THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

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TWELVE ARTISTS EXPLORE IMAGES AND IDENTITIES IN CRISIS

GOVETT-BREWSTER ART GALLERY
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FOREWORD

Allan Smith was initially commissioned to curate *The nervous system* for the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. When he took up a position as curator at City Gallery, Wellington, Te Whare Toi, the project was developed as a partnership between the two galleries. This is not the first time the two institutions have collaborated in this way: the 1992 exhibition *Shadow of style* was the result of a similar partnership.

As Allan Smith has noted in his catalogue essay, *The nervous system* seeks to reveal something of the volatility of the world we inhabit. It explores tensions and crises between conflicting patterns of identity, between new technologies and old, and between histories from the past and new, unexpected narratives.

It was never his — or our — intention that *The nervous system* would project an easy plurality. In a country still struggling to come to terms with its very recent commitment to bi-culturalism, the increasing demands to be heard of "other" voices, other accents is challenging in the extreme. *The nervous system* and the artists in it contribute effectively to the current negotiation of cultural territories. The publication extends this contestation and complexity. The writers of the five major texts represent a diverse range of positions and a variety of voices and tones of voice; while the artists, through their own widely varying texts, add a further and productive complication.

We wish to thank the twelve artists, the writers, lenders to the exhibition, and the curator, Allan Smith. We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of Creative New Zealand Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa and Unitech Institute of Technology which made this publication possible.

Priscilla Pitts, Director
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery

Paula Savage, Director
City Gallery, Wellington, Te Whare Toi

... in a state of siege order is frozen, yet disorder boils beneath the surface. Like a giant spring slowly compressed and ready to burst at any moment, immense tension lies in strange repose. Time stands still, like the ticking of a time-bomb, and if we are to take the full measure of Benjamin's point, that the state of siege is not the exception but the rule, then we are required to rethink our notions of order, of center and base, and of certainty too — all of which now appear as state of sieged dream-images, hopelessly hopeful illusions of the intellect searching for peace in a world whose tensed mobility allows of no rest in the nervousness of the Nervous System's system. For our very forms and means of representation are under siege. How could it be otherwise?

Michael Taussig *The nervous system*

ALLAN SMITH

THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Twelve artists explore images and identities in crisis

Increasingly we are experiencing local and global history as a series of shocks. These shocks can be exciting or disturbing. They may bring sudden illumination or sudden death. They may throw established systems of meaning into new patterns of significance or they may irredeemably destroy old ways of thinking and feeling. This is business as usual in the Nervous System.[1]

The Nervous System is a model for the tangled web of social, political and physical forces in which we live. These forces often seem irresistible and inescapable — running in closed circuits of order and control. However, being a nervous one, this system is crossed by anarchic energies and irruptions of the unpredictable. It is these anarchic power surges within the overall system that make history a state of continual emergency.

In the space of a few days a friend's flatmate has his head baseball-batted for being a "honky shit" and another friend has his tripes kicked in for being a "black curry-muncher". A neighbour carves in stone an offering bowl of deformed fruit to condemn French nuclear testing at Mururoa atoll. The UN fails to unite or separate warring nationalities in the Balkans and stem the blood flow there. Local "noise demonstrations" are threatened in Wellington by sympathisers of the poor, the homeless and under-represented as the Prime Minister declares a new golden age for New Zealand society. If this is not the workings of the Nervous System then it is at least the outskirts of its ways.

It is within the volatile condition of the Nervous System that the artists in this exhibition work out their interpretations of cultural and ethnic identity in change and crisis. Their projects demonstrate the instability that characterises our anxious planet. Theirs is a world in which inherited and regenerated cultural material shifts around in broken fragments. Making new links between dislocated parts, these artists fashion objects and images which can help us think through and feel from the inside the precariousness and the vitality of who we are.

Shane Cotton's painting *The plant* opens out before the viewer like a giant dashboard for a post-colonial video game. Letters, words, numbers and frieze-like icons of dogs, islands and coastal profiles fall into patterns of close-packed syncopation. The quirky ironies that occur when inter-cultural translation takes scripted form: the psuedo-legal colonial dog tax used to extract land from those Maori who could not pay it: the drawing up of the land to facilitate its ready sale; and the recent "fiscal envelope"[2] settlement are all alluded to in Cotton's jumpy motifs.

Cotton's title carries contradictory associations. Read one way this is a painting of organic, arborescent profusion; of branching formations suggesting tribal and regional continuities unfolding backwards and forwards in time.The title also conjures up more sinister ideas of an all powerful industrial plant,of a technological mega-structure humming with its own anti-natural, immanent intelligence. Paradoxically Cotton's painterly touch seems to slow down and personalise this system at the same time as celebrating its impersonal, restless productivity.

Several artists in this show use natural and cultural detritus of one form or another. Luise Fong, Sanjay Theodore, Denis O'Connor, Ani O'Neill, Yuk King Tan and Jacqueline Fraser all demonstrate a range of scavenging, opportunistic modes of operation. This way of working, which is quintessentially of our modern age, produces make-shift, creolised and pidginised visual languages. These improvised languages are forms of response to cultural

catastrophe "arising out of the ruins of culture and communication"[2].

As a post-colonial response to the traumatising of Maori visual culture, and in the face of the homogenising effects of cultural globalisation, Jacqueline Fraser's work thrives in creating new structures of communication.

Fraser's work finds its strength through configurations of frail and fragile resources. Her fabrications weave a delicacy and brilliance of colour from the scraps of recent high-tech culture while drawing on motifs and patterns from more ancient traditions. The plastics and colours of a depthless present are animated and adapted to embellish inherited stories, myths and histories and to provide new circuits for them to run in. In Fraser's *Maria Callas sings* series the celebration of an Italianate, operatic and dressed-up projection of self-identity is fused with the industrial colours of electrical wire and an allegiance to Maori craft traditions. In *The deification of Mihi Waka* a community, a mountain and an individual are memorialised in a procession of dignified personages which pass before the viewer like spirit figures in a dream.

Ani O'Neill also crosses traditional forms of making with non-traditional and found, location-specific materials. Her forms, patterns and processes show craft practices as celebratory activities and as symbolic of communal participation. Like Fraser's, O'Neill's work implies cultural adaptation, improvisation and continuity. Taught extensive skills in tivaevae (appliqué quiltmaking), knitting, crochet and hatmaking by her grandmother, O'Neill plaits these skills into the fabric of contemporary art dialogue.

In O'Neill's ten lei, made from bright foil sweet wrappers and sweets, the pleasures of decoration and texture are laced with humour, mild ironies and the joy of construction. Traditionally in Polynesian society lei are gifts made for specific people and occasions. Therefore O'Neill's lei, which celebrate her young sister's tenth birthday, sit somewhat restively in the art gallery context. This restive quality may serve to point up the ambiguous status of the lei in New

Zealand where it has become one of the most visible and effervescent signs of Polynesian culture, as well as an example of the cultural icon becoming a para-tourist, metonymic sign of the "real" Polynesian.

Yuk King Tan's work *Ping* is a self-portrait in forty physiognomic particles. It records a slow, methodical scrutiny of the self which leads to dream-like detachment and drifting into disconnectedness. Small Chinese fans bearing photographic details of ear, nose, eye and mouth are arrayed on retail display hooks like objects of merchandise. The acts of looking, listening, speaking and smelling are itemised and clarified in a disquieting way at the expense of their integration. Signs of ethnicity and cultural difference are presented as marketable products as much as guarantees of authentic identity.

Ping demonstrates what the poet Rimbaud called "the systematic derangement of the senses". It shows both system and derangement. The fans reveal a self-image under extreme pressure as continual attempts to look, speak or hear according to conflicting cultural expectations produce distortion, caricatures and disorientation. The tension in some of the fans has actually warped their frames. Emerging identity is pulled this way and that by irreconcilable models of appearance and expression.

When Luise Fong's father, who is Chinese Malay, was very ill in the early nineties, she realised that his death would have meant not only the loss of a father, but the loss of her strongest link to a world whose richness and significance for her she was only just beginning to understand.

Made from driftwood washed up on the black sand beaches of Taranaki, *Dragon* is a form of self-portrait in which Fong entwines her Chinese Malay heritage with her attachment to the spiritual and physical presence of the New Zealand landscape. According to the Chinese astrological calendar Fong is a "wood dragon". The Chinese dragon is a rich and multi-layered symbol carrying ideas of fertility and the vigour of the masculine (Yang), but Fong has also feminised her dragon by painting it black (Yin).

A twisting black chassis for an imaginary body, *Dragon* recalls the complexities of traditional Chinese ebony furniture and the knotty structure of an arterial network. The black eggs suspended by ribbons from the work suggest the incubation of some new, mysterious subjectivity.

Denis O'Connor regards much of his recent work as an endeavour to imaginatively patriate his father in this country where he never felt like a local. O'Connor's father came to New Zealand not with any illusions of imminent prosperity but because it was the farthest place he could find away from England and Ireland. Having family connections with the IRA in Ireland, O'Connor senior retained staunchly republican sentiments and believed that it was only the Maori who saved New Zealand from being "an unbearably self-satisfied patch of England".

Denis O'Connor's art tells a broken poetry of immigrant incompleteness. Dislocation and disjunction lie at the heart of his work. On the rind of the sandstone of *Gallerus: The measure of an emigré,* O'Connor has painted the Gaelic words "Ca bafuil m'athair?" and "Ca bafuil mo mhathair?" (Where is my mother? Where is my father?)

In *Ansata: the route of an emigré* a shell aggregate immigrant's cross fastened with a down-pipe bracket fuses Irish pilgrim mythology with local Waiheke Island water storage technology. The first water tanks on Waiheke, where the artist has his studio, were all made from this local shell paste. In *Moling: the chords of an emigré* a ghost image of a Maori tukutuku panel depicting an Irish harp hovers above a St. Francis Xavier immigrant's cross set with red snooker balls which reference the devotion to gambling in O'Connor's home.

One of Sanjay Theodore's earliest memories is of the nocturnal orange flashes of anti-aircraft fire over Northern India. As a child he knew the twelve types of air-raid siren signalling different priorities of emergency. He saw trucks with rocket launchers travelling up to the Pakistan-India border and the burnt out carcasses of destroyed vehicles. In his memory,

images of a dead cobra on a stick and brilliant red pigments used in candle making stand out in surreal contrast to the ever present whiteness of Le Corbusier's governmental and residential complexes in Chandrigah where Theodore lived until he was six years old.

Theodore's paintings often have a smoky colouristic intensity to them and an edgy feel of barely suppressed violence. Variations of drips, tears, burns and Rorschach blots used in psychiatric diagnosis suggest a traumatic and psychically charged materiality. With the title *Curious orange* evoking the memory of William of Orange and his imperialist repressions in Ireland, Theodore summons up the spectres of all forms of politically, racially or religiously motivated violence. His use of cracked pepper and garam masala in this painting also continues Theodore's personal reconstruction of the "spice trade", the 16th century mercantile circulation of otherness and exoticism. Crushed paua shell, gathered from Eastbourne beach, Wellington, sets the work into a specifically local context.

Michael Shepherd's recent sets of painted letters are inscribed with correspondences between colonial history, autobiographical narrative and the very political present. None of the mail in his miniature postal universe, however, seems to follow direct routes between sender and receiver. The *Dead letter mail* series assumes the artist to be a dead letter office. Dead letters never reach their destination and after a certain time are destroyed. Letters of autobiographical inquiry sent into the past from a troubled present are returned to sender "address unknown".

The *Five fiscal envelopes* are the most subversive of Shepherd's recent post. Through their delicately wrought philatelic codes, these letters demonstrate the continuities between the massive confiscations of Maori land in 1863 and the contemporary "fiscal envelope" scandal. Shepherd implies that a whole raft of communications travels back and forth between tension points in our history all the time. The "fiscal envelope"

fiasco is evidence of a failure to recognise this; a failure to address the past or to retain adequate correspondence with the inheritors of this betrayed past in the present.

Shepherd's *Five fiscal envelopes* each carries penny "postage due" stamps. The post office puts these stamps on letters when there has been insufficient payment made; here Shepherd alludes to Maori grievances over the two billion dollar settlement. The letter sent to the Tainui people, the only tribal group to accept the settlement, has had its "debt" cancelled. With this suite of works it is the Government's mail which almost always fails to find its desired destination.

In 1977 Leon van den Eijkel was part of the first post-Mao cultural exchange tour of China for European professionals. In a Shanghai hospital he took photographs of a high-tech surgery where traditional acupuncture was used for anaesthetisation. What interested van den Eijkel about this hospital was the fact that patients could choose between, or combine, traditional Chinese and modern Western medical care. For him, the light that radiates from these medical photographs is a healing light, it is a light which carries a utopian promise of tolerance for social and cultural differences.

Van den Eijkel believes that, like acupuncture, art practice should be characterised by investigative, aetiological care and curiosity for the networks that run between the historical, cultural and ethical registers of the social body.

In van den Eijkel's on-going project the grids of coloured squares signify his dialogue with countryman and chosen mentor, Piet Mondrian. They are signs both of a universalising, abstracting Western modernism and of van den Eijkel's own cultural heritage. The artist looks at other cultural paradigms through the floating grids of his own world view. In the process van den Eijkel has incorporated the body and care for the sick body into his aesthetic vision; Mondrian's ban on the tragic and the corporeal has been lifted. Mondrian's principle of

"dynamic equilibrium" is matched by van den Eijkel's "principle of restorative care".

Blending morphological drives with an appetite for the freaky and the fantastic, Denise Kum practices a weird cuisine. Kum's preferred substances and liquids have ranged from soy sauce, honey and seaweed, which carry secrets and memories of traditional Chinese cooking and medicines, to high-tech lubricants, petroleum distillates and assorted oils which speak of the industrial plant and the secular magic of its fluids.

In *cupel* Kum has used ethylene vinyl acetate mixed with industrial dye and pearlescent pigment melted in a frypan like toffee and then cured in cold water to petrify its molten forms. Embedded in a thick layer of petrolatum are Chinese pharmaceutical cupping glasses. In acupressure treatment these glasses, also known as infusion balls, are heated up and placed on the back to draw toxins to the surface of the body and clear the blood flow. *Cupel* looks like both a glistening prop for a science fiction movie, the bubbling surface of a toxic planet, and an analogical model for the curing of the social body's ills through elaborate processes of heat transferral. Whatever material Kum uses, she volatilises it and makes us feel the extravagance of our imaginative investments in the sensuous matter of the world, and how our need to work on the world attests to our need to work on ourselves.

