

# B.163

Bulletin  
Christchurch Art Gallery  
Te Puna o Waiwhetu

Summer  
December 2010—  
February 2011





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ANOTHER VIEW:  
THE MICHAEL SERESIN  
COLLECTION OF  
INTERNATIONAL BLACK AND  
WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY

Mid 2011

eugene atget, manuel alvarez-bravo,  
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This major photography collection toured  
New Zealand public galleries in 2006/7

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E. J. Bellocq (1873–1949)  
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gelatin silver print, circa 1912  
245 x 197mm

Provenance: Previously in the collection  
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TE PUNA O WAIWHETU  
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ART GALLERY

Cover: Petrus van der Velden  
**Mountain stream, Otira Gorge**  
(detail) 1891. Pencil. Collection  
of Christchurch Art Gallery  
Te Puna o Waiwhetu, presented  
by the family of A.F. Nicoll 1960

Inside cover: Petrus van der Velden  
**A waterfall in the Otira Gorge**  
(detail) 1891. Oil on canvas.  
Collection of the Dunedin Public  
Art Gallery, purchased 1893

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those of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu. All images reproduced  
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**THE START OF THIS LAST QUARTER** was of course marked by the 4 September earthquake. The magnitude 7.1 quake was devastating for parts of the city, but here in the Gallery our building and collection fortunately escaped unscathed—in fact the building was deemed so robust that it quickly became the headquarters for the major Civil Defence operation that swung in to effect. We remained closed to the public for a little over a week, but throughout this period and the weeks that followed we worked hard to install the **Ron Mueck** exhibition, and it is a testament to the dedication of our staff that the show opened on time, and looking spectacular.

We’re now just over halfway through the run of **Ron Mueck**, and it has been wonderful to see the Gallery’s spaces so filled with visitors, many of whom have never been before. The show will run until 23 January 2011, but so far it has been seen by over 36,000 people, which is a truly incredible figure. Audience responses have been great—a quick flick through the visitors’ book demonstrates the range of enthusiastic responses, from ‘I kept expecting them to breathe’, to ‘I’ve never been so moved by an art exhibition’.

Mueck’s sculptures can short-circuit the traditional steps required for art appreciation. You don’t need to understand the complex flow from art movement to movement (or from -ism to -ism) that accompanies much art history and theory to appreciate the spectacle of his works. The empathy that we feel with his scared, embittered, shocked or merely sleeping figures is engendered by these unique works themselves. Equally, it’s easy to see parallels with the sweep of art history, from Egyptian imagery to Spanish religious sculpture to mythical and modern painting. For those who want to know more, the extensive public programme around the exhibition is a great place to start.

Although we have allocated the entire ground floor to **Ron Mueck**, there is still a diverse range of other exhibitions on display. The fifth in the Gallery’s series on emerging artists, **Uncanny Valley** is now open in the Monica Richards Gallery. Featuring seven young New Zealand artists, it explores the idea of the uncanny through works that challenge notions of the everyday. Also on is **Blue Planet**, which finishes at the end of February. This long-running show has proven extremely popular with adults and children alike, so if you’re looking for something to keep the entire family happy over the holiday period, come and take a look.

There is a cyclical nature to the life of a gallery—a constant rotation of temporary exhibitions around the central core formed by the collection, as shows come and go with the seasons. However, one area that has not really been explored before is the period in between, when the works come down, the doors close and the

galleries are deconstructed. **De-Building** is a curatorial foray into the spaces usually hidden from view and includes works by national and international contemporary artists such as Gordon Matta-Clark, Callum Morton, Peter Robinson and Rachel Whiteread.

Petrus van der Velden’s masterpiece *Mountain stream, Otira Gorge* has long been one of the Gallery’s most popular paintings. Epic and dramatic, it is a landmark painting of a landscape that became almost an obsession for the artist. **Van der Velden: Otira** brings together for the first time over thirty works from his monumental Otira series, and includes pieces from private and public collections that are very rarely exhibited. Featuring key works from the Gallery’s collection as well as important loans, the exhibition also investigates the effect that the work had on his contemporaries and subsequent generations of artists.

**Leo Bensemann: An Art Venture** is an intensive look at one of Canterbury’s most influential artists and designers. Bensemann was a quintessential all-rounder, a key figure in The Group and at The Caxton Press and a talented painter, graphic artist and typographer. Curators Peter Simpson and Noel White focus on his landscape and portrait painting as well as his graphic work in this exhibition.

Visitors to the Gallery over the past couple of months would have been hard pushed to miss the sharp new graphic mural on the carpark bunker. Created by Wayne Youle, this new element of our **Outer Spaces** programme is a nice complement to **10 Down: A Wayne Youle Survey**, which will be on display from early next quarter.

Contributing to *Bulletin* this quarter are writers Richard Wolfe and Peter Simpson, Sons & Co. web designer Matt Arnold and artist Cat Auburn. Richard writes on Ron Mueck’s *Mask II* and portraiture, Peter discusses Leo Bensemann’s long and varied career, Matt selects his favourite work from the collection and Cat creates a piece of work for the ‘Pagework’ feature.

**Jenny Harper**

Director

November 2010

DECEMBER, JANUARY, FEBRUARY

**RON MUECK**

*Until 23 January*

Astounding in their realism and emotional power, Ron Mueck’s sculptures are some of the most evocative of our time. Christchurch is the only New Zealand venue for this must-see exhibition, which ranges from the startling *Wild man* to the poignantly tiny *Dead Dad* to the larger-than-life *Pregnant woman*.

*A National Gallery of Victoria Touring exhibition*

**Touring, Borg Henry, William A. Sutton and Ravenscar Galleries**

*Exhibition publication and iPod audio tour available*

**BLUE PLANET**

*Until 20 February*

Blue is a feeling, a place to dream and the colour of our amazing planet as seen from space. Looking at the ways artists have used the colour blue, **Blue Planet** celebrates imaginative art making and thinking, as well as different cultural and global perspectives. Shaped with younger audiences in mind.

**Burdon Family Gallery**

**DANIEL CROOKS: PAN NO.2 (ONE STEP FORWARDS, ONE FRAME BACKWARDS)**

*Until 27 February*

Acquired by Christchurch Art Gallery in 2008, *Pan No.2 (one step forwards, one frame backwards)* by Daniel Crooks offers a view of the contemporary city like you’ve never seen—with pedestrians, buildings, traffic and skateboarders stretched and morphed into mesmerising patterns.

