

drift **north**

s raphine pick

simon mcintyre

valerie nielsen

christopher braddock

joyce campbell

759.
993
CAL

drift **north**

● introduction

There is a phenomenon well known to Christchurch inhabitants, based on empirical observation, where approximately every two years a group of talented young artists abandon the 'city that shines' for the seductive attractions of northern climes. It is generally believed that they go in search of big city lights and seeking the greater exhibition opportunities and artistic exposure which the increased population of the North Island offers.

Drift North features five such artists, all graduates of the Canterbury University School of Fine Arts, who now live and practice in Auckland or Wellington. There is no one single shape to the show; it is not intended to be a thematically unified exhibition. The participating artists have been away from Christchurch for different lengths of time, ranging from two to twenty years, and their work is equally varied including painting, sculpture and installation components. Drift North offers the Christchurch audience the opportunity of catching up with the work, and its development, of a group of artists who all spent important and formative periods in this region.

However, having said that a framework of difference, rather than likeness, drives this exhibition, it should also be noted that, as usual when a group of works is brought together, dialogue between those works is opened. It is talk that is filled sometimes with shared opinion and sometimes with that of opposition and it is a discourse that is enriched by our own contributions.

It is certainly possible to locate points of shared reference and interaction within this group of artists and their work. There are representational references to be found in the work of Simon McIntyre and S raphine Pick, who also share similarities in the way they construct an image using layers and veils of motifs and paint. From a figurative point of view, the body - or an implied presence - connects the work of Christopher Braddock, Joyce Campbell and Pick; who all consider people, their relationship to each other, and the environment they occupy.

McIntyre and Valerie Nielsen can be located philosophically within an abstract modernist tradition, and their work has a meditative and contemplative quality that comes from placing an emphasis on process and the formal elements of a painting's construction. Visual repetition and the use of multiples occurs in work by Braddock, McIntyre, Nielsen and Pick. An awareness of the politics of the museum space links Braddock and Campbell, who have both incorporated aspects of this area in their work, in terms of how it is installed - at heights not typically associated with museum viewing - and by making the museum space itself part of the content addressed in the work.

The tension that results from opposition is another element shared by some of these artists. Braddock combines a polished technical finish with visceral content, Campbell uses a material most are familiar with to draw attention to overlooked and ignored aspects of our environment, McIntyre eloquently explores the interplay of the figurative and the abstract and Nielsen off-sets vertical and horizontal elements within works to reinforce her subject matter.

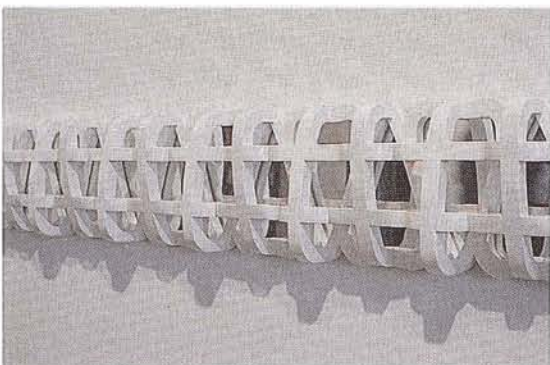
● christopher braddock

For the last few years Christopher Braddock's work has explored the subjects of religious belief, sexuality and identity as it is framed by such issues. He does so from a formal, minimalist perspective employing emblematic motifs as symbols. By combining and juxtaposing these symbols, the works become metaphors for spiritual uncertainty, sexual dilemma and institutional vulnerability. The works are infused with duality and contrast, both in terms of the materials and techniques employed and the content addressed. Tension is established between sleek structures, sacred icons and their visceral body references. This process of symbolic morphing results in religious iconography that is charged with sexual overtones, while the body - or parts of it - are cloaked with a spiritual status. The uneasy relationships formed by these delicately balanced extremes of principle and philosophy are used by Braddock to heighten the viewer's consciousness of contemporary society's crisis of faith.

