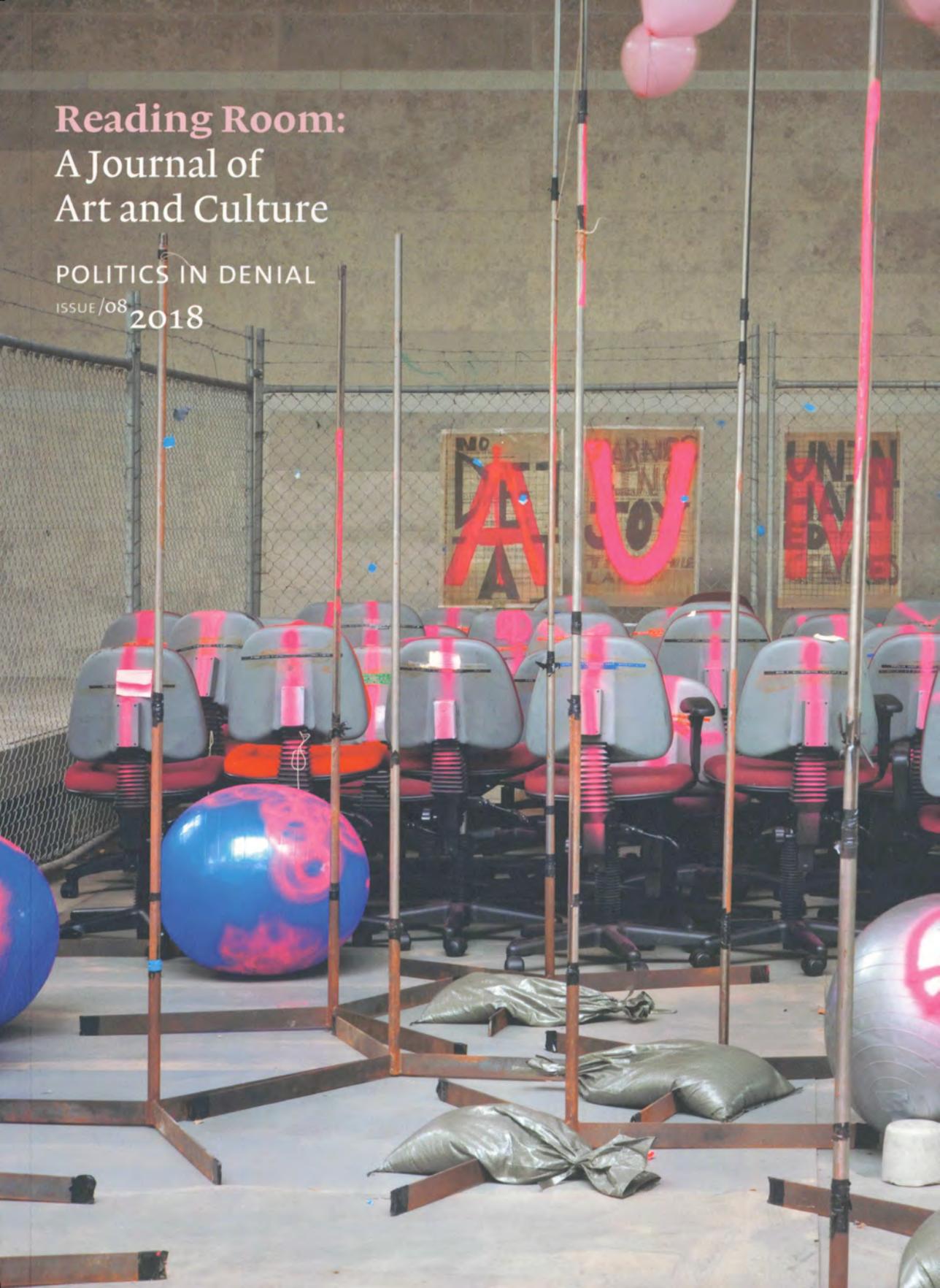


Reading Room:
A Journal of
Art and Culture

POLITICS IN DENIAL

ISSUE/08 2018



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Installation view: Auckland
Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2013
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Reading Room: A Journal of Art and Culture

POLITICS IN DENIAL

ISSUE/08 2018

Edited by Christina Barton, Natasha Conland and Wytan Curnow

Managing editor: Catherine Hammond

**AUCKLAND
ART GALLERY
TOI O TĀMAKI**

Published by the E. H. McCormick Research Library

Supported by

THE MARYLYN MAYO FOUNDATION

Reading Room is a refereed journal of art and culture published by the E. H. McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. ISSN 1177-2549

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Design:
inhousesdesign.co.nz

Printer:
Everbest Printing Co.,
China

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Marylyn Mayo as a
child with her mother
Mavis Mason



Foreword

Rhana Devenport ONZM, Director

Catherine Hammond, Managing Editor

Dr John Mayo established the Marylyn Mayo Foundation in 2002 to benefit a number of causes, including the advancement and wider appreciation of the visual arts. The Foundation's support has enabled the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki to establish a number of major initiatives: in 2007 the Marylyn Mayo Internships and the scholarly journal *Reading Room* began, and in 2011 the John Mayo Members Lounge and Marylyn Mayo and Mavis Mason Painting Conservation were opened as integral spaces within the Gallery's redevelopment. *Reading Room* is also in memory of both Marylyn Mayo and her mother, Mavis Mason, in recognition of their shared interest in the visual arts.

Born and raised in Aotearoa New Zealand, Marylyn Eve Mayo enjoyed a lifelong interest in education, law and the visual arts. Her academic career established her as a legal pioneer in Australasia. Marylyn was one of fewer than two dozen women law graduates when she completed her degree at the University of Auckland in 1960. Her legacy is honoured at its Law School with the Marylyn Eve Mayo Endowment Scholarship and the Marylyn Mayo Rare Book Room. Marylyn's parents, Mavis and Sydney Mason, moved with her to Auckland when she began her university studies. Mavis Mason was an artist and the move to Auckland enabled her practice to flourish: in the 1960s

she studied painting with one of New Zealand's most celebrated artists, Colin McCahon. Mavis's interest in art was imparted to Marylyn who was a regular visitor to the Gallery and, from the time she was a recent graduate, collected works by contemporary New Zealand artists including Colin McCahon, Don Binney and Richard Killeen.

In 1969, Marylyn moved to Australia to teach law at the University of Queensland's campus in Townsville, soon to be known as James Cook University. It was here that she met her husband John Mayo. In 1974, Mavis left New Zealand and joined her daughter and John in Townsville, remaining in Australia for the rest of her life. Marylyn's vision to establish a separate Faculty of Law at James Cook University was realised in 1989 when she became the Foundation Head of its newly established Law School. She retired in 1996 but her links to the University remain with the establishment of the Marylyn Mayo Medal and the Law Students' Society's annual Mayo Lecture.

Reading Room has for 10 years been contributing powerfully to New Zealand and international writing and discourse relating to contemporary art and art archives. It is one of the key research platforms of the E. H. McCormick Research Library and is underpinned by the generous support of the Mayo Foundation, the journal's editors, and its contributors.

Introduction

Natasha Conland, for the editors

It is somewhat ironic that the development of an issue on “the politics of denial” has proven a long, circuitous, and near fatal extenuation of the possibilities and potentialities of the subject. This is not to say that the editors have engaged in the most *literal denial* of the gravitas of the task, which was to “reveal the historical conditions within which art engages politics in and from Aotearoa New Zealand”. Rather, we have presented an almost impossible proposition. How can we address questions such as: “how is political practice uniquely inflected in New Zealand?” Or, with reference specifically to the confluence of political activity in the social and cultural landscape of the 1980s: “What happened to art’s place in the revolution in New Zealand?” What has emerged is a series of case studies that tackle our umbrella theme as symptomatic offshoots and writer-led derivations that take readers in shifting directions, productively extending the topic at hand.

We began developing this issue in 2016, the year of Dr Ranginui Walker’s passing. His death marked the closing of a chapter in bicultural politics in this country, the author of *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou: Struggle Without End* (1990) was amongst other things a leader renowned for his advocacy of Māori rights and social justice. In global politics, 2016 was marked by the “Brexit vote” and proposed exit of the UK from the European Union. This was followed by the

“Facebook election” of businessman and reality-TV-star Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States. For many, a seemingly inconceivable impossibility became reality, and all the while the refugee crisis and war in Syria continued. This shorthand version of global events doesn’t include the extension of the presidential term of China’s Xi Jinping, whose presidency has seen a resurgence in nationalism and a crackdown on human rights, nor the shifting grounds in North Korea. There are as well the repercussions of the #metoo and Black Lives Matter movements.

In this new political environment, global debate and commentary has drawn increased agitation and in equal measures: comic satire, supercilious gifs and hashtags intended to apply a salve to a political left still “in denial”. Without eschewing these events or their possible interrelationship with the field of art, *Reading Room* nonetheless orientates its topic closer to home than in previous issues. We asked a circle of writers, critics, curators and art historians, “on what occasions, according to what conditions, and with what results has art practice entered the fray of politics or not?” These are not easy questions. They need careful attention to historic changes and catalysts, actions and responses. Accordingly, their answers are a series of case studies that unfold chronologically, beginning with Wystan Curnow writing about Colin McCahon in the 1940s, Sarah Farrar, Betty Davis, Victoria Wynne-Jones addressing feminist history in the 1970s and 1980s, David Hall

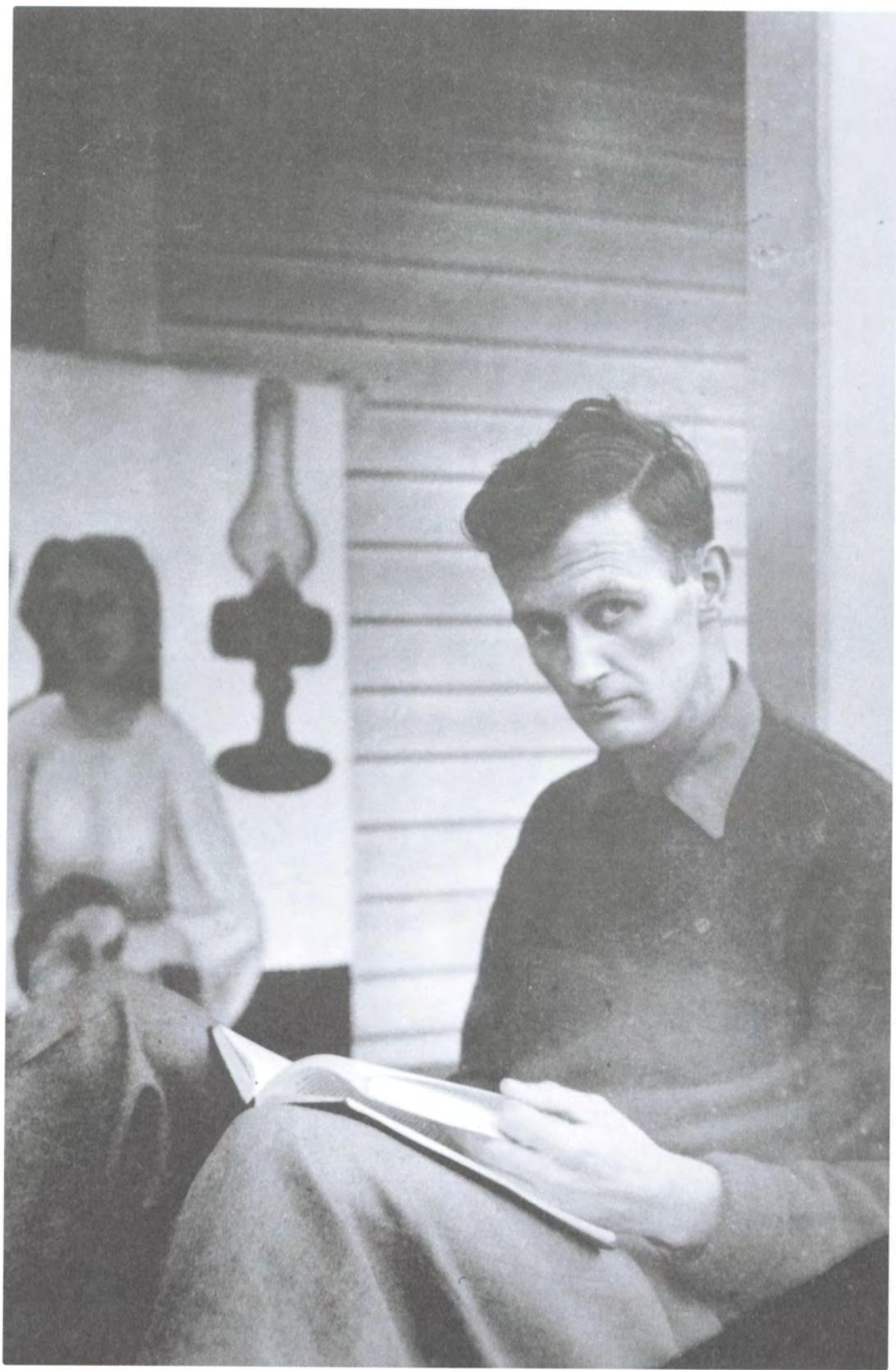
examining the relationship of art to the neo-liberal politics of the 1980s, Anna-Marie White and Robert Leonard unpacking the early politics of the 1990s, and Natasha Conland and Simon Gennard delving into the tactics of radical resistance and political crisis in the 2000s, all centred by Alfredo Jaar's artist pages on deep state under Nixon. For many readers there will still be questions unanswered, that are yet to come, reliant on new research, time and occasion. They may also be surprised to see politics strategically deflected, or redirected towards troubles internal to the art world, or found inadequate (as David Hall admits) to the practical facts of our swiftly changing social and political environment.

In our opening essay, Curnow writes of New Zealand modernist Colin McCahon's adoption and redirection of "religious" subjects in light of his alignment with Christian Socialist pacifism. In so doing Curnow shifts the art historical appraisal of these works from their biblical and theological readings to a characterisation of McCahon's subjects as people who could "see" a landscape devoid of capital, bringing rural communism and "primitive" Christianity together. His argument conceives of McCahon as shaped by a political environment dramatised by war; among a circle whose views were strong enough to "invite personal attacks, loss of employment, arrest and imprisonment". Curnow argues that such commitment "belongs to a past that is long gone and hardly recognisable today", leaving us to wonder about the conditions for New Zealand's "high culture" now.

Curnow's purpose is not to reclaim this central figure as a "political artist" but to understand where and on what grounds it was possible for conviction to become subject matter, even when faced by the rebuke of his peers as to his painterly treatment. McCahon died in 1987 at the end of a period when individuals and collectives spoke out on Māori sovereignty, the place of women and the environment, in what David

Hall would describe as "the denial of denial". For him New Zealand's complacent vision of itself as homogenous and egalitarian was "... denial at its most insidious, a far-reaching fog that can captivate entire communities and social networks, that dampens alternatives and perpetrates ignorance through the harmony of consensus". By the close of the 1980s we witness a new era for the culture of dissent in the face of economic rationalism and the institutionalisation of cultural politics. White and Leonard tackle an important figure of this period, the freelance curator George Hubbard, who emerged into the world of contemporary art and music, operating across political and artistic boundaries, "cross-pollinating" and improvising. In focusing on his exhibition *Korurangi* (1995), which inserted the "young guns" of contemporary Māori art into the artworld mainstream, they show us the jarring edges of 1990s institutionalised cultural politics.

In the short ride from uncovering denial to its proud institutionalisation, a collision occurs in our cultural landscape, from which we are not recovered. This is evident in the issue's archive section in the clash of allegiances captured by Marti Friedlander's photographs of the United Women's Convention, which augur an emerging distrust in the terms and conditions of "difference", once celebrated, now instituted under uncertain terms and governance. The artists et al., who represented New Zealand at the Venice Biennale in 2005, knew enough to stay clear of identity politics but were punished by the local media for their refusal to provide "someone" to access their project. The work at Venice was filled with references to historical forms of belief and religion, individual arguments and political agendas, but the authoring of these positions was deferred and deeply coded. If there is continuity in these essays from McCahon to Hubbard, et al. to *Terror Internationale*, it is – to take from Simon Gennard, writing on a new generation – the "precarity" of the revolutionary subject in this landscape.



Salvation Army Aesthetics: The Politics of Colin McCahon's “Early Religious Paintings”

Wystan Curnow

1.

Colin McCahon's (1919–1987) so-called “early religious works” startled his contemporaries. Viewers upset by his 1948 show at the Wellington Public Library vented their feelings in letters to the editor. Even some of his supporters – writers such as Charles Brasch, and close artist friends, like Toss Woollaston – had problems with them; few got the full message. And then, as abruptly as these works had appeared they were gone. In April 1951 McCahon gave a talk about his work to the sketch club of the Canterbury School of Art; some months later he reported that he had found himself in the “very odd position” of having talked himself “out of a way of painting & be[ing] left with nothing. Disillusion,” he said, “is one of the angels to light the way”.¹ Had the stunning debut ended up four years later in a failure of nerve? McCahon seems to have startled himself as well. There were to be no more “biblical paintings” as he called them, not until the end of the 1950s anyway.²

No one today doubts these are the first of McCahon's major paintings, so obviously we take issue with his conclusion. And because of that we want to know how and why he talked himself *into* that way of painting in the first place. Where did they come from? Answering those questions – they seemed to have been around a long time – is the main task of this essay. Unhelpfully, influential writers, such as Gordon H. Brown, have tended to perpetuate the early confusions of their predecessors, and to minimise the political and intellectual context of the times in which the works were produced. And unfortunately, fresh approaches, such as Thomas Crow's, have been few and far between.³

Fig. 1
Colin McCahon,
Christchurch,
December 1948.
Behind him can be
seen *The Virgin
and Child compared*
1948.
E. H. McCormick
Research Library,
Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
Courtesy
of the McCahon
Family Archive.
Photo: Theo Schoon.

Recently Crow wrote:

The overt historical pastiche in these early, overtly biblical subjects, signals the history of art as a theme, as does his abrupt termination of the series, which inaugurates a series of self-conscious phases in his career analogous to the style periods in an art-historical sequence ... [However] the core theological preoccupations established prior to 1950 remained in place through each of these changes.⁴

We'll come back to these valuable observations – Crow calls them “polemical” – later. Meantime, it seems obvious to observe that not enough weight has been placed on the impact of World War II, on the suffering, deprivation and disruption its violence brought to the lives of McCahon and his circle of friends and acquaintances. It's the War after all that makes the 1940s the exceptional decade it was. So the short answer to our questions would be this: although the War had ended before he began his biblical paintings, McCahon's need to paint about it had been there from the outset. However, to paint “politically” as I will call it, about the War, was easier said than done. To paint about it less as a subject, than as a symptom of the current state of the world: that necessitated a serious change in McCahon's thinking about his ways of painting and it took time.

McCahon's generation came of age in a society in continual if not to say terminal crisis. The 1940s were decades in the making and shaped by global events, notably World War I, followed by the Great Depression, even the Spanish Civil War. The crisis kept deepening. The cataclysm of World War II was the climactic symptom of a deeper ongoing political and spiritual malaise. Geographically removed as New Zealand was, a remote dominion within Britain's far-flung Empire, its ties to the centres of world power nevertheless exposed its people to the carnage of war and the consequences of economic collapse brought on by political, economic, and ideological conflicts within and among those centres. Many of McCahon's contemporaries were convinced, as his friend Bill Pearson wrote, that there were “two facts we can't escape: first, that we are a cultural colony of Europe, and second that the culture of the West is dying.”⁵ McCahon set out to be a painter in a world at war, one spiritually and ideologically in its death throes. We have to imagine what it was like for him. How it was, labouring in Wellington's Botanic Gardens in 1943, one day watching the Prime Minister Peter Fraser on his morning walk to work at Parliament Buildings, and the next witnessing a black American serviceman from the nearby US army base, gunned down by military police before his eyes.⁶

New Zealand was a country, we should also remember, with little liking for art. McCahon was in his early twenties and recently married, he and his wife Anne, were starting a family. There was William (born 1943), Catherine (born 1945) and then Victoria (born 1947). And when the McCahons' landlord discovered his tenants were artists he kicked them out. When the War came to an end, employment and housing prospects were very poor: for McCahon it was one

short-term labouring job after another – if he was lucky. Finding work kept him on the move, shuttling back and forth from Nelson to Wellington and Christchurch, uprooting and splitting up the family, boarding with friends and relations. Under such circumstances setting up a “studio practice” was to say the least a hard ask. “How work ties one & restricts painting,” he wrote to Charles Brasch in 1949, “God I’m sick of it, am bursting with the glory of paint & here I am so tired I can only write foolish letters & paint only the smallest part of the work I am capable of.”⁷ While that smallest part unquestionably retains our interest to this day, the challenging circumstances of its making have tended to drop out of the story.

2.

Woollaston and Wartime

McCahon’s friendship with fellow painter M.T. Woollaston (1910–1998) played a unique and critical part in his emergence as an artist and, if only negatively, in his discovery of a new way of painting. It began in Mapua, a spot on the map across Tasman Bay from the city of Nelson at the top of the South Island. “Toss”, as he was known, had built a mudbrick house there for his rapidly growing family on the land of an orchardist, Decimus Wells, for whom he worked picking fruit. In 1936 Woollaston had held his first exhibition in a rented shop-front in Dunedin, a city at the opposite end of the South Island. It was organised by his friend and occasional lover, Rodney Kennedy, a young set and costume designer for the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA). McCahon, then going on 17, a school boy with an intense interest in art, had seen the show and been deeply impressed. Kennedy, who was McCahon’s neighbour, introduced him to Woollaston and in 1938 the two of them, McCahon and Kennedy, cycled 800 kilometres north to stay at the painter’s Mapua house. It became customary for a group of young Dunedin painters and intellectuals to gather in summer at Mapua or elsewhere in the Nelson region to earn money picking fruit or tobacco, and to paint, read, listen to music and talk. Besides Woollaston, McCahon and Kennedy the group included Patrick Hayman, Anne Hamblett, Doris Lusk, and Ron and Betty O’Reilly.

In Dunedin, late in 1942, McCahon and Anne Hamblett got married, and decided to live in the Nelson area, settling first in Pangatotara, where they picked tobacco. For the following six years they lived in various parts of the region; these place names turn up among the titles of McCahon’s paintings and drawings: Ligar Bay, Maitai Valley, Ngatimoti, Nelson, Pangatotara, Riwaka, Ruby Bay, Takaha.⁸ At this time the direction of McCahon’s painting was less than certain, and his output was irregular. As noted, the scarcity of work and housing had a lot to do with that, although late in 1946 they did find a house in Tahunanui, on the outskirts of Nelson, which provided some much needed stability. He wrote to Brasch: “At last I have a room of my own to work in, it is a great joy, and the work is really being done again.”⁹ Most of the biblical works were painted there in Maitai Street over the next 12 or more months.

Six years earlier, in 1940, McCahon had declared to Woollaston that he:

... imagined people looking at it [his painting] then looking at a landscape and for once really seeing it and being happier for it and believing in God and then the brotherhood of men and the futility of war and the impossibility of people owning and having more right to a piece of land and air than anyone else. The force of painting as propaganda for social reform is immense if properly wielded. ... Communism it is said stamps out Christianity. Christianity as now practised it does stamp out, but true Communism means true Christianity and I believe that by my painting I help to bring it about.¹⁰

In its 1935 Manifesto the Labour Party had described the Welfare State as “applied Christianity”, and somewhat later McCahon had written to Kennedy endorsing the view that “one person with real faith could stop the war”, even as he acknowledged he was unable to “even help stop it.”¹¹ Clearly, despite New Zealand art’s apparent obliviousness to these issues, they had preyed on McCahon’s mind, certainly since the outbreak of the War. Impossibly idealistic and ludicrously naïve as his hopes for himself and his painting may seem, there can be no doubting the high seriousness of his intentions.

Woollaston was a landscape painter. As was the 21-year-old McCahon when he wrote the letter just quoted. If he honestly believed his *Harbour Cone from Peggy’s Hill* (1939) was up to the job he’d given it, then second thoughts can’t have been too far away. After he had settled in the Nelson region, contacts with Woollaston had become more regular, and intense. At first the older artist’s example and influence dominated the relationship – McCahon’s drawings from the early 1940s are almost indistinguishable from Woollaston’s. And his landscapes, like the Pangatotara works of 1943, show him eager to absorb the lessons Woollaston was taking from Cézanne, along with the notes which Flora Scales, a New Zealand student at the Hans Hofmann School in Munich, had passed on to him. As the decade wore on, however, discussions tended to turn into disagreements.¹² Although both experienced the 1940s as a time of crisis, and believed that Christianity would have a crucial part to play in any recovery from it, they disagreed about how this should affect them as painters.

McCahon acknowledged that Woollaston’s ideas of space construction had freed him from “the academic tradition – that is painting of the pre-Raphaelites & the Royal Academy schools ... and landed him in the true painting tradition – but only into a small part of it. Creating space in a picture is never such freedom as painting the whole world. This did happen sometimes but not often. Mostly the new freedom was not freedom at all.¹³ As a result Woollaston “... has no completed work. Nothing is carried far enough. The emotion which starts the painting is romantic – even where concerned with formal values – and to sustain a romantic emotion over even a short period of time demands such selfishness as Toss does not possess – so he loses his emotion and the painting loses [sic] its reason for being. It is never completed.¹⁴

Perhaps McCahon recalled at the time these words of Fritz Novotny in his copy of the Phaidon Press's *Cézanne*:

In them [Cézanne's landscapes] there is no mood, whether in the form of expression of temperament or for the purpose of interpreting definite landscape situations or phenomena, and it is lacking because Cézanne's art is the very antithesis of expressive art.¹⁵

The fact is McCahon's ideas of "the true painting tradition" had been changing; he wrote to Kennedy:

Seurat has fallen back. Picasso still further, Cézanne is less than the angels. The real tradition comes from Giotto, Michelangelo, Gauguin. That is the tradition I try to cope with. . . . the Cézanne tradition begins with Raphael & co period which in itself was not so fundamentally sound . . .¹⁶

In 1945 McCahon reported to Kennedy that "Toss and I have agreed not to talk about art as we seem to fight about it, we are both too cruel evidently about each others' work."¹⁷ Before the end of the decade their works had little in common beside references to the landscapes of the Nelson region. Their difficulties had been made worse by Woollaston's proselytising Uncle Frank, a convert to the fundamentalist Moral Rearmament Movement who in the early 1940s "came to stay" at his nephew's household for weeks, sometimes, months on end.¹⁸ Frank tried to persuade his nephew that painting was sinful, in the process taking Woollaston's canvases off the walls and replacing them with his own amateurish religious diagrams. It is a measure not only of the spell Frank could cast on the two painters, but also of the growing differences between them that McCahon should suggest to Woollaston that he preferred Frank's daubs to the work of his friend. Indeed, if we knew more about those daubs, we might have to argue that their influence was finally the more important. They were, perhaps, notably "complete". As Gerald Barnett puts it, Woollaston's "purpose was not to paint religious subjects – but to paint religiously. For Woollaston this was precisely Cézanne's achievement: it was what made him a religious painter."¹⁹ Utterly secure in his own faith, it was enough to be a Christian who painted. He could not accommodate McCahon's uncertainties, and he neither liked nor endorsed his friend's turn to biblical subjects. From McCahon's perspective, on the other hand, Woollaston's answer to the question of painting's purpose was simply a way of avoiding it.

3.

Christian Socialist Pacifism

McCahon, and most of his friends and acquaintances, were both Socialists and Christians of one description or another, and commonly Pacifists as well. Many were actively engaged members of church congregations and political organisations. They were Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans, and Quakers. They belonged to the Christian Pacifist Society, the Student Christian Movement (SCM),

the Left Book Club, and other leftwing organisations including the Communist Party. Some were conscientious objectors, some defaulters, non-combatants or Peace Pledge Unionists. They read and contributed to *Tomorrow*, the Labour government's most influential critic on the left which it suppressed in 1940. They constituted a small but formidable coalition of talented individuals who were at the cutting edge of New Zealand intellectual and cultural life of the time, and whose antipathy to war was based on the shameful and horrific example of World War I, and the appalling and pointless loss of their compatriots' lives.²⁰ As the next world war began, and conscription was introduced, their freedom of action and speech began to be curtailed and their radical religious and political views and beliefs severely tested. Increasingly they found themselves at odds with public opinion, offside with their employers, and outside the law. Under the circumstances it's hardly surprising the young McCahon felt a pressing need to re-examine his convictions, and to check them against his ways of painting.

Two of McCahon's acquaintances, John Brailsford and Arthur Norman Prior, can be regarded as representative of his wider circle. Brailsford was the McCahon family's next door neighbour in Dunedin. A pacifist and a Quaker, he had been imprisoned for his "conscientious objection" during World War I, and was the director of the local Workers' Educational Association. He gave Rodney Kennedy room and board as well as a job with the Association, and helped inspire McCahon and Kennedy to join the Society of Friends (Quakers) in the late 1930s.²¹ When the Christian Pacifist Society was established in 1941 by Ormond Burton, A. C. Barrington and other leftwing Methodists, Brailsford became its Dunedin President. The Society was at the forefront of resistance to New Zealand involvement in the War, Barrington and two others undertook speaking tours of the South Island in the Society's "Peace Caravan", a car covered with hand-painted placards. As the War progressed, relations between the Society and the Methodist Church which had never been comfortable deteriorated sharply. After Burton was repeatedly arrested and imprisoned for speaking publicly against the War, he was, in 1942, dismissed from the ministry and expelled from the Church. Members of the Society were opposed to the war policy of the Labour Government, many of whose leaders had fought conscription at the time of World War I, and considered it had betrayed the Socialist cause. Equally they opposed a Church that collaborated with Government policy and a Capitalist system that is "the greatest obstacle to human progress, its existence means, not the likelihood but the inevitability of recurring wars, and it must go."²²

The Society sought also to take "positive steps to find an alternative to the violent and acquisitive society of which we were a part." "Increasingly," wrote Dave Sylvester, "our thinking moved in the direction of establishing a Christian community in which all aspects of life would be fully integrated, i.e. worship, work, and service. It would be a life of co-operation, equality, sharing, and fellowship." The most successful of these communities was that at Riverside, northwest of Mapua in the Lower Moutere valley – it is still there and thriving.

Fig. 2
Rita Angus
The Apple Pickers 1944
oil on canvas
858 x 1118 mm
Collection of The Suter
Art Gallery Te Aratōi o
Whakatu; purchased
2014 by public
subscription
Reproduced courtesy of
the Rita Angus Estate



As it happened the wife of Decimus Wells, the Woollastons' orchard owner, was the Nelson representative of the Society, and the Woollastons and McCahons both visited Riverside as did artists and intellectuals from Christchurch and Wellington. Their painter friend Rita Angus, and Quaker Courtney Archer, both determined leftwing pacifists, who had been tobacco picking at Pangatotara in 1941, joined the Riverside community for the apple-picking season two years later (Fig. 2).²³

Arthur Norman Prior also encouraged McCahon's interest in the Quakers, he was a family friend of Brailsford. McCahon belonged to a regular discussion group which Prior, then a young Philosophy lecturer at Otago University College, hosted with his wife Clare in their flat.²⁴ McCahon said Prior, who was five years his senior, had "a terrific effect on me, absolutely terrific."²⁵ In a letter to Ursula Bethell, regarding their mutual friends Kennedy and Woollaston, Prior wrote:

Clare and I have refrained from grinding our own various religious axes as alternatives to the [Oxford-Moral Rearmament] Groups, & instead have encouraged a leaning which they both show towards Quakerism. Toss has been attending Quaker meetings down here.²⁶

He and Clare were committed Christian Socialists and pacifists. Clare became a card-carrying Communist, and in the 1960s ended up in Moscow. Although in the early 1940s he enlisted in the Royal New Zealand Air Force, and turned to a kind of Christian agnosticism, Prior's interest in theology and leftwing causes survived alongside his developing career in philosophy. In 1946, he replaced Karl Popper in

the Canterbury University College's Philosophy department, and re-instated his discussion group. Both Ron O'Reilly, now the Christchurch City Librarian, and McCahon after he'd relocated to Christchurch from Nelson, joined the group. In 1952 Prior purchased one of McCahon's latest landscapes, *Canterbury Plains* and hung it in his university office (Fig. 3).²⁷ As with Brailsford, his acquaintance with the painter was neither particularly close nor sustained, what Prior and McCahon shared was a milieu whose experience and common intellectual culture had a significant and lasting effect on their later achievements. Prior went on to become a fellow of Balliol College, Oxford, and became internationally regarded for his ideas about logic and the language of time.

McCahon's closest friends belonged to the small minority of New Zealanders who opposed the War on religious and political grounds. Kennedy spent most of the War in detention camps as a conscientious objector. Woollaston, who as a fulltime orchard worker was excused from military service, had before the War gone to court to claim exemption from military training on religious grounds. While he was successful, his staunchly Christian parents, appalled by their son's views, not only threw him out of the house but demanded that he leave Taranaki so as not to sully the family name.²⁸ Ron O'Reilly, who organised McCahon's major Wellington exhibition in 1948, was a committed Communist (until 1941 the Communist Party opposed the War.) Despite their ups and downs all three were to be lifelong friends. A somewhat more recent, but significant friend, was the young James K. Baxter. His father, Archibald Baxter, a Christian Socialist who had gone to prison for his pacifist beliefs in the first World War, had authored a memoir of his experiences, *We Will Not Cease* (1939), which was published at the outbreak of the Second. James was about to follow in his footsteps and that of his elder brother Terrence, who was already in detention when the War ended. By the measures of the time, they held views on war, politics and religion, that were extreme enough to invite personal attacks, loss of employment, arrest and imprisonment.

In his early years of seasonal work McCahon had organised a tobacco workers' protest against their conditions of employment. Much later, whilst confessing he'd become "a broken down Christian Communist", he reminded Woollaston: "I was, when I met you people, a real red. It was then very real Christianity in action. Myself and another Nelson bloke got the Union going."²⁹ He wrote at the time of the great pleasure he got

from standing on a hill and feeling I own the land with everyone else in New Zealand and pleasure from planting tobacco for Herbert [Helm] knowing that actually it is as much mine as his. He can't understand it and I preach collective farming and communism to him but with bad results ... Communism it is said stamps out Christianity. Christianity as now practised it does stamp out, but true Communism means true Christianity and I believe that by my painting I help to bring it about.³⁰

Fig. 3
Colin McCahon
Canterbury Plains 1950–1952
oil on canvas
940 x 850 mm
Collection of Christchurch Art
Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū;
gifted by the family of Mary
and Arthur Prior, 2017
Reproduced courtesy of the
Colin McCahon Research and
Publication Trust



Despite his commitment to the Quaker cause, McCahon presented himself for medical examination, and was excused from military service on account of a heart condition. Becoming the father of a young family increased the consequences faced by anyone who held the views he did, and there are no more stories of McCahon the political activist. His later life supports the conclusion that his attraction to unpopular political and religious positions was often offset by a contrarian's suspicion of all unquestioned positions. McCahon preferred "fellow travelling" to "signing on" and after the Society of Friends he would commit himself neither to Party nor Church. In a letter to Woollaston he wrote of visiting a neighbour and landing

bang into the middle of a Christian Pacifist meeting. A most sickening affair oozing stickiness but brightened by the presence of a young man who was evidently neither a real Christian or a pacifist and had to be squashed and ignored when they had a spot of snappy discussion.³¹

McCahon, for all his enthusiasm for the idea of a Christian art, and his talk of someone finding God through one of his paintings, was not sure he was himself a Christian. "What is it that stops me being a Christian?" he asked Woollaston. "I seem to have the desire but not the ability. I see now I never have been. Perhaps, like Bertrand Russell, I should give up this fight to believe in Christ. . . . no, he [Russell] can't be [a Christian] unless he does believe in Christ as something other than a man. It has just struck me more forcibly than ever before that I can't do this myself so that answers my question. So what shall I become, or can I get rid of this disbelief."³²



Fig. 4
Colin McCahon
*Paul to you at
Ngatimoti* 1946
oil on card on plywood
664 x 796 x 50 mm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi
o Tāmaki, purchased
1982
Reproduced courtesy
of the Colin McCahon
Research and
Publication Trust

Of course, McCahon's primary and apparently unwavering commitment was to his art:

I was very lucky [to grow] up knowing I would be a painter. I never had any doubt about this. I knew it as a very small boy and I knew it later. I know now when it is too late to turn back and I only wish I were a better painter.³³

Whatever McCahon's reservations, however, about this or that type of religious or political belief, they did not diminish his support for the radicalism of his circle as a whole, or his conviction that to be better painter meant finding a way of painting that was consistent with its purposes. Of course, a way of painting is not the same as way of doing Christian theology or Marxist analysis, but one with its own language, conventions and history. Not that of Toss Woollaston or of his uncle Frank, although perhaps something in between and in the tradition of Giotto, Michelangelo, and Gauguin.

4.

Art is not an aesthetic but a rhetorical activity³⁴

– Eric Gill

It wasn't until 1946 that McCahon hit upon his new way of painting, how to make painting that belonged to the real tradition. *I Paul to you at Ngatimoti* (Fig. 4) and the watercolour, *Marge as the Virgin Mary in the Maitai Valley*, both from that year, were the first of his paintings to introduce biblical figures and narratives into the contemporary New Zealand scene. Two of St Paul's New Testament epistles are addressed to his disciple Timothy. Presumably that's him in the front and to Paul's right, holding the letter or, like the figure on the left, a local (woman?) of Ngatimoti. All Paul's epistles have the same form of salutation, which here does double duty as the title of the painting: a salutation to the viewer, also to the locals in the painting and the place.³⁵ Hi, let me introduce myself, I'm Paul, – yes, that Paul, the famous Apostle – here I am, showing up all these centuries later in your hour of need to personally hand deliver this letter to your obscure tobacco-growing settlement because you, or someone, kindly gave it my disciple's name.

What's in a name?, we like to ask. The place name – Ngatimoti, Māori for "the place of Timothy" – seems to have called this painting into being. As Crow observes it is "something of a manifesto piece" for the works to come.³⁶ It grounds them, the place name serving as the local pretext for McCahon's recycling of the common allegorical practice of Italian Renaissance painters of setting Bible stories in their own times, so as to bring biblical history closer to the lives of their viewers. McCahon doesn't provide the Italian master with New Zealand local colour in his 1946 *Entombment after Titian*, but a few months later a second version does have a Nelson setting. Such paintings show the past and the present, the earthly and the divine as coterminous. Centuries ago such institutionalised allegorical conventions would be taken as read, but in our own times they are necessarily received, by artists and viewers alike, as momentous contrivances. Arresting conjunctions. Signs of "art history as a theme," crucial to the new way of painting, which require a rhetoric

all their own. The title of the watercolour, *Marge as the Virgin Mary in the Maitai Valley* is similar: “ok, Marge, you can be the Virgin Mary,” as if Maitai Valley were a stage on which McCahon was handing out parts. The name “Marge” is both bathetic and iconoclastic – *Jim as the Lord Jesus*, anyone? I’m not joshing; in McCahon’s allegory not only the distant and the local, but the holy and the humble are seen as coterminous³⁷ and both titles prepare the viewer for that acknowledgement. They suggest there may be an iconoclastic slant to McCahon’s allegory.

As with these titles, the facial profiles of onlookers or witnesses in paintings like *The Family*, *Crucifixion according to St Mark*, *Christ as a Lamp*, *Crucifixion: The apple branch*, *Listener*, and *The Promised Land* are doing double duty as surrogates for ourselves. They echo allegory’s doubleness and oblige us to take a second look at the already seen, whether in Bible stories, saccharine Sunday school posters, or reproductions of Old Master genre paintings.

The expressive power of the biblical paintings grows out of a rhetoric of the gaze which organises not only our relations to them, but also those between the figures in the painting themselves. Some of these profiles are savagely cropped at the framing edge, some are angled away from us so we don’t see enough of their features to know what they make of what transfixes them so. Half in and half out of the picture, caught in the conjunction, we are called upon to follow their gaze as if it were our own. When we do see faces, the gaze that meets us is at once piercing and absent-minded, distracted not by the sight of us but by an inward emotion that has taken possession of them. *Christ as a Lamp* (1947), looks right through us, *I, Paul* (1948), is clearly in the grip of some awesome vision. They aren’t the only figures whose dark-rimmed, black-pupiled eyes bring to mind the thirteenth-century *Madonna of the Large Eyes*, and similar altarpieces influenced by Byzantine mosaics (Fig. 5).

So, there are eyes that we don’t see, eyes like those of the crucified Christ that are closed and do not see. There are figures, notably the numerous Virgin and Childs, who only have eyes for each other. In all these cases the viewer faces a scene in which it and the act of looking itself is so transfigured by intense internal emotion that “normal vision” doesn’t apply. McCahon wrote to Brasch:

At Xmas [1947] I went to Farewell Spit with a friend of normal vision – and for him there was no splendour. Heaven & Hell just don’t exist. The Takaka Valley has real splendour, to him [it] is a place good for farming...

However in *The Promised Land* (1948), McCahon shows us a farm worker who in fact gets the splendour, and gives us a picture of his dream of Farewell Spit, as an insert in a painting which is in itself an instance of transfigured vision.³⁸ Although contemporary viewers tend to misread him as a cultural nationalist imagining the view from his Marlborough lifestyle block, McCahon’s worker is more likely that of a union organiser dreaming of a Christian Socialist New Zealand.



Fig. 5
Unknown Master,
Italian
*Madonna of the Large
Eyes* c1260
tempera on panel
Museo dell' Opera el
Duomo, Siena

5. Iconoclasm: Celestial Graffiti

Of course, neither the biblical subjects, nor their expressive framing contrivances of themselves can't quite explain why McCahon paintings startled and confused viewers who might otherwise have been moved by them. That was down to what art history calls their "primitivism". Although the term belongs to McCahon's "real tradition" – linking Giotto to Gauguin somehow – its iconoclasm needs some theological contextualising of the sort Crow provides by associating it with "Jansenism":

In France in the early eighteenth century – at the onset of what is assumed to be the gathering force of Enlightenment values – a strain of religious imagery was consciously conceived to require decoding against an orthodox grain. The severe suppression of one ascetically minded faction within orthodox Roman Catholicism, the so-called Jansenists, necessitated coded or clandestine expression on the part of its adherents. Vigilant against idolatrous temptation yet attuned to visual signs of divine grace in the world, the Jansenist effect on its Christian subject matter offers a corrective to the implicit endorsement of any and all conventional religious expression, however venal or credulous, fostered by the detached and non-committal attitude of normative scholarship.³⁹

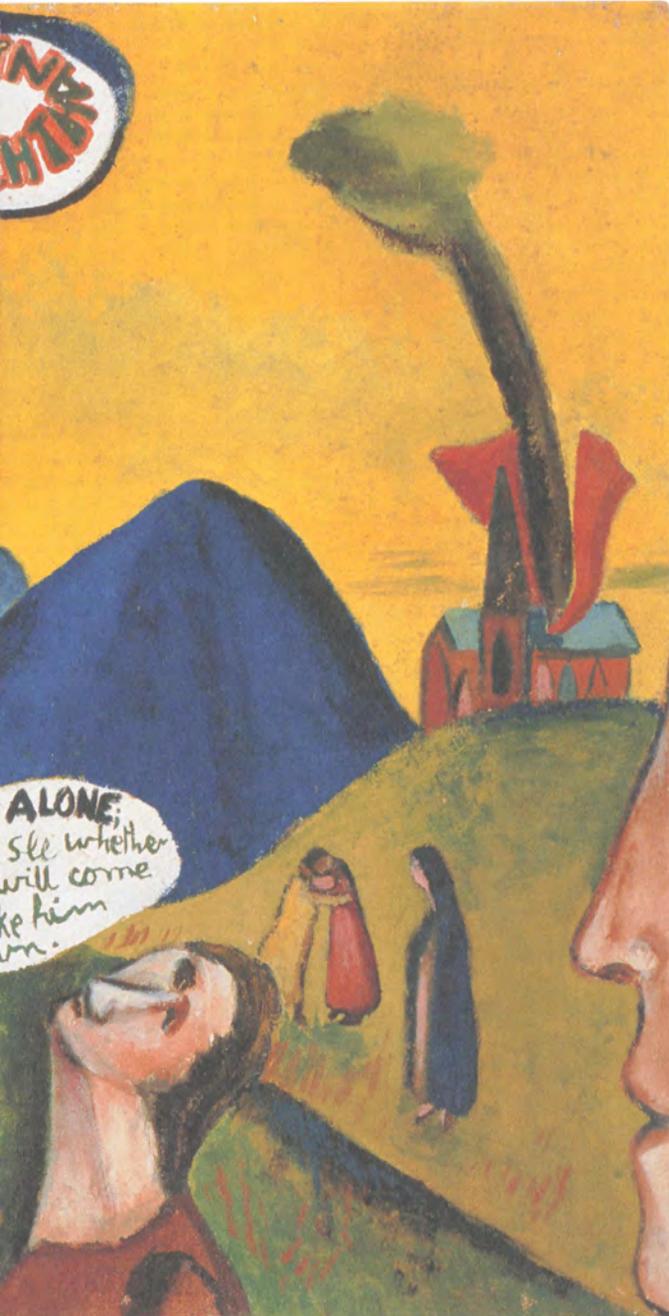


Fig. 6
 Colin McCahon
*Crucifixion according
 to St Mark 1947*
 oil on canvas on board
 828 x 1125 mm
 Collection of
 Christchurch Art
 Gallery Te Puna o
 Waiwhetu; presented
 by Colin McCahon on
 the death of Ron
 O'Reilly, 1982
 Reproduced courtesy
 of the Colin McCahon
 Research and
 Publication Trust

A modern type of Jansenist effect is what “politicised” McCahon’s religious paintings. It was the stylistic crudity that most startled and incensed some first time viewers and made them hard to decode. It is what enables the viewer to recognise the Christian Socialist pacifism which inhabits the paintings. Works like *The Promised Land* and *I Paul to you at Ngatimoti* bring rural communism and “primitive” Christianity together under the banner of an ingenuously ill-mannered style of painting – let’s call it “proto punk” or “comic-book primitivism” – which sharply lowers the tone of conventional religious and artistic expression while at the same time intensifying and complicating its affect. It tells us that Christianity *as it is now practised* was to be stamped out. Here was a way of painting that might rescue the crucifixion from its idolatrous appropriation by the sponsors of capital and the purveyors of war – *God Defend New Zealand, God Save the King* etc., etc? That might disinfect an ineffectually Christian society? That might somehow restore Christ’s outsider credibility? For churchgoers “who wished to forget Christ on weekdays”, and enough in the know to pick up on references to the Church art of Titian or the paintings of the Sieneese Quattrocento, the naïve crudeness of McCahon’s pastiche was simply gratuitous, as doubtless McCahon knew it would be.⁴⁰ But for those drawn to Christian Socialist pacifism, on the other hand, here was a way of painting whose startling oppositions of cruelty and tenderness, mockery and pathos, effrontery and empathy, had obvious appeal.

There were and are influential commentators who have had problems decoding McCahon’s “punk” style. At the time, Charles Brasch wrote that the “harshness and the frequent crudity” of McCahon’s expression, indicated his refusal to gloss over the “rawness and harshness” of New Zealand life, but then claimed he was “hampered at every turn by an inadequate technique” because like all local painters “he was not well enough taught to meet the demands of his vision” suggesting his expression was as much a part of the problem as a solution to it.⁴¹ He wasn’t the only notable writer to miss the boat; poet and publisher, Denis Glover wrote to Brasch: “I am sorry to have to protest against the McCahon stuff. It seems to me to be dreadfully dishonest work, poodle-faking of the worst description and likely to put people off.” Shortly after he called him a “self-taught primitive.” Much later, Gordon H. Brown, was led astray by his conviction that McCahon’s over-riding aim was “ease of understanding.” He found fault with the allegorical method; to his mind the results were self-defeatingly ambiguous, indecisive, and “either incomplete or simply miscalculated.”⁴² He claimed McCahon co-opted the “popular convention” of speech balloons in order “to boost” (unsuccessfully) his paintings “communicative function.”⁴³

A. R. D. Fairburn famously praised McCahon for successfully avoiding “all the vices of the genteel style of painting” then hammered him for “substituting no virtues that can be perceived with the naked eye”, suggesting his paintings might “pass as graffiti on the walls of some celestial lavatory – say an Aimee MacPherson temple – but that is about all.”⁴⁴ Fairburn’s withering (he wished) put-down was actually no different from the advice McCahon himself had suggested James K. Baxter give

to puzzled viewers of his work: Go look at the local Salvation Army Citadel. And as Crow puts it, Fairburn's remark, while "intended to wound and dismiss [actually] ... identifies what was vital in McCabon's art." Referring to *Crucifixion according to St Mark* (1947, Fig. 6), he adds:

the despair, coupled with blaspheming irony, calls upon a motif congruent with the intentional crudity of his drawing, that is harshly demotic cartoons of a kind that forgo all pretence to professional fluency.⁴⁵

Distressed as McCabon was by hostile responses to his work, he told O'Reilly that he was nevertheless grateful not to be classed as "one of [Fairburn's] good taste boys" and that he was "most pleased" that his friend liked this crucifixion, because "It is the sum of all the others without their academic residues. It has there come clear."⁴⁶

"Cartoons" always rate at least a passing mention in discussions of McCabon's biblical paintings, but they play a far larger and more inflammatory part in the visual economy of these paintings than is usually acknowledged. The speech balloons in *The King of the Jews*, *Crucifixion according to St Mark*, and *The Valley of Dry Bones* are too obvious to miss, but partly because other comic book features are seldom noted the cumulative influence of McCabon's pastiche of this "poor" genre on his new way of painting is inadequately recognised. The heavy black outlines of the figures are from comics, as is the "scene-within-a scene" compositions of *The Promised Land*, *Hail Mary* and *Crucifixion: The apple branch*. The multi-panel compositions of *Six days in Nelson and Canterbury* and *Dear Wee June* likewise. Also the scrolls in *I, Paul* and *The Valley of Dry Bones*, and indeed most of the inscriptive devices. Not to mention the treatment of capital letters in *The King of the Jews* and *A candle in a dark room*.

