

The style of the work of Alan Pearson, whose painting is at the City Art Rooms in Lorne St, has never varied throughout his enduring career. Right at the entrance to the Auckland Art Gallery's Likeness & Character exhibition of portraits at the New Gallery is one of Pearson's finest works: his 1978 portrait of the poet and biographer, Denys Trussell. It is done in a vigorous Expressionist style of dashing brushstrokes and so is this new exhibition.

Such a style uses spontaneity and dash, and the principal emotion seems to be anger, as if the artist was always spoiling for a fight. The show is of paintings done between 1988 and 1994 and is called Within, Within: Heads. These are not portrait heads but generalised types.

The tone is set by one big wild painting with an Australian palette of brown colours that shows a slaughter. It has the title The Dunedin Mana-Eaters, Christchurch. This gives the crucified, flayed body set among pools and memorial crosses a local significance. The sense of victimisation is very strong.

The ferocity is continued in a series of four paintings on paper called Christ College Boys. The grotesque masks of their faces suggest they are monstrous, aggressive, frightened and animal. A similar painting, wild and declamatory, is called Feminist Art Curator. Everything is painted with big, decisive strokes which sometimes cross the painting like bars.

A series of pencil drawings called 6 Males lacks the wild attack of the paintings but comes closer to characterising individuals. It suggests the range of the artist's expression in a show that mostly strikes one raucous note but that note unmistakably announces Alan Pearson.

TJ McNamara NZ Herald 5 March 2008