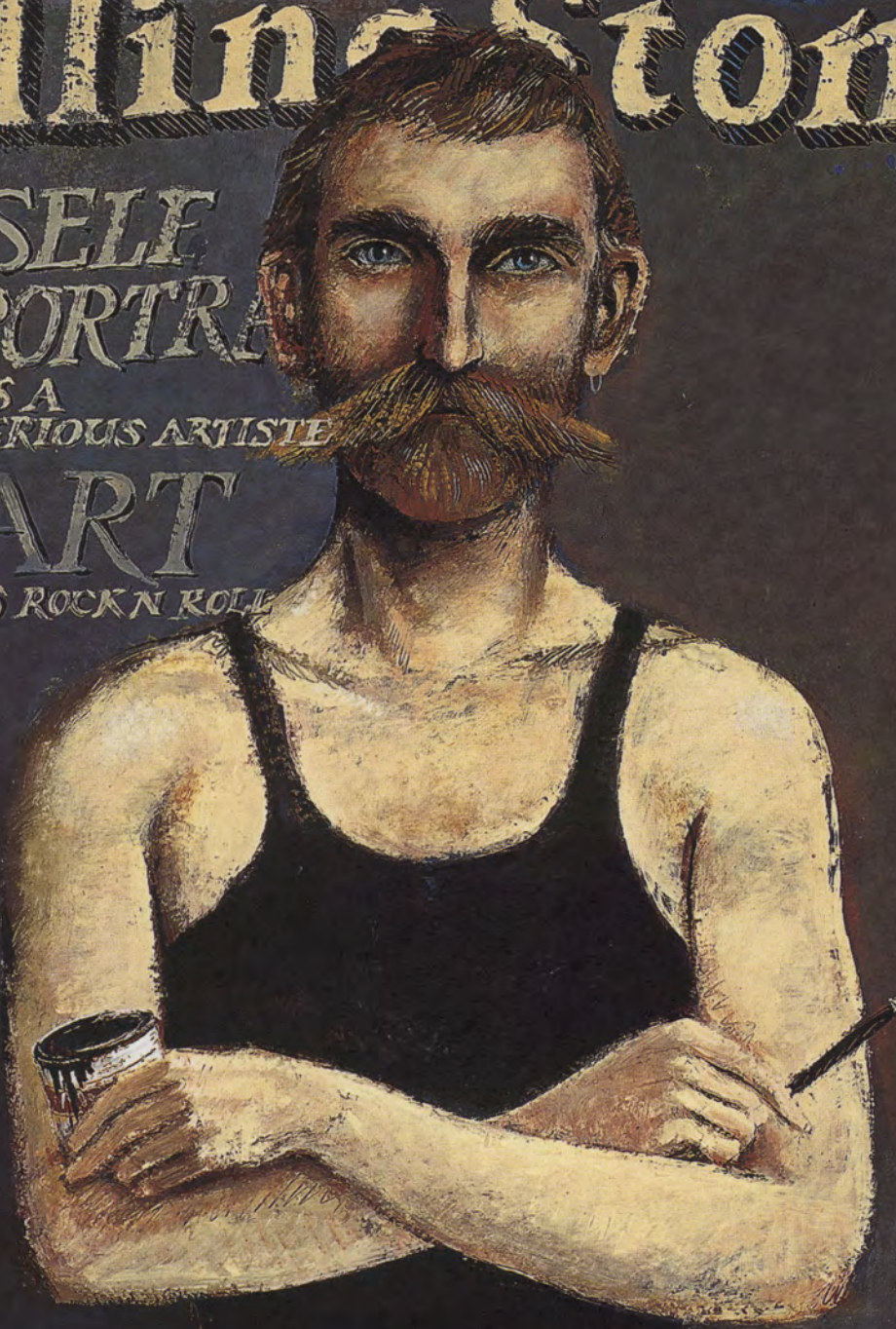




PORTRAIT OF A SERIOUS ARTISTE

William Stone

SELF
PORTRAIT
AS A
SERIOUS ARTIST
ART
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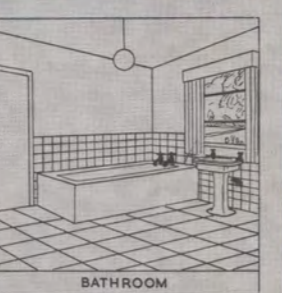
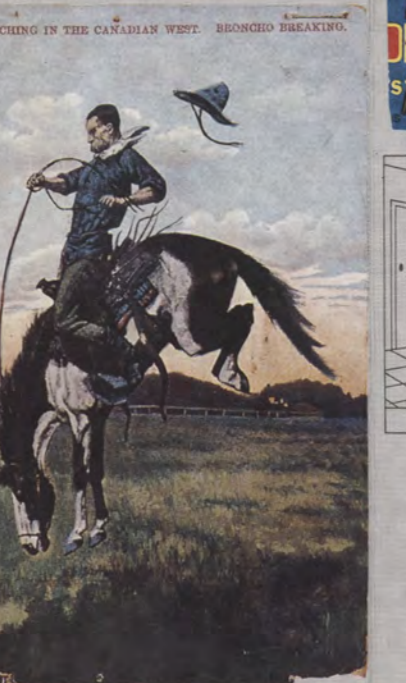
DICK FRIZZELL
4 DECEMBER 1978



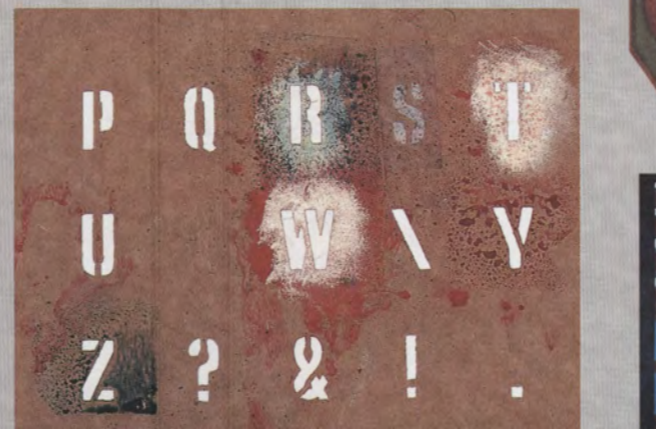
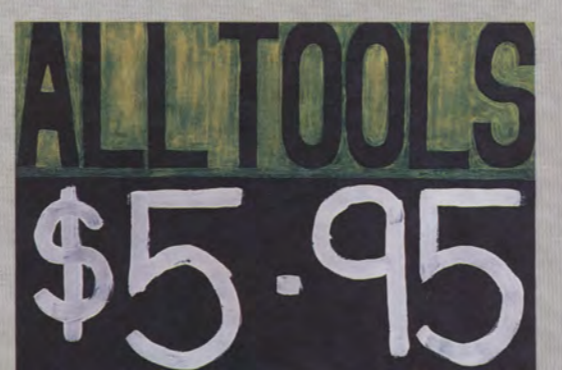
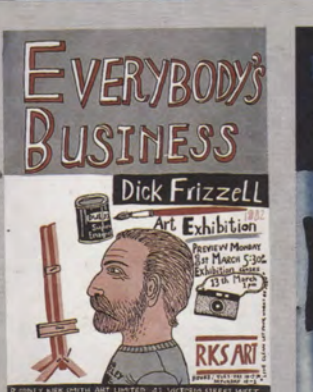
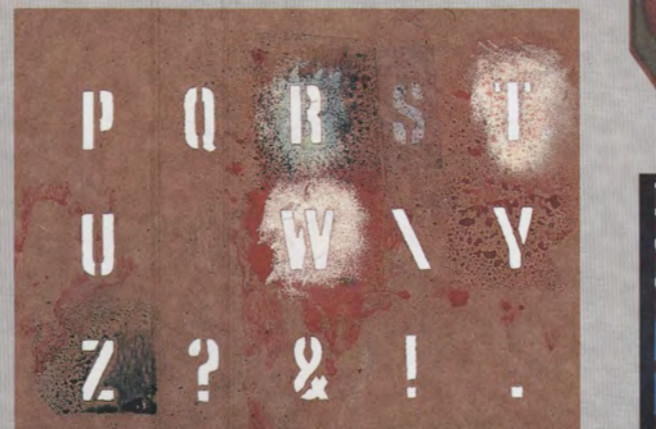
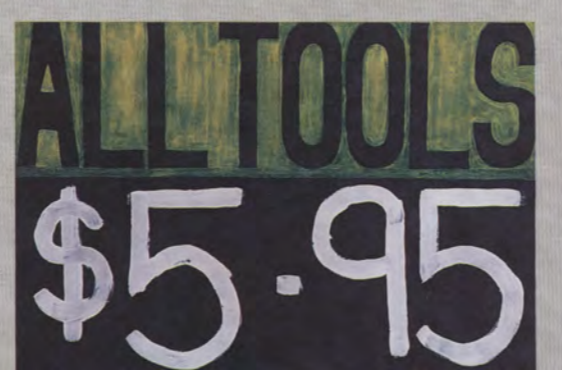
contemporary pluralism in
white yellow blue
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the 80s palette

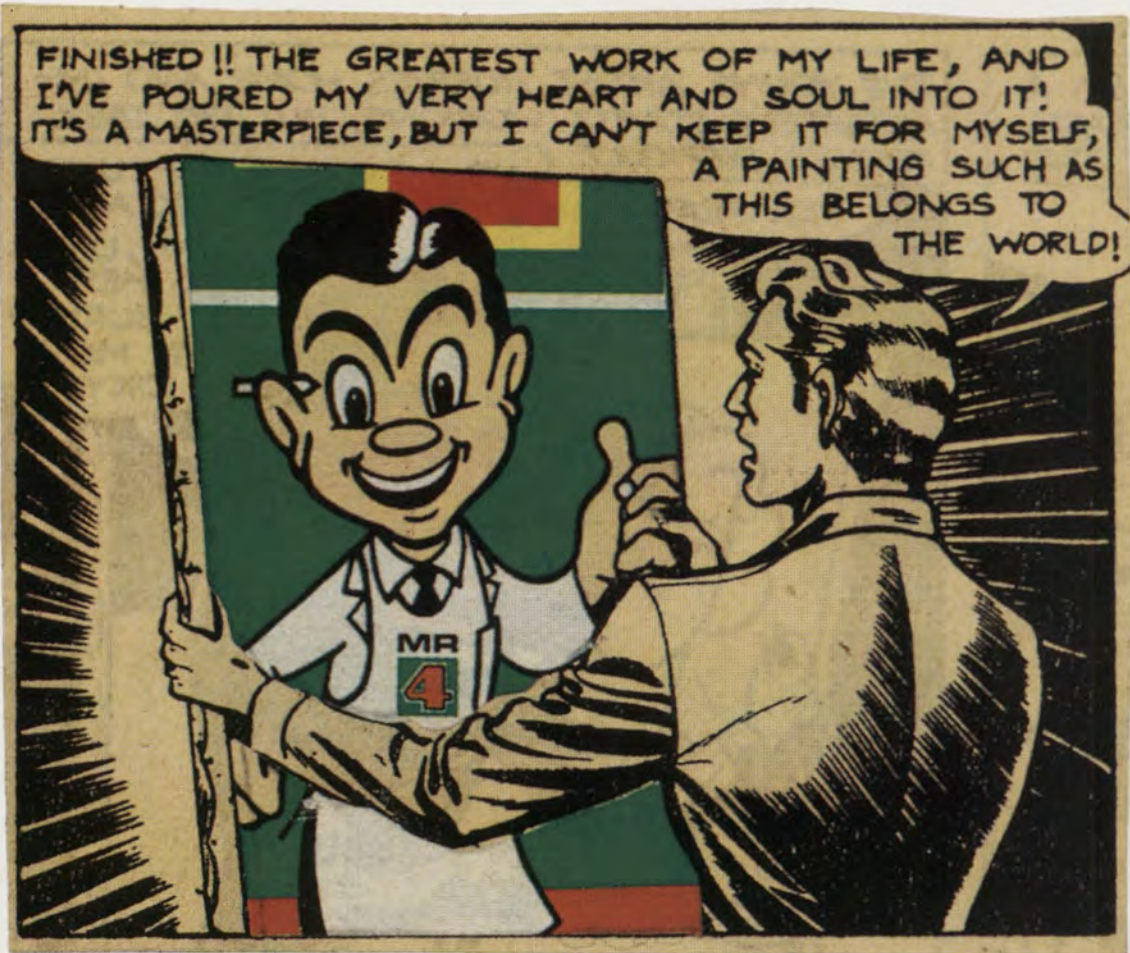


with is nothing more than




CARBONETTE S. COAL COKE CHARCOAL HANG-TRE. PINE-KINDLING. BAG & BULK.



FOREWORD: IN DICK FRIZZELL'S MASTERPIECE A BRYLCREEMED ICONOCLAST APPROPRIATES THE 4 SQUARE GROCER AS AN ICON EQUAL TO ANY OTHER. CONFUSING INVENTION WITH MERE DISCOVERY, THIS CANNY NEW MASTER WOULD SELL HIS FOUND IMAGE BACK TO THE WORLD. SO, IS THIS AVANT-GARDE ART OR COMMERCIALISM? FRIZZELL'S LITTLE COLLAGE PROVIDES A NEAT GUIDE TO THE KEY CONCERNS OF HIS WORK OVER THE LAST 20 YEARS. WITH ONE FOOT IN THE "REAL WORLD" OF ADVERTISING AND THE OTHER IN THE "IVORY TOWERS" OF THE ART WORLD, DICK FRIZZELL HAS ALWAYS ENJOYED AN AMBIVALENT RELATIONSHIP TO BOTH. IT IS OUR GREAT PLEASURE TO STAGE THIS EXHIBITION OF DICK FRIZZELL'S WORK, A SHOW WHICH HAS A LOT TO SAY ABOUT TRAFFICKING BETWEEN THESE TWO WORLDS. THIS EXHIBITION WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE ENERGY AND ENTHUSIASM OF ONE VERY SPECIAL PERSON-THE ARTIST DICK FRIZZELL. WE ACKNOWLEDGE ALSO THE FUNDAMENTAL GENEROSITY AND SUPPORT OF THE LENDERS WHO HAVE MADE THEIR ARTWORKS AVAILABLE FOR A NATIONAL TOUR. WE GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGE THE FINANCIAL INVESTMENT OF CREATIVE NEW ZEALAND ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND TO I AOTEAROA WITHOUT WHICH THIS PROJECT COULD NOT HAVE BEEN REALISED. WE ACKNOWLEDGE ALSO THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF MAJOR SPONSORS ORIX NEW ZEALAND LTD AND SAATCHI & SAATCHI, WELLINGTON FOR THEIR INSPIRED PUBLICATION DESIGN AND CONTINUING MARKETING EXPERTISE. PAULA SAVAGE DIRECTOR, CITY GALLERY WELLINGTON JOHN McCORMACK DIRECTOR, DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY.

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FROM 15 MARCH TO 25 MAY 1997
AND AT THE DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY
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GENEVIEVE WEBB, TITUS CHAN AND ANDREW GEROS



ART'S LAST ACTION HERO an essay by Allan Smith

There is an image in one of Dick Frizzell's illustrated scrapbooks which I keep returning to in my mind when thinking about his art. It is the photograph of a painted door opening into the shadowed interior of a suburban dairy. It was taken in Ponsonby, Auckland in 1980, but could have been taken in any city or small town in New Zealand between 1960 and the present. The door is divided in two with blue sea below, white sky above and stylised little waves between. 'Ice-cream' in sans serif white script sits in the dark blue and lifting upwards into the white, are the words 'Peter Pan' in red cursive letters. Peter Pan is a brand of Tip-Top ice-cream. He is also the boy in J.M. Barrie's story who refused to grow up and continued to have those adventures with pirates and fairies that Walt Disney's cartoons have made so popular. It is all there in this casual vignette; the optimism, clarity and innocence of Frizzell's art; the romance of his vision of a fluent commerce between art, advertising and the dreams of popular culture; and the promise held out by the painted image of plenitude just within reach.

"I want my paintings to be about something, as opposed to being about nothing or being about themselves. Their reference is human experience...I want something to mean something, in a cogent and revealing way, because I want to be purposeful, even useful. So I regard my subject matter as my primary concern as an artist."

NICHOLAS AFRICANO, 1978

DICK FRIZZELL, 1991

"All the things I have done in earning a living have turned out to be very important, so I have confronted them, rather than pushing them away as something secondary to painting. Those skills have become a huge asset."



THE BUSINESS OF ART

IN THE LATE 1960S AND EARLY 1970S WHEN FRIZZELL WAS WORKING IN THE COMMERCIAL WORLD OF ADVERTISING AND ANIMATION HE WAS ALSO MAKING OCCASIONAL FORAYS INTO THE BUSINESS OF 'SERIOUS ART', PRODUCING DUCHAMP AND DADA-INSPIRED SMALL COLLAGES ON PAPER AND SOME 'BY THE BOOK' CUBIST PAINTINGS. HE WAS AWARE OF WHAT WAS GOING ON IN THE LOCAL AUCKLAND ART SCENE, ATTENDED EXHIBITION OPENINGS AND OFTEN DISCUSSED ISSUES OF CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE. HOWEVER AT THIS TIME IT WAS THE GROWING MOBILITY, THE COLOUR AND BUZZ OF THE COMMERCIAL WORLD THAT SEEMED MORE EXCITING TO HIM. AS FRIZZELL DESCRIBES IT, WHAT HAD BEEN A 'LARGE AND STUFFY INDUSTRY' WAS NOW BEING SHAKEN UP BY ADVERTISING 'HOT SHOPS' WHO WERE AGGRESSIVELY MAKING OVER THEIR IMAGE WITH THE AID OF 'WILD YOUNG MEN HUNGRY FOR ADVENTURE.'

A DECADE LATER FRIZZELL WAS ABLE TO FIND WAYS OF GENERATING THIS SAME SENSE OF ADVENTURE IN HIS OWN ART PRACTICE THROUGH IMAGERY WHICH CONJURED UP AN ALMOST EDENIC WORLD OF NOSTALGIC POP ICONOGRAPHY, AND A HOMELY, LOCAL CULTURE JUMP-STARTED WITH THE AID OF ART HISTORY AND A GOOD DOSE OF AFFECTIONATE IRONY.

ALTHOUGH THERE WAS A GAP OF ELEVEN YEARS BETWEEN LEAVING ART SCHOOL AND THE START OF HIS EXHIBITING CAREER, WHAT FRIZZELL WAS DOING IN THESE YEARS AND WHAT HE WAS ABSORBING IN TERMS OF DIFFERENT IMAGE CULTURES AND PICTORIAL SYSTEMS WAS HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT AND FORMATIVE FOR THE PAINTINGS WHICH APPEARED FURTHER DOWN THE TRACK. FRIZZELL'S FIRST EMPLOYMENT AS A COMMERCIAL ARTIST WAS WITH THE MODESTLY SCALED SAM HARVEY ANIMATIONS PRODUCTION HOUSE IN AUCKLAND IN 1967. THE DEMANDS OF THE JOB TAUGHT HIM TO WORK QUICKLY AND FIND THE MOST LEGIBLE AND EFFECTIVE SOLUTION FOR THE ANIMATION OF STORYBOARDS AND SCRIPTS FROM AD AGENCIES. IT WAS AT THIS TIME THAT FRIZZELL WORKED WITH SAM HARVEY ON THE FAMOUS CHES 'N' DALE CARTOONS FOR CHESDALE CHEESE. (HARVEY DREW THE TALL FIGURE AND FRIZZELL THE SHORT ONE.)

FRIZZELL'S TALENT FOR THIS SORT OF WORK WAS OBVIOUS IN HIS ABILITY TO DRAW IN A RANGE OF DIFFERENT STYLES WITH THE GRAPHIC VERVE, WIT AND LIGHTNESS OF TOUCH REQUIRED BY ADVERTISING CULTURE. TWENTY YEARS LATER IN THE EXPLORATORY PENCIL DRAWINGS FOR HIS CUSTOMISED AND HIGHLY STYLISED TIKIS WE CAN SEE THE FACILITY AND COMPETENCE OF A CARTOON ANIMATOR STILL AT WORK. IN HIS TIKI SKETCHES FRIZZELL TESTS OUT REPETITIVE OVERLAYS OF INTERLOCKING, CURVILINEAR PATTERNS AS HE SEARCHES FOR RESOLUTIONS TO COMPLICATED FORMAL PROBLEMS WITH A PRACTISED GRAPHIC SHORTHAND AND QUIRKY HUMOUR.

