



paulline rhodes

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In - between

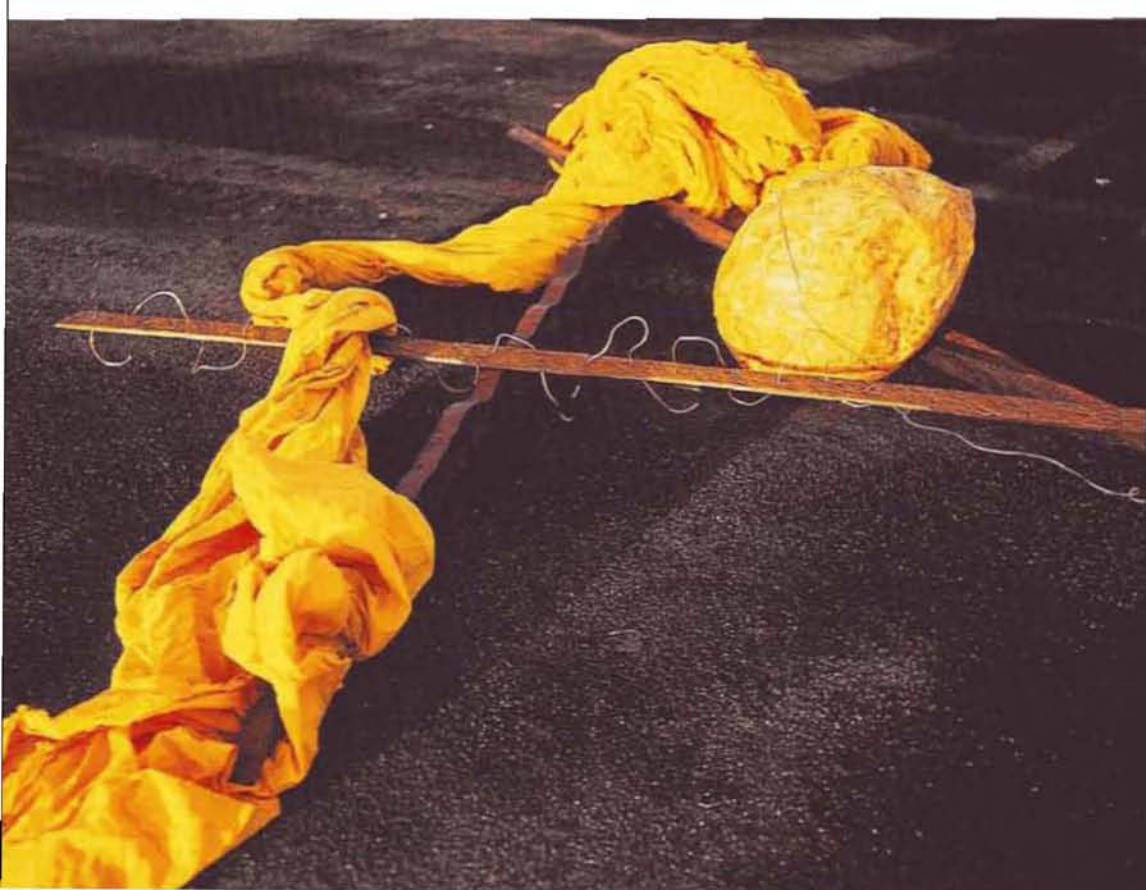


“Opposites are necessarily co-existent and involve one another - they are one and the same”

The art of Pauline Rhodes is one of contrast and contradiction. Within her experimental and highly original practice, dualities exist between past and present, the physical and the intangible, outdoor and indoor, architecture and the environment, the fleeting and the enduring, creation and degeneration, experience and imagination. *In-between* investigates the universe Rhodes has crafted between these binary oppositions and represents a melding of her ongoing extensum (outdoor) and intensum (indoor) projects, illustrating how the distinctive energies of each brings strength and resonance to the other.

The extensums and intensums are parallel projects, intended to be read as perpetual contrasts rather than in isolation. Each enriches the other - it is the memory of the land which imbues Rhodes' indoor works with resonance and significance, and a knowledge of the concentrated energies of the intensums that lend the environmental works such a feeling of lightness and exultation.

