

Shades of deja vu

THERE IS A strong feeling of deja vu about the exhibitions this week. Most are a revisiting of past work.

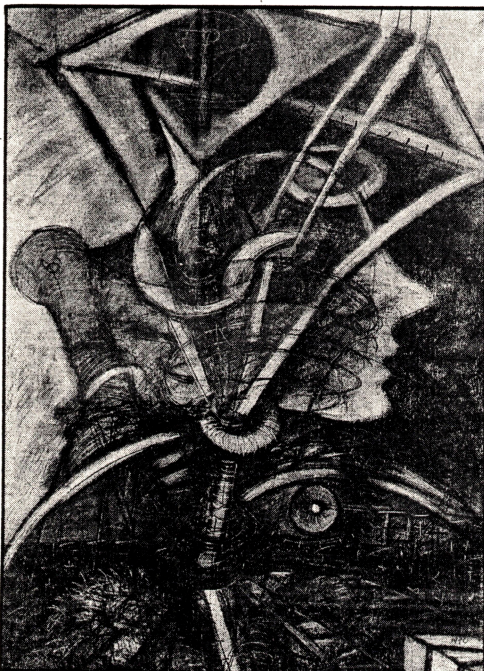
At the Sue Crockford Gallery in Achilles House in Customs St there are seven paintings by Milan Mrkusich that were made more than 10 years ago. This amounts to a small retrospective by one of our most respected abstract artists.

The uncompromising minimalism that has characterised Mrkusich's work in the past two decades is apparent in all this work whether on canvas or on board.

Each painting has big areas of surface colour marked off by fine lines which are sometimes — as in *Four Circles Grey* — the slight spaces between the edges of panels.

Each of the four panels that make up this work has a grey surface with a fine circle of blue painted on it.

Another work, *Untitled, Blue*, is simply made up of two shades of blue. The



● Detail from Philippa Blair's *Light Angel*.

darker shade occupies one corner of the paler surface.

Simple they may be, but these fields of colour are totally convincing as paintings.

One reason for this is that the painter works on a large scale. Geometric paintings of pure colour such as these need to be big to work properly. The colour then becomes not like a tablet but a deep space.

As always with Mrkusich the surfaces of these paintings are very lovely. Some are rich, plain surfaces; others are figured lightly with a pattern like watered silk. But even with restrained tones such as grey the colour has extraordinary density.



To go to the exhibition of drawings by Philippa Blair at the Drawings Gallery at 187 Ponsonby Rd is to revisit the themes of her work since 1987.

These are not strictly observed images from objects or landscapes, but constructions that work according to their own inner laws.

Though these works are obviously related to each other by their energy and intricate patterns of line, each creates its own world of swirls, structures and, often, colour.

The mediums used are pastel and charcoal, rubbed and overlaid in a variety of inventive ways. Often the paper is cut and shaped and a long way from the conventional rectangle.

The basic image that Blair returns to again and again is the vortex. In her constructions everything spins. Within the vortex profile faces may appear and there is always a structure of tapering, converging forms to counterbalance the swirling forces.

A work such as *Christopher Columbus in Central Park* takes its title from being an exploration of the sensations of being in Central Park.

Other works take their name from the hints given by their shape.

One impressive drawing in colour which is shaped both like a torso and a

Confidence, energy, rhythm, movement and a highly individual directness of attack characterise these works, especially the gush of *La Fuente*, the surge of *Torus* and the intricate structure of *Scaffold*.

Overall there is a sense of joy and discovery that gives insight into Blair's achievements.



Though the works by Tony Lane at the Gregory Flint Gallery in The Strand in Parnell are new paintings they offer no departure from his established style — though his imagery is extended a little.

Surfaces are very important in a Lane painting and they are enriched with gliding. The frame is an integral part of these works, though the main part is often isolated on a panel.

The whole ensemble is held together by the gliding and the pale colour so that the painting becomes the artwork as a precious and polished object.

This emphasis on a jewelled surface does not preclude other qualities such as a hint of ritual magic.

This quality gives force to *Nine Stones Twice*.

A sense of dreaming mystery makes the profile and delicate blue colours of *Blue*...

image. There is a similar feeling in the profiles and rubbed surfaces of *Shield*.

The most remarkable of these accomplished works is *Clouds*, which is made up of three long white clouds with delicate colour on their undersides. They are painted on logs which have been given the artist's special alchemical treatment.

The clouds have a series of circles on them which make them transmit visual interest outwards as well as across. They

provide some new sensation among the old, charming effects.

The double exhibition at the Chiaroscuro Gallery in Durham Lane is, in one part, also familiar territory.

In one room are Ruby Huston's carefully drawn images of plants. These float in the space of the paper like the pictures in a botany text or herbal one cannot help but admire the detail.

The colour is not quite natural: it has a special stringency that intensifies it without losing transparency.

The effect of this is to push these works in the direction of symbolism but not in any readily defined way.

The other exhibition at Chiaroscuro is *In Thirty-nine Words* by Tom Murch.

These paintings are at their best when they are at their least pretentious. Three *Coromandel Landscapes* use a long horizontal format to make an effective summary of the feel of the land; *Simpson Hill* and *Castle Rock* also work well.

On the other hand, *Religious Life* contrasts scenes of flagellation a la Goya with the spirit of hills and trees. The trouble is that the drawing is not equal to the task of describing the fanatics.

This painting is the high point in the show.

There is just until the weekend to see an exhibition of major works by the Christchurch artist Julia Morrison at the Fisher Gallery in Pakuranga.

This is again a revisiting since some of the work was shown at the Sue Crockford Gallery. Before that it was shown in France when the artist was the Moët et Chandon fellow.

One work is a systematic series of objects which unfold like a book or an altar for private devotion.

Within the uniformity of the format there is an extraordinary range of visual delights which evoke collections, lead and wax seals, and a whole body of arcane lore. The series is called *Amalgame*.

The same feeling of secret knowledge locked away — but which we know is important emotionally — fills a second work in the exhibition, *Encyclopaedia*, which is made up of sealed books which open to reveal only symbols.

In the smaller room at the Fisher is a solemn group of boulders, wrapped in dried elm bark and set in sand. The artist is Judy McIntosh Wilson. The boulders show nature, more particularly the Canterbury river landscape, controlled and ordered.

It makes a striking installation.

What's On

Theatre Collection, paintings by Patterson Parkin, until July 24.

George Fraser Gallery, 25A Princes St — *Real to Reel*, by Tessa Laird, until July 29.

Gifford Gallery, 583 Dominion Rd, Balmain — *Joe-Jocelyn Hill*, until July 30.

Gow Langford Gallery, Cnr Wellesley and Kitchener Sts — *Paintings by Dick Friczell*, until August 6.

Gregory Flint Gallery, 125 The Strand, Parnell — Tony Lane, until July 30.

John Leech Gallery, 360 Remuera Rd — *The Auckland Scene* by Fiona Hoiroudy, until July 27.

RKS Art, 54 Wellesley St W — Ken Robinson, until July 22.

Rotorua Art and History Museum, Government Gardens, Rotorua — *The Blue Baths*, photographic images by Mark Adams, until September 26.

Sue Crockford Gallery, 45 Customs St E — Milan Mrkusich paintings, until August 5.

Susie Mathieson International, 10 Heaton Grove, Birkenhead — *Landscapes* by John Turner, until July 28.

Tezan Art Schools, 251 Karangahape Rd — *Merchant Series* by David Milne, until July 28.