

With spirit

Don Driver

a retrospective



For over thirty years the art of Don Driver has aroused controversy and debate, not least in Taranaki where he has lived most of his life.

As early as 1967 Driver's sculpture *The Magician* aroused a flurry of protest in the local media while on display in New Plymouth library, and the "nude" work was eventually removed by Govett-Brewster Art Gallery director John Maynard "to save a serious artist the humiliating experience of having to remove his own work from a public place."

When *Ritual*, featuring skull-headed dolls clutching farm implements, was exhibited at the National Gallery in 1982, it was accompanied by an assurance from the gallery's education service that the art had "no black magic or sinister overtones."

"I want to place in an exaggerated context things normally in an everyday range of vision" Driver has been quoted as saying. In his art prosaic objects such as doormats, old tyres, pitchforks, discarded toys and tarpaulins combine to form some unexpected visual and emotive associations.

The essays in this publication collectively widen the boundaries of understanding about the influences which have shaped the work of this prolific artist, including Hindu statuary, the art of Pablo Picasso, African tribal sculptures, and his travels in America and India. The many colour photographs present the startling variety of Driver's output in a way which has not previously been attempted. A comprehensive chronology puts the artist's work into a personal and critical context.

In 1979-80 the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery organised and toured the first retrospective exhibition of Don Driver's work. This new retrospective exhibition and publication follow his development into the 1990s, and reveal the freshness and power of an artist whose aim, in his own words, is "to get an exciting mixture of objects in different colours and forms and make them unexpected."

Cover images: front *Yellow Tentacle Pram* 1980
back *Sugar and Spice* 1980 (detail)



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Govett-Brewster Art Gallery

David Bateman

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ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND Te Aotearoa

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With spirit: *Don Driver, a retrospective 1965-1998* is an apposite title to this 33-year survey of the very best works of Don Driver. It describes both the attitude and the practice of this highly distinctive New Zealand artist. It echoes Driver's energy and persistence against the odds, his ever-present humour and his interest in both esoteric and everyday rituals. Indeed Driver's works stand out, jostle and provoke in any company. Redeploying materials drawn from popular culture that are frequently past their use by date, the works respond to and play with the history of 20th century art. Through a mix of innovation, verve and versatility Don Driver makes art seem so commonplace yet exotic, so simple yet spectacular.

Not only has Don Driver spent most of his life living and working in Taranaki; he also spent 24 years working at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. It is therefore appropriate that the Gallery organise this survey of work. The exhibition updates an earlier Don Driver survey organised and toured by the Gallery in 1979-80. *With spirit* includes many new works produced in the intervening 20 years. All works are reproduced in this substantial publication which also presents a body of fresh new writing by some of New Zealand's leading writers on the visual arts.

As a new Director I arrived just in time to write this Foreword. From the outset the project has been led and the publication edited by former Director Priscilla Pitts. Former Gallery curator Robert Leonard provided invaluable curatorial and editorial advice throughout the project. Susette Goldsmith provided editorial assistance and also compiled the superb

director's foreword

chronology at the end of this publication. Further acknowledgement is due to long-time Don Driver supporters Jim Barr and Mary Barr who provided invaluable assistance to the project.

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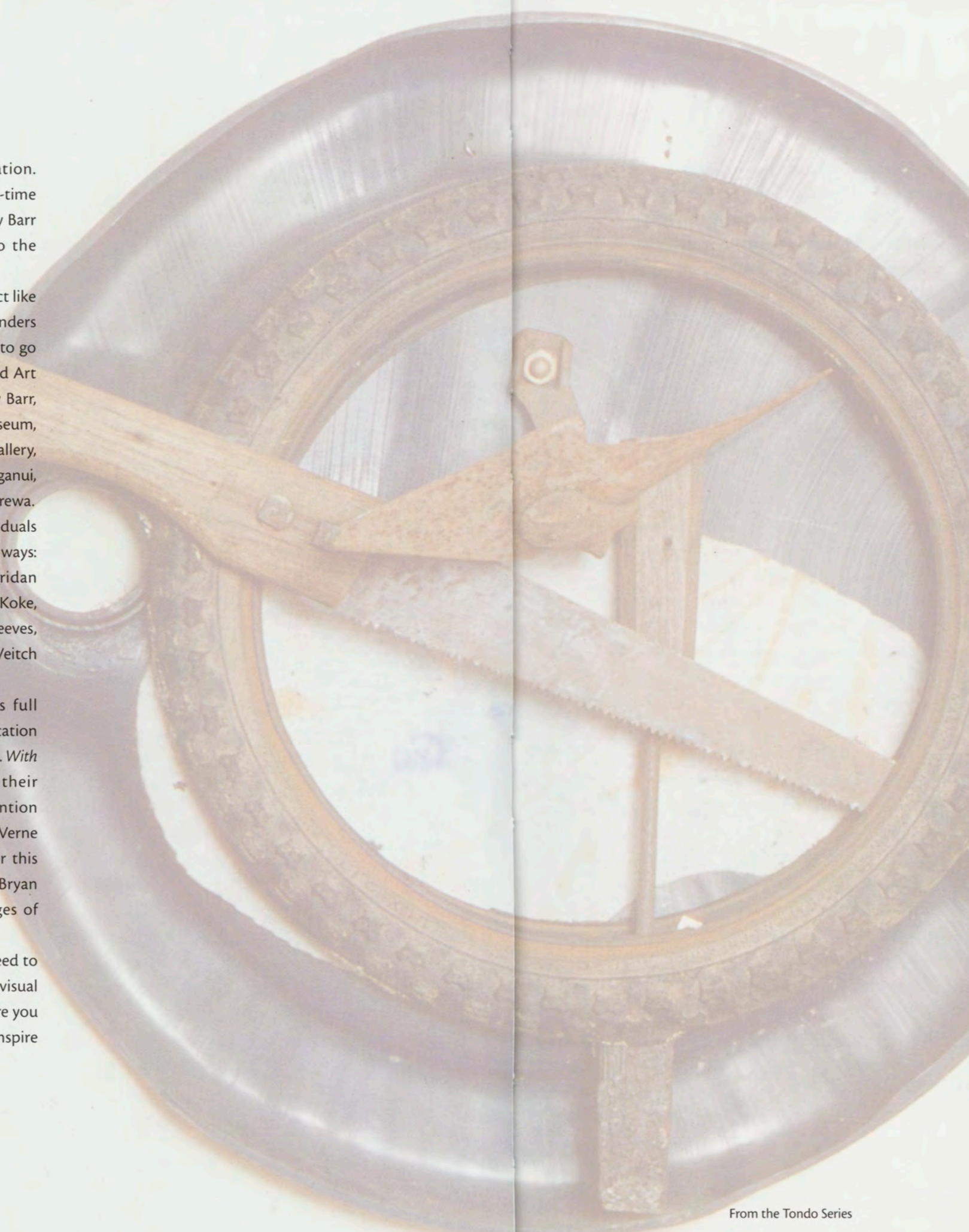
This publication has reached its full potential only through the ongoing dedication and encouragement of David Bateman Ltd. *With spirit* also describes the nature of their partnership in the project. Special mention should also be given to Gallery designer Verne Barrell who has laboured with love over this publication, and Gallery photographer Bryan James for his superb interpretive images of Driver's work.

Finally it is the artist Don Driver I need to thank for contributing so much to the visual arts in Taranaki and New Zealand. I am sure you will agree that his work will continue to inspire and provoke for many years to come.

Gregory Burke

Retracing the history of responses to Don Driver's work and gauging the reactions of individual viewers, one thing that is immediately apparent is the degree to which Driver polarises opinion. The most vehemently expressed position is that taken by those who find Driver's works shocking, offensive, or just downright incomprehensible. In part this is couched as scepticism over Driver's recycling of what many see as junk: the trappings of suburban life – the fluffy bathmats, discarded toys, tatty doormats – and the detritus of agricultural activity – grain and feed bags, fertiliser sacks, tools of all kinds, animal horns and skulls. It is true that it takes not only an open mind but also an unblinkered eye to find the visual pleasure afforded by the rusting elements in a work like *Tundra*, or the subtle textures of *Pacific Salt's* layered shreds of fabric. But for those who wish to see it, Driver's extraordinary and idiosyncratic eye for juxtapositions of colour that, in a lesser artist, might simply be garish and ugly, is everywhere evident – for example in works like *Produce* or sophisticated yet jazzy abstracts such as *Painted Relief No.12* and *Zither*. His collections of the grimy, the dingy and the everyday are assembled with a sensitivity of touch and sureness of composition, while a work such as *Lawn Cuttings* demonstrates an exceptional richness and subtlety of both colour and texture.

More understandable, even for those who admire Driver's work, are those responses which betray an underlying discomfort, even a profound anxiety at his more surreal and disquieting juxtapositions, and the sometimes anarchic nature of his imagery. *Girl with Skull*



From the Tondo Series

and *Ritual*, for example, with their skull-headed dolls, blindly resolute on their oil drums and clutching sharp pronged farm implements, are confrontational. They present a genuinely disturbing collision of childhood innocence, adult sexuality, death and violence; while a work like *Medley*, festooned, fetish-like with chains, doll parts and bits of stuffed animals is, if anything, even more macabre.

Yet for many this troubling aspect, the frisson it sends through the viewer, is part of the attraction and the power of Driver's work. And we should not forget that the disturbing is often leavened with humour. The Driver of *Girl with Skull* is also the Driver of *Soft Hanging* with its witty parody of Rothkoesque soft-edged abstraction, of the playfulness of *For a Taranaki Day* or *Elephants for Sale*, of the downright silliness of *Crocodile with Prey*. There is also an element of comedy about the scanty, brightly coloured skirts of *Ritual's* dolls, and the absurdly perky nature of their genital appendages.

This oscillation between humour and menace is but one of the tensions that operates in Driver's work. Others include the push and pull between, for instance, abstract and pictorial aspects, or internationalist tendencies (most notably the influence of North American abstraction) counterpoised by regionalist or pseudo-regionalist references; and the contrast between the second-hand nature of so much of his materials and a fresh and renewing vision. Some of these are discussed in the essays written for this publication.

Also apparent – and again covered in both the publication texts and images – is the great diversity and range of Driver's sources,

references and raw material. From these many elements, however, Driver has developed a body of work which is various and many faceted, but which has a coherence and a stamp of personality that makes each of the individual parts recognisably "a Driver".

Priscilla Pitts

Made to order

Jim Barr and Mary Barr

The greatest masterpiece in the world is only a dictionary out of order.

Jean Cocteau

Picasso's use of tribal imagery in his 1907 painting *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)* is acknowledged as one of the defining moments in modern art. The repercussions of this daring act were felt strongly throughout the world and, over time, in New Zealand. For Don Driver, isolated in the small city of New Plymouth in the sixties, the inventiveness, determination and passion of artists like Picasso were a challenge and a guide. The combination of the powerful rawness of tribal sculpture and the refined culture of Europe was just the sort of dichotomy that Driver relished.

Despite his passion for Asian and African art and culture, most of Driver's work up to the mid-seventies drew on contemporary Western sources. The pivotal relief *Midwest* (1965), made soon after his first trip to the United States, can be seen as inspired more by the assemblage aesthetic of Robert Rauschenberg's 'combines' or Kurt Schwitters' collage than by African or Asian traditions. *PS Handle with Care* (1968), however, with its mélange of discards and charred texture meshing into a powerful and sacrificial metaphor, indicates the growing influence on Driver of tribal art.

The trip to the United States in 1965 can be seen as a turning point for another reason. It was during this visit Driver began his eclectic collection of Indian and Asian sculpture. The first piece, a Buddha from Thailand, was purchased in New York. It has since been joined by a select group of Hindu temple pieces, an exquisite dancing Shiva, several small Buddhist bronzes and an assortment of ceremonial containers, gongs and paintings – miniature worlds of competing gods frozen in the eternal battle between good and evil. For Driver, their attraction remains their dynamism and obstinate difference from the Western canon. He believes that his extended contact with these objects has enhanced his own intuitive sense of how to place one object significantly against another in his work. This, of course, is the essence of assemblage – as well as the foundation of composition.

During the decade from the mid-sixties Driver successfully produced his 'combines' as well as a highly polished mode of formal abstraction. The cut-off point came in 1976. In



PS Handle with Care 1968
collection the artist/Milford
Galleries, Dunedin



Lawn Cuttings 1976
collection Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

constructing *Lawn Cuttings* in January of that year Driver produced his own *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. In this highly-charged wall piece, he fused his knowledge of recent American and European art with everything he had absorbed through his close association with the art of Africa and Asia. It is an astonishing work both in its daring scale and exotic resonance. Driver has invested its commonplace materials with a mysterious unity. There is a feeling of urgency here that lies beneath visual representation. If *Lawn Cuttings* had simply been a successful formal collage of surprising elements it would have been achievement enough. But there is more going on here.

Driver, who sticks to the well-known adage, "if your work speaks for itself, get out of the way", has had little to say about his sculptures or working processes over the years. The single critical word is 'magic'. Driver has said, "I am drawn to primitive art because of its fundamentality and mystery. The inexplicable and the magical appeal to me." Driver was himself once a keen amateur magician and learnt early the allure of the prestige, the illusion of transformation, that labelled early magicians as prestidigitators. The elevation of the mundane through magical transformation has been, since ancient times, a subject of intense fascination. It is the compulsion that has spawned alchemy and shamanism. Nowhere is this magic more richly harvested than in the tribal sculptures of the indigenous peoples of Africa.

If *Lawn Cuttings* is positioned as a marker of a 46-year-old Driver's second wind after the success of his more formalist works of the sixties and early seventies, it quickly acquired a column of followers. By putting modernist precision and craftsmanship behind him, Driver had liberated himself for a second great phase of production. Driver partly attributes the shift from formal abstraction to the freer assemblages as the result of frustration with the way fine-surfaced works were constantly damaged. Certainly this must have been a factor, but assemblages like *Paddling Pool* and *Relief II: White Bag*, made in the months before *Lawn Cuttings*, clearly show that Driver was ready to make this move. And then, having made it with *Lawn Cuttings*, almost as though the effort had entirely drained him, Driver closed down. As he worked late in the basement of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, a violent stroke dropped him to the ground.

Magic, as opposed to science, is not found where "the pursuit is certain, reliable and well under control of rational methods and technological process".¹ Is it too far-fetched to imagine that during his convalescence Driver drew energy from the tribal works in the books that surrounded him and from the small bronze figures he patiently rubbed with his good hand? Certainly his reduced physical abilities required him to reassess his methods of production and offered him a new freedom. From here on he laid out the components of his works on the studio floor and, while he loosely assembled the elements as far as he could, professional artisans did the construction and finishing. The resulting sculptures, reliefs and banners are just as compelling as those he made before his stroke, and draw

even more clearly on the sources of African and Asian art.

It is possible to arrange Driver's work of this later period according to many of the characteristics that also are used to identify African and Asian works. These are based on simple forms: single figures, tableaux, raised figures and banners. In their turn these groupings can be related to the more performative and functional structures of fetish, altar, emblem, ceremony, and procession. Often these structures don't stand alone, as elements blend one into the other. It is unusual to find a 'pure' form; one work may be based on combinations of two or three structures. Driver's work plays across these provocative cultural patterns.

The relationship of Driver's work to fetish, and particularly the fetish figures typical of the People's Republic of Congo, has often been remarked upon. In the early eighties he embarked upon a series of fetish figures. Traditionally such figures represent the unknown power and forces human beings must deal with as they face the dangers of life. It is here that the concept of the shaman can be useful. In the anthropological sense a shaman is one "who acts as a mediator between the mundane world around him and the cosmic world beyond".²

As a mediator, Driver's take on fetish is imbued with the anarchy of the Western assemblage tradition. Children's dolls are raised up to return our stare eyeball to eyeball. The ways in which they have been manipulated and contorted convince us that stare is malevolent. Tiny heads rearing up out of too-wide shoulders, bodies adorned with pelts and armed with sharply-pointed tools, incongruous and alien. The sense of malice and wrongness recalls the freakish children of John Wyndham's *Midwich Cuckoos* bent on destruction in pursuit of an unknown and terrifying purpose.

In *Fetish* (1978) Driver extends direct formal quotation to near parody. A large plastic doll (a walkie-talkie) is transformed by blue paint, hanging kitchenware and a large shaving mirror. Here Driver both acknowledges the power of the fetish as an idea gleaned from another culture while commenting neatly on the key late twentieth century 'other': a woman burdened down with the tools of her traditional trade. Other dolls are transformed into mutants of Hindu imagery with all its savage hilarity and sexual ambiguity: "I am Vishnu, creator and destroyer." These dolls – once harmless reminders of childhood – are armed and dangerous.

The elevation and display of objects on platforms like altars is another strategy that permeates Driver's later work. His sense of irony never far from the surface, Driver relishes the mock reverence given to often trivial objects such as cheap plastic toys and concrete garden ornaments. In raising up everyday and disposable trivia for veneration, Driver references the ancient tactic of honouring by isolating. Again he is following the rich tradition of Indian bronze casters creating elaborate tableaux. In many of the smaller 'stand/altar' sculptures, a gleefully casual humour – a trademark of many more humble

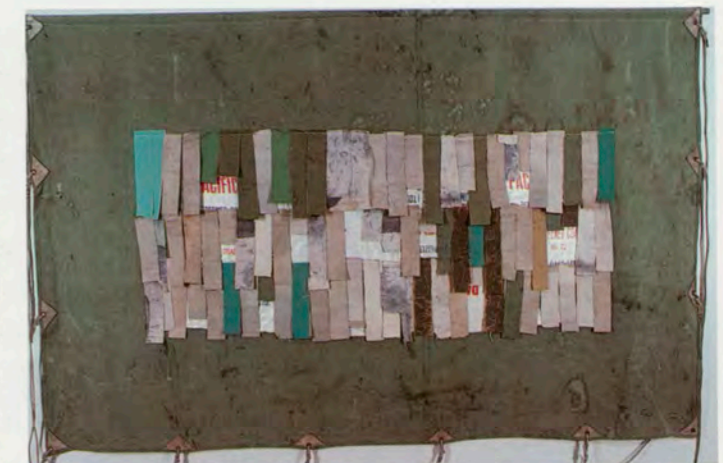
Hindu temple items – helps to unite the disparate elements.

