

Bing Dawe

Bing Dawe: Acts of Enquiry



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Bing Dawe was born in Glenavy, near Oamaru, in 1952. He received a Diploma of Fine Arts (Sculpture) from the University of Canterbury in 1976. In 1989 he became the Programme Coordinator for the Diploma of Craft Design (now Bachelor of Design) at the Christchurch Polytechnic, a position he still holds. In 1995, Dawe received an Arts Excellence Award from Trustbank Canterbury, which enabled him to take seven months' leave from teaching in order to work full time on his sculpture. He was awarded Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Grants in both 1987 and 1990. Dawe has completed many public commissions, including sculptures for the Rotorua Museum of Art and History; the Lotteries Commission Building, Wellington; Auckland Art Gallery and Christchurch's Cathedral Square (relocated to the Christchurch Arts Centre).

Bing Dawe during installation of *The Cockfight*, 1984
Wood and steel
Collection of the Forrester Gallery, Oamaru
(purchased with the assistance of the QEII Arts Council
Contemporary Art Acquisition programme).

Selected Exhibitions

New Sculptures, The Drawings Gallery, Auckland, 1997

Part of the Furniture, McDougall Contemporary Art Annex, Christchurch, 1997

Thinking About Contemporary Art, Centre of Contemporary Art, Christchurch, 1997

Artists' Carpets, Artis Gallery, Auckland, 1996

New Work, Canterbury Gallery, Christchurch, 1996

Drawings: Artist Survey, The Drawings Gallery, Auckland, 1995

Vanitas, CSA Gallery, Christchurch, 1995

Figurines, Canterbury Gallery, 1994

Sister City Celebration, Adelaide, 1993

Chairs, CSA Gallery, 1991

Expanding Spaces, Jonathan Jensen Gallery, Christchurch, 1990

Works on Paper, Forrester Gallery, Oamaru, 1990

Constructed Intimacies (Moët & Chandon touring exhibition), New Zealand, 1989

New Zealand Printmakers, City Gallery, Wellington, 1988

Dilana Gallery Carpets, (touring exhibition), Washington, Chicago, New York, 1988

Barry Cleavin/ Trevor Moffitt/ Bing Dawe, Carnegie Centre, Dunedin, 1987

Sculpture 2: Aspects of Recent New Zealand Art, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1986

Five Christchurch Artists, Centre of Contemporary Art, Hamilton, 1985

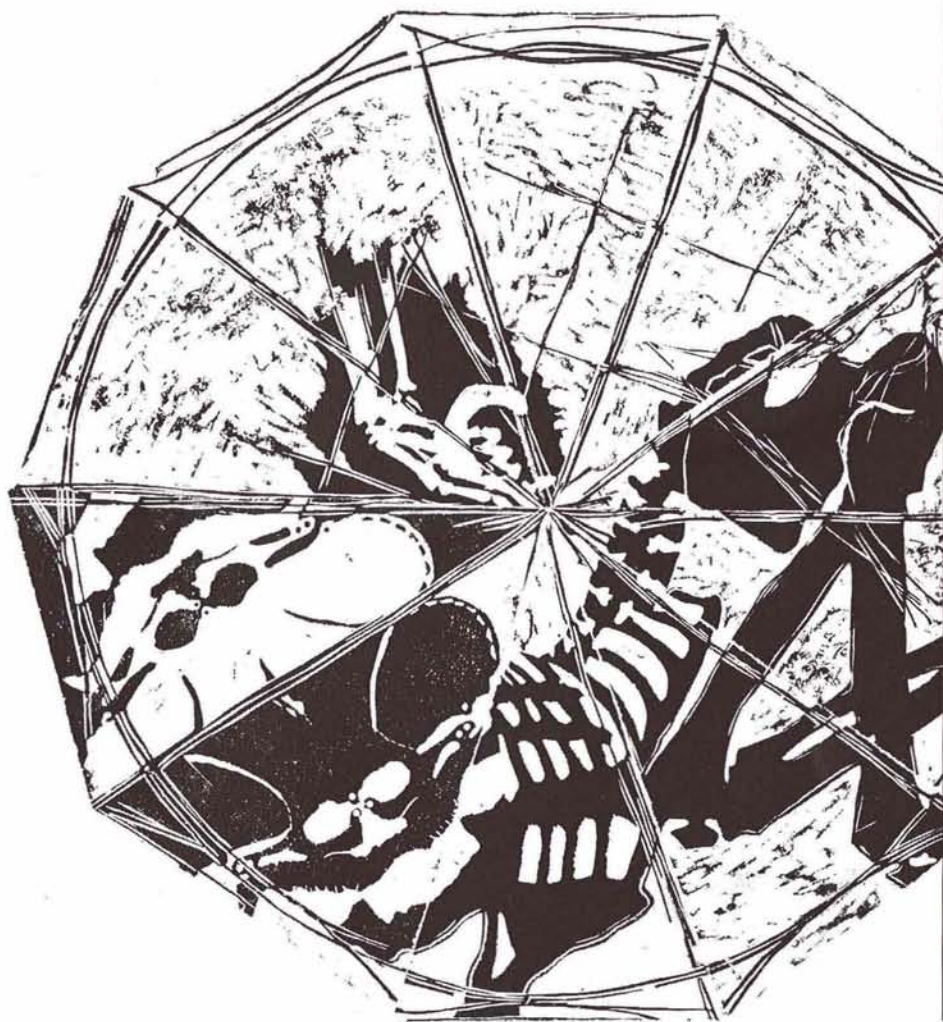
The Cockfight, Brooke Gifford Gallery, Christchurch, 1984

Large Soaring Bird Ensnares, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, 1981

NZ Sculptors at Mildura, QEII Arts Council, (toured New Zealand), 1978-9



Acts of Enquiry



Umbrella Canopy with Figures, 1984
Woodcut
Collection of the Artist

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Edited by Rob Jackaman

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Published on the occasion of the exhibition **Bing Dawe: Acts of Enquiry** 4 June - 8 August 1999.



director's

director's foreword

introduction

It is a special privilege for the Robert McDougall Art Gallery to stage this comprehensive survey exhibition of one of New Zealand's most prominent sculptors, Canterbury resident Bing Dawe.

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of Dawe's practice is his ongoing engagement with current cultural and political issues. Whilst early sculptures considered environmental concerns and the global impact of nuclear technology, his latest cabinet pieces present the river as a metaphor for the struggle between the perpetual cycles of nature, and the fragility and angst of the contemporary human condition.

In addition to his work as an artist, Dawe has also made an important contribution as an art educator. During his time at the Christchurch Polytechnic, where he has been employed as the Programme Co-ordinator of Craft Design since 1989, he has actively encouraged emerging artists to ensure the continued flourishing of art - particularly sculpture - in Canterbury. His numerous public commissions, including the captivating and controversial *Fabulous Races* sculpture in the Christchurch Arts Centre, are a pleasure and a stimulus for all who encounter them.

On behalf of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery, I wish to record our sincere thanks to the many private and public collectors who, very generously, have allowed us to borrow their own greatly valued pieces for **Bing Dawe: Acts of Enquiry**.

The 33 key works, spanning the mid 1970s to the present, are accompanied by an extensive catalogue, which has been generously supported by the Christchurch Polytechnic. We are also very grateful to Rob Jackaman, who kindly donated his time towards the production of this handsome publication.

My congratulations to all involved with this exhibition, which is as significant as it has been long-awaited.

P. Anthony Preston
Director



Front cover image:
The Cockfight, 1984 (detail)
Wood and steel
Collection of the Forrester Gallery, Oamaru
(purchased with the assistance of the QEII Arts Council Contemporary Art Acquisition programme).

Bing Dawe: Acts of Enquiry

An interview between Bing Dawe, Sculptor, and Felicity Milburn, Curator of Contemporary Art, Robert McDougall Art Gallery



From the Days of Oil - Car Part Reclaimed, 1978
Wood and stone
Collection of Christchurch Boys' High School

Felicity Milburn: The earliest works in this exhibition present the object as a kind of artefact. Can you explain how you arrived at this approach?

Bing Dawe: I can't remember exactly how it came about now, but the experience of looking at Maori and Polynesian objects with bindings is close to the source of some of these ideas. At the time there was a display of an archaeological dig in the Canterbury Museum which featured these objects and I began with the idea of invented archaeologies where I could put modern devices such as record turntables and car parts alongside ancient objects. I think I was trying to view these modern devices in the context of some future archaeological dig.

FM: In works like *Tone Arm - A Record to Date* [1] and *From the Days of Oil - Car Part Reclaimed* [3] these modern 'relics' are recycled into primitive machines or devices, often with wing-like structures.

BD: Yes, at that stage I was interested in issues to do with conservation and I was thinking if these objects were of no further use in their current state then could they be recycled?

Many of the works from that time included references to devices for saving energy - a sail which is connected to an ancient drilling device - or to car parts, for example. Environmental issues were high in the public awareness at that time with the oil crisis and 'carless' days, where all drivers were prohibited from using their cars on one day of the week. Each driver selected the day of their choice and displayed a sticker on their windscreen. These were issues I was responding to.

FM: Some of your later work has made references to specific locations such as Birdling's Flat. Were the stones you used at this early stage of any particular variety or from a particular place?

BD: They were from Motunau Beach, up along the coast near the Hurunui mouth, where there are stones of every shape and variety you could imagine. Whatever shape you may need you could find it there. It's a special place. The stones in *Tone Arm - A Record to Date* [1] came from the Waitaki. In this work I was continuing the wearing action on the stones using a mechanical device which required electrical power sourced from the same river. Tenuous connections, I know, but I enjoyed playing with these ideas.

FM: Did these environmental sculptures gradually evolve into the works in which animals, particularly birds, are trapped or threatened?

BD: I did a number of these invented archaeologies and in 1979 I made a piece which involved a pigeon being speared, which shifted me from the artefact works to the 'endangered species' series. Concerns about the environment increasingly became an issue for me, and in particular endangered birds. That time period coincided with the campaign to save the Black Robin. I did a lot of drawing on that subject and of birds being netted and trapped. The speared pigeon (*Bird Ensnared*) came from that, and as I mentioned became the transitional work between the two series. I kept on with the relationship to archaeology, however.

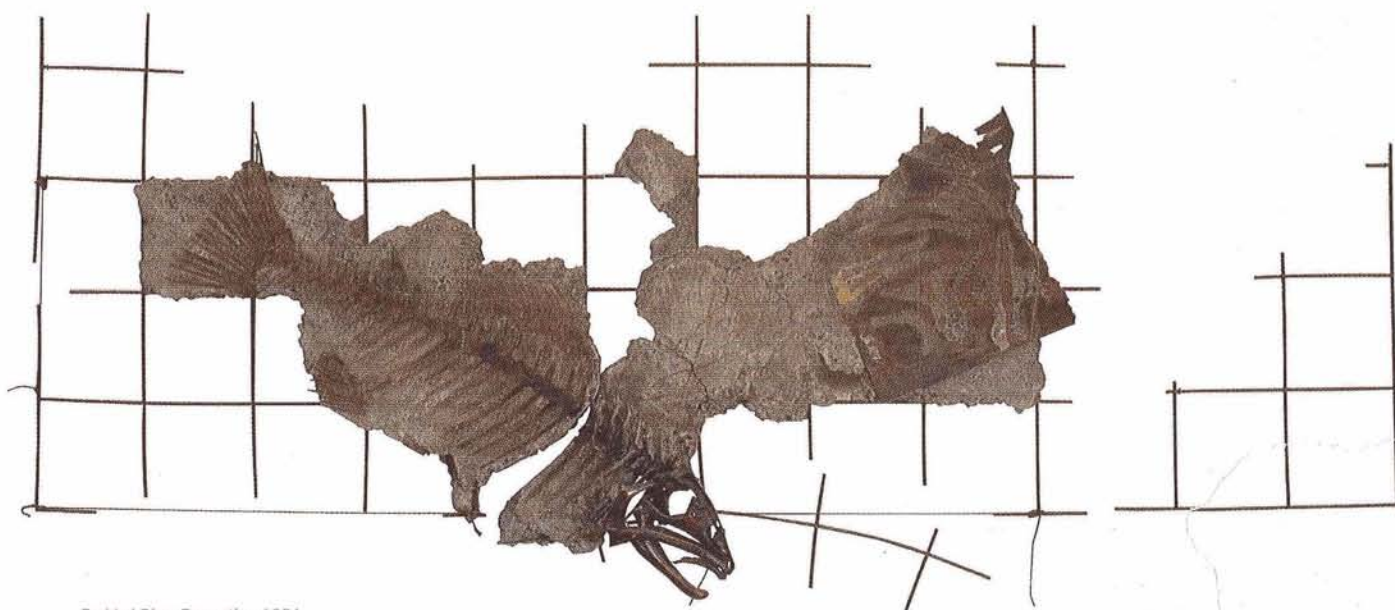
FM: Many of these works include a cage-like wire mesh which presents the sculptures almost as graphic elements.

BD: Yes they do, and a good example is *Braided River Excavation* [7], which played with the idea that you would find animals as well as objects within an archaeological dig. In that sculpture you see a salmon embedded in concrete which is attached to reinforcing steel. The grid of the reinforcing steel matches the way archaeologists grid up a section of land to search for objects. So it was a good device to work with, a grid and within that grid subdivisions and details of the whole. You can see that subdivided section in *Caged Bird - Stripped of its Covering* [4] where the mesh doubles as a cage opened out flat. Flattening these objects became interesting for me too as I was seeing these works as a slice of time and comparing them to archaeological layers.

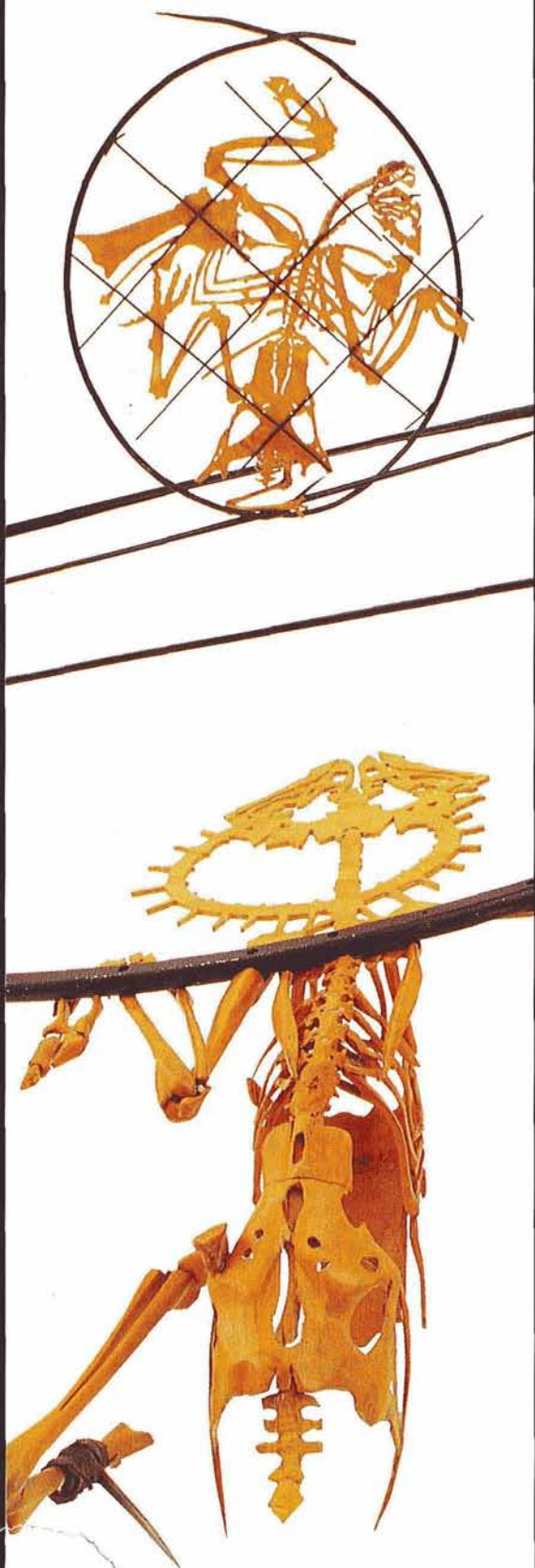
FM: Another environmental issue your work explored was the controversy surrounding the building of the Aramoana aluminium smelter. How did that come into your work and why did you use kite forms to express it?

BD: It started when I met Ralph Hotere, who had recently seen my work and had informed me of the issues surrounding a proposed aluminium smelter at Aramoana. He was to do a television interview about his objections to this and I offered to build a kite to be flown at the same time. The day of the interview was dead calm unfortunately, but it was the first of many of these kites, which were simply elaborate anti-smelter posters. They did lead me, however, into broader issues which I took up in my sculpture.

The first of these works began with a conversation I had with Ralph about my dilemma between being involved in protests about an aluminium smelter and my passion for racing cycles (all made from aluminium). To take this a step further, there's the environmental impact of the smelter on one hand, and the advances and efficiencies this material could have technologically in the conserving of energy on the other. I decided to continue using birds and flight as a metaphor for these thoughts, where the wings could represent both arguments and the carcass the middle ground. Into the wings I integrated tools and bits of machinery (in the case of *Large Soaring Bird (Dead)* [5] aluminium bike parts) which would hinder or help the bird's survival. These metaphors were taken into several works looking at issues both environmental and political. The wishbone of the bird became the compositional centre of each of these works, and the competing sides or arguments radiated out from this.



Braided River Excavation, 1984
Wood, steel and concrete
Collection of Rob Jackaman



The Cockfight, 1984 (detail)
Wood and steel
Collection of the Forrester Gallery, Oamaru
(purchased with the assistance of the QEII Arts Council
Contemporary Art Acquisition programme).

FM: A later work, *Pommel Vault with 1/4 turn/ Equestrian Sculpture* [13] also expresses that idea of two competing sides - this time within one person.

BD: Yes, that work was obviously based on a pommel vault, which historically derives from a military training exercise for horse-soldiers to practise mounting and dismounting. The figure does a quarter turn over the horse. In the work you see the figure which has been lifted out of a half-circle of flat wood leaving a cavity. The result is one figure with a negative shadow, which alludes to the idea of the two sides within you. I used that device in some other works too, that peeling out. The left pulls out the right and so on, both coming from the same body.

FM: An interest in 'military' themes also animates *The Cockfight* [9].

BD: *The Cockfight* [9] was a work which actually came before *Pommel Vault* [13]. *Pommel Vault* [13] was just one of many works which came from this sculpture and provided me with such a rich source of imagery. *The Cockfight* [9] was made in 1984 and was a work which represented a stylised cockfight as a metaphor for global conflict. Nuclear conflict on a global scale raised issues of our ability to annihilate ourselves totally as a species. The work focussed on the management and manipulation involved in warfare. The fact that you cannot use your main weapons without eventually destroying yourself has highlighted in this century the ultimate need to manage conflict. So I made the analogy with cock-fighting and gaming in general. There was a film at the time, *Roller Ball*, which was on the same subject and this reinforced my thinking.

FM: I've always thought of these pieces as being like a chess game.

BD: Yes. In order to see the global I needed to understand the domestic. Of course, cockfighting is such an old activity itself, an artificial 'game' played for stakes which bear no relation to the actual fight. Photographs I had seen of 'sear' marks caused by people's bodies being burned into walls in Hiroshima after the nuclear blast influenced the two-dimensional nature of this work; and in this case the grids resembled the reinforcing steel which was visible in images of the structure of ruined concrete buildings.

FM: *Two Men Gaming - Composition with Figures on a Green Field* [10] is obviously connected to these ideas.

BD: Most definitely. That piece took on the form of a table-tennis game. I remember being quite harshly criticised for that analogy, which had been used previously because of China's involvement in the nuclear arms race and their world status in table tennis. Despite that, I particularly wanted to use the analogy because even though it may have appeared clichéd, it was drawn from a particular experience I had.

