



Mostly
harmless

a performance series



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a performance series

19 August – 24 September 2006

"There are things I remember which may never have happened, but as I recall them, so they take place"

— Harold Pinter *Old Times*

This record of, and response to the performances that took place as part of *Mostly harmless: a performance series* documents what took place, yet it is undeniably separate from the performances themselves. *Mostly harmless* grew from an interest in the many ways in which artists work performatively, as a way of direct engagement with an audience or simply as a solitary way to explore through activity, audience or no audience. As a gallery-based exhibition in a regional gallery, it was as much an investigation into audience interest as it was into current performance art. The performances presented in the exhibition covered several possibilities: from Tao Wells's involvement of the audience through drawing, Louise Menzies's organisation of an evening of couples performing together, David Cross's simultaneous intense isolation from and proximity to the audience, Simon Denny and Tahi Moore's perplexing performance with hard to discern beginning and end and Daniel Malone's precise direction of the audience as extras in his performance for video.

Similarly the writing, done by a variety of witnesses to and participants in these performances, reflects the differences of the performances themselves as well as providing personal responses to them. The texts also have a role in mediating these performances.

What kind of reading comes from an audience member's response to a performance? Many voices seemed the best approach. By inviting a variety of responses to a series of performances that had no unifying agenda, but were always intended to be a collection of individual pieces, then too the responses would reply to the stimulus.

By presenting multiple voices in text the aim is to acknowledge hazed recollection and the artifice of documentation of all kinds. Like all media that records for future reference, writing too does it incompletely. Words themselves are elusive and multiple in meaning. Regaining the event is not possible, but responding to it is.

As documentation, what appears in this catalogue is shaped for a purpose. Together the footage and the text might explain or occlude. In this expanded way perhaps the record of these performances can give insight into the idiosyncrasies of recollection and preservation just as they can provide an experience of the performance.

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David Cross Bounce

Saturday 19 August

Eye to eye --- It was the sort of scene one might find at a suburban birthday party; a swarm of unshod children clung to the side of what looked like a hypertrophied inflatable raft, lipstick red. Adults milled about this swollen vinyl hillock, cautiously eyeing the young, occasionally clambering up to join them. But this was the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, and glistening underneath the crisp fluorescent lights was David Cross's performance/sculpture *Bounce*. That is to say, underneath this little scene was David Cross himself. Discarding adult inhibitions to summit the work, you braced a rush of air to peer into two little holes at the top, and found yourself staring uncomfortably into the artist's clear blue eyes.

Now, meeting David Cross for the first time, it is difficult to know what to do with his eyes. They are moist and tearing, and notice you noticing them. The physical condition, a congenital lack of tear ducts (which has only recently become a subject of his work), is Cross's, but which one of you feels more vulnerable? Scanning your reaction, whatever it may be, you get the distinct feeling they've seen it before. But there they are — there he is — underneath you on this red bouncy castle. Even knowing what awaited at the summit, the encounter is absurd and naked. And if you were me, the most you could muster would be a meek, ridiculous

"Hello".

Sliding down, Vito Acconci's 1972 performance *Seed bed* flashed briefly to mind. Acconci hid beneath a false floor in the gallery, feigning masturbation as visitors walked above. It would be a mistake to tag Cross's work with perversity or aggression, but in the relation between artist and audience, *Bounce* conjured a similar mix of vulnerability and empowerment. While the artist lay impassively below, children played at scrambling and bouncing, oblivious to their little cruelties. Perhaps this reflection on the soft spots we overlook and the unnoticed injuries we inflict was precisely the point. But of course, for the most part, the abuse simply bounced off the artist's newfound plastic skin. Enduring this anaesthetic condition for a full seven hours, for Cross, the distended red tumulus became part coffin and part cocoon.

Freud offered two memorable examples of the uncanny: when something alive appears dead, and when something inanimate comes alive. In its stripped-down human encounter, mixing performance, sculpture and carnival, *Bounce* managed to do both.

Tyler Cann



Matt Henry Breakdown

Sunday 20 August

music credits:

Lonely woman

Composer: Ornette Coleman.

From the album: *Old and new dreams*

Performers: Don Cherry, Dewey Redman, Charlie Haden, Ed Blackwell, 1979.

Rios negros

Composer: Lester Bowie

From the album: *The great pretender*

Performers: Lester Bowie, Donald Smith, Fred Williams, Phillip Wilson, 1981.

Oh, how the ghost sings

Composers: Lester Bowie, Donald Smith, Fred Williams, Phillip Wilson, Manfred Eicher, Martin Wieland

From the album: *The great pretender*

Performers: Lester Bowie, Donald Smith, Fred Williams, Phillip Wilson, Manfred Eicher, Martin Wieland, 1981.

The terms of behaviour breakdown --- the memory of a Matt Henry performance

It is often taken for granted in everyday experience that certain spaces, places and events have prescribed behaviours, expected actions and a common knowledge of proceedings. This is not always the case with performance art. Performance art could be seen as locating an uncertain frame of reference. Being a hybridised media viewed within the context of visual art but borrowing aspects from theatre, dance, music, religious ritual and sometimes adopting a blurred distinction from daily activity, how a performance begins and ends, and the particulars about how one should experience performance art is completely open. Since it does not adhere to one discipline there is no steeped tradition through which to mediate its form. For this reason attending a performance can sometimes be an awkward experience for the viewer. Unless one is familiar with a particular gallery's house style or have prior knowledge of what to expect, it is difficult for the visitor to know how to behave. Therefore, performance art is an apt media for exploring the terms of behaviour since it both disrupts conventional conduct and involves the display of it.

This became evident to me when I visited the Govett-Brewster one Sunday afternoon for Matt Henry's performance entitled *Breakdown*. On this occasion the narrow rectangular gallery space had been transformed into a type of makeshift theatre.

At one end of the room there was a pile of red square cushions and a random arrangement of blue stools that were used as temporary seating. The opposite end of the gallery in which a lounge was set up took on the function of a stage. The lounge consisted of a vacuum cleaner, telephone, white woollen rug, an elegant 1950s-style wooden armchair with finely woven squabs and a modular wooden veneer shelving unit containing two high-end turntables, amp and speakers. Entering the gallery with a brisk and overly decisive stride, Henry (a man of slender physique, tidy short dark hair, cleanly shaven, wearing black framed glasses and dressed in a fitted black sports jacket, black T-shirt, Chuck Taylor sneakers and blue jeans, a satchel slung over the shoulder and two records tucked firmly under his right arm) has calculated his entry precisely (or so it would seem) so not to be stalled by loitering gallery visitors.

From sidewalk to stage in one action without interruption he takes a seat in the armchair with his back to the audience - who startled by his entrance finish their conversations in a whisper and find a seat of their own.

Seated attentively Henry pulls from his satchel a pen and paper with which he begins to studiously make notes, taking pause only every few seconds to study his surroundings. He then rises, adheres the paper to the wall with gaffer tape and returns to his seat. Standing up seconds later, un-sleeves his records, handling them cautiously by the edges, places one on each turntable and proceeds to play a track.

A turbulent trumpet cry peals through the gallery followed by a euphoric torrent of snare drum coupled with a velvety dance of double bass. The jazz fired a charge of life throughout the gallery, colouring the sterile white chamber. The audience, toes tapping and heads nodding to the perturbed but exuberant composition. Henry, rising suddenly, selfishly deprives the audience of hearing the remainder of the

track and moves the needle back to the beginning. Returning to his armchair and reconfiguring his posture, his eyes are trained on the record in captivated stare. He rises from the chair, this time adjusting the angle of the speakers slightly. Taking his seat again, perhaps to analyse his new arrangement, only to rise moments later for yet another adjustment.

This process is repeated by Henry numerous times with every body movement carefully reserved. Although at times displaying fleeting moments of an anxious fidget which he appears to tame with composure. Each new object adjustment seems to be some attempt in which to enhance the sound in some minuscule way. The preoccupation with the sound system is only disrupted by intermittent reactions to listen to the receiver of an unplugged telephone as if expecting it to have a phantom dial tone. Meanwhile, there is a slight discomfort in the audience as with each interruption they are denied hearing the entire track.

The pensive demeanour that Henry maintains progressively degenerates after each new alteration. Unsatisfied by the speaker placement Henry's attention is drawn to increments on the surface of the records. From his satchel he extracts, handling only by fingertips and with steady surgeon like grace, cleaning equipment including carbon fibre brushes and cleaning fluids. The domestic vacuum cleaner is also put to use on the vinyl, making certain no particle will remain to inhibit audio quality. While rearranging the sound system once more he casually starts to sip on the cleaning fluid as if it were a common habit. It takes a moment for the audience to acknowledge with smirks, smiles and the occasional chuckle at his odd substance abuse.

Through adjustments on the turntable the music takes on a haunted chord. The trumpet now evokes the sound of convulsing and murmuring demonic entities. Reclining in the chair for another sound analysis, Henry's intoxicated attuned ear identifies another scruple. The arm chair squabs are now removed and placed under the turntables which are transported

from the shelving to the floor. In a chilling spate Henry now deals to the chair and shelving which have no functional use in this new sound system configuration. Drawing a hammer from his satchel and with a slight sadistic grin Henry calmly but with considerable force, strikes the chair's limbs until the structure collapses. The shelving for some reason escapes this violent fate and is rather appropriately dissected by removing the screws and the wood stacked neatly against the wall.

The culminating scene pictures Henry robed in the white wool rug knees to chest and taking the occasional swig of cleaning fluid whilst rocking involuntary on the floor. The performance ends by Henry's only spoken words: 'that's it', as he steps to the side of the set. His announcement shatters the persona which he has painstakingly created over the past forty minutes. Now that the performance is bracketed by time the audience is given cue to chat among themselves, explore the residue and exit the liminal vacuum that the artist created.

