

**BREAK
CONSTRUCT**

BEN CAUCHI
CORTINA
SIMON DENNY
SIMON LAWRENCE
PETER MADDEN AND SEUNG YUL OH
SAM MORRISON
MARNIE SLATER
YVONNE TODD



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Some eighty years ago the German Dadaist Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948) embarked upon *Merzbau* (*The Cathedral of Erotic Misery*), a sprawling and eccentric twenty year project that accreted itself as mountainous accumulations of discarded materials within the homes of the artist as he moved from Hanover to Norway to England. The work took on a life of its own as it teetered on the brink of limitless self-generating physicality – a psychosis of materiality. Three decades later in 1952, the visionary architect, artist, theatre designer and director Frederick Kiesler – a pal of Schwitters, the Surrealists and De Stijl artists – presented his work *Galaxies* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. This was one of the first examples of environmental sculpture. Kiesler's principle of the 'endless house' and his manifesto of 'correlation' concerned the intimate relationships among space, people, objects and concepts. Kiesler helped articulate notions of art as an experiential totality and environmental sculpture as a seamless conjoining of temporal, spatial and phenomenological moments.

"The environment becomes equally as important as the object, if not more so, because the object breathes into the surrounding and also inhales the realities of the environment no matter what space, close or wide art, open air or indoor... No object, of nature or of art, exists without environment."¹

The third in Govett-Brewster Art Gallery's series of *Break* exhibitions exploring the practice of new generation artists from Aotearoa New Zealand, *Break: Construct* assumes the guise of both construction site and playground. The assembly and disassembly of our surroundings into things comprehensible, experiential or fantastic is its departure point. The artists offer perspectives and experimentations that encircle and perhaps unsettle this strategy of assembly/disassembly. Their diverse practices share a concern for the 'objectness' of things.

The nine artists in *Break: Construct* toy with scope, scale and substances, using strategies of accumulation and association that in turn alter the character and meaning of objects, phenomena and spaces. New relationships are drafted amongst the materials and sensibilities that inhabit our world. This reconfiguration of environs occurs in idiosyncratic ways; Seung Yul Oh and Peter Madden have adopted an expansive, obsessive and somewhat frisky approach in their collaborative work, *Vein of the black stone*. Madden's exquisite Lilliputian collages accrete themselves in the space in jaunty communion with Oh's massive kinetic toy animals. More attenuated and specific interests in mathematics and the spectral inform the work *Prayer/lightning machine* by Simon Lawrence. Ben Cauchi, meanwhile, alludes to the arcane live capturing of assembled things in his unique photographs. For Cauchi, the construct takes place within the camera itself as an extension of a contrived vision. Resuscitated from previous contexts, materials and substances are reassembled to create new provocations. The artists highlight the potential for materials to live another life. Multiple histories – of the materials themselves and of modes of representation – are referenced.

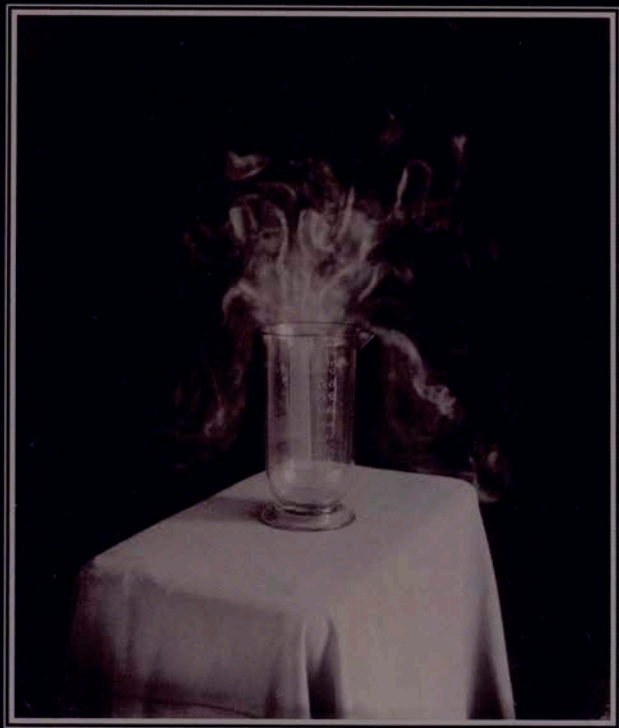
Relational processes are at play in *Break: Construct* as interactions between material interventions and the presence of audiences are envisaged. Marnie