I was working at the Islington Freezing Works all of this time and I remember watching two men having a game of table tennis, and everything about their body language and dialogue reinforced the sorts of things I wanted to express. There was a naiveté in the decision, I know, but I was making the observation firsthand and at a domestic level and it was here that I felt I could only honestly work. The subtitle *Composition with Figures on a Green Field* refers to the idea of set warfare, where, not unlike Henry V at Agincourt, you choose your

Pommel Vault with 1/4 Turn / Equestrian Sculpture, 1988
Wood
Collection of John Parkes

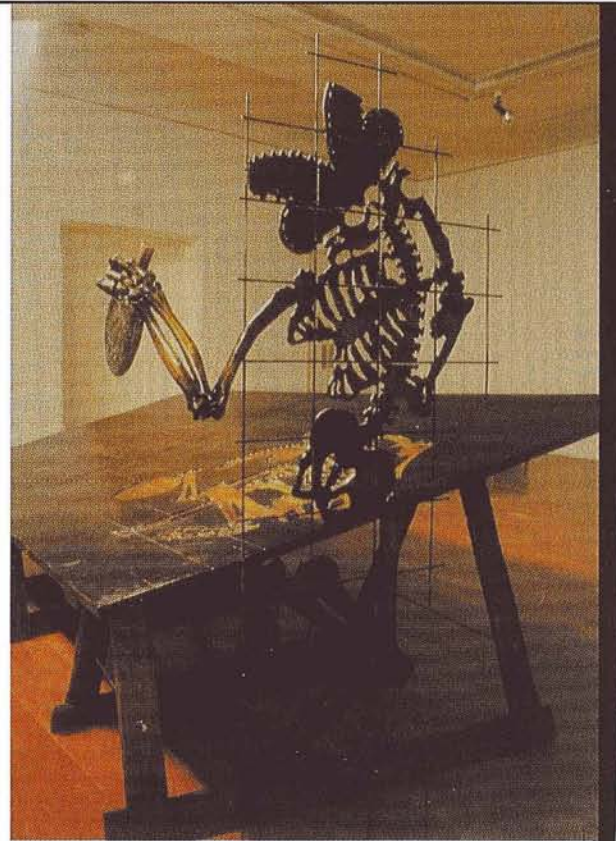


battlefield, nominate its perimeters and away you go. The rectangle which is painted green defines the boundary.

FM: So the link between transferring warfare into some kind of gaming and your experiences at the freezing works is to do with distancing yourself from your actions, making something which is very bloody and has serious consequences into something which appears quite refined and artificial?

BD: That's right, although that realisation came later. I'd read a book by Siegfried Giedion called *Mechanisation Takes Command*, in which he talked about this disassociation with regard to bomber pilots and how they could, or might, justify their actions, so that in the end they were able to open the hatch and drop a load of bombs onto a community without needing to know the consequences.

Giedion put that into the context of the big slaughterhouses in Chicago where the mechanised slaughter of chickens, sheep, pigs and cattle took place. Of course that was something which was pretty close to me. After I'd done the table-tennis piece I produced a series on the freezing works, which started to explore that idea of disassociation. I made a 'dinner set' of prints, each of which dealt with what we on the chain called 'blocks' of work. There were about four or five men to each block, and the killing chain was made up from a series of blocks. By relating the set of prints to a dinner set I was basically saying let's connect this disassociation back up - when you eat that leg of lamb think about where it came from. So when you were mopping up your gravy you would see these images on your plate. I never intended to make the dinner set itself, but the set of prints includes plates, gravy boats, a meat dish and a vegetable tureen.



Two Men Gaming - Composition with Figures on a Green Field, 1986
Wood and steel
Collection of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, purchased 1986



Reintroducing the Fabulous Races - Man with Face in his Chest, 1989
Wood
Collection of the Artist

FM: In other works, such as *Still Keeping his Balance* he used *the Umbrella as a Safety Net* [8], you dealt specifically with the idea of nuclear warfare.

BD: Yes, although I wanted to restate the idea of balance I had used in previous works. The 'umbrella' in that work and later ones referred to the 'nuclear umbrella', which described countries who were part of the nuclear accord and therefore supposedly 'protected' by nuclear weapons. The symbolism of the umbrella was a fairly obvious one, but it is so rich in imagery, and so full of contradiction, that I wanted to use it. In some works it turned into a parasol, a device you could use to protect yourself literally from the sun or metaphorically from nuclear fallout. That work referred to the nuclear testing on Bikini atoll and consisted of an image of a bikini folded out, which alternatively could be read as two people facing, or confronting, each other.

FM: You made a series of prints that was very similar in content to those works. How did that come about?

BD: I accidentally made an image of one of these works - I think I stencilled an image on the floor while I was tarring the surface. This was when I got the idea to ink up these sculptures and print from them. I'd done a print quite a few years before with Denise Copland and when I told her that I thought I might try to print from some of my sculptures she encouraged me with technical advice and the offer to do the printing. That was a particularly productive period for me because of the diversity of the directions I could take and the speed the print offered me.

FM: Would you describe your works as planned and premeditated or more impulsive? Because they seem to me to be part of an ongoing process of enquiry.

BD: Both. The motivating force behind a work and the connections I attempt to make are essentially intuitive. The process I use to understand and to make these connections is the artwork itself. So one doesn't (and I speak for myself here) completely resolve and understand the idea before starting work on it. An old painter friend of mine, Peter Cleverly, said: "I am forever moving into unsafe ground to retain my naivety". I share a similar philosophy in that I believe that inspiration and motivation come from a naïve belief that the ground you are exploring is always new. What you do to retain that naivety is too varied and complex for me to explain, but I know it's always there. As for my work being planned - yes, but at a technical level. One can't avoid that in sculpture.

FM: Visually, the *Fabulous Races* series represents quite a departure from your work before that point. Why did you choose to go in that particular direction?

Portrait of a Grotesque, 1992
Carved wood, tar and acrylic paint
Collection of John and Lynda Matthews, New Plymouth



BD: It came out of a desire to get a definite quality in the work, a sense of simultaneous attraction and repulsion. I'd experienced this as a child looking at children's fairy tale illustrations. The images held my attention and imagination, but I remember being repulsed by them at the same time. It was an intriguing dynamic which I wanted to explore. I read around the subject and stumbled upon early medieval woodcuts of a race of people that were thought by early European travellers to exist in the far East. They were a manifestation of all their fears and superstitions about the unknown. They were collectively known as the 'fabulous races'. The only way I could think of getting into this subject was to select one of the images and sculpt it up to full size. I made the *Man with Face in His Chest* [22] and about six months later the Christchurch City Council invited proposals for a children's sculpture in Cathedral Square and I thought I would submit designs using these figures hoping to achieve a similar quality to what I'd experienced with those early illustrations. That work caused an amazing ruckus in the Square, some people finding it really offensive and ugly. Maybe it struck the same fears and superstitions as those of the early Europeans. However it did create a momentum to explore more. The *Fabulous Races* were a diversion from where I thought I was going, but the ideas they threw up about attraction and repulsion have integrated into my recent work.

FM: Tensions between beauty and ugliness, usefulness and inadequacy or violence and delicacy are apparent in many of your works. Often you'll portray something disturbing or depraved in a very attractive way.

BD: Yes, it's been something that I am very aware of in my work. To get an aesthetic that works for me it needs to be within that area: the subject matter may be grim or unattractive but the work is presented in a palatable way. You get a juxtaposition of those two elements. Francis Bacon's slabs of meat, and images by Goya really appealed to me, because although the imagery was often horrifying the graphic presentation was refined and sometimes quite beautiful. That's what I was unconsciously looking around for when the images of the *Fabulous Races* surfaced. The concept for the *Man Pulling His Face* [21] piece used that idea of attraction and repulsion. Here a man is trying to make his face as ugly as he can but is presented with very finely carved hands and highly polished wood. This work was looking at the concept of opposing forces within the one figure, using similar ideas to the 'endangered species' but centred directly on the human figure. It accomplished a lot of what I was trying to do at the time.

FM: After the *Fabulous Races* you started to use the figure in a less literal way. Why?

BD: The grotesques were very useful in terms of trying out the figure in a traditional stance, but the later works I have done with figures, and parts of figures, are a lot closer to what I'm reaching for. The works which use a figurative element but maintain a component of abstraction are the ones I find most successful. You get an immediate access with the figure, a recognition; but I like the variety of interpretations which are made possible by the abstract, both for the audience looking at them and also for me.



FM: Was it around this time you began working on carpets with Hugh Bannerman?

BD: That was earlier, when I first met Hugh, around 1987 which was about four years before the *Fabulous Races*. I was working around ideas in large scale prints and saw some of Hugh's carpets on display outside his workshop in the Arts Centre. The potential for my woodcuts to translate into this medium was immediately obvious, so I introduced myself and asked him if he would be interested in my images. He was very keen and we have had a long association ever since. Hugh is one of the few businessmen who have a true, ongoing and uncompromising association with the arts. We started with the *May Pole Dance* triptych and went on to many more. The potential for the carpets for a sculptor like myself is exciting because I can literally walk the viewer across the work. I can use dance steps and arrows to turn and direct them and details to bring them close in. I also enjoyed the modern link to the tradition of terrazzo and painted floors. The carpet medium has been slow to catch on in the art community in New Zealand, and large commissions have been few and far between. Some of our larger and more exciting projects remain on the drawing board, but we remain confident they will get done someday.

FM: Like many of your works, the carpets incorporated a different way of looking than we might naturally think of, such as looking down at a river from above or opening out a three-dimensional object like a skull and presenting it in a flattened form. Have you always been interested in exploring unusual viewpoints?

BD: Yes, and of course with the carpets an aerial view was the logical one. The schematic treatment of my previous prints also suited this medium. In the *Black Stones, Waitaki River* series I took this aerial view of the Waitaki River mouth where you can

see the black circles of old Maori hangi sites. In these images the diagonal lines across the circles represent the furrows of the ploughs which even after successive cultivations still turn up these stones.

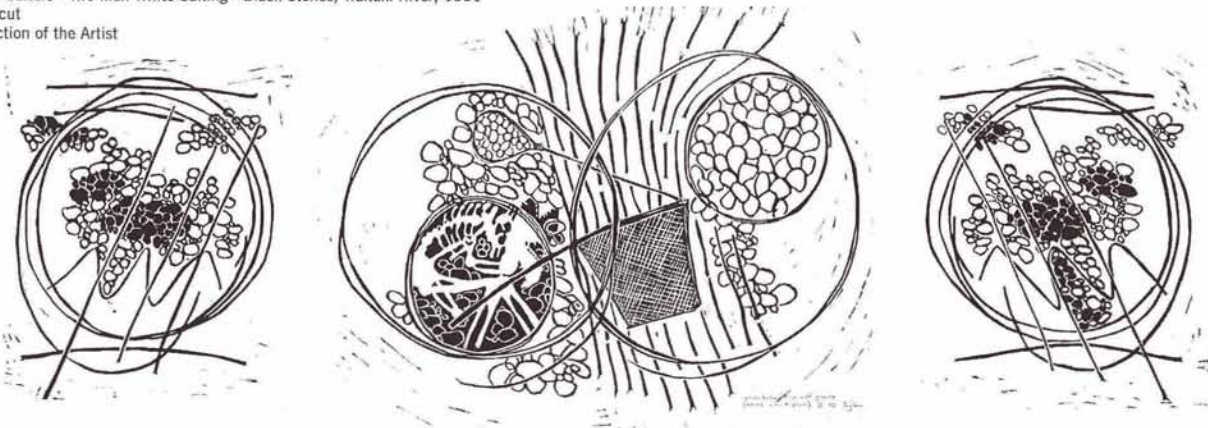
FM: Some reminded me of the aerial photographs of old pa or fortress sites in which you see patterns in the earth which you would never see walking along the ground.

BD: I can remember that when I was 17 or 18, the river that I was used to suddenly stretched in time for me from an historical point of view. There was a civilisation that had lived and fished and cooked on that place years and years ago and I suddenly became aware of that fact. I found that really fascinating because later when I went to Europe that sense of history was all around me, but here it isn't, and to get a feel of history, of precedence, gives for me a sense of security. But it's in such a subtle way. There's a long history of civilisation in this country, but it's so softly imprinted on the land, especially in the South Island. Up North traces of habitation are much more visible: you can see terraced hillsides and such. Here, however, a lot of Maori were nomadic and we don't see much early evidence of them. The Waitaki River mouth was a gathering point, though, and there are still traces to be found.

FM: You mentioned growing up beside the Waitaki. How much of your childhood did you actually spend there?

BD: I was born there, had a brief stay in Dunedin when my father went there for a job, and then went back until I came up to Christchurch to go to University. So the river as a device for representing the idea of continuum functions very well for me. It's a provider, a food source, and the black stones also represent cooking and food. So the river is a continuum, but we put things across it, barriers to stop things - like traps for

White-baiters - Two Men White-baiting - Black Stones, Waitaki River, 1991
Woodcut
Collection of the Artist





May Pole Dance - Design for a Decorated Covering (1-3), 1988
Tufted wool carpet
Collection of Dilana Rugs

eels - and at that point the continuum is breached and you are witnessing a slice in time. That idea appealed to me because much of my early work dealt with archaeological elements and I began to use the dead eel which recurs throughout the cabinet pieces as a symbol for that snapshot of time.

FM: And eels, living for such a long time, make a good analogy for our own life spans?

BD: Exactly. I have also used lampreys, which interested me because they are very ancient creatures and attach themselves to other species to live. I was out fishing once, and it was a Nor'west night, quite dark, and I was up to my knees in water. As I stepped out of the water I somehow kicked a fish up onto the riverbank. I went back into the water and looked down and it was a run of lamprey, thousands and thousands of them - quite a rare sight. So I put my hands down in the water and felt them going past me, just a solid wall of fish, and it was a strange and somewhat scary thing, and it has stuck with me - particularly not knowing until quite a lot later that they weren't just strange-looking eels, as I initially thought. That feeling of surprise and wonder is behind some of the recent works I have made. In one, an upside-down figure puts his head into the water to observe. Another, in *Figure with Lamprey* [29], puts his hand into the water and then contorts his body into a position emulating the fish. By using that motif, I'm suggesting that this natural phenomenon, a life cycle, has become something we need to contort ourselves to see. In embracing the latest technologies have we distanced ourselves from the natural cycles of life?

The issues that are at the heart of these works - the grotesques and, in hindsight, the fabulous races - are the seemingly bizarre contortions we put ourselves through to live on this planet; to understand simple natural laws and cycles, urges and needs. As I was investigating with the *Freezing Works* [33] series, we put barriers between ourselves and these things and so distance ourselves from what is natural and needed. These barriers may be our way of coping with things such as death and grief, stresses and even our own cruelty; but, as I've discovered, they distort the real.

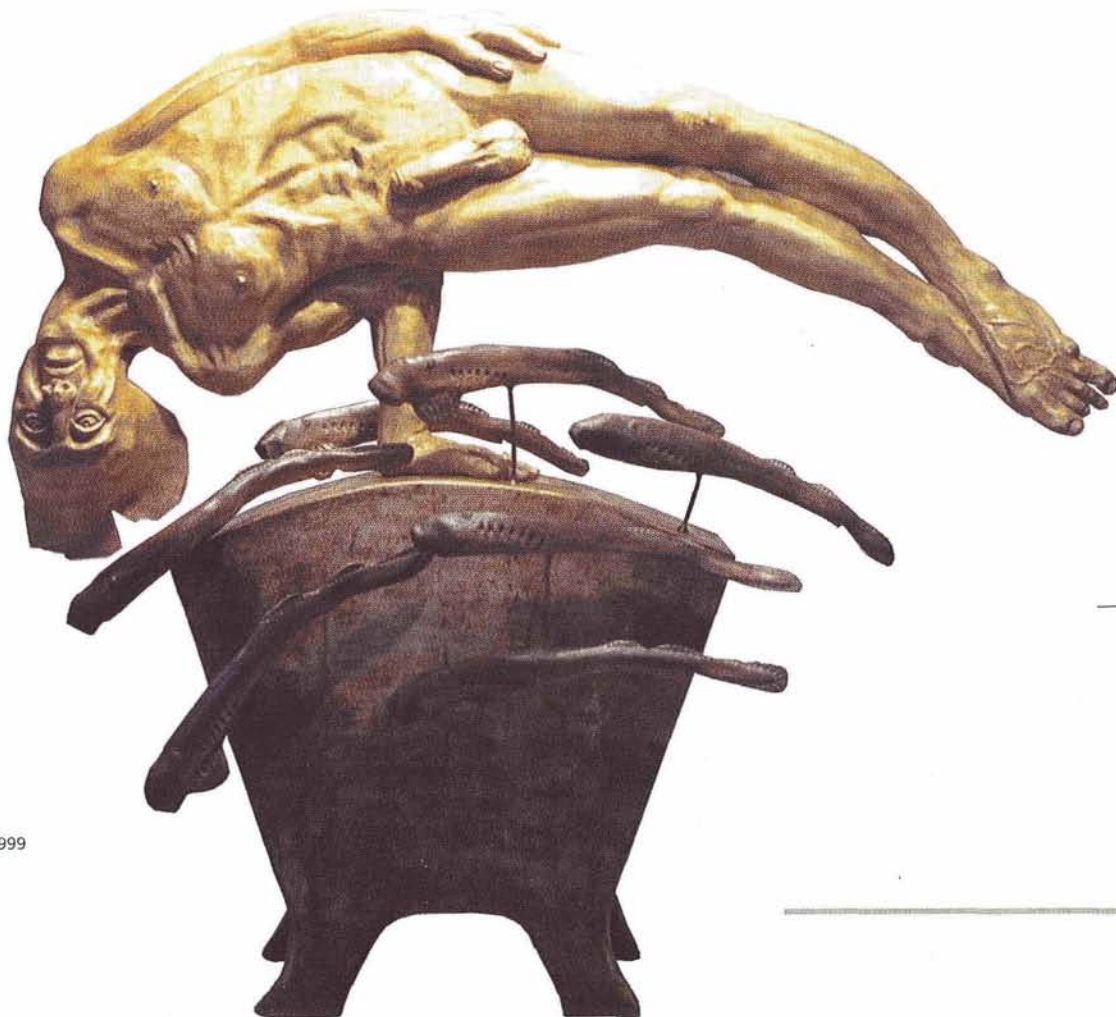


Figure with Lamprey, 1999
Wood
Private Collection



Apportion - Eels with Trap, 1997 (detail)
Wood
Collection of University of Canterbury Library

FM: I notice that some of your prints from this 'river' series incorporate writing. Why did you decide to add words to these images?

BD: I've particularly used pieces of poetry by Rob Jackaman and John Newton, but I'm often inspired by things I've read. Rob Jackaman did a series of works where he spoke of a palimpsest, which involves a layering or juxtaposition of text on a surface on which you write or draw again. He was using that idea in the context of Oamaru, where the white stone walls are covered with posters, then plastered over and covered up. He talked about palimpsests as layers of time, a concept which really appealed to me. His imagery was wonderful too because he talked about his life in Britain before he came out here, and then his life in New Zealand and he layered the incidents from both lives over the top of each other. I was really struck by that. John Newton's poetry also has that quality. I enjoy literature: I envy writers sometimes, the abstractness of it - they appear to have a fluency and speed which is difficult in sculpture.

I've become very interested in a New Zealand writer, Owen Marshall. I've always liked short stories. It's a strange comparison, but they seem to fit the size of a sculpture. Owen Marshall comes up with imagery which is just fantastic, so unexpected, but also really accessible. He captures particular moments in time. He also has the ability to combine the beauty of the prose with strong, often unpleasant, images.

