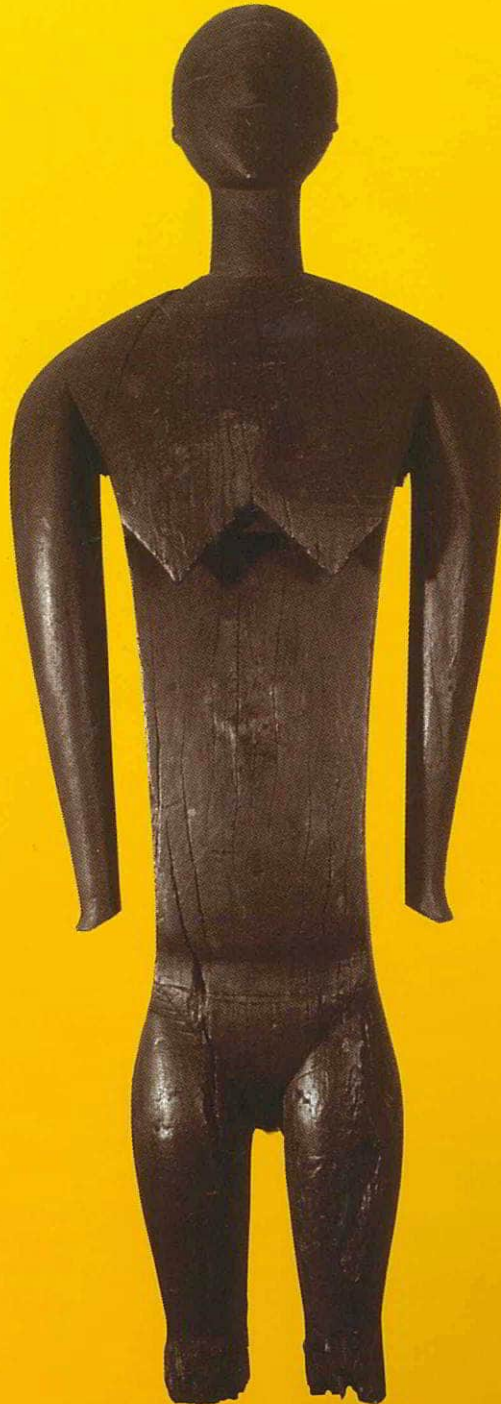


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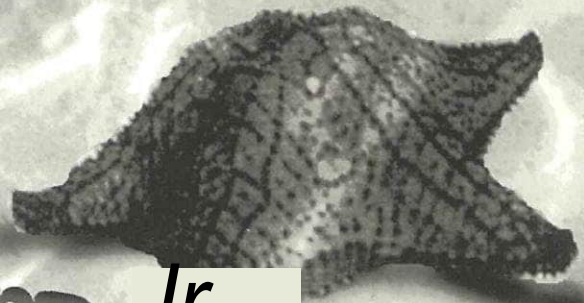
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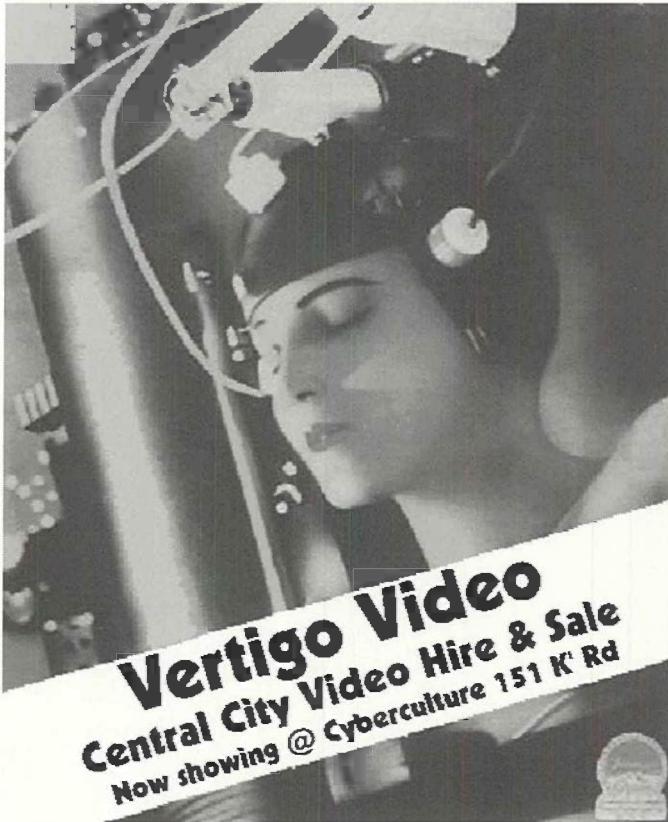
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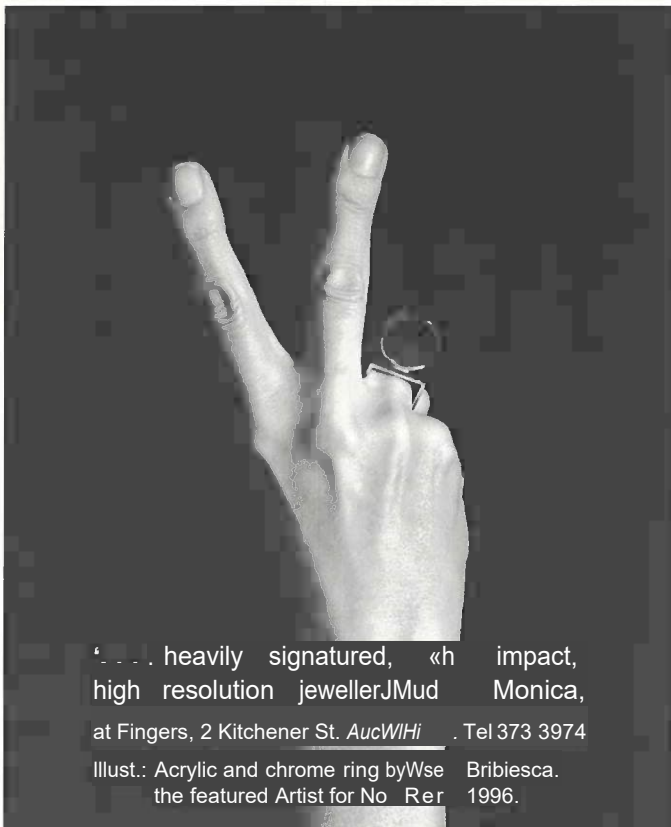
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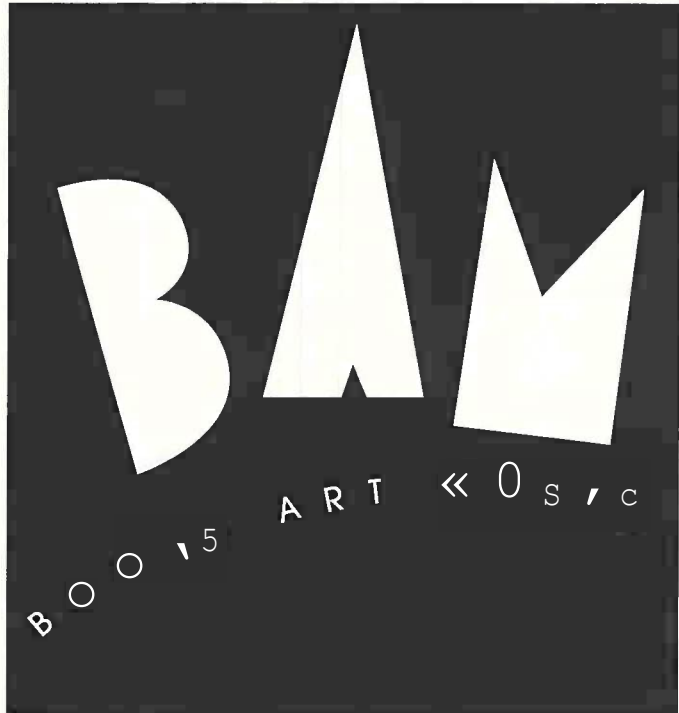
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on the cover

Museum goddess. [Kave De Hine](#) Aliqi from the Caroline Islands, now installed at the Auckland Museum, Te Papa Whakahiku

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monica is printed by
Alphabet Soup Ltd

monica thanks the Auckland Art
Gallery for their support of this
issue.


arts Council of New Zealand *toi Aotoua*

Chartwell Trust

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ximena Alvarez, Mark Amery, Susan
Ballard, Jenny Balle, BOMB
Magazine, Lara Bowen, Gregory
Burke, Kirsty Cameron, Frances
D'Arth, Dunham Bremmer
Associates, Tony Green, Hammer
Graphics, Terrence Handscomb,
Susan Hillary, Gavin Hipkins, Amon
Howard, Douglas Lloyd-Jenkins,
Magazzino, Magic, Julie Paumer-
Pengelly, James Ross, Warren
Sanderson, Rachel Stone, James
Wallace, Lee Wallace, Philippa
Wright

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necessarily those of the editorial staff.

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get

real

The Louvre and The British Museum might have been rejected as culturally inappropriate models by MONZ, but a range of museums in the United States confirm the reflective experience as one of the museum world's best drawcards. Las Vegas or Paramount Studios make it clear that if museums stop playing the authenticity card, the entertainment industry might well call their bluff.

•THE TITAN MISSILE MUSEUM, ARIZONA

Those who preserve and interpret this decommissioned nuclear missile silo believe the intercontinental ballistic missile system kept world peace for twenty years. Here is a physical record of a moment of power and ego, authenticity literally gone mad. They simulated a countdown and asked two of the kids to turn the lift-off keys, but the place and its history proved too powerful to be corralled by the presenters. American visitors proudly covered their hearts with their hands; ours were in our mouths.

•TUTANKHAMEN'S TOMB. LAS VEGAS

Tucked away in the basement of the Luxor Hotel Pyramid in Las Vegas is a museum experience defined by marketing. Its rationale to bulk up a five-item hotel entertainment package which includes three sharp VR rides. You can almost hear the marketers crying out for — a 'low energy, low investment, low overhead attraction'. The answer, blindingly obvious: make a museum. And so: this grab-bag of tacky reproduction treasures solemnly housed in museum-style vitrines. The discovery of the treasures is breathlessly narrated by a genuine museum audio tape system, and the shoddy whole fronted by guards dressed in severe uniforms. An extensive list of 'Don'ts' guides the visitor, but it turns out the NO PHOTOGRAPHY sign, like the others, is just there to give 'museum atmosphere'. "Take all the snaps you want" the guard tells us out of the corner of his mouth.

**JIM BARR
AND MARY
BARR** report on
a number of US
museums



The Holocaust Museum: Tower of Photos taken in Eishishok. In 1941an SSmurder squad killed all the Jews in the village. Photo from [The Holocaust Museum in Washington](#) by Jeshajahu Weinberg and Rina Elieli

The Holocaust Museum is outstanding for how seriously visitors are accepted as curious and intelligent human beings. Films shown are up to 26 minutes long, labels are full and written at a reading level that poignantly offsets the jingoistic platitudes of Nazi propaganda. Some experiences are purely meditative, with art offering moments of restful punctuation to the awful richness. The spaces are modest and pressed against each other to look at each case we bonded as witnesses.

Like most serious collection-based museums The Holocaust museum refuses to trivialise the original experience in attempts at simulation. Where original objects were not available replicas were clearly marked as such. Sparks of obvious drama stand out in this sombre atmosphere — particularly where the height of the space is used — such as the racks of prisoner uniforms, and a photographic tower of the slaughtered inhabitants of an Eastern European town cleansed by the Nazis. The density of artifacts lessened as we approached the exhibits relating to the camps themselves. The museological problem at this point is how to get an audience to think and witness, without dissolving into sentiment over the particular. The Holocaust Museum achieves this by working, on the whole, at a general level. It is this that makes the survivor tapes and films at the end of the exhibition so compelling. It is the intimacy of these stories which drew us into a personal assessment of what it means to be a bystander at such events.

•ELLIS ISLAND. NEW YORK

This defining site of American history, with Liberty out one side and the Manhattan skyline out the other, soars past how it has been interpreted. The large halls, endless corridors and tantalising views of New York, didn't need dull museumification, leaden photomurals and contrived didacticism. Like the Titan Missile Museum, this is a wonderful example of the power of sites where history made its original marks.

•HOLOCAUST MUSEUM. WASHINGTON

MONZ/TPT has used Applebaum and Associates, the designers of this memorial museum, as key consultants. The Holocaust Museum experience is a journey to a time we would rather forget. The tone is set by a factory-like building, in keeping with the historic simplicity of Jewish architecture, which reinforces the commemorative aspect of the project.

The exhibition halls on the first floor are designed to create a narrative, starting in Europe before the Second World War. There is no attempt, as there was in the Museum of Tolerance (another Holocaust Museum) in Los Angeles, to herd us from one site to another. There seemed to be the hope in the West Coast institution that in being pushed around by lights, barriers and fierce docents we might get some small taste of the indignity of the camps. Irritation though is not a stand-in for trauma.

Contemporary museums, for all the rhetoric, have kept very much on a traditional track over the last twenty or so years. Collect, preserve, interpret. Assurances they are becoming entertainment palaces has most often been in the breach than observance. The talk is animatronic dinosaurs, the walk simple astonishment at the majesty of a whale skeleton. In the end any museum, on any subject, is as good as its collections, no better and no worse. The best museums know that when push comes to shove the real museum tortoise will always outstrip the virtual hare.®

objection

JOHN CONOMOS

Edge of the
Trees, by Janet
Laurence and
Fiona Foley,
seen blending
into the sur-
rounding archi-
tecture at the
entrance to the
Museum of
Sydney. Photo
courtesy MOS



The Museum of Sydney on the site of the First Government House at the corner of Bridge, Phillip and Young Streets, is a unique experiment in recent museological practice. The New South Wales Government decided the museum should be a memorial to the archaeological and historical importance of this vital symbol of early British settlement. However, this is not a museological enterprise of Anglo-Celtic orientalism — far from it — the museum's curatorial rationale is grounded in the context of contemporary post-humanist thought and self-reflexive muselage.

Simply put, The Museum of Sydney avoids simplistic celebratory exhibits about the colonial past and related essentialisms about Australian national identity. The museum has been designed around the key notion of creating an open-ended learning environment that stresses the journey itself rather than its destination. Innovative is the refreshing accent on cultural and social issues rather than museum objects.

The museum focuses on Australian history since before the arrival of the First Fleet and italicises social issues uppermost in the minds of the early colonists like nationalism, native title, land ownership and republicanism which remain critical to us today, (especially in the wake of Australia's recent federal electoral 'return' to political conservatism).

The museum's multimedia exhibits in their respective contexts represent, 'different media eclogues' with emphasis on inventive design, presentation and formal features of image, sound and text. The exhibits (both analog and digital) eschew the more familiar over-designed aspects of multimedia and do not succumb to the more predictable temptation to be 'fun' media attractions. The Museum technology emphatically bypasses exhibits designed for children seeking the 'roller-coaster' kineticism of

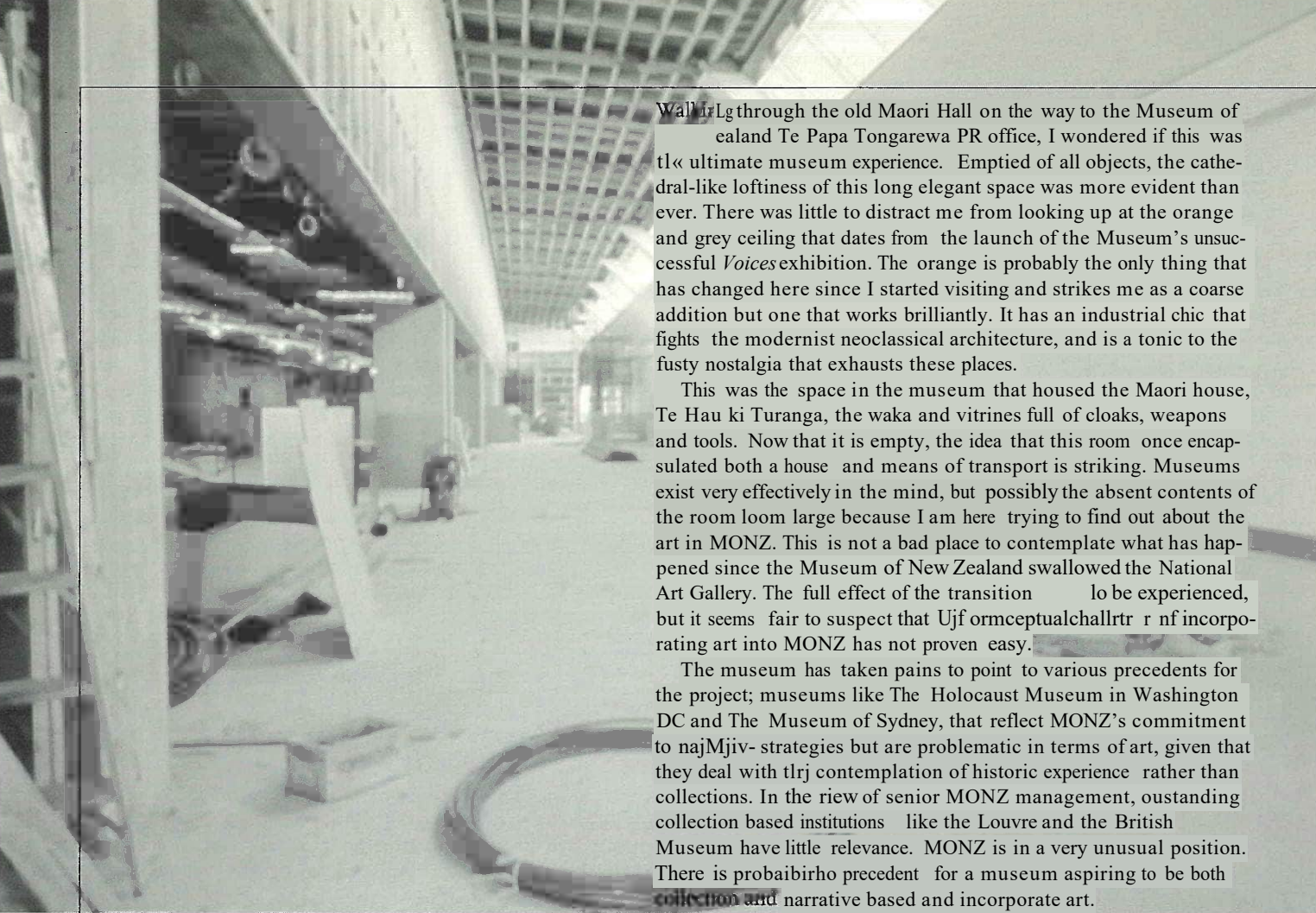
overruled

the video game arcades. Consequently, the exhibits do not evince a Pavlovian paradigm of interactive media technology nor do they entirely ignore the ludic 'high-low' interests of our interactive techno-culture. Their design and presentation and the ways we are expected to utilise them are connected to the specific information they provide.

One of the more appealing characteristics is the museum's emphasis on artists, curators, writers and filmmakers collaborating in an interdisciplinary, self-questioning way. The site becomes a meditative place for visitors to question the more problematic aspects of conventional museum practice and reflect upon the artistic, cultural and historical issues the exhibits raise. Wandering through the museum's uncluttered architectonics we sense its objective of reappraising the idea of the museum as site for dead cultural objects unrelated to the materiality of everyday culture.

The media displays anchor audio-visual and material culture in the shifting currents of history, society and time. These exhibits suggest a diacritical understanding of the hyperbole typically used to herald new interactive technologies in our lives. Central to the media design is Canadian artist Luc Courchesne. His pioneering interactive work of the 70s and 80s focussed on connecting technology, museums, popular culture and visual communications anticipates this combination of digital technology with traditional museum practice.

The artist initiated exhibits denote a pliable, imaginative approach to storytelling about the elaborate links between conflict, history and community. The exhibits informed by interactive technology, provide a stimulating challenge for artists to contest the formal and generic boundaries between art and audience. The Museum of Sydney's collaborative, self-questioning spirit is stamped in the content and design of its exhibits and it points to the ongoing necessity for museums to use new media technology in modest open-ended ways.®



The Natural Light Gallery and Parade Space under construction at the waterfront site. Photos courtesy Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

the art in monz

ANNA MILES

Walking through the old Maori Hall on the way to the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa PR office, I wondered if this was the ultimate museum experience. Emptied of all objects, the cathedral-like loftiness of this long elegant space was more evident than ever. There was little to distract me from looking up at the orange and grey ceiling that dates from the launch of the Museum's unsuccessful *Voices* exhibition. The orange is probably the only thing that has changed here since I started visiting and strikes me as a coarse addition but one that works brilliantly. It has an industrial chic that fights the modernist neoclassical architecture, and is a tonic to the dusty nostalgia that exhausts these places.

This was the space in the museum that housed the Maori house, Te Hau ki Turanga, the waka and vitrines full of cloaks, weapons and tools. Now that it is empty, the idea that this room once encapsulated both a house and means of transport is striking. Museums exist very effectively in the mind, but possibly the absent contents of the room loom large because I am here trying to find out about the art in MONZ. This is not a bad place to contemplate what has happened since the Museum of New Zealand swallowed the National Art Gallery. The full effect of the transition is to be experienced, but it seems fair to suspect that the conceptual challenge of incorporating art into MONZ has not proven easy.

The museum has taken pains to point to various precedents for the project; museums like The Holocaust Museum in Washington DC and The Museum of Sydney, that reflect MONZ's commitment to narrative-based strategies but are problematic in terms of art, given that they deal with the contemplation of historic experience rather than collections. In the view of senior MONZ management, outstanding collection based institutions like the Louvre and the British Museum have little relevance. MONZ is in a very unusual position. There is no precedent for a museum aspiring to be both collection and narrative based and incorporate art.

At a recent Art History department seminar at the University of Auckland, Cheryl Southeran, Cliff Whiting and Ken Gorbey spoke at length, but the question of art in MONZ remained clouded. MONZ board member Jenny Gibbs spoke from the audience, saying she has found "it is not possible to answer people's questions about the art in MONZ without first explaining this is the Museum of New Zealand and The National Art Gallery no longer exists". While MONZ distances itself from the powerful acquisitional urges, exoticism and pilfering of 'loot-based' empire building museums, it has swallowed the collections of the National Art Gallery.

Describing the break with the past, Art Concept Leader Ian Wedde talks about art curators with backs to the world being turned around and a curator being 'freed' to interview Bruce Farr. To signal its incorporation, art must be ordered like the rest of the museum, but is it proving difficult to subordinate? The "More than a Museum" guide handed out at the Museum Visitor Centre says Mrkusich's glass windows along the Cable Street facade "symbolise the colour and energy you will experience inside the new museum", but earlier this year *The Dominion* quoted Chief Executive Cheryl Southeran saying if a rival art institution established in Wellington in the future, it wouldn't worry her one bit.

