

Painting with Shadows

Kapiti Coast artist Kate Elder has her first show in Palmerston – at Zimmerman Art Gallery for the month of March, writes Fran Dibble.

It does sound a bit like the opening to an Irish joke: So here are paintings with no colour, painted more likely with a spray can than a brush, that don't sit flat against the wall – paintings that aren't painted.

They form an exhibition titled *Borderline* by Kate Elder that runs at Zimmerman Art Gallery until March 31. The works are constructed of flat pieces of wood, cut and assembled together, or contoured shapes by sanding back laminated wood. All are painted white.

They should really be called sculptural wall reliefs, and indeed the artist describes herself as a sculptor, I am being facetious. But I think of them as paintings – instead of using shading and contrasting colour they use shadow, playing with light, worked as subtly as any paint. For composition planes are cut out and fitted into carefully placed slots. Some are rhythmically repeated to give a sort of rippled effect, in one part hiding the precise shape of a circle cut behind. In some works there is a precise gap or cut made through the surface, these gaps from a distance read as if they are drawn black lines. One work has an area of threads woven through the work, creating a spidery contrast to the slick paint.

The contour works use a modelled surface, the wood sanded back to create bumps and humps like topographical landscapes. Here the shadows are more diffuse, embracing a curve in the landscape or emphasising a dip, not as sharp as in the flat constructed pieces.

The works are minimal studies, non-representational, although inevitably we read into them something that is part of our "real world". Mostly they give the impression of landscape.

Borderline study #1 reminds me of water pools, the tide as it rolls in half covering rocks so their forms stick out from the water (although here they pull up each side of the pool), or branches of old willows covered up in still lakes.

Whichever it suggests submersion, tacitly done using a simple geometry of shapes.

Borderline #3, with that circle and those repeating uprights that move past the upper and lower edges of the artwork makes me think of looking through long rushes to a full moon on a late summer day when the moon seems to hang low in the day-lit sky.

Borderline #2 makes me think of the movement of the sun as it shifts during the course of the day, the flickering of bright glare to cast shadows. So in spite of the coolness of enactment Elder's works actually conjure a semi-romantic landscaper with its own poignant quality of human experience.

A quick synopsis of the artist after this summary of the exhibition: Elder studied sculpture in Dunedin, later concentrating on furniture making overseas in Madrid. She now lives on the Kapiti Coast.

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