John Lyall explores the confusions between the world and its representations as a form of psychaesthesia. Psychaesthesia is a condition of excited disturbance between the self and its surrounding territory.[3] The distracted organism in psychaesthenic transposition enacts a process of extreme mimetic camouflaging to fuse its own identity with the world around it. Lyall's cibachromes exhibit both a vivid particularity of detail, colour and texture and a dreamy spectrality. They stage inversions between the authentic and the artificial, the concrete and the virtual, the indigenous and the exotic. They are images of a world in which the

referential is stalked and digested by the copy and the simulation. The pixellations, the dots and the allure of representational space devour real space. Yet, in Lyall's encounters between artificial fur tents, leopard-skin pools, fluffy predators, digitalised wild cat markings, and the natural settings, the melancholia of loss is continually countered with a boosted excess of information and intensity. Thrill follows threat in rapid alternation.

Michael Parekowhai's art has often shown a high regard for places of learning — whether they be the classroom or playroom. His toy and kitset based works have turned the art gallery into a virtual playground for adults to consider the way our skills of socialisation and enculturation are acquired through various games, puzzles and tests.

The title *Ataarangi* comes from a TV programme in which lessons in oral Maori were conducted with the aid of Cuisenaire rods. These coloured rods were once used to teach basic arithmetic in New Zealand primary schools. Learning of an educational building set in China which used blocks so big that children had to pair up to lift them, Parekowhai initially considered making this work on a huge scale requiring a school playing field for its disposition by teams of co-operating infants. Though it never got this big, *Ataarangi* is still larger than life. Its magnified scale and smooth high-colour finish give the work the appearance of a dream-like object from some primal scene of instruction.

Appearing in this exhibition for the first time in its double form, as though split into identical images of itself, *Ataarangi* plays with our confidence to distinguish the same from the different. The work implies that art and education should both demonstrate socially constructive and subversive potential through their questioning of the expected. Given that it is assembled from a set of clearly articulated parts, is it simplistic to see *Ataarangi* as a disconcertingly simple assertion of the precarious balancing act required to hold together a multi-coloured world? The work holds its pose with enough gentle irony to excuse Parekowhai, at least, from any

accusation of naivety.

In one way or another all of the artists in the exhibition are exploring what has long been considered the two-headed nature of the modern world — the destructive and constructive forces released in the contact between the old and the new.

Commenting on the increased possibilities that the world in crisis and process is opening up, Salman Rushdie recently welcomed the "hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes from new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs" .

However, given that these exciting possibilities are also accompanied by cycles of racial and religious hatred, by the voices of desperate refugees and by the greedy transformation of venerated cultural property into commercial gain, we need to become watchful interpreters of our age. We need to know what to affirm as enduring, stable, defensible territory and what must remain open to interminable negotiation.

1 I am indebted to Michael Taussig, not only for the title of this show but for the manic brilliance and richness of his writing on images and identities in crisis in his books *The nervous system* Routledge, New York, 1992 and *Mimesis and alterity* Routledge, New York, 1993. I also want to thank Denis O'Connor and Michael Shepherd for suggesting, in a conversation two years ago, the need for such an exhibition as this.

2 "Fiscal envelope" is the term coined by the New Zealand Government in 1995 in relation to their proposed one-off settlement of all existing and future Maori land claims. The fiscal envelope "contained" the total amount which the Government indicated it was prepared to offer in land claim compensation — $2,000,000,000. This proposal generated widespread criticism and protest from both Maori and Pakeha.

3 Peter Wollen *Raiding the icebox: reflections on twentieth-century culture* Verso, London and New York, 1993. pp 190-210.

4 See Taussig *Mimesis and alterity* pp 33-43; and Celeste Olalquiaga *Megalopolis: contemporary cultural sensibilities* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1992. pp 19-35.

TONY LEE

PHYSIOGNOMY AND LACAN

There was something about my daily morning shave that bothered me today. Something about the face. Under close examination, I could see that the eyes are too narrow, and slanted in a vaguely foreign manner. The nose is flat and pig-like. The cheeks are too high and broad, the lips too thick, and as for the skin ... Well, obviously the colour's all wrong.

Then I realised that that's what it is about this face of mine. The miscegenation of cultures has been carrying on under my very nose — in fact, all around it. Kiwi Asians will know perhaps better than most what I mean. We have faces which are clearly not European, but also (though less clearly) not "truly" Asian: not of the Main Land. Body forms may be determined genetically in a very general sense, but our facial features and the way we hold our bodies are subject just as strongly to environment. For instance, a lifetime of speaking another language teaches our jaws and cheeks and mouths to move differently, while our glances and frowns have been borrowed from non-Asian classmates, role models, media pin-ups. Michael Taussig[1] writes about the mimetic capacity of the senses, their ability to reinstate a sensual physicality in the connection between perceiver and perceived. It leads to a world of holography co-existent with a world of essences, where textures become supersaturated with potential pleasures or terrors, where most of the "message" may be found as much in its mode of transportation as in its sender.

In today's society, overflowing with visual images, the weight given to formative visual cues is heightened to an exorbitant extent; much of this historical bias may be attributed to the nature of sight itself, or at

least to the way we regard it. Of all our senses, it is the sharpest, providing the densest data; it is linked to the most expressive of our facial features; and its importance is inscribed within language: we speak of "seeing things to their conclusion", of "looking forward" to an event, of "watching what we say". It seems completely natural that our body biology programmes sight as the originary building block for identity. The American philosopher Daniel Dennett talks of our insistent (and, according to him, mistaken) belief that consciousness comes into being in a discrete juncture behind our eyes, as if Newton's laws of optics were paradigmatic on the neural level as well as the mechanistic. That the case may in fact be wildly different hardly seems to matter when considering the effect of this optical domination in the metaphorisation of language, especially with regard to the current image hedonism of popular media.

We know intuitively that the general effect of most visual media is to elide difference, promoting self-destructive if not impossible ideals. Some part of me really thinks I could be that blond, blue-eyed Hollywood star, gazing serenely out at the world from within a body that is this age's representation of Eden. If I could just squeeze myself through my eyes, pour like aqueous humour into the lens of the TV channel, somehow slither into that wonderful body — surely it was always destined for me! After all, seeing is believing; seeing is possession; seeing is being. In psychic terms, one could say that his was the body I once had in a distant infancy that burned in me the lesson of the dual impossibility of and desperation to achieve extra-bodily travel, a distant infancy that imprinted this lesson along the length of my retina as a double fever of loss and potential: scars, templates, self-repeating sub-routines. Somehow I had been separated from him, this remarkable plastic tanned demigod now residing in my TV. How on earth could I have let this happen?

How is it that the baby is initiated into the world of language and meaning production, and what must it relinquish to pay for the right of

entrance?...

Suddenly the infant explodes into a shuffled world of mirrors. Everything around and in him reflects himself, his self, and yet ... does not. His belly is warm, he is a gurgle of contentment. He smiles. His mother smiles, as he knew she would. After all, it is his smile she returns. He is in everything, and everything is him ... Then, for the first time, he sees a glass that looks back; in it a mother, just like his mother, bends down over a parcel in her arms, coos. She is hunched in the glass, and hunched over him, as well. The parcel reveals itself as a baby, who mimics his own movements perfectly, as if always in anticipation. This other baby is separate, perhaps, more than mere entourage. In fact, things were separating quickly these days, he could almost sense *it. Not separating away from him, or closer. Not up, or down; but just ... settling. Coming to an arrangement. Especially that baby in the glass, that one that moved so well. Such a challenge!*

In Lacan's formulation of the "mirror stage,"[2] the infant moves from the unconscious enlightenment of Oneness to opacity; the triggering event is the mirror encounter. The infant sees its mirror image and begins gradually to glean a basic awareness of "inside" and "outside". Since this first cognition is anchored to (an image of) its own self, it is an event that is also implicated in the process of identity construction. The mirror, however, acts as boundary line; indeed, it is the infant's first taste of such in its progression from seamlessness to discreteness. It realises, however dimly, that its surroundings are organised in parcels, and that its own small body (An appreciation of size must surely be one of life's first insights!) is only one fragment of a similarly fragmented world. Moreover, it is a fragment seemingly under the infant's control, and this would seem to bode well.

However, the mirror stage also programmes into the equation a critical *misrecognition*. The infant, still a jumble of disparate motor

functions and instinctual sensory reflexes, apprehends the specular other as a gestalt more graceful and tenable than it indeed perceives itself to be. The infant is, in a crucial sense, alienated from itself, an alienation which is ingrained as habit. There is always someone who engenders in us envy of them for their greater luck, wealth, sense of self-esteem, attractiveness — in a word, for what our culture has conditioned us to see as normality. The dynamic of identification and alienation learnt at an early age and active between self and mirror image is duplicated as an overlay held between the mirror image and another individual. This creates a range of possible dynamics which may resolve themselves into generalized torsions: self/authority figure, self/foreigner, self/opposing gender, and so forth. One such redundant instance which interests me here is a sub-case of the self/foreigner torsion, the particular torsion that pertains to the figure of the lost immigrant, the person of colour who has lost the culture normally attached to that colour (or race), and grows to adulthood within an adoptive culture.

Initially, at the infant stage, the lost immigrant follows the schedule of the mirror stage more or less conventionally, since most of its visual data will portray a fairly mono-racial world. The dialectic of identification and alienation with the other is based purely on optico-kinetic grounds. But later, as the infant begins to socialise with the majority racial group to which it is denied membership, it begins to suspect that, not only are these other children possessed of more motor control, but that their greater kinetic facility may be linked, *in some fundamental manner,* to their different appearance. The balance of the torsion moves ponderously, inevitably, towards extremity — a polarisation of some kind. In such events, which may last years, accumulation is vitally important. The habit of continued mirror encounters with the majority racial group manifests itself as a palpable weight, a corporeal insistence that not only moulds the body (gestures, stance) but also the retina, which is itself culturally

coded as the "window to the soul", the first witness to wisdom.

The implicit assumption here is that "you are what you see" (or, more strictly perhaps, "you are not what you see"); it deals with a conception of identity construction that takes as its germinal metaphor the "I" that is "eye." That is to say, we invest faith in the continual building of a model for the self which is centred upon the optic nerves. When we imagine our face, we consistently conjure up a mirror image in our minds, a face where right and left are switched. An American inventor recently produced a mirror that restored the balance, re-reflecting to the viewer his or her face as others saw it. Not surprisingly, sales were poor. This so-called "correct" image has little to do with that young infant we saw in the mirror and whom we liked so much, that baby who had all the right moves ... For our entire lives, we nest inside ourselves a self-image which, like a template, guides our movements, and yet is forever faulty.

In *Consciousness explained*[3], Dennett makes a forceful case for a paradigm of consciousness that is not clustered, but spread over the topography of the brain. Consciousness, it would seem, does not "click in" at any one discrete point, but partakes, good-humouredly, of an overall and diplomatic awareness. In order for us to partake of this model, it is essential that we divest some from our sense of sight some of its traditional influence, to adopt a decentralised worldview.

This is all by way of sponsoring a radically different way of interpreting our very art and culture. Although we often speak of a "controlling consciousness", such an idea is highly likely to be a scientific fallacy, and even the inner workings of consciousness itself may be subject to further dismantling. As we have seen, the mind that controls our body (and hence the products of our body, such as art) has no single leader. If we widen the perspective of the analogy, then can we say with surety that culture belongs to any one person? or group? If there is no directing Author or God, nor any form of higher governance, then how

are we to regard the skill of the art consumer, the skill of interpretation.

The "nervous system" of this exhibition's title hints at the way forward. Like the Surrealists of the thirties, the artists on display seek to effect a "crisis in consciousness" , a short sharp shock which must necessarily be downloaded all at once, in a batch as it were, by senses supercharged for the purpose. Too fond of regarding sensory input as vessels of information retrieval, we forget that image and text and sound have a materiality all their own, quite apart from any question of what it is they "mean" or "convey" . Words are not just breath; words are things. Aurally concrete, they roll about in our mouths, activating salivary glands, pumping air in and out of our lungs, ever seeking synchronisation with our heartbeats, jogging the olfactory sense, contributing nuance to the tightness of skins about our eyes, teaching our necks different ways of tilting — and there is no more fit art than poetry to show how words can become terrible or beautiful, sensual, sublime, but in any case, *insistently felt*.

The first few times I read Allen Curnow's poem *You will know when you get there*,[4] I failed to register any kind of surface "meaning" other than the somewhat vague impression it left upon me that the poet was going mussel-picking on a beach. In hindsight, I can see that this failure was wilful on my part, and furthermore encouraged by Curnow's extreme mastery of prosody and otherwise simple poetic techniques — But the softness and noble bearing of his words! The pleasure of feeling them roll around on my tongue! I realised I was consuming the poem with my body, attending not to "meaning" or the evocation of any visual imagery or thematic profundity, but almost wholly to its aural sensuality, the gentle rustle of its language.

Such experiences are by no means confined to the rhetorical arts — as Yuk King Tan's work in the current exhibition aptly shows. Decorative silk printed fans are arranged in an orderly fashion in the manner of a

bank of video screens, thus alluding to the technique of capturing eye-resolved images through pixellation. However, the body parts displayed obstinately refuse to congeal into wholeness, arresting the viewer instead with their near hysterical fragmentation. Mouths gape open in — screams? sighs? mute entreaties? Eyes gaze about but give no more hint of clarifying matters. Yet other fans suggest the comforts of leisurely gossip, tempting the viewer to reach out, take hold of a sensory receptacle, to touch and thereby communicate. The bank of screens demands viewer input, insists upon a reading presence, before it can properly fulfil its performative function. It is a work that mimes the activities of humans, while demanding the viewer not stand idly by but reciprocate, establishing a collaborative break-down of the barriers dividing form and content. The nervous system seems to me to be about just this kind of iconoclasm: a prison escape; a re-ordering of the penal colony. It is about the freeing and re-enlistment of the body as sensual, erotic, supercharged; and the re-mapping of the body leads to a necessary re-mapping of interpretative strategies — fresh new subject matters; fresh new ways of conceiving of the work of art.

1 Michael Taussig *Mimesis and alterity* Routledge, New York, 1993. pp 19-32.

2 See "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience" *Ecrits: a selection* trans. Alan Sheridan, Tavistock Publications, London, 1977.

3 Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness explained* Little, Brown and Co, Boston, 1991.

4 *Allen Curnow: selected poems 1940-1989* Penguin, Auckland, 1990. pp 193-4

LEONIE PIHAMA

IDENTITY : MOVING BEYOND COLONIAL IMPOSITIONS

Whakataka te hau ki te uru
Whakataka te hau ki te tonga
Kia makinakina ki uta
Kia mataratara ki tai
E hi ake ana te atakura
He tio
He huka
He hau hunga

Tihei Mauri Ora

Anei tetahi mokopuna no Taranaki.

