

A Fusion Art...

included a number of works on timber veneer and two large scale drawings. His central approach was an attempt to fuse elements from Maori and Pakeha cultures and artistic traditions into a new synthesis that would occupy a “Tu” or the space between.

Ormsby's works demonstrate a rich iconography drawn from both cultures which combine in unexpected ways to produce restrained and handsome works. There is a strong draughting ability here, and the lines and cross hatching based drawn from traditional motifs have a lucid presence.

A strong feature of these works, and one benefiting his notion of a space between, is the use of negative space. This is used to great effect in many of the works, either as a compositional device between the imagery in the plywood pieces, or as spaces between shaped pieces of plywood as in the *Heke* triptych, Similarly, the natural grain of the plywood veneers is allowed to appear with minimal intervention. Usually stained with natural pigments these grains operate both as neutral space and, at times, as representational forms recalling ripples on water or on desert sands.

In producing works between the poles of the two traditions the artist has incorporated iconography from both traditions which exist simultaneously on the one picture plane. As in the example above, where the natural grain also operates as a representational form, there are times when there is an oscillation between the ways the images may be considered. Another instance is the use of the plywood panels. Echoing the traditional wooden lumps used to make Taonga these lighter weight panels also speak of a post industrial age where Western wood may become an abstracted veneer. In some examples these dualities are contrasted in the juxtaposition of images as in *Ecclesiasts 7:13* where the concrete ramp in Hamilton with its linear construction is silhouetted against the more organic form of the 'Pou' which it stands in front of.

There are several plays too between the two traditions; the ancestral cross hatching patterns stand in strong contrast to representational modes of Western painting. Here there is an amusing play in one work that incorporates Braque's illusionist nail, itself a jibe at pre-cubist conceptions of space. The multiple views which these works incorporate suggest a non Cartesian, simultaneous time more in keeping with the cyclic conception of time shared by the Maori and the pre-industrial West.

The large drawings in the exhibition are complex and very well drafted works that rely more heavily on direct imagery than the plywood works. Although the rendering in these is often exquisite they seem to lack the elegance and significance of the works on wood. Here the imagery must act to indexically refer to particular things whereas the other work seemed more symbolic, sparse and open to richer associations and readings. The

incorporation of the timber supports also allows the presence of the grain to operate in an “in between” state that is perhaps closer to what the artist strives for.

In all this was a rich, well researched and well presented exhibition that produced a fascinating hybrid form. There is a complex iconography of the artist’s own emerging from the works and is finding expression in a pared down minimal way that opens the work up to the viewer’s interpretation. Often very beautiful and elegant, the works contain strong considerations that do not berate the viewer but emerge in a consideration of the work’s structure and the deft use of negative space.

Stephen Haley

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