



**beauty, even**

a tribute to Joanna Margaret Paul 1945–2003

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City Gallery Wellington

Published by City Gallery Wellington on the occasion of 'beauty, even: Joanna Margaret Paul 1945 – 2003', an exhibition developed by City Gallery Wellington and the Sarjeant Gallery Te Whare O Rehua Whanganui. The exhibition dates are: 2 October – 28 November 2004 at the Sarjeant Gallery Te Whare O Rehua Whanganui, and 12 December 2004 – 6 March 2005 at City Gallery Wellington.

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ISBN: 0-9582290-5-8

City Gallery Wellington  
PO Box 2199, Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand  
[www.city-gallery.org.nz](http://www.city-gallery.org.nz)

Dust jacket hand-printed in Gill Sans by Brendan O'Brien on Velata paper. Photograph of Joanna Margaret Paul courtesy of Robert Cross, 1996. All drawings courtesy of the Joanna Margaret Paul estate. The drawings on page 37 and the dust jacket were originally published in **The Lone Goose**, a colouring-in children's book by Joanna Margaret Paul, published by John McIndoe Ltd, 1979. Publication edited by Emma Bugden, Greg Donson and Gregory O'Brien. Proofreading by Lizzie Bisley. Page design and typesetting by Sarah Farrar.

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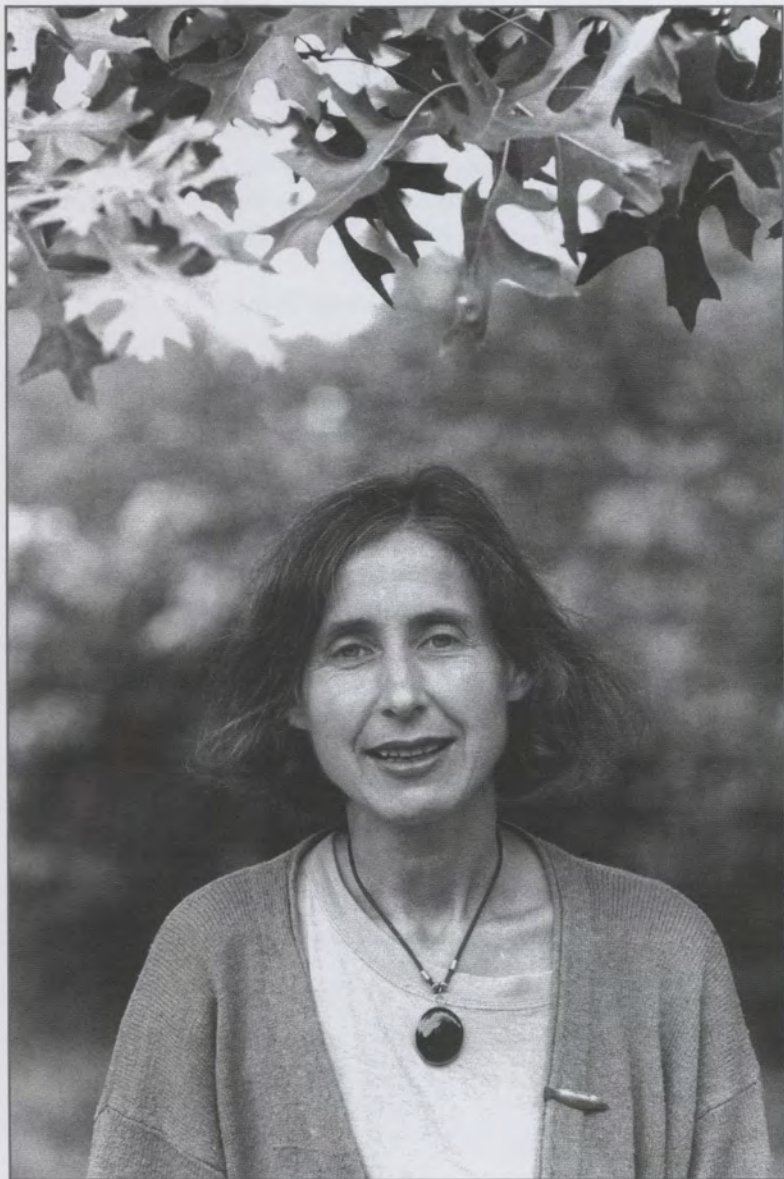
City Gallery Wellington is managed by the Wellington Museums Trust with major funding from Wellington City Council.

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## Illustrations

All illustrations in this publication are untitled and undated artworks by Joanna Margaret Paul.



## Introduction

Emma Bugden and Greg Donson

Joanna Margaret Paul was an artist whose creative practice was intricately entwined with her life—a response to the world immediately around her. Although an extremely dedicated and focused artist whose paintings and drawings are included in all major public New Zealand art collections, she was a self-claimed ‘amateur’ who once described painting as ‘not a job, not even a vocation. It is part of life, subject to the strains, and joys, of domestic life.’ This inclusive approach to art-making meant that Paul never allowed herself to be pinned down to one particular medium. Her work casts its light, airy touch across the fields of drawing, painting, poetry, film-making and photography.

Born to creative and forward-thinking parents (Blackwood and the artist Janet Paul, who established a Hamilton-based publishing house and bookshop), Paul studied both painting and a Bachelor of Arts in English and Philosophy at Auckland University in the 1960s. Moving to Otago in the 1970s, Paul began to paint and write in earnest. Based in Port Chalmers, she was part of a dynamic artistic community which also included Charles Brasch, Pat France, O.E. Middleton, and the painter Jeffrey Harris, who Paul married in 1971. At this time she also began to make non-narrative films, whose abstract visual nature fed off the same personal qualities as her paintings.

Paul followed strands of thought across words, celluloid, and line. Motifs occur and re-occur in her work—washing hanging on a line, a scene framed by a window, simple domestic objects arranged on a table—objects and events selected seemingly for their unobtrusive and often unremarkable nature. Paul herself once said that she was 'aggressively in support of the minor—I like my work to relate to a room rather than a gallery'.

Paul's work can be seen as a visual diary of her everyday life. Each drawing and painting serves to document familiar moments. From a slight strike of watercolour to the spaces between line and text, her work provides a breath of fresh air in a world where small beauty is often overlooked. As Paul said: 'I'm dealing with repositories of life, where it's lived. I'm painting things like the coffee cups after a visitor has left. I am trying to capture an idea from life, pursuing it in a poem or a painting or a collage or a photograph.'

One can track the physical geography of Paul's life through her paintings of various homes and surroundings, from her early work while at the Elam Art School, her time at Port Chalmers, then Wellington, and Banks Peninsula. Later in life, while based predominantly in Wanganui, her work documents not only the suburb of Durie Hill where she lived, but also records frequent trips to other places—the Parapara region outside Wanganui, the Coromandel, the Government Gardens in Rotorua.

