

Laurence Aberhart

Caravan, Cromwell 1977

## THREE NEW ZEALAND PHOTOGRAPHERS

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FIONA CLARK

LAURENCE ABERHART

PETER PERYER

AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY  
NATIONAL ART GALLERY, WELLINGTON  
GOVETT-BREWSTER ART GALLERY, NEW PLYMOUTH  
MANAWATU ART GALLERY, PALERMSTON NORTH  
SARJEANT ART GALLERY, WANGANUI  
WAIKATO ART MUSEUM, HAMILTON  
GISBORNE ART GALLERY & MUSEUM  
ROTORUA CITY ART GALLERY  
WAIRARAPA ART CENTRE, MASTERTON  
BISHOP SUTER ART GALLERY, NELSON

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## INTRODUCTION

One hundred and forty years ago, William Talbot Fox delivered a paper to the Royal Society entitled 'Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing, or the Process by which Natural Objects may be made to Delineate themselves without the Aid of the Artists' Pencil'. He was, of course, referring to photography then newly invented.

It is regrettably a commonly held view that art should be chirographic (delineated by hand) and that photography does not fulfil this requirement. Yet, photographic images are so much a part of our everyday environment — on film and television and in printed form — it is anachronistic to think of them in terms of artists' pencils. Unfortunately, in a gallery context, hung as these photographs are along with paintings and drawings, many people think of photography as a facile art. The old assumption that art should be chirographic is a hangover from the early nineteenth century when photography was first invented. At that time, many of the first photographers similarly found it hard to accept the new medium on its own terms, frequently composing their photographs according to painterly conventions. Today, photography — at least its popular aspect — has gone to the opposite extreme. Instamatic cameras and Polaroid film have made photography everyone's prerogative. The advertisers of easy-to-use cameras suggest that photography is just a matter of pointing a lens in the right direction and clicking. From the corporate media, we experience a constant bombardment of photographic images, from newspapers, magazines and television, day in and day out. Much of this is designed for quick absorption and impact to reinforce the written or spoken word. The individual images which make up a moving film move too fast to absorb individually; instead we look across or behind them for narrative sense. Television and film are indisputably the dynamic media of today. By comparison, the isolated photograph might seem impotent. Imagine the impact of a single frame taken from last night's television serial or news. In these terms, the still photograph appears to suffer a great handicap, like the single musical note competing with a piece of music. The virtue of the photograph, however, is that it stays still long enough for us to study it and impress it deeply in our minds.

Fiona Clark's photographs of transvestites and trans-sexuals, aid an elaborate sexual illusion by what they exclude — tell-tale signs such as voice pitch and exaggerated gestures. The old saying 'the camera never lies' is inaccurate. In this instance the camera tells an incomplete truth and is thus the transvestites' ally. Whether dressed up and made up at the Miss New Zealand Drag Queen Ball, or undressed, like Diana on stage at Mojo's Nightspot, the subjects of many of these photographs appear more as they like to be seen, at their best. In the domestic portraits, we take a peep behind the veil at a less glamorous masquerade but still a masquerade nevertheless. In these domestic portraits, the camera, no longer something to flirt with, becomes more of a voyeuristic instrument.

After moving back to Taranaki from Auckland following her serious motor vehicle accident in 1977, Fiona Clark found other subjects on hand which related closely to the masquerade theme of her transvestite photographs. The portrait of the boy with the ape mask and that of the woman at the Inglewood Gala day, with a monstrous papier mache mask behind her, are the most literal examples. But the letterbox in the form of a strawberry, the ornamental garden storks and the Lion's club cowboy behind the barbecue, are no less fake. **Orchids, Auckland Domain, 1978**, one of the first photographs Clark took after her accident, is a significant image, highlighting an often indistinct boundary between reality and illusion. On first seeing the waxy blooms of the image, I recalled the novel by Huysmans, **Against Nature**, the book which reputedly corrupted Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray. The hero of Huysmans' story is a decadent recluse who cherishes the artificial above the natural, preferring artificial flowers to real ones. Later, in an extreme refinement of his aesthetic theory that man can improve upon nature, he turns to cultivating flowers which look artificial, like the waxy orchids of Clark's photograph. In this sense, Clark's photograph of the hot-house orchids embodies much that is inherent in her other images.