IN 1970 FRIZZELL MOVED TO ANOTHER AD AGENCY WHERE HE LEARNED THE STUDIO SKILLS OF PRESENTATION LAYOUT, RENDERING, HEADLINES, HAND LETTERING, AND TYPESPECS, WHILE WORKING ON ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS AS DIVERSE AS THE LABOUR PARTY AND YATES SNAIL BAIT. GIVEN HIS OBVIOUS ABILITY AS A DRAUGHTSMAN, ALL OF THESE TASKS CAME EASILY TO FRIZZELL. TOO EASILY PERHAPS; IN 1974 HE REALISED HE HAD GROWN OUT OF BEING AN 'AD-MAN HOON'. ON WHAT FRIZZELL DESCRIBES AS 'ONE EPIPHANIC AFTERNOON' HE REMEMBERED THAT HE HAD ONLY MOVED INTO COMMERCIAL ART AND GRAPHIC DESIGN SO HE COULD EARN ENOUGH MONEY TO SUPPORT HIS FAMILY AND THEN PAINT.

ALWAYS CONVINCED THAT HIS OWN ART WOULD HAVE TO COME FROM SOME RE-JIGGING OF HIS PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF THE WORLD, FRIZZELL RECOGNISED A PARABLE OF HIS SITUATION IN THE STORY OF SIDDHARTHA, THE EPNOMYOUS HERO OF THE HERMAN HESSE NOVEL. IT BECAME SIDDHARTHA'S GOAL TO SEEK WISDOM THROUGH AN APPRECIATION OF THE MATERIAL WORLD AND THE DIVERSITY OF ITS APPEARANCES, RATHER THAN FOLLOW THE PATH OF AESTHETIC REJECTION OF THE WORLD. TO AID HIM IN THIS SEARCH SIDDHARTHA ACCEPTED EMPLOYMENT WITH A RICH MERCHANT AND SOON BECAME VERY CONVERSANT WITH THE WAYS OF THE BUSINESS WORLD. HOWEVER HIS VERY SUCCESS POSSESSED HIM TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT HE EVENTUALLY BECAME UNABLE TO SEE OUTSIDE IT AND FORGOT THAT SUCH EXPERIENCE WAS ONLY A MEANS TO AN END, NOT AN END IN ITSELF.

SO WHEN FRIZZELL WALKED OUT OF THE OFFICES OF MAC HARMAN ASSOCIATES IN 1974, AND STARTED WORKING EARLY MORNING SHIFTS AT THE CITY VEGETABLE MARKETS, HE FELT HE WAS SOMEHOW GETTING CLOSER TO THE REAL LIFE THAT WOULD FUEL THE ART PRACTICE TO WHICH HE NOW GAVE THE BEST OF HIS IMAGINATIVE ENERGY.



PEEL
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PEE



GEISHA



BRAND

CUT STYLE
WITH VEGETABLES
DELIKAFISCH PIKANT

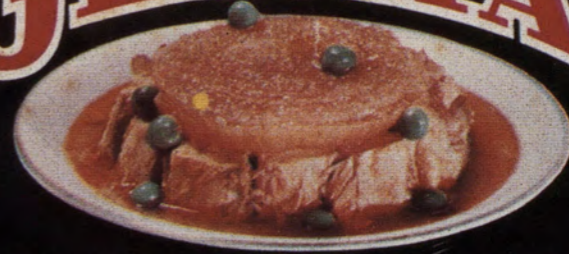
MACKEREL FILLETS IN DRESSING SAUCE

TRADE MARK



PAOR
NOZAKI, LTD.
TOKYO
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GEISHA



BRAND

CUT STYLE
WITH VEGETABLES
DELIKAFISCH PIKANT

NET WEIGHT
6 1/2 OZ. (185 G.)

MACKEREL FILLETS IN DRESSING SAUCE

In Dick Frizzell's first solo exhibition, the *A-Fishial Art Show* of 1978, his paintings' deadpan humour was fringed with a barely suppressed exuberance and delight. The paintings collided the pragmatics of an ad-man's need for a compelling motif with the visceral pleasures of expressive modernist painting. Like the best of his work between then and now, these images of gaudy fish tin labels and comic strip characters painted in bright and viscous enamel conveyed the freshness and magic of a first encounter. They pictured the richness of the material world and the

printed world condensed into striking images. *Black Geisha*, for instance, is a hypnotically opulent work, as mesmerising in its bold graphics as in its succulent paintwork. Because it is sticky and quick drying, enamel paint allows the artist to work fast and build successive layers of colour and line while preserving seductive bleeds and treacley scumbles with a look of glistening immediacy. Frizzell exploits this quality of the medium in virtuoso displays of graphic and painterly dexterity: in *Black Geisha* we sense the skilled hand hovering over the surface, darting confidently

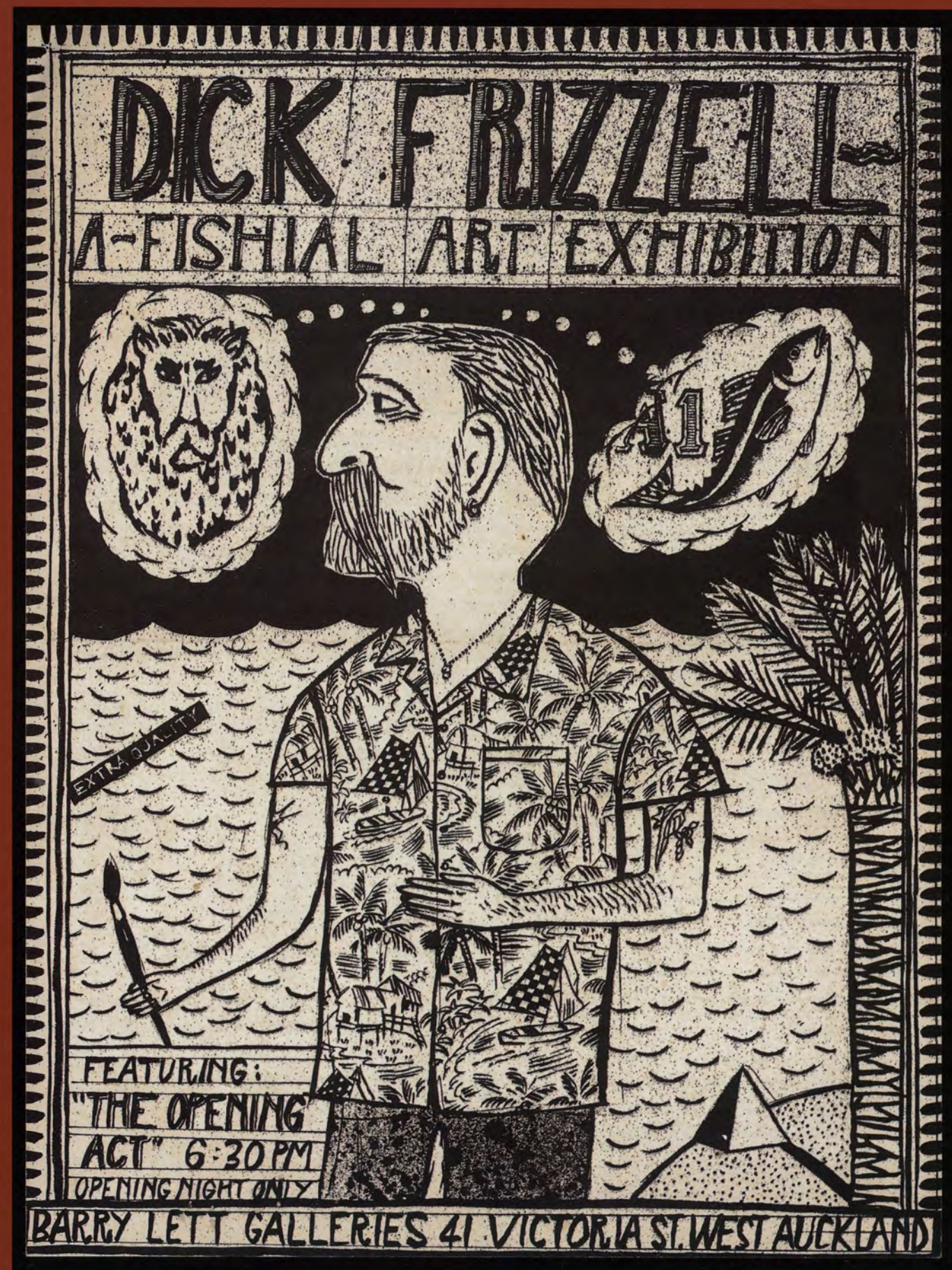
ATRIUMPH IN DULUX!

to fashion the fishy texture of oily iridescence with deft smears and licks of paint, or to cut in with white around the red lining of the snappy lettering. Frizzell uses enamels in a rapid impasto technique which combines notational brevity with the thrill of controlled accidents.

Enamel paint had been used in modernist painting from early in this century when Picasso used it to pick out white or coloured details in some of his cubist still-lives. The harder sheen of the enamel, which was usually only applied to industrial surfaces or used for commercial and domestic decoration, contrasted with the mellow richness of the surrounding oil paint. By introducing occasional facets, sections of shop signs or labels in enamel paint, Picasso was able to jolt viewers' expectations of traditional materials and to bring something of the surfaces of mass culture and the aesthetics of contemporary commercial signage into his painting in a very physical way. Later in the century, the harsh and lumpen glossiness of enamel paint was exploited more dramatically by Pop artists such as Claes Oldenburg when he painted his lurid sculptures of hamburgers, ice-creams, cushions and shoes in the early 1960s.

When Frizzell started using enamels in the mid-1970s, Auckland artist Paul Hartigan had already taken up this medium for his brightly painted soft landscapes populated by weird confectionery shapes and objects. Pat Hanly had been dripping and pooling enamel paint, boosted with oils, into psychedelic landscape and figure studies since 1969. Colin McCahon had also been painting with enamels since the late 1950s and, although in mood and sensibility Frizzell's work was obviously closer to that of Hartigan and Hanly, McCahon probably chose to use Dulux enamel for similar reasons to Frizzell. Although McCahon brought all the weighty metaphysics and chiaroscuro of traditional Western painting to bear on this medium, enamel paint also enabled him to gesture toward his love of commercial sign writing, declamatory placards and the hard, new surfaces of the modern world. However Frizzell was the only one of these artists to use enamel paint to fully model form and texture with a dense combination of hatching, scumbles and glazes. Paul Hartigan called Frizzell's 'Lion attacking a horse in the jungle' - *From a George Stubbs enamel* a "triumph in Dulux".ⁱⁱ

Compared to artists' oil colours of course, house painters' enamels had always been an inexpensive alternative for artists. Many painters who used enamel extensively in the earlier stages of their careers, abandoned it for more expensive materials when they were more financially solvent. However, the 'cheapness' of enamel paint was definitely aesthetic as well as pecuniary. And when Frizzell made it his materia prima for several years he was fully aware of its still obvious cachet as a signifier of the unpretentious, the outré, the garish and the commercial. Frizzell has always had a keen eye for any form of stylistic bad behaviour which might trigger the frisson of insubordination in the serious halls of the art academy.





There is a 1978 painting which, though not exhibited at the time, revealed Frizzell's abiding attitude toward the world of contemporary art and his place in it.

Apollinaire at 21 from an age when art seemed much more fun shows the dandified Apollinaire, collector, critic, poet of the new urban landscape, and perhaps most importantly for Frizzell, patron of the cubists. Across the top of the work is written the legend: 'Apollinaire at 21/From an age when art seemed much more fun.'

The Apollinaire portrait is a nostalgic evocation of the mythic age of modern art when artists sat around in cafés, wrote manifestos and invented new ways of seeing and representing the changing world.

So Apollinaire, prophet of the ever-changing, is affectionately embalmed in the warm glow of nostalgia. Apollinaire's was also an age when painting, while increasingly threatened with anachronism by new technologies, was undergoing an extraordinarily fertile period of activity.

Cubism has always had a particular appeal for Frizzell, not least for its patchwork painterliness unfolding through a graphic scaffolding; for its romance with ordinary objects and bits of printed paper; but also for its discovery of a new pictorial language.

In Frizzell's reckoning, alongside this mythic era, the current art scene has often paled in comparison. In 1981, Frizzell started writing his own manifestos, tub-thumping against the evils of any and every

form of po-faced conceptually oriented art practice: formal abstraction, minimal art, all types of installation art, performance and video art.

Frizzell has maintained this sort of shadow boxing with current art trends as part of his avowed aim to avoid what he calls art's "glass bead games."ⁱⁱⁱ Glass bead games are art practices which are over intellectualised; driven by theoretical and critical programmes rather than by direct response to the 'real' world. The pleasures, appetites and contradictions of the physical world excite Frizzell more than the imperatives of art-historical time-tables, or the dictates of fashionable theories.

Frizzell's determination to chart his career path in his own terms is reflected in the variety of exotic and humorous ways in which he has chosen to represent himself and his role as an artist in written statements, exhibition flyers and finished artworks.

A list of these representations would include images of: the Lone Ranger; a rock and roll star or an ex-biker in black singlet; a Magnum P.I. figure with paintbrush under a coconut tree; Van Gogh in a supermarket; Stanley, the American journalist looking for a big scoop, greeting The Phantom like Dr Livingstone in Darkest Africa; a cannibal in the jungle; a grass-skirted lion hunter; an elaborately costumed lion tamer; Forrest Gump; Barry Crump; and we can add to this a frowning lion and an As salmon leaping upstream to spawn.

Perhaps more than anything else, what has been continually discussed about Frizzell's art career is the number of wild swerves he has made between different art styles and genres. Is there anything he hasn't done?

The fact that he has been an abstractionist, a landscape painter, a faux-naïve still-life painter, an illustrator, a pop artist and folk artist makes Frizzell's career a bit like that of Forrest Gump who managed, through a life of total guilelessness and political naivete, to be a war hero, a shrimp boat captain, a football star and a national celebrity.

Frizzell has certainly enjoyed playing the role of idiot savant, the canny jester in the courts of high art slipping through the nets of curatorial or critical proscription; or the strategic red-neck, feigning ignorance of current theories and debates on the one hand and then reading them up and discussing them on the other.^{iv}





When Frizzell toured America in 1978 on an Arts Council grant he hadn't yet heard of Forrest Gump but he did feel like an instant Barry Crump figure, transformed by his cultural displacement into a caricature of a New Zealander. He had come with his wife and family to see the America they knew and loved from TV and the

However, seeing America as an endless series of clichéd icons, familiar, because known so well from a distance, and yet alien, as frozen into a form of static self-parody through over-exposure, Frizzell was left in no doubt that his roots were elsewhere. He said that in America he felt like a carrot yanked out of the ground and waved around.

Copious drawings, notes and photographs were taken and worked up into the *Illustrations from America* exhibition in the following year. All the works in this show were presented as

small pictures framed by a very wide painted border to resemble a slide mount, an appropriate format for a returning artist's 'show and tell' exhibition. This format seems to register the acknowledged distance Frizzell felt between these images and his more intimate connections to New Zealand iconography.

Ironically these traveller's works looked like 'received' images, not felt through from the inside in the way that his local paintings could be. Their subjects included a cyclist; tramps; an abandoned diner; the Frizzell car in the Colorado mountains

or in the desert with cacti and mesa; and Indians in a reservation. There was also a group called *Hand Held Food* of milkshakes, hot dogs and hamburgers.

One of the most significant aspects of this trip was the endorsement of his own project Frizzell felt he received through contact made with artists who were in the 1978-79 Whitney Museum exhibition *New Image*.^v It was this show which, via Frizzell, provided the title for the Auckland City Art Gallery *New Image* show in 1983.^{vi}

movies and that's exactly what they saw, driving across sixteen thousand miles of it in a station wagon: "The windscreen of the big Chev Concourse was like a movie screen—a road film about America." The movies literally came to life at one point as they pulled into a concrete teepee lunch bar at a roadside amusement park in the mountain village of Cherokee. A casual investigation of the park discovered the very same sideshow stall of the dancing chicken which Frizzell had seen back in Auckland in Werner Herzog's film *Stroszek*.

Frizzell met and talked with three artists from the Whitney show: Neil Jenney, Michael Hurzon and Robert Moskowitz.

Frizzell had followed the work of these artists for some time and was aware of the resurgence of eccentric forms of figuration with groups like The Hairy Who and Jim Nutt from Chicago and the West Coast funk artists such as William Wiley. And, all of these people had been inspired in some way by the artist who was probably Frizzell's strongest role model at the time, H. C. Westerman.

Westerman produced intensely idiosyncratic sculptures and works on paper which mixed up vernacular traditions, folk art, off-beat narratives, old-fashioned craftsmanship and wacko drawing styles. Also, most importantly for Frizzell in these years, Westerman represented an impressive resistance to the homogenising effects of high modernism.

One of Westerman's letter drawings, *The Great Cultural Explosion*, depicts Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye, a prime emblem of International Style modernist purity, as a broken down,

vandalised wreck: "International Horseshit," says a speech bubble; "Fuck it," says a sick passerby, and a miserable figure on the villa's roof is being forced to eat Art with a capital 'A', whether he likes it or not.

Westerman's heartfelt sentiments found an echo in Frizzell's histrionic railings against the banalities of late modern art. Frizzell's argument was spurred on at this point by the growing postmodern rhetoric about the failings of modernism, the dryness of conceptual art, and the dead-end of formalist painting.





Backyard

details



Neil Jenney impressed on Frizzell the importance for him to return to New Zealand and work out his sense of mission in his own culture. Westerman, in a letter to Frizzell at the time said pretty much the same thing. In the two series that followed his return Frizzell made a renewed commitment to the specifics of the place and things he knew best. It was exactly this sort of urgency of the near at hand that had made his label paintings so vivid. He describes the show *Home is where the*

bathos. Frizzell plays an art-historical joke on the formalist abstract and colour field painters by treating their hard won, high-serious, self-referential surfaces as decorative backdrops for vernacular icons. Folk art, pop art and so called naive art has always applied this sort of irreverent inventiveness to any type of style, format or material that is up for grabs; the irreverence can be either nonchalant and unintentional, or it can be strategic. In this case, and as usual with Frizzell, it was both a nonchalant gesture and a strategic ploy.



art is a type of "blessings count" of his own Auckland seen afresh. In the end it is the incinerator with corrugated iron cover, the clothes basket, the lawnmower, the stepladder and the concrete mixer which win out over the diners and the funparks.

In the *Home is where the art is* and *Everybodies business* exhibitions, the device of the small image stranded on the large empty ground is taken up again. It is likely that the example of Nicholas Africano, one of the Whitney *New Image* artists, had been a prompt for Frizzell in this regard. Africano composed his strange conversation pieces out of one or two tiny figures adrift in a large, uninflected field of colour. Frizzell's backyard paintings deploy humdrum objects heavily outlined and isolated in the middle of lightly textured fields of colour. Though for all the similarities to Africano's compositions, Frizzell replaces Africano's stilled and awkward severity with a mood of wry whimsy. The pumped-up hype of the fish tin labels is conspicuous by its absence in these works which make a virtue of their low-key, drab and unassuming subject matter and presentation. The humour in these paintings is a form of

Always on the look-out for local content, that holy grail of the folk realist, Frizzell went out into the highways and byways of inner city and suburban Auckland with his camera and notebooks to collect data for the *Everybodies business* show. Now, instead of actually copying images from comics,



Frizzell culled out a batch of drawings and photographs from his research and transformed them into comic style renditions of figures, workplaces and whimsical signage. Frizzell's motifs broadly fell into three categories. Commercial signs or logos for products and businesses which had become

virtual household names: Fanta, Frosty Boy ice-cream, Sunkist bread, Golden Kiwi lottery, the Four Square man. Small scale businesses or classic urban sites: a tyre repair workshop, a car yard, a railway station, a hardware store and a fruiterer. People at work as type figures: the gas man, the tyre repair man, the local businessman and the elderly lady shopping.

The way that Frizzell brings together type figures with aspects of a comic book aesthetic is telling. As part of his desire to demythologise the elevated rhetoric that often surrounds the activity of the artist, Frizzell has argued for regarding the artist's work as ordinary and as functional as that of "the butcher, the baker or the candlestick maker". Frizzell's romantic realism comes out in his reference to these securely established, and even partly antiquated roles. This romanticism of social roles is evident in the type figures which populate the *Everybodies business* paintings, not only in the way the figures lend themselves to easy categorisation but in their manner of depiction. In these figures and their natural habitats, what Robert Leonard calls a 'levelling strategy' operates in Frizzell's comic book conception of painting which implicitly democratises the business of painting, making it closer to everybody's business^{vii}. Both Frizzell's imagery and his methodology tell the same story.