That seems to me to be a New Zealand thing - a New Zealand aesthetic maybe. Even our landscape is like that: although it may be beautiful to look at, it's lonely - there aren't many people in it and its history is raw and violent. The way that Marshall packages these images in such an accessible manner has given me more confidence in the things I'm doing now, where I feel I need some sort of accessibility to combine with the abstract qualities. It doesn't have to be the figure, but the figure works at the present time.

FM: In your recent cabinet pieces, that level of accessibility also comes from using a shape people can easily make associations with on a domestic level, because there are obvious links to objects people grew up with such as meat safes and glory boxes.

BD: Yes, it's a shape that came out of a series of experimental works I did based on the glory box idea. In my recent work the curve of the cabinet lid becomes the curve of the earth. The cupboard represents a storage resource which relates to the early works and their reference to the earth as our resource. This idea was repeated alluding to a basket form, which reveals it as something you would gather and store things in. Even when the cabinets are open there is a sense that they once contained something, or soon will. In other works the imagery reflects memories of fishing at Birdling's Flat, where the cabinet becomes like a simplified landscape and the gutted eels lie upon it. The dead eel represents a point in time, and the open cavity of the eel repeats the shape of the cabinet. Both are now empty but were once full of life or nourishment.

Man with Flounder turns on a simple image inspired by my father. We'd gone out fishing and he'd pulled his boat up, turned it upside down and just put a couple of flounder on top. In repeating this simple image I tried to give the interior of that cabinet a boat-like feel. In *Apportion - Eels with Trap* [26], I used a pile of dead eels after seeing an old photograph

of a Maori man in front of ten piles of eels that he had divided up between families. This alludes to the current return of lands and fishing rights to Maori. Sometimes I have also used stylised eel traps within the cabinets. As I mentioned before, the traps are the point on the continuum (the river) where I take a cross section of time. The reference to the grid (in the case of traps, mesh or weaves) is still there from the earlier 'endangered species' works.

FM: I spent most of my childhood trying to avoid eels. They are beautifully sleek though.

BD: (Laughs) That's what makes it so interesting working with eels, because everybody you meet has a story about them. And it's always that love/hate thing - it's almost like the eel is our serpent. We take our kids down to a cottage we hire in Fairlie which has a creek out the back. My son asked if I thought there would be any eels in there and I said, "Well, let's find out". So we went out one night and dropped some bits of meat in there, and sure enough after a while this huge eel came out. So the next night we took the rod and line and baited it and threw extra meat around it, and of course the eel went to the pieces without the hook first, and my son was just absolutely scared out of his wits as this eel was getting closer and closer to his hook. When it hit the hook I gave him the rod and promptly he handed it straight back to me. It broke the line in the end, it was so big. He was just so terrified, but attracted enough to want to go out again the next night and every night after that. Everything I can remember about eels has always been something like that.

FM: The unanswered questions that the eels symbolise are something you have touched on in your latest work.

BD: Yes, my latest piece consists of a figure who spreads open the gut cavity of an eel with his fingers and stares intently in. The figure attempts, quite crudely, to solve a mystery: where do they go? How do they know? Maybe the answer is in here somewhere...

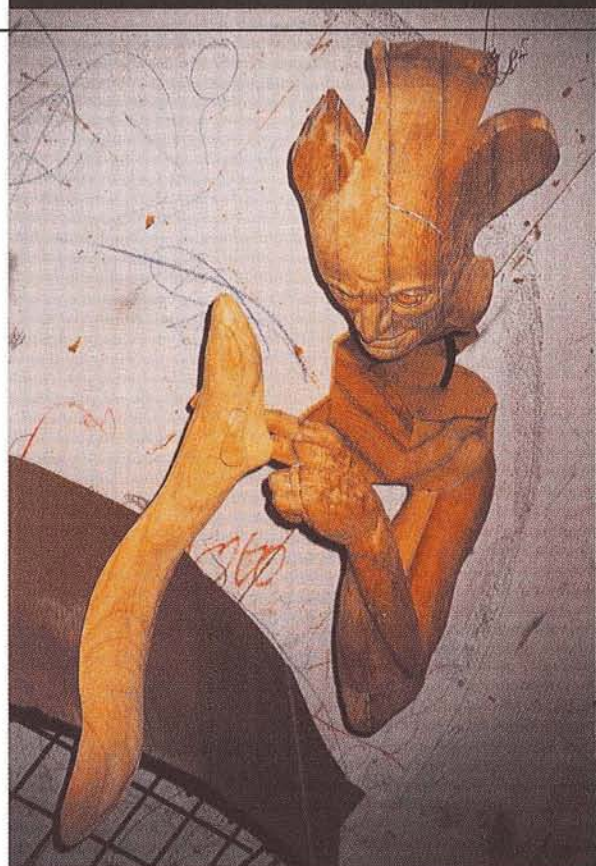


Figure with Eel, 1999 (in progress)
Wood
Collection of the Artist

Apportion - Eels with Trap, 1997 (detail)
Wood
Collection of University of Canterbury Library



Fluent Wood!

Fluent Wood: A Cabinet by Bing Dawe

By Justin Paton



Eel - Birdling's Flat - Black Stones Waitaki River, 1997 (detail)
Wood
Collection of the Artist

1.

It was huge and dented and black, the tin trunk kept in the far corner of the far room of my grandparents' house, and as kids we would return to it with the expectant awe of salvagers prising open a rusted, long-sunk safe. Whenever memory of its contents faded from sharpness my sisters and cousins and I would drag it from the wall where it was pushed, heave the lid up, and peer in at what we came from. Ancient diaries in a fading hand; a chocolate box full of browned and stiffly posed photographs, some with that curious scalloped border favoured in the 'forties; a musty World War I shot pouch whose corners we optimistically searched, every time, for some unfound nugget of ammunition. These trophies we grasped and passed on with odd solemnity, as if in an unusually momentous version of that game in which you must memorise every object on a tray. But strangest was this ritual's effect on the trunk itself when it was shut and pushed into its corner. Like a magician's infinity box, the trunk was now larger inside than out - its lid a trapdoor opening onto giddy heights, lives plummeting into the past along infinitely receding sightlines. In its magic radius we felt one thing certainly: alive in time.

2.

Some version of this story belongs to anyone who has lifted the lid on a store of old photos or letters or trinkets. That awed, treasure-chest feeling is not rare, but it is focussed with rare intensity in this small black box of Bing Dawe's, this cabinet of curiosity.

Will "cabinet" serve as a description? It seems safe to call it a piece of sculpture, yet its medieval air, its aura of artisan labour, its glow of ritual purpose - all of these put it ill-at-ease in the chill and hush of a contemporary art gallery. Though made in 1997, Dawe's cabinet feels as though it might have

existed for centuries, and seeing it amidst white walls and air-conditioning ducts is disorienting, like hearing old English spoken on a teeming city street. At once a smoke-house, a coffin, a meat-safe, a shelter, a glory box, a reliquary, a wonder cabinet, a time capsule, a *vanitas*, and a tabernacle, Dawe's box is, above all, an artifact that promises *secrets*. That promise is plain even if its exact symbolism remains mysterious - *especially* if it remains mysterious. Some sacrifice has taken place. Some gift is being tendered. You are being invited to answer in kind.

Some clues. It is called *Eel - Birdling's Flat - Black Stones - Waitaki River* [27], a title that grounds the object lightly in two known South Island landscapes - or, more accurately, waterscapes. Sealing the box is a skin of linen whose surface, densely black, seems made by bottling night and rubbing it into the surface. Viewed from the front the cabinet has a ground-gripping sturdiness, braced there on short legs like a chesty Sumo wrestler. The box is functional enough, yet everything about it seems to draw us away from function towards metaphor. There's the way its silhouette buckles up and outward, as if to contain some pent force. There's the way it toys with scale, so that you're pulled down into a close crouch like an adult revisiting some locker of childhood memory (I first saw the cabinet on the floor of Dawe's home).

And first and last there is the eel. Out of its element and ready for the knife, served up on the curve of the cabinet like some pagan offering, it's carved in a startling likeness of fishy strangeness: dead eyes, silvered belly. The limp overhang of its tail is a grace note that grimly evokes the slap of wet flesh on wood. Peer harder at the surface it rests on and you see faint traces of stones: a ghostly memory of the river it swam through, and perhaps of those "blind channels" down which

eelers divert migrating eels. Its gut is pierced and held open by a glinting steel gaff, which is also the latch for the doors. The summons to the hand is irresistible. You want to smooth a finger through that tallowy wound, as surely as Christ's wound in Caravaggio's famous painting invites Thomas's touch. But that impulse is soon overwhelmed by one even more powerful: to try the latch.

3.

With a discreet click the doors open. The cupboard is bare but feels hushed, expectant, an effect heightened by its likeness to a tiny stage awaiting its cast. Dawe has worked the kauri until it carries the lovely patina of things well used, the rubbed-in lustre of time-worn school desks. Brighter inside than out, the box seems to carry its own internal candlelight. Gouged through its inner walls are lines of force. At first these look like floorboards, butted together in a brickwork pattern, but the odd sense of torsion and speed in the lines - the way they surge up from left to right - keeps that possibility at bay. What is happening?

A set of rhymes is revealing itself. Just as the curve of the eel chimes with the curve of the cabinet, so its gaping stomach echoes the opened box. We speak of furniture in anthropomorphic ways (a "chest" of drawers, say, or a bed's "head") and for Dawe such puns aren't fortuitous. Thus that linen surface becomes a second skin, while the chamber starts to press on the mind as a bodily space, a ribbed interior held open to our gaze. Most of all, the surging forms inside the cabinet unmistakably suggest stylised images of the creature beached above, shadow versions its teeming offspring. Rhyming the grain of the wood with the flow of fish and rivers, Dawe intimates an awesome vitality. We peer into the cabinet at this abundance, as if through some strange, rustic periscope.

The box encloses a potent paradox. It's as though Dawe wants to catch and commemorate the one thing that won't be caught: the full flood of life in time, which is inscribed in the very grain of the kauri. In the fluent wood.

4.

"My life, a figment of a landscape" wrote Yasunari Kawabata. This faith in the necessary merging of self and place is the emotional keynote of Dawe's recent sculpture. At the beating heart of this cabinet is an insistence that landscapes are composed not just of static matter, "out there", but also moments of experience which are stored, "in here", as memories - like treasures in an old trunk, or food preserved in one of the wood and wire-mesh meat safes so common in Dawe's rural youth. Dawe recalls eeling at night as a boy from the banks of the Waitaki river with torchlight, buckets and gaffs; or, as an adult, putting his hand into the river, and feeling hundreds of lamprey shoaling past - a sensation he bodily "remembers" while hand-polishing the wood.

Any great body of water has its own mysterious interior (human bodies and bodies of water: another rhyme). Dawe cherishes "that uncanny feeling of staring out over a sheet of still water, and there being something in there lurking around", but he has no wish merely to illustrate that feeling. Instead he brings it home to us as a sculptor must, sensuously, by inverting the traditional priority of sight over touch. When the cabinet is closed it seems to hold its inner forces as a secret sensed but not seen: a tingling beneath the surface. An act of blind faith is implied. But because the cabinet can be laid open, we're invited to fathom that secret *bodily* - and fathom is a word whose root sense is "outstretched arms". Dawe's sculpture demands the laying on of hands.



Eel - Birdling's Flat - Black Stones
Waitaki River, 1997
Wood
Collection of the Artist



5.

An obvious objection: "But it looks like furniture."

So it does, and the likeness is pointed. Despite occasional border-raids between the two territories, the modern barrier between the fine and the practical arts remains a stubborn feature of the late twentieth - century cultural landscape. Dawe knocks his own distinctive hole through that barrier and thus expands his art's moral range. Craft returns art to a sociable space, while art furnishes craft with *metaphoric* richness.

This cabinet joins Dawe's prints and rugs and ceramics as part of a larger argument to the effect that we should reside in art, day by day, rather than paying it conscience visits in the maximum-security environment of the contemporary museum. Inspired but not deluded by the holistic dreams of William Morris's Arts and Crafts movement, Dawe's practice runs against the grain of an art world still suspicious of things elegantly crafted. The patience and no-fuss devotion with which his cabinet is built is a sure token of respect for his viewers: *Yours sincerely.*

A cynical line of thought might accuse Dawe of archaic nostalgia or crafty sentimentality, as if the cabinet were merely rusticated furniture with mythic garnish. Dawe never lets you off the hook so easily, however. In his sprung and hovering contraptions of the 'eighties there was always a sense of coiled menace, of a danger that might lash back at onlookers at any moment (not for nothing did a friend dub him "Bing Daunting"). The same unease stirs in this new cabinet, in which Dawe may be hinting darkly that art is a kind of trap, a blind channel that we have to navigate before returning to the world with renewed appetite. (To see the point driven home twice as savagely, look at *Apportion* [26] or *Mortuary Chest* [25] - works in which the barbs cut both ways and you are the prey.)

6.

The eel stands for harvest, vast time, the miracle of regeneration, the whole drama of journeys and returns.

"Everybody has a story about the eel", Dawe says. "It's our serpent, I suppose." His own story, disclosed in this cabinet, finds itself in such rich contemporary company as Chris Booth's rata and bronze work *Tuna (Eel)*, Warren Viscoe's wonderful sculptures from the *Water Series*, Graham Swift's novel *Waterland* and poet Seamus Heaney's "A Lough Neagh Sequence". Like Heaney's, Dawe's guiding emotions are fierce compassion and bedrock respect for the strangeness and radical otherness of what we call Nature. Is there a richer accompaniment for Dawe's cabinet than "The Return", Heaney's evocation of the eel's return through vast reaches of ocean to spawn and die deep in its birthplace?

... silent, wakeless,
a wisp, a wick that is
its own taper and light
through the weltering dark.
Where she's lost once she lays
ten thousand feet down in
her origins. The current
carries slicks of orphaned spawn.

Dawe's metaphor uncoils gracefully. *Eel - Birdling's Flat - Black Stones Waitaki River* [27] describes the epic and fragile cycle of the eels' migration from life to death to life again. This is also, you see, the cycle of the artist's life, since the distance between the stones of the Waitaki River and the eels of Birdling's Flat is also the distance between Dawe's North Otago boyhood and his adult life in Canterbury. And because the eel is presented in two forms - schematically, inside the cabinet, and realistically rendered on top - the whole work becomes a homage to the transformative cycle by which a sculptor arouses bodies and metaphors from mere stuff (a nice, added irony is that the wood is recycled kauri).

So the cabinet is both a self-portrait and the portrait of a place, a confluence of natural and personal histories; and in it there is room for any onlooker's histories too. What once appeared empty now seethes with meanings. The box has become a conduit, a channel, a tributary. And a tribute.

Dramas of Disequilibrium

By Cassandra Fusco

Towards an introduction

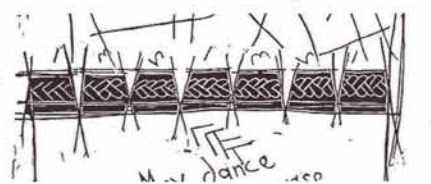
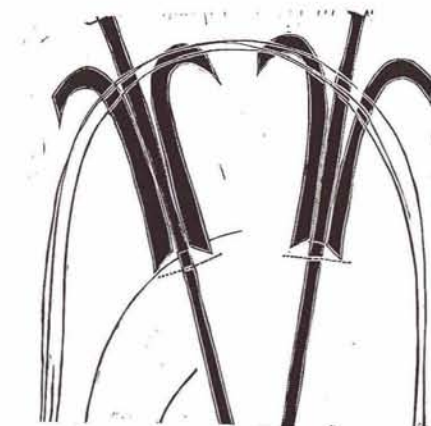
Born in Glenavy, near Oamaru in 1952, Brian (Bing) Dawe graduated from the School of Fine Arts at the University of Canterbury in 1975. Together with his wife, Shona, and their children, Madeline and Oliver, Bing lives and works in Christchurch, where he practises and teaches sculpture at Christchurch Polytechnic.

The sculpture of Bing Dawe is shaped as much by private and public concerns as it is by his circumstance and location. Aspects of those concerns and the audiences Dawe seeks to engage are reflected in the pieces selected for this exhibition. Through a discussion of these, and some critical responses to Dawe's work in general, this essay considers persistent themes and recurring motifs, exploring their significance and potential to engage us. However, existing in a critico-aesthetic mode, the essay is, by definition, incomplete, since talking or writing about sculpture is not enough. The sculpture itself invites, indeed requires, 360° experience. It is a presence and exists in physical space. If effective, it can engage us physically, emotionally and intellectually in a series of relational considerations and enquiries. But how to engage with and 'read' the grammar and significance of sculpture depends on the forms it takes. Accordingly, this essay examines Dawe's evolving sculptural language and logic, and observes how certain components (such as his use of the double circle motif and figurative elements) are repeatedly used to communicate the artist's focus and concerns. These might be paraphrased as searches for solutions, or designs for (correcting) disequilibrium.

In conversation Dawe says that at an early stage in his career he was drawn to the work of Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (1891-1915), a sculptor who, within his short life, produced works of searching self-awareness.¹ Dawe also lists among his influences several New Zealand artists including Ralph Hotere, Leo Bensemann, Tony Fomison, Trevor Moffitt, Doris Lusk and Barry Cleavin. "Whilst their work represents very different aesthetics, they share an empathy akin to the kind of questioning raised by Greg Magee's play, *Foreskin's Lament*, and other writers such as Owen Marshall and Rob Jackaman." Dawe adds,

First and foremost these people are self-critical individuals. They are exemplars. I am wary of the shrines being erected to several of our artists; and I am uncomfortable with galleries spending an entire year's budget to purchase a single item (old or new). My attitude is that whatever we produce belongs to us; and provided we are secure in ourselves, any work (past or contemporary) will be an expression of enquiry, rather than a tradeable commodity. And this applies to my own work. I make sculptures because I am looking for solutions. I believe that sculpture, through the processes and materials, can become a source of understanding and transformation. To have someone recognise or share that enquiry is a bonus; that's the common ground where our circles can overlap.

While Dawe's comments indicate a rich source of influences, his work, which has been described as "testy", "dark" and "difficult", veers towards a critical rather than inspirational aesthetic, one that scrutinises the socio-political-cultural constructions that influence





The Cockfight, 1984 (detail)

Woodcut

Collection of the Forrester Gallery, Oamaru (purchased with the assistance of the QEII Arts Council Contemporary Art Acquisition programme).

Past

In the past, whether monumental or miniature, votive or commemorative, sculpture has tended to be an emblem of collective memory, using the human figure to represent power and presence with images of the victors and the vanquished; of life and death. It has tended to be public and culture-specific: the sphinx, the Nike, kings, queens and ancestors. Here in New Zealand, in the colonial context, sculpture generally copied Old World trends with commemorative public statues of civic dignitaries, like Moorhouse and Rolleston, and the famous, such as Queen Victoria and Robert Falcon Scott.

However, after two World Wars, and the Cold War, and successive arenas of ongoing conflict, some sculptors openly expressed their anxiety over the human condition, framing their concerns through depictions of the human form as troubled, contorted and vulnerable. Sculptors such as Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945), Ossip Zadkine (1890-1967) and Mari Andriessen (1897-1979) made works that openly questioned, indeed contested, war and human sacrifice. The figurative element in their work was an impassioned opposition to the cult of the omnipotent. In a pieta form, Kollwitz's small, beleaguered *Mother and Child* (1917)² expressed the emotion of intimate loss whereas Andriessen's large *Concentration Camp Victims* (1946-9) (Volkspark, Enschede) engaged viewers almost calmly in an examination of collective responsibility. The monumental Cubist-like figure in Zadkine's *The Destroyed City* (1952-3) (sited in Rotterdam) appeared to rail against the destruction of a large part of the city in a single air raid (on the night of 14 May 1940) which led within hours to the surrender of Holland. Totally different in style and scale, such works were designed not simply to commemorate but to disturb and to question the horror and inhumanity of mechanised war.

