

Repetition and Transcendence
for the individual

Introduction

This exhibition of local artists identifies a current Christchurch movement amongst emergent artists away from the slick production and fleeting, hit and run approach of recent contemporary art practice. It examines the desire these artists have to create objects which reflect, in a leisurely and deliberate fashion, on the process and labour of their art, work in which all the stitches show.

In an exhibition where traditional definitions of assemblage, sculpture and painting are blurred, the preferred materials are prosaic, the tools of the everyday - paint, marble and canvas are rejected in favour of media with less obvious artistic kudos such as wallpaper, stone, tea stains, and book pages.

In some works, while conventionally 'artistic' materials are used, their usual meaning is subverted. Paper is present, but it is pre-printed, bringing with it different connotations which complicate the interpretation of the artwork. In other pieces, easily recognised objects (a dartboard, doors, cricket boots) are obscured by coverings or context. Ink and pencil are both employed, but accepted ideas about skill and technique are negated when the ink is spilt randomly and the pencil is used to write out the same phrase, or to draw the same shape, over and over again.

Without making any assumptions about the work's outcome, each artist has at some point surrendered to the process, trusting to the integrity of the unpredictable results. Often the experiments involve strict rules and challenges, and all have evolved over an extended period of time. The

laborious methods used to create many of the works in **Everyday: Repetition and Transcendence** are fundamental to these artists' concerns. Wary that some contemporary art seems too easy and effortless, their works involve an acknowledgement of the time-consuming and repetitive tasks that often form part of the creative process.

The physicality of this process is an integral part of the reading of the work. It is an approach which is not unlike that of the American and European Process artists of the 1960s and 1970s. Like the Process artists, this group gathers together a huge variety of everyday objects and materials for use in their work. They are materials that bring a flavour of their previous use, identity and history to the new context in which they are placed, which then resonates alongside the perspective of the artist and the experiences and viewpoint of the viewer. For the Process artists, the means seemed to count for more than the ends, but for the artists in **Everyday: Repetition and Transcendence**, input and output carry equal weight. Effort, too, is required from the viewer. These works of art are not self-sufficient, or representative of any one single truth, they all require us to crack their codes and ciphers, to participate in their elaborate games, and to make an intellectual and emotional commitment to finish the narrative they have begun for us.

The repetitive actions these artists employ allow for a disconnection from the physical creation to take place, facilitating an investigative dialogue with self, a dialogue which includes the continual questioning of their commitment to their work and its place in contemporary practice.

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Violet Faigan

literary classics, their uniform pages, brightly coloured covers and line drawings branding them unmistakably as the adventure stories and well-thumbed romances which are usually relegated to the five for a dollar box at second-hand stores. But even these bargain-basement volumes still have an indescribable something, somehow the print will always prevail - a bibliophile to the last, Faigan has kept the final page of every book, unwilling to surrender them up completely to this process of transmutation without first taking a memento.

Folding the pages reduces the novels to homogeneity, and yet there is a surprising amount of colour, in diverse tonal ranges, in a black and white book. From the scratchy indigo of hand-written dedications to the delicate foxing of the pages, wrought by age, and the bold reds, blues and greens of the outer covers, Faigan's displays are anything but plain. Even the text itself provides interest, responding

Appropriately, in the ex-library space of the McDougall Art Annex, Violet Faigan's contribution to **Everyday: Repetition and Transcendence** consists of a collection of books, piled and clustered together, in which each page has been painstakingly folded to form intricate and beautiful patterns. The bewitching visual appeal of the creamy fanned stacks and fluttering columns is combined with the inescapable connotations that any collection of books provides. Foremost, there is language, folded back on itself like the pleats of a tunic, it is visible, yet unintelligible, a tangible and persuasive reminder of all that lies between the covers.

