

Art meets altitude at peaky exhibition in Hamilton



Mike Mather | WAIKATO TIMES

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Michael Barker's oil on canvas work titled Whakapapa, Five Peaks is among the featured paintings in the Peaks exhibition at the Welcome Swallow gallery in Hamilton East.

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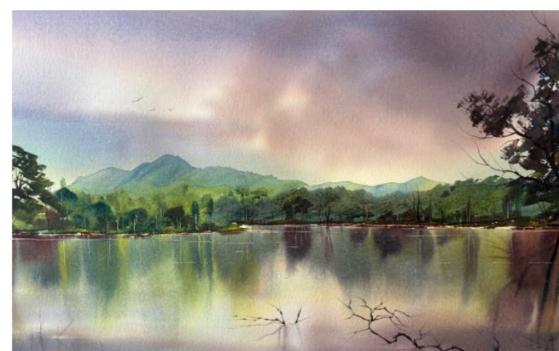
The powerful presence of mountains and hills – and those who climb them – is the theme of a new exhibition at Hamilton's Welcome Swallow gallery.

Peaks is the 40th exhibition to be held at the gallery, and is in keeping with a mountaineering theme already well established – or some might say, traversed – at the Grey St institution.

In October 2020 it hosted the unveiling of a portrait of Lady June Hillary – the widow of Sir Edmund Hillary, the first mountaineer to conquer Mt Everest – painted by Waikato artist Rebecca Downman-Ngapo.

The watercolor artwork was later acquired for the Auckland Museum's Hillary Collection.

The Peaks exhibition, which has just opened and runs until March 21, features 20 paintings by eight artists, who have depicted a variety of ranges, pinnacles and summits – some of which are in the Waikato region.



Hamilton artist Martin Necas painted this watercolour work titled Taupiri Range, which features in the Peaks exhibition at the Welcome Swallow Gallery.

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Exhibition curator Clive Gilson said the exhibition also paid homage to the many artists "who have sought to capture nature's behemoths" – such as Thomas Moran, Paul Cezanne and JMW Turner.

There was also a personal aspect to it, he said.

"I got to know Ed Hillary in his later years. He wrote the introduction to my book, Peak Performance, and during my time with [advertising firm] Saatchi & Saatchi Ed did a number of Toyota ads for us that we shot in the Himalayas."

Gilson also chaired the New Zealand Hillary Centenary Committee in 2019 and '20 and, along with then-prime minister Jacinda Ardern, held a reception at the Beehive to mark the commissioning of a symphonic work dedicated to Sir Edmund.

Roar of a Thousand Tigers, composed by Gareth Farr, that had its world premiere by the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra in Christchurch.



Lady June Hillary, who died in 2024, chats with portrait artist Rebecca Dowman-Ngapo during the unveiling event at the Welcome Swallow gallery in October 2020.

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"The portrait of June Lady Hillary by Rebecca Dowman-Ngapo that was hosted by the gallery in 2020, before being transferred to the Auckland Museum under World Heritage protection, was the final act of the work of the Centenary Steering Committee," Gilson said.

In his curator's commentary included in the programme for the exhibition, Gilson said there were several criteria for art depicting mountains.

"Turner saw such structures as 'sublime', encompassing beauty with overwhelming awe and, indeed, terror."

"For Chinese artists, landscapes stand as the pinnacle of artistic representation, where mountains explore philosophical and spiritual aspects of nature, embracing a sense of harmony and tranquility."

The artists whose work features in the Peaks exhibition are: Michael Barker, Sue Currie, Gaen, Aston Greathead, Yong Ming Lu, Bernadette Parsons, Martin Necas, and Juliet Roper.