

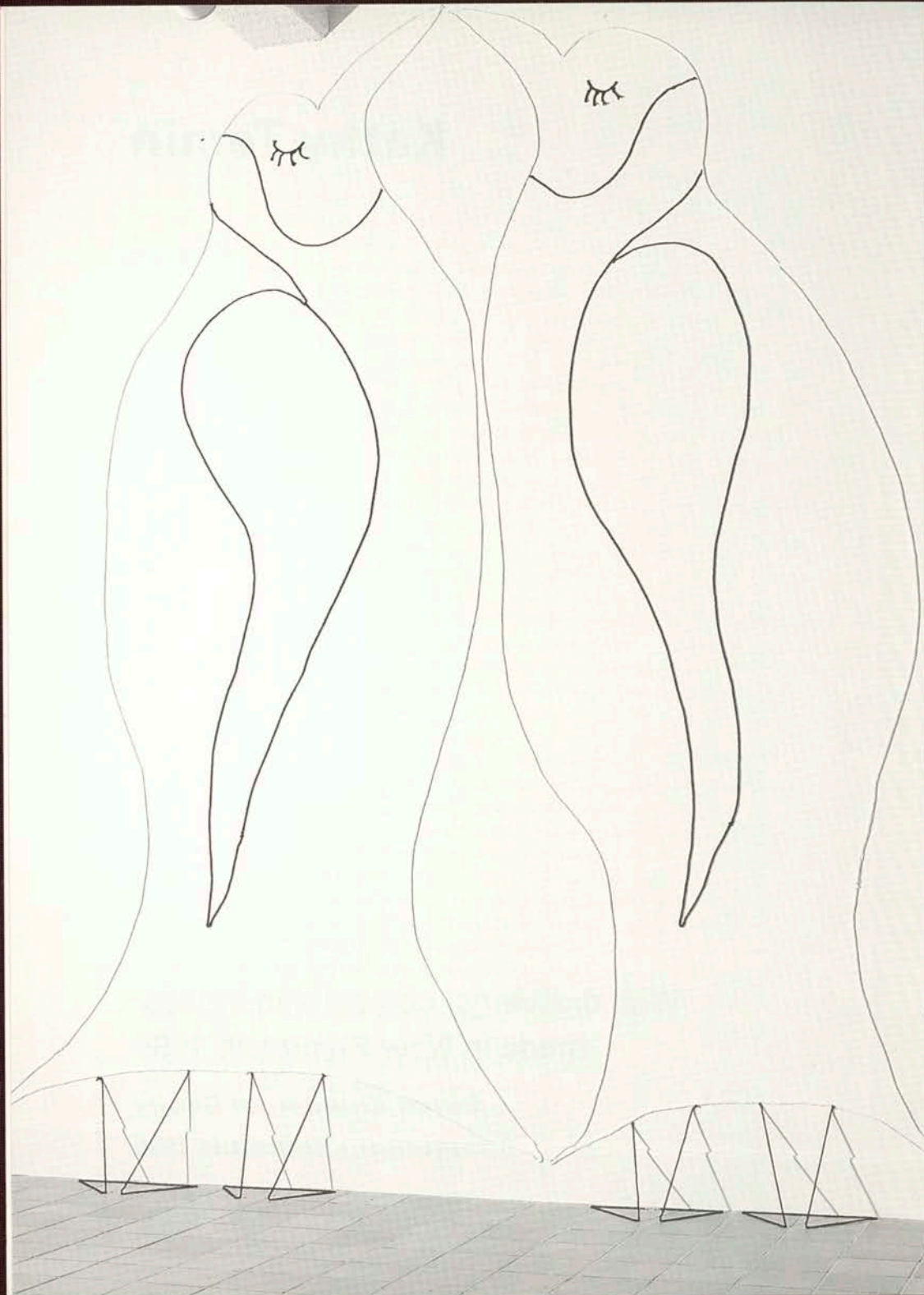
Kathy Temin

Wall drawings, objects and videos:
made in New Plymouth 1995

Kathy Temin

**Wall drawings, objects and videos:
made in New Plymouth 1995**

**Govett-Brewster Art Gallery
9 September - 23 October 1995**

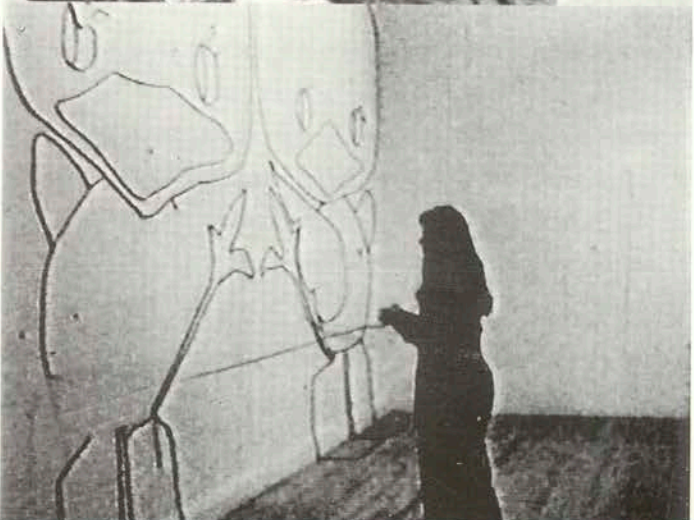
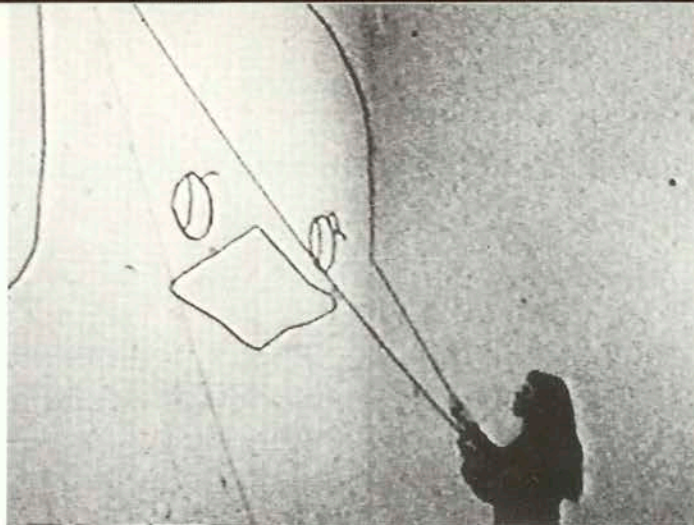


Materiality and metamorphosis

Kathy Temin in New Plymouth

The most immediately striking thing about Kathy Temin's exhibition *Wall drawings, objects and videos: made in New Plymouth* is the overwhelming physicality of her wall drawings — their huge scale, the tautness of the cord elements that extend out on to the floor, the tactility of the bedraggled furry "parts" and, more subtle, the faintly pencilled outlines and rectilinear markings. This experience is counterpointed and inverted by the equally physical process of subtraction involved in Temin's dismantling of a similar drawing, which forms part of each of the three films included in this installation. Added to this are the metaphorical bodies of, in and about the two cabinets which share the space and complicate our experience of the installation.

To go beyond the work's instant appeal, it helps to understand something of Temin's context and her artistic concerns. Her work — like that of artists such as Hany Armanious and Mikala Dwyer — can be located in the "grunge" movement that's so visible in Australia's art scene at present and which, it's been suggested, is characterised by "constant referencing to other art, to popular culture, to film, to the dynamics of exhibition and display ... recasting artifice and trash, the surfaces of a mass and popular culture as key references even for 'serious' work"¹ Temin's wares are typically made of low-rent materials like synthetic fur and chip board. They're deliberately scruffy, with crooked seams, dangling threads, gaping joints and rough edges; and, in her Super-8 films, grainy images and wonky hand-held camera work. Works or bits of works present themselves like soft toys in a nightmare — distorted, threatening to disintegrate or to metamorphose from everyone's favourite stuffed rabbit or teddy into



