

**JULIAN
DASHPER**

**SLIDE
SHOW**

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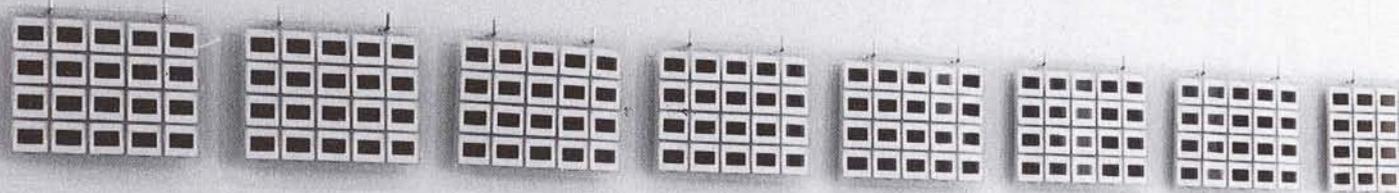
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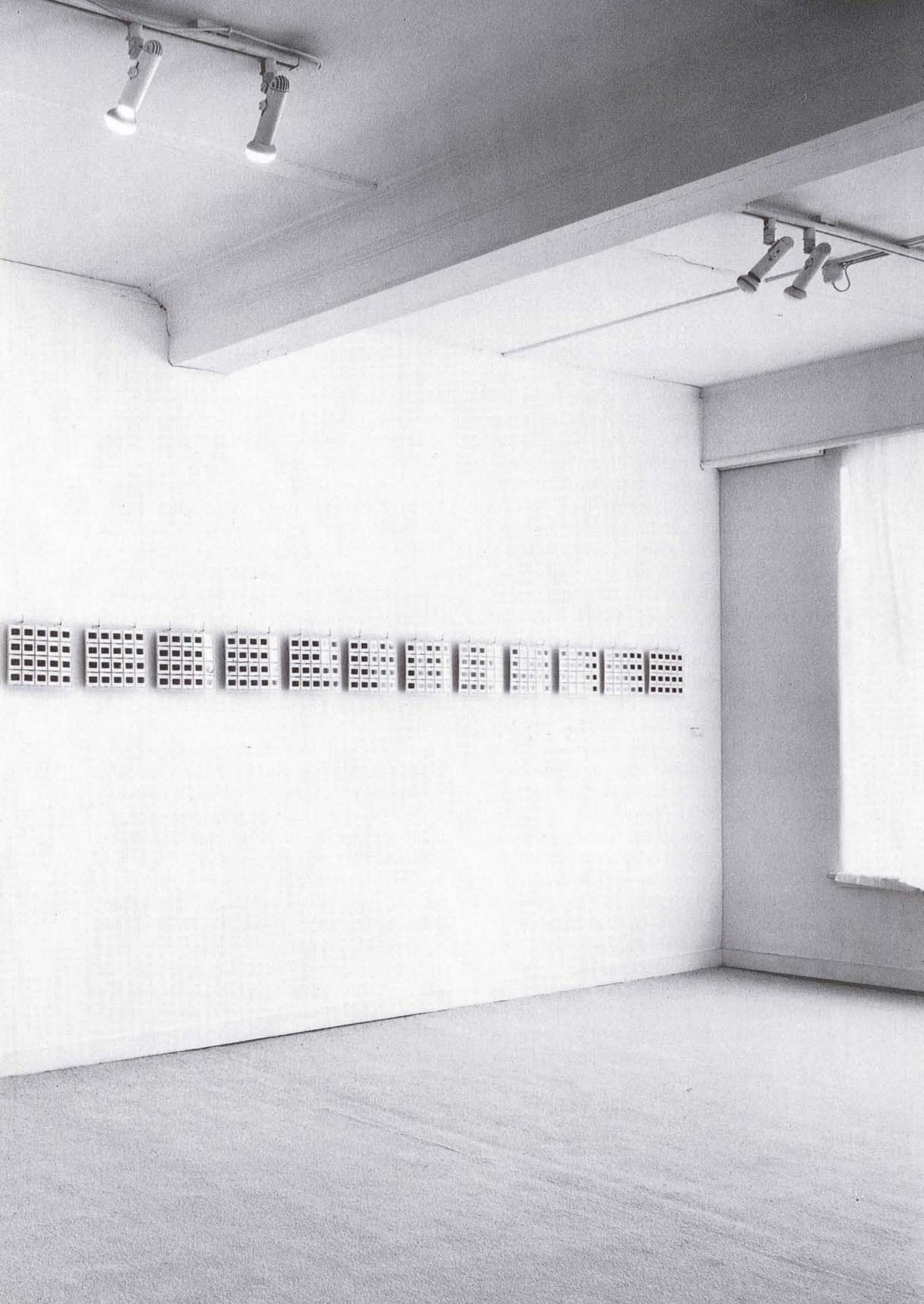
22 APRIL - 26 MAY 1992

SLIDE SHOW



Barbara Bachman, Julian Dashper New York City 1990





B ACK PROJECTION

In 1990, in a statement which discussed the properties of the jumbo jet as a powerful context for making art, New Zealand artist Julian Dashper commented: "At this stage my concern is with carry-on luggage and working within the criteria set for that — how to carry something meaningful with you as well as your vanity bag."¹ That same year, Dashper began to use colour slides of his own paintings, twenty to a plastic sheet, as finished artwork.

