

Waipu artist Brett A'Court has an upcoming exhibition at the Wallace Gallery in Auckland

Waipu artist Brett A'Court will open a new exhibition this month at the Wallace Gallery in Queen St., Auckland this month.

The James Wallace Arts Trust holds collections of the work of some of New Zealand's most celebrated artists and supports emerging artists. An invitation to exhibit at the Wallace Gallery amounts to recognition by some of the most influential people in the New Zealand art scene, that here is an artist worth watching.

Brett's new exhibition is called "Do not fear", which he explains, "The art practice has led me to the experience of religious art that holds a presence beyond the raw emotion or blatant sentimentality, not divorcing it, but letting it lead the viewer into a place beyond fear. Everything is connected to fear. It seems to be the motor that drives this world. The spiritual quest is to replace fear with faith."

Last week Brett's paintings, the culmination of two years work, were spread around his home and the shed where he paints.

They are disturbing. They contain religious icons, the face of Christ, the Madonna and St. Francis of Assisi who Brett says was the first greenie – the man who first recognised the divine in the natural world. There are also, Lotus flowers a symbol from the Hindu religion and Brett points out the cover of the Karma Sutra incorporated into a painting of Christ.

There are also anatomical details, dissected hearts, sexual organs, is that sperm wiggling to pierce the membrane of an egg?, rivers of blood.

I find myself searching out the classical images, the serene face of Christ as a reassurance amongst all this chaos and then notice there is something else familiar in these painting – Colin McCahon.

Brett said he began by painting a replica of a McCahon's Ecclesiastes painting and then painted over it.



Brett sorting out his paintings ready for the exhibition

"He has been this huge huge legend. The challenge for artists in New Zealand who are trying to portray spiritual essence is to build on what he did."

There are texts painted McCahon style on the wall of Brett's studio shed. One reads: "They are not idols to be worshipped but act to concentrate aspects of the spirit world to a material representation."

Brett said he found this one in the Pacific room of the Auckland Museum.

"It (some artwork from Papua New Guinea) had an incredible presence, a selflessness that most contemporary art doesn't have and when I read the inscription at the bottom it made sense."

Brett's daughter, eight-year-old Kezia comes in and I ask her what she thinks of her father's paintings.

"I think they are very beautiful", she said and she is right.

Brett says he has arguments with fellow artists about this. He maintains, "Even a real gnarly painting has to be beautiful."

It's like working on an orchestra. I am out there and I can hear the flute playing and there is something not quite right. I fix that and then I hear the trumpet coming in and that needs altering."

The exhibition Do Not Fear will run from 17 May – 31st May. The Wallace Gallery is at 305 Queen St. and open from 10am – 5pm daily from Tuesday to Saturday.