

SHADOW OF STYLE



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EIGHT NEW ARTISTS

GOVETT-BREWSTER ART GALLERY
NEW PLYMOUTH DISTRICT COUNCIL

WELLINGTON CITY ART GALLERY
WELLINGTON CITY COUNCIL

Style shifts

Gregory Burke and Robert Leonard

Style is the dress of thoughts.
The Fourth Earl of Chesterfield,
a writer on manners and etiquette

*Shift: (n) A fraudulent or evasive device,
a stratagem, a piece of sophistry, an evasion.*
The Shorter Oxford Dictionary

With *Shadow of style* we seek to bring greater public attention to the work of artists who are developing coherent bodies of work but who have yet to be given significant exposure through public galleries. We have chosen only eight artists, so that each may be represented in some depth. Most are recent Fine Arts graduates. Some are currently enrolled in university Masters programmes. *Shadow of style* is designed to focus attention on these artists as individuals. At the same time, by showing them together, we wish to consider what may be new and specific to this particular moment and peer group.

New artists are introduced to the gallery-going public in various ways. Over the last three decades there have been many 'young contemporaries' shows. However, in the last five or six years, it has been primarily through the raft of discursive and issue-based theme exhibitions that new artists have been presented. In such shows, new artists were placed alongside well known figures. These new artists did not need to have years of work behind them to be included in such shows and do well. Rather, what was important was a fresh, innovative and at times radical approach to the topic under discussion. As it happened, theme shows provided an excellent opportunity to be noticed. They carried weight because of the inclusion of

the established artists, but the unexpected work of the new artists gave these shows an edge.

Theme shows were never a systematic or comprehensive means for assessing new artists, nor were they intended to be. In fact many artists were privileged by the thematic approach. Some appeared regularly because their work moved within the same fields of enquiry charted by these exhibitions. Other artists were hampered either because their art resisted thematic contextualisation or simply because it did not readily lend itself to the particular themes that were being explored.

Despite the opportunities provided by theme shows, exhibitions that survey new artists *as such* are clearly still important. They pick up on artists who have not been given exposure through other kinds of shows. They also gauge aspects of contemporary practice that other shows cannot.

Shadow of style evidences a changing professional situation for artists. In the mid 1980s New Zealand witnessed what appeared to be the waning of its 'alternative' scene, as characterised by events like ANZART and FI. This was part of a world-wide trend that has been discussed and documented elsewhere.¹ What is important to our account is that it saw a move from the strategy of critique from without to the postmodernist model of intervention from within. Public galleries and the market also absorbed formerly alternative strategies into their programmes.

The artists in this exhibition work in the space left by 1980s postmodernism. They favour quotation, appropriation, simulation; the second order. In the '80s

these approaches were seen as critical, now for many artists they are stock-in-trade. They feel like a style. For the artists in this exhibition, such practice is second nature, no longer the imperative it once was. They ape '80s strategies but as only artists of the '90s can. Their work favours conceptual mobility; they both take advantage of and are sceptical of distinctions between high art and popular culture, art and fashion, style and content.



from the film **LA PASSION DE JEANNE D'ARC** 1927
Carl Dreyer

Style: (n) Antiq. An instrument made of metal, bone etc. having one end sharp pointed for incising letters on a wax tablet, and the other flat and broad for smoothing the tablet and erasing what is written.

The Shorter Oxford Dictionary

In art, 'style' can refer to the manners of individual artists. In this sense, styles are asserted as uniquely personal,

possessing qualities that can't be copied. Style has operated as a mark of authority, authenticity and value; a currency, a signature that can be banked on. Ironically, the standard features that define someone's style also make that style available for copying. What makes a style distinctive and recognisable also makes it replicable—a code.

In art, 'style' can also refer to general movements, the succession of 'isms' that contest, erase, and rewrite what went previously and mark what is newly fashionable and current.

Certainly styles go in and out of fashion, and not just in the art world. The clothing industry issues and reissues styles each season. Being stylish here means adopting an identity off the rack, buying into a group identity. But the codes of fashion also offer style options, the chance to be someone different every time you dress. In this latter sense, style only pretends to be you. It doesn't give you away. So style is a shield *and* a badge.

Postmodernism engaged with this idea, permitting artists to raid and adopt a huge plurality of styles, to weave in and out of identities. To shift. In turning its back on the modernist idea of style as authentic and advancing, postmodernism permitted a retrospective reconsideration of styles as such; it encouraged an archeology of style.

The artists in *Shadow of style* inherit the legacy of postmodernism, moving in the space between these competing and disparate notions of style. They excavate identity as an effect of style, a social construct. Somehow they are implicated in the identities they explore. Luise Fong, Anna Miles and Jude Rae for instance explore various constructions of female identity. Shane Cotton

and Peter Robinson deal with bicultural identity, relating forms from both Maori and Pakeha contexts. However the *extent* to which the artists are implicated in the particular identities they explore is uncertain. A question. That quality of distance is deliberate. The works have a fugitive relation to identity. They are elusive.

This elusiveness is overt in the work of Patrick Pound and Anna Miles. Pound is a 'tourist of images'. Images of travel appear throughout his work—ocean liners, maps, exotic sights. He tracks through a landscape of styles and identities, sampling them, as if he had no identity of his own, as if he were merely a screen for these odd fragments. Miles also samples images of diverse origin, reproducing them as decor. But whether her own taste is implicated remains debatable. Both artists revel in difference *and* flatten it out.

The artists in *Shadow of style* are very aware of the historical links between critical avant-gardism and the marketing of art as style. In their works criticalities are in force, but the works cannot be reduced to them. There is then something that exceeds the discursive, the political, the critical, in favour of the more suggestive, more ambivalent, more psychological. There is a desire to connect with something deeper through the outward forms that are style. Giovanni Intra's work for instance, parallels Greil Marcus's project in *Lipstick traces*.² Intra and Marcus both scrutinise subcultures distinct in place and time for the suggestion of a feeling, something unrecorded by history, transmitted outside of speech, across generations, across geographies. Similarly Ronnie van Hout's model photographs cross-reference languages

TRANCE 1992
Ronnie van Hout



of heroic masculinity as manifest in war fantasies and 'Supermarionation' with the nation's subconscious quest for identity. With Cotton there is again a grasping at an affinity between things distant, ostensibly foreign; between representations of the microscopic world and the cultural forms of the Maori. Something similar is happening in the work of Luise Fong. Though motivated by a very different agenda, Fong is nevertheless also searching for something within language that cannot be described by it, that resists its own forms. In their striving to reveal this, her works both resist language and allegorise that resistance.

As we similarly struggle for a way to say what we mean, as we gather work to intimate some community, and as we attempt to shadow something as fugitive as the moment, this escapes us too.

1. See for instance Mary Jane Jacob 'Art in the age of Reagan: 1980-1988' *A forest of signs: art in the crisis of representation* Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1989. pp15-20.

2. Greil Marcus *Lipstick traces* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MASS., 1989.

Growing cultures

William McAloon

A single cell divides, and divides again, setting in process a cycle of division and replication which will generate a human life... Looking at Shane Cotton's paintings one might almost hear the voice-over from some science documentary, as cameras get into impossible places and a strange new world is revealed to an engrossed (or grossed out) audience.

In his use of scientific images—the collection of cellular forms, botanical specimens and threads of chromosomes which populate the rich surfaces of his canvases and the grimy spaces of his rickety plywood constructions—Cotton would seem to belong to a tradition of artists who have appropriated science as subject matter, ranging from Wright of Derby to Len Lye. Whether for its use in depicting the Sublime or as material for mystical theories, their attraction to science can be seen to be founded in horror of and fascination for arts' Other.

Cotton's works, however, are precariously located in this discourse of Otherness. The fields of his paintings are unstable, shifting ambiguously through light and space. His constructions are jerry-built. What is depicted on these surfaces and supports has a hard time keeping its balance. In the paintings, images slide over slick passages of paint, only to trip up in a wilfully sludgy build-up of pigment. In his constructions, where Cotton resists the seductiveness of the painted skin, the hazards are greater. Cracks open in these precarious arrangements, seemingly banged together in random configurations. Opposites, of light and darkness, enlightenment and romanticism, have difficulty keeping their distance. Purity cannot be maintained. These are not laboratory conditions.