While the Buckle Street building housed two quite distinct institutions, effectively what existed was a singular local emulation of the great-epochs model of art and civilisation museum. Proceeding

Cheryll Southeran, Cliff Whiting and Ken Gorbey spoke at length, but the question of art in MONZ remained clouded.



directly from the entrance hall and in the centre of the building, the Maori collection, like Greek and Egyptian collections in many museums around the world, was located at the foundation of the nation's art collection. In contrast, the art in the new waterfront museum, will be located at the extremity rather than as the epitome of civilisation. You must travel to the fourth floor of MONZ to see *Parade*, subtitled *But is it art?*; *Face*, the parallel show of specially commissioned contemporary work; and the large touring exhibition space which may house art although the guide tags it 'the place for blockbusters'. On to the fifth and top floor and you find the Natural Light gallery.

Parade is the art exhibition that will probably represent most closely the concept MONZ originated for incorporating art. A large multi-disciplinary tour from European contact to the present day paying particular attention to the influence of new technology, *Parade* is swept up into moments like the "discovery" of New Zealand by Cook, the 1906 Christchurch international exhibition and the establishment of Helen Hitching's gallery in the 1940's. Art will be integrated amongst objects from Cook's waistcoat to Crown Lynn dinner sets and a special section called "Kiwi Magicians" narrating New Zealand's light weight yacht design revolution.

The total art concept has however changed and reshaped.

Wedde agrees it has departed from its initial vision. The sense is that pressure to present art independently of the multi disciplinary exhibitions reflects the growing influence of powerful collectors. Attention has been focussed on the Natural Light gallery which is one of the more obvious architectural appendages. A long elegant channel, like a diminutive Grand Gallery of the Louvre, the space leaves little possibility for partition and it's hard to understand it could have ever been destined for much else but the hanging of large paintings. In Wedde's reading this space becomes appropriately the site of acquisitional urges within the art sector, "if it does something it will purchase a Mrkusich". Meanwhile, with no mention of art, the guide describes it as "a great place for the corporate event ... or a wedding."

The greatest conceptual strains in negotiating narratives and collections, social history and art in the one institution may emerge in *Face*. Institutionalising contemporary art after the white cube brings a myriad of complexities, without moving it into an unprecedented national museum. Maureen Lander, Lisa Reihana, City Group, Greg Semu and Luc Courchesne are among artists commissioned to refer to the collection and engage with the interactive technologies that bear the burden of MONZ's contemporary and crowd pleasing aspirations. Like the brief for art projects throughout the museum which specifies six themes the art could conceptually represent, *Face* places a considerable limit on the range of contemporary art the museum can potentially present. Ian Wedde talks about a certain pace emanating from MONZ, but later says "to satisfy the contemporary art audience on opening day would be like the City Gallery opening with Rosemarie Trockel but a thousand times worse".

Little has been done to alleviate anxiety about the art in MONZ. The biggest answer to any question in "More than a Museum" is about base isolators — the rubber bungs it sits on. There is reportedly no New Zealand art in the Chief Executive's office and more information has been available about the compacting of the reclaimed land than the collection policy. Contemporary art experiences differ from museum experiences, and while MONZ's contemporary art commissions are aligned to museum initiated displays, questions about the subordination of art will remain.

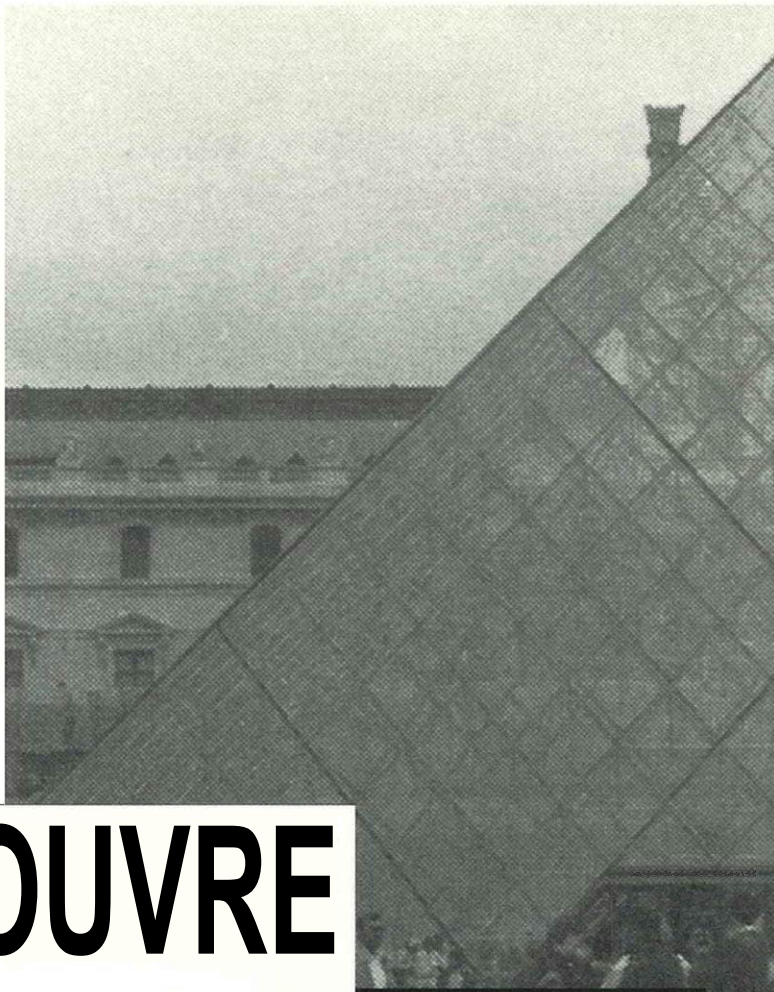
James Boon says museum going enmeshes the seemingly serious and the apparently voyeuristic. Perhaps perversity will become MONZ's stubborn but endearing character. Despite the signage aimed at twelve year olds it cannot help but charm us. Despite trying to reinvent the concept of a museum, it cannot escape it. We might warm to two page press releases that somehow manage to suppress the word museum, just as we can feel amusement even if interspersed with horror at the yoghurt being spray painted onto the walls of Harbour Park to stimulate the growth of moss.

One day when these exhibitions are ripped out, MONZ might after all feel like the stripped Maori Hall at Buckle St. Possibly museums exist mostly in memory. They are monumental for their transience rather than the other way around. I hope I will think again, like I did when the building was dripping with scaffolding — how could it ever look this good?J?

The founding document of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (MONZ) is the 1992 Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act, designed to amalgamate the National Art Gallery, the National Museum, and the National War Memorial into a single entity. The museum's mission statement is to "provide a forum in which the nation may present, explore and preserve the heritage of its cultures and knowledge of the natural environment in order better to understand and treasure the past, enrich the present and meet the challenges of the future."

Under this rather amorphous vision exist a number of specific functions MONZ is expected to perform. The Act makes provision for collecting works of art and items relating to history and the natural environment; developing and conserving the museum's collections; making available the collections to the public and other museums; researching the national collections; providing an education service; and making the best use of the collections in the national interest. The vision of MONZ presented in the Act is essentially of a traditional national museum, which developed in its most influential form in the Louvre.

Or maybe not. According to Ken Gorbey, Exhibitions Project Director, "The Museum world is distorted by the British Museums and Louvres, loot-based and sitting in massive cities. The rest of the museum world is about interpreting our world back to ourselves." Gorbey deliberately



NOT THE LOUVRE

monz as a national museum

DAMIAN SKINNER

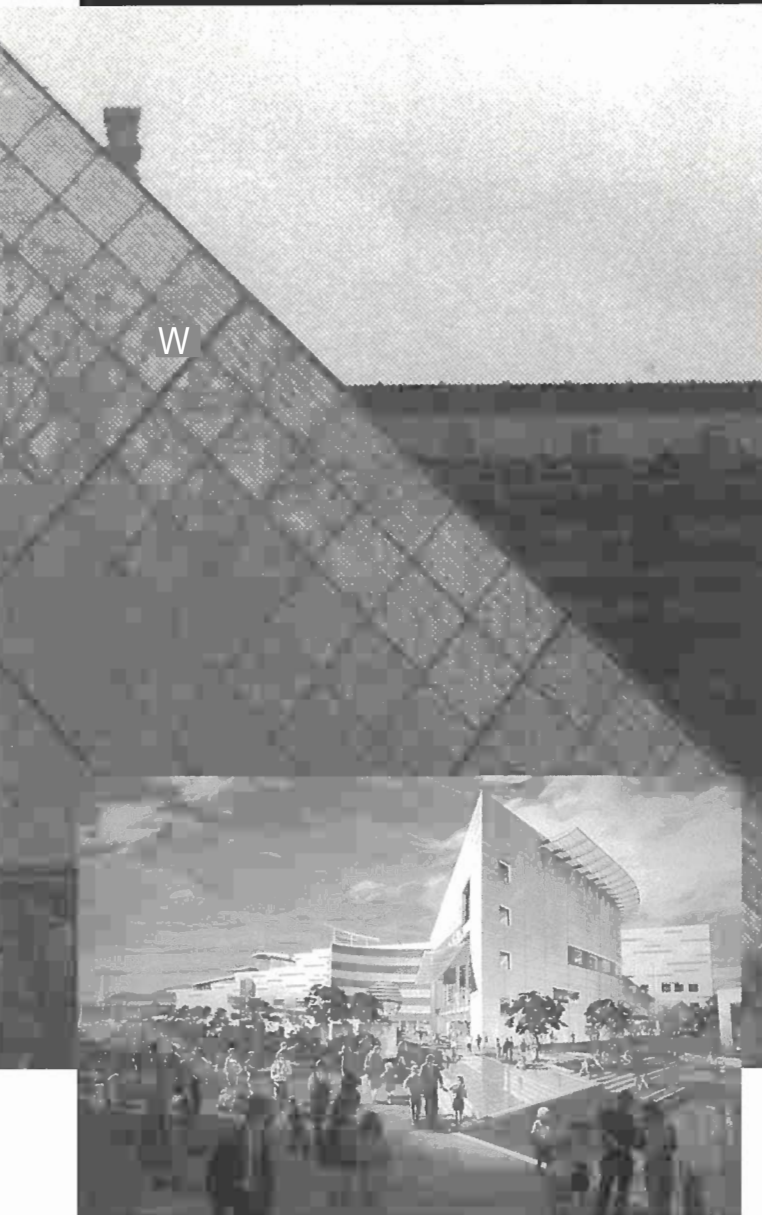
refuses his institution's museological heritage, a heritage that very strongly includes both the British Museum and the Louvre.

Andrew McClellan, in his book *Inventing the Louvre*, notes that the notion of the Louvre as a storehouse of national wealth originated almost immediately after the French Revolution of 1792. The Louvre embodied the proper ideals of the new republic: wealth (both cultural and monetary), and the expression of "grand ideas, worthy of a free people." Serving a political ideal, the Louvre emphasised the ideological characteristics of revolutionary France, to distinguish between the ancien regime and the new republican order.

Many of the responsibilities bestowed on MONZ by the Act are first manifested in relation to the Louvre. Accessibility to the French national collections emphasised the ownership of the monarchy's art collection passing into public hands. Access to the Grand Gallery, a restricted space under the Bourbon kings, highlighted the freedom of the people. Conservation became the mark of an art respecting government, providing substance to the boast

that art treasures 'liberated' from Italy and Belgium were finally on free soil where they belonged. As for education, this was a product of the role the Louvre assumed as propaganda model for the revolution. Through the careful selection of paintings and subjects, the Louvre exhibitions were intended to reinforce the goals of the revolution in the minds of the public. As McClellan notes, didacticism was at the heart of revolutionary politics.

From the very first moment, the Louvre gets caught up in a sequence of events that utilise art as a signifier of political ambition and values. MONZ plays a similar role, presenting a seamless vision of New Zealand that is replete with treasures, and cultural unity. The museum's biculturalism serves a political end, granting the government the appearance of being committed to the Treaty of Waitangi without it needing to shift political power from Pakeha hands. MONZ provides a cultural rallying point, in which the reality of racial unrest is put aside in the pursuit of national unity.



Artist's impression. Photo Courtesy Museum of New Zealand.

Top: I.M. Pei's Pyramid, The Louvre, from *Inventing the Louvre* by Andrew McClellan, Cambridge University Press, 1994

Exhibiting Ourselves, one of the proposed Day One exhibitions, is important in this respect, for it comments on the process of marketing (Pakeha) New Zealand identity through four exhibitions: the 1851 Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in London; the 1906 Christchurch Exhibition; the 1940 Wellington Exhibition; and the 1992 Seville Expo. While the curators are aware of the deliberate and often pejorative ideologies on show at the four exhibitions, I wonder how these will be related to MONZ itself. After all, what really is different about MONZ in 1998? It, too, is a showcase of ideas and objects celebrating a Pakeha government ideology. The danger

of the museum denying what it is, and where it comes from, arises with the substitution of carefully self-aware exhibitions within the museum for a critical self-awareness of the museum as a framing institution.

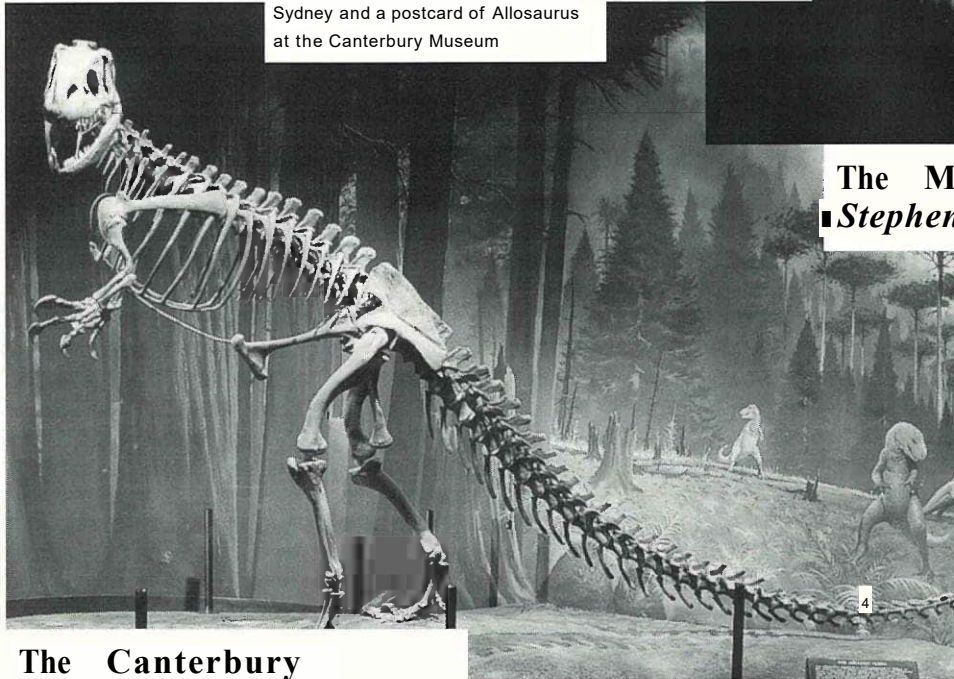
The drive to not be the Louvre takes another form in MONZ. According to the museum's extensive publicity, "Every journey is a story. The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa will be a place where all our stories are told." MONZ has chosen to pursue narratives over an emphasis on objects. What makes this model so bold is that it disrupts the fetishistic workings of the museum. The museum object is a fetish; the disavowal of the loss of history through the substitution of the object in its place. By looking at one, we experience the other, even though an object is entirely inadequate to represent something as contested as history. To place the emphasis on narratives is to disrupt the discourse that posits objects as transparent containers of history.

While admirable as a museological model, MONZ has to cope with a specific command in the Act to "collect works of art and items relating to history and the natural environment." Which is to say, MONZ is legally constituted as a collections-based museum. With the narrative focus, however, MONZ is an institution founded on the desire to impose a radical museological model on an Act that is a traditional statement of what a museum is. Narratives do not always function conveniently within a collections-based museology. *Voices He Putahitanga*, a prototype exhibition developed by MONZ in 1992, is an excellent example of potential difficulties. MONZ chose the narrative of *Voices* as the feature of the exhibition, dealing in part with Pakeha history, an area in which the museum's collections were weak. As Jim and Mary Barr noted in their report to the museum, the rationale behind the funding of MONZ - the notion of it being a storehouse of treasures - was undermined by the resulting proliferation of fake objects. In the decision to pursue narratives into areas where its collections could not follow, MONZ left behind one important museological function, and its principal rationale for funding.

MONZ's current collections policy focuses exclusively on purchasing objects for the Day One exhibitions. Rather than developing the collections as coherent entities, collecting occurs according to the dictates of the exhibitions program. While MONZ envisages this situation as temporary, there is no mention of any other collections policy which is to be implemented in the future. One can imagine the current policy becoming permanent, as MONZ faces the ongoing crisis of narratives leading to areas foreign to its collections. Perhaps the lack of attendance *Voices* received spoke eloquently of the desire most museum visitors have to see beautiful, and valuable objects, a desire that is not erased by any amount of tricky technology. Shows like *Voices* that pursue a narrative intention over the plentiful display of objects put MONZ at risk of not fulfilling its brief as a collections-based museum, and risk turning away people who come to experience objects rather than the narratives of our nation. ☹

Museums We Love

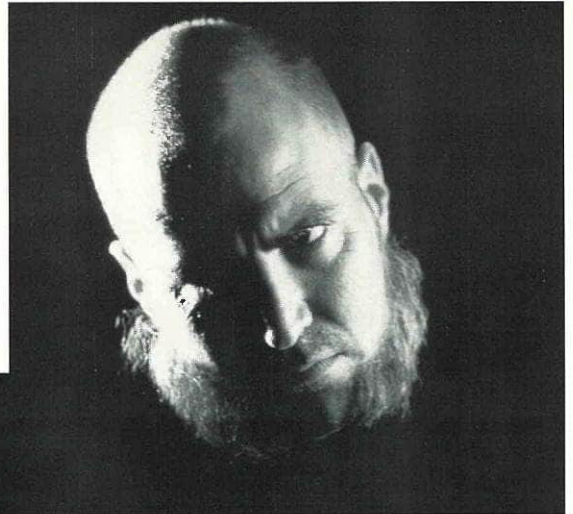
Talking Hologram in the Museum of Sydney and a postcard of Allosaurus at the Canterbury Museum



The Canterbury Museum: *Bill McKay*

In the Canterbury Museum it is served up nicely sliced like afternoon tea. If you have to kill time this is the place. History is set between stone and glass; corridors pass from room to room of relics and vignettes. In one room an ark load of animals. A Ma'ori killing the last moa. Another Maori doing the first rock art one wet afternoon in the cave while mum cooks and tries to keep the baby from the charcoal. A whale boat and oars so long you can feel them cutting through the sea. Cook on the first beach like Robinson Crusoe. The Settlers. A room like someone else's wardrobe. Muscled allosauruses ranging across a paddock like a rugby team. White herons in school uniform. Polar relics under plaster skies. Antarctica like a big white farm. A Massey Ferguson tractor with caterpillar tracks made out of shredded tyres. Dead machinery, rusty cans of food, things made out of number eight wire.

Passing down another hallway, a room full of bones. Behind glass, in a corner office, rather disconcertingly a man's eyes meet yours. Under his gaze you show polite interest in his collection. But he does not see, in his study he is intent on his work; his catalogue, his classifications, his final arrangements.



The Museum of Sydney: *Stephen Zepke*

The first thing about the Museum of Sydney is that although not big, you can feel the weight of money in it. This means that it can afford to be "state of the art", and even if it dates quickly, it will never be cheap. It is the most unusual case (although Sydney Opera House provides another) of a shit-load of money being spent on a spectacle which is intellectual. The second thing about it is that there aren't any objects. At least not in the usual vitrines of ordered examples of exotic and historic material cul-

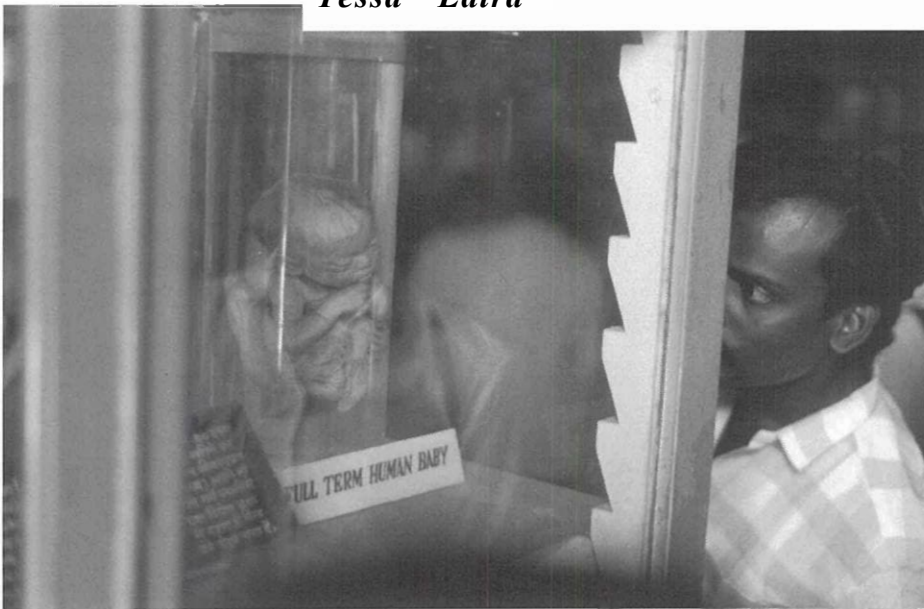
tures, whose stories seem to mainly involve fossicking to find a prize. A prize that has been discarded by this new Museum, in the deconstructive gesture of celebrating the fragment. One particularly tasty example is a series of stainless steel blocks with many drawers in each side. They have a satisfying sculptural presence and each counterweighted drawer drifts open to reveal a beautiful collage of objects, pictures and text. Each drawer weaves a story of its own, usually springing from a textual episode culled from journals and books of the time, which is illustrated by small objects, often fragmented and usually mundane. These displays were created by artist Narelle Jubelin and they are as fascinating as they are exquisite. It is such a rare pleasure to feel the past alive in a museum, rather than dissected and preserved as so many jars of hermetically sealed pickle, never to be opened.

India provides the cynical Western museum-goer with a dusty tonic to the flashy, over-curated, electronic or digital offerings becoming de riguer in the politically corrected first world. In the very many palace museums, visitors are invited to eye the wealth of previous generations in glorious disrepair. Glass cases contain living jewels - lizards, who come for the warmth of the lightbulbs, if not for the pleasure of co-habiting with such fascinating specimens as an ivory elephant small enough to fit inside a dried pea.

Tigerskins litter the floors of disused dance-halls, covered in a thick layer of grey dust, with the odd crystal bauble shed by ageing chandeliers; a collection of cutlasses spells out the word 'Welcome.'

