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woman's art



an exhibition of
six women artists

woman's art

organised by
robert mcdougall
art gallery
christchurch in
conjunction with
international
womens year

an exhibition of six women artists



Jane Arbuckle: Photo Rhondda Bosworth
Joanne Hardy: Photo Rhondda Bosworth
Helen Rockel: Photo Alison Mitchell

Rhondda Bosworth: Photo Jane Arbuckle
Stephanie Sheehan: Photo Jane Arbuckle
Joanna Harris: Photo Rhondda Bosworth

'SOME THOUGHTS ON WOMAN'S ART'

This is an exhibition of women artists who have met together and separately on several occasions to clarify their position in the arts and are beginning with many other women artists in this country and overseas to seek a new woman critique and expression of their art. They hold varied political and apolitical attitudes as to their identity as women and as artists.

It is my intention to briefly outline some of the motivating ideas and forces of the recent Woman's Art Movement and draw on resources from the feminist movement where it has radicalized the attitudes of women artists.

A basic premise needs to be established though, in order to understand the notion of a woman's art: That is, that while there is in this country at least, as yet, very few stylistic differences between New Zealand women and men painters there are a great many cultural experiences and socio-economic factors that make them quite different. These differences explain to a great extent the smaller scale of and output by women artists: (See 'Some Observations on the history of Women Artists notes' by Alison Mitchell for the Robert McDougall Art Gallery Exhibition 'A Survey of New Zealand Women Artists 1974').

The struggle to pursue an art career amidst being a wife and mother has to a great extent disallowed many women a professional pursuit of their career. Jacqueline Fahey, Auckland painter, comments: 'Perhaps what women must guard against is overdoing the housework and bending over backwards for the children to silence those who might send one up as a poor housekeeper and or inadequate mother, 'the arty slut in fact'. The myth of the plain accentric woman artist dressed in homespun cloth, sandshoes, flies and squalor is tolerated by conventional people because they can ridicule her. Her fate is not good. Her intellectual husband usually leaves her for something younger, better organised and conforming. As far as her talent goes the intellectual husband makes sure she is the hand-maiden to his talent. He needs both his ideas and hers. There is no escape through the liberal male as Katherine Mansfield discovered. A woman artist is on her own. Who was the woman politician, who, when asked what she missed most as a woman politician replied 'A wife'?

One does not need to look far for the many talented women artists who no longer paint/pot/sculpt because their husbands are the full-time artists of the family. Traditionally, by virtue of a 'male only' attitude in most pre 1900's art institutions men were the only people who could pursue painting professionally.

Women who did so before this time were mostly the daughters wives or sisters of artists and often used their father's brother's or husband's signatures to achieve recognition for their works.

Since then women have been admitted into the art world but still today are left mostly unacknowledged in historical or current art dialogues, poorly or not represented at all in art gallery collections and mostly "met with a mask of non-comprehension on the part of male art critics" (from Judy Chicago 'Female Imagery' in *Womanspace Journal U.S.* 1973).

Current surveys in Australia, England and America indicate an alarmingly large proportion of galleries showing an extremely low percentage of women's art. (See 'Survey in Women's Art Movement.) Newsletter 2.

When women 'achieve' they do so according to the male critique, and often with much conflict (see 'Toward An Understanding of Achievement-Related Conflicts in Women' Horner. *Journal of Social Issues.* vol. 28, Number 2 1972).

A review by Eric Ramsden in the *Auckland Star* 1972 concerning Grace Butler's work spoke of it as having masculine attributes—the implication being that there is an incongruity between a quiet female who is also a resolute painter: "Mrs Butler is represented in the Auckland Gallery by one of her characteristic mountain studies, painted with that resolute masculine strength which is in such striking contrast to her unassuming personality." and "There is a virility in her work which is redolent of the out-of-doors'. She is bestowed by the reviewer with male (achieving) attributes and in so doing joins the boys.

The argument still persists that women cannot be great artists because biologically it is 'not in women to be geniuses'. Freud, Rousseau, Nietzsche, not to mention many contemporary male teachers have undermined and discouraged women from creating 'great art'. Rousseau said 'Women have in general no love of any art; they have no proper knowledge of any; and they have no genius'.

