

Bulletin



THE ROBERT McDOUGALL ART GALLERY

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Edith May, by A. Elizabeth Kelly, 1934. Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Awarded a medal at 1934 Paris Salon.

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Christchurch City Council



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Elizabeth Kelly Portraits

8 December - 9 February

Annie Elizabeth Kelly, née Abbott, died on 4 October 1946, aged 69 years. This small exhibition has been mounted not only to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of that event, but also to reflect on one of the most distinguished professional artists Canterbury has produced. In the years since her death Elizabeth Kelly's position in New Zealand art history has waned, and unfortunately she is no longer accorded the level of recognition she once enjoyed.

Her specialisation in portraiture, in some respects, worked against her as New Zealand has never had a strongly

established portrait tradition. There was a great deal more interest in the landscape. Canterbury in particular has produced only a handful of artists ranking highly in portraiture. Apart from Elizabeth Kelly, the most notable of these are Raymond McIntyre, Archibald Nicoll, William A Sutton and Alan Pearson.

For many years Elizabeth Kelly struggled with the label 'portrait painter' as she was fully aware of what this meant for an artist in New Zealand. Whenever she was interviewed she maintained that, within her realm of what she termed 'interpretations', the landscape was of equal significance to portraiture in her work. She was right as the number of landscapes she painted equalled

the number of her portraits. However, it was unquestioningly in portraiture that she found her métier and that is why this exhibition is concerned solely with her representative works or portraiture spanning the period 1900 - 1943.

Elizabeth Kelly's interest in this genre developed during the years 1893 - 1901 when she was a free scholarship student at Canterbury College School of Art. Initially her ability in portraiture became apparent in three dimensional work and she was awarded two bronze medals from the Canterbury Society of Arts for her modelling. Her early portraiture in paint was mostly informal and possibly a no more dominant feature of her work than it was with a number of her contemporaries in the early 1900s. By 1908 however, her special ability as a portrait painter was beginning to be recognised.

Following her marriage to Cecil Kelly that same year, her individual strength as an artist became even more clearly defined. Cecil Kelly was best out in the landscape, and Elizabeth in the studio, but they

worked together successfully in both situations which established a real artistic harmony between them.

Elizabeth Kelly's success as a portrait painter is in a sense, remarkable in that it occurred during her early years without the benefit of overseas experience. Their financial position did not enable the Kellys to travel, but when they were able to do so in their early forties, the benefits to them both were considerable.

In the 1920s and 1930s Elizabeth Kelly's work went from strength to strength, and by 1940 she had achieved recognition as a leading artist, not only in New Zealand, but also in Paris and London where, after 1931, she exhibited constantly.

Not only was she the only New Zealand artist to be awarded a silver medal by the Paris Salon of the Société des Artistes Français in 1934, but also in 1938 she was the only woman artist to achieve official recognition by the award of a C.B.E. These were creditable awards for an artist who was in no way self promoting. Members of

the Abbott family, and others who knew her, spoke of a natural, dignified and sensitive person who was always intensely self critical of her work and never keen to push herself forward in the public eye.

In many respects her portraiture between the two wars coincided with a fashionable interest in this genre in Canterbury and elsewhere. But by the 1940s attitudes began to change and by the post war years, interest in non-official portraiture had begun to fade. This also accounts in part for the declining interest in Elizabeth Kelly's work in the decades following her death. She is, when considered within her generation, certainly deserving of more status than she now holds.

This exhibition which adds works from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Hocken Library, University of Otago, Otago Art Society and a number of private collections, to those held at the McDougall, will in some small measure reacquaint the public with the significance of Elizabeth Kelly as a Canterbury artist.

Art Annex

Everyday: Repetition And Transcendence

13 December - 12 January

This exhibition of emergent local artists: Patric Tomkins, Violet Faigan, Jason Maling and Shelley Slater, identifies a current movement amongst some Christchurch artists, away from the slick production process of contemporary art practice. These artists create works which reflect the process and labour of their production; art in which "all the stitches show."

In an exhibition where traditional definitions of assemblage, sculpture and painting are blurred, the preferred materials are prosaic. Everyday tools of paint and canvas are rejected in favour of media such as wallpaper, tea stains, and book pages.

