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DON DRIVER

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DON DRIVER

a survey of his life and works,
incorporating a catalogue of the
Don Driver 1965-1978 exhibition,
with essays by Michael Dunn and Nigel Best
and compiled by R N O'Reilly

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery
New Plymouth, New Zealand
1979

GOVETT-BREWSTER ART GALLERY
NEW PLYMOUTH N.Z.

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GOVETT BREWSTER ART GALLERY



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Galleries participating in the DON DRIVER 1965-1978 exhibition tour, which is being assisted by the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand —

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth	28 June - 15 July, 1979
The Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui	25 July - 12 August
Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North	22 August - 9 September
National Art Gallery of New Zealand, Wellington	19 September - 7 October
Bishop Suter Art Gallery, Nelson	24 October - 11 November
Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch	21 November - 6 January 1980
Wairarapa Arts Foundation, Masterton	23 January - 10 February
Hastings Cultural Centre, Hastings	20 February - 9 March
Gisborne Museum and Art Centre, Gisborne	2 - 20 April
Rotorua City Art Gallery, Rotorua	30 April - 18 May
Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland	28 May - 22 June
Waikato Art Museum, Hamilton	1 - 20 July, 1980

PREFACE

Don Driver, one of New Zealand's leading artists in whose art shines the joy of life, is a modest friendly man with a quirky sense of humour. To walk with him in the streets of New Plymouth is to learn how widely and affectionately he is known, but that has not protected him from the wounding fury of many of the citizens every few years when his new work is on display.

This compilation began as a catalogue of an exhibition covering Driver's work from 1965 to 1978 and to tour nationally in 1979 and 1980. It still serves as a catalogue but may prove more generally useful. The entries have been expanded to record the physical complexity of the works, annotated with comments of critics and the artist, and placed within a biographical setting so that his life and works can be studied in a consecutive manner. The Contents table lists the exhibits by number and title, refers to the page of each entry, and so serves as a short catalogue or finding list.

The exhibition was the idea of Ernest Smith, director of the Auckland City Art Gallery, who did the initial selection; though it had to withdraw, his gallery was to have organised the exhibition jointly with mine. I am responsible for the formulation of the following points on the artist but indebted for them to Mr Smith.

Driver is unique among New Zealand artists for his classicism: not only does his art show order and balance but, instead of turning away from our throw-away technological age, it points — often cheekily — at the virtues of the products. He loves icons, symbols and ritual and shows ingenuity (and, I would say, ritual-like care) in the way he puts together things and materials of astonishing diversity. He is also highly individual in his orchestration of colour and texture.

Ernest Smith sees in Driver's unaffected hedonism an affinity with Matisse and Miro, in his concern with structure and our technological age a link with Constructivism, De Staël and the Bauhaus. He accepts that the artist is indebted to American contemporaries such as Rauschenberg.

It soon appeared to me certain that something important for New Zealand art happened to Driver when he visited the United States in 1965 and when that was consolidated by the American

show he saw in Sydney in 1967. In order to sort out some of the things to which he intuitively related, I have worked on the US art scene as it then was and interpolated the result into the main text on his life and works.

Don Driver's relation to other New Zealand artists is discussed in a useful essay by the art historian and critic, Michael Dunn; while the artist's colleague here, Nigel Best, contributes a personal appreciation of the artist: the care he puts into a work and the meanings that may come out.

R N O'Reilly
 Director, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery
 April 1979

GOVETT-BREWSTER ART GALLERY
 NEW PLYMOUTH N.Z

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Cover: The artist in front of his 1970 work, *Five-Part Piece*

DON DRIVER: LIFE & WORKS

1930 — 1944

Don Driver was born in Hastings, lived during his childhood in Napier and attended Napier Boys' High School in 1943. At the end of that year his people shifted to New Plymouth and in 1944 he attended New Plymouth Boys' High School.

Although his mother was to tell his wife that in childhood he carved horses in wood and by 12 was doing ships in bottles, and although the family in Hawke's Bay retain a carving he did there of his grandfather, he was not able to take art at secondary school. In New Plymouth this was because of the war — Mr Frank Tet, the art master, was overseas.

1945 — 1950

In 1945 Driver started work in New Plymouth under Mr Harry Johnson as a dental technician. He became a competent technician and acquired skills in moulding, shaping and casting modern materials. For about five years he took night school classes from Mr Tet in drawing; later he was to go to night school for woodwork, welding and pottery. He was and remains an avid reader and increased his knowledge and skills through books and journals.

1951 — 1959

Don Driver dates his start as an artist from when at 21 he carved and painted a bust of Nefertiti after a reproduction he saw in a magazine. The story of the start is told in the Weekly News by the New Plymouth journalist, Douglas Elliott. Our clipping is undated but, from the photographs, it would have been written a year or so after the event — and the bust was a virtuoso copy. Elliott goes on to tell how the artist then turned from wood carving to modelling in clay, learning how to do it from books from the public library and shortly afterward turning from conventional plaster of Paris to dental plaster for his castings. It goes on to say that "his first public appearance as a sculptor was made at the recent exhibition of the New Plymouth Arts and Crafts Society" and that, with a commission to carve Maori

heads on an honours board for the Savage Club, he already contemplated a career in sculpture.

In 1953 Driver won second prize for a wood carving of a head — John Kingston winning the first — in the Young Contemporaries exhibition at the Auckland Birthday Carnival.

In 1958 he married Joyce Dodd, a musician.

1960 — 1964

Don Driver, then interested in primitive — particularly African — art and doing work in lead, joined with other New Plymouth artists in forming Group 60. There is an account of the Group, which was to last to about 1966, in an article in the Taranaki Herald of 1 June 1963 by Sue McCauley. She said it was a loosely knit group of artists who “wanted to see more art that ‘expressed some drama — some vitality and life’, and opposed the pretty stuff that is so prevalent — the Kelliher type of art’ ”. Its members were then “Don Driver, Michael Smither, Ton Reitsma, Barry Brown, John Ford, David Aitken, Batch Collins and Bobbie Winchombe”.

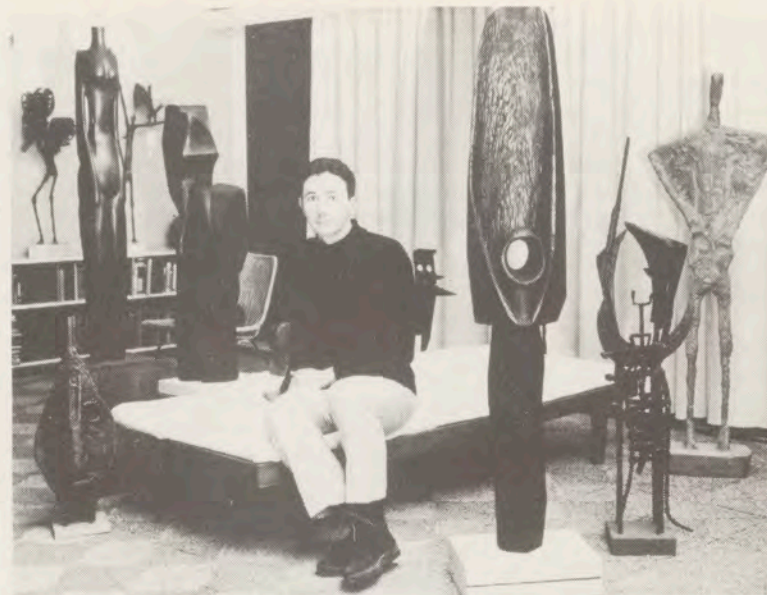
In 1961 the artist had works accepted for a New Zealand Academy exhibition in Wellington.

At the beginning of 1962, because he found his work as a dental technician stultifying, the artist began work for R. E. Tingey & Company Limited, oil colour and wallpaper merchants.

In 1963 the Adult Education department of Victoria University organised a Driver one-man show that toured North Island centres. In Sue McCauley's 1963 article already cited she wrote that “he works by day as a paint salesman and art supplies consultant for a paint firm [and] has experimented in painting and sculpture but his recent work has been in the latter medium. He works in aluminium, concrete, stone, wood; in fact ‘almost everything’. His chief interest at present is in primitive sculpture. ‘I try to capture some of the life, mystery and, well, animal quality of primitive work.’ ”

One of the photographs, reproduced here, that illustrated McCauley's article shows work:

- in fibreglass reinforced with steel (two above the shelf, two on the floor — one at left and one at right)
- in wood (two on stands, one on the floor)



Taranaki Herald

— in reworked metal of different kinds (one partly obscured behind the artist, the other between the wooden and fibreglass pieces at right). Driver has long had a love of African art but the photograph shows that by 1963 the “primitive” for him was seen refracted through modern art in a variety of styles — derived fairly directly from a number of contemporary artists, mostly British and European, and not only from illustrations. In 1962, he had gone to see the Recent British Sculpture exhibition at the Auckland City Art Gallery and, for example, the Chadwick-like piece at the right comes straight from that show.

In 1964 Driver was guest exhibitor at the New Zealand Academy. About that year he was represented in an Auckland Society of Arts show, *Painters of Promise*. Perhaps because of it he was visited at his home by the Auckland City Art Gallery director, Peter Tomory, and no doubt his representation in the Gallery's New Zealand Painting 1966 show stemmed from this visit.

In October 1971 Peter Vuletic was to review the artist's development in *Artis* of October 1971. On the 1960-64 period Vuletic gave 1962 as the date of Driver's turning away from “primitive art and mythology” and the “use of lead, an ancient metal”, to “the use of modern source materials . . . and found

objects such as vinyl, upholstery, chairs, backs of old pictures, batteries, and discarded pieces of metal. . . . When he started these assemblages he had not heard of Rauschenberg. . . ." Vuletic added that "At about the same time he worked on a series of 'matter' paintings . . . of wood, canvas, enamel and sawdust . . . painted in greens, blues and greys, with areas of pink and purple." He commented: "The textural effects in most of these assemblages and collages may have been a reaction against the rather smooth surfaces of his earlier wood carvings. In addition he introduced rough elements such as shattered battery cases and creosoted blocks of wood. The bright colours . . . contrast strongly with the muted colours of his earlier works."

None of the works of this or the earlier periods are included in the exhibition.

1965

Vuletic continued: "In 1965 Driver began a series of brass reliefs utilizing corroded sheets of metal and also works employing corrugated cardboard. These are the first assemblages which give evidence of an explicit awareness of the use of shadow effects, as opposed to the incidental shadows which may be apparent in any work."

Many of the works Vuletic was referring to were shown in Don Driver's first one man show at the New Vision Gallery, Auckland, in April 1966. An anonymous reviewer in an undocumented clipping said he "manipulates with equal facility copper, brass, aluminium and lead . . . wood, fibreglass and resin." But in 1970, reviewing Driver's second New Vision show in the Auckland Star of 31 October, Hamish Keith said: "The authority and control of the works in this show make the curiously hashed-up reliefs of his first major Auckland exhibition in 1966 seem like a bad dream."

From March to August Don and Joyce Driver were in North America. This trip substituted for the more conventional New Zealander's visit to Britain and Europe when she realised their savings would not stretch to that and he commented, in the light of assiduous reading of books and journals supplied largely through the inter-library loan system, that America had become the world's leading nation in art.

UNITED STATES ART IN 1965

The United States since the second World War had indeed surpassed Europe in art, and New York rather than Paris was the art capital of the world. In the 1950's it was the Abstract Expressionists such as Pollock, de Kooning, Kline and Motherwell and, linked with them, the first Colour Field artists such as Louis, Newman and Rothko who had carried all before them; by the early 1960s it was Rauschenberg, Johns and the Pop and Op artists, though De Kooning, Newman and Rothko were still flourishing and Noland and Held were carrying Colour Field painting further.

Though the opening in 1939 in New York of the Museum of Modern Art was a factor and the trans-Atlantic movements of American artists was another, the major factor in the sudden flowering of American art was the presence in the US of artists and art teachers associated with many of the great post-Cézanne movements and displaced before the war from Hitler's Europe. There was Hans Hofmann, whose Munich school Helen Flora Scales attended and whose Cézanne-based doctrines she passed on to Woollaston in Nelson. Hofmann moved his school to the United States in 1932 and was an influence on the Abstract Expressionists particularly in his gestural brushwork; his theory of the push within a field of certain colours and the pull of others influenced more the art of the 1960s. There was Josef Albers of the Bauhaus who taught from 1933 to 1949 in North Carolina, and then at Yale, and the influence of whose systematic work on colour interaction was felt by the artists dominant in the 1960s. (Rauschenberg was one of Albers's students though it was rather Rauschenberg's friend Johns who learnt patiently to juxtapose coloured shapes and passed it on to the Pop artists. Albers himself was an Op artist, famous for his Homage to the Square series in which there are concentric arrangements of overlapping squares of differing colour and a sense of the colours' receding or advancing in space and the squares' widening or contracting. Then there was Duchamp the Dada artist who showed how any object even a urinal might be seen as art if displayed dissociated from its normal use, and perhaps altered somewhat. There were surrealists such as Ernst and the poet Breton whose automatic writing had been an influence on some Abstract Expressionists, and there was the great Dutch constructivist Mondrian. Between them they provided the examples, theory and methods American artists needed.

