

HE TOHU

THE NEW ZEALAND ROOM



Jacqueline Fraser

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He toi whakairo, he mana tāngata

Where there is artistic excellence,
there is human dignity

From 'Ka pu ta ruha, ka hao te rangatahi /
As the old net piles up on the shore, the new net goes fishing',
Piri Sciascia in *Te Maori: Maori art from New Zealand collections*,
ed Sidney Moko Mead, Auckland: Heinemann in association with
the American Federation of Arts, 1984, p 160



Charles Heaphy. *View of a part of the town of Wellington, looking towards the South East comprising about one third of the Water Frontage*, 1841. Lithograph, hand coloured. Courtesy Alexander Turnbull Library.
(The site of the City Gallery, Wellington/former library building is in the middle ground of this scene.)

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A commemorative project

Edited by
Gregory Burke

City Gallery, Wellington

Wellington City Council

FOREWORD

The relocation of the City Gallery, Wellington to the former Wellington Public Library is an inspirational new use for a fine old building.

The City Gallery, Wellington is proud to present the first major installation by Jacqueline Fraser following her return to New Zealand as 1992 Moët et Chandon Fellow in France. *He Tohu: the New Zealand Room* is the inaugural artist project chosen for the opening programme of the new gallery in its permanent premises.

The project, organised by managing curator Gregory Burke, reaffirms the gallery's commitment to artists' projects as a vital component of its programme.

The building will no doubt continue to be known as 'the old library' for some time — as is proper. Such public memory invests the occasion of this changeover with real emotion, transforming the moment into a living part of the city's history.

He Tohu celebrates that emotion and the sense of history it engenders. This publication both documents Jacqueline Fraser's project, and commemorates the moment at which 'the old library' becomes 'the new gallery'.

We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council through the commissioning scheme of its visual arts programme. We thank Saatchi and Saatchi, Wellington and Symmans, Saker, Elliott and Hickman for their innovative and imaginative marketing support and expertise.

We thank the writers who have contributed to this commemorative publication. Many readers will remember Jacque Baxter as the New Zealand Room librarian in the Public Library. Her essay provides the historical context in which Gregory Burke and Paul Walker, lecturer at the School of Architecture, Victoria University of Wellington, have considered Fraser's positioning of architecture, ornament and memory.

And we warmly thank the artist Jacqueline Fraser. Her installation has the delicacy of a memory fixed in history by emotion. This publication will extend that memory at the same time as it announces the commencement of a new life for 'the old library'.

Paula Savage
Director
City Gallery, Wellington

HE TOHU THE NEW ZEALAND ROOM

Gregory Burke

Both commemorative and celebratory, *He Tohu: the New Zealand Room* is a marker of change and renewal. Its occasion proclaims new beginnings for the City Gallery as it is re-launched in its long-awaited permanent home in Wellington's Civic Square. It plays a pivotal role in an opening exhibition programme that both acknowledges the gallery's evolution from its foundation in 1980 and signals its ambitions and exhibition policies for the future. In particular this exhibition project by Jacqueline Fraser has been designed to launch our Artists' Projects Programme. Through this programme we encourage the development of new and major works by artists, projects that explore and interpret salient issues in contemporary New Zealand art.

In launching the projects programme then; that is in looking forward, *He Tohu* also looks back. It honours the past use and history of the gallery's new building, familiar to Wellington residents as the former Wellington Public Library. From its opening in 1940, the library was a major contributor to cultural life in Wellington. Its association with visual art specifically goes back to the 1940s when it hosted a string of exhibitions by contemporary New Zealand artists. Later, its grass verge became the site for outdoor art exhibitions. In the 1980s this same area was the setting for a programme of temporary outdoor artworks initiated by the gallery.

He Tohu pays particular homage to the New Zealand

Warren Viscoe. *Molte Grazie Venezia*, 1989. Temporary installation on Wellington Public Library central lawn. Photo: Neil Price



Interior of Wellington Public Library, 1948. Photographer: Wilson. Courtesy National Publicity Studios collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, (Reference No. F32804½)



DC Pebbles at the Open Air Art Show, December 1956, on the rear lawn of the Wellington Public Library. Photo: GR Pebbles. Courtesy the Robert McDougall Art Gallery



Room. This room housed the New Zealand collection in the library and was symbolic of a post-war focus on national identity. Known to some as 'the quiet room' it was a place of solace for many, a place to learn 'things New Zealand'. This room has been transformed into the project space of the new gallery. It is against this history that Jacqueline Fraser has created a major new work. In recognition of this, Jacqui Baxter, the New Zealand Room librarian from 1970 to 1992, has written on the room exploring its connections to a changing New Zealand identity.



W.H. Oliver. *The Story of New Zealand*, 1960. Photo: Neil Price

Of course *He Tohu* principally profiles the artist Jacqueline Fraser. Fraser is an especially appropriate artist for this inaugural project. She has a background in producing installations that address the social and environmental features of the exhibition space. She also draws on her Maori cultural heritage to explore interaction between Maori and Pakeha aesthetic traditions. Most recently a year working in France and exhibiting in Europe has suggested new directions, and in particular decorative forms have been added to her distinctive vocabulary.

For this project Fraser has drawn on Maori mythology that outlines the formation of Wellington's harbour, a mythology that locates Wellington. She has also worked with her experience of the room — as it was and as it is now. But if this project starts with the local, with Wellington and the very place of the room, it also takes

a national reference from the room. In this way the project moves out and explores important issues of cultural interaction, nationally and internationally. The former New Zealand Room then is both the place and the metaphor for the project.



Explorations of self and its manifestation are fundamental to Jacqueline Fraser's practice as an artist. For her, self is an elusive attribute, a sense of shuttling between the inner person and the outer world. A sense, however, that self is defined by its relation to something affiliated to it. Her work then addresses self in relation to the body, ethnic heritage, gender, the physical, temporal and social environment, and mass culture. For her that form of sculpture known as installation has long been a particularly appropriate vehicle to address this interest in the description and declaration of self.

Fraser began working in installation while at university in the mid 1970s, a time when artists were challenging pre-conceived notions that painting should be limited to the frame, or sculpture to three-dimensional forms. However radical these developments were, they proceeded from a European art-historical tradition, a tradition that valued 'masterpieces' in painting and sculpture over the visual production associated with both women and non-European cultures.

In beginning to develop her own practice as an artist Fraser drew both on her knowledge of the principles of sculpture, and on her experience and knowledge of the artistic and decorative practices traditionally associated with women. Engaging with a spirit of experimentation Fraser felt free to propose alternatives to the sculptural traditions of moulding, shaping, casting or carving. For her

the acts of tying, knotting, threading, weaving or arranging were equally valid means to create sculptural forms and experiences. Her choice of materials also moved beyond solid and structural materials such as wood, metal or stone to include raw and processed fibres or decorative ephemera such as plastic tape or patterned cloth.

Fraser worked with these processes and materials, linking them to articulate and redefine given environmental spaces. While these installations alluded to the exclusion of typically feminine practices from the intellectual canon of art, they were not necessarily conceived as feminist statements. After all she wasn't repositioning handicraft as art, a strategy often employed by feminist artists in the 1970s. Rather Fraser worked with what was familiar to her, taking what she needed from a diverse range of materials and activities. By revising the boundaries of sculpture she developed a working method that reflected the personal and emotional resonances of material, form and space in relation to their constitution within diverse cultural situations.

Fabrics and fibres hung in space, plastic wire strung between corners, coloured ribbon knotted and woven: none of these devices were intended by Fraser to affect the status of sculpture, or to be stand-ins for solid form. Nor were they intended to be simply decorative or play a supplementary role. Their ultimate purpose was less the occupation of physical space and more its description and delineation. In not assuming the place of material or sculptural form they pointed to and addressed its absence. By their very nature these additions refused to block off space visually or confront the viewer as impervious mass. They highlighted their own material transparency and in so doing illicit more of a glance than a stare. The eye was encouraged to trace the delineations of the space, to explore connections, to move from one plane to another,



Jacqueline Fraser. *Maori Concert Party*, 1980. Temporary installation at Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington. Photographer unknown. Courtesy Research Library, Auckland City Art Gallery

to engage with presence and absence at the same time.