Frizzell deployed his cartoony imagery around the paintings like so many badges or stickers which could be removed and rearranged in other combinations. There are jaunty tensions and syncopated rhythms between clustered details and open painterly sections. The portability of the images recalls Frizzell's *American hand-held food motifs* or Milan Kunc's clusters of pop icons on sticks^{viii}.

The brightness of the scattered individual details and the flattening of the pictorial space also reminds me of those educational decal books for children which had sheets of tiny figures to rub down around a page depicting a stage for ballerinas, or a stretch of ground for the Charge of the Light Brigade. Frizzell's own pseudo decal set of "Pic-Stic Logos" designed to tart up empty modernist paintings came directly out of these last two series.

Frizzell regards the years between *Everybodies business* and his full absorption in a neo-conservative mode of landscape painting as lacking in the sort of compulsion and self-confidence which had always propelled his art before and has usually done so since. One of the major missions of this period was the *Escape from Salvation* series. To some extent the gigantic heroic nudes and cartoon characters of this series look like Frizzell's response to the revival of Picasso's and Léger's oversized neo-classical figures which post-modernist artists like Italian Sandro Chia or Australian Peter Booth were turning out on a big scale during the 1980s^{ix}. The slow moving figures in Frizzell's work also bear obvious resemblance to McCahon's early cumbersome and religious figures, burdened with visionary and nationalistic responsibilities.



At the same time as Frizzell was making his sorties into the tradition of epic figure composition, he was also trying out different forms of pseudo naive still-life painting. In hindsight Frizzell's still-life painting can be seen to anticipate the affectionate mimicking of forms of clumsy, flat-footed drawing styles which underpinned the landscapes, especially in their earliest form. Like many modernists before him, Frizzell keeps a weather eye on the poetry of the non-academic, the unschooled and unpretentious. If I seem to hurry over these years with indecent haste, it is not only because I accept Frizzell's general estimation of the period, but also because the exhibition is intended as a selective survey and not an exhaustive retrospective.



THE LANDSCAPES



The landscapes can be seen as a partial answer to the *Escape from Salvation* series. Although, as the title *Escape from Salvation* suggests, it has always been Frizzell's intention to slip the noose of McCahonian religious solemnity & ponderousness, Frizzell's art had to become much more aggressively grounded in the specifics of the physical world again before he could truly effect his escape. One of the early landscapes is called *This is no shadowland*. The reference is to C.S. Lewis' attempt to define a Christian perspective on human sufferings via a belief in the new creation; the new creation will make the present world, with its pain and limitations, seem like shadowlands. To Frizzell, Lewis' term sounds all too Platonist, all too abstract compared to the compelling, empirical weight of the world we are living in.

Talking about the large landscape *Whakapirau*, Frizzell says that when he was painting the sides of a house he actually felt he was painting weatherboards on a real house. He wanted the painting to produce a convincing reality effect, to the extent that one could imagine walking up the road from the beach, across a paddock and into one of the houses for a cup of tea. He put the painting together like a model railway diorama, with all the necessary details for a life-like settlement modelled up as miniature accessories. Like most of the landscapes, *Whakapirau* also displays the strange compressions of scale often seen in dioramas. As if remembering those childhood stories about drawings made with magic pencils which come to life but with crucial details missing if the drawing is incomplete, Frizzell has fully equipped this little world.

Initially Frizzell embarked on the landscapes using a heavy handed, overtly naive style which owed much to the Yugoslav folk primitive artists which he had so studiously researched in order to illustrate Denis Glover's poem "The Magpies", for a children's book in 1987. After he had worked on the genre for a number of years, a more

sophisticated manner replaced the thickly painted, simplified and flattened forms which characterise the earliest examples. However even in the later examples there is still a high degree of schematisation. It is as though Frizzell allows us to watch on as he teaches himself different ways of mastering his chosen painting techniques.

In a way the landscapes are all about immersion. Immersion on the one hand in the full toolkit of illusionistic oil painting^{xi} and drawing techniques understood very self-consciously as conventions to be selected and applied as appropriate and, on the other hand, immersion in the complexity and density of the physical world. In a diary Frizzell writes: "I do find something compulsive about 'the world out there'. I know that from the total 'immersion' I get when confronted by a potential motif, I have to have it - to record it".^{xiii} *Back in the landscape* which incorporates a mini inventory of Frizzellian motifs since the fish tin labels, suggests that it has always been a well-stocked, variegated landscape of objects and images which Frizzell has been trying to get back to. The painting implies an almost bodily projection into the painted subject matter. This inventory of past painting subjects and conceits also acknowledges the range of different subjects and manners available for the job.

In a diary entry at the time Frizzell explains: "Why I'm painting like this at the moment I'm only looking for subjects that give me an excuse to paste up these heavy configurations that are meant to confirm our material world".^{xiiii} This statement brings together the two driving imperatives which preoccupied Frizzell while painting the landscapes. Consider the way he stacks up textures within the works through overlapping hills, rows of trees, sharply differentiated ground cover, folds and ridges in the ground, clumps of bushes, stumps, and chunks of grass. Frizzell is continually emphasising a repetitiveness with staccato strokes which create a textural stitching in broken rows back and forth across the work. The vivid sense of materiality conveyed is both methodological and pictorial.

Desmond Helmore, Earthquake Damage Inspection, 1989



A major challenge of these works for Frizzell the illustrator and ex-adman was the problem of how to convey the most information in the clearest way. As he puts it, "every notion has its maximal method of presentation...half the trick is finding it, the other half is doing it." How to pack in a dense load of information but let it remain logical and legible. This principle is at work in the earlier cartoony landscapes as well as the later more sophisticated models, and contributes to the landscapes sense of dream-like clarity and vivid uniformity. Even on this scale the principles of designing an effective logo are paramount.

For a contemporary painter to produce apparently innocent realist landscapes at this time was to commit intellectual suicide and to risk never being taken seriously again. Fully aware of this Frizzell welcomed the curious sort of freedom available when one is wilfully "outside the argument". In these years local critics such as Wylan Curnow were declaring the landscape tradition "used up"^{xiv} and Francis Pound had so persistently explained the ideological and philosophical agendas that lay behind the tradition that it was very difficult to still have faith in an innocent eye looking out on a waiting world. Frizzell was fully aware that "the idea of professional painters addressing themselves to the landscape in the manner of Bill Sutton or Russell Clarke, was history - it was felt it would never happen again with a new eye."^{xv}

In one way Frizzell's landscapes and those being painted by other New Zealand artists at the time, such as Des Helmore, Johanna Pegler and Michael Stevenson, involved wilful forgetting of this sort of critical position. Yet all of these artists' landscape images have a stagey quality and are permeated with a sense of gentle irony, a sense of pleasure taken in their own peculiar practice with all its own demands, pleasures and rewards. When, with both hands, Frizzell takes hold of the illustrative regionalist manner of E. Mervyn Taylor, Russell Clarke and Bill Sutton and brings it together with the aesthetics of the cake-tin or the tea-towel decorated with national scenic spots, it is as though knowledge of Pound's critical position has actually heightened and complicated the

pleasures of investigating this old-fashioned genre.

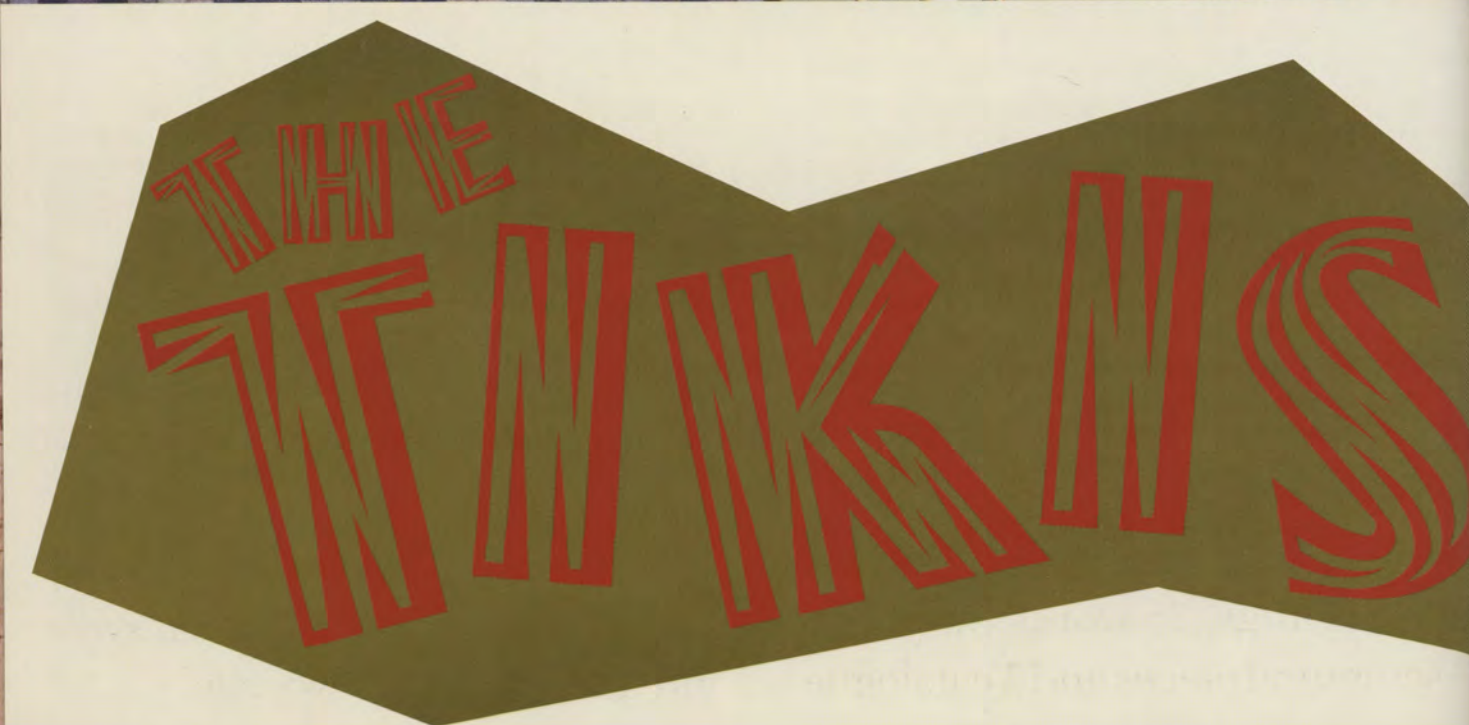
In the middle of all this clear-eyed romantic realism, Frizzell inserted a different type of realism into the landscape equation with *Cleansed by the Blood of the Lamb*. The strange and strained psychology of this work shows how religious language and imagery, and 'man of the land' mythology can all get mixed up with the confusions and repressions of growing up; with sex, death and initiation. The story is different but the intensity is the same in Vincent Ward's film *Vigil* when the young girl gets splashed with sheep's blood in a psychologically very ambiguous scene. Frizzell's painting is based on autobiographical experience. The school boy undergoing some sort of disturbing and hardly understood initiation is the artist himself at thirteen.

Frizzell tells of how as a young, small-town boy he spent one summer holiday on a relative's farm where he encountered the buccolic fecundity of country-life with loudly farting horses and copulating bulls, and had to share a bunk room in a straw-sprinkled and cow shit-bespattered old cottage with a slightly older boy who kept Frizzell awake at night with a noisy and energetic dedication to his adolescent drives. So tired was he from the night's hard graft, the boy didn't want to work during the day and so was chased and beaten with pieces of wood by the farmer. The farmer is the black singleted figure killing the sheep.

In an early work called *Man Scarer*, Frizzell had painted a psychological allegory in which two Boy's Own action figures head for the hills, threatened by the emasculating femininity of a woman who does not conform to the look of stereotypical beauty. Just as *Man Scarer* intimates the fears and uncertainties that often underlie the myth of the adventure hero; so *Cleansed by the Blood of the Lamb* acknowledges something of the darker currents that may flow beneath the pastoral scene.

Dick Frizzell, Waikato Landscape, 1985.





The Tiki works demonstrate as clearly as any the symbiotic nature of the relationship between Frizzell's fine art career and his involvement in the world of commercial art. The *Tiki* exhibition was more than an ordinary dealer show, it was presented in the manner of a small museum survey exhibition, with 29 paintings, 25 works on paper, 3 sculptural pieces and a catalogue

designed by the artist, with five contributing writers. An art museum show, or a fully fledged advertising campaign? A critical and reflective art exhibition or a professionally prepared product launch offering flexible investment opportunities for clients? One of the most interesting things about the *Tiki* project is the way it makes it difficult to answer this question unequivocally. ➤



The heated arguments which the exhibition stirred up often seemed determined to cast the debate in terms of categorical ethical judgements; Frizzell was either guilty of mindless bigotry or he was declared free to do whatever he wanted with culturally sensitive material in his painting as "that [was] his right as an artist"^{xvi}. When Merata Mita wrote a scathing critique of the exhibition she accused Frizzell of sacrificing all of the intrinsic value and shared cultural significance of the Tiki in order to put on an intellectually shallow "display". According to Mita, all of "the multi-layered complexity of the Tiki had been discarded in favour of the ad-man's simplistic rendition. What has been created is a cute cut-out, a cartoon figure according to the conventions and demands of advertising"^{xvii}. For Mita one thing Frizzell's show clarified was the big difference between "great artists" and "mere painters and designers".

Frizzell however, has chosen to strategically and creatively forget the big difference between great art and design. He has been wilfully crossing back and forth between the opposed camps of high art and commercial art for so long now that he often forgets which side he is on. He productively exploits this memory lapse. In part, at least, this is because he believes the manic criss-cross traffic of images and contexts adds up to a primary truth about contemporary mass media culture. He is well aware that stylistic versatility can almost result in an obscene dissociation of style from meaning; he should be, such versatility is demanded of the ad-man, it is considered a necessary skill. Frizzell clearly has mixed feelings about this condition. His *Tiki* show was quite knowingly conceived as a spirited romp through a hybrid, cross-cultural art-history. It was not difficult to see the exhibited works as a display of possible solutions to a design brief set by a perverse client for a range of 'arty' tiki logos, which were all discarded in the end because the client wanted something more tasteful.

When Frizzell produced his *Self Portrait as a Cannibal* images in 1979^{xviii}, he was very preoccupied even then with the issue of indiscriminate image consumption that art and advertising have both shared in through a complex and over-determined history. His cannibal trope suggests Frizzell well knew how images always have a strange life to them which inevitably commits the artist or the ad-man to primal encounters and possibly violent exchanges, even inside the mass media cocoon of self-claimed superficiality.

Frizzell's *Tikis* suggest the artist is compelled by the way shallow and "cute cut-outs", as Mita calls them, still



carry meaning; they are still alive. Frizzell was dealing with an interchange of meanings which I think he recognised as highly charged and potentially dangerous, because of the explosive, territorial and historical content that stuck to the underside of the slick and playful surface. Without being fully conscious of what he was doing (what artist is?), Frizzell seemed fatally drawn to the volatility of these image hybrids; to a strange exchange between the anonymous and supposedly amoral agendas of commercial art on one side and a symbolic form which is revered as a cultural treasure on another.

I believe Frizzell would be the first to agree with Mita's telling observation that "the reduction of complexity

in the Maori symbol also suggests disorder in the Pakeha psyche". Mita's comment is perhaps a back-handed compliment to Frizzell's ability to throw into relief something of the advanced state of psychic disarray that the schizophrenic switching of image systems and codes of representation reveals about late twentieth century visual culture. We could also point out that Frizzell shares in the Western modernist tradition which has often made a virtue out of calculated profanity and sacrilege; consider Max Ernst's image of the Virgin Mary spanking the Christ Child, Picabia's portrait of Cézanne as a monkey or Duchamp's moustachioed Mona Lisa.

By foregrounding potentially racist liberties taken with Maori moko and traditional forms, Frizzell seemed to be jumping into the contemporary debates on cultural identity with guns blazing. He certainly gave new meaning to the term 'design mock-up'. In doing so it was as though he was unconsciously providing some sort of cathartic release for all the pent-up anger and frustration embedded in the arguments and counter arguments between racism, political correctness and committed activism. If the *Tikis*, and especially the *Grocer with Moko* are interpreted as a cultural insult, then Shane Cotton's reappropriation of Frizzell's appropriation, minus the moko, in his painting *Sold*, complicates this interpretation.

Perhaps Cotton, as a Maori artist, is symbolically taking the insult on himself and actually deflecting it, turning it aside, while appearing to send it straight back with his own humorous sense of poetic justice. Perhaps Cotton is giving the grocer back what Witi Ihimaera calls "the moko of the pakeha", understood here as an inanelly wide-eyed grin^{xix}. Frizzell's works offer no moral high-ground, but they do show us a disturbing truth about our present cultural condition and if art is not able to show us where we actually are, then how can we come to understand how we might go somewhere else?

flash^{xx}. on one occasion, talking to art school students about the way to overcome artist's block, he advised them to start copying whatever was at hand to get the motor going. it is this, almost primal pleasure that frizzell identifies in the art of copying and imitation that makes his retroabstractions in the manner of miro, arp, nicholson, and malevich such different things from the cool,

in the australian tv show *the comedy company* might produce in the garage from a few bits of string and some old jam jar lids after visiting the museum of contemporary art. a warm painterly patina at the edges operates in much the same way as the interior decorator's brasso or silvo

which serves to instantly 'antique' humble objects. frizzell is more inclined to the one-liner joke approach to recycled abstraction than any glass bead games of critical reflection; consider the compost bin inserted into the middle of *little rotter's* tilted black malevich square, malevich's aerial metaphysics are brought

vera-icon (1996), something between a spanish catholic icon and an h.c. westerman quirky hand-crafted object, leads off in yet another direction. the image is based on the myth of st. veronica, who wiped the face of christ on his way to crucifixion with a cloth which was miraculously imprinted with an image of his face; the title is taken from a colin mccaahon painting. this idiosyncratic work has a delicate turin shroud face of christ painted on the middle of the carved wooden cloth and therefore puts me in mind of the fakes and forgeries debate

abstractions

ironic and conceptually motivated retroabstractions produced by artists such as sherrie levine, peter halley or julian dashper. frizzell makes affectionate illustrations, renderings, of classic modernist abstractions. in doing so, aware that his own approach is partly motivated by the 'i can do that' response of the enthusiastic amateur, he also looks a lot at the work of earlier third and fourth generation imitators of the masters.

frizzell's abstractions also conjure up all of the trivial and banal applications of modernist abstraction that ended up on everything from 1950's furnishing fabric to murals in the town library. instead of accompanying his versions of post-modern abstractions with the usual de rigeur quotations from post-structuralist texts on simulation and the anxiety of influence, frizzell talked about his as "uncle albert's abstractions"; the sort of things the loopy, bespectacled uncle arthur character

and

archetypes

surrounding both this revered image and frizzell's own aesthetic of copying. the work also has a curious link with the st. veronica scene in *forrest gump* when forrest wipes his face on a t-shirt passed to him and leaves a cartoon imprint of his muddy face which in turn becomes the commercially very successful smiley-face motif. there are connections here between forrest's magic image and frizzell's *vera-icon* which have to do

to earth with a thump as frizzell composts them to feed new images; or the deflated *big soft stella* which implies that the formalist rigour of the original stellas were probably over-inflated in the first place.

over the last year frizzell has made it very clear that his stylistic shape-shifting and artistic role playing is far from exhausted. with the *ambitious objects* (1996) exhibition he returned to his roots in advertising imagery, painting up a number of cheap-printed junk mail images of gumboots, crockery, cutlery sets and handyman tool kits. he has carried the big shapes and flat areas of colour from his abstracts back into daily life; to function as backgrounds to what he calls the "deadpan archetypes"^{xxi} of the mundane world. as if this is not enough to work on,

with ingenuousness, goodwill, the veneration of the image and the unpredictable ways that images will be received and appropriated in the world at large. where dick frizzell's art will take-off to next is anybody's guess but one can be sure he will always find a way of returning himself to the thick of things,

to that creative place where art, commerce and the world meet. "when i'm stuck for an idea", frizzell says, "i mentally ring myself up and commission an exhibition, something snappy something that's missing in the real world...*fill the gap!*"