But it is Calcutta's Indian Museum which provides the greatest multitude of decrepit delights, with a heavy emphasis on the scientific. Rooms full of minerals, duly labelled, often presented on pink plastic plates like alien petfood, are overwhelming in their repetition and incomprehensibility. Random cordons, signs

**The Indian Museum, Calcutta.:
Tessa Laird**



that lead to nowhere, exits blocked with specimen draws, add to the panic of collection obsession.

In the magnitude of its accumulation, the Zoological Hall is breathtaking. Few of the lights are working, so the viewer makes a slow prowl of the darkened premises, coming face to face with the crazed eyes of now a poorly-taxidermed, moth-eaten wildcat, now a sad, rotting monkey. Scores of antlers rise up the walls, lit occasionally by a yellowish light which makes the horns flicker like demonic flame, simultaneously mourning and celebrating this murderous catalogue. The crowning glory? An entire blue whale skeleton suspended from the ceiling; like a chandelier of bones it presides over this dining room of death.

The Indian visitors have less of an appetite for Gothic horror; their favourite haunt being the Anthropology Hall with its well-lit dioramas of life-size regional Indian families. For these Calcutta folk, the West Bengal diorama draws the largest crowds, as if to say that even against all the giant meteorites and pickled snakes in the world, our selves are much more fascinating than our others.

The museum closest to my heart is the Wagener Museum in the tiny far North settlement of Houhora where my parents have a bach (now home). I spent school holidays during high school and polytechnic working at the museum, making triangular sandwiches, rolling illicitly huge ice-creams and dusting exhibits. I have become very fond of the place. What I love about the Wagener Museum is that there is so much eclectic stuff to poke around in and as staff I could get beyond the 'do not touch' signs. Not that many objects were inaccessible, there are heaps of working exhibits - old washing machines, a pianola, gramophones and music boxes. Part of the display includes reputedly the largest collection of chamber pots in the Southern hemisphere - 500 odd. There are boxes and boxes of butterflies and bugs - examples of Victoriana and beautiful local Ma'ori artifacts. If you catch a tour around the museum you may be lucky to get Jenny (who enjoys making and wearing period costume) to show you around. Jenny will happily

**Wagener Museum :
Areta Wilkinson**



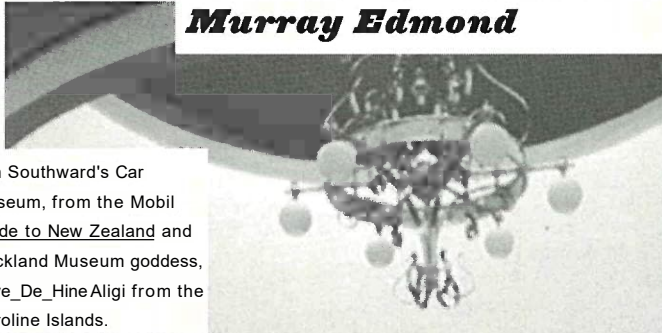
sing you a tune while effortlessly peddling the pianola and detailing the museum's delights. Although staying at Houhora intensifies the experience - the Wagener Museum is certainly an intriguing, wonderful place.

The Indian Museum, Calcutta. Photo Gavin Hipkins and Postcard of the interior of the Wagener Museum

After a long night of partying here is Auckland's best spot to go at dawn to watch the clouds morph images in the sky. Wait for the restaurant on the roof. The Museum occupies a wonderful site in Auckland. If you stand on the remnant of the scoria dome, beside the totara Te Puea planted for Te Wherowhero Potatau (his house, in the 1850s, was on the slope which runs down towards Stanley Street), your gaze can follow the tuff ring round from the hospital (there are lava flows under it) until you sight the Auckland War Memorial Museum. It sits like it has always been there, on Pukekawa, one of Auckland's oldest volcanos, perhaps 120,000 years old. Yet the Museum is young in the human history of this place, even young within Pakeha history: 150 years ago the Domain ponds gave Auckland its first water supply but the Museum has been there less than 70 years, the front half built in 1929. It is not the inevitability it pretends to be.

It is like a tableau, an exhibit itself in the Auckland landscape. Museum of a museum. House of war, dedicated to the remembrance of forgetting. Written across its brow: "The Whole Earth The Auck | and Museum;

Murray Edmond

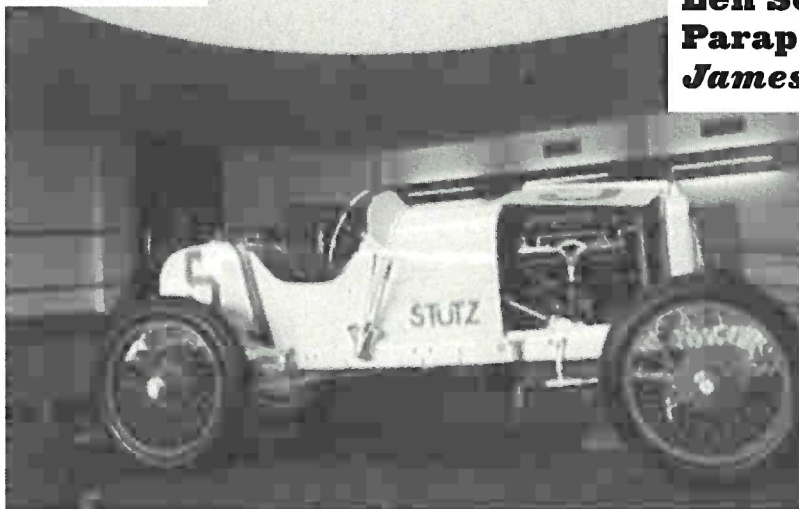


Len Southward's Car Museum, from the Mobil Guide to New Zealand and Auckland Museum goddess, Kave_De_Hine Aligi from the Caroline Islands.



Is the Sepulchre of Famous Men." Monumentally colonial and civic. This aspect is epitomised by the figleaf over the privates of the reproduction of the Discobolus of Myron. Another occupant with less modesty and infinitely more style is the goddess Kave De Hine Aligi ("malevolent female spirit" the label reads) from Nukuoro in the Carolines. Reputed to be "the largest piece of wooden statuary known in the Pacific," for me she is the most beautiful object in the Museum. A Mr G. Cozens of Auckland acquired her while trading in Micronesia in the 1870s and presented her to the Museum in 1978. The label says the advent of Christianity meant no one cared any longer if she remained in her temple. And, the story goes, for years she stood in a disused lavatory until some caretaker wondered who she was and asked.

Len Southward's Car Museum, Paraparaumu: Tina Barton and James Fenton



of cars collected by a man much beloved by motoring New Zealand. Len is in every corner, at the wheel of his speedboat, welcoming the Queen, in his school report pinned to the noticeboard. He's reflected in a myriad gleaming hubcaps, in thousands of shining pistons, in the oddly eclectic gathering of vehicles from Ed Roth's Peace Rat, to the 250F Maserati, to the '72 Holden Torana, in a worn but much loved state.

The revolving postcard stand is the nearest thing you'll get to interactive here. In their place are 'curators' in white coats with red embroidered monograms. They are ancient too - like Len - reinforcing the feeling you've entered a time-

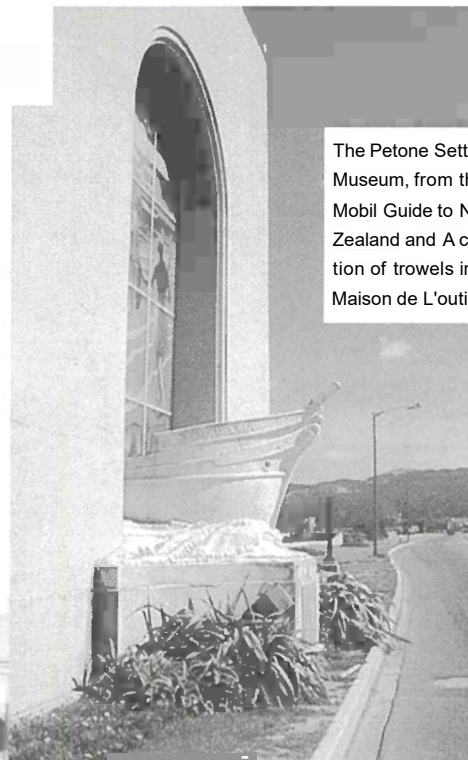
Between the manicured lawns and the streamlined factory-cum-museum facade are some telling clues which distinguish Len Southward's Museum. Domestic-scale carriage lights leading to neat beds of annuals remind us of the tidy suburban gardens of New Zealand's silent majority. We know we are entering a sacred preserve. This is a museum

warp, where cars have been cryogenically suspended, though their carers continue to age. Here, protected from road wear and the over-eager hands of restorers, is a vast gathering of vehicles whose meaning is governed not by function but by detail. The ornaments, accessories, add-ons and extras, are the signs of personal and pack investment. You choose therefore you are. No wonder then that Len has left his very first acquisition - a Model T Ford - unrestored. Rusting, dirty and forlorn it is both a foil and a centrepiece. Amongst all these machines we are reminded of the humanity of his project.

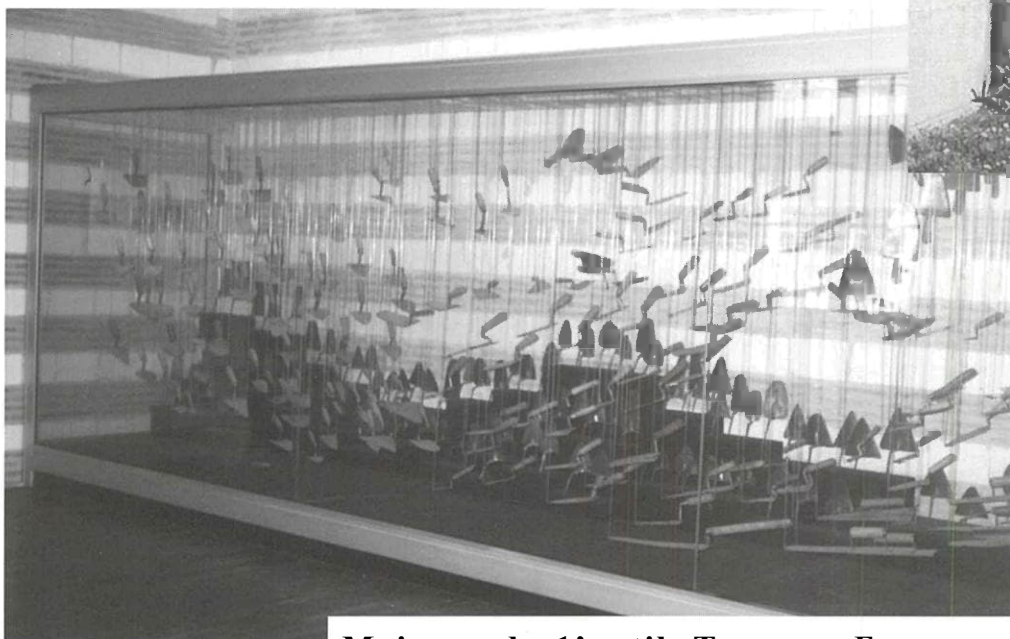
The 1908 Police station and Jail on Jackson Street, Petone, is a huck-

The Petoime Police Station and Museum: Annamarie Jagose

ster museum with no curatorial shame, just the boundless goodwill of Petone citizens and a wild collection of marbles, nails and pieces of pottery of little importance. Nothing like the better-known Petone Settlers Museum, with its replica prow of the NZ Company ship *Aurora* jutting cockily over The Esplanade and its touch-screen computerised records of nineteenth-century immigrants, the museum at 274B Jackson St is confined to a single glass display case in the restored three-cell jail and police station. This museum is unafraid of the ordinary, yet does not shy from the whimsical. *Soft drink lids of a style seen around 20 years ago* reads one caption, returning my childhood to me as already historical, while another identifies a tiny object as *A fossilised octopus tenticle [sic] with a dried Pohutukawa leaf wrapped around it*. Unlike brasher city museums, it understands that certainty and even accuracy have a limited charm and does not hesitate to label one exhibit *A bath tile?* or another *A selection of bone - type unknown*. I am not alone in my admiration for a small museum that challenges received curatorial techniques of collection and display: the last entry in the visitors' book reads "You guys have had too much."



The Petone Settlers Museum, from the Mobil Guide to New Zealand and A collection of trowels in the Maison de L'outil



Maison de l'outil, Troyes, France:
Dennis O'Connor

Originally a mansion built in 1550 by wealthy merchants to store salt, wine and cloth, this specialist museum now houses an extraordinary collection of tools and an extensive research library of 20,000 books, documents and illustrative material (*La Pensee Ouvriere/The Thought behind Working*.) The tools are grouped by trade in monumental glass show-cases and, in some, suspended by aluminium rods, giving the impression of vast flocks of migrating birds, recalling a Rebecca Horn installation. The ghost of Rene Magritte also haunts these magnificent dioramas. They are exclusively hand tools from all aspects of the

engineering, agricultural, manufacturing, architectural and domestic trades. The anonymity of these families of objects is what strikes deepest. I thought of the nameless, plain mugshots, household possessions and clothing catalogued by Christian Boltanski.

Centuries of working lives unrecorded in the Histories or Registrars. These items did a job, did it with devotion, and perfectly realised judgement. This museum has little explanatory labelling, no push button special effects,

no identity crisis, no animation, no coffee, merely the working lives these objects ask you to imagine. As my eye ran along a line of gleaming blades I remembered a short story by Borges of two knives lying next to each other in an aristocrat's collection. They each narrated their story over many generations of owners till they confronted one another with murderous intent in a duel that ended in death. Diary entry that I didn't write in the visitor's book: "I felt like a Giacometti figure when I pointed to the procession of anvils. Reduced to some skeletal form, all my muscle strength and body heat dragged into these belted, hammered and thrashed objects, century after century, shimmering almost molten now in the bare lowlight. Tonight, making art to measure alongside these objects has to be argued from the very beginning again."

ANNA SANDERSON

en avant

Esko Männikkö.
*Savukoski (Man with
Lamb)*, 1994. Photo cour-
tesy 10th Biennale of
Sydney

Jurassic Technologies Revenant
10th Biennale of Sydney, 1996
Artistic Director Lynne Cooke
Art Gallery of New South Wales,
Artspace, Ivan Dougherty Gallery
27 July - 22 September, 1996

You may think that this year's Sydney Biennale, with its lyrical appellation *Jurassic Technologies Revenant*, alludes to L.A.'s Museum of Jurassic Technology. This small-scale 'natural history museum' has won admirers for exhibits which embody the spirit of parody and the spirit of scholarly endeavour. One of these exhibits is the Delani and Sonnabend Hall, in which an embellished and tangential story unfolds between text and material 'evidence'. The bare bones of the story are this: Madalena Delani, a classical singer afflicted with what may have been Korsakoff Syndrome (which impairs short term memory) gives a concert at a

Brazilian spa resort near the Iguacu Falls, attended by Geoffrey Sonnabend, a professor of neurophysiology. After witnessing Delani's romantic leiter, the professor is electrified, and inspired to pursue a theory of memory which comes to him that night. Three volumes and eight years later, *Ohlisen, Theories of Forgetting and the Problem of Matter* explains memory as an illusion buffering us against the "intolerable knowledge of the irreversible passage of time, and irretrievability of its moments and events". The parting shock of the narrative is that unknown to Sonnabend, Delani is killed in a car accident leaving the resort and the Iguacu Falls concert has been her last.

The Delani and Sonnabend Hall was in my mind at the Biennale, because its lavish romanticism and air of implausibility is the nemesis of this international style art curation which is accountable to government funding agencies and corporate sponsors, and traditionally expected to identify what is 'significant' in contemporary art practice. If Artistic Director Lynne Cooke was hoping to transfuse anything from a loose connec-



tion to the Museum of Jurassic Technology, perhaps it was an air of uniqueness and independence. Perhaps too, the notion of an enterprise which is modest in scale but inspired in its conception toned in well with Cooke's decision to down-scale on the massive trade fair biennales of the past, in favour of 'focus and depth', even though the result was a tentative mid-zone between boutique and bonanza.

The thematic underpinning of *Jurassic Technologies Revenant* is that vital art practice is currently exemplified by artists using increasingly obsolete technologies such as photography, film, and print media. These older technologies, Cooke and her writers suggest, are undergoing a renaissance at the very moment when critical attention is turned towards the new. The technological categories are kept quite separate in the exhibition spaces as well as the catalogue, treated as referring to distinct histories and conventions. So one room at the Gallery of New South Wales displays only patterned material: Philip Taaffe's block-printed 'paintings', Yinka Shonibare's african textiles

the result was a tentative mid-zone between boutique and bonanza.

made up into Victorian dresses, Emily Kngwarreye's silk batiks, and Alighiero e Boetti's embroidered canvases, while film works are housed together at Artspace.

In Stan Douglas' *Overture*, a seven minute film loop of crackling historic black and white footage, we see what a train sees ahead of itself as it snakes through the Canadian Rockies, submerging into the blackness of tunnels and emerging into light. The sound is a voice reciting from Proust's notes on the perceptual disorientation between sleep and waking, through the eyes of an insomniac traveller: *When I awoke in the middle of the night, I could not even be sure at first who I was; ...everything revolved around me through the darkness; things, places, years...I did not distinguish... any more than, when we watch a horse running, we isolate the successive positions of its body as they appear on a bioscope.*

With Proust's bioscope, an early film projector, as a mechanism to illuminate the nature of dissociated thoughts, *Overture* shows how technological developments mould perceptual experience, and preside over peoples imaginative self-conceptions. Within the "delirious logic of modernisation", as Jonathan Crary says in his catalogue essay, "the spectator is continually in the process of being reshaped and redeployed for a ceaselessly changing set of productive and consumer tasks". *En Avant (Onward)*, Claude Closky's unstoppable stream of forward motion clips taken from videos — under a 747, down a hospital corridor, towards the Death Star — contains within its structure the unavoidable future and the undetachable past. I like the way that an analysis of the dynamic of capitalist modernity is introduced by Crary, which bridges past/present/future technologies, because in much of the accompanying literature, and especially in the oversimplified press coverage, attention is directed away from new technologies and towards the old to the extent that the show reads as a backlash against techno-evangelism. In a less reactionary mode, Crary supposes that "other more familiar and older modes of "seeing" will persist and co-exist alongside these new forms".

Evidence of this co-existence is in the exhibition, even though the selection doggedly avoids new technologies. Andreas Gursky's colour photograph *Shanghai Bank*, showing the fifty-two story skyscraper illuminated at night has a two-fold vastness. It presents an archetype of modern architectural space, but the detail inside the building, showing the terminals which facilitate electronic currency transactions and securities trading, give evidence of cyberspaces also continually negotiated. Surprisingly, seen as two metre high enlargements, the Gurskys lost the

sparkling and infinite detail which they appear to possess in scaled down reproductions, indicating that it is not the actual existence, but the idea of flawless vision which gives the work its lucidity.

The romanticism of Gursky's distanced views, as if he was the angel in *Wings of Desire*, couldn't have been more alien from the unventilated quality of Nan Goldin's

slide show. I knew the story had been rolled out once too often when I found myself able to narrate Goldin's trials and triumphs as the images flicked up in *Autoportrait* (one of four slide sequences — the other three were recent work from Japan). Much like her film *I'll be your mirror* with Nan distilled in images from childhood, to "beautiful at forty," *Autoportrait* is accompanied by Eartha Kitt's *All by myself*, a mix the catalogue called "bravely sentimental." To me it was the story of someone who is happy to believe in their own cliched mythology.

Also a mythologised figure, Peter Peryer has been characterised to New Zealand audiences in modernist terms as an individual pursuing a unique artistic vision. With his solo survey exhibition and monograph *Second Nature* having been in circulation for some time now, Peryer has come to seem almost without peers, (that is, without relevant contemporaries). His contextualisation at the Ivan Dougherty Gallery with Esko Mannikkb and Boris Mihailov, two photographers who are more aligned to the social documentary than to formalist traditions, is illuminating for the sake of comparison. Peryer's isolating compositional methods seem to insist on profundity when seen next to the more inclusive and unpressurising framing strategies of Mannikkb's colour portraits of Finnish men in their living spaces.

The 'strange spirit' seen in Peryer's subjects is of a different brand from the effortless strangeness of Mihailov's panoramic Kharkov street scenes, taken at waist height unpreviewed, documenting what he sees as a return to the social conditions of pre-revolutionary Russia. There is an air of voluptuousness and disintegration, the fleeting but often charismatic presence of passers-by are testament to a less self-absorbed way of seeing. In one image an upright and stylish-looking woman moves along on a trolley with her legs straight out in front, presumably for lack of a wheelchair. I wonder how the essayists for *Jurassic Technologies Revenant* understand the relation between the jurassic technology which is Mihailov's camera, and the jurassic technology which is the trolley he photographs, in use not out of nostalgia, or critique, but technological devolution born of political and economic crisis. I think of Gursky's *Shanghai Bank*, and Crary's observation that "the early 1980's visions of Virilio and Baudrillard of a collapsed smooth global surface of instantaneity, speed and dematerialisation seem to be giving way to a world composed of a striated mosaic of spaces so unequal and differentiated that communication between them will be less and less possible". ☺

RARRARIAN INVASION

A Mongol horde! What a wonderful appearance in this small puddle that from one perspective New Zealand has become. Something from beyond the back yard and the taupata hedge — even from beyond the South Pacific, Europe, and America. Given the present political / cultural attitudes here, one does not ask ‘how’, but rather ‘why’ did the Museum of New Zealand do it?

Viewing *The Heritage of Genghis Khan* demands a reading level greater than that of a twelve year old, and a certain amount of old fashioned effort. Put together by scholars on the subject, the exhibition assumes middle class literacy and a certain level of interest in such subjects. The significance of the artifacts is more fully understood through their fairly complex contextual explanation. Consequently, I’m not sure how this would rate with those whose main kick comes from visual stimulation alone. Sure, there are some wonderful gold artifacts (and gold, as in *Inca Gold* has the drawback of the fabulous, of treasures and riches). But many of the items, the later ceramics of Chinese origin, for example, are not as spectacular or of the same quality as those which can be seen in several of our New Zealand public collections. Their importance in the exhibition relates more to significant cultural exchange than superlative aesthetics.

