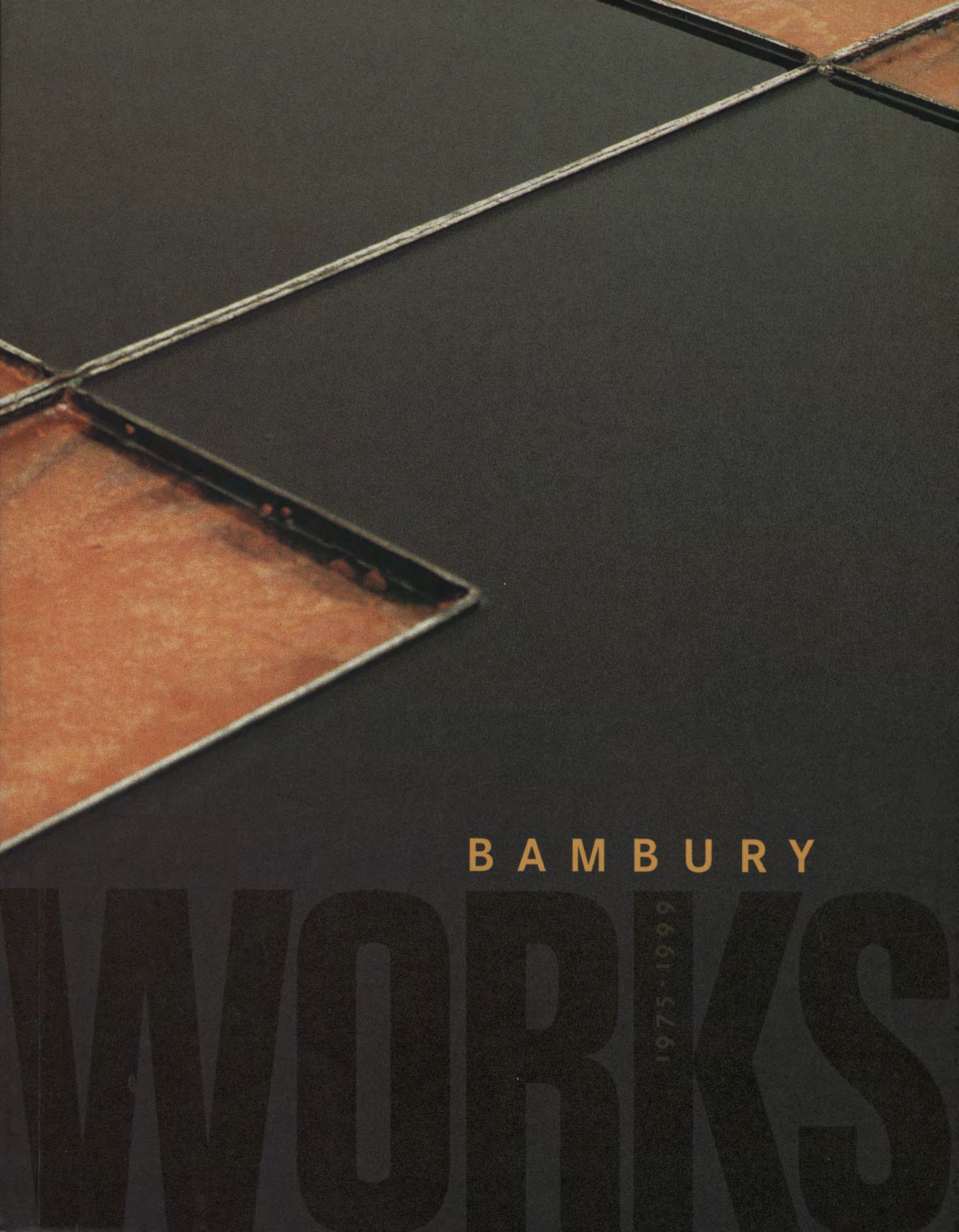

BAMBURY

WORKS

1975-1999

Curated by Wystan Curnow

City Gallery, Wellington 1999

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WORKS

1975–1999

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City Gallery
WELLINGTON
Te Whare Toi

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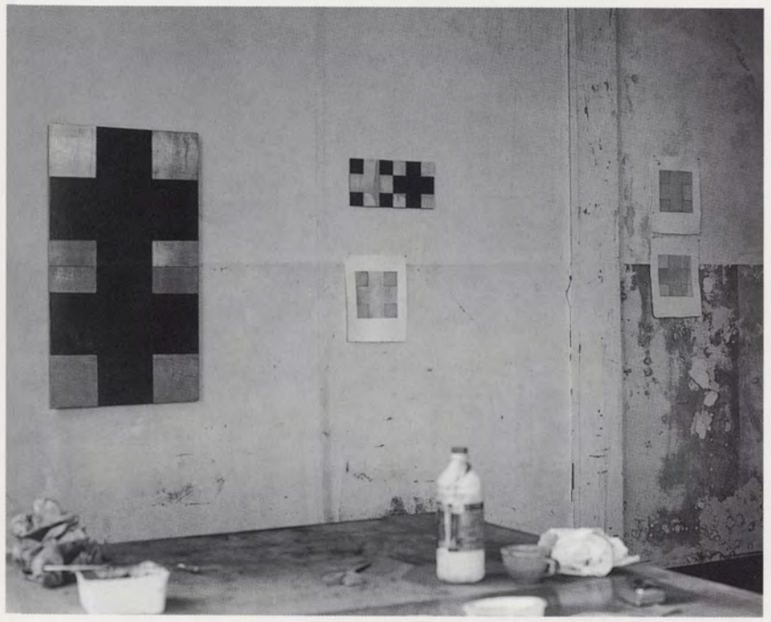


Meudon studio, Paris 1991

DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

It is a particular pleasure to launch this Stephen Bambury retrospective, an important exhibition not only for the City Gallery Wellington but also for New Zealand.

Over the course of 25 years Stephen Bambury has established himself as one of New Zealand's foremost painters. He is the only artist in New Zealand who has single-mindedly adhered to abstraction, right from the time he was an art school student. Rigorously exploring and refining his distinctive vision, Stephen Bambury showed courage, a sense of independence, confidence and personal conviction that has sustained his practice in times of profound isolation when abstraction in New Zealand was the underdog, with limited critical support, audience or market. Times have changed, with Stephen Bambury now well-represented in all major public and private collections in this country as well as overseas collections; though much of his early work remains unexhibited and unseen by the public.

Stephen Bambury has experimented with processes and finishes—such as gilding, aluminum, brass, resin and oil—translucent materials that emphasize light and atmosphere. Architectural in format, the paradoxical cool precision and sensuous lyricism of Bambury's work, a fusion of intellectual content and material quality, is a confirmation of the power of the visual and the spiritual and meditative potential of art. If the mood of Bambury's painting is silent and introspective, it is worth keeping in mind that reticence of this order can be an effective way of saying many things at once.

Bambury: Works 1975-1999 presents early work alongside the better-known later work, not to indicate a development so much as to allow a conversation. Although his work has changed from formalist to post-formalist, modernist to postmodernist, here the early work is re-contextualized as part of the artist's current project. Stephen Bambury has also created new work specially for inclusion in this exhibition.

While a distinct structure has been realised for this exhibition by its a-chronological hang, *Bambury: Works 1975-1999* belongs to an ongoing sequence of City Gallery, Wellington exhibitions which survey the work of senior or mid-career artists—practitioners whose achievement is substantial and likely to be seen as significant in years to come. These substantial presentations are the backbone of the City Gallery's research programme, and provide opportunities to see a body of work of each generation as it comes to maturity. The monographic exhibitions are complemented by the Gallery's international programme, which brings works by major figures of 20th century world art to Wellington.

Special acknowledgement is due to guest curator, Dr Wystan Curnow, Associate Professor of English, University of Auckland, for his rigorous research, his empathy with the artist and profound understanding of his work which has resulted in such insightful scholarship. The City Gallery has a commitment to provide opportunities for guest curators, specialists who have a deep knowledge and understanding of the work of a particular artist.

Special thanks are due also to Lara Strongman, Managing Curator, City Gallery, and Robert Leonard, Director of Artspace, for their contributing catalogue essays. We are deeply grateful for the crucial financial support of patrons Gillian and Roderick Deane, and Jenny Gibbs, also artist Stephen Bambury and his gallerist, Andrew Jensen, without whose generosity this exhibition catalogue would not have been possible.

The Gallery also acknowledges the fundamental support and generosity of collectors who have loaned their works for exhibition in Wellington and Auckland. And most importantly, we wish to thank the artist, Stephen Bambury, whose singular commitment and generous contribution has inspired everyone and been instrumental in bringing this ambitious project to fruition.

Paula Savage
Director

BAMBURY IN ABUNDANCE

WYSTAN CURNOW

If the Spectator could enter into these Images in his Imagination approaching them on the Fiery Chariot of his Contemplative Thought if he could Enter into Noah's Rainbow or into his bosom or could make a Friend & Companion of one of these Images of wonder … then would he arise from his Grave then would he meet the Lord in Air & then he would be happy.

William Blake, 'A Vision of the Last Judgement', 1808

Well, that's William Blake at full throttle! Talking about his own work. For the writer readying himself to write in praise of Stephen Bambury's paintings, these are encouraging words. I am inspired to speak to you directly, to ask: May I hail you a Fiery Chariot to speed your Contemplative approach to these Images? May I open the door, and usher you into the galleries of Noah's Rainbow? Let me introduce these wondrous works, so they may become both Friend and Companion! Introduce you to the pleasure, the knowledge, the happiness that are most assuredly to be had from them. As for waking you from the dead or introducing you to your Maker, those orders are a bit too tall, but what I want to say is that Blake's every word, like every Bambury painting, is imbued with an unshakeable conviction as to the value of the Image. And that is invigorating.

The poise and steadiness that mark the progress of Bambury's vision come from that conviction but also from the confidence he has in his rendering of the Image. The clearest of signs, the most spoken-for symbols, the mere combination of one shape or colour with another—these offer the widest doors to the wonders it houses. Each work in the exhibition in fact speaks of the Image in this way. But there are two shining examples or shall we say charred and fiery emblems of it in this show: *Copper House (Siena)* and *Golden House/Golden Section.* Two sculptures. Bambury confesses he is one with his house, with his oeuvre, his life in art. Looking at it we know we are inside and outside at the same time, approaching the Image in our Imaginations. Both works emblematise this exhibition, this building that houses his work. Go outside, go inside, and see how it shines.

The twenty-five years Bambury has spent on three iconic shapes: the square, the circle, and the cross—more or less in that order—on paintings that needed no more than two or three colours to do their work, have been about disclosing plenitude. This is not abstract painting if such a name calls up thoughts of purity, sterility, coldness, subtraction, plainness, closure, or loss, because Bambury's is unmistakably an art of plenty, not poverty. Whatever their relevance to abstraction's early history, or to the more recent Minimalism and Arte Povera, they are of no use here. They mislead. More to the point are thoughts of increase, excess, multiplicity, openness, play, addition, and beauty.

Do not call this painting abstract if the word means a world divided between realism and abstraction. That war was over before Bambury began to exhibit; although in places like New Zealand, where it had been slow to start—the 1950s—it was also slow to stop. This abstract painting does not *abstract*, does not 'draw out' anything from anything. It is not freeze-dried content, not packet soup. Certainly it is not the abstracting of some pre-constituted reality. Imagination and perception are not distinct. The world and the Image are not distinct; we see what we expect to see. We follow the code. To see is less to respond to the world, as to act on it. In the disclosures of plenitude choice is discovered—therein lies its 'corrective' power, its criticality. Bambury's wondrous images make and re-make the Image, they are instances of what to look out for.