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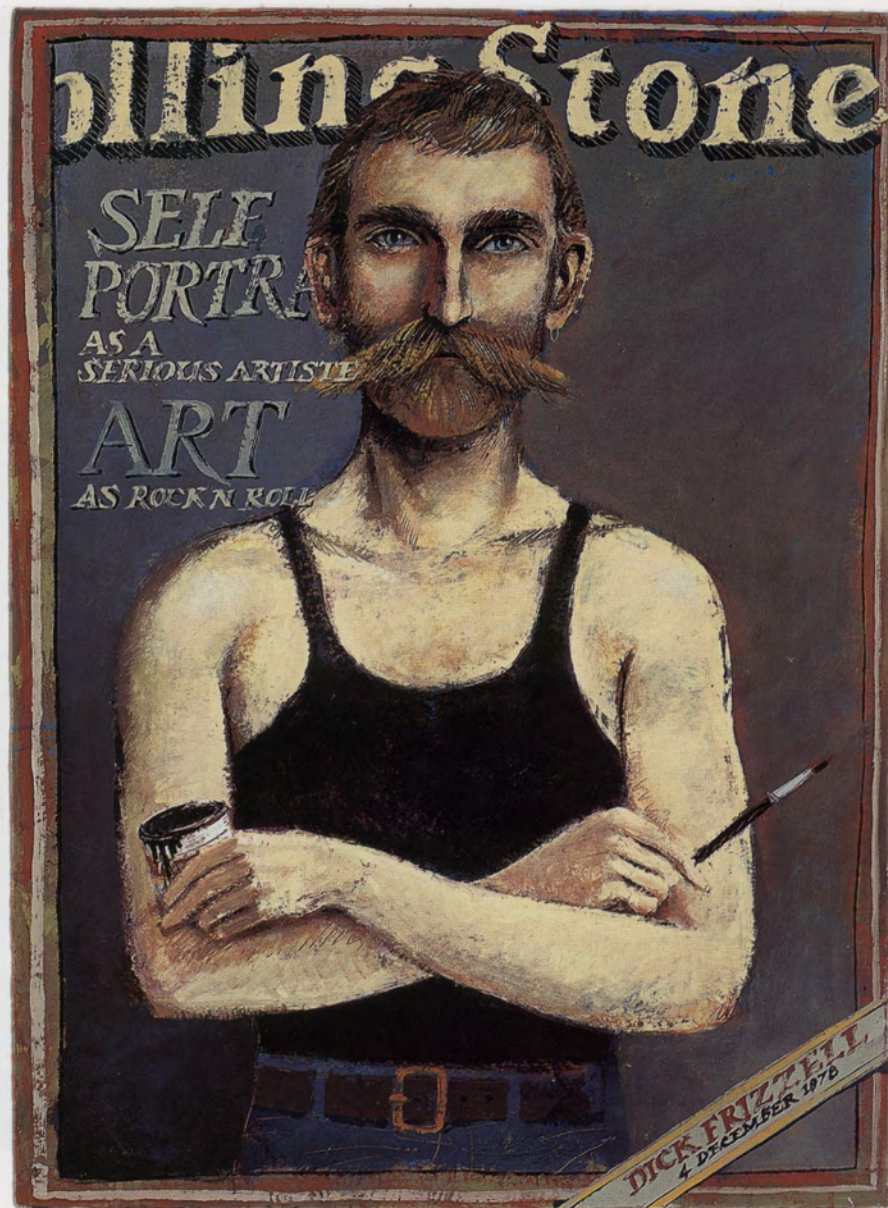
K

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1976



1996



Self-Portrait as a Serious Artiste, Art as Rock 'n' Roll

1978

OIL ON BOARD

843 X 613MM

COLLECTION OF OWEN HUGHES



Cubist Still Life with Hulk Comic/Lemon and Jug

1976
 MIXED MEDIA OIL ON CANVAS
 610 X 610MM
 COLLECTION OF MURRAY GRIMSDALE



Traditional Cubist Still Life With Errant L (and lighter)

1976
 OIL ON CANVAS
 600 X 600MM
 COLLECTION OF ADRIAN BURR



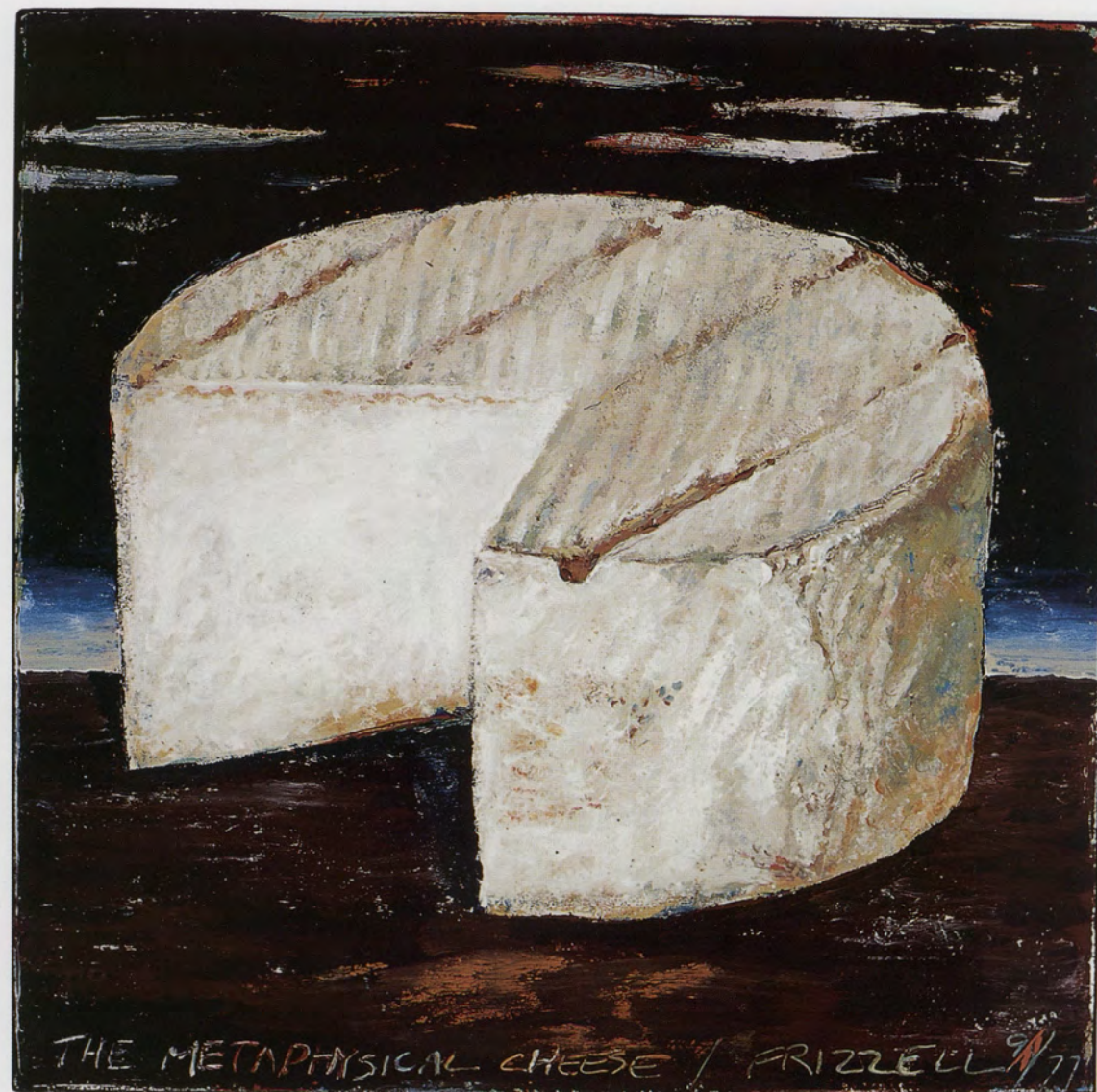
Holy Mackerel

1977

OIL ON CANVAS

760 X 760MM

COLLECTION OF MORT & MARION SCHREIBER



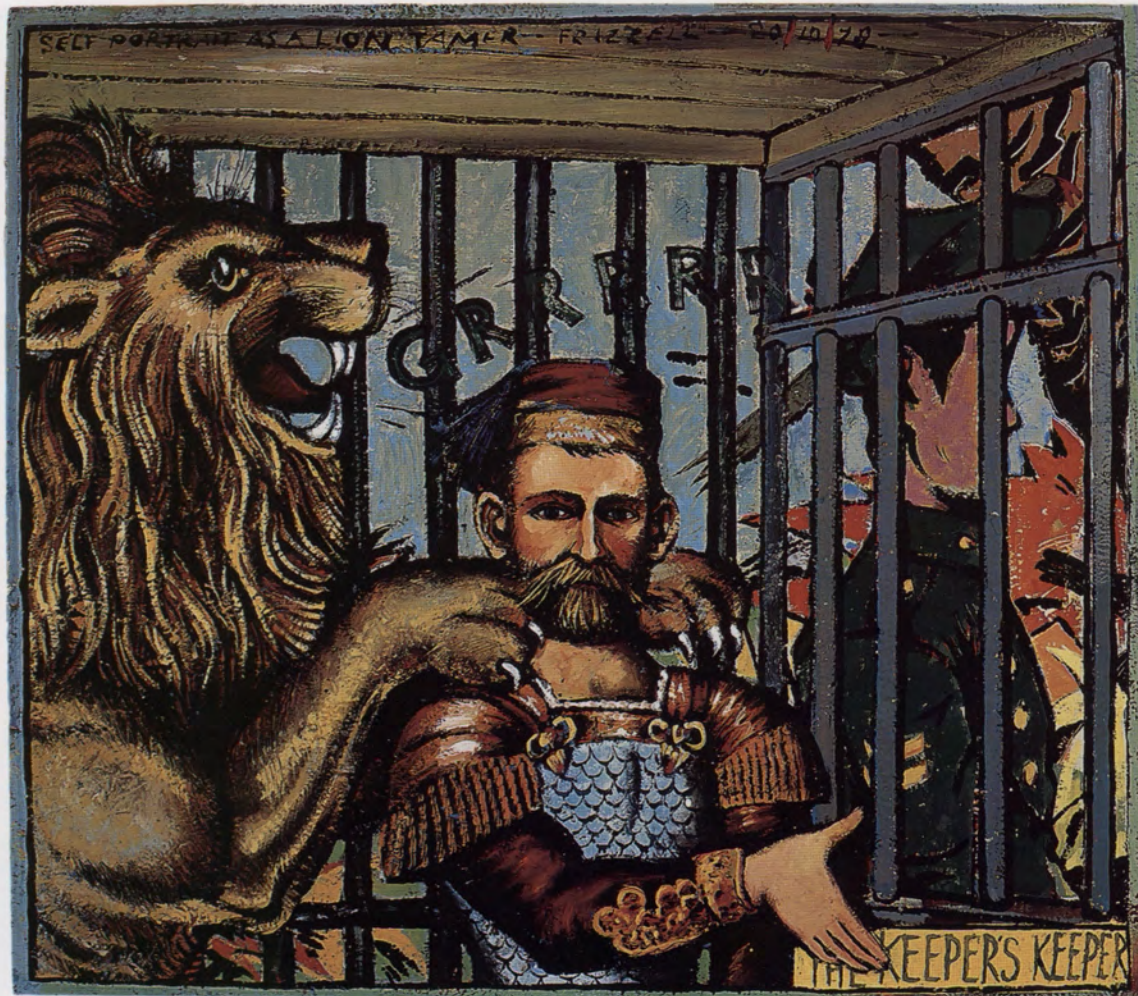
The Metaphysical Cheese

1977

ENAMEL ON BOARD

710 X 710MM

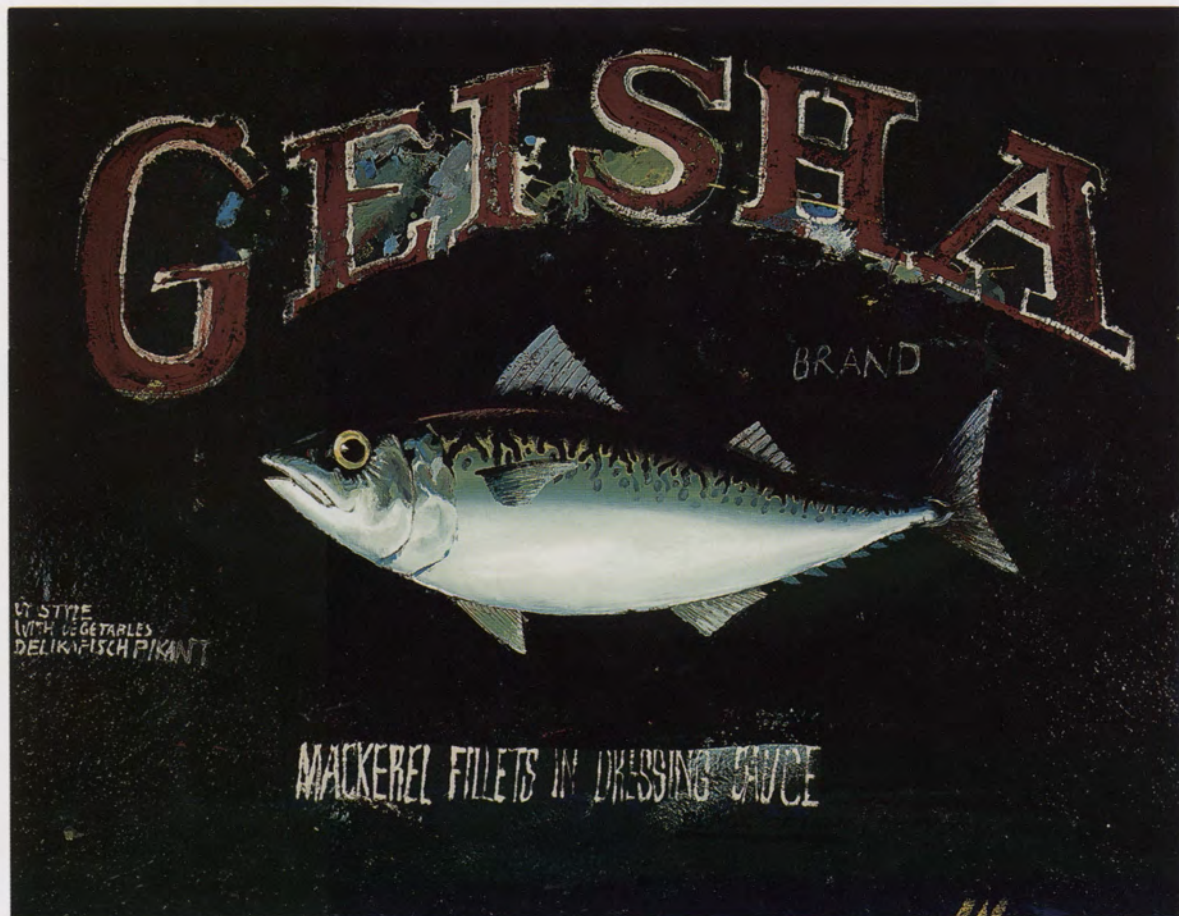
COLLECTION OF STEPHANIE CHILCOTT



Self-Portrait as a Lion Tamer
 1978
 OIL ON BOARD
 900 X 1025MM
 COLLECTION OF BOB HARVEY



Apollinaire at 21 from an age when art seemed much more fun
 1978
 OIL ON BOARD
 610 X 412MM
 COLLECTION OF STEWART MAIN



Black Geisha
 1978
 ENAMEL ON BOARD
 780 X 1000MM
 AUCKLAND ART GALLERY COLLECTION,
 PURCHASED 1978



Man Scarer
 1979
 ENAMEL ON BOARD
 800 X 1120MM
 COLLECTION OF HAMISH KEITH



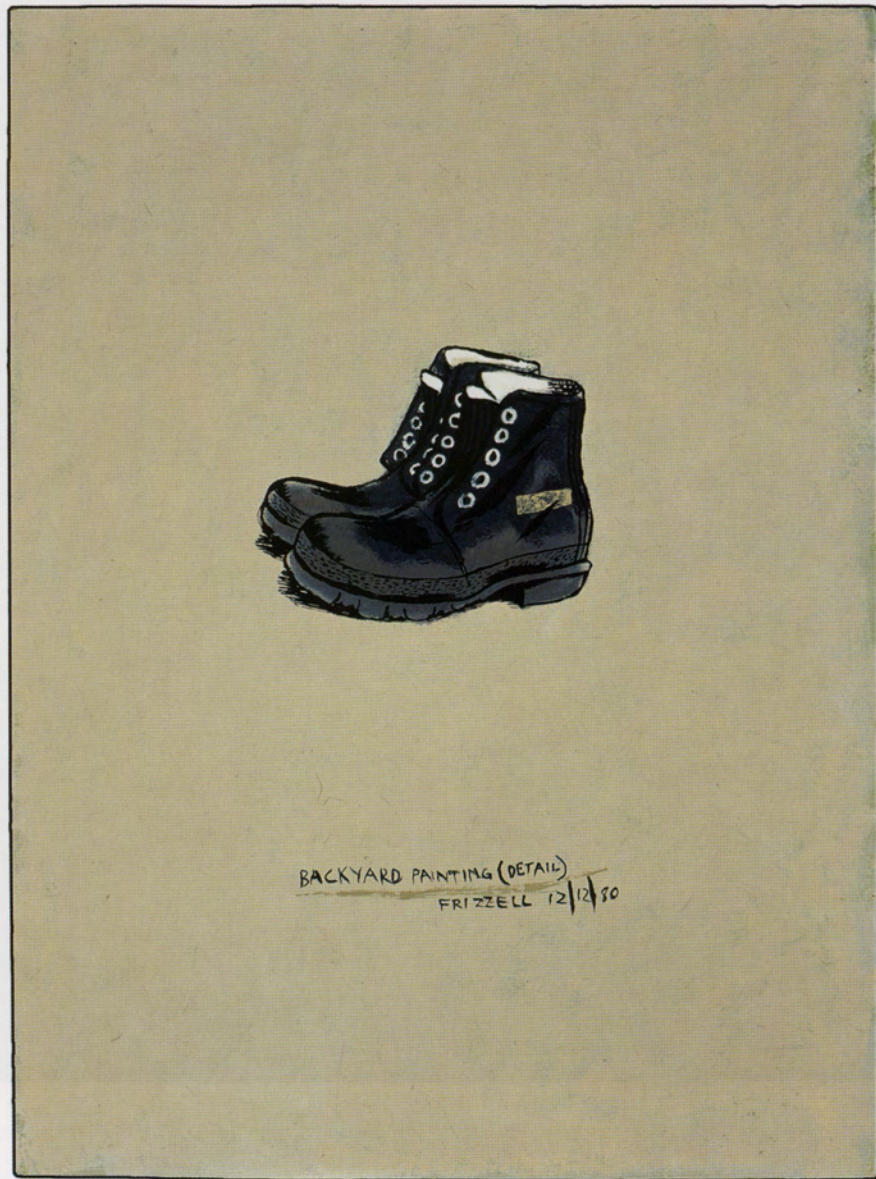
'Lion attacking a horse in the jungle' - from a George Stubbs enamel