Slater plays off existing architectures in *Any Moment*, to provide spectators with unexpected vistas over gallery spaces and other artists' works. Yvonne Todd conjures new psychologically portentous personalities into the world and provokes a double-take on photographic truth as she invites the viewer to construct their own explanatory narrative. Simon Denny, in *Less stale attachment*, challenges our perceptual routines as he holds materials and our attention in time and space. Cortina's engagement with the exhibition occurred on opening night in the form of *Final fantasy*, a musical pastiche of retro glam-rock, a time-based musical construction with a spacey, psychic undertone. Sam Morrison, through his theatricalised stagings in *Drawings with air*, provides an avenue for audiences to breathe life into his expectant and acoustically-charged constructions or 'situations', all connected within the gallery space to an air-compressor that, on cue, forces the potential sound out of these relocated objects.

Reconstituting the mundane, these artists shift our experiences of familiar substances, sounds and scenarios to render the ordinary peculiar and playful whilst revealing unexpected associations. While there are points of commonality, convergence and communication within *Break: Construct*, there exists a wide arc of private investigations. All artists however, interrogate the 'correlation' of space, people, objects and ideas. The works also exist as invitations to consider how we perceive, experience and adjust our environment. In so doing, meaning finally rests with the audience, becomes personal and, like Schwitters's *Merzbau*, perpetually regenerative.

¹ Frederick Kiesler, 'Second Manifesto of Correalism,' *Art International* 9, no. 2 (March 1965): 16-19.

RHANA DEVENPORT



BEN CAUCHI

***Mushroom Cloud* 2004**

Tintype
7" x 5"
Courtesy McNamara Gallery, Wanganui

***Reverse self-portrait (liar)* 2006**

Tintype
10" x 8"
Artist Collection

***Smoking Vessel* 2005**

Ambrotype
10" x 8"
Private Collection

***Flames* 2005**

Tintype
8.5" x 6.5"
Private Collection

***30 Days* 2006**

Ambrotype
10" x 8"
Artist Collection

***White Shroud* 2006**

Tintype
10" x 8"
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery Collection

***Untitled* 2004**

Tintype
7" x 5"
Tim Eslinger Collection, United States
of America

***The Photographer's Studio* 2006**

Ambrotype
8" x 10"
McNamara Collection, Wanganui

***Studio Chair* 2006**

Ambrotype
10" x 8"
Artist Collection

***Studio Desk* 2006**

Ambrotype
8" x 10"
Artist Collection

***Portrait & Smoke* 2004**

Ambrotype (diptych)
5.7" x 4.3"
Courtesy the artist & McNamara
Gallery, Wanganui



BEN CAUCHI

Staging wisps of smoke and dancing flames, ghostly forms and deceptions, photographer Ben Cauchi poses as alchemist, spiritualist and magician. His visual language evokes moments of the mid-nineteenth century when illusion, mystery and authority were paramount in the photographer's studio, generating works that rely on and expose our ability to suspend disbelief. Cauchi uses ambrotype and tintype photographs, both labour-intensive processes derived from historical collodion or wet-plate techniques, as invented by Frederick Scott Archer in 1851. Through these processes, Cauchi addresses the nature of photography as a construct in itself, an extrapolation from the real. Adapting these arcane methods prompts analysis of the apparent shifts in contemporary approaches and responses to photography, questioning how we read and value images. An eerie foreboding pervades the works, referencing past attempts to capture the immaterial, to penetrate magic. Photography as medium is revealed as fraudulent, the bending of truth inevitable and the photographer as incessant conjurer.