PLENITUDE. COLOUR

What first brings you to your senses, what here kindles the apprehension of abundance, is the immense variety and intensity of surfaces. In quantity, their efflorescence of colour and texture cannot be denied. This is Noah's rainbow, no mistake. Take reds: *Area Series, Red; Colour Works; Site Works, set 3, no. 4*, most of the *Sienas* … more than a third of the works in the exhibition have a red in them, and one that looks different from most of the others. There are more reds here than you have names for. And beside the reds there are also pinks, purples, maroons, magentas, coppers. Of course, the perception of the differences among them is strongly affected by the pairings of these colours with others. Closely compare the purple/maroons of *No.38 (After Kave), No 51*, and *No Divisions.* We are talking about discriminating among emotional, not just retinal, experiences. Yellow is the colour with the broadest band-width, stretching from the rather astringent *Area Series, Yellow/Black*, to the amber translucency of *Ideogram (II)*, from the honey-ginger *Chakra (II)*, to the anodised olive and cream efflugence of *'It recalled the immaterial dimension of the universe,'* from *The Golden Echo*'s solar storm to the serene gilded splendour of *Siena (XXIII)*. How many yellows are there, how many reds? When does yellow become green, green blue, blue red? The degrees of difference between the colours have been multiplied, so you find before you colours not previously seen, colours uncalled for. What amount to reconsiderations of the language of colour, rejigging its geometry, new spins on the colour wheel.

The *Site Works, set 3* series, with pairings of intense reds, yellows, blacks, and whites hemmed with bands of one or other of these colours, re-stages colour codes of public urban signage. A small Bambury, a red square with a white border, obscurely adorns one of the pylons of the Auckland Harbour Bridge; not far away a barge is moored sporting a fresh coat of Bambury black and yellow, and on the nearby wharves construction cranes also boast a *Site Works* livery. Back on the streets again the cars and trucks are following the signs. *Colour Works* re-stages another well-formulated colour system, that employed by paint manufacturers. Bambury has always made his own paints, so this range of potted colours, becomes

a kind of 'found object' addition to his own. Bambury does not, however, simply report on these languages, he reviews, or 'corrects' them to adopt his term. As they are made-over in his Image, they are re-codified. Thus the red of *'In the light of a constructive idea'* which refers to Mondrian's use of the primaries, helps express a shape, the cross, that the Dutch modernist's code forbade. But it also assumes a place in the much wilder, more sensuous system of all the Bambury reds.

When 'corrections' come more as a surprise than as an understanding, they come as a colour, or colour relation, not seen or rather not felt before. These are experiences of beauty. Surface has a lot to do with this; because it induces change and movement in the colour, it informs the release of feeling. Compared to those abstract paintings that offer their inert flatness to the eyes only, Bambury's surfaces are increasingly active, leaving traces of their making and/or scripts for their viewing. Transparent or opaque, hard or soft, fluid or viscous, slick or rough, waxy, suede or glazed, the surface materialises the colour, giving it a body, a sense of movement and change. Early in Bambury's practice these traces are more understated and similar, more evidently features of painting as we know it. Later they result from relatively obscure processes, and are more varied and energetic, more responsive to shifts of light and in Spectator standpoint.

Surface intensity is not so much the chroma of a colour as a luminous quality released from an edge it shares with an adjacent colour. The release may be slow or quick—the time of Contemplative Thought will vary greatly, work to work. It is a common quality of the canvases from the first ten years of Bambury's career. In 1986, he found another source of surface aura. Using a metallic paint or resin he added a quality of light that either shimmered on or entered into the medium covering the surface of the work. Wittgenstein is surely right to say 'We speak of the "colour of gold" and do not mean yellow. "Gold-coloured" is the property of a surface that shines or glitters.'[1] But here I will speak of it as yellow intensified, and similarly of silver as grey intensified, and of a band-width that it shares with white. Works which draw on both sources, like the *Siena* series, luxuriate in levels of aura that would fuel the fires of the most lumbering of Chariots.

PLENITUDE. SHAPE

The shapes of Bambury's paintings are not so various as the surfaces which give them their abundance. But few painters make as much of the Image's rectangle as he does. His shapes embody at least one principle of increase. One shape gives rise to another, and gives rise to another. As with the aptly named *Russian Doll*, in which the smaller shape appears to have been lifted out of the larger. As with the *Ladders* and *Chakras*, which could be read as a formula for addition: 'I + I + I + I + I' and so on. One shape doubles, appears beside itself, gives way to a new whole. Juxtaposed, two identically shaped rectangles produce the square of *Looking at the Dance*. The two part works proliferate, give rise to groups *(Site Works—a work in six parts)* sets and series, production lines. Bambury works in series almost exclusively; currently he has seven, as we say, on the go.

This proliferation takes place outside of the frame, across the field of the gallery wall. From 1980 with *Site Works*, Bambury's breakthrough series, paintings assume a figure-ground relationship to the wall and the room in which they hang, that is to say they incorporate the architecture that they share with the Spectator, drawing it into the composition that they make. This puts them in the post-formalist place occupied by Minimalism. The shelf sculptures, the paintings hung at an angle, the aluminium works which seem to insinuate themselves into the fabric of the wall, the frame-like paintings that stand out from it, those that lean against it sitting on chocks, those with pieces cut out of them, each is making an accommodation of its own with the wall. For this reason each wall in the exhibition is itself a composition—albeit a temporary one. However, the proliferation here is neither speedy nor noisy. I would like to call Bambury an installation artist, although his compositions are not invasive—they don't spill off the wall or jostle the Spectators. Unlike even the poised installations of a John Nixon, or an Imi Knoebel, Bambury's tend to leave Spectators free to enjoy the kind of contemplative connection with the components of his compositions which give them all time that they need to make Friends and Companions of them.

As with colour, with increase comes difference; the two parts of the diptych differ. Those that make up *Site Works—a work in six parts* comprise two identical rectangular stretchers. The shorter side of one of has been bolted to the longer side of the other, and the whole has been hung from one or other of its corners so it reads as two diamonds. Because the rectangles are almost square, each seems different, perhaps one is a square and the other a rectangle. Difference results from rotating one element of the diptych in relation to the other; later, in works like *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* rotation reads also as a mirroring. Rudi Fuchs makes the point that ever 'since Mondrian and Malevich geometry, because it possesses an inherent clarity, has always been central in the formal language of abstraction. Geometry was, and probably still is, the very orthodoxy of abstraction... The inherent clarity of geometric shapes depended on the fact that they could be recognised for what they were: rectangle, diamond, triangle.'[2] In *Site Works, set 3, no. 5*, however, and in the image/object works like *Russian Doll*, Bambury does for shape what he has done for colour, he enhances the spectrum of difference between square and rectangle. Challenging the inherent clarity of formal language of abstraction, he begins a review of its geometry.

The interrogation resumes with aluminium works like *'In mutual equivalence'*. As the image is so single and centred, these square works command a lot of wall for their size; however, their top and bottom edges are not quite parallel, and this is potentially quite unsettling. Perhaps you can sense the leverage it exerts on the rectilinearity of the room? The harder you look the more things slip out of plumb. Based on Kasimir Malevich's Suprematist cross of 1913-15, Bambury's cross image is slightly wonky like its original, and so the squares in the four corners of the works, two of whose edges are those of the work, and two of the image, are also irregular. The *Reflective Crosses* and the *Ladders* which rotate and stack this image, elaborate on these uncertainties, subliminally shifting the ground under the enraptured gaze of the Spectator, tipping the rungs of the *Ladders* a little this way, a little that. Often enough shape reminds you to check your standpoint.

ICONCLASM/IDOLATRY

But what becomes of the divinity when it reveals itself in icons, when it is multiplied in simulacra? Does it remain the supreme authority, simply incarnate in images as a visible theology? Or is it volatized into simulacra which alone deploy their pomp and power of fascination—the visible machinery of icons being substituted for the pure intelligible Idea of God? This was precisely what was feared by the iconoclasts, whose millennial quarrel is still with us today.

Jean Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', 1983

Most of Bambury's series since 1987 have been based on the figure of the cross. When an iconophile like Bambury turns from the square and the circle, and commits himself to such an religiously loaded sign, suspicions of idolatry have to arise. 'Thou shalt not worship graven images', says the Second Commandment. Far from being fixated on the 'pure intelligible Idea of God', or the story of the crucifixion, Bambury's attention seems drawn to the 'visible machinery of icons'. With his croppings, doublings, rotations of the cross, his figure-ground flippings of it, he improvises on its 'pomp and power of fascination'. To the original iconoclasts, dollied-up images of the divine were no better than pagan idols. Surely Bambury's conflations of the Christian cross with the chakras of Tantric Buddhism, in *Ladders* housing the Lord in Air in seven psychic centres of the body, place him well beyond the pale. The plenitude of this compound shape re-distributes the sacred more broadly than religious adherents, West or East, would readily countenance, absorbing both cross and chakra into an arrangement of signs that work as much within the codes of Bambury's oeuvre as without. The plenitude of the cross overlaps that of the circle and square. Bambury titled the first of his *Silver Disc* paintings *Gunning for the Buddha*, the inserted square of *'Chromatic fundamentalism developing towards superimpositions' (II)* over which a black cross is laid, has the same dimensions of Kasimir Malevich's black square, which in his notorious Suprematist installation of 1915 usurped the place reserved for the Christian icon in the Russian household.

Making images of wonder, icons for the exercise of your Contemplative Thought—that is for Bambury the task of the contemporary painter. Bambury is guilty of another form of idolatry, that of venerating his modernist ancestors by repeated simulations of parts or aspects of their work. He may have abandoned the avant-garde's histrionics—some of his long-winded titles mock their manifesto writings—and dead-end formalist abstraction, but as a Keeper of the Image he seeks a future for the modernist tradition. In a sense the Malevich cross concerns modernism and its religiosity before it concerns Christianity. Malevich was an iconoclast to beat the band. His associate El Lissitzky said this about Suprematism: 'After the Old Testament there came the New—after the New the Communist and after the Communist there follows the Testament of Suprematism.' And Joseph Masheck commented that in 'one sense that implies a thorough supercession of the Russian Christian tradition, yet in another it suggests an historical rhythm whereby Communism has something in common with the Old Covenant and post revolutionary life with the New'.[3] Bambury's crosses make a similar comment. By gilding Malevich's icon they restore it to a place in the Russian tradition, and separate his modernism from its compulsive iconoclasm. The cross, in its plenitude, gives rise to another image, one to be found in many paintings by Colin McCahon, the 'I' shape of his *Necessary Protection* series of the 1970s. In that series McCahon's method comes closest to Bambury's; a code of shapes that includes both the 'I' and the cross, and a landscape. Bambury's *Necessary Correction* works register his need to acknowledge a kinship, one he experienced most acutely on his return from France. At the same time, their colours distance him from McCahon's need for the protection of a secure Christian belief. Baudrillard suggests that it is 'the iconoclasts, who are often accused of despising and denying images [who] accorded them their actual worth, unlike the iconolators, who saw in them only reflections and were content to venerate God at one remove. But the converse can also be said, namely that the iconolators were the most modern and adventurous minds, since underneath the idea of the apparition of God in the mirror of images, they already enacted his death and his disappearance in the epiphany of his representations (which they perhaps knew no longer represented anything, and that they were purely a game, but that this was precisely the greatest game—knowing also that it is dangerous to unmask images, since they dissimulated the fact that there is nothing behind them).[4] Today's iconoclasts, much like yesterdays, court that danger by threatening the game of art; idolators like Bambury remind us that today art has to be our greatest game.