Moreover, way back then comics were dangerous as well as popular, hardcore as well as easy reads. When I was a child comics weren't to be brought into the house. Not our house anyway. You might not remember – but there was no "popular culture" in those days, just trash – Tin Pan Alley and hit parades, Hollywood films, and lurid American-style comics imported from Australia. Postwar society got into a moral panic about the bad behaviour of post-pubescent youth. Comics, it was said would produce a generation of illiterates, savages, who have escaped the custody of language. McCabon was unusual among his circle in having a taste for a bit of trash, like cowboy songs and horse operas. He asked John Caselberg if "we seek in the wrong place for our culture?" And wondered whether we should start from the "awful stuff ... the signwriting of the towns & the football & racing & advertising."⁴⁷ His sanctification of comics by association was sharply at odds with Bill Pearson's treatment in *Coal Flat* (1963), a serious novel of the period – it boasted a McCabon cover – set in 1947, which told the story of an 8-year-old boy seduced and corrupted by American-style comics. In 1954 the New Zealand Parliament established a committee to investigate misbehaviour among teenagers,

and got to ban *The Lone Ranger* comic, along with Little Richard's *Tutti Frutti*, and Mickey Spillane novels.⁴⁸

If there is an “innocent-eye” at work in McCahon's paintings, it's that of a “damaged child” – a juvenile delinquent – ruined by contact with real art masters from the Old World – and trash from the New. One such youth features in *The Valley of Dry Bones* (1947), the only work depicting the carnage of war, and, with *The Promised Land*, contemplating the postwar future. He has been touched by real religion – the words of the Old Testament – and real war, the dead of World War II. “He” is also the prophet Ezekiel who calls out – God putting the words into his mouth – for the recovery or resurrection of the dead: “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.”⁴⁹ Here the bones depicted are those of the Jews: defeated, dispersed, captive, dead. Here also we see living speech, Ezekiel's/God's, as on a stream of holy breath, a wind, inflating a speech balloon which holds them aloft for us to read. And be inspirited by. And, lower right, “Ye Olde Scroll”, on which is written in a school boy hand the words “Painted By Colin McCahon.” It's no small matter that McCahon has cast his childhood self in the part of Colin McCahon, and of Ezekiel, and assigned to the pair of them the task of recovery and renewal.

6.

Postwar and After

With his April 1951 talk to the Canterbury School of Art sketch club, McCahon said he had ended something. *He* had done it, he had talked himself out of a way of painting. The biblical paintings had not just come to an end, they had, he felt, come to nothing. He had been left “absolutely empty” and worse still he now found that “all that I had doubted then was the important thing.”⁵⁰ If this sounds like crisis time, it is one in which crisis itself is part of the problem. Even though “disillusion was one of the angels to point the way” forward, and even though some months earlier he had reassured himself that “something had been worked out at last” and “that [he could] make a start on a new direction,” he hardly knew where to, so long it was away from where he had been: “Still very vague, only a feeling and not yet clothed with a subject but I feel the need of a deep space and order, this applied by me and not the earlier order which has so much intuition ... after recent work I feel the need for something more conscious.”⁵¹

McCahon's search for a less expressionist way of painting sparked changes in his idea of the true painting tradition. As Giotto and Gauguin lost their sway he began to re-evaluate “all that he had then doubted” about Cézanne, Picasso, and probably his difference with Woollaston as well. “Sunlight rather than the light of the moon – or not even sunlight but at least open daylight. That's where I'm trying to go. Away from hysteria into order & value & reality. ... Bach rather than Beethoven, Cézanne than Van Gogh ...”⁵² Thus began McCahon's so-called “Cubist” phase, which was to last for seven years or more. It began in Christchurch between 1950 and 1952. Not in Titirangi, where he moved in 1953, nor with his

1951 meetings in Melbourne with Mary Cockburn Mercer, who in her youth had hung out with the artists in Montparnasse, but with a series of sunny aerial views of Otago and Canterbury full of "deep space and order" including the triptych *On building bridges* (1952). If McCahon's biblical paintings are about the War, his Cubist works, strangely enough, are about the Peace and recovery. To begin with at least.

Clearly the Christian Socialist pacifist alliance was not going to survive the Peace. Pacifist resistance to the War had been the glue which held these diverse religious and political groups together and brought focus and urgency to their cause. Hadn't victory now closed the argument? Wasn't it case over? Gradually conscientious objectors were being released. Or, if the West's malaise persisted, what shape had it taken? In the late 1940s, as the new Cold War world order took hold, the centre of political gravity in New Zealand moved to the right forcing the left as a whole into a retreat from which it would never recover. In 1951, a National government crushed the powerful Watersiders Union, led it was said by godless Communists, by locking the workers out of the wharves for 151 days and blaming them for the consequences.

As I have argued, this coalition had a crucial part to play in New Zealand's "high culture" of the 1930s and 1940s. It belongs to a past that is long gone and hardly recognisable today. With his rejection of the biblical paintings, McCahon, consigned them to his own history. And yet the foundations of his art were built within purview of that coalition, and all his subsequent works are undeniably part of its legacy. After all McCahon returned to biblical paintings in 1958 and regularly from 1969. He continued to be drawn to leftwing causes. Paintings opposed to the testing and stockpiling of nuclear weapons and the threat of nuclear war, recur from the early 1960s. From the same time an interest in Māori religion and the politics and history of colonisation deepens and expands.

More importantly though, McCahon's changes of heart, and ways of painting, at this early stage of his career, subsequently become paradigmatic of its later progress. What begins as crisis management becomes an habitual process of self-questioning and critical reflection, whereby earlier ways of thinking and painting, whether they are formal, political or theological, are re-examined and newer ones introduced. From the late 1960s on the process of change itself becomes more fully integrated into his practice. Although he sought, even yearned, for simplicity and clarity in his paintings, qualities many of his reviewers and commentators have found or wanted to find in them, McCahon's appetite for ambiguity and uncertainty, rejection of closure, is one he never relinquishes. He knows it is essential to the power of his work. He is as much compelled by the need to generate problems as to solve them. In much of his best later work, we find him placing himself and his viewers on the horns of some current dilemma and keeping them there as long as possible. Talking himself into and out of ways of painting and thinking became a life-time's practice.

1. Colin McCahon to Charles Brasch, July 25, 1951. Hocken Collections, University of Otago Library. McCahon's letters are quoted with kind permission of the Hocken Collections, University of Otago Library, the Colin McCahon Family Estate and the Brasch Estate.
2. Luit Bieringa pioneered the study of this group of works, since then customarily referred to as "the early religious works," with his exhibition, *McCahon. Religious Works 1946–1952* at the Manawatu Art Gallery, 1975, and its accompanying catalogue.
3. I don't include among those predecessors, the young poet James K. Baxter, who was their most perceptive reviewer and the first to accuse the artist of Salvation Army aestheticism, or Ron O'Reilly, who organised the exhibition.
4. Thomas Crow, "A Way with Words. Practical Religion in the Art of Colin McCahon," in *His No Idols: The Missing Theology of Art* (Sydney: The Power Institute for Art and Ideas, 2017), 67. For Crow's important re-assessment of the "early religious works" see 60–64.
5. Bill Pearson, "Fretful Sleepers," in *Fretful Sleepers and Other Essays* (Auckland: Heinemann Educational Books, 1974), 30. In *The Deepening Stream* (1940), M.H. Holcroft referred to New Zealand's "present condition as the appanage (dependency) of a decaying civilization."
6. Gordon H. Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist*, 1st ed. (Wellington, N.Z.: Reed, 1984), 30.
7. Colin McCahon to Charles Brasch, December 1, 1949. Hocken Collections, University of Otago Library.
8. For a chronology of the McCahon's movements in these years see Peter Simpson's "McCahon in 1947–48: A New Date, A 'Lost' Exhibition & Some Letters," *Art New Zealand* 100 (Spring 2001): 88–93, 130–1.
9. Colin McCahon to Charles Brasch, June 20, 1947. Hocken Collections, University of Otago Library.
10. Colin McCahon to M.T. Woollaston, December 8, 1940. See also Brown, *Elements of Modernism in Colin McCahon's Early Work* (Art History Department, Victoria University of Wellington, 2003, 34–6) who, after quoting this letter up to "Communism it is said ..." notes the intensity and McCahon's "pie-in-the-sky idealism" which he links to modernist rhetoric rather than Christian Socialist pacifism. Eric Gill, who McCahon was reading at the time, wrote: "The fact remains. All art is propaganda, for it is in fact impossible to do anything, to make anything, which is not expressive of 'value,'" in "All Art is Propaganda (A contribution to 5 on Revolutionary Art) 1935," in *Essays* (Jonathan Cape, 1942), 174.
11. Colin McCahon to Rodney Kennedy, October 18, 1942, as transcribed by Hamish Keith, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Archive.
12. Hamish Keith, who had gathered from McCahon that Frank tackled biblical subjects and the results were like very bad William Blake, suggests that "Colin's painting grew out of his impressions of and involvement with the man." Hamish Keith File, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Archive.
13. Colin McCahon to Ron O'Reilly, July, 1948. Letters from McCahon to Ron O'Reilly are quoted with kind permission of Matthew O'Reilly. Tony Green's *Toss Woollaston: Origins & Influence*, (Art History Department, Victoria University of Wellington, 2004), is much the best account of this seminal stage in Woollaston's development. Gordon H. Brown's chapter, "McCahon's Early Relationship with Woollaston," in his *Towards A Promised Land: On the Life and Art of Colin McCahon* (Auckland University Press, 2010), and his *Elements of Modernism in McCahon's Early Work* (Art History Department, Victoria University of Wellington, 2003), are invaluable commentaries on the Woollaston/McCahon relationship up to 1945.
14. Colin McCahon to Rodney Kennedy, July 20, [1945], as transcribed by Hamish Keith, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Archive.
15. *Cézanne* (Phaidon Press, 1937), 10. T.J. Clark who recently took issue with Novotny, nevertheless allows that "still, more than a century after they were painted these images so effortlessly keep their distance, resisting our understanding, refusing ... to 'come under a description.' In particular they strike me as putting the strange word 'expression' to death." In "Relentless intimacy," *London Review of Books*, January 25, 2018.
16. Colin McCahon to Rodney Kennedy, February 5, 1945.
17. Colin McCahon to Rodney Kennedy, February 5, 1945.
18. Previously known as the Oxford Group, its name was changed in 1938 by leader, Frank Buchman who proceeded to transform it into an anti-communist, CIA supported, arm of the Christian right.
19. Gerald Barnett, *Toss Woollaston: An illustrated Biography* (Auckland, Random Century, 1991), 51.
20. Of 3000 Conscientious Objectors only 600 were considered legitimate, 800 were sent to concentration camps where they were detained under punitive conditions for the duration of the war.
21. When Kennedy died he left \$180,000 in his will to the Friends.
22. Ron Howell, *Christian Pacifism and Social Change* (Christian Pacifist Society of New Zealand Auckland Branch, 1945), 11.
23. In 1941 Angus worked for the Fellowship of Conscientious Objectors, a breakaway group of Wellington Peace Pledge Union members, and in 1945 the Magistrate's Court found her guilty of refusing to obey the directions of the wartime Manpower Committee and fined her. Her 1944 portrait of Ralph Vaughan Williams pays tribute to his pacifism, and includes an apple branch which it is said alludes to the Riverside Community. Courtney Archer went to China after the War to work with the Friends Ambulance Unit and later joined Rewi Alley, a New Zealander who became famous for his contributions to the economic re-structuring of the country following the success of the Communist Revolution of 1948.
24. Also members were John Summers, and Ron O'Reilly, himself a recent Otago University graduate in Philosophy. McCahon told Gordon H. Brown, it was "where one met the great and the promising" in Gordon H. Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist* (Wellington, N.Z.: Reed, 1984), 28.
25. Interview with Gordon H. Brown, 1978. Hocken Collections, University of Otago Library.
26. Arthur Prior to Ursula Bethell, September 21, 1937. My thanks to Michael Grimshaw for making this letter available to me.
27. Now in the collection of Christchurch Art Gallery.
28. When war broke out, Ian Milner was secretary of the Wellington Peace Committee. His father, the well-known headmaster of Waitaki Boys High School, said he'd disown him, he was a disgrace to his family and to Waitaki. And Dr. Beeby, Milner's boss at the Department of Education, warned him if he stuck to his "subversive" ways he would lose his job. Famously and falsely accused of being a KGB agent, Milner became a Professor of English at Charles University in Prague.
29. Colin McCahon to M.T. Woollaston, July 3, 1979. Letters from McCahon to M.T. Woollaston are quoted with kind permission of Phillip Woollaston.
30. Colin McCahon to M.T. Woollaston December 8, 1940. Hocken Collections, University of Otago Library.
31. Colin McCahon to M.T. Woollaston November 19, 1940. Hocken Collections, University of Otago Library.
32. Colin McCahon to Toss and Edith Woollaston, January 4, 1943. Hocken Collections, University of Otago Library.
33. *Colin McCahon, A Survey Exhibition* (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1972), 17.

34. Ananda Coomaraswamy, epigraph to Eric Gill's "Art" in his *Essays* (Jonathan Cape, 1942), 9.
35. In McCahon's title, Ngatimoti is misspelt Ngatimote. The name in Māori means "of Timothy". The New Zealand Government's History website says a Māori boy named Timoti carved it on a tree, whereas Wikipedia, says it was "a recently converted Maori Christian" who did the carving. Neither of the Epistles to Timothy begin "I Paul ..." but the opening words are "I, Paul ..." meaning this is the first "chapter" of the epistle, the number one, not the first person.
36. Crow, 61.
37. There are two drawings with the same title, dated 1947. Marge was a real person, the McCahons' neighbour, Marjorie Naylor.
38. Colin McCahon to Charles Brasch, February 19, 1948. Hocken Collections, University of Otago Library.
39. Crow, 7.
40. James K. Baxter, *Canta*, July 21, 1948, n.p.
41. Baxter, *Canta*. Brasch here shows little respect for the teaching of R.N. Field; McCahon is not the only artist of his generation to express his indebtedness to Field's instruction and example.
42. Gordon H. Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist*, 1st ed. (Wellington, Reed, 1984), 40–41.
43. Gordon H. Brown, *Colin McCahon: Artist*, 2nd ed. (Wellington, Reed, 1993), 19, 34.
44. A.R.D. Fairburn "Art in Canterbury Some Notes on the Group Show," *Landfall* (March 1948): 2, 1, 50. Aimee McPherson was a Los Angeles evangelist.
45. Crow, 64.
46. Colin McCahon to Ron O'Reilly, April 9, 1948. Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Archives. He said also that "The words 'My God why hast thou forsaken me?' seem to me to show a despair quite unlike the interpretation of the churchmen." Between April and June of 1948 Woollaston and O'Reilly exchanged several letters about the Fairburn review, with Woollaston as stubbornly unforthcoming about why he agreed with the review as O'Reilly is confident of and articulate about his appreciation of McCahon's new work. Unwisely, O'Reilly reported Woollaston's feelings to McCahon, who, unsurprisingly, had heard nothing of them from his friend.
47. Colin McCahon to John Caselberg, September 12, 1950. Letters from Colin McCahon to John Caselberg are quoted with kind permission of the McCahon Family Estate, the Caselberg Estate and the Hocken Library.
48. Rachel Barrowman notes that "The influx into New Zealand of American comics ... provoked a 'comic scare' in the 1930s. The editorial and correspondence columns of the newspapers expressed a widespread community concern akin to the 'moral panic' in the 1950s... Booksellers, librarians and educationalists were among those who campaigned to have comics banned or censored." *A Popular Vision: The Arts and the Left 1930–1950*, (Wellington, Victoria University Press, 1991), 129. The moral panic was not peculiar to New Zealand. Dr. Frederic Wertham, in *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) claimed that comics were a major cause of "juvenile delinquency" – a phenomenon of the 1950s which ranked second only to the "Red Menace" as a threat to American society. See my "Speech Balloons and Conversation Bubbles," *AND* 4 (1985): 145–8.
49. "The hand of the Lord was upon me ... and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones there were very many in the open valley: and lo, they were very dry, [he, Lord God] said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. ... I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live ... So I prophesied ... and behold there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. ... Then said he unto me ... say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." *Ezekiel*, 37:1–9.
50. Colin McCahon to Charles Brasch, July 25, 1951. Hocken Collections, University of Otago Library.
51. Colin McCahon to John Caselberg, September 12, 1950. Hocken Collections, University of Otago Library.
52. Colin McCahon to Charles Brasch, December 1952. Hocken Collections, University of Otago Library.



Fig.1
(Left to right): George Hubbard,
Ruth Watson, Gregory Burke,
and Billy Apple at the opening
of *Now See Hear*, Wellington
City Art Gallery, 1990
City Gallery Wellington Archive

George Hubbard: The Hand that Rocked the Cradle

Anna-Marie White and Robert Leonard

A networker and opportunist, a trader and hustler, a talent spotter and impresario, an agent and publicist, a provocateur and disrupter, a player and pawn ... and a Māori.

George Hubbard played an idiosyncratic and pioneering role in the flourishing of contemporary Māori art. From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, he was an independent art curator, at large in Wellington and Auckland. Unlike other curators, Hubbard didn't come through the university system, via art school or art history; his playbook was more informed by his parallel activity as a music producer. While he worked with many Pākehā artists, he is remembered for making game-changing exhibitions that created a platform for younger Māori artists exploring their urban-hybrid identities within the bicultural context of the day.

Hubbard has been cast as a renegade, whose work countered the cultural-survival philosophy of the contemporary Māori art movement. However, he was also a product of that movement and of the 1980s Tū Tangata political strategy, which created new opportunities for Māori development and encouraged Māori to "stand tall" and express their perspectives. Like many Māori of his generation, he developed his talents "on the job", often in roles that emerged as a consequence of bicultural state policy.

As the Pākehā art scene became more interested in Māori art, Hubbard became a go-to guy, offering access to an alternative network of Māori artists to that provided by national Māori art organisations, bringing different perspectives into the discussion. However, his window of opportunity would be brief. In 1990, Hubbard was riding high from the success of his modest yet nimble Artspace Māori art show, *Choice!*, which really put him on the radar. But, in 1995, he found himself on the outer, sidelined from his major Māori art show, *Korurangi*, at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. The crisis that unfolded around that show was a measure of changing expectations as to how Māori art should be curated and managed by museums.

Much has been written about *Choice!* and *Korurangi*, but little has been recorded about Hubbard's life circumstances and curatorial career as a whole. How did he find himself curating the first major contemporary Māori art exhibition organised by Auckland Art Gallery?

In the Beginning

Michael David Rogers (Murupaenga) [Ngāti Kuri, Te Aupōuri, Te Rarawa] was born on 12 June 1961 at the Salvation Army's Bethany Maternity Hospital for unmarried mothers in Wellington. He was quickly adopted by an immigrant English couple, who renamed him Peter George Hubbard. Raised in Upper Hutt as Pākehā, the young Hubbard enjoyed swimming, water polo, soccer, and cubs and scouts, and took guitar, piano, and double-bass lessons. He says he was unaware he was Māori until this was pointed out to him by a teacher at intermediate school.¹

In his early teens, Hubbard's interest in music came at the expense of his schooling, which continued at Upper Hutt College. In 1977, he was incarcerated at Epuni Boys Home for stealing a *Disco Magic* record from Woolworths. He and a friend absconded from the Home, converted a car at Lower Hutt's Melling railway station, and drove it to Wellington, to gatecrash a Commodores concert at St James Theatre. Neither of them knew how to change gears, so they drove the whole way in first. Apprehended a few days later in Otaki, they were detained at Kohitere Boys Training Centre, a notoriously tough government welfare facility in Levin. After his release, Hubbard returned to the College, but left in 1978, without School Certificate. However, school had not been a complete waste. His art teacher, Ms Amos (better known as the Wellington landscape painter, Jane Pountney), introduced him to Patti Smith, Aretha Franklin, Etta James, vegetarian food, and Wellington Film Society.

Moving to central Wellington, Hubbard secured a job as a trainee storeman at Dixon Wellington, a stationery wholesaler. In 1979, he saw Selwyn Muru's *Parihaka* show at Lower Hutt's Dowse Art Museum. It had a lasting impact on him, although, at the time, he didn't know the artist was his birth uncle. Later that year, he moved to Sydney, where he worked as a kitchen hand by day and haunted discos by night. After a year, he returned to Wellington, and began accompanying his flatmate, Juliette Walker, to openings at the Women's Gallery, usually being the only male in attendance. There, he made his first art acquisition, Jane Zusters's colour photo, *Pink Nude in Blue Pool* (1979). At one opening, some women suggested he might patronise Peter McLeavey Gallery instead. Hubbard took the hint. He would later purchase a Pat Hanly print and a John Reynolds drawing from McLeavey.

Hubbard moved into a punk flat on the Terrace. There, his flatmate, photographer Ivan Rogers, encouraged his interest in photography. He read Susan Sontag's *On Photography* (1977) and purchased photos from Rogers and a

Bruce Foster photo from another flatmate who was cash strapped. (Later, he would acquire photos by Glenn Jowitt, Peter Black, and Miles Hargest.) Rogers lamented being unable to show anywhere other than Wellington's PhotoForum Gallery and Hubbard said he would get him a show in Auckland. He kept this promise. By 1982, Hubbard had relocated to Auckland and was volunteering at Ray Castle's Closet Artists Gallery. Noticing a gap in the schedule, he organised the exhibition, *Photography: Three Good Reasons: Photographs by Anthony Wyld, Ivan Rogers, Athol McCredie*. Soon after, artist Ian McMillan, who ran Department of Education Periodic Employment Programme (PEP) schemes, gave Hubbard a job working alongside artist Peter Roche, setting up and minding a high-school art show at Downtown Shopping Centre. In 1982, with Simon Kerns, Hubbard was also the subject of Derek Cowie's Standard-8 experimental film, *Scalpel*.

By now, Hubbard had begun seeing Lee Russell, who he remembers first meeting at a Flying Nun party in Grey Lynn. They would have an on-and-off relationship for over ten years. When she stripped at the Pink Pussycat under her stage name Phaedra, he provided backing tapes. Hubbard remembers her purchasing an et al. work at New Vision Gallery.

In 1985, Hubbard returned to Wellington with Russell, so she could study Māori language at Victoria University, and he began DJing at Clare's Cabaret, near Cuba Street, where Wellington's hairdresser elite mixed with bus drivers and dishwashers.² He got another PEP job at Wellington City Art Gallery, working on the show *Dancing in the Streets* (30 March – 28 April 1985). It centred on Peter Black's photos documenting the New Zealand breakdancing scene – bop culture, street kids, and substance abuse.³ As part of the show, Hubbard commissioned the graffiti artist Kosmo to make murals and organised break-dance competitions with sponsored prizes. He also wrote the essay, "Origins of Break Music", which was distributed as a handout.

Also in 1985, after the passing of the *Adult Adoption Information Act*, his friend, the weaver Diane Prince, drove him to Lower Hutt to access his records, where he discovered the name of his birth mother.

In 1986, Hubbard joined Wellington Arts Centre, in upper Willis Street, which extended PEP schemes to creatives, including artists Terrence Handscomb, Ronnie van Hout, and Ruth Watson. Its manager, contemporary Māori artist Darcy Nicholas, also fostered young Māori talent, including weavers Katarina Hetet, Diane Prince, and Megan Tamati-Quennell, writer Apirana Taylor and actor Rangimoana Taylor, and musician Gerrard Tahuparae. At the Centre, Hubbard's first task was assisting Lindsay Park in organising an artists-books show, *Visual Diaries* (15 – 23 March 1986), for Wellington's *Flying Kiwi Arts Festival*. Hubbard thought the show was so-so, but was impressed by et al.'s book. When he packed it up to return it to the artist, he enclosed a note, initiating an ongoing correspondence and friendship.

The et al. connection inspired Hubbard to establish a gallery in the Arts Centre later that year, which Darcy Nicholas named New Artists Gallery. It opened with an et al. show, which was purchased by Whanganui's Sarjeant Gallery.⁴ Seeing the potential, Nicholas let Hubbard change the gallery's name to Cupboard Space (rhyming with Hubbard's own name). There, he would go on to show et al., Mary-Louise Browne, Chris Cane, Terrence Handscomb, Ralph Paine, Diane Prince, and Hungarian-British photographer Mari Mahr. Another Cupboard Space et al. show, *Dora's Bathroom*, would be acquired by Wellington's National Art Gallery. Hubbard remembers Director Luit Bieringa turning up at the BYO opening with a six pack, a bottle opener, and a plastic cup. Part project space, part dealer gallery, Cupboard Space was different. Gregory Burke, then curator at Wellington City Art Gallery, remembers: "George was definitely something new in those days, someone who was working very smartly between the curatorial and commercial worlds. Thirty years later this is not unusual but it was then."⁵

In 1986, *Te Maori* returned from the US and began a main-centre national tour. The Contemporary Maori Arts Trust – a private organisation comprising senior leaders of the contemporary Māori art movement – initiated a complementary series of contemporary art shows, *Maori Art Today*.⁶ The QEII Arts Council, the Arts Centre, Karanga artists, and Aotearoa Moananui-ā-Kiwa weavers were involved: the organising committee included Darcy Nicholas, Eric Tamepo, Toi Maihi, Cath Brown, and John McCormack.⁷ Nicholas engaged Hubbard to work on the project. At that point having little knowledge of Māori art, Hubbard describes his role as "puppet curator", but also credits the opportunity as his "big break". *Maori Art Today* debuted at Wellington's Craft Council, then toured to Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Christchurch's CSA Gallery, and Auckland War Memorial Museum, opening around the same time as *Te Maori* in each city.⁸ The line-up changed at each venue, incorporating artists from the respective regions. Hubbard saw that the show lacked younger artists and female artists. When *Maori Art Today* was finally staged out of the way, at Wairarapa Arts Centre (30 August – 11 September 1987), as part of *Wairarapa Maori Festival of the Arts*, Hubbard had more say over the selection, adding younger female artists, including Jacqueline Fraser, Diane Prince, and Hariata Rōpata Tangahoe.⁹ Hubbard recalls, "Māori art was so uncool in those days ... I set about to change that oversight."

Maori Art Today had another outcome for Hubbard. At the Auckland show, exhibiting artist Taitimu Brampton's mother, Ata, immediately recognised Hubbard, identifying his birth father and extended paternal whānau.

In 1987, Hubbard attended a hip-hop competition in the Lower Hutt suburb of Taita, and saw Upper Hutt Posse "in a very raw form". He says, "I insisted that I become their manager, co-songwriter, and beat producer."¹⁰

They would occasionally use Cupboard Space as a practice room. Hubbard negotiated a recording contract with Jayrem, the Wellington independent label. In 1988, it released the Posse's 12" EP, *E Tu* – New Zealand's first rap record. *E Tu* was a stirring militant anthem that referenced the history of Māori resistance leaders, Hōne Heke, Te Kooti, and Te Rauparaha and reflected the Tū Tangata empowerment philosophy: "E Tu, stand proud, kia kaha, say it loud." Front man Dean Hapeta had been inspired by the black political consciousness of hip-hop and reggae, and by Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Angela Davis, and Louis Farrakahn. Terrence Handscomb designed the *E Tu* sleeve, which sported Ken Downie band photos and Handscomb's graphics. Hubbard soon had Upper Hutt Posse sign to the Auckland label, Southside Records, run by photographer and *Rip It Up* editor Murray Cammick, with whom they would release the album, *Against the Flow* (1989).

In 1988, Peter Ireland, at Wellington's National Library Gallery, contracted Hubbard to develop a programme to complement the Library's presentation of *Nga Toi o te Iwi: The Arts of the People*, a national-touring exhibition of Māori art from Te Tai Tokerau (5 – 26 March 1988). This led to gigs by Upper Hutt Posse and others, poetry readings, and Lisa Reihana's first institutional show. Hubbard also recommended Reihana for a residency at Sydney's Australian Centre for Photography in 1988, where she would commence work on her animated video, *Wog Features* (1988 – 90).

In 1989, Hubbard moved back to Auckland, where he worked on soundtracks for *Wog Features* and for et al. films. One of these, *The Story Of* (1990), featured footage of a boy at Marylands School, in Christchurch. Specialising in children with learning difficulties, it had been run by Brothers Hospitallers of St. John of God, a Roman Catholic Order, and, like Epuni and Kohitere, was notorious for abuse.¹¹ However, Hubbard and Tone Cornaga's jaunty melodic accompaniment stands in contrast to this.

Choice!

In 1990, Hubbard joined the Artspace board. When a gap appeared in the schedule, he was asked to curate a "Māori" show. *Choice!* (25 July – 17 August 1990) was assembled fast; Hubbard had worked with some of the artists before. It included Jacqueline Fraser, Rongotai Lomas, Barnard McIntyre, Diane Prince, Lisa Reihana, and Darryl Thomson (aka DJ DLT, an original member of Upper Hutt Posse). The show put Fraser in a Māori art context and was the first time Reihana's *Wog Features* was seen in a gallery. However, it is best remembered for launching the career of Michael Parekowhai, a last-minute addition, suggested by Artspace Director Priscilla Pitts.¹² His sculptures avoided familiar Māori styles and references, instead appropriating forms from mainstream Pākehā culture to express a Māori world view. Still an Elam undergrad, Parekowhai dominated the show. He came to define its concept and aesthetic, and represented a new critical position in contemporary Māori art.

Choice! was accompanied by a polemical handout – “Beyond Kia Ora: The Paraesthetics of ‘Choice!’” – which Hubbard penned with his friend Robin Crow, a scientist at the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research by day and “theory head” by night. Issuing an incisive attack on the perceived traditionalism of contemporary Māori art, it argued a space for the urban, pan-tribal, and individualist approaches epitomised by the *Choice!* artists. It was unclear whether Hubbard and Crow were railing against Pākehā assumptions about Māori art or against the control effected by senior members of the contemporary Māori art movement.

“Real Maori Art” is usually identified by its offering of signifying traces of a “primitive” past. Reflected in the mirror of a supposed Maori Renaissance, classical and traditional Maori modes of representation evoke a nostalgia for the mythical golden age through accepted images of Maoriness purporting to convey the creative genius of the real Maori ... Constricting societal modes of artistic regulation have never allowed Maori artists to become more than bearers of tradition and children of nature, never more than re-presenters of the land and the past. Perhaps it is time to rework the givens of the political and theoretical analyses that surround and govern orthodox notions of “Maoriness” in art practice.¹³

Hubbard said he intended his show’s colloquial title – rendered graffiti-art style by DLT for the invitation – to resonate with Māori and Pasifika young people.¹⁴ But, the show resonated more consequentially with Pākehā curators and critics. Although only 555 visitors were recorded, they included influential curators and critics.¹⁵ Giovanni Intra reviewed the show for *Stamp*, dedicating his response to “Mike P”.¹⁶ The journal *Antic*, whose editors included Pitts, republished Hubbard and Crow’s *Choice!* essay alongside a Stephen Zepke rave review as a centrespread.¹⁷ Collectors Jim and Mary Barr purchased one of Parekowhai’s sculptures. Curator Robert Leonard wrote on Parekowhai’s sculptures for *Art New Zealand*, acquired one for New Plymouth’s Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, and included two in the major *Headlands New Zealand* art exhibition at Sydney’s Museum of Contemporary Art (1992), in which Parekowhai would be the youngest artist.¹⁸ Another *Antic* editor and Assistant Curator at Auckland Art Gallery, Christina Barton suggested to Principal Curator, Alexa Johnston, that Hubbard develop a contemporary Māori art show for the Gallery as part of an anticipated series on New Zealand contemporary art initiated with Barton’s 1991 show, *Surface Tension: Ten Artists in the '90s*. In 1992, Hubbard and Johnston opened a conversation, which ultimately culminated in the 1995 show *Korurangi*.

Not everyone approved of *Choice!* Māori artist, educator, and writer Robert Jahnke questioned Hubbard and those who supported him:

Hubbard ... has been seconded by the Pakeha curatorial fraternity because they perceive his version of “cultural hybridisation” as a tool of

deconstruction. In deconstructing the tenet of “Maori art”, in making definition problematic, in questioning the legitimacy of definition from the cultural perspective of the minority and in presuming a self other than the other, Hubbard’s voice is in tune with the baton of the “white conductor”. Hubbard does not speak for Maori people he merely speaks about them. Anyone can speak about a culture with an awareness of that culture. In order to speak for Maori one must earn the right. The right is not self-imposed but is decreed through genealogy, through acknowledgement or through deed. Even Pakeha may earn the right to speak for Maori but it is a right conferred by Maori not by Pakeha ... [Hubbard] is a self-elected representative with a self-constructed vision of biculturalism that has emerged from the contested site of urban depersonalisation.¹⁹

Choice! certainly exemplified a new and diverse “bicultural” spirit, as evident in other 1990 Hubbard projects.²⁰ With Wayne Laird and Benny Staples, he composed *Hey Kids*, which was performed at the 1990 Auckland Commonwealth Games closing ceremony. With Daniel Barnes and Jon Cooper, he formed Rhythm & Business Productions, which would co-produce, write, and remix New Zealand dance and pop music for Mighty Asterix, Love & Bass/Fuemana, Maree Sheehan, and Upper Hutt Posse. In 1990, they produced the hit single *Positivity*, by rappers MC OJ and Rhythm Slave (Otis Frizzell and Mark James “Logg Cabin” Williams), for Southside Records, and, in 1991, the number-one single, Parker Project’s *Tears on My Pillow*, for Pagan Records. Hubbard also continued developing soundtracks for et al. films, several of which screened at Artspace the following year.

Cross-Pollination

In 1991, with painter John Reynolds, Hubbard curated another Artspace show, *Cross-Pollination: A Group Exhibition of Contemporary Maori-Pakeha Art* (31 July – 23 August 1991). *Cross-Pollination* comprised collaborations by ten Māori-Pākehā duos. Some pairings were obvious (graffiti-artists Darryl Thomson DLT and Otis Frizzell OPTO), some pre-existing (Bruce Sheridan and Rachael Churchward’s in-progress video clip for the Headless Chickens song “Cruise Control”), and one was fractious.²¹ A dashed line was drawn through the middle of Judy Darragh and Inia Taylor’s space, with each presenting their work on their own side.

Again, Hubbard invited Craw to co-author the accompanying handout. “Cross-Pollination: Hyphenated Identities and Hybrid Realities (or Alter/Native to What?)” would be similarly polemical. This time, their target was the idea of biculturalism as a relationship between two distinct, discrete identities. The piece drew on Craw’s scientific expertise and reflected Hubbard’s own fractured identity: “People say I’m part Māori, I ask ‘which part?’” In making its case for hybrid cultural identity, the text exemplified an anti-essentialism current in Pākehā art discussions, but out of step with Māori politics, where there was a pressing need to assert an unequivocal sense of identity and difference.

The concept of identity often presupposes an essential genealogical and ideological core where clear lines can be drawn between Maori and Pakeha, alternative and authorised, self and other. The further one is from the authorised centre, the less one is popularly thought to be able to fulfil one's role as the real artist, the real Maori, the real Pakeha, the real male, the real female, the real self. Identity is, however, something reinvented and reinterpreted in every time by each individual. Ethnic identity is often puzzling to the individual, reopening the self/other question by staging power relations.²²

The Artspace connection proved fruitful for Hubbard. In 1992, Priscilla Pitts was engaged to organise the New Zealand contingent for *ARX 3 Artists' Regional Exchange*, in Perth (1–15 April 1992). She invited Hubbard to work with her as co-commissioner. They chose Māori artists: Maureen Lander, Barnard McIntyre, Lisa Reihana, and Peter Robinson. During the *ARX* symposium, Hubbard made trouble. He recalls:

I had no idea what a keynote speech entailed. Stupid me thought it ... was meant to be a speech that directly addressed the business at hand, which was – there were no Aboriginal artists in *ARX-3*. I wrote out “A significant absence of an ABORIGINAL presence at *ARX-3*”, in felt pen on paper, and got a slide made up. So on the big night, I huffed and bluffed about the wonder of *ARX*, like some dummy ... when I had the trump card ... When I concluded my speech [on that slide], the natives cheered and the Australians booed.²³

Australian critic Julie Ewington was impressed:

How, in a cultural meeting of countries with post-colonial histories, where White Australians and Pakeha New Zealanders are evidently the remnants in South East Asia of the great colonising powers, are we to represent ourselves in good faith until this omission has been corrected ... The reaction of many Australian participants, a palpable backlash expressed variously, whether incoherently or in expressions of political “correctness”, puzzled some Asian participants ... any cultural exchange with South East Asian countries is doomed until Australians recognise, as the bi-cultural New Zealand delegation did, that we Europeans in this region have to earn our place here: this time neither conquest nor cash will do.²⁴

However, Hubbard was not always so PC. He could lurch between righteous and risqué. When Dick Frizzell staged his calculated-to-offend show, *Tiki*, at Auckland's Gow Langsford Gallery (27 October–14 November 1992), Hubbard and Craw wrote a catalogue essay. Frizzell's paintings rendered the Māori tiki form in a range of modern-art styles, playing into the appropriation debate that

had been inflamed by Rangihiroa Panoho's *Headlands* essay, "Maori: At the Centre, On the Margins".²⁵ Frizzell's show would be reproved by Merata Mita (who declared it "mindless caricature" and "ridiculous bile") and by Ngahuia Te Awekotuku.²⁶ Hubbard and Craw's essay – "Foreword: Icon (Irony): Not Maori Art" – was less a commentary on Frizzell's work than a refutation of the binary distinction ("Māori/Pākehā") on which they perceived the contemporary Māori art movement to be premised.

Biculturalism is an equation that attempts to balance success with failure, wealth with poverty, modern with Maori. This equation does not balance but don't it make our white skins brown? Where Maori meets with modern there are sparks, fires, flak, ack-ack. Hot touches and sparks open the way to new identities and novel possibilities outside the three surfaces of biculturalism: rank, row and class.

The tendency to erect borders, boundaries beyond which things seem to be different, taboo, tapu, together with the drive for political correctness and the desire for taking offence on behalf of the Tangata Whenua, assume the existence of some privileged indigenous essence imbued with the voice of authentic "Maoriness" and ethnic truth. In an age of media spaces where cultures melt and meld in moments such an authoritarian attitude makes little sense ... The oppositions of biculturalism will be resolved into a multiplicity of ethnic cultures where people will be free to be themselves without any identity crises.

With the debate over "What constitutes Maori Art?" almost reaching hysterical levels, it is good to find the work of Frizzell to be of a Maori nature or notion, but categorically "Not Maori Art".²⁷

Brownie Points

In January 1993, Hubbard delivered his proposal to Auckland City Art Gallery. He wanted to call his show *Brownie Points*. He explained:

Brownie Points are what Pakeha try to score by indulging Maori, and what Maori try to score by indulging Pakeha ... The focal point and clearly visible intention of the show is to promote contemporary Maori art as a strong, confident and unique arts practice that is exclusive to the indigenous people of Aotearoa.²⁸

The proposal was ambitious, drawing on Hubbard's contacts and other key players in the scene. He proposed a "small" catalogue with commissioned essays (he suggested writers: Lita Barrie, Luit Bieringa, Robert Leonard, Selwyn Muru, Rangihiroa Panoho, Priscilla Pitts, Francis Pound, Megan Tamati-Quennell, and Ngahuia Te Awekotuku); an indigenous film-and-video programme (curated by Lisa Reihana and Rachael Churchward); a contemporary Māori-music radio

programme (with BFM); a lunchtime performance programme of weaving, poetry, theatre, Polynesian drumming, and high-school culture groups; an evening lecture programme on Māori in relation to health and nutrition, alcohol and drugs, colonisation, sexism, the justice system, and the media; and a *Brownie Points* album (with Southside of Bombay, Emma Paki, Strawpeople, Moana and the Moa Hunters, and Upper Hutt Posse).

In his proposal, Hubbard says, “I realise that *Brownie Points* will not be considered a major exhibition by ACAG in 1994 and for this reason I have structured the entire programme to include outside curators, coordinators, and consultants to relieve the strain on the already overworked ACAG staff.”²⁹ He identified potential funding streams to support collateral events. Given the sprawling and obstreperous nature of the proposal, it’s not surprising that the Gallery was immediately nervous. The Gallery’s internal records describe Hubbard’s proposal as controversial and stipulate that the project will require close and careful management. Concerns were also raised about the inclusion of Emare Karaka, with whom the Gallery had been in dispute over a project commissioned for the 1990 sesquicentennial.³⁰

On 9 June 1993, Hubbard signed his “Guest Curatorial Agreement”, which acknowledged his working title, *Brownie Points*.³¹ Internally, staff already had reservations. The contract specified his role as “advisory” and limited to specific tasks: providing a list of artists, recommending works, and writing a curatorial essay (due some months prior to the exhibition opening). The Gallery also reserved the right to edit his essay, saying, if Hubbard was unhappy with the edit, he could have his name removed. The Gallery had final say. William McAloon, the Gallery’s Assistant Curator Contemporary Art, was appointed coordinating curator for the show. His exact role was unclear: was he to be Hubbard’s collaborator or controller? Either way, it would prove a bad marriage. McAloon’s style was to curate shows based on careful juxtapositions of works; Hubbard worked intuitively with artists he liked, typically enabling them to do as they pleased. McAloon was scholarly, precise, and keen to secure his place within the gallery system; Hubbard flew by the seat of his pants. In a memo to Johnston on 16 July, prior to their embarking on a national research tour of artists’ studios, McAloon documented his concerns with Hubbard’s proposal, appealing for a more rigorous rationale for the exhibition and artist selection to be provided. He questioned the choice of Ralph Hotere as the sole kaumātua figure for the show, suggesting other established Māori artists (women included) should be considered. He also indicated the staff’s reservations about the exhibition title, telling on Hubbard for proposing to elicit support for his title from the artists during studio visits – a process McAloon considered unacceptable.³²

After the trip, Hubbard submitted a revised proposal that addressed the concerns held by McAloon and others. He retitled the show *Untitled: An Exhibition of Contemporary Maori Art*, provided rationales for each artist’s inclusion, identified

possible existing works, and suggested artists who would benefit from funding to create new ones. With one exception, the artists listed (including Karaka) would be those in the final show, though Brett Graham was listed with a “?”.³³

Hubbard’s revised proposal framed his exhibition as an attempt to challenge and provoke debate about the perceptions of “identity and identification of the indigenous people of Aotearoa and how the identification process operates”. It developed an argument for the exhibition based largely on Hubbard’s own experience of “becoming Māori” as the common basis from which to consider the work of a new generation of contemporary Māori artists.

Some of the proposed artists in *Untitled* have grown up outside of the culture and have returned to find a place for themselves, some have been raised as Pakeha unaware that they have a Maori side to their family, some have prominent Pakeha features and are not physically accepted as Maori, while others have a small percentage of Maori blood which is considered too insignificant to qualify them as Maori. Some of the artists in *Untitled* simply do not fit in!

A focus of *Untitled* is to look at cultural contradictions, how individuals perceive themselves and how others perceive the individual. For instance: if you have a Maori parent and a non-Maori parent, does your physical likeness to either parent identify your cultural preference?, what if you don’t look like either of your parents?, is the preference of identify inherent, or inherited?, perhaps the dominant of your two parents will decide for you?, perhaps you have known only one parent, which means you know only one culture?, or perhaps you make up your own mind?!

Hubbard wrote individualised follow-up letters to each artist to be attached to a general information document, which included a summary of the show and of his experience and perspective as a curator. A sentence struck-out in Hubbard’s original was not included in the text sent to the artists:

Under the terms of my contract with the ACAG I do not have final say on the selection of artists and artworks, but I will do my best to get my way. As you will be aware, I have encountered difficulty with my working title, but I am prepared to compromise on this as long as we end up with something provocative and not a passive or decorative title that doesn’t serve any purpose other than saying nothing.³⁴

After their studio-visit tour, the curators called again on Brett Graham, who had been reluctant to participate. In a letter following their meeting, McAloon acknowledged that Graham had concerns about the exhibition and accepted his challenge to make it as successful as possible.³⁵ Graham eventually agreed to participate.

As the exhibition's potential scope became clear – and motivated by new internal policy directions signaling a stronger commitment to Māori art – the Gallery rescheduled the exhibition to June 1994, allowing more gallery space and making it part of the opening season for its new contemporary art annex.³⁶ (The New Gallery was expected to be completed in 1994, but wouldn't open until late 1995, prompting the exhibition to be rescheduled three times.)³⁷ In the meantime, Auckland Art Gallery staged *Te Waka Toi: Contemporary Maori Art from New Zealand*, an exhibition developed by Cliff Whiting and Sandy Adsett that toured US museums in 1992 and 1993. The exhibition provided the gallery with an opportunity to work more closely with Māori artists in an advisory capacity: Arnold Manaaki Wilson, Fred Graham and Emily Karaka were part of the “Mana Whenua representatives” group to meet with Johnston to advise on protocol for the exhibition opening; Graham and Kura Te Waru Rewiri would also work with Gallery staff on protocols for hosting and presenting public programmes. These included *Beyond the Boundaries*, Hubbard and Daniel Barnes's programme of New Zealand music videos, initially pitched in the *Brownie Points* proposal. At an exhibition debrief meeting Gallery staff recognised the clear benefits of strong Māori involvement in the delivery, interpretation and reception of the exhibition causing them to reflect on the prospect of *Untitled*:

would like to hear from George H... some concern about Maori reaction. Need to encourage Maori ownership of show. George needs support and possibly guidance. Need more communication from George. Need a meeting between artists and others.³⁸

McAloon was also kept busy with his own exhibition, *Parallel Lines: Gordon Walters in Context* (12 August – 2 October 1994), which, in part, defended Walters against Panoho's *Headlands* essay.³⁹

At this time, Hubbard had fingers in many pies – he was a player. What he lacked in formal qualifications, he made up for in chutzpah. Famously, when the QEII Arts Council asked him to tour visiting *Artforum* Executive Publisher Knight Landesman around Auckland galleries, he did his own thing. Considering the brief “a dumb idea”, he instead whipped up *Knight Landesman: One Hour Exhibition* at Teststrip (8 August 1993).⁴⁰

I got permission and support from the Teststrip board to knock up a huge one-hour warts-and-all show. Only the artists in the show were invited to the one-hour exhibition... After the show I took Knight to *Planet* magazine for afternoon tea to meet all the writers, editors, etc, and talk magazine talk... Knight was impressed with my scheduling and we've been good buddies ever since.

Planet was the bible of early 1990s Aotearoa/Auckland street style, and, for a

while, Hubbard was arts editor. For three issues, he compiled the art section, “Public Domain”, commissioning writing and advertising to match his curatorial interests and preferences. In *Planet 15* (Summer 1994), the section featured pieces written under pseudonyms, including Rita Carlos’s review of Hubbard’s *Re/Placing Australian Painting*, one of the opening shows at the new Teststrip on Karangahape Road.⁴¹

Stop Making Sense

As *Untitled* slouched along, Director Paula Savage commissioned Hubbard to develop a show for City Gallery Wellington. Originally titled *Impurities*, it would be a sequel to *Cross-Pollination*, returning to its model of Māori-Pākehā collaborations. Hubbard ultimately changed the title to *Stop Making Sense*, borrowed from the 1984 *Talking Heads* concert movie. He explained:

The grouping of these artists is a specific attempt to remove some of the strictures that I see limiting contemporary art in this country. This could be seen as absolute madness, and this is why I suggest the show be titled *Stop Making Sense* ... and will focus primarily on artistic similarities between Māori and Pakeha artists, so it is distinctly different than *Cross-Pollination*.⁴²

Was this true or misdirection? Some of the pairings in *Stop Making Sense* (11 April – 25 June 1995) were mischievous. Chris Heaphy was matched with appropriator Gordon Walters (in response to the *Headlands* furor) and righteous reverse-appropriator Shane Cotton danced with wicked Dick Frizzell (a nod to the *Tiki*-show controversy). Māori weaver Ema Lyon worked with ‘Queen of Kitsch’ Judy Darragh; Lyon’s grass skirt ending up on Darragh’s gyrating stand, like a life-sized hula-girl dashboard toy. Peter Roche and Robert Jahnke did not see eye to eye; Roche completed their work by smashing it with a hammer after the opening. And, in reply to Terrence Handscomb’s contribution – signs declaring “Ethically challenged white NZ Male/seek/PC sensitive dominatrix/to support culture punishment games” – Diane Prince provided a trestle table laden with faces shaped from parāoa Māori bread, with her own sign explaining “Freshly Baked Phoney Hone Paraoa 50c”. But Michael Parekowhai and Giovanni Intra had the last laugh. Their work *14 May 1968* reproduced a press photo of the May 1968 Paris riots twice, right-way and wrong way around – but you couldn’t tell which was right, or which was whose. (Parekowhai had been born on 13 May 1968, Intra on 15 May 1968.) Hubbard also included Reynolds and Hotere’s *Winter Chrysanthemums*, from *Cross-Pollination*, thinking it merited another outing.⁴³ Hubbard’s original proposal had imagined some intriguing pairings that didn’t eventuate: Peter Robinson and Billy Apple, Norman Te Whata and Allen Maddox, and Kura Te Waru-Rewiri and Fiona Pardington (then known as a Pākehā artist).

