

Making History - Waiheke Art gallery Waiheke Island; October 2008

New at the Waiheke Community Art Gallery is Making History, the cumulative exhibition of the 2008 artist-in-residence Stephen Mulqueen.

The Irish historian RF Foster wrote “we make history by remembering things”. Mulqueen offers a variation on this: “I think also we can remember histories by making things”. It is this artist’s process of researching human occupations histories, the nature of place and names which fuel his sculptural works from informed research that has made him an ideal candidate for this residency programme. He has been able to develop a new body of work, which responds to the unique history and location of Waiheke and wider Hauraki Gulf environs, and also loops back into ongoing themes within his art practice and wider post-colonial issues.



King Phoenix.

Mulqueen says: “On arrival to the island in early June, my broad plan was to find a way into the Waiheke-Hauraki fabric via the aperture of ‘place’ as named histories. I had been given an introduction to the work of historian Paul Monin through my Dunedin friend and Irish historian Rory Sweetman prior to the residency and had read *Waiheke a History* as a prelude to my arrival. “However, I discovered Paul’s more recent publication *Hauraki Contested* during my first weeks here which I readily consumed, and it is from this work that I have been able to draw out a poetic metaphor regarding the shared bi-cultural history in Hauraki – Toroa/Albatross, which has become a major focus for this exhibition.”



ANZAC Bay.

as the metaphorical ‘bodies’ for bird’s heads created from number 8 wire.

In addition, local place-names Gannet Rock and Shag Rock act as regional signifiers for Takapu (Australasian Gannet), created from number 8 wire with a scythe acting as a wing for this diving bird; and kawau-paka (little shag) created from number 8 wire and a sickle.

The found tools become analogous as they reference both the form of the birds’ movement through the air and the action of the tools’ use within colonial history; ie, tree felling and farming in the Hauraki Gulf. The use of poetic metaphor in the referencing of Waiheke’s history is further developed in the tongue-in-cheek work *Te Kuri o Waiheke*, which starts with a laser-cut aluminium

“After a process which he describes as ‘cultural trawling’, he kept coming back to a quote in Monin’s text; the Maori chief Horeta te Taniwha, who said of the early Pakeha who arrived in Coromandel seeking gold in 1852: “It is the albatross seeking food merely.” Monin goes on to say that “he (the chief) was mistaken. In the age of colonisation they came as permanent migrants.”

From this, Mulqueen has created a series of Toroa/Albatross sculptures, which use found objects – axe and adze handles, a bush-saw, and a shovel



Takapu (Australasian Gannet).

Scottish terrier which, through several editions, becomes shaggier and shaggier to resemble the outline of our shores. This work links back into Mulqueen's larger Kuri/dog project which has seen him create a huge commission on Dunedin's foreshore near Otago's Boat Harbour. He is currently working on a similar kuri/dog for Headland - Sculpture on the Gulf 2009.

The finally work in this series Mulqueen calls, 'Waiheke trophy', King Phoenix, is a huge fish caught on a rod created from number 8 wire and a Phoenix Palm frond. An old photograph sited at the Waiheke Museum inspired this work.



.303/Poppy Wreath.



Te Kuri o Waiheke.

The second body of work presented in the Making History exhibition is a triptych and links back to and extends a group of works Mulqueen has been creating around historical sites of conflict and national war commemorations.

A reclaimed wooden clinker dinghy split in two by time and tide has been painstakingly preserved in a state of charred blackness, the colour associated mourning with the name Anzac Bay embedded in its stern with used .303 gun cartridges.

The work references both the name of the bay on Waiheke, and the cove at Gallipoli where so many Anzacs' lost their lives. The second work in this group is .303 Wreath, a work created from multiple .303 brass cartridges pressed together with the Flanders poppies emblem.

The artist describes this fusion as a work that hybridises the fragile poppy with a discarded and distorted metal fragment – a residue of war through which 'terror meets beauty'. The work carries its own in-built ironies and poetic resonance and is at once a signifier for grief, mourning and new life.



Toroa/Albatross

The last companion is the outline of a firearm – a Lee-Enfield rifle stock has been joined to an aged wooden Jarrah swingletree extending its reach into a work that resonates with the biblical text, 'Swords into ploughshares'.

Alongside these works is a Waiheke Roll of Honour listing some of the servicemen who left the island and lost their lives in war throughout the 20th Century.

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