

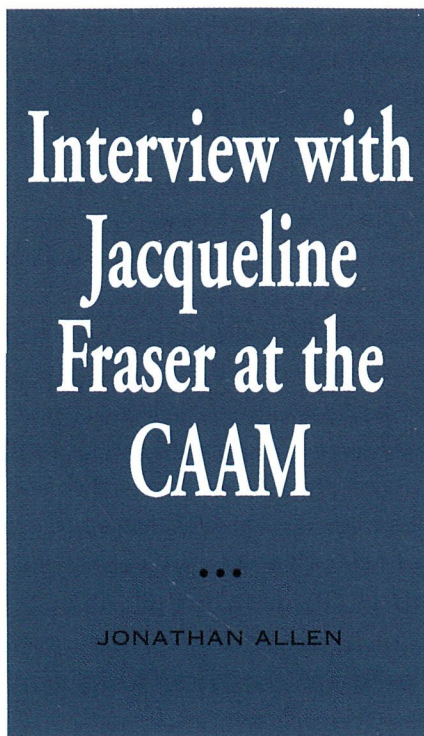
DOSSIER: ISLANDS

Jonathan Allen: Taking a look at your work that celebrates the memory of the martyrdom at Pigeon Mountain of ancient men and women, Pakurangarahihi, it reads like a post-classical iconography of saintly figures. Are the characters portrayed ancestors that became integrated in the Maori spiritual tradition or are they at all historical?

Jacqueline Fraser: Yes, they are the ancestors who lived on Pigeon Mountain, Pakurangarahihi is the traditional Maori name, which was changed to Pigeon Mountain when the Europeans came. The figures in the catalogue represent the ancestors who once lived, died and were buried there. In Maori culture we still speak to the people who are dead as if they are living. We remember them in our speeches and they are still part of our living culture.

Jonathan Allen: You talk about burial sites being disrupted. The most recent impressions from New Zealand seem to confirm the idea that the New Zealand government is at last showing respect for Maori sacred sites, territory and tree culture.

Jacqueline Fraser: It is only very recently that we have stronger rules in place to protect our ancient sites, but unfortunately it is too late. Many of them are already destroyed. New legislation, however, means that this won't continue to happen. The trouble with Pigeon Mountain is that many tribes settled in Auckland because it was a very productive agricultural and fishing area. When the British arrived it was the most attractive place for them as well as the most attractive place for the Maori. The Maori were quickly disposed of, either killed or moved along. Whereas in the more remote parts of New Zealand they were able to continue living undisturbed.



Jonathan Allen: You have chosen the ductile medium of coloured wire to define your characters. This creates the sense of an airy, ethereal body that floats in space. Can you tell me something about the sense and the use of wire in your art?



Jacqueline Fraser: Well, originally I used to mainly use fabrics and ribbons and arrange them in a spatial way that was probably closer to abstract painting. But when I started travelling overseas

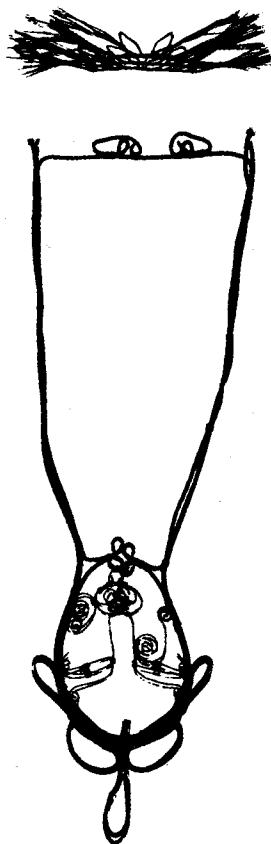
the references I made to our culture had to become more clear because people knew nothing about it although in New Zealand they knew what I was getting at. So I began looking for materials that I could use. In France, where I lived in 1992, I started using the beautiful coloured wire they had in hardware shops and from then I've developed it so that it's much more explicit. I realized that I could draw quite accurately with wire and get the idea of a sculpture and the idea of space but not use solid materials.

Jonathan Allen: The sense of continuing line and design that are intricately very present in traditional Maori art appears as a possibility in your art. Are you actualising the abstract notions of traditional art or are you consciously evolving a new language?