In some works conventional materials are used, but their normal meaning is subverted. Faigan and Maling both use paper, but it is pre-printed, bringing additional connotations. In other pieces objects like a dartboard, doors, or cricket boots are obscured by coverings or by context. Ink and pencil are employed, but accepted ideas about skill and technique are negated when the ink is spilt randomly and the pencil used to write the same phrase, or draw the same shape, over and over again.



Artist Jason Maling working on *The Stain Game*.

Avoiding any preconceived creative intention, each artist has set a process in motion and then awaited the results. Often the 'experiment' involves strict rules and challenges, and all have evolved over an extended period of time. Slater has painstakingly carved a pot from Oamaru stone; Tomkins has built up large areas tirelessly worked in graphite pencil, which can be read as landscapes, abstracts or building site close-ups, using the most proletarian unit of construction: the brick. The laborious nature of the works in

Everyday: Repetition and Transcendence is fundamental to these artists. Wary that some contemporary art seems too easy and effortless, their works involve an acknowledgement of the time-consuming and repetitive tasks that often form part of the creative process. The artists believe that disciplined, repetitive processes can result in contemplative states that release the consciousness, allow a closer examination of self and create the opportunity to make 'honest marks' free from hyperbole and contrivance.

This attempt to make work which cannot be dismissed as glib or slick, and the emphasis on labour intensive art founded in self-interrogation rather than market forces, is a unifying thread for these four

artists. All have produced greatly varied and distinct pieces, showing an ultimate commitment to the creative process, and an interest in the artistic experience for its own sake. Like the 'Process Art' of the mid

1960s, these works invite the spectator to construct what has happened from the evidence placed before them, to admire the crafting as much as the conclusion.



Vigilantia, V closes her eyes to the new day. Megan Jenkinson, 1987-94.

The Virtues - Megan Jenkinson

17 January - 16 February

In *The Virtues* innovative Auckland photographer Megan Jenkinson examines philosophical, moral, ethical and political issues and theories through the time-honoured techniques of personification, allegory and metaphor.

Jenkinson's bold cibachrome collages explore the tensions between past and present, and virtue and vice, using a complex process of juxtaposition, weaving, splicing and layering. The belief is that "the world is so complicated, tangled and overloaded that to see it with any clarity you must prune and prune" (Italo Calvino *If On a Winter's Night a Traveller*). This pruning is then followed by what Jenkinson refers to as "grafting", resulting in a hybrid image conveying the complexity of meaning.

This exhibition relates to work Jenkinson made based on this subject in the 1980s, and includes ten reworked photographs from the earlier series plus thirty new images.

Familiar allegorical figures such as Truth,

Hope and Industry dominate the photographs. Some, carrying their traditional attributes, continue the West's long history of using female figures to represent moral qualities and to reinforce the faith. In Plato's *Republic*, the so-called Cardinal virtues (Justice, Prudence, Fortitude and Temperance) were used to promote the founding values of the ideal state, and the early Church pitted the Virtues against the Vices lining up Charity against Lust and Patience against Wrath. During the Renaissance, increasing secularisation saw these themes expanded, and "new" deities such as Britannia appeared.

Unlike the composed figures of classical tradition, however, the virtues of Jenkinson's photographs are uncomfortably inept when placed in the modern world where attitudes have been reshuffled and realigned. Their once-defined positions no longer assure a predictable or optimistic outcome.

In *The Virtues*, the allegorical figure of Britannia is brought into an unstable and unfamiliar present, where she "weeps for the loss of her colonies". In evocative and

fraught scenarios, the misplaced and outdated virtues attempt, and fail, to deal with the chaos and confusion of the shifting context into which they have been thrown.

In the face of such disarray, the virtues do not behave as we would expect. *Vigilantia*, the allegorical representation of watchfulness, falls asleep. Even the most triumphant of the virtues, *Victory*, seems resigned to defeat. Dressed as a soldier, with three arms, one saluting, the other two holding flowers for remembrance, she stands in front of a wall which lists the names of the dead or missing.

The aegis shapes that accompany each image are subtle reminders of the original perception of each virtue, serving as a counterpoint to the drama of each image. Similarly, the Latin subtitles revitalise classical insights in today's context. Strangers in a strange land, Jenkinson's virtues highlight the uncomfortable distance between the calmly reasoned classical world and the complexity and disorder of today's society, suggesting that the solutions of the past cannot be those of the present.

