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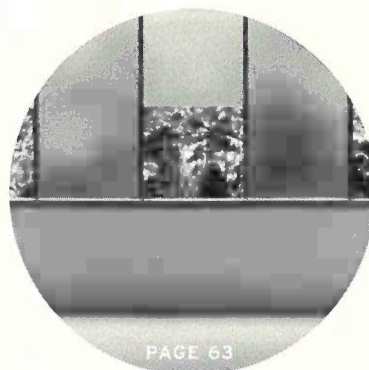
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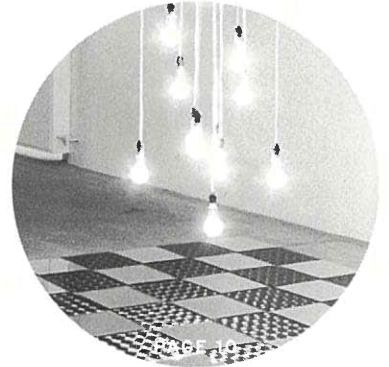
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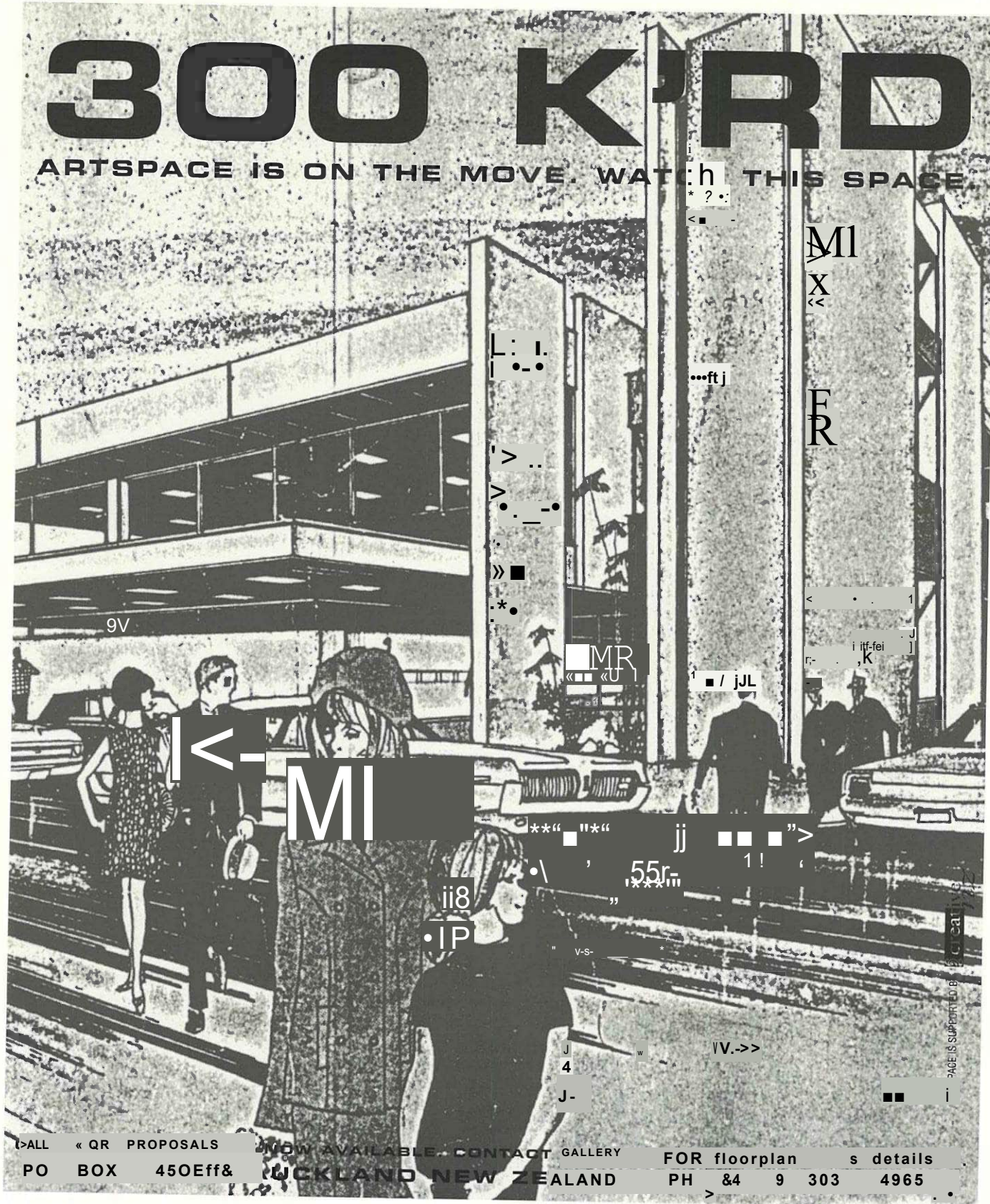
Francis Pound on the show of his dreams

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Museum without a Budget



FRANK STARK

Gavin Hipkins, Museum, 1993

This column, I am informed, was established to allow for outbursts of museological wish-fulfilment — the chance to go art-shopping without even thinking about the limit on the card. There are, however, other, more literal interpretations of the title. In recent years the Government (partly through the Lottery Grants Board) and local bodies, inspired by the triumphalism of the Museum of New Zealand, have let loose a museum building boom with major new facilities in Auckland, Wellington and Dunedin, with New Plymouth, Rotorua and Christchurch not far behind. Millions have been invested. And no-one can accuse museum promoters of simply relying on the ‘field of dreams’ principle. They don’t just build them, they make damn sure that the people come. Audience numbers climb as the marketers, evaluation designers and mailing list builders set to work to revolutionise museums and their market. However, museums are changing in other ways too.

Five years ago the City Gallery Wellington was seen as the next step for the development of the art museum in New Zealand, our first Kunsthalle, where, free of the constraints of a collection, curators could rule supreme. Last year it was amalgamated with a maritime museum, a childrens’ museum and a colonial cottage into the Wellington Museums Trust. Since then it has been restructured to the extent that it no longer has a staff position for a curator.

The Waikato Museum of Art and History has lost two directors and an internationally significant private collection of contemporary art. Its management is in the hands of a city council business unit with responsibility also for public libraries. The Dunedin Public Art Gallery and the Otago Settlers Museum are now managed by a single business unit of the Dunedin City Council. The National Art Gallery no longer exists.

So far as I know there has never been any wide-spread judgement that these institutions failed. In fact, some were cited as very successful. The changes in them were not planned or even necessarily foreseen by their directors; they did not come as a

result of some sea-change among the wider art community. And, as cynics might have expected, artists were not involved in the process at all.

The owners of museums are taking over. Local authorities are intervening to take more control of their museums, bring to an end an era of hero-directors and meta-curators. The new public sector orthodoxy maintains that accountability is all — hence the assertion that hospitals need managers more than they need doctors. It is hardly surprising to encounter the view that museums are best run, not by those from (or in the jargon “captured by”) the cultural sector, but by managers willing and able to apply more generalised expertise and training. In order to become a director of a museum it may soon be necessary to demonstrate to its owners that you do not wish to actually direct it at all.

In 1992 *Midwest* magazine published this comment from John McCormack: “As New Right thinking becomes increasingly accepted, it also becomes the field of terms within which we all operate — it becomes invisible. We speak its language as if it were simply descriptive, value-neutral...Like all dominant cultures it advances its own categories as positive, universal and eternal, shaping the culture in its own image.”

Through the 1970s and 1980s museums got used to the idea that they were a self-evident necessity of civilisation. When relatively hard fiscal times hit they developed new skills which on the face of it followed the new path to financial independence and accountability. They may well have lost more than they gained.

And artists? Does it make any difference to them? As far as I know, no real attempt has been made to find out. I suspect, though, that a corollary of the pursuit of accountability and measurable success will be an increasing concentration on blockbusters — shows with the power to draw big attendances, justifying user-charges and meeting performance measures. In order to compete in those stakes New Zealand contemporary artists may have to make the ultimate career move. EH

futures trading

The most brilliant fusion in this artists' exchange between Hong Kong and New Zealand, is between left and right-wing ideas about art and politics. The project, manifest in Hong Kong as the exhibition *Transfusion*, and recently in Auckland as *Fusion*, is grounded in a left-wing hope that art can be a tool in social progress, and artists in dialogue can touch off the kinesis between understanding and tolerance. *Fusion* aspires, in an initial way, to re-stack the culture/commerce imbalance of Hong Kong/New Zealand relations. Wong Shun Kit's *Energy* with pine tree strung over land masses of charcoal, or the chrysanthemums and cosmologies of Luise Fong's *Ultra*, work on evocation and polysemy rather than emphatic political messages, but placed together in the framework of the artists' exchange, function more clearly as proof of trans-cultural empathy. It might not be too optimistic for the show's organisers to expect positive social impact. The presence of New Zealand artists of Chinese descent, Yuk King Tan, Denise Kum and Luise Fong, as voices of post-migratory 'Asia' in a Hong Kong gallery, may show something to potential immigrants that can't be shown by anyone else. Or the exchange as a high profile art event in Auckland may radiate positively into a culture notable for its bad press and racism toward Asian immigrants.

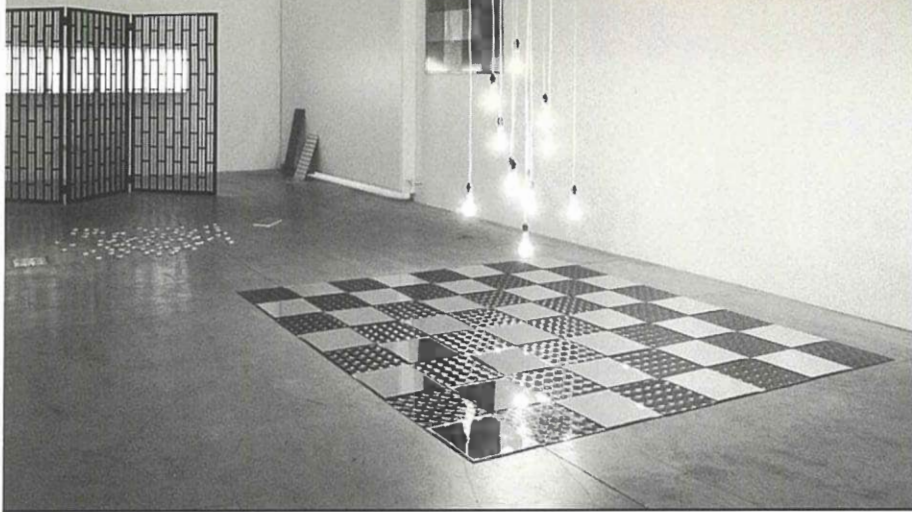
Hong Kong immigration represents a major source of investment in New Zealand. The island provides the second largest source of new migrants here, and a significant proportion of those in the business investment category. The confluence of these social ideals with commercial imperatives which see the role of cultural exchange as an oiler of the mechanisms for commerce, is obvious. Hong Kong is important to New Zealand in its own right as a regional partner in trade, investment migration and tourism,

and as a launching pad for business with China. Government policy to develop and maintain strong links with Asian nations is actualised through agencies and funding bodies such as the Asia 2000 Foundation of New Zealand, Creative New Zealand Toi Aotearoa, City Councils, and by association institutions like the Auckland Art Gallery. Director Chris Saines beautifully dovetails these left and right ideologies in his comment, "Facing the Future," for the *Asia 2000* Foundation Review: "with cultural understanding comes tolerance and with tolerance greater understanding of 'ways of doing' and therefore, concomitant insight into what powers and motivates a people as a market."

In this equation where people are significant insofar as they are consumers, and with the two countries enjoying such a healthy tourist trade, the package tour format is the natural choice and both Yuk King Tan's and Denise Kum's established practice of shopping for art the perfect action. The New Zealand artists travelled to Hong Kong with two weeks for their responses to the city to materialise as artworks, and likewise for Hong Kong artists Wong Shun Kit, Chan Yuk Keung and Anthony Leung Po Shan on their visit to Auckland. Viewing the exchange as transcendently superficial sits uneasily with the fact that a lot seems to hinge, as with McCahon in Canterbury, on a belief in the profound effect that locale can have on an artist. A physical exchange like this would not have been considered so necessary without the conviction that Hong Kong, say, is to be found in its physicality, and that an encounter with the real is worth more than encounters with mere ideas, which is all the New Zealanders had as first time visitors.

Items procured in Hong Kong by Denise Kum for her room of objects, *Rich*; large metal security doors, or mahjong pieces, continue the heavy materiality of Kum's installation work, but also block that clear path between materials and metaphor. Use of encased daylight fluorescent tubes, stainless steel and electrical wiring signals a connection with the real world of industry. In the same way that use of industrial oils in the 1992 work *Lube* skirted any suggestion of environmentalism in preference for the reign of aestheticism, *Rich* doesn't critique capitalism through an investigation of its surfaces, but epitomises its shifting of power from the useful to the useless, leaving heavy industry to the third world and leading in fields like fashion and high culture.

Fusion: Hong Kong/Auckland Artist Exchange
Hong Kong Arts Centre, Hong Kong,
28 June - 9 July, 1996
New Gallery, Auckland Art Gallery
18 October - 8 December, 1996



Denise Kum, *Rich*, 1996.
Photo Courtesy Sue Crockford Gallery

The package tour format is the natural choice and shopping for art the perfect action

Despite the political specificities of 'produce' like petrochemicals or squid Kum has traditionally exploited, the works have averted identification with locale or specific politics. *Rich* moves even further away from narrative: the light bulbs which had a former use as a heat catalyst for curdling organic substances, now more pointlessly shine into a checkerboard of purple and mirror tiles.

Kum's work as industrial chic is a stylistic other to the organic sensibility of Anthony Leung Po Shan's *Tsao* with its cotton blankets, wood, ceramic and pigment. Both works speak the language of contemporary installation art though. This could be thought of as a basis for dialogue, even though the similarity gets in the way of seeing their completely antithetical understandings of art and politics. There is a haywire sense of foreignness and familiarity here, with Kum rendering objects like wall panels as pieces of minimal sculpture, and Leung taking a metaphor-bound approach to meaning, giving every signal that her work has a political message to communicate, but the meaning imploding for non-Chinese viewers due to language barriers. I discovered later that the Chinese characters on ceramic tablets were translatable as "fuck" and "cunt" and that the installation was in part 'about' the sexual abuse of a sixteen year old girl. There's an ironic split in Leung's formulation of art and politics though, when something like an Americo-European 'international' style is used as a descriptive mechanism for a localised political message. At the same time her political context is within Hong Kong's own arch internationalism, where exceptionally affluent collectors educated with western art tastes invest with the big auction houses like Christies' or Sotheby's in either traditional Chinese ink and brush painting, or contemporary Chinese oil painting, affording contemporary art practice like hers little attention or financial support.

As the production of a catalogue has been delayed through funding difficulties, and the only interpretative or contextualising text to come with the show fits on an A4 sheet, you might think that the impression of cultural interaction and the generalised atmosphere of goodwill created by the existence of artworks alone is enough for the gallery, and may be the best way it can do its bit to "feed the Asian Tigers without becoming their economic lunch" in Chris Saines' words to *Asia 2000*. While the show asks to be viewed in terms of the complexities of identity politics, regional politics, racial politics, its reluctance

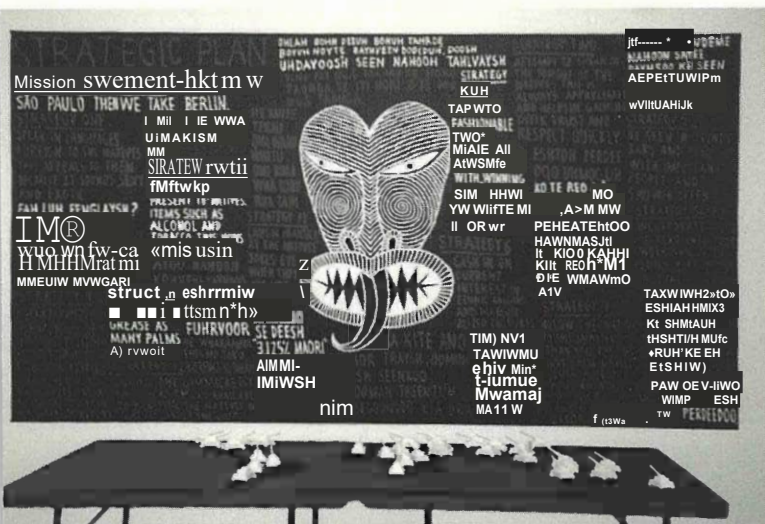
to further articulate the issues means that complexity exists in the show mainly as an aesthetic. *Fusion* introduces itself in the standard language for this kind of formulaically 'challenging' exploration of cultural difference. Words and phrases like "dislocation," "assimilation," "hyphenated reality" roll easily off the curatorial tongue, like a contemporary equivalent of Matisse's armchair after a hard days work. Artworks are only nominally differentiated from autobiography in comments like this from curator Richard Dale: "The three New Zealand artists share the experience of dual identity, as seen in *Longing for the Other*, Tan's installation." The title is at its sharpest when thought of as a satire on this kind of curatorial projection.

It's not only the absence of a contextualising discourse that causes me to think that *Fusion* is attempting some shortcuts to the complexity it claims, but also the way that ambiguity in art is harnessed for the needs of this particular discourse. Luise Fong's abstractions seem to have been put in the simultaneously uncomfortable and fortuitous position of being providers of metaphor for any occasion. In 1992, the chinoiseries of her paintings were latent enough in the curatorial mind for Christina Barton to quote the artist from her workbook as "seeing through slit eyes," to elucidate the formal properties of her *Half Light* paintings in the exhibition *Surface Tension*. In *Fusion* Fong's *Search*, executed in acrylic, Chinese ink, and mixed media, shows itself to be infinitely absorbent of thoughts found on the flyer, like "another story of China is diaspora." The monotone diptych in which one panel holds inward travelling circular forms and the other wears them as a stellar explosion, performs graciously and elegantly in this context as an emblem for the cultural identity quest, even without the tide.

Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe particularises a left-wing avoidance of complexity in art: "It is theories of counterproduction which are called for by works of art, theories of irresponsibility rather than responsibility, of transgression rather than confirmation...the favourite works of the contemporary left are so arid, such trivial evasions of the difficult. The pieties of Jenny Holzer, expensively produced slogans offered as works of art...completely fail to generate anything like new thought. What they do instead is exactly what the slogans of the Maoists or of the Islamic fundamentalists do, which is to pretend that difficult ideas can be reduced to simple formulations." Art shows which try to pass off simple formulations as difficult ideas may be the inverse local variant. S3

colonial produce & universal goods

ASTRID MANIA



Peter Robinson, *Wor(l)d Domination*, 1996.

Sao Paulo 23rd Bienal Exhibition,

Photo Courtesy Astrid Mania

rolled and packed her paintings, rendering them 'invisible', and piling them up in an installation imitating an Arabian bazaar. Talking about the discrimination of black people can still happen within the framework of 'white' aesthetics, so when Ike Ude creates a black Marilyn Monroe, he makes a political and aesthetic statement: quotation is affirmation.

The show pushed artists suffering from curatorial ignorance into the spotlight. While this is of enormous importance, the underlying concept of the exhibition seemed an irreconcilable venture. We know we cannot step out of language, so how can we when talking about art? Do we not automatically refer to traditional 'Western' concepts and aesthetics? It looks like we are trapped. Another danger is reverse Eurocentrism, no longer transporting Western culture into the world, but dragging foreign cultures to Europe, where they face the fate described above, cut from their roots, easy to handle. How much of a colonial attitude is really given up when master turns into patron?

It is interesting, though, to see what is happening to contemporary art outside Europe and the States. *The Bienal de Sao Paulo* attempts to counteract the centrifugal forces of the established art centres, but still takes on their structures and institutions. This year's *Bienal* housed the huge *Universalis* show, subdivided into seven regions, each entrusted to a curator who was free to invite six artists from the relevant countries. Australia and New Zealand were represented in the Africa and Oceania section, where Paris-based curator Jean-Hubert Martin staged artists whose works looked 'untouched' by Western influence. Again Frederic Bruly-Bouabre was included, here with his "encyclopedic memorial" drawings of his people's tales and knowledge, and aboriginal artist John Mawandjul presented delicate bark paintings. Placed against this small group was Peter Robinson's *Wor(l)d domination*, unveiling the ambiguous approach towards 'ethnic art' and its exploitation in a market dominated by fashion. Although only a few pieces in *Universalis* were thrilling, it was an important exhibition in terms of overcoming prejudice toward art from 'marginal' regions. As well-intended as *Inclusion/Exclusion* undoubtedly was, I prefer the approach of *Universalis*, taking the equality of artists for granted. Thus the problem of exclusion is excluded from the very beginning: the best solution at times is not to set up a problem at all. ffl

Inclusion/Exclusion

Graz, Austria

Universalis

23rd Bienal de Sao Paulo

The small Austrian town Graz recently hosted a show attesting the unprejudiced approach of European curators towards 'non-Western' art. *Inclusion/Exclusion — Art in the Age of Post-colonialism and Global Migration* sounded as bulky as the show looked; the intention was to analyse the permeability of 'Western' aesthetics over concepts of the 'other'. How willing was the establishment to accept art with a different self-definition? Non-Western art is usually confronted with two options: either discriminated against as non-relevant, or idealised for alleged spiritual powers by an oversaturated audience (I recall the celebrated arrival of Aboriginal art in Europe).

On the basis of overcoming these attitudes, 55 artists were assembled to make their statements on colonial history and current issues resulting from that past. Mona Hatoum contributed a piece on the political situation in the Gaza Strip, and Cuban artist Kcho presented an installation of boats referring to people fleeing one of the last socialist bastions. African artists Middle Art and Frederic Bruly-Bouabre showed bitter-ironic illustrations of colonial practice, while quite a number of works, especially from South Africa, were devoted to questioning the rigidity of black-white categories. The sell-out of an entire country's land, products and identity was lamented by many.

While the show's aim was to include 'other' concepts, it confirmed the dominance of the structures in power, traditional curatorial treatment excluding any alternative approach to the works. The artists included had long accepted Western concepts of art and were mostly willing to obey the rules. Not only have a number of them left their home countries to rotate around the so-called art centres, where an eager market has swallowed them as 'fresh meat,' many define themselves within or against the Western art system as a frame of reference. As a reaction to an art scene ignoring her work, Iraqi artist Chohreh Feyzdjou

object & metaphor

It is rare to encounter a major contemporary art event that presents itself as provocative. Fin-de-siecle anxiety and nineties sparseness results in so many institutional initiatives talking only to themselves. With all that's at stake in individual careers, institutional standing and the satisfaction of commercial interests, it's little wonder so many contemporary exhibitions are characterised by a knowing and safe seamlessness.

The Asia-Pacific Triennial did not, of course, stand outside this context. However, the potentially problematic aspects of the exhibition were neither glossed in rhetoric nor buried in conceptual closure. Here palpable materiality and strong populist elements resisted exoticising rhetoric, raising questions surrounding cultural and political intent, curatorial process, historical veracity, and changing experiences of gender, class and race.

A number of conference speakers questioned the idea of art as social activism, disturbing romanticised 'Western' notions of the 'Third World' artist struggling for social justice. They pointed to a position of entrapment between personal expression and social obligation, apparent in Karnin Lertchaiprasert's (Thailand) *Problem-Wisdom* — 366 papier-mache objects ranging from temple figures to laptops created through reconstituting the daily newspaper. The obsessive nature of the project suggested a personal struggle to work through the detritus of public discourse and break free into some personal space beyond.

How do artists from 'elsewhere' position themselves in relation to tradition and global forces? Who is served by transmission of traditional forms into an international arena? Who confers value, and to what purpose? Wang Luyan's (China) installation of 20 Australian-bought bicycles painted red and offered for sale as 'reformed' implied national signature finds meaning only within international transaction, specifically the 'free' market.

Much of the best work resisted a collective position. Chen Yan Yin's (China) *Discrepancy between one idea* — an operating table of red roses, each hopelessly sustained by an intravenous drip — enacted the passage of death and emotional decay.

The Pacific/Aotearoa section of the exhibition was, however, structured around a metaphor of cultural collectivity — the waka. Arrived at by Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, Margot Neale and Jim Viviaeare, it represented a transparent curatorial attempt to find an appropriate form for presentation of work within this unstable idea of an 'Asia hyphen Pacific.' But whilst the waka may be a useful metaphor for transformation and journey, and ultimately for the collectivity of any range of individual perspectives, art objects are objects before metaphors — they demand their own spaces to occupy, slipping through the cracks of both cultural and curatorial intent.

Installed in the central Watermall area of the Queensland Art Gallery, a metaphorical Pacific Basin of sorts, the two wakas suggested the lashing together of complimentary male and female roles — processes of construction and binding. The work of Judy Millar, Ani O'Neill and Lisa Reihana patterned and contained

the interior pond where the works of Chris Booth, Bronwynne Cornish, Brett Graham, and Peter Robinson sat. O'Neill wove gallery pillars with local palm fronds, a statement of arrival that felt inconsequential in the cavernous hall, particularly following the (intended) loss of Millar's complimentary white and black rice striping of the edge of pond after the opening night.

Placing the sculptural pieces of Booth, Cornish, and Graham literally in the pond stressed their elemental connotations but created physical islands, isolated outposts of disparate cultural perspectives. Booth's lumpen pillars had the presence and literal weight to stand above the pond. The surfaces of Graham's forms were visually animated by the reflective sheen of the water. But it was Robinson's *Untitled 3.125% plane/waka* which benefited most from this placement, confronting the indeterminacy of arrival and the fragile condition of location.

On walls facing the pond was work by Marie Shannon, John Pule and Yuk King Tan. Shannon's texts embraced not the collectivity of dream and narrative, but their particular banalities. Pule's collection of 'island music' record covers cleverly referenced the question of perspective in identity formation. Tan's firecracker drawings redirected another set of cultural imperatives back at constructions of Polynesian collectivity.

The waka was a pertinent construction through which to speak of regional cultural and artistic energies but it did not embrace particularities of the works it attempted to contain, nor welcome the wilful incoherency of the exhibition as a whole. One wonders about a metaphorical inclusivity which in practical terms leaves one of its components, the paintings of Otago artist Ben Webb, languishing on a distant wall far from the rest of the collective. Metaphors have a tendency to slip from our grasp, ES

Wang Luyan,
Bicycles (20) - 1996.
Photo Richard Stringer

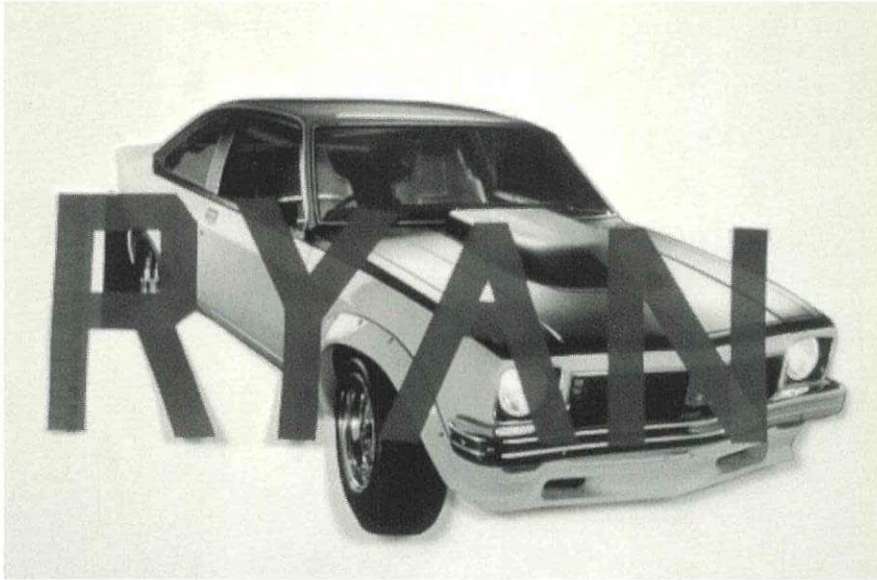


The Second Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art
Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
September 1996 - January 1997

BLAIR FRENCH

Asia Pacific Hotel Art Fair
Coronation Motel,
Brisbane, Australia
September 27 - 29, 1996

Only the lonely



Scott Redford, Ryan, 1996,
Photo Courtesy Bellas Gallery,
Brisbane.

One should see this not just as an Art Fair, but a broader, bigger, more interesting picture. The style; the setting; the people; the 1964 Motel; the gravitationally challenged, aging foreign stars who inhabited the softer corners of the Lounge; the *American Home Beautiful* (or maybe *Vogue New Zealand* 1964) magazine layout with every possible combination of Laminex, cork tiles, and bamboo wallpaper; the lunchtime throng that filled the restaurant with *Opium*, the ever invasive smell of a woman's personal deodorant, and nostalgically bitter *Charlie*, ordering the likes of Cajun-style Tasmanian-farmed smoked Alaskan salmon or House Crab, under darkening chandeliers with Tijuana Brass and moog 'Rocky' soundtracks; the three Larry Clark models always in the empty Beer Garden, too young to drink, but old

enough to know they were too young.

This Palace is ruled over by the charming Manager, Julian, previously, so he told me, from the CIA, and watched over by his brother; white Panama hat, linen suit and 'Copper Art' wife. You could not but think of the ten thousand scripts played out within these walls. All the rooms looked out over the meandering Brisbane River, with the odd Jetski, rowing team in practice or power boat passing by. One occasionally caught a glimpse of a working girl, tight black mini and high white heels trying hard to look the part on the kerb of Coronation Drive.

Most of the Gallery dealers stayed in their *Art Fair* rooms overnight. It must have been interesting to be surrounded by and literally sleeping with the produce of their indentured artists. Under heavy eyes falling off to sleep, and then each morning, suddenly awakened by the thump-like tapping at their door when the Polish deaf and dumb housemaid whisked them out with a wave of her hand, to transform the room back into a gallery.

It was 'spooky' (it is the only word...) to be sitting in the restaurant first thing, waiting for your Maccona plunger and those two wide eyed eggs, trying to feel human and making every effort to face the day, surrounded by galleries and dealers, whispering, occupied with the day ahead but still immersed in the effects of the night before.

Art in Public Galleries, and in a shadowy way, commercial galleries, is undergoing what can only be described as 'economic rationalisation'. Board members from the 'Profit Making Sector' have goals which

DALE FRANK

are nothing to do with art, rather they are about sustaining these operations as businesses. Public Gallery rationalisation comes in the form of reduced funds and resources from Government budgets. The growing presence of a certain type of private sector has meant a re-thinking of the Public Gallery as another element of State tourism. The Art Exhibition, especially the crowd pleaser, the mass market expensive blockbuster has become the adjunct to the Tourist Industry. Under these conditions, the act of looking at art, or a certain type of art, becomes more and more a form of tourism, like window shopping. This situation, the unsustained interest, allusion of extrovert efficiency, imparting nothing either consciously or deliberately, is neither good nor bad. It can't be. It's about attitude.

Being an artist today is not so much about being a producer, as it is about being the product. The relation of art to reality is undergoing a major change. In light of so called 'rationalisation,' the *Asia Pacific Hotel Art Fair* was 'avant garde'; there is no better traditional way to describe it. You could have slapped a signature on its very naked butt and called it a sculpture. It could have been just as valid a work in itself. The rules are changing. It was about issues and ideas that so many artists are thinking about today.

