



POWER WORKS
FROM THE MCA COLLECTION



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Organised by the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, the Dunedin Public Art Gallery and the Waikato Museum of Art and History

This project is supported by a grant from the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council

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GOVETT-BREWSTER ART GALLERY
NEW PLYMOUTH

TOUR

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EXHIBITION

Curator: Robert Leonard
Curator PETER TYNDALL: POSTCARDS: Sue Cramer
Exhibition manager: Terry Urbahn
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LEGACIES OF POWER

In 1993 the Museum of Contemporary Art generously agreed to allow the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery to curate an exhibition from its collection to tour New Zealand. The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery subsequently decided to organise the exhibition in partnership with two other galleries — the Waikato Museum of Art and History and the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Rather than pursue a particular theme or aspect, we decided to proceed from the strengths of the collection, shaping an exhibition around key works. For reasons of coherence and current interest we chose to focus on work produced since 1980. POWER WORKS is the result.

Why POWER WORKS? The title was chosen primarily as a tribute to Dr John Wardell Power (1881-1943), the Australian expatriate artist and medical practitioner whose generous bequest to the University of Sydney initiated the Power Institute, Power Collection and Power Gallery from which the MCA developed. Power left Australia in 1905, to live in Britain and Europe, where he became involved in the avant-garde scene as an artist, art theorist and collector. His own work showed the influence of cubism and surrealism in particular.

When Power left Australia its art museums were conservative and meagre — at least by today's standards — with little representation of or interest in international contemporary art. Power's desire to bring Australian audiences into contact with the latest developments in art prompted his extraordinary bequest. His will (made in 1939) envisaged a museum focusing on the purchase, housing and display of the most recent art.

Although Power died in 1943, it was not until the 1960s that the bequest matured and the first works were acquired for the Power Collection. In its early years the collection looked away from the major figures of contemporary art, concentrating instead on a lower tier of affordable European and American practitioners. Where major figures were pursued, it was usually multiples and works on paper that were secured rather than examples of their primary production. One particular area of strength, however, was European kinetic work.

The 1980s have seen the consolidation of the Power Collection with the purchase of major pieces by key figures in the international scene. In the 1980s the MCA has also actively collected Australian art (and especially Aboriginal art) as part of the "international". This activity has coincided with the rise of a generation of Australian artists — including Juan Davila, Mike Parr, Peter Tyndall, Imants Tillers and Jenny Watson — into international recognition. In recent years, then, the Power Collection has worked to reveal and construct an international and regional context for Australian contemporary art.

Establishing a collection was only part of Power's vision. He wanted the work to be seen. In the early years there were biennial shows of new acquisitions in commercial spaces and the Art Gallery of New South Wales. But it wasn't until 1980 that the temporary space called the Power Gallery opened on the University of Sydney campus, providing some display facilities for

the presentation and interpretation of the collection. But this new venue was not satisfactory for securing a public audience. Arriving as job-sharing joint curators in 1984, Leon Paroissien and Bernice Murphy sought to move the Gallery out of the confines of academia to a more public frontage. In 1989 the Power Gallery closed, to reopen as the Museum of Contemporary Art in 1991, in dramatically enlarged premises in a highly visible and accessible location. Positioned on Circular Quay, the MCA is now able to access larger and more diverse audiences. Just over 50 years after his death, Dr Power's vision has finally been realised in all its parts.

POWER WORKS is perhaps also an ironic title. While the exhibition does contain some spectacular pieces, the MCA does not lay claim to an authoritative collection of international contemporary art of the period. The collection has been assembled judiciously, on what is now a comparatively tight budget; one that does not compare with, say, the current budgets of Australian state galleries or the Australian National Gallery. And not all the works in POWER WORKS are major or expensive examples of their producer's work. There is, for instance, a small painting on paper by Sigmar Polke and a collection of unlimited-edition multiples by Katharina Fritsch. POWER WORKS also features a small exhibition-within-the-exhibition of works that would not normally be considered of museum status: PETER TYNDALL: POSTCARDS. The exhibition comes from the MCA's Contemporary Art Archive, which specifically addresses the kind of "minor" ephemeral and conceptually-based works that tend to be lost in the gap between a museum's primary collection and its library. Assembled by Sue Cramer, the curator of the Contemporary Art Archive, this exhibition provides an active counterpoint to the authority of the major work.

The title has other implications. One of the key themes of art in the period covered by the exhibition is power, particularly the languages of authority: the rhetorics of the state, of history, of modern art, of the self. Many of the POWER WORKS question, undermine or rephrase these authorities. In some works the authority of the museum itself is addressed. We are therefore happy to offer this exhibition, not as an authoritative picture, but rather as a heterotopia: a place where values might be argued, inverted, contested and deranged — a collision of perspectives. We have followed this through in the catalogue by inviting a variety of writers to contribute short essays to accompany plates of the works. Their texts, we believe, show that these works remain contentious, that they are still in the process of being argued for, with and about.

John McCormack, Dunedin Public Art Gallery

Priscilla Pitts and Robert Leonard, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery

Bruce Robinson, Waikato Museum of Art and History

Idiots (1981) is a double portrait of a young man pinned like an elegant butterfly on to a soft field of interwoven brown brushstrokes: the right hand panel is a loosely painted mirror image of the left. Many of Chia's paintings are representations of pensive artists. Because the portrait photographs of the artist found in exhibition catalogues show a similarly self-conscious figure, it is possible to assume that *Idiots* is, at least in part, a portrait of the artist as a postmodern young man. Each element of the painting both alludes to and is oddly disassociated from the superficially expressionist, bravura brushwork of Matisse's early self portraits. Although the texture of the picture is rough, it is rough in a contrived, curvilinear and regular way, like a work after School of London painter Frank Auerbach copied by numbers. For an Australian or New Zealand audience, though, the English painter's search for authenticity is both familiar and flattering, while the Italian artist's nostalgic casuistry is far more unfamiliar, even though it has extensive historical precedent.

Both faces in *Idiots* mimic the triumphant early Modernist arbitrariness of paintings like Matisse's famous *Self portrait* of 1906. *Idiots'* heads are similarly modelled in irregular ribbons of bright colour (red eyebrows, olive shadows and purple noses) in contrast with the siennas and ochres that dominate the rest of the picture. Chia's Europe is a weird and self-consciously alienated place: history is tiring; culture is omnipresent; *faux-naivety* is sophisticated. Seen from the other side of the planet, Chia's subject — the young man of *Idiots* — has the creepy charm of Henry James' *Europeans*.

For all the rhetoric that surrounded the *transavanguardia* — a loosely-knit group of neo-expressionist Italian painters, including Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente and Enzo Cucchi, who attained international celebrity at the start of the 1980s — there is in fact very little sign in Chia's painting of an iconoclastic refusal of early modernism. Rather it suggests a nostalgic recreation of that period's ambience. From the vantage-point of the mid-1990s, *Idiots* is not a "wild visionary spectral" painting (the title of an exhibition of German art, mostly neo-expressionist painting, that toured Australia and New Zealand in 1986).

In Australia, the *transavanguardia* arrived in large survey shows like the Sydney Biennales. The 1982 Biennale catalogue reproduces another double image by Chia — *Due solitari* (1981) — which represented two figures striding away from each other. The same Biennale featured Francesco Clemente's *Two painters* (1980) — yet another painting of two men, one looking forwards, the other looking backwards. Many of Chia's paintings portray artists at the centre of a constructed world, surrounded by the imagery of dreams; others show handsome youths striding across the universe.

In the rushed moment of its antipodean dissemination *transavanguardia* art was projected as a return to Painting, but its excessive self-confidence and bombastic rhetoric should not be mistaken for naivety or real expressivity. The major art museums of Australia — including the MCA — acquired representative collections of Italian *transavanguardia* and German neo-expressionism from the early 1980s onwards. Institutions and collectors in Australia, the United States and Europe were extremely supportive of painters like Chia.

However, as in the United States, these pictures also encountered considerable critical resistance; in Australia they met with great hostility from postmodern critics like *Art and text's*

editor, Paul Taylor, who penned an angry essay titled "Angst in my pants". American critics accused painters such as Chia of a forced childishness and of reactionary appropriation directed by market-driven values and characterised by the glamorous context of an art-market boom, fashion magazine coverage of artists' life-style excesses, Soho loft-living, and the lionisation of art dealers like Mary Boone. The *transavanguardia* — and Sandro Chia in particular — suffered a considerable critical eclipse from the late 1980s onwards in a reaction against the artists' uncritical over-production.

Idiots is a highly contrived, knowing work. *Transavanguardia* entrepreneur Achille Bonito Oliva associated Chia with a capricious desire for elegance and nonchalance. In common with other pictures such as *The painter* (1983), *Idiots* subordinates references to the heroic male artist to another, more sophisticated cult, that of Bohemia. *Idiots* is painted in a fairly traditional manner — in uniform, painterly strokes as if an enlarged detail of a particularly sombre Divisionist canvas by Segantini. This controlled and contrived dynamism duplicates, in an enervated way, the painterly filaments of energy in Futurist painting. The link between this particularly style-conscious strand of early modernism and Sandro Chia is the bohemian cult of the Dandy — the cult of artists whose appearance is calculated to cause maximum effect. The subject of *Idiots* has fashionable shoes; he is smart, tasteful, cultured and a little world-weary, like the hero of an Antonioni or Fellini film. The existential world-weariness of Italian art-film heroes is seen in his agitated, *contrapposto* pose and effete features. A passage from Chia's long poem "Spring story" describes this mood:

*Euphoria, laughter and chaos
games and jokes.
It is dawn
but the crowd of guests shows no sign of leaving.
Few are they
who would return
to the hotel...²*

CHARLES GREEN

¹ *Art and text* 7 Spring 1982. pp48-60.

² *Sandro Chia: dipinti e titoli recenti / paintings and recent titles* (ed. Marià Luisa Frisa) Arnoldo Mondadori Arte, Milan, 1991. p59.

CHARLES GREEN is an artist and writer. He is the Australian reviewer for *Artforum* magazine. He is currently working on a book surveying contemporary Australian art.

Opposite: Sandro Chia *Idiots* 1981 oil paint on canvas



Peter Cripps's installation *From here on* (1989) consists of various elements: a number of geometric objects in raw plywood, some placed on the floor, others wall-mounted; six glass slides painted black, five of which are mounted in a row on the wall; and a polished wooden table and display cabinet, on top of which is placed the sixth glass slide. The installation was originally exhibited as one set among six, with the six display cases and accompanying slides in a symmetrical, ordered arrangement, and the plywood objects arranged in strategic asymmetry across the floor and walls of the gallery. The elements of this set may be variously installed according to the space they occupy — in recognition of it, rather than in spite of it.

While the objects function as art objects within the installation, they relate in different ways to the wider world of objects. The display case is typical of traditional museum cases in which collected objects may be arrayed and classified. The slides could stand in for any object mounted on the wall — a painting, a photograph, a label. Lying somewhere between minimal sculpture and furniture, the plywood forms are less determined by conventional structures. They are lighter, newer, more eccentrically placed. Juxtaposed with the other models of display, however, they also assume a kind of function, as frames, props or building blocks, but they hold more potential, opening space up to view rather than restricting or enclosing it.

Modest in scale, the work nevertheless draws upon a minimalist aesthetic which foregrounds the relationship between the viewer, the object and the surrounding space. This is achieved by the placement of the forms — on the floor and the wall, in clusters and separated — which hinders easy movement and disallows a singular viewpoint. We are encouraged to move through the space, to extend our point of view to its limit in all directions.

A distinguishing feature of the component forms in *From here on* is their emptiness. Whether an empty display cabinet, a blank black glass, or a hollow geometric form, they all lead our gaze elsewhere, beyond the object, to a framed piece of wall, table leg, column, cornice or, in the case of the reflecting glass, to oneself within the space. They draw our attention to small mundane spaces — a piece of felt lining in a display case, a triangle of parquet floor, or the line formed at the intersection of two walls, for example. The emptiness is unsettling and creates a kind of expectancy (unfulfilled by the revealed architectural surfaces) that is fed by the histories embedded in these forms — they appear to await an image, a specimen, a book, a sculpture. They reveal how our perception is constructed spatially, how we identify objects according to codes of display.

Although drawing us to the details of architectural form and surface, the work as a whole frames something larger — the physical and ideological space of the modern art museum, that in turn defines the way in which we interpret these objects as art. This is done not only by opening up the entire space to our view, but by mimicking museum display techniques and the controlling formal neutrality of the modern art museum. There is an attempt to come to terms with the lesson of the ready-made while still creating new objects. These forms have internalised their context, recognising that the presence of an object is not pure or independent.

This point of recognition is defined as a place from which to proceed to making objects, a point which acknowledges the past and boldly anticipates a full future, *from here on*. The title of the work conveys a sense of optimism, a surprising assertion given the world-weary endgame

machinations of much postmodern art. Cripps has described the work as consisting of “raw, blank models for a new art”, of objects that “are not empty of meaning, but prototypes; the beginning of a new project.”¹ We are invited to imagine answers to the question implied in the title and invoked by the austerity of the installation — what follows from here on?

LINDA MICHAEL

¹ Peter Cripps interviewed by Bob Lingard *From here on* City Gallery, Melbourne, 1989. p5.



LINDA MICHAEL is a Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney.

Opposite: Peter Cripps *From here on* 1989 display case, plywood, composition board and painted glass

In each panel of Juan Davila's *Fable of Australian painting* (1982-3) an artist stands in front of an easel, musing on the Australian landscape. The scenes they consider are overflowing with incongruous subject matter, and each artist paints in a very different style, but they all pursue the same project: to give order and unity to the place called Australia. They construct their visions of Antipodean culture by reducing its messy turbulence to the tightly stretched canvas on a steadfast easel, which appears in the centre of each panel. With a tough, fists-on-hips stance, the artist in the first panel calls for national independence with the slogan "A Republic for Australia". The second painter signs his canvas "Ned Kelly" and is saddled up ready to ride off into an Aussie sunset. Excitedly painting a pound sign on the canvas, the third artist watches a wind vane for the latest trend in sales of Australian culture. And in the last panel a colour field painting sits on the easel while the artist fantasises about being an international identity. Each of the frames recalls a popular myth about the "spirit of Australia": independent nation, romantic frontier, flavour-of-the-month antipode, or international terminus.

Davila distances himself from painters in search of the Australian spirit by using particularly crass and superficial visual languages. When he turned to painting in the mid 1970s his canvases emulated postcard and playing card designs. In the early 1990s his works often masquerade as decorative screens and panels. The comic strip format of *Fable of Australian painting*, with its clearly labelled caricatures and appropriations, was a style favoured by Davila during the 1980s. In 1981 Davila explained that the comic-strip "is one of the most important means of art because all the elements of production are shown".¹ The reader of a comic strip is aware that the artist is *constructing* a view of the world with metaphoric codes and easy-to-read symbols. It does not ask to be believed, it asks to be assembled.

