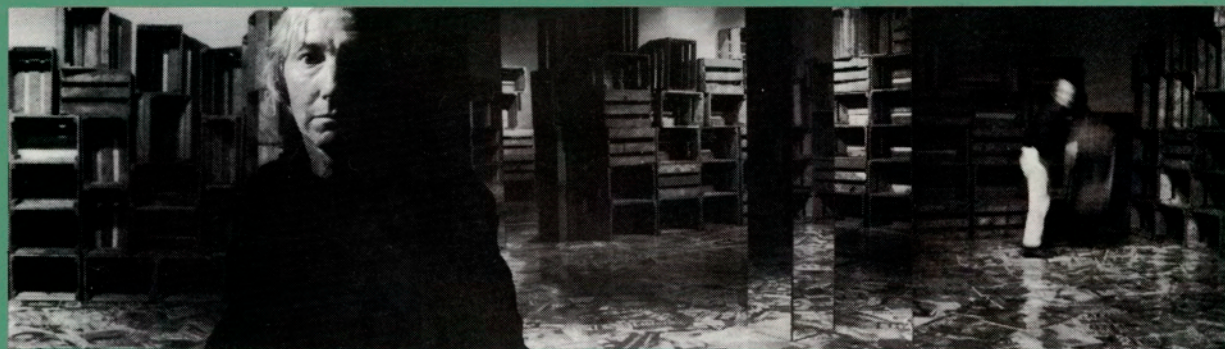


THE SCULPTURAL INSTALLATIONS OF

DON DRIVER



1982-1988

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Colleen Tunnicliffe, Neil Pardington

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INTRODUCTION

In December 1986 we invited New Plymouth based Artist Don Driver to submit a proposal for a site specific work to be installed on the Gallery's 1st floor area. The gallery saw this as an extension to the three major site specific installations created by Driver between 1982 and 1987. As with the other installation produced in this period by Driver, the current installation work is temporary. The work no longer functions once removed from its site. This work 'Boxes' involves the use of 400 wooden fruit crates, synthetic rope, plastic and magazine flyers and will show for a two month period before being dismantled.

'Ritual' the first installation commissioned by a public art institution was installed by Driver at the National Art Gallery in 1982. It was seen amid controversy at the Govett Brewster in New Plymouth in 1986 and at the Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt, in 1987. The controversy surrounding the work merited its inclusion in Jim and Mary Barr's 'When Art Hits the Headlines' exhibition recently concluded at the National Art Gallery's Shed 11.

Driver's first temporary installation was commissioned and shown in the Adelaide Festival in February 1985 as the lead-up to the 1985 Adelaide Festival.

In 1986 the Govett Brewster Art Gallery presented the work 'Elephants for Sale' a work commissioned from Driver on his return from a QEII Grant trip to India. The work was subsequently gifted by the Artist to the Gallery and can be reinstalled.

In 1986 the Sarjeant Gallery sought from the artist a work for installation within the Gallery's central Dome area – the work 'Bicycles' shown over the summer of 1986–87 and was subsequently bought by the Gallery for its collection and when and where appropriate reinstallation.

In his 1988 work 'Boxes' Driver has incorporated into the installation proposal a showing of selected works from his recent paper collage series. The selections are from a large body of work produced over the past 12 months.

Within the context of the installation where they are framed and



Ritual 1982
Installation (detail)
National Art Gallery, Wellington



Wanted 1987
Collage from installation Boxes
790mm x 590mm

hung on the wall they take on the appearance of manipulated images from the strewn magazine promotional papers one walks over when viewing the installation.

As individual images they contain the Driver 'hallmarks' – the same considered interplay of colour and surface, line and edge, order and balance, the humour/cynicism and layered play of opposites which characterises all his work. His work continues to mystify, amuse, anger and challenge, viewer thought.

In discussing the proposal Driver talks about the work 'Boxes' as an installation of 'contrast and unexpected couplings'. A suggestion that the old and new, the artificial and the natural, the formal and informal, the modest and the immodest, the commercially manufactured and artistically created can and do exist satisfactorily side by side.

This work continues the Gallery's practice of inviting artists to install work in the 1st floor area. Artists are given the freedom to use or ignore the architectural features of the space. In seeking interest and subsequent proposal from Don Driver I was mindful of the fact that it had been five years since Driver's first installation work 'Ritual'.

