



# northern EXPOSURE

FIVE AUCKLAND ARTISTS



# northern

## EXPOSURE

Northern Exposure brings together the work of five Auckland artists who are distinguishing themselves in the North Island, and internationally, but who have received little or no exposure in the South Island. Their work embraces a variety of forms and concerns, a mixture of engagement with familiar high cultural western forms through to entirely different perspectives and systems of value.

Although the differences between the artists, and their works, are clearly visible, it is possible to locate some shifting points of affinity amongst the artists as a group as well as various paths of interaction between selected combinations of artists.

All the work takes charge of the context in which it is viewed. The artists have very specific intentions for how the work is to be displayed, affecting the way the work is received and perceived by the viewer. None of the work has come into the gallery passively, without thought as to the context of its viewing reception.

While the works are not joined by a common theme, there is amongst them the shared use of the metaphor as an aid to the communication of the concerns of the works. Denise Kum's exploration of liquid and solid states become metaphors for the body's physical functions while Yuk King Tan's use of imported objects and the colour red come to represent the cultural dislocation of an immigrant.

### Glenys Brookbanks

When Glenys Brookbanks first exhibited in 1988 her representational paintings demonstrated a love of costume, textile, colour, texture and detail. Although the years that followed that exhibition saw a shift in approach to abstraction, those concerns can still be read in her current minimalist style. The weave of her grids and the love of

building and layering the surface of her works recalls the makeup of the fabrics she so carefully rendered in her earlier work. Her enjoyment of the interplay of colour, texture and detail are present but in a subtle distillation of that practised before.

Unlike the objective purity sought in the modernist abstraction of the sixties, Brookbanks' exploration of abstraction, while ordered, makes way for feeling. In this respect she has been influenced by 'romantic

On a more visible level, the artists all employ the use of multiples - of image and or object. Repetition is used to build and reinforce themes and impress them upon the viewer. The grid of fans in Tan's *Graft* provides a reassuring anchor of order while she considers the immigrant adrift in a sea of cultural displacement. Similarly, the grid is used by Brookbanks as the base from which to explore the emotive possibilities of abstraction. Kum introduces variations to her multiple glass forms to convey different stages of her experiment in the perception of colour absorption. Multiples build a sense of strength and credibility to the science arguments of Kum, Intra and Leigh's installations.

When identifying strands of connection amongst the individual artists, apart from the environment of the laboratory that features in the works of Kum, Intra and Leigh, the process of perception and how we are identified in the world is a subject of consideration for Tan, Leigh and Intra. Formally, Kum, Tan, Brookbanks and Leigh all share ethereal and elusive qualities in their presentation.

It is possible then to discern points of contact between these works so that, as different as they are, the distances between each work are not so great that they cannot be bridged. Regardless of any identifiable differences or similarities amongst these works, it is important to note that they have all been produced in a shared consciousness of engagement with contemporary art practice.

minimalists' such as American Agnes Martin whose work utilises the grid format while also suggesting mood.

The grid that Brookbanks uses establishes order and regularity while the sense of the personal is created through the attention she gives to detail without demanding perfection. The repetition of forms contributes to an experience of the surface that is built by steady accumulation. Despite Brookbanks

delicate touch and the apparent formality of the composition, she celebrates the individual marks and variations that make their way onto the surface. Colour bleeds, edges fray and the dislocations in the pattern - produced where portions of grid meet having been produced separately - all serve to create a journey across the surface that produces a myriad of shifts in light and movement.

The incremental manner in which Brookbanks puts together an individual work extends to the display of her work generally. The detail found on the surface of each work is then lavished on the way the units are put together. Links are made between works through colour, size and proportion suggesting that the individual components are part of a larger whole. This is reinforced by her method of display. She eschews the hierarchy of iconic individually framed works. Instead she exhibits pairs or series of units, an approach that draws attention to the interdependence and harmony of the parts.

Glenys Brookbanks graduated from the Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland University in 1988. It was at this time that she received an Arts Council grant and had her first exhibition at the RKS gallery in Auckland. In 1990 she travelled to Canada and the USA. Recent exhibitions include: *Six Artists*, Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North (1991), *The Flawed Surface*, Claybrook gallery, Auckland (1993), *A Very Peculiar Practice*, City Gallery, Wellington (1995).



## Giovanni Intra

*...if Christ turned up at Auckland Hospital on a Saturday night, what would happen to him?*

Giovanni Intra "Giovanni Intra: Germ-Free Adolescence" *Art NZ* 70 (1994)

Intra posits that science and medicine have replaced the Church in today's secular life as the source of hope and miracles. Where once life and death were something mysterious, their understanding and interpretation supervised by the Church, now medicine aims to not only unravel that mystery but to replace it with objective and documented explanations. Intra questions this ethic of truthfulness commenting on the ease with which science can be manipulated.