**Tait Electronics Gallery**

*Exhibition catalogue available*

**UNCANNY VALLEY**

*Until 27 February*

The fifth in the Gallery’s emerging artists series, this exhibition presents new work by seven young New Zealanders. The uncanny is the paradoxical experience of encountering something that is both familiar and uncomfortably strange. These artists use ordinary subject matter to create imagery edged with melancholy, otherness and abjection.

**Monica Richards Gallery**

**DE-BUILDING**

*5 February – 15 May*

An exhibition inspired by a moment usually hidden from gallery-goers—when the show ends, the doors close and the ‘debuild’ begins. Brought together from New Zealand, Australia, Europe and the United States, the artists in this exhibition make the gallery itself part of the art—puncturing walls, adjusting and aggravating the architecture and revealing spaces usually hidden from view.

**William A. Sutton and Ravenscar Galleries**

*Exhibition catalogue available*

**LEO BENSEMANN: AN ART VENTURE**

*11 February – 15 May*

A comprehensive retrospective of an influential and talented Canterbury artist and designer. A painter of portraits and landscapes and a prominent member of The Group, Bensemann is equally well known for his significant contribution to New Zealand graphic design and typography through his work with Christchurch’s Caxton Press.

**Touring Gallery C and Borg Henry Gallery**

*iPod audio tour available*

**VAN DER VELDEN: OTIRA**

*11 February – 15 May*

The wild, untouched natural splendour of the Otira Gorge has long been a source of inspiration for artists. This exhibition brings together for the first time a comprehensive selection of paintings and drawings from van der Velden’s celebrated Otira series, illustrating his intensely personal and powerful vision of the region’s beauty.

**Touring Galleries A and B**

*Exhibition catalogue and iPod audio tour available*

**BROUGHT TO LIGHT: A NEW VIEW OF THE COLLECTION**

From Ngāi Tahu treasures to European landscapes, ceramics to video art, **Brought to Light** is your chance to get up close and personal with hundreds of extraordinary works of art from the Gallery’s collection. For any art institution charged with conserving the past, registering the present and offering suggestions for the future, the challenge to ‘bring to light’ is at once daunting and inspiring. This exhibition is our response to that challenge.

*iPod video tour available*

**OUTER SPACES**

The Gallery’s **Outer Spaces** come alive over summer with three new projects: Jae Hoon Lee creates a sublime hillscape for the Worcester Boulevard billboard, Wayne Youle turns the bunker into a stack of liquorice allsorts and Mark Braunias lets loose his cast of characters in the education corridor.

**SUBSONIC**

The summer **Subsonic** programme features a variety of sounds in the carpark stairwell from artists including Aaron Poole and Torlesse Supergroup.

# PORTRAITURE

## CONFRONTING

When it comes to creative encounters, there can be few that match the first sighting of a Ron Mueck sculpture. As with other landmark events, I suggest you are unlikely to forget exactly where you were when that formative experience took place.

Ron Mueck **Mask II** 2002. Polyester resin, fibreglass, steel, plywood, synthetic hair, second edition, artist's proof. Private collection.  
© Ron Mueck courtesy Anthony d'Offay, London







Ron Mueck *Dead Dad* (detail)  
1996–7. Silicone, polyurethane,  
styrene, synthetic hair, ed. 1/1.  
Stefan T. Edlis Collection,  
Chicago. © Ron Mueck courtesy  
Anthony d’Offay, London. Photo:  
Michael Tropea

**‘As representations, Mueck’s works go far beyond their immaculate finishes in the immortalisation of various stages of life. Human characteristics are laid bare.’**

For me it was the 1998/9 exhibition *New Neurotic Realism*, at the Saatchi Gallery in Boundary Road, London. An Antipodean, I had the feeling of being thrown in at the deep end, amongst so much new and unfamiliar work by equally unfamiliar artists. The viewer became voyeur when confronting Martin Maloney’s large and deliberately badly painted images of urban subcultures at play, and was then forced to walk the plank for immersion in Richard Wilson’s vertiginous oil-filled installation. Every work in this exhibition conspired to stop visitors in their tracks, and none more so than Ron Mueck’s. One of the first challenges was dealing with his wilful manipulation of scale, after which it was a matter of approaching with caution to examine in closer detail his astonishingly lifelike creations. Once over the shock of the new, first-time viewers could then stand back and observe other visitors coping with similar sensations.

Mueck began crafting his signature sculptures in 1996. His style emerged as if fully formed, and within two years had given rise to such celebrated figures as *Pinocchio*, *Dead Dad*, *Angel* and *Mask* (*Self Portrait*). He has an aversion to working at life-size, but whether they are dramatically larger or disturbingly smaller than nature, all his sculptures achieve a larger-than-life quality. The previous standard for three-dimensional realism in New Zealand was set in 1988

with the touring exhibition of American Duane Hanson’s *Real People*. But while the work of both sculptors depends on an intensely lifelike detail, Mueck’s subjects occupy an entirely different realm.

Through his deliberately unsettling changes to size and scale, Mueck deflects any direct comparison with ‘real life’, and so draws attention to his main point. And while Hanson’s ‘real people’ are a celebration of the mundane, in a sense Mueck’s are even more so. Many are presented in natural states—newly born or asleep or dead—and with minimal props or clothing. They are obviously based on particular individuals, but with the exception of *Dead Dad* and *Mask II* (which depict the artist’s own father and the artist himself respectively) they are not identified. As representations they go far beyond—and beneath—their immaculate finishes in their immortalisation of various stages of life. Human characteristics are laid bare and presented for scrutiny. In *Mask II*, for example, the artist is oblivious to our intrusions, while his monolithic scale suggests a timeless quality, and is perhaps a reminder that deep sleep can be likened to a near-death experience.

Among the issues raised by Mueck’s unique vision is the very nature of portraiture itself, one which might be approached from the point of view of the more familiar painted image.

Although a vital part of the art history of this country, the portrait has long been overshadowed by a popular preference for the landscape. The latter has been the default setting, stimulated by the sheer quantity of suitable and accessible subjects, and further assisted by a generally agreeable climate. Not surprisingly perhaps, New Zealand’s search for distinctive local themes has been somewhat self-effacing, focusing on interpretations of the landscape rather than the people who inhabit it.