Born in 1974, Cauchi's recent solo exhibitions were held at Ray Hughes, Sydney (2006); McNamara Gallery, Wanganui (2006); Marshall Seifert Gallery, Dunedin (2006) and Aratoi Art and History Museum, Masterton (2005). He also featured in *History Lessons*, Dunedin Public Art Gallery (2006); *Hei Tiki*, Pataka, Porirua (2006) and *Contemporary New Zealand Photographers*, Starkwhite, Auckland, Pataka, Porirua and Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui (2005). Cauchi was the Artist in Residence at Tylee Cottage, Wanganui for 2006 and is the 2007 Frances Hodgkins Fellow, Dunedin.



CORTINA

Fresh from a spirited international tour, Cortina's contribution to *Break:Construct* was a hyper-kitsch one night only performance on 16 December 2006 at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. Heavy metal hairdos, pulsating lights, leopard print leggings and aliens invaded the gallery in a performance where the costume changes were nearly as frequent as the guitar solos. Cortina are notorious for their spontaneous and wild stage antics, incorporating exhibitionist stunts with an irreverently earnest political commentary which pervades the lyrics of songs such as 'I am not an American'. Bek Coogan and Ace Hurt create their own rock icon personas, seeking the cult status, fame and groupies that make up the raucous revelry of rock and roll. Secure in the knowledge that in the music world, reality can be embellished or even wholly created, rumour begins to overtake facts as 'the only New Zealand band to be formed while hitch-hiking to Wanganui' present themselves as legends in their own time.¹

¹ High Street Project 'Cortina: it's probably better if you don't know us'
<http://www.hsp.org.nz/index.php?PageID=22&Exhibition=77>



CORTINA

Final Fantasy 2006

Performance, 16 December 2006 at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery

Courtesy the artists

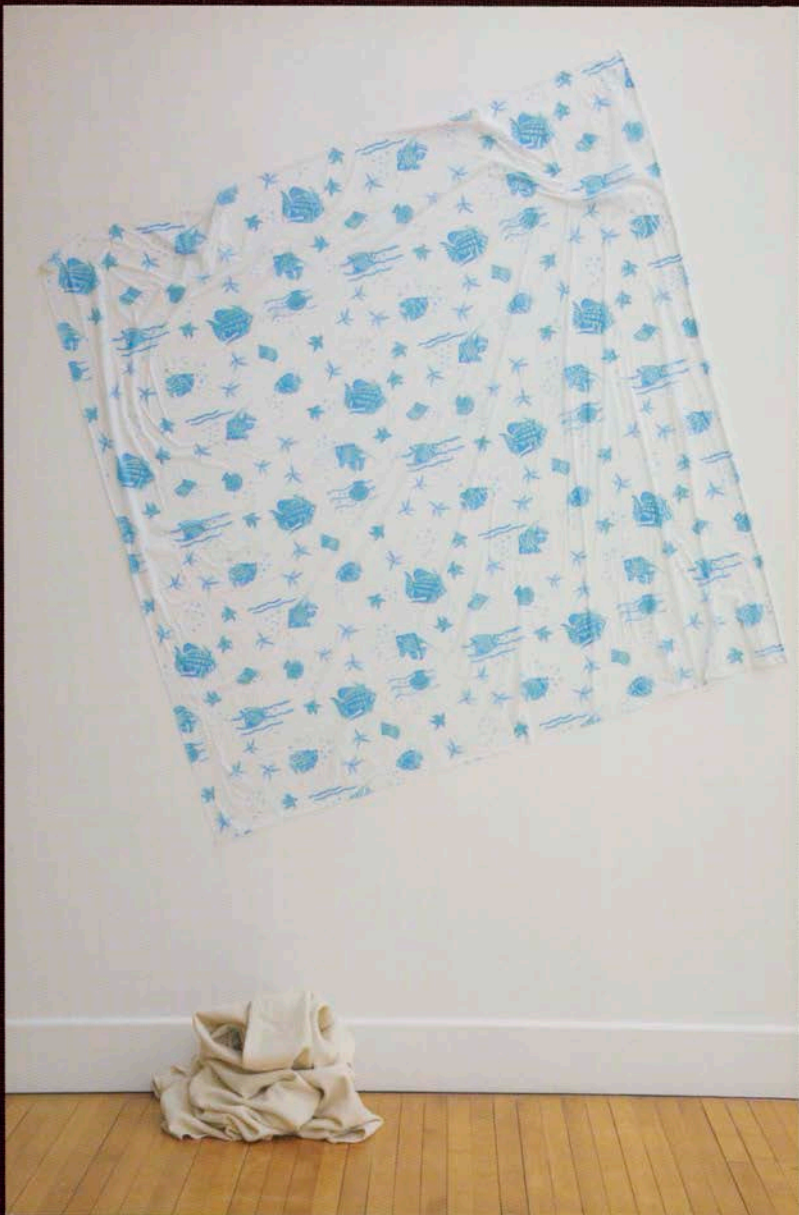
Born out of Palmerston North in 1999, art rock band Cortina features Ace Hurt (aka Matt Hunt) and Bek Coogan, who create an explosion of performance art, rock-metal, experimental pop, new-wave punk, alternative techno and Gothic with a spirited swagger and late twentieth-century retro flavour. The band flaunts excessive confidence with flagrant good humour and lashings of pastiche, and has developed an underground fan base of fervent and obsessive devotees. *It's probably better if you don't know us*, an exhibition by Cortina at High Street Project, Christchurch (2005) featured relics from the band's past performances, costumes worn by the band members on stage and letters and artwork from their fans. Currently based in Wellington, Cortina released their first album *Control Freaks Rule the World* in late 2005 and can be found at <http://www.myspace.com/cortinanz>.



