

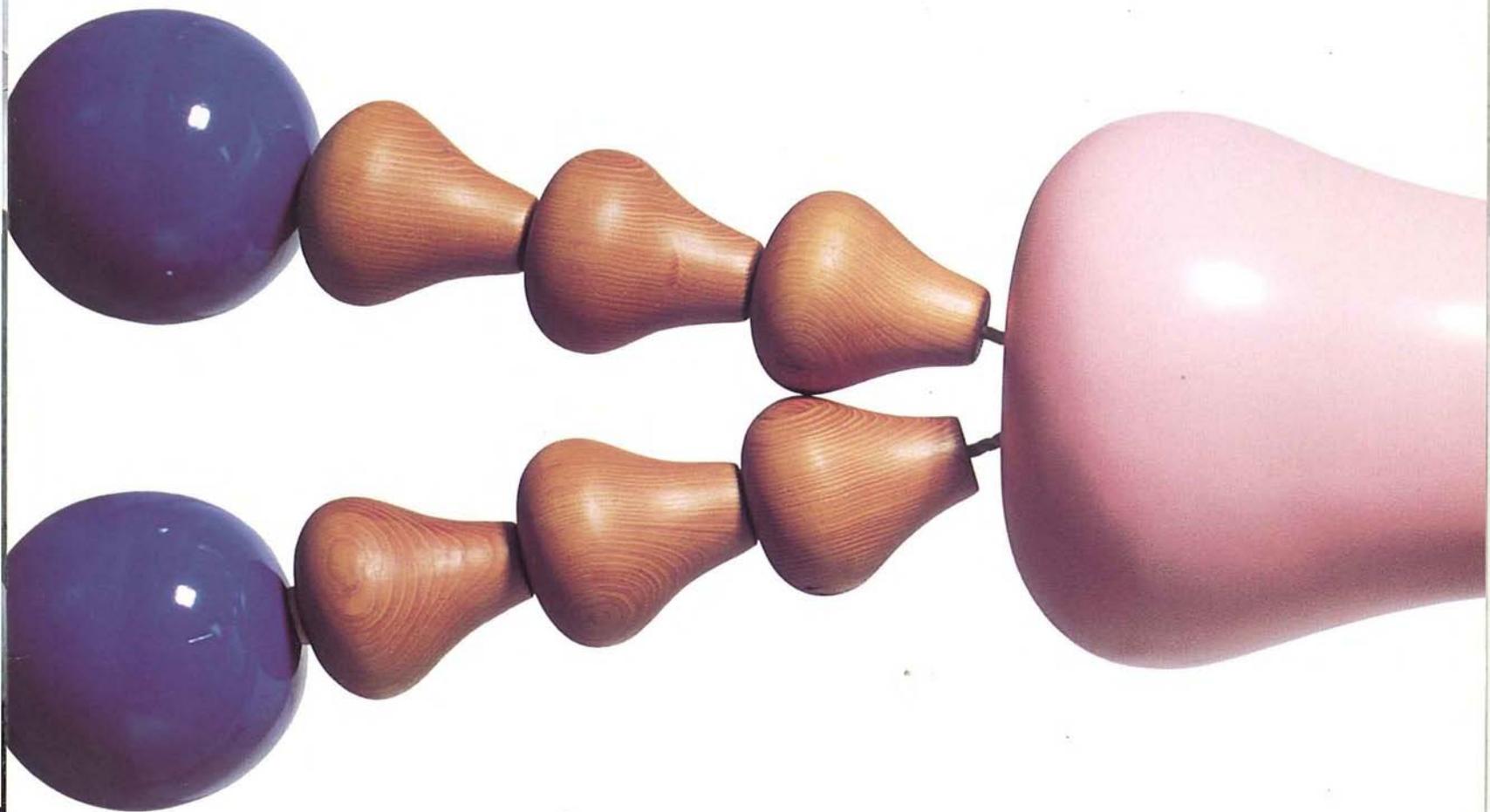


SQUEEZE

TONY BOND

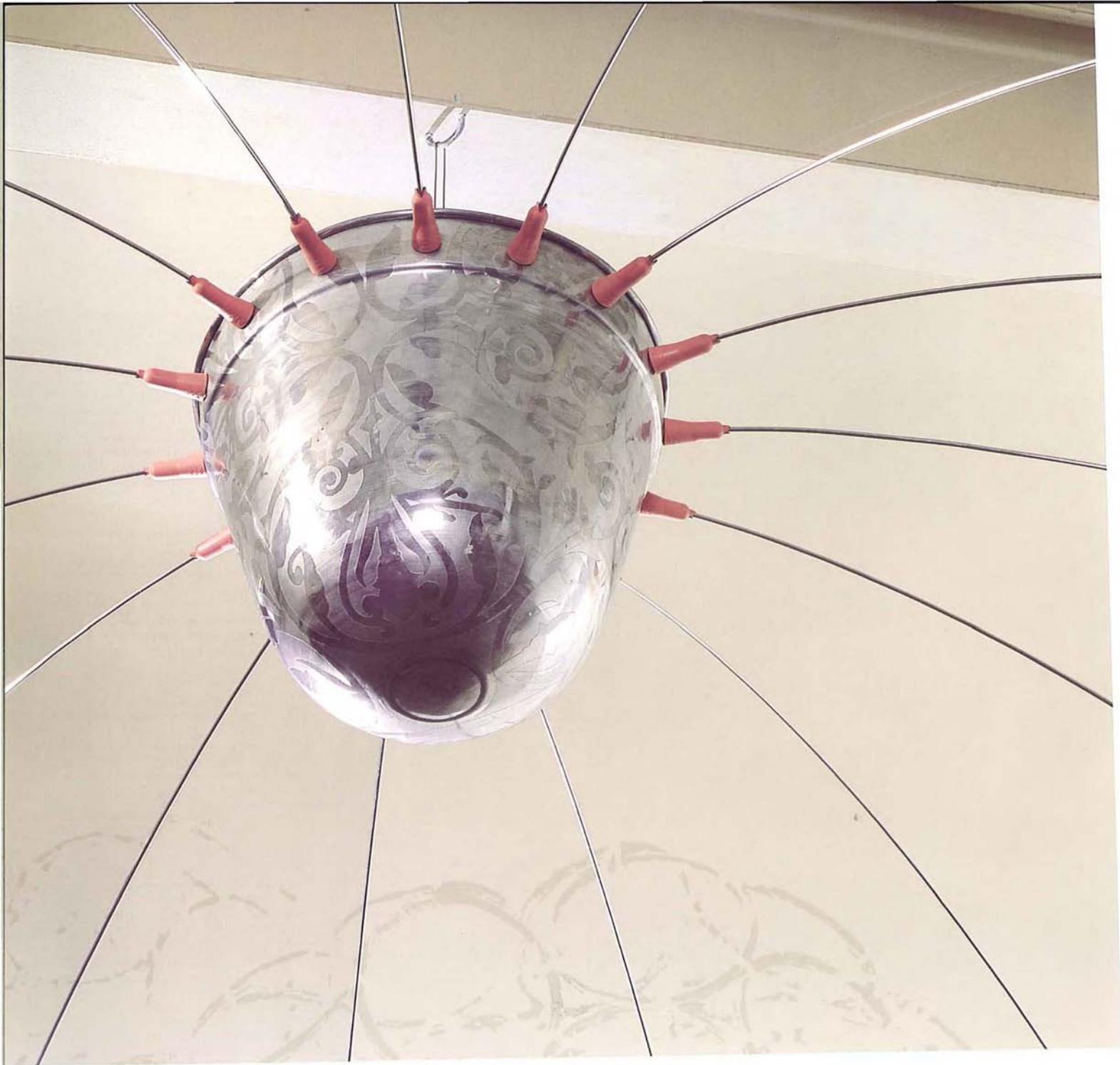
TE PUNA O WAIWHETU
CHRISTCHURCH ART GALLERY

WILLIAM A. SUTTON GALLERY
15 October 2004 – 9 January 2005



ML2 (detail)

Cover: Cumulus (detail)



Calfeteria Spinatus (detail)

What kind of sculptures would a cow make? Where does an object begin and end? And, in a world where goats can be genetically engineered to produce spider silk, what separates the natural from the artificial?