But in Cotton's depictions of scientific diagrams, in which forms are always being partially erased and re-done, the speculativeness of scientific inquiry is in fact evoked. Science, far from being monolithic, is instead '... a nexus of theories and hypotheses that are constantly being replaced by better ones, that is, ones which are deemed more accurate, clearer, explanatory of more...'¹

In order to be explanatory of more, Cotton continually introduces other forms into the fecund fields of his paintings. Other cultures spawn in the cracks of his constructions. Scientific drawings appear within generalised representations of *tukutuku* panels, for example, and the forms merge, each assuming an equal place in the work. In *Celestial nets* those aren't botanical drawings, but stylised images of *hinaki* (eel traps). In *Point*, the petri dish or glass slide is transformed into another vessel, a *waka*, and the genesis of life becomes a journey from darkness into light.

This journey is located in an ongoing mythic history. In Maori mythology this stretches back to the separation of Ranginui and Papatuanuku, from which creation emerged. The elongated *Lineage* indicates this, with its genealogical title and descriptions of layers of life stretching back to a single point of creation. But Cotton's creations aren't specifically Maori. A separation, a division, of light from darkness, of heaven from earth, of water from land, begins the Judeo-Christian story, and the splitting of a single cell initiates the popular history of evolution.

From this mix of genetic narratives Cotton forms hybrid creations. His works are products of a process

which is concerned to remove oppositions between art and science, science and myth, Maori and Pakeha. In botanical notation, the hybrid is identified by a multiplication sign between the names of its parents.² Born of various cultural parents, Cotton's paintings and constructions, themselves so different from each other, take on a multitude of characteristics, duplicating and multiplying like his cellular images. It is in the multiplicity of Shane Cotton's works that oppositions are broken down and difference proliferates.

1. Lynne Cooke 'Thinking models' *Tony Cragg Arts Council of Great Britain*, London, 1987. p57.

2. See George Hubbard and Robin Craw *Crosspollination exhibition supplement* Artspace, Auckland, 1991. np.

LINEAGE, 1992



STACK, 1991

‘Black is black is black is black ...’¹

Stephen Zepke

If the prolific self-evidence of this disco tautology is entirely appropriate to the euphoric nihilism of the 1970s, its repetitive and seemingly meaningless lyric hides a very relevant paradox. The universal form of Black (i.e. ‘Black is ...’) can only be explained in terms of its particulars (i.e. ...black, black, black’). But in finding itself in its particulars nothing is explained about what the universal ‘is’, and so the emptiness of the tautology. We must posit a particular exception (i.e. light), if we are to define the universal. Rather than the particular being an example of the universal, the universal as such, paradoxically but necessarily, contains its particular opposite within itself; not as its impossibility (as in the deconstructions of Jacques Derrida), but as its negative self-relation, in other words, in the possibility of its identity.²

Luise Fong’s ambiguous and beautiful black paintings show us the meaning of this paradox. They are black precisely in as much as they state their self-negation. In *Seclusion I* and *II* and *Speak III*, holes drilled through the paintings reveal white, or light (black’s contradiction), not in its positivity but only through black’s negation. Similarly, the resin that coats all the works adds to their blackness, but, in reflecting the gallery lights, it also negates the paintings’ black surfaces, making them white, bright, black things.

The contrast with Derrida is important, because here it is not the existence of blackness (or any binary opposed term) which is deconstructed and deemed impossible, but the term itself which contains its exception in its identity-with-itself. As Fong has noted, her work is: ‘not opposing

binary forces but / something other not understood / but felt within language / within existence.’³

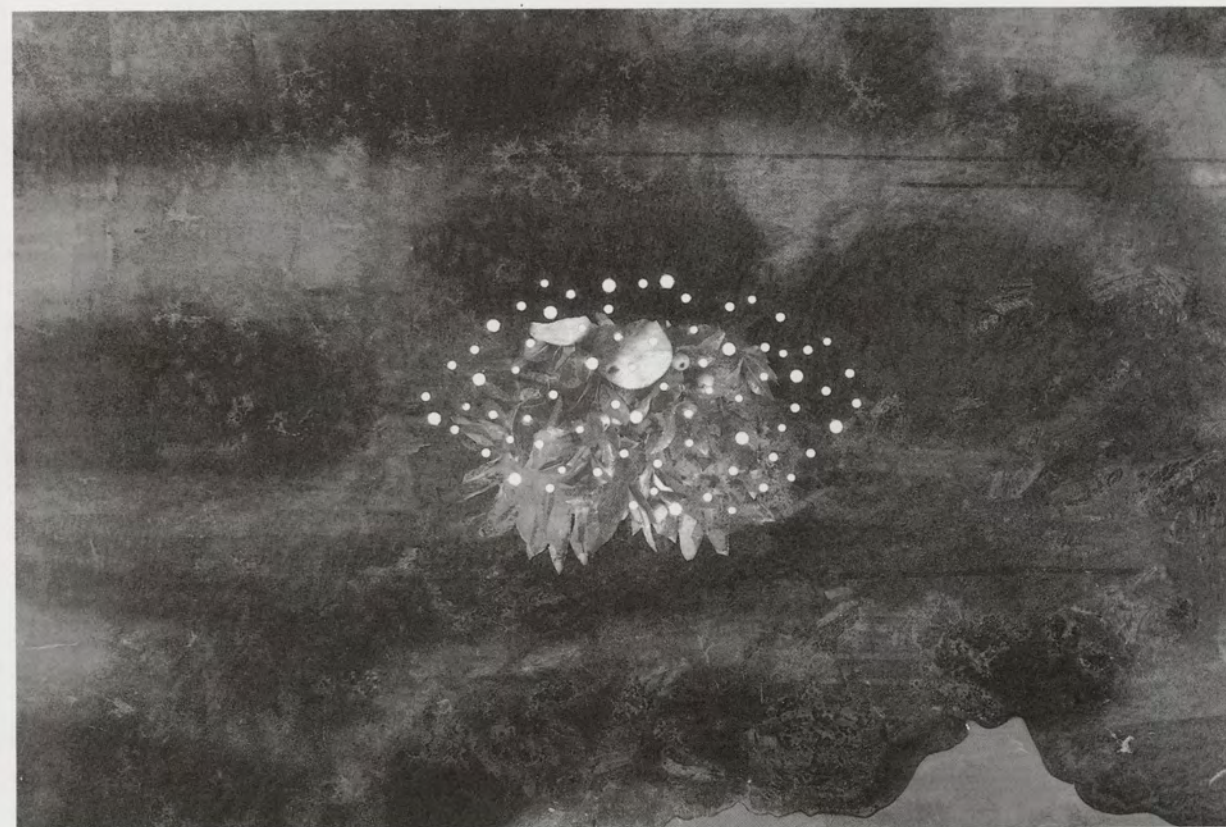
Black, as ‘night’, ‘evil’, ‘death’, etc. is light’s metaphorical and ideological negation. It is the deprived term in their binary opposition. So Fong’s black work also disrupts the ‘opposing binary forces’ from within, suggesting black is not simply white’s negation. If the other is always already within its opposite then a fluidity envelops the binary opposition, like the resin which runs both up and down one of the untitled works, or the movement back and forth between the two planes of *Speak III*.

Fong’s use of the roughly elliptical shape, with black, dates from at least 1989, her last year at art school. Since then she has associated them with the metaphors of the French feminist Luce Irigaray. ‘Woman’, Irigaray writes, ‘is a common noun for which no identity can be defined ... Lips of the same form—but of a form that is never simply defined—ripple outwards as they touch and send one another on a course that is never fixed into a single configuration.’⁴

Fong’s use of the el-lips-e similarly ripples, its concentric circles suggesting a target with a receding bulls-eye, aimed for but never hit—certainty’s despair. Indeed, it occurs to me now that these shapes are fuzzily phallic, floating spectres of phallocracy perhaps, ghostly cocks. But it is this indecision which would be ‘feminine’, and which would frustrate the masculine rationalist gaze and its specula(risa)tions. There is in these paintings always a shadow of doubt, they cast an uncertainty, a fascinating ambiguity which Fong’s notebooks suggest is

intentional. ‘They are’, Fong evocatively writes of her paintings, ‘inside the definition of themselves.’⁵ Always other than, always hiding, always revealed then, in their blackness.

1. Lyric from the disco song *Black is black* by Labelle Epoque.
2. See Slavoj Žižek *For they know not what they do: enjoyment as a political factor* Verso, London, 1991. pp31-54.
3. Luise Fong notebook entry dated 30 January 1992.
4. Luce Irigaray *Speculum of the Other Woman* Cornell University Press, New York, 1985. p230.
5. Luise Fong notebook entry dated 21 May 1992.



