



1. Fountain: Armoury I, 1997, bronze, 60 mm. Figs. 1-4 all share the Birdman reverse.



2. Fountain: Armoury II, 1997, bronze, 60 mm.

3. Fountain: Armoury III, 1997, bronze, 60 mm.



4. Fountain: Two heads, 1997, bronze, 60 mm.

MARIAN FOUNTAIN

LIFE FORMS

Terence Mullaly



5. *Fountain: Nouvelle Zélande, 1997, bronze, 65mm.*

Two things are proved by Marian Fountain's latest exhibition, *Life Forms*. The first is that she deserves to be known outside the circle of those who care for medals and the decorative arts. Indeed, her exhibition at the Simmons Gallery in London's Lamb's Conduit Street late last year (20 November - 5 December), and subsequently at New Zealand House, confirmed that Marian Fountain has emerged as a figure of striking originality. She is driven by a strange, even compulsive impetus. If ever there was a medallist of the moment, an artist whose work proves that the medal is relevant for our times, and, equally, makes it clear that old distinctions between the medal and other expressions of art are no longer applicable, it is Marian Fountain.

It is ironic that when the so-called installation, and every kind of ephemeral display, has come to be accepted as an expression of art, there is resistance against modest sized metal objects. Too often they are not regarded as serious works of art. This points to the second crucial issue raised by Marian Fountain's latest exhibition. It is a matter for celebration.

In the short time it has been in existence the Simmons Gallery has added a new dimension to the London art scene. That London has lost her position as the pre-eminent centre of the art world no observer both informed and impartial can deny. In fact, there is much to suggest the London art market is in terminal decline. The greed and hypocrisy of many, until recently, respected auction houses, along with the miscalculations of numerous once 'glamorous' dealers, has been compounded by the patent vanity of the critics and the clamorous nonsense asserted by the apologists and public relations consultants. No viable response has been found to economic pressures and all too legitimate disillusionment.

The Simmons Gallery has broken this cycle of stagnation and declining confidence. By demonstrating for all to see what members of BAMS have long recognised, the Simmons Gallery is serving both the arts and the art market well. In the face of economic pressures and cynicism the numismatic trade has survived better than almost any other section of the art market. Now by supplementing their activities in that



6. Fountain: Colony of artists, 1997, bronze, 70 x 55mm.



7. Fountain: Spermatozoid medal, 1997, bronze, 70 x 50mm.

field, by holding exhibitions such as Marian Fountain's latest show, the Simmons are making a vital point.

Some of the most exciting work being done today is by those who, like Marian Fountain, move effortlessly between small sculpture, medals, and functional objects, such as door knobs (certain of those in her Simmons Gallery exhibition were not only intriguing, but also satisfying). Indeed, it is time the present critics of the national dailies' stopped feeding their self-inflated egos and made their way to Lamb's Conduit Street.

Paula Davies, in her introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition, in an essay as receptive as it is perceptive,

defines Marian Fountain's latest work as 'elemental, exciting, erotic.' Such descriptive terms need to be set against the facts.

Marian Fountain was born in New Zealand in 1960, and was trained at the University of Auckland, and, crucially, at the mint in Rome. Indeed, her New Zealand background has in recent years been supplemented by living in Rome, London, and now Paris. Furthermore, she has attended symposia, won prizes (including the Monnaie de Paris first prize for sculpture, 1990), and was commissioned to produce the commemorative medals for the 1988 Commonwealth



8. *Fountain: Lion, 1995, bronze, 30cm. ht.*

Games held in New Zealand. She has also worked in Edinburgh (a residency at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art), Hungary, the Czech Republic, Denmark and Turkey.

Even more revealing is the range of the work she has carried out. In 1984-85 she was a design consultant for David Shaw Silverware in London, between 1990 and 1993 she worked for the Tower Mint and Fattorini, and she has, in Paris, been a designer for Arthus Bertrand. She has also been closely involved with the Château de Chatelperron, where BAMS is holding its 1998 weekend conference, and with various other French enterprises and foundries. The objects she has produced in recent years, apart from many medals, range from the *recherché* to the utilitarian. Gold jewellery has been foiled by hotplates for the Conran shop.

With all her work there is a sense of a potent life force. In these pieces one of the earliest influences upon her, that of Maori art, is evident. At times the references are direct, while at others she simply echoes shapes found in Maori and Polynesian art.

Both in her medals (figs. 1-7) and with her small pieces of sculpture, such as her *Lion* (fig. 8), Marian Fountain celebrates the life force. In a bronze entitled *Germination* she suggests the magic of growth, while two elaborate pieces of sculpture, *Domesticator* and *Liquidator*, make witty allusions to the relationship between man and the machine. Marian Fountain is always concerned to convey the wonder inherent in shapes, implying the forces of nature and man's interaction with them.