Questions like these, coupled with an intense curiosity about the untapped potential of functional materials, motivate the playful and ambiguous sculptures of Tony Bond. His latest exhibition, *Squeeze*, brings together an improbable assembly of found and transformed objects – from strangely organic ceramics, curtain rings and cable ties to a super-sized 'Mary Lou' doll – inviting viewers to question what they see and draw their own conclusions about their origins and purpose.

The desire to find meaning is intrinsic to the human psyche. As children, we devour the world, analysing and comparing each object against the next with seemingly inexhaustible curiosity. Toddlers' conversations are peppered with questions; "but *why?*" being one of the most dreaded by parents. As we

get older, however, our encounters with the world are often motivated less by the thirst for understanding and more by a desire to contextualise and label things so they can be more easily dismissed.

We seem to take much more for granted. We 'understand' the mysteries of human reproduction through simplistic diagrams and flowcharts, we operate engines and computers that we couldn't begin to build from scratch and talk nonchalantly about DNA and cloning without any direct knowledge. As our world becomes less and less experiential, it's hard to avoid the jaded feeling that you have seen everything before. So much is explained for us that we expect to understand what things are without really trying. In this sense, Bond's sculptures set out to frustrate, thwarting all attempts to pin them down. Often made from recognisable components, but determinedly neither one thing nor the other, they persistently elude definition. What are they for? Why have they been brought together? Removed from any foreseeable practical function, they lead us into unknown and uncertain territory.



A giant, animated reincarnation of a ubiquitous Kiwi childhood accessory, *ML2* shows how common objects, made from simple forms and ordinary materials, can be transformed into something extraordinary. The original doll's wide-eyed expression appealed immediately to Bond: "It was as if she was seeing everything for the first time." *ML2*'s startled gaze and constantly revolving head are symbolic of Bond's desire to return us all to a place where everything – even what we might have considered prosaic or obsolete – is new and full of potential. The picture of astonishment, she seems as amazed by us and our surroundings as we are by her, challenging our easy assumptions about what is normal.

I once read a poem that considered the world from a visiting alien's point of view. Suddenly vacuum cleaners, televisions, pets – all those things we take for granted and see as so inherently normal – were re-examined in a ruthlessly logical light, rendering us far more eccentric and idiosyncratic than we may wish to appear. It was a lesson in how tenuous and vulnerable our systems of meaning really are.

Anyone who has been forced to explain, "Well, this one we cuddle and care for and this one we kill and eat," knows how quickly those comfortable categorisations can shrivel and dissolve before you. For

Bond, the challenge lies in taking objects that people have already dismissed and creating some-

thing with them that has a sense of mystery. He treats sculpture as an ever-growing language, often taking familiar objects and expanding upon them, increasing our visual vocabulary by squeezing out the hidden potential of ordinary things.

Like the humble calf-feeder reborn as a towering arthropod, many of the elements in *Squeeze* began life as utilitarian objects. That's where we would usually leave them – classified and therefore requiring no further

exploration. But is the meaning of such objects so tied up in function that they cannot exist for other reasons? The individual components of *Cumulus* appear reassuringly functional,

but their subtle differences and flock-like configuration lend them a curiously organic air. Are they natural or artificial? And, in the future, will we be able to tell the difference? Bond's sculptures question and challenge the

