

# MORGAN JONES

JOURNEYS AND  
DECISIONS

TE PUNA O WAIWHETU  
CHRISTCHURCH ART GALLERY

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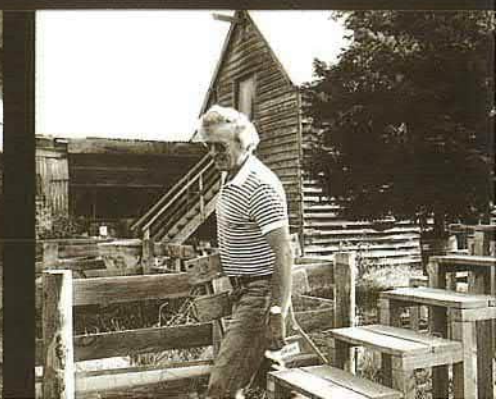
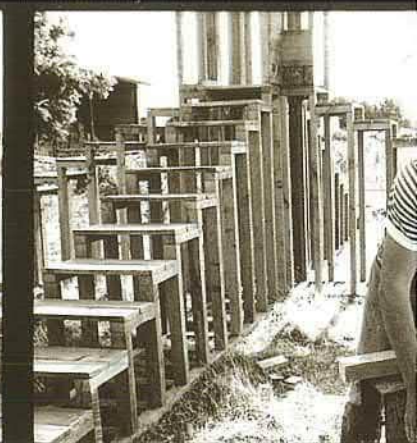
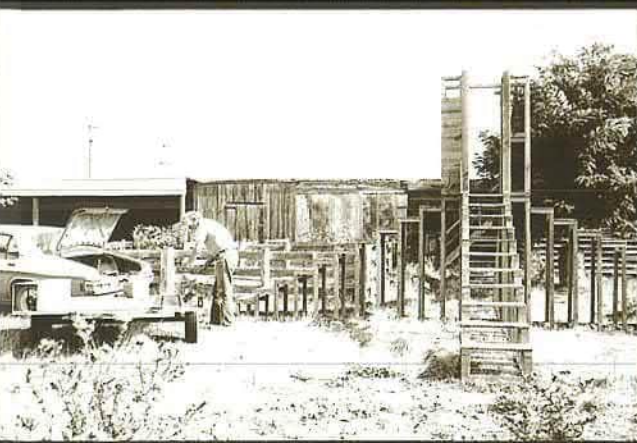
*Collection of the artist*

*Photographed by Brendan Lee*



MORGAN  
JONES

JOURNEYS AND  
DECISIONS





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AGFAPAN 100

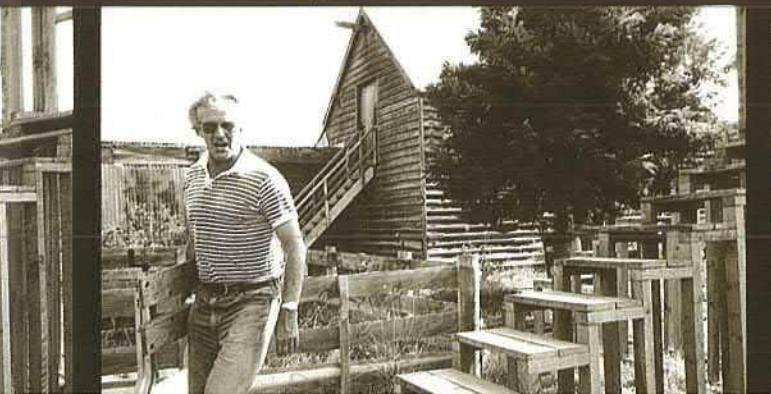
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## Director's Foreword

Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu



The growth of contemporary sculpture in New Zealand has been based heavily on European standards of taste. From an era of British 'imports' and influence to an awakening in the 1940s

of an appreciation of our unique culture, environment and indigenous materials, sculpture in this country has long since developed into an established and respected artform, much of the best now rooted in a singularly New Zealand context.

Leading the way, Otago-based sculptor Morgan Jones has been working since the mid-1960s, establishing himself as a notable artist who has developed a distinctive rural vernacular anchored in Constructivist principles. English-born, Jones emigrated to New Zealand in 1955 aged twenty-one. Compelled to shape, and determined to belong in this new environment, Jones embraced his adopted land through his sculpture, creating raw and profoundly simple works that often referenced farm practices and rural countryside.

Self-taught, Jones provides a robust perspective on cultural and political identity in our young country, using sculpture to make a conscious statement on themes of

individual freedom and the sanctity of human life. Frequently exhibiting in isolated rural sites rather than conventional gallery contexts, his unique style and outlook continue to enhance New Zealand sculpture.

**Morgan Jones: Journeys and Decisions** is the most comprehensive exhibition yet assembled of the works of this respected artist. Consisting of twenty sculptural pieces from public and private lenders as well as the artist's own holdings, the exhibition documents the complexity and scope of Jones's art between 1975 and 2004.

I would like to thank Morgan for his willing support and collaboration in developing this important retrospective, and also Auckland Art Gallery, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Ashburton District Council and private lenders, whose generosity in providing access to their collections is greatly appreciated.

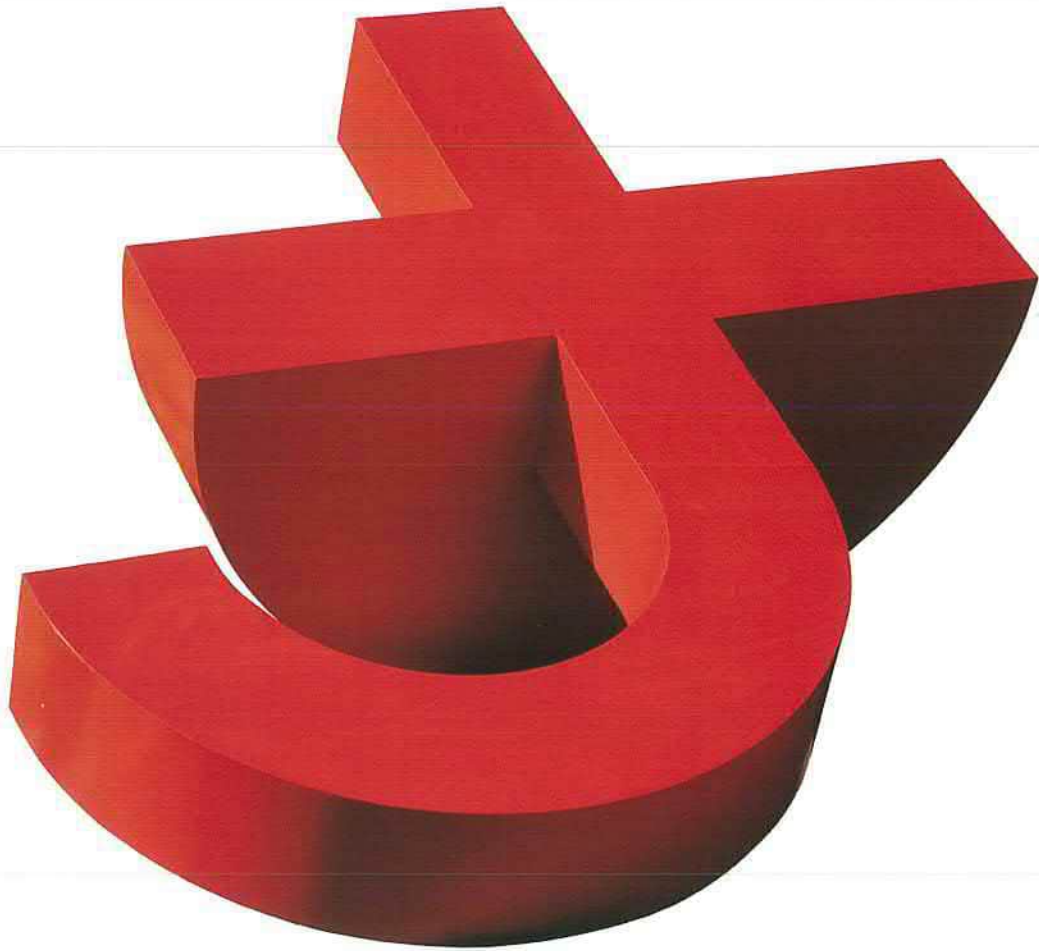
I commend the Gallery team for their commitment and efforts, and all those who have brought this publication and exhibition to such successful fruition.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Anthony Preston". The signature is fluid and cursive.

**P. Anthony Preston**  
Director, Christchurch Art Gallery  
Te Puna o Waiwhetu

Pages 2–3: Morgan Jones  
constructing **Natural  
Selection** 1985

Right: **Anchor What?** 2002  
Steel, powder-coated  
*Collection of the artist.*  
*Photographed by Tim Hawkins*



## Artist's Statement

Morgan Jones

If there is anything we all share, it is the experience of time inexorably passing. I can remember very clearly when *Journeys and Decisions*, this retrospective of my work, was first mooted – we had our initial meeting in Neil Roberts's office at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery four years ago in 2000. It was then I realised I would be seventy years of age when the exhibition opened. At the time, it seemed almost impossible to imagine myself at seventy, but as I'd had equal difficulty at the approach of all the previous decades – and had survived – I presumed the current one wouldn't present too many problems. And I was right. I feel no different now than when I first started making sculpture in the early 1960s. For me, that's the key – making sculpture. Provided I am constantly searching for new ways to express what I want to say, then time – if it can't be kept at bay – can at least be alleviated of some of its sting.