If we see these disparaging remarks debilitating the climate of women's individual creativity for hundreds of years it is not hard to understand why much of women's art work is unsigned; illuminated manuscripts, tapestries, the birthday cakes, flower arrangements, lacework, embroidery and household things, the anonymity relegates the work as 'lesser art'. (See *Feminism as Therapy 'Essay on Art'*).

Meanwhile women have looked again into the notion of 'great art' giving it is a feminist reappraisal. Evelyn Reid has noted that 'women's place' is not as the result of biology, but has been shaped and reshaped by changing historical conditions.

Women have remained outside the scientific mechanical culture created by men. They have remained mostly in family servitude, and woman's work (outside the home) has not been found by her or her patriarchal culture to be central to her identity. It is central to the male identity—from the time a boy is five years old he is encouraged to make it in the outside world.

Trevor Moffitt in his July 1974 press review of the McDougall New Zealand Women Painters Exhibition, suggested that 'Artists, be they men or women, are in part shaped by their environment and in part driven by human capacities to transcend these circumstances'. He comments that 'it is that ability to transcend that becomes the mark of greatness for women no less than men'. Unfortunately, the idea of greatness has been given preference to a collective consciousness and pride found mostly only in white, preferably middle class and above all male artists.

For the woman artist to transcend the circumstances of her environment she has to do without the magical aura that artistic mythology equips man with, as the Great Artist.

(See Linda Nochlin's article 'Why have there been no great women artist, Art and Sexual Politics'.) And, it is perhaps without this 'individual-glorifying and monograph producing sub-structure on which the history of art is based (Nochlin) that women are finding alternatives to oppressive conditions and are reaching expansive new areas of expression that have the beginnings of a revolutionary art critique. A critique that is supportive, not based on rivalry, creating art that is not simply the homely, patriotic, non-threatening, non-sexty; exploring woman's vision, woman's sexuality. The wealth of woman's art literature is encouraging. Unfortunately it is not to be found amongst the glossy Art Masters' books in our local bookstores.

In 1971 Linda Nochlin commented 'in general, women's experience and situation in society and hence as artists, is different from men's, and certainly an art produced by a group of consciously united and purposefully articulate women intent on bodying forth a group consciously of feminine experience might indeed by stylistically identifiable as feminist if not feminine art'. She said, then; 'this remains within the realm of possibility so far it has not occurred.'

Since then, perhaps with Nochlin's encouraging paper heralding the way women have been consciously moving in these directions. One of America's leading young artists, Judy Chicago, is a pioneer in the development of a feminist point of view in art. Chicago's theories are the product of a personal odyssey and it is largely through her own development of a feminist theory of art that many of her ideas have become concrete in the founding of the Feminist Studio Workshop.

The workshop is one of the landmarks in women's discovery of their consciousness. She has been helpful in establishing a female audience for the arts, eager to see its life experience revealed and reflected. Of her art, ranging from a Menstruation Room, an environmental situation to sculptured forms and screen prints, Chicago has made the following comments about the development of consciously female forms.

'I was developing colour systems which made forms turn, dissolve, open, close, vibrate, gesture, all those sensations were emotional and body sensations turned into form and colour. I was pushing at boundaries, internalising the idea that a woman could shape values, shape culture, upset society. I wanted my work to be seen in relation to other women's work, historically as men's work is seen.'

'For me, 'Chicago says, 'the real crux of chauvinism in art and history is that we as women have learnt to see the world through men's eyes and learned to identify with men's struggles and men don't have the vaguest notion of identifying with ours. One of the things I'm interested in is getting the male viewer to identify with my work, to open his eyes to a larger human experience.'

'I couldn't express my own sexuality directly but only by inventing an image that entombed it. That is basically a feminine posture, and I don't think it was possible before the development of abstract form. And only by exposing the most truly human inside use will we be able to reach across the terrible gap between men and women which is 5000 years big (the years men have been dominant over women).'

'What has prevented women from being really great artists is the fact that we have been unable to transform our circumstances into our subject matter, unable to step out of them and use them to reveal the whole nature of the human condition'.

