

Julian Dashper

# Cultural Safety

CONTEMPORARY ART FROM NEW ZEALAND

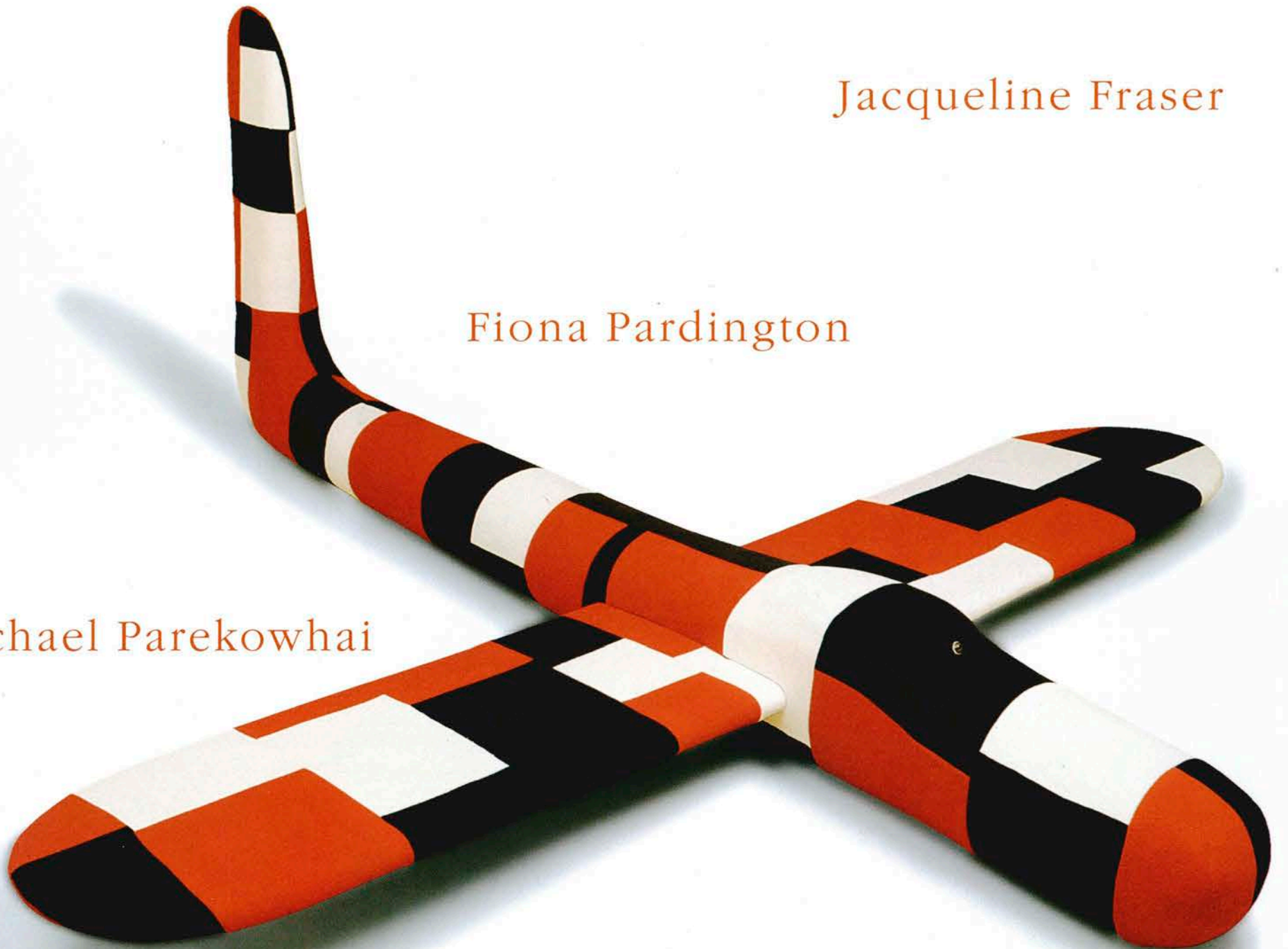
Luise Fong

Jacqueline Fraser

Fiona Pardington

Michael Parekowhai

Peter Robinson



CITY GALLERY, WELLINGTON  
4 April - 22 May 1996

WAIKATO MUSEUM OF ART AND HISTORY, HAMILTON  
5 July - 1 September 1996

Ruth Watson

DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY  
April - May 1997

A joint venture with the Frankfurter Kunstverein. Supported by Creative New Zealand  
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# Cultural Safety

