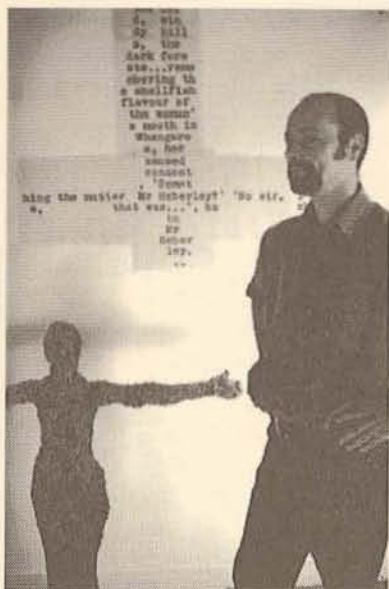




**Richard Reddaway**  
The Deck of My Body

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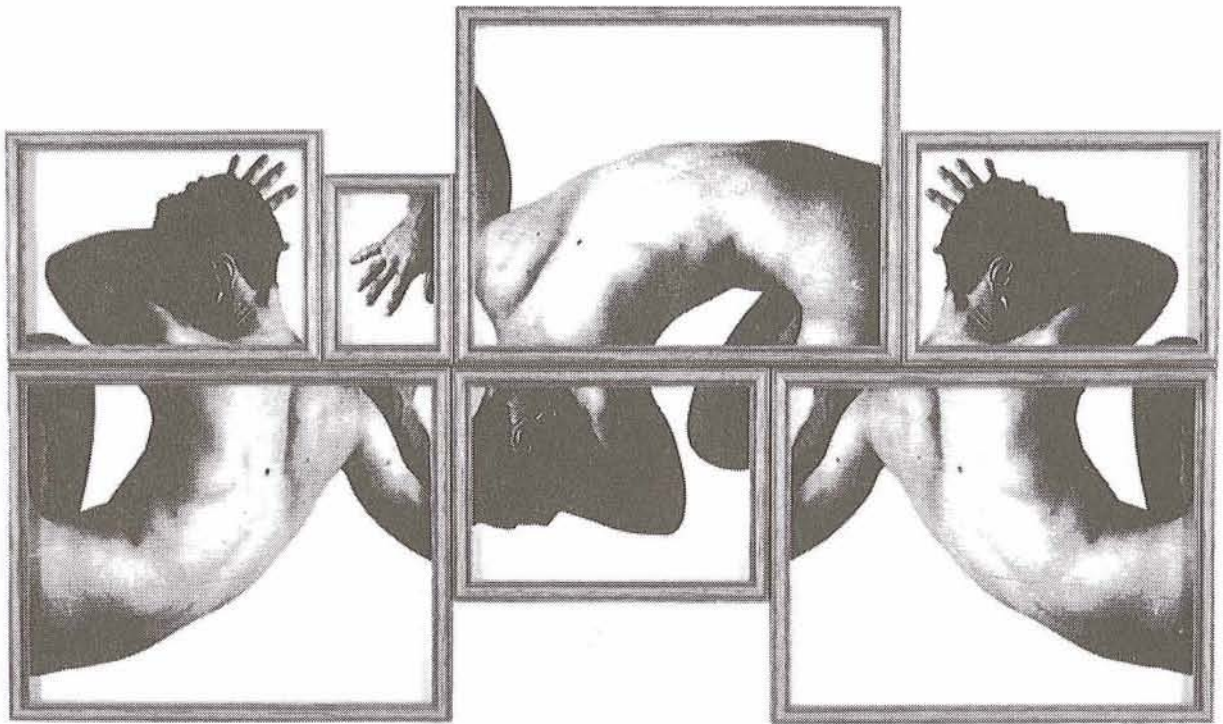
McDougall Art Annex, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, 1993





# Richard Reddaway

The Deck of My Body



McDougall Art Annex, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, 1993

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## **Director's Foreword**

**At thirty Richard Reddaway has established a formidable reputation as a sculptor of singular talent and independent vision.**

**His name is a more recent addition to the extraordinary roll of notable sculptors who have begun their careers in Christchurch in the last two decades. John Panting, Steve Furlonger, Carl Sydow, Boyd Webb, Rosemary Johnson-Müller, Neil Dawson, Bing Dawe, and more recently Philip Price and Anton Parsons have all contributed to the remarkable strength and vigour of sculptural practice today.**