In 1941, Marcel Duchamp, the advance-guard of conceptual art, travelled by road across occupied France disguised as an itinerant cheese salesman. He carried with him an edition of his complete works replicated in miniature, which accompanied him to his next destination, New York. Duchamp's 'portable museum',² the **Box-in-a-Valise**,³ entered America as the artist's cultural baggage, exported from the Old world to the New.

Like Duchamp in this case, Dashper is concerned with art and its travels: from one context or location to another, in its journey from originality to reproduction. Duchamp's **Boxes-in-Valises** were conceived as an edition of three hundred, each one almost identical to the next (the boxes contained one original apiece, and bore the name of the recipient) — a series of original reproductions. Likewise, Dashper's reproductions are originals; each painting is photographed 400 separate times, each shot individually processed to create a unique slide, a miniature artwork. Masquerading as duplications, each slide is the genuine article. Encased in their

protective plastic sleeves, these artworks travel well, air-lifted from one destination to the next, jet-setting ambassadors of culture.

On leaving New Zealand, there is the Pacific to navigate, a historical gulf of distance now daily crossed and recrossed by airlines and their passengers. New Zealand's geographical isolation, its position at the margins of the world, has been a recurrent issue of concern for its artists. Some have responded by devoting themselves to insularity, to the creation of a pictorial national identity: others have ventured further afield, framing their references within the context of contemporary international artistic culture.

For the latter group of artists, distance has been a disadvantage. Experience of international art has typically been at second-hand, through the mediation of reproduction, without direct contact with the originals. Through this process, original artworks take on a new existence as translations. The formal properties of the original, perhaps the essence of its originality, become distorted and revalued. In their new life as photographic reproductions, the surface qualities of the artwork disappear under the flattening glare of the lens, colour is determined by the balance of the film rather than the intention of the artist, scale becomes irrelevant and irreverent: Michelangelo's **David** on a picture-postcard, "Van Gogh's bandaged head a massive fifty feet high, a Da Vinci smile

the width of a lecture-room wall.”⁴

Dashper, however, wears New Zealand’s geographical distance as a badge of international identity, a calling-card which announces the artist’s special credentials. He has stated: “It is an irony of our time that New Zealand’s Pacific distance is an advantage to us. That very distance whose obstacle shaped our past will continue to affect us by placing us in a fresh context. Distance is no longer an excuse, but has instead become an introduction.”⁵

Making an art of slides for easy export, Dashper replicates his *experience* of international art and its exportation, rather than the physical properties of that art. International art has reached Dashper through the slide format: now he creates his own, thus drawing attention to art’s codes of reception. “They were held up to us as examples in slides. Now it seems obvious to me to start sending it back this way.”⁶

Thus Dashper’s slides, recently reproduced in the international journal *ARTFORUM*,⁷ further distanced from their origins by another form of mechanical reproduction, offer a commentary on the politics of marginalisation that defines art from the provinces in its international context. Equally though, in the context of the centre, interpretations would arise relating to general protestations about the over-reliance upon reproduction over the authentic experience of the art object, indicated by such writers as Robert Hughes: “One learns from the image flat in the book, cast oversize on the lighted screen, or glimpsed undersize in the slide viewer. Committees award prizes and fellowships on the basis of slides. Writers write from them. Collectors buy from them. But what is *there*? An image of an image. Not the thing, but a bright phantasm, a visual parody, whose relation to the original and actual work of art is that of a shrunken head to a real one.”⁸

The experience of art through

reproduction has effectively changed the status of the original. If our initial familiarity with the art object is through its reproduction, the copy which projects its own reality, then on being confronted with the original artwork we recognise it as *the original of the replica*. The ‘original’ paintings which Dashper reproduces in his slides are the simply the prototypes of the reproductions, dummies endlessly cloned. The paintings’ status as originals is reduced to that of originators.

The unique experience of seeing a work of art is converted through reproduction into an infinitely repeatable experience, an unlimited edition, the singular view translated into a multiplicity. Art becomes its own souvenir, the photographic memory displacing the physical reality of the art object. Distinguished from one another by fractions of time, seconds divided and multiplied by the camera’s shutter, Dashper’s slides are captured moments in the life of an artwork.

In showing his slides, Dashper recaptures moments belonging to another time, the domestic slide shows of 50s and 60s, retrospective exhibitions showing nightly in the suburbs. Dashper’s slides recall hypnotic evenings spent watching friends and relations appear and disappear in technicolour on the living-room wall, exotic destinations projected on familiar surfaces, to the accompaniment of a running commentary in which the projectionist unpacks the memory of his/her travels.

