

THE NEW ZEALAND MEDALLION GROUP is celebrating twenty years of art medal making. Originally comprised of sculptors and painters, the group was brought together by Marian Fountain and Betty Beadle as contemporary makers of art medals in a tradition that developed out of coinage in the Italian Renaissance.

Marian Fountain had studied with Paul Beadle who had been medal making in New Zealand with an international exposure in this art form up until his death in 1992. Fountain and Beadle's widow Betty saw the possibility of New Zealand continuing to have a voice in the lively international dialogue among art medallists.

New Zealand born Marian Fountain lives in Paris and has work in five major institutions across Europe. One of her works in this exhibition, *Shelter 1* (1) is a British Art Medal Society issue and shows her characteristic combination of wit and menace.

Since the inception of the New Zealand Medallion Group its members have exhibited bi-annually with the International Art Medal Federation (FIDEM). This New Zealand voice has been heard particularly clearly by one institution, The British Museum, which adds contemporary medallions to its historic holding. New Zealand medals collected by The British Museum include Wallace Sutherland's *Her Face* (in 1995) and Jim Wheeler's *Solstice [Winter]* and *Equinox* (in 1992). Wheeler's interest in the way the hand handles sculpture is illustrated by the poise of *Balanced Change* (2), collected by the British Museum in 1999 for their exhibition *Size Immaterial: Hand Held Sculptures of the 1990s*.

Michael Reed has made a series of works using the image of the war medal and considering its implications. Three of his pieces were collected by the British Museum in 2005, including his 1999 *Looking Back, Looking Forward/An Award for Manufacturing* (3). His work is discussed by John Freeman-Moir, *Neither Shall They Learn War Any More/Michael Reed's Medals of Protest*, in *The Medal* no. 47, 2005. In 2000 the Rijksmuseum in Leiden collected a group of three of Reed's works, *Iwi Tawhito o te Moana/Ancient People of the Sea – I Vision, II Mana, and III Navigation*.

Members of the New Zealand Medallion Group take turns to curate the annual exhibition. One memorable event was the 2001 exhibition *Pacific Rim – Te Pae O Te Moananui A Kiwa*, in which Fatu Feu'u drew together work from across the Pacific area. The exhibition, supported by Deutsche Bank, showed at the McPherson Gallery Auckland, Brooke/ Gifford Gallery Christchurch, Simmonds Gallery London, and Medialia New York.

Christine Massey is the present international delegate for the group. She has recently attended international conferences debating the definition of the contemporary medallion, and its other option, the medal object. Both forms are hand-held, with a relationship between image and text that traverses both sides of the work. Massey's work in this exhibition *Florigenium* (4) explores these ideas in still life.

Members of the group are commissioned periodically to make commemorative medallions. Of particular note is Terry Stringer's *Montana Medal*, which is presented annually for outstanding authorship. His work in the present show, *Night and Day* (5) employs the form of space on one side of the medallion as the subject of the other side.

With this exhibition the New Zealand Medallion Group presents individual artworks that demonstrate what makes a New Zealand medallion distinctive.

