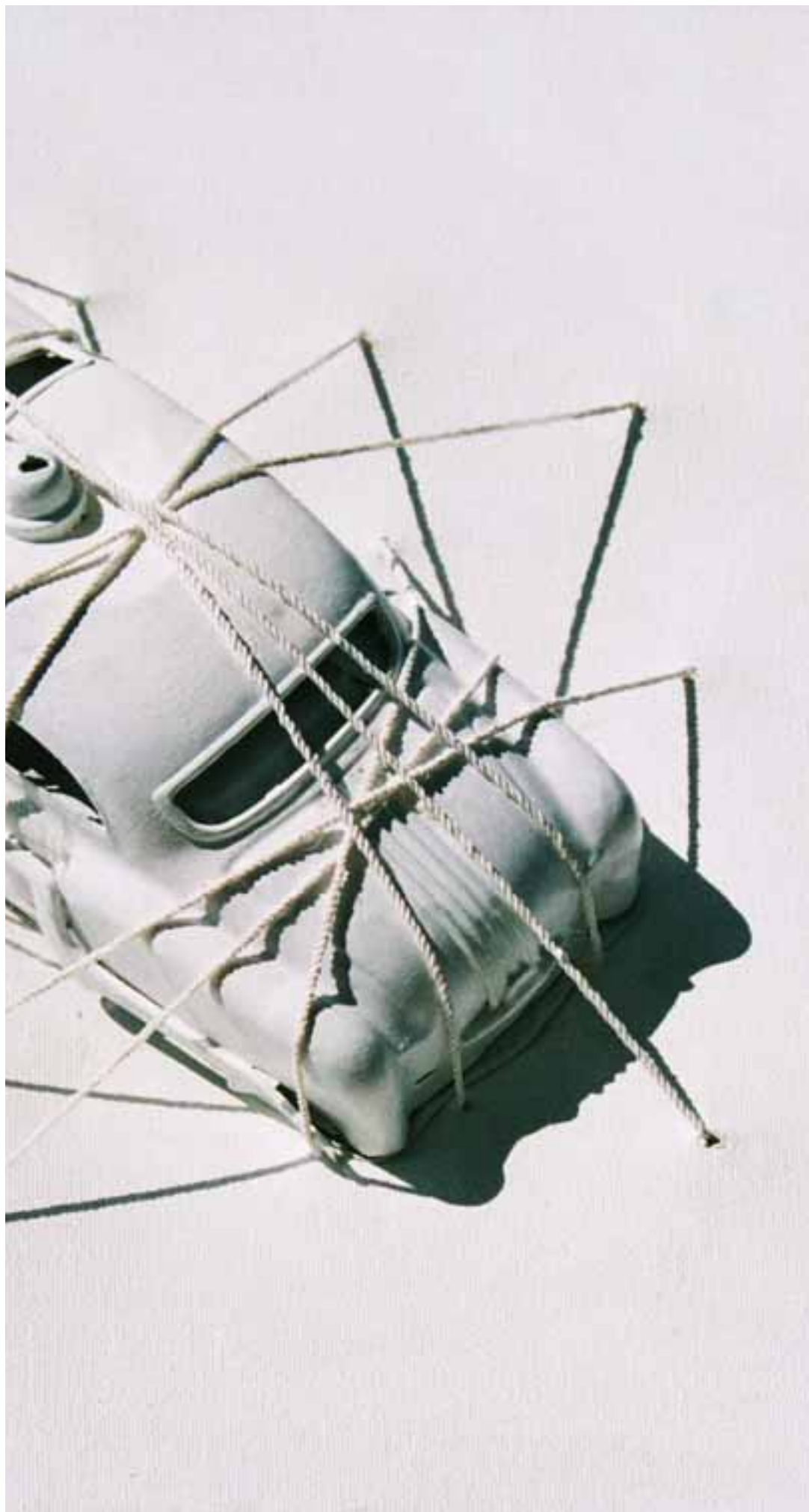




chrysalis seed trust



CS ARTS

JUNE 2008 - ISSUE 30

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Who we are

Founded in 1998 the Chrysalis Seed charitable trust serves a growing number of contemporary artists. We aim to 'help resource the arts community from a Christian perspective'.

CS Arts is our main publication, distributed to individuals, institutions and businesses throughout the arts community. It seeks to engage with contemporary artists, current art issues and events.

We have a number of groups who meet regularly to support each other professionally.

Our office and library are located in the heart of The Arts Centre, where all are welcome.

Chrysalis Seed Trust

2nd Floor, Scott Block, The Arts Centre

PO Box 629, Christchurch 8140

New Zealand

ph +64 3 374 5721

fax +64 3 379 3762

info@cs.org.nz

www.cs.org.nz

Library Hours: Monday–Friday, 1–4pm

Guest Editor Rob d'Auvergne

Producer Gloria Heazlewood

Designer Andrew Clarkson www.snowsite.co.nz

Printer Rainbow Print

Trust Board

Peter Phillips (Anthony Harper lawyers)

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Cover image: *Possession*, 1997, Sudhir Kumar Duppati, found object on canvas, 450 x 450 x 100mm.

EDITORIAL

Chasing after the wind

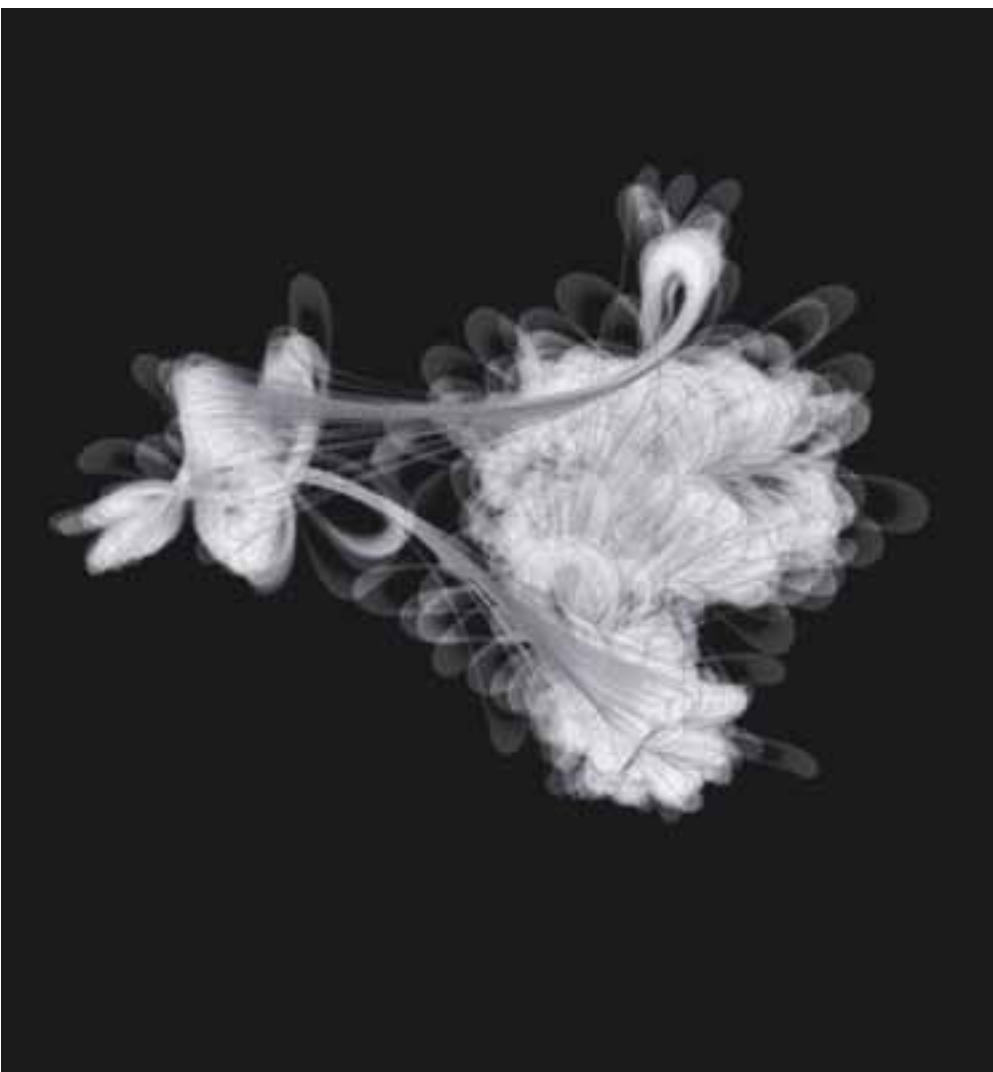
'Meaningless! Meaningless!'

says the Teacher.

'Utterly meaningless!'

Everything is meaningless.'

They could be the rantings of a postmodern philosopher-poet, railing cynically at society in general. But these words open the ancient biblical book of Ecclesiastes. They speak of a constant factor in human experience that we are only beginning to acknowledge.



stem parametro,
2007, Rachel Brunton, interactive digital installation.

Like it or loathe it, deny it or embrace it—a superficial approach is one defining element of the present times. Art, as always, is right up with the play. Some of my llam contemporaries exhibited in the Christchurch Art Gallery recently. *Another Destination* spoke my language in a way that much of the concurrent *Art School 125* retrospective did not.

James Oram's cynical one-liner *Self Generating* expressed perfectly the pessimism of postmodern accounts of human identity (with God removed from the equation). The artist pedalled furiously on the edge of exhaustion, going nowhere, just to keep a basic assertion of his own identity glowing dimly

before him. If there was playful optimism in Rachel Brunton's *Stem Parametro*, it was hollow. I indulged in the escapism for a while. The perfect graphics unfolding at the whim of my Apple mouse reminded me of my own complicity in a consumer-culture.

Both works were self-consciously superficial. Irony provides a perfect counter to the quandary that we find ourselves in. How do we make meaningful work in a world where everything can be re-contextualised? The stereotypical artist who refuses to make a concrete statement about their work is (understandably) avoiding being hung out to dry or revealing too much about themselves. When claims of universal truth are seen as power-trips, it's so much easier to question something else, send it up, or be totally self-referent to a carefully constructed identity. A well-placed piece of wit proves you're 'with it'.

Our stereotypical artist provokes a stereotypical response from the general public. Come on, we've all heard it—the sneering dismissal of 'art these days'. As Bill Cooke pointed out (in *Art All*, August 2007), 'contemporary art's strategic inaccessibility is little more than a marketing ploy. It circumvents the labels 'good' and 'bad', and even that of 'art'. Cooke goes further: 'Neither can we place much value on that which "questions" if we preclude the possibility of any sort of answer'.

Joe Public's accusations of superficiality may have justification, but they are not one-sided. The same culture that refuses truth-statements demands an easily digestible message that can be thrown into the shopping basket ... and discarded, half-eaten, at a later date. Civic bodies commission art to beautify their squares, but whatever you do, don't make a statement! Churches have been some of the worst culprits of superficial engagement with art—subverting it to a message or using it for mass-appeal (pardon the pun).

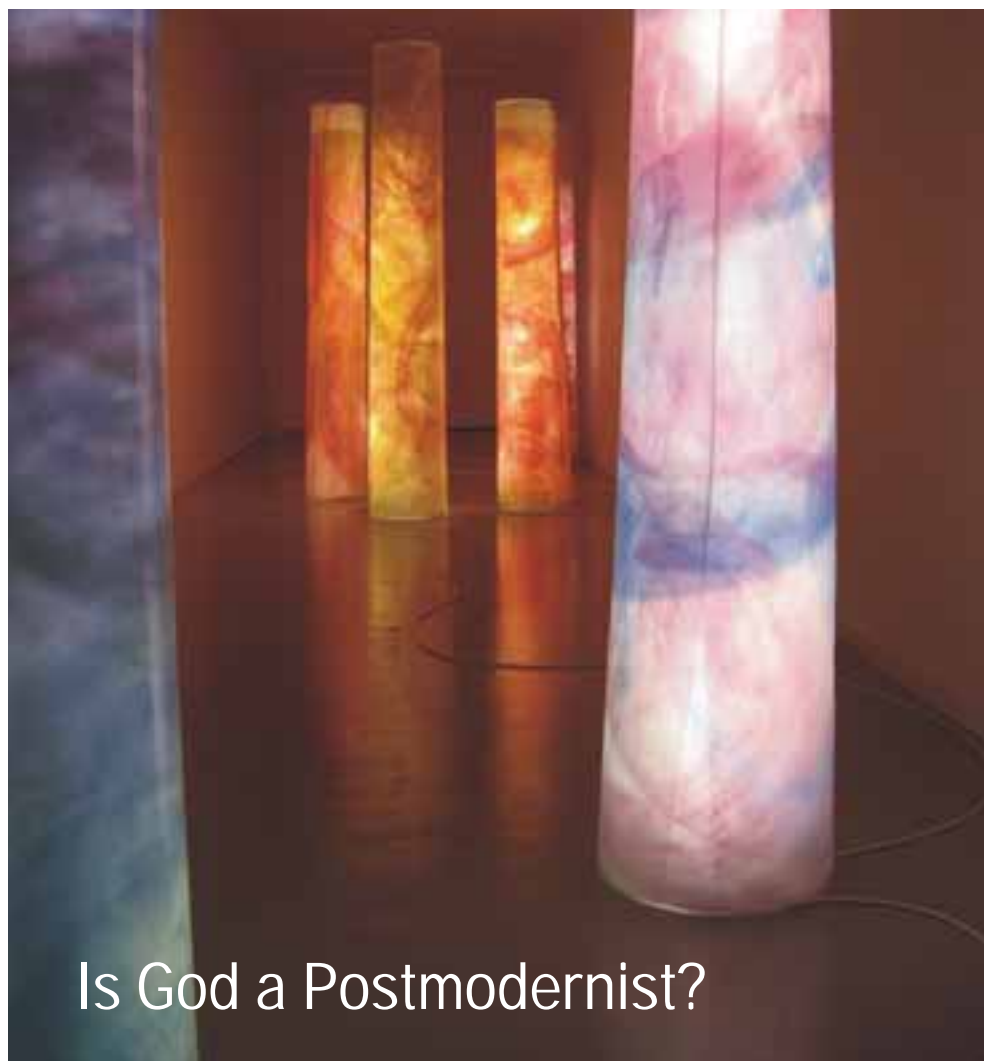
Many of the items that follow in this edition of *CS Arts* explore the ins-and-outs of superficiality. Leafa Wilson discusses superficial appropriation. Our interview with Justin Paton reminds us of our calling to make art of value. Esther Hansen navigates the responsibility of Christians to uphold a universal truth-story. But for all its scepticism, we shouldn't reject postmodernism out-of-hand, demanding a return to modernism. The value in ambiguity is obvious throughout these stories, opening art to interpretation. It facilitates the exploring and sharing of our own experience.