This exhibition catalogue with black and white and colour images of the artist's installation with an essay by the artist's friends Jim and Mary Barr offer viewers to the work 'Boxes' some insight into similarly commissioned and installed public Gallery works. It does not set out to contextualise Driver as an installation Artist. The main body of his work produced over thirty years are the paintings, sculpture and assemblages which are in private and public collections in this country.

The work 'Boxes' has been documented on video.

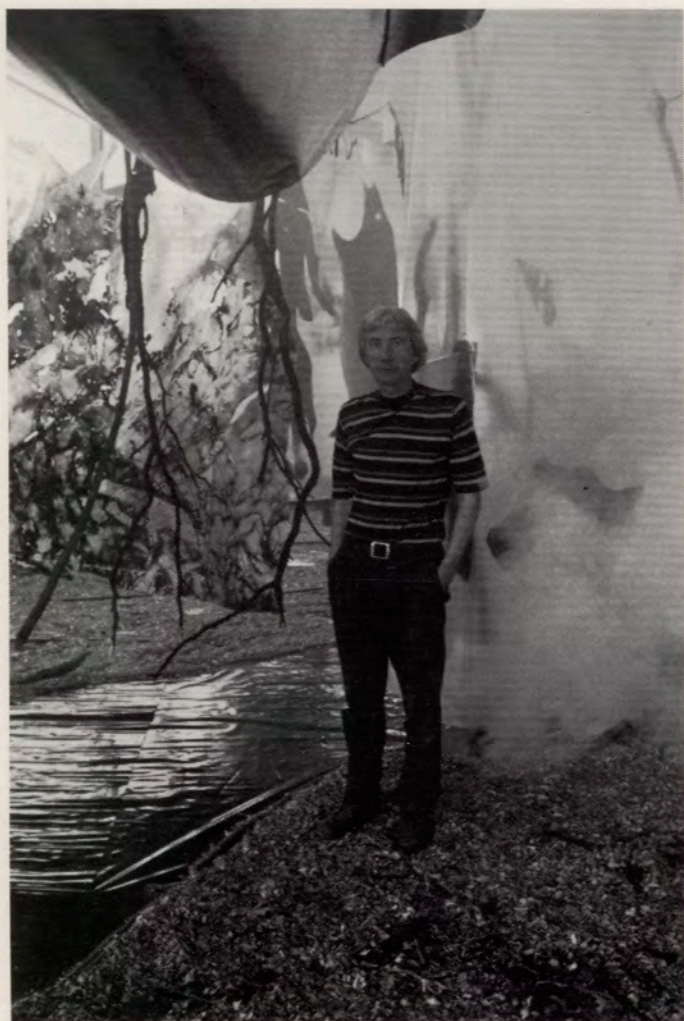
We are grateful to Don and Joyce for the loaning of material for publicity and to the National Gallery, Sarjeant Gallery and Govett Brewster Gallery for their assistance.

John Leuthart,
Director.
Wellington City Art Gallery.
February, 1988.

ALL SYSTEMS GO

The commissioning of temporary installations has become part of the public art galleries stock in trade since the *Project programme* series was presented by the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1975. The general format has evolved into a space being allocated to an artist who is then given pretty much free reign. The specificity of the site has been seen by the galleries as both a challenge to the artist and a chance to have their own space and on occasions, functions challenged by the artist. As a result often the same gallery space has been dealt with by a succession of different artists. In the Sarjeant Gallery in Wanganui the designated space has been the Gallery's central dome area; at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth installations have tended to use the top display levels. It's been upstairs at the Wellington City Art Gallery too.

Don Driver has taken part in nearly all of these series and has also developed installations for the National Art Gallery and the Adelaide Festival Arts Centre. Just given all these commissions you could say then that he is a well established installation artist. But although they are not labelled as such formally, you could also decide quite reasonably to define many of his other exhibitions as installations too – *Pockets and tools* at RKS Art in 1982 for instance. When selecting and hanging his own shows Driver has frequently challenged conventional expectations of how much



Don Driver with his installation *Burnt Trees*
Adelaide Festival Art Centre
1985



Ritual 1982
Installation (detail)
National Art Gallery, Wellington

space art needs, forcing his audience to also consider the exhibition as one work composed of a number of saleable components. Hung with the emphasis on individual works it takes on quite a different iconographic appearance as was seen in the hanging at the Dowse Art Museum in 1983. By hanging his own works so densely, Driver appears to be trying to break down efforts to read them as isolated statements. In doing so he manages to challenge the convention that each work should be presented for its own undisturbed contemplation.

