

PAUL ZIKA

STEPHEN  
McLAUGHLAN  
GALLERY

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Melbourne Victoria

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# PAUL ZIKA

Tasmanian School of Art - University of Tasmania

## THE TOPOGRAPHY OF DECORATION

This brief paper traces a personal search for a new space in painting beyond the modernist figure/ground relationship, in which decoration attains its own assertive status beyond embellishment. This research draws heavily from the highly ornamental scenographies and elaborate decor of the Baroque and Rococo - styles shunned by the puritanical reductivism of High Modernism.

During the eighties I constructed paintings made up of geometric forms. Each form was three dimensional and painted a different colour. The work concentrated on a range of formal questions exploring relationships between actual and illusionary space. The strong colour relationships either exaggerated or negated the low relief form. Each surface was completely flat and smooth, sprayed with enamel paint. The gloss surface, reflection and multiple shadows heightened the ambiguity of form. This development culminated in the site specific structure - Place of Contemplation - in which the wall was replaced by the ground as the base plane and the dimensions increased; thus enabling the viewer to actually rather than mentally, enter.

A series of smaller constructed paintings followed which incorporated the formal element of the entrance. This expanded into the narrative of 'the enticing entrance to another place'. These 'Entrances to Xanadu' started to echo the various surfaces of architectural facades - gloss, metallic, pattern insized into impasto paint, high key colour patterns etc. This decorative vocabulary expanded while resident in Italy in 1989, drawing upon medieval facade and paving designs. The planar division and dynamic spacial sensations of the earlier structures was replaced by overlapping layers of pattern. Work was on paper and larger constructions in layered wood followed after my return to Australia. Initially they were based upon regular repeated geometric pattern with an expanded colour range, but the fragments of architecture being referenced in these journeys through the built environment changed from medieval to the Baroque. As a result, there was not only a change in decorative quality but the inclusion of both interior and exterior references produced new spatial explorations. No longer did the viewer move across the surface from plane to plane, but now in and out in a quite random way. This new work also brought with it a conceptual shift. I became far more intrigued with issues of artifice and embellishment.

A brief trip to Germany and Spain, focusing on Franconian and Andalucian Baroque in 1992, gave this research considerable momentum. Within Baroque architectural scenographies, painting, sculpture and decoration are all combined for total effect. Every aspect of décor is critical in creating this audacious style. Categories and heirarchies of media become blurred and the notion of decoration as mere embellishment is no longer valid. Everything is artifice (not only the ornament), calculated to create a complete visual experience. Even in the most extreme examples of the Baroque, however, these breath taking interiors are still subservient to the architectural program. To liberate this artifice from the constraints of architectural tectonics was an attractive challenge - to take a roller coaster ride through a Baroque interior! Initially these paintings - free form objects in layered relief - appeared to be architectural fragments that had fallen from some unidentified location; part of a larger architectural scheme. The forms and gold impasto suggested the Baroque, but there was no specific reference. So the emphasis was on surface and layering, decoration, and consequently superficiality and content.

In Prague (in late 1994) I further investigated the Baroque interior, but ultimately became intrigued by various ornate objet d'art. They represented both a microcosm of the complex architectural orchestration and also commanded their own stunning presence beyond their functional purpose. A set of fantastic monstrosities in the Loreto Museum became the catalyst for a new series of works. The main body of these gold, silver and jewelled objects became the new focus; decoration became form without any apparent structure (especially when the supporting stands were removed and the central circular housing removed). The very materiality of the object became undefineable echoing the notion of the venerated transubstantiated host changing its very substance. Supplementary to this re evaluation of late Baroque and Rococo decorative arts was an increased appreciation of the status of decoration within Rococo architecture. Architectural form is no longer dominant and the complex assymetrical decorative systems become assertively independent. I saw potential in applying this to current research located within contemporary debates about decoration and the fragmentary nature of postmodern visual form.

There are many similarities in Rococo and Art Nouveau decorative elements and their incorporation within both elaborate architectural systems and discreet examples of decorative arts. They are about abundance and overt complexity and have been shunned by the reductive geometric aesthetics of high modernism. It was the Art Nouveau (known in Spain as Modernismo) that drew me to Barcelona. I didn't expect, however, to find the wonderful Catalan Rococo mirror frames (something one would expect to find in Madrid or Seville, not to mention Vienna, Dresden or Versailles). The best of these 'Cornucopia' mirror frames have a surprising complexity and are often totally asymmetrical in form. Although the decorative elements derive from the usual symbols of abundance and opulence, they are so abstracted that they almost completely lose their direct figurative associations. Importantly for me the complex, irregular and fragmented frames became a perfect starting point for a further interrogation of pictorial space.