The *Art Fair* inserted artistic action

Sydney and Melbourne, as well as Brisbane, exhibited, and should be credited for taking the chance, feeling that 'something' was happening. After all, the vast vacant mausoleum of the *Melbourne Art Fair* was an alternative.

A very large crowd attended the opening night of the *Hotel Art Fair*, comprising the Australian art world, and a large part of the audience and participants of the *Asia Pacific Triennial*, which also opened that week, at the Queensland Art Gallery.

There was good art to be seen, and to be had. White Box, a new Brisbane gallery had a drawer full of black and white photos of naked suburban men in various positions and stages of masturbation. Bellas Gallery had a collection of fast cars cut from garage calendars with boy's names in duct tape over them, "Guy", "Troy", etc... It was the Perfumed Lotus Gallery in Room 117, with its living, welcoming sculptures that became the hub of the entire *Art Fair* experience.

I browse, window shop, like everybody, I think. A longing glance at any one object or situation is worth at least a thousand words. Most people have novels to write eventually. But for now there's just the recall of the *Fair's* timely occurrence, its moments, and not least its fun.

The *Fair* was the originally the idea of Peter Bellas, and worked from American models. During the *Fair* and since, the



Above and bottom: Dale Frank, Perfumed Lotus Galerie, Room 117 Sculpture. Misses Leanne and Bridgette, Transsexual Escorts, welcome people into Room 117 with champagne and Swiss chocolates and warm, relaxed, intimate conversation
Centre: Angela Blakely, Masturbator tt4, Courtesy Whitebox Gallery, Brisbane



Gallery dealers stayed in their Art Fair rooms overnight, surrounded by and literally sleeping with the produce of their indentured artists

into a social function. Works of art are transitive, they liven things up. Art is always incomplete, left to be polished up by the viewer (or a generation or cumulative deviation and selection). Art is not bland: it is far more exciting and progressive than the many aging lone white bulls would have you believe: they're firing blanks.

The Brisbane area is growing so rapidly that it will soon replace Melbourne as Australia's second city. There are many new galleries, providing an interesting side to the *Fair*. Major galleries from

better galleries have come to realise that the Hotel Room is not an annex to the gallery, or a floating stock room with room service, though that would be nice, but a facility that can be given over to any artistic expression. Artists have always worked this way. This understanding, coupled with the much confessed idea that the next *Fair* will have more rooms devoted to a selected list of artist interventions means the *Asia Pacific Hotel Art Fair* is well on its way to laying the seed of something that is important and much needed in this country, ES



Secret Handshake

Institution: *a group of people organised for some purpose, following rules of procedure, with a structure designed to be complex and make things difficult for the people who belong.*

— glossary entry, C M Beadnell *Objects and images from the Cult of the Hook*

In the late 1970s Richard Killeen developed an innovative approach to painting. He painted appropriated image-fragments on shapes cut from aluminium and nailed these shapes to the wall in clusters, like butterflies pinned in a case. Called “cutouts”, they were collections of specimens or artifacts offered without explanation. Decontextualised and divorced from any clear overarching logic or sense of purpose, images were now available to the viewer for the pleasures of free association — there was no correct or privileged reading. Because they were not telling us what or how to think, but letting us make up our own mind, the cutouts were quickly championed as an escape route from the tyranny of ‘the frame.’

Killeen said the cutouts were “democratic”, implying two things: firstly, that their compositions were non-hierarchical: the images they contained were created equal; secondly, that the format empowered viewers to make their own readings, denying any authoritative meaning emanating from the artist. And yet the cutouts were never ever disruptively democratic, politically or compositionally. With each work, the democracy always functioned within a limited stylistic range: a style-consensus. Further, the cutouts’ pleasant shapes, harmonious colour schemes, curious images and non-threatening format offered a balanced, almost New Age, world view. Killeen promoted a utopia in which all things might be experienced as discrete, inviolable, autonomous — a world without hierarchy in which

Objects and images from

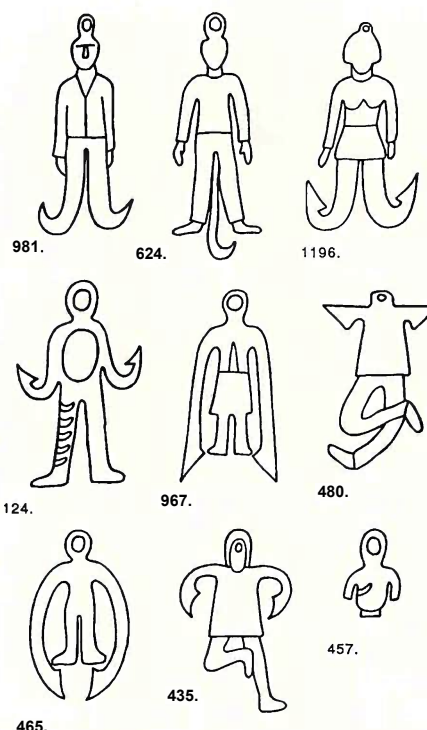
the Cult of the Hook

Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington

October, 1996

ROBERT LEONARD

16 monica

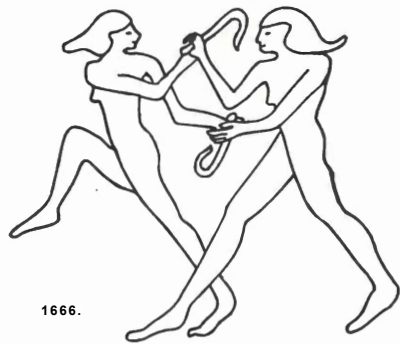


- HM. No. 981. Amulet figure with hooked feet, hands passive, eyelet on top of head. Hooking the feet is a way of honouring this part of the body, silver, 65 mm. (After Small)
- HM. No. 624. Amulet figure, arms held away from sides, tail or penis hook, trousers and eyelet on top of head, cast silver, 33 mm, Fishbeam, c. 1430 AD.
- HM. No. 1196. Amulet figure, female, hooked feet, arms held away from sides, small eyelet on top of head, silver, 66 mm, Fishbeam, c. 1430 AD.
- HM. No. 124. Amulet figure, hooked arms upwards, hole in chest, eyelet through head, striated decoration on the leg, silver, 57 mm, Cachepot, c. 600 BC.
- HM. No. 967. Amulet figure, long barbed arms, eyelet in head, lead, 67 mm, Tyre, c. 1000 BC.
- HM. No. 480. Amulet figure, short hook stub arms, crossed legs, no head, eyelet through neck, lead, 47 mm. The arms are honoured in this example as in No. 124, 465, 435.
- HM. No. 465. Amulet figure, necklace shaped arms, eyelet through head, lead, 55 mm.
- HM. No. 435. Amulet figure, dynamic pose, hooked down arms, hair, eyelet through face, silver, 66 mm, Fishbeam, c. 1430 AD.
- HM. No. 457. Amulet, part of a figure, eyelet through head, hook decoration on chest, spondylus shell, 29 mm.

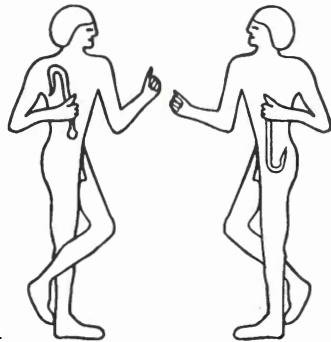
all particles would be granted their own personal space.

In the mid 1980s Killeen was influenced by feminist thought. In works like *Social document*, he was no longer happy with viewers simply free-associating, he wanted to address the politics of the image. Now the cutout format proved recalcitrant; it left images so open to interpretation that it became hard to make a point. Occasionally Killeen gave the works instructive titles and inscriptions, such as *Language is not neutral* and *Time to change the Greek hero*, prompting the viewer to read the images in a particular way, underlining the conclusions to draw. Ever since then Killeen has been caught between two conflicting ethics, one to do with opening up freedoms for the reader, the other with addressing issues, speaking his mind.

Throughout the late 1980s and into the present, Killeen stayed with the cutout format despite its inherent “democracy”, using it to make statements on sexual politics, on ecological issues, on his concerns with paternal



1666.



1666a.

HM. No. 1666. Nude hook dancing, two women dancing with hooks, there appears to be interaction taking place. Contrast the dynamic action of the women with the static dance of the men. See below. Illustration from a frieze, painted plaster and brick, 270 mm, Baculiam, c. 1000 BC.

HM. No. 1666a. Nude hook dancing, two men dancing, with a hook. There is some form of hand signaling taking place, may even be sign language. Illustration from No. 1666 frieze, painted plaster and brick, 270 mm.

CM Beadnell, *Objects and images from the Cult of the Hook*

authority (his father's and McCahon's) and, recently, his thoughts at the death of his mentor, the painter Gordon Walters. *Objects and images from the Cult of the Hook*, Killeen's latest show at Peter McLeavey Gallery addresses the difficulty of making authoritative statements with cutouts.

Book of the hook, a huge cutout painting, completely fills one of the end walls, side to side, top to bottom; the pieces crammed in, overlapping. The images recall archaeological catalogue illustrations. Each image involves some kind of hook form or motif, some blatant, others obscure. There are images of little hooks, big hooks; tattooed hooks, ceramic hooks, hook-boats, hook forks, hook people; hooks from antiquity, hooks from more modern times.

The work needs to be read in tandem with the hoax catalogue offered as its guide: *Objects and images from the Cult of the Hook (Papers of the Hook Museum Vol.38 No.2)*. This tome catalogues objects which crop up in the big work. We are asked to believe that these images collectively represent some cult linking images from diverse times, locales and cultures. Maps argue the way the cult developed and spread, or maybe how it was unearthed — it's not clear. The maps have helpful captions such as: "As far North as it got" and "Showing the concentration around Desdes".

The authorship of the catalogue is attributed to a C M Beadnell, much lauded in Killeen's foreword — an erudite gentleman scholar, no doubt. And yet his essay is minimal, shorter in fact than Killeen's own foreword,

and goes no way in explaining the cult. It simply defers to Manetho, an authority with "good sources". So in the catalogue, 'the essay', the authority, is missing, in the same way that the authoritative explanation is perennially and conspicuously deferred with the cutouts; Killeen scrupulously sidesteps the big picture.

With this show Killeen participates in a current preference for conspiracy theories, invented news and hoax museums. The book is arcane. The treehut mentality of the hook cult is at once linked with the treehut mentality of the scholar-curator: all secret handshakes and nods to authority. It's an elaborate play on phallic imagery; on meaningful signs and the authority that supposedly guarantees them. What for instance are we to make of the catalogue entry "HM. No.1666a. Nude hook dancing, two men dancing, with a hook. There is some form of hand signalling taking place...?"

Killeen's Hook Museum recalls the unconvincing museum assembled by Flaubert's anti-heroes in his novel *Bouvard and Pecuchet*: "In former times towers, pyramids, candles, milestones and even trees had a phallic significance, and for Bouvard and Pecuchet everything became phallic. They collected swing-poles of carriages, chair-legs, cellar bolts, pharmacists' pestles. When people come to see them they would ask: what do you think that looks like? then confided the mystery, and if there were objections, they shrugged their shoulders pityingly."

Interestingly, Killeen is known to be a critic of 'seagull shows,' those tragic curatorially-driven efforts in which artists' works are gathered because they each have, say, a seagull in them, regardless of what they might really be about; shows that hang a lot on a little. This practice is satirised and perfected in Killeen's Hook Museum — it's an artist's hook show. Suspecting that there may be some clear point behind the collection, the viewer gets lost trying to find it. These images have been mustered for their visual resemblance rather than because of some deeper practical, philosophical or historical affinity. In fact, the show points to the cutout format's fundamental inability to illuminate such deeper principles. But then this is the very pleasure of Hook museology: the love of details: microphilia.

This show is Killeen at his funniest. He offers us a museum of phallic authority which deliberately fails to convince. But while he might seem to be critiquing the authoritarianism of the museum, Killeen is really revelling in the quirkiness, the quaintness, of authority — it's strangely nostalgic. Killeen sure has a love/hate relationship with 'the institution', ffl



Stills from *Learn to Deal*, an installation/performance by Liz Lerner. Photo courtesy Chris Kraus

Chance: Three days in the desert
Whiskey Pete's Casino, Nevada
November 8 - 10, 1996
Produced by Chris Kraus
Sponsored by Art Center and
The French Cultural Service

GIOVANNI INTRA

Baudrillard and his wife, Marine Dupris, for two of them. Jean, in denim jacket, and Marine, a blonde in sunglasses, were immediately recognisable as French middle class tourists, which is, in fact, what they were. This rigged paradox was poetic and Baudrillard at Whiskey Pete's was like Johnny Cash at San Quentin: an ecstasy of song and dance presented in honour of bad luck.

So it was that disability, obesity, philosophy and mysticism were made to dine on \$4.99 buffet meals with powdered pancakes for breakfast, endlessly retracing their steps over alcohol-sodden carpets emblazoned with the face of our stubbled forefather, Whiskey Pete. But aside from providing an excuse for the number of reprehensible and illegal behaviours which this decor

practically enforced, *Chance* presented the work of over 50 writers, artists and performers and was an occasion splintered by opinion. My own hackles were raised early in the piece by Marcella

Greening's tediously pedagogical lecture

about chaosophy, a subject which was later redeemed from math lesson status by Wall St. stockbroker Douglas Hepworth's account of economic theory, financial collapse, madness, crowds, and the Dutch tulip trade. Hepworth's entertaining paper made bankers out to be cheats and investors to be vulgar gamblers, all the funnier as he was their sole representative.

There was a humanist/mystical crowd present, who, not only being inclined towards divination (and narrative repetitions of the past), took the conference for a holistic site where a lot of people 'come together' (something like a healing community). Notable cosmics were Sheppard Powell, a practitioner of the I Ching, and Dianne di Prima, the great Beat generation poet and prose writer who unfortunately did little else than read from her earlier books and suggest in discussion that perhaps there was something antihumanistic about theory in general and about Baudrillard in particular.

Morphing the produce of capitalist greed and autobiographical anecdote was Alluquere Roseanne (Sandy) Stone, the ex-male song and dance act. What Stone didn't get by plonking herself on Baudrillard's lap in front of 400 people and serenading him

PIMPS FOR CHANCE

To be trapped in a 25c brothel in the middle of the Nevada desert might sound like no fun at all. As if to inspire repentance, the venue for *Chance*, a philosophical rave conceived and produced by Chris Kraus and sponsored by Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, and the French Cultural Service, was a most frightening den of iniquity, worthy of mention in the Old Testament. The word "Disneyland," muttered anxiously by several stunned guests in a vain attempt to speak for Whiskey Pete's Casino, hardly explained the large number of myopic addicts who were busily feeding the "loosest slots anywhere." This real-life white trash, slumped over profoundly anti-ergonomic one-armed bandits as if they were orthopedic devices, were arrogantly derided by many of the international conference guests, myself included, until, that is, I mistook guest star Jean

with her adaptation of Cole Porter “I get a kick from Jean B,” was that academe was a theatrical medium in the first place. Stone’s primary investigations, identity and gender in the age of virtual reality, are obviously compelling, but anyone who gives an audience plastic hooters and requires them to hoot upon command can do nothing but accept their title as the Richard Simmons of Postmodernism. In retrospect, the cringe epidemic Stone engendered was rather interesting and her two most ludicrous claims — “we are all children of Baudrillard,” and “theory is God” — will not be forgotten for some time.

Paul Miller a.k.a. DJ Spooky had the right answer to this deification of the word. His theorisation of God: total noise. If God can simply be thought of as Eurotrash, then Spooky’s black noise committed a Baudrillardian act of reversal upon the audience: it was philosophy without words, a paradox which Baudrillard himself couldn’t accomplish. I still do not know exactly why Spooky’s mixing was so amazing, but its matter-of-factness and uncanny intelligence connoted a blasphemous indifference to the rising theological babble of anti-elitism. It produced meaning completely by surprise.

Spooky, the mixing artist who produces new noises, and Towel, a guitar band from San Francisco, performed tandem roles. Towel, terrorist aesthetes who belt out their shit wearing balaclavas and ski masks were happily incomprehensible, as, for that matter, was Baudrillard’s own paper, a fact which connected his theory much more closely to these canons of insensible obfuscating noise as opposed to the democratic elucidations one usually gets served up at a ‘conference.’ What Towel, Spooky and Baudrillard produced collectively was a condition of bewilderment-as-entertainment, a noise which may have suggested to some the need for subsequent de-scrambling. These were spastic, gymnastic feats for an audience to manage; they discouraged the patronising threats of participation and interactivity, whilst refusing to succumb to the ‘forces of the universe.’

Baudrillard’s three presentations amounted to a baroque flurry of aphorism and abnegation. He argued that the drives for individuality, autonomy, liberation, and destiny are suicidal traps which have produced nothing but ornamental forms of self hatred. His main paper featured brilliant pronouncements on the universality of harassment (“homeopathic torture”), as well as the impossibility of subversion (“artificial adversity”); and his reading which proceeded Oguri and Renzouku’s remarkable Butoh performance understood the Japanese discipline as a disfigurative theatre of cruelty. As Sylvere Lotringer puts it, Baudrillard likes to take punts on the future because the past and the present, let alone the medium of theory itself, are quite simply too boring. These reversals are themselves perverse and might well be tedious to maintain as a theoretical contract, however Baudrillard displayed a cinematic taste for gambling, disfiguration and shock which rivalled Ballard: “Isn’t it our endless work, in the absence of God,” he asked, “to reconvert all accident into attraction and seduction?”

Here Baudrillard struck the most malignant, universal, and diabolical aspect of chance: bad luck. And there was quite a lot of it discussed. Liz Larner’s reading/installation (part of the art show *Hotel California* curated by Sarah Gavlak and Pam Strugar)

Baudrillard at Whiskey Pete's was like Johnny Cash at San Quentin



told the sorry tale of a casino cocktail waitress who, when her silicon breasts up and burst one evening, saw no option but to jump to her death from a hotel window; or Shirley Tse, an artist from Hong Kong, who spoke beautifully on the pollution and plasticisation of Asia; and chance’s great sell-out as laid down by Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe: “Only the possibility of winning a very large amount of money [in a lottery] ameliorates an otherwise wholly determined capitalist condition.” In the final analysis, luck, chance and their rosy derivatives were engulfed by a pessimistic tide of technological misadventure, corporeal disaster and fractal hallucination. It would have been difficult to have thought up a more pleasing conclusion or to have asked for more interesting contributors.

The much anticipated Chance Band, a motley crier consisting of members of The Red Krayola, Mike Kelley, Amy Stoll, and a gold sequin clad Jean Baudrillard (singing his own number, “Motel Suicide”) made the final jump between between thought and its disintegration, and if, as Baudrillard suggested, “Stephen Hawking and his broken body constitute the ideal model for superscience,” it might be concluded that randomness and white noise constitute the ideal model for future philosophy, EH

j s d n § t a r

ANTONIN ARTAUD

Autogenesis: Antonin Artaud is like Jesus Christ; one should never act him. Indeed, it was Artaud who claimed that he was the only one able to imitate himself. In this respect the film *En compagnie d'Antonin Artaud* by Gerard Mordillat (1993) was difficult to watch. The conference was, after all, a 'multimedia' event and probably interdisciplinary too, and maybe if it had been Robert de Niro I wouldn't have minded. It's not that the actors can't portray Artaud's excesses, they do it all too well. It's that they cannot act his constraint, the way he was always on the verge of a bigger explosion.

PERFORMING: Despite the unfortunate nature of the Australian accent, so unsuitable for the voice of Artaud's cruelty, Sydney-based theatrical group Nightshift Theatre Asylum still managed to damage Artaud. It is 1996 and the man in the hospital gown leans over a chair on the stage spreading his buttocks while reciting passages from Artaud's radio poem *To have Done With The Judgement Of God*. This ventriloquism was an impotent experiment with Artaud's language and thought. Artaud's work demands that you read it aloud but not with the dispensable literality of your bottom. The agony of having a body must be acted with a voice brutalised by the constant consonants in putrefaction. The languid

100 Years of Cruelty
Artaud Conference
12 - 15 September 1996
Artspace, Sydney



"Artaud the Actor, about 1920," from *Antonin Artaud Anthology*, edited by Jack Hirschman, City Lights Books, 1965

whip of the man in the army uniform was, I think, supposed to create confusion between the torture suffered under a military regime and the torture suffered under Nietzsche's 'military school of life,' but it also created a rehearsal of the corporate image. And yet they did that rare thing, they read Artaud live, this was the hardest thing to do and it was the greatest thing about them. On the subject of art, Artaud wrote to Henri Parisot declaring that in Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" are "passages of fecality, but it is the fecality of an English snob who curls the obscene within himself like ringlets of hair around a curling iron... It is the work of a man who ate well — and this makes itself felt in his writing." In trying to avoid this kind of criticism from Artaud, (who seldom lets anyone get anything right) Nightshift Theatre Asylum swung reductively the other way until they smelt so bad that they became an act that never stops smelling itself.

Famous Failure: In a hall of hundreds Samuel Weber gave the introductory paper to the keynote address by Professor Derrida. In talking about Artaud's aesthetics of suffering Weber wanted to expose the cliché of Artaud as a failure. But as the conference went on it became obvious this cliché suggests no such thing. Weber's disavowal was more obviously an attempt to deny an Artaudian industry founded on a panegyric of the opposite. Sylvere Lotringer was good enough to tell us that Artaud was indeed a successful failure, that his breaking down was a creativity. Unafraid of biography Lotringer made us laugh at Artaud's miserable efforts to act, he described Artaud's acting as all wrong and funny for it and he told us of Artaud's chagrin in a droll tone, apposite for describing the pain of another.

Virtually Derrida: Due to technical problems with the satellite link-up to Paris most of the audience heard very little of Derrida. Partiality of knowledge signals the necessity of passion, of feeling affected. When Derrida combed his fingers through his hair, when he addressed us with footnotes and asides and when he worried that we couldn't hear him and that time was running out, he became our clown. Derrida's paper played with the phoneticisms of Artaud Le Momo, (one of his names), and MOMA, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which is where a full version of this paper was destined. Derrida explained that at the sections exclusively relevant to MOMA he would say "cut" and gesture "cut" by slicing his hand horizontally through the air. Due to the barely audible transmission Derrida's "cuts" became a ridiculous series of interruptions, of inappropriate and yet ordinary (uncanny) aural and gestural icons.

Corporate Cruelty: It is difficult to justify any invidious remarks about the corporate look of the conference when we had come from all over the world and paid to see it. The usherettes ought to be recruited as security guards, they looked so smart in their conference t-shirts and

CATHERINE DALE

The genre
of abuse we
know so well
is 1980s drill,
like watching
Lydia Lunch and
sipping red wine

authoritarian willingness to patrol the door and stop any criminal element from getting in. A poor friend of mine wanted to see Lotringer's paper but it was impossible to get past the keen eye of the sentry. *One Hundred Years of Cruelty*, if you missed it there is always the enthusiastic t-shirt with its logo and its picture of Artaud's eyes peering over a torn image of himself (in miniature on the back like a naughty corporate joke, is a whisper of sartorial madness in a quote from Mr. Artaud, "All writing is pig shit.") The academic coextension of this business appeal was the way the professionalisation of thought was meted out by a clique of the published and famous. These savants only stayed to hear each other, always leaving cordially just before a post-graduate was to speak.

Suicide: I took exception to a young speaker who said, "Poor old dead Deleuze," as patronisingly as possible, and meant it. Lesley Stern's abuse on the other hand, was a pleasant quasi-disabuse of performance art sung to the tune of Capital. Stern did not try to destroy the imperative of pretence that accompanies such avant garde events. The genre of abuse we know so well is 1980s drill, like watching Lydia Lunch and sipping red wine. In the simplicity of such a position where self-obliteration is an obligation, Stern had good things to say about Artaud. Suicide, ranted the vivaciously abusive Stern, is an impossibility, an anterior suicide is the only one which makes any sense.

Cruelty: the conference was an important exegesis on Artaudian cruelty, the practice of an acute, severe, sceptical and detailed thought. Antonin Artaud's cruelty produces the clarity and discipline that he uses in his attempt to become himself, to match life. Part of this is achieved by keeping anguish alive. As Lisabeth During in her paper "Anguish," pointed out, it is Artaud who, (in his earlier texts), gives anguish back to philosophy as one of its becoming names. But there is a lot of confusion about Artaud's ontocruelty. The distracted sense in which cruelty is understood was perfectly enacted at the beginning of the conference when the leaflets that were handed out were revealed as the secret work of tendentious anarchists. Imitating the list of conference participants the cover was an inventory of 20th century atrocities — Nagasaki (1945), Thalidomide (1962), Amin's Uganda (1971), Pinochet's Chile (1973), Bosnia (1992), Rwanda (1995) and so on. This is reason enough to specify Artaud's cruelty, especially when the bottom of the tract said, "What's there to celebrate?" But what, when little seemed to have been read about Artaud, did the audience expect? What cruelty did we come for? The overriding principle of the conference was our feeble-mindedness about, and our folly towards, Artaud's work and yet this insensibility was intertwined with a desire to know something of Artaud's work and a curious will to be affected, despite the nervous cost, ffl

planet bollywood

TESSA LAIRD

My first experience with Hindi Cinema was in Jaipur's Raj Mandir Theatre, complete with flashing lights that burst into florescence during every hit song. My self-appointed guide was choking back tears at this, his ninth viewing of *Hum Aapke Hain Koun*. India's top grossing film, its soundtrack was a constant aural backdrop across the continent.

Home in New Zealand, I began attending screenings at the Civic Theatre and Crystal Palace. My ignorance of Hindi and the fact that the films are never subtitled adds to their appeal. No matter how accustomed I become to repetitive narratives and deliciously transparent acting, the Hindi film is still a beguilingly opaque viewing experience. There's delight in being a foreigner, of being sublimely irrelevant to a culture that is, despite change and diaspora, perversely, potently, intact. In this haven of anonymity I'm agog at the eye-popping mis-translations and semiotic wormholes that inevitably occur between myself and the screen, like blasts of hot and rancid Bombay air, overwhelming attempts at surrealism and displacement in Western 'arthouse' cinema.

The very first of these I experienced was at the Raj Mandir, in the opening scene of *HAHK*, as that film is fondly referred to in Bollywood magazines. A squeaky-clean game of upper crust family cricket is marred by a generic 'ugly sister' wearing a t-shirt emblazoned "Bum Chums." This incongruity didn't elicit a murmur from the audience, although global slapstick, such as the 'salt substituting sugar' joke caused an uproar.

The same rear-end undercurrent emerges triumphant in *Ram Jaane*. Every morning, a boys' orphanage rises to the tune of "Bum Chiki Chiki Bum." As the naked boys parade their bottoms, the

fully matured and clothed Juhi Chawla (who looks a lot like Cindy Crawford) dances among them.

In *Chaat*, Shah Rukh Khan and Anupam Kher play a father/son acrobatic duo. Assailed by baddies, they end up in the unfortunate position of father, head in noose, balancing precariously on son's tiring shoulders. Shah Rukh must stay put, meanwhile his wife is being (presumably) gang raped in the next room. Even so, they keep up familial repartee. Eventually, father leaps to save son, Shah Rukh is beaten further (approximately every bone in his body is broken) yet still manages to bind his limbs with his traditional musical instruments, scale a fifteen storey building, and terrorise guests at a high class party, all rags and bells like a Morris-dancing Richard III.

I remain dubious about my fascination, which, like Rudyard Kipling's orientalism, involves anecdotal theft and transparent attempts to appear an 'insider.' But is this a personal phase or the crest of a popular craze? The latest Diesel ad shot on location in Jaipur with a bloated Govinda look-alike has me suspect it might be the latter. For me, and perhaps others, Bollywood possesses an antidote to some of the ills infecting the Western artworld including compulsory irony, minimalism, atheism and small talk. Hindi Cinema has an impossibly difficult national role: to keep in thrall the disparate peoples that fall under the banner of Indianness. It's not surprising that the lowest common denominators, 'primal' plots and raw, charged emotions, are exploited, fulfilling the kind of collective desires Western Cinema has long been too embarrassed to attempt.

Usually it's the way Western culture surfaces in Hindi films that I find most endearing, not least because it thoroughly

confuses the issue of appropriation. You learn to think nothing of an entire dance troop of green-faced gents impersonating Jim Carey's *Mask* character as they gyrate around a heroine. I was more taken aback by Shah Rukh Khan dancing to techno with Billy Apple's Indian double in a nightclub decorated with massive Warhol reproductions. Seconds later the Apple doppelganger is shot, right in his third eye.

One truly arresting moment I experienced recently was *Khamoshi*'s Hindi reenactment of a famous sequence from Jane Campion's *The Piano*, where the grand is dragged by native men along the beach, with Victorian garbed mother and daughter in tow. Only, in the Bollywood version, everyone is singing and dancing and smiling, with buxom bosoms flying.

There are as many delights to be had from dipping randomly into Indian video: 1980s *Secret Agent Raja* with his progressively louder pinstripe silver suits, 1970s *Mera Badla*, in which our chubby hero gets down to disco all night then races home to be chained to the bed by his sister...because he is a werewolf. Colour saturates, camera slants, and madness is acted out to a jazzy dirge of bile-bloated bassoons that would do Nick Cave proud.

The most infectious discovery for me has been Shah Rukh Khan, whose energy and presence had me recall a Monroe myth; that she "illuminated every frame." But upon dragging some of my white friends to a replay of *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, I was reproached with "He's a buffoon" and "He's got silicon implants in his eyebrows." Undoubtedly, Shah Rukh is not a realistic actor, but he certainly possesses the gift of the gab, leading one friend to speculate that top filmstars are paid by the word. Mandatory versatility has hero and heroine bump and grind to a rapidly jump-cut backdrop, from monuments to moun-



Shah Rukh
is willing
to be made
over as
Alfred E.
Newman or
to have his
blacked-up
visage
turned into
cardboard
masks

tain ranges, with nightclub follies or traditional dancers in an endless array of costumes to signify unheard-of wealth, as if a polylingual, polytheistic India requires its representatives to be shape-shifters by trade.

It still seems to be heroes that make and break hits. Many heroines go by a single name and, to the uninitiated, seem interchangeable. Recent years have seen some progress, to the extent Sushmita Sen, Miss Universe 1995, can command several star vehicles despite her crippling inability to act. Meanwhile, a stalwart like Sridevi reinvents herself, totes a gun in *Army*, sips beer in *Mr. Bechara*, and knocks reigning queen Madhuri Dixit from the headlines.

Older Indian movie-goers may long for a reprise of the classic style hero, like Amitabh Bachchan, tall and reserved, the perennial compere at Miss India competitions and firm friend of top politicians. Sanjay Dutt seems to have made it big on the same drawcards; great height and lidded eyes. Ostensibly India's answer to Stallone, Dutt cannot dance, and got thrown into prison for gun-toting on election day. Anil Kapoor's claim to manhood resides entirely on his chest (and shoulders, and back) As one Bollywood magazine tastefully put it announcing the Hindi remake of *Forrest Gump*, "Forrest alright!" Akshay Kumar is similarly hirsute, though, with Grecian good-looks, has been dubbed "the sexiest man in India." Performing all his own stunts with a rakish fab-four grin, he is yet to be a fall guy for the movie-mad press.

Shah Rukh, however, has a zest for the business that's palpable. Obsessed with computer games, idolising Michael Jackson, he is willing to be made over as Alfred E. Newman or to have his blacked-up visage turned into cardboard masks which were a hit on the streets of Bombay.

