



contemporary
New Zealand
art 5

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Martin Ball
Mark Braunias
Margaret Dawson
Luise Fong
Marian Fountain
Viky Garden
Charlotte Graham
Paul Hartigan
Niki Hastings-McFall
Dion Hitchens
Sara Hughes
Monique Jansen
Richard Lewer
Euan Macleod
Russell Moses
James Ormsby
Stanley Palmer
Neil Pardington
Phil Price
Jude Rae
Elizabeth Rees
Bill Riley
Natalie Robertson
Wayne Youle

Bateman

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Squeeze, Paris 2005.
Bronze, 800 x 250 x 200 mm.
Edition of 4.

MARIAN FOUNTAIN



Germe I., Paris 1996.
Bronze, 200 x 290 x 170 mm.
Edition of 8.

MARIAN FOUNTAIN

Introduced to the ancient tradition of medal-making by Paul Beadle* at art school, Fountain found her artistic niche and a wealth of inspiration when she attended the Italian Mint in Rome, in 1985–86. There she not only revelled in the richness and diversity of contemporary European art and culture and its long history, but also came to recognise the strength and significance of her New Zealand roots and the uniqueness of that influence.

Three features have consistently dominated Fountain's work: her amalgam of Pacific and European style and imagery; her use of the female nude as a symbol for fertility, growth and life; and the mystery of metamorphosis. Her bronze bowls, spoons and containers and her imagery of 1983–85 had a distinctively Pacific feel with a hint of the archaeological. But after her arrival in Italy in 1984 Fountain began making medallions, wall reliefs and table-top sculptures in which the previously Pacific-influenced female nudes showed the impact of her new context among the great classical painters and sculptors of Europe. Her interest in early indigenous figurative art was also burgeoning at that time, as evidenced by the creatures that populated her wall reliefs and medallions. These crouching, bird-like figures with fingers and feet are reminiscent of both the Rapanui birdman and manaia (the symbol for the soul in Maori mythology) and ancient Egyptian drawings.

The duality of medallions [page 79], with their 'trickery' – the surprise of different imagery on each side disguised within the same shape – must have spurred Fountain's fascination for metamorphosis. Her interest was evident as early as 1986, in works that feature the female form with fused legs. These were the precursor to her later 'seed pod' sculptures such as *Germe IV* (1995), comprising two pairs of legs intertwined, or *Germination* (1996), a female haunch with legs tapering to a point. The origins of *Squeeze* (2005) [page 80] can be seen in *Donna che Balla* (1986) with its disjointed limbs and torso.

During the 1990s, Fountain intensified her exploration of metamorphosis. Works showed mutated humans, animals, insects, reptiles or combinations of these. *Pistolait* (1997), for example, comprises a crouching figure with a breast as abdomen, a crustacean-like head and claws at the front. In *Predator* (1997) the 'head' is two hands palm to palm, thumbs atop, while a scorpion's tail plays thorax. *Germe I* (1996) [page 81] demonstrates the amalgam of organic and figurative which typified Fountain's works in these years.

In the 2000s, these 'morphed' into a more harmonious fusion of human and plant life. In *Spirit* (2001) an armless man has huge leaf-like limbs from the waist down. Her 2002 trio, *Liberté, Humanité, Egalité*, are patu-shaped but are also female forms, with hands cupping the breasts. Mouths are open in a scream, conveying the pain of the human condition in spite of the lofty aspirations of the titles.

Fountain's finely crafted and tactile works – variously imaginative, ambiguous, erotic, organic and disturbing – have dwelt on universal themes, including love, inspiration, conflict, growth, fertility and womanhood. Their titles have ensured a philosophical interpretation. Every two years she brings her work home for exhibition and refreshes the 'New Zealandness' she carries in her heart.

* Paul Beadle (1917–1993), New Zealand sculptor and proponent of medal-making.



Clockwise from top left:

Venus and Vulcan, Roma, 1987.
Bronze, 48 mm diameter.
Edition of 30.

Pas Encore, New Zealand, 1989.
Bronze, 93 mm diameter.
Edition of 30.

Femme d'Après Rodin, Paris, 1984.
Bronze, 70 mm diameter.
Edition of 40.

Madonna, London, 1987.
Bronze, 100 x 80 mm.
Edition of 30.