

artist Biography

Albert McCarthy - written by Jarmin Smith

Albert McCarthy's natural talent and ability was encouraged and developed at an early age by a number of notable European and Maori exponents of the visual arts. While still at school, he was awarded a National Bank Art Scholarship that allowed him to work alongside renowned New Zealand artists Ralph Hotere, Kate Coolahan and the late John Drawbridge.

His early career experience broadened when he relocated to Palmerston North Teachers College. Whilst there, Albert continued to develop under the guidance of Cliff Whiting and the late Frank Davis, exploring new ideas and new media. He exhibited through both local and national, solo and group exhibitions alongside recognised artists Selwyn Muriu, Arnold Wilson, Fred Graham, Sandy Adsett, Cliff Whiting, Para Matchitt, Darcy Nicholas and the late John Bevan Ford, among others. This helped Albert develop a strong sense of self awareness and respect for his creativity.

Albert came of age as an artist during the 1970s amidst the renaissance of Maori art. Cliff Whiting and Para Matchitt were among those at the forefront of this movement. Through his associations with Cliff, Albert became immersed in art and craft projects on a number of Marae., the meeting houses that are at the heart of the Maori community. This traditional form of learning continued to form his natural abilities and talents.

Whilst grounded in cultural traditions and world-view, Albert is also very much a contemporary artist. A time spent at 11am School of Art in Christchurch in the late 1970s developed a familiarity with modern European arts emphasis on colour sensitivity. His enthusiasm and ability to blend these creative energies sourced from his diverse cultural background (English, Irish, German, Hawaiian American, Samoan, Maori), has always been a strength of Albert's work. Within these wide multicultural influences, his art defies strict definition within any single culture. Instead, its symbols and messages have an ambient concern and regard with the human interaction with the primal elements of nature (earth, wind, fire, water), and the perennial expression of the human spirit in a way that seeks universal application and appreciation.

Albert has displayed his work in many individual and selected group exhibitions throughout New Zealand and internationally. He has held individual shows in New Zealand's major cities - Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch - as well as regional centres. His solo exhibition at the Hogarth Gallery in Sydney featured an installation that drew on both Aboriginal and Polynesian cosmology. Among the group exhibitions Albert has contributed to was Te Waka Toi (1993), the first exhibition of Maori contemporary art to tour the United States. Group exhibitions including Albert's work have been held in Dubai, Tokyo and Gifu, Japan, the American cities of San Diego, Phoenix, Chicago, Seattle, Orlando and the island of Hawaii.

He has won prestigious awards and fellowships in New Zealand and been recognised by receiving major visual arts grants from Creative NZ and Te Waka Toi, (now Toi Aotearoa). Albert held the inaugural Jenny Gibbs fellowship for Artist in Residence at Elam School of Fine Arts in Auckland and was awarded the Trust Bank Canterbury Artist in Residence at the Christchurch Arts Centre. His work has been selected for the James Wallace Art Awards and the former Visa Gold Art Awards. Albert's work has appeared in a number of publications and his pieces are in public and private collections in New Zealand, Australia, Asia, North America and Europe.

In addition to his own creative output, Albert has curated and coordinated major international art events and exhibitions in public galleries. The commissioned stone sculptures, resulting from the 2000 Pacific Rim Sculpture event held in Palmerston North, are testament to his vision, coordination and management of this millennium event. He has also contributed to the development of other artists through workshops, tutoring and lecturing nationally and internationally (Burke University, Seattle; Claremont Post Graduate Art School, LA) and assessing students in Master-craft courses, Teachers Training Art courses, Design School foundation papers and School of Fine Arts Degree - Masters and Post Graduate assessments.