1979
ENAMEL ON BOARD
967 X 1219MM
COLLECTION OF MANAWATU ART GALLERY,
PALMERSTON NORTH



The Dancing Chicken

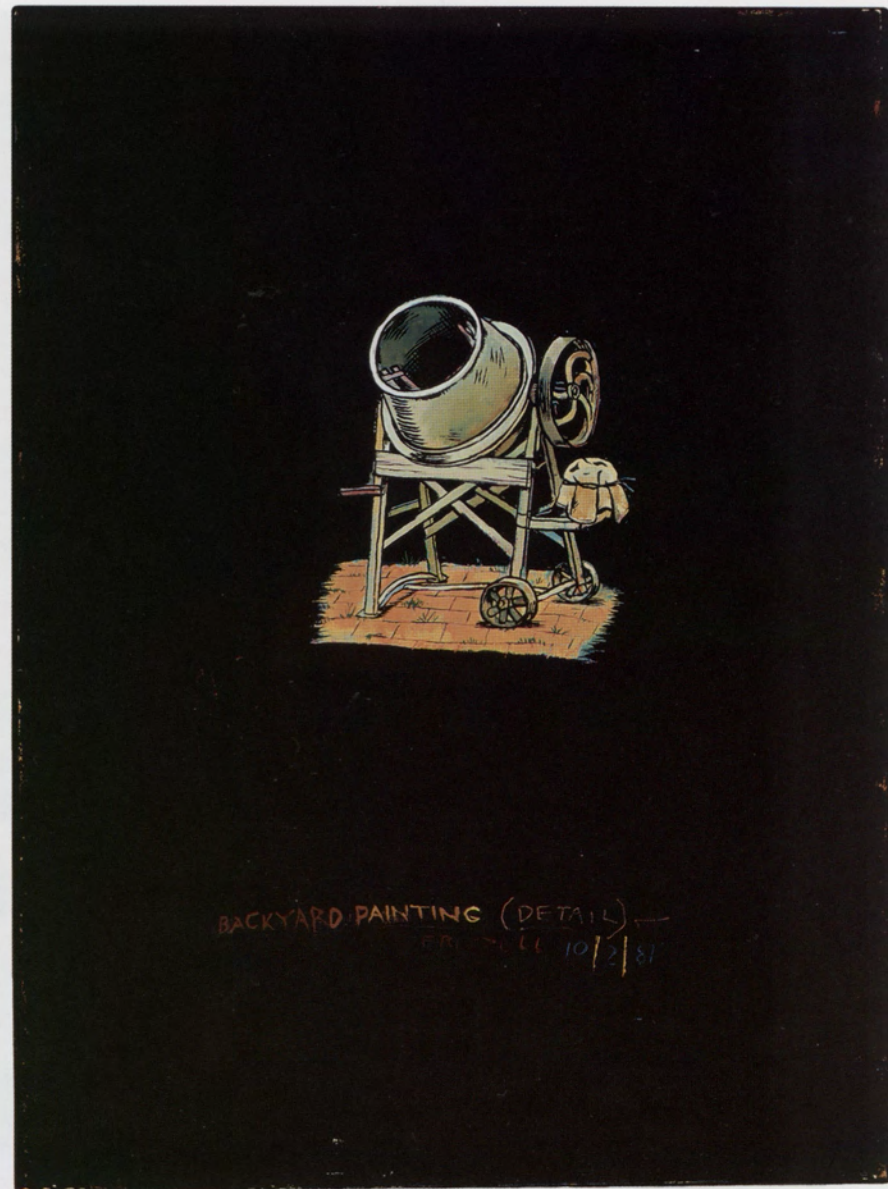
1980
ENAMEL ON BOARD
895 X 942MM
MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND
TE PAPA TONGAREWA



BACKYARD PAINTING (DETAIL)
FRIZZELL 12/12/80

Backyard Painting (detail)

1980
OIL ON BOARD
730 X 540MM
ARTIST'S COLLECTION



BACKYARD PAINTING (DETAIL)
FRIZZELL 10/2/81

Backyard Painting (detail)

1981
OIL ON BOARD
910 X 680MM
COLLECTION OF SAATCHI & SAATCHI



Fresh is Best

1981

OIL ON BOARD

1000 X 1000MM

COLLECTION OF MORT & MARION SCHREIBER



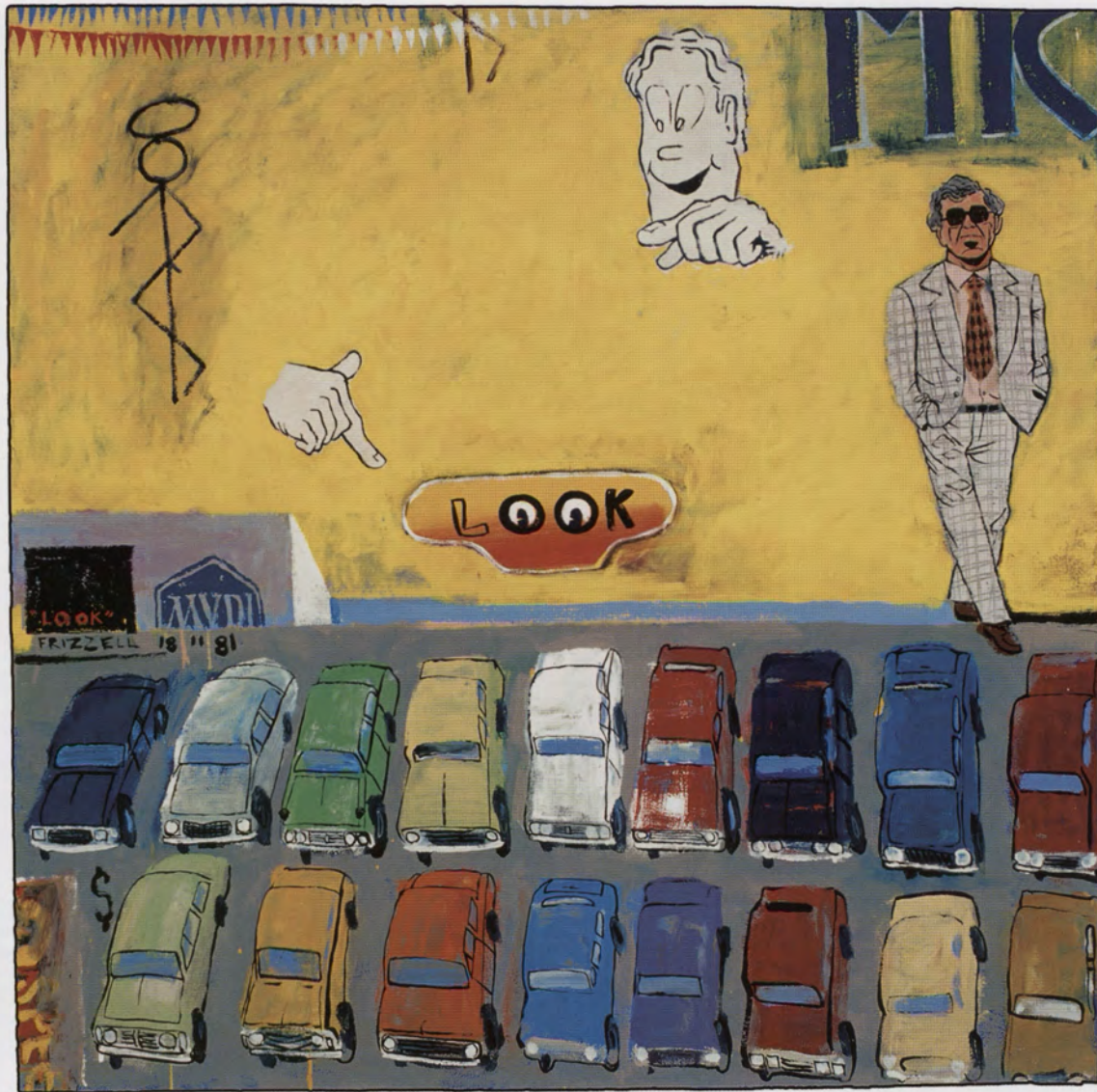
Tyre Doctor

1981

ENAMEL ON BOARD

1000 X 1000MM

COLLECTION OF TIM AND ANDREW GREENHOUGH



Look
1981
OIL ON BOARD
1000 X 1005MM
BANK OF NEW ZEALAND ART COLLECTION



'Often Licked, Never Beaten'
1982
ENAMEL ON BOARD
1030 X 1030MM
COLLECTION OF WILLIAM DART



Breakfast at the Whalers Inn
1987
OIL ON CANVAS
700 X 790MM
COLLECTION OF R & M EAST



Compost Bucket and Cat Plate
1987
OIL ON BOARD
630 X 970MM
COLLECTION OF LEN AND PAULINE CHEESEMAN



Milling
1987
OIL ON CANVAS
1500 X 1950MM
ELLERTON TRUST COLLECTION



Country Store
1989
OIL ON BOARD
925 X 1200MM
PRIVATE AUCKLAND COLLECTION



Dark Landscape
1989
OIL ON CANVAS
1610 X 1760MM
COLLECTION OF ADRIAN BURR



Cow in a Dam
1989
OIL ON CANVAS
710 X 890MM
COLLECTION OF KIM & BRONWYNNE THORP



Tarawera Rest Stop
 1989
 OIL ON CANVAS
 1505 X 1710MM
 COLLECTION OF AMERICAN EXPRESS



Whakapirau
 1990
 OIL ON CANVAS
 1600 X 2200MM
 COLLECTION OF PAUL HOLMES



Cleansed by the Blood of the Lamb

1990
 OIL ON CANVAS
 1950 X 2800MM
 JAMES WALLACE CHARITABLE
 ART TRUST COLLECTION, AUCKLAND



Back in the Landscape

1990
 OIL ON CANVAS
 1500 X 1955MM
 COURTESY OF THE
 GOW, LANGSFORD GALLERY, AUCKLAND



Tiki II
1990
OIL ON CANVAS
500 X 600MM
COURTESY OF THE
GOW, LANGSFORD GALLERY, AUCKLAND



Tiki VI
1991
OIL ON BOARD
435 X 445MM
COLLECTION OF TOM AND LESLEY KREISLER



For all intents and purposes
1992
OIL ON BOARD
190 X 150MM
COLLECTION OF GRANT AND SUE ALEXANDER, AUCKLAND



E.W. Tiki
1992
OIL ON CANVAS
380 X 487MM
COLLECTION OF CONNOR MALONEY



Grocer with Moko
1992
OIL ON CANVAS
700 X 600MM
PRIVATE COLLECTION, WELLINGTON



Tiki with Chair Caning
1992
OIL ON CANVAS
290 X 385MM
CHARTWELL COLLECTION,
WAIKATO MUSEUM OF ART AND HISTORY
TAONGA O WAIKATO, HAMILTON



Giant Double Moderne Manaia
1992
OIL ON CANVAS
2200 X 1600MM
AUCKLAND ART GALLERY COLLECTION,
PRESENTED BY THE PATRONS OF THE GALLERY, 1996



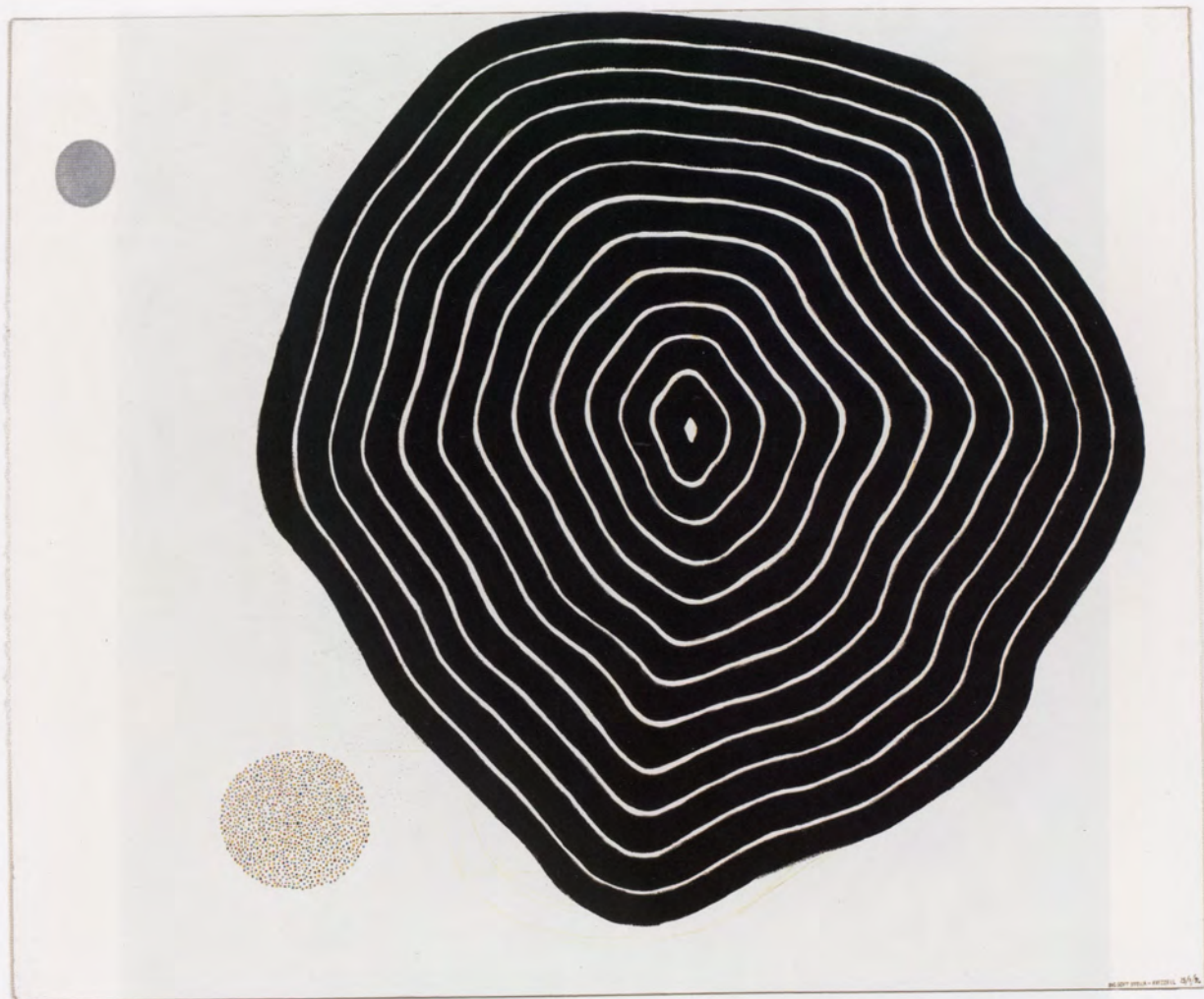
Architiki #1
1992
OIL ON WOODEN RELIEF
480 X 406MM
COLLECTION OF ADRIAN BURR



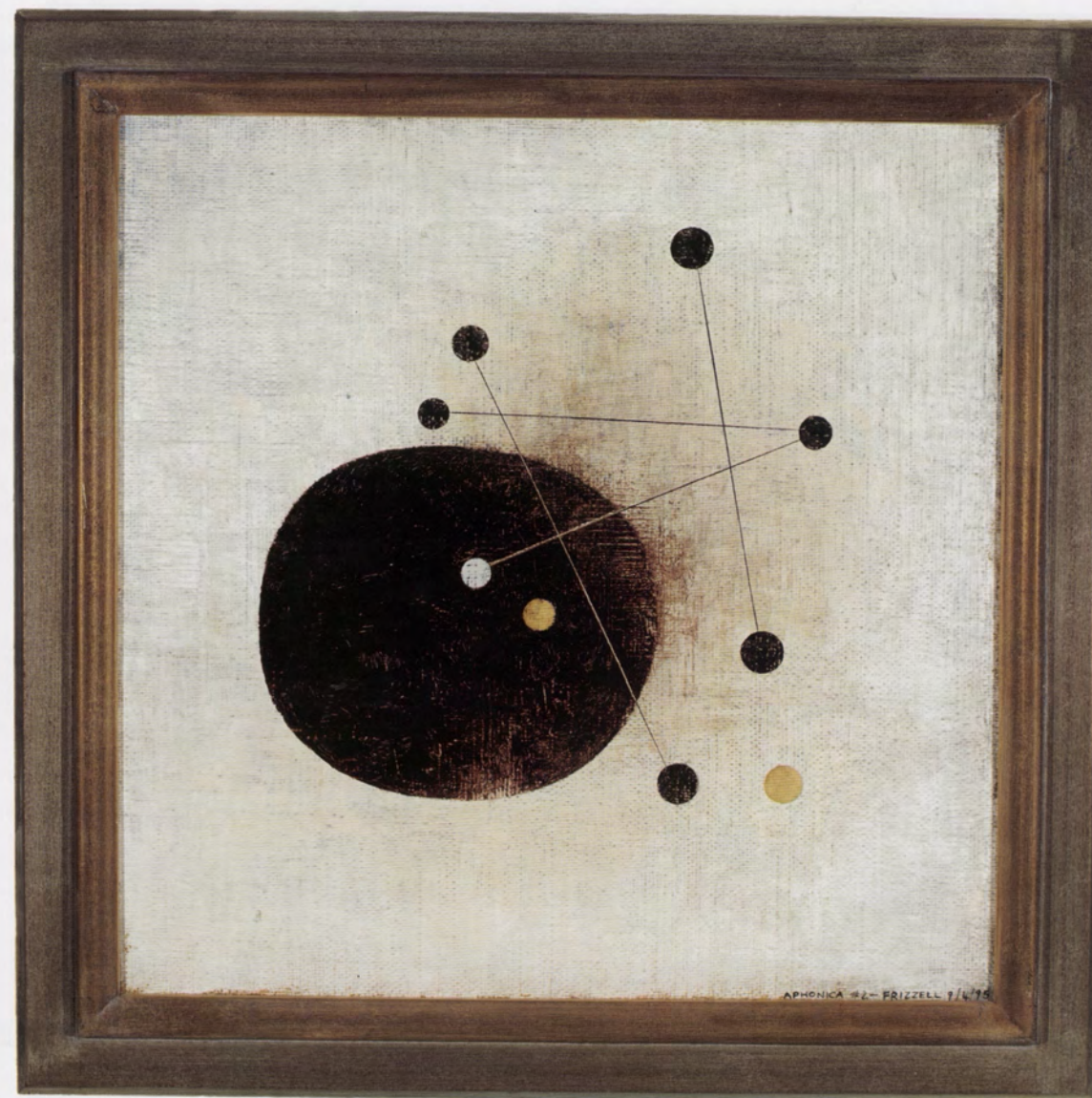
Architiki #2
1992
OIL ON WOODEN RELIEF
400 X 300MM
PRIVATE COLLECTION



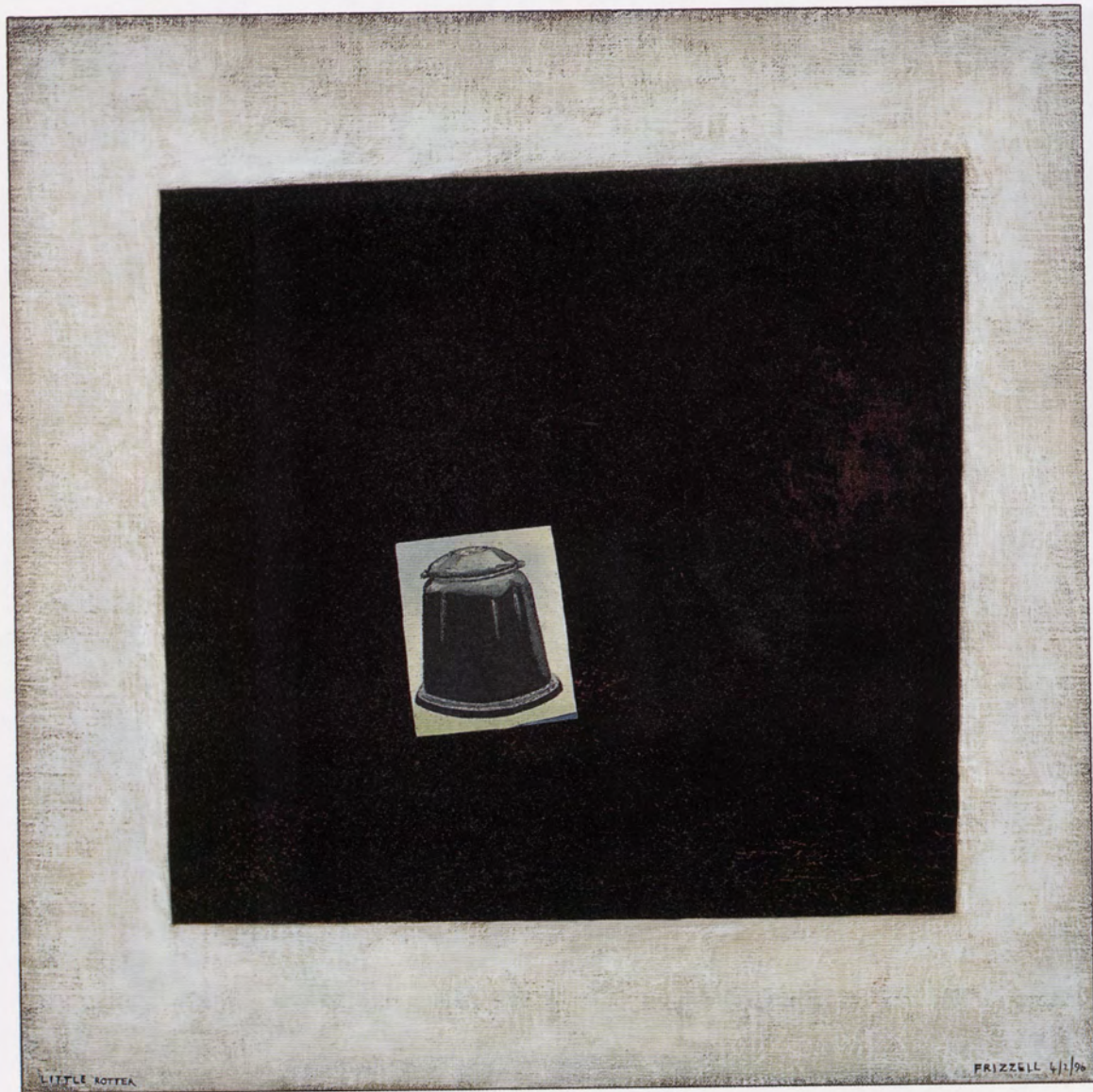
Architiki #3
1992
OIL ON WOODEN RELIEF
470 X 360MM
COLLECTION OF SCOTT AND FELICITY WILSON



Big Soft Stella
1994
OIL ON CANVAS
1520 X 1835MM
COLLECTION OF LINCOLN UNIVERSITY



Aphonica #2
1995
OIL ON CANVAS
440 X 445MM
COLLECTION OF PETER & DEBBIE CUTFIELD



Little Rotter
1996
OIL ON CANVAS
535 X 535MM
COLLECTION OF KIERAN SMYTH



Vera Icon
1996
WOOD ON WOOD WITH OIL PAINT
690 X 695MM
ARTIST'S COLLECTION

SELF - PORTRAIT AS A SERIOUS ARTISTE

ROBERT LEONARD

Dick Frizzell once said, "Walking through a supermarket, I feel like Van Gogh walking through a wheatfield." Frizzell's description conjures up a vision in which rows of wheat magically transform into aisles of commodities, lush nature gives way to a cornucopia of packaging. And yet what persists throughout this morph is a romantic motif, that stock image of the artist - serious, sensitive, observant, original - only now he is strangely out of place; lost; stranded in the modern world.