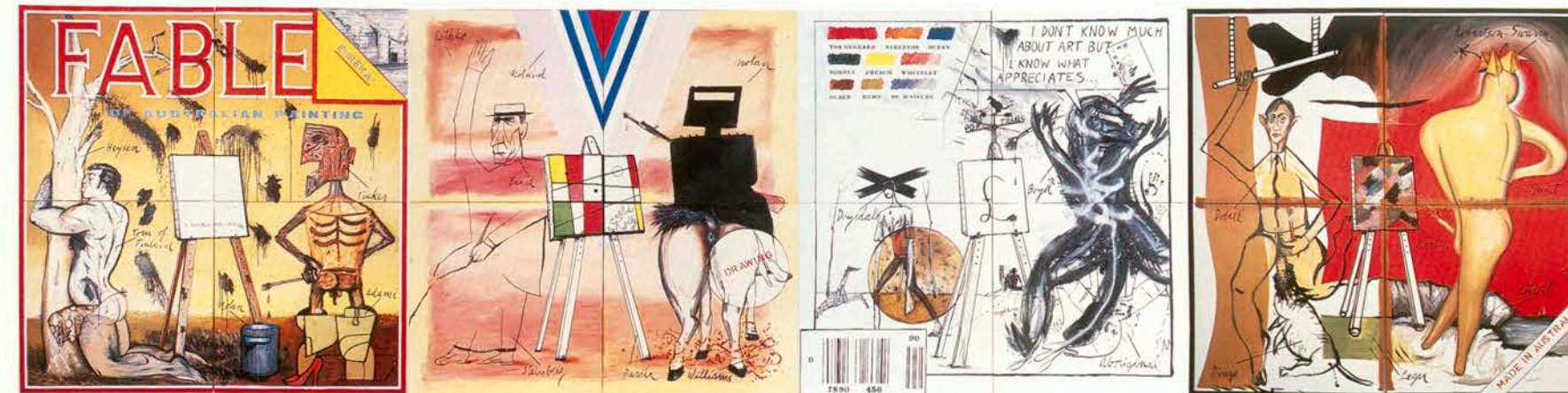
In the process of assembling a reading of the work, however, we realise that the various elements sit in awkward juxtaposition. The title panel and the "made in Australia" label suggest that they refer to the same history, but they don't correspond in a homogeneous way. Albert Tucker's expressionistic figure totters about in a stylised stiletto, borrowed from the wardrobe of contemporary Italian painter Valerio Adami. A character from gay porno comics copulates with the sensuous curves of a Hans Heysen gum tree. Davila's perverse inclusion of references to imagery from Australian and international contexts, produced for high and low audiences, complicates what we might understand as "Australian Art". These signs and symbols do not refer to a single national history. (The artificiality of Davila's aesthetic robs painting of any claim to verisimilitude.) It is in fact the failure of these superficial signs to convincingly refer to something specific which gives them meaning. They clash with each other and stutter irrationally, indicating that there is something that resists being articulated in a simple way.

Davila's fragmented vision of Australian identity is paralleled by his own transcultural makeup. Since immigrating from Chile in 1974, Davila has made a practice of travelling back and forth between Melbourne and Santiago, participating in both art communities. This movement has allowed Davila to develop a particularly dynamic artistic persona. His transient identity is continually affected by the inconsistencies between different sociopolitical agendas and artistic traditions. We might contrast this with Australia's current push for independence from the British Empire,

and the associated urgency to settle its relationships with indigenous people and Asian-Pacific neighbours. Rather than developing a sense of national identity capable of being transformed by encounters with difference and diversity, the government's aim is to resolve or at least regulate any conflicts. We are told that the republic will grow out of a unified people. In Davila's scheme of things however, the turbulence between different points of view becomes the very basis of identity. Unlike the heroic painters depicted in *Fable of Australian painting*, Juan Davila represents Australian culture as an unstable encounter between disparate stereotypes. There is no belief here in a quintessential Australia. He works from the premise that the shape of our world is artificial rather than natural. The meaning of the geographic territory called Australia is constructed, so rather than searching for an underlying essence to the country Davila takes it at face value, finding meaning in the clashing images of national identity.

STEPHEN O'CONNELL

¹ Juan Davila "Spider woman in Australia" *Art and text* 4 Summer 1981. p16.



STEPHEN O'CONNELL is a post-graduate student in the Visual Arts Department at Monash University, Melbourne.

Opposite: Juan Davila *Fable of Australian painting* 1982-3 oil paint on linen

These are mugshots, documents of another person's subjugation to police surveillance and the glorified snooping of anthropology. Yet I can't help feeling I am the one on trial, submitted to an interrogation no less uncomfortable for being totally unexpected. You walk into an art gallery and reasonably expect to be the one doing the looking, at your own leisure and for a brief while the mistress of all you survey. It's not like that here. These people look right back at you, dumbly, and you have nothing to say to them. Life in the late twentieth century seems a long way from petty criminality in remote South American outposts and even further from the people of Tierra del Fuego. Across the immense distances in time and space old photographs signal, concern for a man long dead is an easy irrelevance, pity impertinent.

I scan the faces more closely. So many of them. What events left these traces of women and men in negative? William stares back so boldly, appraisingly, at the now nameless police photographer. What brought him to the attention of provincial powers? Was he more delinquent than his fellows or merely less agile? Photographs promise so much information, but no amount of looking will tell me more about these people. Entire histories are hidden in these records, obscured mirrors of resistance to officialdom, regional rejection of the capital city, markers of desperate poverty. Some faces seem defiant, some awkward, and some like Tobias hold on to their dignity in the face of this systematic spying. But whatever brought these people to the attention of the documentary machine is lost forever. All that remains is the evidence of their once having been captured, photographed and humiliated. Perhaps the child's drawings are more revealing about the human heart. For hers is another version of the "truth", one seriously at odds with the camera's fetishisation of appearance.

I recognise this work by Eugenio Dittborn is spare, strict, even stylish in its austerity; the non-woven lining fabric he borrows from tailoring is completely devoid of charm, durable, portable and convenient rather than seductive in any sense. I understand presenting the images in mailing packages suggests the fleeting and contingent character of all social encounters. As an art historian I note Dittborn's insistence on the non-precious and multiple character of his work, a legacy from post-object art experimentation in the 1960s and 1970s when artists in many countries rejected art's trafficking in luxury goods. I applaud the artist's research into the histories of colonisation and surveillance in modernising Chile, and his search to understand the present circumstances of his country. I also appreciate the distancing effect achieved by the cool interplay between the photographs, drawings and texts, indeed that these devices initially worked to delay my gut reactions in favour of more speculative discussions with the work.

So much for scholarship. The work still makes me feel bleak, uneasy. I cannot escape these faces from the past. I begin to panic, agitation rising inside of me to demand an outlet. But there is none. It is far too late. What today is only an image was once a person, a human being with desires and hopes. There is no telling what befell them in the far-off brutality of their times. Thus the emotional horrors of living in modernity strike home, mocking one's inability to act against the organised power of the state, worse, one's inability even to conceive of an effective tactic. This is a catalogue of shocking helplessness. But maybe these people resisted. Even today these subjects of the camera's imperium are somehow impervious, holding on to their thoughts and

feelings in the face of the monstrous interconnected apparatuses of modern policing and scholarship. Back then they were muted, from populations whose appearance in these records could not guarantee they were seen or heard. On the contrary. Now they will not speak.

Even open-ended questions demand an answer. The cumulative effect of *The 5th history of the human face (The London Camino)* (1989) is to provoke pity after all, not only for these individuals but for ourselves. Dittborn's faces are but a tiny sampling from the greater gathering of all humanity, set into its grid of overlapping relationships. The mailing envelopes are displayed in each location: they chart the small individual movements from which grand communications systems are compiled. As the panels unfold each time the work is exhibited, the transience of human existence is acted out in episodes, now in this city, now in that. One and many: the work is a play between each and all, between each image in each grid, and all forms of communication, and, eventually, every instance of human struggle. It is clear: the complicity of even such casual audiences as ourselves is implied precisely by our easy access to these distant registers of pain. Standing before the work, I am at the same time interrogated, and the one asking the questions. Suddenly I remember lines from John Donne's great meditation, forgotten many years ago: "Never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee". Are we all to be silenced?

JULIE EWINGTON

JULIE EWINGTON is Curator at the Canberra School of Art Gallery. In 1993 she received a Writer's Fellowship from the Visual Arts/Crafts Board of the Australia Council to research contemporary art in South East Asia.

Opposite: Eugenio Dittborn *The 5th history of the human face (The London Camino)* 1989 screenprint and fluorescent paint on non-woven fabric; ink, postage stamps and crayon on printed paper envelopes



Katharina Fritsch speaks of wanting to show "the clarity of the things themselves — their essential qualities and characteristics."¹ She always begins her work with a clearly visualised image which she realises as exactly as possible. Her objects typically have the appearance of prototypes or replicas: "I don't aim for expressiveness. That is a concept that I find too spongy, too vague. On the contrary, I find precision to be the best possible contribution one can make to art."²

The arresting simplicity of her work makes a direct impression on the viewer, who immediately recognises something familiar but also senses that these objects do not entirely belong to the ordinary or the everyday. Her imagery originates in personal experience and recollection (she has disavowed any interest in exhibiting readymades), although subjective qualities are kept at a distance by the minimalist precision of the works and methods of production which erase any trace of the artist's hand.

All of Fritsch's works could, at least in principle, be produced in various sizes or on a mass scale. According to Fritsch: "It's very important that they be exact; they have to be repeatable."³ Each of the five objects included in this exhibition has been produced as an unlimited edition. Some suggest an everyday purpose. *Vase* is one of a number of domestic objects Fritsch has made, including other vases, a bowl, cooking pot-lids, a broom, a mirror, a bookcase. *Grünes seidentuch* can be worn as a scarf. *Katze* resembles an ornament. *Madonna*, based on a pocket-sized souvenir from Lourdes in France, and *Gehirn* are more ambiguous in their function, if no less meticulously observed.

Every detail of colour and form is integral to the realisation of the work: the perfectly arched back and taut curl of the black cat's tail; the precise yellow of the Madonna; the symmetry of the pale-white brain; the image of the ocean-liner on the white opaque vase, and the heraldic depiction of a knight on a white horse on the green silk cloth. Each of these works is distinct, emblematic, perfectly formed, asserting its material presence whilst remaining an enigma.

Elsewhere these works have been exhibited in sculptural configurations with an insistent repetition of identical forms: a pyramid of vases; a column of Madonnas; brains arranged in two adjoining cones joined at their points; green cloths bundled up on a black table resembling a bargain counter. These typically geometric and symmetrical formations demonstrate Fritsch's predilection for formality and order.

Fritsch once referred to herself as a "manufacturing company"⁴, although her editioned works are never produced on a truly mass scale but are intended to function instead within the discourse of art. Their likeness to and yet difference from industrially produced goods, their apparent banality and yet qualities of specialness, are part of what makes these works so compelling. Fritsch's interest in the English Arts and Crafts Movement, her fascination with the idea of "making the world a better and more beautiful place with the aid of objects harmonious in themselves", as Julian Heynen has expressed it,⁵ is particularly revealing of her concerns.

So too is the artist's interest in the concrete qualities of her objects; a newly created, reconstructed reality that she refers to as "exemplary form ... a kind of structuring that corresponds to the thing itself. Certain things should have a particular form; this is what I want to bring out in them." Fritsch's pursuit of ideal form can be likened to a form of structuralist activity, a desire to:

"reconstruct an object in such a way as to manifest the rules by which the object functions."⁶ It is through her precise choice of colours, material and scale (her works range from the miniature to the gigantic) and her use of repetition that Fritsch charges her works imaginatively, lifting them from daily reality to a paradigmatic level.

The yellow Madonna is one of Fritsch's most vivid and famous forms. The image of the Madonna has become hackneyed through its use as a souvenir. But Fritsch's colouration shifts the meaning away from Christian ideas "... just as if I were all of a sudden showing it in a completely foreign context."⁷ Just how foreign that viewing context was can be seen from the hostile reaction the work received when a six-foot version was shown in a public square in the Catholic town of Munster and was vandalised and eventually destroyed.

Fritsch's works have a singularity and presence that is not dependent upon notions of uniqueness. "Each is a world of its own and presents itself as an event."⁸ This accounts for a certain unpredictability in her work and for its capacity to surprise and even astonish (as if catching us off-guard) by confounding our usual sense of things. The strangely disconnected character of her objects gives them a startling lucidity, not unrelated to dreamlike experiences, suggesting that for all their seeming anonymity and precision they function as highly charged catalysts for memories and experiences that have collective as well as individual dimensions.

SUE CRAMER

1 *Binationale: German art of the late 80s* Städtische Kunsthalle, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Dumont Buchverlag Köln, 1988. p117.

2 *ibid.* p117.

3 *ibid.* p116.

4 quoted by Christoph Blase "On Katharina Fritsch" *Artscribe* March-April 1988. p54.

5 *Katharina Fritsch 1979-1989* Westfälischer Kunstverein Münster, and Portikus, Frankfurt am Main, 1989. p67.

6 Roland Barthes, quoted in Jean-Christoph Ammann *Katharina Fritsch* Kunsthalle Basel and Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1988. p7.

7 *Binationale* op cit. p116.

8 Ammann, op cit. p8.

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Opposite: Katharina Fritsch *Vase* 1987-8 screenprint on acrylic *Katze* (cat) 1981-9 acrylic *Madonna* 1982 acrylic paint on plaster *Gehirn* (brain) 1987-9 acrylic *Grünes seidentuch* (green silk cloth) 1982-9 screenprint on silk



For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.

Isaiah 65:17

The more Christianity has been discredited by artists since the 1970s, the more Christian symbols have appeared in contemporary art. Now they symbolise the exhaustion of religion. Not so much a way of living, Christianity is increasingly presented as a way of dressing up.

Teasing this fashion, Gilbert and George have consistently called themselves Christian artists. And just as they have always presented their lives as art, they have presented Christianity in their art as the whole of life.

But the Christian symbols that appear in the art of Gilbert and George often seem to be turned against Christianity. They are turned against Christianity as it is known by those who insist that Christianity is turned against the world. All too often Christianity is known as other-worldly.

Ironically, those who repudiate Christianity as un-worldly do so against the authority of many Christian thinkers who divine in Christianity a religion driven by its very mythology deep into this world. In our time, the most powerful expression of such radical Christian thinking has been death-of-God theology. For these Christians, the incarnation of Christ represents, in the words of a Gilbert and George title, the sacred coming "down to earth". This movement is clinched by the crucifixion, the actual death of God — transcendence irrevocably subsumed by immanence.

Although the death of God was announced with the crucifixion, the realisation of this event has blazed fully only in our time. The loss of God is the lurking darkness illuminating contemporary life like mescaline. For this reason, the theologian Thomas Altizer writes: "Ours is a time in which all the traditional theological categories have become meaningless. However, if theology will open itself to a truly paradoxical language, it must be prepared for the possibility that the most radical expression of profane existence will coincide with the highest expressions of the sacred."¹

Such inversion is crucial to the art of Gilbert and George. *Shit faith* (1982), for example, shows a cross made from faeces. Quite obviously an outrage to Christianity as it has been known, this work equally clearly figures the epiphany of the sacred in the very bowels of profanity.

Shit faith belongs to a series of works called "Modern faith". This series complements "Modern fears", a group of works made between 1980 and 1981. In these two series the polarity of sacred and profane, faith and doubt, hope and fear are held in tension — a tension quietly maintained in *Friendship* (1982).

Friends are united by fellow feeling for each other, as we imagine Gilbert and George themselves are twinned. The work *Friendship*, however, admits separation before allowing any sense of unity. Frequently Gilbert and George picture themselves striking shared attitudes. But in *Friendship*, a standing Gilbert gazes upwards while George, crouching, looks apprehensively towards a band of three sullen, pretty young men. In this work too the black line around each figure enforces the idea of separation, confirmed by the division of the work into two halves.

Friendship is divided into two spheres, recalling ancient cosmology which pictured the earth as flat and heaven held back by the vault of the sky. The skies are dark, the clouds thick and

glowering, bearing down upon the land, disconsolate. Heaven, however, is heavy-laden with the goods of the earth.

In this work, Gilbert and George suggest that the maintenance of the ancient division between heaven and earth sows estrangement. On the other hand, if the good that was formerly projected on heaven is recognised as this-worldly — if heaven is brought down to earth — then friendship might truly take root amongst men.

STUART MCKENZIE

¹ *Mircea Eliade and the dialectic of the sacred* Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1975. pp17-18.



STUART MCKENZIE is a filmmaker and writer who lives in Wellington. His latest film is *Snap*.

Opposite: Gilbert and George *Friendship* 1982 photo-piece

Keith Haring was the true "radiant child" of the 1980s. An artistic legatee of Andy Warhol, Haring created a consummate art which merged the worlds of mixed media and entertainment through the wizardry of mass productive techniques into a popular amalgam which was equally at home on the street and in the discotheque as in the gallery. A sexually liberated, young gay man, his work ranged from mother and child images through indictments of nuclear weapons, apartheid and drugs to positive images supporting people with AIDS and advocating safer sex practices, all of which were user friendly.

While trained as a commercial art student, Haring first came to public attention in 1981 with his chalk drawings on black paper which covered expired New York subway hoardings. For the next four years, the artist would produce over five thousand of these instant graffiti drawings which very quickly became collectibles. A true improviser, Haring drew without a predetermined plan or concept, borrowing from young Black and Hispanic graffiti artists whose tags (a.k.a. colophons) decorated both the interiors and exteriors of subway cars. Haring's own tag, a crawling baby from whose body radiated sun rays (which was, in fact, an idealised self-portrait) spoke with the confidence and exuberance of the artistic moment.

