

S H I F T I N G
G R O U N D

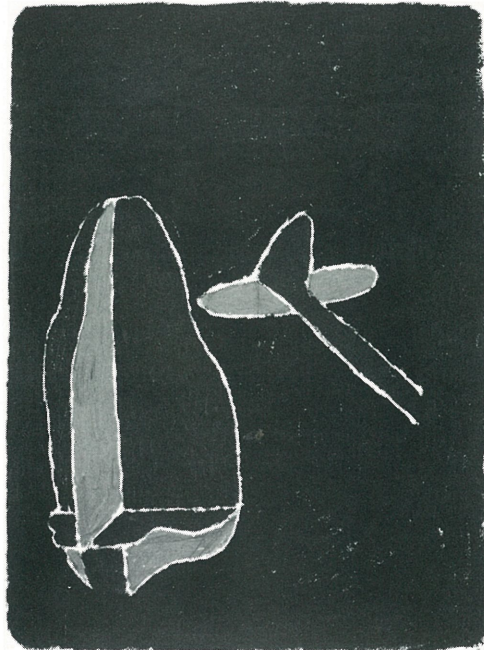
Chris Cane
Derek Cowie
Barnard McIntyre
Jane Pountney
Diane Prince
Ruth Watson

Wellington City Art Gallery

SHIFTING GROUND is an exhibition organised to introduce the Wellington Public to a selection of works by six Wellington artists. It follows in a tradition of group exhibitions of Wellington artists organised by the Wellington City Art Gallery to survey current art making in this region. The tradition began with the exhibition *Opening* which opened the gallery in 1980, an exhibition that was followed up in a substantial way with the *Regional Arts Exhibition* of 1984.

Those exhibitions took in a broad sweep of artists exhibiting one work each, the intention to comprehensively survey the breadth of activity in the region. While this strategy has advantages it limits the potential to engage with one artist's output, may exclude some of the most committed artists¹ and may also lead to public confusion as to criteria for selection. In organising this exhibition I was aware of this gallery's commitment to exhibiting Wellington artists, which provides an ongoing platform for the interpretation of art activity in the region.² With this in mind I decided to focus on the work of younger or emergent artists who had not been considered in a regional context by this gallery and who might provide some insight into future artmaking activity both regionally and nationally.

This exhibition is structured primarily to provide access to the individual achievement of six artists: Chris Cane, Derek Cowie, Barnard McIntyre, Jane Pountney, Diane Prince and Ruth Watson. All have emerged as significant and challenging artists in Wellington in the last five years, in fact none were included in previous regional exhibitions. Yet all command attention.



Barnard McIntyre Untitled (cat. no. 8)

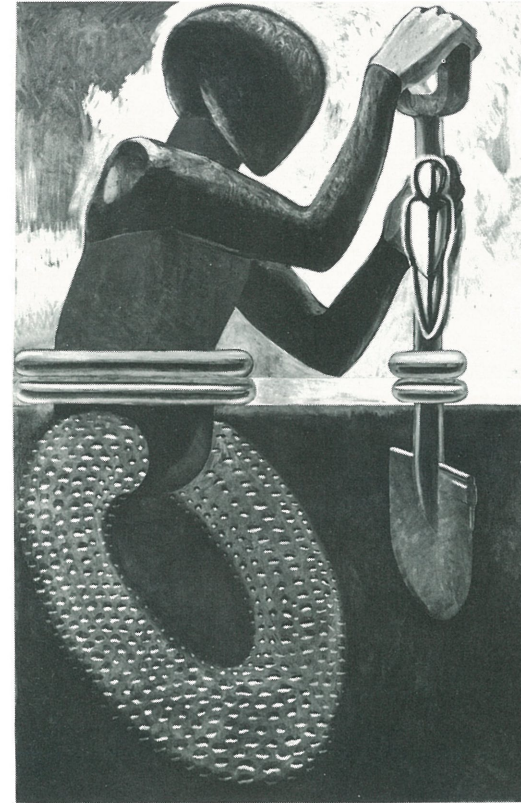
They impress for their innovation and sheer confidence exhibited in the handling of materials consistent with their ability to realise and follow through complex visual concepts. However what really distinguishes these artists are implied reassessments within their work of traditional principles and subject matter. This is not to suggest any radicality on their part but rather an implicit openness and a critical and questioning approach to attitudes of certainty of cultural perspective underlying many of the conventions central to the making of art and images. The context or ground both philosophical and material on which their images are based often seems illusory. There appears to be a refusal to adopt a single point of view, the viewer then is invited to wend a path through multiple positions.