Bringing together the exceptional figure of Van Gogh and the common supermarket is a typical move for Frizzell. He is a leveller. Over the last twenty years Frizzell's work has sung the praises of various forms of low art, including comic books, fish tin labels, naive art, and the derided indigenous tradition of regionalist landscape painting. While endorsing low art, Frizzell has made light of high art, offering a comic book cubism in the mid 1970s, a comic-book neo-classicism in the mid 1980s, mock-moderns and limp Stellas in the 1990s. In the 1980s the critic Wystan Curnow offered a great insight when he argued that Frizzell's work represents the struggle, not of the-ends-against-the-middle, but of the-middle-against-both-ends. Frizzell presumes to elevate low art - as if it required elevation; at the same time he takes the gloss off what he considers to be the pretensions of transcendentalist and intellectual art - in this regard his notorious 'bullshit detector' is most vigilant.

Being a leveller has afforded him a kind of mobility, a certain freedom. Frizzell has been able to engage both ends while siding with neither; occupying positions that are routinely considered exclusive. He has done graffiti bombing but he will also execute a commissioned civic portrait of Dame Cath. He may seek to give theorists a run for their money, but he is a recognised pedagogue, a senior lecturer at the university. He is regarded as an advocate for the unsung virtues of low and popular art, but he's also a successful market artist. His work regularly satirises the grand art of painting, but in the market place he is often presented (especially with the landscapes) as a 'real' painter. (Certainly, many of those who bought the big landscapes of the late 1980s accepted them as the continuation of

a dormant tradition - agreeable traditionalism for the foyer or boardroom - rather than as a parody of it.) And while Frizzell may set himself against current theories, in the process of bucking them he follows and invests in the debates. For instance his interest in regional landscape painting followed the critique of the nationalist landscape tradition, while the Tiki show also exploited an established critical hot spot. In both cases, Frizzell volunteered to exemplify derided practices. And he did it knowingly, not naively; although a dash of naivety may have been part of the pose.

Frizzell's work plays with ideas about 'the artist.' Take his 1978 self portrait as a serious artiste, his Rolling Stone cover. This work recalls Colin McCahon's painting The Promised Land (1948) in which the black singletted artist-hero is visited by an angel in the backblocks. McCahon offers the artist as existentialist, as seer. McCahon's work is earnest, and the black singlet becomes a marker of that. Frizzell's image is different. Despite wearing a black singlet and styling himself as a real man, a worker/artist/hero, the dandified moustache and Rolling Stone masthead pointedly give the game away. In offering himself less as a noble grail-quester than as a confident publicist, the work belies Frizzell's paying gigs as an ad man and illustrator. The artist becomes a merry mate of Ches and Dale, the black singletted farmers from the cheesy cheese commercials he helped animate for TV in the early 1970s.

In such self portraits as Putting it all on the Lion (1977), Self Portrait as a Lion Tamer (1978) and Self Portrait as a Cannibal (1979) Frizzell continued to perfect his parody of the earnest, authentic, expressive artist battling against the dark side. These works set the tone for much of Frizzell's work in the 1980s. Anticipating the axemen, the wrestlers beating up angels, the neo-classical big men and the blood-letting farmers, they seem to caricature a certain masculinity, with Frizzell himself cast as the male lead. At the same time they embrace a very masculine 'no bullshit/no wankers' mentality, from the choice of subject matter right down to the 'blokeish', matter-of-fact application of paint.

Through all its chops and changes, Frizzell's career can be understood as consistent in its parodic acting out - its hamming up - of stock scenarios of being an artist. This parody is not just to be found represented in the works themselves; it is also embodied in Frizzell's practice, the way he plays the part. Frizzell has written art manifestos, meanwhile slagging off other artists who make grand claims. He has

deliberately pursued cliched and retrograde themes, such as the archetypal mythologies of Escape from Salvation II. He has been prolific within established and tired genres, especially landscape and still life. He has cultivated a studied brand of "bad painting", redeemed with passages of tell-tale virtuosity.

If parody and irony keep Frizzell at a distance from his subject matter, they also allow him to engage with it. Perhaps this way of working relates to his background in commercial art and advertising where the artist is regularly required to render up, mimic and manipulate a variety of manners rather than specialising in a signature style, rather than identifying with a style that is him. In the advertising world vernacular imagery and high art are equally grist for the graphics mill, being decontextualised and reduced simply to styles. The result is camp. Frizzell takes great pleasure in this reduction, saying, "Whether it's a Malevich or a Batman comic cover, it's the same thing: just printing on paper."

Frizzell is a tourist of existing styles. This is nowhere more evident than in the 1992 Tiki series, in which almost every work is painted in a different style. It is as though the tiki - and by extension Frizzell himself - had infiltrated 20th century visual culture (art and popular imagery), to possess it, and mock it from within. The Tiki series was hugely controversial. The politics of cultural appropriation was a key issue at that moment, and Frizzell, despite his protestations and defences, did not naively stumble into this minefield. He adopted a classic ad man approach: kick up controversy for free column inches. True, the Tiki works were designed to offend some people, but, it must be said, they were also an instalment in a larger campaign, Frizzell's self-appointed good-fight against inequality, against perceived sacred cows be they tiki, monochrome, artist-hero or puffed-up self.

Frizzell is a leveller, but he's not mean-spirited. He's no balloon-pricker, his parody is always affectionate, his tone is not superior. In fact, as we have seen, much of his work is self-deprecating. However, as much as he makes fun of 'the artist', the joke is an alibi. By showing up a cliched romantic notion of the artist, he keeps the idea in play. He is more than happy to live out the mythology - to have his parody and eat it too.

Robert Leonard

"[It's] like skip reading the instructions on your shiny new chainsaw and then just about wrecking it starting it up in the wrong sequence; it's always zoom, zoom-gotta get cracking-can't lie here reading all day..."

Dick Frizzell, on his method of applying art theory to art practice, 1996

Chrono-



logy

Born. Mount Albert, Auckland

1943

Family. The Frizzell family moves to Hastings where Frizzell's father takes work as an ammonia engineer at Tomoana Freezing Works.

Parkvale Primary School.

Frizzell copies comic illustrations by the hour. He is the "best drawer" in his class and the only one able to identify the hand of Walt Disney's definitive duck drawer, the inventor of Scrooge McDuck, Carl Barks. He idolises the style of Carmine Infantino, who drew *The Flash* in the big Century comic albums.



Richard Frizzell Snr



Joan Gibson

1946

1948



Richard bird flies off to the bush

Comic artists were usually anonymous, but Infantino got a credit. "Carmine Infantino! I'll never forget it. What a name to conjure with." Frizzell also loves the illustrations in Norman Lindsay's book *The magic pudding* (Lindsay's drawing style and dry humour will influence *Sam and the dog from the sea*, the book Frizzell illustrates in 1984), May Gibbs' *Snugglepoot and Cuddlepie* and Mollie Miller Atkinson's *Richard Bird in the bush*.



Hastings Boys High School.

Frizzell takes School Certificate twice, so he can take Practical Art the second time around. He takes maths and science the first time, so he can get a sensible job like surveying, because he likes tramping and is good at maths! His father is afraid that if he pursues the art racket he may "starve in a garret" or "turn into a poofter".

1959



Marries Judy Cheesman. Frizzell shifts to Auckland with Judy and daughter Juliet before finishing his honours year at Ilam. Soon he is busy with house renovations, gardening, children, hippies and rock'n'roll. Their sons Josh and Otis are born 1967 and 1971 respectively.



1964

1960-63



1960-63



Canterbury School of Fine Arts (aka Ilam). Frizzell takes painting. Interests and influences include: Rudolf Gopas, Bill Sutton, Braque, Bernard Buffet, Klee, Alan Davie, Ben Nicholson, Milo, John Bratby, Russell Clark and Picasso—all painters with a strong graphic orientation. Frizzell's mother had attended Canterbury School of Fine Arts and considers it a "safer" environment for the growing boy than Elam in Auckland.

1966

Auckland Teachers College.
Scrapes through.



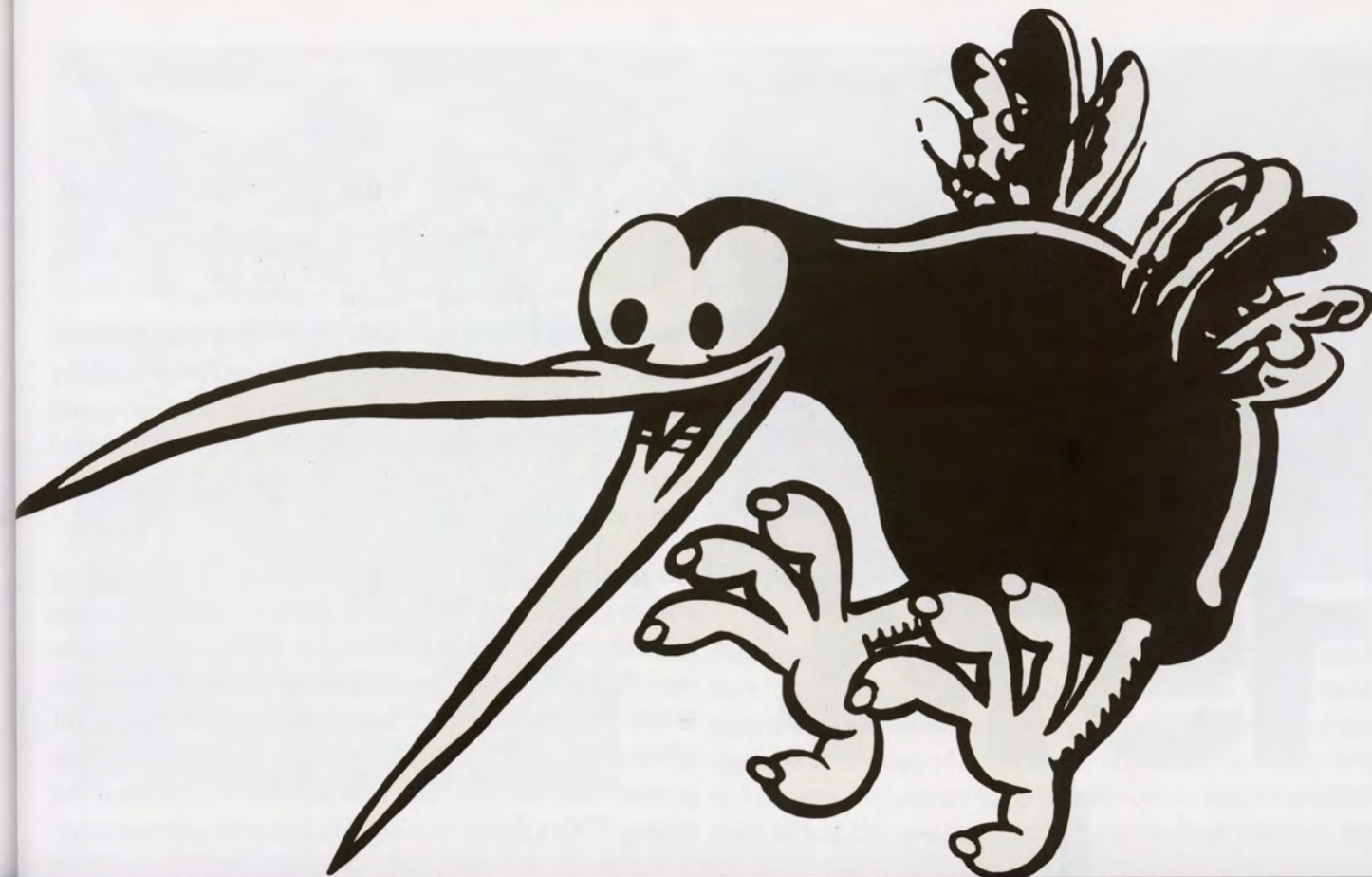
Dick & Family

Animation. Frizzell works at Sam Harvey Animations in their small studio in Mountain Road. For three years Sam is head animator with Frizzell as the support act. Frizzell works on animations for Tip Top Eskimo Pie and Chesdale Cheese's Ches'n'Dale ads.

Ches'n'Dale: Stills Collection, NZ Film Archive

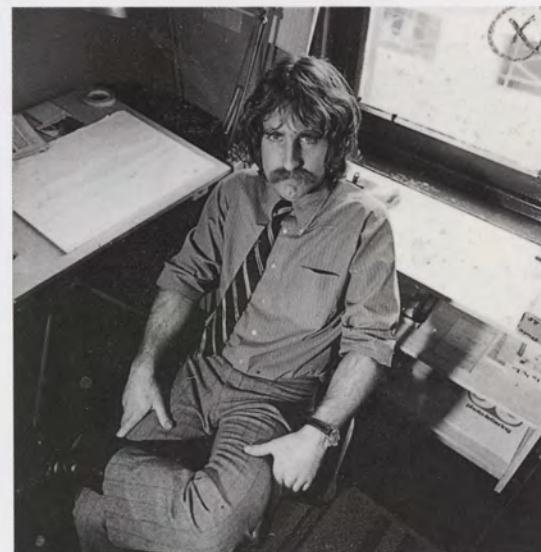


1967



1970

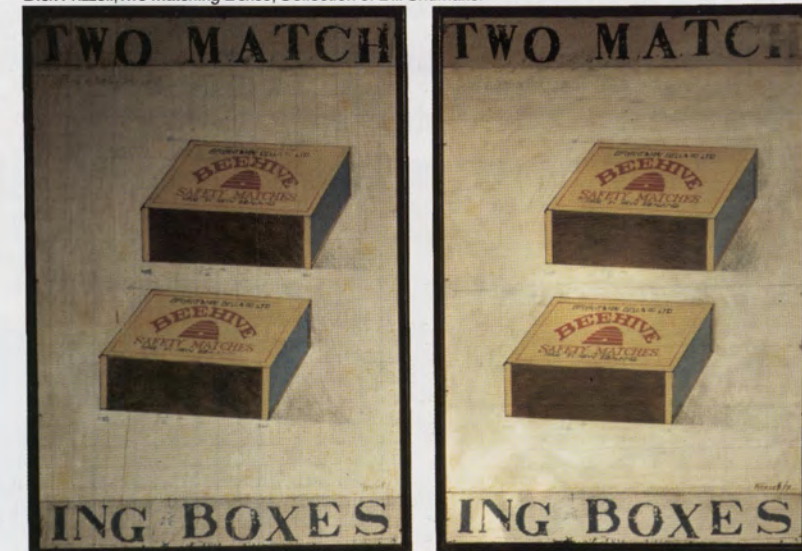
Advertising. Frizzell moves into the 'going places' agency Dobbs, Wiggins, McCann, Erickson as Art Director. He soon ends up as Creative Director at MacHarman Associates. Frizzell finds his drawing skills are a major asset in this line of work. "If you liked Peter Max and Heinz Edelman (*Yellow Submarine* artwork), Mary Quant and Cooper Black and were aggressively hip-you were in." Frizzell works on a poster for The Great Ngaruawahia Music Festival 1973, does graphics for the rock group Dragon and record covers for Down Under Records, including *Pins in it* and Ticket's *Let sleeping dogs lie*. His ubiquitous "Come alive kiwi" logo promotes healthy, outdoor activities for young New Zealanders.

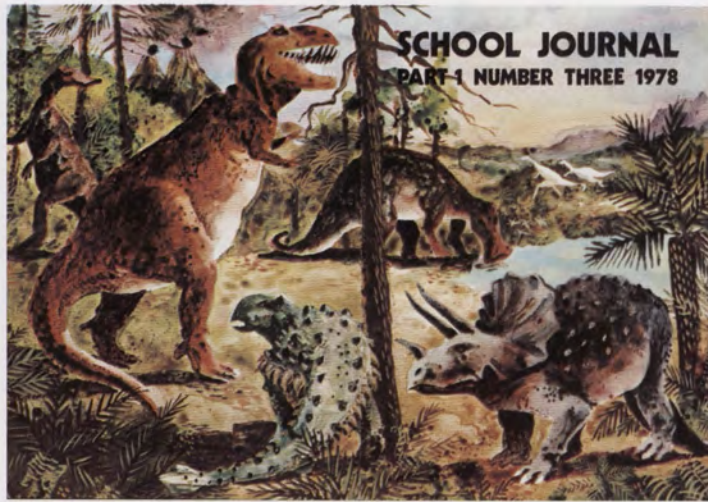


MacHarman's early days

Art on the side. Now up to his elbows in "that vulgar business of advertising", Frizzell is still "romantically dreaming" about art and producing occasional art works. In such works as *Two matching boxes* he seeks a poetic, artist's garret look, distinct from the colour and sheen of the contemporary advertising.

Dick Frizzell, *Two Matching Boxes*, Collection of Bill Shumaker





Freelancing. Frizzell leaves his full-time job in commercial art to freelance. For a few months he works at the City Vegetable Markets, unloading lorries on the graveyard shift, until the cheques start coming in from his animation, story-boarding, illustration and graphic design work done in the afternoons.

No grant. During five years' freelancing, art making comes increasingly to the fore. Working in the evenings, Frizzell gets six paintings together and applies, unsuccessfully, for an Arts Council Grant. He asks Rodney Kirk Smith, director of Barry Lett Galleries, how the grant system works. Kirk Smith reminds him of things like proven commitment. "But how can I do that without the money?!" Kirk Smith replies, "Ah, that's the commitment."

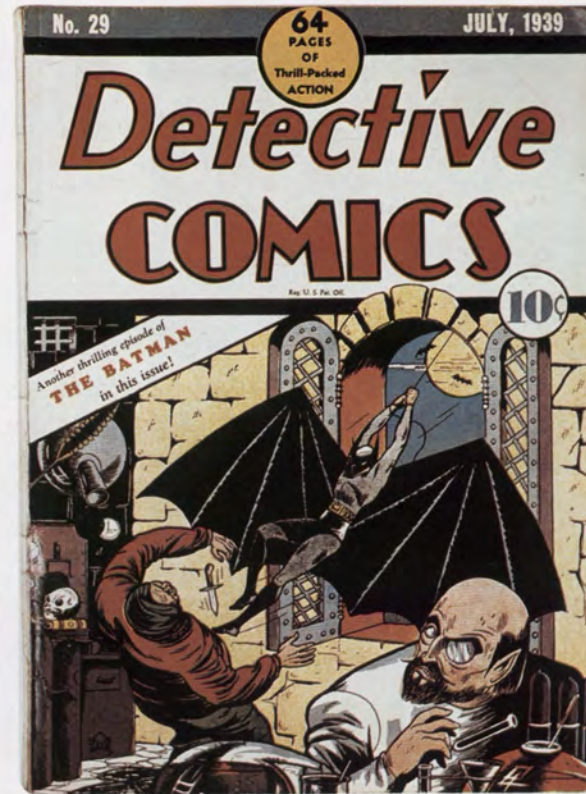


Illustration. Frizzell begins a parallel career as an illustrator for children's books and school journals. His favourite illustrators from his childhood and youth, along with the drawing styles and devices of comics and adventure annuals, feed into this work. He proves to be just as able to vary his illustration style to suit the occasion as he is to change painting styles.

