

EARTHBOUND: Long Memory

By Linda Bruce, Julia van Helden and Claire McCormick

Hawke's Bay Exhibition Centre

Hastings

19 November 2005 to 15 January 2006

REVIEW: The Exhibition Centre's latest display mixes intriguing works

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Reviewed by Terence McKenna

Photo:

TALENTED TRIO: From left, Julia van Helden, Linda Bruce and Claire McCormick, pictured with Linda's *Bound No III* carving at the Hawke's Bay Exhibition Centre, Hastings

This exhibition places together three different kinds of work; the patterned ceramic constructions of Linda Bruce, the calligraphic paintings of Julia van Helden and women's stories collated by Claire McCormick.

McCormick's catalogue essay makes some sense of the grouping of the artists, and particularly of her decision to not include any visual images or references to the women and their oral stories.

Her intention is to remove their voices from the dominance of images and the cultural baggage that accompanies them. This is effective to some degree as the flow of words, phrases and descriptions creates an aural pattern similar to the visual patterns in the other artist's work.

As my focus shifted from the stories to the objects and back again these stories became disjointed and easy to overlook.

Bruce's work has changed substantially over the past few years and I was genuinely impressed with these ceramic sculptures. Her gear assemblages are both striking and decorative. They are animated, appearing almost animalistic in some works and their surfaces are covered in abstract floral patterns.

A fusion of gears, elongated forms, iconic feminized forms and surface decoration, pieces within individual works balance against and articulate each other, successfully acting as metaphors for the feminine memory and communication that is the conceptual basis of the show.

Bound VII and *Bound IV* are particularly successful. Bruce also has another range of cream coloured works featuring bound bricks, female figurines and teapots that speak about domesticity being either a trap or commitment.

Van Helden's carefully layered and spontaneously executed paintings at first seem inconclusive, but after a while became quite absorbing. The patterning of marks works conceptually with the rest of the exhibition, and they share the same things which always makes a good painting: An individual voice, skill in execution and conceptual coherence. *Pulse IXX*, *Pulse XV* and *Pulse XI* with its contextualizing and differentiating flash of blue are the better works to my eye.

The work from these three artists has been combined successfully, both conceptually and visually. Colours and movements complement each other, there is a tendency towards pattern making, in the forms of Bruce's works as well as their surfaces, in van Helden's mark making and in the aural weaving of works, and the disposition towards the feminine escapes easy definition.

The effect of the show as a whole seems at first to be simple but becomes more complicated as time goes on.