Bruce E. Phillips





James McCarthy

Accent

Saturday 26 August

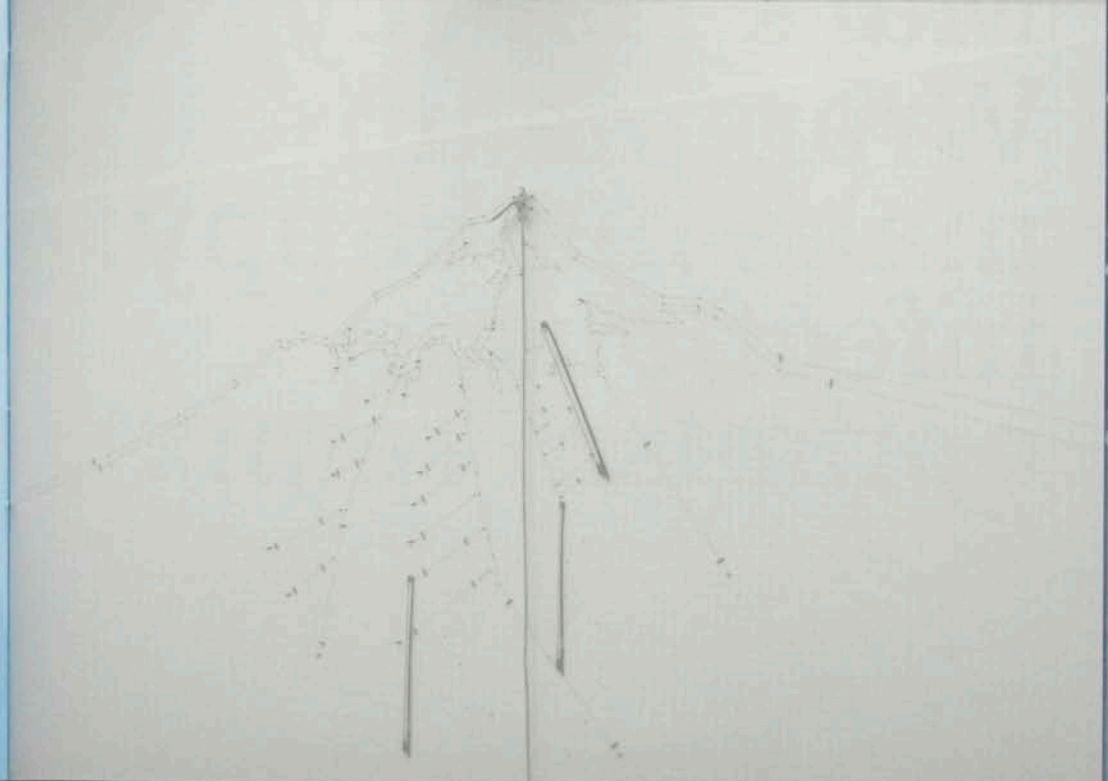
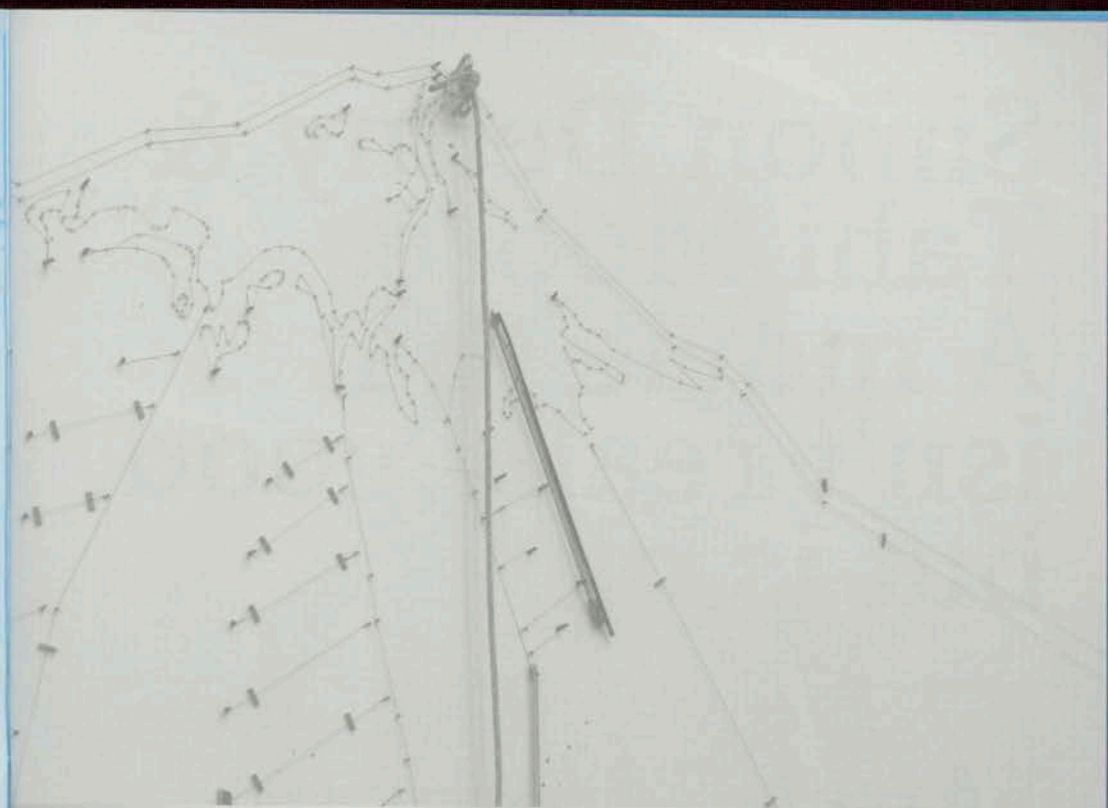
Length, tension, tonality: performing the mountain


Recently James McCarthy reintroduced a form of drawing into his sound-based performative practice. As someone who in his own words has 'always worked with space in between walls and a purely performative location', this return to drawing is a return to a more object-based and physically evident mode of action. McCarthy's sonic drawings explore the aural properties of steel, piano wire and architecture. McCarthy's activation of the drawings is informed by his long association with minimalist and serial music forms combined with his skills of improvisation and as a percussionist. Using location as a base McCarthy deftly and lyrically relays the physical relationship of sound and materials through serial improvisation.

McCarthy's performance *Accent* followed on from two earlier investigations of this kind. This series of works represent a shifting of space and temporality for McCarthy into site responsive and specific instruments inhabiting a space bounded by ephemeral performative action and physical artefact. The first, *Sight lines* 2004, was devised for the SHIFT Project exhibition *Ouse*. McCarthy responded to a flat expanse of wooden bench top with a sketch of the footprint of the exhibition space in wire, bridges and steel. With the bench acting as a resonating chamber McCarthy then performed the drawing, translating the physical dimensions of the space into a tonal sonic landscape. Following that, in 2006, McCarthy rendered a portion of the Southern Alps on a wall at the Physics Room performing, together with Jenny Gillam's live video mix, *Transposition of a mountain*. McCarthy, who was attached by piano wire and a rock climbing harness, providing tension and pitch control, transposed the Alps in line and tone. The piece remained for several days after the performance to be observed as a drawing and played as instrument by visitors.

Like the two drawings before it, *Accent* also responded to location. McCarthy worked up a drawing of the inimitable yet elusive Mt Taranaki on a plywood wall built out from the gallery wall to create space for resonance. In an inspired realisation late the night before the performance, McCarthy decided that the mountain needed to be ascended as it was played. As a result McCarthy's tonal exploration of Mt Taranaki was a poetic feat of verticality. His ascent of the wire wall drawing with harness, crampons and violin bow was an ascent of scale as the piano wire supporting him shortened and tightened, heightening the notes to correspond with his distance from the ground. This rise in tone was punctuated by the increasingly frequent sounds of McCarthy's laboured breathing, the ratcheting up of the piano wire and the percussive kick of the crampons into the plywood wall as he ascended. In frequent rest stops McCarthy plucked the wall-based wires and bowed the ever shortening high tensioned piano wire. As he neared the summit he plucked out evermore delicate melodies on the tensioned steel wire of the drawing; the detail of ridge and crevasse requiring more frequent nails, shortening the wire and raising the notes. The rise in tone and McCarthy's height off the ground worked in seamlessly with the imagined experience of fair weather mountain climbing; the effort, the rest stops in the rarefied air and the silence of altitude.

Charlotte Huddleston





Simon Denny &
Tahi Moore
A movie that
isn't really good,
but is ok.

Mark Harvey
Wrap me up
make me happy:
infectious
optimism remix.

Saturday 2 September

Friday 01st September

A first visit to the Govett-Brewster was long overdue. This, as well as having an interest in performance art, prompted me to make the trip down from Auckland to New Plymouth.

A phone call to a friend, once oft my travel companion, for some tips on a short cut removed the need to consult a map and made the impending drive seem more like an escapade.

Sat 02nd September

When driving around New Zealand, I imagine the journey as travelling up or down, probably due to growing up viewing flat maps on straight walls, making the drive to New Plymouth feel like a descent...

Entering the township of New Plymouth with not much time to spare I made a beeline toward Queen St where the gallery resides.

A movie that isn't that good but is o.k.
by Simon Denny and Tahi Moore 2.00pm.

At a glance on my arrival, what seemed to be the artists arranging furniture in preparation for their piece was in the fact the performance already begun. This scenario presented a curious introduction. Seeing a few of the other guests scattered on chairs within the space amongst what was happening, I also chose a seat.



A projection showed at each end of the space. One was 'My life as a house' (a movie you might find on TV on a Sunday afternoon), the other was footage of the artists in a landscape appearing to be digging a hole in the middle of the night.

The ensemble of furniture was obviously from the public gallery (as well as its offices and storage rooms as I was informed afterwards) conveying an interest in these things as symbols in an environment rather than discrete objects.

Throughout the performance Denny and Moore casually moved and arranged the items in unexpected ways i.e. a table, seat and cushion slab in a loosely configured stack (to begin with I wondered whether the chair I occupied would soon be moved as well) occasionally stopping to sit and watch the films.

Members of the audience sitting within the space of the performance created an ambiguous relationship, where the usually clear spatial division between artist and audience was instead in this case left to its own devices. The use of the gallery furniture mirrored this contingency, further reflecting how the particular viewers and location contribute to the nature of a performance-based work.

