciation club meeting
 - 3 **Saturday 1 Club.** 10.30 am. Art appreciation club meeting
 - 7 **Wednesday 1 Club** 10.30am. Art appreciation club meeting
Wednesday 2 Club 1.00pm. Art appreciation club meeting
 - 10 **Saturday 2 Club.** 10.30 am. Art appreciation club meeting
 - 15 **LocArt visit** to Helen Rockel, 59 Abberley Cres. at 10.20 am. To book or cancel phone 379 4055

Lectures & Concerts

- 4 **Concert. Symphonic Band CSM** - at 2pm
- 4 **Floortalk.** Malcolm Harrison will speak on **Exquisite Mysteries**, 11 am. at the Annex.
- 18 **Lecture** - Margery Blackman will speak on "Embellishments in Thread" at 11 am, at the Gallery.-
- 21 **Speaker of the Month.** Josie Martin, Akaroa artist and sculptor will give an illustrated talk on her work. 10.30am at the Gallery
- 24 **Workshop - Contemporary Threads - Workshop on current trends in overseas embroidery** - 9.30 - 1 pm at the Hurst Seager Room, Arts Centre. Information and enrolments 372 2973



Will Cumming in his garden during the LocArt visit in February.



Alice Langley, Jonathan Mane-Wheoki and Val Wisely during the November LocArt visit.

More Volunteers Needed for the Guide Team

We are looking for Volunteers interested in being trained as voluntary Gallery Guides.

You need to be available for a training programme May - July.

If you are interested and would like to discuss what would be involved please phone Ann at 372 2973.