

Powers suffer in small scale



SASHA GRISHIN

Clara Hali: Figure transformations

Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin
Closes August 11, Tuesday-Friday, 10am-5pm, Saturday-Sunday, 9am-5pm.

Clara Hali was born in Indonesia, trained in Queensland and Sydney, and has been an incessant traveller. She now teaches sculpture at the National Arts School in Sydney.

In this exhibition she faces the problem which confronts any artist who chooses to work within a well-established artistic tradition, one which is studded with examples of work by some of the great names of modernist art. Here she is specifically tackling the problem of the human torso, but as viewed through the prism of cubism. Some of the greats who have also explored this idea in the past, include Pablo Picasso, Alexander Archipenko, Ossip Zadkine, Jacques Lipchitz and André Derain.

Hali, who effortlessly slips between limestone and wood carving, cast bronze, cast iron and fired ceramics, explores the cubist principle of angular disjunction of



planes to initially deconstruct the female torso and then to reassemble it.

In its newly reconstituted form there are hints at landscape forms – rockscapes and topography – which may relate to the area of the Blue Mountains where she lives. The mastery of her mediums and the boldness of the resolution of her forms is the strength of the work, while the repetitiveness and

the eclectic echoes of other masters is a drawback. Hali is strongest when she embraces the greatest degree of abstraction in her imagery, as in *Walking hips III*. Here the simplicity of the arrangement and purity of forms suggests a basic natural order which is strong and effective.

The slight anti-gravity quality gives the work a degree of tension which blends perfectly with the



Clara Hali's
Walking hips III and
Scree.

bronze and the angular metallic planes which bring us back to the nature of the materials involved.

Throughout the exhibition I was constantly left with the feeling that the work did not operate as effectively as it could because of the scale.

With the largest piece in the exhibition under half a metre, the work seems to cry out for the scale of monumental resolution. Some

time ago, in a *Sculpture by the Sea* exhibition, I recall seeing one of her metal figures, called something like *Tribanga iii*, which was a couple of metres high and had a very effective sense of presence.

It is this lack of scale and sculptural presence which is perhaps my greatest disappointment in Hali's sculptures in this exhibition.