Ko Taranaki te maunga
Ko Waitara te awa
Ko Takitimu te waka
Ko Te Atiawa toku iwi
Ko Ngati Rahiri toku hapu.

Within Aotearoa there is a growing body of literature engaging with the notion of identity. Much of the writing of the 1990s is located within postmodern frameworks as writers, academics, theorists challenge modernist metanarratives of the rational all-knowing subject. Part and parcel of this is the reshaping of how the notion of identity is discussed and debated.

For some this is a response to notions of "political correctness"; for others it is an exploration of the complexities of how and why we position ourselves in particular ways. Whatever the reason, it is clear that the modernist notion of identity is inadequate to describe our experiences. What needs to be made clear, however, is that, whereas for many the current debate surrounding identity is new, it is not new for those that have been raised within a society that denies who they are. It is not new for those that have struggled all their lives to know about themselves and their people.

The construction of identity for Maori has been a site of contestation since colonial contact. The use of the term Maori became, upon contact, a means of providing the coloniser with a universal term to refer to the indigenous people of the land.[1] The complex structures of whanau, hapu and iwi were homogenised under an all-encompassing label, a label that has been defined and redefined by successive settler governments in line with the political agendas of the time.[2]

> I have a faint suspicion that Maoritanga is a term coined by the Pakeha to bring the tribes together. Because if you cannot divide and rule, then for tribal people all you can do is unite them and rule. Because then they lose everything by losing their own tribal histories and traditions that give them their identity.[3]

The act of collectivising iwi nations in such a way supported positivist paradigms that were located in colonial dualisms. The term Maori became a signifier for notions of inferiority: heathen, barbaric, uncivilised, immoral, native; the antithesis of the colonisers' self-characterisation as civilised, Christian, moral, superior. These dichotomies served one purpose: to provide justification for the many acts of colonial violence that were to follow.

The imposition of colonial dualisms has meant an ongoing struggle within and against notions of identity that define Maori solely in opposition to Pakeha. It has meant an ongoing struggle to break loose from the structures that define who we are and how we should be, in line with dominant group cultural definitions. This is not easy. It is for many of our people a painfully difficult task. The extent to which colonialism has impacted upon our lives is immense. The extent to which dominant discourses of Maori identity have been internalised means that in order to actively engage with notions of identity we need to critically reflect on

our world and how our experiences have been shaped.

I was born and raised in Taranaki.

I have lived under the korowai of the Maunga and have experienced the awe of seeing Taranaki stand firmly on the landscape, defining the geography in a way that we who live under his shadow may never achieve.

I have lived alongside the awa and the Moana. Known them in their strength and beauty. Known them in their provision of kai, before they were poisoned.

I have lived on land that was taken from my people and watched as my parents struggled to "pay the rent" on land that was rightfully ours.

I was schooled alongside Owae Whaitara, the marae that stands above the township. We walked through and around that space every day and were never schooled within its bounds. It was an "out of bounds" area.

I learnt of a history of this land that told us of Cook and Tasman and Browne. And I knew these names because they named the streets upon which I walked. They named my world.

Waitara.

I was told we were all the same. New Zealanders/National identity/Kiwi/ Egalitarian/National identity/One New Zealand/One identity.

But I knew that to be Maori wasn't the same. And I see now why we were never to know who we were. Identity had to be controlled. So the system could be maintained. As without the system the "Nation" would be fragmented.

And we would be left with a Nervous System.

It is clear that our experiences influence the ways in which we construct and reconstruct our notions of identity and the multiple ways

in which we position ourselves. Identity is neither fixed nor closed, but is a system of complex shifts, positions, relationships and interrelationships. For many the notion of identity is unstable and uncertain, for others it refers to a strength and cultural awareness of who they are. Where we locate ourselves along the spectrum is connected to knowledge about ourselves and our people. This brings to light the ways in which power relations determine our access to knowledge, who controls and defines knowledge and how particular knowledge forms are validated and legitimised over others.

As colonisation sought to promote universals, in the negation of iwi identities, we can invert the process to reaffirm both our iwitanga and our kotahitanga, in ways that do not subvert the complexities of our identity. Whakapapa is a vehicle through which we can express these complexities. Within Whakapapa we are a part of a complex set of interrelationships. We are a part of whanau, hapu and iwi. We are part of kotahitanga. Yet, contrary to "popular" (read dominant) belief this does not deny our own person as individuals. Rather what it argues for is the prioritising of cultural relationships over a notion of privileging the individual. As Kathie Irwin states:

> The identification of Maori is an issue over which whanau, hapu and iwi have cultural control. This control is exercised through tikanga Maori, including Whakapapa.[4]

In the discussion we cannot ignore the painful experiences of those who do not have ready access to knowledge about who they are, for those that do not know their Whakapapa. Not having access to that knowledge does not negate Whakapapa as a means of cultural identity. All Maori people have a Whakapapa. It is a cultural notion that both precedes and postdates the individual. Not having knowledge about Whakapapa may render it invisible; however, it does not remove its

existence. Whakapapa remains irrespective of our knowledge of it. Our tupuna will always be our tupuna. Therefore, our agenda cannot be solely one of challenging modernist constructions of identity; it needs also to encompass a process of reclaiming those knowledge bases that have been submerged through colonialism.

One of the requirements of such action is to move not only beyond the frameworks of colonialism but also beyond that which is presented as postcolonialism. The notion of postcolonialism is used increasingly within this country, as a framework for moving outside of colonial models to provide space for voices of the "Other". The use of the term to describe the present social context within this country is problematic. So too is its use in naming, describing or positioning Maori expressions of resistance. Although there is a usefulness in articulating the need to move outside colonial discourse, it is not enough to assume that relocating to another space is sufficient. Such an assumption does little to bring about necessary structural change, nor does it make explicit notions of resistance and opposition to colonial oppression.

> *I have dismantled the frame of reference further, and in my construct postcolonialism, which denotes passivity, has become anti-colonialism, which is a truer description of what influences the arts and politics in the Maori world.*[5]

If our work is actually about moving beyond colonialism and colonial constructions, which includes a decolonising process and a challenging of colonial mythologies, then perhaps it is time to be explicit about our intentions. For those involved in "the arts and politics in the Maori world" it is about redefining and, if necessary, breaking boundaries that have been constructed to limit the expression of Maori identity.

Decolonisation is a crucial concept when engaging with identity. It is a process that requires critical reflection upon how we define who we

are and the presentation of ourselves to the world. This is not an easy task given the nature and complexities of colonisation. Nor is it easy given that it demands that we call into question many things that we have previously taken for granted or embodied as a part of our common-sense. However, it is necessary in identifying how we wish to name our world and where we position ourselves within that.

Decolonisation requires a deconstruction and reconstruction of our fundamental belief systems about the world, and in doing so relocates us in the centre of our own analysis. We no longer take the imposed position of the westernised "Other" but validate ourselves from our own centre. This means engaging with constructions such as the notion of "tradition". At what point do we move from a place of traditional to one of contemporary? What do we mean by "traditional" Maori practices? What do we mean by "traditional" Maori art? Who defines these notions and how do those definitions work for, or mitigate against, anti-colonialism?

Similar interrogation is required of postmodern and poststructural theoretical frameworks, particularly in regard to the construction and deconstruction of identity, subjectivity and essentialism. Within postmodern analysis we are encouraged to engage with a notion of the individual as a vessel of contradiction and conflicting subjectivities. We are asked to forsake arguments of essentialism; that is, those arguments that assume there to be an essential self. Whilst these basic tenets appear relevant to an anti-colonial agenda, it is clear that they are underpinned by particular constructions of the individual, and of what constitutes the subject and the self, which do not necessarily equate with a notion of the individual within Whakapapa.

Questions need to be raised as to the cultural assumptions that underpin such arguments, and the usefulness, or otherwise, of those in a colonial context. For example, the locating of identity as dependent upon modernist concepts of the self may be problematic for those that

do not privilege the individual in cultural configurations. Where the locating of identity within a postmodern assertion of anti-essentialism may be useful in moving from a place of "hard-line" identity politics, it does not provide the space for Whakapapa, Wairua and a whole range of other culturally specific notions. Furthermore, a concept of "decentring the self" may prove problematic for those that have historically been decentred, denied, marginalised and positioned as "Other" by dominant colonial discourses.

When we (perhaps necessarily) engage with postcolonial/postmodern/poststructural paradigms, we run the risk of attempting to fit ourselves into someone else's framework. Frameworks that position identity as fragmented and multiple and shifting and complex do not provide for complex cultural ways of operating and therefore cannot fully provide for Maori discussions of identity.

If we are to look more closely at how we define ourselves then it is apt that we do so from within appropriate structures. This then necessitates a reassertion of Te Reo Maori me ona tikanga, and the moving of Maori structures and knowledge from the margins to the centre. To centre ourselves within our own analysis. To discuss our identity/identities within our own structures. This is entirely possible and necessary. It is anti-colonial in asserting frameworks that are not dependent upon colonial affirmation, whilst having the active potential for the critique of colonial ideologies. It allows us a potential to identify ourselves in a range of ways in recognition of the multiplicities of Whakapapa. It provides us with an analysis that acknowledges the pain of the loss of knowing who you are and where you come from. It has the potential to open an area of Maori expression that has been locked through the imposition of modernist limitations.

For this to be realised we require a shift. A shift from the margins to the centre. A shift in space. And in time it will demand a shift in the system.

It will be a nervous shift and it will create a nervous system, calling into question the colonial foundations which support dominant structures. For many this would be an anxious move. However, it is necessary in order to unsettle the mythologies that perpetuate a belief that we are "all one people" , in order that our cultural realities are validated and legitimised. This has begun within Maoridom with the challenging of the system, through extending and breaking boundaries, through calls for constitutional reform, through Te Kohanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Maori. These are movements that seek shifts, these are cultural movements, these are Tangata Whenua movements, these are movements of affirming identities that move beyond colonial definitions.

Papa te Whaititiri
Hiko hiko te Uira
Ru ana te Whenua

1 L.T. Smith "Maori women: discourse, projects and mana wahine" in S. Middleton and A. Jones eds *Woman and education in Aotearoa 2* Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1992. p 33.

2 M. Harawira "Maori: who owns the definition?: the politics of cultural identity" *Te pua 2: the journal of puawaitanga* 1993. pp 27 - 34.

3 J. Rangihau, "Being Maori" *Te ao hurihuri: the world moves on: aspects of Maoritanga* ed. Michael King, Hicks-Smith and Sons, Wellington. pp 174-5.

4 K. Irwin "Towards theories of Maori feminisms" *Feminist voices: women's studies texts for Aotearoa/New Zealand* eds. R. Du Plessis et al, Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1992. p 11.

5 Merata Mita "Trick or treat?: issues of feminism and post-colonialism in relation to the arts" *Te pua 3: the journal of puawaitanga,* 1993. p 37.

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE

TOURISTS

The airport at Nandalore is dusty and dry. At the edge of the tarmac one dog mounts another, its skin gleaming in pale patches through its fur. The mounted dog does not look up from where it is grazing the hot stubbled grass like a cow. I watch Navaz as we wait for our luggage to be unloaded from the 'plane: her nose hooks over her mouth, her hair shines as if oiled. She is beautiful, so beautiful I cannot bear her to look at me. Outside the terminal, in the early morning sun, a line of auto-rickshaws are waiting. We climb into the first one with our suitcases and direct the driver to Hotel Printravel.

"I am Prakash," says the driver, unnecessarily though ponderously, as if he is the heroine in a Victorian novel, mistaken for a girl of low birth, whose declaration happily clears a path for a good marriage. He is short but muscled, like a tiny weightlifter; his eyes are dark and the sleek lick of hair that falls across his forehead reminds me of a seal cub. There are no doors on the auto-rickshaw and the sun warms our legs. Our feet are up on our luggage and we hunch to each side, trying to see where we are. A tree, a country road: we could be anywhere.

On the way into town, Prakash talks to us, shouting over his shoulder against the noise of the two-stroke engine.

"You are from Australia?" he shouts. "I have many Australians." The rickshaw bounces along the road, its toy wheels catch against the stones and throw up spurts of dust. Navaz and I heave up and down in the back.

"In six years, I have taught myself English," says Prakash. "Now I

will learn Japanese. My friends all teach me when I show them around. You will give me three words please."

He looks over into the back seat where Navaz and I are jiggling from side to side.

"Three words please," he repeats. "Three English words." Suddenly I do not know a single English word. I look at Navaz whose brain is full of words, English, Japanese, German, Russian, and those little switchpoints that turn one word into another. She is looking out the side of the rickshaw at a chicken, the thinnest chicken I have ever seen, rolling in the dust at the side of the road.

"Chicken," I say foolishly, gripping Prakash's shoulder with one hand pointing behind us with the other, as if the word itself is not enough, to where the chicken continues to thrash on the ground.

"*Chicken* I already know," says Prakash dismissively, showing his teeth white against the brown of his face.

Nobody says a word: the only sound is the chainsaw buzz of the rickshaw's engine. I look out my side of the rickshaw at the scenery scrolling past. I am sure, without turning my head, that Navaz is allowing herself a small smile at the thought of my "chicken" . There are fields of some leafy crop stretching back from the road, every now and then a woman is working, a roll of cloth twisted about her head, there are small buildings with smoke winding out of the roof. Here, and again there, a "chicken" stands mockingly, scratching the ground with its scaly feet, throwing dust over its outstretched wings. We sail down the road jibbing from side to side, the countryside behind us joining together again at our wake as if we had never passed this way. I stare and stare but the world is suddenly, for me, unspeakable. The neat captions that once labelled everything, that we exchange with each other, are no longer available. What is the green crop called, whose star shaped leaf is unfamiliar to me? Are those

little buildings "houses" or "kilns"? What is the name of the women's headgear? Nobody says a word: the rickshaw passes between the fields, pulling them together on either side like a dusty zip.

"Tarmac," says Navaz. I turn to look at her. She is smiling slightly, lightly, in her fashion.

"Tar-mac?" asks Prakash, screwing himself around in his seat to face Navaz. His neat parting cleaves his head in two like an axe blow. Over his shoulder I watch the road as if I am the driver.

"Tar-mac".

"It is the surface the 'plane lands on," says Navaz. Prakash nods complacently, as if the definition is less valuable than the word, as if he always knew where the 'plane landed but not the "tarmac".