*Journeys and Decisions* surveys works I have made during the past thirty years. I live on a farm, and when recently our former farm manager, John, took his successor on a tour of the property, they drove past my studio. Apparently he was asked what went on in there – a hard question to answer, but John didn't get bogged down in aesthetics. He replied that I made things. I liked that,

because that is just what I do. To be more accurate, I construct things. I join things together. I assemble. There is only one sculpture in this exhibition that isn't totally constructed. It was carved, then its pieces joined – an echo of the way I used to make sculpture in the first ten years of my career. In those days, the material I used was wood, and when you carve wood you open up the possibility of entering somewhere with no exit; in other words, you can become obsessed with your material and the surface of the wood takes precedence over what you are trying to say.

What rescued me from this cul-de-sac was the emergence of real ideas. The change occurred on a Friday afternoon in 1974 – in a very minor way I regarded it as a miracle. It began when I decided to enter something in a national competition. Earlier, in the summer holidays, I'd made my children a sailing dinghy. I couldn't quite get the process of that out of my mind, couldn't quite divorce it from sculpture. I hadn't carved something that floated on the surface of water, I had *constructed* it. Now, a couple of months later, I stumbled on the complete equation; the idea for the sculpture appeared in my mind, along with the means of doing it – for the first time, I was using metaphor, and it was very exciting. Later that afternoon, I

went into town and bought several sheets of building plywood, a roll of fibreglass cloth, some epoxy resin, and a pot of matt black paint. By the end of the weekend, *Jaws* was completed, and I never looked back. It reminds me of Dave Brubeck's response when he was asked what it was about playing jazz that most appealed to him. His reply was: the freedom. That's what constructivism gives me – the means and ability to move outwards from a given theme, unhampered by boundaries or the limitations of a single block of wood, or a given type or amount of material. It is perhaps not a surprise that I have jazz playing in my studio while I work.

When I look back over the work that has been assembled for this retrospective, I can't help but recall the bare minimum of tools that I used. *Boom*, for instance, which was a very large installation on the Wellington waterfront, and part of 'Content/Context', the 1986 survey of New Zealand art, was made with a handsaw, hammer, crescent spanner and electric drill. I made it on site over a period of a fortnight, and I can remember that the actual 'boom' had to be lifted and lowered into position with a crane. My main concern was that the two pieces of the installation would fit together. I don't know why I was so slow to learn the usefulness of power tools. Partly it would have



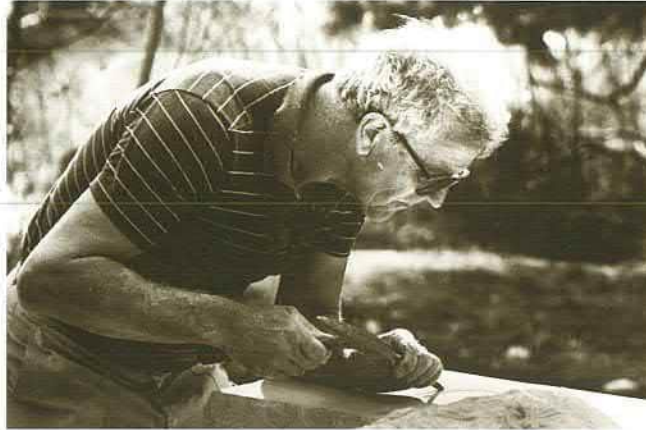
been cost, but also there was an element of the work ethic present. This, too, was related to my experience of once working on the assembly line in a car factory. I like the repetition that is sometimes involved in my installations. In the latest one, for instance, I put in by hand several thousand small screws. The repetitive nature of this task somehow, I feel, gives a certain rhythm to the completed work. Of course, I now have a powerful compound mitre saw, so that something like *Look Out* would take a week to make, rather than the six weeks it took in 1984 with a handsaw.

I cannot totally divorce myself from the fundamental fact of making sculpture: for a completed work to be truly realised it must be well made and strong. Although unseen, all my works have an internal structure based on what I learned as a young boy when I made model aeroplanes that would fly and return to earth without breaking. I find this analogy reassuring, not only because it was a basic truth learned long ago, but because, in a sense, it brings my life full circle in this retrospective entitled **Journeys and Decisions**.



## Beginnings

Some have compared the experience of viewing a Rothko painting to taking a long, warm bath: it could be argued that looking at one of Morgan Jones's sculptures is more like a brisk walk before breakfast. 'Looking' is often not enough – his works are robustly physical, requiring choices and exploration, through actual steps or pictorial ladders, symbolic take-offs or leaps of faith and imagination. One of the first sculptors to successfully harness the vernacular of New Zealand's rural landscape, Jones has honed a minimalist, reductive aesthetic that embodies and evokes the history and character of his adopted country. Using the materials and processes of modern agriculture as a metaphor, he asks questions about freedom, faith, personal responsibility and social manipulation. Jones's oeuvre ranges from compact, finely balanced constructions to large-scale installations in public spaces and isolated rural locations, and **Journeys and Decisions** draws such various works together, revealing the cohesion and sense of purpose at their core and showing how each project has contributed to a rigorous ongoing examination of human motivations and behaviour.



Using such familiar, functional materials as slate, tanalised pine, corrugated iron, galvanised nails, aluminium and rope, Jones speaks plainly, physically, inventively, with an eye to the underdog and an inbuilt aversion to pretension or brutality of any kind. Woven into and around these utilitarian objects is an idiosyncratic and tightly rationalised symbolic language – words, steps, arrows, doors – with which Jones expresses his own search for answers and enlightenment. His guiding theme, the sanctity of personal freedom, is held taut within each sculpture and echoes across his entire body of work.

Above: **Morgan Jones 1988**  
*Photographed by Bryn Jones*

Left: **300 Steps, Mt Gay 1982**  
*Photographed by Eric Feasey*

*[S]elf education, away from the crowd, may make for freer spirits, for minds which can feel for profound and unusual connections.<sup>1</sup>*



It is sometimes hard to believe that Jones was born half a world away. Who but a Kiwi would try to eke art out of such unforgivably rustic materials as corrugated iron and galvanised bolts? Who would place a major sculpture in the most isolated of rural areas, for an audience of a few determined humans and several generations of sheep? Despite Jones's willingness to adopt the idioms of his New Zealand, however, and the way in which his work absorbs and reflects aspects of our national character and environment, his English childhood was hugely influential on the development of his world-view, and echoes of that time appear and reappear in his sculpture.

Born in Surrey in 1934, Jones was living with his family on the outskirts of London when the Second World War broke out, but was evacuated with his mother and brother to his grandfather's farm in South Wales. In 1940,

however, when things seemed deceptively safe, he returned to the capital – just in time to witness the terror and destruction of the Blitz first hand: 'I remember seeing the horizon on fire when the docks were bombed. We would watch dogfights in the air and go out and find shrapnel the next day. We were lucky – our house wasn't hit, but a V2 bomb landed nearby. I dreaded the sound of the warning siren – the "all clear" was very different.'<sup>2</sup> Jones spent many of his schooldays locked underground in a claustrophobic air raid shelter, an experience that would leave him with both an abiding horror of fascism and an appreciation of the physical and psychological power of architecture. The impact of these early lessons would later become clear in installations such as *Natural Selection* (1985, p. 18) and *Pitfall* (1988).

Jones's memories of his time at London's Mill Hill School are ambivalent and revealing: he

enjoyed the model aeroplane club, but suffered under an oppressive regime of hard discipline. Twice beaten by senior boys for his disloyalty in not watching a house cricket match, he spent most of his time there in fear of the next assault. On leaving, he worked briefly in a London bank – 'I hated it' – and later joined the Forestry Commission. By his early twenties, Jones was finding the English class system increasingly oppressive. He applied for free passage as a labourer to both New Zealand and Australia – 'I had no plan, it was an adventure' – and was accepted by

Above: Morgan Jones  
constructing *Natural  
Selection* 1985

Facing page: Morgan Jones  
1964



the New Zealand Forestry Service. He spent eighteen months in the country in a forest camp near Waiouru, accompanied by 'immigrants from Manchester, Newcastle and Birmingham, ship-jumpers and criminals on the run'. He was then able to change occupations, becoming a herd tester (by horse and cart) in the Bay of Plenty; after two years he was free to do as he wanted. He initially found work in a timber mill, then at Todd Motors and later planting seedlings on a tobacco farm at Sandy Bay, near Kaiteriteri. In 1958, Jones arrived in Christchurch for a 'pressure cooker course' at the city's teachers' college. He received his diploma in 1959, the beginning of a long career as an educator, spent largely at small, sometimes sole charge, rural schools throughout Canterbury.

Jones received no formal art education, but an early interest had first been revealed at a Forestry Commission training school in

Wales, when, then nineteen, he was asked to carve a head from wood and was 'astonished at how lifelike it was'. Now he began to find form in carved works – crude at first, but increasingly gaining in sophistication. He completed a set of fully articulated marionettes and built a stage for them with his first wife, planning a touring show for schools. These early works revealed the seeds of his mature practice – precision, real or potential movement, repetition and multiple elements – and some would prefigure later thematic concerns. A series of moving figures, each thirty centimetres high, was based on an image of women in a concentration camp running past the guards. Though Jones's first works were traditional in both means and material, he soon realised that he needed a more flexible format with which to test and explore his rapidly developing ideas: 'I think I've always been a bit of a Constructivist, but adding something on to something you've carved is almost like breaking a pledge.'



