

# Demons and violence on High St

by Karl Puschmann

Auckland's fashionable High St will be home to demons, cannibalism and violence when local artist Bruce Stirling John Knox unleashes his new exhibition on June 9.

The week-long exhibition, entitled *The Strength of Hatred: An exhibition of great stupidity*, is a controversial collection of paintings, short animated films and music.

It will be the third exhibition for Mr Knox, (26) who is expecting high levels of viewer discomfort.

"At my last exhibition, *F\*\*k the Weak*, someone said to me that the pictures were too violent — and they were right.

"The pictures are violent, but you see a lot of violence everywhere."

Explaining the title, Mr Knox says hatred is an emotion that is overlooked by most people, but is as important as happiness or sadness.

"People say hatred is a bad thing, and it is. But everyone hates something and anyone who says they don't is a liar.

"I'd have to say hatred is probably the defining force of humanity."

An animator by trade, Mr Knox has worked on cartoons for Warner Brothers and Disney, and is currently working on New Zealand's first fully animated series.

Dismissing the idea that his nightmarish images are a knee-jerk reaction to drawing cute cartoons all day, Mr Knox offers his own idea.

"It is the theory of shadow and light. If you ignore the shadow it becomes something that you're not aware of and you'll end up doing bad things.

"I have become completely aware of my shadow side, and as long as you know about it, and appreciate it, then you won't indulge it."

The paintings, all done in Indian ink and pen, are startling, confrontational images that force the viewer to contemplate the darker side of humanity.

Mr Knox has not shied away from taboo topics.

This exhibition includes unpleasant ideas of humans as nothing more than prime grade steak and recurring imagery of cannibalism.

"Despite human rights, humans



PHOTO: KARL PUSCHMANN  
**PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST:** Bruce Stirling John Knox in front of his work *Confidence of Conviction*.

treat each other like meat.

"My lack of any spiritual beliefs makes me see humans as animals that have evolved to the point where we are consciously aware of ourselves. There's no excuse for the things we do to each other."

Some people may be offended by his grisly paintings but Mr Knox says he wants to confront viewers.

"If it offends you then at least it's affected you on some level."

The multi-media event will enable viewers to see the paintings and watch

Mr Knox's animated short films on a looped video.

The artist will also perform on opening night with his two bands, *Battery Pig* and *The Holy Moleys*.

Staging such an exhibition presents its own challenges.

Mr Knox found the best solution was to bypass the usual gallery route and hire office space which could be easily adapted to his needs.

"This gives me the freedom to get everything exactly how I envision it," he says.

Mr Knox says he wants people to leave the exhibition thinking there's more to New Zealand art than people who paint "really crap hills".

"It's an invitation to come along and have a look inside my brain, what goes on inside my head. And then leave thinking, 'Wow! I'm glad I don't live inside his head.'"

*Strength of Hatred: An exhibition of great stupidity runs from June 9-16 and is located in Room 2i, Level 2, 47 High St. Viewing during business hours. Opening night 7pm.*

## Art-house films for Auckland

by Aroha Awarau

Mark Croft has a job that would make any film buff envious.

During the day he promotes big blockbuster Hollywood films as the marketing manager for 20th Century Fox New Zealand.

As a hobby he owns the Academy Cinema in central Auckland, an independent theatre which specializes in art-house and foreign films.

Despite growing up around film, Mark does not describe himself as a film buff.

"My dad was a projectionist at the local cinema so I've always had an interest in film. Growing up, I went to premieres and hung out in the projection room."

Croft's first job in the film industry wasn't glamorous. Working for a distribution company, he had to censor movie posters by covering images of women's breasts with black tape.

This led to various jobs in film until he was offered a position at Fox.

When the 'For Sale' sign went up at the Academy Cinema two years ago, Croft jumped at the chance to buy it.

This put him in the rare position of marketing mainstream films as a nine-to-five job and marketing independent films as a hobby. So is there a conflict of interest?

"No," says Croft.

"Cinema theatres are there to be utilized by distributors.

"With my current position, I'm fortunate to have a worldly view of the film industry."

"About two years ago, a man hired out the theatre to propose to his girlfriend."

After a discussion with Croft, it is obvious he's not a film buff as he often ponders the titles of films he has seen.

"What's that one where Ethan Hawke woos that girl in Paris?" he asks.

His worldly view of film pertains to the marketing and distribution side, which is just as well for New Zealand film buffs.

Croft brought the Oscar nominated Brazilian hit, *City of God*, and the US independent hit, *The Station Agent*, to our shores, two films that didn't make it to mainstream theatres.

Since Croft's acquisition, the Academy has had a major face-lift.

The most significant change is the addition of another cinema, *Encore*.

This 16-seater theatre screens films and is available for hire.