"Pneumatic tyre," says Navaz.

"*Tyre* I already know," says Prakash. "New-magic?"

"Pneumatic," says Navaz. "A tyre inflated with air."

Prakash drives with a new seriousness. *Pneumatic, tarmac,* he makes these words his own.

We are on the outskirts of town. The fields have given way to buildings recognisable as houses, and a garage, with two Hindustan Ambassadors parked nose to nose on the forecourt, now passes by the side of the rickshaw. A weight of expectation rests heavily on the third word; as, in fairy tales, it rests heavily on the third dream, the third wish, the third son. Navaz is still looking out her side of the rickshaw at two boys sitting high on roped together bamboo scaffolding, painting a billboard advertisement for butter. I try to think of a word that Prakash will not know. *Kursaal, plumassier, rowel.*

"Shorts," I hear myself say. Navaz does not turn her head.

"Shorts," repeats Prakash, without much pleasure.

"They are like trousers but they finish here." I make an amputative slicing gesture across my own thighs. Prakash is turning in his seat to see my demonstration.

"I know the thing," he says now, with some excitement. "Shorts."

And then here is the Hotel Printravel, its name in faded blue lettering over the door. Navaz and I climb down. Prakash arranges our suitcases on the pavement beside us, one on each side, as if he is about to take our photograph. We stand there stiffly while he climbs back into the rickshaw.

"Get cleaned up," he says. "Have a rest. I will be back at nine thirty to take you on tour. One hundred and twenty rupees for the day, the best deal in town." Navaz and I have not discussed Prakash's offer to guide us around Nandalore but we nod anyway, our murmurs of gratitude lost to the engine's roar.

Although Navaz and I would never admit to each other our belief in the real India, Prakash was to have been our guide to that country. At nine-thirty, we are outside the Hotel Printravel, clean and ready for whatever he might show us. The first stop is a water mill, just outside the town limits. Prakash hands us down from the rickshaw, taking particular care with our limbs, as if we are stick insects whose legs might be lost to careless handling. Navaz slips out gracefully. I feel clumsy under Prakash's touch and bark my shin on the side of the door, clip my head against the overhang of the roof. Other drivers are now pulling up; other tourists, cameras swinging from their necks, are climbing down unassisted. Prakash ignores the other drivers, standing together in their shirt sleeves in the sun, and their much more ordinary cargoes. He steers us through the arched entrance.

The courtyard of the mill is cool and leafy, and full of the splashing of the water wheel that turns in the pool. We walk around its circumference while Prakash explains the workings of the grinding stones.

"A holy man is buried here," says Prakash. "A saint." He leads us over to a white plastered hut which I had taken for a pump house.

"This is his tomb." Prakash stands in front of the tomb, tucking his chin into his neck, once, twice, three times, like a duck. Navaz and I stand stiffly behind him.

"Do you have any money?" asks Prakash now. "Any small coins?" Navaz pulls some coins from her pocket and hands them over.

"Come," says Prakash and we walk around to the side of the tomb, to a blank wall, harshly white in the sun. Prakash presses one of the coins to the wall and when he removes his hand it stays there, glittering like a small mirror.

"There is no explanation for this," says Prakash. "Now you must try." My coin does not stick. It falls from the wall as soon as I remove my hand.

"You are pressing too hard," Prakash says. "No pressure is needed. Just hold it to the wall, then take your hand away." This time the coin stays there, shining next to Prakash's. Navaz is still trying. Prakash has his hand on hers, helping. He is shorter than her and he stands between her and the wall, her chin almost resting on his gleaming head. The coin stays. There are three of them, a shiny triangle on the white wall, and the three of us stand below, smiling at each other in the sun, as if we have succeeded in some trick or other.

"A holy place," says Prakash, taking the coins down and handing them back to Navaz. "And look," he tilts his head back, we do the same and stare up into the blue square of sky that hangs over the walls of the mill like a roof. I can see nothing, only a blue of incalculable height.

"No bird ever flies over this enclosure," says Prakash. "They fly

around. This is how we know it is a holy place."

Prakash takes us to the doorway of the inner pool.

"Give me your camera, please. I will take your photo now," he says in a businesslike way. Navaz and I stand woodenly, one on either side of the doorway, like topiary, as if we have never had our pictures taken before.

"Smiling or not smiling?" calls Prakash. Then he hands the camera to Navaz, arranging himself beside me for the next shot. He has produced from somewhere a pair of sunglasses with reflecting lenses and he puts these on. I have not moved from my side of the doorway but Prakash stands beside me. I feel his warmth at my hip. Then Navaz and I are obediently swapping places. Through the crosshatched inner circle of the camera lens, I see Prakash take Navaz's hand in his own. His head comes up to her shoulder, he stands beside her like a schoolboy.

"Ready," he calls through his teeth. This is to be a smiling photograph. I look again to where his hand holds hers, two brown hands gripping each other below shirt cuffs. I press the shutter and everything goes black.

On our way out, I see another group of three, a driver and a German couple in matching tracksuits, heads tilted back, looking up at the square blue sky. The wife is holding the husband's elbow as if the flat courtyard is a thin high ledge that she might pitch off at any moment. I hear the driver say "No bird ever flies over this enclosure," and the Germans take photographs of that pure blue, their cameras pointing straight up like the beaks of baby birds. Back at the rickshaw, I climb in the far side while Prakash assists Navaz in taking her seat. We are on our way to a famous hill fort, Prakash explains over his shoulder. There are green fields on either side of the road: for all I know we could be heading straight back to the airport. Navaz's hand lies between us on the seat, like something

wounded. As the rickshaw begins to climb, I look back across the plain to where the dark smear of trees and white walls of the mill are still visible. I think I see a crow fly over the enclosure but, from this distance, it is hard to be sure.

This essay is an extract from Annamarie Jagose's novel *In translation* 1994, reprinted here by kind permission of Victoria University Press, Wellington.

PETER BRUNT

ON BEING MODERN

> *I will not serve that in which I no longer believe whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use — silence, exile and cunning.... I do not fear to be alone or to be spurned for another or to leave whatever I have to leave. And I am not afraid to make a mistake, even a great mistake, a lifelong mistake and perhaps as long as eternity too.*
>
> (Stephen Dedalus) James Joyce, *Portrait of the artist as a young man*

> *The beginner who has learnt a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue, but he has assimilated the spirit of the new language and can produce freely in it only when he moves in it without remembering the old and forgets in it his ancestral tongue.*
>
> Karl Marx

The question of identity is a vexed one today. On the one hand it is celebrated by those whose identities have been denigrated or unrecognised in the past — and rightly so, for the recovery and assertion of local cultures, histories and heritages has challenged the assimilatory narratives of modernisation in which the identity of the West or of Europe was thought inevitable and appropriate. On the other hand, we see in the same contemporary mirror the rise of the most virulent nationalisms,

ethnic hatreds, racisms, separatist movements and so on; an often violent refusal of the other in the name of one's own precious uniqueness.

We are aware too of the inseparable relationship between identity concerns and the structural forces of "late capitalism". These forces — the decline of the nation-state as a primary player in global economics, the developments in technology and communications, globalisation, the displacement of labour, the mobility of populations, etc. — have eroded former boundaries in which identity has been claimed (nation, class, ethnicity) and led to a complex over-determination of who we are by multiple, unstable and often conflicting social and cultural codes. We are also aware of the way in which this polyvalence is the flip-side of a concurrent tendency towards homogeneity and sameness — what anthropologist Levi-Strauss referred to pessimistically as "monoculture". A recent newspaper predicts that "of the 6,000 or so languages presumed to exist on Earth, ninety-five percent seem destined to disappear in the next one hundred years",[1] attesting surely to the irrefutable predicament of identity in the contemporary world.

In view of such predictions, it is hard not to take seriously, even as we want to celebrate the "renaissance" of "culture" in this "postcolonial" moment, the suggestion by historian Eric Hobsbawm that "this hunger to belong, and hence the 'politics of identity'" is in fact a "symptom of sickness" in the context of "social disorganisation". The issue of identity, for Hobsbawm, is not a "diagnosis" of this social malady, "let alone (a) therapy" but the expression of "anguish and disorientation".[2] And it is hard not to be troubled by Julia Kristeva's recent defense (itself symptomatic) of the continued validity of the socio-political ideal of the modern nation-state in the face of what she sees as a "regressive" and escapist desire, understandable and even profoundly tragic as it may be, to retreat to those "primal shelters" of family, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion.[3]

These assessments are, to be sure, over-generalised; if the "politics of identity" must be assessed at all, it can only be as a local politics. However, they register the seriousness of the questions and explorations engaged by the artists in this exhibition and the appropriateness of its title, *The nervous system*. More acutely, they raise perhaps the most vexed question of all, which is to say, the identity of the modern: what does it mean to be modern, to be *at home* in the modern world, to *belong* there?

The question may have no unambivalent answer. It yokes together two terms — modernity and identity (in this sense of belonging) — which may be, finally, antinomious, irreconcilable, yet impossible to separate. To be modern is to be "rootless". Dedalus (in the epigraph above), perhaps the paradigmatic figure of modern identity, cuts his ties with the past, with the communal values of home, national culture and religion, in order to fly to the urban metropolis, "the city of strangers", to live in exile and alienation. And yet, whether one approves or blames, celebrates or mourns the fact of this break, or however one plays the gamut of possible emotions in between, there is an inescapable awareness (and by no means only a nostalgic one) of an anterior something (roots, origin, home...) which makes its *demands*. The mythic parallel to Dedalus's ambition, we know, is the doomed flight of Icarus to the sun. It is an open question whether, like the Phoenix, he will rise again from his ashes but it is the question of *ashes*, to be sure, which haunts our contemporary modernity, and the artists in this exhibition, all of whom — as travellers, emigrés, exiles and the colonised — live in Dedalus's legacy.

That is to put things very cryptically but let me suggest my sense of this question with an example from Baudelaire who took its measure in the middle of the nineteenth century in a way which anticipates, I think, the present. At issue for Baudelaire is the question of what it means to be modern. The answer, in essence, is the demand to transform oneself. To be modern is somehow to have entered that volatile nexus in which

arises the imperative *to change*, to abandon what was familiar — a language, a tradition, a way of life — and become otherwise. In a commentary on Baudelaire, Michel Foucault reduces this essence to the following axiom: "He is looking for a difference: What difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?"[4] This, of course, echoes the familiar modernist ethos of taking one's bearings from the world of the present, of being contemporary or of one's time. But Baudelaire is also deeply aware of the fact that the imperative to change is experienced, more often than not, in terms of a conquest or subjugation. It is not the whim of the fanciful but the plight of the vanquished. We become modern by identifying with — transforming into — the image of an other which has defeated us, or dispossessed us of what we were, or of something we have loved.

The ambivalence of this transformation emerges in a double analogy he makes in illustrating this idea: the first to a "man of the world ... transport[ed] to a distant land" where, by a process "which is something of a mystery", he acclimatises to what is alien.[5] Baudelaire is fascinated both by this transformative power and by the allure of the foreign (the exotic, the different, the new ...); and if one could speak of an ethos of the modern, it would be this openness or hypersensitive vulnerability to the other. But it is also important to stress here that although Baudelaire speaks of a "distant land" it is not any particular place or identity he would valorise so much as the possibility, as truly corresponding with the nature of modernity, of a *universal* identity: "To be away from home and yet to feel at home anywhere; to see the world, to be at the very centre of the world, and yet to be unseen of the world" .[6] But in a further analogy, this emigré is compared to the figure of the "converted Sicambrian", an ancient Rhineland tribe conquered by the Romans during the reign of Augustus and relocated to Gaul, who "became Roman subjects and accepted Roman religion":

> *... and it may even happen that, overstepping the mark and transforming justice into revolt, he will do as the converted Sicambrian did, and burn what he adored, to adore what he had burned.* [my emphasis]

But it is here, in this process of becoming modern, if you will, (one converts to the religion of the conqueror) that there is a reversal, a chiasmus; it turns back on itself; the shadow of an unholy ghost falls on the new self and disturbs what Baudelaire earlier calls the "divine grace of cosmopolitanism". Instead, the *burnt* identity, the dead letter "Sicambrian", becomes the (lost) object of a melancholy adoration, a residual attachment; a ghost, a void, haunts or doubles the identity of being modern, decentres and alienates its belongingness ("at home anywhere") with the "death-in-life" traces of a former way of being which cannot, or refuses to, be forgotten.

To invoke Marx (in the second epigraph) we might speak of the resistance of "ancestral tongues" which makes "assimilat[ing] the spirit of the new language" called modernity only ever an immigrant's stutter, caught in the hesitation of translation, neither fully of the modern nor of the "mother tongue" but in the passage between the two.

This doubleness in the identity of the modern speaks in complicated ways to the strange survival of cultures; not only in the affective experience of loss and memory but in the recognition, through the very experience of transformation — burning what you adore — of the radical contingency and historicity of identity in modernity. Its "life" is extinguished or "put to death" in terms of one set of signifiers (a world which gave them life) so that the signs "survive" in the arbitrariness of their material nature (mere ashes), but in this way become newly available for re-presentation, translation, re-invention, re-membering, etc. in different temporal and spatial contexts of meaning and being.

The work of the artists in this exhibition speaks to the complexity of contemporary social identity; their diverse and polyvalent histories of colonisation and migration, of cultural displacement or loss, of sensibilities attuned by the perplexities and ironies of cultural diaspora and hybridity attest to the homelessness and fragmentation of our collective identity (or its strange "community"). They exemplify what Homi Bhabha has called the "transnational" and "translational" character of the postcolonial, in which the nature of how and what "culture" signifies is rendered complex as it calls into question the idea of the nation-state (or any other social body) as a unified and homogeneous locus of modern identity.[7] The artists here speak rather of itinerant, cosmopolitan identities, mobile, seemingly without boundaries or borders; yet also, paradoxically perhaps, of desires to be linked (ironically, melancholically, futuristically, ethically ...) to particular places, ethnicities and histories. Linked and delinked: how indeed do we negotiate the demands *across space and time* on our sense of ourselves and who we are today, demands which seem to divide us between what is boundless and changing, and those stakes through the heart which pin us "here", to this *place*, or to this *name*, and nothing else?

1 George Monbiot "Global villagers speak with forked tongues" *Manchester Guardian Weekly* 3 September 1995. p 10.

2 Eric Hobsbawm *Nations and nationalism since 1780* Cambridge University Press, 1990. p 177.

3 Julia Kristeva *Nations without nationalism* trans. Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York, 1993. pp 1-3.