Throughout the early 1980s, he designed myriad cartoon figures which were raceless, genderless, and ageless but, in sum, represented "all of humankind". Even with his first exhibition at Soho's Tony Shafrazi Gallery in 1982, Haring avoided anything that would alienate his working class audience and began to paint on vinyl tarpaulins rather than canvas. In conjunction with this exhibition, Haring produced a 32-page colouring book which utilised the same characters found in his paintings. For him, every composition was eminently reproducible and totally flexible in both scale and medium.

With the creation of the Pop Shop in 1986, Haring was to put this mutability to the supreme test as he produced everything: buttons, T-shirts, posters, radios, inflatable "radiant child" dolls, Swatches, album covers, even refrigerator magnets! Just as he'd gone into the subways to avoid the curators and critics who shunned his art, the Pop Shop represented another way to remain part of popular culture and yet, in the artist's own words, "to still keep it art".

The MCA's large banner recalls the early graffiti years. These works were produced quickly to avoid arrest by subway police, but also with a clear connection to the automatic writing beloved by the Dada artists. The almost heraldic, rampant man-dog recalls cave art and also the body paintings done for religious ceremonies by various indigenous peoples (Haring also decorated the lithe bodies of dancer Bill T. Jones and pop star Grace Jones for gala events). In both traditions the sacred and the profane — music, dancing and oblivion — ran side by side, as exhibited by the barking, dancing demiurge whose body fills the entire field of the tarpaulin. Haring has chosen a colour scheme which, in itself, speaks to vernacular taste — the red and orange employed in the logos of all popular fast food restaurants in America; colours that scream: eat me, buy me, love me!

Haring created his own brand of performance art which most frequently involved large bands of children who worked under his direction to create mammoth outdoor paintings and street banners. Whether these creations took the form of party decorations or fund-raising tools

for AIDS philanthropies, each succeeded in galvanising the community for which it was intended. In his last years, aware of his own HIV positive status, Haring became an articulate and passionate supporter of ACT-UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) whose street-savvy demonstrations mirrored the strategies of his own activist work. Keith Haring himself died from AIDS-related complications on February 16, 1990. He was the most accessible and, hence, successful chronicler of a new territory of art that mirrored a new society to which the 1980s had given rise.

THOMAS W. SOKOLOWSKI

THOMAS W. SOKOLOWSKI is Director of the Grey Art Gallery and Study Centre, New York University.

Opposite: Keith Haring Untitled 1982 acrylic paint on vinyl tarpaulin



"Appropriation" is a word that has been very busy in the ten years since Richard Killeen made this work. It has been casually used to describe various modes of art making involved in collecting and recontextualising found imagery. It doesn't seem much of a leap to say all art involves appropriation but in saying this very little is revealed about either art or appropriation. While "appropriation" easily stuck to the work of influential artists of the 1980s like Barbara Kruger, it has recently acquired a quite different and more particular focus. "Appropriation" has become embedded in the debate over cultural property. The appropriateness of appropriation is increasingly contentious and the term "appropriation" has become something of a slur. To title a work *Appropriation* in 1983 is clearly not the same as titling a work *Appropriation* in 1994. The difference is a measure of the political and moral shift of a decade.

This difference is also indicative of the way language persists in shedding and acquiring meaning. Words can never be wholly appropriated as they are always open to interpretation and re-appropriation. The persistence of language, ideas and art depends upon the ease with which they are appropriated. Francis Pound writes "even on the rare occasions where their titles are positively buttonholing," Killeen's cut-outs "are never quite colonised by the name."¹ Certainly the relation between this particular work and its title is a precarious one; it raises questions rather than confirming and sealing a definitive reading. The images in *Appropriation #3* (1983) don't smack of a *particular* time or place. There is nothing like the unmistakable profile of the Duke of Urbino, the pieces of Celtic ornament or the Hypercard formats from the computer screen that appear elsewhere in Killeen's cut-outs. Appropriation is less than clear-cut, like many things it is relative and in the eye of the beholder. Our detection of appropriation rests on the information we have at hand: our ability to attribute to the image a *specific* origin. Some images, however, refuse a proper place, they shake off labels, they will not be pinned. The frog, the fish and the deeply ambiguous blends of the strange and familiar that comprise *Appropriation #3* open the title to speculation, they point to its limits. These images test the territory of appropriation, asking how and why they sit under that heading.

Killeen's cut-outs make room for the sort of digression that supplies a whole context of association. Like collections, they hold out the elusive promise of infinite connections and relations to be uncovered. Stephen Greenblatt writes that precariousness, "a quality of artifacts that museums obviously dread", is "a rich source of resonance".² He sees the vulnerability of objects as revelatory of the displacement that marks their positioning within the museum. Precariousness encourages the kind of historicising gaze Greenblatt advocates. Lightly pinned to the wall and so readily rearranged, Killeen's cut-outs have a potential mobility that inspires a similar vein of observation.

Appropriation and collection are associated with greed and possession, stealing and colonisation, but they are also intimately bound up with taste making and breaking. The changing and shaping of personal perception and opinion is a continual process of appropriation. Collection is an obsessive and idiosyncratic activity and Killeen's cut-outs carry a compulsive sense of this. In *Appropriation #3* only some of the cut-out pieces are singular images; others are ambiguous hybrids, collections breaking off and forming within the larger collection. The more cut-outs Killeen makes, the more the creeping sense of being overwhelmed by the oeuvre develops. As more and

more images collect, the chance of recovering an identity for the oeuvre becomes slight. But every introduction of an image extends the possibilities for repetition and mutation, and sets off again the desire for coherence that drives the collection.

"Appropriation" is often used to describe borrowing and imitation, suggesting a regurgitation of the same. The cut-outs, however, hold out the possibility of transformation and unexpected combination. They draw attention to the flimsiness of categories and suggest, not the same, but different ways of relating and connecting. Killeen's cut-outs are remarkably graphic. In *Appropriation #3* even the most puzzling enigmatic images are sharply defined. Their clear outlines promise coherence and order. But, unlike collections which can be catalogued and arranged precisely, Killeen's cut-outs hang in any order, touching, overlapped or spaced. The cut-outs are characterised by uncertain spaces. There is a gap between the title and the work, and between each piece surrounded by changeable pockets of space.

Cut-out and out of place, Killeen's works continually invite filling in, digression and contextual speculation. What they have is an openness to appropriation.

ANNA MILES

¹ Francis Pound "Richard Killeen's stacking, naming and lightness" *Richard Killeen* Workshop Press, Auckland, 1991. p13.

² Stephen Greenblatt "Resonance and wonder" *Exhibiting cultures: the poetics and politics of museum display* (eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine) Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington and London, 1991. p43.

ANNA MILES is an artist and writer. She is currently based in Wellington.
Opposite: Richard Killeen *Appropriation #3* 1983 acrylic paint on aluminium



"We will no longer be seen and not heard". The words — once you can make them out and string them together in the right order — sound declarative, angry, triumphant. Does Barbara Kruger's work make a simple, direct political statement? If so, time may not have served her too well. The vanguard feminist art of 1985 can all too readily be ambushed as dreaded "politically correct" propaganda in these ungenerous, conservative days of the mid 1990s. One well imagines the diatribe from a Robert Hughes acolyte on some cultured current affairs programme on prime-time TV — casting Kruger as a grandstanding player in our "culture of complaint", and delivering a final, fatal one-liner about how Kruger and her stylish, radically chic compatriots are both seen and heard *ad nauseam* in the international avant-garde academy.

Maybe what has been lost in both the empathetic acclaim and the sourpuss derision heaped on Kruger's work is the sense that she is, after all, an artist — and that her art is the sum of its materials, not its imagined intentions. This Untitled (1985), in its arrangement of images and sound, may strike a viewer as direct and transparent, but it is deceptively so. The piece plays off apparently simple elements — the three-by-three panel arrangement, the choice of short, basic words — against logics that are rather more playful and obscure, such as where the word appears within each image, the changes in colour from one image to the next, and the queer, heterogenous assortment of lines, bars, dots, backgrounds and shadings in the total assemblage, which gets queerer the more obsessively one stares at and studies it.

There is an emblematic, almost medieval picture book aspect to Kruger's art — sparse, terse, illustrative conjunctions of word and image for a didactic, modern, moral lesson. This obviousness is a ruse in so far as the artist is also clearly enamoured of contemporary modes of mass communication — TV and cinema, but especially advertising graphics and comic strip narrative. Kruger well knows that the meaning of ads or cartoons is communicated not directly, nor even through basic semiotic combinations of signs. Meaning sparks into life dynamically, through sudden, surprising interferences, collisions and mutations happening across all the levels and valencies of form and content. That is why Untitled dwells on "signing" (as in sign language) and on signifying — and more particularly on cliché, corny, obvious signs, ready to be played with and subverted mercilessly. Kruger's work undoubtedly offers a social analysis — but, mercifully for us, it is analysis that emerges from a knowing, intricate, masterful tinkering with exact cultural materials.

It has always been too easy to reduce the actual look and detail of Kruger's images to representational tokens offering simple messages: sinister looking man, woman with her arms crossed as if ready to be bound by rope, obedient girl. Yet the actual generic sources of her found imagery, and the kinds of very particular effects they produce, need to be carefully considered. Kruger's work, on the levels of both image and text, is part of a chapter in the history of "found object" appropriation art. Similar to Bruce Conner's classic avant-garde "compilation" films (such as *Report* and *Mongoloid*), Kruger draws very specifically on a family of pop culture images that are "old-fashioned", banal, suffused with a certain demented innocence and confidence. What cultural theorist Andrew Ross defines as the camp effect is important to Kruger's art: the sense that we are looking at images that once were effortlessly persuasive and seductive on the ideological

plane, but now no longer convince. So we are left examining the strange image-husks of bygone values and beliefs — all the documents that Kruger so fastidiously collects of people engaged in queer acts for the camera, like prayer or self-examination or rituals of etiquette and cleanliness.

There is a clean-cut, even moronic look to most of the poor individuals who end up as manipulable, two dimensional signs in Kruger's collages; these guinea pigs of a theatre of yesteryear, obediently slotting into the role which society set for them. There is even a droll note of pathos, as the postmodern collagist looks back on a nation of well-behaved people wishing on a star for all their consumerist, utopian dreams to come true. But there is a colder edge to her montage as well, a deliberately anti-human chill — caught particularly in the strategic cropping that Kruger is so fond of, cropping that leaves only half a head (with a mouth either gaping or jammed shut), or an awkward, sliced section of a torso in the picture. This form gives Untitled an unmistakably sci-fi, police state aura, somewhere between the chronicle of omnipresent social surveillance in Michel Foucault's *Discipline and punish* and the gothic, feminist nightmare of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's tale* as filmed by Volker Schlöndorff.

ADRIAN MARTIN

ADRIAN MARTIN is a film critic based in Melbourne. His first book *Phantasms* will be published this year.

Opposite: Barbara Kruger Untitled 1985 photolithograph and silkscreen on paper



Robert Longo's installation *Love police: engines in us (the doors) / Purple kids (sound) / Purple kids (heat)* (1982-3) along with two other works from the same period, *Now everybody* and *Corporate wars*, marked a break from his earlier, rather subculturally enclosed work to a bolder, more monumentally conceived and scaled way of working which, at the same time, showed a greater engagement with the everyday media(ted) images and forms of the contemporary world.

Love police... features the busts of middle-aged male and female figures ("love police") atop a bas-relief sculpture of a pile of wrecked cars; framed, painted drawings of children are placed on either side.

Longo has dramatised some major discontents of our civilisation in this triptych whose central sculpture welds dark images of eros to even darker images of thanatos, while the two side panels take us to much lighter economies of the body. By setting only the head and shoulders of his couple upon a mountainous heap of junked cars, Longo effectively creates a bizarre, retro-"cyberpunked" amalgam of the human form merged with one of its metallic extensions. This pair, two "love police" who display conflicting emotions, might echo the roles played by Jean Yanne and Mireille Darc in the final segment of Jean-Luc Godard's film *Weekend* (1967). This bourgeois couple's attempts to escape from "civilisation" only lead to deeper immersion in its crises, culminating in a protracted lateral tracking shot across an endless line of stalled cars and theatrically posed car accidents, an "atrocious exhibition" only terminated by a final title — *Fin du cinema*. The mood of *Love police* is similarly apocalyptic but Longo must achieve spatially what Godard develops cumulatively over the course of his elliptical narrative. Yet the tableau-vivant effect of Longo's central sculpture manages to both condense and amplify the ramifications of *Weekend's* final narrative grind-to-a-halt in the spectacle of a grand auto pile-up.

Longo calls his pile-up of crashed/crushed cars, *Engines in us (the doors)*. Who is this "us" he is referring to? It may be many things; perhaps one of them is the United States, the ultimate automobile culture where a man might ask a woman, at least half seriously, to strap her hands across his engines. And like the three members of Husker Du on the cover of their 1984 album *Zen arcade*, facing up to a car cemetery of their own, we (us) recede into sketchy outline in front of Longo's even more graphic rendering of the fate of dead cars. Is this Longo's contribution to Paul Virilio's putative museum hall of accidents, in which "the accident is to the social sciences what sin is to human nature ... a certain relation to death, that is, the revelation of the identity of the object"?

"The doors" could also be several things: a variation of Rodin's *Gates of hell* (1880-1917), a key early modern narrative relief designed as "sculptural decoration for a monumental set of doors that were to serve as the entrance for a projected museum"²; or a nod in the direction of the band that gave us "Roadhouse blues" and "Riders on the storm". But perhaps they stretch back further than that, in an allusion to Aldous Huxley's *The doors of perception* (1954), the work which along with its sequel and companion piece, *Heaven and hell* (1956), inspired the name of the band, The Doors, in the first place. In those volumes Huxley traced the manner in which perception could mutate into revelation by means of the use of certain mind expanding drugs, in effect technologies of inner space.

The portraits which flank the central sculpture of *Love police ...* are the most variable dimension of the work-as-installation in that, as with his previous serial works, one could imagine Longo making substitutes. The youth and 1980s street-style of the "purple kids" contrasts with the rigid austerity of the middle aged "love police" as much as it does with the edgy, retro-rocker/Hepburnesque chic of the older figures in Longo's earlier drawing suites *Men in the cities* and *White riot*. The lighter, looser-limbed feel of the *Purple kids* flows from their rendering in pencil and charcoal and their admission of bold colour, both of which contrast strongly with the heavier, monochromatic fixity of the *Love police* sculpture. The possible source of the *Purple kids* drawings in contemporary "multi-cultural" advertisements (for instance, United Colours of Benetton stylings) and their collision montaging against a mock-classical relief sculpture again invokes a film like Godard's *Weekend* with its assemblage of variegated signs.

This essay does not attempt an exhaustive reading of this installation which, like many of Longo's major works, is elusive in meaning. Rather, it moves away from the tendency of previous commentators on Longo (Douglas Crimp, Craig Owens, Hal Foster, Carter Ratcliff) to press his work too neatly into the service of exemplifying some central feature of the image culture of late twentieth century capital.