As the information age expands our knowledge, it also expands our questions. In light of this, postmodernism disposes with a strictly rational account of being human. A more holistic approach is much closer to the mark, accounting for our complexity as physical, spiritual and relational creatures. This implies that any statement about human nature will be a superficial one, barely scratching the surface. Art enables us to embrace this mystery—different interpretations are

okay, even not being able to interpret is okay. Maybe accepting this humbly will allow work that flows honestly out of who we are, and help us engage with each other's stories with respect and integrity.



Rob d'Auvergne



Is God a Postmodernist?

I was born in 1972 at National Women's Hospital in Auckland. I'm a child of scratch and sniff Sunday School stickers, Abba, polo necks (the first time round), Battle Star Galactica and anti-nuclear protests. I am a child of postmodern times. I am a contemporary artist who works in a postmodern context, as is Franklin artist Vicky-Anne Allen. We are also both Christians. We both graduated from the Whitecliffe College of Art and Design Master of Fine Art programme in 2006 and work together at Pukekohe High School. During our frequent debates on art and faith, a question we have kept coming back to is this: how can we preserve both the valid claims of postmodernism and biblical truth in our art?

Gallery spaces are the new sacred spaces, where people speak in whispers. But as we whirl through art exhibitions, do we ever take enough time to really contemplate or bear witness? Are we always in a hurry to get the message and move on quickly? In our rush to experience an 'accelerated sublime'¹ do we ever make a real connection?

A legacy of suspicion

All of us share similarities with our parents. The same eyes or nose, our features reflect where we come from. It is the same with our postmodern culture, which gets its DNA from modernism. 'Modernism is characterised by a suspicion of authority and tradition as a source of knowledge, and the conviction that human reason is the engine of progress. This implies that religious faith was a bad guide to understanding the world, and that the unimpeded march of

science and technology was a very good thing. The Enlightenment was optimistic: knowledge through reason alone would produce an ideal world which goes on forever forward.'²

We now see a reaction to these utopian ideals and the consequences of technological advancement, but not an abandonment of the conclusions. 'Postmodernism is a parasite within the body of modernity, digesting it with enzymes; it is not a conqueror or a destroyer. No discontinuity is noticeable: which is why some people still feel this a "modern" age, unable to see the thousand simultaneous, invisible paradigm shifts which annulled modernity, fraying at its edges, rather than attacking its core ... What is going on is a reconsideration, a return to reflection, a reappraisal. Can that be so bad?'³

Everything is up for revision. But in this chipping away of absolutes, a cynicism and scepticism has infiltrated our imaginations. We are so careful not to get our hopes up over anything, not to put ourselves at risk of believing in something or someone that could get washed away in the next knowledge wave. On the other hand, I'm a believer in the powerful hope of epic stories. The Bible is the best example. These narratives articulate our hearts; they reveal truths.

Big picture stories

I recently took part in an exhibition called *Quartet* at the New Zealand Steel Gallery in Franklin with Peter Le Fevre, Gavin Kew and Vicky-Anne Allen. I titled the work I was showing *Joyful Myths*. This

Being Present installation view,
2006, Vicky-Anne Allen, mull, polythene, wax, acrylic
paint, fluorescent light, electrical cord, drafting film,
variable sizes.

took the form of a series of black and white mono prints and painted signs selected for their quirkiness. Despite St Augustine rubbing shoulders with Anne of Green Gables, the dialogue was one of hope, judgement, favour and strength: 'I am She', 'Love's not a competition but I'm winning', 'Jesus didn't come to dig you in but to dig you out', 'Join the Pollyanna club and be glad'.

For me making art is about capturing a self-effacing spiritual lightness. *Joyful Myths* is an invitation to the viewer to enjoy, play and build a variety of possible narratives from images that have become my joyful moments in the visual landscape. It references both personal and popular culture but the images are taken out of context, suspended within a new body of work. The viewer can flit or swing from image to

to engage with the materials she uses, light and colour—a visceral response that displaces intellect. Her work focuses on the gap experience of 'being' without language.

Her life-sized columns of light encased in a skin of paint echo the presence of the body. When grouped in the installation space we experience relationship and interconnectedness with these embodied beings of light—an experience beyond words, senses or intellect that is about being present. Allen captures heart issues: beauty, joy, love and honour. Using light as a medium has the same quality. It is in us, moves through, between and beyond us.

Allen's work represents the spiritual journey that she is living. Her longing to connect with beauty, joy and



image. The text can also be questioned and the viewer attaches the value and the voice to these phrases. Who is telling? And who is told? The statements are by turns authoritative, emotive, playful, deep and directive. They underpin the visual images literally and metaphorically, but they are also intended to subvert and undermine, making the viewer second-guess the surrounding images.

Joyful Myths sits comfortably in the postmodern frame. A work that uses language, text, word play, borrowed images and narratives, letting the author make the meanings. But at the same time the text directly confronts the postmodern distrust of God and the heroic myth. The signs dialogue human weakness and insecurity: 'the lack is in me'; but also dialogue hope and faith: 'I claim the flame'. It acknowledges God and faith are not shattered by being questioned. And that Christians are not diminished by laughing at ourselves or questioning our religious attitudes. This is a space I am happy to operate in.

Mind the gap: beyond word games

As moments of revelation are embedded in narrative they can also be embedded in silence. The works of Vicky-Anne Allen are about the contemplative moment. For Vicky-Anne Allen artworks, life, self, faith and spirituality cannot be defined or wholly articulated. It is in essence a part of the spiritual to defy definition. To put into words what is beyond words becomes the impossible task. The way she makes work is a way for her body and her being

love comes through in her need to make art. This is in reaction to darker elements—the violence, chaos and destruction present in the world around us. She is bearing witness to the light. Light must stand against darkness. Her work reveals this spiritual truth.

Is God a Postmodernist?

In my work lightness, playfulness and frivolity reveal heroic truths and in Allen's work the lightness is a revelation of spiritual truths. Light is essential to both. Artwork centred on faith can become either message-laden or so light that it floats away. Allen and I do not wish to make holy images, but we seek to represent fragments of the God we know in our daily lives. As C S Lewis said: 'My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself. He is the great iconoclast.'⁴ In this way perhaps, God is the greatest postmodern thinker. I'm glad just to be along for the ride.

Esther Hansen

- 1 Bell, Claudia and Lyall, John: *The Accelerated Sublime: Landscape, Tourism, and Identity*, p 1. 2002, Greenwood publishing.
- 2 Fitzgerald, Martin: *Focus on Postmodernism*. 2006. http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/focus_on_postmodernism_your_pocket_guide_to_pomos_history/
- 3 Mizrach, Steve: *Talking Pomo*. 2000. <http://www.fiu.edu/~mizrachs/pomo.html>
- 4 Lewis, C S: *A Grief Observed*, p 55. 1961, Faber and Faber, London.

Joyful Myths installation view, 2008, Esther Hansen, oil-based mono prints, acrylic hand-painted signs, A4 and A3 in variable combinations.



From concepts to performance

Sudhir Kumar Duppati

is a lecturer in Drawing at the School of Art at Otago Polytechnic. In late 2007, he took up a residency at Henry Luce III College for Arts and Religion, Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington DC, and exhibited at New York's Tamarind Art Gallery and Museum. Prior to this, he had taught in India and

Eritrea. His art involves painting, installation and performance work, and his concerns are metaphysical and ontological: that is, around questions of presence and being, positioning these in relation to questions of cultural context.

While contemporary Western European and Indian art have definite connections, Duppati's work demonstrates differences that need to be considered. In his tertiary education during the 1990s, Western modernism was seen as both liberating and problematic. In his postgraduate studies at Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda, India, Western European art theory was taught with a focus on relations between Kantian notions of the aesthetic and Indian notions of a transcendent unity, with Marcel Duchamp's work playing its usual role as indicator of position or value.

Skill-based art

Duppati's undergraduate education was almost entirely skill-based, neither conceptualised nor historicised. Discussing how he came to be an artist, Duppati says, 'Perhaps it was because of the recognition I got when I was at school—I won awards and competitions, parents and friends encouraged me, made me aware and I was fascinated by the aspect of being skilful. My immediate access to art at this point in time was the cinema hoardings that were made in a studio next to our house. I used to visit that place, thinking it was art. I used to see them work on a huge scale—they used projectors and were so fast. I gained access to the spaces and watched them into the night.'

Concepts and philosophies

It was only in postgraduate study that the conceptual was really explored. 'In our Masters degree, Sanskrit was compulsory—we learned it to an extent, and we studied the Puranas, the Vedas, the Shilpa and Natya Shastra philosophies. This taught us that the ancient peoples used to perceive nature as an art, and also considered performance as the purest art form, as any other discipline in art has to fall under this category. Painting was considered, and was described as, the bodily



decoration, and sculpture was seen as the spatial element between drama/act and the expressions/emotions. These were central to the ancient Indian Art forms.

'In the philosophy of art class, we used to study the comparative analysis of eastern and western art ... this insight widened my perspective about the philosophical enquiries that could address my personal yet universal thoughts of human psychology.'

Performance art

'I began doing performance work during my Masters. Whatever I was trying to do was not making sense to me. I usually liked what I was doing, but I did not find meaning in it, and I began to think: why? Why do I have to please anybody? Am I doing something that I believe? Am I adding to what has been made? I came up with the idea of doing performance, including my poems, and I made performances that had absurd elements. I did not record this, because I wanted it to exist only in people's minds. It seemed that what has to be done in art has mostly been done. There is nothing more, except on personal levels.'

In the late 1990s, Duppati became involved in a group of thinkers and activists who developed performances around the cultural shifts implicit in the increasingly accelerated development of industrialisation, its impact on the human psyche and on traditional Indian beliefs. He continued to use painting to explore more abstract notions of unity and transcendence, but painting and drawing were also activated in his performances.

'Inspired by Joseph Beuys' and Allan Kaprow's performances, we used to practise as a theatre person would, so we would physically undergo certain training—make our bodies fit for certain kinds of challenge. The performance was called *Interpretation of Social Phenomena, Dilemma 2000+*. I did one show in Hyderabad for the Alliance Française centre; first as "happening", but then the title was challenged, and it became a performance. This was divided into several acts, in which I tried to portray a modern working person's lifestyle and the elements of it—sex, power, politics, belief system—and I did acts which had these elements in a lecture hall among the audience. I used 24 portraits of my face, derived from the 24 thoughts of the Jain philosophy ... I used boxes as props, and had a computer and office files.

'I had an act depicting corporate life, in which I had two tables and two sets of files and was transferring them from one table to another; I gained momentum and then fell exhausted to the floor. And I presented a symbolic act of sex as a set of push-ups. I was looking at how people are classified according to that act, just a hint of it. I was asking whether what sets us apart from non-humans is the way that we deal with our instincts—whether whatever we do, whatever we call a limit or civilised behaviour, is historically constructed. I also looked at the act of power politics. I had a ladder set up and told one audience member to push me off it.

'In another performance I looked at mark-making. I did this in Eritrea with a UK-based professional theatre artist. I was in a restricted space, in a cube covered with plastic, and she was outside this, moving around;

I painted faces within the cube until I disappeared inside this, while she plotted her own acts outside the cube, based on the four elements of child, youth, middle and old age. It was about acts of appearance and disappearance.'

In 2000
Duppati

published *Shifts in medium, trends, tendencies and breakthroughs* in a symposium of essays, *Twentieth-century Indian Sculpture, the Last Two Decades*.

Duppati writes: 'The predominant problem of Indian art, sculpture being no exception, was how to negotiate modernity while retaining a uniquely Indian identity.'¹ Speaking of performance, he argues that 'Indian art has an intertextuality between plastic and performance arts' which 'has roots in India's past in both classical and folk traditions, where sculpture and dance existed side by side, collaborating to affirm a common mythic tradition.'²

Contemplating science and religion

Now, in Aotearoa/New Zealand and in New York, where he will exhibit again in late 2008, Duppati continues to work in installation, drawing and painting, bringing these together in installations and performances. The importance of the act of contemplation remains; art for Duppati is an ethical and meditative practice that seeks a redemptive transcendence, but recognises the contingency of the human.

'My present interest is in the topography of Genesis. We have no knowledge of this—we deliberately sail in two boats, the scientific and the biblical. We have the choice of making a bridge. When I was in Chicago, I stumbled upon the original diaries of Charles Darwin. He says that everything selects its genes as per that stage of evolution. Darwin explored the mechanism, but he did not ask why, which is where there is also room for a religious perspective.

