

Review:

*Summer Show at Ahuriri Contemporary, 2022.*

A large haunted mask howling, like a riff on Edvard Munch's anxiety-laden "*The Scream*" dominates the main room at Ahuriri Contemporary. But where the European Expressionist's 1893 painting uses convulsing form and discordant colour, Chris Heaphy has constructed his image on a white ground from a densely packed cluster of flat black pictograms; limbs, taiaha, boots, puppet-like profiles, non-specific signs. There's the sense that this cultural detritus flocked like iron-filings around a common grief to form this death's head. Hidden within the gaping mouth and eye-holes, painted white-on-white, barely a whisper to the eye, are more densely-packed figures; guns, bombs, extinct hominids, more guns.

"*Peace*" (2007) by Chris Heaphy carries an undeniable charge, but it does so with a lightness of touch, thank goodness, because if ever we needed the summer season to bring us some relief, it's this year. Still Ahuriri Contemporary's Summer Show isn't exactly trading in *light ent*. It's partnership with Auckland's prominent Gow Langsford Gallery ensures that most of the work here has craft and rigour to burn, produced by artists who have earned, or who are earning their places in histories of art in Aotearoa. You've got to applaud any initiative that creates cultural links between the cities and the provinces and so increases the mobility and visibility of great art around the country.

That said, some of the most stunning work on show here is the work of Australian abstract artist, Dale Frank. Despite the incongruity of his seemingly private-jokey titling ("*The Crotch Swelling of the Crochet King 8*", anyone?!) the paintings themselves are constructed from sublimely transparent veils of varnish and epoxy colour on perspex; the interplay of slick surfaces reflects and warps the surrounding space and creates seemingly illuminated pond-like pictorial depths. Lovely.

James Cousins has also conjured the kind of technique with paint that leaves you marvelling, "How the hell does he do that?" His paintings glow the way almost dead computer screens glow. Gorgeous technical

interference in layers of oils almost, but doesn't quite obscure the ghosts of botanical forms.

*Summer Show* is a bit of a grab-bag as group shows often are. To search for curatorial or thematic consistency in this case might be a bit of a tall order. Nevertheless, works of wide variety, from the decorative Pop art of Reuben Paterson's 2012 glitter painting "*Celebrity Chef*" to Paul Dibble's melancholy little bronzes, mostly sit well within the gallery's open and breezy spaces.

That said, Michael Hight's "*Awatere Valley*" (2015) feels a bit squeezed into the tight corridor at the head of the stairs. Even so, there's something about this small intriguing painting with its sharply painted detail that suits enforced close-quarters viewing. In it, a nasty-looking rusted mechanism guillotines a miniature landscape against an implacable black sky.

Allen Maddox (1948 – 2000) is also represented here by two terrific works that might have been better served in the main room than in the confines of the small one. Featuring his immediately recognizable ramshackle meccano of brushstrokes that teeter between frustrated and liberated, these works are immediate, frail, and vital all at once. They seem like desperate gestures to negotiate difficult times, something we can all find recognition in.

Michael Hawksworth, 2022