**Despite having spent almost a decade of producing arresting sculpture, this is Richard Reddaway's first solo exhibition in a public gallery, although it is in one respect a return. His first one-person show of work from his Honours year at the University of Canterbury in 1985 was installed in the Centre Gallery before it became the McDougall Art Annex in 1988. In that year he was included in the Annex's opening exhibition *Here and Now*.**

**Since then Reddaway has seasoned his experience and tested his ideas in the European arena through extended stays in Germany and the Netherlands, absorbing those impulses he has felt to be useful in the development of his work.**

**In *The Deck of My Body*, the Robert McDougall Art Gallery is pleased to present the work of an important, more recent contributor to an enviable tradition of excellence in contemporary sculpture practice in Canterbury.**

**The Gallery is grateful for the assistance of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council through the commissioning scheme of its visual arts programme in the presentation of Richard Reddaway's exhibition.**

**John Coley  
Director, Robert McDougall Art Gallery.**



**Building the Body: Architecture and the Figure in Richard Reddaway's**  
The Deck of My Body

Lara Strongman

Over the last decade, New Zealand sculptor Richard Reddaway has produced a large body of work consistently concerned with representation of the human figure: a 'body of bodies.'<sup>1</sup> Though the works have differed from one another in their material and technical aspects, a basic preoccupation with architectural and social metaphor is evident throughout. In *The Deck of My Body*, his first site-specific installation, the general concerns of Reddaway's sculptural practice which have previously been realised in discrete works have here been resolved as a general scheme. *The Deck of My Body* both extends and redefines a reading of Reddaway's work.

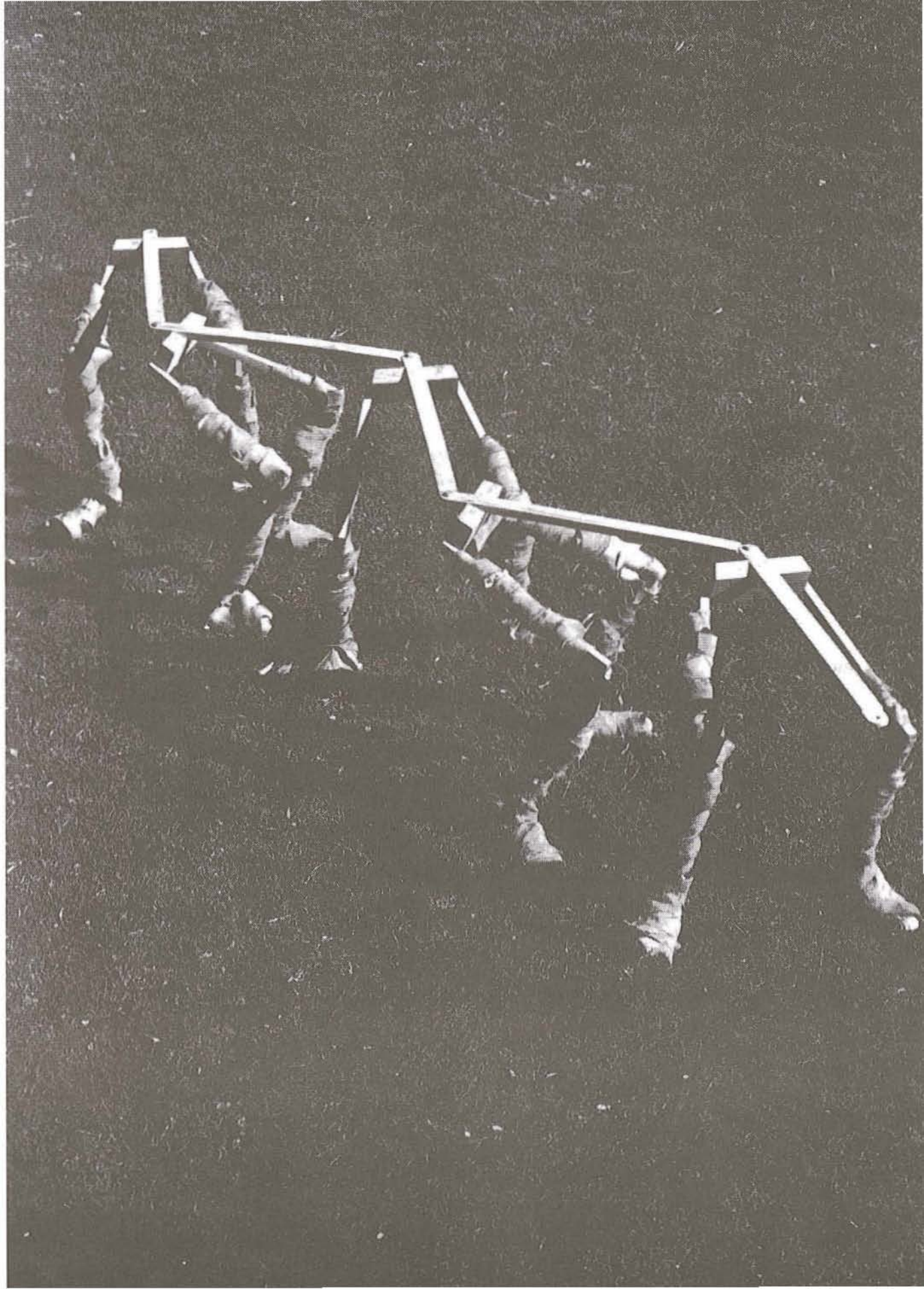
Reddaway has always been concerned with structure. His sculptures have been built rather than found, constructed from the inside out, rather than chipped away from the outside in. However, Reddaway's sculptures are artificial rather than organic, cultural constructions as opposed to natural projections. An underlying notion of structure, of architectonics applied to art, has pervaded almost every aspect of Reddaway's practice, informing his material sensibility, choice of technical process, and the theoretical implications of his work.