Untitled: repeated cross (1993) presents the most sacred of religious symbols constructed from wood and wire mesh. The repetition of the vertically stacked series of crosses recalls, and pays homage to precedents such as Brancusi's notion of infinitely repeating modules, Ad Reinhardt's vertical crosses and, closer to home, St ephen Bambury's works of the same subject. The mesh also grounds the work in the vernacular of everyday New Zealand. The crosses, one on top of another, also bring to mind the vertebrae of the body's spine, perhaps implying a backbone of strength, but strength of dubious vigour, riddled with holes in the mesh and at the centre of each cross. These holes and indentations can be seen as base references to body orifices, or as the marks of penetration associated with the stigmata and the cross. The cross is a symbol of the passage from death to life, of redemption and renewal. The cavities too, are entry points to the interior life of the body, passages to the soul. That the structure is hollow, transparent and made from a material associated with a cage - and concomitantly with repression - suggests that the church is an institution which is not without its weaknesses.

Repeated, cage-like modular structures, are also present in *Untitled: continuum* (1994). Here, the religious overtones have been replaced with an emphasis on sexuality and relationship. The long, horizontal form is built up from interlocking components modelled on a sports groin guard. Its lozenge shape also alludes to other parts of the body; a face or a heart. *Untitled: continuum* is hung at groin height on the wall, and as mirrors back each of the units, the viewer becomes intimately involved with the inhabitant of this form. A chain of hearts, faces or groins, stretch across the wall's surface so that other people standing in front of the work also become connected to it and each other. At the same time that involvement is invited, the skeletal frame creates a kind of prison, imposing restraint and enforcing distance. Viewers are given a fragmented reflection of themselves looking out from their enclosure. A literal reading of the work is one of repression and caged, or guarded, sexuality. Emotional dichotomies abound. An invitation to enter is coupled with an arm's length restraint: a cool, polished and sophisticated finish is underscored by a web of tangled relationships. It is the viewer who occupies the caged hollow heart, who gives it substance and, as such is given the responsibility of untangling the web.

Christopher Braddock was born in Waiuku, South Auckland in 1962. In 1985 he graduated from the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts with a BFA. During 1986-1988, he was the recipient of a French Government Scholarship to study sculpture at the Ecole nationale supérieure des Beaux Arts in Paris, where he graduated with a diplôme supérieure (First Class Honours) and was awarded the school's Joseph Epstein Award for sculpture. He concluded his studies, in 1988-1989, with an MA from the Courtauld Institute in London. For the next few years he lived and worked in Northern Italy returning to New Zealand in 1992. He received a QEII Arts Council grant the same year. The following year he was awarded New York's Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant. He is currently a lecturer in the Theory and History of Art at the School of Art and Design at AIT in Auckland. Recent exhibitions include: Galleria del Naviglio, Milan, Italy (1991), *Vogue/Vague: New Sculptors, New Sculpture*, CSA Gallery, Christchurch (1992), *Station to Station: The Way of the Cross*, Auckland City Art Gallery (1994), solo exhibitions at the Gow-Langford Gallery, Auckland (1992-1995), *Fleshly Worn*, ASA Gallery, Auckland (1995).



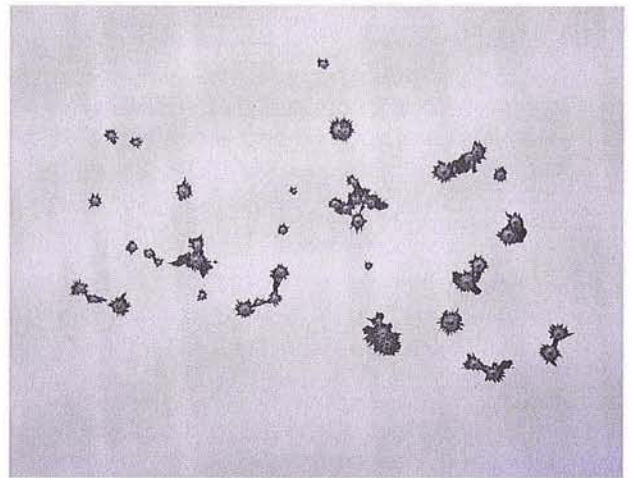
Untitled: continuum 1994
Customwood, paint, mirror

