
LLEWELYN SUMMERS

Llew Summers was born Christchurch in 1947. He held his first exhibition in 1971 and since then has held many one-man shows as well as exhibiting alongside other artists such as: Tony Fomison, Fatu Feu'u, Michael Smither, Tom Mutch, Peter Carson, Alan McLean, Roger Hickin, Bing Dawe, Graham Bennett and Fergus Collinson. He has also participated in numerous group shows.

A visibly challenging artist, his work has often caused controversy, but he is proud to have brought the nude to Christchurch. An intuitive sculptor who creates from the heart, he believes that art should be about beauty; enriching and seductive. He also believes it is the role of the artist to challenge: "if it's not challenging, then, in some way, it's not new".

His interest has been primarily in figurative works, and is celebratory of the human form, affirming the beauty of the human body. However, following a formative and revelatory overseas trip, funded by a Community Trust Arts Excellence Award, his work often has a more overtly religious content and has included a series of icons and shrines. As his use of religious symbolism has developed it has led to a recent and fertile preoccupation with winged forms; most often, but not exclusively, attached to bodies. These angels are an obvious melding of the human and the divine – bringing an explicitly spiritual element to his work and highlighting the important role of morality, and the spiritual dimension of human existence.

"What's important to me is to get a balance between the physical and the spiritual in life. We're given a soul and we're given a body. Sculpture is a nice balance because works can be made which are deep and meaningful, but they require your physical body to produce them. Works must have soul, rather than being merely clever or smart."

He was commissioned to create 14 Stations of the Cross to mark the centenary of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Christchurch. These were installed and blessed in February 2005 and subsequently a book was published: *The Way of the Cross: Sculptures Llew Summers, Poems Bernadette Hall*. (Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament Trust, Christchurch, 2005.)

Rejoicing in life and working hard remain paramount and were embodied in his participation in a Saatchi & Saatchi publicity campaign for *Of course you Canterbury*. Entitled "Don't just sit there, do something," this full page advertisement affirms his belief in hard work: "the important thing is doing something".

Llew works in a variety of media: wood, bronze, concrete, clay, marble, and cast glass. The works range in size from very large scale (more than 2 m in height), which despite their monumental size are often remarkable for their sense of movement and even flight, to small-scale pieces of 150 mm.

He regularly participates in outdoor sculpture shows such as those held at the Waitakaruru Arboretum and Sculpture Park, the Auckland Botanic Gardens, the NewDowse Gallery, Governors Bay and Sculpture in Central Otago (Wanaka) as his larger works are ideal for garden settings. His work *Butterfly* was purchased for permanent placement in the Auckland Botanic Gardens following its inclusion in their inaugural exhibition in 2007.

He has been the recipient of a number of awards including the Aotearoa Arts Festival Sculpture Award, BP Art Award and the BNZ art award. His work is held in private collections in New Zealand and also overseas in many countries including Australia, USA, Germany, Great Britain, Switzerland, Greece, Malawi, Sweden and Finland.

He is represented by the Parnell Gallery in Auckland, ZeaYou (Taupo), the Williams Gallery (Lower Hutt), the Diversion Gallery (Renwick), the Coolstore Gallery (Mapua), galleries in Christchurch (The Arthouse and Salamander Gallery), the Little River Gallery, Gallery Thirty Three (Wanaka) and The Artist's Room (Dunedin). Some works can be viewed on-line at the websites for these galleries as well as at: www.llewsommers.co.nz

COMMISSIONS AND PUBLIC ART

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| <i>Stations of the Cross</i> | Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament (Christchurch) |
| <i>Fly Me to the Moon</i> | Christchurch Polytechnic |
| <i>Joy of Eternal Spring</i> | Christchurch City Council |
| <i>Front Row Prop</i> | Kaitaia Borough Council |
| <i>Up and Over</i> | Lincoln University |
| <i>Lorna</i> | Christchurch College of Education |
| <i>Love Me Tender</i> | Ashburton Borough Council |
| <i>The Wrestlers</i> | Christchurch City Council |
| <i>Maternity</i> | Upper Hutt City Council |
| <i>Tranquility</i> | Timaru City Council |
| <i>The Hand that Nutures</i> | Queenstown-Lakes District Council (Wanaka) |
| <i>Moongazer</i> | Christchurch City Council |
| <i>Butterfly</i> | Auckland Botanic Gardens |

BRIEF BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Shiels, Rosa. Cross talk. *The Press* p D4 Mainlander section 26 February 2005.
- Dunn, Michael. **In** New Zealand sculpture: a history. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2002, p. 101-2.