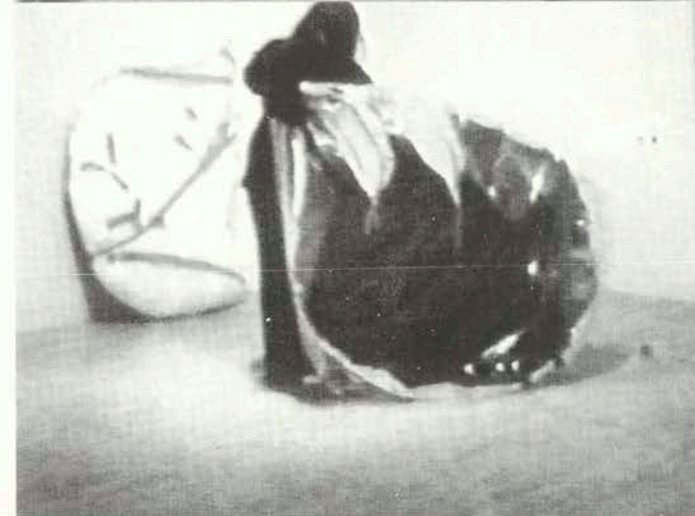
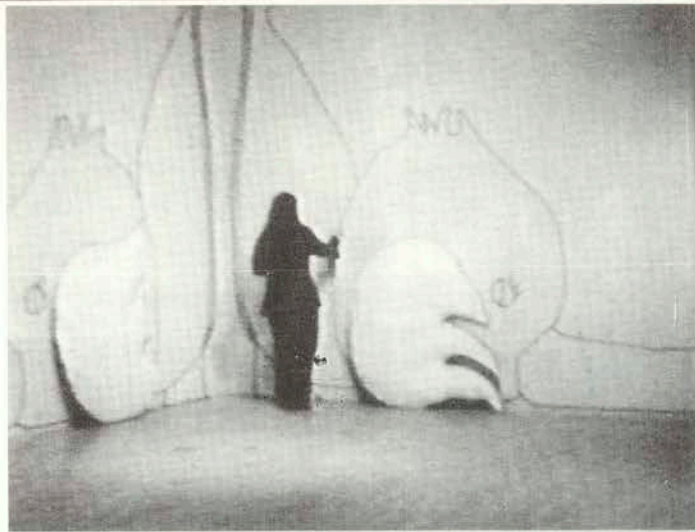
something unspeakable. Yet the menacing and potentially disgusting is made bearable by the banality and sentimentality of her images (fussy ducks, cute owls and penguins, fluffy rabbits), by her homey dressmaking aesthetic and by her use of soft, decorative and invitingly tactile materials.

Temin's work can also be seen as part of an international feminist interrogation of the "official version" of American minimalist art of the sixties.² Her parodic reconstructions of works by Frank Stella (re-cast in synthetic fur or overlaid with upholstery cord drawings of stylised ducks) parallel Rachel Lachowicz's cast lipstick versions of Carl Andre's floor pieces and grid "paintings" constructed from palettes of eyeshadow, or Lucy Pul's restyling of Donald Judd's metal stacks, (dis)figured with superfluous hair.

Temin has focused on Stella's striped paintings, exploiting the connotations of their pinstriped business-suit look. Her use of upholstery cord and images of cute ducks, derived from found haberdashery items, sets up a confrontation between Stella's "impersonal and inflexible composition of stripes"³, and a range of awkwardly curvaceous forms which are imbued with the kind of soppy sentimentality that serious art isn't supposed to tangle with. She's also recycled his stripes in the various furry "parts", such as owls' eyes and ducks' wings. In these works Temin deliberately constructs a collision of the infantile feminine with the authoritative masculine.

I have been interested in reworking minimalism so it takes on the appearance of what it represses — the body, sentiment and memory.⁴

The work she's used in her wall drawings — in *Made in New Plymouth* as elsewhere — is *Tomlinson Court Park*. She's turned it through 90 degrees on to a vertical axis, so that its Chinese box arrangement of rectangles



may be read as a geometricised and masculine version of central core imagery. For Temin, however, the appropriation of Stella's images to her own project goes beyond their recuperation into the feminine. Her initial interest was triggered by her discovery that a number of his titles and notations — specifically for his black striped paintings — relate to the Holocaust (for instance, one work is titled *Arbeit macht frei* — “work makes you free” — which was the inscription over the gates of Auschwitz). As Temin and others have pointed out⁵, this seems strangely at odds with his insistence (and the readings of contemporary commentators) that his painting is “based on the fact that only what can be seen there *is there* ... what you see is what you see”⁶.