The desire for structural order is implicit in the physical construction of Reddaway's sculptures. In the manner of the individual works included in *The Deck of My Body*, these have tended to involve elements of symmetry, repetition, and proportional relationship to create an aesthetic based on a Classical architectural system. Reddaway's frequent use of armatures to support his figures, and rigid materials, often those used for house-building (concrete, timber, aluminium, ceramic tiles) to construct them, support this notion of predetermined form: a building code, which demands the physical endurance of a constructed body.

Reddaway has frequently employed historical architectural motifs in his work, drawing upon earlier models as the basis for the communication of contemporary ideas. Using the representation of the human body as a basic unit for building, Reddaway has imitated a range of familiar architectural details such as columns, column capitals, pediments, arches, vaults, windows, and friezes. These reconstructions are variously conceived as three-dimensional sculptural works and two-dimensional photomontages: each exists as a fragment of an imaginary architecture, components of an unrealisable structure.

To date, three distinct systems of production have become apparent in Reddaway's sculptural practice. In the first of these, produced from 1985 to 1988, crude representations of the human form, variously wrapped in resin-







soaked hessian ((white) Jamb or (yellow) Rib, dating from 1986), or encased in rigid carapace-like coverings ((paua) Lintel (1987)) were bonded together to construct architectural forms. These mummified bodies, hung on the wall, were the (almost) three-dimensional equivalents of Reddaway's photomontages, which first appeared in 1986. In works such as Barrel Vault (1988) or Rose Window (1988), architecture was represented by a photographic collage of bodies, multiple exposures of a (real) human form.

These two definitions of the architectural body co-existed for a time in Reddaway's practice, variations on a theme which was extended by a new series of work produced following a visit by Reddaway to Germany in 1990. The later sculptures, exhibited in Christchurch and Auckland under the title Real Real Real, were more definitely modelled than the earlier works, their human forms more explicitly articulated. Strong elements of colour and texture replaced the hitherto generally monochromatic and flat. As 'real' sculptures, they formed a response, in part, to Reddaway's experience of works of sculpture in Europe, available for viewing in three dimensions as opposed to the two-dimensional reproductions which primarily inform a New Zealand experience of international art. While Reddaway's earlier works were conceived within the tradition of reproduction available to him as a surrogate for actual sculpture (the photographic representation of a sculpture in a magazine or book, and the sculptural details of colonial revivalist styles of architecture), the Real Real Real works generally eschewed the imitation of existing architectural systems, establishing new internal modes of relationship. In The Deck of My Body, Reddaway has brought together in a single installation these diverse elements of his past practice, drawing upon his own traditions as the source for new work.

