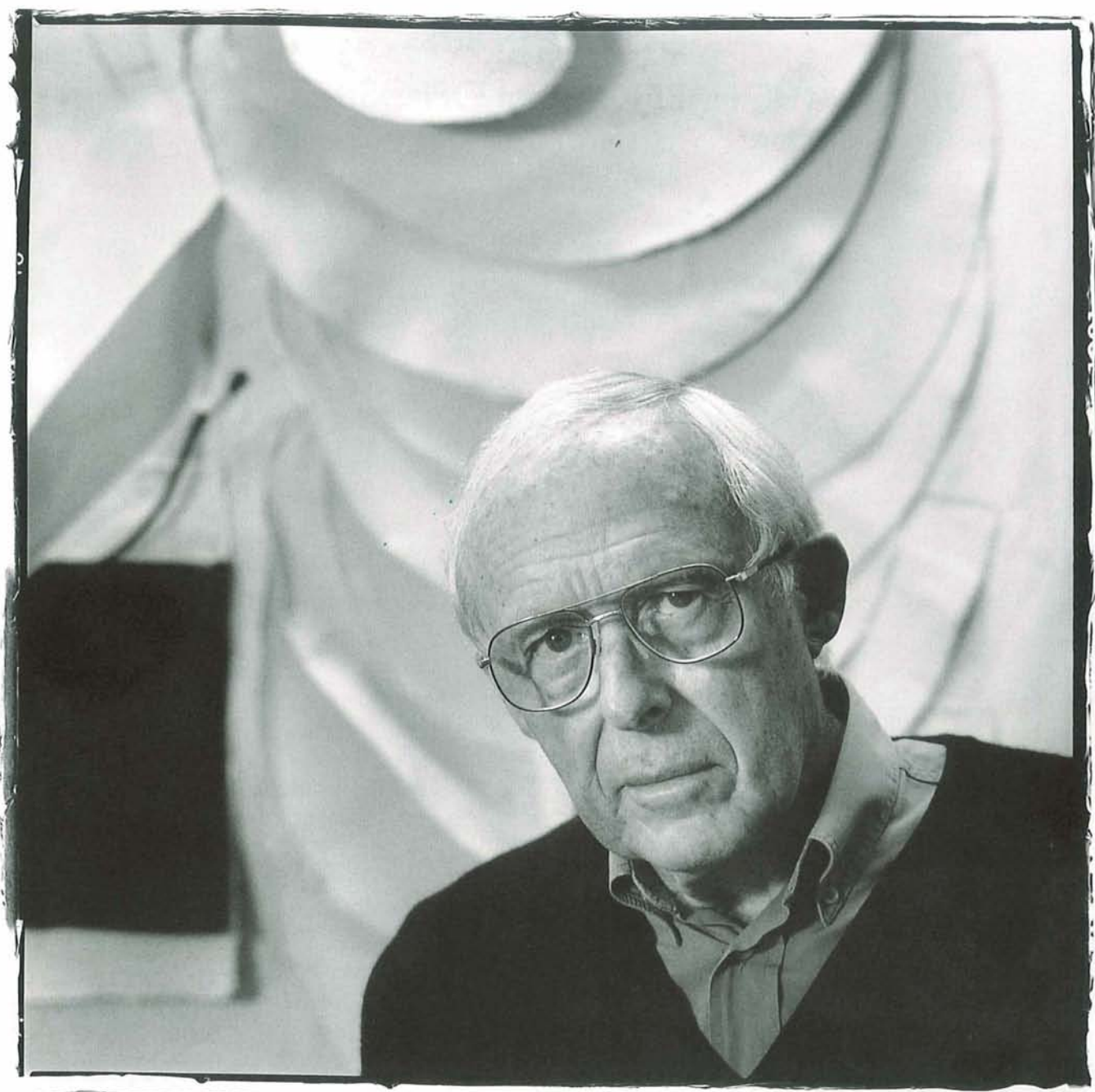


Amorables





# Don Peebles

## THE HARMONY of OPPOSITES

Text by  
Justin Paton

A ROBERT McDOUGALL ART GALLERY TOURING EXHIBITION



THE ROBERT McDOUGALL ART GALLERY

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## FOREWORD

Don Peebles has been a major force in contemporary New Zealand painting for more than three decades, yet despite his high national profile as an artist and teacher, the McDougall was aware that no major touring exhibition had been held since 1973/74.

The twenty years since that early show have been amongst the most productive in Don's career, so in 1992 early discussions to correct this long-standing sin of omission were held. This exhibition is the final fruit of those discussions.

That realisation of this important retrospective is due to the committed involvement of many people, but a special debt is acknowledged to the artist himself, whose co-operation and creativity have been laudable. To Prue Peebles, whose years of gathering and recording a complete archive of her husband's career created an invaluable research resource for artist and curator alike, we offer our gratitude, and equally to our guest curator, Justin Paton, who has brought new insights and discernment to the curatorial profession.

Grateful thanks are also extended to the many owners of works, whether public, private or corporate, whose support and contributions have turned this exhibition from an exciting concept to an even more exciting reality.

Quentin Wilson of Hazard Press deserves credit again for the special attention he has given to the production of a major McDougall exhibition catalogue; and finally, and very importantly, I wish to record my appreciation of the McDougall staff who have co-ordinated and monitored the progress, and then managed this exhibition in its final touring form.

My congratulations to you all.

P. Anthony Preston  
Director  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery

## DON PEEBLES: THE HARMONY OF OPPOSITES

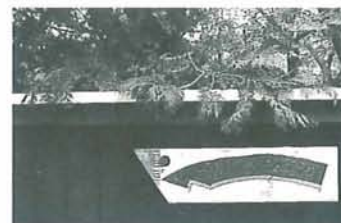
I

Let's begin at the beginning, where the paintings begin: in the studio. It sits behind a white concrete-block home at the end of a quiet cul-de-sac in suburban Ilam, Christchurch. The studio, another white brick box, is hunkered down at the rear of a small, tidy property. A short concrete path runs from house to studio, and in the garden that flanks and sometimes spills onto the path can be seen small, strange objects, tiny constructions fashioned from odds and ends of wood and canvas, blips of bright colour amid the foliage. Here is a stake of plywood with a tongue of blue canvas attached, plunged into the garden like a quirky weather vane. There's an 'L' of raw plywood with a rectangle of blue material pinned to its surface, propped casually on the weatherboard fence. And over there is a swatch of faded canvas that betrays its lengthy residence in a garnish of cobwebs and fallen leaves.

And ahead, down a few steps and through a door, is the studio. The space is soaked in a clear, subdued light that falls through a skylight which runs the length of the studio's roof. To your left, the space stretches away for ten paces; windows on the north side, catching the morning sun; solid wall on the south. The near end of that wall is where Peebles hangs his large canvases, a working space rich with dribbles and scribbles formed when he overrides the edge of his canvas or scratches out an impatient working drawing on the only surface at hand. The far end of this wall is pristine; here a canvas will hang, often for weeks or months, awaiting destruction, revision, or, rarely, approval.

It is an orderly studio, but you soon see that the order contains pockets of chaos. Against the far wall is a tumble of boxes and easels and wood; on the floor, a brand-new bolt of canvas, raw and oatmealy, waiting to be unscrolled; beside that, a box full of shards and splinters of scavenged wood. On the bench spaces are crowds of plastic paint bottles and punnets, decorated with the runs and spills of decades' daily use; coils and loops of cord, drawings and papers, books and scissors. Above all this, on the walls surrounding Peebles's bench, hangs an array of tiny objects, much like those you saw in the garden – too ephemeral to announce themselves as artworks, but too odd and sweetly eccentric to be anything else: a quirky squiggle of aqua paper, a floppy purple spinal cord of canvas, a pouch of yellow canvas masking-taped to a rectangle of board, a cross of timber drizzled with white and blue acrylic. One week ago these bits and pieces held a different formation, and their positions will have changed a week from now. Like everything else in Don Peebles' studio, this impromptu cluster of objects seems to announce: *In Progress*.

To understand Don Peebles, and to grasp the nature of his achievement, it helps to know that this studio is the engine-room of his art, its philosophical and physical hub. He comes here daily, unrushed by the jabbering imperatives of the market: a tall, slowly-spoken, self-possessed man, ruminating over his materials. Painting begins early, around



9:00 am, continuing until mid-afternoon, when the sunlight that rakes down through the skylight glances too aggressively off the painting wall. This daily programme of artistic research suggests a routine – ordered, predictable, grounded. Yet what propels Peebles' art is not routine but rather those moments of intensely fruitful doubt that he undergoes every morning as he leans over his work bench or fronts up to a recalcitrant canvas, regarding its surface with watchful suspicion: *Red or blue? Rough or smooth? Dense or spare?* Peebles has pursued such moments for a half-century now, and in the studio still holds fast to a favoured Guston quote: 'Frustration is one of the great things in art; satisfaction is nothing.'<sup>1</sup>

In the late eighties Peebles kept several painting diaries. Candid journals of his daily progress, they are earthed in the textures of the studio – in details of colour and surface and scale. Reading them, you can almost smell the paint. Through the minutiae of the studio, however, can be glimpsed the outlines of something bigger: an artistic mindset or even self. Day by day, the diaries compose a registry of doubts, despair, and dogged progress – in sum, a narrative of experiment. Moments of self-congratulation are rare. We hear the artist talking himself through his paintings, coaching himself, agonising over a change of colour, reprimanding himself for taking an easy option: *Don't play safe . . . Lift tempo of activity – Think less about it while painting. Assess the results after the action. Don't slip into caution . . . Risk all . . . Keep off balance – Don't fall into a style . . . Don't settle and become a living monument.*<sup>2</sup> One painting is begun in August 1987 and worried at week after week until, in January 1988, Peebles scrapes the work back completely, and begins again, sending the reader back a few pages to a paraphrase of another favourite Peebles' quote, by Paul Valéry: 'A poem is never finished, only abandoned.'

Peebles cherishes doubt above all else. It is the psychic climate in which his art germinates, and he distrusts any painting unscarred by the pains of gestation. In him, an intense certainty about the value of painting is wedded to an equally intense uncertainty about what exactly a painting, still less a good painting, might look like. He puts an immensely confident command of painting's resources in the service of a restless curiosity about exactly how those resources might be deployed. Advocating speculations rather than conclusions, journeys rather than destinations, and questions rather than answers, Peebles has said: 'I want to be almost totally out of my depth all the time – swimming to the surface, not floating on top and gradually sinking.'<sup>3</sup>

*I want to be almost totally out of my depth all the time.* There are few artists in whom the impulse to mannerism is more strictly curbed. His critical sense is unforgiving. To replicate one more 'Peebles' would be the cardinal aesthetic sin. 'You can get on that treadmill, of just producing an alternative to the last and so on. It's thought to be an admirable consistency in some artists' work. I often think it's an inability to take chances and risks, and so utterly boring.'<sup>4</sup> He is, in this sense, a 'hard' artist – as hard on himself as he is on his viewers. But if the address his works make to the viewer is a challenge, it is just as surely a compliment.

For a long time the challenge was left unmet. The art world, and the writing which preserves its movements, is fuelled by novelty. Fame's lens is small and roves continually,



doing little justice to long and eventful careers, full of difficult twists and subtle turns. Peebles' art, however, is best seen whole and savoured slowly. We will need new words to do justice to the long rhythms of his career and its sense of patient adventure: for 'novelty' we might just as profitably read 'integrity' or 'continuity.' And so we can turn to Peebles not just for his place in a stock narrative of stylistic breakthroughs, but for the way all his art is visibly the product of an attitude that goes deeper than the received terms of art-historical classification can suggest: the product, that is, of a distinctive and idiosyncratic artistic mindset, an attitude, a *character*.

A superficial glance through the first three decades of this painter's life might suggest that Peebles has made fickle leaps from 'ism to 'ism – from Cézannism which gave way to Expressionism and on to Constructionism which clove in turn to Colour Field painting. But something deeper underpins these stylistic changes, and that something can be plumbed only when the course of his art's five full decades is charted. The artist's words on Mondrian are germane: 'When you look back over Mondrian's career it seems clear that he remained the same person all his life, but that he was asking his questions in different ways and at different levels. I think that an artist only has one idea and spends a life trying to find a way of stating it.'<sup>5</sup>

How, then, is this character present in the art? In Peebles' art, there are two key sets of co-ordinates – order, intellect and purity lie to one side; intuition, passion and complexity to the other. Peebles is a classicist by temperament – inclining to contemplation rather than spectacle – but the story of his art is not, or not solely, one of purification, since he slipped the noose of minimalism midway through his career. His classical sensibility is, instead, the finely ground lens through which his passions are focused. Between order and expression, gesture and geometry, austerity and abandon, rigour and romance, discipline and freedom, head and heart – it is in the elastic space between these terms that Peebles orchestrates his art, drawing together such tensions while striving for a sense of rightness in the final image.

You see this in the artist's conversation, which will accelerate suddenly from a slow, measured discourse on the art of painting into a choppy physical rhapsody of Mondrian or Cézanne or any of the other gods in the pantheon of Peebles' imagination. You see it, too, in the studio, in the way order shares house with chaos. And you see it most of all in the paintings themselves. It is there in the way a lush flourish or surge of brushwork will be countered by a terse line; in the way an austere design will be mellowed by a rough, sandpapered surface; in the way a pristine acrylic field will be ruptured by a chance run of paint. And it is there in the larger patterns of his art, where years of severely reductive art-making were followed in the eighties by a baroque flowering. In this way Peebles defies pat categories. Call him dour, he seems playful. Call him a classicist, his work will seem lush. Call him reductive, you will be struck by how much of the world his art contains.

If Peebles' art embodies a world view, it is this idea of painting as a domain where opposites are harmonised, where the tensions thrown up by the teeming world – between rough and smooth, hard and soft, taut and slack – are held in a dynamic poise. Peebles sees these tensions in the wider world – the way a receding tide gurgles and swirls

around a drain on a beach; the way a hill juts up against the horizon; the full-tilt improvisations of a tennis player – and he distils them in his art. ‘I see that all these things are so interconnected, connected to all we see and do in life. I think there’s something very special about art. I have to. But I also know that it’s very ordinary, that these things I’m dealing with in my painting are the very stuff of which all human activity is moulded and built, and they are going on all around me all the time. This is what my work’s about, I suppose. It’s about that sort of human situation, that duality, that sort of sociability, of life in different situations and the surprisingly different and unexpected things we have to cope with all the time.’<sup>6</sup>

It is this counterpoint between freedom and discipline that gives his art its quiet drama and distinctive life: constraint giving shape to passion, while passion gives life to constraint. ‘I think that freedom only exists through its connection with its opposite. I see tennis and painting very similarly. I go on to the rectangle of the tennis court. I have to act within certain accepted parameters. I have to act with imagination, with changes of speed. I have to act with anticipation, and expectation. I have to do the unusual to win a tennis match. Play does not have a meaning, or a sense of pleasurable achievement, until you accept a certain convention, and nothing becomes a convention unless it has some good in it; but that very goodness can also become a prison.’<sup>7</sup>

Peebles, thus, courts convention. The conventions in this case are those of the modernist painting tradition he inherited. To damn Peebles’ art on that count is pointless, for all artists operate within the terms of their time. What we should do instead is cherish his athletic exploration and renovation of those conventions. To be sure, the stretched canvas surface, seen on the flat white wall of the white cube, is the datum of his work: all his experiments must be measured against that benchmark. But within the borders of that convention, he has been continually inventive: dismantling, scouring, tearing, stitching and layering. This journey began fifty years ago, and it continues at its patient pace today, amidst the orderly mess of the studio. But to understand that journey we will need to depart the studio and return to the very roots of Peebles’ art.

## II

A researcher who rummaged through Don Peebles’ life for traces of romantic biography would come up empty-handed. Few artists are less likely to inspire or encourage a cult of personality. The arc of Peebles’ life simply does not conform to the popular cliché of artistic life, as embodied in New Zealand by such hard-living expressionists as Tony Fomison. Measured against such bohemian clichés, Peebles’ biography seems free of drama: a smooth and even surface on which his art has been played out.

He was born on March 5, 1922, and he spent the first six months of his childhood in Taneatua, 15 kilometres southwest of Whakatane, in the Bay of Plenty. After a shift to Whangarei, the family moved in 1924 to Wellington, following a job transfer for Peebles’ father, who worked for New Zealand Railways. There Peebles, the second of three sons, attended Wadestown primary school and, later, Wellington College. He lived an unremarkable middle-class childhood, in which art was enjoyed side-by-side with sport. Only one incident points forward to the course his life would take, and to the distinctive,

flinty intelligence that would later emerge in his art. In Peebles' last years of primary school, his teacher set the class an unusual assignment: he asked the students to draw a horse.

*Now I would have only been about ten or eleven then, and yet for some reason I started to think to myself, horse, what does horse mean? What really is a horse? Of course I wouldn't have framed it in these words then, but somehow, and for some reason, the concept of a horse seemed to imply something much deeper and more profound than could possibly be expressed in the image of one single horse. It had to mean something more than the animal which every day dragged the milk cart around our suburb. And so I just sat there with a piece of paper, wondering what on earth I was supposed to do. I seemed to be trying in some confused way to come up with an idea that would evoke the reality of a horse. A quality that was horse. In the end of course, I just couldn't do it. . . . But going for the essence of the thing, that was it. That was the first time it came to me.<sup>8</sup>*

For the moment, though, art had to wait. Peebles was 15 when he left school and began work as a telegram delivery boy for the Wellington Post Office, an institution which would serve him well in the course of his artistic apprenticeship. Two years later, World War Two flared into life; and two years after that Peebles, an idealistic 19 year old, was called up. He was eager to leave the Post Office inkwells behind, and did so on an American troopship in 1943. The next two years took him from Guadalcanal to the Solomon Islands and finally, for a few chastening months, to the killing fields of Italy. Peebles was in Italy when the war ended and, life obliging art, the British army occupied a wing of the Florence college of art and organized a study programme for soldiers awaiting demobilisation. Peebles signed up. This month of lessons, with British tutors, was his first experience of academic art-teaching. In the churches and galleries of Florence and its outlying areas he saw masterpieces of Italian Renaissance art, while in the large, cool studios of the college Peebles made his first tentative paintings.

Only one survives. *Old Tower, Florence* 1945 was painted *en plein air* as a class exercise, but its execution was interrupted by a downpour, leaving an oil sketch, its blocked-in brush-marks and hungry surface recalling Walter Sickert's dry and sparing touch. What holds you in this small and otherwise unremarkable painting is Peebles' refusal to finish the work. This renunciation of polish points forward to the habits of the artist who has again and again declared his preference for rough-edged failures over easy solutions.

Not long after, Peebles returned to his parents' home in Wadestown, Wellington, and to the Post Office; but like many returned servicemen felt isolated and bewildered. Art more and more was his sanity and passion, a refuge from a mundane vocation. In the afternoons after work he would walk from the Post Office to the train terminal, and catch one of the buses or units that snaked from central Wellington out through the Hutt Valley, or to Eastbourne, or sometimes west to one of the small becalmed bays around Paremata, where he would set up his watercolour kit. The fruits of these forays were conventional works, as good a guide as any as to what was expected of an enthusiastic amateur painter in New Zealand in the late nineteen forties, and far removed, needless to say, from the more radical experiments being conducted by Colin McCahon and Toss Woollaston at the same time. At their best, however, these are deft naturalistic scenes,



*Karori Light* 1950  
Watercolour on paper  
337 x 374  
Whereabouts unknown

cautiously expressive in treatment, in which swathes of unsoaked white paper mimic the explosion of sunlight off the glassy harbour water.

Yet there are, again, inklings of the artist Peebles was to become. Seen through the filter of Peebles' later work, these paintings reveal a young painter responding, albeit hesitantly, to the abstracted nature of the landscape; and they hint at the emergence of a reserved, stringent and contemplative sensibility. The pull towards chocolate-box imagery is seldom heeded. Peebles is fascinated by the way a late, low light will throw forms into silhouette – the long flat limb of a spit interrupted by the bollard of a distant lighthouse, the abrupt punctuation of a lone fencepost, the dark band of the distant hills – thus simplifying the image into broad angles and elements, and reducing colour to tonal extremes.

In his mid-twenties by now, Peebles was a latecomer to the art of painting. Eager to make up for time lost during the war, Peebles took up night courses in painting and drawing at the Wellington Technical College Art School. Undeceived about the difficulties of making art in provincial New Zealand, and well aware of the distance he had yet to travel in his apprenticeship, Peebles' aim was to 'learn to make notes before I can hope to play tunes.'<sup>9</sup> The results of that apprenticeship were exhibited at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts Annual Exhibition in 1949 and 1950.<sup>10</sup>

Though Wellington in the mid-century was in relative terms a culturally lively and cosmopolitan city, energised by the presence of European émigrés, to a young painter like Peebles it nevertheless seemed islanded from the wellsprings of advanced European art. Avant-garde European painting arrived in New Zealand hands in the form of a few air-mailed art magazines. Many pioneering New Zealand painters underwent an epiphany in the presence of such reproductions of offshore modernism (Toss Woollaston, for one, was mesmerised by a tiny black-and-white reproduction of Cézanne's *Self Portrait* in an instalment of Arthur Mee's *Children's Encyclopaedia*, while Colin McCahon was similarly awestruck by some Cubist paintings sighted in the *Illustrated London News*)<sup>11</sup> and Peebles was no exception. During the post-war years Peebles was drawn to such elegant tonalists as James Whistler, the early Philip Wilson Steer and the New Zealander Raymond McIntyre. (Steer's airy and unfussy wash drawings were savoured by Peebles when they hung in 'Contemporary British Prints and Drawings Selected from the Wakefield Collection of the British Council' [1948-49] in the D.I.C. building on Lambton Quay, where part of the National Art Gallery's collection was displayed during the war; McIntyre's sensitive still lifes and suave urban scenes were regularly admired by Peebles in the National Art Gallery's permanent collection.) It was in 1950, though, that Peebles found new progenitors for his personal artistic bloodline. In the National Gallery's wartime premises on Lambton Quay Peebles first saw posters of artworks by the Fauves (they were loaned, the artist recalls, by the French embassy), and was transfixed. Here were Braque, Vlaminck and Derain, blazing with bird-of-paradise colour, radiating tones and textures new to Peebles. Breathlessly, he related his discovery to tutors and peers at the Wellington Technical College. The response was as brief as it was dismissive, just as it had been two years earlier when Peebles voiced admiration for an exhibition of paintings by Colin McCahon in the Wellington Public Library. It was then, Peebles recalls, that he knew he had to get out.

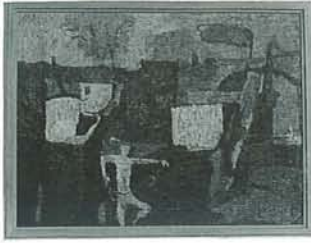
In 1951 Peebles took a year's leave from the Post Office, which he would extend twice in the coming years, and took off for full-time study in Sydney at the Julian Ashton School of Art. This journey, the first of two offshore forays Peebles made as a young painter, looms large in his artistic biography. Both trips radically altered the way the rest of his career would look; both were apprenticeships in offshore modernism; and both journeys reveal Peebles' radical willingness to shuck off old burdens and rethink cherished assumptions. It was, in short, a time of exhilarating experiment.