Die Fahne hoch!, for instance (or *The Banner High!*, so-called for its reference to Jasper Johns' flags), contains four quadrants of stripes in mirror reversals of each other. The paintings are about nothing but relations, orderly relations, embodied in an impersonal and inflexible composition of stripes. Like numbers, they are morally and metaphysically neutral.⁷

Temin takes exception to the denial of history and meaning typified by Lippard's extraordinary reading (*Die Fahne hoch!* is, in fact, the first line of a famous Nazi marching song) — and with good reason. Although persecution of the Jewish race stretches back centuries, it is hard to believe that modernism's attempts to erase history in the pursuit of the hygienically new did not in some way facilitate the scale and thoroughness of the Holocaust.⁸ Temin's reinvention of Stella's images uses the refusal of certain kinds of abstract art (Minimalism included) to overtly acknowledge meaning or representation as a metaphor for the attempt to obliterate Jewish history and experience.

Temin's noted that Stella's “impersonal” stripes remind her of prison uniforms⁹, and those of the Jewish concentration camps come inevitably

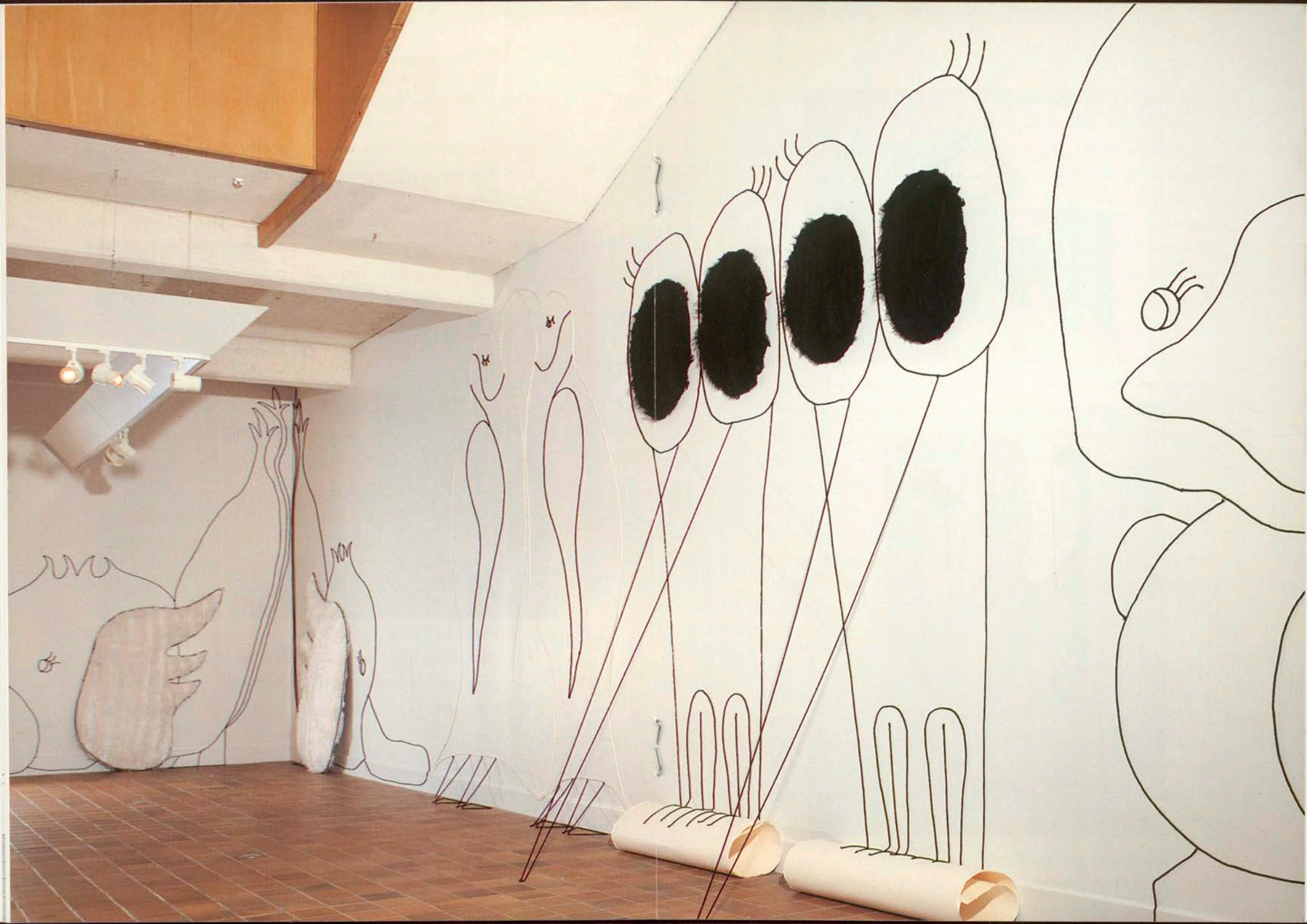
to mind. In this context, the juxtaposition of her ducks, owls and penguins with Stella's sparse geometries invests these bird couples with a wilful and poignant anthropomorphism. Her use of animals to reference human emotion and sentiment in relation to this particular subject brings to mind Art Spiegelman's *Maus* comix, in which the character Art draws out his father's recollections of life as a Polish Jew during Hitler's reign. Spiegelman's Jews are rendered as mice; a sombre transmogrification of Micky and Minnie, devoid of the buttonnose appeal of Disney's comic pair, their mouseness is the mark of their Jewishness, the outward sign of their difference. (Non-Jewish Poles are represented as pigs, Americans as dogs and the Nazis as cats.)

