



up/down\up - Canterbury Museum, Christchurch



'Fire water paper clay' (detail) by Mark Lander



'When you look at this what do you see?'
by Darryn George (left).
'Fountainhead' by Gareth Williams (right)



'Wasserleiter' (detail) by Gareth Williams

Hautu by Kathleen Gallagher

Presented by Re Act Theatre and directed by Lesley McMillan.

Southern Ballet Theatre, 23-28 March, 2002

Review by Godfrey Sim

Hautu is a narrative of the personal conflicts of two conscientious objectors interned during the Second World War, and of their families back at home. Structurally this narrative platform has allowed Kathleen Gallagher to use symbolic action through chorus, physical imagery, song and use of object to explore the wider themes of military/pacifist action, moral courage/compliance, separation, and isolation/collectivism.

Although at times the many 'scene' changes tended to break continuity, the combination of realistic expressionistic acting styles suited the overall intention of this challenging text. Lesley

McMillan and her production team managed to design a simple yet versatile set and isolate through use of tight lighting angles, spaces which emphasised themes the play is exploring - particularly distance, isolation and the sacrifice of 'standing up for what you believe'.

It is also evident that the cast had contributed significantly to the development of their characters and to choric and musical expression. Their strength as an ensemble with clear definitive facilitation by Lesley McMillan is to be commended in the development of this new work.

While the challenges to author, director and cast in this kind of collaboration are rarely successfully met, I believe they have been in this production. The result is a moving play which both stimulates the mind and moves the heart. Thank you Kathleen, Re Act Theatre, and organisers of *Easter 2002: The Fine Art of Raising the Dead*.

The Arts and Spiritual Life: A Forum

Seminars by Mike Riddell, Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, Kathleen Nicholls, Kevin Ward.
Panel discussion with the addition of Don Binney

*Hurst Seager Room, The Arts Centre,
Saturday 6 April, 2002*

Review by Bruce Nicholls

The forum discussion on the afternoon and evening of Saturday April 6th brought the *Easter 2002: The Fine Art of Raising the Dead* to a fitting climax. At the afternoon forum, four speakers with considerable depth brought their own insights regarding the function of art in making the invisible visible and the inexpressible intelligible.

The novelist Mike Riddell of Otago University struggled to unravel the relationship of the silence of the void with the impossibility of maintaining silence. He argued that the starting point of all art is to enter the emptiness of the void which he called 'voiding the void'. While the mystic leaves the void untouched, the artist mines it in search of meaning. Mike explored the Judeo-Christian story of creation in the opening verses of Genesis 1 where the earth was without form and was void. As the breath of God brooded over it and the Word of God brought form to it, so the Christian writer seeks meaning out of emptiness and darkness. Mike recognised that his own compulsive urge to write becomes therapeutic as he oscillates between hope and despair. His searching but cynical spirit raises more questions than it answers. But perhaps this is the lonely journey all artists travel. One wished that the biblical hope of order out of chaos were more evident in the presentation.

Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, Dean of Fine Arts and Senior Lecturer in Art History at the School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury, took us through a breath-taking sweep of the history of

art before focusing on the post-Christian condition of contemporary art. He reminded us of the need to accept the inevitability of change. The 18th century cyclic view contrasts with the rationality of the 19th century. Symbols change and acquire new meaning. For example, the roadside crosses warning the motorist of the meaningless of death are a corruption of the Christian symbol of the Cross. Again, the representation of the Virgin Mary with full moko, meant as the highest honour, shocked European sensibilities of the time. Some cultural values are ever changing, others remain constant. For Maori, 'bread' in the Lord's Prayer is always taro, even for those born in our urban society.

Our celebrated artist Colin McCahon interpreted the Gospel in symbols drawn from the Nelson landscape. For example, the cross becomes visible with a man up a power pole. In his art the artist's life documents his spiritual journey. For McCahon it was from faith to doubt. The certainties of faith are now drowned by the materialism of the here and now. The death of God motif of the 1970s is still with us as we move into the post-modern era; it does not die.

Jonathan showed that the post-modern search for the irreducible essence of reality ends with a bleak canvas. 'Where do we go from here?' he asks. 'Post modernism is the death of art.' Post-modernism is post-Christian. He went on to argue that Christian art in a post-Christian age must show the impact of Christianity on art. He cited the works by Christian artists in the up/down\up exhibition in the Canterbury Museum sponsored by the Chrysalis Seed Trust. Here is the cutting edge of art. He urged that Christian artists turn popular culture to Christian use. He concluded that art must bring together the realities of the external with the mystical reality of the Christian Faith.



