

From the collection



Judy Millar, *Simon-Peter*, 2009, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 800 x 2000mm
The University of Auckland Art Collection

Thousands of renowned (and aspiring) artists, curators, writers, collectors, and anyone else significantly interested in contemporary art recently converged from around the world for the opening of the 53rd Venice Biennale.

In addition to the main international exhibition, *Making Worlds*, which features 90 artists, there are 77 countries with their own pavilions and 44 collateral events from a range of organisations. Included in the collateral exhibition *Glasstress* is Elam School of Fine Arts graduate Hye Rim Lee, who appears alongside such international luminaries as Louise Bourgeois and Mona Hatoum.

This year Creative New Zealand has selected two artists to represent New Zealand: Francis Upritchard and Judy Millar. Millar's project *Giraffe-Bottle-Gun* will be installed in Santa Maria

Maddalena, the only circular church in Venice, which has existed on the site in various forms since at least 1222. *Giraffe-Bottle-Gun*, named from oddly-shaped long-necked canvases leaning against the walls surrounding the large looping installation at the heart of the installation, interrupts the spaces between the viewer, the architecture and the art.

Simon-Peter was created specifically to help raise funds for New Zealand's presence at Venice. It is named after St Peter, who initially refused to wash Jesus' feet at the last supper, a scene painted in 1547 by Venetian late Renaissance master Tintoretto. It echoes Millar's enthusiasm for Italy's heritage of palaces, cathedrals and frescoes, in which painting plays an active role in the environment. It is an interest that was sparked

during a year she spent in Turin in 1990 studying Italian artists of the 1960s and 1970s who combined baroque space with gestural painting.

Millar graduated from Elam with an MFA in 1983 but became disillusioned with the relationship between life and art so went on to run several Auckland cafes. She returned to the University in 1989 to study Italian feminist authors before receiving an Italian Government scholarship to study in Turin. On returning to her West Coast home in Anawhata, she developed her now-familiar approach to painting, and teaches at Elam.

Along with Tintoretto, her work has also been compared to that of movie director Quentin Tarantino. The accompanying text for a pivotal exhibition at the New Gallery in 2005 stated that: "If Tarantino makes action movies about action movies, Millar makes action painting about action painting." She works in a large, gestural manner that recalls the heroic expressionist paintings of the 1950s but in lurid colours. More importantly, instead of splashing and dribbling, Millar's paintings take a more reductive approach, wiping away layers to deconstruct the work, revealing new spaces beneath and placing tension on the processes employed.

Simon-Peter is the second work of Millar's to be acquired for the collection after *See-See*, which was produced in response to one of the University's Frances Hodgkins paintings for a 2002 staff exhibition at the Gus Fisher Gallery, the same year she won the Wallace Art Award.

Andrew Clifford