

PAUL MARTINSON

An abiding interest in the surreal and the symbolic has seen Paul Martinson (b.1956 Aotearoa New Zealand) shift away from realism in search of a style that expresses the poetry of the human mind. While retaining a drawing-based figurative style, Martinson has embraced a personal, liberal approach to painting that allows a free flow of imagery and ideas.

Martinson's compositions are surreal and poetic; a bird in flight within a closed glass jar, a fish swimming in a water-filled light bulb. Where human figures appear, they are rendered as archetypal forms—faceless, marble-skinned Venus figures in sensuous, surreal contexts. The artist's works are both poetic and troubling. They span subliminal and liminal realms with effortless agility. References to the known world are complicated with nonsensical paradigms. The lyrical is rendered in unexpected juxtapositions, and a transcendent reality is presented, beyond biological classifications.

Despite the delicate, meticulous handling of surface treatment and the soft gradation of subtle hues, it is as though Martinson is trying to get “behind the scenes” of life itself. What makes a fish, a fish? How does a fish relate to a light-bulb? These types of questions, although ridiculous on first reading, reveal a quest for epistemological knowledge, that is to say an appetite for the knowledge of knowledge itself. Martinson boasts a career as a research technician, committed to the science of nature, he asks questions to explain connections between seemingly disparate incidents of vitalism. Reflecting upon his time in the 1980s, whilst assisting the eminent Dr Neville Grace in his studies of Ruminant Mineral Metabolism, Martinson explains, “people talk about animals and humans as somehow separate; as if we aren't animals. To me there is no distinction whatsoever and never has been, but my time back in the '80s made this idea indelible and all-consuming to express visually.”

Martinson's works are held in the collections of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Pōneke Wellington; Waikato Museum of Art and History, Kirikiriroa Hamilton; and Aratoi Wairarapa Museum of Art and History, Wairarapa.

BIOGRAPHY

BORN: 1956, Papaioea Palmerston North

LIVES: Whakaoriori Masterton

EDUCATION: NZ Certificate of Science in Biology, Palmerston North Polytechnic, Papaioea Palmerston North

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AWARDS: Wai Art Awards - Runner Up (2008); Montana Book Awards, Extinct Birds of New Zealand - Finalist (2007); Norsewear Art Awards - Finalist (2003); North Shore City Art Awards - Merit Award (1994)

COLLECTIONS: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Poneke Wellington; Waikato Museum of Art and History, Kirikiriroa Hamilton; Aratoi Wairarapa Museum of Art and History, Wairarapa

PUBLIC EXHIBITIONS: For the Love of Birds - The artistic depiction and classification of New Zealand birds, Dunedin Public Libraries (2023), Sleeper Dreamer Space Adventure, Aratoi, Wairarapa Museum of Art and History (2017); Figures in the Landscape, Waiheke Art Gallery, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland (2012); The Inimitable Mister Hopkins: The Barry Hopkins Art Collection, Waikato Museum of Art & History, Kirikiriroa Hamilton (2009); Mind Games: An exhibition of Surrealism in Aotearoa, Hastings City Art Gallery (2009); Wairarapa Review, Aratoi, Wairarapa Museum of Art and History, Whakaoriori Masterton (2007); New Work (accompanying exhibition to Extinct Birds of New Zealand book launch), Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Poneke Wellington (2006); Wairarapa Review, Aratoi Wairarapa Museum of Art and History, Whakaoriori Masterton (2005); Crosslinks, Pataka Museum of Arts and Cultures, Poneke Wellington (2002); REAL VISION, Robert McDougall, Christchurch Art Gallery (1993); Huia, Te Manawa, Papaioea Palmerston North (1993)

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY: 'Art seen' by James Dignan, Otago Daily Times, Feb 2012; 'Bird's-eye view' by Lorna Thornber, Her, Nov 2010, pp 116-119; 'More than a touch of strangeness' by Terry McNamara, The New Zealand Herald, Oct 2010; Atherfold, Kim, Venus in Free Fall: The Art of Paul Martinson 2004-2008, dissertation as part of Post-Graduate Diploma Art History, University of Auckland, 2009; Tennyson, Alan and Paul Martinson, Extinct Birds of New Zealand, Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2006; Martinson, Paul, New Zealand Birds, Auckland: Grantham House, 1991; Gill, Brian and Paul Martinson, New Zealand's Extinct Birds, Auckland: Random Century, 1991

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