

Thursday Arts

Esoteric imagery from old Spain

THE art scene this week is not only full of interest but also dilemmas for the critic.

First is the problem of evaluation with the major show of the week which is uneven in quality and esoteric in imagery.

Then there is the problem of excellent group shows that are filled with so many fine things that comment is stifled by their sheer numbers.

The major exhibition is undoubtedly the work by John Reynolds at the Fisher Gallery, Reeves Rd, Pakuranga. Reynolds is a young artist who has received a great deal of attention and is the recipient of a Queen Elizabeth II Fellowship.

These works have been inspired by a recent visit by the artist to Spain.

It is not necessary to know about Spain to appreciate these works but it helps. The Spain that inspires them is the Spain of the Moorish occupation of Spanish literature and poetry, not brash, modern Spain.

In the foyer of the exhibition is a work which is a toro poster for a bull-fight. Added to it is a scrawli assertion which may or may not be ironically meant.

This work is not a good

start to the show. It manages to be petulant and trivial at the same time.

Yet the very large works that are in the main gallery are very far from trivial.

One is called *Eureka School* and consists of seven large panels that march across the wall beginning with the plan of the immense cathedral in



Perspective on Art

by T. J. McNamara

Seville, part of which was originally a mosque. Then there is a sketch of a system like a heart or a tree and a flow of blood.

Then a panel that is all chaos. Then a panel of horizontal lines and the remaining three panels full of drawn signs and signals.

The whole suggests a development from precision and certainties into uncertainties and hints.

Alongside this very big work is a tiny one of no more than a few square centimetres.

Both works are more drawn than painted. Reynolds makes complex mazes of intricate little marks. There is always a great deal to read in his works. They need close scrutiny but they also

work from a distance.

One of the results of his method is a dryness which, when combined with the obscure nature and hinted quality of his imagery makes it hard for the viewer to become very emotionally involved in the work.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the two works done on plywood.

Woman based on one visual idea blatant as a squeal.

It all makes for a difficult, elitist exhibition that is, nevertheless, sustained by a powerful sense of purpose that overcomes the feeling of self-indulgence rather than communication.

In the other room at the Fisher Gallery is a work by Derrick Cherrie which is equally difficult to pin down.

It is an exceptionally long bed called *Notes for the House Officer*. The bed's head and its cabriole legs are orthodox and familiar and painted in bright colours.

What is unfamiliar is the bed's inordinate length, a feature that suggests stretching and the rack. The overtones of inquisition and interrogation are heightened by the way the bed is equipped with leather straps.

From the head of this Procrustean bed extends a long strap with a collar. The other bindings around the edge of the bed have a less immediately practicable purpose but they are equally sinister.

The whole ensemble is a disquieting work that hints at repression in the midst of the ordinariness of life.

The third artist at the Fisher Gallery is Barry Lett who has installed his

Aeroplanes and Clouds in the courtyard.

Four aeroplanes sit, big and wooden, on top of wooden clouds.

These works were done in 1986 but have retained their freshness as bold evocations of the zoom of planes in the sky and the curly cloud around them, though they might have been better suspended rather than just supported by wire.

A further exhibition full of signs and significations is the work of Fatu Feu'u at the Lane Gallery, O'Connell St, City.

This copious show of prints has Polynesian motifs that evoke ancestral spirits and are clean, bright images with the firm patterning found in tapa cloth but much more colourful.

The strongly Polynesian feel of the prints extends to a bold mixed media work called *Matri-arch* and carries over well into the big carpet which is also part of the show.

At Oedipus Rex Gallery, in Achilles House, Custer St, there is a double exhibition by Nicky Foreman and Maree Wilson.

Foreman is devoted to Taranaki and expresses her response to the landscape in two ways, first with paintings full of the rhythmic pattern of the hills and then with collages that use photographs



● Fatu Feu'u's *Matri-arch*... a strong Polynesian feel.

PICTURE: DAVID WHITE

and maps to give a sense of place.

The paintings are at their best when they have unexpected elements such as the fence line in *Mahoenui*.

Wilson paints dark, moody landscapes inspired by Murival and the west coast. Big blocks of dark colour contrasting

with a red blaze of light in a typical work such as *Tai Tamatane* are very effective.

Wilson is also well represented in a fascinating exhibition called *Small Works* at the ASA Gallery, Blake St, Ponsonby.

This show has more than 200 works — all tiny.

A few of the 40 artists have simply scaled down their larger work but most have fitted subject and style to size.

A thick tablet-like format is used to brilliant effect by *Keggie Carew* and by *Sarah Munro*. Rodney Fumpston has a hilarious little mezzotint of legs and a sparky blaze

of energy called *Naughty Weekend* and, more seriously, *Haru Sameshima's* tint photographs of detail from European cities are exquisite.

These are only a few of the fine things in this lively show and its variety is matched by *Modern Myth*, a show of drawings at the Chiaroscuro Gal-

lery, on the corner of Durham St East, City.

Most of the artists are well known and have produced a number of striking images. One new name is *Emma McCellan* whose *Nature of the Beast* with thumbscrew and shrieking mouth is one of the most striking of all.