Following the invention of photography, the death of painting was announced—somewhat prematurely—in 1839. The tradition survived and was transplanted in New Zealand, and by the second decade of the twentieth century Christchurch had taken over from Dunedin as the country’s leading centre for the visual arts. This pre-eminence also became evident in local portrait work by such artists as Elizabeth Kelly, Archibald Nicoll, Sydney Thompson and Elizabeth Wallwork. Later, this city produced what would become the country’s most popular of all such images, Rita Angus’s 1942 *Portrait of Betty Curnow*, famously described by Peter Tomory as ‘a portrait of a generation’ and by Frederick Page as ‘more than a portrait ... a revelation of the subject’.

However, the landscape continued to dominate the easels of New Zealand, and the painted portrait faced further competition in the late 1940s with the arrival of abstraction.



In 1968 Gordon H. Brown observed that the previous half-century had seen the practice fall into ‘general disrepute’, largely because artists were disinterested and had allowed it to be taken over by photographers. But if it had reached a low point in the late 1960s, portraiture was about to be revitalised. The focus now moved north to Auckland where the challenge was taken up by a new generation, among them Ian Scott, Michael Smither and Robin White, who had trained at the Elam School of Fine Arts.

In the face of being labeled irrelevant and conservative, the painted portrait has not only survived, but flourished. It has dealt with the alleged threat posed by photography—and all other technology, for that matter—by simply embracing it. Diversity continues to be its keynote, as demonstrated in the work of such current artists as Gavin Hurley, Mary McIntyre, Richard McWhannell, Liz Maw and Peter Stichbury. Perhaps it is the hyper-real and billboard-scale portraits of Martin Ball that best prepare us for the sculpture of Ron Mueck. But, once again, any similarity may be misleading. At first sight Ball’s close-cropped paintings appear like giant photographs, but on closer inspection they become increasingly fugitive, and lost beneath layers of delicately applied pigment. On the other hand, Mueck replaces two-dimensional metaphor with a more tangible reality in the round. His sculptures

remain hard-edged from any distance, and their focus has shifted from the particular to something more universal.

Basil Hallward, the artist at the centre of Oscar Wilde’s 1890 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, observed: ‘Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist.’ One hundred and twenty years on we may be able to go further, and ascertain that these sculptures by Ron Mueck are also portraits of ourselves.

Richard Wolfe

*Richard Wolfe is a freelance writer and curator whose recent books include New Zealand Portraits, Artists @ Work: New Zealand Painters & Sculptors in the Studio (with photographer Stephen Robinson), and It’s in the Post: The Stories behind New Zealand Stamps.*

***Ron Mueck is in the Touring, Borg Henry, Sutton and Ravenscar Galleries until 23 January 2011. A National Gallery of Victoria Touring Exhibition.***

***Confronting Portraiture is based on a lecture given by Richard Wolfe on 10 November 2010. The full audio file of the lecture is available online at [www.christchurchartgallery.org.nz](http://www.christchurchartgallery.org.nz).***

Ron Mueck *Dead Dad*  
1996–7. Stefan T. Edlis  
Collection, Chicago.  
© Ron Mueck courtesy  
Anthony d’Offay,  
London. Photo: National  
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EVENTS

**WEDNESDAY 12 JANUARY**  
**Floortalk / Becoming Who I Am**  
Join the Very Reverend Peter Beck  
in a search for self, meaning and  
purpose through the work of  
Ron Mueck.  
6pm / exhibition space / entry  
charges apply  
*Sponsored by The Press*

**WEDNESDAY 19 JANUARY**  
**Travels in Hyper-reality**  
Ron Mueck’s hyper-real sculptures  
have a distinguished pedigree in  
the history of western art. David  
Maskill, senior lecturer in art  
history at Victoria University of  
Wellington, explores the tradition  
from the mummy portraits  
of Roman Egypt to Madame  
Tussaud’s waxworks.  
6pm / Philip Carter Family  
Auditorium  
*Sponsored by The Press*



# What they said

It seems everyone is talking about Mueck at the moment. Here are a few snippets from the Gallery's public programme and the exhibition visitors' book.

*'There's an amazing realism in this work—it's uncanny and almost overwhelming. And yet of course we know that if we were to stretch our hand out we wouldn't touch a warm breathing living body. We're looking at a sculptural construction ... but this work we believe, somehow, is living. It's like going to a play—we know they are actors on the stage, we know they are dressed in costume, but when the curtains rise and the theatre goes dark we enter that world for a brief time.'*

**Mary Kisler**, Mackelvie curator of international art, Auckland Art Gallery, on *Pregnant woman*

*'We get the sense that we have wandered into the maternity ward of a hospital and we're intruding on a very private moment in someone else's life.'*

**Alison Fox**, Gallery guide, on *A girl*

*'Never been so moved by an art exhibition.'*

**Anonymous**

*'Beautiful and so hard not to touch. I had to hold my hands behind my back the whole time AND restrain myself from climbing on to the bed.'*

**Jon**

*'What I think is most fascinating about Ron is that despite his use of relatively new materials, his practice follows quite traditional techniques ... He makes the first version out of clay using his hands and very simple modelling tools ... The really time-consuming part is inserting the individual hairs, which he does by hand. With pieces such as Youth where the hair is quite tightly curled he uses nylon monofilament, and then wraps it around a wire and heats it so that it becomes quite tight. And he does that for every single hair.'*

**David Hurlston**, curator, Australian art, National Gallery of Victoria

*'In art history there is a deep relationship between the concepts of beauty and the human body. Most of the time when you want to represent beauty you take the most beautiful parts of beautiful men and women. Art shifts from that perfect composite body that you see during a period like neo-classicism to the more realistic body that you see during the twentieth century. That's part of this evolution, when you start looking at the human body in a different way and trying to make it as real as possible. And with Mueck you see something that's even more real than real.'*

**Dr Emilie Sitzia**, University of Canterbury, on *Wild man* and monumental sculpture

*'What spooked the Wild man?'*

**Chris**

For more information about the Gallery's public programme see our website.

[www.christchurchartgallery.org.nz](http://www.christchurchartgallery.org.nz)



# UNCANNY VALLEY

Arie Hellendoorn  
Portrait Man 2010.  
Oil paint on jute.  
Reproduced courtesy  
of the artist and  
Suite Gallery



The fifth in the emerging artists series at Christchurch Art Gallery, **Uncanny Valley** presents new work by New Zealand artists Cat Auburn, Marie-Claire Brehaut, ZhongHao Chen, Arie Hellendoorn, Rosa Scott, Roberta Thornley and Shannon Williamson. Curator Jennifer Hay introduces the show.