The Renaissance believed that art is an imitation of something outside called Nature and the question of imitation or illusion is the one on which all modern schools challenge that tradition. Manet in colour and Cézanne in form made the break over 100 years ago. Instead of seeming to see physical objects going back

in space to a vanishing point from the picture surface as if from a window of clear glass, the viewer is reminded that the surface is itself a flat physical thing to be seen and judged on the artist's terms. Cézanne was content to compose the planes, into which he analysed his equivalents of the objects, so they were flattened in sympathy with the picture surface and not strictly perspectival; the Fauves, Cubists, Expressionists and Constructivists went much further — including Matisse, Picasso, Rouault, Mondrian and most of the leading artists in Europe throughout this century. The Abstract Expressionists in their turn drew attention to painting as an activity on the canvas through their strenuous and spontaneous gestures in applying paint; instead of forms drawn and concentrated in certain areas they achieved overall configurations relating to the painting surface and its margins and with little, or else indefinite, background depth. Thus, and by an increase in scale, they created works of great physical presence. Rauschenberg from about 1953 made "combines" (collages and/or assemblages) in which printed images and texts, and thrown away or discarded objects that are a feature of mid-20th Century living, appear to spill from a bedaubed surface in which there is no apparent depth. Such an approach is referred to, for example, by Barbara Rose in her *American Painting: the 20th Century* (Skira, 1970), as a "literalism of image and space" and expresses a rejection of the belief that art imitates anything.

"Literalism" means that image and space in a work are as and where they seem to be and so do not constitute an illusion of objects in space. It does not preclude visual metaphor or allusion to things outside the work. And it allows, like a quotation within a novel, inclusion of an illusionist or other image — usually a familiar reproduced one that is copied/modelled by the artist or added as collage or assemblage. The principle thus opens up a variety of ways, many ambiguous and so tension-creating, in which a work can both be and communicate. It was adopted by the Pop, Op and later Colour Field painters, as well as by sculptors and the creators of semi-theatrical Happenings. Coming more into the 1970s the Photorealists (equivocally) and the Conceptualists carry it on.

Literalism then was one of the things shared by the artists of the early and mid-1960s. In contrast to the embattled art of the 1950s colour was heightened, there was an impersonality of surface treatment and a detached or "cool" approach. There were parallel developments in the other arts including music: McLuhan's doctrines were in the air and barriers between the arts were falling.

This was how it was, in the buoyant times of President Johnson's Great Society, when Don Driver visited the United States.

The American cities the Drivers visited, and the things in them he now recalls (apart from the leading art museums and dealer galleries none of which they missed) were — San Francisco ("good African things" and Rodin), Los Angeles (crowds kept them away from the Bonnard show at the County), Sante Fé (the Federal School of Art for Indian Students), St Louis (where, through an American collector in New Zealand who had bought several Drivers, they met the Bernoudys and saw their Picassos), Washington DC, New York ("a marvellous Morris Louis show", a Hofmann one, and Indian bronzes some of which he acquired and so made a start with his collection of Asian sculptures), Baltimore ("many Matisse's, small but really raw colour") and Chicago ("a show of fantastic sculptures by David Smith" at the Art Institute). One senses he felt closer to Smith than the other artists.

Driver says he did not get a clear view of contemporary American art in 1965 and saw no Op Art except work by Vasarely. Questioned on specific artists, he says he saw individual works by Bluhm, Frankenthaler, Gottlieb, Johns, de Kooning, Lichtenstein, Newman, Pollock ("all over the place — but I didn't like him") and Rauschenberg, but not Dine, Held, Kelly, Kline, Liberman, Motherwell, Noland, Poons, Stella or Warhol and not the sculptors Caro, Judd, Morris or Oldenburg. However, there is no doubt he was strongly affected by the experience or that he gave, and still gives, allegiance to the movement stemming from Rauschenberg and Johns.

Driver admires both those artists. In his method of work he is closer to Johns. If his use of discarded objects owes something to Rauschenberg he does not combine painting with it, the style is different, and in no way is a Driver an imitation Rauschenberg as one was an imitation Chadwick. What is importantly shared is the literalism.

Vuletic states that the artist's "first true band painting, Small Red", which was to be exhibited in Tokyo at the 1971 International Young Artists-Asia exhibition, was done in 1965, and presumably on his return from America. Driver cannot recall who or what triggered it off — it could hardly have been Newman or Rothko. But soon after his return he subscribed to the leading American art journals and a distinct possibility is that he then read about the Colour Field painters and this, combined with what he had seen, was enough.

The works in the exhibition dating from 1965 after the artist's return are —



1
Mid-West

Wall relief built up on a wooden base, within a wooden frame, from pieces of stained and painted timber — dressed and undressed, split off and sawn both straight and in curves, some with round and oval holes also from pieces of painted sheet iron, some machine-pressed to have ridges and then with a circular piece rivetted on, numerous small holes for further rivets or screws and a round and an oval hole. Upper left, an inverted galvanised iron stencil with DECORATOR and daubed with paint; upper middle on a circular piece of flat timber, a 192 x 107mm dog's skull protruding 75mm and hung by a white cord to a flat-headed galvanised iron nail.

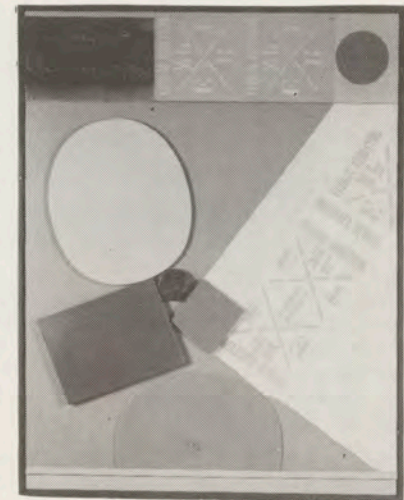
1837 x 1508mm within frame; 1857 x 1530mm overall.
Collection: Keith & Ngaere Adams, New Plymouth.

First exhibited Group 60 exhibition, New Plymouth, 1966. In the 1971 Artis article, Peter Vuletic quotes the artist as saying of this work that it expressed: "a feeling I had of the Mid-West . . . involving rustic barns, doors and shutters and bright colours". Vuletic commented: "The use of aircraft parts sets up a tension by introducing a contradictory reference to the urban into what is essentially a rural, almost a homespun atmosphere. 'Mid-West Painting' is probably Driver's key work. Here the concern for light and shadow is given fuller rein. The utilization of the wooden strips and the presence of the skull and other found objects are reminiscent of his earlier work, but bands of colour are employed in a much more obvious way." "This was inspired by a trip just made to the US. We drove through the Mid-West countryside for days on end and I was very impressed not only by the landscape but by the beauty of the red and brown barns and the interest of aeroplane pieces discarded in the vastness of the area." — DD, December 1978.

2
Zag

Wall relief on tripartite wooden base within a black wooden frame. *Top part*, left and stuck to base: an inverted cardboard label with "Samson Folding Furnit"; middle: purple canvas marked in blue through a reversed stencil plate; right: a red disc of vinyl veneer on blue-painted wood. *Middle part*: orange canvas stuck to base and having affixed to it — (right) a piece of vinyl fabric, the yellow reverse of which is presented, and marked in blue through the same stencil plate, and affixed to the rectangular corner of which is a square wooden block painted blue; (lower middle) a dark brown leather dome and to its left a flat rectangular block painted brick red; (bottom) a truncated oval sheet of purple painted plywood. *Bottom part*: raised strip of blue painted wood and, below it and stuck to base, a strip of green canvas marked, through same stencil plate, OWN DRUM in blue twice in reverse, twice plus a ONE the right way. 1372 x 1068mm; 1415 x 1106 overall.

Collection: the artist.
Not previously exhibited.
"A purely abstract piece. I moved into bright colour-field work after my return from North America. This is the first use of that stencil plate and of printed labels to form a pattern — the words don't have meaning." — DD, 1978.



1966

Driver was commissioned to do for the New Plymouth Airport a large aluminium mural, which so nearly blinded him he was hospitalised. In the Auckland City Art Gallery's New Zealand Painters 1966 show he was represented by a cruciform work made up of charred pieces of wood. From 18 to 30 April at the New Vision Gallery in Auckland he had his first dealer-gallery one-man show; as suggested above it was mostly of earlier works.

The exhibits from 1966 in the present show are —

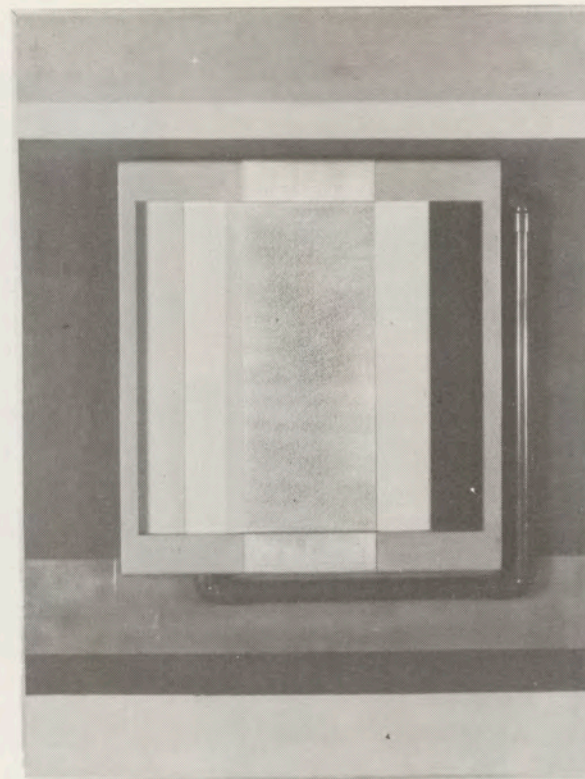
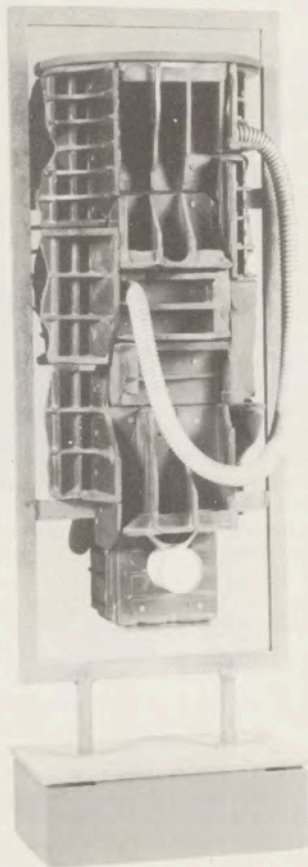
3
Battery-Case Sculpture

Free-standing sculpture constructed out of black-painted wood, black polypropylene battery cases, flexible connection pipe of galvanised iron, Novacase (pvc plus alkathene) pipe with two pink polythene balls, all set into a sheet of green perspex within a rusty cast-iron frame above a rusty cast-iron base.

1381 x 475 x 480mm.

Collection: The artist. Colour plate, p.25.

First exhibited Don Driver Retrospective, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 1973. "The dark battery cases against the perspex and pinky red balls seemed mysterious and dramatic." — DD, December 1978.



4
La Guardia 2

Wall Relief on canvas-covered plywood base painted in blue, yellow, red and orange horizontal bands. To the base is attached an open, wooden, box-like structure painted in blue enamel and framing a sheet of plywood on hardboard painted in vertical bands and with vertical strips, left and right, of coloured perspex and, centre, chased aluminium — the latter also fitted top and bottom over the box edge. At the right of the box and around and under it is grey Novacase pipe with pipe corner fittings at each end and at the junction at the corner of the box. Paint is enamel and frame is aluminium.

1226 x 923mm overall.

Collection: The artist.

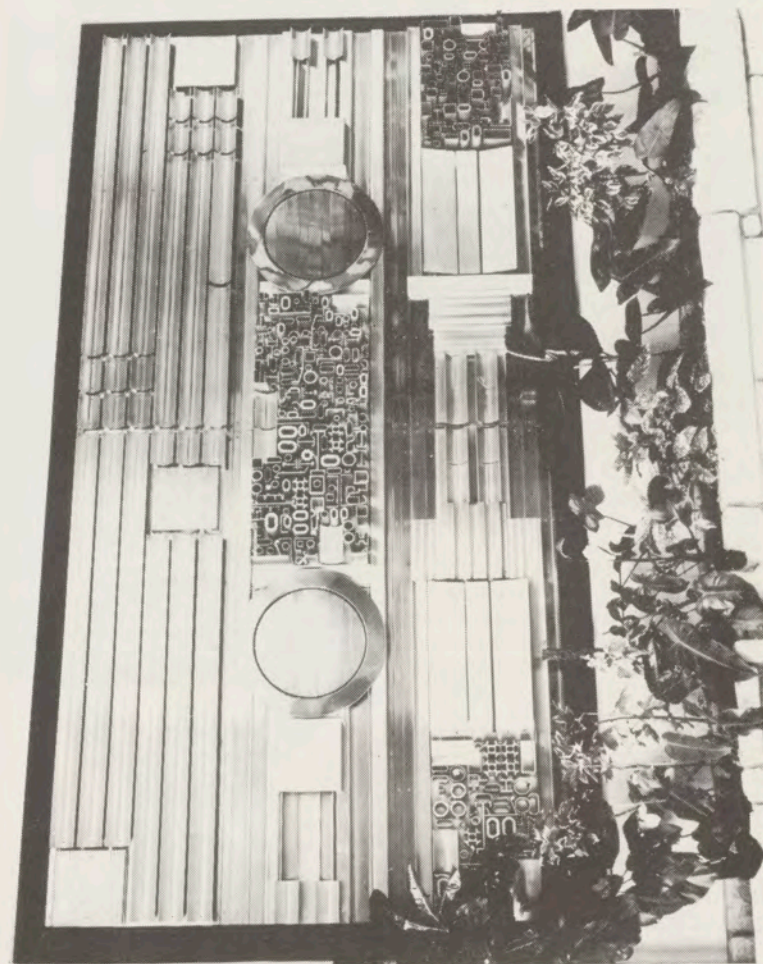
First exhibited Don Driver Retrospective, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth 1973.