The contrast between Fiona Clark's and Laurence Aberhart's photographs is pronounced. It is by selection — by our choices — that our personality expresses itself as much as by the things that we make with our hands. In the chirographic sense, the photographer does not make his images, he selects them. It is by what he chooses to point his lens at and immobilise on film with the shutter, as well as by what he chooses to print and present for viewing that the photographer expresses his individuality. There is a stillness, a silence, a dignified quality about Aberhart's velvety, gold and selenium toned prints which is as appropriate to his subjects as the saturated colours of Fiona Clark's photographs are to hers. Aberhart's photographs are painstakingly composed, immaculately printed and critically selected. Each image reflects patient thought and realisation. To some extent, this approach is imposed by the bulky 8" x 10" plate camera which Aberhart uses almost exclusively — only a few of the photographs in this exhibition have been taken with miniature format cameras. The dark corona which vignettes some of the images is caused by a lens intended for a 4" x 5" camera employed on a 8" x 10" one. In the family portraits and discreet self-portraits (shadows of the photographer), this masking device lends an intimate quality to the images emphasising the photographer's highly personal viewpoint. The lengths Aberhart will go to to obtain a desired effect can be seen in the photograph of Kamala and Maggie in a Mornington graveyard where the figures of the children and the funerary pillars have been fastidiously 'dodged'. The photographs of Masonic lodges, variations on a theme on which Aberhart is still working, are remarkable for the solemn dignity of the buildings. In contrast, many of Aberhart's other photographs in this exhibition are touched with a wry humour. Outstanding among these is the Disney-like tableau of tree, bench and duck in **Untitled, Pines Beach, Kaiapoi 1977** which seems more contrived than real. **Caravan, Cromwell 1977** similarly depends on a critical composition; even a small change in the photographer's viewpoint would have destroyed the crucial tangential relationship between the oval caravan and the triangular pediment of the adjacent house. In photographs like these, the humour is partly latent in the arrangement and partly created by the photographer who communicates it.

Peter Peryer has carefully chosen his eleven photographs to make a harmonious and autonomous grouping. The images of people are as much reflected self-portraits as they are portraits of the sitters whose sombre expressions are characteristic of Peryer's images rather than of themselves. The Wellington art critic Neil Rowe has aptly described Peryer's sitters as actors in a photographic passion play. Peryer directs his pictures by contriving the setting, specifying costumes and arranging the lighting. The subjects of these portraits are all his acquaintances, although sometimes he will seek an appropriate face for a picture he has had in mind. In the case of the nude study of Auckland photographer Anne Noble, the two discussed the projected photograph on a number of occasions before the picture was realised on an Easter Saturday. Peryer rarely carries his camera around with him in the hope that he will happen upon a photograph; he works more deliberately than that, even keeping a work book in which he makes notes and sketches about ideas for photographs.

Peryer's animal photographs are the result of several photography expeditions he made to the Auckland Zoo earlier this year in response to a keen interest in Egyptian art he developed during his visit to Europe and America. In Rome's Vatican museum, he chanced upon a comprehensive collection of Egyptian funerary statuettes of animals which made a strong impression on him. Talking about his animal images, Peryer remarked on the 'nobility' of the creatures — peacock, ibis, pelican, kingfisher, alligator and the monitor. Several of these animals are sacred to the Egyptians and the kingfisher is regally named. In a sense, the animal photographs are intended to be viewed as icons, as is the still life arrangement of the miniature photographs of Peryer's parents with cone. The latter object, which he found in a gutter, Peryer sees as a pyramid. The control of composition, although it is not obvious, was the means by which Peryer attempted to construct visual icons. For Peryer this group of photographs can be seen almost as ritual devices, contributing either singly or collectively to a subjective mood which has roots in his Roman Catholic upbringing. He delights in his discovery that the pelican occupies an important place in Christian symbolism on account of its remarkable maternal instincts. It is said that the pelican will, in extreme situations, pierce its breast with its beak to feed its young on its own blood. Peryer talks of synchronicity as an important ingredient in his work, not necessarily as a chance factor in the making of a picture but, more importantly, for his relationship to the image after he has made it.