**THE UNCANNY—OR ‘UNHEIMLICHE’** (un-homely)—is a Freudian concept relating to the paradoxical experience of encountering something that is at once familiar and uncomfortably strange. **Uncanny Valley** takes its title from Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori’s theory of the uncanny, in which he describes the gap that exists between familiar living things and familiar inanimate representations and our responses to this phenomenon. This season at the Gallery, the uncanny reigns supreme as Ron Mueck’s hyper-real sculptures of humans confront visitors with their almost forensic renditions of flesh. This group of young artists, however, take ordinary subject matter such as food, animals, anatomy and portraiture to create imagery edged with otherness and abjection. They challenge preconceived notions of the everyday, revealing the experience to be potentially threatening but ultimately wondrous.

Cat Auburn, currently the Olivia Spencer Bower artist in residence, graduated in 2007 with a postgraduate diploma in fine arts from Auckland University. She skilfully uses polystyrene and fibreglass to create hybrid animals with delicate bone-like limbs that appear to be in a state of metamorphosis. An animal lover and keen horse rider from an early age, melancholy creatures such as the reclining horse in *Rest Cure* derive largely from personal influences. Auburn’s disassembled and then rearranged mutations of nature emerge as complete and triumphant—despite their apparent fragility.

The hybrid nature of much of the work in **Uncanny Valley** is also evident in Shannon Williamson’s and Arie Hellendoorn’s creepy biological portraits. Hellendoorn graduated with a degree in fine arts from Massey University and has exhibited in public and artist-run spaces including the Michael Hirschfeld Gallery, Enjoy and High Street Project. His two portraits unsettle in their erasure of obvious facial features—identity and gender concealed behind vivid organ-like faces. Williamson’s intricate watercolour drawings on paper are charged with aspects of both biological phenomena and horror. Dismantling representations of the human body, Williamson then reassembles them to create mutant forms that are both beautiful and grotesque. Her practice is informed by scientific and medical imagery and methods of display. She was awarded the Ethel Susan Jones Travelling Scholarship in 2010 and graduated in 2009 from the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts.

Cat Auburn *Rest Cure*  
2009. Mixed media.  
Reproduced courtesy of  
the artist and Rob Garrett  
Contemporary Fine Art.  
Photo: Ken Stewart







Right:  
Shannon Williamson **Untitled**  
2010. Watercolour and pencil  
on paper. Reproduced courtesy  
of the artist

Below:  
Rosa Scott **Untitled (exile)**  
2010. Oil on board. Reproduced  
courtesy of the artist



Roberta Thornley **Crying  
my Mother's tears (Meme)**  
2010. Archival pigment print.  
Courtesy the artist and Tim  
Melville Gallery, Auckland

*‘They challenge  
preconceived notions of  
the everyday, revealing  
the experience to be  
potentially threatening  
but ultimately wondrous.’*

between a sweet sentimentality and contemporary unease is accentuated by the artist’s meticulous pictorial style. Hovering objects evoke paranormal activity, as if these children are special beings operating in a parallel world. Also exploring the boundary between youth and adulthood is Auckland artist Roberta Thornley, whose photographic practice captures in a cinematic and uneasy way a state of decay and renewal. Aspects of the everyday world, be it people or objects, are suspended in a moment of change; her subjects appear to be on the edge of either promise or disaster. Thornley graduated in 2007 from Auckland University’s Elam School of Fine Arts.

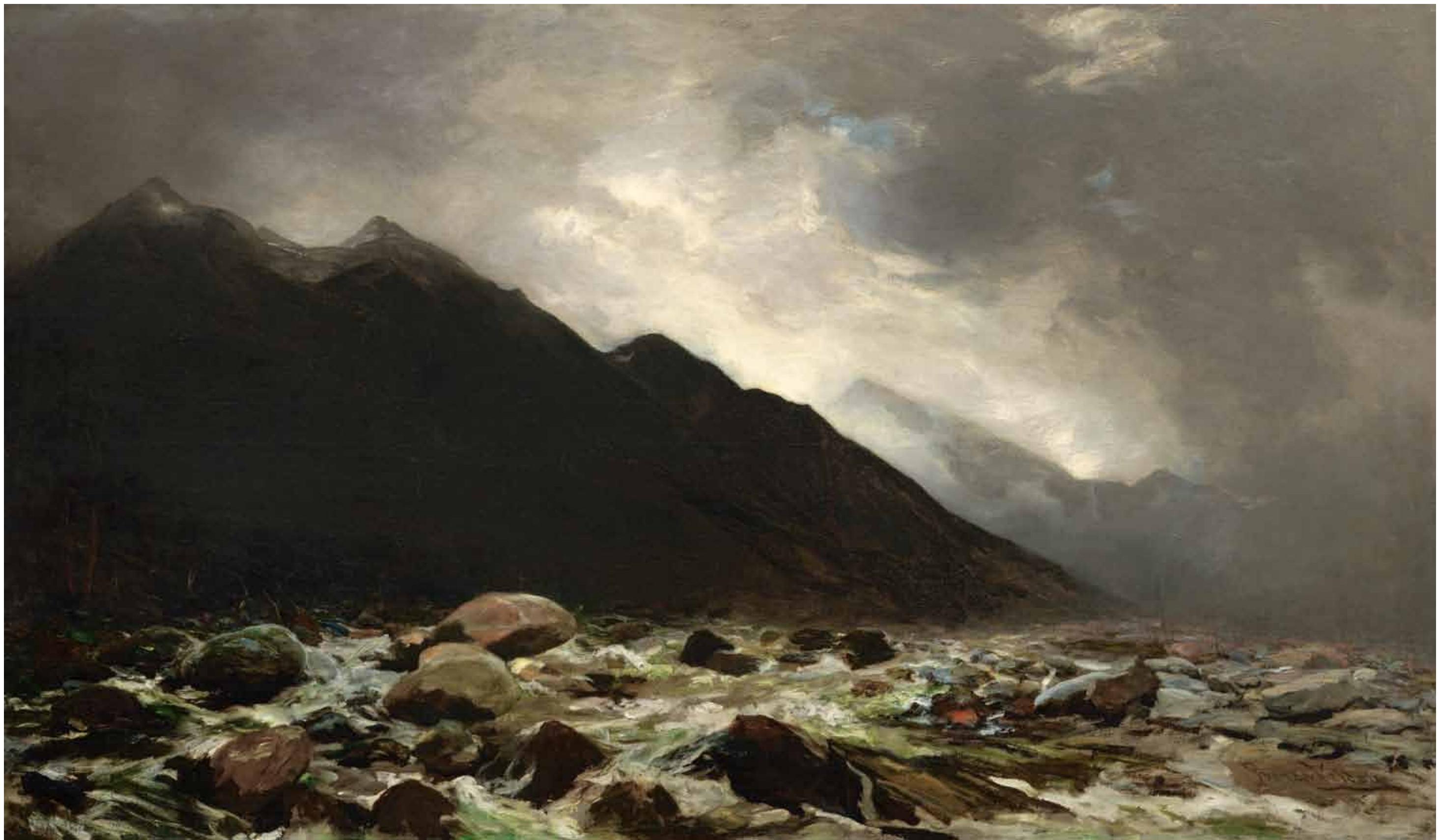
Another 2009 graduate from the University of Canterbury, Marie-Claire Brehaut’s portraits of children and young adults at first appear conventional. However, upon closer inspection they quickly become disconcerting. The clothes and the formality of the sitters, as well as their odd expressions, recall dated school photographs or religious iconography. The contrast