The third group, and in many ways the most spectacular, of Driver's works of this period comprises large banners and reliefs. From tarpaulins, sacking, plastic strapping and other industrial materials, Driver built his formidable banners. Two successful early works are *50 kg* and *Large Cross* (1977). It is hard to escape the suggestion that these banners should be at the head of a legion or billowing above the ramparts of a castle. The eagle heads, the strips of cloth reminiscent of the armour worn by Roman centurions, the large crosses and heraldically placed bags all read as symbols for more desperate causes than art. Flaps of coloured material appear again in *Pacific Salt* (1977) with a more primeval feel. As Driver eases into his series of emblematic banners the content loosens; the atmosphere is still combative but now speaks of wars that might have taken place in Ghana or Nigeria. Later, the *Pockets and Tools* series with its sharp blades and padded additions, is reminiscent of Asante war shirts.

The presentation of dolls and other creatures, often raised on drums or other platforms, brings us to the fourth broad grouping of ceremonial works. Here Driver combines his knowledge of twentieth century European and American art with tribal and Asian sources. *Homage to Rauschenberg* (1984) sums up many of the main themes. The sculpture is based on a stuffed goat, an obvious nod to the tyre-girdled goat in Rauschenberg's famous 1959 assemblage *Monogram*. The homage is reinforced by the pelvic bone encircling the goat's neck. The animal's legs are wrapped, Beuys-like in felt, its face masked with another goat's skull and the whole consortium bolted to three large metal drums.

This work is a complex collage of found objects along with cultural and contemporary art references. The use of skulls and bone is, of course, common to many cultures, but the mirror hanging round the goat's neck can certainly be traced to mirrors used in African fetish figures. The drums, the top one adorned with colour and a mirror-like surface, are like Jamaican drums used in carnivals. The draped clothing over the goat's back mimics the adornment of Hindu gods and goddesses like Durga, who is paraded each year around villages in West Bengal to celebrate the victory of good over evil. Driver brings to this cluster of diverse ceremonial tactics a unity so they can be read as a distinctive and personal image.

These components of fetish and altar, emblem and ceremony are compellingly brought together in one of Driver's key works, *Ritual* (1982). The raised figures and the tumbrel and drumbeat soundtrack speak of a mystery revealed to us as it progresses though



Pacific Salt 1977
collection Sarjeant Gallery/Te
Whare O Rehua/Whanganui

time and space. Our sense of witnessing a ritualistic procession as it winds on its private course sets *Ritual* apart. While many of the other 'doll' works could play a supporting part in any procession, the scale and complexity of *Ritual* are amplified by its appropriated plinth in the form of a ceremonial cart.

While the practice of taking religious or fetish figures from hidden or secret places and displaying them to their believers is typical of many cultures and religions, in India it reaches remarkable intensity. There the gods are taken through their territory to check up on occupants, inspect innovations, see and be seen. But *Ritual* seems to have a more sinister purpose, trekking endlessly through the order and mock neutrality of twentieth century, white cube, art galleries. Somewhere, at some time, these gods took the wrong turn in their quest for the 'real' world.

Experiencing the power of complex installations like *Ritual* is enough to make you wonder at the effect of all the works of Don Driver, together as one large installation. Imagine it. Hundreds of canvases, hangings, sculptures, collages, fetish figures and banners made across the years cheek-by-jowl in one grand encyclopaedic presentation. Driver himself has given some credence to this fantasy in the way he has packed his own exhibitions. It is not hard to believe (if such a show were possible) that as we entered the gallery, the whole glorious enterprise would shift in a sudden optical convulsion and reveal itself as a single shimmering form.

1 Bronislaw Malinowski, in *Magic, Science and Religion*, Greenwood 1984.

2 David Maybury Lewis in *Millennium: Tribal Wisdom and the Modern World*, Viking Penguin 1992.

Don Driver: getting things together

Gordon Brown

Looking back over Don Driver's career, the temptation is to ignore the early stuff – the carved heads and simplified standing figures, some directly influenced by Chadwick.¹ What relevance has this work from the 1950s and early 1960s to Driver's later work? The connection is indirect. It lies in skills learnt and applied at that time: moulding, casting, handling fibreglass and plastic putty used when Driver practised as a dental technician; woodwork, welding and pottery learnt at night school classes; and, after taking a job at Tingeys in 1962, working with Perspex and Formica, as well as daily mixing different coloured paints. This dexterity with various media, including, from about 1963, his recycling of used materials, gave him the technical facility and ease of execution needed to meet new challenges which came with fresh ideas. The transition from the early work to that which we recognise as being 'Don Driver' was achieved with a swiftness that, in itself, represented a leap in artistic maturity. Another significant feature in Driver's effort to catch up with contemporary art was his extensive reading, a habit lasting a lifetime.

What consolidated this leap in Driver's artistic practice was his 1965 trip to the United States of America. Although he was stimulated by the art he saw, the impact of four months' concentrated viewing took time to sink in, re-emerging later as circumstances warranted.² With Dubuffet's works, however, where surfaces are made from various fragmented substances, he at once recognised the possibility of applying textured materials directly to his work rather than simulating texture by means of painterly illusion. But the clearest hint of how the trip immediately affected Driver had less to do with remembered artworks and more with the generalised impression left with him as he and his wife travelled around the United States by Greyhound bus. While passing through the American rural midwest, he was particularly taken by the warm, textured wood of barns, by aircraft parts abandoned in a vast landscape and by cattlemen handling steers; these provided image associations that he also linked with Taranaki farms. *Mid-west* (1965) epitomised these aspects (the animal's skull was a new, to be repeated, motif). In a similar, if more colourful vein, Driver tapped a new sense of urban vitality with works like *Zag* (1965), *Zoom* or *Zing*, (both 1969).³ With *La Guardia 2* (1966) 'garishness and glitter' in colour, plus compositional formality, summarised New York.⁴ While the use of bright colour followed Driver's return from America, his native sense was already taming any assertiveness in the American influence on his imagery. At the same time, the sombre tones of his early assemblages

were carried on in works made from pieces of wood (darkly stained, painted, even charred) or from sheet-metal irregularly corrugated, as in *Large Brass* (1966). What characterised all these works, pre- or post-trip, brightly coloured or not, was their enclosure inside a regular, if minimal, frame, with components formally arranged within a limited shallow relief that implied a sense of flatness akin to painting.

The early free-standing constructional sculptures, such as *Battery-case Sculpture* (1966), clung to the enclosing frame and early sobriety. By contrast, *Sentinel* (1967) and *Flyaway* (1968) were not only conceived 'in the round', but possessed a formal elegance rarely seen in New Zealand sculpture at that time, remarkably so considering the industrial origins of some of their parts. Driver's 'solid' oblong and cube structures from the late 1960s⁵ varied in their degree of independence. While some could stand alone, others seemed to weld their captured space either to their immediate interior surroundings or to simulate such an environment as part of the work itself. Although it was not always externally obvious, Driver saw such works as owing a debt to the stainless steel *Cubi* sculptures by David Smith that he had seen while in America.

Also surfacing during the 1960s – for Driver's practice of pursuing several overlapping approaches to his art continued throughout his career – was the exploitation of provocative imagery that could stretch and challenge the formal aspects of his art. One early example is *Medieval* (1967). Rather than the turned-wood table legs that impose on the work an irregular boundary, or the wit of the dribbling tap, it is the inclusion of an actual small icon into the work that is pivotal to its reading. Here images associated with sacred and domestic rituals mingle, carrying depths of association, for what is uplifting can touch the mundane. This process of transformation is vital to Driver's art. Through the suggestive power of combining ordinary things, unexpected visual and emotive associations become possible. In these works from the late 1960s can be found cut-out wooden letters and stencilled words or initials, coloured plastic balls, kewpie-dolls and similar prosaic images which, in themselves, may carry little that is obviously ritualistic or overtly sexual, but in the way Driver employs them, acquire such implications, often with bizarre undercurrents. During this period a lot of the imagery Driver picked up came out of his reading; he has been a magpie in this respect throughout his career. Don't look always for big influences; the sources for images could just as well come from reproductions after minor artists.

For Driver, ritual was interpreted loosely to embrace simple customary acts, prescribed ceremonies or semi-magical rites. Other aspects, including the mildly erotic, emerged from Driver's longtime fascination with African and Hindu sculpture. But a broader interest in their ritual and mythic connotations was embraced by his own art later on.

Also entering Driver's work in the late 1960s, and soon to become a recurring image, was the cross. This was not so much the upright crucifix with its load of Christian



Large Brass 1966
collection Auckland Art Gallery
Toi O Tamaki

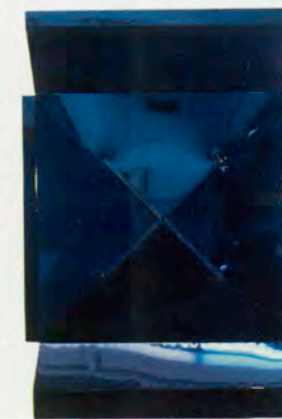


Counterpoint 1967
private collection

associations, but the diagonal cross, with its own heraldic affiliations, or where 'X' indicates a point of interest, location or even a negative. Among the first was *Black Relief* (1969), an elegant cross centred within a black vinyl shine with protective surrounds, waiting for some reflective response. The precise forms and smooth, clean, taut surfaces of this piece were to find an antithesis in other works with the same central motif, but where rough edges, imperfections and even grime imply a grittier reality. Such is the case with *Large Cross* (1977). This is a rural heraldic banner, where used, worn-out or discarded items acquire rich, sensuous qualities, and the blue-across-green St Andrew's cross is placed over an oil spotted ground-sheet – a splatter of hard working Scots' blood? Consider also the ceremonial element in the flags Driver incorporated into his works, especially the Union Jack, or the emblematic eagle's head in *50 Kg* (1977).

From the formal layout of *La Guardia 2* there slowly evolved, via the low-relief, shaped canvas of *Four Part Piece* (1969)⁶ and the conventionally painted *Dimension No. 6* (1970), the geometrical abstraction of the painted *Relief* works, 1970-74.⁷ Each work was made up from several abutted panels (the surface of these either slightly raised or lowered in relation to each other) to form bands of colour. While most panels were acrylic paint on canvas, some were fabricated metal. Most of these works have panels mounted horizontally, but sometimes the format is vertical. Slightly overlapping in time, the *Cosmos* series (1974-75) maintained a similar degree of formal abstraction. Each work was a sizeable free-standing box in which were composed a few basic ingredients such as stainless steel sheeting, perspex and coloured plastic tubing. Standing and looking into one such work, viewers had their own reflections thrown back by the highly polished surfaces as though the innermost content of the box was to be shielded from prying eyes. Mainly because of their susceptibility to fingermarks and other surface damage, Driver abandoned the construction of similar works.

In 1975 Driver employed another important motif, loosely hanging strips of fabric. Whereas works such as *Black Relief* had smooth, precise mirror-surfaces, the new motif exploited roughly-torn edges and an informality that almost seemed casual. Earlier, in 1969, in what was then an isolated work, *Relief with Pleats*, a similar use of over-hanging strips is found. In this work the fabric was glued and stapled over a wooden frame, but by 1975 Driver had changed his basic technique of working with fabrics. In assembling the new works he began employing sewing machinists⁸ (just as earlier, in fabricating his metal components, he used welders, metal-workers and spray-painters). Over-lapping strips of cloth and other motifs, such as agricultural bags, doormats, sleeve-like pockets, farm tools or rope, were attached to old tarpaulins or brightly coloured vinyl sheeting to become a large group of works which were hung like wall banners. On the whole these wall-hangings were basically large collages of ready-made found objects and were restricted in depth, though some included high-relief objects. Driver was here extending the thematic core,

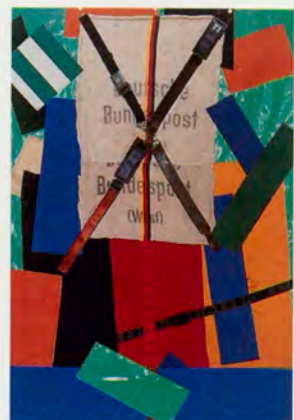


Black Relief 1969
collection Govett-Brewster Art
Gallery, New Plymouth

particularly that associated with agriculture, found in earlier works such as *Mid-west*, but what had been rustic had now acquired a new earthiness. So, too, the obvious craftsmanlike status of the early pieces had given way to the inclusion of mundane items whose presence was likely to be unsettling to the viewer. Driver has used the wall-hanging as a working format capable of great flexibility and applicable to various situations. Since his impressive *Pockets and Tools* exhibition of 1982, he has kept adding new categories of found and ready-made objects: flags, dresses and coats, animal skins, strips of Duraband, German mailbags and tyres, often combined with a host of miscellaneous items – even a big plastic Mickey Mouse. Sometimes the wall-hanging format was modified, as with the iron pipe frame of *Lawn Cuttings* (1976), a work that displays both Driver's ever-ready wit and the ease with which he realises grandeur of scale. The work's general tawny colour encourages its sense of expansive scale and of a unifying lyricism that draws from the materials used an evocation of summer-dry earth and thinning, short-mown grass. In Driver's typical manner, the worn, thinly woven coir flooring and the four rather shoddy coir doormats acquire implications removed from their original purposes while still remaining what they are.

Although Driver's strength as a colourist pervades all his work and is often enhanced by the very tactile surfaces of the materials he chooses, in range and discipline it reigns most gloriously in the wall-hangings. Colour can convey much of the nuance of a work, as in *Tundra* (1965) with its heavy earthy colours. In *Soft Hanging* (1976), pastel colours point to the over-domesticated materials used to pretty-up suburbia; in *Mellow Yellow* (1991), the slightly bloodied acid yellow and the writhing of the dark intestinal tyres suggest an experience that may be less than mellow; while the bold, Matisse-like colours in *Bundespost West* (1989) initially convey an unswerving luxuriousness that soon gives way to the less obvious warning of the crossed-over belts and straps with their own apparent ritual purposes.

During 1978 Driver again exploited wood as a vehicle for his art, either as ready-made objects used with other found-objects or as newly-crafted artworks. Among the already-mades were ladders. Ten years earlier a short ladder formed part of a relief, *For a Taranaki Day* (1968). On recessed shelves, occupying the right half of the work, sat coloured plastic balls and empty drink cans, while to the left the ladder looked as if it could be sliding down from where it was placed. In 1978, in another wall relief, *Up the Ladder*, draped across the top of a short, paint-splattered ladder is a piece of paint-encrusted, rubberised material over which hang plastic fruit and a piece of rope. But more searchingly quixotic was a much larger work simply titled *Ladder* in which ascension is thwarted by a ceiling that is always too low. Over an almost upright ladder, a sizable sheet of plywood "ceiling" balances horizontally with one edge resting high up against the wall. As Driver aptly wrote: "Ladders? Well they suggest they get you up, but they don't necessarily get you anywhere."⁹



Bundespost West 1989
private collection Auckland

Driver extended his use of ladders in later works, including *Three Ladders* (1981) with its triple image of a ladder whose top half is hidden by an old paint-stained coat, *Ladder and Garments* (1984) and *Climbing Planes* (1994). Returning to 1978 and his assemblage *With Spirit*, Driver playfully placed a piece of salvaged timber with one end on the floor so that it angled up to the other two components of the work as if propping them in place on the wall. The board leans against a piece of yellow vinyl sheeting that partly obscures an old Shell petrol sign, the only readable words becoming the witty pun that is the work's title. It's as if the old piece of timber is propping up questionable spiritual values. This work, and the unstable looking *Ladder*, raised an issue that regularly troubled Driver. This concerned other people's habit of placing artworks into conventional categories that set restrictions on their content or form. By defying their strict genre status as either wall hanging or free-standing sculpture, both *With Spirit* and *Ladder* proclaim their independence from pedantic pigeonholing. They also act as a link between the earlier wall-hangings and Driver's return to free-standing sculptures. One group of free-standing works, made with cabinetmaker precision, had chairs as its dominant image, *Red Chair and Table* (1978) being the largest. The main thrust, however, came from waywardly combining garden and domestic ornaments, toys, children's masks and assorted knick-knacks. Small, humble, but cheeky in character, many of these became his *Animal Crackers* (1978).

Following *Animal Crackers*, over the next three years larger conglomerate objects and creatures appeared, as in *Babysnatcher* (1978), *Yellow Tentacle Pram* (1980), *Dressed Bird* (1980) (this, like several other pieces, used a stuffed bird), and *Girl with Skull* (1981). This last work consisted of a large, standing, scantily dressed doll, one hand gripping its decapitated head, the other clutching a skull excreting wormlike twine. Usurping the head's role is a goat's skull. For most of these works, the plinths – which traditionally raised artworks in a neutral manner to bring them closer into view – were made from plastic barrels, milk-crates and the like, seditiously making them an integral part of the assembled sculpture. These works brought out more stringently the surreal and bizarre side of Driver's art, including juxtaposed images from human and animal sources. This mix fascinated Driver. Such works also reveal Driver's awareness of the way the likes of Robert Rauschenberg and Edward Kienholz combined and altered their pre-processed images.

Since 1982 several art institutions have invited Driver to set up installations on site: *Ritual* at the National Art Gallery in 1982; *Burnt Out*¹⁰ for the Adelaide Festival Arts Centre in 1985; *Elephants for Sale* at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in 1986; *Bicycles* in the Sarjeant Gallery between 1986-87; *Boxes* at the Wellington City Art Gallery in 1988, and in 1991 *Energy City* at the Fisher Gallery, Pakuranga. *Energy City* was then modified and, with a few new works added, transferred to the Bath House, Rotorua's Art and History Museum, later in 1991.

Ritual was not so much an installation assembled for a specific site as a largely



Girl with Skull 1981
collection Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

self-contained single work that created its own powerful environment within the provisions of a darkened space. Beyond the work's physical identity, the only additional elements required were those of dramatic directional electric lighting, recorded sound and straw scattered on the surrounding floor. *Ritual* took as its theme the disturbing forces inherent in *Girl with Skull*, the main differences being that most of the nine dolls grasped a fork or scythe and, as a group, multiplied what with one doll had been unsettling into something that became both menacing and more erotically charged. In the darkened gallery they stood on individual 44-gallon drums placed in a dray, illuminated by a strong light to exaggerate the cast shadows and augmented by the sound of ritualistic drumming. The overall effect breathed intimidation.