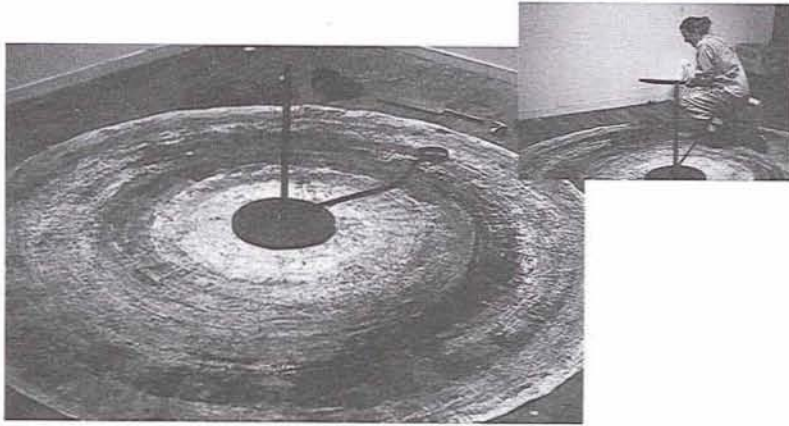
Faigan has made it clear that she would never manipulate a book she had read, or might read one day, in this way - these novels are far from

to its newly imposed form in different ways as some words seem to retreat back towards the splayed spine and others are flung out towards the viewer, dangling dangerously close to the page's edge. The basic dimensions of the books are similar, allowing an elegant interplay of shapes and grids which explore the formal elements of composition.

The final appearance of the books is dependent on the types of fold, which went from simple to more complex and back to simple as Faigan discovered that the most uncomplicated page manipulations produced the most intriguing and alluring effects. The number of pages in each book also contribute to the eventual outcome: some fan out with lazy extension, others are fuller, bursting at their seams. The first book Faigan folded was a Bible, in which the tightly turned, claret-edged pages took on the cylindrical appearance of a prayer wheel. These laborious folds are considered and even, but suggest natural and organic forms; a glassy salmon fillet, the smoky gills of a Shiitake mushroom, rather than anything made by human hand.

Faigan's previous work has always held something of the nostalgic, and in this exhibition you sense a childhood enchantment with books, a reverence for the mental sojourns they allow us to take and a sensual delight in the exquisite textures of their pages. The artist has not destroyed or vulgarised this sense of wonder, rather she has enhanced it, what we see before us is the work of the body while the mind was contemplative - each book is like the continuation of a prayer, each folded page a literary rosary bead.





Jason Maling

When Jason Maling devised the complex set of rules that governed the creation of the works in this exhibition, he was guided by the desire to produce the most honest form of mark-making that he could. Believing that much of current contemporary art practice is too progressive, yet indirect and lacking in honest emotion, Maling wanted to make work that faithfully records the processes that have gone into its production.

In *The Stain Game* and *The Tilting Game* chance encounters rule and tension is the result. While both encompass uncertain, 'wildcard' elements, these works have been shaped by strict guidelines and parameters designed by Maling. The method was pre-determined but the marks which resulted were random and obscure. *The Stain Game*, a large circle made of wallpaper, covered by soiled and brittle book pages, and surrounded by seemingly

discarded and damaged objects, charts the playing of what was essentially a meaningless person-sized board game, the purpose of which was to map the ingenuous stains of the unconscious in a curious trial of stamina and perseverance. *The Tilting Game* takes these intentions a step further, articulating them with the words "I will not lie", a phrase which Maling has written repeatedly across a surface coated with blackboard paint, from the precarious platform of a knock-kneed wooden chair.

Language and other visible forms of communication and how honest and true they are, is just one of the themes encompassed by Maling's work. Woven into his narratives are references to New Zealand culture and identity; the yellow tea stains a passing nod to its past dependence on British culture. The miscellaneous assortment of

objects has been cloaked with a sooty layer of graphite to disguise their original purpose and to give them a generic but residually sporting appearance; an allusion, for Maling, to the masculine tests and rites of passage that make up the experience of being male in New Zealand. The almost punitive system Maling set himself for recording the marks delineates this country's famous obsession with endurance and physical encounter.

Ultimately, these are tests, games of self-enquiry with rules that insist on Maling accepting the resultant mark-making and their subconscious origins without question. For Maling, the prescribed and repetitive behaviour that went into the making of these works is simply an exercise, a studied game which contributes to the attainment of a personal truth.