Her sculptural repertoire developed in tandem with her interest in making installations that explored mutability as much as permanence; that foregrounded a layering of meaning over single, fixed interpretations. She would begin, then as now, by attending to the metaphorical possibilities not only of what was established on a given site but what could be added. Her materials announced a use outside the realm of art. They were the materials of clothiers, decorators and homemakers, or industrial flotsam and jetsam. Inexpensive, they were usually bought

at emporia, cheap frippery not accorded value and thereby seriousness within society. Their arrangement spoke of fleeting moments of festivity. They were in effect, materials already stamped with meaning; a meaning that could be altered but not easily denied. In building up layers of reference in her installations, Fraser evoked multiple and interconnected histories. The effect was a sense of a floating dimensionality not grounded in one symbolic order.



The Maori dimension of her heritage has long been a reference point for Fraser. Her working methods echo the traditional activities of women on the marae. Fibres woven to create pattern recall the forms used in tukutuku panels, cloaks and kete; her distinctive strategies of hanging and arranging are reminiscent of the setting and

adornment of Maori dining halls for festive occasions. While her method remains allusive and in that sense open to a range of cultural interpretations, in recent years Fraser has more specifically indicated a Maori dimension in her work.

This can be seen in the installation *Te Wai Pounamu* created for the exhibition *Choice!* in 1990. The title refers to the middle island of New Zealand, place of her birth and home of her tribe. The patterns and motifs used such as the koru strung on the floor connote Maoriness. Their symmetrical incorporation within the installation suggest the ceremonial space of the whare whakairo. When commissioning Fraser, curator George Hubbard had said that *Choice!* was not a 'koru' show. By profiling Maori artists whose work was not branded with Maori symbolism he sought to challenge a view of Maori art as a

Otaki Hui. No date. Photo: Bill Hall Raine.
Courtesy Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa



Jacqueline Fraser. *Te Wai Pounamu*, 1990. Temporary installation, *Choice!*, Artspace, Auckland, 1990. Photographer unknown. Courtesy Artspace, Auckland

'preconstituted category based on Eurocentric notions of indigenism with Maoriness as a trademark'!

Fraser's decision to use Maori symbolism for this installation is indicative of her continuing refusal to work from one point of view. Even so, the 'Maoriness' of the installation remains lightly pinned. The forms have both particular and general meanings. They are transformed by context and move within an open system that incorporates meaning from a wider cultural field.

This unwillingness to categorise a Maori dimension has been defined by Francis Pound as a 'doubleness of voice'.² Fraser's work, however, never simply proceeds from one dimension to another but is consistently moving backwards, forwards and across the many connotations of masculine and feminine, Pakeha and Maori, historical and contemporary, ceremonial and everyday. She not only doubles but further redoubles her voice.

The work *The New Zealand Room* (*Sculpture II*: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1986) exemplifies this strategy. The English title denotes a conception of New Zealand defined by a colonial and Eurocentric history. Maoriness is signified within this conception as 'primitive'. The arrangement of forms in the work recalls the classification and display of artefacts in ethnographic and natural history museums. The forms however are not encased. They are

both object and frame. Reconstructed from within Fraser's own imaging system they use synthetic fibres and draw on Maori weaving systems to create form and pattern. They refer to but resist classification systems that naturalise and primitivise women and Maori. In this way Fraser repositions both the Maori and the feminine and in so doing repositions a conception of 'New Zealandness'.

Fraser's decision to explore beauty, decor and attractiveness, qualities associated with the feminine, should not be seen as resistant to the aims of feminism. Rather, connections between the feminine and the feminist are a core subject of her work. This focus is perhaps at odds with the dominant strategies of feminist artists in the 1980s who renounced such connections, fearful that any identification with the feminine risked perpetuating



Jacqueline Fraser. *The New Zealand Room*, 1986. Temporary installation, *Sculpture II*, Auckland City Art Gallery. Photographer unknown. Courtesy Auckland City Art Gallery

cultural fallacies of gender difference. These artists sought rather to elucidate and upturn the representational codes that construct gender divisions. A number of women artists have more recently challenged the restrictiveness of these strategies concerned that, by default, they strengthen perceptions of the feminine as a lesser cultural category. They seek to open up possibilities for exploring assignments of the feminine.

Reviewing a group exhibition by women, *Plastic fantastic lover*, Dan Cameron noted the use of 'seemingly luxurious materials (especially fabrics), bright colours and rampant figuration, appearing almost as an attempt to crowd out our recollection of a time when all art had to be black, white or red'.³ The artists in that exhibition join others in addressing the philosophical history of notions of beauty and aesthetics and their translation into domestic and commercial worlds. Their work speaks of a contemporary arbitrariness in distinctions made between the excess of surface and the solemnity of structure, between the commonplace and the sublime. If we now compare Fraser to these artists we are only catching up with where she has been for some time.

Dualities of ornament and structure have from the beginning pervaded Fraser's work. Her constructions suggest both the ornamental and the structural but strictly speaking are neither. That is, her use of materials may connote the ornamental but they delineate structure. But if these very delineations imply form they are skeletal and in effect enclose absence.

This analysis becomes complicated when we address the Maori references in Fraser's work. Her constructions have tended to allude more to Maori weaving practices, work traditionally done by women. This work has incorrectly been thought of as simply decorative. The continuity of the patterns of the tukutuku panels in the whare

whakairo certainly act as a counterpoint to the singular presence of the ancestral columns traditionally carved by men. If we can suggest that these carvings give figurative form to genealogical histories, histories that follow the linear and punctuated form of narrative, so might we suggest that the woven panels represent a non-linear interdigitative transmission of unembodied but enduring knowledge. It is such knowledge that Fraser works across.

It is significant then that in *He Tohu* Fraser has turned her hand to creating and rhythmically placing shapes that suggest ancestral figures. Fraser here more directly engages with narrative and figuration, traditionally the domain of men. But like the sense of the ghost house she weaves in the space, these figures lack substance. As with the house, they are formed out of processes and materials that carry their own meaning. Against the history of a reading room built on reclaimed land Fraser collates a number of pasts and brings them into the present. In reconfiguring them she reorders possibilities for their interpretation.

So how can we translate *He Tohu: the New Zealand Room*? We can't. Neither part of the title is a translation of the other. Its understanding relies on local knowledge of the interconnected and dynamic histories of two cultures.



Notes

1. George Hubbard and Robin Craw. 'Beyond kia ora: the par-aesthetics of choice'. Press release. Auckland: Artspace, 1990.
2. Francis Pound. 'Jacqueline Fraser and 'Maoriness'', in *Distance looks our way*. Exhibition catalogue. New Zealand: Trustees, *Distance looks our way*, 1992, p 51.
3. Dan Cameron, 'Don't look now', in *Frieze* 3. London: Durian Publications Ltd, 1992, p 6.

A KIND OF TIME CAPSULE

THE NEW ZEALAND ROOM IN CONTEXT

Jacquie Baxter

Between 1970 and the end of 1991 nearly half my waking hours were spent in the New Zealand Room of the Wellington Public Library. But 30 years before I became responsible for the maintenance and development of the New Zealand Collection, its foundations were being laid and the ground work was being done by others, most of whom I never knew. I pay tribute to those earlier librarians whose vision and professionalism created the collection and made my job easier than it might have been.

It is reasonable to assume that Joseph Norrie (City Librarian 1928-46) and his deputy, Stuart Perry (City Librarian 1946-73), were responsible for shelving the New Zealand books as a separate section in the Reference Room upstairs; for having it reclassified as the New Zealand Collection (a major cataloguing undertaking); for creating a new position, assistant in charge of the New Zealand Collection; for moving both collection and librarian into a room of their own; for formulation of a policy of acquisition (at book auctions and overseas) plus non-withdrawal of New Zealand stock; and for making the room and its contents readily accessible to the public. The whole project was spread over a decade, from its inception in 1940 to its completion in 1950. Norrie and Perry must have been also responsible for 'the policy of making the library a cultural as well as an informational centre for the community' (see the library's annual report 31.3.48), and for the library's displays between 1946 and 1950 of original works by New Zealand artists, most notably, Colin McCahon, Gordon Walters and Toss Woollaston.