## THE NEW ZEALAND TOUR

In 1990 staff of the City Gallery, Wellington and the Frankfurter Kunstverein began scoping possibilities for an exhibition of New Zealand art in Germany. These discussions led to the preparation of what came to be known as the *New Zealand Art to Germany* project. Four years later the largest exhibition of contemporary New Zealand art to be staged in Europe opened at the Kunstverein in Frankfurt and later toured to the Ludwig Forum for International Art, in Aachen. Now the return exhibition of *Cultural Safety* in New Zealand cements a principle that has been a foundation of the *New Zealand Art to Germany* project from the outset – that of exchange. For the project aims to not only present our art in Europe but to also offer both European and New Zealand audiences the opportunity to debate the significance of contemporary New Zealand art within an international context.

At first glance contemporary New Zealand art can appear similar to art produced elsewhere – an aspect of a condition of sameness prevalent in the late 20th century, a condition which includes people in geographically distant countries wearing the same style of clothes or reading the same magazines. While such similarities are a testament to the globalisation of world culture, they can camouflage a broad range of cultural differences. This fact has led to a dilemma for organisers of international exhibitions and has encouraged many such exhibitions to both exaggerate and distort similarities and differences between countries. In an attempt to avoid such pitfalls *Cultural Safety* was jointly assembled by German and New Zealand curators, with the intention that each would bring to the exhibition an understanding of the factors impacting on both the production and reception of art in their native countries.

To fully represent the art of a country in one exhibition is an impossible task. For this reason the organisers of *Cultural Safety* chose to present only seven mainly younger artists whose works reveal a range of issues that are currently driving developments in art in this country. Unlike many group exhibitions each artist is presented in depth, in many cases with a body of work spanning several years of activity. This was a strategy designed to engage a German audience with the distinctive character of an artist's work – an invitation to more fully appreciate the local influences that set our artists apart from their European contemporaries.