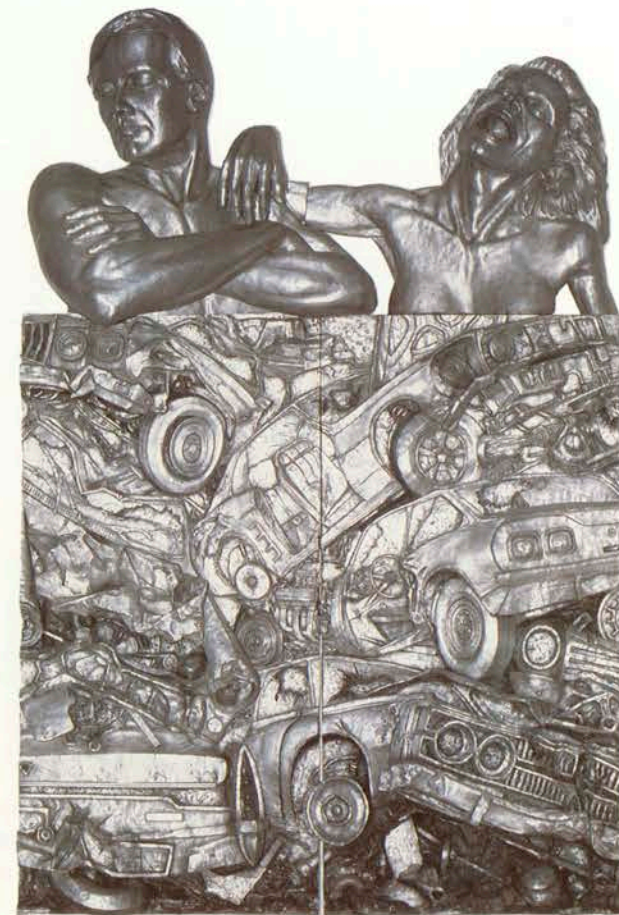
LAWRENCE MCDONALD

1 Paul Virilio *Pure war Semiotext(e)*, New York, 1983. p33.

2 Rosalind Krauss *Passages in modern sculpture* MIT Press, Cambridge, 1981. p15.

LAWRENCE MCDONALD writes on art and film. He is the editor of *Illusions*, a journal of moving image and performing arts criticism. He is based in Wellington.

Opposite: Centre: Robert Longo *Love police: engines in us (the doors)* 1982-3 aluminium powder, acrylic resin, fibreglass Left: *Purple kids (sound)* 1983 charcoal, pencil, acrylic paint on dyed paper Right: *Purple kids (heat)* 1983 charcoal, pencil, acrylic paint on dyed paper



Our ancestors — big people, strong people — stuck to it. And then we grew up, and this is our story and our country [called] Mulanga.¹

David Malangi's people, the Manyarrngu, have three major creative spirits who created their landscape on the mouth of the Glyde river of central Arnhem Land. Their art refers continually to these three ancestral beings: a male called Gurrmirringu, and the Djang'kawu sisters. The two Djang'kawu sisters came from the sun (from the east) and gave birth to the first people. They made a series of water-holes with magic digging sticks on the western bank of the river called Dhamala and gave birth to Manyarrngu people, the people of the manyarr trees — the trees of the coastal mangroves.

"In the future everybody will be world famous for fifteen minutes."² These often-quoted words of Pop artist Andy Warhol — in a way a contemporary of Malangi's — were originally spoken in the 1960s, when Malangi himself was discovered by the world at large as a painter. In 1966, when Australia changed to a decimal currency, a revolutionary shift in consciousness occurred with the inclusion of Aboriginal art images on the new one-dollar note. One of these was taken from a bark painting by Malangi, completed some years earlier and on exhibition in Paris at the time it was selected for reproduction on the new currency. Curiously the subject of the painting is a funeral scene, a ceremony for Gurrmirringu conducted under a Wurrunbuku tree (a white berry bush). Gurrmirringu, the mighty hunter, could be thought of as the original member of Malangi's kinspeople, the Manyarrngu group or clan. The one-dollar note which brought Malangi his fifteen minutes of fame, however, is no longer in circulation, having been replaced by a coin decorated with multiple images of kangaroos.

When mission time, we used to work at painting and sell it to balanda missionary people, me and my father...I was selling my paintings to one balanda [white Europeans] from overseas [Karel Kupka], at Milingimbi. Down south...they been fixed it up, with work, you know [i.e. transferred the drawing on to the currency note]. From there, all these balanda people, like big people, went to buy [started to use the dollar notes]...from Wurrunbuku [a tree], and from him [Gurrmirringu]. This one, this fellow here [Gurrmirringu], is the memory of him...he's my memory [whom I paint]... From there, I been got this medal, and all government people been pay me. But small, not bigger [money].³

The Warhol reference is inspired by a recent hanging of Aboriginal bark paintings, installed at the same time as a Warhol portrait exhibition at the MCA. Warhol was further quoted in accompanying wall texts: "I never wanted to be a painter. I wanted to be a tap dancer."⁴ For David Malangi, his paintings are always connected to song, dance and ritual. His own particular art factory and schooling were nevertheless a world away from New York. David Malangi's first "studio" training involved the human body decorated in mortuary rites.

These other Yolngu⁵, when they die, I used to do painting and singing — or who else [would do it]? Other people, like my father or some of my elder people [would do it]. If the dead person was their mother's people, they used to paint the body with their mother's design — the dead body. Yo [yes]: I saw my father paint...dead men, when I was a little boy, and I copied. Who were these Yolngu that died [I can't remember]? When they did, their body we paint[ed].⁶

Dreaming story (1985) came about as an experiment in the early 1980s; it is one of the earliest paintings on canvas by Malangi. Until that time he had worked on bark, on bodies of performers and on sacred religious objects. Malangi's characteristic style of large monumental figures, confident compositional divisions and blocks of "regal colours", transfers easily on to the larger scale and flatter surface of this work. Over the next decade he was involved in even larger-scale painting projects including several mural projects in Darwin and Surfers Paradise. The *Dreaming story* canvas was originally completed as a sail to complement a dug-out canoe that Malangi and his wives had hand-hewn for an exhibition concerning art and its ecological context at the Power Gallery (now the MCA) in 1984. (The entire exhibition was later purchased for the Power Collection.)

It has been suggested rather cynically that bark painters should make the move to working wholly on canvas as a marketing strategy, as the so-called "dot and circle" Papunya painters from the Western Desert in central Australia have done successfully — though for entirely different reasons. This proposition by outside experts ignores the long history of Aboriginal people applying ochre to sheets of bark in many parts of Australia, and that this tradition had previously not existed in the desert for obvious reasons — the lack of suitable trees and bark to work on. The notion also ignores the special aesthetic characteristics of the undulating bark surface which, being a skin itself, is in some senses synonymous with the raw exterior of the human body. Malangi himself dabbled with canvas further on a few more occasions, but so far has continued to work primarily with bark.

DJON MUNDINE

¹ David Malangi *Australian perspecta* 1983 Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1983. p67.

² *Andy Warhol Stockholm* (eds. Andy Warhol, Kasper König, Pontus Hultén and Olle Granath) Boston Book and Art Publisher, Boston, Massachusetts, 1968. np.

³ David Malangi in an interview for *Bula'bula arts*, a video by Cecile Babiolo, 1992.

⁴ *Andy Warhol Stockholm* op cit. np.

⁵ Arnhem Land term for Aboriginal people.

⁶ David Malangi in an interview for *Bula'bula arts*, op cit.

DJON MUNDINE has worked as an art advisor in Arnhem Land for fourteen years. He is currently working as a freelance curator.

Opposite: David Malangi *Untitled (Dreaming story)* 1985 acrylic paint and ochre on canvas



The complete series of *Something more* (1989) concludes with a black and white image of its heroine lying face down, dishevelled, dead presumably, in the middle of a road. A sign points to Brisbane, the big city and Moffatt's home town, 300 miles away. This selection of four photographs from the suite of nine renders the narrative structure of the original series less palpable, effectively foregoing the possibility of closure. In this way the excision necessitated by the MCA's curatorial choice serves to highlight something already present in the work, for Moffatt's glossy scenario of a woman's thwarted ambition is at the same time a reflection on the conditions of narrative and the thwarting of its desire.

The model for this arrangement is clearly cinematic. In the series of nine — six lush cibachrome prints interspersed with three black and white — Moffatt conjures a drama whose contours are already broadly familiar through film melodrama: a woman's desire to escape a patriarchal family structure is denied. This desire and its denial are at the heart of the genre, but *Something more* disturbs this advance knowledge as much as it is dependent upon it by introducing parameters absent from the middle class milieu in which family melodramas traditionally take place. Chief among these is the question of racial identity, here treated via stereotype. Moffatt, an Aboriginal, dons a cheongsam for most of her appearance, invoking the figure of the tragic mulatta while making the details of her identity indeterminate. The white trash parents and the "Chinaman" are equally figures of caricature. The most severe dislocation to this melodramatic form, transplanted by Moffatt to the Australian outback, is produced in what can only be interpreted as a sado-masochistic interlude. In two images (a black and white shot of Moffatt's bound torso is not included in this selection) *Something more* makes apparent the violence latent in the family melodrama. But this too is disturbed, for the protagonists of this encounter are both female.

The four images here sketch no narrative, but simply four colour scenes; and of these only the motorbike image introduces a new "narrative" development, for its content has not been hinted at in the establishing shot; the knife could be termed a detail, or close-up. Moffatt's play with the mechanics of narrativity, considered as a principle of linkage between shots, hinges on the operation of those generic conventions so hyperbolised in this work. The form may be recognisable in advance, but Moffatt overloads it by staging the violence of submission and desire otherwise repressed by melodrama. Within each scene every element risks overdetermination, and in so doing is depleted of what would otherwise be its dramatic force. There is no story in these four scenes so much as a series of poses.

Something more is possibly the most "formalist" of Moffatt's work to date. Quite aside from its singular stylisation, the work's hold on the viewer rests on that difference between the stasis of the posed shot and the image of movement, arrested, concentrated by the still. These images function as both. As with much of her other work, in photography and film, Moffatt's concern is equally with the modes of presentation as the content of representation. The dislocation and refashioning of melodrama in *Something more* continues in the vein of an earlier film, *Nice coloured girls* (1986), where Moffatt happily undid stereotypes, racist and otherwise, of young Aboriginal women. In this regard the allegorical dimension of *Something more* might be

understood as an acting out of "tragedy", the tragedy of the woman who wants something more, the tragedy of the half-caste. The staging of this action refuses the posture of victimhood by playing it, in Moffatt's own words, "to the hilt". Moffatt ironises melodrama, trashes it twice, and in playing it against itself shows, almost as if by accident, the masochism ruling its construction.

Moffatt continues this rewriting of the conditions of narration, asking what stories are possible in these pictures, in her feature-length film *Bedevil* (1993) in which three characters weave stories from their separate, inchoate recollections. As with her film *Night cries: a rural tragedy* (1990), this film contains autobiographical references and as with *Something more*, and the subsequent *Pet thang* series (1992), Moffatt puts herself in the picture. While *Something more* suggests iconographically that it is located in the middle of an Australian nowhere, a nowhere mediated by photographic codes and the conventions of landscape painting, Moffatt's presence confers a very different kind of specificity. For all its dislocation of narrative and other models, *Something more* asks to be read as an attempt to write anew in the discredited genres of autobiography and history.

INGRID PERIZ



INGRID PERIZ is a writer and curator based in New York.

Opposite: Tracey Moffatt from the series *Something more* 1989 4 cibachrome photographs

Since 1968, John Nixon's work has been dedicated to the reductivist imperative fundamental to avant-garde art from the first decades of the twentieth century. The monochrome, the readymade, simple abstract compositions such as the cross, in combination with an absolute emphasis on the materiality and objecthood of the work of art are the cornerstones of his practice. Nixon's use of these elements builds upon the pioneering work of the dadaists, the constructivists, Malevich and Duchamp, a set of actions which sought to demystify art practice, grounding the art object in its material and social reality and liberating it from the mythic determinations of the past. Nixon's work equally capitalises upon the more recent strategies of minimalism, conceptualism and Arte Povera in the use of language, materials and installation as critique and clarification of the nature and purpose of art.

It may thus seem ironic that Nixon has chosen to subtitle a work which stands as such a straightforward assembly of objects and materials "history painting". In the unfolding of western modernism from the nineteenth century, the genre of history painting was generally perceived to be an anachronistic cultural form, its dependence on narrative content seen to precede (and thus diminish) the aesthetic integrity of art. By contrast modernist art practices were increasingly privileged on the discovery of new formal languages founded on the indivisibility of the aesthetic sign and meaning.

Self portrait (history painting) (1981-4), clearly rejects the bravura narrative and illusionistic tradition upon which history painting was based. Each element in the work stands resolutely as a thing-in-itself in material, formal and conceptual terms. The simplicity and rawness of the monochrome paintings is echoed in the utilitarian character of the wheelbarrow, which offers a pragmatic support for the works of art propped against its sides. If this is "history painting" it seems to speak only of the historical eclipse of preceding genre forms by a reflexive concentration on artistic means to the exclusion of all other concerns.

Yet principles of history are crucial to Nixon's work on many levels. In the face of the broad restitution of traditional cultural values since the late 1970s, Nixon's oeuvre reveals the possibility of extending the radical project of twentieth century avant-garde practice whilst demonstrating its continuing validity. In its simultaneous commitment to non-objectivity and the readymade Nixon's work stresses that the rejection of traditional forms of representation by artists throughout the twentieth century was not a momentary aberration to be easily consigned to art history in favour of the affirmative function of conventional artistic means.

Self portrait (history painting) alludes to the achievements of avant-garde art whilst demonstrating how they might be developed. Aspects of the work's being point directly to Nixon's interest in the value of experiment and the idea of art practice as a total project. Nixon's utilisation of the monochrome across a range of material supports stands as the most basic example of the painterly form while grounding the meaning of art in the nexus of materiality and formal structure. It is also significant that these are "recycled" paintings, rejected from the ever-expanding collectivity of Nixon's work on the grounds that their former geometric compositions made them too "artistic" to serve a clarificatory function. They were restored to Nixon's oeuvre once their aesthetic complexity had been cancelled under a uniform field of monochrome colour, allowing them to

serve as more fundamental statements about the nature of painting, thus attesting to the historical flux of Nixon's work over the time through experimental action.

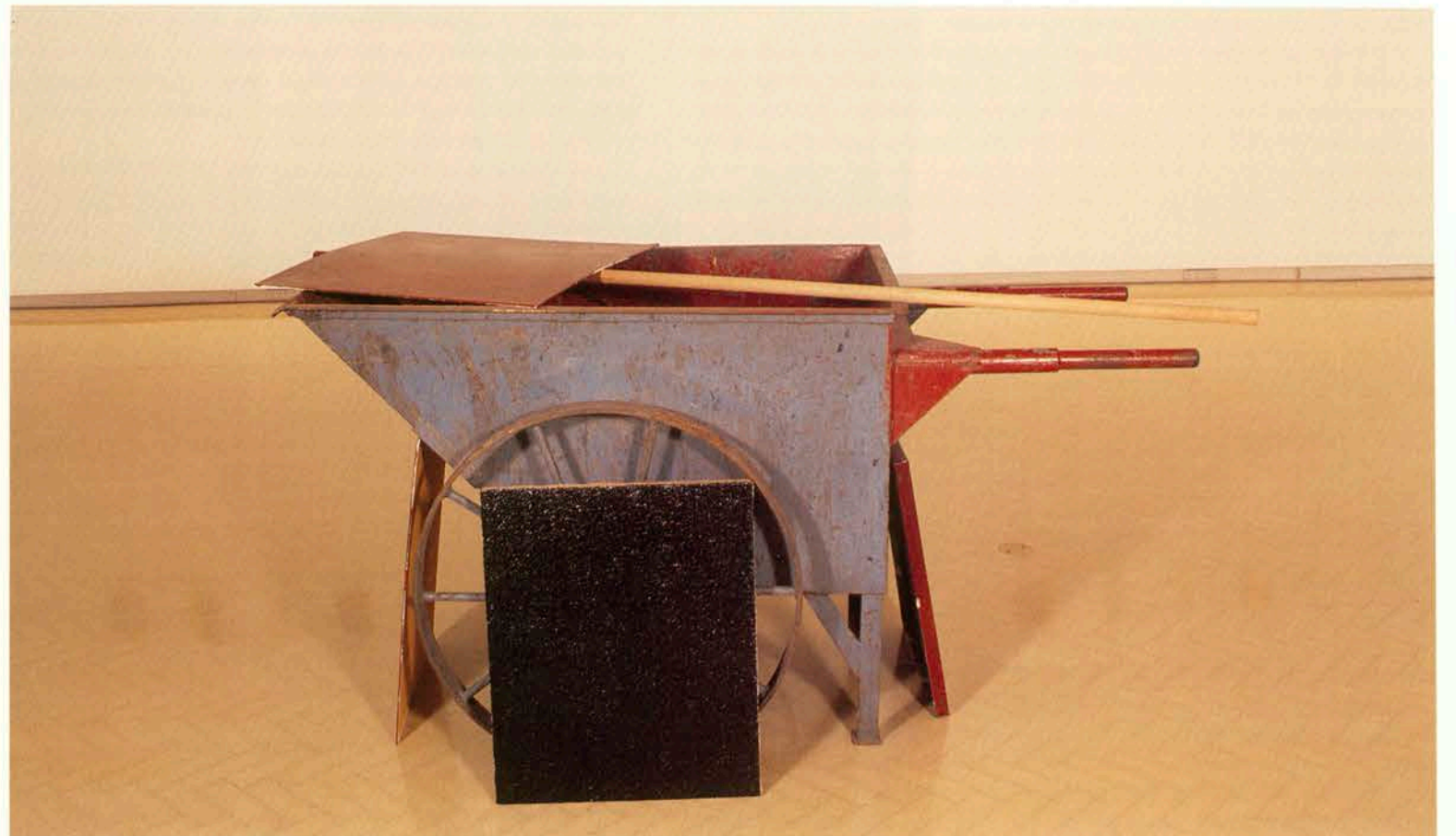
While *Self portrait (history painting)* is a work in its own right, it alerts us to the many facets of Nixon's activity as an artist. Through experimental production Nixon has accumulated a large storehouse of work made up of paintings, readymades, drawings, collages, photographs and texts which are combined to create discrete works (as in this instance) or used as the source of an ongoing cycle of installation/exhibitions. In rejecting the self-sufficiency of any single medium while blurring the boundaries between painting and sculpture, *Self portrait (history painting)* dispels the illusory autonomy of art, its invocation of principles of art, life, work and culture speaking of the broader socio-cultural context of art.