New Zealand had two major and unrelated preoccupations in 1940: going to war with the rest of the world and celebrating its first centenary. The restructuring of its library was one of Wellington's centennial projects and the end result was a public 'informational centre' better housed, better equipped and more up to date than any other in the southern hemisphere. A clever combination of the two winning entries in a competition for the best plan, produced the design of the new building which was sited, for reasons known only to the town planners of the day, on reclaimed land well below what used to be high water mark in 1840. Its considerable grace and dignity, enhanced by a setting of smooth lawns and trim flower beds flanked by silver birch and golden elm, were derived from a European, rather than an indigenous style of architecture, and it made no attempt to integrate itself with a typically

**ARTISTS
EXHIBITED IN
WELLINGTON
PUBLIC LIBRARY
1946-50**

1946
JAMES COE
S G MacQUARRIE

1947
KATE KOPPEL
JOAN ALPERS
'BARC'
R H BRUCE
R R F JONES
SAM CAIRNCROSS
GUSTAV KOHN
C M PATERSON
STANLEY H EDWARDS
V PARKINSON
S H MAYNE
KEN HASSELL
A D FRASER
D H JUDE
E MERVYN TAYLOR
R CLARK
G McAUSLAN
SAM WILLIAMS

1948
R COWAN
F GERSON
R J WAGHORN
E M TAYLOR
C McCAHON
O LEE
W BRISTOW
G WOODS
S M BRUCE
SAM WILLIAMS
WELLINGTON ART
CLUB

Schoolboys moving books into the new Wellington Public Library building, 1948. Photographer unknown. Wellington Public Library collection



New Zealand landscape of harbour, hills and distant snow-capped peaks. It was as much an import as the cherished bric-a-brac the early pioneers lugged halfway around the world to help them make home away from Home. Its quiet reassurance was that of a confident coloniser.

The word Home (substitute Hawaiiki for Polynesians) has bothered New Zealanders, white or brown, since they arrived here. This preoccupation could be described as a chronic complaint peculiar to colonists, producing vague feelings of unease, of being out of step/place/joint with their environment. But, does feeling distanced, willy nilly, from Home, make us exiles? If so, can we be more than that? If not, what are we? By the 1930s, most of those asking these questions were only the grandchildren or great-grandchildren of colonists. They have never lived in Home, did not regard themselves as exiles and denied with some heat that they should. Some were already making artistic statements about who they were, where they were, what they wanted to do and they tried, with missionary zeal, to convert us to their convictions.

This was the scenario when war took the world by storm in 1939 and New Zealand was preparing for year of centennial celebrations. Curiously enough, both these events (if one can describe a world war as an event) furthered our search for a national identity. Already some European refugees had arrived, bringing with them a cultural heritage most of us had only read about. Although they could not tell us what we were, they certainly showed us, simply by being themselves, what we were not. Then from 1942 to 1944 hundreds of American servicemen were stationed here and touched the lives of many New Zealanders, especially the young women. It would be interesting to examine all the various



Interior of the Wellington Public Library, 1948. Photographer: Wilson. Courtesy National Publicity Studios collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, (Reference No. F33226½)

ways they affected us, but only one is relevant to this essay: they gave us hands-on experience of the complex synthetic culture of their vast multiracial nation. We found it more unlike ours than we had imagined and they were excitingly different from us. So, like the Europeans, they taught us in a negative way, a little more about ourselves.

While some of us were befriending newcomers, others were farewelling New Zealanders being drafted in droves and shipped overseas to fight other people's battles. Some of the rebellious generation ended up in Home and were startled to find their grandparents' nostalgia and sentiments were about something which still existed, and what is more, something they could relate to. But for most, Home remained the place they had left behind and to which they hoped to return: an old house in a paddock, a quarter-acre in suburbia, the main street of a small town on a Friday night, a mountain, a river, a surf-pounded beach. Those who made it back had no doubts about who they were (New Zealanders), where they belonged (New Zealand), what they wanted to do (get on with living).

In spite of the war, the Labour government led by Peter Fraser went ahead with its plan to introduce state patronage of the arts in New Zealand. By 1940, the County Library Service and School Publications were in business, all broadcasting was brought under state control, the Department of Internal Affairs prepared to launch the centennial publishing programme which produced 30 pictorial surveys entitled *Making New Zealand* and 12 substantial historical surveys were begun by commissioned authors. The National Film Unit was established in 1941, the National Library Service in 1945, the New Zealand Literary Fund in 1946 and the National Orchestra in 1947. All were state-funded. Also in

1949
N G WHITTY
M A SENCE-SALES
R H BRUCE
GWEI KNIGHT
A L TEADWELL
M TYEE
I COCKE
J RITSON
M T VOOLLASTON
H STEWART
W P DIXON
M FAIRQUHAR
GORDON WALTERS
ARTISTS WITH
SCHOOL
PUBLICATIONS

1950
O LEE
R JONES
IRENE ENGLISH
DOUGLAS McDIARMID
E R CUFF
M BARKE
PAMELA SEARELL
H MASON
D RAMAGE
N G WHITTY

REFERENCE
WELLINGTON PUBLIC
LIBRARY ANNUAL
REPORTS 1946-50

The legendary origin of the main channel was that it was forced by a taniwha (fabulous monster) named Ngake. Another local taniwha, named Whataitai, tried to force a passage via Evans and Lyall bays but failed, and then assumed the form of a bird and flew to the top of Mt Victoria.