In *Energy City* Driver used wall-hangings and other works that had previously come to fruition as self-contained items, as well as new pieces produced for the occasion. Into these new works tyres were introduced as a significant motif (as distinct from the bicycle wheels complete with tyres that featured in *Bicycles*). An assortment of tyres was gathered and piled up to form a sizeable centrepiece. Driver then had to solve a major difficulty. Faced with so many diverse, virtually independent artworks, how could he impart to the installation a sense of unity? He skilfully brought it together with a floating layer of large, dark-green plastic drums suspended from the gallery's ceiling.

Such problems of integration and conceptual consistency had been less of an issue for *Boxes*, with its piled-up wooden crates against walls, a floor-cover of scattered posters, mainly for magazines, and framed collages. *Boxes* assembled three seemingly disparate classes of 'things' to represent products serving quite different ends. Yet there were some obvious, if restricted, cross-over connections, such as the shared visual imagery common to both the printed posters and the collages, where similar printed material was used. But more importantly, all three classes were also items that, by one means or another, were either 'boxes', 'boxed' or 'boxed in', hence the installation's title. The printed images of the posters and of the visual images of the collages are 'boxed in' by the images' outer edge or surrounding paper margin, while the collages were also 'boxed' by their picture frames. Although empty, the wooden crates were boxes for carrying produce. While viewers might have found themselves unsuspectingly walking on images of their revered pop-idols, it was the crates, as the dominant image, that bore an agenda by the way they were stacked, either with the open 'top' or the slats of the 'bottom' facing outward and piled up to seven crates high. This conveyed an element of uneasiness, as if they represented open cells (partly darkened by the lighting's hard cast shadows) or gloomy enclosed cages, the slats suggesting prison bars.

Bicycles was sited in the central square gallery area under the dome of the Sarjeant Gallery. In no other installation has Driver been able to utilise an advantageous architectural environment in such a visually positive way. The four Duraband wall-hangings (which

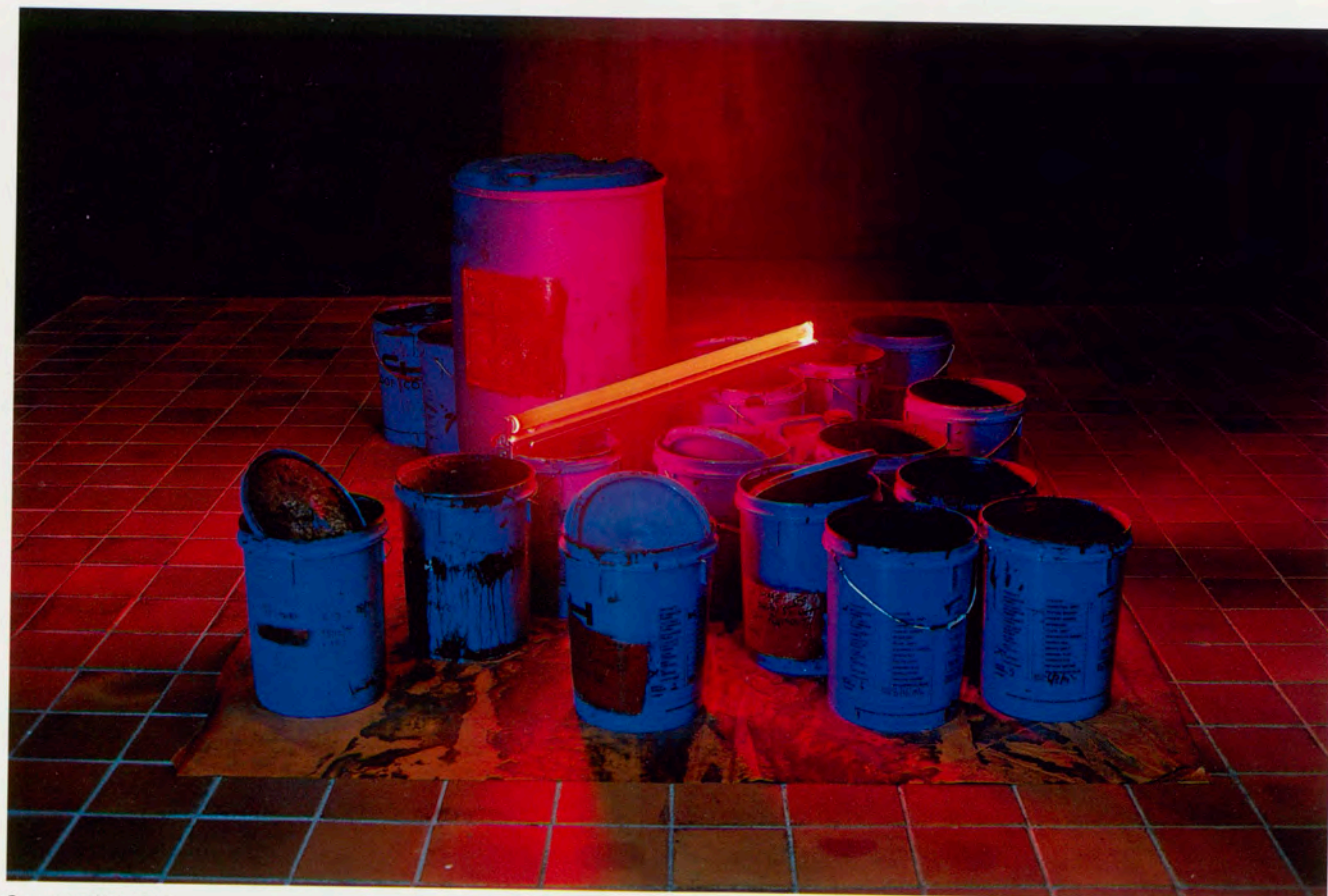
occupied the corner niches), the eight wall panels with their jutting-out bicycle parts (hung on the short walls either side of the niches) and the central, free-standing, high-mounted bicycle, plus the freshness of all the other contributing elements, such as the streamer-units (hung from the dome's drum), appeared both disarmingly relevant and, owing to the geometry of their spatial arrangement, satisfyingly complete. What boosted this sense of unity was the way shapes echoed shapes both within the installation components and of the main surrounding architectural features.

Late in 1986, as a means of asserting his physical independence from the help needed in assembling his larger creations, Driver began his snip and paste paper collages¹¹ (other materials came later). Initially images cut from magazines and billboard posters were his main sources, but recently video shops have provided images to match those issues that concern him. *Warriors* (1988-93) became a series of collages with a typical Driver twist in its theme. It started with portraits of personalities seen as benign fighters, including Jack Nicholson, Picasso, Madonna and Sandra Coney; it continued with images suggestive of a warrior's ambivalence; then, in the manner of Dr Jekyll transformed into Mr Hyde, the warrior's aggression switched to endangered creatures such as the giant gorilla and our own tuatara fighting for their lives.

For the first six years of the 1990s the circle permeated Driver's work, variously as a form, a shape, an image and a motif. As a set feature it entered without artistic pretensions as the tyre, then more deliberately as a form in the *Small Tondo* pieces. The bases for these works were the ends of discarded plastic drums or similar containers. They made an ideal backing for a variety of ready-made objects that often revisited past interests: tools and other implements, toys, gloves, elephants, as well as pieces of printed matter, reflective sheet-metal or plastic, even a thin red plastic imitation typewriter. The *Large Tondo* pieces began when Driver acquired an assortment of round, wooden sides off old cable drums. Driver utilised the natural colour of weathered wood and existing stencilled and hand-painted words and numbers to enhance the inherent qualities of a multitude of found objects he attached to these surfaces, as can be witnessed in *Tooled Diptych* (1996). Sometimes the circular shape left the wall to become a mat for an assembly of objects, as in *Encampment* (1993) in which a stuffed pheasant nests above its surroundings.



World of Dark 1987
(from the Warrior series)
collection the artist



Regeneration 1995
installation Govett-Brewster Art
Gallery, New Plymouth

Between the two *Tondo* groups Driver tackled the possibilities offered by empty, used paint tins (or buckets). These, the *Potted Paint* series, continued to emphasise the circular motif, but while some individual works carried a touch of magic, as in, for example, *Regeneration* (1995) with its glowing fluorescent light, the rigidity of the empty paint cans often hampered the play of his fantasy.

As a result of being asked to spruce up his 1966 mural at New Plymouth Airport, Driver's early interest in aeroplanes was rekindled. The *Circular Planes* began in 1993, thus continuing with the *Tondo* format. Again he used cable-reel sides, though those with less interestingly weathered surfaces were freshly painted. With the planes, Driver's resourcefulness again soared with visual similes looping ingeniously around suggested reality or playfulness. In works such as *Various Planes* and *Sliding Planes* (both 1994), the slats that cross and criss-cross the circular space stand in for flight-paths, navigational bearings or airstrips, while their layout can also suggest flight or control-functions operating at different altitudes, a fact played upon in the punning titles. In many of these works, such as *Blue Planes* (1993), the aircraft are richly coloured or fly on sunset clouds. Later works, such as *Cornered Planes* (1995) with its dog-fighting aeroplanes, escaped the circular arena to take on the square or rectangle as their staging space before the artist finally grounded his aircraft.

Although Driver's artworks jostle with ideas, what most stirs us when viewing his artworks is their ability to trigger feelings that are exceptionally varied in range, resonance and nuance. But because of this directness, some viewers have difficulties taking in what the artist is on about. Driver has said: "I want to place in an exaggerated context things normally in an everyday range of vision."¹² What Driver specifies as "exaggerated context" can often be seen as bizarre, even repugnant by some. The raw emotional power triggered by some artworks can bring on an unsettling reaction. If the bizarre undercurrents in some of Driver's imagery can raise a disturbing response, this reaction is often countered by his puns, or alternatively his quirky humour and his ease of touch.



Blue Planes 1993
collection the artist/ Dick Bett
Gallery, Hobart

- 1 Lynn Chadwick, an English sculptor who represented Great Britain at the Venice Biennale in 1952 and 1956 (when he won the International Sculpture Prize) had five works in the *Recent British Sculpture* exhibition which toured New Zealand in 1962. Driver saw this exhibition when on a visit to Auckland.
- 2 Interestingly, despite contrary suggestions, Driver cannot recall seeing any piece by Rauschenberg.

- 3 *Zing*, which is Driver's own title, was exhibited by Peter McLeavey as *Saracen*. Another work, *Zither* (1968), was also a McLeavey title, but although Driver agreed to it at the time, he thinks it conveys an old world feeling rather than his intended implication of urban bustle.
- 4 *Don Driver: A Survey of His Life and Works*, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 1979, p 17. In this same publication there are discrepancies between what Driver is reported as saying and Petar Vuletic's quoted article. For instance, he has Rauschenberg among the artists whose work Driver saw in America (p 13), and he refers to the aircraft parts as having an urban connotation, whereas Driver places them in an open landscape (p 15).
- 5 Several of these works exist only as maquettes. One large untitled work, constructed in 1972 (which is about two years later than the rest) and formerly sited in the courtyard of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, shared similar characteristics to those mentioned.
- 6 This work was reorganised to become *Dimension No.1*.
- 7 I have included with *Painted Relief* works of similar format, such as *Horizontal* (1970) and *Pink and Red Relief* (1974). [Author's note]
- 8 After Driver's serious stroke in February 1976, his employment of sewing machinists increased as he adapted to this new situation. Although he was physically slowed, and suddenly reliant on friends for assistance, the line of work he had already begun was quite manageable once he had recovered from the worst effects of the stroke.
- 9 *Don Driver: A survey of his life and works*, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 1979, p 52.
- 10 Through a misunderstanding, this installation has incorrectly become known as *Burnt Trees*.
- 11 (See also note 8.) It was to reassert his former physical independence that he turned to the smaller scale, mainly paper collages in 1986, for here was a medium that allowed its parts to be easily moved around until satisfactorily assembled.
- 12 Quoted in notes by Joyce and Don Driver in response to questions put to them by Gordon H. Brown in August 1997.

Equivalents: substitution and subterfuge in the art of Don Driver

John Hurrell

I work totally for myself. If you think of working for other people you never get anywhere.

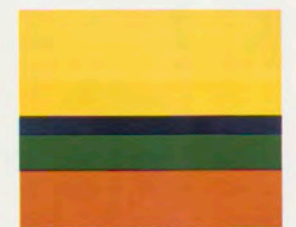
Don Driver

The mercurial nature of Don Driver's practice is reflected in the variable positions he has taken in his artist's statements or interviews. Vacillating between candour and reticence, what he has not said has been just as startling as what he has said, particularly about place.

When talking about living in his home province of Taranaki, Driver has stressed its practical advantages and the ease with which he can get the materials he likes. Yet he has not expressed the affection for place that might be expected from an artist who has put regionalist titles like 'Taranaki' to some works. He has enthused about the pleasure of working in New Plymouth, but also expressed an indifference, even antipathy, to the area and its public. The audience he *has* been mindful of has been the national 'art establishment' which has supported him.

Driver's descriptions of his own working processes and intentions have tended to match the kind of practice referred to. In 1972 he won the Benson and Hedges Award with a group of austere minimalist panels butted together within a rectangle. Of *Painted Relief No.11* he adopted a classic formalist stance when he said he did not want the viewer to experience associations, only to enjoy the painting as an object looked at for qualities within itself.¹ Ten years later, when referring to *Ritual* and its free-standing demonic figures, he took a different position. The flier for the exhibition, based on interviews with the artist, asked the viewer to think not only about "visual links and contrasts," but also to consider its "links through association of objects."²

Ritual was typical of a large part of Driver's work which, since the mid-sixties, had been in the collage/assemblage tradition pioneered by the Cubists, expanded by Kurt Schwitters, then developed by Robert Rauschenberg and others. From the mid-seventies Driver's practice began to include ambiguous juxtapositions that encouraged a type of absurdist or surreal narrative. By the end of the decade his combinations of objects and



Painted Relief No. 11 1972
collection Robert McDougall Art
Gallery, Christchurch

materials were being perceived as readable,³ even sensationally or extravagantly so.⁴ The usual interpretation of these works was that they contained local or national signs of place,⁵ with Driver being praised for using locally acquired materials in an affirmative way within an internationalist sensibility.

In one illuminating interview, Driver elaborated on how he viewed his own internationalism by discussing how he used ideas based on art from overseas. He stated that he was motivated not by "an idea to copy but to make an equivalent from materials around me."⁶ The word "equivalent" seems to suggest here a substitution for an overseas artwork that had been an initial stimulus. Such a work prodded him into searching for visual and sculptural formal qualities that would arouse similar emotional and visceral sensations in his audience. He was driven, he said, by a "feeling" or "urge", so that he worked quickly and "tried to get an exciting mixture of objects in different colours and forms and to make them unexpected".

Driver has made these unexpected equivalents with relish, often delighting in ambiguous and conflicting meanings. Despite his work being perceived as linked through its materials to his local environment, very few of these materials are, in isolation, uniquely of the place called 'Taranaki.' When combined with other apparently 'local' materials, however, they often provide a suggestive ambience that alludes to his home community.

Many of the specific items Driver has used can also be found in (or indeed come from) distant countries like Canada or South Africa, or from other New Zealand provinces. This even includes the Barton's Garnet bags which he has often used in works such as *Large Cross* (1977) and *Barton's Garnet* (1978) and which, in fact, come from North Green, New York. It is their collective presence that to some speaks 'Taranaki.' Their usage in this place, not their origins, is what makes them distinctive.

The ubiquity of an object defines its meaning in a community, and so Driver's use of unanticipated juxtapositions has enabled him to mischievously confound expectations. When he incorporated common rural implements like pitchforks in sculptures such as *Ritual*, their presence was seen as sinister and provocative, and "nothing to do with the New Zealand farmer".⁷ This denial was created by the totem-like figures which held them, exposing conspicuously large pudenda and setting up a direct conflict of values. Driver's use of pitchforks and animal skulls was clearly different from the affirmative approach shown by, say, American regionalist painters like Grant Wood and Georgia O'Keefe. The locally acquired, rural materials lured viewers in, only to spring unanticipated and shocking meanings upon them.

Like his apparently recycled and locally produced objects, Driver's titles can serve as decoys. The title *Mid-west* refers to the first work he made after his trip to North America

in 1965, and suggests rural New Zealand, particularly Taranaki in the mid-west of the North Island. Keep that title, but hide the *real* story of its inspiration – his journey through the American midwest – and the work becomes an emblem for Taranaki, but one that is in fact an ersatz sign, a fake heraldic 'equivalent' for the province.

During that North American trip, Driver saw at first-hand not only a diverse range of Western works in various public and private collections, but also many works from Asia and Africa. Already an enthusiastic admirer, he began a collection of Hindu and Buddhist bronzes. Driver is passionate too about African and New Guinea carving, which he doesn't collect for reasons of cost. This passion is reflected in the fetishistic forms of his sculptures and collages, which often contain or depict objects rich in emotively potent associations.

Driver's fetish sculptures are not to be confused with his vertical totem works, such as *Metal Bone Plastic* (1981), which consist of stacked-up objects and which are clearly based on figure forms. With his fetish works, however, he has suspended articles similar to the display of West African 'voodoo' dolls and the wax votive body parts on the walls of Catholic and Hindu shrines – as in *Nineteen Tools and Birds* (c.1985) or *Two Dolls* (c.1978), for example. Others, like *Medley* (1987), reference the hanging of items from nails or blades on Central African 'fetish sculptures,' sometimes called 'power figures'. His collages contain equally loaded images, such as body parts or guns. These cut-out, photographed images, like the dangling objects in his assemblages, seem to possess magic or power.

'Equivalents' inspired by Asian bronzes are less obvious. Although there are occasional similarities between his animal/human hybrids and certain Hindu or Buddhist gods or demons, it is more his use of specific forms and compositional devices that is of interest. These correlate with, or run parallel to, some of the fundamental symbols of Hinduism that stand for reincarnation and the endless recycling of lives. Doctrines such as samsara seem to be alluded to, the karmic process by which actions during one's current life inevitably affect the quality of lives to come.