in fine arts from the University of Canterbury, addresses ideas of ‘animality’ and otherness using the domestic dog as her subject matter. Scott explores the human/animal relationship from the notion that animals are both same as us and different from us—that these pets are domesticated but potentially deadly beasts. Like Scott, ZhongHao Chen’s paintings explore the physicality of paint and colour. His viscous piles of food within ambiguous landscapes assert both the formality of painting and the shifting cultural contexts implicit within his imagery. ZhongHao draws upon a number of cultural references in his work, from traditional Chinese painting techniques through to European masters and pop art. His ability to combine these references with his own visual interests reflects his astute observations on the gluttonous excesses of contemporary society. Chen graduated from the University of Canterbury in 2009 with a master’s degree in fine arts.

**Jennifer Hay**  
*Assistant curator*

***Uncanny Valley* is in the Monica Richards Gallery until 27 February. An iPod audio tour is available from the front desk.**





V  
Van der elden

## OTIRA

**A first encounter with a painting by Petrus van der Velden more than twenty years ago was the start of many years of research for Gallery curator Peter Vangioni. Peter is the lead author of the Gallery's new book on van der Velden, and talks here of his fascination with the artist's Otira works.**

Petrus van der Velden *Mount Rolleston and the Otira River* 1893. Oil on canvas. Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, purchased 1965





*‘The aim of our existence  
is nothing else than to  
study nature and with so  
doing to understand more  
and more how grand and  
pure nature is.’*

**SOME TIME DURING THE LATE 1980S** a few mates and myself drove our rattly old Honda Civic hatchback into Arthur’s Pass to climb Avalanche Peak via Crow Stream in the southern shadow of Mount Rolleston. The trip was a complete disaster due to a severe southerly storm that hit the area just as we began our tramp. The DOC ranger at Arthur’s Pass recommended we cancel the climb, but at the invincible age of nineteen we naïvely thought we could easily manage the ascent, and pushed on. We were on the opposite side of Mount Rolleston to the Otira River, but the mountain dominated the entire trip, looming over us in the rain and snow and occasionally allowing us a glimpse of its peaks. We ended up trapped in the Crow hut for two nights before the storm cleared enough for us to make our escape back through the valley the way we had come. This included two seriously perilous crossings of the swollen Waimakariri river and to this day I still shudder at our foolishness (hearing the muffled sounds of rocks being carried down the river bed by the torrent, my legs feeling like they were about to give way to the force of the river’s flow).

Later that year I went to the Robert McDougall Art Gallery for the first time, to see the Andy Warhol screenprint (I was the drummer in an obscure garage band heavily influenced by the Velvet Underground and Warhol’s Factory). I found myself instead standing in front of Petrus van der Velden’s *Mount Rolleston and the Otira River*, reliving my tramp up the creek bed beneath the mountain. I found I had a far stronger connection with this work than I did with the Warhol print, and even now I remain thankful every time I see van der Velden’s painting, with its turbulent rushing waters over the broad rocky river bed while the darkest of storm clouds hang threateningly above the valley—very much the same weather we experienced at the junction of the Crow and Waimakariri rivers all those years ago.



Far left:  
Petrus van der Velden **Jacksons, Otira** c.1893 Oil on canvas.  
Collection of Christchurch Art  
Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu,  
purchased with assistance from  
the Olive Stirrat Bequest 2003

Left:  
Petrus van der Velden **Study for Otira Gorge** c.1912. Watercolour,  
gouache and charcoal. Collection  
of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o  
Tāmaki, purchased 1959

The Otira Gorge and Arthur’s Pass region is as spectacular today as it was when Petrus van der Velden first visited it in January 1891—a watershed moment, not only for the artist’s career but also for the history of New Zealand art. Van der Velden’s paintings of the Otira Gorge remain to this day some of the most powerful and emotive works to have been produced in New Zealand and have appealed to generations of art audiences since they were first painted 120 years ago.

In 1891 Otira was a must-see destination for any visitor to the country, a justifiable reputation that was enhanced by numerous accounts of the dramatic coach ride along the steep and narrow road. Awe-struck travellers related tales of the surrounding majestic mountains, the thunderous roar of falling water that reverberates throughout the Gorge, particularly when it rains, and the dense primeval bush that covers the mountain slopes. Many published descriptions from the late nineteenth century expounded the Victorian notion that to experience pure nature, untouched and unsullied by human hands, brought one into closer communication with God—a notion that appealed to van der Velden’s thoughts on spirituality. His tempestuous visions of the Otira Gorge reveal his deeply personal ideas about God, nature and art:

*Colour is light, light is love and love is God and therefore on Sundays instead of going to church I teach my children drawing after nature. I have come to the conclusion that painting and drawing after nature, instead of being a luxury is the most necessary for the education of man ... The aim*



*‘This is a landscape that still inspires awe in much the same way as it did for van der Velden and his Victorian counterparts over 120 years ago.’*

---

*of our existence is nothing else than to study nature and with so doing to understand more and more how grand and pure nature is.*<sup>1</sup>

Van der Velden’s first trip to Otira took place over January and February 1891, when he spent six weeks based at the George Dyer Hotel. His major Otira motif, that of a mountain stream, was developed out of his experiences on this visit, and his masterpiece *A waterfall in the Otira Gorge* was an undisputed success when shown at the annual exhibitions of the Canterbury, Auckland and Otago art societies in 1891 and 1892. The reviews he received suggest that van der Velden had made his mark on New Zealand’s fledgling art scene. Comments such as ‘The pride of the exhibition’, ‘the best picture of its kind [to have been] shown in Auckland’ and ‘the great feature of this year’s exhibition’ highlight the accolades he received at the time for this painting.<sup>2</sup> Van der Velden had secured his position as one of the country’s leading artists. Establishing his reputation even further was the £300 pounds paid for the above painting by the Otago Art Society, an unprecedented amount for a New Zealand painting at the time.