1. J. L. Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe, University of California Press, 1987.
2. Rudi Fuchs, 'Pulling Strings', in *Imi Knoebel Works 1968-1996*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam/Canz, 1996, pp.9-10.
3. Joseph Masheck, 'Cruciformality', *Artforum*, Summer 1977, p.57.
4. Jean Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', in ed. Brian Wallis *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art/Boston: David R Godine, 1983, p.256.

HIGH FIDELITY, LOW RESOLUTION

LARA STRONGMAN

The response to art is the real art field.
Agnes Martin, 1998.

It's hard to know where to begin with Stephen Bambury. Twenty five years of geometric abstract painting, a dense serial body of work conceived as an over-arching project: written about, like much historical abstraction in New Zealand, in the language of a pseudo-military campaign borrowed from the abstract avant-garde of the 1920s—Bambury's 'commitment' to abstraction[1], his 'journey ... against the fashionable tides'[2], his 'assumption of the task'[3]. Bambury's work has often tended to be read in this programmatic fashion. Commentators have detailed his emergence in the mid-1970s as the youngest of an earlier generation of modernist abstractionists in New Zealand, and the sole member committed to abstraction from the beginning of his career; his early exploration of painting as an 'actualised object' developing into a later concern for the postmodernist contextualisation of painting as a historical subject; his engagement with, on the one hand, European Modernism's utopian traditions, and on the other, McCahon's location of Antipodean Modernism in specific sites in the New Zealand landscape. There didn't seem to be much room for outside participation in Bambury's oeuvre. For a while, the work seemed closed off to me; airless, elegant, hermetically sealed, like elegies to a dead historical moment. The work looked like art history. There didn't seem to be a way in. Until, that is, I saw *Ideogram (II)* (1995).

This work intrigued me: its imposing scale, its nonchalant lean against the gallery wall, the delicate material quality of its surfaces, its ominous nicotine-coloured shadow, and its wanton asymmetry which seemed to refute the order of other works by Bambury. I saw it as an image before I read it as a word; suddenly, with the sense of discovery that fixes a work of art indelibly in the memory, I read the word hi-fi, and was captured. Astounded. Why would Stephen Bambury make a painting of the word hi-fi, I wondered. Was it really part of his project? It was a beautiful thing, but what did it mean? It was hardly lofty, or spiritual, or evangelical, like Colin McCahon's word paintings: but neither was it abject and contemporary like Ronnie van Hout's 'I'm with stupid' and 'Stupid's with me' paintings on concrete[4]. Instead it occupied some strange hinterland between the transcendental and the commonplace. A real life position.

I hadn't heard the word hi-fi for years. It was a word from my childhood in the seventies, referring to the woodgrain componentry in the corner of my parents' lounge, out of which issued a terrifying compendium of Jethro Tull, Mike Oldfield and the Mahavishnu Orchestra. The 'hi-fi' had replaced my parents' 1960s 'record player' (Elvis, Gene Pitney, Eric Burdon), and predated their sleek black 'stereo' of the 80s (Enya, Van Morrison, Carole King). Like other works by Bambury, *Ideogram (II)* recalled a historical moment; the difference was that this historical moment belonged to me—and spoke of the real world of things rather than the second-hand daylight of art history.

Milan Kundera has compared significant moments in people's lives with musical fugues, cataloguing the themes that give shape to formlessness and impose a pattern on the otherwise random. 'Human lives ... are composed like music. Guided by his sense of beauty, an individual transforms a fortuitous occurrence (Beethoven's music, death under a train) into a motif, which then assumes a permanent place in the composition of the individual's life.'[5] Sometimes these personal motifs only assume significance in retrospect, as a pattern begins to establish itself, or as we look backwards in an attempt to read our lives as a narrative. Thus, in speaking of his *Ideogram* series, Stephen Bambury reflects on a vivid childhood memory: the sound of a train racing through the living room of his family home. It was the day on which his father had brought home the family's new 'hi-fi', and with it the demo record that revealed the capabilities of the new sound system. His father lowered the stylus and the train tore across the room, passing in a flash from speaker to speaker, and with its momentum, modernism—or at least modernity—arrived in Bambury's life.

Sometimes the narrative reveals itself not in the order in which things happened but in the order in which they became significant. I didn't appreciate *Ideogram's* allusion to McCahon until some months after I'd first seen the work, when by chance I read that between 1976 and 1977 McCahon painted his loose *Angels and Bed* series in an emotional response to his friend Rodney Kennedy's convalescence following a fall from a ladder[6]. Paintings four and eight of the series of ten contained the word 'hi-fi', presumably in reference to the contents of Kennedy's room (several of the canvases appear like abstracted aerial views of a bedroom, where rectangular forms might be read as speakers). Such is McCahon's ownership of language in New Zealand art that it was subsequently impossible for me not to see Bambury's *Ideogram* as a re-negotiation of McCahon's word-imagery, as much as if Bambury had constructed a work from the familiar geometries of 'I AM'. McCahon had been there first in the 1970s with 'hi-fi', though I had apprehended him through the retro-vision of Bambury's work: and now the low-brow 'hi-fi' was caught up in a Heideggerian principle of infinite return, trapped in an Antipodean loop of eccentric modernist quotation. Like Cavafy's old things[7], this modernist hi-fi would be knocking around the world for some time yet to come.

In 1984, McCahon's biographer Gordon H Brown described the hi-fi inscriptions as: 'a pun in which the means of existential communication is seen in high fidelity as a sensibility to, and awareness of, situations in which angels are revealed with great clarity.'[8] If we're to accept this notion, then perhaps Bambury's work can likewise be regarded as a meditative device, a sort of divine channel filtering out the distortion of the world to encourage a direct spiritual experience: a conveyor of essential truth. Or perhaps the truth is more prosaic: 'hi-fi' might be the key to thinking about both works in terms of daily life, as signs

that might move with the times, changing meaning with each new viewer. Bambury has commented: 'The idea that things can be timeless in that they have a number of lives is a perversion of modernism. I desire that my work can go on living; it doesn't have to be timeless but it does go on living and our uses of it change.'[9]

Art theorist Dave Hickey suggested recently that works of art exist in a perpetual present, whereas writing about art is immediately consigned to a historical past. Artworks are always open for interpretation: by contrast, art writing is about defining a moment, encircling an idea, apprehending an experience. As soon as it's confronted, the moment is always past. In this way, writing about art is always nostalgic, always retrospective, in that it tries to recall past experience, the moment of interchange between the viewer and the artwork; in that its aim is to give intellectual form to a fleeting sensory encounter. As Milan Kundera writes: 'Imposing form on a period of time is what beauty demands, but so does memory. For what is formless cannot be grasped, nor committed to memory.'[10] Art writing is a way to impose form on time spent looking: it is an attempt to account for the experience of beauty.

Beauty has always posed an intriguing problem in Bambury's work. Although for the last two or three generations the word beauty has been persona non-grata in the artworld lexicon, Bambury has repeatedly advocated its usage as both descriptor and content of his work. He has spoken of wanting 'to seduce the audience with [the work's] visual interest'[11]; and stated: 'I really enjoy concepts such as beauty. It's a word that the art world doesn't care for. But I take pleasure in allowing access to my work through the sensual.'[12] While many of his commentators have skirted around the beauty issue, confining themselves instead to theoretical analysis of his practice, other writers have veiled Bambury's work in the language of seduction, describing the material quality of its surfaces as 'voluptuous', 'delicious', 'disturbing and mysterious'.[13] Through both images and statements, Bambury has been concerned with reconciling this apparent schism between the intellect and the senses. He has frequently explored ideas of duality and oneness in the work, taking the position that something may not necessarily need to be seen as 'either/or' but may well be 'both at once'. The Cartesian mind-body problem peculiar to much contemporary art writing—the implication that what is intellectually rigorous cannot also be physically attractive, or that beauty has no role in critical thinking—has long problematised a holistic reading of Bambury's work, rendering it either 'intellectual' or 'sensual'—but not both.

The overwhelming effect of *Bambury: Works 1975-1999* is one of beauty. As with encounters with beauty in real life outside the fictional space of the art gallery, it would be impossible to define the exact nature of that beauty; to locate it in a specific surface texture or passage of paint or colour, as much as it is not necessarily found in the colour of a woman's eyes or the shadows of hills in the afternoon or the exact

named blueness of a lake; but beauty is there, nonetheless, is present in the gallery, suffusing the experience of the exhibition, ineffable, indescribable, not to be accounted for. It is there in the ochre glow of the leaning *Ideogram* paintings; in the jewel-like foils of the *Siena* series; in the seeping resins of the *Chakras*; in the prosaic familiar pungent smell of used engine oil rising from *Ngamotu*.

The story of people's lives is always in the details; in the remembered fall of light across a wall, in the familiar objects of a room, in the iridescent sheen of oil on water. To simply describe the facts of the matter in life or in art is to miss the point entirely. Peter Schjedahl has remarked that for him, the notion of beauty is never pure. 'It is always mixed up with something else, some other quality or value—or story, even.'[14] Both beauty and memory need an analogue: neither can be apprehended directly. It seems to me that Bambury's works function as such an analogue. Bambury has stated that he has 'always seen the paintings as a means of promoting an inner reflection and of creating a context where an experiential exchange could take place.'[15] But in order for it to be expressed, and thus for experiences or motifs to be exchanged, inner reflection needs language to support it. This tension between subjectivity and objectivity, between the ineffable and the rational, has always been a call to action both within the art field as well in personal narratives. Louise Bourgeois has commented that for her, beauty is not a noun but an active verb:

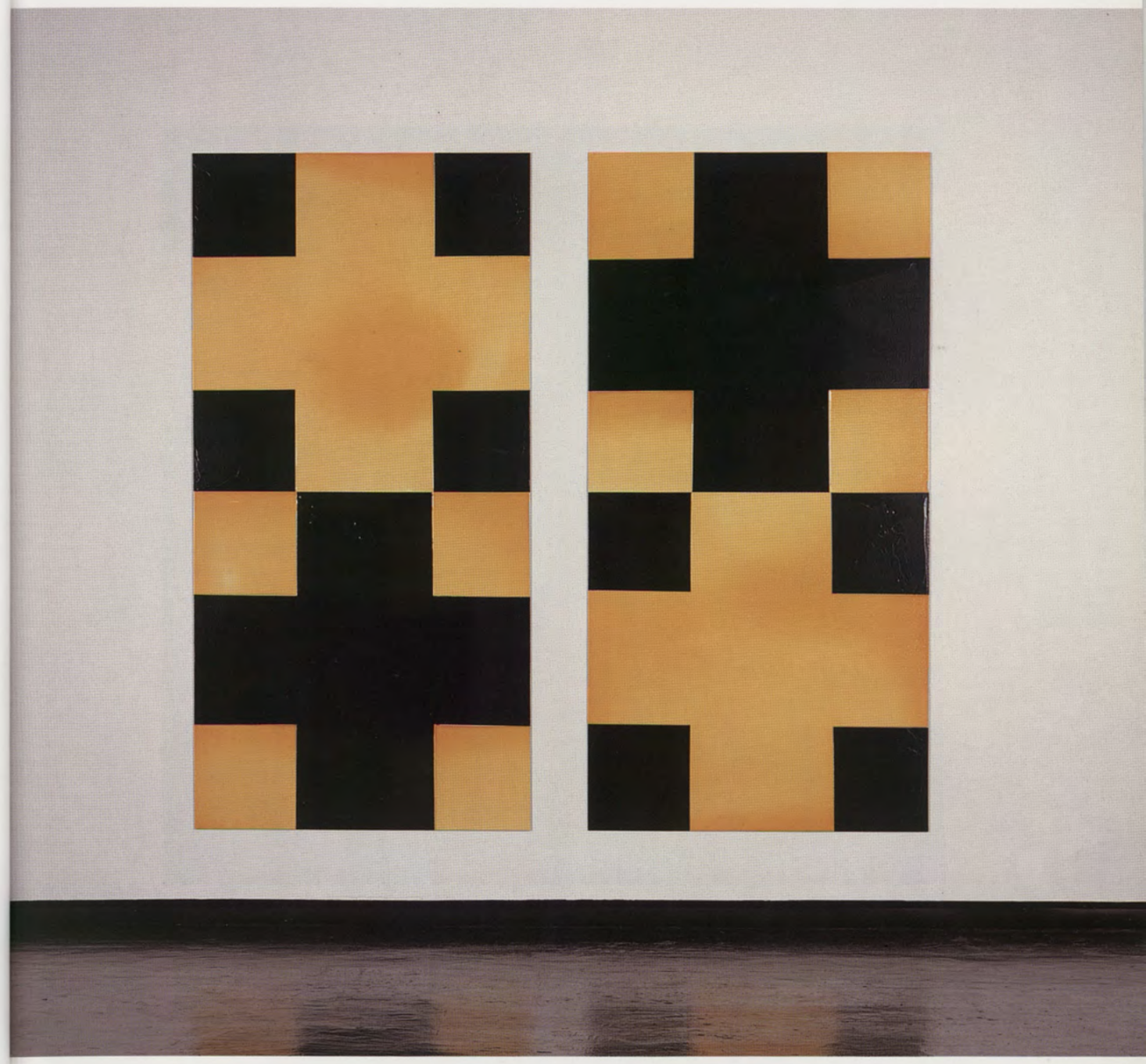
> 'Beauty is a series of experiences... People have experiences. If they feel an intense aesthetic pleasure, they take that experience and project it on to the object. They experience the idea of beauty, but beauty in and of itself does not exist. To put it another way, experiences are sorts of pleasures that involve verbs. The fallacy occurs in taking the experience "I like X" and referring to "X" as beauty. The process is similar to what TS Eliot said of Wordsworth, "Wordsworth found in stones the sermons he had planted there." In fact, beauty is only a mystified expression of our own emotion.'[16]

Sometimes all it takes is a way in: a personal point of reference from which to stand and survey the ground. For me, *Ideogram (II)* provided an experiential context which has opened the main body of Bambury's work for comparative speculation. I would suggest that a critical space for Bambury's work might be found in its powers of association; which is not necessarily located between points on a modernist/postmodernist continuum, but is rather a mobile viewpoint, grounded in the specific historical moment and life experience of his viewer. It is a fluid and emotional position, which argues for the efficacy of the artwork in terms of the meanings and identities the individual viewer is able to take from the work, rather than bring to it. The viewer is changed by the work, rather than the work by the viewer: the viewer locates in the work an individual point of reference, a motif which belongs to a personal narrative.

Encountering Bambury's work is primarily a sensory experience; but it is one underpinned by the intellect, by the references to the world of ideas which are embedded in the works and which begin to manifest themselves after time spent looking. The beauty of Bambury's work—its ineffability, its shifting motifs, its very lack of closure—brings us to a sense of our place in the world and releases us from it to keep on looking. Looking at a Bambury painting, we are struck by the sheer beauty of the work; the beauty reawakens in us the memory of another, earlier significant moment, when like Bambury's locomotive in the lounge, we were similarly transfigured, and when the first experience became imprinted on the mind as a motif; and from the remembered details of the previous encounter we are able to analyse the import of the current situation, a resting place in the narrative.

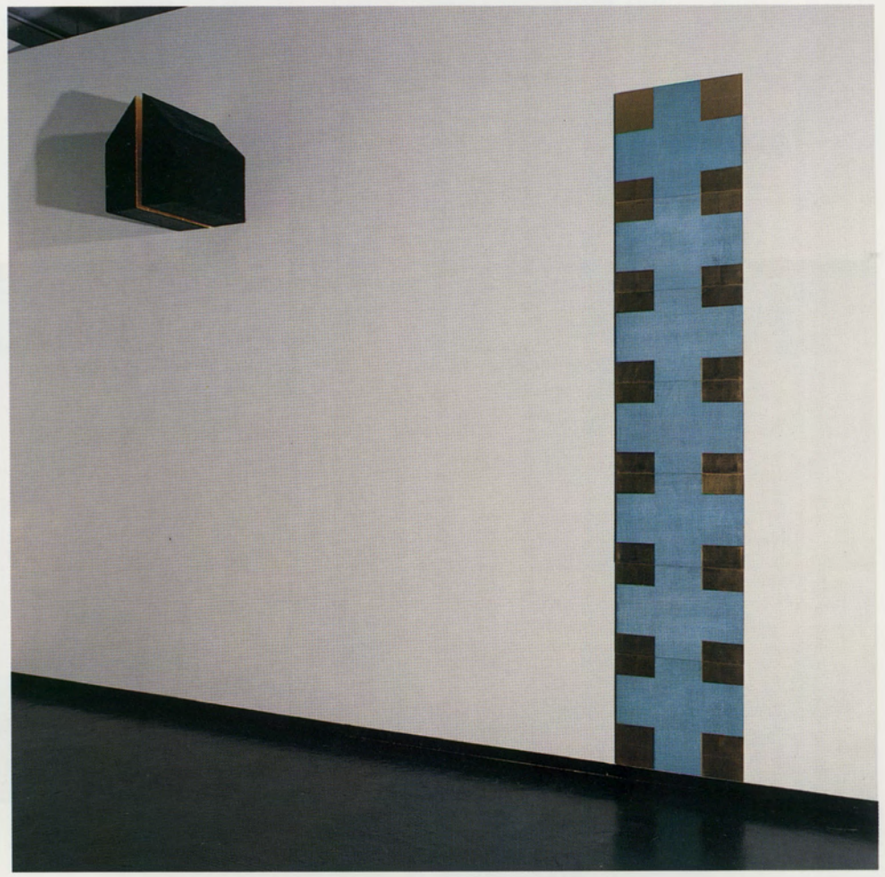
In our time of relativity, meaning has become essentially empirical. Even language has become relative; utterances are translated instantly and infinitely. We are always missing the point. We can take nothing for granted. When we approach a work of art, our primary reading is always based on our own experience, whatever the theoretical basis that underlies our assumptions. As Marcel Proust wrote, with equal application to the visual arts: 'In reality every reader is, while he is reading, the reader of his own self. The writer's work is merely a kind of optical instrument which he offers to the reader to enable him to discern what, without this tool, he would perhaps never have experienced in himself.'[17]

1. Michael Dunn, *A Concise History of New Zealand Painting*, Auckland: David Bateman, 1991, p.146.
2. Bernadette Rae, 'A fellow with abstract ideas from Germany', *New Zealand Herald*, 2 February 1989.
3. Allan Smith, 'Stephen Bambury', *Art & Text* no.46, 1993, p.87.
4. Ronnie van Hout, *Stupid Painting 1* and *Stupid Painting 2*, 1993, pencil on sulphur on concrete on wood, Peter Robinson Loan Collection, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.
5. Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (transl. Michael Henry Heim), London: Faber and Faber, 1984, p.52.
6. Gordon H. Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist*, Auckland: Reed Publishing, 1984, p.182.
7. 'The couch was here, near the door,/A Turkish carpet in front of it./Close by, the shelf with two yellow vases./On the right—no, opposite—a wardrobe with a mirror./[...]/They must still be around somewhere, those old things.' From C.P. Cavafy, 'The Afternoon Sun', 1919.
8. Brown, op.cit., p.185.
9. Barbara G., 'Repented, Reformed, Reconstructed Modernist', in *Fashion Quarterly*, Autumn 1992.
10. Milan Kundera, *Slowness*, London: Faber and Faber, 1996, p.34.
11. Diana Dekker, 'Common Global Threads', *Evening Post* 31 January 1998.
12. Stephen Bambury, quoted in Kevin Ireland, 'Content is always what drives the work', *Listener and TV Times*, 29 July 1991, p.41.
13. ibid, p.40.
14. Peter Schjedahl, in *Uncontrollable Beauty*, ed. Bill Beckley with David Shapiro, New York: Allworth Press/The School of Visual Arts, 1998, p.53.
15. Allan Smith, 'Stephen Bambury: New Paintings from Europe', *Art New Zealand* no.58, Autumn 1991, p.55.
16. Louise Bourgeois, 'Sunday Afternoons: A Conversation and a Remark on Beauty', in *Uncontrollable Beauty*, op.cit., p.331.
17. Marcel Proust, quoted in Alain de Bouton, *How Proust can change your life*, London: Picador, 1997, p.25.

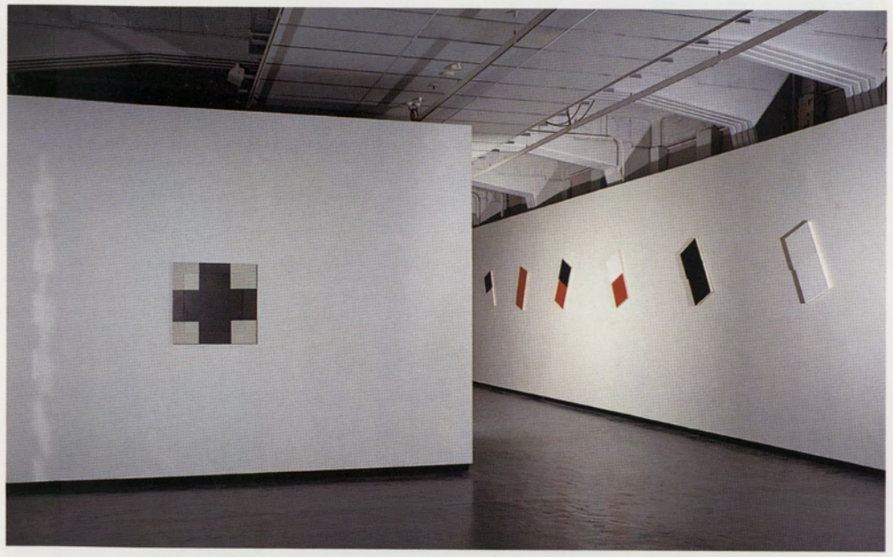


'Of the feminine and the masculine' (II) 1998

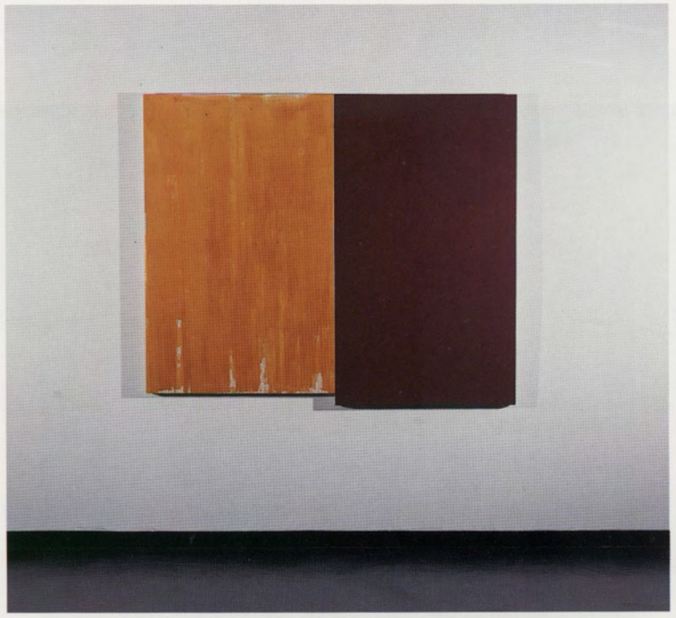
left to right *'Of the cosmic equilibrium'* 1993
'Chromatic fundamentalism developing towards superimpositions' (II) 1993-97
'It recalled the immaterial dimension of the universe' 1999