Rhodes' extensums, which began during her time at the University of Canterbury's School of Fine Arts (she graduated in 1974), acknowledge and celebrate the inherent physicality of our existence. Site-specific installations created in both New Zealand and Britain, but predominately in Rhodes' local area of Banks Peninsula, they are transitory by nature - often set up or placed, documented and then removed in a matter of minutes. The extensums began as the simplest of ideas - a way for Rhodes to explore the land she moved through.



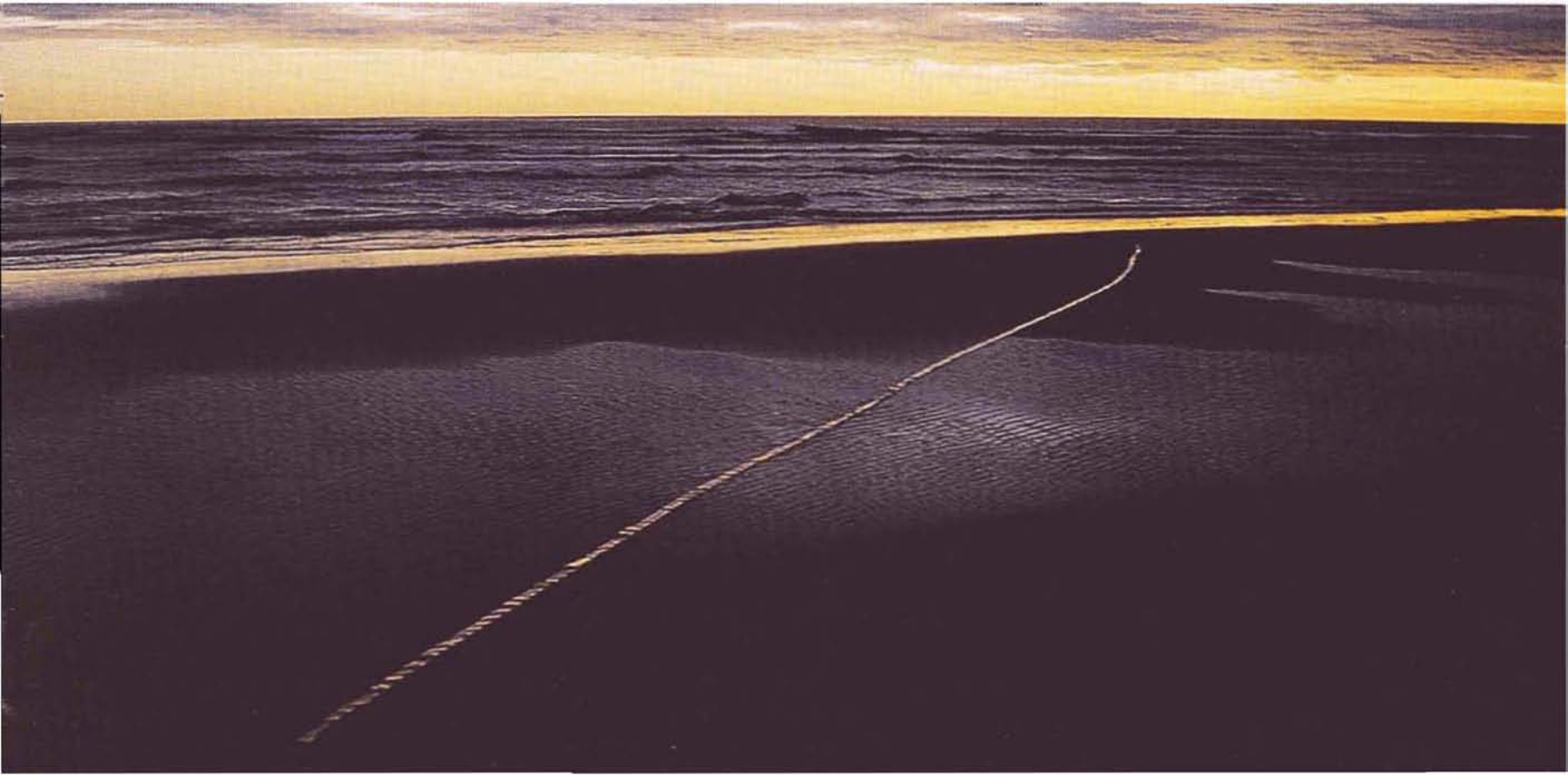
“ ... appreciate, respect and explore the land,
but take nothing, leave nothing, alter
nothing and interfere with nothing ”

