

Genealogy

**By MIKE STEVENSON
& STEVEN BROWER**

FOREWORD

The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery runs an ongoing Artist in Residence programme in partnership with the Taranaki Polytechnic. The residency provides artists the opportunity to create new work, to present that work in association with the Gallery and Polytechnic, and to document that work in the form of a publication.

Each year the partnership brings one New Zealand and one international artist to New Plymouth, usually for separate projects. Between February and May 2000 both artists took up the residency at the same time to work on a joint project. This publication documents the 2000 residency project *Genealogy* by New Zealand/Australian artist Michael Stevenson and American artist Steven Brower.

Michael Stevenson was born locally in Inglewood, Taranaki, moved to Melbourne, Australia in the 1990s and is now based in Berlin. Steven Brower was born in Washington DC and is now based in New York City. Both artists have exhibited extensively in recent years and have exhibited together in exhibitions in Germany and Austria. This project *Genealogy* acknowledges each artist's upbringing and also the fact that their parents were artists. While the project is credited to the artists, it features in large part works made by their parents: Alan and Margaret Stevenson and William and Barbara Brower.

The Gallery thanks all the many people who assisted the project. In particular I would like to thank Donna Willard-Moore and her staff at the Taranaki Polytechnic, Creative New Zealand Toi Aotearoa for their major support of the project, Jim Barr, Lea Freid and Lombard-Freid Gallery in New York, Hamish McKay and Hamish McKay Gallery in Wellington, Darren Knight and Darren Knight Gallery in Sydney and Hanna Scott, Art Development Curator at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. Last but not least, I thank the artists for a project of great wit and insight.

Gregory Burke
DIRECTOR

GREGORY BURKE

Artistic regression

It is unusual to associate the idea of regression with genealogies, unless in a pathological or psychological sense. Implicit in a modernist use of the term 'genealogy' is the notion of development, the idea that what is inherited is improved upon over time. It can also be used metaphorically to refer to general aspects of cultural or societal development. Steven Brower and Michael Stevenson draw on this sense to interrogate standard assumptions concerning artistic development by reference to their place of birth, upbringing, education and their place within standard accounts of art-history. However in doing so they also define a specific moment of familial inheritance by engaging in an act of regression. The artists replicate what they did with their fathers when they were 15 years old – Stevenson creating his School Certificate art folder¹ and Brower building additions to the back of his father's house in West Virginia. Indeed the project invokes numerous psychoanalytic models of both personality development and disorder.

Beginning with Freud, psychoanalysis offers its own genealogy of theorists on personality development, a genealogy partially recited by art critic Peter Fuller in his essay *The rise of modernism and the infant-mother relationship*. In this essay Fuller relates developments in modern art to developments in psychoanalytic theory. In fact, he uses his art education to compare the development of abstraction to the development of Post-Freudian theories on the infant-mother relationship. He relates that his own contact with art began while looking through books of naked women when eight years old. Tellingly he says:

at first my art appreciation was accompanied by some guilt feelings; the books belonged to my father and I did not have his permission to gaze on them²

Clearly, significant points in the development of Fuller's personality are linked to art through his father and later his art teacher, a situation that can be compared to that of Stevenson and Brower in *Genealogy*. There is one major difference. Both artists' parents are artists themselves.

The oedipal nature of Fuller's first moment can be contrasted to Stevenson and Brower's situation. With Stevenson, his father was also his school art teacher, while the art of Brower's father, and his books, appears as fundamental to the family environment of young Brower as the house itself. However suggested within the interior of this house are links between the rise of modernism, the development of psychoanalytic theory, and the formation of young Brower's own personality. Indeed many of the scenes depicted by Brower's father could be read as psychoanalytic case studies. One titled *Totem and taboo*, even depicts Freud's head defiled by excreta from a

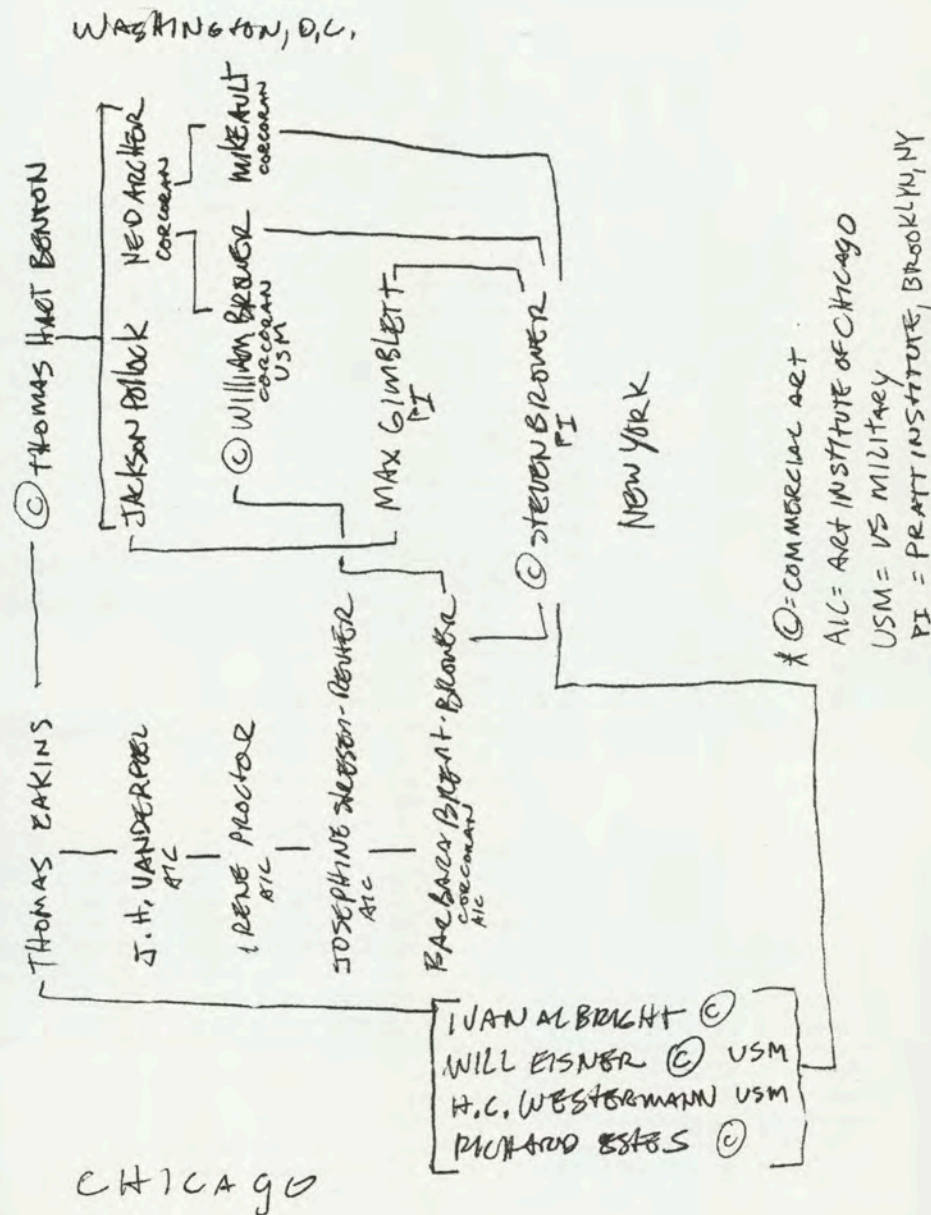
douche. In Maori terms, the head is tapu (taboo). As with Fuller, the book is frequently the instrument of transmission in the Brower household. Not only was Brower surrounded by an abundance of art texts, but also texts on Freud and many other theorists as well as flotsam and jetsam of pop culture and pulp fiction. For young Brower the text was a supplement to the interior of the house, if not initially to the exterior.

In *Genealogy* Brower, by reference to his 1:12 scale model of the house, suggests this archive became so large that it threatened to strangle typical functions of a home. Initially the structures progressively added to the back of the house were begun to cater for this overload. In the end, in their partial state of collapse, they derange the exterior as a view of a model home. In Lacanian terms we can read this as suggesting an over-investment in or a break down of the Symbolic, that stage in development where language provides an individual a sense of connection to the social, a place within history. Brower's modelling of the house further emphasises this reading, for in scaling it down he removes it from the social and thereby a condition of history. Frequently associated with childhood or old age, the model can allow us to order in fantasy what is out of reach in reality. Nevertheless, Brower complicates this reading by presenting his father's paintings on the walls of the gallery in the form of a retrospective, a history.

For Lacan, fantasy is fundamental to a stage of development he termed the Imaginary. He proposes that the Imaginary begins in an early phase of development he describes as the mirror stage, where the sense of self is yet to be integrated and can be projected outside of oneself. In this stage the individual confuses personal pronouns such as 'you' and 'I'. This confusion can be seen as manifest in *Genealogy*. The artists' identities can not be separated from others, from earlier versions of themselves, from other artists, from letter writers to the editor of the local newspaper, even one might argue from their parents. By reference to school lesson plans, Stevenson reveals that students are taught to mimic modernist styles such as abstraction before they are initiated in the art history from which these styles arise. Therefore, Stevenson and Brower's installation not only suggests an unstable or fluid relationship between the Imaginary and the Symbolic on a personal level, it also implicates this confusion in the rise and ultimate fall of modernism.

¹ In New Zealand School Certificate is a qualification that must be attained before a student is able to study for University Entrance exams. For art a folder is submitted for examination.

² Peter Fuller, 'The rise of modernism and the infant-mother relationship' in *Art and psychoanalysis*, Writers and readers publishing collective, 1980, p135.



Steven Brower Hand-drawn diagram 2000

So what's it all about?