SIMON DENNY

Simon Denny's practice emphasises relationships within communities of things; complex sculptural combinations of objects found, bought, gathered and made. Denny presents his audiences with situations that tend to foreground an engagement with associations of form, purpose and action. The apparent crude modesty of form belies the poetic intelligence of the works coming-to-be and sculptural conceit. Denny's art-making is rooted in doing; considerations of performance and acts of making which embed the artist's gesture and activity in his objects – objects chosen in the first instance for the character and activity they already inhabit.

Born in 1982, Denny graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland in 2004. He currently lives and works in Auckland. During 2006 he made solo shows at Michael Lett, Auckland, LISTE, Basel and Window, Auckland. Recent collaborative and group shows include *54321* at the Auckland City Art Gallery (2006); *Mostly Harmless* at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth (2006); *SCAPE Biennial of Art in Public Space*, Christchurch (2006) and *Shift*, Galerie Grita Insam, Vienna (2006). Denny was instrumental in running Special, which up until its recent closure was one of Auckland's most vital artist-run spaces.



SIMON DENNY

Less stale attachment 2006

Paper, timber, balloons, helium, woollen blanket, plastic, static electricity

Courtesy the artist & Michael Lett, Auckland

There is a fluidity to *Less stale attachment*, a process of discovery that is in front of us. A precarious arrangement of wood, wool, plastics and paper gather as an articulation of form and material. Simon Denny uses these objects to divide the space, drawing attention to the material tactility, the way they sit. Each object is employed to speak of how it occupies a volume in relation to other parts, forming a community of structures that points us toward meanings that are conversational in nature.

How forms touch, and how they have been touched, whether in fragile or crude ways, faint or funny, is key. This is wet. Everything is wet. This is folded, everything is folded. Or it's screwed up. Or it's just up. This is falling, or rather, it would be falling if it wasn't taped up here, propped up there. This one's sloppy, it's all pretty sloppy. With parts wrapping, holding, balancing and supporting, the work exists as an interdependent arrangement. The performative residue of the making process stresses the potentiality of the materials – the meeting of form, purpose and action.