4 Michel Foucault "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader* Pantheon Books, New York, 1984. p 34.

5 Charles Baudelaire, "The Universal Exhibition of 1855" in *Selected writings on art and literature* trans. P.E. Charvet, Penguin Books, 1972. pp 116-7.

6 From "The Painter of Modern Life" ibid. p 399.

7 Homi Bhabha *The location of culture* Routledge, London and New York, 1994. p 172.

NOTES ON WRITERS

Allan Smith is of English, Scottish and primarily Irish descent. He has written on a range of contemporary New Zealand artists and is at present Curator at City Gallery Wellington.

Tony Lee was born in Hong Kong but raised since infancy in New Zealand according to fairly conventional Kiwi Chinese standards (market gardening, fish 'n' chips). Living in Christchurch he writes poetry and is currently reading poets Allen Curnow, Hone Tuwhare and Derek Walcott.

Leonie Pihama's iwi affiliations are Te Atiawa and Ngati Mahanga, hapu Ngati Rariri. She lectures in aspects of Maori studies in the Education Department of the University of Auckland and is a member of Moko Productions, a Maori women's film and video production company. She has twin four-year-old boys and an 18-month-old daughter.

Annamarie Jagose is a New Zealander of Indian/Irish descent. Her book *Lesbian Utopics* (Routledge, New York, 1994) is an analysis of theoretical and fictional figurations of the lesbian. She currently teaches in the English Department at the University of Melbourne.

Peter Brunt was born in Auckland in 1955 to immigrant parents from Western Samoa. He is currently a PhD candidate in art history at Cornell University, New York State, USA.

SHANE COTTON

History is the object of a construction whose site forms not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now.

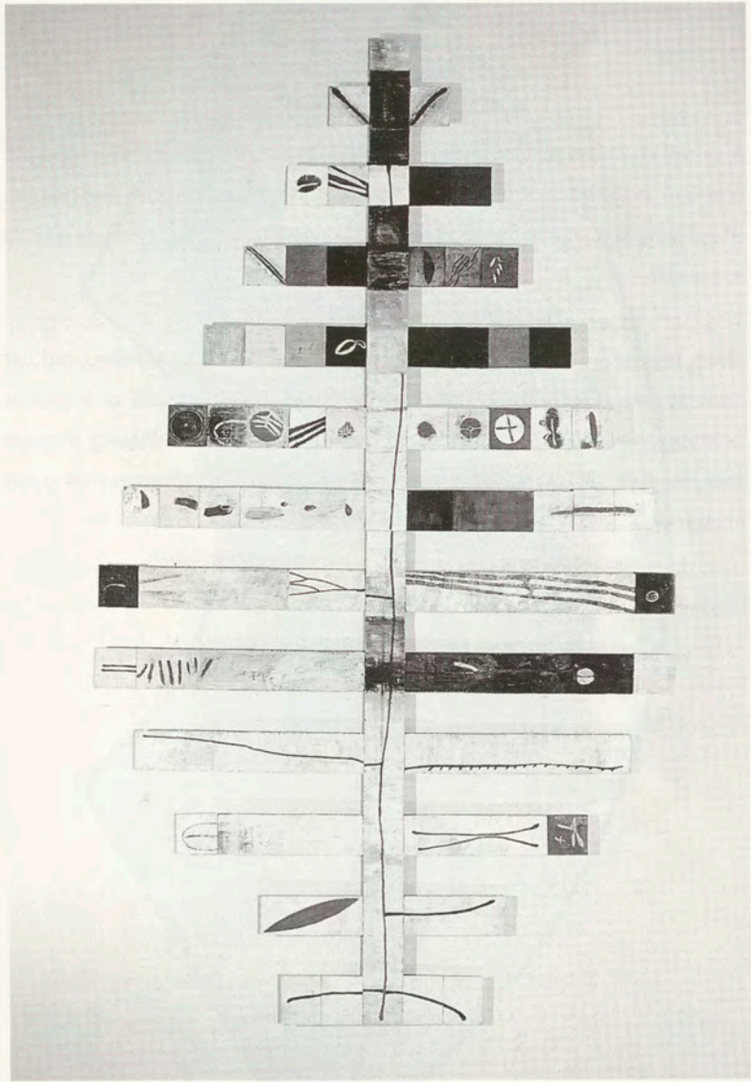
Walter Benjamin

Titiro rawa ake ki te rire o ngaa rangi, kua ngaro te wairua o te whenua.

The plant presents a multitude of impressions to expose a landscape of images as momentary, singular and partitioned; a system or pattern of sorts that overlaps, weaves, contains and filters different kinds of historical and indigenous information. The overlapping of planes through degrees of translucency (dis)connects layers as do the meandering dot patterns, basketballs and numbers.

In a literal sense the viewpoint depicted is one of profile, elevation and plan. In another sense they are places of vantage; viewing points of momentary glance where representation and reception fluctuate.

Shane Cotton August 1995



Shane Cotton *Rib* 1992
encaustic and oil on plywood 2300 mm x 1400 mm

LUISE FONG

DRAGON

A small child stands alone amongst giant macrocarpas, heavy boughs creaking in the wind. The air is still beneath the branches. Safe and private. She slowly peels back layers of bark like a ritual, sing-songing words quietly to herself.

Years later, the sand glints and flashes in the bright sun, blinding and yet drawing her eyes into the heavy-metal black. The foreshore is abundant with exposed limbs of driftwood, strewn and abandoned. Picking through this treasure of curious and graceful forms she rediscovers that quiet intonation.

Luise Fong 1995

Found in London's Chinatown, this metal silhouette dragon relates to Chinese folk art paper cutouts.

JACQUELINE FRASER

Mihi Waka (Mrs Walker)

Mihi Waka with her hat
Mihi Waka with her stick
Mihi Waka with her shag
Mihi Waka with her dog
Mihi Waka with her daughter
Mihi Waka with her bell.

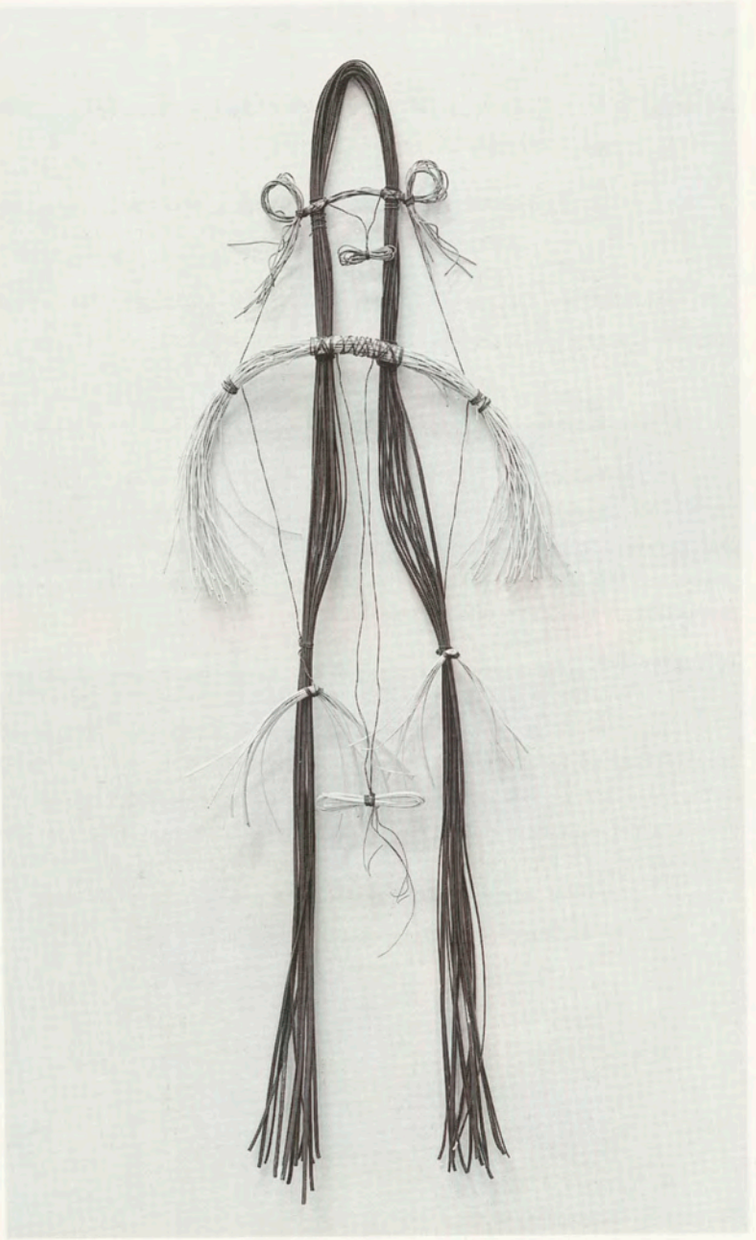
The deification of Mrs Walker

Mihiwaka is our little mountain. When we introduce ourselves on the Marae, we address her. Her name is a transliteration of the name of a European woman who lived there last century. We do have an ancestral name but Mihiwaka has become common. My Mihi (Mrs) Waka (Walker) is fictional. I give my apologies to the descendants of the real Mrs Walker.

Tena koe Mihiwaka
Greetings to our mountain

Jacqueline Fraser 8 March 1995

Jacqueline Fraser *Maria Callas sings* 1989
plastic-coated electrical wire 1899 mm x 600 mm



DENISE KUM

How does material feel before it gets encoded? Before natural and cultural systems impose their meanings?

Working with matter leaves the residue of the past and the future under your nails : this is a state both potent and polluted.

The aesthetic, the edible, the toxic, the industrial, the social, the cultural are all rampant and consumable in a processed reality.

Blending and Packaging

One way in which lubricants differ is in the additives they contain. Additives are selected from a great variety of available agents, each of which possesses the ability to enhance the existing characteristics, bestow new properties or suppress undesirable behaviour.

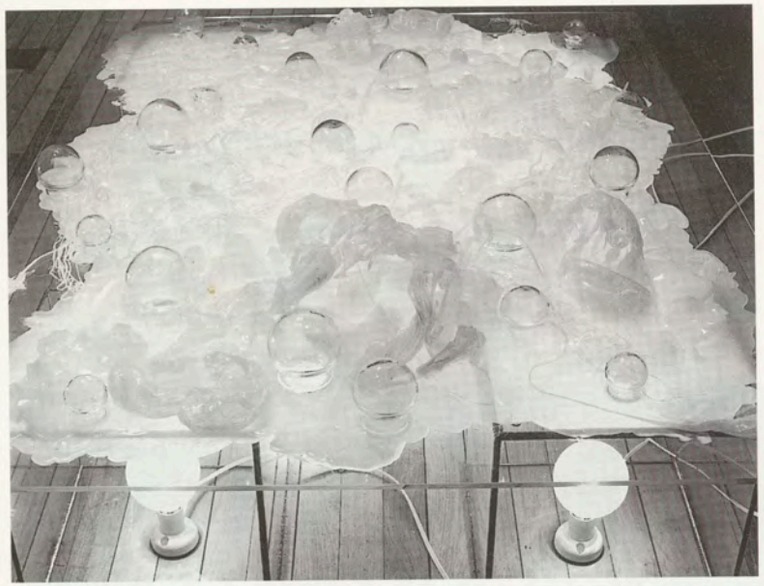
Taking Samples

If there is any doubt about the quality of a product, or any suspicion that it has become contaminated, or even doubt about its identity (perhaps if the markings on the container have become defaced) a sample may need to be taken for laboratory examination. In the case of used lubricants, the sampling may determine whether the contents of a system need to be changed, or it may help in the investigation of operating problems, or will simply confirm whether the machinery is functioning efficiently.

Lubricants: Care and Handling BP Oil International Limited, 1991.

Denise Kum 1995

Denise Kum *cupel* 1995 (details)



JOHN LYALL

TOWARDS AN HYPER-FERAL ART, AOTEAROA

Against the romantic landscape of nostalgia into which the media deliver us, in contrast to a hyper-nature composed of simulated pristine eco-systems, John Lyall presents us with a series of imaginary ecologies in which feral objects and familiar scenery fuse into an unthinkable Eden. These ephemeral installations have minimal environmental impact, existing only long enough to become a photographic image, then vanishing with only this trace.

These traces are scenes which exist just beyond the current range of the conceivable, serving in this way to accentuate and accelerate the logic of the hyper-natural. They send us not on a self-defeating and ultimately destructive search for an undefiled nature, but invite us back into the hyper-natural with a new fascination for the impure and the promiscuous. We live in a world in which a flood of well-intentioned but naive representations of nature unintentionally collude with the forces of its destruction. In this series of images neither the introduced entity nor the indigenous terrain remain inviolate; what ensues is a series of only partially predictable re-presentations of introduced ideas as exotic interventions.

Nigel Clark 1995

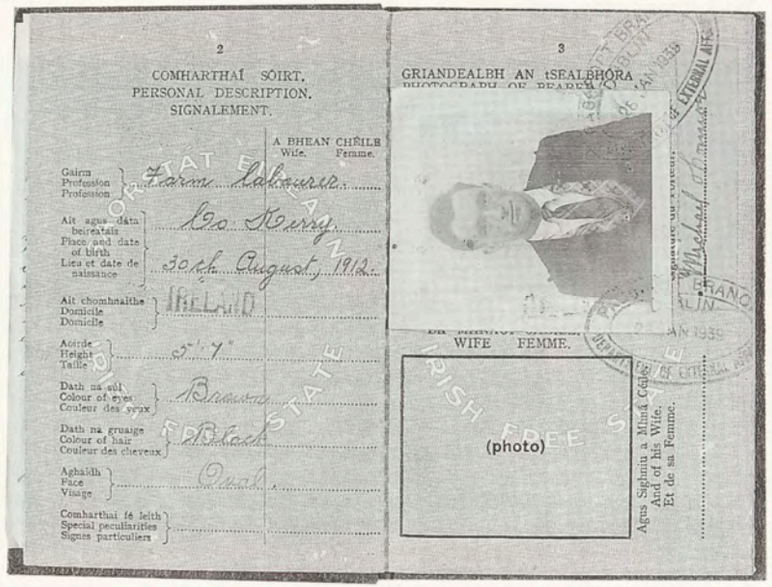
John Lyall *Towards an hyper-feral art, Aotearoa: a universal appliqué; given both a binary nature and the conventional illusions* 1993

DENIS O'CONNOR

THRALL

I stood at the stern of the vehicular ferry watching the wake. I felt the snub lead net-sinker warming in my pocket, its chrysalis shape a sixth finger on my palm. In mid-channel I hurled it with everything I had. It arced and plummeted to the foaming sea. My arms spread involuntarily upwards. I felt my hands grip an overhead bar that wasn't there before. A rearing horse glowed in my mind's eye. (I recognized Redon's Pegasus in the Library the next day). Had I reached the Horse Latitude? The distance where sailors were said to have paid their debt to the captain and tossed a burning straw horse overboard as the clearance. You once mentioned that in Luachra, the skulls of horses, or ribcages, were buried beneath the floor of a new house to align all who walked the boards above. What I'm sure of is that I passed over a brink as real as the day my father passed over the Equator through the Panama Canal. The day he'd come too far to return to an Old World. The day a New World awaited him.