Spiegelman doesn't invest animals with human characteristics in an attempt to reduce their behaviours to human codes of social functioning and understanding; rather, he uses animal "actors" in order to tell a horrific human story in a medium and context that could not otherwise accommodate it. Temin's approach is more oblique, but there are a number of connections between her take and Spiegelman's. One thread that runs through Spiegelman's tale is Art's lament over the destruction of his mother's diaries. Though Art has his father's memory to draw on, the disappearance of even a part of the picture is deeply disturbing for him. It is, of course, the woman's story that has been excised. As well, there's a correspondence between the inconsistencies of scale we see in Temin's installation and those in *Maus*. Here, mice, cats and pigs are all the same size; and at one point, when Vladek and Anja are in hiding, Vladek reassures Anja: "Those aren't rats. They've very small. One ran over my hand before. They're just *mice!*"

In *Made in New Plymouth* the comparisons Temin draws between what we do to animals and what we do to one another are clear. She sets up recurrent disjunctions which operate to derange the space and the



Wall drawings, objects and videos: made in New Plymouth
installation view





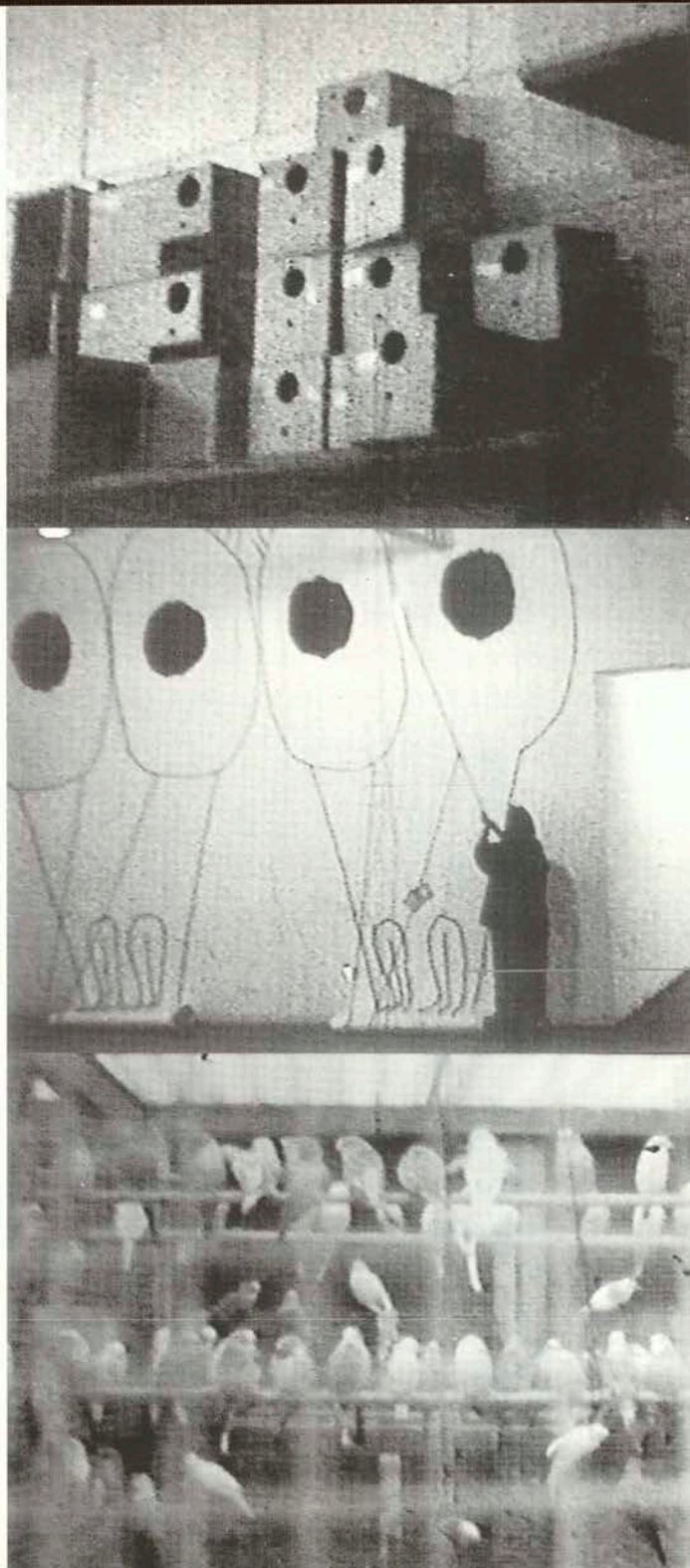
Spearmint problem (New Plymouth)