My painting has never been on a flat surface nor has it been contained within a square / rectangular format. From the 'Monstrance' works onwards there has been a heightened enquiry of the frame (and this has historical antecedents in the Baroque) whereas previously I had tended to just ignore (conceptually) the issue. The 'Cornucopia' frames with their rise and fall and interweaving of positive and negative form, were an ideal format.

Especially with a strong single shadow on the object providing an intermediary form between wall and painting. The complexity of shadow cast onto the wall within the perimeter of the painting creates an uncertainty of physical dimension and depth and heightens the overall theatricality of the whole. The infinite space of the mirror glass (used to reflect candle light as much as a personal image), is replaced by a layering of Art Nouveau inspired patterns sourced from tile and wrought iron designs. The highly stylized frame dissolves into a juxtaposition of screens layered through to the wall, setting up an ambiguous reading of space. There is nothing illusionistic about this space, nor is it merely an abstract positive / negative optically ambiguous one (although these sensations are employed particularly at the lowest in the sequence of layers). The intention is to orchestrate this profusion in the articulation of a bewildering and disorienting pictorial space. Rather than extending the tradition of Malevich's mystic white 'nothingness', the use of fragmentary decorative elements associates this quest with a digital 'spaceless' space - a hyperreal space without the virtuoso illusionistic devices of Baroque hyper-realism.

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STEPHEN MCLAUGHLAN GALLERY

**Cornucopia 2**

1999

Acrylic on wood

1390 x 980 x 95 mm



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**Cornucopia 3**

1999

Acrylic on wood

1410 x 815 x 95 mm



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**Cornucopia 4**

1999

Acrylic on wood

1400 x 720 x 95 mm





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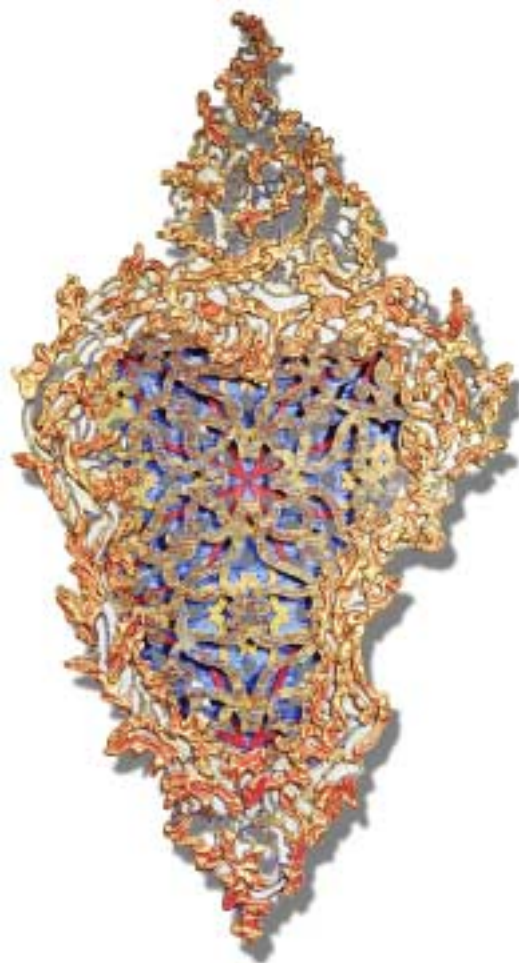
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**Cornucopia 5**

2000

Acrylic on wood.

1400 x 750 x 95 mm



Born 1949 Albury, NSW

#### Studies

- 1968-70 Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Melbourne. Associate Diploma (Fine Art - Painting)
- 1971 Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Melbourne. Fellowship Diploma (Fine Art - Painting)
- 1972 State College of Victoria (Hawthorn). Trained Technical Teacher's Certificate
- 1974 St Martin's School of Art, London. Certificate of Advanced Studies