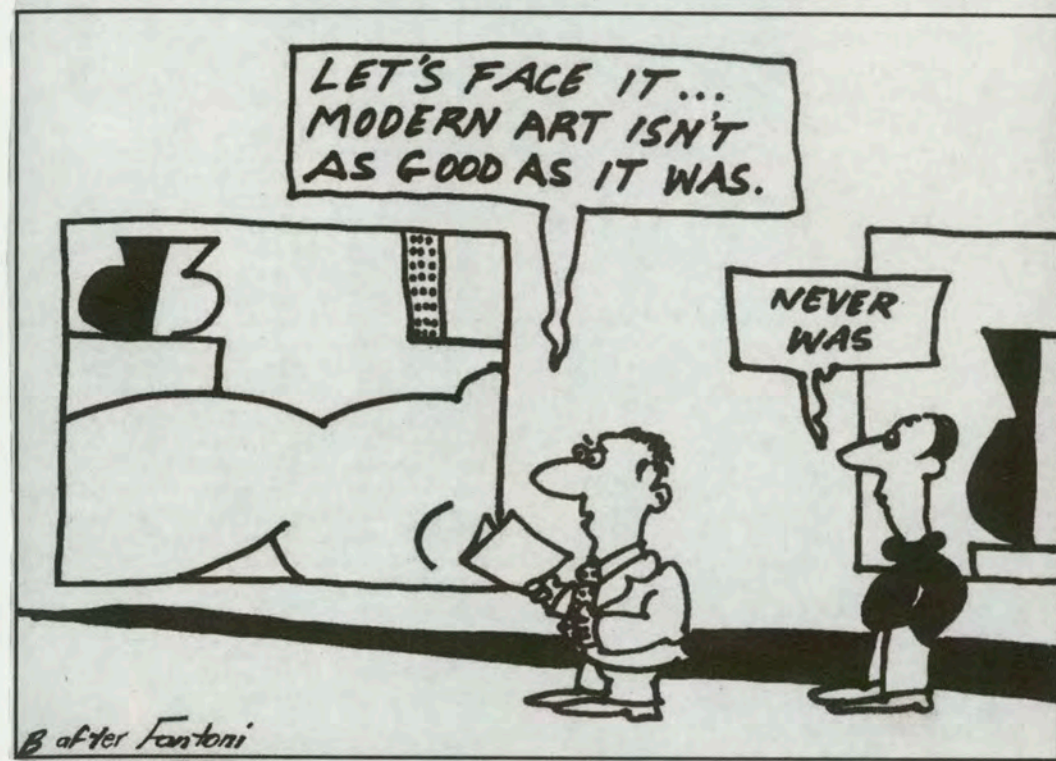
The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery has certainly presented the public with a conundrum in its latest exhibition *Genealogy*. Billed as a joint exhibition by Steven Brower from New York and Taranaki's own Michael Stevenson, in fact much of what is presented by these artists is the work of their fathers. In the names of their fathers, these artists cover quite a range of subjects, from sublimely rendered figure studies to controversial comic strip impressions of questionable taste. Many will be disturbed by these latter images. But what is arguably more controversial is the artists' appropriation of other people's identities, not only of their fathers but also of other artists, members of the public and even this newspaper.

Of course the Gallery is no stranger to controversy. The 1970s and 80s were a particularly turbulent period with all sorts of weird and wonderful exhibits provoking both outrage and art-world applause including Don Driver's fetish dolls and Christine Hellyar's clothesline. Many readers took the Gallery to task for failing to be a judicious arbiter of moral and artistic values. Time has vindicated the Gallery on both counts. The Gallery after all has no legal right to act as censor on moral issues. Its role correctly is to present the best of the art of our time for public appreciation and discussion. Understandably at the time, Hellyar's clothesline provoked the response, "IS IT ART?" However, this sort of assemblage art has become standard for many artists today and Hellyar herself is now a respected senior New Zealand artist.

Surprising then to find a rather conventional School Certificate folio mocked up in her name in *Genealogy*. If it were real, one might well ask whether such a folio is of sufficient merit to be shown at the Gallery. In fact it is not real, made instead by Stevenson along with a number of other folios representing New Zealand artists. Stevenson's intentions might be to acknowledge the role of his father as a secondary school art teacher and also to reflect on the common grounding all the artists represented have in the New Zealand education system. Brower's exhibition may be intended to indicate common formative influences for artists in New Zealand and America. Together, Stevenson and Brower may be commenting on the desire of artists to deny their common and even unfashionable influences in a bid to craft unique, recognizable and ultimately marketable styles.

Regardless, the stunt has led many viewers to question the ethics of appropriating other people's identities. We say this is fair game. Artists have always been free to use whatever is in the public domain, not unlike the news-media. As we are all aware, the media's portrayal of people in the news is not always to their liking. The media even take artistic licence from time to time. Witness the retouched photograph of the Easter egg atop the *Windwand*. Let's face it, artists rely on their names to market their work. As such, their names become commodities just as a 'Picasso' now refers to a painting rather than a person. Indeed Stevenson and Brower's appropriation of other artists' identities is a form of acknowledgement. Similarly, their appropriation of the newspaper opinion page can be seen as recognition of the central role the newspaper plays as a community forum. However, by mocking up their own paper and public response they tread a thin line between acknowledging and pre-empting the very role of the newspaper to be a forum. It may well be that our readers decide these artists are being just too clever for words.

OPINION



Wicked exhibit

Our teacher took us to the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery to see School Certificate folios by artists such as Dashper and Parekowhai. I think the Hartigan one is wicked.

H. Omey
Vogeltown



Best yet

I write in response to A. Paul's comments regarding Michael Stevenson and Steven Brower's residency at the Taranaki Polytechnic (May 6). I have been a keen follower of the residency programme since it started in 1995 and believe New Plymouth is very lucky to have a programme of such quality. Students and teachers have told me that this year's residency has been the best yet with the artists engaging readily not only with Polytechnic students but also with local high school teachers and students. Far from acting like 15-year-olds these artists have apparently taken their community responsibility very seriously.

Tom Valliant
New Plymouth



Frottage

I believe the current exhibit at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery could be significantly improved by vigorously rubbing each work with turpentine.

Nazas Gopasas
Kaunas



Past Resident

As a past resident of New Plymouth and a frequent visitor to the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, I write with concern regarding the barrage of comments on the *Genealogy* exhibition. Viewing the show for myself I was pleased to have made the five hour journey south from Auckland. Afterwards, in the Gallery cafe reading the comments of Barbara Heapworth's in the paper (May 6) I was compelled to respond. The warts and all view Brower and Stevenson unearth in this exhibition stretches to breaking point, notions of artistic lineage and examines how and why artists wish to create fables around themselves. The Govett-Brewster's role in supporting such important international art projects is rivalled by no other gallery in this country. Nurturing art in this harsh climate is a constant battle and in times like these the cease fire line is clearly drawn (it's about three metres in front of the Gallery's main entrance). I for one was pleased to get in my car and pass quickly through town knowing my destination was Wellington.

Fiona Tan
Brooklyn



Sign of the times

I bet Mr. Stevenson and Mr. Brower have had a jolly good laugh at the expense of the Taranaki Polytechnic after a ten week stint as 'artists' in residence there. Surely they were supposed to offer a model for tertiary level visual arts students. Instead they acted like 15-year-olds making fake School Certificate folios and model houses. Surely this is just another example of civilisation in decline.

A. Paul
Spotswood



Get it right

The exhibition at the Govett-Brewster was advertised as opening on May 6. Obviously this is misleading since today is May 6 and the commentary on the show has been going on for some time.

The misprinting of dates is far too common and this sloppiness, although easily avoided, causes confusion and makes the whole region look bad. Would someone please take the time to proofread these dates to avoid future embarrassment?

Don Kawara
Hawera



Get over it

In response to the recent controversy created by the *Genealogy* exhibition at the Govett-Brewster. The Gallery has a long history of generating public ire and this incident should be seen as one among many. That is not to say ratepayers are being taken for a ride (witness the success of the 'Drive' show). Rather than focusing on one tiny detail, perhaps we ought to look at the overall implications of what the artists have done. Or would that be too boring? Perhaps we would rather believe that this work is gratuitous and stupid than suspend judgment for a moment in the hope of finding something we can actually debate for some useful purpose. Let's face it, we're isolated here in New Zealand, but maybe not as isolated as we'd like to think. Frankly I saw nothing in the show I haven't seen a million times elsewhere. I don't think the artists intend to make fun of the local scene at all. I think they're merely pointing out that we are not alone. However, I must confess I thought that placing themselves in an ipso facto debate was quite egotistical and only served to complicate the valid issues they brought up.

P.Meul
Waverley



Ivory Tower

As a past graduate of the School of Fine Arts at the University of Canterbury, I feel I am qualified to comment on the Govett-Brewster's latest exhibition *Genealogy*. Back in my day, we were taught to draw from the greats: Michaelangelo, Augustus John, and Christopher Perkins. We left varsity with a well-grounded education in the visual arts that encompassed drawing, painting, modelling and the plastic arts, poster design, lettering and perspective rendering. I am one of the many hundreds of graduates to go through the course. At the time, few made a name for themselves as artists, but the community was a direct benefactor of their talents in the form of teaching, posters, hand-lettered awards, signs, community notice boards, tea towel and teaspoon designs. In my opinion, it is unfortunate that the artists in this exhibition choose to hide behind social commentary and avoid reciprocating the generosity extended to them in the form of this residency. Surely they would prove themselves worthy artists if they would only descend from their ivory tower and let us know what they are really thinking.

I. Wright
Mainlander



Pleasant Surprise

As a recent visitor to New Plymouth from New York (USA) I was so surprised and pleased to find such a diabolically clever exhibition at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, that I had to take pen in hand to congratulate and connect with its organisers. I must confess that I wasn't expecting much from a provincial gallery, but being an insatiable art consumer I felt it my duty to at least take a look. Maybe I'd find some nice pictures of that fabulous Mount Taranaki. Imagine my delight when countenanced by the most avant-garde installation I'd seen since the last Berlin Biennial. The intertwining of these two unrelated artists' lives with the status of towns, cities, regions, families, geo-political systems and global economic relations has really far-reaching implications. The Govett-Brewster is to be commended for bringing these artists from so far away (and yet so near), and for the high calibre of the Gallery's exhibition roster. If I lived here I would feel privileged to have such an internationally-minded resource.

J. K. Neric
New York



Sloppy research

I would like to add my two cents worth to the debate over the Govett-Brewster's *Genealogy* exhibition. I have visited the Gallery several times to see the Stevenson/Brower contribution and the more pleasing offerings upstairs. It is to the *Genealogy* catalogue that I wish to direct attention. A handsome publication for sure, but for a show that claims to be about biological and artistic lineage, there is at least one grave omission. Using the more thoroughly researched *home and away* catalogue, it becomes clear that Max Gimblett (represented in *home and away*) taught student Brower when he was visiting professor at Pratt Institute.

On a subsequent visit to the Gallery, this piece of missing 'genealogy' was writ large, even the hanging of the works suggests this link. In the left-hand panel of Gimblett's painting, the floor plan of Brower's model can be clearly recognized! Brower's debt to Gimblett is obvious. Is there nobody at the Gallery doing the research?