While Reddaway's works have engaged with the constructions of the past, their allegiance to an existing order is not straightforward. While appearing to uphold the structures which they describe, Reddaway's works also can be perceived as intervening in an established hierarchical code. Reddaway's architectural details are not capable of assuming the functions they describe: they are imitations only, fabrications of reality. His load-bearing structures such as columns and vaults are constructed from materials which are incapable of carrying any real physical weight. Economic in construction, they are capable of supporting only themselves. They are decorative rather than functional, art rather than architecture. Concerned with weighty matters and great traditions (the histories of architecture and sculpture, and the structure of societies), the relationship of Reddaway's sculptures to these concerns is in itself ambiguous. Reddaway's figures appear simultaneously to embody the establishment and comment upon it, at once forming part of a tradition and standing apart from it.

Traditionally, sculpture has been concerned with representation of the human form: the history of sculpture is primarily a history of bodies. For much of this history, sculptural practice has been associated with





architecture. Sculptural bodies were created to fill specific spaces in buildings and to define particular architectural and social functions. Capitalizing on a tradition, Reddaway's work explores this well-established relation between the sculpted body and architecture, and by implication, the relationship of people to the constructed environment which they inhabit.

In Reddaway's work, architecture functions as a metaphor for society. Significantly, Reddaway has tended to rework motifs belonging to two architectural styles, the Classical and the Gothic, both of which embodied in symbolic and didactic form the social ideals of their respective ages. For Classical society, architectural practice symbolized the democratic ideals of its (adult male) citizens; likewise, the elements of Gothic architecture (the arch pointing to Heaven, the precisely ordered hierarchy of the carved figures on a tympanum relief) provided a physical manifestation of the values of a fundamentally patriarchal institution, the Christian church.

The basic unit of society, the individual figure, becomes a building block in Reddaway's sculptural constructions. Bodies, **permanently** transfixed in a momentary posture or gesture, are cloned, reproduced **in series, and reconstituted** into architectural and sculptural forms. Stacked **one above the other, Reddaway's figures form** columns or describe the curves of **imaginary vaults. Elsewhere, squatting figures** are clustered, interlocked in the delicate **curves of a column capital, or ranged sinuously** side-by-side as an architectural frieze. **Seemingly lacking any indication of** the hand of their maker, the figures **appear to be mass-produced, each one individually** hand-crafted to the **same specifications. Personal specificities are subjugated to** the group design. There would appear to be **no room for idiosyncrasy in the strict** geometries of **Reddaway's architecture, no wild card to play in the deck of the body. Difference is suppressed in favour of structural unity: the figures** in Reddaway's **photomontages and sculptural objects are almost identical, any slight individual variance** in photographic printing or physical **composition a matter of** accident. Reddaway's architectural bodies seem to describe a totalitarian **system, a society whose** strength demands the conformity its individual members.

However, it is the very presence of the accidental in Reddaway's work, the small but not insignificant individual variances between the constructed figures, which lead one to question the fundamental relationship of the works to the totalitarian ideals which, at first glance, they appear to uphold. Totalitarianism admits no possibility of accidental outcome in design, of any individual variance, however slight, in the manufacture of its products. By making each figure individually, rather than casting the components of a work in an edition, Reddaway appears to be undermining the very system of values which his works describe, in which each component is not just equivalent but is equal to the next, the same rather than similar. It is as if Reddaway is knowingly attempting to build the perfect structure using inherently flawed materials. There is no possibility of success; given the weakness of its components, the structure is doomed to eventual collapse. This ambiguity of reading, where a work simultaneously seems to manifest the values of a given system and to break it down, can perhaps be seen as the critical foundation of Reddaway's approach.

Reddaway's depiction of the individual as a component of the establishment, a single piece of the large pattern, involves a social commentary based on the law of order.