Throughout his career John Nixon's work has explored the role of art and artist, the relationship between art activity and the art object, between the art object and its physical context. *Self portrait (history painting)* was made at a time when Nixon understood his work to be the highest expression of the self and his development as an artist. If he no longer needs to signal this emphatically in the titles of his work — he now employs simple descriptive titles — his artistic project is no less dedicated to challenging artistic convention as means of investigating the place of art in the world.

CAROLYN BARNES

CAROLYN BARNES teaches the history and theory of art and design at Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne.

Opposite: John Nixon *Self portrait (history painting)* 1981-4 enamel paint on hessian, cardboard and canvas boards, wood, steel barrow



Mike Parr's *Alphabet* (1989) can only be fully understood within the parameters of the Self Portrait Project which has dominated his work throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. In his self portraits Parr's goal is to evoke a dissolution of the self as ego. The ego is understood by Parr as a superficial socially constructed mask which erects a barrier against making contact with deeper psychic levels in oneself and others. For Parr both language and photography (represented in *Alphabet* by the photocopies) function as metaphors for the social construction of identity, and in his work he seeks to symbolically subvert this construction.

The language component in *Alphabet* consists of a grid array of framed A3 sheets of paper on which Parr typed all the words from his *Funk and Wagnalls standard dictionary* whose meaning he did not know. (This project completes the language piece Parr initiated in *A-atrophy (self-portrait at 37)* (1982), the first work in the Self Portrait Project. In this work he typed out all the words beginning with "a" whose meaning he did not know. In *Alphabet* he has gone through all the letters of the alphabet, beginning a new sheet of paper when he had reached the end of a particular letter.)

Parr's concern with language can be seen as far back as *Wall definition* of 1971 where he deconstructed the pragmatic use of language to define and rationally delimit the world by pushing linguistic definition to the point of absurdity. He typed out a dictionary definition of "wall" in such a manner that it filled an enormous number of sheets of paper which eventually covered an entire wall. Parr did not stop at typing out the definition for "wall" but went on, obsessively, to give the dictionary definition for each of the words in the definition of "wall", a task which required several months at the typewriter.

Later, Parr said that the effect of the continual typing implied "a process of self-inscription/self-delimitation".¹ This suggests a connection between the way in which a de-sensualised language defines the world, and the way in which the body and the self can be over-defined and de-sensualised by conditioned habits and attitudes. Understood in these terms *Wall definition* becomes an important precursor to the Self Portrait Project, in the sense that the latter can be read as an allegory of the construction and deconstruction of social identity.

In the self portrait component of *Alphabet* there are 64 laser photocopies of self portraits taken from the 1988-9 series *100 mirror self portraits*. The laser photocopied self portraits are arranged as a grid in a wedge or hinge-like configuration set into a corner — a configuration that evokes the perspectival vanishing point. In Parr's work perspective functions as another metaphor for rational, socialised construction of identity.

The use of the laser photocopier to produce a bank of self portrait images in *Alphabet* is reminiscent of the subversive strategy used in *Wall definition*, and proliferation to the point of dissolution is a theme in Parr's work. In ten years of Parr's Self Portrait Project he has produced almost one thousand self portraits in different media; and in *Alphabet* the use of the photocopier suggests the potential to make this proliferation virtually endless.

By using the photocopier as a means of increasing the proliferation of his ego-image Parr seeks to deconstruct what he understands as the deathly manner in which a still photograph can capture or freeze a person's identity — a phenomenon Parr refers to as "photodeath". For Parr

the photographic image is so precise and so frozen that it is a perfect symbol for the reification of identity in a rationalised industrialised society. By proliferating the photographic image Parr tries to push photography to the point where its capacity for fixation dissolves.

His desire for dissolution is evident in the fact that the copies were made with the control turned to maximum density. Many of the portraits black out completely, and in some the black "stain" or "hole" has been configured into a rectangular shape reminiscent of Kasimir Malevich's *Black square*. The square is a primary form of the grid and, as such, refers to the perspectival grid and the rationalised vision that this connotes. But, coloured black, the rational matrix of the grid — which in perspective, like photography, attempts to capture and control nature — becomes abyss-like. The black squares in *Alphabet* can be understood as a sign of the lack or absence which lies at the heart of the reified, rational ego.

In *Alphabet*, as in *Wall definition*, the process of (self) definition is never ending; and Parr's use of laser copies confirms the fact that his ambition is not "self-expression" — the expression of his unique self-presence, in the mode of traditional expressionism — but rather a declaration of the total impossibility of self-expression. Instead of the essential Parr — the "real" Parr — there is a multiplicity of simulacra which at once suggest the dissolution of conscious presence into its "other", while simultaneously barring the presence of this "other". It is this poetics of absence which can be said to epitomise the Self Portrait Project.

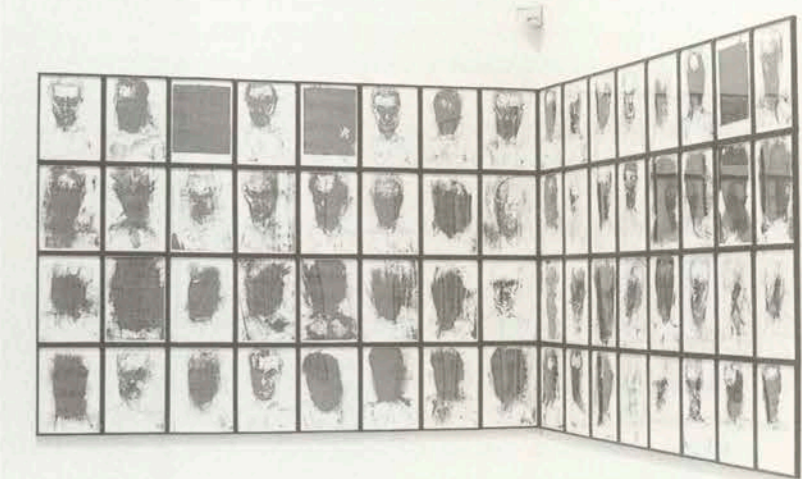
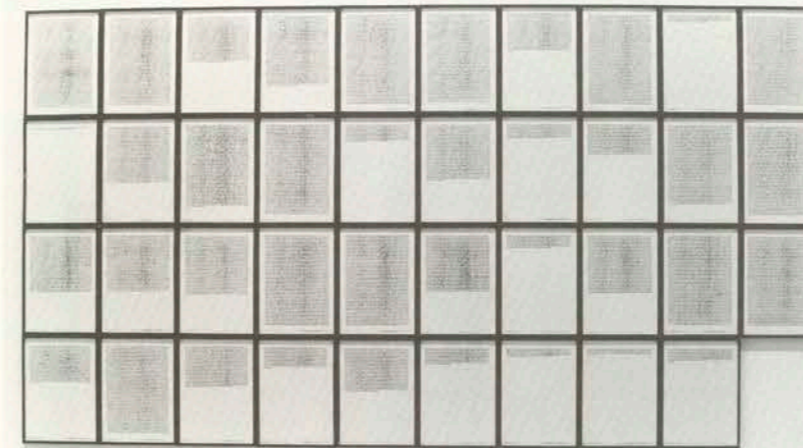
GRAHAM COULTER-SMITH

1 Sue Cramer *Inhibidress 1970 - 1972* Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 1989. p70.

GRAHAM COULTER-SMITH lectures in art theory at Queensland College of Art, Griffith University.

His book *Mike Parr: the self portrait project* will be published this year.

Opposite: Mike Parr *Alphabet* 1988-9 photocopies in painted wooden frames



Bice Curiger: Does time stand still in painting?

Sigmar Polke: Not in my pictures! They're always changing...vibrating.

BC: Why do you want your pictures to be changing all the time?

SP: Because everything is in flux. You have to look fast. You have to be real quick when you look at my pictures. You have to watch them, take them to bed with you, never let them out of your sight. Caress them, kiss and pray, do anything, you can kick them, beat the daylight out of them. Every picture wants some kind of treatment — no matter what. A picture doesn't become a picture until others do their part...¹

Sigmar Polke's work over three and a half decades has been characterised by its mobility; by frequent changes of style and diverse directions pursued simultaneously. After emigrating from East to West Germany in 1953, Polke studied at the Dusseldorf Academy during the 1960s and in 1963 founded the Capitalist Realist group with Gerhard Richter and Konrad Fischer-Lueg. A parallel direction to Pop Art and ironic rejoinder to the Socialist Realism of East Germany, Capitalist Realism was influenced by dadaist tenets of the Fluxus movement. The Capitalist Realists sought to overcome the sterility and artifice of conventional painting by recognising the cultural significance of the mass media and absorbing its imagery and visual processes into their paintings.

The small untitled drawing from 1982 in this show can be related to two key aspects of Polke's work. The first is the layering, superimposition and juxtaposition of appropriated images and pictorial styles, which has been a feature of his painting since the mid 1960s. The second is a new direction which emerged in the large abstract paintings of 1982 and involved an interest in veiled and superimposed colour and a more experimental approach to colour and pigment.

The first solo exhibition of Polke's work in the United States was in 1982 and featured paintings from the early 1970s. These included *Alice in Wonderland* (1971) — whose unstretched ground of patterned fabric is superimposed with a giddy layering of iconic images appropriated from low art — as well as large works with comic strip motifs akin to those in the MCA drawing. Critical responses to the exhibition argued that Polke's work had pre-empted, by a decade, the concerns of much of the "New Painting" then emerging in New York.

"The joke of a typical Polke picture", wrote Donald Kuspit, "is that every element in it cancels every other element's attempt to dominate the scene — to be *the* pictured thing."² The use of layering as a central organisational device creates pictures in which the viewer's attention cannot stand still, but is kept constantly moving between the different elements. Different levels of information spliced in edgy simultaneity invite reflection on the way consciousness organises and filters the bombardment of images in contemporary life. Layering allows a "non-committal co-ordination" of motifs. Diverse and opposing images and styles collide and relativise one another, leaving it to the viewer to explore the valencies.

Polke's trips between 1979 and 1981 to Australia, New Guinea and Singapore served as the catalyst for a new direction.

When I came home, I went straight to work and did a lot of painting. That was in 1981/82. I started thinking about colour and its treatment, but I also thought about how, for

example, Hinduism explains and uses colour or how Australians use colour. The whole business of red and yellow and green out of a tube, which is perfectly valid, but I started thinking about what it is...³

The *Negativwert* (Negative value) paintings shown at *Documenta 7* in 1982 featured layered expanses of veiled and superimposed abstract colour and a more gestural approach. Red lead and pigments of violet were used alongside readymade oil paint from a tube. These works signalled the beginnings of an extensive experimentation with pigments, their associations, chemical compositions and transformations. This exploration later resulted in paintings that change colour and composition over time, either gradually through slow-acting chemical reactions or, as with the large mural for the German pavilion at the 1986 Venice Biennale, in response to alterations in temperature and humidity.

The MCA drawing incorporates the use of layering, appropriation and juxtaposition of diverse pictorial styles and images and, less directly, with its veiling of abstract colours and gestural marks, connects with the new direction emerging in the large paintings of 1982.

CHRISTINA DAVIDSON

¹ Sigmar Polke interviewed by Bice Curiger "Poison is effective; painting is not" *Parkett* 26 1990. p25.

² Donald Kuspit "At the tomb of the unknown picture" *Artscribe* March-April 1988. p40.

³ "Poison is effective" op cit. p19.



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Opposite: Sigmar Polke Untitled 1982 gouache, metallic paint and ink on paper

Cindy Sherman came to prominence with her *Untitled film stills*, a series of 8" x 10" black and white photographs executed between 1977 and 1980. These works established the *modus operandi* she has continued with since; always using herself, dressed and made-up in a variety of different guises, as the photographic model for her work. While Sherman personally claimed a detachment from theoretical concerns ("leaving the analysis to the critics"), her work was central to the debates of the 1980s, presiding over the early theorisation of postmodernism and providing an exemplar for a feminist analysis of the politics of representation.

The way in which the *Film stills* were able to reflect and focus the theoretical concerns of the time, capturing them in an imaginatively compelling and accessible form, makes these works a classic of the period. They also constitute a classic moment in terms of the development of Sherman's oeuvre. The use of colour, greater technical ambition, increasingly elaborate costuming, make-up and props, larger and more luscious print type and stock, all position the later works as a "decadent" development away from the simplicity and economy of means of the *Film stills*. But more importantly, the later works, at least until 1987, all devolve from the *Film stills* in the sense that they play out and play off the implications of what these first images had to say about the construction of femininity.²

In the *Film stills* Sherman presents female stereotypes quoted (in a generalised rather than specific way) from the representation of women in movies of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. The play of image and identity in these works can be viewed as a play between surface and depth. The costume and make-up that Sherman wears in performing these roles constitute one type of surface. The formal aspects of filmic style she quotes in the images themselves play an equal part in establishing the type of femininity on view. The surface appearance of these women and the surface of the image combine to give rise to an unfathomable depth. "The image suggests that there is a particular kind of femininity in the *woman* we see ... For what we construct from the surface of each picture is an interior ... which is at once mysteriously deep, and totally impenetrable."³

The types of women Sherman depicts in this series are for the most part conventionally attractive. From 1982 Sherman's work began to change, and she started to use costume and in particular make-up in a different way — "to get uglier". "I started messing up the wigs, and using the make-up to give circles under my eyes or five o'clock shadows, or hair on my face".⁴ The 1983 series to which the two works in this exhibition belong evolved through a commission working on advertisements for designer fashions. In these images she grotesquely parodies the kind of female allure that fashion photography conventionally produces. Glossed lips are replaced by dry cracked ones. Rather than slightly parted, the mouth is open, catatonically fixed. The blank expression of the fashion model becomes the fixed vacant stare of a collapsed mind. The physical unattractiveness of the women in these images — Sherman's cosmetic ingenuity in this series ran to rotting teeth and "bad skin" — is linked to states of psychological degeneration: dementia, imbecility, psychosis. Some of the women appear violently crazed, but even the less aggressive personae are unsettling, even threatening. Whereas the *Film stills* represented a "respectable", passively conformist femininity, these works give us the flip side: images of the unacceptable, an

unsocialised woman — out of control, not out to please. The woman in the pink satin pantsuit is not so much mocking her own inadequacy for the role she plays, as using it to mock the desires of the audience she plays to.

In the *Film stills* Sherman explored the surface quality of stereotypical "femininity". In these later works she uncovers what it is that is implied lies hidden beneath that surface — the monstrous-feminine. Both images are the product of a misogynist discourse. As Lisa Tickner has written:

*Women are never acceptable as they are ... at a deeper level they (we) are somehow inherently disgusting, and have to be deodorised, depilated, polished and painted into the delicacy appropriate to our sex.*⁵

But by inhabiting the other, unacceptable side of femininity, Sherman discovered a disturbing power not easily consumed.