1974

High and low.

Frizzell paints *Cubist Still Life with Hulk Comic / Lemon and Jug* and *The Metaphysical Cheese* - early, successful examples of his conflation of serious, master painters (here Picasso and de Chirico) with comic imagery and package design.



1975

Debut. Frizzell is included in a group show at Barry Lett's, *New year, new work.* It's his first show.

Mural. Frizzell paints a mural of the Colosseum in Il Colosseo, the Italian restaurant in Karangahape Road.



Il Colosseo mural

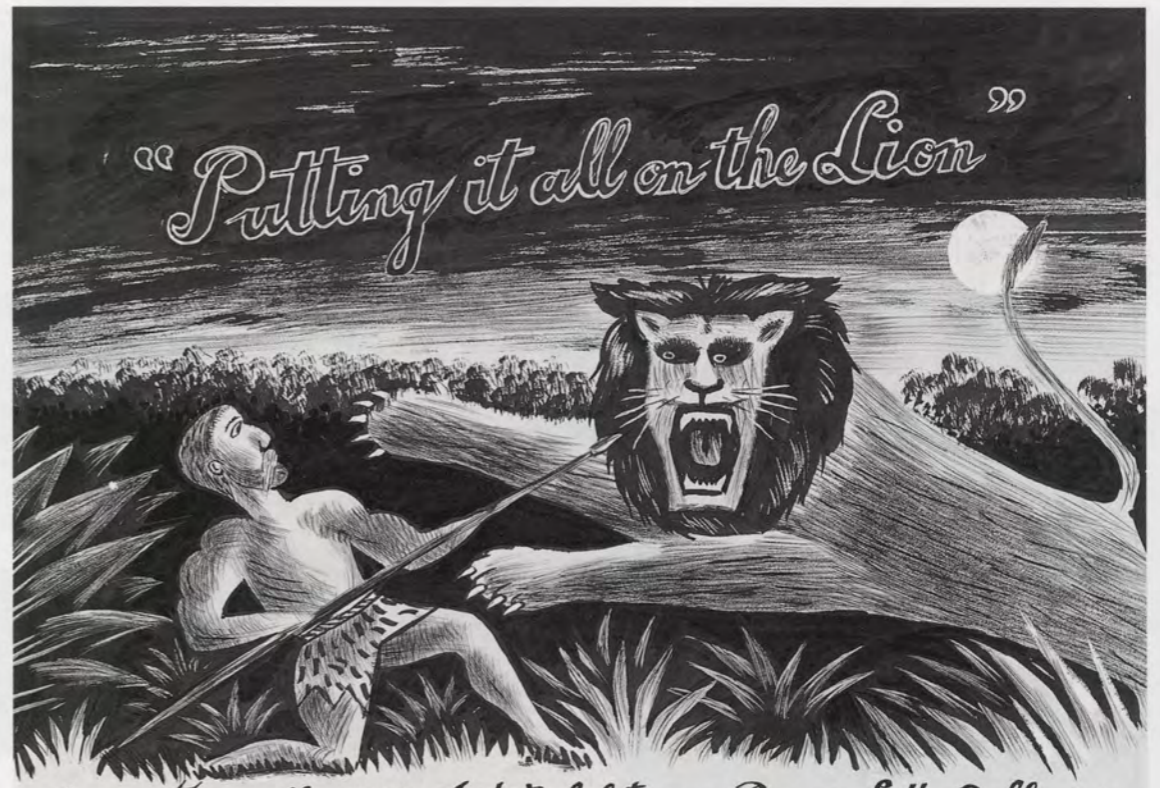


A-Fishial Art show (Barry Lett Galleries). This show presents Frizzell's enamel paintings based on fish tin labels. The year before a friend of his son Otis had brought a tin of mackerel over as a contribution to the lunch table. Frizzell remembers the flash of insight, "the tin of mackerel that the boy's mother had forced upon him and me picking up the can and looking at the label and seeing in it everything I was attempting to address: the colour field, the image, the lettering, the cheap printing - the general presentation of the image as being symbolically/narratively inert. Here was something that I could paint that didn't say anything but sure as hell could do a lot - or at least say a lot about painting!!"

1976



Wearing Levi's is better than wearing pants.



*Dick Frizzell 1979 Art Exhibition - Barry Lett Galleries
26th Feb - 9th March - 41 Victoria St. West Auckland*



1977



Putting it all on the lion (Barry Lett Galleries). This exhibition pictures the artist in exotic costumes and settings, as Victorian lion tamer, lion hunter in the jungle and the Lone Ranger. Frizzell regards this as a re-injection of subjectivity into his work (his star sign is Leo), after the objectivity of the fish tin paintings. It is easy to see how the British pop graphics of Heinz Edelman and Alan Aldridge, the aesthetics of Carnaby Street and the illustrational imagery of British artists such as David Hockney, Richard Hamilton and Peter Blake were shaping Frizzell's developing style of bright, embellished optimism.



America. Frizzell travels through America on a QEII Arts Council Grant for six months with his family. He visits the *New Image* show at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. He speaks to *New Image* artists Michael Hurzon, Neil Jenney and Robert Moskowitz. Jenney tells Frizzell to work with the material he knows best, "Your country and culture need you, so haul your ass back home and get busy doing what artists are meant to do." Frizzell writes twice to H.C. Westerman and receives further pragmatic and emphatic advice about the artist's job. Several years later Frizzell receives a letter from Westerman remarking on the artist's ultimate isolation whether or not he or she is in fashion, in New Zealand, or "on the fucking moon" and mentioning a Kirk Douglas Western, *Lonely are the brave*.



The home of the Dancing Chicken "Cherokee"

1978

I ACTUALLY INTENDED TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO EXAMINE SOME OF MY CURRENT EXPERIMENTS/INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MYSELF AND PAINTING BUT ALREADY I'M OUT IN FRONT OF A CURIOUS FACTOR INHERENT IN ANY SORT OF ART WRITING/CRITICISM THAT IS OCCURRING...
 I'M BEGINNING TO REALIZE WHY A LOT OF ARTISTS ARE ACCUSED OF MAKING CONTRADICTORY STATEMENTS WITH REGARD TO THEIR PHILOSOPHY...
 A CLOSE EXAMINATION OF ANY CONCEPTUAL PREMISE DISCLOSES TWO (OR MORE) SIDES TO THE QUESTION/STATEMENT AND THE ARTIST, IN ATTEMPTING TO EXPRESS HIS PHILOSOPHY, COULD BE SAYING SOMETHING THAT, SAID ON A DIFFERENT DAY COULD APPEAR TO MEAN THE COMPLETE OPPOSITE.
 OBVIOUSLY THE ONLY REAL THING TO DO IS TO GO — JUST GET ON WITH THE JOB — AND IN FACT I FIND, WHEN I'M WORKING, I BECOME SO CAUGHT UP IN THE PURE PRODUCTION PROBLEMS INVOLVED, THAT ALL QUESTIONS — ALL THE WHY'S AND WHEREFOR'S — ARE SWEEP ASIDE.
 UNFORTUNATELY (I SAY WRYLY) IN THOSE GAPS BETWEEN THE PERIODS OF PHYSICAL PRODUCTION I INvariably SEEM TO HAVE TO GO THROUGH THIS PERFORMANCE OF CRANKING MY CONSCIOUSNESS ON ANOTHER WHEEL, AND OF CRANKING MY CONSCIOUSNESS ON ANOTHER WHEEL, AND OF CRANKING MY CONSCIOUSNESS ON ANOTHER WHEEL, WITH TWO EXTREMELY DANGEROUS AND AMBIGUOUS AREAS OF ENDEAVOUR: THE WRITTEN AND SPOKEN WORD (THE RATIONALE) IT THAT I FIND I'VE CONTRADICTED EVERYTHING I BEGAN WITH AND WERE I TO CONTINUE PAST A CERTAIN POINT, THE PREMISE WOULD START GOING BACK AGAIN — OR WORSE — EVEN DISAPPEAR ALTOGETHER AS THINGS TEND TO DO UNDER TO CLOSE A SCRUTINY. THE IMPORTANT THING (AND THIS INVOLVES TIMING, PROBABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF ALL) AT THIS POINT IS TO STOP AND TAKE STOCK AND SORT THROUGH THIS MESS OF CONTRADICTIONS, ARROGANT SUPPOSITIONS, PURE BULLSHIT AND EARNEST PROCLAMATIONS AND TRY AND ISOLATE THE NEW KNOWLEDGE, IF ANY, THAT'S BEEN GAINED IN THE PROCESS AND THEN APPLY IT TO THE NEXT ONSLAUGHT (OF PAINTING) — ITS A SORT OF "FORWARD, 2 BACK" LEARNING PROCESS.
 AND THIS — WHICH GETS ME BACK TO WHAT THIS PARTICULAR BIT OF NONSENSE IS MEANT TO BE ABOUT — UNFORTUNATELY EVERYBODY BUT THE INVESTIGATOR OF ALL THIS VERBAGE ONLY GETS TO HEAR DIFFERENT FRAGMENTS AND IS OBLIGED TO FORMULATE THEIR CONCLUSIONS OF THE ARTIST'S PHILOSOPHY ON THE EVIDENCE OF THESE FRAGMENTS — A PROCESS THAT CAN LEAD TO SOME HUGEY MISLEADING ASSUMPTIONS — AND FURTHER COMPOUND THE AMBIGUOUS NATURE OF CONTEMPORARY PAINTING. NOT A BIT VERY DESIRABLE SITUATION WHEN THE ULTIMATE OBJECT OF THE EXERCISE IS MEANT TO BE CLARITY.

NOW, ON THE ONE HAND I SAY THIS DOESN'T BOTHER ME AND THAT ACTUALLY IT'S ONLY WHAT FINALLY GOES UP ON THE WALL THAT COUNTS, BUT ON THE OTHER HAND, AND BECAUSE I REGARD MYSELF AS ESSENTIALLY A COMMUNICATOR, IT DOES.
 SO THIS BRINGS ME TO WHAT SHOULD BE REGARDED AS THE CONCLUSION OF ALL THIS IMPASSIONED BROW BEATING — THE PAINTING ITSELF — I WANT TO MAKE PAINTINGS THAT SOMEHOW COMMUNICATE ON A TOTALLY NON-AMBIGUOUS LEVEL WITHOUT BECOMING SO TRANSPARENT THAT THEY LOSE ALL SUBSTANCE AND PARADOXICALLY THIS DOUBLE EDGED JARGON GAME IS THE MEANS TO THAT END.
 PERHAPS THE PROCESS COULD BE SEEN SOMETHING LIKE THIS:
 THE HEAVY GALL (DEATH) THE PAIN STATEMENT
 SHARP, DANCEGROUND, CHARACTER ETC.
 EVEN THIS ESSAY IS CONTRIBUTING TO THE 'JARGON' — PERHAPS ONE SHOULD LEARN TO WRITE WITH BOTH HANDS SO ONE COULD CONSTANTLY CONTRADICT THE OTHER TO BALANCE TRUE TO THIS CONCEPT IF I WAS TO BE (I SHOULD SHUT UP — THAT'S WHAT I SHOULD DO) ANOTHER ESSAY AND INVESTIGATE JUST HOW UNIMPORTANT THIS ALL PROBABLY IS — BUT MY HEART WOULDN'T BE IN IT.
 ANYONE IN THEIR RIGHT MIND WOULD HESITATE TO SAY CATEGORICALLY THAT THEY ARE 'RIGHT' YET BY THE SAME TOKEN ONE MUST HAVE SOME SORT OF PASSIONATE CONVICTION WITH REGARDS TO ONE'S BELIEFS. WHEN LÉGER LAY DOWN THE LAW HE WAS SIMPLY DOING JUST THAT — NO APOLOGISING AND SAYING 'OF COURSE I MIGHT BE WRONG' — HE BOLDLY STATED THAT 'ART WILL DO THIS' — AND BY GOD IT WOULD! (I HESITATE TO IMAGINE WHAT I'M TRYING TO IMPLY BY ALL THIS). [SOMETIMES] THIS EXHIBITION, VIRTUALLY A RETROSPECTIVE DOESN'T REALLY ILLUSTRATE MY CURRENT DIRECTION WHICH, I FEEL, WITH THE EXPLOSIVE EFFECT ON MY THINKING OF THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE, TO BE A BIT CLOSER TO MY TRUE AMBITIONS — TO FIND OUT WHAT THEY MIGHT BE — WILL HAVE TO WAIT TILL I STOP RAVING ABOUT

familiar and Dick realized that it was the same one that was used in the film "Strawhead".
 He went in and there was the dancing chicken exhibit. Dick put a coin in the slot and started playing and out came a chicken and danced. When the music ended, the chicken was automatically rewarded with a grain of wheat and vanished behind a curtain until summoned to perform with another coin.
 Dick Frizzell made some drawings in America, but none more weird than his classic discovery of the dancing chicken.

1979

Illustrations of America (R.K.S. Art). Also known as *The dancing chicken show*, this exhibition is based on material made and gathered by Frizzell during his American trip, including drawings and photographs of diners, fast food, policemen, tramps, amusement parks, and the Frizzell Chevy on the road.



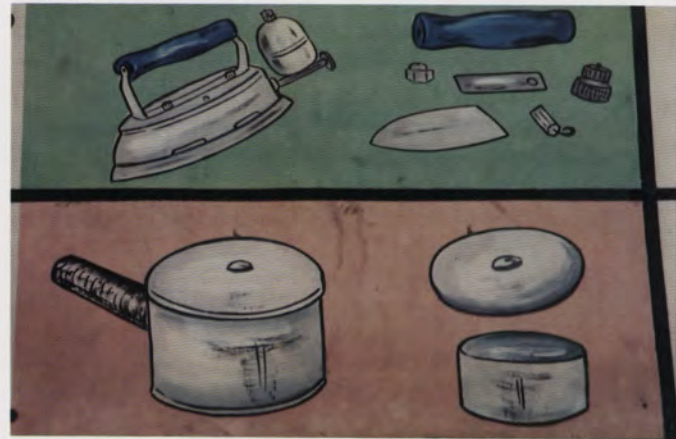
Take Me Home

Home is where the art is (R.K.S. Art).

This exhibition includes paintings of New Zealand backyard subjects: gardening trowels and forks, washing baskets, lawn mowers, incinerators. Frizzell is returning to the things he knows best.



Shop sign - Suva Fiji



PIC-STIC

1981

Everybody's business (R.K.S. Art). With this show, the "blessings count" of the "backyard paintings" is extended to classic sites, signs and characters of inner city and suburban Auckland. Drawings and photographs of car yards, shops, retailers, and workmen are rendered as cartoon-like images and presented alongside popular advertising logos like Frosty Boy, the Four Square man and the smiley Fanta orange face on monochrome fields. Frizzell's hoax Pic-stic ad in *Art New Zealand* (Summer 1981-82) markets kitschy decals to apply to boring minimalist and colour field paintings. Jousting with stereotypes of late modernist art, Frizzell is uncertain as to how his idiosyncratic figuration fits into the current art climate.

NEWSLETTER NB 38 - MAY 1981

BACKYARD PAINTING

KITCHEN PAINTING

HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

DICK FRIZZELL AT THE ELVA BETT GALLERY
MAY - 4 - MAY - 15

ELVA BETT GALLERY-DIRECTOR LOUISE BEALE. 147 CUBA ST. WELLINGTON NZ.
YOU ARE INVITED TO THE PREVIEW OF THE EXHIBITION ON MONDAY 4 MAY 5:30 PM

1980

Teaching. Frizzell takes up a part-time lectureship in Painting at Elam School of Fine Arts. (Frizzell is now a Senior Lecturer at Elam.)



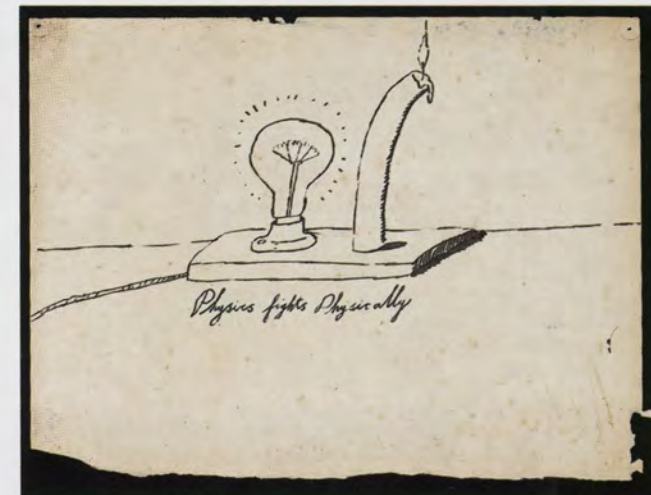
Escape from salvation. Frizzell creates a prophetic pagework for *Paper*, a short-lived glossy rag in which commercial artists showcase their personal work. The work ties together strip collages of Donald Duck, King Kong, Bob Marley, a petrol head skull and crossbones and Captain Marvel images with Frizzell cartoons of a whistling New Zealander mowing the lawn, digging the garden and stuffing the incinerator. The text repeats, "wake up-wake up-wake up and escape". The escape Frizzell has in mind is from an elite, over refined and intellectualised idea of culture to one grounded in the argot of popular subcultures and the vitality of the vernacular.

More illustration. Frizzell illustrates Trish Gribben's children's book *Pyjamas don't matter*, which soon becomes a classic of New Zealand parenting literature.



New Image: aspects of recent New Zealand painting (Auckland City Art Gallery). Curated by Francis Pound, this exhibition suggests an affinity between several Auckland painters including Gavin Chilcott, Paul Hartigan, Denys Watkins, Wong Sing Tai and Frizzell, and the artists in the Whitney's *New Image* show. (In *Art New Zealand* (Summer 1981-82) Pound had already discussed the calculated levity and mock-heroics of these Auckland artists. Frizzell's painting *Christmas New Zealand* was the cover.)

1983



More illustration. Frizzell illustrates "The Magpies", written by poet Denis Glover, and Judy Frizzell's *Sam and the dog from the sea* the following year.

The Magpies



1984

Escape from salvation part II (R.K.S. Art). Frizzell completely covers the walls of R.K.S. Art with ten three-metre high canvas panels. He paints these in situ, with the assistance of three Elam students, Simon Williams, Matthew Palmer and Patrick Pound, and his son Josh. Visitors watch the team at work for two weeks. The show picks up the idea of a "wake-up" to local culture. It also shows Frizzell's interest in the "return to history" of contemporary post-modern painters like the Italians Sandro Chia and Carlo Maria Mariani, who were also using classical and neo-classical styles of figure painting. Frizzell's ponderous simplified figures also owe something to Colin McCahon's prophetically burdened people of the land. However the series contains a critique of McCahon. Frizzell's muscle-bound wood choppers and stone breakers, cowboys and heroic nudes demand action in this world rather than focus on a spiritualised future.





Scruffy regionalism. Frizzell exhibits mock-naive still life paintings and his first landscape work, *Waikato landscape*, at Red Metro. He embellishes the walls of the gallery with a spray-can bombing of comic book images. He gets on the cover of the summer issue of *Art New Zealand*, standing in front of the work. For Frizzell, the conjunction of Red Metro and the Sue Crockford Gallery in the same building nicely illustrates the major alternative directions of Auckland art. While Crockford stands for a cool, refined internationalism, Red Metro represents idiosyncratic, funky figuration and a "scruffy regionalism".

All over the place. Frizzell describes the mid 1980s as years in which he tried out a number of different ideas without ever finding "the roll-on effect". Though for many the diversity of the work in these years serves only to confirm Frizzell's growing reputation for stylistic virtuosity.