In his essay, “Who’s Pushing the Bandwagon Anyway?”, Hubbard argued that the show was not about the curator – “the artist is the star” – but spent most of the text talking about himself, not mentioning a single artist:

With *Stop Making Sense* I did not even get to see any finished art until I travelled to Wellington to install the show. This made my role as curator particularly exciting, if not a little anxious.

The role of the curator in the 1990s is like the job of a pop band manager. The manager secures the venue, oversees transport and freight arrangements, books the PA system, draws up fliers, compiles set lists and pushes talent on stage to wow the audience. The manager is never on stage as a performer or star, opting instead to take care of important backstage chores such as sweeping the floor and organizing toilet paper. *The artist is the star.*

My earlier shows, *Choice!* and *Cross-Pollination*, were largely the products of my personal agenda. I workshopped my cultural inadequacies in public, with the artists as vehicles for my confusion. In retrospect, I think that even though these shows were largely successful and launched a few stars, I should have worked in more with the artists instead of thinking about myself ...

With *Stop Making Sense* I am more interested in blurring the boundaries of Maori and Pakeha cultures, and curating a show where the audience will have to decide for themselves what is going on, instead of being bashed around the head by some high-flying politically correct curatorial rationale. Some will think that *Stop Making Sense* is a promotional tool for the outdated notion of biculturalism – it is not! With the fiscal envelope fiasco, I would prefer to think of Maori as *cross cultural* (cross and cultural) and not bi-cultural.

Art and Text reviewer Robin Neate acknowledged Hubbard's intention to make "an artists' exhibition" where "the artist is the star", but observed "unfortunately it isn't and they aren't".⁴⁴ Recognising "collaboration as a metaphor for biculturalism", Neate observed that "like some kind of Frankenstein's monster, the show's composite body of stitched-together parts lurched awkwardly about the gallery dumbly pondering the reason for its existence".⁴⁵ In a prophetic closing, he said "while Hubbard can be admired for his refreshing approach and non-curatorial scientific detachment, he may eventually have to take responsibility for his experiments before they turn on him too".⁴⁶

Niho Taniwha

In Auckland, Hubbard's experiments had begun to turn on him. Frustrated by the exhibition's protracted development, formal bureaucratic processes, and building delays, and busy with other projects, Hubbard became "tricky" and started to miss his contractual deadlines. The Gallery had a lot riding on the show politically, but staff felt they lacked the cultural authority to question or constrain their independent Māori curator.⁴⁷ This prompted the Gallery to action a long-discussed, long-overdue plan to establish a Māori advisory and

liaison group. The first meeting of Haerewa – comprising Elizabeth Ellis (Chair), Fred Graham, Ngahua Te Awekotuku, Kura Te Waru Rewiri, and Arnold Manaaki Wilson, with senior Gallery staff, Johnstone and Johnston – came on 13 May 1995, just five months before Hubbard’s show was due to open. The first issue its members raised, however, was not the show; they wanted a commitment from the Gallery to increase Māori staff.⁴⁸ Then, Gallery staff expressed their concerns with the show’s newly proposed title. *Niho Taniwha: Cutting Edge* – which referred to the “monster teeth” tukutuku and tāniko pattern – had been suggested by participating artist Maureen Lander during her studio visit. Arnold Wilson offered a conciliatory alternative: *Korurangi: New Dimensions in Maori Art*. “Korurangi” is “a Māori motif in which two spirals surround each other without meeting – a coexistence that recognises difference”. This new title was immediately embraced by Johnstone and Johnston.⁴⁹ Haerewa also discussed the possibilities of associating the exhibition with Maori Language Year and implementing a kaiārahi (Māori host) programme.⁵⁰

Haerewa met again on 21 June to discuss the exhibition specifically.⁵¹ McAloon and other Gallery staff attended, Hubbard didn’t. Gallery staff indicated their reluctance to issue agreements with the artists or to commission new works as Hubbard still hadn’t delivered key exhibition content. Haerewa, however, were primarily concerned with the kaiārahi programme, Māori-language tours, and the possibility of bilingual exhibition labels and education-outreach kits.

The following day, the Gallery dispatched the finalised artists’ agreements, which explained why Haerewa had offered their new title.⁵² *Niho Taniwha* was considered to be inappropriate due to its tribal specificity, whereas *Korurangi* gave the show a positive spin.⁵³ Hubbard and McAloon’s roles were also clarified, suggesting there had been confusion before. Hubbard’s responsibilities were listed, as per his contract; on behalf of the Gallery, McAloon would liaise with him and the artists in managing the exhibition overall.

However, the relationship between Hubbard and McAloon deteriorated further, as the erratic Hubbard failed to attend meetings or meet deadlines, most critically for the delivery of his essay. Soon after receiving a strongly worded letter from McAloon, he delivered a draft outline for “Systems of Survival”. In his response to the outline, McAloon questioned its sweeping generalisations and suggested Hubbard focus on the history of contemporary Māori art and the artists included in the exhibition – and furnish facts to back up his claims. McAloon’s response to a subsequent draft was less conciliatory, accusing Hubbard of hypocrisy and inconsistency.⁵⁴ McAloon’s strongest criticism was reserved, however, for Hubbard’s concluding comments:

Korurangi: New Maori Art is nothing new at all. Maori have always and will continue to produce artwork. It is within our nature. The last thing we need is continued Pakeha meddling, interfering, and dictatorial decision making

supposedly on our behalf in the name of the white man's rapidly fading notions of biculturalism. It is the management, and institutional policies of presentation and re/presentation that need immediate attention and critical consideration.

Interpreting this as a criticism of his role in the exhibition, McAloon declared it to be offensive and unpublishable.

Hubbard's draft was circulated among Haerewa members on 12 September 1996. In an attached memo, Elizabeth Ellis (Chair of Te Waka Toi at the time) reminded the committee that Te Waka Toi had pledged money to the publication and outlined its overall structure (including short texts on the works by Hubbard and McAloon, artists' statements, and biographical information).⁵⁵ She asked committee members, when reading the essay, to consider the publication an opportunity to highlight the importance of contemporary Māori art. Haerewa's advice was to commission Robert Jahnke – a critic of Hubbard's and an artist not included in his exhibition – to write an essay for the catalogue in response to the show. He was invited on 19 September to meet a 20 October deadline.⁵⁶

Korurangi

Korurangi: New Maori Art opened on 1 October 1995. There were endless dramas, before, during, and after the opening.⁵⁷ For instance, two *Korurangi* artists, Jacqueline Fraser and Emily Karaka – tipped off by Hubbard – voiced concern at the use of human excrement and blood in a Julia Morison work in a nearby gallery. Morison was pressed to remove components of the work during the *Korurangi* opening. The eventual compromise saw her open her show, in its entirety, a week later.

Of the *Korurangi* opening itself, Māori art historian, Jonathan Mane-Wheoki would later write:

Two Maori worlds, the urban and the marae, collided at the opening: the incongruity, the disjunction, between the magnificent powhiri in the afternoon ... and the exhibition was plainly evident in the bafflement of tangata whenua as they gaped at the artworks on display. To move from the powhiri into the exhibition was to move between two mutually unintelligible worlds.⁵⁸

The issue that gained most public attention concerned Diane Prince's work, *Flagging the Future: Te Kaitangata – the Last Palisade* (1995), where visitors were invited to walk on the New Zealand flag. After a complaint to police and red-hot media debate over the sanctity of the flag, the work was removed to avoid prosecution under the 1983 *Flags, Emblems, and Names Protection Act*. Later, Hubbard's erstwhile collaborator Robin Craw would write to the Gallery

requesting copies of relevant internal documents under the 1987 *Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act*.⁵⁹

The show closed on 26 November. Johnston would later declare, “for some there was a numbed sense of relief when the show ended”. She added:

It is clear that there is no substitute for Maori staff at all levels of an organisation which seeks to be bicultural in New Zealand today. With *Korurangi* such staff could have provided advice and support to both Maori and Pakeha involved in the show, and possibly averted some of the distressing conflicts and misunderstandings which occurred.⁶⁰

The Gallery acquired no works from the show. However, a major outcome would be the creation of a Kaitiaki Māori curator position, to which Ngahiraka Mason was appointed in 1998. When preparing her first major contemporary Māori art show, *Pūrangiāho: Seeing Clearly* (2001), she first called a hui to address “the spectre of *Korurangi*”.⁶¹

The Young Guns

Korurangi also defined a new generation of Māori artists. It would be Mane-Wheoki who gave this generation its name: “the Young Guns”. He introduced the term in a radio interview with Paul Bushnell shortly after the *Korurangi* opening.⁶² Robert Jahnke picked up on the phrase in his *Korurangi* essay, though the catalogue’s publication got postponed.⁶³

In the 1990s, the term “the Young Guns” suggested “young, aggressive and dynamic individuals”, “ambitious and talented young people”.⁶⁴ It played on the “YBAs”, the irreverent Young British Artists who had earlier captured world attention.⁶⁵ Linguist Neil Whitman attributes the term’s common proliferation to the 1988 Hollywood Western, *Young Guns*, whose youthful breakthrough cast included three second-generation Hollywood actors.⁶⁶ Here, it indicated the younger “guns” of a shooting party, who were immature, reckless, and quick to fire – an apt description for some *Korurangi* artists perhaps, but hardly all.

In a 1999 essay, Mane-Wheoki elaborated on his use of the term, specifying the Young Guns as Shane Cotton, Brett Graham, Michael Parekowhai, Lisa Reihana, and Peter Robinson. Mane-Wheoki said the Young Guns are “university art school trained” “urban sophisticates”, for whom the theoretical contexts of postmodernism and post-colonialism are central to the production and reception of their work. Here, he identifies only some of the artists in *Korurangi*. His reasons to include some over others is not qualified.

Mane-Wheoki was likely influenced by Jahnke’s essay in the *Korurangi* catalogue, where Jahnke argues that, while Māori artists and curators (in this case,

Hubbard) reserve the right to freedom of expression, their work can only become part of Te Ao Māori if the “tenor of their korero is comprehensible” to Māori ears.⁶⁷ Jahnke acknowledges the “audible” Māori qualities in the works of Cotton, Parekowhai, Reihana, and Robinson, yet dismisses the work of Chris Heaphy and Barnard McIntyre as “peripheral” and “silent”.⁶⁸ Here, he intimates that these artists are accommodated within the exhibition only by virtue of Māori ancestry. Jahnke does not deny their Māori identity, but reserves the right to criticise their statements as Māori artists.

In his essay, Jahnke insists: “*Korurangi* will not be the final curtain call for Maori art.”⁶⁹ By stressing the influence of Hubbard’s personal detribalised urban-based experience on the representation of Māori, Jahnke positions *Korurangi* as representing only one dimension of contemporary Māori art, suggesting other dimensions might be silenced if the show remained unchallenged.⁷⁰ Jahnke points to the work of Brett Graham, whose artist statement – the only one in te reo Māori – describes his carving *Kahukura* as a memorial to Rangimarie Hetet, the master Ngāti Maniapoto weaver who died a few months before the show.⁷¹ In her later years, Hetet was widely recognised within Te Ao Māori as the greatest living Māori artist.⁷² In *Korurangi*, Hubbard had positioned Ralph Hotere as a presiding kaumātua figure, singling out the Māori modernist who had gone his own way and had succeeded within the Pakeha mainstream. But, in the context of *Korurangi*, Graham’s sculpture trumped Hotere (and Hubbard) and laid claim to another history of Māori art.

Hubbard also issued his own critical response to his show. At Auckland’s Gallery 23a, he curated *Pilot Error* (3–21 October 1995) featuring mostly younger artists, including several Māori artists Hubbard said he would have liked to have included in *Korurangi*.⁷³ The show opened just days after *Korurangi* and ran concurrent to it.⁷⁴ Hubbard said the title was a joke about the curatorial debacle of *Korurangi*: “that show is called *Pilot Error* and questions the necessity of even having a curator. I should have called it ‘auto-pilot’ error.”⁷⁵

Despite all the attendant dramas, criticisms, and pontifications – or because of them – *Korurangi* was a major achievement. And, it was very much Hubbard’s show – his initiative and crew. It registered the state of play in contemporary Māori art in the mid-1990s, framing a new generation of Māori artists in the country’s premier gallery. Hubbard got so much right; so many of the artists he selected went on to be consequential, canonical figures in New Zealand art. But *Korurangi* also exposed tensions – between Māori and Pākehā and between Māori and Māori – as to the future course of contemporary Māori art.

And then ...

Although the Gallery complained about Hubbard’s lack of professionalism on their show, he was otherwise extraordinarily productive. Over the course of 1995–6, he was not only behind two major museum shows (*Stop Making Sense*

and *Korurangi*). He also did some teaching at Unitec, continued his collaborations with et al., and, with Simon Chesterman, briefly ran Spot, a gallery in the Lister Building, showing Howard Matil, Anton Parsons, Reuben Paterson, and Ronnie van Hout. And he continued programming at 23a, where, in addition to *Pilot Error*, he orchestrated the painting show, *Quartet: Four to the Fore* (16 May–1 June 1996), showcasing James Kirkwood, Matil, Paterson, and Australian Elizabeth Pulie. Hubbard's PR infamy at this time was noted by reviewer Anna Miles:

the opening ... was broadcast later that evening on TV3's *Nightline*. The coverage was inspired by curator George Hubbard's promise of a hotdog stand at the opening. Predictably there were no hotdogs.⁷⁶

In 1995, Hubbard was also one of three Māori creatives invited to pitch a design concept for New Zealand Post's "Māori Craft" stamps. His proposal – to generate digital representations of generic traditional Māori-craft objects – prevailed.⁷⁷ He worked with Rongotai Lomas to make six images – kete (basket), taiaha (weapon), tāniko (twining), pounamu (greenstone), hue (gourd), and korowai (cloak).⁷⁸ It was an odd mix of old school and new. The stamps would be issued in 1996.

In January 1996, about two months after the close of *Korurangi* on 26 November 1995, Hubbard submitted a draft of his catalogue essay, "Systems of Survival", to the new Auckland Art Gallery Director, Chris Saines. But, it was not accepted. When the catalogue was released in October 1996, a year after the opening, it included a candid account of the process by Alexa Johnston, Robert Jahnke's essay, and the interview with Hubbard by Kura Te Waru Rewiri, titled "Brownie Points":

Kura Te Waru Rewiri: I think that *Korurangi* will open up dialogue that even you will have to be prepared to listen to.

George Hubbard: I know that is true.⁷⁹

Out

In 1997, somewhat burnt and burned-out, Hubbard escaped to Sydney, "to be alone", he said.⁸⁰ But it was not in his nature to keep to himself. That year, he organised three one-day solo shows in a former dry-cleaning factory in Newtown, with the artists Sophie Coombs, Lindy Lee, and Elizabeth Pulie, calling the space Spot Sydney.

Over the years, he went on to work in various capacities for Sydney dealer galleries, into whose programmes he occasionally introduced New Zealand artists. In 2002, he scored Daniel Malone a show at Mori Gallery; in 2005, et al. joined Yuill | Crowley; and, in 2015, Murray Cammick went to Darren Knight Gallery. From 2012, with Robert Lake, Hubbard also organised shows at East Sydney Doctors, a doctors' waiting room opposite the National Art School, presenting New Zealander Anton Parsons, and Australians Elizabeth Pulie, Tamara Mendels, Sadie Chandler, and the veteran Gunter Christmann (who would be picked up by Sydney

gallery The Commercial). In 2016, Hubbard began working with emerging artist Dionysos Avramides. Hubbard also occasionally acquired and traded art. (He has just sold a Tracey Moffatt photo to Te Papa, buying a Robert Macpherson painting with the proceeds.)

Hubbard recently began making his own art as “Sooty”, mixing quotes and pithy semi-autobiographical quips with appropriated images, including Larry Clark *Tulsa* photos, disco-album covers, and shots of the models Donyale Luna and Diogo De Castro Gomes – Sooty’s avatars. These works have been formatted for various online platforms: email, Facebook, and Instagram. On 8 September 2017, the Sooty project was presented live at *Track and Feel*, an “art bar” event at City Gallery Wellington, which Hubbard curated as part of the *Tai Ahiahi///Tai Awatea: Curating Contemporary Māori Art* symposium, where he was also a speaker.⁸¹ Honouring the symposium format, the work was a PowerPoint presentation, titled *Powerpoint&Plug*, with Hubbard’s texts read by Anna-Marie White. Those familiar with Hubbard would have understood the work as a mihi, a mode of Māori oratory, reintroducing him to the Wellington art scene:

Apart from mood swings, paranoia, insomnia, psychosis, high blood pressure, a fast heart rate, panic attacks and cognitive impairments, Sooty enjoyed relatively good health.

It was a homecoming, of sorts.

Change Agent

In the 1990s, Hubbard helped change the course of New Zealand art. His curatorial practice marked the turn from the strident political tenor of Māori art in the 1980s to the more subjective, individualised positions of the 1990s. His story is also one of enculturation; he discovered and explored his Māori identity *through* curating. His biography reveals *both* the negative social forces that affected his identity (like other Māori of his generation) *and* how he benefitted from efforts to change the future of Māori.

Suggested by Hubbard, the tongue-in-cheek title of our essay – “The Hand that Rocked the Cradle” – raises the question of *agency* in curatorial work.⁸² Hubbard can be considered a heroic figure but also a tragic one.⁸³ His entrepreneurial flair and charisma endeared him to many, enabling him to bridge Māori art and Pākehā avantgarde-art scenes. But, his dispossessed identity and lack of formal education were both his points of difference and his Achilles heels, allowing him to be overruled and controlled. When Auckland City Art Gallery decided to recruit him in the wake of *Choice!*, he was a known quantity. But, during *Korurangi*’s protracted development, the Gallery changed its mind about what it wanted. In that moment, Hubbard discovered he lacked the authority and support to defend his project. His position was always precarious – subject to the whims of patronage.

While Hubbard is remembered for his Māori art exhibitions, he was not a “Māori curator”, as we understand it now. He was an auteur, working from a personal position, workshopping his issues in public, as he admitted. There hasn’t been anyone like him subsequently. Since *Korurangi*, contemporary Māori art curating has become a formalised, specialised discipline, exemplified by in-house Māori art curator positions at Te Papa and Auckland Art Gallery.⁸⁴ The expectations under which these curators operate are very different to those under which Hubbard worked, rose to fame, and made his contribution, in the “wild west” bubble of mid-1980s, mid-1990s “biculturalism”. In fact, his legacy is precisely his acutely self-conscious “biculturalism” – it was never clear which side he was on. However, what has been called for since, by both Māori and Pākehā art institutions, is a clearly defined and explicit commitment to “Māori”. Could the system now tolerate a curator of Hubbard’s ilk, someone more likely to rock the boat than rock the cradle?

Our account is largely based on email correspondence between George Hubbard and Anna-Marie White throughout 2017, which is the source of any unreferenced Hubbard quotes. While we have fact checked as much as we could, at points our account will only be as reliable as the memories of our subject and other informants. For contributing in various ways, we thank Jim Barr and Mary Barr, Peter Brunt, Megan Dunn, Brett Graham, Catherine Hammond, Terrence Handscomb, “Tail” Peter Ireland, Aaron Lister, Athol McCredie, Darcy Nicholas, Garry Nicholas, Ralph Paine, Lindsay Park, Priscilla Pitts, Lisa Reihana, Peter Roche, and Tim Woon. During the period addressed, Wellington City Art Gallery changed its name to City Gallery Wellington and Auckland City Art Gallery changed its name to Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki; we used the names that were current in the moments being discussed.

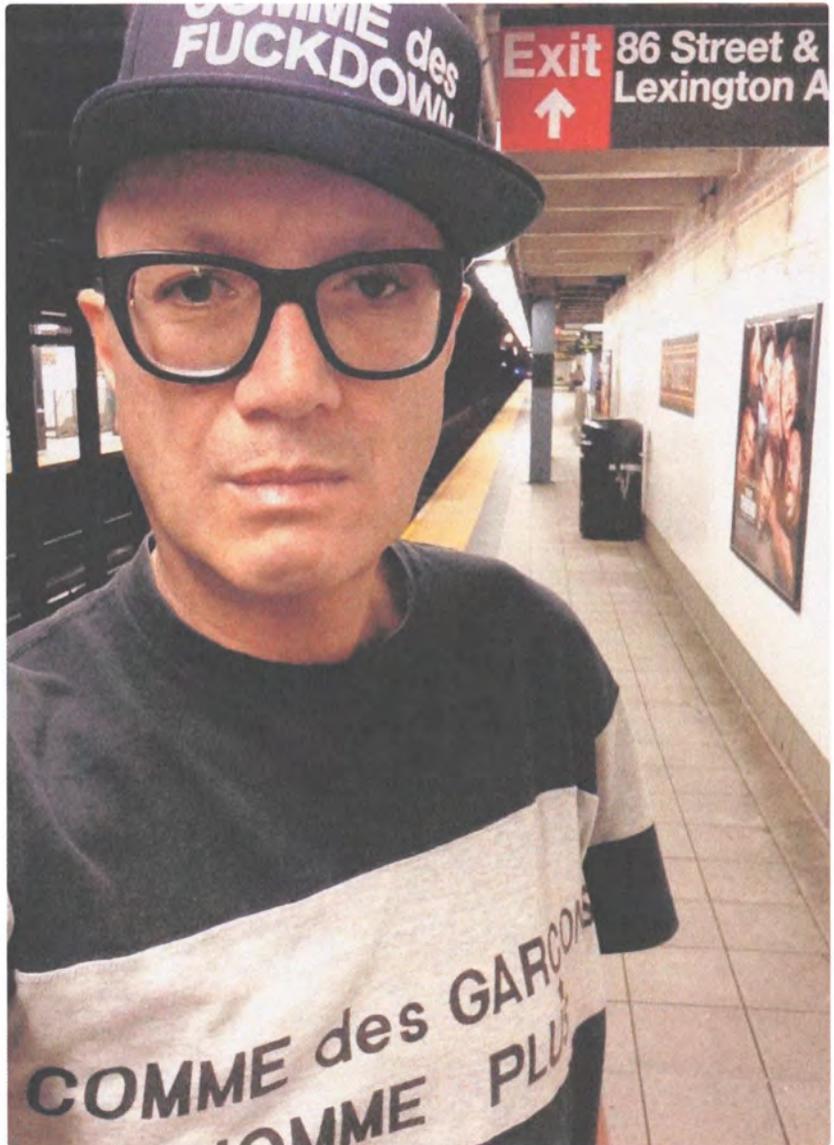
- In 1995, Hubbard recalled: “As I was adopted by English parents, I grew up thinking that I too was English. It was not until 1973 at an Upper Hutt intermediate school that I discovered much to my alarm that I was not Anglo-Saxon. I had just filled out my census form when the teacher called me to the front of the class to explain to everyone why I had not listed myself as Māori. I was very annoyed as I have always been pale and legally I am English. So, this is part of the reason why my curating has primarily revolved around ‘what constitutes Māori?’” *Stop Making Sense: Who’s Pushing the Bandwagon Anyway?* (Wellington: City Gallery Wellington, 1995), np. Here, Hubbard may be referring to a school survey, as there were censuses in 1971 and 1976, but not 1973.
- Hubbard and Terrence Handscomb both stress the importance at this time of two Wellington hairdressing salons, Bananas and Guava. See also Antonio Fernandez, “The Anti-Fashion Years”, *Planet*, no. 15 (Summer 1994), 44.
- The photos were taken for a book: Mark Cross and Peter Black, *Street Action Aotearoa* (Auckland: Arohanui Publications, 1985).
- Of the Imperious Dominion of the Thing over Language* (1986) was purchased from the artist in 1986.
- Gregory Burke to Anna-Marie White, 19 June 2017.
- Darcy Nicholas was reported as likening *Te Maori* and *Maori Art Today* to “twin canoes ... the canoe representing the arts today to complement the canoe of the arts represented by *Te Maori*”. He added, “for some, particularly non-Maori, viewers it was a challenge to their perception of ‘Maori Art’ and the galleries now need to address the contemporary Maori art scene in a responsible way”. *Maori Art Today*, exhibition flyer (Christchurch: CSA Gallery, c.1987), Ngā Puna Waihangā: Administrative Files, 1/4: Newsletters, National Library of New Zealand, Wellington, MS-Papers 9430-009.
- Stacey Hanham, “The Te Maori Exhibition: An Examination of Its Organisation and Impacts as Seen by Those Who Developed the Exhibition”, MA thesis (Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington, 2000), 36.
- Assembled at short notice, the first *Maori Art Today* exhibition featured just 18 artists. For the Dunedin and Christchurch shows, which featured 27 artists, artists had time to create new work. By Auckland, the number had swollen to 47. Ngā Puna Waihangā: Administrative Files, 1/4, Newsletters, National Library of New Zealand, Wellington, MS-Papers 9430-009. The Auckland show was reviewed by Amy Brown, “Maori Art Today”, *Art New Zealand*, no. 45 (Summer 1987–8), 52–5.
- Kahungunu ki Wairarapa Festival of Maori Arts Souvenir Programme* (Masterton: Wairarapa Arts Centre, 1987).
- See Hubbard and Upper Hutt Posse’s 1988 interview with Dick Driver for the TV music show *Radio with Pictures*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJEX4-dv4E; also F91359, Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision, Wellington.
- The blurb that accompanies the film on the *Circuit* website is clear: “The young boy in the film was in the care of the brothers of St John of God at the time of filming. Marylands School, more recently, was the centre of a number of sex abuse cases. A non-profit trust, the Survivors of Sex Abuse Trust, worked with many of the victims. Staff at the school were involved in 121 sex abuse allegations with about eighty former students.” www.circuit.org.nz/film/the-story-of.
- Initially, Hubbard didn’t want any “big-boy male sculptors”, meaning the type that dominated the Māori art scene in the late 1980s. He was, however, persuaded by Pitts’s recommendation. He claims he left the Artspace key out in the drain, so Parekowhai could view the show privately and determine the nature of his contribution – as had the other artists.

13. "Beyond Kia Ora: The Paraesthetics of Choice!", *Antic*, no. 8 (1990), 28. Hubbard and Craw borrowed the term "Paraesthetics" from a book on French poststructuralist aesthetics, David Carroll's *Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987).
14. Six months before *Choice!*, Julian Dashper exhibited his own work with a selection of works from the Auckland City Art Gallery collection in his 1989 Auckland City Art Gallery show *Art Is Choice: Artist's Choice*.
15. These visitor numbers, drawn from the *Choice!* visitors book, are cited in Lara Strongman's "The Awful Stuff": Collin McCahon, High Art, and the Common Culture 1947–2000", PhD thesis (Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington, 2013), 180.
16. Giovanni Intra, "Being Brown, Making Flutes, and Dying", *Stamp*, no. 12 (August 1990), 4–5.
17. Stephen Zepke, "Difference without Binary Oppositions: A Chance for a Choice!", *Antic*, no. 8 (1990), 29.
18. "Against Purity: Three Word Sculptures by Michael Parekōwhai", *Art New Zealand*, no. 59 (Winter 1991), 52–4.
19. Robert Jahnke, "Dialogue: Talking Past Each Other", in *Culturalism, Multiculturalism, and the Visual Arts*, papers presented at the 1994 Auckland Conference of the Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools, ed. J. Holmes (Hobart: University of Tasmania, 1995), 11.
20. For more on *Choice!*, see Peter Brunt, "Since 'Choice!': Exhibiting the 'New Māori Art'", in *On Display: New Essays in Cultural Studies* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2004), 215–43; and Lara Strongman, "The Awful Stuff", 179–98.
21. The full lineup was Rachael Churchward/Bruce Sheridan, Ralph Hotere/John Reynolds, Helen Kingi/Deborah Smith, Rongotai Lomas/Matthew Palmer, Michael Parekōwhai/Monique Redmond, Lisa Reihana/Deborah Lawler-Dormer, Jenny Rushton/Charlotte Handy, Ngawalerua Simpson/Miranda Dempster, Inia Taylor/Judy Darragh, and Darryl Thomson/Otis Frizzell.
22. As Hubbard and Craw's *Choice!* essay had been republished in *Antic*, their *Cross-Pollination* essay would be republished in *Midwest*, the journal of New Plymouth's Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, edited by Robert Leonard and John McCormack. Robin Craw and George Hubbard, "Cross-Pollination: Hyphenated Identities and Hybrid Realities (or Alter/Native to What?)", *Midwest*, no. 3 (1993): 32.
23. George Hubbard, email to Priscilla Pitts, 29 May 2017.
24. Julie Ewington, "Overarching Concerns", *Art Monthly Australia*, no. 49 (May 1992), 9.
25. Rangihira Panoho, "Maori: At the Centre, On the Margins", *Headlands: Thinking through New Zealand Art* (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1992), 123–34. Panoho's title echoes a line in Hubbard and Craw's *Choice!* essay: "Maori art is moving from the margins to the centre."
26. Ngahua Te Awekotuku (interviewed by Peter Shand) and Merata Mita, "Tiki'd Off", *Stamp* (December 1992–January 1993), np.
27. George Hubbard and Robin Craw, "Foreword: Icon (Irony): Not Maori Art", Dick Frizzell: "Tiki" (Auckland: Gow Langsford Gallery, 1992), np. Robert Jahnke issued a heavy critique of the exhibition and this understanding of biculturalism in his 1994 conference paper, "Dialogue", 13–7.
28. George Hubbard, "Brownie Points (Bi-Culturalism and Its Consequences)", proposal, January 1993, *Korurangi* exhibition file, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
29. Hubbard, "Brownie Points".
30. For an account of this, see Witi Ihimaera, "Karaka", *Art New Zealand*, no. 60 (Spring 1991), 78–81, 109.
31. Auckland City Art Gallery, "Guest Curatorial Agreement: Peter George Hubbard also known as Michael David Murupaenga", 9 June 1993, *Korurangi* exhibition file.
32. William McAloon to Alexa Johnston, 16 July 1993, *Korurangi* exhibition file.
33. George Hubbard, "Untitled: An Exhibition of Contemporary Maori Art", proposal, 7 September 1993, *Korurangi* exhibition file. Darryl Thomson DLT was the only listed artist not included in the final show.
34. George Hubbard, "Correspondence to Artists Post Studio Visit", 7 September 1993, *Korurangi* exhibition file.
35. William McAloon to Brett Graham, 9 September 1993, *Korurangi* exhibition file.
36. In 1993, the Gallery initiated a strategic-planning process in response to the findings of the 1991 Auckland City Council Arts and Heritage Group report, which was amalgamated into Auckland City's vision document *Setting Sail: Strategies for Auckland City: Towards 2020* (1993). The process included establishing a Steering Group that included a Māori representative, Pauline Kingi, and led to the appointment of Elizabeth Ellis to the Auckland City Art Gallery Enterprise Board in December 1993.
37. Alexa Johnston, "The Pathway to Korurangi", 7 *Korurangi: New Maori Art* (Auckland Art Gallery, 1996). The *Korurangi* exhibition file offers a series of exact dates.
38. *Te Waka Toi* exhibition file, E.H. McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
39. "Director's Report", 21 July 1994, Auckland Art Gallery Enterprise Board Trust papers, E.H. McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
40. See *Teststrip: A History of an Artist-Run Space* (Auckland: Clouds, 2008), 61. Hubbard would maintain his connection with Landesman, attending *Artforum* functions on visits to New York, hobnobbing with the likes of choreographer Michael Clark, artist Sherrie Levine, and filmmaker John Waters.
41. The artists were Vicente Bruton, Matthew Johnson, Stephen Little, John Nixon, Elizabeth Pulle, Robert Pulie, Nike Savvas, and Janet Shanks.
42. George Hubbard, *Stop Making Sense*, proposal cover letter, 3 November 1994, *Stop Making Sense* exhibition file, City Gallery Wellington.
43. The full line-up: Rachael Churchward/Kirsty Cameron, Shane Cotton/Dick Frizzell, Jacqueline Fraser/Bill Hammond, Haere Mai Marching Team/Ann Shelton, Eugene Hansen/Anton Parsons, Chris Heaphy/Gordon Walters, Ralph Hotere/John Reynolds, Robert Jahnke/Peter Roche, Charles Koroneho/Dion Workman, Ema Lyon/Judy Darragh, Barnard McIntyre/Karl Maughan, Michael Parekōwhai/Giovanni Intra, Diane Prince/Terrence Handscomb, Lisa Reihana/Julian Dashper, and Dean Strickland/Denys Watkins.
44. Robin Neate, "Stop Making Sense", *Art and Text*, no. 52 (1995): 85.
45. Neate, 85.
46. Neate, 86.
47. Johnston, *Korurangi*, "The Pathway to Korurangi", 7–11.
48. Auckland City Art Gallery, "Notes from the First Meeting of the Maori Consultants to the Auckland City Art Gallery", 18 May 1995, *Korurangi* exhibition file.
49. Robert Jahnke, "Korurangi: New Maori Art: A Commentary", *Korurangi: New Maori Art*, 40.
50. The Gallery piloted a kaiārahi programme during *Taiarohia: Te Waka Toi*, 30 January–1 April 1994.
51. Auckland City Art Gallery, "Korurangi [sic]: New Maori Art Meeting Report", 21 June 1995, *Korurangi* exhibition file.
52. At this point, Shane Cotton, Jacqueline Fraser, Brett Graham, Emily Karaka, Maureen Lander, Diane Prince, and Lisa Reihana were commissioned to make new works.

53. The files offer no explanation for the subtitle changing from *New Dimensions in Maori Art* to *New Maori Art*. The show's claim to represent "New Maori Art" became an issue. See Jahnke, "Korurangi: New Maori Art: A Commentary."
54. William McAloon, "Notes to the First Draft of 'Systems of Survival'", *Korurangi* exhibition file.
55. Elizabeth Ellis, "Memo to Haerewa re: Korurangi Catalogue Essay by George Hubbard", 12 September 1995, *Korurangi* exhibition file.
56. Alexa Johnston to Robert Jahnke, 27 September 1995, *Korurangi* exhibition file.
57. Alexa Johnston, "The Pathway to Korurangi", 7–11.
58. Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, "Korurangi/Toihoukura: Brown Art in White Spaces", *Art New Zealand*, no. 78 (Autumn 1996), 47.
59. Robin Craw to Chris Saines, 15 October 1996, *Korurangi* exhibition file.
60. Alexa Johnston, "The Pathway to Korurangi", 11.
61. Ngahiraka Mason, 16 May 2004, quoted in Anna-Marie White, "Māori Curatorship at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki 1998–2001", MA thesis (Palmerston North: Massey University, 2006), 11. The subtitle for that exhibition, *Pūrangiaho: Seeing Clearly*, resonates with a line in Johnston's *Korurangi* essay: "On the anniversary of the opening of *Korurangi*, its significance as a landmark exhibition for the Gallery can now be clearly seen." Alexa Johnston, "The Pathway to Korurangi", 7.
62. This and other interviews (including one with Hubbard) were compiled into a radio programme *The Rise and Rise of Young Maori Artists: The Young Guns*, National Radio Concert Programme, 30 October 1995. Raw interview audio recordings are held at Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision, Wellington, catalogue number: 21998.
63. Robert Jahnke, "Korurangi", 41.
64. Neal Whitman, "What Triggered the Rise of 'Young Guns'?", www.visualthesaurus.com/cm/dictionary/what-triggered-the-rise-of-young-guns/
65. The term "Young British Artists" was first coined in 1992, and abbreviated to "YBAs" in 1996. See "Young British Artists (YBAs)", www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/y/young-british-artists-ybas.
66. The actors included Donald Sutherland's son Kiefer Sutherland and Martin Sheen's sons Emilio Estevez and Charlie Sheen.
67. Robert Jahnke, "Korurangi", 42.
68. Jahnke, 43.
69. Jahnke, 45.
70. *Korurangi: New Dimensions in Maori Art* was the title suggested by Arnold Manaaki Wilson at the 13 May 1995 Haerewa meeting. There is no evidence as to who chose the ultimate subtitle *New Maori Art* or why. The change became significant. In his catalogue essay, "Korurangi: New Maori Art: A Commentary," Jahnke criticises Hubbard for his claim to the "new", citing a long history of innovation in Māori art. But it's a point Hubbard himself made in "Systems of Survival".
71. *Korurangi: New Maori Art*, 16.
72. The Ngā Puna Waihangā annual hui in 1990 at Oparure Marae, Te Kuiti, was dedicated to Rangimarie Hetet. It is the only instance of a Ngā Puna Waihangā hui being dedicated to an individual. Ngā Puna Waihangā, 'Administrative files 1/4, Newsletters', National Library of New Zealand, MS-Papers 9430-009. In 1994, Hetet was also presented with a Te Waka Toi lifetime achievement award (their highest honour) at Auckland Art Gallery in conjunction with the exhibition *Te Waka Toi*. Her last cloak, made before her eyesight deteriorated, was also included in that staging of the exhibition. *Te Waka Toi* exhibition file.
73. Gallery 23a was run by Derek Gehring and Chris McCafferty.
74. *Pilot Error* included Stella Brennan, Lillian Budd (et al.), Jacob Faul, Grant Hall, Eugene Hansen, Giovanni Intra, Esther Leigh, Daniel Malone, Howard Matil, Robin Neate (the *Stop Making Sense* reviewer), Ani O'Neill, Reuben Paterson, Ronnie van Hout, Leon Wilson, and Dion Workman. The young Māori artists Hubbard would have liked to have included in *Korurangi* were Hansen and Paterson. As an aside, Paterson and Ngahiraka Mason were both Gallery docents during *Korurangi*.
75. *The Rise and Rise of Young Maori Artists: The Young Guns*.
76. Anna Miles, "Stylistic Ventures: Quartet in Auckland", *Art New Zealand*, no. 81 (Summer 1996–7), 64.
77. 1996 NZ Post Stamp Issue: Maori Art Correspondence File, New Zealand Post Museum Collection, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.
78. Hubbard explained: "Traditional Māori arts flourish today although new materials, tools and international influences have introduced an added new dimension to traditional design. Twentieth century technology produced these stamp designs – all are original images created on the computer screen and are therefore not aligned to any specific tribal area but are representative of Māori culture as a whole." "Historical Stamp Issues: Māori Craft: Issue Information", <https://stamps.nzpost.co.nz/new-zealand/1996/maori-craft>.
79. Kura Te Waru Rewiri, "Brownie Points: An Interview with George Hubbard", *Korurangi: New Maori Art*, 39.
80. McAloon left the Gallery at the end of 1998, not returning to a gallery curatorial position until 2005, when he was appointed Curator of Historical New Zealand Art at Te Papa, when the art department was under the leadership of Jonathan Mane-Wheoki.
81. *Track and Feel* also featured Dean Hapeta as DJ and a Dion Avramides installation.
82. William Ross Wallace's 1865 poem "The Hand that Rocks the Cradle is the Hand that Rules the World" praises motherhood as the preeminent force for change in the world. (The name of Hubbard's gallery, Cupboard Space, could be a nod to kind motherhood, via the English nursery rhyme "Old Mother Hubbard".) On the other hand, *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* is a 1992 American film, a thriller about a psychopathic nanny out to destroy a naive woman and steal her family. The title also recalls 1930s New Zealand Prime Minister Michael Joseph Savage's project to create a welfare state to care for citizens "from the cradle to the grave".
83. In retrospect, Hubbard seems to have been a sacrificial lamb for future Auckland Art Gallery exhibitions developed closely with Haerewa, including Roger Blackley's *Goldie* (1998) and Ngahiraka Mason's *Pūrangiaho: Seeing Clearly* (2001).
84. In addition to these positions, Rangihira Panoho was Curator Maori at Whanganui's Sarjeant Gallery, 1988–91, and Reuben Friend was Curator of Maori and Pacific Art at City Gallery Wellington, 2009–13.

George Hubbard's curatorial essay for *Korurangi* was not published in the exhibition catalogue produced by Auckland Art Gallery in 1996. Instead Kura Te Waru Rewiri interviewed him for the catalogue. Written without Robin Craw, Hubbard's essay represents something of an about face, as he seems to turn his back on his former arguments founded on postmodern hybridity. He even borrows the term "white conductor", which Robert Jahnke had once used in criticising him. Was he missing the theory muscle Craw had lent him earlier, had he changed his mind, or was some other strategy afoot? Who was he writing to and for? Was he appeasing his critics or pulling the rug on them? "Systems of Survival" is published here for the first time.

— Anna-Marie White and Robert Leonard



Systems of Survival

(unpublished, 1995–6)

George Hubbard

George Hubbard
Selfie, Manhattan, 2013

“The white man arrived, and we were ruined!”

So the renowned orator Selwyn Murupaenga described the countless betrayals and broken promises which pockmark the bicultural byways and multicultural highways leading to today’s situation in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Despite many decades of calamities and tragedies for our people the status of Maori Art in the national and international artworlds has never been higher than today. From ancient and traditional taonga Maori, mainly carved in stone or wood, to contemporary work in every variety of media, Maori art as a separate and distinct entity plays a crucial role in the reclamation and affirmation of Maori ethnicity and identity in this moment of a powerful surge of Maori activism and culture.

With the groundbreaking success of *Once Were Warriors* (a feature film which was Maori written, produced, cast, and featured an original Maori soundtrack), the rest of the world has been able to experience an accurate portrayal of the seedy side of how, through no choice of their own, some Maori are forced to subsist. The exhibition *Cultural Safety*, shown in Europe, featured prominent Maori artists Jacqueline Fraser, Michael Parekowhai, and Peter Robinson, and was met with much critical scrutiny. In an art system which has been administered almost totally by non-Maori, the opportunity for Maori to determine their own place within the larger art world has obviously been restricted. Most institutional Maori exhibitions have been curated by Pakeha, from a patronisingly Pakeha perspective. Perhaps this is because Maori art has not been considered to meet with the predominant Pakeha high-art flavour of the day.

A substantial proportion of Maori art makers have had to make do with marae, community centres, and government funded “alter/native” spaces as venues for the exhibition of their art, without adequate resources, without the benefit of adequate administrative systems, and without the benefit of the wider critical audience. This ghettoisation is also applied in the areas of music and television. Commercial radio rarely plays contemporary Maori music; it is banished to iwi and student radio. Maori television programmes are ghettoed to the early-morning Sunday slot and are regularly dropped in favour of the more popular rugby-league games.

However, earnest efforts have been made by some institutions over the last five years to readdress this unfortunate predicament by employing Maori in decision-making roles. But it was inevitable that the relocation of Maori art from the margins to the centre and the rejuvenation of Maori art making would attract the attention of art critics, historians, and theorists – mainly Pakeha cultural voyeurs.

According to Francis Pound, “contemporary Maori art... has become a hot critical topos”, while Robert Leonard declares that “‘contemporary Maori art’ is a contested term” and that “there is disagreement on where to draw the line on what kinds of work can be admitted as ‘contemporary Maori art’”. Even more restrictive and prescriptive is William McAloon’s recent statement (as paraphrased by Peter Shaw) that “the relatively common perception that Maori art has a particular set of qualities which define it” apparently demonstrates “how problematic such essentialist definitions are”.

From a Maori perspective, these are the comments of outsiders to the culture, and they might even be thought ignorant and impertinent. Are outsider interpretations and evaluations of Maori art to continue to be preferred and privileged over insider accounts? Are Maori to be forever prisoners of the Pakeha gaze and forced to perform to the batons of the white conductors?

There is no longer a place in this debate for such critical agendas based on the importation of irrelevant theorists like Homi K. Bhabha, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault in the name of cross-cultural solidarity and bicultural hybridity. Such intellectual constructs have no meaning for Maori, whose sovereignty is guaranteed by the uniqueness and singularity of Aotearoa New Zealand.

While post-colonialist curators and transcultural commentators may yearn for a synthetic “space between”, there is instead an endless proliferation of fields of difference and valleys of deceit. Meanwhile, other Pakeha critics can only write of the history of New Zealand painting and sculpture but Maori know that there is an Aotearoan Art. An art not of essence but of experience – the experience of a walk of heartache amidst hypocrisy and a signed (this is correct, it is not a misspelling for signed!) Treaty of Waitangi in the search for justice.

Pakeha curatorial theory imposes itself in such an arrogant manner that a new reading of the past and present is required to map the way to the future. So what is contemporary Maori art? The 1966 survey show *New Zealand Maori Culture and the Contemporary Scene* (curated by Buck Nin, and significantly exhibited in a museum rather than an art gallery) defined it as modernist work produced by young Maori who were venturing out from their cultural base into the “international” (i.e. Western) art world in order to overcome an ambiguous position between pre-history and modernity. By the late 1970s, there was a visible shift, a venturing back into tradition and into the past.

In 1984, *Te Maori* packaged and marketed our treasures as though they had little connection with the present. *Taonga Maori: Treasures of the New Zealand Maori People*, an exhibition that toured in Australia in 1989–90, expanded on *Te Maori*'s repertoire of time-honoured carving by men to include fibre arts by women and works by contemporary sculptors and painters. All of a sudden, the story of Maori artmaking was relocated within a timeframe of fifty to sixty generations, and reconstituted as a timeless continuum. This made nonsense for Maori such foreign ideas and terms as “pre-European”, “postcolonial”, and “postmodern.”

Maori Art is commonly understood as genre and unified corpus in terms of shared repositions of indigenous images and artistic practices and was from the first settler contact bound up in a wager of cultural identity. Craft arts became the paradigm of political action. Nineteenth-century Maori figurative and folk art was a contestatory expression from one site of imperial intervention. Parody, counterknowledge, and counter history (in)formed these (mis)appropriations and (mis)recognitions into something both ephemeral and lasting.

Around 1926, the Maori Board of Ethnology was set up with the express purpose of initiating schools specifically for the teaching of Maori arts and crafts. This marked the recommencement of a redefinition of Maori cultural production as “art” rather than “ethnological curiosity”. By the early 1940s, the fine white art journal *Art in New Zealand* had published several articles on Maori art.

The first generation of Maori recruited for training in the teachers colleges as art specialists had largely been drawn from rural areas and were part of the post-war migration to the cities. Their art reaffirmed their iwi base and retained recognisable elements of traditional design.

More recently, Maori have been exploring new ideas and mediums, which can leave the viewer baffled as the work does not often have an obvious Maoriness about it. Many of the new Maori artists are products of Pakeha art schools trained in the use of eurocentric art concepts, Western technologies, and electronic media. They are urbanised, detribalised, and westernised, but they know that they are Maori without a doubt!

Since 1990, the number of Maori involved with the education system has increased substantially, particularly in the arena of art educators. Young Maori art teachers such as Shane Cotton, Brett Graham, Eugene Hansen, Michael Parekowhai, Lisa Reihana, Peter Robinson, and Areta Wilkinson have been able to offer Maori students invaluable support, as they are all aware of the need for acknowledging the Maori dimension. All of these educators are highly successful artists in their own right and their works are pursued with an unlikely vigour. They have managed to cross over into the Pakeha artworld, which is a feat in itself. However, there has been dissension from some quarters of Maoridom, who wonder which waka these Johnny Come Latelys arrived on.

Our present situation is dynamic and complex in its interrelations within and without Maori culture. In non-traditional Maori artistic production, transcending the so-called “avant-garde” and “primitivism”, we can glimpse the emergence of art that is no longer about the West, an art assimilating to its own advantage forms and resources from other sources beyond a naïve dynamism of Pakeha possession and Maori innocence. There is nothing problematic about this art – it is a strategic centre of immense diversity. These works constitute readings which conflate geography, race, and identity. They are not locked into an assumed and automatic relationship between indigenous signs and named identities. Instead they represent oblique and circuitous ways in which the self is positioned in relation to Maori tradition, and new cultural conjunctions beyond the signatures of specific location, cultural identification, and narrative history. Successive strata of cross-pollinations accumulate in a bizarre mutant sink as a Maori influence works from the inside to the outside, as an active presence beyond the stench of cross-cultural sewers.

Korurangi: New Maori Art is nothing new at all. Maori have always produced and will continue to produce artwork; it is within our nature. The last thing we need is continued Pakeha meddling, interfering, and dictatorial decision making supposedly on our behalf in the name of the white man’s rapidly fading notions of biculturalism. It is the management and institutional policies of presentation and re/presentation that need immediate attention and critical consideration.

Maori do not need to earn their place within the artworld. It is our place already, it is our right!