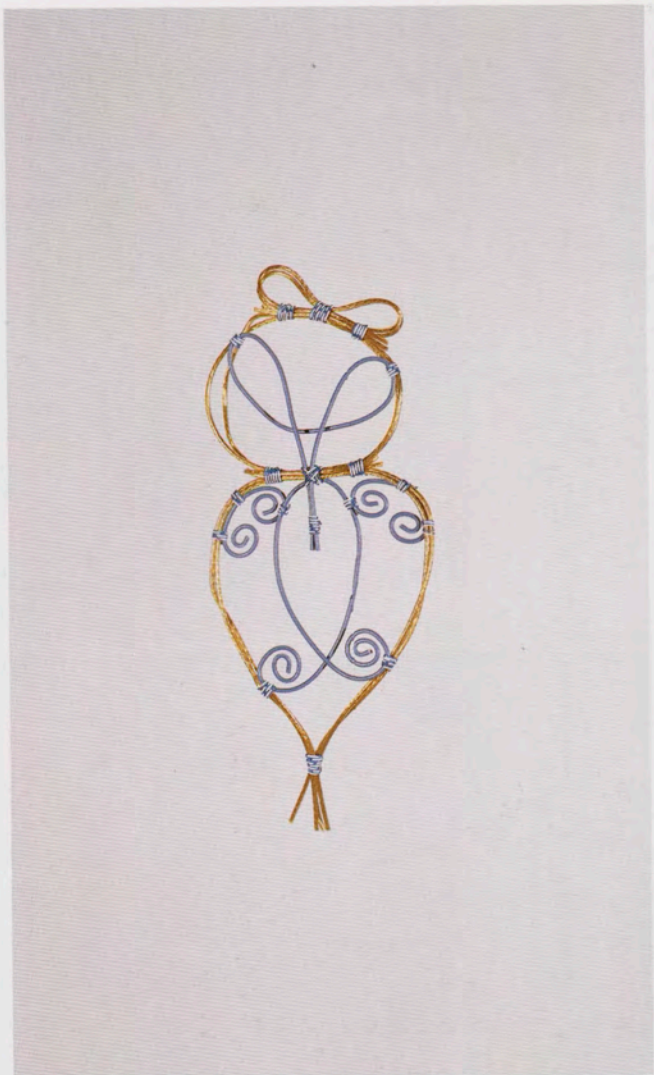
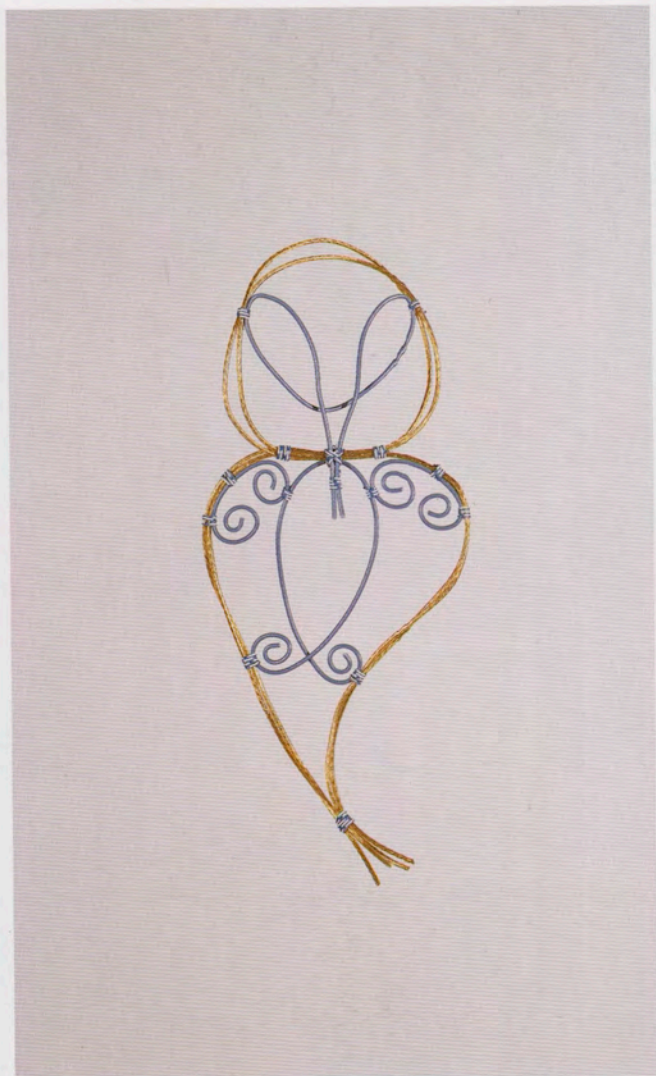
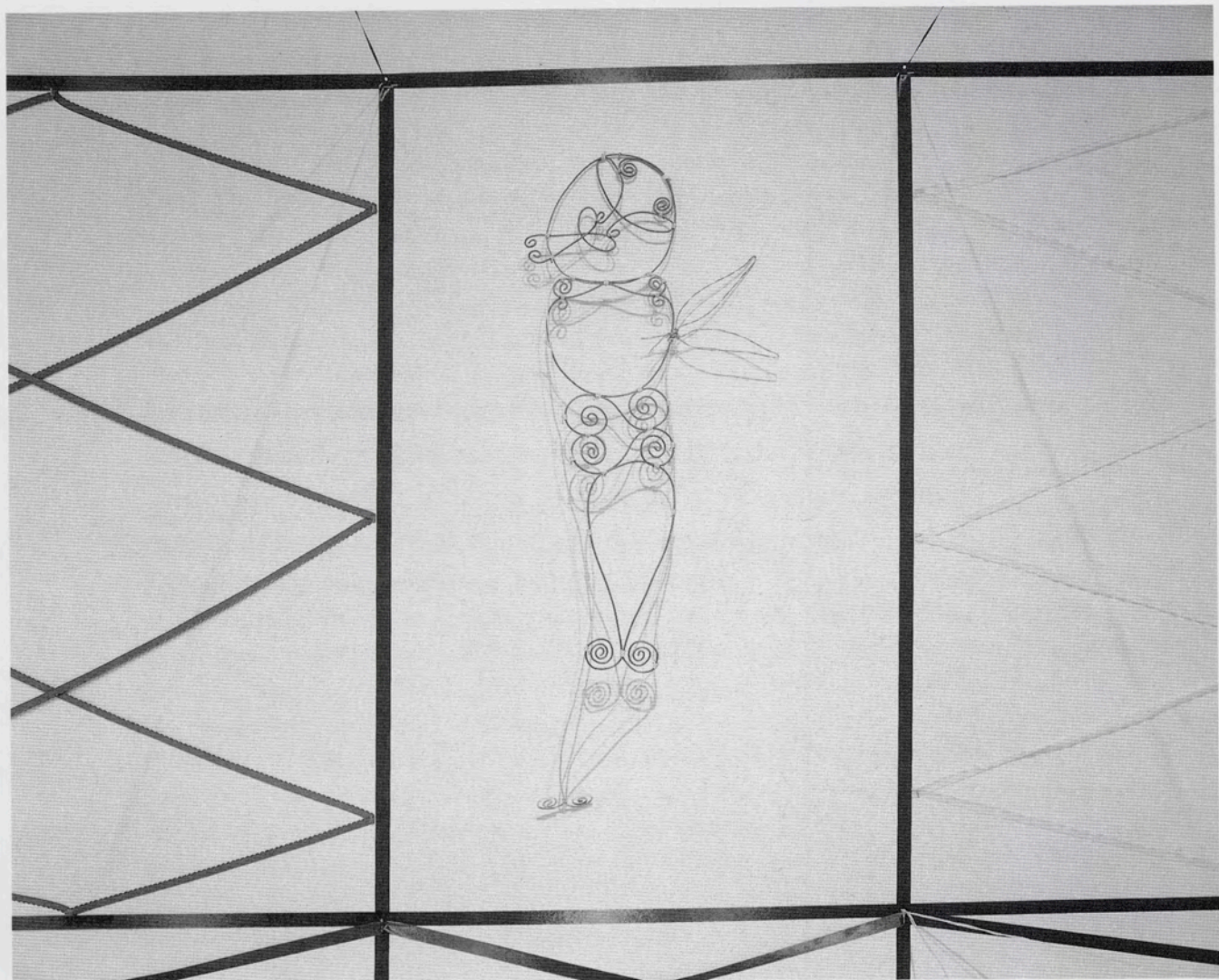
From *The Great Harbour of Tara: traditional Maori place-names and sites of Wellington harbour and environs*, a revision by G Leslie Adkin, Whitcombe and Tombs, Auckland, 1959

