

ALEX KOSMAS - SCULPTURE

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The 9 works in this exhibition celebrate a decade (2014 – 2024) of Alex Kosmas's sculptural explorations. They represent different but related directions in his art, and each powerfully asserts Kosmas's continuing journeys into the language and processes of sculpture. His is an art that reveals the primacy of *making*. For him the intricacies and convolutions of intimate engagement with his materials (here essentially ceramic and bronze) and the fashioning of these into resolved and significant sculptural expressions was, and remains his chief artistic *raison d'être*. This does not mean that his productions do not hold meaning. Rather it is the means that articulates and holds any meaning, that is prime for Kosmas. From his student days at the (then) Canberra School of Art in the 1980s his search for a personal creative language would be based on gaining a deep and considered understanding and ultimate control of his chosen materials and the forms in which those would be expressed. Kosmas has worked diligently at fine-tuning his understanding of medium and how that best conveys plastic intent, The achievement of the correct syntax of sculptural elements through his masterful manipulation and understanding of medium and the elision of the *right* formal components with these, is a given in his art and results in masterful sculptural statements.

In the *Terra* series, the earliest works in the exhibition, the artist demonstrates his ability to imbue each element in the tripartite compositions with its own aesthetic identity. Simultaneously these assert their role in the consolidation of the overall work. The vehemently triangular forms thrust upward into the spatial configuration that surrounds them with a dynamic push. The upward movement is played off against each base, the latter sitting solidly on the ground. The combination of contrasting movement imbues a marvellously controlled aesthetic energy that moves the viewer in and around the work. This movement invites close inspection and showcases the beautifully modulated surfaces, surfaces enlivened by the serried ranks of striated lines that populate them. These rich decorative treatments exemplify Kosmas's masterly exploitation of surface and its role in inserting a level of intimacy to the ostensibly monumental scale that each of the 3 pieces in this series exhibits.

Brindabella day and *Brindabella night* see the artist working respectively in porcelain and earthenware. Kosmas's student major was in ceramics. It was certainly from that discipline that he developed the love of the expressive power of *surface* that is such an important component of his personal visual vocabulary, and something that gives an exquisite aesthetic edge to all his sculptural work. These 2 works are in a sense natural successors to those discussed above. The *Brindabellas* of the title are the mountains that the artist viewed on a daily basis during his several residencies at Strathnairn Arts Association on the edges of Canberra's suburban sprawl. The dynamism of the *Terra works* is now

more subdued and the viewer is slowly moved through a largely horizontal journey that speaks of Kosmas's daily confrontations with the rhythmical presence of this beautiful topographical entity. I have written elsewhere of the sense of permanence that these mountains hold and how the artist's choice of porcelain, a material characterised by its hardness and longevity, reinforces the astuteness and acuity in his choice of materials. The sense of intimacy imbued here, again achieved in the intense configuration of striated lines that cover the surfaces of the multiple units that comprise these works, speaks of his attraction to the motif but also clearly avers his passion for material and making.

The natural world and the effects on it by man's interventions are invested with a powerfully beautiful presence in *Precious* and *Large Nexus*. In the former the artist's use of a significant amount of gold leaf gives special prominence to the title. The combination of gold trunk and branches with the silvery shimmer of the leaves, is both alluring and allusive. Connotations of *precious* gems, items of jewellery, and the like are insinuated in rather overt ways. The extension to the *preciousness* of the natural world as held in the image of the tree becomes equally present. Kosmas here uses his aesthetic means to give voice to environmental concerns. The latter though, as always in his art, are subdued in favour of a captivating visual *éclat*.

Large nexus continues the use of the tree as symbol and metaphor for nature. Here the tree is literally anchored to its base in a seeming battle for escape. The tree appears to be pulling away from the chain which binds it to the anchor that is embedded in to the base (*earth*). The message is again overt. The means to express it are carefully structured and exquisitely articulated. Kosmas uses his art as a tool for questioning the world but not so much as environmental propaganda but as assertion of the versatility of expression that characterises the artist's skill and mastery of method, material and process. *Large nexus* is marked by a wonderful aesthetic tension and characterised by Kosmas's continuing employment of the graceful disposition of the various elements that constitute this embracing work.

The built environment is present in 2 works – *Temple gate* and *Temple of tears*. The former is an imposing combination of 4 arched, pillared openings. The reality of the architecture is disarmingly impressive. The latter directly demonstrates its source in the temples of Ancient Greece – think the Parthenon for example. Both works are forceful exemplars of the importance of *making* for the artist. Their ultimate sources may lie in ancient Rome (the arch) and Classical Greece (the pedimented temple), but for Kosmas they are part of his wide aesthetic repertoire. Essentially the structures are comprised of geometric elements stacked and deployed in various ways to make readily recognisable constructions. While this might be the initial viewer apprehension, full comprehension comes with accepting the artist's invitation to completely engage with his arresting objects. Process is clearly

celebrated and overtly displayed. How the artist made these is as much their subject as is their acknowledgement of august predecessors.

Alex Kosmas is a consummate maker; an artist with a sophisticated understanding and control of material, form and surface, and the successful aesthetic resolution of the elision of these. He continues to produce commanding sculptural objects in a visual language that is his manifestly is own.

Peter Haynes - May, 2024