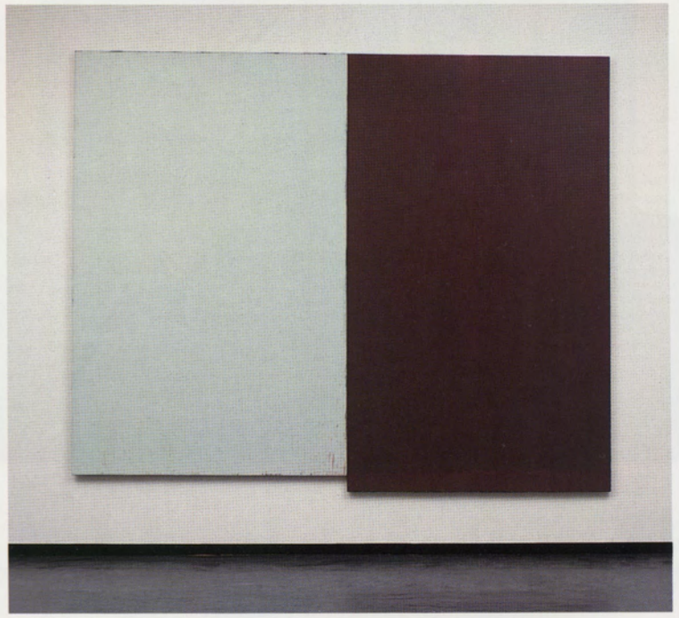
left to right *Golden House/Golden Section* 1999
Advaita (Chakra 7) 1993



left to right '*Chromatic fundamentalism developing towards superimpositions' (II) 1993-97*
Site Works—a work in six parts 1981

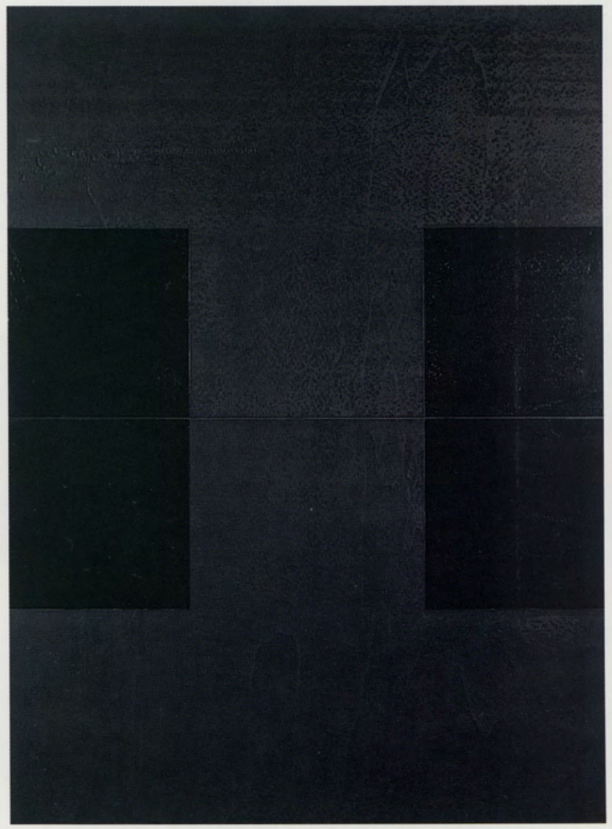


No Divisions 1983-85



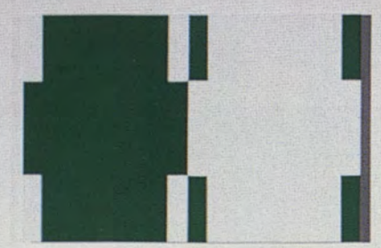
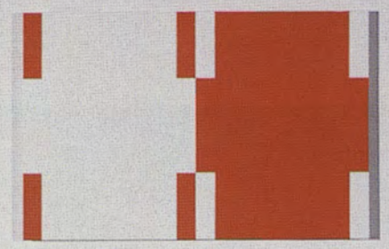
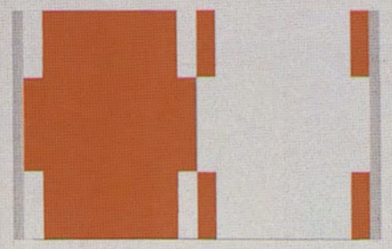
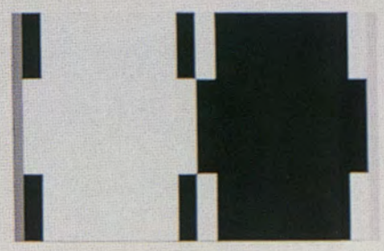
No. 38 (After Kave) 1982

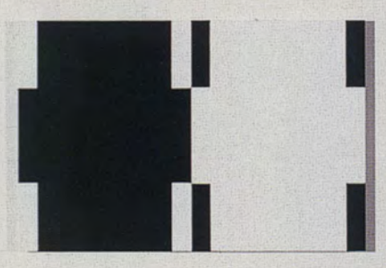
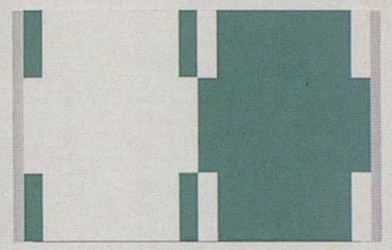
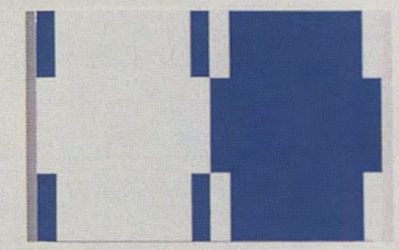
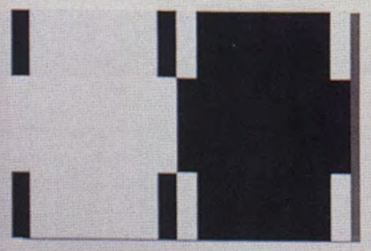
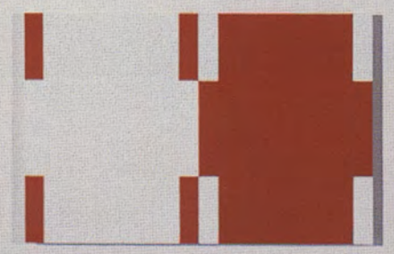
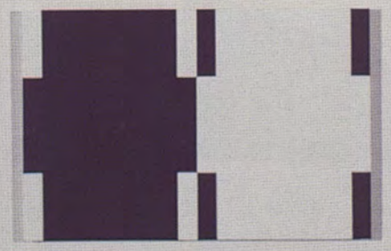
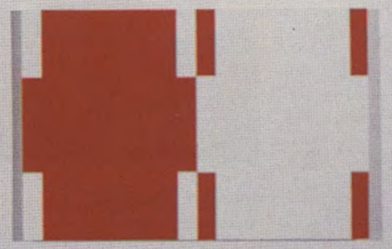
left to right *Red, Black, White* 1978
Necessary Correction (XIV) The Leaden Echo 1998
Tetragonal, Black 1975

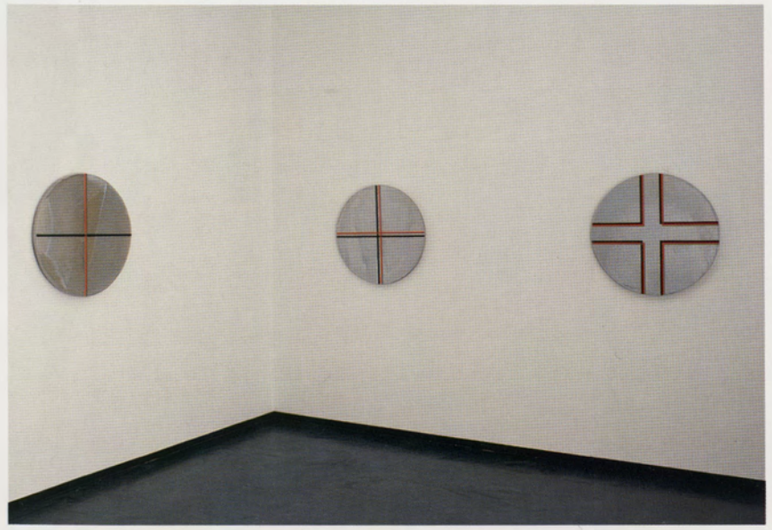


Necessary Correction (XIV) The Leaden Echo 1998

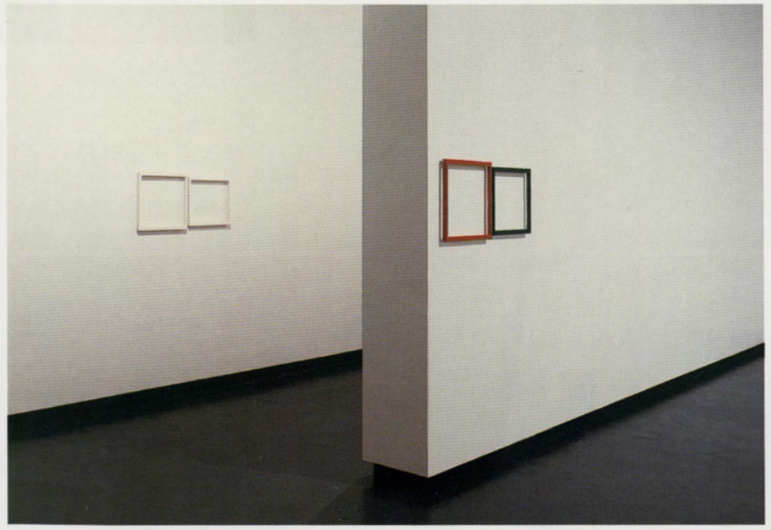
following page: Selected *Colour Works* 1996



left to right *'Matured by a deeper rhythm' (Cell with conduit)* 1988
'Their inseparable unity' 1988
'At the same time a new beginning' 1988