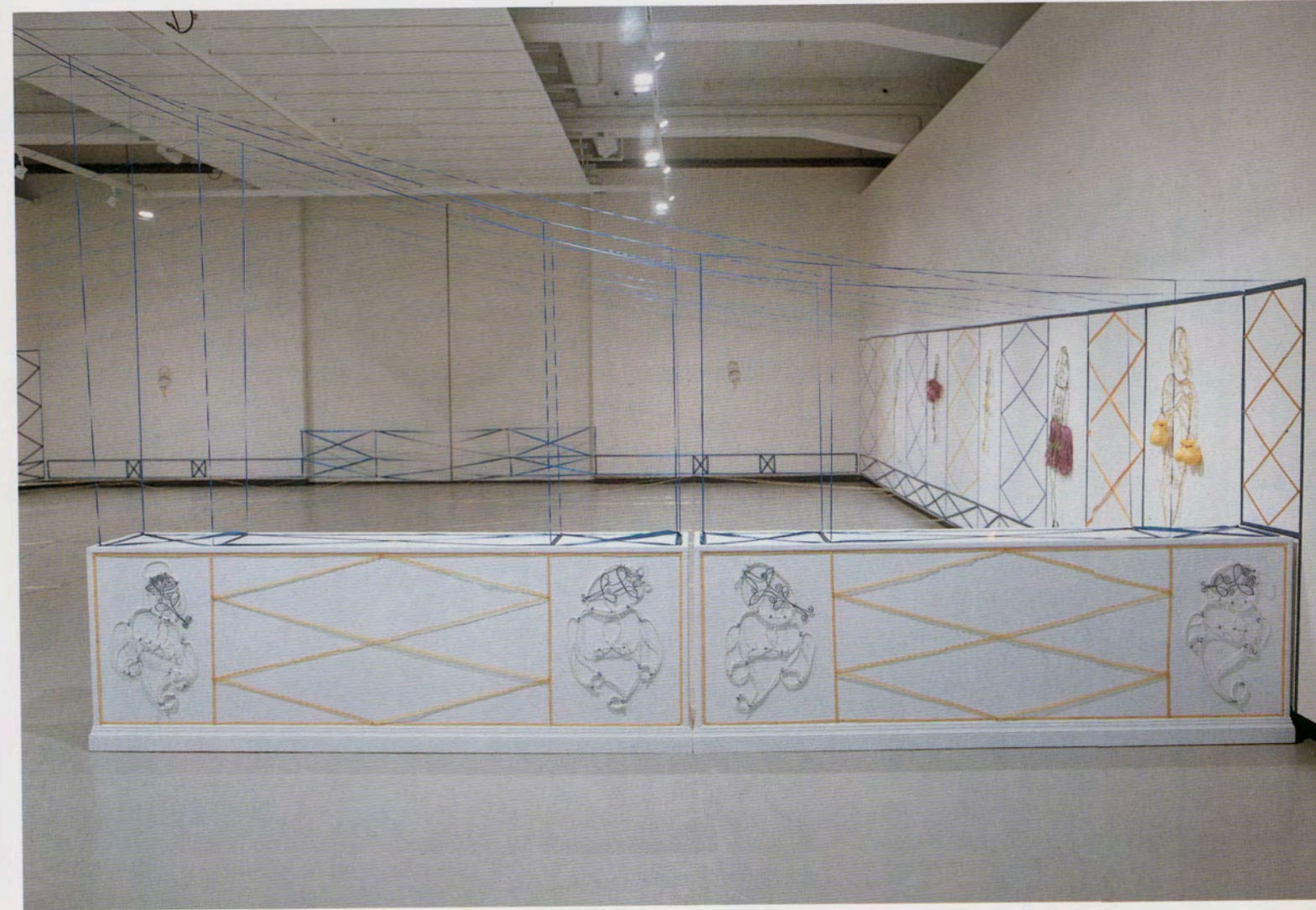
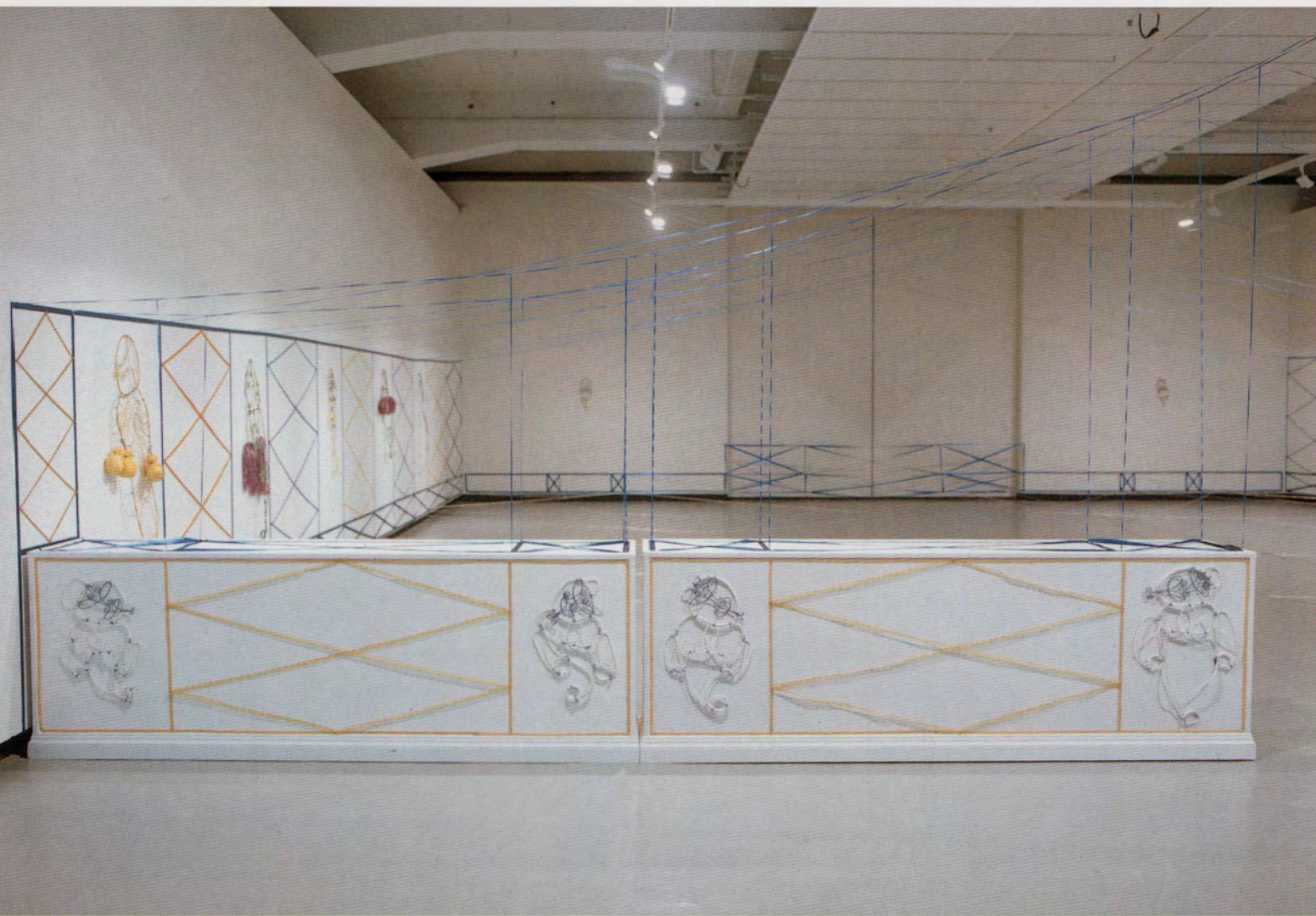
14 1947, the government established travel grants for performing artists to study overseas and the Literary Fund assisted Charles Brasch to launch *Landfall*.

