

Exhibition launch – 185 Chairs

"I grew up in Christchurch, with Christchurch Cathedral and climbing up its spire," says printmaker Susan Hurrell Fieldes. Now based in Auckland and New York, a trip south in 2014 allowed her an outsider's fresh view of the city's earthquake trauma and reconstruction. "I just haven't been able to forget it," she says.

That visit led to a body of work, which will be launched this Sunday at Geraldine's McAtamney Gallery and Design Store.

Particularly unforgettable to Susan was Peter Majendie's *185 Chairs*, a central-Christchurch public art tribute to the February 2011 quake's victims. Amid the disorder of her old hometown, Majendie's 185 simple empty white chairs in rows struck her deeply.

"I was awestruck by the juxtaposition of [the city's] chaos and the order of the chairs," she says. The installation traversed artistic territory Susan knew. "For years, my work has explored that fine line between beauty and horror." And she knew the power of the empty chair in signifying absence. So, the seed of her own tribute – to Christchurch and to the Majendie work itself – was sown.

Drypoint was her medium. It's a printmaking technique in which lines are etched into plates – Susan uses PET plates – and ink is applied, captured in the incisions and by the adjacent burrs. The plate's topography makes a rich image when a press transfers the ink onto dampened paper. The burrs' fragility limits the print runs.

Susan's *185 Chairs* images are monoprints and the chairs themselves are modest but unique. "They're all different. I wanted to honour the singularity of the people.

"And in each print, as well as the chair, there's an embossed shadow figure, a very basic shape of a person; a male-female



Susan Hurrell Fieldes' *185 Chairs* exhibition opens at McAtamney Gallery and Design Store this weekend. Photo: Submitted.

duality." It's a personal mark she's used for years and here it's "a link between me and the earthquake victims."

Keeping *185 Chairs* a complete work is important to Susan, so she has returned to many of her plates to create additional works for individual sale, but, "I've treated each a little differently – they're monotypes."

There is clear artistic development from the concept of the empty chair to Susan's separate monotypes. Likewise, Majendie's chairs, presently sited at the corner of Christchurch's Madras and Cashel Streets, are weathering, appearing ever-differently in their fast-evolving environment.

"There's always a beginning," says Carolyn. "Susan takes it from that moment and grows it to a new moment. She shows you the shadow of the earthquake – and acknowledges a future."

Susan Hurrell Fieldes' *185 Chairs* opens at McAtamney Gallery and Design Store on Talbot Street at 2pm on Sunday 21. February. Susan will be present to talk about her work. Everyone is welcome. For more information, contact Carolyn on 693 7292 or at carolyn@mcatamneygallery.co.nz.

Jan Finlayson