While continuing to explore notions of identity and the relationships formed between people and their environment, Joyce Campbell's work has recently undergone some shifts in emphasis. Campbell's work has always dealt with residues - the traces left behind - of human habitation and interaction. Earlier work, such as *Bleach* (1992) and *Slip* (1993) had a domestic focus and employed an anecdotal approach. The allegorical installation *She's Waiting* (1994) featured a series of female forms constructed from eeling net weaving an ambiguous narrative. It is a tale of the tension between two aggressors, exploring relationships of gender and offering a perspective which is one of mutual seduction and entrapment. *Scour* (1995) considered cleaning rituals and the way people continuously work to remove the evidence of their interaction with each other and their surroundings. Campbell suggested that the removal of the visual evidence of being human leads to a sense of loss, a loss of self identity and of one's location in the world.

Campbell's more recent work has become more minimal and increasingly equivocal. The intimacy of personal parable has been replaced with an accent on site specific work. The representational elements found previously have made way for a greater stress on implied presence, the resonance of human occupation. At the same time, the location for such explorations has moved from the private domain of the home into the territory of public spaces. Campbell is primarily concerned with the articulation of a space's architecture and the way this process reveals aspects of the social and psychological dynamic of the environment. By introducing subtle architectural intrusions, she draws attention to, and heightens awareness of, elements of the environment which communicate something of its accumulated history and habitation.

Campbell considers that such endeavours are particularly relevant in gallery spaces, where special effort is taken to eradicate the residues of previous occupation. Holes are filled and walls are repeatedly repaired and painted, to remove the traces of intervention. Campbell wants to draw the viewer's attention to their own relationship to the environment they occupy. It is her intention, by amplifying elements of the environment, to identify the mediated nature of the experience of a gallery space and to illustrate the way constructed environments - and the experience of them - are validated as normal and natural.

One of the materials Campbell favours for this exercise is vitreous enamel and steel. Together these materials are used for objects such as baths, stove tops, tool boxes and shelving and are, therefore, familiar to almost everybody. Indeed, it is a familiarity that borders on being intimate, such is the daily contact most people have with it. Campbell plays with the tension created by using a cool, uninviting and brutally industrial fabric and the warmth of the relationship people have with it. That relationship is evidenced by the graffiti-like marks that can be made on it through sheer use. As the material is subjected to use, inherently territorial marks appear, recording the wear and tear.



Untitled Panel 1996
Vitreous enamel on steel

Joyce Campbell was born in Wairoa in 1971. She attended Canterbury University School of Fine Arts, graduating in 1992 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts majoring in Sculpture. Campbell lives and practices in Auckland and is a Senior Tutor in Sculpture at the University of Auckland School of Fine Arts. Recent exhibitions and installations include: *Vogue/Vague New Sculptors*, *New Sculpture*, CSA Gallery, Christchurch (1992), *Bleach*, High Street Gallery, Christchurch (1992), *Gaining Interest*, Artspace, Auckland (1993), *Constance Turning*, Auckland City Art Gallery (1993), *She's Waiting*, Art Now, The Museum of New Zealand, Wellington (1994), *Scour*, Fisher Gallery, Auckland (1995), *Five Winters*, 23A Gallery, Auckland (1996).

Joyce Campbell acknowledges the support of Creative New Zealand, Toi Aotearoa.

● simon mcintyre

Mies van der Rohe's now famous catch-cry "less is more" are the words currently governing Simon McIntyre's approach to his work. You could say, however, that since McIntyre's interests lie in mining the field between abstraction and the figurative, it is an approach which has always informed his work. He will tell you that if there is one single painting that most clearly influenced his early ideas and development, it was Colin McCahon's *Northland Panels*. McIntyre took from his study of this work a desire to look for the key elements and motifs in the landscape and make pictorial sense out of them.