Home dis-play with legs

relationships of the things in it. Time is unsettled: in Temin's three films we see her dismantling a wall drawing that could be the one that surrounds us in the present. Scale and function are unsettled too. For instance, the giant birds on the walls occupy the same space as standard sized birdboxes (several of which aren't birdboxes at all — one's a letterbox, another's a mouse house). Surprisingly, some of these are housed inside *Home dis-play with legs*, where we might expect instead to find stuffed birds. And is this a display cabinet for one's home — a china cabinet or trophy cupboard gone seriously awry — or a display of various "homes" which mimics a museum collection?

Home dis-play with legs is a complex construction. As well as the birdboxes, it contains a spearmint green fur "Stella", and a number of other furred objects, including a strangely ghostly bird head, crested with straggly white hair. But the things Temin displays aren't simply or easily contained. They colonise the top of the cabinet, poke messily out through its joints, are parked underneath. To complicate things even more, she interferes with our view of her "exhibits" by painting brown biomorphic forms on the perspex walls of the case. These painted shapes suggest animal markings and, along with its rickety legs, configure the cabinet as a kind of body, within which the various objects are accumulated for consumption of a kind.

Any inclination to see the inhabitants of *Home dis-play with legs* or *Spearmint problem (New Plymouth)* as quirky cuddly toys is swiftly dispelled by viewing *A bird film*. The rupture and disorder which infects the playful candyfloss aspects of Temin's work and which is signalled by her use of the word "dis-play" is most tellingly explored here. As in her earlier *Art films*, images of Temin dismantling a wall drawing of ducks suggest unravelling, disintegration, peeling skin. This footage is juxtaposed with images of birds jammed together on perches in an aviary, stuffed



birds in museum displays and storage cupboards, and bins of pet food in New Plymouth supermarkets. *A bird film* reminds us of the ways in which we seek to govern and access to our own interest animal behaviours and appearances. We're reminded that a stuffed bird in a case is not only a representation of the living, absent creature but also a corpse. In this context Temin's fluffy objects and furry "parts" suggest, more than ever, a kind of soft toy taxidermy.

Temin's work, however, is not polemical art. Nor does it posit art as a problem-solving device. Its relationship to the matters it touches upon hovers uneasily and intriguingly between complicity and resistance; and this is mirrored in our own ambivalent responses to its compelling materiality.