Van der Velden returned to Otira for a second visit in the winter of 1893. During this trip he developed his second Otira motif, that of Mount Rolleston, a view taken from in front of the George Dyer Hotel at the foot of the Gorge where the Otira and Rolleston rivers converge. As with his mountain stream series, van der Velden completed numerous versions of this motif, varying the atmospheric conditions from darkened stormy skies and flooded rivers to less turbulent scenes with the sun setting over the ranges to the west. With an almost obsessive zeal, he returned to them again and again throughout the early 1890s, exploring compositional and tonal variations.

In 1912, van der Velden returned to the Otira again, at least in his studio. He completed several studies of the mountain stream motif that ultimately led to his last major painting. Now in his twilight years, he had come to the realisation that the Otira series was one of his major achievements as an artist. This is clearly evident in *Self-portrait with Otira background*, completed just three weeks before he died, in which the artist pays modest homage to himself and his Otira works, proclaiming to the world

Petrus van der Velden  
*A waterfall in the Otira Gorge* 1891.  
Oil on canvas. Collection of Dunedin  
Public Art Gallery, purchased 1893







#### NOTES

1. Quoted in T.L. Rodney Wilson, *Petrus van der Velden (1837–1913): A Catalogue Raisonné*, Sydney, 1979, pp.111–12
2. In order: *Lyttelton Times*, 6 November 1891, p.5; 'Brother brush', *The Observer*, 19 March 1892, p.4; and *The Otago Witness*, 17 November 1892, p.15

#### EVENT

##### WEDNESDAY 16 FEBRUARY

Van Der Velden: Otira  
Join curator Peter Vangioni for a floortalk on van der Velden's celebrated Otira series and a unique opportunity to view a selection of works that respond to Otira and van der Velden by artists as diverse as John Gibb, Alfred Walsh, Colin McCahon and Ann Shelton.  
6pm / exhibition space / free  
Sponsored by The Press

#### Left:

Petrus van der Velden Pages 14–15 from an Otira sketchbook 1891. Charcoal. Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, gift of W. Fergusson Hogg 1967

#### Right:

Petrus van der Velden Self-portrait with Otira background 1913. Charcoal. Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, bequeathed by Miss D.C. Bates, 1983



the importance he places on his Otira paintings above all his other work from his long career.

**Van der Velden: Otira** brings together for the first time a comprehensive collection of the Otira paintings and drawings, including the masterpiece *A waterfall in the Otira Gorge*, which will be shown alongside lesser known examples based on his mountain stream motif as well as examples from the Mount Rolleston series. Collectively these works highlight the artist's single-minded approach to painting the Otira, exploring the range of variations in his compositions. Alongside these will be exhibited a selection of van der Velden's sketchbooks, drawings and his last major work, *Otira Gorge* (1912).

Artists who also worked at Otira, or have produced work influenced by van der Velden or his Otira motifs, will also be included. John Gibb, Charles Blomfield, Alfred Walsh, Margaret Stoddart as well as colonial photographers W.A. Taylor and the Burton Brothers will be shown alongside more contemporary artists such as Colin McCahon, Ann Shelton, Elliott Collins, Brenda Nightingale, Derek Henderson, Jason Greig, Rudolf Boelee, Andrew Drummond and the sound artists Torlesse Supergroup.

In 1997 I drove some friends from Chicago over the main divide via the Otira Gorge. Even from the comfort of

our Nissan Sunny it was a revealing moment as we reached the top of gorge and began our descent into the ravine. The chatter fell to silence and there was a palpable sense of wonder at the dramatic landscape that was unfolding before us. I could also sense a little fear in our guests at the sheer drop over the side of the road. We stopped halfway down and were struck by the scale of the mountains that engulfed us—and not least the volume of the thunderous torrent crashing its way down the Gorge below us. This is a landscape that still inspires awe in much the same way as it did for van der Velden and his Victorian counterparts over 120 years ago.

**Peter Vangioni**  
Curator

**Van der Velden: Otira** is in *Touring Galleries A and B* from 11 February until 15 May. A major new exhibition catalogue by Peter Vangioni and Dieuwertje Dekkers will be available from the Gallery Shop.



Earlier this year the Gallery acquired a major painting by Petrus van der Velden. Painted in 1867, *The Leuvehaven, Rotterdam* is an early example by the artist, completed while living in the Netherlands, at the time when he abandoned his lithographic printing business and made the brave step of committing himself to painting full-time. During his early career van der Velden focused on marine subjects and this work is one of the first he was to exhibit.

*The Leuvehaven, Rotterdam* meticulously depicts the bustling activities of one of the Netherlands' busiest ports, and the accuracy and care with which van der Velden has completed the scene is quite remarkable given the much looser brushwork he developed throughout the 1870s when he had come under the

influence of the leading Dutch painter of the period, Jozef Israëls. *The Leuvehaven, Rotterdam* is the first major work from van der Velden's early period to enter a public collection in New Zealand and is a fitting complement to the Gallery's other masterpieces by the Dutch artist, *The Dutch funeral* (1875) and *Mountain stream, Otira Gorge* (1893). This new addition has been acquired through the generosity of Gabrielle Tasman in memory of Adriaan and with the support of the Olive Stirrat Bequest. It was also supported by Christchurch City Council's Challenge Grant to Christchurch Art Gallery Trust.

*The Leuvehaven, Rotterdam* is currently on display in the Connoisseurs Room in Brought To Light.