SIMON LAWRENCE

Prayer/lightning machine 2006

Lightbulbs, light fittings, electrical components, DVD (5 min)

Courtesy the artist

Prayer/lightning machine 2006 is a reconstruction of the device activated in a suburban Christchurch living room for a brief period of time in 2005. This current system, although functioning, is somewhat incomplete due to the unexplained loss of certain components.

Simon Lawrence's work draws subtle associations through mathematics and astronomy, and is tempered with the presence of the supernatural or even possibly divine involvement. The work often alludes to layered tracings and to the guide-lines erased after a technical drawing is completed. In *Prayer/lightning machine*, trajectories are drawn in space via the harnessing of electrical impulses; light from everyday bulbs and once-ordinary lamps drain back and forth in space. A potential travel path is indicated. A dialogue is also established with another element in the system; a nocturnal flyover of a slice of current urban planning envisioned on a grandiose scale. The lines between architectural artifice, socially constructed utopias, and domestic reality become blurred in mystery and a misplaced energy grid.



SIMON LAWRENCE

Born in 1972, Christchurch artist Simon Lawrence graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Ilam School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury, Christchurch. Lawrence has presented solo and collaborative exhibitions at High Street Project, Christchurch and The Physics Room, Christchurch, Blue Oyster, Dunedin and Enjoy Public Art Gallery, Wellington. His most recent projects include the solo exhibition *PFFFFT* at High Street Project, Christchurch (2006) and group shows *Play* at Blue Oyster, Dunedin (2006); *Policy Decals For New Habits* at High St Project (2006); *Talk to the Dumbness* at Rm401, Auckland (2004) and the 2006 Trust Waikato Contemporary Art Awards.



PETER MADDEN

Born in 1966, Peter Madden gleans images from books, magazines and encyclopaedias, building sculptural installations that reorder our knowledge with poetic and pseudo-taxonomic resonance. Madden graduated with a Bachelor of Visual Arts from Auckland Institute of Technology in 1995 and a Masters of Fine Arts from Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland in 2004. He has held numerous solo and group exhibitions and is represented in many public and private collections. Recent solo or collaborative projects include *Escape from Orchid City* at City Gallery, Wellington (2006); *The Deep End* (with Sam Sampson) at Te Tuhi, Auckland and Pataka, Porirua (2006) and *Silk Cuts* (2005) at Michael Lett, Auckland. He was included in the recent group projects *54321*, Auckland City Art Gallery (2006); *Collage Effect*, 1301PE, Los Angeles (2006); *Uncanny*, Artspace, Auckland (2005) and *Snake Oil*, Auckland City Art Gallery (2005). Madden is currently based in Auckland.



PETER MADDEN & SEUNG YUL OH

***Whole of whole* 2006**

Acrylic paint, paper, collage, Fimo, polyurethane, resin, found objects
Courtesy the artists
(Wall)

***Pee Mung Been Garden* 2006**

Paper, collage, Fimo, polyurethane, resin, found objects
Courtesy the artists

***Mr Robinson* 2006**

Paper, collage, Fimo, polyurethane, resin, found objects
Courtesy the artists

PETER MADDEN

***Teaching mountains to fly* 2006**

Paper collage
Courtesy the artist & Michael Lett,
Auckland

***Australopithicus architectopolous* 2006**

Wood, plastic, paper, Fimo, found objects
Courtesy the artist & Michael Lett,
Auckland

***The round earth's imagined corner's blow* 2006**

Paper, hair, wire
Courtesy the artist & Michael Lett,
Auckland

SEUNG YUL OH

***Nectars* 2006**

Timber, plywood, rope, motor
Courtesy the artist & Starkwhite,
Auckland



PETER MADDEN & SEUNG YUL OH

Vein of the black stone 2006

Various materials in seven chapters

Courtesy the artists

Transforming the gallery space into a lush and exotic garden laden with creatures, insects, and fluttering, growing things, Peter Madden and Seung Yul Oh work in dialogue to explore representations of nature, the ordering of knowledge and territories of spectatorship. Here, whimsical scenarios are created with the various elements in animated conversation. This artificial environment incorporates traces of history and memory, drawing on the former cinematic purpose of the building. The giant black circle painted onto the wall references the aperture of the film projector previously located in the space during the years the building was a movie theatre (1918 - 1964), and exists as both a telescope and microscope into the space. By constructing a garden to walk in that is simultaneously micro and macro in scale, the artists also tease the idea of the art institution as a framework for viewing. Playing out and entertaining in ways fantastical and spectacular, the exuberant installation is underscored by quirky and sinister details that are slipped in to unsettle the comfort zone of museum viewing.