## Control

Jones had already participated in a number of group and solo exhibitions when he came to the attention of the wider New Zealand arts scene in 1975 with his entry and subsequent success in the prestigious Hansells Sculpture Award. It came at a time when he was beginning to relinquish carving and wooden reliefs in favour of creating large forms from plywood and fibreglass. He had realised the possibilities of these materials after making a fibreglass dinghy earlier in the year and arrived at an appropriate starting point while teaching an afternoon class at Flemington School: 'I suddenly had the idea of a pair of pliers. I saw the jaws as a mirror image.' The final work, *Jaws* (1975, p. 12), was sleek and vaguely menacing, its matt-black opposing parts poised in perfect balance. For Jones, it was a crucial moment: 'I suddenly realised I could make things, rather than just carving away.' In it, and in the sculptures that followed, Jones focused on the sense of potential violence that lies within ordinary tools and machinery: 'As their opposing parts draw closer together there is a controlled though inevitable destructive force present. You find this in a vice and with the jaws of pliers, with the shearing action of scissor, the sweep of a scythe – where the ground is the passive partner – and with most hinged surfaces. Just before that contact takes place there appears to be a moment of balance and calm. It is this moment I try to recreate

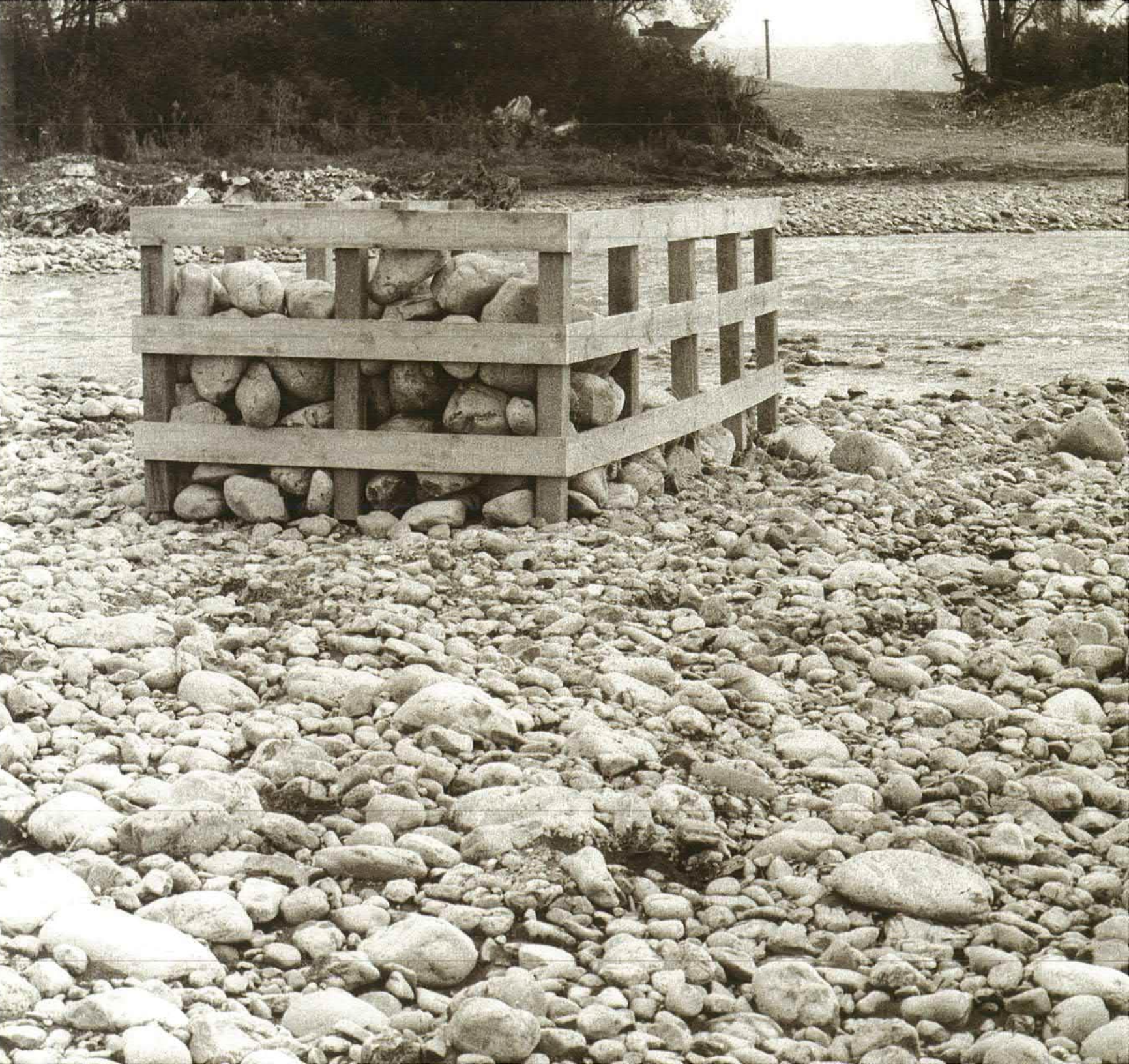
in my sculpture – the closing one before order becomes chaos.'<sup>13</sup>

Encouraged by his success with *Jaws*, Jones continued to investigate other forms, playing with the sense of movement and energy he could create by using intersecting angles and the space between objects. The works that followed were not only removed from his previous sculptures in their simplicity and geometric lines, they were also on a far greater scale. In a brochure for an exhibition in 1976 of five large fibreglass pieces at the Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Jones commented: 'Since I stopped carving and began to use plywood and fibreglass, I have felt the need to make sculpture that is at least as big as myself. Carving, for me, became a dead end. I was becoming too involved with the material, and instead of me being the leader it was I who was being led. I feel that with fibreglass I am in control from the outset, not only with the material but with what I have decided to make.' True to their Constructivist origins, Jones's sculptures emphasised volume rather than mass. At over 2.4 metres, *Quarters* (1975, p. 35) towers over viewers, but its most lasting impression is of the tension between its four angled columns.

With their smooth finish and aerodynamic lines, Jones's sculptures of the mid-1970s eloquently express a sense of contained

energy. Like the wings of an aircraft or the smooth bow of a ship, they cut through space, activating their surroundings. Names like *Cleft*, *Lift*, *Divide* and *Stern* reinforced these readings. Their strong, economical forms and playful use of colour (from vivid yellow, green and orange to deep slate blue and magenta) signalled Jones's admiration for the works of artists such as Anthony Caro (b. 1924), whose witty and dynamic sculptures made from industrial materials have been described as 'drawings in space'.

Left: *Jaws* 1975  
Plywood, fibreglass, epoxy  
resin, acrylic  
Collection of Ashburton  
District Council  
Photographed by Brendan Lee





## A Rural Vernacular

Jones's purchase of an old hall at Waterton, near Ashburton, in 1974, which he converted into a studio, allowed him to plan and construct sculptures on a larger scale. More importantly, however, the discarded farming equipment he found in and around the building provided him with creative inspiration and new working materials. He began to construct assemblages and wall reliefs from weathered fence palings, old harnesses and other pieces of obsolete farm machinery. Some, including a series of 'backpacks', positioned rough leather straps and metal buckles against smooth, carved wood. Although these works continued his interest in conveying a sense of balance and spatial control – a quality that is particularly evident in counterweighted works such as *Rock* (1978) and *Slung* (1978, p. 16) – their thematic direction was to be even more significant. The harnesses, with their inherent connection to restraint and servitude, suggested to Jones an analogy between the farm and the prison. 'You literally bind an animal (usually a horse) so that it will work for you without chance of escape. [...] On a farm, every single animal is a prisoner. It is grouped, sorted, and finally, with great premeditation, killed.'<sup>4</sup> This was not the response of a naïve townie, horrified by the realities of country existence – farming was buried deep in Jones's Welsh ancestry, and he had witnessed the treatment of animals in both Britain and New Zealand.

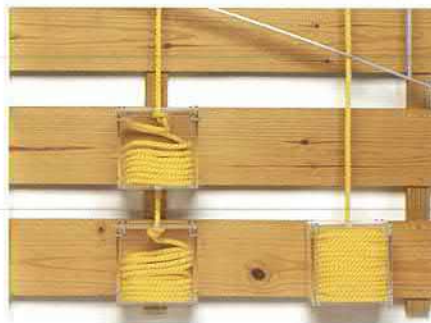
Although the new direction in his work had been triggered by old, abandoned farming equipment, Jones began to choose materials to reinforce the connections between animal husbandry and man's inhumanity to man, incorporating more modern agricultural objects such as grain bags, galvanised nails and baling twine. Despite obvious misgivings about the treatment of animals on farms, it is clear that the modern agricultural environment with its reduced, functional forms, appealed to his increasingly minimalist aesthetic. Large timber sculptures such as *Slim Chance* (1980) reflect this ambivalence, appropriating the satisfyingly clean lines of fences, sheep pens and races, while emphasising the control and manipulation inherent in such structures. Though these works, sited in the natural landscape, were made to 'real' scale and could be mistaken at first for genuine farm objects, they conveyed an element of anxiety and danger through their titles and in their slightly precarious, narrowing forms. Further extending the metaphor, wall pieces like *Fenceline* (1977, p. 16) likened the methodical division of livestock and countryside to social control and manipulation. Its tight coils of yellow rope, contained within compact perspex boxes, suggest control and tension: a sense of things that must be regulated and kept clear of one another. It is tempting to make connections with the political climate of the time, when issues like apartheid were dominant.