This harmonious relationship of the parts to the whole, the subjugation of individual bodies to the lore of the corporate body, can be located in its most essential form in the Classical tradition of architecture from which many of Reddaway's earlier works borrowed. Classicism involves a preference for formal **order**, establishing its aesthetic principles through the mathematical statement of **relationships**. **Measure**, proportion, ratio; balance and stability through repetition and symmetry: **these are Classical rules** which define a conception of ideal beauty, and by implication, **denote an idealised** conception of society. (It is for this reason that Classical revivalist **styles of architecture** were employed as the official building code of contemporary totalitarian **societies** such as fascist Germany and Italy.)

**In his works which** deal overtly with architectural allusion, such as *The Deck of My Body*, **Reddaway uses** Classical rules to structure his societies. A mathematical system **of relationship links this** family of figures: a carefully constructed canon of proportion is **determined by progressive** hierarchies of scale among the figures, which are in turn related **proportionally to the** existing architecture of the gallery.

**In Classical society, the male body** in its idealised form was the expression of a **universal intellectual order**, denoting the triumph of reason over illogic, and culture over nature. The Roman architect **Vitruvius** derived architectural proportions from the figure, defining the **human form in terms of** geometry, encased within the ideal forms of a square and **circle**. This rule **was redefined in** the twentieth century by the Modernist architect **Le Corbusier**, whose **Modulor system** based dimensions and ratios of building on measurements of the **body in an attempt to** endow architecture with the human scale of its inhabitants. In *The Deck of My Body*, Reddaway has applied the Modulor principle in reverse, determining the **scale of the** constructed figures in relation to a given architecture. **However, Reddaway's figures, the** measurements and intervals of which are derived from **his own body, are also** proportionally related to the body of the viewer. The viewer's **bodily self-image determines his** or her view of the figures on display: these are variously **life-size and smaller or larger than** life, requiring, like all figurative sculpture, the proximity of the **human ratio to be** animated as body doubles.

**While Reddaway** employs the rules of a Classical architectural sensibility in his work, **one fundamental** Classical code, that of the idealized proportions and features of the **human form, is notably** absent from his constructions. For most of his photomontages, **the model has been** Reddaway himself, a naked figure posing for the self-timer of his **camera**. **Lacking ideal** qualities, Reddaway's figure is less than adequate as a medium from **which to construct** the perfect system. This self-conscious flaw in materials interjects **a note of uncertainty** into the proceedings. Reddaway's use of his own body destabilises **the architectural and** social metaphors which he has constructed. The conceptual **heaviness** of the **traditions** upon which he draws is once again belied by this ambiguity of **interpretation: do** the figures support a **totalitarian ideal or** deconstruct it?

**It can thus be perceived** that Reddaway's sculptural and photographic constructions, while **modelled upon** historical systems which aspired to perfection, are, by their material nature, **imperfect**. **The individual** modelling of the three-dimensional architectural works, and the **use of a specific**, unidealised individual figure to construct the photomontages, disestablish a **straightforward** reading of the works as manifestations of a totalitarian scheme. Reddaway's constructions do not stand up to inspection: they are let down by their inappropriate materials, which by implication condemn





**the systems which they appear to support. Rather than representing the real thing, Reddaway's works are designed to be read as imitations.**

**This concern with the metaphors inherent in materials which are used to make a work of art was extended by Reddaway in a body of work he produced from 1990 to 1991, following his return from study at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie in Germany. The figures which populated his Real Real Real exhibitions in Christchurch and Auckland were constructed from familiar, domestic materials, the colourful detritus of everyday living. Reddaway used broken crockery, ceramic tiles, records, shells, formica, plywood, and cast plaster to make sculptural bodies which, while tending to retain the architectural dependence of the wall, were generally released from the structural support of their neighbours. Representations of the female form appeared for the first time in these works, the conformist male societies of Reddaway's earlier sculptures here transformed into a proliferation of difference.**

**While the earlier architecturally-specific works required a conglomeration of bodies to create a single corporate mass, the newer works revealed the body as a physically independent unit, conceived as a whole, but related in posture and material conception to its fellows. Released from their conformity to the architectural system of their predecessors (a system to which Reddaway has returned for *The Deck of My Body*), the later works established a new code of building based less upon fundamental structure and more upon the significance of their material concerns, their veneers. In these new works the rigid grammar of architecture was replaced by the seductive syntax of the surface, an orderly hierarchy of communication subverted by colloquialisms. The lofty aspirations of the Classical and the Gothic orders were here brought to earth by the vernacular.**