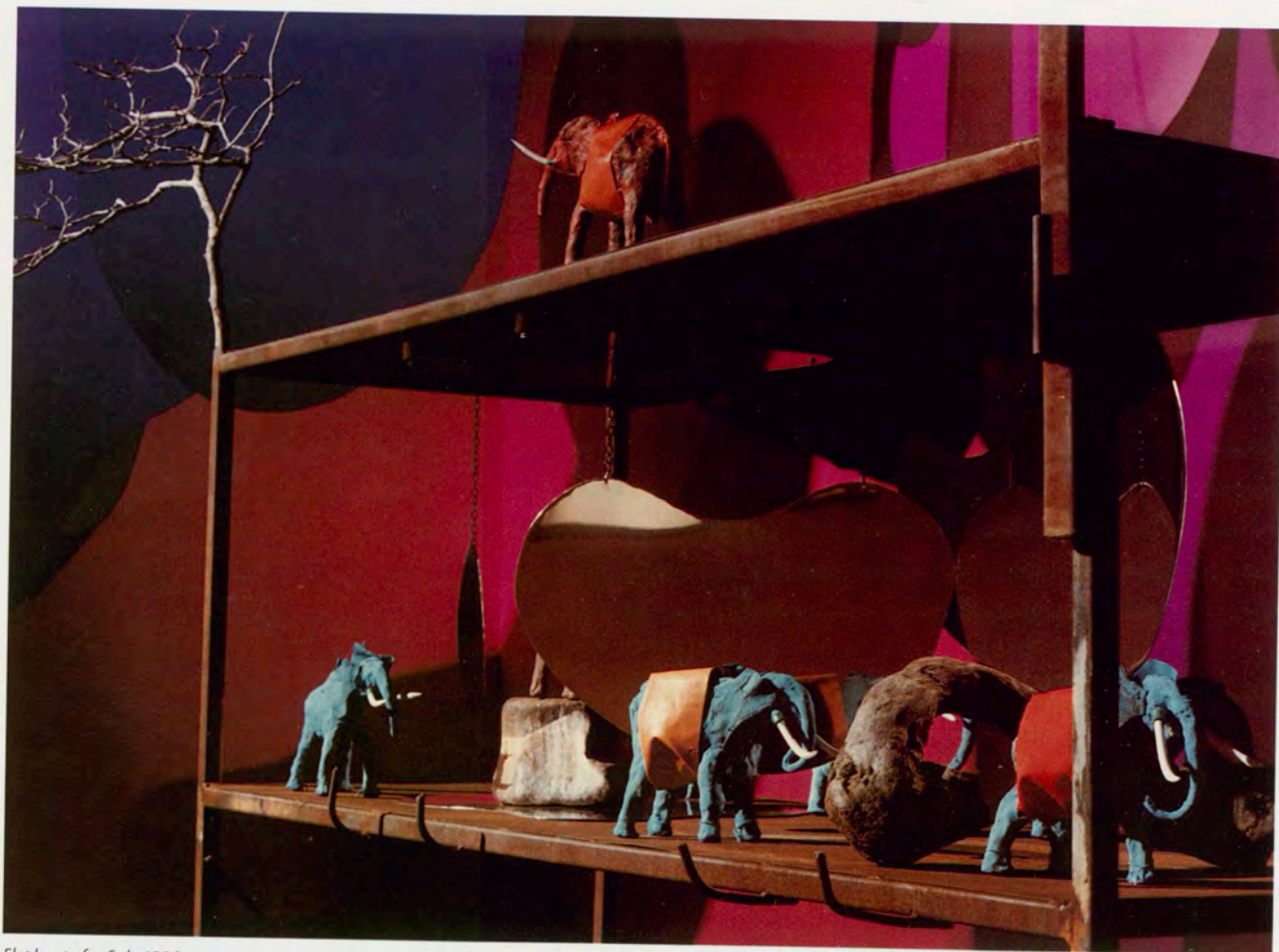
In this reading, the many wheels and circles in Driver's compositions take on an unanticipated significance, as does his use of objects that serve as containers. Whether sacks, plastic drums or grass clipping catchers, his containers can be interpreted as symbols for soul-bearing bodies; so also can coverings for the body like skins or articles of clothing, extensions of the body such as tools and methods of transport such as planes or bicycles.



Large Cross 1977
collection Govett-Brewster Art
Gallery, New Plymouth



Bicycles 1986-87
(installation detail)
Sarjeant Gallery Wanganui



Elephants for Sale 1986
(installation detail)
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery,
New Plymouth

This Hindu or Buddhist interpretation provides a conceptual role for the placement of Driver's chosen objects within certain compositions, particularly those that present horizontal systems of looping. Continuums of fetish-like objects hanging on racks, stands or tarpaulins seem to have their edges or ends arbitrarily cut off. Specific examples, such as *Produce* (1982) and *Nineteen Tools and Birds*, can be understood as sequences of births and deaths, or lives caught up in perpetual toil.

Other works seem to allude to an individual's aspirations for salvation and release. Driver's *Ladder works* (1978), his *Red Chair and Table* (1978) and *High Chair* (1978) fit into this category, as do sculptures and wall-hangings with titles like *With Spirit* (1978) and *Flyaway* (1969). Even prams take on added significance, with parabolic tubed 'lives' springing out of them, as with *Yellow Tentacle Pram* (1980), or incessant suffering embodied in the jawed *Babysnatcher* (1978).

While Driver has never expressed any interest in being a symbolic artist – in fact he vehemently denies it⁸ – perhaps by thinking about certain types of Hindu or Buddhist

art, by enjoying their images, myths or narratives, he has absorbed aspects of their doctrinal content. If so, the resulting 'formalist' equivalents are not only rich in associations, but also unconscious similes for cosmic processes.

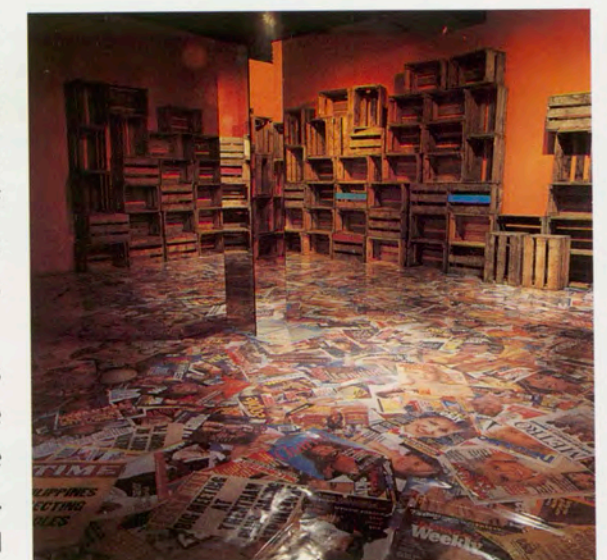
Some of these apparently unconscious similes are non-formal in nature. In 1986 Driver positioned brightly coloured clay elephants on two shelves of scaffolding as part of an installation at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, *Elephants for Sale*. The title came from a set of posters selling computers. Just as computers provide easy access to information, so do elephants provide a pathway free of obstacles, through their ability to lift up and move fallen tree trunks.

There is a direct connection between the two access processes in the figure of Ganesh. Ganesh is a popular Hindu deity with an elephant's head on a man's body. As the god of wisdom and good fortune, he clears away obstacles to knowledge. The elephants on the scaffolding can be read as standing between heaven and earth, but Ganesh provides the synthesis which links them. He is able to unite opposites in Hindu cosmology such as God and man. He is the one who can remove ignorance and help all seekers realise that fundamental unity.

This theme of a fundamental unity can also be read into Driver's exhibition *Hangings and Borrowed Work*, at the Dowse Art Museum in 1983, where individual works were presented in mass. As Jim and Mary Barr observed, "by hanging his own works so densely, Driver appears to be trying to break down efforts to read them as isolated statements".⁹ Such holism was even more pronounced in his *Boxes* installation (1988), where a continuous wall-to-wall collage of predominantly women's faces covered the Wellington City Art Gallery floor, undifferentiated except for stacks of wooden boxes positioned against the walls, and mirrors encasing a column.

Boxes was rich in interpretative possibilities. Whilst its images of women on the floor and its seemingly provocative title attracted irate feminist criticism,¹⁰ this installation can be understood as a comment on the limitations of categorisation. It can also be seen as an espousal of monism, where individual selves are simply part of an ultimate, impersonal reality.

The polarising effect of *Boxes* on its audience was a consequence which seems at odds with the notion of a shared regional sensibility that many art viewers assume Driver stands for. Yet such a sensibility must always imply a separation from those outside the local community who do not belong. In Driver's case, it was these very "outsiders" who provided the original models for his "equivalents" in the first place.



Boxes 1988
(installation detail)
Wellington City Art Gallery

Within Driver's work lies this deep ambivalence: an internationalist and universalist ethos mixed in with values from regionalist and non-Western art sources. The resulting sensibility allows his work to oscillate between aesthetic delectation and black humour, serene contemplation and overt manipulation of primal fears. Driver's 'New Zealand' or 'Taranaki' equivalents are, however, more than just substitutes. As generators of "unexpected" emotion that replace overseas models, they also provide a sheltering cover from under which he can sharpen and focus a kind of beam on the community. His beguiling and sensual objects can serve as corrosive irritants, providing his audience with the most worrisome of pleasures.

1 "Top painting 'Not for average man'", *New Zealand Herald*, June 9, 1972, p 3.

2 *Don Driver: Ritual*, National Art Gallery, June/July 1983.

3 Gordon Brown, "Admirable use of the discarded", *The Daily News*, New Plymouth, July 7, 1979.

4 Hugh Coley, "Lost and found", *New Zealand Listener*, September 23, 1989, p 71.

5 These are common viewpoints. Examples of each from *The Christchurch Star* include John Coley's "Don Driver turns grot into art", December 12, 1979, and Brett Riley's "Don Driver – skin deep," September 19, 1984.

6 Alex Pointon, "Happy to be an individualist," *Hawkes Bay Herald-Tribune*, May 4, 1985.

7 Elizabeth Smither, "Dolls and the unknown," *New Zealand Listener* July 9, 1983, p 42.

8 In response to my discussion of his interest in Asian bronzes in this essay, Driver has said, "It is the mystery and the form which grabs me... I like the legends – the adventures of these characters...(but) my reading has not covered the 'karmic process'."

9 Jim and Mary Barr, "All Systems Go," *The Sculptural Installations of Don Driver 1982 - 1988*, Wellington City Art Gallery, 1988, p 5.

10 Most criticism came from a Wellington group, *Women Against Pornography*. In reply, Driver claimed his work was in fact a critique of the objectification of women.

Cut to pieces: Don Driver's abstraction

Allan Smith

It was worse than the twice-a-year showing at Fennelly's dressworks, he said. It was more terrible than a Baptist Convention. Ten thousand men came rushing down to the stormy shore carrying bolts of drape material, cages full of parakeets, tomato-and-tangerine-coloured sport coats, and lime-coloured shoes.

Ray Bradbury¹

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

Don Driver²

Two men work together. A lamb is grabbed and held by one man. The other lifts his sharp knife; one slash and the tail is off; the ear is split with the station mark; then quick as a thought the castration is performed by the shepherd's teeth. Blood spurts everywhere; the animal struggles convulsively; he is released, and the operator spits his mouthful into a billy and takes on the next. ... Savage and brutal, ay? The docker's teeth are joined in and tear the living flesh so that there may be prime New Zealand mutton.

Jean Devanny³

Today, looking at the range of Don Driver's unorthodox takes on the languages of modern abstraction, I am impressed most of all by two things: first, how fresh and strange the best of these works look; second, how colour and materiality are equally important to them. Driver has invented numerous signature formats which splice the rhetoric of abstraction with the inert banality of found materials. He reanimates clichés of abstraction and makes the ordinary world look exotic; two Dayglo bath mats on a cotton blanket appear momentarily like Rothkoesque colour bars floating in a lemon mist. Driver's need to collect and juxtapose materials and things through his art is matched only by his appetite for the shapes and moods of colour. Psychedelic, mellow, brutal, raucous, astringent, tropical, broody and electric by turns, Driver's indecorous colour combinations

kick-start almost all of his work. Even the most conventional abstract works, such as his generic striped relief paintings, have an edgy tension to their intervals and colour chords, and a combination of grace and awkwardness.

Don Driver is clearly no pure abstractionist. If we isolate the hard-edge geometric painted panel series from the rest of his output, we can say he has produced some relatively rigorous abstract works. These, "carefully laid out pieces";⁴ as he calls them, represent the 'purist' end of a truly eccentric spectrum of abstract and semi-abstract modes within which Driver has operated. From the mid sixties to the late eighties, which is the time-

frame I want to concentrate on, Driver produced a varied oeuvre of what could be called hybrid abstraction. However, given that the primary context of Driver's abstract work is all the rest of his output – which includes grotesque, surrealist-based, figurative sculptural assemblage and a range of installation work – the diversity within the abstraction only repeats the restless diversity of the total practice. The peculiar intensity and idiosyncratic mien of his abstract works owe much to the mixed nature of the seed bed out of which they grow.

Shortly after his return from America in 1965, Driver produced a number of constructed assemblage paintings which combined shallow box-like components with geometric divisions or stripes in lurid candy colours. *La Guardia 2* (1966) and *Relief Red/Pink* (1968) are two fine examples. These works look both matter-of-fact and like precious objects which contain a mystery or serve secret functions. The former work includes a black plastic pipe with fittings, which links two corners of the central box; and the latter a small compartment with bright pink and green balls. The seductive dreaminess of the enamelled colour schemes, the refracted light from pitted aluminium sheet or slivers of

translucent plastic, and the complicated mapping of geometric zones add up to something rich and strange. Unlikely as it may sound, they combine associations of lost fairground magic paraphernalia as Joseph Cornell or Ray Bradbury might interpret them, with the intractable physicality of Donald Judd's 'specific objects', in limbo between sculpture and painting.

Simpler and more emphatically coloured works came next, in 1968, using diagonally placed sections of machine-grooved wood set off against flat areas of painted canvas. The routed timber strips look like off-cuts from the world of architectural detailing and so, while they serve to structure what Driver called a "purely abstract work", they carry mixed associations of interior design and mural work. These painted reliefs are, in fact, like

distillations or abbreviations of the language of construction used in Driver's collaged metal mural of 1967 for the McKechnie Brothers company. As was the practice in much sixties and seventies mural design around the world, cross-sections and off-cuts of extruded light industrial materials were arranged to form a landscape of dense pattern and texture. Such murals allowed the surfaces and materials of the modern world to operate as a background – decorative Muzak. The reflective surfaces of the McKechnie mural tell of a naively optimistic materialism at home with the new and shiny face of the technological society; by comparison the grooved wood has a more folksy and natural aura. There is humour in paintings such as *Saracen* (also known as *Zing*) and *Zodiac*, in which connotations of the 'down-home' and hand-crafted are jolted into a new register with American-style hot colours and geometric simplicity.

Not surprisingly, the critic Petar Vuletic, who wrote as New Zealand's doctrinaire Greenbergian formalist in the seventies, warmly approved of the painted panel series produced between 1971 and 1974. Vuletic noted their "exceedingly 'deadpan' format," their "even, textureless fields" of colour and the "stepped arrangement" of their individually abutted canvas units. For the Auckland City Art Gallery's *Large Paintings* exhibition of February, 1971, Driver had assembled his contribution painting from five separate panels joined together. The panel series that followed accentuated the distinctness of the panels by setting some back and slightly projecting others. At first these works were all paint on canvas, later they incorporated stainless steel and aluminium sections which further enriched their tightly constructed materiality. The impact of the big, clean-cut, coloured shapes of late modern American painting has been obvious in Driver's work ever since his trip to the United States in 1965. With a nod in the direction of artists like Ellsworth Kelly and Kenneth Noland, Driver's panel series, his versions of up-beat American stripe painting, fulfil an ambition from this trip: "From first impressions of New York. I wanted to make a colourful relief suggesting garishness and glitter but in a formalised way overall."⁵

Although the panel ensembles are governed by an aesthetic of pristine rigour, the abruptness of their juxtapositions and a slight clunkiness in the scaling of part to part denote a rankling independence of separate elements in the midst of euphoric colour coordination. The combination of dislocated parts and intense colour is given a different twist through Driver's variations of the unstretched canvas format, which he has favoured since consciously abandoning the rigid aesthetic of the panel works in the mid seventies. Driver has said that his real interest is in different forms of "actual textural depth";⁶ rather than flat surfaces. The open-ended form of the wall-hanging-cum-banner allows each element to breathe in real space; its pictorialism is always undermined by its haptic qualities.

What Driver does with his wall hangings is, in fact, take up the possibilities already tested out in 1967, through *Relief with Pleats*. This work is more truly paradigmatic of Driver's approach to abstraction than are the later panel reliefs. *Relief with Pleats* is assembled



La Guardia 2 1966
collection Joyce Driver and
Justine Driver

from differently coloured strips of leather, suede, canvas and vinyl stacked up in horizontal bands; creases, puckers, overlaps and wrapping providing an assertive, textural depth. The use of stitching and cut strips of material gives added density and body to the work. Although Driver is working with used and damaged materials here, there is not the sort of mellow patina, the harmonising varnish or sense of old-world depth which blends elements together in a Tàpies, or even a Rauschenberg. More often than not, Driver jams colours, materials and associations together with similar effect to the infamous lines which start Ronald Hugh Morrieson's novel *The Scarecrow*: "The same week our fowls were stolen, Daphne Moran had her throat cut."⁷

At first glance, the disturbing psychology that animates many of Driver's composite figure sculptures – whether we consider the pseudo-mythic, sado-eroticism of the kewpie dolls with secateurs for genitals and goat skull heads, or the frog with a voodoo mask and plastic fruit phallus – seems to be absent from the wall-hangings. A second look shows that a less direct, though equally insistent language of psychic and physical violence and trauma keeps surfacing in these works as well.

