

RUSSELL MOSES

Headland 1996

Clay, shade cloth and ply

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society for the 1998 Commemorative Collection.

Headland (1996) evokes and memorialises the artist's experience of Observation Point, the headland that once jutted from Port Chalmers into Otago Harbour. The towering rock edifice has been carved up and redistributed, replaced by a platform for storing logs waiting to be shipped to foreign ports.

In the 1980s Moses worked behind Ralph Hotere's studio at Observation Point, digging large pits in which he fired the clay sculptures he was making at that time. For him the headland was an incredibly elemental place, a kind of weather-prone eyrie. *Headland* embodies the memory of both the shifting light of the sea that surrounded him and the earth with which he worked.

Moses uses a rectangle of shade cloth to recreate the movement of water as light plays off and across it in waves, pools and ripples. He also uses actual earth from the point to coat 15 square boards and make a 2-metre-long string, or rosary, of large beads. Bringing together his representation of water and his veneration of earth, he creates a billboard-sized work that echoes the scale of Observation Point and his powerful sense of connection with it.

With the beads of the previous *Red, White and Black Composition* (1995) and *Headland*, he also creates a link between the clay sculptures that brought him to national attention in the 1970s and the wallworks that have largely occupied him since.

RUSSELL MOSES

Oturehua Southern Cross I 1999

Pruning paint on paper and clay beads

Collection of the artist

Oturehua Southern Cross II 1999

Pruning paint on paper and clay beads

Private Collection, Auckland

In *Oturehua Southern Cross I* and *II* (1999), Moses' beads become the Southern Cross. Here he evokes Oturehua in Central Otago, named after the star Rehua (Antares), one of the brightest in the summer sky and, for local Maori, associated with long dry summers. Moses gives us the colour of a hot, southern landscape, still glowing under a vast night sky.

Moses' beaded Southern Cross pulls in references to navigation and time-keeping, to the making of journeys and the choice to be in a particular place at a particular time. With his backdrop of pruning paint on paper, Moses represents not just the colour of the earth, but the hue of an old map or a sepia-toned photograph. His is a land of light and warmth, the subject of memory.

By often using the materials of landscape gardening in his wallworks, Moses embodies his tactile relationship with the physical environment. This also indicates his intuitive and experimental approach, which is not bound by traditional notions of 'painting' or 'sculpture'.

RUSSELL MOSES

Whareakeake III 2006

Acrylic on steel

Collection of the artist

One of Moses' favourite landscapes near Port Chalmers, Whareakeake Beach was once a powerful base for the production of pounamu weapons and jewellery, initially traded with other Maori and then with entrepreneurial Pakeha sealers who settled in the area.

Whareakeake III is made from many small pieces of steel 'carved' by laser. They are not only references to pounamu pendants found in the area, but also fragments of a story, or, as Moses says, 'pages in a little book'. He breaks the landscape down, and builds it up, always privately referring both to the history of a place and his response to it. On the surface of each piece Moses has painted patterns reminiscent of the beautiful surface and marbling of pounamu. He also creates what could be called his essential 'garden of light'. Singly and together, the pieces present the patterns of nature—on water, through trees and highlighting intricate details of rock, soil and foliage. At the same time, they are overlaid with, or sometimes completely taken over by, Moses' dots, indicating that this landscape is a part of his identity.

RUSSELL MOSES

Garden of Light 2001

Pruning paint, acrylic and ink on hardboard

Collection of Hamish Morrison

Light Garden 2001 (opposite)

Pruning paint, acrylic and ink on hardboard

Collection of the artist

Garden of Light (2001) is a collection of vignettes inspired by the Moses family garden in Port Chalmers, a wonderful mixture of established trees, bushes and flowering plants that is about strata, leafiness and filtering light. Moses paints the surface of small round discs of hardboard, then places them in a circle to create a meditation on the passing of days, the cycle of growth and decay.

In *Light Garden* (2001) Moses is responding to pictorialist photographer George Chance's (1885–1963) sepia-toned image of cabbage trees whipped by wind in *The Storm, Lake Wanaka, N.Z.*, as well as cabbage trees in his own garden. Chance, who emigrated from England to Dunedin in 1909, went to great lengths in the darkroom to get the effects he wanted—the land softened and yet dramatised by light and dark. In this work Moses similarly plays with contrasts, and with the patterns of leaves in outline.

Each disc in *Garden of Light* and *Light Garden*, with its sepia tones, could be a moment photographed, Chance-style, by the artist's eye.

RUSSELL MOSES

Green Cross 2007

Acrylic on steel

Private Collection, Auckland

The disc or dot is the most persistent symbol in Moses' work. It is a metaphor for the intimate relationship that comes from physical engagement with the environment. The cross, made of dots, is often punched out of or painted on Moses' works. It upholds and unifies the fragments of stories related to a particular place and the artist's relationship with it.

