



Mind Full

MAX GIMBLETT IS ARGUABLY NEW ZEALAND'S GREATEST LIVING ARTIST. HE IS BACK FROM HIS NEW YORK HOME TO RECEIVE HIS AWARD: OFFICER OF THE ORDER OF MERIT AWARD FROM THE GOVERNOR GENERAL. AN ACADEMIC, BUDDHIST MONK, ARTIST, TRUE KIWI BOY AND NEW YORK LOCAL, HE IS PRETTY SPECIAL.

WORDS JENNY RUDD / PHOTOS LOGAN DAVEY



For an 80 year old who has done and seen so much in his life, Max Gimblett was extraordinarily touched by his experience in being awarded Officer of the Order of Merit.

"I thought it would be a bit of a production line, we'd all shuffle in, shake hands and that would be it. In fact, it was heavenly. The Governor General, the Lt Gen The Rt Hon Sir Jerry Mateparae was a beautiful man. I watched a man knighted whose knee was cushioned on a stool. He leant forward and the Governor General's sword touched lightly on his shoulders. When it was my turn, the Governor General leaned towards me and whispered kind and knowledgeable words to me. I thought he would say a few cursory points about my painting, but instead, he talked generously and beautifully for three minutes or so about the work I had done to help others. I cried, shook his hand and sat down.

"We then watched people receive awards who had pulled people from the ocean, helped others at great risk to themselves and achieved things which had helped New Zealand. It was both lovely and moving."

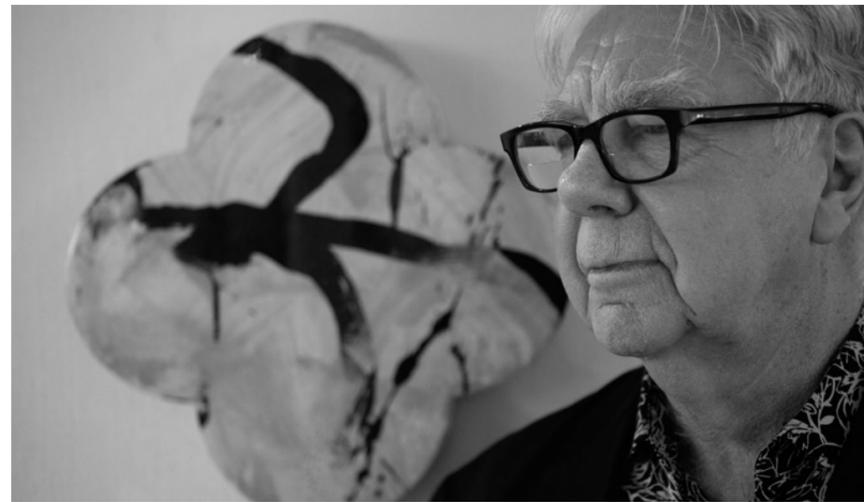
KIWI BOY AT HEART

Listening to Max speak is rather special. His vernacular, tone and accent switch from the poise and elegance of a New York artist, to the rounded informality of a kiwi boy and to the soft, intuitive language of someone keenly in touch with their own spirituality. Everything is punctuated by hearty chuckles.

"As a teenager, I remember driving down to Mount Maunganui from Auckland with four boys in a Morris Minor. We went to see Bill Haley and His Comets in a hall. We all shared a cabin together and were keenly aware that in those days, a boy couldn't take a girl out without a car. In fact it was all very innocent, we were far more interested in surfing."

Although deeply connected to his New Zealand roots, Max became a US citizen in 1979, seven years after he moved to New York. "I believe you should live in a country you can vote in. However I also believe we are strongest in the country of our birth. There are some street corners in Auckland on which I feel invincible."

"The purple one stayed purple for quite a few days. Then the black went in. After that we put a projector on the roof and shone it on the piece."



ABOVE: Captions of artwork. labels of different artworks



JUNGIAN PRINCIPLE

Max left Auckland Grammar at 15 and was brought up his mother and aunt. "I respond better to women. I have had to learn to enjoy male company. Jung taught that the anima, which is the unconscious, feminine sensibilities of a man, should be studied, read about and learnt." Max explains that all creativity stems from the anima, which has steered his life as an artist.

A Buddhist monk, Max meditates every morning at dawn. He sits in front of a blank wall. "After a while, faces appear in front of you. They may look like God but they are all projections of masks. We all wear masks. In removing all masks, we recognise the fact that we are a being. Not a human. Just a being. Death is just like taking off a coat. I have no fear of it."

