

Art review Sasha Grishin

Exhibition an impressive 'stack'

Sculpture: Fusion by Clara Hali. Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Until October 2.

Sydney-based sculptor Clara Hali has been exhibiting with the Beaver Galleries since 2002 and has been a regular participant at *Sculpture by the Sea* at Bondi and at Cottesloe in Perth.

She was born in Indonesia, trained in Toowoomba and Sydney, and has been an incessant traveller. She has been teaching sculpture at the National Arts School in Sydney since 1988. Although Hali is flexible and varied in her practice and seems equally

at home with bronze, stone, wood carving and ceramics, she is primarily a sculptor who belongs to the grand tradition of modern figurative sculpture.

Apart from the somewhat adventurous *Hip Shuffle*, that is made from cast iron, and a small wood sculpture, *Upside Down Lotus*, this exhibition largely consists of editioned bronzes, in most instances editioned out of nine copies.

The most impressive piece is *Stack*, on show in the courtyard, where a monumental bronze figure is on a pedestal of Corten steel blocks. The height is about 2½ metres, which gives the work larger than human

proportions. The piece invariably reads in anthropomorphic terms, but is sufficiently abstracted not to give way to a literal interpretation. The sculptural masses may refer to the female form, but equally relate to landscape masses, like great rocks piled on top of one another to create a gravity-defying structure. It may refer to the rugged terrain of the Blue Mountains, where the artist lives and where huge rocks appear precariously balanced. This sense of tension is further accentuated by the cubes that act as a plinth and are placed at angles. The patina of the bronze catches the light and reflects the surrounding environment, while the blocks of Corten steel



Stack by Clara Hali.

have their characteristic rusty, earthy colour and seem to belong to the soil from where the metal came.

Stack works in part because of its scale; it dominates the space and plays with our sense of gravity. A suspended totem needs to possess presence and is not effective in miniature proportions. The piece can also be read as a comment on the precariousness of the human condition and a metaphor on a person's passage through life.

Hali is a veteran artist who has a considerable body of work that demonstrates technical virtuosity and a consistent mode of visual thought. She is at her strongest when she has scale on her side and can make an imposing statement.