As a mixture of the nonchalant and the dreamer, Denny and Moore roamed the space. In hindsight ideas about what is known as the 'borderland state' or 'pre-dream condition', used to describe the transition between wakefulness and sleep, come to mind: a brief view at the edge of slumber where recognisable objects transform and the unknown emerges - we visit our own dreamscape.

Like a tourist in someone else's - there and yet removed - the performance felt surreally familiar.

Wrap me up and make me happy: infectious optimism remix by Mark Harvey 2.40pm

I had seen this work a few years earlier at the Moving Image Centre in Auckland in low lighting so it was another experience to see it in a well-lit space.

Harvey, dressed in white shirt, pants and shoes standing before a seated audience, elicited a dual presence, a persona and a blank sheet of paper to be drawn upon.

Harvey began a pattern of movement: repeatedly leaving the space and returning with a flattened cardboard box that he taped onto himself, (it sounded like a limit-testing of a ripping and pasting melody) the task becoming more physically demanding as he proceeded to wrap his entire body.

The activity alluded to playful experiments with repetitive processes, as well as our more serious attempts on perfection where the obsessive and compulsive enters the picture. Engaging in a process of adding, while also subtracting by obscuring the body, Harvey suggests a negation of this desire.

The performance evoked states of personal quandary: whether to build or tear down - construct or deconstruct; whether these wishes are fuelled by the same fire; and perhaps the irony of their potential sameness in nature.

A slapstick style humour on the surface was an important element, providing an accessible layer to communicate the ideas involved. There were some amused children sitting at the front. Like any good satire, it was appreciated on more than one level.

Later on that afternoon as the relative structure of the day petered out so did my sense of propulsion.

An invitation was accepted - sustenance - stasis.

Sunday 03rd September

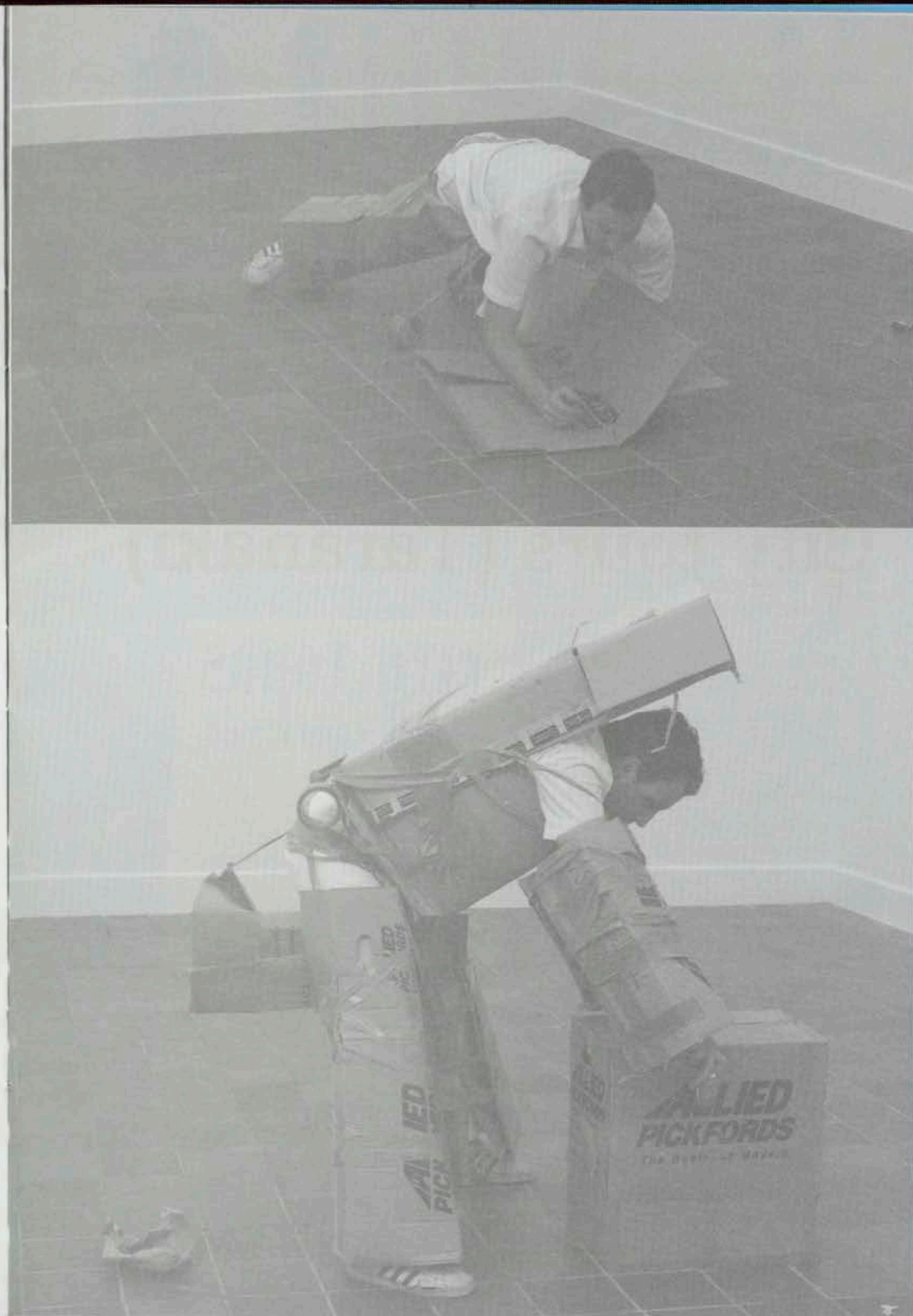
On leaving New Plymouth, thoughts about the performances seen the day before and transience came to mind.

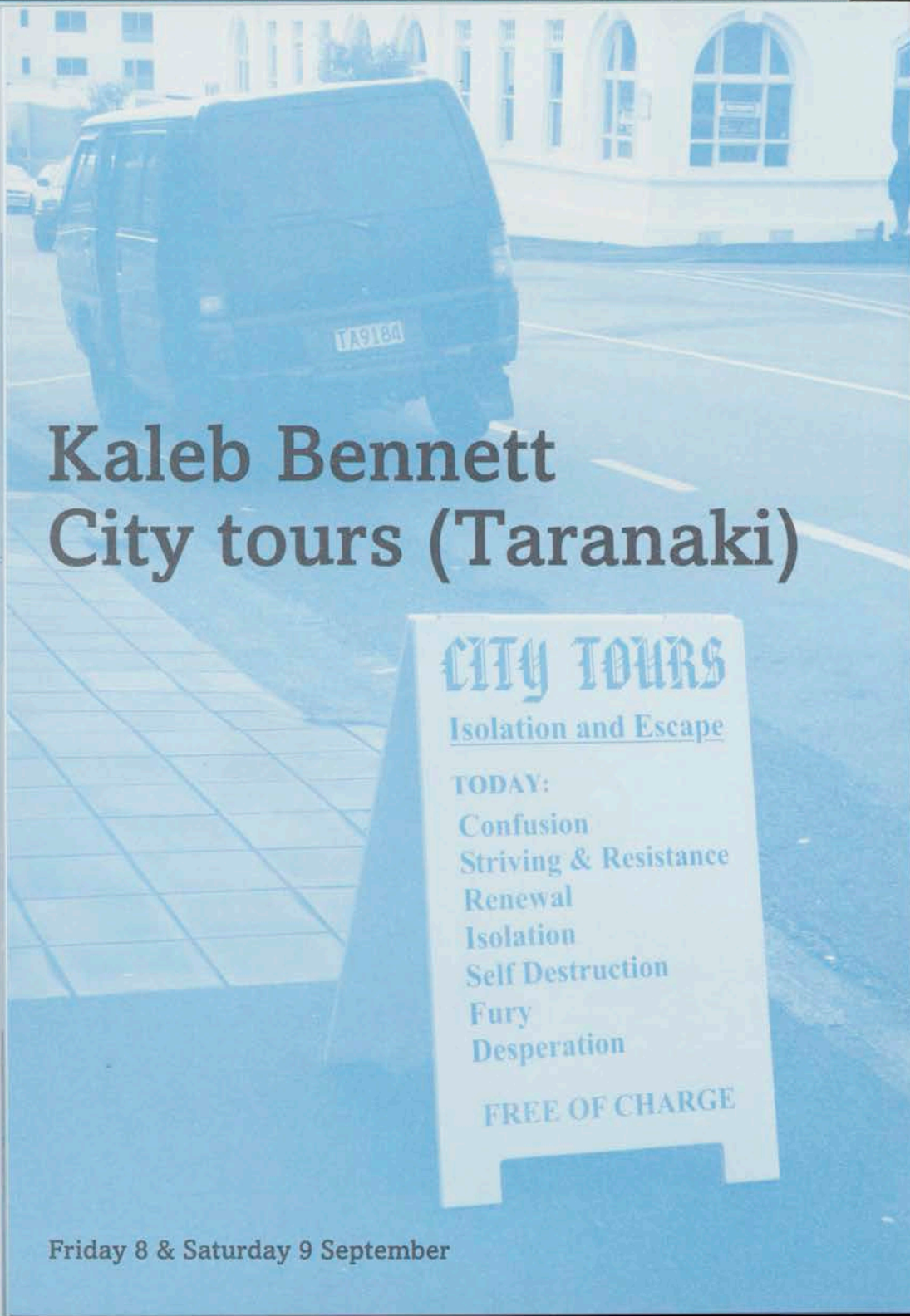
Denny and Moore engaged the audience in a transcendence of logic, presenting a liminal space to occupy and experience the work. The immediacy of Harvey's actions was what engaged the viewer. Following an apparently finite process, they created a more linear experience of time, and yet his repeated phrase "am I finished yet?" brought the activity itself into question. As the body disappeared (was obscured) and the taping became more clumsy, both object and action dissolved into liminality.

In both performances with the tracing and retracing of steps, beginning and end intertwine; purpose is subsumed into process.

More like a visitor than a traveller – less like an excursion than a holiday, the experience accompanied me home.