Since 1945, building upon the freedom of expression asserted by individuals and movements such as the Surrealist and Constructivist, sculpture, that most conservative of the arts, has undergone radical transformation. Consequently, post-1950s Modernist sculptural forms and vocabularies questioned more openly than before the parameters of freedom and constraint, and notions of 'progress'. In turn, exponents of Pop Art and Nouveau Réalisme challenged these Modernist sculptors so that by the 1960s it was clear that not only sculpture but also its audiences were changing.

In the wake of World War II, 'official', or High Art prescriptions, of subject and materials were replaced by a multiplicity of forms; and recurring themes included the means and materials of mass-production as well as its socio-environmental effects. Now, as sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi says, "there is hardly anything which has not been touched in the name of avant-gardism: a ton of horse-manure, rotting margarine, 10 tonnes of newspaper with a piano on top, buildings wrapped in cloth. Anything goes."³ What Paolozzi recognises is the challenge facing the sculptor (and indeed all artists) of how to respond to this new freedom of uncertainty.

Present

The body of Dawe's work exhibited here begins and ends with an examination, symbolic and actual, of the braided Waitaki and its rich hapua resources. In many of these works (as well as in Dawe's enormous canvas prints and sculpted carpets) the artist uses a double circle, drawing our attention to the need for balance and accommodation of resources in relation to the cycles of life. The double circle also acknowledges and celebrates differences, as represented in his *Fabulous Races*. Such diverse representations (skeletons and grotesques) demonstrate not only the body's mutability and vulnerability in relation to socio-political pressures, but also something of Bing Dawe's response to these - a search for solutions.

Dawe has been described as a "protest artist,"⁴ "preoccupied with violence," "brilliant and disturbing,"⁵ and his work has been summarised as "the brilliant balancing of grace with danger,"⁶ "unexpected, unusual and challenging,"⁷ "fabulously imaginative,"⁸ and nostalgic. Thus, to date, popular critical response has found Dawe's sculptural

language to be inflected with enquiry and memory. For some the word 'nostalgia' connotes a yearning for an illusionary ideal or lost essence. Closer to the mark, however, is to recognise that nostalgia, from its Greek root *nostos*, refers to a return home. If Dawe's work is nostalgic, it is because it 'looks back' purposively - in order to question prevailing patterns and values, and to consider possibilities thwarted by the polarities of Left and Right.

If we glance at any Dawe piece from the '80s or '90s, whether in two or three dimensions, perhaps the only common attribute we find is a preoccupation with balance, or rather, imbalance. In common, the 'invented archaeology' pieces, the 'endangered species', the 'grotesques' and the 'River' works (particularly in their figurative aspects) share a tension of interior and exterior sense of space. The works question the position of the self in relation to society. Standing or soaring, leaping or vaulting, these vertiginous entities are invariably fragmented. But whether sculpted in the lean language of steel, in wood and polishes, or in bronze, they draw us into dialogues that investigate the impact and possible causes of individual (inner) fragmentation and its relationship to wider patterns and pressures.

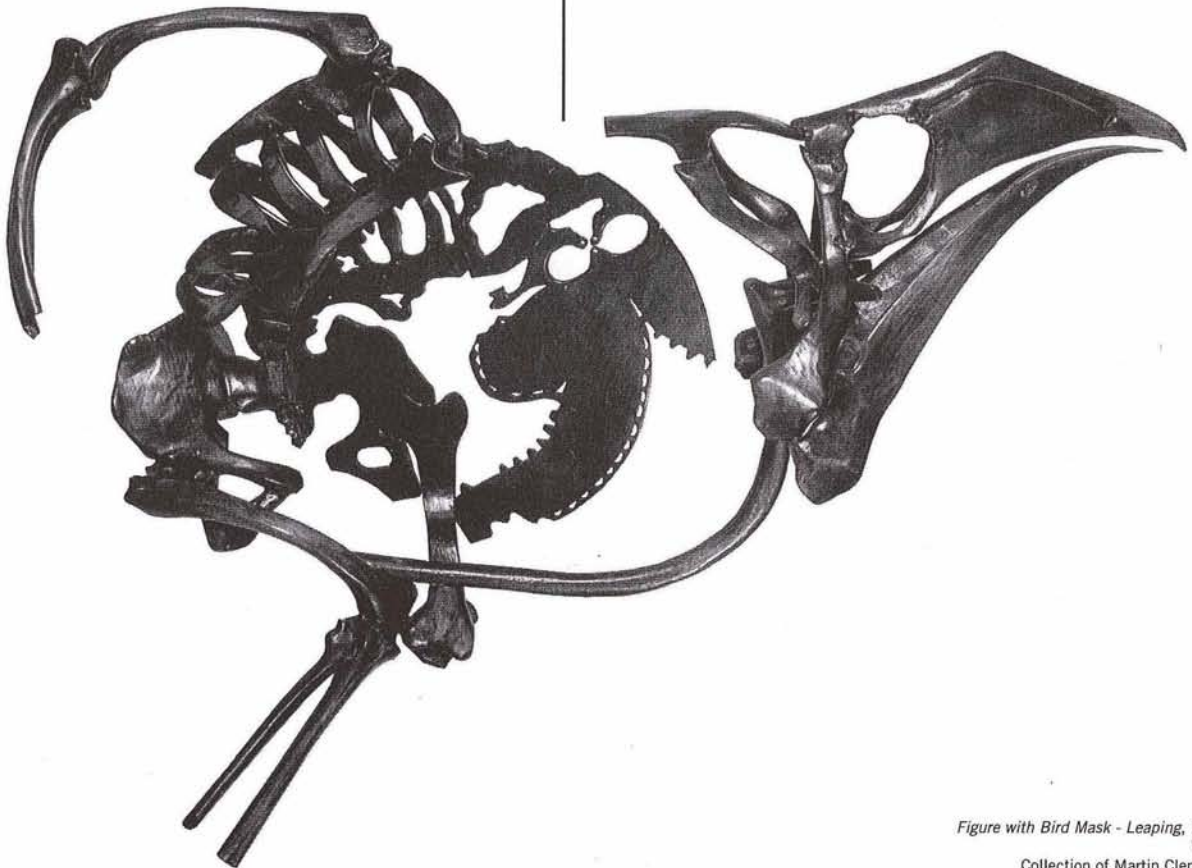


Figure with Bird Mask - Leaping, 1989
Wood
Collection of Martin Clements

Commission for MED (now Southpower), 1987
Ceramic



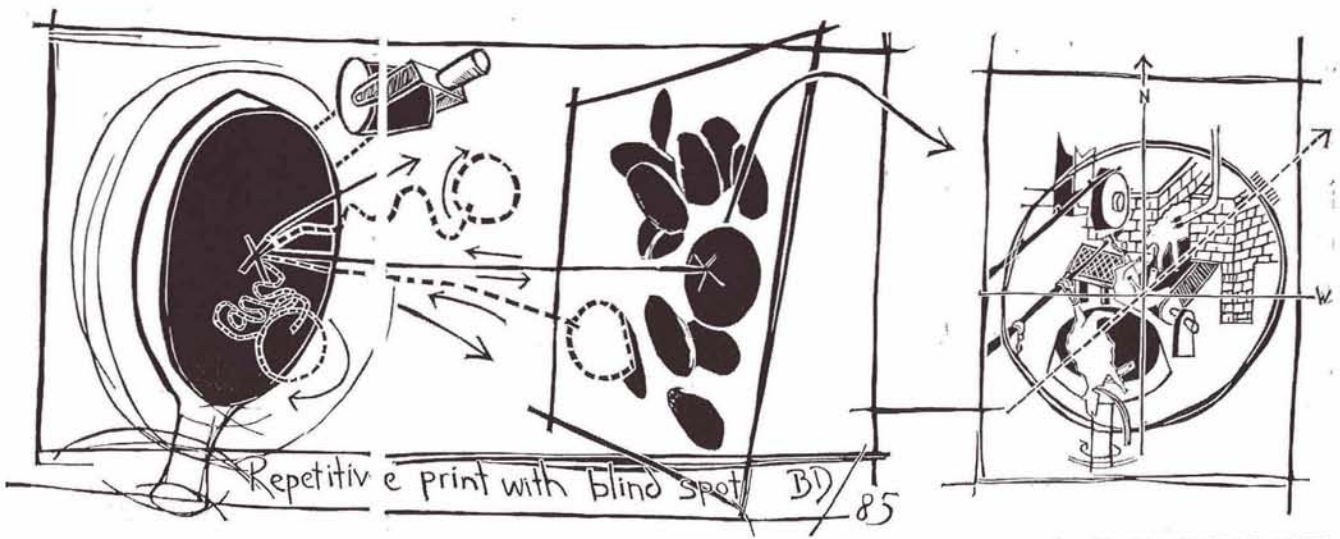
Throughout the '80s and '90s, in both the three dimensional and two dimensional works, Dawe's titles were often ironic or oblique yet frequently echo one another. For example, both the title and concerns of the large 1984 print, *Floor Plan for a Shelter* (a twentieth century anti-nuclear ark), relate to and are continued within the sprawling 1986 installation, *Drawing from a Shelter*, commissioned for the Shortland Street tower in Auckland. Both, in turn, relate to the woodblock series: *The Cockfight* [31], *May Pole Dance* [32] and *Freezing Works* [33]⁹.

Works often contain recurring compositional patterns and motifs. As a result, a cross-section of Dawe's work can be read almost as a set of blueprints, provocatively outlining the connections and inter-relationships between the self and society. The woodblock prints, for example, without exception, are full of black and white diagrammatic detail. Aspects of these reappear in three dimensional works such as the sculpted *May Pole Dance* carpets (made throughout the 1980s and 1990s in conjunction with Hugh Bannerman's Christchurch-based Dilana Studio), and in the 1987 ceramic medallions sited outside the Southpower offices in Manchester Street, Christchurch. In these medallions, bold, black, directional arrows and mechanisms hover above ripples of water and mountain ridges, exploring cycles of energy generation and our involvement in such resources. In one, a hairdryer, running on electricity from water-driven turbines, funnels air (like a nor'wester) to create the mountain moisture for the dams that generate hydro-electricity.

A dark humour is at work in both the *May Pole Dance* woodblocks (especially *May Pole Pattern for Funerary Vase* [32])¹⁰ and the Maypole sculpted carpets. In both the Maypole prints and rugs, the seasonal rites of passage associated with the Maypole are contrasted with anti-life agents such as nuclear warfare, drawn in the language of the abattoir. In one rug, alluding to the Aids crisis, a female and two male figures circle in a danse macabre. But, despite the directional arrows, the dancers fail to plait the Maypole braid so that their efforts become an anti-fertility ritual. In another rug, more arrows direct and emphasise not only the mechanised 'endless recurrences' of slaughter, but also the particular requirements of killing lambs for Muslim consumption (signalled by a Persian-style rug prayer in an adjacent circle). These circles are juxtaposed with a third, depicting the production of condoms. Thus, within the round of the abattoir, at the height of the killing season, the themes of life and death are explored in a language⁹ provocative beyond its black and white lines.

In common, the *May Pole Dance* [32] and *Freezing Works* [33] prints, like the *Cockfight* works, assert that there is an inextricable relationship between how we treat animals and the earth, and each other. The Nuclear section (from the late '80s and early '90s), especially *Bikini Pattern - A Double Portrait with Vase and Parasol* [12] and the two 'umbrella' works [8] and [14], exhibit a deep scepticism regarding our recognition of these inter-relations. In these works, in a language of literally bare bones, the tone and temperament are interrogative, scrutinising our sense of balance and direction.

In the 1989 work, *Reintroducing the Fabulous Races (A Sculpture for Children)*¹¹ the sculptural language (but not the message) changes. Originally, *Reintroducing the Fabulous*

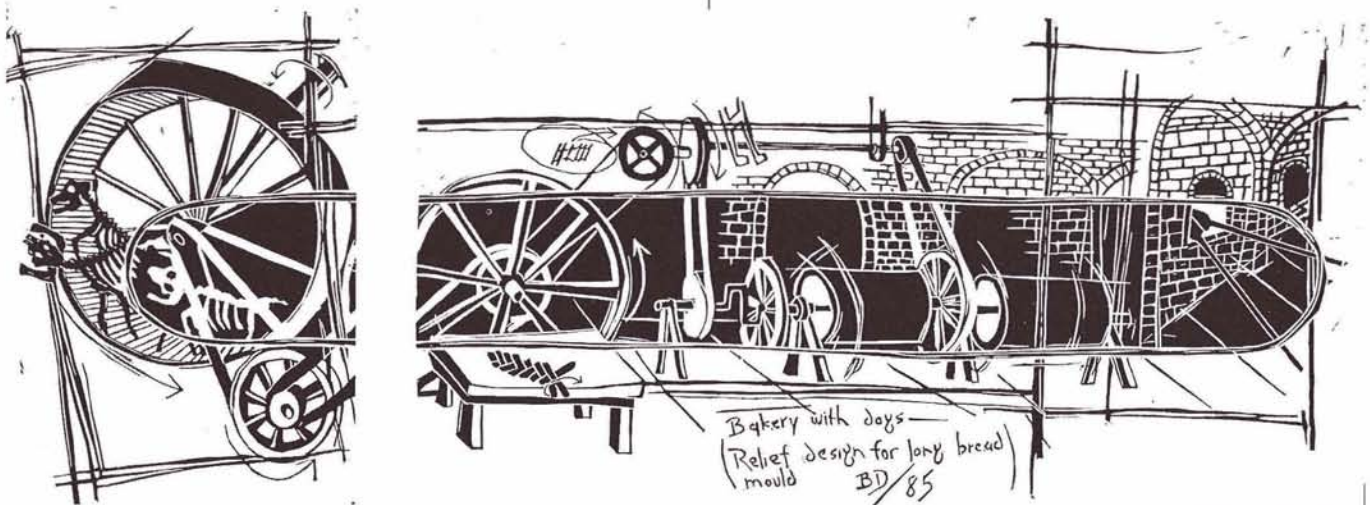


Repetitive Print with Blind Spot, 1985
Woodcut
Collection of the Artist

Races was sited in Cathedral Square in 1990 where it raised considerable controversy and excited both critical and popular debate. Educationalist John Freeman-Moir and artist William Sutton staunchly defended the work; and a series of pro- and anti- letters published in *The Press* provide a telling 'barometer' of Christchurch's response to public sculpture at that point. The work was re-located in 1994 to the Market Place in the Arts Centre, Christchurch, a site Dawe considers more appropriate to the sculpture's thematic content of growth and self-knowledge.

By contrast, an earlier sprawling sculpture (privately commissioned) met with unqualified critical acclaim in Auckland.¹² Measuring 10 metres long by 5 metres wide and made from 12 mm steel rod, wood and plywood, *Drawing from a Shelter* is a fusion of 'fabulous' and figurative forms, past and present. Installed in the (two-storey high) foyer of the 18 storey Shortland Centre, it celebrates both the area's Maori heritage and the city's link with Waitemata Harbour. However, like the *Fabulous Races*, this work also 'looks back' in order to assess present and future growth.

Based on a Maori rock drawing, *Drawing from a Shelter* is a three-plane structure, constructed of highly polished and tarred flat timber. The overall effect is airy and elegant, yet aspects belong to some semi-conscious shadowlands. Stylistically the composition is reminiscent of *The Cockfight* (1984) [9] and *Two Men Gaming - Composition with Figures on a Green Field* (1986) [10].¹³ Like these last two works, *Drawing from a Shelter* is large and uses both three and two dimensional forms. At its widest part, it spans over ten metres. But one of its most striking aspects is a 1.25 metre circle within which a skeletal Taniwha and a human are interwoven. The Taniwha and the human share a steel 'spine' which is literally peeled out of the boatdeck and suspended in a steel circle at a right angle from the main elements. And because these elements are 'drawn' within an archaeological grid, there is the strong suggestion that the threatening monster is not from any mythical past or external threat, but rather is present and internal; that is, it reflects the ambivalence of human decisions and 'achievement'.



Bakery with Dogs - Design for a Long Bread Mould, 1985
Woodcut
Collection of the Artist



Dead Bird with Weapon, 1983
Wood, feathers and found object
Collection Rob Jackaman

Into this work one can read comments about war canoes, nuclear and anti-nuclear vessels. Ultimately, however, by fusing the Taniwha and the human (representing imagination and 'reason'), Dawe offers us another circle of focus. It alludes not only to the yin and yang elements of life (connections between apparent differences), but also to the inter-relations between the personal and the political. Dawe emphasises this by placing the interlocked figures within the circle but extends their forms beyond, into the airy void. The sprawling elements are in fact carefully mapped out on the steel grid, with the last of these suspended to within four metres of the foyer floor engaging us.

Dawe uses circles (or fragments thereof) to draw our attention to the possible fusion of differences - the inner and outer; the personal and 'other'; bare-boned physicality and spiritual possibilities. Such circles sketch out the possible floor-plan for a May dance, the cycles of life, of death and re-birth. They are used to symbolise the embrace of someone or something valued or endangered. In the *Freezing Works* [33] prints, for example, they focus our attention on the common and inescapable fate of lambs feeding on an insatiable killing chain that moves with clockwork precision. Repeatedly interlocking circles are used to enunciate the unease that is part of this secular century, yoking life and death, faith and doubt. "They are," Dawe comments, "the overlapping circles of differing viewpoints."

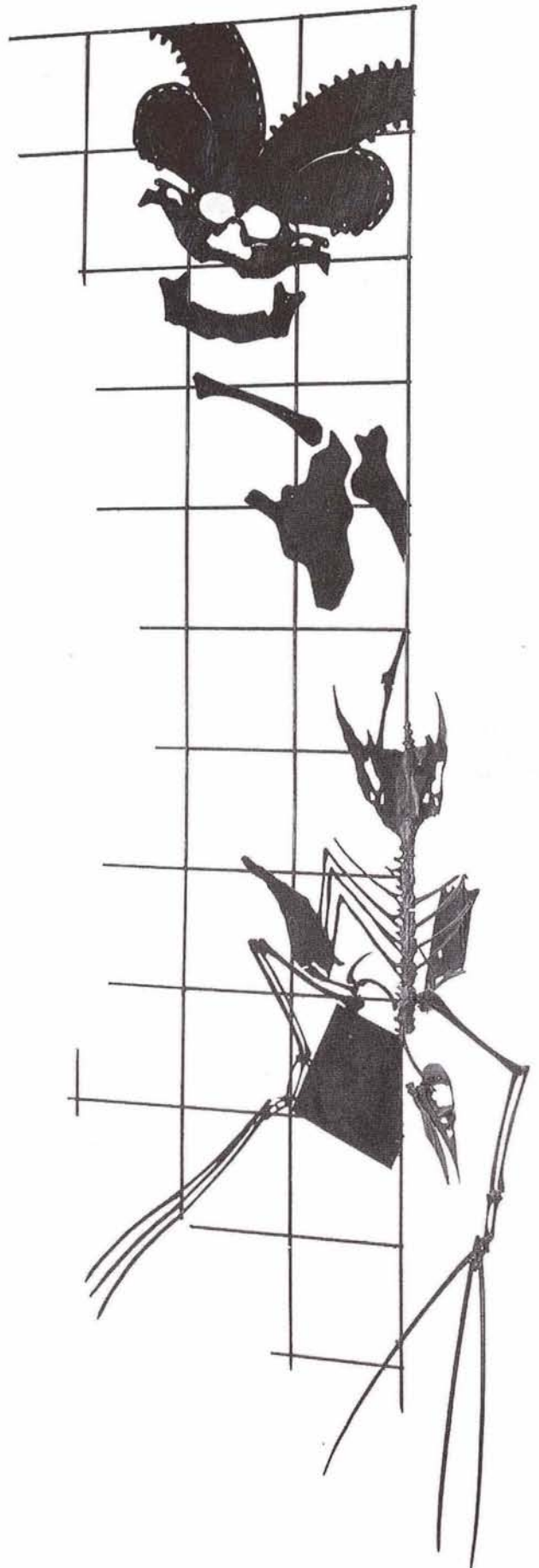
Often the circle is set within a grid. This can be interpreted as merely a mechanical support (as in sculptures 6, 8, 12 and 13), or as reminiscent of a drawing frame (as in several of *The Cockfight* [31] and *Freezing Works* [33] woodblocks) or, as an archeological grid (as in *Braided River Excavation* [7]). But the grid can also be experienced as a form of constraint, the visible parameters within which the circle (of self and other) must function. Nevertheless, the visual juxtaposition of these contraries (the circle and the square) is regularly interrupted, signalling that intervention is possible. The implication is that while the circle is endless, it can, like the fragmented self or society, be questioned and, therefore, re-drawn. In this context the grid can be interpreted not merely as a support but more as another insistent aid in our field of focus. Our ability, indeed responsibility, to question is evoked consistently in these works. What began as a mechanism of focus, the circle, has become a symbol of enquiry into self and others, and has persisted in Dawe's work for almost two decades.