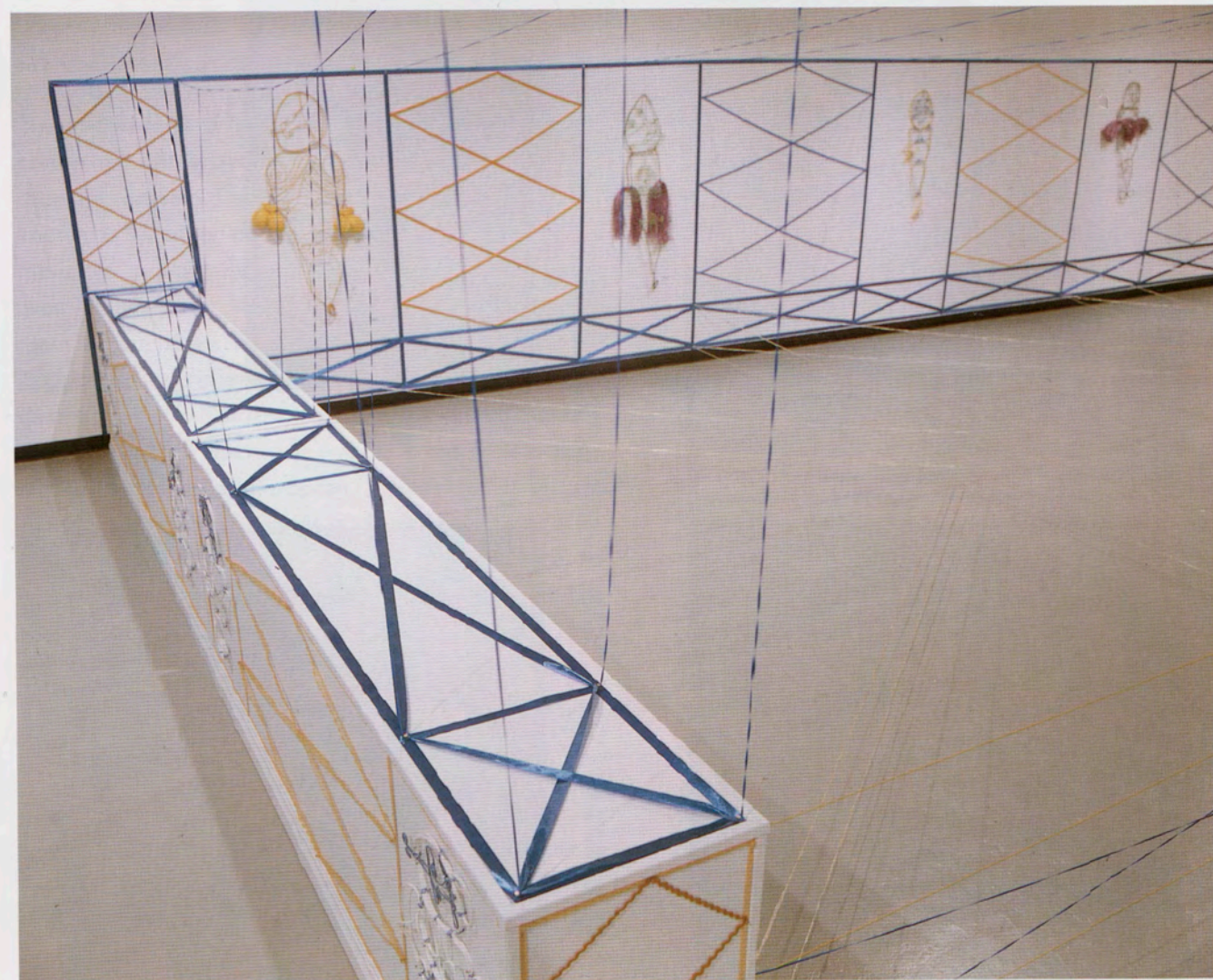
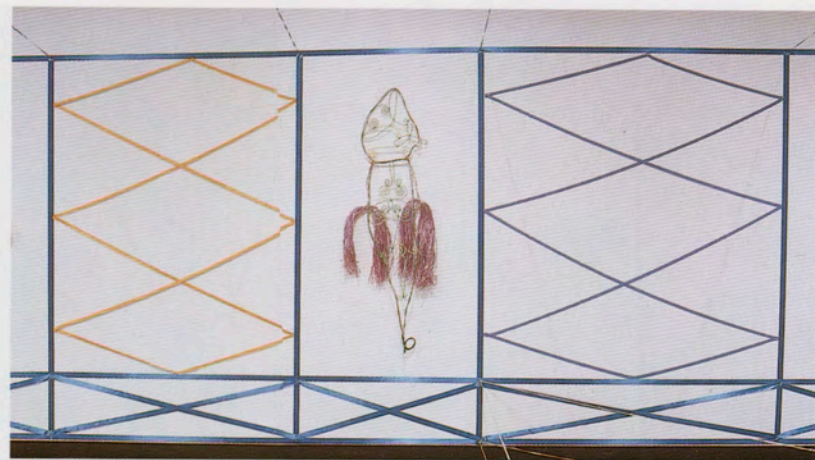
By the time peace was declared in 1945 the scene was set for what has been described as 'a period of cultural change'. This is a gross understatement. Take a quick look back 50 years (which is all this article can do) and what actually took place looks more like a frenzy of creativity to make up lost time in the killing years and to demonstrate we, the survivors, were very much alive. Artists and crafts people, working in groups or splendid isolation, accepting or rejecting government assistance, were extending themselves in new directions and dimensions, not as home-sick exiles or self-conscious colonials, but as New Zealanders intent on coming to terms with their environment and rooting themselves in it through their work. They were striving to discover or create a national cultural identity and the works they produced were statements about the nature of this identity as much as statements about themselves. Many of them have become part of our cultural heritage.

Meanwhile, the New Zealand Room librarian was having a busy time acquiring, storing and making easily accessible all these works or their reproductions, in accordance with the library's special policy for the New Zealand Collection. And there were others: the plans of The Group in Auckland and the Architectural Centre in Wellington; McCahon's landscapes and the early efforts of the film unit; what came out of the kilns of Len Castle, Barry Brickell, Helen Mason and the small presses of Glover and Lowry; the ex-cathedra pronouncements of Curnow, Horeft and Brasch; the insights of Sargeson and Frame; the visions of Fairburn, Glover and Baxter; the sounds of history and the sea in Lilburn's head; and what Theo Schoon and Eric Shwimmer were trying to tell us about Maori art and society. The New Zealand Room became a kind of time capsule in which all this information was stored, and its outer shell of European architecture emphasised, rather than detracted from, its importance.

In November 1991 the library moved to a new, bigger and architecturally very different building, and was given a Maori name, *Te Matapihi ki te Ao Nui*, meaning, the window on the wide world. This reflects the current emphasis on biculturalism and also certain radical changes in our cultural attitudes and development. We have moved on from an adolescent introspective insularity toward a mature appraisal of how we relate to the rest of the world, and for those artists, like Jacqueline Fraser, who wish to explore such relationships through their work, the New Zealand Room could be their point of departure or return. And what more fitting function for the old room, or better *raison d'être*?









JACQUELINE FRASER AND THE ADORNMENT OF ARCHITECTURE

Paul Walker

The installations of Jacqueline Fraser have always been concerned with architecture, with the settings in which they are located. This concern of the work is as well known as its other characteristics. It was clear in the Moët et Chandon pieces fabricated in Auckland last year, even in their titles *Wide room for an empress* and *Tall room for an empress*. It is clearer still in *He Tohu: the New Zealand Room*, referring as it does to the forms and decorations of the whare whakairo, the carved meeting house. In fact in this work two different architectural traditions, Maori and European, are engaged at once.

More than being about architecture, Fraser's installations have come, in their delineation of space, to approximate to the condition of architecture. But while they make space, they lack tectonic substance. They are not architectural structures. Her work has instead the quality of architecture's other, of architectural ornament.

In the Maori tradition, structure and ornament once could not have been separated. Ornament was not applied to the structure of the meeting house as Fraser's poupou figures are applied to the walls of the gallery. Rather, the structural elements — posts and rafters — were themselves heavily carved. But the introduction of western technology (milled timber) saw the introduction also of a de facto distinction between structure and ornament.¹ This distinction is an old one in the European tradition. It is central to the treatise *On the art of building* by the fifteenth century Italian

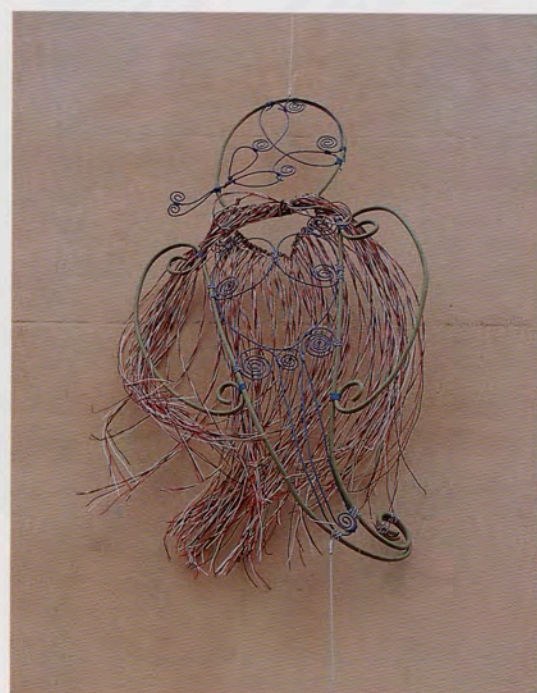


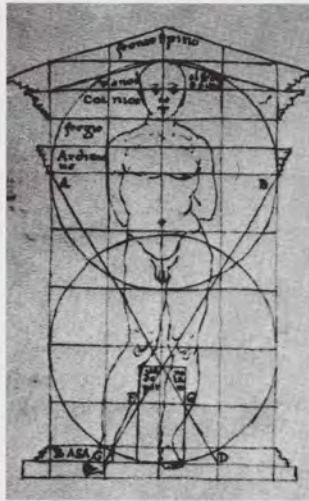
JW Giles (after) George French Angas (1822-86). *Maketu House, Otawhao Pa, built by Puatia to commemorate the taking of Maketu, 1844*. Hand-coloured lithograph. Courtesy Research Library, Auckland City Art Gallery



Tokanga-nui-a-noho meeting house, Te Kuiti, 1969. Photo: CA Schollum. Mead collection. Courtesy University of Auckland Anthropology Department Photography Archive

polymath Alberti. Alberti differentiates the condition of the beautiful from that of ornament. Beauty is a positive value which belongs to architecture's fundamental conditions, its disposition of forms and structure.