At times the diaristic nature of Paul's work is heartbreaking in its personal intensity. The poetry book *Imogen* (Wellington: Hawk Press, 1978), and paintings such as the 'Mortality' series (1982), created in response to the death of her daughter Imogen at the age of 10 months, are painfully touching commemorations of a life too short-lived. Yet even this evocation of loss is subtle and quiet. In the 'Mortality'

series the painted objects are surrounded by vast empty gaps, the spaces between becoming as important as the objects themselves. This sense of emptiness opens up a poetic stillness, where meaning is derived from absence.

The intimacy of Paul's focus belies the prolific reach of her practice. At the time of her death at fifty-seven in 2003, Paul left an extensive archive of writing, self published books, hundreds of drawings and paintings, and over one hundred and fifty sketchbooks. This publication, and the exhibition it is produced to accompany, in no way attempts the definitive survey of this production. The exhibition 'beauty, even: Joanna Margaret Paul 1945 – 2003', a partnership project between City Gallery Wellington and the Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui, is a glimpse at the broad diversity of the artist. This accompanying publication is not, strictly speaking, a catalogue. Rather, it sits alongside the exhibition, offering another kind of tribute to the life and work of an artist who found extraordinary beauty in ordinary things. The contributions to this publication come from people who knew Joanna Margaret Paul—writers, poets, critics, and family members. Their observations offer us tributes to an artist whose work was intensely personal, yet continues to have a far reaching impact.

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## Still Life with Wind in the Trees

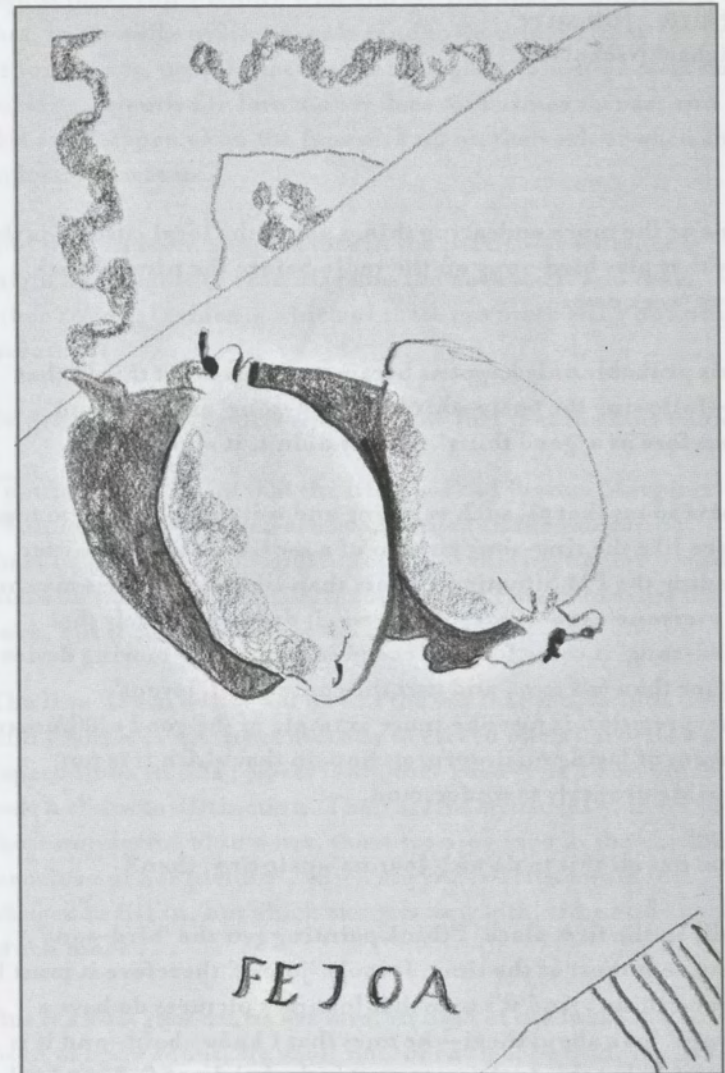
Bill Manhire

So much of the planet is fragile:  
things that flap on the line,  
stuff on a plate, a car skidding  
over the paddocks . . .

I mean: abrupt, conditional,  
and, as usual,  
brief: so that you once again assume your place.  
Yet what if one day you looked out

through the open window  
and saw mortality  
in the gray scribble  
of a boy holding an apple?

Fragility. Brevity. Beauty, even.  
Light in available space.  
And what's joy?  
Even a pencil will point to it.



beauty, for sure  
Michael Nicholson

One of the more endearing things about the local culture is the way they play bird-song on the radio before the nine o'clock news, week days.

This probably only happens because management thinks that we—following the poets—think of 'bird-song' as joyous and therefore as a 'good thing'. If they didn't, it wouldn't.

I have to say that all such warbling and twittering sounds to me more like the sing-song rhythm of a morse-code transmitter sending the PM Situation Report than like music. This may not be everyone's experience. However, it does seem likely that 'bird-song' is some form of coded information-moving device rather than *belle canto*, and that the consensual 'joyous' interpretation is just one more example of the good old human custom of laying misinterpretation on that which it is not possible properly to understand.

What has all this to do with Joanna's painting, then?

Well, in the first place, I think painting gets the 'bird-song', treatment most of the time. It looks 'joyous' therefore it must be 'a good thing'. And it's true that Joanna's pictures do have a 'joyous' look about them—the ones that I know about—and it is also true that this look is not exactly the height of fashion in the present state of art theoretical play. So why, if this is not what art is about any more, should we care?

Reasons: with painting, as with 'bird-song' it's not the look but what goes on behind the look that we should regard. Where do joyous looks come from? Who knows? But what we do know is that, in all walks of life, people tend to do things either for love or for money, usually not both, although to some who start out working devoutly for love money does sometimes accrue, and this may happen when the fans pick up on the work or when the industry moves in . . .

And this, in turn, suggests that in the particular instance it might be possible to read off from the work itself and from other residual evidence which of these two motivating options is in control.

Evidence of a loving provenance is the fuel that the fans run on.

I would wish to claim that the life's work of Joanna Margaret Paul, examples of which are represented in the exhibition 'beauty, even', is an abundant source of this particular brand of fuel and that this is, in itself, a sufficient reason to value the work, but it certainly is not the only one.

The line 'It ain't what you do but the way that you do it' is true. And Joanna's capacity constantly to exceed one's hard-nosed expectations in this respect is another good ground on which to base a claim to distinction. Then again, stylistically, there are those wonderful blue notes, those yawning gaps in the rhythmic structure of her pictures, which any other artist would feel obliged to fill in, but which she gets away with, time and again. Much more . . .

But it's what goes on, as was said, in back of the look, that we need to know about. We shall not, of course, be told. It will be necessary to rely on the few available shreds of evidence: we know, for example, that Joanna rejected any kind of market

driven professionalism in the way that she deployed her talents. We see by looking, that she accepted a stripped-down version of the classical repertoire as her play-ground: traditional subject matter of no special significance; paint; paper; love; climax; image; with no ponderous overtones of political significance, post-modern posturing or art-theoretical otherness. That was it.

