

Reviews (History in Other Media)

Canterbury Quakes. Canterbury Museum, Rolleston Avenue, Christchurch. 22 February 2012–1 October 2012. Reviewed 9 August 2012. Internet: <http://www.canterburymuseum.com/>.

THE ON-GOING EXPERIENCE of the Canterbury earthquakes has been very difficult to convey to those living outside the region. Locals have endured more than 11,500 aftershocks; the loss of people, homes and jobs; and the radical alteration of their built environment. Vast swathes of eastern Christchurch are zoned red and destined for obliteration. The once-bustling central city is now a desolate place: Alice's Video stands defiant in a wasteland that was once the edgy fashion and café hub of High Street; bouquets and messages cling to the fence beside the site of the former CTV building — the Ground Zero of 22 February 2011; swarms of demolition crews move through condemned buildings like locusts. Driving east, the scenes are bleak. Roads have become tricky, throwing up new holes, dips and bumps on a daily basis. There are tarpaulins, containers, empty houses, orange marker cones and dust. Water and mud spews onto suburban streets as contractors work underground to repair broken pipes and cables. Meanwhile, residents struggle to find their way through the bureaucratic maze that is the Earthquake Commission or organise to challenge the zoning decisions imposed by the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority. One finds humor and resilience in the face of adversity. But 'seismic activity' has also unleashed darker forces: severe stress, physical and mental illness, broken relationships and deepening social inequality. After earthquakes, many things fall between the cracks.

The Canterbury Museum's decision to develop an exhibition that introduces visitors to selected aspects of the experience — and to the science behind the earthquakes — is courageous. In the first instance, we are still inside the event: the institution, for example, has recently had to temporarily close its doors and relocate staff. Restructuring is under way; resources and revenue have been stretched. Second, museum professionals were required to meet an unforgiving timeline to open *Canterbury Quakes* for the first anniversary of 22 February and did so despite disruptions and without the benefit of hindsight. That they have achieved so much in these displays is testimony to their vision and hard work.

Visitors enter and leave the exhibition from the ever-popular *Christchurch Street* exhibition. On the left, we are greeted by the Elliot O'Donnell-directed video of Scribe's 'Not Many' (the tribute remix) with its altered lines: 'How many cities ya know roll like this/not many/if any'. Even though this piece is available on YouTube, it deserves its place here. The footage of the inner-city red zone, where Malo Luafutu lost one of his cousins, makes for compelling viewing. Crusader Robbie Fruen has a cameo, along with Mayor Bob Parker in his trademark orange jacket (which is displayed elsewhere). The city is 'broken but still beating', Scribe tell us, and the message suits the forward-looking orientation of *Canterbury Quakes*. It is further underlined at a later point by the YouTube hit *Stunts*, which shows boarders skating through the deserted, alien environment that was central Christchurch in March 2011. In an inspired move, Mayor Parker gave 'Adrian' a high-definition camera to record the action, and the results are spellbinding. It works an absolute treat on the floor, and its location next to a display case containing the mayor's vest adds an additional layer of interpretation to both items.

Like other visitors, I was drawn irresistibly to the mini-theatre which takes pride of place in the middle of the exhibition. It is behind a marvelously designed faux-container wall (an appropriate choice!), and dominates the surrounding spaces with sound. The

story behind the video histories featured here is extraordinary. Julie Hutton and Sandra Close knew nothing about film, lighting or sound before they formed 12.51 Productions. With help, they organised equipment and training. Their participants — 110 at the time of the exhibition's opening — were recruited through flyers that showed an image of the Victoria Clock Tower frozen at 12.51pm, the moment that the 22 February quake struck. The 15 interview excerpts chosen for this exhibition are gut-wrenching. Amanda describes her five-and-a-half-hour wait to be rescued from the Pyne Gould Corporation building. A fireman, Steve, finally arrives and she asks to touch him so that she knows he is real. Her lower arm is trapped and finally freed, leaving her dismembered fingers behind. A construction worker, Pete, describes the 'darkness, dust and rubbish' as they broke through to level two. Three people die in front of him in five minutes: he chillingly recounts the death of one man and his look before that final fateful moment. Pete learns humility and tells how his co-workers 'grew up' on that terrible afternoon. But there is also humour mixed with horror. One mother recalls the frantic search for her daughter ('11 going on 21') and finds her in the Botanical Gardens, only to be acknowledged by raised eyebrows. The use of music at key points adds to the emotional impact of the narratives: Cris's *Otautahi Lament* provides a pause for reflection. The final song by Natalie Hutton (Julie's daughter) and Georgia Mackay is a superb touch.