For those who like to hear the story told, the BBC documentary showing in the theatre gives the best impression of the period and its people. Listening devices like cellphones apparently also gave good extended information. They probably also dealt with one of my problems with the printed labels and information — how is a name like “Xiajiadian” pronounced? A basic phonetic breakdown of these words such as are found in dictionaries, would be helpful guidance to the English speaking



The Heritage of Genghis Khan
Organised and Toured by the
Natural History Museum of
Los Angeles County, Presented
by the Museum of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa and City
Gallery Wellington Te Whare Toi
24 August - 6 October, 1996

WALTER COOK

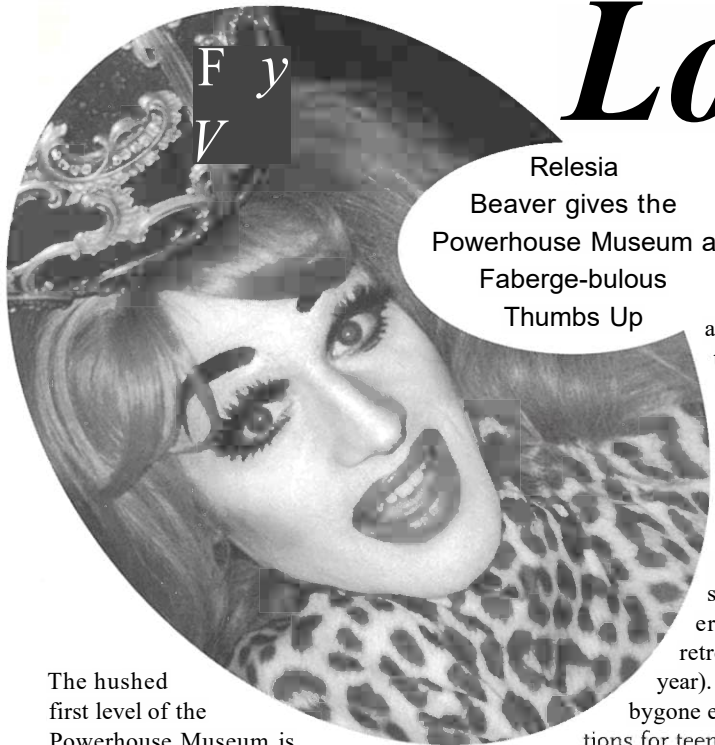
Yellow silk-lined robe, Mongol, 13-14th
Century. Photo courtesy Museum of
New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and
City Gallery Wellington Te Whare Toi

monocultural masses like myself. (I have only recently discovered that the name of the first Manchu Emperor, Jiangxi or Kiangsi) sounds something like “kong-she” when spoken). It would also save us from glottal dislocation through attempting the impossible.

It is not common in New Zealand for us to think of ourselves as descendants from a bronze age or Neolithic heritage, although five thousand years ago the first Neolithic settlers in Britain were pastoralists and grain growers. So in a very general sense, Pakeha New Zealand has origins in common with tire cultures of the pastoral nomads of Central Eurasia. And Central Eurasia with its ancient overland routes of cultural exchange and trade between East and West, not Genghis Khan’s empire, is the real context of this exhibition. People drawn in by the reputation of the great Khan’s name may take some time to sort out that the ‘heritage’ of the title refers more to Genghis Khan’s cultural precedents, than to the consequences of the Mongol Empire on Central Eurasia at large. The artifacts on display have been excavated by Chinese archaeologists from sites in inner Mongolia during the last forty years, and most date from the Neolithic period to the fourteenth century AD — a span of some four thousand years.

Probably the best known example of Central Eurasia’s role in cultural exchanges relates to silk. The Han Empire of China had won control of the Eastern trade routes into central Eurasia from the powerful confederation of pastoral tribes known as the Xiongnu (also, I discovered, spelt as Hisung-nu). For almost a century previous to this, the Xiongnu had exacted tribute from the Han, much of which consisted of huge volumes of silk. It was a result of Han attempts to appease the Xiongnu that silk began to (relatively speaking) flood the world markets, and the silk road began its long history in east/west trade. Though Chinese silks had reached Central Eurasia as early as the second millennium BC, they didn’t feature in the exhibition until the thirteenth century. The fragile fabrics on show have survived six or seven centuries in Mongol tombs intact.

The exhibition brought to mind a poet’s view of the motivation of Khan and conquerors — “soft as the earth is mankind, and both need to be altered”. At least today the social, political and corporate alterations that most of us experience are less messy, and their terrors less tangible if no less prolonged, than those unleashed by the restructuring hordes of Genghis Khan.©



Relesia
Beaver gives the
Powerhouse Museum a
Faberge-bulous
Thumbs Up

Love You, Darling

The hushed first level of the Powerhouse Museum is devoted to Science, Communication and Transport. The principal display is a velvet case housing a complete collection of Star Wars figurines, austere laid in rows like Egyptian amulets. Here manifests the long-term vision of the Powerhouse; value is bestowed on transient fads; *junk du jour* becomes the *bijoux* of tomorrow.

Spending a large portion of my time perched on limousines, I confess a penchant for the Transport section. Amongst the congregation of buggies and bicycles, the high point is a Toyota displayed cut-away style. Like a samurai who has committed hari kiri, the car's entrails are in motion for all to see. Harking the Giomesh campaign of the 1970s, if you've had an unsated craving to inspect the contents of Mrs. Toyota's clutch, here's your opportunity.

Electro-Masochists will send themselves rocketing into the stratosphere of technological dementia whilst viewing the floor's finale, *At Home in the Future*. My philosophies were crushed by the revelation that "Fibre Optics" in NOT a pop-art fabric by Mary Quant!

Amidst this century-surfing, floor two's cornucopia of nostalgia includes a pharmacy, Victorian scullery, brewery

and stunning Art Deco theatre. The innocent viewer gains carnal knowledge of contraception in *Taking Precautions* — A History, which exemplifies the PHM's enthusiasm for risqué subject matter (consider the hefty Mardi Gras retrospective earlier this year). A film screen shows bygone educational promotions for teens, my favourite being

a campy short in which an efficient wife manages to utilise every Hoover in the house to demonstrate puberty and the joys of matrimony. A display of chastity belts on salad platters and douche kits akin to cake decorating sets is accompanied by plaques with the PHM's signature 'crunchy' anecdotes. For the lesbian viewers who were disappointed by the litany of novelty condoms, Relesia has a creative tip: stamp your latex dams into fanciful shapes with a cookie cutter until someone fills this market niche!

The PHM is an innovator when it comes to multi-media presentation, and its success is obvious; witness the slew of institutions replicating this approach in an effort to gain popularity. Their semi-permanent collection, *Treasures of Art and Design*, runs the gamut of style from Morris to Memphis, covering four centuries of international decorative highlights. Fashion fetishists claw passionately at wall-mounted display cubes of fine and rare footwear. Style-o-philas may need to insert a fresh incontinence pad on sight of the luxurious Armani ensembles. For those not culturally frenzied enough to turn delirious over a Chanel boucle suit, there are computer games such as "Constructing a stylish

teapot" or, alternately, furnishing the room of your choice, from Rococo to 'Organic.'

Rise to floor three where *Treasures from the Kremlin* was the only ticket in town for everyone and their Grandma Yetta. I entered via the souvenir section, littered with badly painted Babushka dolls at prices I won't mention, lest as you read, the praline stops half way to your lips and you fall backwards off your divan.

The sparidng hoard features the renowned Royal Easter Eggs by the House of Faberge (I don't recall this team in *Paris Is Burning*). I reeled at the Royalty's extravagance in the form of brandy lighters, parasol handles and crystal mushrooms which look like petrified turds. Imagine enough encrustation of pearl and emerald to sink Pamela Anderson-Lee in the Dead Sea! The scene began to resemble an instore appearance by the Chippendales at a Manhattan delicatessen. Toothless spitting hags tossed me around like so much potato salad in their fervour to scrutinise rubies bigger than Sydney cockroaches. Behold the wonder of the *Imperial Cruiser Egg*. As an award for unrelenting efforts at the railway station, this would go down like Martina Narratilova on Flight 800.

The PHM contrasts the cliché with the outre. This innovative style of juxtaposition is evident from the foyer where Mark Newson's *Lockheed Lounge*, which Madonna gyrated on in her video *Rain*, is paired with a 400 year old Strasbourg Clock. The peanut-shaped steel chaise is packaged in a perspex shell like a space shuttle, while the clock is embellished with mechanised biblical scenes. As the four ages of man rotated continuously, I decided whoever coined the phrase "Less is more" should be gunned down with my Cartier revolver. ☺



GIOVANNI INTRA

fear factory

Imagine the paranoid, trapped in a world of amplified sounds and predatory phantoms, rapists and rent collectors. There's no air, the locks on the door don't work, the walls are closing in, the room is drinking blood. But peel back the rubber mask to reveal the mastermind behind this scheme. What is actually there?

Horror is the designer drug which will transfix you until the smells of popcorn and spilled soda once again inflame your nostrils; until the lumpen and everyday usher you out of the theatre. Fear doesn't come out of nowhere; it is crafted in jelly moulds, a product on supermarket shelves sold to grateful consumers. *The paranoid machine*, fifteen artists curated by Michael Cohen at the Shoshana Wayne Gallery in Los Angeles, argued for the enthusiastic production and consumption of both special effects and delusional complexes: not so much a thesis on paranoia but a showroom of the products which have emerged from its factory.

And if *The paranoid machine* was an occult rebellion playing on fear-as-leisure whilst eschewing art historical ironies, well good on it, though it was somewhat disappointing to read Cohen's introduction to the show. "From the Unabomber and corporate downsizing, to militia movements, drive-by shootings, and censorship battles, paranoia has clearly emerged as the mind-set of the 90s," is one step away from saying that heavy metal is responsible for teen suicide. No doubt there's some validity in stating art's intimacy with the front line of American evil, and Cohen is correct to locate paranoia as a tool of political manipulation. Paranoia is made, not begotten, and to identify it as an automated psychosis has been the vote of psychoanalysis, anti-psychoanalysis, and even of the disease's most dazzling amanuensis, Salvador Dali, who considered paranoia to be a delirious, almost fascist, organising principle.

As Dali put it, "paranoia uses the external world as a means to assert the obsessive idea." In this exhibition, the mirrors of political event and the writings of Deleuze and Guattari (the "paranoid machine" hails from *Anti-oedipus*) couple the artistic malefactions on show with an abstract context of violence, demonstrating that art is less a reservoir of social conscience than a hypothetical theatre where projections and evasions of the political are played out and swallowed up.

Walking into *The paranoid machine* one was surrounded by a

The paranoid machine,
curated by Michael Cohen
Shoshana Wayne Gallery,
Santa Monica

July 12 - August 31, 1996

visually encrusted chamber of faux-terror; a veritable Lascaux of the chilly. While Nancy Barton equipped a fall-out shelter with photographs of her father, bottled water and slasher film mementos, Shuji Arioshi anticipated future hungers by stashing a ground beef dinner inside a pair of dress shoes, and Cindy Sherman and Mike Diana force-fed us with enough cliché dismemberment to animate the Frankensteinian carcass of the whole show. In Tony Oursler's *Phobic*, 1993, the video-projected

Rachel Lachowicz,
Paranoid Toxi
Psychosis (My 3
Sons), 1996

talking-head of Mike Kelley extolled the coolness of being buried alive with the droll consistency of a mechanical scarecrow. And then it rewound and started again — the paranoid bla, bla, bla. The works all took the neurotic pleasure of over-stating their points, cramming their stories into every available inch.

The paranoid machine directed its most prostrated homage to cinema, particularly the perverted flaying-flicks of the early eighties — where teenagers are skinned alive for the pleasure of a teenage audience. Brilliantly, Cohen included an elegant bust of the world-famous Pin-Head, the urbane spike-face of *Hellraiser* fame, attributed to horror genius Clive Barker. However, as one feasted the eyes on the finely rendered pins and plastic flesh, attention was cast back to the exhibition's wilderness and onto the equally bumpy contours of Victor Estrada's *Creep*, 1996, a motley crier of fluorescent mutants (on wheels) like a melted down *Brady Bunch*. From their mole-like physiognomies, one gathered these creatures came from an extremely deep hole in the ground, or Estrada's head.

Other works resorted to the more rudimentary presences of performance, for example Tamara Fites' *Normalene the corn queen*, 1996, a live-in hybrid of a mid-west farmhouse and the bedroom of an urban teen. Each visitor was greeted by the artist who flattered them excessively, smothering their discomfort with genuinely disturbing baby-talk. Also stupendously visceral was Paul McCarthy's *Rocky*, 1976, a video featuring the artist in an auto-pugilistic fight to the death. Naked aside from boxing gloves and head gear, McCarthy took on his inner demons with a spitting and cussing bravado which put the WWF to shame. The Hulk Hogan of self-help did finally suffer the ultimate humiliation (or was it triumph?) of knocking himself out, ending crumpled on the floor, an absurd heap of his former self and tomato sauce.

And as the audience, along with McCarthy, fell in hysterical defeat then stepped up again — back for more like a libidinally charged Jack-in-the-box — the message seemed to be that hammed-up paranoia is the antidote to a violent, but more especially, a banal reality. Not only is paranoid-production a new branch of academic capitalism, it's a strangely therapeutic entertainment. ☺

INSECTIVOROUS

Gargantuans from the Garden
Shed 11, Wellington
May 25 - August 4, 1996

Detail of *Urodacus
novaehollandiae*, 1996.
Photo Gavin Hipkins

As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect.

-Opening sentence from Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, 1916.

Developed by the Australian Museum and on the road for eight years now, it appears that *Gargantuans* has changed very little since its inaugural exposition. But crucially, metamorphosis—as Kafka insisted—is the vital folklore when handling anthropods; those bugs that “constitute 90% of all known animals” (I discover from the show's informative placards).

In *Gargantuans*, for practical reasons, only a select troupe of anthropods are fabricated as giant animatronic models: spider, scorpion, bull ants, praying mantis, cicada, dung beetle, mosquito, and naturally the house fly. These over-sized specimens in the insectarium share a common quality of familiarity and foreignness. Basically they are found, as the show's title promises, in the garden—if you happen to live in Australia. The Museum of New Zealand and the City Gallery who joined host-limbs to bring this freak show to the region, don't see this as an issue. Yet as my daughter precociously remarked: “Where on earth is the weta?” Without the essential facility of adaptation, *Gargantuans*, like other international vintage-shows on the New Zealand circuit, is pre-determined kitset assemblage. Compared to more ‘historically important’ shows such as *Genghis Khan* though, *Gargantuans* welcomed live swarms of school children. Comprising by my account about 90% of the show's audience, the kids methodically altered the otherwise empty showroom in Shed 11. On the hour, every hour a bus-load arrives. Tours are booked up by teachers until the end of the exhibition's tenure.

To a certain degree, the joys of education had also paved the way for my visit to *Gargantuans*. A resurgence of insect appeal promoted by various art historians emerged in the 1980s; notably, Rosalind Krauss and the editorial crew at *October* magazine reinstated a degree of surrealist kudos to the insect. They had struck the (legendary in itself) text by Roger Caillois: *Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia* of 1935. Here's Caillois on insectivorous behaviour: “Carnivores, moreover, do not generally bother with motionless prey: immobility would thus be a better defence, and indeed insects are exceedingly prone to employ a false corpse like rigidity.” Museums—I include art galleries under this label—and the staff therein, also have a tough role to play as cultural purveyors. All shows are selected by someone. The enigma for curators or increasingly an institution's administration, becomes choosing the real one: The immobile yet liv-

ing show? Or travelling dead exhibition?

Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia was first published in the surrealist publication *Minotaure*. In this light, *Gargantuans* reminded me that we are all surrealists. Everyone loves insects, at least in model form. In the Paris scene insects were everywhere. From the ants surfacing on the cyclist's palm in *Un Chien Andalou* to Andre Masson's little swarm in his painting *Gradiva* or Salvador Dali's irrepressible underbelly locusts. It was of course the femme fatale of the garden, the praying mantis, that seduced the surrealists. In the nineties, the invitation to a beheading is still on. (The male praying mantis often literally loses his head in an attempt to woo the female cannibalistic counterpart—not a personal vendetta, more a predatorial formality.) The Australian Museum staff recite the lines in this sphere effortlessly: “Only female mosquitoes bite.” It is furthermore, the sexy praying mantis that is the most dominant and dominating anthropod (over three metres in height) in the show. Her towering movements are programmed—like a true professional—and fiercely antagonistic: the most animated of all animatronics on display. What is missing from her real-time, black-box monitored performance is the rhythmic, alluring and impulsive swaying of real mantises. Automatism, in the form of ‘live action’, so precious to Andre Breton and the boys is, once again, sadly lacking.

The touring animatronics in *Gargantuans* share their birthplace in the Showtronix laboratory. Best known for their gremlins, from the movie of the same name, Showtronix blends computer technology with flexible plastic, clay and foam. In *Gargantuans*, partially mobile monsters are manufactured rather than bred; for the curators are well aware it is the anthropods en masse that really scare paying visitors. Swarms of mosquitoes are far more terrifying than one archetypal bug. Evidently, the show's agenda is to inform, warn, and demonstrate via display; an assured control over the creatures from the garden.

At the level of appearance, *Gargantuans* is more tacky than the *Gremlins*' carefully animated screen performance—the anthropods' pneumatic-system rods, like puppet strings, are also on exhibition. Like *Gremlins* however, *Gargantuans* finishes as a gory product. The last animatronic anthropod the visitor pays homage to is a metre long mozzie. It sits pumping saliva into a gaping puncture on a model human foot amputated at the wall. In the shoddy exhibition bay, functioning as a startling and vile postscript, an unrelenting drone of amplified mosquito buzz literally drives visitors out onto the street for respite. ☹



ASSAULT & BATTERIES

Mediascape

Guggenheim Museum, New York

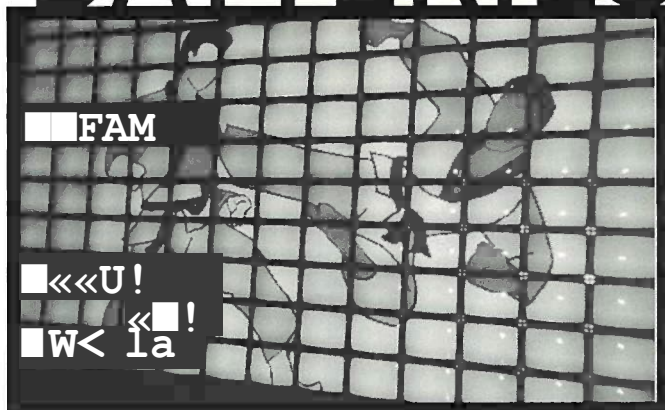
June 14 - September 15, 1996

ALICE HUTCHISON

Mediascape inaugurated the grandiose, well-financed collaboration between the Guggenheim, ZKM Centre for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, Germany, and ENEL of Italy, the second largest power company in the world. The Downtown Museum on Broadway reopened after extensive renovation with this overwhelming display of techno-topia. Seeking to review the fusion of art and technology within a historical framework, *Mediascape* featured examples of work from its 60s roots to the present day. Celebrating the 'pioneering' electronic media mavens, Nam June Paik, Bill Viola, Bruce Nauman, and Jenny Holzer, (regurgitating once again their pre-eminence over lesser-known artists) and popularising a new generation of hardwired technophiles, particularly Jeff Shaw and Toshio Iwai.

Mediascape presented works which were physically intimidating in their sheer scale and voltage; expensive, rather than cerebrally stimulating, toys. The lobby was dominated by *Megatron*, 1995, a monstrous videowall installation by Paik. A bank of 215 monitors (standing 10 high and 15 across), it was joined to *Matrix*, a flanking square made up of a few hundred more monitors, both feeding off the same 8-channel video inputs. Images of the Seoul Olympics, traditional Korean rituals, *Playboy* sequences and cartoons, were interspersed with Paik's previous collaborations with Joseph Beuys, Merce Cunningham and Charlotte Moorman, in a solipsistic retrospective. As a visual counterpoint to *Megatron's* shifting landscapes, *Matrix* offered a swirling vortex with a single image appearing at different orientations and scales, shifting in sync with the work's booming audio track.

The museum's corridors and rooms were styled to simulate a virtual reality journey with modulated lighting, and computer generated directions. Stark, maze-like spaces led from one intoxicating virtual world to another. The ENEL Virtual Reality Gallery had been constructed as a sci-fi environment; a *Return of the Jedi* home-base, all aluminium, glass and joysticks. As Italian cultural propaganda, the gallery focused on historical Italian culture, creating simulated environments that allowed the participant to 'walk through' works of art and architecture in a rather disorienting juxtaposition. After patiently waiting my turn, I took my seat, placed the heavy helmet around my head and fumbled for my control stick. Apparently I was now on a mission *In Search of the Holy Grail*. This meant being able to explore the interior of St. Peter's in Rome, Michelangelo's Basilica and colonnade, and to leap back in time to the Constantinian Basilica (demolished in the 16th Century). Reconstructed in extreme high-definition from records and illustrations, the graphic realism was extraordinary. Joystick in hand, I was able to



Left: Nam June Paik, *Megatron*, 1996. Photo Alice Hutchison

glide into every nook of St. Peter's, through the eerie corridors of ancient Egyptian Nefertari's tomb, and in S. Francesco di Assisi, actually entered Giotto's frescos to float through his perspective-perfect city, bumping into the smooth azure walls and gliding off again. I was subsequently 'beaten' in my mission seeking the Holy Grail because I was too busy probing.

In an adjacent room was Jeff Shaw's *Legible City*. Virtual recreations of New York, Amsterdam, and Karlsruhe required riding an interactive stationary bicycle through their streets, passing architecture replaced by language. Huge looming 3D letters spelt out texts evocative of the respective cities on a large wall projection. To create the Manhattan segment, Shaw incorporated fictional monologues by Frank Lloyd Wright, Donald Trump, a taxi driver, and other past and present denizens of New York. The faster one pedalled, the faster the phrases could be read.

Toshio Iwai created the exhilarating interactive piece *Piano as Image Media*, 1995. Despite novelistic appeal, the work, a grand piano and track ball podium provided ultimate participation. Allowing viewers to find analogies between notation and their sensory equivalents, one literally drew with the track-ball. Like buoys dropped in the wake of a ship, these points floated across a grid to the piano keys, striking corresponding notes which triggered star-shapes that streamed toward the ceiling. By tracing particular patterns the participant could 'compose' chords and melodies using an interface that was unfamiliar, more intuitive than conventional musical notation.

Despite its rewards, *Mediascape* represented the vested interests of the marketplace in continual techno-saturation; a barrage, for the most part, of assaultive rather than immersive experience. Grandiose, physically intimidating works, especially Paik's along with Holzer's *Untitled*, 1990, an LED installation, were certainly retinally alienating — obviously the whole point. Critic Claudia Springer has discussed the fascistic overtones of cyberpunk material which involves a form of masochistic giving-over to the system, a willed loss of self by merging with, or 'jacking into' the data net. *Mediascape* offered room to play, but only within the tenets of technological domination. ©



Stelarc in
Performance
part of *Electronic
Bodyscapes*. Photo
courtesy Artspace

SIMON REES

industrial-military complex. *Electronic Bodyscapes* failed to clear a theoretical ground for itself, so risked inclusion in the banal quadrants of cyber-space.

While a definitive curatorial approach was elided, various works in the exhibition did engage with some of the terms of reference we expect from an exhibition titled *Electronic Bodyscapes*.

