

An eye for art

ries at Newcastle and Lake Macquarie have some wonderful artworks in permanent collections and visiting mmer, which are there to be enjoyed by all. Summer Herald asked experts from both galleries to provide a layman's ces of art on display during January:

ing has been included in national touring exhibitions of Dobell's art and has been reproduced many times. For good reason this is one of the most famous and endearing treasures in the gallery's collection.

3. HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON

Marilyn Monroe
Black and white photograph

Our gallery has billed Henri Cartier-Bresson as the greatest living photographer.

What makes him so great and different from all other photographers? His portrait of Marilyn Monroe, for example, presents us with a non-typical view of the famous film star. Here she is demure, unassuming and pensive.

In the Monroe portrait, as in many other photographs in the Tete a Tete exhibition at the gallery, Cartier-Bresson looks down on his subject, places her in the bottom third of the picture and sets her in a familiar context. Likewise, the great painter Henri Matisse is photographed in his studio with his adored white doves, writer Jean-Paul Sartre smokes a pipe on a Paris bridge and politician Harold Macmillan looks comfortable in a lounge room setting.

Monroe is on a set for the film *The Misfits*. Cartier-Bresson captures her in a unique moment. This is not a random picture and Cartier-Bresson has never been known for wasting film on his photographic assignments. He carefully selects his subjects, their settings and the moments to depict them.

The portrait of Monroe is enigmatic and compels us to look more closely and to become immersed in her world and the moment. He invites our curiosity, as do all great works of art.

Cartier-Bresson is famed for his pictures of momentous political events, from rioting in China to Ghandi's funeral pyre in India. He photographed the famous, as in the Tete a Tete exhibition, and ordinary people in everyday settings. All the pictures he has published have a magic and enticement which have become Cartier-Bresson's trademark.

London's National Portrait Gallery compiled this remarkable exhibition and Newcastle Region Art Gallery was selected as the only NSW venue. Some 10,000 visitors have viewed Tete a Tete in Newcastle. The exhibition is open until January 27.

Information supplied and written by Katrina Rumley, Newcastle Region Art Gallery curator.

LAKE MACQUARIE CITY GALLERY

1. JOHN TURIER

The Aolian Tree
Steel, fibreglass, terazzo, concrete, bronze, stones

THE most recent addition to the gallery's spectacular waterfront sculpture park is a work produced in 2001 by prominent sculptor John Turier. Entitled *The Aolian Tree*, the sculpture is situated among the trees outside the new gallery, triumphantly rising and moving, like the ebb and flow of the lake.

The piece seems to defy the logic of what is possible in construction. There is a sense of magic in the large and heavy 'sail' form balanced on a fine central point, from which it pivots gracefully in the wind (much like a giant weathervane).

As this moving shape playfully catches and holds the light, there is a counter-balance created by the base, which seems to dutifully anchor the work to the ground.

The materials qualify the elegance and movement of the work. A seamless fibreglass shell stretches over an aluminium frame to create the 'sail' form, which in turn is fitted over a steel sub-frame. The 'sail' is drawn into the base at a bronzed capped terazzo end piece. The textural shift continues down into the solid conical base which is studded with local stones.

This tree shaped pedestal offers the illusion of an anchor, preventing the 'sail' from being whisked away by the prevailing wind.

Visitors continue to be attracted by the immediacy and the playful qualities of *The Aolian Tree*, as they walk around the park to enjoy other sculptures, including Richard Tipping's *Hear the Art*, Ted Prior's *Love Boat*, and *Moon and Tide* by Susan Morris

2. PETER ATKINS

Mist
Oil and enamel on tarpaulin

The painting *Mist* (1996) is part of a contingent of works that has accompanied Peter Atkins from Melbourne for the duration of his month-long residency at Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery.

Bold yet lyrical, abstract and yet somehow familiar, it draws on a genuinely idiosyncratic view of the world. Like its other large-scale companions in the group, *Mist* reflects Atkins's attraction to life's 'small things': objects and designs, which have an unpretentious and non-reverential quality. A twist of wrought iron on a gate, a bread clip, the motif on a china cup or a flash of fabric passing by in the street, can be equally captivating for Atkins.

He focuses on these ordinary details, finding the extraordinary in them by 're-casting' their overlooked beauty. In *Mist*, he restates a shape which may easily have appeared on a 1960s carpet. But any connection to a source is only in the viewer's lingering feeling of recognition. Otherwise, the design has been made over to become Atkins' own. Any impression of simplicity is also less than skin-deep. Atkins chooses tarpaulins and drop-sheets as grounds for his elegant pared-down imagery. These rough grounds, which are exposed in the layering of the paint (household enamels), wear all the marks of their former life.

This formal tension introduces a complexity to the paintings that Atkins - collector, traveller, and visual diarist - deliberately forges. There's a story behind every story. Atkins is regarded as one of the nation's finer contemporary artists and it is a great privilege for members of the public to be able to both watch him work and discuss his practice.

He has received numerous prestigious awards and his work is included in major State and regional collections such as Art Gallery of NSW and National Gallery of Australia. Born in Murrumbidgee and schooled in Newcastle, Atkins has family ties to this region and regards it as his formative home. Peter Atkins, *Mist* and other work will be at Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery until January 19.

3. ROBYN STACEY

Surrender (Pink), 2001
Photograph

ROBYN Stacey's *Surrender (pink)* is one of the key works in a Hazelhurst Regional Gallery touring exhibition, *At First Site*, which will be hosted by Lake Macquarie from January 17 to March 3.

Stacey is an accomplished and well-respected contemporary artist who has been 'in residence' at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney since 2000. Her specific area of research is the Herbarium, which contains 1 million botanical specimens; dried, pressed and permanently stored.

Through *At First Site*, Stacey has allowed this precious, fragile and mostly unseen collection to be viewed by the public.

Specimens have been photographed and re-presented to reflect the scientific research and the methodical collecting behind this very important and widely respected resource.

Further to this, in the *Surrender* series (to which *Surrender (pink)* belongs), Stacey has used the specimens to explore the ways in which society has represented and interpreted plants in historical and contemporary contexts.

Inspiration for the series was also drawn from the depiction of familiar and unusual plants in romantic landscapes in a 1979 publication, *Temple of Flora*, commissioned by Robert John Thornton.

In *Surrender (pink)*, a giant *Stargazer Lily* floats across a brooding landscape. The lily dominates the landscape, demanding the viewer's full attention.

The physical scale of the image is exaggerated and therefore daunting. The effect is surreal, even sinister, however, the viewer is still irresistibly drawn to the romance of it.

Robyn Stacey will be at the Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery on January 27 to celebrate the opening of *At First Site* as well as *Naturally Preserved* (work by students of the University of Newcastle Wildlife Illustration course).

These exhibitions will be launched with a series of informal talks by Stacey, Christine Sanders (coordinator and senior lecturer) and Barbara Lane (CEO, Hunter Region Botanic Gardens).

Information supplied and written by staff from the Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery.