Shelley Slater

The notions around which Slater's work centres can be related to the American poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, who believed that it was possible to locate the god-head in 'self', suggesting that each individual carries within them an inherent knowledge- a kind of genetic blue-print- of 'world soul'. Slater has gathered together a variety of objects, of different shapes, sizes and media, in order to explore personal feelings regarding a search for identity and the conflicting desire to position oneself easily in the world. It is a task which takes on the kind of fervour we might associate with a quest for the holy grail.

Slater's installation, a magpie-like collection of

diverse objects united only by the fact that they are all white, is a comment on a world where everyday life can seem to be full of confusion, chaos and uncertainty. It is filled with people who try to be like each other and who pointlessly strive to achieve the day's tasks, only to have to repeat them again and again in a perpetual and monotonous cycle. What is it that makes each one of us an individual, what gives us our unique identity and where does she fit in? Slater explores the different relationships a person develops in order to find their place in the world; connections with each other, the environment, spiritual realms and the transcendence of them all so as to attain personal harmony with the world.

In **Everyday: Repetition and Transcendence**, Slater uses white as a tool of symbolic expression. Traditionally a colour identified with purity and innocence, she believes that, given the current levels of anxiety among young people, white is a calming, soothing presence, both a protective veil and a cushioning buffer against moments of pain and disillusionment. It is a colour which can conceal, or throw things into relief and contrast, highlighting the negative spaces and oppositionary principles around it. If, by using white, Slater implies an unworldly new life spirit, then equally she is covertly suggesting its polemic complementary: death and desire.

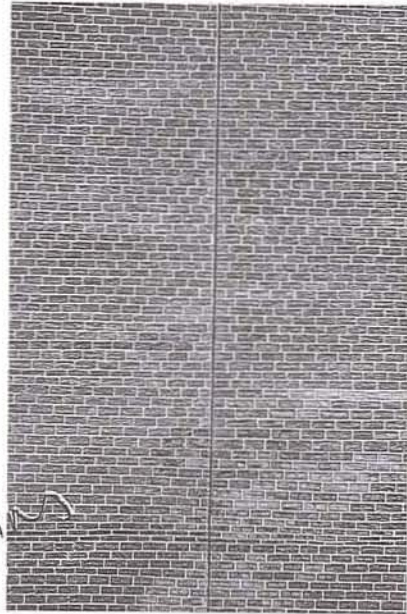
The centrepiece of Slater's collection of fetish-like emblems is a small rounded pot she has slavishly carved out of limestone. The carving itself

is another reminder that what is not visible can be as informative and relevant as that which remains. This creamy, crumbly material is generally regarded with some derision by the art cognoscenti, who tend to associate it with the rural, the lowbrow and the naive. The fact that Slater has pointedly chosen this as her media, knowing the way it is perceived, points to her desire not only to fasten onto the workaday processes of her art, but her determination to resist being drawn into the maelstrom of other people's life blue-prints, to be true to self.

All of the objects in Slater's work are found, meaning that they are from, represent and reflect the real world. They are brought together to form a new narrative whole, one that requires the viewer to decipher meaning as if each object is a part from a puzzle, a word from a story which has already been told.



While Patric Tomkins' new masonry landscapes, worked in graphite pencil, have quantity in common with his early multi-object work, they crystallize an iconography which the artist previously found to be too fragmented. The bricks involve a stepping back, an internal conversation, a determination to see differently and more clearly.



Patric Tomkins

Attracted by the intimacy that working with pencil and pen provides, Tomkins' current laborious work is testimony to his commitment to slowing down, to paying his dues, and an unequivocal statement of his belief in drawing. Unwilling to fall into the trap of churning out unexceptional, market-pleasing pieces, Tomkins' brick paintings are candidly workmanlike. Not only do the tools themselves announce the presence of an honest craftsman, but the brick itself represents the most proletarian unit of a working society; a

building block, a loaf of bread, the patchwork plains of farming fields, or peak-hour traffic stalled bumper to bumper.

The crafting is laborious, and it is the process which is important here, more central than the final result, to the artist's concerns. Tomkins has used as his canvasses 'found' objects - large wooden doors, which he completed at the rate of about two every three months: a tireless and seemingly unending project which became a continuous dialogue between the emotional and the academic, between faith and doubt.

