

The Daisy Chains

Peter Madden & Rohan Wealleans

At its essence all art is alchemy. Paint and paper, pigment and props transformed, as though by magic, into a whole greater than the sum of its parts. The act of understanding and appreciating work is an exercise in wonder that, from basic prosaic materials, the artist transmits their thoughts, their mood, their feelings, filtered through the twin sieves of their own and their audience's perceptions and preconceptions, values and beliefs. It is a deliciously imperfectly articulate means of communication. What the artist means, and how they are perceived will never exactly align. Yet the liminal space between their outstretched hand and their unseen viewers' grasp is fertile ground for inspiration and elevation of consciousness.

The Daisy Chains is a joint offering from Napier based collage and mixed media artist, Peter Madden, and sculptural painter Rohan Wealleans, now showing at the newly established offshoot of the Boyd Dunlop Gallery, Ahuriri Contemporary. Madden describes the Daisy Chain as a lover's gift, a delicate benefaction illustrating the fragile threads that bind us. 'When chains are made of daisies they don't hold anyone down.' Rather than placing their audience in bondage, they give us wings to fly - an insight into the flight of imagination from these two exceptional fantasists.

Madden exhibits a selection of his famed collage works, painstakingly piecing together images foraged from his impressive collection of old magazines to create works that reach off their composite surfaces and grasp the psyche. Reimagined portraits arrest our sensibilities with a plethora of accusing eyes or strangely absent faces, screaming of identity. Tiny distal fragments of cultural flotsam and jetsam come together in a slow frenzy, whorling like a man-made tornado that draws the eye around and around allowing the viewer to alternately become lost in the weeds or suddenly see the big picture. Sculptural works conflate his signature collage imagery with everyday objects, which have the same found quality as his pictures excised from paper. They speak of impermanence, the vast scope of life, death and rebirth, gently reminding us of the wonderment of childhood even as our corporeal forms decay.

Though Wealleans nominally works in paint, his innovative technique transcends that of the traditional painter. Layer upon layer of paint - sixty or more - are built up over time, each one dried before the next applied. The resulting thick surface is carved with a knife to reveal the strata of pigment and acrylic inside. His wall mounted works, hesitant to be labelled paintings because of their intensely three dimensional nature, are a trypophobic's nightmare. Tight patterns of holes cluster in organic forms, punctuated by naive figurative imagery rendered by a blade in a range of distal processes. Rather than waste the removed particles of paint, they are repurposed in his hanging and free standing sculptures, conglomerated with a grotesque density and juxtaposed with strangely irregular beads rendered too in paint layers. A series of portals hang in the air like ceremonial necklaces destined never to be worn. A ride-on dolphin makes a static leap, its surface covered in piques of paint like barnacles clung to a hull. These artifacts Wealleans channels from the cosmos, the imagined relics of an alien witch race. The

wall mounted pieces extend his mythos, representing scans of the fly-like perspective of an otherworldly eye.

In contrast to the verbosity of both artists' horror vacui, the small room is a reprieve. White walls showcase Wealleans' everlasting gobstopper like *Love Spores* and Madden's *Flies*. The latter are actual found flies, painted in acrylic and preserved in resin. There is a delicate whimsy to these pieces, enhanced by their erratic hanging. Although subtle compared to the intense impact of the larger body of works, their sensitive display serves to bind the works together in a congruent show, the eponymous daisy chain.

The depth of thought and the height of curatorship of this show raises the bar for Ahuriri Contemporary, fulfilling its stated commitment to project based innovation and collaboration. It is work that challenges perceived notions of ethnography and culture. At its heart the inspiration it provides is a function of the artists' drive to push against the edges of their practice, to dare to explore the playful in the masculine, the powerful in the feminine. It shows us that, though we are all inextricably linked, our bonds need not be shackles, rather they can be light and joyful, freely given and received with love.