Denis O'Connor July 1995



Irish Free State passport of Michael O'Connor

ANI O'NEILL

Sweet Rap

for Marion and Geoffrey Masters 1995

This is a story
'bout three sisters and a
Brutha —
2 different fathers
But they had the same Mother

My little bro' G
has his head in the streets

••••Greet • Meet. when you're
walking down the street •
Beat da Feet • when you feel the
HEAT

wrapped at home
by no telephone
sweet treat
prettiest girl on the street
SWEET SIS, SWEET!

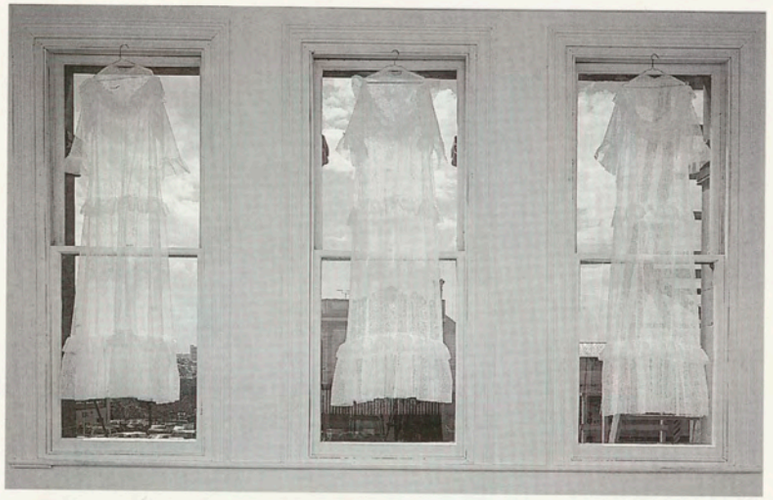
cant write • no Rap
No bro
you know
no show
seems he "dont wanna know"
Im by my phone
yo bro! Im home!
... struttin' the street • asking
people I meet • He Sweet?
HEAT

Warm Raps 4U
lite brite
dont lose sight

This Fight Aint Right
There are finer things in Life.

Luff Ani

Ani wanted to ask her brother Geoffrey Masters to write one of his raps for the catalogue but at the time of writing he had disappeared on the streets of South Auckland. The ten lei celebrate Marion Masters' tenth birthday.



Ani O'Neill *Mu'u mu'u mama* Teststrip 1995
synthetic curtain fabric

MICHAEL PAREKOWHAI

Well it was dark see. And cold. With this high spread of stars in the ready-to-read-green-book-sky. You could feel the hills, close, conspiring against the blackness while the Parikino river cliffs at the centre of our universe rose onwards and upwards.

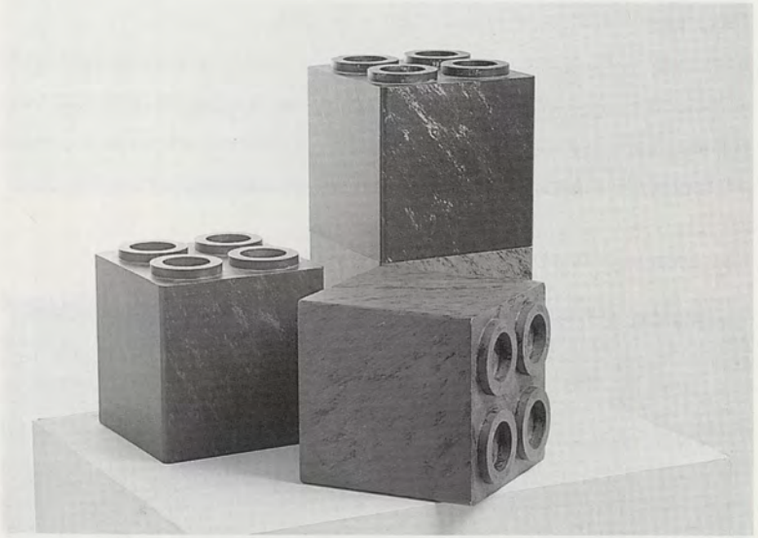
I remember the rugby paddock and how big it was. Like this vast plain that went on forever until it fell into the river. And on the edge of the basketball court (the only level playing field at Parikino Maori School) the small mountain of winter stumps and old fencing battens which had grown during the day under the watchful eyes of the Junior Room lay in silhouette; an intense shape that would be torched to life to signal the beginning of Guy Fawkes night.

In the Primers we'd been making masks. Animals mostly. Lions and tigers, possums, bears and rabbits. But it was night time now and the bonfire was about to start. Peter Potaka, one of the fathers, worked quickly. He soaked the mountain of wood with kerosene. He splashed it everywhere. And I remember the stillness and expectation and then that liberating rush as a strike from a single match exploded wood and shadows into a great ball of fire.

The children laughed and we were drawn to the flames together. And then for some reason a small child ripped away their paper face and threw it on the fire. The mask ignited in an instant and we shrieked with the thrill of it as the classroom identity we had laboured over burst into flame — for just that moment the spirits inside us were free.

Cushla Parekowhai 1995

Michael Parekowhai *Quadruplo (Torro, Torro, Torro)* 1990
enamel paint on MDF each unit 320 mm x 300 mm x 300 mm



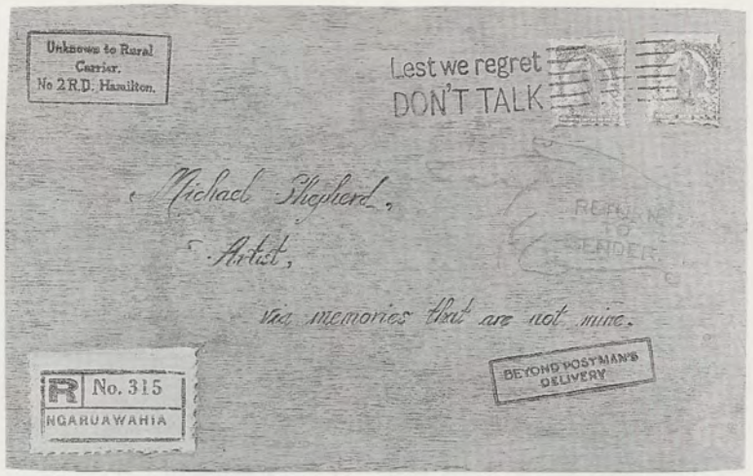
MICHAEL SHEPHERD

A colonial male's colonial mail (inheritances) 1992-4
History of a personal nature, an attempt to "address" male pattern behaviours and musings on the "wild colonial boy" myth led to the scripting of this mail in 1992. In late September 1994, the stamps were painted, cancelled and the mail travelled my emotions. Unable to find a destination of sorts, it was finally consigned to the "dead letter office".

Dead letter mail from the colonial service 1995
This suite, with its staccato addresses and cachets, again treats the artist as a dead letter office. Here, anxious personal messages combined with self lampoons and a growing disenchantment with the language of curated art, crackle and pop across a web of cultural synapses.

Five fiscal envelopes (the language of colonialism) 1995
These five cinderellas are cancelled and mailed from the past, whilst being rubber stamped in the present. Each is sent "postage insufficient - postage due" with the implication that this is half the ("fiscal") value of the stamp, thus invoking Maori grievance over the billion dollar settlement. Each cover is undeliverable due to the nature of their cachets (the cachet is the rubber stamp which registers a change in status of the letter being sent) and to insufficient address details. The significant exception is the Tainui envelope.

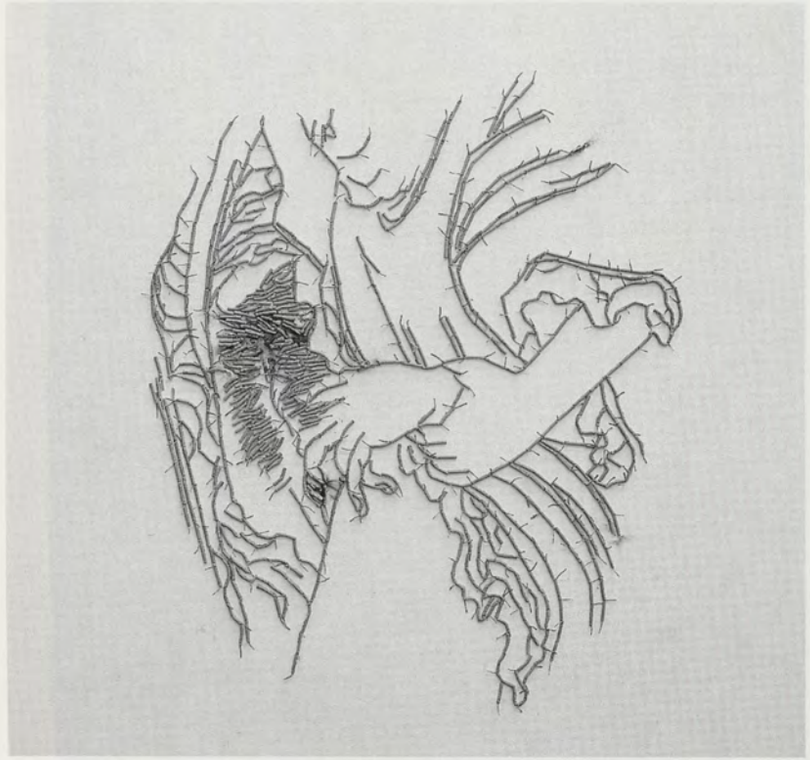
Michael Shepherd 1995



Michael Shepherd
Dead letter from the colonial service 1995 (detail)
Five fiscal envelopes (the language of colonialism) 1995 (detail)

YUK KING TAN

slant of the mouth they make the stamp in the old style now pull of the eyes she coyly lifts the fan to face the drum is made of pig's skin stretched over the lip with gold rivets braiding the hair tightly into a plait she plays suzy in front of the mirror what are you looking at the double eyelid operation is popular and relatively cheap acquiring commodities of culture I speak just a little how much is it to appease the hungry ghost drawing diagonal lines for the eyes lips in red rust pencil no. 6 they melt the laser copy onto the jersey silk with a heat press the face is flared out around the features a grimace of the skin then photocopied at that t.shirt place your skin is so fair it is a combustible mixture of gun powder and dirt for official documents and craft purposes only the perfect profile has a line that can be drawn from forehead to chin it is said that precious flower is quite a common girl's name nostrils flaring he took her into his arms and carried her to the couch herbal medicine is applied twice daily into the pores for circulation 'culture hawker' the vendor who travels from place to place selling merchandise of familiarity and manipulated belief eyes closed open wide in you go



Yuk King Tan *Bang!* 1995 (detail)
tomthumbs, unlit and lit

SANJAY THEODORE

INTERIOR. SLEAZY BIKIE BAR-NIGHT-SEPIA

ANGLE: Crane Down. The Unabomber, Malcolm X and Sanjay Theodore are sitting at the bar talking, and downing Vodka and cranberry shooters.

CLOSE SHOT: A stony faced barman slides the Unabomber a drink.

MALCOLM X

We formed an organisation... to fight whoever gets in our way, to bring about the complete independence of people of African descent here in the Western Hemisphere ...and bring about the freedom of these people by any means necessary.

UNABOMBER

I attribute social problems and psychological problems of modern society to the fact that society requires people to live under conditions radically different from those under which the human race evolved. Sanjay, you should know, your work alludes to a genetic link. You've burnt the ladder for Christ's sake!

MALCOLM X

No! I think the Sanjay's used the carbon like a paint, he's used a heat gun to paint the wood with its own inherent paint.

UNABOMBER

That explanation sounds a little too ambiguous.

MALCOLM X

No! I think to continue to deconstruct meaning is total arrogance. Balzac wrote: Do HUMAN BEINGS have the power to make the universe enter into their minds, or their minds talismans with which they abolish the laws of time and space?

SANJAY (RISING TO LEAVE)

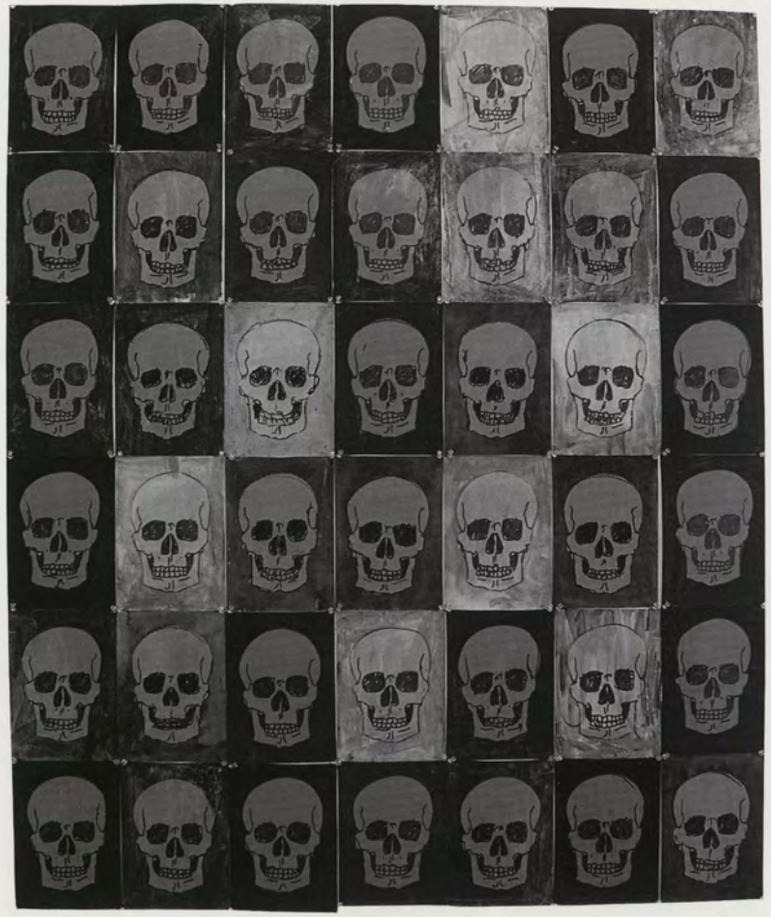
OK, OK, I've read *The new skin* too. I'm off back to work. Thanks for the booze dudes.