In Sydney, Cézanne was God. Thus began a fascination with the French painter which is undiminished in intensity today. When Peebles took off for Australia he had seen only a few Cézannes, flattened into illustrations in the pages of *The Studio* magazine, but it was under the tutelage of the remarkable Australian painter John Passmore that Peebles was converted to the Cézanniste style. Passmore, a hermetic but charismatic presence, spoke the languages of early continental modernism – from Sickert, Cézanne and Bonnard through to Picasso and Braque – having spent seventeen years in Britain in the company of such influential British painters as Keith Vaughan. The Australian's example opened new worlds to Peebles.

Over the next three years, while boarding first in the suburb of Colloroy and later in Northwood, Peebles immersed himself in Cézanne with fanatical zeal – 'even to the extent of trying to *be* Cézanne'<sup>12</sup> Here he learned of the importance of unifying the picture's surface by flattening planes, of sacrificing smooth and polished effects for a clumsy but hard-won pictorial unity, and of advancing all parts of the painting – both foreground and background, both shadow and highlight – at the same time. It was here, too, that Peebles was first introduced to the rhetoric of 'plastic' painting: that is, painting in which all of the painter's resources are marshalled in an attempt to give the painting a palpable physical presence and internal structure, as opposed to a 'mere' decorative scheme or illustrative purpose.<sup>13</sup> Thus, pigment became thicker, watercolour was replaced by oil, scenes became less legible, paintings more muscular and difficult. *Landscape* of 1953, with its dabs of pink and green oil locked into a deliberated structure, is one of Peebles' most accomplished essays in this mode.

Peebles had left New Zealand as a cautiously expressive naturalistic painter. He returned to his Wellington life three and a half years later with a working knowledge of the languages of early continental modernism and a fierce new commitment to his art. His first show on his return, at Wellington's recently opened Architectural Centre Gallery in 1954, was an attempt to extend this new knowledge into a language of his own. Not only was this his first solo show, it was among the first solo exhibitions of abstract painting seen in the capital.<sup>14</sup> Thus, it is a signal event in any account of the emergence of abstraction in New Zealand art, and a watershed in Peebles' early development.<sup>15</sup> Predictably, the event sparked a squabble.

The style-wars of the fifties were fought with zeal in the 'letters' pages of local newspapers. The polarisation of Wellington's artists into a cast of progressives and conservatives was exacerbated by New Zealand's provincial situation. Battle lines were clearly drawn, dividing modernists from traditionalists, abstract painters from figurative, the young from the old. The establishment, such as it was, comprised a loose affiliation



Landscape 1954  
Oil on canvas  
380 x 510  
Private collection

of academic painters who clustered under the wing of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts and an ultra-conservative National Gallery.<sup>16</sup> The progressives had as their exhibition space the Architectural Centre Gallery – ‘the trojan horse in the camp of the conservatives’, as David Millar wrote – and, occasionally, Graeme Dowling’s Willeston Gallery.<sup>17</sup> Among the vanguardist fold were Brian Carmody, Melvin Day, John Drawbridge, Jacqueline Fahey, Victor Gray, L. D. McCormack, John Pine Snadden, and Pat Williams.<sup>18</sup>

Almost half a century after its tangled reception in Europe, modernism in New Zealand remained an aesthetic heresy: such was the cultural lag enforced by distance. Faced with these strange, violently distorted, vividly coloured images – look at *Girl with Ball*, 1954 with its jarring transitions from flat plane to modelled volume, and its calculated disrespect for anatomical correctness – Eric Ramsden, critic for the *Evening Post*, could only flounder: ‘. . . what he is seeking to express could only be answered by those people who are perhaps as interested in this obscure cult as is Mr. Peebles. . . . While there is no doubting the sincerity of this painter’s outlook, some of the work, particularly *Girl with Ball*, might well be the product of children. The difference is, of course, that Mr. Peebles deliberately paints that way.’<sup>19</sup> From the vantage of the late twentieth century, such skirmishes seem quaint. Sneering at Ramsden’s philistinism is too easy, for his complaints about unclothed emperors, unoriginal though they were, are all too comprehensible. Bereft of an institutional culture, modern art lacked a context in which understanding could be nurtured: simply, Ramsden lacked a critical vocabulary with which to respond to such art.

In any case, Peebles did not go undefended. A spirited defence of his art was conducted in the *Evening Post*’s ‘letters’ column, and Ramsden’s verdict was counterbalanced by several sophisticated reviews. Stewart McLellan, Director of the National Art Gallery, implored viewers to go beyond their initial shock at the radical elisions of facial features and realistic detail, giving time instead to Peebles’ tussle with ‘problems



Don Peebles at open-air exhibition outside the Wellington Public Library in 1955.

of pictorial architecture, the organisation of shapes and colours into a specific composition wherein realism is of a minor importance.<sup>20</sup> In hindsight, of course, we know that abstraction and figuration need not stand opposed. Peebles was not unaware of this irony. Ramsden might cast modernism as an apocalyptic break with a naturalistic tradition, but Peebles, in a later letter to the newspaper defending abstract styles, begged to differ: 'Abstract painting in its modern form is at least 50 years old – it has reached the stage where it may be considered evolutionary rather than revolutionary. Perhaps it was never revolutionary since it seeks not to destroy older traditions but only to bring some of their elements nearer the surface.'<sup>21</sup>

Still, Ramsden's barb stung. The opening quote in Peebles' first scrapbook of press clippings is Jean Cocteau's advice to artists: 'Note what it is about your work that the critics don't like, then cultivate it.' And so Peebles did. In December 1955, Peebles and other vanguardists conducted an open-air exhibition outside Wellington Public Library. For one week in high summer Wellington's young modernists set up their stands and bared their art to the world.<sup>22</sup> Most of the work looks tame enough today (and the fact that the city's burghers permitted such an exhibition should give caution to anyone wishing to paint too grim a picture of modern art's reception in Wellington at this time), but it was the defiance of the event that mattered: this was their *salon de refuses*.

Throughout the second half of the fifties Peebles painted nightly in a small studio below his parents' home in Wadestown, Wellington. By 1957 he had produced one of his first bona-fide essays in abstraction. *Landscape* 1957, with its palette-knifed surface and bustling geometric forms, like a city or architectural structure seen from above, gave the first hint of the real fruit of Peebles' long and energetic apprenticeship: namely, the Wellington series, a sequence of over twenty works in which heavily impastoed zones of oil paint – white for city, blue for sea – are corralled within supple architectural structures, thus beginning the play back and forth between order and expression in Peebles' art. The series is an abstract evocation of the harbour city seen from above, a painted homage to a favourite place, richly evoking the scud of dark shadows across a brooding ocean surface. The harbour, with its dark weighty mass of water and its constant push and pull between tide and land, was the perfect vehicle for such essays. Even so, the paintings are less a literal transcription of geography than an occasion for experiments in visual tension, pictorial dynamism, opposing forces. (It is worth noting that Peebles, though an expressive painter, is not strictly speaking an expressionist one. His scored or agitated surfaces may chart the frustration involved in wresting the work into being, but they are never offered as an index of psychic turmoil in the way that the angst of the expressionist painter is vouchsafed by frantic or slashing brushwork.)

There is no other series in which Peebles' ongoing self-education is more vividly dramatised. In the earliest works there is a tendency, noted by several critics at that time, to let a chaotically textured surface do the work of structure.<sup>23</sup> Up close, the palette-knifed surface yields fascinating textures: the surface is thick with bumps, rugosities, hollows and swirls of paint, with white oil piled like mock cream and dense slabs of blue, often mixed with coffee grounds to yield a coarse, raw texture. Seen from a distance, though, these early paintings are less compelling, and the slow, sometimes sluggishly



Don Peebles in his Wadestown studio with paintings from the Wellington series, 1959.

Wellington Series 1957  
Oil and coffee grounds on canvas  
795 x 1205  
Private collection



literal surface seems to work against the fluidity of the harbour image: the images seemed *paved* as much as they were painted.

This soon changed. Painting by painting, Peebles mastered colour and found more convincing ways to structure the paintings without relinquishing the just-brushed dynamism he strove for. Look at *Wellington Series No. 12*, 1959. Gone are the heavy, farded surfaces. Gone too are the easy contrasts of blue and white, energised by yelping blips of red. In their place are swiftly brushed planes of thinned-down paint in a narrow range of blue and black, bounded and energised by bars or vectors of colour, such as the swipe of black that rushes down into the painting, or the swooping horizontal line which leaps into the image from the left. Receiving overwhelmingly positive notices, these paintings lifted Peebles onto a regular (or less irregular, at least) exhibition circuit, chiefly at the Auckland City Art Gallery, whose progressive new director Peter Tomory had arrived at the Gallery in 1956 and ushered several Wellington abstractionists northwards.<sup>24</sup>

From Don Peebles to Colin McCahon to Jean Horsley, this kind of lushly brushed and tentatively abstract approach to landscape was pursued by many New Zealand painters in the late fifties.<sup>25</sup> Whose lead were these painters following? Of all the ties that bound New Zealand art to the wider world in the fifties and early sixties, the New Zealand-Britain axis was by far the strongest. British painting filled the few art magazines that Peebles could lay his hands on, and British abstractionists such as Peter Lanyon and Roger Hilton were at the front of many New Zealand painters' minds, Peebles chief among them. Indeed, the significant leap in the quality of the Wellington paintings may have been spurred by the sight of the Auckland City Art Gallery's touring show of seventy



Outside John Drawbridge's studio (downstairs from Peebles') in Nugent Tce, St John's Wood, London, with [from left] Robert Macdonald, John Drawbridge, Patrick Elliot, Don Peebles and Bob Elliot (partly obscured). 1962. Photo: Alex Starkey, F.R.P.S.



British abstract and semi-abstract paintings, which Peebles helped hang in 1958 in the Architectural Centre Gallery after the show's rejection by the National Gallery.<sup>26</sup> If the early works from the series owed much to the layered and cosmetic surfaces of the French Tachistes, then the swift, fluid structure of *Wellington XII* c. 1959 owes a good deal to the expressionist wing of British modernism.

Nevertheless, by the end of the series international influence was balanced by individual interpretation. There are influences here, to be sure, but they have been assimilated, made over. Just as Peebles' contemporary Gordon Walters married the koru motif to the frugal geometries of continental modernism, and just as McCahon produced a distinctive hybrid of regional landscape and continental Cubism, so had Peebles acclimatised an international style to a provincial situation. He had also reached the end of a series, and begun looking for new places to take his art. One of them was Europe. London beckoned.

### III

The Wellington series was rewarded in 1960 when Peebles received the Association of New Zealand Arts Societies' Fellowship Award of £1000. He was the first abstract artist to receive what was one of only a few art endowments in New Zealand. Like many young painters who had bridled at the constraints of New Zealand's tiny art scene – Brian Carmody, Melvin Day, John Drawbridge, Robert Macdonald, Patrick Williams – Peebles was drawn to the taproot of modern art as he knew it: 'London – New Mecca For Our Artists' was the headline of an article in *The Weekly News*.<sup>27</sup> A few days before he left New Zealand, Peebles married Prue Corkill. In London, Peebles taught part-time while Prue, who then as now was Peebles' partner and abiding supporter, worked as a dietitian at the Royal Free Hospital.

Peebles left New Zealand determined to abandon old attitudes to art. 'I didn't want to carry my past with me at any time,' he recalls.<sup>28</sup> Yet in London he floundered. Setting aside some forays into affichism *a la* Burri and Tapiés – ruggedly worked canvases overlaid with violently torn material – the most telling work from this period of indecision is, ironically, the final, urgent work from the Wellington series. A catapult composition, black and white with a few silvery mid tones, this impressive and confident work sends two slots of black rocketing through the space between two black squares out into open white space, like projectiles loosed from a slingshot. It is called *Wellington Series No. 14* but hails back to the New Zealand landscape in name only. At the time, it must have felt like the last step on a journey Peebles had begun four years ago in Wellington, but it was also the first step on a new and fruitful leg of that journey.

When Don Peebles opened the *Sunday Times* early in 1961, his art took a new turn. There he read an article by the British painter Victor Pasmore called 'What is Abstract Art.' Here, in Pasmore's lucid prose, were words that seemed to sum up all Peebles felt about art but had yet to find form for. Extracting his theories from the writer and artist Charles Biederman, whose book *Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge* had been published in 1948, Pasmore argued that painting, to maintain its relevance in the world of new art, had to abandon the frame, shoulder itself out from the flat canvas surface,



Don Peebles, Robert MacDonald and John Drawbridge in 5 Nugent Tce, St John's Wood, London, 1962.  
Photo: Alex Starkey, F.R.P.S.

and unfold into the third dimension. Those artists who made that move, Pasmore chief among them, called themselves Constructionists. Their art would be demotic and accessible, employing workaday materials, and engaging in a stringent refinement of basic geometries: square, lozenge, grid. Biederman's thesis and Pasmore's art, as Frances Spalding has noted, 'rests on the belief that all significant art depends on the artist's grasp of external reality. In the portrayal of this reality, painting had reached a point of unsurpassable illumination in the work of Cézanne and could go no further; the next logical step was from illusionism to actuality, from the flat surface to the use of real materials in real space; to the making of reliefs.'<sup>29</sup> This might serve as a precise description of the radical changes wrought in Peebles' art during the early sixties.

Reeling with the impact of these new ideas, Peebles wrote to Pasmore, and Pasmore invited Peebles to his show at the New London Gallery in February 1961. What Peebles saw there were austere works, wary of colour, purged of irrelevance, hard-edged, clinical and crystal clear. It was a baptism by ice. Victor Pasmore was the guru, and Peebles, for a time, played the disciple, going at Pasmore as he once went at Cézanne. Despite an abiding interest in resolutions of art and architecture, Peebles has been drawn less to the Utopian pole of Constructivism, with its hopes of a functional marriage of social and artistic good, than to its lyrical potential and its poetic evocation of space.<sup>30</sup> Photographs document his wholesale conversion to the new art. By 1962, Peebles' studio in Croydon, South London, looks less like a painter's domain than a carpenter's workshop, bustling with clean flat planes in white and grey and black, studded with rods and bars and struts of wood.



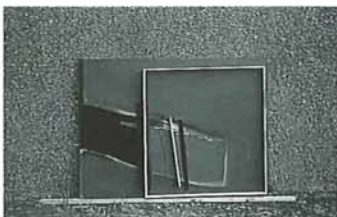
Interior of Don Peebles' London Studio, with Construction works. 1962

If the trajectory of the Wellington series ran from chaos to order, then this impulse to precision truly crystallized when Peebles first laid eyes on Pasmore's work: 'Seeing their work was like a kick in the guts for me. It pushed things home. Made me realise that the only justification for painting was to get at the essence of things – to keep pushing back the boundaries.'<sup>31</sup> The English painter's example lay at the heart of Peebles' artistic development for at least the next decade, as he sought to purge and purify his art – a process that began in works such as *Relief Drawing* 1962.

From *Wellington XIV* to *Relief Drawing* 1962 Peebles does seem to have traversed a vast cultural, not to say geographical, distance – from New Zealand to England; from abstracted landscape to non-objective construction; from paintbrush and pencil to hammer and nails. Yet what is remarkable about his conversion to Constructionism is an uncanny continuity between the Wellington series and the first works made in a Constructionist mode – simplification of an image down to its formal ingredients; suspicion of colour; surfaces that border on the sculptural. Far from being merely fortuitous, the path to Constructionism via the Wellington series seems nothing less than logical. As in Sydney, all that Peebles knew was kindled and transformed by a revelatory new influence.

In a recent diary entry Peebles quotes Socrates: 'If mathematics, measurements and weighing of parts be taken out of any art that which remains will not be much.'<sup>32</sup> Pursuing a philosophy of economy and a doctrine of truth to materials, Peebles' aim in the sixties was to take out of his art everything *but* mathematics and measurements.

*Relief Painting* 1961  
Oil and wood on board  
Work destroyed



Metaphor was suppressed, symbol too: just the bone-dry visual facts. The results were frugal, stringent and poised objects, their components locked together in dynamic counterpoint like pieces in a Platonic jigsaw. First, colour was purged. Next, elements in the composition were nudged into the third dimension, canted out toward the viewer, and the frame was projected forward into space, forming a shallow tray or sculptural boundary in which the work's internal energies are contained and intensified. To look at such works is to engage the mind in a kind of visual sum, as the eye follows each crisp line or vector, traverses each shadow, registers each gnomon and bollard. A very sculptural painter, Peebles always advances his images away from their ground. If his art can be viewed as an attempt to parlay painting into the realm of sculpture, then that attempt really begins in London.

Peebles had become, then, an abstract artist, a pure painter; but this did not then and has never meant shutting out the world. The membrane between abstract and figurative has always been porous in Peebles' art, a fact bodied forth in a fascinating sequence of photographs made while Peebles travelled through Spain. They compose a catalogue of his fascination with the shapes and forms offered up by the world – a boat hull swept with orange waterproofing paint and resembling nothing so much as an abstract painting; nets laid out to dry on a Costa Blanca beachfront, a motif taken up again and again in his art; roads pocked and fissured by time, another favourite sight. These images were his life drawings.

From Spain back to London, Europe was a revelation. Peebles spent hours and days in galleries. He met artists – Terry Frost, Barbara Hepworth, Patrick Heron, Roger Hilton, Peter Lanyon, Bryan Wynter – making face to face contact with figures from his personal pantheon. He showed in several large shows, often to some approving notice, and often alongside major names.<sup>33</sup> It must have seemed to Peebles that he was finally inhabiting the world he had once glimpsed from afar in the flat illustrations of art magazines.

#### IV

Very little art came back to New Zealand with Peebles in 1962. The artworks mattered to him less as product than as a series of signposts on a larger journey. Peebles was unsure whether to return, but it was a fruitful homecoming, for he removed himself from Pasmore's sphere of influence in time for a personal and idiosyncratic style to germinate.

Nevertheless, the works he exhibited at the Architectural Centre Gallery in September 1964 on his return were Peebles at his purest: austere abstract paintings, small wooden hurdles, and perspex constructions of ascetic purity. They were among the most pared back and frugal art objects seen in New Zealand up to that time – too ascetic, by most accounts. Russell Bond preferred the memory of the Wellington series to these aloof and 'uncommunicative' constructions. Don McKenzie, in a sympathetic review, tactfully observed that the show promised less than it delivered.<sup>34</sup> McKenzie was, however, the first commentator to see in Peebles' early works an interest in landscape 'not as mood and variety, but as a play of forces,' to see that this interest in dynamic structure underlay even these rather dry works, and to make plain that Peebles sought to make artworks that were 'self-sufficient and objective in having no meaning but their own visual forms



Wall, Madrid 1961  
Photograph by Don Peebles

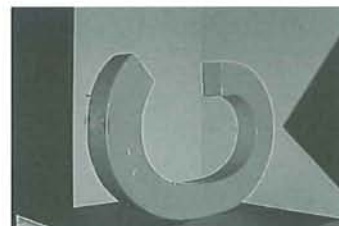


Fishing Boats, Altea, Spain 1961  
Photograph by Don Peebles



Solo exhibit by Don Peebles in the Centre  
Gallery, Wellington, 1964  
All works were destroyed  
Photograph by Don Peebles

Red Form 1963  
Acrylic on wood  
Whereabouts unknown  
Photograph by Don Peebles



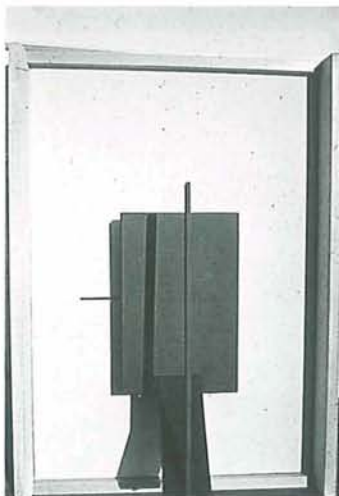
and an organic structure generating its own internal rhythms.' Though it drew respect rather than pleasure from its viewers, this homecoming show revealed to a local audience the radical turn his art had taken, and his new dedication to abstract art, or, in the parlance of the time, 'non-objective' painting. Not that Peebles was alone in his quest for essentials: in Wellington and Auckland respectively, Gordon Walters and Milan Mrkusich were already making abstract paintings of a sophistication unparalleled in New Zealand at that time.

In 1965 Peebles left the Post Office in Wellington for a teaching post at the Canterbury School of Art. Pasmore was one of Peebles' referees, and his mentor's pedagogic ideas, earthed in the Bauhaus ethic, were the keystone of Peebles' teachings in Basic Design. Shifting south to Christchurch, where Peebles has lived ever since, he could now spend his days, and not merely evenings, immersed in the business of art. New Zealand's distance from the centres of international art was compounded in the 1960s by regional rifts and antagonisms. On the map of New Zealand art history, Christchurch was known as the home of regionalist landscape painting, with W. A. Sutton as its supreme exponent, while Auckland, a faster-paced and less conservative city, boasted such advocates of abstraction as dealer Petar Vuletic and Peter Tomory. In any case, Peebles had always felt himself out of step with the main rhythms of New Zealand art at that time: 'I must admit I have never been very interested in New Zealand art. It was in my youth a ridiculous clamouring after the great New Zealand style, which didn't appeal to me.'<sup>35</sup> Until the later sixties and early seventies, abstract art that eschewed any landscape references remained suspect. Despite all this, there was in the mid-to-late sixties in Christchurch a growing number of venues for the exhibition and reception of 'international' styles of art (the dealer gallery era was just beginning in New Zealand) and a burgeoning interest in abstract art. That interest centred on the prints and paintings of artists in the 20/20 Vision group, formed in 1964, who strove in their Op Art abstractions for an art both international and provocative.<sup>36</sup>

As befitted a lecturer in the design-based Basic Studies course, this period yielded work of huge finesse. One of the underpinning tensions in Don Peebles' art is between the second and third dimension, between painting and sculpture, and in the late sixties that tension is distilled in two distinct bodies of work. On one hand, Peebles crafted a series of ever more refined sculptural reliefs, usually in shallow wooden trays. Patrick Hutchings' analogy – he compared such works to navigational instruments, strange varieties of sundial – is apt, for light (and thus chance) activates these works. In at least one case (*Relief c. 1968*), Peebles liked a shadow so much that he painted it into place.

Of these works, two constructions shine. Firstly there is, *Relief Construction 1966*, winner of a Hay's Prize Merit Award, and a work of the utmost poise and surface tension. In a cool cream tray Peebles floats a diamond in which zones of yellow and black clench and unclench, locked in a dynamic synergy. But perhaps the most finely tuned essay in this mode was made by Peebles a few years later. *Relief Construction 1974/5* began with the central rectangle of wood, which Peebles salvaged from the side of the road (chance having its say again), and deployed as the central element in a composition that is as finely calibrated as a Swiss watch, with a comparable perpetual motion – an unwinding

*Untitled Relief c. 1968*  
Acrylic on wood  
Work destroyed



system of fine, tensile lines and pivoting rectangles. As always in Peebles' art, it is the diagonal, slicing across or lancing up through an implicit grid, that gives the work its torque and speed.