"From first impressions of New York. I wanted to make a colourful relief suggesting garishness and glitter but in a formalised way overall." — DD, 1978

Driver completed the Airport commission and was represented at the Mildura (Victoria) Sculpture Triennial by Sentinel (illustrated) a free standing work in formica wood, stainless steel and Novacase pipe fittings, on an aluminium base. It was later exhibited at the Barry Lett Galleries and Gordon H Brown in the 23 November Auckland Star described it as "well thought out, elegant, if formal".

In the meantime John Maynard had been appointed as director of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, soon found Don, and took him to Sydney to see the Two Decades of American Painting exhibition. If he had difficulty in getting an overall view of American painting in 1965 he got it now. There were works by Albers, D'Arcangelo, Bluhm, Davis, Francis, Frankenthaler, Gorky, Gottlieb, Guston, Held, Hofmann, Johns, Katz, Kelly, Kline, de Kooning, Lichenstein, Louis, Mitchell, Motherwell, Newman, Noland, Pollock, Poons, Rauschenberg, Reinhardt, Rivers, Rosenquist, Rothko, Stella, Still, Tobey, Tomlin, Twombly and Warhol. Vuletic in the article cited suggests that the sense of colour that emerged was influenced by the paintings seen there by Noland, Kelly and Held, but Driver says he was interested more in Lichenstein and de Kooning.

During the year Driver executed a commission, illustrated, for McKechnie Brothers, Bell Block, using sections of their various extruded metal products, and caused a furore with the exhibition at the New Plymouth Public Library of a free standing sculpture. The Magician that incorporated "a female shop dummy, a watering can head, with a phonograph mounted at waist level".



Photographer not known.

The exhibit from 1967 is —

5
Medieval

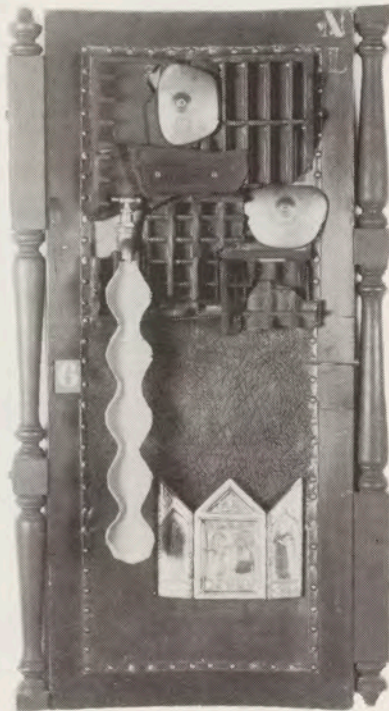
Wall relief, with base constructed from an old varnished wooden cinema seat with painted letter and number and upholstery in red vinyl fabric, and with pieces of plastic from battery cases, brass car-mirror backs, brass tap, papier-maché apple-case divider, and an icon with colour reproductions on paper over wood; all between turned, varnished, wooden table legs.

1097 x 602mm.

Collection: The artist.

First exhibited Don Driver Retrospective, 1973.

"The icon was given to us by the director of social services for the National Council of Churches in San Francisco, the wood and plastic seats were from New Plymouth's old Regent Theatre about to be converted into the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. . . . 'Medieval' not only because of the icon but also because of the general colouring and richness of texture and the suggestion that the chair legs could be Gothic pillars." — DD, 1978.



1968

Justine Driver was born and there were many works done including structured wall reliefs incorporating dolls or coloured plastic balls. There were also a number of works in black plastic. Driver was represented by Euclid, a work of painted wooden ridging with insets of stainless steel, in the Benson & Hedges Art Award exhibition.

The exhibits from 1968 are —

6
PS Handle with Care

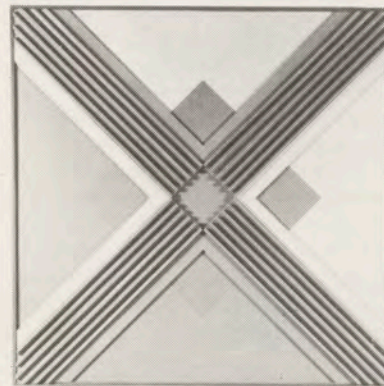
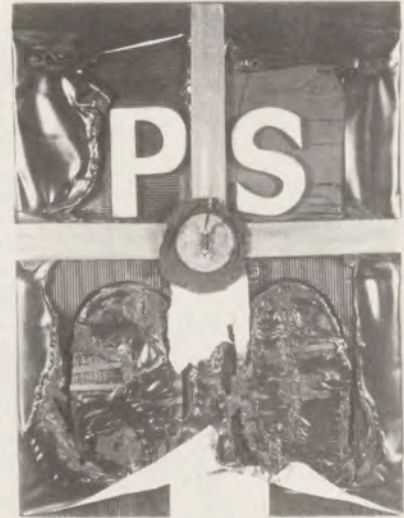
Wall relief on wooden base covered in — corrugated cardboard painted in acrylic; rumpled and partially burned polythene sheet with a black and a white side; white paper label printed in faded red ink HANDLE WITH CARE; and (largely over these) the cut-out wooden letters P and S, painted yellow in enamel, two oval wooden boards painted black in pva and steel banded, and three arms of a wooden cross in oil cloth imitating wood grain in the centre of which is a circle of plasticised cloth and (from an old gas meter) a rusty metal disc with moveable crank handle.

1246 x 919mm.

Collection: The artist.

Not previously exhibited.

"Except for the circular gas meter part, this piece is made from discarded products (including the cut-out letters) from Tingey's paint shop where I worked at the time. I burnt the polythene myself for textural effect. There is an obvious reference to the Cross in the placing of the P and the S and the sacrificial burning. I wanted to work all these things in and it took me a long time." — DD, January 1979.



7
Zither

Relief on wooden base covered in canvas. Canvas is painted red blue and green and over it is a structure in machine-ridged wood, painted in red and muted orange and in the form of a St Andrews cross over a flat square. 1216 x 1219 mm within the frame; 1244 x 1247 overall.

Collection: Mrs Joyce Driver, New Plymouth.

First exhibited in a one-man show in 1969 at the Peter

McLeavey Gallery in Wellington, when it was given this title.

"A purely abstract work. I used the Cross in a formal way quite a bit during this period." — DD 1978.

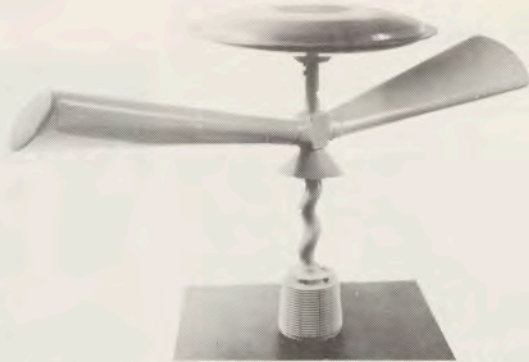
8
Flyaway

Free-standing sculpture in aluminium and stainless steel, made from parts of discarded machines and painted in yellow car lacquer.

728 x 1314 x 548mm.

Collection:

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth.



First exhibited in the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery Sculpture Show, 1970. "I had thoughts of a flying machine, with the bright yellow suggesting the sun. It took about a year to complete." — DD 1978.

1969

Driver was represented from 21 March in the Tokyo exhibition mentioned above, had a one-man show at the Peter McLeavey Gallery in Wellington and one in Sydney (he visited Sydney for it and also Melbourne) at the Bonython Gallery along with Lenton Parr and Bryan Westwood, and was represented by a black pvc work in the Transfield Prize exhibition there.

The Bonython show, which in retrospect appears premature, attracted reviews from John Henshaw (*The Australian*, 6 September), Donald Brook (*Sydney Morning Herald*, date not known), James Gleeson (*Sydney Sun*, likewise) and Elwyn Lynn (*Bulletin*, 13 September). Henshaw spoke of Sentinel as exemplifying "Driver's restless but disciplined exploration of minimalist aims". Lynn, about a wall relief titled Blue-Green, echoes: "those two balanced colours are made restless by a thin red diagonal." Gleeson called Driver "inventive and eclectic . . . his exhibition . . . almost a compendium of current avant-garde attitudes. . . ." Lynn sums up: "Driver is a pure constructivist, reinforcing form even with blatant colour . . . Like much peripheral art relying on metropolitan modes . . . [Driver's work] is rather unrelaxed, over-earnest and takes too few risks with form and colour, but is effective nonetheless."

In November Driver joined the staff of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery under John Maynard.

The exhibits from 1969 are —

9
Relief with Pleats

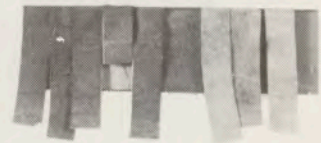
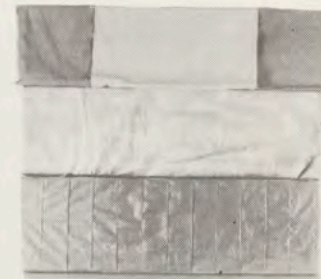
Flat, canvas-covered, wooden base the exposed canvas of which is painted in black enamel, with (from top) loose pieces of green and red canvas, soiled and creased blue vinyl fabric wrapped around a board, pleated dark green vinyl fabric around a second board, yellow "Vinylon" cloth with printed brand name and number around a third, a piece of green canvas stapled to the black and these latter largely obscured by hanging strips of black and dark grey suede leather.

1266 x 885mm plus distance the strips hang below the base — 130mm being the longest.

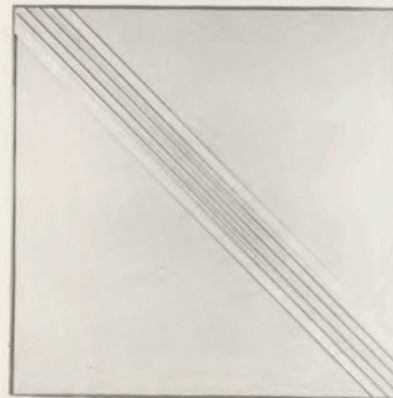
Collection: The artist.

First exhibited Don Driver Retrospective 1973 when it was titled "Relief 1969".

"Predates the hard-edge horizontal panels (1971 on) and the works with hanging strips (1975 on)." — DD 1978.



10
Zodiac



Relief in diagonally disposed, red and green, machine-moulded wood on stretched canvas painted blue upper right and purple lower left; all bordered in a black wooden frame. The paint is acrylic.

1554 x 1550mm including frame.

Collection: The artist.

First exhibited in one-man show, Peter McLeavey Gallery, 1969.

"One of about a dozen similar works each titled by Peter McLeavy with a word beginning with Z. I preferred actual shadows to the illusion of them and used this ridged moulding a lot." — DD, 1978.

1970

The artist was represented at the Mildura Triennial by Balbac, a composite 2130 x 940 x 1430mm blue piece of wood and fibreglass, now in the Govett-Brewster collection. The work was described by Alan McCulloch — "as owing its monumentality to well-balanced volumes and proportions" and illustrated in his piece on the Triennial in Art International, XIV/6, 1970, p103. He was also represented in the Benson & Hedges exhibition by an earlier version of Dimension no 1 (see 11 below) and in the Auckland City Art Gallery's New Zealand Art of the Sixties exhibition. He was among the 10 artists invited to submit works for Auckland's 1971 Large Paintings Exhibition (see note to 12). From 27 October to 6 November he had his second one-man show, of 16 works including Zither (7) and Balbac, at New Vision. The latter show was favourably reviewed by T J McNamara (NZ Herald 27 October: ". . . big, bold, stridently coloured works . . .") and Hamish Keith (Auckland Star 31 October: "formal control" and "a fine sense of acid colour.")