Emma Page





Kaleb Bennett City tours (Taranaki)

CITY TOURS

Isolation and Escape

TODAY:

Confusion
Striving & Resistance
Renewal
Isolation
Self Destruction
Fury
Desperation

FREE OF CHARGE

Friday 8 & Saturday 9 September

Isolation and Escape/on Phlegyas' ferry — I embarked on Kaleb Bennett's *City tours (Taranaki)* in an absent minded way, almost in passing. There was an anonymous black van pulled up to the kerb in front of the Govett-Brewster beside a sign promising all kinds of angst, sub-headed: *Isolation and Escape*. The side door of the van was open, and two figures were seated in front. Someone indicated that I should get in, so I did.

I thought I had at least some idea of what I might be in for. On some level, I had imagined Bennett's tour might involve a more personal selection of commentary and site than would be expected from a commercial guide, tweaking the usual tourist routines to poignant effect, along the lines of Christine Hill's 1999 *Tourguide?* In Hill's work, the tour became a kind of street theatre played out around New York City in which the audience participated, re-contextualising both the activity and sites. Simultaneously I held half-realised notions that the city tour might entail some kind of narrated *dérive*, Bennett as a driven *dériveur* echoing Ian Sinclair's informed psychogeographical rambling around London in his book *Lights out for the territory*. However, it was only once the van door slid closed and we moved off that I became aware of having preconceptions at all, because clearly neither was going to happen.

As we were driven away, our guide offered no droll banter or inane wisecracks to ease our passage. The passenger space in the rear of the van was dominated by large, squat, blunt, double-barreled speakers, which sat quietly rumbling in front of us, offering more of a threat than information. As the tourist my natural inclination, when it became clear we were not going to be told where we were being taken, was to try to see. However, any possibility of this was denied by a black wall dividing the van immediately in front of us, broken only by a small caged aperture beyond the speakers. Through the cage I could see the van's gear stick topped with a chrome skull, beside which various audio devices were being manipulated by our unseen host, presumably generating the acoustic unease oozing from the speakers. If there was a verbal commentary behind the noise, it had long lost any semblance of coherency by the time it emerged in front of us, mangled and filthy.

Through the tinted side windows New Plymouth scrolled past as a series of branded small town anywheres and light industrial no man's lands. The city was rendered distant and alien by its lack of distinguishing features. The aural interference inside



the van that replaced the usual urban soundscape accentuated this sense of distance. The non-sites through which we moved seemed more like images on a screen than a direct experience of anywhere real.

Still the beatless rumbling, squelching and subsonic chugging continued, punctuated only by the engine noise and gear changes. Surely something was going to happen to give this all some point? Where exactly were we going?

My expectations about the tour had been completely negated which pulled the experience into a sharp focus, in a way reminiscent of the sleight of hand associated with the performance of John Cage's *4'33"*. As it continued, our journey through the succession of municipal re-runs mixed with the murky disquiet emanating from the speakers to create in me a feeling of semantic vertigo. My mind scrambled in a search for definition, or at least a destination. We were literally in transit but between what and where?

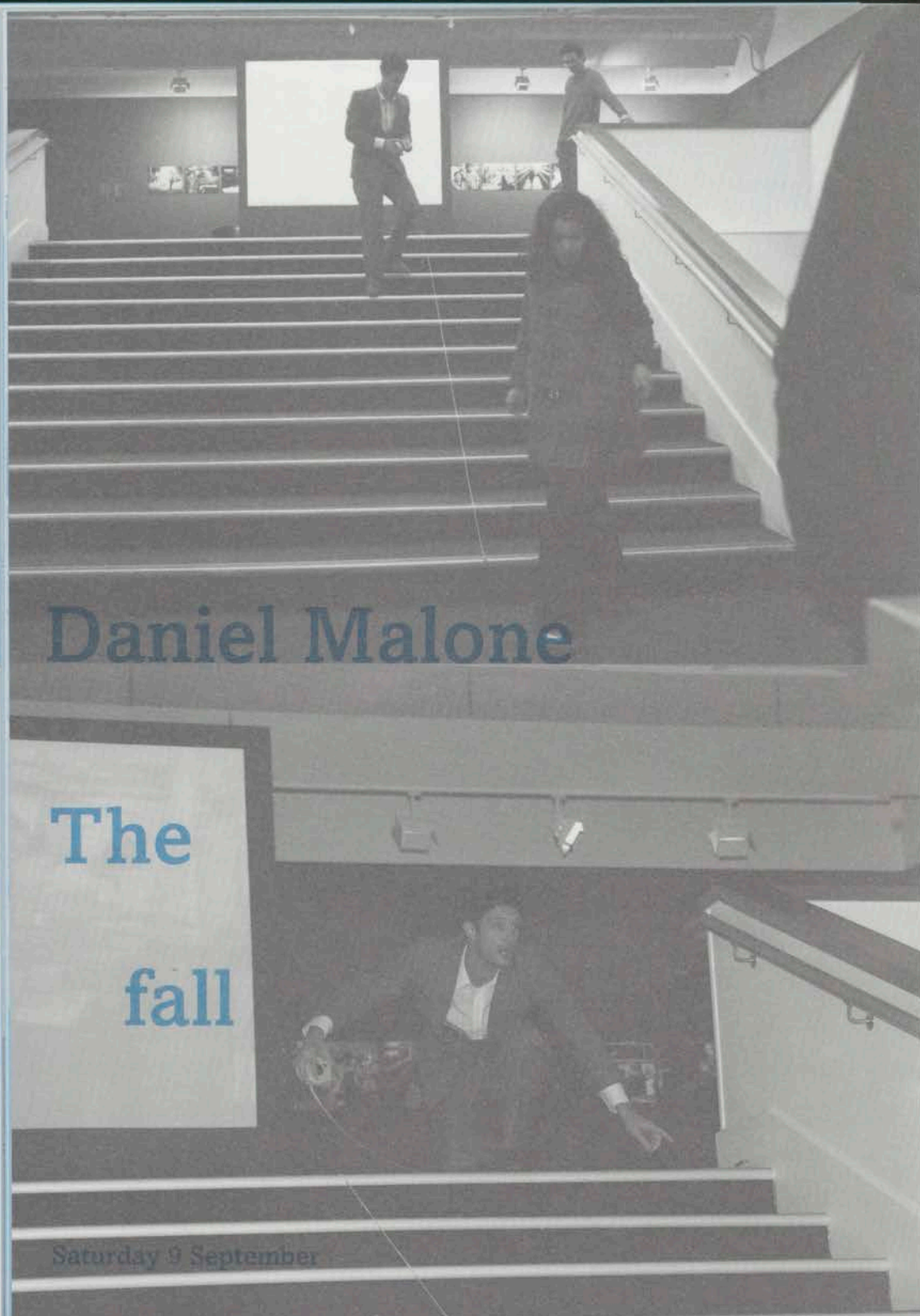
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We seemed to be in a kind of limbo, unsure of our role in the piece, slipping between one state and another like the damned aboard Phlegyas' ferry. I couldn't tell if we were tourists or captives, insulated and protected behind the tinted glass or isolated and under threat. By then the journey felt less like a guided tour and more like a removal to me; less a performance than an extraordinary rendition, complete with aural and spatial disorientation.

On being returned to the gallery and released I felt a certain amount of relief at the return of my independence. The shifting ground of the last fifteen minutes resolved itself into semantic certainty once more. Reassuringly, I felt no obligation to confess to anything in particular. I continued my day bemused by the experience, strangely grateful to have had it and wondering whether gratitude was a symptom of Stockholm syndrome.

Duncan Carter





Daniel Malone

The fall

Saturday 9 September

We see his lips moving --- The witty sleight of hand of Daniel Malone's work can leave one feeling duped. Whether it feels as if the artist has been unfair or if, as the 'duped', one feels personally responsible for allowing it, the question is one of perspective. With a deal of sangfroid Malone plays on this; plays with the audience and with the situations within which his work is presented. Casting wide in his challenge of the tangible and ephemeral aspects of the hierarchical structures that are the apparent givens of a cultural and political context, Malone uses what is to hand in a particular situation, turning it into an interrogation of itself.

In the case of *The fall* the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery steps between the mezzanine and level two presented themselves as a must, or a given, or as Malone has referred to them 'the taken'. The stairs themselves, altered by artist Billy Apple in 1980, are significant. The Apple project *Alterations: the given as an art political statement*, among other more superficial alterations widened the stairs, improving the architecture by opening up the space. The widening of the stairs was proposed as a permanent alteration, an artwork, they remain altered and a work in the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery collection.¹ Malone has a history of engagement with Billy Apple through his work. Among other things, Malone has previously changed his name by deed poll to Billy Apple for an exhibition and in his 2003 retrospective *malone@artspace* he involved Apple by asking him to clean his (Malone's) tag off the ARTSPACE sign. Overlaid onto Apple's altered architecture Malone acknowledges the senior artist's concerns with the white cube, the edifice of the museum, hierarchy and architectural restrictions.

Another given that Malone responded to was the video documentation of the performance for inclusion in this DVD catalogue. From the outset, the final form of *The fall* was going to be a video work edited by the artist; it was a performance devised and performed under the influence of this. As a result Malone approached the performance as documentation, playing with performance/documentation methodology. Uppermost was a play with the idea that the experience of the performance and the documentation would remain estranged, each one providing a partial story. Rather than having the cameras and operators hovering in the background trying to capture the atmosphere without influencing it unduly, Malone made this apparatus a part of the performance directing the audience and the camera-people to stand, move and film exactly where and what he wanted. The audience obediently went along with the artist's specific instructions as Malone shot take after take positioning the cameras at every possible angle to capture the fall in the round.

The final video piece acknowledges the particular location of the performance – not only Malone's connection to Apple, the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery is a converted cinema – and contrivance of the edit. *The fall* as seen on DVD is presented as a sequence based (as the performance was in part) on filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein's famous 'emotional montage' sequence on the Odessa steps in *Battleship Potemkin*. Malone's jump cuts edit the long and repetitious process of directing the audience and cameras, ascending the stairs numerous times and, with more and more reluctance falling down the stairs, into one smooth set up, ascent and fast tumble.