SEUNG YUL OH

Seung Yul Oh, born in Seoul in 1981, traverses the media of drawing, painting, sculpture and video, constructing whimsical installations in response to the physical and social specificity of location. Oh graduated with a Masters of Fine Arts from Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland in 2005 and won the Waikato National Art Award in 2004 with his painting *It's ultra moisture and protein rich formulation smoothies*. His recent solo projects include *Bearing* at Te Tuhi, Auckland (2006); *Chew Chew Tongue* at Starkwhite, Auckland (2006); *All the way down back inside the bones of your spine* in Peter's Garage, Auckland (2005) and *Sniffing onioned armpit* at Special, Auckland (2004). Selected group shows include *54321* at the Auckland City Art Gallery (2006); *Snake Oil* at Auckland City Art Gallery (2005) and *Compelled* at Artspace, Auckland (2005). Oh is currently based in Auckland.



SAM MORRISON

Auckland-based artist Sam Morrison was born in Wellington in 1980. Creating interactive sculptures that allow for an alternative mapping of space, Morrison works within the realms of sound, installation and performance, often reflecting on the functional, historical and cultural elements of a site. Morrison completed a Masters of Art and Design at Auckland University of Technology in 2006. His recent projects have been included in *54321* at Auckland City Art Gallery (2006); *StillMoving* at Corban Estate Art Centre, Auckland (2006); *Vroom: Istanbul Fragmented*, Istanbul Technical University, Istanbul (2005); *Compelled* at Artspace, Auckland (2005); *Nothing Doing: Crease Magazine* at Artstation, Auckland (2005); *Igniting St. Paul ST* at St. Paul Street Gallery, Auckland (2005) and the *Alleluya Noise Festival* coordinated by Artspace, Auckland (2005).



SAM MORRISON

Drawings with air 2006

Various materials, air compressor

Courtesy the artist

In *Drawings with air*, Sam Morrison inhabits the Gallery with sound-emitting gadgets that the artist describes as 'situations' or 'drawings'. Simple and absurd, these ridiculous inventions trip over themselves to conceal their innate technological elegance. These devices are constructed from gathered or previously discarded materials, mostly unremarkable. Combinations of materials - such as metal rules, plastic gloves, seeds, pins, A4 paper, ping pong balls and empty beer bottles - were selected by the artist for their inner acoustic potential. Gaudily coloured plastic hose strung through the space becomes a network of life lines to an air compressor that sends an expressive surge of air into the devices on cue. Sounds inherent to the materials are finally liberated in this burst of released energy. A turntable features but only as a rotation device, the overt simplicity reflects the artist's move away from his earlier forays into more apparently sophisticated technological environments. Morrison describes certain objects, such as a well-used oil drum, as 'star actors' in his 'performances' as he re-allocates them differing roles in his constant interrogation of acoustics and efforts to encourage others to join him in his quest. The gadgets in *Drawings with air* are given voice only by audiences who are invited to play; through triggering these contraptions, visitors literally 'breathe life' into silent materials.