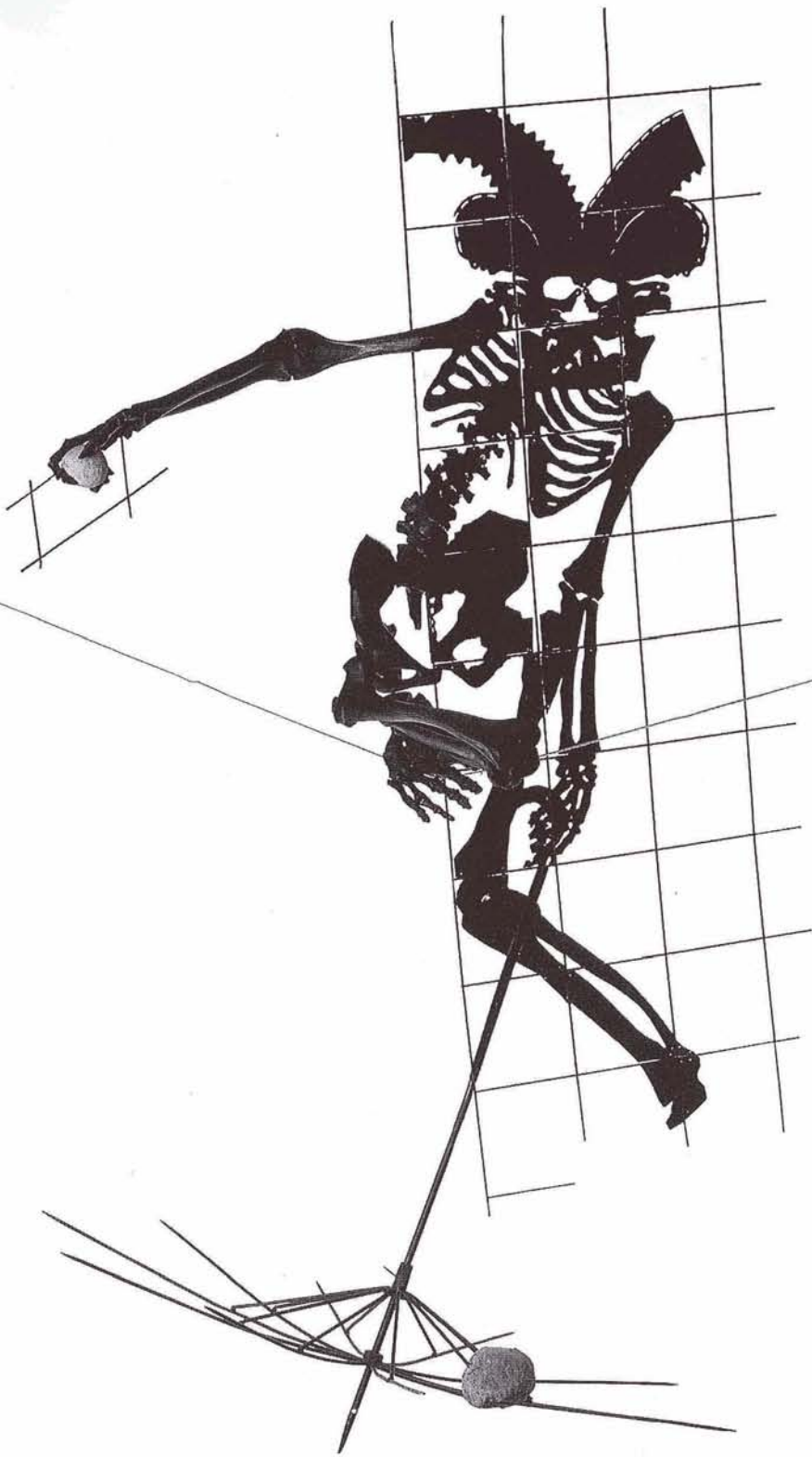
Quietly insistent, Dawe states that "self-knowledge, based in the ability to question, is imperative; without it, the dangers of self-estrangement and exclusivity are potentially endless." In this respect, both his three dimensional and two dimensional skeletal and fleshed-out protagonists remind us that the body (of self, society and the environment) is the locus of being and that as such it has to be valued. Accordingly the imaged (skeletal) distortions dramatise the precarious nature of being and embodiment and the recurring patterns that engender estrangement. This tension between the particular individual 'centre' and the surrounding whole is addressed in *The Cockfight* [31] and *Freezing Works* [33] woodblocks as well as in the private commissions such as *Figure with Bird Mask - Leaping* (1989) [15] or *Drawing from a Shelter*.

Returning again and again to the issues of socio-political inter-relationships, Dawe's language changes yet remains constantly interrogative, whether in two or three dimensions. The intricate mechanical explorations of early works such as *Tone Arm - A Record to Date* (1978) [1], *From the Days of Oil - A Tool Reclaimed* (1978) [2] and *From the Days of Oil - Car Part Reclaimed* (1977/8) [3], persists, albeit altered, in the 'endangered species' (1981-82) [4, 5 and 6], as well as in the Nuclear images.¹⁴ The linear language of works such as *Large Soaring Bird (Dead)* [5], for example, which reads like a lament for something that once soared and inspired us, is echoed in *The Cockfight* (1984) [9] and *Freezing Works* (1985) [33] woodblocks. Similarly, the airy rhythms and 'limbs' of *Large Soaring Bird (Dead)* [5] show mechanical interventions and allude to human choices as surely as the images in the woodblocks. In like manner, the language of *Bikini Pattern - a Double Portrait with Vase and Parasol* (1984) [12], *Pommel Vault with 1/4 Turn Equestrian Sculpture* (1988) [13], *Umbrella Canopy with Figures* (1984;89) [14] and *Portrait of a Grotesque* (1992) [23] portray humans in absurd but self-imposed positions.¹⁵ The tone is surgical. Excoriated limbs play out the ambivalent and lethal games. In *Self-Portrait with Loon* (1984/8) [6], for example, the protagonist appears to contemplate his catch as a source of food and 'sport'.¹⁶ However, because both the protagonist and the bird are laid bare, the sculptural language implies that we are in fact the architects of our own dramas of disequilibrium.

Although in apparently different styles, the Nuclear protagonists [9-15], with their flattened skulls,¹⁷ are thematically linked to the *Fabulous Races* [16 - 23] and the *River* works [24 - 30] in so far as all are metaphors investigating instabilities.¹⁸ The sculptural language of the *River* sculptures teases out the same questions of relationships and responsibilities found in the earlier works; the difference between needs and wants, between the use and abuse of sources and survival. These concerns were perhaps first explored in *Tone Arm - A Record to Date* [1]. In this piece, (shown at the Mildura Sculpture Triennial in 1977), a wooden arm drives down into a cavity in a Waitaki River stone within which a smaller stone is embedded. There is at once the suggestion of energy and erosion. Dawe comments that this piece, like *Braided River Excavation* (1984) [7], relates to the well-being of the river and the generation of electricity and our use of all such resources. His most recent *River* works (particularly the prints where the Waitaki, watched over by a whitebaiter, courses through groyne cycles of life) demonstrate Dawe's use of, and ease in, the vernacular of North Otago, an idiom that resonates much more widely. Here, then, is his use of nostalgia - a re-cycling of old knowledge in a critique of developing patterns.

Through successive critical translations of this old knowledge, Dawe's language has become spare and local, so that it is possible to look at both the early and more recent *River* works and trace recurring concerns about choices made, expressed in a domestic idiom of cycles and seasons. This is signalled at the outset of this exhibition with the early 'archaeological' parameters of *Braided River Excavation* (1984) [7]¹⁹ and it persists, in various forms, through to the most contemporary *River* works so that it is possible to interpret all these 'waterscapes' as a flowing but consistent trajectory, one that engages us and questions the parameters of freedom and restraint in this 'anything goes' era.





Still Keeping His Balance He Used the Umbrella as a Safety Net
- *Image of a Man with a Missile*, 1984/5
Wood, steel and stone
Collection of Robert McDougall Art Gallery

Anomalous states

Bing Dawe's is a gradually unfolding and altering perspective, yet consistent in its representation of the irregular shape and state of things around us. Whether in two or three dimensions, whether in lean assemblages or concentrated masses, his works address and debate balancing acts - the vulnerable and vertiginous quality of life - the inter-relationships among birds, beasts and humans. Attention is constantly drawn to the wider context through the language of the particular. And, consistently, while critics use adjectives such as 'morbid' and 'melancholic' to describe Dawe's work, inevitably they comment that it is also "thoughtful" and "provocative," "combinations of the mysterious and familiar that make us think and feel."²⁰

Dawe's style can with justification be described as enacting dramas of disequilibrium. The content poses questions about self and society and critiques a life lived without design or balance. His double circle motif, for example, does not propose the 'eternity' drawn by an assured Renaissance hand, but, rather, anomalous states that trace and re-trace its own revolutions. There is no apparent resemblance between Dawe's circle and that of Leonardo. Yet as one moves through and around these works, there is every possibility of connecting these past and present enquiries and the information and possibilities they pose.

In his modelled (assembled) works, Dawe draws attention to this synthesis, using a vocabulary of joints and bindings which on one level constitute his sculptural decisions, while on another they allude to the implications of our actions and interactions. In his carved works he achieves a similar emphasis regarding decisions through a particular sculptural logic whereby figures (somehow) maintain impossible balances.

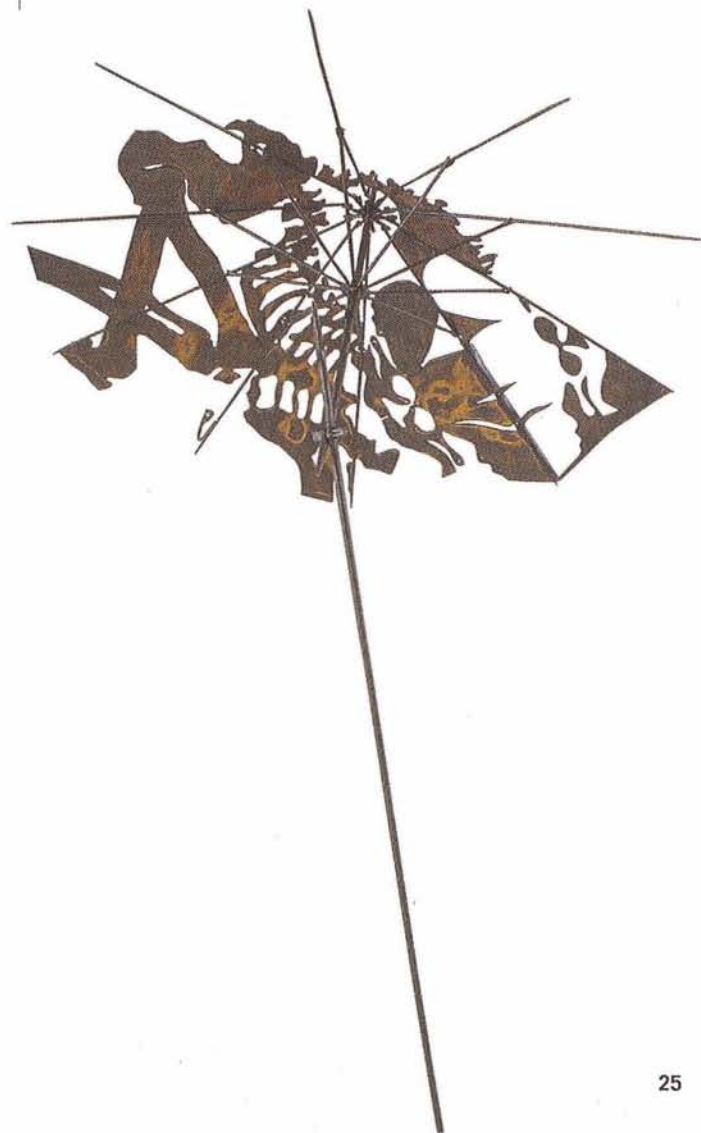
Dramatic personae

Suspended high in the centre court of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery, the figure in *Still Keeping His Balance He Used the Umbrella as a Safety Net* (1985/6) [8] is a perfect example of Dawe's dramas of disequilibrium. The figure inspires not so much confidence as a wary alertness regarding elementary acts. Tilted off his axis, the protagonist (a skeletal man with umbrella and stones pinioned to a grid) hovers and maintains a precarious balance. Like many of Neil Dawson's sky-drawings, this trapezing figure catches and holds our attention, exciting both the imagination and perception. Logic tells us that the compositional components have nothing to do with anatomical accuracy but everything to do with engaging us in the experience of imbalance. Exaggerated and yet familiar, this theatricality seems wholly appropriate to the slight and ridiculously poised frame. The vulnerability of the figure is emphasised by the useless, naked umbrella. Thus Dawe suggests that the very idea of a nuclear umbrella is ridiculous. And this sense of the absurd is echoed throughout

the Nuclear Works (especially 6, 10, 13 and 14) as well as the *Freezing Works* [33], and the 'endangered species', and the robust *River* works, particularly *Figure with Eel* (1999) [30].

Dawe's skeletal figures, with their flattened-out skulls, appear absurd and impossible. Yet they arrest us because they assert their space and engage us in imaginative and metaphorical gymnastics. These antic figures reflect aspects of our own decision-making, revealing how they impact upon the wider context of life. None of these skeletal works employs naturalism. Sometimes unfooted or with minimal supports, their arrested motions create not only a sensation of imbalance but also a consciousness regarding the inter-relationship between balance and imbalance (particularly 6, 9, 12, 13 and 14). It is as though each protagonist senses the elementary - that walking is an act of imbalance corrected - but each continues as though inextricably ensnared in their antics. Ultimately the tensions and rhythms suggest that these untenable positions are 'manmade', and perhaps nowhere is this more lyrically expressed or more powerfully contested than in the 'endangered species' works.

Umbrella Canopy with Figures, 1984/9
Wood and steel
Courtesy of Canterbury Gallery





Endangered Species

Between 1981 and 1982 Dawe made three large sculptures, the 'endangered species'.²¹ "These," Dawe comments, "were part of a protest against the proposed smelter at Aramoana, near Dunedin, and were in part influenced by an empathy with Ralph Hotere, his way of life and the life of that region."

The proposed smelter would have destroyed the albatross breeding colony at Taiaroa Heads, across from Dunedin's harbour. Dawe expressed the potential plight of the albatross and, by extension, that of the whole environment, in shapes that evoked not only the birds' strength and beauty but their vulnerability, as well as our part in their continued survival. The result was three sprawling, unprotected 'birds', taut amalgamations of fine, smooth, dark kauri 'bones' and metal parts.

In *Large Soaring Bird (Dead)* (1981/2) [5]²² two of the bird's kauri 'bones' are broken. They are reassembled with marlin twine and are, unexpectedly, held up by aluminium bike parts. "Wood," Dawe comments, "shows and conveys growth. Its natural beauty contrasts with the manufactured elements. The juxtaposition of the natural and manufactured parts accrue to create a nostalgia for things like a bird skull caught among driftwood, twine and tar, nature's re-cycling, and also to question our use of resources. This is a Yin-Yang affair, an attraction of opposites and this is why, ironically, it is the bike parts that hold the birds up; it is incongruous yet inextricably inter-related."

The limbs of *Caged Bird Stripped of its Covering* (1983) [4],²³ like *Large Soaring Bird (Dead)* (1981) [4], are a mixture of natural and manufactured materials. Suspended (ironically free-hanging), its extended, anguished wings appear to beat the air. Clearly these birds, like the freedom, the space and the environment they represent, have suffered.

In *Study: Bird Removing Foreign Object from its Wing* (1981/2) (sited in the Christchurch Convention Centre) more slender kauri ribs, patinated with bitumen and wax, are lashed together with twine onto a wire grid, suggesting yet another trapped and frantic bird. Close inspection reveals that the foreign object the bird seeks to remove is in fact a silicon chip, suspended between a lens and a mirror. Within the lens is a microscopic grid, a minute but telling echo of the structure onto which the bird is tethered. Dawe's bound joints and use of ready-made parts represent and emphasise decisions he has taken in terms of materials and process, and, by extension, the questioning he hopes to engender. Embedding a piece from his own racing bike into the works, the sculptor indicates not only the complexity of the Aramoana issue but also something of his own personal involvement and ambivalence, and the issue of collective awareness. As Roger Blackley comments, "By combining the skeletal remains of a bird or insect, by stringing it up on a wire death-trap, [and] by introducing a late twentieth century conceptual conceit, Dawe has produced a menacing work of great resonance."²⁴

Through an exaggerated and incongruous and yet related syntax of wood and aluminium, the 'endangered species' probe our attitudes towards resources. Stripped of their feathers, the sad, lyrical quality of these 'endangered aves' enunciates abuse. Not even the elegant gallery lighting can contradict the fact that these suspended spatial rhythms are distraught souls, an endangered species.²⁵

Dawe's use of the bird, a symbol of transcendence in many cultures, was and remains very apposite in a country that has already, one way or another, lost or endangered so many of its species. Dawe's use of these local birds, like his use of the Waitaki eels, refers to the wider condition.

Between the 'endangered species' of the early 1980s and the *Cockfight* works of the late 1980s, the symbolic bird undergoes many transformations which in turn relate to changes in the environment. The plight of such birds and the environment is echoed throughout the *Cockfight* works as well as the skeletal envoys [6, 8 and 14]. In both the *Cockfight* and the *River* works, in addition to the figure, two specific motifs are used consistently to examine intra- and inter-relations: the bird (as in 4, 5 and 11) and the river [24 - 30]. These motifs (one vertical, the other horizontal) cross and connect the traditional spheres of spiritual and physical freedom - air and water. They are the symbolic arcs that enclose the world.