Her photographic documentation is strangely affirmative and uplifting, a confirmation of the presence of the body in the natural landscape. Although operating within a comparable framework, Rhodes' practice is not 'earth art' in the strictest sense. She does not intend to impose change upon the landscape, but rather to reflect her movement through it, hence her use of transient, lightweight and removable materials.

While they often occur within vast landscapes, the extensums are subtly linked to Rhodes' own bodily dimensions, allowing them to retain a compelling sense of the corporeal. The addition of what Rhodes' has referred to as 'cultural objects' - fluorescent rods, vividly dyed cloths, sticks, driftwood and stones - acknowledges the fabrication involved in any representation of nature. These articulators extend the site geographically, "keying onto landforms"³ in an exploratory way, and functioning within the space as Rhodes' body would, experiencing, and reacting to, the environment. Rhodes meticulously records her outdoor interventions in the form of still photographs, a process which began as pure documentation but has since become something more. It is a conscious yet unobtrusive 'framing' of the scene, offering a pristine and distilled essence she discovered video could not provide.

Whereas the extensums expand energy through matter, the intensums concentrate it, allowing, in Rhodes' words, "an outlet for the captive energies of life"⁴. Occurring within interior dimensions, they react to the structures and essence of architectural space, just as the outdoor works take their direction from the environment. Mercurial, complex and ambiguous, the intensums are Rhodes' analogy for our internal 'mind-spaces' and the relationships between the ideas and associations within.

“ The only way to begin to understand life is to experience it ”⁵





“ Human beings are like fragile leaves of wet paper between sheets of flaking steel:
vulnerable to destruction yet open to change, to being subtly altered or transformed ”

Fractured, fragmented, stained, twisted and crumpled, these unruly accumulations trace the layered fabric of time. They eschew the openness, the 'spatial extrapolations' of the extensums, focusing instead on concentrated masses that are designed to recontextualise the space. Outwardly chaotic, the intensums somehow retain the sense of an inner order. Unlike the outdoor works, which Rhodes has stated began as kind of 'private working diary', these installations are intended for prolonged public inspection and speculation. This is an interesting contrast to the generally accepted view of the outdoors as a public space and internal areas as private ones.