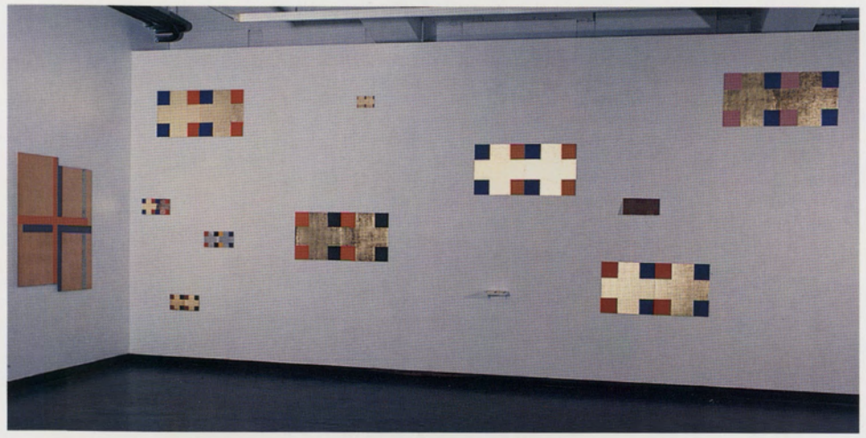


left to right *Aragoto* 1986
Russian Doll 1986

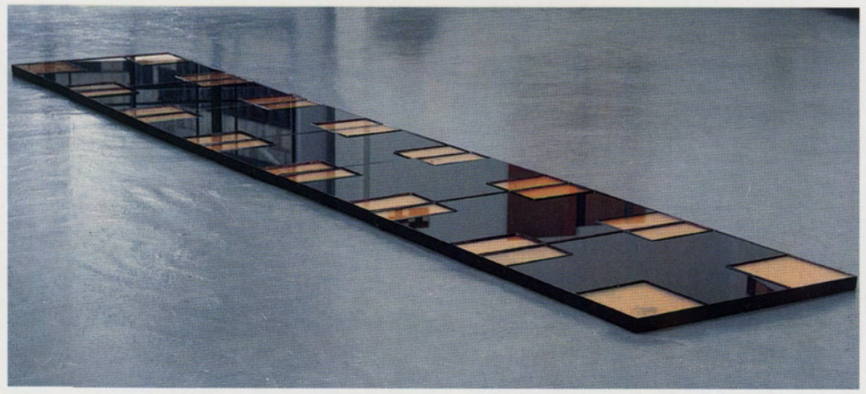
above left to right: *Area Series, Yellow/Black* 1979
Four Truths (to El Lissitzky) 1989
Site Works set 3, no.5 1980-81
Site Works set 3, no.2 1980
Area Series, Red 1978

Necessary Correction (XIX) The Golden Echo (for Wystan) 1999

opposite left to right *Chakra (II)* 1995
Necessary Correction (XIX) The Golden Echo (for Wystan) 1999
No.51 1983-85

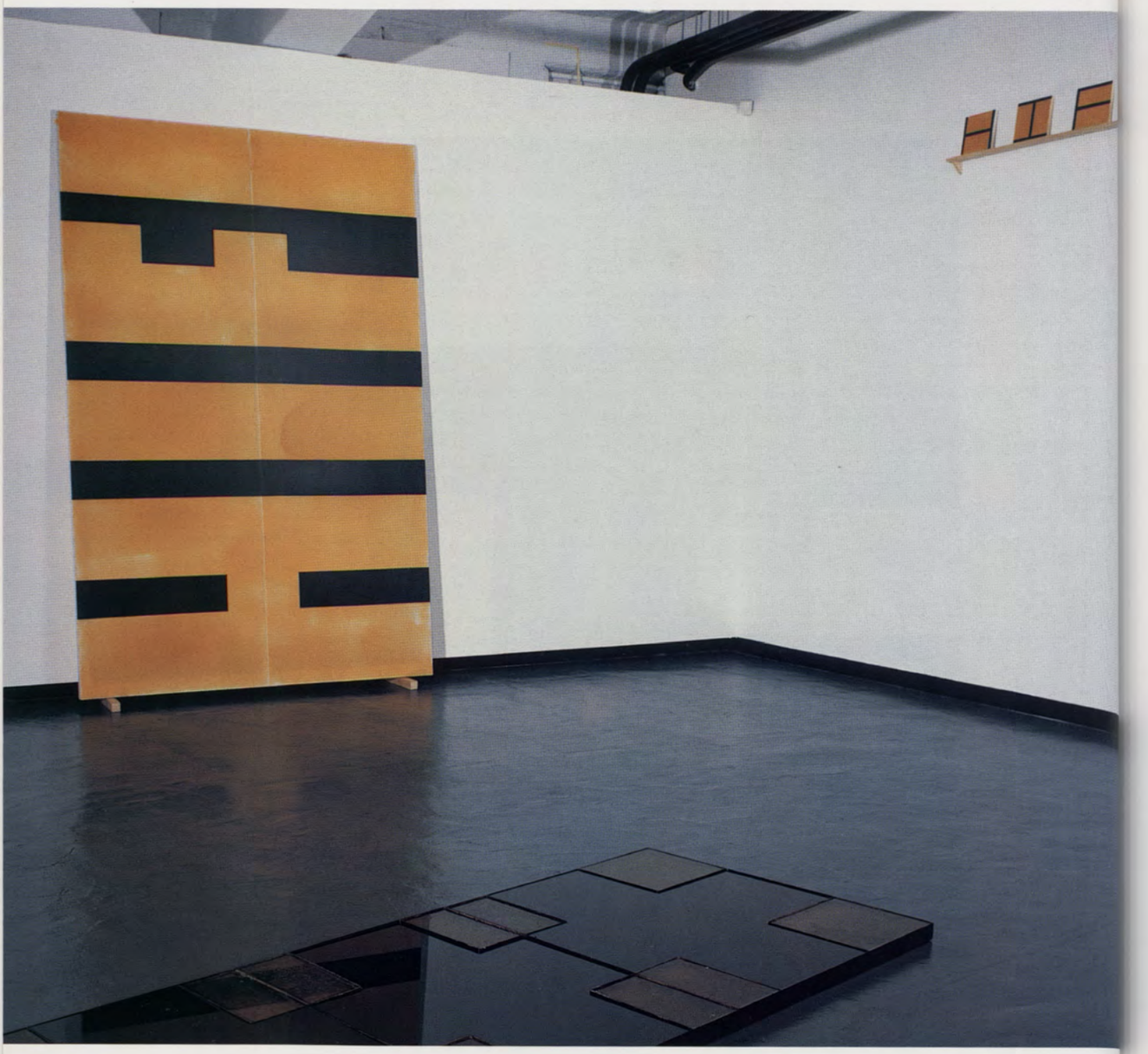


Selected *Siena* paintings 1993-99



Ngamotu 1993

Golden House/Golden Section 1999



left to right *Ideogram (II)* 1995
Ngamotu 1993
Ideogram (III) 1996

INTERVIEW

ROBERT LEONARD WALKS THROUGH THE SHOW WITH STEPHEN BAMBURY

ROBERT LEONARD: *The show's non-chronological hang lets works produced over 25 years participate in the same notional moment, as though they all remain relevant and live and equal, as though new arguments hadn't succeeded old ones.*

STEPHEN BAMBURY: The show offered me the chance to circle back and collect some initiatives from long ago, things I haven't looked at in ages, things which have never or barely been exhibited. Wystan Curnow, the curator, recognised that my work doesn't develop from beginning to middle to end, and we carried that idea through with the show, configuring it without any sort of chronology, which is unusual for a retrospective. We were thinking a lot about the shift that comes with postmodernism, making abstraction seem no longer simply about intrinsic formal properties but also about extrinsic aspects, the life of the work in relation to places and moments, languages and discourses and histories.

So, this show places early formalist works within the context of your more recent post-formalist project.

Looking back, I'm approaching my early paintings as something of a stranger, they feel as if someone else did them. Mel Bochner says all works are consciousness viewed from the outside, but now I've got so much time on them that it sometimes feels like someone else's consciousness. In the early days I was trying to fit certain agendas, but in retrospect it interests me how the work often failed to meet those agendas. Now I'm more interested in the failure than the success, and in the peripheral content, the stuff around the edges. For example, *Tetragonal, Black*, the earliest work in the show: in 1975 it was about disrupting the consistency of the grid, now it seems more about movement, the red moving into the black, sliding into place or out of it.

The work changes in the late 1980s. Before then you're moving along in a logical progression, as with a philosophical inquiry or experiment. Then in the late 1980s, there's a rupture; the work takes on a different logic. Once you hit the crosses, it's less about progressing an idea, more about elaborating one, expanding on it, multiplying it, detailing it. You become fixated, yet expansive like never before.

It's like there are two mes, one up to the late 1980s and one following. Early on, the work seemed more about essence and purity, about radicality, progress and a desire for historical closure. The usual stuff. I got fairly close to the monochrome thing, but I got dissatisfied with the dogmatism involved. I see now I was already uncomfortable with formalism. And, while the work might have appeared to be operating within minimalist and formalist conventions, I was never trying to 'evacuate content', to use your term. As I look back, I see I was always increasingly bringing content on board. Coming to terms with post-modernism was really what did it. Going to Melbourne in 1987 for that residency was crucial. I got to meet the artists who became the core group at Store 5, Kerrie Poliness and Co. John Nixon was a key figure. I was so relieved, because I found it hard to relate to the abstract work in New Zealand at the time, which

was British in a 1950s kind of way. The Australian work was so different; it was fresh, energetic. It was about letting stuff in rather than locking it out. It had attitude. They ran their interest in the historical avant-garde through a set of postmodernist filters, which generated a whole different discussion. It was conceptual painting, and it gave me ideas about how to open up my own practice, about raking through the embers of the prematurely liquidated modernist project. There were many things about modernism I didn't want to abandon, and then there was a lot I did.

How did this relate to the New Zealand situation?

Right through into the 1980s in New Zealand, there was this belated battle for the high moral ground between internationalism and nationalism (or provincialism, as some called it). At some point, I had this idea that there might be a space between these positions, and that that might be where the action was. It was like cutting a Gordian knot, the idea of saying no to both arguments, or yes to both. Courting duplicity. And while the work seemed to retain its former autonomy, it increasingly leaked into something more discursive and contextual. I like the idea of the work existing formally and post-formally at once, being both hermetic and porous. I aim for that equivocation. I'm not prepared to buy into a position with some sort of consistency. There is a consistency, but it's a consistency that emerges out of the production itself.

Ngamotu*?*

I did it for the Govett-Brewster in 1993. It's a floor painting, a chakra made of seven trays; seven crosses filled with crude oil and the squares between with water. Ngamotu's the Maori name for a New Plymouth beach, meaning 'islands.' It's where oil was first discovered in New Zealand. I was a little apprehensive about using a Maori placename—at the time Gordon Walters was being rapped on the knuckles for his appropriations. But when Aunty Marge, the gallery kuia, came in to check out the piece, I told her my idea for the title and she got it instantly, and she said, 'Around here, oil and water don't mix.' So I went with it. Certainly New Plymouth is a site of plunder and asset stripping, and of passive resistance—Parihaka. And those ideas are still current, those actions are still being played out. The piece combined oil, which has sustained the local economy, and water, which is essential for life, arranged in a fragile state of co-existence, providing an image of transcendence that might or might not be available through this path of contamination. For the installation here at the City Gallery we opened the shutters over the windows. Those reflections are great; the work lets the world in.

I'm intrigued by the way the cross works appear so flat, but have this subtle spatial dynamics going on.