Bikini Pattern: A Double Portrait with Vase and Parasol, 1984
Wood and steel
Collection of the Artist

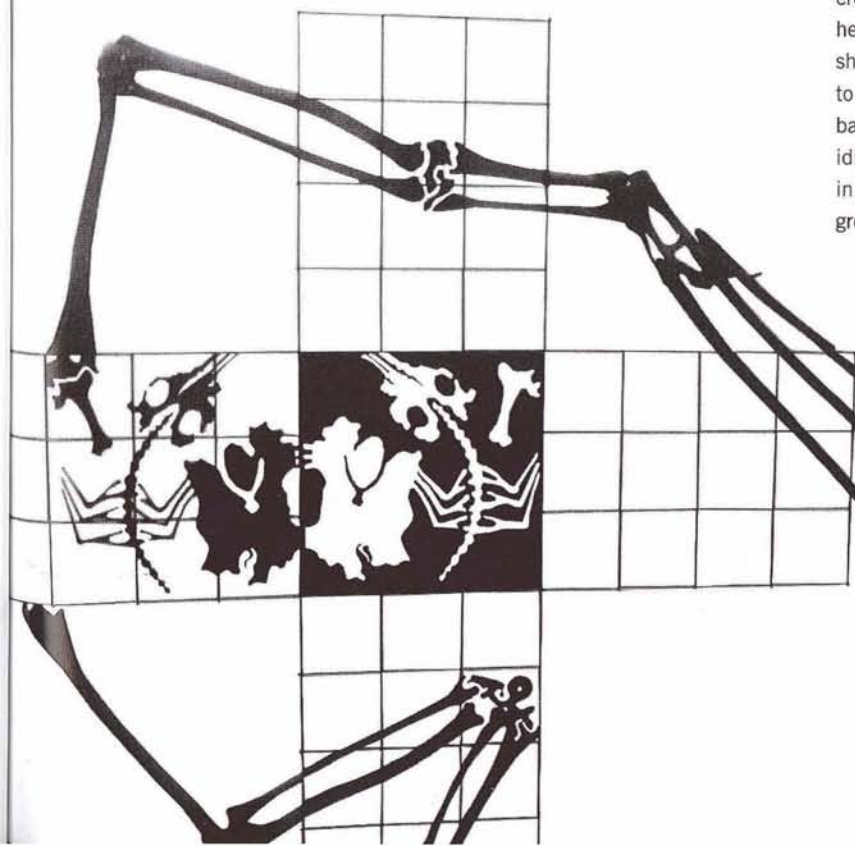


Nuclear Threat

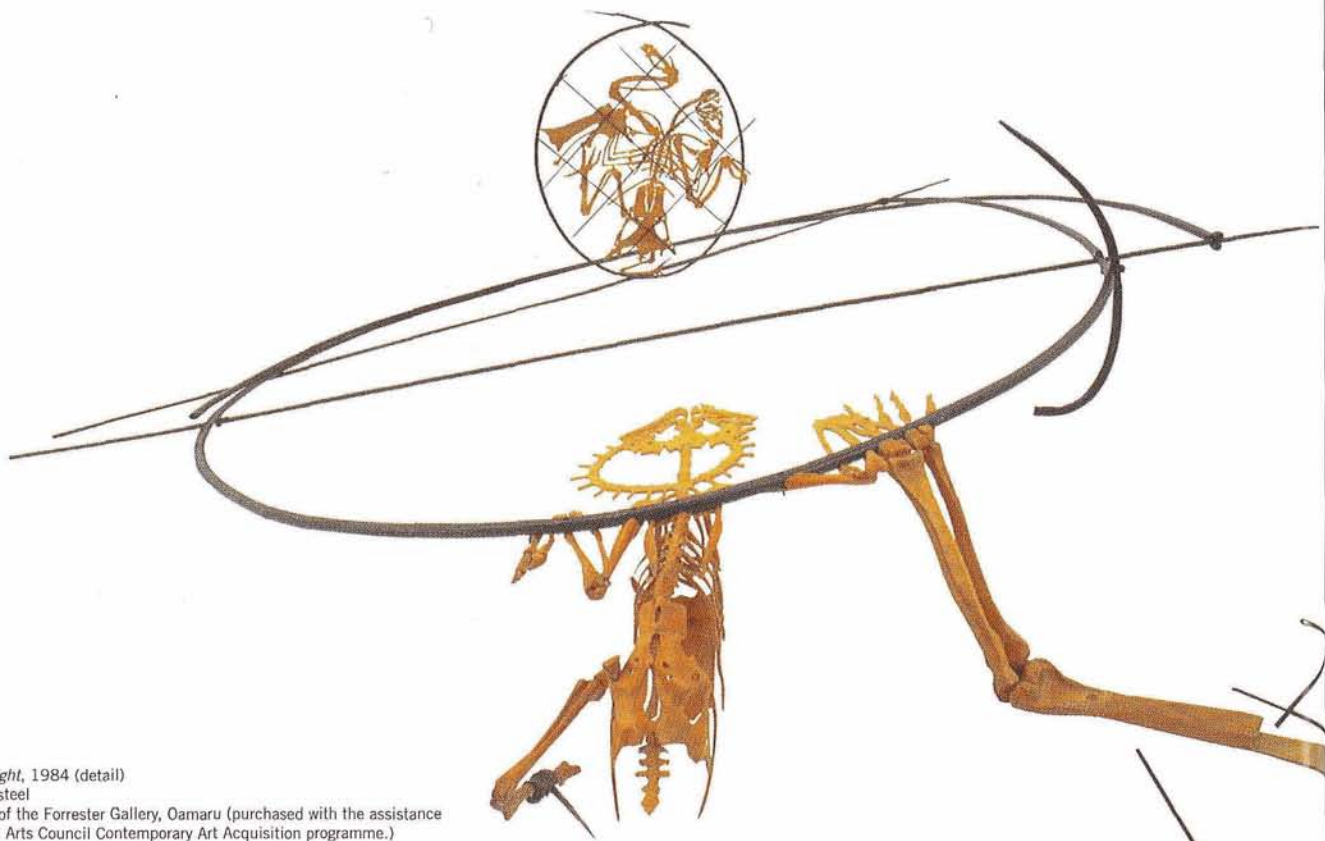
If the bird in Dawe's work symbolically represents something of a natural-cum-spiritual crisis, then the skeleton (the self, ecorché), especially in Dawe's Nuclear Works, reveals us in a state of imbalance and engaged in the games of chance.

In *Two Men Gaming - Composition with Figures on a Green Field* (1986) [10], like another Trusttum, Dawe appears to engage us in a game of table tennis. One 'player', supported by a fine drawing grid, appears simply to wait, while below him lies the image of another player, engraved. Or is it our fossilized shadow? In this postponed or arrested game the protagonists are in fact echoes of one another, yet curiously at odds with each other and their tilted field. The work, as Dawe

comments, "refers to several other such represented 'games' (such as seen in Hogarth's social satires like *Marriage à la Mode*)²⁶ but this work expresses a sense of frustration with an erosion of a particular way of life and personal self-government here in New Zealand. It reflects the human condition and the sheer stupidity of replicating patterns that are not conducive to the survival of all species; building and maintaining a balanced way of life." Once again, in an almost domestic idiom, Dawe draws our attention to the plight of those caught in traps created by notions of exclusive power and human greed. There can be no winners in such games.



Caged Bird Stripped of its Covering, 1983
Kauri, string and wire
Collection of Rotorua Museum of Art and History



The Cockfight, 1984 (detail)
Wood and steel
Collection of the Forrester Gallery, Oamaru (purchased with the assistance of the QEII Arts Council Contemporary Art Acquisition programme.)

Survival in trapped positions is a recurring theme throughout these works. At a compositional level we sense this in Dawe's repeated use of overlapping circles and his general placement of elements, vertiginous yet somehow connected. This is the anxious language of the 'endangered species' as well as works such as *Self-portrait with Loon* [6], and the *Cockfight* sculpture [9] and prints [31], all of which examine the construction of blindspots of one form or another.

Removed from its traditional or anticipated position (a sawdust floor), Dawe's metal *Cockfight* [9] is flung up on the wall and confronts us at eye-level. Inside the sinuous, black double circle, two white cocks face off (observed by us). The equilibrium is precarious; the gallery light and shadow re-draw the steel dance of imbalance, wrought with an unshamed finesse of craftsmanship and superb model-making. On the outside of the rings, the kauri cock skeleton is three-dimensional, every bone formed and fitted in smooth mechanical balance. But inside the 'sporting' plane, the plywood skeleton and its skull (reminiscent of Holbein's double portrait of *The Ambassadors*)²⁷ are flattened into two dimensions, hackles splayed. On a supporting grid, an observer hovers, extending the stub of a limb, the remainder of which, on the ring, reaches out and touches one of the birds.

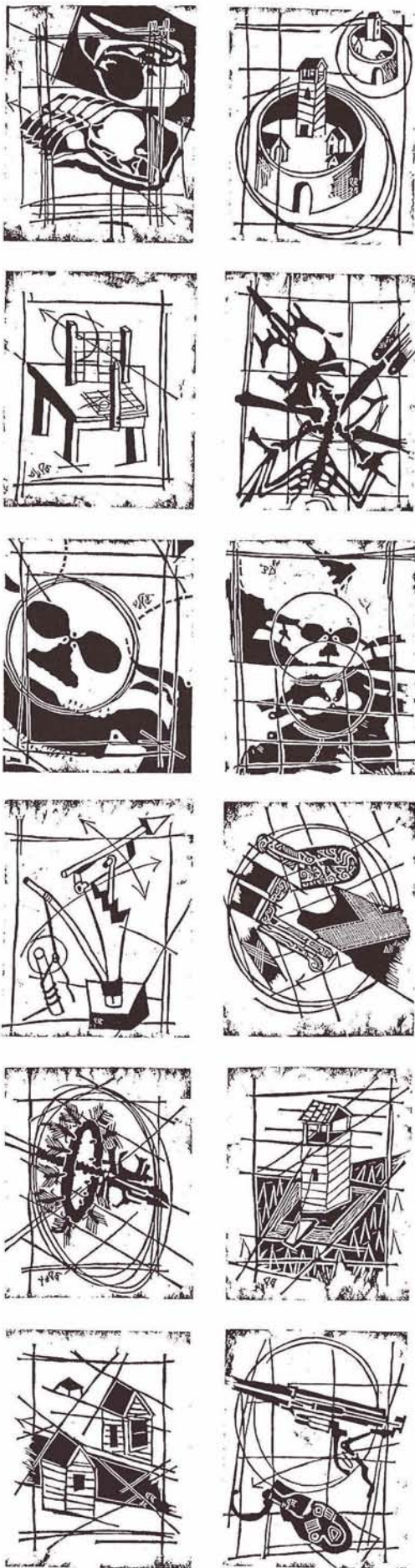
The Cockfight [9] is a protest work, a powerful and disturbing metaphor, fraught with barbaric echoes of incarceration, extermination, violence and death. In 1984 Dawe commented, "You can look at it simply as a cockfight, as a representation of destruction, or you can extend it to the super-Powers."²⁸

Like the print series of the same name, *The Cockfight* [9] is a sad echo chamber of humans' inhumanity to one another. Its

visual language berates an age-old brutality towards cocks and bears, and all things 'tamed' or caged. And its anguished steel plaint is extended in the warlike images and titles of the *Cockfight* [31] woodcuts, particularly, *Missile Throwing Device with Arrows*, *Town with Circular Defence* and *Bomb Blast*. En masse, the black lines of these prints are fiercely declamatory. Yet within these there are sad little ironies, like the birds engraved on the weapon of their destruction in *Sporting Rifle with Etched Decoration*. In *A Rectangular Tower with Defence*, for example, ironically the structure featured becomes a prison. Similarly, the reversed perspective used in *Table with Drawing Aid* shows that there are other ways of seeing. While both these images appear to illustrate mechanisms of 'help', in fact, their ironic echoes repeatedly affirm that neither 'aid' is necessarily right nor sufficient since survival is not simple nor is sight or seeing a singular matter.

This logic, arguing for endless enquiry, reverberates among the 'recurring' endeavours of the *Fabulous Races* sculpture in the Arts Centre and is echoed in the paddle held by the skeletal man in *Drawing from a Shelter*. The paddle, symbolic of forward movement, contains an intricate replica of the entire sculpture in miniature, affirming the inter-relatedness of micro- macrocosm patterns and relationships.

Both the *Cockfight* sculpture [9] and the prints are designed to disturb and repel. Throughout the *Cockfight* prints [31], recurring double circles, diagrammatic grids and shard-like elements create an aura of assault and siege, interrogating power, violence and freedom. For example, *Missile Throwing Device with Arrows* and *Town with Circular Defence* describe both past and continuing conflicts while the Nuclear sculptural works [10, 13 and 14] confront us with the outlines

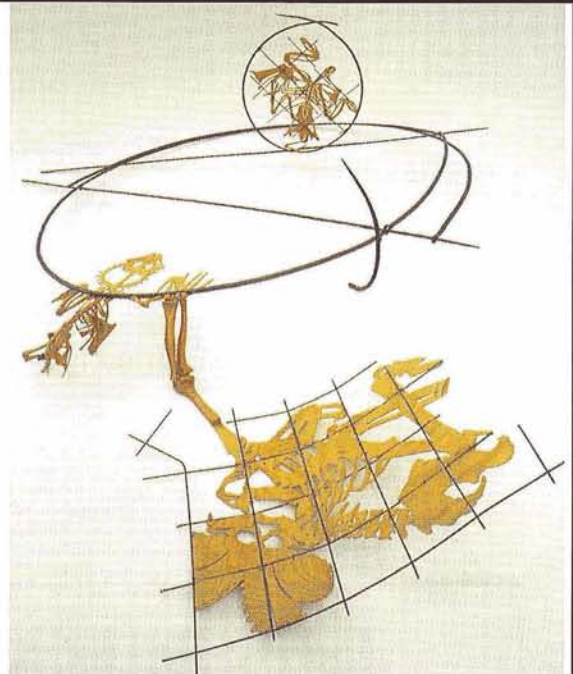


The Cockfight, 1984
Woodcuts
Collection of the Forrester Gallery, Oamaru (purchased with the assistance of the QEII Arts Council Contemporary Acquisition programme.)

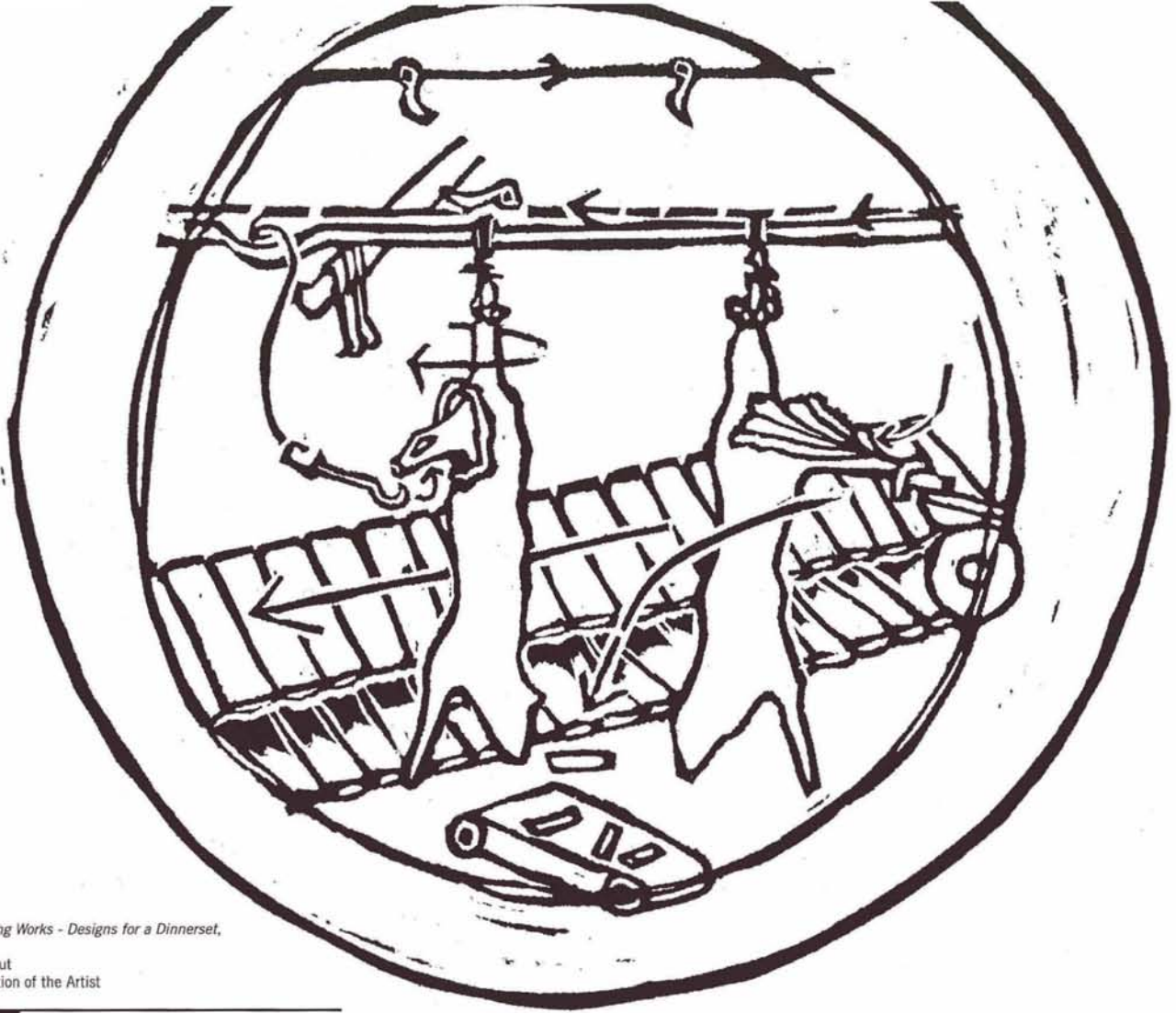
of blasted, fossilised figures (ourselves?).²⁹ This interrogation of violence is echoed in the subsequent images and content of the *Freezing Works* prints [33].

In both *The Cockfight* [31] and the *Freezing Works* [33] prints, Dawe examines the numbing and exploitative patterns practised in certain daily employments. He asks if these contribute, or are related to, the anti-life practices of war and atavistic ethno-nationalist antagonisms. The woodblock is labour-intensive, requiring rigorous control of the chisels used to gouge away the wood surface to reveal the desired line. As a result, the medium behind these images, alluding to ancient and modern warfare and slaughter, is highly appropriate to the content, revealing an imagination at work with almost surgical precision, searching for resolutions.

At an immediate visual level, the *Freezing Works* [33] images read like a sequence of heavy-lined blueprints. But rather than plans for improvement, the black lines, and titles such as *Bakery with Dogs - Relief Mould for Long Bread Loaf* [36] or *Repetitive Print with Blind Spot* [34], tell of brutalities. In *Repetitive Print with Blind Spot* [34], Dawe gives complicated instructions for the printing of 'blind spots'. A detail of one such blind spot is magnified by a hand mirror and reveals a slaughter chain. Animals enter, are hoisted and executed. The same pragmatic line and sense of design informs *Bakery with Dogs* [36], a dark blend of mechanisms and canine skeletons running in a treadmill. The reference is apparently to bread, the staff of life, and ovens, yet the imagery talks not only of the disturbing daily reality for many slaughterhouse animals but also reminds us of other efficient killing chains. Both the methods involved and the purpose of the long bread mould are only some of the questions posed to us through black-lined irony. Talking about time spent in the Islington Freezing Works, Dawe commented that "just as the killing process is erased in the packaging and presentation of meat in supermarkets, so much of the brutality of human aggression appears, to me, almost casually automatic."



The Cockfight, 1984
Collection of the Forrester Gallery, Oamaru (purchased with the assistance of the QEII Arts Council Contemporary Acquisition programme.)



Freezing Works - Designs for a Dinner Set,
1985
Woodcut
Collection of the Artist

Hung left to right, the images of chains of endless carcasses produce a stress and press us into questioning relentless automation, pragmatic despatch and the numbing effect of killing tens of thousands of animals per day. There is the disquieting sense that all such relentless activities lead not only to full bellies for some, but a neutralising of human feelings in the workaday repetition of efficient assembly-line killing; wheels within wheels. Within these *Freezing Works* [33] the gouged circles, drawn and re-drawn, appear darkly appropriate and potent, thematically echoing and extending the tensions in the surrounding sculptures such as *Umbrella Canopy with Figures* (1984/89) [14], *Figure with Bird Mask - Leaping* (1989) [15]³⁰ and, especially, *The Cockfight* (1984) [9].