That this kind of craze still sweeps a country as old and populous as India hooks me in. Enthusiasm and lack of cynicism has the

Left to right: Sridevi, from *Star and Style*, June 1996, Madhuri Dixit, from the *India-Fiji Express*, August-September 1996, Anil Kapoor, from *Movie magazine*, September 1995, Shah Rukh Khan, from the "Shah Rukh goes Mad" shoot in *Star and Style*, May 1995

poorest scrimping their paise to go cry at the woes of imaginary families 1,000 times richer than themselves; a cinematic engagement I don't believe Westerners possess any more. The impossibly lavish Busby Berkeley sequences in Western 'Golden Age' musicals are still de rigueur in India, where most of the viewers are even further removed from any semblance of luxury. But Hindi cinema is so multi-layered as to refer to the last few decades simultaneously, and always the latest Western trends are up for grabs, witness Manchester haircuts on the heroes and 'nude-look' make-up on the heroines.

Sometimes the Hindi film appears to be positively futuristic. In *Oh Darling, Yeh Hai India* there's Bond-esque scientific experimentation, but there are also urchins in rags, unavoidable signs of poverty. We are presented with a nation living amongst its historical ruins, yet from the remains of this ancient culture emerges a spirit willing to negotiate everything from genetic cloning to the music of KLF. Love, family, religion, continue to bind and motivate people against all odds. It's tempting to imagine ourselves post-apocalypse in a perpetual state of survival and invention, with a more useful relationship to our past. I am consistently impressed at how none of the traditional elements of Hindi Cinema or Filmi music seem forced or tokenistic, just as none of its appropriation of the West seems naive or try-hard. Rather, the two are integrated into a package which, however formulaic, contains surprises that uphold a global model for cultural adventure and absolute joie de vivre; the last bastion of the truly imaginary on the flickering screen, EB

Noble Trash



King Loser in a studio shoot before their acquisition of Sean O'Reilly. Photo courtesy Flying Nun

CHRIS HILLIARD

at here. Since *Sonic Super Free Hi-fi* in 1993, King Loser's music has become increasingly retro, playing with surf music, Lee and Nancy, and 1960s TV-theme genres to the point where people could acclaim last year's *You Cannot Kill What Does Not Live* as the *Pulp Fiction* soundtrack you have when you're not having the *Pulp Fiction* soundtrack. Reworkings of 60s music abound in New Zealand as else-

King Loser are hot for Summer. *Pavement* told me. So important was the occasion that the now three-year-old magazine sent one of its better writers to sit in a Vulcan Lane cafe and listen to Chris Heazlewood and Celia Mancini complain about The Media and protest their integrity. Mancini told the public: "I'm happily married and live in Port Chalmers with a cat and I like reading, cooking and sewing."

King Loser are, however, in no danger of safety. The last few times I've seen them they've been quite chaotic: equipment often malfunctions, and Heazlewood, Mancini, Sean O'Reilly and Tribal Thunder, the artist formerly known as Lance Strickland, sometimes function quite bionically. That a band who have played in strip clubs should now assert their rectitude in a magazine that's the print analogue of a strip club moved from Fort Street to High Street is not without its neat irony. Which is itself an irony of ironies: King Loser may want to be "just a rock band," as Heazlewood puts it, but one of the reasons for their cachet is their perceived role as ironists, carnivalising retro where others simply replicate it.

It's the relationship between irony and retro that I want to look

where, but there's quite a variety among them. However derivative you may think Garageland are, they're borrowing from 60s music to make contemporary pop songs. Then there's Flying Nun's Abba covers album, an embarrassment cast as knowing, ironic, and therefore legitimate. King Loser are much more complex, and in their recent work they raise the issue of the hazy borderline between parody and pastiche. They engage with the conditions of postmodernity.

Rock music has always posed problems for anyone trying to relate it to postmodernity, for the simple reason that the genre begins well after the heyday of modernism. Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* tentatively suggests that punk and 'new wave' rock (who coined that term?) might be seen as a 'moment' of postmodernism; "the Beatles and the Stones now standing as the high-modernist moment of that more recent and rapidly evolving tradition" (i.e. rock music).

That kind of working assumption, however, creates a host of problems. For one thing, the problem with punk as a turning point is that it's not something that can be periodised according to the career of the Sex Pistols; it goes back further, overlapping with so-called 'modernist' kinds of rock. And if you're going to intellectualise punk, its associations with futility and rage have more than a little in common with modernist Angst (in the sense of a dreadful emptiness, not the teenage-bedroom sense). Another temptation is to regard the sometime avant garde as postmodern; doing so runs the risk of making 'postmodern' mean 'more modern than modern'. Only in that skewed sense could you call a band like Sonic Youth postmodern.

But while delineating the course of postmodernity in rock music poses problems, and while many aspects of rock do not appear postmodern, it's nevertheless quite easy to identify recent music that appears to exhibit postmodern tendencies: recycling bits of 'classic' songs, hamming up the retro, and the by-now-overpopulated 'novelty covers' genre that probably began in earnest with Hiisker Du's cover of the *Mary Tyler Moore Show* theme and the Jesus and Mary Chain's versions of "Surf City" and "Surfin' USA." The Mary Chain's surf songs had a vicious, albeit blatant, irony about them, coming as they did wrapped in white buzzing guitar and flat slum-dweller vocals. They were parodies, acts of love and hate, sleeping with the enemy. Pastiche, on the other hand lacks that duplicity. It is, in Jameson's words, "without any of parody's ulterior motives, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs."

What about King Loser, or *Abbasolutely!* In the case of the latter, the mere rationale and popular appeal of the concept undercuts any parody. The songs remain essentially Abba songs. Bent, ventriloquised, and with eleven secret herbs and spices added, yes, but still Abba songs rather than something new. As such they're typical of 'novelty covers': superficially ironic but essentially celebratory, lacking the love-hate relationship of real parody. They are acts of necrophilia rather than reincarnation.

King Loser are harder to pin down. A lot of their recent work is outright pastiche of 60s Americana. But at other times they

Parodies are acts of love and hate, sleeping with the enemy. Pastiche, on the other hand lacks that duplicity

combine these borrowings with Flying Nun routines which, I suppose, almost count as retro themselves. "Broken Man" on *You Cannot Kill What Does Not Live*, for instance, merges a folk-ish song about a 'man alone' with persistent 60s organ which occasionally breaks into phrases of TV incidental music. Not parody, but a clever appropriation of two pasts, making them new. As for their surf-and-Sinatra stuff, it's not postmodern in the sense of creating simulacra, a history-effect rather than history, but it does tend toward the unironic pastiche. If this is irony, it's less a subversive force than an in-group identifier. As Linda Hutcheon comments in her book *Irony's Edge*, "There would seem to exist some discursive communities...in which using and attributing irony seem to play a role in proving communicative competence." I am reminded of a Deborah Wilton poem in which the dead-pan, 'knowing' teenage narrator relates the tale of a boy who had to be committed after smashing the Beach Boys records being played at a party because "he didn't realise that the Beach Boys were being played 'ironically'."

Moreover, in their choice of 60s 'noble trash' as their main raw material, King Loser are a little comfortable. 60s music and material kitsch are ubiquitous these days; there's nothing mildly outrageous about them now. As such, the incorporation of them into art or rock music generates no 'estrangement', no parodic reexamination. A point Anna Miles made in *monica's* first outing struck me: if the appropriation of trash in art is critical and self-aware, why restrict yourself to the trash of the safely distant past? Why not, apart from legal reasons, appropriate contemporary schlock like Anne Geddes's photographs? For the same reason, why Lee and Nancy? They sang good songs, they had presence; replicating them doesn't upset anything. Why not attempt to appropriate, say, Bryan Adams? By that I don't mean just shitting on him from a great height with a cover, as the Revolting Cocks did with Rod Stewart. I mean borrowing his riffs, his structures, his lyrics, his attitudes, and twisting them round on themselves. If in doing that you came up with something arresting as well as just repugnant, then you'd have a statue with eyes that'd follow you.

All this, of course, assumes that rock music is supposed to be new and disconcerting, that a rock band can be more than "just a rock band." But isn't it possible that rock music is indeed escapism, that its power derives, as Christopher Lasch said of sport, from its "glorious pointlessness"? I can accept that. But not all the time, ffi

New Works

Sam Ireland

Out of the Blue Studios, Auckland

27th October - 9th November, 1996

DRAWING FOR FORM

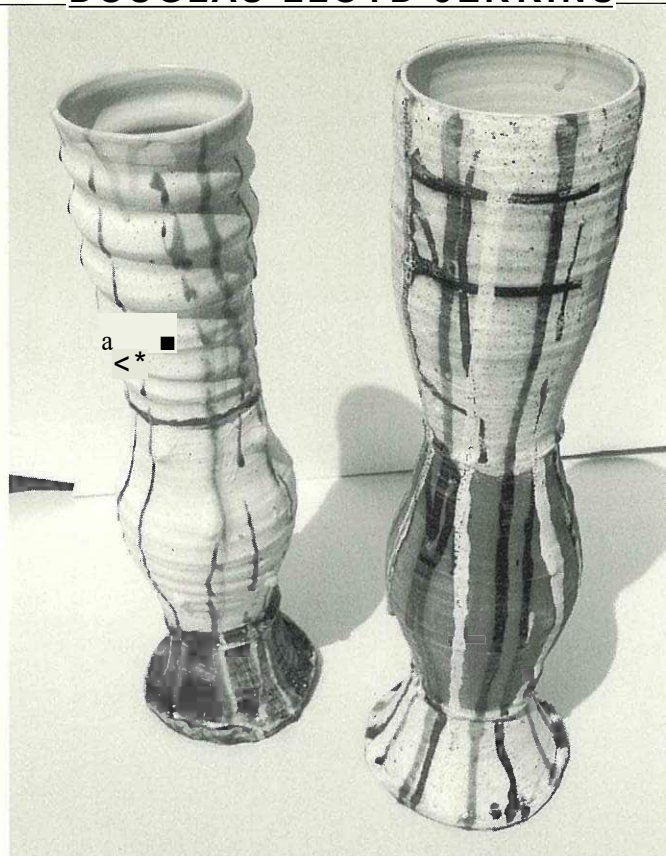
It is easy to believe the claim that craft in New Zealand is stuck in a time warp dominated by old hippies and hobbyists when top level craft in New Zealand is so hard to see. Throughout New Zealand, there is not one professionally run craft gallery. Instead craftspeople can only aspire to exhibit in shops with quasi-gallery space. Therefore the newest work by Sam Ireland, one of Auckland's top young potters, is not to be seen in a gallery but in the front window of an inner city shop.

Ireland throws tall cylindrical vases of an extraordinarily restrained sensibility. Exhibiting experimental matt finishes and an ultra subdued colour palette, these works are at once both crude and immediate, complex and assured. What makes these works particularly refreshing is that while they are of considerable size they avoid the machismo that has dominated much local ceramics. In doing so Ireland opens up new and fertile territory.

The form of Ireland's new works is a type of ceramic assemblage combining the organic and constructivist approaches to ceramics and recalling the Surrealists' exquisite corpse. Three cylindrical forms sharing a collar of a common diameter are worked individually and then assembled into a vase. A finished vase contains any number of independently finished sections, each in dialogue with the other. While this could easily result in a dislocated form, each shape is connected through colour and decoration.

The exhibition is a significant one for Ireland. Earlier works have shown great promise and potential, but the role of decoration in those works was unclear. Ireland clearly draws and draws well. Graphically motivated potters are a rarity in New Zealand ceramics, yet in his earlier work there was a lack of connection between form and decoration. This risked the decoration becoming essentially meaningless. In these new works, Ireland is drawing for the form and decoration earns its place emphasising, parodying, expanding and connecting the formal language of each segment of a vase. Because form and decoration are working together, this dialogue unites the finished work. Ireland is clearly a thinking potter.

The emphasis on the vase — although the potter admits to only "a vase phase" — enforces the belief that when it comes to clay the sculptural is more interesting than sculpture. There are those who will point to Ireland's leaning vases and occasionally permeable forms as a failure of functional intent. This delicacy, or instability, of form is an increasingly visible characteristic of ceramics headed for the domestic environment. Gone is the solid, often stolid non-breakability of 'traditional' pottery. Instead,



Sam Ireland, Vases 1996. Photo courtesy Douglas Lloyd-Jenkins

Ireland's works become part of a more delicate and considered domestic ballet centred around the role of ceramics in the home. One is directed by the maker to take care of the objects. They will not tolerate abuse but will reward careful and intelligent use.

Out of the Blue Studios in Kingsland works hard for ceramics. During *The Fletcher* they handed over their window as a salon des refusés for the talented. This exhibition by Ireland is a strong follow up. Despite this, there is something uneasy in the relationship between stock and invited exhibitor. A viewing audience has little choice but to take in so much post-Memphis foppery while viewing Ireland's works. This inability by the craftsman to have their conceptual ideas seen in isolation in an exhibition space impacts strongly on how audiences perceive quality craft.

Herbert Read once suggested that you can judge the art of a country by the quality of its pottery. If so this exhibition indicates that our art is extremely healthy — but that the system by which we view it is increasingly dysfunctional. How strong would contemporary New Zealand painting look exhibited amongst tie-dyed scarves and leather sandals? In a more mature art climate Ireland's work would be viewed as part of the wider dealer gallery network. Here a top potter would round out a stable of painters and sculptors et al, to the benefit of the gallery and their public. While we await the emergence of such maturity, much time will be spent tracking the radar blip of good craft on its transient and fleeting appearance in bolt holes around the country, ffl

CAN ANY GOOD THING COME OUT OF HAMILTON?

For most New Zealanders, the Hub of the Waikato is several kilometres of garish signage interrupting an otherwise pleasant drive. With the exception of the Waikato Museum of Art and History, its public buildings range from dull to appalling. And though the WMAH is a moderately impressive facility, the city council recently decided to strip it of its senior curators and reduce the number of exhibitions from thirty-plus to twelve a year. According to the new management plan, the remaining handful of shows are not to be 'elitist,' while Hamilton's premier art treasure, the Chartwell Collection, comprising 400 works by prominent Australasian artists, will shift to Auckland.

That's the kind of thing that happens here. Although the cow-town has mushroomed into a substantial city, it suffers a relentless artistic brain-drain to Auckland and Wellington: only a few alternative performance groups, and the McGillicuddies, remain.

Against the odds, however, Hamilton is emerging as a national leader in one public art-form. Over the past five years the Hamilton Gardens have been the site of a spectacular initiative. While public gardens elsewhere function mainly as botanical showcases, here the history and artistic function of the garden are invoked on an ambitious scale.

The Paradise Gardens are examples of ideal gardens from various cultures and periods. The Chinese Scholar's Garden, Japanese Garden of Contemplation and English Flower Garden are complete, while work has begun on the American Modernist Garden, and the Italian Renaissance Garden and Islamic Garden will follow.

The Chinese garden is superb. Entering through a gateway guarded by marble lions, a curving path leads to a courtyard paved with an elaborate pattern of quatrefoils. Inside, the path passes through a sequence of discrete spaces to give the impression of an extensive journey. A jasmine arbor leads to a further gateway which opens onto the shore of a large pond; water-lilies float there, and a bridge zig-zags across its further side.

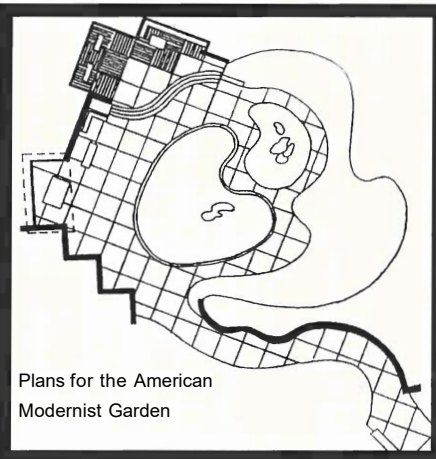
The path follows the wistaria bridge to the far shore, and turns into a dense grove of bamboo. A heap of stones with a little space beneath, titled the "Grotto of Contemplation," is the only false note. Through the bamboo grove, we reach an orange-roofed pavilion with a view across the Waikato River.

The Japanese Garden of Contemplation is more static than the Chinese: visitors enter a large, splendidly roofed pavilion from which they can view, on one side, a Zen garden of raked gravel and boulders beyond a trench full of shrubs; on the other side a large pond with islands and banks studded with mosses.

The English Flower Garden is refreshingly low-key. It is based on a design by the New Georgian gardener Gertrude Jekyll,

involving two enclosed courtyards of thematic beds of flowers and herbs, and a lawn with lily pond and a raised stone pavilion.

These three gardens' meticulous attempt to translate the viewer to another place and time stands in curious tension with the piecemeal development of the rest of Hamilton Gardens. As well as the traditional Rogers Rose Garden, the hothouses, the rhododendrons and azaleas — the gardens are dotted with fitful, half-baked symbolism: the bright blue, pointy-arched Suffrage Pavilion with its background of bricks in a tukutuku pattern; the



Plans for the American Modernist Garden

sculpture composed of concrete pipe sections painted black and white to "express an abstract conception of the ancient & modern civilisations of the South Americas;" the "Place of Peace" near the cemetery (a spiral of concrete paving-stones buried in long grass); the

"Goldfish Terrace" commemorating Dorothy C. Blomfield MBE JP 1895-1984: "She served Hamilton."

Even the Paradise Gardens development is infiltrated by dodgy moments. The approach passes through an inexplicable Italian piazza, its brick arches freshly backed in good old NZ concrete; while the central court of the Paradise Gardens contains two statues of ancient Egyptian gods. These caused a fuss among local fundamentalist Christians, but a greater problem is the vagueness of their *raison d'être*.

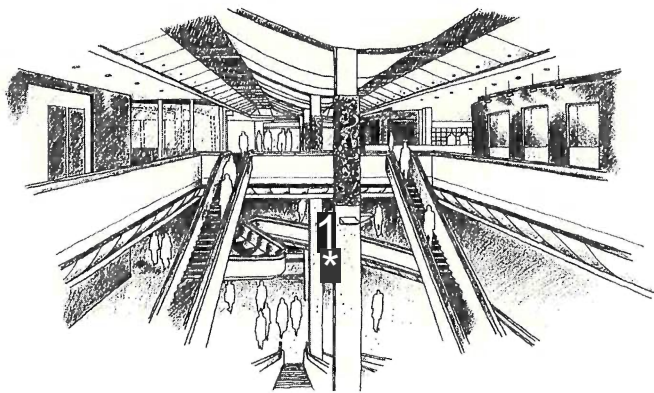
The Paradise Gardens themselves have so far avoided such vague gestures, thanks to their precisely defined project: the faithful reproduction of historical moments. The American Modernist garden will, unfortunately, be more open to interpretation; a danger signal is the fundraising brochure's confidence about what modernism is. This garden seems likely to liberate the banal Hamilton demon, in the form of a large poolside mural of Marilyn Monroe.

In the paradise gardens scheme Peter Sergei has found a weak point in Hamilton's defenses against art. Hamiltonians are keen gardeners, and imitating someone else's garden makes sense to them. The lavish equipment of the paradise gardens was assisted by community fundraising, while the gardens have been rated very highly by Hamilton residents; the average number of annual visits was an improbable fifteen.

A good thing has, after all, come out of Hamilton, and we may even appreciate the projected Monroe mural, the piazza, the Egyptian statues, as evidence of the powerful forces ranged against such a development. EH

KAI JENSEN

summer 1997 27



Points of Contact

Alvar Aalto: Points of Contact

Auckland Art Gallery

30 August - 13 October, 1996

Most present at the *Points of Contact* opening night were architects, always an indication of poor attendance levels to follow. The black and white photographs of the architecture which constituted the body of the show can be praised as spare, but tended to reinforce stereotypical impressions of modernism as a dry period piece. On the other hand, the presence of Aalto's furniture and fittings allowed one to engage with his work in more sensuous and colourful ways.

The night was notable for the collective burst of laughter raised during Les Mills' speech when he linked Aalto's architecture to the Aotea Centre. The comment displayed Mills' characteristic lack of discretion and came across as a pot shot at a captive audience delivered by a mayor harangued over the Britomart development. Yet *Points of Contact* does represent a suitable moment to consider connections between the Finnish architect and New Zealand's understanding of him. Currently many Aalto-esque buildings in and around the city are being altered after standing untouched through several unruly booms.

The Parnell Pools (1954-57) bask in the sun. They are the emblem of a city that could have happily built up to its waterfront but instead retreated irrevocably behind a wall of commercial interests. Engaging to the passing motorist and bather alike, they represent modernism at its best — egalitarian, public and playful. After recent increases in usage, the council has made the decision to upgrade the buildings. The commission was received by Chow Hill Architects. According to architect Maurice Kylie, the aim is for a "low cost, low profile" job consisting of "making good [the existing building] rather than adding new design elements." The architects have no intention of touching the mural, a collaboration between City Architect Tibor Donner and artist John Turkington. The probability is that other, separate buildings will be erected, but beyond this point, Kylie was not willing to elaborate until the proposal is put by a working party to the council.

The work of Andrew Patterson Co. Partners on the Ellen

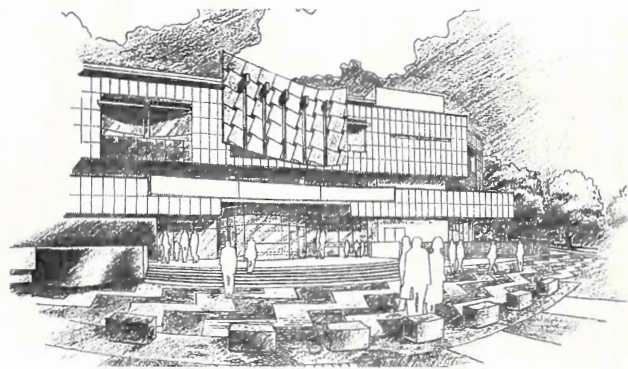
Melville Hall (1963) should be cause for considerable agitation. Designed by Donner, the building held many delightful biomorphic moments — such as the curving plywood ceiling lifted almost entirely from Aalto's Viipuri Library (1928).

However, Patterson's alterations have given the public a glossy and generic rehash of late 50s architecture. The architects have appeared unsure whether to respect the original structure or intervene decisively and as a result the whole efforts reads as ad hoc and clumsy. They have repeated formal cliches of the original building rather than investigate its material subtleties. The new public space is arid and its complicated ground patterns derived from a Mrkusich painting do not read as envisaged in plan. Little is provided in the way of public seating other than around the periphery. Most of this is oriented with its back to the passing foot traffic which is psychologically uncomfortable and denies the pleasure of people watching. Landscape architecture is still believed to require no more than designating planting and paving types, when historically, its role has encompassed the consideration of pedestrian movement, placemaking and civic enhancement.

If High Street is enjoyed as a small stretch of continental urbanity, then Peter Beaven's Canterbury Arcade building is the best bit of streetscape on it. The collage construction is indebted to Aalto's critique of modernism's insistent use of a narrow range of materials. It vibrantly reworks elements of 'Christchurch School' (Warren and Mahoney white concrete block) architecture, producing a deeply modulated facade. David Mitchell rightly compared it to a Milanese garret, while Peter Shaw suggested it had been lifted straight from Paris. In 1967, this level of historicism seemed brazen, yet compared to the international mood of architectural thinking it was remarkably contemporary.

When American Architect Robert Venturi published *Complexity and Contradiction* in 1966, most architects found themselves suddenly confused. Venturi attacked the reductivism

GILES REID



Artist's impressions of the Auckland Central Library renovations. Drawings courtesy Creative Spaces

of modernism as it had developed in the corporate expansion of post-war America. His call for an architecture that once again spoke to the 'man' on the street instigated a reevaluation of decoration as a formidable means of communication. But as Venturi argued, architects such as Aalto had always maintained that modernism's objective of rationalism never need be incompatible with embellishment and narrative. Rather rationalism should 'go deeper' and explore psychological and tactile possibilities.

Last year, the Canterbury Arcade was bought by Ladstone Holdings Ltd, who employed Lloyd Ellis Architects to refurbish the retail areas at the bottom and High Street levels, while leaving the upper floors untouched. In general, the alterations respect the feel of the arcade. The boldest move is by far the best. Here the glass roof over the light well at the bottom of the escalator has been lifted up one floor. By creating a single fire cell out of the lowest levels, much of the visually obtrusive Georgian wire glass has been able to be removed, most noticeably in the cafeteria area. Although currently run down, this space now has the potential to become once more a lively place to meet and catch strange views of the backsides of buildings with the occasional shafts of light coming through.

Of all the lessons that Beaven learnt from Aalto, the one he failed to understand here was rhythm. The repetition of the arcade's elements lacks interludes of calm, and despite most of Ellis' new detailing being a familiar mixture of Mitchell Stouts' New Gallery cum Sister shopfront minimalism, more areas of simplification were probably called for. The High Street entrance has been reworked and simplified to create a brighter space. The decision to paint over areas of the original tile work is a mistake and one asks, does every surface have to be white? Hopefully though the modifications to the Canterbury Arcade may counteract the current demise of the arcade along this street.

The Auckland Public Library circa 1970 is liked by archi-

ects for its sculptural form and diagrammatic simplicity. It is strongly derived from Aalto's contemporaneous late works but the copy is shell like; encrusted, but empty within. Designed when the avant garde of modernism had all but disintegrated, the big blank statement seemed a tenable holding position. Although the council architects (under Ewen Wainscott who was later to design the Aotea Centre) were engaged to provide a container for books, one questions just how literally this task was embraced to the exclusion of pleasurable reading spaces or any link with the city beyond.

Alterations to the library are being carried out by Creative Spaces Architects. The work will proceed in stages and opens up the facade to the city as well as punching an atrium through the building's centre. The aim is to provide a more active and festive space with greater visibility of the second floor which will become accessible to the public for the first time. This floor contains the New Zealand, Pacific and George Grey collections plus a dedicated space to the Ngati Whatua. The room is to be cantilevered out over the entrance and New Zealand stones were intended to be laid to a curve in a basket weave pattern.

The big new windows fit into the building's existing framework and are well proportioned, although the detailing is annoyingly transient. The reasoning behind the screen is simplistic. From the perspectives it looked both aggressive and weak. It could have been partially redeemed by the quality of its execution. However, its crude reality is shocking. The architects have defaced Wainscott's beautiful wall. Their disregard for values in the work of their predecessors has no justification.

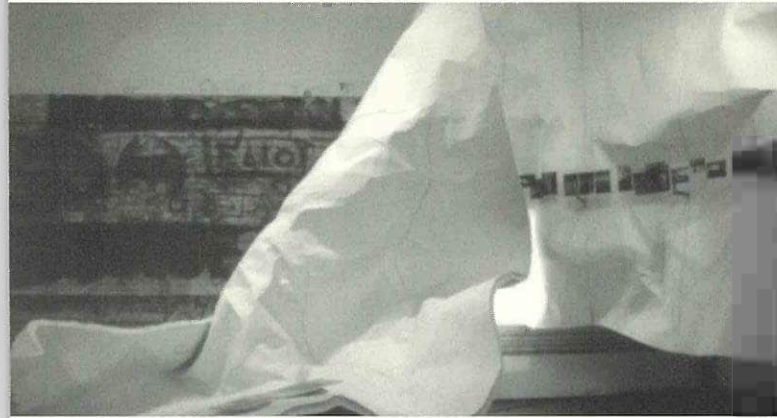
In the midst of perpetual yet superficial change in Auckland, modernist buildings are likely to suffer worse than others. They remain largely unloved by the public or council and often unappreciated by architects, many educated in a time of reaction to them. Ironically it is at the moment that these buildings are receiving belated recognition that they have become most endangered. EB

The NZ Milan Triennale Entry

Auckland Art Gallery

16 August - 29 September,

1996



Left: New Zealand's contribution to the Milan Triennale (detail). Photo Glenn Watt

Below: The crushed paper under construction. Photo Andrew Barrie

Italian children visiting the *Milan Triennale* loved the New Zealand installation, they scribbled all over it and the carefully primed wall of burnt ivory stringlines became a luscious panel of thick, velvety, greasy graffiti.

Auckland University School of Architecture represented New Zealand at the *Triennale* between March and May of this year. The theme *Identity and difference* was subtitled *Integration and plurality in the forms of our time: Cultures between the ephemeral and the lasting*. Twenty eight countries were invited to design an installation for a particular space temporarily constructed within the Palazzo dell'Arte. Gently curved like a segment of a wheel, the allocated space of the Auckland project was viewed as a site for the unfolding of a narrative moment in New Zealand architecture.

Four figures formed the beautifully constructed installation: a white crumpled piece of paper blown-up to assume architectural and geographical proportions; a horizon-line of photographic images of buildings pinned to this paper 'landscape'; a black 'adze' quartered into rhomboidal shapes which housed 150 models of recent domestic work along its blade edge; and a rectangular field of horizontal string-lines applied to an existing wall which was later transformed by daring fingers. As a group, these figures imaginarily defined and layered space as they danced around the periphery of an Italian room.

A Dali-esque dreamscape was created by the scrap of paper and adze vastly over-scaled in the context of the room and work displayed. As surreal tools they comprehensively drowned architecture, which assumed a minor and ornamental status in relation to their unnatural size. The four buildings submerged within the adze pressed against the surface of their sharpened prison like drowning faces rushing towards the surface of dark water. Interior space in these models was obliterated, unnaturally expanded or sectioned, creating cavities and weaknesses along the surface of the blade, but the buildings remained passive, dissected specimens.

The paper and adze hovered like alien markers or trigs in foreign territory and the buildings decorated their surfaces like cryptic hieroglyphics. The installation attempted to disqualify the primacy of built form as the necessary end of architecture and it mythologised a sense of anxiety as images and models of build-

ings struggled for breath in the rarefied air.

Most compelling, beautiful and grotesque of the figures was the vastly swollen slip of crushed and over-wrought paper hovering about twenty centimetres from the floor. Sixteen white

panels, two inches thick, blistered and peeled away from the inner wall of the Palazzo dell'Arte, elastically released from Classical origin and precedent.

The paper could have been a letter, sixteen sheets delivered battered and worn from a long journey; it might have been an incomplete drawing with only a few tentatively etched plans and elevations marring its surface; or an unnaturally empty landscape; but ultimately it was a wall. It had structure (albeit devilishly curved and invisibly studded) and skin seal, two layers of carefully massaged card, front and back, with a concave edge. But somehow, in the sealing up of the interior, meaning folded over on itself. What was 'paper,' ephemeral and delicate, metamorphosed into building in spite of all attempts to disguise three dimensions in two.

The failure of the paper wall to remain two-dimensional related to the bland stone-like homogeneity of its surfaces. The hermetic seal created by the concave edge topped of the pretence that the timber frame did not exist. Maybe the framing was buried for providence, an architectural time capsule not to be opened for a thousand years? But it was this secret framing which could have been interpreted as lines of a drawing or the words of a letter inside their paper envelope. In the process of fabrication 'building' as a language re-asserted its predominance and drawing and writing were transferred from the scene. If the edge had not been filled, the 'wall' could have been an almost opened letter, the end-points of the framing creeping out and whispering of the crimes and desires in its whip-lash construction. But unscathed by travel, rubbed free of Italian fingerprints and with all evidence of drawing and writing concealed, the clean-bone pure surface of this paper 'landscape' left a perplexing sensation of emptiness when the installation returned to the New Gallery in August, ffl

HIGH STREET GENDER BENDER:

An Inner City Auckland Report

Auckland's Freyberg Place, that ambiguous urban space where four tangential streets engaged awkwardly with High Street and frequently ground inner city traffic to a halt, has undergone 'upgrading' in Council parlance — meaning it has been domesticated by a Local Authority logic of maximum site densification, traffic segregation and the assertion of landscape values over urban qualities. It has become a 'people place.'