What Malone leaves us with in this format is around 3 minutes of silent activity with scant information in silent movie dialogue type. We see his lips moving but there are no words. This disjunction emphasises the rift between being there and seeing the edited highlights, and, as partial information it also challenges the memory of being there. As provocative cultural archivist Malone acknowledges that this shift equals our shifting relation to history

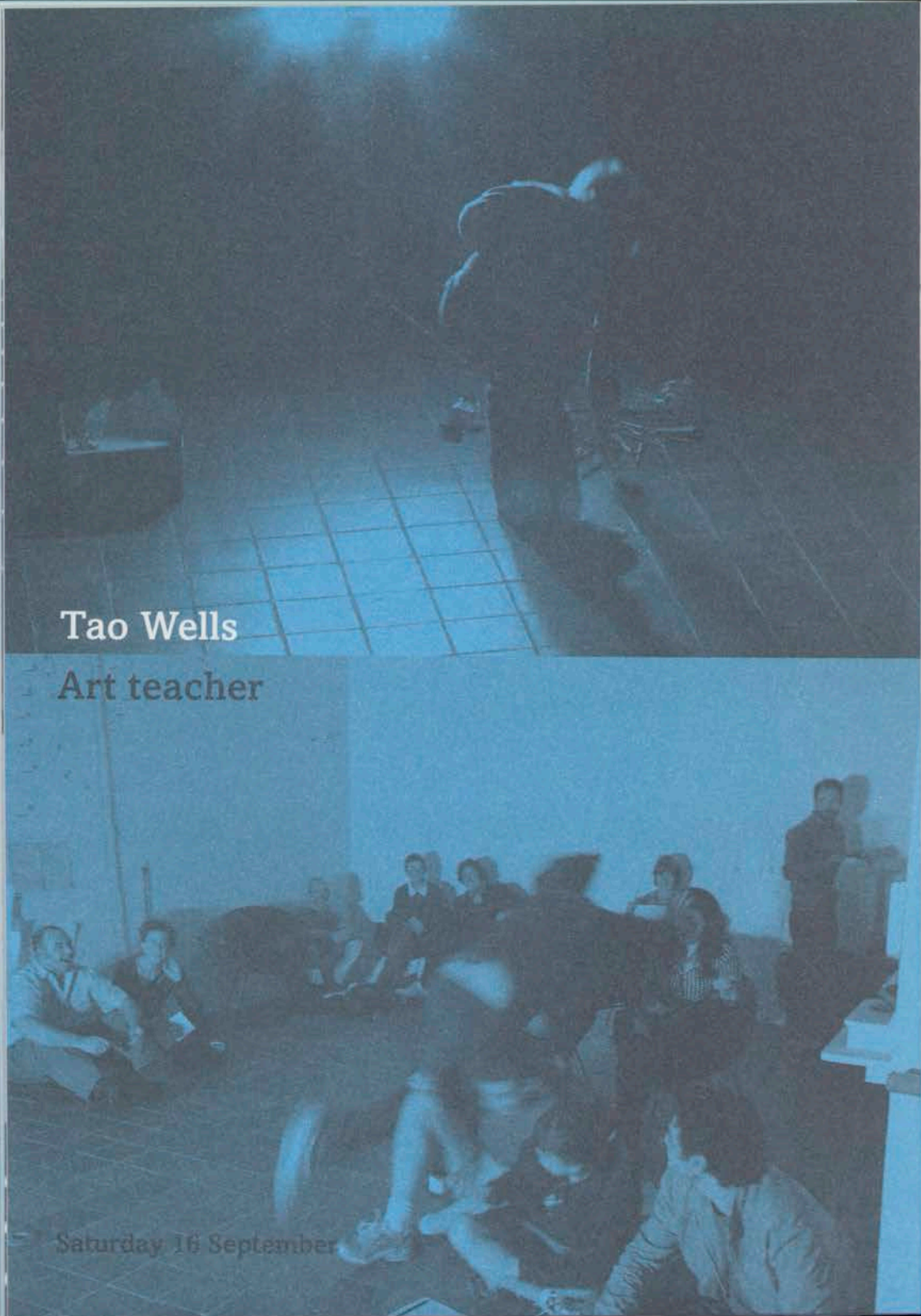
Just as Eisenstein manipulated the viewer with his rapid jump cuts to cause confusion and heightened anxiety, Malone's seriousness in his activity and the compliant audience, committed as material in his action, is also a manipulation. Within a wider context Malone's play seems an attempt to shake us out of the pliable credulity of numbed daily performances.

Does Malone take the fall,
or does his audience take it?

1. See Wystan Curnow, 'Report: The given as an art political statement' *Art New Zealand* number 15, autumn 1980, pp.26-33, 60

Charlotte Huddleston





Tao Wells
Art teacher

Saturday 16 September

For Tao's thing...

Off the top of my head.

Tao looked like he was a prisoner in Abu Ghraib. He patiently gave us instructions to encourage us to draw a piece of art that was impossible to visualise. By attempting to draw within impossible dimensions, he was forcing us to respond creatively, no matter how primitive we felt we were at drawing.

Creating art from an audience is an interesting concept. He made it accessible. He didn't convince me that I was a brilliant artist or anything (he didn't try to, and I'm not). But what he did was describe art as another method for communication. Another way of expressing thought. We can all talk. We can all sing. We can all write. We can all draw.

It was nice to see a collection all drawn together by people sharing an experience, taking in images and filtering them through their perceptions.

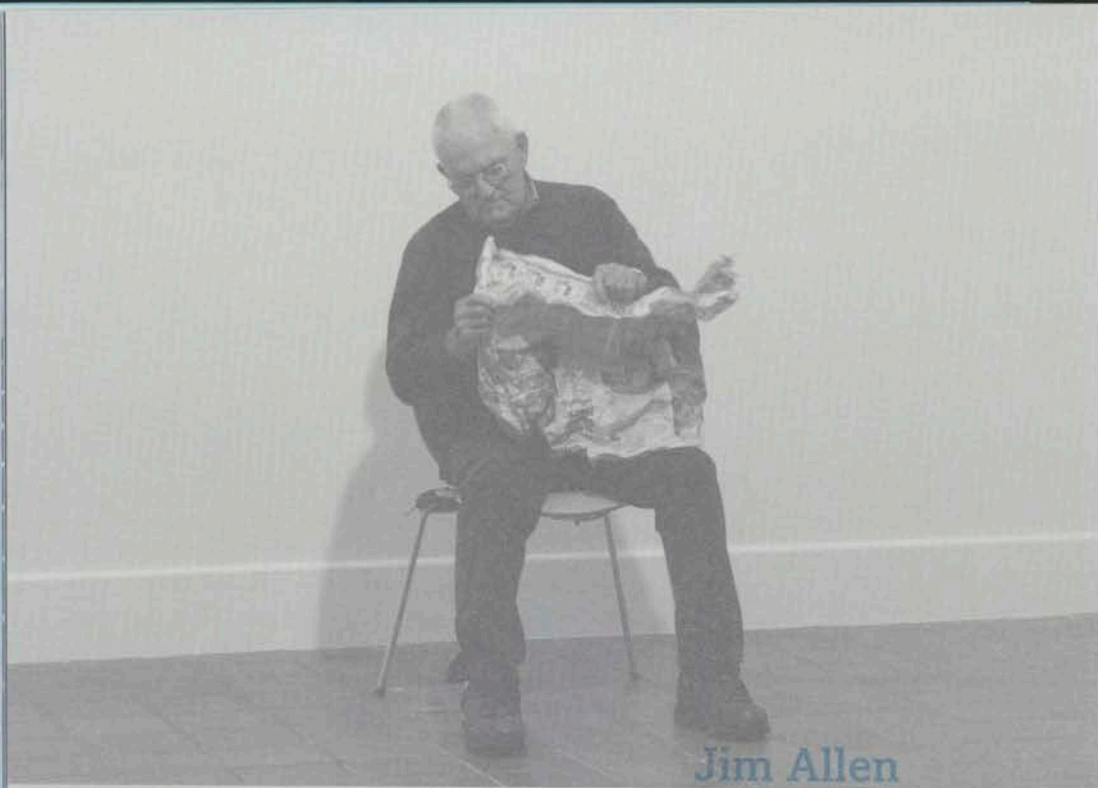
What did I learn from it?

Not sure.

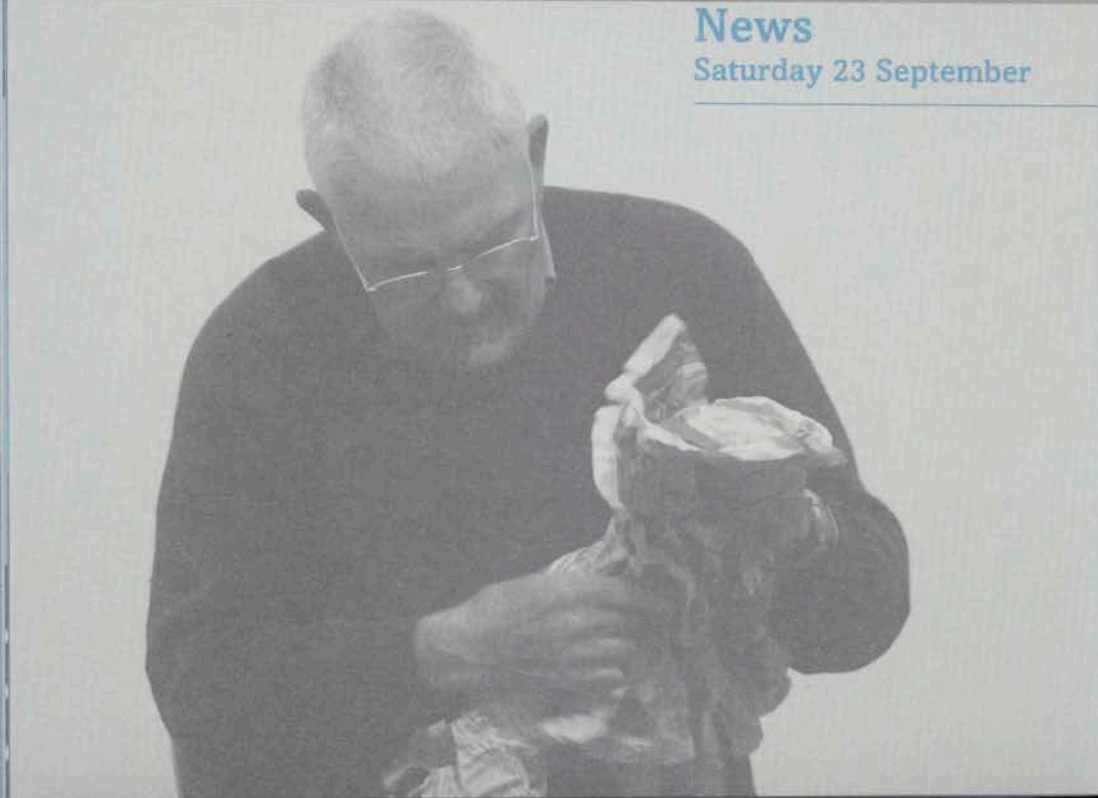
Art as community? Art as communion? Art can be fun? Art can be thought provoking? Art is ego? Art is bullshit? Art is communication? Art is contemplation?