MARNIE SLATER

Marnie Slater investigates the institutional site as a space of contest, negotiation and collaboration. The language of minimalism, materiality and form, the social and ethical relation of individual elements to one another, is combined with an acknowledgement of the specificity of an audience to create works that are invitations. Born in Wellington in 1980, she graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Massey University, Wellington in 2004, and has since exhibited throughout New Zealand and in Australia. Slater's most recent solo projects include *Our Moment Together* at The Physics Room, Christchurch (2006); *Everything I Know at the Top I Learned at the Bottom* at Enjoy Public Art Gallery, Wellington (2005) and *Love and Armor* at Special, Auckland (2005). Selected group exhibitions include *Sister City* at Blindside Gallery, Melbourne (2006); *Painted Faces* at Hirschfeld Gallery, City Gallery, Wellington (2006); *Sleepwalker* at Artspace, Auckland (2005); *Models for a New Community* at Canary Gallery, Auckland (2006) and *Coordinates For the Super Sensible* at High Street Project, Christchurch (2005). Slater is a Wellington-based artist, current trust member for the artist-run initiative Enjoy Public Art Gallery and was recently awarded a 2006 Commonwealth Arts and Craft Award for travel to India.



MARNIE SLATER

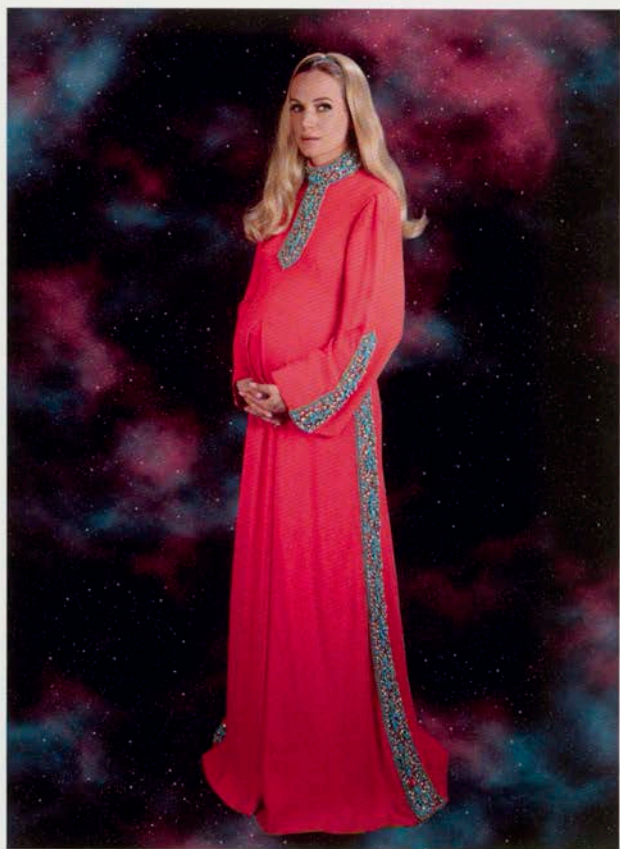
Any Moment 2006

Timber, plywood, acrylic

Courtesy the artist

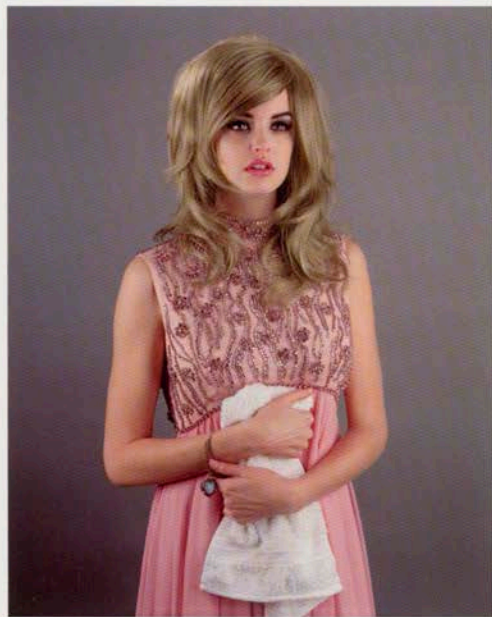
Special thanks to Lily Yang and APEX Consultants, New Plymouth