In conclusion, and heralding the beginnings of a new art critique for the artists of this country these comments from a Roman feminist photographer Suzzane Santoro are appropriate: 'Each need for expression in women has a particular solution. The substance of expression is unlimited and has no established form. Self expression is a necessity. It is easily accessible if authentically desired. Expression begins with self assertion and with the awareness of the differences between ourselves and others'.

Alison Mitchell
Exhibitions Officer
McDougall Art Gallery
June 1975.

Resources and Bibliography

- Linda Nochlin
Art and Sexual Politics
Why have there been no great women artists?
1971 (Collier Books)
- Women's Art Movement
Newsletter Number two
Sydney
- Anica Vesel Mander &
Anne Kent Rush
Feminism as Therapy
1974 (Randon House Books)
- Eleanor Tufts
Our Hidden Heritage
1974 (Paddington Press)
- Suzanne Santro
Per Una Espressione Nuova
(Towards a New Expression)
Riivolta Femine Roma
- Manuscript
Letter from Jacqueline Fahey to
Alison Mitchell
January 1975
- Judy Chicago talking to Lucy R.
Lippard (Ramparts)
- Refractory Girl
A Women's Studies Journal
Sydney
- Off our Backs
September 1973 (American Feminist
Newspaper)
- Towards a Revolutionary Feminist
Art
1973 (London Women's Art Move-
ment Newsletter)
- Woman in Sexist Society
1971 (Signet Books)
- The New Woman's Survival Cata-
logue
1973 (Berkley Publishing Co)



Alison Mitchell:
Photo Rhondda Bosworth

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This Exhibition was organised to mark the occasion of
International Women's Year.

HELEN ROCKEL:



Statement:

My work has always been primarily concerned with people, initially simply as beings affected by light and space. As ideas developed, space was used to suggest the depth of the human mind, or the forces of time and experience which link people together. I began to deal with general themes such as 'life' in which I showed people and things relating to one another within this spatial field. I am very interested in the way people must relate to one another. The people in my work are often shown in varying size within the same painting indicating the degrees of importance they assume for the central figure. Other ideas I use in my work involve such abstract elements as 'thought', 'Death', 'memory', and 'awareness', where I try to produce a visual answer to these problems.

I do not like to restrict the media in which I work. My ideas are derived from actual incidents I observe, or photographs which catch my attention in some way, or they simply occur to me as random thoughts.

On Women as Artists:

The overworked argument: 'Look to the past'.
How many women are to be seen among 'the Greats'.
The unconsidered element:
'Look to the Past'. How many women have been free to pursue an interest in earnest and with encouragement?

Born, 1949; Wanganui. Attended University of Canterbury, School of Fine Arts, 1968–71. Hons. in painting. Taught art for two years, now painting full-time.

HELEN ROCKEL

Dimensions in inches.
Height preceding width.

- 1 **Reflection**
1974.
Oil.
39" x 48"
Signed and dated in Pastel,
L.L. *H. Rockel 74*
\$180
- 2 **Seascape**
1974.
Oil.
39" x 48"
Signed and dated in pastel,
L.L. *H. Rockel 74*
\$100
- 3 **Dream**
1974.
Oil.
45" x 48"
Signed and dated in pastel,
L.R. *H.M. Rockel 74*
N.F.S.
- 4 **Lamplight**
1974.
Oil.
48" x 41"
Signed and dated in pastel,
L.R. *H.M. Rockel 74*
\$100
- 5 **Seated Figure**
1974
Oil.
48" x 42"
Signed and dated in pastel,
L.R. *H.M. Rockel 74*
\$120
- 6 **Maori**
1974.
Oil.
48" x 36"
Signed and dated in pastel,
L.L. *H.M. Rockel 74*
\$100
- 7 **Thought**
1974.
Oil.
48" x 33"
Signed and dated in pastel,
L.L. *H.M. Rockel 74*
\$90
- 8 **Life**
1974.
Oil.
60" x 48"
Signed and dated in pastel,
L.L. *H.M. Rockel 74*
\$180
- 9 **Space**
1974.
Oil.
2 pieces each 48" x 34"
Signed and dated in pastel,
L.R. *H.M. Rockel 74*
Collection: Robert McDougall
Art Gallery.
N.F.S.
- 10 **Life**
1974.
Printers Ink and Dyes.
20" x 24"
Signed and dated in ink L.R.
H.M. Rockel 74
N.F.S.
- 11 **Interior**
1974.
Printers Ink and Dyes.
25 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
Signed and dated in scraffitti
H.M. Rockel 74
Lent by Margaret Morton.
N.F.S.