#### Individual Exhibitions/Site Work

- 1973 Chapman Powell Street Gallery, Melbourne
- 1977 Powell Street Gallery, Melbourne
- 1982 University Fine Arts Gallery, Hobart
- 1983 Christine Abrahams Gallery, Melbourne
- 1984 Chameleon Gallery, Hobart
- 1984/86 'Place of Contemplation', Mt Nelson, Hobart
- 1987 Roz MacAllan Gallery, Brisbane  
Chameleon Galleries, Hobart
- 1989 Roz MacAllan Gallery, Brisbane
- 1990 Plimsoll Gallery, Centre for the Arts, Hobart
- 1992 Chameleon Galleries, Hobart
- 1996 Stephen McLaughlan Gallery, Melbourne
- 1998 Stephen McLaughlan Gallery, Melbourne

#### Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1970 'Eight Students from Victoria', Rudy Komon Gallery, Sydney
- 1971 'Students Printmakers', Print Council of Australia, Touring Exhibition
- 1973/86 Print Council of Australia Touring Exhibitions
- 1977 'George Crouch Jubilee Invitation Exhibition', Ballarat Fine Arts Gallery, Victoria
- 1980 'Australian Prints', Touring Exhibition - Sweden  
'Recent Tasmanian Sculpture and Three Dimensional Art', Fine Art Gallery, University of Tasmania, and Tasmanian School of Art Gallery, Hobart. Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston
- 1982 'Australian Screenprints 1982', National Tour
- 1984 'Australian Contemporary Printmakers', Touring Exhibition - Canada and USA  
'Four Contemporary Artists', Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart
- 1985 'Anzart', Auckland N.Z
- 1988 'Insites - Art in Public Spaces', Centre for the Arts Gallery, Hobart  
'The Gold Coast Invitation Prize', Centre Gallery, Surfers Paradise
- 1990 'Balance 1990', Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

**Exhibitions Curated**

- 1981 'Landscape - some interpretation of' (with a 6-page catalogue)
- 1983 'A Place of Contemplation - architectural attitudes to space' (with a 68-page catalogue)
- 1984 'On site' - co-curated with Jonathan Holmes (with a 36-page catalogue)
- 1987 'Screenprint; Poster; Ray Arnold' (with a 10 page catalogue)
- 1988 'Outgrowing Assimilation?' (with an 8 page catalogue)
- 1991 'The Total Look - locating furniture' (with a 24 page catalogue)
- 1992 'The Flower' (with a 24 page catalogue)
- 1993 'Install x 4' (with a 24 page catalogue)
- 1994 'Four Seasons - objects that contain' (with a 4 page catalogue)
- 1995 'Liquid Voices - Anne Morrison' (with a 16 page catalogue)
- 1996 'Tangibility? - three installations' (with a 32 page catalogue)
- 1997 're: search' - co curated with Mary Scott (with a 36 page catalogue)
- 'Interface 2' - Stephen Hurrell (with a 32 page catalogue)
- 1999 'Jamboree - Works by Mandy McIntosh' (with 10 page catalogue)

**Public Collections**

- Artbank
- Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
- Ballarat Fine Art Gallery
- State College of Victoria - Hawthorn
- Geelong Art Gallery
- Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery
- Museum of Contemporary Art, Brisbane
- University of Melbourne
- Parliament House Construction Authority, Canberra
- University of Tasmania
- Queensland Art Gallery
- Victorian Ministry for the Arts

**Employment Record**

- 1975/79 Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology/Faculty of Art - Sessional Lecturer (Painting)
- 1979/80 Tasmanian College of Advanced Education/Tasmanian School of Art - Lecturer (Painting and Drawing)
- 1981/ University of Tasmania/Tasmanian School of Art at Hobart - Senior Tutor/Lecturer/Senior Lecturer (Painting)

**Research Grants**

- 1980 Exhibition Grant - 'Landscape - some interpretations of' (Visual Arts Board - Australia Council)
- 1982 Special Projects Grant (Visual Arts Board - Australia Council)
- 1982 Preliminary Research on the exhibition 'A Place of Contemplation - architectural attitudes to space (Departmental Research Grant)
- Exhibition Grant - 'A Place of Contemplation - architectural attitudes to space (Visual Arts Board - Australia Council)
- 1983 'Place of Contemplation' - a site specific structure on Mt Nelson (Departmental Research Grant)
- Exhibition Grant - 'On Site' (Visual Arts Board - Australia Council)
- 1985 Changing perceptions of space, and the emergence of Abstraction, in early modernist painting - a study tour (University Research Grant)
- 1986 Publication of set of postcards of 'Place of Contemplation' (Departmental Research Grant)
- 1989 Overseas Development Project Grant (Visual Arts/Crafts Board - Australia Council)
- 1990 Exhibition Development Grant - 'The Total Look - locating furniture' (National Exhibitions Touring Scheme (Tasmania))
- 1991 Exhibition Development Grant - 'The Flower'. (National Exhibitions Touring Scheme (Tasmania))
- 1992 The use of decoration in Franconian Baroque Architecture and attendance at Documenta IX (Departmental Research Grant)
- 1994 Preliminary Research on the exhibition, 'Tracking Reductive Abstraction. 1965-95.' (Departmental Research Grant)
- 1996 Small ARC Grant 'D'cor, Ornament and Fantasy: the Rococo aspect of contemporary art' (with Edward Colless), University of Tasmania Supplementary Funding.
- 1997 Overseas Development Grant /Barcelona Studio Residency (Visual Arts/Craft Fund - Australia Council).
- 1999 Exhibition Development Grant - 'Death and Decoration'. (National Exhibitions Touring Scheme (Tasmania))