UNABOMBER (WHISPERS IN MALCOLM'S EAR)

Too bad. He'll never be an art star. Not Bi-Cultural or *Art Forum* enough, just can't fit him in.

FADE TO BLACK

Sanjay Theodore *Drawing for Alfred* 1995
mixed media on paper 2086 mm x 1260 mm

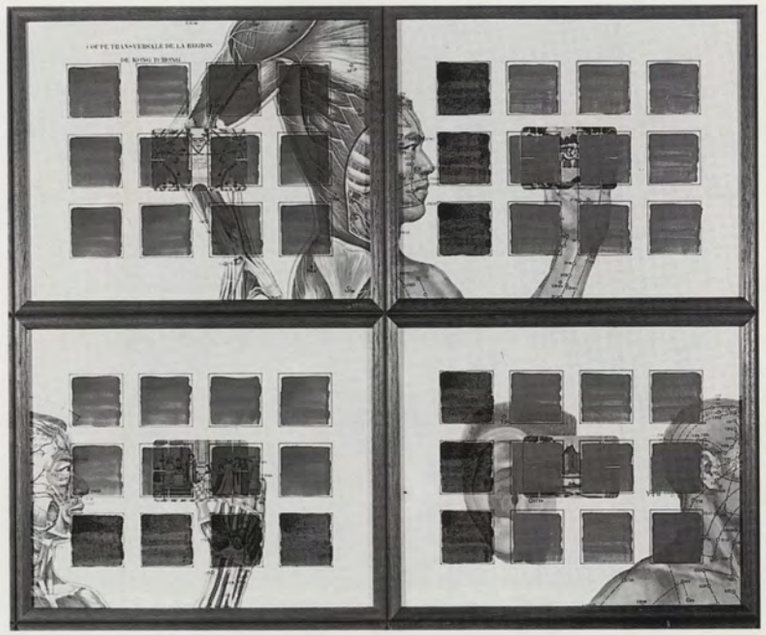


LEON VAN DEN EIJKEL

WHAT CONDITIONS CAN ACUPUNTURE TREAT

- *RESPIRATORY* Asthma, Pleurisy, Bronchitis, and Emphysema.
- *SKIN DISORDERS* Acne, Eczema, Psoriasis and painful scars.
- *EAR, NOSE AND THROAT* Common cold, Influenza, Tinnitus, Nerve deafness, Menieres disease, Eye problems, Sinusitis and loss of smell.
- *GASTROINTESTINAL* Hyperacidity, Nausea, Ulcers, Colitis, Constipation, Spastic colon, Diarrhoea and Haemorrhoids.
- *CARDIOVASCULAR* High and low blood pressure, Angina Pectoris, Palpitations and cold extremities.
- *MUSCULOSKELETAL* Arthritis (All types), Tendonitis, Bursitis, Low Back pain, Shoulder/Neck pain and stiffness, Tennis Elbow, Carpal Tunnel syndrome, Injuries of knee and ankle, Most sports injuries.
- *MISCELLANEOUS* Obesity, Smoking and drug addictions, Allergies such as Hayfever.
- *GYNAECOLOGICAL AND UROGENITAL* Cystitis, Prostatitis, Bedwetting, Menstrual Disorders including P.M.T., Infertility, Anaesthesia during childbirth.
- *NEUROLOGICAL* Headaches (Migraine and Tension types), Tic, Tremors, Trigeminal Neuralgia, Bell's Palsy, Shingles, Sciatica, Post-Stroke syndrome, General neuralgias and numbness.
- *PSYCHOLOGICAL* Anxiety, Depression, Insomnia and Nervous Tension.

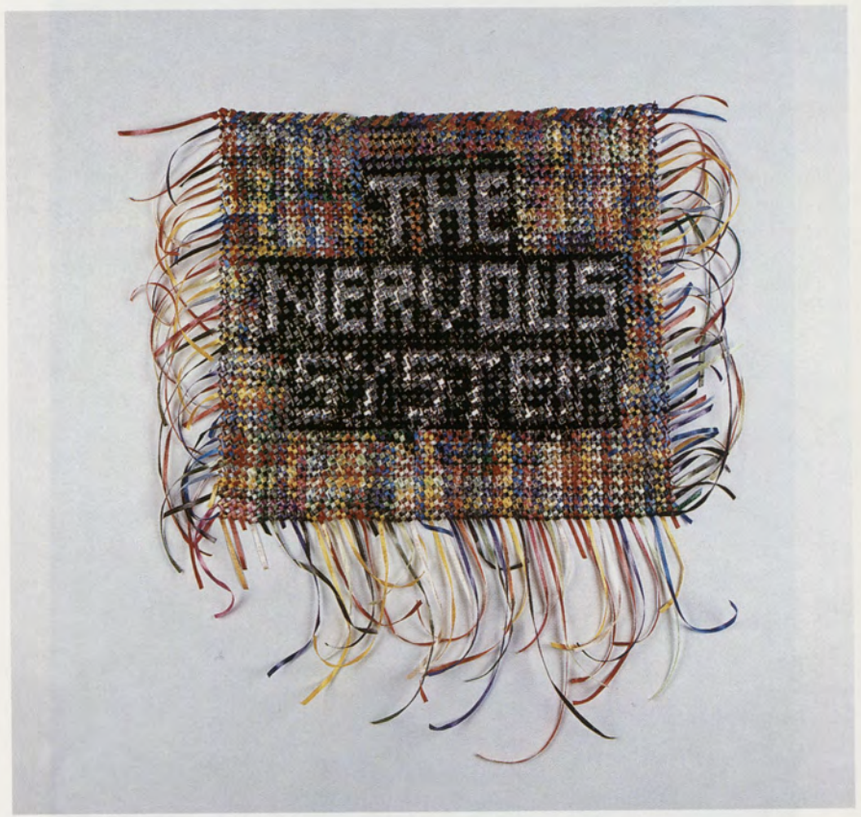
With acupuncture's system of diagnosis, an acupuncturist will ask not only for details of the immediate problem, but also take a full case history of past illnesses, familial tendencies, and aim to determine a complete picture of the patient's health.



Leon van den Eijkel *Restructure 33, man's body* 1993 (detail)

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

NOTES ON ARTISTS

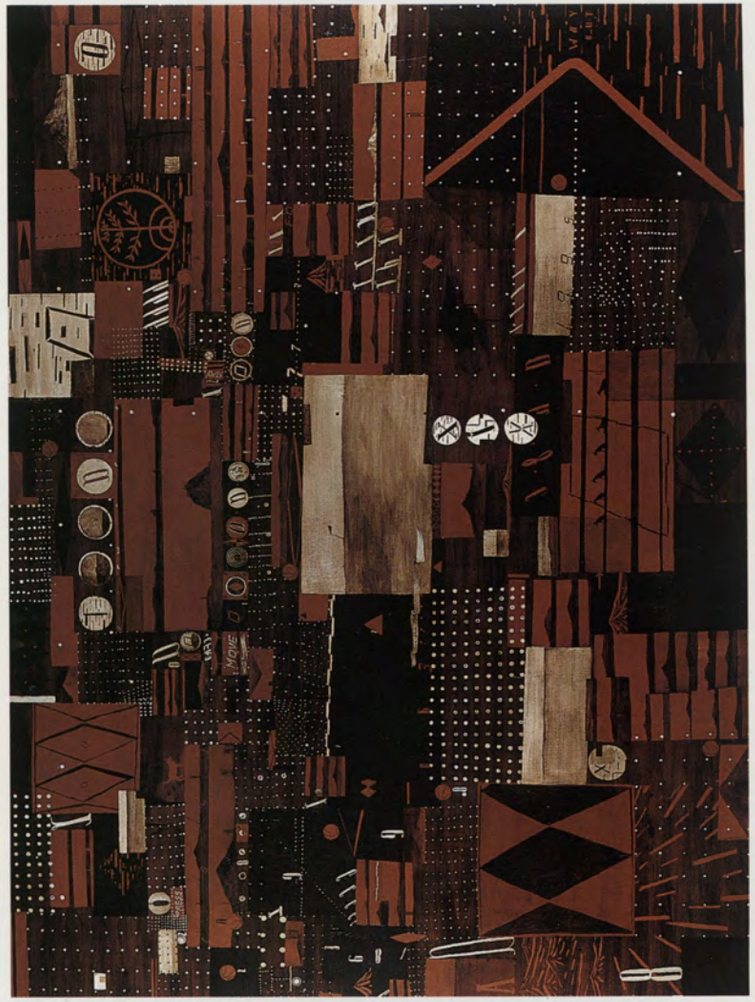


SHANE COTTON

The plant 1995
oil on canvas
1903 mm x 2750 mm
collection of Fletcher Challenge

Shane Cotton (Nga Puhi) was born in Upper Hutt in 1964. He has a BFA from the University of Canterbury and teaches Maori Visual Arts in the Maori Studies Department at Massey University. His work has been included in a number of important group exhibitions of contemporary Maori art and in 1995 his solo exhibition *Shane Cotton: recent paintings* was staged at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.

Cotton's recent practice uses a layered landscape paradigm to explore relations between biological, historico-political, technological, and perceptual systems of growth and change.

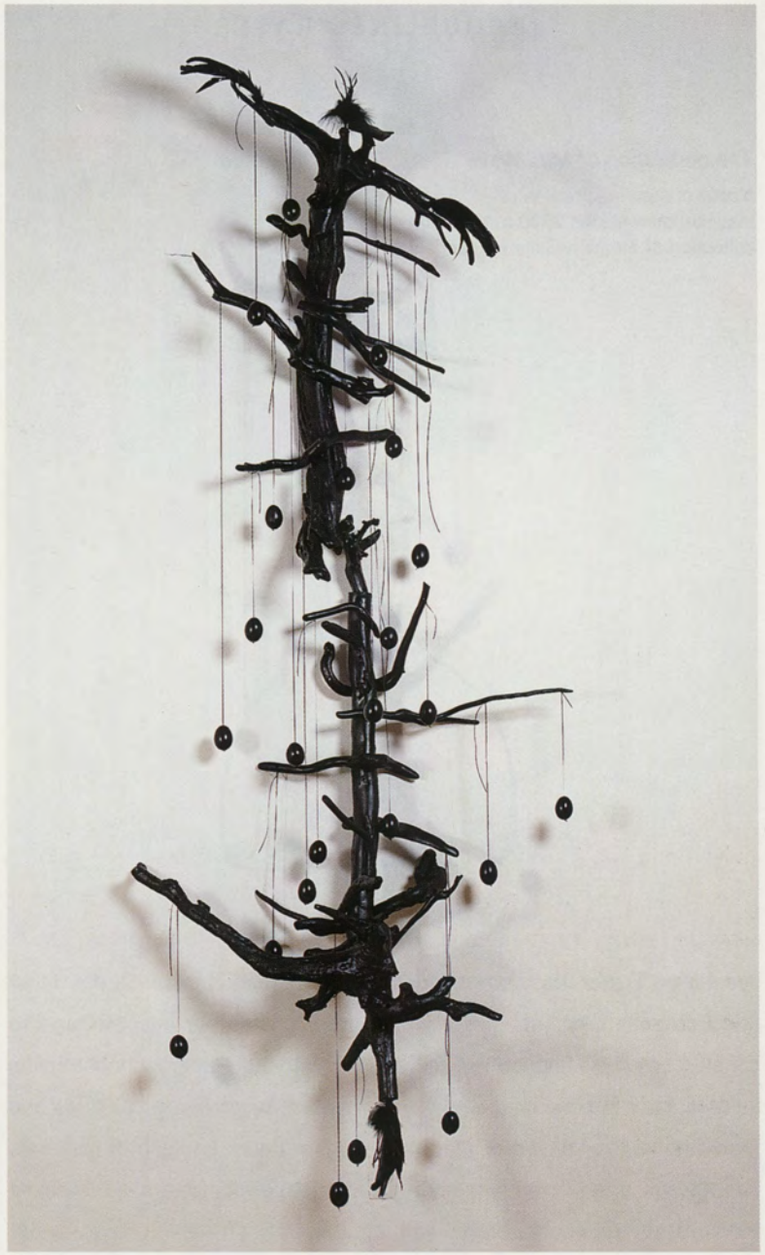


◀

LUISE FONG

Dragon 1995
mixed media
2720 mm x 1100 mm x 540 mm
collection of the artist

Luise Fong is a 31 year old Eurasian artist born in Sandakau, Malaysia. She grew up in Auckland and says "My Chinese half is fairly hidden from view as I take after my mother in looks and I feel flattered when people say I look Asian. I guess Dad's quiet Confucian presence gave us children another way looking at the world, and certainly New Zealand, almost that of an onlooker." Although mainly known for her work as a painter, she occasionally works with three dimensions and installation. Luise has recently completed a two-month residency at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, where *DRAGON* evolved. She is currently living and working in Melbourne.



JACQUELINE FRASER

The deification of Mihi Waka 1995 (detail illustrated)

plastic-coated electrical wire
installed dimensions 2300 mm x 4400 mm
collection of Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui

Jacqueline Fraser was born in Dunedin in 1956 and is of Maori (Kai Tahu) and European descent. In her work, she explores her dual heritage to construct multiple and interwoven cultural histories. Her art school training as a sculptor is combined with her interest in decorative techniques and materials traditionally associated with women's arts. Her use of materials has always been inventive; recently they have included plastic-coated electrical wire, ribbons, braids and metal mesh.

DENISE KUM

cupel 1995

glass, ethylene, vinyl acetate, cupping glasses, industrial dye, pearlescent pigments, petrolatum, light bulbs, electrical fittings
installed dimensions 3580 mm x 3200 mm
courtesy of the artist and the Hamish McKay Gallery

Denise Kum is a Chinese New Zealander, born in Auckland in 1968. Since 1990 Kum has been making site-specific installations in found spaces, Chinese supermarkets and public galleries. For several generations her family has been involved with Chinese restaurants, catering, fruit and vegetable retail and market gardening. Kum utilises diverse materials and provocative fluid substances to explore stains, excretions and bacterial contaminations of culture and cultural relationships..