Intra's comment was made in reference to his series of photographs called *The Unrequited Passion Cycle*. In this series, 14 images and slogans are given a medical perspective representing the stations of the cross. An enlarged detail from this series, *Best after 33 AD*, exhibited here stands for the moment of Christ's death. Intra employed a technique learned from a medical photographer to make the images, placing the objects on glass underlit with a blue light so they appear to float in a pristine stainless space.

With *Pelvis*, viewers are asked to almost accidentally find the security peephole giving them access to a video that reconstructs a CT scan of a pelvis. A white image of a pelvis rotates continuously in black space. Intra holds up a mirror to social issues and catches the viewer in the image reflected. Is medicine this black and white, so uncomplicated? We view this video through a security peephole - should we feel secure in the knowledge that medicine knows what it is doing? Who is

being protected by the security peephole - us or them?

*The grip that medicine has over the late capitalist imagination is tight...Medicine has been granted...both a sanctioned ability to see all and an ideological iron curtain to protect itself from the contamination of the untrained.*

Giovanni Intra *Everyday Pathomimesis* University of Canterbury (1995)

With *The way doctors see*, Intra continues to question the medical stranglehold that doctors - the priests of science - have on the way we perceive our place in the world. The danger and vulnerability that results from the authority credited to medicine is represented by the broken cameras. They symbolise a flawed vision and when placed on red carpet they beg the question, at what cost does this flawed vision come?

The three works operate in conjunction to ask that we question the authority over our lives that has been given to medicine. They ask also that we assert intellectual independence and take back control over these issues.

Giovanni Intra currently lives in Auckland. He studied sculpture at Elam, graduating MFA in 1994. He was an Auckland University Senior Scholar and received an Arts Council Project Grant in 1991, a Postgraduate Scholarship in 1992 and is a recipient of an Arts Council Visual Arts Fellowship for 1995. He is an art writer, curator and practitioner and began exhibiting in the mid-1980's. His recent exhibitions include: *Waiting Room*, Teststrip, Auckland (1993), *Station to Station: The Way of the Cross*, Auckland City Art Gallery (1994), *One Hundred and fifty ways of loving*, Artspace, Auckland (1994), *Art Now: The First Biennial Review of Contemporary Art*, Museum of New Zealand/Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington (1994).

## Denise Kum

The current directions in Kum's practice reflects a concern with the essential nature of materials and process: in a constant state of flux and change.

Kum's previous work has incorporated components of foodstuffs sourced from Chinese supermarkets. In these installations the materials and their use evoked a sense of place: a cross between a Chinese Takeaway and an alchemists den. These works both explored the inherent qualities of the materials and notions of culture.

More recently, she has directed her investigations away from organic matter towards materials with industrial applications. These include flabbercast, petroleums, elastomers, and synthetic oils - substances more often located within the sphere of industry and laboratories.

Thus, her fascination with oils has moved from the nourishing variety (sesame and soy) to the chemical (SB5 and SB15). Kum has given the fluids containers creating metaphors for physical operations. The works fluid and permeable states serve as a reminder of our body's limits, our corporeality and mortality.

The work in *Northern Exposure* takes another step in Kum's quest to both understand and manipulate the states of solid and liquid by dissolving any sense of their separation. The forms are at once both fluid and container. The titles of the works (Chromascope, Syenite and Succubi, Salve) suggest an exercise in the perception and acknowledgement of colour, the degree of its saturation and how

colour serves as a material integral to process. The sense of motion and flux is further developed here as she explores the liquiferous properties of glass. The forms are poised, possessing the seemingly imminent potential to become fluid again.

Kum's work combines an exploration of 'process' with an ability to engage and delight the viewer through her ingenious transformation of materials.

Denise Kum was born and lives in Auckland. She received a BFA from the Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland in 1992. She is a founding member of Teststrip, an artist run gallery for contemporary and experimental art. Kum began exhibiting in 1990 and her recent exhibitions include: *Mediatix* at Artspace and the Govett-Brewster Art Galley (1993-94), *Denise Kum* at the CBD Gallery Inc, Sydney (1993), *Art Now: The First Biennial Review of Contemporary Art*, Museum of New Zealand/Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington (1994), *Localities of Desire: Contemporary Art in an International World*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (1994).



## Esther Leigh

Leigh's art is one of subtle nuance, shades of meaning and perception. She re-presents the body through a laboratory lens using a scientific framework to question the certainties and parameters of technical knowledge. She replaces this certainty with an ambiguity that allows for all possibilities by removing boundaries and creating space for experiences.

She establishes a sense of clinical objectivity, and then introduces elements to undermine the surety of that gaze. Images of flapping white coats, microscopes and petrie dishes are all evoked with economy. A cool narrow spectrum of colour and colonies of forms suggesting cells and microbes work together to create a sense of the apparently hermetically sealed environment of the laboratory.

Gradually you become aware of the way light is entering this translucent domain, an advocate for the outside world, the one you inhabit. Through the layered use of transparent and opaque materials Leigh begins to fuse space and light. The viewer is absorbed into these layers, ephemeral and fragmentary reflections ripple across the surfaces.