Above: *Slip* (detail of installation, Waterton, Canterbury) 1981  
Tanalised pine, river stones  
Collection of the artist

Left: *Gap* (detail of installation on either side of the Waingawa River, Masterton, for the Hansells Sculpture Exhibition) 1980  
Tanalised pine, river stones

*Gap* (p. 14), built for the 1980 Hansells Sculpture Exhibition at the Wairarapa Arts Centre in Masterton, expressed the human compulsion to contain and control nature. That year, in contrast to previous award exhibitions focusing on a single winner, twenty-one practitioners were selected for a month-long exhibition, which *New Zealand Listener* reviewer Margaret Christensen described as 'a multi-media summation of the state of the art'.<sup>5</sup> All the participating artists (including Paul Cullen, Matt Pine, Jacqueline Fraser and Di ffrench) made works based on the broad theme 'Earth, Water, Air, Fire', and the resulting sculptures were displayed in the centre's gallery, the adjoining cottage and church and in the local landscape. Over six days, Jones constructed two large open-ended pine boxes loosely filled with river stones, which faced each other across the fast-flowing Waingawa River, suggesting the optimistic futility of man's attempts to corral and contain nature. In an ironic turn of events, the sculpture was washed away by powerful floodwaters the night after it was completed, demonstrating Jones's argument more effectively than perhaps even he had envisaged. Philosophical, he later credited *Gap* with sparking a crucial insight: 'For the first time I saw how to relate sculpture to landscape, no matter how fortuitous the elements might or might not be. I also saw that for a sculpture to stand easily in the landscape it stood a better chance of



relating to its surroundings if it was actually made there, using the materials of its surroundings.'<sup>6</sup> Prompted by the realisation, Jones explored the possibilities in a series of outdoor works that included *Shaft* (1980) and *Slip* (1981, p. 15).

For the 1981 ANZART exhibition in Christchurch, Jones created his most ambitious piece so far, a resolute wood and corrugated iron structure called *Shelter* (p. 17), which was sited incongruously on the neat lawn outside the Court Theatre. After the exhibition, Jones determined that this monument to man's primal desire to build should be situated 'in the middle of nowhere'. After gaining the permission of the Ministry of Works, he relocated it to a remote area in the MacKenzie Basin, where Aoraki/Mount Cook acts as a dramatic backdrop. There it remains, seen by a lucky few, 'immense and absolutely at home'.<sup>7</sup>



Above left: **Fenceline** (detail)  
1977

Wood, metal, rope

Private collection

Photographed by Brendan Lee

Above right: **Slung** (detail)  
1978

Wood, metal rings, leather straps

Collection of the Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, gifted by the artist, 1999

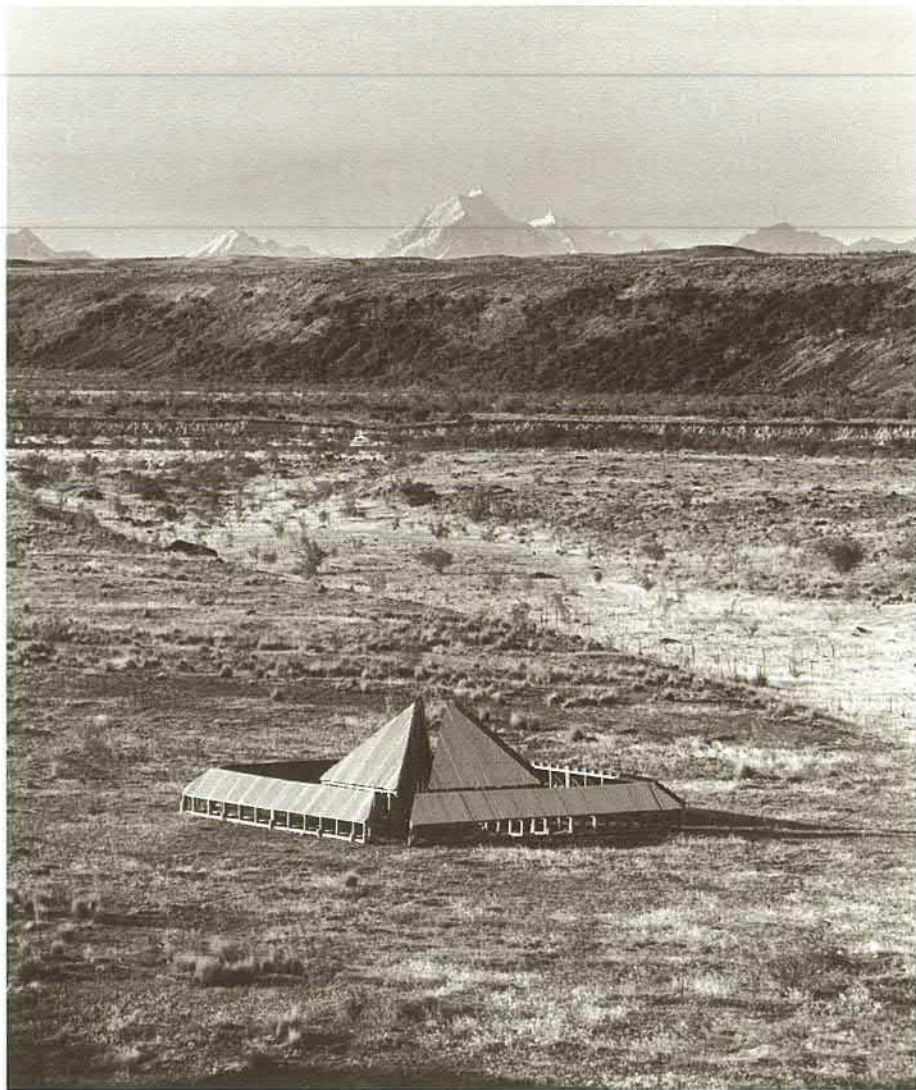
Photographed by Brendan Lee

Right: **Shelter** (MacKenzie Country) 1981

Corrugated iron, wood

Collection of the Ministry of Works

Photographed by Eric Feasey





RACE

## Traps and Shelters

A simple but monumental intervention in the landscape, *300 Steps, Mt Gay* (1982, pp. 8, 19) was one of Jones's largest environmental works and the first time he had encouraged viewers to participate in an installation. He placed a long flight of 299 home-built wooden steps into an isolated, rolling hillside near the South Canterbury town of Pleasant Point, then, through a flyer and word of mouth, invited friends, family and the general public to join him for the completion of the work: 'I climbed up, put the last step in then carried on across the hill and disappeared down into a farmhouse where I got changed. Then all these people started to climb up behind me.'<sup>8</sup> Photographs taken on the day show more than one hundred people making the ascent. It was to be an important moment for Jones, who began to explore new ways to physically involve people in his sculptures. In 1984, Jones constructed *Stand*, a major installation inside the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Made of untreated wood, '1,050 six-inch bolts and goodness knows how many nails',<sup>9</sup> the sculpture consisted of a large platform resembling the floor of a woolshed, the outline of a door, a towering auctioneer's stand or diving platform and three tiers of grandstand seats. Visitors were encouraged to make the journey across the rickety boards, stepping onto a 'stage' where they were not sure how to act. The juxtaposition of elements encouraged multiple interpretations: though connected to a livestock saleroom, they also

made reference to the national obsession with watching and playing sport. A waterless 'well' cut into the floor below the raised platform hinted at the potential consequences of such a preoccupation. The size of the installation, obviously designed for human beings, lent it a vaguely sinister feel and opened up other possibilities. As commentator Bridie Lonie observed, 'There's something about the scale of the piece which recalls prisoner of war camps, with watch-towers for guards.'<sup>10</sup> On drawings exhibited alongside *Stand*, Jones included annotated references to 'doorways/gallows' and 'gallows/doorway/goalpost'.

The themes Jones had hinted at in *Stand* were made explicit in his next large-scale work. In the late summer and autumn of 1985, he embarked upon *Natural Selection*, a project for the Centre Court of Christchurch's Robert McDougall Art Gallery. This massive structure, memorably described by Tom Weston as combining 'the Babylonian ziggurat with the Kiwi outhouse',<sup>11</sup> was built over ten weeks on a Canterbury farm. Once complete, it was dismantled for the journey into the city where it was installed in the gallery as part of an ongoing series of artists' projects. *Natural Selection* consisted of four tiered ramps, fixed at right angles around a central tower. Entrances at the top of each ramp led into a revolving cubicle, described by Jones as 'the eye of the needle',<sup>12</sup> at which point the participant was provided, not with inspiration or salvation, but rather with four options for



descent: 'The thing about climbing to the top is – where is there to go? You just come down to the bottom again.' Above each door, Jones had stencilled the word RACE: 'I wanted to put on something that evokes the way animals on farms are processed and the way human beings are processed. There isn't much difference between mistreating animals and mistreating a human being.' Jones's enjoyment of language, a consistent element in his later works, was evident in the annotated

Above: *300 Steps, Mt Gay* (detail) 1982

Photographed by Eric Feasey.

