

From the collection



Max Gimblett (b.1935), *ORIGINS: Always, in these islands, meeting and parting shakes us, making tremulous the salt-rimmed air, 1992-1993/2008. Ceramic mural in approx 70 pieces made from Stoneware Clay, bisque fired then glazed. Produced in collaboration with Phillip Luxton. The University of Auckland Art Collection.*

New Zealand painter Max Gimblett, based in New York since 1972, spent his childhood living above a shop in Grafton and exploring the paths and gullies at the bottom of the Auckland Domain. The site of many of those boyhood haunts is now the home of The University of Auckland's Owen G Glenn Building where a magnificent mural by Gimblett was completed in January.

Gimblett is now one of New Zealand's senior abstract painters and was the subject of a major retrospective at the Auckland Art Gallery and City Gallery, Wellington in 2004. Pre-figured by

Abstract Expressionism, Gimblett's work is characterised by his Zen approach to mark-making, informed by his ongoing exploration of Asian culture. This brings a philosophical slant to his work, which was largely geometric to begin with but has become increasingly expressionist, establishing a tension between order and chaos, discipline and freedom. His approach can involve extensive preparations that culminate in a few seconds of intense, intuitive decision-making as the artist's body, brush, paint and surface are combined in performance. Right now his work features in the New York Guggenheim Museum's

Art

exhibition *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989*, which opened last month and includes such pivotal figures as John Cage, Yoko Ono, Laurie Anderson and Jack Kerouac.

Gimblett's mural for the Business School is unique, translating his gestural interrogations of the liquid medium of paint and precious metals into an exploration of the earthier, concrete forms of clay, although it is interesting to note that he was a ceramist in Toronto for three years before taking up painting in his late twenties. It was originally produced in 1992-1993 in collaboration with Phillip Luxton for a private collector, who later gifted it to the University. Working together, Luxton prepared large slabs of clay in a wet state for Gimblett to cut shapes from, working quickly with a knife. They were then bisque fired before glaze was brushed and poured on, and then fired again.

It was personally reconfigured (and re-titled) by Gimblett especially for the Owen G Glenn Building in 2008 during one of his visits to the University as inaugural honorary Visiting Professor at the National Institute of Creative Arts and Industries. The modular nature of the piece is inspired by the late cut-out works of Henri Matisse, and is made up of ceramic pieces that float on a blue wall, added in 2008 to reflect the sea, sky and glass vistas that the building captures. "As above so below," says Gimblett of his sea/sky-scape, invoking the well-known alchemical phrase that links levels of reality (physical, mental and spiritual) or the interconnectedness of microcosm (interior/self) and macrocosm (exterior/universe). This work also recalls the cut-out forms of Richard Killeen and the deep blue spaces surrealist painter Joan Miro associated with dreams. It is an array of primeval forms, each a manifestation of the artistic moment of creation that not only make reference to the evolution of life itself but also acknowledge the artist's own origins in Grafton.

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