EXHIBITIONS:

1969 Five Young Painters Exhibition
Robert McDougall Art
Gallery.

1969-71 Represented in Bay of
Plenty Exhibitions.

1971 Exhibition with Jo Wells
Canterbury Society of Arts.

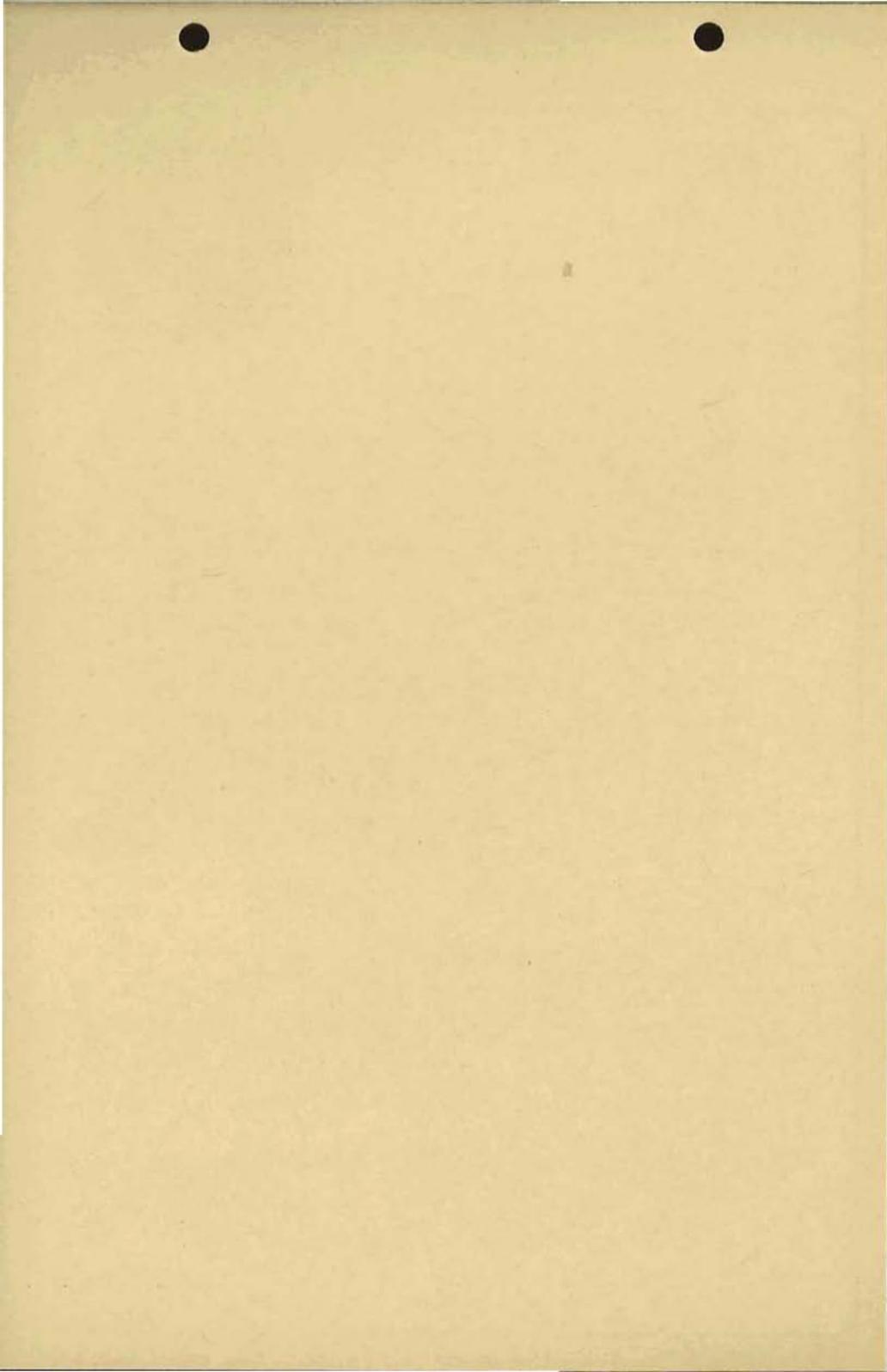
1972 One Woman Exhibition
Canterbury Society of Arts.