Ruth Watson's works involve an analysis of the way language is used to map out a cultural territory, enforce ideologies and validate myth. She maintains that the land and the way it is manipulated is inseparable from language. In a statement on her map works she holds that "... the invisible world of the code is a vast landscape, with flooding rivers of persuasion, cracks into which we can push unwanted perceptions, and criss-crossed by electric fences erected by group motivations of power. The changing desire of the language user keeps the landscape rumbling and shifting."³ Rather than affirm one ideological stance Watson works to decipher the means by which the certainty of ideological and cultural positions are constructed and maintained.

In her paintings Jane Pountney focuses specifically on landscape but not as neutral form. The history of landscape painting suggests that the representation of landscape often functions as allegory, the artists embodying within their representations their cultural, spiritual and political aspirations. Pountney reworks this tradition in order to expose its covert intentions. Her landscapes are imaginary and tend to be characterised by an indeterminacy of position. The viewer is not located in relation to the landscape and the distinctions between land, sea and sky often remain undefined. By creating, out of lush use of charcoal and pigment, a sense of flux with an echo of landscape, Pountney emphasises the representation of landscape as a construction, as imaginary.

Derek Cowie too confounds a sense of single viewpoint in many of his paintings and constructions. While a generalised figure frequently dominates his images Cowie often employs a landscape image as one of many forms that lie behind or overlay a central form. This has the effect of shifting perspective, form, scale and consequently meaning. With the paintings that appear to adopt a relatively static viewpoint there

is a quality of fluidity, both the figure and ground appear organic, we are left unsure whether the more or less than human forms are emerging from some other reality or being consumed by their own invention.



Derek Cowie Dug of a Beast

landscape also features strongly in the work of Chris Cane, both as a sign and as a ground for other signs. His works rely on juxtapositions, so we have a suggestion of figurative landscape juxtaposed with fragments from a media landscape (film, TV, print and radio) juxtaposed with secondhand imagery and materials. By using imagery suggestive of New Zealand's past, in particular the use of the sign 'NZ', cut with contemporary fragmentary signs, Cane infers a sense of complacency and nostalgia inherent in the notion of New Zealand and implies an unease, a lack of definition of this island nation's current sense of place, of identity.

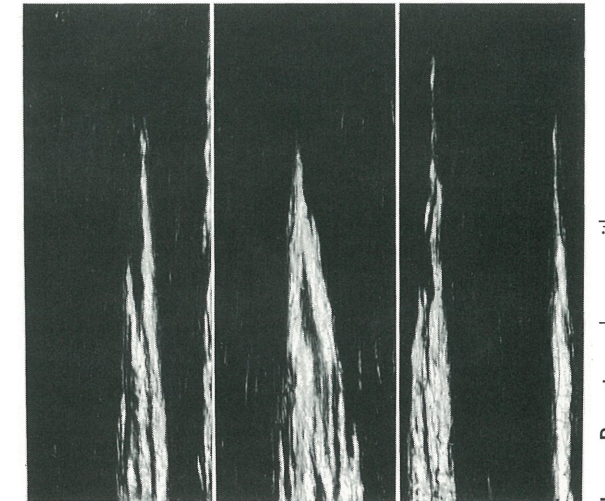
An embracing and nurturing sense of the land is implicit in the shelter constructions of Diane Prince, whose tribal affiliations are to Nga Pahi and Ngati Whatua. The material for the basis of the structures, flax poles, comes directly from the land and is combined with flax woven in traditional weaving patterns and other pieces of manufactured flotsam and jetsam collected from the environment. The suggestion of shelter in her constructions is combined with a quality of portability which

"... seems well suited to the concept of a spirit of place and being which occurs whenever a weaver sits down to work".⁴

In contrast Barnard McIntyre's drawn and three dimensional constructions appear to deny a sense of ground and place. His "rogue furnitures or architectures"⁵ seem deliberately stranded out of context, appropriating from an extraordinarily diverse cultural circumstance. His use of mock materials — mock wood grain, formica and marble suggests the stylistic period of the 1950's in particular, but also recalls the use of the fake surface in the history of art and craft. The quirkiness of his structures remind one of the legends of the kiwi do-it-yourselfer, home-handyman and kitset-maker and encourages a perception of an object made for one context and put in another. Oscillating between a sense of function and functionlessness his objects both imply and deny meaning and consequently remain oddly fascinating.