K. Mumby
Auckland

STEVEN BROWER

Parental guidance
and viewer discretion
is advised





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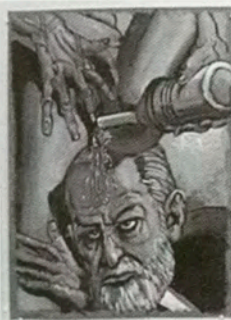
Note: the numbers listed here correspond to the layout of the exhibition

1. William Brower *Portrait of woman, perhaps artist's sister, Virginia Fagg* c.1950's • 2. William Brower *Self portrait* c.1950's • 3. William Brower *Portrait studies* 1954 • 4. William Brower *Portrait and figure studies* 1954 • 5. William Brower *Newspaper ad for Washington Post* 1963 • 6. William Brower *Cartoon studies* c.1950's

14. William Brower *Illustration depicting husband and wife just out of bed, each watching a TV set* c.1960's • 15. William Brower *Graphic artist as knight in shining armor* c.1960's • 16. William Brower *Man and a woman looking at pictures* c.1960's

7. William Brower *Newspaper ad for Washington Post* 1963 • 8. William Brower *Ad for Washington Post* c.1960's • 9. William Brower *Ad for Washington Post* c.1960's • 10. William Brower *Ad for Washington Post* c.1960's • 11. William Brower *Cartoon for Washington Post* c.1960's • 12. William Brower *Anatomy studies (4 sheets)* c.1960's • 13. Barbara Brower *Drawing of Greek bust* 1959

17. William Brower *Illustration of a man and a woman* c.1960's • 18. William Brower *Family* c.1960's • 19. William Brower *Drawing of a tall man and a short woman* c.1980's



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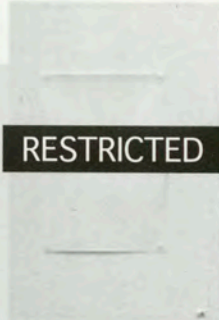
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40. William Brower *Totem and taboo* c.1980's • 41. William Brower *Two women at a beach with a child* c.1980's • 42. William Brower *Group of Nazis determining the fitness of an Aryan couple* c.1980's • 43. William Brower *Beauty contest winner arriving home to find her husband abusing their child* c.1980's

20. William Brower *Woman inspecting a video camera* c.1970's • 21. William Brower *MBC Another tool in the arse - senal of democracy* c.1980's • 22. William Brower *Nude* c.1980's • 23. William Brower *Attempted rape of a woman thwarted by stylish Karate-chop* c.1970's • 24. William Brower *Woman threatening a man* c.1960's • 25. William Brower *Overbearing man intimidating a woman at a party* c.1960's • 26. William Brower *Woman walking a poodle* c.1960's • 27. William Brower *Couple at a costume party* c.1960's • 28. William Brower *Sketch for painting depicting a bondage queen cavorting on a large revolver* c.1980's

44. William Brower *Painting depicting a family* c.1980's • 45. William Brower *Painting depicting German soldiers aiming an artillery piece at a vagina* c.1980's • 46. William Brower *Painting depicting Bill Clinton and the first family* c.1980's

29. William Brower *Layout and plate for invitation of artist's landscape paintings* 1982 • 30. William Brower *Tree and field* c.1980's • 31. William Brower *Drawing of three women and a machine gun* c.1980's • 32. William Brower *Painting of a mountain* c.1980's • 33. William Brower *Study of tree branch* c.1980's



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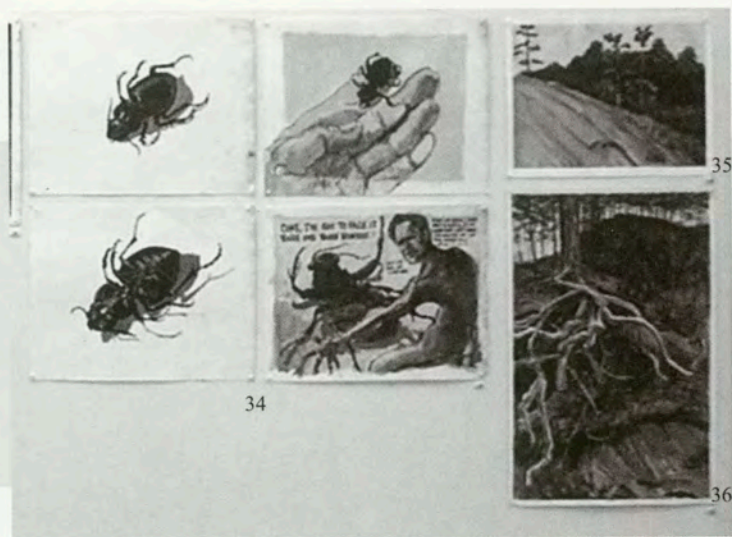
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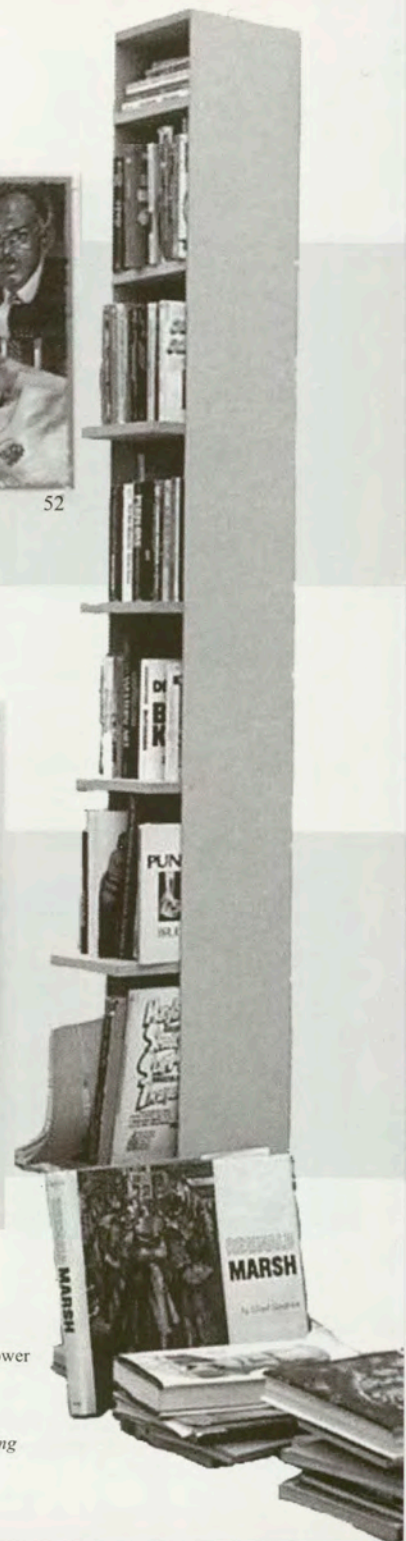
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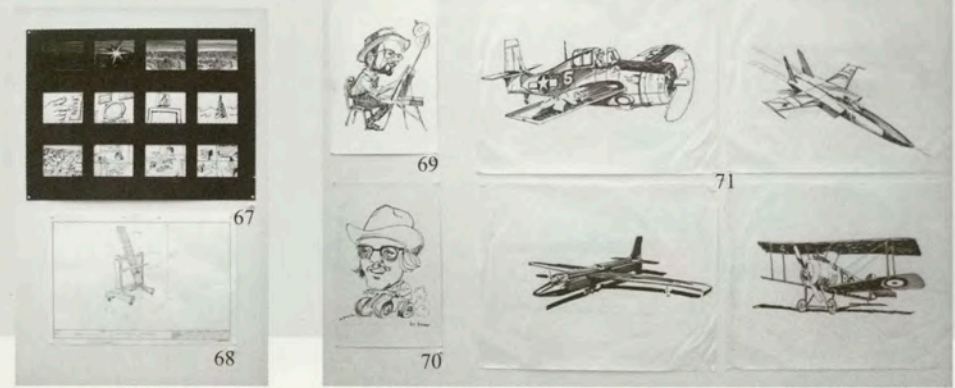
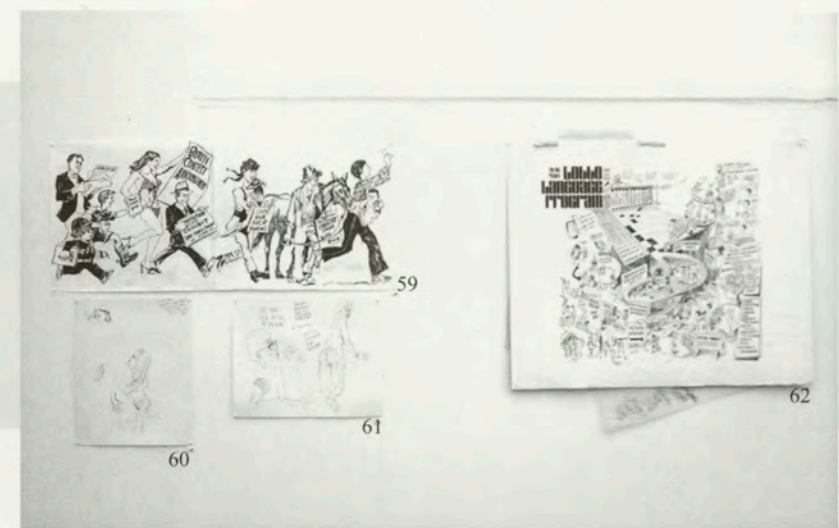
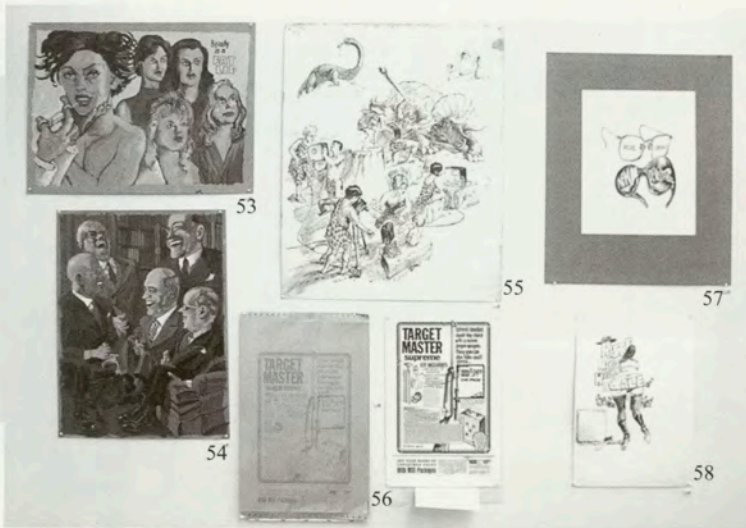
47. William Brower *Painting of George and Barbara Bush* c.1980's • 48. William Brower *Portrait of a Nazi officer and a woman* c.1980's • 49. William Brower *Painting of two men in a city admiring phallic skyscrapers* c.1980's

34. William Brower *Series of four images depicting examination of a Stag beetle* c.1980's • 35. William Brower *Painting of hillside and trees* c.1980's • 36. William Brower *Painting of tree roots and hillside* c.1980's

50. William Brower *Group of Nazi officers at a meeting* c.1980's • 51. William Brower *Nazi interrogation* c.1980's • 52. William Brower *Real concern* c.1980's

37. William Brower *Painting of the Reed's farm* c.1980's • 38. William Brower *Painting of rocks and river* c.1980's • 39. William Brower *Painting of a gully* c.1980's