Petrus van der Velden *The Leuvehaven, Rotterdam* 1867. Oil on canvas. Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery, purchased with assistance from Gabrielle Tasman in memory of Adriaan and from the Olive Stirrat bequest, 2010. Purchase supported by Christchurch City Council's Challenge Grant to Christchurch Art Gallery Trust



# The Olive Stirrat Bequest

THE OLIVE STIRRAT BEQUEST is one of the largest to have been made to the Gallery, and the major focus of the seventy-two works acquired through the bequest over the past twenty-eight years has been New Zealand and international historical art. Some highlights include *Return of the river* by Frances Hodgkins, Rita Angus's *Riverbed*, *Waiau*, Margaret Stoddart's *Godley house*, *Diamond Harbour* and four works by Petrus van der Velden including *Jacksons*, *Otira*. Also purchased through the bequest were important early views of Lyttelton Harbour by William Holmes and Richard Oliver, including Oliver's excellent 1850 study of *The Maori settlement*, *Purau Bay*, *Port Cooper*. The Gallery's international print collection has also benefited immensely from the bequest with the acquisition of important examples by Odilon Redon, Claude Flight, Francisco Goya, J.M.W. Turner, Charles Meryon and Käthe Kollwitz. Stirrat's legacy to Canterbury art audiences was recently continued when the bequest was used to assist the in the purchase of van der Velden's *The Leuvehaven*, *Rotterdam*.

Olive Stirrat was a long-time supporter and life member of the Friends of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery. On her death in 1982 a provision in her will left an incredibly generous \$90,000 to the Gallery, specifically for the purpose of acquiring works of art for the collection.



Top: Richard Aldworth Oliver *The Maori Settlement, Purau Bay, Port Cooper* 1850. Watercolour. Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, purchased with assistance from the Olive Stirrat Bequest 1983

Above: Frances Hodgkins *Return of the river* 1937. Gouache. Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, purchased with assistance from the Olive Stirrat Bequest 1983

# MAKE A DONATION, MAKE A DIFFERENCE

*We invite you to become a supporter of the Christchurch Art Gallery Trust. You can help the Trust support the Gallery as it continues to grow as an internationally recognised centre of excellence, providing a stimulating and culturally enriching experience for all who visit now and in the future.*

## WAYS YOU CAN MAKE A DONATION

The Christchurch Art Gallery Trust welcomes all contributions and offers a number of ways you can make a donation.

### Annual Giving

Our three-tiered programme for making annual donations allows you to choose the level that best suits your circumstances. Each level of giving confers a number of exclusive benefits, including private dinners and cocktail functions, personal invitations and special viewings of the collection.

*Patrons' Circle* (\$10,000 and above)

*Ambassadors' Circle* (\$5,000 – \$10,000)

*Benefactors' Circle* (\$1,000 – \$5,000)

### Collection Development

*The Challenge Grant and Challenge Grant*

*Response Fund*

The Challenge Grant is a ten-year commitment by Christchurch City Council to supplement the collection development budget by matching dollar-for-dollar any amount raised by the Trust up to a set amount per annum.

*Target 2010–11: \$200,000*

*Total raised by 30 November 2010: \$142,125*

*\$57,815 to be raised by June 2011*

### Special Donations

Making a special donation means you can stipulate what you would like your contribution to be used for.

### Bequests

This is your opportunity to leave an inspirational legacy for the future by including the Gallery in your will.

*Christchurch Art Gallery formally acknowledges the major donors who contributed to the building of the Gallery.* Hon. Margaret Austin, Kiri Borg and Brian Henry, Hon. Philip and Mrs Ros Burdon, Philip Carter, Ben Danis, Sir Neil and Lady Isaac, Neil and Diane McKegg, Monica Richards, Robert and Barbara Stewart, Sir Robertson and Lady Stewart, Stout Trust, W.A. Sutton Trust, Sir Angus and Lady Tait, Adriaan and Gabrielle Tasman, Jim and Susan Wakefield

Many continue to support the Gallery and we thank them.

## RECENT CONTRIBUTIONS AND GIFTS

### Annual Donors

*Patrons' Circle*

Hon. Philip and Mrs Ros Burdon

Gabrielle Tasman

Theo and Janet Giesen

*Ambassadors' Circle*

Sir Miles Warren

*Benefactors' Circle*

Anonymous

### Special Donations

Philip Carter

Friends of Christchurch Art Gallery

W.A. Sutton Trust

Worcester Trust

### Major Bequests

N. Barrett

### Christchurch Art Gallery Trust Trustees

Mike Stenhouse—Chairperson

Chris Bocket, Garth Gallaway, Jenny Harper,

Bruce Irvine, Stephen Montgomery,

Guy Pask, Monica Ryan, Alexandra Stewart,

Gabrielle Tasman

## CHRISTCHURCH ART GALLERY TRUST

Tax Status—The Christchurch Art Gallery Trust is a charitable trust registered with the Charities Commission. The Trust has tax charity status as defined under the Income Tax Act 2007.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please contact the Gallery's development manager.  
Tel: (+64) 3 941 7348; email: [cagtrust@ccc.govt.nz](mailto:cagtrust@ccc.govt.nz)



# Mark Braunias

*Bulletin* asked the artist a few quick questions as he worked on *The Children's Charter*, a new wall work he has created for the Gallery.

**BULLETIN:** *We've seen you drawing with the long stick—can you tell us what that's about?*

**MARK BRAUNIAS:** The main thing with the long stick is it allows me get back from the individual drawings on the wall and get a much better sense of scale and proportion, and perhaps most importantly, the relationship of elements within the overall composition. You get a good overview of the work as a whole.

**B:** *What does the Children's Charter mean?*

**MB:** The drawings and the intention of the imagery are loosely based on the Children's Charter, which was passed into law in nineteenth-century England. Commonly known as the 'Kids Act', it was essentially to stop the exploitation of children during the Industrial Revolution. Widespread delinquency among youth was also a major problem. The charter was the beginning of state schools and general education for the working classes. I actually like the notion of children who can't read or write making their own 'charter' through doodled drawings sketched in the margins of school exercise books and so on. So in a sense my work at the Gallery is like a wall chart of the imagination.

**B:** *So what is going on in the mural? Who are the wee characters and what are they up to?*

**MB:** They began as freeform doodles, but as I processed them they started to develop like weird biological mutations. Something gone wrong in a laboratory. I have drawn them in a processional manner and they all seem to be heading in the same direction. Evolution in reverse perhaps. They are not based on individuals but more a generic species either from the past or possibly the future.

**B:** *Is this the biggest work you've produced?*

**MB:** No. However, it is up there in terms of the many wall drawings I have completed since I first started doing them in 2004. Maybe the third largest. A good scale I think.