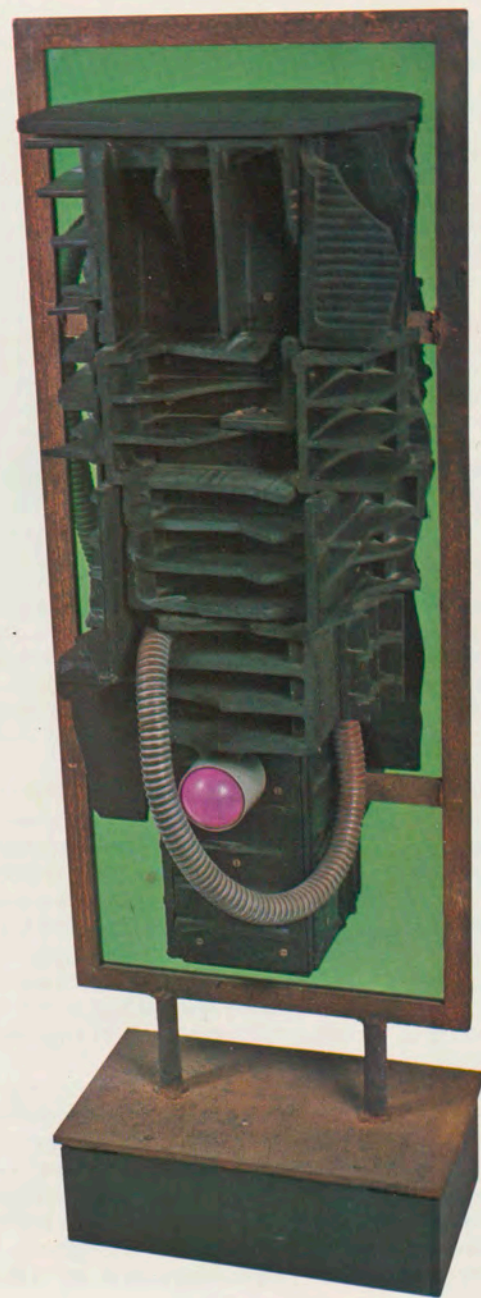
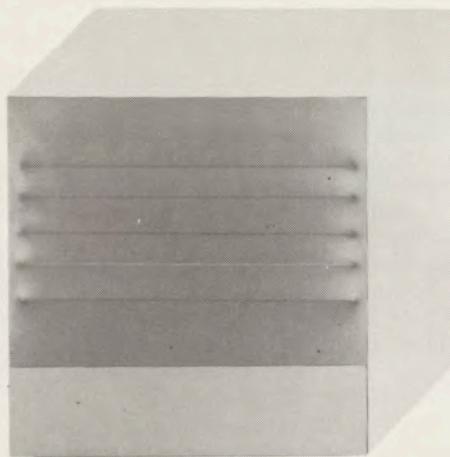
The exhibits from 1970 are—

11 Dimension no 1

Wall relief on a constructed wooden base with two diagonal corners and five horizontal ribs over which canvas is stretched taut so they show through; the canvas is painted in vermilion, blue and purple acrylic.
1402 x 1402mm.

Collection: Mr & Mrs C Garnham, New Plymouth. First exhibited, in a different form, in the 1970 Benson & Hedges Art Award show.

"In certain respects this is one of a series transitional between the open use of parallel ridges as in Zodiac and stretched canvas panels as in the piece that won the Benson & Hedges Award in 1972 and Vertical Relief 1974. The parallel ridges here are behind the canvas. The ambiguous perspective in this as it now is was continued into Five Part Piece and Dimension no 6." — DD 1978.



12

Dimension no 6

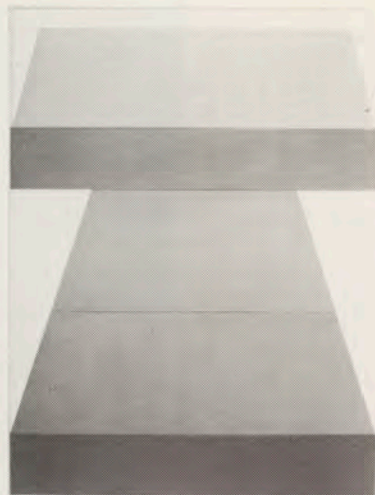
Relief painting in acrylic on five stretched canvases which are butted together, one above the other.

1846 x 1375mm in aluminium frame.

Collection: Manawatu Art Gallery.

This is a similar (smaller and "up-ended") version of Five-Part Piece, the artist's entry in the Auckland City Art Gallery's Large Paintings exhibition of 1971 and too big to tour in our one. On that: "... a series of ambiguously related volumes — adhering to a surface yet encroaching on our own space." — David

McMillan, *Art and the Community*, April 1971. And "I made mock-ups in cardboard. I wanted intense colour and simple shapes, the colour distances working the opposite way from the recession in space suggested by the converging diagonals, for example the red comes forward where perspective is holding it back." — DD 1978. On this: "Because I was pleased with Five-Part Piece I created the smaller version with its panels horizontal." — DD 1978.



1971

The artist received a grant from the Arts Council towards the big corten steel sculpture he was commissioned to make for the Govett-Brewster sculpture court; his Five-Part Piece was amongst the works most mentioned in the critics' writings on the Large Paintings exhibition in February and was the subject of an analytic piece by David McMillan (see also note to 12) who regarded only it and McCahon's Gate III as solutions of the scale problem; he had another one-man show at the Peter McLeavey Gallery and was represented in March at the Manawatu Centenary exhibition.

That year Driver began a Painted Panel series, the panels being in acrylic on stretched canvases fixed together, like Vertical Relief (15) but initially horizontal and smaller; nos I to V in the catalogue of his 1972 New Vision show are given as 1971. In the 1971 Artis piece already cited Vuletic says of them: "These have an exceedingly 'deadpan' format. . . . The sharp, hard colours of the earlier works have been replaced by saturated colours

applied in even, textureless fields. The colour bands are physically separated since each is on a different piece of canvas, and this separation is accentuated by the fact that some panels are placed further forward than others. This stepped arrangement creates a shadow effect which heightens the contrast . . . yet . . . acts as a unifying feature . . . by making the demarcation line a 'non-area' that acts as a neutral buffer zone." Vuletic concludes: ". . . although his recent work has some similarities to colour field painting, its monumental simplicity and resonant colour are his alone."

There are no exhibits from 1971.

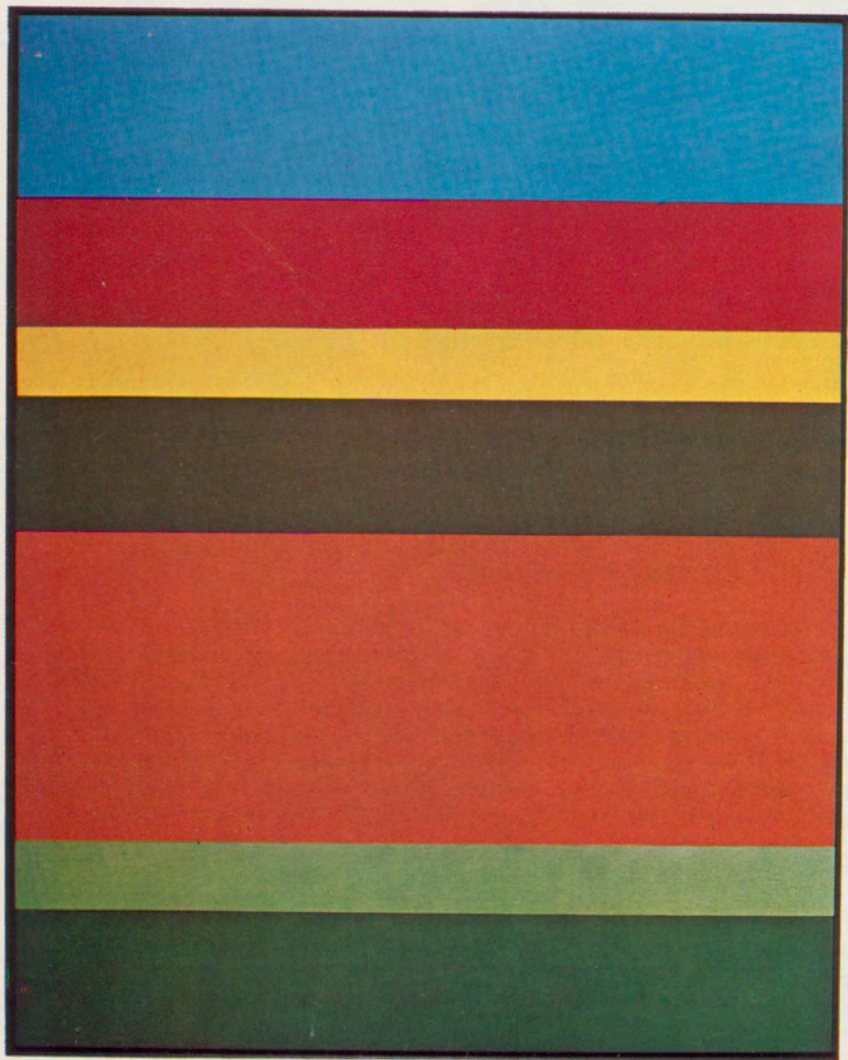
1972

This was the year Driver won the Benson & Hedges Art Award. Earlier he had completed his Govett-Brewster sculpture court piece and in May-June he joined John Lethbridge in a two-man show at New Vision; the Award was later in June. He also had a one-man show at the Victoria University library and participated in a group show at the Petar/James Gallery in Auckland.

With Joyce and Justine his daughter, Don Driver went on a trip to South-East Asia, visiting Melbourne, Hong Kong, Macao, Bangkok, Singapore and Sydney; he studied South-East Asian art and extended his collection.

Eleven painted panel-reliefs, done in 1971 and 1972 and including one in lacquered aluminium, were in the New Vision show and were well received by T J McNamara (NZ Herald 23 May), Hamish Keith (Auckland Star 27 May and 3 June) and Bute Hewes (who found the aluminium one "startlingly effective" — Sunday Herald 28 May). The artist's fusing of painting and sculpture and his boldness and firmness is well brought out, while Keith in his second review states: "These works challenge the conception that art must refer to something outside itself. Driver's painted reliefs form their own reality."

The winning Benson & Hedges entry was another aluminium panelled relief from the same series, no 11. The Award was judged that year in Christchurch at the McDougall Art Gallery, which bought the work. The judge was Elwyn Lynn from the Sydney University's Power Institute with its great contemporary art collection. The urbanely lyrical descriptions given by such a distinguished person of a completely non-representational work resulted in a flood of publicity in newspapers throughout



15 Vertical Relief, 1974



18 Relief II: White Bag, 1975

the country. Lynn said: "It is a really fine example of geometrical art, that refines the notion of matte seductive surfaces that float away, that stay glowingly rigid, or are uptight. Added is a dark blue strip that rejects one's approach and is the opposite of seductive. The nuances between these are subtle and exciting."

The artist's "candour" in saying the work was not one the average man would like was headlined. "I didn't make it for popularity. I did it because that's what I wanted to do," he told a New Plymouth reporter, who also recorded him as saying: "I try to create tensions between colours, shapes, shadows and reflections to create simplicity and ambiguity. And that, I think is among the qualities the judge saw in my Painted Relief no 11." P Æ Hutchings in his Art International article Eight New Zealand Painters (XIV/1, 1975), on p 32 quotes the artist as saying on it: "I don't like my painting to be evocative but to be something to be looked at for itself. It is a combination of flat surfaces and colours just nestling against each other."

Terry O'Meagher, in a Saturday feature article in The Daily News of 10 June, describes the artist as "slightly built, with greying hair not overlong by contemporary standards . . . [and speaking] with quiet precision about painting and sculpture." He quotes him as saying: "I've never been interested in flat surfaces, but I am in actual textural depth. . . . Painting and sculpture have merged. . . . The critics say it's new in New Zealand but I'm not too concerned about that. It's where I am at the moment." O'Meagher sketches in the story of Don Driver's life to that date, touching on his collection of Oriental art and his sense of the mystery of the pieces in it "from India, China, Thailand and Burma . . . which, he feels, influences his own work." On the question of the commercial value of his work O'Meagher reported that Driver shrugged his shoulders and said: "Naturally if a work sells, then I'm pleased. . . . But what I do I don't do for money. It's no good if the stuff you turn out is influenced by what you are going to get for it. In the end it's no longer yours. It's somebody else's idea of what is valuable."

Michael Dunn in the Auckland Star of 10 June explained that Driver was self-taught and that his non-figurative works lay in the mainstream of contemporary painting, that they have points in common with such prominent American painters as Noland and "can arouse little controversy". Mentioning that Lynn was curator of the "largest collection of modern painting in Australia or New Zealand", Dunn concluded that the award would encourage "other artists who are breaking away from conventional approaches. . . ." The next day in the Sunday Herald Peter

Cape, traversing the history of the three Benson & Hedges awards, found confirmation that in this award they and "the mainstream of New Zealand painting had caught up with one another."

Back in Sydney Elway Lynn in the Bulletin (New Zealand's Cool Air, 24 June) discussed the award winner and exhibition in the light of New Zealand art, which impressed him, and its relation to American art: he had been lucky enough on his visit to see the Driver show in Auckland, the Colin McCahon Survey in Christchurch, and Robert Ballard's State of California exhibition in New Plymouth. Reflecting also on Driver's Bonython showing he compared him favourably with Michael Johnson.

The exhibit done in 1972, but after those discussed, is —



13
Painted Relief no 14: 3
Blues

Panel-relief in six horizontal metal panels in a brown, wooden, box-frame, each panel moulded into the shape of a shallow pan with the four edges going back at right angles though with the corners rounded and with the flat "bottoms" presented to the viewer. The 1st,



21 Lawn Cuttings, 1976



22 Soft Hanging 1, 1976

5th and 6th panels are each 230mm high, the 2nd 234, 3rd 133 and 4th 407mm. The 2nd, 4th and 5th, of stainless steel, are set forward 11-14mm from the 1st, 3rd and 6th, which are of aluminium lacquered in Brolite. The panels, which were fabricated to the artist's specifications, are bolted to each other and the frame through their edges.