SECLUSION II, 1992

UNTITLED, 1991



Blood mobiles

Bridget Sutherland

I challenge any art lover to love a canvas as much as a fetishist loves a shoe.

Georges Bataille¹

The first, most obvious thing that Punk shares with Surrealism is a disregard for style, in the sense of what is considered socially and materially desirable. Nothing, from their dissident perspective, can be thought of as particularly tasteful. The punk boot kicks *back* and along city streets the waste and rubbish of the middle class, kicking it back through shop window displays, across the windscreens of Mercedes and Fords. Similarly, Surrealism presents us with artefacts of decay—the upturned, returned world of society's unconscious.

It is through this hectic pursuit of shadows, of darkness, that the signs which once designated Culture, this style or that, are revealed in their truly disfigured and fragmented state. Nature is dead. *Nature morte*. Surrealism reads the world as representation, as some kind of unconscious script. So too the 'art' objects found or invented within their haphazard universe have a kind of bent significance—in the realm of unconscious desire. That is, they are *uncanny*.

The uncanny object is the fetish. Freud calls it *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, meaning at once both homely and unhomely—familiar yet twisted, occult and frightening. The uncanniness sparked off by the notion of the double leads Freud to designate the mirror or, more, what one sees in it, as the diabolical fetish par excellence. This connection of the double to reflections, mirrors, shadows, to guardian angels and the like, translates in this context as a primal

fear of death. The dead-pan inscription etched across Intra's mirror, 'an excellent fetish', leaves us uncertain though as to the meanings of this—our reflected image in today's designer bedrooms.

Many cultures believe the spirits of the dead return in the form of shadows to haunt or possess the living. Surrealism, likewise, was obsessed with shadows, casting photography itself as a mirror giving access onto a shadow world of labyrinths and doubles. Surrealist photographers were bent on capturing these psychic conditions of loss, fragmentation and dispossession. Their images often depicted the body as literally fragmented: toes, tongues, arms, legs, hands, violently or unnaturally severed, dislocated or distortingly reproduced. The use of photographic techniques such as multiple exposure, negative printing and solarisation further emphasised the dark and fetishistic nature of this subject matter.

365 days, a photographic work by Giovanni Intra, engages the surreal in this way. A repetitious display of hands subtly disturbs the picture plane. This organ appears in a series of disfiguring photographic registers. The nature of the physical is again read in terms of death. Time and material decay become simply signs to manipulate and distort. The blatant display of the body as fragment in *365 days* is taken in another direction with Intra's latest work, *Blood mobile*. Referring to the work and body of artist Hans Bellmer, this ghoulish mobile could also belong in the attic of those popular TV freaks, the Addams family.

But what is the uncanny, the fetish, in today's market place? (Corporations are certainly magic.) The fetish is

stranger, more elusive than the terms commodity, art or style can accommodate. So where is this shadowy spirit world now—with corporate angels in their gold studded suits or celebrity hosts fitted out for the occasion on television quiz shows? The minefield of both Surrealist and Punk worlds within the work of Giovanni Intra suggests that it lies, in part at least, with Consumption; some crazed, religious form of consumption. Expenditure, consuming the lot, decay, rot, 'the use-value of the impossible'.² The true fetish is cultic, ritualised, uncanny. Its use-value does not imply profit, collateral or bankable assets, but a use that is sacrificial—a violent expenditure, an excess that once worn, simply wastes away. Depreciation.

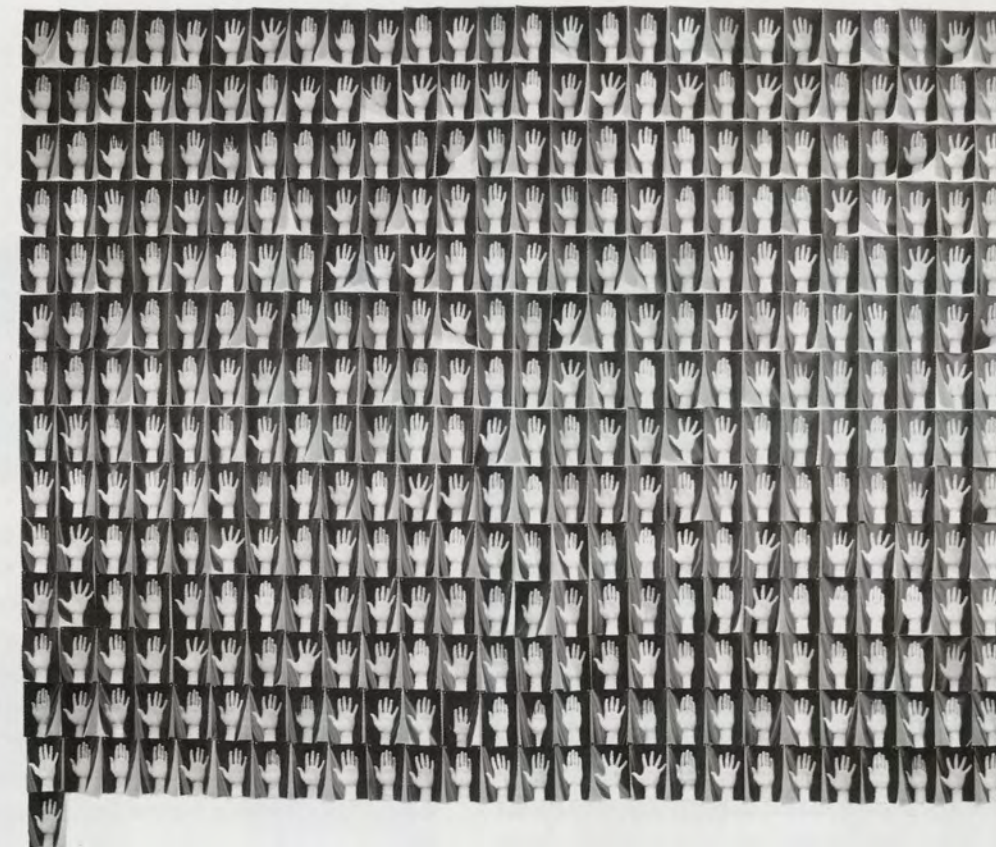
The work of Giovanni Intra deals with the religious in this sense only. His suited yet absent figure presides over some debased ritual—a science-fiction priest who wallows in the glamour of a low and aggressively vulgar materialism. Like a devilish performer, he conjures for us the breakdown of reality into dream, object into fetish.

Untitled, unnamed, the studded suit is somehow representative of everything we can't say about this culture and its style—our sense of unease as we sit before *Sale of the century*, secure life insurance, or watch hospital gothics on TV.

1. Georges Bataille 'L'esprit moderne et le jeu des transpositions' *Documents 8* 1930. pp490-91.

2. Denis Hollier 'The use-value of the impossible' *October 60* Spring 1992. pp3-24.

365 DAYS, 1991



NATURE MORTE, 1990 (DETAIL)



At home with Anna Miles

Ruth Watson

In the song *If I were a rich man*, the peasant dreams of a 'great, big house with rooms by the dozen', but with a staircase 'leading nowhere just for fun.' This is his ultimate proof of success, squandering resources for non-functional ends. It is even more the proof because the display of non-functionality is achieved through what should be functional. It is also a challenge to those who cannot afford a staircase. Anna Miles presents us with curtains that don't bother acting as screens, cushions which are far above being used to prop us up. We are asked if we are able to accept such displacements of function.

Discomforting for some, these cushions may support others, offering proof of conceptual flexibility. So form does follow function... Miles' work seems to come from the pages of an interior design magazine, and as such is a threat to the definition of what constitutes 'high art'. We are asked to accept fashion, taste, and acquisitional urges as intrinsic to the artistic economy. These worlds may not be as removed from each other as we would like to think. The word 'gallery' came from 'galleria', meaning the hallways of the castles where the aristocracy hung their armour, crests and art. Usually portraits or landscapes, that art functioned as a display of ownership. Perhaps Miles' work enacts a conspiracy of the owned, *objets d'art* pushing themselves into the gallery, or slyly parodying, even satisfying, a fetishistic investment in objects.