On the other hand, Peebles painted his way through two overlapping series of stretched-canvas paintings: the Canterbury Series and the Linear Series. Less aggressive in their retinal effects than any Op art, these are works of some panache, elegant and erudite, in which large zones of pristine colour are activated by linear foils – pendulums of blue ping and twang on a taut red field; staves of lines dance and bend tautly across placid seas of colour; serried triangles hover in serene fields, angling through the canvas or floating along its edges. To use the formalist rhetoric of that time, these are paintings whose 'subject' is the lyrical pressure that fields of singing colour can exert on a rigid format, paintings in which the relation of field to edge, surface to depth, colour to colour are freighted with the utmost consideration. At the time, Peebles quoted Albers: 'Notice also, silence sounds/Listen to the voice of colour.'<sup>37</sup>

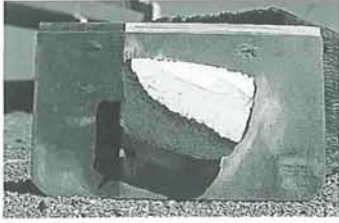
At their best, these are serene and lovely paintings, playing their hushed colour-music to the patient eye. They are also, it must be said, some of the most doctrinaire of this artist's works. Up-to-date in their time, these paintings seem academic when measured against Peebles' richly idiosyncratic solutions in the decades since the sixties; the presence of such American colour field painters as Poons, Kelly and Noland looms large behind them. Though the works were far from glib in their facture (the artist would fastidiously apply up to fifteen layers of thinned pigment), Peebles did seem to be ringing the changes within a cramped range of options. Wrote Hamish Keith, revising Albers: 'it seems that the sound of colour is becoming a thin and insubstantial tune.'<sup>38</sup>

Peebles was not unaware of these dangers, and his work of the seventies is his answer to such accusations. Three things bear witness to his increasing dissatisfaction with this purified and machine-clean way of working. First, in 1973 a survey of Peebles' art toured New Zealand to some acclaim, giving him cause to take stock of his art. Next, he destroyed a great many of the colour field paintings of the later sixties. Last, and most important, he began, slowly at first and then with increasing violence, to ruffle his urbane surfaces with rogue effects, bleeding foreign colour onto the pristine fields. In sum, he began to champ at the minimalist bit. In the 1960s, Peebles had become a virtuoso geometric abstractionist, a position he can't have relished, since virtuosity is second cousin to mannerism, and mannerism is alien to Peebles' querying sensibility. Orthodox colour field painting had become, to steal a title from the painter Allen Maddox, 'finer and finer and more gutless.' Peebles now sought ways to double-cross his own facility, to rupture his own impeccable manners: 'I have this feeling that in all creative periods you have this burst of creativity and then a crust forms around things and they ossify. This happens in our own work too, so we've got to smash our way through it. If the works are raw and ugly, that's great! . . . It's so easy to solve all your problems and just go on and on making ever more lovely and beautiful works, each one just like the last.'<sup>39</sup>

Just as Peebles' art changed radically in the sixties, so would he pursue a programme of radical and dedicated experiment throughout the seventies. As that decade unwinds, we see Peebles searching for new ways to spring surprises on himself, to launch his art



Untitled 1972  
Acrylic on canvas  
1590 x 1590  
Collection of the artist



*Assemblage of Found Pieces* c. 1978  
Acrylic and pencil on wood  
Private collection

beyond his own intentions and into the realm of chance. There was nothing strategic or premeditated about this change: just as Peebles had arrived at a fully abstract art by intuition rather than calculation, so did he move instinctively towards the spectacular flowering of his late work. Thus, pristine surfaces were replaced by raw ones, smooth by scoured, serene and unruffled fields by brushy and churned. Process and chance played their hand – both in Peebles' willingness to use found objects, his new-found passion for improvisation, and his willingness to let random effects stand. The frame was radically dismantled. Paintings were left to hang raggedly loose, freed of their wooden stretchers. The stretchers, in turn, were put to new service as the basic scaffolding of new constructions. And in due course the loose canvas paintings returned as a relief element to the raw wooden constructions – another rapprochement of painting and sculpture.

Peebles makes slow and thoughtful adjustments to his trajectory, not U-turns, and his discoveries of the seventies can be traced in a sequence of five works, spanning that decade. In the early seventies, he was working through a series of canvases structured by that classical modernist device, the grid: all are anchored by a structure of tensile verticals and horizontals, whether implicit or explicit in the image, a trellis resting implacably on the painting's surface. These works (three examples: *Painting, Canterbury Series* 1968, *Untitled* 1972, *Relief Construction* 1973) retain Peebles' customary panache and severity, but their impeccable acrylic skins have begun to bare the scars of their own making. Impurities have intruded. In the 1972 work, subtle cloudings of pink acrylic stir the placid grey field, summoning the illusion of depth; most compellingly, the image reads as a sky seen through a storm wire fence. This violation was, so to speak, the first crack in the modernist edifice, through which the world would later come rushing in. Only one year later, in *Untitled* 1973 the field seems to have moulded or decayed. Clouds or bruises of blue and purple underpainting rise up through the grid, muffling and almost swallowing it.

By 1975, in *Untitled Combine Painting*, the stretcher has been abandoned, yielding a more pliant and less predictable surface. But for a network of blue blips at its interstices, the lattice is barely visible through rapid wristy flurries of charcoal, brambles of alterations and cancellations. And there appears for the first time on one of Peebles' canvases a relief element, a tongue of canvas sagging out from the painting's surface. By 1976, Peebles was suspending loops of rope across unembellished drapes of pre-coloured canvas. He had hit on a rich vein of experiment, and mined it vigorously through the late seventies, working on the paintings in his huge studio on the first storey of an old mill in Addington. This period unleashed the first of his freehanging paper reliefs as well as numerous works in which loose canvas was suspended like a bib from wooden grounds. Peebles: 'I realized that I could have gone on making ever more perfect works, out-perfecting myself if I'd wanted to . . . And I would have found it, I think, constricting and unsatisfying to do that. At that stage I just wanted to let more of this sense of the physical come in; and finally it did, resulting in dropping the canvas stretcher altogether.'<sup>40</sup>

Fluent in the languages of hard-edged abstraction, Peebles could now stretch and distort its syntax, watching with quiet fascination and delight as it fell back into fresh and unexpected new configurations – a process which would in time release the

splendours of his 'book page' reliefs. This process of freeing-up culminates spectacularly in *Untitled* 1978/9, a monumental painting with an eight metre running length that sweeps up the eye across its lyrically brushed surface. The grid structure, so often seen as antiseptic or clinical in format, has here been recast as a fugue or even a chant, fiercely punctuated at its left-hand end by a violent red 'X'. Both chronologically and stylistically, it is the axis or fulcrum of his career to date, signalling a key swing from classic to romantic, austere to lush, rigour to romance. It was in this painting that Peebles decisively unclenched the grid, relaxing gestural brushwork into the rigid scaffold of his early work. More, by draping rather than stretching this canvas, Peebles seems to have withdrawn the very girders from the modernist paradigm, letting it flop out audaciously into real space. Far and away the most telling account of this major work was penned not by a critic but by a fellow painter, Sir Toss Woollaston:

*His painting, an abstract, is utterly free from the tight control and hard edges we so often have to swallow with our abstract pill. It is no medicine, this painting; it is pure joy. You can forget it is abstract, while you ride on the excitement of the brushstrokes – an excitement that doesn't fail once in a painting more than 20ft long. It is all lyrical repetition – repetition with constant variation through thematic changes of the simplest kind – from wider to units; open to compressed and back to open again; grey to slightly purplish; red and back again to grey. There is nothing mysterious here, nothing hard to understand. It is open-handed painting, painted (as Cézanne said a painter should) 'as a bird sings'. If this painting has got to look like anything, then perhaps it is a wall of pigeonholes in sunlight, but made by the processes of nature rather than by a carpenter with his rule and square. I repeat, it is beautiful.<sup>41</sup>*

As Ian Wedde suggestively noted, that emphatic red cross may be read as an assertion of freedom, as if, having worked his way through the imprisoning structure of the grid for the last decade, Peebles had finally freed himself from its clutches, marking that escape with an 'X'. It is a reading richly confirmed by a lovely and witty work from 1979, in which two skinny strips of red canvas form a giddy red 'X', leaping across the wall in what seems to be jubilant freedom.<sup>42</sup>

## V

The eighties. A signal decade. We find Peebles poised once again on the brink of a new phase of work, and as his career unscrolls towards the present we traverse the richest and most fertile period of his artistic life. In the early eighties, the artist whose reputation as a cold-blooded designer had proved so hard to shake came out with some of the most sensuous, raw and gorgeous works New Zealand art has produced. Just as Frank Stella's austere pinstripes clove to his cacophonous reliefs, and just as the elderly Mondrian recast his trademark grid as a pulsing network of bars and blips, so did Peebles, after two decades of apparently austere abstract painting, find a way to admit lyricism, warmth and expression back into his art.<sup>43</sup>

In 1978 Peebles made the most impressive of what critic Brett Riley has called his 'lateral leaps' by unleashing the first of his breakthrough 'book page' reliefs.<sup>44</sup> They are no small achievement. These provocatively underfinished works, with their rough, frayed canvas edges, were made by sewing strips of canvas vertically to a rectangular swathe of

canvas. Thinned acrylic colour is soaked in, not stroked on, as if to enhance the organic effect. Initially, these fins of canvas were shallow and stiff, but in time they become denser and deeper, protruding provocatively into the viewer's space, flopping and sagging into lyrical rhythms, setting off a graceful play between light and shadow, image and depth, sculpture and painting. The eye is drawn at once across the riffling folds, down the plummeting lines of the fins, and into the dark shadowy folds between. They're all flow and fruition. The modernist grid still underlay these works (one can see it from behind, in the pattern of stitching) yet it had been extended and softened. Peebles had arrived at that rarest of things: romantic minimalism. It was Colin McCahon who in New Zealand first loosed painting from its frame, but Peebles may be the first local painter to have made that looseness indivisible from the painting's effect. Peebles' special achievement in these works was, as critic Rob Taylor has written, to '[make] sense of the great New Zealand loose canvas, by making it a formal structural necessity.'<sup>45</sup> *Lyrical, warm, humane, lush, beautiful*: these words peppered the glowing critical notices.<sup>46</sup>

For anyone who doubted such appraisals, dissent must have been stifled by a pivotal exhibition at the Janne Land Gallery in 1984. With their sagging gills of leaf-green and pungent red canvas, their grand and fluid designs, these relief paintings are Peebles' masterworks, in the sense that they draw together longstanding themes in summative artworks of the utmost confidence (among the works in the exhibition were *Untitled A2* 1984, *Untitled A4* 1984, *Untitled A1* 1985 and *Untitled Maquette* 1984/5). Other artists might make works as free or as lush as these, but those freedoms would mean less, because they did not spring from the same context of restraint: you have to learn to hold back before you can let go so spectacularly. The paintings are built with the kind of benign strength that comes of being able to relax where most artists would tighten their grip. Seen beside the kempt constructions of the sixties, these reliefs have an easy grandeur.

Peebles' insight, here, was to take the formal innovations of the paper reliefs (of which more shortly) and book page canvases, and to imbue them with both painting's fluidity of image and sculpture's mass and presence. What is immediately impressive about these works is their palpable sculptural weight, their *gravity*. In this sense the paintings fulfil one of Peebles' great aims for his art. Again and again in his notebooks and conversation Peebles restates his desire to achieve in his art a physical weight and mass: *I want the works to have PRESENCE . . . The good painting pumps its energy out from the wall. How can painting be called surface-bound?*<sup>47</sup>

'Presence' is not, or not merely, a function of size. It has to do with internal scale, and with the way the works address themselves to the viewer. Look at *Untitled A2* 1984. Consider the density and depth of the leaves at the top; the long thin tail that hangs in space; the way the work burgeons almost a metre out from the wall, active from almost all viewpoints; the fluted shadows cast by the fins. To stand in front of this work is to register its stretch and heft at gut level. (This point is wittily made by Peebles in a small drawing of 1992. Called *Stretch*, it depicts a human form as a rent in the drawing's fabric, its arms stretched out to each side of the image as if to hold it together.) Though it would be foolish to overdraw the connections, the comparison with Stella is instructive:



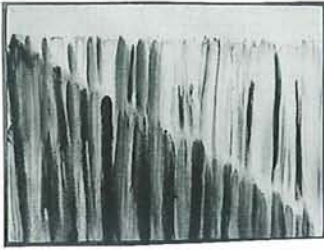
both artists have rejuvenated an austere abstract art through an athletic and Baroque extension into real space, by flirting with the third dimension.

The second half of this decade was punctuated by several more spectacular works, as Peebles, who had retired from teaching in 1984, worked his way through this rich seam of experiment, playing through all the possibilities of colour, format and scale. Seen from almost any angle, however, *Untitled A2* emerges as Peebles' central work of the decade: perhaps his masterpiece. The work's title, like strict formalist analyses, does nothing to convey its physical, still less its psychic force. Almost predatory in mood, this canvas relief hovers massively above the viewer, threatens to envelop him or her in its massive outspread wings. Ian Wedde, who took intelligent stock of this show when it first appeared, saw in this work a vast, ritualised image of the female genitals. That is not all there is to see in the work, of course, but Wedde's flirtatious take serves a larger purpose.

To explain: though their deadpan, workaday titles give nothing away, Peebles' reliefs unleash a rich cargo of associations. Like a mathematician composing a sum and coming up with a poem, Peebles had produced in *Untitled A2* an object of profound poetic force by pursuing strict formalist lines of enquiry. Unperturbed by such interpretations, he is content to let meanings breed unchaperoned by his own intentions for the works. 'People,' he says, 'can see what they like in them.'<sup>48</sup> Stand in front of one of those big reliefs and a host of possibilities unfold. A slack spinnaker? A lily pad? Kelp swayed by currents? A mushroom's gills? Whatever the exact nuance, they are soaked in nature.

Which brings us to the nub. Peebles' best works of the eighties, like most works of abstract art that matter, are less a move away from figuration than an intensification of it. Just as Peebles' first abstracts seem latent in his early landscapes, so are landscapes and bodies latent in his recent abstractions. The division between abstract art and figurative art, so often cast as an unbridgeable gap, is in fact completely permeable: less an unbreachable barrier than a shifting tide line. As practised by Peebles, abstraction is always impure, coarse-grained, and engaged in a hands-on romance with the body of the world. Indeed, when his works are very large, they become a kind of second nature, a lush garden of sensation that the viewer inhabits. He has made no works which fulfil so clearly Cézanne's dictum that 'The artist creates a harmony parallel to that of nature and develops it according to a new and original logic.'<sup>49</sup> Where formalist criticism would once have stressed the paintings' self-referring nature, eschewing any references to the wider world as 'literary', we are today, in anti-formalist times, apt to speak of the ties that bind Peebles' art to the wider world – its use of assemblage, say, or its roots in life drawing.

For a vivid proof of this truth about the intertwinings of abstract and figurative in Peebles' art, a viewer need look no further than the artist's drawings. Within a single decade we can chart an arc from silvery, shimmering grids that are fully abstract (*Untitled Drawing* 1985), to drawings of abstract paintings in real space (*Study for Painting, Circular Motif* 1986), to drawings of landscapes in which the forces of river or hill amount to abstract vectors (*Lake Ohau* 1990), to photographs of landscapes in which the image is retouched, right through to unaltered photographs which resemble nothing so much as abstract drawings (*Untitled Two* 1994). Within that arc the old divisions between realism



Untitled 1978  
Acrylic on paper  
Collection of the artist

and abstraction are gracefully dissolved. The way the walls of a valley fold together, the way bollards stud a wharf, the way rocks cluster in a quarry: Peebles' eyes feed on such things, and his drawings are the immediate and intimate conduit for that passion. His line may be harshly gouged and scrubby (*Ladder*, 1980) or *pianissimo* delicate (*Drawing Towards Hanging Canvas Forms*, 1984), and his subjects may be scrutinised at length or snatched out of vistas glimpsed from a moving car; but always there is a self-watching quality to his drawings, a sense of a distinctive visual intelligence superintending the hand's digressions. Peebles draws an object as a person might chant a word, over and over, turning it in mind and hand, until its syllables slip away from meaning and assume a strange new life. Because they are a more liquid form, the drawings often contain hints of leaps that Peebles will later make in his large canvases. For instance, in the late seventies Peebles executed a series of drawings in which sheafs of vertical lines were laid out across a page, like pick-up sticks on a tray. At the time they looked merely odd, but by 1979 they seemed clear auguries of the finned book-page works.

Running congruent to the large canvas reliefs was a series of works which, though physically more modest, are equally important in any account of his art from this period. These are the paper reliefs Peebles made between 1979 and 1989, works which, as he readily allows, led him through to the major resolution of the 1984 canvas reliefs. Building out from the paper surface and into real space just as he had in his canvas reliefs, Peebles arrived at some of the most innovative and quietly ambitious drawings made in New Zealand in the post-war period. Although there is no shortage of artists who take unstretched fabric into sculptural territory (the Americans Robert Morris, Sam Gilliam and Richard Tuttle are obvious examples) far fewer artists have done the same with the conventional paper drawing. With their light washes of watercolour, their richly patinated sisalcraft surfaces, and their organic shuffle of crinkling paper blades, these reliefs amply fulfil the old Constructionist aim that the artist create no mere imitation of the natural world, but a reality parallel to that nature, with its own energy and rhythms. Simply, these are elegant, crisp, and beautiful works – too beautiful for Peebles, who viewed their popularity with bemused suspicion: if he was not testing his audience, how could he be testing himself?

## VI

Accordingly, his art of the last decade has tended toward difficulty, complexity, renewed toughness. This was clearly signalled in 1987 by a series of large circular canvases, a brave, grumpily persistent and somewhat uneven attempt to produce two-dimensional paintings with some of the weight and presence of the large-leaved canvases. A dissonant blend of oil and acrylic, colour here is dense rather than limpid, textured rather than soaked, opaque rather than translucent. The painter's aim in these works is to keep the vast surface alive without letting the eye flounder in a sea of brushmarks or 'cute sub-motifs'.<sup>50</sup> The energies of *Circular Motif No. 1* are, as the artist has noted, centrifugal: the eye rides up the long vertical tongue of canvas, floats out and up into the sea of pushed and pulled red paint, reaches the purfling green border, riding it full-circle back down to the tongue of the work. The tondo is a troublesome format, however, famously difficult

to energise, and this painting's surface tells a story of struggle and irresolution. Peebles' decisions and counter-decisions are problematically alive in the final object.

In the large canvas reliefs of the last five years, Peebles combines the scale and plushy splendour of his big-leaved reliefs with a playful complexity normally reserved for maquettes. Dense almost palpable colour, a play between painted shadow and real shadow, and a general profusion of tongues, fins, flaps and sagging dewlaps of canvas distinguish the visceral, almost bodily spectacle of these works. Open weaves of twittering marks are drawn tight by seams of paint. Möbius strips of canvas loop out to meet the viewer's eye and draw it back into the painting. Riffing chords of canvas slice out at the viewer. Coloured cord, working as a chancy kind of sculptural drawing, ties real space to painted space, literally 'drawing connections' between second and third dimensions. And painting thus unfolds into sculpture. A grand improviser, Peebles in these works is travelling without a map. We see him making good on his own cunning and nerve, finding out where he is going *as he goes*, uncertain where his line will lead him. Looking on, we're drawn into and through this risk-taking process. These are densely argued works, and their internal trajectories are hard to exhaust.

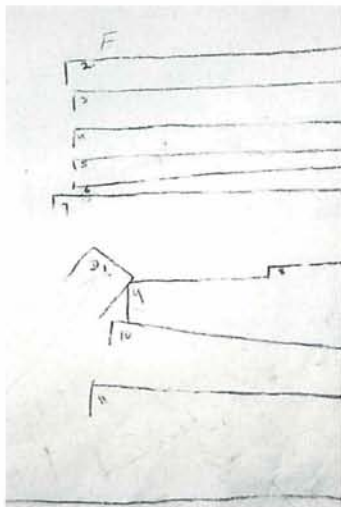
Peebles has spoken often of his desire to violate his own good manners by yoking two seemingly irreconcilable elements. More and more in the eighties and nineties, he has pursued that aim in small and often ephemeral works. Provocatively casual and often stubbornly underfinished, these works may be fitted into that mode of art dubbed 'Eccentric Abstraction'<sup>51</sup> They feel less like precious objects than raw research, but for that very reason they are crucial to an account of Peebles' recent art. Juxtaposition, asymmetry, dynamic collision: these are the principles underpinning such works. 'I like works that are visually disturbing,' he has said, summing up the manner of these objects, 'even if they are conceptually inconsistent.'<sup>52</sup> To an eye accustomed to, say, the graceful harmonies of the paper reliefs, these objects feel wrong, off, dissonant; but it is the artist's dogged and forthright attempt to prove that very wrongness right which gives these paintings their drama and edge.

In these works an alert and inquisitive artist tests himself and his materials to their limits. Because smaller, they stay 'open' for longer, thus giving full lease to the spirit of serious aesthetic play that underpins Peebles' art. A favourite policy is to take some rogue shard of wood and see how many possibilities lie latent within it. Another is to self-cannibalise, tearing apart old works and recombining them anew. In *Untitled Construction* 1995, for instance, humble offcast materials are transformed into the stuff of art. Part of an older painting's packing crate becomes a proscenium-like backboard for a new painting; and Peebles coaxes a perspectival recession up from the wood grain, following the material's lead.

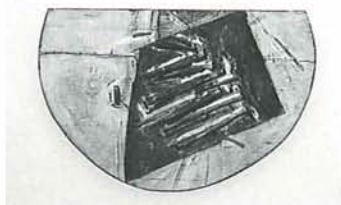
Each of these works tells a candid narrative of visual thought. All of Peebles' feints, doodles, hesitations and second thoughts are preserved on the surface. You can see the artist speculating – throwing hypotheses at his materials, seeing if the conclusions will hold. Peebles is thinking *through* his materials, dismantling and reconstructing painting's syntax, combining irreconcilable dialects to form odd new pidgins – juxtaposing stern constructivist vectors with lush swatches of canvas; laying ethereal clouds of white paint



*Untitled* 1991  
Acrylic on board  
290 x 360  
Collection of the artist



Untitled Canvas Relief 1995  
Detail of work in progress. 1995



Untitled Painting 1995  
Acrylic and charcoal on canvas and board  
452 x 675  
Collection of the artist

over raw plywood surfaces. Jerry-rigged rather than machine-tooled, hybrid rather than pure, these are some of Peebles' chanciest and wittiest works: arenas for the testing of raw ideas.

It is impossible to know where these small works will lead Peebles. A few years ago, in one of the most fascinating turns of his career, Peebles began to revisit the austere geometries of his constructionist years, but in a newly playful spirit (see, for instance, *Construction* 1995). Indeed, by 1995 Peebles' art resembles less a domino-like sequence of stylistic advances than a series of limber loops and reprisals around a spare yet ever-expanding visual alphabet. See the echo between photos taken in Madrid in the sixties (*Wall, Madrid* 1961) and Sydney in 1994 (*Untitled Two*); note the way *Relief Construction* 1966 resurfaces in the shape of a paper relief from 1979; and look at Peebles' appropriation, in the small work *Untitled Painting* 1995, of one of the ruled canvas swatches from which he normally builds his large canvas paintings.

