

Suffering and nobility entwined

Portraits of royalty contrast with images of battle and death

IT'S NOT often that Auckland is graced with a show that is grand in a good old-fashioned way, but the Gus Fisher Gallery's *The Power of Portraiture* begins with more than a hint of imperial grandeur.

The exhibition is made up of portraits of leaders in New Zealand from 1840 to the present.

The foyer is dominated by an image of Queen Victoria created by that great 19th century master of the swagger portrait, **Frans Xaver Winterhalter**. This version is probably a copy done by a highly competent assistant.

It once graced the Treaty House but recently has been in storage. It transforms a little podgy lady into a stately figure by means of heavy robes, crowns, a sceptre, a great hanging curtain and a palace in the background. The show also includes much more amiable portraits of the present reigning monarch and her consort.

In the main gallery it is more than a little disconcerting to be in the presence of so many dignitaries.

As well as giving insight into the character of these leaders, there is also material for an intriguing study of the iconography of dignity and power.

Bishop Pompallier, in the rich robes of a Catholic prelate, has a benign smile, a scroll of office with a big papal seal, a crucifix and a medal. Sir George Grey, one of Thomas Carlyle's brilliant young men born to rule, as painted by **Charles Barraud**, has immaculate linen and the Order of Knight of the Bath on his plain Victorian coat.

Captain Cargill, the Otago worthy painted by **John Irvine**, has a medal, a newspaper and a very shrewd look. Many of the 19th century dignitaries are graced with a noble beard, notably **Louis John Steele's** portrait of Sir John Logan Campbell.

Gottfried Lindauer's portraits of Maori reveal a different set of symbols of leadership: moko, huia feathers, carved patu, pounamu and sharks' teeth.

A really touching portrait is **H. Linley Richardson's** portrait of Sir James Carroll standing by the cabbage tree planted to mark the place where the placenta was buried after his birth alongside the Wairoa River and the



TJ McNAMARA

The same artist has a lively painting of Mary Louise Roberts, clear of eye and confident of manner that indicates her place as a pioneer of physiotherapy.

There is an equally remarkable portrait by **Julia Lynch** of Sister Mary Joseph, founder of the Sisters of Compassion.

In more recent times, talents like **Archie Fisher**, **Garth Tapper**, **Bill Sutton** and **Richard McWhannell** give this splendid exhibition life and variety and on the end wall you can make your choice between a stylised icon of Edmund Hillary by the polished English portraitist **Sir Edward Halliday** or the rugged individuality depicted by the Australian **Lewis Miller**.

The exhibition is curated by Erin Griffey and the catalogue contains a thoughtful essay on leadership by Brad Jackson and a deeply insightful piece on Maori attitudes to portraiture by Paul Tapsell.

The portrait exhibition has much to say about people in our history. The Auckland War Memorial Museum is host to a solemn memorial to a raw wound in our past.

Much is made of the sacrifices at Gallipoli but less is heard of the unspeakable quagmire of the Battle of Passchendaele in 1917, where New Zealand lost more than 800 men.

In medieval times there must have been a Passion Play performed in that shallow valley and the name is appropriate to the sacrifice of the young men who died there in the 20th century.

Ceramic artist **Helen Pollock** has mixed New Zealand clay with clay bought from the battlefield to create a grove of hands reaching up in a way that suggests aspiration and death

THIS WEEK AT THE GALLERIES

What: The Power of Portraiture
Where and when: Gus Fisher Gallery, Shortland St, to Jan 24

TJ says: An intriguing exhibition of portraits of dignitaries in all the glory of their robes, beards and medals but with insights into character as well.

What: Falls the Shadow, by Helen Pollock

Where and when: Auckland War Memorial Museum, to Jan 11

TJ says: A powerful ceramic sculpture installation to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the Armistice and to remember those who died at Passchendaele in 1917.

What: The Fourteen Stations of the Cross, by Richard Lewer

Where and when: Oedipus Rex Gallery, Khartoum Place, to Dec 12

TJ says: A curious sequence of paintings caught between the traditional Stations of the Cross and the artist's own memories and determination to distance himself.