1973 Guest of The Group
Work in the Labyrinth Gal-
lery.

1974 One Woman Exhibition
Canterbury Society of Arts.

1975 South Island Women Paint-
ers Exhibition
Dowse Art Gallery, Lower
Hutt.

Currently working towards a one woman exhibition for New Vision Gallery,
Auckland.



JANE ARBUCKLE:



Statement:

Here are some of the moments, people and friends in my life. They reflect aspects of my consciousness and my ways of being in the world. Ultimately these images have an existence independent of any verbal statement I can make as to my intentions in making them.

On Women as Artists:

Our society does not encourage women to develop their abilities as artists. If we should choose to, we must do it within the context of a male dominated art establishment and art education system. Patriarchy discourages in a woman the single-mindedness and inner commitment to herself, that is necessary if she is to be an artist. However, with our discrediting of the old myths of femininity and its limitations, many of us will be woman artists.

Born, 23 August, 1951; Christchurch.

At present she is a stage II painting student at University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts.

JANE ARBUCKLE

Dimensions in centimetres.
Height preceding width.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 12 Self Portrait in a Crystal Ball
1975
\$25 | 18 Two People
1975
16cm x 24.4cm
\$25 |
| 13 Richard Knitting
1975
19.5cm x 13cm
\$25 | 19 Hand and Arm
1975
12.8cm x 19.3cm
\$25 |
| 14 Torso with a Scar
1975
16.2cm x 24.4cm
\$25 | 20 Last Supper
1975
19.5cm x 13.3cm
\$25 |
| 15 Former Devil's Angel
1975
20cm x 13.3cm
\$25 | 21 Hand and Leg
1975
13.8cm x 21cm
\$25 |
| 16 Breast and Armpit
1975
12.9cm x 19.3cm
\$25 | 22 Woman with hand over her face
1975
12.9cm x 19.4cm
\$25 |
| 17 Child on Bed
1975
14.4cm x 24.4cm
\$25 | 23 Indian Pure Breed
1975
20.9cm x 13.9cm
\$25 |

EXHIBITIONS

This is Jane Arbuckle's first Exhibition.

JOANNE HARDY:



Statement:

On the importance of vitamin C to the painter.

Vitamin C prevents colds, induces a healthy glow in the cheeks, a sparkle in the eye, a bounce in the step and casts an orange wash over the luxury of choice.

Lack of vitamin C, generally accompanied by a decline in both fortunes and morale, leads to ghastly skin disorders, a positive wallowing in the sordid, the plumbing of unparalleled depths of pettiness and fear and produces a vehemence unseemly in the discreet painter.

'Dance the orange, the warmer landscape fling is out of you that the ripe one be radiant in homeland breezes'.

Rainer Maria Rilke

On Women as Artists:

If women's painting is to be re-appraised then it must be the painting of women which demands the consideration.

Born, February 1952; Christchurch

Presently engaged in consistently conjuring paintings from thin air as a full time pre-occupation.

JOANNE HARDY

Dimensions in inches.
Height preceding width.

24 Prevailing Wind

March 1975

Acrylic on canvas

60" x 59½"

Signed and dated with brush point

L.L. '75 *Hardy*

\$150

Artist's note: The 'Here Buckle' moments of change, midflight, stopped for convenience and thereby lost. The Small pink rose did: from tight to blown in atwinrling.