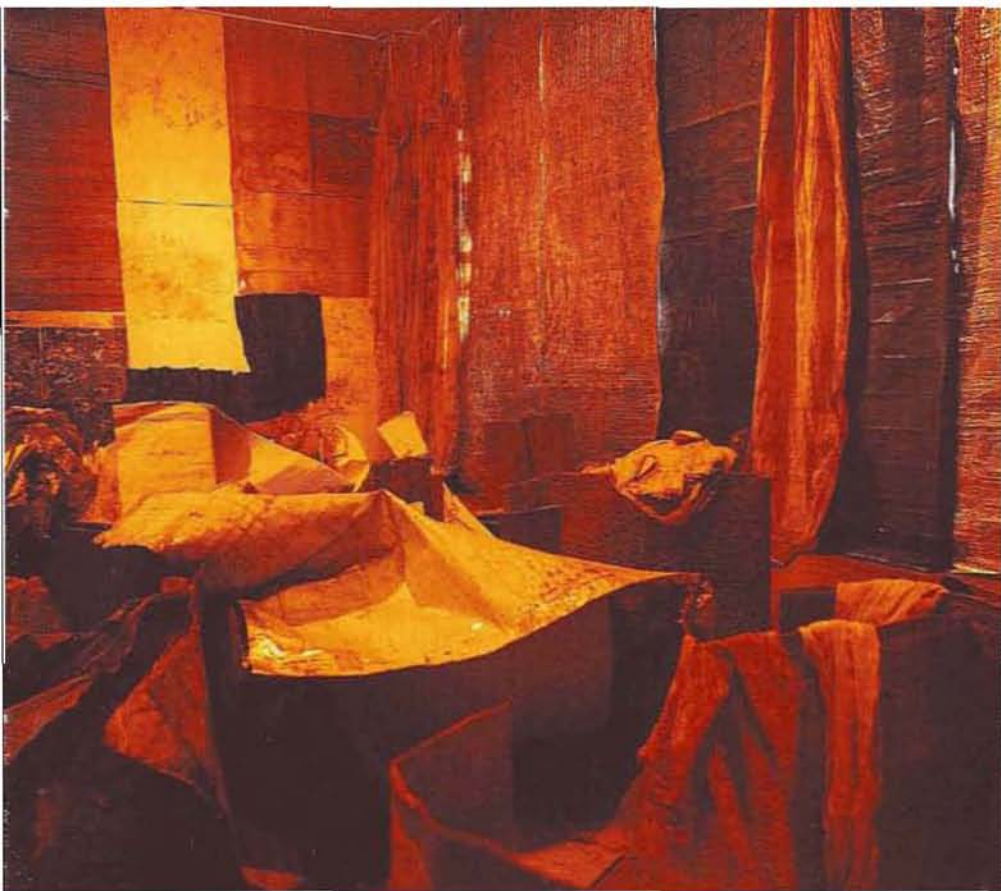
Steel, cardboard, cloth, wood: the often prosaic materials Rhodes uses celebrate the strange richness of the ordinary and reiterate her connection with, and commitment to, the land. She first began to use steel after experimenting with rock during her second year of Sculpture at the University of Canterbury's School of Fine Arts. Directed to the University's Geology department to study local stone, she discovered that some of the rocks from a quarry on the Summit Road contained horizontal veins of iron oxide, a rust-like substance. Combining the idea of stone with her interest in planar elements, she started to use sheets of steel and gradually began to experiment with the marking (or contamination) of other materials with steel rust. In this way, Rhodes' later installations, while often delicate and ephemeral, retain the earthy monumentality of stone.