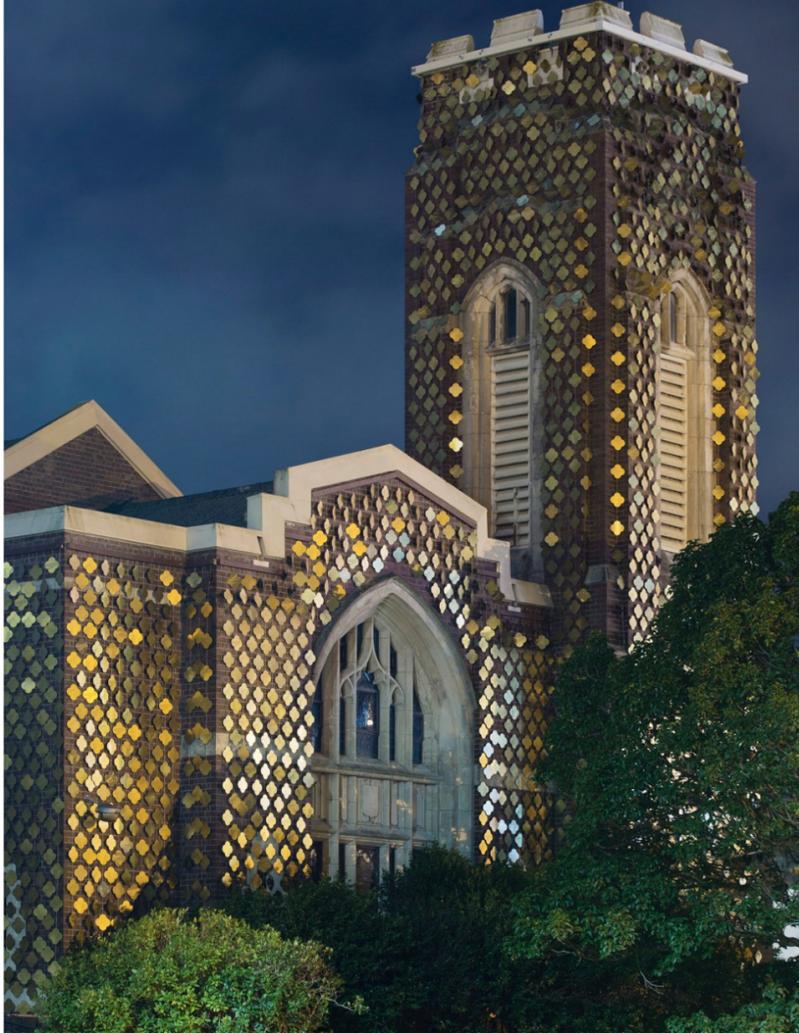
Listening to Max is an activity which requires concentration. He is a deep thinker whose breadth of academic and philosophical understanding mean he comes out with profound and affecting comments which settle inside and incite personal reflection.

QUATREFOIL

"I struggled along for about twenty years or so, during which time I sold a few paintings but it took a long time for my art to become sold well. I began painting the quatrefoil in 1983 after I had a dream in which a quatrefoil appeared and spoke to me, 'Paint me and I will heal you'."

All the Max Gimblett paintings hanging in Aesthete Gallery, Hamilton today, are painted on quatrefoils. The exterior walls of St David's Church in Auckland has been covered in thousands of small, bronze quatrefoils, each meticulously printed with Max's sumi-ink prints. This installation, the Art of Remembrance commemorated ANZAC day and raised funds for St David's, The Soldier's Church where Max has close links, having grown up near the Khyber Pass church. "St. David's was my childhood church and Reverend Owen Baragwanath was my Minister. I had a very close personal relationship with him. His grandson Paul managed the St. David's quatrefoil installation."





ABOVE: Captions of artwork. labels of different artworks

*“You are gentle and non-abrasive.
We have met in another life.”*

GETTING PAST THE MIND

Speaking about the process, Max explained that each piece functioned at a highly technical level. “I go into a mystical state of not knowing and doubt, wandering around doing lots of things to lots of different works.

“You have to try not to project things from your mind like ‘Shall I have a meat pie?’ I have to try and get past that. I often work on a number of pieces at the same time. The purple one stayed purple for quite a few days. Then the black went in. After that we put a projector on the roof and shone it on the piece. From that, my assistants cut out shapes and we gilded them. During that process we were working on and discussing other pieces in the studio.”

“When I’m painting, I execute All Mind, No Mind, the title of one of my exhibitions. The energy must flow through the arm to the brush and it takes some practice to remove all thoughts from every corner possible: meat pies, Bill Haley and His Comets, everything. It’s a great relief to be out of the mind.”

It’s that mind which makes him such a beautiful man. During the interview, our photographer Logan sat on the floor and the three of us chatted easily. We laughed about how the subjects Max had

brought up echoed those Logan and I had shared on our way to the interview.

“Your persona is knowledgeable and attentive, Logan,” said Max. “You are gentle and non-abrasive. We have met in another life.”

Generous, spectacularly clever, confident and erudite, everything Max said lingered with us well after we left him, drinking ginger beer and chatting amiably to the gallery patrons.

Max Gimblett exhibits in Aesthete Gallery, Hamilton
Max will be in Tauranga July 2016
maxgimblett.com
aesthete.co.nz

