



**STANDOUT:**  
Christopher Orchard's charcoal drawing *Earth*, part of the *Avarice* exhibition at the Festival Centre.

# Operatic metaphors

**Avarice**  
Artspace, Festival Centre  
Until January 9

**H**AVING survived the Festival Centre's exasperatingly protracted period of reconstruction, Fulvia Mantelli last year renewed her contract as visual arts programming executive. She envisages an "intersection between performance and visual arts cultures" to differentiate Artspace from other public-funded galleries.

Curated by Dianne Longley and Craig Marsden, *Avarice* was accordingly programmed to coincide with Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. From the manipulated found objects of James Parker (*The Trade of Fafner and Fasolt #2*, pictured) to Shaw Hendry's glittering "explosion" of wire-cut polystyrene, the exhibition brings together the diverse responses of nine artists to the four operas.

A metaphor for the disintegration of the dream of Valhalla, Roy Ananda's deconstructed and flattened table is an effective counterpoint to Christine McCormack's engaging oil painting of the Valkyrie Brunnhilde as a buoyantly innocent, blue-eyed child/doll.

Printmakers Longley, Marsden, Parker and Sandra Starkey Simon trace the Wagnerian narrative, frequently incorporating glowing fragments of gold and silver leaf into their interpretations.



Although Olga Sankey has titled her etchings *Shimmer*, *Sparkle* and *Glitter*, they are characteristically elegant and rhythmic evocations of the River Rhine, which symbolically floods the earth at the culmination of *Gotterdammerung*.

Stripped of any embellishment, Christopher Orchard locates his familiar bald-headed protagonists within an equally sparse landscape, which nevertheless conveys the immensity, the supremacy of nature.

For some time Orchard's work has veered towards the monumental, and his charcoal drawings *Earth*, *Wind*, *Fire* and *Water* are congruent with the grand drama of Wagner's *Ring* cycle. Hinting at new directions, they are also the standout works of *Avarice*.

Next to the Festival Centre, along the Riverbank Promenade, seven of Khai Liew's winged *Jeannie* benches, which first appeared in his 2001 *Long Weekend* exhibition, have at last been installed.

The Rietveld-like geometry of Liew's benches is cannily complemented by the looping metal, boulevards of George Popperwell's *Drift* (2002). At a time of renewed controversy over government-funded artworks, Popperwell's playful, text-inscribed *Drift*, in tandem with Liew's stylish public seating, constitute a most successful outcome for this site.

Wendy Walker