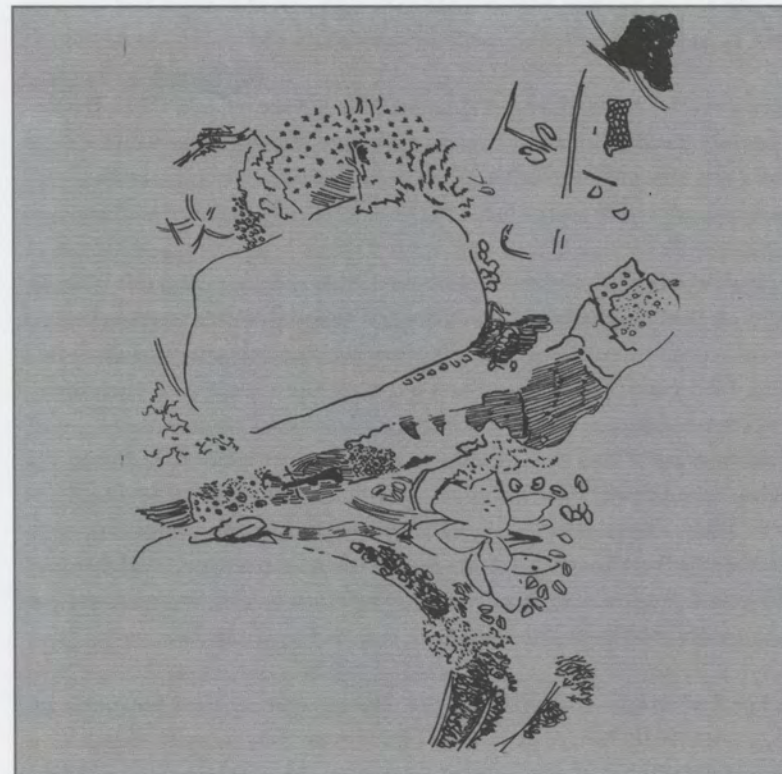
At a guess, Joanna found, in the course of her tragically truncated working life, that only with such uncluttered simple means could she obtain satisfaction from her love-making sessions with the object addressed. Only so could she obtain that vivid replica of her inner imperatives, driving towards that climax, familiar to artists, when the image quite unexpectedly drops all resistance and bursts, if one may be excused the corn, into song. You probably know what I mean. Joanna certainly did.

Philosophically transcendent musings of no significance, you could say. Then there is that telling short Janet Paul poem—Joanna's Mother, in her typographic designer mode—'Still Something':

success or failure  
the right or the left  
hand column  
something still  
lies behind  
figures

Suggesting perhaps that such musings may not, after all, be entirely worthless.

Try to imagine the World without such glimpses of sentient mystery as Joanna has to offer, amongst the ballistic missiles.





## Rain on the hills

Ian Wedde

I

Rain on the hills changes things. Where yesterday's clear frosty blue sky made horizons recede and foregrounds assemble detail, the rain simplifies that: a simple dark mass constitutes the horizon whose sky edge isn't clear, and the foreground flattens.

The dramas of the view fold inward into secrecy, and the points of view that might have transformed those dramas into revelations of sublimity or allegory, or into theatres of action, also fold inward. Distinctions between the viewer and the view, between subject and object, between body and world: these declamations and their salients become hesitant, filled with echoes and foggy folds of space and time. The hesitancy isn't irresolute, however: the viewer hesitates to mark her place distinctly in this space where distinction is neither truthful to the condition of viewing, nor appropriate to the viewer's sense of her relationship to the world.

A kind of modesty may enter the way representation happens in this truthfully hesitant space. The viewer may want to think about details and her intimate relationship with them, rather than about grand views and her distanced command of them.

Representation may become a matter of thinking about and processing relationship, of abjection and the absorption of self into context; rather than of reproducing a clearly commanded object.

What clarity is sought will more than likely have to do with attention to detail, with the careful calibration of scale, with the limits of relationship, with the coherence of sequence, and with the exact syntax of duration.

2

Drawing rain on the hills: this might be done not by making marks, but by thinking. The thinking might appear as blank sheets of paper, as blank spaces on sheets of paper; or not at all (except in thought).

Once, many years ago, I visited Joanna in Wanganui on the way north. She laid out an obstacle course for Pascal in the back yard, and they both ran around it, jumping over things, dodging around others. Later I noticed that the artfulness of the course consisted not just in its ability to tire out a fretful child, but in its drawing of the back yard: the yard's detail, scale, relationship, sequence, and duration.

Running around the yard with Pascal, Joanna was drawing it. The odd solemnity of the game, and Joanna's self-deprecatory tone with it, said she knew she was doing this. There was no great difference between thinking about drawing rain on the hills, laying out the obstacle course, and making actual marks on paper. In a general sense, they all involved thinking about representation as a process not as a result. In particular senses, they were distinct ways of doing this.

3

Joanna made the covers for two of my books of poems: *Earthly: Sonnets for Carlos* in 1975, and *Spells for Coming Out* in 1977. She also made drawings to mark the internal sections of *Spells*.

Like the obstacle course many years later in Wanganui, the cover of *Earthly* is an artful obstacle course, a kind of map and

route, a succession of quickly shifted views: all about detail, scale, relationship, sequence, and duration.

One view, through a doorway into a little kitchen with a high chair (with a little boy in it), is cunningly overlaid with another that deliberately excises the image of the child, replacing it with a cluttered mantelpiece above a coal range. The child's mother's right arm and shoulder are just visible in this frame: her implied direction is discovered on the back cover, a view out the kitchen window past a breadboard to the trunk of a cabbage tree, a couple of car tyres, and the handle of a child's push-chair (with no child visible in it).

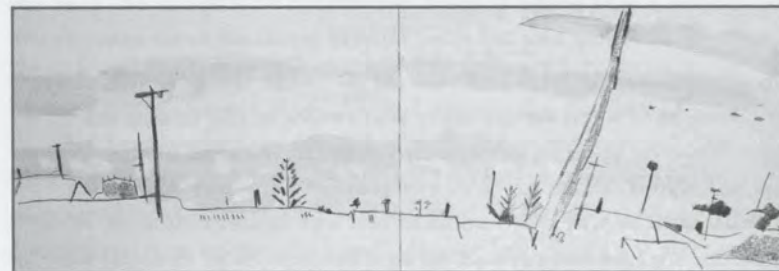
Out of some superstitious fear, I'd asked Joanna not to show the actual image of Carlos in his high chair. But more to the point, she'd thought through the condition of this representation, and made a succession of views that interpolated somewhat cluttered, domestic framings within framings of what, then, appears in the text itself: the child in the kitchen.

The cover of *Spells* consists of a working of the rusty, patina'd surface of a sheet of spoiled drawing paper. Inside are three small ink drawings: of details, but details of what, exactly? They could derive from peering even more deeply into the detail of the cover, a microscopic, almost forensic view. They could derive from equally forensic sections of latticed twig-work or foliage. They could, on the other hand, be evidence of thinking about routes, about maps of reticulation, the oddly precise (but inscrutable) detail, scale, relationship, sequence, and duration of 'spells' bringing about exactly mediated infoldings of self and world.