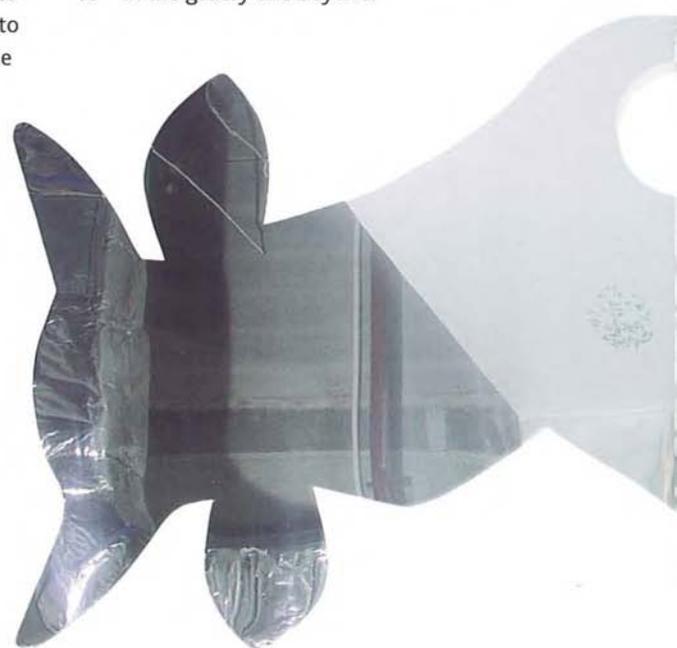
hierarchies we use to fence ourselves off from the world, suggesting other possibilities and returning us to the position of children, surrounded by unfamiliar forms with no relevant memory or experience with which to classify them.

We are accustomed to using names and labels as a tool for clarification, but those Bond has provided only increase our sense of disequilibrium. *Formunculae*, *Ferroderma*, *Calfeteria Spinatus*, *Noonhoof Gasket* – they certainly *sound* like something, but you can't quite put your finger on it, and the closer you get to them the faster they slide away from meaning. Ceramic objects should be useful, surely. But the tumescent examples clustered here, precariously balanced on narrow shelves, provide no clues. Cramped and tilting, the shelves themselves seem to symbolise our own inadequate attempts to contain and control the unfamiliar – is the scene set for a disastrous laboratory accident or are we poised on the brink of a scientific breakthrough? Each object seems designed for a specific purpose, yet as one offers an explanation the next seems to cancel it out, leaving only the possibility that they have been created for an activity we have not yet discovered. Are these

experimental self-replicating human/ceramic hybrids, futuristic prototypes for some yet-to-be discovered industry or adult toys for aliens?

Those who are suspicious of contemporary art often describe it as an exclusive club, where only the artist and a select few are party to what it all means. If you can't tell the

difference between the next big thing and the emperor's new clothes, for God's sake keep your mouth shut and hope they think you look intelligent. Bond, however, welcomes a gallery full of tilted heads and furrowed brows. His work may confound expectations, but there's no prize reserved for the right answer. In fact, there really are no answers to be had, just an awakening curiosity about *all* the objects that surround us – in the gallery and beyond.