I can't describe what I learned in words. If I could do that, then what I learnt probably would not have been worth describing.

Duncan Sarkies



Jim Allen
News
Saturday 23 September



News --- For Jim Allen's performance *News* I am engaged in steering the dolly on which the camera is mounted. It must keep straight over the approximately 15 minutes it takes for the slow zoom in on Jim as he reads, crumples, unravels, reads, crumples, unravels until the paper is in ribbons and he lets it fall gently to the floor, used up. Before the performance Jim mentioned that he has noticed a big difference in the makeup of newspaper since the 1970s when he first performed what he then called *Newspaper piece*. It used to soften into grey cloth with repeated crumpling and unraveling; now it doesn't soften much, but retains a certain crispness and tears into uneven strips.

My task gives me an interrupted view of Jim as he reads, crumples, unravels. My thoughts are on the importance of keeping the dolly straight and the outcome of the filming, done on two cameras. One, dolly mounted, telescopes in towards Jim's continuous activity, the other, perpendicular, tracks the progress of the first, emphasising the passing of time and the slow pace of the long zoom in on Jim as he reads, crumples, unravels. Underneath Jim's chair a microphone captures the crisp sound of the paper as it is crumpled over and over again. As the paper wears it sounds less crisp and as it falls into ribbons it becomes harder for Jim to read and unravel.

I wonder if Jim is thinking about the news. I don't recall there being any particular sensational or tragic news on that day. I think about the 30 years that have elapsed since Jim first performed this piece, and the other recently re-performed *Poetry for chainsaws*, about the condition of the world and in particular the media. I think about protest and how these two performances are as relevant now as they were when first performed and what that might mean about the condition of the world and our collective interest in addressing it.

Every now and then I look up from my position at the helm of the dolly inching slowly towards Jim as he reads, crumples, unravels. When I do I am looking to see what expression Jim has and I always find it absorbed in the task. His actions and expression are focused; frustrated and angry when he crumples and agitated when he unravels, as if hoping that each time the paper is unfolded the news has changed

to something more palatable. This absorption and repeated reading, crumpling, unravelling strikes me as a ritualistic act performed for everyone whose lives have become news. Those who, distraught, excited, outraged have faced the camera and the reporter and been published around the world and delivered into calm homes at breakfast time. Looking around, everyone else seems to be just as absorbed. As the piece has progressed from the beginning, when people were still shuffling and settling distracted by background, attention has slowly zoomed in onto Jim and his attention to the activity. It is a restless and anxious activity, Jim looks frustrated at the news, yet the watchers are quietly absorbed. It is as if Jim is performing a ritualistic activity on our behalf and we are there to support his tribute to victims of tragedy, banality and sensationalism.

As the dolly approaches Jim the paper is disintegrating into ribbons and there is not much left to unfold. He gently lets it fall, with its mediated tales, then sits back in the chair and looks directly at the camera, waiting. This even stare is accompanied by silence. The crumpling has stopped. The moments telescope and no one moves, we all wait for Jim to move. Jim waits for a signal from the cameraperson; everyone waits for a signal from Jim. He is in charge of our participation. In the compounded end moments we wait, impressions, thoughts and responses slowly settling in the silent moments before the palpable release of applause.

Charlotte Huddleston

Seabed and Foreshore

Sparkling Duets

Louise Menzies Sparkling duets, New Plymouth

Saturday 23 September

Sparkling duets, New Plymouth

Louise Menzies's ongoing project *Sparkling duets* uses the format of musical performance as a vehicle to focus on the dynamic between performers and the particular dynamic that exists between couples that perform together. These performances under the aegis of romantic partnership, play with the public performance of 'selves' within the boundaries of personal relationships. *Sparkling duets* emphasises the small details of exchange and unspoken communications that pass between a couple, putting the idea and act of familiarity up for observation.

Sparkling duets, New Plymouth, the second presentation of Menzies's project, was an evening of amateur and professional musical couples from New Plymouth and Wellington. Participants responded to an open call made through advertisements and word of mouth.

Charlotte Huddleston

Performers

Pink Champagne
Stay at Home Saturdays
Scott & Tash
Seabed and Foreshore
Henri & Rhiannon

Images: Rachel O'Neill

LOOKING FOR LOCAL MUSIC

In mid-September New Plymouth will host the second *Sparkling Duets, New Plymouth*, a night of couples playing music together, which first started in Wellington.

Sparkling Duets, New Plymouth is part of *Mostly harmless: a performance series* hosted by the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. *Sparkling Duets, New Plymouth* will be at a local venue, yet to be confirmed, on 16 September and we are looking for couples from New Plymouth to be involved. Only a short set is required (between 2 and 3 songs) with original music preferred but covers ok.

If you are interested in being part of the project or would like more information, please contact either:

Louise Menzies:

sparklingduets@gmail.com
tel: 027 2576738

or

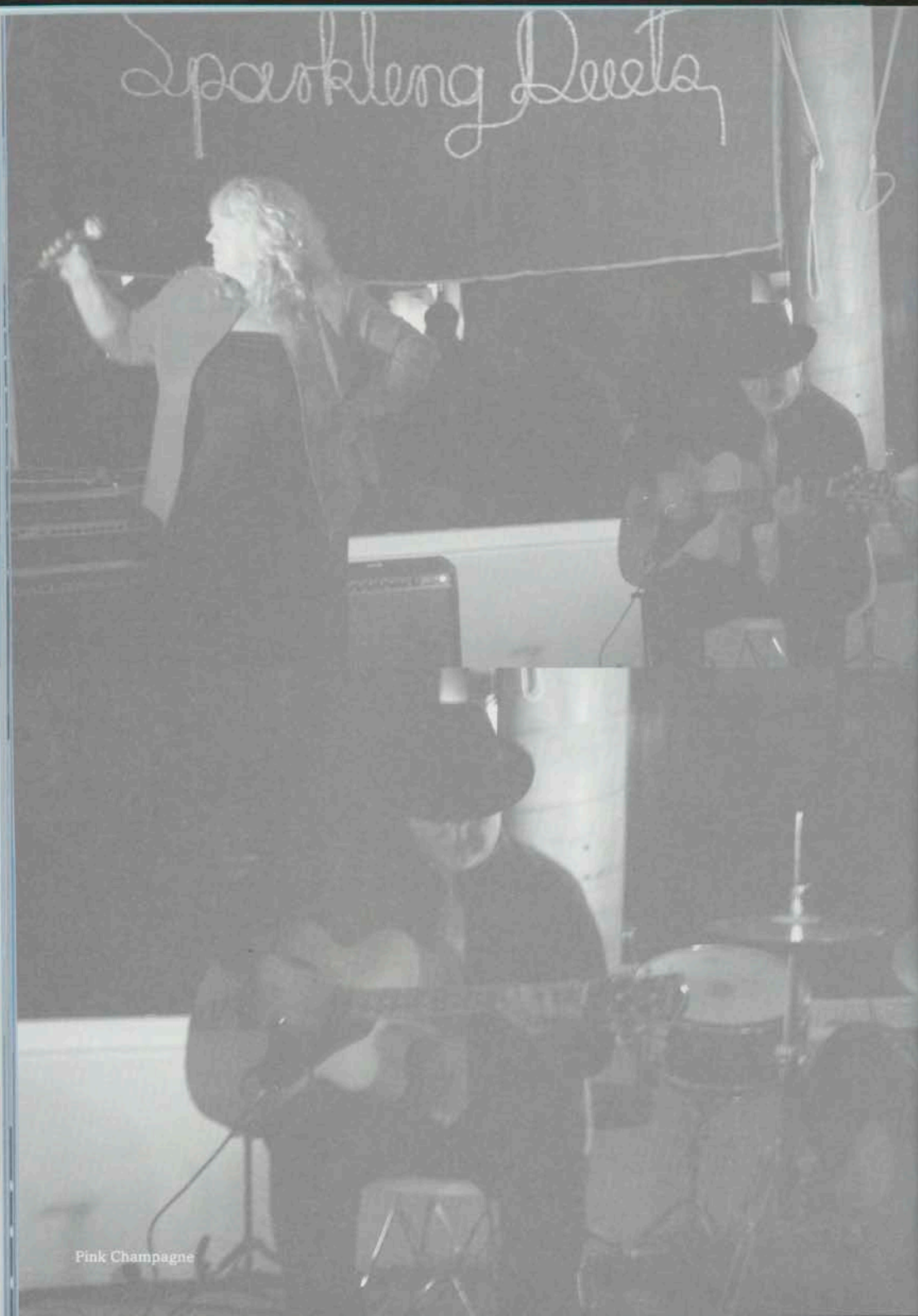
Charlotte Huddleston:

charlotteh@govettbrewster.com
tel: 06 759 0852

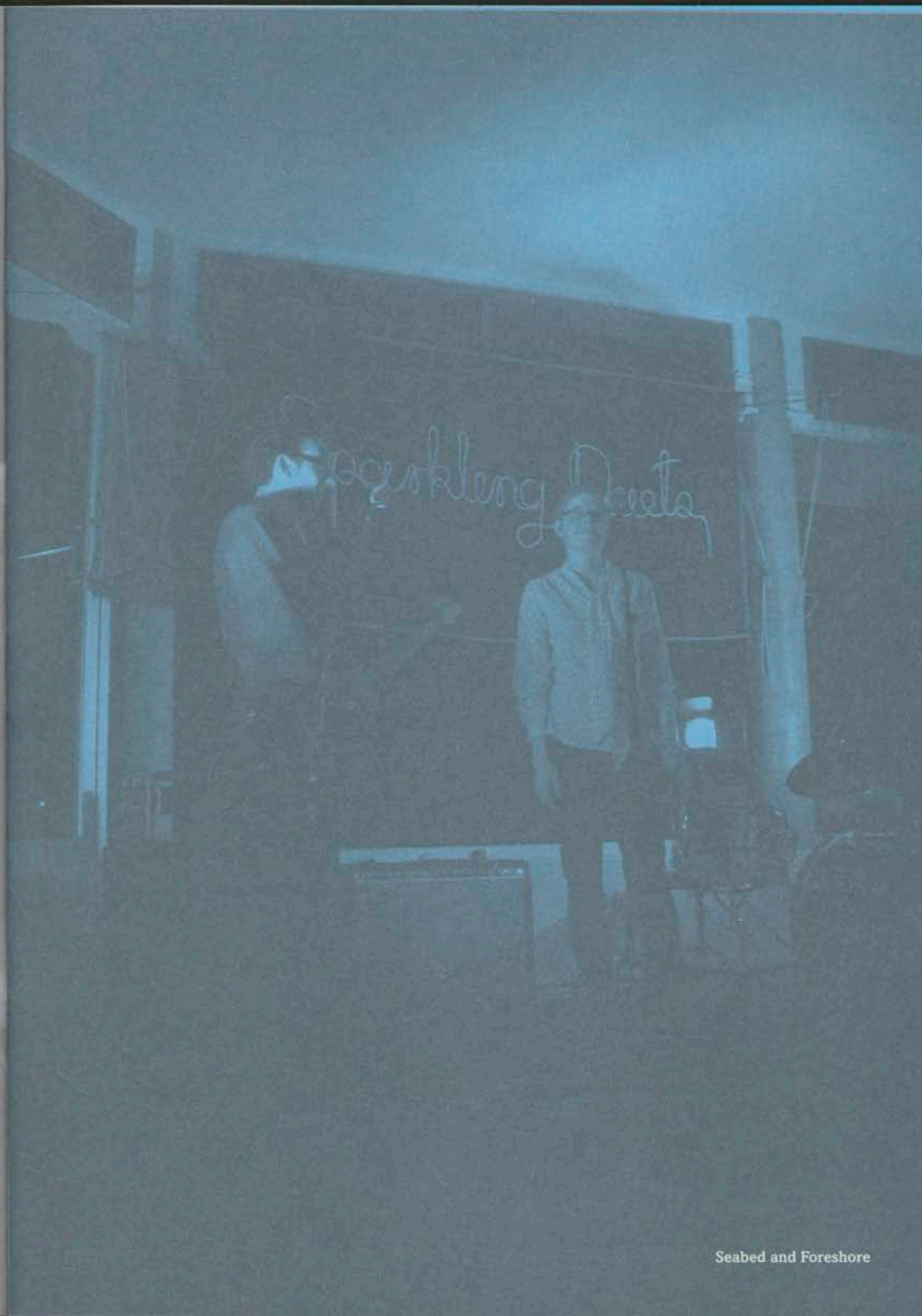


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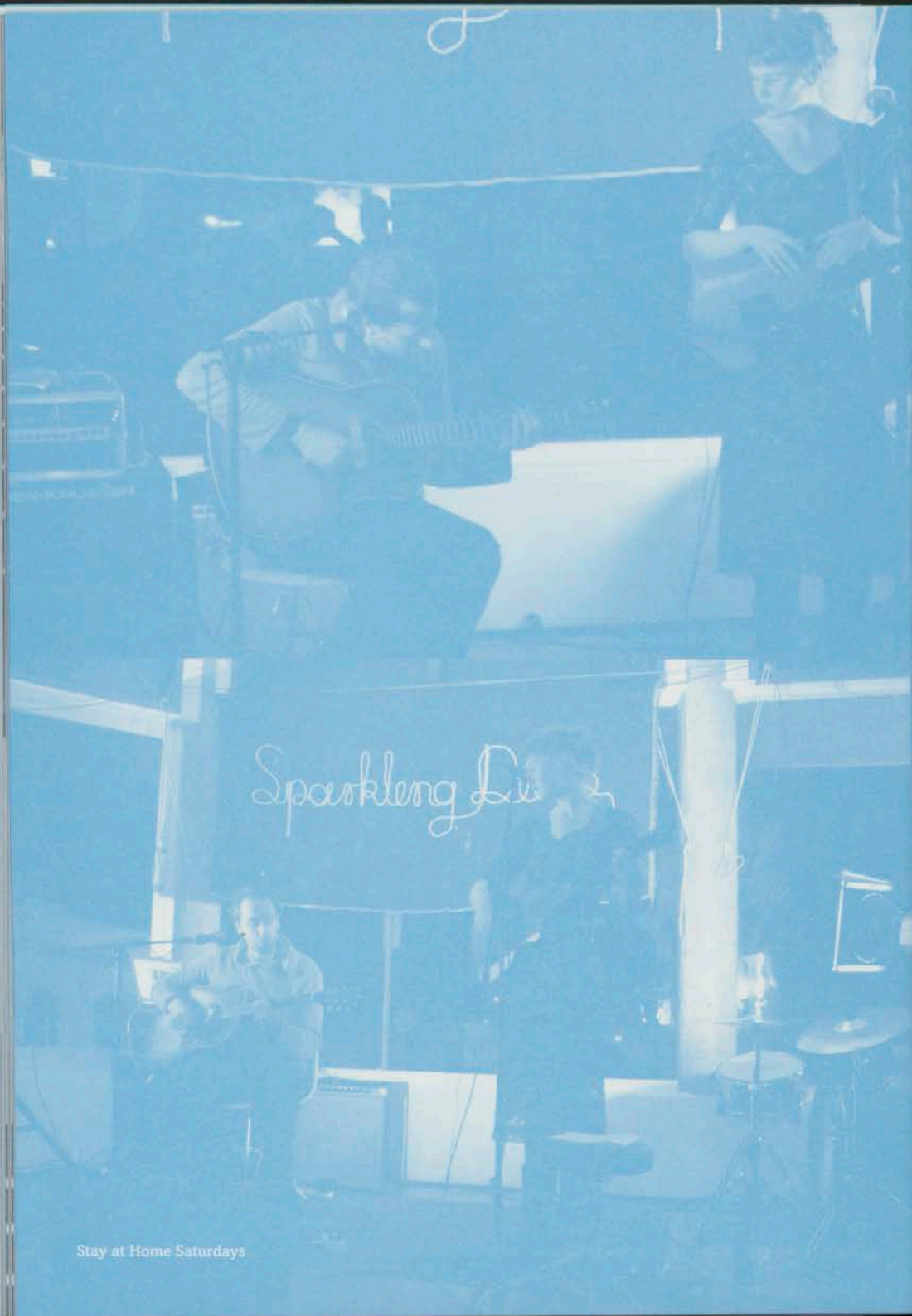




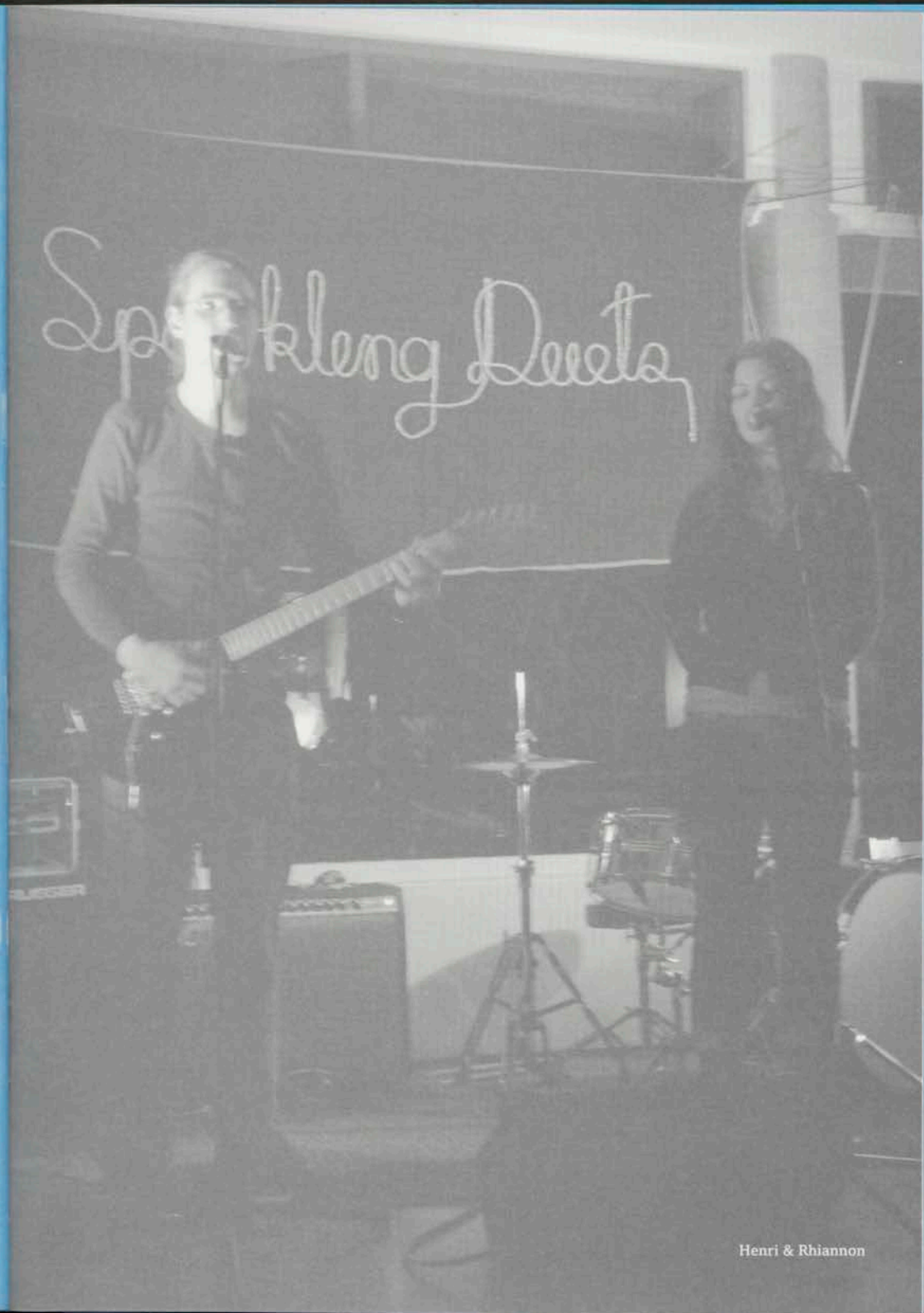
Pink Champagne



Seabed and Foreshore



Stay at Home Saturdays



Henri & Rhiannon

List of works in the exhibition

Va Acconci

Theme song 1973

Courtesy the artist and Video Data Bank, Chicago

Jim Allen

Poetry for chainsaws 1976/2006

Live performance with chainsaws 16 May 2006
A reading of Allan Ginsberg's 1956-59 poem *Howl*
Courtesy the artist and Michael Lehr, Auckland

