

ALBERTO GARCIA-ALVAREZ

An immersion in culturally significant periods is a distinguishing factor in the admirable practice of **Alberto Garcia-Alvarez**. Born in Barcelona in 1928, the artist grew up during the Spanish Civil War and as a student attended the Llotja Art School. He later became one of the founders of the FLAMMA group (1948 - 1953), working on religious murals and frescoes including the Saint Sebastian Chapel in Tossa de Mar. Religious commissions marked a valuable way for the artist to both immerse himself in traditional painting and to work within a social space.

In his studio practice, Garcia-Alvarez was exploring tendencies towards abstraction. During the counterculture period of the early sixties, he moved to the United States to teach at the University of California at Berkeley where he remained until 1971. Religious commissions during this time included the Portland Church and Saint Joachim Catholic Church in Madera. But the artist continued to follow tendencies in abstraction too, exhibiting with minimalists **Frank Stella** and **Brice Marden** and staging solo exhibitions at San José Art Centre and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Upon moving to Auckland, New Zealand in 1972, he commenced a career in academia where he became a well-respected mentor for many New Zealand artists including **Stephen Bambury** and **Judy Millar**. In 1980 he completed the permanent

outdoor wall sculpture at the University of Auckland; *Collective Mind* encompassed references to both minimal sculpture and mathematical structures. Garcia-Alvarez has always maintained the importance of an uncompromised personal vision, but over the last five years, there has been a revival in public interest for his work.

Recent works include an expansive range of highly gestural large scale paintings, small assemblages and geometric sculptures. Like Constructivist imagery, the assemblages bear the traces of religious iconography that is reduced to a series of lines. In 2015, **Robert Leonard** curated the *Crossings* series at Wellington's City Gallery. And earlier this year, the Fundacio Vila Casas in Barcelona mounted a major solo exhibition, marking six decades since the artist's last exhibition in Spain. Garcia-Alvarez is now preparing for an exhibition at Tim Melville Gallery, Auckland, opening 31 October. When pressed about plans for the exhibition, the artist sagely replied, "The act of doing is for me the essence of the work; an intense moment (hours, days or years) of physical, emotional and subjective activity. I know what I don't want to accept in my work, all else is possible."

Jane O'Neill

» ALBERTO GARCIA-ALVAREZ HOWS AT TIM MELVILLE GALLERY, AUCKLAND FROM 31 OCTOBER – 25 NOVEMBER 2017.

1. // Alberto Garcia-Alvarez, *Crossings*, Installation at Tim Melville Gallery, October 2014.

2. // Alberto Garcia-Alvarez, *1982-35*, 1982. Oil on wood, 70 x 62cm.

3. // Alberto Garcia-Alvarez, *2016-88.6*, 2016. Water-based mixed media on canvas, 213 x 173cm. Fletcher Trust Collection.

PHOTO: KALLAN MACLEOD. COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND TIM MELVILLE GALLERY, AUCKLAND