Miles' work foregrounds the politics of design. The seemingly benign world of taste is as subject to the structures of culture as any other field. We see tokens of elitism, once imbued with precious uniqueness (and now

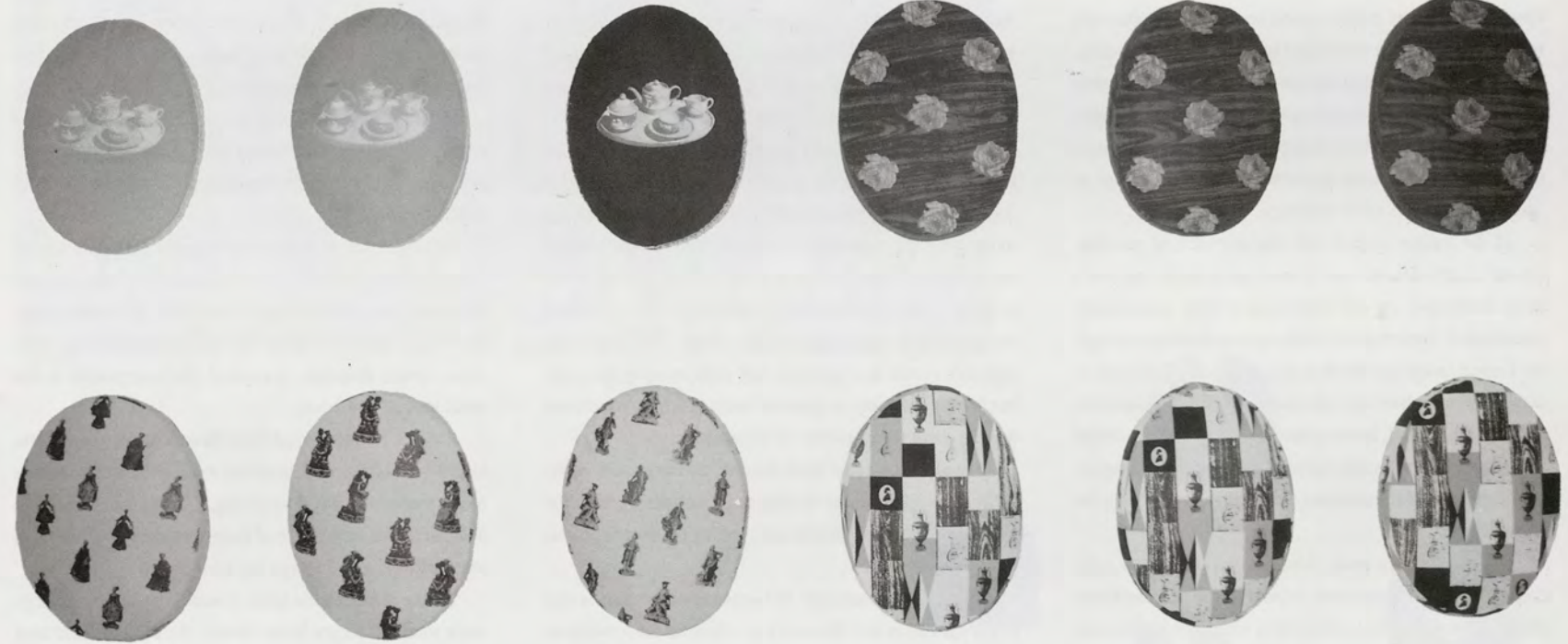
glorified by history), replicated for decorative effect: see the cushions *Nineteen horse studies* ('after' George Stubbs) and the *Three lemon figurines* (with Derby figurines re-enacting commentaries on coupling). Their 'debasement' seems humorous; in *Three curtains*, vases, lutes and silhouettes of the lord of the manor, now jostle among contemporary brick walls, blanks and wood grain which looks suspiciously like veneer.

As another veneer, cushions and curtains may add a touch of class to the artworld, eschewing the traditional rough or tough materials of installation art. Women are expected to exhibit decorum, and this is exactly what Miles does. Fashion, decoration, the interior (taken literally)—Miles gleefully embraces the world of feminine dilettantism that serious women artists supposedly should abandon if they are to be taken seriously, not dealing with these subjects precisely because they are too close to them.

Curtains are expected to frame, reveal and enclose action between realities. Miles' curtains demand that we find *them* more interesting than what may be beyond any window or frame. The roles have changed, the curtains take centre stage, and the spotlights shine on them. They reduce the light—with its powerful heritage of symbolic associations—to an adjunct, thereby denying it any resonance. The ties with nature are also severed, in preference to a reflection on the vainglorious worlds inside rooms.

Miles translates texts back and forth between worlds, ultimately qualifying all. Through devices such as multiplying the once unique, over-inflating to the scale of

history painting, or miniaturising, she insists that we re-examine images often accepted as part of a quiescent history, as if tamed by their function as designs. Like licking the back of the Queen's head on a stamp, Miles' work offers us the opportunity to muse on the power relations among seemingly innocent exchanges. We get to have the cake and eat it too.



TEASET CUSHIONS, 1991

ROSEWOOD CUSHIONS, 1991

THREE LEMON FIGURINES, 1991

THREE CUSHIONS, 1991

The opportunist

Ben Curnow

Patrick Pound has never owned an easel. He seemingly uses anything but the traditional supports of easel painting. Rather than beginning with canvases or boards, he paints on seats, books or existing images, whose prior associations add this special twist to the figure/ground distinction: here the grounds are already figured. Pound takes things as 'givens' and alters their currency.

If the gallery wall is still the province of painting, Pound's *Little deceits—art crimes* takes up the space of a large landscape, yet one that is paper-thin, ephemerally constructed. Superimposed with a deadpan portrait though, the format could also be that of a banknote. This work is composed by a drawing together of objects and materials across a horizontal, heterogeneous plane. But its vertical disposition imputes to the metonymy of lateral economies the metaphorical dimensions of painting, relativising the logic of each.

Painted on gym seats, *Seven days (Universal)* quite literally elevates horizontal objects to the perpendicular plane of the wall. The local (you're sitting on it) becomes universal, as it were, except that Universal happens to be the brand name on the gym seats. This work's title relates somewhat ironically to Colin McCahon's painting *Six days in Nelson and Canterbury* (1950), suggesting that both the regional and the universal in art are equally fictitious. The six days of Creation have become the seven days of a regular week. The stuffed convexity of the gym seat's vinyl surface, also, explicitly denies any notion of a pictorial space.

Pound's resistances to easel painting are essentially matters of preference and precedent. In contrast to the

theoretical causality of historically avant-garde practices, and the sense of a journey implicit in McCahon's linear sequence, his constellated arrangement of odd-shaped panels implies the randomness of choice.

In *Little deceits—art crimes*, the gridded landscape format is made up of pages from a book, *Notable Australians*. The format would usually represent a framing of the pictorial plane and its axes, oriented by the horizon line and the standing position of the viewer. But the sense of gravity and dimension provided by such subliminal architecture is suspended in this work. This flattening does not result in a hermetic self-referentiality however but in flux and play, a space of language, into which one dips to catch small pieces of information.

Pound perpetrates 'little deceits' on the *grands recits* of *Notable Australians* by flippantly tampering with the identities of famous people and creating his own fictitious micro-narratives.

The 'master narrative' of twentieth century art is one of transgression and discovery in which art underwent an era of expansion, progressively breaking through boundaries to discover previously uncoded realities. Generic sailing ship paintings in *A pilaster of ships* seem to stand for this heroic spirit of adventure which might once have belonged to art.

Pound's Dada-esque gesture of using pictures as readymades or supports bespeaks both a nostalgic affection for avant-garde modes and a wry scepticism as to the reality of their romance. The artist avoids the visionary, pioneering stereotype, and prefers to describe himself as 'a tourist of images.' Over scenes of sailing ships at sunset

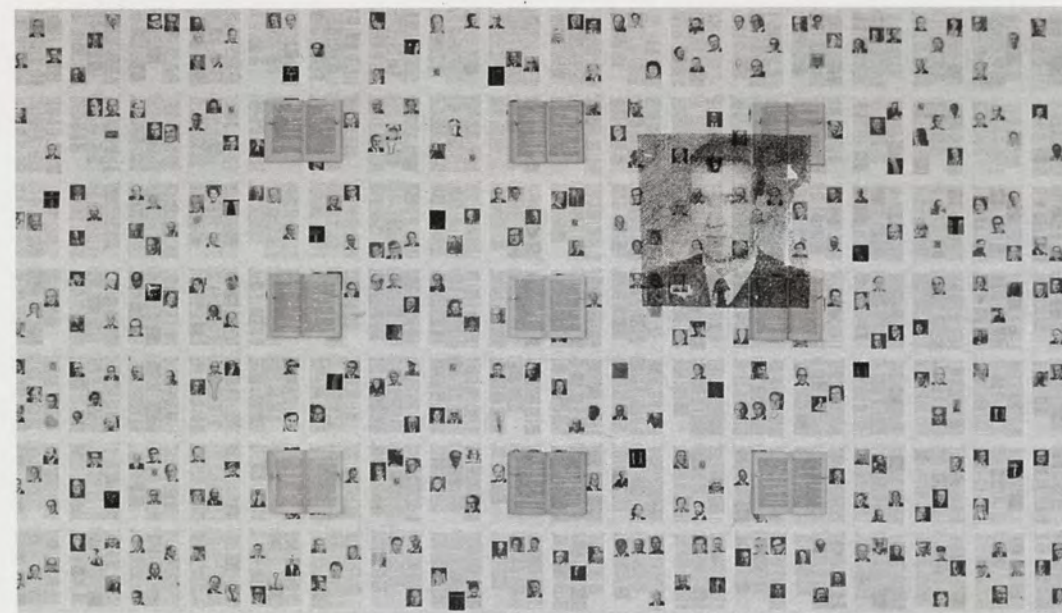
he paints imposing, silhouetted prows of modern-day commercial vessels which, facing each other, are like pairs of brackets on the scene.