'I enjoyed existential philosophy, but Kierkegaard made me feel comfortable because he linked religion and existentialism; he leaves space for religious thought. I enjoy reading Nietzsche, but he eliminates the thought of God. At each step, he asserts, we negate our philosophy, but then he creates an entity.

'I am concerned with where I can find connection between science and religion. I suggest that the beginning of Genesis connects with the end of the

Big Bang theory. The word "belief" is central to my thoughts. I want to investigate the sensible ideas behind existence, the idea of being. Kant also talks about the contradictory elements in life. I have tried to attach his thinking to the concept of Maya: life minus consciousness is nothing, but can we give form to that nothingness?'

Cardboard boxes again

In his latest work, Duppati has used cardboard boxes again, with silhouettes for images cut out of them, and light creating repeated shadows within them, a circle of red fibre, and a maze with hands on the floor; the work is called *How I Found my Soul*.

'The idea of using a box actually started while I was using it as a prop in one of my performances. I used to stick my self-portrait drawings on them, and make them into a background. When I was in Eritrea, I used carton boxes for two main reasons: to explore their dimensionality and the spatial effect, and to consider the material as a recyclable and ephemeral substance.

'What you see in the boxes is some pleasure, some spirituality, environmental issues, violence, corporate life, society—each one symbolises an aspect. What is in the centre is something very contrasting, a kind of being lost and found. You find your own consciousness in the centre. We are trapped in the midst of these things and must negotiate, but in the gaps we get a chance to find ourselves. That's where our turning point is. The red threads are hanging as a hope. The red thread is made out of a combination of materials: we have to connect with each other, otherwise we are just raw material.'


Bridie Lonie

1 Sudhir Kumar Duppati, *Shifts in medium, trends, tendencies and breakthroughs*, p 53 in Shivaji K. Panikkar, ed, *Twentieth-century Indian sculpture, the Last Two Decades*, Marg Publications (on behalf of the National Centre for the Performing Arts, Mumbai, India), Vol 52 No 1, September 2000.

2 *ibid* p 61.



We-Us-Our installation from the group show *Maps, Metaphors and Mythologies*, curated by Dr Deepanjana Klien Danda at Tamarind Art, New York. Each carton box measures 747 x 610 x 330mm, yarn and plaster-casted hands from 100 latex gloves. Size: 3.5 x 3.5 x 4.5m.

A portrait of Justin Paton, a man with dark curly hair and glasses, smiling. He is wearing a black button-down shirt. The background is a blurred mix of red and green colors.

Pleasure communicates

An interview with Justin Paton

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**so few of us
have much time,
but time is exactly
what art wants
from us**

Justin Paton. Courtesy Christchurch Art Gallery
Te Puna o Waiwhetu. Photographer: Brendan Lee.

CHRYSALIS SEED ARTS JUNE 2008

Justin Paton talks to *CS Arts* about the importance of valuing the art experience, writing about art, and how art works within the gallery space. A writer and former art critic, Paton became senior curator at Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu in late 2007. Reading his well-known and highly acclaimed book *How to look at a painting*, I discovered an easy and informative read in a personal and sincere style. On meeting the man, these attributes were confirmed and made for an enlivening experience sharing the love of art.

On writing about art

'I didn't start out thinking I would be a curator, but a fascination was always there. Instead I became an art writer, through fortuitous circumstances. I was studying Art History and English at Canterbury University when Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, who was one of my lecturers, recommended me as a reviewer to The Press.

'Some of my richest art experiences have come about through reading other writers. Reading good criticism is all about entering a living conversation. In the 1990s I read my way through the film criticism of Pauline Kael, watching what she'd watched and then turning to her writing afterwards. What I valued in Kael's work was the way she'd open your eyes to things you might have been unsympathetic to. And the sense of a human being at home in the writing—this passionate, cranky, witty and totally engaging intelligence.

'The most telling art experiences of my career are when I have dealt with artists or artworks I don't necessarily feel one hundred percent comfortable around. There are artists whose work you feel in total agreement with. For instance, I have written

about Ricky Swallow, the Australian artist. I feel like I am there with him, on side with the work. And then there are artists, such as Jeffrey Harris, whose works are so tumultuous and fierce that they knock you back on your heels. They want to be remembered but not necessarily liked. It's as if loving the work is enough. The writing is often just a bit more peppery or flavoursome when you have something to argue with, as well as something to praise.

'So few of us have much time, but time is exactly what art wants from us. As a curator you're in this lucky position, now and then, to be able to spend several weeks thinking and writing about an artist—really finding your way into their work, learning their language, and then looking out at the world through something resembling their eyes.'

Artists and critics

'The most compelling contemporary art often comes from artists who are vexed about the value of art. The most interesting artists are the fiercest doubters of art. They ask the biggest questions. Where is art at the moment? What is its value to us—how much traction does it have on the public imagination? Is it just baubles hung above a mantelpiece for a wealthy elite, or is it in fact something that has a larger obligation to the culture? These artists won't necessarily be those that I like the most, and this in turn raises a very interesting question: do we need to like the artists we respect most? Or are the artists we respect most those that leave us feeling most shaken, that unsettle and disenchant us?

'To give just one example: in the mid 1990s Peter Robinson was making work that scrutinised his own

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**people who want
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contemporary art**

flight to fame as a commentator on biculturalism. As a critic, at the time I felt frustrated by how self-reflexive the work was. It felt like a closed, parasitic loop, art about the systems of art. Yet viewed from another angle, Peter was just expressing in visual form some of the same doubts I felt as a critic about art's marginal role. And one of the nice things about working as a curator with artists is that you have the opportunity to imagine your way more sympathetically inside those doubts. With an artist like Peter I have a sense that, to produce the work he needs to produce, he pushes himself as close as he can to despair with the whole enterprise of art-making, and at that point says, "Here, at degree zero, taking into account all my doubts, concerns and anxieties about art's role—what can I make at this moment?"

On 'good' art

'The best artists have the courage to follow their questions without necessarily knowing where the line of enquiry will lead them. Because of the new emphasis on research-based funding in art schools, there is now an emphasis on always accounting for your practice, declaring "aims" and "outcomes". The danger there is that the work turns into its own explanation—an illustration waiting to be translated back into a wall label. In the art works that hold me for the longest, you have the feeling that whatever the work is saying can't be summed up quite so easily.

'Given a choice, I wouldn't define good art, because

you're always looking for the thing you feel you don't have words for. But two key qualities are patience and stamina. You want art that is slow-burning rather than giving itself away all in one go—that keeps getting richer the more you reflect on it. That's what defines the good work, the way it seems somehow mysteriously to refresh itself. You see that with McCahon's work in the Christchurch Art Gallery, *Tomorrow will be the same but not as this is* [1958-59]. It is fifty years old this year, but still has total clarity and mystery.'

Shock tactics

'I do often hear people talking about contemporary art as being shocking, or full of shocks, or relying on shock value. And obviously there are sharks in tanks in the famous works by Damien Hirst or the mannequin of the Pope crushed by a boulder in an infamous work by Maurizio Cattelan. These are the vivid and controversial objects that, of course, get reproduced a lot.

'But to be honest, when people say contemporary art is shocking I wonder what on earth they are talking about. Turn on television on any given evening—there are more gratuitous shocks and violence in a single forensic TV crime drama than there are in twenty galleries. Yet the same people who might complain about a mildly risqué nude in a gallery let it slide when it's beaming into the nation's living rooms. I think it is just that people have different expectations of the two



Family, 1981, Jeffrey Harris, oil on canvas,
1500 x 1340mm, Courtesy of Dunedin Public Art Gallery.



when you step into galleries, even if you don't feel like part of the so-called art world, you are an agent in the life of art at that moment

Tomorrow will be the same but not as this is,
1958-59, Colin McCahon, enamel paint and sand on
hardboard, 1824 x 1217mm, Courtesy of Christchurch Art
Gallery Te Puna O Waiwhetu.



forms. Unpacking this double standard would tell us a lot about what people think art galleries are for.'

Power-plays

'Quite a few people believe that art is defined by a small and elect circle of powerbrokers and gatekeepers. And there are definitely lots of moments when someone with an independent mind and strong feelings about art ought to want to quarrel with the institutional consensus on matters. But to me people are too pessimistic about the power they have as independent viewers.'

'As a gallery-goer you are not just this neutral outsider. Your visit, your time, your attention—these are all things that have value. So when you step into galleries, even if you don't feel like part of the so-called art world, you are an agent in the life of art at that moment. Ideally art changes us. But we also change art. The conversation about quality is not over when you enter the gallery. It's just beginning.'

On galleries and curators

'Galleries are spaces for the free play of ideas. People who want to extract one straightforward message from art and then move on will probably not have much fun looking at contemporary art. Because what contemporary art often offers us is a chance to immerse ourselves in the question or the problem, to entertain doubts, to be in two minds and enjoy it.'

'Images always matter, and one definition of a gallery is that it's the place where images matter most. A gallery is a place where there is an ethic of attention—where paying attention and slowly unpacking the visual experience have primary value. And there are so few other spaces like that. I think galleries have value because they are places where people can come in and try on different sets of eyes and different ways of looking at the world, and then move out into the world with a much larger sense of it. It's always tricky saying that galleries have an ethical or moral purpose, but I think that is one of the places where they are most likely to reside—the



the best artists have the courage to follow their questions without necessarily knowing where the line of enquiry will lead them

way they encourage an imaginative generosity and openness to other perspectives.

'For a curator there is a wide range of things to think about, from purely practical thoughts about where things go, through to big picture thoughts about what the programme should be. But I do feel strongly that we as curators should believe in the work we are showing, we should be passionate about it. Customer surveys are all very well, but I think the best possible guarantee that visitors will be enthusiastic in experiencing a show is that the people who organised it were themselves excited. Pleasure communicates.'

Janet Joyce

Presence, not pictures

An interview with Brett a'Court



On entering the dimly lit, corrugated iron roofed studio in its country location, I was immediately confronted with intensity—both of the works and of the artist. Grappling with big, expansive themes, the paintings both confront the onlookers and draw them in. Intense gyrations of light and dark surround sexual organs and crucified Christs. But unlike many contemporary juxtapositions of such imagery, there is no ironic statement here—rather an honest exploration of what it means to be human.

A superficial reading of these works might dismiss them as being brooding and dark. Much more is discovered through a closer look. Influences range from medieval Christian mystics, Yoga Bakti, Renaissance masters Massaccio and Leonardo, and our own Colin McCahon.

Brett explains about his radical shift in style, and the underlying concepts behind it. He gives us some glimpses into the furnace of financial need that drew him closer to God and a fresh range of artistic influences and spiritual disciplines.



Challenge and struggle

Brett a'Court works from his home studio at the charming location of Waipu, just south of Whangarei. He's been living there for twelve years with his wife and two young children. Visible from the road is the spectacular deep blue of the Northland coast and nearby islands. Tourists dive below the surface of the sea looking for fish. This artist dives deep for artistic inspiration and spiritual truth.

'My first exhibition was in Auckland at the Letham Gallery in 2002. It was a solo show and sold well. However soon after I was meditating on a scripture ... Jesus, talking to his disciples, said "Put down your nets into deeper water and make a catch". I also read a book on Picasso with this quote: "A good work should bristle with razor blades". I struggled to dive deeper into the meaning of existence. The hearing of God's voice ... to be still, the lost practice of Christian meditation ... aspects of yoga in a Christian context.

'I started painting and looking at the human figure. I wanted to look beyond what we see and go into our "spiritual anatomy", but in doing this I felt my own experience and life would change. I felt challenged by the words "Seek first the kingdom of God and all

these things shall be added to you". I left my bread-and-butter ceramics job and kind of entered into an abyss ... experiencing interesting provision, but also learning aspects of Francis of Assisi: through having little I have somehow been drawn deeper into the divine presence.

'In 2005 I met John Hodgson from Art-Artz who put on a show for me in a chapel-like hall in Parnell, Auckland [May 2006]. We exhibited the four-year struggle. I think in many ways this was my beginning.'

Doubt, fear and faith

'I have had this drive to look beyond the physical. I started to understand more about dealing with doubt and fear as a way to truth. Many times I was faced with financial difficulty, causing me to fear. Yet fear is an undercurrent of our existence. It's there in my work. The fear of losing the house was one example, not having enough money to pay the bills.'

Brett explains how he was challenged to move beyond his fears and trust God for his material needs. He recounts examples from times when his '... back was right against the wall': an unexpected back-payment of two thousand dollars from the Inland Revenue Department; a fellow artist handing him an envelope containing five hundred dollars, saying 'I felt God wanted me to give you this'. But Brett keeps it in perspective. 'This ... was not always the case, and I learned that sacrifices were constantly needed if I was to produce painting that would be more than just pictures.'

Artistic influences

His struggle with fear, doubt and faith reflect his artistic lineage. 'Faith, I am finding, is not a dogma or a doctrine but an experience. This experience brought me face to face with some of McCahon's major works. I could see the possibility of visually being able to unearth spiritual truth, to paint it.'

During this formative period, a'Court explored Renaissance iconography as well as the tradition of icons. Artists from this period provided a rich vein of material for Brett to give artistic substance to his emotional and spiritual journey.

'My arts practice has lead me to the aspects of religious art that have a presence. I have found that such art can produce the miraculous. At the same time it should be open to interpretation, and not be a tirade of propaganda or sentimentality. I don't believe I have achieved this ... but it's there in my thinking.'

The spiritual dimension of human existence

'In my second-to-last exhibition, *Lingua Sacra*, I painted a five-metre veil based on Massaccio's *The Holy Trinity with the Virgin, St John and Two Donors*. Renaissance work has always intrigued me with its figurative representations of the spiritual dimension. I have tried to find a way of painting the spiritual dimension that is linked to the past, but also with the break-throughs in modern art—like Rothko's work, which seems to hold a spiritual power in its non-representative motif.