27 Frothing on a tiny slime

1975

Acrylic on canvas

59¾" x 59¾"

Signed with brush point mid

L.R. '75 *Hardy*

Collection: Bill Matheson.

N.F.S.

Artist's note: Delight in the large splash.

25 Tree (Rugby 6) or And Leaves do Fall

April 1975

Acrylic on canvas

59½" x 59¾"

Signed and dated with brush point

L.L. *Hardy April '75*

\$200

Artist's note: Unquestionably tree, as if now should suddenly vanish.

28 Vapid Stage

January/February 1975

Acrylic on canvas

59½" x 59¾"

Signed with brush point

L.R. *Hardy*

Artist's note: 'Stage of 'all the world's a.....'Fame and then back to the household Gods'.

\$200

26 Degree

May 1975.

Acrylic on canvas.

Size 60" x 60"

Signed and dated in brush

point. Mid Right.

Hardy '75.

Price \$300

EXHIBITIONS:

December 1973

Fine Arts Students Exhibition
236 Gallery, High Street, Christchurch.

December 1974

Two Woman Exhibition with Stephanie Sheehan
'Gadgetry'.
236 Gallery, High Street, Chrichstchurch.

STEPHANIE SHEEHAN:



Statement:

Recalcitrant words.

(1) Orange. To make of words some clear and easily supported notion usually entails a desperate frivolity; lightweights balance no better than the heavy.

On Women as Artists:

Armed with the flaming sword of truth – woman.
Back bent buckled with the agony of man – woman.

It has been generally accepted that woman has been a slave too long; unfortunately a slave mentality is imposed on us at birth and to express oneself truthfully involves throwing off more chains than one was aware of carrying. I have ceased to paint men's doings. My paintings are an extension of myself, as a woman I think.

Born, November 1949; Christchurch.

Diploma Honours, 1974, Canterbury. Special thanks to Yvonne Rust for extra support and encouragement.

STEPHANIE SHEEHAN

Dimensions in inches.
Height preceding width.

- 29 **Apple**
January 1975
Acrylic on canvas
60" x 59½"
Signed and dated with brushpoint
centre L.R.
Sheehan Jan 75
\$250
- 30 **Audience**
1975
Acrylic on canvas
59½" x 59¼"
Signed and dated with brush point
L.L. *Sheehan 75*
\$250
- 31 **Pickled Onions**
March 1975
Acrylic on canvas
59½" x 59½"
Signed and dated with brush point
mid L.L. *Sheehan, March 75*
\$250
- 32 **Moon Shadow**
May 1975
Acrylic on canvas
59½" x 59¼"
Signed and dated with brush point
Sheehan May 75
\$250
- 33 **Baby**
May 1975.
Acrylic on canvas.
60" x 60"
Signed and dated in brush
point mid lower right
Sheehan May '75
\$250

EXHIBITIONS:

December 1973 Joint Exhibition with Joanne Hardy at
236 Gallery, High Street, Christchurch.

RHONDDA BOSWORTH

Born, July 1944; Takapuna.
Diploma Fine Arts in painting,
University of Canterbury.
Teaches art at a Catholic Girl's
School; lives with her two children.

Dimensions in centimetres.
Height preceding width.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 34 Polynesian Woman
1975
32cm x 45cm (mount)
\$30 | 40 Terry
1975
32cm x 45cm (mount)
\$30 |
| 35 Polynesian Youths
1975
32cm x 45cm (mount)
\$30 | 41 Jae
1975
32cm x 45cm (mount)
\$30 |
| 36 Momma
1975
32cm x 45cm (mount)
\$30 | 42 Jae Laughing
1975
32cm x 45cm (mount)
\$30 |
| 37 Denise
1975
32cm x 45cm (mount)
\$30 | 43 Allan
1975
32cm x 45cm (mount)
\$30 |
| 38 Jill's Kids
1975
32cm x 45cm (mount)
\$30 | 44 Rose
1975
32cm x 45cm (mount)
\$30 |
| 39 Dawn's Hand
1975
32cm x 45cm (mount)
\$30 | 45 Charlotte
1975
32cm x 45cm (mount)
\$30 |

EXHIBITIONS

- 1975 Photo Forum Workshop
Auckland, 1975
- 1975 Contemporary N.Z. Photograph (Touring Exhibition organised by
Manawatu Art Gallery).