1468/74 x 1830/34 within frame; 1505 x 1870mm overall.

Collection: The artist.

First exhibited: The Govett-Brewster's Don Driver Retrospective, 1973, then later that year at the International Art Fair, Dusseldorf. It arrived back from the subsequent Australia tour damaged and three panels have been replaced.

"I had incorporated pieces of stainless steel in my 1968 Benson & Hedges entry but in a different way and on a smaller scale, and earlier in 1972 I had incorporated panels of another metal — lacquered aluminium — as well as stretched canvas ones. Here I was interested in the reflections the steel created against the different shades of blue, but for the first time came up against the problem of getting stainless steel fabricated for an art work. Getting the correct polishing is a headache. From these panels I moved into the formal sculpture of the Cosmos series with stainless and corten steel, perspex, formica and plastic tubes, including the piece for which I won a Hansell prize in 1974 and the one I did for the Auckland Medical School. I think I was working on these and other panel reliefs both canvas and metal in 1973." — DD 1978.

1973

Driver was given a retrospective exhibition by Robert Ballard at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery and there was a full-page Profile in the Saturday (12 May) Taranaki Herald preceding the opening. It was there stated that the show embraced "about 50 pieces he has constructed over the past 12 years" and six of the nine illustrations were pre-1965, something he would not allow today. He is revealed as "mild-looking and shy" but "pretty hard hitting". After a mention of the pieces "he has made from bits of vinyl from the old Regent theatre, old iron . . . brass [and] battery cases", he is quoted as saying: "Too many people think that works of art can only be made out of bronze or stone and painting should be 'oils'. But people who want to be constructive can make art out of next to nothing. They don't have to have money. . . . Everything has its own value; everything has shape and colour and line and can be used, if you really want to use it."

He was also represented, by two 1972 panel-reliefs (see also the note to 13) at the International Art Fair in Dusseldorf and his works along with the other Australian and New Zealand works returning from that exhibition were toured from September in Australia. The other New Zealand artists represented were Hanly, McCahon, Papas, Smither and Brent Wong.

The exhibit from 1973 is one of the small ones —

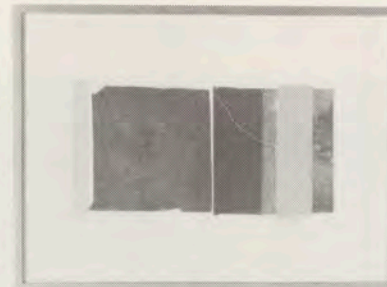
14 Collage no 3

Framed and glazed collage using variously coloured pieces of canvas some painted in acrylic. 563 x 768mm within frame; 582 x 787mm overall.

Collection: Mrs Joyce Driver, New Plymouth.

First exhibited New Vision Gallery in a three-man show, 1974.

" . . . Driver has produced works of great presence. Canvas has been dyed, crumpled and assembled in rectangular fragments as a kind of glossary of the most visually enjoyable things about the material." H. Keith, Auckland Star, 1974, day and month not known. "Just a change from the large, formal, panel-pieces. I wanted things I could do quickly and made a dozen of these within a few weeks." — DD 1979.



1974

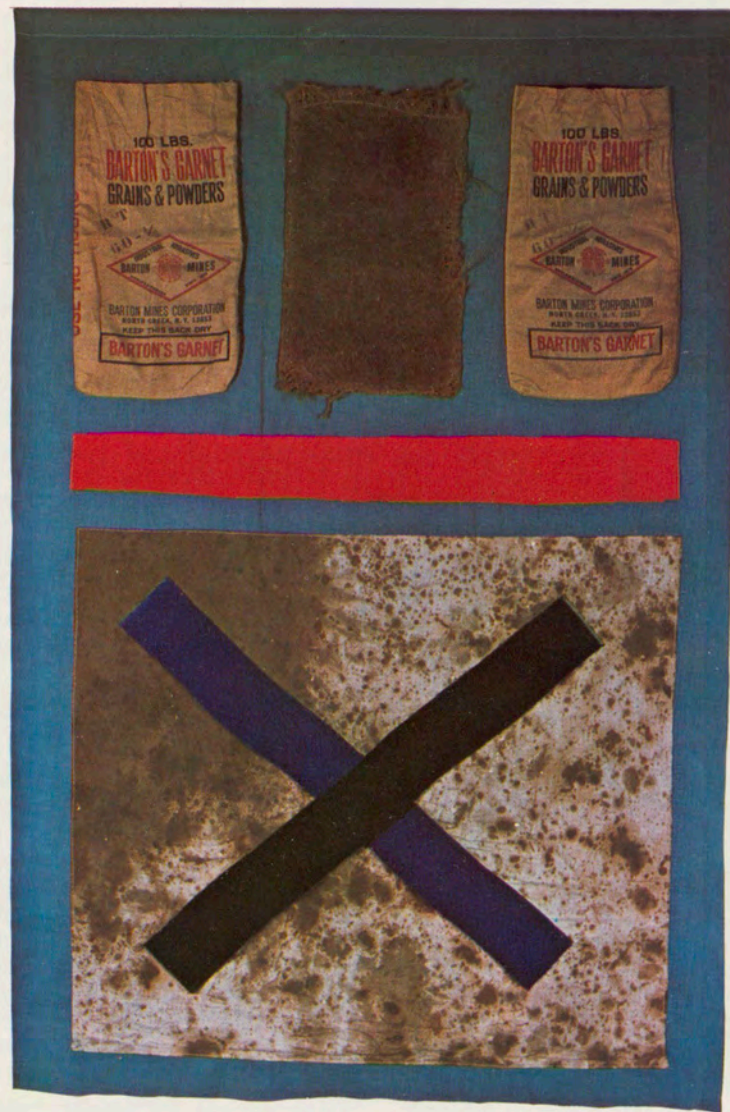
Driver was represented in the New Year New Works show at the Barry Lett Galleries in Auckland, had a one-man show at the New Vision and also (with small collages — see 14) participated there in a three-man show along with Philip Truettum and Brian Reid, in October he won section A of the Hansell's Sculpture Award in the Wairarapa Arts Centre in Masterton with Double Cosmos.

The one-man show was reviewed by T J McNamara (who found magical "the appeal to the eye and mind of certain carefully calculated encounters of stainless steel and canvas" and described two big Cosmos sculptures as "made of corten steel, stainless steel, perspex and plastic; they are . . . three-dimensional and change in remarkable ways as the spectator moves around them," (NZ Herald 19 June) and by Hamish Keith who (in the Auckland Star 22 June) spoke of Driver's "being a consummate magician . . . sophisticated artisan. He puts his works together with the kind of skill we more usually expect from some precision instrument-maker."

Michael Dunn in the Sunday Herald of 23 June stressed the unorthodox inventiveness and "taunting [of] our expectations of what should go together in terms of materials and colours", that the "works are not about representation . . . [but] objects to be accepted as such and on their own terms", that his method was controlled assemblage, that there was "little evidence of his handwriting, as it were" in the works but "each object has a



24 50 Kg, 1977



25 Large Cross, 1977

literal quality and a high degree of freedom from associations with a particular personality. This produces an analogy with a consumer product that is assembled from different materials, to a plan and to a design that considers the relation of materials and their shapes. Without any stated attitude to society. . . . Driver nevertheless manages to reflect something of its materialistic values and impersonality." After describing evocatively the strong and disturbing experiences given by the exhibits Dunn mentions the fineness of judgement required: "The gap between what is merely pedestrian, another useless object in an already cluttered world, and what is capable of relating to the commonplace, but escaping from it, may not appear very wide" though few artists except Driver "are capable of bridging the gap".

In the Listener of 20 July Dunn stresses Driver's concern for his materials, fastidiousness of presentation, the pictorial element even in the sculptures (the Cosmos pieces like the wall-reliefs are viewed from the front), and the artist's playing off of real recession with the recessive properties of some colours and their opposites.

Dunn also discussed, in the Auckland Star of 27 October, the problems the Hansell Sculpture Award was having as a result of its being based in a small and isolated centre but, on the winners of the two sections, said only that they were "sculptors of recognised achievement".

The exhibits from 1974 are —

15 Vertical Relief

Relief painting in seven panels of stretched canvas painted in acrylics, abutted side by side and held with a recess around the conjoined 7, within a brown wooden box-frame. The colours and widths of the panels are — dark green 310mm, light green 156, scarlet 690, brown 298, yellow 156, crimson 285, blue 407.

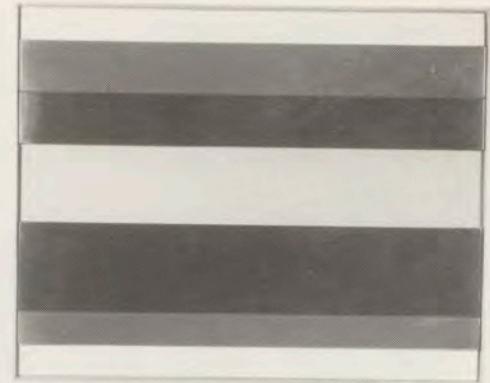


1830/5 x 2302/7mm; 1877 x 2350mm overall.

Collection: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. Colour plate p.28.

First exhibited: New Vision Gallery, 1974.

"... blazing bands of colour. . . ." T J McNamara, NZ Herald 19 June 1974. "Back to the vertical after many horizontally banded panels." — DD 1978.



16 Pink & Red Relief

Panel-relief in seven horizontal panels in a brown wooden box-frame: six of aluminium, the other (4th panel) of canvas on a stretcher. Construction is as for Painted Relief no 14:3 Blues, with 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 6th panels set 15/18mm forward from the 1st, 4th and 7th. Colours and heights of the panels are: pink 127mm, maroon 203, Prussian blue 203, grey 308, Prussian blue 354, maroon 127, pink 127. Vynol acrylic on the canvas, lacquer on the aluminium. The aluminium panels were fabricated for the artist.

1464/73 x 1834/5 within the frame; 1510 x 1877 overall.

Collection: The artist.

First exhibited, as Relief 1974: New Vision Gallery 1974.

"What a relief! Mind blank on how it happened. But apart from the Cosmos sculptures and, in a way, Albers' Shaving Mirror, this was the last of the carefully laid out pieces. I was looking at books on Picasso and decided to let it all flow like him." — DD 1978.

1975

Don Driver acted as director of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery from Robert Ballard's departure in January till Ron O'Reilly's arrival in mid-July; he was not well and did not enjoy the experience. In January also appeared the Art International article (already cited) by Hutchings. It contained two black and white reproductions and one large coloured reproduction of Driver's; the last was of Painted Relief no 12, 1972. In March he was commissioned to do a piece of sculpture for the Auckland Medical School and in September he installed Giant Cosmos there. Soon after he began again to work in cast-off materials and objects and to do so in a way radically at variance with the immaculately turned out panel-reliefs and sculptures he had done for several years: 18 and 19 are examples.

The exhibits from 1975 are —



A display of small sculptures, 1977/9

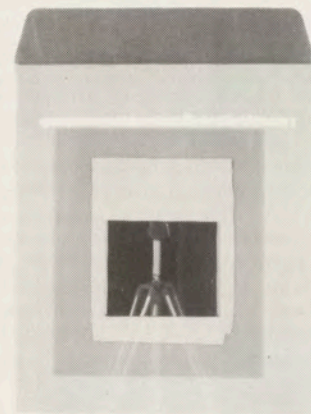
17 Albers' Shaving Mirror

Collage/relief in/on a frame with clear perspex at front and around sides, top and bottom. On a sheet of white mounting board that fills the frame is — the reverse of a large orange envelope that was used for Agfa film, that has at top a large dark grey flap and, below the edge of the flap when it was turned down, the white under-layer of the envelope card presumably exposed when a sealing strip of cello tape had been torn away; on the envelope a rectangle of opaque red perspex; on the red perspex two irregularly rectangular pieces of blue twill, the lower one hidden except for a small area at its bottom; above the clear perspex and over the blue twill, a slightly irregular piece of dark blue mirror-perspex.

922 x 720mm overall. Camera reflected in photograph.

Collection: Mr John B Matthews, Omata.
Exhibited in the Don Driver 1971-77 show.

"I had the envelope and the red perspex and together they set off the chain. The mirror ties the work in with the stainless steel works." — DD 1979.



18 Relief II: White Bag



Wall hanging, on a galvanised iron pipe, of canvas from a soiled torn and patched green tarpaulin to which is affixed the seat of an old upholstered chair in brown leather and tattered hessian. Over these are — a Suzuki motorcycle seat in black vinyl, red and black vinyl motor car upholstery, a soiled open white vinyl pram bag with twisted and rusted frame and fittings. The patch lower right is double, the top being of green,

yellow and red striped canvas. There are letters in faint white paint upper left and numerous daubs of green paint elsewhere on the tarpaulin.

2200 x 2030mm.

Collection: The artist. Colour plate, p.29.

