

A Field of Centres

MICHAEL BRENNAND-WOOD

The Harley Gallery, Welbeck 15 May – 27 June 2004

Ruthin Craft Centre, North Wales 24 July – 12 September 2004

MAC, Birmingham March – May 2005

Leicester City Gallery 4 June – 2 July 2005

Gracefields Art Centre, Dumfries 6 August – 17 September 2005

Park Gallery, Falkirk 22 October – 7 December 2005

University of Hertfordshire, St Albans January – February 2006

MICHAEL Brennand-Wood's new body of constructed mixed media panels is a polyphonic, riotously colourful, shimmering visual feast offering much to delight any viewer, whether they are coming to this work for the first time, or have followed and enjoyed his work over many years.

Firstly, there is the sheer visual pleasure and exuberance of so much colour, rhythm and pattern carried through the diversity of materials in this range of related compositions. They are almost like a series of sketches, so closely do they relate to each other. A sense of musical improvisation and variations on a theme are evident in viewing these works as a group. For the aficionado, pieces such as *Wasn't Born To Follow* provide points of familiarity with and reference to earlier works. But there is also the intrigue of seeing where Brennand-Wood's work is heading. The earlier photographic works *Stars Underfoot* produced using fresh flowers in 2000-1 for Year of the Artist, seem particularly related to this exhibition. The fresh flowers used then have become hundreds of individual machine embroidered flower heads in these new pieces, combined with toy soldiers, Eastern fabrics, wire, pencils, glass, beads, crayons, shisha mirrors, wood and more, to produce constructions that encourage viewing from a distance. The actual depth of each constructed panel is composed of different physical levels, which then

invite the viewer closer. For example, *Crystallized Movements* closely reveals materials that make references on several intellectual and emotional levels. The Harley Gallery provided an excellent setting for these 18 works; the daylight enhances the relief of the pieces and reminds viewers of the world of gardens beyond the glass. *World of Echoes* first brought to mind the formal topiary gardens of English country houses, then a whole range of competing points of reference including the *Stars Underfoot* series, French chateaux, carpets, carved stone reliefs and children's sweets.

Michael Brennand-Wood has been a key

creative figure in the textile and the wider visual arts arena for many years. Development time is often especially hard to find in such a significant and diverse career, making it particularly good to see core artistic practice successfully supported by public funding through the Regional Arts Lottery Programme. This exhibition, accompanied by a catalogue, has its origins in Brennand-Wood's 12-month residency at the Harley Foundation Studios. The residency provided the space and time to work in a 'new' studio space, uncluttered by earlier work and debris of a long-inhabited studio space. This body of work appears to reflect this freedom, and yet clearly connects to previous concerns.

The evident liberation, challenge and possibilities offered by working in new spaces and new ways is worth further consideration, both for practitioners and for those who support them.

Helen Parrott

A 50-page catalogue, *Michael Brennand-Wood, Field of Centres* with essays by textile historian Mary Schoeser accompanies the exhibition. ISBN 1 9009417 4 0 (pbk)



Wasn't Born To Follow, 2004. Embroidered flowers, acrylic, wire, fabric, metal, glass thread, sand on wood panel. 90 x 90 x 7cm