



David Rowe's 'Inca Ritual' was produced in Switzerland in 1967. 'Alchemy' on copper, this work measures 40 x 25cm.

Metallic collages with intriguing surfaces

by Chantal Oederlin

If alchemy is the process of changing base metals into noble ones, then it is the right word to qualify the young English artist David Rowe's work now being shown at Galerie Picpus in Montreux.

Showing until June 30, the exhibit is called "Alchemy on copper".

Cutting out small-sized copper sheets, each being incised, delicately furrowed, intricately engraved, eroded by acids and oven baked, David Rowe assembles them like collages to form intriguing and precious surfaces.

Although fragmented, these pictures are very monumental.

They lead us into the mysteries of the stellar universe: galaxies with their central nucleus and trailing spiral arms, ready to swirl; stars, those luminous bodies condensed out of the primeval dust; all these celestial powers oscillate, pulsate,

move into orbit, gravitate and give out a very high intrinsic luminosity and intense life.

Not only the graphism but also the colors, summon evocations of solar systems.

Working only with acids and controlling their chemical reactions on metal, Rowe (who is also a chemist) creates all shades of gold, rich and brilliant, tarnished or gray.

Dark mysterious craters call forth pictures of lunar volcanoes or impacts of meteorites; halos surrounding planets, subtle clouds of bright pink or reddish tinge suggest the refraction of light by atmosphere; clutters of glittering spots as dense as the Milky Way evoke a summer night studded with stars.

The artist's scientific knowledge is put to very good use; it guides his hand and deepens a feeling of wonder inspired by the universe.

There is also another as-

pect in David Rowe's work. The very beautiful material seems fit to adorn some sacred function of some archaic ceremony.

It shows a wide variety of signs and symbols as left by an extinct civilization.

There are remnants of inscriptions, of commemorations as found on a stele.

Steles always stir one's emotions: but their messages travel through time in the same way the light of a burnt out sun keeps coming up to us.

So, in spite of the hermetic language used by the artist, some conjectures about him can be ventured.

He must have a strong feeling for the created universe, for the passage of time, for signs and knowledge to be spared destruction and transmitted to future generations.

And this is where alchemy has to take place: only beauty stands a chance to resist time's insidious or brutal attacks.

Only the beautiful things have managed to survive: the rest have been utterly destroyed.