Andrew Ogile  
Senior Curator  
August 1979

## FIONA CLARK

### Biography

Born in Inglewood, Taranaki in 1964. Studied at Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland, 1971-1976. Graduated Dip. F.A. (Hons) Photography in 1976. Moved to Tikorangi, Taranaki in late 1976 and set up darkrooms and studio in an old dairy factory. Was involved in a serious motor vehicle accident in 1977 which resulted in prolonged hospitalisation. Has resumed photography and at present is working on a photography project about professional wrestling in New Zealand.

### Exhibitions and Work

'The Active Eye' 1976, (controversy over two of the photographs of trans-sexuals and eventual disappearance of the photographs on tour).  
'Some of my Best Friends are Women', (commissioned by the New Zealand Government for International Women's Year, used still photographs by Fiona Clark of cosmetic saleswomen in George Courts Ltd, Karangahape Road, Auckland, 1976).  
Clearwater Gallery, 1976 (photographs of trans-sexuals); 'Excitements and Enticements', Tikorangi Factory Gallery, Taranaki, 1979.  
Govett-Brewster Gallery, New Plymouth, 1979.

### Photographs

**Belinda Lee, Miss New Zealand Drag Queen** 1976  
taken at Mojo's Night Club, Auckland, colour

**Carmen and the Judges** 1975  
Drag Queen Ball, colour

**Contestant June** 1975  
Drag Queen Ball, colour

**Sheila June** 1975  
Drag Queen Ball, colour

**Lisa June** 1975  
Drag Queen Ball, colour

**Mamie June** 1975  
Drag Queen Ball, colour

**Diana** 1975  
Mojo's, colour

**Tina** 1975  
Mojo's, colour

**Tina at home** 1975  
colour

**Geraldine at home I** 1975  
colour

**Geraldine at home II** 1975  
colour

**Ella** 1975  
colour

**Ella's friend** 1975  
Mojo's, colour

**Orchids, Auckland Domain** 1978  
colour

**Boy with Mask holding frisbee** 1979  
colour

**Lady with Mask, Inglewood Gala Day** 1978  
colour

**Strawberry Farm Letterbox, South Auckland** 1978  
colour

**Lions Club member, New Plymouth** 1978  
colour

**Storks, Timaru** 1979  
colour

**Tree, Awakino Gorge** 1978  
colour



Fiona Clark  
Geraldine at home 1975

## LAURENCE ABERHART

### Biography

Born in Nelson in 1949. Educated in Nelson. Teaches photography at the Ilam School of Fine Arts, Christchurch.

### Exhibitions

'The Active Eye', Manawatu Art Gallery and touring exhibition, 1976.  
Four-Man Show at Christchurch Society of Arts, 1976.  
Group Show at Auckland Building Centre, 1976.  
N.Z. Landscape Show, Snape Gallery, Auckland, 1977.  
Photo-Forum Exhibition, War Memorial Museum, Auckland, 1977.  
Two-Man Exhibition (with Peter Peryer), Bosshard Gallery, Dunedin, 1979.  
Group Show of Christchurch Photographers, Students' Art Festival, Christchurch, 1979.  
'The New Image', Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, 1979.

### Publications

'The Active Eye' catalogue, 1976  
Australian Photography, 1976  
Photo-Forum, August 1977  
Art New Zealand (early 1977)  
Photo-Forum, March 1979