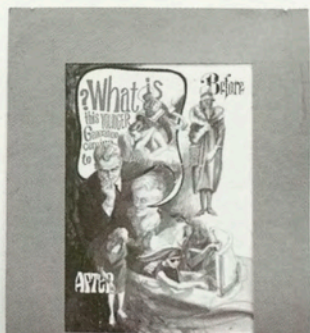
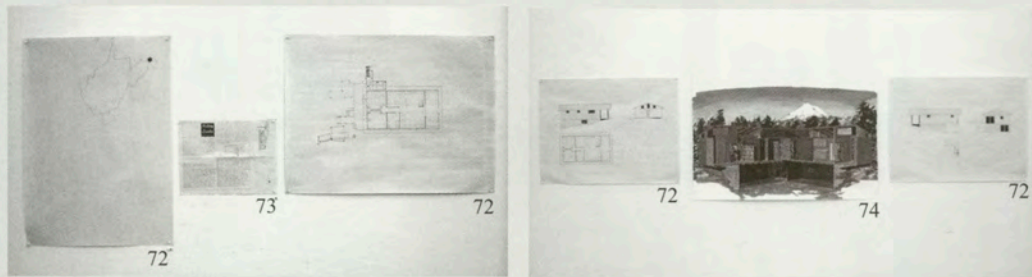


53. William Brower *Beauty is a fat lip* c.1980's • 54. William Brower *Group of middle aged men in an office* c.1980's • 55. William Brower *Illustration depicting TV. education for Neanderthals* c.1980's • 56. William Brower *Layout, and plate for gun catalogue page 1982* • 57. William Brower *Visual literacy, new developments* c.1970's • 58. William Brower *Haste makes waste, a tale of the olde West* c.1980's

63. William Brower *Art for Christmas card* 1970 • 64. William Brower *Merry Christmas (art for Christmas card/party invitation at Brower residence)* 1970 • 65. William Brower *Portrait of Steven Brower* 1986 • 66. Steven Brower *Portrait of William Brower* 1986

59. William Brower *People running with signs* c.1990's • 60. William Brower *Study for painting* c.1980's • 61. William Brower *Study for painting* c.1980's • 62. William Brower *The big picture, lotto language program (illustration for language learning system)* c.1980's

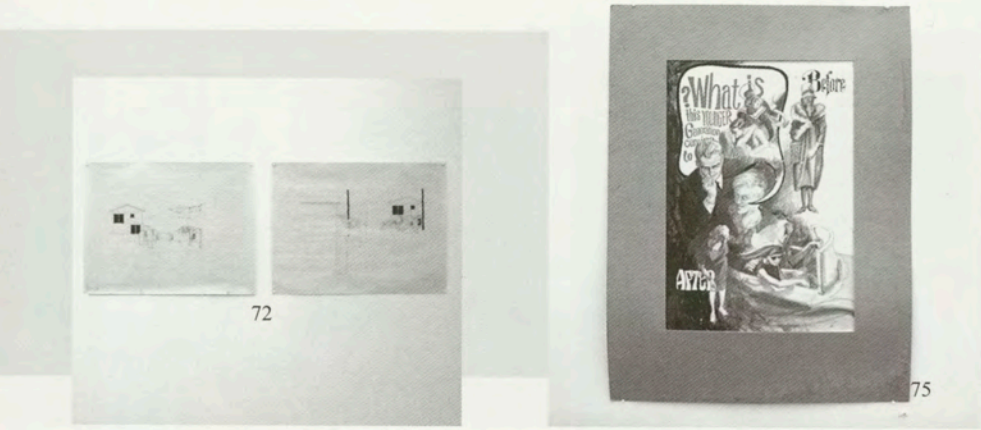
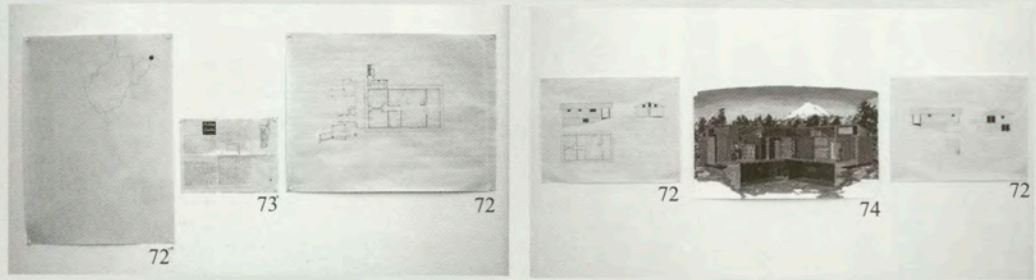
67. William Brower (drawing) and Steven Brower (color) *Storyboard for radio station ad* c.1985 • 68. Steven Brower *Drawing of easel* 2000 • 69. William Brower *Caricature of a caricature artist* c.1990's • 70. William Brower *Caricature of man, four-wheeled vehicle* c.1990's • 71. William Brower *Four illustrations of aircraft* c.1990's



Steven Brower *Genealogy* (Installation view) 2000

72. Steven Brower *Six blueprints for Brower residence, Berkeley Springs, West Virginia* 1997 • 73. Steven Brower *Falling lumber brochure* 1997 • 74. Steven Brower *Painting of house in West Virginia with Mount Taranaki* 2000 • 75. William Brower *What is this younger generation coming to?* c.1960's



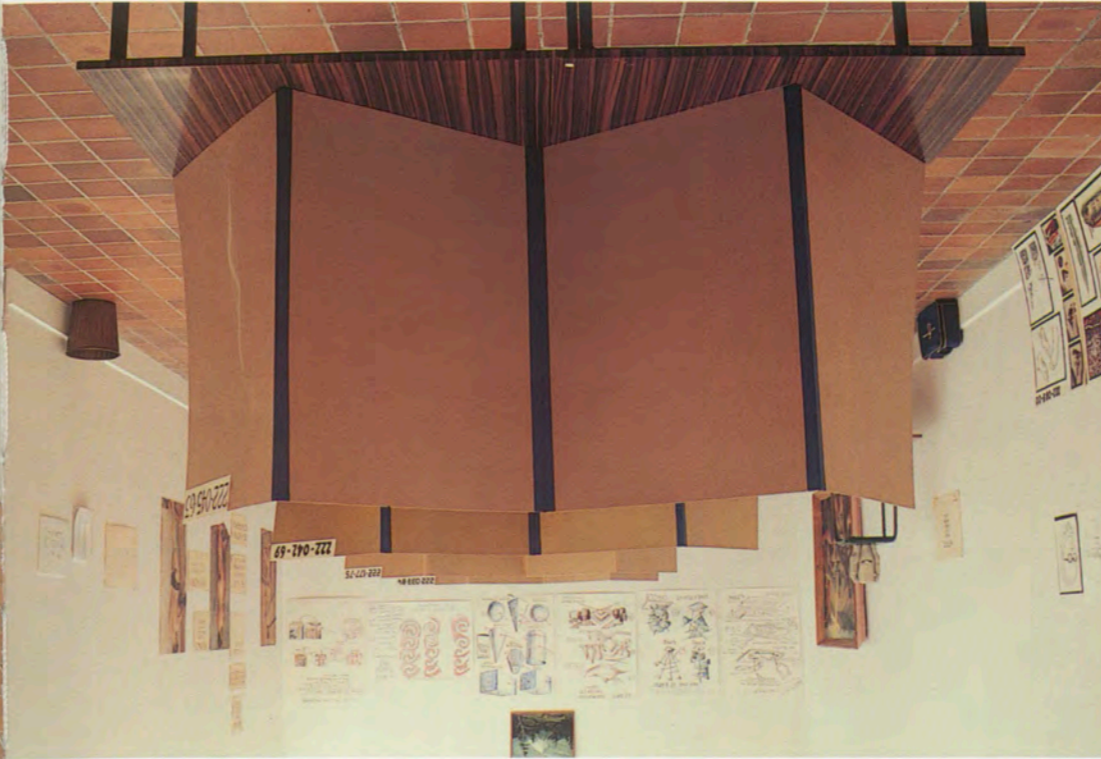


Steven Brower *Genealogy* (Installation view) 2000

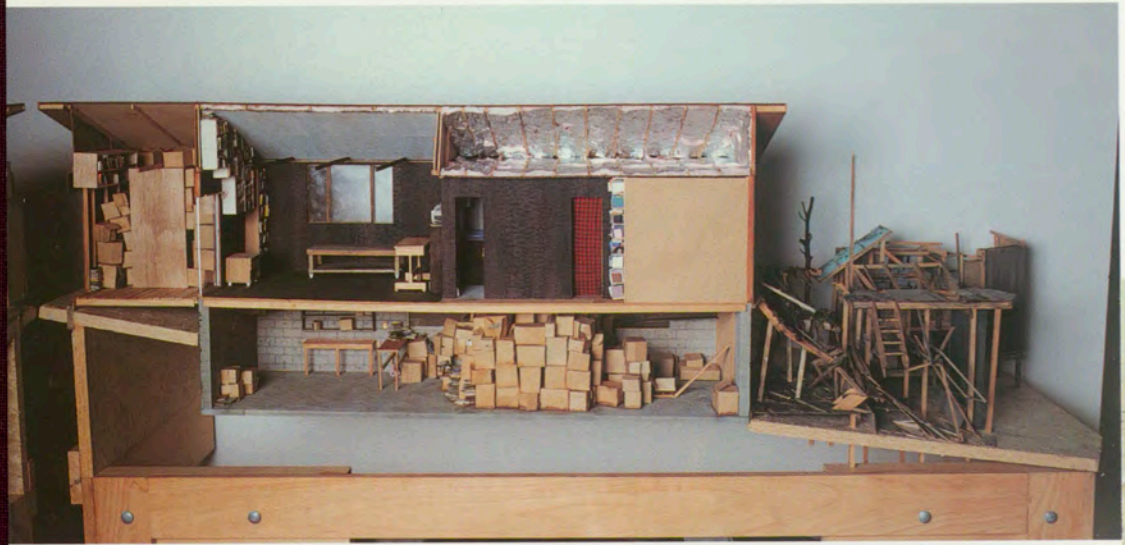
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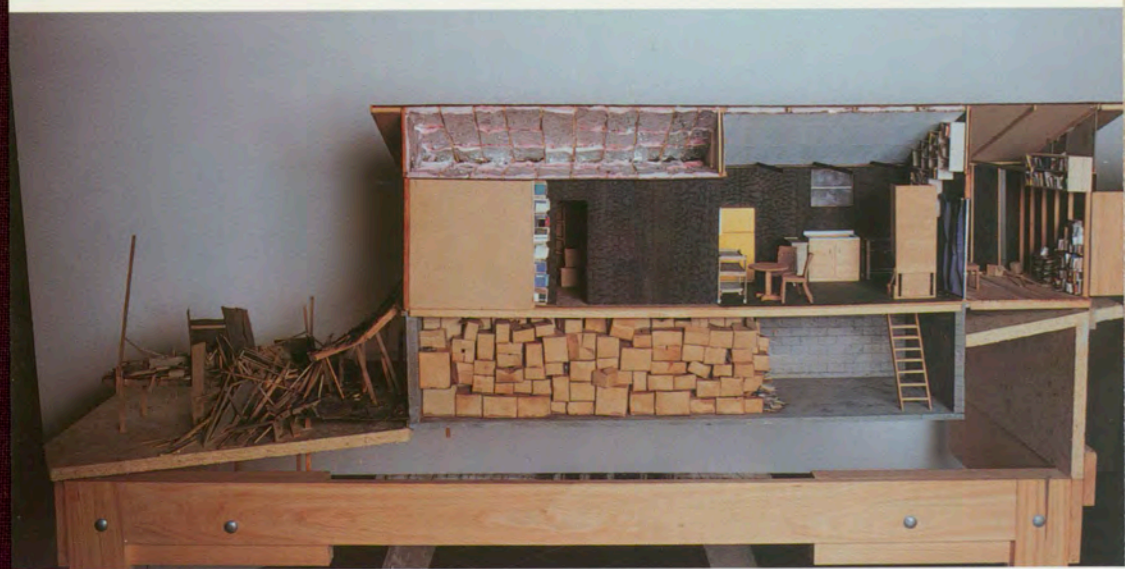
Michael Stevenson *Genealogy* (Installation view) 2000