Kosmo
Graffiti bombs in
Dancing in the Streets,
Wellington City Art
Gallery, 1985
City Gallery Wellington
Archive

D' HAPETA (NGATI RAUKAWA)
D' THOMPSON (NGATI KAHUNGLUNU)
B' POMANA (NGATI KAHUNGLUNU)
 NGATI POROU
M' HAPETA (NGATI RAUKAWA)
A' THOMPSON (NGATI KAHUNGLUNU)
T' RAPLEY (RURUNATA'I)
 AND OUR BEATBOX **E' LOVE**
 (TE ATI AWA)

D WORD - VOCALS, KEYS, BEAT, LYRICS
DJ DLT - TURNTABLES
MOB-WARE - VOCALS
WIYA - BASS
BLUE DREAD - 'PUKANA: ON 'E TU'
 TOASTIN ON, NO WORRIES'

STUDIO - WRITHE RECORDING, WGTN
ENGINEER - NICK ROUGHAN
MIX/PRODUCTION - ANDY D. RAY AND UH POSSE

UP SIDE: E TU
OTHER SIDE: INTERVENTION/NO WORRIES IN THE PARTY TONITE

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK AND ACKNOWLEDGE ALL WHO HAVE HELPED... D' RHYS B. THREE THE HARD WAY - STAY
 DOWN BLOODS/ANDY - OAK PARK/NICK/PETER KAYE/GARY RYAN/MALCOLM/BRUCE STIRLING/STEVEN AND
 JUDITH DELFT/MOANA JACKSON FOR REFERENCE/OUR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS. SPECIAL THANKS TO THOSE WHO
 BELIEVED IN US, THOSE WHO DIDN'T...
 THIS RECORD IS DEDICATED TO THE FIGHT AGAINST INJUSTICE.

PHOTOGRAPHY - KENNETH DOWNIE
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UPPER HUTT POSSE THANK GEORGE HUBBARD.

JUST JUICE

Upper Hutt Posse
 E Tu 1988, EP (back cover)
 Photography by Ken
 Dowie, design by Terrence
 Handscomb

Installation view:
Māori Art Today, Auckland
War Memorial Museum,
1987
Auckland War Memorial
Museum Tāmaki Paenga
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A R T S P A C E



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an exhibition of work by

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Rongotai Lomas

Barnard McIntyre

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Choice! invitation
artwork, 1990
Artspace Archive.
E. H. McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

John Reynolds
Cross-Pollination flyer
artwork, 1991
Artspace Archive,
E. H. McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki

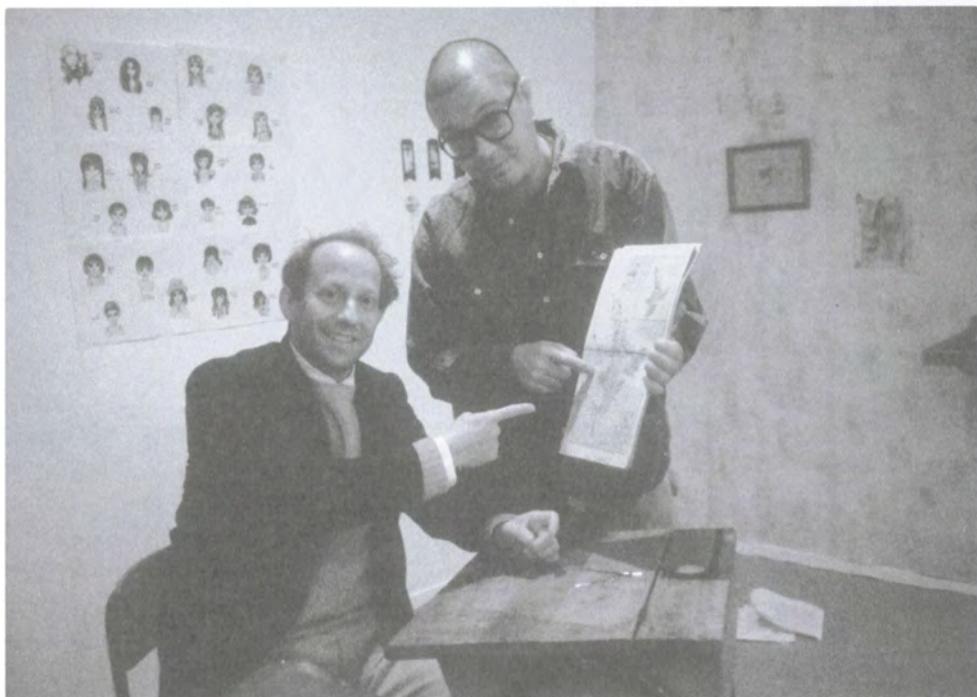
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+ NOT IN THE CATHOLIC SENSE.



LEFT PAGE

Judy Darragh/Inia Taylor
Arteaoa 1991
 in *Cross-Pollination*,
 Artspace, Auckland, 1991
 Artspace Archive,
 E. H. McCormick Research
 Library, Auckland Art
 Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

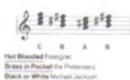
Knight Landesman and
 George Hubbard,
*Knight Landesman: One
 Hour Exhibition*, Teststrip,
 Auckland, 1993
 Photo: Ann Shelton

BELOW

Stop Making Sense
 invitation, 1995
 City Gallery Wellington
 Archive

Robert Jahnke and
 Peter Roche
No Sense 1995
 in *Stop Making Sense*,
 City Gallery
 Wellington, 1995
 City Gallery Wellington
 Archive

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Stop
 Making
 Sense



Same Old Song

So many tunes, so few chords

an exhibition of collaborative works by **Maori & Pakeha** artists

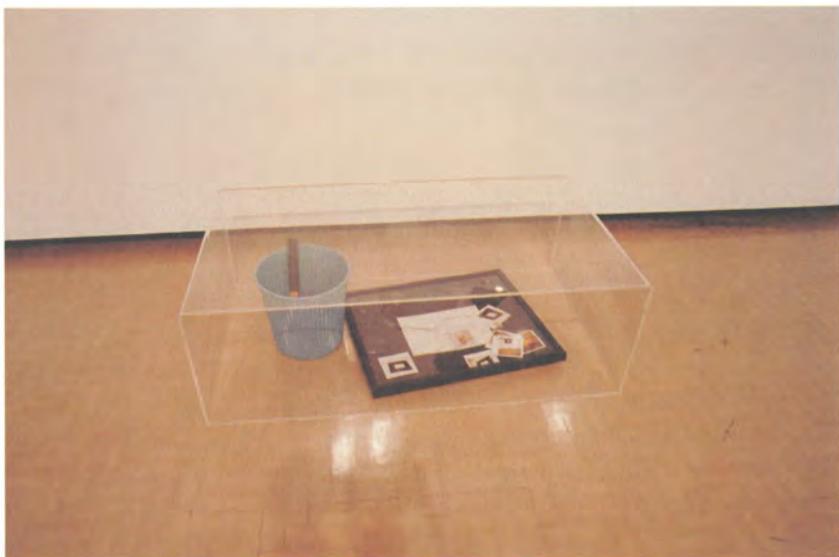
Eugene Hansen • Anton Parsons • Chris Heaphy • Gordon Walters • Michael Parekōwhai • Giovanni Intra • Rachael Churchward • Kirsty Cameron
 Shane Cotton • Dick Frizzell • Lisa Reihana • Julian Dashper • Robert Jahnke • Peter Roche • Ralph Hotere • John Reynolds • Barnard McIntyre • Karl Maughan
 Jacqueline Fraser • W.D. Hammond • Diane Prince • Terrence Handscomb • Dean Strickland • Denys Watkins • Charles Koroneho • Dion Workman
 Haere Mai Marching Team • Ann Shelton • Erna Lyon • Judy Darragh
 curated by George Hubbard



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Opening event for
Korurangi: New Maori Art,
Auckland Art Gallery, 1995
E. H. McCormick
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Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

(Left to right): works by
Jacqueline Fraser, Barnard
McIntyre, Michael Parekowhai,
Ralph Hotere, Brett Graham,
Peter Robinson in
Korurangi: New Maori Art,
Auckland Art Gallery, 1995
E. H. McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki



Phone message
Korurangi exhibition file,
 Auckland Art Gallery Toi o
 Tāmaki

Gallery 23a advertisement,
Art and Text, no. 55,
 October 1996

Good messages save time ... Courtesy is contagious!

TO: Jim

DATE: 29th TIME: 12:05

WHILE YOU WERE OUT

M: George Hubbard

OF: _____

PHONE: _____

TICK	TELEPHONED	TICK	PLEASE TELEPHONE AT (TIME)
	CALLED TO SEE YOU		PLEASE CALL AT (TIME)
	WILL CALL AGAIN AT (TIME)		OTHER

MESSAGE

Wants to disassociate himself from Korurangi - does not want his name mentioned in the catalogue

SIGNED: _____

gallery

23a Liverpool Street Auckland 1

ph/fx (64-9) 358-1488

NEW ZEALAND

dring dring.... Chris speaking.... it's George here.... UH-OH!.... I told you not to call me outside of gallery hours (hangs up).... dring dring.... what now?.... it's Art+Text ad deadline.... ahhhh, ads are such a chore and a waste of money, any ideas for copy?.... what shows are coming up?.... **Bram, Poliness, Workman**.... whooo?.... **Pulle**?.... nah, she's already been on.... **Apple**?.... uh-uh, he's gone for coffee.... **Budd**?.... I thought Budd was back in Berlin?.... **Hansen**?.... I think he's at the Marae?.... **Faul!**?.... someone said he was mountain biking during mid semester break.... **Brennan**?.... she's got a bread run now.... **Parsons**?.... at the optician.... **Matil**?.... observing opera in Majorca.... **Hughes**?.... too stitched up right now.... **Campbell**?.... chilling.... **Leek**?.... I thought she was up at Teststrip?.... **Roche**?.... joined the armed defenders squad.... **Paterson**?.... shopping for Hilfiger.... **Shelton**?.... in the dark room.... **Reddaway**?.... teaching in Wellington.... **Hipkins**?.... too busy at Monica.... **Scott**?.... meditating I think?.... **Fris**?.... pretty cool work.... **O'Shannessy**?.... far too young.... **Butron**?.... it's not an Australian gallery Chris.... alright, alright.... SILENCE.... let's can the ad.... yup.... later.... see ya!

with the support of
 Creative New Zealand/Toi Aotearoa

Fig. 1
Tony Fomison
No! 1971
oil on canvas
1740 x 1790 mm
Collection of
Christchurch Art
Gallery Te Puna
o Waiwhetū;
purchased 1973
Reproduced with
permission



Admit Nothing: Mapping Denial

David Hall

The problem with recording one's life is not that there is so much that escapes the memory, but that there is so much that does not.
– David Lange, *My Life* (2006)

Genuine self-denial is difficult to achieve – no one, least of all politicians, should pretend that it is easy. Equally, the appearance of self-denial is easily achieved; no one, least of all politicians, should pretend that putting it on is hard.
– David Runciman, *Political Hypocrisy* (2010)

This is not a text. Emphatically not.
Except, of course, that it is. Undeniably it is.

Yet for argument's sake I shall continue to deny it; indeed, I pledge to deny that this is a text for as long as it is asserted. I pledge to deny the undeniable.

Is this nonsense? For Jacques Derrida, far from it: this is the very logic of *l'indéniable*. As he says, for a thing to be undeniable “means that it is so simply and so constrainingly obvious that, if one wants to oppose it, one can *only* deny it.”¹ Or more pithily: “Being undeniable can *only* leave room for denial.”² Those pleading italics signal the threshold: there is nothing left to hurl, no ink with which to cloud the water, other than flat denial.

Derrida's exposé of the real – which cuts against the grain of his reputation as incorrigible relativist, as cunning punster – is most clearly articulated in his discussions of the ethical. A reader of Derrida more dedicated than I notes that he ascribes undeniability to the facts of contemporary capitalism, to the fear produced by 9/11, to the suffering of animals, to the wrongness of the death penalty and, above all, to justice. There the undeniable functions as “a strategic or rhetorical adjective to show where debate is to be cut off.”³ Derrida is showing no quarter; he is refusing that any tractable lines of reasoning or persuasion remain. The denier has nothing left – and as long as we know that we are hearing *only* denial, then a kind of moral truth is back-handedly revealed, a negative space beyond the denial in which we can place our faith.

The problem – and this problem seems particularly acute today – is that mere denial can take the denier quite a long way. A Derridean notion, “kettle-logic”, helps to make sense of why Donald J. Trump’s maddening strategies of denial have the electoral purchase they do. Kettle-logic is a riff on Sigmund Freud’s joke about a man who returns a damaged kettle to his neighbour and offers a maddeningly contradictory defence: “I returned the kettle undamaged; those holes were there when you lent it; and in any case, I never borrowed your kettle.” Logically, these disparate reasons ought to annul each other, but Freud draws the opposite conclusion: “So much the better: if only a single one of these three lines of defense were to be accepted as valid, the man would have to be acquitted.”⁴ In a similar way, Trump defies political gravity by providing a smorgasbord of lies and bullshit: a different fiction for every kind of sucker.⁵ On their own, any one of these untruths and deflections would not get him far, but when launched *en masse* over a short time into the multiple silos of social media, this onslaught of kettle-logic produced an Electoral College victory.⁶

Perhaps this sort of success is necessarily short-lived, like a cheap, shoddy knock-off. In 1971, reflecting on the limits of totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt took it to be axiomatic that: “Under normal circumstances the liar is defeated by reality, for which there is no substitute; no matter how large the tissue of falsehood that an experienced liar has to offer, it will never be large enough, even if he enlists the help of computers, to cover the immensity of factuality.”⁷ Of course, today’s computers are rather more sophisticated and insidious than the computers that Arendt knew, and were, indeed, instrumental to Trump’s success. The possibility of micro-targeted communications, particularly through Facebook, enabled his campaign team to engineer armies of elective affinities – that is, to personalise Trump’s impassioned outbursts to fittingly susceptible minds.⁸ But the force of Arendt’s point sits elsewhere, not with processing capacity or dissemination, but with tipping points of mass psychology:

There always come the point beyond which lying becomes counter-productive. [...] If the mysteries of government have so befogged the minds of the actors themselves that they no longer know or remember the truth behind their concealments and their lies, the whole operation of deception ... will run aground or become counterproductive, that is, confuse people without convincing them. For the trouble with lying and deceiving is that their efficiency depends entirely upon a clear notion of the truth that the liar and deceiver wishes to hide. In this sense, truth, even if it does not prevail in public, possesses an ineradicable primacy over all falsehoods. ... The self-deceived deceiver loses all contact with not only his audience, but also the real world, which still will catch up with him, because he can remove his mind from it but not his body.⁹

Ultimately, Arendt’s is a more elegant version of that crude riposte faced by Derrideans everywhere: “If truth is so relative, then why not try walking through

that brick wall?”¹⁰ As Arendt knew very well, however, matters of truth in politics are often more subtle, more fluid, more multi-modal, than mere brick walls. Take the reality of anthropogenic climate change, for example: scientifically well-supported but notoriously susceptible to denial. The truth will intervene eventually, to the point that this reality will become undeniable to all (I throw my lot in with the physicists here). But it will intervene decades too late, long after the majority of the greenhouse gases that cause global warming have been hoisted into the atmosphere, long after the decision makers that might have made a difference have entered another stage in the carbon cycle. This lag on feedback creates ample opportunities for lies and wishful thinking to flourish uncorrected. Corporate-funded climate deniers – “merchants of doubt” to use Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway’s apt phrase¹¹ – create states of collective denial, using deliberate deception to spawn self-deceiving deceivers. If we ever save ourselves from global warming, as one commentator keenly observed, “it won’t be because we woke up to the science. It will be because we woke up to the politics.”¹²

The constraints of obviousness, then, are not that constraining at all. This is what’s so insidious, so relentless, about the monsters that we sleep with. In the most vulgar ways, the undeniable is denied all the time – *and to great political effect*. Hold that thought.

How much truth does a mind endure, how much does it *dare*? More and more that became for me the measure of value. Error (faith in the ideal) is not blindness. Error is *cowardice*.

– Friedrich Nietzsche¹³

There is more to denial than lies. Indeed it is the non-lying denials, the sincere forms of deception, that are the most impervious to reality.

Take, for example, New Zealand’s foundational denial: the denial of te ao Māori. This is a monumental, ongoing violence that, when it is acknowledged, is usually done so by proxy, by reference to the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, the so-called founding document of New Zealand.

(It is worth reiterating – again and again – that “the Treaty” is more properly two texts: te Tiriti o Waitangi and the Treaty of Waitangi, written in te reo Māori and English respectively, their meanings misaligned in important ways. The most significant of these misalignments is the lack of equivalence between *kāwanatanga* and sovereignty, the former of which the rangatira (chiefs) signed up to in the Māori language version, the latter of which the Crown endorsed in its English language version. Sovereignty was intended in its monarchical sense whereby supreme authority would be vested in the Queen and exercised by the Crown’s representatives on her behalf – a contestable interpretation of sovereignty even within the

European tradition.¹⁴ By contrast, *kāwanatanga* translates as “governorship” – *kāwana* is a transliteration of “governor” – which implied a less comprehensive power: an administrative authority to govern British subjects and to manage international relations. *Kīngitanga* or *tino rangatiratanga* would have more clearly conveyed the power that the British eventually claimed.)

This focus on the pledges and perfidy of “the Treaty” is important, of course, but it tends to paper over other moments, such as the 1835 Declaration of Independence, or the decision by many *rangatira* to not sign *te Tiriti* at all and, therefore, to consent to neither *kāwanatanga* nor the sovereignty of the Crown. More fundamentally, it obscures what I identified as New Zealand’s foundational denial, *the denial of te ao Māori*, which is the denial of a language, a cosmology, a way of being.¹⁵ In this way, the legal dimension of colonialism supplants the economic, political, philosophical and psychological elements. This is symptomatic not only of denial’s artful persistence, but also the astonishing stickiness of colonialism, where, like a spider web, every effort to free oneself seems to lead to further entanglement in what one fought to be free from.¹⁶

This history is well understood, but not widely known. That is to say, it is well-traversed by Māori and European historical methods – through *whakapapa* (genealogy), through narrative history, through the Waitangi Tribunal – but only patchily diffused among New Zealand publics. To use a suggestive phrase, this history *lacks purchase* – and it does so most decisively among New Zealand’s Pākehā majority. Why is this so? Lies are a part of this denial’s genealogy, no doubt, but the denial of *te ao Māori* today is often upheld by people who know not enough to lie, who know too little about colonialism and what came before to wilfully obscure it. Denial is maddeningly sophisticated, as Stanley Cohen remorsefully concedes in the prologue to his study, *States of Denial*, where he laments depending on a word whose “conceptual ambiguities are so gross”.¹⁷ Still, there is much to be learned from his efforts.

He begins, most adamantly, with *literal denial*; for instance, denial that Māori are first peoples, or that the Crown broke the promises made in the treaties. Such denials might be sustained by lies, but literal denial can also be sincere, carried along by false beliefs or sheer ignorance. But by being so literal, this species of denial is also the most vulnerable – in Arendt’s words – to being “defeated by reality”. Recent reports of pre-Māori skulls, wishfully reconstructed to look like lost members of the Swedish pop group ABBA, did not hold up to the mildest journalistic scrutiny.¹⁸ These were assertions with nothing more substantive than assertion alone. That won’t prevent certain people from believing what they long to be true, but at least appears to stave off the majority.

What is more common in New Zealand – indeed all *too* common – is *interpretive denial*. As Cohen writes, this occurs when “the raw facts (something happened) are not being denied. Rather, they are given a different meaning from what seems

apparent to others.”¹⁹ In other words, agreed-upon historical details are swept up into disagreeable angles, slants, retellings and reorderings. This is the realm of Hobson’s Pledge, the One New Zealand Foundation, and the swivel-eyed enthusiasts of the Littlewood Treaty who knead cherry-picked details into the mould of their prejudgments. These are practitioners of bad hermeneutics.

Then there is a species of denier who accepts the facts, as far as they go, and even accepts the more truthful interpretations of those facts, but who nevertheless has *implicatory denial*, whereby what is denied is the moral imperative to act, to respond appropriately to the weight of reasons. Thus there is a gap between the promises made in 1840 and realities for Māori since, a gap that was created without consent, full knowledge, good faith, or respect for mana. The settlements of the Waitangi Tribunal are something of an acknowledgment of this, but hardly a liberation from denial. From a strictly fiscal perspective, the 54 settlements since 1989 are roughly equivalent to \$2,500 for every living Māori person – a paltry compensation for what was lost.²⁰ Yet even this misses the point. The idea of payment-as-settlement, the idea that money might wipe the moral slate clean, is a solution that originates from te ao Pākehā (and even then not uncontroversially).²¹ It is an acknowledgement of a kind, yet the assumption that cash compensation could be final or sufficient involves a further denial of te ao Māori by treating as redundant the acts and attitudes that tikanga might prescribe.

Moving more swiftly, there is also *historical denial* of what happened and *contemporary denial* of what is happening still. There is denial by *victims*, *perpetrators* and *bystanders* – by those being wrongly affected, by those committing the wrong, and by those observing whatever occurred. Then we shift to the structure of denial, beginning with *personal denial* where the mechanisms of denial are private, as it were, inside the mind of a person. At a higher level is *official denial*, which is exercised through the state or the empire. Here the mechanisms aren’t only psychological but political, ranging from those totalitarian go-tos (surveillance, threats, beatings, disappearances, executions) to the subtler strategies of contemporary democracy (spin, leaks, stonewalling, distractions, euphemisms, controls of official information) to the time-honoured techniques of bureaucratic secrecy (hierarchies of classification, security clearances, redactions, surpluses of information, technical obfuscation).²² Finally, we encounter what Cohen calls *cultural denial*, which is collective without necessarily being politically sponsored, in the sense that it is self-sustaining and self-imposed. As Cohen ominously describes it:

Without being told what to think about (or what not to think about) and without being punished for “knowing” the wrong things, societies arrive at unwritten agreements about what can be publicly remembered and acknowledged. People pretend to believe information that they know is false or fake their allegiance to meaningless slogans and kitsch ceremonies. [...] Besides collective denials of the past (such as brutalities against indigenous peoples), people may be encouraged to act as if they don’t know about the present.²³

This is denial at its most insidious, a far-reaching fog that can captivate entire communities and social networks, that dampens alternatives and perpetuates ignorance through the harmony of consensus. It is hard to name, let alone to combat, because it simply hangs there, rarely asserted or interposed, residing in habits, silences and turns-of-phrase, in instincts for distinction and appropriateness, and in expectations of what others might think.

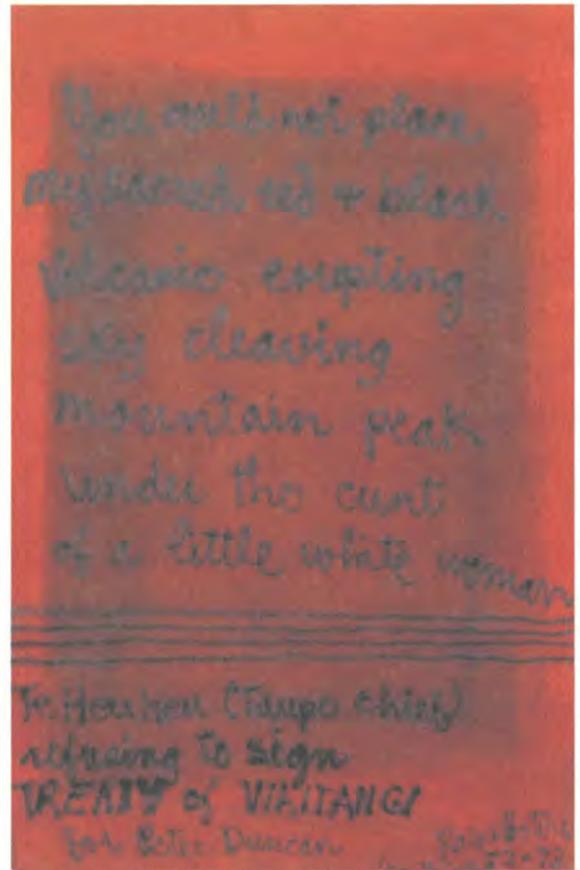
Yet cultural denial has its weak spots, not least because it connects to denial at other structural levels. As Cohen says, although official and cultural denial are distinctive, there is also a “mutual dependency” between them, which I imagine echoes the dynamics of political representation.²⁴ That is, *the state cultivates those forms of denial that the majority of people long for, while the longings of the majority shape what is in the state’s interests to deny*. This is menacingly self-reinforcing; however, the involvement of the state provides tangible things to defeat. In the New Zealand context, the state makes choices (which it need not make) that empower cultural denial: it drags its heels on 6 February (Waitangi Day) and puffs its chest out on 25 April (ANZAC Day), it organises citizenship ceremonies where new New Zealanders pledge allegiance to the Queen; it mandates our self-pitying and staunchly Christian national anthem; and it refuses to remediate its historical suppression of te reo Māori by compelling its inclusion in school curriculums. These things aren’t easily changed, admittedly, but they do make for clearer targets.

The major vulnerability of cultural denial, however, is its incompleteness. There is no unified “we” in denial. Not all New Zealanders, because by no means all Māori, despite the pressures to make this so. As Maarire Goodall succinctly put it, “*Pastlessness* is the curse of the Pākehā”,²⁵ a curse that is absorbed into the state through its majoritarian mechanics. But not all Pākehā either, which is why we can justly speak of denial instead of simple ignorance. There are degrees of pastlessness which creates a dual responsibility; firstly, on the pastless to become more pastful; and secondly on the pastful to help the pastless out of denial, to reach from the outside in.

Here we reach an important point: *that denial is not necessarily the enemy of truthfulness*. When we deny a false accusation, for example, it is reality we are seeking to defend.

It is in this vein that Ralph Hotere reasserts Mananui Te Heuheu Tukino II’s rejection of te Tiriti o Waitangi. Mananui was so resolute in his refusal to sign that when his brother Iwikau did so in 1840, he denounced this signature too.²⁶ By naming his painting *Treaty of Waitangi* (1972–73, Fig. 2), Hotere – with uncharacteristic alacrity – depicts “the Treaty” precisely as its repudiation. *This* is its reality: a point of defiance and departure, not only agreement and betrayal. The surplus vulgarity underlines the intent for political impact, as offensive to contemporary liberal sensibilities as it is to those of Victorian imperialism.

Fig. 2
 Ralph Hotere
Treaty of Waitangi
 1972–73
 watercolour on paper
 570 x 400 mm
 Private collection
 Reproduction courtesy
 of the Hotere
 Foundation Trust



While Hotere's *Treaty* involves an assertion of reality, however, it isn't an act of acknowledgement, which is what Stanley Cohen hesitantly takes to be the opposite of denial. Hotere has no need to acknowledge what he, like most Māori, already well know. Rather, he is *denying denial*, resisting the misconceptions that many Pākehā use to make history comfortable for themselves, in particular the belief that tangata whenua (indigenous people) surrendered to the sovereignty of the Crown by way of consent or ignorance. For those viewers to whom this historical reality comes as a surprise, Hotere demands more than acknowledgement, rather a deep recognition, disruptive and disquieting, which dares its audience to sit with its complications. This is strategically shrewd, because acknowledgement works in the other direction, in a spirit of affirmation and consensus, which, as Freud well understood, is a precondition for denial. Freud describes denial as "a way of taking cognizance of what is repressed; indeed it is already a lifting of the repression, though not, of course, an acceptance of what is repressed."²⁷ This is what distinguishes denial from ignorance: it involves sensing, if only fleetingly, that there is a problem. In our context of late colonialism, this manifests as a common craving for histories that don't involve

self-censure, culpability and, above all, shame. As Ranginui Walker sharply put it, “Because Māori occupy the moral high ground . . . it is uncomfortable for Pākehā to confront our colonial past.”²⁸ *Hotere’s Treaty* – by revealing that there is an outside to denial – offers the gift of a choice. We can dare to face history, or we can turn away in cowardice, to live with disgrace unattended. To deny, or not to deny: that is now our choice.

Your words of discomfort, loss, and disconnection don’t resonate with me at all.
– Ruth Richardson²⁹

The last three decades are haunted by a further denial: former Prime Minister Robert Muldoon’s refusal to devalue the dollar before and after the snap election that he famously, fatefully and slurringly called for on 14 June 1984.

In the weeks after his announcement, the country fell prey to an exchange rate crisis, as investors, anticipating a change in government, switched from the New Zealand dollar to other currencies. Treasury and the Reserve Bank recommended that Muldoon devalue the dollar, but he refused to do so. Immediately after his electoral defeat on 14 July, in the throes of yet another run on the dollar, incoming Prime Minister David Lange and incoming Finance Minister Roger Douglas ordered Muldoon to devalue the New Zealand dollar on their behalf. Muldoon did not. As the standard narrative goes, Muldoon was in denial, not only in denial that the decision was no longer his to make, but also that his prior decisions had steered New Zealand toward economic ruin.

One could ask whether this diagnosis is correct.³⁰ But my focus is the effect that this diagnosis has had, correct or otherwise. Because the common wisdom is, that by denying the economically undeniable, Muldoon made what came next absolutely necessary. And what came next, of course, were a series of disruptive reforms that radically changed how New Zealand was organised.

Days after this final refusal, Muldoon relinquished, reluctantly implementing the incoming Labour Government’s preferred economic package: a 20 per cent devaluation, a removal of interest rates controls, and a three-month wage and price freeze. Over the coming months and years, the Fourth Labour Government (1984–1990) would implement much more: the privatisation of state assets, the corporatisation of state-owned enterprises, the reduction of income and company tax, the removal of foreign exchange controls, and the abolishment of import tariffs. These reforms were extended into social welfare and labour relations by the Fourth National Government (1990–1999), especially in its first few years by Finance Minister Ruth Richardson. This programme was popularly known as Rogernomics, then Ruthanasia, now more generically – and probably less helpfully – as neoliberalism.

The repudiation of Muldoon was a central justification. Initially, this was driven by Lange's talent for oratory – more powerful, perhaps, than he often meant it to be. At the height of the exchange crisis, he memorably skewered Muldoon by remarking that “like King Canute he stands there and says everyone is wrong but me.”³¹ Yet Lange's rationale, as well as his allusions, became thoroughly bipartisan. Years later, Richardson recycled the King Canute line for her autobiography, adding that: “Muldoon either did not understand what needed to be done or shrank from doing it – perhaps a combination of both.”³² This shared conviction that “there is no alternative”, to use Margaret Thatcher's famous phrase, became the pretext for total transformation.

More than anyone, David Lange bore the burdens of this victory. In his memoirs, Lange writes: “It was gratifying to be associated with success, but it was my responsibility to represent our least popular as well as our most popular policies. I had to sell the offal as well as the T-bone.”³³ This apparent lack of denial about the offal is what set him apart as a politician. While committed to his government's general direction of travel – “I believed in our capacity to do good”³⁴ – he made a virtue of not pretending that his hands weren't dirty.³⁵ In his valedictory speech, he poignantly concluded by saying:

I want to thank those people whose lives were wrecked by us. They had been taught for years they had the right to an endless treadmill of prosperity and assurance, and we did them. People over 60 hate me. They hate me because I was the symbol of what caused that assurance of support and security to be shattered. That is something that has always been part of my burden.³⁶

The approach to politics these words embody is captured well by Bonnie Honig, who writes that “every politics has its remainders, that resistances are engendered by every settlement, even by those that are relatively enabling or empowering.”³⁷ In pursuing the good, she argues, what we should not deny are “the insidencies, cruelties, deceits, and inconsistencies”.³⁸ Yet these are denied all the time, of course, especially by those who believe that the dilemmas of politics are perfectly resolvable, that: “For each [dilemma] there is a right answer, without remainder. Each solution is rational and justifiable, unmarked by power, violence, or tragedy.”³⁹

It is a distinction of this kind that Lange draws between himself and Roger Douglas. As Labour leader, he exploited Douglas's “doggedness” to his own political advantage, although not without lamenting its dogmatic flipside: “he heard what he wanted to hear and he closed his mind to the rest.”⁴⁰ Lange wants us to know that Douglas's single-mindedness, his denial of other perspectives, is something that he himself lacks.

Still, Lange's and Douglas's accounts of that time are strikingly convergent, despite their conative differences. Douglas recalls a “generally remarkably united Cabinet

whose motto became: ‘We will do the right thing’ no matter what.”⁴¹ Meanwhile, Lange confesses: “I cannot remember any serious sustained discussion in Cabinet of the human costs of our economic policy.”⁴² Two highly contrasting attitudes, yet a concurrence on history, on Cabinet’s denial of the consequences of policy. For one, this was a matter of technique; for the other, regret, a moral remainder. For one a question of right, for the other a question of good. Two politicians who wielded influence, but only one who wants us to know that his responsibilities kept him up at night.

Of course, Lange is a politician, so we are entitled to wonder how deep this virtue really goes. His display of candour, of non-denial, could be a deception in itself, perhaps even self-deception. But if we accept that his remorse is genuine (which I don’t think is unwarranted), if we accept that he really did *care*, how are we to judge him? One charge that hovers is hypocrisy: perhaps Lange wanted to have his “cup of tea” and drink it too.⁴³ But hypocrisy is far too easy an accusation in politics, akin to condemning an actor for artifice, all the more galling when we non-politicians – as citizens – are so thoroughly implicated in democracy’s perversities.⁴⁴

We might get further by considering another modality of denial, more practical than epistemic, not so much a denial of what is, but what might have been. Recall Lange’s earlier quote: *no sustained discussion of human costs*. Yet it was his Cabinet to manage, his opportunity to grasp. Why not defenestrate Douglas at an earlier stage? Lange’s justification:

If you set out on a course and you find yourself beset by doubt, it is not easy to concede that you are wrong and that the effort has been made in a losing cause. It is a concession almost never made in politics, not because politicians are more deceived or deceiving than the rest of humankind, but because such concessions are not rewarded with popular support.⁴⁵

What is *not* being denied, then, is the harm created in pursuit of some greater good. What *is* being denied, however, is his capacity to act otherwise. On Lange’s account, the circumstances of politics, especially democratic politics, forced his hand.

There is surely some truth to this. Our institutions constrain politicians in unfortunate ways, particularly in their capacity to fail safely and honourably, even when circumstances could permit this. We could sympathise on this count; we might even support attempts to revise our institutions, to make space for human fallibility. But note Lange’s wording: he does not say that admissions of wrongfulness are *never* made in politics, only *almost never made*. That “almost” is also, surely, part of his burden, because it concedes that there were alternatives after all. It was his appetite for popular support, his need to be loved, that impeded the making of harder decisions.⁴⁶ Self-denial was required: a reining in of pride, an acceptance of the humiliation that comes with being wrong in public. As the second of this essay’s opening epigraphs acknowledges, this would not have been easy; however,

as the first epigraph implies, neither was the remorse that came with remembrance, with pastfulness.

So what path are we going to privilege today? A decision, any decision, seems – I say *seems* – always to come down to a path to be taken, or a track [*une trace*] to be followed along a path to be determined. To decide is to decide on a direction, on a sense in the topographical sense of orientation. Such at least is the dominant trope of figure. Where to go? Where to take oneself? How to orient one's step? That is the form of every question concerning a decision, a decision to be taken. Where to go? Where to take oneself? Am I going to go there or not, here or there? What is the best path? – Jacques Derrida⁴⁷

One thing that art and politics have in common is this eternal return to decision.⁴⁸ We are constantly recalled to judgment, to a state of mind like Derrida sketches above. This is because – in spite of theory's imperial aspirations – art and politics ultimately reside in practice. It is always in the doing.

Which brings us finally to a genera of denial that has haunted this essay from the beginning, which I shall call *practical denial*. This is the sense in which we speak of “denial of service”, “denying a goal”, or “access denied”. Here, it isn't reality that is at issue – I call that *epistemic denial* – rather, it is eventualities, potentialities, possible states of affairs. It is the posture of Tony Fomison's *No!* (1971, Fig. 1), all bare gesture and perlocutionary effect: the eyes averted, the hand as wall, the mouth shut resolutely to even the prospect of argument. It is the “talk to the hand” GIFs that punctuate Twitter, reinforced by the blocks and mutes that set the boundaries of social media's inner space, that curtail what can be heard by bringing conversations to a close. For better or worse, for right or wrong, for good and bad, practical denial is an exercise of power, imposed on oneself or on others. It is, in short, the prevention of an occurrence.

For Donald Trump – as his surname beautifully prefigures⁴⁹ – practical denial is primary. He denies reality, he denies mores and norms, but, above all, he denies Hillary Clinton the presidency. This, crudely, is the fact of the matter, and this is why high-minded appeals to factuality and moral fitness have little immediate effect. It's not that his lies and bullshit are doing much work, it's that they ride along on his forcefulness, his devotion to himself, and the deficiencies of American institutions.

This is what I intimated near the beginning of this essay, when I asked you to hold the following thought: “the undeniable is denied all the time – *and to great political effect.*” Denial doesn't always fail or succeed through its reckonings with reality, but through the brute facts of denial itself – through timing, delivery,

strength and fortune. This is affronting in its vulgarity, yet neglected at one's peril, because in politics the deed is primeval.⁵⁰ Practical denial is simply the outcome of a zero-sum encounter among two actors, where someone must lose in order for someone else to win. It underlies the Thucydidean tragedy, the cut and thrust of parliamentary politics, the pointfulness of the filibuster,⁵¹ and even the "violence without ground" that Derrida and others regard to be the kernel of hierarchical sovereignty.⁵² A politics that wants to be responsive to reality – to the facts of climate physics, to the vestiges of history, to the dynamics of economics – cannot afford to deny this. Reality strikes back, eventually, but actions occupy the interim.

This forcefulness is often overlooked in accounts of neoliberalism.⁵³ Beyond all its rhetoric of economic inevitability, the victory of Ruth-and-Rogernomics relied substantially upon practical denial, on the influence of action over truth.⁵⁴ Beyond all the libertarian grandstanding about rolling back the government, the reforms also required a deft but firm application of top-down power: the invisible hand of the state. Roger Douglas revealed this in bracingly rationalistic



Fig. 3
Taryn Simon
*Central North Island
Forests Land Collective
Settlement Act 2008
(Trelords) Beehive*
Banquet Hall,
Wellington, New
Zealand, June 25, 2008
2015
archival inkjet print
and text on archival
herbarium paper
in mahogany frame
2159 x 1861 x 70 mm
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, gift of
Mark Schdroski and
Edmond Chin, through
the Auckland Art
Gallery Foundation,
2017

terms when, in 2004, he described economic reformers as those who answer the question, ““Why am I in politics?” by deciding “I will do the right thing no matter what the political consequences.””⁵⁵ Yet as the prosecutions against neoliberal policies mount, we are entitled to ask: what sustains this right when certain consequences turn out to be appalling? How can reality get a look in, even when it must? Douglas’s conviction betrays an authoritarian streak that, far from being atypical to neoliberalism, is fundamental.⁵⁶ This is most striking in the paradoxical fashion with which neoliberal reforms, justified on the grounds of freedom and choice, forcibly disrupt and dismantle forms of association and collective enterprise that people *freely* choose to construct, cultivate and defend. To treat politics as Douglas does – that is, to anticipate true/false answers, to tether policy to absolutes, to deny actual consequences – can only foreclose our sense of possibility, of creativity. As Derrida continues:

But there is decision only where, at first, one does not know where to go. When one knows the path in advance, the best path, when one knows the map, when one knows in advance where to take one’s steps and toward which destination, there is no reflection, no deliberation, no justification to be given, neither question nor decision, because there is no indecision. It is decided in advance, so there is no decision to be taken. The path is already taken, and this is, as they say *tout bête* [quite stupid or empty-headed]. What I am saying here is, moreover, *tout bête* but undeniable, which also means that it is so simply and so constrainingly obvious that, if one wants to oppose it, one can *only* deny it.⁵⁷

Surety, routine and habit are possible, but contingency is inevitable. Policies and brushstrokes won’t always go to plan. Events will conspire to interrupt sleepwalkers with a choice, with a demand upon their judgment that is theirs to recognise. But these are only the shallows of acknowledgement, because the demand for choice is perpetual, ever present. The hunger striker, for example, takes a decision where most of us act unthinkingly most of the time, but this extraordinary act only shines a light on a path that was never closed to us. This is part of all our burdens: *the potential for things to be otherwise*, the “almost never” in Lange’s words. If persisting in error is cowardice, as Nietzsche claims, then this is surely its practical equivalent: the failure to fully consider our options.

This is a trap for art as much as politics, both in general and in particular. In general, it haunts questions of method and strategy, when we wrestle with the logics of our practice. In particular, it haunts questions of context and circumstance, when we wrestle with where we are. For New Zealand’s artists, no less than its politics, to do this properly requires (at least) a reckoning with the histories discussed in this essay. Such reckonings are familiar enough when it comes to te ao Māori; arguably, this is the prevailing conceptual motif of New Zealand art practice today. What is not so readily acknowledged, however, is art’s entanglement with the economic reforms of 1984–1993, particularly the reliance

of its markets, institutions and benefactions on people who played decisive roles in the reforms and accumulated great wealth as a consequence. This is no secret to anyone inside the arts community, but less well known on the outside, especially among those prospective audiences known as “the public”. It isn’t that this dependency is denied, as such; rather that it is infrequently exposed or interrogated. And far from fading into irrelevance over time, this dependency has reproduced itself, buoyed by speculative engorgement or interest from new frontiers of capital – from global media, digital technology, even the vectors that hatched the Trump presidency.

Of course, artists are not under any professional duty to correct their vocation’s idealised public image. (To an important degree, this mythology of creative freedom helps to forge the actual freedoms that many artists refrain from exploiting.) Nor, of course, do all artists shy away from exploring the economic infrastructure that their practices and livelihoods rely upon. Michael Stevenson’s *Call Me Immendorf* (2002, Fig. 5) is a well-known exception, yet its investigation of art and finance during the 1987 stock market crash was undertaken in the knowledge of its own unusualness.⁵⁸ But who refrains from daring, and for what reason? Or to put it more pointedly: what is not being said by those artists, writers, teachers and curators who, economically speaking, have something to lose?

“Admit nothing”, begins the CIA’s unofficial motto, a dictum of wonderfully Freudian perversity that already admits to something (“nothing”). It demands an active silence, not because there is nothing to say, but precisely because there is. The absences of New Zealand art – the subjects that curators and artists refrain from exploring, the judgments that they refuse to make about their subjects, the projects that aren’t lifted into plain view – cast the shadows of untold stories. The great shame – and this feels quite keen in this moment – is that these negations so often relate to problems that our politics are tasked with solving. Who do we sell our labour to, and what do we suppress in order to close our sales? What denials are we sustaining and whose interests do they serve? What alternatives, what choices, aren’t we seeing?

To be decisive, to embrace a choice, won’t always produce the outcomes that it might have, as the story of Mananui amply demonstrates. Obvious things constrain us: brick walls, historical records, the ΔF of CO₂, access to capital, the weight of collective belief, and the might of empire.⁵⁹ Still, Mananui left a trace, as others have too: words and deeds in history that might have produced other outcomes, and that might yet still. Human creativity – in politics, in art – moves between divergent callings: between the possible and impossible, between innovation and tradition, between the radical indeterminacy of life and the overwhelming disposition to deny as much. It haunts our intentions – “Where to go? Where to take oneself?” – and this *seems* like forks in the road. But it could be something more: the dissolving of walls.

Fig. 4
 Michael Stevenson
The New Zealand Herald,
COLOSSAL SHARE-MARKET
CRASH, Wednesday,
 21 October 1987
 2002
 photocopy, screenprint
 and dye on paper
 600 x 420 mm
 Auckland Art Gallery Toi o
 Tāmaki, purchased 2003

Fig. 5
 Michael Stevenson
Call Me Immendorf
 2002
 Installation view: *Walters*
Prize 2002, Auckland Art
 Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2002
 Photo: Jennifer French



1. Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 45.
2. Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 45; *On Touching* (Stanford University Press, 2005), 52.
3. Peter Gratton, "Philosophy in Denial: Derrida, the Undeniably Real, and the Death Penalty," *Derrida Today*, 9(1): 69.
4. Sigmund Freud, "Interpretation of Dreams," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 4 (London: Hogarth Press, 1899), 119–120.
5. I refer to bullshit here specifically in Harry Frankfurt's sense: "Both in lying and in telling the truth people are guided by their beliefs concerning the way things are. However, for the bullshitter... all bets are off [...] He does not reject the authority of the truth, as the liar does, and oppose himself to it. He pays no attention to it at all. By virtue of this, bullshit is a greater enemy of truth than lies are." See "On Bullshit," *Raritan Quarterly Review* 6, no. 2 (Fall 1986).
6. That's 63 million votes from an estimated 250 million eligible voters, just over 25 per cent. In a country of 324 million people, that means that less than one-in-five picked Trump at the ballot box.
7. Hannah Arendt, "Lying in Politics: Reflections on the Pentagon Papers," *The New York Review of Books*, November 18, 1971. Retrieved from <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1971/11/18/lying-in-politics-reflections-on-the-pentagon-pape/>
8. The most plausible account I've read is Sue Halpern, "How He Used Facebook to Win," *New York Review of Books*, June 8, 2017.
9. Arendt, "Lying in Politics".
10. I'll leave it to the Derrideans to defend themselves here – if indeed they wish to do so. But I will address in passing a related accusation: that Derrida was not only a cataloguer, but a creator of contemporary epistemological confusion. In other words, Derrida and his interpreters are, in some way, responsible for this post-factual environment that demagoguery thrives. I would suggest that this vastly overestimates the influence of Derrida's ideas, even the influence of misunderstandings of his ideas.
11. Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2010).
12. David Runciman, "How Climate Scepticism Turned into Something More Dangerous," *Guardian*, July 7, 2017.
13. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage, 1969), 3.
14. For an account of sovereignty that preserves its pluralism in European thought, see *Sovereignty in Fragments: The Past, Present and Future of a Contested Concept* ed. Hent Kalmo and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
15. This framework of 40, of "worlds", is indebted to Anne Salmond, *Tears of Rangī: Experiments Across Worlds* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2017).
16. As Joan Cocks observes, "it is one of the self-defeating traits of sovereign power that it often sparks desires for counter-sovereignty even among those who originally had not seen the world in sovereignty terms," in *On Sovereignty and Other Delusions* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 34. This is where tino rangatiratanga most risks becoming lost, in a false equivalence with state sovereignty.
17. Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, Malden, MA, 2001).
18. Tess McClure, "Grave Robbers with Far-Right Links Could Be Stealing Ancestral Māori Skulls," *Vice*, May 18, 2017.
19. Cohen, *States of Denial*, 7.
20. This estimate is for illustrative purposes only, made in full knowledge of the hazy lines of ethnic classifications. It is calculated using 2014 parliamentary figures for total settlements (about \$1.5 billion) and 2013 census data for people living in New Zealand of Māori ethnicity (598,605 people).
21. For an argument against the monetisation of life from within the Anglo-American worldview, see Michael Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2012).
22. These modes of anti-communication are evocatively transfigured through the practices of et al., see Natasha Conland's essay in this issue.
23. Cohen, *States of Denial*, 10–11.
24. Cohen, *States of Denial*, 10–11.
25. Emphasis preserved. Maarire Goodall, "Translation and the Treaty," in *Now See Hear!: Art, Language, and Translation* (Victoria University Press for the Wellington City Art Gallery, 1990), 32.
26. Mananui was clear-eyed about his reasoning. When in 1845 he explained to Donald McLean, a Protector of Aborigines, why he supported Hone Heke, he observed: "The English were an insatiable people, desirous of conquering all nations," adding that "the British Government intended to deprive the New Zealanders of their lands, their liberty, and their rights as chieftains." He was not in denial about what would occur. See Claudia Orange, *Treaty of Waitangi*, 105.
27. Sigmund Freud, "Negation," *Standard Ed* 19 (1925), 236.
28. Ranginui Walker, *Ngā Pepa a Ranginui Walker/The Walker Papers* (Penguin, 1996), 184.
29. Ruth Richardson quoted in Andrew Dean, *Ruth, Roger and Me: Debts and Legacies* (Bridget Williams Books, 2015).
30. Interestingly, Barry Gustafson, in his definitive biography of Muldoon, is less than unequivocal. He notes that the exchange crisis was partly engineered by the Labour Party itself, particularly by Roger Douglas, who, at the beginning of the 1984 election campaign, publicly circulated a policy paper which endorsed devaluation. As Gustafson describes, this created a "self-fulfilling expectation": "The widespread belief that there is going to be a devaluation drives the reality." Muldoon wanted Lange to dampen investor expectations by promising not to devalue the dollar, then wait for capital to trickle back from whence it had flown. Although Gustafson describes this as "probably unrealistic", he also attests that it belongs to "an honourable tradition". See Barry Gustafson, *His Way: A Biography of Robert Muldoon*, 387–9.
31. Marcia Russell, *Revolution: New Zealand from Fortress to Free Market* (Hodder Moa Beckett, 1996), 67.
32. She wrote: "His nine-year performance would have done honour to King Canute." Ruth Richardson, *Making a Difference* (Christchurch: Shoal Bay Press Ltd, 1995), 14.
33. David Lange, *My Life* (Auckland: Viking Books, 2006), 218.
34. Lange, *My Life*, 179.
35. This phrase comes from a play by Jean-Paul Sartre whose Communist leader Hoederer informs a youthful idealist that: "I have dirty hands right up to the elbows. I've plunged them in filth and blood. Do you think you can govern innocently?" See "Dirty Hands," in *No Exit and Three Other Plays* trans. Lionel Abel (New York: Vintage, 1960), 224. For a classic discussion, see Michael Walzer, "The Problem of Dirty Hands," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1973):160–80.
36. David Lange, Valedictory Speech, August 23, 1996.
37. Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 3.
38. Honig, *Political Theory*, 3.