◀

JOHN LYALL

Towards an hyper-feral art, Aotearoa: zero impact; despite both a predatory nature and uncertain conversation with the Heidelberg School (detail illustrated)

Towards an hyper-feral art, Aotearoa: upon reflection: given both a predatory nature and an uncertain content

Towards an hyper-feral art, Aotearoa: a Lamarckian stoppage; given both zero impact and a vacant niche

Towards an hyper-feral art, Aotearoa: a universal appliqué; given both a binary nature and the conventional illusions

12 cibachromes
installed dimensions 2700 mm x 3650 mm
courtesy of the artist; collection of G and D Twiss

For most of his adult life John Lyall's condition has been ex-patriate, having come from somewhere else and always subject to the post-colonial condition. The understanding of the shifting antipodean position is implicit in his work, as the investigation moves from feral to hyper-feral, to cyber-feral: the site shifting from bio-physical reality to cultural nature to a virtual nature. John Lyall installs portable, recycled ephemera: objects, events, drawings and sound. The work has always dealt with the problematic impact of a wilfully misinterpreted received art on the indigenous landscape.

DENIS O'CONNOR

Gallerus: The measure of an emigré 1993

oak, glass, aluminium, metallic powders, eggshells, helidon sandstone, tweed cloth, sand
courtesy of the artist and Gow Langsford Gallery

Ansata: The route of an emigré 1993

shell aggregate, forged iron, copper, helidon sandstone, oilskin, sand, hemp
courtesy of the artist and Gow Langsford Gallery

Moling: The chords of an emigré 1994 (illustrated)

vinyl records, snooker balls, helidon sandstone, suiting cloth, sand
courtesy of the artist and Gow Langsford Gallery

each 2630 mm x 900 mm x 30 mm

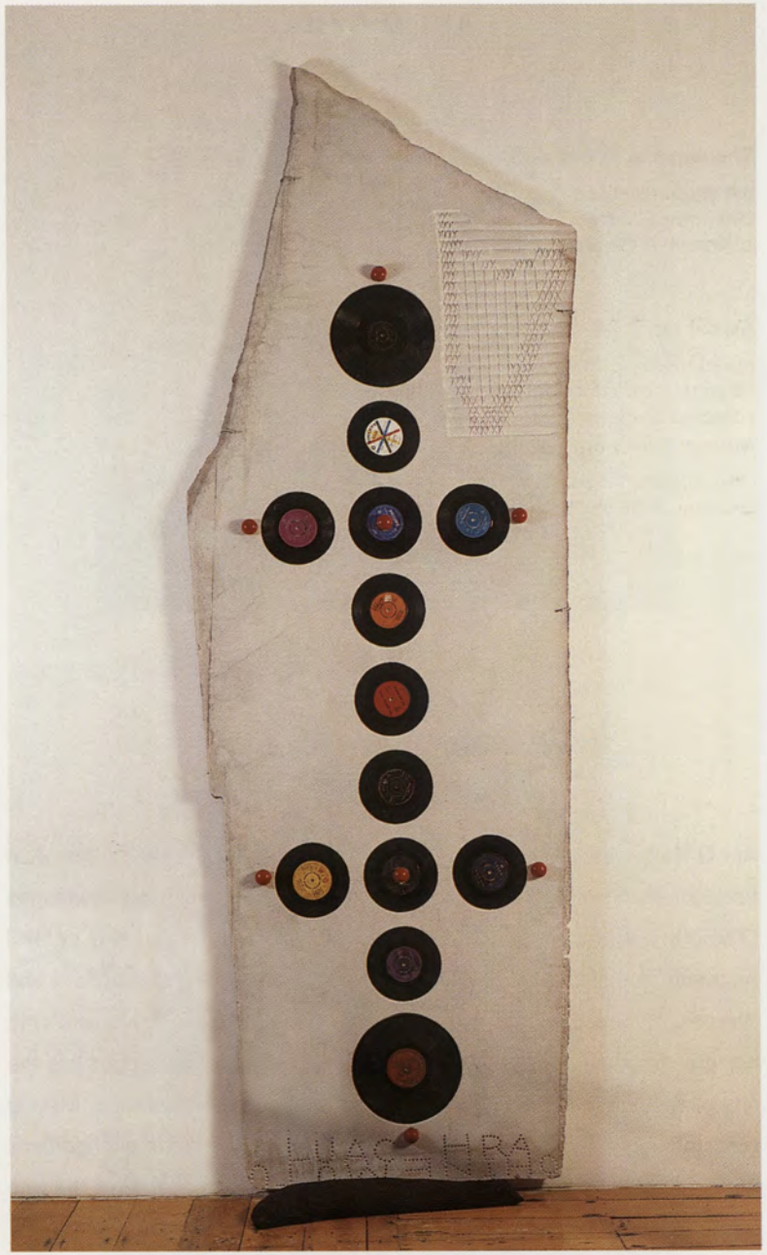
DENIS O'CONNOR born 1947

I grew up in a state-house in a street called TARAWERA in a suburb called ST. HELIER, in a city called AUCKLAND in a country called NIEUW ZEELAND.

The native tongues I listened to were Lilting Gaelic brogues and a chorus of gregorian chants in the air that called Test Matches from JOHANNESBURG, the second leg of the double at TE AWAMUTU or the Latest Smash Hit from MOTOWN. Dogs barked at headlands in the silences inbetween.

My work is a way of fitting all this and more into the space between my arms where the thing called my culture can be measured and felt.

At present Writer-in-Residence, School of Architecture and Design, Unitec, Auckland.



ANI O'NEILL

The nervous system '95 1995 (illustrated p 67)
gift wrapping ribbon
600 mm x 700 mm
collection of the artist

Sweet rap 1995 (detail illustrated)
mixed media
10 parts, installed dimensions 540 mm x 4850 mm x 100 mm
collection of the artist

Ani O'Neill was born in Auckland in 1971. Her work reflects her dual Rarotongan, New Zealand background. More specifically it acknowledges O'Neill's upbringing by her Cook Island grandparents in the central Auckland district of Ponsonby — once home to working class Maori and Polynesian, now the café centre of New Zealand. O'Neill still lives with her grandmother in the house in which her grandmother taught her the arts of tivaevae making, crochet, sewing, lei making and weaving. Making contemporary art using these skills allows O'Neill to continue the traditions her grandmother brought from the Cook Islands and to bridge the gap between the two sides of her cultural heritage.

MICHAEL PAREKOWHAI

Ataarangi 1990
automotive paint, wood, steel
1607 mm x 1000 mm x 100 mm
courtesy of the artist and Gregory Flint Gallery

Ataarangi 1990
automotive paint, wood, steel
1607 mm x 1000 mm x 100 mm
collection of the Paris Family

Michael Parekowhai is of Maori (Nga-Ariki) Te Aitanga and Rongowhakaata and Euopean descent. He was born on 13 May 1968 in Kenepuru Hospital next to the psychiatric institution in Porirua — the last of five children born to Rose and George Parekowhai. He was four years old before he spoke his first words, taught to him by a group of intellectually handicapped children. As his parents were both teachers he was always close to a school classroom from an early age and this has proved to be a major on-going influence in his thinking about his art. Parekowhai regards a large part of his work to date as being about reliving a few crucial years in his childhood. At present he teaches art in an Auckland secondary school.

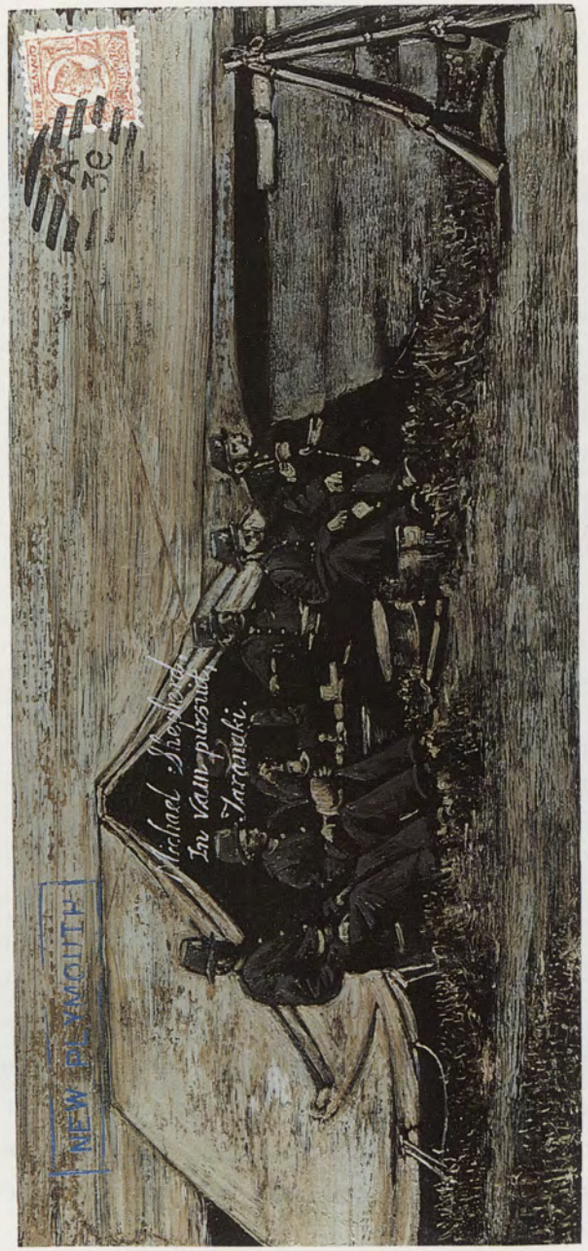
MICHAEL SHEPHERD

A colonial male's colonial mail (inheritances) 1992/94 (detail illustrated)
6 panels oil on board
installed dimensions 465 mm x 540 mm
collection of the artist

Dead letter mail from the colonial service 1995
10 panels oil on board
installed dimensions 505 mm x 820 mm
collection of the artist

Five fiscal envelopes (the language of colonialism) 1995
5 panels oil on board
installed dimensions 465 mm x 620 mm
collection of the artist

Michael Shepherd was born at Ngaruawahia in 1950 of Scots, Irish and English descent. He regards himself as a sort of "amateur historian camouflaged as an artist". Shepherd's chief interest has been in New Zealand social history between 1880 and 1950. This history is a largely obscure regional history in which the language of memory plays a major part. As Shepherd says: "This obscure, fought over history allows me great manoeuvrability as an artist in that I can ride the boundaries between art, geography, sociology and history and create a model through which time and narrative might plausibly be depicted."



YUK KING TAN

Ping 1995
mixed media
1530 mm x 1400 mm x 140 mm
courtesy of the artist and Sue Crockford Gallery

Although born in Australia in 1971 and having lived in Malaysia and the United States, Yuk King Tan regards herself as a Chinese New Zealander. Her work examines intersections between art, ethnicity and commerce. In her work to date she has developed a distinctive vocabulary of objects and motifs including details of her face and body, decorative fans, Buddhist paper burial dresses, firecrackers and red tassels. In her recent "shop-counter-culture" work Tan says she "incorporates the aesthetics of display and merchandising to activate the notion of the shop as site for the commodification of culture".

SANJAY THEODORE

Curious orange 1995
mixed media on card, ladder
2630 mm x 1920 mm x 600 mm
courtesy of the artist and New Work Studio

Sanjay Theodore was born in Ludhiana in 1967 and lived in Chandrigah, North India, until he was six years old. Brought up on the edge of a border war with Pakistan and a larger war with China, Theodore attributes his survival to the wits of his parents and their strong will to live. As an "accidental tourist" Theodore was led around the world by his father's research work in medical technology. Although he has stayed longest in New Zealand Theodore has also lived in England, Australia and the United States. As he puts it, "in any such journey culture becomes comparative and so I am uncomfortable with parallels made between my work and Indian art history". Whatever place he has been in, it has always felt to some extent like being in a strange and unfamiliar land.

LEON VAN DEN EIJKEL

Acupuncture, Schs I 1994
(illustrated)
cibachrome transparency, light box
500 mm x 755 mm x 165 mm
courtesy of the artist and
New Work Studio

The healing art, Schs II 1994
(illustrated)
cibachrome transparency, light box
500 mm x 755 mm x 165 mm
collection A T and J B Gibbs

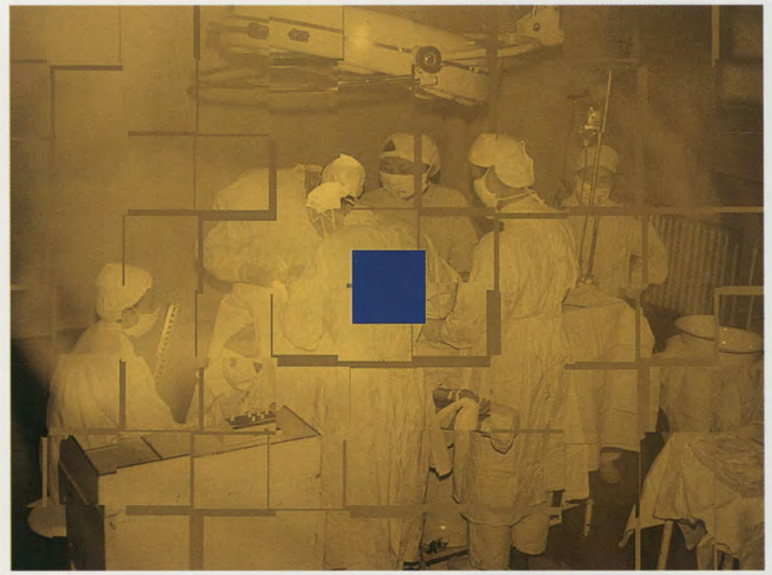
The anaesthetist, Schs III 1994
cibachrome transparency, light box
500 mm x 755 mm x 165 mm
courtesy of the artist and
New Work Studio

Restructure I, man's body 1993
mixed media
1135 mm x 1377 mm
courtesy of the artist and
New Work Studio

Restructure 17, man's body 1993
mixed media
1135 mm x 1377 mm
courtesy of the artist and
New Work Studio

Restructure 33, man's body 1993
mixed media
1135 mm x 1377 mm
courtesy of the artist and
New Work Studio

Leon van den Eijkel was born in the Hague, the Netherlands in 1940. His mother was of Polish and Russian background and his father was Dutch. His father taught his children American Indian stories and told them he was an Indian chief who had met Buffalo Bill. Van den Eijkel regards himself as an alien traveller. After studying in the Royal Academy of the Fine Arts in the Hague, van den Eijkel moved to Leiden in 1967. In 1986 he moved to Wellington, New Zealand, where he has been working on his on-going Mondrian project. In van den Eijkel's recent work Mondrian's principles have been introduced to and radically altered by a Pacific context. Since 1994 he has been working on a "Manhattan Project" through which he will symbolically give Manhattan Island, bought by Dutch settlers, back to the Native Americans.



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