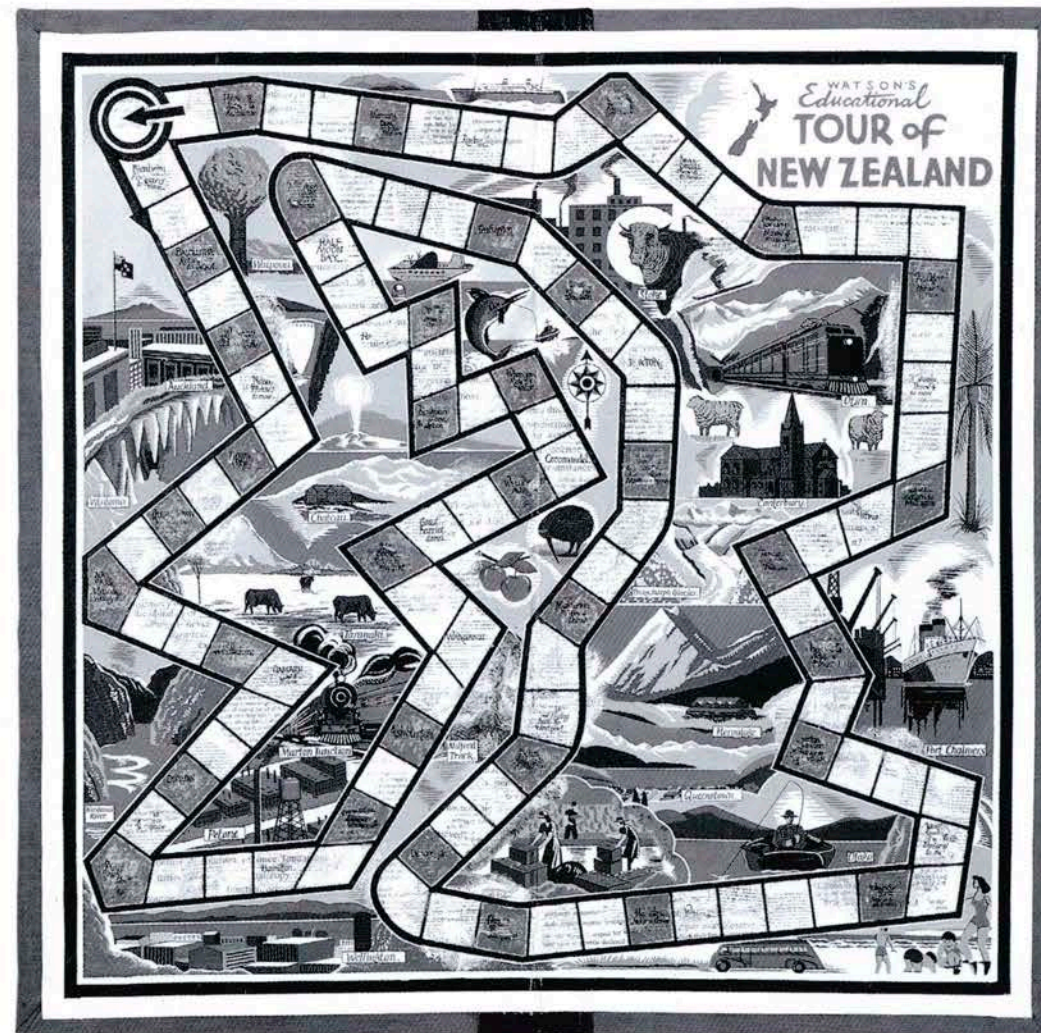
In presenting a suite of mini-surveys *Cultural Safety* now offers a rare bonus for New Zealand audiences not used to seeing early to mid-career artists surveyed in depth in our public galleries.

Each artist's body of work is presented as separate and distinct and in this sense *Cultural Safety* is not an overly thematic exhibition. But while they work in different media and explore a wide range of genres all the artists are involved with issues at the core of current cultural and artistic debates, both here and abroad. As Peter Weiermair says in the catalogue "Our exhibition poses a range of questions and problems currently of concern to artists in many different parts of the world – questions of cultural identity that are not only of importance for New Zealand, located from our perspective at the geographic end of the world, but that are also crucial issues for a Europe now involved in a new phase of ethnic migration".

### Cultural Safety

"Cultural Safety" is a practice that was coined in New Zealand's national health-care system where Western medical practices are used to treat patients from a range of cultural backgrounds. It aims to recognise the security provided by cultural beliefs and that culture itself can be an invasive force impacting on the health of a patient.

Used as a title the term "Cultural Safety" intentionally de-emphasises the national focus of this exhibition while also alluding to the wider issues of



Ruth Watson, *Tour of New Zealand* 1989

culture that are examined by the artists it presents. Through translation the meaning of the term alters by drawing on different cultural histories. In a European context the title may refer to an illusion of the safety of distant cultures in the Pacific, societies seemingly removed from the tensions that continue to form a backdrop to cultural and ethnic exchange in Europe.

### Ethnic Diversity

In former times the artforms of different cultures were frequently presented by our museums as distinct. And while Western art has absorbed many stylistic influences from other cultures, historians traditionally recorded such developments in terms of the growth of Western art. In the late 20th Century the emerging field of contemporary art is increasingly multicultural, the boundaries between cultures less clearly demarcated. This is particularly true of contemporary art in New Zealand and is reflected in this exhibition by the inclusion of artists of mixed ethnic backgrounds, many of whom draw on their mixed cultural heritage in making their art. In this sense *Cultural Safety* records a shift from as little as a decade ago when artists represented in group exhibitions of contemporary New Zealand art were predominately Pakeha working within western traditions.