Left: *Natural Selection* (installed in Centre Court of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery) 1985

Wood, iron, acrylic  
Private collection

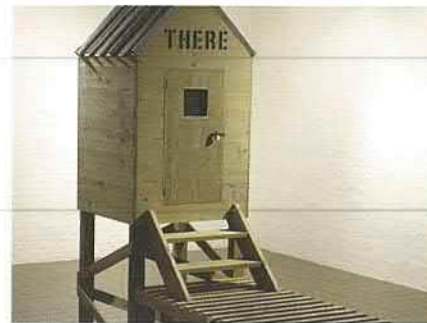
drawings that accompanied the installation. They played on anagrams for RACE – CARE and ACRE – both of which played into Jones's larger themes. It was at this point that he began to explore language as a structure for the demonstration and delivery of power. Like architecture, it can exclude or include (exit/no exit), direct, instruct or confuse.

Offered the carrot of choice and free will, participants in *Natural Selection* found themselves being controlled and manipulated by the sculptor in absentia. The moment the first step was taken, they had become players in a larger game with uncertain rules and consequences. Like a mob of sheep being drafted between the pasture and the abattoir, or refugees in concentration camp, those who participated had entered a situation controlled by an invisible and omnipotent other. As Tom Weston observed, 'Children play on the sculpture far more happily than adults do.'<sup>13</sup>

*Here and There* (p. 20), exhibited in 1986 as part of the 'Aspects of Recent New Zealand Art' series at Auckland City Art Gallery, also considered ideas of personal freedom. Again, an arrangement of steps and platforms with directing arrows appeared to offer visitors a journey or choice between two locations, or states. At the bottom of the sculpture, a lid marked HERE seemed to lead down into a subterranean shaft; up the steps was a roofed cubicle with THERE stencilled above its door. A window in the door revealed a glimpse of a

mirror at the other end, in which the viewer's face was reflected. Those who thought they had arrived at their destination were to be disappointed: the door was padlocked, denying entry. For Jones, the work attempted 'to make a statement about the limbo of our everyday lives. It is about journeys and decisions, the object of them, whether they indeed have an object, a destination, or an outcome. It is about the present and the future.' He also saw it as a statement about architecture's potential to imprison: 'At the same time as you are free to explore, there is also the sense of entrapment.'<sup>14</sup>

Many of Jones's concerns and motifs were distilled in *Pitfall*, which was commissioned by the Wellington City Art Gallery for the lawn outside the public library. Three related 'doors', an entrance and two exits, led down into the earth. Marked alternatively ENTRANCE and EXIT/NO EXIT, they were all padlocked, making the act of experiencing the sculpture deliberately frustrating. Jones related the installation to his experiences as a child in air raid shelters during the Blitz and nowhere in his work is the power of architecture to entomb, or the function of steps as an escape, more clearly stated. As Jones said, 'This is a constant in my work: the forces that, in a physical sense, threaten man's freedom and the way we might avoid detection when that freedom seems in danger of being taken from us.'<sup>15</sup>



Above: **Here and There**  
(detail) 1986  
Tanalised pine  
Collection of the Auckland Art  
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Right: **Boom** (installation  
view) 1986  
Shed 11, National Gallery,  
Wellington







## Journeys: Decisions

In 1988, Jones received Arts Council funding for a trip to Europe. While visiting Grizedale Forest in Cumbria, he was invited to make a sculpture. The resulting work, *Axis* (p. 22), was constructed from the stones of a dry-stone wall. The main purpose of Jones's Arts Council application was to visit the concentration camp at Dachau, an experience that would induce some of the most haunting sculptures of his career – a series of black wall reliefs depicting buildings with boarded up windows and half-open doors. Bleak and shadowy, with no sign of human presence, they exuded a sense of hopelessness and despair in the face of an all-encompassing evil. Several earlier works, made for an exhibition at the Manawatu Art Gallery about 1987, had included references to the trains that had been used to transport prisoners to the camps. Jones had stripped away his customary bright colours, and the wood was no longer natural pine – it had taken on the empty blackness of places that had never seen the sun.

During his time in Europe, Jones had also visited some of the places of his childhood and memories of his wartime experiences, never far from his mind, began to surface. His residency at the Otago Polytechnic in 1989 provided an opportunity to explore the residue of those times and used the theme of flight in both in its literal and metaphorical senses. One sculpture from the subsequent exhibition 'Escape and Flight' consisted of

three vertical pine boxes (p. 30), marked GO GOING GONE on one side and GAS GASSING GASSED on the other. Set into the top of these structures, semicircles marked with Arabic and Roman numerals seemed to suggest that the human predilection for violence and destruction was constant across time and culture. Wooden panels, fanning out above the numbers, resembled an opening book or the passing of time. Other works, such as *Cross (What Time?)* (1989, p. 23), likened the fall of a doomed aeroplane to a personal failure of faith.

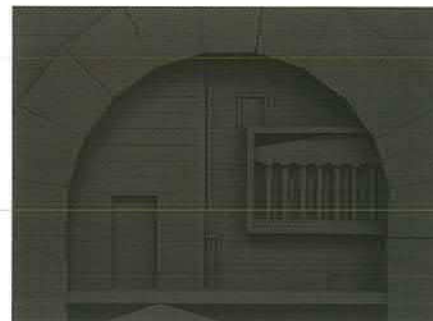
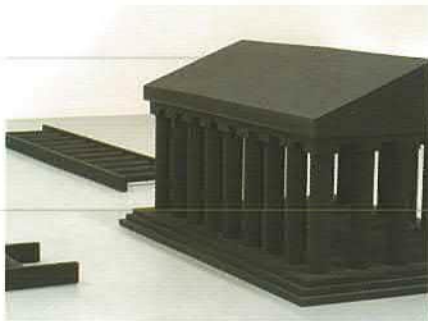
In 1991, Jones created a major installation, *Dream of a Prisoner* (p. 24), for the Canterbury Society of Arts. It drew upon the earlier relief works, combining them with other elements to sombre and profound effect. A classical temple occupied the centre of the floor, with four ladders placed flat around it at right angles. Five large wooden reliefs were hung on the surrounding walls, offering glimpses, through shallow doors, archways and windows, of buildings beyond, some industrial, others classical in form. By painting every object in the room black, Jones created a landscape of imprisonment and hopelessness that was both physical and internal, negating the idea of sleep as the prisoner's release.

Jones's *In Search of Go(l)d* series had been pre-figured by a series of wall reliefs in the late 1980s, with titles such as *Panhandle*, *Shovel*



Above: *Cross (What Time?)*  
(detail) 1989  
Wood, copper, acrylic  
Collection of Whakatipua

Left: *Axis* 1988  
Stone  
Collection of Grizedale Forest,  
Cumbria



and *Gabriel's Dream*, which drew on the gold mining history of the Central Otago region. In 1992, Jones, who was now living close to the area where several of the most significant early strikes occurred, began to make works that drew an analogy between the southern gold rush and another kind of quest – the search for spiritual enlightenment. The resulting exhibition, seen at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery in 1993, combined a variety of materials, including local schist, Oamaru stone, copper, pine and aluminium, in structures that recalled mining dredges and sluice boxes. Throughout, the imagery of journeying and pilgrimage abounded, in tilted ladders, ascending steps and arrows. Jones's now-characteristic gorse-flower yellow symbolised the promised riches at stake: 'For me, yellow means light and I associate it with gold.' Yet, as in many of Jones's previous works, an ultimate destination or resolution proved elusive. As Justin Paton observed,