While teaching Peebles was once asked 'What stage are these students at?' and replied: 'They come here experienced, they will leave (I hope) as beginners.'<sup>53</sup> That is the artist we see in the last half-decade of Peebles' art: a perpetual beginner, always willing to unlearn old certainties and surprise himself. Peebles may be one of the pioneers and professors emeritus of New Zealand modernism, but he is also one of its most alert exponents. In a sense, the subject of a Peebles retrospective is less the works themselves than the restless, querying logic that generates the leaps between each. And that may be one of the reasons why Peebles, though far from being a neglected artist, has often slipped under art history's fickle radars. Old artists are expected to take up stately and immobile residence in art history, their pensions secured, the book closed. Peebles, though, has moved constantly, exhibited reluctantly ('nothing's ever finished'), and remained too mobile for leadfooted historians to bag and tag. Few senior New Zealand abstract painters have been so willing to take chances, few so self-critical.<sup>54</sup>

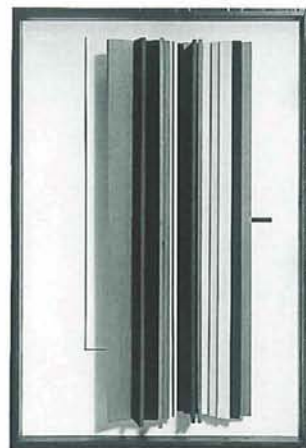
## VII

Proclaimed dead by one group of ideologues just as another championed it as art's last true avenue of aesthetic adventure, abstract painting has a vexed history. In the end, these either/or debates do nothing to open our eyes to the unique shapes and textures of art in the present. What they do reveal is the impoverished terms of the argument, as if 'painting' mattered only as a conceptual pawn in a game of critical or historical chess. In his quiet and unhurried way, Don Peebles provides us with a rare opportunity to shuck off these tired arguments and give our eyes over to the pleasures of a pragmatic and playful abstraction: candid, un-doctrinaire, earthed firmly in the soil of the studio. In the face of all kinds of horizon-sweeping claims about the 'Fate of Painting,' the unpretentious playfulness of these works seems a humble but noble assertion of small pleasures for eye and mind: of food for visual thought. For while Peebles is restlessly inventive within his own 'accepted parameters', there is an abiding modesty to his art. Wary of over-reaching himself, Peebles has never invoked the corny mysticism that still inflates the reputations of some abstractionists. Favouring the small and contemplative statement over the grand and rhetorical declamation, he has maintained a scrupulous

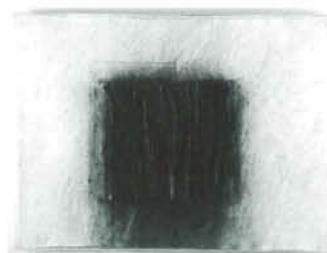
personal silence about his work. This awareness of the limits of language, one might say, is what sends him daily to his studio.

At 74, Peebles is engaged by a serious and exacting form of aesthetic play. Asking nothing more of us than our time, his paintings reveal the workings of a curiously narrow but intensely focussed material intelligence. This narrowness can make his art hard to tune into – it is not ‘about’ anything, it omits a great expanse of art’s moral and poetic and political spectrum – but such limitations are an index of humility, not hubris (and humility is a necessary attribute for any painter in a technological age). Some painters strive to say something, simply. Playing a more complex game, Peebles aims to say something about saying, about the way painting’s language works. Pursuing that task with uncommon seriousness and commitment, Peebles has found within his own ‘accepted parameters’ a realm of infinite interest, like a scientist who discovers infinite worlds within the tiniest fragment of matter. Skeptical of painting’s power to influence people’s actions, he has offered his work as a calm space for the eye to breathe, move, reflect on its own processes, and thus attain a heightened awareness of the world: a space, that is, where opposites are harmonised and tensions are resolved.

It is tempting, and it would be easy, to end with a grand generalisation, but that suggests completion and closure; and finalities, as we know, are anathema to this artist. *Nothing’s ever finished.* So we must resist the lure of the sweeping conclusion or the categorical pronouncement. And we must resist the urge to embalm the artist in the tomb of art history or pension him off to the old age home of a reputation. Better to end where we began, amongst this clutter of boxes and bottles and wood and paper, out of which the artist wrests his hard-won harmonies. And better to leave Peebles where we found him, in the studio. It is, let’s say, early morning in late summer. The studio is filled with its serene light. On the wall, perhaps, is a large raw canvas, recently returned to the artist by his tentmaker, its raw weave awaiting the soak of paint. And in front of it, like a chess player awaiting his opponent’s first move, the artist is holding silent counsel with the painting, listening for its answer to his eye’s inquiries, waiting for his materials to yield up a clue – a swirl of woodgrain, a chance shadow, a random run of paint – and thus set the game in motion.



*Relief Construction* 1966  
Oil and acrylic on wood  
1220 x 915  
Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa



*Untitled Paper Relief* 1979  
Charcoal and chalk on fabiano paper  
582 x 788 mm  
Private collection

Work in progress  
Wise Street studio No. 2  
c. 1983  
Photo: Peter Bannan

## NOTES

1. Artist's journal, Tuesday 14 March 1989.
2. An edited compilation of comments in the artist's 1989 journal.
3. *Untitled*, a film by Jocelyn Allison, 1981.
4. The artist in conversation with the author, 21 March 1994.
5. Conversation with the author, 17 March 1995.
6. Conversation with the author, 8 June 1995.
7. Conversation with the author, 21 March 1994.
8. *How to Draw a Horse and Other Bits*, 1991, an interview with the artist by Glenn Busch. Unpublished manuscript, courtesy Glenn Busch and the Auckland City Art Gallery.
9. Conversation with the author, 8 June 1995.
10. See Robin Kay and Tony Edens' *Portrait of a Century: the History of the N.Z. Academy of Fine Arts 1882-1982*, Wellington: Millwood Press, 1983. Kay and Eden record Peebles exhibiting in 1949 and 1950, but the artist's records list 1948 and 1951 also.
11. Toss Woollaston, *Sage Tea*, 1980, pp.98-99. Colin McCahon, 'Beginnings', *Landfall* 80, Dec. 1966, pp. 360-4.
12. Conversation with the author, 21 March 1994.
13. For theoretical as opposed to practical discussion of such ideas, Peebles and other students turned not to their teachers but rather rummaged through the library of the East Sydney Technical College, which yielded fruit in the form of the *Skira* series of books on contemporary art, and such international art magazines as *Cahiers d'Art*.
14. In 1949, a small exhibition by Gordon Walters including semi-abstract and abstract works, was held at the Wellington Public Library. See Michael Dunn, *The Art of Gordon Walters*, PhD Thesis, University of Auckland, 1984. Vol. One, p.39.
15. In the same year Colin McCahon had curated for the Auckland City Art Gallery an exhibition called *Object and Image*, which gave to abstract art in New Zealand new coherence, purpose and institutional endorsement. Peebles, living in Wellington, was aware of but did not see the show.
16. For an account of Wellington's style wars and of the mixed fortunes of the city's conservative and academic painters see Jill Trevelyan's 'Leonard Mitchell: a Cautionary Tale', *Art New Zealand* 67, Winter 1993, pp.85-87.
17. David Millar, *Don Peebles Retrospective*, 1973, unpaginated.
18. See Millar and Trevelyan.
19. Eric Ramsden, 'Abstract Art in Current Display', *The Evening Post*. Unpaginated and undated clipping, artist's scrapbook. Almost as dismissive was H. R. Tornquist reviewing an exhibition of work by the Thursday Group at the Auckland City Art Gallery in *Home and Building*, October 1954, vol. 17, no.5, p.64.
20. Stewart McLellan, review on Radio 2YC, 1954.
21. Don Peebles, letter to the editor in *The Evening Post*, circa 1958. Unpaginated and undated clipping, artist's scrapbook.
22. Also in the exhibition were Melvin Day, John Drawbridge, Jacqueline Fahey, Vic Gray, John Pine Snadden, W. M. Mason and L. D. McCormack.
23. See, for instance, John N. Knight's 'Woollaston Dominates New Zealand Painting', *The Press*, July 22 1960, p. 5.
24. See, for instance, Janet Paul's 'Painting from the Pacific', in *Comment* Spring 1961, Vol.3, no.9, pp.9-10, where Peebles and Mrkusich alone are seen to transcend the earnest provincialism of the bulk of New Zealand abstract art.
25. A telling stylistic echo was established in the Auckland City Art Gallery's *The Fifties Show*, 1993, by a hanging which flanked an abstract from Peebles' Wellington series with Jean Horsley's *Mark O 1959* and Colin McCahon's *Painting 1958*. My thanks to William McAloon for pointing out this juxtaposition.
26. See Trevelyan. Included in the show were Gillian Ayres, Sandra Blow, Denis Bowen, Henry Cliffe, Bernard Cohen, Robyn Denny, Paul Feiler, Donald Hamilton Fraser, Terry Frost, William Gear, Adrian Heath, Patrick Heron, Roger Hilton, James Hull, Gwyther Irwin, Louis James, Peter Kinley, Peter Lanyon, Derek Middleton, J. Milnes-Smith, Henry Mundy, Rodrigo Moynihan, Victor Pasmore, Ralph Rumney, Frank Avray Wilson and Bryan Wynter.
27. Wednesday November 28 1962, pp.4-5.
28. Conversation with the author, 17 March 1995.
29. Frances Spalding, *British Art Since 1900*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1986, p. 179.
30. Pasmore was at pains to distinguish the Anglophile offshoot from its Eastern European roots – calling his Constructionism, not Constructivism – but the styles' visual difference was less pronounced than the differences in theoretical underpinnings.
31. Quoted in David Millar, *Don Peebles Retrospective*, 1973, unpaginated catalogue.
32. Artist's journal, Sunday 26 March 1989.
33. While in London Peebles showed in exhibitions as diverse as the London Group Exhibition, 1962, the Penwith Arts Society exhibition, the 15th Aldeburgh Festival of the Arts, and the 'Commonwealth Art Today' exhibition of 1962, where his work hung alongside Colin McCahon's. For a full account of Peebles' exhibition activity while in London see Jonathan Mané-Wheoki's 'Don Peebles in London', *Art New Zealand* 47, 1988, pp. 93-95.
34. Russell Bond, ' "Independent" Subjects By Artist', *The Dominion*. Unpaginated and undated clipping, artist's scrapbook. Don McKenzie, 'Don Peebles', *Landfall*, June 1964, p.160-3.
35. Conversation with the author, 21 March 1994.
36. On the 20/20 *Vision* group, see the entry for 1964 in Neil Roberts *A Canterbury Perspective: Since the Sixties*, unpaginated. The group was formed by John Coley in 1964 and included among its approximately twenty members Coley, Michael Eaton, David Graham, Peebles and Quentin Macfarlane.
37. Quoted by the artist in a catalogue for an exhibition, 'Recent Paintings', at Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland, 1972.

38. Hamish Keith, 'Insubstantial Tune in Colour's Sound', *New Zealand Herald*. Unpaginated and undated clipping, artist's scrapbook.
39. Conversation with the author, 17 March 1995.
40. Ibid.
41. Toss Woollaston, letter to the editor, *The Nelson Evening Mail*, 22 September 1979.
42. Ian Wedde, 'Grid Painting Style Works Up Interest', *The Evening Post*, 16 February 1984.
43. Peebles' love of Mondrian, and the late changes in Mondrian's art, is a matter of record: '... here we had the most seemingly doctrinaire of artists who one would have thought could not at that age be changed by anything he had seen or experienced. And suddenly air comes back into his work. He ends up near pointillism.' Conversation with the author, 17 March 1995. T. L. Rodney Wilson compared the loosening and expansion of Peebles' art in the seventies with the changes transacted by Mondrian in the New York Boogie Woogie paintings. See 'An Art of Pure Relations,' *New Zealand Listener*, 6 September 1975, pp.28-29.
44. Brett Riley, 'Making Lateral Leaps', *New Zealand Listener*, 29 June 1985, pp.52-53.
45. Rob Taylor, 'Bowen Galleries rises from ashes with old-new show', *The Dominion*, 13 September 1989. Unpaginated clipping, artist's scrapbook.
46. See T.J.McNamara, 'Art Appreciates Room to Move', *New Zealand Herald*, 11 February 1980; Gordon Brown, *Auckland Star*, 13 February 1980; and Neil Rowe, *Evening Post*, 26 May 1979.
47. An edited compilation of comments from the artist's journal entries for 13 June 1987 and 4 January 1989.
48. Conversation with the author, 21 March 1994.
49. Artist's journal, 15 April 1989.
50. Artist's journal, 7 April 1988.
51. The term was coined by Lucy Lippard (*Art International* Vol. X, no.9, November 1966) to describe the post-minimalist practice of a range of American sculptors who were jettisoning academic formalism for more experimental and psychologically charged approaches to abstraction. The term has been rehabilitated by Robert C. Morgan to describe some recent hybrid forms of abstract art.
52. Conversation with the author, 17 March 1995.
53. Artist's journal, 22 March 1989.
54. Surveying the decade since 1974, John Hurrell noted that of Ralph Hotere, David Armitage, Pat Hanly and Don Peebles 'only Peebles in the 10 years since has developed, making startling innovations in his canvas and paper wall reliefs.' *The Press*, 21 June 1984, p.5.

## COLOUR PLATES

Dimensions are given in millimetres, height preceding width and followed by depth in the case of works incorporating relief elements. Where an image is boxed, framed and/or matted, dimensions are given for the framed image unless noted otherwise. Where a work is made of freehanging canvas, its actual as opposed to hanging dimensions are recorded.



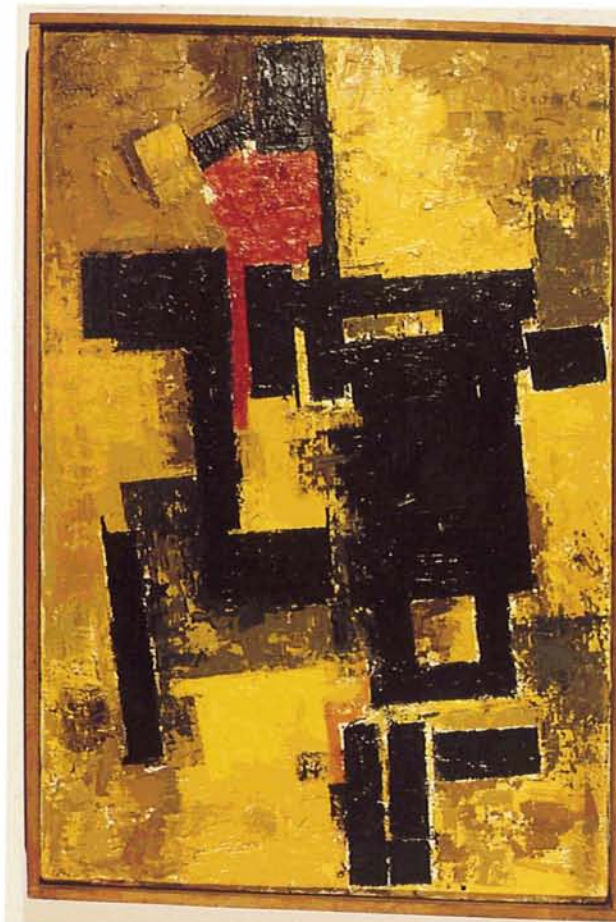


*The Little Beach* c. 1947  
Oil on board  
225 x 269  
Collection of the artist



*Landscape* 1953  
Oil on canvas  
447 x 547  
Collection of the artist

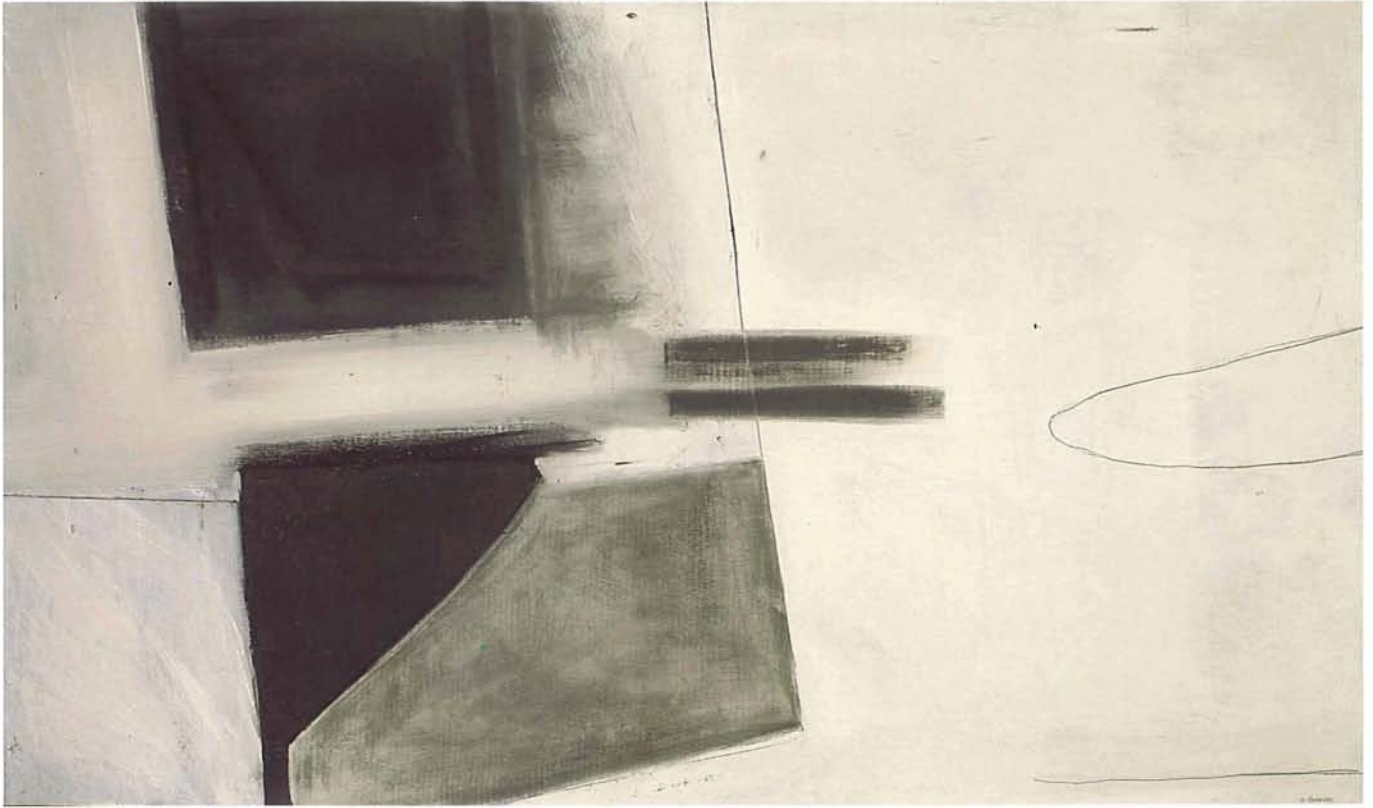
*Girl with Ball* 1954  
Oil on canvas  
746 x 589  
Collection of the artist



*Abstraction* 1957  
Oil on canvas  
784 x 521  
Collection of Govett Brewster Gallery,  
New Plymouth



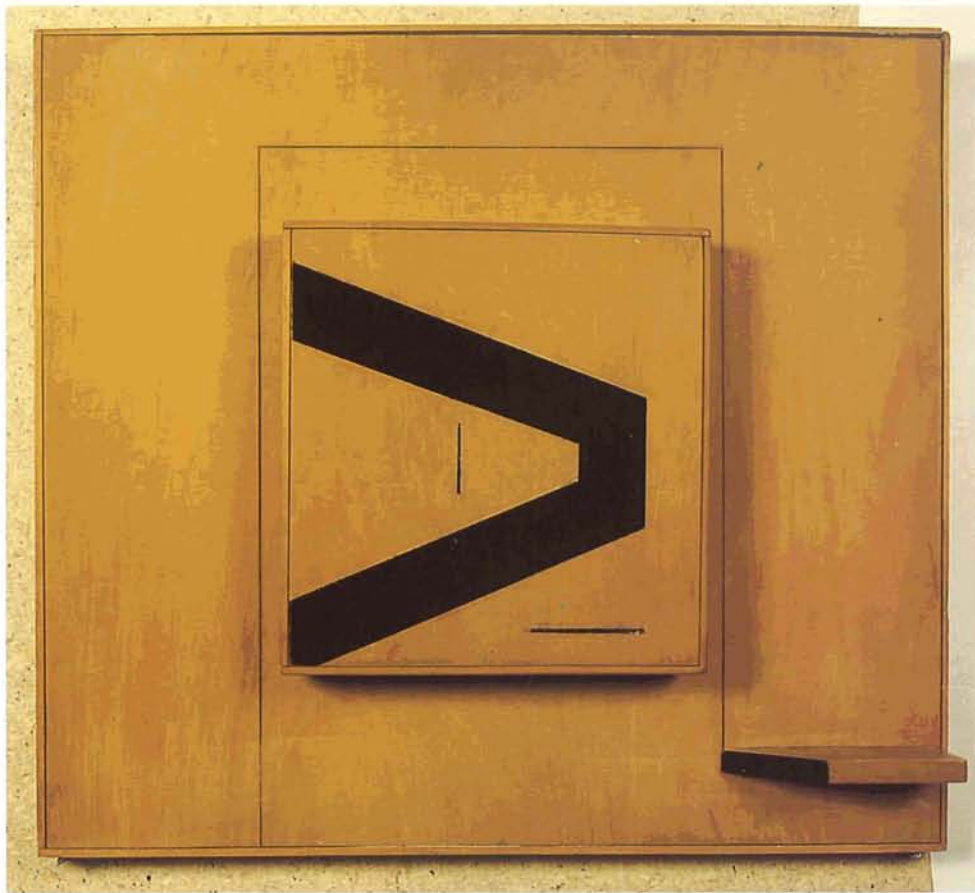
Wellington series No.12 c. 1959  
Oil on canvas  
1479 x 933  
Auckland Art Gallery collection



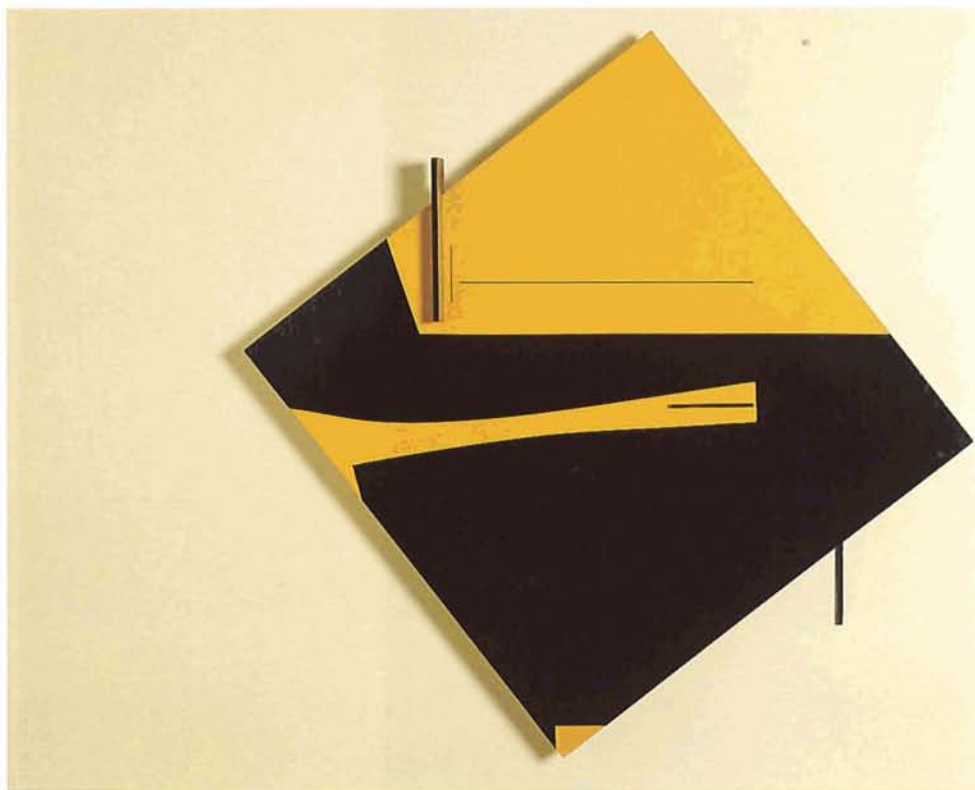
*Wellington series No.14* 1961  
Oil on board  
920 x 1550  
Collection of the Dowse Art Museum