The most emphatic example of 'hyper-space' was encountered in the City Group video installation in the Teststrip window. A man and woman enacted sexualised dance-like movements before a static camera, each in the privacy of their own monitor, placed side by side for the viewer. We had to try and constitute an object to the performers' subject — did they dance for the camera, us, or each other?

At one point the woman leaned towards the man, her upper body disappearing off-frame, cut by the edge of the screen. Her body didn't appear in his half of the diptych, which was tantalisingly close in actual space, instead it was dissected, her torso floating unsupported and unseen in another dimension.

Paul Swadel had reconfigured his *Interdigitate* piece as a video monitor inside a mirrored chamber sunk into the floor of the gallery. The emanating light beam and industrial sound created a technophobic atmosphere, as if the hole was the Kraken's lair. Physical interactivity could be engaged by sinking your head into the pit; more visceral for me as a blood vessel burst in my eye.

Dennis Wilcox' cyber-netic work, *Zeno*, offered at least the conceptual possibility of corporeal restoration. A sculpture of found metal objects spun in mid-space like a jury-rigged satellite, in which rotated an LCD, screening enchanting anatomical radio magnetic images (RMI's), looking like the junk-yard repair of bodies and machines found in post-nuclear holocaust films. The disappointing reality of technological art was unfortunately reiterated by the complete malfunction of *Zeno's* twin — *Zenotrope Oscillator*.

A touch screen program heightened the interactivity of the Seductor Productions / Mediatrix work *Missing*. A catalogue modelling women's wig-styles scrolls past the interactor, who can touch a style to elicit a response. Only certain points are sensitised though, so we have to hit an 'erogenous zone' to gain access to further information. When the interactor is successful, images of soft-porn coupled with elliptical text and soundtrack appear. In this fashion the surface of the screen is fetishised, with implications about the sexualisation of computer technology as a whole.

Missing is a reflexive redress of the much publicised cyber-sex available on the Internet. This work excavates the place of cyber-technology in reinforcing established phallogocentric norms.

It is this type of systemic examination that makes an encounter with new media art satisfying, and that which the constituted *Electronic Bodyscapes* exhibition lacked. ☺

Electronic Bodyscapes suffered from the same uncritical curation as the New Gallery's recent *Transformers* show. Both exhibitions were exercises in grouping artworks together at a very basic level of similitude — regardless of the art historical disparateness and philosophical antagonisms that made them inappropriate cell-mates. The rudimentary nature of the juxtapositions had me eschew any possibility that a postmodern 'fractal multiplicity' was at play inside the gallery.

Spatial exigencies aside, the display of three CD-ROM works in the project room was the most emphatic example of theoretical slippage. While all the works shared mouse-activated interaction, their intellectual provenances were polarised, and when seen in sequence, bombarded and dislocated the interactor.

Troy Innocent's *Idea-on* dealt with computer aesthetics and the creation of artificial environments, fames Cunningham's dealt with the computer as memory-bank, and Linda Dement's *Cyberflesh Girlmonster* was a hardcore excavation of misogyny and lesbian sex.

While the first two works enter into a general dialogue of electronic facility, Dement's work is a sexualised diatribe which uses the computer as an aesthetic, not theoretical prosthesis. Accordingly it belongs in an exhibition which accounts for its theoretical position, not the physics of its medium.

That the catalogue of the show is now being produced late(r) and on CD-ROM seems to be an avoidance of any theorisation whatsoever, though the production of a curatorial statement onto a new technology may be consonant with the exhibition exactly because it is over-hyped and under theorised.

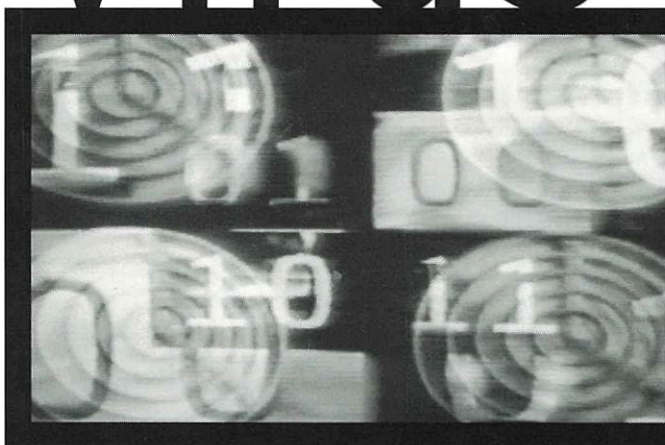
In his critic's talk John Conomos concentrated on a search for self-reflexive new-media-art that realises its position in an over-exposed new-media scape cluttered with insidious or banal information. Conomos stressed that new-media-art had to hinge upon a cogent critical theory to differentiate itself from the brute nature of its medium, which is essentially a tool of the

Electronic Bodyscapes,
Curated by Deborah Lawler-Dormer
Artspace, July 31 - September 6, 1996

Perpetual novelty has supposedly immunised us against the shock of the new. We see things coming. But not always. Seven years ago, something invisible and very infectious hitched a ride into my hard drive, and my digital universe imploded. New to the computer, I found myself in the presence of something leaner, faster, better adapted to the digital realm than I would ever be. Something with an agenda of its own.

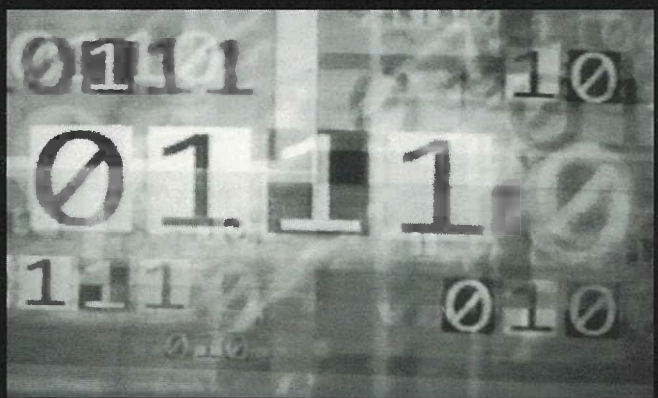
The computer virus is somebody's handiwork, a piece of code cunningly designed to power its own reproduction. Its purpose is to escape the control of its creator, to run wild. At present,

NIGEL CLARK Virus



has a familiar ring. We have heard it, seen it, felt it coming, long before it arrived. Enter the virus — and another generation of cybercultural events. What's enviable about the virus is its capacity for dispersal and its sheer persistence. The 'Brain Virus', for example, concocted in Pakistan in 1986, has infected over 100,000 computers and is expected to survive for hundreds of years. More interesting is the capacity of interacting digital entities for self-transformation. In artificial life research, virus-like strings of code are released into a contained section of the computer. These a-life organisms 'mate' by exchanging bits of code. In this way, new patterns may take shape. As Manuel DeLanda puts it: "The exercise will be considered successful if novel properties, unimagined by the designer, emerge spontaneously."

Some researchers believe given enough processing power, interacting digital wildlife might develop high intelligence. Researcher Thomas Ray proposes to borrow processing space



there is a re-evaluation of computer viruses afoot, a dawning recognition that the creative potential of digital 'wildlife' might outweigh its destructiveness. Could it be that the next phase of digital culture belongs to the fast breeders and cunning mutators of the new networks?

We might see ourselves arriving at the virulent stage by steps. In the first phase of cybernetic culture the computer was deployed as a logical device — a machine which reimposed order on the messy complexities of the modern world. Spurning the superficialities of consumer society, the hackers of the 50s and 60s consigned themselves to an underworld of pure logic, an alphanumeric universe in which the sign of grace was the most efficient and minimal program.

The experiments of the first generation opened the way to the next wave, in which the cybernetic terrain went multi-sensory. As the site of convergence of all prior media, the 'originary purity of the grid' gave way to the spectacle of hypermediation, the technosphere with which we are now familiar, defined by an ability to translate any material from one form to another, characterised by endless sampling and unlimited recombination.

The very strength of the new metamedium is also the source of its frustrations; a feeling of being swamped, of our messages being condemned to obscurity by the sheer level of systemic noise. Due to its parasitic relationship to prior media, this noise

envy

Paul Swadel, stills from the video *Super Collider*, 1996

from the Internet. With safeguards built in, he believes the networks could be turned into a vast 'wildlife reserve' of digital organisms. Others claim that even without Ray's project, the proliferation of autonomous entities will turn the cybernetic landscape into a seething 'jungle' of diverse evolving forms.

Biological metaphors give the impression terrestrial evolution is in for a virtual replay. What we are dealing with is the simulation of creative impulses that can drift free from human agency and head off on unpredictable tangents. Already artists like Karl Sims and William Latham are using elements of computer-generated randomness to produce novel forms, but in these cases intervention insures the final images are accessibly seductive.

The biggest attraction lies in genuinely 'out of control' systems; the hothousing of whole continents of virtual difference. A response perhaps to the hyper-visibility of our world, to the fact that modernity has left scarcely anything unseen. In the absence of accessible planets and extraterrestrials, its up to us to germinate our own mysterious beings and terrains. As the antidote to a thoroughly designed world, we seem to be on the path towards shadow universes — ones with designs of their own.&

TWA 800: a Dada manifesto

In television footage of the crash, pieces of aeroplane bob on the green meniscus of the sea, forming a random-pattern aesthetic which glistens on an awesome scale; an unknown language which drifts, basking in the gaze of world-wide broadcast. The TWA 800 crash collides the sciences of aerodynamics, terrorism and broadcast. Everything is blown into pieces — but what beautiful pieces they are.

In the service of scapegoating and hard news, the wreckage fell to the various agencies of decryption: laboratories, air transport authorities, the US Navy, the FBI, were speedily deployed to transform this nonsensical mass into the kind of information required by families of victims and the public at large.

The pieces of the once-whole TWA 800 achieved the magical stasis of potential evidence. This material is uncannily suspended as a relic, becoming collective property which the arcane sciences of the FBI ration out to the media, which in turn rations out its morsels with great care. When something is 'held as evidence' it is trapped by specular, forensic powers which will make the most of what they temporarily possess.

There's nothing left of the TWA 800 flight but Dada. It is the decryption agencies' task to turn Dada into a Government report. The most significant line is the issue of blame, and now that the world has geared itself up to hear the 'terrorist' theory confirmed, the crash retreats from the headlines with its 'tale' between its legs. An embarrassing pause in coverage indicates the someone writing the crash monograph has lost the plot.

But how can anyone apportion responsibility for an explosion? Explosions are not responsible things. The FBI are nervous that a 'motive' has not been identified; the death of 230 people is somehow absolved in the light of politics: 'Hey, that's war. We understand war.'

The West copes best when there is somebody to blame. But perhaps the West itself is to blame. Even if it wasn't terrorism, the downing of TWA 800 represents a breaking point of our faith in technology; a protest against the strain exerted on 747s which work too hard and are patently quite stressed. One could expand the definition of terrorism to include the margin of error airlines face as part of their programme; chance itself is terroristic. All the optimism and fright of travel is canned into the short spaces and tight schedules of the intercontinental jet. We sit comfortably belted in our seats, covering great distances at high speeds, protected from air pressure and freezing temperatures. Obviously, there are risks.

But let's not forget which nations were involved. The event would never have elicited as much 'international' hysteria if it

GIOVANNI INTRA

were not for Paris/New York. Ideas such as 'Paris' and 'New York' increase the quality of disturbance in terms of ripple and effect. This was no Uruguay-to-Capetown. So let's place the blame for the TWA 800 disaster at the feet of the historical and commercial impulses which spectacularise and fetishise tourism and the significance of one particular zone of the earth above another. The idea of World Centres is the real culprit and should be put on trial.

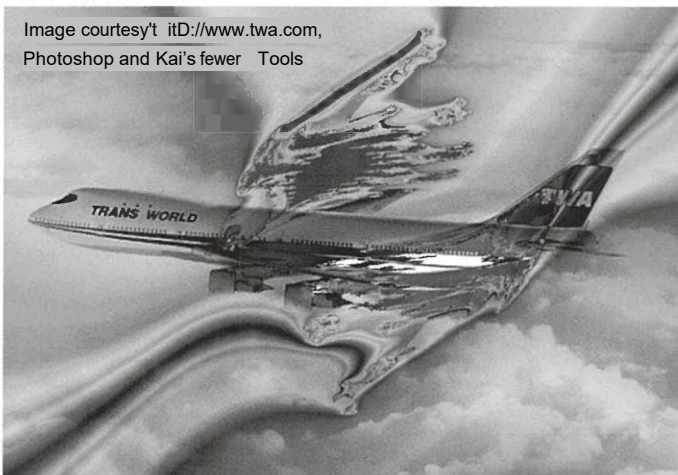
One answer to terrorism would be the old Dada trick: to destroy, by whatever means necessary, Art, Architecture, History, and every other symbol of national identity and pride. One should also flatten snowy mountains and pollute beaches so everywhere in the world becomes a nondescript backwater thus forfeiting terrorist desire. Who would bomb a shearing shed or a sewerage pond?

Another answer: make everywhere the Centre of the World. There would be no 'best place' to bomb, as the 'developed' countries would have put billions into obscure, poor nations in order to divert the terrorist's interest. Explosions are site-specific, so why not carefully conceal the whole idea of site?

The bomb is merely a motif. Any sucker can make a phone call which will cause the evacuation of hundreds of people. The terrorist bomb creates a new opportunity for the Pacific Bell user to be taken seriously: thus it expands civil liberties. Bombs are broadcast media. The way things explode is analogous to the way television is transmitted, and vice versa. If you are prepared to bomb something, then your message is likely to be on TV within hours. It could be argued that the terrorist bomb, especially in recent weeks, has become a television genre.

Take the pipe-bomb; the ordinary citizen can walk into a hardware store and purchase the ingredients necessary to kill a person, disrupt the Olympic Games, and get on television the world over. It has taken years and billions for NBC to get that far. It was just as easy for Marcel Duchamp who bought *In advance of the broken arm* from his local hardware store, and even easier for the person who left a suspicious parcel on an American Airlines flight recently, causing the plane to return to LAX. The parcel turned out to be tins of catfood. If the avant garde is dead, how do we explain terrorism and the ingenuousness of this instinct for broadcast?!

Image courtesy of www.twa.com,
Photoshop and Kai's fewer Tools



Desire and Derision: a tribute to Grant Lingard
Jonathan Smart Gallery, Christchurch
25 June - 20 July, 1996

JONATHAN BYWATER

The nails protruding from the demo-site weather boards seemed of the West Coast, too.

On my way to the gallery, I was stared down by a DB bill board promoting Canterbury rugby. "SNAGS," it punned with a matey nudge, "Our boys love 'em. Especially with white bread." Almost as a reply to this, *Strange Bedfellows (four trophies, four poems)*, 1993 appeared in the gallery; pedestaled half-g's of bitter neatly inscribed with a beery thesaurus. Misread by *The Press* critic as a wholly homosexual work, it is a take on masculinity generally, hinting at violence in connection with alcohol. One side of each jar lists terms for the penis. Another lists terms for penetrative sex. Yet another lists names describing relations one male may bear to another: "father, lover, brother, hero, stud..." Only the fourth side is necessarily homosexual in reference, listing slang terms for gay men.

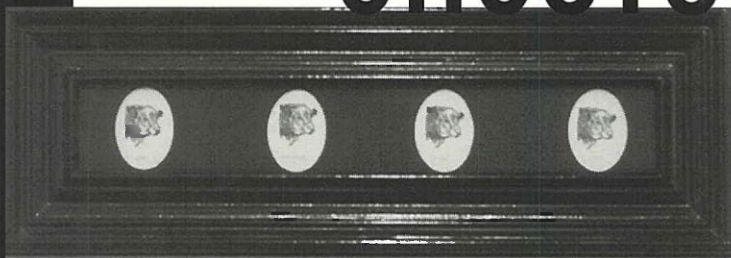
The pieces from the show *Coop*, 1994, also undo the 'gay art' reduction. Bringing back memories of the White Power activity in Christchurch that was in the news at the time, the phallicly-angled flag staff flying a y-front, the white (boverish) boots, and the tar-and-feathered canvases, take Lingard's concern for claims to identity much further than a report on his own experience.

Dying from AIDS is serious, and the serious binary title (uncharacteristic of the artist's own), with the stark nouns "death" and "desire", made the work appear more solemn, less witty, than in the past. Perhaps such throwaways as *I'm Looking Over A Four Leaf Clover* in which Max Gimblett's guffawing face from the cover of *Art New Zealand* (#67) is spliced onto the cover of Max Bygraves' *Singalonga Party Hits*, and *Mereilyn Tweetie*, a tar-and-feathered ghetto blaster playing a loop of *Disco Duck* by *Rick Dees and his Cast of Idiots*—would have leavened the proceedings a little.

A curated show might have tidied up the thinking to be done on the artist's achievement. But in its unframed organisation this show made no claims for itself, apart from being a gesture from Lingard's friends, patrons and dealer in his honour. In this it succeeded, gracefully stepping over any tasteless hurrah or sentimental kid glove work.-S

Although assembled as a tribute rather than claiming the status of a retrospective, the congregation of Grant Lingard's work at the Jonathan Smart represented a de facto career survey. Revisiting what was mostly familiar work (the artist continued to show his work in New Zealand while living in Australia) the show as a whole had me knitting and unravelling generalities. While justly credited with an ability to speak widely, Lingard's work is, as is often remarked, "intensely personal". It is unified by its consistent examination of identity. *Like Father Like Son*, 1988, with its blood red frame, provided one of many possible keys to this generalisation.

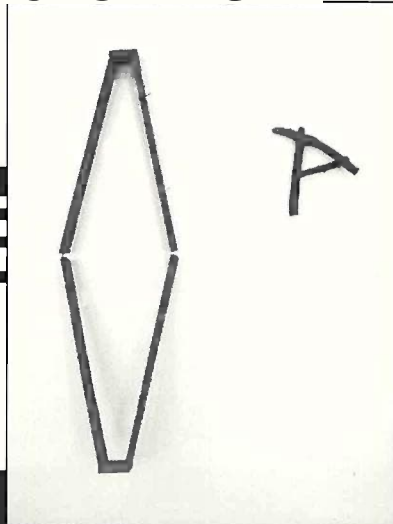
GHOSTS



OF

COAST

THE



Stylistically, the works demonstrated a striking discontinuity when pushed up together. A progressionist story could chart a chronological development from such innocently traditional forms as the self-portrait, through exuberant anti-craft reworkings of expressionism, to deadpan manipulation of found objects. Such a story could be told as one of increasing urbanity; and almost to make it literally so, I found myself extrapolating from the work three locations (as described in Brent Skerten's catalogue essay), the West Coast of the artist's childhood, the Christchurch art world of the mid-eighties, and Sydney, his home of several years before his death in late 1995.

The earliest work was a dark, defensive self-portrait. Bleary charcoal smudges around the sharp facial features suggested the face-blackening grime of his father's work as a miner. This drawing was hung at head height. Under it, as if to represent the feet of the same figure, sat *Mummy's Boy*, 1993, the Sunlight soap football boots familiar from the back cover of the *Art Now* catalogue. The installation invited the autobiography of the earlier work to be read into the later piece, casting Lingard as the un-sporty sook amidst visions of Saturday sport, aftermatch showers and laundry.

The work that seemed strangest to me, was from the 1985 show, *Skeletons*. The bawling crudeness of these spiky constructions is gleefully loud; their plug and socket, in/out, black/white oppositions so blunt as to be hardly symbolic. The mischievous glint in these barely veiled genital references was repeated, less aggressively, on the floor beneath them, in *Hutch, and Lure*, 1993, a fairy ring of white Y-fronts, bearing the bulge of various fruit shaped soaps.

Left: Grant Lingard, *The Vessel Uncocked*, 1985. Photo Courtesy Jonathan Smart Gallery. Far Left: *Like Father Like Son*, 1988. Photo Courtesy Jonathan Smart Gallery

show champion

Shane Cotton has presented seven new paintings in a variation on the theme of a post-colonial search for identity. The words *kotahi* (one) and *mano* (many) repeated in several of the works indicate that the nature of this search is one that is both personal and generic. In the process of locating himself in a contemporary sense, Cotton explores his own origins and the history of colonisation, in an articulate, and by no means nostalgic, display of symbols and imagery immanent in that history. Although the teetering structures of former works do not appear in these paintings, the construction of a conceptual framework is still achieved through the stylistic device of split levels, and boxes or frames on the canvas, into which are fitted a proliferation of images. In contemplating *Ahi*, one of the major works in the show, I find myself counting off the references to fire in a game of 'find as many clues as you can in this picture.' Through *Ahi ka*, the fires left burning on the land, Maori could customarily claim their right to that land. The symbols on this landscape of identity include a cross and a candle and then pits or trenches, leading upwards to 'that mountain,' the fire within it, standing alone like a beacon on a hopeful horizon.

Perhaps the most compelling work here is *Tuna*, and for me it is the most problematic in terms of understanding. Transmutations of the image of a carved face with protruding tongue parade across the canvas in a disturbing manner, alternately disembodied, mummified, placed incongruously on a besuited figure, and then oscillating on a stick inside a wheeled cart. The idea of appropriation of cultural symbols seems clear. This image is an identifiable cultural stereotype, reproduced in the kitschy Maori art aimed at the tourist trade and used in the identification of New Zealand 'culture' to the outside world in the post-war era of developing nationalism. As connections with Empire receded, leaving a kind of cultural vacuum for European New Zealanders, Maori were required to act as performers in a cultural pantomime. The image of the same carved face on a dog's body, its feet up and tail wagging indicates that Cotton is alluding to such a performance. I wonder too, whether he isn't making ironic reference to his popularity within the Pakeha art



market (in a continuation of that pantomime) in the text "trained in the 80s...still performing to millions." The themes of appropriation and acculturation are continued in the repeated and punning use of the symbol of the cross, and the text in English and Maori, "cross ki te paepae" and "whiti" (to cross over), a reference perhaps to the conundrum posed by the dual elements of Cotton's own identity as Maori and Pakeha.

The painted texts in these works (which in some cases is obscure of meaning and seems to defy sensible translation), especially the large lettering of the Bird paintings, appear as ironic stylistic takes on the use of Te Reo Maori in the contemporary New

Shane Cotton, *Tuna*, 1996.
Photo Robin Neate, courtesy the artist and Hamish McKay Gallery

SIAN DALY

Shane Cotton
New Paintings
Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington
31 August - 4 September, 1996

Zealand art world. It must also be noted that Maori began to use the written word in a ritual way in figurative art forms following contact with Christianity. This use of text might be seen as a further exposition of the connected concepts of iconographic appropriation and the process of acculturation.