"... a very fine colour sense and a marvellous feeling for the tactile quality of materials as well as a sense of scale. . . . In Relief II a huge piece of torn canvas is loaded with bits of pram and motorbike seats to make a remarkable object." — T J McNamara, NZ Herald 19 June 1976. "Some weather-beaten and somewhat off-putting pieces appear to have been resurrected from the municipal rubbish dumps. Driver, with a fine sense of form and workmanship, effortlessly shapes these objects, removing the banality of the original purpose and surrounding . . . (them) with an aura of privilege status. The metaphysical ambiguity . . . is balanced by a rich vein of satire." — Peter Bromhead, Auckland Star 25 March 1976. "A break-through: I used things I found in a tip near Cape Egmont that revived themes from the past and I used them in a new way. I suppose the use of strips in the canvas patch is most obviously connected with the panel pieces but so is the formation of the leather flap, while back in 1969 I had used vinyl and before that had incorporated found objects. In essence this is colour-field without the hard-edge." — DD 1978.

1976

In March Driver was represented by his 1974 collage Taranaki at the Canterbury Society of Arts Christchurch Festival exhibition, Land. Taranaki is reproduced in colour in Jim Barr's piece on the Paris collection in Art New Zealand 4, February-March 1977. About the time Driver got this away he was active, perhaps hyper-active, in producing new works. On the night of 18-19 February, whilst on a work, he had a stroke. He was paralysed down his right-side, had to relearn to speak, walk and use his right hand, and was off work for 10 weeks.

He had been invited by New Vision to be its Auckland Festival Artist in a one-man show and Joyce Driver, with the assistance of John Maynard and other friends, organised it. Mrs Driver relates how T J McNamara made himself known to her at the opening and expressed the view that, even if it turned out that Don Driver was physically incapacitated, his ability was such that he could have others do the work of putting pieces together as he wanted them.

Similarly, Mrs Driver organised a one-man show largely of the same works at the Victoria University library, the dispatch of his contribution to the Barry Lett Galleries Screens exhibition (his screen was made of pieces of old painted sheets of corrugated iron, held in clear plastic bags and hung like so many suits from iron "clothes hangers" suspended within a moveable frame of galvanised iron piping) and of his contribution, as invited artist, to the Christchurch Group show.

At New Vision there were seven of the 1975/6 wall hanging assemblages, a free-standing assemblage of large poles girdled in rusty sprocket-chain that now belongs to the Dowse Art Gallery and one of the earlier hard-edge reliefs. As the reviews of Relief II (see notes to 18) indicated, the Auckland critics hailed the new works, as did Professor Roberts in Wellington in a radio broadcast that also mentioned the disdainful faces of the librarians.

The exhibits from 1976 are —

19 Relief VII: Green Ball

Wall relief of three vertical wooden panels constructed, and bolted together by their side pieces, so the main faces of the 2 outer panels face away from the recessed centre one. The panels are largely covered in canvas — that on the outer ones old, wrinkled and patched, that on the centre one new and striped in bright green, red, yellow and blue, except that the lower part is discoloured. The canvas of the left panel is roughly painted in green acrylic over brown which shows through on the sides; that of the right is painted brown over blue which shows through in front. The brown paint extends over the exposed edge of the side pieces of the centre panel between which, and revealed where the canvas is torn away, is a 292mm wide plank in its original off-white house paint. Two bands of imitation leather cross the bottom of this panel loosely, the outer one partly pulled away at right. The green ball, of polythene, is suspended by a green fishing line held at the top over the middle of the centre panel.

1855 x 845 x 153mm.

Collection: The artist.

Exhibited: New Vision Gallery and Victoria University Library 1976.

"An even stronger link with the panel pieces, here de-formalised. I stained and tore the striped canvas because it looked too new. I had used plastic balls before but now put one on string to give the effect of an exclamation." — DD 1978.



20
Black with Three

Wall hanging, on a galvanised iron pipe, of worn black vinyl fabric hemmed and notched at the outer edges and with a length of elasticised cord visible at two of the notches in the bottom hem. To the fabric are stretched three horizontal sleeves within which, but protruding at each end, are three elongated, kapok-filled, canvas bags like draught-stoppers. The top sleeve is green, its "stopper" blue; the middle sleeve is also green, its "stopper" yellow; the lower sleeve has yellow and red strips and its "stopper" is green. The stitching was done for the artist.

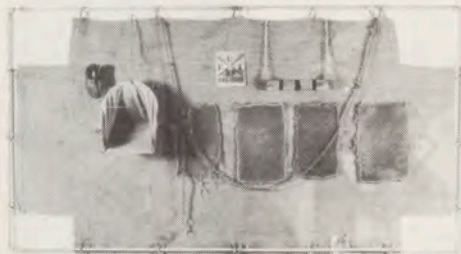


c1860 x c1135mm.

Collection: The artist.

First exhibited at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery's Don Driver 1971-1977 show, 1977.

"Instead of the hard-edge panels I used the long solid wads of colour they have as draught-stoppers for doors. I invented sleeves to hold them and made them in new colours. About that time I decided to have the stitching on these hangings done for me by a local canvas firm, but I had to stand over them." — DD 1978/79.



21
Lawn Cuttings

Wall hanging made of a cruciform piece of coir matting held by loops of plaited coir cord more or less within a four-sided frame of galvanised iron piping and having attached to it or the frame — an aluminium stencil plate partly covered in blue, a four-part wooden roller on galvanised iron chains, a pair of shoes, a used grass catcher of stained white duck with flat galvanised iron base and galvanised iron frame, a rusty length of iron chain, and four used coir doormats.

Frame: 2145 x 2950mm; matting hangs down a further c70mm.

Collection: The artist. Colour plate, p.32.

First exhibited Don Driver 1971-77 show, 1977.

"I used my grass catcher, Leon Narbey's shoes and the Tingey stencil plate I had used to stencil with in a number of works including Zag about 1965. The galvanised iron surround was constructed for the

purpose but the coir formed the floor of a tent. I acquired the doormats from various sources by replacing them at dead of night with new ones. This is one of my larger works and I regard it as a major one." — DD 1978.

"... a broad range of chromatic sonorities flow together into a complex polyphonic whole. This major work is a tone poem, a landscape of our urban environment." — Ernest Smith, personal communication, February 1979.

22
Soft Hanging 1

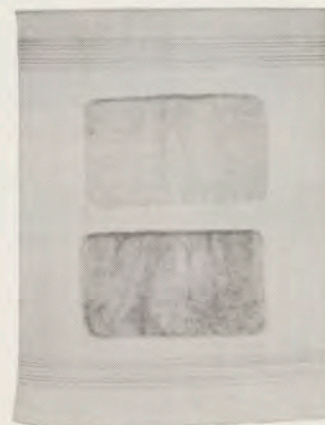
Collage wall hanging, on a galvanised iron pipe, of a yellow cotton blanket with a pink and a purple nylon-fur mat affixed.

2000 x 1470mm. The stitching was done for the artist.

Collection: The artist. Colour plate, p.33.

Exhibited in the 1977 Govett-Brewster Don Driver show and in his 1978 New Vision one-man one.

Of the latter exhibition Gordon H Brown wrote: "The best works have an informal precision that emphasizes the materials while denying their original purpose. . . . This . . . takes on different implications, as in the suburban pastel colours and over-domesticated materials used in Soft Hanging 1. . . ." — Auckland Star 7 June 1978. "Gordon Brown defined well what I was trying to do here." — DD 1978/79.



1977

Driver in January organised his own show at the Govett-Brewster. Titled Don Driver 1971-1977 it consisted of 60 works including 13 hard-edged reliefs and 16 sculptures, filled the whole gallery, and gave New Plymouth gallery goers their first chance to see his work since Ballard's Retrospective four years before.

Tom Kreisler, a teacher, fellow artist and friend, wrote in the Taranaki Herald of 26 February: ". . . a circus of discarded and rejected objects turned to magic — an encyclopaedic bonbon of colour and texture concocted from the unnoticed of our daily life: this is not new. What is new is a density, intensity and toughness in the way it's all put together. The comment is less about trivia and his debt to other artists . . . but largely about

... his inner self and a strangely disquieting melancholy underlying a gentle sense of fun."

In July the artist was one of those exhibiting by invitation at the opening of the new Manawatu Art Gallery, and at the end of the year was given a show, along with Peter Peryer the photographer, at the Dowse Art Gallery, Lower Hutt.

Neil Rowe in the Evening Post of 24 December explained Driver's national and international achievements to comment on how "seldom seen and even less understood or appreciated" he was. Rowe found the new works "more formal in their concern with subtle juxtaposition of colour and texture . . . than the looser more expressionistic pieces" in the university library in 1976 and "more concerned with playing conceptual games . . . juggling ambiguities, junk materials, onion bags, door mats . . . with taffetas and grograms, textured woven cloths, plastic, vinyl and canvas with references to Warhol pop brand names and formal post-painterly abstraction."

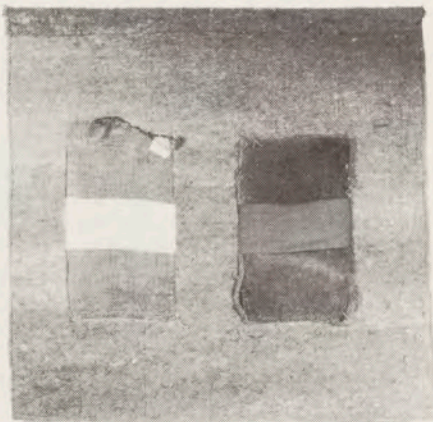
Our exhibits done in 1977 are —

23 Two

Collage wall hanging, on a galvanised iron pipe, of grey (red- and white-flecked) Fel-tex having affixed a red and white polyurethane onion sack and, by a strip of blue denim, an old coir doormat. 1750 x 1785mm. The stitching was done for the artist.

Collection: The artist.
First exhibited as Two Bags at the Dowse Art Gallery, December 1977-January 1978.

"I really cannot explain my passion for doormats and old bags. My wife says I should see a psychiatrist." — DD 1978.



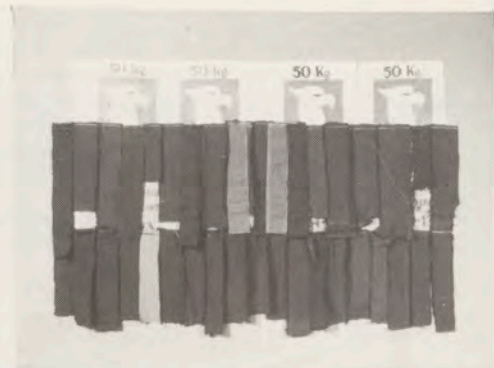
24 50 Kg

Collage wall hanging, on a galvanised iron pipe, of blue-green canvas with, sewn on for the artist, four polyurethane sacks each with "50 Kg" printed in black above a red block-bordered eagle's head device and with two overlapping rows each of 19 strips of fabric largely differing in weave, texture, colour and dimensions. Each strip is likewise sewn to the canvas sacks at the top, the top strips just below the eagles' heads. 1740 x 2315mm.

Collection: Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. Colour plate, p.36.
Exhibited Don Driver 1971-77 show, 1977; Dowse Art Gallery 1977-78; New Vision 1978. A proposal that the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery should purchase the work, which was agreed to only in March 1979, created a furore in New Plymouth in late 1977.

"Considering the materials used in Large Cross . . . or 50 Kg . . . the final results can be surprisingly sensuous." — Gordon H Brown, Auckland Star, 7 June 1978.

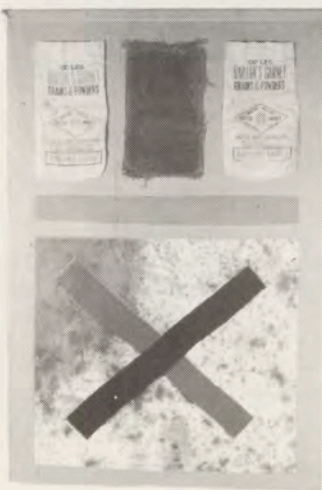
"When I first saw polyurethane sacks, with their bold printing, colour, sheen, texture and mystery, I was excited and found ways of incorporating them in my works, just as I had old doormats. The strips first occurred in Relief with Pleats, 1969." — DD 1978.



25 Large Cross

Collage wall hanging, on a galvanised iron pipe, of blue canvas with, sewn to it for the artist, — (upper left and right) two jute sacks printed in red and black with name, device and particulars of the contents (Barton's Garnet); between them a used coir door mat; (across near middle) a wide strip of brushed, red, synthetic fabric; (below) an oil-marked rectangular piece of linen sheeting bearing, in strips of the same synthetic fabric, one green, one blue, a St Andrew's cross. 2780 x 1810mm.

In a private collection in New Plymouth. Colour plate, p.37.

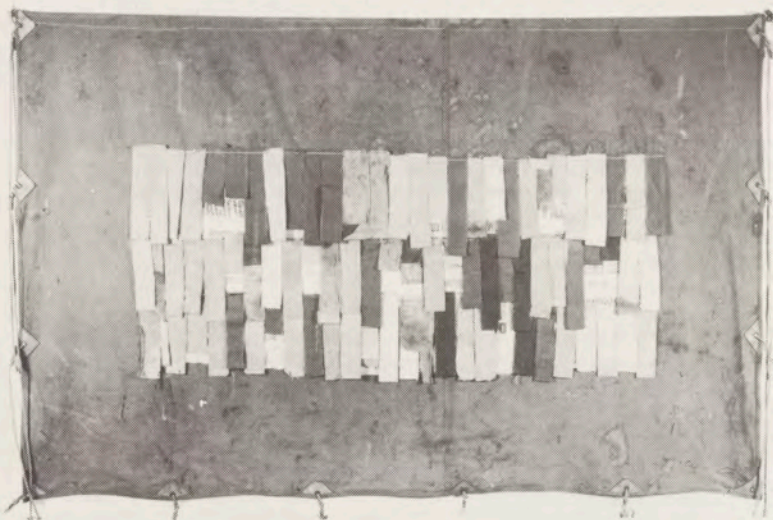


GOVETT-BREWSTER ART GALLERY
47 NEW PLYMOUTH N.Z.