In *Green Cross* (2007) the cross becomes the work's ultimate form and a statement of faith that, behind the most wild and irregular forms of an untamed land, can be found a quiet, rhythmic beauty. The cross, although associated with the Christian faith, also represents a way of seeing, recording or retaining a particular view of the landscape. Moses is referring to land surveying, as perfected in the use of the theodolite, which has always been based on simple geometry—the relationship and intersection of vertical and horizontal planes. He is fascinated by the visual overlay of geometry: the sight axis of a telescope, the crosshairs in the viewfinder of a camera, the site lines of a surveyor, the modernist grid.

RUSSELL MOSES

Goldfield 2004

Gold leaf & ink on steel

Collection of the artist

Kohinoor 2004

Acrylic & ink on steel

Collection of the artist

Border Chief 2004

Pruning paint, acrylic and ink on MDF

Collection of the artist

In *Goldfield* (2004) pattern is reduced to a more simple and symmetrical order. Here the gilded component panel is like the illuminated page in a precious manuscript, designed for private contemplation. The work is an object of devotion that continually moves the viewer around and through its many axes of symmetry. Diamond, square, rectangle, cross and rhombus come in and out of focus; small and then larger and then smaller again, these shapes seem to grow and morph, ebb and flow.

Punched out of the centre of each side of the work is a small set of dots that suggest a cross. They also echo the perforated plates that lined the goldfields' sluicing channels, fragments of which Moses has seen in the mined landscape. As he says, they are also 'like hands holding the work—a clasp, or embrace', the perfect support for a precious object.

The 'clasp' is used in two other 'new landscapes': *Kohinoor* (2004) and *Border Chief* (2004), both named after mines. In discussing *Kohinoor*, Moses poetically associates the work with 'a book in the heart of the desert' and 'a cloak, woven from the fabric of the land'. Its patterns are something of an amalgam of other works in the series, and it is possible to see new, even more complex shapes in it, such as a loose flower-like motif and a series of concentric circles. The ungilded colours are those of the desert, built up in layers of ink to subtly evoke red-ochre warmth, and isolation.

RUSSELL MOSES

Snowfield II 2005

Acrylic & ink on MDF

Collection of the artist

The idea of nature's cycle, the movement from light to dark then dark to light, is extended with Moses' *Snowfield* works. In this particular unfolding of the *Bannockburn* series, he uses cool blue and white for his screenprinted panels, veils them in white acrylic paint, then covers them with a regular dusting of silver dots. Seeming both to invite and defy close examination, *Snowfield* epitomises the kind of quiet mystery Moses creates in his landscapes of memory.

RUSSELL MOSES

Matauri Bay V 2002

Pruning paint and ink on MDF

Private Collection, Auckland

Matauri Bay Site Pacific IV 2002

Pruning paint and ink on MDF

Collection of Tony Farrell and Donna Osborn Family Trust

With his *Matauri Bay Site Pacific Series* (2002), Moses added a new shape to his vocabulary of symbols—the French curve. French curves come in sets of four or eight, each a flat transparent template with its own shape and pattern. Although traditionally used by engineers to draw curves of different shapes and sizes, they have been largely replaced by electronic drawing packages. Perhaps now, more than ever, they can be seen for their simple decorative beauty.

In tracing around one of the pieces in a French curve set, Moses recreates the sweep of Matauri Bay in Northland, the site of Chris Booth's memorial for the Greenpeace ship, *Rainbow Warrior*. Moses creates a symbol that triggers his deep sense, when he visited the memorial, of being close to where the bombed vessel was 'buried'. He also deliberately creates a symbol that can be read in many different ways related to birth and death, growth, closeness and protection.

The way French curves delineate pattern is made explicit, even sculptural, in *Matauri Bay Site Pacific IV*. Moses repeatedly cuts out and removes his French curve to make it present in its absence. Each curve faces another as if in continual conversation with its opposite, a pair that speaks of life and its cycle. *Matauri Bay V* seems to physically grow out of *Matauri Bay Site Pacific IV*. What was removed in one makes up the other. In this work, French curves are arranged in a diamond shape reminiscent of a cascade of leaves, water or tears. Each curve is painted to represent the delicate play of light on the water in which the *Rainbow Warrior* rests and the photographer Fernando Pereira drowned.

RUSSELL MOSES

Koputai Full Cycle 2001

Pruning paint, acrylic and ink on hardboard

Collection of Hamish Morrison

Koputai Full Cycle (2001) is made up of large and small discs, each containing half an interior circle pointing in a particular direction, to create a diamond-shaped framework that literally explores a turn or cycle. In previous works such as *Otakou Siteseeing I* (2001), Moses had inscribed an interior circle to act like the viewfinder or zoom on a camera, a way of signalling the need for focus. In *Koputai Full Cycle* he shifts our focus around a central disc, making the work seem to spin. Once again the artist reminds us of the seeming endlessness and inevitability of the earth's cycle.

RUSSELL MOSES

Whareakeake VII 2006

Acrylic on steel

Collection of the artist

Moses' large and small discs come together in *Whareakeake VII* (2006). This work, which explores the alternation of light and shadow created by floating a field of discs a centimetre or so from the wall, recalls the fractured or dappled light that filters through trees. Moses has also created a plane on which to float a pattern he thinks of as a tattoo, which is another way of marking a place. He often takes small patterns, or pieces of pattern, from one work into another. Here he highlights both this aspect of his working process and the way he develops works over time.