When the *Freezing Works* prints were first exhibited in 1985, Dawe included a telling fragment from Siegfried Giedion's *Mechanisation Takes Command*: "What is truly startling in this mass transition from life to death is the complete neutrality of the act.... This neutrality toward death may be lodged deep in the roots of our time."³¹ Dawe comments:

These prints represent a cross-section across a fragment of time. Many things motivated these images. The level of numbing-down of the senses that the job required. And how this detachment could be shattered when a live lamb would escape from the pens, up among the chain activities of skinning and portioning. The impact of a live lamb among dead limbs is startling. It made me think about the

actual slaughter of the animals, the need to almost anaesthetise the brain, the difference between the frenetic confines of the abattoir and the hygienic packages we pick up in the supermarket. I began to wonder if the dulling down of the senses within the job could be carried over into other relations. I enjoy meat as much as the next person but the job, plus books like Siegfried Giedion's *Mechanisation Takes Command*, made me question the possible spread or contagion of automation. Pressure to conform can be as innocuous and necessary as traffic roundabouts, but small patterns can and do influence the larger ones. This is alluded to in the images of both the *Cockfight* [31] and *Freezing Works* [33]. Territories and peoples have been and continue to be devastated by the dulling down or devaluation of differences, by numbed senses, erased with swift, 'clean' technologies. I am uncomfortable with violence and my work often asks others to consider and question violence. Who would have thought that the violence of the holocaust would ever be repeated? But it has been. I do not claim to know whether or not we are an inherently violent species, but I make work that confronts acts of violence, against ourselves, each other and the earth, and the consistent thread is the necessity for self-awareness. How we accomplish this is both an individual and communal struggle, a struggle into balance. Individuals, especially children, constantly remind us of how difficult but worthwhile this can be.

Originally designed for a dinner service of 8 plates, meat ashet, vegetable tureen and salt and pepper set, each of the *Freezing Works* images [33] represent a job on the killing chain. Combined, these stark activities suggest not only the slaughter of the lamb (a symbol of innocence, yet very much part of rural New Zealand), but also the rise of consumerism and a decline in social goals. The archaeology of the *Freezing Works* prints [33] reveals land perceived as territory, and a country built upon a culture of killing. As Brett Riley remarks, "behind the intricately meticulous craftsmanship lurks an appalling violence ... a central focus in Dawe's work."³² Even after ten years away from the freezing works, Dawe continues to be disturbed by what he perceives as the shifting standards we apply in our treatment of animals, "often seen as nothing more than links in our food chain."

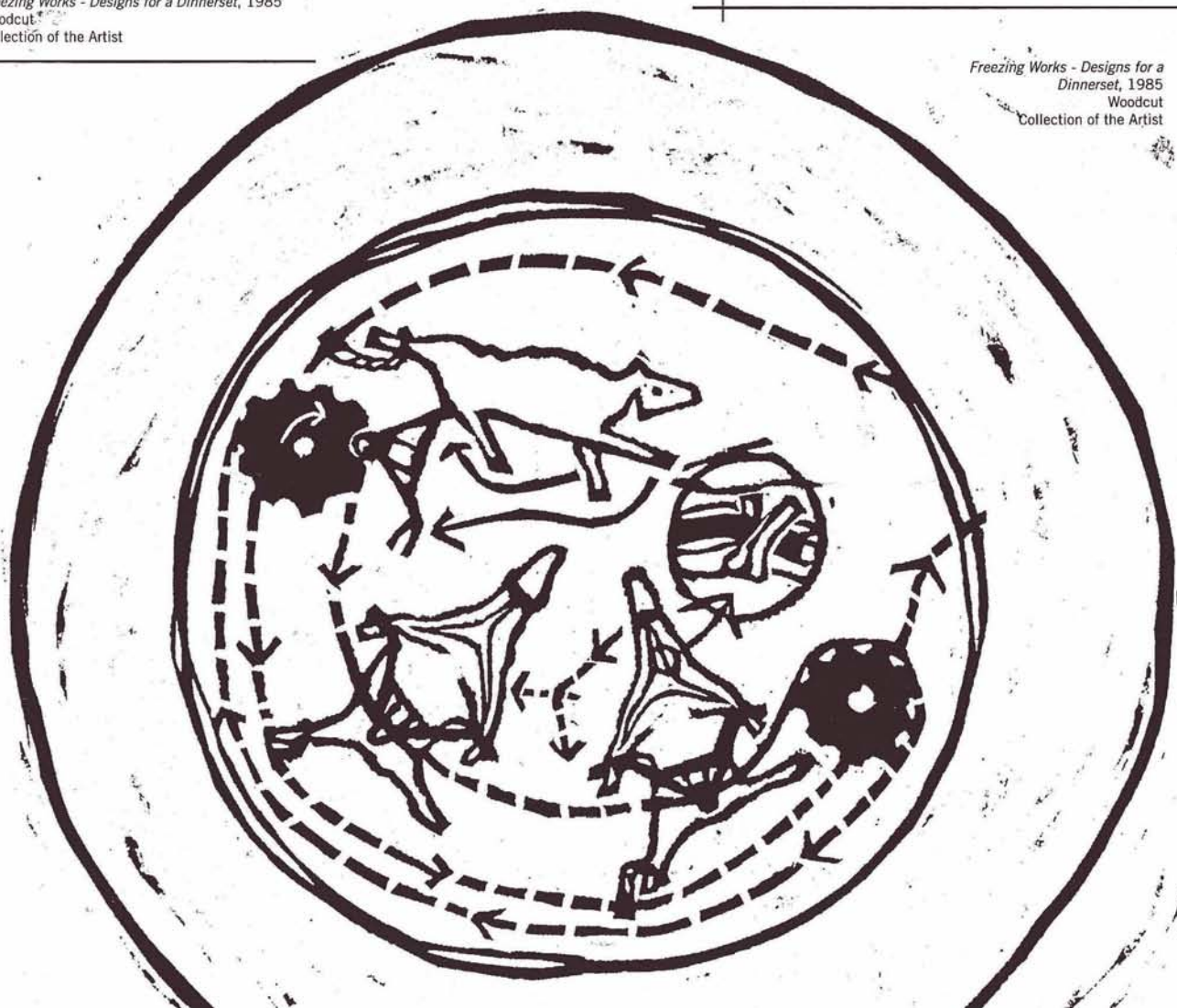
Dawe's ongoing investigation of balance in relationships is apparent through *The Cockfight* prints [31] as well as the *Freezing Works* prints [33], and it is reiterated in works such as *Umbrella Canopy with Figures* (1984/89) [14]. Thematically they are reminiscent of Barry Cleavin's and Michael Reed's anti-nuclear works and are concerned with the lunacy of 'safety' based on nuclear arms. Their works argue against the useless protection offered by any such 'umbrella'.

In a similar mode, *Floor Plan for a Shelter* offers an ark-like 'blueprint' for escape, but its design and detail are ironically redolent of a slave ship.³³ The suggestion is that certain destructive trades and merchandising pay dividends - but only for some. Commenting on *Floor Plan for a Shelter*, Alexa Johnston concluded: "Here is yet another reminder of human inhumanity, especially evident it seems where there are profits to be made. Armaments manufacturers today fuel the world's conflicts yet they too cannot escape the consequences forever."³⁴



Freezing Works - Designs for a Dinnerset, 1985
Woodcut
Collection of the Artist

Freezing Works - Designs for a Dinnerset, 1985
Woodcut
Collection of the Artist





The Grotesques

As indicated at the outset, the cohering aesthetic of these various works is critical rather than inspirational. There is a consistently 'beautiful' finish but a ruthless, bare-boned phrasing of parts continuously interrogating choices and decisions. Dawe's skeletal protagonists, as surely as his distorted *Fabulous Races*, are all characters in the same dramas. All of the exhibited works protest against unquestioning participation or involuntary entrapment in practices that are antithetic to life and renewal. No blame is apportioned but, repeatedly, beneath immaculately finished materials, Dawe confronts us and asks "why?" "We live," he says, "in an era preoccupied with consumption and its side effects, detritus and pollution. With an increasing hunger for elusive 'ideals' - the 'ideal' job, body, family, life-style. It appears as though 'far off fields' are continuously being presented as 'greener', and yet this is often at the cost of local, sustainable values."

Reintroducing the Fabulous Races (A Sculpture for Children) was perhaps Dawe's most overt or obvious protest against uncritical relationships - personal, political or aesthetic.³⁵ This circular structure uses medieval projections to promote self-scrutiny.

It is no accident that Dawe's *Fabulous Races* re-introduces us to the fabulous peoples imagined by medieval Europe, irregular and exotic peoples thought to exist at the edges of the world and recorded in the borders of the Nuremberg Chronicle (1493).³⁶ There, in the margins of Europe's most ambitious early books of 'world history', these ill-shaped bodies gambol and falter. Grotesques were a popular element in medieval travellers' tales and, in the Chronicle, they are shown in convincing (woodblock) detail, beside printed passages telling where they were to be found. Such depictions were also used to satirize contemporary foibles. The Cynocephali, for example, with their inarticulate barking and growling, symbolised slander and vindictiveness. The headless men represented those who cheat and seek advantage of the unsuspecting.

Each of the seven sections of Dawe's *Fabulous Races* represents an assortment of these grotesques who will either help or hinder children's entry into an enclosed, heavenly garden. In one section, a woman with six arms represents possessiveness and possible obstacles. Close by a man with one foot, a Sciapod, is caught on the 'ropes' of indecision and playfully invites children to sit on the 'fence' with him. Another woman, an Antipod, with back-to-front feet (representing accommodation) has parted her hair in order to let children through. Yet another woman (with elephant-like ears and representing shyness) lifts the lowest railing allowing entry. In contrast, anger is represented by a Cynocephalus, a dog-headed man who bars children's entry. Nearby, a man with his face in his chest (contrary to his stereotype) pushes down the rails, facilitating entry. All of this is watched over by the sun and the moon, representing the attainment of self-awareness.

The controversy generated by *Fabulous Races* surprised many. Some commentators considered its circular fence-like design to be "dangerous" while others found its fabulous people "unseemly." John Freeman-Moir expressed the view that "the

*Reintroducing the Fabulous Races -
Man with Face in his Chest*, 1989
Bronze
Collection of the Artist



Reintroducing the Fabulous Races - Antipod, 1989
Bronze
Collection of the Artist

whole piece [was] designed to awaken the imagination... conceived with a sense of fun and satire" and asserted that "At a time of profound social crisis, art in the public space can play its part in supporting hope, thought and criticism."³⁷

By their nature, grotesques are neither ideal nor uniform. In the physiognomies of Dürer and Lavater their irregular proportions are invariably beset by physical distortion and inevitably refer to human phobias. With his Grotesques, Dawe re-creates the fabulous people as representing not the terribilità of a past world, but rather as reflections of our own time, machinations and prejudices. Moreover, as its title indicates, the work was primarily designed to excite the imagination and thought of children.

A blend of innocence and enquiry shapes Dawe's Grotesques. Here the body assumes an almost totemic significance yet their scale is local, 30 cms., almost domestic. The Grotesques are discernibly human and, like us, vulnerable. Tumbling and turning in the small circumferences of their worlds, each figure has been given a distinctive trait. They twist [23], tumble [19 and 20], turn [16 and 18] or simply sit [21], or stand stock still as though confounded [22]. It is intriguing to speculate what persuaded Dawe to model these figures in such an intimate scale, one that almost invites us to handle the object, each of which seems to ask, "Are we so different, you and I?"

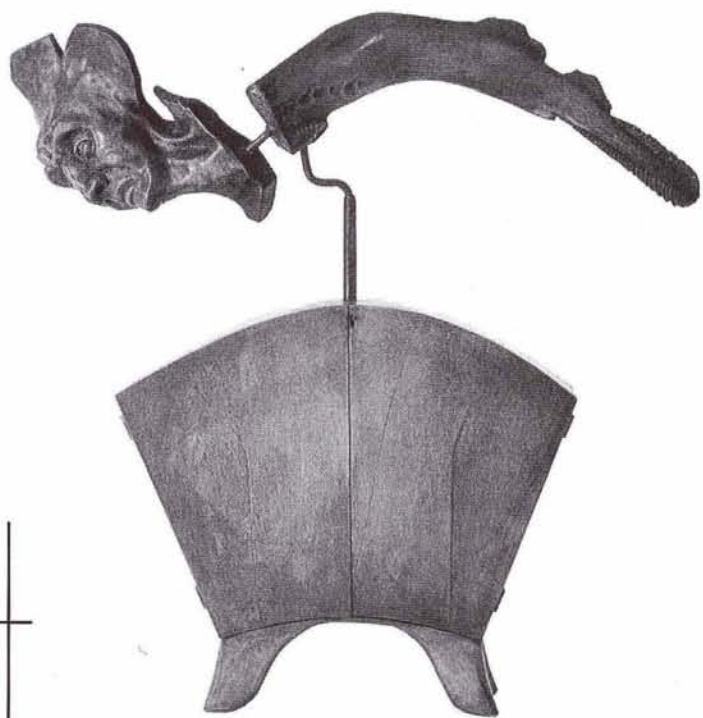
Throughout history the sculpted body has appeared in various forms and environments, fulfilling a multitude of functions and generating a diverse range of meanings: as a symbol of fertility and maternity, as an object disciplined into 'perfect' proportions, as a source of sensual pride, as a reflection of victory and/or the vanquished. Above all, the body has survived as the central means of expressing what it is to be human.



Reintroducing the Fabulous Races - Sciapod, 1989
Bronze
Collection of the Artist



Reintroducing the Fabulous Races - Figure Handstanding, 1989
Bronze
Collection of the Artist



Still Life Composition - A Man Fish with Empty Cupboard, 1995
Wood and steel
Collection of the Artist

Dawe is alert to the freedom that the figure facilitates; access to the sublime, the ignominious and even the base. But, whether as bird, beast, grotesque or human, the body has been used by Dawe consistently as an indicator (a representative portrait) of the wider socio-political-cultural state. It is not that the artist hesitates to indulge in individual portraiture (*Self-portrait with Loon* [6] shows us otherwise) but rather that he believes much portraiture can, sometimes unwittingly, become too autobiographical. He insists that individual well-being is inextricably bound up with the interrelations between self and society; and, in this sense, the body is always symbolic in Dawe's work, part of his appreciation of common knowledge and part of an ongoing critical process:

My sculptures are doing things; they are verbs. As human beings we are makers and I make in relation to the world around me. I am in pursuit of solutions and I think the body is the most truly wonderful work of design solutions. And so time and again I return to its workings. That does not mean that I have found solutions. It simply means I view the complexities of the world through the body...

The individual fascinates me. But I believe that too often portraiture, supposedly grounded in biography, turns into autobiography. This can lead to a form of intervention, one I try to avoid, hence the skeletal frames. Yes, they are influenced by my experience in the freezing works, but also by my studies of anatomy. I think the skeletal frames free the body from outward differences and allow and encourage us to find a sense of humanity greater than the sum of individual portraits. The skeleton potentially reminds us of the brevity of life and cycles, the significance of the bare

bones beneath the drapery or fine feathers. In my most recent works, although the body is fleshed out and athletic, it is, nonetheless, subject to the same uncertainties and inevitabilities.

From such comments and the works themselves it is clear that neither in the skeletal nor the fleshed-out forms does Dawe use the body as some sort of exemplar of the ideal.³⁸ Each form, in its different sculptural language, is an agent of enquiry with Nos. 15 and 30 symbolically representing the metaphoric heights and depths of such investigations. Nevertheless, in all of these works, the body is a frame through which Dawe interrogates the confines and the anxiety of decisions, definitions and differences. Dawe's comments reflect his appreciation not simply of anatomical design. His use of the skeleton and the fleshed out form pose the same concerns.

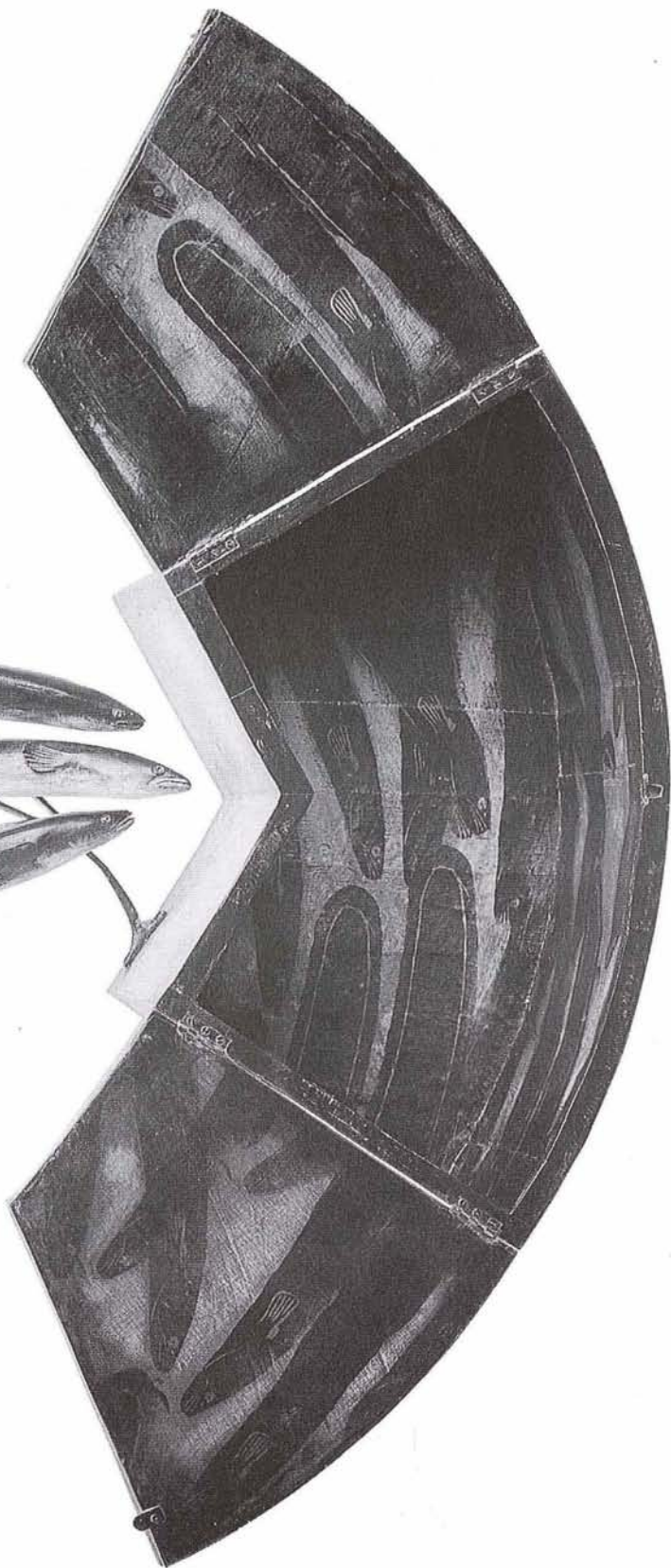
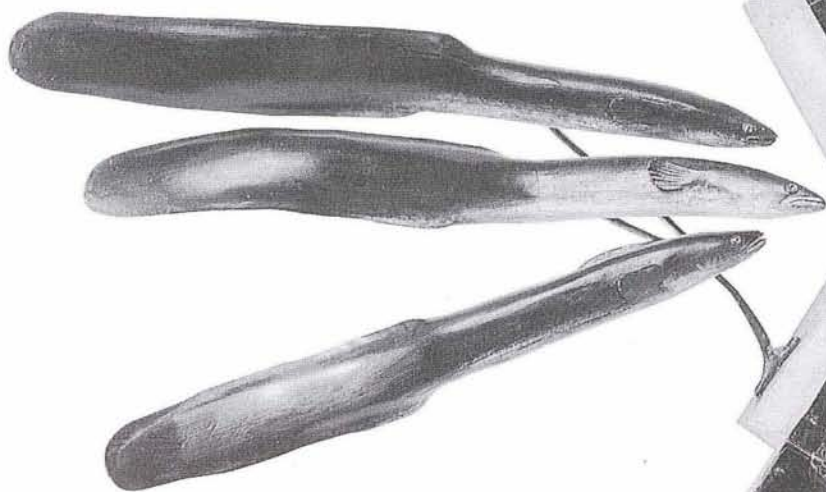
The River

Perhaps more than in any other section of this exhibition, the *River* works possess an arcane quality: they are a mixture of the sacred and the mundane. But what is the proportion? Are these tabernacles or meat-safes? Need we make a distinction, or is Dawe proposing a daily amalgam of the two? Has he dispensed with the pedestal, or re-created it in the language of the local, his sisters' glory boxes? These boxes are like cassone, the Italian marriage chests often featured in Vanitas works.³⁹ They are, like the black Waitaki cooking stones, treasuries of precious supplies. They are cupboard versions of Dawe's recurring circles.