Commenting on a 1980 work, *Big Relief*, made from tarpaulins and plastic sheets sewn together, Driver writes: "Red - Red - Red!! The gash was already there when I obtained the tarpaulin and I felt it was very appropriate to leave it."⁸ There are numerous gashes, cuts and incisions in the wall hangings. The most dramatic examples of this are in the *Skin Pieces* series of the mid eighties, which often uses animal hides split down the middle with a bailing hook on a strap sewn into the gap which bleeds in multi-colour. The hectic brilliance of coloured plastic sheeting stitched together in these works fuses a heightened sensuality with fear of irrational destructiveness. Another type of excoriated surface appears in the Duraband panels of 1987. The bristling, synthetic, feral strips of curling plastic flay the brightly coloured grounds into a shimmering light. The works, which incorporate rows of variously coloured and stained fabric strips sewn to canvas, such as *Pacific Salt*, may also be read as samples collated for forensic evidence of some indeterminable crime, their many cut-up pieces resembling the fragments of a *corps morcellé*.

Commentators have often responded to the presence of hooks, pitchforks, scythes and saws in Driver's work as tokens of violence and menace. Reviewing Driver's work in 1983, Bridie Lonie found that "the tools bring with them a sense of danger. There is an explicit link between the fertility of land and people."⁹ In the same year Avenal McKinnon said these farm implements "belong to the NZ pastoral environment, yet when juxtaposed with red-stained sacks labelled 'meal and bone' or puncturing a red velvet cushion they carry associations of violence, even death."¹⁰ In *Huttons Skin and Bone*, possum skins are laid out over meal sacks, triggering a chain of associations linking blood, land, food, roadkill, and the carrying or drowning of animals in sacks. Driver himself allows that a blood and bone sack lining a pocket made from sheep and cow skin is "quite horrible really."¹¹



Bicycles 1986-87
(installation detail) Sarjeant
Gallery, Wanganui

In a work such as *Rites*, the off-cuts of silver-grey tarpaulin next to the red dress and sticks with rams' horns attached look like the aftermath of some violent dismemberment, some sort of archaic castration scenario. The garishness of the colour patches only heightens the sense of what Mario Perniola would call a Dionysiac inebriation. As opposed to the fervent serenities and harmonies of the Apollonian tradition, the Dionysian is a drive for dynamism, movement and delirium: "for the *sparagmós*, the tearing to pieces, the dismemberment of reality, its dissolution."¹² Perniola stresses how abstraction is a form of expressionism based on aesthetics of disconnection and alienation from, rather than an aesthetic of empathic reconciliation with, the natural world.¹³ If the panel relief series approaches an Apollonian aesthetic, then the pierced, patched and stitched loose hangings are taken up with a more Dionysian materiality.

Though works such as *Soft Hanging* (1976), *Two* and *Barton's Garnet* (1978) do not so readily evoke imagined scenes of violence, they are certainly volatile in terms of their bristling textures and discordant colours, and in their collaging of the disparate languages of domestic 'bad' taste, light industrial packaging, rural produce and high abstract painting formats. Driver's moves between registers of high formality, mock seriousness, bucolic fecundity, pop lyricism and ritualised violence map out a distinctively personal interpretation of visual modernism rooted in small-town New Zealand culture of the sixties and seventies. However, the ongoing significance of Driver's art, with its undeniable currency in terms of contemporary practice, does not only depend on his ability to frame that combination of banality, strangeness and spiky emotionalism which much New Zealand art, fiction and film have explored as essentially 'Kiwi'. It is clear now that aspects of Driver's rhetoric of colour and materiality also have a lot in common with the art of much younger artists, here and elsewhere, currently deconstructing and reanimating the hoary traditions of modern abstraction. The way that Driver imposes an almost austere hierarchy on an assortment of discarded fabrics in *Relief with Pleats*, or moves between playful irreverence and formal elegance in *Soft Hanging*, shows him completely at home with a form of impure abstraction which only became widespread in the eighties. The reconstitution of the formats, materials and colour language of modernist abstraction has become a major paradigm in recent art internationally. If, for instance, we consider Julian Dashper's interest in found abstraction or paintings made



Tooled Skin Pocket 1982
collection the artist

without paint, Jessica Stockholder's manic textures and colouristic profusion, and Dale Frank's grandeur of sublime kitsch, it is not hard to envisage an exhibition of these artists together with Driver that would reveal his work as making a distinctive, if restless, contribution to the more impious end of contemporary abstract art.

- 1 Ray Bradbury, "The cold wind and the warm," *I sing the body electric*, Rupert Hart-Davis, London 1970, p 108.
- 2 Don Driver in *Don Driver: a survey of his life and works*, Michael Dunn et al, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, 1979, p 17.
- 3 Jean Devanny, *The Butcher's Shop*, Auckland University Press and Oxford University Press 1981, p 184.
- 4 Don Driver, 1978, in *Don Driver*, p 39.
- 5 Driver, 1978, in *Don Driver*, p 17.
- 6 Ibid, p 30.
- 7 Driver's juggling of the low-key and familiar to bring out their strangeness put another reviewer in mind of Morrieson: "Driver's irruption was a shock. Its rural Kiwi gothic air reminded me, oddly, of Taranaki author Ronald Hugh Morrieson: same mixture of irreverence and exuberance, bizarre humour and small-town sleepiness." (Pam Walker in *The New Zealand Listener*, May 9, 1987, p 41.)
- 8 Driver, quoted in *Don Driver*, 1986 National Art Gallery exhibition notes, unpaginated.
- 9 Bridie Lonie in *Otago Daily Times*, June 30, 1983. Precedents for Driver's use of farm, garden and workbench tools can be found in the work of Jim Dine. However, the sinister air that hovers about Driver's rough-cut saws and pitchforks, suspended in front of American type geometric coloured grounds, is absent in the paintings that Dine made with tools hung off atmospheric, painterly colour fields in the sixties and early seventies. In his *Skin Pieces* works, Driver could also be seen to be taking up a device which Dine used in his paintings of robes bisected by chains with hooks and handles attached; however Driver's bisection has all the force and violence of a chainsaw whizzing through fat and bone on a killing floor.
- 10 Avenal McKinnon in *The Evening Post*, May 12, 1983.
- 11 Driver quoted in review by Terry Snow for *The Auckland Star*, July 5, 1982.
- 12 Mario Perniola, translated by Christopher Woodall, *Enigmas: The Egyptian moment in society and art*, Verso, London and New York 1995, p 137.
- 13 Perniola follows Wilhelm Worringer's classic distinction between 'abstraction' and 'empathy'.



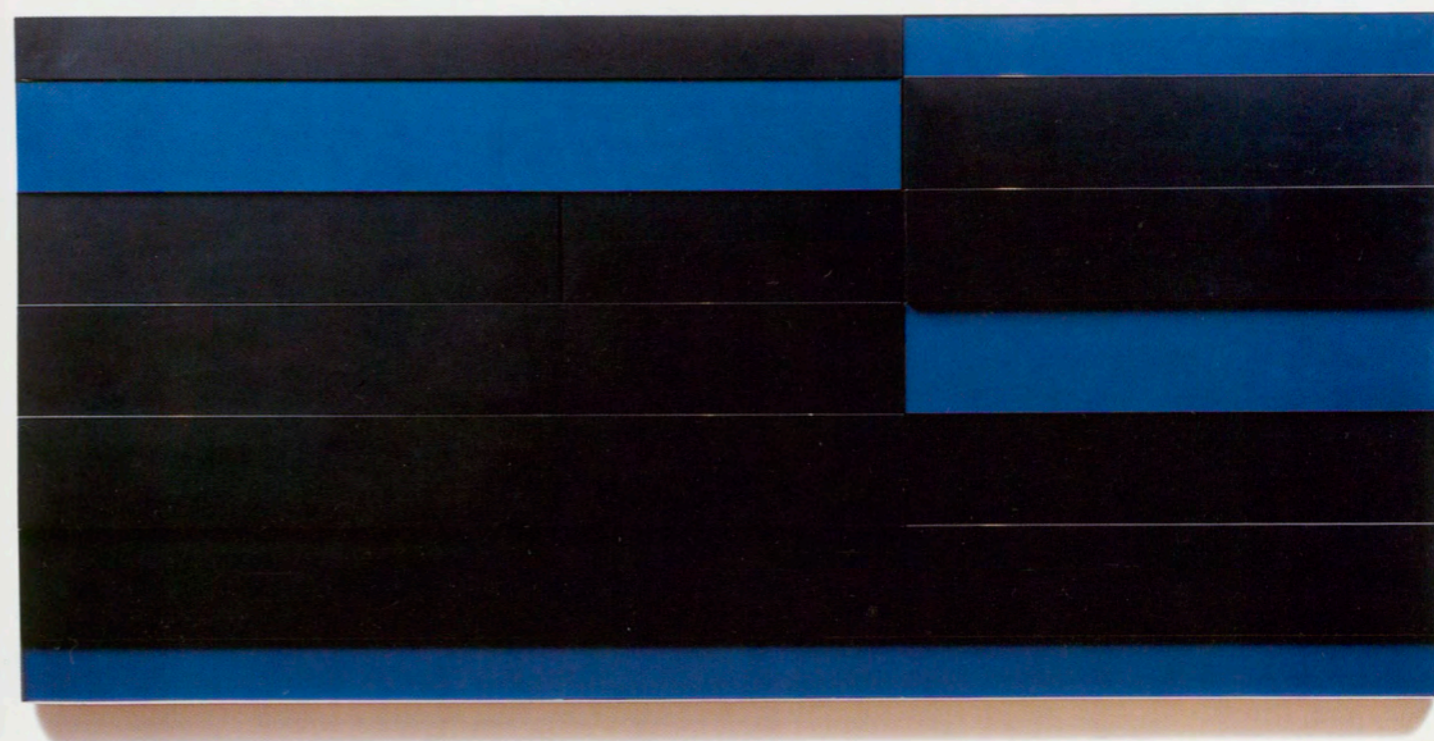
works in the exhibition



Mid-west 1965
 wood, iron, galvanised iron, acrylic, paint, bone
 1857 x 1530 x 280mm
 collection of Keith Adams, New Plymouth
 photograph: Bryan James

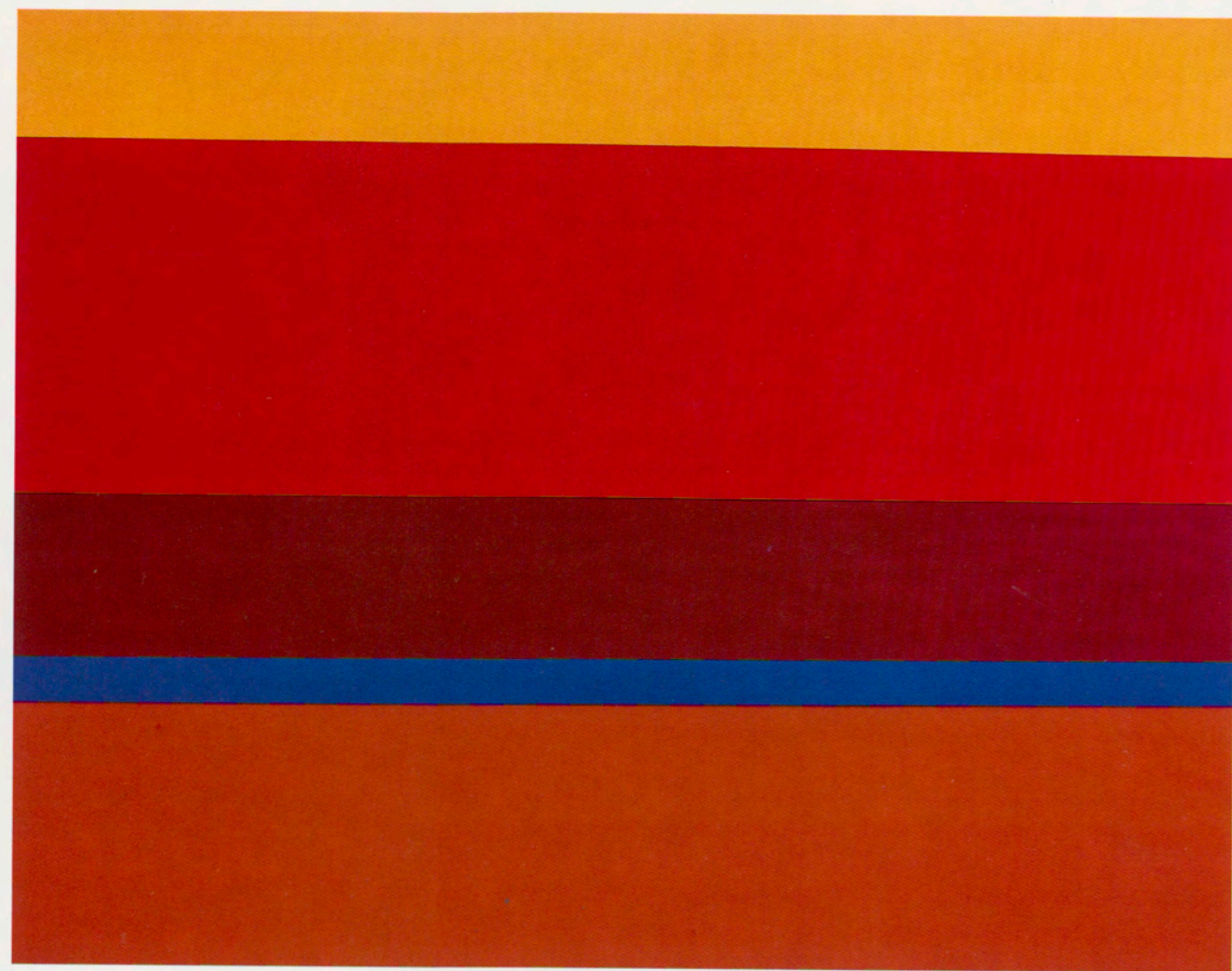


Flyaway 1966-69
 stainless steel, aluminium, lacquer
 734 x 1300 x 540mm
 collection of Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth
 photograph: Bryan James



Sentinel 1967
stainless steel, aluminium, plastic, pvc, laminate
505 x 400 x 390mm
collection of Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth
photograph: Bryan James

Relief No. II 1971-72
aluminium, laquer
1430 x 2960 x 75mm
collection of Auckland Art Gallery Toi O Tamaki



Relief No.10 1972
canvas, acrylic
1455 x 1860 x 65mm
private collection
photograph: Bryan James



Private Cosmos II 1974
corten steel, stainless steel, acrylic sheet, plastic
930 x 930 x 305mm
collection of Auckland Art Gallery Toi O Tamaki



Paddling Pool 1975
 vinyl, plastic, wood, metal
 1875 x 1205 x 280mm
 Jim Barr and Mary Barr collection
 photograph: Bryan James



Blue and Green Pacific 1978
 canvas, plastic, rope
 1785 x 2570 x 53mm
 collection of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa



High chair 1978
wood, cast iron, steel
1978 x 535 x 510mm
collection of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa



Fetish 1978
plastic, metal, fibre, wood, glass,
195 x 275 x 300mm
Jim Barr and Mary Barr collection
photograph: Bryan James



Soft Hanging 1976
acrylic, wool
1925 x 1520mm
collection of Manawatu Art Gallery, on loan from Julie Hanson
photograph: Bryan James



With Spirit 1978
vinyl, wood, metal
2575 x 915 x 400mm
Jim Barr and Mary Barr collection
photograph: Bryan James



Ladder 1978
wood, plywood
2690 x 1962 1225mm
collection of Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt
photograph: Bryan James



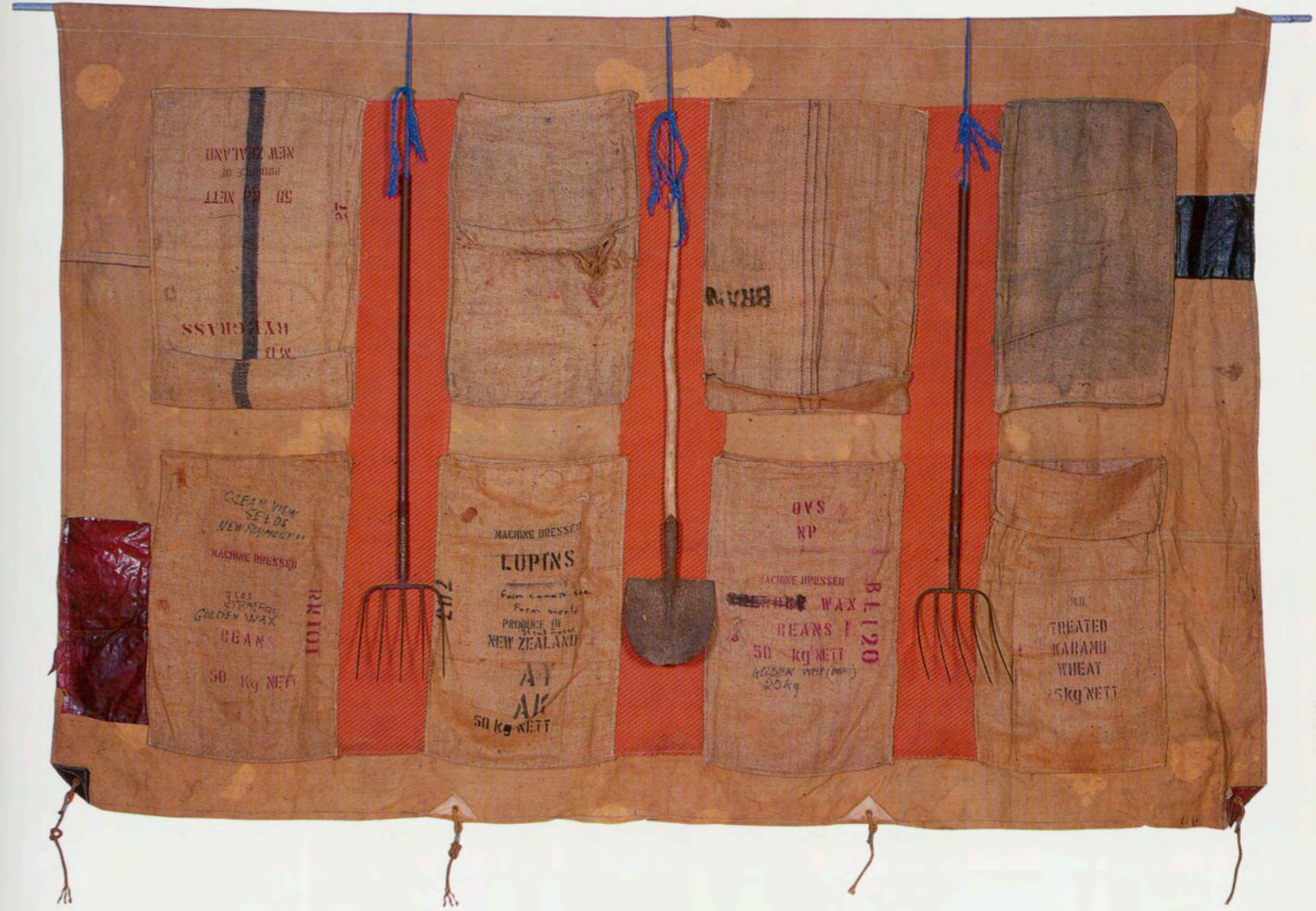
Red Chair and Table 1978
wood, plastic, paint
2660 x 1065 x 710mm
collection of Sarjeant Gallery/Te Whare O Rehua/Whanganui
photograph: Bryan James