I find much to admire in these paintings; the skilful rendering of the depth and lustre of wood in the simulacrum of a carved panel in *Ahi*, the irony and sharp humour contained in a baffling play of hieroglyphs in *Tuna*, and the sense of the arcane and evocation of myth and spirituality in the deep red and misty brown portrayals of carving and landscape in the smaller works. As Maori and Pakeha, we are individually engaged in a mutual post-colonial search for identity, and this search involves coming to terms with the same colonial history. We all 'have our crosses to bear' in terms of personal identity, and as New Zealand comes to identify itself in Maori terms and through a discourse over the effects of colonisation, we bear them also, I think, over the same generic landscape; a landscape oddly recognisable in Shane Cotton's work.T

ONE-NIGHT STAND

It's snowing again in Dunedin tonight. It's been falling and turning to slush off and on since early this morning. Below my office window the grass is dusted like a sponge cake decked with icing sugar, bright under the all-night spotlight. The taxi drivers are either going home early or staying over with family in town. Anyone wanting to get beyond the city's perimeter of icy hills tonight might as well kiss the baby goodbye.

It snowed last week too. A surprising white dump that disappeared as quickly as it came. And on that very night, as if she had known what was to fall, Shay Launder opened snowy *oriental garden*, a one-night stand at The Butcher Gallery in Port Chalmers.

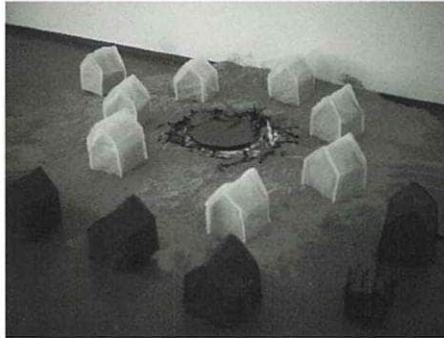
How did her garden grow? With little boxes stitched together from supermarket bags, crimson tissue and Chinese embroidered silk. Some of

her houses floated from the ceiling with cotton threads, others were clustered on the floor around blue 'lakes' made from acrylic in the shape of petrie dishes, each ringed by gorse twig 'trees'.

Climbing like ivy

up one wall, Launder had pinned tiny black and white photographs of snow on shrubbery cheek-by-jowl. All the pins were bent. Standing in the triangular gallery-come-cafe facing the Port Company which grows like a virus on the city outskirts, I was overtaken by a sense of the uncanny. The dislocations of scale had me feeling like Santa Claus drifting on a reindeer-sleigh over a beautifully twisted fairytale scene. Here was a hybrid of alpine village, frosted toy town and refugee camp, secreted into a fugitive space. It was like being taken out of myself while standing in a supermarket aisle. Perfect scale, perfect distance. People like ants, buildings like toys. Launder's "ticky-tacky" toy town streets were empty; like Nadar's balloon the people were up above. But like *The Simpsons* too, it was the suburbs at night. It was Springfield, with everyone indoors watching TV.

Blanketed, blank, banal and beautiful. An event staged according to Launder to "hint at the romance of winter wonderlands". At the outset of this evening a circle of fireworks was lit. There was electronic snow playing on a TV monitor facing the street from the gallery's shop-front window. And woven into the fabric of opening chatter, sounds could be heard coming from speakers inside the wee houses: the soft tinkling of drum sticks on cymbals and the gentle tones of one or two solo string instruments played with the rhythm of a child's swing under pine trees. This was an installation hovering between the won-



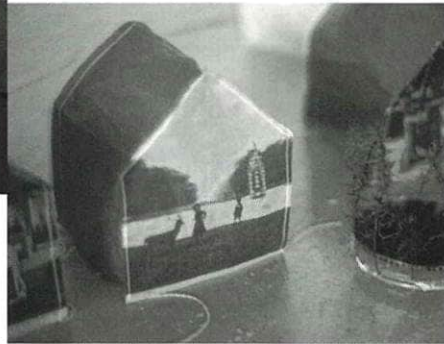
Shay Launder, *snowy oriental garden* 1996, detail of an installation. Photo Shay Launder

ROB GARRETT

drous and the stupid, between effortlessness and an over-played pun. After all, fake snow flakes and messy sand gardens all have their unassailable apotheosis in child's play.

Finding the space to work is not child's play in Dunedin though. Where, when, how, and how long are all conversational gambits and performative positions in the politics of making an appearance at all in the city of stone and ice. In her attention to the aesthetics of the meeting place, Launder's snowy *oriental garden* referenced a Dunedin tradition going back at least as far as Chippendale House in the 1980s. It is a tradition that understands the exhibition event as a way of bringing people together. It has been seen to in the on-again, off-again existence of the arts collective Super 8. Now entering its third generation, Super 8 has oscillated between the withdrawal characteristic of a club, and aesthetic 'comings out' which signal social consciousness and desire for political change. A number of galleries this decade — particularly Solutions, N05, O'oops, and Stupid Street — survived more by the goodwill of the arts community that used them as meeting places, than by any savvy as dealerships. Equally, artists have gone solo in vacant buildings not only to show their work but to open spaces for social interaction and critical debate. Launder's pitch, both shonky and earnestly

knowing, is vaguely reminiscent of those news file clips of politicians recorded early in their career. The ones where they seem caught, pathetically off-guard, before they were targeted for the 'media-ready



makeover'. What is betrayed in the absence of patina is often a sensibility still touched by vision and hope.

Making a difference to people's lives must still matter. Activating sensuality and longing are still worthwhile aspirations. If anything is to be learnt from the separation between aesthetics and activism typical of so much that went for correct cultural politics of the 1980s, then the temporary appearance of the beautifully banal must be approached as being relevant to questions about what constitutes activism. Distractions from high seriousness might be what is needed to awaken something of the yet-to-be in people's expectations. Such work brushes on the imagination's capacity for thinking differently, and might occupy that tenuous and fruitful space between the disavowed and the inevitable. Encountering Shay Launder's snowy *oriental garden*'s fleeting fall and thaw left a sense that we may have missed something.☺

Shay Launder,
snowy oriental garden
The Butcher Gallery, Port Chalmers
22 August, 1996

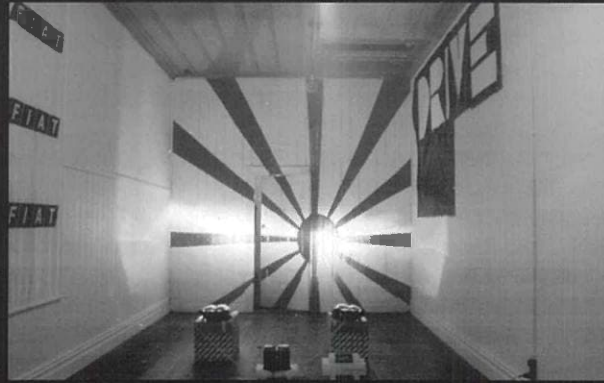
TESSA LAIRD

CRIMINAL LORE

On arrival at Daniel Malone's inauguration of Fiat Lux, a new artist-run space in Hobson St, the atmosphere is thick with 'performance in progress,' including the obligatory aural stench of rhythmic feedback. It's actually a clock radio tuned to taxi signals. Reading 12 AM although it's around 7.30, de rigueur displacement sets the work in a netherworld of the poignantly pointless. With deft nonchalance Malone places Chinese funeral candles in the floorboard cracks, between installation parts comprising a car battery and headlights. The brand, of course, is Fiat. Malone has happily engaged in contemporary art's most performative aspect: the search for sponsorship. A Fiat banner emblazons the wall, complimenting 'DRIVE', an inverse replica of the Dashper mural circa 1984, stencil-cut into black polythene. Whether to read this as an instruction, or as an integral quality of the performance artist (think: Mobil Man), I'm unsure, but Malone delights in corny puns. Fiat Lux is Latin for "Let there be light", so the back wall is painted with a rising sun, Asian style, and the headlights are unblinkingly appropriate.

The artist spreads a subtler illumination, encouraging his audience to hold candles, 'lightening' the proceedings with inter-

Fiat Lux, by Daniel Malone, comprising Backiojthe Future, a performance, and Asian Driver, an installation Fiat Lux Gallery, Auckland September 5 - 21, 1996



people continue talking, while the artist maps a course through potholes, woodpiles, and existential graffiti, like Theseus in the Minotaur's labyrinth. Linking the flag, he repeats the circuit, this time blowing up his trademark blue balloons and tying them to an earthbound version of ebullient caryard decorations. Mirroring the aesthetic of parades, this flag-molestation occurs just days after the All Blacks were in town. The audience are mostly unwilling to trample the uneven terrain of the alley, and unused to being deprived of their protagonist, begin to disperse. There is something of a lull, as Malone attempts to revitalise the Fiat lights. They don't glow, though predictably it's the failure of the live event that cements its intrigue. Suddenly, he is gone in a cab, leaving tech heads to fiddle with the electrical failure.

But, like a sputtering candle, the evening refuses to die. The cab is back, inviting an expenses paid DRIVE through a city of perfectly naturalistic extras. The final destination is a car park, where the waiting Malone has siphoned petrol from a water inspection vehicle marked 'contamination control.' Malone dons a toy Indian headdress, douses and immolates the flag. We're right behind the district court, but the only sentries are the Telecom building and the Sky Tower. It's a beautiful sight, with a strange reverence. I wonder if burning a vandalised flag is anarchism or a cleansing form of nationalism? Or just an artist engaged in a personal phoenix-out-of-the-ashes-of-my-last-show enactment? Malone's gleeful impurity in his appropriation of other people's identity politics, from the candles, to the flag, to the headdress, suggests a deep suspicion of the fixity of identity full stop. Of course we knew all this already, but Malone's seductive combination of generosity and mystery is worth the reminder.

The seemingly random locale is an indication of how much personal symbolism the artist invests in the smallest decisions. The car park is, in fact, the site where ioom2 was performed. Malone's work is far denser than the 1981 piece; he has scrupulously charted the evening's associations, working to a recipe that's more theft than homage, with a hint of superstition (I can almost hear the intonation, "Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue"). There are rules for staging these events, and Malone's carefully conceived entry into the lineage is, on talking to the artist, so self-referential as to make the roles of critic and even viewer redundant. Malone has become a conspiracy theorist of art, 'stringing' together disparate ideas and images to create a larger whole that isn't whole at all, but boasts some natty threads of coincidence. For Malone, equation solving is the purest aesthetic. But regardless of whether you are attuned to his constructed meanings, the work transcends information gathering. In its real time exposition, it attains the elusive glamour of the liminal. For one magic moment, we are all intoxicated by the pedigree of performance art and its puritanical criminals.©

action. He unfurls a New Zealand flag which has "Please walk on me" written on it. This is *Back to the Future*, the original replica of Dianne Prince's *Flagging the Future* shown by Malone in *Crime Show* (The Physics Room, Christchurch). A mirror is wrapped in the flag and then dashed. Shards are placed by the candles, referencing ioom2, a 1981 performance by Peter Roche and Linda Buis.

Out comes string, and Malone ties one end to an eyelet in the flag, then walks outside, looping the building. Inside,

Daniel Malone, *AsianDriver*, 1996, installation view. Photo courtesy the artist

Object Activity

The Fletcher Challenge Ceramics Award 1996
Auckland Museum Te Papa Whakahiku
July 28 - August 25, 1996

DOUGLAS LLOYD-JENKINS

In Search of The Yeti

The Fletcher Challenge Ceramic Award has turned twenty. Its proud parents presented twenty thousand dollars to one of the birthday guests flown in from Japan that day and (as far as we can tell) flown out the following morning. This fleeting appearance and consequent disappearance of the winner leaves much unanswered. How does this process contribute to the development of ceramics? The answer lies not in a discussion of the exhibited works but in an ongoing critique of the award, and of contemporary ceramic practice.

The alliance of a major corporation with studio ceramics is not as unusual as it might seem. Like the profits of any multinational, the award money (usually) disappears offshore, while public relations tells us how lucky we are this is happening here. But perhaps more interestingly both corporation and competition have, up until now, had an abhorrence of critical investigation, preferring publicity over critique.

This aversion is not a peculiarity of *The Fletcher* competition, but ceramics has become the most insular of the crafts. For many practitioners, questioning the validity of what potters create is seen to oppose the process of making. Ceramics opts for a critical culture dominated by fellow practitioners, allowing potters to believe their only cultural obligation is to be technically dexterous.

This anti-critical ethos is further complicated in that, although practitioners wish to have little to do with independent critique, they demand the wider world, and particularly the art world, pay attention to ceramics. The ceramics community misunderstands a crucial cultural pairing. If what ceramic artists have to say through their work is of little interest except to other ceramic practitioners, the critical discussion focuses elsewhere. When historically potters have explored invigorating ideas which engaged with the wider world, art writers have willingly discussed ceramics.

This failure to integrate contemporary ideas into practice is evidenced in the intellectual paucity of most works in this year's



Yasuko Sakurai with her winning entry. Photo courtesy The New Zealand Herald

awards. If this award tells us anything, it is that ceramics needs to explore ideas sourced in the wider cultural framework. While it may have seemed impossible to avoid the wave of cultural theory that defined art practice in the 1980s, ceramics did exactly that, largely to its detriment. To explain this occurrence, one has to examine the move from modernist to postmodern frameworks that occurred in the late 1970s.

Ceramics' rejection of the theories of Bernard Leach (who came to represent modernism in studio ceramics) became a rejection of all theory. Ceramics remained isolated from the innovative positions being taken up elsewhere in the arts. The result has seen ceramics unable to operate in a postmodern environment at any level except the empty stylistic gesture. With the desire to destroy the dominance of Leachian aesthetics, ceramics power brokers promoted non-functional ceramics as the new highway. The strongest examples in New Zealand were produced in the early 1980s by such artists as Bronwynne Cornish and Dennis O'Connor. These works were overtly political statements of opposition to an oppressive theoretical climate. However, now that opposing Leach is no longer avant garde, non-functional ceramics are revealed as standing for nothing more than an opposition to function. The highway has proved a cul-de-sac.

The insistence that a practitioner judge the award protects ceramics from external critique. *The Fletcher* judge is usually picked from ceramics' elite ranks, but what assurance is there of a quality appointee? While last year's judge Takeshi Yasuda features in most recent international surveys of ceramics, one has to search extensively to authenticate the credentials of this year's judge. So what was the basis of the decision on which the award was presented? Technical dexterity certainly, but in short Yasuko Sakurai captured the premier award because her work *A Pair with Shadows* reminded the judge of a Yeti. Whether delightfully quirky or intellectually inept, this decision does little toward exploring the intellectual frontiers of ceramics.

The overall contribution the award makes to international ceramics was brought into question this year, when the previous nineteen winners were dusted off and assembled for the public. Despite considerable investment in the medium, Fletcher Challenge appears to have accumulated an exceedingly poor collection of momentary fads expressed in clay.

The opportunity to see international ceramics in New Zealand is welcome but an overseas judge is ill equipped to read new developments in local work. Young potters working in a New Zealand tradition are marginalised in a competition that is read as an indicator of quality. Having failed approval from afar, their absence from the competition impacts negatively on the public's response to their work. To overcome these risks, many New Zealand practitioners produce references to the international ceramics prize circuit — imitative works that are little more than a pitch to the judge. When they win prizes the artists receive localised acclaim, which gives rise to a vision of future New Zealand ceramics as a rootless movement courting international attention.

The Fletcher is not devoid of strong, relevant and informed ceramics. The irony is that many of those are by New Zealand artists — Chris Weaver, Richard Parker, and Marilyn Wiseman prove themselves at the forefront of local ceramics and of ceramics generally. At ease amongst the best overseas artists, these potters are engaged in an exploration of the role of functional ceramics in contemporary culture.

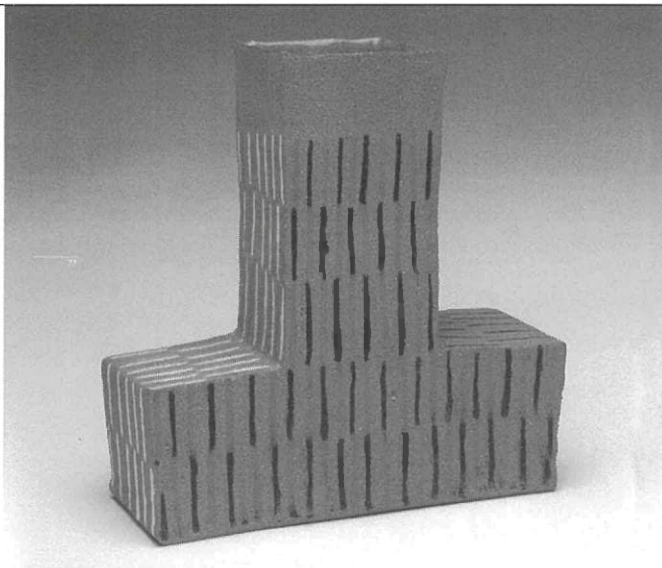
With the collapse of Britain as the centre of studio ceramics — a position it maintained through virtue of mediating responses to Japanese work — the ex-colonies are increasingly reclaiming the centre. As in literature, innovative work comes from the periphery. Alongside Weaver, Parker and Wiseman, Australians Gwen Hansen-Piggot and Prue Venables illustrate that contemporary ceramics is capable of being relevant and culturally informed. If international ceramics has no wish to be judged against New Zealand standards, then perhaps we should accept the presence of the award might simply be a colonising one.®

MARTIN POPPELWELL

Medium Counts

One of the most attractive aspects of *The Fletcher Challenge Ceramic Award* is that it is an annual event, meaning that if you miss one, you can always catch a repeat the following year. With a concurrent display of previous winners, all in all over one hundred and eighty works were on display, quite a task for any eager visitor, myself included. What was apparent was the variety of work, the only general tendency being diversity. For such a binding and 'primal' medium as clay the amount of different effects and treatment was astonishing (not to mention the 800 odd pieces that were rejected).

Michael Robinson — curator, historian and lecturer at the



Kazuo Ishikawa, *Passing Imagination*.

Royal College of Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum, who attended the exhibition and the clay forum, cites his early enthusiasm for the ceramic medium as emanating from the committed activity taking place in the field of clay, and at the same time the seemingly incoherent direction it was following. Coming from a fine art background in the mid-to-late 1960s, it may have appeared as a playful and eclectic contrast to the sobriety that had befallen the 'art world' with its dominant minimal aesthetic. He went on to point out that successful pottery has a definite function, i.e. social, mythic, cultural. This is not to be confused with efficiency, which, as Garth Clarke points out in *Art Deco and Modernist Ceramics*, is not necessarily a work's ultimate virtue.

With this in mind I returned to the exhibition. While much of the work demanded to be viewed as art, somehow the making process was at odds with the medium itself. The work that seemed to succeed exuded a natural unfussy quality, as if the maker had something to communicate and clay was the obvious material — here lies function.

A piece titled *Passing Imagination* by Japanese potter Kazuo Ishikawa, not taller than 20cm, constructed with thin earthenware slabs inlaid with thin coloured clay strips, white, black and teal — in my mind embodied function, concept, and the fleeting and rare attribute described in the title. The maker had avoided any sentimentality of process and had ingenuously constructed a resolved sculpture, content to sit on a flat surface. Coming from Japan, still a revered shrine to many Western studio potters, this work was rigorous in its form while embodying a reductive panache.

Because of the show's democratic and inclusive nature, it leaves itself open for derision from art critics expecting a more theoretical context. However, amongst the plethora of 'stuff', if one can find a single piece that encapsulates one's values in the form of an object, it must be worth it. *The Fletcher Challenge* on this level will always succeed.®

Short Reports

JOYCE CAMPBELL

Rock Your World

An installation by Melissa MacLeod

The Physics Room, Christchurch

August 9 - September 7, 1996

Two rooms are accessed through the same short corridor, up twin flights of stairs wedged into spacious floors. The floors are at the same height, the stairs the same scale, though one room is clearly the functional 'replica' of its Rimu other — chip board floor, raw pine steps, and I'm sandwiched nearer the ceiling than feels natural. The floor is covered in a sky blue mesh, in case we need the grip.

Because it rocks, this room, dips under your feet, bounces back. It's a super king size, a trampoline, the wrestling ring of my dreams, only not. It's like all sorts of things, but the single greatest pleasure in MacLeod's work is that it just is what it is. Understated, materially direct. It's an empty room — that rocks. As I step out and take the stage, the world kicks back. I'm bouncing, taken out of myself.

The opening crowd revert quietly and naturally, after a few minutes of frenetic play, to the lulling seesaw of their bouncinettes, bobbing gently, unconsciously as they talk. Her audience remembers, quite simply and physically. I'm not sure that many of them even notice what they are remembering.

Meanwhile, the other room is doing something altogether different. Solid, convincingly worn, empty apart from a single video monitor tuned to live feed from the first. There is something totally satisfying in discovering this screen, because with work this ambitious, this big, you can't help wondering how she's done it. In an incredibly generous gesture, the artist shows us. There is no trickery allowed here, no black box mechanics to leave us bewildered but flattered by the mystique of it all — just some mind blowing simplicity. Beneath the chip board, to the muffled laughter of someone freshly rocked, a buried light illuminates a sea of bobbing, groaning bed springs working the room. The spell is broken, intimacy restored and I don't feel let down at all.

The power of this work resides in its ability to heighten a sense of self, without the preaching or particularising of identity politics. MacLeod takes a leap of faith in assuming that we can be altered by experience which is inherently difficult to articulate. When we become acutely aware of the detail of a room and



Melissa MacLeod, Rock Your World, Photo Courtesy The Physics Room

the way we act within that space, our relationship to the world becomes clearer: we become momentarily conscious of ourselves. Through this self-consciousness we learn more about where we were before. This work doesn't aspire to irony and doesn't ask you to identify. It simply asserts 'you are here,' something you probably knew already.-☺

RUBÉN REYES

Critical Mass

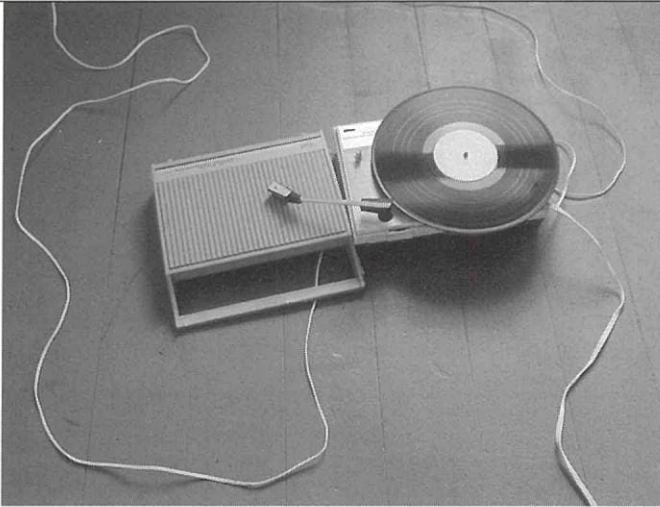
G. Treadgold & L. Budd

Teststrip

July 25th - August 17, 1996

Some artworks invite us to converse; others happily converse amongst themselves whether we are listening or not. *Critical Mass* is of the latter kind. This work casually posits locker cabinets, record players, blinds, cheap exposed lighting and loops of tapes amongst the names of Pascal, Descartes and high flown anonymous quotes whose only point of reference is the artists themselves. We are presented with a collection of bits which are easily recognised but now altered, wavering in their simplicity. As we read on one of the blinds, "First it is necessary to understand the nature of the voices produced by melody."