Francesco di Giorgio Martini.
Proportioning scheme of the facade
of a temple with a longitudinal
plan, from Diana I Agrest,
*Architecture from within:
theoretical framings for a
theoretical practice*, Cambridge,
Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991

'of something attached or additional'. It is that which is added, as *He Tohu* is added to the old New Zealand Room. And as the body of architecture traditionally has been male, the addition of the ornament has been seen traditionally as feminine. Further, it has been seen as potentially corrupt(ing).³

The best known denunciation of ornament in this regard was that of the early modernist architect Adolf Loos, who, in his polemical essay 'Ornament and crime' of 1908, linked ornament to immaturity, degeneracy, immorality and barbarism.⁴ Referring both to Loos and to the identification of ornament with woman, Jennifer Bloomer — a contemporary American writer, and one of the new generation of architectural theorists, writes that 'the feminine is a metaphor for many forms of alterity [otherness] to the dominant'.⁵ And so might

'Beauty is that reasoned harmony of all the parts within a body, so that nothing may be added, taken away or altered but for the worse.'² The body of the building has been regarded theoretically as a male body. Western architectural theory has until recently told the story of architecture's origins as the accommodation of man's body both physically and psychically.

Nothing may be added to beauty but for the worse. But ornament has precisely the character, wrote Alberti,

ornament be. In the ornamental quality of Fraser's work, various assigned conditions of otherness coalesce: Maori versus Pakeha, the feminine versus the masculine, ephemerality versus the permanent material nature of 'proper' sculpture. Woven together, these senses of excluded otherness positively shimmer.

Unlike Loos, Alberti did not reject ornament. He described it as delightful: in the hierarchy of building tasks that the Renaissance architect confronted, corresponding to a hierarchy of values, the most important buildings (temples) were to be resplendently embellished.⁶ On the one hand ornament is a delight to be enjoyed; on the other it is something added to the already complete body of the building which it can only diminish.

Bloomer has suggested that ornament can be seen here as a *supplement*, to use literary theorist Jacques Derrida's term, 'an entity that is added to another entity, which is both in excess of that to which it is added, that is, excessive, and which by nature of being added points to, by supplying, a lack in the original entity'.⁷ The ornament then, is like the frame around the painting; something which is not an integral part of but not simply external to it. The frame mediates between the artwork proper and that which is not art. This could be extended to the art museum or gallery itself.⁸ The gallery is also a frame, a mediator, a condition which underwrites the distinction between art and not art; that which it may contain (and in containing endorses) and that which it will not.

The problem with supplements is that they can, through failing to maintain a degree of self-effacement, appropriate privilege which is not their own. They can usurp our attention. The gilded frame may appear more beautiful than the painting it surrounds. The ornament

may appear more beautiful than the building it embellishes. The architecture of the art gallery may distract attention from the artworks it accommodates. This circumstance becomes particularly acute with Jacqueline Fraser's *He Tohu: the New Zealand Room*. For as *He Tohu* approximates to the decorative condition of architectural ornament, it should be a supplement to the architecture of the gallery; but at the same time, recognising the status of Fraser's intervention as art, the gallery should be nothing but a supplement to it. By its particular architectural references and strategies, Fraser's work in fact calls attention to the problematical relationship between art in general and its setting. This has obviously concerned the designers of the new City Gallery, Wellington, and the institution's curatorial staff. The alterations that have been made to the old library building to make it a gallery have mostly constituted a stripping back. But gutted, the building has not been



The old New Zealand Room in the City Gallery, Wellington
under construction, 1993. Photo: Neil Price

simplified, reduced to blank walls and bland lighting. The rhythm of the beams across the gallery ceilings and the engaged columns that support them are attractive now as they never were before, as are the patterns of light

from the obscured windows below. The new white screens installed in front of columns and windows alike to provide surfaces against which art works can be mounted are perfectly plain but have a superficial, additional nature that could be read as ornament. Simplicity, then, becomes the supplement which has been added to a building whose fundamental condition is ornamental. The distinction between structure and ornament, and primary and secondary architectural conditions, begins to slip away.

Such slips and reversals have recently been considered in architectural theory. Some of architecture's oldest myths have recently been rewritten. Architectural theorist Beatriz Colomina, for instance, retells the story of the Cretan labyrinth. The builder of the labyrinth, Daedalos, is usually described as the first architect. But to give him this title is a mistake, holds Colomina, for he did not understand the structure he had built. Rather, it is Ariadne who should be assigned the founding role, for in supplying Theseus with the red thread that enabled him to find his way out of the maze she devised an interpretative strategy for the building, a representation of it.⁹ This is what architecture is. Architecture is building captured for discourse. And in Ariadne's red thread, architectural criticism, architectural theory, even architectural drawing (the thread traces a line as effectively as does a pencil or a stylus), and architectural ornament, can be collapsed into a single trope.

The story of Ariadne is thematically connected to that of Philomena (another Greek legend recounted recently in architectural circles, by architectural writer Anne Bergren).¹⁰ Philomena, raped and with her tongue cut out to keep her from telling, wove a robe that told

the story she no longer could. Like the Maori, the Greeks saw weaving as women's contribution to culture. It need hardly be said that textile arts and crafts have continued to be seen as 'woman's work'.

The haberdashery and other manufactured articles that Fraser uses, red or any other colours she settles on, have a kinship with Ariadne's thread and Philomena's weaving and with the making of tukutuku, cloaks and poi, and with more common domestic skills. But the sense of the stuff Fraser uses being *ad hoc*, at hand, is itself important; an undoing of the material pretensions not only of sculpture (it need not be made of stone or wood or metal) but also of architecture.

Bearing in mind this textile theme, a last myth I will recall here is the story of the origins of architecture and all the 'technical arts' as told by the nineteenth century architectural scholar Gottfried Semper. A major influence was the 1851 Great Exhibition in London. There among the manufactures of many nations he saw a hut from Trinidad, in which the construction displayed four technologies that he hypothesised to be fundamental to architecture: carpentry, masonry, ceramics (associated with the hearth), and textiles. The walls of the hut were woven. Semper was to develop this connection of textile and architecture in this thesis of 'dressing'. Building begins with textiles not so much in their sheltering capacity as tents or wicker fences, but in what Semper called the,

festive apparatus, the improvised scaffolding with all the special splendour and frills that indicate more precisely the occasion for festivity and enhance the glorification of the day — covered with decorations, draped with carpets, dressed with boughs and flowers, adorned with festoons and garlands, fluttering banners and tapestries — this is the motive of the permanent monument . . .¹¹

It is not incidental to recall here that at the London Exhibition in 1851 Semper admired, amongst other things, 'Maori plaited decorations applied to tools, ships, and houses . . .'¹²

There is a strong sense in which Fraser's work can be read as adornment, a dressing of the spaces in which it is installed. This is no simple matter. Concerned with a sense of place in her work (starting from what is architecturally established, addressing her ancestors before the process of the work's construction) the motifs in her work have nevertheless become various, their provenance both local and foreign. Consider her interest in specifically European architectural and emblematic traditions, the French fleur-de-lis for example,

and her intent to import them in some degree in to the old New Zealand Room. A lily perhaps (a marian symbol) in its origins, the fleur-de-lis could also derive from the anthemion, a decorative device of classical architecture often said to be a representation of the honeysuckle but in fact its origins are unclear. The fleur-de-lis has a long history in France, but it is also a symbol of Florence¹³ where Catherine de Medici reputedly imported many of the customs we now think of as belonging to the French. In France the fleur-de-lis has been mainly a heraldic motif, but it was sometimes arranged with



MG Bindesboll. Antefix found at the Acropolis, 1836, from *Architectural design: neoclassical architecture in Copenhagen and Athens*, Vol 52, No 3/4, 1987, eds L. Ballev Jorgensen and Demetri Porphyrios, London: Academy Group, 1987

acanthus leaves in the capitals of columns that were occasionally designed in an effort to make a French classical order to rival the doric, ionic and corinthian. It found an architectural role earlier, also, in French Gothic, and later in the florid excess of art nouveau, a decorative style typically thought of as a Parisian one. Culture everywhere is imported. And so is ours. It, too, is negotiated and renegotiated, woven and rewoven.