Andrew Patterson Architects have separated the streets with a walled 'pedestrian precinct' which attempts to create a plaza oriented to Tibor Donner's 1963 Pioneer Women's Memorial Hall but reads more as residual space between blocks, and is so large and complex that it unfortunately usurps the street and promenade as a place of social representation and bleeds the crowded footpath of life. This plaza is a munching place for lunchers with the aesthetics of a playground — long lines of seats with backs to the street, penned-in lunchers who gaze at an introduced "water feature and rock scree." Stage-like in location, artificial in its lack of relation to the ancient earth mound behind, this feature claims to serve as a reminder of Auckland's volcanic geology, but is more reminiscent of a bleak sub-alpine scene in its sheer, fractured form; slatey stone and coursing white water.

There has recently been a certain gender tension in Freyberg Place's structures, with the Ellen Melville/Pioneer Women's Hall to the north under the gaze of Anthony Stone's gloomy, introspective bronze of General Freyberg (1976) to the south. The boys seem now to have gained the upper hand, with the deployment of military grey shellcase-like bollards that cordon pavement with soldierly regularity, streetlights like parachutes or helmets sprouting (spoor of the Sky Tower?), from desert coloured paving, and seats of industrial mesh. Combined with the battered sandstone walls and buff bunkers of the plaza this place seems more evocative of a Normandy beachhead than Freyberg's desert theatre. There are Classical and Renaissance examples of public squares sporting the spoils and symbols of victory in war but one has to ask if this desert ambience, and an urban design strategy seemingly derived from Checkpoint Charlie, are appropriate here.

The Pioneer Women's Memorial Hall has had more than a 'facelift' — it has lost its pink cladding, been dressed in a skirt of awnings and the blue blazer of city corporate identity and been fattened up in floor area with the addition of a bar rather unfortunately called Baritone. The addition is well handled, picking up the form of an existing wing and replicating that in two modules, but is rather abrupt in the way it opens onto a severe semi-circular walled courtyard. The space under the main hall's pilotis has

been stuffed with a glass walled restaurant so the building now appears to squat on an orthogonal egg in a nest of awnings and pot plants. The original biomorphically formed pool and garden under the building have been removed and James Bowie's organic kauri sculpture has been moved indoors, parked under the stairs amongst news clippings, although his door handles remain. The architects have preferred to adopt an ersatz geometric 50s style, particularly in a linear, abstract paving pattern "reminiscent of an artwork by pioneer artist Milan Mrkusich." This is disappointing given the richness of art historical references surrounding the building. The 1957 "Freyberg Place; High Street Rediscovered" plan, in which an embryonic Pioneer Women's Memorial Hall first appeared, also proposed an enormous Michael Nicholson mural and a Molly Macallister *Reclining Female Figure*. The 'Mrkusich pattern' reads well in plan but from street level dwindles, competing with road paint, taking on the character of game court markings. The plan-based approach of Andrew Patterson Architects neglects more humanistic attitudes towards creating a space dedicated to "pleasence (sic) values". For a 'people place' this plaza will be blinding in summer due to light coloured paving and few trees — a lone punnetted cabbage tree is now the object of Freyberg's contemplation. It seems strange that this statue alone remains untouched in location or orientation.

In the end this scheme seems overdone. Although the paving is a relief from the city's endless amorphous asphalt skin, one wishes for less urban design and more confidence in the qualities of the existing urban scene. It loses the interplay of the street, cementing a more formal hierarchy. Rather than city square, node of urban activity, Freyberg Place brings the values of landscape and mall to town. As such, it should prove very popular, ffi

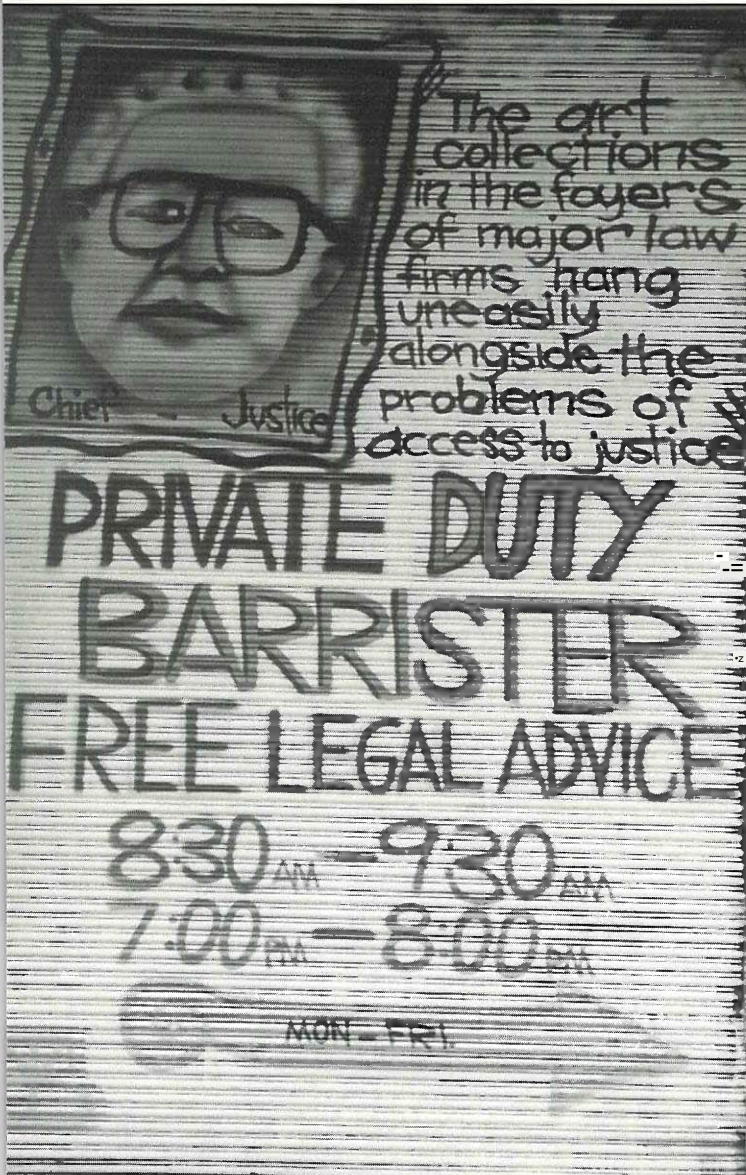


Freyberg Place, Photo Bill McKay

BILL MCKAY

SPRAY

PORTRAIT



Patrick Senior's Kingston Street portrait of Chief Justice, Sir Thomas Eichelbaum. Photo Sheri Roberts

ANNA MILES

32 monica

Patrick Senior's spray portrait of Chief Justice, Sir Thomas Eichelbaum, was the only image in town this year to rival the Vegas Girl for controversy. While the Vegas Girl remains on 'Vegas Time' on Karangahape Road, Senior's Kingston Street garage portrait of the Chief Justice was removed only days after going up. It was the fourth of seven punishment works Senior was sentenced to after being convicted of tagging earlier this year, and its notoriety derived largely from the way it was read as an advertisement for the services of Senior's defendant, the barrister Christopher Harder. Senior's rendering of powdery wig, gilt frame and safety-style glasses on roller door was striking, but it was the inclusion of a quote from the Chief Justice that ensured the power of his portrait and its subsequent demise: "The art collections in the foyers of major law firms sit uneasily alongside the problems of access to justice."

The Chief Justice has apparently seen a photograph of his portrait and, according to Christopher Harder, his secretary reported he laughed at it as he hadn't for some time. Sir Thomas appeared unconcerned that he had become the face of Harder's free legal advice service overnight. Pressure for the removal of the portrait came instead from the Auckland District Law Society. Executive Director Margaret Wong invited Harder to remove the work, saying it was misleading and the use of the phrase "Duty Barrister" meant the public was likely to confuse his service with the duty solicitor scheme administered by the Society and provided free of charge by its members. In a statement to the media, Wong went further: "The painting on the garage door may be of artistic merit in its limited field. It is not an appropriate method of advertising legal services." The merits of the Vegas Girl in contrast have been expounded by artists, academics and Jonathan Wiles, the lawyer acting for her owners, who has described her as "a crouching tigress."

Senior's advertisement was conveniently positioned. Next door are Harder and Shane Morris's Kingston Street Legal Chambers and opposite is the entrance to the Auckland District Court, a facade memorable for its own ubiquitous style of judicial art, in this case a stained glass interpretation of tukutuku panels. Kingston Street is an interesting part of town: to one side of the garage door is Serville's Academy of Hairdressing; on the other the El Jay building, decorated by elaborate concrete cartouches saying "Manufacturers under license of Christian Dior Pret-A-Porter"; beyond this is the Telecom Tower.

Senior's garage portrait was labelled "Chief-Justice." Framed in spray-on gilt it hung next to Sir Thomas' highly quotable

Australia Institute of Judicial Administration speech extract that had appeared in the papers only days earlier. The quote sat beside a depiction of exactly what art collections in many law firms have displaced: mugshots. Portraits of partners have probably been as inevitable in law offices as White's aviation photographs, which Peter Shaw describes as the regular decor of mid-century head offices throughout New Zealand.

If the tradition of legal portraiture is not the presence it once was in the foyers of major firms, it persists in the High Court in Wellington. It was here in 1991, that Sir Thomas spoke at a small ceremony to unveil posthumous portraits of the first two Chief Justices of New Zealand painted by the Canterbury artist Bill Sutton. These two portraits were the missing link in the collection that had until then only included the subsequent eight Chief Justices. At the ceremony, Sir Thomas applauded this contribution to the preservation of the traditions of the legal system. Four out of the ten Chief Justices have now been painted by Sutton. Sir Thomas said Sutton had worked from written material as well as photos, "so as to form that image of the subject which I understand portrait artists regard as essential to their work."

Harder supplied Patrick Senior with a photo of Sir Thomas and the quote. "I was the idea, he was the art" he told me. Presumably both Harder and the Auckland District Law Society were aware that Sir Thomas' use of "art collections" could be read as shorthand for corporate excess. In the garage portrait, Harder had the Chief Justice endorsing his "free legal advice," and by including the "art collections" quote he implied he was the only lawyer in town addressing "problems of access to justice". Recently Harder told me "In hindsight it wasn't that fair, lots of lawyers do pro bono work." "Art collections" were not the issue, but there is no doubt Harder got a particular kick out of Sir Thomas' euphemistic reference to them. Harder's chambers are decorated by an aquarium, newspaper headlines and laminated blow-up photocopies of *Time* magazine's coverage of the OJ Simpson trial.

In *The NBR* of October 11, John Daly-Peoples was the first art writer to contest Sir Thomas' remarks in an article primarily concerned with law firm Buddle Findlay's Art Award. The misguided argument mainly served to indicate that a commerce angle is what makes art newsworthy in *The NBR*. Daly-Peoples defended art in law firms as "something dynamic in what are often bleak interiors." Harder's interior is dynamic although not in the style of a major Queen Street firm. I asked him why he has hung OJ Simpson images on his office walls. Having received all the advertising he could hope for since *The Herald* published the full colour picture of Senior's portrait, Harder was not about to try and define his surroundings in holistic terms. He just said they were from the trial when he had CNN running so people could watch it.

Interviewed by Daly-Peoples, Buddle Findlay senior partner Roger Craddock responded most literally to Sir Thomas' remarks. "At Buddle Findlay we are conscious that visiting a firm of lawyers can be a daunting experience. The display of art in reception areas is designed to make the experience a more

Sir Thomas appeared unconcerned that he had become the face of Harder's free legal advice service overnight

welcoming one." Buddle Findlay's collection is not the legal fraternity's most valuable or extensive, but unusual for its concentration on emergent artists, and Craddock seized the PR opportunity the Chief Justice had created for the firm's Art Award. Perhaps even Education Minister Wyatt Creech had been reading the Chief Justice's comments, for within days he was on the warpath: "Victoria University can't plead poverty when it owns a valuable art collection." Unfortunately what these stories demonstrate is something Harder could have told me. The ideas of civility the arts typically resort to in self-defence are not up to this kind of market-driven attack.

The next line of the Chief Justice's speech that followed his much quoted "art collections" remark was: "The increasingly strident cries of the well-heeled sector of the community, pressuring Government and the judiciary as to the particular brand of justice they seek, are not a pretty sound either." This led the editor of the *New Zealand Law Journal* to respond "The Chief Justice was not making or tackling any argument. He was simply insulting people for having their say." Lawyers are free to advertise their services, and campaigns far less witty than Senior's ad for Harder have resulted. Law firm Phillips Fox takes its name from the family that produced one of Australia's greatest impressionists, Emanuel Phillips Fox, but when it ran a brand awareness campaign in Auckland, the billboards read "The Queen's husband and an All Black" and "a lightbulb and Basil Brush." More recently legal aid advertising has reached new heights of visibility, thanks to the Legal Services Board's "Here to help you with the law" television campaign.

The story of Senior's garage portrait reveals a number of dismissive attitudes to art, but they do not emanate solely from the legal players. The contemporary art world's uncertain response to graffiti parallels any hesitation about art on the part of the legal fraternity. After rejecting a graffiti show proposal several times, the Artspace Board recently relented. The result is *Represent*. What the Board was hesitant about, the media is hungry for and the show has been a publicity frenzy. The *Harbour News* front page headline read "But is it Art?" This is a stock media response to contemporary art. Disturbingly, it is also what institutions which formerly championed art have internalised in their drive to satisfy the customer. "But is it Art?" is the subtitle of *Parade*, the showcase art exhibition planned for the Museum of New Zealand's opening day. Now that the museum establishment shows signs of appropriating this reactionary speak, it is time for the media to lift its game, ffl

CLASSIFIED STYLE

As an academic, you get used to nerdy chic. More than used to: there is, of

course, something disingenuous about the emphasis on the dowdy, the frumpy, the preternaturally shabby. The straggling strands of hair pulled across the bald spot and the leather elbow patches may give the look of someone too unworldly to know the first thing about what's in and what's out, but, as Stanley Fish insists in his essay "The Unbearable Ugliness of Volvos," that's just the point. For Fish and many other linguists besides, all language, including nonverbal forms, is rhetorical; the corporeal and sartorial vernacular of the academic is adopted to signal certain ideological commitments, and as such operates as a sumptuary code no less than the eighties power dresser's gridiron-influenced battle dress.

The institutionalised power structures of the academy set themselves apart from each other, supposedly more rigid and conservative, and less self-reflexive, institutions by their players' carnivalesque adoption of the jester's garb, the rags of the fool, the clown's engagement with the bizarre. The bad dress sense of the scholar claims a special type of authority and legitimation for the academic project. Like the aestheticists and other protoromantics, there seems to be a self-legitimising insistence on divorcing the cerebral and the creative from the praxis of life. We may theorise about and analyse fashion, but like true objectivists, we will deny anything but a tangential engagement with it. In this way do grey zip-up shoes and beige polycotton slacks authenticate our cultural commentaries.

In a similar way, the artless style of the classifieds only papers — represented in these parts by *Trade and Exchange* — announces an antithetical relationship to the glossy pictorial print ad of the glamour mag. The hammy design and layout of *Tb/E*'s free ad columns suggests a world of inconspicuous consumption. The layout which manages to be at once minimalist and crowded points to a marketplace of necessities in which the rhetoric of status and desirability apparently have no representation. Even the highlighter and deluxe options are formalised to the point that they are as likely to draw attention to the non-highlighted ads, depending on how many 'highlights' are present. This is a marketplace proclaiming its own transparency. Such mystery as is to be found comes from the one flirtation *Tb/E* has with the pictorial; typically as a colour snap of the item for sale (including plenty of other foreground detail) is provided for scanning in, reducing to one column's width, and printing in ultra-low resolution black and white. The results can be quite cryptic.

But, of course, the claim to transparency, as Fish would insist, is linguistically naive. Geoffrey Braithwaite, hero of Julian Barnes' *Flaubert's Parrot* makes his point when considering perhaps the most terse form of autobiography, the personal column ad, when he observes: "I always read those pinning paragraphs on the back of magazines, though I never feel like replying; and I've just realised why. Because I don't

153 INTERNATIONAL SALE & SWAP

A Croatian Him looking for wedding dresses and accessories elegant women clothes, elegant children clothes and white fabrics: crepe satin, lace, lull, chiton. Silk, taffeta. Fax: 00385 1899044

A high class bussines offices 125 +80 m2 in two objects with parking place near the customs office, hotel. Suitable for any kind of bussines. Kreso Cavar. D.Cesarica 35. 10000 Zagreb. Croatia

AGENTS wanted world wide: Ideal bussiness opportunity to sell African curios - selective market. Contact <http://www.upumu.co.za>, or Fax 0027-11-7941424. We also speak German, serious applicants only.

AMERICAN Auto Brokers seek buyers and brokers worldwide for all types of vehicles. We ship anywhere. Send for free brochure to AAB PO Box 908 Alameda, CA 94501 USA or Fax request to 001-51 0-704-9909

ANTIQU DEALERS/TRADERS WANTED. We can supply you with certified stock at good rates direct from England. Pls send your name, address & requirements on company letter headed paper to N. Williams on fax 0044 181 994 9795. No private callers please. UK.



Advertising from the *Trade and Exchange*. Photograph Anna Sanderson

believe any of them. They aren't lying — indeed, they're all trying to be utterly sincere — but they aren't telling the truth. The column distorts the way the advertisers describe themselves. No one would think of himself as an active non-smoker inclined to melancholy if that wasn't encouraged, even demanded by the form. Two conclusions: first, that you can't define yourself directly, just looking face-on into the mirror; and secondly, that Flaubert was as

always, right. Style does arise from subject matter. Try as they might, those advertisers are always beaten down by the form; they are forced — even at the one time they need to be candidly personal — into an unwished impersonality."

If the form demands certain infidelities of self definition, though, it also generates an awareness of other social indicators of which the advertiser may or may not be aware. Both the highly singular — "German millionaire, own castle, sks small, very dominant lady for reinship, poss marriage and fun times..." — and the highly repetitive — the current *Tb E* has over twenty-five ads for Russian women seeking marriage — say more about international social and economic dynamics, about the conditions from which advertising genres and sub-genres arise, than they do about the individual advertisers. The international columns in particular, seem to be indicators of some particularly obscure, even encoded, demographic information. Why, for instance has the agency which offered "complete [Albanian] labour force" who would do "wide variety of works for very reasonable rate, anywhere" stopped advertising? Did they all get jobs? Has Albania finally followed the New Zealand model of economic reform, effecting a turnaround almost as miraculous as our own and bringing wealth and happiness to all? Or is something more sinister at work?

Trade and Exchange is no less full of carefully encoded information about conditions of production than any other form of text. Its disavowal, through formal and structural features, of textual opacity, of indeterminism, and of rhetorical intent should merely serve to alert us, as should the enduring myth of academic disinterested cultural analysis, that that which is most concerned to draw attention away from its own implication in the discourse, is merely that which has the greatest interests to serve in doing so. ES

JAMES MEFFAN

TOXIC EMPATHY

Just in time for Christmas, a package to rival gift sets of ten *Penguin 60s*! As these svelte volumes are the only ones Teststrip have published to date, you miss out on the expensive thrill of purposely not choosing. But for the person who receives your loving gift, the pleasure of extracts is as intoxicating as ever. If all the literature a body needs can now be had in ultra-convenient slivers, *Micrographs* do the same thing for art, distilling its essence so that the consumer has total control over her intake. (And former wastrel artists become desperately efficient in the race to meet demand). It's clear that slimming down and gouging away are on Teststrip associates' minds. Mike Stevenson's comic hero *Super Stormy* purges the art world of multicultural, Jewish conspiracies, sparing Colin McCahon alone, and bringing back the kitsch New Zealand of Christopher Dean's

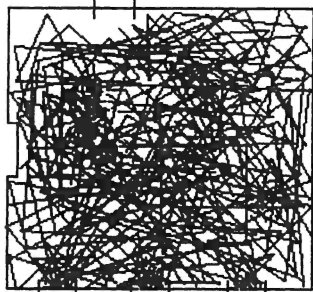
Dominion micrograph, themselves half-erased images in that they're so familiar as stereotypes it's hard to pay them individual attention.

Meanwhile Sophie Coombs offers neither text nor title, just black lines on white, and Michael Harrison's *Senseless Attractions* are mercilessly obscured by photocopying.

At the end of *Enter the Dragon*, Gwynneth Porter feels "small enough for someone to put in their pocket" (like a little card-covered book, obviously). Knowing that Y.V. and alcohol can erase years' worth of messy memory, she sets out to deflect invisible kicks and slaps with Feng Shui mirrors. Like Tessa Laird, whose first person persona bewails pariahdom in the city of Clever in vertiginously clever punning prose, she realises that real life is the dustbin of biography, not its raw material. When it's sufficiently reduced and exclusive, 'intimate' narrative becomes a sort of inhabitable Feng Shui mirror ball, within which daily existential squalor is securely concealed.

There's another mirror ball in Daniel Malone's *Notes on the Future of Vandalism, being a gnostical Unconscious*, which stretches the conceit of erasure further still. Here the mirror ball, the "lamp turned mirror/turned lamp again," is a cipher for "the eye turned into the sun," the ruin of vision in the camera's blinding flash. Reduction means cutting out middle-men between eye/I and a riotous crowd of objects which "perceive me!" Robert Morris is quoted as decrying the "sentimentalising historical awe" with which photography desecrates ruins' present tense potential. But that's so much nostalgia for a mythical time before nostalgia: photographic vandalism makes a present-tense ruin of the event of vision rather than of a merely spatial site.

The 'gnostical' bit of the title may be a cheap pun on 'optical,' but it can be taken seriously inasmuch as photography is



Top to bottom: *Untitled: the poetics of Modern Reverie* by Giovanni Intra; *Notes on the Future of Vandalism* being A Gnostical Unconscious by Daniel Malone; *Super Stormy, Our Great White Hope* by Mike Stevenson



Bad White Gnosticism, preached most famously by Greil Marcus, and flirted with by Giovanni Intra in *Untitled: the poetics of modern reverie*. This quietist cult has been with us ever since Carl Gustav Jung got his slimy hands on the *Nag Hammdi* codices and declared that "Gnosis is undoubtedly a psychological knowledge whose contents derive from the unconscious."

The individual dreams of liberation from time itself, from discontinuity, weakness, the event's singularity. This freedom is found in empathy, a personal identification with the past that makes history our playpen. Everyone can be an antipodean



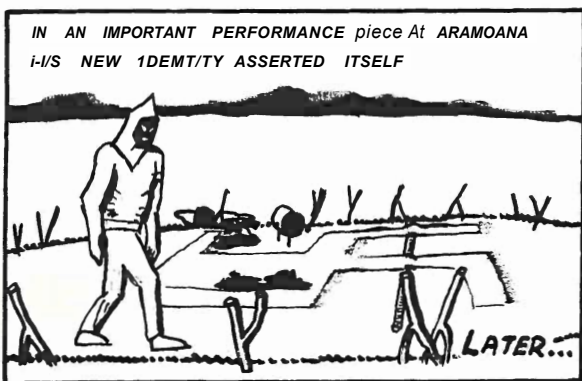
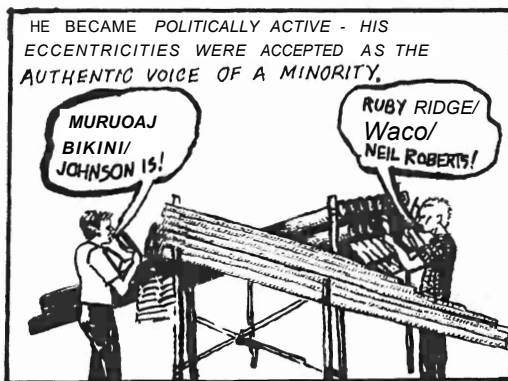
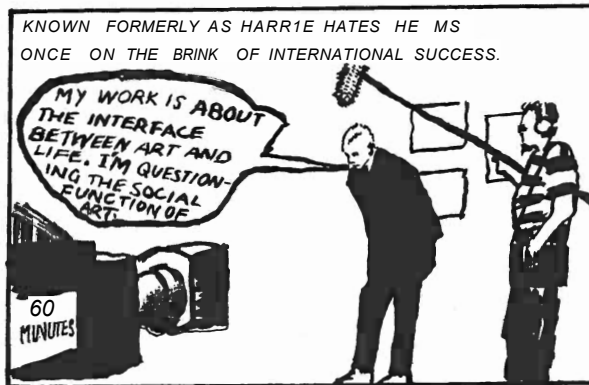
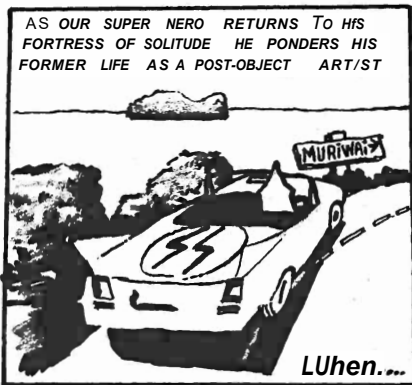
flaneur in the ageless centre of the universe: Paris is perpetual Dada and Situationism (and why not Punk Rock, existential jazz and vagrant poets?); any sap who documents his drug intake becomes Artaud in Mexico. World literature is there to be traversed at light speed in cute \$2 excerpts.

As will be clear to anyone who remembers the Waikato Museum's *Hangover* show ("these artists don't just refer to trash culture, they identify with it"), the schema of identification keeps subject and object poles apart. When, as in this vulgar-gnostic paradise, the subject lays claim to perfect rear-vision, history isn't interrupted but eliminated: things as they are are as they've always been.

With their breathless travelogues and cool concision, (at least some of) the *Teststrip Micrographs* try to spring an unlikely ambush on this whole dismal trend. Their desperate gambit is to inflict on the pseudo-gnostic attitude of *Lipstick Traces* and *Penguin 60s*, an 'identification' as destructive as the latter's toxic empathy, ffl

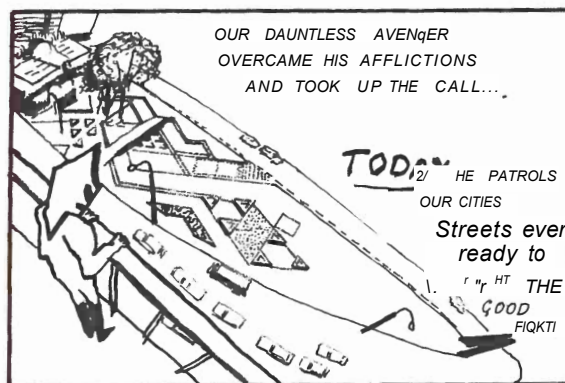
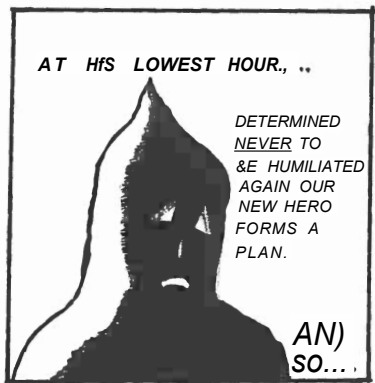
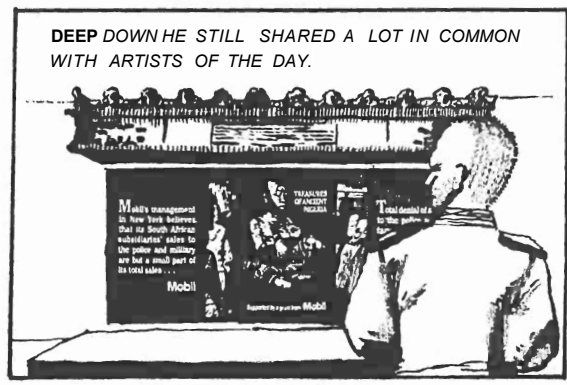
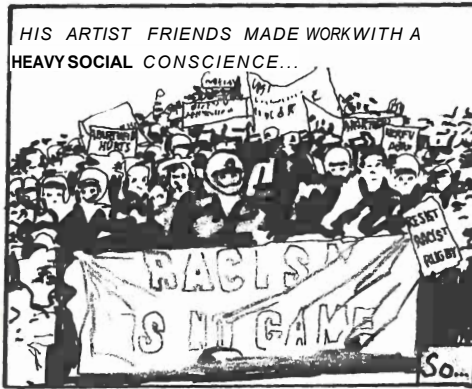
MATTHEW HYLAND

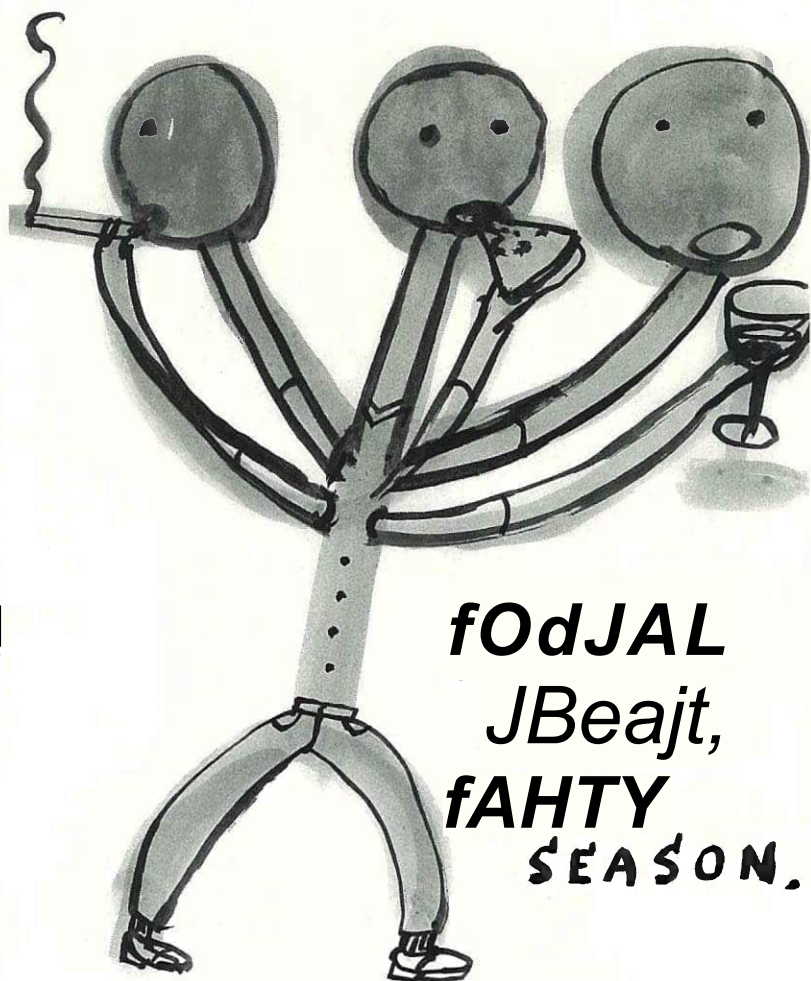
Reviews the Teststrip Micrographs HO



MIKE STEVENSON

OF ART
...