The thousands of bricks are hand drawn, the result of continuous hours, days, weeks and months of work, and the slight variations between each adds life and movement to the composition, lending an organic feel to these gently leaning panels. Taken together, the units are details of something bigger, an animal's skin, a face dappled by sunlight, raindrops on a window or the doors upon which they are etched. Tomkins explores our ability to make mental associations, and also suggests our own physical and emotional relationships with each other - a single brick can only touch selected others before it is surrounded, and yet it is an important part of the multitudinous whole, the continuum to which we all belong.

Such regulated patterns sustain multiple and various explorations, the rectangular shapes encouraging both horizontal and vertical inspection. They can be read into as a landscape, from top to bottom as a highway or from side to side as lines of indecipherable text. Whatever

reading we take from them, whether we see them as wide-angle photographs, tracking shots or telescopic close-ups, they entice us to make connections, the pinkish background on two of the doors suggests something more nurturing than concrete, they are the familiar bricks of home, the warm nest of skin. The doors themselves are enigmatic, do they close before us like the proverbial brick wall, or do they welcome us in, with their whispered allusions to landscapes and portraits? Irresistibly, too, their proportions are body-like, testing our ability to recognise ourselves in their complex patterning.

Much of Tomkins' work is about journeys, about searching for new perspectives, new explanations. These are revolving doors, simultaneously revealing past and future, front and back, road and sky. They represent an infinite world, dependent on (and limited by) our own perceptions. Extensions of our own imagination, they tilt to our tilts, showing only what we let ourselves see.

Artists.

Violet Faigan

Violet Faigan was born in Timaru in 1970. She began exhibiting paintings in 1988 and has included object making and installation work in her practice over the last two years. Her exhibitions include: *Picture Book*, High Street Project, (1994); *Four Eyes*, Teststrip, Auckland (1995); *Girls Don't Surf* (part of What Now? series), High Street Project, (1995); *Evening Shimmer*, a public shop window installation, Gerties, Christchurch (1995); *Beautiful Paintings by Perfect Strangers*, in collaboration with Saskia Leek, High Street Project, (1996); *Pins and Needles*, Suter Art Gallery, Nelson (1996); *Group Show*, 23a Gallery, Auckland (1996).

Jason Maling

Jason Maling was born in Wellington in 1973. He attended the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts graduating in 1995 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting. Maling has recently moved to London to study at the Slade School of Fine Arts for a Masters degree. He has taken part in a variety of group and solo exhibitions including: *The Doctrines, Precepts, Miracles and Acts of...*, High St Project, (1994); *The Remarkable Rocket and the naughty boy, with assistance from Oscar Wilde*, Perstructive Informance, University Gallery, University of Canterbury, (1995); *Untitled*, collaboration with James Wallace, (part of What Now? series) High St Project, (1995); *Parlour Games*, Brooke Gifford Gallery, Christchurch, (1996).

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Shelley Slater

Shelley Slater attended the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts between 1992 and 1995, completing a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Sculpture) in 1995. Since then she has taken part in a number of exhibitions and performances, including: *You Can't Dance*, Canterbury University School of Fine Arts Sculpture Department exhibition, Interzone, Christchurch (1994); *Bind*, Quadruphenia, Christchurch (1995); *Female of a Banal World*, University Gallery, University of Canterbury, Christchurch (1995); *reLoading*, Canterbury University School of Fine Art Sculpture Department, The Old Wool Store (1995); *Untitled show*, (part of Identikit series), High Street Project (1996).

Patric Tomkins

Born in Mosgiel in 1969, Patric Tomkins attended the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts between 1991 and 1996. He will graduate with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Painting and Psychology) this year. His exhibitions include: *Cuming Soon*, an Inner City/ Echo Records Poster Run in collaboration with Andrew Brown as part of *Praxis* series, South Island Art Projects, Christchurch (1995); *Family Snaps*, (part of What Now? series), High Street Project, Christchurch (1995); *Bricks*, part of Identikit series, High Street Project, (1996).

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