



Tyne Gordon, *Alley-oop 2*, 2018, oil on board, concrete, 355 x 305mm. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Mitchell Bright

Julia Morison, *Head[case]/043*, 2018, glazed stoneware. Courtesy of the artist and Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū



CHRISTCHURCH

I write this paragraph as a kind of postscript from the aftermath of unimaginable tragedy in a city that has suffered more than its fair share of that. The cordon around the Linwood Masjid is around 100 metres from my front door, and although – make no mistake – this was a terrorist attack of white supremacist evil against Christchurch’s Muslim community, the grief and the anger spills out through all of us in a city already bound together by the trauma of the earthquakes of 2010 and 2011. With that in mind, it sometimes feels a bit trite and trivial to talk about what is going on in the visual arts in the city. But the arts are also a sanctuary of sorts when I feel like I can’t feel any more. Art helped us heal as a community last time, and I hope I’m not naïve to think it will have a similar role in the coming months and years.

Julia Morison’s *Head[case]* at Christchurch Art Gallery (until 14 July) is a powerful testament to the artist’s unstoppable and apparently limitless creativity and imagination. Arranged in an open, if confined (caution is required if you’re my size), structure of seven interlocking hexagons, Morison has installed 100 of the ceramic heads she has been working on for the past few years. Each is loosely based on a milliner’s block, having undergone an extraordinary diversity of morphs, mutations and augmentations ranging from the surreal to the sci-fi posthuman and the mythologically magical. Distant family resemblances can be suggested to the work of Adam Sobota, Juliette Clovis and even Henry Moore’s helmet heads, but as always Morison is startlingly original and unique in vision. There’s a slightly chilly, alienating quality to the heads, too, which seems emphasised by the darkness, downlights and narrow confines.

Graduating from an honours year at the Ara Institute (formerly CPIT), Jenny Ritchie gave us *Sphaera: Elegant Solutions* at Art Box Gallery, a delicate meditation on macrocosm and microcosm. Constructed out of a range of materials – resin, ceramic, and stones fused and exploded in a kiln, for instance – Ritchie’s intricate sculptures took their inspiration from the Ptolemaic model of the universe with Earth at the centre of eight crystalline planetary spheres. Exciting and evocative.

I was very much impressed by Tyne Gordon’s show *Double Dribble* at the University of Canterbury’s School of Fine Arts Ilam Campus Gallery in February–March. Gordon is an Ilam

graduate and this exhibition was the summation of her 2018 Olivia Spencer Bower Foundation residency. I enjoyed the way it managed to be light and fun with its kitschy, crusty painted fountains sitting on little patches of astroturf, while at the same time referencing a deeper dialogue, through sculptural object and painting about the frailty and physicality of the human body and its relationship to the environment and landscape. Gordon is a star on the rise – one to watch out for.

Another Ilam grad and young artist to watch is Gareth Brighton. I particularly enjoyed the “painted objects” of his March show, *Until Your Room is Ready*, at Chambers Art Gallery. Chambers is known for its eclectic line up, and I give full props to gallery manager Julie Williams for its lively stable. No matter how many times painting is declared obsolete, I will never fall out of love with it. Brighton paints with an incredible assurance, emphasising the textures of his recycled surfaces to provide deliberate formal ambiguity, and relishing the properties of his diverse media – spray paint, pastel and oil stick. Staying with the Ilam grads, Viv Kepes’ *Remember Me, Rangitahua’s Treasure* at PG gallery192 was memorable. Her softly seductive paintings of coral forms played in a space between abstraction and figuration, and they also had an ecological message – about climate change and the ocean, as a pendant to the research of marine biologists David Aguirre and Libby Liggins into indigenous corals of the Kermadec Islands/Rangitahua.

In February Kaikōura joined the Japanese city of Sendai, Christchurch and Wellington as a location for an iteration of *Shared Lines*, an ongoing art project that came out of the earthquakes that struck Christchurch and Sendai in 2011. The collaboration highlights the importance of art in building resilience and helping recovery in Pacific Rim communities prone to natural disasters, and earthquakes in particular. Part exhibition, part festival, *Shared Lines: Kaikōura* brought together art and artists from these communities and fostered dialogue between them, disaster management experts, urban planners and the local community. An effective and innovative model for building bridges between populations dealing with similar problems, the *Shared Lines* project reminds us that art is used to working on the margins – and is a powerful healer.

/ Andrew Paul Wood