*Relief Drawing* 1962  
Acrylic and pencil on paper and wood  
425 x 405 x 45  
Collection of the artist

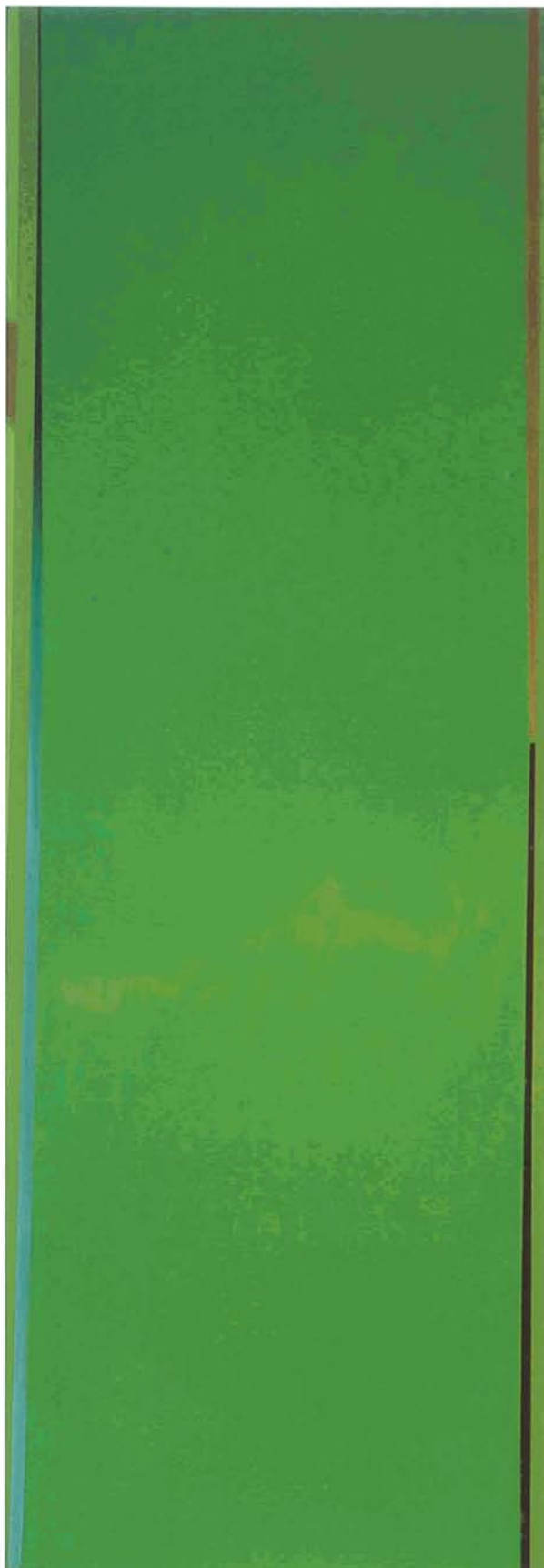


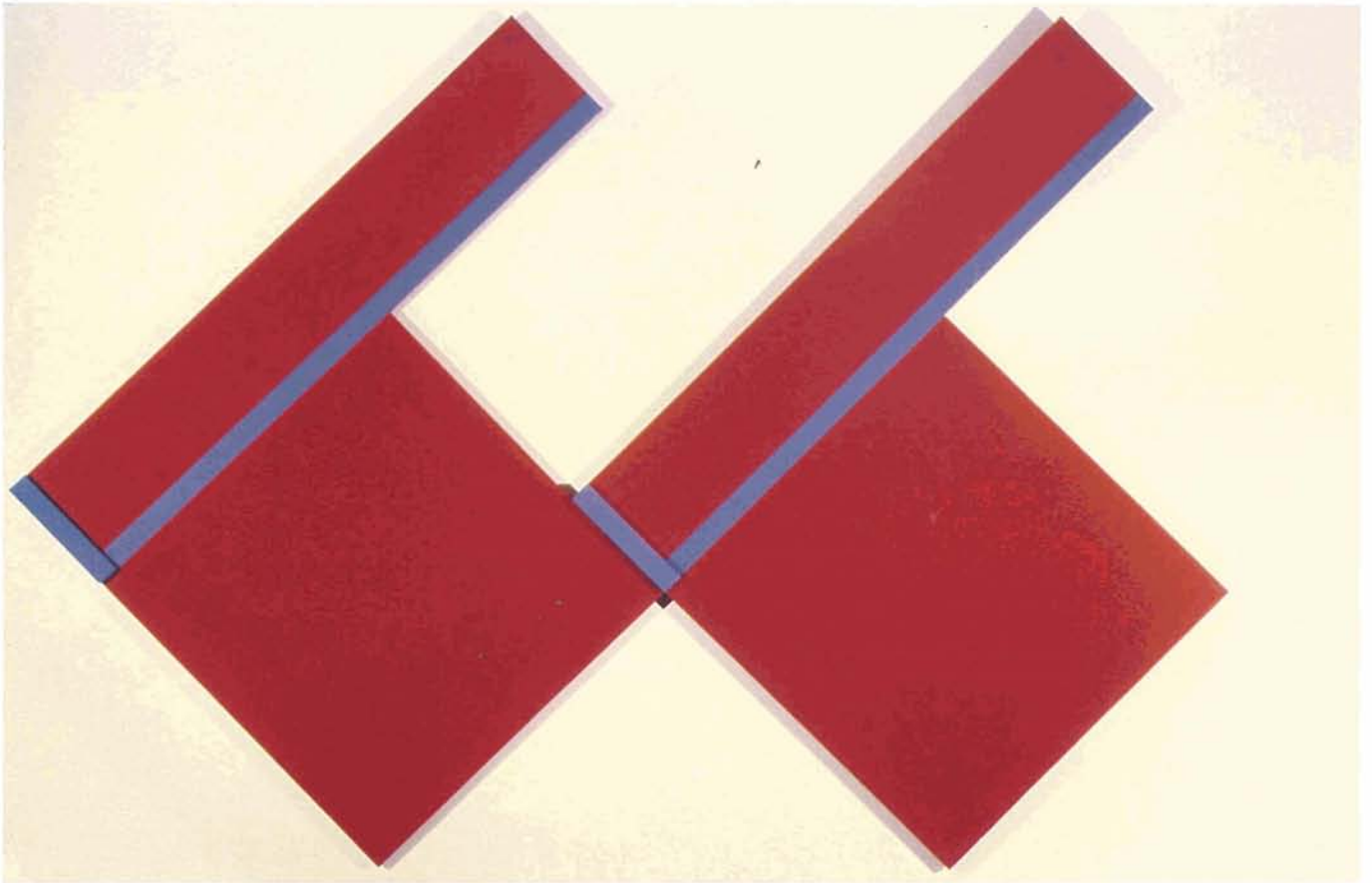
*Construction* 1964  
Acrylic on wood  
400 x 450  
Collection of Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui



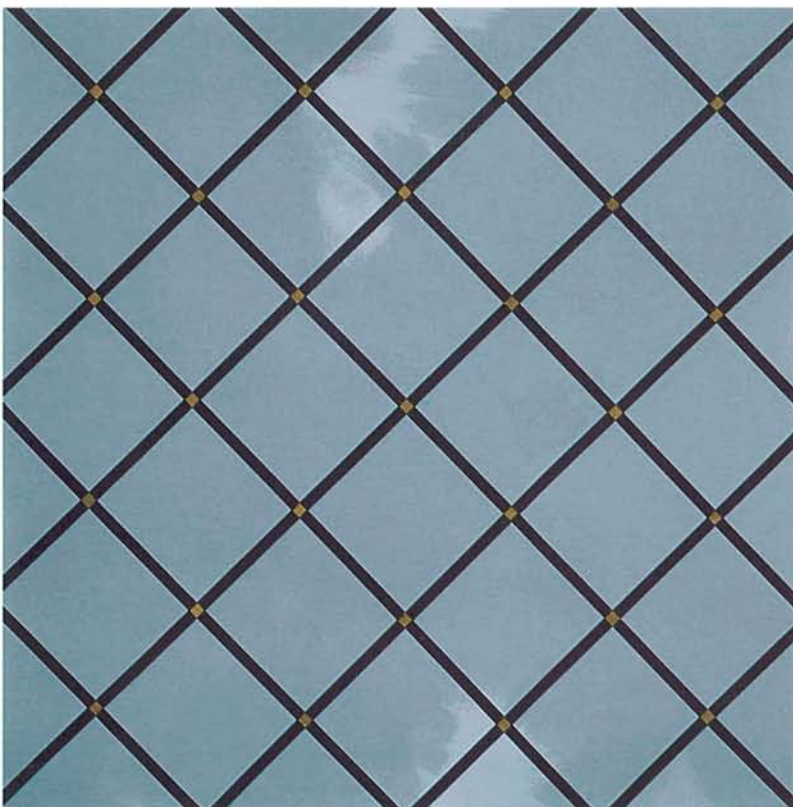
*Relief construction, Yellow and black* 1966  
Painted wood on panel  
1219 x 1219  
Auckland Art Gallery collection

Painting, *Canterbury series* 1968  
Acrylic on canvas  
2135 x 760  
Private collection

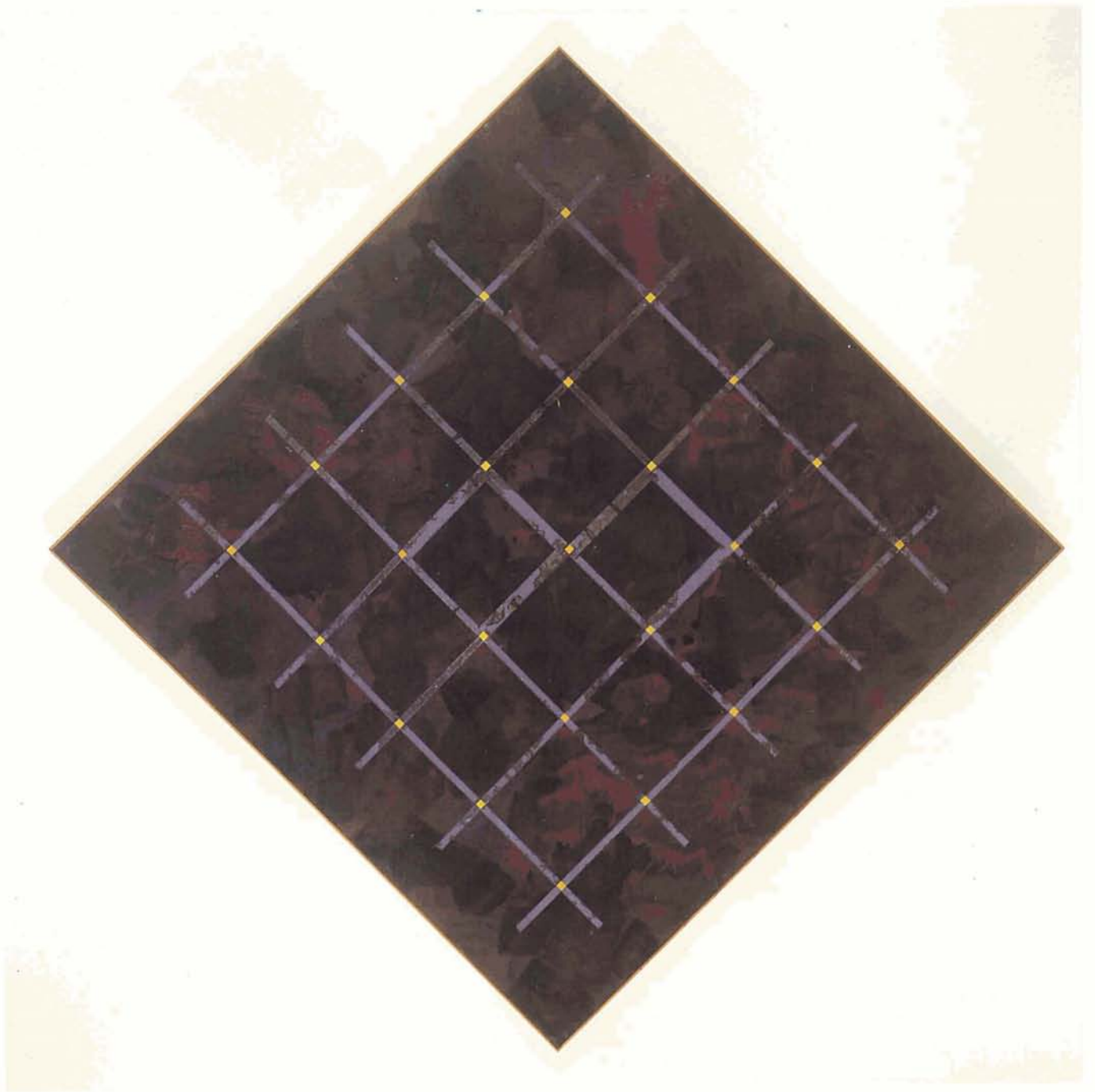




*Painting, Linear series No.9 1969*  
Acrylic on canvas  
2665 x 3790 x 65  
Collection of Govett Brewster Gallery,  
New Plymouth



*Untitled 1972*  
Acrylic on canvas  
915 x 915  
Collection of Robert McDougall Art Gallery,  
Christchurch, New Zealand. Presented by the  
Friends of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery  
Inc., 1986



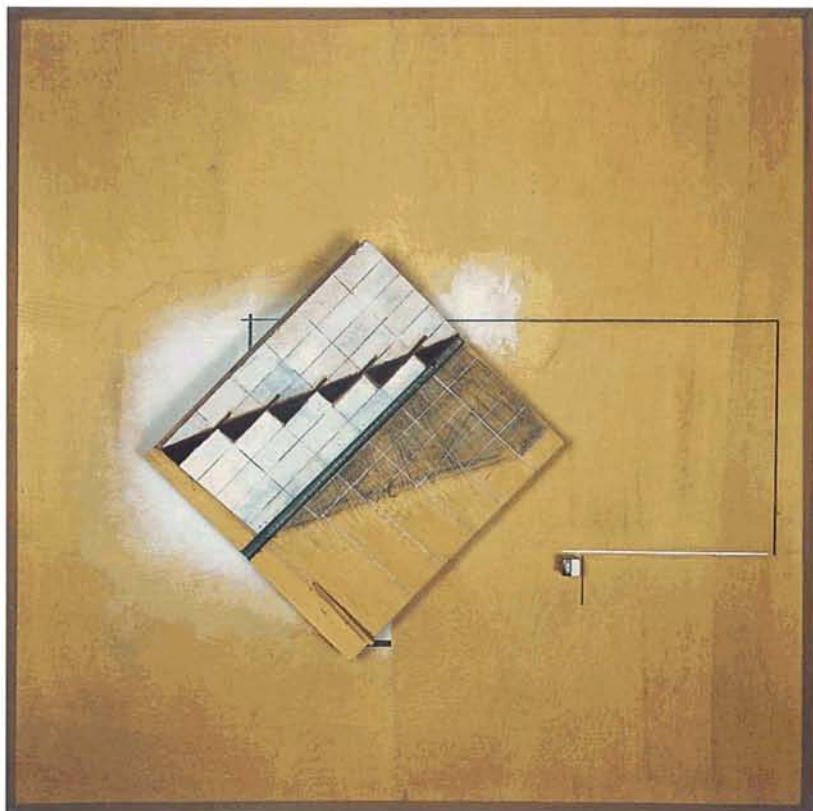
*Untitled* 1973  
Acrylic on canvas  
1760 x 1740  
University of Canterbury Staff Club Collection





*Relief Construction 1974/5*  
Oil and acrylic on wood  
915 x 915  
Private collection

*Relief Construction* 1973  
Acrylic and pencil on wood  
910 x 910 x 75  
Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te  
Papa Tongarewa  
Ellen Eames Collection

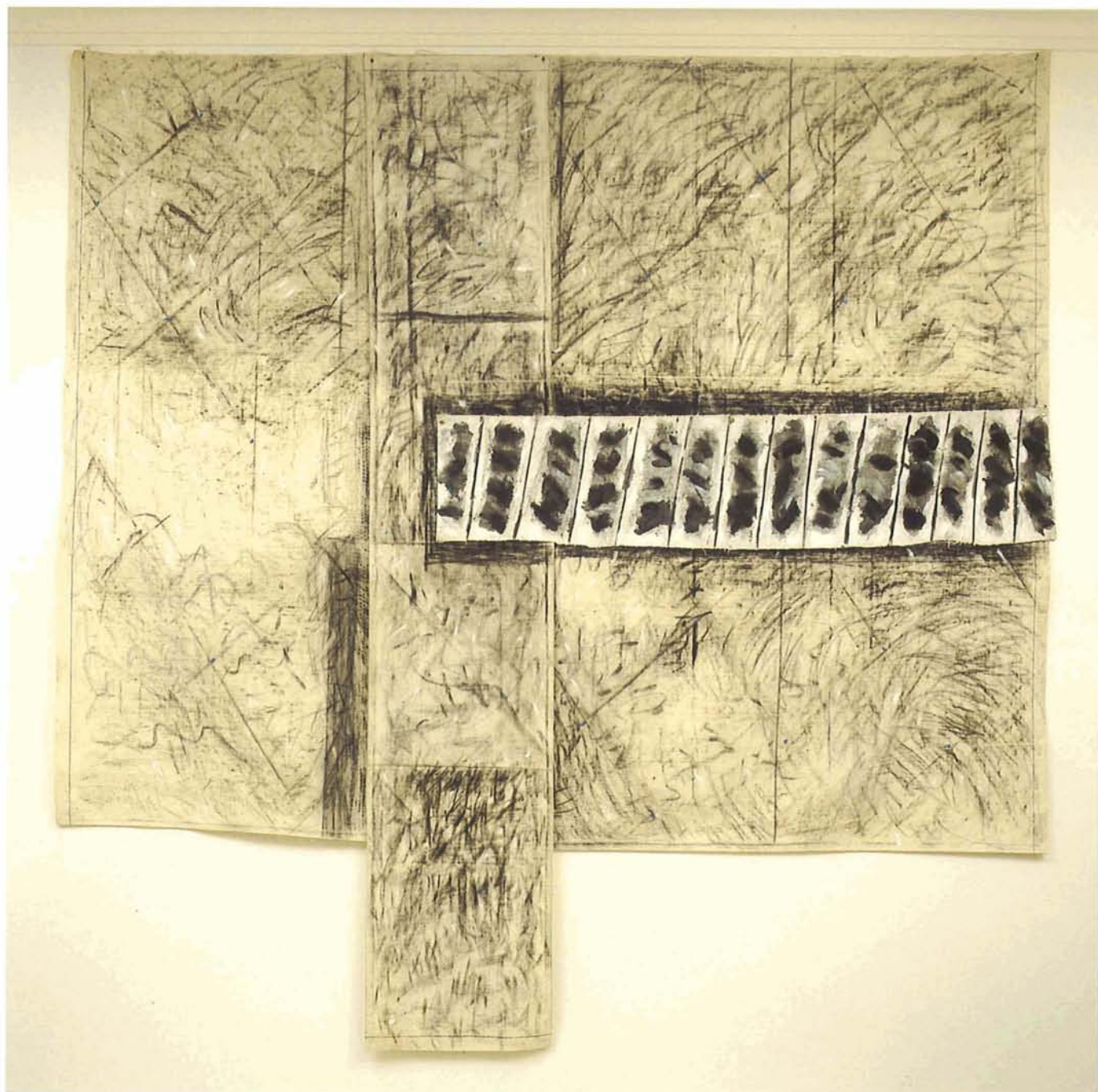


*Untitled Relief* 1974  
Acrylic on wood  
530 x 500 x 83  
Private collection

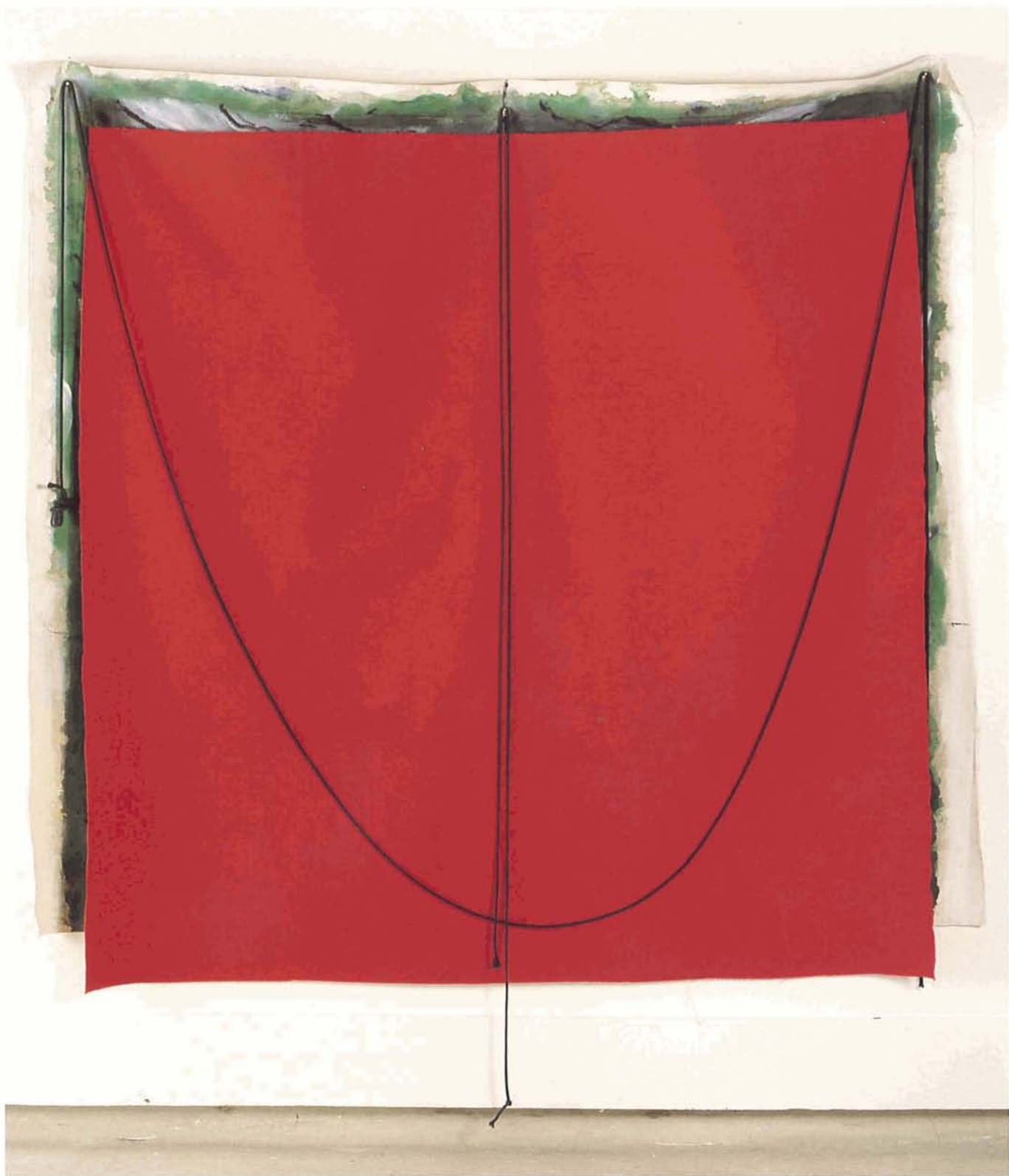




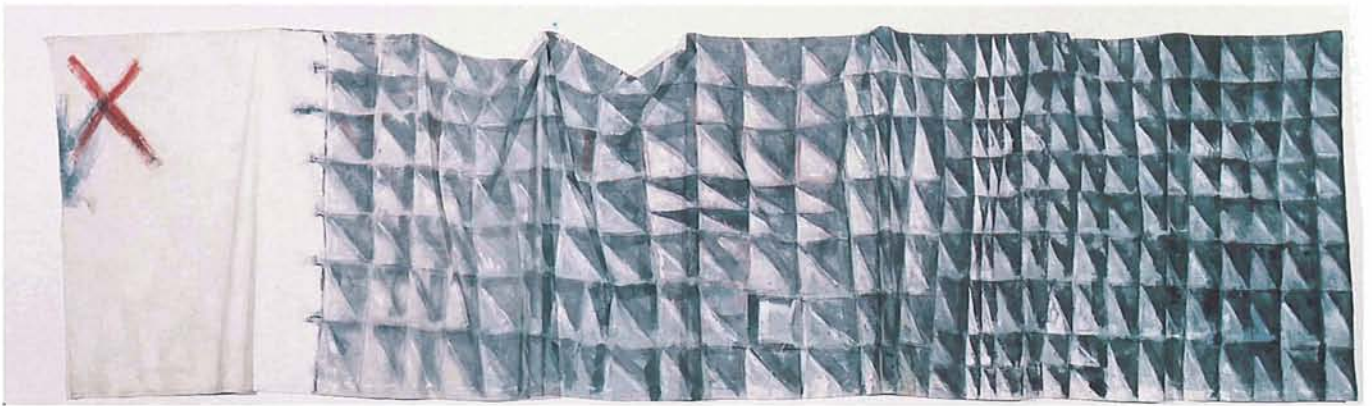
*Untitled 1977/80*  
Acrylic on jute and plywood  
1722 x 1720 x 130  
Collection of Creative New Zealand, Arts  
Council of New Zealand, Toi Aotearoa