39. Honig, *Political Theory*, 3.
40. Lange, *My Life*, 235.
41. Roger Douglas, "Reflecting on the Fourth Labour Government," speech delivered to conference at the Stout Research Centre, Victoria University of Wellington, April 29, 2004.
42. Lange, *My Life*, 227.
43. This is a reference to Lange's January 1988 call for "a cup of tea" – that is, a pause in the reforms – and a belated signal of the rifts in Cabinet.
44. I cannot do justice to this point here, but I enthusiastically direct the reader to David Runciman, *Political Hypocrisy: The Mask of Power, from Hobbes to Orwell and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).
45. Lange, *My Life*, 238.
46. See an account by former Lange staffer, John Henderson, "Predicting the Performance of Leaders in Parliamentary Systems: New Zealand Prime Minister David Lange," in *Profiling Political Leaders: Cross-cultural Studies of Personality and Behaviour* eds. O. Feldman & L. Valenty (Westport: Praeger, 2001), 203–216.
47. Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, 44–45.
48. This final section treads upon similar terrain to my earlier essay, "Sensing Sovereignty: On What's Real About Emergency," *Reading Room: A Journal of Art and Culture*, 7 (2015), 8–29.
49. In tarot, the trump cards are the Major Arcana, beginning with the unnumbered one, the Fool, also known as the Joker or the Jester. In his analysis of this trickster archetype, Carl Jung emphasises the centrality of denial, describing the trickster as "both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being, whose chief and most alarming characteristic is his unconsciousness. [...] He is so unconscious of himself that his body is not a unity, and his two hands fight each other." Carl Jung, "On the Psychology of the Trickster-Figure," in *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, vol. 1, part 1 of *C. G. Jung: The Collected Works*, eds., trans. R. F. C. Hull (H. Read, M. Fordham & G. Adler, 1959), 263.
50. Here I echo Goethe's Faust who famously contrasts his view with the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word". Faust first toys with "Sense", then "Power", as appropriate substitutes, before finally settling on: "In the beginning was the Deed". Ludwig Wittgenstein is well-known for resurrecting this pragmatist insight.
51. The purpose of a filibuster is to take up so much procedural time that it delays or derails the passing of legislation. Truthfulness is largely irrelevant – the obstruction is what matters – so nonsense is often resorted to. When the New Zealand Labour Party filibustered Auckland's Super City legislation in 2009, it did so by forcing votes on whether to rename it the Auckland Katchafire Council or the Funsized Council.
52. "Since the origin of authority, the found or grounding... the positing of the law... cannot by definition rest on anything but themselves, they are themselves a violence without ground." Jacques Derrida (2002). "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority," in *Acts of Religion*, ed. G. Anidjar (New York, NY: Routledge), 242. This understanding of sovereignty is also associated with Carl Schmitt and Giorgio Agamben; however, I stand by my denial of their essentialism – with help from Bonnie Hong's more open-ended and paradoxical conception of sovereignty – in David Hall, "Sensing Sovereignty: On What's Real About Emergency," *Reading Room: A Journal of Art and Culture*, 7 (2015), 11–14.
53. Two notable exceptions are Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015); and Will Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism: Authority, Sovereignty and the Logic of Competition*, revised ed (London: SAGE, 2016).
54. It should not be inferred from my argument that Muldoon is faultless. There are, after all, many ways to be wrong. Furthermore, the question of whether he denied the economically deniable is not one that I am qualified to answer. What I am qualified to say is that this is not entirely a question of economics. It is also a question of politics and, insofar as it is political, our first priority ought to be a perspicacious account of what happened next: the consequences of a decision and its remainders, the suffering that is and isn't caused, and the prosperity that is and isn't created. This is a job for art as much as social science.
55. Roger Douglas, "Reflecting on the Fourth Labour Government," Speech delivered to conference at the Stout Research Centre, Victoria University of Wellington, April 29, 2004.
56. Proving, perhaps, that it takes one to know one. Muldoon foresaw these authoritarian tendencies in neoliberalism. He once said of Milton Friedman's economic theory that "his system would work in a dictatorship, but would collapse in a free choice society because the imperfections of human nature could not be adapted to the precise logic of his theories." See Robert Muldoon, *My Way* (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1981), 67.
57. Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 44–45.
58. In an interview, Stevenson notes: "That kind of self-reflection is not very common in the art world." See Linda Herrick, 2002, "Art and the '87 Crash", *New Zealand Herald*, May 30, 2002.
59. ΔF refers to radiative forcing, the difference between the solar radiation that enters Earth's atmosphere and that which leaves. The Watts per square metre ($W m^{-2}$) of carbon dioxide (CO_2) is abstracted into the formula $\Delta F = 5.35 \times \ln(C/CO)$, which is used by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change for its parsimony and its corroboration with radiative transfer calculations.

Fig. 1
et al.
*simultaneous
invalidations_second
attempt 2000-01*
Installation view:
Arts Centre,
Christchurch, 2001
mixed media



The Politics of Erasure: The Artists et al.

Natasha Conland

1.

In 2001 the artist working under the pseudonym L. Budd resigned, re-signing thereafter simply as “et al.” meaning “and others”. While L. Budd had been an inclusive signature throughout the late 1990s often signing as “L. Budd et al.”, hinting at the collaborative of unnamed parties, this was nonetheless a new beginning, a birth with an implicit end.¹ Not the death of the author but the death of the individual signatory, and the emergence of a new collective framework, also anonymous. The art work to mark this occasion was *simultaneous invalidations*, (2000–2001, Fig. 1), an installation of collapsing tables with a network of inverted speakers attached to their top face vibrating in different tonalities across the room. The work was exhibited in three permutations with its final installation in Christchurch in a temporary basement with raw concrete walls, floors and structural columns.² Reflecting back on the work in Christchurch, it feels prescient of the scenes in the city post-earthquake. Like the many images we have seen of human activity stilled by natural disaster, signs of life were removed, their support structures broken. The work buzzed like an electronic “noise” performance; with wires exposed and running loose across the room from tables to amplifier. The sound waves passed through the tables and into the circulatory system of their audience. So hazardous was the scene it wasn’t clear whether this was an architecture to inhabit or a theatrical “set” to look upon.

The work was installed again 10 years later in September 2011, framed within the collection displays of the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki in an exhibition to mark the Gallery’s reopening. This was coincidentally a year after the devastating Canterbury earthquake and a decade since the global aftermath of 9/11. The combination of the work’s shifting relationship to historical context and its continuously altering forms and concealments, provoked the question:

what or whom was controlling the meaning and content of the work, and how much does its meaning derive from this new time and space realisation? Or how stable is the content of the work and where does its meaning lie – in the mood or “theatre” of the scene, the textual references, the site, or the characters invoked either through authorship or staging? Such questions have preoccupied strands of art historical and critical enquiry from the latter part of the 20th century onwards. However, they are of particular relevance to et al.’s practice because of the basic challenge the artists pose to navigating the process of meaning construction, or “interpretation”. Even the title “simultaneous invalidations” is a relevant clue in this regard as we could understand it to mean everything (or everyone) all at once, contemporaneously, refuting one another. Their deliberate and considered obfuscation of source material and its originating context or citation, and authorship (theirs and others), flies in the face of normative means for seeking and gaining “information” – at least that which would typically lead to “understanding”.

In handling the job of meaning-making, writers on et al. have tended to get caught up in evoking either the experiential qualities of the work, with particular regard to its institutional aesthetics and analogous narratives, or the artists’ own particular set of dramatic and shifting role-plays. In fact we may need to look closely at how these two devices: the construction or “structuring” of matter via the aesthetics of the institution, and the strategy of “play” as a destabilising force are interrelated and powerful agents in the work. This rogue fictional collective et al. sets up an installation practice in which classroom-like activities, group meetings, lessons or séances occur; places and spaces which they themselves could feasibly inhabit. Yet what we have are a loose set of signs and signifiers, disconnected from anything that comes close to the concrete. With this image in mind it is useful to remind ourselves of Derrida’s formative text which bridges the turn from structuralism to deconstruction. This reference is useful not just for his description of “freeplay” as a disruptive agent, but also because of the historical moment in which it emerged:

Play is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Play is always an interplay of absence and presence, but if it is to be radically conceived, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence; being must be conceived of as presence or absence beginning with the possibility of play and not the other way around.³

While et al.’s carefully staged departure from both biography and chronology creates a breach with the past, I would argue that their work and practice from the 1970s and 1980s provides a formative strategy. For whilst it may not be Derrida specifically who guides the modality of this practice, new theoretical thinking to emerge in the 1970s gave the concepts of “play” and “dissonance” the ability to critique the social and cultural institutions of the day. In this case the most relevant are the institutions of the family, education and of art.



Fig. 2
et al.
restricted access
2003
Installation view:
The Walters
Prize 2004, Auckland
Art Gallery Toi
o Tāmaki, 2004
mixed media
Photo: Jennifer French

2.

Et al. emerged as the new millennium began, and the artist shifted from the one to the many. This transference occurred after almost 15 years of changing and overlapping pseudonyms in a non-linear pattern and in association with three decades worth of artistic practice. While their authorship typically designated one person, often with a shifting gender (for example, Lillian Budd or simply L. Budd, Lionel, Minerva Betts, P. Mule); it also, even earlier, referenced a collective or company name (such as Popular Productions, the “author” of the film works, and CJ (Arthur) Craig and Sons, who typically produced sculptural items using furniture). Then there is the name still captured in the annals of art’s history, almost entirely erased at the artist’s own volition, and the only connection to roughly a decade’s worth of art making. Certainly this “biographical” name has been distanced from the umbrella collective of et al. and the artists’ sphere of professional practice, it is the name that won’t be answered.⁴

The formation of et al. signalled the possibility of a non-name *as if* toying with a noun for absence, “anonymous”, for unnamed authorship (no one person). With the proper noun finally dropped away, all we are left with are “the others”, the impossibly open catch-all for all possible parties, past and present – or those outside authorship: the receptor, the mirror, the audience. Whilst it is not uncommon within the twentieth century for artists to work under pseudonyms or fictional names, (like Duchamp’s *Rose Sélavy* or contemporary examples of collectives, such as feminist practitioners the *Guerilla Girls* or French artists *Claire Fontaine* and *Bernadette Corporation*), it *is* unusual for that pseudonym to remain so unstable, even if some codes of usage are maintained (Fig. 2).⁵

More than just a change in signature, the shift to et al. ushered in an installation practice that focused more overtly on the aesthetics and architecture of the institution. This could not have been more pronounced than in their 2003 survey exhibition *abnormal mass delusions?* (Fig. 3) The artists, in collaboration with curators Jim and Mary Barr, reshaped their artistic history through the new et al. organisational structure adopted by et al. This new installation theatre and format, trialled in *simultaneous invalidations*, involved dividing up what was essentially furniture – tables, chairs and screens – into rooms with walls comprised of et al.’s signature use of “hurricane fencing” as barriers within the architecture. Individual existing works, like the Popular Productions films of the late 1980s, were then redistributed through these “rooms” and further reformed and destabilised (even disappeared) in the process of re-editing. The museological guidelines of titles, dates, provenance and context were absent from the space. Here, the past was treated like a found object to be assembled and categorised according to the demarcations of the architecture in which new sub-sets of the artists’ practice coalesced. The effect was of an awe-inspiring *gesamtkunstwerk*, not unlike such modernist examples as Kurt Schwitters’ *Merzbau* (1933). It was one of the most dramatic gestures of simultaneous consolidation and invalidation, in which a 20-year history of individual work was contemporised into one new whole under the new signature and emerging “et al.” brand aesthetic. The move even seemed at odds with the artists’ own strategy to date; as described in an interview from 1994, “the advantage of working with a group [is that] they can actually work in different areas rather than just the investing of one identity”.⁶



Fig. 3
et al.
abnormal mass delusions?
2003
Installation view:
Govett-Brewster
Art Gallery, New
Plymouth, 2003
mixed media
Photo: Bryan James

There were however significant absences from the survey, notably the collage and epoxy resin work of 1988–89, and importantly the photographic portraits from the mid-1970s. These absent works are also those that most closely align in the public record with accounts of feminist activity. What appears to be a removal or even abandonment of an association with feminism has puzzled and even disappointed some who have admired and participated in this period of the artists' activity, who appreciate the radical nature of those works within the socio-political context of their time. What in fact can be made of these omissions? Were they an act of dissolution by the artists, and if so, under what pretext? Or could the organisational structure of et al. not accommodate the "presence" of such a defining and perhaps singular politic 20 years after the fact? This is an art historical track record that would reveal a woman (singular) and a body of work in long-term engagement with the anonymous action group FAN (Feminist Art Networkers); membership in the organising collective for the ANZART Feminist Seminar (Auckland, 1985); and for *Herstory* (1987); "Visual Diaries/Artists Books" (Association of Women Artists, 1985) and co-editing *Six Women Photographers* for Photoforum 56 in 1987. The history of association with feminism is there, but today the work is not easy to find. It occasionally appears on the secondary market, and a suite of five photographs were published in *Fragments of a World*, a Photoforum book from 1976 intended to redress the gender balance in that publication's history. Had the newly formed et al. become an all-too autonomous system, not porous enough to accept the past of its members?

The "problem" with these works was perhaps not their relationship with feminism or its history but the strength of its presence as a defining centre for their practice. From Derrida we heard of "the determination of Being as presence":

It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence – eidos, archē, telos, energeia, ousia (essence, existence, substance, subject) alētheia, transcendental-ity, consciousness, God, man, and so forth.⁷

Answering Derrida, et al. offers a single identifiable and contemporaneous system of variable members. It is a system with clear disregard for the values of historiography. But there are relationships that are hard to ignore between past documents, principally the photographs from 1974–76, now attributed to member Minerva Betts, and the et al. system. Given the role of these other members within the et al. system there is also a clear logic for bringing the past back into focus.

3.

The photographs, which date back to Minerva's earliest period at art school were made in a highly performative manner, influenced by Francis Bacon's figurative post-war portraits, and motivated by an exploration of psychology (Figs 4–5).⁸ They show individuals in motion captured using a slow shutter speed. The setting is domestic, often with wallpaper or hand mirrors recalling the time of the generation before, of the 1950s.⁹ The sitters or performers are typically wearing white face paint



to further distort their facial features and identities. Children are depicted in a state of free play, everyone is performing for the camera. There is of course politics here, as with play comes disorder. Sometimes it's hard to tell who is a child/adult, man/woman. We know with children, for example, that given enough freedom they will happily disregard systems of symbolic gender categorisation in order to follow their explorative impulses.¹⁰ Occasionally the role-play is more pronounced, especially in the bedroom where a couple is also in costume. To our adult eyes there is a more knowing disruption of the family unit and the prescribed roles within.

What is striking in the early photographic work is the development of a subversive mode very early on, before the artists' engagement with radical deconstruction. In other words, another aspect of the "play" in these works is the disruption of existing photographic modes and language. Much like the practice of "spirit photography" from the late nineteenth century, in which the tools and language of photography were utilised for means outside its own conventions, in that case to represent the un-representable. Here, the camera and lens serve to document what is otherwise a set of performative actions. As well as distorting the features of the subject, the long exposure time draws attention to the action which, rather than "the sitter", is the real subject, a subject that cannot be fully conveyed in a single still frame. Thus, these images occupy the space of portraiture

Fig. 4
Minerva Betts
Untitled (1)
gelatin silver print
137 x 91 mm
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki,
purchased 2018

Fig. 5
Minerva Betts
Untitled (2) 1975
gelatin silver print
137 x 91 mm
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki,
purchased 2018

and yet deny its primary functions, situating this early practice within a broader set of global developments which Lucy Lippard has framed as the dematerialisation of the art object through the period 1966 to 1972.¹¹

4.

Taught during this period in the sculpture department at the University of Canterbury, the artist recalls lecturer Tom Taylor's recommendation that she should work in performance. The idea was dismissed, but the recollection is telling.¹² Taylor also introduced his students to early structuralist art criticism in particular the nascent writings of Jack Burnham who is best remembered for his espousal of what we now call "systems art".¹³ At the time, Burnham's "task" in the critical arena was to integrate and conceptualise the radical explosion of pre-existing forms and contexts for art and give this new field of activity an analytical base. Writing "Systems Esthetics" in 1968, the year we now associate with social revolution, (and two years after Derrida had delivered his ground-breaking lecture at Johns Hopkins University) he exposes the sense of critical vulnerability felt by many as this "paradigm" shift was developing; "As yet the evolving esthetic has no critical vocabulary so necessary for its defence, nor for that matter a name or explicit cause."¹⁴ Burnham was also unique in the field for linking artistic change with changes in technology. In his 1969 text for *Artforum* "Real Time Systems" Burnham, who was trained as an artist before establishing himself as a critic and writer, explored a "systems" approach to art which to our eyes and ears today appears idiosyncratic in its attachment to "new technologies" and their language, but is nonetheless prescient for the times. He writes:

A major illusion of the art system is that art resides in specific objects. Such artefacts are the material basis for the concept of the work of art, but in essence, all institutions which process art data, thus making information, are components of the work of art. Without the support system, the object ceases to have definition; but without the object, the support system can still sustain the notion of art. So we can see why the art experience attaches itself less and less to canonical or given forms but embraces every conceivable experiential mode, including living in everyday environments.

For Burnham, who was also associate editor of *Artforum* from 1971–73, the transition from an object-orientated to a systems-orientated culture was broader reaching than the dematerialisation of the objects themselves, incorporating economic, environmental, educational and in fact "all the other matrixes of human activity".

Other critics and art historians working in this area also made use of the recently translated and disseminated structuralist texts to explain how the "new practice" could be analytically framed. One of the most cited examples is Rosalind Krauss's essay for *October* a decade later, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" (1979). However the approach of these two critics is quite noticeably divergent. Whilst Burnham

argued that change emanates “not from things, but from the way things are done”, Krauss was preoccupied in this early essay with systematising difference. This would have been a problem for Burnham for whom the new systems approach would no longer be so preoccupied with the problems of organisation. To the same concern for the new art’s possible dismissal Krauss argues for a new interconnected system of categories now infamously deploying the Klein diagram to establish a system of binaries: landscape/not-landscape architecture/not-architecture, to describe the limits of possibility within which the new practices could be defined.¹⁵ Indeed both authors were looking for a means to engage critically with “other” meanings outside the existing categorical definitions of art.

For the sculpture student-cum-photographer Minerva Betts, who was working with her own divergent practice even at this earliest stage, Krauss’s argument at its most literal does not sit easily. Betts is not so much employing art in its negative – not-sculpture or not-photography – but examining the internal possibilities of the system with a view to their distortion, especially regarding the subject of the family system, which is reconceived as mobile, masked and largely made up of women and children. In contradistinction, Burnham’s insistence on the lived experience surrounding the work seems applicable. Again in “Real Time Systems” he writes,

To use another cybernetic analogy, artists are “deviation-amplifying” systems, or individuals who, because of psychological makeup, are compelled to reveal psychic truths at the expense of the existing societal homeostasis. With increasing aggressiveness, one of the artist’s functions, I believe, is to specify how technology uses us.¹⁶

Here, Burnham is also paying attention to the psycho-social desire to corrupt systems. What Burnham reflects is this early media artist’s investigation of the socio-cultural values of the individual or singular authorship as it pertains to concepts of truth, originality and social norms. In response to questions of originality, P. Mule has said, “The whole issue is that no matter how hard you try to protect an artwork even if it is a ready-made, there is still the need to invest in it a sense of originality. So when the artwork doesn’t actually exist those questions of aesthetic and originality don’t exist either – they can’t be pinned down – only the review [can pin them down]”.¹⁷

5.

Betts’ early interest in “systems esthetics” with its concentration on “all living situations” slides easily into an exploration of the feminist analysis of gender within the patriarchal system. Entering further study in Auckland, Minerva decides against working in the photography department, instead undertaking a Master of Fine Arts partially under the auspices of the English Department with Film Studies lecturer Roger Horrocks. With some film work already underway, “Dora” takes over at this point as the signatory and author, the films had mostly not yet been

exhibited publically, but would be later authored by Popular Productions. In many ways the Master's thesis written at this time is the most significant artistic act after the photographic and films works. It operates under a knowingly destabilising strategy in which Freud is interspersed with Kristeva, Laura Mulvey and other theorists, including romance novelists. Here Dora's "writing" is in fact a collage of what appear to be non-linear dissociative quotations, destabilising her relationship to authorship altogether. Dora remembers, "to function in the social the child must enter the symbolic order or "the law of the father" representing society's laws as a series of interconnected signs, rituals and roles, forming recognisable codes. The acceptance of "his" authority which is essential for "normal" development takes place through the Oedipal complex."¹⁸

In the mid-1980s a comparatively small group of students, academics and others interested in second wave feminist theory clustered around the Department of English at the University of Auckland and transitioned quickly into the post-structuralist analysis of Dora and her "hysteria".¹⁹ The original Dora was also a pseudonym for Ida Bauer, the patient Freud identified as an "hysteric", suffering from loss of speech. Around the same time Didi-Huberman also published, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière* (1982) a study into the origins of the concept of hysteria in Western thought and the clinical practice of psychology. Didi-Huberman's book traces the construction of hysteria as a term coined by neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot in the same socio-historical context in which the early photographic image was also emerging, thus tying the origins of photography to the meaning of hysteria.²⁰ While it is unlikely that Minerva knew of Didi-Huberman in the 1970s, it is interesting to think of those photographic portraits as the beginning of an exploration of hysteria that would develop over the next decade.

For our Dora, the Dora in question, there were two writers in particular, Mary Ann Doane and Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier, who became especially relevant due to their focus on the use of speech or "voice" in film (after Derrida). These references are critical for understanding the concept of voice in et al.'s practice. Obscured into a series of footnotes to Freud's own text, Dora writes in amongst the citations in one version of the thesis submitted:

Note 10: "A feminist re-reading of theoretical work then centres on language as the means by which man has created a unified identity and relegated woman to the negative pole of binary opposition. A phallogocentric structuring that has made man the central reference point, and the phallus the symbol of social or cultural thinking" ... Note 14 "this investigation can only be carried out on the margins of discourse, "if the reader feels a bit disorientated in this new space, one which is obscure and silent, it proves perhaps, that it is a woman's space" ... Note 19. "A resistance to the domination of meaning is based less on the rejection of words, as Ropars-Wuilleumier notes, than of perverting their function: "offering the paradox of making the voice the means of writing ... writing into speech."²¹

The film work of the late 1980s in particular engages prototypical feminist motifs: the mirror, the female body, Freud's figure of Dora and the "disembodied body". However, the "quotations" drawn from feminist critique are in many senses as *disembodied* within the work as any other philosophic, political statement, religious text or other belief systems. However the work comes very close to feminist text, as it was explored through the artist's Master of Fine Arts submission in 1988. In many ways familiar to radical deconstruction, Dora enters into feminism itself as a symbolic system and rearranges it. Thus she reiterates the way feminism had attended to the symbolic patriarchal order. Ultimately, what Dora borrows from feminism is a strategy for the examination and critique of language in which the very idea of sense is suspended:

Sylvère: What did you think of their readings? Were you convinced by them?
 P. Mule: No I didn't think I was particularly convinced by any of them. But then, I don't think that I've been looking for answers in that sort of literal sense.²²



Fig. 6
 Estate of L. Budd
 (lional b.)
 Lionel, X50933.1015
 2010 xerox on paper,
 acrylic paint, tape
 1520 x 840 mm
 Chartwell Collection,
 Auckland Art Gallery
 Toi o Tāmaki,
 purchased 2010

In the sculptural and assemblage practices of L. Budd (distinctively white) and Lionel (distinctively black) in the 1990s, text without signature or quotation was increasingly used to suggest and destabilise the function of speech as meaning making (Fig. 6). Writing and text positioned over erased ready-made text became a familiar strategy. Erasure takes place in the non-colours – white, grey and black – those colours anthropologist Michael Taussig refers to as the palette of civilisation

and truth. In his essay “What Color is the Sacred” Taussig comments, “truth on the other hand comes in black and white for our philosophers as much as for us”.²³ Outside the context of Dora’s academic study, this strategy no longer addressed feminist texts as such, but was tasked to destabilise systems of belief, including those revered in the hallowed halls of the fine arts. “Speech” was introduced to the affective and often abstract spaces of painted monochromes and soundscapes. The artists knew and explored our compulsion towards the word, dislocating it from meaning by evoking aesthetic devices to accentuate either its desirability or repulsion, or both.

Fig. 7
et al.
the fundamental practice 2005
installation view: 51st
Venice Biennale, 2005
mixed media
Photo: Jennifer French



6.

This history, like a set of character studies, informs et al.’s practice in equal parts. In the most significant work to follow the survey of 2003, their 2005 presentation at the 51st Venice Biennale,²⁴ the artists made several shifts during the development of that work which have been overshadowed by the controversy that surrounded their selection.²⁵ The work presented was a multi-part, multi-media installation titled *the fundamental practice* (2005, Fig. 7), developed specifically for the site and context. *The fundamental practice* came hard on the heels of the 2003 survey and the subsequent 2004 Walters Prize installation *restricted access* at Auckland Art Gallery (*restricted access* was in fact a reprisal of the survey, *abnormal mass delusions?*, 2003). The process of developing the survey and its further reinstallation for *restricted access* enabled et al. to shift their attention from what had been a critique of the system of individuation to that of the mass. In *the fundamental practice* the artists developed a means to probe the construct and psychology of the mass, as distinct from “the master”. This shift in their thinking occurs contemporaneously with a rise in awareness of the growth of fundamentalisms globally.²⁶

The installation structure of *the fundamental practice*, was comprised of five tracks – much like shortened train tracks – with upright metal units sitting on wheels along which they rattled down at random intervals. As they moved voice and other sound elements would emerge from speakers within the unit, as if they were standing up quite suddenly to speak. The tracks included operatic music, computer-generated readings, recordings of the bombing of the Mururoa Atoll in the Pacific Ocean, political treatises, philosophical texts and so on. There was also no singular soundtrack, rather the central computer randomised the sound files throughout the space. The development of the “intelligence” behind this random acoustic network and mechanical system was a critical and time-consuming component of the project. As in earlier installations, et al. divided the space into a series of rooms within rooms. Furniture was sparse and dusty, overlaid with an acoustic experience which was often heightened with emotion – the political mixed with the romantic mixed with the esoteric. Occultist and other diagrams scrawled over the units suggested an historic desire to systemise thought matter, yet the construction company signs reminded audiences of the contingency of such desire.

In writing about the project prior to its installation I had utilised the notion of a parliament of ideas, a parliament of disagreement, which was in many ways a creative adaptation of writer and philosopher Bruno Latour’s writings on the “parliament of things”.²⁷ But despite the dramatic atmosphere and the overt nod to the learning environment – with chairs set up before a screen with scrolling texts – the exhibition did not offer its meaning easily. There was in fact quite literally no centre. Was this an artistic exemplar for the philosophical problem Derrida had outlined, that “the original” (the author or the reference) or the “transcendental signified” is never present outside a “system of differences”?²⁸ Perhaps, but what we were dealing with, ultimately, was a work of art. Its intentions were to solve a problem in art, even when the artists drew in content or strategy from the ideas or problems of philosophy.²⁹

Drawing on the critical field presented by Derrida and his influential lecture “Structure, Sign and Play”, Burnham’s “system esthetics” and 1980s feminist critique, et al.’s is foremost a practice that connects with the legacy of “institutional critique”. Indeed, a key early proponent of institutional critique, Hans Haacke, was a close friend of Burnham’s and his influence can be heard in such statements as, “There are two kinds of artists: those who work within the art system, and those few who work with the art system.”³⁰ But “the system”, as it appears in et al.’s work, is too metaphorised, too thematised to align with this early mode of institutional critique. Rather than “demystifying” the structures that shape meaning³¹, et al. and their circulatory system remind us that it is not the artist’s job to create a new order (or avant-garde), or “a new voice” even by way of critique but to examine the givens (this they owe to Duchamp).³² This would suggest their strategy to locate a critical force in “unnamed” directions from a multitude of authorship positions aligns their practice more closely to the kind of institutional critique to emerge

in the 1990s with artists like Andrea Fraser. Fraser has commented, “There is, of course, an ‘outside’ of the institution, but it has no fixed, substantive characteristics. It is only what, at any given moment, does not exist as an object of artistic discourses and practices”,³³ and “finally, it is this self-questioning – more than a thematic like “the institution”, no matter how broadly conceived – that defines institutional critique as a practice”.³⁴

7.

Since the Venice Biennale exhibition, each subsequent et al. installation has delved further into a region or variant of fundamentalist activity. Between 2006 and 2009 et al. have worked on a number of variants of the *Maintenance of Social Solidarity* (2006–, Fig. 8). On the et al. website they write:

Maintenance of Social Solidarity makes reference to the published transcripts of Wilhem Reich. Wilhem Reich M.D. (1897–1957) who created a unique and valuable legacy of social, medical and scientific achievements in psychoanalysis and psychiatry; sexual health; the psychology of fascism; cellular research; the origin and experimental treatment of diseases such as cancer; infant and childhood health; and weather experimentation. Tragically, Reich’s published books and research journals were banned and burned by the United States government in the 1950s, and again in 1960.³⁵

In 2006 et al.’s installations of *Maintenance* began to use live mapping systems to illustrate the new political geographies occurring within a region. On the website they write: “live Google Earth reviewing locations involved in the “extraordinary rendition” transference of person/s. Extraordinary rendition or irregular rendition defined as government sponsored abduction and extrajudicial transfer of a person from one country to another.”³⁶

Fig. 8
et al.
Maintenance of Social Solidarity 2006
Installation view:
the fundamental practice—
reorder, regroup,
restore, Artspace, 2007
mixed media
Photo: Jennifer French

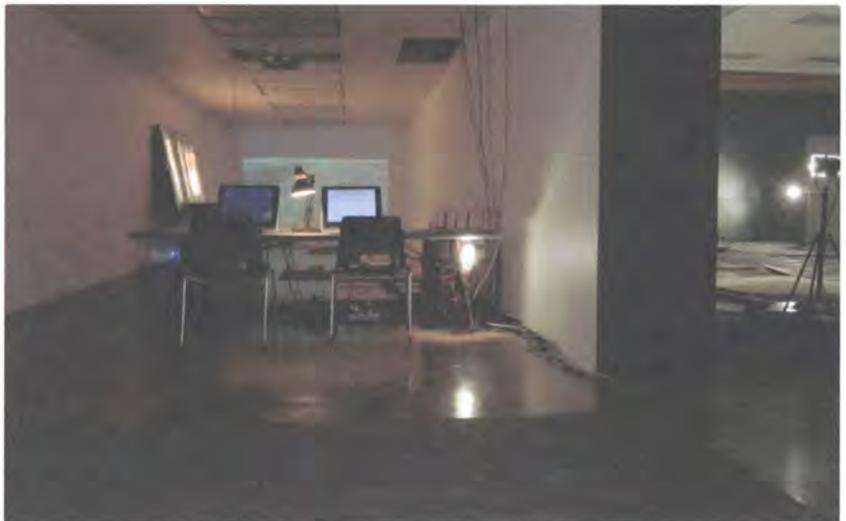


Fig. 9
et al.
many_to_many 2013
Installation view:
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, 2013
mixed media
Photo: Jennifer French





This statement of a political conscience in amongst the “system of differences” raises the question of how one discerns critique? More than just a signposting of postmodernism’s generalised embrace of difference, the entity et al. is devised as a structure of multiplicity which seemingly denies the singularity of critique. In two of the more recent installations, *that’s obvious, that’s right, that’s true* (2009), and *many-to-many* (2013, Fig. 9) the artist has increasingly assembled the sculptural material within the installation around a central activity, as if the group is indeed emulating a singular gathering made nonetheless of parts.

Still grappling with the problem of the system, but this time systems for the masses, the artists nonetheless seem implicitly to understand that there needs to be a representation of independence. That somehow, something or someone needs to make clear that there is a break, even within the “system of critique” as Fraser has defined it, whether this is a breakthrough in understanding, or an analogy for liberation, as in the use of the piano in their most recent installation. For the group et al., the variations in their signatures remain highly characterised and aesthetically styled: the grey erasure of difference (in material), the use of found “impoverished objects” and found texts with erasures and inscriptions, the use of handwriting and a thick impasto painterliness, and diagrammatic devices often from esoteric source material. What is perhaps unique about the artists et al., is that even within the legacy of practices we might define broadly as “sculpture in the expanded field” or the interdisciplinary field of the dematerialised art object, or later, the field of “institutional critique” their commitment to “play” as a destabilising force. They unsettle most categories and expectations for art while setting up a structure that has the capacity to introduce powerful ideas and atmospheric conditions.

Most recently oppositional colour palettes increasingly enter et al.’s frame for moments of relief – gold, hot pink, baby pink, canary yellow, silver (Fig. 9). These incursions reflect playfulness within the system. An ongoing and reoccurring figure within the practice is the donkey/Elephant-Ganesh. Ganesh is the Hindu god figure, the Lord of Good Fortune who provides prosperity and success. Ganesh is a tangled being within the scope of the et al. complex, as he/she is also a donkey an “end of the line animal, a horse and a donkey”. Everywhere, if you look closely enough, there is optimism to be found in the art work’s elements and signs. This kind of optimism and “liberty” is arguably only possible because it emerges from the (necessary) base conditions of criticism. Accordingly it is fragile (seemingly without attachment) and it is neither truthful nor faultless, but it is there, more or less the only quality that is left without erasure.

1. The formalisation of L. Budd's terminus as artist/signatory was marked by the publication, *The Estate of L. Budd. Catalogue of Extant Works* (Auckland: Michael Lett Publishing, 2008).
2. *simultaneous invalidations* was exhibited three times that year, firstly at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in the group exhibition, *In Glorious Dreams*, 16 December 2000–11 February 2001 with the subtitle "first attempt"; then as *simultaneous invalidations, second attempt*, at Artspace, Auckland, February 2001; and finally at the Annex Basement, Christchurch Art Centre, presented by Jonathan Smart and the University of Canterbury Department of Theatre and Film, July, 2001.
3. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1978), 352.
4. Note from the artists, 27 February 2018, "et al. projects have included collaborators since the inception. These collaborators are acknowledged within each project and have recently included Samuel Holloway, Blaine Western and Ivan Mrcic and PĀNĪAĪ Marama Inc. It is timely to recognise Dr Ralph Marrett whose conceptual and technical collaborations from 2000 to 2016 informed et al. installations including the *fundamental practice* (2005). Dr Ralph Marrett (Defence Technology Agency 1968–2016) has previously chosen to remain as an unacknowledged contributor to the et al. project.
5. The principle rule being if an outsider wishes to address a single member, they might write or contact P. Mule. Speaking to the author, the artist (P. Mule) has said that fundamentally theirs is a very permeable practice, partly because it's non-commercial. In other words, in a real sense, works which remain unsold, are re-authored in a new context, under a new name, adding to the confusion. Explaining that "various different artists have been put into the closet, then brought out again and altered".
6. Sylvère Lotringer, *A Visit with the Artists: An Interview by Sylvère Lotringer* (Melbourne: Pataphysics, 1994).
7. Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play," 353.
8. P. Mule, in conversation with the author, August 2017.
9. P. Mule, August 2017, refers to the presence of domestic items like a 1950s hand mirror, August 2017.
10. The theory and importance of play in psychology and paediatrics was popularised in the early 1970s through writings by Donald Winnicott, who wrote "It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self." Donald Woods Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock Publications Ltd, 1971).
11. Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973).
12. The artists describe their reluctance as a matter of "confidence", especially regarding the possibility of an audience (P. Mule, August 2017).
13. Whilst his name and reputation is less familiar to readers of art history and theory today, during this period Burnham was also read by other New Zealand artists connected to the development of post-object art, evidenced by his appearance in the bibliography of a student essay by Bruce Barber which cites his book *Beyond Modern Sculpture* (New York: G. Braziller, 1968), Bruce Barber Archive, E. H. McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
14. Jack Burnham, "Systems Esthetics," in *Artforum* 7 (no. 1, September 1968): 31.
15. Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (Spring, 1979): 30.
16. Jack Burnham, "Real Time Systems," in *Artforum* 8 (no. 1, September 1969): 55.
17. P. Mule in Lotringer, *A Visit with the Artists*.
18. Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of Master of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, 1988.
19. Roger Horrocks, in conversation with the author, September 2017.
20. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention Of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière* (Paris: Éditions Macula, 1982), trans. Alisa Hartz (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003).
21. Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of Master of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, 1988.
22. Lotringer, *A Visit with the Artists*.
23. Michael Taussig, "What Color is the Sacred," *Critical Inquiry* 33 (no. 1, Autumn 2006): 32.
24. Et al. presented the *fundamental practice* for the New Zealand Pavilion, at the 2005 Venice Biennale, La Pietà, Riva degli Schiavoni, Venice, 8 June–6 November 2005.
25. For a detailed discussion of the controversy and its impact, see Roger Horrocks, "A Short History of the New Zealand Intellectual," in *Re-inventing New Zealand: Essays on the Arts and Media* (Waikato: Atuanui Books, 2016).
26. It shouldn't be underestimated also how the impact of the intense media scrutiny on the artists was a catalyst here in addressing how the force or pressure of the "mainstream" might impact upon the freedom or otherwise of the individual.
27. Natasha Conland (exhibition curator), "Spineless Virtue: et al.'s *fundamental practice*," in *Et al. the fundamental practice* (Wellington: Creative New Zealand, 2005), 51–64.
28. Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play," 354.
29. For a fuller argument in this regard see Gilles Deleuze, "What is the Creative Act?" in *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975–1995* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2007).
30. Burnham, "Real Time Systems," 55.
31. James Meyer, *What Happened to the Institutional Critique?* ed. Peter Weibel, (New York: American Fine Arts, 1993).
32. In the *fundamental practice* and its installation variants up until 2007 et al. incorporated the title page and cover of a Dutch journal, *De Nieuwe Stem* (1946–1967) or "The New Voice". For Venice it was reformatted as "La Nuova Voce".
33. Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," *Artforum* 44 (no. 1, September 2005): 103–4.
34. Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions," 105.
35. <http://etal.name/2006--maintenance-of-social-solidarity>, accessed 19 October 2018.
36. <http://etal.name/2006-maintenance-of-social-solidarity>, accessed 19 October 2018.



Fig. 1
Bernadette Corporation
Get Rid of Yourself
(still) 2003
digital video
courtesy Electronic Arts
Intermix, New York

Nothing Ever Happens

Simon Gennard

This essay is in two parts. The first part reads Bernadette Corporation's *Get Rid of Yourself* (2003),¹ described by the artists as a "video-tract-film" which documents the riots around the 2001 Group of Eight (G8) summit in Genoa, Italy.² The film fails its subject. Its fretful, erratic rhythm leaves viewers groundless, unable to identify with the protesters we glimpse, and unable to grasp who is speaking and where they speak from. The work emerged during a transitional moment; filmed during the height of the anti-globalisation movement, and edited during the aftermath of 9/11. In failing its subject, in staging an address that flounders and stutters, the film gestures towards a reimagining of how an artwork might be a vehicle through which to arrive at, play with, and test the limits of a commitment to social change.

The second part of this essay documents the re-emergence of this film 14 years after its release at Terror Internationale, a short-lived artist-run initiative near Karangahape Road (K Road) in Auckland in April 2016.³ Rather than seeking to align the activities, attitudes, and performative tendencies of Terror Internationale with those of Bernadette Corporation, I speculate why the film might appeal to artists living and working in the present political atmosphere. The context in which Terror Internationale emerged is markedly different from that in which *Get Rid of Yourself* was produced, and yet common attachments and antagonists are able to be detected. In Terror Internationale, we see a playful, devoted, and slyly critical taking up of the waste products of historical avant-gardes, both local and international, and from this play emerges unlikely tactics for maintaining a grasp on a model of making and living that is transformative, unpredictable, and intimate.

Together, these parts are not designed to cohere. Rather, they are positioned as episodes which took place in separate artworlds at separate times, but remain loosely connected. What interests me in this loose connection are the attitudes, strategies, and modes of address adopted by both groups. These artists probe what

it might mean to be a subject now and how community might operate in a post avant-garde present.

Get Rid of Yourself, as the title suggests, is a work of refusal. The film is long, baffling, and often deliberately abrasive. The film documents, at least ostensibly, a moment of political rupture – the protests that accompanied the G8 summit in Genoa, Italy, in July 2001. This event is now considered to be a watershed moment in the anti-globalisation movement. The scale of the protest was enormous, with over 800 international political organisations participating, effectively shutting down the city for a number of days. The Italian government responded with violence, culminating in the death of a protester, Carlo Giuliani, on the afternoon of 20 July.⁴ The momentum of this event, though, was quickly swept away. Less than two months after the summit, on 11 September (9/11), the al-Qaeda terrorist attack in New York on the World Trade Center’s Twin Towers forced a recalibration of the priorities, terms of engagement, and political vocabulary on the part of the movement.⁵

Get Rid of Yourself, which was edited in the wake of 9/11, seems to struggle with this altered political landscape. The film opens with idyllic beach scenes quickly cut between iconic shots of the World Trade Center burning. Tacky digital effects have been applied to these latter images. The buildings appear upside down, or spin slowly, or are mirrored (Fig. 1). The film treats its subject restlessly, as if, in anticipating their failure to faithfully reconstruct the event, the artists pre-emptively stop short, stutter, or fold back on themselves. It is perhaps this restlessness which leads Jian-Xing Too, in her profile of Bernadette Corporation published in *Afterall* in 2006, to dismiss *Get Rid of Yourself* as “unconvincing” as a political documentary.⁶ *Get Rid of Yourself* trades in ambivalence. The conventions of almost a century’s worth of radical political documentary are recognisable, but seem somehow insecure. Political speech is here at once steadfast and shaky. It is this very ambivalence that gives the work its urgency. In their ambivalence, Bernadette Corporation offer a model for political engagement in the twenty-first century. This model at once admires, and acknowledges the shortcomings of, the avant-garde of the previous century, clinging desperately to a commitment to transforming the world, while remaining suspicious of art’s ability to do so.

Immediately following the World Trade Center sequence, a voice sets the scene. The voice belongs to American actress Chloë Sevigny (Fig. 2). Over shaky clips of protest scenes, she recites an essay published by the leftist collective Tiqqun in their eponymous journal in 2001 (Fig. 3).⁷ The essay, the title of which translates to “How is it to be done?” acts as something of a manifesto. Proposing a break with the leftist institutions of the twentieth century – which were quick to turn work into a moral virtue – it resurrects an Autonomist-inspired insurrectionary politics in which revolutionary subjects are bound to exploitative means of production, but

Figs 2–3
Bernadette Corporation
Get Rid of Yourself
(stills) 2003
digital video
courtesy Electronic Arts
Intermix, New York



are not reliant on their own productivity for their salvation. The section quoted in the opening scenes of *Get Rid of Yourself* offers a litany of disparate resistance groups that emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century:

Twenty years, there was punk, the Movement of 77, Autonomy, the City Indians, an eruption, a whole counter-world of subjectivities that no longer wanted to consume, that no longer wanted to produce, that no longer even wanted to be subjectivities.

Here, Tiqqun, and by extension Bernadette Corporation, appear to fold themselves into a decades-long project of reimagining the subjects of history, an effort to move the scene of class conflict from the factory to the city streets.⁸ The subject Tiqqun go on to describe, and Sevigny goes on in the video to recite, is plural, fugitive, and in the future tense. They make room for those subjects that Karl Marx in the nineteenth century – and later the Communist parties of Europe in the twentieth century – historically neglected: women, the unemployed, the precariously employed, the anti-social, and, perhaps, artists.

As well as drawing heavily from the films and writings of Tiqqun, *Get Rid of Yourself* was produced out of a “provisional” alignment with Genoa’s Black Bloc.⁹ Whether

the nature of this collaboration amounts to either an endorsement or repudiation of the tactics employed by the Black Bloc is ambiguous. The Black Bloc, as Jeffrey S. Juris writes, is neither an organisation nor a network, “but rather a specific set of tactics enacted by groups of young militants during protests,” often including:

destruction of private property, usually banks and storefronts of transnational retail chains, ritualised confrontation with police, and a series of more specific practices: such as “de-arrests”, marching in small, compact groups with elbows linked, or jail solidarity.¹⁰

These tactics are coupled with a uniform of black clothing, combat boots, and black balaclavas or bandanas covering the face. The purpose of this uniform is at once to distinguish Black Bloc militants from police and other protesters, and to avoid detection by surveillance cameras and police.

In the film, we experience the spectacle of Black Bloc only briefly. Among the montage of protest clips, we catch glimpses of black-clad bodies, of projectiles flying in all directions, vehicles burning, smashed up shopfronts. Interspersed between these images are clips of a seaside retreat; a family swimming in the ocean, a table being set in a sunny courtyard.¹¹ The most direct contact with Black Bloc offered to the viewer is through testimony in French and English from unseen speakers. During the first half of the film, scenes of protest are narrated by Black Bloc participants reflecting on the protest from a temporal remove. These descriptions all circulate around the kind of transgression permitted when one becomes both anonymous and among others behaving similarly.

There’s a moment ... when you arrive at these kinds of situations with some people you know, friends, people you meet, chance encounters. And then you begin to lose them, because the action makes everybody scatter ... It’s at that point where you feel something that goes beyond you. You’re no longer a subject, the points of reference are lost.

Some fleeting, affective pull occurs both in the adoption of certain modes of dress, and in the understanding that one is among allies. Though the testimony provided by protesters is often lucid, precise and visceral, we are still left with a partial view. Black Bloc is a spectre, something untenable outside the time and space of protest. Or rather, as something unrepresentable. “You don’t see much in these moments,” one protester says, “You don’t have a wide field of vision. There’s a general opacity because everyone’s masked ... plus there’s tear gas, and also the opacity of the crowd.” As these words are spoken, we witness a jet ski zip across an increasingly overexposed frame, eventually disappearing altogether into a blinding brightness.

During these moments of over- and underexposure, it is difficult not to recall the films and writings of French philosopher and filmmaker Guy Debord

(1931–1992). The influence of the Situationist International on *Get Rid of Yourself* is palpable. The leaps the viewer is forced to make between the chaos of protest and the interruptions of fashion shoots, luxury clothing stores, and idyllic beach scenes (images both filmed by the artists and *détourned* without citation) bear a striking resemblance to the composition of Debord's film *The Society of the Spectacle* (1973).¹² In the middle of *Get Rid of Yourself*, at around 33 minutes, the frame goes black for two minutes. The soundtrack continues, and we hear sounds from the streets of Genoa: indiscernible shouting, objects banging into each other, people running. Such a gesture speaks back to the interventions made by Debord into the continuity of filmed action. The image track to Debord's first film, *Hurllements en faveur de Sade* (1952), made during his association with the Lettrists,¹³ is comprised entirely of alternating white and black frames, and the soundtrack to the film lasts for only 22 minutes out of the film's one hour and 20 minute duration. As Thomas Y. Levin writes, for Debord, such a radical negation:

is employed as the essential ingredient in a recipe of provocation intended to “radically transform” the cinematic “situation” from a shrine of passive consumption into an arena of active discussion, a shift *away* from the spectacular and *toward* critical engagement.¹⁴

Debord's undermining of the sanctity of the image, through its *détournement*, or elsewhere its omission entirely, acts as an intervention into the terms of reception and identification. While we may read a sympathy between Debord's project and *Get Rid of Yourself*, Bernadette Corporation's film also reminds us that the conditions of image transmission and reception, as well as the necessary tactics for articulating and enacting dissent, had, in the five decades between the production of *Hurllements* and that of *Get Rid of Yourself*, changed dramatically.

Though the film's visual politics would appear to be Situationist in ancestry, it is through Bernadette Corporation's engagement with the French collective Tiqqun that the film finds its pedagogical thrust. Texts by Tiqqun are quoted throughout the film, often without citation, and often read aloud by Sevigny. Tiqqun emerged in 1999, as a loose group of anonymous participants, with the collectively authored journal of the same name.¹⁵ The essay Sevigny quotes from at the beginning of the film, and continues to quote from throughout, was published in the second issue of this journal. Drawing on (and at times arguing against) a cacophonous host of unattributed theorists including Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, and Giorgio Agamben, the tract stages a critique of a politics based around recognisable identity forms and reformist compromise (Fig. 4).

The work of Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, in particular *The Coming Community* (1990), provides the basis of Tiqqun's call to action.¹⁶ Tiqqun propose a politics based around Agamben's concept of the “whatever singularity.” A “whatever singularity” describes a model of community devoid of the terms of inclusion and

exclusion presupposed by the nation state and its institutions. Agamben describes the “whatever singularity” as “a being whose community is mediated not by any condition of belonging (being red, being Italian, being Communist) nor by the simple absence of conditions (a negative community . . .) but by belonging itself.”¹⁷ “Whatever,” here, is taken to mean that which is neither general nor specific,¹⁸ or, we can interpret it as an ethical model which grants legitimacy to all regardless of particular attributes. *Get Rid of Yourself* invites the viewer to detect lines of affinity between the “whatever singularity” and the spectacular performance of Black Bloc. In *Get Rid of Yourself*, through Tiqqun’s words, the “whatever singularity” comes into being in “nocturnal spaces,” “In a squat. In an orgy. In a riot.”¹⁹ We wander through Genoa, focusing on nothing and no one in particular, we move through narrow streets, passing police cars, buses, and pedestrians, as Sevigny intones:

Everything that isolates me as subject, as a body endowed with a public configuration of attributes. I feel it dissolve, bodies fray at their edges, at their limit, they blur, little by little, I achieve a new nakedness. That’s what our need for communism is. A need for nocturnal spaces, where we can find each other beyond our qualities.

