

Hannah Kidd, 'Inheritance', The Central Art Gallery.

Elizabeth Smyth.

*Tiger Tiger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?*

William Blake

Walking into exhibition *Inheritance* by Hannah Kidd, the viewer is dazzled by the large tiger skin artwork. With teeth bared and his body an intricate, beautiful pattern of interlocking welded painted iron, you can see how over the years, Hannah Kidd has perfected her technique of using wire frame and corrugated iron cladding to render her pieces. This work is so meticulous and jewel like, it is easy to forget that it takes such a labour intensive craft, to produce the only acceptable contemporary 'inherited' tiger skin..that is, one made by an artist.

Since 2001, Hannah Kidd, has wooed us with her wire framed, corrugated iron clad, objects of the Kiwi vernacular, so familiar to us all and yet presented in a new quirky, fun loving and highly skilled manner. There have been so many objects, animals, plants and humans that have drawn us to their idiosyncratic personas; the huge bear riding a child's tricycle, a working dog, heading its prey, or a four horned antelope...we have adored her renditions of that which is so recognisable.

Using what can best be described as 'tools of the trade' this is the work of not only an artist, but a qualified welder, corrugated iron flattener, (she rolls it flat by using a large farm roller in a paddock), wire frame constructor and spot welder. Kidd somehow brings finesse and exceptional skill, to that which is clunky, rigid and lifeless. She brings into the object, its vital force, often but not always with a wry humour, curiosity and celebration of life.

As Kidd's style has developed, works often became more detailed and sometimes painted. Kidd has sometimes painted or added other materials, to complete the artwork. At The Central Gallery in 2018, her work, *In season*, depicted a stag in full glory, with a chandelier attached to its head, its head thrown back, crying, while lit up from above. Over the years, many more of her works have become painted, recently, using enamel paint over the entire piece, as in the above *In Season*. Emotion too has become more delicate and to the fore. Mischievous playfulness is still celebrated in each work, yet at times a more tender rendering is on show. In her series of figures titled *Avonside Drive*, Kidd created 'everyday heroes' associated with the 2011 Christchurch Earthquake. Anyone who experienced this moment in history, did not feel camaraderie with her figures of the neighbours, we had come to appreciate...*Noel Peterson* doggedly mowing a neighbours lawn and *Tanya Brown*, feeding the stray cats.

And so, with her latest exhibition, *Inheritance*, Kidd focuses on the intimacy, fondness and sometimes discomfort, our ancient and colonial ancestry brings to our present. As Kidd herself states, "*This is what this whole show is...who are we ,where did we come from and where are we going and on a more personal note, "Who am I, what am I giving to the future generation?"*"

When she inherited a load of possessions from family members, Kidd began to think that if she could somehow become intimate with the objects by rendering them, she could let these pieces go. In *Inheritance*, we see this in her delicately painted teacup and saucer stack, titled, "*Prince Albert*", influenced obviously by Royal Albert teacups. Similarly with the group of crockery entitled *Aunty O'Briens*, we remember our own family treasures, which sit often a similar china cabinet. The painting is delicate and beautifully rendered. However next to this Kidd has placed '*Nanas Teeth*'..some macabre set of teeth, showing that which is inherited is sometimes uncomfortable and unpleasant. Kidd also re-interprets the more kitsch or vulgar inheritance we may have hiding at the back of our china cabinet. With its candy colours and wonky portraits, Kidd's "*Figgis*" vases sit perched above the cabinet in all their ghoulishness. Prince Charles, Queen Elizabeth and even Captain James Cook are rendered as if they are freaks from a sideshow, the watery paint running that their faces are a splash of comedy, rather than the pomposity they set out to be. Here Kidd is influenced by Irish painter, Genieve Figgis, who takes portraits from the Rococo period and sends them up in an absurd manner.

Personally, the standout of this exhibition, are Hannah Kidd's series of 8 Maori heads (Mokomokai). At first, possibly confronting, these heads of Maori gods, require an acute examination, in order to fully take in their essence. Kidd made these works while in Covid 19 isolation and it shows. The careful threading of the horse's hair (collected from local donations), to the beautiful pattern every face contains, each god becomes alive, so individual and unique. From '*Papatuanuku*' (earth mother), whose detail encompasses a nurse, to '*Tawhirimatea*' (God of weather), with his mohawk and painted clouds, these faces communicate something far beyond iron and paint. They talk of our uncomfortable colonial past and of Hannah's own inheritance. Some of her ancestors are from Ngāti Toa iwi, and it is possibly that inheritance she is exploring. Whatever it is, this exhibition, examines our complicated Maori and Pakeha history, by casting an intimate and piercing eye, on what is our unknown future.