If *Reintroducing the Fabulous Races* invites us beyond habitual spheres and shapes, then the *River* works, both the chests and the cooking stones, constitute both a departure from but also a return to the local, to the Waitaki River and the sources and sustenances of Dawe's childhood:

The collective title, *Black Stones - Waitaki River*, refers to the old cooking stones still found at the mouth of the Waitaki. As a boy I remember references being made to these and how, despite successive cultivations, they still reappear as black circles in paddock. I was and remain fascinated: fascinated not only by the visual image but the realisation of a history that extended much, much further back than I had been aware of. That history is not revealed in carving, in cultivated terraced hillsides, or treasured artefacts, but in the humble, everyday ritual preparation of food. I felt then, and still do, that those stones, and the associated gestures (harvesting and preparing food) gave me a sense of place and a sense of my own history so that I felt and still experience a sense of place and purpose that is at once personal and part of a human continuum, one that started thousands of years ago. This realisation has been a motivating factor and a recurring source of imagery in many of my works. The river, its mouth, and those cooking stones, represent not only the complex and fragile evolving stages of nature and food sources, but are a metaphoric conduit for the cycles of life.

And it is this blend of rushing and spent life that informs Dawe's river chests and figures. The chests are shapes of apparently anodyne simplicity, stores for the future. Their



surfaces are sensuously tactile, light and dark paint and linen over re-cycled silk-smooth kauri. But their volume and spaces are anomalous and ambivalent. Their beautiful surfaces are Sisyphean in that nothing, neither fish nor figure, can remain stable. Like the river and the human body, they are vehicles and vessels; stores of ordinary and numinous resources. Whether we experience these chests as caskets or meat-safes, they are emblematic of daily rituals - food and thought. And, like cassone, and as vanitas objects, they symbolise the joy and ephemerality of life.

One possible interpretation of the river chests is a marriage of life and death, a union of physical and spiritual aspects (as with Coleridge's use of the albatross and eels in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*). These *River* works, especially *Figure with Lamprey* (1996) [30], probe natural and other tides. Here is where the local river, the Waitaki, flows into the universal. Joyce uses the Liffey in such a manner; Liffey-Anna Livia Plurabella flows through Dublin and out into the open sea. Thus Joyce offers his readers the opportunity to experience the river rush of life and death in themselves, in 'double-belief,' vitalised by the persistence of pagan beliefs and habits of thought alongside Christianity. Similarly, in Dawe's *River* works, two freestanding worlds are proposed and merged, proffering another - of repetition and renewal.

Eel - Blind Channel - Birdling's Flat, 1996
Wood
Collection of the Artist



A Constant Pull Down - Mortuary Chest Composition with Figure and Basket, 1997
Wood and steel
Collection of the Artist

Dawe's Waitaki flows between stone groynes and over curvilinear kauri surfaces; it is a river of life and death, Styx and Sarasvati, West and East.⁴⁰ The river flows over the curve of the glory box turning it into the shoulders of the earth. Symbolising both the particular and wider possibilities, the river carries in its current the angst of individual enquiry, such as we experience in *A Constant Pull Down - Mortuary Chest* [25], and the possible relationship between mystery and revelation as explored in *Figure with Eel* (1999) [30] and *Figure with Lamprey* [29]. The latter work investigates the migration of the lamprey and the sculptor's curiosity as to how he might experience such a journey. 'It is then another enquiry into the contorted positions humans can assume in order to understand a natural process - migration - and how it might relate to us. Dawe comments. "I make sculpture because I am still looking for solutions, for ways that make sense, nothing to do with the dogma of structures, more to do with the experience behind symbols that work and are meaningful to people. I value a medium of expression which is accessible and can evoke the same range of emotions as a good tune."

Clearly, the *River* chests, like their braided source, symbolise precious (finite) resources, stewardship, conscience and spiritual sustenance. With their cambered floors that preclude both storage and stasis, these designs (for the domestic or the sacred?) are, in fact, metaphors and defy definitive interpretations. At a surface level they refer to the task of trapping and harvesting fish; for example, *A Man Fish with Empty Cupboard* [24]. At another, they may, for some, offer an epigrammatic, ethnographic or biblical reference, expressed in a vocabulary of redemptive struggle as in *A Constant Pull Down - Mortuary Chest* [25]. For others these chests and figures may represent a cultural and/or ecological summons.

The *River* works recycle old knowledge and its symbolic language, and are layered with earlier themes: the endangered birds and beasts, the brevity of existence which cannot be halted or contained, and the mystery of life encapsulated in a child's question, "Where do the eels go?" But because these works re-state the irrevocable dynamics of choices made and resources spent, ultimately, through their presence and shape, they assume a symbolic-critical role vis-a-vis established customs, traditions and institutions.

The excoriated bones of earlier works appeared so well suited to Dawe's critical enterprise that, initially, the shift in scale and volume in these *River* works seems strange. But is the language so different? The protagonist in *Figure with Eel* [30], is caught in yet another state of disequilibrium that engages us not with bare bones but the pressure of intriguing and athletic mass. Here, once again, sculptural logic supersedes anatomical fact, convincing us that this impossibly contorted position (of enquiry) is possible.

Figure with Lamprey [29] is an expressively concentrated and sceptical work. The figure balances, looking down around the riverbank and over the shoulder of the world (the pedestal re-read as Earth?). And yet questions about how and why this strong figure is so vulnerable, or what will happen next, become secondary to the central realisation, which is that, explicitly or complicitly, we create these difficult positions ourselves. Either we exercise balance (personal and political) or we must struggle with the consequences. Either we pursue our own enquiries or have these dictated by others.

Dawe relates that while on holiday at the Waitaki his children were fascinated and intrigued with the dark and scary motions of eels they watched. So the origins of *Figure with Eel* [30] may, in part, be biographical, beginning with the question of a small boy, "where do the eels go?" But the ramification of this profane crucifixion is that questioning is our individual responsibility.⁴¹

Centuries ago, wrestling with his own material and spiritual questioning and promising neither 'truth' nor solution, Peter Abelard suggested that by doubting we come to questioning. This is the position assumed by Dawe's protagonist in *Composition with Figure and Eel*. His struggle (enquiry) concerns being and becoming. Two fingers are thrust into the gutted side of the eel. Is this the side of an eel or the side of Christ? Waitaki or Calvary? Is this our position of "necessary uncertainty," the daily act of examining the anomalous shapes and state of things around us?

These *River* works (as Dawe indicates in his interview with Felicity Milburn) are about the interconnectedness of life and death and the patterns and structures humans create, trying to order the flux of uncertainty and doubt. Out of disequilibrium Dawe has carved a truth about our modern lives: since balance and imbalance are part of our condition, a critical awareness of both is essential.

As Dawe has commented, "The 'endangered species', like *Apportion - Eels with Trap* [26], is about the cycle of life and resources, and our relationship as a species to others and the impact of our direct actions upon these dynamics." The 'endangered species' works represent some of Dawe's most poetical expressions of this concern. Through analogy and metaphor *The Cockfight* [9 and 31] and *Freezing Works* [33] images confront us with machinations of our own making. And it is this sense of struggle and continuum, of unending change, flowing through the devastated limbs of birds, beasts and humans, and across the precarious surfaces of the *River* works, that makes each of these works interrogative elements of the same drama. Each phrasing of Dawe's sculptural language raises questions: the skeletal works, the *May Pole Dance* prints [32] and rugs, *The Cockfight* [31] and *Freezing Works* [33] woodblocks, as well as the tosses and tumbles of the grotesques. All reiterate the same enquiries regarding balance and relationships.

Sculpture, by its physical nature, can be more complicated to organise and exhibit than shows of two-dimensional work. Its sheer physicality can both impose and test boundaries. And because it engages us physically, it can elicit an almost immediate response. The selection of carved and modelled works in this exhibition represents a sustained questioning of the balancing act required in intra- and interpersonal relationships. They question the dynamics of freedom and constraint in shapes poised, often vertiginously, in relation to defining boundaries. There are gaps. Neither the works nor the artist claim solutions. The 'dramas' continue.



Figure with Eel, 1999
Wood
Collection of the Artist

Endnotes

1. Henri Gaudier added the surname of his life-long platonic, Polish friend, Sophia Brzeska, to his own. The couple were acquainted with Katherine Mansfield who gave the sculptor a tiki. A tiki-like image was carved on to his army rifle butt and, arguably, the tiki influenced his abstracted figure, *Red Stone Dancer*. See: *Burning to Speak, the life and art of Henri Gaudier Brzeska*, Oxford, 1978 and *Gaudier Brzeska, drawing and sculpture*, Cory, Adams & Mackay, 1965.
2. Käthe Kollwitz, Bronze, 72 x 46 x 48 cm, Hirshhorn Museum, Washington D.C.
3. Eduardo Paolozzi, "Sculpture and the Twentieth-century Condition" in *Sculpture Today, Art & Design*, 1987, 77-80 (80).
4. See Jonathan Smart, *Landfall* 142, Jun. 1982; C. Fusco, *Christchurch Press*, 7 Dec. 1995 and Sally Rae, *Otago Daily Times*, 30 Dec. 1997.
5. Garry Arthur, *The Press*, 21 Jul. 1984.
6. Ian Wedde, *Evening Post*, 22 Aug. 1984.
7. T.J. McNamara, *New Zealand Herald*, 5 Jun. 1997.
8. Colin Slade, *New Zealand Crafts* 35, Autumn, 1991, 8-10.
9. These series were printed with the assistance of Denise Copland, Printmaker.
10. Collection of the Forrester Gallery, Oamaru. See John Hurrell, *Christchurch Press*, 10 Jan. 1986 and Kathryn McNeil, *Oamaru Mail*, 14 Dec. 1990.
11. Made in collaboration with wrought-iron master Noel Gregg.
12. See Warwick Brown, *Dominion Sunday Times*, 6 Apr. 1986.
13. On loan from the Auckland Art Gallery.
14. *Tone Arm - A Record to Date* (1977/8), *From the Days of Oil - A Tool Reclaimed* (1978) and *From the Days of Oil - Car Part Reclaimed* (1977/8) are on loan from the Sargeant Gallery (Wanganui), the Artist and Christchurch Boys' High School, respectively.
15. *Pommel Vault with 1/4 Turn Equestrian Sculpture* (1988) and *Umbrella Canopy with Figures* (1985/6) are on loan from John Parkes (Christchurch) and Patria Lambey (Auckland) respectively. *Bikini Pattern - A Double Portrait with Vase and Parasol* (1984) is on loan from the artist. *Portrait of a Grotesque* from the collection of Lynda and John Matthews (New Plymouth).
16. *Self-Portrait with Loon* (1984/8) - on loan from Burnside High School, Christchurch.
17. A design idea suggested to Bing Dawe by fellow sculptor, Neil Dawson.
18. See also the 1994 works entitled '*figurines*', a series of small painted ceramics depicting males and females dancing on top of glory boxes.
19. *Braided River Excavation* (1984) together with *Dead Bird with Weapon* (1981/2) on loan from Dr. Rob Jackaman, Christchurch.
20. Keith Stewart, *Sunday Star-Times*, 15 Jun. 1997.
21. *Large Soaring Bird (Dead)*, in the Auckland Art Gallery's collection; *Large Soaring Bird (Ensnared)* (1981/2) in the Ministry of Works Building, Wellington; and *Study: Bird Removing Foreign Object from its Wing* (1981/2) sited in the Christchurch Convention Centre.
22. *Large Soaring Bird (Dead)* (1981/2) on loan from the Auckland City Gallery.
23. *Caged Bird* (1981/2) on loan from the Rotorua Museum of Art and History.
24. Roger Blackley, *New Zealand Herald*, 13 Sep. 1982.
25. In Egyptian, Near Eastern, Greek, Roman, Celtic and Northern European traditions, birds symbolised departed souls, messengers from heaven, or carriers of occult secrets. From Siberia to Central America, feathers have been used to symbolise spirituality and the ability to rise above earthly struggles and to learn the language of birds was a metaphor for enlightenment.
26. William Hogarth (1697-1764) English painter, engraver and social satirist.
27. *The Ambassadors* (1533) oil on canvas, 207 x 209.5 cm, by Hans Holbein the Younger (1497/8-1543). In this work, two men stand either side of a table which, like the *intarsia* 'shelves' at Urbino, displays objects symbolising a humanistic background. The table, not the human beings, is the central focus. Holbein breaks with Renaissance naturalism and perspective in the object floating across the bottom of the picture. When viewed from the lower lefthand corner, this image returns to its natural form and becomes a skull.
28. Garry Arthur, *Christchurch Press*, 23 Aug. 1984.
29. See Jonathan Smart, "Devices which disturb," *NZ Listener*, 8 Sep. 1984.
30. *Figure with Bird Mask - Leaping* (1989), 2000 x 2000 x 500 mm. On loan from Martin Clements (Sumner).
31. Siegfried Giedion, *Mechanisation Takes Command*, Oxford: OUP (1948) repr. 1955.
32. Brett Riley, *The Star*, 25 Jul. 1984. See also Bridie Lonie, *Otago Daily Times*, 27 Jul. 1984; Jonathan Smart, *NZ Listener*, 8 Sep. 1984.
33. Dimensions: 600mm x 3000. Collection of the *Bank of New Zealand*, Christchurch.
34. Alexa M. Johnston, "Aspects of Recent New Zealand Art," *Sculpture* 2, 1986.
35. See John Freeman-Moir, "Marvels and Monstrosities, the Fabulous Races of Bing Dawe," *Art New Zealand* 16, Summer 1991-92, 50-53.
36. See Rudolph Wittkower, *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1977.
37. John Freeman-Moir, *Art New Zealand* 16 1991-92, 50-53 (52). See also Adrienne Rewi, *Christchurch Press*, 19 Jan. 1994.
38. Western aesthetics, grounded in Platonic theory (which insists upon the primacy of ideal forms) proscribe the exact presentation of the natural world, replete with differences and irregularities. Against the ideal tradition, however, presses the anti-classical call for the exact re-presentation of appearances.
39. The Latin phrase, *vanitas vanitatum* (from *Ecclesiastes* 1:2) translates as 'vanity of vanities'. Translated into allegorical paintings (particularly the seventeenth century Dutch Leyden School) it often featured a skull together with still life objects, signalling the transience of human existence.
40. The River Styx for the Greeks, and the Saravasti ('Flowing One') for the Hindu, were rivers of wisdom and renewal. Heraclitus viewed a river as a symbol not only of birth, death and rebirth, but also of time itself, flowing ever onward without reversal. He said, "You cannot step twice in the same river, for fresh waters are ever flowing upon you." See J.E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (New York: Meridian Books, 1960) 94; 347. The *Nuremberg Chronicle* was published by Anton Koberger (Dürer's grandfather) with designs by the leading Nuremberg painter, Michel Wolgemut (1434-15-19) with whom Dürer was apprenticed.
41. The origin of the profane crucifixion (which is part of the Pope's coat of arms) possibly relates to the story that St. Peter asked to be crucified upside down, in a position lower than that of Christ.

Catalogue Listing

1. *Tone Arm - A Record to Date*, 1978
Wood, river stones, string and paint
Collection of Sarjeant Gallery te Whare o Rehua Whanganui
 2. *From the Days of Oil - A Tool Reclaimed*, 1978
Wood and stone
Collection of the Artist
 3. *From the Days of Oil - Car Part Reclaimed*, 1978
Wood and stone
Collection of Christchurch Boys' High School
 4. *Caged Bird Stripped of its Covering*, 1983
Kauri, string and wire
Collection of Rotorua Museum of Art and History
 5. *Large Soaring Bird (Dead)*, 1981
Kauri, marlin twine and cycle parts
Collection of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, purchased 1982
 6. *Self-portrait with Loon*, 1984/8
Wood and steel
Burnside High School Collection
 7. *Braided River Excavation*, 1984
Wood, steel and concrete
Collection of Rob Jackaman
 8. *Still Keeping His Balance He Used the Umbrella as a Safety Net - Image of a Man with a Missile*, 1984/5
Wood, steel and stone
Collection of Robert McDougall Art Gallery
 9. *The Cockfight*, 1984
Wood and steel
Collection of the Forrester Gallery, Oamaru (purchased with the assistance of the QE II Arts Council Contemporary Art Acquisition programme)
 10. *Two Men Gaming - Composition with Figures on a Green Field*, 1986
Wood and steel
Collection of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, purchased 1986
 11. *Dead Bird with Weapon*, 1983
Wood, feathers and found object
Collection Rob Jackaman
 12. *Bikini Pattern - A Double Portrait with Vase and Parasol*, 1984
Wood and steel
Collection of the artist
 13. *Pommel Vault with 1/4 turn / Equestrian Sculpture*, 1988
Wood
Collection of John Parkes
 14. *Umbrella Canopy with Figures*, 1984/9
Wood and steel
Courtesy of Canterbury Gallery
 15. *Figure with Bird Mask - Leaping*, 1989
Wood
Collection of Martin Clements
 16. *Reintroducing the Fabulous Races - Sciapod*, 1989
Bronze
Collection of the Artist
 17. *Reintroducing the Fabulous Races - Man with Face in his Chest*, 1989
Bronze
Collection of the Artist
 18. *Reintroducing the Fabulous Races - Figure Handstanding*, 1989
Bronze
Collection of the Artist
 19. *Reintroducing the Fabulous Races - Women with Fabulous Beast*, 1989
Bronze
Collection of the Artist
 20. *Reintroducing the Fabulous Races - Antipod*, 1989
Bronze
Collection of the Artist
 21. *Reintroducing the Fabulous Races - Man Pulling his Face*, 1989
Bronze
Collection of the Artist
 22. *Reintroducing the Fabulous Races - Man with Face in His Chest*, 1990
Wood
Collection of the Artist
 23. *Portrait of a Grotesque*, 1992
Carved wood, tar and acrylic paint
Collection of John and Lynda Matthews, New Plymouth
 24. *Still Life Composition - A Man Fish with Empty Cupboard*, 1995
Wood and steel
Collection of the Artist
 25. *A Constant Pull Down - Mortuary Chest Composition with Figure and Basket*, 1997
Wood and steel
Collection of the Artist
 26. *Apportion - Eels with Trap*, 1997
Wood
Collection of University of Canterbury Library
 27. *Eel - Birdling's Flat - Black Stones Waitaki River*, 1997
Wood
Collection of the Artist
 28. *Eel - Blind Channel - Birdling's Flat*, 1996
Wood
Collection of the Artist
 29. *Figure with Lamprey*, 1999
Wood
Private Collection
 30. *Figure with Eel*, 1999
Wood
Collection of the Artist
- Prints**
31. *The Cockfight*, 1984
Woodcut
Collection of the Forrester Gallery, Oamaru (purchased with the assistance of the QEII Arts Council Contemporary Art Acquisition programme)
 32. *May Pole Dance - Pattern for a Funerary Vase*, 1985
Woodcut
Collection of the Artist
 33. *Freezing Works - Designs for a Dinner set*, 1985
Woodcut
Collection of the Artist
 34. *Repetitive print with blind spot*, 1985
Woodcut
Collection of the Artist
 35. *White-baiters - Two Men White-baiting - Black Stones, Waitaki River*, 1991
Woodcut
Collection of the Artist
 36. *Bakery with Dogs - Design for a Long Bread Mould*, 1985
Woodcut
Collection of the Artist

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