Right: Noonhoof Gasket
Above throughout essay: *Formunculae*

List of works

All works 2004, collection of the artist

Calfeteria Spinatus

Aluminium, wood, rubber and steel wire, 330 x 700 x 700 cm

Cumulus

Aluminium and silicone rubber, dimensions variable

Ferroderma

Steel rings and cable ties, dimensions variable

Formunculae

Ceramic, dimensions variable

ML2

Chrome, steel, wood, plastic, fibreglass and rope, 300 x 130 x 45 cm

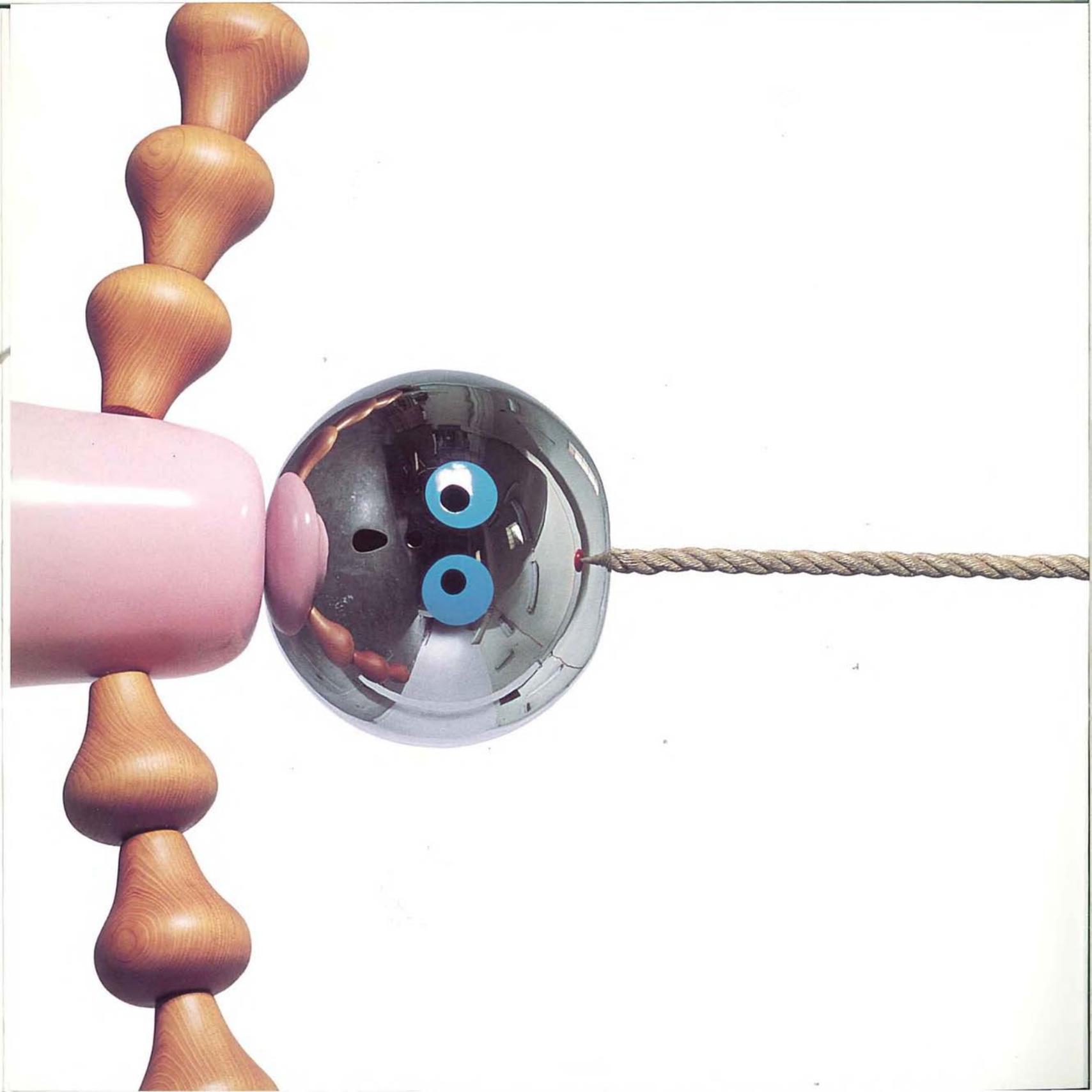
Noonhoof Gasket

Reflective stainless steel, 0.1 x 240 x 80 cm

Supalova

Ceramic, 60 x 50 x 40 cm







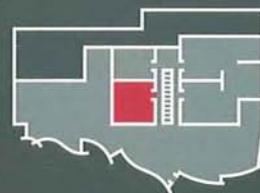
Tony Bond

Sculptor Tony Bond was born in Christchurch in 1958. After completing his studies in Visual Communication at the Christchurch Polytechnic School of Art & Design in 1984, he worked as a designer/illustrator before moving to Wanganui to study fine art in the early 1990s. He returned to Christchurch, gaining a Bachelor of Design in 1998 from the CPIT School of Art & Design, and is currently a tutor in Drawing and 3D Design.

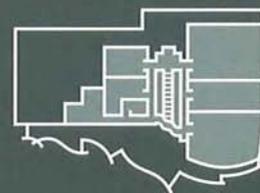
Bond has exhibited regularly in New Zealand and overseas. Solo exhibitions include 'Sanctum' (Lopdell House Gallery, Waitakere City, 2002) and 'Push' (CoCA Centre of Contemporary Art, Christchurch, 2001). Selected group exhibitions include 'The New Alchemists' (touring New Zealand and Australia, 2004), 'The Middle Way' (CoCA, 2003; touring Thailand, 2004), 'Space, Form and Fire' (touring Australia, 2002) and '172.43°: Looking Back, Looking Forward' (High Street Project, 2000). Recent awards include the National Award for Artworks in Reclaimed Materials (2004), the Portage Ceramic Art Award (2000) and the Cleveland Art Award (1997 and 1998).

Ferroderma (detail)

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