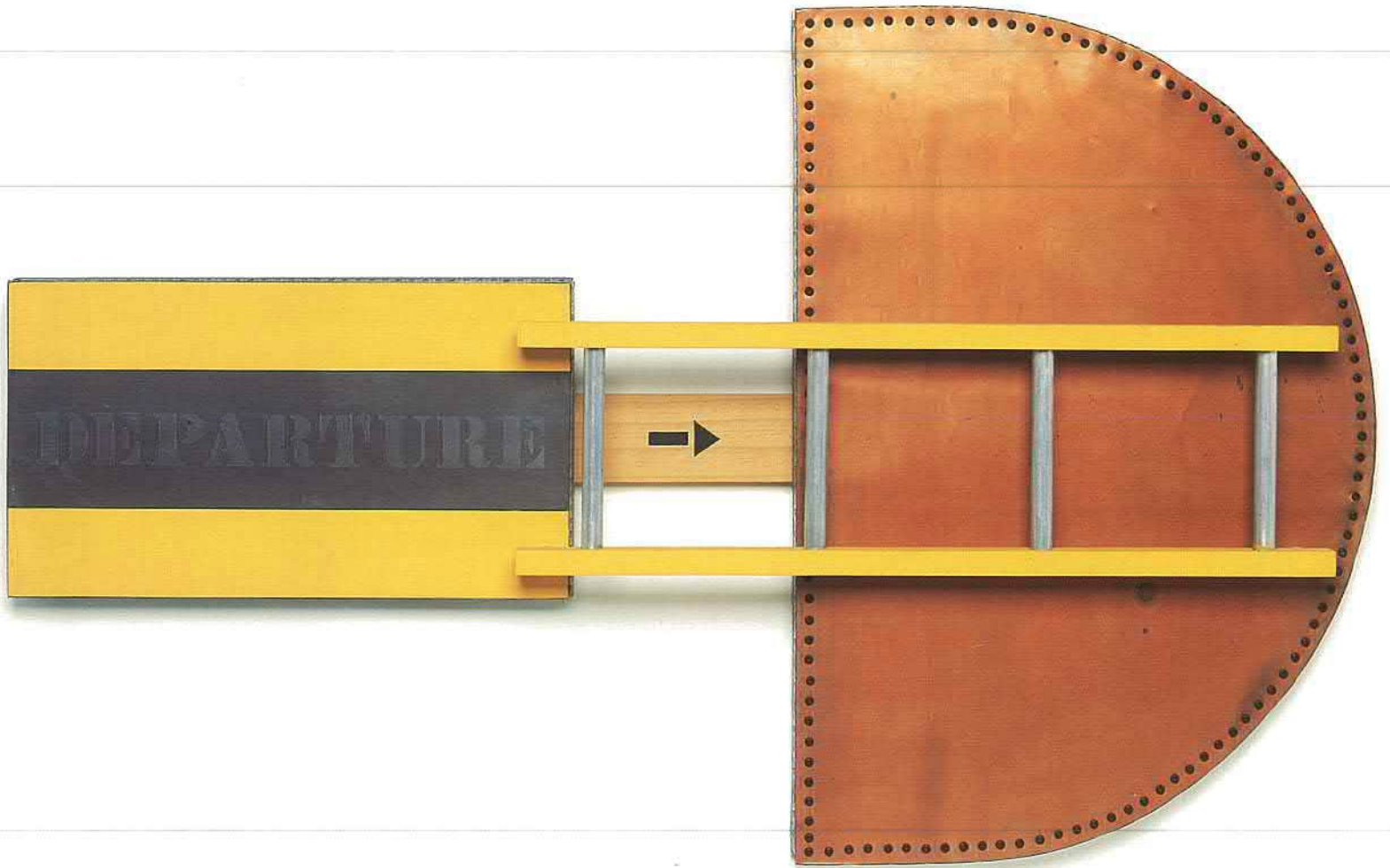
'there is no real destination, no reward, no God found or paydirt struck'.<sup>16</sup> Such ambivalence reflected Jones's own interest, but ultimate uncertainty, in the true nature of spiritual belief: 'I admire people who have faith tremendously. As for myself, I can't quite make that leap.'<sup>17</sup>

Eight years after completing *In Search of Go(l)d* (1993), Jones turned again to the history of his local environment with *Stream* (2001, p. 25). This time, his theme was another sought-after commodity – the 'liquid gold' of the electricity-generating rivers of the South Island, in particular, the nearby Arrow. Five elements in a tight arrangement that spanned wall and floor suggested the devices constructed to trap and filter the powerful flow of water. Though physically absent, water was tangibly present as a palpable energy that rushed from one element to the next – 'dramatic distillation made visible' in the words of David Eggleton.<sup>18</sup>

Above: **Dream of a Prisoner** (details) 1991  
Wood, plywood, acrylic  
Collection of the Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, gifted by the artist, 1992  
Photographed by Brendan Lee

Right: **Stream** 2001  
Copper, brass, plywood, acrylic  
Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery  
Photographed by Tim Hawkins





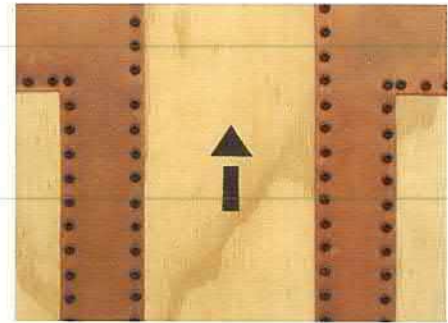
## Arrivals and Departures

Recent works by Jones have continued to use the metaphor of journey to tease out both prosaic and profound concerns. *The Big D* (1998, p. 26) at first appears to be a simple statement of the act of leaving, but it also opens up a deeper conversation about departures of other kinds. It was one of a group of several small wall-based sculptures concerning airports and flights Jones made as he and his wife Pat were preparing to go overseas for six months. A small arrow and yellow ladder breach the gap between a slate 'runway' and a glowing copper 'wing', the gravity of the materials suggesting that this particular voyage may be more significant than we first think. One farewell makes us think about all farewells; the small journey suggests the great one. The title of the sculpture recalls the kind of euphemism embodied by 'The Big Sleep' – suddenly the act of catching a plane is imbued with far greater consequence, as we, the passengers, are channelled (voluntarily or otherwise) towards our ascension. Another work in this series, *Black Box*, seemed to offer even less cause for optimism: while one arrow pointed up, the other pointed down. *Memorial* further extended the idea of transformation from the earthbound to the airborne, with the word SLATE rewritten as STELA.

*Battle Group (Last Supper)* (2002, p. 28) was part of a selection of recent works Jones exhibited under the collective title 'Moorings' at

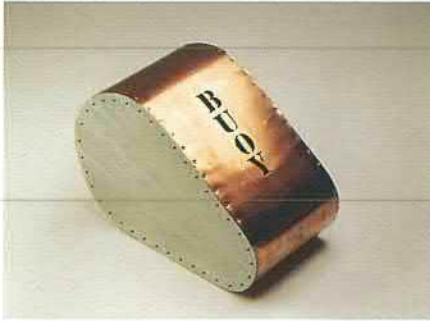
the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 2003. It consisted of thirteen sculptural elements, individually mounted on wooden tables, which were arranged in the form of a cross. Each was marked with a stencilled phrase relating to locations on an aeroplane or warship. Most – cockpit, vent, flight deck, bridge – were merely descriptive, but in the context of the work's subtitle, the rearrangement of 'siren' to form 'risen' suggested another agenda. Alone, they operated as succinct, sculptural statements – a harmonious union of form and materials. Together, however, they resembled a mysterious, elegiac procession, laid out like recovered elements in an accident investigation.

In contrast, *Landing* (2003, p. 29) reveals Jones in playful form, combining references to esoteric knowledge with elegantly contrasting materials and forms. An aluminium and copper ziggurat, symbol of the age-old search for spiritual connection, is capped by a square section of slate, while nearby a brass circle is suspended over a bright copper cylinder by delicate supports. Linking both elements is a 'T'-shaped brass rod, which Jones has described as 'a paraphrase of an aircraft's tricycle undercarriage' – a reference to flight that is reinforced by the sculpture's title. Like encrypted, newly discovered messages from an unknown source, maze designs drawn from traditional Irish and Scottish patterns are inscribed into both the circle



Above: **Ceiling** (detail) 1998  
Copper, brass, slate, wood,  
acrylic  
Collection of the artist  
Photographed by Brendan Lee

Left: **The Big D** 1998  
Copper, brass, slate, wood,  
acrylic  
Collection of the artist  
Photographed by Brendan Lee



and square. As did the steps and ladders of previous works, these mazes represent the path toward our final destination, revealing it as anything but simple and straightforward. Do our choices make a difference in the long run? Once we have climbed the ziggurat and found our way to the centre of the maze, must we simply turn around and go back down again?

Jones's series of large fabricated steel structures, such as *Anchor What?* (2002, p. 5), sustain this sense of *brio* and enquiry, while their simple, distilled forms recapture the tempered energy of the fibreglass works of the 1970s. The most recent is a towering sculpture for the forecourt of the Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu. *Scissor*'s symmetrical black steel sections interlock and oppose each other to form what Jones has described as a 'visual anagram'. Operating as a mirror, they energise the space between them,

two halves of a mysterious equation. Like all of Jones's work, *Scissor* has its origins in an ordinary object – a Yale padlock: 'I was interested in the basic cube structure. I find the best things you make are simple – they shouldn't be complicated at all.'

Over more than forty years as a sculptor, Jones has used reduced forms, vernacular materials and a distinctive repertoire of symbols to explore a variety of concerns, from personal freedom and spiritual enlightenment to the way we interact with others and our environment. Perhaps his greatest strength is his ability to investigate profound issues in a way that never veils his sense of wonder and love for life. Combining irrefragable curiosity with a healthy scepticism, his sculptures dissect and analyse the world in and around him and invite us to do the same, as though the meaning of life were somehow encrypted in simple things. As, surely, it must be.