Steven Brower *Genealogy* (Installation view) 2000



76. Steven Brower *Model of William Brower's house in West Virginia*(detail) 2000



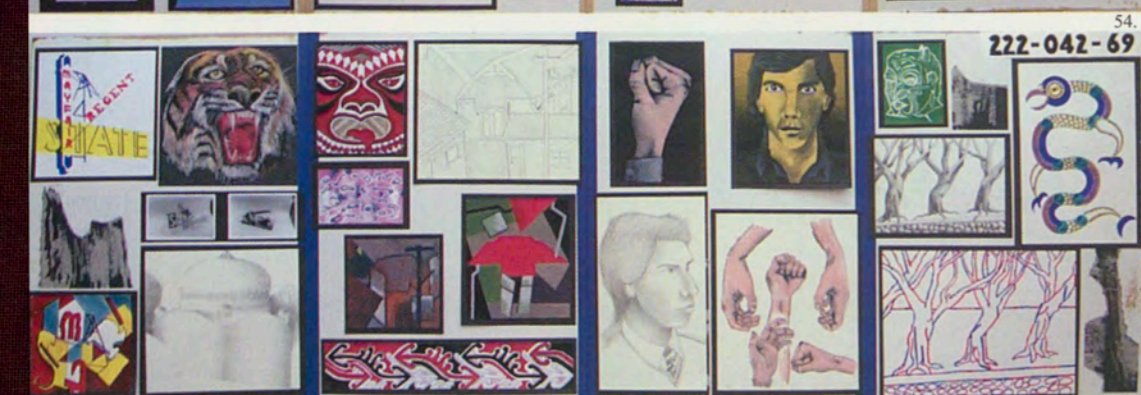
76. Steven Brower *Model of William Brower's house in West Virginia*(detail) 2000



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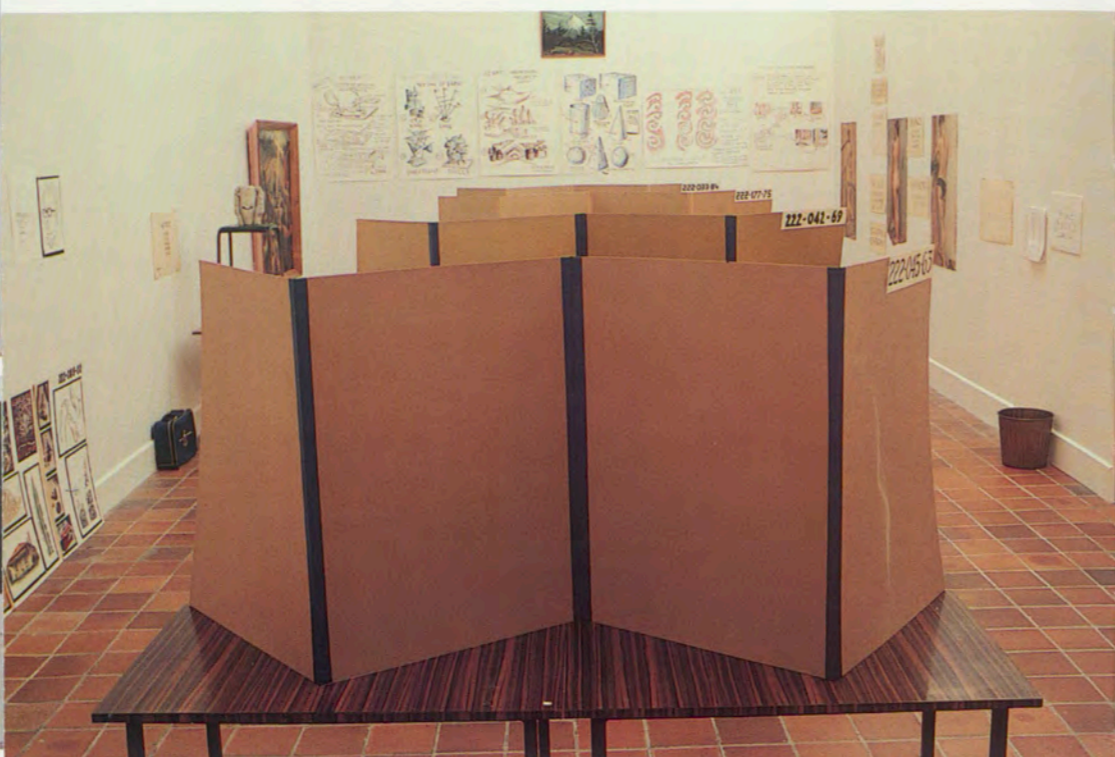
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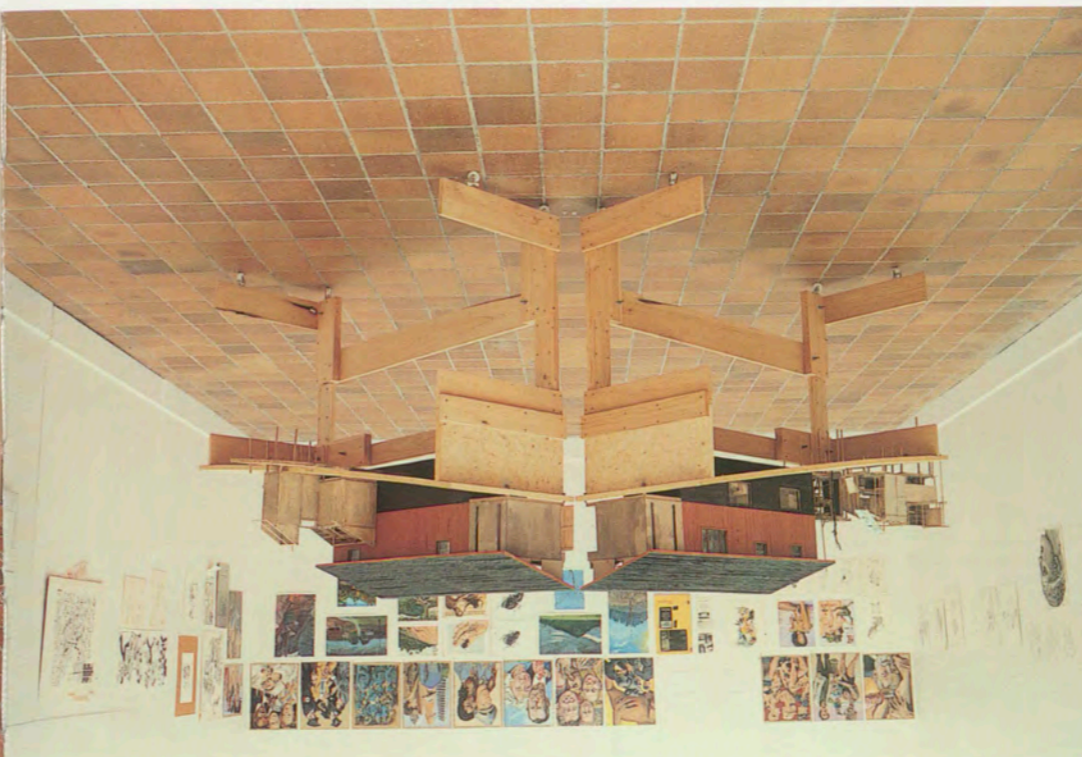
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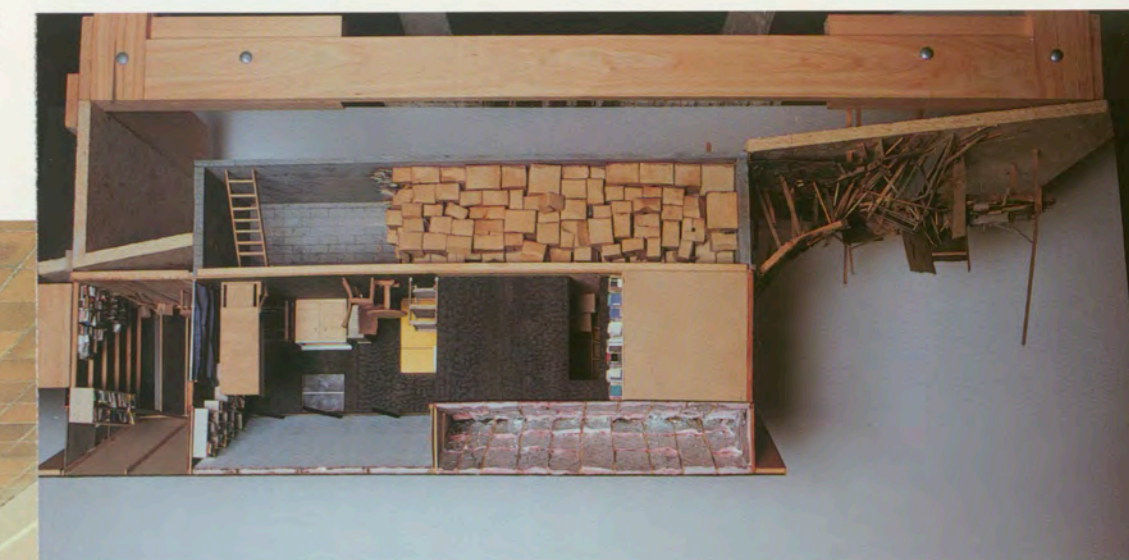
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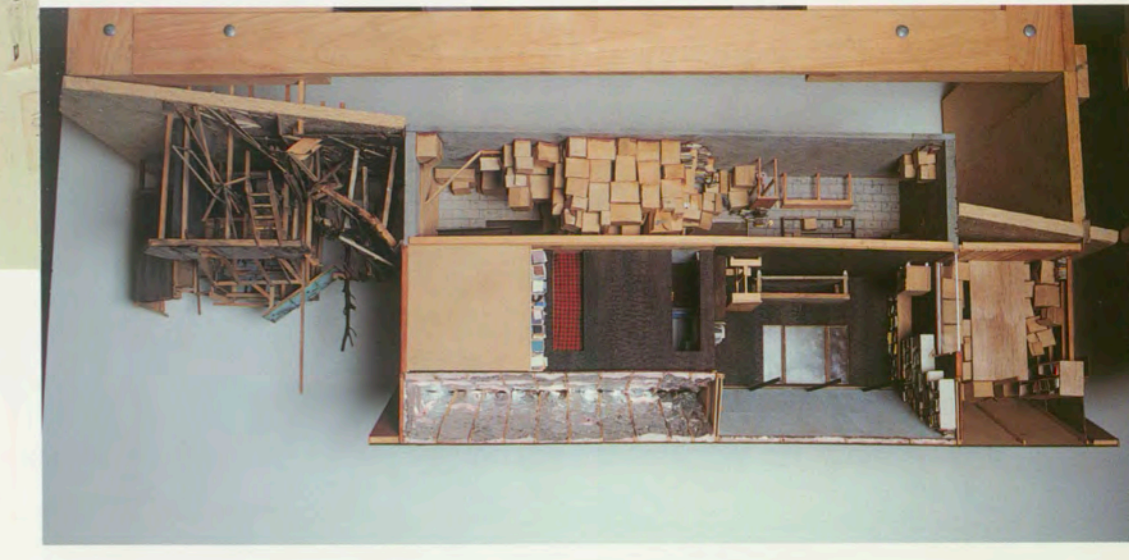
Michael Stevenson *Genealogy* (Installation view) 2000