Three Ladders 1981
wood, fabric, paint
1800 x 3000 x 905mm
collection of Auckland Art Gallery Toi O Tamaki



Yellow Tentacle Pram 1980
plastic, steel, rubber, oil paint
1700 x 1830 x 1740mm
collection of Dunedin Public Art Gallery
photograph: Bryan James

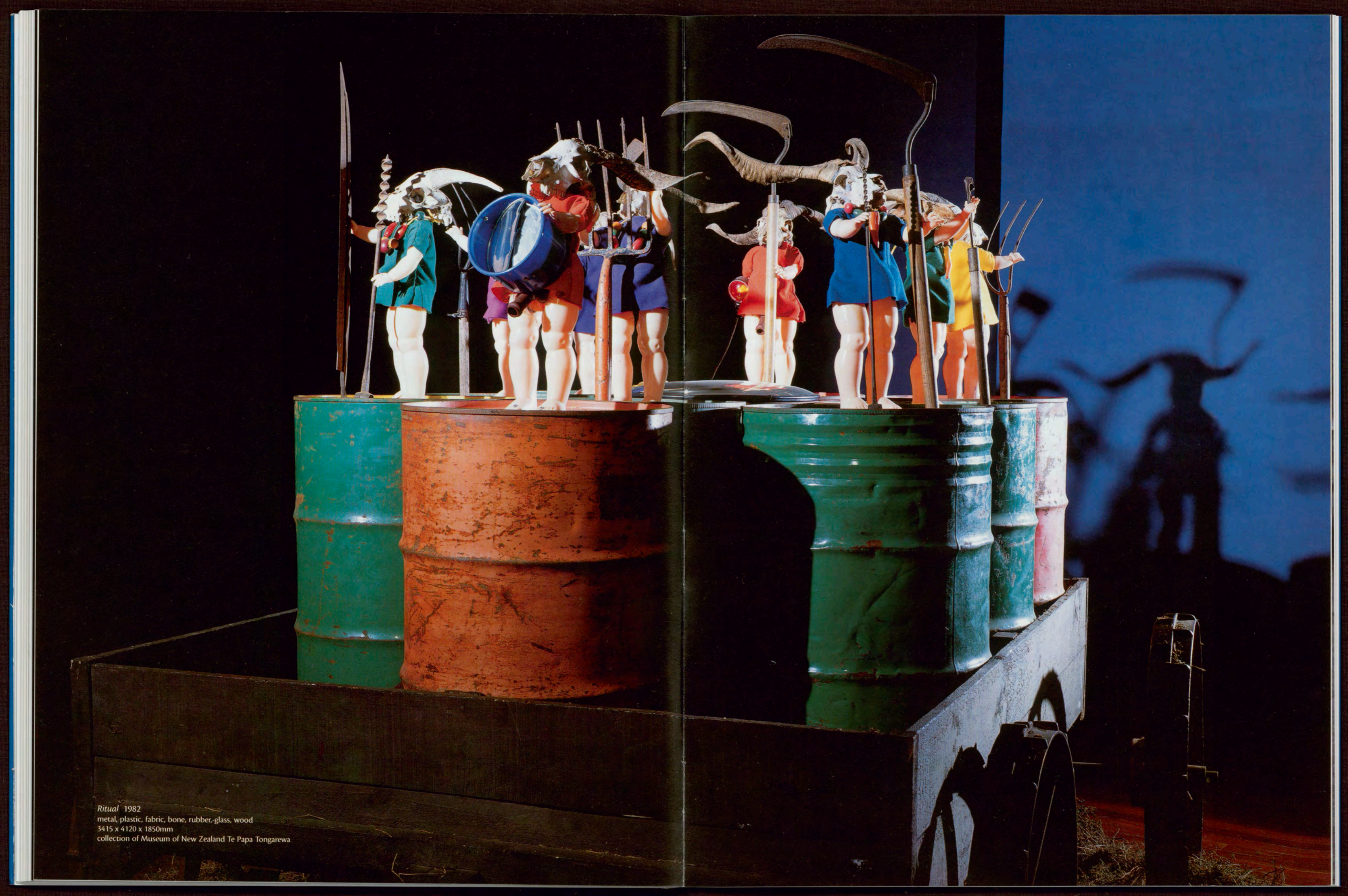


Sugar and Spice 1980
 plastic, steel, hemp, nylon, wood
 1430 x 720 x 590mm
 collection of the artist
 photograph: Bryan James

Beans Lupin and Wheat 1982
 hessian, jute, rope, nylon, wool, steel, wood,
 leather
 2470 x 3700 x 200mm
 collection of the artist/ Dick Bett Gallery Hobart
 photograph: Bryan James



Produce 1982
fabrics, metal, plastic, jute, rubber, wood
2075 x 4600 x 205mm
collection of Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth
photograph: Bryan James



Ritual 1982
metal, plastic, fabric, bone, rubber, glass, wood
3415 x 4120 x 1850mm
collection of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa



Green Skinvested 1984
 PVC, hide, acrylic paint, canvas, nylon, steel
 1600 x 1200 x 140mm
 collection of Sarjeant Art Gallery/Te Whare O Rehua /Whanganui
 photograph: Bryan James



Mellow Yellow 1991
 rubber, nylon cord, rope, wood, acrylic paint, canvas
 1900 x 1200 x 180mm
 private collection, New Plymouth
 photograph: Bryan James



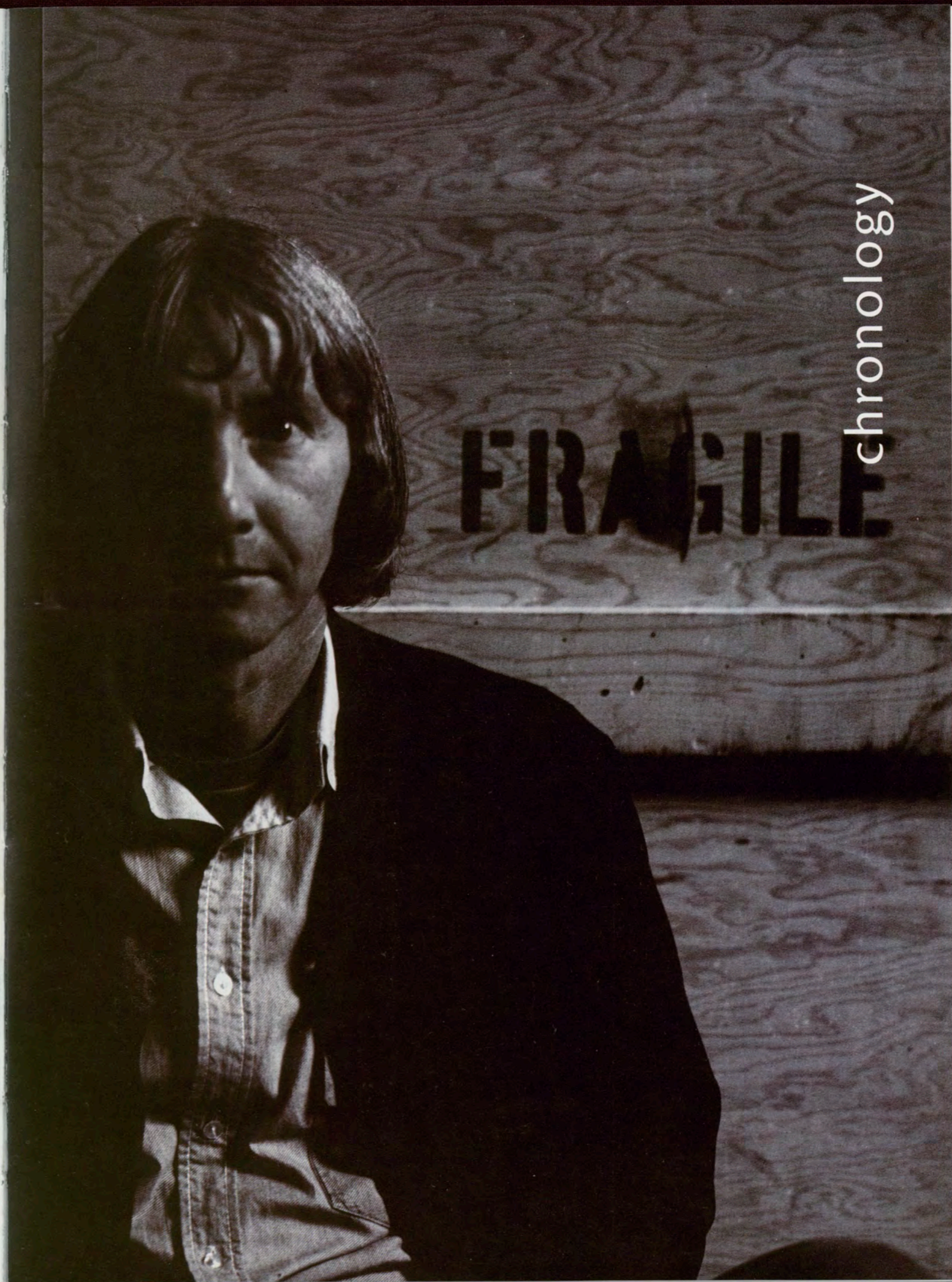
Chain Reaction 1998 (detail)
 paper, ink
 875 x 1025mm
 collection of the artist
 photograph: Bryan James



Joie de Vivre 1998
 paper, ink
 840 x 1175mm
 collection of the artist
 photograph: Bryan James



Target 1997
wood, cardboard, aluminium, plywood, acrylic paint, signboard
1470 x 1160 x 30mm
collection of the artist
photograph: Bryan James



1930

Don Driver is born in Hastings. At the end of 1943, he shifts with his family to New Plymouth and completes his schooling at New Plymouth Boys' High School. There are no art classes as the teacher is away at war.

1945

Begins work with New Plymouth dental technician, Harry Johnson, learning how to mould, shape and cast materials. Takes night classes in drawing from Frank Tet and later in woodwork, welding and pottery. Takes an active interest in magic, complete with "false-bottomed tables and top hat". Later Driver comments, "I was always interested in magic and it followed into my art works through the mystery of the objects and things as icons. I like to create many levels of meaning. I like people to wonder what it is about."

1951

Carves and paints a wooden bust of Egyptian queen Nefertiti from a magazine likeness. Makes copies of other figures in wood and also carves original sculptures in jarrah, African walnut and totara. Begins modelling in clay.

Takes part in the *Rutland Group* exhibition, Auckland City Art Gallery and exhibits with the North Taranaki Arts and Crafts Society. "There is an outstanding wood-carving section ... Don Driver despite his youth shows unusual maturity in the fluidity

of his work." (*Taranaki Herald* review, author and date unknown).

SELECTED REVIEWS AND REFERENCES:

Douglas Elliott *Auckland Weekly News*

1952

Completes a commission to carve heads on an honours board for the Taranaki Savage Club and receives commission to carve pew ends for St Mary's Anglican Church, New Plymouth.

Wins awards for water-colour and oil painting at the Taranaki Winter Show.

1953

Wins the sculpture prize with a wood carving of a head in the *Young Contemporaries* exhibition at the Auckland Birthday Carnival.



1954/5

Exhibits a painting at the Young New Zealand Artists' Exhibition at Durham Street Art Gallery, Christchurch (now CSA Gallery).

1955-59

Continues to exhibit paintings and sculpture annually with the North Taranaki Arts and Crafts Society.

1958

Marries Joyce Dodd, a musician and teacher.

1960

Forms Group 60 along with another New Plymouth artist, Barry Brown and art adviser, Don Campbell.

Voluntarily designs and supervises the construction and installation of a sculpture of cats for the children's playground in Pukekura Park, at the invitation of New Plymouth Jaycees.

1961

Exhibits work in *Seventy-five Years* at the Bishop Suter Art Gallery, Nelson.

Exhibits *Cloaked Figure*, along with other polyester resin and metal (bronze, aluminium and lead) sculptures which he later describes as "my own creations with a feeling of primitive art or mythological creatures", at the first *Group 60* show in the art annexe of the Taranaki Museum. Invited to exhibit also are Pamela Shepherd (Walker), Rae Sanderson (Priest), Bobbie Winchcombe and Michael Smither, who then become *Group 60* members. The group is later joined by Ton Reitsma, John Bevan Ford, David Aitken and Batch Collins.



Cloaked Figure

1962

At the invitation of R. E. Tingey & Company Limited, paint and wallpaper merchants, Driver takes charge of their newly-established artists' materials section and leaves his dental technician's job.

Has works accepted for a New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts group exhibition in Wellington.

A 1972 review by Petar Vuletic in *Artis* describes 1962 as the date Driver began to reject his former style, "realising that such mythological creatures were alien to our technological age and had, now, no real significance".

1963-64

Solo exhibition organised by the Adult Education Department of Victoria University which tours the North Island, and exhibits at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington.

Guest artist at Bishop Suter Art Gallery's annual show.

Sue McCauley *Taranaki Herald*, June 1, 1963
Letters to the editor: *Daily News*, *Taranaki Herald*, May 1963
Leah Newick, *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, June 20, 1964

1965

March to August, Don and Joyce Driver visit North America and the leading art museums and dealer galleries in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Santa Fe, St Louis, Washington DC, New York, Baltimore and Chicago. Driver buys an Indian bronze and begins his collection of Asian sculptures.

Takes part in group exhibition *Painters and Sculptors of Promise*, Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland, begins a series of brass reliefs and works using corrugated cardboard and produces *Small Red*, his "first true band painting" (Vuletic).

Creates *Mid-west* on his return from North America, "this was inspired by a trip just made to the US. We drove through the midwest countryside for days on end and I was very impressed not only by the landscape but by the beauty of the red and brown barns and the interest of aeroplane pieces discarded in the vastness of the area." - DD.

1966

Work on the New Plymouth City Council commission of a large aluminium mural for the airport almost blinds Driver and he is hospitalised.

Completes *La Guardia 2*. "From first impressions of New York. I wanted to make a colourful relief suggesting garishness and

glitter but in a formalised way overall." - DD

Is guest exhibitor at the annual show of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington, with *Six Sculptures*.

Group exhibitions include *New Zealand Painting 1966*, Auckland City Art Gallery and *Abstract Paintings by 40 NZ Artists*, NZ Display Centre, Wellington, which subsequently goes on tour.

At New Vision Gallery, Auckland, Driver's first solo exhibition at a dealer gallery, *Don Driver*, shows mostly earlier works, reliefs and free-standing sculptures.

1967

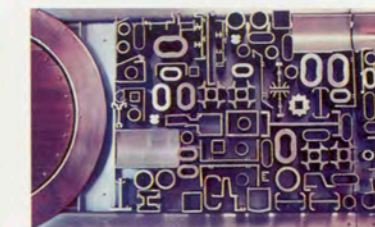
Completes the airport commission.



New Plymouth Airport mural

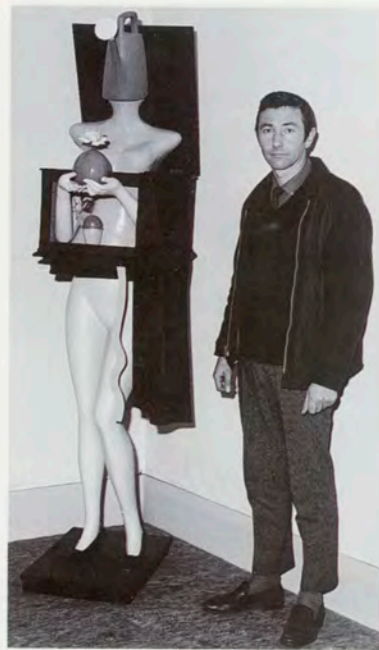
Takes part in the *Mildura Sculpture Triennial* in Victoria, Australia exhibiting *Sentinel* and in *Group Sculpture*, Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland.

Director of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth John Maynard goes with Don Driver to Sydney to see the *Two Decades of American Painting* exhibition.



McKechnie Brothers mural (detail).

Carries out an administration block mural commission for McKechnie Brothers, Bell Block, Taranaki, using sections of their various extruded metal products.



Don Driver with *The Magician*

Makes use of a display space in the New Plymouth War Memorial Library along with other Group 60 artists and exhibits *The Magician*, which excites a flurry of public debate and results in a request for the sculpture's removal. John Maynard steps in, "to save a serious artist the humiliating experience of having to remove his own work from a public place". A *Taranaki Herald* editorial comments, "The public commotion, however, has not been by any means harmful. Indeed, if it has made people think a little about the function of art and artists it may well turn out to have done a great deal of good."

A letter to the same newspaper reads:

*Evil everywhere I see,
Flamboyant nude in the library,
Flower and watering can are rude
Growing on a purple nude.
Cover every female dummy,
Muffle breast and hide the tummy.
On and on the phonograph
Shouts out beware the pornograph;
Unless used in commerce, sonny,
The nude is neither nice nor funny,
HUMOUR IS NO LAUGHING
MATTER*

The Magician is dismantled later and metamorphosed into *The Red Lady*.



Red Lady

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

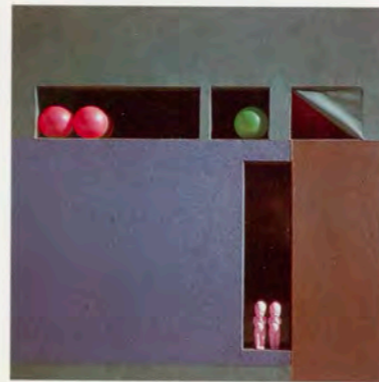
Peter McLeavey *Dominion*, October 11
Gordon Brown *Auckland Star*,
November 23
Editorials and articles: *Taranaki Herald*, *Daily News*, October



Medieval

1968

Daughter Justine Driver is born. Many works are achieved including structured wall reliefs incorporating dolls or coloured plastic balls and a number of works in black plastic.