*Encore* has been used for events that range from the wonderful to the bizarre.

"About two years ago, a man hired out the theatre to propose to his girlfriend," says Croft.

"He played his girlfriend's favourite film and at the end he proposed.

"Also, there were this group of friends, half dressed as Doris Day and the other half dressed as Rock Hudson. They hired the theatre to watch — you guessed it — Doris Day and Rock Hudson films."

Though patrons of the Academy vary, Croft wants to attract more students.

This year, the Academy will screen films for the Gay Film Festival and the annual New Zealand Film Festival.

Croft says New Zealanders want an alternative to mainstream films.

As long as there is a demand for independent and foreign films, he will continue to bring them to his cinema.

## Sculpture trail winds through the Domain

by Chelsea Mes

A sculpture trail taking shape in Auckland's Domain will be a gift to the city's art lovers, says the trust funding the project.

The Edmiston Trust, set up in 1946 to acquire art works for the benefit of Auckland, funded a series of sculptures to be placed on permanent display in the Domain.

A subcommittee of the Lottery Grants Board is the co-funder.

Trust spokesperson Gary Hays hopes the sculpture trail, featuring some well-known local artists, will attract widespread support from the public.

"Even if they don't understand the sculptures, they'll think, 'Gosh, that's nice,'" says Mr Hays.

Eight sculptures by prominent New Zealand artists will be placed around the Domain.

This is the first project of its kind the trust has funded, as it normally acquires "significant" works for the Auckland Art Gallery and the Maritime Museum.

"This is just another way of presenting art and providing it for the benefit of the people of Auckland," says Mr Hays.

Artist Christine Hellyar's *Auckland Domain Public Water Supply* sculpture was the first to be placed on May 11, with the others following throughout May and June.

The biggest piece, by Tainui artist Fred Graham is 13m high and located behind the museum.

Funding for the sculpture trail has cost \$850,000.

The artists' representative, Jane Sanders, approached the Edmiston Trust for funding for the project.

Miss Sanders, who runs a private gallery in Mt Eden, says getting the sculptures into place has been hard work.

Finding sponsorship was also difficult, considering the project had been in progress since late 1999.

"I was happy to help the artists. It was a great goal and artist initiated," says Miss Sanders.

She says the works will "make dialogue with the Domain. This is the exciting part."

"The City Council are committed to seeing Auckland has more sculptures in the public eye," she says.

Mr Hays says the trustees thought it was a great idea, considering "it's what we've been doing for the past 35-40 years."

The trust supports only Auckland art ventures, with preference given to local artists.

Among works in Auckland the trust has sponsored is the George Rickey sculpture in Khartoum place in the CBD.

It was voted best city sculpture by *Metro* magazine in 2003.

## Sarah sings for success

by Haley Lynch

If you ask singer/songwriter Sarah McCallum about success, she will tell you big things happen at the last minute. But after a quick scan of her achievements, it's clear that it has not happened overnight.

In 1999 she scored 100% in school certificate music, in 2001 gained the highest bursary music mark, and has won two North Shore AMES awards for best musician.

She has won various classical composition awards, written the theme song for North Harbour netball, appeared twice as a vocalist at Christmas in the Park and played support for jazz icon George Benson.

Studying a classical music degree at Auckland University, she has still had time to write and produce her debut album *Goodnight Lonely Girl*.

The modest 20-year-old from Murrays Bay knew early on that music would be her path.

"My father is a musician and my mother teaches music, so it's always been around me and it captivated me from a very young age."

She considers herself a musician with eclectic tastes.

"I listen to country, rock, pop and jazz and study classical music, so I try

to incorporate all of that.

"My influences are people like PJ Harvey, Jeff Buckley, and Bjork, but then there are the Ella Fitzgeralds and the Stravinskys."

Sarah's father and manager Malcom McCallum agrees.

"If you look at Sarah's CD collection, she's got everything."

Sarah attributes much of her success to her musical family.

"Mum and Dad would have supported me in anything."

"If I had have been a brain surgeon, they would have gone and got me some books from the library," she laughs.

Her father sees it differently: "With Sarah, it's always been a matter of not encouraging her."

"We've just kind of let it happen, let our kids find their own level."

Elise Bradley, Sarah's high school music teacher and mentor, says Sarah is an excellent musician.

"Her varying talent has meant she is a fantastic oboist, a skilled composer, song writer and singer."

Would Sarah audition for NZ Idol? "I think it's really about figuring out whether it's the fame or the actual music that is important to you."

"For certain people, it gives them an opportunity that they wouldn't have otherwise had, so that's really cool."

But don't count on seeing Sarah at one of those auditions.



PHOTO: MALCOM MCCALLUM  
**Sarah McCallum**