Dashper’s installation of slides as final artwork is extended on the occasion of his current exhibition by a mini-retrospective of his works of the last decade, represented by slides. Affixed to the gallery wall, this set of slides stands in for the originals, a pocket-solution to the exigencies of limited space and freighting costs. Here, within the single gallery, Dashper has assembled his complete works for the inspection of the viewer. Archivaly

mounted and framed, regularly hung, carefully lit, the reproductions are accorded the same status as the originals they reproduce.

The usual vehicle for the presentation of slides, the projector, is absent from the gallery. The slides appear in their original state, pictures in miniature, lit, like paintings, from the front. The context of their illumination here is metaphorical, rather than physical: the apparatus of projection (the strong beam of light from the rear, the lens, the screen) is replaced by the mechanisms of the gallery (the pristine white walls, the precise display systems, the contemplative space for viewing). The gallery itself becomes part of the work: it acts as a metaphor for enlightenment, providing a space for the artist to project his vision. Unlike the slide evenings of his childhood, Dashper's display is silent and static. Here the viewer, rather than the projectionist, is required to provide the commentary, to decipher the meaning of an accumulation of images.

Dashper's installations have not always been silent. His first solo exhibition, an installation of polaroid photographs entitled **Motorway Schools**, was backed by a soundtrack of road noise. (The effect of these works was somewhat similar to Dashper's **Slide Show**: the viewer was forced to approach the gallery's wall to assimilate its sparse, multi-viewed and minute imagery.) The photographs which constituted **Motorway Schools** assumed the guise of stills from a banal road-movie — stripped of narrative context, hanging on to their original format. Associations can be made with the practice of Len Lye, New Zealand's pioneer experimental filmmaker, who reportedly exhibited his 35mm movie film strips directly on the wall, when projection facilities were unavailable.⁹

Like Lye's films, Dashper's slides conceive for themselves an independent life as 'art', and find validation of this assertion on the walls of the gallery.

Originating as an artistic prop, an aid to visual memory in the various contexts of art history lectures, advertising presentations, family slide evenings and artists' promotional material (all theatrical backdrops of a sort), Dashper's slides take centre stage. Currently, Dashper's art is on the travelling circuit, doing the rounds of the provinces. And while Dashper may play his part, continuing a line of troupers begun by Marcel Duchamp, it is finally the stage that has the key role. It is by their position in the gallery, in the art world — and all the art world's a stage — that Dashper's gestures have their currency.

Lara Strongman

NOTES

¹ Julian Dashper, "Carry On Flying", in **Julian Dashper: Quote**, exhibition catalogue, Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, 1990, n.p.

² Alexandrian, **Marcel Duchamp**, Bonfini Press, Naefels, 1977, p.82.

³ Each **Box-in-a-Valise** contained sixty nine phototype reproductions, four pages of text, four objects smaller than life-size, and a replica of the **Large Glass** on celluloid, the whole encased in a valise of fawn leather. Begun in 1938, twenty copies were assembled by the time Duchamp arrived in the USA in 1942.

⁴ Jim Barr and Mary Barr, "The Old Slippery Slide", in **Julian Dashper: New Zealand**, exhibition catalogue, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland, 1990, n.p.

⁵ Julian Dashper, from "Artist's Notes, 1990", quoted in Francis Pound, "Dashper and Distance", in **Julian Dashper: New Zealand**, 1990, n.p.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Dashper purchased advertising space in **ARTFORUM** over two consecutive issues. The first 'advert', which appeared in January's edition, reproduced the graphic format of the magazine's cover, with the words "Art From ... [New Zealand Julian Dashper]" substituted for the title. Dashper's gridded slides were featured on the magazine's 'cover'. The second insertion, the following month, purported to be a review of the work, again graphically almost identical to the 'real' reviews which appear at the back of the journal. This 'work' was titled **Cover Version**.

⁸ Robert Hughes, "Introduction: The Decline of the City of Mahagonny", in **Nothing if Not Critical**, Collins Harvill, London, 1990, p.12.

⁹ Julian Dashper, "Drawn from Art", in **Julian Dashper: Quote**, 1990.

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ulian Dashper was born in Auckland, New Zealand, in 1960. He completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at Auckland University in 1981. His first solo exhibition was held in Auckland in 1980.

Over the last decade he has regularly exhibited painting and photography in solo and group shows throughout New Zealand, and has shown work in Sydney and London. Most recently, work by Dashper was included in **Headlands**, an exhibition of contemporary New Zealand art at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney.

He has received assistance from the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand on several occasions, and was awarded a Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Visual Arts Programme Fellowship last year.

Dashper began to use slides of his own paintings as final artwork in 1990. Julian Dashper lives and works in Auckland.

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ara Strongman was born in Exeter, England, in 1968. She studied art history at the University of Canterbury and holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree with first class honours and the degree of Master of Arts with Distinction. She is Assistant Curator at the

Robert McDougall Art Gallery, administering the Gallery's contemporary exhibitions programme at the McDougall Art Annex.

Photography Credits:
Barbara Bachman, Julian Dashper New York City 1990
Geoffrey H. Short, Sue Crockford Gallery installation

Julian Dashper wishes to acknowledge the support of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand Visual Arts Programme.

ISBN 0-908874-10-3