**Bibliography****(Studio Practice)**

- Ian Atherton: 'Paul Zika: Place of Contemplation', Praxis M, No.17, 1987
- Edward Colless: 'Hobart Report', Art & Australia, Vol. 27, No.1, 1989
- Edward Colless: 'Paul Zika' - Australian Perspecta (Exhibition Catalogue), Sydney, 1993
- Nevill Drury, 'New Art Six: Profiles in Contemporary Australian Art', Sydney, 1992
- Max Germaine: 'Artists and Galleries of Australia and New Zealand', Sydney, 1980
- Peter Hill: Group Show at Dick Bett Gallery: Asian Art News, Vol.4, No.5, 1994.
- Peter Hill: 'The Baroque roller-coaster', Art Monthly, No.74, 1994.
- Jonathan Holmes: 'Island Imagery, Other Imagery', Australian Art Review, 2, Melbourne, 1983
- Jonathan Holmes: 'Italian Works' (Exhibition Catalogue), Hobart, 1990
- Sean Kelly: 'Beyond the Surface', Exhibition Newsletter No.21. Dick Bett Gallery, Hobart, 1994.
- John Lewis: Paul Zika, 'Paintings and Prints', (Exhibition Catalogue), Hobart, 1982
- Clare Rice: 'The Surface, and Beyond', Contemporary Art Tasmania, No.5 Spring / Summer 1994.
- Paul Taylor: 'Recent Tasmanian Sculpture and Three Dimensional Art,' (Exhibition Catalogue), Hobart, 1980
- Lillian Wood (ed): 'Directory of Australian Printmakers', Melbourne, 1976, republished 1983
- Artist's statements (Exhibition Catalogues)
- 'Australian Screenprints', Print Council of Australia, Melbourne, 1982
- 'Place of Contemplation', Chameleon Gallery, Hobart 1984
- 'As I gaze upon the mountain', Chameleon Galleries, Hobart, 1987
- 'Insites - Art in Public spaces', Centre for the Arts Gallery, 1988
- 'Balance 90', Queensland Art Gallery, 1990

**(Exhibition Curatorship)**

Annette van den Bosch: 'On Site', Art-Network, No.14, 1985

Edward Colless: 'Outgrowing Assimilation?', Art and Text, No.30, 1988

David McDowell: 'Outgrowing Assimilation?', Art Monthly. No.15, 1988

Edward Colless: 'The Total Look: Decor and Ambience', Art and Text, No.41, 1991

Peter Hill: 'Two at the Plimsoll Gallery', Asian Art News, Vol.2, No.6, 1992

Peter Hill: 'A twist to the cliché', The Bulletin, 29 December 1992

Peter Hill: 'Floral Tributes', Artlink, Vol.13, No.1, 1993

Jenny Spinks: 'Contaminating Space', Art Monthly, No.61, 1993

Diana Klaosen: 'Installx4', C.A.S.T. News, No.2, Spring 1993

Diana Klaosen: 'Four Seasons', Contemporary Art Tasmania, No.3, Autumn 1994

Sean Kelly: 'Designs on Shopping', Artlink, Vol.14, No.2, 1994

Mary Knights: 'Touch don't touch', Artlink, Vol.16, No 4, 1996

Jennifer Spinks: 're: search', Art and Australia, March 1998

**Committee Membership** (outside University of Tasmania)

1983/84 Print Council of Australia

1984/85 N.A.V.A. National Advisory Board

1985/86 N.A.V.A. National Board Representative

1985/86 N.E.T.S. (Tasmania) Steering Committee/Interim Management Committee

1990-91 N.E.T.S. (Tasmania) Management Committee