Canterbury Quakes is strongly visual. This holds true for the scientific component of the exhibition, which successfully incorporates film as a key interpretative device. Two installations feature University of Canterbury geologist Mark Quigley, whose fellow professionals have become the super-geeky stars of recent seismic events by virtue of their sudden media prominence. The most effective footage, however, is from security cameras. One on Liverpool Street captures the moment that the earthquake of 22 February struck; the other shows multiple views of the violent tremors accompanying a June 2011 6.4 aftershock at an ITM Centre on Dyers Road. All these videos attracted visitors — and facilitated discussion — on the occasions I was there. This is also one of the few places where people engaged with labels, graphs and other written materials.

The eclectic objects are excellent. The fallen cross from the top of the Christchurch Anglican Cathedral is a standout, along with the prone and damaged statue of J.R. Godley, which formerly stood in the Square. Visitors will be intrigued by the 'Snappa Crappa', representing the 'new normal'; a memorial guitar constructed of wood taken from heritage buildings; and the time ball accompanied by an ode from amateur fire-fighter and former Flying Nun artist Roy Montgomery. By far the most moving items, however, are to be found in the section on emergency services and forensic photography.

The boots worn by Christchurch police dog Otis to protect his paws on building sites speaks volumes about the nature of rescue and recovery missions. These are accompanied by a jacket, collar and lead from Boss, a USAR border collie, the dusty shoes Constable Brad Hagerty wore in the smoldering CTV ruins, and a police forensic helmet and goggles. The layers of interpretation here are pleasing. Visitors can listen to an oral history recorded with police forensic photographer Geoff Burns and view objects and images at the same time. The use of iPad technology to deliver the photographs taken by the forensic teams is inspired. These people took the opportunity to record the event and their own work for posterity, including victim recovery and mortuary operations. I came away with renewed admiration for the forensic units and their painstaking efforts to collect fragmented evidence and build a context from which they can identify the dead.

Some aspects of the exhibition are not so effective. I am still puzzled by the long-winded labels that adorn the outer walls. The 'Community Voices' panels, for example, are nothing more than a pamphlet on a wall, ignored by visitors. What purpose do they serve? Who were they aimed at? Opportunities are lost in the section on 'religion'. The labelling around the fallen cathedral cross is verbose and unconvincing. One of the best stories, represented by three chalices from the Roman Catholic Church of the Blessed

Sacrament, is surely about looting (the relics were eventually retrieved by police). What of the Virgin Mary's miraculous survival and her turn to look down on us from a Basilica window? This is museum gold! I also wondered about the tacky whiteboard for messages from visitors. Surely it would have been better to have a memorial wall on which visitors could pin messages of love and support (using specially designed cards)? And where are the heroic, overworked and chronically under-paid fire-fighters? Despite these and other questions, I walked away from Rolleston Avenue sobered by — and reflecting on — many of the things I had seen or heard. The exhibition made a deep impact. Canterbury Museum staff deserve high praise for what has been accomplished under very challenging circumstances.

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Figure 1: Christchurch Mayor Bob Parker's Orange Parka and 'Munted' T-shirt, Canterbury Quakes Exhibition, Courtesy of Canterbury Museum.

Black in Fashion: Wearing the Colour Black in New Zealand, New Zealand Fashion Museum in association with the Museum of Wellington City and Sea, 1 Brandon St, Wellington, 24 February–18 March 2012. Reviewed 14 March 2012. Internet: <http://www.fashionmuseum.org.nz/>.

ONE OF THE SIDE-EFFECTS of 'pop-ups' — shops, exhibitions and the like — is the interesting juxtapositions that can occur. The exhibition *Black in Fashion: Wearing the Colour Black in New Zealand* was a prime example. It popped up next door to *Brides on Thorndon* in central Wellington for a few weeks in early 2012. The shop and exhibition shared a doorway: left to ivory, white and pink; right to a sea of black. The contrast continued inside: soft and light on the one side; industrial chic on the other.

This is the second exhibition organised by the New Zealand Fashion Museum, the brainchild of fashion designer Doris de Pont. It is a new and welcome direction for museums in New Zealand. The Fashion Museum exists virtually and physically only