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Arts & literature Story

The galleries: Remarkable riches in Auckland shows

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Some weeks in Auckland the art scene is filled with extraordinary riches in both public and dealer galleries. The university's Gus Fisher Gallery at the top of Shortland St is a good place to start. A group show in the main gallery called *Clean Machine* pays homage to engineering in contemporary art. It runs until the end of August.

Most intriguing of all are two kinetic sculptures by Aiko Groot. The largest is a silver column of cubes that endlessly rearranges itself in terms of space, opening to the edge of precariousness then returning to a monumental solid. It changes in ways that are scarcely perceptible but is complex enough to be unpredictable.

This is accompanied by a wall work that does the geometric trick of beginning as an equilateral triangle that dissolves into incoherence as it turns clockwise and reassembles as a perfect square. It reverses the process anti-clockwise. Simple but fascinating.

On the floor is a big work by Scott Eady with ranks of planes and trains and tractors dominated by a truss that is a leaning memorial in the manner of the Russian artist/designer Tatlin, and made possible with modern engineering. The whole is a comment on a soulless Communist regime.

Sarah Hughes makes paintings of computer viruses and Gina Jones makes attractive work from laser-cut steel and sandblasted Perspex. Modern and mysterious, but given life by rhythms of change.

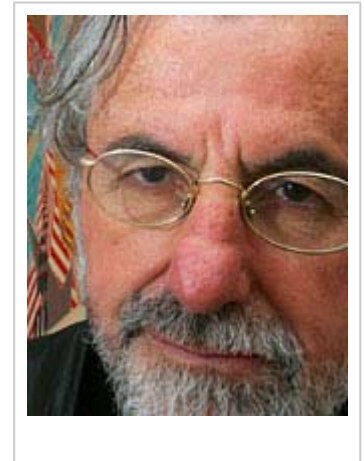
Down the hill at the corner of Victoria and Kitchener Sts are two galleries showing work that is the complete antithesis of engineering. Thomas Elliott's new work at the Lane Gallery until August 18 is in his established style of arrangements of figures against a dark background.

The figures are of anonymous, faceless people but all are engaged in rituals. One of the most effective paintings, *Bathers*, has only two figures, one in a bowl and one on a pedestal. The one on the pedestal is apparently baptising the other. This may refer to the River Jordan and baptism or it may be a simple cleansing. Either way it is a touching image in a great tradition.

Other bigger works like *Hours of the Night* have the figures ranged on a structure of platforms. These figures suggest in a multiplicity of ways a variety of human emotional activities: praying, tending, consoling, supporting and supplicating. As they emerge from the darkness, they touch the heart.

The elegiac tone of these works is not always successful. There are times when the painting of hands and feet dissolves in an unconvincing way. In a work like *Night's End* they are involved in a ritual over a corpse. More power in the gesture is needed.

Then round the corner at the Milford Galleries we have a show that reinforces the reputation of three long-established artists, running until August 25. J.S. Parker with his minimal abstractions marked by splendidly worked surfaces and a sense of light, Garry Currin with his apocalyptic seascapes full of thunder and the rush of waves, and Peter James Smith who combines dramatic landscapes with scientific formulae.



Not all of these works are perfect. Sometimes an ambitious concept outruns the visual, particularly when Smith abandons drama in favour of simple line on a dark background but, as a whole, it makes a grand showing.

Even more grand is the show of painting by Ralph Hotere at the John Leech Gallery until August 20, which takes its wonderful title *Dream of Snow Falling* from a big painting that dominates one wall of the gallery. There is work here from as early as 1974 and as late as 1998. Hotere has a special place in our pantheon of artists. In these works, as always, he makes from dense black a deep benign space and imposes on the black, which is sometimes made turbulent by emotion, a series of singing geometric forms, spinning circles and vertical lines that rise and fall like the spirit.

Dream of Snow Falling is one of the more complex works with colour emerging from the darkness and a circle imposed like an intellectual construction on emotion.

The complexity is matched by the utterly simple works on stainless steel with a grinding wheel or gas torch.

Towards Aramoana is at once an angel's wing and manifestations of layers of light. Hotere is in all the textbooks and histories – go and make contact with his work in reality. It is a wonderful exhibition.

It is a leap from there up to Karangahape Rd where, at the Ivan Anthony Gallery until August 25, Richard Killeen continues to develop his extraordinary computer-generated images. This is a world of strange demons, staring eyes and wrapped in snakes living in the midst of oddities and curiosities that would defy imagination. Quite properly the exhibition is called *The Temptation of St Anthony*.

Anthony was a saint attacked by demons and the subject of many paintings, notably Hieronymus Bosch and Grunewald.

One of the works has the exact size and shape of a triptych by Bosch but this is modern fantasy. Doll-like and humorous, Killeen's demons are compiled from selections of the immense visual overload that is the modern world.

His work is spectacularly clever – and getting stranger and more potent.

Alongside these established artists it is good to see a new talent. Samantha Bech in a show at the Satellite Gallery until August 11 gives a spin to abstraction by painting a hint of the flight of birds into varied and painterly arrangement of shapes.

She combines natural and abstract shapes in subtle harmonies of unusual colour, most notably in *Floreat*.