A quality of 'fake' is exploited productively by other artists in the exhibition namely Jane Pountney and Ruth Watson. By the use of such devices as the oval frame and a treatment of landscape reminiscent of painters such as William Hodges and Petrus Van Der Velden, Pountney draws the viewer into a past landscape painting tradition in order to expose history as an ideological force. Ruth Watson involves the past in her analysis of language by making fake relics and ancient maps. In so doing she works ordering processes of culture, such as mapping and naming, into a metaphor of the psyche.

All the artists in the exhibition have worked with qualities of installation. It is seen most obviously here in the work of Jane Pountney, Barnard McIntyre and Diane Prince. Jane Pountney links her works to and through text in a collaboration with Wellington writer Lindsay Rabbit. Barnard McIntyre's



Jane Pountney leave with me

objects gather meanings and associations when displayed and viewed as a group, while *Whakewhare* by Diane Prince was constructed on site and was contingent on my selection of *Woman in a Working House* for this exhibition.

Ruth Watson, Derek Cowie and Chris Cane have in many of their exhibitions also amplified the sense of shifting from one perspective or reference to another by arranging their paintings and objects in such a way as to confound a sense of separate and independent units. In this way these arrangements function as an installation. However, in most cases the works can be displayed separately which encourages a perception that the meaning of the works is not fixed but rather contingent on a context of display. This quality of open-endedness further implicates the viewer in a circumstantial attribution of meaning to the artwork and its inherent subject matter. It is a strategy that appears intrinsic to much of the work in this exhibition.

The three women in this exhibition all touch on issues relevant to the contemporary experience of women. Diane Prince locates her sculpture within a tradition associated specifically with the work of Maori women by extensively using woven flax. However, she seeks to place herself and that tradition in a wider context. By working within a landscape painting tradition of male mastery Jane Pountney implicitly offers an alternative based not on hierarchies and cultural certainty but rather a sense of fluidity. Ruth Watson addresses the feminine explicitly in the work *A map of the Dark Continent which is neither dark nor unexplorable*. The title is in fact a quote from the essay 'The laugh of the Medusa' by the feminist writer Helene Cixous.⁶ By creating a complex and multilayered metaphor centred on the form of a shield, Watson opens for analysis a spectrum of historical and contemporary definitions of the feminine.

An exhibition such as this is self consciously regional. However, it does not attempt to define a regional sensibility. Visually and aesthetically the work of the artists in the exhibition speaks of difference. The artists come from diverse backgrounds and collectively they canvas a broad range of artistic and cultural possibilities. They do however offer the promise of a vigorous and critical edge for future art activity in Wellington.

Gregory Burke
Exhibition Curator

Footnotes

1. In her introduction in the catalogue for the *Regional Arts Exhibition* 1984, then Gallery Director Anne Philbin noted that there were professionals who would not exhibit with amateurs.

2. In 1988 this gallery exhibited work by the following Wellington artists: Terrence Handscomb, Robert McLeod, Ruth Watson, Robyn Kahukiwa, Leon van den Eykel, Barbara Strathdee and Gerda Leenards.
3. Ruth Watson, statement in *Drawing Analogies* ex cat. Wellington City Art Gallery 1988 p.48.
4. Geri Thomas 'Wellington Now' *Art New Zealand* No.46 Autumn 1988 p.63.
5. Ian Wedde, review in *Evening Post* 5/8/87.
6. Helene Cixous 'The laugh of the Medusa' *New French Feminisms. An Anthology: Edited and with Introductions* by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron 1980 p.255.