“Perfection and certainty are unattainable”⁷

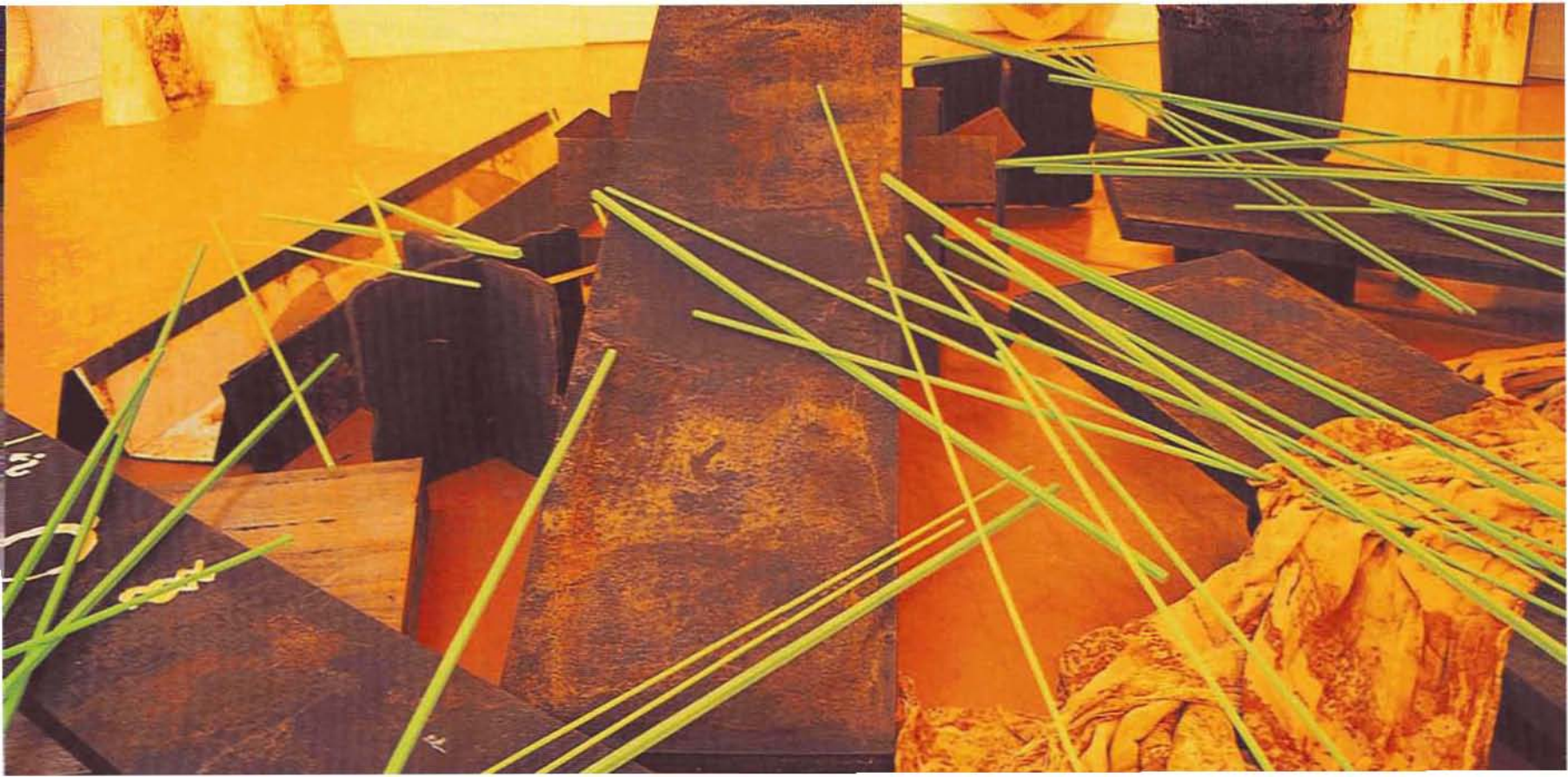
Rhodes uses natural outdoor processes to alter these materials, staining paper, cardboard and cloth. This weathering process adds a sense of time, with the rust evoking the slow but certain passage of time and the subsequent breaking down of materials. A sense of history is reinforced by the reappearance of objects from previous installations, often in a different form. The fluorescent green pigment often seen in Rhodes' outdoor works begins to fade as soon as it is attacked by ultra violet light, its impermanence emphasising the work's transient nature. Used for its intense visibility, this colour signifies high energy and regenerative properties.

The act of contamination, in which one material is coloured or imprinted with the mark of another, challenges the idea of purity and truth to materials, recalling the “reciprocal contamination of philosophy and poetry”.⁸ The elements Rhodes juxtaposes are not arranged, nor treated, in a hierarchical way, but rather allowed and encouraged to challenge and pervert the nature of their neighbours. Fine silk is stained with the corroding imprint of rusty steel; tangled bundles of wire lie beside corrugated cardboard and fractured marble pieces. While many viewers find Rhodes' chaotic and unkempt accumulations attractive, she “doesn't set out to make beautiful work”.⁹ Her use of natural systems (heat, air, water) to encourage the process of contamination echoes the natural world, in which all elements are related but often unpredictable.

Rhodes lived in Nigeria between 1965 and 1966, and was influenced by the definition of art from that country, where it was seen as something impermanent and constantly evolving. She discovered an unwillingness to separate the visual arts from other media, such as performance and poetry, confirming the ideas she had already developed regarding her practice.



“Entering into the strangeness and richness of being
through intensities of matter and energy”



Throughout her time at university, sculpture was opening up to include and embrace performance, photography and video. Rhodes responded to this by making work which refused to see art as a commodity by engaging in an ephemeral, context-specific mode.

