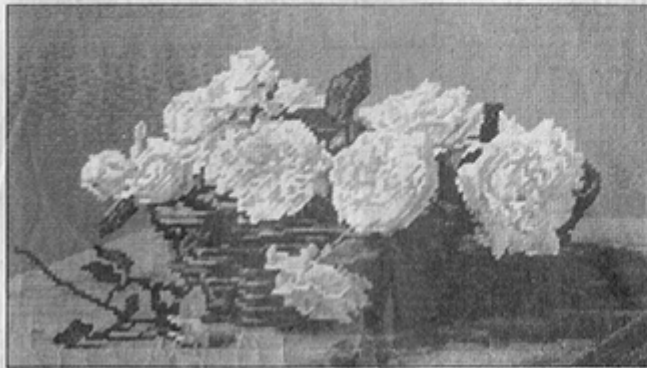


THEATRE • ARTS

Welcome work from record-setter



ROSY VIEW . . . Alvin Pankhurst's painted tapestry of right-sized roses

PAINTED TAPESTRIES, by Alvin Pankhurst;
MY STANCE — YOUR PERSPECTIVE, by Christine Bell-Pearson, both at Millford Galleries, Dunedin, until August 17
Reviewed by HELEN WATSON WHITE

ALVIN PANKHURST is best known in Dunedin as the painter of *Maybe Tomorrow*, which was bought for a record price by the Dunedin Public Art Gallery after winning the 1974 Benson & Hedges Award.

In this surrealist vision, the interior of a typically Victorian-Edwardian house is crawling with invasive vines. There's the sense of something unaccountable growing out of the past and threatening life around the hearth.

Pankhurst's paintings since then have been few and far between, so the present eruption of his fantastic imagination is welcome.

His nine painted tapestries show the relationship of past to present in another way.

He has taken three typical tapestry subjects, two of beagles running through a stitched landscape and one of a bowl of roses, and magnified a detail, first by 300% and then by 1000%, so that in the third rendition all we see is a grid of large painted stitches, each one a discrete colour, in what would appear (without the series setting) to be an abstract design.

There is a staged progress from sober historical realism (the bowl of roses being quoted from a 17th-century still-life by La Tour) to the ebullient self-assertion of op-art and pop-art.

Also implied is the change in perceptions of tapestry as an artform, from its origins on palace walls to its re-appearance as painting-by-numbers designs for footstools and firescreens.

Realism still reigns — outra-

geously — for Pankhurst paints each strand of the underlying openweave cloth as well as the stitches on it.

But in doing so, he exposes the resulting construction as the product of artifice from beginning to end.

One can enjoy, all at once, the age-old drive to imitate something you've seen before (and in *Annexen Country 1993* the tall grasses are blown sideways by an almost palpable wind); the drive to create something without a past; and the irony that neither aim can ever be achieved.

Follow

It's a hard act to follow — or accompany — for co-exhibitor Christine Bell-Pearson, but her 10 large untitled abstracts represent an achievement of great substance and integrity.

Thirty years of working with ceramics have given her a maturely

confident approach to form, and her use of colour, always in a restricted range, is profoundly evocative.

Pastel cream or white over a dark ground suggest water, light, air, or emotions that are not quite pure; combinations of sparse reference to ochre, rust red or cobalt blue with a shadowy, permeating darkness give those bright strokes a disproportionate, extravagant value. The canvas-on-canvas presentation, with mocking reference to a gilt-painted frame (also canvas) and sometimes a scrawled signature — which can be anywhere on or off the work — draw attention to the medium, and the historical determinants of meaning and valuation associated with it.

— But the exhibition's title is open-ended, like the paintings, inviting the viewers to see their own interpretations of the artist's ambiguous signs, indications and gestures as part of the work.