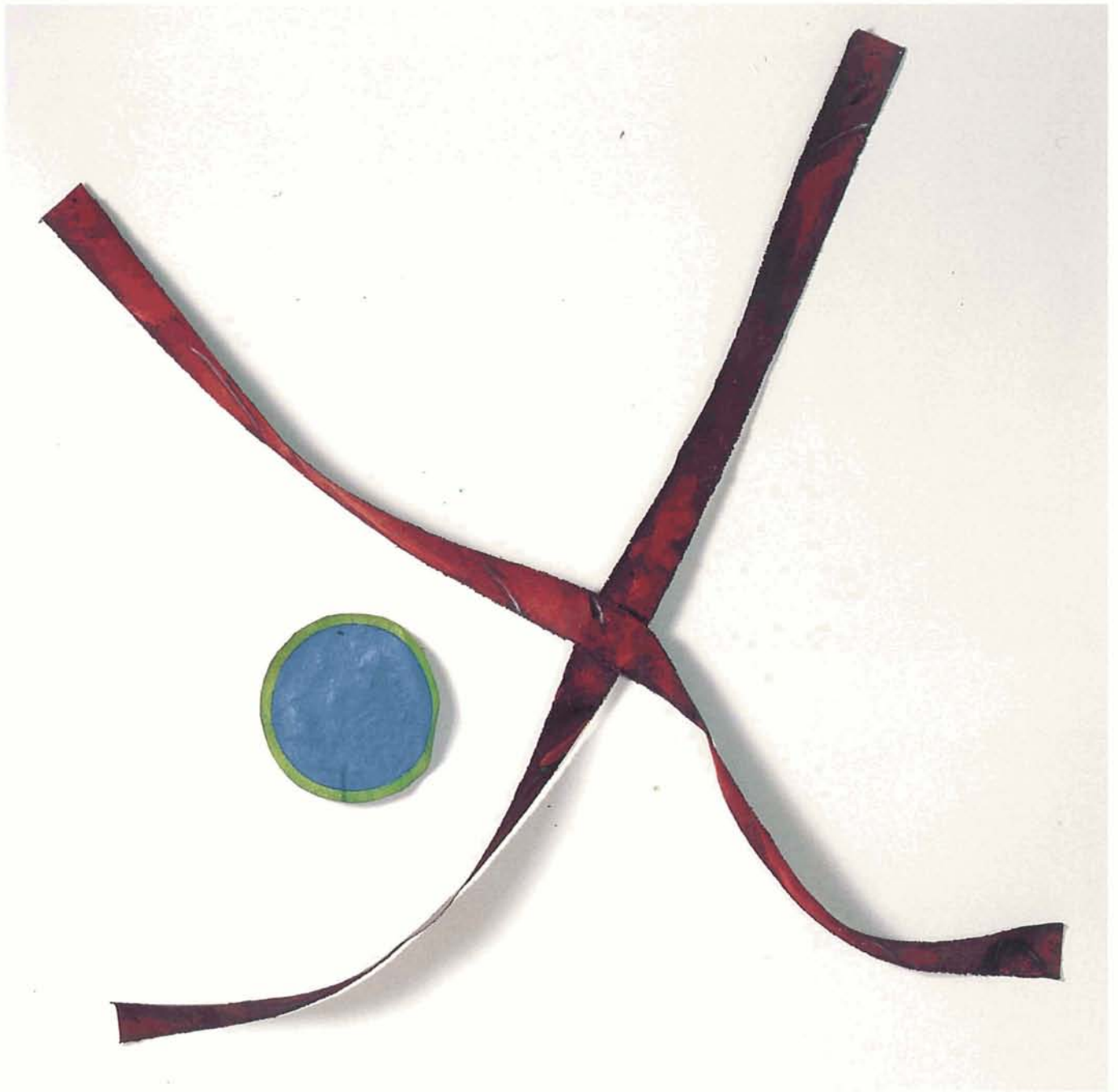
*Untitled Combine Painting* 1975  
Acrylic, chalk and charcoal on canvas  
1470 x 2030  
Private collection



*Untitled 1976/77 (reconstructed 1996)*  
Acrylic on canvas and cords  
1930 x 1980  
Collection of the artist



*Untitled 1978*  
Acrylic on canvas  
1828 x 7620  
Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te  
Papa Tongarewa



*Untitled* 1979  
Acrylic on canvas  
1430 x 1350 (dimensions variable)  
Collection of the artist



*Untitled Blue/Green 1979*  
Acrylic on canvas  
1800 x 3210  
Collection of Govett Brewster Gallery,  
New Plymouth





*Untitled A4 1984*  
Acrylic on canvas  
2000 x 1950  
Collection of Robert McDougall Art Gallery,  
Christchurch, New Zealand. Purchased 1986

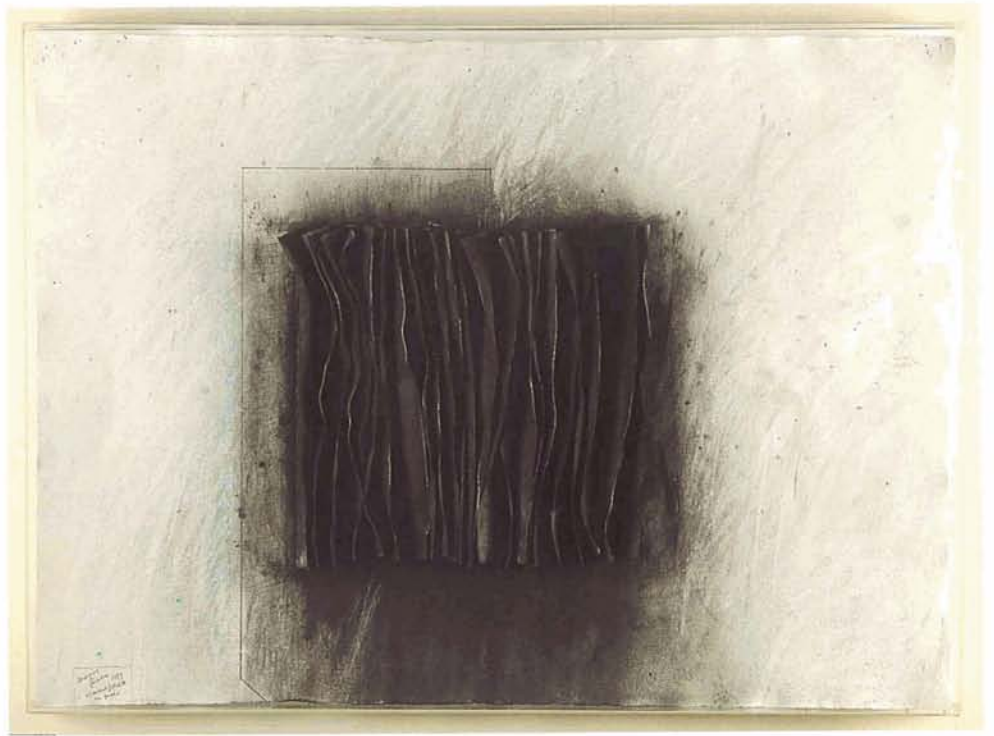


*Untitled A2* 1984  
Acrylic on canvas  
2410 x 4320  
Private collection

Opposite: *Untitled A1* 1985  
Acrylic on canvas  
2780 x 1828  
Auckland Art Gallery Collection



*Untitled Paper Relief* 1979  
Charcoal and chalk on fabriano paper  
582 x 788 mm  
Private collection

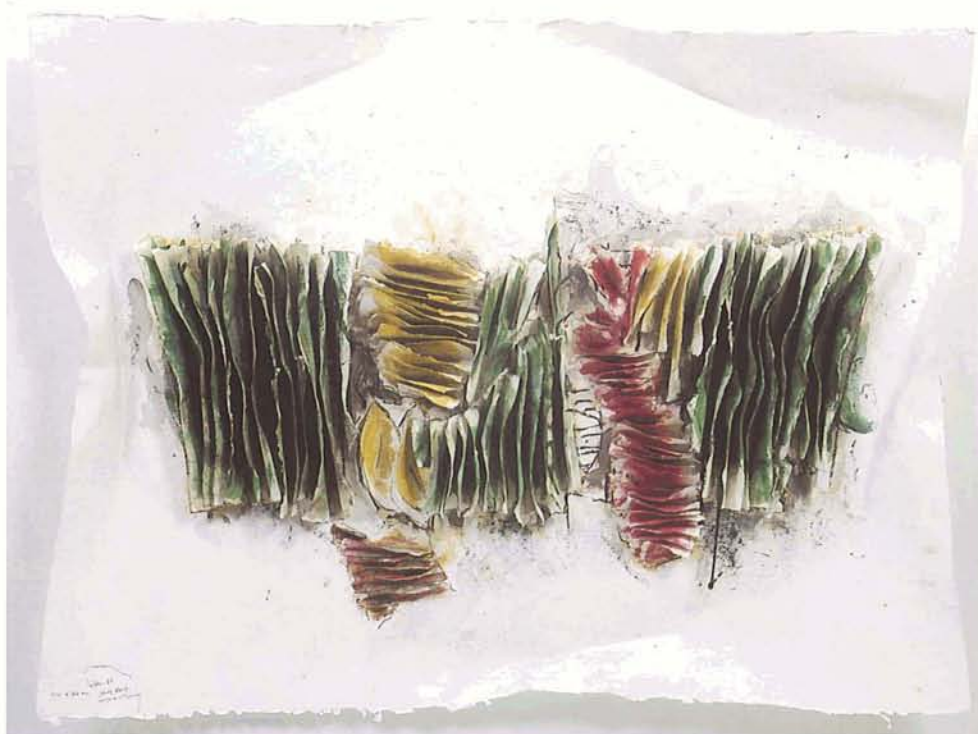


*Untitled Paper Relief* 1981  
Acrylic on paper  
677 x 890 x 70  
Collection of Brent Skerton





Above: *Untitled Paper Relief* 1981  
Acrylic and charcoal on sisalcraft paper  
830 x 1078 x 105  
Collection of Grant Banbury, Christchurch



*Untitled Paper Relief, Study No.17* 1989  
Acrylic and charcoal on paper  
660 x 853 x 105  
Private collection



Above: *Untitled 1983*  
Acrylic on canvas and board  
600 x 900 x 185  
Private collection

Right: *Untitled maquette 1984/5*  
Acrylic on canvas on board  
400 x 720 x 130  
Collection of the Manawatu Art Gallery,  
Palmerston North



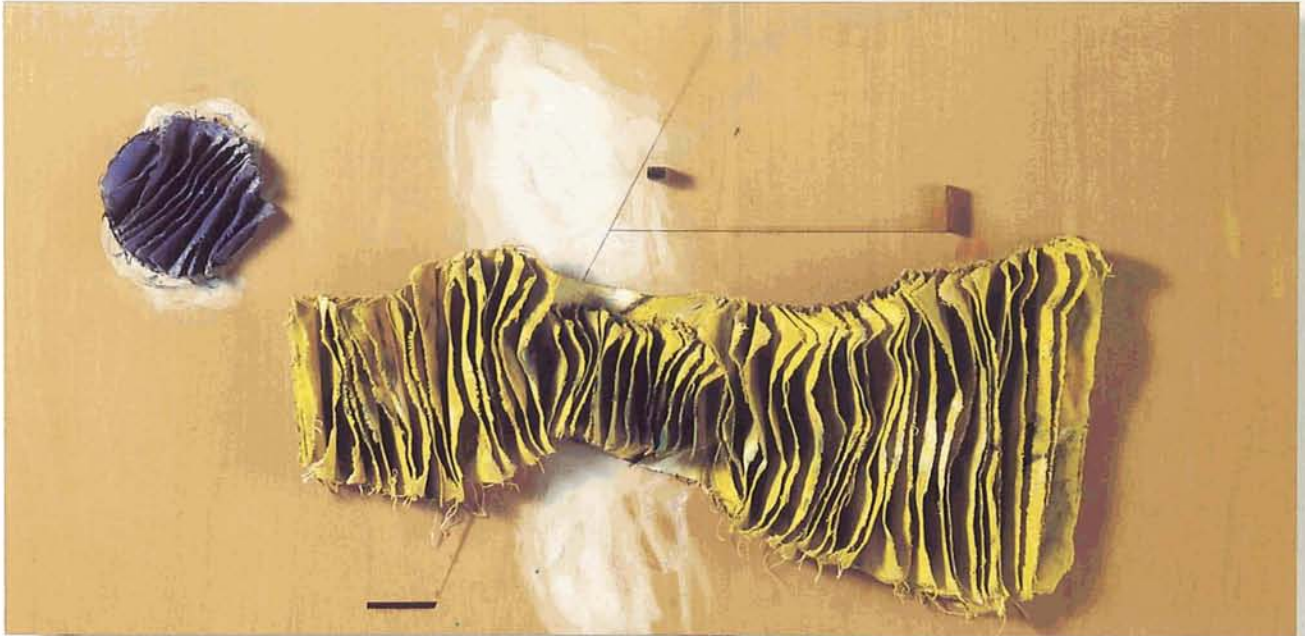
Opposite: *Untitled Painting 1985*  
Acrylic on canvas  
1670 x 1460  
Collection of Brent Skerton



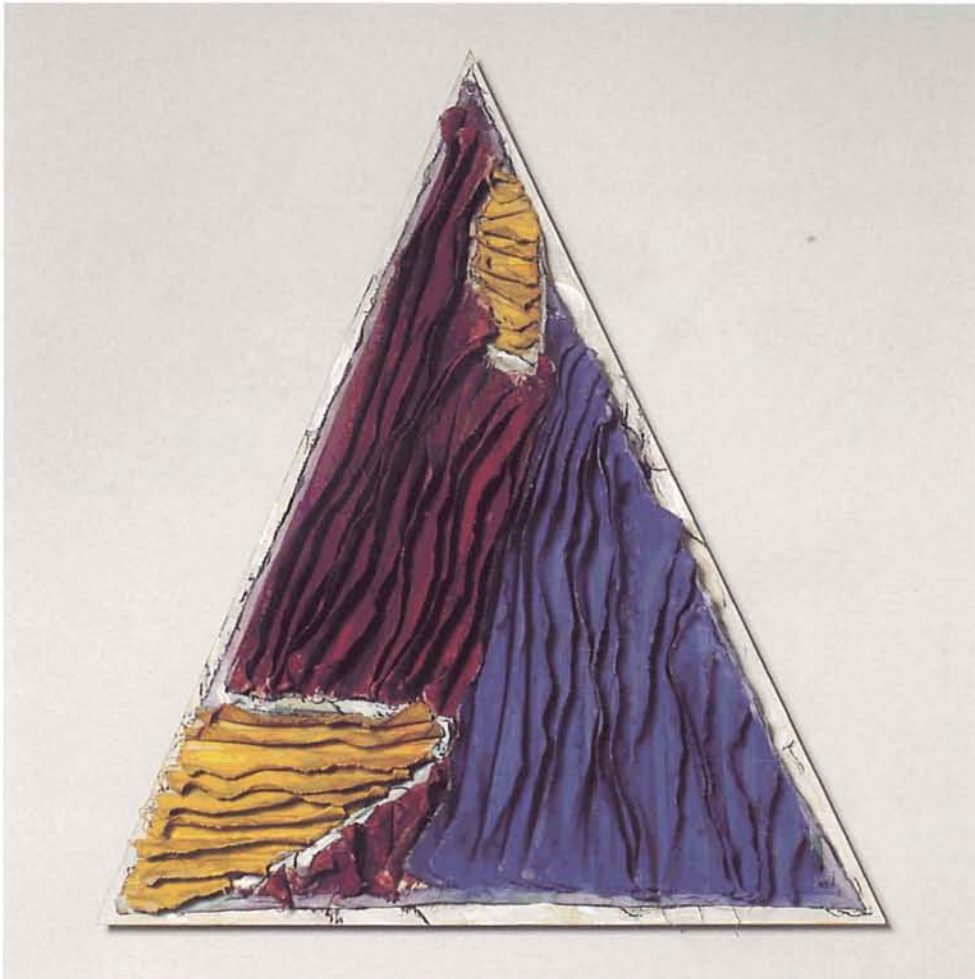


*Circular Motif No. One* 1987  
Acrylic and oil on canvas  
2780 x 2580  
Auckland Art Gallery collection





Above: *Canvas Relief, Yellow and Blue* 1989  
Acrylic and pencil on canvas and board  
600 x 1220 x 120  
Collection of the artist

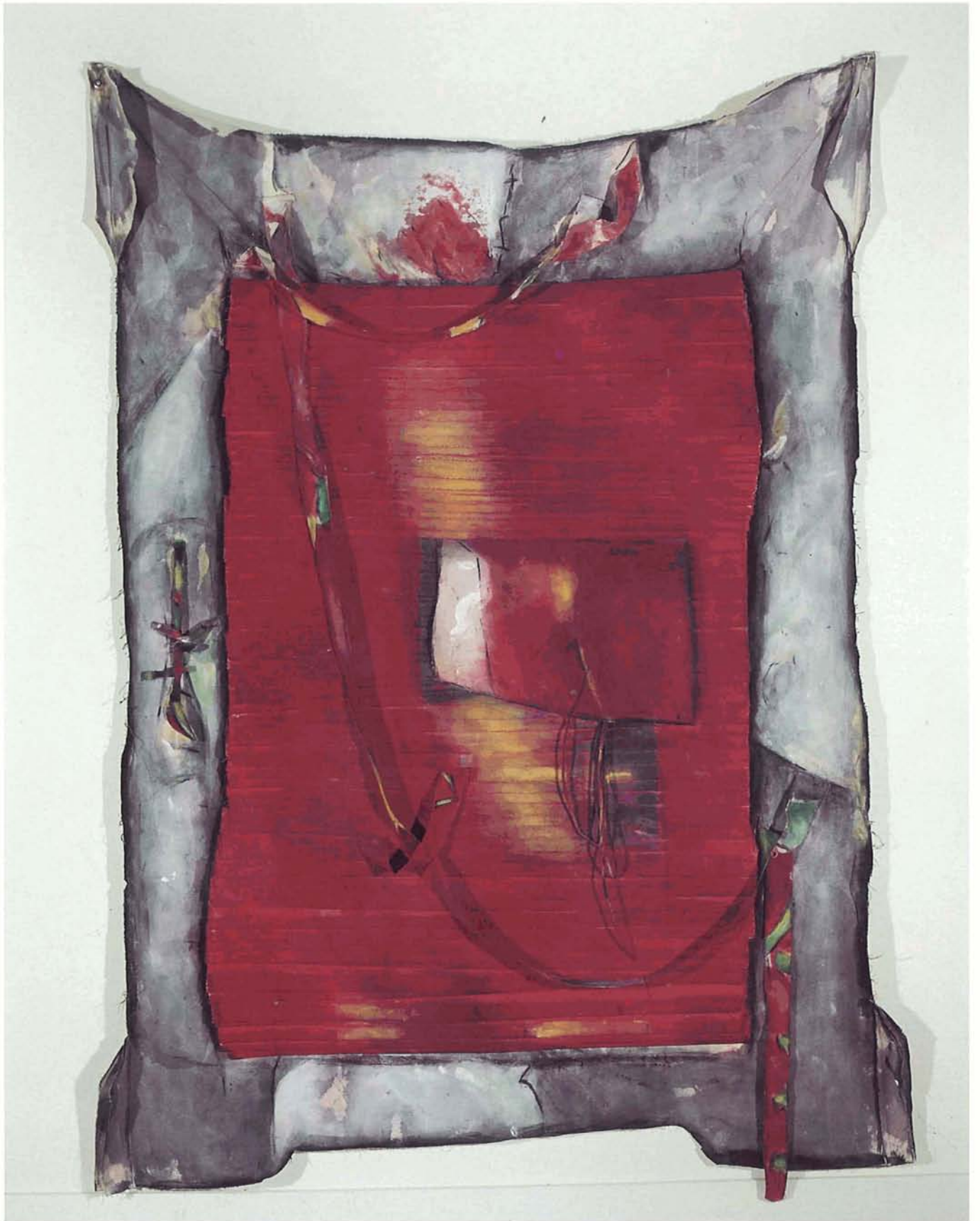


Left: *Untitled* 1987  
Acrylic on canvas on board  
845 x 765  
Private collection



*Untitled 1991/2*  
Acrylic on canvas  
1890 x 2320  
Collection of the artist

Opposite: *Untitled No. One 1993*  
Acrylic on canvas  
2475 x 1800  
Collection of the artist





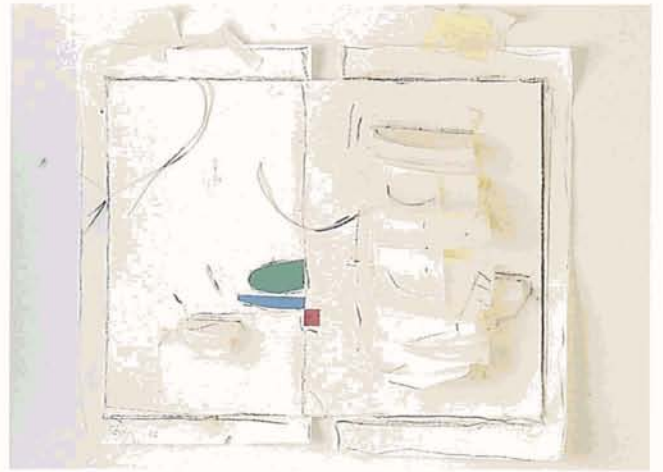


*Untitled No. Two* 1994  
Acrylic on canvas and rope  
1825 x 2690  
Collection of the artist