Nailing nine art-crime novels open on a ground of non-fiction pages, the fantasy of real transgression (art-crime) is presented perversely by Pound in the form of trashy novels.

Modern art is inherently duplicitous. It hovers (suspiciously) between worthlessness and value, serious statement and joke, authentic and fake, art and non-art. This work however shifts across such boundaries with more casual abandon, irreverent like marginalia to the main text of art history.

Patrick Pound moved from New Zealand to Australia in 1989 (as I did), and his recent work reflects this change of environment. But if anything, I think, this relocation only increases ones sense of being at the ends of the earth and looking back through the telescope.

At the moment, the artist is working on another large work made of pages from a book: the colour-illustrated Sotheby's catalogue for a sale of Australian art. All the pages are laid out in sequence, ending in the lower right-hand corner with the bidding slip. That is where we expect to find the artist's signature.



LITTLE DECEITS—ART CRIMES, 1992

SEVEN DAYS
(UNIVERSAL), 1991



Corpus in absentia

Deborah Lawler-Dormer

In the realm of academic art the depiction of drapery has had a long and significant history. For centuries 'drapery' has been a means through which the master demonstrated his virtuosity, his ability to convey 'reality'. The capacity to both transmit the delicacy of the cloth and a body beneath its folds was a revealing exercise in expertise. Drapery often operated as a device which symbolically defined humans as 'other' than animals. Drapery as garment revealed the social persona in its many guises as sophisticated, courageous, intelligent, fashionable, religious, whorish, virginal or familial, amongst others. Drapery, therefore, may have been 'embellishment' to the final work, but it carried great import for the master.

Jude Rae's paintings contribute to the practice of the representation of drapery. Her nostalgic recollection of the academic tradition is furthered by her meticulous, labour-intensive and conservative style. Her display of technical skill recognises the traditional code and uses it. The resultant fabric-ation assumes sumptuous tones, as in the rich pinks and reds of *Surface I*. Rae displaces the body which conventionally lies beneath the drapery. For the moment it is not there—or is it?

Rae's work is a flirtation with an absent body—a body whose absence is almost palpable. A hint of seduction is carried in the suggestive folds of cloth. Flirtation and seduction are, historically, effective strategies women have used to gain power. Rae employs seduction, although when she glances in the direction of the desirable body she is faced with absence. An absence which denies a unified self and opens up into fragmentation. An absence which manifests a nostalgic yearning that inevitably transforms

into the yearning of desire—the yearning for completion and unity. This absence is in sympathy with French feminist Julia Kristeva's claim that a woman is 'something that cannot be represented, something that is not said, something above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies.'¹

A tension exists in Rae's work with the various visual juxtapositions formed when her square or rectangular unframed canvases are hung in serial or grid formation. In *Surface I*, the two black flanking panels are devoid of brushstrokes. The central panel, depicting drapery, on the other hand, visibly reveals the brushstrokes—the hand of the artist, the evidence of process. But the tension surpasses these juxtapositions; it is inscribed in the very nature of painting itself. Painting, particularly the learned academic technique Rae uses, is a structured pictorial code. Straining against this code is the sensual process of its production, that subverts the signs, symbols and objects it represents.

With her grids, Rae offers us manifold versions of elaborate, elegant folds of drapery and a blackness which empties out. Both become symbols which, with repeated viewing, build up a plurality of meanings. In so doing, an opportunity is provided for us to play with our imagination. Rae herself has described her paintings of cloth as evoking the various memories of the hem of her mother's skirt, the sheets of her parents' bed, veils, dust sheets, funerary shrouds, curtains, bandages, fragments of the Virgin's robes, the canvas, screens. The black space at times exists as silence, breath, absence, abyss, interlude or as a framing device focusing attention on a central canvas. 'Interpretation is infinite because meaning is made infinite

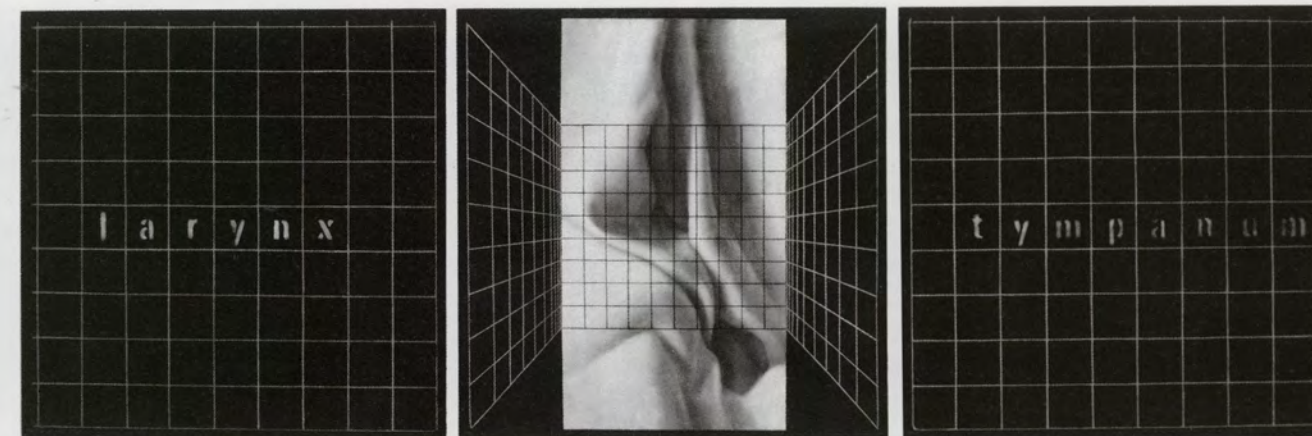
by desire.'²

Rae evokes our collective memory. Resonance. Through reflection a nostalgic relationship is established between us and the artwork. A conversation, with and within the artwork, emerges. It wanders into recollection, it breaks into silence, it solicits beauty, it plays with artifice, slowly it climaxes into a polyvalence of meaning.

1. Julia Kristeva, cited in Elizabeth Grosz *Sexual subversions: three feminists* Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1989, p98.

2. Julia Kristeva, cited in Toril Moi *Sexual/textual politics: feminist literary theory* Methuen, London, 1985, p156.

UNTITLED, 1991



SURFACE I, 1991



Sickness and health

Lara Strongman

Peter Robinson's work is concerned with situations of need. The weighty presence of his sculptures and paintings is belied by their description of a fragile state. These works hover on the brink of imagined catastrophe, as potent projections of change and loss and decay. There is a sense of danger apparent in Robinson's work, where grey and shadowy issues of the spirit are polarised into battles between forces of light and dark. Cultural oppositions are represented by themes of purity and pollution, expressed in mutually incompatible materials.

Peter Robinson is of European and Maori (Kai Tahu) descent. His work draws upon the history and resources of both cultures. Though his paintings abstract Maori symbols, and his sculptures reference the forms of Maori artefacts, both are constructed using predominantly European materials and techniques. The resulting hybrids move readily between the two cultures. Robinson's works are carriers, conduits for spiritual values which cross cultural boundaries.

Robinson has shown a persistent concern for environmental and ecological issues. Much of his sculpture from 1990 and 1991 refers to the destruction of the natural environment through interventions such as the strategic burning and felling of forests and the importation of pests. Robinson draws attention to the often oppositional relationship between people and their habitat, between culture and nature. Through these works Robinson ponders options for the treatment of a spiritual malaise, whose symptoms appear in the degradation of the natural environment.