**fOdJAL
JBeajt,
fAHTY
SEASON.**

My decisive moment was the festive dance and music opening of *Lapa* at Lopdell House on 8 November 1996. I saw the work of Ani O'Neill, Greg Semu, Lisa Reihana, Suzanne Tamaki, Sofia Tekela. A thrilling opening event and one which I'll never forget. These artists have big talents.

Seven days later with Toni Symons and Fred Wilson, I return to *Lapa* so that Fred can meet some of the artists. They're showing some fantastic artwork here. I buy two shirts to wear over the summer. Toni gives one to Fred to take home. I wonder how can this art be seen by more people? It has to be recognised for what it is doing and achieving. Future work.

RON BROWNSON

MILLY AND LES PARIS

There was no significant art moment for us this year in New Zealand. From our viewing of exhibitions in Wellington and our somewhat limited viewing of exhibitions outside Wellington, there was nothing that we would place in the category of significant.

What however was significant to us was *Kandinsky and the Russian Avant Garde* in Sydney. To view works by such legendary artists as Kandinsky, Malevich, Popova, Rodchenko, Rozanova and Stepanova was an experience that we will never forget.

Avant garde they may have been in the first 20 years of this century but for us their works continued to be fresh, exciting and very contemporary. It was interesting to see the development of Kandinsky from an expressionist landscape painter to a pure abstractionist, always in iridescent colours.

Rodchenko we had known as an experimentalist in photography but not as a painter. His canvasses soon changed that notion and a sun like orange orb still burns bright in our consciousness.

The strength of Malevich's peasant paintings exuded a statuesque presence that was almost sculptural and his suprematist works gave forth an optimism for the future of painting which was unfortunately denied to him and so many of his contemporaries.

The exhibition made one realise why these works and their creators were too revolutionary for The Revolution. For us they remain excitingly revolutionary and an important reference for our own contemporary artists.

B I G

Palace, The Troubadour, West Hollywood, November 14

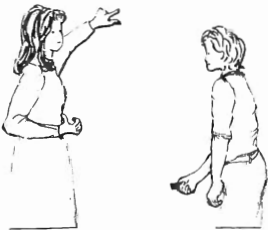
GIOVANNI INTRA

A rock cemetery abhorred by the moon and by most sensible people, West Hollywood's The Troubadour is so 'famous' that it is obliged to celebrate its past in the form of videos of the "Troubadour Alumni" above the bar. I was lucky enough to catch Tom Petty and Stevie Nicks when I was there yesterday evening. The Troubadour was an immense pit, full of more corpses (that is, students) than a common grave and I never would have gone within a mile of the place if it wasn't for the fact that Palace were playing. *Why* were Palace playing *there*? There was nobody around to ask.

I was amused to discover that Will Oldham is in fact an ugly creep who now sports a terrible beard. When he sings he bares his teeth and looks rather like a half-peeled Francis Bacon painting. Strange, as I had always imagined him to be beautiful. Singers who play with the indifference which announces that they are 'working' and have the appearance of an earthworm wearing out-of-date clothes, can, in fact, be rather beautiful, and after being bothered by it, I reinstated my opinion that Palace Music redeems ugliness in most of its myriad incarnations.

ART

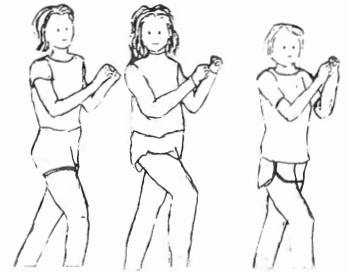
Kate Small



When she was standing at the blackboard Ms. Small liked to think Kevin was the teacher.



In Ms. Small's class Barb got a surprise - she'd known the answer all along.



Ms. Small only narrowly missed out on being the most enthusiastic member of 3S.

MOMENTS

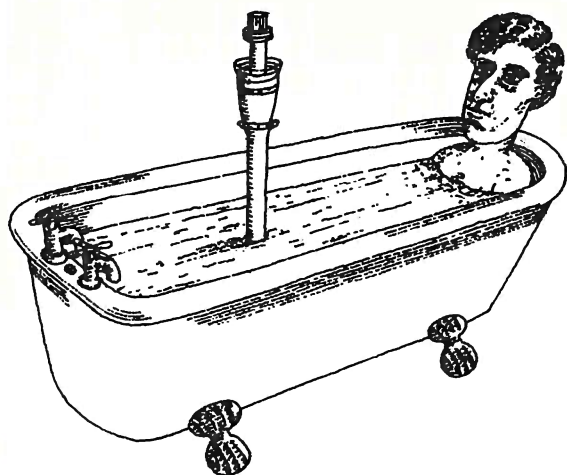
After years of moaning that art was under-represented in our local media we suddenly got more art writing than we might have

hoped for. Independent News Auckland led the charge with an expanded and rational Sunday contribution until their Auckland correspondent decided to reinvent himself as a raving rightwing loony — possibly after an epiphanic night on the Neudorf Montere with his Cellar Club cobbles.

Whatever might have inspired this burgeoning bombast it did coincide with Justin Paton's appointment to the review pages of the *New Zealand Herald*, and while Justin's attempts at the occasional rark-up are a welcome adjunct to TJ's intelligent but relentlessly egalitarian sense of fair play, Keith Stewart's crusade to purge us all of our egos, vanities, career ambitions and unprofessional behaviour has I suppose at least introduced a heady style of outraged indignation into our otherwise cautious art media.

Which brings me to my real significant art moment, and that of course was the astonishing act of collective will that brought us the brave but exhaustingly youthful *monica*. A chance maybe, of blowing caution to the wind without forgetting the often lamentable fact that however fabulous we'd like it all to be, New Zealand art is always going to be influenced by the nature of its makers.

DICK FRIZZELL



F o w e- r*

In the theatre of our criminal courts, we are introduced to unfamiliar dimensions of human behaviour. Old grudges, old motives, new techniques, new depths of depravity. Along the way, the entire country gains a precipitous education in the interior landscapes of supposedly unusual people, as, a few years back, an unprecedented number of New Zealanders came to grips with the dominatrix concept, and of B&D as a recreational pursuit.

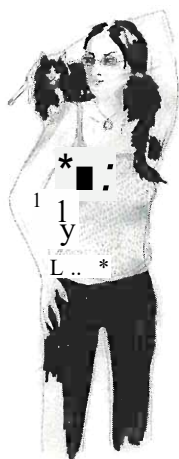
In the courtroom, lives are reconstructed to suit the telling of the tale. In Christchurch this year, scientist Vicky Calder stood accused of trying to kill her ex-lover, plant biologist Prof. David Lloyd. The weapon: a potent neurotoxin — odourless, tasteless and highly soluble. The molecular intricacies of a chemical substance have an exquisite geometry that is somehow perfectly apt.

We become chemists, analysing the formulae of passion between scientists. Calder's past pain is dissected; the prosecution claims she has the skills, the motive, the chemical to hand. But Calder also has defence lawyer Judith Ablett-Kerr, with a mind twice as sharp as Portia. The barrister's clear voice of indignation rings out in court and across our living rooms.

It hangs on a hairshaft.

Calder is found Not Guilty.

ANITA MCNAUGHT



My big art moment was as you might expect split between Wellington and Amsterdam and it was particularly the installation days, putting up *The World Over* in those two disparate spaces, the installation because that for me is the kicks, all the money, the applications, the travel, the phone calls, the writing, the personalities, the politics, the fears, the exhaustion all are lead up to that time in gallery spaces with the works and sometimes as here with some of the artists (David Tremlett, Ruth Watson, Michael Parekowhai, Jeffrey Shaw, Lothar Baumgarten, Gary Simmons, Imants Tillers), the kind of time an independent curator like me so seldom gets to *place* work — it is all geography after all — put and see, physically, emotionally, intellectually; different galleries, different moments, with much of it ready in place following discussions, sketches, etc before I got there as in Wellington the Tremlett room was built, the Byars platform and Gary Simmons' wall on which he'd already drawn his buoys and Leon van den Eijkel had hung the Ger van Elk adjacent to them so that wall now leant backwards at the top and the floor spread and bulged until Michael Parekowhai and I got to work with the mannikins to rewire the space whereas Gary had yet to do the lighthouse drawing at the Stedelijk and I photographed him finishing the thing off in 15 minutes in a few bursts of intense action high on the scaffold



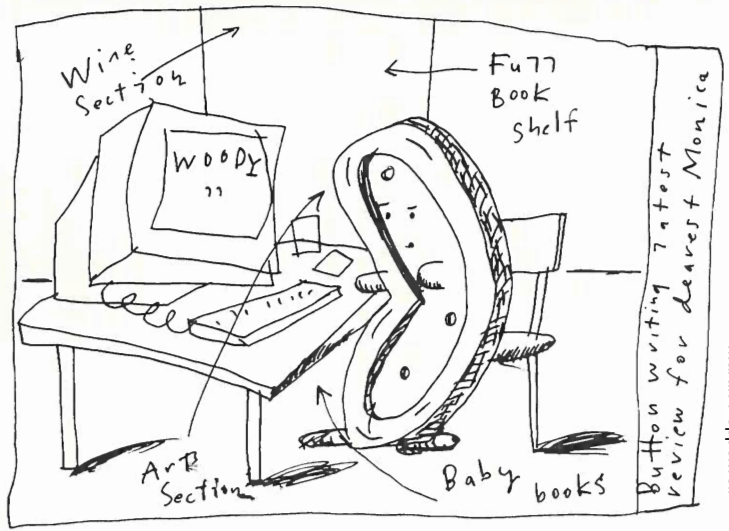
and Dorine had hung all the McCahons to my surprise using only three paintings on the biggest and toughest of walls, 30 metres of it, and the light was so great as they dressed the galleries for the opening drawing taught gauze across the ceilings to filter the Dutch light whereas in Wellington indoors downstairs the off white light going on creamy is just right for what is tactile about the installations, drawings, photos, installations, to lock them together there forever. That was the moment.

WYSTAN CURNOW

69

Peter Robinson

ARTISTS EAT ARTISTS, PETER AND PETER.



Martin Poppelwell

Has anybody seen *Catchfire*!! Jodie Foster plays a Jenny Holzer-like media artist who witnesses a mob slaying. Dennis Hopper is the hitman paid to knock her off. Instead, she knocks him off his feet and the two of them go on the run together. Hopper suggests they flee to New Zealand. But Foster refuses, "I can only practice my art somewhere that's got a culture," she says.

Well, if only Jodie had hung up her hang-ups she might have got to see Dion Worleman's knock out show at Hamish McKay Gallery; or Trouble's immaculately stylish production of *Black Monk* at Bats Theatre; or Sima Urale's finely observed short film *O Tamaiti* — just 3 of the significant art moments we racked up down here in the Southern hemisphere in the last 365 days.

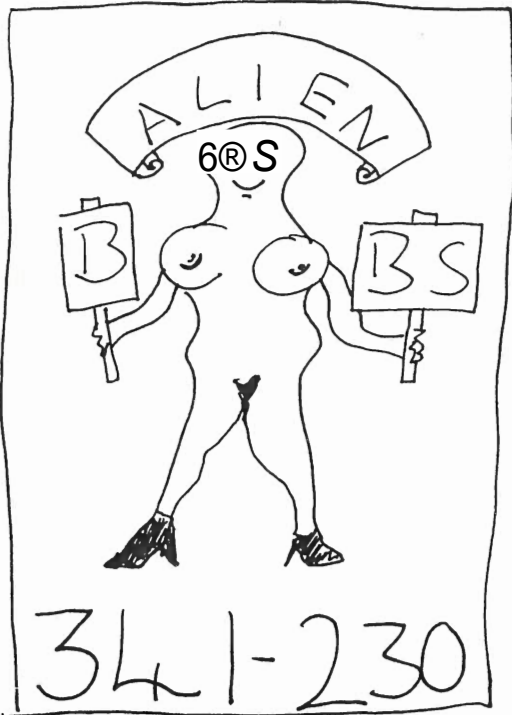
And if Jodie had taken Dennis' advice, she might not only've escaped the ending of a dreadful movie, but hooked up with another refugee with a fiery passion for culture. One Sinisa Copic from Yugoslavia, who wrote to my wife Miranda Harcourt after seeing her in *King Lear*. "I was a guy with black beret sitting in the second row on 24 Sep." He also composed a poem for her called "What should I do?" which became the outstanding art-hap of 1996 for me.

*Should I kill somebody,
Or rob a bank, spit on some fiag?
Hit a policeman with all my force,
Or drive a car drunk
To see you again?*

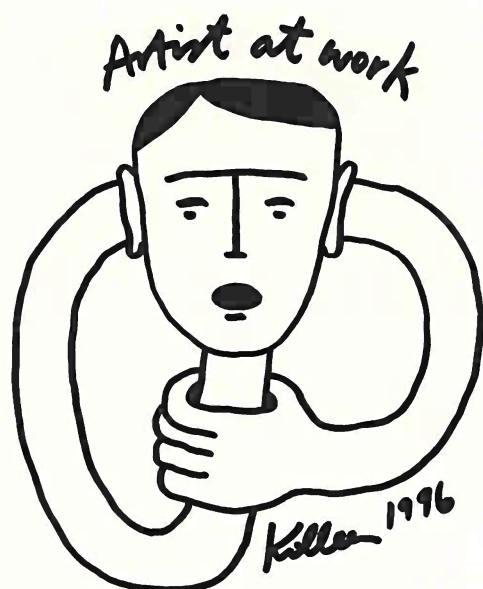
*Should I be punk with tattooed body
Breaking down some nose throwing a keg
Should I plant hemp,
Become a liar send some black-mail
Stop full-speed train?
— All that, of course
to come in jail.
I'll pay a tip
To be in a cage.
To see you again*

*I'm thirsty prisoner, waiting in pain
Just for small sip — Word,
from your sweet mouth.*

STUART MCKENZIE



David Carman



Looking back at this point, 1996 is a blur of cheap cask wine at openings and a sea of Artspace invitations drenching the floor of my office as they pour plentifully from the envelope. I couldn't think of one particular moment that stood out, so here are some highlights:

The Dunedin Public Art Gallery — fondly remembered from my childhood as the DIC department store, home at this time of year to Santa's Grotto, with its mechanised toy village and materialistic patriarchal mystique. The DPAG is proudly showcasing their collection at the same time as taking brave risks with contemporary and visiting displays and showing a commitment to art historical research and education in their study gallery. *Pixietown* was a hard act to follow but the first six months in the Octagon bode well for the DPAG.

Gallery Rock — the better moments of the *Relay* series, which were at times marred by performances that were ill-conceived/indulgent, provided an interesting forum for the more 'experimental' sound-based stuff currently happening, and this was also demonstrated in performance nights at Teststrip. TV3 should ditch the Topp Twins and give Bandy Candy and the Cocksuckers (Artspace, January) their own show.

Visits by Daniel J. Martinez and Fred Wilson — two articulate, driven and totally spunky artist/curators who gave lots of time, advice and valuable input to the Auckland art community.

DANIELLE TOLSON



The loss of six staff from the City Gallery including curator (Allan Smith), designer (Leon van den Eijkel) and exhibition manager (Mark Roach). Although a distressing event in itself (one with a send-off which was more a wake than a valediction), this signified not a 'moment' but a marker in an insidious erosion of that institution's commitment to its role as a shaper and interpreter of culture. City Gallery was unique as an art gallery without

a collection, with a contemporary programme focused on examining visual culture in relation to Wellington, New Zealand and the world. It may now be unique in another way. It is perhaps the first to jettison those professionals who have traditionally given the institution its intellectual direction and its authority as a publisher, as a maker of exhibitions and as the architect of a programme. If we celebrated the 'death of the author' in the 80s we are now witnessing the 'death of the curator' in the late 90s. While some will be happy to dance on this particular grave I shall mourn this loss borne not of any theoretical agenda, but rather of an ascendant pragmatism which will serve neither the interests of artists nor that new putative entity the 'audience'.

TINA BARTON

I don't know that I can isolate a single significant art moment for this year. It's been more an accumulation of seemingly less significant moments that somehow seem to inform each other. Like finally getting my own video copy of Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull*, the Dale Frank *Social Realism* show at Roslyn Oxleyg Gallery, the view day or night from my window across Oriental Bay, rediscovering the Rolling Stones (nothing after 1966), Robert Capa's photograph of Silvana Mangano in *Magnum Cinema*, drinking coffee vodkas at Castro's, learning to Tango (miserably), re-runs of *The Waltons*, coming across *The Friends of Dean Martinez* in a second-hand CD store, *Small Faces* reminding me of growing up in Christchurch, hearing Julian Schnabel sing Johnny Paycheck's "Apartment #9", Castle Point in a gale, Tony Oursler's *The Three Faces of Eve* and Nan Goldin's slide show at the *Sydney Biennale*, drinking red wine at Castro's, listening to P.J.Proby singing "That Means a Lot," watching the bar girl at La Luna serve drinks, seeing Vittorio de Sica's *L'oro di Napoli*, *Sciuscia* and *Umberto D.*

ROBIN NEATE



Michael Harrison



James Kirkwood



Derek Cowie

- Daniel Malone's triad season of performance and installation: *Asian Driver/back to the future* (Fiat Lux), *Change the script* (Teststrip), *Ignoring Customs* (The Basement). For conceptual waltzing, waxing lyrically and "John I'm only dancing" haze.
- The baby boom.
- *monica's* new wardrobe, Gavin Hipkins' writing, Ronnie van Hout's dreams.
- Mladen Stilovic's *The Geometry of Cakes* (North Adelaide School of Art Gallery), a yummy, powerful and poignant show, and for saying: "cynicism of power is caused by not knowing about things and even the desire not to know."
- MONZ, for nothing significant in the land of contemporary art.
- The Casino in Auckland, for bringing us the 'death star' and trying to spend money on contemporary art.
- The coffee at 23A.
- Too much hype about the Internet, the body, plastic surgery, 90's sexuality and pesticides.

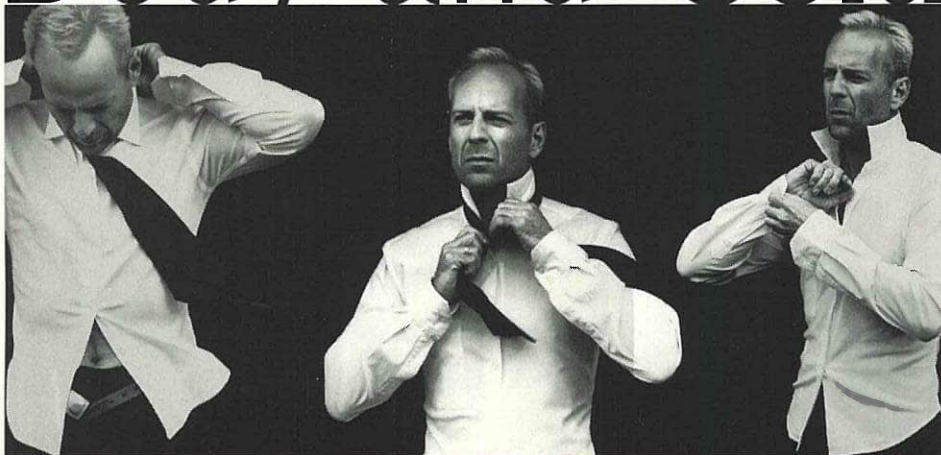
Derrick

- Lillian Budd's record deal.
- *One on one*, City Group's video installation (Teststrip); significantly sexy, and for truly engaging an audience.
- Louis XIV and The Good Luck Bar in LA.
- Im goi sai — cheng mung lae youw mo yen foi joon?
- The realisation that snide bitching is not called 'constructive criticism.'

DENISE KUM

Body and Sold

Donna Karan's
Couple-of-the-Century
Campaign



MADDIE LEACH

Bruce Willis selling DKNY

Demi Moore and Bruce Willis. Says Karan, "Donna Karan New York is for me and my friends" (while

"Everything I do is a matter of heart, body and soul" says Donna Karan neatly providing an example of the kind of statement that has gilded her company's transition into the nineties and her own survival as a brand name designer. Launching her own label (Donna Karan New York) in 1984, Karan was up there in the eighties with the likes of Bill Blass, Bruce Oldfield, Christian Lacroix, Claude Montana, Gianni Versace, Karl Lagerfeld, Oscar De La Renta. They were a bunch of Dallas-style Big Boys who admired themselves for really being able to dress a woman.

In contrast Donna appeared to be on the hoof — in 1988 she established DKNY as a 'bridge' line for "the woman who has designer-level tastes but not designer-level income." In the quest for the perfect pair of jeans came DKNY Jeans in 1990. In response to the needs of men she launched Donna Karan Menswear in 1991. And, solving the need to smell good and look perfect, in 1992 she produced her signature fragrance and beauty line. In 1995 annual sales figures for the Donna Karan Company were at US\$510 million. Karan transcended the puffed-up cheesy glitz and exaggerated sexiness of the eighties cocktail scene. How did she do it? She became seductively simple, downscaled the themes while upscaling the business. She provided for any fashion situation that might arise — sportswear, business wear, rainwear, evening wear, painting-the-house-wear (cute faux denim overalls, a stripy tee and flip-flops) and used the easy-rip lycra body shirt as a common basis for all styles. She covered couture with Donna Karan New York (price tags in the vicinity of \$4500) and the street with DKNY.

Karan prefers to attribute her success to her "feminine instincts" which she sees as perfectly complimented by the intensely masculine notes of her husband sculptor/entrepreneur Stephen Weiss. It is this notion of the perfect compliment in nineties coupledom that Karan endorses in her recent ad campaign for Donna Karan New York. It's Big Hollywood Stars doing modelling contracts, really big stars, couple-of-the-century

DKNY is for everybody else). It is a campaign that is perhaps tailored to Karan and Weiss's vision of themselves.

Above the rack of pristine pinstripes in the menswear compartment of the Queens Wharf store, Wellington, sits an icon of all that is male — a silver framed photograph of Bruce Willis eyes downcast, DKNY shirt open at the neck, hair tousled. Interestingly, Demi (as solo icon) is absent from the walls of the womens' section, but appears prominently and seductively in a clothing catalogue with Bruce, that shouts 'Intense,' 'Urban,' 'Soulful.' It's in black and white with the occasional muted hue. It is here Karan displays a shrewd understanding of marketing and demonstrates her grasp of the easy, impassioned rhetoric used to encourage consumer impulse, "Demi and Bruce embody all that is modern — the power of emotion. Of physical expression. Their energy, their style, their fearless embrace of life. They move with passion, they create freely. Their connection is unmistakable — in their touch, in how they relate. They are spiritually alive and always looking forward — individually and together." Captured as they approach mid-life, they appear essentially sexy, thoughtful, even slightly depressed. In a cheek to cheek clinch, one gazes directly at the camera while the other looks away. Demi strikes classical sculptural poses, she is muse and temptress to Bruce's steaming maleness, though overtones of sexual need are kept in balance, it's a she-wants-it-as-much-as-he does situation. Most striking, however, is the theme of simplicity and personal strength. The 90s is a no-flaunt, world-weary era. Everybody's got problems, but the Big concerns fall on the shoulders of celebrities — pesticides, rain forest depletion, terrorism, Bosnian children...and the burden shows. Such concern tinges the pages of the catalogue and the features of the two stars. Willis and Moore show up as people who have lived, learned, loved and lasted. There is no shlocky residue of *Die Hard* or *Indecent Proposal* here. They're over and above that, transcendent, burnished, glowing inwardly, ffl

This little piggy went to market

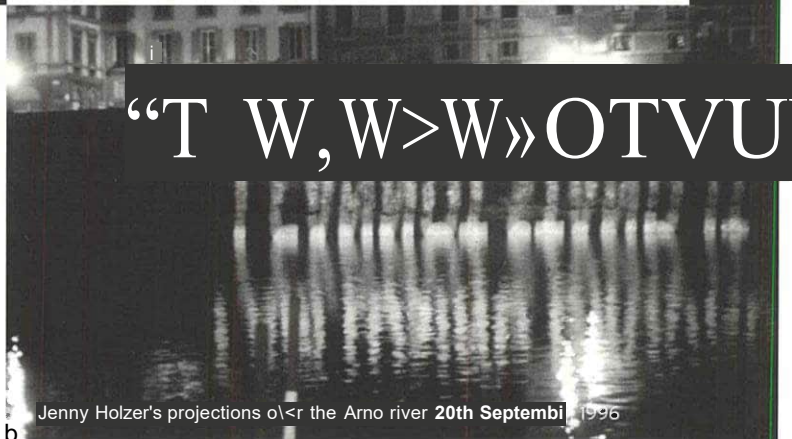
Given that 'convergence of art forms' is the buzz at the moment, the development of *La Biennale di Firenze* — a survey of the story 'when art meets fashion' — came as no real surprise. The curators, Germane Celant, Ingrid Sischy and Luigi Settimbrini, combined their clout to bring some hot names to the lukewarm contemporary art scene in Florence. Attempting to critique the 20 plus sites of the *Biennale* is difficult, especially having been involved in the organisation of the event myself. *La Biennale di Firenze — il tempo e la moda* (time and fashion) covered an impossibly large range of events to be either wholly successful or unsuccessful. Designers took over entire museums and galleries in an attempt to abandon themselves to their creativity; a beautifully redesigned railway station showed manifestations of 'the new persona' and something loosely connected with the future as seen by the Hubble Space telescope; designers collaborated with artists in pavilions customised by Arata Isozaki at the historic Forte di Belvedere; a supposed metamorphosis of Elton John was staged at the Uffizi along with an unenviable attempt to sum up the history of fashion's influence on art.

In this last case, the result was a disappointing showcase of artworks displaying a nominal connection to fashion. Without a broader intellectual forum, this particular exhibition failed to demonstrate the critical commentary that art has made regarding fashion over the years, resulting in a pejorative display of art's role in fashion. It is this that most critics have been concerned about in the wider *Biennale*; the loss of art's ability to speak without being gripped by the purse strings of fashion.

This concern exists simultaneously with a worry that the audience for 'art' is diminishing. An event such as this could definitely not have eventuated without the capital or public appeal of Versace, Armani, Prada, Lang, Gigli, Alaia, Lagerfeld and Pucci. The problem is that the involvement of famous names doesn't justify bad art. Romeo Gigli's banister wrapping a la Christo at the Museo Marini did nothing but look rather pretty. Looking more like a media stunt than a belief in his visual artistic ability, David Bowie was wheeled into *New Persona, New Universe* to display bad record cover ideas he had for *Space Odyssey* so many years ago, which a discreet agent might have attempted to keep a secret. If nothing else, at *New Persona, New Universe*, we were reminded that if you had a lot of money you could do some pretty cool things. Like embed video images in the floor — of sleeping people who groaned and turned over when you walked on them (Ferrara brothers). Moschino's heart-shaped labyrinth leading to a crazy mirror was a gimmicky but brave attempt to admit that fashion leads to self deception and body image distortion.

There was merit in having the designers challenge their own

self conception. Gucci's interactive fashion corridors made the viewer a star for 30 seconds as he or she walked through the velvet, mirror tiled and wall to wall carpeted corridors complete with soundtracks. Funky, but disposable. Artistically, it was obvious that the designers weren't up to the follow through of their poor cousins. Put alongside the disturbing plasticised women of Inez van Lamsweerde, or the macabre works of Yohji Yamamoto, the designers were asked to pay homage to the ingenuity of artists,



Jenny Holzer's projections on the Arno river 20th September 1996

and to absorb criticism from those who have made art tearing strips from fashion's commodification of women.

The real transformation of Florence occurred through the work of Jenny Holzer. Eight of her signature truisms (e.g. *Decadence is an end in itself; Let your body talk*) were painted in five languages on the bonnets of a troupe of 100 or so white taxis, engaging the minds and opinions of the local drivers and public. Her phrases projected over the banks of the Arno at midnight on a misty evening were poetic, reminding us of our lives outside the exclusive, material worlds that the *Biennale* was paying homage to.

The combined pavilions of Art/Fashion at the Forte di Belvedere were a mixed lot. Some of the best pavilions were those in which the fashion contribution was minimal. Damien Hirst's penned live animals were artistically, if not physically more comfortable without the oversized handbag that Miuccia Prada had decided not to hang in the pavilion that they shared; the Lang half of the Lang/Holzer pavilion was canned when his new perfume clashed terribly with the varnish on the walls. However, the understated work of Oliver Herring and Rei Kawakubo (*Commes des Gargons*) weaving bubble wrap and silver Mila, blurring packaging with content, was a quiet reminder that two minds from different worlds can work together.

For the city itself, the *Biennale* brought a new wave of contemporary art tourism. And so the sleeping Florence was reawakened to the idea of international art by a very well dressed prince. It will be another two years before we see whether they get to live happily ever after. EH

La Biennale di Firenze,
Florence, Italy
September 20 - December 15, 1996

Auckland's Melrose

New Zealand has been referred to as "The land of the long white soapie" in the the Australian media recently because there have been fears that Kiwi soaps will flood the market. After it was announced that Kiwi programs can be included as part of the local content quota, an alliance of industry groups calling itself 'Project True Blue' was formed to fight the ruling. Amid this controversy, *The Sunday Age* ran a feature on the New Zealand soap phenomenon which appraised the four major threats to Australian television: *Shortland St.*, *Topless*

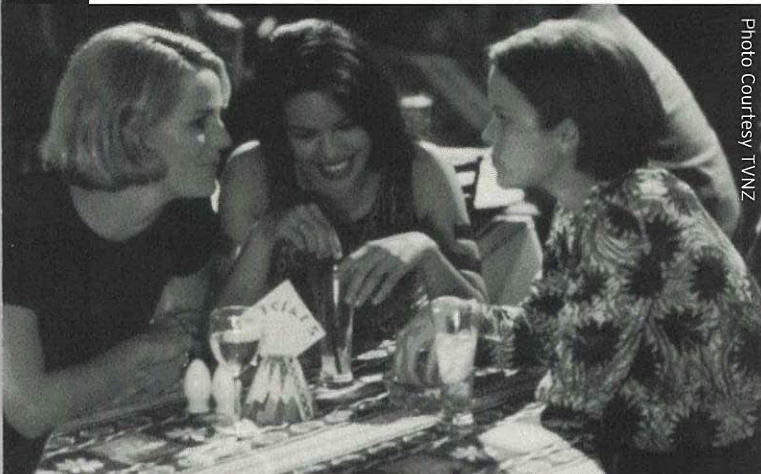


Photo Courtesy: TVNZ

Women Talk About Their Lives, *Tux Wonder Dogs* and *City Life*. Out of the four, *City Life* received the most uncomplimentary rating. Erin Kennedy of *The Dominion* is quoted as saying that *City Life* is about "the life and loves of a group of twentysomethings with dreadful hair. Very little relationship to reality: young unemployed in thousand dollar dresses."

Since Australians have not yet experienced the joys of *City Life*, the media has described it by comparison to other shows. It has been characterised by Australian commentators as a kind of 'North Island *Melrose Place* clone.'

Within New Zealand, the soap may serve to reinforce the usual parochial complaints that Auckland is shallow and money driven. Hand-held camera is used to suggest the hectic pace of Auckland city but it can be disconcerting or even nausea-inducing. *The Herald's* David Lawrence was particularly scathing about this aspect of the program: "jumpy camerawork made it impossible to watch, it was a bit like the *NYPD Blue* thing where all the cameramen had epilepsy or Parkinson's disease."

Like the inhabitants of *Melrose Place*, *City Life* protagonists are members of an urban elite living in the same apartment building. The opening credits immediately reveal some debt to the Aaron Spelling style of television program. However, *City Life*

attempts a good deal more than the tried and true Spelling formula.