In being, supposedly, free of all that might identify them as anything in particular – in being, supposedly ungendered, unracialised, unencumbered with anything that might attach itself to being named – Black Bloc would appear to provide a model for the kind of community set out by Tiqqun and Agamben. We know, however, that Black Bloc is unstable, fleeting, and impossible to access outside of moments of occasional rupture. It struggles to make itself seen in the film. The viewer is left to approximate, left to fill in the blanks opened up between what is spoken, and what images we find ourselves privy to.



Fig. 4
Bernadette
Corporation
Get Rid of Yourself
(still) 2003
digital video
courtesy Electronic
Arts Intermix,
New York

That “whatever” bears a striking resemblance to the now outdated vernacular term denoting indifference, aloofness, or adolescent myopia is an awkward idiosyncrasy of translation. This inference, however, is only the more pronounced when the term is spoken in a dry monotone by Sevigny. Around 16 minutes into the film, we see her sitting in a comfortable suburban kitchen, rehearsing the testimony we have just heard spoken by, what the viewer has previously assumed to be, protesters. Sevigny represents, or she did in 2003, a very specific kind of celebrity. According to Jamie Sexton, she signifies “*uncool cool*,” by which he refers to Sevigny’s seemingly unaffected performance of reluctant stardom, her straddling of the fashion and art film worlds, and her apparent reluctance to appease the normative expectations of either scene.²⁰ What, then, are we to make of Sevigny’s recital of Black Bloc testimony? If it amounts to parody, who is being ridiculed? Should the viewer be left to wonder, if Sevigny is seen rehearsing from a script, whether all other contributions to the film were not also scripted beforehand? Sevigny is an affront. She unsettles. She stutters when trying to pronounce “desubjectivisation.” She provides a thrift-chic counterweight to the grotesque Werner von Delmont, the aged theorist who appears in the film sitting by a stream, pontificating on the lack of “strategic intelligence” in contemporary activism, who displays his blistered foot to the camera, who plucks a dead fish from the water and calls it “capitalism today.”

Sevigny, stuttering away in a space which, in comparison to the chaotic street scenes, appears to be both bucolic and antiseptic, strips bare the affective potency of Black Bloc. Whatever traction, whatever potential for permanent change, for a coming community, may have seemed possible during the moment of protest gets lost somewhere between the capture of images and their transmission, and finds itself flaccid, out of place, or exhausted when enunciated by Sevigny. Political feeling is difficult to sustain. Sevigny brings to the surface the artifice of the film, as well as confirming the inadequacy of filmic representation to capture moments of political upheaval. In addition to this, however, she introduces into the film an acute awareness of branding, and in doing so, we witness the provisional alignment between Tiquun and Bernadette Corporation transform from a regurgitation of the arguments produced by the former into something more ambivalent.

In *Get Rid of Yourself*, doubt enters the scene as an affront to enunciation. Repetition, here, estranges the enunciation of the protesters and forces the viewer to recalibrate their understanding of where emphasis should fall, and what argument might be being made by the film. This repetition, however, does not necessarily amount to an evacuation of conviction on the part of the film’s creators, or the participants we see and hear. Sevigny’s repetition may gesture towards an acknowledgement of the failure of the avant-garde of the twentieth century. A certain dissonance opens up when one compares Debord’s fervent, measured narration of *The Society of the Spectacle* to Sevigny’s stuttering drawl. To stutter, however, is not necessarily to disavow oneself of a committed position. To stutter may be to find oneself aware of the limits of political language, and to find oneself limited when uttering it. There are other examples of stuttering in the film. At one moment near its beginning, we

see a couple waiting at a four-way intersection on a scooter. As they wait for a space to open up in the traffic, the driver inches forward, and then reverses back slightly, starting to turn, and then stopping quickly. He steadies the scooter with his foot. Eventually the scooter turns, and disappears off-screen. The scene hangs on for a few seconds, making all the anticipation and deflation of the previous minute of inaction all the more profound. The scene repeats at the end of the film – the couple again edging back and forth, again turning off-screen towards a destination we cannot know.

In expanding upon her claim that *Get Rid of Yourself* is “not convincing” as a political documentary, Jian-Xing Too turns towards an essay written by Bernadette Corporation in 1997, which represents a mock-defence of the corporate form.²¹ The author(s) describe the corporation as “bands of people forming a bodiless/flexible entity in order to do whatever they want – and not be liable.” They continue by speculating on the potential of assuming a corporate form:

It might be possible to rethink the totality of the present system from the perspective of how your corporation is structured. While you were once dedicated to producing “loaded” products, you might take it up a level by enacting “loaded” modes of production ... Take it up many levels, change patterns of brutality by encouraging negative business practices, sketchy follow-up, worthwhile delays, mysterious gaps in information, that force factors of patience into the market while trying to dispel anger and cruelty from client expectations.²²

The corporation, we might say, is the only legitimate model of collective life available under the total domination of capital. This, perhaps, over-invests in the revolutionary potential of Bernadette Corporation’s organisation, but it offers a way to think about their reinvention, their play, their *détournement*, as a series of strategies that bear a certain resemblance to Black Bloc’s spectacular politics while remaining ambivalent about the way in which Black Bloc produce those politics. It allows us to think about the organisation of Bernadette Corporation as an entity without a face, without an identity, but not necessarily in the way Black Bloc presents itself as faceless. Black Bloc’s mode of inhabiting facelessness is perpetually volatile, fleeting, and vulnerable to repression. By inhabiting facelessness in the corporate form, Bernadette Corporation is able to reproduce itself as it sees fit. Founded in New York City in 1994 by Bernadette van Huy, John Kelsey, and Antek Walczak, they have, throughout their career, transformed themselves from party planners to editors of the magazine *Made in USA*, designers of several lines of clothing, and authors of the novel *Reena Spaulings* (2005).²³ Though the identities of the founding members are not kept secret, the Corporation itself expands and contracts, absorbing the skills it needs in order to produce. The corporate form allows members of the group to eschew authorship, to avoid the possibility of having their work read against and among overdetermined identity categories. When, therefore, Bennett Simpson claims

that BC “undermine [identity] from within,”²⁴ we might be able to point to ways in which this form is toyed with, performed, and perverted; the ways in which the corporate form provides a conduit through which something like the “whatever singularity” can be imagined in the existing world.

We might also consider *Get Rid of Yourself* a typical product of “negative business practices, sketchy follow-up, worthwhile delays, mysterious gaps in information.” A product which gleefully fails to deliver the promises it makes – that is, the promise of the political. In interrupting itself, the provisional alignment between Black Bloc and Bernadette Corporation is splintered. The film’s diagnosis of its historical situation and its offer of a way out of the hostile living conditions this situation produces does not cohere comfortably with either Tiqqun’s diatribes or what Black Bloc’s testimony would suggest. Tiqqun appears to retain faith in a kind of post-Situationist project of shattering the unlivable conditions of capitalist production through revolutionary praxis. Tiqqun (and Black Bloc) share with the Situationists an “antipolitical” position, in that they reject “existing political forms, since these are exactly what maintain the separation between politics, art and everyday life on which the spectacle is based.”²⁵ Bernadette Corporation’s *modus operandi* is subterfuge. This position acknowledges that finding a way out of the political conditions of the present is more difficult than it appears. It is perhaps best elucidated in a short essay published in 2006, in which Bernadette Corporation appear to acknowledge the failure of the avant-garde project and its utopian fantasies:

Every utopia has been discredited, it seems, while bohemia and the seductive margins of urban life have vanished. For those who are extremely agitated and inflamed by their resolution to subvert the existing way of things, the dangers are quadrupled. No longer a hope for popular revolt and change, today’s mass is completely middle class. The proletariat is gone, and in its wake there is only proletarianisation, a marginalisation and poverty without communal identification, without class politics.²⁶

Get Rid of Yourself was produced at a moment when socialism had failed, the welfare state had already largely been dismantled, and yet protesting the continuing unfolding of global capitalism’s spread still seemed legitimate. The energy of the anti-globalisation movement, which seemed so promising during the protests in Genoa, was quickly swept away following the attacks on the World Trade Center, to be replaced by an era of what Tom McDonough calls “military neoliberalism.”²⁷ *Get Rid of Yourself* acknowledges that existing political languages are haunted by their own failure. Bernadette Corporation acknowledges, too, the gravity of 9/11 as a periodising event, in which the potential for transformation seized by Tiqqun and Black Bloc seems to have dissipated.

By considering *Get Rid of Yourself* against a backdrop of broken promises of post-World War II social democracy in the West, we are able to think about the film as a

cultural product unable to bear the overinvestment of the political that takes place in the situation it purports to document. For all their brash, daring iconoclasm, both Tiqqun and Black Bloc exemplify a mode of political optimism that quickly became untenable in the months and years following Genoa (and may already have been belated at the moment of protest). The protest, we might say, represents a moment when the horizon of possibility gets shattered. These moments, and the alliances and communities that form in these moments, are volatile, unstable, fleeting, and perhaps most importantly, they struggle to make it into representation. *Get Rid of Yourself* presupposes this. In the space opened between the capture of images, their arrangement, and their transmission, doubt (never productive in revolutionary settings) finds itself entering the scene. The time of film, unlike the time of protest, is ongoing, and in being ongoing it is forced to navigate unexpected contours, hurdles, blockages that spring up seemingly out of nowhere. Bernadette Corporation's performance of irony, its seeming parody, its apparent recognition of the exhaustion of the political, might be able to be reframed under these terms. We might think of their practice not as an abandonment of the political, or of the will to be otherwise, but as an attempt to maintain some kind of grip upon a transformative desire in unpredictable times.

The circumstances under which *Get Rid of Yourself* reappeared in Aotearoa New Zealand were fairly prosaic. Teghan Burt, one of the members of Terror Internationale came across Bernadette Corporation through the book *2000 Wasted Years*,²⁸ published in 2014 on the occasion of the group's first retrospective at Artists Space, New York.²⁹ Several members of Terror Internationale had also interacted with Bernadette Corporation's work online. In the years since its original exhibition, *Get Rid of Yourself* has appeared on a number of different websites, and subsequently been circulated among anarchists and artists alike; disappearing and reappearing sporadically as copyright infringement complaints are made, and users then simply replace what gets removed. Hoping to access more of the collective's work, Burt contacted Antek Walczak, one of the founding members of Bernadette Corporation, who responded by supplying the group with a password to an online database of works by the collective, Walczak himself, and others. Walczak also gave the group permission to exhibit works in Terror Internationale's artist-run space in Auckland, New Zealand, at that time known as Halloween Gallery. As ordinary as this exchange sounds in its description, it is perhaps necessary to mention that the ease with which a fledgling artist-run initiative in Auckland could contact, and subsequently gain permission to exhibit works by, a well-established group of artists based in New York is the product of a particular historical moment. Thanks to the internet, contact between artists across continents is near effortless, and the ripping, sharing, and multiplication of artworks has become ubiquitous.

On 8 April 2016, Terror Internationale staged an event titled *Butterfly Darwin Sex Party* (Fig. 5), during which they screened *Get Rid of Yourself*, alongside *Bernadette Corporation: Fashion Shows* (1995–97), and two videos by Walczak, *Dynasty* (1998), and *Run With Zeroes* (1999). The films were projected onto the walls of the Hereford Street space in Auckland using three projectors running simultaneously (Fig. 6). The event proved popular. At one point in the evening, the owners of the restaurant below, otherwise tolerant of the group's activities, came up to warn them that the floors were at risk of giving way.³⁰ Following the event, the films were exhibited for another three weeks, during the space's sporadic opening hours.

Butterfly Darwin Sex Party was the third event to be held at the space. The first was the launch of fashion designer Oliver Edward Guyon's Fall/Winter 2016 collection on 4 February 2016. Later in the same month, artists Diva Blair and Tim Webby staged

Fig. 5
Teghan Burt
poster for *Butterfly Darwin Sex Party*
Halloween Gallery/
Terror Internationale,
2016

Fig. 6
Installation view:
Butterfly Darwin Sex Party
Halloween Gallery/
Terror Internationale,
2016



two installations side by side (Fig. 7). Following the screenings of the Walczak and Bernadette Corporation films, Terror Internationale would go on to stage four more exhibitions before eventually disbanding in late 2016: a group show titled *Friday the 13th; Imaginary Party* by Teghan Burt; *Method Acting*, a performance by Jessie Howell; and *Army of One* by Selena Gerzic.³¹

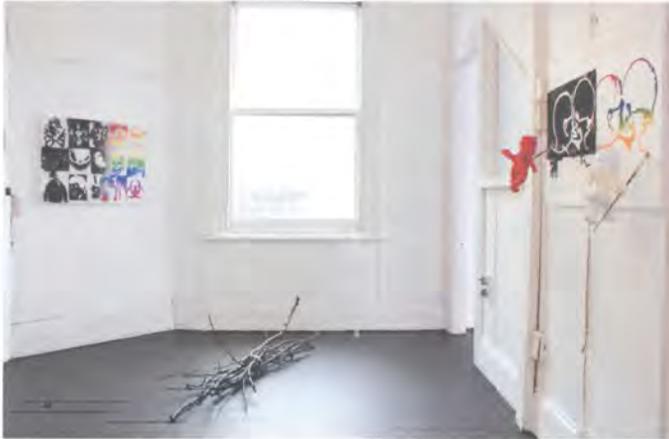


Fig. 7
Tim Webby
Installation view:
Burning
Derealisation Under
Electric Light at Sad
Carnival in the
Woods, Halloween
Gallery/Terror
Internationale, 2016
Photo: George Rump

The ambitions of Terror Internationale were humble. The gallery space was inside a home shared by several members. There was no manifesto, no curatorial board, and no external funding. The founding members of the group included dropouts and graduates from the Elam School of Fine Arts in Auckland, self-trained artists, DJs, and fashion designers. Their aim was simply to provide a space in which they could exhibit their own work; to speak to and among themselves, without concern for critical recognition, or kowtowing to institutional tastes.³² The group was large, with members coming and going throughout the space's short life, and included Diva Blair, Teghan Burt, Rachel Duval, Selena Gerzic, Oliver Gilbert, Oliver Guyon, Jessie Howell, Honor Munro, Tash Keddy, Joanna Neumegen, Bridget Riggir-Cuddy, George Rump, Ella Scott-Fleming, Anna Sisson, Jacob Terre, and Tim Webby.³³ In May 2016, the group were invited to participate at Auckland Art Fair as part of a series of artist projects called *Pacific Real Time*. After unsuccessfully trying to secure a booth among the participating dealer galleries, Terror Internationale occupied a space on the periphery of the fair proper consisting of works by artists associated with the group scattered amongst tattered furniture from the gallery. Among these works was a threadbare rug, into which the words "The End" had been burned by Selena Gerzic, and wine bottles repurposed as candlesticks by Tim Webby. In their space, Terror Internationale at once gleefully engaged with the language of commerce upon which the art fair is predicated, while interrupting that very language with their imposition of the typically downtrodden trappings of bohemian life. Here, they might be positioned within a lineage of artist-run initiatives, including local Auckland examples Gambia Castle and Gloria Knight, which willingly assimilated into a matrix of dealers,

fairs, and public institutions, and, once there, playfully antagonised the very conventions of these spaces.³⁴ Not everyone, however, was convinced by the gesture. In her round-up of the fair, Natasha Matila-Smith commends the group for “injecting personality” into the fair, but proceeds to shed doubt on the group’s authenticity. “There is no doubt in my mind,” Matila-Smith writes, “... that the artists of Terror Internationale will be the Michael Lett’s, Simon Denny’s and Sarah Hopkinson’s of the future. This stall, although aesthetically different from many at the fair, absolutely belonged there.”³⁵

Terror Internationale’s inclusion in Auckland Art Fair contributed to a mythology which quickly formed around the group; a mythology informed as much by the recent history of K Road in Auckland as by the tangible gestures made by the artists. In a review of the fair, published in *The Spinoff*, the anonymous author briefly draws a comparison between Terror Internationale (known at that time as Terror Management) and Gloria Knight, who participated in the previous Auckland Art Fair in 2013. The reviewer writes:

Terror Management aka Halloween have a booth, filling the role of the on-trend artists-run space included in the fair to provide a younger, riskier flavour. So a similar function to the Gloria Knight gallery last time. But Terror Management don’t fit in so well (more punk and less private school art-bro) and are more interesting.³⁶

This comparison is telling. For while Gloria Knight shunned K Road and its historic association with Auckland’s art scene, preferring to locate itself among the super yachts and premium waterfront apartment buildings of the Wynyard Quarter, the seedier qualities of K Road, now being swept away in the street’s pockets of gentrification, provided Terror Internationale with the perfect playground. The comparison is telling as well, when one considers both Terror Internationale and Gloria Knight in their vague, perhaps coincidental, relation to Bernadette Corporation. A decade prior to Gloria Knight’s establishment, the members of Bernadette Corporation founded Reena Spaulings Gallery. Reena Spaulings, like Gloria Knight, is a fictitious woman – who slips between the role of dealer, gallerist, and, occasionally, artist.³⁷ My point in dwelling on this comparison, and on the unlikely presence of Bernadette Corporation in these gestures, is neither to accuse the founders of Gloria Knight of imitation, nor to overstate Bernadette Corporation’s influence on the recent trajectory of art in Aotearoa New Zealand. My intent, rather, is to insist upon an understanding of branding, marketing, and personality necessary to the establishment of recent artist-run initiatives – an understanding played with, and undermined by, Bernadette Corporation, Terror Internationale, and Gloria Knight alike.

I want to insist that the “punk” attitude adopted by Terror Internationale was strategic, but by no means insincere. For Teghan Burt, at least, the legacy of seminal Auckland artist-run space Teststrip (1992–97) and other artist-run initiatives



Fig. 8
Teghan Burt
*Substitute for
Mortals* (detail) 2016
fabric, clothes
Photo: George Rump

around K Road provided a model for collective living and making; a time and space which was intimate, exciting, and open to possibility. Burt admits her “obsession” with the heady, ecstatic intimacy of the Teststrip scene in the 1990s, yet simultaneously remains suspicious of her own nostalgia.³⁸ She’s aware, for instance, that the very traces which remain of this scene – Teststrip founder Giovanni Intra’s writing, photographer Ann Shelton’s *Red Eye* (1997) – were as much exercises in mythmaking as they were documents of a social milieu. Or, as Stuart A. McKenzie notes in a short profile of the space published in 1993:

Teststrip shows often tread a fine line between reporting and celebrating social dysfunction. There is a Nietzschean amorality here, and also a strenuous Romanticism in the style of Keats’ promise that until we are sick, we understand not.³⁹

For Burt, however, obsession and suspicion aren’t necessarily at odds. In her practice, obsession becomes the seed from which a performative mythology might grow and be put to use, as well as that which enables one to maintain a grasp upon a desire for art to be capable of social transformation.

The ends towards which Burt’s obsession point are perhaps best illustrated in the exhibition she held at Terror Internationale, titled *Imaginary Party* (2016). The exhibition featured two works by Burt, *Substitute for Mortals #1* and *Substitute for Mortals #2* (Fig. 8). The latter work is a collage made up of 13 different outfits sewn onto a white sheet of fabric. These clothes were sourced from friends, lovers, or found abandoned in op shops. The clothes are drab, well-loved, and contain all kinds of 90s throwbacks – a short plaid skirt, wide-legged jeans, a statement lapel of leopard print faux-fur accenting a brown suede jacket. The work indexes the milieu surrounding the space; it seems at once intimate, overbearing, and ecstatic. The clothes feature creases, stains, the odd rip; gesturing towards the stories they may have to tell, the bodies they may once have covered, without ever fully revealing themselves. The figures are ghostly, constituted by the absence of faces and limbs,

but this absence should not necessarily be read as lack. It might rather gesture towards a community in becoming. The title of Burt's exhibition was taken from Tiqqun's text *This is Not a Program* (2011).⁴⁰ For Tiqqun, the Imaginary Party is a social organisation, not unlike Agamben's "whatever singularity", always in the future tense – "at once already present and yet to be built."⁴¹ The Party exists in the very "nocturnal spaces" motioned towards in *Get Rid of Yourself*. Tiqqun, like Agamben, attempt to describe a historical subject at once universalised, plural, and infinitely malleable. "Building the Party," Tiqqun writes:

no longer means building a total organisation within which all ethical differences might be set aside for the sake of a common struggle; building the Party means *establishing forms-of-life in their difference, intensifying, complicating relations between them*.⁴²

The space of potential left by Burt's figures might then be read as an attempt to illustrate, at least speculatively, the forms of life that might make up the Imaginary Party.

Tiqqun, it must be admitted, are not necessarily always generous to artists. And Burt remains coy about the extent of her identification with the Party. Burt's work, though, demonstrates a commitment to art and what it might do. It demonstrates a willingness to suspend disbelief in the promises an increasingly expensive, sterile K Road can no longer keep; it demonstrates a willingness to believe the myths a group of artists wrote around themselves two decades prior; and a delight in the creation of new myths around the artist and her friends.

What, if anything, might we make of the re-emergence of *Get Rid of Yourself* in Aotearoa New Zealand 13 years after its initial release? The film, as I have argued, gestures towards a reimagination of the revolutionary subject and a renegotiation of how that subject is to speak. It takes up the strategies of a historical avant-garde and tests the limits of these strategies, tests how they might be reapplied to very different political circumstances. The film also anticipates the failure of its own address, and repeatedly attempts to undermine itself, not to evacuate commitment or to sink itself into political quietude, but in order to maintain some grip on its own reparative ambition. While we may point to certain common gestures detectable in the respective practices of Bernadette Corporation and Terror Internationale – an anti-fashion aesthetic, nods to the Situationists, an approach to shared authorship and anonymity at once calculated – I do not wish to labour this comparison. Perhaps what is most interesting about these two groups may be their similar, but distinct, approaches to refusal. Each, in different ways, refuses to be exhausted by the exigencies of the present they find themselves in. Each, as well, maintains a faith in the misplaced optimism of past avant-gardes, and each hungrily digests the tactics of these avant-gardes and redeploys them knowingly. The cumulative effect of these refusals is artwork which is awkward, intense, intimate, indulgent, sincere, stuttering, and urgent.

1. Bernadette Corporation was founded in New York City in 1994 by artists Bernadette van Huy, John Kelsey, and Antek Walczak. Since then, the group has been based between New York and Paris. Bernadette Corporation, *Get Rid of Yourself*, 2003, digital video, sound, colour, 61 minutes, distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York.
2. The first part of this essay is an edited version of a chapter from my MA thesis, *Negative Capability: Documentary and Political Withdrawal* (Victoria University of Wellington, 2017).
3. Throughout their short life time, Terror Internationale were known by several names – first Halloween Gallery, then Terror Management, then Terror Internationale. For clarity, I have referred to the group as Terror Internationale throughout this essay.
4. Antigoni Memou, "When It Bleeds, It Leads": Death and Press Photography in the Anti-Capitalist Protests in Genoa in 2001," *Third Text* 24, no. 3 (2010): 341.
5. Mark Rupert, "In the Belly of the Beast: Resisting Globalisation and War in a Neo-imperial Moment," in *Critical Theories, International Relations, and the Anti-globalisation Movement: The Politics of Global Resistance*, eds. Catherine Eschle and Bice Maiguascha (London: Routledge, 2006), 37.
6. Jian-Xing Too, "Burn a Debt to the Present," *Afterall* 14 (2006): 64.
7. Tiqqun emerged in France in 1999 with the publication of the first issue of the group's eponymous journal. The group disbanded in 2001. Many of its members remain anonymous. English translations of selected texts from the first two issues of *Tiqqun* were published by Semiotext(e) between 2010 and 2012, leading to a renewed interest in the group among leftist critics and artists.
8. Jason E. Smith, "The Politics of Incivility: Autonomia and Tiqqun," *Minnesota Review* 75, no. 1 (2010): 121.
9. Bernadette Corporation, "Get Rid of Yourself," <http://www.bernadettecorporation.com/getrid.htm> (accessed August 9, 2016).
10. Jeffrey S. Juris, "Violence Performed and Imagined: Militant Action, the Black Bloc and the Mass Media in Genoa," *Critique of Anthropology* 25, no. 4 (2005): 420.
11. These scenes were filmed in Calabria, where the group retreated following the protests. Janet Sarbanes, "An Independent Group? Bernadette Corporation, Post-Pop Collective," *Afterall* 14 (2006): 52.
12. The grammar of this montage, including the imposition of the Twin Towers burning, also bears a resemblance to Tiqqun's (sometimes credited as The Imaginary Party) film *And the war has only just begun* (2001).
13. The Lettrists were an avant-garde group of artists, writers and filmmakers founded in Paris in the mid-1940s by Isidore Isou. See: Sylvain Monsegu, "Lettrism," in ed. Achille Bonito Oliva, *Art Tribes* (Milan: Skira, 2002) 35–84.
14. Thomas Y. Levin, "Dismantling the Spectacle: The Cinema of Guy Debord," in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, ed. Tom McDonough (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2002), 347.
15. See: Tom McDonough, "Unrepresentable Enemies: On the Legacy of Guy Debord and the Situationist International," *Afterall* 28 (2011): 42–55.
16. Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
17. Agamben, 84.
18. Agamben, Translator's Notes, 107.
19. The passages quoted by Sevigny differ slightly from the translation published by Semiotext(e) in *Introduction to Civil War*. I have here quoted directly from *Get Rid of Yourself*, though have relied on the Semiotext(e) edition when consulting the prose in full.
20. Tiqqun, *Introduction to Civil War*, trans. Alexander R. Galloway and Jason E. Smith (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010).
21. Jamie Sexton, "Prisoner of Cool: Chloé Sevigny, Alternative Stardom and Image Management," in *Cult Film Stardom: Offbeat Attractions and Processes of Cultification*, eds. Kate Egan and Sarah Thomas (London: Palgrave, 2012), 75, italics in original.
22. Bernadette Corporation, "Corporate Responsibility and the Swine We Are," *Purple Prose* 12 (1997): 138–141.
23. Quoted in Jian-Xing, 64.
24. Bernadette Corporation, *Reena Spaulings* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005).
25. Bennett Simpson, "Techniques of Today," *Artforum* 43, no. 1 (2004): 222.
26. Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, "Art, Revolution and Communitisation," *Third Text* 26, no. 2 (2012): 241.
27. Bernadette Corporation, "Be Corpse," *Afterall* 14 (2006): 58.
28. McDonough, 52.
29. Bernadette Corporation, *2000 Wasted Years* (New York: Koenig Books, 2014).
30. As is the case with many artist-run initiatives, Terror Internationale left few documents behind them. In writing this essay, I have relied on personal testimony from three of the members of group, shared with me through email exchanges which took place between July and September 2017.
31. Email correspondence to the author, August 15, 2017.
32. Following Terror Internationale's demise, the same group of artists continued staging exhibitions and events in the space until their landlord forced them to leave in mid-2017. Email correspondence to the author, September 24, 2017.
33. Email correspondence to the author, September 24, 2017.
34. Email correspondence to the author, August 28, 2017.
35. See: Emma Bugden, "Hybrid Practices: Artist-run Spaces and Money," in *Assay/Essay: Artist-run in Aotearoa New Zealand*, ed. Gabrielle Amodeo (Wellington: Enjoy Public Art Gallery, 2016), 52–57.
36. Natasha Matila-Smith, "All is Unfair in Art and Privilege," #500Words, <https://hashtag500words.com/2016/06/13/all-is-unfair-in-art-and-privilege> (accessed August 15, 2017).
37. "Disjointed Art and Unbridled Commerce: An Insider's Take on the Auckland Art Fair," The Spinoff, posted May 28, 2016, <https://thespinoff.co.nz/featured/28-05-2016/disjointed-art-and-unbridled-commerce-an-insiders-take-on-the-auckland-art-fair> (accessed January 10, 2018).
38. "Werk," Gloria Knight, October 2013, accessed via Internet Archive, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160123053200/http://www.gloriaknight.co.nz/current/gloria-knight-werk> (accessed January 10, 2018).
39. Email correspondence to the author, July 6, 2017.
40. Stuart A. McKenzie, "Teststrip: A History of an Artist-run Space (1992–1997)," eds. Teststrip Board (Auckland: Clouds, 2008), 34.
41. Tiqqun, *This is Not a Program*, trans. Joshua David Jordan (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011).
42. Tiqqun, 13.
43. Tiqqun, 13, italics in original.



Le regard des vaincus. Militants d'extrême gauche et surtout révolutionnaires étrangers recueillis par le gouvernement d'Allende

Georges Menant, de Santiago du Chili, réfugié à Paris



1980 • exposité • sous les/ramis depuis près d'un mois au stade national.

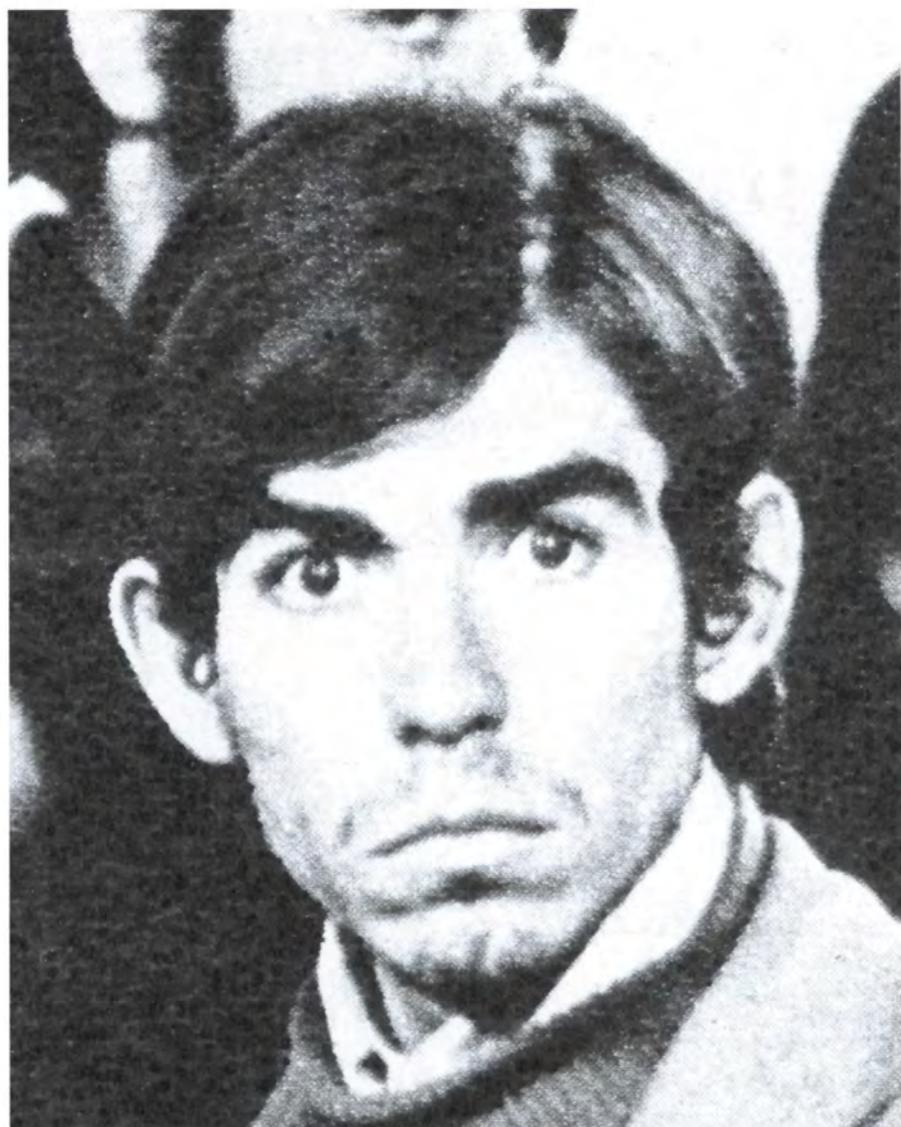
On 1980





Le regard des vaincus. Militants d'extrême gauche et surtout révolutionnaires étrangers recueillis par le gouvernement d'Allende.

Georges Menant, de Santiago du Chili: 1973-1974





Le regard des vaincus. Militants d'extrême gauche et surtout révolutionnaires étrangers recueillis par le gouvernement d'Allende.

Georges Menant, de Santiago du Chili, 1973.



CHILI SOU



7.000 « suspects » sont enfermés depuis près d'un mois au stade national.

On brûle

















TelCon:9/16/73 (Home) 11:50

Mr. Kissinger/

The President:

K: Hello.

P: Hi, Henry.

K: Mr. President.

P: Where are you. In New York?

K: No, I am in Washington. I am working. I may go to the football game this afternoon if I get through.

P: Good. Good. Well it is the opener. It is better than television. Nothing new of any importance of is there?

K: Nothing of very great consequence. The Chilean thing is getting consolidated and of course the newspapers and bleeding because a pro-Communist government has been overthrown.

P: Isn't that something. Isn't that something.

K: I mean instead of celebrating - in the Eisenhower period we would be heroes.

P: Well we didn't - as you know - our hand doesn't show on this one though.

K: We didn't do it. I mean we helped them. _____ created the conditions as great as possible(??)

P: That is right. And that is the way it is going to be played. But listen, as far as people are concerned let me say they aren't going to buy this crap from the Liberals on this one.

K: Absolutely not.

P: They know it is a pro-Communist government and that is the way it is.

K: Exactly. And pro-Castro.

P: Well the main thing was. Let's forget the pro-Communist. It was an anti-American government all the ~~wide~~ way.



K: Oh, wildly.

P: And your expropriating. I notice the memorandum you sent up of the confidential conversation _____ set up a policy for reimbursement on expropriations and cooperation with the United States for breaking relations with Castro. Well what the hell that is a great treat(?) if they thing that. No don't let the columns and the bleeding on that

K: Oh, oh it doesn't bother me. I am just reporting it to you.

P: Yes, you are reporting it because it is just typical of the crap we are up against.

K: And the unbelievable filthy hypocrisy.

P: We know that,

K: Of these people. When it is South Africa, if we don't overthrow them there they are raising hell.

P: Yes, that is right.

K: But otherwise things are faily quiet. The Chinese are making very friendly noises. I think they are just waiting for my confirmation to make a proposal.

P: When you say their noises are friendly, what do you mean?

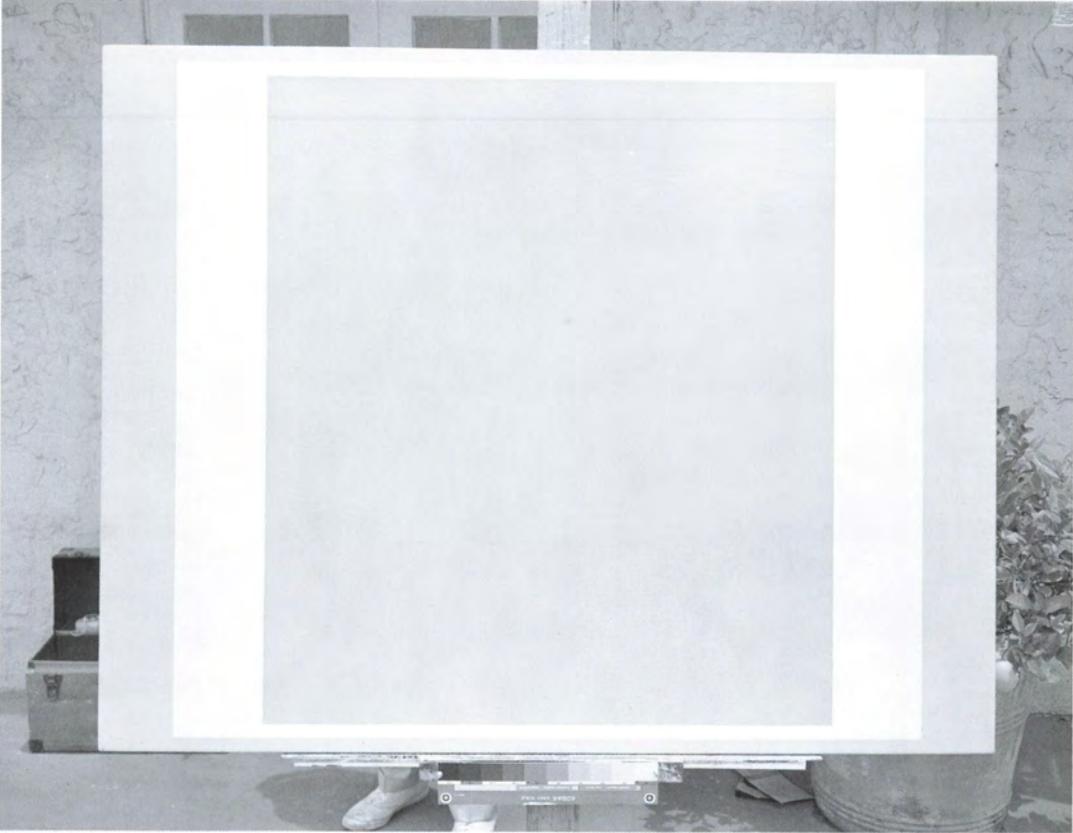
K: Well their newspapers have stopped attacking us. They are blasting the Russians like crazy. And they have blasted them so much with Pompidou there that he is embarrassed. And Sy Sultzberger(?) had been denied a visa so we called them ~~xxx~~ to say that he was not like Reston. And within 24 hours he got a visa.

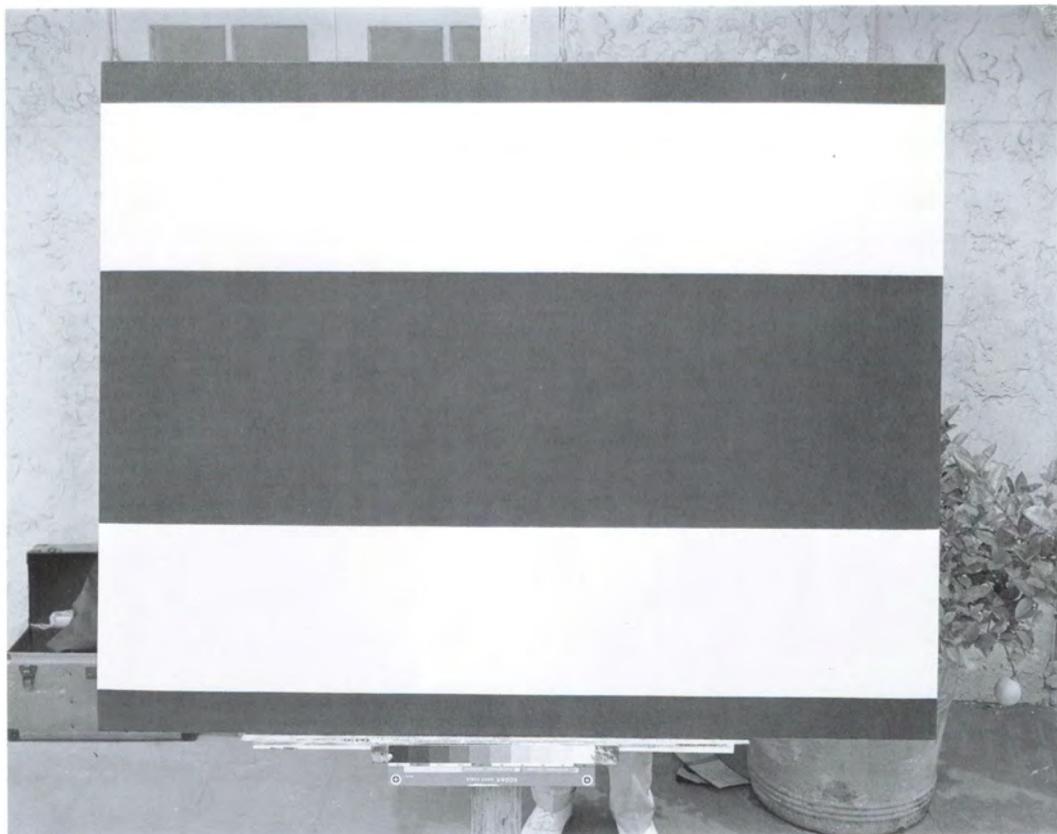
P: That is good.

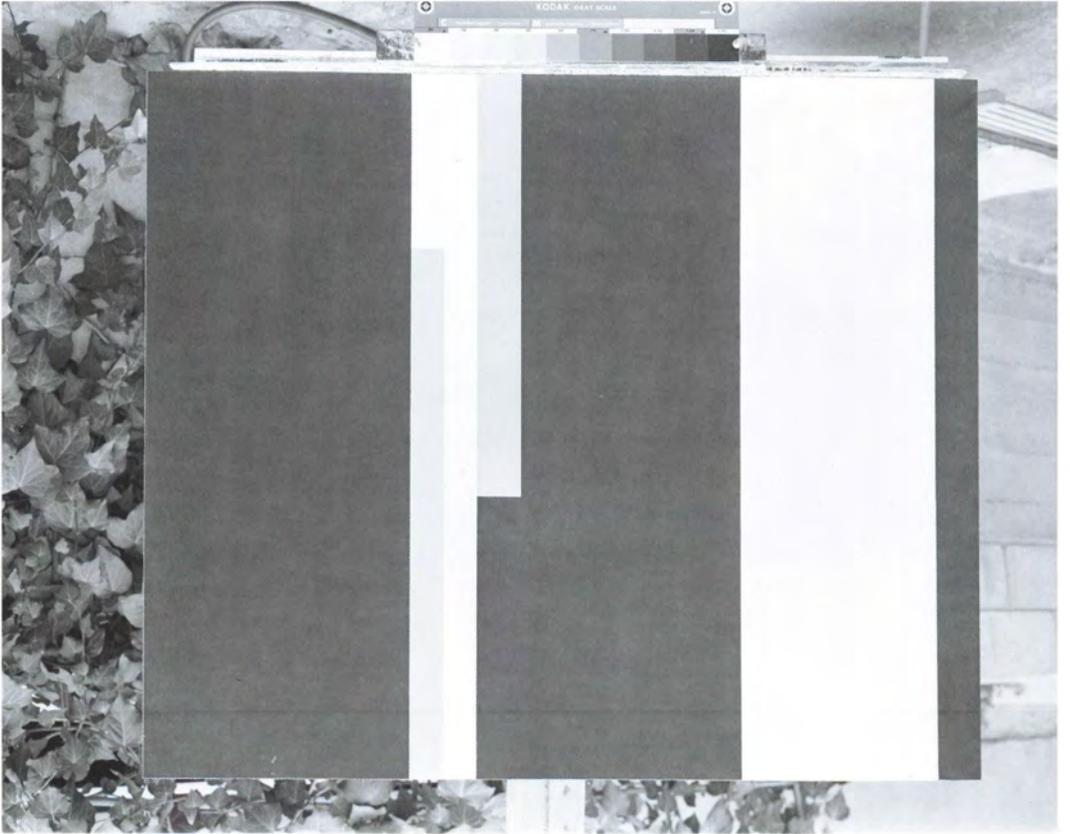
K: You know that they wouldn't do unless they wanted to ingratiate themselves.

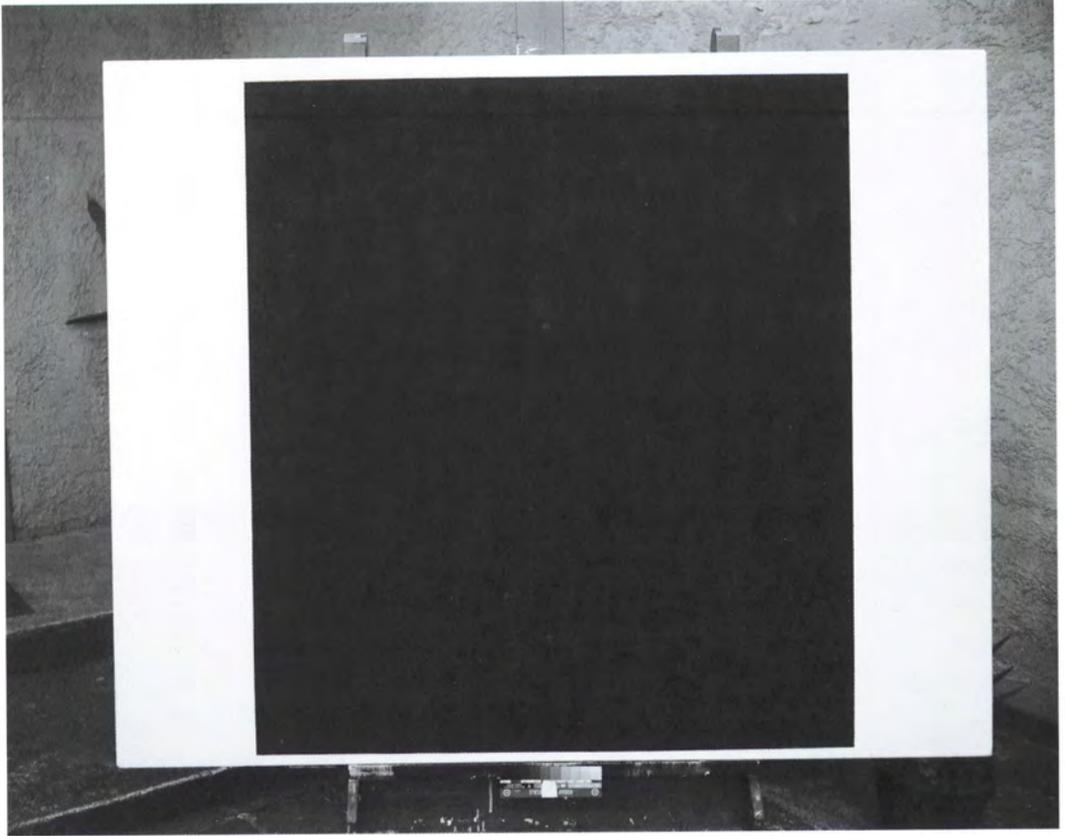
P: Right, right.