Steven Brower *Genealogy* (Installation view) 2000



76. Steven Brower *Model of William Brower's house in West Virginia* (detail) 2000



76. Steven Brower *Model of William Brower's house in West Virginia* (detail) 2000

53. Michael Stevenson *Michael Parekowhai's School Certificate folio* (after lost original) 2000 • 54. Michael Stevenson *Julian Dashper's School Certificate folio* (after lost original) 2000 • 55. Michael Stevenson *Paul Hartigan's School Certificate folio* (after lost original) 2000 • 56. Michael Stevenson *Christine Hellyer's School Certificate folio* (after lost original) 2000

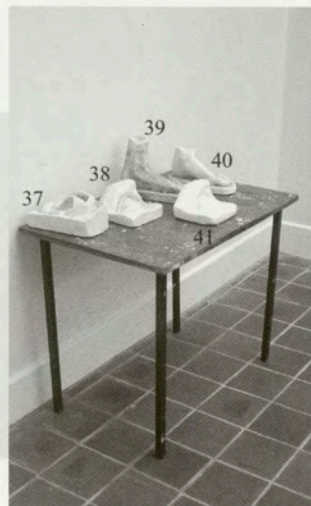
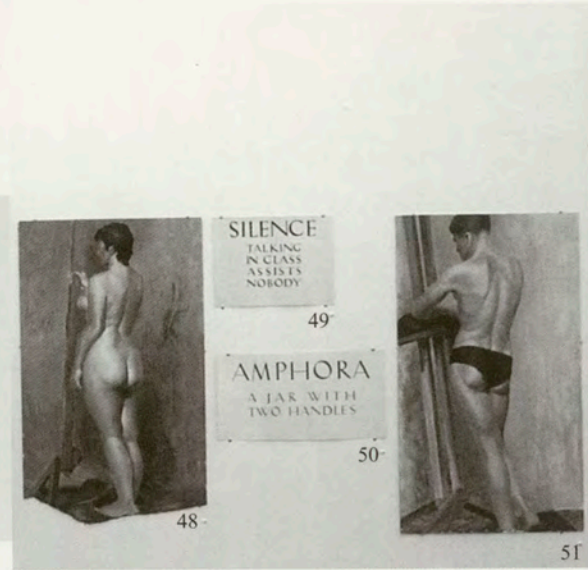
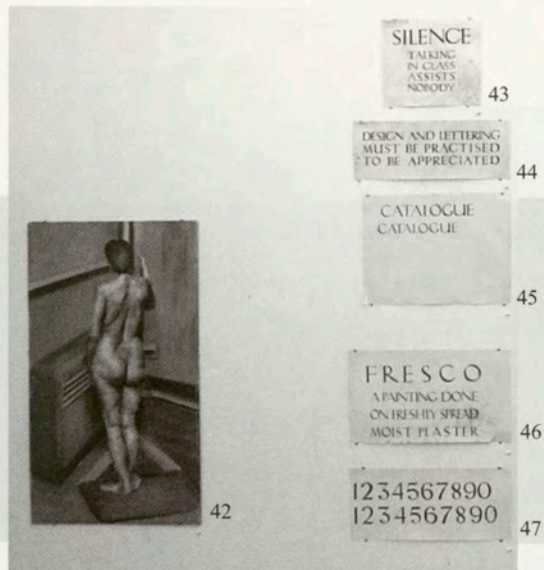


Michael Stevenson *Genealogy* (Installation view) 2000





Michael Stevenson *Genealogy* (Installation view) 2000



42. Alan Stevenson *Figure study* c.1950s • 43. Alan Stevenson *Lettering exercise (silence...)* c.1950s • 44. Alan Stevenson *Lettering exercise (design...)* c. 1950s • 45. Margaret Stevenson *Lettering exercise (catalogue...)* c.1950s • 46. Margaret Stevenson *Lettering exercise (fresco...)* c.1950s • 47. Margaret Stevenson *Lettering exercise (1, 2, 3...)* c.1950s

37. Alan Stevenson *Ear* 1956 • 38. Margaret Stevenson *David's eye* 1955 • 39. Alan Stevenson *Foot* 1956 • 40. Margaret Stevenson *Foot* 1955 • 41. Alan Stevenson *David's eye* 1956

48. Margaret Stevenson *Figure study* c.1950s • 49. Margaret Stevenson *Lettering exercise (silence...)* c.1950s • 50. Margaret Stevenson *Lettering exercise (Amphora...)* c.1950s • 51. Margaret Stevenson *Figure study* c.1950s • 52. Alan Stevenson *Lettering exercise (lettering...)* c. 1950s

Left: Alan Stevenson *Bust* 1957 and *Dove-tailed bookcase* 1960s • Right: Artist unknown *Picasso sat here (after lost original)* c.1979



36

SC ART
EXPLORING DRAWING
MONOPRINTS

MIX 1
USE 2 METHODS

INK ROLLER
INK PLATE
SHEET OF GLASS
USE NEEDLE IN CORNER
USE NAIL FOR DRAWING ON PLATE

EVEN COAT OF INK ON PLATE
PAPER OVER - LET DRY
DRAW ON PAPER THROUGH TO INK
PENCIL

LIFT PRINT
INKED PLATE

35

SC ART STRUCTURES
TRY ONE OF EACH

① PLANE
② LINE
③ LINE & PLANE
④ CIRCLE

35

SC ART MOUNTAIN PROJECT

① CURVES
② SYLSTIC
③ GEOMETRIC

35

SC ART BASIC FORMS

1. CUBE
2. CUBE
3. CYLINDER
4. SPHERE
5. RECTANGULAR PRISM
6. HEXAGONAL PRISM
7. CONE
8. SQUARE PYRAMID

35

SC ART MAORI ART
(COMPULSORY)

Make a copy of 'KORU' spirals (2,3)
Make an original paper using these 'KORU' 1,2,3 spiral forms
Paint using only Red, Black & White

you have a week to complete

35

SC ART PAINTING PROJECTS

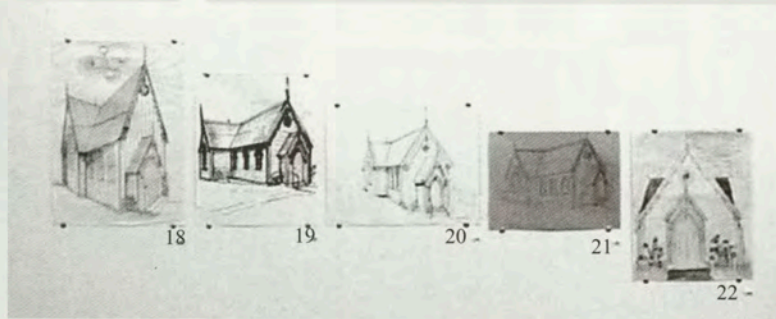
ITEM 1 ZOOM Make a sketch of a group of objects looking through a card from 20cm in to a section of the group. Paint this area keeping minimal detail features.

(a) group
(b) card frame
corner of a window
point
use tree

35

36. Margaret Stevenson *Mount Taranaki* c.1960s

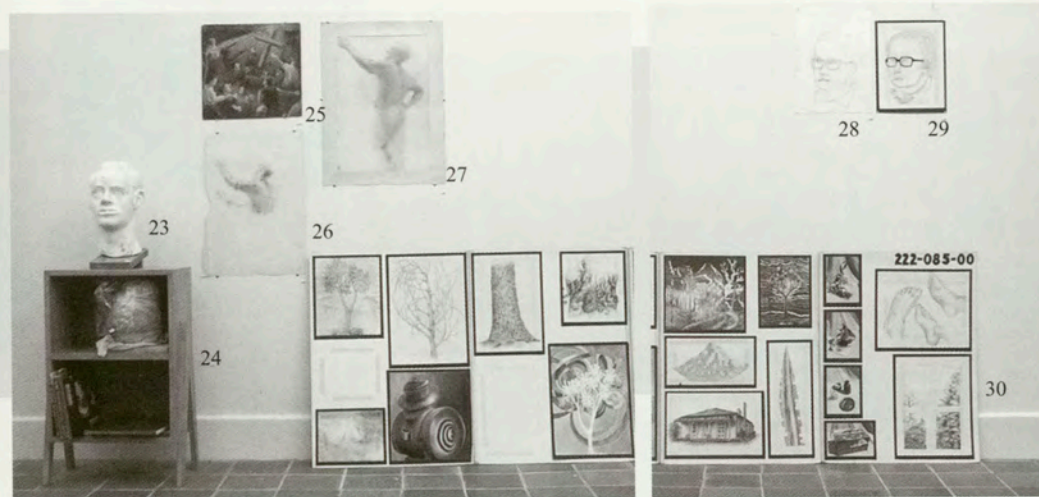
35. Alan Stevenson *School Certificate charts (after lost originals)* 2000



18. Shona Stevenson *Church, Matakana* 1977 • 19. Alan Stevenson *Church, Matakana* 1977 • 20. Margaret Stevenson *Church, Matakana* 1977 • 21. Michael Stevenson *Church, Matakana* 1977 • 22. Catherine Stevenson *Church, Matakana* 1977



31. Alan Stevenson *Lettering exercise (notice...)* c.1950s • 32. Inglewood High School bag, with badge designed by Margaret Stevenson c.1970s • 33. Alan Stevenson *The one eyed protestor* 1982



23. Alan Stevenson *Bust* 1957 • 24. Alan Stevenson *Dove-tailed bookcase* 1960s • 25. Margaret Stevenson *Study for 20th century attitudes to the cross* 1955 • 26. Margaret Stevenson *Figure study for 20th century attitudes to the cross* 1955 • 27. Margaret Stevenson *Figure study for 20th century attitudes to the cross* 1955 • 28. Michael Stevenson *Alan Stevenson* 1980 • 29. Michael Stevenson *Alan Stevenson contour* 1980 • 30. Michael Stevenson *Michael Stevenson's School Certificate folio* 1980



34. Margaret Stevenson *20th century attitudes to the cross* 1955



Note: the numbers listed here correspond to the layout of the exhibition

3. Art room display board • 4. Art room storage unit

9. Alan Stevenson *Drury creek* 1956 • 10. Michael Stevenson *Taranaki estuary* 1986 • 11. Margaret Stevenson *Figure study* 1955 • 12. Margaret Stevenson *Still life* 1955

7. Margaret Stevenson *Raglan* c.1960s • 8. Margaret Stevenson *Mr. Large* c.1950s

13. Margaret Stevenson *Figure study* 1955 • 14. Alan Stevenson *Mount Taranaki* 1958 • 15. Alan Stevenson *Still life* c.1950s • 16. Margaret Stevenson *Commissioned painting for Inglewood High School* 1967

Dear Sir,

The provocative and strangely entertaining exhibition (Giovanni Intra acutely positioned it to me as "Taking smartalec-ism to a whole new level!") by Mike Stevenson and Steven Brower reminds me of a great statement by comedian Woody Allen.