Making pictorial sense is a critical area of concern and emphasis in McIntyre's work. His paintings are about the formal process of their own construction - the rhythms of line and tone, the compositional balance of shape, object and space - and setting out to achieve a harmony and wholeness from these elements. A dialogue is established between surface and image, using a language created from a vocabulary of subtle nuances found in the internal relationships of a painting.

A love of place shines out of McIntyre's earlier work, always translating into the communication of a sense of his local environment, be it the Christchurch Port Hills, the inner city buildings of Auckland, or the Devonport harbourside where he now lives. These works employed a vigorous and gestural technique with a heavily worked, complex and layered surface, to make marks that were abstract, but also took symbols from his surroundings as their inspiration.

There is still a sense of place in McIntyre's recent work, but one that has been drawn only in a more general way from the visual world, using it as a starting point, or catalyst, for abstract spaces. The substance of these works is the articulation and manipulation of these lyrical and evocative spaces. The layering is still there too, but it has taken on a simpler and more sophisticated elegance. Motifs and images float, emerging, retreating and reforming amidst the veils of delicate translucent hues of a muted palette.

In works like *Clef* (1995) and *Dulcet* (1995) McIntyre makes a correlation between the formal elements of a painting's construction and those required for the composition of a piece of music. The titles for the paintings are directly associated with music and sound and in both, a scroll form like that to be found on a violin, is placed in a field of lines that recalls those of a staff, at the base of the canvas, right of centre. In *Clef*, the sinuous scroll anchors the forms above it which interrupt and punctuate the staff, as if notes to a musical score. Its curling contour in *Dulcet* has more volume and floats through the undulating motion established by the horizontal bands. It is a motion made more tranquil by the regular grid of circular marks lying beneath this surface. The ethereal notes struck by these paintings can be interpreted in many ways - just as McIntyre intends. He provides fragments and glimpses of the real world and then positions them in contemplative mindscapes where meaning and understanding are open-ended options.

Simon McIntyre was born in Wellington in 1955. He graduated from the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts in 1976 with a Diploma of Fine Arts. He followed this with an Honours year in Painting in 1977. He has travelled to the USA and Europe several times during the years 1978-1989 and is currently living and practicing in Auckland, where he also teaches part time at the School of Art and Design at AIT. His work has been written about in magazines and is included in the texts *New Zealand Art: A Modern Perspective* by Elva Belt (1986) and *100 New Zealand Paintings* by Warwick Brown (1995). He has exhibited in solo and group exhibitions throughout New Zealand and in Australia since 1977. Exhibitions in which he has participated include: *Young Contemporaries*, Auckland City Art Gallery (1977), *Canterbury Centennial Exhibition*, Brooke Gifford Gallery, Christchurch (1982), *Coventry Gallery*, Sydney (1988), *Realities Gallery*, Melbourne (1990), *Visa Art Award* finalist, *City Gallery*, Wellington (1993 and 1995), *Review '94*, Fisher Gallery, Auckland (1995).

Clef 1995
Oil on canvas

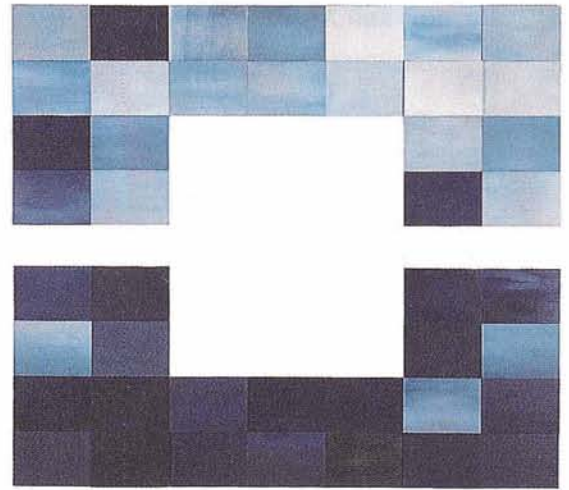


The most obvious change to occur in Valerie Nielsen's work in the last few years is the move from figuration to abstraction. However, it can be seen that this change, which at first seems a dramatic one, had a natural evolution and one for which the seeds were planted at the beginning of her career.