Bridget Underhill - Exhibitions Coordinator
and Ruth Unger - Easter 2002 Coordinator



'Fire water paper clay' by Mark Lander



'Fire water paper clay' by Mark Lander



'Measure for Measure' by Jo O'Hara

In the third hour of the Forum Kathleen Nicholls spoke on North-South Art and the Christian hope, drawing on her wide experience in leading consultations of Christian artists in several countries in Asia, West Africa and Central Europe. Her presentation was illustrated by colour transparencies of work by painters and sculptors of many cultures. Kathleen discussed the relation of Symbols and Reality. Through symbols, as distinct from signs, the artist engages in reality. She traced the use of Christian symbols in modern church life, but noted that they became idolatrous when the symbol and the reality merge into one. True art expresses the soul of the artist in experiencing reality. However, in the case of Christ, artists often interpret him through their own traditional art forms. These widely differing interpretations of Christ can be justified by the reality of the Incarnation - the meeting of the divine and the human.

Kathleen then traced the interpretation of the biblical themes of Creation, the Fall and Re-creation by Christian artists of many cultures. She noted that while Christian artists have interpreted the person and death of Christ in a multitude of ways, few have been able to envisage the Resurrection of Christ, yet it is in this unique event of re-creation that meaning is given to the reconciling power of the Cross and the final transformation of all things into 'a new heaven and a new earth'. The directness and the simplicity of the work of Asian artists drawing on their millennia of national culture are a challenge to the artists from the younger cultures of the West to strive for greater clarity of meaning and message through their art forms.

In the final session of the afternoon Kevin Ward, a lecturer at the Bible College of New Zealand, focused on spirituality and fantasy in modern films. The rationalism and scientific truth of modernity dominated the film industry until 1950. Since then, the spirit of post-modernity has given new directions to their films. The search for spiritual reality is now central. Religion and the Church as an institution appear to be in decline though there are many exceptions to this generalisation. The death of God theme of the 1970s has refused to die, but for many the cinema replaces the Church. The prophets of today are the musicals and the cinema.

The new interest in the transcendent and in the spirit world is seen in the shift from the rational behaviour of Spock in *Star Wars* to the robot who wants to become human.

Matrix, Armageddon, Rain, The Gladiator, Chocolat and a host of others reflect this change in worldview.

Kevin illustrated the increasing role of fantasy and myth in modern films from *Jurassic Park, Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings*. C S Lewis and Tolkien foresaw the end of the scientific age and the coming of the spiritual power of fantasy. However, the film *Lord of the Rings* fell short of Tolkien's spiritual depth. Kevin called for the

revisiting of spiritual images in the life of the Church. Since Gutenberg the Church and especially its Pentecostal wing has centred on the written word and has ignored the role of art in worship and witness. He noted that the Catholic and Orthodox churches are the only ones growing in New Zealand. Churches should learn from the cinema which is using contemporary culture as the source of stories. New directions in the cinema open up new possibilities showing the relevance of the Gospel for our churches. Christians need to use pagan symbols as bridges for their proclamation.

In the evening Don Binney with his wealth of wit and insight joined the panel of the four seminar contributors. This part of the event was ably chaired by John Stringer, a cartoonist with a background in graphic design and politics. The evening session brought together many of the themes explored in the afternoon such as the need to move beyond the false separation of the sacred and profane in church life. The starting point was a lively discussion on Stuart McKenzie's comment that 'the age of modernity is often characterised as a displacement of religion by art'. It is now art rather than religious myth that presents the sacred.

In their concluding remarks Don called for unity in vision and work against the backdrop of the clash between iconoclasm and the veneration of the arts; Mike appealed for an attitude of gentle drawing rather than a spirit of compulsion; Jonathan warned against judgmentalism and the need to see the larger picture of creativity; Kathleen suggested that the great traditions of preaching and music had not lost their appeal amongst many young people as illustrated by an Anglican church in Vancouver; Kevin called for a post-modern community of memory and hope. The participating audience expressed their hope that Chrysalis Seed will continue to sponsor such stimulating forums.

[Tapes from this arts and spiritual life forum are available from CS centre at \$4.00 per copy, \$20.00 for a whole set. Ed]



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