ROBYN MCKENZIE

- 1 "Cindy Sherman interview" *Art talk: the early 80s* (ed. Jeanne Siegal) Da Capo, New York, 1988. p275.
- 2 See Laura Mulvey's reading of the "narrative" of Sherman's development in "A phantasmagoria of the female body: the work of Cindy Sherman" *New left review* 188 July-August 1991. pp136-50.
- 3 Judith Williamson "Images of 'woman': the photography of Cindy Sherman" *Screen* Vol.24, No.6, 1983. pp102-3.
- 4 "Cindy Sherman interview", op cit. p276.
- 5 Lisa Tickner "The body politic: female sexuality and women artists since 1970" *Art history* Vol.1, No.2, June 1978. p239.

ROBYN MCKENZIE is a freelance writer on contemporary art. She teaches art history and theory at the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne.

Opposite: Cindy Sherman *Untitled 1983* c-type photograph *Untitled 1983* c-type photograph



To be perfectly honest, I have never seen this Tillers painting. The reproduction in front of me from his Venice Biennale catalogue — just like the one in front of you now — is, I calculate, roughly 400 times smaller than the original. Instead of jogging my memory of a primary (overwhelming) encounter with it, all it does is lay its (diminutive) claim to such a moment. Anyway, it's all I have got to go on and, if you have had the misfortune to miss the show, all you have as well.

Perhaps there's nothing remarkable here; the commonplace assumption that an image and its reproduction are "one and the same" is readily made in a world composed increasingly of images which picture a reality which retreats to make space for them. Yet it's also one Tillers's painting is designed to interrogate. He begins his essay in the Venice catalogue with these words: "In Australia the experience of works of art through mechanical reproduction always precedes their direct experience."¹ It is Tillers's distinction not only to have claimed this "precession of simulacra" as an inherent feature of provincial culture but also to have embraced it as a spur to creativity. Tillers's "originals" are all based on reproductions of other artists' works as though that were all he had to go on.

To tell the truth, then, *Heart of the wood* is a copy of *Germany's spiritual heroes* (1973) by the German painter Anselm Kiefer or, more accurately, it's a scaled-up rendition of a reproduction some 400 times smaller than its original. Tillers painted it on 164 canvas boards — a product mass-produced for amateur artists — each of them numbered (from 5339 to 5502) and representing a "page" in "the book of power", as he calls the project he began back in 1981 when he started to use the canvas boards. Sometimes parts of "the book of power" are exhibited as they are stored in his studio, as stacks of boards. *Heart of the wood* may have been shown in this way. The canvas board I should say makes all the difference. Because of it Tillers's painting differs from Kiefer's as not entirely a painting — or sculpture, or book. Further, the canvas board's unit size in relation to the painting as a whole is like that of the reproduction to the original in as much as both measure processes of transformation from which the image is not free. The canvas board grid reveals the work's instability, signifies its imminent reproduction and return to "the book of power". As such differences indicated Tillers means neither to steal the thunder of Kiefer's originality, nor to replace it with his own. Starting with a reproduction his concern is with the destiny of the image rather than its origin, with its death and rebirth rather than its creation.

The grandiloquently rough-hewn shrine pictured in Kiefer's *Germany's spiritual heroes* was also his studio. The implication is that Germany's creative present is contingent upon devotion to its creative past. Tillers intervenes in the destiny of Kiefer's image in two ways. First, he renders it generic, reinforcing its romantic nationalism by grafting on to it Georg Baselitz's *The poet* (1965) — he is the figure on the right which seems to be struggling out of the heart of a stump of wood. (Baselitz is in fact a favourite of Tillers with various figures from his *Ein neuer typ* [a new type] series turning up in at least seven works.) Secondly, Tillers confuses that nationalism by inlaying his own name with insolent prominence across the face of the picture.

Tillers only renders those works with which he finds some common ground. Like Kiefer, he is a child of Europe's Second World War. His Latvian parents emigrated to Australia as refugees a

few years before he was born. Tillers's sense of rupture is notably one of displacement rather than discontinuity. *Germany's spiritual heroes*: Wagner, Beuys, Friedrich, Musil, and so on beg comparison with the list of artists from whom Tillers draws inspiration: de Chirico, Arakawa, Andre, Tjakamarra, von Guerard, McCahon, Roevich ... The repeated re-rendering of these artists, singularly and in combination, their death and resurrection at his hand, speak of an insistence that the presence of art is always contingent upon a devotion to its absence.

WYSTAN CURNOW

1 "In perpetual mourning" *Imants Tillers: Venice Biennale 1986: Australia Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, Sydney and Art Gallery Board of South Australia, Adelaide, 1986. p16.*



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Opposite: Imants Tillers *Heart of the wood* 1985 oil paint and acrylic paint on canvas boards

There is that moment when we stop looking at the painting itself and take a mental step back to consider instead the painting's frame and the wall on which it hangs. Suddenly the rich world *in* the painting goes flat and now we apprehend it as an object in real space. As we become aware of the painting's edges, the strings which hold it up and the wall which supports it, we wonder what forces brought us together, here, at this moment. As we reflect, we encounter ourselves as part of a bigger picture. We become self-conscious. We catch ourselves seeing. Peter Tyndall's work emerges from this moment.

□ is Peter Tyndall's prime symbol. It embodies this paradox: the picture is framed, distinguished from its surroundings, yet it is also dependent (for its meaning) on the institution of the wall, the gallery, and ultimately the whole culture on which it hangs. A painting comes with strings attached. Alongside the □ Tyndall has added many other elements. For instance, in the work illustrated opposite the □ s have been arranged into a formula; there are also images of a light bulb, a family and the words LOGOS/HA HA. (John Barbour has translated this, Tyndall's summa, as "reason founded on the brink of madness".¹) Such elements are combined and recombined throughout Tyndall's oeuvre to suggest relations between the work of art, other artworks, cultural contexts and the viewer.

Diagrams are used to simplify and clarify, but Tyndall's diagrams enmesh us in complexity. For instance, in the work reproduced opposite at least three distinct representational systems are at work: algebra — the □ s; imagery — the family; and words — LOGOS/HA HA. It is not clear how these elements relate, what common ground they might share. Are the family looking at the □ s, at the words or into space? A slash separates and relates LOGOS and HA HA; the same slash separates and relates the equation □=□ (implying closure) from □=□=□=□ (which suggests infinite interconnectedness and extension); the small girl is separated from her family though we recognise she also is related. As she looks into space, her mother's hand threatens to return her into the group focus. Papa is also off to one side. These separations-relations echo one another, but to what end? Is the domestic light bulb to be read as a literal light source or as a symbol? The word LOGOS comes from the Greek meaning reason or wisdom. In theology LOGOS is The Word of God, the-word-as-light that illuminates and creates the world. The Christian God is Our Father, always with us and yet separate, perhaps echoed in the image of the secular family. Perhaps. In the absence of a key which might stabilise and delimit its elements' references it is hard to determine precisely what is intended in the work. Instead we enjoy what we make from the play of many possibilities.

Tyndall calls his works "details", presenting them as related fragments of a larger project. Thus we might think to search through other works for clues as to how to read this one. But as we look for clarification in other works, more problems and complexities emerge. Each new work further attenuates Tyndall's idea (the □), stretching its logic, deferring its closure. Elaboration necessitates further elaboration, endlessly.

Tyndall's work reminds me of conspiracy theory. Conspiracy theorists read the world in terms of a hidden factor which underlies everything, finding the most benign and contingent occurrences as proof of something going on. In Tyndall's case the hidden factor would have to be

the □ — it crops up everywhere. In Tyndall's *Culture corner with Uncle Pete* comic series, □ s are on the tip of every tongue. Elsewhere Noddy is surrounded by □ s, a shopkeeper paints a □ on his window and Christ carries one in lieu of the cross. Tyndall admits: "My work seems to progress from one mysterious recognition to the next".²

In Tyndall's Puppet Culture Framing System works the suggestion of a conspiracy becomes almost explicit. □ s hang on strings from puppeteers' sticks suggesting the deliberate and covert manipulation of our frames of reference. However nowhere is the conspiracy made *specific*, because □ is a generic conspiracy, standing in for all connections that have gone unacknowledged. So while conspiracy theorists argue total closure around their hidden factor, Tyndall's □ is frustrating or liberating in its openness, amusing and terrifying in its indeterminacy.

Tyndall might be cast on the side of the HA HA, as a humorist who would interrogate and outwit the authority of the LOGOS, its presumption to closure. Tyndall, however, shows the LOGOS and the HA HA to be inextricably linked and equally excessive. If HA HA is "a burp, a laugh, a fart"³, it is also the deadly serious Oedipal project in which the authority of the Father (the LOGOS) is contested by the father-to-be. The HA HA is also a light which illuminates its foe, providing the very flash in which the authority of the father is recognised. Significantly in Tyndall's work the LOGOS also becomes the HA HA, as he frantically strains the sober logic of the diagram to absurdity. There is method in his madness, and madness in his method.⁴

ROBERT LEONARD

¹ John Barbour "'I lead it astray'" *Art and text* 14 Winter 1984. p59.

² *Double crossed again* daadgalerie, Berlin, 1992. p18.

³ *Power works*. p50.

⁴ With apologies to Ngaio Marsh and Stuart McKenzie.

ROBERT LEONARD is Curator at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery and co-editor of *Midwest* magazine.

Opposite:

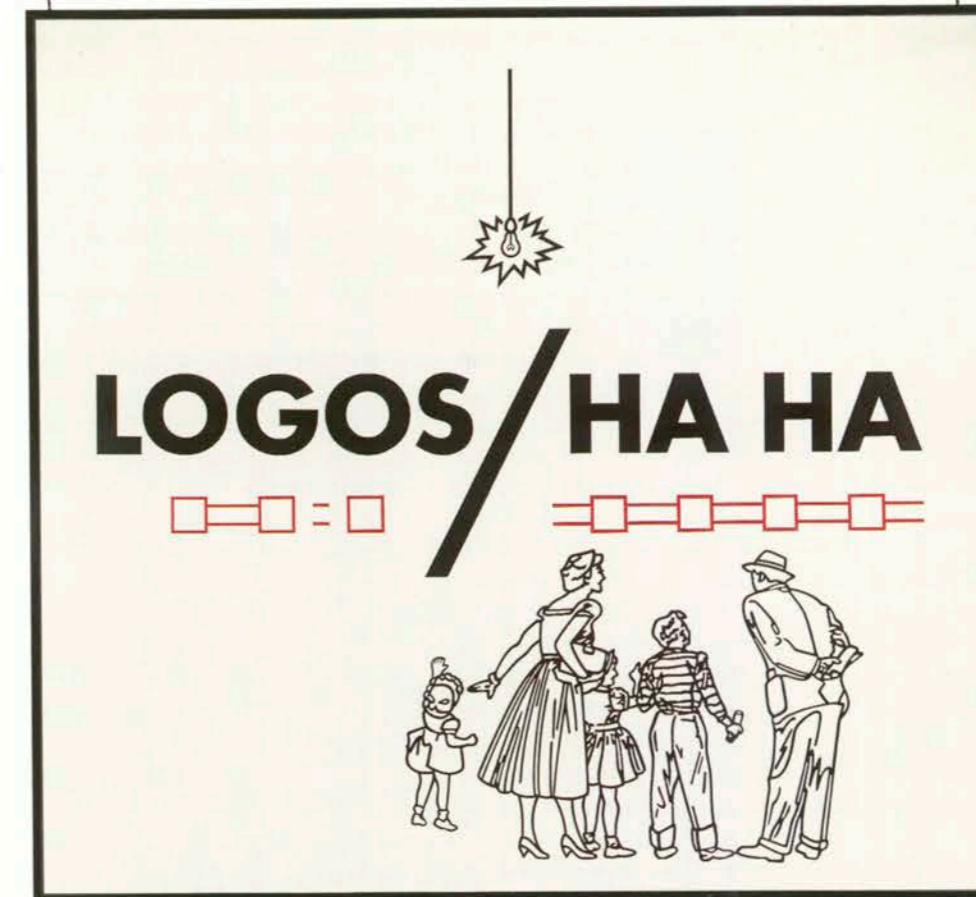
Peter Tyndall

detail

A Person Looks At A Work Of Art /

someone looks at something...

-1984-



There is never a conventionally neutral background, but always the "blank" or one-colour canvas as the counterpoint to Jenny Watson's figurative imagery. This was evident early in her *Figure paintings* (1974-5) in which life-size superrealist figures floated on "colour fields", juxtaposing a prescriptive formality of the ground with "what the doctor didn't order". More recently the monochrome of the support is often established in her works by coloured dress fabrics such as taffeta or velvet; or else a coloured background is scribbled in paint over light brown Belgian linen. Instead of the earlier "transparency" of photo-based imagery, in most of her work since 1981, we find autographic representations that are so loosely sketched with the brush as to be literally transparent to the support.

Jenny Watson's work arose initially in the 1970s, from a Conceptualist understanding of art as a rhetorical site — able to be constituted by information at any level rather than determined by a singular, aesthetic code — and from a comprehension of "the death of painting" which had led many artists to abandon the medium in favour of other possibilities. As one determined still to paint, Watson has subsequently developed an "all or nothing" approach to the medium. The contradictoriness of painting as a contemporary mode of expression constitutes her prime resource for its continuation. While a perceived obsolescence of existing models and the waning of prescriptive theory by the 1970s presented the medium as available for reinvention, breaking down the power and formality of styles associated with "high" modernism was straightforward; the ambition lay in arguing for and with, not against the medium as a signifying practice.

In 1981 Paul Taylor placed Jenny Watson's work at the forefront of an emerging tendency in Australian art that demanded a new interpretive approach, according to which "signs themselves are not of primary importance ... Instead the relations between them are pertinent as it is a semiotic interpretation which the art occasions." Taylor pointed to recent semiotic analyses of the dress styles of subcultures such as punks or gays, and drew an analogy between these practices and what he called "New wave" visual art. Undermining conventional sign systems, such practices appealed to an "un-pre-chartered reading of signs".¹

Although Taylor's argument now seems hasty and rather dated, it remains a beacon for the discussion of Watson's work because it emphasises the work's operative modality rather than iconographic significance. In retrospect, he was describing her work during a tense transition on the brink of major change. More simplistically, subsequent readings have dwelt on the artist's personal identity, tending to make the work's formal and material aspects seem merely idiosyncratic. Yet an alternative analysis should recognise something more thorough-going than a postmodernist play with signs.

If photographic images were employed in Watson's earlier works as an optimally transparent and "innocent" type of representation, the point was neither simply their referentiality nor their relationships as signs, but the relation of this "linguistic" layer to the ground it must traverse (its "abstract" antithesis) and the dialectic thus activated. As early as the *House paintings* series (1976-7) the "innocence" of photographic images was being disrupted with gestural applications of paint, and fragmented through accentuating the grid by which they are scaled up from an original.

In *Dream palette* (1981) she broke with the use of photography and turned instead to her own devices — using mainly her memory as an archive of subjective fragments. The work consists of 36 small canvas boards, alternating free-hand images, monochromes and handwritten text panels. The shift to expressionist painting and highly personal imagery was quickly completed. Can we conjecture that "self-expression" directly substituted in terms of function for what photography initially should have been? The autobiographical voice in most of her work since 1981 seems even more true to its sources than photographs might be.

Watson's narrative of self is genuine, but also works as an allegory: a veil that covers, but is still too transparent to conceal the work's countervailing tendencies; its expressivity enhances them. Her insistent self-portraiture thus personifies and, mask-like, gives a face to something that eludes recognition. In other words, there is no simple equation between the artist and the "fictive self" (or selves) portrayed in the work.

In *Self portrait as a narcotic* (1989) Jenny Watson introduces herself centrally as a psychoactive agent. The "I" of the needle — the same heroine of her never-ending story — can be considered here as personification of her desire to occupy the medium and to have specific effects upon it. An artistic agency is portrayed that produces altered states in order to vivify the experience of the painting, no matter that (as in a narcotic state) the experience may be aberrant. Under the pretext of the metaphor, the "phonemes" of Watson's self-declaration are dispersed and deranged, fluctuate wildly in proportion, and verge on an absurd anaesthesia of its meaning while nonetheless exalting the concrete act of painting and its liquid potentiality.

