



chrysalis seed trust



Is that you, Caravaggio. Kees Bruin, 2004, Oil on Canvas, 550 x 500mm.
© The artist. Reproduction courtesy of the Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu.

Super Realism and the vision beyond

A year ago we looked at how painters such as Cristina Popovici use Abstract Expressionism as a way of expressing themselves and therefore their faith. One of the hallmarks of Chrysalis Seed exhibitions to date is that within the framework of a common faith, a diverse spectrum of styles are used. Christian art is not determined by either style or content, rather by the convictions, belief and life of the artist. To explore this reality further in this edition we look at the life and art of Kees Bruin and Helm Ruifrok, both of Dutch ancestry and building on this heritage in contemporary ways - Kees showing a strong link with Vermeer, Helm with Rembrandt.

Kees Bruin's compositions would be among the finest examples of visionary super realism today. Helm combines the talent for detail seen in Kees' work with the raw mystical emotionalism of Popovici's work, explored in our October issues last year.

All three styles reflect a passion to express the unseen and the link between the visible and the invisible, the human and the divine, natural/supernatural. Kees does this through his remarkable facility to observe and record in details aspects of the visible world, then reset them in unexpected juxtapositions. Cristina explores the link through her intuitive manipulation of paint and colour in careful compositions, such as *Waterfall of Energy* 2003.

In his recent *Vanitas*, Bruin uses emblems of

consumer society and the 'good life' to expose the vanity of it all. Other less obvious more enduring values and realities are alluded to, echoing sentiments in the book of Ecclesiastes, and McCahon's final works. This reflects the 16th century Dutch heritage of highly detailed metaphysical symbolism. One of his most poignant examples of carefully recording visible reality as a link to the divine, is in his *Elizabeth and Goldfinch*. Part of the collection of Te Puna, the entire painting is very physical and personal. The allusions are to death, resurrection and life beyond our daily existence. The goldfinch is a traditional symbol of the passion of Christ and links it with the artist's fiancée's battle and death with cancer (see *CS News* April 2004). *Easter Lily and Eve* (1996) presents a Lily in details that can almost be smelt and picked, along with a nude reminiscent of Venus in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, and ancient Greek sculptures. This figure symbolises women universally, from Genesis to Picasso's daughter. This composition, with its strong chiaroscuro suggests both the creation of night and day, and the emerging tension between them.

As with Colin McCahon's *Takaka Night and Day*, it references the garden of Eden in a contemporary context.

Beyond Night and Day

Bruin and Ruifrok provide a link between our two group shows 2004-2005. The last issue of *CS News*

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Ascending Angel, Helm Ruifrok, 2003, oil on aluminium with light box, 900 width x 710 height x 200mm depth.

focused on the theme of 'making the invisible visible' as seen in our Otago group exhibition *Beyond*. The artists were exploring various ways of reflecting the physical world as a bridge and a reflection of the unseen. Bridie Lonie in her review reflects further on where this show fits in the canon of 'Christian art'. Our next group exhibition in Canterbury (March 2005) will be at CoCA, called *Night and Day*. Strong interest in the use and play of light in both his media and subjects links Ruifrok with both shows in spirit. His recent adoption of light boxes and engraved copper paintings highlights this in works such as *Ascending Angel* (above). In Bruin's latest work *Is that you. Caravaggio*, he contrasts the night of Christ's betrayal (according to Caravaggio) with an incredulous modern woman gazing in at the scene (cover image this edition).

The number of reviews in this issue reflects the growing number of exhibitions by contemporary artists who identify themselves as Christians.

Public installations, night and day

Other interviews in this issue include those with Deborah McCormick (Art and Industry) and Steve Mulqueen. Their installations explore social, civic and spiritual aspects of public sculpture. Steve Mulqueen's work in the Dunedin Public Gallery and *Beyond* (Peter Rae Gallery) reflect a strong social conscience and observation of industrial development, war and their impact on people and the land. Material is provided to document tensions which ultimately trace back to biblical concerns for social justice, peace and the environment. Instead of turning swords into ploughshares, he is turning bullets into poppies.

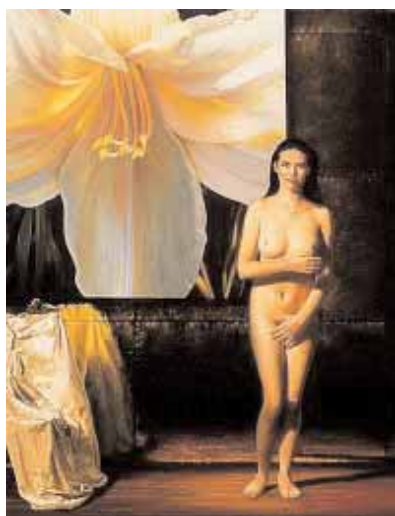
September, Christchurch pedestrians along some of the inner city streets were treated to *LightSCAPE*. "This was a series of public installations which explored urban narratives by illuminating important natural and built features along the intersection of the Avon River and Worcester Boulevard." Curated by Jonathan Mane-Wheoki and Deirdre Brown, they physically formed the shape of a cross, as they linked river and street, cathedral and gallery. The most dramatic of these was the installation *Alphabetic*, a laser projection by Paul Hartigan. Electrifying the atrium of the new Christchurch art gallery at night, its dynamic gyrations alluded to the process of creation itself. 'The oscillating patterns suggested the vigorous gestural drawing in the process of art making.' Two permanent art works remain from *LightSCAPE*, lighting the dark in Worcester Boulevard. Jim Speers 'multi coloured light box in the Oriel window of Te Puna', and the new circular work by Peter Roche, installed by the clocktower in the ground outside the Arts Centre, 'to celebrate Lord Rutherford's momentous achievements'. All three works vigorously and creatively generate circuits of fluctuating light interacting vibrantly with the darkness of the night. An interesting juxtaposition to the current exhibition *Christchurch After Dark*.

These themes remind us of the purpose of Christmas as described in the book of John¹. "The Word was the source of life, and this life brought light to mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out."

Peter Crothall

As part of *Scope* during the first few days of

¹ John 1: v. 4, 5. Good News Bible, New Testament, p. 118.



Easter Lily & Eve, Kees Bruin, 1995, oil on canvas, 500 x 650 mm, private collection.