

David Hofer

Born 1962, Auckland, New Zealand
MFA, Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, 2010

Solo Exhibitions

2012

Wandering fixing (w/ Schaeffer Lemalu), Robert Heald Gallery, Wellington

2011

David Hofer (w/ Frank Hofmann), Robert Heald Gallery, Wellington

David Hofer (w/ Milli Jannides), Hopkinson Cundy, Auckland

2007

Sea of Tranquility, 2007, A Centre for Art, Auckland

Group Exhibitions

2012

Soft Cut, Calder & Lawson Gallery, University of Waikato

2010

In Search Of Last Time, Window (online), The University of Auckland

2009

Picnic on a Frozen River, Project Space B431, Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland

More Jokes with Strangers, A Centre for Art, Auckland

2008

Painting, Window, The University of Auckland

2004

Landscape Group Show, Anna Bibby Gallery, Auckland

2003

Picture, George Fraser Gallery, Auckland

Bibliography

Amery, Mark, 'Hofmann and Hofer,' eyecontact website, 13 September, 2011

Chitham, Karl, 'Soft Cut,' University of Waikato, February/March 2012

Hurrell, John, 'Hofer and Jannides,' eyecontact website, 4 May, 2011

Hurrell, John, 'Reprise?', eyecontact website, 6 August 2009

Frank Hofmann

František Simon Hofmann was born on 27 December 1916 at Prague, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the son of Katerina Blochová and her husband, Rudolf Hofmann, a prosperous Jewish businessman. He was given a camera prior to a trip to Venice with his mother in 1929 and took his first photographs there. At 16 he joined the Prague Photographic Society, whose prevailing aesthetic was informed by a respect for pictorialism and a vital interest in the New Photography then dominating the photographic avant-garde. This pairing of influences characterised Hofmann's work throughout his life.

As an only son he was destined to manage the family business in Pilsen, but in early 1940 he escaped to England after the Nazi occupation. From here he soon emigrated to New Zealand, where he joined cousins who had earlier moved to Christchurch. Beginning as a free-lance photographer, Frank (as he was known in New Zealand) soon secured work at Standish and Preece's studio, where he stayed for a year. During this time he established contact with a group of painters, musicians and writers, including Louise Henderson, Eve and Frederick Page and Antony Alpers.

In search of a more secure position Hofmann first went to Wellington, then to Napier, where he worked for three months at A. B. Hurst's studio. He then moved to Auckland, having been offered work by Clifton Firth, who ran that city's most fashionable studio. He married Helen Lilian Shaw in Auckland on Christmas Eve 1941; the couple made the city their home thereafter. Helen, whom Frank had met in Christchurch, was to become a well-known editor, poet and short-story writer.

Professionally, artistically and culturally the following 15 years were particularly fruitful. Hofmann later acknowledged his debt to Firth as a crucial artistic mentor, and the six years of their professional association laid the foundation of his later business career. In 1947 he joined Colonial Portraits as manager of photographic production. There he met Bill Doherty, with whom in the early 1950s he established the firm Christopher Bede Studios, which for 20 years was to dominate the home-based portrait photography business in New Zealand.

In Auckland the Hofmanns quickly established links with local artists, writers, musicians and architects, including Dennis Knight Turner, Frank Sargeson, Maurice Clare and Vernon Brown. Brown later designed one of his most significant houses for them, and Frank photographed his buildings, leading to further architectural work for publications such as the *Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand*. His Karsh-influenced portraits of Auckland's art community of this period mark a valuable cultural achievement. He was also on the founding editorial panel of the periodical *Here & Now*.

Hofmann had learnt the violin in his youth and became a foundation member of the Auckland String Players. This later developed into the Symphonia of Auckland, of which he was the management committee chairman for a period. The Hofmanns held regular after-concert parties in their home and were hosts to visiting international musicians, many of whom Frank photographed.

By 1942 he had joined the Auckland Camera Club (later the Auckland Photographic Society), then mildly progressive. Although the business and his family occupied his time from the early 1950s, he maintained an active association with the club as exhibitor, judge, writer and officer. In 1959 he had his first solo exhibition at the Photographic Society of New Zealand's convention at Tauranga. The following year he visited Europe for the first time since 1940, returning home via the United States; the stimulation of this trip gave his work a fresh impetus, and led to an exhibition at Auckland's John Leech Gallery in 1963. Hofmann shared the New Photography's preoccupation with photographing familiar objects from unexpected angles and its stress on the abstract nature of the image. He maintained that the photographer should contribute a 'personal perspective to the subject matter' and used high vantage points and carefully geometric composition to achieve this.

Over the following two decades Hofmann's work gradually became less popular, but towards the end of the 1980s there was a revival of interest. In 1987 a retrospective was mounted at Auckland's Aberhart North Gallery, and two years later the National Art Gallery mounted and toured nationally *Object & Style: Photographs from Four Decades 1930s-1960s*. In 1992 a selection of his work featured in the Auckland City Art Gallery's *The 1950s Show*.

Frank Hofmann died in Auckland on 13 April 1989, survived by his two sons. His wife, Helen, had died four years earlier. Like many Jewish people who emigrated to New Zealand after being displaced by the rise of Nazism, Hofmann made an important contribution to the cultural life of his adopted country. As a photographer, he was an influential proponent of the New Photography.

Peter Ireland