Elemental forces: Mysterious Hamilton landscape artist features in gallery showcase

Mike Mather|Waikato Times
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The Hamilton artist known as Gaen, whose work will soon adorn the walls of the Welcome Swallow gallery in Hamilton East. Photo: Supplied

New Zealand’s unique geography and landscapes are the foundation for two new exhibitions at Hamilton’s Welcome Swallow gallery.

Starting on Sunday, November 1, works by the mysterious Waikato painter known as Gaen will be showcased in Land of Captured Time.

Gallery curator Clive Gilson said Gaen was making a name for himself through his distinctive use of geometry, “with precise lines together with the natural colours of nature”.

“I'm not supposed to tell you or anyone his real name. It’s the artist’s desire to be mysterious ... it’s his ‘art name’.”

It was clear Gaen had found much of the inspiration for his expressive abstract works from the post World War II “colour field movement”, Gilson said.

He likened the works to those of famed artists Piet Mondrian, Paul Cezzane and Paul Klee.

This compelling work by Gaen is titled Cass Railway Station, 1984.
Photo: Supplied

“Gaen uses firm geometric lines that present a architectonic method to build the elemental structures of New Zealand landscapes and rural scenes.

“His colour field and geometry make the subject matter known and accessible. The result is aesthetic and emotional strength.”

In his own artist’s statement on the gallery’s programme, Gaen said he saw himself as as “a visionary artist whose work is an evocative celebration of nature’s splendour.

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“From the snow-capped peaks of the Southern Alps to the lush valleys of the Waikato, my purpose is to capture and express the essence of New Zealand’s diverse terrains.”

Land of Captured Time will be shown at the gallery until December 1, and it overlaps a second, multi-artist exhibition in the same venue titled Kiwi Life Past and Present.

Starting on November 6 and running to January 8, that show features 40 landscapes - and a few portraits - by several acclaimed New Zealanders.

They include a 1910 chromolithograph (colour copy) of A Good Joke, a famous work by another mono-monikered artist - Goldie (aka Charles Frederick Goldie) - that he painted five years earlier.

Other creators featured include Jan Nigro, Sean Garwood, JP Blackhouse, Ella Juliet Spicer, Colin Wheeler and Ron Stenberg.

“By depicting what they see around them, their artworks give us a glimpse of life as it was during their lifetimes,” Gilson said.

“This is something that continues today and it gives us more than just a photograph. The artists present their own interpretation of life in the environment they live in.”

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