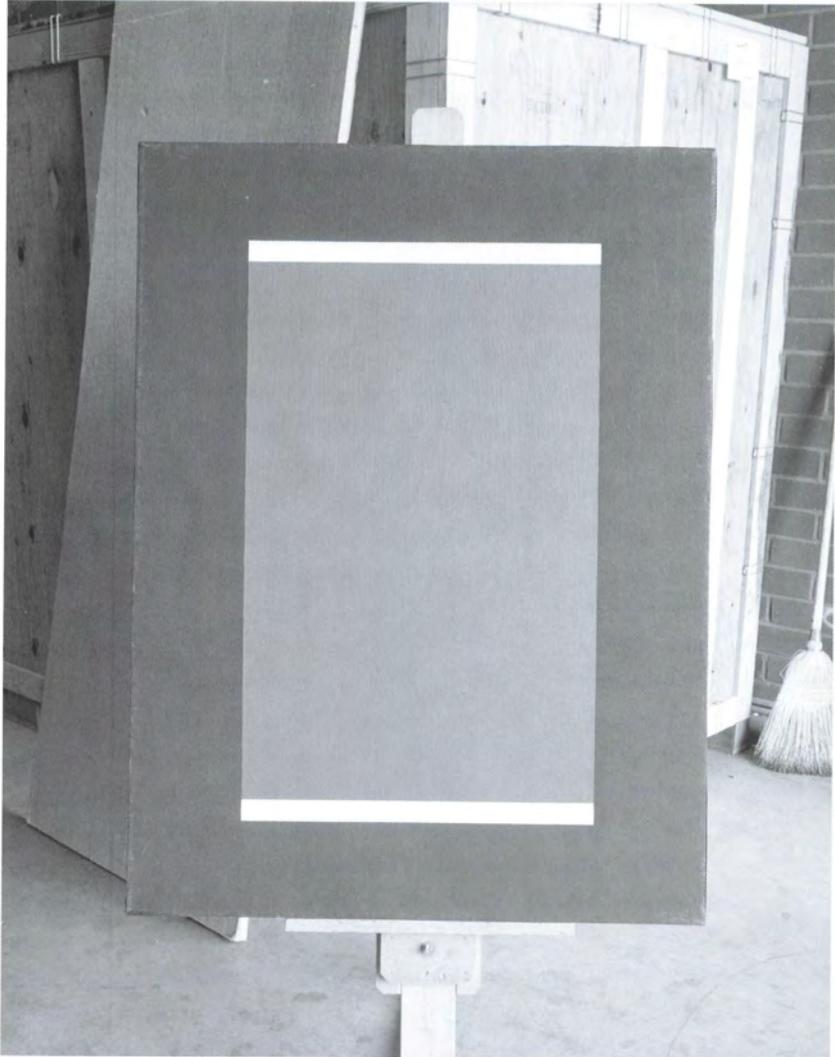
K: And I told you from the European front that is going along very well but I think they ought to play it cool until next spring. ~~xxx~~



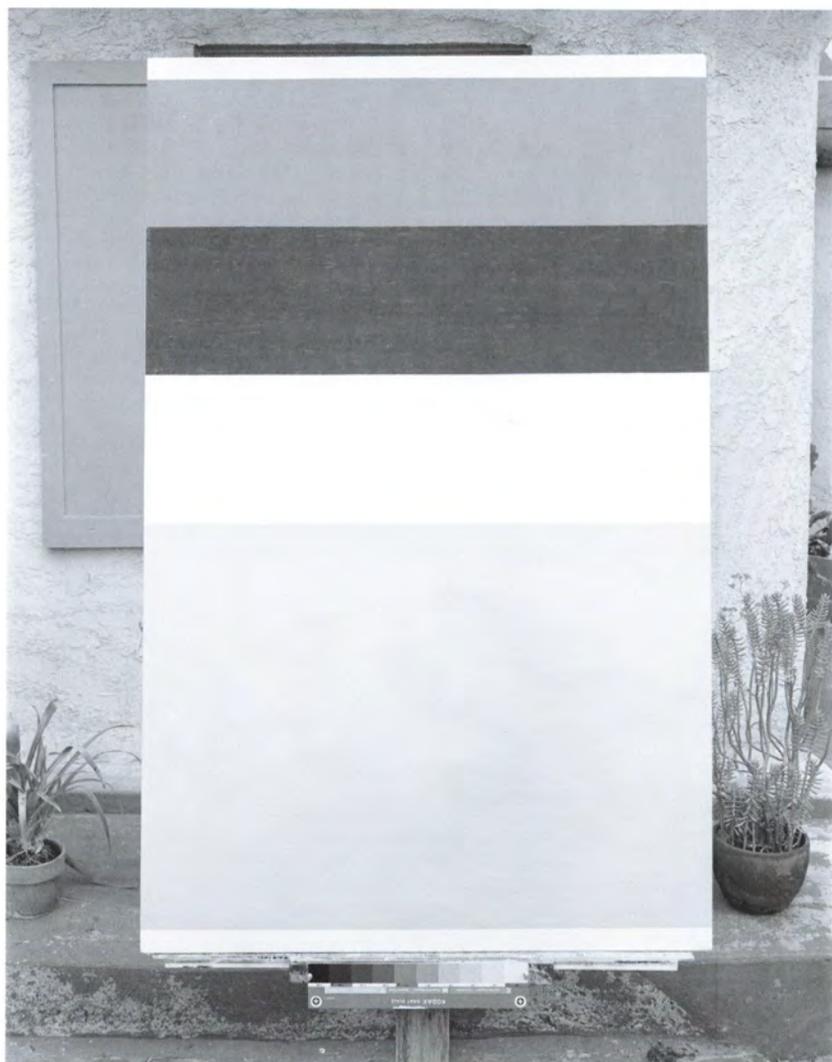


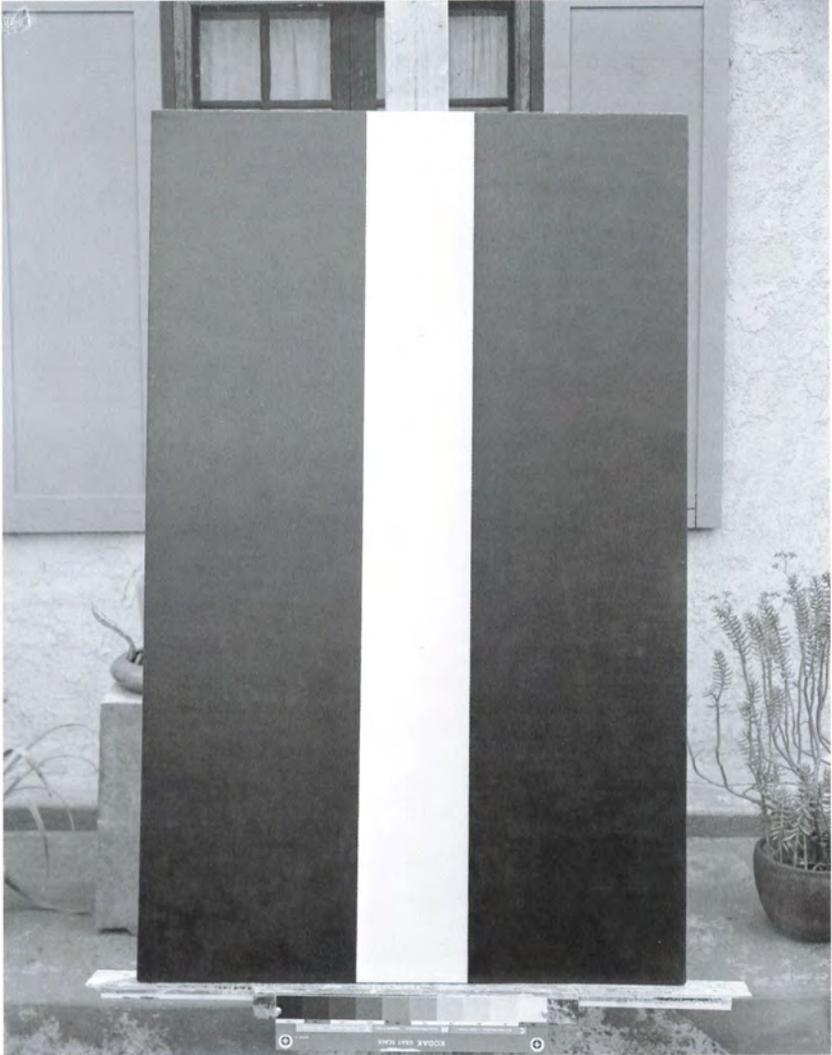












Figs 1–5
Frank J. Thomas
Documentation
of paintings by John
McLaughlin
Laguna Beach, 1968
courtesy of Frank J.
Thomas Archive

Fig 6,
Frank J. Thomas
Documentation
of paintings by John
McLaughlin
Nicholas Wilder Gallery,
1979
courtesy of Frank J.
Thomas Archives.

Figs 7–8
Frank J. Thomas
Documentation
of paintings by John
McLaughlin
Laguna Beach, 1968
courtesy of Frank J.
Thomas Archive

Figs 9–10
Fredrik Nilsen
Documentation of
Ma at Château Shatto,
2016–2017
Curated by Fiona Connor
courtesy of the artist
and Fredrik Nilsen

Fig. 11
Fiona Connor
Documentation of *John
McLaughlin in Print*
E. H. McCormick Research
Library display case,
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, 2016
Curated by Fiona Connor
courtesy of the artist

These black and white photographs were taken by Frank J. Thomas in Southern California, in 1968, to document the paintings of John McLaughlin in the period leading up to McLaughlin's retrospective exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington DC. Many of the photographs were taken in the yard outside McLaughlin's home studio in Laguna Beach, with the painting propped on an easel in order to make the most of the natural light. Some were taken later, under artificial light, probably in the back rooms of the Nicholas Wilder Gallery on Santa Monica Boulevard, in 1979. The photographs were taken with a professional 4x5 camera; the camera case can be seen on the ground and the Kodak "gray scale" card perched on the easel.

Frank J. Thomas always intended to crop these photographs for reproduction – they were never meant to be seen like this – yet in their original form they propose a striking contrast between the formal programme of the paintings and their surroundings. The paintings become embedded within a specific space, their forms echoing the rectangular shutters on the house behind them, as they sit among the

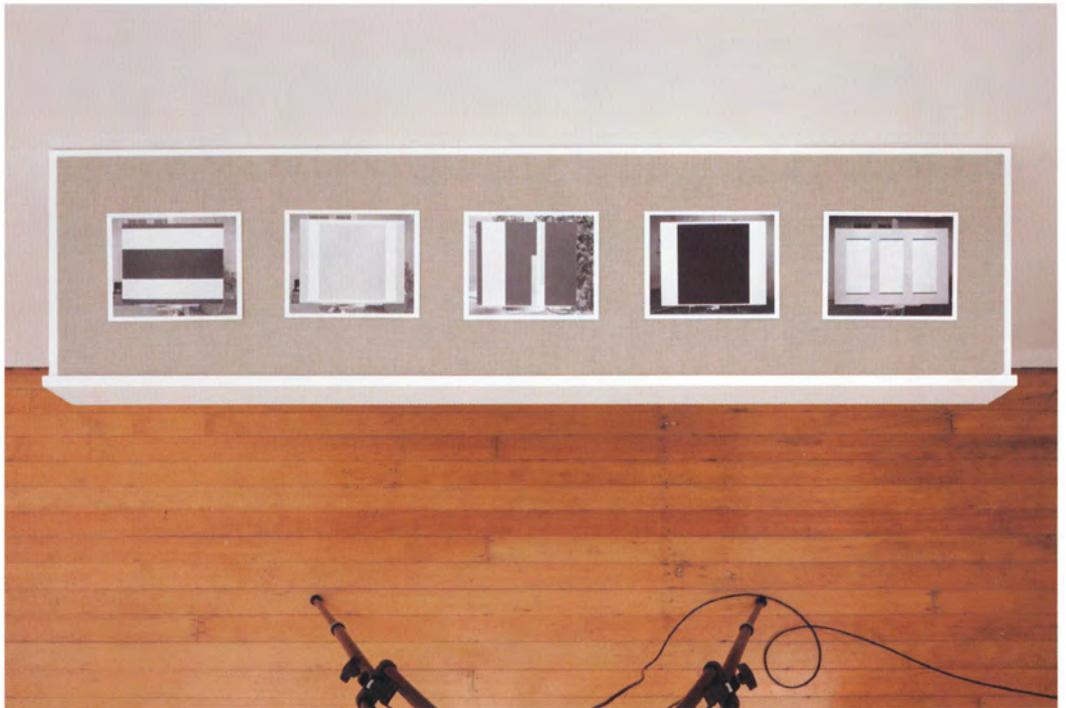
potted plants, the sneakers, and the wooden packing crates that accidentally frame them.

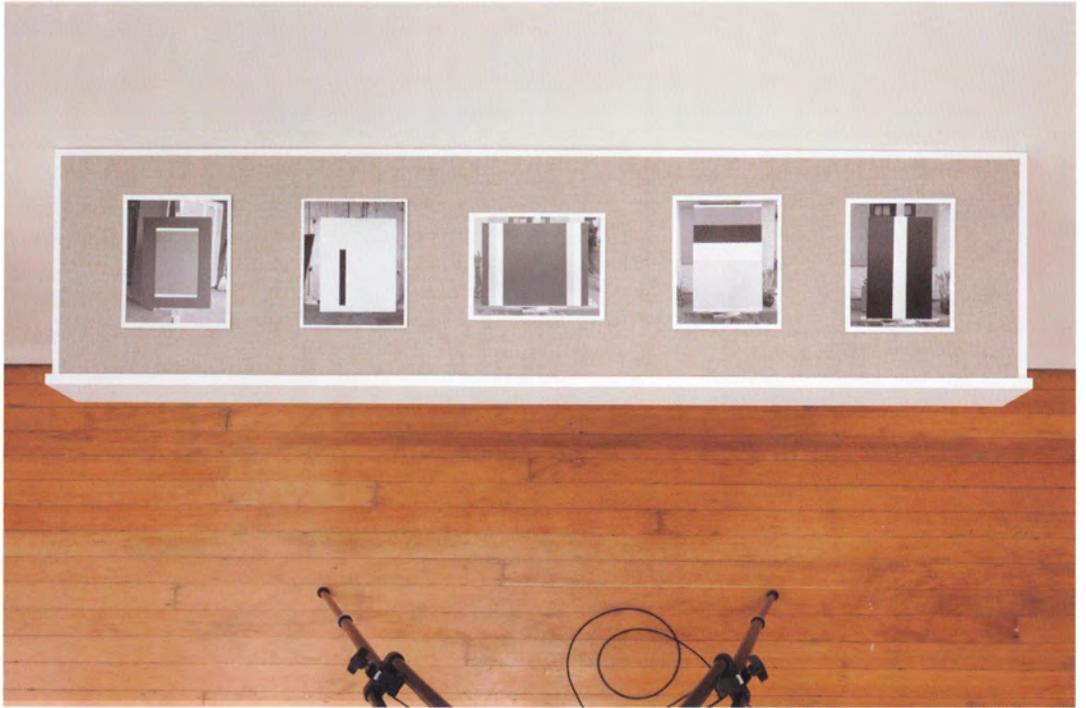
John McLaughlin wrote:

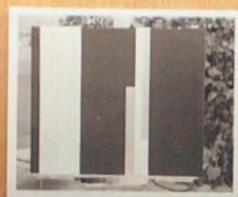
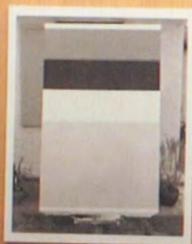
My purpose is to achieve the totally abstract. I want to communicate only to the extent that the painting will serve to induce or intensify the viewer's natural desire for contemplation without benefit of a guiding principle. I must therefore free the viewer from the demands or special qualities imposed by the particular by omitting the image (object). This I manage by the use of neutral forms.¹

The photographs complicate this project by locating his practice in a particular place and time, Southern California in the early 1960s. In hindsight, these images demonstrate the fluidity of the boundaries of an artwork, expanding and contracting to include or exclude their own context, reproduction, and history. Ultimately these photographs remind us that every artwork exists in a specific place and time, and that the edge of the painting is not the end of the work.

1. John McLaughlin, 'Draft letter to Jules Langsner, 11 March, 1959. John McLaughlin Papers, Archives of American Art, Washington DC.







ARTS AND CRAFTS IN PRIME

ARTS AND CRAFTS IN PRIME





REGISTRATION
AND
ARRIVAL BAGS



White Women's Convention?
Marti Friedlander Photographs the United
Women's Convention, 1979
Victoria Wynne-Jones

Fig. 1
 Marti Friedlander
United Women's Convention,
Hamilton 1979
 black and white photograph
 Marti Friedlander Archive,
 E. H. McCormick Research Library
 Auckland Art Gallery
 Toi o Tāmaki
 on loan from The Gerrard
 and Marti Friedlander
 Charitable Trust

In 1979, feminist politician Marilyn Waring invited Marti Friedlander to be the official photographer at the United Women's Convention at Waikato University in Hamilton. More than 2,500 women attended the event and Friedlander documented both its formal and informal aspects. The mass assembly of women was photographed as they gathered within the large concrete space of the Claudelands Showgrounds, all sitting upon chairs and benches borrowed from local schools.¹ Friedlander also captured women lining up at the university for registration, collecting buttons and conference bags emblazoned with a graphic flower superimposed over the female gender symbol (Fig. 1). There were passionate conversations, small gatherings, smiles and hugs. The Brutalist architecture of the campus appeared newly minted and sharp as women enjoyed the autumnal setting, sitting outside on benches or upon the grass.

At first glance it was the physical appearance of these women that struck me: their sharp fringes and the way their hair then fans out from side to side. There were a lot of pageboy cuts as well as hairstyles that were more relaxed and naturally wavy, shoulder-length, grown out. The women wore floral-print dresses, long skirts, blouses and boots as well as high-waisted jeans and slacks, sometimes with T-shirts and sometimes with collared shirts or vests. Kerchiefs were worn around the neck and jackets were sometimes tailored, sometimes broad-shouldered and oversized. There were extremely large sunglasses,

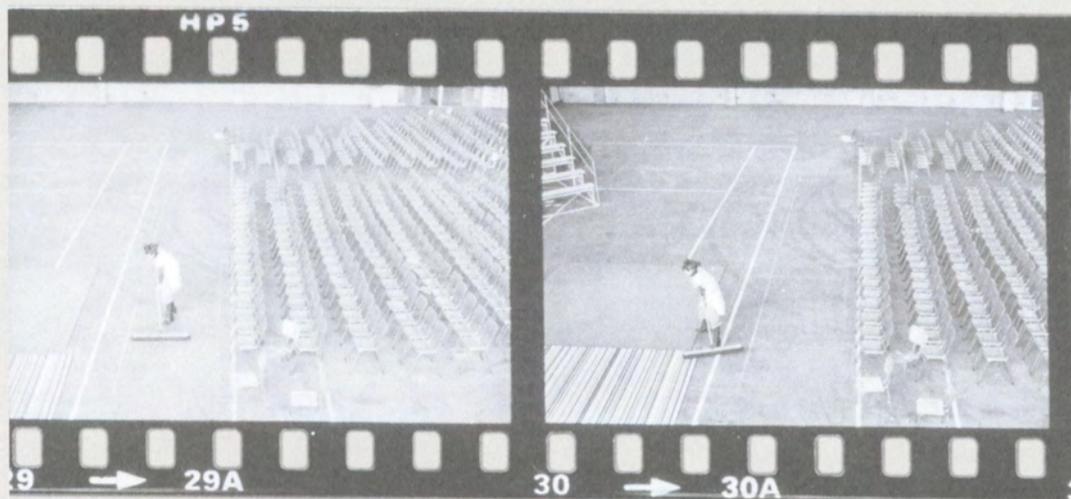
turtle-neck sweaters, handknit jerseys, crocheted shawls, leather satchels as well as socks worn with sandals. However, looking more closely, I then noticed the different ways in which they had gathered, in pairs, in groups and in extremely large numbers. It is their attendance and attention that is remarkable, their absorption in each other, their concentration. It seems that there is a lot at stake. There are so many images of listening.

Standing Aside from the Crowd

The archival file dedicated to Friedlander's coverage of the convention includes approximately 35 negative sheets, five contact sheets and 25 8x10 inch prints. In a small envelope there are 46 prints sized at 5x7 inches. From the rolls of film Friedlander took at the convention, many of the images she chose to print repeatedly feature crowds of seated women. In one particular image, an immense group of women listen, the frame is filled with their attentive faces (Fig. 2). The sheer number of women gathered together is very impressive and Friedlander photographed them from all different angles. Many of them were taken from above. She reflected:

a few images convey the essence of the event. One in particular, of all the women sitting in the hall, intrigues me at the moment. I took it to show how well attended the conference was by women from all over New Zealand and every walk of life.²





LEFT

Figs 2–3

Marti Friedlander

United Women's Convention,
Hamilton 1979

black and white photographs

Marti Friedlander Archive,

E. H. McCormick Research

Library

Auckland Art Gallery

Toi o Tāmaki

on loan from The Gerrard

and Marti Friedlander

Charitable Trust

ABOVE

Fig. 4

Marti Friedlander

United Women's Convention,
Hamilton 1979

contact sheet

Marti Friedlander Archive,

E. H. McCormick Research

Library

Auckland Art Gallery

Toi o Tāmaki

on loan from The Gerrard

and Marti Friedlander

Charitable Trust





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT
Figs 5-7
Marti Friedlander
United Women's Convention,
Hamilton 1979
black and white photographs
Marti Friedlander Archive,
E. H. McCormick Research
Library
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki
on loan from The Gerrard
and Marti Friedlander
Charitable Trust

The way in which Friedlander stands back and looks at those who are looking and listening to someone else is important. She stood aside and apart, diligently observing and documenting the event, despite her own desire to sit and chat with her friends, to listen without photographing. This action of standing apart belongs to the photographer, the reporter, one who documents, yet it is also often the position of the immigrant. Having moved from London to New Zealand in 1958, Friedlander communicates belonging and not-belonging to her adopted country. As an image-maker, it sometimes feels as though she assumes the position of a perpetual outsider. Frequently it is her ability to be slightly removed from a situation, to observe and then photograph it that allows her photographs to be so perspicacious.

Friedlander's fascination with the crowd is interesting given her own suspicion of the way in which people might be drawn together in large numbers. Later she would write that "it's better not to belong" and that there is a certain strength in:

standing aside while others are saying yes... you're a much stronger person if you do stand aside... the news of the Holocaust convinced me even more that you should always question everything and never be part of a crowd – too often the crowd is wrong.³

Therefore, no matter how enamoured of the crowd Friedlander was at the time, she was also drawn to clusters and individuals (Fig. 3). There were the discussions that occurred in between scheduled activities, preludes, aftermaths as well as the main event. Gazing through the contact sheets I notice images of women setting up lines of chairs and someone sweeping the large expansive concrete floor (Fig. 4). Seeking out the specificity of each woman's experience, Friedlander photographs them folding pamphlets amidst cigarettes and coffee mugs and eating their lunch at picnic tables. They gather, speak animatedly, and rest. One woman breastfeeds her child and Friedlander delights in capturing a few different women with babies packed firmly upon their backs or slung casually across their chests (Figs 5–7). On one contact sheet, I spy a self-portrait Friedlander has taken of herself reflected

in a swinging door (Fig. 8).⁴ Situating herself, she visually records her presence in that particular place and at that particular time. Yet there is something transitory about the image, there is a pause, a moment of suspension as Friedlander stops and captures her reflection upon the surface of a threshold.

White Women's Convention?

One of the elements of political protest and gathering Friedlander was visually attracted to were the signs and slogans, enjoying their humour and wit.⁵ A prominent sponsor of the convention was Air New Zealand, and a conciliatory sign above each speaker as she stands behind the lectern reads: "Air NZ has a good deal going for you." Women sit beneath a sign pinned to a wall saying "When God made man she was only joking" (Fig. 9) and "Housewives. The natural people to turn to when there is something unpleasant, inconvenient or inconclusive to be done." Friedlander made a quick snap of a young woman, mid-movement, tucking her hair behind her ears and wearing a fitted T-shirt emblazoned with the words: "Women Against Rape" (Fig. 10). But the most crucial phrase of all stretches across a large banner pinned to the back wall of the hall, on top of the hand-painted frieze with the convention logo which reads, "White Women's Convention?" Friedlander made an 8 x 10 inch print of two Māori women, Donna Awatere Huata and Ripeka Evans, standing before the banner, grinning and emphatically moving (Fig. 11). Another sign behind them reads "Why no Maori Speakers? We do not live in France." On the bleachers behind them sit a whole host of women of all different ages and backgrounds, each wearing an official convention name tag on her chest. This moment illustrates a tension integral to the entire convention: that the desire to unite women, to bring them together, fails to take into consideration their complex differences and the wide variety of challenges they face in each of their lives.

A selection of 30 of Friedlander's photographs were included upon 19 pages of the convention's report (Fig. 12) with the acknowledgement: "The Convention Committee is grateful to Marti Friedlander for her photographic record of the convention."⁶ Great care was taken within the 206 page report to record as



Fig. 8
Marti Friedlander
United Women's Convention,
Hamilton 1979
contact sheet
Marti Friedlander Archive,
E. H. McCormick Research
Library
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki
on loan from The Gerrard
and Marti Friedlander
Charitable Trust

Fig. 9
Marti Friedlander
United Women's Convention,
Hamilton 1979
black and white photograph
Marti Friedlander Archive,
E. H. McCormick Research
Library
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki
on loan from The Gerrard
and Marti Friedlander
Charitable Trust

Figs 10–11
Marti Friedlander
*United Women's Convention,
Hamilton 1979*
black and white photograph
Marti Friedlander Archive,
E. H. McCormick Research
Library
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki
on loan from The Gerrard
and Marti Friedlander
Charitable Trust



much information about the event as possible, including organisational logistics, budgets, timetables, transcripts, as well as forms for requesting additional printed resources. According to the document, the convention invoked the women's movement and was run in accordance with a feminist perspective and principles. With a committee consisting of 14 women, its central tenet was that "all women have the right to equal choice and equal opportunity." Key concerns included women's health: abortion, alternative approaches to medicine, cancer, childbirth, contraception, menstruation and menopause, sexuality and

mental health; the right to freely available, quality childcare; the abolition of gender stereotyping; the development of non-hierarchical organisations and institutions and the recognition of various kinds of sexual preference.⁷ Other issues were women as " chattels", marital violence, assertiveness and child abuse. There was some discussion of "institutions of power", which seems to have been mainly concerned with the church as well as the law and the way in which the media was controlled by men. Indeed, following a public meeting, a male journalist wrote two lead articles for the *Waikato Times* which the organisers considered



to have titles and content “deliberately designed to inflame divisiveness and controversy between women.” The committee subsequently refused to give any comment upon the articles.⁸

Often the report is refreshingly frank. Poet Riemke Ensing observed the negativity towards the women’s movement at the time with perceptions of “politicking, radicalism, factionalization, separation, ‘the clamour against men and frequently children’ as well as ‘outpourings of hostility and anger.’”⁹ Worthy of note is a series of tables which present information from the previous conventions, including location, attendance figures, organisational structure, speakers, workshops and “areas of dissent or discomfort.” Whereas at previous conventions the weather and presence of male members of parliament at a cocktail party were seen as problematic, in reference to the 1979 convention, areas of dissent and discomfort included “lesbian aggression” and “white racism” (Fig. 13). Despite the frustration with the church as an “institute of power,” the dates of the convention always read “Easter,” the very event is framed in reference to

the highly secularised, yet still Christian holiday. In hindsight, the lack of discussion of the impact of colonisation upon women is troubling. Indeed the choice of the two guest speakers, Charlotte Bunch (a journalist and lesbian feminist from the United States) and Martine Levy (an advisor to the French government on women and labour), indicates a bias towards so-called white women’s concerns. As a “natural sceptic,” Friedlander was very keyed into these issues. For her, questioning was the very basis of Judaism: “it’s a constant rhetoric of question and answer. Nothing is ever black and white, and there are always at least two sides to every issue.”¹⁰ Friedlander admired Ripeka Evans’ tenacity and ability to “get up there and speak” and she mused that the Māori women at the conference “didn’t know that I might have understood their situation better than a lot of other people.”¹¹

When regarding Friedlander’s photographs, at first I found the question mark on the “White Women’s Convention?” banner perplexing, why not have an exclamation mark? But then I realised that the use of the interrogative acted as a challenge, it put the



PLACE	NUMBER ATTENDING	ORGANISING STRUCTURE	AIMS	LAYERS	WORKSHOPS	AREAS OF DISSENT OR DISCOMFORT
UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO SHOWGROUNDS 1979	2,500	Self appointed co-ordinating committee of 15	to continue the work of the three previous conventions within a feminist framework.	<u>Charlotte PUNCH</u> Feminist vision, theory and work. <u>Martine Levy</u> Moving with women; the French example.	Women and Health Women as Chattels Institutions of Power The Women's Movement Communication	Two inadequate venues Lesbian aggression White racism Feminist perspective Self appointed co-ordinating committee

Figs 12-13
University of Waikato,
Hamilton *United Women's*
Convention, Easter
1979
convention report
Photos: Jennifer French

question to all those gathered, "is this just a white women's convention, or can it be more, what are you going to do about it?" This act of questioning and re-labelling manifested itself again. When poring over this archival material I noticed that some of the white envelopes of negatives, contact sheets and prints have the initials U.W.C. (United Women's Convention) carefully pencilled beside the accession numbers. However, many of them are also marked with the phrase "White Women's Convention" as though it was the "official" name of the event. Within the archive the perceived exclusivity or limitation of the event lives on and this reading coloured my own research. I began to take note of the various instances in which the event was more than a mere "White Women's Convention." The convention's poster, Robin White's screen-print *Mere and Siulolovao, Otago Peninsula* (1978), depicts a Pacific woman standing before a colonial cottage on Harrington Point Road at Portobello (Fig. 14). And in her address, guest speaker Bunch emphasised the importance of structural change stating: "Feminists envision a world in which no groups have domination over the lives of others. This would require an end to all the isms – sexism, heterosexism, classism, racism, imperialism, an end to institutionalised operation, an end to power over people as is known to us."¹² Bunch also pointed out that feminist theory involves "recognising that almost all existing societies, capitalist, socialist, Islamic, Christian, tribal, "modern" are simply variations on this patriarchal mode."

Such issues were also diligently recorded within the convention's own report. In a section marked "Maori and Polynesian Women", the committee noted their dismay at the absence of Māori and Pacific women at previous conferences and their subsequent contact with branches of Pacifica and the Māori Women's Welfare League in an effort to have delegates "other than European Women."¹³ A series of meetings were held throughout New Zealand and the response received was in fact "not yet, we have some sorting out of our own to do." The event itself included a workshop on "Women and White Racism" whose participants criticised the convention, labelling its poster as "patronising," protesting its lack of workshops for "black women," the "absence of black women speakers" and the convoluted schedule. Each of these criticisms, together with replies, were carefully recorded in the final report. The section ends with the

statement: "Any future convention should consider a non-European woman speaker to attract diverse racial groups in the same way as Charlotte Bunch acted as a magnet for New Zealand lesbians." The committee noted the sentiment that the convention catered only for white middle-class women. Environmentalists and conservationists were concerned at the amount of waste generated, whilst others felt the convention to be too radical with "nothing for the wife and mother", complaining about the "destructiveness, exclusiveness and tantrums of some lesbians present."¹⁴ As crystallised in Friedlander's photographs, the convention provided a cross-section of the tensions, conflicts and multiplicities of the women's movement. In fact, the very notion of women as "united" was fraught with difficulties.

Open Forum

To this day, the University of Waikato enjoys a pastoral, almost semi-rural campus. Situated amongst wide, grassy fields, its 1970s Brutalist buildings seem to have been beamed down from a British science fiction miniseries. At its centre is a small lake nestled amongst trees and shrubs and it was here that the convention held its "Open Forum."¹⁵ The aim of the forum was for it to be "a 'speak out' opportunity for women to air their views on issues relevant to women."¹⁶ It is at the Open Forum that Friedlander took her seminal photograph of the peculiar trinity of Roman Catholic nun, Māori lesbian and Pākehā woman (Fig. 15).¹⁷ It is in that peaceful setting, upon the grass beneath the silver birch trees, that the nun, like a spectre of missionisation, reads from the bible, standing above a young Māori woman looking simultaneously sultry and defiant, with one hand held behind her head, as she looks down her nose at the camera. Just visible, to the right of the frame is a third woman, she is barefoot, her eyes are almost closed and her face is held in her hands. Yet another 8x10 inch print Friedlander made shows the same Māori woman but this time more in her element, holding a guitar and flanked by her comrades (Fig. 16). She bends over a microphone that is far too short and looks towards the audience. Her two friends stand beside her linking arms, perhaps they are about to sing together? The friendship of all three is demonstrated by the similarities in their attire: men's collared shirts and rolled-up jeans. Two of the women wear combat boots, the other a long-tailed coat and

a Black Panther-esque beret. Friedlander has framed them beneath the birches, upon the grass. Canvas satchels and various belongings lie beside them and the ground is strewn with bits of rubbish. Just visible to the left of the frame kneels another guitar player with long blond hair. She seems to be either tuning her guitar or preparing to sing along, though for some reason she has been almost excluded from the picture frame.

Friedlander delighted in juxtapositions and ambiguity, noting that:

We think of protest as expressing one point of view. But you often find people of the opposite viewpoint protesting alongside. I like that. It shows that even with opposing viewpoints, people can still share the public spaces that allow democracy to function.¹⁸

The “trinity” was described by Friedlander as being about love and anger and how they both needed to be expressed within such a forum: “Each of the women is doing her own thing and yet, for me, it was a perfect sort of miniature of the diversity of the crowd.”¹⁹ The written report notes that the open forum event was “emotional” and “illuminating.” Away from the restrictions of the institutional interiors, voices were raised and people shouted out more personal testimonies. An appeal was made by a former patient of a mental hospital to any psychologists present, people openly criticised the organising committee, women from the Aroha Trust spoke of their lives as “welfare kids” and the work collective they had subsequently formed.

Yet Friedlander was also saddened by the lack of unity at the convention, observing that “there were a lot of disparate factions and it often showed.” Although her images of the assembled crowd demonstrate a shared enthusiasm, it belies the sheer diversity of their concerns. Friedlander reflected:

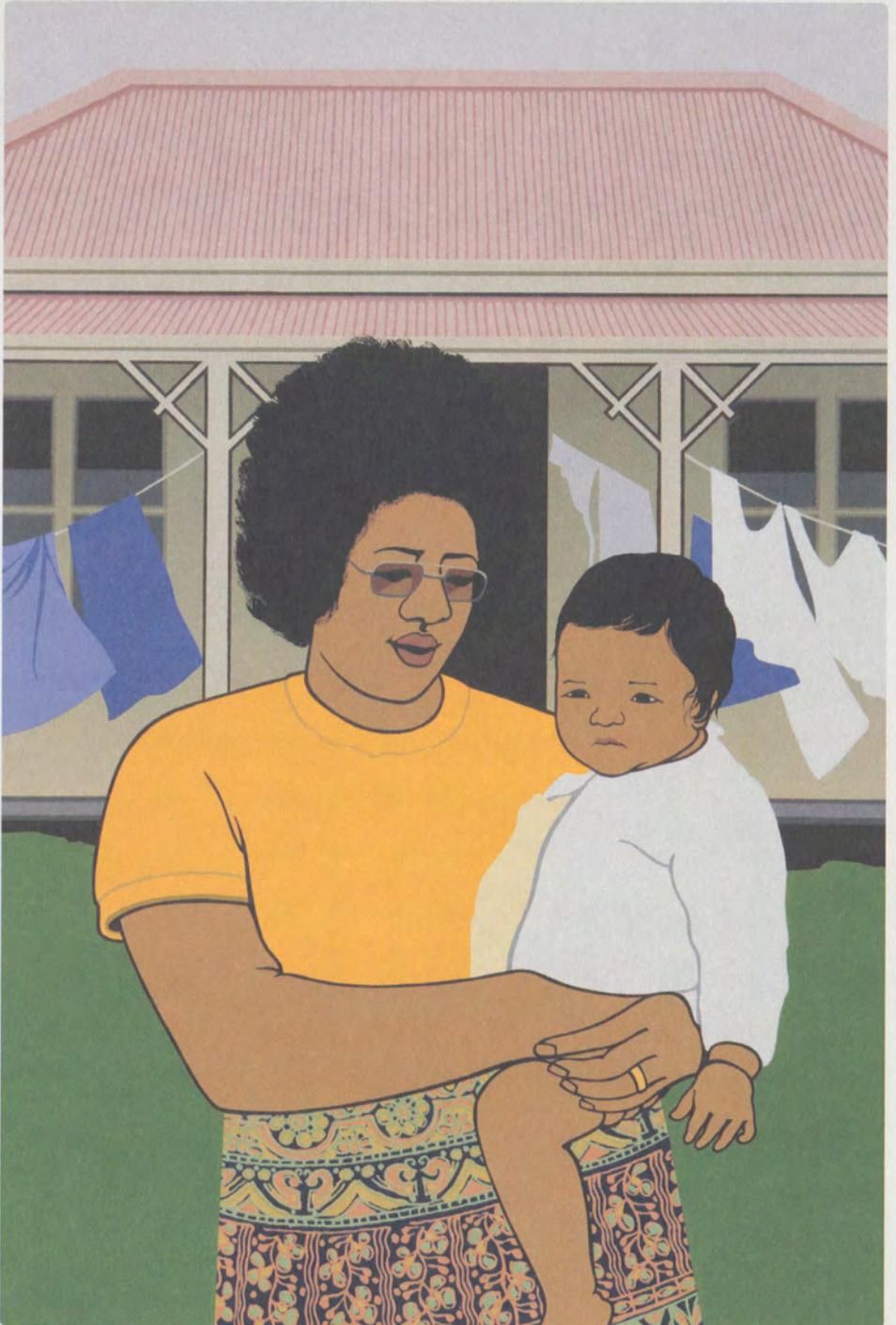
All these marvellous women were at the convention, but there was some hostility between the lesbian faction and the other women. I thought to myself, what a shame that we can't all be united simply to promote the betterment of women.²⁰

Her photographs express her joy at the conviviality and her pride at witnessing such a significant gathering of women. Yet her sensitivity and perception meant that she was deeply attuned to its contradictions and underlying tensions. Perfectly frank, Friedlander points out her own position with regards to the women's movement: “Since I had no particular axe to grind, the feminist movement was not of such importance to me. I had always been able to make choices even though I was married.”²¹ It is characteristic of the divisions made manifest within the convention that Friedlander observes her own complex position within feminism:

the fact that I was a good domestic goddess as well was a choice I made. Looking back, perhaps it appeared silly to my friends, but I have no regret about it at all. I was free to work as I wished, doing what I wanted to do, recording what I wanted to record.²²

Thanks to Susy Thomas and Mark Caunter, Heritage Librarians at the Hamilton City Council.

Fig. 14
Robin White
Mere and Siulolovao,
Otago Peninsula 1978
screenprint
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki
purchased 2004







1. *United Women's Convention, Easter, 1979* (Hamilton: University of Waikato, 1979), 121.
2. Marti Friedlander with Hugo Manson, *Self-Portrait* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2013), 215.
3. Friedlander, *Self-Portrait*, 25.
4. Friedlander did not choose to include this image in a section dedicated to self-portraits in her 2013 publication.
5. Friedlander, *Self-Portrait*, 203.
6. *United Women's Convention*, 77.
7. *United Women's Convention*, 10.
8. *United Women's Convention*, 98.
9. *United Women's Convention*, 3.
10. Friedlander, *Self-Portrait*, 25.
11. Friedlander, *Self-Portrait*, 219–220.
12. *United Women's Convention*, 16.
13. *United Women's Convention*, 116.
14. *United Women's Convention*, 135.
15. *United Women's Convention*, 121.
16. *United Women's Convention*, 119.
17. This is the only photograph of the convention to be included in Auckland Art Gallery's 2001 touring exhibition *Marti Friedlander: Photographs*. Ron Brownson, *Marti Friedlander: Photographs* (Auckland: Random House, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2001). This image was also included in Len Bell's *Marti Friedlander* (Auckland University Press: Auckland, 2009.) Bell's publication also includes an image taken by an unknown photographer of Friedlander crouched amidst the crowd of women, listening attentively, her camera cradled in her hands. In her own 2013 publication Friedlander's image of the convention included the image of the three women at the forum, one of the crowd gathered within the hall as well as the "White Women's Convention?" banner image. Each is given the simple title "United Women's Convention, 1979."
18. Friedlander, *Self-Portrait*, 208.
19. Friedlander, *Self-Portrait*, 216.
20. Friedlander, *Self-Portrait*, 217.
21. Friedlander, *Self-Portrait*, 218.
22. Friedlander, *Self-Portrait*, 218.

Figs 15–16
 Marti Friedlander
United Women's Convention,
 Hamilton 1979
 black and white photographs
 Marti Friedlander Archive,
 E. H. McCormick Research Library
 Auckland Art Gallery
 Toi o Tāmaki
 on loan from The Gerrard
 and Marti Friedlander
 Charitable Trust

from the
Women's

ART ARCHIVES



26 AUG-20 SEPT

the women's gallery

26 harris st.

PHONE 723 257

Fig. 1
 From the Women's
 Art Archive 1980
 poster
 Women's Art Exhibition
 Posters Archive,
 E. H. McCormick Research
 Library Auckland Art Gallery
 Toi o Tāmaki
 gift of Juliet Batten, 2008

The idea of creating an audio archive of interviews with women artists in New Zealand emerged during a two-day Women Sculptors Seminar held at the 1982 *F1 New Zealand Sculpture Project* in Wellington. There, the women in attendance expressed the desire to establish a formal audiovisual record of their work on slide and cassette tape – the file formats of the time. Vivian Lynn, a Wellington-based artist who organised the seminar alongside Barbara Strathdee, set about realising such an archive. With funds raised from the central government's Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council and the Department of Women's Affairs, Lynn purchased a tape recorder and employed Lita Barrie to carry out the Women's Art Archive Interview Project.

Barrie, an art critic and feminist theorist, graduated from Victoria University of Wellington with an MA in Philosophy in 1980. During the 1980s she involved herself in art and feminist theory, both lecturing at Victoria and freelance writing. It was through Ian Hunter, then acting director of the National Art Gallery, that Barrie was put forward as a potential interviewer to Lynn – he saw her as a promising writer. So, over six months in 1984 Barrie interviewed 58 women artists around New Zealand, and was interviewed herself, making a total of 59 interviews recorded onto C60 (60 minute) audio cassette tapes.

Once completed, the tapes were donated to the National Art Gallery in Wellington, now the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, along with

Where are all the female nudes standing up with hands on their hips and their legs apart in a self-defence stance? If we had all those images then we as women would feel different. Our whole body language would be different.

– Juliet Batten

Interviewed by Lita Barrie, 1984

Tape 1 of 2, B side

associated material. There it was named "Oral Histories: Women Artists" and was held within the Women's Art Archive, an archive initiated in 1979 by Ian Hunter and artist Eva Yuen and set up by Lindley Turnbull and Janice Antill through a temporary government work scheme. From its conception, it was intended that the Interview Project audio archive would be housed within the pre-existing Women's Art Archive (Fig. 1). Barrie also donated a duplicate set to the Auckland City Art Gallery (who supplied her with blank tapes). It was here, 33 years later, that I found these "travelling" tapes, in the Gallery's E. H. McCormick Research Library (Fig. 2).

While the archive does not take up much space, 0.16 linear metres, it is big in content. It consists of two cardboard filing boxes housing 80 cassette tapes (three of which are of 1982 panel discussions on women's art in New Zealand, the rest interviews), a yellow folder containing an annotated index (Fig. 3) and a manila folder containing copyright forms and resumes of the artists. With each cassette tape affording one hour of recording time it would take over 3 days to listen to them all.

This is an archive that was created to function as an archive. In a typed preface found within the yellow folder, Barrie addresses the objective of the project, which I take as its provenance. Adopting a "survey approach," Barrie's goal was "to record a wide range of diverse viewpoints on the issues arising from women's art activity."¹

Fig. 2
Women's Art Archive
Interview Project 1984
cassette tapes
E. H. McCormick Research
Library Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki
gift of Lita Barrie, 1984



Fig. 3
Annotated Index for
Women's Art Archive
Interview Project 1984
E. H. McCormick Research
Library Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki
gift of Lita Barrie, 1984



The word “record” here is central. These tapes ensure that, in resistance to the “historic pattern which has conspired toward the invisibility of women’s art... documentation material is retained.” Barrie writes that she views the project as an “archival ‘time capsule’ of resource material” for future use. The sense of self-conscious recording, of ensuring documentation takes place, is amplified when considering that the archive I handled is a duplicate. These tapes are backed-up. Should, as Barrie’s recorded voice worries, they “end up under a dripping tap,” there exists another copy.

While listening to Barrie’s own interview from 1984, in which she addresses her vision for the archive’s care, placement and use, I had a strange experience. She says that they “need to be held by a full-time library

who can provide for people to come in and use them.” By using the archive, I was performing Barrie’s projection as I listened. The space requirement is performed by Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, along with, currently three, full-time Research Library staff that Barrie hoped would serve as the archive’s custodians. The public can request access to the archive during the library hours and listen to the tapes in the audiovisual room. Barrie gave her interviewees a copyright form with the option that the tape be used either with or without “restriction of access.” As such, some of the tapes cannot be reproduced (played) without permission from both Barrie and the artist herself.

The tapes held in Auckland have now been digitised: this update in technology (30 years later) will open up their accessibility. The freedom to move around an MP3 file, locating times on the tape, will allow the listener to explore more material than I could. The update also ensures against the tapes’ obsolescence as they are transferred to new media. In 2017 the research librarians Catherine Hammond and Caroline McBride included a number of the tapes and their digital surrogates in the exhibition *Collective Women: Feminist Art Archives from the 1970s to the 1990s*. Available on iPads anyone can walk in, put on a set of headphones and dip into Barrie’s interviews (Fig. 4).

For this essay I draw on six of Barrie’s interviews: Juliet Batten, Mary-Louise Browne, Marian Evans, Jacqueline Fraser, Robyn Kahukiwa and Evelyn Page; and the interview conducted with Barrie herself.

The archive is situated firmly in its context, the women’s art movement in New Zealand in 1984, witnessed by the sonic “pinging” of people and place names recorded on the magnetic tape of the cassettes. The



Fig. 4
Installation view: *Collective Women: Feminist Art Archives from the 1970s to the 1990s*
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, 2017
Curated by Catherine Hammond and Caroline McBride,
Photo: John McIver

Women's Gallery, opened in 1980 in Wellington by Marian Evans, Bridie Lonie, and Anna Keir (all on Barrie's list), is a public space important to the movement, and echoes throughout the interviews (Fig. 5). Evans talks about its role of supporting and promoting women's art and the gallery's push for exhibitions relating to women's experience. Mary-Louise Browne and Robyn Kahukiwa both mention being introduced to the gallery. The private homes of the women "ping," too. Many of the interviews took place in these intimate spheres. In her interview Barrie talks about the "human context" of women's art and the ability she found to engage with the work in terms of their lives, in the "natural" place of house and garden, rather than the artificial art gallery/art magazine context. As Jacqueline Fraser says of Bronwynne Cornish, "her house was like her work." The archive is hooked to these local sites.

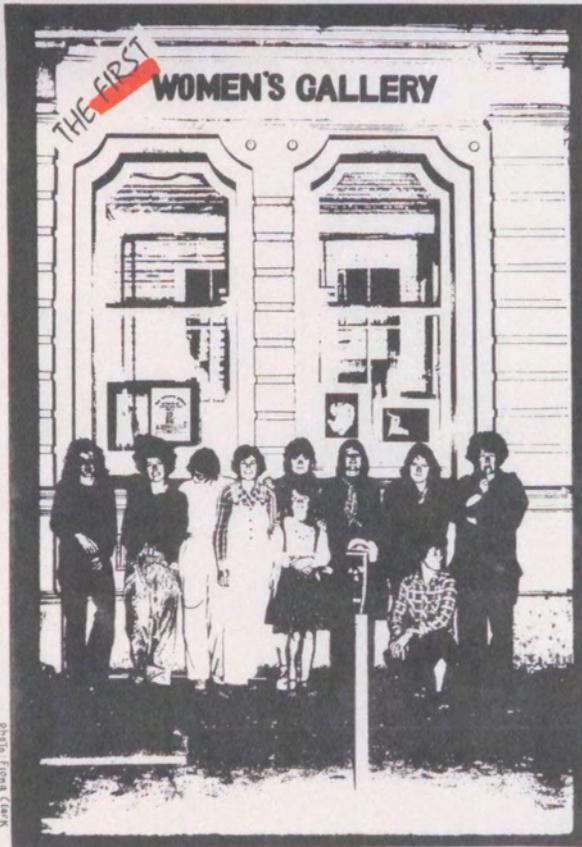
People and their names resound in the tapes. What emerges is a community at a locatable point in time or a kind of sonic network. Rita Angus is present, mentioned by Barrie and Evelyn Page. Juliet Batten discusses having joined a group of women painters headed by Gretchen Albrecht (the Ayr Street Group). Keri Hulme "pings" via Marian Evans' voice (Evans was part of *Spiral*, the independent feminist collective that published the first edition of Hulme's 1984 Booker Prize winning novel *The Bone People*). Robyn Kahukiwa names Patricia Grace (they worked together on the

book *Wahine Toa: Women of Maori Myth*). The interviewed women also interconnect with one another as collaborations, friendships and familiarities are traced. Browne talks about her working relationship with Ngaire Mules; Batten talks about how her friendship with Alison Mitchell "unlocked her art," "crystallised her ideas," and was "like dynamite." There are of course references to men too, John McCormack, Frank Stark, John Drawbridge, Neil Rowe and Colin McCahon are all mentioned. I could sketch this sonic network by listening to seven tapes. The remaining 73 hours' worth of recordings that I have yet to listen to likely holds an expansive and comprehensive roll call of those involved in New Zealand art around this time, positioning the archive here, in 1984.

Tape One: Lita Barrie, Kōrero

Lita Barrie's tape deals with the methodology of the project: the interview process. She says that first she had to "get the list" of women. Then she identified her survey objectives as documenting each woman's work and discussing her relevance to the (women's) art community. Barrie acknowledges the limitations imposed by taping. People tend to become inhibited on record. Intimidation also factored, both by her presence and by the premise: *let's talk about your art*.

Talking is what the interview process is based on. There is a call and response. The call might largely stay the same but the response always varies. In one sense the attempt to "document the woman's work" lags, as according to Barrie, "the majority of the women haven't developed the confidence and experience to be very vocal about their work." Barrie says the tapes are unedited, not to be used "like a radio interview," and that they are not "refined, crystallised expressions of that woman's work."



~~Juliet Batten~~ ✕

Fiona Clark

Allie Eagle

Marian Evans

Pond
Claudia A'Eyley

Keri Hulme

Anna Keir

Bridie Lonie

Heather McPherson

Joanna Paul

~~Nancy Peterson~~ ✕

~~Helen Rockett~~ ✕

Carole Stewart

Tiffany Thornley

~~busy elsewhere~~

OPENING 10 Sept. 5pm

-plus VIDEO screenings of the Opening Show Jan 1980

RIXEN TAPE A Video on women's struggle in the workforce

Wed. 15, 22, 29 Sept. 7.30 at the gallery

\$1 unpaid/\$2 paid workers

10 SEPT.-6 OCT.

THE WOMEN'S GALLERY 323 WILLIS ST. Ph. 850179

Fig. 5
The First Women's Gallery
 1980, poster
 Women's Art Exhibition
 Posters Archive
 E. H. McCormick Research Library
 Auckland Art Gallery
 Toi o Tāmaki
 gift of Juliet Batten, 2008

Fig. 6
 Jenny Doležel (cover)
Antic One June 1986
 Edited by Susan Davis, Elizabeth
 Eastmond, and Priscilla Pitts
 E. H. McCormick Research Library
 Auckland Art Gallery
 Toi o Tāmaki



Two years later in 1986 Barrie published a controversial piece on feminist art in New Zealand, "Remissions: Toward a Deconstruction of Phallic Univocality" in the first issue of *Antic*, an arts journal focused on critical practice and theory (Fig. 6). Inspired by French feminist theorists Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, Barrie argues the lack of, and need for, "critical feminist art, which challenges cultural codes which create women's repression."² Here, Barrie is pushing for women artists to engage with critical theory outside of New Zealand and to identify with feminism in order to transgress the "phallogocentric order."³ A backlash ensued⁴ because, as Kirsty Baker comments, this potentially rendered lacking all feminist art (including that by the women interviewed) produced in New Zealand in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵ Baker adds that in the "desire to promote a specific theoretical school of thought," that which has come before is necessarily rejected. In both "Remissions" and in her recorded interview, Barrie appears to be considering the value of the archive. This value is found in the space between her task of making women visible (the structure) and the 59 kōrero (the content).