Jacqueline Fraser's *He Tohu: the New Zealand Room* can be understood as such a rewoven. The transformations that Fraser causes in the spaces in which she makes art are not simply mechanical, however. They are, rather, metaphysical: transformations not only from building to architecture but also from the inert to the animated, the world of things to the world of values. Gottfried Semper — who found in weaving a basic poesis which the architect should cultivate — wrote in this regard 'whatever I adorn, be it living or inanimate, a part or a whole, I endow with the right to exist by making it the focus of relations that are valid for it alone. I elevate it to the rank of a person.'¹⁴ Michael Linzey has said that it is such a personification of the whare whakairo that distinguishes it from European architecture, that makes it a being that can be directly addressed.¹⁵

I have tried to suggest in this article that in *He Tohu: the New Zealand Room* Fraser can also be seen, however, to engage with a European division between structure and ornament, one which was imported into New Zealand only last century. Two traditions are woven together here, then, and if we accept the artist's invitation to complicity in *He Tohu*, and suspend our disbelief, we will be rewarded with a sense of pleasure in an ephemeral state of grace which our art and architecture very rarely achieve.

Notes

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3. Naomi Schor, *Reading in detail: aesthetics and the feminine*, New York: Methuen, 1987, p 45: cited in Bloomer, op cit.
4. Adolf Loos, 'Ornament and crime', Programmes and manifestos on 20th century architecture, Ulrich Conrads ed, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1971, pp 19-24.
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7. Jennifer Bloomer, op cit.
8. Jacques Derrida, *The truth in painting*, trans Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, p 11.
9. Beatriz Colomina, 'On architecture, production and reproduction' in *Architecture production*, Beatriz Colomina ed, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988, p 7.
10. Anne Bergren, 'Architecture gender philosophy' in *Strategies in architecture thinking*, John Whiteman, Jeffery Kipnis, and Richard Burdett eds, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992, p 16; Jennifer Bloomer, 'D'OR', *Sexuality and space*, Beatriz Colomina ed, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992, p 166.
11. Gottfried Semper *The four elements of architecture and other writings*, trans Harry Francis Mallgrave and Wolfgang Herrmann, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p 41-42.
12. Gottfried Semper, *ibid*, p 256.
13. Philippa Lewis and Gillian Darley, *Dictionary of ornament*, London: MacMillan, 1986, pp 132-133.
14. Gottfried Semper, op cit, p 256.
15. Michael Linzey, op cit, p 49.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS AND INSTALLATIONS

28

1978

Lunar eclipse, Bosshard Gallery, Dunedin

1979

Hovering balcony, Otago Art Society, Dunedin

Market Reserve is sprung, outdoor installation, Market Reserve, Dunedin

Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington

1980

National Art Gallery, Wellington

Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington

1981

Outdoor installation, Otago University Library, Dunedin

Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington

1982

22/4, Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington

Yard sculpture, Domino's restaurant, Auckland

1984

Taku poi poi, Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington

1985

Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington

Taranaki, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

Willow, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland

Untitled 1980, National Art Gallery, Wellington

1986

Kauri, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland

Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington

Waikato, Centre for Contemporary Art, Hamilton

1987

Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington

Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland

1988

Mainzeal foyer installation, Shortland 2 building, Auckland

Nana's birthday, Centre for Contemporary Art, Hamilton

Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington

Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland

Taranaki and recent sculpture, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

Whariki, Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton

1989

Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington

Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland

1990

Star of the sea, Hawke's Bay Museum, Napier

Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland

1991

Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington

Tall room for an Empress, Aotea Centre, Auckland

Three garden sculptures, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland

Two towers installation for Fay Richwhite, Fay Richwhite building foyer, Auckland

Wide room for an Empress, Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland

1992

E rua ngaa taniwha/Les deux genies, Cadran solaire, Chapelle de l'Hotel Dieux, Troyes, France

1993

Deux petits couronnes/Two little crowns, Moët et Chandon commission, Epernay, France

Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington

Whariki, Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1977

Young contemporaries, Auckland City Art Gallery

1978

Seventh Mildura sculpture triennial, Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura, Australia

New Zealand sculptors at Mildura, Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand. New Zealand tour

1979

Flight fancies, Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North

Sculptural propositions, National Art Gallery, Wellington

Third Biennale of Sydney, outdoor installation, King's Cross, Sydney, Australia

1980

Aramoana — New Zealand artists against the smelter, Wellington City Art Gallery; Wellington and Hocken Library, Dunedin

Rank Xerox group exhibition, National Mutual Arcade, Dunedin

1981

ANZART, 'The ginko tree', outdoor installation, Christchurch

Group show, Ilam Gallery, Christchurch

Phoenix Palm Park, outdoor installation, Mount Eden, Auckland

3 sculptors, 'Fern', National Art Gallery, Wellington (with Christine Hellyar and Pauline Rhodes)

1982

Hansells sculpture exhibition, 'The sparkling wand', outdoor installation, Wairarapa Arts Centre, Masterton

1983

FI New Zealand sculpture project, 'Breaker Bay', warehouse, Tory Street

1984

Art in Dunedin, 'Omeka', Erewhon, Dunedin

1985

ANZART, Alexandra Tavern courtyard, Auckland

Six New Zealand artists: Australian perspecta '85, Mori Gallery, Sydney, Australia

Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland

1986

Aspects of recent New Zealand art: sculpture 2, 'The New Zealand room', Auckland City Art Gallery

Auckland sculptors, 'Western Springs withy', Fisher Gallery, Pakuranga Arts Society, Manukau City

Content/context, Shed II, National Art Gallery, Wellington

Maori art today, Auckland Institute and Museum, Auckland

Maori art today, 'Motoitoti', Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin

1987

Drawing analogies: recent dimensions in New Zealand drawing, 'Ngati Poneke', Wellington City Art Gallery, Wellington

1988

NZXI, Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Museum of Contemporary Art, Brisbane

1990

Choice!, 'Te wai pounamu', Artspace, Auckland

Kei konei inaianei/here and now, 'Two towers', The Bath House Museum of Art and History, Rotorua

Partners in the Treaty, Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North

Te koanga (Maori arts festival), Wellesley window, Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland

1991

Cross currents, Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton

Swirled ground, Artspace, Auckland (with Christine Hellyar and Pauline Rhodes)

Te ao me te po, children's exhibition, National Art Gallery and Museum, Wellington

Wanganui fibre symposium, 'Chiffon', Wanganui

1992

Distance looks our way: 19 artists from New Zealand, 'Ko Aoraki te maunga', Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui; Expo '92, Seville, Spain; Conde Duque, Madrid, Spain; Stelling Gallery, Leiden, the Netherlands

1993

Prospect '93, 'Tane Mahuta', Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt, Germany

Pumanawa: contemporary Maori weaving and art, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland

29

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Jacqueline Fraser (Ngai Tahu, Kati Mamoe) was born in Dunedin in 1956. She studied sculpture at Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, graduating in 1977. Fraser has exhibited in New Zealand since 1977 and internationally since 1978. She received grants from the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council in 1987, 1990 and 1993. In 1992 Fraser was awarded the Moët et Chandon New Zealand Arts Foundation Fellowship. In 1993 she also travelled to Germany to install her work in the international art exhibition *Prospect*, at the Frankfurter Kunstverein. *He Tohu: the New Zealand Room* is Fraser's first major installation since returning to New Zealand after her fellowship year in France. Jacqueline Fraser lives in Auckland with her two children.

Jacque Baxter was the librarian in charge of the New Zealand collection at the Wellington Public Library from 1970 until 1992. Her poems, short stories, book reviews and articles have appeared in a range of periodicals and anthologies since 1947. A collection of short stories, *The house of the talking cat*, was published by Spiral in 1983. Baxter has tribal affiliations with Taranaki and Whakatohea.

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