For Justine

Becomes Benson and Hedges Art Award National Touring Exhibition finalist with *Euclid*. Included in group exhibition *Sculpture 4* at Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland.

Creates *Flyaway*: "I had thoughts of a flying machine with the bright yellow suggesting the sun. It took about a year to complete", and *High Chair*: "from the late 1960s, my wife and I were collecting these bentwood chairs for our dining room. I found them such beautiful objects that I appropriated one for a sculpture. By elevating it onto a high stand of mellow wood, I emphasized its special character, at the same time creating incongruity to avoid any 'precious' feeling." - DD

1969

Takes part in group exhibition, *International Biennial*, Tokyo.

Solo exhibition at Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, which includes *Zodiac*: "One of about a dozen similar works each titled by Peter McLeavey with a word beginning with Z. I preferred actual shadows to the illusion of them and used this ridged moulding a lot." - DD

Solo exhibition at Bonython Art Gallery, Sydney, along with Lenton Parr and Bryan Westwood.

Finalist in the *Transfield Prize Exhibition*, Sydney.

Joins the staff of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.

James Gleeson *Sydney Morning Herald*, date unknown

John Henshaw *The Australian*, September 6

Jan Walker *Salient*, March 26

Sydney Sun, date unknown

Elwyn Lynn *Bulletin*, September 1

1970

In a solo show, exhibits 16 works, including *Zither* and *Balbac* (sometimes *Baalbec*), at New Vision Gallery, Auckland.

Takes part in group exhibitions, *Mildura Sculpture Triennial* at Victoria, Australia with *Balbac*, *Benson and Hedges Art Award National Touring Exhibition* as a finalist with the first version of *Dimension No.1* and Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council's *New Zealand Art of the Sixties* showing the same earlier version of *Dimension no. 1*. "In certain respects this is one of a series transitional between the open use of parallel ridges as in *Zodiac* and stretched canvas panels as in the piece that won the Benson and Hedges Award in 1972 and *Vertical Relief* 1974. The parallel ridges are here behind the canvas. The illusory perspective in this, as re-worked, was continued into *Five-Part Piece* and *Dimension No 6*." - DD.

T. J. McNamara *New Zealand Herald*, October 27

Hamish Keith *Auckland Star* October 31
Auckland Tourist Times, March 26

1971

Receives a grant from the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council for a Corten steel sculpture commissioned for the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery sculpture-court.

One of ten artists invited to enter the Auckland City Art Gallery's *Ten Big Paintings* and exhibits *Five-part Piece*, which he later donates, along with *Balbac* to the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.

Solo exhibition at Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington.

Small Red is exhibited in Tokyo at the International Young Artists Asia exhibition.

Takes part in group *Centenary Exhibition*, Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North and begins a painted-panel series in acrylic on stretched canvases.

David McMillan *Arts and the Community*, April Vol 7 No.4



Don Driver with the Corten steel sculpture for the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery sculpture court.

1972

Wins the Benson and Hedges Art Award with aluminium-panelled and canvas *Painted Relief No.11*. Letters to the editor and editorial comment grow as the work goes on tour. In a Press Association report, Driver describes his winning painting as one the average man will like least of all, "it looks so simple - almost a dead-pan simplicity - that there is nothing there for the average man to recognise ... I do not like my painting to be evocative, but to be something to be looked at for itself."

Completes the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery sculpture-court

piece, joins John Lethbridge in a two-person show at New Vision Gallery with *Painted Panel* series and takes part in a group exhibition at Petar/James Gallery in Auckland.

Solo exhibition in the Victoria University library, Wellington.

Finalist in the Hansells Sculpture Award at Wairarapa Arts Centre, Masterton.

Don, Joyce and Justine Driver travel to South East Asia, visiting Melbourne, Hong Kong, Macao, Bangkok, Singapore and Sydney. Driver studies South-East Asian art and extends his collection.

T. J. McNamara *New Zealand Herald*, May 23

Hamish Keith *Auckland Star*, May 27 and June 3

Bute Hewes *Sunday Herald*, May 28

Michael Dunn *Auckland Star*, June 10

Peter Cape *Sunday Herald*, June 11

Elwyn Lynn *Bulletin*, June 24, *New Zealand's Cool Air*

Petar L. Vuletic, *Arts and Community*, June Vol 8 No. 6

Petar L. Vuletic, *Artis* October

Terry O'Meagher *Daily News*, June 10

David MacMillan *Craccum*, March 18

New Zealand Herald, June 9

The Press, June 8

Taranaki Herald, June 10

1973

A solo retrospective exhibition at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery looks back over 12 years.

Exhibits two 1972 panel-reliefs at the Dusseldorf International Art Fair and along with other New Zealand artists, Hanly, McCahon, Papas, Smither and Wong, takes part in the *Australian Touring Show* from Europa Galleries, Melbourne. "From these panels I moved into the formal sculpture of the *Cosmos* series with stainless and



Painted Relief No. 14 exhibited at the Dusseldorf International Art Fair

corten steel, Perspex, Formica and plastic tubes, including the piece for which I won a Hansell prize in 1974 and the one I did for the Auckland Medical School." - DD

Provides work for the *Mildura Sculpture Triennial* in Victoria, Australia.

Hamish Keith, *Auckland Star*, October 27

Bryan James, *Daily News*, May 19
Taranaki Herald, May 6

1974

Group exhibitions include *New Year/New Work* at the Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland and *Art NZ '74*, CSA Gallery, Christchurch. Along with Philip Trusstum and Brian Reid at New Vision Gallery, Driver exhibits small collages, commenting, "just a change from the large, formal, panel-pieces. I wanted things I could do quickly and made a dozen of these within a few weeks."

A solo exhibition, *Don Driver, Sculptures and Reliefs* is held at New Vision Gallery, including *Relief* (later *Pink and Red Relief*) "What a relief! Mind blank on how it happened. But apart from the *Cosmos* sculptures and, in a way, *Albers' Shaving Mirror*, this was the last of the carefully laid out pieces. I was

looking at books on Picasso and decided to let it all flow like him." - DD.

Wins the Hansells Sculpture Award, Wairarapa Arts Centre, Masterton with *Double Cosmos*.

T. J. McNamara *New Zealand Herald*, June 19

Hamish Keith *Auckland Star*, date unknown

Hamish Keith *Auckland Star*, June 22

Michael Dunn *Sunday Herald*, June 23

Michael Dunn *New Zealand Listener*, July 20

Michael Dunn *Auckland Star*, October 27

Sharon Wilson *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, May 6

1975

Acts as director of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery for six months.

'Eight New Zealanders' article by P. A. E. Hutchings appears in *Art International* with two black and white and one large, coloured reproduction of Driver's work.

A sculpture is commissioned for the University of Auckland School of Medicine in March and in September he installs *Large Cosmos*.

Begins to work again with cast-off materials and objects rather than the panel-reliefs and sculptures of the past few years.

P. A. E. Hutchings *Art International*, Vol XIX/1, January 20, 1975

1976

While working at night, Driver has a stroke which paralyses him down his right side. He has to learn again how to speak, walk and use his right hand and is off work for 10 weeks.

The 1974 collage *Taranaki* is

exhibited at the Christchurch Arts Festival's *Land* exhibition at CSA Gallery and is reproduced in colour in Jim Barr's piece on the Paris collection in *Art New Zealand* No.4, February - March 1977.



Relief II: White Bag.

An invitation by New Vision Gallery to be its Auckland festival artist in a solo show has already been accepted, and Joyce Driver, John Maynard and friends organise the work, including *Relief II: White Bag*. "A break-through: I used things I found in a tip near Cape Egmont that revived themes from the past and I used them in a new way. I suppose the use of stripes in the canvas patch is most obviously connected with the panel pieces but so is the formation of the leather flap, while back in 1969 I had used



Relief VII: Green Ball

vinyl and before that had incorporated found objects. In essence this is colour-field without the hard-edge." - DD

Also included in the solo show is *Relief VII: Green Ball*: "An even stronger link with the panel pieces, here de-

formalised. I stained and tore the striped canvas because it looked too new. I had used plastic balls before but now put one on string to give the effect of an exclamation." - DD

Joyce Driver goes on to arrange a similar solo exhibition at the Victoria University library and organises the Driver contribution to the Barry Lett Galleries *Screens* exhibition and his work as guest exhibitor for the *Group Show*, CSA Gallery, Christchurch.

T. J. McNamara *New Zealand Herald* June 19

Peter Bromhead *Auckland Star*, March 25

Noeline Blackman *Taranaki Herald*, February 7

Taranaki Herald, February 23

Daily News, February 24

1977

Driver arranges his own show for the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, *Don Driver 1971 - 1977*, comprising 60 works including 13 hard-edged reliefs and 16 sculptures, and filling the whole gallery. Includes the first exhibition of *Lawn Cuttings*: "I used my grass catcher, Leon Narbey's shoes and the Tingey stencil plate I had used to stencil with in a number of works including *Zag* about 1965. The galvanised iron surround was constructed for the purpose but the coir formed the floor of a tent. I acquired the doormats from various sources by replacing them at dead of night with new ones. This is one of my larger works and I regard it as a major one." - DD

Exhibits at *Opening exhibition*, Manawatu Art Gallery,

Palmerston North and, alongside work by Peter Peryer, provides a solo exhibition, *Don Driver: recent paintings*, at the Dowse Art Gallery, Lower Hutt.



50kg

A Govett-Brewster Art Gallery proposal to buy 50 Kg attracts much debate including loud, public protest and equally robust defence from director Ron O'Reilly. The *Taranaki Herald* quotes an anonymous source who claims that the fertiliser sacks used in 50kg are light sensitive and "could break down in a matter of months". The Olin Corporation of New Zealand Ltd which uses the sacks, investigates the matter. General manager I G Menzies comments, "It is a great achievement for a fertiliser bag to become a work of art - and a surprising one."

Taranaki Herald, October 26, November 18

Daily News, November 17, 23, 28, 30

1978

Takes part in Barry Lett Galleries' *New Year/New Work, Auckland, Mildura Sculpture Triennial* at Victoria, Australia, which subsequently tours New Zealand and *A chair is a chair is a chair* exhibition at the Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui. "A chair stacked on a table outside a

house excited me. Perhaps I recalled chairs and desks stacked in schoolrooms. When I was recently given a QEII grant for timber for sculptures this [*Red Chair and Table*] was the first sculpture I made, the first of a Chair series." - DD

Receives Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Grant.

A solo exhibition, *Don Driver: Recent Sculpture* held at New Vision Gallery, includes *Soft Hanging* and attracts high praise from critics.

Creates *Ladder*, "a magic ladder on its way to infinity is blocked by a lowering ceiling".

New Plymouth City Council defers the purchase of 50kg until a report on its durability is completed, but agrees to buy *Vertical Relief*. The following year a report on polypropylene supports the product and 50kg also becomes part of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery's collection.

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

Gordon H. Brown *Auckland Star*, June 7

T. J. McNamara *New Zealand Herald*, June 12

Michael Dunn *New Zealand Listener*, September 2

New Zealand Herald, June 8
Auckland Star, October 25
Daily News, March 15

1979

Entertainments solo exhibition at Galerie Legard, Wellington, is



Entertainments

held concurrently with the 1979-80 retrospective exhibition at the National Art Gallery. Sculptures which feature then Prime Minister Robert Muldoon, one with Mickey Mouse ears and another with a sun-hat and kitchen gloves over his ears, receive much attention. Driver comments later, "It is serious sculpture but in an entertaining way."

Participates in group exhibitions *Indoor Outdoor*, CSA Gallery, Christchurch and *New Year/New Work*, Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland.

Michael Dunn *Sunday Express*, July 8
Neil Rowe *Evening Post*, September 29
Gordon H. Brown *Daily News*, July 7
John Coley *Christchurch Star*, December 12

Evening Post, September 18
Taranaki Herald, June 19, 28
Daily News, June 30, July 5, 7, 20
The Press, December 15
Evening Standard, September 12

1979-80

A retrospective, *Don Driver 1965-1978*, at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth tours 12 art galleries throughout New Zealand. Critics hail Driver as, "an artist of whom this country can be proud", "numbered among our foremost artists - one who has always been ahead of the game" and "high on my

list of the 10 or so most important painters currently working in New Zealand".

Don Driver, 1965-1978 exhibition catalogue, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery
Daily News, July 10

1980

Solo exhibition at New Vision, Auckland.

Participates in group exhibitions *Diverse Dimensions*, New Vision, Auckland; *Loose Hangings*, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch and *Carnival of the Animals*, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth.

Four works are purchased by the National Art Gallery and Driver points out that it is time national recognition is shown for art work being done in Taranaki.

One of Driver's works becomes embroiled in a National Art Gallery and Museum funding controversy when a member of the Hutt Valley Electric Power and Gas Board, Len Little, leads the charge to cut the \$500 annual grant. He shows board members a news clipping of the purchase by the gallery of a chair on a pedestal, saying that the board's money is "wasted on these stupid art gallery people". Indignant and opposing letters land on editors' desks in New Plymouth and Wellington.

Gordon H. Brown *Auckland Star*, May 28
T. J. McNamara *New Zealand Herald*, May (day unknown)
Neil Rowe *Art New Zealand No. 15 Taranaki Herald*, March 6, 11, 12
The Hutt News, September 2
Evening Post, March 14, 22, 25
Daily Post, May 9
Hawke's Bay Herald-Tribune, February 22

1981

Solo exhibition, *Recent Sculpture* at RKS Art, Auckland.

Takes part in *Opening Exhibition* at Janne Land Gallery, Wellington.

Birthday Banner is commissioned by Dowse Art Gallery, Lower Hutt.

T. J. McNamara *New Zealand Herald*, August 10
Leonard Bell *Art New Zealand No. 18, No. 21*
Auckland Star, August 11
Taranaki Herald, January 17

1982

Two solo exhibitions, *Pockets and Tools*, RKS Art, Auckland and *Don Driver Sculpture 1978-1981* at Centre for Contemporary Art, Hamilton. One Auckland critic labels *Pockets and Tools*, a "Taranaki" exhibition. Cheryl Sotheran highlights the contrast between Don Driver's "simple, almost Puritan association of the farmers and the land" with the actual high-tech developments in agriculture in the province.

Participates in group exhibitions *Recent Acquisitions* at National Art Gallery, Wellington; *Loose Canvases*, Janne Land Gallery, Wellington, *Artichoke*, Auckland City Art Gallery; *Summer 82*, RKS Art, Auckland and *School Fibre Art Show*, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth,

Exhibits in the *FI Sculpture Project* in Wellington.

Birthday Graphic is commissioned by Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.

School of Architecture, Auckland, mural is commissioned.

At the Beach (print folio) is commissioned by Peter Webb Galleries, Auckland.

Installation of *Ritual* in the National Art Gallery, Wellington, is accompanied by a cautious hand-out by Education Officer Moira Johnson, assuring visitors that, "The artist insists that the work has no black magic or sinister overtones. But it does harbour a secrecy and mystery". In an interview with Elizabeth Smither the following year, Driver explains, "*Ritual* has ties with ancient myth but also the ongoing of myth in the future." He says he hopes the sculpture will bring its audience, "the attraction of colour, sound, lights, reflections in a mirror. It should be observed like any totemic thing: in its entirety first, then its details."

Ritual attracts a great deal of attention. The next year, Driver remarks in an interview with David Hill that during the National Art Gallery showing of *Ritual*, it appeared that the sculpture was being interfered with each night. A gallery guard, he said, was tugging down the hemlines of the figures' dresses.

Gordon H. Brown *Art New Zealand No. 25*
Terry Snow *Auckland Star*, July 5
T. J. McNamara *New Zealand Herald*, July 5
Cheryl Sotheran *Auckland Star*, July 12
Taranaki Herald, July 9, November 13

1983

Driver has five solo exhibitions throughout the country: *Recent Wall Hangings* at Janne Land Gallery, Wellington; *Tools and Others*, Dowse Art Museum,

Lower Hutt and *A Focus on Don Driver*, at three Dunedin Galleries - Bosshard Galleries, Hocken Gallery and Red Metro Gallery.

Two city murals are commissioned by Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth.



Mural commission, St Aubyn Street, New Plymouth.

Bridie Lonie *Otago Daily Times*, June 30
Elizabeth Smither *New Zealand Listener*, July 9
Warwick Brown *Sunday Times*, March 27
Noeline Blackman *Taranaki Herald*, June 25
David Hill *Auckland Star*, August 25
Jane Dove, Nigel Carter *MORE*, June issue
New Zealand Herald, August 26
Kaleidoscope, Television One, August 26

1984

Solo exhibitions *Hangings with Tools* at Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North and *Skin Pieces*, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch.

Wins the Whanganui Art Award, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui and participates in group exhibitions, *The Little Ones* at Whitecliff Galleries, Auckland; 9 *New Zealand Artists*, Denis Cohn

Gallery, Auckland and *Don Driver/Philip Trusstum* at Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui.

Receives Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Travel Grant and Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Purchase Grant.

A request to buy *Ritual* for the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery is debated by the New Plymouth City Council, referred back to its Cultural Committee and Director Dick Bett to renegotiate the price, and four months later (March 1985), when re-submitted by new director Cheryl Sotheran, is referred back to the committee and sent for arbitration to the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery's Disputes Committee (gallery directors from the four main centres). The Disputes Committee supports the proposed purchase but, at Cheryl Sotheran's request, advises the gallery to defer any action and to arrange an option. (*Ritual* is purchased by the National Gallery in 1989.)

Brett Riley *Christchurch Star*, September 19
Doreen Bridgeman, *Dominion*, November 28
Taranaki Herald, October 20, December 18
Daily News, November 20
Daily News, December 18

1985

Solo exhibitions *Skin Pieces* RKS Art, Auckland, *Collector's Pieces*, Janne Land Gallery, Wellington and *New Works* at Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt.

Exhibits in *Spare Parts*, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch; *Big Paintings*, CSA Gallery, Christchurch; *Better than Collecting Dust*, Manawatu Art

Gallery, Palmerston North and 9 *New Zealand Artists* at Denis Cohn Gallery, Auckland.

