A Wellington City Council Public Arts Bonus

FAULT

BY

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Foreword

Fault, by artists Bill Culbert and Ralph Hotere, was commissioned by the Wellington City Council Arts Bonus scheme, which offers incentives to developers in return for commissioning public artworks on or near their building site. The scheme encourages the production of new works by New Zealand artsts. Wellington City Council sees *Fault*, and works like it, as part of its commitment to developing public art initiatives which will create a more meaningful and memorable urban environment. *Fault* is a special case because its unique position breaks barriers. It takes the inside outside – going beyond the walls of the City Gallery and directly to the people. Complementing the diverse architecture and public art works in Wellington's Civic Square, *Fault* also draws attention to the building and signals its function to passers-by 24 hours a day. Wellington City Council is very happy to be associated with Scollay Holdings in this venture. The result is a spectacular work and a major public art statement for Wellington. – **Fran Wilde Mayor of Wellington**

Foreword

To realise its Arts Bonus, Scollay Holdings Ltd opted to commission a nationally significant and accessible artwork for Wellington's new Civic Square. My company is pleased to join with the Wellington City Council to enable this major work to happen in Wellington. A bonus for me personally has been to meet the artists and to find out about their work. It has been a delight to leave the world of commerce for a while and enter the arena of vision and design. Ralph Hotere has made an enduring mark on our artistic landscape, and been a vital influence on two generations of painters and sculptors. He is one of New Zealand's most outstanding artists. His partner in this work, New Zealand born Bill Culbert, has established a considerable reputation for public artwork in Europe. *Fault* is a striking celebration of Wellington. It enlivens the inner city and I hope it will uplift and inspire the people who see it. – **Chris Scollay Managing Director, Scollay Holdings Ltd**

PORT CHALMERS PINOT NOIR 2.3.94 PR

Bill

Ralph

[fault]

PORT CHALMERS PINOT NOIR 2·3·94 PR

Bill

Ralph

[fault]

P H I L O S O P H Y

Whose fault is it? There are two of them (two artists/two lines) and probably they are both at fault. That is, though they would not choose to be called collaborators, they have certainly drawn the line between them. Those dark rectangles of glass might have their history in canvas or hardboard or corrugated iron. Like any Hotere painting, the blacker they become, the more they seem to entertain reflection. And that lifting line of light, the neon, has made its way along other corridors, in other countries, in and out of the Culbert family suitcase. Sky and cloud step out at either end.

R E L I G I O N

They were correcting a fault – abandoned sheets of glass, a house made up of openings that wouldn't work. But how did they set about it? Did they stand in silence, for example? Did they walk about a lot? Did they hum and ha? Did they sit late at night and stare out the window? Was there wine? Perhaps a star? Did one say dark and the other light?

S O C I O L O G Y

They left ghosts in the facade: a world of borrowings and books still haunts the words above the windows. The letters themselves are carved in stone. Thus the line of light lifts from Philosophy to History. I used to come here with my kids every Saturday morning. If we were lucky we would park the car out here, just where I am standing to admire the fault (jet trail, song, pure note rising on a string). There was grass (still is). You could see people inside the building. They walked around with books and newspapers, keeping quiet. We filled the car with books. I never noticed the names above the windows; I just looked through. It always looked to me as if they threw the whole place in through the windows.

S C I E N C E

The fault is full of power. It's working. It uses about as much electricity as a modest two-bar heater.

WELLINGTON
GENERAL
LIBRARY

[L I T E R A T U R E]

U S E F U L A R T S

But is it one work or many? I want to know and they won't tell me. There's the promise of narrative and rhythm: chapter headings, the line ascending left to right. Page after page, and each window with its title, each like the last but different, like a row of pictures hanging on a gallery wall. So what's the story? Maybe they've turned the inside out? I go up close and look. Matt black. Osram. Hellweiss/Cool White. Some of the neon tubes are 'Made in Italy' and some 'Australian Made'. Then I come and stand back here. They're working late at the gallery: dark windows and all the light is on.

C O M M E R C E

Or maybe Civic Square is the meeting house, the wharenui? Maybe the windows are tukutuku panels – ribs and tears, teeth and stars – and the dark panes of glass are lattice webs that shine with everything they capture. It looks like an exhibition. This and this and this. But no one's selling anything. No one's taking money at the door.

