

A FINE SELECTION

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Take 20 young Canterbury artists, mix well and sample a diversity of creative ideas. WARREN FEENEY reviews the annual exhibition by students from the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts.

The annual exhibition from final year students and postgraduates from the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts showcases the work of 20 artists. Like all group shows characterised by a diversity of ideas, the gallery visitor's immediate wish is to establish connections between works.

Of course, such desires are usually frustrated, and an initial viewing of Select suggests little immediate relationship between works. Consider a claymation film that considers poverty in the 21st century, or a hot poker image on animal hide that critiques the relationship between animals and humanity. Can a series of works so divided in conception and execution find good reason to be together in the same room? Well, yes they can. Like much current practice, all are grounded in a fundamental belief in the subjective nature of our experience of the world. Irony abounds, not least in the fact that the very diversity of imagery in Select ensures it is a cohesive exhibition.

Yet if this exhibition is unified by a taken-for-granted faith in the potential of irony to question and elucidate, the works that are the most successful are those that give due attention, not so much to the idea of the work, but to the object as entity in the gallery: a thing that connects with the gallery visitor, offering provocation and/or enlightenment.

And then there are the challenges that group exhibitions present when assessing the quality of an artist's practice, confronted with the evidence of a single work. How to provide a relevant context? This is an issue highlighted in Mat Logan's *The Endless Everyday*, a wacky sports trophy assembled from Astroturf, brass, bowls and tennis rackets. If Dr Seuss had been a tennis player, this is the kind of warmly apologetic object he would have wanted as a trophy and memento of his career.

Hannah Batty's *Lattice* is a pen and paper work in which the artist's statement in the accompanying catalogue and the work itself speak clearly to one another. It is also a favourite work.

When Batty claims that her subject is a "record of a series of shifts, the evidence of labour," she is absolutely correct. *Lattice* is a work of beauty and intelligence, in which intention and outcome add up to so much more.

Lana Burtenshaw's *Hardcore # 2*, similarly gives due attention to a formalism of construction and while her assertion that her work "raise[s] questions", is usually a dubious disclaimer of

sorts, her engagement with materials, the rendering of surfaces and sense of resolution in this work is intimate, subtle and persuasive.

There are other works in Select that also succeed through their scale and quality of execution. Sophie Jone's Nest is an intimately scaled work in which the pattern and repetition of organic and fabricated forms shift, as its title suggests, between nature and the industrial.

Such clarity of intention is also shared by Rachel Dewhirst's Cloud, an expressive painting that embraces grand traditions of modernism and brings them to life in a work that effortlessly carries the weight of such traditions.

There is a generosity to Dewhirst's imagery that is similarly shared by Joshua Bashford's State of Flow, a large woodcut on canvas, nearly 2 1/2 metres high.

Bashford renders the detail of the natural world, its flora and fauna, seemingly animated by the energy and forces of life itself. State of Flow is a highly- charged pseudo pre- Raphaelite print, and entirely convincing in its sentiment and vision.

Lucy Matthews' People, also gives primacy to its audience. A series of letters EOLEP in concrete, located in a pile outside the main gallery space spells out the word "people". This is a work that depends on site and a subjectivity of responses.

The photo-realism of Emily Hartley-Skudder's Vintage Library Still Life gives due attention to context. The diminutive painting draws upon the processes of photography and undermines them in a depth-of- field painting of replicated objects from the real world.

However, is not merely about layering visual deception upon visual deception. Hartley-Skudder's success reveals an artist in command of her practice and a humour and maturity that serves as a welcome reminder about the ambitions of a survey exhibition like Select.

Postscript: Three artists from Select (Lana Burtenshaw, Rachael Dewhirst and Makoto Takuoka) were awarded \$2000. Their works were also presented to the collection of the University of Canterbury

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Select. University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts. January 7-18.