Priscilla Pitts

- 1 Graham Forsyth "Wit's living end" *Art and text* 45, May 1994. pp26-29, 99 [26].
- 2 See, for instance, Anna C. Chave's essay "Minimalism and the rhetoric of power" *Arts magazine* January 1990. pp 44-63; and the exhibition *Sense and sensibility: women artists and minimalism in the nineties* Museum of Modern Art, 1994.
- 3 Lucy R. Lippard "Minimalism" in *Concepts of modern art* ed. Nikos Stangos, Thames and Hudson, London, 1981. p 247.
- 4 Kathy Temin in conversation with Priscilla Pitts, September 1995.
- 5 This material is explored in some detail in Chave's essay. Temin has pointed out that, as well as the examples cited by Chave, Stella made a series of paintings titled with the names of Polish synagogues destroyed during World War II.
- 6 Frank Stella, "Questions to Stella and Judd" an interview by Bruce Glaser reprinted in *Minimal art: a critical anthology* ed. Gregory Battcock, E.P. Dutton, New York, 1968. pp 148-164 [158].
- 7 Lucy R. Lippard, *ibid.* p 247.
- 8 For a developed discussion of this idea, see Zygmunt Bauman *Modernity and the Holocaust* Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1989.
- 9 Kathy Temin *Wall drawings with parts* Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 1995. np.

LIST OF WORKS

Wall drawing with parts 1990-95

haberdashery cord, pencil, synthetic fur, dacron stuffing

Home dis-play with legs 1995

wood, synthetic fur, acrylic paint, cord, felt, perspex

Spearmint problem (New Plymouth) 1995

wood, acrylic paint, felt, perspex bowl

An art film 1991-93

black and white Super-8 transferred to video. 7 min
filmed by Kathy Temin and Melissa Rymer

An art film II 1993

black and white Super-8 transferred to video. 5 min 5 sec
filmed by Kathy Temin and Hany Armanious

A bird film 1995

black and white Super-8 transferred to video. 5 min 30 sec
filmed by Kathy Temin and Nici von Senger

KATHY TEMIN

Born 1968, Sydney

1987-89 Bachelor of Fine Arts, Victoria College, Prahran

1992-93 Master of Fine Arts, Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne

1995 Artist in residence, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery/Taranaki Polytechnic, New Plymouth, New Zealand

Solo Exhibitions

1989 *Photocopies* Store 5, Melbourne

1990 *Terracotta DAS sculptures* Store 5, Melbourne

Wall drawings Store 5, Melbourne

Repenting for my sins Store 5, Melbourne

1991 *The duck rabbit problem* 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne

1992 Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

1993 *Drawings* Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

Corner wall drawing with parts; An art film Store 5, Melbourne

1994 *Display problem* Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne

In the box dis-play CBD Gallery, Sydney

Art Cologne young artist sponsored space, represented by Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery

1995 *Wall drawings with parts 1990-95* Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane

Residence in the home of Julian Dashper and Marie Shannon, Auckland

Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

Three indoor monuments Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne

What's in a song, CBD Gallery Sydney

Galerie van Gelder, Amsterdam

Recent Group Exhibitions

1989 *Annotations* 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne

A3 Photocopies Store 5, Melbourne

1990 *10 Animals* Store 5, Melbourne

1991 *Architectural subjects* Store 5, Melbourne

100 Exhibitions Store 5, Melbourne

Frames of reference: aspects of feminism and art Pier 4/5, Sydney

The sub versive stitch Monash University Gallery, Melbourne

Association city 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne

Megasin 5 Gallerie Cannibal Pierce, Paris

Exultate jubilate Store 5, Melbourne

- 1992 *The body in question: works from the Monash University Collection* Monash University Gallery, Melbourne
- 1993 *Wit's end* Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
Lauren Berkowitz, Stephen Bram, Debra Ostrow, Kathy Temin Studio 16, 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne
High Pop Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
Monster field Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney
Perspecta 1993 Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
The exact moment A Critical Cities Project, Melbourne
Art Cologne represented by Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery
- 1994 *Babies and babies*, Arti et Amicitiae, Amsterdam
 Store 5, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane
Spoken because "I" Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Melbourne
Aussemblage Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland
Drawings: Louise Bourgeois, Asta Gröting, Eva Hesse, Roni Horn, Kathy Temin, Rosemarie Trockel, Rachel Whiteread Frith Street Gallery, London
Romantisystem Canberra Contemporary Artspace
Loop A Critical Cities Project, Longford Cinema, Melbourne
 Art Hotel, Amsterdam Hilton represented by Galerie van Gelder, Amsterdam
Melbourne Seven David Pectorious Gallery, Brisbane
Drawings as drawings Galerie van Gelder, Amsterdam
Zapp video magazine No.2, Amsterdam
- 1995 *Moët and Chandon exhibition* Art Gallery of New South Wales and national tour
Artrage video, commissioned for Rage TV
Videonale Bonn Kunstverein, Bonn
Smart Art Galerie van Gelder, Stockholm Contemporary Art Fair
Sculptecture Hamish MacKay Gallery, Wellington
Wall drawings 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne
Poodles and pussies: Kate Daw & Kathy Temin Teststrip, Auckland