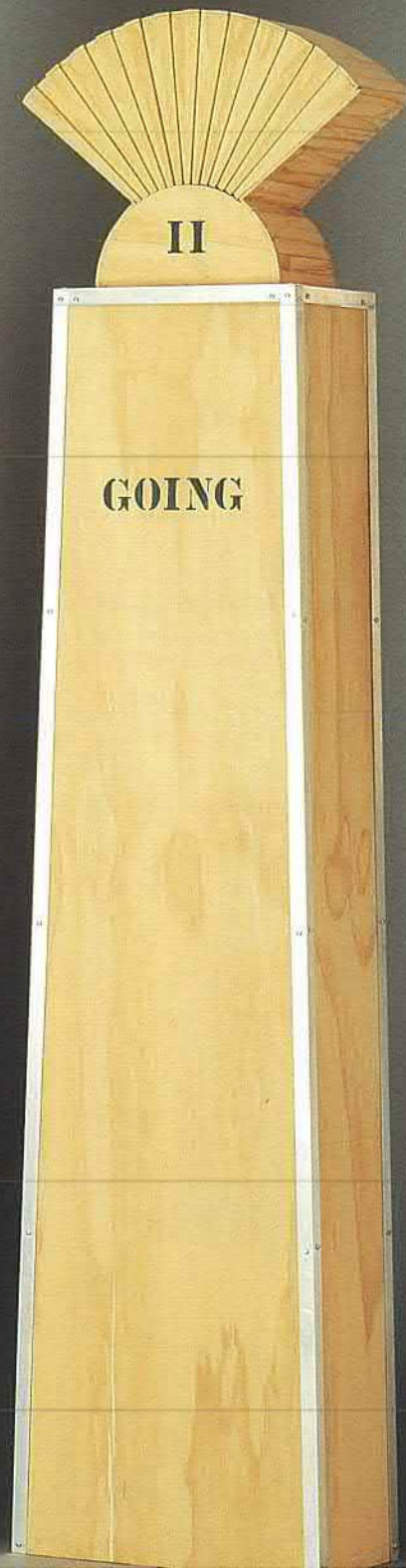
Above: from the work **Battle Group (Last Supper)** (details) 2002

Left: **Buoy**  
Centre: **Vent**  
Right: **Cockpit**  
Copper, aluminium, acrylic

Collection of the artist  
Photographed by Tim Hawkins

Right: **Landing** 2003  
Aluminium, copper, brass, slate  
Collection of the artist  
Photographed by Tim Hawkins







## Notes to the text

- 1 Janet Paul, Fergus Collison, *Art New Zealand* 39, Winter, 1986, p. 48.
- 2 And following quotes unless otherwise noted: Morgan Jones, conversation with the author, 2003.
- 3 Morgan Jones, brochure for CSA Gallery exhibition, 1976, unpaginated.
- 4 Morgan Jones, interview with Sarah Pepperle, *Bulletin 137*, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, 2004.
- 5 Margaret Christensen, 'In their element', *New Zealand Listener*, 24 May 1980, p. 34.
- 6 Morgan Jones, quoted by T.L. Rodney Wilson in *Aspects of Recent New Zealand Art: Sculpture 1*, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1986, unpaginated.
- 7 Tom Weston, 'Morgan Jones: The Ascent Beckons', *Art New Zealand* 35, 1985, p. 39.
- 8 Morgan Jones, interviewed by Ann Betts, Robert McDougall Art Gallery education files, 1985.
- 9 Morgan Jones, quoted in 'Installation at Art Gallery', *Otago Daily Times*, 1984.
- 10 Bridie Lonie, 'Stand: of Sheep and Men', *Otago Daily Times*, 1984.
- 11 Weston, 'The Ascent Beckons', pp. 38, 39.
- 12 And following quotes this paragraph: Morgan Jones, interviewed by Ann Betts.
- 13 Weston 'The Ascent Beckons', p. 38.
- 14 Morgan Jones, quoted by T.L. Rodney Wilson.
- 15 Morgan Jones, statement for *Pitfall* brochure, Wellington City Art Gallery, 1988, unpaginated.
- 16 Justin Paton, 'In Search of Go(!)d', *Press*, Christchurch, 12 May 1993.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 David Eggleton, 'Like Dancing to Architecture', *New Zealand Listener*, 30 August 2003, Vol. 190, No. 3303.

Go Going Gone 1989  
Wood, aluminium, acrylic  
Collection of Whakatipu  
Photographed by Tim Hawkins

# Chronology

1934

Born, Surrey, England.

1947–50

Attended Mill Hill School, London.

1953

Attended Forestry Commission Training school in North Wales, where he first attempted carving with wood.

1955

Arrived in New Zealand.

1958–9

Attended Christchurch Teachers' Training College.

1960

Began to make carved wooden sculptures.

1964

First exhibition (with four South Canterbury painters) at Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

1966

Participated in 'The Group of Seven', Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

First solo exhibition, Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

1967

Participated in 'New Zealand Graphics' exhibition, New Vision Gallery, Auckland.

1970

Began to construct wooden reliefs.

1971

Participated in the Hansells Prize for Contemporary Sculpture, Wairarapa Arts Centre, Masterton.

1973

'Chess pieces' exhibited at Cerima Gallery, New York.

1974

Solo exhibition 'Leather and Sculpture' at CSA Gallery, Christchurch.

Purchased old hall at Waterton, near Ashburton, making the construction of large sculpture possible.

Began to use plywood and fibreglass.

1975

Joint winner, Hansells Sculpture Award, Wairarapa Arts Centre, Masterton.

1976

Solo exhibition 'Morgan Jones' at CSA Gallery, Christchurch.

1977

Solo exhibitions at CSA Gallery, Christchurch and Aigantighe Art Gallery, Timaru.

1978

Began to make sculptures from old farm equipment.

Participated in 'Package Deal' at CSA Gallery, Christchurch and Hansells Sculpture Award, Wairarapa Arts Centre, Masterton.

1980

Received Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Grant.

Solo exhibition in Christchurch Arts Centre.

Participated in the Hansells Sculpture Award, Wairarapa Arts Centre, Masterton.

1981

*Shelter* made for ANZART exhibition. It was exhibited in the Christchurch Arts Centre, then relocated to a permanent position near Lake Pukaki in the MacKenzie Country.

'Stations' exhibition, CSA Gallery, Christchurch.

Participated in 'The First Australian Sculpture Triennial', Preston Institute of Fine Arts and La Trobe University, Melbourne and 'Artists' Boxes', Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North.

Received an Arts Council grant to travel to the United States to view sculpture in New York, Washington and Miami.

1982

*300 Steps, Mt Gay* installation, Canterbury.

*New Zealand Landscape 1* included in Hansells Sculpture Exhibition, Wairarapa Arts Centre, Masterton.

Participated in 'F1 New Zealand Sculpture' project, Wellington and 'New Zealand Drawing 1982', Dunedin Public Art Gallery (toured nationally).

Contributed to 'Arte der '82', Muestra Internacional de Arte Grafico, Bilbao, Spain.

1983

Exhibited barbed wire and stile sculpture at ANZART, Hobart.

Received Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Grant, attended International Sculpture Conference at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, England.

1984

*Stand* installation, Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Made *Stone Circle* for Aigantighe Art Gallery, Timaru.

Participated in '1984 Art in Dunedin', Dunedin.

1985

*Natural Selection*, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.

1986

*Boom* exhibited in 'Content/Context: A Survey of Recent New Zealand Art', Shed 11, National Art Gallery, 1986.

Participated in 'Totems', CSA Gallery, Christchurch.

*Here and There* exhibited in 'Aspects of Recent New Zealand Art: Sculpture 1', Auckland Art Gallery (later acquired for permanent collection).

1987

*Pitfall* installation, Central Wellington Library lawn (City Gallery, Wellington, commission).

1988

Travelled to Europe on Arts Council travel grant, visited museums in West Berlin and Dachau concentration camp. Created *Axis* sculpture in Grizedale Forest, Cumbria, England.

1989

Artist in Residence, Otago Polytechnic.

*Escape and Flight*, installation, Carnegie Centre, Dunedin.

*Flights*, sculpture, Hocken Library, Dunedin.

1990

*Mater* exhibited in 'Come To Your Senses – Art You Can Handle', Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

1991

'Foundations' exhibition, Bowen Galleries, Wellington.

*Water Music* included in 'Raising the Curtain', CSA Gallery, Christchurch.

1992

Solo exhibition, 'Broken Journey', Artspace, Auckland.

*In Search of Go(I)D*, installation, Carnegie Centre Gallery, Dunedin.

1993

*In Search of Go(I)D*, installation, Robert McDougall Art Gallery.

'Landfall', Chiarascuro Gallery, Auckland.

'End of the Line', Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North.

1997

First book, *Taken to the Cleaners*, published.

1998

Second book, *Dummy Run*, published.

Solo exhibition, Warwick Brown Gallery, Auckland.

2000

*Go Going Gone* exhibited in Spring Collection, Lakes District Museum, Otago.

2003

Solo exhibition, 'Moorings', Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

2004

Solo exhibition, 'Traffic', at SoFA Gallery, Christchurch.