Ruth Watson *Dark Continent*

Published on the occasion of the exhibition **SHIFTING GROUND** at the Wellington City Art Gallery
26 January — 16 April 1989

ISBN 0-908818-04-1

© 1989 Wellington City Art Gallery. Published by the Wellington City Art Gallery. PO Box 2199, Wellington, New Zealand

Curator: Gregory Burke/Design: Terrence Handscomb/Photography: Neil Price
Typesetting: Typesetting & Design, Wn/Printing: Thames Publications

Chris Cane

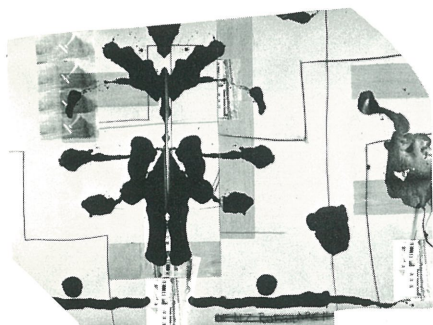
Chris Cane was born in Kawa Kawa in 1957. In 1977 he moved to Palmerston North, starting a Bachelor of Arts degree at Massey University.

In 1978 Cane began working in the exhibitions area for Art Galleries. In 1981 he joined the National Art Gallery staff and was the Exhibitions Officer at the Dowse Art Museum 1984-5.

Cane began practising as an artist in 1980 and has been exhibiting since 1986. Of note was his inclusion in the *Installation Series* Wellington City Art Gallery 1986.

List of Works

- 1 **Name fold 1987**
Gouache, acrylic, pastel, tin on paper
1490 x 1837
Courtesy of Southern Cross Gallery
- 2 **NZI 1988**
Gouache, pastel, photocopy on paper
595 x 1150
Collection Jim and Mary Barr
- 3 **Of NZ Rorschach 1988**
Gouache, pastel, ink, photocopy on paper
1805 x 2400
Courtesy Southern Cross Gallery



Chris Cane *Of NZ Rorschach*, 1988

- 4 **Landscape II 1987**
Gouache, acrylic, pastel, on paper
1195 x 1738
Collection National Library of NZ
- 5 **sub 1987**
Gouache, pastel, graphite on paper
1125 x 780
Courtesy Southern Cross Gallery

- 6 **plane 1988**
Gouache, acrylic, pastel, ink, photocopy, staples on paper
1195 x 2815
Courtesy of Southern Cross Gallery

Derek Cowie

Derek Cowie was born in Ruatoria in 1956. In 1976 he began studying at the Wellington Polytechnic, School of Design, graduating in 1978 with a Diploma in Visual Communication Design.

From 1980 until 1983 he worked as a set designer on a number of theatrical productions. Primarily a painter Cowie has also made many short films and has worked in the area of performance art.

He has been exhibiting his paintings since 1978 and his paintings are included in a number of public collections.

List of Works

- 1 **Dug of a Beast 1987**
Oil on canvas
Two panels hinged horizontally
(a) 1315 x 1800
(b) 1485 x 1800
Courtesy Peter McLeavey Gallery
- 2 **We Can Do This Now 1986**
Acrylic on canvas
Two panels hinged horizontally
(a) 1347 x 1810
(b) 1382 x 1813
Collection National Art Gallery
- 3 **Cry Babies 1988**
Oil, acrylic, collage on canvas
Two panels hinged vertically
(a) 1777 x 1525
(b) 1777 x 1435
Courtesy Aberhart North Gallery
- 4 **Untitled 1985**
Acrylic on canvas
1000 x 3230
Courtesy Peter McLeavey Gallery
- 5 **Figure 1984**
Acrylic on canvas
1270 x 1700
Courtesy Peter McLeavey Gallery
- 6 **Concentrates Isolator 1988**
Oil on canvas
1705 x 1140
Collection Mr Barry Collins

Barnard McIntyre

Barnard McIntyre was born in Wellington in 1961. From 1982-85 he attended Ilam School of Fine Art, Canterbury University, majoring in Sculpture.

In 1986 he moved back to Wellington and has been exhibiting since that time. That year he also assisted with the organisation of *Maori Art Today*, a touring exhibition of contemporary works by Maori artists.

Notably he was included in the 1988 exhibition *Exhibits: The Museum display and the encyclopaedia plate* staged at the National Art Gallery and Artspace Auckland.

