

Spectrum of splendour

IT is good to be able to record exhibitions showing the work of two of our most mature artists reaching new heights of expression.

At the Sue Crockett Gallery in Achilles House, Customs St, Milian Mrkusic, a veteran in minimal abstract art, has a series of works called *Alchemical Spectrum*. The paintings are among the finest he has ever done.

T. S. Eliot, in a poem, speaks of "inexplicable splendour". He is referring to the white and gold interior of a London church, but the phrase also fits these fine paintings which use a glittering white and a rich gold among their colours.

The colours are applied on rectangular fields which interact with one another, but — in five of the six paintings — with one colour rising supreme at the top. Each of the range of colours has its

turn to reign, hence the title *Spectrum*. Only in one painting, *Alchemical Progression*, is the movement of colour and thought from left to right.

The colours are called "alchemical" because they are linked with the symbolic significance given to colours in the experiments of alchemy: green is the base matter; black signifies the transformation from one form to another; white is a separation; red is a culmination; and gold the ultimate.

None of this would matter if the colours were not of the greatest intensity and if they did not ring and chime together to make a rich visual harmony. This is the inexplicable element that words cannot convey. It is contributed by the large scale of work, the exact relationships as the rectangles lock into each other, and the wonderful surface of the colour which is intense and loaded without



Perspective on Art

by T. J. McNamara

losing anything in depth and resonance.

The works that elevate green and gold are perhaps more potent than the others, and *Progression*, which moves from green and white across the wall to gold, has a special grandeur.

The show demonstrates convincingly that spare, pure abstraction is still a style that can have a monumental power.

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The other consistent and complete expression of ideas is the Fisher Gallery in Pakuranga where Don Driver has filled the gallery with an installation he calls *Energy City*. The energy theme is keyed to bright green barrels that are suspended from the ceiling and the stacks of tyres in the centre of the gallery whose matt, black shapes contrast with the brilliance of the fluorescent tubes placed on them.

These are only the backbone to the limbs of the show which are hung on the walls. These are all assemblages of found material. To a surprising degree they carry on the green colour of the drums and continually counterpoint this with rich rust colours and the orange of canvas tarpaulins. Ordinary things are wonderfully coloured.

These assemblages of tyres, tools, rice bags, rope and old coverings, displayed against rusted sheets of plate steel, successfully re-educate our eye to the beauty and colour of things around us, their remarkable textures and intricacy of surface.

There is a powerful nostalgia at work here too. The things that make up these works are discarded

products of hands. The show reasserts the value of their making.

It is interesting how things, once they become obsolete, enter into the realms of art. The tools that feature are mostly old-fashioned, supplanted tools that take their place easily alongside bones and skulls that are placed in the same leather pouches.

The tools give a special quality to *Pouch*, and gloves give point to *Projection*. The artist's wit is seen when he places a bust of Sir Robert Muldoon on top of a blue drum and under the weight of red one in *Think Big*.

The heaps of material on the floor remains dead work for all the cleverness of its contradictions; the box-like works such as *Shifting the Viewpoint* have inventive touches, but the effect is stolid.

At its best, though, the exhibition shows an accomplished command over form and materials used to express a unique style.

At the Gow Langford Gallery in The Strand, Parnell, there is another show that depends to some extent on found objects. Part of many of Andrew Drummond's sculptures is a bronze casting of a piece of weathered wood. The dark bronze of the cast wood is counterpointed with wrappings of copper carefully welded along the seams to make patterns and texture.

The show is called *Flight Across the Desert* and in many ways these sculptures have the effect, both of weathered signs,

and of plants that one might find on a desert journey. They also have their own distinct presence that comes from the combination of natural and man-made matter.

The impression made by the work becomes more powerful when there is an element of tension that gives spring to the work without disturbing its weight. Such a work is *Wine Receiver*, which is split at the top, and *Figurless Object*, where a worn roller shape is held by the apparent spring of the wood.

Many of the works have a touch of gold to key-up their prevailing grey, brown and copper tones. The gliding gives a delicate lift to *Flight Object*; this is the best of the wall sculptures which, on the whole, cannot compete with the standing pieces.

Mementoes from a Journey is a laboured work for all the cleverness of its contradictions; the box-like works such as *Shifting the Viewpoint* have inventive touches, but the effect is stolid.

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The drawings by Robert McLeod in the smaller gallery at Gow Langford are a new departure for a painter usually known for his deeply textured abstractions.

These works are all curves and spindles. Everything twists and turns in a very aggressive way that culminates in a group of drawings that are full of knives, darts, scissors and images of squeeze and thrust.

Harsh colour is associ-

ated with the cut and thrust of these forms, and with the heavy-handed drawing make for works that are unpleasant without having much in the way of redeeming force.

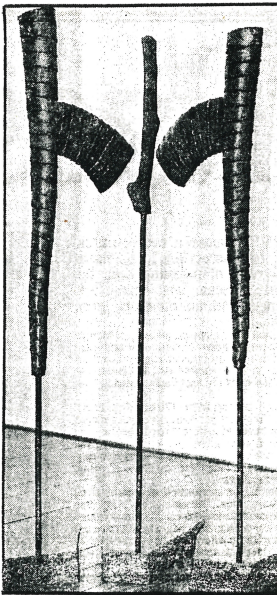
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Downstairs at The Strand in the Gregory Flint Gallery is an installation by Leon van den Eljke, a Dutch artist who lives in New Zealand.

The work centres around a series of masks, all with a card over the left eye which gives a peering, squinting quality to the images.

Variations are played around this mask form. It is the material of large photographs where it replaces the face of a figure standing like a statue in black and white versions; it is the material of some very fine drawings; and it is part of images that combine abstract paint with stills from old movies by Fellini.

The results are intriguing and strange but amount in all to a demonstration of cleverness and invention that evokes admiration but leaves the viewer unmoved by any stronger emotion.



● *Resting while Travelling*, a work by Andrew Drummond.