

## Thursday Arts

# Clay tradition challenged

**Urban Heart**, ceramics by Sam Ireland, at Fisher Gallery, Pakuranga, until February 12.

**S**AM IRELAND studied glass and ceramics in England, graduating as a BA and working as a technician in a glassworks before coming to live in New Zealand.

Here he has worked at Barry Brickell's Coromandel potteries and at Unitec in the Craft Design School, where he realised clay was the medium best suited to his needs for expression.

*Urban Heart* is a selection from his series of vessels in which he "challenges formal ceramics in order to reinvigorate the medium." A challenge is perhaps presented to those who prefer "formal" ceramics, but whether this in itself invigorates clay work is a matter for individual assessment.

Ireland builds his vessels unconventionally, but manages to retain the essential spirit of thrown clay.

In this he is successful. To be different is difficult without resorting to gimmicks — the age-old problem. Ireland shows sincerity in his experiments.

A base is flattened sheet clay, impressed deeply with geometric patterns which show inside the finished work. On this is built an inward-sloping pedestal which then rises as a vigorously thrown cylinder,

with throwing rings left to show the immediacy of the action.

On top of this cylinder a second is added, followed by others, resulting in a tall vase form growing in a succession of rhythmic bands, each slightly waisted, each joining ridge defining the segments.

The throwing leaves the vessel walls thin, though they are strong through high firing, giving a

knowledge of glass as well as clay to reinvigorate his medium.

**Mixed Media** at Te Taumata Gallery, Finance Plaza, until February 10.

**T**HIS exhibition, *Tihei Mauri Ora! — Behold the Breath of Life!* welcomes the birth of a new year celebrating Te Tau o Te Reo Maori

hills, coastline and sea. The detailing is semi-abstract, the celebration of the tree impressive.

Equally masterful is his three-dimensional sculpture of eels curving through the current between strands of water weed. Each eel, with traditional eyes of inlaid paua, and each plant stem is carved from kauri using the natural curves of selected branches.

Further, Gale takes his carving skills into reviving the old art of woodblock printing. In the tight grain of smoothed kauri blocks, his tools carve lines fine enough to give intricate detail when inked and transferred on to paper.

The resulting prints are reminiscent of those by artist Mervyn Taylor, commonly known from *School Journal* illustrations 40 and more years ago. Similarities occur because the graphic style is in part determined by technicalities of the carving process, and the subject matter — Tane Mahuta, a king among kauris; Waitotemarama waterfall; beach scenes; and ponga-clad hills.

Other sculptures, by **Ross Hemara**, **Fred Graham**, **Ray Pomare** and **Lionel Matenga**, are also powerful in their combination of traditional Maori elements and present-day sculptural practice and materials. **Matt Pine's Pacific Hut** series is dramatically simple in his use of rough-cast aluminium and welded steel rod.

—Howard Williams

## Around the Galleries

natural aspect as if layer-grown by some giant sea creature for its shell.

Some vessels are more or less columnar. Others spread outward, growing in diameter as each successive band is added, and becoming more floppy and off-centre as they climb higher. Some are built less high and are shaped into long, narrow ovals on oval bases.

Decoration is added in natural tones. Soft earthy colours are broadly brushed in panels and overpainted with black symbols. Devices like hearts, stars, spirals and asterisks appear repeated in grid patterns, scratched in and brushed on spontaneously, almost carelessly.

These pots hold a special fascination as intimate inspection reveals a multitude of tiny beads and bubbles of bright colour speckling across their surfaces. Here Ireland uses his technical

with paintings, prints and sculpture.

Nineteen respected artists provide a feast of ideas and images; paintings and prints ranging from contemporary interpretations of traditional symbolism through individual pictorial concepts to sharp racial/political statements.

The predominant first impression is of powerful colour and design executed with professional acumen.

Of particular interest is the use of craft skills in the production of fine art works. Allan Gale's wood carvings weld lyrical design and visual storytelling by expert use of chisel and gouge.

In laminated sections of kauri his *Maunganui* wall sculpture is a bas-relief carving depicting the great tree central on its peninsula, branches in the air, roots underground, supported on either side by contours of bush-clad