I've just returned from a month of reticulating myself through the back-routes of the country: its gravel roads that obscure the rear-view with dust, intricate infoldings of mangrove estuaries with manuka covered hills, the spires of marae churches throughout the Hokianga, beach vistas fading into salt mist or rain, the new glinting band of beach-front development on Omaha viewed from over the water at Ti Point, the dark hills around Waikaremoana from the Panekiri bluffs, the Mount rearing next to its companion condominium, the muddy estuary at Maketu, the dying lake seen from the Polynesian Baths at Rotorua.

'Rain on the hills' became a kind of mantra, a way of talking myself through the empirical attentions needed to understand how views worked, how their detail, scale, relationship, sequence, and duration might disclose ways of thinking rather than merely ways of representing a result, an out-there.

I knew I was lucky to have been helped into this rigour by the example of Joanna's mock-ludicrous obstacle course at Wanganui, the delicate thought of her enigmas within *Spells for Coming Out*, and the respectful, tender interpolations of the photograph-framings on the covers of *Earthly*. I was lucky to have still had her as one of my guides.



## In the sign of the archer

Bernadette Hall

e hara i te mea, no naianei te aroha,  
no nga tupuna, tuku iho tuku iho

We had sung this song at my brother's funeral. I sang it at Joanna's graveside. There were no other words that could be trusted. Better to be silent.

I first met Joanna in 1971 when she was teaching art at St. Dominic's College in Dunedin. The Dominican sisters showed much creativity in their teaching appointments. James Baxter had taken poetry classes—poetry readings really—a few years earlier. And Robin White followed on after Joanna.

I wasn't writing poetry, or anything for that matter, at the time. I had a one year old son, I taught Latin to make ends meet, I was blown away by this mysterious, exotic creature who seemed to know everyone in the New Zealand art scene. *She draped a rich silk scarf around her head and leaned into the southerly. It was in the rain-wet Octagon at night, the street light illuminating her glowing face, her dark blue eyes, her full rosy mouth.*

In many ways our lives had run on the same tracks up till then. We were both born in the same year, right at the end of the war. We were born in the same month, in the sign of the archer—Apollo with his arrow of inspiration—our birthdays almost side by side. We had both lost our fathers when we were sixteen. We had both grown up in a household of women, our

hearts and minds filled with desire for men, a dreamed desire for men, owing more to art and literature than the real thing. *I never told her this about myself. She was more open. Over the years she spoke of her suffering. And as I helped sort the papers and poems strewn through her abandoned house, there they were, so many syllables of her passion.*

Joanna introduced me to Meister Eckhardt and Hildegard of Bingen. To St. John of the Cross. She was embracing the Church as I was easing myself free. There was something of Virginia Woolf about her, the soft flowing garments in layers, the charming hats, her clear skin rinsed with herbal lotions. She adored gardens but did not labour in her garden. She scrubbed down wooden benches in her kitchen and washed her clothes by hand. She distrusted a life of ease and comfort but would bake a whole salmon for guests. She loathed commercialism. She wept bitterly when a neighbour brought a pine tree into her house at Christmas time, she would not shop in a supermarket.

We worked together on two of my books. I took her to Akaroa so she could catch the line of the volcano's rim for a cover drawing. She sang there in the bath, and in the room where she settled her two little boys. *My house fills with her paintings. She enters my poems. I remember visiting her in Wanganui, in Stark Street, and she offered to show me her new work. She brought out several sheets of paper, plain white sheets, with little pencil scratches here and there like speech marks but with the sentences rubbed out. All the colour has gone from my palette, she said. So simple. So terrifying. I put the line into a sonnet, where years later Kathryn Madill found it and put it into a little gesso book that she gave me as a gift. A Latin dictionary, opened out: lateo—to lie hidden; Latona—the mother of Apollo; latus—a bosom friend. A pale green teapot wrought with tiny stems and leaves (aha, tea leaves!) ghosts across the pages and underneath in cursive script, Joanna's words. Luminous now on the dark wall. Beautiful.*

## Joanna Poem

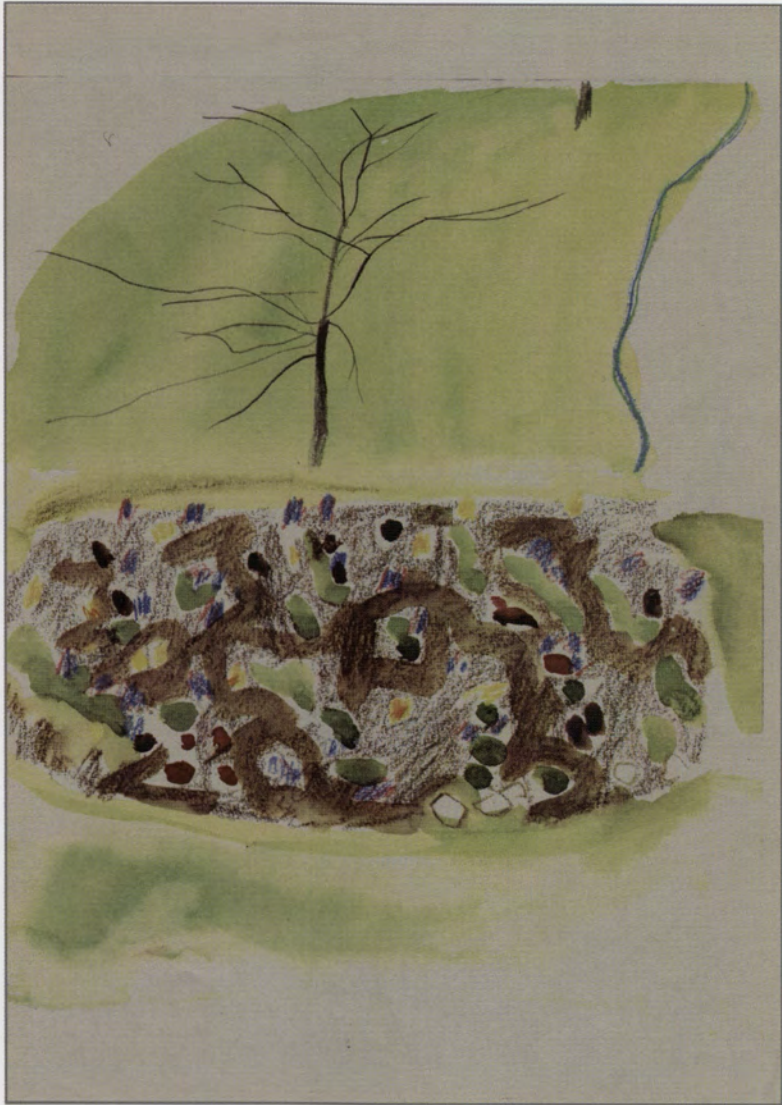
Jenny Bornholdt

The window frames six  
views—hills, trees, houses,  
fruit in a bowl, the child  
asleep.

Sheets loop  
in the breeze.  
Inside—cup, vase,  
apple on the sill.