BEN CURNOW

¹ Paul Taylor "Australian 'new wave' and the 'second degree'" *Art and text* 1 1981. pp23-32.

BEN CURNOW is a freelance curator and writer who lives in Sydney.

Opposite: Jenny Watson *Self portrait as a narcotic* 1989 oil paint, ink, animal glue and paper collage on linen



Confining himself to his studio, and making do with his small range of bargain basement props, photographer Boyd Webb does his best to suggest all manner of land, sea and even space scapes. For several years he relied heavily on carpets. For instance, there's the ghastly green one with the sculptured pile he used a lot in 1984; for the forested "land of the dinosaurs" in *Tortoise*, for the polluted, junk-filled harbour in *Dry-eyed*, and for the farm landscape seen from the air in *Supplicant*. He had not one, but two horrible blue carpets which he thought would be good for sea shoots: see *Sargasso* (1985) and *Periscope and sheet music* (1984), and perhaps pass muster for the blue vegetated surface of a distant planet like that in *Host* (1985). As for the rubberised undersides, the possibilities have proved endless: elephant legs in *Untitled* (1982), a cliff face in *Replenish* (1984) and the belly of a whale in *Nourish* (1984). So, disinclined to work *en plein air*, and obviously limited in his resources, Webb persists in tackling subjects that are rather beyond his means. Not surprisingly, he fails, sometimes ludicrously so. We see clearly enough what he is trying to do, and do give him credit for his ingenuity, but we can't dispel the air of pathos that hangs over his work. An air which is stirred occasionally with recollections of childhood, of a time when we "used our imaginations", played with our toys in bed making landscapes of the bedclothes. And Webb's world is full of toys: model planes, electric train sets, toy cars, tractors, model dinosaurs, globes, inflatable ducks.

In more recent pictures, like *Cataract* (1989), Webb uses plastic sheeting where before he'd used carpet. With its lightness, give, transparency and reflectiveness, the plastic makes for a better balance between the successful and the failed illusion. As in the mix here, in *Cataract*, of the submerged and the deflated plastic ducks. But why deflate the ducks? Why deny them their ontological self-esteem in this way? (Some still manage to stick their necks up, querulously). Are these dead ducks? Is this just another manifestation of the general fiasco? A *cataract* is a deluge, a violent rush of water, a kind of on-going watery debacle. The ducks are caught in it: will they be dashed onto the rocks below, or will they summon one last aeronautic breath and inflate themselves out of there?

A *cataract* is also a disease of the eye whereby an opaque covering forms on the lens causing partial or even total blindness. According to Henry David Thoreau, who was in his day no less a curious ecological watchdog than is Boyd Webb, a "lake is the earth's eye looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature." In *Cataract* that depth appears as a blind spot, a projection. It looks as though the map image has been thrown by a projector. Ideologically, the map is a measure of the projection of the human on the natural. And cartographically, it is the semiotic reduction (read "deflation") of the three dimensions of the earth to the two dimensions of the map. And, come to that of the photograph. We imagine the map makes the world more visible to us, but Webb's picture insinuates that it causes, is indeed a *form* of blindness. Can what Webb thinks about cartography be related to his ideas about photography? Why inflate photography if it is part of the general fiasco?

"The photograph" wrote Thomas Lawson, "dominates the modern landscape, giving form and substance to all aspects of life. Like a language, it gives meaning to the existence it frames ... The narcotic (of the media spectacle) turns us into somnambulant consumers subsiding toward

an easeful oversated death. Gradually we become little more than eyes, tourists watching the spectacle of our own ruin".¹ I doubt Webb would have much truck with such puffed up rhetoric, yet the kind of analysis to which it gives voice helps us articulate what is oppositional about his practice as a photographer. Webb's travesties serve as indices of how and why photography should be taken seriously. His is a photography which refuses to deliver the goods, whose poverty and whose failures are a calculated insult to the power and the profligacy of the medium.

WYSTAN CURNOW

¹ "The future is certain" *Individuals: a selected history of contemporary art 1945-1986* (ed. Howard Singerman) Abbeville Press, New York and Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1986. p293.

WYSTAN CURNOW teaches in the English Department at the University of Auckland. He is currently writing a book about Imants Tillers.

Opposite: Boyd Webb *Cataract* 1989 cibachrome photograph



THE CONTEMPORARY ART ARCHIVE

An archive should develop an understanding that all things are in connection, in flux. It should do this because for one thing it is not singular. So often in museums an artist is represented by one work, which comes to represent their body of work. An archive can provide material that places the single object in a matrix of interconnectedness.
Peter Tyndall¹

Whereas the history of art is conventionally written as a succession of masterpieces, the MCA Contemporary Art Archive provides a fuller and more contextual understanding of art practice. This Archive is a collection that does not emphasise the "masterpiece" as the artist's singular and most important statement. Rather, the collecting and exhibiting policies of the Archive have involved, in some cases, a revaluing of material previously considered as incidental to the main body of an artist's practice and thus not often collected by museums. In other cases the Archive has drawn within its ambit more widely acknowledged works of contemporary art, including some major works of conceptual art, and has also provided the occasion for new works of art to be made.

The Archive is one part of the MCA's permanent collection, but has its own coherence as a specialised grouping of works. Several layers of material have a place within the Archive. There are a number of works of art originally intended by the artist for public exhibition. Alongside these there are more personal and informal works, many of which have been rarely seen or gathered together, but which suggest a wealth of activity and ideas. In addition there is supporting material revealing the processes involved in conceptualising works of art, ideas for projects, and the sources of ideas. The inclusion of art works produced in editions (artist's books, multiples, periodicals, occasional publications, videos, audio cassettes) is also central to the philosophy of the Archive.

A related series of exhibitions and publications has been initiated by the Archive and constitutes one on-going stream within the MCA's overall programme. As well as including material from the collection, these exhibitions may encompass the borrowing of pieces, mostly from the artist, for the purpose of exhibition, fresh presentations of historical material as well as the exhibition of works made specifically for inclusion in the Archive programme. Whenever possible artists are actively involved in re-presenting and documenting earlier works which might otherwise be lost from the historical record, as well as in the presentation of new works.

To date, five Archive exhibitions have been curated, each proposing different ways of exploring the notion of an archive in relationship to contemporary art and its display. The first, shown at the opening of the Museum, included works from Ian Burn, Tim Johnson, Lyndal Jones, Mike Parr, Imants Tillers, Peter Tyndall and John Young. The selection focused on specific and little known aspects of each artist's practice. The second displayed ten archive boxes designed by Lyndal

Jones containing original material — scripts, artist's notes and diagrams, photographs, audio cassettes, costumes, props and photographic slides — from her series of performance and installation works *The Prediction Pieces* 1981-1991. The third exhibition, *MK Art*, was an installation of Maria Kozic Products — screen-printed T-shirts, dresses, pillowcases, publications, posters, compact discs, video work, all produced under the banner of MK Productions. *The Horse Who Sings: Radical Art from Croatia*, was the first international component of the Archive programme. It looked at a stream of radical thought in Croatian (formerly Yugoslavian) art. The most recent exhibition was *Peter Tyndall: postcards*, part of which is included in the POWER WORKS exhibition.

The Contemporary Art Archive should be distinguished from a conventional study collection containing working drawings and sketchbooks made prior to the "finished" work of art. Whilst these form a part of this collection, they are not its emphasis. Rather the Archive is oriented towards "ideas", taking an analytical and experimental approach to art that has little to do with traditional notions of artistic technique or craft-based skills. In this sense the Archive is non-hierarchical: a typewritten manifesto has an equal place, for example, with an object, photograph or artist's book. The broader cultural activities of artists as writers, curators and publishers are embraced within the collection as part of the totality of their practice.

This is not an Archive which deals exclusively with the past, though in many ways the late 1960s and 1970s, a crucial period of questioning the forms and contexts of art, provides an important point of departure for the collection. Rather, the types of activities and practices that the collection represents are very much a continuing part of contemporary practice. To exclude such material from the domain of the art museum is to greatly diminish our understanding of the versatility of artists and their ongoing inquiry into the nature of art and exhibition practice.

SUE CRAMER

¹ from an unpublished interview with Sue Cramer, 1990.

PETER TYNDALL: POSTCARDS

In 1990 I visited Peter Tyndall's studio in Hepburn Springs, Victoria, as part of my research into the development of the MCA's Contemporary Art Archive. We talked about the nature of archives, a topic of mutual interest. As a result of our discussions, Peter began regularly to send through the post numerous small artworks addressed to the Archive including many of the postcards exhibited here. These postcards are not conventional correspondence. Each contains a thought, or makes reference to a thought in Tyndall's work. Postcards not in the Archive collection have also been included to give a more comprehensive account of Tyndall's use of this genre. The following interview was conducted by fax machine in May and June 1993, between myself and the artist.
Sue Cramer

SC: Peter, you have long been an avid collector of many types of things including images and texts from newspapers and magazines. How long have you collected postcards and what motivated you to start making them?

PT: I began collecting postcards when I began receiving them. First, starting in the early Seventies, as invitations to exhibitions. I've kept a considerable number of these. Then, as is the custom, as correspondence from travelling friends. I usually responded in kind because I've always enjoyed receiving and sending mail. Often we would make some simple alteration to the cards we sent one another as, for instance, Marcel Duchamp did in 1919 when he added a moustache and beard to a postcard-size reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* and wrote the letters L.H.O.O.Q. at the bottom. Puns and additions of this kind seem to be a part of the postcard tradition in and outside the Art domain.

After a while you become aware you've accumulated certain like things, at which stage you either dump the lot or begin to sort them into some order. The activity becomes a little more discriminating and active as one begins to seek out certain missing or additional pieces. Postcards have become the one, generally recognised "collectible" that I do avidly pursue. Most postcard collectors seem to concentrate on a narrow, pre-existing category; more often than not, it is the cartographic documentation of a particular town or region. These precious topographicals are of no interest to me. My prime interest is in the hand-made, one-off card. These, if they are acknowledged at all as "postcards", seem to be of no interest to most serious collectors or dealers. Happily for me, they are not even afforded a Category of their own and are usually in the Miscellaneous box.

My initial response to receiving personalised postcards was to return the pleasure. It's not surprising that this became the basis of my two-way interest: to make and send my own postcards; to keep and collect the hand-made cards of others.

SC: In your recent catalogue *Double Crossed Again* from the daadgalerie, Berlin, you write of a sense of wonder, or of the "mysterious recognition" involved in selecting certain images as more significant to you than others. Could you say more about what this intuitive recognition might mean?

PT: I recently encountered the Latin dictum: "Nomen est omen" (Name is destiny). It rings for me a similar bell to that of my phrase "mysterious recognition". Yes, I attempted to address this curious energy in my Berlin catalogue giving as an example the puzzle I continue to entertain: of wondering at, or about the *choices* I make as a postcard collector. I wrote about one particular, not atypical day when I sorted through an enormous number of cards from which I bought just nine. Why these nine? Why do we respond so differently to things? I used the phrase "mysterious recognition" to indicate *something* of what I feel is involved in such choosing. At the end of the day, when I had bombarded my nine postcards with all the words that I could summon to interrogate them, they remained, as they had begun, still wondrous.

The double meaning of *to wonder*, I give as:

1. to admire with rapture (unequivocal acceptance)
2. to puzzle, to desire to know (questioning)

"Mysterious recognition" has something to do with ageing and the accumulation of experience. Having wondered at various *points* along the way one accumulates a sufficiency of cognition to wonder at the *line of points*, then at the *shape of the line of points* and so on, producing by way of this passage of knowing and re-knowing a freshness of wonder.

I proposed my own originating myth, based on the first, formal photograph of myself which I refer to as the *Baby Scopophilic in Wonder, Looking at a Cube*. This photo appears now to have been an omen of my later pre-occupation with matters of *looking*. Stories, like postcards, should not only be received but made as well.

Whilst we're on this subject, the most stimulating image ("mysterious recognition") I encountered during the four months I spent in Europe last year was an advertisement I found in the in-flight magazine as we were leaving Australia, flying to Berlin. Two cartoonish figures stand either side of a REVOX (re-voice? re-LOGOS?) product, looking at it. One asks a question: "Was ist das denn?" The other answers: "Eine Parabolantenne für Satelliten-Empfang." The questioner seems satisfied: "Aha."

SC: Whilst the postcards in the exhibition have been organised into various groupings, or themes, there is, as you have said, essentially only one subject-matter in your art which is summed up in the three-line title that you use for all of your work:

detail

A Person Looks At A Work Of Art/
someone looks at something...

PT: "Summed up" isn't quite right. "Begun" would be better.
"Begun again" would be better still.

SC: All of the works in the exhibition go by this title. Could you comment on how these groupings relate to their overall title? In other words, how do the parts relate to the whole?

PT: Sometimes I also add the subtitle LOGOS/HA HA. (LOGOS: the Speaking into Being of the Universe; the Word; the Given; Jesus Christ; Agnus Dei. HA HA: a laugh, a burp, or a fart; a crack in the voice; a broken word; a prick to a bubble; an involuntary release from the Proud Body; any embarrassment to the LOGOS) as a reminder that the title is itself a shaky construction of cracked wordage.

How do the parts relate to the whole? What whole? There *are* parts, but there *isn't* a whole being offered. The first line of the title, *detail*, is deliberately set against the usual expectation of the declaration of limits. So whatever is perceived to have been offered by this artist, a postcard say, is according to the information of the title, a *detail*.

Of what? We can speak of what this detail includes (the second and third lines refer to those who look, to works of Art and to things), but not of where this detail ends or what it does *not* include. This exhibition bears the name "POSTCARDS". One of these, posted from Babel, shows the word "postcard" in fourteen different languages!

When the postcards are seen, the groupings will be pretty obvious. Postcards usually have stamps; some are grouped by a common aspect of their stamps. Postcards have often been photographs; some are grouped this way. The postcards are exhibited in vitrines, in a museum, in a city, in a country: they have been grouped according to these frames also. People will be looking at them and speaking of them; they, the postcards, have been grouped to reflect and declare this too.

SC: Many of the images and texts which you select relate to the activity of looking and some comment on how things are named and described. The cards themselves mostly bear the markings of a rubber stamp of either your three-line title or the Fosterville Institute of Applied and Progressive Cultural Experience, a fictional cultural institute which you invented in 1972. Could you comment on the function of these stamps?

PT: The function of the title stamps is to concentrate the focus and embrace the attention of the viewer:

"Was ist das denn?"
"Das ist der Titel."

"Aha."

The function of the Fosterville Institute of Applied and Progressive Cultural Experience stamp is to supply a "This is who" to "Who did this?" The conventional expectation is that a Work Of Art will be ascribed to an Individual. Attributing it to an Institute, and one so curiously named, begs this expectation. There is the suggestion of an ongoing, expanding and *inclusive* authorship.

The FIAPCE stamp was struck to reify its name. It has always had a parodic (What is tradition anyway?) aspect to it. Sometimes this has had a negative twist, aping the inflated nomenclature of Authority; at other times it has rebounded to seem ("Nomen est omen") almost real.

Aesthetically it has, for me, associations with the red stamp of the Eastern calligrapher - calligraphy being a form I've always felt close to. And from the West derives the aesthetic of the insignia ring pressed into red wax to make the seal beneath a hand-written text.

SC: Over the years, you have maintained a private correspondence with certain other individuals, including the artist Robert MacPherson, often using the form of the postcard. Could you comment on this interchange or dialogue?

PT: I mentioned earlier that I've always enjoyed receiving mail, particularly the hand-made or self-designed things that friends send, and I enjoy making and sending it. In the early 1980s, Bob MacPherson sent out widely a series of postcards he'd designed that made cross references between aspects of Art and frogs. I responded to these with a few froggy things and that exchange has continued to this day. Hardly a day goes by without my receiving something from Bob. The most items received on a single day (the local post-office loves him when they have a count on) is about fifty.

I also enjoy exchanges with others, usually on a subject related to their interests, sometimes to mine; thinking, drumming, architecture, whatever. For instance, some years ago I found a turn of the century photo postcard of someone with the name George Alexander, and sent it to George Alexander the writer. Recently I found a similar photo postcard of someone whose real name was evidently Robert F Jackson, but who had signed beneath his photo "Yours Fraternally" and on the next line "Peter". (Previously I'd made a postcard of a breaking down of my own name from Peter to LOGOS/HA HA). So who is the other, this false Peter? And this other George Alexander? To my mind, these two cards make a bridge for a possible ongoing exchange on any number of things: doubles, doubts and identities to name a few. Themes emerge.