Lawrence claims the series set a callous tone early on by having a major character killed by one of his friends with nobody caring. The inference is that the characters are too self-obsessed to grieve for the death of one of their number. For the scriptwriters this could have been a strategy for creating a sense of community through collective mourning. In dramatic terms, death is often used as a device to bring people together and reveal character, and this crucial opportunity was squandered.

City Life does aim for a sense of commonality among the characters but the relationships are not taken to the incestuous extremes of *Melrose Place*. Matters of sexuality are much more openly handled in the New Zealand soap. Unlike *Melrose*, *City Life* allows its two gay characters to be intimate with one another, not content with the odd handshake or backslap. One of them has some problems with acknowledging his sexuality because he's a "homophobe straight in a gay body." This dilemma is ostensibly resolved when he performs in drag for his lover. In this way, the soap broaches cultural complexity but eschews any further investigation.

City Life provides a kind of skewed critique of aspects of New Zealand society, like the send-up of the Auckland art world in a later episode. When the pretentious artists Seth and Zoe create their installation *The Lethality of Desire*, the local fundamentalist landlord threatens eviction, causing everyone to rally against the censorship of 'artistic expression'. However distasteful it may be to them personally, it's the 'principle' that matters. During this skirmish, the besieged art gallery owner complains, "art is meant to be beauty and life not groping and horrible landlords." This clash between idealism and reality recurs throughout the series.

When Wiki lands a part in an American movie she becomes involved in a tawdry sex scene. Even though she is a sophisticated metropolitan, Wiki finds herself out-manoeuvred by Hollywood power players. The points being made in this sequence are that women are reluctant to report rape and that Americans exploit New Zealand resources as a matter of course. The American lead actor says, "We only came to this third world backwater because we were told it would save money." Major issues are either glibly dismissed or flogged mercilessly and no consistent balance is achieved. Disingenuity flourishes when Hugh poses as Denzel, combat photographer, to impress a woman he met on holiday. So as not to blow his cover, he stages a mock-Bosnia using his friends as models and takes photos as proof of his daring profession. When he doubts the ethics of the enterprise, he asks his friend: "Isn't this really tasteless?" and his friend replies: "Do you want to get her into the sack or not?" End of argument. TV classics like *Dynasty*, *Dallas* and *Melrose* have proved that the glitzy hyperreality of soaps can be a winning formula but success relies upon suspension of disbelief. *City Life* is ultimately compromised by its effort to be glossy and gritty at the same time. This basic uncertainty may be remedied once the ongoing market research into its audience's perceptions has been completed. EH

BRIGID SHADBOLT

Y q 3 j j W /G



Anton Parsons: Glovely Midget;

Judy Darragh: Matthew Barney and NZTS; Lisa Reihana: White Tie and Guano; David Townshend: Trepanning and Dungarees;

Ann Shelton: Kim Swanson and Martin Margiela;



P. Mule: Sox and Xerox; Megan Dunn: Tennis Whites and Regrowth;

Haru Sameshima: Matthew Barney and Yoda

Gregory Wood: Neckbrace and Blonded Denim;



DI/IT00H2 GALLERY

Stylist: Kirsty Cameron Make-up and Hair: Denise Kum and Stefan Knight Photographer: David Scott Location: Teststrip



LAYING CABLES

Alex Bag
E30, E60, E90, GO!
Dunedin Public Art Gallery
31 August - December 15, 1996

Alex Bag was the visiting artist at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery for August of this year. The fact that an artist of Bag's eminence should visit New Zealand was a major coup for the DPAG. Bag is well known for her Public Access Cable show in New York and has garnered much international attention with her *Fall '95* video installation at the 303 Gallery in New York.

The irony of *E30, E60, Ego, GO!* is that New Zealand does not have a television culture that comes anywhere near approximating American television culture. The lack of cable and public access television in NZ is a huge drawback. The 'major' networks are stuck in a hermetic universe that does not meet the demands of the sophisticated viewing public. The advent of Sky TV is not cable, no matter how many salespeople try to convince me of the similarities. New Zealand is dullsville when it comes to presenting a range of TV that caters for everybody.

Public access television is the only way a community can reflect its diversity without relying on advertising dollars to support its existence. Bag's show hones this idea of community to a fine point. Bag's grabbing of the best bits of television and editing the accumulation into patterned bites of entertainment distinguishes her from all others in this field of contemporary arts practice. The in-jokes may be lost on a New Zealand audience, but perhaps it is not so alien as we would like to believe. Too much of it becomes familiar and over extended periods of observing the exhibition the viewer becomes lost in a make believe world that is of course not at all.

A case in point is the interview that Bag did with Alex de Jong on TV3's *Nightline* in early September. Bag was commenting that public access television was the only real television because everyone involved was doing it for the love of the medium, they were not getting paid and they weren't selling anything for the networks. De Jong commented that he was paid for his job and that he didn't think that he was selling anything.

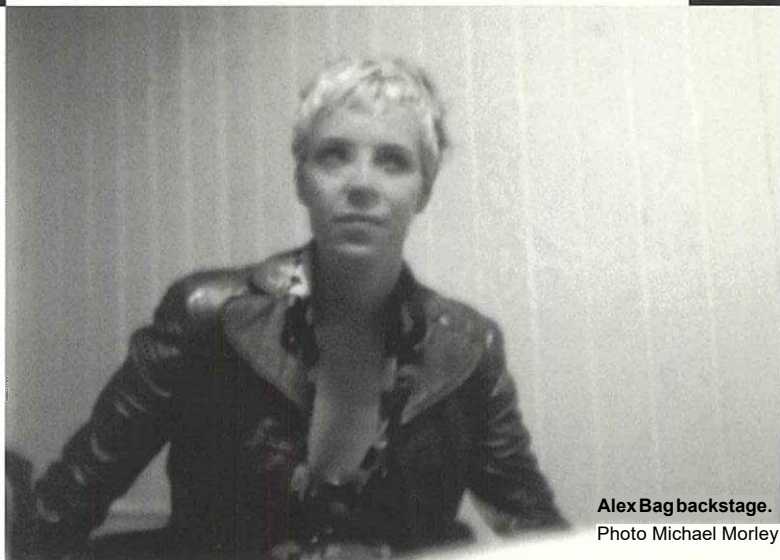
Wrong. Mr. de Jong made the fatal mistake of owning up to the fact that he didn't think he was on commercial network TV for any other reason than to film magazine articles. Every second of commercial television must be geared towards selling commodities, that is its function. One only has to watch 15 minutes of television at any point of the day or night to bear witness to this fact. Ms. Bag's rejoinder was swift and brutal "Oh well if you don't know what it is you're selling I can sure bet that your boss knows." Correct.

Bag's stance may be seen as a holier-than-thou position, but her television and video work is art and not product endorse-

ment. Bag can be seen as the harbinger of an idea about television that has really yet to appear in New Zealand.

So what do we get when Bag visits the bottom of the world? Well, an accumulation of video loops showing an array of characters known or not. Most is taped off cable but we also get to view Bag's video works from the last two years, *Spring '94* and *Fall '93*, as well as segments of her own cable show *Cash into Chaos now* renamed *Unicorns and Rainbows*.

Kate Moss plays the idiot savant in a brilliant loop where after being asked a rather demanding question about the role of the waif in the modern fashion world, she giggles, lisping "sorry



Alex Bag backstage.
Photo Michael Morley

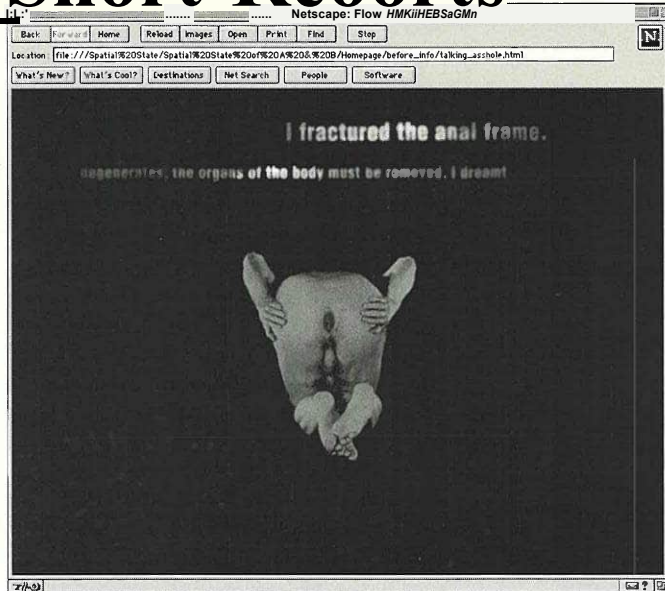
what was the question?" Thus she encapsulates all that it is to be 'modern.' Her attention span appears to be less than a 5 second sound bite and her response is designed to be read two ways, covering her ass with the bat of the eyes.

Matt Dillon appears as 70s he-man giving us the lowdown on the greatest of American inventions — the roller coaster. Dillon must be reading his lines off cuecards to the right of the camera cause he's always wandering over that way. This gives the program Raymond Pettibon production values which don't seem out of place. His tight jeans, tight black t and silver cross around his neck will be the envy of every 16 year old wanting to know 'just how it's done'.

Nirvana on *Top of the Pops* doing their lets-fuck-off-the-stupid-English-kids routine is a pretty inspired piece of television history, great just for the amazing air-bass-guitar. Another favourite is titled *Chris Rage* where a young man in 70s garb leaning on someone else's Chrysler, pisses down one leg, sticks his hand inside his fly, moves his cock to the other side and pisses down the other leg. Watching his jeans change colour as the liquid runs down his legs is perhaps one of the funniest moments of television history, EE

MICHAEL MORLEY

Short Reports



Terrence Handscomb, *Before Information there were the Machines*, 1996

HEATHER BARTON

Before Information there were the Machines

Terrence Handscomb

Spatial State of A and B

<http://spatial.co.nz>

I have to admit right off that perversity bores me witless. I can't bear the itemisation of sex acts, giving things beginnings and ends and nominations; I hate definitions of deviance. Counter-investing in the anus to override the the over-investment in the phallus is to engage in the myth of the avant-garde. Nor do I need any proselytising about the 'Body without Organs.' The thing about the BwO is that you can't get a prescription for it. There are many dangers involved, not the least of which is ending up with OwB. So you can imagine my first impression of *Before Information there were the Machines* a web piece at *Spatial State* (archive) by Terrence Handscomb. His 'talking asshole' tells me that "The anal frame in its simplest sense is a set of possible worlds and a dyadic relationship..." This, along with the icons of penis, anus, intestine and faeces available to enter the work (the pun of penetrating the work via the anus is just too bad to even make) made me think of how many days I had left to live and whether I was going to spend any of them reviewing this.

I had seen Handscomb's works on paper and found them intoxicating. His background in graphic design souvenired in scrolls of draftsman's paper like sheaths of peeling skin, tattooed with calligraphic type; layered renditions of Lacanian formulae translated to the pictorial field, the torsion bred of the very impossibility of such an undertaking evident in the work, not simply as theoretical price tags. There was the monochrome nod to Colin McCahon, earlier mystic symbols, his time as a Buddhist monk, notations of the logician and colourful line abstractions of the graffiti art of the period. Handscomb has not abandoned particu-

lar styles but painted over them, building up the surface and texture, at once transparent and opaque, like the debate around 'meaning in his work' (see an essay by Stephen Zepke of 1992 accompanying an exhibition at Gregory Flint Gallery). Nor is Handscomb a pious theory drone (despite the degree in comparative religion and philosophy). The stingingly funny "The Problem with Monica" in a previous issue of this magazine attests to that. Equipped with humour and education along with his skilled manipulation of space and volume, his use of typography and colour, made me eager to see how he would employ the shallow space of the screen, the garish luminescent colour, digitised typography and economy of desire produced in soft space.

Given that this is only a companion piece to Handscomb's work in the *Electronic Bodyscapes* exhibition held at Artspace between July and September meant solely for distribution on the web, one can only assume that it's not as fully developed as the original piece. There is some possibility of layering but no real attempt at thinking the medium to compound or confound Handscomb's body of work. Given the limitations of space I can only say that I would very much like to see how Handscomb's greater familiarity with the medium complexifies the work and theories of images produced in such a medium, fff

OLIVE WINCHESTER

I had a thought

Bryan Caldwell and Tracey Collins

Artspace, Auckland

October 16 - November 2, 1996

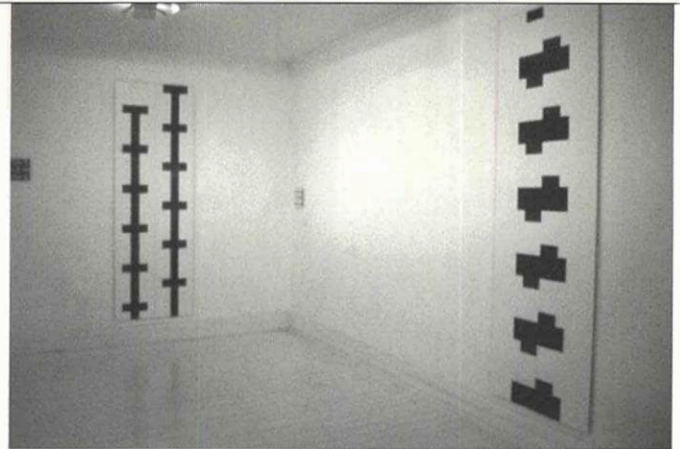
A friend and I enthusiastically trekked along Quay St, eager to sample 'interactive theatre.' For this happening we were welcomed in by specially employed extras and offered a personal see-through costume. Gently they stapled us up in plastic garb, tin-hatted and visored, our feet thrust into bags secured around the ankles with rubber bands. As willing and curious adventurers we were ushered through the entrance flap into the gallery.

Inside, long mirrors reflected ourselves as tall, disturbing, alien-like figures. We turned to scrutinise a collection of pools and fountains in rainbow hues. Some sprouted twigs and their swaying reflections were eerie, not of the narcissistic genre. Paradoxically the scene promoted a feeling of both tranquillity and restlessness. The uniform kept us clean and pure, but felt superfluous. I had the urge to disrobe, to lie in the orange water, then sample the blue, the yellow, the green; to vault nimbly over the edges, oblivious of the fellow inter-actors. For here was a setting for the uninhibited. I had flashbacks to the mineral pools in Rotorua and the tinkling fountains of Granada. The waters issued strange words in unknown languages, for nine pools in a cluster is a magical number.

An odd monk-like figure glided by, affecting to ignore all us strange creatures, while its spraycan dribbled some abstract expressions on our backs, (more Sam Francis than Jackson Pollock).



Bryan Caldwell and Tracey Collins, *I had a thought*, 1996. Photo courtesy Artspace



Simon Morris, *New Work* 1996. Photo courtesy the artist

One pool was clogged with sodden tissues; overhead a notice read, "Please do not throw your handkerchiefs here." This proves that in interactive theatre participants laugh at and shun orders.

Gliding along on that slippery floor was a timeless, relaxing activity. We did linger longer at the last pool which held a mass of ballpoint pens. Were they souvenirs or was this a soup on of commercialism?

We left this strange, but exhilarating art performance. Our gear was expertly ripped off, and with name labels attached, the coats of varied hues were elevated on hangers over the waters. We had arrived, though not in lights.

On the prosaic bus ride home, I also had a thought. We appreciated the drollery by courtesy of the two wizards; their interactive theatre with its amalgamation of subtle humour and imagination. We ask, are these two of the vital components lacking in today's somewhat sombre world? ffi

ALLAN SMITH

New Work,

Simon Morris,

New Work Studio, Wellington

October 8 - November 2, 1996

Obviously artists put their work up in galleries so that viewers can see what they have made. However, at Simon Morris' latest Wellington exhibition I felt I was looking at something Morris had installed primarily so he could review what his varied procedures had led to, and then think about how he wanted to re-insert himself in the process. It was not that the exhibition was staging a specially granted look into the workings of a painter's mind, but rather, although Morris works within a heritage of idealised, high-modern geometric abstraction, he seems more intent on the contingencies of a 'conditional' abstraction. Morris is less concerned to perfect and embody an ideal of visual balance, poise and compositional resolution,

than to set out possible itineraries for his own research.

The formal devices Morris used, either singly or in combination included: Newman-esque zips or vertebrate columns on tall narrow panels; lattice formations of interlocking shapes like dovetail mortises; mosaic patterns and fields of spots on medium and small panels. Overall, forms of diagrammaticity prevailed. Information from the world of real space and real architecture had all been flattened into graphic pattern which gave out ambiguous clues to height, depth, texture and distance through the planar matrix. Yet there was a difference in these works from Morris' earlier paintings, in which Peter Halley type circuit diagrams created a frictionless opticality of rapid shifts between uniform hotspots. This sort of hyped-up saccadic space had been modified in the recent works which moved at very different speeds. In some pieces there was a laconic attentiveness, a care without fussiness; in others a high velocity optical lift; or an attention to edge registration and shifts of interval; and in others a studied mapping of irregular events within a uniform field.

As much as anything, I took away from this exhibition thoughts about ways of looking, measuring and transcribing proximities between architecture, painting and ornament. If the show resembled a setting out of results, then Morris' findings were heterogeneous. They were interrelated in terms of their attentions to positive/negative reversals, repetitions and incremental augmentations but were disjunctive as a group, sometimes going off at tangents or quietly petering out. Referring to his recent installation project at the Waikato Museum of Art and History, Morris explains that his combination of leaning battens, stacked floor pieces, patterned wall paintings and paintings on shelves came out of his desire to work with a sort of inventory of methodology and structure: "I decided to almost list a range of painting structures and formal strategies with the aim of activating space and experience in...revealing ways." His Wellington show, being in a dealer gallery, did not allow him to push his interests in installation as far as he did in Waikato, but Morris displayed the same curiosity in the way articulated surfaces and drawn patterns can be interrogated for intricate collusions between the plotting of graphic information and the apprehension of implicitly architectural experiences, ffi

JENNIFER FRENCH

Invisible

Michael Harrison

Teststrip, Auckland

22 August - 7 September, 1996

In the cool, white cube that is Teststrip's upstairs exhibition space, 21 small works on paper were pinned to the wall, arranged at eye level around the perimeter of the room. They were readily identifiable as Michael Harrison's by virtue of their small scale and delicate hue. A plinth stood off-centre in the room, supporting an assemblage of found objects — dried lotus stems, an old cream bottle containing the remnants of incense, and a paperback entitled: *Section II — Magical Practice*.

In conversation Harrison speaks of his work as being "cumulative." This is both a reference to the diaristic regularity of his working, and the overwritten, multi-exposed imagery of some of the pieces. Harrison has evolved a type of hypercritical reworking of figure and ground, in which the delineation of a body's curve, for instance, is set against another colour or shape. One figure is possibly Harrison himself, in silhouette with the addition of bear's ears. There are other works too — some strange cubist views of an indeterminate cityscape, and a cloyingly sentimental cat.

The overall effect is of observing a disjunctive narrative from another's memory. This interior world is rife with idealisation and obsessive repetition; the false-memory syndrome of subjective reality. One can recognise individual characters as they reappear within a given sequence of images, and within the wider context of Harrison's work. His allegories are those of a twentieth century consciousness — a dreamscape of relationships, sexuality, emotion and mind. I have observed the appearance from time to time of two or more different women and a Harrison doppelganger, who play out an interminable drama of tension and loss. The objects on the plinth provide a counterpoint to the psychology of the works on paper; ritual magic is perhaps indicative of the dramas of the psyche — good and evil, the nature of the soul, and the relationship between self and God.

Harrison's characterisations — particularly those of women — are always ideal. These archetypal maidens are seriously at odds with the conventions of feminism in regard to the portrayal of women in contemporary western culture. However politically incorrect any evocation of fecund youthfulness is currently deemed to be, Harrison has engendered a sense of the transcendent and eternal feminine within his work that is quite unusual. The lightness of these works becomes the defining characteristic; the feminine being accentuated by his utilisation of a traditionally female medium.

The installation of *Invisible* — in which all images are accorded equality by dint of their informal placement upon the wall — forms the basis of a larger document; one in which Harrison speaks quietly, but persistently, of the ephemera of memory, dream and reflection. E0



Michael Harrison, *Invisible*, 1996. Detail of an installation, photo courtesy Teststrip

ROB GARRETT

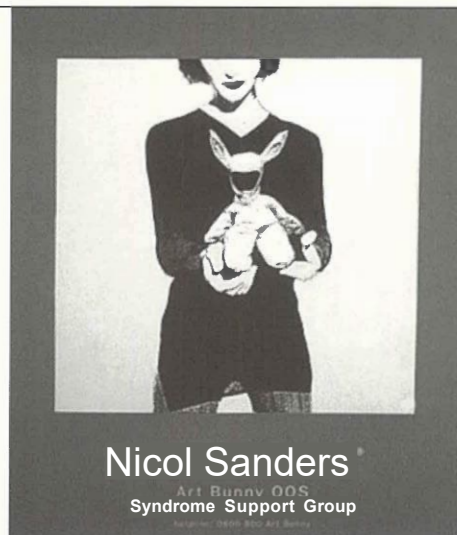
Sydney sidelines

Commissioned to perform in conjunction with the Antonin Artaud conference, London artist Crow installed himself in a basement and offered his audience a curtained-off space in an upper gallery where a video projector threw live-link images from the basement onto a wall. Attending *Theurgy (Messe Basse)* was like finding something nasty under the floorboards — the imagined body of Artaud after death — and leaving it for someone else to clean up. Crow is an archivist of the rotten, sound recordist of bodily functions and wrecking yards, and founder in 1991 of the Institution of Rot. Perhaps mindful of Artaud's warning that representations sanitise and paralyse life, Crow's recordings and transmissions for *Theurgy* skillfully disturbed any expectation for clarity at the same time as avoiding the chaotic plunge into complete incomprehensibility.

Also balanced on an edge of sorts, but lighter, more mobile, was Ann Hamilton's installation *Bearings* for the 10th Biennale at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Two six-metre tall silk organza curtains, white on the inside and black on the outside, were hung from motorised hoops which rotated in a quiet pas-de-deux in one corner of a large room. Spinning at a walking pace, or perhaps the tempo of a waltz, the fabric shimmered and shifted between black, grey and silver. Many viewers shunned the work's invitation to enter the giant skirts as they opened at each pause. Playing on the fetishistic attraction of the veil, beyond the curtains Hamilton had hidden a tiny video screen in a hole in the wall. It played a looped zoetrope of a mechanical hand repeatedly reaching for a small hoop silhouetted against billowing fabric. The faint sound-track betrayed the click, click, click of the hand as it closed without grasping the ring. Several teenage boys who bounded in and out of the spinning circles while I was there seemed equally transported with delight.

To my surprise I found myself most distracted in amongst

Stephanie Valentin, chiasma,
1995. Photo courtesy Rob
Garrett



Nicole Sanders,
Art_Bunny OOS,
1996. Photo
courtesy the
artist

the art boutiques of Paddington. On a taxi-tiki-tour of galleries, I found Stephanie Valentin's exhibition *materia prima* at Stills Gallery. In over two dozen selenium toned photographs spanning two years' production there was a body of darkly enchanting images. Combining fragments of 17th-century French and Italian landscape and flower paintings with the milky refractive crispness of photograms, the images closed the gap between the new agriculture of Europe two and a half centuries ago and contemporary designer genes. According to the artist, her herb-filled test tubes, gauze-bound microscope slides, and shallow crystal-encrusted glass dishes, mimic "the microscope's investigative circle of light." By referencing the slippage between matter and magic, Valentin's works play on the paradoxical relations between repetition and difference, between the idea of DNA sequence information as a set of instructions and thoughts of mutation and transformation. Whether or not Valentin is looking for the 'undo' function in fin-de-millenaire nucleotide tinkering, her images reawakened sensual delights in this writer's body and investigative eye. EB

STELLA BRENNAN

Successful Living

Nicol Sanders

Elam Open Day, Auckland

November 16, 1996

For artistic purposes PVC has been tested on balloon animals. Nicol Sanders' images are printed and painted on the reverse of clear PVC. As a result the work is both lush and kinda scratchy at the same time — acrylic thinness with the slick of polyvinyl. There are seven pieces in all: three tableaux with handy Diesel-style 'successful living' bylines, and four stretched works with chunky red borders. The tableaux use the Diesel format of ironic image with caption, questioning the palatability of cosmetics (how

many kilos of lipstick does the average woman consume in her life? I think its something like five or six...) and the washability of those pricey designer undies. The remaining works have a similar form — the wide red borders with Nicol Sanders® and assorted captions. Sanders is her own name brand, just like Calvin and Donna and Coco. Her images are drawn from sources we know well — the Karen Walker chick, Diesel logos and captions, perfume and makeup commercials. Sanders chooses as models ads that are ironic in their promise that a new frock and a pair of heels will change your life. It's Karen Walker's chicken hypnotist who is the constant star of these works, lending her glamour gangle to the cause: *Art Bunny OOS Syndrome Support Group call 0800 800 Art Bunny. Obsessive for Women* features the model, peg 'tween teeth struggling with a basket of underwashing *Oh, F... pink CK's* is the coy subtitle.

Nice art. Its big and shiny and bright and it incorporates everything a girl could want — feminist art references (Trockel, Kruger), bits of our favourite products from our favourite ads; colour, body and shine. Sanders investigates how saturation affects the viewer. Advertising is in our face more frequently and more forcefully than art in the late 20th century can ever hope to be. The art bunnies really do need our help. As Liz Farrelly writes in the October 96 issue of *The Face*, "it has become pretty much impossible to tell a lot of styled fashion images from a piece of artful photo-documentary (or, indeed, a hyper-surreal gallery installation)." Fashion appropriates all the tricks and tropes of the art world's finest and puts them to work hocking frocks. Sanders shops for ideas: there is a certain formula to the images — like someone who buys repro-retro but is innocent of the funk of pre-worn polyester. That, I guess is the point: like advertising, art that is too smart, too disdainful or too inaccessible ceases to function as an effective sales tool and hence condemns itself to oblivion. Who wants to buy the past like it really was anyway? We want it hipper and without our parents in it, thanks very much. Being a little predictable means the buyer is on your side; complicity is always a higher-grossing strategy than condescension. ES

MIRIAM HARRIS

When Night Comes

Susan Jowsey and Marcus Williams

Artspace, Auckland

6 November - 22 December, 1996

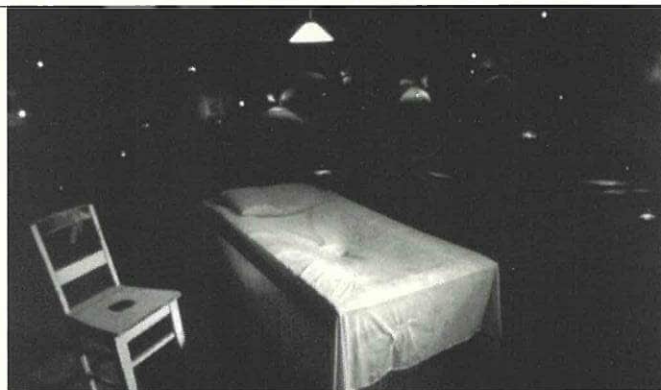
Emerging a second time from this evocative installation, I found myself blinking in the afternoon light and reading the comments left behind. Residual traces are strong features in both William's and Jowsey's work, and it seemed apt that these qualities should reside within Artspace's visitors' book. I noticed an entry by someone small expressing enjoyment of the installation. Determinedly asserting its presence alongside adult hands, the comment summed up one of the main thrusts of the show; the outsider status of the child. In an accompanying booklet the artists refer to the "salvage paradigm" which regards time as linear, and childhood a utopian idyll preceding incorporation into a capitalist definition of 'usefulness'. In the Western world the 'other' is represented by those society has put out to pasture such as the child, a distancing which leads to collective amnesia.

When Night Comes, however, makes childhood palpable by engaging your senses. With ceilings and objects positioned at difficult heights, including a luminous yellow door of shrunken *Alice in Wonderland*-like proportions, I found myself caught in the limbo that Alice experienced. On the one hand, the adult is addressed with items placed at their height, such as a pink cardigan and music box, which plays the syrupy refrain of Disney's "When You Wish Upon A Star." On the other hand, the tactile nature of this involvement and the summoning of the senses (including the fragrance of talcum powder), transports you to a state that everyone has experienced: being a child.

This to-ing and fro-ing between the tangible and ephemeral opens up a new space. Jowsey's room is deliberately 'girlish' — soft pinks abound. Yet there is a sense of equivocation which threatens to collapse codification. A photograph of Jowsey as a child is dusted on the wall with tawny face powder and has already been partly erased. A narrative describes escape: shoes and socks have been abandoned and a pair of wings is disappearing into the wall.

In Williams' 'boys' room the rational is taken to a spirit — numbing extreme. Stark walls, low ceiling, and bluish fluorescent tubes suggest the emotional remove of the laboratory. There is a singular focus upon a small black rectangle which extends into the wall like a camera lens and proffers a lit photograph of a suited father and son. What seems to be a clear directive towards the adoption of consumerist codes like the work ethic becomes subverted, however, through the use of sound; your footsteps echo on the gravel beneath.

The largest room cast illuminations that were alternatively apparitions and soaring benevolent creatures, amidst darkness and flickering lights. Snippets of nursery rhymes, "What are little girls made of?" mocked and merged the delineation of gen-



Susan Jowsey and Marcus Williams, *When night comes*, 1996. Photo Courtesy Artspace

der encountered outside. It is appropriate that Jowsey and Williams worked together in this room. A bed in the centre, with a tube in its middle, siphons secretions towards an unknown destination. Childhood with all its tenors is evoked rather than romanticised. But neither is this purely about bumps in the night — actuality in all its shades is experienced, and integrated. EH

BRETT LEVINE

The Slaughterhouse project

Brad Buckley

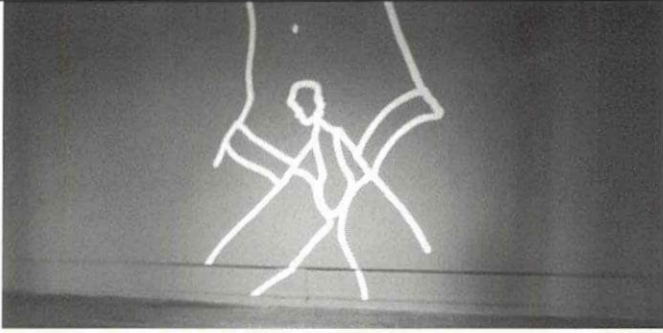
Artspace, Auckland

11 September - 4 October, 1996

The Slaughterhouse Project is as much about what is seen as what is said. And what is said is not without reservations. For the work is particularly 'naughty'. Using texts from Georges Bataille which reveal an objectification of women not unknown in the late twentieth century, Buckley makes us question the various constructions of space, site, the body and pornography.

On a formal level the installation is part of Buckley's continuing interrogation of site-specificity. He has painted the entire gallery blue, embossing four texts from Bataille on separate walls. The fifth wall, which confronts the viewer on entry, is a line drawing of two torsos having sex, headless figures as archetypal icons of desire. It is here that the image becomes truly pornographic, not because of its content but because, as Keith Broadfoot's catalogue essay explains, "any difference between figures is abolished as there is a reduction to the monotonous sameness of a singular line — the deadening repetition of the endless porno tape-loop."