Nielsen's early work contained references to the landscape. She then moved on to painterly images which depicted an object isolated in a field of colour and space. It was as if these objects had been ensnared in some uncertain psychic void. She began to emphasize this contrast with materials, including aluminium panels attached to the canvas, making works that were almost a hybrid of painting and sculpture.

The combination of canvas and metal has now given way to a more resolved sculptural treatment, by dispensing with canvas all together, painting instead on a variety of other materials including plywood, aluminium, perspex and glass. Moods of entrapment and mysticism have evolved into rhythmic treatises inviting contemplation. This is achieved by using a restricted palette and exploring the variations to be found in the chosen hues, eliciting every possible subtlety of tone. She builds a work, with the addition and accumulation of tile-like leaves, into sequences that are organised into a harmonious whole. The small individual parts form delicate moments within an epic collective.

Sky Above, Sky Below (1995/6) embodies this description, composed of over forty panes, all miniature essays in subtle tonal shifts of blue. The painting is arranged in two halves, complementary in shape, but placed facing each other across an open divide. The huge scale of the work means the viewer feels as if they are drawn into the space between parts, to float on cloud-cushioned ether. Binary opposition and polarity are words regularly used to describe the dynamics of Nielsen's work and a strong sense of duality continues to inform such abstract compositions. *Sky Above, Sky Below* is a metaphor for a philosophical view that espouses the cyclic patterns governing life processes. It investigates the states of tension and resolution located within sites of complementary opposition. This polarity is anchored in the natural world, as the title of the painting suggests, with the shifts in colour from light to dark evoking day and night. The tiles' pigment journey, from a blush of blue that gradually deepens and darkens, suggests the passing of time and the importance of this element in the



Sky above, Sky below 1995/6
Oil, plywood and aluminium

communication process. The vertical and horizontal forms employed in *Plant* (1996) continue this environmental metaphor of organic opposition.

For Nielsen, the focus in recent work has shifted from the image depicted to the process and act of creation, while still incorporating the elements that previously interested her - the balance has just been rearranged. So it is almost as if Nielsen has come full circle when it comes to a consideration of her work's content. This seems appropriate for an artist whose work focuses on the nature of binary opposites. Her first works contained landscape references with a hint of abstraction and now these works, striving to capture painting's essence, evoke a sense of the natural world and the environment, while also inviting contemplation on a more poetic and philosophical level.

Valerie Nielsen was born in Hamilton in 1967. She graduated from the Canterbury University School of Fine Arts in 1990 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Painting). In 1991 Nielsen was awarded a QEII Arts Council Grant, for her first solo exhibition, *Key*, at the Brooke Gifford Gallery in Christchurch. In 1993 she travelled overseas visiting galleries and museums in Europe and the United States. Recent exhibitions include: *Vanitas*, McDougall Art Annex, Christchurch (1992), *Prospect Canterbury*, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch (1992), James Wallace Art Award (finalist), James Wallace Gallery, Auckland (1994), *Between a rock and a high place*, Teststrip Gallery, Auckland (1995), Visa Gold Art Award (finalist), City Gallery, Wellington (1995), *Dialogue with a relative*, Vavasour Godkin Gallery, Auckland (1996).