This determination not to be neatly pigeon-holed also comes through in Driver's attitude towards installation work. So while some of his exhibitions might also be taken as installations, he also manages on occasion to deftly slip an exhibition into an installation. *Ritual*, being the first of his formal installations, illustrates this point. Before making the work Driver had already constructed a number of individual sculptures in which he attached dolls to items of bric a brac, including forty gallon drums, as ad hoc podiums. Yet corralled on the large dray, the individual figures of *Ritual* assume the power and menace of a crowd. This effect of unanimity is amplified by music and lighting.

And yet the effect of *Ritual* is rather like visiting one of Driver's sculpture exhibitions. Certainly the dray in the installation contains and raises the figures above the public, but it is also possible to



Ritual 1982
Installation
National Art Gallery, Wellington



Burnt Trees 1985
Installation
Adelaide Festival Arts Centre



(detail)

DON
DRIVER



Boxes 1988
Installation (detail)
Wellington City Art Gallery
Soundtrack by Allan Purdy

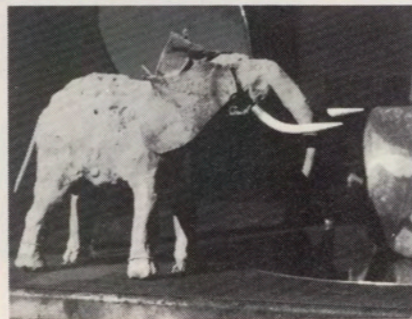
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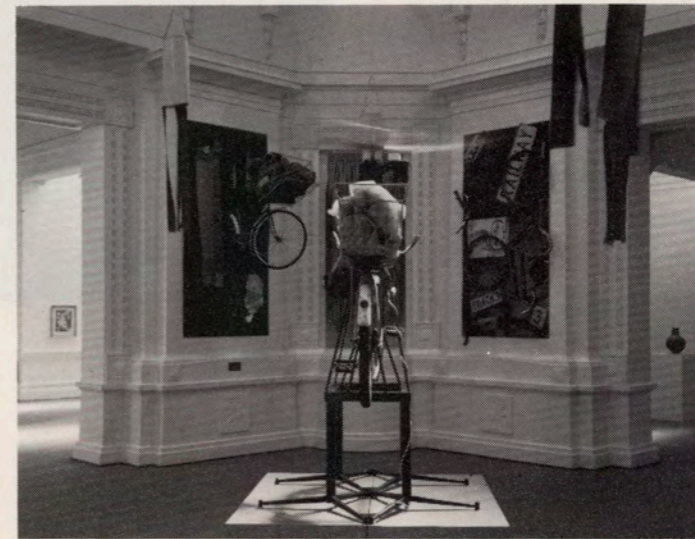
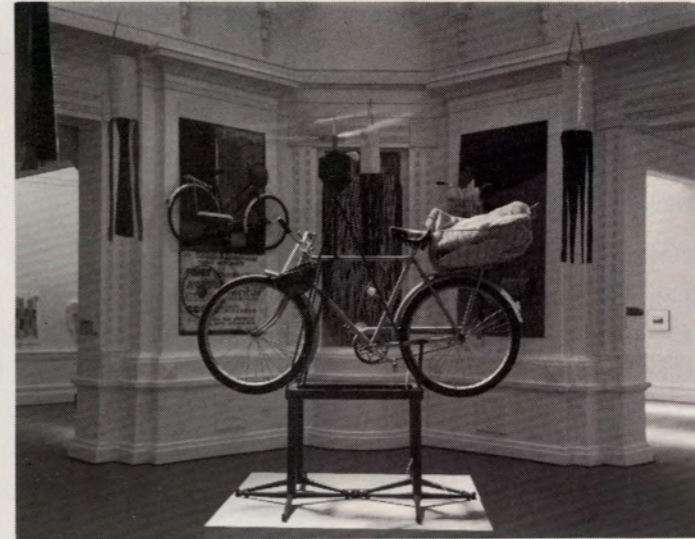
Boxes 1988
Installation (detail)
Wellington City Art Gallery
Soundtrack by Allan Purdy



Elephants for sale 1986
Installation (detail)
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth



(detail).



Bicycles installation 1986-87
Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui.