The texts relate a tale of visual desire, causing the viewer to consider the constructions of language, its transgressive qualities, and the changing limits of acceptability over time. In the second, a man is bathed in sweat having seen something, presumably a couple having sex. In the third, a man describes a woman's clothing and considers how he might see her "private



Brad Buckley, *The Slaughterhouse Project*, 1996. Photo courtesy Artspace

parts unveiled.” In the fourth, a man dares his mistress to sit in a bowl of milk. All the time the two headless torsos stay locked in frozen desire, frustrated because unlike the majority of pornography, nothing is going to happen. In a manifestation of pure male fantasy, he will be locked in a “loving embrace,” forever erect, yet never able to come.

It is difficult to move from the visual to the conceptual aspects of the work because the visuals are so confrontational. Buckley flattens the individuality of the space, it becomes a blue box, a blue canvas, a blue movie. The contents of the installation are metaphors for the context of installation. The sameness, the emptiness of the line drawings are mirrored by the sameness and flattening of the space through the uses of a single colour. The spectator becomes complicit in the construction. The spectator looks at the couple having sex, reads the texts, creates a visual image or index of the acts and deeds outlined, and becomes a part of the installation. The viewer brings the installation into being, constructing it visually in exactly the same manner that the male gaze in Bataille’s texts constructs its object of desire. This doubling is highly effective, as Buckley teases the audience with the realisation that everyone is a participant in the construction of objectification. It is here that Buckley compels the work to be, as it were, ‘sight-specific.’ What is being critiqued by the single colour, by the transgressive texts, is the construction of limits, and our understanding, or our opposition, to them. EB

JON BYWATER

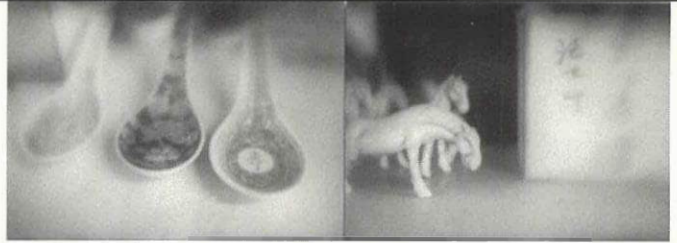
Squint,

Vanessa Jack

Hop Yick Cheong building, Christchurch

October 23 - November 9, 1996

To squint, as to crane or to peer, is to look with difficulty, even to look without being able to see. A squint is also a Eurocentric misreading of an ‘inscrutable’ Chinese physiognomy (or perhaps the act of making it), so as a title it’s a gag that plays up the motivation of Vanessa Jack’s work in considering perception,



Vanessa Jack, *Squint*, 1996. Photo courtesy the artist

visual and cross-cultural.

Hop Yick Cheong Ltd traded at 177 Madras St for over seventy years before relocating in October this year. The former home of Christchurch’s oldest Chinese store is due for demolition soon, to make way for carparking and student accommodation, and so the patched floorboards of the shop’s streetfront display area and the conspicuously humble living spaces behind and upstairs were bare of goods and furnishings for Jack’s use of them as a venue for her photographic installation.

The indelible scent of Oriental foodstuffs and their spices, and the grime and wear of decades of habitation, were still strewn through the empty rooms; and for the nosier visitor, the building itself was as much on show as Jack’s work which, in any case, referred back to the place and its history.

A voyeurism mingling ethnographic museum and open home day led me poking and peering through the building. The sad pleasure of being able to walk behind the scenes, though, was that now I was there to demystify for myself these formerly unreachable spaces, they were drained of their treasures and use. And in Jack’s photographs similarly, only the previous use of the public area was there to be seen.

Blurred at the edges, Jack’s long, narrow prints gave a through-a-keyhole, memory-drawn or hurry-smudged view into the shop as it was, stacked with boxes of tins and dragonfly kites. Within one image or between two abutted, the Western and the Eastern doubled up and blurred together: A can of Grass Jelly Drink next to a can of Coca-Cola on the fridge shelf, an elegant Caucasian cartoon surfer on a tin of California Girl bamboo shoots next to a courtly costumed Chinese woman on a box of tea, a handwritten sign with a Chinese character and the English “pull.”

Other images, most embedded in the crazed and stained lathe and plaster of the back rooms, repeated the finally bared thin board walls of the display area as we could now see them. Here the outlook in the prints seemed to have steadied, clearer focus echoing for me the fact that it was easier to stop and stare now the place was empty.

The vaseline smeared vitrines onto the street, with slats left clear the same size and at the same height as the panels of photographs inside, offered an explanation for the visual smear in the shop images. The mist on the lens, despite the associations this technique usually carries, was no hamming up of romance or nostalgia. The fuzziness, instead, clearly commented on my own inspection of the photographs and their site, and so gently raised questions within a deserved and respectful memorial to an otherwise abandoned location, EH

Short Reports

MARY GILLINGHAM

Unprotected

Fiona Pardington

Jensen Gallery, Wellington

8 October - 3 November, 1996

Although I ended up liking this show, I first wrote it off as yet another commentary on sex and power. With images diverse to the point of incoherence, I was frustrated Pardington had done little to guide the uninitiated. For me, the key to the show was a piece of writing on Pardington in the *Cultural Safety* catalogue, which poignantly described the experience of emotional nakedness between a couple; a moment of exposure and vulnerability doubling as a site of empowerment. This show develops tensions within a narrative of sexual relations, beginning with initiation. In the glossy still life *You must fuck me now*, a handwritten note bearing that inscription is nestled amongst flowers and chocolates. I was taken aback by such audacity, but also embarrassed for the writer, who, through such a direct proposition, laid him or herself open to rejection as much as to sexual adventure.

The writer's offer seems to be taken up, though, because in the next three works Pardington considers sexual safety. In *Pox*, a blurred torso suggests erotic pleasure. Closer inspection, however, reveals dark pustules on the skin. The ambiguity of the image parallels the tension of whether to be seduced into pleasure without protection or to be sensible given the risks.

Next, two collections of photographs contrast two possible outcomes: empowerment and disempowerment. Soft porn shots from a girlie magazine address the complexity of sexuality in a series of explicit scenarios. Topless *Madame X* stands hands on hips, staring into the lens of the camera. *Venus*, by comparison, lies on the floor, completely naked, her face turned away; a familiar erotic pose. In *Country and Western*, two nude, stilettoed women lie upside down on a trashy sofa, laughing uproariously. These active poses disrupt reading the collection as being for male consumption only, rather the series is recast as a celebration of female sexuality.

The evocatively titled series *There's no right way to do me wrong* are in striking contrast to the assured sexuality of *Madame X*. A photograph of marks encircling a neck suggests victimisation, and the curled up figure of a woman with her back to the viewer denotes rejection and hurt. Vulnerability is heightened by faces and limbs being cropped or hidden.

Though clear that psychological and physical dangers lurk in sexual relations, Pardington is concerned to remind us that sexuality is a site of adventure. Winding up the show are three still lifes. An old dressing gown dumped on the floor, a piece of cloth embroidered with the word 'Saturday', and a pair of undies, were all found by Pardington down the back of a sofa. The aftermath of a 'night in'? I found this series hilarious, and thought it made an astute end note. By breaking up the serious issues of danger and disempowerment with humour, Pardington achieves a balance that reflects the range of experiences that complicate sexual relations, ES



Fiona Pardington,
Madame X.
Photo courtesy the
Jensen Gallery

CHRIS HILLIARD

Splitting the Gaze

Lisa Crowley

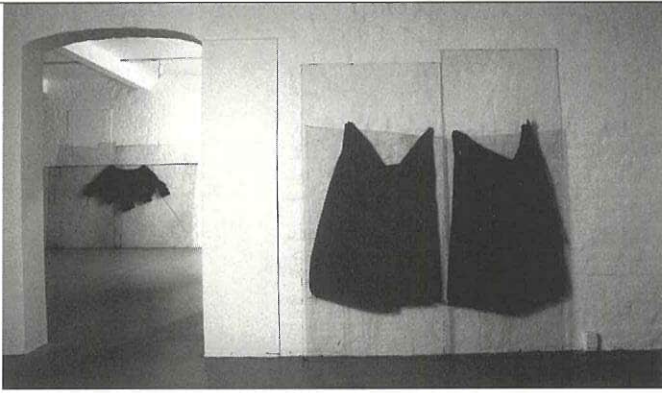
George Fraser Gallery, Auckland

November 5 - 16, 1996

Splitting the Gaze is an exhibition of six works exploring issues of desire and the gendered gaze. Each work takes garments or pieces of fabric and presses them between differently shaped plates of glass. The device of the specimen in glass suggests an explicitly institutional gaze, but the incompleteness of the 'specimens' rob this gaze of full knowledge. Elsewhere Crowley has talked of the difference between images which proffer full, unmediated delivery of their object, and those which complicate that goal. In the inability to possess an image fully, Crowley sees a space between the self and the object of its desire; this frustration provides a starting point.

The works in *Splitting the Gaze* merge the concept of the male gaze with the notion of costume and fashion as peculiarly feminine: most of Crowley's 'subjects,' or, more correctly, 'objects,' are items of clothing, divorced from bodies, but retaining at least something of a female body's shape. One piece, *Cretin*, conjures with Victorian images of the insane, but in contrast to the Baudelairean flaneur — a privileged male intellectual drifting elusively, observantly, knowingly through the city — Crowley contrives a different gaze, less fleeting but just as uneasy. *Cretin* presents a dull, bunched-up black silk skirt, frayed at the top as if forcibly ripped, sandwiched between two panes of glass of different size and shape, one very scratched, and oppressively blackened around the edges.

Crowley's use of glass (which, in these pieces, always bears signs of some previous use in a window or cabinet) works to imply



Lisa Crowley, *Splitting the Gaze*, 1996. Photo courtesy the artist



Stuart Sontier, *Untitled*, 1996. Members of Papua New Guinea's performance troupes snapped by tourists

a third party between object and spectator in the gallery. The glass is, of course, an analogue of an eye (or lens). In *Cretin*, prior inspection does violence to the image it frames; while the stunning *Red Gaze* consists of a loud red 'dress' attached to a 'torso' of darker red silk. The torso is all but hidden by blackened glass until it reappears when the front piece of glass ends. In the space between chic and obscurement is a sense of threat and suppression.

The work I enjoyed most, however, I appreciated in terms other than Crowley's emphases of gender, desire and psychoanalysis. *Punctum* is composed of two silk rectangles, burnt in different places; the lower sheet's burn-holes can be seen, muted, through the upper sheet. The burns are dark brown thinning to yellow; shaped like stars, or, in one case, a ragged coastline. To me they evoked old nautical maps, imperial explorers' charts. Embalmed within glass like a museum piece, they were a reminder of the way gazes and desires are implicated in mapping and knowing as well as in more visceral things. EH

STUART SONTIER

The South Pacific Festival of Arts

Apia, Samoa

September 8 - 23, 1996

Culture is always in flux. Nonetheless, changes in culture are not always benign and undirected. Many would agree that some cultures have ability to change others beyond recognition, to the point where they cease to exist.

The South Pacific Festival of Arts is a huge four yearly event involving more than 20 island cultures. The instigators, the South Pacific Commission, aimed to "conserve and develop the various Pacific art forms", and prevent possible loss of these arts through outside influences. Running since 1972, Rotorua hosted the 2nd festival, and in September 1996 Samoa hosted the 7th.

For most visitors it has been a venue where Pacific Islanders can showcase traditional performance, costume and craft. But the festival is also an important arena for contemporary performance, ritual, visual arts, theatre, political and theoretical debate.

A festival which allows opportunity for cultural interchange between participating countries may be criticised for causing dilution of the old traditions, but it can also be seen as developing stronger links with neighbours and contributing to understanding of difference.

Two incidents brought this discussion to the surface. Some Samoans were not happy with the less than Christian presentation by the Sanduan Papua New Guineans (amongst others). One night an angry local man tried to hit some of the performers with a palm frond. The Sanduans were shocked, and finding that it was their semi nudity that offended, were deeply insulted. The incident caused much discussion, and while one Samoan *Observer* journalist took an aggressively enlightened view, many others voiced an unaccommodating attitude to 'pagan' cultures.

This was made more complex by Samoa's enthusiastic moulding of Christianity into its culture. While some would say that the missionaries stripped the traditions, many Samoans believe that they themselves have taken what they wanted and integrated it into their culture. Imagine then, being host to an event which includes performances your culture defines as offensive. A conflict of this magnitude is not easily solved and challenges us all to consider the implications of difference in value systems.

A second more insidious and revealing incident occurred involving influence over cultural change. It revolved around a dramatisation of the birth and growth of Samoa, from pre-Christian times to the present day. An American Samoan magazine revealed that the title and content of this opening night performance had been changed, removing the significance of the god Tagaloa. Samoan creation stories place Tagaloa as the pre-eminent figure, with the god Nafanua coming along later. But Nafanua talked of a future religion that would sweep through Samoa, which fitted more tidily into Christian thinking. Sure, in the long history of a culture, figures come and go in their popularity, much as the popularity of various Christian saints waxed and waned. But when it is a central figure in a creation story, we have to consider the possibility of mythological revisionism, and ask who, if anyone has the mandate to do this. Right or wrong is not the point, more important is that there is wide discussion of the issues which add to the constant evolution of all cultures. The next festival, in New Caledonia will undoubtedly continue this. EH

Short Reports

MATTHEW FITZSIMMONS

Contemporary Hong Kong Art Biennial

Hong Kong Museum of Art

17 September - 3 November, 1996

Exploring the rest of the Hong Kong Museum of Art prior to viewing the *Contemporary Hong Kong Art Biennial* rewards the visitor with a perspective to further appreciate what the *Biennial* has to offer. I spent a couple of hours in the Museum's Chinese Painting and Calligraphy gallery, absorbing the various scripts, 'clerical', 'cursive', 'regular' and 'running,' which helped me enjoy the huge amount of calligraphy on show in the *Biennial*, along with 120 other works roughly grouped into sculpture, installations and painting.

Kwok-chung Yuen's *Da Hai Hang Hsing K'aoT'o Shou*, 1996, seemed out of place in the painting section — given it consisted of two panels of calligraphy, dark blue, separated by a poster-red panel — all in clerical script. There was no clue as to what texts said, though Yuk-chun Puk's plinth of Mao's works with "Revolutionary Spirit" written on the spine a metre away provided a clue. Here Mao's thought was separated by a Buddhist text and a Confucianist text. This painting broke the mould for me, and commanded attention.

The brief guide to the exhibition states that the overseas selectors (two panels, one local and one overseas whittled down the 1,294 entries) "lamented the lack of originality found in submitted works." I agree with this comment, for much of the painting and sculpture and most of the installations.

Ng Siu-ming's *Willy-willy II*, three plastic boxes with a plaintive message to "Please take a few minutes to think of your secrets," is barely a 'trend follower,' more like a conceptual art throw-back. I found Andy Wong Ngai-hong's homage to his heroes, (*The Muppets*, *Sesame St.* and other cartoon characters) more like a homage to Peter Blake. For me the pieces that actively engaged with Chinese society or culture stood out and were just as accessible. Yung Ho-yin's *Moral Cultivation* was a masterpiece of serenity evoked by characters occupying a great blue, gold flecked surface, while Warren Leung Chi-wo's fine, tall ink on paper panels were surprisingly reminiscent of McCahon.

Kwok Mang-ho's *Frog Thoughts* in the calligraphic section defied categorisation and was the best installation, to my mind. Consisting of an album of thirteen spreads (mixed media on paper), the artist says he found inspiration in ancient folded albums, and likens them to our use of video. The red/blue on black/white card sat in its own acrylic aquarium exuding the happiness the Frog symbolises. For me the most memorable installation was Alice Chan Lai-fan's *Fetishism of Material Wealth*, assembling 25 television sets and juxtaposed 'live' characters enjoying the current materialist obsessions — cell phones, BMW's, watches, etc, with figures who, along with funerary objects (mingchi), would be incinerated as part of a funeral rite. Viewers were clearly disturbed by the pictures of real people using the mingchi cellphone and the funeral figurine sitting in the otherwise realistic office.



Ray Tsz-man Yu, *Enjoy the Fine Menu Tonight*, 1996, from the catalogue to the Contemporary Hong Kong Art Biennale

The stunning Museum, situated on the Kowloon waterfront, has a gallery for contemporary Hong Kong artists, and I'm sure some of the works in this *Biennial* will find a place there, ffl

JAMES LITTLEWOOD

Puccini's *Tosca*

Opera New Zealand at the Aotea Centre, Auckland

October 5 - 20, 1996

Unfortunately for authors, the majority of theatre and opera revolves around the art of the remake: how to make the audience forget they already know the story. With that given, Opera New Zealand must be commended for linking up with the big Australian companies and importing the best of their standard repertoire pieces. Elijah Moshinsky's funky *Rigoletto* was a classic example: pop tunes, well sung, cool setting; as was Ken Russell's ageing but contentious *Madam Butterfly*, butchered in Wellington but restored with its political semiotic well intact in Auckland. In fact, the Australians are getting so good at face-lifting these old-crowd pleasers that ONZ's own woefully static *Lucia di Lammmoor* raised doubts about the Aucklanders' need to go to the expense and effort of any new productions at all.

And so it was with a degree of confidence that we bowled up to this *Tosca*, first directed by John Copley for Australian Opera in the seventies, revamped last year for the Australasian circuit and directed on the Aotea's stage by Thea Brejzek, under the baton of Stephen Matthews. Once again, the Australians did really well. In fact, it was electrifying.

Set explicitly in Rome on June 17th and 18th, 1800 (the time of Napoleon's occupation), designer Allan Lees wisely avoided messing with place and time. The first act, set inside the Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle is rendered in large scale with rigorous attention to detail. Only the wrought iron partition that separates the family chapel from the rest of the building imparts a sense of enclosure, incubating the jealousy and menace that festers between characters on this hallowed ground.

In the second act (possibly the best 45 minutes in the popular canon) realism is subjected (along with the two lovers) to Scarpia's cruel bias. Malcolm Donnelly's understated stage pres-



Tosca, Finale Act 1. Photo courtesy Opera New Zealand



Caroline Williams, *In absentia* (the vacuum of lack). Photo courtesy James Fenton

ence leaves the text and pervasive music to carry much of the evil weight. This approach also provides a vital counterpoint to the set; his vast, receding study in the Palazzo Farnese. Twisting perspective, it pulls us into the world of a man truly defined by his material and human possessions. As Cavaradossi is tortured in the lurid green light from off stage, Tosca is forcefully invited to relieve his suffering by yielding to Scarpia either the information he desires or her body. It has been said that this opera makes light of its own left-wing political backdrop, and as Prof. Nicholas Tarling's programme puts it "political motivation is rather assumed than expounded." The greater *mise en scene* reflects the same forces at a national, rather than an individual level and suggests that Tosca's story may be one of many. By the time she gets around to articulating that it's not Cavaradossi "but my soul you are torturing", the characters' opposing moral counterpoints move faster than our sympathies can keep up with. Even the eradication of the antagonist at the end of Act II is insufficient to change the lovers' fate.

Puccini is so good at bringing political and emotional reality to the sublime spectacle of opera: a great blend of modernist and classical sentiments. This production, despite — even because of — its resistance to innovation, captures the mix perfectly, EB

JAMES FENTON

In absentia (the vacuum of lack),
Caroline Williams,
Brooker Gallery, Wellington,
October 29 - November 16, 1996

"Only a very small part of architecture belongs to art: the tomb and the monument; everything else that serves function is to be excluded from art." (Adolf Loos, *Architecture*, 1910)

Even from the outside, The Brooker Gallery offers clues to Caroline Williams' installation *In Absentia* (the vacuum of lack). Set at the base of a typical eighties-boom office on Wellington's financial wall, The Terrace, it is shielded from the street behind smoky-grey windows. This is a space of partial disclosure, which the external signage underlines. The name in white hel-

vetica, the place marked by a simple arrow pointing to the door: this is the kind of signage used to indicate tourist spots, memorials and mausoleums.

"When we find a mound in the woods, six feet long and three feet wide, raised to a pyramidal form by means of a spade, we become serious and something in us says: someone was buried here. That is architecture." (Ibid)

For as long as my memory allows I have dreamt of a massive presence of some monolithic rocklike thing. It has a texture which gives no clues to its scale but implies a mass that goes on forever, right through and around the earth — the world is the biggest thing I know. Perhaps it's the architect's greatest dread.

"Beyond a certain scale, architecture acquires the properties of BIGNESS. The best reason to broach BIGNESS is the one given by climbers of Mount Everest: 'because it is there'. BIGNESS is the ultimate architecture". (Rem Koolhaas *S,M,L,XL*, 1994)

We architects spend our lives making things that sit on the earth — they touch but are not supposed to tamper. The mausoleum is the only building which allows us to make openings into the earth.

It is the mausoleum I am reminded of when I see Williams' work. I am drawn in particular to Adolf Loos' *Design for Dvorak's Mausoleum* (1921). Her ramps are made of the same stuff as the walls floor and roof — blocks of Swedish granite — carved from the hard parts of the planet. These ramps are not ambulatory paths, they lean like headstones before the monumental mason has inscribed them — markers without memories.

Williams' drawings have been hung high, lined up to catch the natural light. It is as if the absence her title remarks is the space itself. They are held in place, like specimens pinned by darts with their tail feathers removed. Such weighty gestures seem necessary to hold these massive ink rafts in place above the highly reflective Sardinian granite of the Brooker floor.

Williams occupies space beyond the pictorial limits of a Piranesian massivity. Hers is an interior psychological space teetering on the brink of a larger void. It exceeds the bounds of a single image seeping into the space of the gallery and beyond.

"Bigness is no longer part of any tissue. It exists; at most, it coexists. Its subtext is fuck context." (Ibid) ffl

Short Reports

PHIL KELLY

Untitled

Mikala Dwyer

Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington

24 September - 12 October, 1996

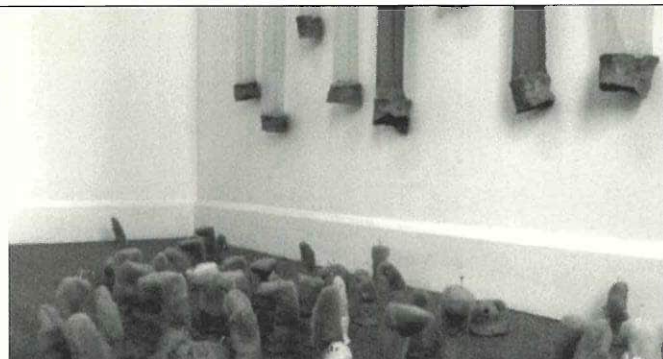
So truly jolly, a Christmas dolly, I talk on request, I'm never depressed, I'll wink a good time till someone pokes me one big blue eye out. So truly heady a Christmas Teddy, I laugh on request, I'm never depressed, I'll keep you warm at night till someone rubs me, hey, a Junfilled toy.

A group of dismembered teddy bears are scattered across the gallery floor. Each limb or head has been 'bandaged' with clay to seal off the rupture. Some limbs have dress making pins sticking out of them. On the wall above is a row of coloured tubes made of organza similarly bound at the bottom with clay swaddling. The backdrop is Buren in the playpen — the stockings from which the Teddies seem to have been untimely ripped. But it is the dismembered toys that hold our attention.

We seek reference for the work outside the gallery — in the home. As a child I had a hand-me-down Teddy which had the lining torn from one ear. The broken body part made me feel for the toy, to want to care for it. Teddy had feelings which influenced my own. But the tale is different in Dwyer's kiddy killing field.

To nurture or to torture? It would seem Dwyer has thrown a tanty in the nursery. Like a test for abused children run amok, an exploded diagram of domestic violence; the pins point to voodoo and revenge. Is Dwyer describing the escalation of child abuse as reported in the media or is this catharsis at play? There is tension between observation and autobiography; she seems to play both parent and child; the overseer who comments on behaviour and the subject itself, flailing wildly with the toys in an effort to speak. One thinks of the mannequins of Jake and Dinos Chapman with their misplaced orifices and sexual organs. These sculptures display dysfunction unspeakably loudly; the Chapmans latterly tearing through the international art scene causing degrees of shock and outrage. With Dwyer the articulation of a similar set of issues is rendered in a more palatable, or perhaps veiled way. The references are coaxed into our consciousness, like a therapy session as opposed to being beaten and abused by the imagery of the Chapmans.

Our first instinct is to make light of the work. Perhaps what lies alongside the installation is easier to turn into comedy than to confront. Viewers seem excited that individual elements are available for purchase as if an arm or a leg-come-pin cushion would be a cute item to have about the house. Although not for domestic contemplation in its entirety, ironically the work (as described by Hamish McKay) "screams domestic." This house-bound tragi-comedy for the gallery quietly tears your insides out. *Would you like to say what silence was meant to intend. Would you like to see what violence these eyes can send to your heart from the nursery.* "From the Nursery," from the Wire LP *Chairs Missing*, 1978 EMI Records, fl



Mikala Dwyer, Untitled, 1996. Detail of an installation, photo courtesy Hamish McKay Gallery

STEPHEN HAMILTON

Behind the Printed Page:

New Zealand writers' Papers

National Library Gallery, Wellington

12 July - 3 November, 1996

Legend has it that when Denis Glover and friends needed funds to support their work they would deliberately manufacture 'literary papers,' manuscript poems scrawled and revised then aged by scuffling on the dusty floor of the Caxton Press, and offer them for sale to a wealthy United States university eager to collect such material. Perils of this sort are not unique to the curators of manuscript collections, although it is surely far easier to manufacture a bogus draft of a poem than to forge a painting.

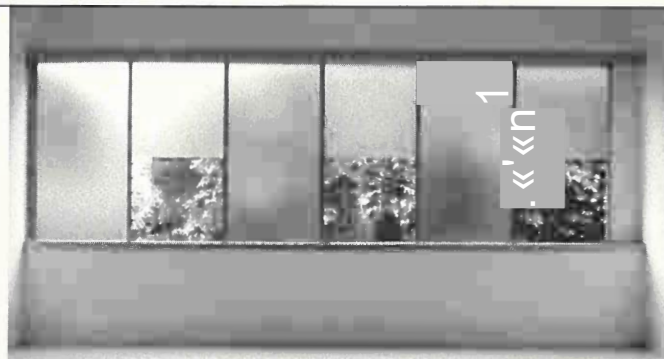
In viewing this exhibition of writers' papers from the Alexander Turnbull Library collection, it becomes clear that the Turnbull has either been very fortunate or very canny in its acquisition of this type of material. Its reputation as a national cultural repository has led many New Zealand writers to give it first option on the purchase of their papers. That there are gaps is partly the result of an inability to compete with overseas institutions when papers are offered on the open market. And, appropriately, other New Zealand libraries have often collected the papers of the sons and daughters of their own regions: for example the Hocken holds the majority of the papers of James K Baxter and Charles Brasch.

Curator Jim Traue has acknowledged the difficulty of displaying books as exhibition objects: "A book is a wrapped parcel, a container for words and ideas, and is meant to be read over an extended period of time. You can't, unless you dismantle it completely, exhibit the whole thing." Traue successfully engages that longer span of attention by setting out a carefully arranged archaeology of the occupation of writing. There is plenty to see; Katherine Mansfield's notebooks, the odd pithy rejection slip, a humorous squib by Glover jotted on the back of a torn envelope.

The first exhibit displays a selection of Maurice Gee's papers, from research notes on his grandfather, model for the main char-



Katherine Mansfield's typewriter. Photo courtesy Alexander Turnbull Library



Dion Workman, *Untitled*, 1996. Photo courtesy 23A Gallery

acter in *Plumb*, to his scripts for the television series *Mortimer's Patch*. Glover's papers are there in all their tatty disarray, lines scribbled on anything that came to hand. Of his more lightweight verse, much of it appears to have been composed in his head and written out with few alterations. Among those on display are typescript drafts of his poem "Reading Room Rules at the Turnbull Library," a tongue in cheek response to his being reminded that liquid refreshments, alcoholic or otherwise, are not allowed in the vicinity of the collections.

And while it is generally the archives of canonic writers that are collected by the Turnbull, occasionally papers of the unpublished masses are also gathered. Among these, those of Herman Foston were selected for inclusion in the exhibition, although soon after its opening it was made clear that Foston was in fact the author of several published, albeit long-forgotten novels. EH

JUDE RAE

Stephen Bram, Kerrie Poliness and Dion Workman
23A Gallery, Auckland
8-26 October, 1996

Poliness' *Red Matter Wall Drawing* is visible through the glass entrance doors as you approach 23A gallery. The drawing is placed to the right, an unruly network of red lines inducing a mild kinesthesia. Opposite a technical manual details the step by step construction procedure to make your own *Red Matter* drawing. With all the sobriety of a guide to table etiquette it describes a communal task based on the estimation of mid points within the contingencies of a selected site. The result combines the visceral immediacy of multiple perspectives with a drawing process based on negotiation and consensus — touchstones surely of the late 20th century. The project emerges as an allegory of shared vision and human error and generates pleasingly divergent connections — Sol Lewitt meets Duchamp, Bridget Riley, Brunelleschi... It looks like perspective gone mad. In fact the work owes more to Nietzsche's "gay science" than to the fantasies of Renaissance perspectivists. Perhaps it is the Nietzsche of the late 1880s that the work salutes, a man prone to madness who, had he been female, might have been merely hysterical. But schizophrenia rather than hysteria is a more useful metaphor for Poliness' work, raising as it does questions of

alterity and multiplicity in our perception of subjectivity.

The works share an apparent simplicity. Bram's prosaic composition of polygons in muted red, green and blue belies the complex multipoint perspective articulated in the artist's statement. If Poliness generates the air of the hysteric, Bram seems to favour sly disavowal. The infinite regress of representation to which he lays claim, while it forms an engagingly baroque contrast to the coolly geometric painting, is more suggestive of a hermetic model than the collaborative paradigm chosen by Poliness. In the latter's work there is a struggle as one attempts to reconcile contradictory depth cues. With Bram this is more of a niggle than a struggle but effort is rewarded by a shadowy obverse image verging on the sublime. I imagine working drawings of a striated space, obsessive spidery lines emanating from the canvas in all directions. Where Bram's statement is dry and knowing, Workman's installation represents a much more lyrical take on what might be described as 70s' site specificity. While the show as a whole complements the gallery it is Workman's installation which activates and extends one's experience of the environment. The work moves easily between two and three dimensions conflating overtones of Donald Judd with more painterly and graphic antecedents. For me this confirms the main theme of the show as that dimensional slippage which underlies the western tradition in both art and metaphysics — a subject elaborated in Gregory Adamson's densely written catalogue essay. Embedding the glass louvers into the back wall, Workman has altered their identity and the interior climate of the gallery. Although an obsessive intensity evident in the seamless finish threatens to undermine conscientious minimalism it is balanced by scrupulous timing. Dense green foliage fills the openings left by the louvers, appearing strangely flat against the frosted glass. Patches of sunlight move across the linoleum and I am left in no doubt that Spring has arrived. It is unsurprising to find Workman (unlike Bram and Poliness) is a local, attuned to seasonal change and well acquainted with the gallery.