Outside—olive  
on a lean, black doris  
in blossom, cherry  
in blossom, now,  
full of spring.





watercolor: "Landscape" (top), "Landscape" (bottom) - why does it feel so...



## Joanna Paul, a view from here

Bridie Lonie

Throughout Joanna Paul's work—writing, film-making, installation, drawings, painting—there is a white space. Sometimes it erases everything else, expanding across the drawn line. In the drawings she did in my father's house, a white mirror almost catches the ghost on the staircase. Or a nappy, harsh and sharp against black film, incises the force of life against darkness. In print, it is the word itself, white. Through that space, breath enters and leaves.

*Myself at Beta St, 1982* is made up of two watercolour drawings framed together. On the left, the body of a woman, collar to knee. She wears a blue blouse and white skirt; the only parts of her actual body that I can see are her lower arms, a little awkward, as if she were unsteady. Her blue blouse indicates a fullness of body, perhaps pregnancy. To the left, at a different scale and rotated, a book, *The Dialogues of Catherine of Siena*, on a golden cloth with pink heart-like shapes, a flourish of colour. Top right, a white space. The painting is deliberately awkward. St. Catherine's dialogues were conducted while she enjoyed the pleasures of self denial. In the painting, the book is firmly closed. Domesticity and the pleasures of spirituality make an awkward match.

I remember a year or so before that work was painted standing in a room filled with words drawn onto strips of paper, words that dealt with the body through one or another kind of metaphor. Caput, cup, for head, for instance: what does it mean

to call a head a cup? The room was dry, white, full of space—a sharply cleansing mixture of grief and analysis.

In the 1970s the feminist notion that 'the personal is political' could both open and shut doors. It made possible the re-invention of traditional women's art-forms: the still life, the view from the window, the flower painting. It encouraged the idea of art as a 'practice'—a constant activity but pragmatic, contained within the parameters of daily life. It discouraged the single-minded pursuit of an intellectual idea and the personal ruthlessness that can be necessary for this. Instead, artists worked with the stories that attach themselves to images, and vice-versa, fragments of sensory experience, connections drawn between ideas and things.

By the 1980s this could be stated as a position, and Joanna Paul wrote:

The sense in which I feel connected at some points with postmodernism is the recognition of subjectivity as the only mode of truth / the impossibility of taking for granted a shared subjectivity / the necessity to build in one's own perspective / hand, chair, time of day into the construct; treat words as things.

Thereafter her drawings and paintings continued to argue for art as an interleaving of the artist and her environment. Joanna Paul's approach was to move between synthesis and inclusion. Other writers, thinkers, artists are drawn explicitly into the work, which becomes responsive, almost conversational, always connecting this thought with that time and place. There was always a risk that such work might be read as elitist, removed from the complications of everyday struggle; or simply patchy, incomplete.

Joanna Paul's last major work, *Frugal Pleasures*, is a still life sequence of table settings with lines from a satire by the Roman

poet Horace. The full text is an ironic meditation upon parentage and privilege. The protagonist's frugal pleasures are cast into relief by his status and position in society. There are white spaces in these paintings but they are more ordered, deliberate and opaque. The work is full of the world, no longer perforated by ways out of it.

#### References

Marian Evans, Bridie Lonie & Tilly Lloyd (eds.) *A Women's Picture Book: 25 Women Artists of Aotearoa (New Zealand)*, Wellington, 1988.



Joanna

Cilla McQueen

Her hands lay colour light  
as lips on paper

with the utmost care,  
in faith the soul may leave us

as the sun the hills,  
effacing shadows with all shadow,

or the moon the sea, reflection  
rippling into time between,

the space in the world that held her  
invisibly healing.

(for Pascal)

'Always quartettish thoughts'

Gregory O'Brien

'The dead don't die. They look on and help.'

D. H. Lawrence

'Stars, bread, libraries of East and West,' begins Jorge Luis Borges's 'Matthew XXV; 30', a poem which goes on to itemise other cherished staples of a life: 'Playing cards, chessboards, galleries, skylights, cellars . . .'. It is a list that Joanna, a great maker of lists herself, would have warmed to: ' . . . a human body to walk with on the earth . . . / shadows for forgetting, mirrors that endlessly multiply, / falls in music, gentlest of all time's shapes . . .'.

Single words and phrases trickle down a page of Joanna's poetry or they emerge from the whiteness of paper or the ground of a painting. The noun never far from its object. Joanna was a keeper of journals and inventories. (What is her book *Unwrapping the Body* but a bound, annotated and illustrated 'list'?). However, there is an important distinction to be made between the impulse to itemise the world and the impulse to commodify it—Joanna's art being an ardent instance of the former and a negation of the latter.



Like the lists of the tenth century Japanese diarist Sei Shonagon, or the Chinese poet Li Shangyin, Joanna's inventories manifest both an attentiveness to everyday detail and a decorum. There is something of Joanna to be found in Shangyin's many lists:

Things that certainly won't come

A dog, if called by a man with a stick in his hand.

A singing-girl, if summoned by a penniless student.

Things that make a Bad Impression

To fall off one's horse at polo. To choke when eating with one's superiors. To return to worldly life after having been in a monastery or convent. To lie on someone else's bed with one's boots on. To sing love-songs in the presence of one's parents.

Maybe there is an unwritten code of conduct lurking out back of Joanna's art, a respect for certain rules (but only rules worthy of respect) and an acceptance of the restraints of time, family and circumstance. There is certainly—and this is another lesson learnt from Shonagon—a quality of courtliness and manners which is also reminiscent of the Baroque music she loved, but without the frivolity, decoration and excess. Her works are structures of refinement, order and restraint.

~

If Goethe had it that every genuine poem is prompted by an event, Joanna's art upholds the moment of stillness, the easily overlooked detail, the non-event. Presented with a grand vista of forest, Joanna would as likely walk up to it and make a bark rubbing as paint or draw the long view.

~

While Joanna's eye would often seize upon a discreet object, a thing in isolation (and she could approach a vase or a flower or a fencepost as if it were the only thing in the world that mattered), she was also a maker of marriages, of juxtapositions. Within a single work, she would place a pen drawing of a flower alongside a pastel of a brass band; a still life would be framed by musical manuscript; a bark rubbing placed in the same frame as an oil painting. Things renew themselves by being in relation to other things. She was a master or mistress of the paint-box, pillow-book, sun-hat, play-ground, day-room. (She would, in her poetry, invest an adjective with the qualities of a noun—white, red, luminous—and her nouns could describe and embellish: fragility, beauty, even.)

~

There is the euphoric engagement and delight you would expect from Julian of Norwich or from Eileen Duggan sitting at her desk overlooking Lyall Bay, Wellington: 'All that green calm crept in and flowed around me . . . '.

According to what principle, you might ask, is a half of a bowl missing from a still life drawing, or is a patch of field left blank—and why, in another work, does the word HORSES appear where you might expect horses to be? These recurrent blind spots, the sensory deprivation of them, are like silence in music. They are also like an overexposed negative, a vision too intense.