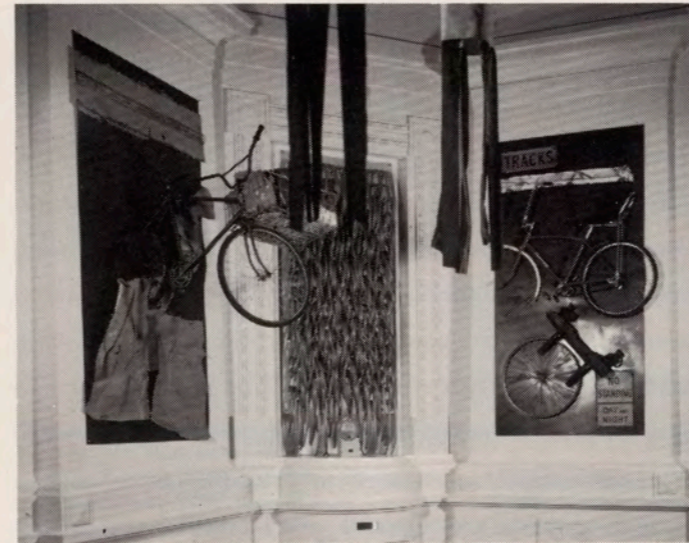
read the wagon as simply another support structure, another podium, with its own set of connotations. What is important though about the structure of the work in this context – small sculptures arrayed as a group – is that it can be displayed in places it was not specifically designed for. So while we might conclude that *Ritual*, thanks to its sound track and lighting requirements can be considered primarily as an installation, it is certainly a very non-specific site specific work.

So does site matter to Don Driver? Yes and no. Take *Elephants for sale*, commissioned by the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth in 1986 for instance. To get to see it was a bit of a journey up and down the stairs of the converted picture theatre. Driver had appropriated the architecture to his purposes placing the work in a sort of highrise pit formed by the old back of screen area. This allowed the work to be seen from above with parts of it at near eye level, for where the old movie screen had once hung, Driver had suspended cut-out clouds and oil drums.

Below these high flyers the basic structure was a central edifice with supporting statements. In this respect it was like one of the Indian sculptures that Driver collects in which a central god sits serenely in the midst of a supporting cast of lesser beings. The elephants placed on this structure (another podium) had been made by a woman in New Plymouth out of papier mache. Driver had dressed them to suggest ceremony – a ceremony of plastic



Elephants for sale 1986
Installation (detail)
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery
New Plymouth



Bicycles 1986–87

and hemstitch rather than silk and embroidery. The effect was the tawdry grandeur of an Indian village wedding, an effect reinforced by taped music and close to vulgar lighting.

While the whole installation was not up in the air, the physical relationships between the work and its audience could not be achieved in any other gallery in the country. Unlike *Ritual* the elements making up *Elephants for sale* demand more from the space and take more of it. If *Ritual's* centrally huddled mass retains some of the claustrophobia of confinement in a corridor (its original site), *Elephants* has all the ambling generosity owing an installation in a cavern. You can also chalk up *Elephants for sale* as specific.

Bicycles was commissioned in 1987 for niches outside the Sarjeant Gallery but was later moved indoors to the central domed area. It had a mobile central construction, but additional elements attached to the walls of the octagon and in the four niches made *Bicycles* difficult to replicate in any other gallery. The installation was like a miniature survey of Driver's sculpture of that time with a number of elements being loosely combined to construct the whole. In the niches Driver placed four Duraband hangings whose arcing straps optically shimmered against their plastic supports. Punctuating these pieces were a number of collages constructed from bicycle parts, the frames jutting into the space like the antlers of bagged game. Connecting these elements were wind catchers made of plastic strips fanned by the slowly rotating blade

of the central construction.

It seemed to be the physical relationships established by the architecture of the Sarjeant that held together this disparate collection of work. Driver responded to the formality of the octagon shape and the rhythmic placement of the niches by both asserting the separate identity of each element and joining them together as part of the same experience. So, on the site specific issues for *Bicycles*, it seems to be an obvious yes, and yet there was talk of the whole installation being shown at the Govett-Brewster in New Plymouth – so maybe it's a qualified no.