Jacqueline Fraser: I am always respectful of the way things are done in traditional Maori art and I would never do anything that is against our religious beliefs. On the other hand I have a contemporary training and I take elements from religious art in Europe and I use beautiful fabrics and wire from the modern world and I don't use any traditional materials. There are some materials that I would never use because that would be going against our culture.

Jonathan Allen: Is there a progression in your work from linear alignments to three dimensionally oriented work that is perspective conscious and more theatrical?

Jacqueline Fraser: No, I've always used theatre, the spectacular and the three dimensional. Because I'm often travelling, I've tended to use the flat wall. Unless I can actually travel with it I can't arrange it. Probably my work belongs now to two separate types. The



very three dimensionals we have in this exhibition, where I use all the walls, the whole room, or else only using the flat wall for work in galleries or for commissions. Until the beginning of the 90s when I started coming to Europe I had always used a whole room, every part of it.

Jonathan Allen: How do you feel the phenomenon of living in an island influences your work, how does the idea of the island make itself present?

Jacqueline Fraser: I think that now that I am coming to Europe it makes me more self-conscious. I have to try and explain who I am because nobody knows us. On the other hand I have a lot of experience of exhibiting only to the small audiences on our islands. I have to be able to use some images of Europe, for instance, the image of the Virgin I've used to try and explain the atmosphere of our culture to other cultures. Perhaps if I had only stayed on my own island the work would have remained at a certain level. Going far away and

travelling meant that I had to develop it further by going to another audience.

Jonathan Allen: The quarterly magazine ART AND AUSTRALIA is main-streaming contemporary Australian art culture, revising and analyzing historical art production while also following both historical and present developments in aboriginal art. Is there such a publication with similar functions in New Zealand?

Jacqueline Fraser: We do have a main magazine, but it's not really very good quality writing. The best things written in New Zealand are for exhibition catalogues, when the artist is working with the curator. The catalogue devoted to the theme of the Martyrdom of Pigeon Mountain I did entirely on my own because I think that neither curators of institutions in New Zealand totally understand what I am doing. The more I come over to other cultures the clearer I am about what I am doing. Yet in the art cultures the clearer I am about what I am doing. Yet in the art cultural context of New Zealand they don't value my kind of work because I, and several other artists, are out of step with how the New Zealand art community likes to see itself in relation to New York or Europe.

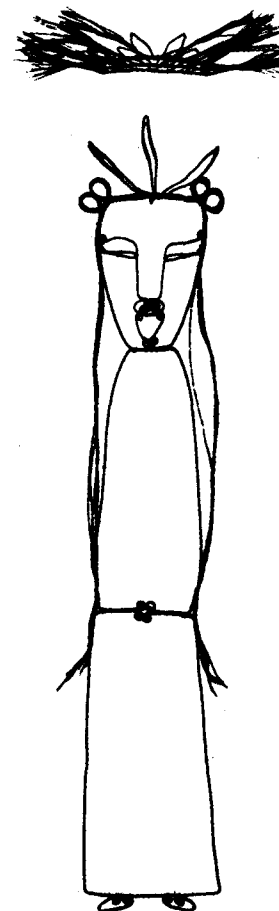
Jonathan Allen: Are you saying that the New Zealand art establishment identifies as its own the image that contemporary European art culture beams world-wide?

Jacqueline Fraser: Yes, the biggest percentage of the government cultural funding is spent on art which looks as if it comes from another country. They are very slow to recognise the true voice of our distinct country. If it looks as if it comes from New York or somewhere else it has more success with the collectors and official institutions. The only time I have success in my own country is when I've been away from the country and I showed them what I did overseas. If you only stay in New Zealand it is very

difficult to do something about our culture.

Jonathan Allen: What experience have you derived from taking part in an international multi-island show like ISLAS? Do you think that the art shown in ISLAS is more important for its insular essence or because it integrates smoothly with contemporary art trends?

Jacqueline Fraser: The thing I've noticed the most from speaking with the artists is that they all have the same feeling that we do as Maori people in our own country of somehow being oppressed. In order to be true to what you believe you have to battle in some way, terrorism or else a more subtle way, like abandoning your country and living the life of an artist in another country. We all have the same feeling of being threatened. That doesn't mean necessarily that the work is angry but this does come through in almost all of the work.



The martyrdom of the kumara close by.