My work's never been about the kind of flatness that modernism is supposed to have aspired to, it never interested me. It's more about where Pre-Renaissance painting links up with Suprematism. In the Renaissance, everything's pulled back to a central vanishing point, making the viewer God. But in Pre-Renaissance painting the spaces are incoherent, at least from a Renaissance point of view. But if you move around in front of those paintings, there are multiple points of perspectival convergence, and from different points things that appeared spatially wonky start to cohere into some kind of sensible framework. Now, the viewer isn't God, the centre of the world is somewhere else. Pre-Renaissance painting with its weird perspectives is often cast as an unresolved version of Renaissance painting, but really it's offering a completely different proposition. It has more in common with Indian miniature painting. And that sense of perspective is echoed again in Suprematism, with Malevich's tilted cross and his not-square square.

So while at first the shapes seem to belong to the flat surface, when you spend time with them they open up into a space beyond, a shallow infinity.

You hung Chakra *in a specially constructed corridor, encouraging people to view it up close while walking past. It's like McCahon's idea of 'paintings to walk by'.*

And when you walk by, it does odd things. The repetition of the crosses causes a sort of cinematic flickering, a pulse. Actually Wystan sees those early double frame ones as cinematic in a different way, as empty screens awaiting projection, so there there's less a sense of dynamism than one of anticipation, of time-before. I'm interested in all those temporal qualities. *Chakra* is not only cinematic, or kinematic, it's also photographic. The panels look like inconsistently processed blank film frames. The image comes from inconsistencies in the processing, especially when there's a group of similar panels run together. I court that. It's that kind of 'process marking' I do. The panels are processed or treated rather than painted. They're obviously hand-done but it's not an autobiographical mark at all.

Icon painting was always a production line affair. Baudrillard writes about the spiritual as an effect that can be generated mechanically.

But some icons have real power, and others don't.

Baudrillard deconstructs the opposition of iconoclasm and iconolation. He says the iconoclasts were the truer believers because they invested in the power of images enough to need to destroy them, and that the iconolators were truly modern because they invested in the mechanistic nature of imagery, its ability to generate a divinity with nothing behind it.

That feels right. Malevich certainly was a believer, that's evident in the intensity of his iconoclasm. For his Suprematist work, he took what he needed from the rhetoric of Greek Orthodox icon painting, for instance the traditional placement of the Russian icon high in the corner of the house. He exploits the register of the icon as a meditative object, while appearing to jettison so much of the tradition, the gold, the figurative. Iconolation and iconoclasm are both there in the Suprematist, work revving one another up. The iconoclastic dimension is really testament to his belief; his not mine. I'm no iconoclast. Implicit in iconoclasm is transgression, and I'm not really interested in transgression. I agree with Herzog and De Meuron, who say it's boring not to be normal today.

Where did the Ideogram *paintings come from?*

The idea first appears in my notebooks in Paris in about 1991. Initially it was going to be just 'HI', done in a quasi-De Stijl manner. I was going to call it *Friendly Abstract Painting*. The idea lay dormant until I came back to New Zealand and was offered a large commission for a wall with three speakers built into it. I wanted to avoid this wall because of those speakers, but the clients were adamant; this was the wall they wanted the piece for. Then I got really interested in the idea of these speakers. I'd been thinking about McCahon's *Angels In Bed* series and particularly his Hi-Fi painting, which include those speaker shapes. I found myself wanting to turn that Hi-Fi painting inside out, taking the little title inscription from the bottom margin of the painting and make it the whole painting, and then leave those speakers on the wall around it. I'm into aspects of McCahon's work that have been ignored, things that aren't obvious, that

are buried. The *Ideograms* became a 'what if' situation: what if this overlooked detail were the major aspect of the work? What if I dovetailed this slice of McCahon with my interest in the ideogram and the form of the I Ching?

Because the ideogram is the combination of abstract form and language?

Which all abstraction is anyhow. The work is emblematic of the moment I first profoundly felt modernism enter my life. It was as a kid in the mid 1960s, when the first swish stereo cabinet came into the house and we got a test record. Sitting in the lounge and hearing the train come through one wall and go out the other was a big moment. For me the transpersonal narrative of modernism and the story of my own personal engagement with it collapse into one in this work. The *Ideogram* in the show is actually the second version, and in a sense turns the first inside out. Everything that's hard and rigid and permanent in the first becomes soft and dematerialised and provisional here. In the first, the panels are hard-pressed and abutted, pristine and crisp; here, they're soft and stitched together. The first sits just two or three millimetres off the wall, but this one sits on chocks, in an ambivalent space between the wall and the floor, between the gallery and the storeroom. The first is permanently installed, but the second... you're not sure if it's about to be installed or about to go into storage. That kind of transience and mobility gives it a different sense.

High fidelity literally means obedience to truth.

Wondering is really the point. Hopefully the work opens up a space for contemplative wondering. Certainly, as a child, going from mono to high fidelity inspired awe and disbelief. Like, 'I can't believe it, the cymbal's shimmering over there, and the bass is over here!' It's magical, that sense of disbelief. There's something about the idea of hi-fi that takes us beyond our normal range of expectations—a train passing through the living room. As a kid, experiencing that, it was very powerful. As an adult, I would just see it as a trick.

The Copper House*?*

The house shape comes out of a post-Suprematist Malevich drawing. Many people ignore this highly fertile period of Malevich's work. Malevich's work after Suprematism is an embarrassment for some people, as if going back to the figure were necessarily and demonstrably the failure of abstraction. That's so simplistic. Much of the development of the post-Suprematist work is concurrent with the Suprematist work. Anyway, I find this period of Malevich's thinking fascinating and that drawing is a very curious thing. There's the horizon line he often draws in, and a figure, and you can't really tell whether the figure is looking out or in, facing you or facing in. In what appears to be a space behind the figure but in front of the horizon, there's this cross. And in the foreground, there's a very tiny little house form. Well, it's either a house or a grave, either way it's a house. It's such an open-ended and paradoxical image. It captured me.

Is Malevich's house split in two?

Not at all. But in my work it's not 'split' either, there's no violence, no rupture; it's more an opening. You're invited in. Nearly all my works involve reflected forms. The works mirror themselves: left/right, top/bottom. The dual, the doubled, is a constant in the work.

And it's church-like.

You say 'church', I say 'contemplative'. When I get to visit the great Gothic cathedrals, I don't thank God, I thank the architect, and that's the difference. I should footnote Judd there, he said it first.

The companion work, Golden House, *has a strong* Necessary Protection *association, that 'light falling through a dark land' thing.*

You talk of McCahon but I also want to evoke Barnett Newman's *Cathedral.* Of course, McCahon looked very hard at Newman. I find that cross-referencing a fertile area. Really, I don't want to see McCahon in isolation, as tends to be the way here. That's my 'Necessary Correction.'

But you've drawn on McCahon a lot in recent times.

In 1991, I came back after three years in Europe knowing that McCahon was a huge asset for me here in a way that virtually nothing else was. Looking back I can see that McCahon's voice inflects my work right through. McCahon's part of my cultural landscape, part of our cultural landscape, but still only part.

You say McCahon inflects the work 'right through', but back in the late 1970s I can't imaging you saying that.

Sure. Back then, he was the enemy. The work was used to exemplify an argument I opposed and so I was opposed to McCahon. But that positioning was really false. It wasn't a matter of what McCahon was for but what the culture said he was for. McCahon was somewhere else. He was an astute reader of international art, all art, yet you had this official programme of reception mounted against that, against his classically modernist project of synthesis. McCahon really came into my thinking through the back door, it was the perversity of his homage to Mondrian—saying thanks but using that heretical diagonal. McCahon pushes things so far through his wilful misreadings that the work takes on an almost proto-postmodernist quality. He provides a model for making use of the tradition, escaping it, and feeding into it at once. And that's the only way the discussion can move forward. I see a lot of very sterile uses of McCahon, which I'm not really interested in.

Let's close on the most recent painting in the show, The Golden Echo (for Wystan). *I'm used to your works having figure-ground relationships which are managed, controlled, precise; and being painted in a way that is very considered. So this one's a real surprise. I don't know whether I like it or not. The paint is almost sexual, secreted; there's a vulgar, foody, super-sweet but abject quality to it, like sticky icing.*

That work certainly is loose. I've become keen on having the forms juddering right across the boundaries people are expecting them to fit into, deranging any orthodoxies I appear to have been setting up. Here, there's a real sense of the elements not quite being in place, but good enough! I've always wanted the work to fly apart, from a very centred position. I'm surprised by your choice of words, because I find it quite ravishing. I want to go there.

Robert Leonard is director of Artspace, Auckland.

LIST OF WORKS

'Of the cosmic equilibrium' 1993
acrylic and seven anodised aluminium panels
2765 x 500mm

'Chromatic fundamentalism developing towards superimpositions' (II) 1993-97
graphite, resin and acrylic on aluminium panels
795 x 795mm
Collection of J. Gibbs Trust

'It recalled the immaterial dimension of the universe' 1999
resin and acrylic on seven aluminium panels
2765 x 500mm
Private collection, Auckland

'Matured by a deeper rhythm' (Cell with conduit) 1988
acrylic and aluminium paint on canvas
720mm diameter
Collection of J. Gibbs Trust

'At the same time a new beginning' 1988
acrylic and aluminium paint on canvas
720mm diameter

'Their inseparable unity' 1988
acrylic and aluminium paint on canvas
720mm diameter

Area Series, Yellow/Black 1979
acrylic on canvas
1160 x 800mm
Collection of J. Gibbs Trust

Four truths (to El Lissitzky) 1989
aluminium paint and oil stick on aluminium
1275 x 1200mm
Collection of J. Gibbs Trust

Site Works, set 3, no. 5 1980-81
acrylic on canvas
820 x 1630mm

Site Works, set 3, no. 2 1980
acrylic on canvas
440 x 790mm

Area Series, Red 1978
acrylic on canvas
1750 x 1750mm
Fletcher Challenge Collection, Auckland

Red, Black, White 1978
acrylic on canvas
464 x 464mm

Necessary Correction (XIV) The Leaden Echo 1998
graphite and acrylic on two aluminium panels
2336 x 1704mm
Collection of A. Streefland

Tetragonal, Black 1975
acrylic on canvas
1410 x 1290mm

Site Works—a work in six parts 1981
acrylic on six canvases
840 x 435mm each

'Of the feminine and the masculine' (II) 1998
resin and acrylic on four aluminium panels
2300 x 1150 each

Golden House/Golden Section 1999
charred wood and 23k gold
530 x 430 x 530mm

Advaita (Chakra 7) 1993
23k gold, chemical action on seven brass panels
2765 x 500mm
Vieira/McCloy Collection

Chakra (II) 1995
acrylic and resin on seven aluminium panels
704 x 3545mm
Courtesy of Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland

Russian Doll 1986
acrylic on canvas, diptych
430 x 410/380 x 380mm

No. 38 (After Kave) 1982
acrylic on canvas
2650 x 3220mm

Colour Works 1996
(L - R): FVL539, FRB359, FOBS204, FVA512, FRCC361 (for Judd), FVE610, FTVV551, FBM041, FVE610, FRCF362, FV601 and FRV393
acrylic on two aluminium panels
420 x 630mm each
FVE610 Collection of A. Streefland

Unity/Division 1986
acrylic on canvas, diptych
each 2300 x 1110mm
Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Colour Stack (red yellow blue) 1980
acrylic on canvas, triptych
each 1070 x 610mm

Necessary Correction (XIX) The Golden Echo (for Wystan) 1999
resin and acrylic on two aluminium panels
2336 x 1704mm
Private collection, Auckland

No. 51 1983-85
acrylic on canvas
1525 x 1820mm

'Rustic appearances must be removed' 1995
acrylic and chemical action on two brass panels
1220 x 650mm
Private collection, Wellington