As I recall it, Allen said "More than any time in history mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness; the other to total extinction. Let us hope we have the wisdom to choose correctly."

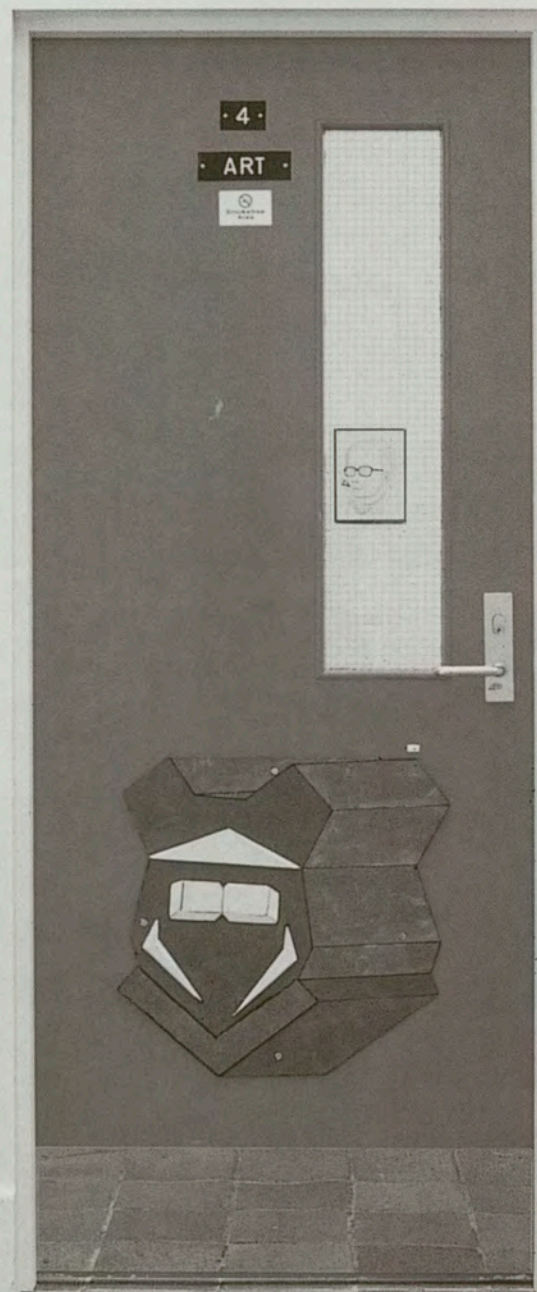
How else can you come away from Stevenson's bleak yet hilarious evidence that we are a nation still enthralled in a long-term love affair with the lowest-common cultural denominator. Any exhibition that foregrounds the institutionalisation of art creation as its starting point is bound to be an astringent to those who believe we have a lively and robust culture - at the production end anyway.

Still Stevenson's warning is timely. As I write arts bureaucrats scurry round the country searching for the Heart of our Nation which they are convinced is located in the infrastructure (huh?). Meanwhile Te Papa's curators continue to mock contemporary art with signs that can read "I hate new ideas."

Thank goodness none of our great artists are bothered with this mediocre hogwash. Seemingly unaffected by the cookie-cutter mentality, exemplified by School Cert., they somehow gloriously rise above it all.

Jim Barr
Mt Victoria

MICHAEL STEVENSON



Chaos theory



Family dissemblance

I left the Govett-Brewster the other day utterly confused. This exhibition called *Genealogy* is supposed to be by two artists, Michael Stevenson and Steven Brower. I couldn't tell which was which. This is probably because none of the objects in the show had these two names on them. There were many similar names, and some not so similar. It seems the point of the show was to divine who was 'Steven's' son. Apparently Alan's son is Steven. But he's living in Melbourne. Brower is from Washington, D.C., and his son is in New York. Somehow one of them has a kid in New Plymouth at Boys' High. I guess someone made up the name Bill Fagg to solve the confusion. Are all these authors made up façades for the real artist to hide behind? The portrait of the Emperor in his new clothes was revealing. By the end of it I didn't even know who I was. And by the way, what were all those little numbers about?

Nosnevets Williamson
Hamilton



Plagiarism is not on

It has come to our attention that the Govett-Brewster is exhibiting copies of our artworks in the form of School Certificate folios and other degrading and juvenile forms. As you know, the material is our original work, and we hold copyright. As authors and copyright holders, we give no permission to use this material without our consent. We ask you to stop further use of any material that references our work. There are so many ways artistic talent can be used to affirm humanity; squandering it on cynical plagiaristic renderings of your peers is not one of them. If you respect our artistic rights, you will abide by our request.

A. Orange
Sydney



Right is left

While I enjoyed the exhibition at the Govett-Brewster titled *Genealogy* in general, I did not like the works in the room on the right. I think the organizers of the show would have done a lot better to omit these items and give more room for the artists represented on the left. The artist on the right isn't even from here. The left artists are all from New Zealand and deserve a closer look. The right gets too much exposure as it is anyway. I say don't leave the left behind.

Al Denizen
Auckland



Skeleton in the closet

Of all the inevitable condemnations of the Govett-Brewster's newest 'exhibition', I hope mine will be the first. With a title like *Genealogy*, I expected to find images of family members, not family's members. Anyone who has seen the show will know what I mean. Since the opening on May 6, I have returned several times just to be sure I wasn't imagining the level of disgust I felt upon being attacked by this utterly reprehensible fiasco.

The work on view, by expatriate Michael Stevenson and New Yorker Steven Brower is of the most cynical and gratuitous variety. Ostensibly concerned with the nature of 'artistic development' and a comparison between 'education' here and abroad, the installation succeeds in condemning not only beauty and the sanctity of the family, but also the Govett-Brewster and art in general.

Stevenson's presentation of School C. folios and school memorabilia might be fitting in a gymnasium or someone's attic, but lacks any artistic merit whatsoever, and somehow manages to cast a pall over the possibility of even a nostalgic look at Taranaki. Brower's confusing hodgepodge of his father's lunatic scribbles is simply offensive. For the sake of decency, I am making a call to have this trash sent back to America immediately. I doubt any upstanding ratepayer wants to see her or his hard earned money squandered on a public mockery of every institution we hold dear. I have forbidden my children to attend the 'exhibit', and if I could I would extend that restriction to the entire region. How could this be done to us?

Barbara Heapworth
New Plymouth



Shoddy workmanship

I take exception to the construction techniques demonstrated in the model house on view at the Govett-Brewster. As a builder I know a house like that would be impossible to put together, regardless of the country it's alleged to exist in. There should be a sign somewhere amongst the junk stating that this is a work of fiction and not a real house.

Brent Lakewood
Bell Block



Ignorance is bliss

After "Genealogy" I miss the halcyon days of the Wind Wand debate. What will the Govett-Brewster think of next in its tireless pursuit of profligate spending of public funds on useless, ugly art? Why not have a solo show of my eight year-old son's collection of refrigerator decorations? Or how about a special viewing of the backroom stock from Nauti Nik Naks? If this is what passes for art on the international scene, then I am perfectly happy to remain ignorant of it.

Hale Foster
Hawera



Ernie and Burt folios

My trouble and strife and me was having a butchers at the linen draper and saw this *Genealogy* thing advertised at the Grubby Rooster. We decided to take a Captain Cook and, mate, I nearly choked on me pick. The Barbara Thumm was filled with Ernie and Burt folios! We thought the pitch and toss who runs the gallery must be taking us for a virgin bride. Then, using me loaf of bread, I went home and got on the dog and bone and rang me skin and blister, told her to take a look up in her attic. She raced up the apples and pears to dust off the ole Ernie and Burt folio. We reckon it's worth big Bugs Bunny. Could fatten up the ole gray nurse. Could get me a new bag of fruit.

Today in History

Today is Saturday, May 6, 127th day of 2000.
There are 239 days left in the year:

Highlights in history on this date:

- 1919- Thomas Hart Benton begins his practice of making clay and plaster models for his paintings, a procedure that becomes a permanent feature of his technique. Jackson Pollock received instruction under Benton at the Art Students League from 1930 to 1933.
- 1955- Margaret Stevenson (née Cooke), a student at Elam School of Fine Arts begins drawing family members as models for a large figure composition, under the instruction of her tutor, A. Lois White. These preparatory works will eventually culminate in the large painting "20th Century attitudes to The Cross".
- 1958- William Fagg (previously and in the future William Brower) graduates from the United States Military Academy at West Point.
- 1968- Then pupil of New Plymouth Boys' High School, Paul Hartigan, makes his first screen print under the direction of then art teacher, Tom Kreisler.
- 1975- Despite having no arms, Wade Keesecker lays foundations for a house at Rt 2 Box 234-H, Berkeley Springs, West Virginia. 30 years later, the house becomes the subject of an art exhibition.
- 1975- Alan Stevenson, then art teacher at Inglewood High School, introduces the "zoom" assignment to the School Certificate art syllabus. Students catch on fast!
- 1998- Steven Brower and Michael Stevenson receive fax confirmation regarding a residency in New Plymouth, New Zealand.

Bible Thoughts

Genesis 10:22-25 AV

The children of Shem; E'lam, and Asshur, and Ar-phax'ad, and Lud, and A'ram.

And the children of A'ram; Uz and Hul, and Ge'ther, and Mash.

And Ar-phax'ad begat Sa'lah; and Sa'lah begat E'ber.

And unto E'ber were born two sons: the name of one was Pe'leg; for in his days was the earth divided; and his brother's name was Jok'tan.