Although *In-between* was planned on paper in notes and sculptural drawings, Rhodes could not predict how the objects would react to each other and to the geography of the Gallery space. An element of chance is present within their placement and also within the materials themselves - the crumpled wire netting can never again be replicated exactly. For these reasons, Rhodes likens the exhibition to a performance that cannot be rehearsed - like improvised musical compositions where players introduce spontaneous and individual elements. Rhodes' first appreciation of the power of the disorganised was during her residency at the Otago Polytechnic in 1993, when she saw wood on demolition sites which had fallen in random piles but seemed to contain a kind of coherence nonetheless. She set about trying to find other notions of entities which seemed to work together but were in fact random.

Not concerned with creating order from chaos, Rhodes is interested in celebrating chaos as a way of experiencing life. Her work requires a willingness to accept and explore the eccentric and off-centre in an invigorating mix of the rational and irrational. Believing the best placements to be those which are the least self-conscious and regular, Rhodes finds that the temporality of her materials allows her more potential for change and discovery.

“ The world is not what I think, but what I live through ”¹¹

A (con)fusion of physical, intellectual, environmental and architectural, *In-between* seeks to bring the intensums and extensums together in a single space. By including projected images of outdoor works from various locations over the last twenty years, the exhibition not only operates in the hinterland between exterior and interior, but explores the space between past and present. Resisting the attempt of the mind to formalise it into a lucid order, the environment Rhodes has created cannot be easily analysed and must instead be experienced through our physical proximity to it. She describes *In-between* as being about “things which represent ways of thinking about and participating in the world in order to discover more about reality and our place within it”.¹²

The challenge of Rhodes' work has always been in its deliberate navigation around definitions and categories; between sculpture and photography; installation and performance; architecture and landscape; body and mind. These dualities animate and enliven Rhodes' artmaking, transgressing boundaries and viewpoints to complicate and enrich our experience. Works to be breathed, felt and lived through, they demand a willingness to enter the space not merely as a viewer but also as a participant, collaborator and conspirator, acknowledging the mysteries that can unravel when our minds remain open.

Felicity Milburn

Curator

- 1 *Heraclitus*
- 2 *Pauline Rhodes, The Body of the Land, SIAR 1993*
- 3 *Conversation with the artist, October 1999*
- 4 *Pauline Rhodes, Intensums '85, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1985*
- 5 *Ibid*
- 6 *Pauline Rhodes, Notes for Intensum/Extensum, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, 1988*

- 7 *Pauline Rhodes, Notes for In-between, 1999*
- 8 *Pauline Rhodes, Notes for In-between, 1999*
- 9 *Conversation with the artist, October, 1999*
- 10 *Pauline Rhodes, Notes for In-between, 1999*
- 11 *Merleau - Ponty*
- 12 *Conversation with the artist, October, 1999*



Born in Christchurch in 1937, Rhodes lived in Wellington, Westport, Nigeria and England before returning to Christchurch in 1970. Between 1972 and 1974, she completed her Diploma of Fine Arts in Sculpture at the University of Canterbury. The first ever recipient of the Olivia Spencer Bower Foundation Annual Award in 1987, Rhodes received grants from the Queen Elizabeth Arts Council in 1989 and 1992. In 1993 she was selected as the Otago Polytechnic Art School Artist in Residence. She received the CoCA Travel Award in 1995 and was awarded a Merit Prize in the 1996 Visa Gold Art Award. Rhodes began her outdoor projects in the mid-1970s and has exhibited work internationally since the early 1980s. Her solo installations include: *Energy Fields, Stone Movements*, C.S.A. Gallery, Christchurch, 1977; *Intensums*, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, 1982; *Intensum in Memorium* (project series), City Art Gallery, Wellington, 1987 and *Stained Silences, Interconnections*, Govett Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, 1998. Rhodes' *Intensum/Extensum 1981* was part of the *Action Replay* exhibition at Artspace in Auckland in 1998 and earlier this year she participated in *Oblique*, a site-specific, multi-artist project at Otira.



This catalogue was published on the occasion of the exhibition *In-between* at the McDougall Contemporary Art Annex, Christchurch, 3 December 1999 - 16 January 2000.

Photography: Pauline Rhodes

Design: Amanda Woodford

Photolithography: Digital Pre-Press

Print Production: The Caxton Press

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ISBN: 0-908874-55-3

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