With the surface becoming such an active zone of shifting perception, it defies clarity and definition. Limits, boundaries and horizons cannot be fixed.

Leigh emphasizes with her works the malleability of perception. The way we see an image, receive an idea or concept can be constructed and, therefore, manipulated. She suggests that all manner of perception is

subject to the possibility of this kind of distortion, even an area grounded in objectivity like science.

By merging the territory of the observer and the observed, Leigh gets the viewer to become conscious of the experience of seeing.

Esther Leigh lives and works in Auckland. She completed an MFA at Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland University in 1992. She was awarded a University of Auckland Graduate Scholarship in 1991 and an Arts Council Grant in 1992 and 1993. She currently tutors at the ASA School of Art in Auckland. In 1994 Leigh was named as the 1996 Olivia Spencer Bower Award recipient. Recent exhibitions include: *Light Sensitive*, Artspace, Auckland (1992), *Inside the Atlas*, George Fraser Gallery, Auckland (1992), *From Liquid Darkness*, Dunedin Public Art Gallery (1993), *N+1*, Artspace, Auckland (1994), *Esther Leigh*, Brooker Gallery, Wellington (1995).



## Yuk King Tan

*I'm working with the tension of cultural identity.*

Yuk King Tan *Sunday Star Times*  
17-7-94

Using a variety of ready-made, found and bought objects, Yuk King Tan's art is her way of exploring her personal history. As a Chinese/ New Zealander

Tan consciously makes work which overtly investigates her dual cultural background.

The materials she uses are an important part of that process. They come from Chinese stores and supermarkets and are always mass produced imported objects, a reference to the way she sees herself as a Chinese import. Utilising materials such as these is a way of considering the culture that is imported along with the objects. A two way process of integration takes place when one culture settles with another. Tan looks at the way an immigrant must make their home in a different place but in doing so also changes that place. An immigrant works to keep a hold of their own culture while also acquiring the culture of their new home. Her work activates these notions of alignment and displacement, integration and translation.

This theme forms the basis for the content of *Graft* and *Takeaway Symbols* and her signature use of the colour red is evident in both works. Red has a long and symbolic history in Chinese culture. In ancient times it was part of the symbolic language associated with the 'Five Activities', a systematised plan that gave shape to the universe and the forces of nature.

Tan is particularly interested in the way red is also symbolic in other cultures but for different reasons. Its multiple and transferable interpretation is an appropriate representation of cultural transference.

Wrapping forms also becomes part of the cultural metaphor of alignment and displacement informing her work. The

thousands of metres of red silk thread coiled around objects both reveals their essential shape and transforms them into something new.

Tan's work contemplates the nature of personal identity with ephemeral qualities of grace and elegance eminently suited to such an elusive meditation. She manages nevertheless, to manipulate this fey subject of study with a deftness and surety of purpose.

Yuk King Tan was born in Australia but has spent most of her life in Auckland. Tan was awarded a BA from the University of Auckland in 1993. She has been exhibiting since 1989 and recent exhibitions include: *Elam Sculpture*, Telephone Exchange Building, Auckland (1993), *a.genda*, Artspace, Auckland (1993), *Localities of Desire: Contemporary Art in an International World*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (1994), *Wow*, Teststrip, Auckland (1995).



## List of Works

### Glenys Brookbanks

Half Round 2  
Half Round 6  
Half Round 9  
Half Round 10  
Half Round 11

All Half Round's egg tempera on gesso on wood  
(1994)

Incised Panel 3  
Incised Panel 4  
Incised Panel 6  
Incised Panel 7  
Incised Panel 8

Striated Panel 1  
Striated Panel 2

All panels graphite on Gesso (1995)  
Courtesy of the Claybrook Gallery, Auckland

### Giovanni Intra

Best After 33 AD (1993)  
From *The Unrequited Passion Cycle* a 14 photograph  
version of the Stations of the Cross. Collaboration  
from a text by Stuart McKenzie.  
C-type colour photograph

Untitled (1994)  
Video, security peephole

The way doctors see (1995)  
Approximately 30 vandalised cameras

### Denise Kum

Chromascope (1994)  
Handblown soda lime glass, plate glass, petrolatum,  
automate blue, steel frame, incandescent lights

Syenite and Succubi (1994)  
Handblown soda lime glass; blue, purple and green  
glass chips, glass, silver solder

Salve (1994)  
Glass, silver solder, petrolatum, automate blue

### Esther Leigh

Untitled (1993)  
Glass, acetate

Untitled (1993)  
Glass, acetate

Coagulum 1 - 6 (1994)  
Aluminium, resin, enamel

Drawings 1 - 6 (1995)  
Resin, enamel, graphite

### Yuk King Tan

Graft (1994)  
Fans, heat laser transfer, stamp, silk

Takeaway Symbols (1994)  
Red tassel, found objects  
Courtesy of the Hamish McKay Gallery, Auckland

