



ALL FIRED UP

**John Blackburn
Margaret Lovell**

JOHN BLACKBURN

Still going strong at 86, it is both apposite and convenient to suggest that John Blackburn's extraordinary career as a painter is now bookended by fire works. For surely, at his age, Blackburn cannot be expected to top this latest body of work, the *Fire Paintings*; thirty paintings made in 2017-18 and first exhibited at Osborne Samuel in London in September last year.

Five of these feature in this exhibition in Auckland, where it all began, in 1960, at 290 Wairau Road, Glenfield. Here in his backyard, with an Auckland City Art Gallery group exhibition² behind him, Blackburn, then 28, ambitiously embarked on a creative journey which would take him back to England and artistic success.

The Auckland paintings, called the *Encaustics* (1960-61) since Blackburn used fire in their creation, were made of hardboard covered with hessian and old sheets, on which Blackburn painted and collaged disparate objects. But then, to the amazement and delight of his children, he set the paintings alight with kerosene, dancing around them and splashing on more until he got the effect he wanted. The *Encaustics* were totally innovative and unlike any paintings produced anywhere at the time. Their purchase by Les Harvey and his encouragement to pursue his talent as an artist motivated Blackburn's return to England.

The *Encaustics* were fuelled by Blackburn's extraordinarily vital, expressive urge, which continues today, as evidenced by these new *Fire Paintings*, painted at his home and studio in Kent. It never crossed Blackburn's mind to employ fire again until over half a century later when, inspired by a painting by Karl Weschke, in 2017 he plunged into this new series, using both flames and smoke to achieve their final effect.

The visual element common to all the *Fire Paintings* is the vertical oblong "stripe", Blackburn's adaptation of Weschke's column of black smoke rising from the flames of fire in an otherwise empty Cornish landscape.

These latest works by Blackburn constitute a Promethean *tour-de-force*, conjuring dark magical beauty through the evanescence of smoke and flame. They are as much wrestled into being as painted, requiring the physicality of this nuggety but diminutive octogenarian artist and drawing on every ounce of his six decades of creativity, skill and experience.

Christopher Johnstone



John Blackburn, the first ever monograph on the work of British artist, John Blackburn (b.1932). The book covers Blackburn's extraordinary early life in New Zealand, his return home in 1961 and his subsequent career and close association with Jim Ede of Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, & Christopher Penn.

This new full colour, 180 page monograph, published by Samson & Co will be available from the gallery. \$100 + P&P

John Blackburn

Fire Painting XXVIII

Mixed media on board, burnt

35.6 x 41.3 cm





John Blackburn

Fire Painting XXIII

Mixed media on board, burnt

28.6 x 21.5 cm



Illustrated Cover:

John Blackburn

Fire Painting XIII

Mixed media on board, burnt

76.2 x 50.8 cm



MARGARET LOVELL

Margaret Lovell takes deceptively simple forms of nature, translating them into abstract works in bronze.

“Beauty I see around me is my inspiration, whether a leaf, the sinuous glide of a fish, or the undulating movement of grass; all elements become an idea which develops into sculptural form. Elements of the sea, the wind, or between shadow and light, all create a rich, fascinating world to explore.”

Since moving from England to New Zealand, she has immersed herself in the essence of the undulating landscape and ever-changing atmosphere caused by the weather. “The silence, the stillness, the space, has brought me closer to nature”.

Even now in her 80th year, she recalls how the violence of sudden storms, quickly followed by blazing sunshine feels like an initial emotional ‘discovery’ - as if casting a sculpture in bronze. “The silent peace of carefully working in plaster - followed by the metamorphosis of fire and the furnace, and the ‘trauma’ of molten bronze being poured! Then.....the final resultant stage.....so different to work on, but entirely dependant on the contrast of what has gone on before. All very exciting and always a new experience.....and.....so much still waiting to be discovered!”



Sumptuously illustrated, *Margaret Lovell: Sculptor*, discusses the life and work of the award-winning British sculptor Margaret Lovell who works largely in bronze. Her abstract works explore the organic links to natural and botanical forms as well as the human figure. Lovell’s work varies in size from a few inches to eighteen feet in height, all notably elegant in form and texture.

This illustrated catalogue of 220 works, published by Samson & Co will be available from the gallery. \$90 + P&P



Margaret Lovell
Artelier I
Bronze on granite
122 x 27 cm



Margaret Lovell
Leda
Bronze
156.5 x 30 cm

Illustrated Cover:
Margaret Lovell
Mantis
Bronze on Portland Stone
132 x 57 cm



Margaret Lovell
Irenika Verde
Green slate & Bronze on Granite
41 x 12 cm



Margaret Lovell
September Head
Bronze
48 x 28 cm



Margaret Lovell
Stratina
Bronze
24 x 9 cm



Margaret Lovell
Sails
Bronze
9 x 21 cm



John Blackburn
Fire Painting XXIV
Mixed media on board, burnt
28.6 x 22.9 cm

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