'I never see painting to be about pictures but about presence. However, I am personally linked in painting to the human figure. It's my starting-point. We are

Left: Brett a'Court. Photographer: Kerri Vernon.

Right: *Ground of being*, Brett a'Court, 2007, mixed media and oil on cheesecloth and canvas, 1677 x 1372mm.

// Powerful work ... but the subject matter?



Above: *Assisi Factor #2*, 2007-8, Brett a'Court, oil on canvas, gesso paper and cheese cloth, 1585 x 1215mm.

Above right: *Kundalini #2*, 2007-8, Brett a'Court, mixed media and oil on canvas, 1810 x 1570mm.



made in the image of God. In this period, I felt like I was peeling back layers ... I started to dissect the human figure, creating this chaos of body parts and religious imagery. The sexual element and female forms started to become a large part of my work. I felt this need to express the female aspect of the divine, which seemed to want to birth its way through the work.'

On how his work is received

'The content of my work in the commercial environment of art galleries is certainly difficult at times. A large body of my work incorporates religious imagery with sexual content, not to shock but to produce a certain effect, message and power. The comment by one gallery was to the effect of: "Powerful work ... but the subject matter?"

'I really have two currents of work, both hunting for essence and presence. In the first, the *Ground of being* series, I have taken Brancusi's statement "simplicity: at the bottom of it is complexity" [sic] and tried to come at it from a different angle. I wanted the simplicity to be unseen, as it is the eternal. Yet to bring you into this I have tried to use the brush like a scalpel, dissecting, creating chaos.

'This has been misunderstood at times. The work is hard to read, and looks like an inexperienced painter who sticks everything into a work. But it has this pull factor, like a vortex. This has been commented on, and has bewildered at least one notable art guru. However

the other series, *Behind the religious image*, seems to be commanding a wider respect. It is in many ways less demanding.'

Behind the religious image

This unassuming Northland visionary picks up the prophetic heritage of McCahon and Tony Fomison. He explores this with the honesty of James Robinson, and anchors it in contemporary Christian mysticism through his own unique fusion. Brett has just had an exhibition of new work at the Wallace gallery in Auckland's Queen Street (May 2008). It was originally called *Behind the religious image*. About the work in this recent exhibition, the artist explains:

'This is my response in many ways to the religious images that have affected me personally. What is behind the facade, the skin? Colin McCahon's work is something I often comment on in my paintings. I believe he left us with a vacuum ... a road ... this has been hard for us to carry on. We focus on the doubt, not the "spiritual truths" that McCahon unveiled. Without searching for this spiritual intent we cannot carry his legacy forward.

'Being a painter is—even at its hardest—a big privilege. What I want to do with this privilege is to not be mediocre. I want my work in some way to heal, to help, to communicate. But I also believe strongly that good work is always ambiguous. Its strength is its openness to interpretation.'

Peter Crothall

Deep calls to not-so-deep

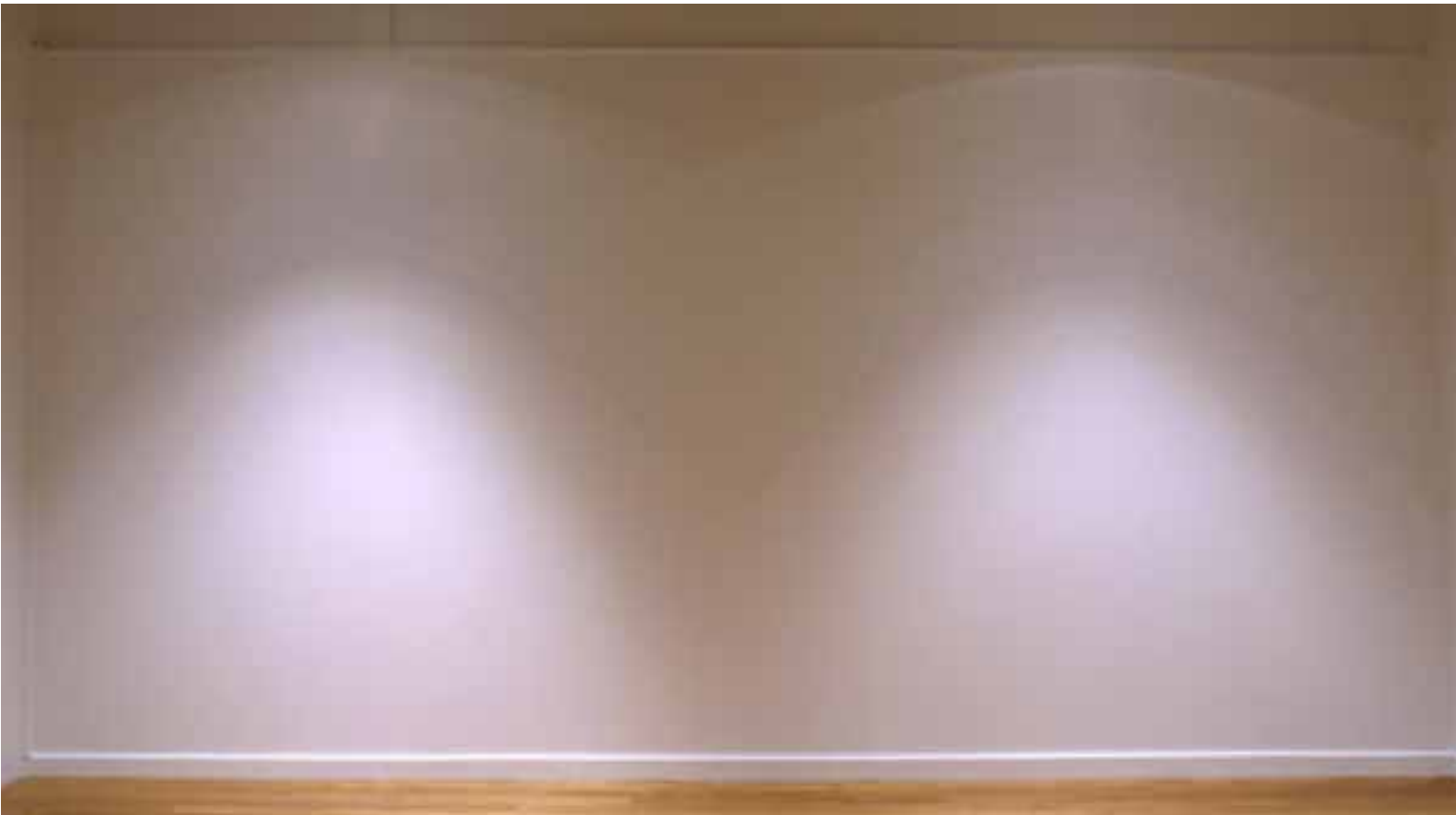
Plumbing the depths of contemporary New Zealand art

Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers
have swept over me.

Psalm 42:7 (The Bible, New International Version)

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

Macbeth, Act V, Scene V. William Shakespeare



Four Spotlights,
Billy Apple, (The original was installed in 1969 at Leo
Castelli Gallery in New York). Installation and recreation
of this work 30 September–17 October 2003 at Ramp
Gallery, Hamilton, New Zealand. Medium: four spotlights.

Words of King David and William Shakespeare, sitting on the same page, illustrate the binary of superficiality and depth. I started out with a noble intention: pointing out significant superficialities that I considered existent in New Zealand art. But delving deeper, I concluded that this is not as easily measured as I first thought. So between these two poles, I've taken a superficial look at a complex space—and some ideas that may have been catalytic in creating this space.

Appropriate appropriation?

The long wending path towards abstraction and modernism in Europe had an extended gestation period. And coming full-circle, modernism gave rise to primitivism, a kind of abstraction based on appropriating motif and icon from so-called 'primitive' cultures. This interest from the West also meant a

revisiting of indigenous belief systems, which had largely been cast out by Christian missionaries. The romanticization of the exotic 'other', like all trends, captured the interest of New Zealand artists too.

Aotearoa, still in her youth, is already up with the pace. The interaction between indigenous peoples and colonisers here has been more recent than the colonial presences felt in the ancient histories of Asia, Europe, the Americas and Africa. To be fair, perhaps our guys Len Lye, Gordon Walters, Colin McCahon and Theo Schoon (among others) were a little closer to issues of indigeness than their European counterparts. Unlike those who appropriated ancient African artefacts that are far removed from much of European culture, pakeha artists in Aotearoa had the opportunity of living amidst the tribal cultures and at least having first-hand experiences.

It could be said that their efforts were pivotal (though still sorely debated in cultural theory circles) in bringing pakeha attention to indigenous art and causes, albeit largely superficially. In this very real sense, superficiality has actually been a catalyst in the conversation of race relations; the corollary of this, though, is that it has also acted as a provocation.

Commodified culture

In Francis Pound's book *The Space Between*, the tension that exists becomes evident. The utilisation of a Maori motif such as the koru by the late artist Gordon Walters is discussed from both poles. His stylisation of the koru was seen to be an act of wanton desecration of something that is of deep significance to Maori. It was being made to perform as a Europeanised, Maori-ish element in a picture.

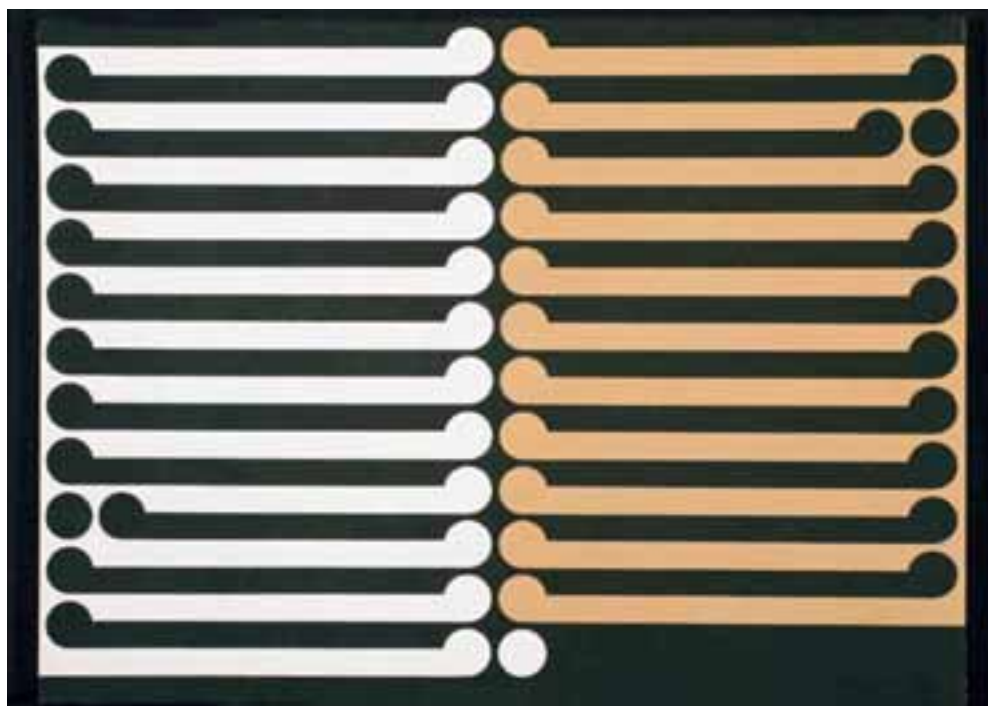
'The deliberate, and, I think, promiscuous plundering of Maori motifs—designs, forms, myths... and that's looking at not only the so-called major artists but many new and young artists... people who should know

with great love for Maori; who was seen to be one of the first European New Zealand modernists who were 'influenced' by Maori. At that time though, this new aesthetic coined a synthetic tribalism in Aotearoa. The commodifying of culture signified a shift towards the secularisation of art. It denuded cultural forms and objects of their spiritual or social significance, and bestowed upon them the new name of 'art'—or a commercial value, like the Hei tiki soaps that became popular in the 1970s.

No objects/no objections

Now, the Object is no longer even central to art. No longer are line, tone, light and other formal pictorial elements valued for themselves. Value now is gauged on cleverness and the new and novel ways in which media can be made to obey the artist's concept.

An early example of this is the famous Billy Apple exhibition that was first realised in New York in 1969 and recreated at Ramp Gallery, Hamilton in 2003. The main work was entitled *Four Spotlights*.



better or at least be receptive to hearing our pain and sensitivities.¹

Ngahua Te Awaketuku's comments above are more reactionary than condemnatory. Her objection is to the artists' (implied by Pound to be Colin McCahon and Gordon Walters²) superficial interpretation and use of motif and form—forms integral to Maori and imbued with spiritual and emotional significance. It is intrinsically an issue to do with spirituality and depth versus a humanistic approach—rendering something down to mere element.

'Taonga are said not only to collapse temporal and spatial boundaries but to blur the Western separation of the material and immaterial world. Maori people respond to taonga as living rather than inanimate things—carvings do not just represent ancestors, they are those ancestors.'³

Pound is an apologist for the utilisation of motif by Theo Schoon, Richard Killeen and of course, Walters—holding him up as an example of an artist

Which is precisely what it was, four gallery spotlights illuminating an anal-retentive clean white gallery space. Billy Apple's work, though clever, skims the surface. But he was definitely interested in the way the white cube works and dismantling the modernist idea of 'gallery'. This work's intent is not to worry about emotion, or existentialism or life or death; it was purely about making the 'gallery' do something we don't expect it to do.

Interpret this!

Interpretation is completely subjective—a more democratic way to view art. But how can we establish value through subjectivity? It is like conversing with oneself in a mirror. Can both an untrained and trained eye assert equally valid judgements on what can be derived from a work of art? Anyone can apply superficial readings of art.