There is thus a shamanistic impulse to be detected in Robinson's work, an atavistic drive towards ecological balance which is simultaneously spiritual and pragmatic. His works take on lives as talismans, enigmatic objects which lead an indeterminate existence between the artfully constructed and the naturally occurring. They become intercessors in battles of the spirit, amulets to ward off unspecified disease. There is a magnetic quality of simultaneous attraction and repulsion about Robinson's fetishistic objects; they appear at once to embody corruption and to function as a warning against it. Robinson frequently employs natural and artificial materials together; the former encased by the latter in arrangements which simultaneously suggest protection or suffocation, conservation or contamination—organic ash in an aluminium vessel, a large log wrapped in cured opossum skins, wood sealed in an armour of studded lead, fistulas of earth erupting through a polluted skin of tar. This fragile relationship between the organic and the inorganic, one of potential contagion, relates to the Maori notion of *tapu*, or forbiddenness, a spiritual belief system comparable with aspects of shamanism, similarly derived from the basis of practical survival through ecological health.

In recent works such as *Prophecy* and *Aitua*, Robinson has activated a repertoire of symbols abstracted from ancient Maori *tiki wananga* (godsticks) and *waka koiwi* (bone chests). These sacred objects functioned as repositories for the healthful containment of powerful spiritual forces. The experience of death, embodied symbolically in both, rendered comprehensible the idea of spirit. Robinson places these symbolic and ritualistic

forms into the context of another ritual, that of European art practice. Reinterpreting traditional Maori forms in metal rather than wood, Robinson further draws attention to cultural context, raising issues of colonisation and the intermingling of cultures.

By using the organic to represent spiritual values, Robinson urges a view of the land as a spiritual entity, an organism capable of various states of sickness and health. In Robinson's work, the land becomes a metaphor for the self, a shared body whose values are both physical and spiritual, susceptible to invasion by potentially destructive forces.



PROPHECY (TRIPTYCH), 1991-92

Stupid as a photographer

Stuart A. McKenzie

We get our word 'stupid' from the Latin 'stupidus', meaning senseless, confounded, amazed. It is commonly thought that to be amazed by everything is a form of grace. To be amazed by everything is to be caught up in the moment. Once upon a time people had to take religious instruction to live in the moment. Now it is hard not to. Now we live in a society of the moment. Information is instantaneous and determines the facts. Everything is up for view. We like to watch. We are amazed by anything.

Ronnie van Hout's art is both a comic rejoinder to such divine stupidity and its celebration. At art school in the early '80s he was doing big ugly paintings, spoofing the sloppy figuration of artists like Jean-Michel Basquiat. At the time, few people in Christchurch knew about the international artists van Hout was sending up. For this reason then, his work looked plain stupid instead of strategically stupid. The copy, as it were, preceded the original and confounded his audience.

In the society of the spectacle, the breakdown between copy and original pushes us to our wits' end: sorting out what is first rate from what is plain stupid. Van Hout keeps his wit about him. On leaving art school, he was doing paintings which reproduced the dot structure of over-reproduced media images. In 1988 he abandoned painting in favour of photography, the model medium in this age of simulation. But when it comes to simulation, van Hout's work is not the real thing. He simulates simulation. His paintings advertise the fact that they copy real copies. Likewise, his recent photos of kit-set models are blatant dummies.

If van Hout's works are not real copies, they must really be originals. But if they are the real thing, it is all too clearly the real world which he models on his models. In this way, van Hout the moralist highlights a world of model behaviour...

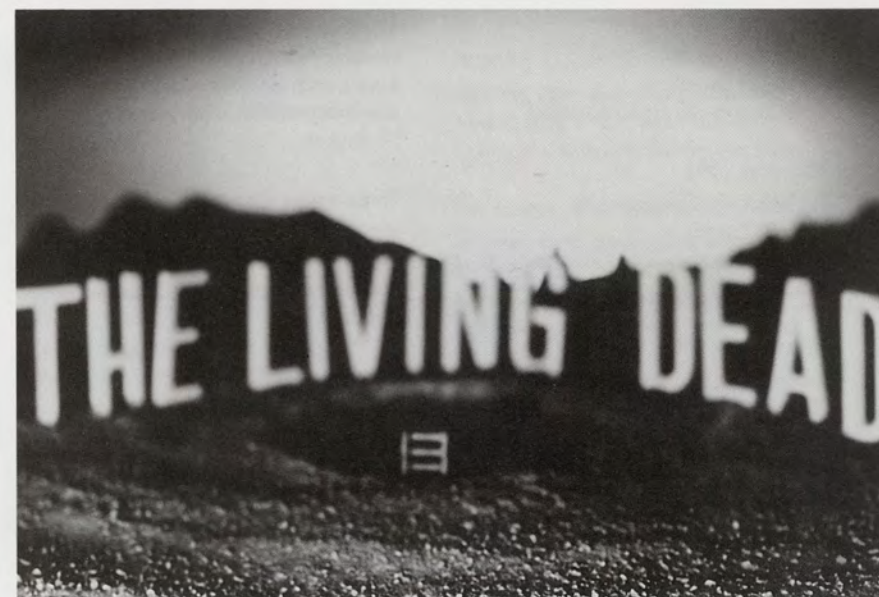
In the perfect world of Ronnie van Hout everything is perfectly stupid. For example, his photographic work *Untitled (Four days in Nelson and Canterbury)* mocks up McCahon's frequently reproduced painting *Six days in Nelson and Canterbury* (1950). According to the popular story, McCahon's amazing six day bicycling adventure transported him to paint the land in all its religious intensity. But van Hout's plasticine model is photographed in only four panels because he imagines the artist getting through the land more quickly using modern transportation.

Van Hout uses McCahon's spare landscape in several of the works in his photographic series *The living dead*. In *Dog and pig*, the two plastic friends are posed against a background of McCahonesque mountains. At first sight, it doesn't look as if much is happening, but van Hout has said that the two animals are having an amazing new adventure. Similarly, McCahon has said that something is always going on in his vacant landscapes, 'a constant flow of light.'

Van Hout shows us that something pretty amazing is going on in McCahon's simulations of the New Zealand landscape. What McCahon understood as a supernatural experience, van Hout simulates in terms of pop-horror and sci-fi. The photograph *The living dead* shows a black hole in the middle of a McCahonesque landscape. We imagine New Zealand's most reproduced artists

clambering up the ladder and out of the pit like zombies returning to their old haunting grounds. This stupid visitation is literally spelled out in *Dead artists I and II*, where the names Angus, McCahon, Lusk, Gopas, Weeks and Page are outstanding in the land.

Ronnie van Hout is witness to the constant flow of reproductions modelling reality for us. *Witness* characterises this amazing grace. As everybody knows, the word for 'witness' in Greek is 'martyr'. Van Hout shows that in our all too clever age of simulation martyrdom is on the cutting edge of art practice, a model of stupidity.



THE LIVING DEAD, 1992



"That was perfect," he said, in a totally satisfied voice.



I kneeled down next to him and stared at his penis.



the music on the radio got wilder and faster,

THAT WAS PERFECT, 1989

I KNEELED DOWN, 1989

THE MUSIC ON THE RADIO, 1989

SHANE COTTON

Celestial nets 1990
oil on canvas
2130x1620mm
Courtesy Gow Langsford Gallery,
Wellington

Stack 1991
oil on canvas
1830x1670mm
Courtesy Claybrook Gallery, Auckland

Lineage 1992
photocopies, colour photographs, pencil,
charcoal and oil on board
2500x165mm
Private Collection, Dunedin

Ora 1992
photocopies, colour photographs, pencil,
charcoal and oil on board
590x590mm
Courtesy Claybrook Gallery, Auckland

Point 1992
black and white photographs, wax and oil
on board
2405x290mm
Courtesy Gow Langsford Gallery,
Wellington

LUISE FONG

Untitled 1991
gouache and resin on card
1510x595mm
Courtesy Claybrook Gallery, Auckland

Untitled 1991
gouache and resin on card
1510x595mm
Courtesy Claybrook Gallery, Auckland

Seclusion I 1992
gouache, resin, lasercopy on paper on
board
595x900mm
Courtesy Brooker Gallery, Wellington

Seclusion II 1992
gouache, resin, lasercopy on paper on
board
595x900mm
Courtesy Brooker Gallery, Wellington

Speak III 1992
oil on canvas, oil and resin on board
3000x1850x900mm
Collection of the artist, Auckland

GIOVANNI INTRA

Nature morte 1990
mixed media on card, sandblasted glass, in
wooden frame
1600x1600x70mm
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery Collection,
New Plymouth