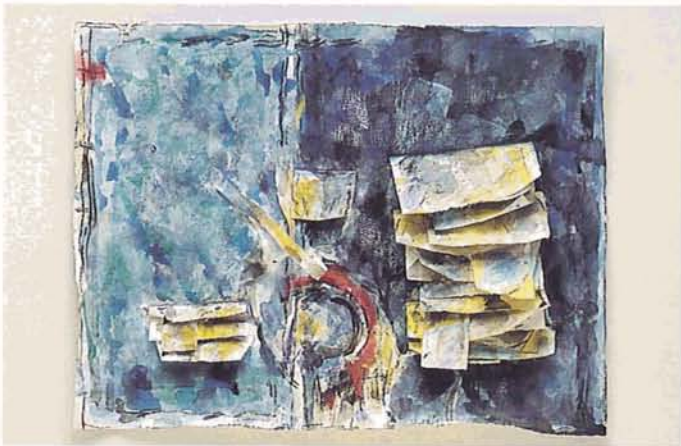
Opposite: *Untitled No. Two* 1993  
Acrylic on canvas and rope  
2660 x 1730  
Collection of the artist



*Drawing for Untitled Canvas Relief 1995, 1995*  
 Pencil on paper  
 295 x 210  
 Collection of the artist



*Paper Maquette for Untitled Canvas Relief 1995, 1995*  
 Paper and string  
 355 x 433  
 Collection of the artist

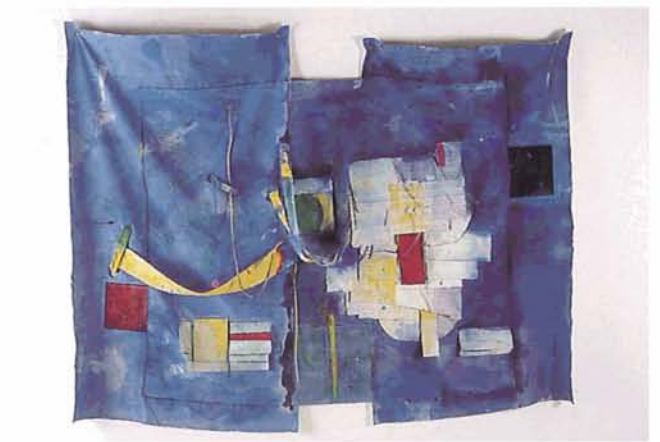
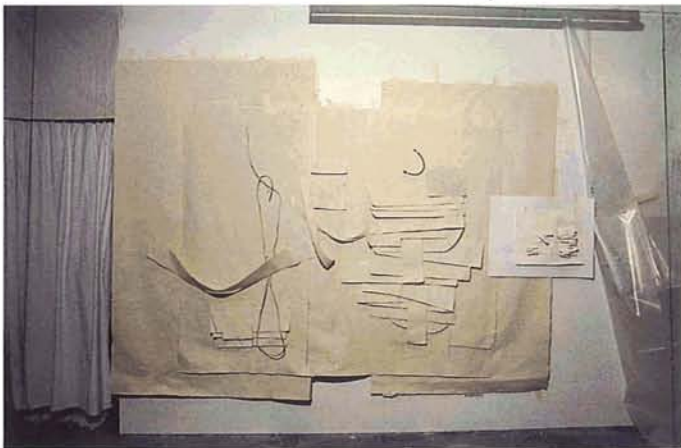
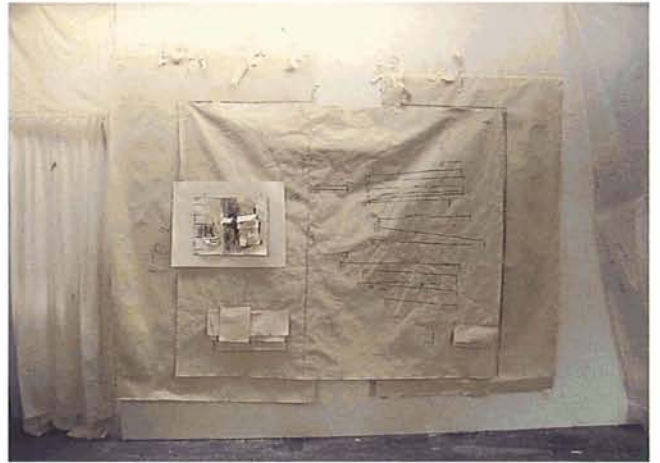
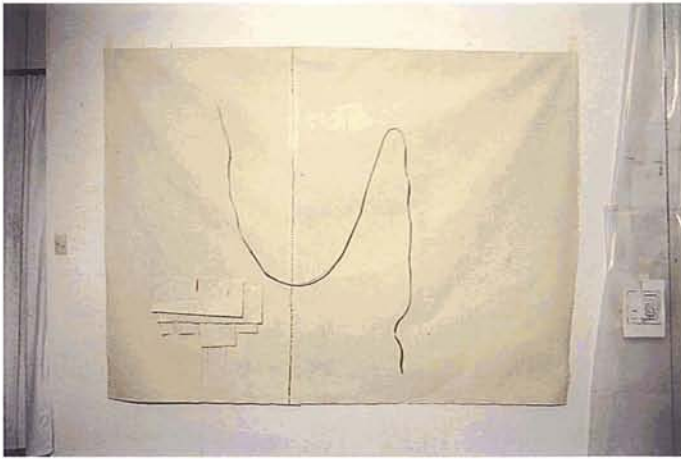


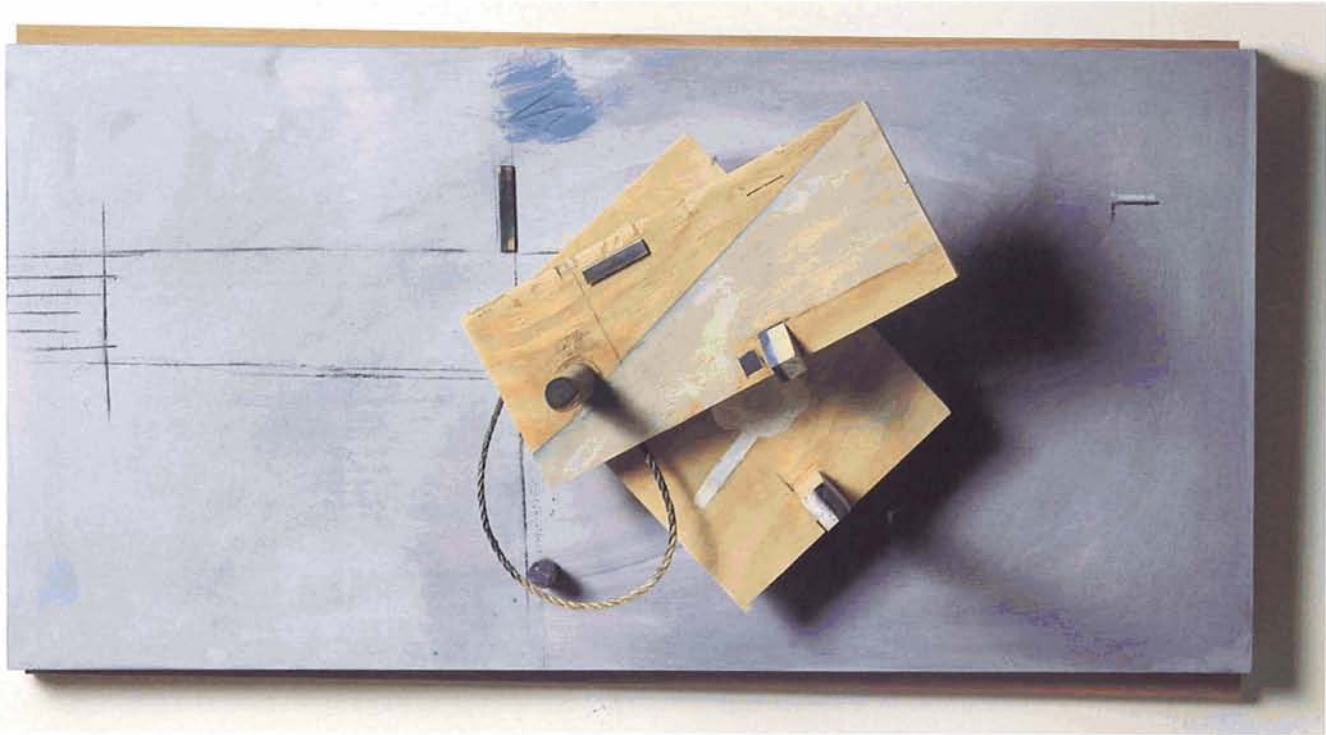
*Paper Maquette for Untitled Canvas Relief 1995, 1995*  
 Acrylic on paper and string  
 385 x 425  
 Collection of the artist



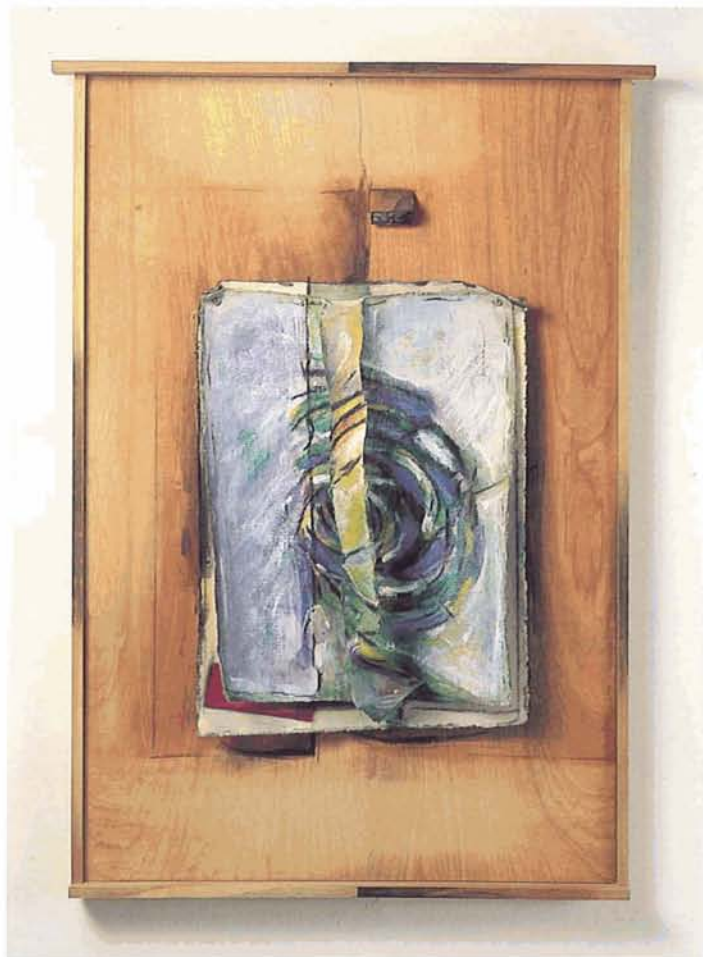
*Untitled Canvas Relief 1995, 1995*  
 Acrylic on canvas and cord  
 2020 x 2835  
 Collection of the artist

Opposite page: *Untitled Canvas Relief 1995*, in progress: sequence of six images





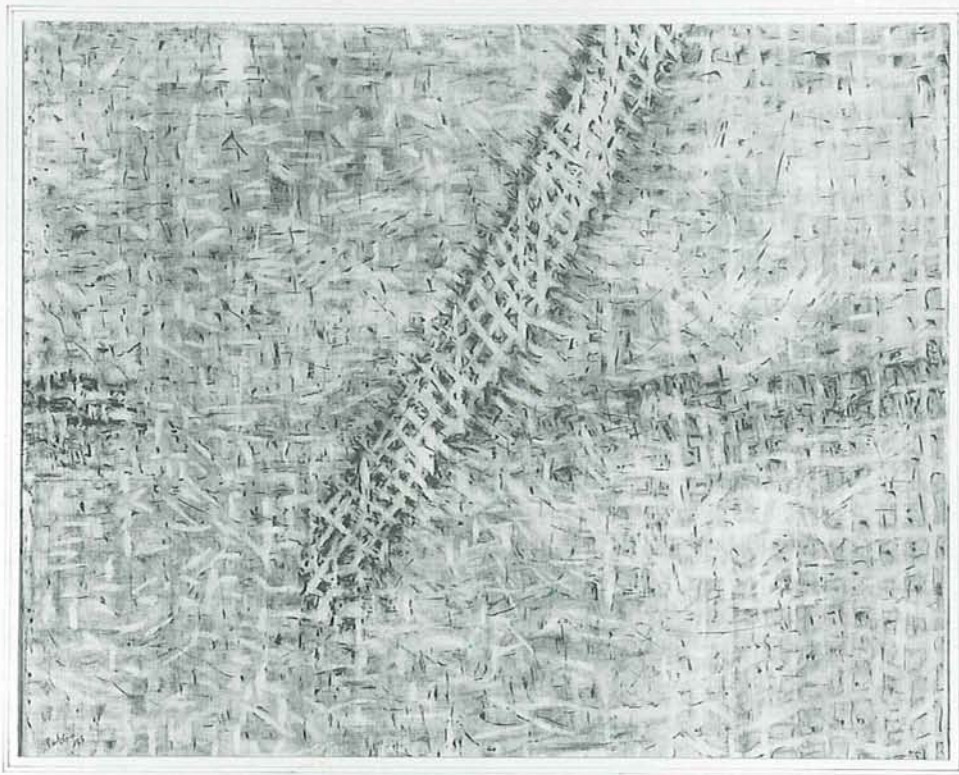
*Untitled Construction* 1995  
Acrylic on wood on rope  
423 x 800 x 198  
Collection of the artist



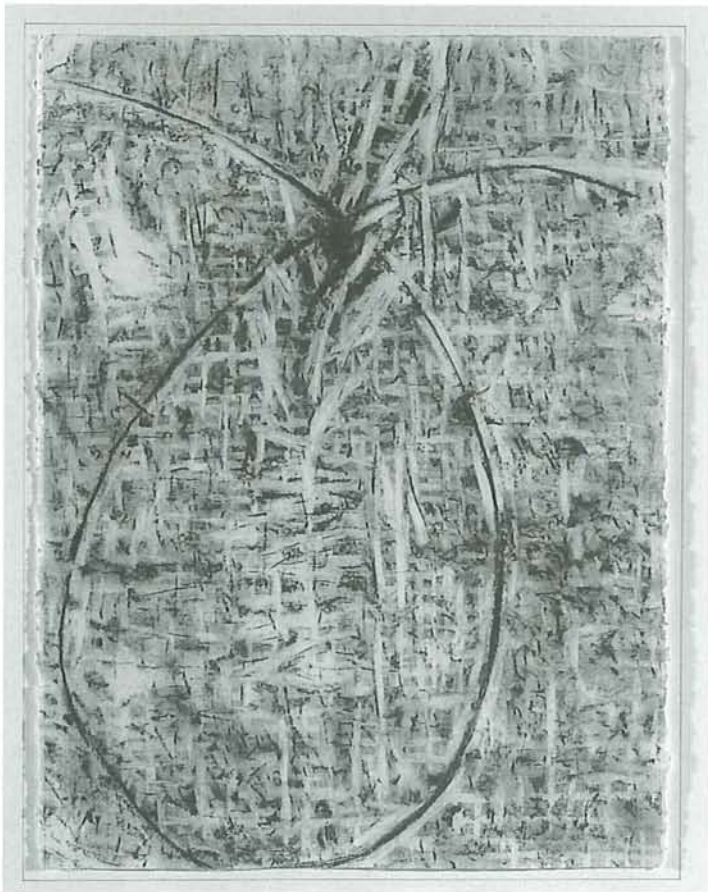
*Untitled Relief Painting* 1995  
Acrylic and charcoal on canvas and board  
933 x 675 x 60  
Collection of the artist



*Untitled Drawing 1985*  
Charcoal on paper  
1025 x 1275  
Chartwell Collection, Waikato Museum of Art  
and History, Te Whare Taonga o Waikato,  
Hamilton



*Untitled Drawing 1983*  
Charcoal on paper  
1048 x 846  
University of Canterbury Collection

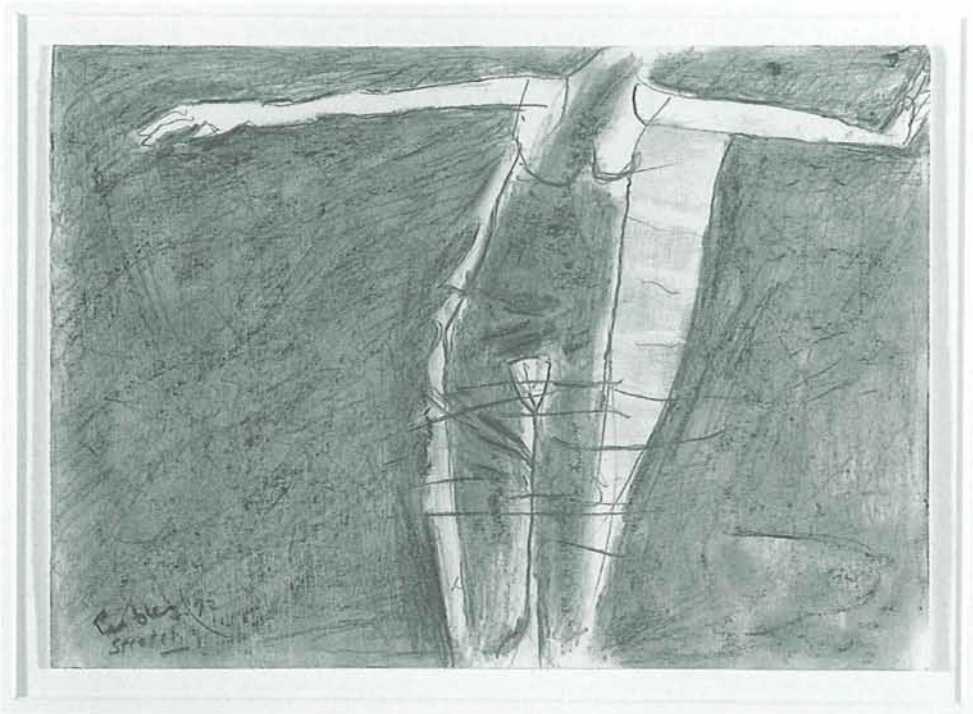


*Ladder* 1980  
Acrylic, chalk, charcoal and pencil on paper  
635 x 567  
Collection of the artist



*Lake Ohau* 1990  
Charcoal and watercolour on paper  
230 x 305  
Private collection

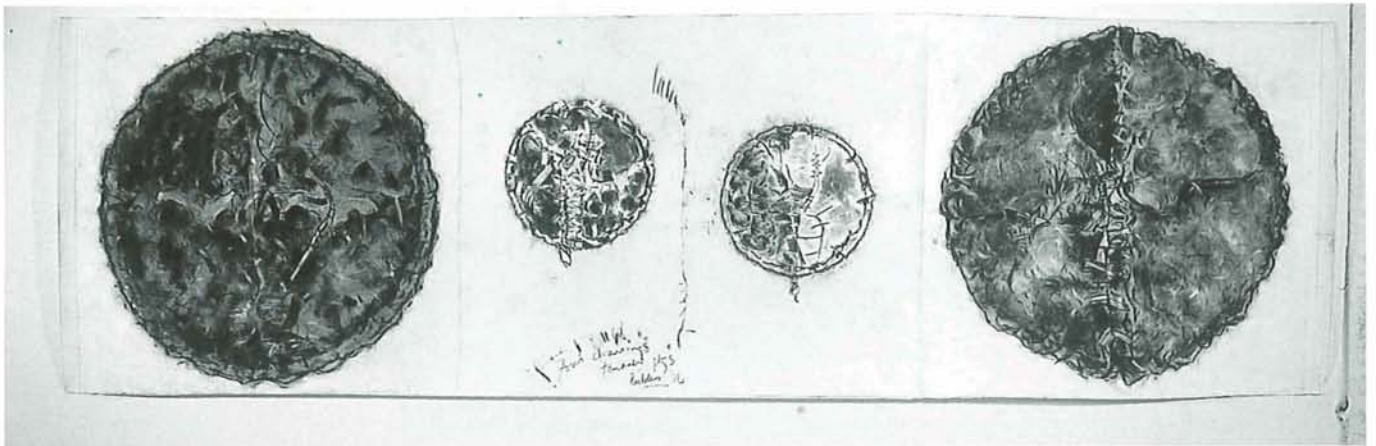




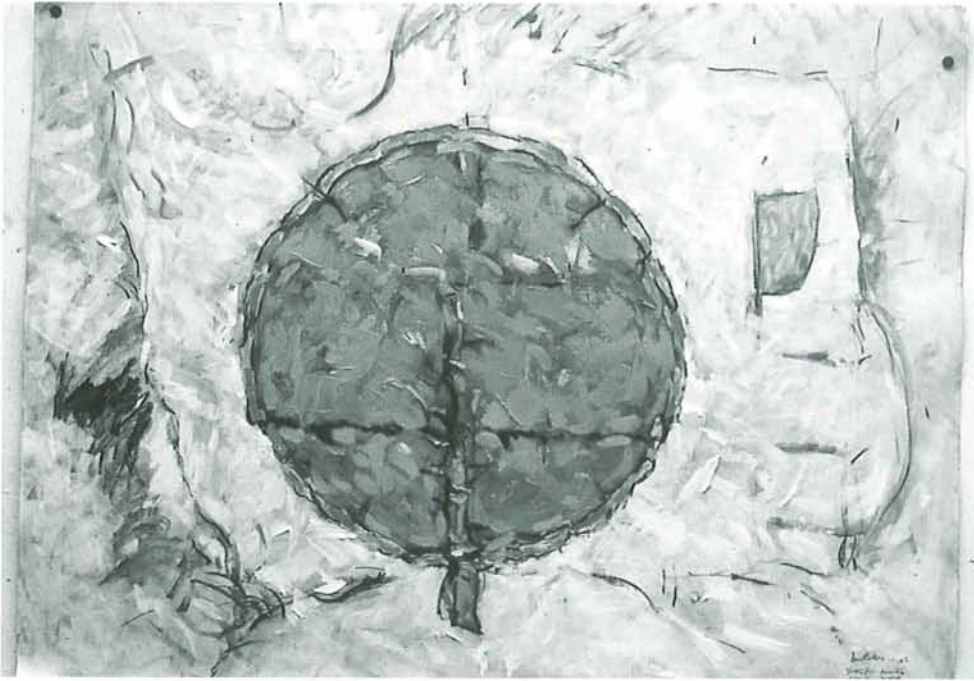
Stretch 1992  
Pencil on paper  
515 x 655  
Private collection