F I N E A R T S

Shriek in the dark, lightning frozen in the glass. The sleepy light at dawn. The way things shift and change. The bannister shines above the staircase, the wave beside the shore. The earth goes quaking on its faultline, which is also the line on which the child will learn to write. His first word is underlined before he gets it out. Crevasse. How small he is, with his chalk, his crayon, that quiet gleam already in his eye. At dusk the fault softens, shivers at the edges. Light spills across stone. Surreptitious warmth. The kids have all gone home. The way things shift and change. You notice the windows high in the opposite building. Bright electric light inside a frame. Curtains. Look, there's a man inspecting a sheet of paper: my latest parking fine.

H I S T O R Y

One small window has escaped both the darkness and the line of light. Is it faultless, or a mild mistake? Look high, the second row, the upper row, top right-hand corner, there, the one without black, without neon, where the building is tied to a horizontal sail, tugging against sky and water. It's the tea-room. The gallery staff are up there, clutching their mugs, chuckling to one another, glancing down into the square. They are pleased and anxious and transparent, safe for the moment, which is of course only the moment: there may be dangerous men on the streets with cans of paint, women with bricks, librarians, artistic children. The gallery staff watch the square, the citizens coming and going. They stare out at the contemporary weather. They note how the light changes, and they see their own building reflected in the windows opposite. How history wavers! Look, there's a woman inspecting a sheet of paper. Undertow. Oh soon the night will come: the dark with its moon, the dark with its streetlights and headlights, the dark with its stars. When that happens, they can go.

Bill Manhire

The Artists

Bill Culbert was born in Port Chalmers in 1935, although he has lived and worked in London and France since attending the painting department at the Royal College of Art in 1957. Culbert has maintained strong connections to New Zealand, showing regularly in this country as well as referencing New Zealand places in the titles of many of his works. Naturally, Culbert's witty conceptual works elicit different responses in Europe than in New Zealand where specific titles acquire particular force. Since the sixties, Culbert has experimented with electrically generated light. Much of his work has involved neon tubes, often in conjunction with familiar remnants of domestic life – chairs, tables, garden implements jugs, suitcases, plastic bottles, wine and glass. Culbert's persistent investigation of lightness and transformation has also been realised through photographic work.

Ralph Hotere was born in 1931 in Mitimiti, Northland. Like Culbert he too studied in London, attending the Central School of Art in 1961. Hotere lives and works in Port Chalmers. He is a leading New Zealand artist, highly respected for abstract paintings which explore the use of black in different philosophical, cultural and religious systems. Hotere has developed a rich vernacular, introducing sculptural processes and materials such as corrugated iron, polished steel and window frames into his paintings alongside

HISTORY

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references to texts, including Bill Manhire's poetry. A concern for environmental protection has also dominated Hotere's art and notable work includes those he made in protest against the proposed aluminium smelter at Aramoana.

Bill Culbert and Ralph Hotere have been friends for years, and have worked together on a number of occasions. Culbert and Hotere's joint works prior to *Fault* include *P.R.O.P.*, a neon and steel work inspired by protests at the Otago Port Company's plan to remove part of Observation Hill overlooking Port Chalmers. *P.R.O.P.* was included in *Headlands : Thinking Through New Zealand Art* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, in 1992.

Also included in that exhibition was the striking work *Pathway to the Sea – Aramoana*, first shown at the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1991. Culbert and Hotere have also collaborated on a series of lithographs which were exhibited at the McDougall Art Annexe, Christchurch, in 1991. Their most recent project before *Fault* was *Post Black*, a series of thirteen black painted window frames glazed with clear or blackened glass and supporting jutting and hanging neon tubes. This series, a precursor to *Fault*, was shown at Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland, and the Centre for Contemporary Art, Hamilton, in 1992.

The Writer

Bill Manhire was born in Invercargill in 1946, and was a student in Dunedin when Ralph Hotere moved there as Frances Hodgkins Fellow in the late 1960s.

He and Hotere have a long history of collaboration, most notably in the *Malady* poems and paintings, and in the *Song Cycle* sequence and series. Ralph Hotere designed and illustrated Manhire's first book of poems, *The Elaboration* (1972). Manhire has won the New Zealand Book Award for Poetry three times, most recently for the 1991 collection, *Milky Way Bar*. He has also published a volume of prize-winning stories, and is the editor of several anthologies, including the best-selling 100 *New Zealand Poems*. He is currently Reader in English at Victoria University, where he teaches a highly regarded course in creative writing.

Acknowledgements

Bill Culbert and Ralph Hotere
Port Chalmers Pinot Noir
2.3.94
Photo: Patrick Reynolds

Centre pages
Fault, 1994
City Gallery, Wellington
Photo: Michael Roth

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