Installs *Burnt Out*, at the Adelaide Festival Centre Gallery.



The artist with *Burnt Out*



Don Driver, at the Pinnacles W.A.

Travels to India.

T. J. McNamara *New Zealand Herald*, May 20
Rob Taylor *Salient*, June 10
Ian Wedde *Evening Post*, August 14
Warwick Brown *New Zealand Times*, April 28
Alex Pointon *Hawke's Bay Herald-Tribune*, May 4
Taranaki Herald, March 30
Auckland Star, May 20

1986

Solo exhibition, *Driver: Works from the Collection* at National Art Gallery, Wellington.

Participates in *Totem*, CSA Gallery, Christchurch; *Goodman Suter Biennale*, Suter Art Gallery, Nelson; *The Word*, Suter Art Gallery, Nelson and *NZ Festival of the Arts* at Janne Land Gallery, Wellington.

Receives Purchase Award, Goodman Suter Biennale.

Installs *Bicycles* at Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui, and *Elephants for Sale* at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth.

Later, Driver comments that *Elephants for Sale* was inspired by his trip to India the previous year and the impression left on him of large numbers of elephants. The title, he says, is an example of his tendency, which began around this time, to use puns in his work.

Pam Walker *New Zealand Listener*, April 26
Priscilla Pitts *Art New Zealand No. 41*
Rob Taylor *Dominion*, April 22
Pam Walker *Daily News*, March 15, December 20
Daily News March 7, October 1, December 9, December 20
Taranaki Herald, March 6

1987

Solo exhibition *New Collages* at Taranaki Museum, New Plymouth.

Has works in group exhibitions *I te Whenua: Of the Land*, Taranaki Arts Festival, Hawera; *Whanganui Art Award* (finalist) at Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui; *Banners*, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth; *When Art Hits the Headlines* at Shed 11, Wellington and *Sculptors: Corbishley, Dawe, Driver* at Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt with *Ritual*.

Receives commissions for *Duraband 5* for Albert Dental

Services, Auckland and a bus shelter mural, Wainuiomata.

Wins BP Art Award.

Tony Little *Taranaki Herald*, August 1
Pam Walker *Daily News*, August 15
Rob Taylor *Dominion*, September 24
Evening Post, October 8
Sunday Express, March 22
The Hutt News, October 6
Daily News, August 1

1988

Solo exhibitions *Fifteen Years* at Centre for Contemporary Art, Hamilton and *Wall Hangings & Collages*, RKS Art, Auckland.

Guest artist at New Zealand Academy of Arts exhibition (part of IBM Art Award).

Takes part in *Taranaki Group Show* at The Citadel, New Plymouth.

Receives Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Studio Grant.

Installs *Boxes* in Wellington City Art Gallery and attracts controversy.

Ian Wedde *Evening Post*, March 5
Rob Taylor *Dominion*, March 8
T. J. McNamara *New Zealand Herald*, May 26
Patrick Smith *Auckland Star*, June 7
The Dominion, March 11

1989

Solo exhibitions include, *Warriors* Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North and *Four Years On* at Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt.

Has works in group exhibitions, *Gate, Door, Lintel* at Fisher Gallery, Auckland and *Taranaki Summer* at Gallery 79, Hawera.

Limited edition prints are commissioned by Muka Studio, Auckland.

Hugh Coley *New Zealand Listener*, September 23
Daily News, November 18
Sunday Star, August 13

1989-90

Takes part in *Out of the Woods* at Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui.

Begins work for the *Potted Paint* series.



Potted Gold

1990

Solo exhibition, *Print Show*, exhibiting lithographs from Muka Studio, Auckland, in a private New Plymouth home.

Takes part in *Celebration*, Fisher Gallery, Auckland; *Animals*, Lopdell House Gallery, Auckland; *Inner and Outer Spaces*, Gallery 79, Hawera and wins second place in the Pacesetters Exhibition Award at The Bath House, Rotorua's Art and History Museum.

Large Cross and *Vertical Relief* are exhibited in *Twenty Years of Collecting* at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth. Driver comments on *Vertical Relief*,

"there is no point in people looking for any 'meanings' in these paintings. They are exactly what they appear to be. I am simply exploiting colour and form – in relationship one to the other. What you see is what the painting really is. There is no story behind it. No inner significance." - DD
Daily News, July 11

1991

Installs *Energy City* at Fisher Gallery, Manukau City.

Solo exhibitions, *Survey*, along with an installation of *Energy City* at The Bath House, Rotorua's Art and History Museum and *Warriors*, Waiariki Polytechnic, Rotorua.

Ann Somerville likens Driver himself to a 'warrior': "Driver, in his art, is a brave and individual man who eschews art popularity, gathering from the world around him a varied accumulation of materials which he arranges, tacks, sews, sticks and fits together."

Wins the Caltex-sponsored, NZ Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington Award and exhibits in *Academy Awards Revisited* at National Gallery, Wellington.

Vertical Relief, *Large Cross*, *Painted Relief No. 12* and *Sentinel* included in *Open Storage*, an exhibition of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery's permanent collection.

Ann Somerville *Daily Post*, Rotorua, October 16, November 6 and *Rotorua Times*, November 14
T. J. McNamara *New Zealand Herald*, May 9
Daily News, April 30 and August 24
Eastern Courier, May 15
Dominion, February 25

1992

Exhibits solo in *A Decade of Assemblage*, Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland and *Selections from a Decade of Assemblage*, Gow Langsford Gallery, Wellington.



Exhibition invitation

Takes part in *Contemporary Update*, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui and *Headlands, Thinking through New Zealand Art* at Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney and National Art Gallery, Wellington. Work commissioned by Muka Studio, Auckland, which tours throughout the country and is exhibited in *Youth Prints*, Education House, New Plymouth. Restores the New Plymouth airport mural.

T. J. McNamara *New Zealand Herald*,

February 27
Warwick Brown, *Dominion*, January 26
Daily News, September 18

1993

Solo exhibitions *The Last Ten Years and More*, in association with Taranaki Arts Festival, New Plymouth; *Don Driver in the Round* at Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui and *From the Last Ten Years*, Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt.

Exhibits in *Muka in Taranaki*; Information Centre, New Plymouth and *The Wallace Trust Touring Exhibition*. *Produce* is part of the permanent collection exhibition, *The New Zealand Environment* at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth.

Robert Macdonald *Contemporary Art*, Summer edition (letter)
Pam Walker *Daily News*, March 20
Daily News, March 11

1994

Solo exhibitions *Sculpture, Hangings and Collage* at Dick Bett Gallery, Hobart and *Collages from the Warrior Series*, Warwick Brown Gallery, Auckland.

Takes part in *We're Still Here: A Celebration of Achievement* at Milford Galleries, Dunedin and *Dilana Rugs*, Artis Gallery Auckland. *Painted Relief No. 12* is exhibited as part of *Abstracts From the Collection*, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth.

Receives Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council International Study Grant and New Zealand/Australia Foundation Study Grant and subsequently takes up residency at the University of Tasmania, Hobart.

Jim Barr and Mary Barr, *Dick Bett Gallery Newsletter* No. 17 1994
Peter Entwisle *Otago Daily Times*, May 25

1994/95

Takes part in group exhibition, *Elvis in Geyserland* at The Rotorua Museum of Art and History.

Further rug designs are commissioned by Dilana Rugs Ltd, Christchurch. Completes six designs during 1994-1998.

1995

Solo exhibitions *Circular Planes*, Robert McDougall Gallery, Christchurch and *Selection* at Milford Galleries, Dunedin.

Group exhibitions include *Festivart*, Taranaki Festival of Arts, New Plymouth; *New Zealand Light*, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth; *Waste Not, Want Not*, Lopdell House Gallery, Auckland; *Contemporary NZ Sculpture*, Warwick Henderson Gallery, Auckland; *Fresh and Fruity*, The Hawke's Bay Cultural Trust Ruawhara Ta-U-Rangi, Napier; *Dilana Rugs*, Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt and *Spring Exhibition* at Martin Browne Gallery, Sydney.

Maskeraid commission, Fifehire Foundation, Nelson, a mask for auction (Government House, Wellington).

Collaborates with New Plymouth poet, Elizabeth Smither, exhibiting *Pouch* in a group exhibition for Artists and Writers Week at Dick Bett Gallery, Hobart during the Salamanca Festival.

Pouch for Don

*This is your title: pouch. Mine's pen.
I can announce your ingredients which extend
Horn from canvas, wedge, drill, saw
And at base a golden floor
Which I think is profit. All this pouching
Tool-holder, stitch-grip, seems like papoosing
Something in air but tight confined
Allowed a half-life, provided
It's half-useful where it is
And can come out. How many times
Used is a criteria. The golden floor
Slides under the tools' door
As yet invisible. The skull's horns
Say the fatal tool word: worn
And occupy like a marsupial
The pouch slack and dropsical
As the pouch of skin under an eye
The diplomatic pouch to fly
The secret document in or take
The invitation back to celebrate
Thanksgiving at the embassy. All this
Is where a pouch poem starts to slip
From the workings of the work
To the talkings of the talk.
I think you should hang from a tree
Beyond a waterhole. Travellers would see
It as a flag or recipe card
The skull admitting life is hard
But humorous. There is a place (pouch)
For every ache and every heart
And useful actions stay close to us
Who walk through them to dust.*
Elizabeth Smither

1996

Solo exhibition *Circular Planes* at Lopdell House Gallery, Auckland.
Work exhibited in *Get Tuft*, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth.

T. J. McNamara *New Zealand Herald*, March 13

1997

Solo exhibitions *Faces of Don Driver* at New Plymouth Information Centre and *Driver Works from the Barr Collection* at Dunedin Art Gallery.

Takes part in group exhibitions *Sharp & Shiny*, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, with Medley and three collages; *Current Abstraction*, Milford Galleries, Dunedin and *Eye-Opening* at One Eye Gallery, Paekakariki.

1998

Joyce and Don Driver travel for 10 weeks to Hawaii, Toronto, London, Paris, Geneva, Nice, Florence, Rome, Venice, Vienna, Innsbruck, Munich, Koblenz, Amsterdam, Brussels, Barcelona ("the highlight artistically"), Hampshire, Scotland, Wales, New York and Los Angeles.

Completes tapestry design commissioned by Marilyn Rea-Menzies, master weaver, Christchurch.

"All works of art that people do come together, there is some sort of magic out there. Life is a mystery."

Don Driver July 1998.

NOTES

Don Driver's comments followed by - DD, were recorded during conversations with Ron O'Reilly in 1978/79. Other remarks noted here were recorded in 1998.

Bishop Suter Art Gallery became Suter Art Gallery in 1979.

New Vision Gallery became New Vision in 1979/80

Dowse Art Gallery became Dowse Art Museum in 1982.

The Bath House, Rotorua's Art and History Museum became The Rotorua Art and History Museum in 1992/3 and The Rotorua Museum of Art and History Te Whare Taonga O Te Arawa in 1995.

Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui became Sarjeant Gallery/Te Whare O Rehua/Whanganui in 1995.

The former National Gallery collection is now housed at The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

Auckland City Art Gallery became Auckland Art Gallery Toi O Tamaki in 1995.

Photograph credits listed where known.

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|--|--------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| <i>Albers' Shaving Mirror</i> c.1971 | 70 | <i>Dressed Bird</i> 1980 | 19 | <i>Medley</i> 1987 | 8, 27 | <i>Relief with Pleats</i> c. 1969 | 17, 33, 35, 72 |
| <i>Animal Crackers</i> 1978 | 19 | <i>Duraband 5</i> 1987 | 74 | <i>Mellow Yellow</i> 1991 | 18, 61 | Relief Works series 1970-74 | 17 |
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| <i>Battery-case Sculpture</i> 1966 | 16 | <i>Entertainments</i> 1979 | 72 | Photograph: Jane Dove | | Photograph: Bryan James | |
| Photograph: John Crawford | | Photograph: John Crawford | | <i>New Plymouth Airport mural</i> 1966 | 23, 67, 76 | <i>Skin Pieces</i> | 34, 36 |
| <i>Beans Lupin and Wheat</i> 1982 | 55 | <i>Fetish</i> 1978 | 12, 47 | <i>Nineteen Tools and Birds</i> c.1985 | 27, 28 | <i>Sliding Planes</i> 1994 | 23 |
| Photograph: Bryan James | | Photograph: Bryan James | | <i>Pacific Salt</i> 1977 | 7, 13, 34 | <i>Small Red</i> 1965 | 67, 69 |
| <i>Bicycles</i> 1986-87 | 19, 20, 27, 34, 74 | <i>50 Kg</i> 1977 | 13, 17, 71, 72 | Photograph: Charters and Guthrie | | <i>Small Tondo Pieces</i> 1990-96 | 21, |
| <i>Big Relief</i> 1980 | 34 | Photograph: Bryan James | | <i>Paddling Pool</i> 1975 | 11, 44 | <i>Soft Hanging</i> 1976 | 8, 18, 35, 48, 72 |
| <i>Birthday Banner</i> 1981 | 73 | <i>Five-Part Piece</i> 1970 | 69 | Photograph: Bryan James | | Photograph: Bryan James | |
| <i>Birthday Graphic</i> 1982 | 73 | <i>Flyaway</i> 1966-69 | 16, 28, 39, 69 | <i>Painted Panel Series</i> | 70 | <i>Sugar and Spice</i> 1980 | 54, back cover (detail), |
| <i>Black Relief</i> 1969 | 17 | Photograph: Bryan James | | <i>Painted Relief No.11</i> 1972 | 25, 69 | Photograph: Bryan James | |
| Photograph: Bryan James | | <i>For a Taranaki Day</i> 1968 | 8, 18 | <i>Painted Relief No.12</i> | 7, 75, 76 | <i>Taranaki</i> 1974 | 70 |
| <i>Blue and Green Pacific</i> 1978 | 45 | <i>For Justine</i> 1968 | 68 | <i>Painted Relief No.14</i> 1972 | 70 | <i>Target</i> 1997 | 64 |
| <i>Blue Planes</i> 1993 | 23 | <i>Four Part Piece</i> 1969 | 17 | <i>Pink and Red Relief</i> 1974 | 24 | Photograph: Bryan James | |
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Priscilla Pitts

Priscilla Pitts is currently Director of Dunedin Public Art Gallery. As Director of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery when this project began she was curator of *With Spirit Don Driver a retrospective 1965-1998* and editor of this publication. She was founding editor of *Artis* magazine and has edited and produced a number of other art publications including *Mediatrix: new work by seven women artists* while Director of Artspace Auckland.

Jim Barr and Mary Barr

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Gordon H Brown

Gordon H Brown has held many appointments in the library and art worlds including the Alexander Turnbull and Hocken libraries, Auckland City Art Gallery, Waikato Art Gallery and the Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui. In 1977 he was awarded an Arts Council Fellowship for his services to New Zealand art history. He has written prolifically, co-authored with Hamish Keith *An Introduction to New Zealand Painting* and *Colin McCahon: Artist* and written *Contemporary New Zealand Painting*.

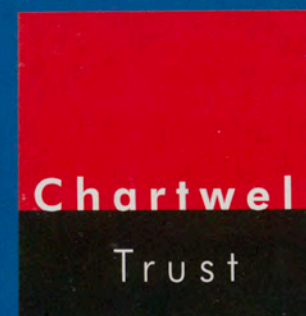
John Hurrell

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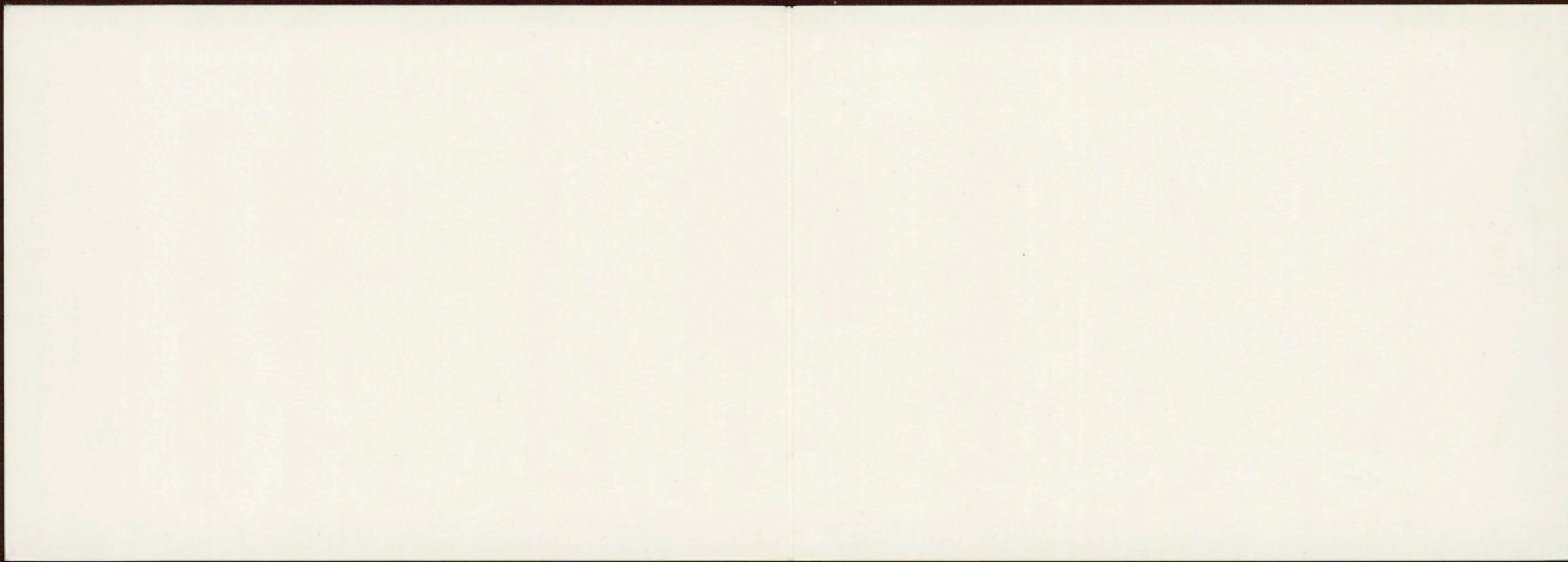
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