The identification of each piece is problematized by their being either altered in their traditional function or by preventing them from performing any real function at all. With lockers, blinds, a suitcase, all being poorly painted or written upon, and locker doors removed/moved/put back, the stability they once represented is destroyed and the artists potential to meddle expands. These alterations do not, however, suggest any great technical or conceptual goal but a desire to experiment and observe results.



G. Treadgold and L. Budd, *Critical Mass*. Photo Ann Shelton courtesy Teststrip

On the floor, a record player, whose needle sits upon its own speaker in a state of low-fi introspection. Here the mechanism designed for the production of sound attempts to listen to itself, but nothing is heard except static vibrating to the empty rhythm of the still turning turn table. Is this the "voice of silence" we see written along some of the locker doors? Another functionary perversion making the totality that little cheaper? The grandiosity of the textual fragments that little more comical?

The small closed suitcase with "beauty of omission" written on it under a plain naked bulb may appear to profess something important, but this illuminated assertion is questionable in part by its own presence. Whatever may have been omitted we are not to know. Noise, text, history, Western thought, sculpture, painting all inhabit the same space along side each other. No one thing becomes the bearer of significance.

With the work being re-arranged midway through the exhibition, relations are loosened even further; the work is given a dynamism that contributes to its self-sufficiency. New intimacies and frustrations emerge but still no criteria are offered to decide which combination is better, nor any way of guaranteeing that the work won't change again.

What does result from such a re-shuffle is a certain degree of urgency. The sound continues and the possibility of an end or conclusion remains unlikely. The work plays on such an outcome by appearing half packed up in its second installment. The blinds, rolled and placed in a corner, but the text still readable. The melody continues. "Forgive Descartes." ☺

BRETT LEVINE

Most and Least wanted Paintings

Vitaly Komar and Alex Melamid

Dia Centre for the Arts Website

<http://www.diacenter.org/km>

It is, in the end, about painting. This is why Komar and Melamid's *Most and Least Wanted Paintings* project at the Dia Centre for the Arts' website is so enigmatic. For here is a work which is digital without being about being digital. Instead, taking as their premise the rather obsolete idea that there is a "true people's art in painting", Komar and Melamid ascertain, interpret and create 'ideal' art. During a two-year project they will distribute multiple choice surveys to people in fifteen countries, analyse the results, and create the 'most wanted' and 'least wanted' painting for each country in question.

The project began in 1994 when the artists first tried to understand just what it was people wanted in art. While working in a studio in New Jersey, Komar and Melamid contrasted their observations on the available art for purchase with the responses they were receiving to their work. After being offered \$1,000 for a painting, Melamid noticed that "it was not a kitschy painting. It was a normal, elite painting. So there was a scent of something, but we couldn't grasp it. There were not enough people." Working with a public relations firm, the artists designed a questionnaire to identify American tastes in painting. After surveying 1,001 people at random, they exhibited two works that showed Americans preferred landscapes with clothed figures. Now paintings based on preferences from the USA, France, Turkey, Finland, Denmark, Russia, Kenya, Iceland and China have been completed, with figuration the clear winner. Despite its importance for twentieth century critical theory, abstraction has missed out completely. In what teeters precariously on the edges of high camp, the American landscape contains water, a hill, George Washington, children and deer. Kenyans are graced with a rhinoceros, the French get both a nude family and deer and the Chinese get a water buffalo.

The web's results vary highly from the countries'. Web participants are more highly educated (74.8% with a university degree), liberal (53.09%), middle income and male (58.99%). It seems trite to say that education, income and gender are factors which frame any consideration of digital technologies, as it would be elitist to suggest that respondents in the country by country surveys know 'little about art'. What seems more evident is that 'elite' artists know little about what people really want to see. As Melamid notes, "numbers never lie.... That's really the truth, as much as we can get to the truth."

What remains to be seen is whether this project will lead viewers to question what electronic arts are and whether digital media are creative tools for an educated elite or useful technological items with mass applications. Some may say that a project which positions paintings as the final object is not truly digital. In a sense, the *Most and Least Wanted Paintings* poses the simple question of what it means to be interactive. Clearly, for the majority of participants, digital art is not even a desirable arts practice. They call consistently for painting and the return to figuration. It would be all too easy to dismiss this discourse; instead, for Komar and Melamid, the people have spoken. ☺

LEONIE REYNOLDS

King Lear

Theatre at Large

The Ambassador

16 August - 27 September, 1996

Theatre at Large have produced some of the most innovative work in this country; their extraordinary visual sense and risk-taking created a tour de force in last year's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, a production emotionally compelling as well as visually spectacular. While *Lear* was visually engaging, emotionally it was hollow at the core; the actors seemed overwhelmed by the elaborate formality of the play's staging.

The design had a Japanese minimalism, and costumes were samurai-inspired. There was, however, no corresponding Asian ceremony in the actors' interaction, rendering the design choice somewhat mystifying.

The relationship on which the play hinges is that of Lear and Cordelia. As Lear, Mune lacked both majesty and vulnerability, never exuding the sense that he is the most important person on stage. Rachel House as Cordelia (and Oswald) is likewise miscast, seeming more comfortable in the role of Oswald the fractious steward than as Lear's favourite daughter. As Cordelia, she was so sure of herself that her refusal to flatter her father, the crux of the play, carried little weight.

Strangely, for a production so determined to be formal, many of the most significant lines were passed over with unseemly haste. In the midst of this torrent, both Carl Bland's and Mick Rose's performances stood out. As Edgar, Bland's affection for his father is believable, despite the fact that Gloucester (Simon Ferry) is mysteriously wandering around in a half-face mask like a reject from a commedia dell'arte troupe. I wondered if the mask was to facilitate some spectacular effect in the eye-gouging scene; this was not to be, though the scene was certainly effectively gruesome.

That scene, and Bland's breathtaking emergence from swirling fabric as the woad-covered Poor Tom, were reminders that this is a powerful company indeed when they hit their stride. There were moments of sublime spectacle and delicate humour, but moments they remained. The overall impression was that of distance, tension, and lack of emotion. This production falls short of Theatre at Large's previous work; a demonstration (if we needed one) that style, alone, is never enough.-s?



Jude Rae, Glass, 1996, detail. Photo courtesy Anna Bibby Gallery

MICHAEL HARRISON

Whitework and Penumbrae,

Two exhibitions by Jude Rae,

30 July - 17 August, 1996

Jude Rae is a painter interested in the abstract and the figurative. Her recent show, *Whitework* at Anna Bibby Gallery, Auckland, was confined to still life, while a simultaneous exhibition, *Penumbrae* at Jonathan Smart Gallery, Christchurch, was limited to the genre of stripy minimalism. The artist was careful to physically separate out the two creative directions, but all the works remain related, beginning with shared materials of oil and linen and moving on to theoretical concerns.

The Auckland show consisted of images of glassware, ceramics and books, simply arranged in plain settings. Their muted tone is in harmony with the abstract works sent to Christchurch. In each case we are directed to culture rather than nature — everything depicted or abstracted has been carefully manufactured by human agency, subject and object.

A large part of the charge to Rae's quiet works is provided by an unusually rigorous formal training. The artist does not set out to flaunt this technical knowledge, if anything she is somewhat apologetic about it, but nevertheless it informs everything she does. Such 'academicism' was long ago dismissed as 'oppressive', but paradoxically provided the practical transport for all the early modernists. At the end of the century, Rae shows how it can still be useful to have keys to the vehicle.

Beyond technique, what is the artist driving at? She seems to seek calmness and coolness, to delight in nuance. She sees a refined world of tans, pinks, creams and greys, rather than harsh contrast. She looks for what is in between things as much as at things. She likes to dissolve edges, so that we as viewers do not know quite where we are.

There is a conflict between the desire to tell all, to put as much in as possible, and the desire to take away, to only include in the picture what is absolutely necessary. Every developing human being has to first clear a psychological space in order to distil some sense from an ever more complex world of ideas. This process is never straightforward. Rae has been able to give pictorial form to this problem, by honestly keeping her artistic options open.

When you stand up close to the still lives you see how the edges of plates and vessels are fuzzy, how there is a visible vibration to everything so methodically depicted, suggestive of energy contained within organised bounds and channelled by engineering of precise tolerance. When you stand back again the 'objects' become more solid and you wonder about the haze surrounding them. Perhaps Rae's abstractions are actually architectural details outside the frame but integral to the imaginary space occupied by her objects, lit just as the sun is coming out from behind clouds, causing a great ripple to the uncertain area between light and shadow, causing us to look all over again.☺

BRIGID SHADBOLT

Laurence Aberhart Photographs

Darren Knight Worldwide

Fitzroy, Victoria

3rd - 28th September, 1996

Most photographers are known by what they choose to frame and Laurence Aberhart is no exception; his reputation to date has been founded on his framing of New Zealand still life subject matter. This show at Darren Knight Worldwide reveals a little-known international dimension to Aberhart's oeuvre. During his travels he reiterates his obsessions with recording traces of human habitation, talismanic images, and signs left behind.

The show spans New Zealand, the United States and Europe. There are two flows of images, the first sequence finishes with the Mediterranean and the second sequence starts with New Orleans. The well-traversed American and European terrain is appraised here by an antipodean eye interested in detail suggestive of the bigger picture. Some of Aberhart's earlier New Zealand work, in an attempt to document a sense of place gives an impression of nostalgia and stasis associated with the inertia of being as opposed to the dynamism of becoming through travel.

In Aberhart's photography people are secondary subjects, not the things of interest. He is fascinated by inanimate objects which are in place and out of place at the same time, as in *Remake of Lourdes, St. Martinsville* where a representation of the Virgin is anchored by paper mache rocks in an empty church in the USA. Here, a European object is reinterpreted in a New World context. Often the objects of Aberhart's attention are damaged in some way, like the nose-less statue with children clambering over it in *New Orleans, Louisiana*. Though this pho-



Laurence Aberhart, Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1988, detail. Photo Courtesy Darren Knight Worldwide

tograph features people, unlike most of his shots, the children are moving and out of focus while the monument is more distinctly rendered. Artifacts tend to be defunct, past their use-by date, another example of this tendency is to be seen in *Friterie (closed) Northern France* which depicts an old food caravan fallen into disuse.

In Aberhart's photographic sleight of hand, everyday views are made exceptional. His photography brings out aspects of the original that are unattainable to the naked eye, yet accessible to the lens which is adjustable and chooses its angle at will. His is an atmospheric style which lends fullness and security to the viewer's gaze. Using a quaint old Korona view camera, Aberhart will often choose to focus on aspects of a composition which would be left out of an aesthetically perfect shot. Many of his scenes pivot upon seemingly inconsequential details like heaters, scaffolding and powercords. *Rotorua* and *Maniaia Taranaki* are deceptively ordinary photographs of nondescript buildings under construction. In *Vicksburg, Mississippi*, a powercord is wrapped around a La-z-boy sign, against the backdrop of Dykes Furniture Centre, conveying an atmosphere of Southern malaise. A wry observation of the provincialism which exists in parts of every nation.

Aberhart adheres to a notion of community which is international; his photographs tend to evoke feelings of commonality through a representation of the quotidian. Evidently, Aberhart recognises that the global is everywhere and already implicated in the local. More than any of his previous shows in this part of the world, his latest collection of photographs demonstrates that Aberhart is place-based but not place-bound.☺

Shtirt Sighnrits

GILES REID

JASMAX Architects
AIT School of Hotel and
Restaurant Studies
Cnr Mayoral Drive and
Wellesley St, Auckland



AIT's new School of Hotel and Restaurant Studies by JASMAX Architects is the first building Auckland has seen this decade which tackles the notion of urbanity. Its smart scale defines an edge to the campus, an exciting journey along the street and a terminus at the traffic lights.

Its style is drawn from a catalogue of the work of Richard Meier and Sir Norman Foster. Anyone who picked up *Vanity Fair's* black-and-white issue will feel familiar with this design. Whereas postmodernism once considered it hip to quote classical arches and arcades, New Zealand architects now use the trademark styles of architectural superstars because they expect the public has become sufficiently sophisticated to recognise them.

In deploying these signs of imported rigour, JASMAX ensure that rigour per se does not obstruct the photo opportunity. Consider how the building runs tangential to Mayoral Drive's curve — returning with greater emphasis at the lights. Where it is cranked hard, the modules of the building 'proper' and its skin lose step both with each other and with the rhythm of the column bays behind. In these moments, one suspects JASMAX of hoping to attract the public with an overall image of ostensible design (prominent features equal value added), not the search for built coherence.

Eschewing the monumental — the definition of a city by the permanent, the solid and the edifying — JASMAX bring the family living room to pride of place at the head of the building. Although lacking a TV set, the wall to wall carpet, stuffed red chairs and abjectly located art tokens are all there. The suburban ideology of the timber framed house gets writ large. JASMAX persist with a mentality which crippled the founding company JASMaD's architectural contribution; simply stand before the Auckland University Arts and Commerce building.

With the continued demise of the intelligent monument, the pursuit has become marketing. When Craig Craig Moller made the casino a monument to an activity that symbolises triviality, JASMAX probably thought it best not to even try. Instead, they give this campus the brand identity of smooth, friendly and efficient service in a niche market via a product which differentiates itself against the imposing bastion up the hill. Because the buying public will rarely see the building's back, should it matter that it pales by comparison next to the highly textured facade of the otherwise unadventurous administration block?

AIT's new building maintains many questionable beliefs. Until we drop the self-congratulatory attitude that what we have here could pass for a transplant from downtown Los Angeles, and begin to examine how we do things rather than just what we 'reference', our definition of this city shall remain immature. To have a work with this much verve arrive so noticeably close to the 'heart of Auckland city' warrants critical discussion; it is the level of argumentation which authenticates and ultimately measures the level of our urbanity.,!?

SOPHIE JERRAM

A report from Italy

In a country utterly dedicated to the maintenance of its permanent heritage, one must look hard for contemporary art practice. Tiny areas in the more removed parts of Italy host superb, but obscured collections of works. Romans — a north-eastern town of around 2000 inhabitants, hardly on the tourist route and reluctant to serve coffee to foreigners, recently hosted a series of installations: 'Come arte?' Without a map or clear directions, the collection of work offered the viewer a treasure-hunt for the discovery of art, including that of Julian Dashper.

In empty streets, on a hot and dusty summer day, yellowed and torn signs pointed to vague spaces where you just might be able to discern an art work from its site. Fallen leaves alongside a path hide a sublime collection of signs that read "Quanta strada ho per corso per non trovare nulla" (how many roads I've walked to find nothing), by Artisti Internazionali Anonimi, making its discovery pure poetry. Other works are found attached to sign posts, situated under park benches, some washed away in the recent floods. The works are not self interested or greedy for attention. A la Bishop Berkeley, it is only their observation by the occasional intrepid art hunter that attributes them the vicarious 'art' status. This collection was curated by Moreno Morelli, who is becoming known for his organisation of the Stazione di Topolo.

A mountain village bordering Slovenia with merely 200 inhabitants, Topolo's continued existence is in doubt without industry or natural resources. For the last 3 years, Moreno has brought in visitors from around the world, assembling groups of artists to use abandoned stone cottages, churches and hilly alcoves for their work. The locals have begun to enjoy this annual introduction of the weird and intellectual, and come out for the opening party, rubbing their eyes at the bright light and technology. This year's rather loose theme was 'experience'. The works tended to be based inside rather than out, using video, music and light to create ambient spaces. Unfortunately, the contrast of modern technology appeared to rattle Topolo; the electrical cables grating against its slow pace. Chinks of light came in through the ancient cottage walls, ruining the colour and sound of the experiential chambers, while slick city images were perplexing in contrast to the desolate grey stone walls. The



Artisti Internazionali Anonimi, from the Comme Arte? series, Friuli, Italy



Joyce Campbell, Pink Bits, 1996, detail. Photo courtesy The Physics Room.

ancient town's atmosphere was at odds with the buzzing anthropological analysis of the contemporary world.

In Tarcento, another town of lively nature in the district of Friuli, Sabrina Zannier has organised a series of the region's artists to use the town council's central chambers, Palazzo Frangipane. Odinea Pamici, a Triestine artist, capitalised on the grandiosity of the Palazzo, turning the traditional busts on plinths into wax chickens' heads on plinths. What is most striking about this type of installation is its effect on the local communities — and their comprehension or otherwise of the works. Those that were present at the opening were a mixture of friends and suspicious local artists, not entirely clear about the significance of the work. But an interest in the contemporary had been courageously planted by Zannier, and the local council representatives turned out to welcome the 'city' culture, unsure whether they should be taken aback or not by the inversion of their veneration of respectable men of old.-JI

JONATHAN BYWATER

Pink Bits, Joyce Campbell and Ann Shelton,
show #6 in the Identikit series,
August 14 - 24, 1996
High Street Project, Christchurch

The points of intersection between Joyce Campbell and Ann Shelton's *Pink Bits* works were washable, intimate surfaces that were pink in places. Shelton displayed A4 laser copied photographs in two large rectangular grids. Lightly suggesting associations, coincidences and conceptual links, they were empty of human figures. In this respect they were close to Campbell's practiced installation strategy of implying rather than directly depicting human occupation. Campbell built into the gallery two alcoves surfaced with pink bathroom tiles. One something like a sauna room bench, the other containing two recessed surfaces which water ran over as in a flushing urinal. Melded inconspicuously into the existing architecture, their formal neatness

meant they worked as large colour fields in this otherwise white-walled room.

For me the photographs came into focus as something other than a play of shapes and pigments most quickly. Taken in Japan last year, their strong colour, and casual-seeming composition presented a glamorous, slick view. Kanji and brands of cigarettes unavailable at any dairy near the gallery were not the only elements that marked the exotic in these pieces. Shelton seems to want to claim a nonchalant and at the same time exclusive view. She made mundane glimpses of a geographically removed world striking by cosmeticising the grime; allowing us to take in the fecal stain on the porcelain, the sweat worn vinyl, or less clichéd graffiti. This seductive coolness and the fun of these visual resonances — from tenderly packaged fruit to sex toy-equipped 'love hotel' rooms — provided a juicy hook to the installation, drawing me into the otherwise empty-seeming room.

Once in front of the photographs, I was aware of the gently trickling water in the wall and approached the warm heated seat (which Christchurch kindly contrasted with cold surrounding air). The tiled constructions were a quieter presence, barely removed from what they represented — and the stranger for it. They were curiously less mediated in their representation than Shelton's photographs, being neither anthropologically exact recreation, nor obvious comment on style or design.

The *Pink Bits* micro-catalogue alternated Shelton's photos with shades of pink in the small squares of a paint shop colour chart. The names of the colours read as an erotic poem, laying bare the fleshy connotations of pink ("Cavern Pink", anyone?), the subliminal sales strategies of hardware merchants and the sexual overtones announced in the exhibition's title.

Seen under the *Identikit* banner (the High Street series, not the Auckland photography show!), the diaristic quality of Shelton's images and Campbell's alertness to the architectural construction of domesticity nicely drew out the token "exploration of identity" theme with a less psychological cast than most of the shows to date. Both halves of the show shared a similar play between the formal and conceptual. Skillfully achieved visual pleasures sustained the work, making an ambitious and satisfying whole.☺

Short Reports

BRETT LEVINE

The Visa Gold Art Award 1996

The New Gallery, Auckland

August 23 - October 6, 1996

Letters published recently in *The New Zealand Herald* battered Susan Jowsey's winning work in *The Visa Gold Art Award*. Considering "a dozen soiled tea towels" and "stained and discarded blankets", these men's musings served merely to cloud the issue at hand. Clinging to traditional ideas of "good", presumably meaning representational arts practices, that Jowsey's work could win seemed too much to bear. Still, the unexpected result of *The Visa Gold* exhibition has provided the impetus to rethink the body, again. While detractors and defenders take turns arguing *Untitled's* relative merits, the more complex issues remain unspoken. One worth considering, is that of staining.

The notion of the stain is a powerful one in western iconography. It really begins with the Shroud of Turin, that shadowy length of linen Georges Didi-Huberman describes as the ground for the "almost nothing" of religious belief. It is in the stain, he explains, that one can see something merely by looking forward to seeing it or by desiring it.

Having the ability to stain is clearly gender based. For men staining is either a symbol of virility (compelling Lytton Strachey to see the stain on Vanessa Bell's dress as semen) or the index of heroicism as the "red badge of courage". For women, unsurprisingly, this is not the case. And here is the unspoken issue which lies at the heart of *Untitled*.

The primary association is that of menstruation. This act is, according to Freud, the visual manifestation of the primordial male fear — castration. And despite developments in feminist and critical theories, the attitudinal changes towards menstruation have not yet entered the language of conversation nor that of visual representation. So this stain constitutes a 'transgressive' representation within western art. To continue the Freudian analysis (via Laura Mulvey), women are often the object of scopophilic desire, so when a woman displays a work about staining, there is a psychological double displacement for many of her male viewers.

Untitled will be viewed in many ways; not all stains have the same value. Not all stains can connote that disconcerting rupture between self and other, nor can all be the visual index of gender. As Mulvey aptly noted, "woman's desire is subjected to her image as bearer of the bleeding wound, she can exist only in relation to castration and cannot transcend it." By tapping into the unconscious, Jowsey takes the leap towards transcendence.



Susan Jowsey, Untitled November 1995, detail. Photo courtesy Symmans Saker Elliott and Hickman

Hopefully she has rekindled many of the issues of gender and difference so often absent in mainstream arts practices today. ☺

KARIN STRAATHOF

Under Capricorn - The World Over

June 29 - August 18, 1996

Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam,

City Gallery, Wellington, and on the Internet

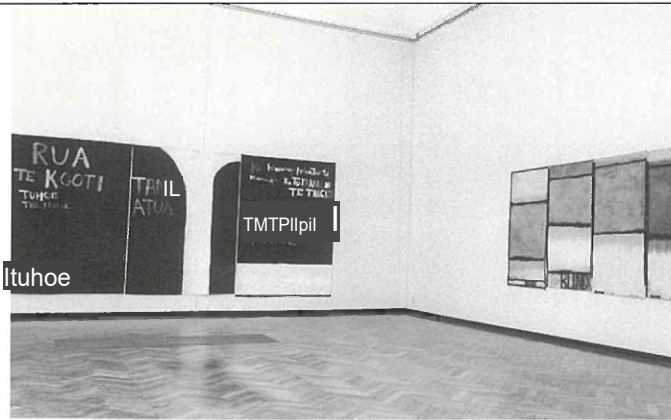
Co-curated by Wystan Curnow and Dorine Mignot

In the Honour Gallery of The Stedelijk, Colin McCahon reigns. He gets all the attention on one side, as does the Internet on another side. McCahon's works are a tribute of major importance whereas the Internet leads us to unknown paths, where there are holes and mouse-traps, no-way-outs or no-way-ins, blocks and crashes.