RUSSELL MOSES

Behold the Moon 2008

Acrylic and polyurethane on board

Collection of the artist

Finally, in *Behold the Moon* (2008), one of the latest in the *Whareakeake* series, Moses builds on, but steps away from, his previous practice by both removing and adding sculptural components in a single work to create a solid panel. He 'carves' out a massive disc, only to set another back in its place. With careful finishing, the disc becomes a sculptural inset and is given the relief of a glowing Otago moon. Moses also carves out and then replaces the pendants found in works such as *Whareakeake III*.

Behold the Moon is like a slab of pounamu embedded with place-specific stories of the Maori greenstone industry at Whareakeake. It is named after a poem of the same name recorded in Maori by David Samwell in 1777, notable to Moses for the way it mysteriously relates to events that took place at Whareakeake fewer than 50 years later.

As Moses says of the Samwell poem, *Behold the Moon* is a cosmic, timeless landscape that seems to 'tip you back and forward from one time to another'. With its deliberate yet almost accidental paint effects, it captures something of the light play he achieved with his shade cloth over 10 years earlier in *Headland*. It is at once the recollection of a particular place and the expression of what Moses calls 'a feeling now from back then'. It could also be a nocturnal garden of light.

RUSSELL MOSES

From Higher Ground, Bannockburn 2004

Graphite & ink on steel

Collection of the artist

Bannockburn from Higher Ground 2004

Acrylic & ink on steel

Courtesy of Nadene Milne Gallery

In the Bannockburn series, the ordered natural world is seen as the result of monumental human effort. Between 2003 and 2005, Moses created a series of works inspired by the goldfields in the Cromwell area of Central Otago. Underlying all these works are variously cropped details of the manmade yet organic patterns of the goldfields, which Moses excerpted from an aerial photograph provided by the Cromwell Museum. Tailings were dumped in an orderly fashion, in neat rows extending from central ridges. Seen from above, they are like meandering leaf structures, fossils, crystals or snowflakes. For Moses they are proof that if something is done repetitively for long enough, patterns emerge.

He has enlarged, cropped and screenprinted pieces of those patterns onto small component steel panels that are then put together to create larger, often richly decorative panels. Produced as positive and negative images, the prints alternate both pattern and light and dark. Moses brings these patterns together, overlays them with dots and sometimes even adds gold leaf. They are what he thinks of as new landscapes, which interweave the past and the present.

In *From Higher Ground, Bannockburn* (2004), Moses' pattern making is at its most loose, experimental, even playful. Its colour is also distinctive within the series, the silvery subtle surface evocative of Central Otago's schist. The decorative nature and structure of *Bannockburn, From Higher Ground* (2004), on the other hand, is more deliberate. As the leaf-like forms join and reflect each other through the central axis of Moses' cross, a rhomboid pattern emerges. At the same time, a pattern comprising three component panels, in the shape of a kind of '6', alternate light and dark, yin and yang, down the length of the work.

RUSSELL MOSES

Koputai III 2001

Pruning paint, acrylic and ink on hardboard

Private Collection, Queenstown

RUSSELL MOSES

Red, White and Black Composition 1995

(remade 2008)

Shade cloth, vinyl paint and clay beads

Collection of the artist

Visual presentation of sited works

This presentation has been developed by curator Jodie Dalglish and the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in conjunction with Russell Moses to bring the spirit and presence of Moses' sited works into *Garden of Light*.

Moses grounds his practice in a physical engagement with the land, so his sited sculptures are the most direct expression of his practice. They are also an eloquent expression of his belief in the regenerative power of landscape. Two sited works are *Stone Waka*, Back Beach, Port Chalmers (1993) and *Kaipara Waka*, Kaipara Harbour (1996).

Exploring his interest in the waka as a symbol of passage, Moses built three stone waka on the foreshore at Careys Bay in 1990; these no longer exist. His waka at Back Beach, constructed as part of the Public Practices Project in 1993, has survived, a groyne that protects the shore from the inevitable tidal erosion. Its position, on the waterline, is also a reference to Koputai, the Maori name for Port Chalmers, which means 'high tide'. As the water perpetually rises and falls, the waka is covered and revealed, a symbol of preservation and of the temporal beauty of a landscape in flux.

Changing water and light effects are also an important part of Moses' *Kaipara Waka*, built on a tidal flat at The Farm, a private sculpture park flanking Kaipara Harbour. A key work, it is part of, and accentuates, a unique natural environment. Created to mark the burial place of the Chief Te Hemara Tauhia on the hill above, *Kaipara Waka* points north to Cape Reinga, where spirits depart for their last voyage. Its form is also reminiscent of prayer beads, like those evoked by Moses' wallwork, *Headland*, of the same year.

Photographs of the sculpture sited at Kaipara Harbour, the Gibb's Farm, were provided by the Key Stone Trust. Photography: Bridget Sutherland. Other photographs have been kindly supplied by Richard Douglas and Russell Moses.