**In his sculptures of about this time, Reddaway began to employ a new material to describe the figure – text. In these works, the printed word is used as an available material for the construction of sculpture, a material which, like any other, brings with it its own set of metaphors. These two-dimensional text-works were paired with other more solid sculptural bodies, which inhabited 'real' space while the text figures lay flat on the wall. Reddaway's concrete poetry of the figure was sourced in quotations from works of fiction, evocative and enigmatic fragments which defied easy reading. In works such as *Smoke and Fire* (1992), Reddaway broached a new definition of the body, a figure built literally from words, its details and functions prescribed by cultural projection. The text fragments which Reddaway employed were generally concerned with adventures of the body and spirit, and, as with the title of his present installation, *The Deck of My Body*, were appropriated from contemporary works of literature.**

**'The Deck of My Body' has its source in a quotation from Milan Kundera's novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. "The crew of her soul rushed up to the deck**





of her body" is a phrase which is repeated, in various forms, throughout the first two chapters of Kundera's book. It functions as a metaphor for a state of extreme and ecstatic emotion, where a character's sudden consciousness of the relationship of personal existence to the machinations of fate is realised as an intense bodily experience. The romantic associations of this phrase, where the heated disorder of emotion overcomes the rational distance of the intellect, is at odds with Reddaway's employment of the Classical tradition as a system for making his work, and is suggestive, perhaps, of the broadening of Reddaway's societal metaphor to accept difference and equivocality in place of equivalence.

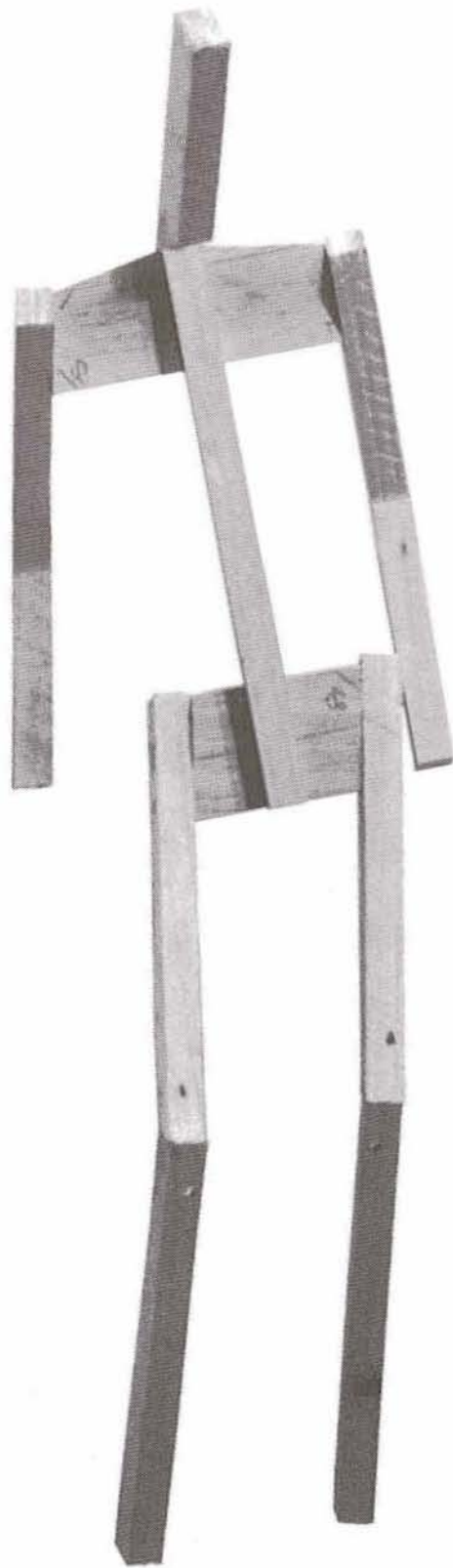
It has never been Reddaway's practice to rewrite the codes by which he has chosen to work, and likewise, he does not tamper with the text he borrows to construct his figures, apart from manipulating it physically to fit into a given space. In *The Deck of My Body*, Reddaway has appropriated an entire story, a dialectical version of the 'Three Little Pigs' fable, to build up the forms of fourteen small figures. There is a satisfying formal relation here in Reddaway's adoption of this apocryphal tale: the 'Three Little Pigs' depends, like Reddaway's own work, on the repetition of a motif to tell a story, and a wise choice of materials to build an enduring structure. The adventures of the three little pigs provide a light-hearted and familiar metaphor to describe Reddaway's sculptural practice.