Empty cabin

I am the owner of the cabin that was the model for Steven Brower's autobiographical conundrum art-piece object sculpture. The house is now empty but my heart is full.

The Cabin Owner
West Virginia



Model home

I am enjoying all the controversy over the *Genealogy* exhibition at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery but it seems the debate is missing some of the most interesting points the show is trying to make. If you put aside the obviously objectionable images (which I must admit sicken me too), and you look at the model of Brower's house, for instance, you begin to see that there actually are relationships between that place and, say, Mr. Amor's situation. I have found it gratifying to see works from the formative years of some of New Zealand's best artists as well. What I can't figure out is whether or not the whole thing is a big hoax.

But even if it is, I think we should look at the things that pass through the Gallery as a potentially interesting look into another world: a world in which we may or may not participate, according to our own tastes.

Jen Ericsson
New Plymouth



Bravo for Govett-Brewster

I want to take this opportunity to thank the Govett-Brewster for finally exhibiting some local artists. I think it is a brilliant idea to show School Certificate folios of promising young students in the region's best gallery. It gives young people the chance to experience what it's like to have a real show in a real gallery and it gives the general public the chance to take pride in our talented youth and the brilliance of the unsung heroes of this exhibit, the art teachers of Taranaki. I hope this becomes an annual event.

Pat Scull
New Plymouth



Freudent exhibits

These exhibits in this *Genealogy* show at the Govett-Brewster are not so much fraudulent as freudent. Do we really need to be reminded of Freud's crazed idea that sons compete with their fathers or his depraved ideas of the Oedipus complex? The Gallery should close the canal and disabuse itself of this mind-rot by dumping the exhibits from a great height.

T. Hansom
Salisbury

These genealogical facts are significant because Benton (unlike certain others of his contemporaries) deliberately cultivated his roots when he became a painter; absorbing through his family interests an intense concern for the American land, its citizenry, its politics and its destiny.³

Benton, famous for being Jackson Pollock's teacher, also taught William Brower's teacher Ned Archer at the Corcoran School in Washington DC. Benton's influence doesn't stop there however; his figurative style in works such as *July hay* 1942⁴ can also be recognised in the figure and landscape works of Margaret and Alan Stevenson. In turn, Benton's illustrative prowess can be read in the literal realism of Steven Brower's model making, and in the immaculate illustrative techniques employed by Michael Stevenson.

Stevenson and Brower knowingly restage regionalist realism, citing their art historical credentials. The installation space is crafted with illusionistic attention to detail: Stevenson's remake of the Inglewood art classroom where he was taught by his parents includes the notice boards, models, and instructional signage of the original. Similarly, Brower's detailing includes a replica of his father's unique table design, and books imported from his father's vast library. Both spaces are introduced by replica doors: Brower's by the door to his father's shed and Stevenson's by the door to his father's art room.

Both artists go to extreme lengths to ensure the veracity of their reconstructions: making preparatory sketches, elevations and plan drawings, revisiting original sites, and refining their techniques. It was with some excitement that Stevenson discovered the same exact spot, not far from his residency studio, that Paul Hartigan must have sat to paint the *Three trees* (attributed 'masterpiece'). They deliberately stained and aged their materials to look like convincing fakes. Just in case ripping, dog earring, scuffing and abrading their work wasn't enough to create the illusion of old age, Stevenson exposed the folio pieces to harsh amounts of ultraviolet light (hard light).

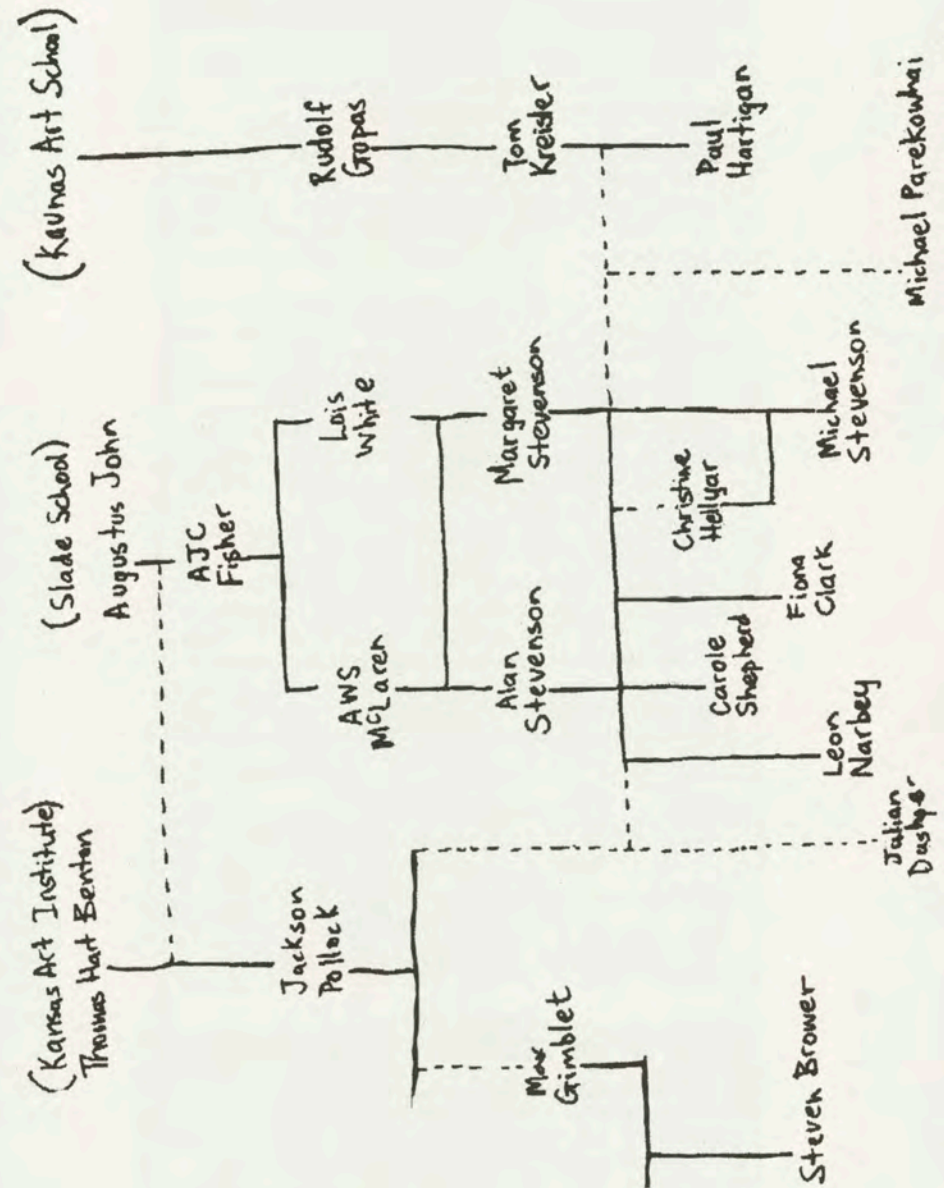
More self-reflexive than any self-respecting retrospective, *Genealogy* has a wide net of implications for critical artistic practice. While Stevenson and Brower have adopted personal perspectives, attuned to their specific residential locale in time, the installation reconsiders a number of home truths. It recasts the artistic personality into a complex of social relations; it stares in the face of artistic lineage and biography.

¹ genealogy 1. a a' line of descent traced continuously from an ancestor. b' an account or exposition of this. 2. the study and investigation of lines of descent. 3. a plant's or animal's line of development from earlier forms. Oxford Concise English Dictionary, ninth edition.

² Jose Lebrero Stals "Dragging oneself over the threshold of the exhibition" in *Mike Kelly 1985-1996*, 1997 MACBA p13.

³ Mark Baigell *Thomas Hart Benton*, Abrams c.1974

⁴ *July hay* 1942, oil and egg tempura on mounted canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, NY George A Hearn Fund



Michael Stevenson Hand-drawn diagram 2000

Published in 2000 on the occasion of the exhibition *Genealogy* by Michael Stevenson and Steven Brower at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 6 May-16 July 2000.

Genealogy resulted from the Artist in Residence partnership between the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery and the Taranaki Polytechnic, New Plymouth, New Zealand. Supported by Creative New Zealand, the Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa.



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NB: The artists and Gallery do not want an age restriction on this publication. Steven Brower's images 43 and 44 may face age restriction in some countries.



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w w w . g o v e t t b r e w s t e r . o r g . n z

Artistic development

Initially dubbed 'family resemblance' the exhibition title *Genealogy* borrows from evolutionary biology. Tracing its root we find that genealogia comes from 'genea' or 'race', hence the preoccupation with tracing development from 'earlier forms'.¹ However, art history, at least the biographical variety, predates Charles Darwin's ideas. Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the artists* (Vol II) was published in 1568. His text also exhibits a preoccupation with tracing lines of descent: stylistic and biographical.

Vasari, the father of art history, is credited with establishing the principles of individual painterly styles and, as a result, the doctrine of art historical lineage. It is this pervasive doctrine which comes under scrutiny in the deconstruction of family resemblance by Michael Stevenson and Steven Brower. Drawing on a strong stock of family talent, these boys draw attention to the polite ways in which the traits of an *artistic* family are described – the supposed lines of influence and exchange. The project also describes the investment in the biographical charting of an artist's career, from emerging artist through to mid-career.

*The process of institutionalisation of culture implied by the museum phenomenon converts the creative impulse into cultural model, transforms it into heritage and patrimony.*²

The retrospective gaze signified by the title *Genealogy* looks back into an artist's history, a history that implies evolution. Both artists put work by their parents on show: paintings and sketches documenting early, middle and late phases of their parent's oeuvre. Sidestepping a retrospective exhibition, that necessary notch in the belt of a mid-career artist, Stevenson and Brower defer the burden of an historical survey of their work onto their parents.

This curious act of homage de-centers and democratizes their practice. Their parent's work stands in for a retrospective. It draws attention to the unreliable, mythologising aspects of art history. The construction of a legitimate chronology of influences and outcomes (traditionally narrated through a biographical retrospective or *catalogue raisonné*) is forced to take in the span of the careers of each artist's father as well as the influence of a state and art school education. This self-conscious salute to the biographical art history instigated by Vasari highlights the ways in which a history of an artist's work is supplemented by the anecdotal and the personal.

Stevenson's installation includes his original School Certificate art folder, placed amongst purported folders of his predecessors. This intimate act, like the inclusion of a family drawing study, foregrounds work that is normally edited out of an artist's history. Similarly, Brower exhibits his working drawings, and the private, portrait exchange between him and his father. This family resemblance softly makes explicit honest traits of artistic lineage, so often ameliorated in an account of an artist's career.

Studying Old Masters is a distinguished academic legacy. Imitation is an act of homage. Stevenson's method includes appropriating New Zealand's 'Old Masters', but it also quotes the familial tradition of his upbringing. Both artists cite American regionalist painter Thomas Hart Benton as an antecedent for the project.

Genealogy

By MIKE STEVENSON
& STEVEN BROWER