Tape Two: Evelyn Page, Voices

Barrie's recordings animate real voices off its magnetic tape. Evelyn Page has a refined "Received Pronunciation" accent which is seldom heard today. She is the eldest of the 59 women on the tapes, born in 1899 and 85 years old at the time of the interview. She flies around Barrie's questioning. I have reproduced some of her responses here to reanimate her recorded voice.

On the beginning in 1927 of The Group in Christchurch:

"I don't know how bitten we were over that. I thought it was just a bright idea, we liked doing it, and we liked the importance of starting this sort of thing."

On painting nudes:

"I never wanted to paint a male nude... they're always a bit four-square but women flow, their lines flow."

On Wellington architecture:

"That fired me up! Lovely subjects."

On Rita Angus's success:

"I remember feeling so sore that it happened after her death. She had such high ideas."

On her marriage with Fred Page and the value of his criticism:

"He was a realist. We left each other free... breakfast at half past eight and I'd come in here [to paint] at nine."

On her sympathy with the feminist art movement:

"Which?"

"*The feminist art movement*"

"Oh no I'd never think about it. It was a man's world."

On whether she felt any handicap as a woman:

"No. I just got cracking and did it, without thinking much about it."

On whether her mother felt any handicap as a woman:

"I'm sure they never thought about it. My mother might have. She might have found it exasperating sometimes."

On theory:

"It's all a lot of hot air."

Fig. 7
Annotated Index for
Women's Art Archive 1984
Interview Project 1984
E. H. McCormick Research
Library Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki
gift of Lita Barrie, 1984

Tape Three: Robyn Kahukiwa, Tūrangawaewae

Kahukiwa says of her work, “my Māoriness and my womanhood is my theme, my inspiration. It’s very simple” (Fig. 7). This is her tūrangawaewae (place to stand). In her tape there is an ambivalence echoed by other women artists, in that her work takes from her experience as a woman, yet she does not identify herself as a feminist. For Kahukiwa, childbirth is one of the main reasons she paints. Barrie mentions the male myth of women’s creativity being taken care of by having children and Kahukiwa replies that she could not have painted before. She paints in “fragmented time” between working, looking after her children and the house. Support from the feminist art movement does not make any difference to her (“I’ve got this obsession”), yet she says of the *Mothers* exhibition at the Women’s Gallery in 1981 that she “firmly believe[s] that women have things to say that only they can say, and that if they can say it together it’s very powerful.” Being a woman artist in New Zealand and one’s relation to Feminism (capitalised) is a shape-shifting conversation throughout the archive.

Kahukiwa paints Māori atua wahine (goddesses) (Fig. 8). In talking about the minimising of women from Māori mythologies since they were written down rather than part of an oral tradition, she questions the tampered record, “I’m sure that these women were very, very strong influences on the people, otherwise why would they have been there? Why were there so many of them?” By giving visual form to atua wahine she reanimates them and makes them visible. Kahukiwa had not thought that young Māori women would identify with *Wahine Toa* and “get something” from her work; she paints because she wants to.

Gaps

The Women’s Art Archive Interview Project produces anxieties surrounding inheritance. Barrie’s informal manifesto, the archive’s preface, states the objective is “to record a wide range of diverse viewpoints.” Women must be made visible in history for “cultural continuity” to take place. Cultural continuity in turn “inspire[s] a sense of common female ancestry.” However, the continuity recorded here is one version of inheritance for New Zealand women artists and so the “common female ancestry” can only apply to some women. While Barrie’s archive clearly models ideas of inheritance, the documentation is selective and therefore problematic.

Despite the intention, this record fails to be diverse in terms of class and ethnicity. The inheritance received is narrow, exclusive and with gaps. The majority of the women are from middle-class backgrounds, evidencing, as Gerda Lerner notes, that the gains made by feminism have often benefitted middle- and upper-class white women and not all women.⁶ There are only two Māori women interviewed, Robyn Kahukiwa and Jacqueline Fraser. Barrie addresses this gap, saying that her focus was a “European art context.” She did not seek “Māori women working in a Māori context.” It becomes clear that this archive is a product of its time – carried out now with the same demographic it presumably would struggle to get public funding.

Within the Māori community at this time feminism was regarded by some with skepticism. It was seen to be an “imported Pākehā idea” that had “no place in the Māori world.”⁷ Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains how for many Māori women, white women belonged to

ROBYN KAHUKIWA

Painter

Side A

- 046 begins
- 047 beginning of painting - no training - goes to work early
- 061 begins painting after having two children - releases energy to paint
- 082 awareness of Maori heritage - born Australia - awareness later
- 094 early subject matter of painting, always Maori theme, from own experiences, unconsciously Maori subject
- 112 teaching - painting slow through other commitments - organizing priorities
- 126 self-taught, in painting
- 136 attraction to colour - 'icon' semblance from early exposure to 'holy pictures' in church
- 161 involvement in Women's Gallery - Marian Evans - participation in Mothers exhibition
- 180 becomes conscious of female sources in work - women as audience for work - though motivation is always personal
- 210 association with Maori women - making Maori women visible - particularly through Wahine Toa - enabling women to identify with these goddesses
- 241 origins of Wahine Toa - from teaching Maori mythology at Mana College - began with small works on papers - discovers Hine Titama
- 263 minimising of women in Maori myths, quite recent - since the writing of the myths (European influence?)
- 281 finding a visual form for the Maori goddesses - multi-dimensions of the goddesses - emotional basis of work
- 298 narrative aspect in Wahine Toa paintings - paintings as 'statement of the myth'
- 307 incorporation of traditional Maori symbols in painting
- 318 combining Maori symbols with European form language
- 331 working process of working from drawings, which develop for the paintings



Illustration 1989-90 on Board, 1989 and a 1989-90
Manawatu Art Gallery Collection

Robyn Kahukiwa
WAAHINE TOA
WOMEN IN MAORI MYTH

An Exhibition of Paintings, Drawings, Lino Engravings Mounted and Toured
by the Wairarapa Arts Centre with the assistance of Queen Elizabeth II Arts
Council of New Zealand and the New Zealand Art Gallery Directors Council.
Published as a Book with a Text by Patricia Grace, by William Collins Ltd.,
October, 1983.

Fig. 8
 Robyn Kahukiwa
*Wahine Toa: Women
 in Maori Myth* 1983
 poster
 E. H. McCormick Research
 Library Auckland Art Gallery
 Toi o Tāmaki
 gift of Juliet Batten, 2008

the dominant white structure and represented another “oppressive agency.”⁸ This existing tension added to the mistrust of feminism as a “white women’s project.”⁹ Ngahua Te Awekotuku adds that at the time Māori women had other consuming struggles to do with land, culture, language and racism – women’s liberation necessarily took a back seat.¹⁰ Against this backdrop of the late 1970s, Māori women began to adopt the values of feminism in their own way and a distinct movement emerged, Mana Wahine Māori. This was about restoring mana, as Te Awekotuku writes, “reclaiming and celebrating what we have been, and what we will become.” The Interview Project cannot be taken at its word as a “survey” of women’s art in 1984 as it is missing Mana Wahine Māori. Its absence is telling of the tensions between Māori and Pākehā at this point in history, and highlights the differences within women’s art in New Zealand.

The invisibility of women in history is a well-rehearsed concept. These 80 tapes give form to a recording of women’s history – a local feminist art movement history – carried out by a woman. On tape Barrie comments that part of her motivation for the project was born from the realisation that it was always a male point of view on women’s art being heard. This echoes with what Lerner says of the “forgetting” of women in history:

Women have always lived in history, acted in it and made history. But the history of women was...distorted in a peculiar way: it came to us refracted through the lens of male observation.¹¹

There is no refracting male lens in Barrie’s tapes: she has replaced it with resounding female dialogue.

1. Lita Barrie, Women’s Art Archive Interview Project, 1982–1984, 80 audio cassette tapes and associated material, E.H. McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, RC2002/10.
2. Lita Barrie, “Remissions: Toward a Deconstruction of Phallic Univocality,” *Antic* 1, June (1986): 87–104.
3. Barrie, “Remissions,” 87–104.
4. Juliet Batten wrote a response to Barrie’s “Remissions” article in the next issue of *Antic* titled “The Edmonds Cookbook and the Ivory Tower,” *Antic* 2, March (1987): 5–17.
5. Kirsty Baker, “Inhabiting the Threshold: The Women’s Gallery as Liminal Space in New Zealand’s Feminist Art History,” Master of Arts thesis, (Victoria University of Wellington, 2016), 43.
6. Gerda Lerner, *Why History Matters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 141.
7. Ngahua Te Awekotuku, *Mana Wahine Maori: Selected Writings on Maori Women’s Art, Culture and Politics* (Auckland: New Women’s Press, 1991), 10.
8. Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, “Maori Women: Discourses, Projects and Mana Wahine,” in *Women and Education in Aotearoa 2*, edited by Sue Middleton and Alison Jones (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1992), 48.
9. Tuhiwai-Smith, “Maori Women,” 47.
10. Te Awekotuku, *Mana Wahine Maori*, 10.
11. Lerner, *Why History Matters*, 53.



Sarah Farrar

Fig. 1
Vivian Lynn
*Gates of the Goddess:
A Southern Crossing
Attended by the Goddess*
1986
Installation view: *Aspects
of Recent New Zealand
Art: Sculpture 2*,
Auckland City Art Gallery,
21 October–
4 December 1986
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o
Tāmaki, purchased 1986
Photo: Jurgen Waibel
Courtesy of Vivian Lynn

Gates of the Goddess: A Southern Crossing Attended by the Goddess (1986), in the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki’s collection, is a major, large-scale work by contemporary artist Vivian Lynn (born 1931) and an important example of feminist art in Aotearoa New Zealand (Fig. 1). Despite this, the work has not been exhibited for over 30 years. This short essay considers the context in which the work was made and its reception from 1986 to the present day, and posits why it has remained in storage.

In 1985 Lynn was commissioned by Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth to produce a major new sculptural work. *Gates of the Goddess: A Southern Crossing Attended by the Goddess* was displayed at the gallery from 6 January–2 March 1986. The Govett-Brewster had received support from the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council (now Creative New Zealand Toi Aotearoa) and local businesses for a series of seven

sculptural commissions that were displayed at the gallery over 1985–86. Lynn’s project was the second in the series, which included new works by Jacqueline Fraser, Chris Booth, Don Driver, Pauline Rhodes, Neil Dawson and Warren Viscoe.

The Govett-Brewster had undertaken that its dedicated “Sculpture Project” give “special emphasis and support to sculpture.”¹ As its then-director Cheryl Sotheran explained: “partly because of the difficulties associated with size, and problems with transportation and storage and cost of material, this form of visual art is often overlooked or lacks support.”²

When Lynn received the Govett-Brewster’s invitation in 1985 she had been exhibiting for over three decades and had an established reputation as an important New Zealand artist with works held in the collections of the Auckland City Art Gallery (now Auckland Art

Fig. 2
Vivian Lynn
*Gates of the Goddess:
A Southern Crossing
Attended by the Goddess*
(detail) 1986
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o
Tāmaki, purchased 1986
Photo: Jurgen Waibel
Courtesy of Vivian Lynn

Gallery Toi o Tāmaki), National Art Gallery (now Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa) and the Robert McDougall Art Gallery (now Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu). The 1980s were a particularly active period for Lynn. In 1982 alone she had a survey exhibition at Wellington's City Art Gallery, she exhibited as part of the *F1 New Zealand Sculpture Project* and her major work *Garden Gates* was shown at Janne Land, a dealer gallery in Wellington. In 1984 her work was included in the Auckland City Art Gallery's *Anxious Images* exhibition, part of its "Aspects of Recent New Zealand Art" series. Critical response to Lynn's work in the 1980s indicates that her work was perceived at the time as feminist, conceptually

challenging and technically accomplished.³ Writing about Lynn's art in *New Zealand Women Artists*, Anne Kirker observes:

At a time when it was usual for artists to pare down images to simple, austere forms, she chose to make her works more complex, to infuse them with layers of meaning which reflected her unease with the status quo.⁴

Gates of the Goddess reflects the zeitgeist of feminist thinking and art-making in New Zealand in the 1980s, especially in its use of goddess imagery, a subject that was also being explored by a number of other



contemporary New Zealand artists including Carole Shephard, Bronwynne Cornish and Claudia Pond Eyley. A key source for Lynn was American feminist philosopher Mary Daly's book *Cyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978).

Despite her acute awareness of feminist theory and politics, Lynn chose not to align herself with the women's art movement. "I've never been interested in badge brigades," she once said.⁵ Instead, she has approached "feminism as a critical strategy" and developed an art practice which is, in her words, "oppositional, critical and research-based."⁶ She clarifies, "I do not want to be oppositional for the sake of

it. What I was interested in and am still interested in is the social/political intent of the work."⁷

Lynn describes *Gates of the Goddess* as tracing "the cyclical process of my journey from menarche (beginning of menstruation) to menocease [the artist's preferred term for menopause], and menocease becomes a metaphor for rebirth."⁸ The left hand panel with its series of open pouches containing lunar charts refers to women's fertility and to the average number of years that women menstruate (Fig. 2). On the right hand panel a gridded layer is partially pulled up; a lifted veil or – given Lynn's fascination with skin – evoking the natural repair process when a top layer



of skin lifts to reveal the raw and tender dermis (Fig. 3). Small figures bound in hair, a common material in Lynn's works, appear across its surface (Fig. 4).

Between these two panels one encounters the large goddess figure on the central panel. Channelling Mary Daly, Lynn notes: "The passage through the *Gates of the Goddess* signifies metamorphosis, or rebirth, into the wild realm of the sacred and ecstatic."⁹ Lynn based her goddess on sources as culturally diverse as the Babylonian goddess Ishtar; Māori rock art figures that

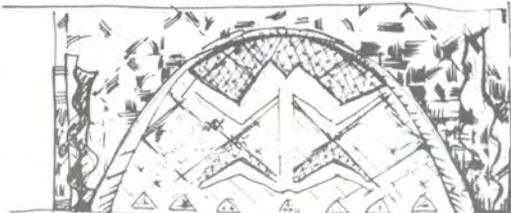
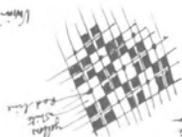
Lynn saw in the late 1950s when she lived in South Canterbury; and dilukái figures from the Pacific Island Republic of Palau – most likely a carved Gable figure (Dilukai) (late nineteenth – early twentieth century) in the collection of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art.¹⁰ The seven masks above Lynn's goddess relate to the seven gates through which the Sumerian goddess Inanna passes in order to reach the underworld – an association Lynn had earlier explored in *Garden gates* (1982). The working drawings for *Gates of the Goddess*, also in the Auckland Art Gallery's collection,

LEFT
Fig. 3
Vivian Lynn
*Gates of the Goddess:
A Southern Crossing
Attended by the Goddess*
(detail) 1986
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o
Tāmaki, purchased 1986
Photo: Jurgen Waibel
Courtesy of Vivian Lynn

BELOW
Fig. 4
Vivian Lynn
*Gates of the Goddess:
A Southern Crossing
Attended by the Goddess*
(detail) 1986
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o
Tāmaki, purchased 1986
Photo: Jurgen Waibel
Courtesy of Vivian Lynn



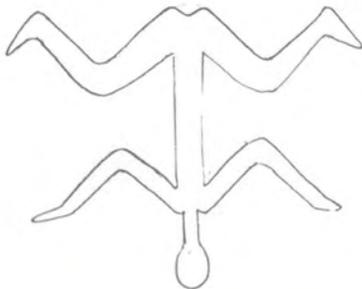
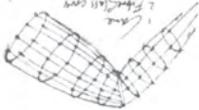
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Face: Steps, hand, shadows



1. Face
2. Profile/Cell on surface

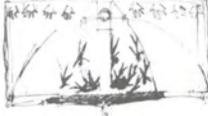
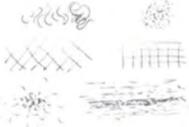
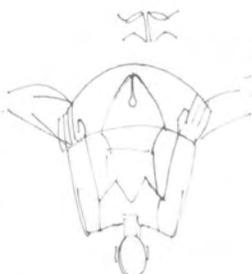


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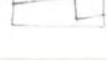


Large open space - unobstructed face - not too small

1. Kalyan, India / 2. Kalyan, India / 3. Kalyan, India



Facing profile



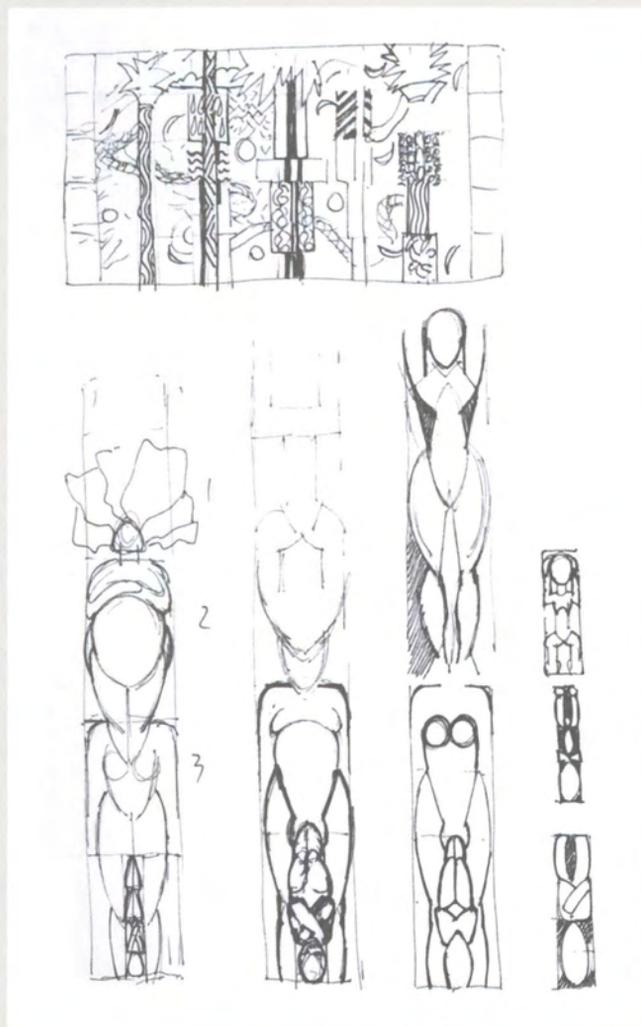
East side / West side / North side



provide insight into the development of the work and the evolution of the symbols and forms that appear in the final work (Figs 5–7).

A significant aspect of *Gates of the Goddess* is Lynn's use of Pacific tapa (bark cloth) (Fig. 8). Bark cloth has been used as material in the Pacific for a range of everyday and ceremonial uses. Today, it is primarily

made and exchanged to mark ceremonial occasions such as graduations, weddings and funerals. As a contemporary practice, tapa is particularly strong in Tonga (where it is referred to as ngatu), Fiji (masi), Samoa (siapo), Niue (hiapo) and in parts of Papua New Guinea. It is also made by Pacific Island diaspora communities based in New Zealand, Australia and the United States.



Figs 5–7
Vivian Lynn
Working notes for *Gates of the Goddess: A Southern Crossing Attended by the Goddess* 1985
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1986
Photo: Jurgen Waibel
Courtesy of Vivian Lynn

Fig. 8
Vivian Lynn
*Gates of the Goddess:
A Southern Crossing
Attended by the Goddess*
(detail) 1986
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o
Tāmaki, purchased 1986
Photo: Jurgen Waibel
Courtesy of Vivian Lynn

Lynn wanted to work with tapa because of the fact that it was made by women and for its natural and fibrous material qualities. The reverse of the side panels retain the marks of the original makers as well as Lynn's own abstract patterns and forms including the phases of the moon, shells, and plants – suggestive of the tall paper mulberry trees used to make tapa cloth (Fig. 9).

The tapa that Lynn used in *Gates of the Goddess* were damaged pieces that she had collected over three years by placing advertisements in Wellington newspapers offering to purchase “destroyed” tapa for \$5 per square metre. She received offers from across the Wellington region including offcuts from a company making tapa lampshades and a man who had been using sections of tapa to clean car engines.¹¹ Lynn believed that the mistreatment of these pieces of damaged tapa was symbolic of the way in which art by women – and women themselves – were undervalued in New Zealand society at the time. She later described her use of the damaged tapa as a form of “revendication,” a way of publicly calling this out, in a work that sought to affirm the importance and significance of women’s lives. In Lynn’s words, “by constituting the tapa cloth into a new whole,” she wanted to “signify healing, repair, restoration of value, making up in some way for previous loss, setting something right.”¹²

The initial public and critical reception of *Gates of the Goddess* was largely positive and Rodney Wilson, director of the Auckland City Art Gallery, acted

promptly to acquire the work for the gallery’s collection.¹³ The work was exhibited at Auckland City Art Gallery later that year as part of its exhibition *Aspects of Recent New Zealand Art: Sculpture 2* (21 October – 4 December 1986).

However there were dissenters. Feminist critic Lita Barrie took exception to the work and criticised Lynn and other New Zealand women artists in lectures and articles published in 1987:

When Juliet Batten paints large cunts, or facilitates a walk-in menstrual cunt (“Menstrual Maze”) and Vivian Lynn makes a walk-in menstrual Goddess cunt (“The Gates of the Goddess. A Southern Crossing attended by the Goddess,” 1986) they effectively deliver women up for a gang-bang. The visible vagina is men’s experience of sexuality, not women’s.¹⁴

Barrie, who favoured a post-structuralist feminist approach, viewed these works as “essentialist feminist art.”¹⁵ She argued, “When women artists resurrect ancient goddesses and matriarchal symbols and position them in the place of patriarchal symbols, they leave the underlying structure of meaning unchanged. They merely annex an irrelevant past to present structures of meaning.”¹⁶

Concerns were also raised about Lynn’s use of tapa, which was viewed as an act of cultural appropriation. In an *Art New Zealand* review, Priscilla Pitts commented:

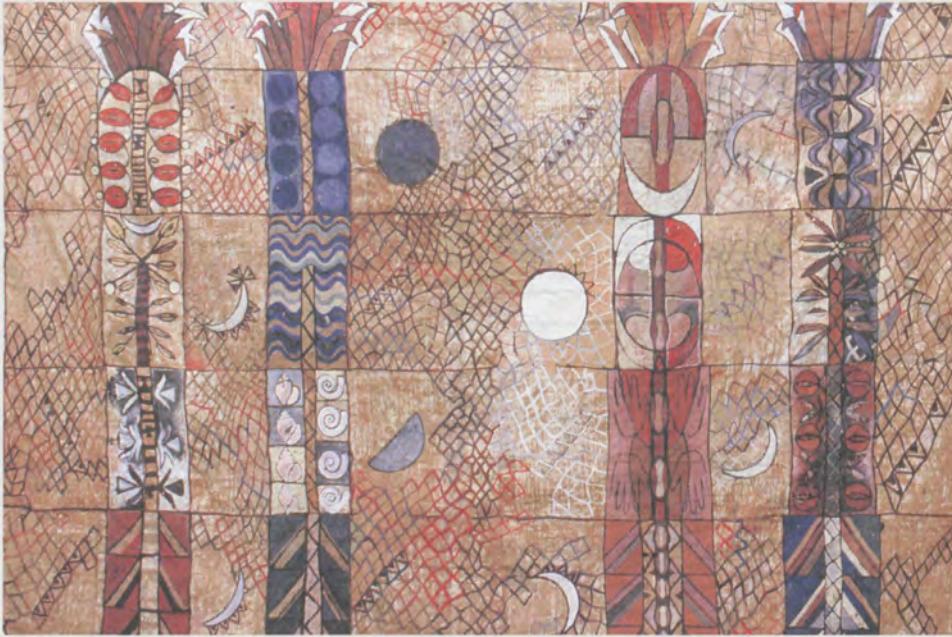


Despite the visual richness of Lynn's handling of the material and the undeniable power and beauty of the work, her use of tapa, an art form in its own right, does raise some questions. Would we use painstakingly created art works from our own culture as raw material in this way? Does the fact that some of the cloth was already damaged mitigate such usage? Does the common gender of the artists involved justify this kind of appropriation?¹⁷

Even Alexa Johnston, Curator of Contemporary Art at the Auckland City Art Gallery, who worked with Lynn on the display of the work at the gallery in 1986, had some reservations about this aspect of the work. In her catalogue essay Johnston notes, "Many questions arise today over the use of material from other cultures in the making of art works – in particular,

Western artists' use of forms from tribal art."¹⁸ She quotes Lynn's response to "the appropriation question":

I used tapa cloth as part of the specific construction of meaning within the work. The material is not specifically used for its aesthetic possibilities but in a context of re-education. This was tapa cloth made by women but colonised by non-Pacific symbols, heraldic symbols, or insignia. It is allied in my mind with the takeover of women's energies and inventions by men. So the concept of rehabilitating the tapa made by women, the fact that tapa was used for intimate functions like clothes and bedcovers and the fact that its source was a tree became the politics of the work.¹⁹



Lynn later explained what she meant by “colonised tapa” – she was referring to tapa that was “printed or painted with heraldic symbols, insignia, maps and signs showing the influence of the British colonial presence, Boy Scouts, the military, christianity and tourism.”²⁰ She “cleaned” the damaged tapa and glued it into large sections which she painted over, except for “two strips printed with unmistakable Polynesian geometric pattern” which she deliberately left as “clear indicators... as to authorship.”²¹ From a contemporary perspective, Lynn’s concept of “colonised tapa” is at odds with a more dynamic view of innovation and cross-cultural exchange in Pacific art in response to ever-changing social contexts.

Correspondence between Johnston and Lynn at this time shows that Johnston did not agree with Lynn’s justification for using tapa.²² “I acknowledge that you feel you have carefully worked out your re-use of tapa, but your assertions do not place the issue beyond discussion... I am aware from discussions of photographs of *Gateway to the Goddess* [sic] with women from Tonga and Niue, that they see the work

from a very different perspective.”²³ While no further details were given, it is likely that Pacific audiences responded with consternation and concern at seeing tapa represented in *Gates of the Goddess*, especially given two years earlier, from November 1984 – January 1985, the Auckland City Art Gallery had an exhibition of Pacific tapa from the Auckland Institute and Museum’s collection (now known as Tāmaki Paenga Hira Auckland War Memorial Museum).²⁴ The *Tapa Cloth* exhibition (Fig. 10), which presented tapa as an art form worthy of serious attention within an art gallery and helped the gallery’s staff to develop relationships with local tapa makers, was received very differently. Indeed, the contrast between the earlier exhibition and Lynn’s project must have been jarring. It is important to note that these were early days for both the institution and Pacific Island peoples in addressing Pacific cultures in the context of the contemporary art gallery. How must it have felt for Pacific audiences to see a palagi artist representing their art form? How better could the institution have mediated the “problem” Lynn’s work posed to Pacific audiences?



Fig. 9
Vivian Lynn
*Gates of the Goddess: A
Southern Crossing
Attended by the Goddess
(detail)* 1986
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o
Tāmaki, purchased 1986
Photo: Jurgen Waibel
Courtesy of Vivian Lynn

Fig. 10
Installation view: *Tapa Cloth*,
Auckland City Art Gallery,
November 1984–January 1985
E. H. McCormick Research
Library Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki

The re-use, or up-cycling, of tapa within Pacific communities is not in itself controversial. A large piece of tapa can be cut into smaller pieces and redistributed for a number of reasons. From a Pacific perspective, damaged tapa might be considered unsuitable for display or ceremonial use and therefore other functional uses may be culturally acceptable.²⁵ Such uses are not necessarily viewed as acts of desecration.²⁶

Several contemporary Pacific New Zealand artists have at times incorporated pieces of tapa into their work. In a 1990 interview with curator and art historian

Rangihīroa Panoho, artist Ioane notes:

I started using it [bark cloth] in my second year at Elam. [...] tapa was a substitute for canvas. The tapa was used from my mother's collection. [...] The good thing about my use of it is I process it and you don't recognise it as tapa cloth. I know some artists (palagi) who use tapa in its original form and Samoan people, who hold fast to traditions, have got upset. I've never had that feedback... but I'm not looking forward to the day when someone comes up to me and says they don't like it.²⁷



In the mid-1990s artist Rosanna Raymond incorporated tapa into the Pacific Sisters' costume *H'nard K'nore G'ngang G'ngear* (1995-96, Fig. 11). In correspondence with Pacific art historian Karen Stevenson in 2007, Raymond comments:

I was interested in making something... whole... from scraps... somewhat like my cultural make-up... repatriating the culture back to me... not recreating the past but using the past to make a relevant future for me, making my Polynesian heritage relevant to me as an urban NZ born islander.²⁸

By the late 1980s the "appropriation debate" was just beginning to gain momentum in New Zealand. As Priscilla Pitts notes:

The context at that time was one of growing awareness – to which Ngahuia [Te Awēkotuku] was an early and influential contributor – of the need for an increased sensitivity to the appropriation by artists of dominant cultures of images, stories, etc. from Maori and "other" cultures. There was also discussion around the blurring of the distinction between "art" and "craft," which probably played into the concerns about Vivian's use of tapa.²⁹

The 1987 *Herstory Diary* – which included Māori weaving, Cook Islands tivaevae and embroidery, Samoan lei, and patchwork quilts alongside the work of Pauline Rhodes, Fiona Clark and other Pākehā /palagi (New Zealand European) artists – is an example, Pitts says, of attempts to reposition women's art at the time.

Lynn's use of tapa in *Gates of the Goddess* galvanised debates that are still unresolved. Her work remains undoubtedly controversial. In the course of writing this essay I have heard several accounts of more virulent criticism against Lynn's "appropriation" being voiced privately and in public talks, however, there is no written public record of these objections. Lynn, herself, is only aware of this criticism as retold to her by other people, including Johnston.³⁰ It is challenging to retrospectively guess what lay behind these concerns. Some have speculated that it was the association of tapa with menstruation and hair that was problematic. This is not straightforward and it is likely a matter of context, including time, place and audience. Tapa is often used in relation to the body, for example in costumes or as part of wedding ceremonies and funerary rites. In such contexts, Te Papa's Curator of Pacific Art Nina Tonga notes, "it is more than a material object but a medium to negotiate relationships and tapu".³¹ In Māori and Pacific cultures there is tapu relating to women's bodies, menstruation and hair. Pregnant and menstruating women are considered tapu by Māori and, in a museum context, this may mean that exposure to certain taonga is restricted. Former senior curator of Mātauranga Māori at Te Papa, Rhonda Paku, explains:

Maori culture acknowledges the very special childbearing role that women have and that spiritually in our culture, that's a significant role. We are the bearer of tomorrow's generation. It is about respecting the sacredness around that role culturally. When it comes into conflict, and potentially it can, with some of the strong influences of taonga in the collection, the two obviously may clash.³²

Many Māori also consider the head to be tapu and the cutting of hair has cultural associations.³³

Gates of the Goddess implies a "universalist sisterhood," which does not account for the nuances of diverse feminist positions nor different historical and cultural contexts. It could also be interpreted as speaking on behalf of, or representing Pacific women's perspectives, rather than creating space for these perspectives to have a public platform on their own terms. It is also possible that Pacific viewers responded negatively to the aesthetics of the work and the use

Fig. 11
H'nard K'nore G'ngang G'ngear (Customised
Levis by Rosanna Raymond)
1997
Photo: Greg Semu
© Rosanna Raymond
and Greg Semu,
Courtesy of Rosanna
Raymond

Fig. 12
*Te Moemoea no lotefa, The
Dream of Joseph: A
Celebration of Pacific Art
and Taonga* 1990
exhibition catalogue (cover)
Sarjeant Art Gallery,
Whanganui

of tapa as canvas. As Nina Tonga observes, Lynn's "re-working of tapa ignores the existent design aesthetic of these women...and ignores the display methods associated with these textiles."³⁴

Exhibitions tend to be a lightning rod for public opinion. In 1990 Lynn and the Auckland City Art Gallery were approached about the inclusion of *Gates of the Goddess* in Rangihiroa Panoho's upcoming exhibition *Te Moemoea no lotefa, The Dream of Joseph: A Celebration of Pacific Art and Taonga* at the Sarjeant Art Gallery in Whanganui (Fig. 12). This landmark exhibition, along with *Bottled Ocean: Contemporary Pacific Artists* in 1994-95, is rightly celebrated for not only opening "doors for Pacific artists", but as Karen Stevenson points out, "placed Pacific art in New Zealand's art galleries and consequently brought Pacific art to the attention of New Zealand."³⁵

One strand of the *Te Moemoea no lotefa* exhibition was works by palagi artists that, as Panoho put it, "constitute a response to Pacific Island subject and motif," or as anthropologist Nicholas Thomas later described them, "white appropriators of Pacific style."³⁶ These artists included Tony Fomison, Barry Lett, Mark Adams, Pat Hanly, Ian Scott, Warwick Freeman and Glenn Jowitt, among others.³⁷ Intriguingly, there is a reference to "Lynn" as an example of one of the palagi artists listed in the front of the exhibition catalogue.³⁸ The loan request to borrow *Gates of the Goddess* was declined due to the short lead-in time and in response to Lynn's concerns about how the work would be accommodated in

the Sarjeant's galleries.³⁹ None of Lynn's works would feature in the exhibition. Were there other factors at play in this decision? Whatever the ultimate reason, given Panoho's later criticism of Pākehā artists appropriation of Māori motifs in the catalogue for *Headlands: Thinking through New Zealand Art* (1992), it is interesting to speculate on how *Gates of the Goddess* would have been read in the context of *Te Moemoea no lotefa*, and what impact that might have had on interpretations of the work today and opportunities for it to be seen since.

In October 2017 art critic Lana Lopesi wrote a critical review of contemporary Pākehā/palagi artist Francis Upritchard's *Jealous Saboteurs* exhibition.⁴⁰ Lopesi took the artist and the institutions involved to task for, among other things, "the lack of agency for those represented in the work, appropriation without engagement, and the exercising of unchecked privilege."⁴¹ Lopesi described Upritchard's practice as "an exercise of the white imagination" and the review was a timely reminder of the moral questions artists, curators and institutions need to ask themselves.⁴² This demonstrates that the arguments raised against Lynn's *Gates of the Goddess* are still in play. Would *Gates of the Goddess* be selected for display in 2018? Given the highly sensitised climate of identity politics at the present moment, the answer is probably not. Until the arts of the Pacific and the work of contemporary Pacific artists in Aotearoa are accorded greater prominence in gallery programming, works such as *Gates of the Goddess*, historically important as they may be, will likely remain hidden from view.

TE MOEMOEĀ NO IO TE FA

(The Dream of Joseph)



A CELEBRATION OF PACIFIC ART AND TAONGA

Features interviews with 10 contemporary Pacific Island artists

SARJEANT GALLERY, WANGANUI. DECEMBER 15, 1990 - MARCH 3, 1991

The author thanks Nina Tonga, Curator of Pacific Art at Te Papa, for her feedback and discussion while working on this text. Thank you also to the following people: Lizzie Baikie, Christina Barton, Victoria Boyack, Victoria Curtis, Catherine Hammond, Alexa Johnston, Christine Kiddey, Martin Lewis, Vivian Lynn, Priscilla Pitts, Rebecca Rice and Jurgen Waibel. Acknowledgments also to those people who preferred not to comment publicly.

1. Cheryll Sotheran, "The Gates of the Goddess: A Southern Crossing Attended by the Goddess" exhibition notes (New Plymouth: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 1986). Vivian Lynn artist file, Te Aka Matua Reference Library, Te Papa. These notes have a handwritten annotation which states "Notes prepared by Cheryll Sotheran (Dec 1985) and approved by Vivian Lynn."
2. Sotheran, "The Gates of the Goddess."
3. For example, T. J. McNamara, "Men Misdirected in Satiric Prints," *New Zealand Herald*, September 29, 1980, 8; Elva Bett, "Obsessions Articulated," *NZ Listener*, March 20, 1982, 32–33; Ian Wedde, "Forms have Ritual and Natural Magic," *Evening Post*, September 24, 1984, 31.
4. Anne Kirker, *New Zealand Women Artists: A Survey of 150 Years* (1986; repr., Tortola: Craftsman House, 1993), 190.
5. Vivian Lynn, quoted in Laura Preston, "No Safe Anchorage: A Conversation with Vivian Lynn," *Art New Zealand* 130 (Autumn 2009): 69.
6. Preston, "No Safe Anchorage," 69.
7. Preston, "No Safe Anchorage," 69.
8. Vivian Lynn, quoted in Sotheran, "The Gates of the Goddess."
9. Vivian Lynn, quoted in Sotheran, "The Gates of the Goddess."
10. The Metropolitan Museum of Art gives the following information for this object: Gable Figure (Dilukai) (late 19th to early 20th century), wood and paint, 652 x 965 x 200 mm, The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller, and Purchase, Nelson A. Rockefeller Gift, 1970 (1978.412.1558a-d).
11. Vivian Lynn, conversation with the author, March 11, 2017.
12. Vivian Lynn, notes on *Gates of the Goddess* (c.1992). Vivian Lynn artist files, Te Aka Matua Reference Library, Te Papa. These notes are annotated with a handwritten reference to an exhibition of Lynn's work at Southern Cross Gallery in Wellington, March–April 1989, but this is likely an error as the notes relate to *Gates of the Goddess* and the exhibition contained unrelated works from Lynn's series *Your mental set* and *Beyond the either/or*.
13. Pam Walker, "Beautiful Sculpture," *Taranaki Daily News*, January 25, 1986, 12. "Goddess Sculpture on Display," *Dominion*, February 3, 1986, 4; "Season of Sculpture at the Govett-Brewster," *New Zealand Art News* 2, no. 6 (February–March 1986): 9; Pam Walker, "Lifework," *NZ Listener*, March 1, 1986, 35.
14. Lita Barrie, "Further Toward a Deconstruction of Phallic Univocality: Deferrals," *Antic* 2 (March 1987): 30–31.
15. Barrie, 34.
16. Barrie, 32.
17. Priscilla Pitts, "The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery Sculpture Project," *Art New Zealand* 41 (Summer 1986–87): 57.
18. Alexa M. Johnston, "Vivian Lynn," *Aspects of Recent New Zealand Art: Sculpture 2* (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1986), n.p.
19. Vivian Lynn to Alexa M. Johnston, September 1, 1986. Quoted in Alexa M. Johnston, "Vivian Lynn."
20. Vivian Lynn, notes on *Gates of the Goddess*.
21. Lynn, notes on *Gates of the Goddess*.
22. "Alexa Johnston's Correspondence with Artists" is an archive of correspondence between Johnston and artists between 1978–2001 held at E. H. McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. Subsequent references to letters between Johnston and Vivian Lynn are from this archive.
23. Alexa M. Johnston to Vivian Lynn, October 8, 1986.
24. From photographs of the *Tapa Cloth* exhibition in the Auckland Art Gallery's exhibition archives, it appears that it included Tonga ngatu, Samoan siapo, Niuean hiapo and other pieces of tapa from the Auckland Institute and Museum's collection of unknown origin and provenance.
25. Nina Tonga, conversation with the author, February 2018.
26. Nina Tonga, conversation with the author, February 2018.
27. Ioane Ioane, quoted in Rangihiroa Panoho, *Te Moemoea no lotefa (The Dream of Joseph)* (Whanganui: Sarjeant Gallery, 1990), 34.
28. Rosanna Raymond, 2007, quoted in Karen Stevenson, *The Frangipani is Dead: Contemporary Pacific Art in New Zealand, 1985–2000* (Wellington: Huia, 2008), 170.
29. Priscilla Pitts, email to the author, March 12, 2017.
30. Vivian Lynn, conversation with the author, March 11, 2017.
31. Nina Tonga, personal correspondence with the author, February 1, 2018.
32. Julie Ash, "Te Papa Tapu Advice 'Can be Ignored,'" *Dominion Post*, October 13, 2010, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/4225775/Te-Papa-tapu-advice-can-be-ignored> (accessed January 28, 2018).
33. For more information about hair and tapu: Awhina Tamarapa and Patricia Wallace, "Māori Clothing and Adornment – Kākahu Māori – Hairstyles," *Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, accessed 28 January 2018, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/maori-clothing-and-adornment-kakahu-maori/page-6>.
34. Nina Tonga, personal correspondence.
35. Karen Stevenson, *The Frangipani is Dead*, 29–30.
36. Rangihiroa Panoho, *Te Moemoea no lotefa*, 2. Nicholas Thomas, "The Dream of Joseph: Practices of Identity in Pacific Art," *The Contemporary Pacific* 8 no. 2 (Fall 1996): 308.
37. A full list of exhibiting artists and works was included as a handout at the back of the *Te Moemoea no lotefa* catalogue.
38. Panoho, *Te Moemoea no lotefa*, 2.
39. "Alexa Johnston's Correspondence with Artists," archive held at the E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
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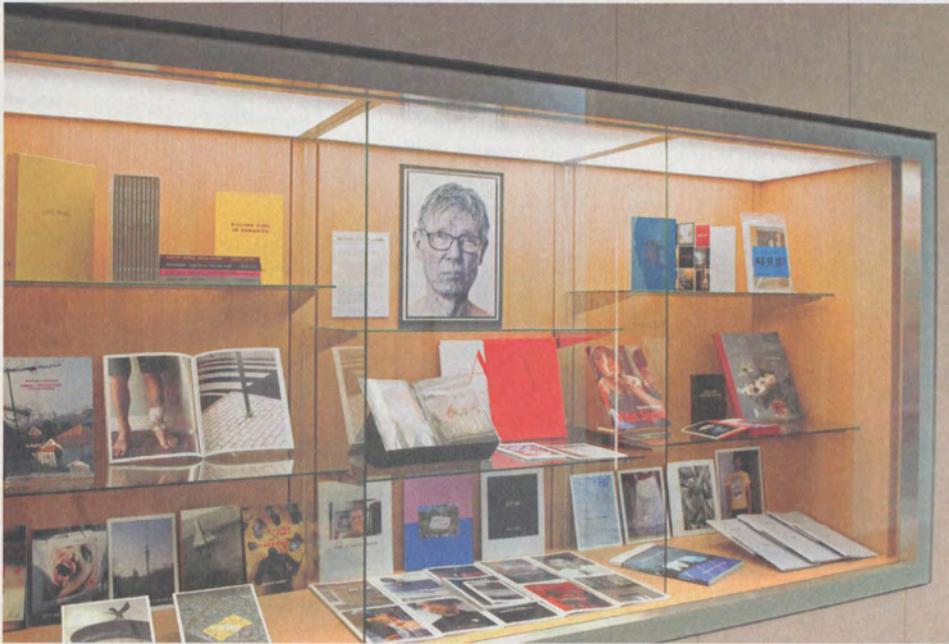
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E. H. McCormick Research
Library display case,
Installation view: *Nothing
is as it Seems: Harvey Bengt
Photobooks*, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2015
Photo: John McIver

E. H. McCormick Research
Library display case,
Installation view: *Collective
Women: Feminist Art
Archives from the 1970s to
the 1990s*, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2017
Photo: John McIver



From Andy: Gifted to the Archive

3 Sep 2011–6 Feb 2012

Fifty Years of Modern Masters in Auckland

7 Feb 2012–17 Jun 2012

Better to Give: The Greg Semu Archive

18 Jun 2012–8 Nov 2012

Andy Warhol's Interview: The Crystal Ball
of Pop Culture

9 Nov 2012–14 Feb 2013

Ruth Buchanan: The Curtain

15 Feb 2013–11 Apr 2013

Being Modern: Auckland Art Gallery in
the 1950s and 1960s

5 Jul 2013–23 Oct 2013

Marti Friedlander: Artists in the Archive

24 Oct 2013–20 Feb 2014

He Raranga Toi: Robyn Kahukiwa, Emily
Karaka and Kura Te Waru Rewiri

21 Feb 2014–4 Apr 2014

Over Here: America and the Auckland Art
Gallery

5 Apr 2014–21 Aug 2014

Beginnings: Auckland Art Gallery 1888-1938

22 Aug 2014–21 Nov 2014

Nothing Is As It Seems: Harvey Bengé
Photobooks

17 Apr 2015–13 Aug 2015

John Weeks: Art in the Archive

14 Aug 2015–10 Dec 2015

Teststrip: Nostalgia for the Avant-garde

11 Dec 2015–28 Apr 2016

Roberto Matta: Les Oh! Tomobiles

29 Apr 2016–18 Sep 2016

Fiona Connor: John McLaughlin in Print

19 Sep 2016–19 Oct 2016

Mr Partridge's Gift: The Story of the
Lindauer Pictures

20 Oct 2016–9 Mar 2017

Tate & Us

10 Mar 2017–16 Jul 2017

Wonderful, Crazy, Subversive: The John
B. Turner Archive

21 Jul 2017–24 Jan 2018

Collective Women: Feminist Art Archives
from the 1970s to the 1990s

25 Nov 2017–16 Jun 2019

Alexis Hunter: Icons of Fearlessness

25 Jan 2018–27 May 2018

Notes on rest

28 May 2018–5 Jul 2018

Gordon Walters in Print

6 Jul 2018–5 Nov 2018

Contributors

Natasha Conland is Curator of Contemporary Art at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. In 2005 she was curator of et al's *the fundamental practice* New Zealand's representative artist at the Venice Biennale. She was curator of the 4th Auckland Triennial (2010), the Scape Biennial of Art and Public Space (2006). Curated exhibitions at the Auckland Art Gallery have often focused on emerging issues in contemporary art and culture today including, *Mystic Truths* (2007), *Freedom Farmers* (2013), *Made Active* (2012), *Shout Whisper Wail!* (2017). Current research is focused on the historic development of the "avant-garde" in New Zealand art.

Fiona Connor is a New Zealand artist currently based in Los Angeles. Her contribution to *Reading Room* is part of an ongoing project that orbits around the documentation of John McLaughlin's work by Frank J. Thomas. The first iteration was in the E. H. McCormick Research Library's display case at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki in 2016. Other outcomes have included a series of artist talks and exhibitions at Chateau Shatto in Los Angeles, Minerva in Sydney and the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth.

Wystan Curnow is writing a book on Colin McCahon, his essay is an extract from its first chapter. He co-authored with Robert Leonard the guide to their recent *On Going Out with the Tide*, an exhibition of Colin McCahon's paintings on Māori themes at City Gallery Wellington. Edited, and written with From Scratch and Phil Dadson, *Splash #5, From Scratch Special Issue 1986/2018* is due out soon from Small Bore Books, published in partnership with Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Art Gallery.

Betty Davis is currently studying a Masters at the University of Auckland in English. She came into contact with archives in a paper in her Honours year, *Opening the Archive*, with Michele Leggott. She has lived in both Japan and Argentina and is passionate about language.

Sarah Farrar is Senior Curator Art at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. She is a curator of contemporary art and writer with a particular interest in the social reception of contemporary art, exhibition histories, and innovative approaches to collection exhibitions. She is the lead curator on Te Papa's *Toi Art* renewal project (2018) and she led the development of the museum's previous collection exhibitions programme, *Ngā Toi | Arts Te Papa* (2013-17). She is a PhD candidate in Curatorial Practice at Monash University, Melbourne.

Simon Gennard is a writer and curator based in Te Whanganui-a-Tara.

David Hall (tangata tiriti) is a political theorist with a background in geography, presently Senior Researcher at The Policy Observatory and Associate Investigator at Te Pūnaha Matatini. He has a D.Phil in Politics from University of Oxford and has contributed writing to the *New Zealand Listener*, *New Zealand Herald*, *Art New Zealand*, *Pantograph*, *Punch*, *Spinoff*, and elsewhere. His research interests include sovereignty, borders, political judgment, and climate change policy, particularly the design of forest solutions for negative emissions.

Alfredo Jaar is an artist, architect and filmmaker who lives and works in New York City. He was born in Santiago, Chile in 1956. He has participated in numerous exhibitions and a major retrospective of his work was held in 2014 at the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma in Helsinki. His work was featured in *Space to Dream: Recent Art from South America* at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki in 2016.

Robert Leonard is Chief Curator at City Gallery Wellington. His exhibitions include *Headlands: through New Zealand Art* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1992), and *Colin McCahon: On Going Out with the Tide* (City Gallery Wellington, 2017). His collaboration with Anna-Marie White arose from participating on the organising committee for the symposium *Tai Ahiahi///Tai Awatea: Curating Contemporary Māori Art* (City Gallery Wellington, 2017), which saw George Hubbard return to his Wellington stamping ground for the first time since *Stop Making Sense* in 1995.

Anna-Marie White (Te Ātiawa) is a doctoral student in art history at Victoria University of Wellington. Her thesis will address contemporary Māori art histories.

Victoria Wynne-Jones is an Auckland-based art historian and curator. She is currently a Professional Teaching Fellow in Art History at the University of Auckland where she recently completed her PhD. Her research interests include: intersections between performance art and dance studies, feminisms, contemporary art theory and curatorial practice.

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ISSUE/08.18

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