Whilst curating the exhibition *Existence*, I had an experience with a work by Kees Bruin called

Kahukura, 1968, Gordon Walters, acrylic and pva on canvas, 1138 x 1523 mm, Victoria University of Wellington Art Collection.

Musterion. For some reason, the literal nature of the subject completely eluded me. In hindsight, the image of the bride of Christ was so obvious; yet because I have a personality that digs for unseen depth, I construed this work as the act of creation and the bride being the feminine part of God.

Go figure! I did approach Kees and he thankfully gave me clearance for this 'different' interpretation. However, this highlights the slippage between reading a work of art (the signifier) and the artist's intent (the signified).

Fiona Amundsen's photographs of wide-open spaces such as the *Garden Place* series appear as though aliens abducted whole chunks of the CBD's population. The lack of people in these spaces makes this an accurate visual record of Garden Place (Hamilton). However, at the same time, it is asking the viewer to ponder questions. It is accepted that this is obviously not a work about buildings nor is it about people, so what is it about? Where can we define the borders between the *essence* of the picture and *outward appearance*? What can the viewer glean from the space between meaning and intent, especially if there is no apparent meaning? This work is a carefully constructed image and it counts on the viewer's experience of downtown hustle and how they will react to the familiar but oddly unpopulated places. There is such a lavish layering of theory in these works that they almost skate about their ability to be mistaken for mundane photos of an equally dull public space. The very fact that the people are missing is the point.

Those of us ignorant of the theory behind this image and of many über-academic works are left in a quandary, wanting substance and meaning. In the age where the origins of things are abandoned in the pursuit of higher thought, self-referential art, performance-based art and conceptual post-object art can leave an audience cold. Why? Possibly for the same reason that we crave intimacy—we are intrinsically relational creatures.

Strategic superficiality

At first glance, one might immediately link works by Darryn George with geometric abstractionism. Yes, there is a link—superficially only, with the ability of his works to focus on the colours that operate together or in opposition to one another. But because the hidden narrative is not described in visual language (as a Colin McCahon image-and-text work might do) doesn't negate it as a work of depth. These works become more than just a response to colour, shape or relational aesthetics—they signify hidden depth. This subterfuge is a necessary strategy for the artist, serving as an oxymoron. As a Christian, George obviously sees no need to commodify Christian symbolism as an outward sign that he is a follower.

In contrast to his non-use of Christian symbolism is Heather Straka's use of it. This is not with the intention of adoration. She doesn't ask us to view her art as works about the Christ; ergo, a superficial reading of the Christian iconography is quite necessary. Her clever and beautiful application of 'the Sacred Heart of Jesus' to Maori chieftains deifies them by employing the powerful trope of *Messiah*.

This strategically surface use is also the case

with *Crucifixion* by Greg Semu (2000). This was a photographic installation where the artist depicted himself as a crucified Christ. Semu uses the trope of sacrifice in a superficial way: not necessarily to pay homage, possibly even to vilify Christ. Here, he inverts the victim-hood of Christ; *culture* has been sacrificed in the name of its proxy—the crucified Christ. Semu politicises the image of Christ as the metaphor for imperialism. This is a poignant example of the chasm between surface and meaning. Were we to read this work as a Polynesian Christ, this would only scrape the top layer of the narrative.

The supermarket of signs

As a curator, an artist and 'purveyor' of contemporary art, I find that there is almost a necessity for this kind of duality—a façade that appears superficial, yet all the while isn't at all, engaging both the academy and the public.

In a move away from narrative, we come closer to what is happening in the now, and common phenomena become the premise for art shows. In 2002, The Physics Room had the idea of employing the very crude hard-core of marketing as the premise for an exhibition series, cleverly called *HARD SELL!! Because you want it*. This slick and very tongue-in-cheek approach to art through brilliant branding and graphic design utilized the tackiness of the old Warehouse typeface and similar tactics as a curatorial premise for the show. The approach is as unrepentantly hard-sell as it says; but it is indicative of the fact that we are bent on buying, acquiring and wanting more. It strikes a chord with the state of post-modern society. It is out-and-out shallow, and it makes no apologies.

To deem anything superficial or deep would be to take an extreme essentialist position, implying that one system of reading signs is more valid than another. It would appear that this isn't the case. Consumerism and multiplicity of meaning is part of today's social vocabulary, the place where everyone is forced to 'shop'. With art in Aotearoa, we are all lost in the supermarket of signs, and that isn't necessarily a bad thing.

Though Aotearoa's system of signs has in many ways been founded on colonial/post colonial narrative, the distinctive nature of the relationship of Maori/Pakeha signifiers has given us 'fresher' brand than most. Superficial as it might seem, this kind of branding is the stuff of contemporary art. It is branding that is one of the most powerful agencies of communication. And it's the stuff that makes superficiality a space where everyone gets a bargain.

Leafa/Janice Wilson

- 1 Francis Pound, *The Space Between*, p 107, Workshop Press, 1994.
- 2 *ibid.* Pound p 107.
- 3 (Mead 1997a) Conal McCarthy, 'Exhibiting Maori: a history of colonial cultures of display', p 29, Te Papa Press, 2007.



HARD SELL!! Because you want it,
An exhibition series held at The Physics Room,
2002, Christchurch.

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old white front feet and
chest - very precious plse
call
Reddips

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NAME:.....PHONE:.....

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Flatmate W
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(3min from city
house

8/30 single

DATE: 22/8/08

NAME: Samantha

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Cash



11/03

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PHONE: 376

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 Black Pants
 + white shorts
 + Navy Blue Shorts

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 with sofa bed in living room
 for family. short term.
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 24 x 14 x 12 50 liter
 Comes with gravel, external
 filter, flooded light cover, 300w
 Aqua Glass Lite, ornament
 \$250 50% off

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 when combined with a strong
 red colour scheme.

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TWO SEATER COUCH AND
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 SANDERSON NILEY
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CONTACT JOHN TEL
 ADDRESS-MAIL 11/05/08
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 nature of the Christ image
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 of "The Divinici Code"

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 PHONE: 826 1156

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(A) 2 BAR HEATER \$10.00
 (A) WATER LILLO WITH PUMP \$50.00 ONO!
 (A) MOTOROLA C300 CELLPHONE HAS TEXT
 CALENDAR/PHONEBOOK/GAMES/RINGTONES/DATE BOOK
 CALLULATOR/NO CAMERA \$50.00
 WITH CHARGER/BOOK/HEADSET/CASE

DATE: 10/3/08
 NAME: MIKE
 ADDRESS: (undated cards will be removed)
 PHONE: ADDINGTON ROAD

will be removed)
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DATE: 8/3/08
 NAME: WENDY
 ADDRESS:

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DATE: 27-2
 NAME:
 ADDRESS:

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DATE: 11/8/05
 NAME: KATH
 ADDRESS:

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 Please call
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EXHIBITION REVIEWS

Art School 125

125 years of the University of Canterbury
School of Fine Arts

3 November 2007–17 February 2008

Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna O Waiwhetu

Another Destination

Five Canterbury Artists

16 November 2007–16 March 2008

Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna O Waiwhetu

The Christchurch Art Gallery celebrated the 125th anniversary of the Canterbury Art School with an exhibition showing the work of students and staff, past and present. *Art School 125* was like a reunion of old friends. In the section *Expatriates and Regionalists* you were sure to bump into people you knew, either on the walls or walking around the galleries. In *New Energies: the emergence of modernism* I eavesdropped on two elderly ladies jogging each other's memories to recall the young men of 22 Armagh Street.

Near the beginning, I recognised Ngaio Marsh's ironically titled *Still Life/In the Quarry/Relief Workers* (1933), seen previously at her house. Like many of the works selected it was interesting not only as a painting from its era, but also as social commentary. There were some surprises, like Bill Sutton as bookbinder (*Aucassin*, 1939/40) and a Bing Dawe woodcut (*Re-introducing the Fabulous Races—Man With A Face In His Chest*, 1988). The majority of the works were from the collection of the Christchurch Art Gallery, with help from other institutions or private collections.

Selection and presentation

What a Herculean task of selection! Every visitor would have his or her opinion on what should have been included. The curators acknowledged the situation: 'an anthology exhibition must necessarily be selective'.¹ They were interested in '...peer groups formed while, and since, studying at the School' and aimed to show '...significant historical moments in the development of New Zealand art'. Most artists were represented by one work only. The curators set up rules such as selection of 'the mature work of living artists', as opposed to the historicism of the centennial exhibition at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery in 1982. Then they cheerfully played around with their rules by showing work done before the date of graduation.

The works were grouped as loose chapters, such as an era, or a peer group at Art School, or a discipline such as photography or printmaking. Woven around that structure, works were grouped to reveal links between eras or disciplines, or maybe just for the effects of colour or scale. The title blocks gave not only the date of the work and the artist's birth, but also their time as students and/or staff at the Art School, leading the viewer to work out the links.

In her floor talk, Lara Strongman (co-ordinating curator of *Art School 125*) explained the curators wished to avoid an 'on-the-line' chronological hang. Variety was built in by having each curator work on individual parts of what could have been an overwhelmingly large whole. The exhibition was rightly more about the School than about individual artists, and hence about the development of art in Canterbury and in New Zealand.

School of Fine Arts Okeover, 1970s.





Chapters and peer groups

For the chapter *Identity politics in the 1990s*, Allie Eagle was selected to represent feminism with two works, both watercolours: *Old Chair Getting Older* (1978), and *Facing Ourselves* (1990). Nearby, among the work of expressionists influenced by Rudi Gopas, was the triptych *Te Tohi Tuatahi* (1991) by Kura Te Waru Rewiri—the first Maori woman honours graduate, who ‘combines expressionist gestures with customary Maori concepts’.

Then the gallery opened out to a vista of large-scale works: Philip Clairmont’s *Fireplace* (1971), beside Tony Fomison’s *No!* (1971), taking us right up to the present, the awe-inspiring *Takarangi* (2007) by Shane

Cotton and the even broader *Underworld* (2006) by Tony de Latour. The juxtaposition of recent paintings with works from 1971 was arresting. Although the title blocks revealed that Clairmont and Fomison were at Art School a decade apart, and also that one was in Painting and the other in Sculpture, they were part of a peer group of artists. This showed in the visual relationship between the works on the wall, in scale and passion, and in engagement with the issues of that era. Fomison, whose portrait was shown back in the photography section (Mark Adams, 1972), epitomised ‘the artist as visionary social critic’.

By the time you got to the late 1980s, in *Politics of the Image*, several generations of wrestling with New Zealand identity had passed. Darryn George, *Pukapuka #6* (2007), was described as a post-formalist who ‘alludes to customary Maori concepts and references earlier Maori modernists’.

Changing times

The Art School started with imported British ideas of art education and a strong emphasis on ‘the Decorative and Applied Arts’. About 75% of the students were training for trades for which it was considered some artistic skills might be useful. Students went straight from primary school, aged twelve, to prepare them for their future. The website www.artschool125.co.nz had some fascinating interviews with a wide variety of past students. The exhibition title allowed for the changing names, status and aims of the school.

From the early movements of New Zealand art, around the pluralism of postmodernism, to the *Expansion and Diversity* of the latest chapter, there was a sense of coming full circle to the energetic making of the contemporary sculptors. In the galleries of more recent work, passionate comment on society or the environment was interspersed with one-liners. For example, Francis Uprichard’s mixed media *Six Days in Nelson and Canterbury* (1997), was clever, accurate and economical—at the expense of the anguish of Colin McCahon. Artists such as Ronnie van Hout prefer to hide identity behind a smorgasbord of identity choices.



Above:
Old Chair Getting Older,
1978, Allie Eagle, pencil/watercolour,
Collection Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu.

Right:
Better Not Fall Asleep in Detroit,
1997, Saskia Leek, oil on vinyl, Collection of Christchurch
Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu.

Another Destination

Like an additional chapter, the concurrent exhibition *Another Destination* continued the story of art in Canterbury with an emerging artists show. Rachael Brunton, Francesca Heinz, Simon Lawrence, James Oram and Zina Swanson are all recent graduates of the School of Fine Arts. Their show also continued the Christchurch Art Gallery's commitment to contemporary Canterbury artists evidenced in last year's exhibition, *Out of Erewhon*.

A few years out from Art School, Oram continues to be a master of one-liners. His video work, *Self Generating* (2007), simply but powerfully engaged the viewer in feeling the struggle and vulnerability of the individual, threatened with definition merely as a work unit. A cry for the value of a person runs through his work. Swanson presented a museum-like collection of curiosities, intricately fabricated from glass and other strange stuff, under wildly assorted glass containers, titled *Some people's plants never flower* (2007). There was nothing twee about this glass making—the closer you looked, the more disturbing the associations evoked by the unexpected combinations of nature and artefact. The specimens in their individual glassware were arrested, partially escaped, rising alongside a selection of Swanson's characteristic delicate mixed media drawings. There was a satisfying connection between the three-dimensional work and the reflective drawings. Both these artists play with the sense of fragility of the natural world, from the human to the almost unseen.

Self Generating, 2007, James Oram, video.

Francesca Heinz comes from the painting studio of SoFA, but her work crosses to the sculptural. *Bloodlines* (2007) explored metaphorical and literal meaning in her chosen material—untanned sheepskins. Heinz too disturbs with her presentation of natural material. Her work was large-scale, having presence in the gallery, and was successful for its abstract qualities as well as the layers of meaning. She combines many strands of twentieth-century art: abstraction with un-painterly materials, concept and corporality. The arguments of contemporary art described in *Art School 125* are obviously alive and ongoing.