- Farra, Nic. Monumental Summers: wizard works his magic. *The Citizen* p 22-23, 20 August 2001.
- Andrew, Kelly. Monumental dynamism. *The Press* p 3 Weekend section 8 January 2000.
- Griffin, Kate. The sculpture of Llew Summers: art or eyesore? BA (Hons) Research Paper. University of Canterbury, 1994. 89 pp.
- Ansley, Bruce. Shock of the nude. *NZ Listener* p 4-5, 18 June 1990.
- Cartwright, Garth. Llew Summers. *Art New Zealand* no. 42, p 68-69, 1987.

FILM AND RADIO

- My God: Llew Summers by Chris Nichol (TVNZ). Screened TV1, 24 August 2008. 30'.
- In Llew of the body by Marcus Hamilton (Radio NZ) 2005. 28'.
- Naked Christ offends: interview with David Rutledge (Radio National, Australia) 2005.
- Naked in the garden by Halina Oganowska-Coates (Radio NZ) 2003. 24'.
- Work of art. (TV programme). 1995. 7'.
- The sculpture of Llewelyn Summers. Video by David Cowie. Christchurch: Manana Films, 1989. 39'.
- Llew Summers by Liz Grant. Kaleidoscope (TV programme). Screened 3 July 1987. 20'.

SELECTED REVIEWS

- Overwhelmed by beauty of book about stations by Joy Cowley and Terry Coles. *NZ Catholic* p 20, 27 August 2006.
- Sombre Summers: shrines and icons by Christine Whybrew. *The Press* p 37, 3 May 2000.
- Sublime sculptures by Don Stephens. *Marlborough Express* 21 September 1999.
- Joyous, voluptuous pairs by Robyn Ussher. *The Press* 10 August 1994.
- A return to traditional values by Justin Paton. *The Press* November 1992.
- Llew Summers by Pat Unger. *The Press* p 21, 7 March 1991.

EXTRACTS FROM REVIEWS

We've admired Llew Summers's Stations on the walls of the Christchurch Cathedral, the solid South Pacific Jesus whose spiritual strength grows stronger as his body gets weaker, the women who balance grief with steadfastness, their large feet planted on earth as firmly as tree roots, Pilate's bulk channelled into a finger pointing to destruction. There is nothing passive about these figures. The emotions are shown in assertive simplicity and we've felt the force of each station...

Joy Cowley and Terry Coles: Review of The Way of the Cross, NZ Catholic 27 August 2006

There's a quality to any sculpture by Llew Summers that makes it immediately identifiable. In the age of austere minimalism, Summers' opulently curved and sumptuously textured figures and forms are a refreshing change; sculptures that beg to be caressed and loved. Here's an artist who dares to be different.

Christopher Moore, The Press 2004

The impact of this collection is immensely striking, but in contrast to the exuberance of his earlier work, the mood here is a sombre one. His visual language may have changed, but his work resonates from a consistent core – the celebration of life. Whether this is the marker of a new artistic direction or a momentary diversion, Summers has once more proved himself to be an accomplished and dynamic artist.

Christine Whybrew: Review of Shrines and Icons, The Press 2000

Sublime could well be used to describe the majority of these works by Christchurch-based, nationally acclaimed sculptor, Llew Summers. Perhaps the most extraordinary sculpture in this exhibition is *Circle Dance*. Carved from a single piece of oak, it depicts two female figures in joyous abandon ... albeit linked, the physical space between them gives the work its true sense of movement and naturalness. The crafting is meticulous.

Don Stephens, Marlborough Express 1999

His images are unmistakable. They have barely suppressed energy and a sense of largeness. They are mass in tension and material in sympathy with form. Summers' simple, stylised and stocky figures are enhanced by the silky finish of his marble and the visual appeal of his metal. Whether a dancer, a prancer, a diver or a footballer, these squat stone jesters suggest that all is movement and harmony.

Pat Unger, The Press 1987

Summers is a primitive artist, a term used to define those who are self-taught and who work independently of the mainstream of artistic development, expressing their highly idiosyncratic vision with a usually simple and direct technique.

John Coley, Christchurch Star 1980

Summers is a humanist, and people are the medium through which he expresses himself in his search for truth and the reality of human existence.

John Oakley, Christchurch Star 1975