The gentle sense of wit suggested by Reddaway's use of the 'Three Little Pigs' story in the current installation (a metaphor which he extends in a material sense in the figures, using brick veneers and straw-patterned wallpaper) is present in much of Reddaway's work. The very inappropriateness of the materials which construct some of the architectural works, plus the self-conscious awkwardness of the posture and gestures of the photographic figures, often invites an ironic reading of the works. This gently self-mocking good humour brings the figures down to earth, cutting them down from the serious totalitarian ideals to which they appear to aspire. Figures of fun, neither they or the systems to which they refer can be taken entirely seriously.

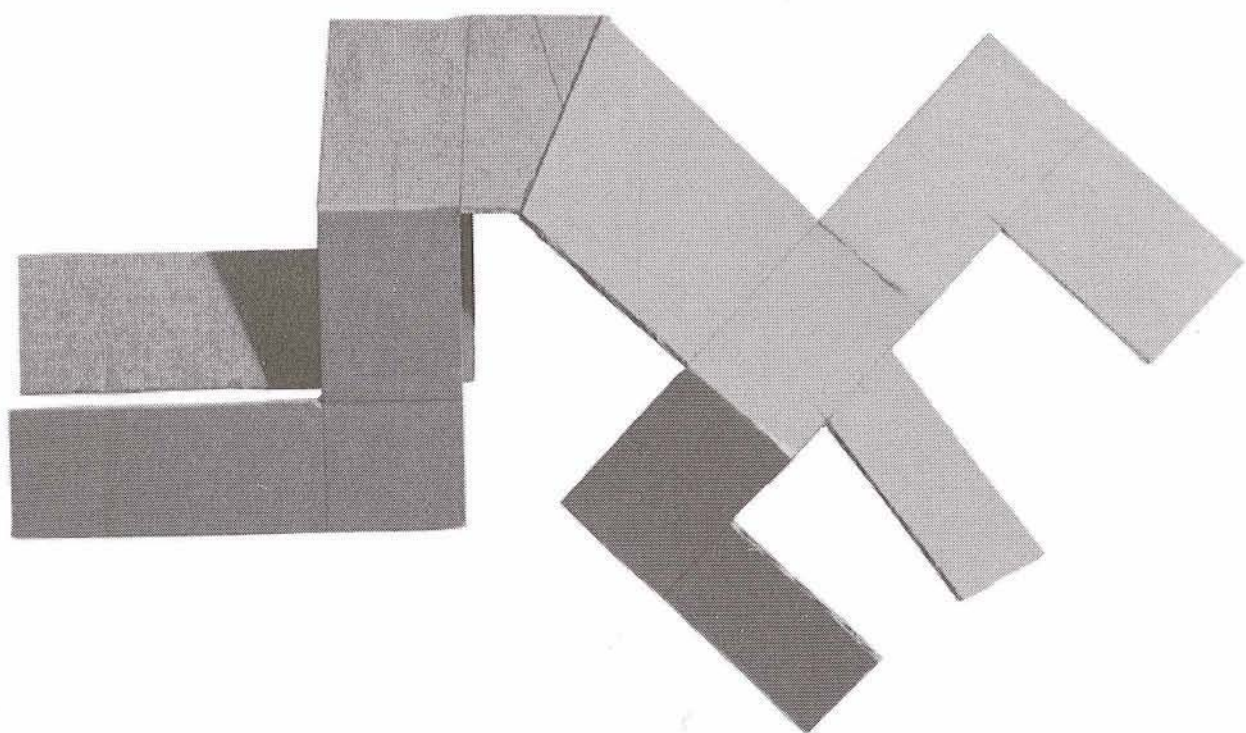
The various concerns and issues of Reddaway's sculptural practice over the last decade reach their most cohesive expression yet in *The Deck of My Body*. Deceptively simple in form, richly complex in its possibilities of interpretation, this installation reveals Reddaway at home with the materials and metaphors which have become his signature style, building on a tradition of architecture and the figure which he has made his own.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> See William McAloon's article, 'Richard Reddaway - Stepping Out: A Body of Bodies', in *Art New Zealand*, no. 62, Autumn 1992. I am indebted to William McAloon for his comments on an initial draft of this essay.







