



Dead Steer 1987

SECOND NATURE

PETER PERYER, PHOTOGRAPHER, NEW ZEALAND

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Organised by the City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand in association with the Frankfurter Kunstverein, Germany / Exhibition toured in New Zealand and Australia by the City Gallery, Wellington / Guest Curators Gregory Burke and Dr Peter Weiermair / Generously supported by Creative NZ - Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa

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Peter Peryer's entry into the world of photography 20 years ago was dramatic. Discovering the camera at the age of 32, Peryer explored its expressive potential with gusto, producing in a few short years a distinctive group of images that quickly marked him out for national and international attention. By the late 1970's Peryer's production of images had slowed, coinciding with a shift away from what has often been described as the brooding temperament of these early images toward a pensiveness and humour that has since characterised his work. His approach is strategic and meticulous and allows for the release of only a handful of new images each year. As a result Peryer's work communicates a collective coherency and power; a sustained insightfulness rarely achieved by an artist.

Second Nature brings together a range of images that chart Peryer's development as a photographer. Limited to 60 images the exhibition is better described as a selected survey than a comprehensive retrospective. As such it aims to present Peryer and his work as living and evolving, consequently the selection is tentatively weighted toward more recent photographs. That said the exhibition includes many of Peryer's strongest images, photographs he frequently returns to as benchmarks and as reference points to inform future developments. For it is not uncommon for Peryer to have an image from early in his career pinned to his studio wall alongside a print he is currently working on. The connections between such images may be obvious such as a similarity of subject matter. As often as not though, the relationship is oblique, determined by incidental factors such as the mood of the images or the composition of the subject within the frame. As a consequence when Peryer's images are seen together, these seemingly incidental interconnections gain meaning and impor-



Erika 1982

tance. It is a defining characteristic that led co-curator Peter Weiermair to describe Peryer's photographs as being "as complex as good poems, which can be read again and again, and always differently".

The overlapping connections in Peryer's work mean that stylistic periods are not clearly demarcated in his development as a photographer. It is possible however to isolate themes and concerns that resonate throughout his two decades of production.

THE WORLD OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Peryer has often been described as a photographer's photographer, a reflection on his commitment to the medium as a discipline and as an artform. His knowledge of photography is extensive, demonstrated in this exhibition by images which recall several of the great photographers celebrated in the history of photographic modernism. However photographs are produced for many diverse situations; as images for post-cards, as souvenirs in family albums, as documents for scientific study. Peryer is equally fascinated by such genres of photography and frequently draws inspiration from them when developing ideas for his own photographs. His pictures are never straight copies, rather they draw on selected aspects of photographic genres from the subject matter of New Zealand post-card imagery to the flattened picture plane of photographic studies of geomorphology.

PORTRAITURE

In 1978 Peryer commented that "my photographs are self-portraits" and "the photographs are somehow related to my past". Certainly portraiture and self-portraiture are dominant in his early work. The psychological focus on the human subject diminished from the late 1970's however his images remain connected to his personal and shared history as a New Zealander. Be they of objects or animals Peryer frequently exploits the potential of his subjects to convey emotion or a sense of human character. This quality of his work is most easily identified in his images of animals such as *Sea Elephant* 1989, but it is also a feature of many of his photographs of inanimate objects from *Divided House* 1975 through to *The Mecanno Bus* 1994.

MARKERS OF PLACE

In different ways many of Peryer's photographs depict subjects that act as markers of place, in particular, icons or symbols that have long been associated with an idea of New Zealand. Examples in this exhibition include pictures of volcanic cones, snow-capped peaks, a map of New Zealand, a kauri



Sea Elephant 1989

tree, trout fishing, sheep, cows and native ferns. By use of such devices as black and white printing and the muting of the tonal range of the print, Peryer often instills these images with a sense of datedness, of melancholy. Other images depict specific markers of place such as *Marsden Cross* 1994, a monument to the first European birth and Christian service in New Zealand. Collectively these photographs map images of the familiar, symbols of time and place embedded in the public imagination.

Peryer's methods of presentation contribute to the sense of nostalgia conveyed by his subjects, nevertheless by means of photography he also presents them anew thereby inviting the viewer to dwell on them as both real objects and still lifes.

TRAVEL AND TOURISM

Travel and tourism are frequently referenced in Peryer's images if sometimes subtly. Methods of transportation are a recurrent subject such as buses, boats and trains. Other images are associated with touristic travel such as giant kauri trees, waterfalls, animals in zoos and model houses. Some have been shot directly from planes while others artfully recall great migrations; from Polynesia as in *Edward Bullmore's Launch* 1993, and Europe as in *Marsden Cross* 1994. With the arrival of European migrants in New Zealand came the camera and it is a relationship to the history of photography that links these diverse images.