Selected Bibliography

- Carolyn Barnes "Exhibition as Material Proposition: 100 exhibitions Store 5"
Broadsheet 20 December 1991.
- Naomi Cass "Anthropomorphising formalism at the haberdashery" *Agenda* 18, 1991.
 "Saying Kaddish for modernism" *Perspecta*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney 1993.
 "Kathy Temin" *Art & text* 50, January 1995.
- Max Delany "Provisional notes towards an exhibition of 'wall drawings'" *Wall drawings*
 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne, 1995.

- Juliana Engberg "Problem child" *Kathy Temin* Sutton Gallery, Melbourne, 1992.
Spoken because "I" Museum of Modern Art at Heide, 1994.
- Julie Ewington "Frames of reference" *Art & text* 41 January 1992.
- Felicity Fenner "Lowly grunge meets high pop" *The Sydney Morning Herald* 8-9 May 1993.
- Pamela Hansford, ed. *Wit's end* Barberism and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1993.
- Jeff Gibson "The good, the bad and the abstract" *Art & text* 44, January 1993.
- Christopher Heathcote "Like love, in Melbourne art will find a way" *The Age* 19 February 1992.
- Bruce James "Wheat, wood and world weariness" *The Age* 10 August 1995.
Kathy Temin: three indoor monuments Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1995.
- Natalie King *The sub versive stitch* Monash University Gallery, 1991.
 "Rematerialisation: The work of Rosemarie Trockel and Kathy Temin" *Binocular* 1993.
 "Dis-played" *Art and Australia* 32, Autumn 1995.
- David Lillington "Drawings:Frith Street" *Time Out* London, 19 July 1994.
- Robyn McKenzie "Kathy Temin" *Art & text* 42, June 1992.
 "Kathy Temin, infantile terrible: object relations and the problem child" *Art & text* 45, May 1993.
 "Monuments to family history" *The Age* 10 August 1995.
- Simon Plant "Amazing spaces" *Herald Sun* 4 August.
- Andrew Renton "The problem is..." *Art and cultural difference* Art and Design, London.
- Robert Rooney "Shows go on as X-rays meet funky fake fur..." *The Weekend Australian* 22-23 February 1992.
- Bala Starr, "In line with the present" *Art Monthly Australia* 71, July 1994.
- Virginia Trioli "Beauty in 'ugly ducklings'", *The Age* 14 September 1994.
- "...when I found a real bird house, it looked like a modernist home: Priscilla Pitts talks to Kathy Temin" *Midwest* 7 1995.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The exhibition *Wall drawings, objects and videos: made in New Plymouth* resulted from the Taranaki Artist-in-Residence programme, a partnership between Govett-Brewster Art Gallery and Taranaki Polytechnic, New Plymouth, New Zealand.

This project was supported by Creative New Zealand Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa. Additional assistance was given by C.C. Ward Limited and Winstone Glass Limited, New Plymouth.



The artist wishes to thank Priscilla Pitts and staff of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, especially Bryan James, Manu Magrath, Penny Swann, Gill Winter and Barbara Valentine; also Tom and Lesley Kreisler, David Clegg and Fiona Gray.

Kathy Temin is represented by Roslyn Oxley9, Sydney; Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne; and Galerie van Gelder, Amsterdam.

Published by the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, in association with Taranaki Polytechnic, 1995. P O Box 647, New Plymouth, New Zealand. Fax 64 - 6 - 758 0390.

Copyright: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery
Images copyright: Kathy Temin
Design: Kathy Temin, Verne Barrell
Photography: Bryan James
cover Kathy Temin

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form without the prior written consent of the publishers.

ISBN: 0-908848-13-7