~

She said she belonged to the musical school of the painter Frances Hodgkins, to which might be added the painterly school of Claude Debussy, and the theological school of filmmaker Robert Bresson. To this identikit picture, I would add the following virtues: the reticence of Erik Satie, the good

housekeeping of Sei Shonagon, the orderliness and inspired disorder of her mother Janet Paul, the delicacy of Pierre Bonnard and Maurice Denis.

If you required a manifesto or style manual, you could consult—alongside Shonagon's *Pillow-Book*—the Elizabethan miniaturist Nicholas Hilliard and his *Treatise Concerning the Art of Limning*:

A good painter hath tender senses, quiet and apt . . . Discreet talk or reading, quiet mirth or music offendeth not, but shorteneth the time and quickeneth the spirit, both in the drawer and he which is drawn; also in any wise avoid anger, shut out questioners or busy fingers.

~

Joanna's paintings, domestically scaled, subtly articulated, are a kind of *hausmusik*—a 'house music' in the original sense of music which is written for the home, to be shared among self and friends, by performer and audience alike. The paintings are musical arrangements. There is the music of what and how we think as well as the music we think about. What we see, what we listen for: 'the gentlest of all time's shapes'. Joanna would have approved of Robert Schumann's reply when asked what had been so happily preoccupying him: 'Always quartettish thoughts.'

~

And when we have ceased talking about the quietness, poise, inwardness and subtlety of the work then we can begin to talk of Joanna's resourcefulness, the tough, resolute nature of hers. An artist of circumstance, but not a victim.

~

I am left thinking about the long wavering lines of her landscape drawings, the subtle distortions of her interior spaces and the explorations into the different frailties of youth and of age. Infinite variations on these themes. As Thomas Morley would instruct the singers of madrigals: 'You must be wavering.' And, as John Cage would have paraphrased it: 'Let us admit, once and for all, that the lines we draw are not straight.' It is this infinite human variety which pleases, the shifting, mutable nature of life and living.

As an accompaniment to the long lines of Joanna's evocations of the Wanganui or Wellington skylines, I return to her short-lined poems: frequently one word per line, stepping down the page like a shopping list while, at the same time, invoking past masters of the short line such as Pablo Neruda, E. E. Cummings, William Carlos Williams and Lorine Niedecker. Life, too, can be a tragically short line. Art is one of the few consolations—'the gentlest of time's shapes'. We join, with Joanna Margaret Paul, in Henri Michaux's evening chorus: 'Always the deathless music.'



## Photograph

Daryl McLaren

The young woman is  
crossing the road, the unroofed  
church in the roadbend,  
the light red beneath the fir tree,

she looks into the high branches,  
her eyes are grey,  
slates lie in the shade  
the shadows drop across  
her open throat,

or slip by her waist.  
Windows broken now, down which  
water runs, bells at a wedding,  
breezes tear along  
the road she crosses,  
crazed with shadow.

(for Joanna)

## Joanna

Mary Paul

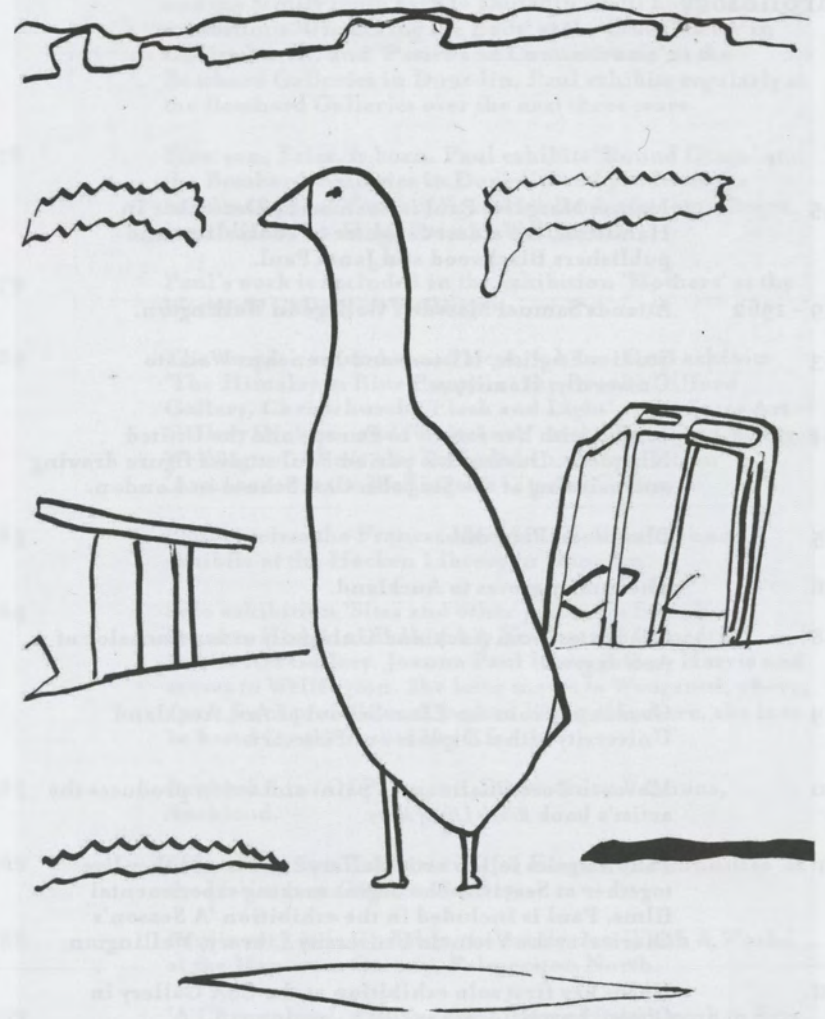
There is a story about Joanna as a little girl being told off for drawing on a wall and famously retorting: 'I'll draw on walls, I'll draw on floors, I'll draw on onion skins.' I don't know where 'onion skins' came from but I can easily imagine an incensed little Anna, as we called her, looking round for a sufficiently pithy rejoinder to her mother.

The primary sources for such stories have suddenly, in just over a year, disappeared for us—Joanna died in a tragic accident at a Rotorua hot pool on 29 May 2003 and our mother, Janet Paul, on 28 July this year—but the domestic turn of the story is appropriate. Joanna did paint lots of at-home interiors, and on lots of 'at hand' materials, including on parts of her walls and furniture. She adored houses, inside and out—they were often her site of inspiration as well as her place of work. Even after she got her lovely Wanganui studio she painted mainly at home, as well as out on journeys to streets, gardens, parks and bush.

Other images I recall: Joanna about age fourteen in the sun porch of our Hamilton house working on her scrapbook, pasting in pictures of her favourite paintings and drawings. This book, much revered by her younger sisters, was covered with a colour reproduction of Leonardo's *Last Supper*. Another picture comes from a friend of hers at Marsden Collegiate in Wellington, where Joanna went for secondary schooling. She recalls Joanna leaning out a window in their dormitory gazing at

the stars in a dark sky and 'wired' with their beauty. Celebration, passion, love for what she painted and drew—these are all elements in my thoughts of her.

