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LISA REIHANA

TRUST BANK CANTERBURY
ARTIST IN RESIDENCE
1992

McDOUGALL ART ANNEX

TAKE



For the title of her installation, Lisa Reihana has chosen *Take*, a word which has meanings in both the Maori and English languages. This duality reflects the artist's twin cultural heritages.

In English, 'take' means to lay hold of, to grasp, seize, or capture; in *te reo* Maori, 'take' (pronounced tah/kay) can perhaps be translated as an issue, or foundation. Its Maori usage is various, and includes such different (but related) meanings as tree root or stump; cause or reason; origin or beginning; and incantation or charm.

Both the Maori and European connotations of the word 'take' (foundation or capture) can be related to the central concern of Reihana's installation, that of Maori land issues. The land is the basis of life, the foundation of civilizations; in Aotearoa/New Zealand, the land has been claimed and taken by European settlement. Reihana uses this play upon words with the many possible interpretations of 'take' to create an artwork which is capable of a variety of readings, where the cultural background of the viewer can help to determine meanings.

This coincidental interchange between language and cultures which is present in the exhibition's title is also reflected in its content. Slides are projected on the wall in a changing series: this sequential juxtaposition of imagery sets up the viewer's expectation of an interrelationship, where an image appears to develop in meaning through its placement near another image. Again, the possible readings of the imagery are left open: chance processes interact with the viewer to create a variety of potential meanings and personal interpretations.





The understated quality of suggestion in Reihana's slide walls is also present in the beams of projected light which recall the rafterboard forms of the Maori marae. It is as if, through describing the most familiar forms of Maori architecture with contemporary electronic technology, Reihana has evoked the presence of a marae within the gallery space. Reihana has literally projected the structure of the marae on to the gallery walls, and over the western tradition of art history which the gallery embodies. Once the presence of a Maori architecture is focused on by the viewer, the near-abstract quality of the imagery can be more readily deciphered: maps projected on bodies, the New Zealand coat of arms, close-ups of a museum diorama depicting the early Maori, and the remnants of graffitied political words suggest a more specifically Maori reading, concerned with the sovereignty of the land and the integrity of a people. Depictions of figures and photographs of Maori *tukutuku* and weaving patterns suggest the symbolic decorations which line the walls of a marae.

Reihana has included among the projected images stills from her earlier films, and photographs of personal friends. The *karakia* which sounds as a welcome is a recording of her father's voice. By using images and sounds of a personal significance, Reihana displays and reworks her own history within the gallery, claiming for herself a personal tradition which is rooted in both Maori and European cultures.

Lisa Reihana states: 'I use my artwork as a point of self-discovery and key into my own Maori culture. I create my own interpretations of traditional concepts and artforms in a way that I feel comfortable with, whilst still pushing the boundaries. My strategy is one of quiet





subversion. By creating a contemporary marae no taboos are transgressed, but issues are being dealt with.'

The soundtrack created by Michael Hodgson evokes a wistful mood for *Take*, forming a total environment which the viewer is invited both to be a part of and contemplate.

Lisa Reihana states that her intention in producing *Take* was 'to give back to the local community a sense of the personal experience gained in the year as Trust Bank Canterbury Artist in Residence.'

ELECTRONIC INSTALLATION ART



Take, Lisa Reihana's installation at the McDougall Art Annex, uses electronic technology to create an environment made of pictures and sound. Slide projectors display a changing series of images on the gallery walls; an electronic soundtrack plays on an endless loop; sensor devices triggered by the viewer's movements are linked to prerecorded sound effects; the viewer's progress in the installation is filmed by a security camera and displayed on video monitors.

Reihana's use of electronic technologies to make her work is part of the comparatively recent video art tradition. The beginnings of video art can be traced to the early 1960s when such artists as the Korean-born American Nam June Paik incorporated the television set as an object





within their installations. With the development of portable video technology in the mid-1960s, artists began to experiment with the manipulation of video imagery, using it in installations and performances. Many artists have used moving images (whether film or video) to create their artworks. A notable example is the pioneering New Zealand film maker Len Lye (1901-1980).