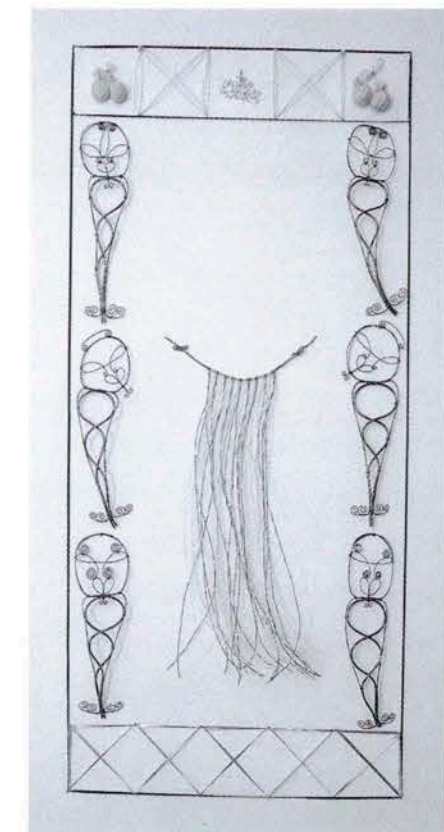
### Vision and Language

When Peter Weiermair refers in the catalogue to "the international language of the participating artists", he intrinsically acknowledges that no medium, style or genre represented in the exhibition is out of place in an international context. But while the artists work in painting, sculpture, photography and installation and utilise the strategies of conceptual art, in different ways they work through this international language to address aspects of their local and personal situation.

In recent years many artists have begun to incorporate text into their art and in so doing they explore the relationship between language, culture and vision. The use of text has become a particularly strong feature of New Zealand art demonstrated in this exhibition by Julian Dashper's use of signs, labels and magazines, by Michael Parekowhai's word sculptures, by Ruth Watson's maps and billboards and by the slogans that are now characteristic of Peter Robinson's works. Other artists refer to language metaphorically as with Jacqueline Fraser in her work *Te Reo Rangatira/The Language of Chiefs*. Both Parekowhai and Fraser refer to and use the Maori and English languages. A reference to the particular bi-cultural make up of New Zealand society, this use of dual languages makes their work simultaneously inclusive and exclusive of a western audience.

### Body and Self

The body as a shifting cultural, physical and metaphorical entity is a concept that is reiterated throughout this exhibition. In some works the body is specifically depicted as with Fiona Pardington's photographic portraits that explore the ambiguities of sexual identity. In others the body is only inferred as with Luise Fong's paintings which allude to the body's cellular construction, its skin, or the textiles used in bodily adornment. Regardless, though, of whether it is presented directly or indirectly, in *Cultural Safety* the body is primarily treated as mutable, a filter through which cultural meanings are graded.



Jacqueline Fraser, *Te Reo Rangatira/The Language of Chiefs* 1993

### Trade and Exchange

All the artists in *Cultural Safety* are acutely aware of both the local and international situations in which they work and many examine and highlight the complexities involved in the exchange of cultural property and information. For example Dashper explores the ways information is channelled and constrained in the venues for contemporary art by the use of devices such as labels, display cases and magazines. In a wider sense Robinson's works suggest that the valuing (or devaluing) of goods or cultural property is the lowest common denominator in mass-culture, while his use of particular slogans such as "dirt cheap" offer a wry commentary on the exchange of goods between Maori and Pakeha in the 19th century.

In the work *The indefinite article* which plays on the different Maori and English meanings of the word HE, Parekowhai examines distortions brought about through the process of translation. In many ways this work epitomises a concern the artists have for what gets lost, displaced or added when cultural motifs and traditions are shifted from one context to another.