Untitled Two 1994  
Untouched photograph  
455 x 590  
Collection of the artist



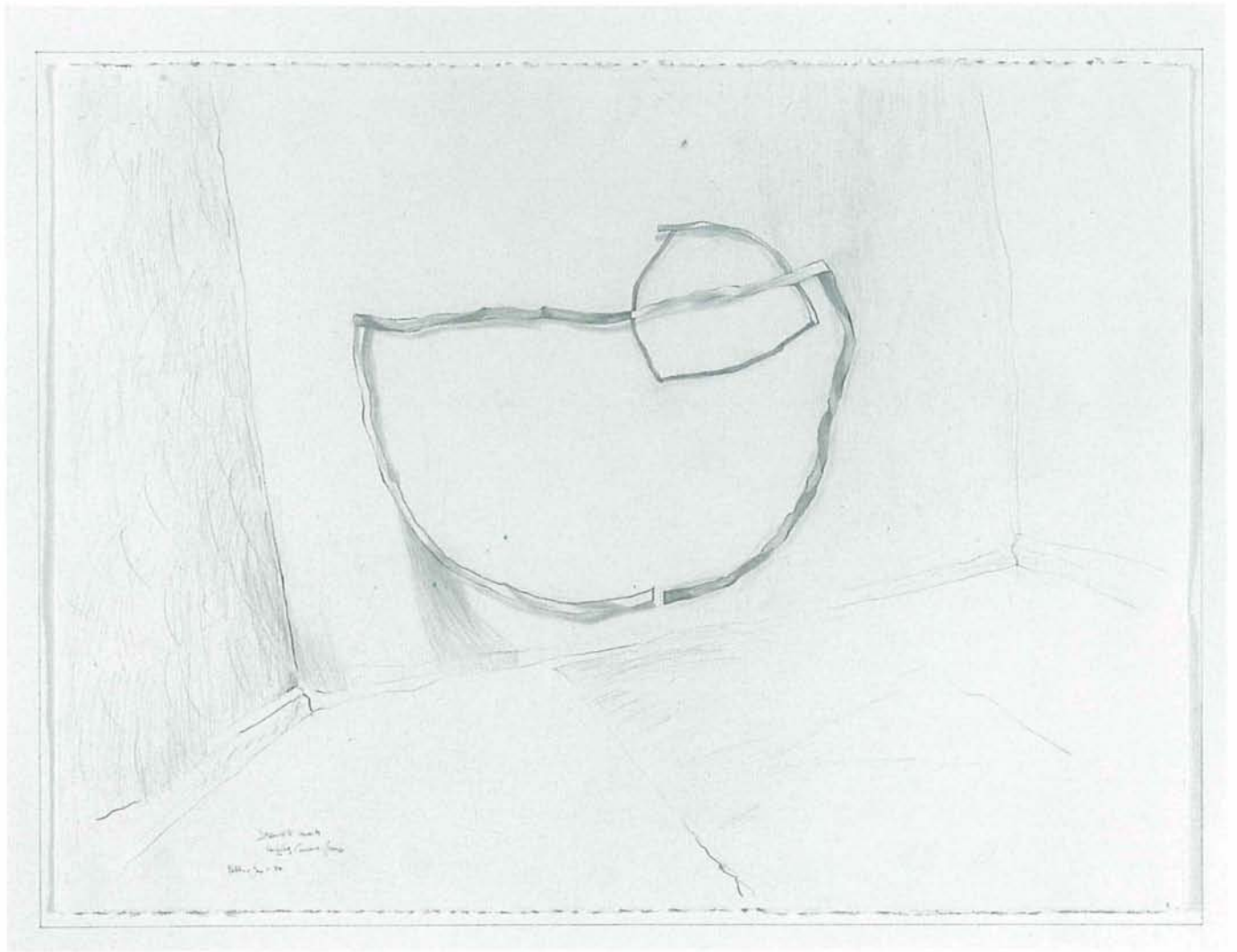
Four Drawings Towards Paintings 1986  
Charcoal on paper  
1330 x 4550  
Collection of the artist



*Study for Painting, Circular Motif* 1986  
Charcoal and oil on paper  
840 x 1020  
Private collection



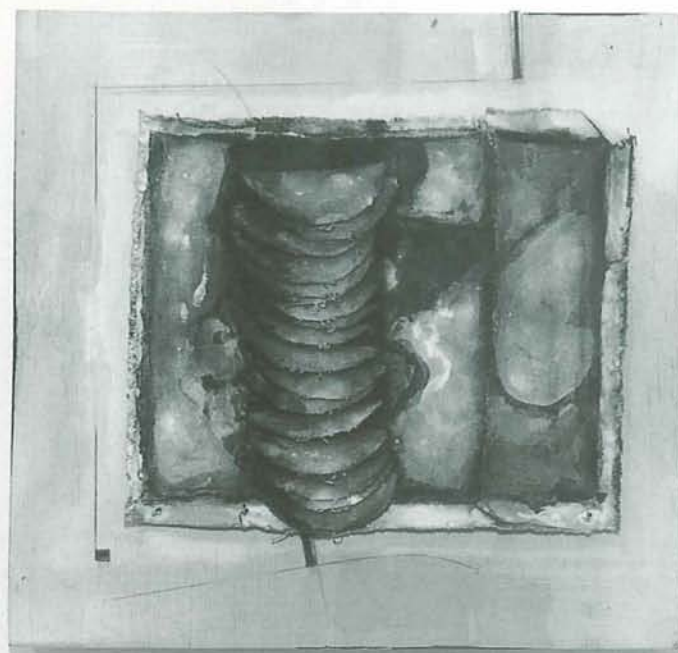
*Sketch for Large Circular Canvas Relief* 1983  
Ink and watercolour on paper  
513 x 563  
Collection of John and Kathryn Peebles



*Drawing Towards Hanging Canvas Forms 1984*  
Pencil on paper  
840 x 1020  
Collection of the artist

Untitled 1987  
Acrylic on canvas on wood  
285 x 570  
Collection of the artist





*Untitled* 1992  
Acrylic on canvas on plywood  
430 x 454  
Collection of the artist



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'A Self Portrait.' *Self Portraits*, compiled and edited by Judith Laing. Christchurch: Raven Press, 1984, pp.34-35.  
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'Doris Lusk (1916-1990).' *Art New Zealand* 55, 1990, p.48.

### Film and Video

- Allison, Jocelyn. *Untitled*, 1981. 25 minutes, colour.  
Macfarlane, Quentin. *Don Peebles*, 1993. 35 minutes, colour.

### Articles, Interviews and Reviews

- Brown, Gordon. H. 'The Pursuit of Modernism in the 1940s and Early 1950s 2.' *Art New Zealand*, pp.50-54.  
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Cowan, Roy. 'Five Guest Artists.' *Ascent*. November 1969, pp.37-39.  
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Hurrell, John. 'Drawings by Peebles.' *The Press*. 21 March 1984, p.18.  
Hutchings, Patrick. 'Eight New Zealand Abstract Painters.' *Art International*. Vol XIX (1), 1975, pp.18-35.  
MacDonald, Robert. 'Isolation Angst, Maori and Pakeha Art in Aotearoa.' *Contemporary Art*, Vol II (3), pp.20-24.  
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van der Lingen, Gerrit. 'Profile: Gerrit van der Lingen talks with Don Peebles.' *C.S.A. Preview* 143. November/December 1985, unpaginated.  
Webb, Evan. 'Christchurch Festival: Paperchase.' *Art New Zealand* 31. Winter 1984, p.20.  
Wedde, Ian. 'Grid painting style works up interest.' *Evening Post*. 16 February 1984.  
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\_\_\_\_\_. 'Don Peebles: Between Chance and Intention.' *Art New Zealand* 36. 1985, pp.44-45.  
\_\_\_\_\_. 'Cowie's painting makes the narrative juices run.' *Evening Post*. 1 October 1986.  
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\_\_\_\_\_. 'Formal Abstraction in Post-war New Zealand Painting.' *Art New Zealand* 2. October/November 1976, pp.13-20.

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- Wilson, T. L. Rodney. 'Some Reflections on Don Peebles's Drawings.' *Don Peebles – Drawings of the 1980s*. Nelson: Bishop Suter Art Gallery, 1986.

## SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

In each given year, solo exhibitions are noted as such and listed before group exhibitions.

1949-50

New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington. New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts' 'Annual' Exhibition.

1953

New South Wales Art Society, Sydney, Australia.

1954

Architectural Centre Gallery, Wellington. Solo exhibition.

1955

Wellington. Open-air group exhibition outside Wellington Public Library.

1958

Architectural Centre Gallery. Two-man show with Melvin Day.

1959

Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland. 'Five Wellington Painters: Brian Carmody, Melvin Day, Don Peebles, John Pine Snadden, Pat Williams.'

\_\_\_\_\_. 'Eight New Zealand Painters III.'

Gallery 91, Christchurch. Group exhibition.

Willeston Galleries, Wellington. 'Festival Exhibition of Contemporary Painting.' Group exhibition.

1960

Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland. 'Contemporary New Zealand Painting and Sculpture.'

\_\_\_\_\_. Exhibition with Milan Mrkusich and John Pine Snadden.

Centre Gallery, Wellington. 'Group Exhibition' of New Zealand abstract paintings.

1961

Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland. 'Painting from the Pacific.'

Fore St. Gallery, St. Ives, England. 'Summer exhibition.'

Penwith Gallery, St. Ives, England. Penwith Art Society annual exhibition (Guest artist).

1962

Art Federation Galleries, London. 'London Group '62.'

Commonwealth Institute, London. 'Commonwealth Art Today.'

The Fifteenth Aldeburgh Festival of Music and Arts. 'Collages and Constructions.'

1963

Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland. 'Contemporary New Zealand Painting 1963.'

1964

Centre Gallery, Wellington. Solo exhibition.

Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland. 'Contemporary New Zealand Painting 1964.'

Durham St. Art Gallery, Christchurch. 'The Group Show.'

Japan, India and Southeast Asia. 'New Zealand Contemporary Painting and Ceramics.'

1965

Commonwealth Institute, London. 'Contemporary Painting in New Zealand', an exhibition organised by the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council.

Durham St. Art Gallery, Christchurch. 'The Group Show.'

1966

Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland. 'Five 20/20 Painters.'

World Bank Auditorium, Washington, D.C. 'UNESCO and Brandeis University Library International Art Auction.'

Hay's Department Store, Christchurch. 'Hay's Prize Exhibition.'  
Durham St Art Gallery, Christchurch. '20/20 Vision Exhibition.'  
\_\_\_\_\_. 'The Group Show.'

1967

Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland. 'Peebles: Auckland Festival Exhibition.' Solo exhibition.

1968

Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland. 'Ten Years of New Zealand Painting in Auckland.'  
Bonython Art Gallery, Sydney, Australia. 'Five New Zealand Artists.'  
Dominion Motors Ltd, Christchurch. '20/20 Print Exhibition.'

1969

Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland. 'Don Peebles: Paintings.' Solo exhibition.  
New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington. Special exhibition: 'Five Guest Artists' (Melvin Day, John Drawbridge, Patrick Hanly, Ralph Hotere, Don Peebles).

1970

Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council, Auckland. 'New Art of the Sixties: a Royal Visit Exhibition.'  
CSA Gallery, Christchurch. 'Works by Ted Francis and Don Peebles.'  
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth. 'The Kim Wright Collection.'  
New Zealand Pavilion, Tokyo, Japan. 'Expo '70.'  
Smithsonian Institute, Washington. 'Contemporary Painting in New Zealand: Twelve Artists.'

1971

Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland. 'Ten Big Paintings.' (Toured).  
Bishop Suter Art Gallery, Nelson. 'Seven New Zealand Artists.'  
New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington. 'Paintings from Victoria University at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts.'  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch. 'Recent Painting in Canterbury.'

1972

Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland. 'Don Peebles: Recent Paintings.' Solo exhibition.  
\_\_\_\_\_. 'Drawings group Exhibition.'

1973

CSA Gallery, Christchurch. 'Paintings, Constructions, Drawings by Don Peebles.' Solo exhibition.  
Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt. 'Don Peebles: Retrospective.' Solo exhibition. (Toured).  
Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland. 'New Year/New Works.'  
Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North. 'Drawings Invitational.'  
National Art Gallery, Wellington. 'Wellington Through the Artist's Eye.'

1974

CSA Gallery, Christchurch. 'Art New Zealand 1974: Commonwealth Games Exhibition.'  
Govett-Brewster Gallery, New Plymouth. 'The Kim Wright Collection of New Zealand Paintings.' (Toured).

1975

CSA Gallery, Christchurch. 'Michael Eaton and Others.'

1976

Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland. 'New Zealand Drawing 1976.' (Toured).

1977

Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland. 'Relief Constructions in Canvas and Wood.' Solo exhibition.  
Victoria University Library, Wellington. Solo exhibition.  
Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland. 'New Year/New Works.'  
Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch. 'Artists from the South: Recent Work.'  
CSA Gallery, Christchurch. 'Artists for Amnesty.'  
\_\_\_\_\_. 'Drawings - Lusk, Peebles and Sutton.'  
Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt. 'Private View.'

National Art Gallery, Wellington. 'Formal Abstraction in New Zealand.'

1978

Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland. 'New Year/New Works.'

CSA Gallery, Christchurch. 'Platforms.'

Elva Bett Gallery, Wellington. Two-man show with Ian McMillan.

Govett-Brewster Gallery, New Plymouth. 'The Govett-Brewster's great show of its purchases over ten turbulent years.'

1979

Bishop Suter Art Gallery, Nelson. 'Paintings and Reliefs by Don Peebles.' Solo exhibition.

Elva Bett Gallery, Wellington. 'Don Peebles: His Latest Work.' Solo exhibition.

Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch. 'Recent work by Don Peebles.' Solo exhibition.

Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch. 'New Work from the South.'

CSA Gallery, Christchurch. 'Drawing '79.'

1980

Auckland City Art Gallery. 'Don Peebles: Nine Recent Works.' Solo exhibition.

Govett Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth. 'Don Peebles.' Solo exhibition.

Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch. 'Work for a New Decade – Six Painters.'

CSA Gallery, Christchurch. 'Small Works on Canvas, Paper and Wood.'

Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt. 'Drawing the Line.'

Ginkgo Gallery, Christchurch. 'Donor's Exhibition.'

1981

Ginkgo Gallery, Christchurch. 'Don Peebles: Works on Paper.' Solo exhibition.

National Art Gallery, Wellington. 'Don Peebles: Paintings.' Solo exhibition.

Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North. 'Gordon H. Brown's Collection.'

RKS Art, Auckland. 'Domestic Scale.'

Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch. 'Conformity and Dissension: New Zealand Painting 1940-1960.' (Toured).

Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch. 'Loose Canvas.'

1982

Robinson and Brooker Galleries, Christchurch. 'Paintings, Reliefs, Drawings 1962-1981.' Solo exhibition.

CSA Gallery, Christchurch. 'Canterbury School of Art Centenary Celebrations.'

Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin. 'New Zealand Drawing 1982' (toured).

1983

Auckland City Art Gallery. 'Artist in Focus: Drawings and Paper Reliefs.' Solo exhibition.

Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch. 'Paintings and Works on Paper.' Solo exhibition.

Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland. 'The Grid: Lattice and Network.' (Toured).

Ginkgo Gallery, Christchurch. 'Third Anniversary Exhibition.'

1984

Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch. 'Paperchase.'

1985

Janne Land Gallery, Wellington. 'Don Peebles: Recent Works.' Solo exhibition.

CSA Gallery, Christchurch. 'Big Paintings.'

Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North. 'Better Than Collecting Dust.'

National Art Gallery, Wellington. 'Extracts: Three Decades of New Zealand Art, 1940-1970.'

1986

Bishop Suter Art Gallery, Nelson. 'Don Peebles: Drawings of the Eighties.' Solo exhibition.  
(Exhibition toured).

Janne Land Gallery, Wellington. 'Don Peebles: Works on Paper.' Solo exhibition.

Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch. 'Christmas Exhibition.'

Janne Land Gallery, Wellington. 'Festival Exhibition.'

National Art Gallery/Shed 11, Wellington. 'Content/Context.'

Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch. 'A Piece of Art for Peace.'

1987

Gingko Gallery, Christchurch. 'Don Peebles: Personal Sketches.' Solo exhibition.

Artis Gallery, Auckland. Group exhibition.

Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch. Exhibition of painting and sculpture with architectural references held in conjunction with the NZ Institute of Architects' 1987 Biennial Conference.

CSA Gallery, Christchurch. 'Art in Hospitals Exhibition.'

1988

Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch. 'Don Peebles: Drawings of the Eighties and Recent Paintings.' Solo exhibition (expanded version of 'Drawings of the Eighties').

Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch. 'Christmas Exhibition.'

CSA Gallery, Christchurch. 'United Modern Masters Collection.' (Toured).

New Zealand Embassy, Washington. 'The Artists' Collection: Dilana Rugs.'

1989

Janne Land Gallery, Wellington. 'Don Peebles.' Solo exhibition.

Artis Gallery, Auckland. 'Christmas Exhibition.'

Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch. '14th Anniversary Show: Canterbury Artists.'

CSA Gallery, Christchurch. 'Library Treasures.'

Janne Land Gallery, Wellington. 'Works on paper.'

1990

Artis Gallery, Auckland. 'Christmas Exhibition.'

Bishop Suter Art Gallery, Nelson. 'Goodman Suter Biennale.' (Guest artist).

Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch. 'Christmas Exhibition.'

\_\_\_\_\_. 'New Work.'

Grezt Gallery, Melbourne. 'Carpet Concepts: Dilana Rugs.'

Janne Land Gallery, Wellington. 'Festival Exhibition.'

Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch. 'A Canterbury Perspective.'

1991

Artis Gallery, Auckland. 'Drawings and Paintings by Don Peebles.' Solo exhibition.

Lesley Kreisler Gallery, New Plymouth. 'Drawings, Canvas Reliefs, Constructions.' Solo exhibition.

University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts Gallery, Christchurch. 'Paintings by Don Peebles.' Solo exhibition.

Artis Gallery, Auckland. 'Works on Paper.'

National Art Gallery/Shed 11, Wellington. 'U.K. Works.'

Waikato Museum of Art and History. 'Cross Currents: Contemporary New Zealand and Australian Art from the Chartwell Collection.'

Whites Building, New Plymouth. 'Works from Te Wai Pounamu, Taranaki Arts Festival 1991.'

1992

Centre for Contemporary Art, Hamilton. 'Works by Don Peebles.' Solo exhibition, accompanied by the satellite exhibition 'Don Peebles: Peers and Contemporaries.'

Janne Land Gallery, Wellington. 'Paintings and Drawings by Don Peebles.' Solo exhibition.

Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland. 'Hidden Treasures.'

Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland. 'The 50s Show.'

Robert McDougall Art Gallery and Annex, Christchurch. 'Prospect Canterbury '92.'

Robert McDougall Art Annex, Christchurch. 'Latent Realities.'

Rocky Mountain College of Art and Design, Denver U.S.A. 'International Fax Exhibition.'

1993

Artis Gallery, Auckland. 'Driving Drawings.' Solo exhibition.

Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch. 'Scale and Dimension: 1976-1991.' Solo exhibition.

Hawkes Bay Exhibition Centre, Hastings. 'Works by Don Peebles.' Solo exhibition.

University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts Gallery, Christchurch. 'Recent Paintings and Drawings.' Solo exhibition.

Kurashiki Public Art Gallery, Kurashiki, Japan. 'Paper and Print - 15 Canterbury Artists.'

Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton. 'Shared Pleasures: the Jim and Mary Barr

Collection.'

1994

Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch. 'Drawings.' Solo exhibition.

Artis Gallery, Auckland. 'Dilana Rugs, Group Exhibition.'

Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch. 'Small Works.'

\_\_\_\_\_. 'Summer 1994 Group Exhibition.'

City Gallery, Wellington. 'Town and Gown: the Victoria University Art Collection.'

CSA Gallery, Christchurch. 'Fax About Art.'

Robert McDougall Art Annex, Christchurch. 'Studio.'

Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui. 'Taking Stock of the Nineties.'

1995

Artis Gallery, Auckland. 'Recent Small Works.' Solo exhibition.

Artis Gallery, Auckland. 'Abstraction in the Seventies.'

CSA Gallery, Christchurch. 'Drawing from Experience.'

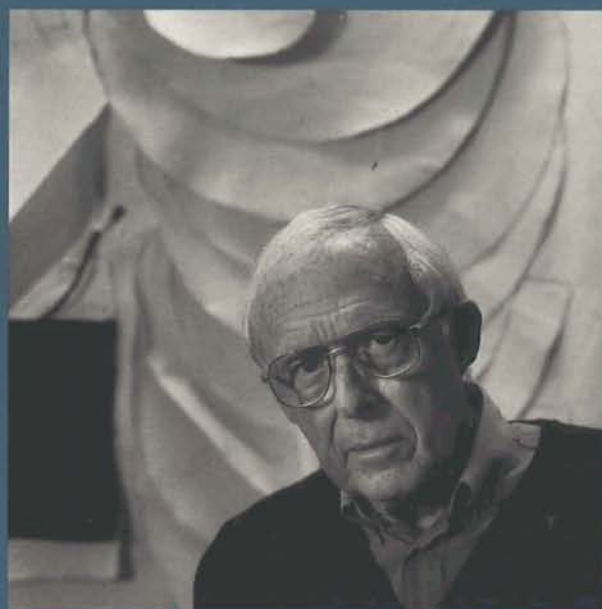
Robert McDougall Art Annex, Christchurch. 'Unstretched.'

## BIOGRAPHICAL CHRONOLOGY

- 1922 Born at Taneatua, fifteen kilometres south of Whakatane in New Zealand's North Island.
- 1924 Family moves to Wellington, where Peebles attends Wadestown Primary School and Wellington College.
- 1937 Leaves school for work as a telegram deliverer in Wellington city for the New Zealand Post Office.
- 1941-45 In 1941 Peebles enters the New Zealand army. He goes into service in 1943 in the Pacific, then the middle East, and lastly Italy.
- 1945 Studies art in Florence for a short period at the war's end before returning to New Zealand and employment with the telegraph office of the Wellington Post Office.
- 1947-50 Studies part-time at the Wellington Technical College Art School.
- 1951-53 Taking extended leave from the Post Office, Peebles studies at the Julian Ashton Art School, Sydney. There he receives the Philip Musket Award for landscape, 1953.
- 1954 Peebles' first solo exhibition, held in Wellington's Architectural Centre Gallery, attests to his new commitment to abstract painting.
- 1958 Peebles helps hang part of a touring exhibition of British abstract painting at the Architectural Centre Gallery.
- 1960 Marriage to Prue Corkill.
- 1960-62 Receives the Association of New Zealand Art Societies Fellowship Award. Using that award, Peebles travels to London and Europe. There he meets with and exhibits alongside many British artists. Chief among them is the abstract painter and Constructionist Victor Pasmore, who invites Peebles to exhibit at the Aldeburgh Festival of the Arts.
- 1963 Birth of daughter, Karen.
- 1964 Peebles' first solo exhibition of post-London works is held at the Centre Gallery in Wellington.
- 1965 Appointed Lecturer in Basic Design at the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts.
- 1966 Birth of son, John.  
Receives the Hays Prize Merit Award.
- 1967-68 Writes regular art criticism for *The Press*, Christchurch.
- 1968 Visits Australia.
- 1969 Birth of son, Colin.
- 1971 Visits the United States of America, Canada, England, Europe, and Australia.
- 1976 Visits England, Europe and New York.
- 1980 Appointed Head of Painting at the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts.
- 1981-82 Serves on the Visual Arts Panel of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council.
- 1982-92 Council Member, National Art Gallery.
- 1982 Appointed Reader in Fine Arts, University of Canterbury.  
Visits New York and Australia.
- 1984 Retires from teaching.
- 1985 Appointed Acting Head of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury.
- 1986 Retires from University of Canterbury to paint full-time.
- 1988 Visits USA, Canada, Spain, Holland, France and Great Britain.
- 1990 Visits Australia.
- 1991 Visiting artist and tutor at International Art Workshop, Teschemakers Conference Centre, North Otago.
- 1992 Visiting tutor in painting at Wanganui Summer School.
- 1993 Visiting tutor in painting at Wanganui Summer School.
- 1995 Sole judge of the Cranleigh Barton Drawing Award.







# Don Peebles

## THE HARMONY of OPPOSITES

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A ROBERT McDOUGALL ART GALLERY TOURING EXHIBITION



ROBERT McDOUGALL ART GALLERY