In *Any Moment*, Marnie Slater continues her considered navigation of architectural and institutional sites as spaces of contestation and negotiation. The physical site of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery has always offered a place of viewing, entertainment and spiritual replenishment; it was initially the location for a primitive Methodist church (1862) before its transformation into a movie theatre (1916-1964) and its repurposing as a contemporary art museum in 1970. It is the current multi-tiered levels of the Gallery that become both subject and form for Slater. This residue of a former guise as picture theatre, as a space for spectatorship, is brought to the fore. Slater audaciously introduces yet another level, a sixth space, by creating a viewing platform scaled for individuals. The nineteenth century tradition of constructing panoramic viewing platforms, poised strategically at the threshold of danger, to behold 'the nature' is wryly evoked. Slater's platform is expressly for sharing, for viewing the artworks of other artists in the Gallery as these works occupy the spaces below. The moment of vantage is also the moment of vulnerability; being looked at looking from. By cladding the platform in mirrored surfaces, Slater camouflages the overtly solid structure while offering a series of vertical surfaces for (distorted) viewing of reflected works and architecture. Through this intervention, Slater incites fresh conversations amongst the other artworks and provokes consideration of cultural spaces, modes of viewing and architectural conceit.



YVONNE TODD

Yvonne Todd constructs imagined and yet-to-be imagined narratives with her disquietly compelling photographs. Particular and precise, strange and uneasy, her evocations of unique female personalities, redolent with untold personal histories, are posited within wider social and psychological milieus. In this group of photographs certain personalities have starring roles, such as the winsome blonde from the pages of a Jacqueline Susann novel (*Amanda* 2006) and pregnant cover-girl for a glamorous culty religious association (*Gynecology* 2006). Simultaneously, the scopic language of studio portraiture and product photography inform and penetrate the tenor of her work. Early training in this mode of representation has left its mark on Todd's absolute attention to detail in the construction of artifice; the gowns are fastidiously hunted down and selected and the styling and mood are meticulously contrived. There is little room to move in the creation of these works, yet their interpretation remains wide open. The audience is left to its own devices to connect and disconnect the narratives that may or may not penetrate these works. Meaning becomes alluring and illusive. The failure and hope of human relationships and the tenuous associations that breathe amongst people, physical appearances and objects are embedded in the underbelly of Todd's work.



YVONNE TODD

Amanda 2006

Lightjet print (diptych)
Courtesy the artist, Ivan Anthony,
Auckland & Peter McLeavey Gallery,
Wellington

Inverse Funnel 2006

Lightjet print
Courtesy the artist, Ivan Anthony,
Auckland & Peter McLeavey Gallery,
Wellington

Eye-Vein Rose 2006

Lightjet print
Courtesy the artist, Ivan Anthony,
Auckland & Peter McLeavey Gallery,
Wellington

3 Beige Garments 2006

Lightjet print
Courtesy the artist, Ivan Anthony,
Auckland & Peter McLeavey Gallery,
Wellington

Barbara Inc. 2006

Lightjet print
Courtesy the artist, Ivan Anthony,
Auckland & Peter McLeavey Gallery,
Wellington

Gynecology 2006

Lightjet print
Courtesy the artist, Ivan Anthony,
Auckland & Peter McLeavey Gallery,
Wellington

Frenzy 2006

Lightjet print
Courtesy the artist, Ivan Anthony,
Auckland & Peter McLeavey Gallery,
Wellington

Born in 1973, Yvonne Todd studied commercial photography before graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Elam, University of Auckland in 2001. In 2002 she received the Walters Prize for her series *Asthma and Eczema*. Todd's recent projects include the 2006 Busan Biennale, South Korea; *Recovered Memory*, Suter Gallery, Nelson (2006); *Desire, Para/Site*, Hong Kong (2006); *Small World, Big Town*, City Gallery, Wellington (2005); *Mixed-up Childhood*, Auckland City Art Gallery (2005) and the publication *Dead Starlets' Assoc.* (2007) produced following a residency at the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia.

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Queen Street New Plymouth
Aotearoa / New Zealand
tel +64 6 759 6060
www.govettbrewster.com

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