Janet Chambers

1 All quotations are from the exhibition boards.





Te Maataa Waka Toi
Andrew Panoho, Linda Waimarie King, Clarry Neame and Terry Starky
8-17 February 2008
Suffuri House, Blenheim

Often, by making the effort to get off the beaten track, you will find experiences that are enriching and spiritually uplifting. I experienced this recently, being invited to an exhibition celebrating the opening of Maataa Waka's new offices. The name means 'from many waka'. It refers to people from diverse backgrounds and people-groups that have washed up in Marlborough. Maataa Waka serves these people, encourages the arts and has a community focus. The group exhibition *Te Maataa Waka Toi* was also an occasion to launch a new logo designed by Andrew Panoho.

The warm summer's evening had a formal but relaxed atmosphere, with children playing and speeches from kaumatua (including the mayor of Blenheim). The evening events finished with *kai* and *waiata*. The spiritual and cultural atmosphere placed the exhibition in an appropriate context.

Four Maori artists exhibited works: painters Andrew Panoho, Linda Waimarie King and Clarry Neame, and carver Terry Starky. The first thing I noticed was the innovative way the works were displayed on hand-made wooden easels. The placing of the easels enabled the paintings to take optimum advantage of the natural light.

Andrew Panoho's passion for the arts was evident. He organised and curated the exhibition, built the easels and designed the Maataa Waka logo. A truly Renaissance man! Andrew explained to me that this was not a traditional art opening, but rather a *koha* by the artists—supporting the organisation by gifting their time and talents.

Andrew sees painting as 'priestly', and this was shown in his recent word paintings. To me they are like sermons in paint, following the traditions of Maori, as well as artists like Colin McCahon and Nigel Brown. Six works alluding to the Stations of the Cross are about the power of words. Andrew has used the *puhoro* patterns (a type of *kowhaiwhai*) from his iwi Nga Puhi for these oil-on-board works. They have a translucent quality, with cadmium yellows and oranges and prussian blues giving an almost stained-glass effect.

Linda Waimarie King's abstract landscapes have an emotive quality. They show her strong identification with the land in both a physical sense and a spiritual one. *Burnt Sienna and Mangu* reveals this by exploring the strata of the land, like geological cross-sections. She includes found objects in her work—such as harakeke seeds and even the earth itself—giving it a physicality and tactility.

Clarry Neame gives form to the theme of Tangata Whenua through his landscape *And They Belong* in which figures are interlocked. Painted from Rarangi beach in Marlborough, the landscape has an atmospheric quality created by many glazes of paint.

In contrast to the paintings, Terry Starky's two stunning carvings were reminiscent of early Maori carving before European influence. Terry understands the importance of truth to his materials, integrating such things as the knots in the wood. There is a sense of acknowledging past traditions.

I will be off the beaten track again in the future, seeking out exhibitions of Maori artists who have worked outside the traditional art establishment to communicate their ideas.

Craig Bluett

Hine-piwiwaka, 2007-8, Terry Starky, Totara, 1800 x 610mm. Photo courtesy Andrew Panoho.

Look Again Katie Thomas

11 March–5 April 2008

Campbell Grant Galleries, Christchurch

Katie Thomas' new works are spider-web dirty greys, amongst curls of sun-faded paint. In each work is a woven degradation: layers of dust of generations past. Her colour palette—muted and dulled, though filled with light—is a defining shift from her rich and refined previous work.

Thomas' shift to painting, from the pristine liquid finish of resin work, is a significant move. She has moved away from an involved (and extremely toxic) resin process, which, she said, confined her to formulaic technicalities only, to reveal a refreshing painting practice. Her previous works were constructed,

Her works seem to speak of care, of nurture. The purl stitch lends the appeal of parental care, and things knitted for children. Threads are gathered in patches in *Neither Slumber nor Sleep*, the blue-grey of birds' eggs. Her choices in titling have spiritual undertones: of a God who neither slumbers nor sleeps and is ever-watching with care (as Psalm 121:4). Her titles are active, unravelling or bringing together a living, and moving, hope.

The brush marks are loose and flowing, scratchy and thick. The works are accessible, tactile, and immediate—the immediacy of a woollen embrace, *Still Burning* is painted darkly and brushstrokes thicken out from the surface of the hardboard. The layers of painted purl unravel in parts, to reveal glowing skin in bright colour beneath. The lighting was intense, and reflection glared starkly off the dark works.



fixed and geometric, complete circles or curved forms enclosed within squares. Her new works shimmer—alive, not static. They seem to contain a sense of down-to-earth homeliness, like the comfort of a treasured jersey, worn again and again, in spite of the holes.

This exhibition carries over her interest in knitting to paint in oil. The works are sections of enlarged purl stitching. Her last show at Campbell Grant, *Casting Purls*, introduced this purl stitch in a heavy and stylised symmetry. *Look again*: this show is organic. Linked stitches forming networks are used in both shows as a metaphor for relationships and communities. Along with her resin-encased doilies and shards of second-hand text, this work contains a sense of retro-vision relating to Thomas' personal taste. Her new work has not lost diligence; her painting contains the evidence of many hours, with each stitch in perfect succession and accurately enlarged.

The same subdued tones of painted thread in different colours and in several layers produced a depth that kept the eye interested and shifting; fascinating it through curving, repeating, pattern. Painted creamy yellows and grey exude warmth in *Come alive*, and fawn-brown violets and gold in *What Lies Beyond*.

The drawing included in the show, preliminary perhaps, was in striking contrast to the rest with its fine lines and dramatic contrast. Scratched into, dirty and netted like the others, all seemed like curtains. This show was about vision again: life seen through things—or obscured, through veils and distance.

Joanna Osborne

Drawing,
2007, Katie Thomas, ink and charcoal on paper,
1330 x 1550mm.

Stations

Mary Mulholland

23 February–12 March 2008

Milford Gallery, Dunedin

Mary Mulholland's *Stations* presents a series of personal meditations on a universal theme of devotion—the Stations of the Cross. Through each of the 14 canvases Mulholland develops a unique vocabulary that touches on genres of still life, botanical studies and religious painting. The symbolism and suggested metaphors that she develops within these small compositions allow the viewer access to Mulholland's response, yet also leave them open to independent interpretation.

Meticulously rendered flowers form the common motif of *Stations*. Seemingly detached from the scenes around them, these flowers become impartial

the series. Each painting contains within it an unusual sense of spatial depth. While the flowers are immediately accessible, the spatial depth of the paintings is much greater than one would expect. Each scene is also quite deliberately and severely cropped, which increases the scale of the flowers and further obscures that which surrounds them. This effectively dissolves some of the imagery and results in a disconcerting combination of surfaces and planes, varying in density and texture of form, colour and line. While this is striking, it is not necessarily visually easy, appearing at times garish and harsh.

The most effective pieces are the seventh and eighth, *VII Second Fall* (2007) and *The Desire of the Storyteller to Speak* (2007). Here, Mulholland has submitted to increasingly abstract tendencies and the background of the image has dissolved into a kind of watery abyss. I see this style of non-representational



Above: *VII Second Fall*, 2007, Mary Mulholland, oil on canvas, 508 x 508mm.

Right: *The Desire Of The Storyteller To Speak*, 2007, Mary Mulholland, oil on canvas, 508 x 508mm.

Both courtesy of Milford Galleries, Dunedin.



painting working better for her, rather than relying on representation and symbolism to realise her vision. It allows her to bypass the risk of cliché, which she flirts with by engaging with the genres of flower painting and still life. Instead her work takes on an alternative form of emotive communication by concentrating on the element of expressive paint application.

Visual impact aside, *Stations* has a certain enigma to it. This effect is produced by Mulholland's use of traditional symbolism in a personal way. Her icons conjure a variety of associations and values epitomised by her flowers. Flowers can appear at times of celebration and times of despair, and can represent love, grief, sympathy and apology. This ambiguity is acquired by Mulholland's series. It is poignant that each flower is depicted in bloom, none wilting or showing signs of decay. This seems to invest the works with an overwhelming sense of optimism and warmth. It confirms the artist's commitment to her faith, which permeates the paintings.

Hester Reich

observers of the whole series. Within each scene, the flowers interact with each other and become like characters within the larger narrative of the series.

The environments that the flowers inhabit contrast in style and do not maintain the same realism, nor are they uniform across the different stations. The individual scenes have an atmosphere that is without a definite location, yet is structured by grounding man-made elements, such as corrugated iron, carved wooden caskets and billowing fabric. This allows Mulholland to expand her painting expertise beyond the highly controlled and realistic flowers that she has mastered in work previously exhibited at the Milford Gallery.

The contrast between the flowers and their surroundings creates an intriguing dimension within

Slaker
Gareth Williams
21 October–17 November 2007
Signal Gallery, Waitakere

‘What is the relationship of the cosmic tendencies: towards mechanical disorder (entropy principle) and towards geometric order (in crystals, molecules, organisms, etc)?’ (Gyorgy Kepes, 1965. Quoted in the *Slaker* exhibition broadsheet.)

Gareth Williams’ exhibition at the Signal Gallery discusses this question in an intimate gathering of objects. The *Slaker* series resonates references to sacred things in physical appearance and materials. To me, these speak more about natural mysteries (and their possible metaphors about life) than the pure scientific understandings that underpin their design. The focus is on decay and adulteration, but also suggests new beginnings and insistent growth.

Reactive salts and water interact progressively with metals—sheets and rods of copper, brass, iron and silver—and inert yet closely involved plates of glass. Solutions meander deliberately downwards, through holes and slots and over plates in the structures. The processes and actions operate according to chemical and physical laws, independent of human control—though they are seemingly managed and harnessed in Williams’ work.

The works are visually reminiscent of organic or plant-like forms. This provides an allusion to the dynamic processes of crystalline growth, transformation, energy transfer, evaporation, and chemical layering. Williams says ‘I need to have control over the physical principles of the metals and the work in order to present a piece of art. If there is salt crystallisation, I need to understand how that works, and get it to function. There is an understanding of the physicality of the materials and the processes that I need to have in order to control some sort of metaphor.’

Earlier works discussed forces and processes linked to properties of electricity and light. These recent

works involve reactions and chemical relationships that are slower in their progression, and deal with more fundamental and less dramatic qualities. Where previously transfers of energy were mysterious, swift, and evanescent, the dynamics of chemical transfers and transformations in *Slaker* are almost constructed by layered interventions and exhibit a determined purpose. Here, the transfers and pathways of energy could provoke contemplation of similar forces and processes in life itself.

The chemical stories of the forms in the overlays of semi-transparent and opaque surfaces imply a sense of narrative. Viewers will bring to bear whatever understandings they have about the scientific processes involved, but too much knowledge in this regard could limit the works to scientific illustration. If this was the case, the subtlety, complexity and beauty would be missed. As various metallic skins interact with chemicals and air, their demise collectively creates and empowers growth—producing new and inspiring crystalline structures. Could this hint at how gradual and incremental change can occur in our lives, and how this is often partnered by the loss and transformation of earlier things?

To Williams, an important aspect in viewing the reactions is not simply the apparent decay and destruction of the identity or veracity of the metals, but also appreciating the phoenix-like structures that result. Any metaphors about the vagaries of life are left to the viewer to interpret, but it could be said that these works are full of hope, if we care to accept that change can bring about new possibilities and serendipitous gold.

Greg Piper



Left: *Slaker*, 2007, Gareth Williams, copper, brass, coins, glass, copper sulphate, water.

Right: *Core Scenario*, 2007, Gareth Williams, steel, plumbline, copper sulphate, water.



FILM REVIEW



Atonement

Director Joe Wright

Atonement is an absorbingly-intelligent must-see. The movie is based on the Booker Prize listed novel by Ian McEwan. This ensures a satisfyingly complex plot. The acting is strong, with James McAvoy a standout. The soundtrack includes the creative use of a typewriter which, mixed with piano, provides a superb platform on which to advance the movie's themes.

There are three main backdrops. First, a hot summer in an English estate, where the actions of Cecilia Tallis (Keira Knightley) are misinterpreted by her younger sister, Briony Tallis (Saoirse Ronan) leaving a man falsely imprisoned for rape. Second, a Dunkirk beach, on which a bewildered Robbie Turner (McAvoy) wanders wide-eyed. Third, a war-torn London, in which a maturing Briony (Romola Garai) realises her mistake and begins her search for atonement. A cinematographic highlight is the scene in which an adult Briony (Vanessa Redgrave) nurses a dying Frenchman, creating a fiction in order to provide comfort. In a white hospital ward, beside a white-sheeted bed, her white uniform is a beautifully stark contrast to the red bedside curtain.

Atonement raises ethical questions worth probing, especially in the context of art, faith and imagination. As the movie ends, we find Briony's imagination at work again. Once again a fiction is created. Once again, truth is obscured. Should imagination have limits? Can an artist make amends for her sins through her art? Such questions are enriched by the movie's title. 'Atonement' is derived from the phrase 'at one in harmony'. Originating in the 15th century, it is a word used by Christianity to refer to the claim that, in Christ, past and present and future are redeemed.

The movie probes the Christian cliché 'forgive and forget' amid the reality of war, asking how one can unravel the pain of the past. It suggests that atonement is impossible, apart from a fictional re-

imagination. What interests me about *Atonement* (the movie) is that the seeking occurs in a generation in which the God-narratives have died. I left the movie wanting to place it alongside a recent book. *The Faces of Forgiveness* (Baker, 2003) catalogues rehabilitation done in American prisons among those with a past in which God was absent, and whose past demanded atonement. The authors outline a threefold pattern of healing.