First exhibited: Dowse Art Gallery 1977-78.

"... junk materials ... Driver imbues ... with a style and an authority that is distinctly his own. A superb colourist, his colour handling ... is immaculate, particularly in Large Stripe and Large Cross. Although the adjective seems at odds with the mundane materials used ... they are elegant, both in the restrained and subtle arrangement of elements ... and in the handling of colour, texture and scale." — Neil Rowe, Evening Post, 24 December 1977.

"A freed version of past compositions using the same elements and a vibrating red in the middle." — DD 1978.



26
Pacific Salt

Collage wall hanging, on a galvanised iron pipe, of a stained and faded green tarpaulin with, sewn to it for the artist, four white polyurethane sacks overprinted in red and black for the product named in the title and, suspended from their tops in two overlapping rows over these, strips of fabric that largely differ in colour, texture, weave and dimensions.

1770 x 2645 mm.

Collection: The artist.

Not previously exhibited.

"A mate to 50 Kg." — DD 1978.

1978

The artist was represented in the Barry Lett New Year New Artists show, in March-May by his 1976 Screen and a 1977 ladder piece at the Mildura Triennial, and at the year's end in the Sarjeant Gallery's Chairs exhibition. He had a further one-man show at New Vision that was reviewed by T J McNamara (who spoke of his combining "monumental scale with the lively graces of wit and irony" and "the relaxed feeling that characterises the work of a major artist." — NZ Herald, 12 June) and Gordon H Brown, who wrote at some length in the Auckland Star of 7 June (see also note to 22).

Gordon Brown spoke of Driver's "gradual development over 15 years ... consistent within its own stylistic terms while remaining free from mannerisms", of his being one of the best artists in New Zealand, of his synthesis of sculpture and "two-dimensional elements akin to painting" that had "the feeling of total stylistic unity": "the sense of scale from intimate to monumental, the simplicity of statement with its variety of reverberations, the variety of textures and colours derived naturally from the materials used ... not only combined with sensitivity allied to boldness, but [having] the paradox of making credible works of art out of our civilisation's junk and trivia."



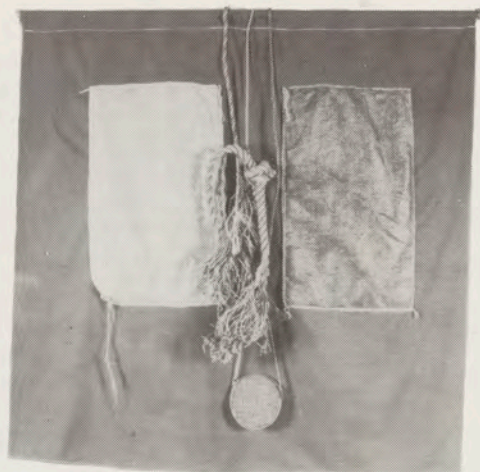
Crocodile with Prey, 1978

Michael Dunn in the Listener of 2 September found in Driver's "latest return to assemblage ... astonishing thrust and energy. ... The sacks and their labels speak of a farming community, of short cuts to productivity and a reckless live-now — pay-later mentality. By recycling these discarded articles Driver makes them into totems of mock-solemn grandeur. ... Unexpected in the art gallery, their matter-of-fact, materialistic and unpretentious quality gives them the more relevance. ..."

Dunn went on to say that the works "have literal quality. They

are not illusional, although their allusions are many. . . . Driver shows how an ordinary environment of mass-produced signs and symbols can supply real visual energy. His art lies in the selection and presentation of the materials; he relates his found objects to one another in an apparent disorder that conceals his skill. Rough canvas is shown against smooth plastic and torn edges lie alongside unbroken seams. He sorts, stacks and arranges the items to give the range of meaning he wants. . . ."

The exhibits from 1978 are —



**27
Plaid Purse**

Collage wall hanging, on a galvanised iron pipe, of the green-brown reverse of a sheet of synthetic material resembling suede, to which sewn on for the artist or otherwise attached are— (left) a pinky-brown polyurethane sack with a frayed piece of binder-twine hanging from its lower left corner; (right) a dark brown one with orange stitching; (between the sacks and suspended from top) three pieces of coloured nylon cord from the middle one of which hangs a largely unravelled mass of thick orange nylon cordage with some green and black strands; (below the mass and hanging by its red plastic strap) a purse with circular pieces of synthetic plaid material front and back, red plastic sides and steel and brass zip-fastener and fittings.

1515 x 1510mm plus thickness at top of the three nylon cords, the thickest being 15mm.

Not previously exhibited.

"A fairly simple work related to others such as Relief VII: Green Ball with its exclamation mark but with the hanging piece breaking apart to create a more dramatic, bursting effect." — DD 1978.



**28
Barton's Garnet**

Collage wall hanging, on a galvanised iron pipe, consisting of a hemmed sheet of green canvas having attached to it (upper left and lower right) two jute sacks printed in red and black with brand-name (as per title) device and particulars of contents and (upper right and lower left) two old coir doormats held about their middles by pieces of bottle-green polythene. The stitching was done for the artist.

2150 x 1870mm.

Collection: The artist.

Exhibited, as Four Bags, Dowse Art Gallery, 1977-78.

"Another variation on earlier themes." — DD 1978.



29
Up the Ladder

Wall relief the base of which is a panel of moulded fibreglass, the rough plaster around the edges of which indicate it was torn from a demolished wall. It is coated in crimson fibre glass and attached to it are — a section of wooden ladder reinforced with galvanised iron wire and partially painted and paint-spotted; part of an old worn purple-coated wet-suit of black rubber, draped over the top of the ladder; a bunch of plastic fruit (apple, lemon and grapes) hung over the wet-suit material on a plaited plastic cord; heads of screws that pierce the fibreglass in the dished back of the panel and, attached to the back, two wooden blocks to keep it out from the wall.

1307 x 820 x 215mm.

Collection: The artist.

Not previously exhibited.

"Possibly a culmination of the last three years, combining many elements from that period. It seems to be heralding a return to free standing sculpture. Ladders? Well they suggest they get you up, but they don't necessarily get you anywhere." — DD1978.



30
Red Chair & Table

Free standing sculpture in enamel-painted wood with plastic vessels. The joinery was done for the artist.

Table 1218 x 1066 x 710mm; chair 1421 x 453 x 430; cylindrical vessel 170 x 130 (diam); mixing bowl 102 x 236 (diam) — 241 with spout. Overall 2936 x 1066 x 710mm.

Collection: The artist.

In the Chairs exhibition, Sarjeant Gallery, 1979.

"A chair stacked on a table outside a house excited me. Perhaps I recalled chairs and desks stacked in schoolrooms. When I was recently given a QE II grant for timber for sculptures this was the first sculpture I made: the first of a Chair series." — DD 1978-79.

DON DRIVER AND NEW ZEALAND ART

by Michael Dunn

By living in New Plymouth Don Driver has established himself in a smallish North Island centre cut off from the art worlds of Auckland and Wellington for most of the year. Perhaps this helps to explain the failure of critics to place him within a New Zealand artistic perspective. Instead, comparisons have been made between him and American masters of the modern movement. Unanswered and unexplored is the relationship between Don Driver's art and that of his New Zealand contemporaries. My plan is to examine some aspects of this question.

At first sight New Plymouth does not seem to have much to sustain Driver's constant experimentation and creativity. Contemporary artists of standing are few indeed. The best known of these is Michael Smither, a younger painter whose figurative pictures of landscape, domestic genre and still life are popular throughout the country. Unlike Smither, Don Driver has no interest in realist imagery or regionalist subject matter. Occasional approximations to Driver's concerns, for example in the Shell Company mural, New Plymouth, are exceptional for the younger painter. Also, the conservationist and religious convictions of Michael Smither are not shared by Driver. In technique, too, they differ greatly. Whereas Driver avoids hand painting and illusionist space creation, Smither favours both. It is hard to see how there could be much supportive dialogue between artists so diverse.

A more sympathetic local figure was the painter, teacher and art critic Tom Kreisler. Until his departure for Mexico City in 1977 Kreisler was a friend and admirer of Driver's art which on one occasion he reviewed with insight for the local press. Kreisler's own painting touched on the area of Pop-art; for example in his series, Coats. Also, in productions such as a calendar in which he used randomly chosen numbers instead of correct calendar dates, he approximated Driver's own satirical humour.

There is a degree of levity about some of Don Driver's works that reveals a ready wit and sense of satire. This comes out in his entertainments, such as the Animal Crackers works of 1978 or

his recent, irreverent, wholesale purchase of Muldoon piggy banks to provide him with the basis of fun sculptures, where glasses, masks and the like provide a variety of comical situations. This aspect of Driver's personality and art is exceptional in New Zealand. Echoes of it can be found in the sculptures of Christine Hellyar, who comes from New Plymouth. For example her Country Clothes Line, a rope hung with articles of clothing each of which had once been dipped in coloured latex, is comparable. In art it debunks stuffy high seriousness without undermining values.

By far the most important assistance to Don Driver in New Plymouth has been the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery where he now works. This ambitious venture helped to create a local focus for the visual arts. Besides providing the artist with a more congenial job than his previous employment it attracted a number of talented staff to the city. The most important of these from Don Driver's viewpoint was John Maynard, the first director, who was appointed in 1967 and began what is now a Govett-Brewster policy of advanced thinking in gallery programmes and purchases. Maynard quickly saw the merit of the artist's work, got him his new job, and gave him encouragement to continue his experimentation. From the Gallery's opening in 1970 developments, such as environmental and kinetic art, have been presented in New Plymouth. Maynard set the pace of exciting exhibitions with the opening environmental piece by Leon Narbey Real Time in 1970. It was a show that put New Plymouth on the map by drawing visitors from the main centres. Artists like Narbey made use of materials such as polythene and neon tubing, rather than traditional pigments on canvas. Now the public could see Driver's work in a wider context than that previously provided by local painters. Despite the outcry and outrage the artist could benefit from more informed debate among gallery staff. Facilities at the gallery also made possible the production of larger and more ambitious works during the seventies.

Outside New Plymouth it is harder to pinpoint direct contacts between Don Driver and other New Zealand artists. There are those he knows and admires such as Gordon Walters, others whom he sees occasionally on trips to Auckland. But he has no allegiance to any. He is unlike the regional realists. But does this mean he has no sense of local identity in his art? At first the answer would appear to be yes. Certainly yes in the sense of illustration of local subjects. However, if we consider the matter more obliquely it becomes less simple. Rather than seeking out

a specific regional symbol like Mt Egmont, as Christopher Perkins did, Don Driver avoids obvious references of this sort. They are not central to his work. Instead the references to his environment come as a byproduct of the making process — at the perimeter not the centre of his work's being. The allusions are there in the labels on fertiliser bags, in the door mats from New Plymouth homes, in the rollers of his lawnmower, in the discarded stencils from Tingey's paint shop which he has recycled in his assemblages. We find out about the environment of the artist in this understated way. Perhaps because of this ordering of priorities, with the visual and inventive aspects first and central, Driver manages to give a wider range of information about a provincial New Zealand centre than the regional realist picture with its description of distinctive land forms and buildings. To give one example, we find out about the materialistic values and the throw-away consumerism of the plastic age in Don Driver's art but not in the typical regionalist picture or print. By avoiding self-conscious regionalist subjects the artist often achieves deeper statements on such issues than many who make them their central concern.

The use of words in Driver's works provides a link with a number of contemporary New Zealand artists. He has been incorporating words in his reliefs since 1965. His words do not carry the biblical or poetic meanings found in those Colin McCahon so often employs. He is unconcerned, too, with Maori phrases and titles such as painters like Ralph Hotere and Melvin Day have put in some of their work. It is rather in his awareness of the visual usefulness of words that he can be compared in a general sense with them. He does not write words himself but finds them in the materials he selects for his assemblages. Examples are the word "decorator" of the 1965 Mid-West (1) in the form of a stencil, or "100 lbs Barton's Garnet Grains and Powders" used on sacks of the 1978 Large Cross (25). His words are literal not literary in nature. They are contemporary, mechanical and impersonal. Yet they have a decidedly strong visual punch caused by the sharp blues, reds and blacks of commercial lettering where words are made to attract attention, to catch the eye. His primary concern with the visual qualities of words does not exclude the occasional touch of wit, for example, in the junk sculpture relief PS Handle with Care (6).

His words read, too, as a rejection of traditional sources of visual stimulus by implicitly showing that the everyday world of commerce and utility has much to offer. But it is not a discovery easy for the "educated" eye to make when the rawness and

brutality of such words and labels can be an affront to a sensibility which uses art as an escape from the reality of modern life. Among New Zealand artists Driver is one of the few willing to come face to face with the everyday world. That is why his art is often as unacceptable to artists as it is to the general public.