● séraphine pick

The last time that Séraphine Pick exhibited in Christchurch was two years ago at the Brooke Gifford Gallery. The exhibition, **Headspace**, proved to be a seminal one for Pick. Her earlier work was concerned primarily with society's depiction of women and her imagery drew from a range of art historical and mythological sources. There was a restless and fragmentary quality to the gathering of motifs for these images, that served to limit their cohesion and obscure Pick's identity as a painter. **Headspace** saw Pick harness the fragments, restlessness and borrowing, according them independent status fuelled by the personal. The paintings in this exhibition drew on the subject of memory and the images were imbued with a nervous and fey energy. Spidery, calligraphic lines were etched into layers of oil in an effort to bring painting and drawing together. Instead of using established imagery from history, Pick created her own language with a private vocabulary of motifs derived from childhood memories. Tremulous veils of pigment establish a psychic ground from which a rich array of symbols (skinny iron bed frames, boxes, balloons, bandages, colanders, ladders, shoes and dresses) bubble forth and recede, hovering in the dreamscape of the subconscious. The palette for these works is restricted to creamy, yellow whites and warm, sepia browns, as if separating light and dark, day and night, dream and nightmare.

White Bags (1995) is an example of the work that followed **Headspace**. While the figure is absent, there is an implied presence established by the sea of paperbag masks and the outline of a dress at their centre. Pick makes reference, in this work, to childhood games of dress-ups and role playing where the mask is donned in order to become someone else. The blurred, genderless identity of the paperbag mask's occupant is slightly disturbing, the repeated mass of this motif serving to unnerve. The impasto paint application relates to minimalist painting with its initial appearance as a field of limited colour. Gradually you become aware that there is a great deal more

High Rise 1995
Oil on canvas
Collection B.King, Wellington

to the surface, as the scratched drawing slowly reveals itself, much as memories themselves are pieced together.

Pick's work has undergone some changes since that momentous exhibition in 1994. The now characteristic elegant and detailed iconography is retained, but a period spent travelling overseas has inspired her to return to a more tightly painted surface, as in her earlier work, with imagery in the round. Being confronted by Europe's vast art history reminded her of the concentrated and intimate nature of this type of painting. She is still exploring the theme of memory as *High Rise* (1995) demonstrates. However, while an image prompted by the personal recollection of seeing shoeboxes stacked high in a store window overseas; it is now a topic given a more general and universal treatment. Seeing the shoeboxes led Pick to thinking about the way people store things in boxes, the way memories are stored and the need for people to gather, and keep near, those objects that evoke special memories.

Glowing colour has also been added to recent work, although Pick likes to use a base shade in which her motifs appear suspended. They hover, floating in a fluid pool, with bright tints entwined in the memories being recorded. The complex layering of memory is also still referred to, with figures lightly etched into the backgrounds of the pictures.

Pick still occasionally makes the ephemeral white paintings. She enjoys working with the opposition of these two styles. The white works represent a dream state while the more colourful tightly painted pictures are clear and real, although just how real, is another matter. Pick enjoys the psychological play of these two states and styles, and increasingly, she is bringing them closer together in her paintings.

Séraphine Pick was born in Kawakawa, Bay of Islands in 1964. She graduated from the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts in 1988 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts. The following year she studied Drama and in 1991 she gained a Diploma of Teaching from the Christchurch College of Education. In 1994 she was the recipient of the Olivia Spencer Bower Award and in 1995, the Rita Angus Fellowship. Séraphine Pick has exhibited regularly throughout New Zealand since 1987, and her work is held in public, corporate and private collections. Recent exhibitions include: *Recognitions*, McDougall Art Annex, Christchurch (1991), *Prospect Canterbury*, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch (1992), *From Liquid Darkness*, Dunedin Public Art Gallery (1993), *Shadowplay*, Claybrook Gallery, Auckland (1994), *unveiled*, City Gallery, Wellington (1995), *A Very Peculiar Practice*, City Gallery, Wellington (1995).

CHRISTCHURCH CITY COUNCIL



C01295658



McDougall Art Annex
drift north

22 june - 21 july 1996

ISBN 0-908874-42-1

text : elizabeth caldwell
design : simon mulligan

