



Strange Attractor 10,
Mixed media, 2016,
150 x 120cm

Cover Image:
Strange Attractor 13,
Mixed media, 2016,
150 x 120cm

JAMES ROBINSON
James Robinson was born in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 1972 and currently lives in Dunedin. He completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts, Otago School of Fine Arts in 2000. He was the Paramount Winner of the Wallace Art Awards in 2007, and has held prestigious residencies at the Sarjeant (Whanganui), the McCahon Trust (Auckland), the William Hodges (Southland), and others in New York, Berlin and Melbourne. James Robinson's work is held in numerous public, private and corporate collections throughout New Zealand and Australia.

STRANGE ATTRACTOR
EXHIBITION DATES:
24 September – 24 October 2016

SEYMOUR SQUARE, BLENHEIM
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MARLBOROUGHART.ORG.NZ

MILLENNIUM ART GALLERY
Marlborough's Public Art Gallery





Strange Attractor 6,
Mixed media, 2016,
150 x 120cm

Following page:
Strange Attractor 12,
Mixed media, 2016,
150 x 120cm

Strange Attractor 4,
Mixed media, 2016,
150 x 120cm

James Robinson's art flows on like a tide, picking up debris, expunging old marks, meandering, retreating, advancing again. Like the tide Robinson is a force of nature, and, like nature, is capable of sublimity and terror, of tranquillity and turbulence.

The works on paper in this exhibition offer an excellent introduction to Robinson's evolved styles for viewers who have not previously encountered his work.

Among them can be found echoes of his earlier huge ruptured canvases, stitched up, burnt, heaving, accreted with nails and debris. Torn paper fragments, tiny figures and dots, and lines of inked text appear, most carefully rendered, demanding to be taken seriously. These refer to much larger works in which these elements predominated. Blacks, sombre greys and burned areas are contrasted here and there with pretty pinks and blues, as seen in some former series of paintings. The artist's trademark black holes will also be found; alarming terminal elements in fields of complexity. All of this will resonate strongly with Robinson aficionados, but should communicate forcefully with everybody who takes the necessary time to engage with each and every one of these powerful pieces.

Robinson is an expressionist, but not in the traditional figurative sense, nor is he completely an abstract-expressionist. There is far too much abstraction for the former and too many personal, figurative and text elements for the latter. We are presented with combined gestural records and mind diaries.



Robinson's past paintings have often contained suggestions of landscape. In this new body of works these hints of landscape and the real world seem much stronger. Although superficially abstract, these are very structured paintings. The earlier sense of wild abandon, of struggling with the materials, of wrestling with compositional issues, has been replaced with a more methodical layering and building up of the picture plane. This more disciplined approach marks a new maturity in Robinson's work. Many added elements that in earlier work were gratuitous here can be read as buildings, boats, cliffs and streets. Depending upon one's fancy one could be looking obliquely across a valley, frontally at a hillside, or vertically from a low-flying aircraft. For example, in SA1 we see what could be a detail of a Rio favela, with close-packed shanties and an open doorway. In SA2 a majestic waka is propelled through the mist beneath stratified cliffs by vigorous warriors (perhaps).



In SA6 a railway traverses precariously across a steep hillside, with smoking factories behind, while at the foot of the spoil-clad hill mining shacks cluster together in the scarred, treeless land (or maybe not). Contemplation of SA4 reveals an apocalyptic scene as a Mad Max-type barge, armoured with battered metal plates, runs ashore in a dirty, wave-tossed cove, either carrying rapacious ferals or harbouring terrified innocents (could be). SA12 and SA13 lend themselves to both vertical and horizontal readings as run-down urban areas. Somehow these visions keep asserting themselves, making it very hard to see the paintings as pure abstractions.

The artist notes: "This series was reconstituted from fragmented remains of studio ecology, over the autumn and winter period of 2016 in my Port Chalmers studio, Dunedin. The collage, sewing and painting all occurs in old parts of my practice, so the sense of time is real, however rearranged. New

techniques were discovered – hot metal and coals from the fire outside, rain-weathered surfaces, angle-grinder and washes, sand, all lightly done with attention to detail in a mix of graphic and expressionistic modes, but with a personal vocabulary of making that intrigues me as I discover it. There's my usual fears, dystopias and human condition musings, however I'm pleased with this set as that background in content is overwhelmed by the process itself ... the regenerative force of creation ... the ancientness of papatuanuku ... not necessarily benign or convenient to our immediate needs." The artist's willingness to be carried along by a voyage of discovery through a sea of found material is given an extra drive by his philosophy. "The context is the terrain we are all in on the biosphere and the inner terrain of mass-colonising digital media and what we may even consider the individual self. We are at pivotal and never-before-seen edges of our civilisation and my work seeks to bear witness to the 'anama mundi', a Sufi term meaning 'the world soul'."

If all of this adds a mystical, spiritual side to Robinson's work; that is as it should be. His art has always seemed loaded with indecipherable meaning; no matter how chaotic, everything seems to be linked and interdependent.

Warwick Brown, August 2016