Aragoto 1986
acrylic on canvas, diptych
430 x 410/ 380 x 380mm

'The reason of its true form' 1988
acrylic on timber frame and aluminium paint on plywood
395 x 395mm

'Chromatic fundamentalism developing towards superimpositions' 1988
acrylic on timber frame and aluminium paint on plywood
395 x 395mm
Collection of the James Wallace Charitable Arts Trust

Memories, Dreams, Reflections 1990
resin and graphite on two aluminium panels
1200 x 650mm
Private collection, Auckland

Maungarongo (Chrysalis) 1999
silkscreened flag in nylon case
1200 x 650mm
Courtesy of the people of Te Rongopai Marae

Site Works, set 4, no. 1 1980
acrylic on canvas
540 x 720mm

'In the light of the constructive idea' 1989
acrylic and aluminium paint on aluminium
620x 620mm

'His formula of the orbits' 1989
acrylic and aluminium paint on aluminium
400 x 400mm
Private collection, Christchurch

'In mutual equivalence' 1989
acrylic and aluminium paint on aluminium
400 x 400mm
Helene Quilter Collection, Wellington

Ideogram (II) 1995
resin and graphite on synthetic fabric
2925 x 1999mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of the Patrons of the Gallery, 1998

Ideogram (III) 1996
resin and graphite on four synthetic fabric panels and shelf
each 200 x 200mm

Ngamotu 1993
steel, oil and water
5200 x 1000 x 50mm

'The sensory vehicle of the cosmic energies' 1998
resin and acrylic on two aluminium panels
170 x 340mm
Collection of the James Wallace Charitable Arts Trust

Copper House (Siena) 1996
copper leaf, MDF and stainless steel
150 x 200 x 60mm

Siena (VI) 1993-96
copper leaf and acrylic on two aluminium panels
1270 x 1200mm
Private collection, Auckland

Siena (XV) 1996
23k gold, schlagmetal and acrylic
on two aluminium panels
500 x 1000mm
Private collection, Christchurch

Siena (XXXI) 1999
23k gold, schlagmetal and acrylic
on two aluminium panels
170 x 340mm

'In colour and non-colour' 1991
acrylic and aluminium paint on two aluminium panels
170 x 340mm
Private collection, Auckland

Siena (XIX) 1998
23k gold, schlagmetal and acrylic
on two aluminium panels
170 x 340mm
Private collection, Wellington

Siena (III) 1993
23k gold, schlagmetal and acrylic
on two aluminium panels
118 x 180mm
Vieira/McCloy Collection

Siena (XXVI) 1998
23k gold, schlagmetal and acrylic
on two aluminium panels
500 x 1000mm
Private collection, Auckland

Siena (XIII) 1996
23k gold, schlagmetal and acrylic
on two aluminium panels
500 x 1000mm
Collection of B. Walker, Christchurch

Siena (II) 1993
23k gold, schlagmetal and acrylic
on two aluminium panels
118 x 180mm

Siena (XXVII) 1998
copper leaf and acrylic on two aluminium panels
170 x 340mm

Siena (XXII) 1998
23k gold, schlagmetal and acrylic
on two aluminium panels
500 x 1000mm

Siena (XXIII) 1998
23k gold, schlagmetal and acrylic
on two aluminium panels
500 x 1000mm

Siena (XVI) 1997
23k gold, schlagmetal and acrylic
on two aluminium panels
118 x 180mm

No Divisions 1983-85
acrylic and resin on canvas
1530 x 1820mm
Vieira/McCloy collection

Site Works, set 4, no.2 1980
acrylic on canvas
1020 x 200mm

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Curnow, Wystan, 'Necessary Protection' in *Necessary Correction: Colin McCahon, Stephen Bambury, Helmut Federle*, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 1997

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Davis, Leigh, 'Learning to Read' in *A Very Peculiar Practice: Aspects of Recent New Zealand Painting*, City Gallery, Wellington 1995

Davis, Leigh, 'Bearing Witness' in *Siena: Stephen Bambury*, Jensen Gallery, Auckland 1999

Dunn, Michael, *Contemporary Painting in New Zealand*, Craftsman House, Sydney 1996

Green, Tony, 'Stephen Bambury' in *Art New Zealand* 48 1988

Green, Tony, *Used Geometries*, Artis Gallery, Auckland 1988

Leonard, Robert, 'Double Entendre' in *Midwest 7* 1995

Leonard, Robert, 'Stephen Bambury' in McAloon, William, *Home and Away: Contemporary Australian and New Zealand Art from the Chartwell Collection*, David Bateman Ltd and Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki 1999

McAloon, William, *Station to Station: The Way of the Cross*, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki 1994

McAloon, William, *Parallel Lines: Gordon Walters in Context*, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki 1994

McAloon, William, *Necessary Correction: Colin McCahon, Stephen Bambury, Helmut Federle*, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki 1997

McAloon, William, 'Model Painter' in *Stephen Bambury*, Craig Potton Publishing and Ouroboros Publishing, Auckland 1999

McDonald, Ewen, 'Bambury Cross' in *Contemporanea* 22 1990

Piguet, Philippe, 'Stephen Bambury: Des Geometries Intimes et Variables' in *Stephen Bambury*, Passages/Centre d'Art Contemporain, Troyes, France 1990

Renker, Diana, 'Double Entendre' in *Midwest* 7 1995

Ritchie, James, 'Bambury: Calculated Tensions' in *New Zealand Listener* 26 November 1988

Schultz, Derek, *Seven Painters/The Eighties*, Sarjeant Art Gallery, Wanganui 1982

Smith, Allan, in Ross, James (ed.), *New Zealand Modernism in Context: Paintings from the Gibbs Collection*, Auckland 1995

Smith, Allan, 'Stephen Bambury: New Paintings from Europe' in *Art New Zealand* 58 1991

Smith, Allan, 'Stephen Bambury' *Art + Text* 46 1993

Strongman, Lara, *Shared Pleasures: The Chartwell Collection*, Waikato Museum of Art and History Te Whare Taonga o Waikato 1994

Tyler, Linda, *Cross Currents*, Waikato Museum of Art and History Te Whare Taonga o Waikato 1991

BIOGRAPHY

1951 born in Christchurch, New Zealand

1975 studies painting at the Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland

1980 travels to the United States

1987 artist in residence, Victorian College of the Arts, Prahan Campus, Melbourne

1989 awarded inaugural Moët et Chandon New Zealand Art Foundation Fellowship, with residence and studio in Champagne, Ardenne, France

1989-92 lives and works in Paris

1992 - lives in Auckland, New Zealand

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1975 *Tetragonal Series*
Petar James Gallery, Auckland

1976 Victoria University, Wellington
University of Canterbury, Christchurch

1977 Gallery Data, Auckland

1978 *Small Paintings 1977-78*
Gallery Data, Auckland

1979 *Selected Paintings from the Area Series*
Peter Webb Gallery, Auckland

1980 *Site Works and Area Paintings*
Peter Webb Gallery, Auckland
Area Series
Elva Bett Gallery, Auckland

1981 *Site Works*
Janne Land Gallery, Wellington

1983 *New Paintings*
Petar James Gallery, Auckland

1985 *New Paintings and Works on Paper*
Artis Gallery, Auckland

1986 *Looking at the Dance and other related paintings 1980-86* Artis Gallery, Auckland

1987 Artis Gallery, Auckland

1988 *Paintings and Works on Paper*
312 Lennox Street Gallery, Melbourne
Used Geometries (Part I)
Centre for Contemporary Art, Hamilton
Used Geometries (Part II)
Artis Gallery, Auckland

1989 *Paintings*
Gary Anderson Gallery, Sydney

1990 *Paintings and Works on Paper*
Passages/Centre d'Art Contemporain, Troyes, France
Recent Works on Paper from France
Artis Gallery, Auckland

1991 *Stephen Bambury*
Stiftung für konkrete Kunst Reutlingen, Germany

1992 *Two Rooms for Paintings* Store 5, Melbourne
Double Take Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland

1993 *Stephen Bambury*
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth
Annandale Galleries, Sydney
Jonathan Jensen Gallery, Christchurch
Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland

1994 Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland
Jonathan Jensen Gallery, Christchurch

1995 *Site Works—a work in six parts (1981)*
CBD Gallery, Sydney; Jensen Gallery, Wellington

1996 *Colour Works*
Jensen Gallery, Auckland
Colour Works
Jensen Gallery, Wellington

1997 Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland

1998 *Siena*
Jensen Gallery, Wellington
Stephen Bambury
Jensen Gallery, Auckland

1999 *Stephen Bambury: Works 1975-1999*
City Gallery, Wellington
Work
Jensen Gallery, Auckland

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1977 *Young Contemporaries*
Auckland City Art Gallery

1982 *Acquisitions 1981-82*
National Art Gallery, Wellington

1982-83 *Seven Painters/The Eighties*
Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui; Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch; Dunedin Public Art Gallery; National Art Gallery, Wellington; Auckland City Art Gallery

1985 *Chance and Change: a century of the avant-garde*
Auckland Art Gallery
Goodman Suter Biennial
Bishop Suter Art Gallery, Nelson
NZNY
22 Wooster Gallery, New York

1986 *Content/Context: a survey of recent New Zealand art*
National Art Gallery at Shed 11, Wellington

1987 *Content and Symbol*
Artis Gallery, Auckland

1989 *Constructed Intimacies*
Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui; Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch; National Art Gallery, Wellington; Auckland City Art Gallery
Bambury/Felber/Mitelman/Partos
EMR Gallery, with Garry Anderson Gallery, Sydney
Bambury and Nixon Store 5, Melbourne

1990 *Bambury/Compagnon*
Espace Jules Verne, Centre d'Art et de Culture, Bretigny sur-Orge, France

1991 *Acquisitions*
Espace Jules Verne, Centre d'Art et de Culture, Bretigny sur-Orge
Cross Currents
Waikato Museum of Art and History Te Whare Taonga o Waikato, Hamilton
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Special Projects
Haines Gallery, San Francisco

1992 *Intimate Abstraction*
Haines Gallery, San Francisco
The Museum Collection: New Zealand Works
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

Hidden Treasures
Auckland City Art Gallery
Walters, Gimblett, Bambury
Jonathan Jensen Gallery, Christchurch

1994 *Parallel Lines: Gordon Walters in Context*
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
Station to Station: The Way of the Cross
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
2 x 5: Bambury, Bonnefoi, Hickey, Hunter, Leach-Jones
Annandale Galleries, Sydney
Shared Pleasures: The Chartwell Collection
Waikato Museum of Art and History Te Whare Taonga o Waikato, Hamilton

1995 *A Very Peculiar Practice: Aspects of Recent New Zealand Painting*
City Gallery, Wellington
Abstraction in the Seventies: Hotere, Peebles, Bambury, Thornley, Mrkusich
Artis Gallery, Auckland

1996
Schwarz
DieWeisse Galerie, Cologne
Relocating Asia
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
Bambury, Mosset, Walters
Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland

1997 *Rhyme and Reason*
Gallery 4a, Sydney, Australia
Necessary Correction: Colin McCahon, Stephen Bambury, Helmut Federle
an artist's project, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

1998 *Painting after Formalism: Bambury, Lalic, Roeth*
Jensen Gallery, Auckland
C6 H10 05
Jensen Gallery, Auckland

1999
Home and Away: Contemporary Australian and New Zealand Art from the Chartwell Collection
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

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