Back to the Honour Gallery. McCahon is at the top of a list of internationally well known artists including Julian Schnabel, Willem de Kooning, and Barnett Newmann. His painterly canvases are filled with language in black and white, yet always with traces of colour. Predominantly landscapes as in *Blind*, 1974, a companion piece to *The Song of the Shining Cuckoo*, 1974. Painted from the same roll of canvas and originally exhibited as a unit, it was broken up for sale, and this is the first occasion its five parts have been reunited.

Although McCahon gets all the credit, the other participants are interesting as well. Curators Wystan Curnow and Dorine Mignot brought together artists that travel the world in images or via television and computer screens. Dutch artists Ger van Elk and Jan Dibbets both work with photographs; organised in a painterly fashion, they question the line between land and water, and the various influences on landscape.

Matt Mullican has always been interested in architectural structuring of space, making plans of plans, images of plans, plans of images. Whereas James Lee Byars deals with geomet-



Colin McCahon in the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.
Photo courtesy Karin Straathof

ric form in a more poetic way, creating a golden ball in the City Gallery, Wellington, and one made of 3333 roses in the Stedelijk. Rob Scholte, one of Holland's most important artists, uses computer manipulated images in his paintings. His work is on the edge of art and media and therefore part of the Internet component.

To travel the world in an exhibition is a wonderful idea. *The World Over* was in all the papers: an Internet exhibition on both sides of the world, simultaneously! Unfortunately a few sites were not ready yet, for example Janet Shanks' (Australia), which was beautifully illustrated in the catalogue. Some artists were unable to find their way with the Internet as a medium, and resorted to derivatives of earlier works, such as Han Schuil, the Dutch artist who moved a house-like form around the screen.

Gerald van der Kaap created a truly interactive site where one could choose words like 'hell', 'love' and 'art', which activated different images. Just as spectacular was *Here* by American Laurie Anderson who also based her work on language; listing the 258 most common English words in various sequences.

Press reviews focussed their attention on the Internet and the difficulties it brought up. Emphasis on other parts of the exhibition was hard to find. Introductions of works by artists unknown in The Netherlands were scarce, however the contributions by Ruth Watson, Michael Parekowhai, Giovanni Intra, Phil Dadson, Immants Tillers, and Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri invited seeing more. ☺

JOHN PULE

Ina and Tuna

Pacific Sisters

Basement Theatre, Auckland

29 - 30 August, 1996

Ina and Tuna, a Manganian legend has been picked up by the Pacific Sisters, and twisted into a clever piece of interdiscipli-



Lisa Reihana, *Ina and Tuna*, slide image from a performance by the Pacific Sisters. Photo Courtesy Lisa Reihana

ary theatre. The legend is how the coconut grew in Mangaia out of human/fish flesh, and nearly every Pacific people has a unique version.

The story begins with Ina, a woman of great beauty and daughter of Kui the Blind. They live in Mangaia near a large cave pool called Tautua. Ina bathes regularly in this pool infested with eels. Tuna, the king of the eels, desires Ina, enters her vagina with his tail, and the ecstasy transforms him into a handsome man.

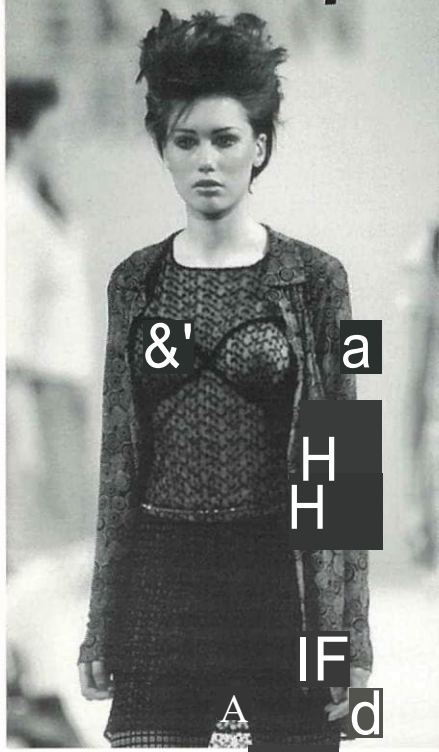
The story takes another twist when Tuna sees his own death in a dream of a storm. Tuna explains the prophecy to Ina, and that when he arrives at her feet she must chop off his head. When the flood subsides she must plant the head and care for it, for it will feed her people. Ina chops his off head without blinking an eye, buries it on high ground, and a strange fruit grows from a new tree.

The many versions of the legend were introduced by narrator Rosanna Browne, giving a feel for the change that occurs when stories, like people, emigrate to new lands.

The narrator's left arm moved eerily in front of her torso, dressed in layers of coconut husk, polished and loosely bound to resemble the eel's tail, while an image of a coconut projected onto a screen showed the watery face of Tuna. Played by Karlos Quartz, his object of love was Ani O'Neil. The piece relied heavily on the sound effects of water, image projection, industrial plastic and live musicians to speak for the actors. Karlos wore a glittering lycra bodysuit with coconut pieces for abdominals. Every gadget was there, reels of video tapes imitating a sick wind, to musicians playing congo, pate, shakers, Tongan bass drum, purere hua, koauau, voices and the music of DLT, generating in my opinion a great show.

Pacific Sisters are well known in Auckland for their colourful and elaborate fashion shows, but the costumes and props for *Ina and Tuna* were dark tones and shady patterns perpetuated in a grim gothic space, and subsequently performed at the 7th *South Pacific Festival of the Arts* in Western Samoa. ☺

5hart xaaiis



TESSA LAIRD

The Welia Fashion Collections 1996
ASB Stadium, Auckland
25 - 26 July, 1996

The Welia Fashion Collections 1996, was about commerce, not innovation, as I had to remind myself sitting through countless look-alike offerings from fashion houses as mainstream as Expozay and Barkers,

The hasty admonition that fashion and art are bosom buddies recently promulgated by the international art press, not to mention issue two of *Monica*, seemed here, in the ASB stadium, rather misguided, or in the parlance of *The Welia Collections*, “mismatch and rematch. Just about anything goes.”

Pithy aphorisms seemed the only truly indispensable accessory, as the visual struggled to encode itself into press-friendly soundbites. Craig Parker was condemned to an insipid mantra of “gregarious green, audacious orange... take a shine to incandescent fabrics — shimmering, gleaming, STEAMING.” Visual art vernacular bubbled to the surface of

Zambesi at The Welia Fashion Collections 1996.
Viscose Crop Jacket, Net Embroidered Slip Dress
and Geometric Trousers. Photo Cou tesy Welia NZ

this fashion rhetoric, appropriated as signifies of sophistication. Op and minimalism were referenced visually and verbally, with conflicting commands to “Team playful patterns, the louder the better” with that masterpiece of minimalism, “Tone down.”

Why am I so interested in words, and what, you might wonder, were the clothes actually like? In this sense, *The Welia Collections* bore a striking resemblance to art criticism in its verbal mythologising of (arguably) simple visual statements. The word propagates meaning, even when visual evidence is to the contrary.

The lows: Lorraine Mexted's hair (after Karen Walker's surprising makeover, Lorraine went back to her Pakuranga roots, in more ways than one), Vamp's mid-eighties ethnic extravaganza of earth-ware jugs atop turbans, a surfeit of headscarves and an ongoing competition amongst male models to look the least sentient, and Barbara Lee, taking a stab at Westwood but getting stuck at Burgundy's.

The highs: Blanchet Menswear for hair-clips and charcoal satin suits, but mostly for their super-surly models and ‘street personalities’ (imagine if choice of female models got this daring!), Street Life for their severe, Jill Sander-esque style, Sister for fat black jandals and pretty lace slips, World for being the humour valve of the fashion scene, presenting an array of flamboyant manhood, from Reuben Paterson in an impersonation of one of his glitter paintings (Daniel Buren goes disco), to drag queens in foot long eyelashes and Docs covered with butterflies.

But the real highlight was Zambesi, whose collection took the stage to an arresting soundtrack of vocal hocketing. In contrast to the pale puke suits dominating the catwalk, Zambesi offered a fiery profusion of brocades with dramatic accents such as pinafores, gloves, and black stockings over white shoes. Ignoring the declaration that layering is out, these were shameless ensembles of up to five sumptuous garments per model.

Seeing these clothes within the context of the show made me re-think the notion of vanguardism. Visual art's appraisal of commercial artistic fields never takes into account the various straight-jackets of public demand and industry. Zambesi refutes the current party line by exploring its own identity rather than tripping down the lane of incessant change, posing a powerful antidote to the seduction of the avant garde and a role model of individuality to an art scene almost as rabid for change as the fashion industry. ☺

letters

Dear *Monica*,

I am writing in response to Jane Gregg's “Instant refurbishment: Just add art” which reports on the new Centre of Contemporary Art in Christchurch. The basic premise of Ms. Gregg's article, that CoCA evolved in response to Creative New Zealand funding criteria, is incorrect. We are changing because it is a good idea. In order to participate in the contemporary environment, we refurbished the gallery to work towards increasing audience levels; an essential factor in any gallery's role.

Being a non-profitmaking organisation our income is derived from a number of sources, but Creative New Zealand is not one of them. Yes, we did come up with a corporate style vision statement and aim to be “A Dynamic and Vibrant Centre that Embraces the Diversity of Contemporary Cultural Production.” Ms. Gregg feels the word ‘quality’ is problematic. However, the quality statement is important in terms of management and I am unwilling to shrink from it.

Ms. Gregg's article is persistently cynical and she was unable to make one positive comment on the changes to our institution, in sharp contrast to other responses we have had. It is unfortunate she chose not to interview any of the staff or board of CoCA. *Monica* readers deserve to be presented with writing that is thorough and not based on misinformation.

Marian Maguire
Chairperson, CoCA Board.

Letters

Dear *Monica*,

Jane Gregg writes in your August / September issue that John Pule's exhibition at CoCA "reflects the fact that he is currently a resident artist at the Ilam School of Fine Arts." In fact Fatu Feu'u is the current artist-in-residence, the first recipient of this scholarship at the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury. Gregg's mistake subverts her critique. While aimed mainly at CoCA rather than Pule, it is tempting to wonder if Gregg even bothered to look at the works themselves? It may seem more impressive to attack "the packaging of institutions" than to write meaningfully about art which is culturally different. This is an opportunity missed and a shirking of critical responsibility.

Max Podstolski
Christchurch

Dear *Monica*,

How pleased you must have been by Terrence Handscomb's petulant epistle, setting you up as a glamorous outsider while flaunting the weakness of psychoanalytic thought, including the tendency to mistake collective commodities like magazines for real young ladies in need of a good transference. No doubt Terrence would say this is just a cute conceit, but treating a multiplicity as a personality is the error therapists make. Reading a magazine as a set of symptoms buys into a moral code much more threatening than modernist nostalgic melancholy. When Terrence talks about *Monica's* "hysteria", he's not only breaking patient confidentiality, he's making sure he doesn't have to respond seriously to its contents. This is '90s' morality, made familiar by politicians and fitness trainers: everything comes down to personal responsibility. Health is a body's duty; sickness is a sign of negligence.

New Zealanders' passion for their "young, heroic culture" have kept this poor creature in a coming-of-age agony for more than fifty years, giving successive generations of parent/counsellor figures the chance to teach it lessons about growing up. Terrence dearly relishes his turn to admonish the youngsters. Only one thing has changed since 'New Zealand Culture' reached puberty after World War 2. It used to be forbidden to speak of it because of its innocent vulnerability. Recently, however, this prohibition has been expressed in terms of health, or

what Anna Sanderson calls "Creative New Zealand's 'get with it or die' policy." "We've got an export product on our hands, and only those too lazy to compete would want to be negative about it.

Terrence warns *Monica* that "her" judgments will be trivial unless she "transforms the structures that presently give meaning" to them. In other words, if you're not big enough to change everything, shut up and be willing to put up with anything. To demand of a new magazine with a staff of five that it change these structures as a precondition of speaking angrily about them is either wildly ingenious or a very cynical way of saying 'give up.'

'Changing the system from within' has obvious advantages: high production values, decent distribution. *Monica* has writers with a rare combination of disenchanted passion and technique enabling them to address questions so pervasive as to be undetectable to cultural common sense. However, participation in the 'real world' of patronage requires a familiar format. The "reviews art" subtitle has to stay. This is no problem when it's a flimsy alibi for a private agenda, but when credibility demands reviews recognisable as such, quality control weakens, catalogues are quoted at length, and there's an editorial amnesty on phrases like "interminable endlessness." Such lapses of taste are rare in *Monica*, yet the more immaculate the style and acute the wit of art critics, the more gratuitously they flatter not the art but the business of explaining it.

Essays like those on Mapplethorpe, Derrick Cherrie, and magazine culture, however, identify deserving targets beyond their ostensible subjects. I hope *Monica's* sponsors see the necessity of such extravagant ambition. If they don't, the irony redeeming flirtations with High Street (how depressing to learn through an ad that *Pavement* survives) will be crippled, and you'll be left with "The Clothes We Love" in earnest.

New Zealand Culture looks likely to go from strength to strength, inasmuch as that means international competitiveness and the domestic solidarity (conformism) that goes with it. *Monica* can do without any part of this. Attempts at 'constructive criticism' will only encourage sophisticated cultural nationalists like Terrence to treat you like a spoiled child resentful of its parents.

Love and Light
Matthew Hyland
London

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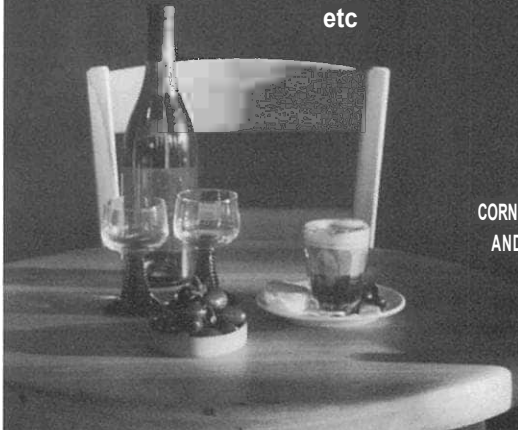
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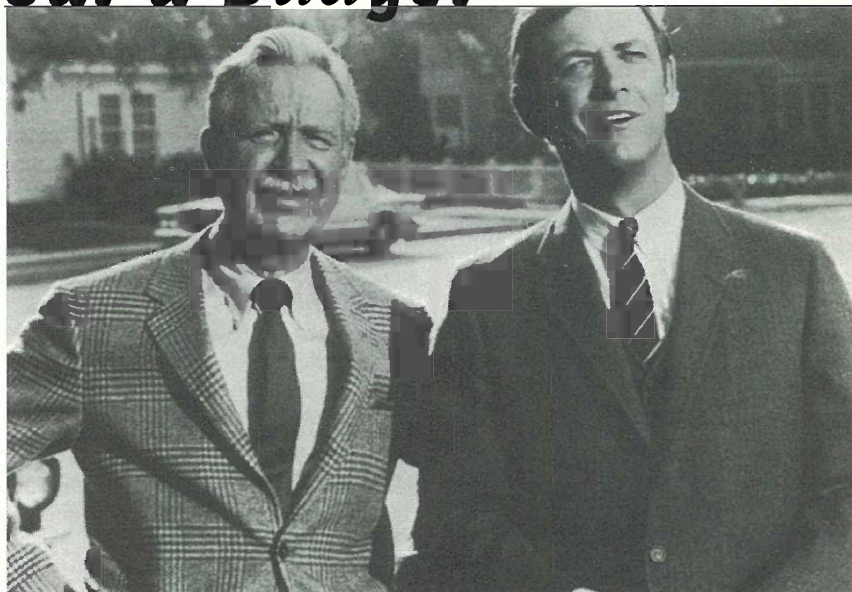
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Museum without a Budget

In this regular column, *monica* invites artists, writers and curators to talk about the show of their dreams.



Arthur O'Connell and Monte Markham from the 1967 television series *The Second Hundred Years*, from *The Complete Encyclopedia of Television Programmes 1947-1976*, by Vincent Terrace

RONNIE VAN HOUT

If I were asked to describe my dream art show, I wouldn't, at any price, I don't really have dream art shows, but I do have dreams, and they manifest more like this...

It is May 1999, and when flying from New Zealand to New York to attend the opening of my first New York show, I decide to stop over in Anchorage, Alaska for about a week. (I remember being there for an hour on a previous trip). Within a few days a local artist I've befriended invites me along on a hike to view a glacier not far from the city. While we are there a huge wall of ice and water collapses upon us.

The next thing I know I'm gaining consciousness in some kind of hospital, and not feeling very well at all. Although I can see and hear okay, all sensations of touch seem to have disappeared, leaving me strangely floating within the outside world, feeling neither cold nor hot, just numb and heavy. This dislocated feeling is further exasperated by the very unfamiliar surroundings. Everything seems right, but then somehow different. There are some people staring at me, and asking me how I am. It is hard to talk, hard to remember even how to talk. It is then they tell me that they recovered my body from a thawing glacier some weeks ago, and that I had been frozen there for just over one hundred years. It is the year 2102! Cool.

After a few weeks of observation (their observation of me) and regaining the ability to talk I learn of some of the changes that have occurred in the world since I was frozen. The most interesting from my point of view is that art no longer exists. There was even a lack of understanding as to what I was talking about.

A person with an interest in things historical came to visit me in the hospital. They explained that in approximately the year 2047 the gap between what was considered art and what was considered real life collapsed completely. Art and life became

indistinguishable from each other and people no longer felt the need to be actual practitioners. The institutions which surrounded this activity gradually faded from prominence, with only a handful of museum type places still existing. These museums dealt with the idea of art as it related to social change, using it as a form of illustration. It was often mixed up with other old forms of media, like television, cinema and computers. The reasons for these changes were very complex. One of the prominent causes was the ever decreasing price of air travel at the end of the last century. It became so cheap to travel that people lost the desire to communicate through vast electronic networks. A general sense of intermingling, and a loss of self-identity led to some radical social change. The use of computers became non-existent. They were replaced with elaborate use of physical and linguistic rituals, most of which I didn't understand. They often referred to the present as the Third Phase. This phase somehow related to an idea of societal maturity, about their relationship to themselves. It all kind of made me feel ill.

Where was my show in New York? What was I going to do now? The answers were plainly clear; I would do nothing, I could do nothing. The idea of no more art amused me greatly, especially when I thought back at how much my distant existence owed to it. My hazy memory recalled the many people whose whole lives now seemed so pointless.

I laughed out loud, but could see that my outburst was not exactly appreciated. Along with the failure of art had obviously come the failure of irony. This was going to be a joke I would have to keep to myself. I had many things to learn of my new world.

Meanwhile, I would just continue to lie here, recovering, the centre of attention, and keep to myself the very pleasurable idea that I had finally made it.

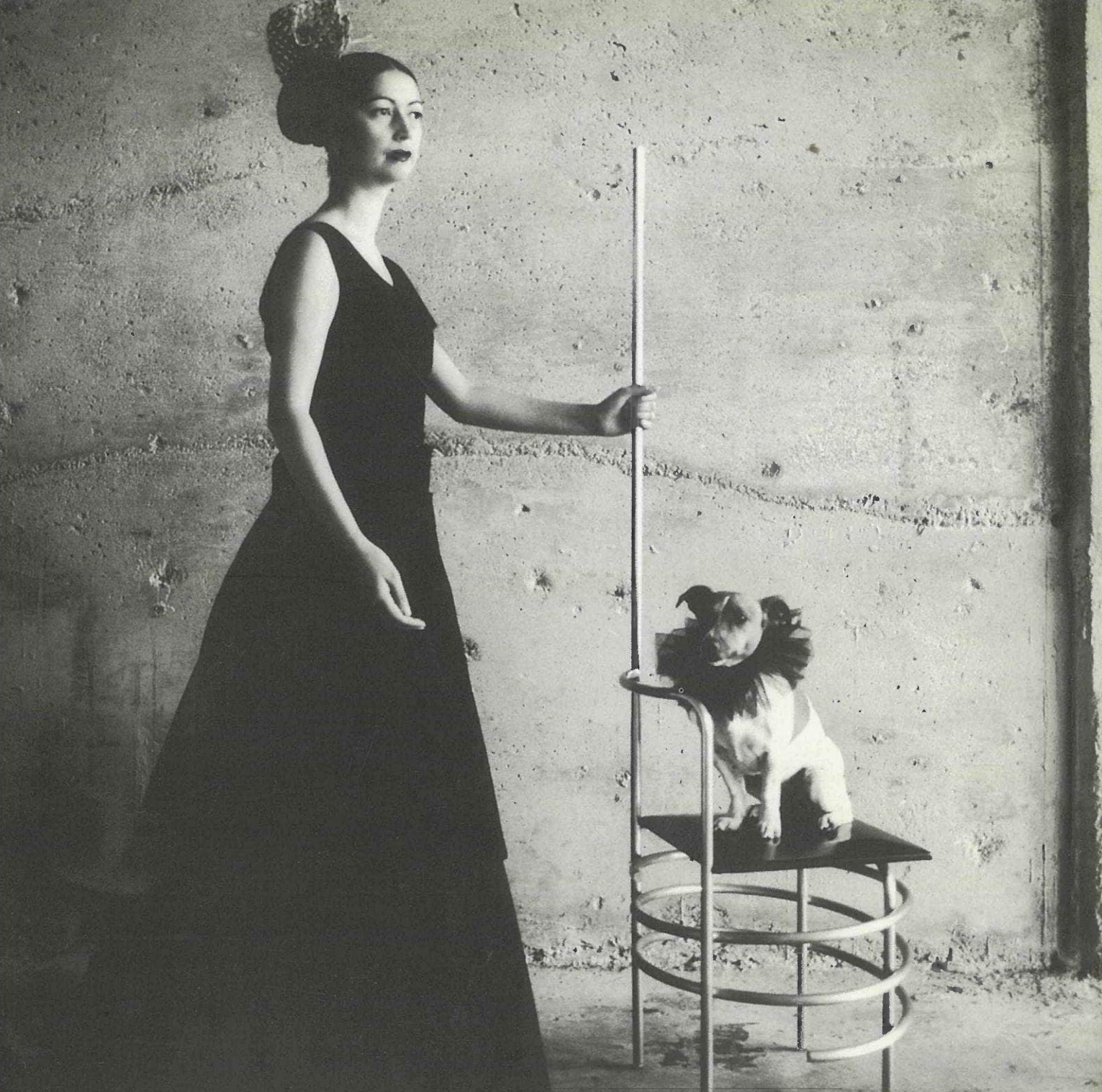
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