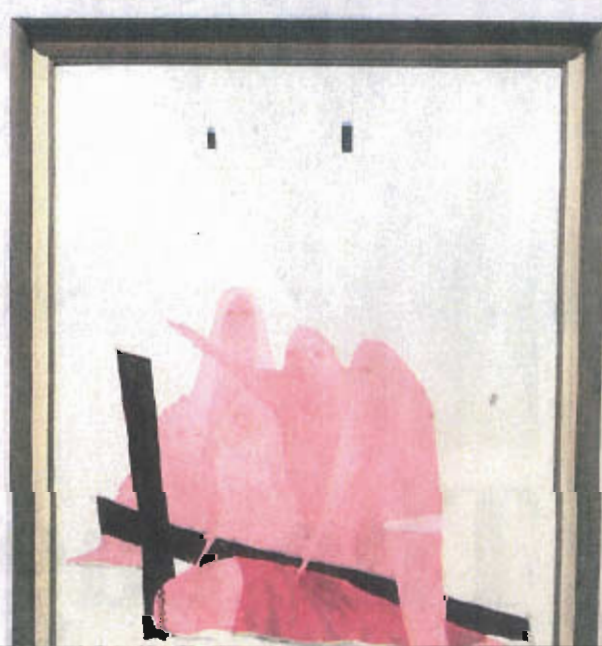
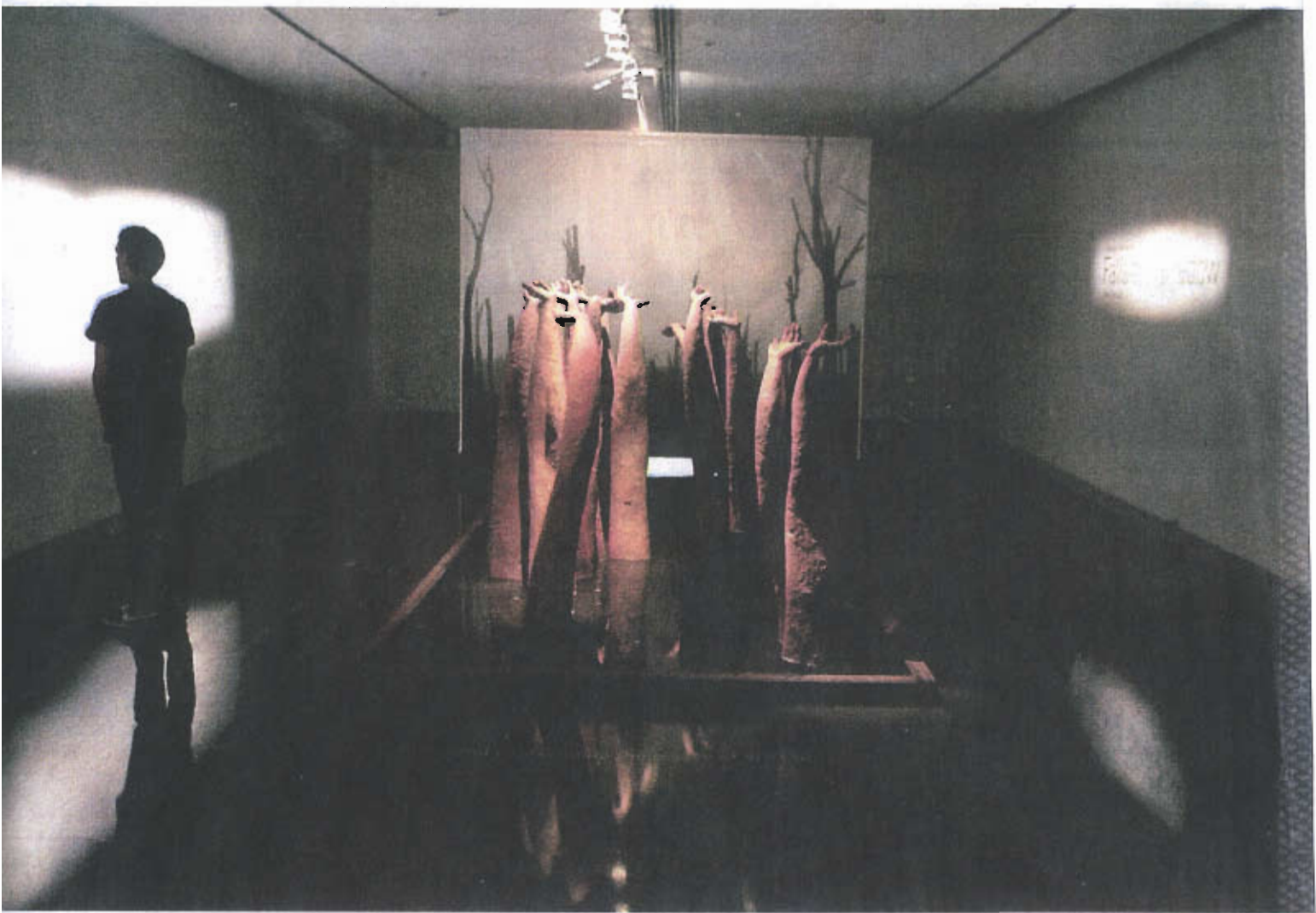
What: Liquorland, by Geoffrey Notman

Where and when: Milford Galleries, 26 Kitchener St, to Dec 13

TJ says: Detailed depiction of baches and boats and the sun of summer leaves the viewer to decide whether this is heaven or a peculiarly New Zealand hell.

the effect of taking away a little from other exhibitions. **Richard Lewer**, straight from his residency at McCahon House, has *Fourteen Stations of the Cross* at Oedipus Rex Gallery. The paintings do not so much concentrate on the incidents of Christ's death but rather the artist's highly personal memories of depictions of the stations in churches when he was growing up. This is allied to Lewer's strenuous avoidance of any appearance of sweetness or sentimentality. The presence of the cross is emphasised by dark brown paint rather than thickness or weight. The other participants in the drama — Mary, soldiers and disciples — are all

Suffering and



INTO THE DARKNESS: Helen Pollock's *Falls The Shadow* (above) is on show at the Auckland War Memorial Museum. Queen Victoria is one of the highlights of *The Power of Portraiture* (far left) at the Gus Fisher Gallery and *Fourteen Stations of the Cross* (left) by Richard Leaver, is at the Oedipus Rex Gallery.

PICTURE (TOP) / GLENN JEFFREY

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