Gregory Burke



**I**t is with a considerable sense of pride that the City Gallery, Wellington, Te Whare Toi, in association with the Frankfurter Kunstverein, presents *Cultural Safety*, one of New Zealand's most significant visual arts cultural exchange initiatives. New Zealand's cultural engagement with Europe has been predominantly one way - north to south. *Cultural Safety* redresses this situation - providing a relevant forum for the presentation of contemporary New Zealand art within a European context.

*Cultural Safety* is the culmination of three years dialogue between the City Gallery and the Frankfurter Kunstverein. It is to date the most ambitious and demanding international project the Gallery has undertaken. *Cultural Safety* reaffirms our commitment to developing opportunities which provide forums for dialogue, increase cultural understanding, establish frameworks for cultural exchanges, and foster professional relationships and partnerships with institutions and organisations outside New Zealand.

*Cultural Safety* is a project of genuine collaboration, the result of a team effort between the two curators, Peter Weiermair and Gregory Burke. They travelled throughout New Zealand, visiting public and commercial galleries and meeting artists in their studios to survey current art. *Cultural Safety* is their personal selection, constrained only by practical considerations of an international touring exhibition.

A project of this ambition succeeds only if it gains the sustained commitment of many individuals and organisations. The detailed acknowledgements which follow indicate the overall spirit of co-operation this project has engendered.

We are profoundly indebted to the lenders for remarkable generosity in allowing works of art to travel great distances for the duration of the tour.

On behalf of the City Gallery, I would like especially to thank Creative New Zealand for their major investment in and advocacy of this project. We also recognise the importance of the corporate sector in achieving success for our endeavours. We welcome the goodwill of both Air New Zealand, Frankfurt for travel assistance and international freight, and the New Zealand Tourism Board, Frankfurt.

**Paula Savage**

*Director*

*City Gallery, Wellington, Te Whare Toi*

**Julian Dashper** was born in Auckland in 1960 and is of European descent. He graduated from the University of Auckland School of Fine Arts in 1981 with a degree in painting. Since his first exhibition in 1980 he has exhibited widely in New Zealand and internationally. In 1995 he was an artist in residence in Germany. He is based in Auckland.

**Luise Fong** was born in Sandakan, Malaysia in 1964 and is of Chinese and European descent. In 1989 she graduated from the University of Auckland School of Fine Arts with a degree in printmaking. In 1995 she was artist-in-residence at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth. She currently lives in Melbourne.

**Jacqueline Fraser** was born in Dunedin in 1956 and is of Maori (Kai Tahu) and European descent. She graduated from the University of Auckland School of Fine Arts in 1977 and has been exhibiting nationally and internationally since. This year Fraser will participate in the exhibition *Containers* in Copenhagen. She lives in Auckland.

**Fiona Pardington** was born in 1961 in Auckland and is of Maori (Kai Tahu) and European descent. In 1984 she graduated from the University of Auckland School of Fine Arts with a degree in photography. Pardington has exhibited widely in New Zealand and is currently based in Dunedin as the Frances Hodgkins Fellow.

**Michael Parekowhai** was born in Porirua in 1968 and is of Maori (Nga-Ariki/Te Aitanga and Rongowhakaata) and European descent. He graduated from the University of Auckland School of Fine Arts in 1990 with a degree in sculpture. In 1992 he was included in the major survey exhibition *Headlands: Thinking Through New Zealand Art*. Parekowhai currently lives and teaches in Auckland.

**Peter Robinson** was born in Ashburton in 1965 and is of Maori (Kai Tahu) and European descent. In 1989 he graduated from the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts with a degree in painting. Since then he has been included in many important exhibitions in New Zealand and Australia. In 1995 he had solo exhibitions in Belgium and Germany. He currently lives and teaches in Christchurch.

**Ruth Watson** was born in Canterbury in 1962 and is of European descent. She graduated from the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts in 1983 with a degree in painting and has exhibited widely since nationally and internationally. In 1994 she received an Arts Council of New Zealand Visual Arts Fellowship which enabled her to take up a residency in Berlin. She currently lives in Sydney.