We said goodbye to Joanna in a hospital room in an intensive care ward. We had filled the room with pink camellias that the nurses had encouraged us to pick from the hospital gardens. Joanna died so suddenly and unexpectedly that she was still there in our minds, living and vivid. Members of the family, her children, sisters, husband, and I am sure her friends—we would find ourselves suddenly seeing her smile, or gesture, a glance, hearing her tone of voice. She was there as if she had just walked round the corner. Because of this we treasure more vividly her paintings and all her made-things as a unique record of that trace of her. It seems extraordinary, both that she is no longer here, and what she has made, with such love, beauty, even.



## Chronology

- 1945 Joanna Margaret Paul is born on 14 December in Hamilton, the eldest daughter of booksellers and publishers Blackwood and Janet Paul.
- 1959 - 1962 Attends Samuel Marsden College in Wellington.
- 1963 Studies English, History and French at Waikato University, Hamilton.
- 1964 Travels with her family to Europe and the United Kingdom. During this period Paul studies figure drawing and painting at the Sir John Cass School in London.
- 1965 Blackwood Paul dies.
- 1966 The family moves to Auckland.
- 1968 Graduates from Auckland University with a Bachelor of Arts degree.
- 1969 Graduates from the Elam School of Art, Auckland University with a Diploma of Fine Arts.
- 1970 Moves to Port Chalmers to paint and write; produces the artist's book *Rilke's Life of Mary*.
- 1971 Paul marries fellow artist Jeffery Harris and they live together at Seacliff. She begins making experimental films. Paul is included in the exhibition 'A Season's Diaries' at the Victoria University Library, Wellington.
- 1972 Holds her first solo exhibition at the CSA Gallery in Christchurch.
- 1973 Joanna and Jeffery move to Wellington. Their first child, Ingrid Magdalena is born.
- 1974 Moves to Banks Peninsula.

- 1976 The couple's second child, Imogen, is born in February. She dies in December following surgery to correct a major heart defect.
- 1977 Jeffery Harris receives the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship and the family move back to Dunedin. Paul holds the exhibitions 'Unpacking the Body' at the CSA Gallery in Christchurch, and 'Posies and Conundrums' at the Bosshard Galleries in Dunedin. Paul exhibits regularly at the Bosshard Galleries over the next three years.
- 1978 First son, Felix, is born. Paul exhibits 'Round Otago' at the Bosshard Galleries in Dunedin and produces the handmade book *Gesture of Prayer*. Her book of poems, *Imogen*, is published by Hawk Press in Wellington.
- 1979 Paul's work is included in the exhibition 'Mothers' at the Women's Gallery in Wellington.
- 1982 The couple's second son, Pascal, is born. Paul exhibits 'The Himalayan Blue Poppy' at the Brooke Gifford Gallery, Christchurch, 'Flesh and Light' at the Suter Art Gallery, Nelson, and 'Whitework' at the Brooker Gallery, Wellington. She is also included in the exhibition 'Aramoana' at the Wellington City Art Gallery.
- 1983 Paul receives the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship and exhibits at the Hocken Library in Dunedin.
- 1984 Solo exhibition 'Sites and other paintings from her Frances Hodgkins Fellowship Year' at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Joanna Paul leaves Jeffery Harris and moves to Wellington. She later moves to Wanganui, where, apart from periods working and living elsewhere, she is to be based for the rest of her life.
- 1985 Paul exhibits 'Of Poppies & Duration' at Editions, Auckland.
- 1986 Solo exhibition 'Intimate Maps, Fragile Communities' at the Wellington City Art Gallery.
- 1988 Paul's work is included in the exhibition 'Faith & Works' at the Manawatu Gallery, Palmerston North.
- 1989 'A Chronology', a survey exhibition of Paul's work to date is held at the Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui, alongside an exhibition of new work 'Resisting Foreclosure / Wanganui works'.
- 1993 Paul receives the Rita Angus Residency Award.

- 1995 Included in 'The Figured Landscape', an exhibition of five woman artists at City Gallery Wellington. Paul exhibits the installation work *Paris Is Changed, Alas!* in the Dome space at the Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui.
- 1996 Paul is one of eighteen artists included in the book *Lands and Deeds: Profiles of Contemporary New Zealand Painters*, by Gregory O'Brien, published by Godwit Publishing. She exhibits 'Last Year in the Government Gardens' at the Rotorua Bathhouse, 'A Repertoire for White' at Gray's Studio, Dunedin and 'Port Chalmers Cycle' at the Lodge, Port Chalmers.
- 1997 Exhibits 'Beta St. and Other Paintings' at the Tinakori Gallery, Wellington and 'Stones of Oamaru' at the Forrester Gallery, Oamaru.
- 1998 Paul exhibits 'Eros & Psyche / Mount Eden Series' at the Tinakori Gallery, Wellington.
- 1999 Exhibits 'Daily Life' at the One Eye Gallery, Paekakariki.
- 2000 The artist's book *rose* is published, handprinted by Brendan O'Brien at the Rita Angus Cottage, Wellington. Paul exhibits 'Frugal Pleasures' at the Tinakori Gallery, Wellington.
- 2001 Paul exhibits 'Music for Palm Trees, Perhaps' at Icandi, Wanganui and 'Classical Measures' at Gray's Studio, Dunedin. Publication of *the cherry now*, Fernbank Studio, Wellington.
- 2003 Marries Palmerston North architect Peter Harrison on February 25. Joanna Paul dies in a tragic accident at Rotorua on the 29 May, at the age of fifty-seven. In September, a selection of her experimental short films is included in the film festival 'Mahi ata Mahi ahua: Women's work in film' at City Gallery Wellington.
- 2004 City Gallery Wellington and the Sarjeant Gallery Wanganui present in partnership the tribute exhibition 'beauty, even: Joanna Margaret Paul 1945 – 2003'.

## List of works

A list of works included in the exhibition 'beauty, even: Joanna Margaret Paul 1945 – 2003' at the City Gallery Wellington and the Sarjeant Gallery Te Whare O Rehua Whanganui. NB. Not all works listed appeared at both venues.