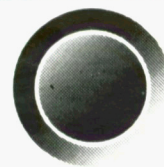
Friends of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery

President—Chris Brocket 355 7133

Vice-President—Mark Stocker 365 3895

Treasurer—Helen-Mary Black 332 7290

Secretary—Ann Watt 379 4055



REMINDER

The Xmas Party is on Sunday 8 December



At 6pm we will be gathering for the 1996 Xmas Party which this year will include an opening for the Elizabeth Kelly Exhibition and a talk by Neil Roberts about her works.

Tickets are \$6.00 with doorsales only and for the catering we need you to please r.s.v.p. to 379 4055. We will also repeat the Christmas gesture of distributing gifts to needy elderly via Nurse Maud.

Friends wishing to donate gifts are asked to please mark them 'male' or 'female' and leave them at the Gallery on the night of the party.

Recent Speakers of the Month

Alan Pearson - The artist and his work.

The Print Room of the Robert McDougall was packed for artist Alan Pearson's entertaining slide presentation in September. Born in Liverpool, Alan Pearson worked his way to New Zealand where he graduated with honours in painting from the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts in the 1950s, an exciting time in New Zealand's art history. Slides of early paintings from this period were shown and followed through the artist's development, while slides with his family on an early study trip to Britain and Europe added humour and a personal touch.

Return trips to Europe provided new inspiration in Alan Pearson's work, for example the Italian theatre series, which also demonstrated the large influence music has been on his work. Like the artist himself, Alan Pearson's paintings are full of spirit and creative energy. His works can be quite moving, especially his portraiture, and we are very fortunate that this artist has chosen New Zealand as his home. Lady Christina McCombs gave the vote of thanks on behalf of an appreciative audience.

New members

Mrs P B Ensor

Mrs Lorraine Keech

Dr Ian Lochhead - B.W. Mountfort, the works 1850 - 1898.

Following the popular lecture given by Dr Lochhead last year on the life of Benjamin Mountfort, this lecture concentrated on the works of this antipodean Neo Gothic architect. We were transported back to the first days of Canterbury settlement with the arrival of Mountfort on the 'Charlotte Jane' in 1850. His first church in 1852 at Governors Bay was planned with intentions of later additions, as were many of his designs.

The initial difficulty of adapting to the extreme elements of Canterbury's winds and weather and using unfamiliar wood, proved disastrous in the building of Lyttelton's Holy Trinity Church, later dismantled. Future designs used vertical board and batten, and eaves extended to the ground, to give structural stability. Primitive design and "picturesque utility" were trademarks of Mountfort's works as in St Mary's, Halswell, and St Stephens, Lincoln (now sadly in danger of relocation).

Each of his churches used timber in a distinctive way and many wonderful examples were shown to give us a clear idea of the architect's direction in the design of early New Zealand buildings. His brilliance was particularly illustrated in St Mary's, Parnell, one the finest timber Gothic churches in the world, and in the Canterbury Provincial Council Building with its magnificent debating chamber.

The appreciation and enthusiasm shown by the Friends for the lecture was voiced in a vote of thanks from Peter Dunbar.

Speaker of the Month

These functions take place on the third Wednesday each month, excluding December and January. The sessions commence at 10.30 am with tea and coffee. The charge is \$1.50 for members, \$2.50 for non-members. Please check the venue for each 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.



Friends Alice Langley, Vivienne Burrows and Hilary Langer at the LocArt visit to Stephen Glesson's Studio.

LocArt visit to Stephen Gleeson

On Thursday 3 October a group of 19 Friends were welcomed by the sculptor Stephen Gleeson into the impressive display areas and studio spaces of Limeworks in Moorhouse Avenue. Amid a fine selection of his recent bronze heads, Stephen outlined his philosophy on contemporary sculpture, and spoke about the way contemporary artists are responding to the disappearance of the traditional art category boundaries, and the technical opportunities provided by modern materials.

Many were amazed at the many stages the sculptural form passes through before emerging in its final bronze form. From modelled clay to plaster, to wax, to ceramic mould and to the final cast bronze unit involves, as the Friends were shown, an elaborate nine stage process. Stephen Gleeson was also very generous with the detail and candour with which he discussed the process of capturing a credible and living likeness which is capable of reflecting the immediacy and personality of the sitter. Much to our delight his recent subjects have included a group of New Zealand artists who many of the Friends recognised from their impressive and lively portrait heads. This was a visit thoroughly enjoyed by all.



top right: Stephen Gleeson speaking to the Friends in his workshop.



right: Friends Pauline and Tony Everist with Gleeson's bust of Pauline's brother Charles Upham.