List of Works

- 1 **Untitled 1988**
Unsupported formica
795 x 175 x 30
- 2 **Untitled 1987**
Unsupported formica
1220 x 90 x 90
- 3 **Untitled 1987**
Unsupported formica
760 x 124 x 40
- 4 **Untitled 1987**
Unsupported formica
775 x 90 x 90
- 5 **Untitled 1987**
Unsupported formica
515 x 170 x 60
- 6 **Untitled 1987**
Unsupported formica
560 x 235 x 170
- 7 **Untitled 1988**
Unsupported formica
430 x 370 x 375
- 8 **Untitled 1988**
Oilstick on paper
760 x 563
- 9 **Untitled 1988**
Oilstick on patinated copper
516 x 200 x 150
- 10 **Untitled 1988**
Oilstick on paper
760 x 563
- 11 **Untitled 1988**
Oilstick on paper
760 x 563

- 12 **Untitled 1988**
Oilstick on paper
595 x 420

- 13 **Untitled 1988**
Oilstick on paper
595 x 420

- 14 **Untitled 1988**
Oilstick on paper
595 x 420

All works courtesy Southern Cross Gallery

Ruth Watson

Ruth Watson was born in Darfield, Canterbury in 1962. In 1980 she began studying at the Ilam School of Fine Art, Canterbury University. She graduated in 1984.

In 1985 Watson moved to Wellington to work as an artist and has exhibited in solo and group exhibitions. Of note recently was her inclusion in the exhibition *Drawing Analogies* held at the Wellington City Art Gallery 1987-88 and her solo exhibition *Planetarium* held at Auckland Artspace Gallery earlier this year.

List of Works

- 1 **Dream Come True 1988**
Wax, paint, resin, string, newsprint and photocopy on linen, paper and wood
1050 x 2890 x 50
Courtesy Southern Cross Gallery
- 2 **A map of the Dark Continent which is neither dark nor unexplorable 1987-88**
Paint, resin, photocopy, tissue on mesh on wood
2925 x 710 x 85
Collection Jim and Mary Barr
- 3 **An Introduction to Gaming 1988**
Paint, polyurathane, resin, photocopy, tissue on canvas on hardboard
1300 x 1300
Courtesy Southern Cross Gallery

- 4 **Before/The Sea 1986-87**
Pastel, wax, photocopy on paper
614 x 850
Private Collection

- 5 **After/The lie of the Land 1986-87**
Pastel, wax, photocopy on paper
614 x 850
Private Collection

- 6 **Another map of the world 1988**
Photocopy on rice paper
370 x 472
Courtesy Southern Cross Gallery

Jane Pountney

Jane Pountney was born in 1949 in Rotorua. From 1966-68 she trained as a teacher at Hamilton Teachers' College and Waikato University. Since 1973 she has worked as an art teacher and currently works at the Correspondence School in Wellington.

From 1980 onwards Pountney devoted more time to her own painting and has been exhibiting since 1982 when she exhibited in a regional survey exhibition at the Dowse Art Museum. She has had several one woman exhibitions in Auckland and Wellington.

List of Works

- 1 **lovely thunder 1987**
Oil on canvas
1810 x 3010
Courtesy of the artist
- 2 **leave with me 1987**
Charcoal on paper
1400 x 510 (x3)
Courtesy of the artist
- 3 **flotilla 1988**
Oil on canvas
895 x 2000
Courtesy Aberhart North Gallery
- 4 **sounding 1988**
Oil on canvas
507 x 405
Courtesy Aberhart North Gallery
- 5 **galloway 1988**
Oil on canvas
Two panels hinged vertically
(a) 305 x 860 (b) 305 x 860
Courtesy of the artist

Diane Prince

Nga Puhi Ngati Whatua

Diane Prince was born in Wellington in 1952. From 1970-73 she attended Teachers Training College in Wellington. From 1975-78 she began a Bachelor of Arts degree in Art History.

Currently she is a supervisor for the Access Weavers Programme in Wellington.

She has been exhibiting since 1986. She was included in the touring exhibition of 1986 *Maori Art Today*. Most recently she exhibited this year in the exhibition *Nga Toi o te Iwi/Nga Hua o te Iwi* held at the National Library of New Zealand.

List of Works

- 1 **Woman in a Working House 1988**
Mixed media
2830 x 1200 x 900
Collection National Library of New Zealand
- 2 **Whakawhare 1989**
Mixed media
To be constructed on site



Diane Prince *Woman in a Working House*