*Jerusalem Dormitory* 1990  
oil on board  
Private collection

*White* 2000  
from the series 'Frauen liebundleben cycle'  
oil on board  
Collection of Peter Ireland

*Mary Ursula Bethell Vase* 1996  
ink and pencil on paper  
Private collection

*Untitled (Felix at Makara)* c. 1986  
oil on canvas  
Joanna Margaret Paul estate

*Untitled (Garden Suburb)* undated  
pencil and watercolour on paper  
Private collection

*Untitled (Garden Suburb Durie Hill)* undated  
pencil and watercolour on paper  
Private collection

*Untitled (Garden Suburb)* undated  
pencil and watercolour on paper  
Private collection

*brevity* 1993  
from the series 'Black Poppy'  
pencil and watercolour on paper  
Dame Janet Elaine Paul estate

*joy* 1993  
from the series 'Black Poppy'  
pencil and watercolour on paper  
Dame Janet Elaine Paul estate

*beauty, even* 1993  
from the series 'Black Poppy'  
pencil and watercolour on paper  
Private collection

*Remembering Imogen* 1984  
pencil and watercolour on paper  
Dame Janet Elaine Paul estate

*Pirongia Memorial Mountain* 1984  
pencil and watercolour on paper  
Dame Janet Elaine Paul estate

*Love Seat*  
Included in *Paris is Changed, Alas!, Dome*  
installation #22, Sarjeant Gallery,  
Wanganui 1995  
wooden seat  
Private collection

*Paysage / Passage of Weather and Time Kakatahi*  
1984  
pencil and watercolour on paper  
Private collection

*Te Wai me te Marae—Hiruharama* 1992  
watercolour and pencil on paper  
Private collection

*Mortality III* 1981  
watercolour on paper  
Private collection

*Screen Winter / Spring* 1987  
from the series 'Leaf and Frame'  
oil on wooden screen  
Private collection

*Flowering Current* 1981  
watercolour on paper  
Private collection

*Absence* c. 1988  
watercolour on paper  
McNamara collection

*Untitled* 1999  
from the series 'Frugal Pleasures'  
watercolour on paper  
Collection of Raewyne Johnson

*Untitled (Domus)* c. 2000  
oil on canvas  
Collection of Raewyne Johnson

*Last Year in the Government Gardens (I)* 1995  
*Last Year in the Government Gardens (II)* 1995  
*Last Year in the Government Gardens (III)* 1995  
*Last Year in the Government Gardens (IV)* 1995  
watercolour on paper  
Friends of Rotorua Museum of Art and  
History

*Self-portrait* c. 1970  
pencil on paper  
Collection of the Sarjeant Gallery Te  
Whare O Rehua Whanganui

*Sea Rose* 1977  
gouache on paper  
Collection of the Sarjeant Gallery Te  
Whare O Rehua Whanganui

*Inventories* 1977  
*Inventories (bedroom)* 1977  
*Inventories III* 1977  
*Inventories V* 1977  
*Inventories VI* 1977  
*Inventories (kitchen)* 1977  
gouache on paper  
Collection of the Sarjeant Gallery Te  
Whare O Rehua Whanganui

*Beta Street* 1981  
oil on board  
Collection of the Sarjeant Gallery Te  
Whare O Rehua Whanganui

*Gita and Anthony Brooke* 1991  
graphite and coloured pencil on paper  
Collection of the Sarjeant Gallery Te  
Whare O Rehua Whanganui

*Untitled (Sublunary Wardrobe)* c. 2002  
Three works from a larger series  
made in memory of Kevin  
Cunningham  
chalk pastel on paper  
Joanna Margaret Paul estate

*Untitled (in this sensual music)* undated  
watercolour and pencil on paper  
Joanna Margaret Paul estate

*Small Events at Evans Bay, Boxing Day* 1999  
pencil and watercolour on paper  
Joanna Margaret Paul estate

*Horses* undated  
acrylic and letaset on paper  
Collection of Te Papa Tongarewa  
Museum of New Zealand

*Landscape at Barry's Bay* 1975  
gouache on paper  
Collection of Te Papa Tongarewa  
Museum of New Zealand

*Untitled* 2003  
oil on canvas  
Joanna Margaret Paul estate

*Untitled* c. 1988  
*Untitled* c. 1998  
from the series 'Skyline'  
watercolour on paper  
Joanna Margaret Paul estate

*Weather and time* 1985  
mixed media on canvas  
Victoria University of Wellington Art  
Collection, Gift of Professor John  
Roberts

*Plato's Cave / Wanganui River I* 1987  
*Plato's Cave / Wanganui River II* 1987  
*Plato's Cave / Wanganui River III* 1987  
*Plato's Cave / Wanganui River IV* 1987  
*Plato's Cave / Wanganui River V* 1987  
coloured pencil and pencil on paper  
Collection of the Sarjeant Gallery Te  
Whare O Rehua Whanganui

*Untitled* undated  
watercolour and pencil on paper  
Joanna Margaret Paul estate

*Adrienne Martyn*  
*Joanna Paul, Painter, Dunedin* 1983  
black and white photograph  
Courtesy of the artist

*Robert Cross*  
*Joanna Margaret Paul* 1996  
black and white photograph  
Courtesy of the artist

*Gary Blackman*  
*Joanna Margaret Paul, Aramoana* 1980  
black and white photograph  
Courtesy of the artist

*Gravestones* 1975  
7.14 minutes  
DVD transfer from 16mm black and  
white film  
*Jillian Dressing and Aberhart's House* 1976  
5:37 minutes  
DVD transfer from 16mm black and  
white film  
*Sisterhood* c. 1970s  
3:07 minutes  
DVD transfer from 16mm black and  
white film  
*Swings* 1972  
3:34 minutes  
DVD transfer from 8mm colour film  
*Round Picton* c. 1970s  
3:49 minutes  
DVD transfer from 8mm colour film  
*Pat France* c. 1970s  
3:38 minutes  
DVD transfer from 8mm colour film  
*Magda* 1973  
4:00 minutes  
DVD transfer from 8mm colour film  
*Maggie Documentation* 1975  
5:31 minutes  
DVD transfer from 8mm colour film  
*Barry's Bay* c. 1970s  
14:31 minutes  
DVD transfer from 8mm colour film  
*Peony I* 1976  
3:48 minutes  
DVD transfer from 8mm colour film  
*Task* 1982  
3:49 minutes  
DVD transfer from 8mm colour film

*Blossom Blue Flowers* 1980  
0:50 minutes  
DVD transfer from 8mm colour film  
*Maggie's Dream Time* 1970  
2:49 minutes  
DVD transfer from 8mm colour film  
*Aramoana 2* c. 1980s  
3:50 minutes  
DVD transfer from 8mm colour film

*Imogen*  
handprinted by Alan Loney at Hawk  
Press, Wellington 1978  
Private collection

*Your Name*  
handmade book late 1990s  
Joanna Margaret Paul estate

*SONS OF SEVEN SEAS ONS*  
handmade book with pen, ink and  
watercolour early 1970s  
Joanna Margaret Paul estate

*rose*  
handprinted by Brendan O'Brien at  
Rita Angus Cottage, Wellington 2000  
Joanna Margaret Paul estate

*The Awakening*  
handmade book 1998  
Joanna Margaret Paul estate

*SENSATIONS*  
poem on paper and tissue packaged in  
cardboard and bound with tissue 1983  
Joanna Margaret Paul estate

*UNWRAPPING THE BODY*  
self published book, printed by  
Progress Print, Dunedin, 1977  
Private collection

Thanks are due to: the many writers, and all those who contributed to this publication, as well as the staff at both City Gallery Wellington and the Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui. Others who have generously supported the project are: Kay Roberts, Gill Wilkshire, Peter Ireland, Charles Bisley, Daryl McLaren, Brendan O'Brien, Margaret Taylor, and the New Zealand Film Archive. We are immensely grateful to Michael Nicholson, Peter Harrison and the members of the Paul and Harris families.



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