So what takes work like this beyond the retrospective? The art of the last decade has often amounted to ironic workovers so it is heartening that this might not be the final word — that a discourse on stylistics can be balanced by revisiting genres in ways which newly engage lived experience. The 23A exhibition project seems to be ending on a high note. Hopefully it will continue in another form elsewhere, ffl

Short Reports



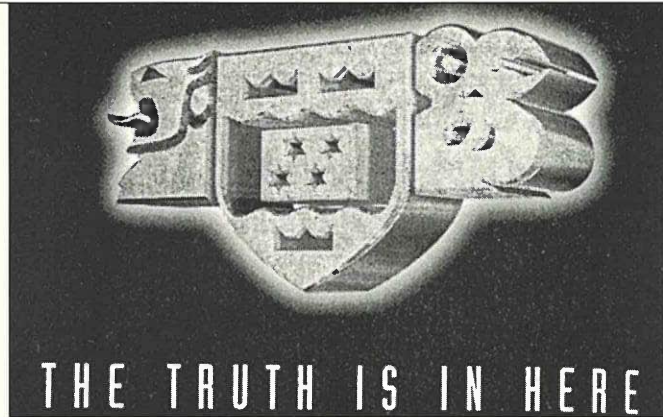
Auckland Ballet, *Giselle*, 1996. Photo Mark Smith, courtesy Mary Jane O'Reilly

SIMON REES

State of the Dance

Writing on dance should be included in the mainstream of arts discourse. Our national performance culture hangs on good reviews and scrappy funding, so it is little wonder dance has remained largely un-theorised. Graeme Murphy, director of the Sydney Dance Company says "dance reviewing should be about poetry, about drawing out the thread of movement... If you can't find any poetry you shouldn't write anything."

The opening of Douglas Wright's *Buried Venus* possesses the poetry Murphy alludes to. The dancer stands alone and exposed on a stripped stage. He pirouettes with head thrown back and arms wide, staring accusingly upward from his centrifuge before tracing a matrix of hieroglyphs in the air and falling floor-ward with a thud. *Buried Venus*' drive is compressed into the hang between spin, matrix, and fall as the dancer's arms crook helplessly at the force of gravity. The poetic mode can also describe tensions that exist between Ballet and Contemporary Dance. In Mary Jane O'Reilly's reconstruction of the traditional *Giselle*, a hip-hop bass beat suddenly sliced through the 1841 Adolphe Adam score; a visceral reminder of the resuscitation master works need to make them relevant to new audiences. At one point in the action, the female corps de ballet advanced across the stage at each other, in martial lines of grand jete, their shadows following them on the back drop. It was as if the shadows were ghosts of past ballerinas dragged into this modern spectacle. O'Reilly saved the traditional touches of delicate adage and emblematic white ballet dresses. Her dancers became ciphers for a convocation of traditional technique and contemporary calisthenics. Revisionism is necessary to save dance from what Graeme Murphy describes as "necrophilia." Despite receiving the largest slice of the funding cake, organisations like the Royal New Zealand Ballet are the most resistant to change, clinging to nineteenth century ideals of form and function. Perhaps 1997 will prove more fruitful: Wright and the RNZBC will collaborate, O'Reilly is developing new work for WOMAD and Graeme Murphy will bring his adaptation of Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast* to Auckland. EB



Victoria University's ad campaign as seen in Wellington's newspapers

PAUL WALKER

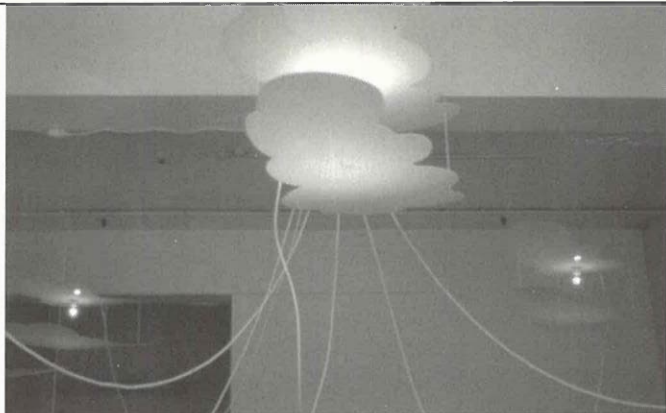
Selling the Truth

A hoarding in central Wellington. A green, glowing, gelatinous thing on a black background. What's it advertising? Perhaps it's another incomprehensible Saatchi spot, promoting some new software thingy? The Museum of New Zealand? The slogan becomes clearer. *The Truth Is Out There*. Must be part of a campaign for a new season of the *X Files*? The green blob? Some new, mutant monster for Mulder and Scully to stalk!

Nearer still and that green thing turns out to be Victoria University's coat of arms. It's presented slightly askew, with translucent depth added so that it does not appear entirely insubstantial in the perspectival view. Newspaper ads pick up the theme. The green blob on the black ground again. Beneath, a block of text with a file tab on the side. "File Two: Summer Courses." "File Three: Postgraduate Courses." File One I have not seen. I believe there are TV spots as well. The print ad slogan is changed to read *The Truth Is In Here*. "Your search for the truth no longer needs to be confined to the months of March to November." The scifi note is also picked up: "To prepare you for your next mission into the world of employment, we recommend you take a postgraduate course at Vic."

I'm not offended by the fact universities advertise — it's not their fault they are supposed to tout for customers. Nevertheless the commercialisation of the ivory tower is excruciating. It is hard to believe Vic's dignified VC was comfortable as he was recently pictured in a Wellington newspaper, balancing a giant mock-up of the University's credit card above his head. All the universities and polytechnics are at it. Massey has ads with a dove flying out of a cage. It's a cliché but at least we get the drift — education opens your mind and lets you take off (no weight of loan debt around that bird's neck). It's harder to figure out what Victoria is saying to us. Is there a secret city of aliens under the Kelburn campus? More than anything it is the claim on Truth with a capital 'T' which is most disturbing. Is University education about purveying the Truth? Shouldn't it be about promoting healthy scepticism? Education is not like the empty-headed thralldom of scifi. Personally, I'm not a believer, ffl

Letters.



Maddie Leach, wonderful human beings, 1996. Photo Courtesy the artist

ROB GARRETT

wonderful human beings

Maddie Leach

High Street Project, Christchurch

23 September, 1996

Maddie Leach's *wonderful human beings* opened in a deep glow of tangerine and a pale green mist. This was girl-minimalism hosted by the colours orange and white and the letter 'c-for-cloud.' With people and clouds, you really have to wait and see, hear and feel how they skitter, titter, scatter up (and down) to expectations. Watching for the unexpected, waiting for the familiar, I still expect to be caught out and carried away.

When I walked into Leach's installation something elbowed my street rhythms out of the way and my breath expanded involuntarily, just long enough to catch me out. The larger of the gallery's three rooms contained white perspex sandwiches filled with light suspended from the ceiling. Light emanated from single clear-glass bulbs — five a delightful tangerine, and one white. Paired plastic cartoon cut-out clouds were hung just above head height. Adjacent stood a tall pair of speakers, white exclamation marks with the sounds of boots tramping through snow and of a scuba diver breathing in and bubbling out. With the speakers angled to face a point in the main room, I guessed the best listening post was with my head in the clouds.

Wait and see. Leach's clouds seemed to profit from the duration of the opening. At the start the room was dominated by late afternoon light through windows facing the street. As the afternoon progressed the sky turned from bright to blue to background-black. Meanwhile the lamps brightened in luminosity and hue while the florescent lighting turned from neutral to green to white. As this subtle light show unfolded around the small crowd of opening devotees I thought about the hopeless optimism of breathing underwater. I was thinking too about what is possible in Leach's breathing space when you know High Street's days may be numbered? Mobil (the demolition demons who took the 'Rise' out of the Edmonds building) have bought up land in this Edwardian neighbourhood of strip joints, architect's offices and clearance retail stores, ffi

Dear Monica,

I am writing in response to Simon Rees review of *Electronic Bodyscapes (EBS)*. This is a particularly badly researched review containing a number of factual errors, misinformation and/or partial information, namely:

"*EBS* did have a critical stance. According to the published flyer *EBS* profiled "Artists...using new media to aesthetically explore a digital world in which new relationships to the body, time and space are being formulated.

"Simon Rees did not outline what *EBS* was; a five-tiered project centred around two consecutive exhibitions of major New Zealand and international artists at Artspace that examined the interfacing of art, technology and the body. Other aspects of this project included *EBV*; a video programme, *EBF*; a series of artists' and new media commentators' talks and *EBE*; a six-hour multimedia event profiling live electronic media and performance. *EBV*, *EBE* and *EBF* received no coverage by Rees therefore he missed the curatorially integrated base for the project. These parts of the project provided vehicles for extending the premise of the exhibition beyond the walls of the gallery and importantly attempted to intersect with the alternative arenas for digital media. By presenting a range of opportunities for interaction with new media *EBS* strived to give an overview of the complex digital environments artists work within today. I know of no other NZ exhibition to date which contained these diverse opportunities for both discourse and exhibition.

"Paul Swadel did not reconfigure his *Interdigitate* work for *EBS*. His work was, as with all the NZ works for *EBS*, specially commissioned for the exhibition. A fact that integrated

the exhibition and strengthened it conceptually. Paul was a late inclusion in *Interdigitate* and his work was therefore assembled from existing material.

"Publishing the catalogue as a CD-ROM is not an avoidance of theorisation (!) but choosing a medium which can most effectively document in the long-term the artist's works. It also places equal importance on the experience of the art work rather than the need for a curator to authorise the work. It is late because of horrendous budget and resource constraints.

"John Conomos has written an essay in support of the show and it will be published in the CD-ROM catalogue.

"Comparing *EBS* to *Transformers* is ridiculous. *Transformers* was curated to be a contemporary kinetic sculpture exhibition for a significant public gallery, with a large budget for its realisation, and the mandate that it service a wide sector of the public. None of which has relevance to *EBS*. Its strength or weakness curatorially therefore does not have any equivalency and only goes to show how far off the mark Rees is.

"In terms of the over-hyped nature of this exhibition — Stelarc got all the hype, and Simon fell for it — used a photo of his performance and ripped off one of his titles — and still did not critique or address seriously Stelarc's work.

In an era of museums and galleries downsizing, restructuring and often losing its curatorial staff, the curatorial profession badly needs some good PR. In this environment the use of reviewers who are not accurate and not prepared to thoroughly research needs to be seriously questioned.

Deborah Lawler-Dormer
Director, Moving Image Centre

toiws

Dear Monica,

Douglas Lloyd-Jenkins' review of the 1996 *Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award* (Monica Oct/Nov 1996) is compromised by the wholly inaccurate statement that "both corporation and competition have, up to now, had an abhorrence of critical investigation, preferring publicity over critique."

On the contrary, Mr. Lloyd-Jenkins knows better than anyone else the extent to which Fletcher Challenge Limited, the exhibition's sponsor, has actively sought to encourage critical debate about each annual exhibition.

It is unfair of him to credit Fletcher Challenge Limited with insularity when the company's twenty year association with the competition has been motivated by a desire to encourage the development of New Zealand ceramics through contact with the international ceramics community.

Critical debate is of course an essential part of such a development but responsibility for any lack of it here can hardly be

laid at the sponsor's door, as Douglas Lloyd-Jenkins undoubtedly knows.

Peter Shaw,
Art Curator,
Fletcher Challenge

Dear Monica,

Just a note regarding "Fractal Fuzz" from the last issue. Because of the nature of the electronic beast, the opening night of *EBS* did indeed see a piece of reconfigured *Interdigitate* work within my *rm 701* installation.

Kia ora etc...to the energies of Deborah Lawler-Dorner and Greg Bennett for enabling the facilities for me to complete the proposed piece and install it a day or so later (a 'noise' barrage culled from 'in your absence' notes left for me in the reception of a Tokyo hotel in early '96).

Process being everything—bits of this work are soon to wind up in a bFM commercial. Quoting Nigel Clark from the last issue, "these...organisms mate by

exchanging bits of code, with small variations magnified by high speed generational turnover."

Paul Swadel
Auckland

Dear Monica,

Who the hell is Jane Gregg? Did she walk into Coca? Did she see *Two Hands of Desire*? She must be some back street journalist trying to educate the red neck folks and sheep of the Canterbury farm lands.

She is a typical dabbler trying to critique art and blunders. Confusing me with Fatu Feu'u, who is Samoan. Her head is still in a colonial time warp. All brown people look the same to her. She is typical of someone who did not make an effort.

John Pule
Auckland

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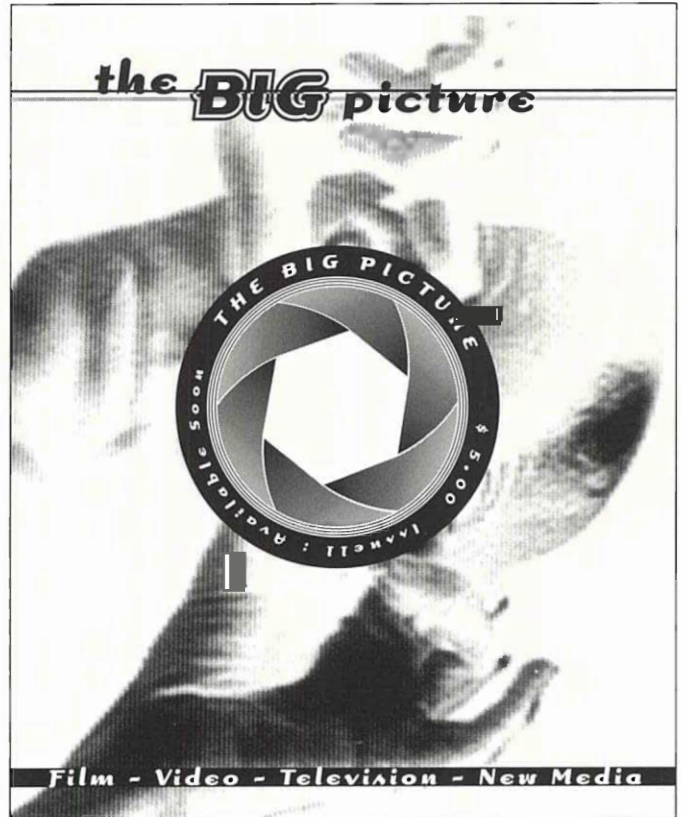
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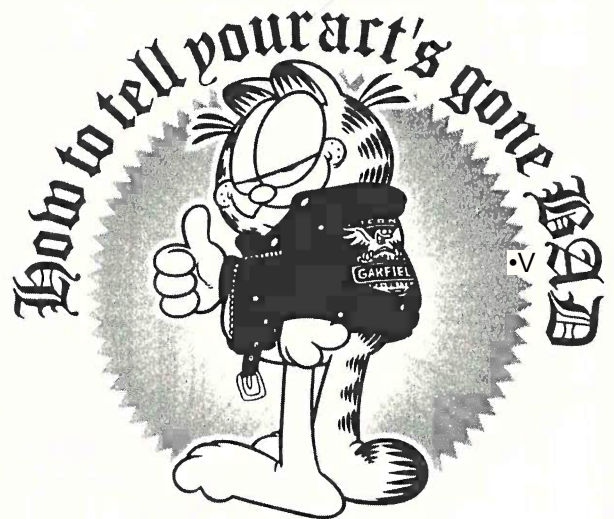
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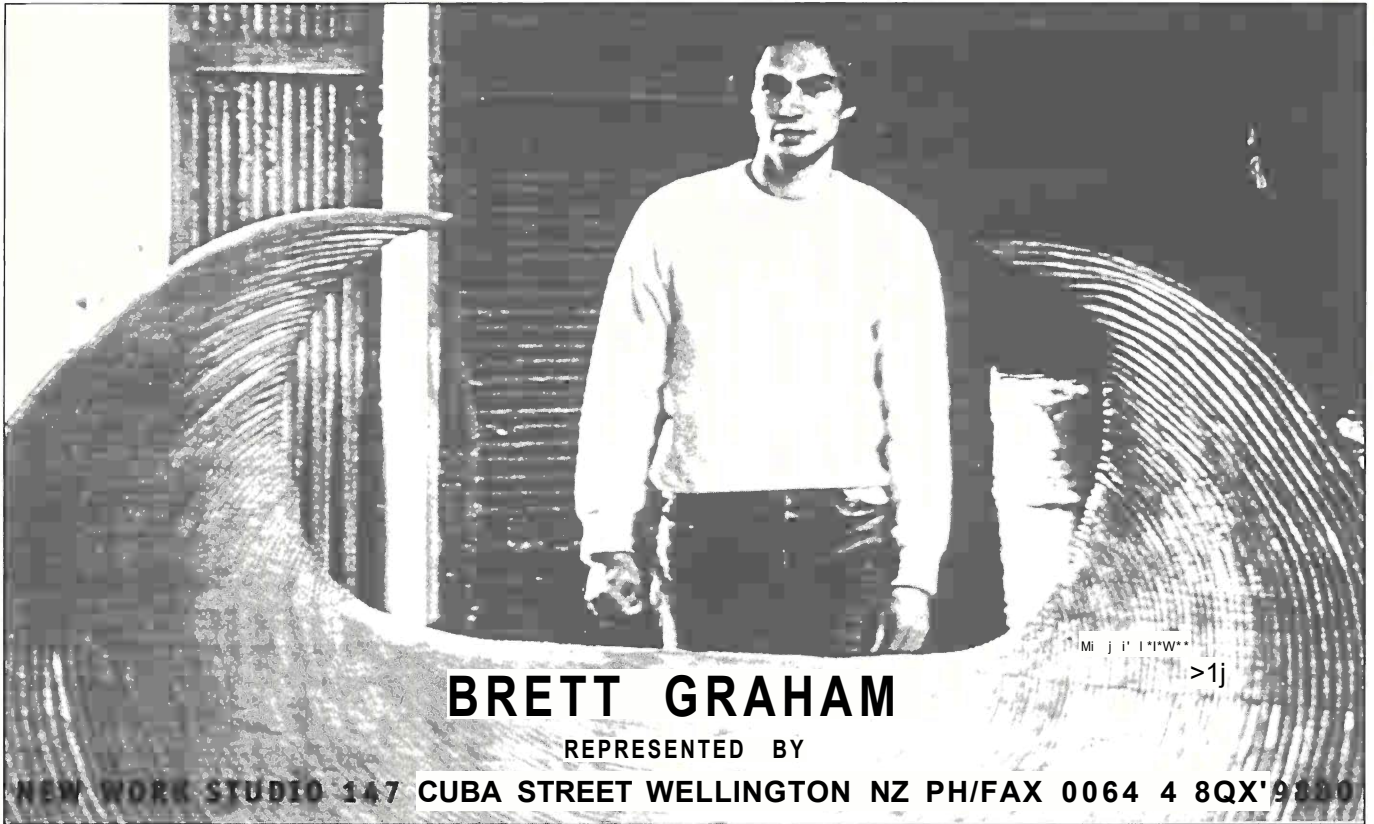
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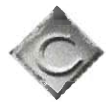
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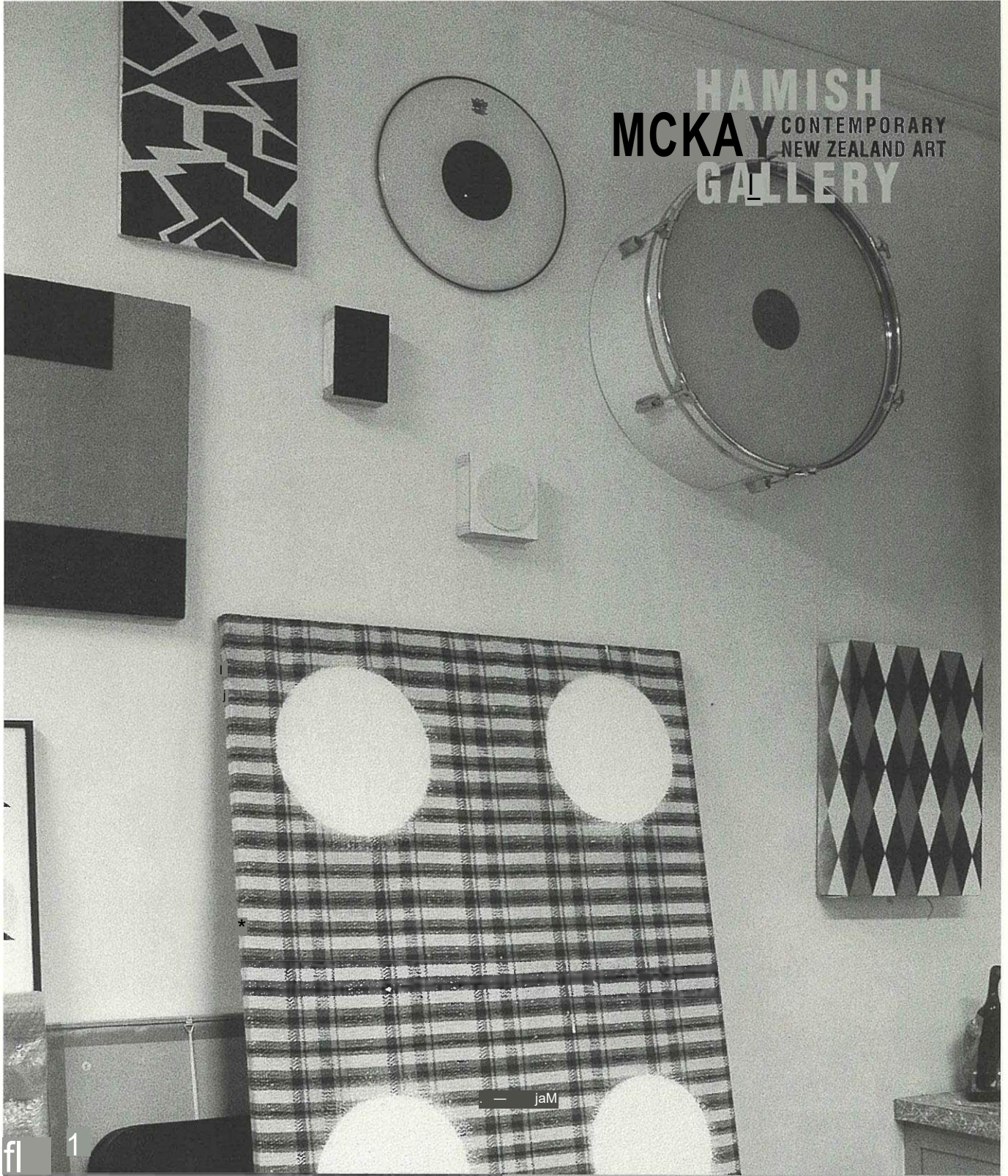
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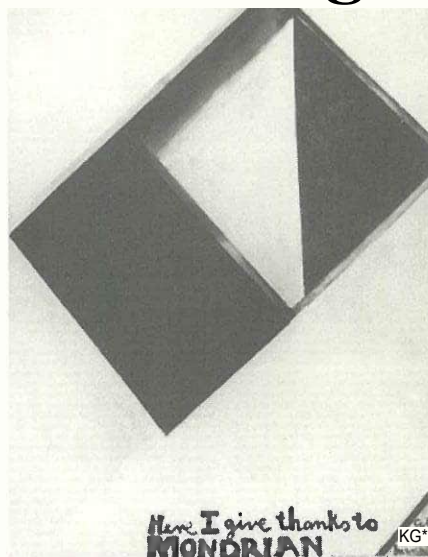
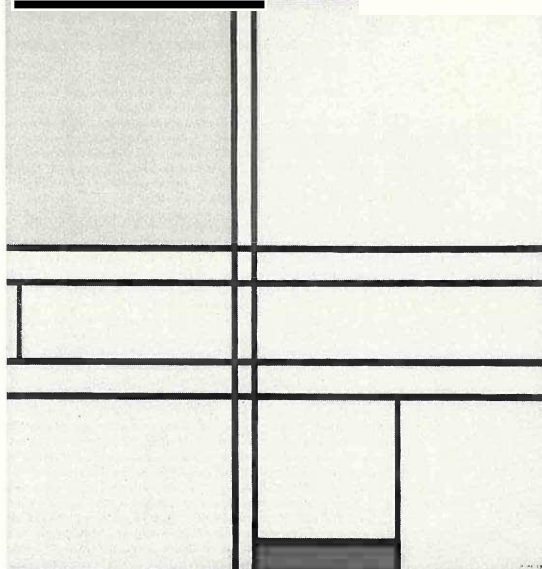
/l/museum Without a Budget

FRANCIS POUND

Talking with the Dead

Left: Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Blue and Yellow*, 1935, from Mondrian: the art of destruction by Carel Blotkamp, 1994, Reaktion Books, London

Right: Colin McCahon, *Here I give thanks to Mondrian*, 1961, from Colin McCahon, Artist by Gordon H Brown, 1984, AH and AWReed Ltd



You were talking here about dream shows. Well, McCahon once said of his *Waterfall* paintings:

The waterfalls started flowing in 1964 and there were hundreds of them. They grew out of William Hodges' paintings on loan from the Admiralty, London. Hodges and I eventually realised we were friends over the years and got talking about his painting. He was dead and I was about the same. We conversed, through paint (about Naples yellow to start with) — and in 1964 I painted my first waterfall. Hodges is my hero in all these paintings, but the Fairy Falls and Japanese and Chinese painting are the real influences later.

McCahon once called the exhibition of hanging scrolls by the Japanese painter Tomioka Tessai, which he saw at the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum, during his American trip of 1958, “one of the most beautiful exhibitions I’d seen.” In rejecting the possibility of a Tessai influence he remarked that Tessai’s works were “among the tops of what we saw: and that’s it. They were just the most beautiful; just plain beautiful.” (‘Beautiful’ — an unfashionable word I’d like to revive.) I’d bring some of that Tessai show here, plus some of the other other examples of Chinese and Japanese art McCahon saw at the de Young Museum; at the Museum of Fine Art, Boston; at the Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas; and at the Cleveland Museum of Art, where he also admired the Indian miniatures. I’d bring some of those too. And, given that McCahon inscribed *Jump E 19*, 1974, ‘To Tomioka Tessai,’ that painting would have to be in.

McCahon speaks of Goya in an inscription on his golden screen — an example of Japonisme if ever there was — with mushroom cloud, in the Auckland City Art Gallery. So, a Japanese screen and a major Goya.

McCahon turned Newman’s ‘zips’ into roads and waterfalls, and into a line of Muriwai surf. So, Newmans, too.

McCahon paints *Here I Give Thanks to Mondrian*. I would

put a Mondrian next to that painting. And a Malevich, too, since, as I’ve argued elsewhere, McCahon might better have said “Here I Give Thanks to Malevich.”

No New Zealander has ever, without getting out of this country, seen a Mondrian or a Malevich. Getting out, I have seen the Mondrian and the Malevich shows in this decade — the two greatest shows I shall see before I talk to you dead.* But why should we forever have to put up with travellers’ reports. Bring the stuff here.

I’d do the same, too, for Walters, and for Mrkusich, the one living one among these masters. With Walters I’d put a Herbin, a Vasarely, a Capogrossi, a Taeuber-Arp, an Albers, a Newman, a Stella Black Painting, and, of course, a Mondrian, his most beloved and greatest mentor. With Mrkusich, I’d have Mangold, Rothko, Reinhardt, Kelly.

I would put all these things together so that the dead might talk with the dead, and with us. Instruction and delectation would be my purpose: to get all these paintings to converse through paint.

Of course, most of the people in the Arts Council today — sorry, ‘Creative New Zealand’ — would never have heard of these foreign painters I’ve been talking about, which might make it hard to get this show funded. But I don’t complain, it’s precisely this happy fact which allows me to write of a ‘dream show’. And who knows? Perhaps Chris Saines will read this and say, ‘Right, Frank, you’re on.’ EH

* I did once write a report on the Malevich show for *Antic. Antic.* — never was there a more perfect misnomer. It was a deeply earnest little magazine for academics on the make. That report was rejected as ‘too personal,’ and for speaking of New Zealand art while speaking of Malevich. One simply wasn’t allowed to speak of Malevich, Walters, Mrkusich and McCahon in the same breath.

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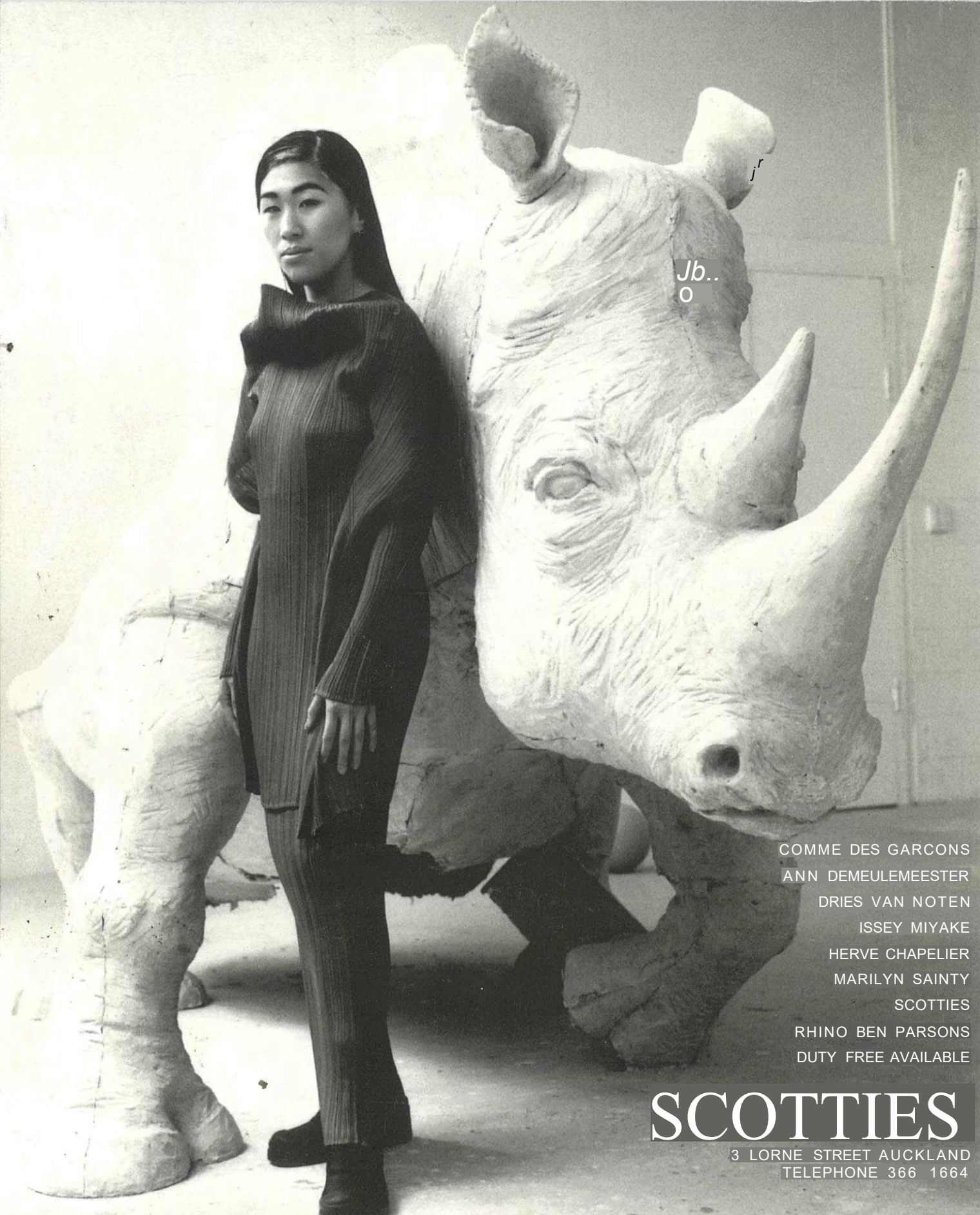
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