

TJ McNamara:Winging it works... for some

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The title of **Glenn Wolfgramm's** spectacular show of paintings at Orexart is *Come Here Palangi*.

From this, you might expect an explicit statement about Polynesians and the Pacific, but since his first exhibition in 1998 Wolfgramm has been developing his images of the city in all its criss-crossing intersections and inter-weavings.

His paintings have become denser with every exhibition. These paintings are almost swamped with black: the black of tyres, roads, cars, power lines and overhead structures.

In a painting like *Scissor*, the lines drive forward into deep perspective, whereas in *Trophy* there is a horizon and the lines drive across the painting. The upper part is filled with fluttering shapes, the lower part with the endless crossing of traffic. Yet the centre has bright lights and an over-arching figure like an obscure, presiding deity.

In the midst of all this tense, emotional energy there are glimpses of elements of Polynesia, with little patterns from tapa cloth, tattoo and carving, so there is an identification with the Pacific's largest city. It is not so specific as to rob these intricate and powerful paintings of their universality.

It is indicative of the confidence Wolfgramm has attained that the biggest painting, called *Site*, is nearly 5m long and every part has vitality.

The birds are often wonderful, but many of the ideas are very conventional: the spectacle on the kiwi's nose, the cat as doctor and the sudden intrusion of a unicorn. The works are undoubtedly appealing, but their explicitness leaves little for the viewer's mind to work on.

This is Ching as a brilliant illustrator.

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There is vitality of a different, calmer sort in the elegant, rich, abstract work of **Kathryn Stevens** at Whitespace. Her paintings have two levels.

The lower level is a regular grid with fields of colour between fine lines. Over this is imposed a grid of wider lines, again encompassing fields of colour. The two layers interact: the inner layer is static while the outer layer swings outwards, inwards or like a wave across the canvas in a wonderfully rhythmic and musical way.

Though these paintings move in space in many different ways, the individuality of each painting is founded in its colour harmony. *Frame #3*, which forces outward, has rich russet-reds and brown, whereas *Canopy*, which curves gently inwards, is a harmony of blue and pale green.

These delightful paintings are supplemented by a series of drawings that make precise dances of line in space.

The subject of birds returns in an impressive exhibition of lithographs at Seed Gallery. **John Pusateri** is a fine lithographer and a master draftsman.

The show, called *Skin and Bone*, contrasts the limp featheriness of bird skins with the hardness of the bones of a skull.

AT THE GALLERIES

What: *The Rock That Was Taught It Was A Bird* by Dan Arps, Kim Beom, Layla Rudneva, Koki Tanaka

Where and when: Artspace, 300 Karangahape Rd, until Nov 20

TJ says: A strange lecture, a violent performance, a photograph and a witless parody do very little for contemporary art.

What: *Aesop's Kiwi Fables* by Ray Ching

Where and when: Artis Gallery, 280 Parnell Rd, until Nov 13

TJ says: Ching's brilliance in painting birds illustrates fables set in New Zealand for a book and the specifics limit the impact of the painting.

What: *Come Here Palangi* by Glen Wolfgramm

Where and when: Orexart, Upper Khartoum Place, to Nov 13

TJ says: Wolfgramm's evocations of the city with flashes of Polynesian imagery are developing into images larger and more energetic.

What: *Frame* by Kathryn Stevens; *Shatter* by Martin Whitworth

Where and when: Whitespace, 12 Crummer Rd, Ponsonby, until Nov 6

TJ says: Elegant grids moving through space, each with its individual colour harmony, make an appealing, lovely exhibition. By contrast, there is the immediate graphic response of an artist who lost his home in the Christchurch quake.

What: *Skin and Bone* by John Pusateri

Where and when: Seed Gallery, 23A Crowhurst St, Newmarket, until Oct 31

TJ says: Splendid, if rather grim, lithographs by a fine draughtsman who has concentrated on this form of printmaking. It is indicative of the confidence Wolfgramm has attained that [his] biggest painting is nearly 5m long and every part has vitality.

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