1996 Spring Trip

On Sunday 3 November over thirty Friends enjoyed a great day out on the trip to Mid Canterbury. Their first delight was at the beautiful home of Tommie and Philip Munns where an amazing collection of paintings and drawings by illustrious members of Tommie's family, who included Olivia Spencer Bower, Rosa Spencer Bower, and Evelyn Poulson. A light drizzle did not spoil the wonders of the Trott's Garden, nor dampen the group's interest in the Frames Art Group's collection of contemporary art, and then it

was on to the Ashford Craft village and lunch at their cafe.

The final treats of the trip were found at the beautiful home and art collection of Kath van Tunzelman and at the newly opened and well appointed Ashburton Art Gallery where Gallery Friends were on hand to share with us the Colin Wheeler Retrospective, the display of folk art, and a fine Ikebana display. A very happy and contented bus load then travelled effortlessly back to Christchurch after a very fine day out in great company.

A Reminder about the Gallery Shop

At this time of the year you may appreciate a timely reminder of the special cards, art books, gift wrappings, reproductions and the wealth of other useful and seasonal things available at the Gallery shop where this is a special discount Friends.

A gift subscription to the Friends may also be that something different you are seeking for a friend or family member.

Recent Acquisitions

The following works have been recently acquired for the collection.

Gail Haffern

Utopia - Us Not Them, 1996
Mixed Media

John Pule

Pokia
Lithograph
Tokolonga Faoa e loto he misi
Lithograph
Pulenoa
Lithograph

Rudolf Boelee

Composition with artist
Mixed Media

Simon McIntyre

Blur 1996
Oil on canvas

Cecil Kelly

The Heathcote Valley 1932
Oil on canvas

Max Weber

Untitled
Woodcut

Don Driver

Triad
Mixed Media

Heber Thompson

Gypsies before Gerona
Etching

Margaret Dawson

After Eugene Smith's portrait of a Haitian Madman
Photograph

Kees Bruin

Hope in the Door I
Oil on canvas
Hope in the Door II
Oil on canvas

Michael Shepherd

Dead Letter Mail
Mixed Media (set of 7)

Hope in the Door,
Kees Bruin



Coming Events

DECEMBER

Exhibitions

- 1 **Don Peebles: The Harmony of Opposites** - until 2 February
- 9 **Elizabeth Kelly Portraits** - until 9 February
- 13 **Everyday: Repitition and Transcendence** - at the Annex - until 12 January

Events

Gallery Clubs & Art Appreciation Programmes

- 4 **Wednesday 1 Club** 10.30am. Art appreciation club meeting
- Wednesday 2 Club** 1.30pm. Art appreciation club meeting
- 5 **Mac Club** 10.30am. Art appreciation club for the disabled or differently abled. New members welcome
- 6 **Friday Club** - 10.30am. Art appreciation club meeting

- 7 **Saturday 1 Club**. 10.30 am. Art appreciation club meeting

Children's Club. 1.30pm. Art appreciation club for children

- 14 **Saturday 2 Club**. 10.30am. Art appreciation club meeting

Lectures & Concerts

- 1 **Don Peebles, "A Dip Into My Notebooks."** 11 am. Admission \$3. Door Sales only and space restricted to 50 persons.
- 8 **Xmas Concert**. The Hagley Singers 11.30 am.
- 8 **Friends Xmas Party**. 6pm. Tickets \$6. Door Sales only

JANUARY 1997

Exhibitions

- 1 **Don Peebles: The Harmony of Opposites** - until 2 February
- Elizabeth Kelly Portraits** - until 9 February
- 17 **The Virtues**- Megan Jenkinson- at the Annex - until 16 February

Lectures & Concerts

- 24 **Learning to Look at Contemporary Art**. Session 1. Fee \$3. Hurst Seager Room, Christchurch Arts Centre. Bookings 372 2973
- 25-26 **Painting in the Abstract** - Practical Art Workshop. 10am - 3pm. Christ's College Art Room. Fee \$45. Bookings essential 372 2973.
- 31 **Learning to Look at Contemporary Art**. Session 2. Fee \$3. Hurst Seager Room, Christchurch Arts Centre. Bookings 372 2973