NATURE AND ARTIFICE

Typically a photograph freezes a moment in time to produce an image, a fact we know instinctively when we pose for a photograph. Often it is a tension between the animate and inanimate, the mobile and the stationary that gives Peryer's images their enigmatic charge. We know the rabbit in the *Concrete Rabbit* 1982, is not real, nevertheless it peers knowingly at the camera. Similarly the kangaroo family in *Kangaroos* 1987 appear to be posing for the camera. In other ways Peryer also takes advantage of the photographic process to create an ambiguous relationship between the real and the artificial. Frequently the viewer is left unsure whether the subjects of his photographs are models or lifesize as with *Home* 1991; or of the distance of the subject from the camera, as in *Black Nerita* 1986. Peryer continuously plays with the potential of the camera to create illusions, forcing the viewer to repeatedly question the nature of his subjects.

While such thematic undercurrents accumulate in Peryer's photographs each commands a solitary presence and has its own distinct character. What they all share is a sense of strange familiarity that tests the habits of vision.

GREGORY BURKE

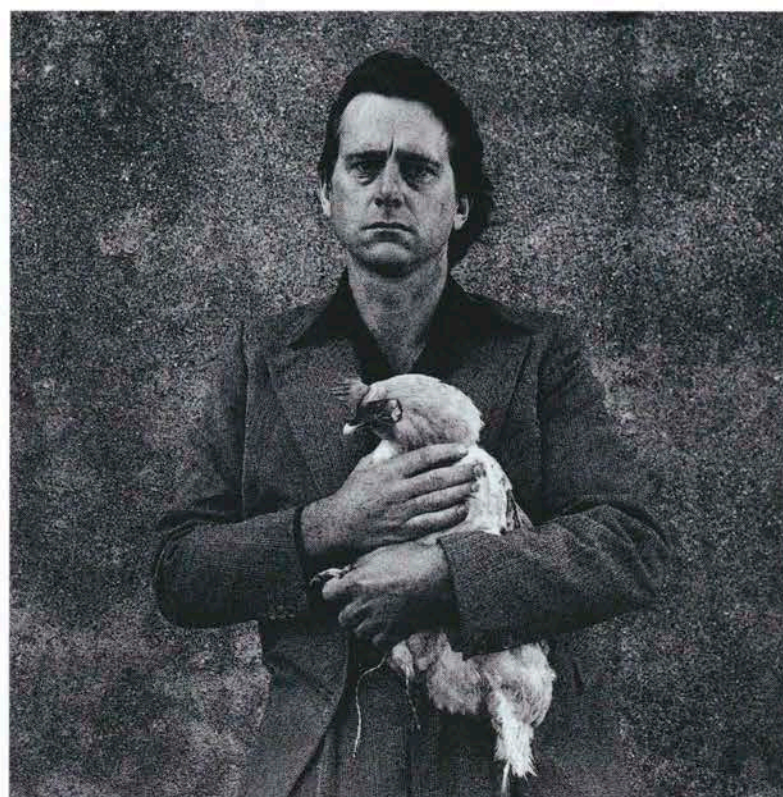
Peter Peryer was born into a Catholic family in Auckland in 1941. At the age of four and a half he moved to the Far North where his parents owned a series of small hotels. In 1969 he attended Auckland Teachers' College and received a Diploma in Teaching. He graduated from Auckland University with a Master of Arts in Education in 1972. The following year at the age of 32, having never owned a camera, Peryer decided that photography rather than teaching was his true vocation.

He started exhibiting his photographs in the mid 1970s and in 1978 a portfolio of his work was published in the prestigious London-based *Creative Camera International Year Book*. He visited the United States in 1986 on a Fulbright Scholarship, and has been the recipient of several Arts Council grants, including a Fellowship in 1994. A documentary on his work was made for TVNZ's *Work of Art* series during this time. Peryer's work has been included in several international exhibitions. *Second Nature*, however, is his first international solo exhibition.

Peter Peryer works fulltime as a photographer and lives in Auckland with Erika Parkinson, his wife of 30 years.



Sacred Heart 1993



Self-Portrait with Rooster 1977

The City Gallery, Wellington *Te Whare Toi* in association with the Frankfurter Kunstverein, Germany are proud to present *Peter Peryer: Second Nature*.

The exhibition was first shown in Germany as a component of one of New Zealand's most significant visual arts cultural exchange initiatives. Whereas New Zealand's cultural engagement with Europe has been predominantly one way - north to south, the City Gallery aimed to redress this situation. In April 1995, after three years of dialogue and collaboration with the Frankfurter Kunstverein, three exhibitions from New Zealand - *Second Nature*, *Cultural Safety* and a selection of contemporary film and video - opened in Frankfurt and subsequently in Aachen during 1995.

Peter Peryer: Second Nature reaffirms the City Gallery, Wellington's commitment to developing opportunities which provide forums for dialogue, increase cultural understanding, establish frameworks for cultural exchanges, and foster professional relationships with institutions and organisations outside New Zealand.

The City Gallery, Wellington *Te Whare Toi* and the Frankfurter Kunstverein would like to acknowledge Creative New Zealand - Arts Council of New Zealand, Toi Aotearoa for their investment in and advocacy of this project through their International Cultural Exchange Programme.

Paula Savage
DIRECTOR
CITY GALLERY, WELLINGTON *TE WHARE TOI*

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