Video art can be regarded as a contemporary branch of sculptural practice. Like a conventional sculptor, the video artist is concerned with the relationships of three dimensional objects in space. The video process renders the solid objects in two dimensional form: in video art, the 'objects' are also created with light and sound, and move in space. Frequently the viewer too is invited to become part of the installation, with the use of interactive technologies such as close-circuit television. This strategy of placing the viewer in the actual artwork which he or she is viewing personalises the encounter with the artwork.

Multi-media art using electronic technology is a medium which is constantly evolving as advances are made in technology. Lisa Reihana's *Take* uses relatively 'low' aspects of technology with which most of us are familiar - slide projectors, tape loops, commercial security cameras - to create an electronic environment which reinterprets the traditional look of the gallery space.

Using modern technological tools which are available to the contemporary artist, Reihana's installation both belongs to, and comments upon, a contemporary media culture based on electronically processed information.



LISA REIHANA



Lisa Reihana was born in Auckland in 1964, of European and Ngai Tu and Ngati Hine of Ngaa Puhi descent. She is a leading figure among a new generation of contemporary Maori artists, who draw upon aspects of their dual cultural heritages to create their work. In 1992 Lisa Reihana became the fourth artist to gain the prestigious Trust Bank Canterbury Artist in Residence Award.

Since graduating in 1988 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, Reihana has worked with a variety of media. At university she specialised initially in sculpture, going on to study film in the Intermedia Department. In 1991 she returned to Elam as a part-time lecturer in the Intermedia Department.

Lisa Reihana is particularly noted for her work with electronically manipulated imagery. She uses film, video, and a variety of photographic processes to create artworks which have varied in scale from hand-coloured photocopied drawings to a video wall composed of thirty six monitors. Reihana has made many short films and videos, including *Wog Features* (1990; 8 minutes) which has screened at festivals and in galleries in New Zealand and Australia, and at the 'Il Sud del Mondo - L'Altra Arts Contemporanea' exhibition at Marsala in Italy.

Lisa Reihana has curated several exhibition screenings of contemporary Maori film-making, and has spoken on issues relating to contemporary Maori art at many arts forums at Australia and New Zealand. In 1988 she was Artist in Residence at the Australian Centre for Photography in Sydney.





During her year as Trust Bank Canterbury Artist in Residence for 1992, Lisa Rehana has researched, developed and directed a new short film which will be premiered in Christchurch later this year. Another major achievement for the year was her participation in 'ARX3' (Artists' Regional Exchange) in Perth, Australia, representing New Zealand as part of a group of emergent Maori artists.

Take is Lisa Reihana's first solo exhibition in a public gallery.

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THE TRUST BANK CANTERBURY ARTIST IN RESIDENCE AWARD



Lisa Reihana is the fourth recipient of the Trust Bank Artist in Residence Award. She has spent the last year living and working in Christchurch's Arts Centre. Reihana's installation, *Take*, marks the close of her year as Artist in Residence for 1992.

The Trust Bank Canterbury Artist in Residence Award was established in 1988. The Award provides an opportunity for New Zealand artists to use the residency to develop a new body of work. Through their presence in the community, the Trust Bank Canterbury Artists in Residence bring fresh stimulus to activity in the visual arts in Christchurch and its environs, and provide a model for and encouragement to local artists.

The residency is a prestigious award available to artists throughout New Zealand (excluding the Canterbury region), who are seriously involved in developing their work, who have a record of innovative and excellent achievements and who are considered to have the potential for significant future development. A stipend, studio, apartment, and opportunity to exhibit are provided by the Award's sponsors.

Previous recipients of the Trust Bank Canterbury Artist in Residence Award have been Tom Kreisler (1989), Di ffrench (1990), and Gavin Chilcott (1991). The Trust Bank Canterbury Artist in Residence for 1993 will be Albert McCarthy.

The Award, which is unique in New Zealand in enjoying the support of a commercial sponsor, is supported by Trust Bank Canterbury, The Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand, The Arts Centre of Christchurch Trust, and the Robert McDougall Gallery.



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