RHONDDA BOSWORTH:



Statement:

Through my camera I record my experience. I photograph relationships in progress and for me making images is a natural response to being with people. Photography enables me to express very directly what I perceive and what I project.

I can express more of myself this way than I have been able to do with either words or paintings. When I left school at 16 I worked as a journalist. This taught me economy with words, but newspaper reportage was a skill that left me cold. I went to art school when I was 25, and had two young children. I had been a housewife for six years. My only accomplishment during that time was voracious reading, as an outlet from a life style that did not extend me. I saw art school as a means to an end — being able to support myself. Photography as a creative medium was not understood at art school — but it was occasionally conceded to be "a valuable tool". After I left I bought a Pentax and began a long struggle to understand the technique of photography.

All my friends photograph and we teach ourselves, and each other. I feel a particular affinity for the work of Dorothea Lange and Emmet Gowin, both Americans. Both have an intimacy and directness that attracts me.

Women as Artists:

I cannot separate being a woman and being an artist. It was a long time before I could assert myself positively but after having dammed it up for so long — out it all comes!

JOANNA HARRIS:



Statement:

My work is always rooted in the particular circumstances of my domestic life, the objects, clothes, toys, cups, flowers, that speak of myself, my child, my husband and the house, garden, land, that frames the life.

The paintings and drawings in this exhibition have a common subject; The frames of bed and window, a thicket of plum tree, a barred gate. This subject contains the formal assertions of vertical and horizontal countered by pattern and the associations inherent in patterned wood and clothes. Perhaps far, frame, sheath, window, gate also work as (ancient) transcendent metaphor?

'Through the shaped spaces of the bed's frame; through the flowers carved in the wood and through the window pane; through the pierced verandah hood, the foliate rose, I see the straight and curved branches parting of a tree. Without the lens heaven, the heavens not understood'

Thus domestic life is both subject and metaphor.

Women as Artists:

As a woman painting is not a job, not even a vocation. It is part of life, subject to the strains, and joys, of domestic life. I cannot paint unless the house is in order. Unless I paint I don't function well in my domestic roles. Each thing is important. The idea that one sacrifices other values for art is alien to me, and I think to all women whose calling it is to do and be many things. To concentrate all meaning and all energy in a work of art is to leave life dry and banal. I don't wish to separate the significant and everyday actions but to bring them to close as possible

JOANNA HARRIS

together. It is natural for women to do this; their exercise and their training and their artistry is in daily living.

Painting for me as a woman is an ordinary act — about the great meaning in ordinary things.

Anonymity pattern utility quietness relatedness.

Born, December 1945; Hamilton.

Diploma Fine Arts, Elam B.A.

Now living on Banks Peninsula.

Through the Window

Dimensions in inches.
Height before width.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 46 Window and Doll
1975
Acrylic on paper
size 78¼" x 24"
unsigned
\$90 | 50 Bedstead and window
1975
Oil on hardboard
24" x 24"
Unsigned
\$50 |
| 47 Five Drawings
1974
Ink on paper.
25" x 35" each
Unsigned
\$30 each | 51 Allegory of the frame
1975
Pastel on paper
22" x 30"
Unsigned
\$40 |
| 48 Looking at the plum tree
1974
Acrylic on paper
53" x 26"
Unsigned
\$90 | 52 Bedstead
1975
Oil on hardboard
12" x 48"
Unsigned
\$50 |
| 49 Three Drawings
1975
Ink on card
8" x 5" each
Unsigned
\$12.00 each | 53 Three Photographs
1974
5" x 7" each.
\$12.00 each. |
| | 54 Through the window etcetera
1974
Oil on board
48" x 48"
Lent by Leicester Kyle
N.F.S. |

EXHIBITIONS

Joanna Harris has exhibited in Wellington, Hamilton, Dunedin and Banks Peninsula 'places where I have lived'.