Yes and no, black and white, soft and hard, light and heavy, shiny and dull, wet and dry. If there is one thing that insinuates itself through all of Driver's work – and these installations are no exceptions – it is his persistent use of oppositions. Polarities, dualities, binary oppositions seem to have a bad name at present. They are seen as crude schematizations imposed to privilege one term at the expense of the other. The most telling example is male/female in which the male is seen as the norm with the female being defined in opposition to it. If he is active, she is passive; if he is strong, she is weak and so on. It's then a system which seems to have covered all bases because anything that is not one or the other is ignored. But what about those terms where social and political power does not make the dominant immediately apparent. Dark/light, rough/smooth, shiny/matt – which from these pairs is always favoured above the other?

By generating multiple, overlapping oppositions and refusing to come down on one side or the other Driver presents a myriad of possibilities but seldom clearly positions himself in relation to them. It is here that much of the dynamic of his work can be discovered. There is in each of Driver's works a series of multiple visual systems all operating with two terms in opposition. Each simple system – like the board of a computer – directly connects information from one part of the work with information from another making linkages and variations. They go from the simplicity of it is green/it is red, to: this edge is ripped/this edge is smooth. From such propositions about physical properties Driver goes on to the metaphorical with high art/low art references, metaphysical allusions to eastern/western cultural symbology, proposals about the power of nature/culture. Constantly disrupting these poles is Driver's playfulness. Such playfulness can only work, of course, when it is clear just which rules are being broken. His insistence that they are *his* rules, and that *he* is the only one to break them is how Driver operates his many systems of materials, symbols and contexts.

The various installations in this and the previous series have fluctuated in attitude from respect to indifference of the site. How Driver will occupy its arena will be of intense interest given his work in this field to date. On that at least we can be specific!

Jim and Mary Barr

C H R O N O L O G Y

Born 1930 in Hastings

- 1965 Travels to USA and Canada
- 1969 Travels to Australia
- 1972 Travels to South East Asia and Australia
- 1979 Travels to England and France
- 1981 Travels to Australia
- 1985 Travels to India

Lives in New Plymouth

Solo exhibitions

- 1963 Adult Education, Victoria University touring exhibition to North Island centres
- 1966 Auckland, New Vision Gallery *Don Driver*
- 1966 Sydney, Bonython Gallery
Wellington, Peter McLeavey Gallery
- 1970 Auckland, New Vision Gallery
- 1971 Wellington, Peter McLeavey Gallery
- 1972 Auckland, New Vision Gallery
Wellington, Victoria University
- 1973 New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery
- 1974 Auckland, New Vision Gallery *Don Driver sculptures and reliefs*
- 1976 Auckland, New Vision Gallery
Wellington, Victoria University
- 1977 New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery
Lower Hutt, Dowse Art Gallery *Don Driver 77: recent paintings*
- 1978 Auckland, New Vision Gallery *Don Driver 78: recent sculpture*
- 1979 Wellington, Galerie Legard
- 1979 New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery *Don Driver* (national tour)
- 1980 Auckland, New Vision Gallery
- 1981 Auckland, RKS Art *Recent sculpture*
- 1982 Auckland, RKS Art *Pockets and tools*
Hamilton, Centre Gallery *Don Driver sculpture 1978–1981*
- 1983 Wellington, Janne Land Gallery *Recent wall hangings by Don Driver Lower Hutt, Dowse Art Gallery (Hangings and borrowed work)*
Dunedin, Bosshard Gallery, Hocken Library and Red Metro *Focus on Don Driver*
Hamilton, Centre Gallery
- 1984 Wanganui, Sarjeant Gallery *Don Driver/Phillip Trustum*
Palmerston North, Manawatu Art Gallery *(Hangings with tools)*
Christchurch, McDougall Art Gallery *(Skin pieces)*
- 1985 Auckland, RKS Art *Skin pieces*

- Wellington, Janne Land Gallery *Collectors pieces*
- Lower Hutt, Dowse Art Museum *Don Driver: recent work*
- 1986 Wellington, National Art Gallery *(Collection & borrowed work)*
- 1987 New Plymouth, Taranaki Museum *New collages*

