

## White, Kahukiwa, & Hotz in Lively Solos at Montserrat Gallery

Three woman artists with strikingly different approaches were featured in separate, yet simultaneous, solo shows at Montserrat Gallery, 584 Broadway, through September 30.

### Susan Dorothea White

Susan Dorothea White, an internationally exhibited painter and sculptor from Australia whose work is in the National Gallery, among other prestigious public and private collections, explores the most intimate experiences of her life, as well as more topical subjects, in meticulously limned acrylic paintings on wood panels. Her ability to examine unflinchingly such personal milestones as her surgery for a benign brain tumor with a dazed self-portrait in a vertiginously askew hospital setting results in some of the most emotionally jarring narrative imagery in recent art. However, her work can also be informed by an appealing light-heartedness, as seen in her whimsical picture of her professorial husband suspended in mid-air with a book seeming to take flight, like a startled bird, from his hands.

She is also a strong social satirist, particularly in paintings such as "The Crowning with Sexism,"

which combines iconographic images of Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio with a composition borrowed from Hieronymus Bosch, as well as in other Boschian extravaganzas such as "The Seven Deadly Sins of Modern Times" and "The Seven Deadly Isms." The latter work is mounted on a circular table and comprised of several interconnecting compositions depicting such contemporary obsessions as "Materialism" and "Workaholism" in intricate figurative tableaux.

Susan Dorothea White's use of unusual materials such as endangered and recycled woods native to Australia contributes significantly to the effectiveness of her work, with the grain showing through her translucent glazes in her paintings and the surface skillfully carved in mixed media sculptures such as "It Cuts Both Ways." In the latter sculpture, black and white clasping hands morph into lethal-looking shears, while in White's bronze maquettes for monumental fountains, natural phenomena are imaginatively transformed through the artist's fluid handling of shapes in space.

### Robyn Kahukiwa

The paintings of Robyn Kahukiwa

are majestic memorials to the Maori people, Polynesians who have inhabited her native New Zealand for at least 600 years. Noted for artistic skills such as woodcarving and singing, the Maoris experienced a loss of cultural identity following their uprising against and subsequent defeat by British colonialists in 1860. Since, the majority of Maoris have been thoroughly integrated into Western-oriented New Zealand society and have adopted Christianity.

Born to a New Zealander father and a part Maori mother, Kahukiwa simultaneously celebrates and mourns a lost culture in her huge, powerful portrait faces set against rows of numbers relating to the population decline of the Maoris and other significant statistics.

Robyn Kahukiwa has also designed book covers (most notably for "Once Were Warriors," which was adopted as a critically acclaimed film) and created posters for Amnesty International and other worthy causes, but her exhibition at Montserrat gallery was by far one of her most dynamic statements on the systematic cultural genocide committed on the

Maori people. Her heroic heads, boldly delineated in areas of starkly contrasting light and shadow, have a haunting presence that stayed with this viewer long after he departed the gallery.

### Valentina Hotz

A unique ability to strike an aesthetically pleasing balance between formalism and fantasy is the special gift of Valentina Hotz, who has had several successful exhibitions at Montserrat Gallery and reportedly has a waiting list of collectors eager to acquire her paintings.

In Hotz's surreal, self-invented realm, moonstruck maidens move gracefully in pristine settings, amid shapely vases, elegant draperies, mysterious baubles, and planetary orbs. Their faces and forms are classically beautiful and they seem to share a distant kinship with the similarly lovely sleepwalkers of the late surrealist Paul Delvaux as they drift somnambulant through smoothly painted dreamscapes. Valentina Hotz, however, has her own slant on surrealism, as well as her own inimitable manner of making each painting at once an elaborately wrought fantasy and a skillfully realized formal statement.

—Andrew Margolis