1985

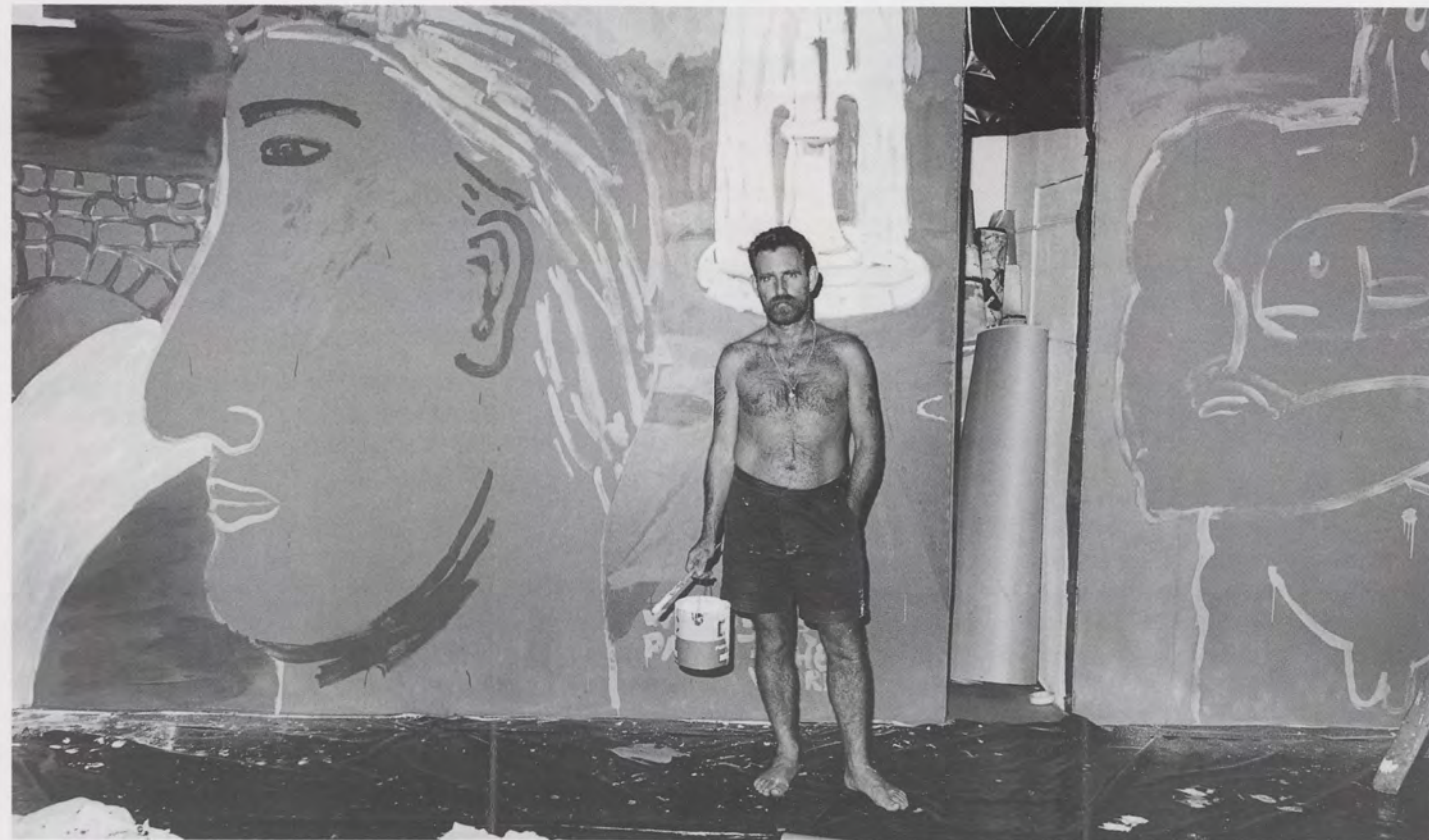


Mid-life crisis. Diagnosed as suffering from a serious dose of hepatitis, Frizzell stops drinking for four months and moderates his life-style. In the reflective period which follows Frizzell decides that a form of naive, unfashionable landscape painting may be the way out of his artist's block. He works primarily with landscape painting for the next four years. The folksy naive images of fences, macrocarpas, cabbage trees, farm cottages and barns which Frizzell uses to illustrate Denis Glover's poem "The Magpies" spur him to further exploration of such material in his painting.

Prizes. Frizzell begins entering his landscape paintings in the sort of regional art competitions usually regarded as off limits for serious artists. He collects first prize in four competitions: Nelson's Goodman Suter Award Exhibition, the Wanganui Art Award, the Taumarānui Art Award and the Birkenhead Arts Council Art Award. He also wins the Russell Clark Trust Award for book illustration.

Meanwhile... Frizzell's spray-can bombing mural on both sides of a 100 yard long tunnel beneath the Finance Plaza Building, a collaboration with his son Otis, caricatured Queen Street landmarks such as the Keans Jeans lassoing cowboy, the Lion Breweries ad and 246 department store.

1987



Dick Frizzell, *Christmas Pudding*, 1987

Mirko Virius, Harvest, 1938



1988



Europe. Frizzell enjoys a ten month sabbatical study tour of Europe, which includes a three week residency at Frans Masereel Lithographic Workshop in Belgium. Two things are of particular interest in relation to his landscape work. One is seeing the rural landscape of Yugoslavia and its peasant culture, which Frizzell had only imagined through the paintings of the Yugoslav primitives who had influenced his own pseudo-primitive landscapes. The other is seeing the more densely textured and intensively cultivated landscapes. Frizzell is confronted with a wealth of details for his developing sense of a "patterned landscape:" hedgerows, wheat fields, ploughed fields, vineyards, terraced hillsides, pollarded trees, orchards, and rows of cyprus trees. This informs later landscapes such as *Milling* and *Dark landscape*.

Back to the landscape. Frizzell is fully immersed in the practice of landscape painting. At this moment a great deal of attention and energy is focussed on various brands of contemporary art which seek their contexts in the burgeoning industry of post-modern and post-structuralist theory. This aspect of the post-modern held more sway in the later 1980s than did the neo-expressionist figuration, which had interested Frizzell a few years earlier. Although Frizzell reads the new theory, he adopts an oppositional stance. Francis Pound suggests his neo-regionalism amounts to "hiding in the hills", waiting for the hot-air over Roland Barthes and Baudrillard to disperse. Many regard Frizzell's landscapes as a critical aberration. The fact that they sell well only serves to convince sceptics that Frizzell is abandoning the difficult heights of respectably serious art for the lowlands of easy popularity and commercial gain. He exhibits landscapes at Gow, Langsford Gallery and at Janne Land Gallery, Wellington.

1989



Photo - Judy Frizzell

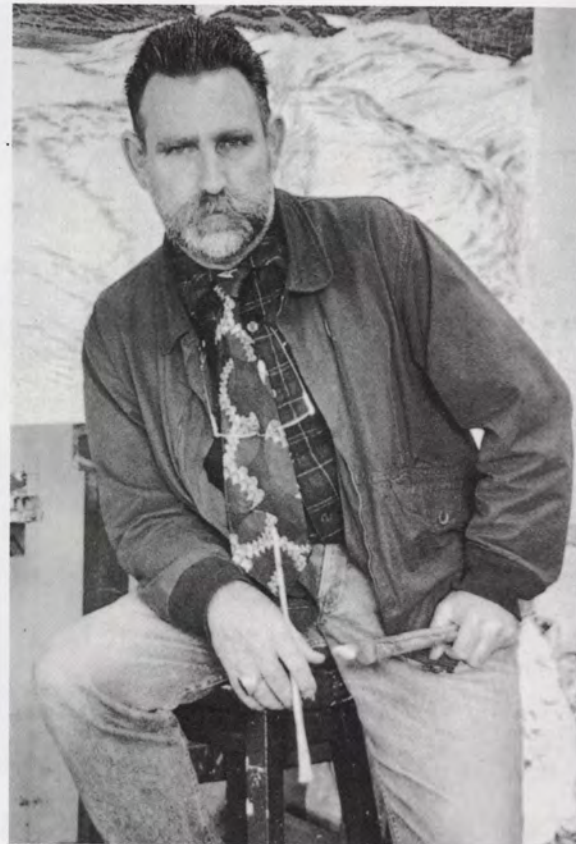


Situation and style: vestiges of regionalism in recent New Zealand Art (Jonathan Jensen Gallery, Christchurch). Curated by William McAloon, this exhibition focuses on artists pursuing critically retrograde regionalist themes. It includes Laurence Aberhart, Judy Darragh, William Dunning, Michael Stevenson and Frizzell. Frizzell also exhibits his South Island landscapes at C.S.A. Gallery, Christchurch.

Brush for hire. Frizzell is commissioned to paint a portrait of Dame Cath Tizard. He also paints *The Drover* for the cover of *Pacific Way* in-flight magazine.

More illustrations. Frizzell's illustrations for the children's book *Pukeko in a punga tree* are accepted for the Australian and New Zealand Museum of Children's Literature in Melbourne.

Photo - Judy Frizzell



1990



Dick Frizzell, *Swing-Tag*, 1994

Sabbatical. Frizzell has seven months study tour of France and Spain. He emerges from the Miro Foundation in Barcelona seeing Miro's everywhere, in bits of wool squashed into the asphalt pavement and other urban detritus for instance. He begins series of small collages mimicking early modernist styles. This research feeds into the small scale collages of *The agua amarga suite* and the *Hook, line and sinker* series, which further unravel some of the ideas of formal improvisation and joking initiated with the *Tiki* series. *Hook, line and sinker* pastiches 1940s and 1950s School of Paris abstraction, Denis Knight Turner, Henry Moore crayon and dye drawings, Theo Schoon, Walters and early Mrkusich works, and Russell Clark, turning abstracted, biomorphic shapes into cunningly devised hooks and sinkers. Frizzell also pastiches works in the Auckland City Art Gallery's *The 1950s show*.

Tiki collage for Levi Jeans New Zealand



1992

Tiki (Gow, Langsford Gallery). This exhibition dramatically divides opinion on matters pertaining to the cultural ownership of images. Through their distorted and distorting mirrors the Tiki works bring into focus a complex post-colonial politics. Frizzell offers a tiki tour of early modernist art history, as though, using the basic hei-tiki form as his vehicle, he is painting his way daily through the different styles of artists such as Picasso, Archipenko, Wyndham Lewis and Jean Arp and a host of unnamed followers. He designs the Tiki label for Levi Jeans, New Zealand. He also designs a record cover for rap duo MC OJ & Rhythm Slave (Frizzell's son Otis is MC OJ). It is nominated for Best Album Cover of the Year at the New Zealand Music Awards.



Grocer with Moko preliminary sketches

1993



1995



Photo - Patrick Reynolds

Lands a big one. Frizzell paints the Maui mural for the atrium of the Auckland Casino in 1994. It is installed in 1995. Frizzell's choice of Maui, the great trickster of Maori and Polynesian mythology who fished up the North Island, is apt for the gambling context of the casino. Known for his capacity to transform himself, Maui is an appropriate role model for Frizzell's own artistic shape-shifting. Several years earlier Frizzell had illustrated the Maui legend for Maori school journals, using comic book superheroes as models. Frizzell also collaborates on a large painting with Shane Cotton for *Stop making sense?*, an exhibition curated by George Hubbard which pairs up six Maori and six Pakeha artists.

Ambitious objects (Andrew Jensen Gallery, Wellington). Frizzell returns to the inane object and the inert commercial icon. These paintings cut and paste images rendered up from fragments of junk mail and cheaply printed advertising circulars. Their flat brightness differs from the syrupy gloss of his early ad and label based paintings. Frizzell says of these works:

“I reposition myself in my old territory at the interface between high art and low art.”

Compiled by Allan Smith

1994

Dadstracts. Frizzell calls his new mock modern abstractions “Uncle Albert abstracts”. His family call them “Dadstracts”. Homegrown humour is an important part of these paintings. And when Frizzell paints a mural in his retro 1950s abstract style for the Newmarket fashion shop Saks, in 1994, he is able to do so without making any differentiation between the look of his commercial art and his paintings for galleries. Frizzell is interested in the pollution of purist notions of abstract art as painting styles filter down the “food chain” from art galleries to fabric design, commercial graphics and even cartoons. He notes that plundered Stuart Davis imagery ends up as background in Mr Magoo cartoons. Whereas modernist abstractionists like Mrkusich and Walters, who have both been involved in commercial art and design, emphatically demarcate their design work from their art, Frizzell feels compelled to blur these categories.



Cotton without Frizzell



Cotton with Frizzell

He establishes a good footing for the next shift in direction. Later this year he finds himself in his studio surrounded by strange new “plywood Jesus things” such as *Vera-I-con* and *I will be*, and working on a further 70 metre mural for the Auckland Casino.

1996

Photo - Judy Frizzell



FOOTNOTES

i Correspondence with the writer, 1996. All statements from the artist from same source or conversation with the artist unless stated otherwise.

ii In a letter to Frizzell in April 1981, after seeing photographs of his work, H.C. Westerman said, "I don't know how in the hell you manage to paint with house enamels and quite well too. Beats the shit out of me."

iii Frizzell's term is borrowed from another Herman Hesse novel, *The Glass Bead Game*.

iv For several years now Frizzell has kept up a running conversation with his son-in-law, artist Patrick Pound, on matters post-modern and theoretical.

v *New Image Painting*, Richard Marshall, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1978.

vi *New Image: aspects of recent New Zealand art*, Francis Pound, Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland, 1983.

vii Albert Boime interprets the role of comic art in a way that is totally applicable to Frizzell's practice: "I make no distinctions between 'high' and 'low' art... This is totally independent of judicial criticism; while the spectator is perfectly free to evaluate such activity in terms of some canon or aesthetic frame of reference, the individual 'shaper' - his own best spectator - needs no audience to satisfy the conditions of his experience. Comic strip artist, cabinet makers, plumbers, and mathematicians are essentially no different from 'old masters' when viewed from this perspective." Albert Boime, "The comics stripped and the ash canned: a review essay", *Art Journal*, vol XXXII/1, Fall 1972, pp 21 ff, quoted in Sheena Wagstaff, *Comic Iconoclasm*, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, 1987, pp.82-83.

viii Given Frizzell's on-going fascination with the way art styles can be used as signifiers of the uncool or the culturally bad mannered, Milan Kunc's self-declared style of "Embarrassing Realism" suggests a kindred spirit.

ix The painting of Texas artist David Bates, which is based on a gritty folk realism, combines something of the innocent forthrightness of Frizzell's large *Escape from salvation* figures with the chunky materialism of Frizzell's later landscapes. Particularly pertinent here are Bates' images of *Jetty fisherman*

FOOTNOTES

1990), *Butchering the hog* (1984), and *The dock builder* (1987). Bates has been said to combine a "rough innocence with acquired sophistications". See Ed Hill and Suzanne Bloom, "David Bates", *Artforum*, November 1984, p.108.

x The model railway diorama analogy is one of Frizzell's favourite when discussing his intentions for the big landscape paintings.

xi Frizzell stopped using enamels in the early eighties and has rarely used them since.

xii Frizzell, diary entry Saturday 13th, 1990.

xiii Frizzell, diary entry Monday 8th, January, 1990.

xiv Wystan Curnow, *Putting the land on the map: art and cartography in New Zealand since 1840*, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, 1989, p.6.

xv Francis Pound, *Frames on the land: early landscape painting in New Zealand*, F.D. Collins, Auckland, 1983.

xvi J.T.M. Chadwick, "Whose paddock is it anyway?", in *Dick Frizzell: 'Tiki', Gow/Langford Gallery*, Auckland, 1992, unpaginated.

xvii Merata Mita, in *Stamp*, December/January, 1993.

xviii Frizzell, incidentally, in a letter to H.C. Westerman, refers to these images as being "in the Westerman manner." Letter 1981.

xix For Cotton, Frizzell's grocer also called up the type of European storeowner in the colonial period who had allowed Maori customers to accumulate huge debts so to the point where they were forced to pay them off with tracts of land. Witi Ihimaera uses the term "moko of the pakeha" in *The Matriarch*, Pan Books in association with Heinemann Publishers, 1988, p.191.

xx Frizzell, letter to the writer, 1996. It was rare, in this sort of comic to find the illustrator's name; the young Frizzell was entranced by the romantic name of this Carmine Infantino. It is revealing that it has always been comics from the 1950s and 1960s such as *The Phantom*, *Donald Duck*, *Superman* and *The Flash* which have defined Frizzell's comic art aesthetic; as yet he has not taken up the more graphically intense, more psychologically violent and

FOOTNOTES

darker aesthetic of Japanese Manga comics for instance or the recent revisions of Batman in the Dark Knight graphic novels.

xxi Frizzell in letter to reviewer Mark Amery, 9/7/96

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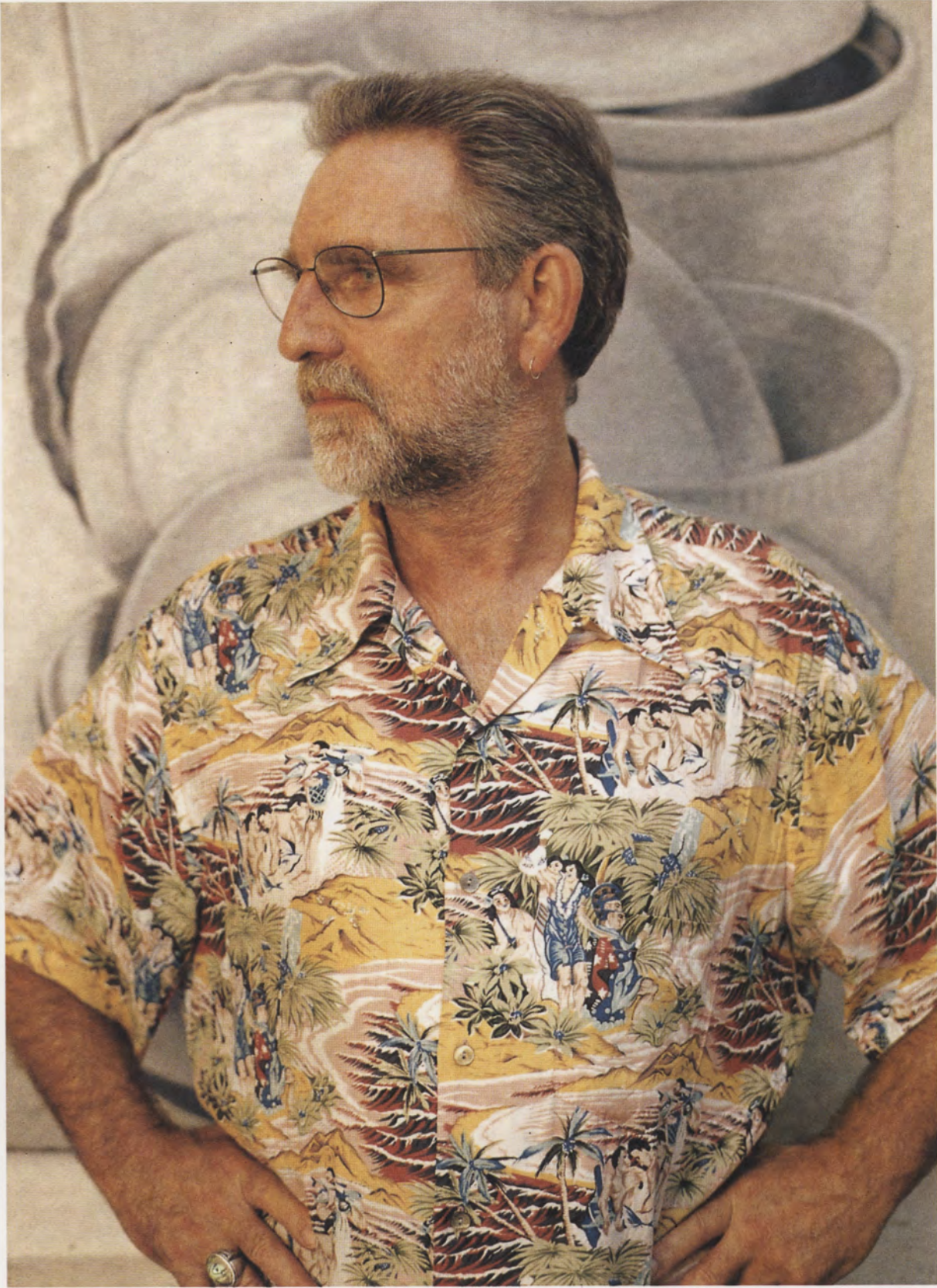
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