First, there is *lament*. One reckons honestly with the damage done. Second, there is *empathy*. One begins to detach from one's own emotional pain, in order to start to comprehend the perspective of those hurt. This is not forgive and forget. Such piety has little place in the Christian passion for justice. Rather, the search for atonement must place the offender in context, aware of their humanity. Following lament and empathy is a third and final stage, *extending horizons*. One starts to wrestle with what it might mean to apply the seeking of atonement to all of life. Hope starts to emerge that the search for one moment of atonement might, in fact, usher in new attitudes and patterns of behaviour, within a community of justice and redemption.

The movie marks lament and fosters empathy. Yet in ending, it offers only a typewritten, fictional, attempt to extend horizons. Can imagination obscure truth? *The Faces of Forgiveness* argues the opposite, that truth-telling must lie at the heart of one's search for healing and atonement. It suggests that in so doing, people open themselves to the possibility of divine encounter. 'Our experiences of human faces of forgiveness can offer us just enough hope to keep searching for the divine face of forgiveness.' (page 98).

Rev Dr Steve Taylor

Rev Dr Steve Taylor is Lecturer in Gospel and Film at Bible College of New Zealand and writes regularly at www.emergentkiwi.org.nz. This review is an adaptation from his regular film review column in *Touchstone* magazine.

EVENTS AND NOTICES

NATIONWIDE

Online promotion and support package launched

The Artist Pro Pack is the new artist membership package launched by Artfind. It offers New Zealand artists full online promotion and support to advance their careers as professional artists. It was designed under guidance from Artists Alliance, a not-for-profit incorporated society that represents and advances the professional interests of visual artists in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

It also affords artists a personal website and the option to make their artworks available for immediate online purchase through www.thedeal.co.nz. Artists can catalogue their artworks and manage their web content from the Virtual Curator system. The Artist Pro Pack also offers artists the benefits of Artists Alliance membership.

Set-up fee: \$175. Membership: \$30 per month. Email natasha@artfind.co.nz to request a membership pack with further information (please include your postal address).

One day sculpture

A New Zealand-wide contemporary art commissioning series was launched in Wellington. It is a cumulative series of place-responsive public artworks by national and international artists that will begin in June. Twenty new artworks will be created across five New Zealand cities over the coming year. Each artwork will exist for no more than a 24-hour period, with each being realised on a different day.

www.onedaysculpture.org.nz

Trade Aid art auction and competition

Fair Trade fortnight: 3–18 May

A number of events based around the theme of environmental justice celebrated Fair Trade Fortnight. One local artist represented each Trade Aid shop in New Zealand, each creating a work that converts junk into a piece of art. The artworks were showcased in each shop during Fair Trade Fortnight, and then went on to Wellington to participate in the World Environment Day auction (5 June). A *Junk to Green Funk* online competition was based around the same ideas as the art auction.

Amanda Tomaso was selected to be Trade Aid Remuera's artist. Her sculpture *Junk to Funk Art* was in their store during May. Amanda writes: 'I saw the honour as something wonderful God has given me and am excited to discover what else He has planned. It is my passion that we should all use the talents God has given us, and trust in Him to bring glory to Himself.'

Te Papa's Art Director honoured

The degree of Doctor of Letters (honoris causa) was conferred on Jonathan Mane-Wheoki at the University of Canterbury graduation ceremony on 18 April, in recognition of his contribution, as an art historian and curator, to the contemporary Māori art movement.

AUCKLAND/WAITAKERE AND COROMANDEL

Lighting the way

An innovative new way to showcase public art in the CBD is being trialled by Auckland City Council on a phone booth in Lorne Street. The first lightbox artwork was installed last December. **Jae Hoon Lee's** *Salvation*—a digitally collaged photograph of his first New Zealand keyboard—is on display for the first six months, and artist **Niki Hastings-McFall's** *Bloom* will be installed for the remaining six months. The artistic brief was for the works to encompass graphic art, colour, light and technology. Telecom New Zealand is supporting the one-year trial and hopes to reduce graffiti as a result.

Garry Currin *Occupied Territory*

13 February–1 March
Milford Gallery, Auckland

Currin turned his attention back to the land and 'the forces of nature and the metaphysical balance of man's place in the universe'. He explores 'the subtle though obvious presence of man, shifting the dynamic in his work to enhance its narrative possibilities'.

Laurence Aberhart

16 February–11 May
Auckland Art Gallery (New Gallery)

Aberhart's quiet yet potent photographs of church interiors, meeting houses, landscapes, graveyards and lodges are recognisable by their absence of figures and their profundity of detail into depth. His work is a kind of archaeology: a study of what humans leave behind. Aberhart's continued use of a 19th century plate camera (which requires up to 12 hour exposures), and the way he trains his lens on what remains in the wake of time, express his interest in the evolution of his subjects.

Kill the Cynic

4–23 March
Sanderson Contemporary Art, Parnell

Kill the Cynic brings together the works of emerging artists and recent graduates from New Zealand institutions. For several it is a first or second showing in the commercial art world. Despite the cynicism and pressure that can bear upon an artist later in their careers, positivity and belief in their potential is required for the emerging artist to present in the gallery space so early on—suspending any self-doubt so that they can also give us something to question, ponder or believe in their work.

Cat Auburn, Dave Beazley, Michael Chal, Young Sun Han, Will Handley, Sam Hartnett, Sonia Keogh, Aleksandra Petrovic and Clinton Phillips

Darryn George *Pukapuka*

4–28 March
Gow Langsford Gallery

George's geometric forms may be read as bookshelves, a collection of books or a library of sorts—'pukapuka' being the Maori transliteration of 'book'. Within them a basic assortment of symbols



Top to bottom:

Salvation, 2008, Jae Hoon Lee, lightbox on phone booth, CBD Auckland.

Occupied Territory VIII, 2007, Garry Currin, oil on board, 636 x 530 x 43mm.

Moreporks (Bird Skins Room #2), Taranaki St, Wellington, 3 October 1995, Laurence Aberhart, Courtesy of the artist.



Top to bottom:

Karekare Weeping Sands, 2008, Judi Bagust, acrylic on canvas, 760 x 760mm.

Performing arts at *Celebrate Pasifika*, courtesy of Auckland City Council.

Nails for the Cross, 2007-08, Philip Trusttum, Stephens vivid permanent waterproof markers on Das acid-free paper, variable dimensions, courtesy the artist and Warwick Henderson Gallery, Auckland; CoCA, Christchurch, and Brett McDowell, Dunedin.

and iconography is interspersed—fragments of maps and bridges are enlisted as metaphors to encompass the notion of salvation. The idea of a 'book of salvation' naturally generates associations with the Bible and, by extension, Christian theology ... George's paintings offer the viewer freedom to explore alternative possibilities. *Reproduced with permission of Gow Langsford*

Judi Bagust *Journeys*

14-16 March

At the artist's home in Takapuna

Bagust's works are vibrant and expressive, often combining symbolic use of colour, gestural brush strokes and strong abstract elements. Many of her paintings are very tactile, with multi-layered surfaces and several viewpoints within each piece. She often includes references to the landscape and her faith.

Celebrate Pasifika

A regional programme of arts and events that reflected the unique talents and showcased the achievements of Auckland's Pacific communities was held during March. It encompassed a range of events including film, performing arts, concerts, sculpture and expos. Launched in 2005, Celebrate Pasifika was developed to complement and support the original Pasifika Festival, which still features in the wider programme.

Come Together

1-29 March

Artstation

Part of the *Celebrate Pasifika* programme, *Come Together* united artists from a diverse range of Oceanic communities. They discussed the ideas of identity, family, belonging and race that are unique to New Zealand.

The Li'I Mamas Art Klub, an Auckland-based art collective, used a Pacific weaving technique to explore ideas of collaboration, utility and fragility. Natalie Couch and her 4-year-old daughter created a small tent-style whare in the gallery, complete with traditional games, where children could play. Andrea Low and Melanie Rands combined disparate found texts and images to create new connections in their collaboration.

Participating artists: **Evotia Tamua, Eimi Tamua, Andrea Low, Melanie Rands, Rachel Walters, Ruth Thomas Edmond, Natalie Couch and Mumu Te Awha Couch.** From **LMAK (Li'I Mamas Art Klub): Ahilapalapa Rands, Paula Schaafhausen, Melemafile'o Uhamaka, Samantha Atasani and Maila Urale.**

Stations of the Cross

14-24 March

Gus Fisher Gallery

An Easter exhibition with specially commissioned works responding to each of the 14 Stations of the Cross. The artists involved hold a range of religious beliefs and were asked to respond from whichever point of view, and in whatever form, they chose. The result was an unconventional and non-denominational series of works.

Participants included **Octavia Cook, Darryn George, Tony Lane, Jae Hoon Lee, Niki Hastings-McFall, Peter Madden, Ani O'Neill, James Ormsby, Peter Peryer, John Pule, John Reynolds, Natalie**

Robertson, Hamish Tocher, Philip Trusttum and John Walsh.

Performances of music from 15 New Zealand composers, including **Jack Body, Eve de Castro-Robinson, John Rimmer and Gillian Whitehead**, accompanied the exhibition. Sponsored by the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand.

The Desert Files Lenten experience

Works emerging were exhibited 19-22 March

An initiative of Cityside Baptist Church, *The Desert Files* was designed to enable people to engage with Lent in their own creative process. It focused on the art-making process by inviting people wherever they were to use the time of Lent for reflection and creativity.

Website: www.cityside.org.nz/desertfiles

Blog: <http://desertfiles.typepad.com>

Tony Fomison *The Ponsonby Madonna*

27 October 2007-20 April 2008

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki

This mural is an expression of the artist's engagement with Pacific culture and Christianity. Painted for St Paul's College 25 years ago as part of the artists in residence scheme, it was acquired by Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki last year. It was exhibited for the first time to the public, as the centrepiece of the gallery's portrait show *Likeness & Character*.

Overdrawn

2-17 April

Artstation

This contemporary drawing exhibition highlights the re-emergence of drawing as an eclectic and contemporary art practice, through the work of painters, photographers, sculptors and designers. 'The term "overdrawn" stresses the idea of over-doing something, or exaggerating it, as a means of describing a story or an idea,' says artist and co-curator Mandy Thomsett-Taylor. 'To be overdrawn or in the red is a fact of life for many artists.'

Artists included: **Mandy Thomsett-Taylor, Samantha Walters, Judy Grace, Holli McEntegart, Richard Fahey, Esther Leigh, Mark Braunias, Toni Mackinnon, Karen Crisp, Zeke Wolf, Jade Bentley, Andrew Rankin, Bryan Hobbs, Frances Hansen, Rachel Walters, Karl Chitham, Sue Jowsey and Jerome Webby.**

Deirdre Airey: Artist in clay

13-20 August

Mercy Spirituality Centre, Epsom

Deirdre Airey (1926-2002) was the local doctor in Coromandel for 25 years. Inspired by some early relief tiles by her friend Barry Brickell, she started working in clay for recreation and as a means of expressing her interest in religious art. Dr Airey's work is in churches, in private and public collections and has been purchased by the National Gallery of New Zealand.

Airey's works can be seen at www.coromandel.com



Top to bottom:

The Ponsoy Madonna, 1982-83, Tony Fomison, oil and alkyd on hessian laid on medium density board, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, purchased with funds from the Charles Lyndsey Garland Bequest.

Nana Kaiti, 2008, Mandy Thomsett-Taylor, mixed media on paper, 610 x 610mm.

Rock-Deception Island, 2007, Sue Cooke, etching, 142 x 195mm.

From Butterfly creek (edition of 22), 2007, Andrea Mae Miller, Bamboo etchings, 150 x 200mm.

WAIKATO

Sue Cooke *Blizzard in a Dark Landscape*
Four venues: between 29 March–11 May

Cooke used this year's Wanganui Artists Open Studio event to launch the first completed works from her trip to Antarctica in December 2006. She has spent the past 14 months developing the series of 18 etchings from drawings, watercolours and photos made in Antarctica. They depict an eerie yet dramatically awesome landscape, and are well worth close inspection.

Cooke simultaneously exhibited the series at her gallery in Guyton St, Wanganui, Art Associates in Auckland, the newly established Quay Gallery in Napier and the Salamander Gallery in Christchurch.

Monavale Arts Festival *Celebrating Christian Artists*
21–22 March
Capernwray Bible College, Cambridge

The first of a planned annual event for Capernwray Bible College brought in 200 visitors over the two days. It included an art exhibition, an Easter installation, and garden concerts. An invitation was extended to practising Christian artists to contribute work pertaining to their faith. Most artists were from around the Waikato, but other work came from Wellington, Auckland and Australia, and from two Canadian students currently studying at the College.

Contributing artists included **Jos Coufreur, Cornelis Monsma, Lynne Sinclair Taylor, Caren Thompson, Rosslyn Johnson** and **Anne-Marie Verbeek**. Coordinated by **Elizabeth Thomas**.

MANAWATU AND WELLINGTON

Andrea Mae Miller *Bamboo etchings, pencil studies and woodblock prints*
15 March–2 April
LeSA Gallery, Petone

An exhibition of Miller's rendering skills, rare bamboo etching techniques and relief printmaking. Miller grew up living at the beach, on Northland's beautiful Tutukaka coast. After graduation from Otago Polytechnic in 2002, she established her studio *St Peter's Thumb* in Petone. In 2006 she spent a year living and working in Copenhagen, to explore the other side of the world, and 'to practise being a stranger'. Andrea returned to New Zealand in May 2007, setting up *St Peter's Thumb* again—this time in Eastbourne, Lower Hutt.