Selected group exhibitions

- 1965 Auckland, Barry Lett Galleries *Painters and sculptors of promise*
- 1966 Auckland City Art Gallery *New Zealand Painting 1966*
Wellington, New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, *(Guest exhibitor)*
Wellington, New Zealand Display Centre *Abstract paintings by forty New Zealand Artists* (toured)
- 1967 Mildura, Australia *Mildura sculpture triennial*
Auckland, Barry Lett Galleries *Group sculpture*
- 1968 Benson and Hedges *Art Award*
Auckland, Barry Lett Galleries *Sculpture 4*
- 1969 Tokyo, Japan, International biennial
Sydney, Australia *Transfield Prize exhibition*
- 1970 Mildura, Australia *Mildura sculpture triennial*
Benson and Hedges *Art Award*
Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council New Zealand *Art of the sixties*
- 1971 Auckland City Art Gallery *Ten big paintings*
Palmerston North, Manawatu Art Gallery *centenary collection*
- 1972 Auckland, Petar James Gallery
Masterton, Wairarapa Arts Centre *Hansells sculpture award*
Benson and Hedges *Art Award*
- 1973 Dusseldorf, Germany *Dusseldorf international art fair*
Melbourne, Australia, Europa Galleries *(Australia touring show)*
Mildura, Australia *Mildura sculpture triennial*
- 1974 Auckland, Barry Lett Galleries *New year/new work*
Auckland, New Vision Gallery
Christchurch, C.S.A. Gallery *Art N.Z. '74*
- 1976 Christchurch, C.S.A. Gallery *Land*
Christchurch, C.S.A. Gallery *Group Show* (guest exhibitor)
Auckland, Barry Lett Galleries *Screens*
- 1977 Palmerston North, Manawatu Art Gallery *(Opening exhibition)*
- 1978 Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui *A Chair is a Chair is a Chair*
Auckland, Barry Lett Galleries *New Year/new works*
- 1979 Christchurch, C.S.A. Gallery *Indoor/outdoor*
Auckland, Barry Lett Galleries *New year/new work*
- 1980 Auckland, New Vision Gallery *Diverse dimensions*
Christchurch, Robert McDougall Art Gallery *Loose hangings*
New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery *Carnival of the animals*
- 1981 Wellington, Janne Land Gallery *(Opening exhibition)*
- 1982 Wellington, National Art Gallery *Recent Acquisitions*
Wellington, Janne Land Gallery *Loose canvases*

- Auckland City Art Gallery *Artichoke*
Auckland, RKS Art *Summer 82*
New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery *Fibre show*
Wellington *F I sculpture project*
- 1984 Wanganui, Sarjeant Gallery *Whanganui art award*
Auckland, Denis Cohen Gallery
Auckland, Whitecliff Galleries *The little ones*
- 1985 Christchurch, McDougall Art Gallery *Spare parts*
Palmerston North, Manawatu Art Gallery *Better than collecting dust*
Christchurch CSA Gallery *Big paintings*
Christchurch, Robert McDougall Art Gallery *Spare parts: the found object in contemporary New Zealand art*
- 1986 Nelson, Bishop Suter Art Gallery *Goodman Suter biennale* and 1988
Nelson, Bishop Suter Art Gallery *The word*
Wellington, Janne Land Gallery *N.Z. Festival of the Arts*
- 1987 Hawera, South Taranaki Arts Festival *The land*
New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery *Banners*
Wellington, Shed 11 *When Art hits the Headlines*

Installations

- 1982 Wellington, National Art Gallery *Ritual*
1985 Adelaide Festival Arts Centre *Burnt Trees*
1986 New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery *Sculpture project – 1985–86 Elephants for sale*
Wanganui, Sarjeant Gallery *Bicycles*
1988 Wellington City Gallery *Boxes*

Commissions

- 1966 New Plymouth *Airport mural*
1967 New Plymouth *McKechnies Administration Block mural*
1967 New Plymouth *Sculpture for Govett-Brewster Art Gallery Courtyard**
1972 Auckland Medical School *sculpture*
1981 Lower Hutt, Dowse Art Gallery *Birthday banner*
1982 Christchurch, Robert McDougall Art Gallery *Birthday graphic*
Auckland *Architecture School mural*
Auckland, Peter Webb Galleries *At the Beach* (print)
- 1983 New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery *mural scheme*
1987 Auckland, Albert Dental Services (wall hanging) *Duraband 5*
* Now beside pool in public square outside Atkinson Bldg.

Awards

- 1971 Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Special Projects Grant
1972 Winner Benson and Hedges Art Award
1974 Winner Hansells Sculpture Award

- 1978 Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Materials Grant
1984 Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Travel Grant
Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Purchase Grant
Winner Whanganui Art Award
1986 Purchase award Goodman-Suter biennale
1987 Winner B.P. Art Award

Selected artist statements

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