### Photographs

**Moutere Hills, Nelson** 1976  
selenium toned

**Untitled, Takamatua, Banks Peninsula** 1976  
selenium toned

**Untitled, Pines Beach, Kaiapoi** 1977  
gold/selenium toned

**Caravan, Cromwell** 1977  
gold/selenium toned

**Kamala and Charlotte, Lyttelton** 1977/8  
gold/selenium toned

**Padding Pool, Rangiora** 1978  
gold/selenium toned

**Tauranga Lodge** 1978  
gold/selenium toned

**Kumara Lodge, Kumara, Westland** 1978  
gold/selenium toned

**Ara Lodge, Auckland** 1978  
gold/selenium toned

**Coffin, Stafford, Westland** 1978  
gold/selenium toned

**Bush, Auckland** 1978  
gold/selenium toned

**Untitled, Christchurch** 1978  
gold/selenium toned

**Memorial, Canterbury** 1978  
gold toned

**Untitled, Hokitika** 1978  
gold/selenium toned

**Kamala and Charlotte, Christchurch** 1978  
gold/selenium toned

**Kamala and Maggie, Mornington, Dunedin** 1978  
gold/selenium toned

**Kamala in Devil's Mask, Lyttelton** 1978/79  
gold/selenium toned

**Castle Hill, Canterbuy** 1979  
gold/selenium toned

**Pukerau Studio, Pukerau** 1979  
gold toned

**Kaitangata Lodge, Kaitangata** 1979  
gold toned

**Royal Oceanic no. 164, St. Kilda, Dunedin** 1979  
gold/selenium toned

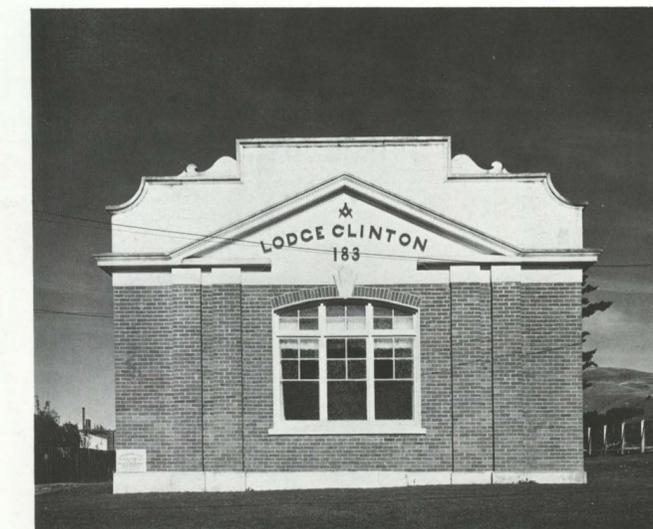
**Lodge St. John, no. 84, Mosgiel** 1979  
gold/selenium toned

**Lodge Clinton, Clinton** 1979  
gold/selenium toned

**Aparima 77 Lodge, Riverton** 1979  
gold/selenium toned

**Kamala, Charlotte and Tamsy, Lyttelton** 1978  
gold/selenium toned

**Lodge Clinton, Clinton** 1979



Laurence Aberhart  
Lodge Clinton, Clinton 1979

## PETER PERYER

### Biography

Born in 1941 in Auckland. Graduated M.A. in Education from the University of Auckland and taught for a number of years. In 1973, started drawing then, late in the same year, turned to photography in which he is largely self-taught. In 1978, with the aid of a travel grant from the QE II Arts Council of New Zealand, made a study tour of Europe and America. Held one-man shows of photographs at Snape Gallery and the Peter Webb Galleries in 1976 and the Dowse Art Gallery in 1977. Has participated in numerous group shows in New Zealand as well as in a three-man exhibition at New Zealand House, London in 1978.

### Major Portfolios & Interviews in Print

Photo-Forum, December 1976 — January 1976  
**Mars Hotel**, limited edition of 20 of 6 prints, 1976  
**Gone Home**, limited edition of 20 of 10 prints, 1976  
Spleen, volume 7, Wellington, 1977  
Photo-Forum, Summer 1977-1978  
Art New Zealand, volume 8, November 1977 — January 1978  
Creative Camera International Yearbook 1978, London.

### Photographs

**Pelican** 1979  
black and white

**Ibis** 1979  
black and white

**Peacock** 1979  
black and white

**Man in Uniform** 1979  
black and white

**Woman in Evening Dress** 1979  
black and white

**Alligator** 1979  
black and white

**The Monitor** 1979  
black and white

**Kingfisher** 1979  
black and white

**Anne Noble, Easter** 1979  
black and white

**My Parents** 1979  
black and white

**Erika, Winter** 1979  
black and white

**Erika, Winter** 1979  
black and white



Peter Peryer  
Woman in Evening Dress 1979