Pauline Allomes *The Truth*
23 March–30 April
Mangaweka Gallery, Mangaweka

Allomes turns her hand to a more serious topic with her latest collection of work. Her concern for the environment, and how humankind's inhumanity seems to be pushing the world to the edge, has led her to produce these paintings of our greatest yet most helpless treasures, newborn babies. Allomes says 'The images that play on our emotions the most are images of the most vulnerable and precious ... our babies. This exhibition gives a different insight into our feelings; these illustrations are both thought-provoking and challenging to the viewer.'

Murray Hewitt *Gospel*
3–19 April
Enjoy Gallery, Wellington

Creating a dense and contemplative space, Hewitt's formally composed videos are subtle and open-ended, yet politically complex. In one of the works, *Weeping Waters*, a surf beach with massive sand dunes is the picturesque location for an endurance performance acted out by the artist. A solitary man works methodically against gravity and fatigue, kicking a football while wearing a 1970s motorcycle helmet bearing the Raukura symbol. This image, featuring albatross feathers, is a symbol of commitment to resolve conflict through peaceful means, and is an important emblem of the prophets Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi of Parihaka.

Hewitt says that although his works speak to particular political themes, he recognises that viewers will come to his work with different kinds of understanding. He is interested in opening the meaning of his works to the process of audience interpretation.

The New Zealand Affordable Art Show
1–3 August
Queens Wharf TSB Arena, Wellington

Encourages New Zealanders to celebrate our identity and culture by buying local art. The vision is to promote and expose new, emerging and established New Zealand artists by providing opportunities to further their development, and to promote the appreciation of New Zealand art and artists, bringing this together in an annual event.

www.nzaffordableartshow.co.nz

Anne-Marie Verbeek *Let there be light*
28 August–13 September
ROAR! gallery, Wellington

'The theme and title of this show is "Let there be light". Light as in lighter touch, tone; enlightenment; less heavy, freer—physical, spiritual and emotional lightness,' says Verbeek.

NELSON AND MARLBOROUGH

Jessica Crothall *Landworks*
2–26 April
Refinery Art Space, Nelson

In the latest development in Crothall's abstracted responses to the West Coast, she continues her love affair with colour and texture. Creating texture through scraping into the paint with a worn-out brush is a new development. The land is used as a starting point for artistic and emotional discovery. This was the first time this series has been shown outside the West Coast.

CANTERBURY

A new kind of gallery
Art Lounge, 163 High Street

Stephanie McEwin has set up a unique kind of gallery on Christchurch's High Street in the central city—where she and her work will be on display. A work and exhibition space will feature all of Stephanie's work and her works-in-progress. People can come in off the street and see her work and watch her paint. Stephanie plans on holding lessons in her gallery in the future. www.artlounge.co.nz

Two Rivers opens

A new out-of-town art gallery/café opened at the beginning of March in Cheviot. One of the early exhibitors, **Philip Trusttum**, takes the nails used on the crucifix as his starting point, in a work based on an idea for Stations of the Cross.

Claire Beynon *Fathom*

5–23 March
The Arthouse, Christchurch

In October this artist, poet and singer was among a group of nine artists from various disciplines to take part in a six-day residency on a conservation yacht, the *Breaksea Girl*, in western Fiordland. The new works on canvas and paper are the results of Beynon's experience. Her latest book *Open Book—Poetry & Images* was also launched.

Colin McCahon focus exhibition

8 March–8 June
Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu

An exhibition celebrating the work of one of New Zealand's most widely acclaimed artists. McCahon's *Victory over death 2* was donated by the New Zealand Government to Australia more than 30 years ago and has been lent for this exhibition.

Darryn George: *Pulse*

8 March–August
William A Sutton Gallery, Christchurch Art Gallery
Te Puna o Waiwhetu

The walls themselves become the artwork in Darryn George's new project. Stretching more than fifty metres and reaching from floor to ceiling, *Pulse* is an engulfing fusion of customary Maori art and contemporary abstract painting. Using intricate patterns, chanting rhythms and an eye-popping palette of red, black and white, George fills the hushed white cube of the Sutton Gallery with a continual pulse of light, language and pattern.

In his paintings George has often alluded to the physical structure of Maori wharenui—the 'big houses' wherein rafters and centre poles represent the ribs and backbones of ancestors. This is reflected here in the Sutton Gallery, where George has spun his designs from the centre pole out to the walls.

source: www.christchurchartgallery.org.nz

Janie Porter *Here, where we are*

14 March–12 April
Studioworks, Christchurch

Porter says '...As an immigrant I have seen from the outside in, and often now from the inside out. I love this place, with its proud Maori history, its stunning bird-life and rugged scenery. I'm constantly reflecting how we fit here as people with huge ethnic differences and personal stories. How do we love and protect each other and this fragile land we share? And I wonder at God's perspective of it all, these small mountainous islands raised out of a great ocean on a fiery fault line, part of a fragile blue planet, itself like a fleck of dust in a vast universe.'

Holy Week Residency

18–20 March

New Zealand artist **John Badcock** was Artist-in-Residence at The Merivale Corner during Holy week,

an opportunity for Merivale residents to see the artist at work and to talk with him. He was particularly interested in drawing inspiration from the interior and stained-glass windows of St Mary's Church.

Sam Harrison *Fallen*

19 March–5 April
CoCA, Christchurch

Harrison has used both print and sculpture for this exhibition to reflect the human condition. His work picks up on the fine line between light and darkness that is present inside each of us. The artist complemented two-dimensional work with three-dimensional to take full advantage of the space in the Mair Gallery.

Journey Towards Easter

19–21 March

Hornby Presbyterian Community Church (Christchurch) held an interactive, reflective, multimedia journey, to walk through and reflect on the Easter story.

SCAPE Christchurch Biennial

19 September–2 November

Turkish curator Fulya Erdemci joins New Zealand's Danae Mossman to form the curatorial partnership for Art & Industry's fifth *SCAPE Biennial of Art in Public Space*. It is the largest producer of new contemporary artwork in New Zealand—by both national and international artists. It is the only New Zealand biennial which focuses on commissioning new works of art, and has established a vital platform for both national and international artists to develop dynamic, lively and progressive artworks.

OTAGO

Sarah Guppy *Corrugated Colour*

23 February–12 March
Milford Galleries, Dunedin

Guppy has found a way of working that has become entirely her own. Her use of fluted glass and enamel paints is pioneering and the results are compelling achievements. '... Whilst visiting London I helped unpack a dinner service. Each piece of crockery was packed in corrugated cardboard for protection. I used the packaging to paint on and so began this new work.' The colour is laid down amongst the high edges and along the concave hollows of the corrugated, fluted shape.

Marcus Wainwright *Medieval Daily Life* and Mary Horn *The Unknown Road*

29 March–20 April
Salisbury House Gallery, Dunedin

The *Medieval Daily Life* series depicts '... time when "lesser goods" had greater value, and where nature and everyday life were integrated in a way now lost to contemporary lifestyles.' Wainwright seeks to capture the relationship of his medieval subjects, both to each other and to their environment, through the production of relief plaques which are intricately carved, initially in stone and then produced as a hand-finished limited artist's edition in either plaster or ceramic. These works play with shadows and perspective and, although located in the medieval era, the effect is one of quiet timelessness.

Mary Horn says 'I was thinking about the fact that



Top to bottom:

Windswept Tree (Pink), 2006, Jessica Crothall,
acrylic on canvas, 755 x 1220mm.

Ocean Navigators, 2008, Janie Porter,
acrylic on canvas, 1200 x 750mm.

so much of the potential of people is wasted when I wrote [a poem called *The Unknown Road*], but then I used it in an essay on Spirituality and the Environment ... the journey of life we make must encompass darkness, which is essential for human growth and maturity.'

Crème

4–25 April
Gallery Thirty Three, Wanaka

An exhibition of new work by some of New Zealand's senior practitioners. Featuring **Don Binney, Don Driver, Dick Frizzell, Glenda Randerson, Michael Smither, Philip Trusttum** and **Michel Tuffery**.

INTERNATIONAL

***Transforming Culture* symposium**

1–3 April
Austin, Texas, United States of America

Transforming Culture: a vision for the Church and the Arts brought together pastors, church leaders and artists to discuss the Church's relation to the arts and to artists.

'Our overriding desire is to inspire a movement among pastors and artists to lay hold of God's great purposes for the church. We wish to encourage a more theologically informed, biblically grounded, liturgically sensitive, artistically alive and missionally shrewd vision for the arts.

'The hope is for a powerful, grace-filled transformation of the culture. And that future begins now.' Speaking were **Eugene Peterson, Jeremy Begbie, Barbara Nicolosi, Andy Crouch, David Taylor** and **John Witvliet**.

Online Art Exhibition

1 April 2008–31 March 2009

Upstream People Gallery was created in the late 90s in order to serve artists throughout the world by hosting international juried online art exhibitions. Artists from almost every country have exhibited with the gallery over seven years. Visit their 10th annual international juried online art exhibition at www.upstreampeoplegallery.com

Blake Prize for Religious Art 2008

Entries close 27 June
Australia

For 55 years the Blake Prize for Religious Art has been awarding a prize for works of art that explore the subject of religious awareness and spirituality. In the search for fresh contemporary expressions of spirituality, artists have continued to extend the envelope of the Blake, drawing on a wide diversity of major religious traditions such as Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Judaism, as well as indigenous spirituality.

A prize for religious art reminds us that the arts have a valuable role to play in a society, as we explore the place of passion, love, belief and action. Learning to appreciate the diversity of belief allows more opportunity to act together with understanding and compassion. Art allows us to speculate on the mystery of life, while learning to appreciate the deeply held perceptions of people different to us, without needing to agree with their ideas. www.blakeprize.com.au

Christ in my culture

Christian Artists' Networking Association (CANA)
international arts conference
June 2008
Bankia, Bulgaria (just outside Sofia)

'This working title is perhaps fitting in a day when, in some places, so much stress is on honouring cultural diversity in the midst of globalisation. Others speak of a Europe in which Christian images, symbols and narratives no longer resonate in such a post-Christian setting. This, for us, is part of the value of such a culturally diverse event. In some cultures the Christian faith is deeply rooted, and finds local expression through creative means. In other cultures, the seeds of the faith are being freshly planted ... sometimes through the arts.'

www.canagroup.org

International Christian artists seminar

2–7 August
Doorn, The Netherlands.

Running for 28 years, the seminar this year will be looking at social-cultural dialogue about cultural diversity and the practical implications for work opportunities, lifelong learning and what Christian ethics mean. The plenary sessions and most workshops will be in English.

www.christianartists.org

Greenbelt annual festival

22–25 August
Cheltenham, England

Greenbelt is an independent Christian charity working to express love, creativity and justice in the arts and contemporary culture, in the light of the Christian gospel.

www.greenbelt.org.uk



Top to bottom:

Returning Home - Medieval Illumination, 2008,
Marcus Wainwright, cast plaster with hand finishing,
340 x 340mm.

The Unknown Road, 2008,
Mary Horn, oil on canvas, 1170 x 960mm,
private collection.

The Art of Theology

Reflections on the symposium
Christian Theology and the Arts
and the accompanying exhibition,
The Art of Theology.

Dunedin, 26 January 2008

I love food. I know very little about cooking but I know what I like to eat, even if I'm less certain about why I like it.

That also pretty much sums up my approach to art. I'm not an artist in the formal sense—my artform is curating worship—but that didn't limit my enjoyment or appreciation of the feast that the symposium and following exhibition offered us.

The intention of the day was to explore the engagement of art with Christian theology, and of

It was a rare opportunity and great delight to engage with five contemporary New Zealand artists and to hear their stories, their motivations, and the processes they go through to produce their work—Andrew Ponoho, Esther Hansen, Kees Bruin, Mary Horn and Sudhir Kumar Duppati. They bravely responded to penetrating questions and promoted discussion among the audience.

Each of the artists shared their stories with passion, insight and often emotion. While some saw their art as conveying a Christian worldview, the art form was primary and the work carried out with integrity to a very high level of skill and professionalism. I found their journeys to be very insightful and emotionally moving. The day concluded with my presentation proposing that the Church see worship as an art form that is coordinated by curators.



The Art of Theology opening night.

theology with art. Trevor Hart, Professor of Divinity at the University of St Andrews in Scotland, opened the day by reminding us that contemporary theology is seeking a discussion with the arts. With an audience predominantly of artists, it was the reverse that was emphasised. To my mind this is the way it should be.

Too often, when theology engages with the arts (as when churches attempt to do so), it leads to an abuse of creativity and a subverting of the forms for the sake of a didactic or proselytising outcome. Mystery, open-endedness, questioning, failure, beauty, and hope are more helpfully engaged with by artists than by theologians. During the day, issues were raised such as: whether beauty can also be found in darkness and suffering, creativity as healing and the intersection of image and word. These have a stronger voice and are more readily engaged with when explored and presented by way of art than by written or spoken theology.



We moved from the symposium to the opening of the related exhibition *The Art of Theology*. Several of the symposium artists displayed works in the Salisbury House Gallery. The symposium and this exhibition supplemented a week-long *Theology in the Company of the Arts* paper offered by the University of Otago School of Theology. I found it interesting and challenging to view the works in the light of comments made earlier by the artists. However, I had difficulty engaging as deeply as I would have liked with the works in the gallery space. Being a former dweller, the spaces were rooms of various sizes and miscellaneous nooks and crannies. In places it wasn't possible to get back far enough from the work to view it properly, especially with the opening-night crowd.

A smorgasbord of a day with many courses to choose from. Not all familiar, but all very nourishing.

Mark Pierson



www.cs.org.nz

is a website for visual artists

It offers free access to both an extensive directory of national and international arts organisations, and *CS Arts* magazine.

These resources connect professional artists and fine arts students with practical information to help them succeed in a challenging career.

This website explores the compelling relationship between faith and contemporary art.