Untitled 1990
fabric, metal studs
1600x560mm approx
Collection of the artist, Auckland

365 days 1991
black and white photographs
2125x2575mm
Jim Barr and Mary Barr Collection,
Wellington

Blood mobile 1992
stained glass, metal, wire
3000x3000x3000mm approx
Courtesy Myfanwy Rees Gallery,
Auckland

ANNA MILES

Rosewood cushions 1991
screenprinted fabric with dacron filling
3 units, each 500x370x120mm
Courtesy Myfanwy Rees Gallery,
Auckland

Teaset cushions 1991
screenprinted fabric with dacron filling
3 units, each 500x370x120mm
Courtesy Myfanwy Rees Gallery,
Auckland

Three curtains 1991
screenprinted fabric
3000x3000mm
Jane Vesty and Brian Sweeney Collection,
Wellington

Three cushions 1991
screenprinted fabric with dacron filling
3 units, each 500x370x120mm
Jane Vesty and Brian Sweeney Collection,
Wellington

Three lemon figurines 1991
screenprinted fabric with dacron filling
3 units, each 500x370x120mm
Bud Shoop Foundation (NZ) Collection,
Auckland

Gentle reader 1992
screenprinted fabric
3000x2000mm
Collection of the artist, Auckland

PATRICK POUND

Seven days (Universal) 1991
oil on vinyl upholstered gym seats
7 units, each 300x300x90mm
Jim Barr and Mary Barr Collection,
Wellington

Pilaster of ships 1991
oil on framed reproductions
2620x435mm
Collection of the artist, Melbourne

The letter 1991
oil and collage on four photographs, one
painting and one reproduction
6 units, 2000x2500mm approx installed
Collection of the artist, Melbourne

Little deceits—art crimes 1992
oil and collage on book pages
1770x3040mm
Collection of the artist, Melbourne

JUDE RAE

Contract II 1991
oil on canvas
305x1135mm
Courtesy Jonathan Jensen Gallery,
Christchurch

Mnemosyne's mirror 1991
oil on linen
9 units, 1370x1370mm installed
The Canvas Collection Group,
Christchurch

Surface I 1991
oil on canvas
300x1230mm
Courtesy Claybrook Gallery, Auckland

Untitled 1991
oil on canvas
465x930mm
Courtesy Jonathan Jensen Gallery,
Christchurch

PETER ROBINSON

Prophesy (Triptych) 1991-92
wax, tar, earth and oilstick on canvas
3 units, 1830 x 4675 mm installed
Courtesy Claybrook Gallery, Auckland

The tongue of the false prophet 1992
tar, wax, earth, pasta, glass, wool,
fibreglass, polystyrene
4 units, 2660x3310x600mm installed
Collection of the artist, Christchurch

RONNIE VAN HOUT

He brushed against me 1989
colour photograph
500x760mm
Collection of the artist, Wellington

I kneeled down 1989
colour photograph
500x760mm
Collection of the artist, Wellington

I'm just about to print some pictures
1989
colour photograph
500x760mm
Collection of the artist, Wellington

One summer afternoon 1989
colour photograph
760x500mm
Collection of the artist, Wellington

That was perfect 1989
colour photograph
500x760mm
Collection of the artist, Wellington

The music on the radio 1989
colour photograph
500x760mm
Collection of the artist, Wellington

Dead artists I 1992
black and white photograph
335x500mm
Courtesy Gow Langsford Gallery,
Wellington

Dog and pig 1992
black and white photograph
335x500mm
Courtesy Gow Langsford Gallery,
Wellington

Man, tent and transmitter 1992
black and white photograph
335x500mm
Courtesy Gow Langsford Gallery,
Wellington

The living dead 1992
black and white photograph
290x425mm
Private Collection, Wellington

Trance 1992
black and white photograph
290x425mm
Courtesy Gow Langsford Gallery,
Wellington

Untitled (Four days in Nelson and
Canterbury) 1992
colour photographs
four units, each 295x455mm
Courtesy Gow Langsford Gallery,
Wellington

Witness 1992
black and white photograph
335x500mm
Stuart McKenzie and Miranda Harcourt
Collection, Wellington

all measurements: height by width by depth

SHANE COTTON

(Nga Puhī; born 1964, Lower Hutt) Shane Cotton is a painter. He graduated with a B.F.A. from Ilam School of Fine Arts (University of Canterbury) in 1988. In 1989 he won the Wilkins and Davies/Auckland Society of Arts Young Artist of the Year Award. He taught art part-time at Christ's College from 1989 till 1990 and then in 1991 trained as an art educator at Christchurch College of Education. He has exhibited in Christchurch and Wellington since 1990 and in 1992 in Auckland. He was included in *Kohia ko taikaka anake* (National Art Gallery, 1990) and *Recognitions*, an exhibition of six young Christchurch artists (McDougall Art Annex, 1991). He is represented by Brooke/Gifford Gallery (Christchurch), Gow Langsford Gallery (Wellington) and Claybrook Gallery (Auckland). He often exhibits with Peter Robinson.

LUISE FONG

(born 1964, Sandakan, Malaysia) Luise Fong is an Auckland-based painter. She graduated from Elam School of Fine Arts (University of Auckland) in 1989 with a B.F.A. She has been exhibiting in group exhibitions since 1985 and had her first solo show at The Fish Shop Gallery in 1989. That year she also received a QE II Arts Council of New Zealand new artist grant followed by a project grant in 1990. She was represented in *Speaking through the crack in the mirror* (Artspace, 1991), *Light sensitive* (Artspace, 1992) and *After dark* (Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 1992). In 1992 she was commissioned to do a project in the window of the Auckland City Art Gallery. Fong is a member of the board of Artspace in Auckland. She is represented by Brooker Gallery (Wellington) and Claybrook Gallery (Auckland).

GIOVANNI INTRA

(born 1968, Auckland) Giovanni Intra works in a variety of media. He is currently in the first year of a Masters degree in Sculpture at Elam. In 1991 he received a QEII Arts Council project grant and was an Auckland University Senior Scholar. He has been exhibiting since 1985, having had his first solo show in 1986 at Zoom Creative (Auckland). He also had a solo show, *Lifestyle morte*, at The Fish Shop Gallery in 1991. In 1991 and 1992 he worked as Public Relations Officer at the Wellington City Art Gallery. A regular contributor to *Stamp* magazine, he has also written for *Art New Zealand* and *Music in New Zealand*. He is represented by Myfanwy Rees Gallery (Auckland) and also shows with Brooker Gallery (Wellington).

ANNA MILES

(born 1969, Wellington) Anna Miles is a sculptor. She graduated from Elam in 1991 with a B.F.A. in printmaking. She was an Auckland University Senior Scholar in that year. She is currently completing a Masters degree in English at Auckland University. She has exhibited since 1989 and her work was seen in *Artists' screens* (The Fish Shop Gallery, 1991), *Home made home* (Wellington City Art Gallery, 1991), *Light sensitive* (Artspace, 1992) and *Vogue* (Canterbury Society of Arts, 1992). Miles writes on art for *Stamp* and *Landfall*. She recently wrote for Ruth Watson's *AEIOU* exhibition catalogue. She has also designed book covers for Auckland University Press. She is represented by Myfanwy Rees Gallery (Auckland).

PATRICK POUND

(born 1962, Hamilton) Patrick Pound is a painter and video-maker. He graduated from Elam in 1987 with a B.F.A. majoring in Intermedia and Art History. He received QEII Arts Council grants in 1987 (for painting and video), in 1988 (for video) and in 1990 (for painting). His work was included in the exhibition *Now see hear!* (Wellington City Art Gallery, 1990) and he also contributed an essay to the catalogue. Pound is also known for the limited edition catalogues he produces for his solo shows, such as *Fragments and fakes* (Southern Cross Gallery, 1989), *Rough sketches* (Sue Crockford Gallery, 1991) and *Little deceits—art crimes* (Michael Wardell Gallery, 1992). Since 1989 Patrick Pound has lived in Melbourne. He continues to exhibit in New Zealand as well as in Australia. He is represented by Sue Crockford Gallery (Auckland) and Michael Wardell Gallery (Melbourne).