## Public collections

Aigantighe Art Gallery

Ashburton Borough Council

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu

Dunedin Public Art Gallery

Geraldine Borough Council

Te Manawa

# List of Works

## Sculptures

### Jaws 1975

Plywood, fibreglass, epoxy resin, acrylic  
1710 x 740 x 420 mm  
*Collection of Ashburton District Council*

### Quarters 1975

Plywood, fibreglass, epoxy resin, acrylic  
2438 x 914 x 914 mm  
*Collection of the Christchurch Art Gallery  
Te Puna o Waiwhetu, gifted by the artist, 1999*

### Fenceline 1977

Wood, metal, rope  
710 x 1040 x 180 mm  
*Private collection*

### Rock 1978

Leather, rock  
1050 x 380 x 170 mm  
*Collection of the artist*

### Slung 1978

Wood, metal rings, leather straps  
564 x 1120 x 417 mm  
*Collection of the Christchurch Art Gallery  
Te Puna o Waiwhetu, gifted by the artist, 1999*

### Here and There 1986

Tanalised pine  
3000 x 3000 x 3000 mm  
*Collection of the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki*

### Look Out 1986

Wood  
4500 x 50 x 50 (base 1000 sq. mm)  
*Collection of the artist*

### Cross (What Time?) 1989

Wood, copper, acrylic  
2410 x 800 x 800 mm  
*Collection of Whakatipua*

### Go Going Gone 1989

Wood, aluminium, acrylic  
1820 x 1520 x 220 mm  
*Collection of Whakatipua*

### Dream of a Prisoner 1991

Wood, plywood, acrylic  
Dimensions variable (coliseum, 540 x 750 x 1070;  
ladders, 50 x 290 x 1535)  
*Collection of the Christchurch Art Gallery  
Te Puna o Waiwhetu, gifted by the artist, 1992*

### Sluice (In Search of Go(l)d) 1993

Wood, copper, acrylic  
1530 x 2750 x 3000 mm  
*Collection of the artist*

### Ceiling 1998

Copper, brass, slate, wood, acrylic  
1350 x 350 x 60 mm  
*Collection of the artist*

### The Big D 1998

Copper, brass, slate, wood, acrylic  
1015 x 630 x 120 mm  
*Collection of the artist*

### Stream 2001

Copper, brass, plywood, acrylic  
1360 x 3600 x 3000 mm  
*Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery*

### Battle Group (Last Supper) 2002

Breaker, 920 x 700 x 680 mm  
Crews, 920 x 1100 x 520 mm  
Cockpit, 920 x 710 x 520 mm  
Buoy, 920 x 500 x 360 mm  
Amidships, 920 x 860 x 365 mm  
Siren/Risen, 920 x 880 x 360 mm  
Launch, 920 x 720 x 360 mm  
Bridge, 920 x 650 x 520 mm  
Hatch, 920 x 780 x 520 mm  
Vent, 920 x 670 x 680 mm  
Dive, 920 x 1020 x 520 mm  
Flight Deck, 920 x 680 x 680 mm  
Prow, 920 x 900 x 680 mm  
All pieces copper, aluminium, acrylic on wooden table  
*Collection of the artist*

### Landing 2003

Aluminium, copper, brass, slate  
1426 x 622 x 1200 mm  
*Collection of the artist*

### Scissor 2004

Steel  
2438 x 4810 x 4290 mm  
*Collection of the Christchurch Art Gallery  
Te Puna o Waiwhetu*

## Maquettes

### Stand 1984

Wood, 210 x 382 x 343 mm  
*Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery*

### Natural Selection 1985

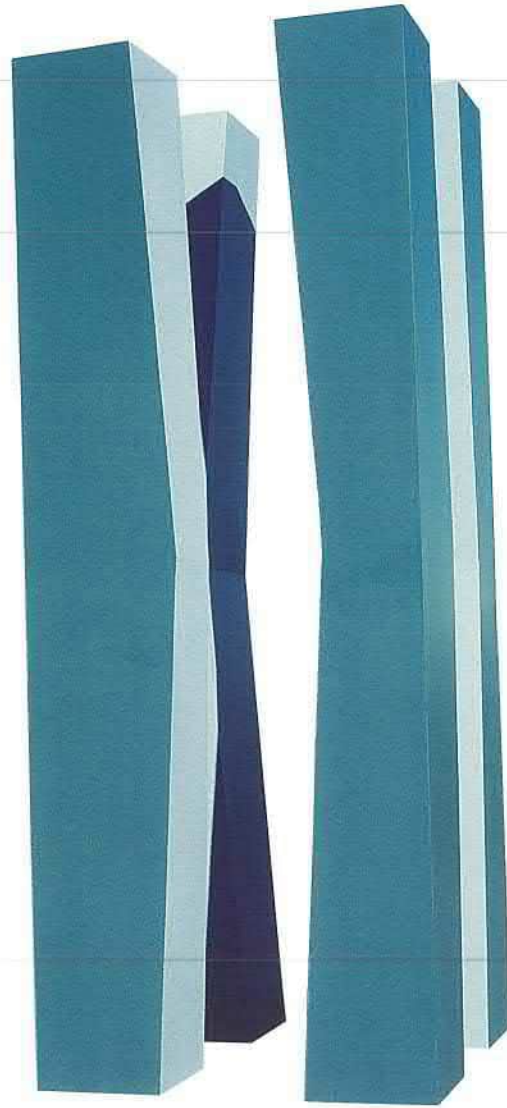
Wood, 290 x 630 x 620 mm  
*Collection of the Christchurch Art Gallery  
Te Puna o Waiwhetu*

### Boom 1986

Wood, acrylic, 285 x 600 x 400 mm  
*Collection of the artist*

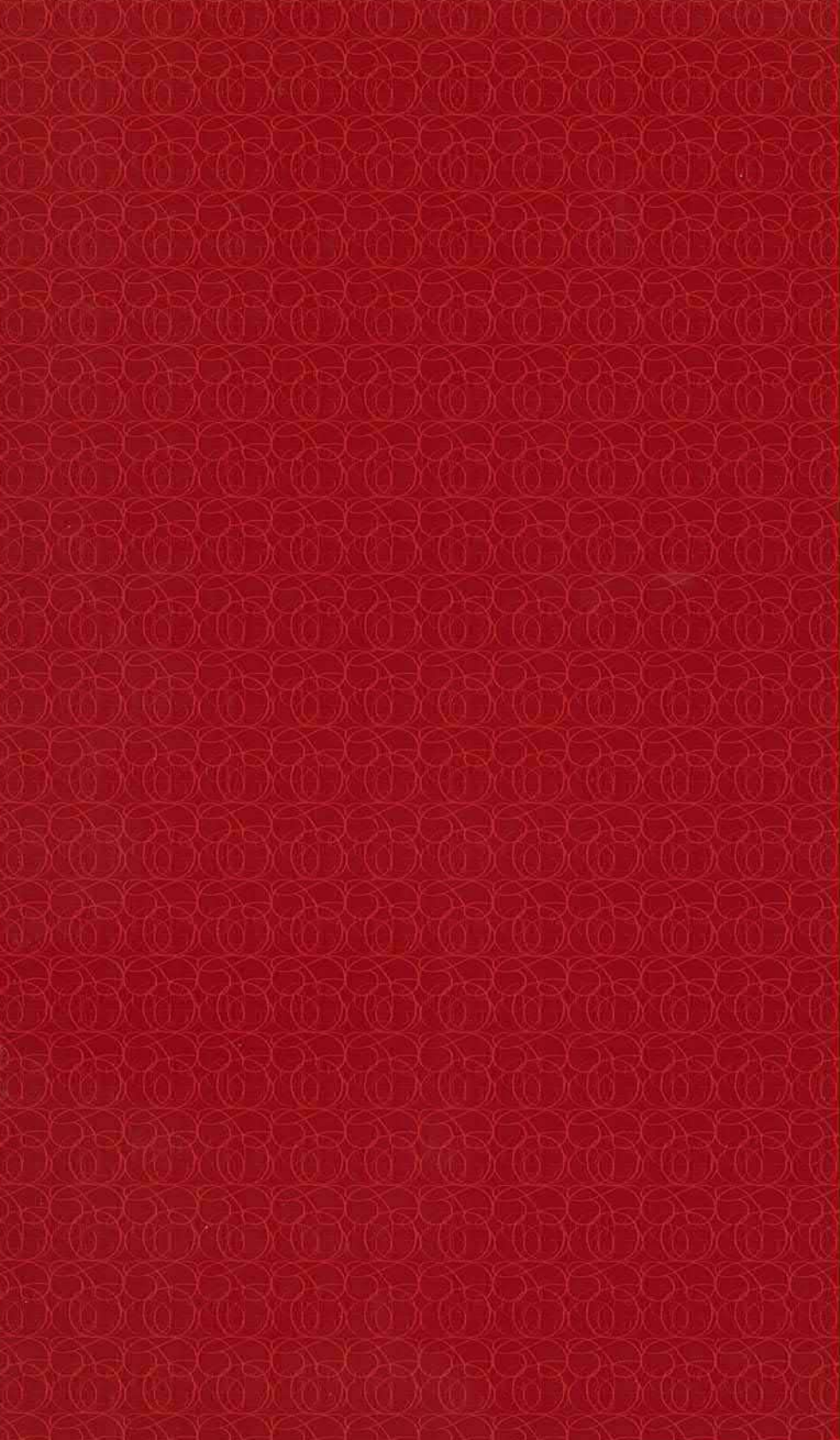
### Quarters 1975

Plywood, fibreglass, epoxy  
resin, acrylic  
*Collection of the Christchurch Art  
Gallery, gifted by the artist, 1999*



Architectural rendering of a modern building facade.





Back cover: **300 Steps, Mt Gay** (detail of installation) 1982

*Photographed by Eric Feasey*



# MORGAN JONES

JOURNEYS AND  
DECISIONS

23 JULY – 25 OCTOBER 2004

This full-colour publication has been produced by the Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu to support *Morgan Jones: Journeys and Decisions*, a survey exhibition of works produced over the last three decades by this original and significant New Zealand sculptor.



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CHRISTCHURCH ART GALLERY