## Richard Reddaway

**Richard Reddaway was born in Lower Hutt in 1962. He moved to Christchurch in 1981 to study at the University of Canterbury, completing a diploma in Fine Arts with Honours in 1985. Reddaway has exhibited his sculpture and photomontage work regularly throughout New Zealand since 1984. In 1987 he travelled to Perth, Australia, as an Arts Council-sponsored participant in an artists exchange entitled Limited Sediton. Reddaway also received support from the Arts Council in 1989, when he travelled to Germany to study for six months under Christian Megert at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie. In October 1992 Reddaway returned to Europe on an international artists exchange programme, organized by the Abel Tasman Commission in the Netherlands. Reddaway has also lectured in sculpture at the University of Canterbury's School of Fine Arts, and the Christchurch Studio Art School. The Deck of My Body is Reddaway's first solo installation in a public art gallery.**

### Selected Exhibitions

- 1993** Opening Exhibition, Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington
- 1992** Prospect Canterbury '92, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch
- 1992** \*New Sculpture, Jonathan Jensen Gallery, Christchurch  
Vogue, CSA Gallery, Christchurch  
Distance Looks Our Way: Ten Artists from New Zealand, EXPO Seville, and Leiden, Holland  
\* The Crew of My Soul, Gregory Flint Gallery, Auckland
- 1991** Works from Te Wai Pounamu, Lesley Kreisler Gallery, New Plymouth  
Space Fictions, Catherine Scollay Gallery, Wellington  
\*Sculpture, Gregory Flint Gallery  
Distance Looks Our Way, Sarjeant Art Gallery, Wanganui
- 1990** \* Real Real Real, Jonathan Jensen Gallery  
\* Real Real Real, Gregory Flint Gallery, Wellington  
Out of the Woods, Sarjeant Art Gallery
- 1989** Sculpture?, Southern Cross Gallery, Wellington  
The Exquisite Corpse (with Fiona Pardington and Adrienne Martyn), Jonathan Jensen Gallery  
Nobodies, Shed 11, National Art Gallery, Wellington  
The Photography Show, Fisher Gallery, Pakuranga
- 1988** The Govett-Brewster Presents..., Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth  
\* Photomontages on an Architectural Theme, Jonathan Jensen Gallery  
Here and Now: Twelve Young Canterbury Artists (opening exhibition), McDougall Art Annex,  
Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch
- 1987** Guest Artist, Suter Art Society annual Exhibition, Bishop Suter Art Gallery, Nelson  
Art to Architecture, Manawa Art, Christchurch  
Sculpture and Drawings, Southern Cross Gallery  
Limited Sediton, Arts Council-sponsored participant in ARX '87, Perth, Australia
- 1986** Drawing Out, Manawa Art  
Sculpture and Drawing, James Paul Gallery, Christchurch





**1985 Honours Exhibition, Centre Gallery, Christchurch Arts Centre**

**1984 Four Person exhibition, Great Hall, Christchurch Arts Centre**

\* denotes solo exhibition

Public Collections

**Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt**

**Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth**

**Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North**

**Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch**

**Sarjeant Art Gallery, Wanganui**

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**McAloon, William** *'Richard Reddaway, Stepping Out: A Body of Bodies', Art New Zealand, no 62, pp. 54-57.*

*'Richard Reddaway: Building Codes and Reproductive Systems', in Distance Looks Our Way: Ten Artists from New Zealand (exhibition catalogue), Sarjeant Art Gallery, Wanganui, and the Distance Looks Our Way Trust, 1992.*

**McKenzie, Stuart** *'Coming Up Roses: The Photomontages of Richard Reddaway', Art New Zealand, no 53, pp. 50-51.*

Catalogue Illustrations

*Zig Zag (1985), wood, hessian*

*Archivolt (1988), plywood*

*Barrel Vault (1988), photomontage, aluminium. Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery*

*Globular Bodies (1991), wood, hessian, text*