JUDE RAE

(born 1956, Sydney, Australia) Jude Rae is a painter. She graduated from the University of Sydney with a B.A. (Fine Arts) in 1980, adding a Graduate Diploma in Professional Art Studies from the New South Wales Institute of Arts in 1984. She has exhibited in Australia since 1985. She was a founding member of the Ultimo Project (an artists' co-operative) in Sydney, and a board member of Artspace, Sydney. She moved to Christchurch in 1990 and has been exhibiting in New Zealand since then. Her work was included in *Speaking through the crack in the mirror* (Artspace, 1991). She is currently enrolled in the Masters programme at Ilam. Since 1991 Rae has been Director of South Island Art Projects and is also a member of the QEII Arts Council Visual Arts Professional Development/Artist in Residence Panel. She is represented by Jonathan Jensen Gallery (Christchurch) and Claybrook Gallery (Auckland).

PETER ROBINSON

(Kai Tahu; born 1966, Ashburton) Peter Robinson is a painter and sculptor. He has a B.F.A. in Sculpture from Ilam. In 1988 he won a Maori Education Foundation Award and an Irwin Allen Hunt Tertiary Scholarship. In 1990 he trained as an art educator at Christchurch College of Education and now teaches at Christ's College, Christchurch. He has exhibited in group exhibitions since 1989 and was included in *Kohia ko taikaka anake* (National Art Gallery, 1990) and *Recognitions* (McDougall Art Annex, 1991). He was a participant in *ARX 3 1992* in Perth. He is represented by Brooke/Gifford Gallery (Christchurch), Gow Langsford Gallery (Wellington) and Claybrook Gallery (Auckland). He frequently exhibits with Shane Cotton.

RONNIE VAN HOUT

(born 1962, Christchurch) Ronnie van Hout has worked in film and painting but has concentrated on photography over the past four years. He is currently experimenting with ceramics. He studied Film at Ilam from 1980 to 1982 and first showed his films publicly in 1981. A number of his 8mm films were included in *Good movies* (toured by the University Students Arts Council, 1984). He had his first solo show at Southern Cross Gallery (Wellington) in 1986. He received a QEII Arts Council new artist grant in 1986 and a project grant in 1989. This year van Hout published an artist's project in *Illusions* magazine and created the inaugural cover for *Midwest*. He is based in Wellington where he is represented by the Gow Langsford Gallery. He also shows with Gregory Flint Gallery (Auckland).

BEN CURNOW directs Deakin University Gallery, Geelong, Australia. His programme has combined exhibitions by emerging artists with projects by more well known Australian artists such as John Nixon and Peter Cripps.

DEBORAH LAWLER-DORMER is Curator/Project Manager at Wellington City Art Gallery. She curated *Speaking through the crack in the mirror* (Artspace, 1991) and *The sacred way* (Wellington City Art Gallery, 1992). She is currently co-curating an exhibition examining contemporary feminisms in New Zealand art.

WILLIAM McALOON is an art critic who writes reviews for *Christchurch Press* and *Dominion Sunday Times*. He has written frequently on young Christchurch artists. This year McAloon curated *Vogue*, an exhibition of new sculptors at the CSA Gallery.

STUART A. MCKENZIE is a Wellington-based art writer and filmmaker. His film *The mouth and the truth*, co-directed with Neil Pardington, won Best Short Film at the New Zealand Film Awards, 1992. He has recently completed a new film entitled *Ends meat*. He is currently working on a doctoral thesis in Religious Studies.

LARA STRONGMAN is Assistant Curator at Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch, where she is responsible for the contemporary art programme at the McDougall Art Annex. In 1991 she curated *Recognitions*, an exhibition of emerging Canterbury artists. The Annex is known for its active publishing programme.

BRIDGET SUTHERLAND is an Auckland-based art writer. She has written for various magazines and catalogues. She recently completed her Art History Masters thesis, *Art and the machine*. She also co-curated the exhibition *Light sensitive* (Artspace, 1992).

RUTH WATSON is an artist and art writer. Her work has recently been included in a number of exhibitions overseas, including *Pacific parallels* (San Diego Museum of Art, 1991) and *Headlands* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1992). She is the 1992 Olivia Spencer Bower Fellow.

STEPHEN ZEPKE is an Auckland-based art writer. He recently completed his Art History Masters thesis, *Colin McCahon and the writing of difference*. He was also the curator of "[...] exuberant, floating, dancing, mocking, childish and blissful art." Nietzsche *"The Gay Science"* (George Fraser Gallery, 1990) and co-curator of *Light sensitive* (Artspace, 1992).

This catalogue was published on the occasion of the exhibition *Shadow of style: eight new artists* at Wellington City Art Gallery (8 August - 4 October 1992) and at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery (17 October - 6 December 1992). *Shadow of style* was curated by Gregory Burke and Robert Leonard and jointly organised by Govett-Brewster Art Gallery and Wellington City Art Gallery.

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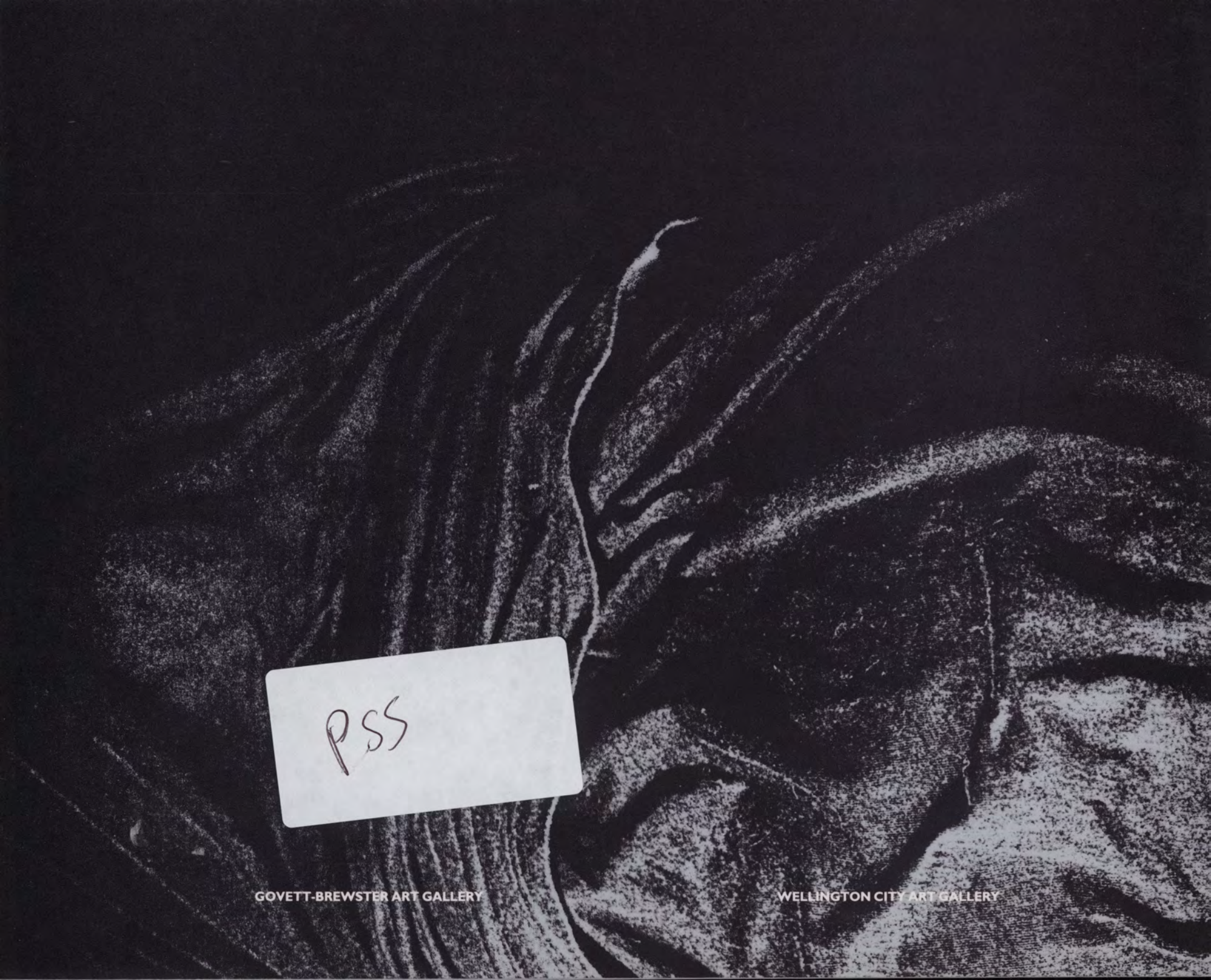
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CORRECTION: One of Jude Rae's works reproduced on page fifteen is incorrectly captioned. The work listed as *Surface I*, 1991 is *Contract II*, 1991.



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