In his method of working Driver tends to make discoveries by finding things and materials which he arranges, stacks, has sewn, and fits together. The process is no doubt highly selective yet it is not restrictive. Certainly there is no danger of a narrow self-conscious style. Unlike many New Zealand artists who are content to set very tight limits to their style Driver has a wide range. This is particularly noticeable in the contrast between his so-called "immaculate" constructions such as Pink and Red Relief (16), and a wall hanging like Relief II: White Bag, 1975 (18). On the one hand there is a clear alignment of precise flat surfaces of metal and canvas, on the other an asymmetrical positioning of worn fabric and frayed edges on wrinkled unstretched canvas. Whereas the Pink and Red Relief might call to mind in its horizontal disposition of bands the precision of a contemporary non-figurative painter such as Gordon Walters, White Bag is unthinkable in that company. It is misleading, then, to point to a superficial resemblance between some of Driver's works and the production of an artist who is consistent in style and, on close analysis, consistently different. Nor is it helpful to try and separate out the immaculate side of Driver's art as the true one and reject the rest. To do so is to distort and to misunderstand what he does.

That is why the comparison of his art with that of Americans like Kenneth Noland or Elsworth Kelly is helpful only up to a point. Certainly he drew something from them in his hard-edge reliefs but he did not accept their principle of working. As the metal and canvas constructions show, he assembled his immaculate reliefs on the same principle as his assemblages of fabric, door mats and the like. The juxtaposition of surfaces, textures and colours here is as important as in the other works.

Rather than trying to impose specific relationships to other artists on Driver, it is more accurate to see resemblances in viewpoint behind his art. In his flaunting of convention, in his readiness to take risks, in his willingness to offend in the pursuit of his goals, Driver can be compared with Colin McCahon. That basic background of approach, which does not deny or disguise

vast differences, is probably more valid than actual physical similarities between materials and techniques both artists use. That McCahon and Driver both have used unstretched canvas hung on the wall is readily discoverable. That in both cases it gives a degree of informality and directness of communication with the spectator is also self evident. Other comparisons of this type can be made, maybe should be made, as a critical exercise. But, the philosophy and morality of McCahon's work, as well as its sometimes pronounced literary overtones, are at a long remove from Driver's art. Also, McCahon's constant preference for hand painting and working of his materials is almost the polar opposite of Driver's downplaying of individual gesture and manipulations of media. So, too, is there a radical difference between the way they use colour and space. Whereas in Driver these elements are literal or "real", in McCahon they remain tied to atmosphere.

In his literal approach Driver has affinities with some of the younger abstract painters, such as Ian Scott and Richard Killeen. Both these painters also favour the kind of bright, unmodulated colour so often used by the New Plymouth artist. Colour is not placed in the service of form, or used to describe some object, but is liberated to become an identity in its own right. Blueness or yellowness, the effect of juxtaposition, of wedging and tensing colour, then becomes an artistic objective. The common source for this kind of colour usage in New Zealand art lies undoubtedly in American painting and sculpture. Yet Driver has not taken his inspiration at second hand. The acid yellows, hot pinks and sharp greens he makes his own derive from what he sees and finds around him in New Plymouth. The colours of plastic, of bags, of signs, of industrial machines and tools, set his colour scale apart. With Don Driver each colour is a discovery that at its best can be as vivid for the spectator as for the artist who first made it. In his adventurous approach to colour he differs from many contemporaries in New Zealand who restrict themselves to near monochrome. For him this is unthinkable when colour can give the visual joy and exuberance he wants to convey in all his works.

To conclude, it is wrong to believe that Don Driver stands in total isolation from the wider context of New Zealand art. Instead as an original and inventive artist of high quality he has achieved a considerable degree of individuality and freedom in his work. He refuses to be parochial in outlook, by being receptive to a wide range of stimuli, for example, from Oriental

sculptures which he collects. His trip to the United States in 1965 was an opportunity for him to widen his experiences of art and other matters. It was not a short cut to local fame based on borrowed ideas any more than McCahon's trip in 1958 was for him. His ability to accept and respond to the best of modern artistic developments links him with the contemporary painters and sculptors who refuse to restrict themselves to styles and themes of proven popularity. It is a difficult course to follow. Don Driver's work puts a considerable strain on the spectator to understand and evaluate what has been achieved. He shows again that it is not easy to produce or comprehend what is of the highest value.

University of Auckland
February 1979

DON DRIVER

by Nigel Best

It is good to have the opportunity to study an artist in such depth as the text on Don Driver's life and works makes possible. After reading it I want to turn up my eyes and try and take an overall summary view. I think Aristotle said perspective is truth, Bertrand Russell grew up with a love of wide horizons, and it is good to have lots of trees on view when trying to get a perspective on the forest. The catalogue is full of details which like arrows seem to go to the heart of the matter all the better for being slim. One was that Don did ships in bottles in childhood — I find that completely characterises his manual not mental approach to art.

Let us try to summarise this field. It is a large field, with many features all interaffecting, and we need to hold all features in mind to obtain the most truthful perspective we seek. May we forget nothing.

The first thing I think to say is that Driver's works are beautiful. Pacific Salt (26). Lawn Cuttings (21), White Bag (18), Medieval (5), PS Handle with Care (6) and Mid-West (1) spring to mind at the moment as beautiful things. The art appreciators/critics have been unusually uniform in expressing in their specific ways their appreciation of the beauty of Driver's works. Don Driver is well capable of filling the gaze with subtle pulses of perfection by manipulation of aesthetic elements, especially of colour, line, edge, texture, materials, shapes and things.

Secondly, I think of Babysnatcher in the NZ Sculptors at Mildura show and we turn to our second feature: a quirky sense of fun about tragic things. Actually in both these features one is bound to see one thing, love. In the first feature, one feels in the immediacy with which his hands reach out to fleapit picture-theatre chairbacks, lawn mower rollers, gardening shoes, pram bags, car door upholstery panels and aeroplane bits lying under desert skies: an appetite, a large hunger to contact things that have absorbed over years large amounts of human life, large amounts of the love that love craves. In the love that he gives to an old moviehouse chairback, in noticing that its many properties can harmonise with other things (both much more and much less valuable — the triptych and the papier-maché fruit-tray cutout), he worships and celebrates the life that sat

itself down so many times on that theatre seat in so many forms in so many moods. We notice the love in his sense of fun in the way that he notices tragedy, neither denying the tragedy nor saying more about it than he knows, too modest, too mature or too manual to moralise.

The third feature that strikes me — I have already started to mention it — is the way Don is a hands-man. Hands at the beck and call of immediate creation. I don't think that Don theorises. To have a thought separate from placing something in a new position might cause him pain. His hands are always poised, relaxed and ready. I saw it in the way his flexible hangings are not to be folded when on the floor, and I saw it when looking at the Oriental sculptures on his coffee table: the precise and living way they had been placed for viewing to give him peace.

His learning and knowledge on how things are to be placed would fill volumes if it could be written. Chapter 23: placing of Oriental sculpture on low tables. Chapter 53: placing of soft cloths on hangings. Chapter 61: notes on placing of allusional things in relation to each other, and in relation to non-allusional shapes. Chapter 66: Protection of allusions in interrelational placing of allusional things. Chapter 93: Special rules for placing hard and soft things in relation.

I have said "if it could be written"; of course, it has been written: it is there in invisible lettering that lovers can read in the works themselves. In short, his art is placement, and because it is placement of everything, it is care and celebration of everything.

I may be wrong. I was going to raise the question of the validity of Driver's art: what is the value of manipulation of aesthetic elements and the creation and exhibition of useless harmonies of visual elements? When Vertical Relief (15) — seven vertical bands of colour — was shown to a group of people, you could almost hear their jaws drop. It was like: "You mean money, real money, money, the most valuable thing in the world, was spent, was given away to have this?" I don't think the people could even see it: I couldn't see it either. What had been bought, actually, was colour. People had paid all sorts of money for centuries for scenes and depictions; no one had ever bought colour. Colour is everywhere, colour is cheap and free and easy. You don't need to pay good money for colour. Colour gives herself to everyone anytime. It was perhaps like paying someone money to enter his tent to breathe air. The same reaction applied to the materials: "Why, there's a piece of cloth, I've got

a piece like that at home"; "Oh look at those bags, I know where he got those"; "Look, this thing is from a dump."

To show how illogical some people are, imagine someone in front of a landscape painting saying: "Look at that colour, that is ultramarine. Who does he think he is? I can buy that colour myself but they don't pay me."

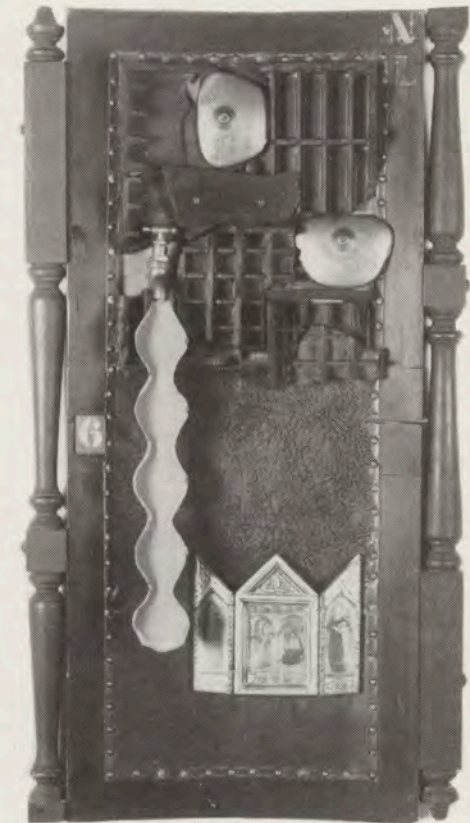
Some people, of very different cultures from this present one in New Zealand, cannot "read" a photograph. It is perhaps the same with people in front of a Driver. The first problem is that the artist and some of his viewers belong to different cultures: some of his viewer to a culture that expects the usual (irresolution, disharmony), the artist to a culture that seeks the perception that brings peace. Another problem may begin with a lack of purpose in the viewer without an appropriate modesty about it: if we don't know what we are looking for, we are not going to find it. Further, I don't see anyone entering a library and saying: "I say, I never read, what's this book, why this is shocking, here is a book I am not the least bit interested in, fancy spending money on this!" But galleries get this treatment every week. It hurts, it is amazing, but it happens. Even people without a grudge will express prejudices in a gallery.

Some people get their peace from art. It is as simple as that. Some people have the patience and sincerity to "read" a work of art.

Looking at Babysnatcher in the Mildura show, one saw the teeth things coming from the pram, one had the punch of the name, and the contradiction could be realised thus: "The teeth come from the pram, do not reach into the pram, they are teeth not hands." Nonetheless, the punch of the tragedy is unimpaired by this. One realises that that punch is created by obedience to laws unknown to many of us, that in fact the construction follows a logic of feeling, not a logic of the intellect, that it follows a manual logic not a mental logic.

Looking at for instance Medieval (5), one can suspect that there is a tie-up among all the allusions — the immediate unity of the composition in colour, shape and dimensionality encourages the suspicion. Let us try.

Running tap, mirror-backs like breasts, breasts run with milk. Medieval triptych against 20th Century tap; the time element; time is running ever. The medieval religious ornament preserved for more than five hundred years and now reproduced against the fruit tray cutout designed to be thrown away after one use but taken by the artist and preserved for many years. The brilliance of the perception of the perfectness of the cutout to indicate running water is one practical example of care, of the spirit of care. The modern reproduction of a medieval precious object is an example of modern care. The colour scheme ties



together, first the tap and the breasts, then the brighter-gold icon. The rich dark brown of the theatre chairseat plays with the dark purple columns at the sides and with the lighter purple of the cutout, and the red plays equally with all, with the dark brown, the gold, the rich brass and the purples. The icon features the Annunciation, remind us that the pure receive blessings. The tap runs with time, a blessing to the pure, to those who can use it. The feeling of the tap running is of abundance. Mary was blessed with abundance, Who blessed the world.

Medieval itself is a child, the cared-for child of the artist's fatherhood, a child with two breasts. Two breasts set in the Picasso mode, at modern angles. The colour of the tap and the breasts is soft gold, drawing our feeling for abundance. The

artist's child is a child that feeds us, as the Father's child brings us love. The breasts are rear-vision mirror-backs reminding us that technology still looks back to human forms, that looking backwards is still part of getting ahead and that abundance — giving, the moving ocean between souls — is the mirror in which the heart sees its true self, finds perfection and enables us to find our way back home to the heart. The breasts are set amidst rectilinear matt-black shapes with broken contours, reminding me of man in the city, man the lover in his natural setting of technology and trouble. That technology brings the humble heart humble mercies, like water on tap. The broken batteries repeat in technological allusion the message of the breasts and the icon and the work of art. The old-fashioned demolition theatre seat reminds us of the endless nightly parade of human escapism in time passing, that is yet also part of abundance. The theatre seat provides a theatrical backdrop to the presentation of the icons of time, mercy, care, waste and abundance.

So there it is. I have let my logic loose amid some of the allusions of one of Driver's works and ended up with something plausible and something which feels right to me. Not that the work of art is those meanings, nor that Driver thought of them or cared for them nor that we have to think of them. Those meanings do not bring us love. The work of art, which has those allusions and echoes, does. If the exploration of the interplay of allusions does anything, it reveals the intelligence of hands, the thought in these two restless relaxed hands that pick out, place and care.

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