Bruce Barber

Diddy squat 30 hours of community service 2003

Queen Street West, Toronto, November 8 & 9 2003
Courtesy the artist

Kaleb Bennett

Direct experience initiation 2005

Courtesy the artist

Chris Burden

Shoot 1971

Courtesy the artist and Electronic Arts Intermix

Kah Bee Chow

Nine dancing ladies 2004

Courtesy the artist and Anna Miles Gallery

John Cousins

BOWED PEACE 1986

Courtesy the artist

Dan Graham

Performer/audience/mirror 1975

Video: Darcy Lange
Courtesy the artist and Electronic Arts Intermix

Mark Harvey

Wrap me up, make me happy (helpers high remix) 2006

Performed at The Physics Room, Christchurch 29 April 2006
Courtesy the artist

Daniel Malone

Tra/velArT 1992

Courtesy the artist

James McCarthy

Sight lines 2004

Performance for SHIFF Project, Kent Terrace,
Wellington 20 August 2004
Courtesy the artist

Amanda Newall

Pink box 2000

Courtesy the artist

Hannah Wilke

Through the large glass 1976

Courtesy the Estate of the artist and Electronic Arts Intermix

Carey Young

Optimum performance 2003

Performance at the Whitechapel Gallery, London
Courtesy the artist and IBID Projects, London

Adjunct video programme from The New Zealand Film Archive holdings

Jim Allen

Contact: *parangole capes* 1974

Contact: *computer dance* 1974

Contact: *body articulation imprint* 1974

On planting a native 1976 with Noel Sheridan

Bruce Barber

Whatipu beach performance 1973

Film works 1972 - 1973 (compilation)

Phil Dadson

Solar plexus 1981/1983

NZFA video art compilation 04

Phil Dadson & Gray Nichol

Triad 1978

Five works by New Zealand artists at Mildura
NZFA video art compilation 04

Andrew Drummond

TOXICK 1980

Ngauranga set: onto skin 1978

Ngauranga set: 20 directions in an enclosure 1978

NZFA video art compilation 01

Andrew Drummond

Conversation between two animals 1978

NZFA video art compilation 02

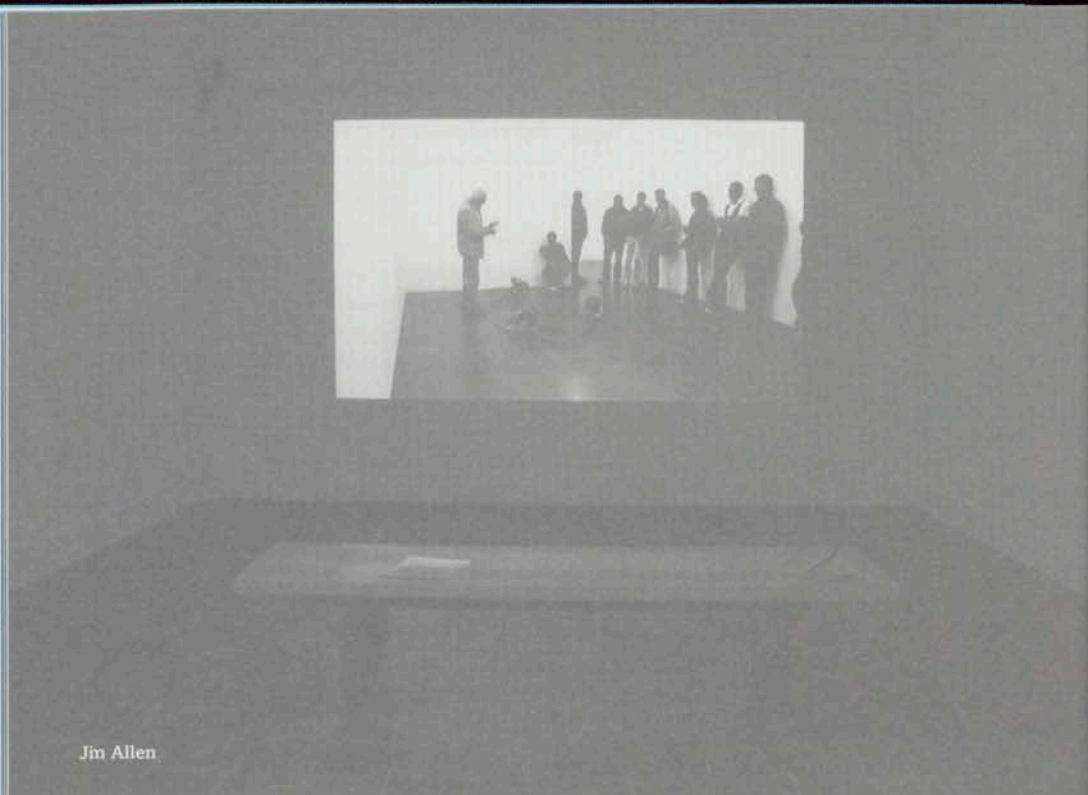
Andrew Drummond

Suspension ascension 1979

Gray Nichol

Duck calling 1978

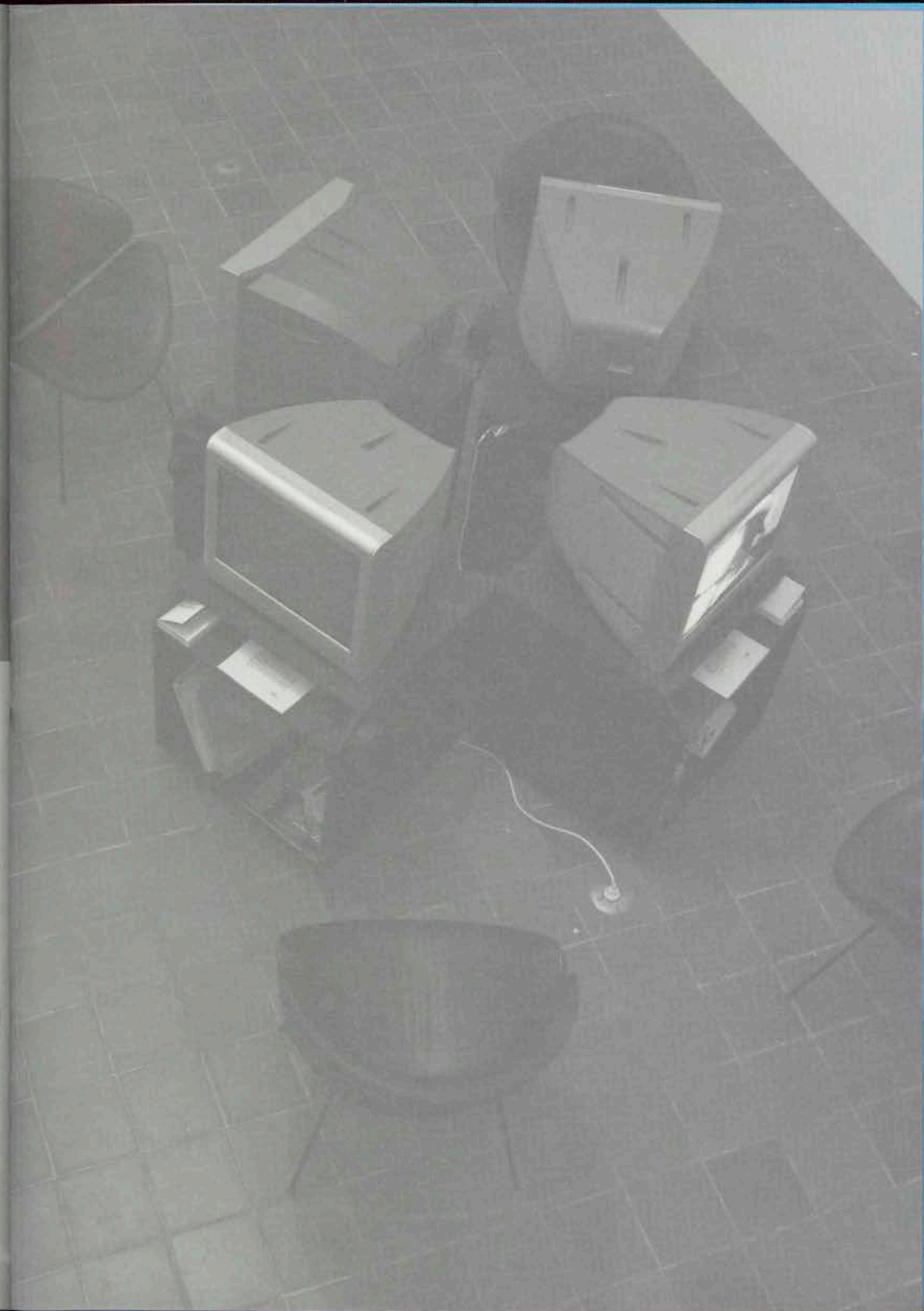
Five works by New Zealand artists at Mildura
NZFA video art compilation 04



Jim Allen



Cey Young





En Graham

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