SC: In the past you have used the postal system as a means of disseminating material such as your occasional bulletin *Bricks and Mortar* 1989. How do the postcards relate to the concept of mail art? Is it integral to the meaning of these works that they have travelled through the post, or is the postal system merely a convenient way of distributing information?

PT: Yes, I am aware of the changing mythology of the message bearer. One of the key images in my work is *The Triumph of Christianity Over Paganism*, a fresco by Tommaso Siciliano on a

ceiling in the Vatican. In this, Paganism is represented by the broken figure of Hermes otherwise known as Mercury, the Greek and Roman Messenger of the Gods. They have been overthrown by Christianity whose Messenger is Jesus Christ. The overturning of Messengers goes on into the present day when Rupert Murdoch and the Media Barons fight for position to deliver their message to us.

The newspapers I cull so much of my imagery and headlines from declare their origins in names such as *The Courier*, *The Herald*, *The Messenger*, and *The Mercury*. I cut and paste what I cull to make my own messages of wonder and mysterious recognition which I then hand over to the next messenger, the mail service which delivers it to you for further contrivance and transmission. Yes, I am aware of the presence of Messengers.

After that it's a matter of choosing to work within one or other particular, traditional form. There are many parallels between the activities of the production and the collection of artworks for a Museum and the production and collection of postcards for a shoe box. I enjoy the various aspects that each has to offer. With postcards I savour the lot: the stamp torn and stuck, the postmarks registered, the photographs taken, the messages written, the images used and abused, the people and places joined, the signatures signed and the X that always marks the spot.

Overleaf:

Peter Tyndall: Postcards, Contemporary Art Archive 5, installation photograph,
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, June-October 1993

detail

A Person Looks At A Work Of Art/
someone looks at something...

The Right-Angle Giver
(Instruments of the Passion)

-1987-

detail

A Person Looks At A Work Of Art/
someone looks at something...

-1988-

PETER TYNDALL: POSTCARDS CHECKLIST

detail

A Person Looks At A Work Of Art/
someone looks at something...

Postcards

-1970s-1990s-

1. Postcards about postcards emphasising such aspects as:
 - the envelope
 - varieties of cards (colour, texture)
 - the philatelic stamp
 - the right-angle and rectangle
 - the painting, the drawing, the print
 - the frame
 - the Museum
 - the Museum postcard

2. The Title
detail

A Person Looks At A Work Of Art/
someone looks at something...

- the titleist
- headlines and other words about looking

3. something to look at...

- postcards made by Peter Tyndall showing images of our looking, from magazines, newspapers etc.

4. - The right-angle, the rectangle, the building block, the child looking at the block, the Scopophilic (lover of looking)
 - The implications of the right-angle: the frame, the Vitrine, the Cross, the Triumph of Christianity over Paganism
 - Masks, locks and keys; angling, grids and nets

detail

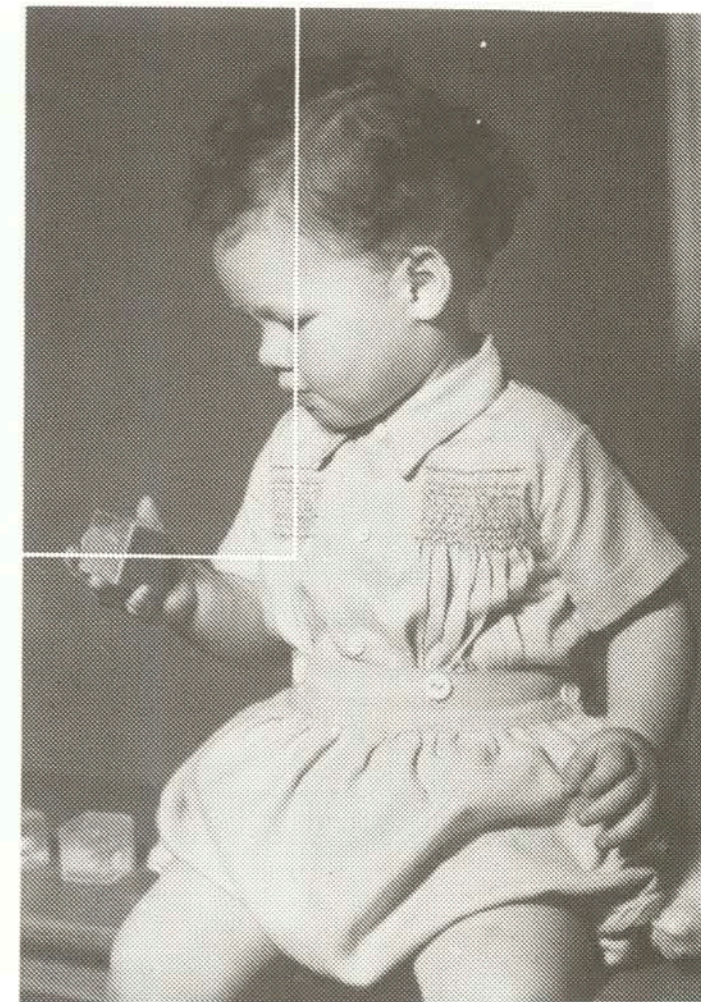
A Person Looks At A Work Of Art/
someone looks at something...

LOGOS/HA HA
(The Right-Angle Giver)
(A Life)

-1952-1993-



899. Roma - Chiesa del Gesù - Sacra Famiglia - Gagliardi



BIOGRAPHIES

SANDRO CHIA (born 1946, Florence, Italy) studied at the Accademia di Belle Arti, Florence, gaining his diploma in 1969. He moved to New York in the early 1980s. He was one of the Italian painters dubbed La Transavanguardia Italiana by critic Achille Bonito Oliva. He lives and works in New York and Montalcino, Italy.

PETER CRIPPS (born 1948, Victoria, Australia) lives and works in Melbourne.

JUAN DAVILA (born 1946, Santiago, Chile) studied law from 1964 to 1969 and art from 1970 to 1972 at the University of Chile, Santiago. In 1974 Davila emigrated to Australia. He has worked in performance, film and photography, but is primarily known as a painter. Davila travels regularly to Chile and produces different bodies of work for exhibition in Chile and Australia. He lives and works in Melbourne.

EUGENIO DITTBORN (born 1943, Santiago, Chile) lives in Santiago. He studied art in Chile, Madrid, Berlin and Paris in the 1960s. He started making airmail paintings in the 1980s, and has shown these works in diverse locations all over the world. His work was included in *Documenta 9* (1992) and last year he had a major solo show at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London. This show will be seen at the City Gallery, Wellington this year.

KATHARINA FRITSCH (born 1956, Essen, West Germany) studied art at the Kunstakademie in Dusseldorf. In addition to her small works, often produced as multiples, she has created a number of major sculptural projects including *Ratking* for the DIA Center for the Arts, New York, in 1993. She lives in Dusseldorf.

GILBERT (born 1943, Dolomites, Italy) and **GEORGE** (born 1942, Devon, England) met in 1967 while students at St Martin's School of Art in London and have worked collaboratively since then. In the 1970s they became notorious for their performances as living sculptures. Since the early 1970s most of their works have been photo-pieces. They live in London.

KEITH HARING (born 1958, Kutztown, Pennsylvania, United States) first attended art school in Pittsburgh. In 1978 he moved to New York, where he enrolled in the School of Visual Arts. He became involved in the graffiti art scene and in 1981 began doing chalk drawings on blacked-out billboards in the subway. He also showed in galleries. In 1986 he opened the Pop Shop, to retail his multiples and products. In his last few years much of his work was concerned with AIDS issues. He died in 1990.

RICHARD KILLEEN (born 1946, Auckland, New Zealand) graduated from Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland in 1966. In 1978, having worked through a variety of painting styles, figurative and abstract, he invented the "cut-out", the painting format which has provided the basis for his work ever since. Showing regularly in Sydney and New York, he is one of the most internationally visible of artists resident in New Zealand. He lives in Auckland.

BARBARA KRUGER (born 1945, Newark, New Jersey, United States) studied at Syracuse University and Parsons School of Design in New York. She subsequently worked as a graphic designer and as a magazine picture editor. Her work mixing images and texts draws on this experience. In addition to her gallery pieces, she has produced many public art projects, particularly billboards. She lives in New York. Her work was the subject of a major survey exhibition at the National Art Gallery's Shed 11 in Wellington in 1988.

ROBERT LONGO (born 1953, Brooklyn, New York, United States) studied art at the State University College, Buffalo, receiving his BFA in 1975. He had returned to New York City by 1972. His early performances included *Sound distance of a good man* (1978). He is known for his spectacular mixed media works. He has also made music clips with REM, New Order and Megadeth, and a short film *Arena brains* (1987). He is currently making another film, *Johnny Mnemonic*. He lives in New York.

DAVID MALANGI was born in the "bush" on the north coast of Australia in 1927. He grew up in a lifestyle rich in aboriginal tradition. Taught to paint by his father in religious ceremonies, he came to public attention when one of his images was reproduced on Australia's new decimal currency in 1966. He continues an active ceremonial life, now inheriting his late father's senior position.

TRACEY MOFFATT (born 1960, Brisbane, Australia) studied film and video production at Queensland College of the Arts. Since her move to Sydney in 1983 Moffatt has worked as an independent filmmaker. She also makes photographic works. In 1993 she completed her first feature *Bedevil*, which she introduced at the Auckland and Wellington International Film Festivals that year. She had previously visited New Zealand as one of the Australian artists in *ANZART'85* in Auckland.

JOHN NIXON (born 1949, Sydney, Australia) studied art at Preston Institute of Technology, Melbourne (1967-68) and at the National Gallery School, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (1979-1980). He began working professionally in 1968 and began exhibiting in 1973. His work was included in *Documenta 7* in 1982. He has been closely involved with alternative spaces such as Art Projects, Q Space and V Space, and co-edits the magazine *Kerb your dog*. He lives in Sydney.

MIKE PARR (born 1945, Sydney, Australia) studied at the University of Queensland from 1965 to 1966. He is largely self taught as an artist. He began working as a performance and conceptual artist in the 1970s. He has also made sculpture, installations and graphic works. He visited New Zealand in 1981 to participate in *ANZART* in Christchurch. He lives in Sydney.

SIGMAR POLKE (born 1941, Oels, Silesia [now Olesnica, Poland]) fled with his family to Thuringen in 1945, and in 1953 emigrated to West Germany, eventually settling in Dusseldorf. Polke studied at Dusseldorf Kunstakademie from 1961 to 1967. In 1963 he was one of the founders of the Capitalist Realism group. He won the Golden Lion Prize for painting at the 1986 Venice Biennale. He has had a number of major retrospective exhibitions including one at the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1990.

CINDY SHERMAN (born 1954, Glen Ridge, New Jersey, United States) studied at the State College University, Buffalo, graduating in 1976. She moved to New York in 1977, and it was in this year she began producing her *Untitled film stills*. In 1987 the Whitney Museum organised a retrospective exhibition of her work. In 1989 an exhibition of her work was shown at Shed 11, Wellington and the Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton. She lives in New York.

IMANTS TILLERS (born 1950, Sydney, Australia) assisted Christo in wrapping the coastline at Little Bay, Sydney, in 1969. He studied architecture at the University of Sydney from 1969 to 1972. He began exhibiting in the early 1970s. He painted his first works on arrays of canvas boards in 1981. He represented Australia at the 1986 Venice Biennale. Since the late 1980s he has shown frequently in New Zealand. His exhibition *Imants Tillers 19301* was seen at Shed 11, Wellington and the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth in 1989. He lives in Sydney.

PETER TYNDALL (born 1951, Melbourne, Australia) studied Architecture at the University of Melbourne in 1970 and at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology between 1971 and 1972. In 1972 he co-founded the Fosterville Institute of Applied and Progressive Cultural Experience. Since 1974 all his works have been entitled "detail / A Person Looks At A Work Of Art / someone looks at something...". He lives in Hepburn Springs, Victoria, Australia.

JENNY WATSON (born 1951, Melbourne, Australia) studied art at the National Gallery of Victoria Art School in 1972 and at the State College of Victoria at Melbourne in 1973. In the early 1980s she moved from a photo-realist style into the more expressionist manner for which she is now known. She represented Australia in the 1993 Venice Biennale. She has studios in Melbourne and Karlsruhe, Germany.

BOYD WEBB (born 1947, Christchurch, New Zealand) studied at the School of Fine Arts of the University of Canterbury from 1968 to 1971, and at the Royal College of Art in London from 1972 to 1975. His approach of photographing constructed tableaux developed out of his work as a sculptor. Webb remained in Britain but also exhibits regularly in New Zealand. He lives in Brighton.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

all measurements in millimetres,
height by width by depth

SANDRO CHIA

Idiots 1981
oil paint on canvas
1605 x 2600

PETER CRIPPS

From here on 1989
display case, plywood, composition
board and painted glass
installed dimensions variable

JUAN DAVILA

Fable of Australian painting 1982-3
oil paint on linen; acrylic film and acrylic paint
on canvas board with wooden easel
2740 x 10960 and 2000 x 610 x 610

EUGENIO DITTBORN

*The 5th history of the human face (The
London Camino)* 1989
screenprint and fluorescent paint on
non-woven fabric; ink, postage stamps
and crayon on printed paper envelopes
installed dimensions variable
approx. 2000 x 5500

KATHARINA FRITSCH

Katze (cat) 1981-9
acrylic
165 x 170 x 55

Vase 1987-8,
screenprint on acrylic
300 x 110 x 110

Madonna 1982
acrylic paint on plaster
300 x 70 x 65

Gehirn (brain) 1987-9
acrylic
110 x 120 x 140

Grünes seidentuch (green silk cloth)
1982-9
screenprint on silk
800 x 780

GILBERT AND GEORGE

Friendship 1982
photo-piece
4230 x 4550

KEITH HARING

Untitled 1982
acrylic paint on vinyl tarpaulin
2135 x 2200

RICHARD KILLEEN

Appropriation #3 1983
acrylic paint on aluminium
installed dimensions variable,
approx. 2000 x 3000

BARBARA KRUGER

Untitled 1985
photolithograph and silkscreen on paper
1752 x 1752

ROBERT LONGO

Love police: engines in us (the doors)
1982-3
aluminium powder, acrylic resin, fibreglass
3350 x 2290 x 610

Purple kids (heat) 1983
charcoal, pencil, acrylic paint on dyed paper
2440 x 1220

Purple kids (sound) 1983
charcoal, pencil, acrylic paint on dyed paper
2440 x 1220

DAVID MALANGI

Untitled (*Dreaming story*) 1985
acrylic paint and ochre on canvas
2495 x 1258

TRACEY MOFFATT

from the series *Something more* 1989
4 cibachrome photographs
each 1015 x 1315

JOHN NIXON

Self portrait (history painting) 1981-4
enamel paint on hessian, cardboard, canvas
boards, wood, steel barrow
915 x 610 x 1220

MIKE PARR

Alphabet 1988-9
photocopies in painted wooden frames
3624 x 5280 and 1812 x 3300

SIGMAR POLKE

Untitled 1982
gouache, metallic paint and ink on paper
698 x 995

CINDY SHERMAN

Untitled 1983
c-type photograph
1015 x 761

Untitled 1983
c-type photograph
915 x 860

IMANTS TILLERS

Heart of the wood 1985
oilstick, oil paint and acrylic paint on canvas
boards
2800 x 6480

PETER TYNDALL

detail
*A Person Looks At A Work Of Art/
someone looks at something...*
—1984—

detail
*A Person Looks At A Work Of Art/
someone looks at something...*

Postcards
—1970s—1990s —

detail
*A Person Looks At A Work Of Art/
someone looks at something...*

LOGOS/HAHA
(The Right-Angle Giver)
(A Life)

—1952—1993—

JENNY WATSON

Self portrait as a narcotic 1989
oil paint, ink, animal glue and paper collage on
linen
2132 x 2896

BOYD WEBB

Cataract 1989
cibachrome photograph
1580 x 1230