**B:** *What is the relationship between this and the smaller works on paper you produce?*

**MB:** The small drawings on paper are the initial ideas and they are mostly done in an almost automatic way. A stream of consciousness approach. These are then translated into much larger works and I adapt and modify as I go.

**B:** *How have you found it creating art in a public space?*

**MB:** I have done about ten wall drawings in public spaces and I try to learn something from every one of them. With each wall work I bring a slightly different approach and see what will work or not. I don't have a fixed plan for the composition and prefer not to project the images up and copy in from there. So I can be reasonably experimental with technique and improvise quite freely. Working in front of people can be a challenge, and of course if things start going poorly you have nowhere to hide. But on the positive side you get instant feedback and the adrenaline pushes you through. As an artist it's healthy to be forced outside of your comfort zone. I have enjoyed doing this wall the most and the support of the Gallery and the Gallery-goers has been excellent.

Mark Braunias *The Children's Charter*  
(detail) 2010. Ink and acrylic on wall







Fiona Connor *What you bring with you to work* (detail) 2010, mixed media. Collection Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, purchased 2010. Installation view from the exhibition *NEW010*, ACCA, Melbourne, 2010. Photograph courtesy the artist and ACCA, Melbourne

# DE— BUILD ING

There's a moment in the life of all exhibitions that public galleries usually hide from their audiences. It's the moment when a show ends, the doors close, and the 'de-build' begins. In different institutions it has different names—I've also heard it called 'the takedown', 'the undo' and 'the dismantle'—but the process looks (and sounds) the same wherever it occurs. Crates are wheeled in and artworks wheeled out. Walls are crowbarred open, broken apart, and trundled out to the skip. Drills whine and nailguns cough. Dust covers the floor and paint fumes fill the air. And when the gallery opens again in two weeks time, no sign of all this mess and unmaking remains. You'd think the de-build had never happened.

Not this February, however. When the doors to the Sutton and Ravenscar galleries reopen during that month, a de-build of sorts will continue. Screws, stanchions, plinths, crates, paint-pots, tools and sandpaper—they all play their part in the new exhibition **De-Building**. This international group exhibition brings together fourteen artists who specialise in sculptural surprises, architectural double-takes, and small shocks of misrecognition. From pioneering 'anarchitect' Gordon Matta-Clark through the Spanish provocateur Santiago Sierra to the young New Zealand sculptor Fiona Connor, the show spans several generations,

numerous countries, and many different ways of making art; there's video, wall painting, embroidery, photography and some truly heavy metal sculpture. But for all these artists the de-build is a moment of possibility and potential—a moment when energy is high, categories get confused, art bumps into non-art, and unexpected views and connections open up.

Peter Robinson, for instance, takes his cue from the props and structures that usually support art, creating plinths, cases and stanchions from ghostly polystyrene and reinforcing steel and stacking them in ceiling-high piles. Callum Morton also reimagines a common back-of-house sight in art galleries, namely the sizeable and seriously carpentered crates that precious artworks travel in. Even by public gallery standards, however, Morton's crate is preposterously large, and it literally





#### EVENTS

##### SATURDAY 5 FEBRUARY

Artist Talk / Callum Morton  
From hotels and motorways to his own family home, Australian artist Callum Morton explores the look and meaning of the built environment. Hear this renowned sculptor—who has represented his country at the Venice Biennale—discuss art, architecture and his new installation for **De-Building**.  
2pm / Philip Carter Family Auditorium / free

##### WEDNESDAY 9 FEBRUARY

Floortalk / De-Building  
Senior curator Justin Paton will lead a lively walk and talk through the show, exploring the 'love/hate relationship' between contemporary artists and the gallery spaces they show in.  
6pm / Sponsored by *The Press*

Peter Robinson  
**Modern Standards**  
2010. Installation  
at Sue Crockford  
Gallery, Auckland

**‘THE DE-BUILD IS A MOMENT OF POSSIBILITY AND POTENTIAL—A MOMENT WHEN ENERGY IS HIGH, CATEGORIES GET CONFUSED, ART BUMPS INTO NON-ART, AND UNEXPECTED VIEWS AND CONNECTIONS OPEN UP.’**

roars and rumbles with the presence of some cargo that sounds a lot scarier than art. And in the third of the show’s major installations, a work recently acquired by Christchurch Art Gallery titled *What you bring with you to work*, Fiona Connor opens a series of ‘picture window’ views into the hidden spaces of the gallery—recesses filled with sawdust and the signs of construction, spaces the building never expected us to see.

But even while they examine these inner spaces and backstage objects, the de-building artists also look outward, using their interventions in the gallery to open up broader matters of taste, value, memory, and shelter. For Santiago Sierra, for instance, de-building is an act with a political edge—a way to zero in sharply on the gallery’s status as an ‘inside’ that not everyone has access to. For Rachel Whiteread, by contrast, de-building is an act with social and psychological dimensions, a way of giving shape to the memories that buildings contain and acknowledging that even the most permanent-looking structures won’t last. And the latter reading seems particularly relevant in Christchurch at present, as the city recovers emotionally and architecturally from the 7.1 earthquake of 4 September. Indeed, if one work

in **De-Building** seems especially resonant in the wake of the quake it is Connor’s installation. These perfectly ordinary windows framing strange spaces of dust and construction found an unexpected echo, for me, in the hardest hit sections of Christchurch’s inner-city, where one could look through familiar windows and see, not the room within, but crumbling brickwork or open sky. Seen in that sober light, Connor’s windows felt like the kind of art that Christchurch might want sometime soon—gentle memorials to modest dwellings that have now been wiped off the map.

In classic images of white-cube galleries, art and architecture live together in a state of lofty, almost spiritual, harmony. Paintings hover without friction or interference in a space of perfect and colourless purity. The relationship between the ‘de-builders’ and the white cube is at once more prickly and impassioned—a love/hate affair, you might say. From Liz Lerner wrapping a corner of the gallery with a fierce network of high-tension chain, to Pierre Huyghe sanding back white paint to reveal the strata of colour beneath, to Monica Bonvicini slowly hammering her way through a white wall (like a convict making a slow break for freedom),

these are artists who insist on making the gallery part of the art—adjusting it, aggravating it, testing its limits, cutting through it and revealing fresh perspectives. Together they offer a portrait of the art gallery as a permanent work in progress—a realm that isn’t perfect, timeless and inviolable but rather provisional, open for examination, and rowdy with competing meanings. Not a showroom but a workspace. A space for surprise.

Justin Paton  
*Senior curator*

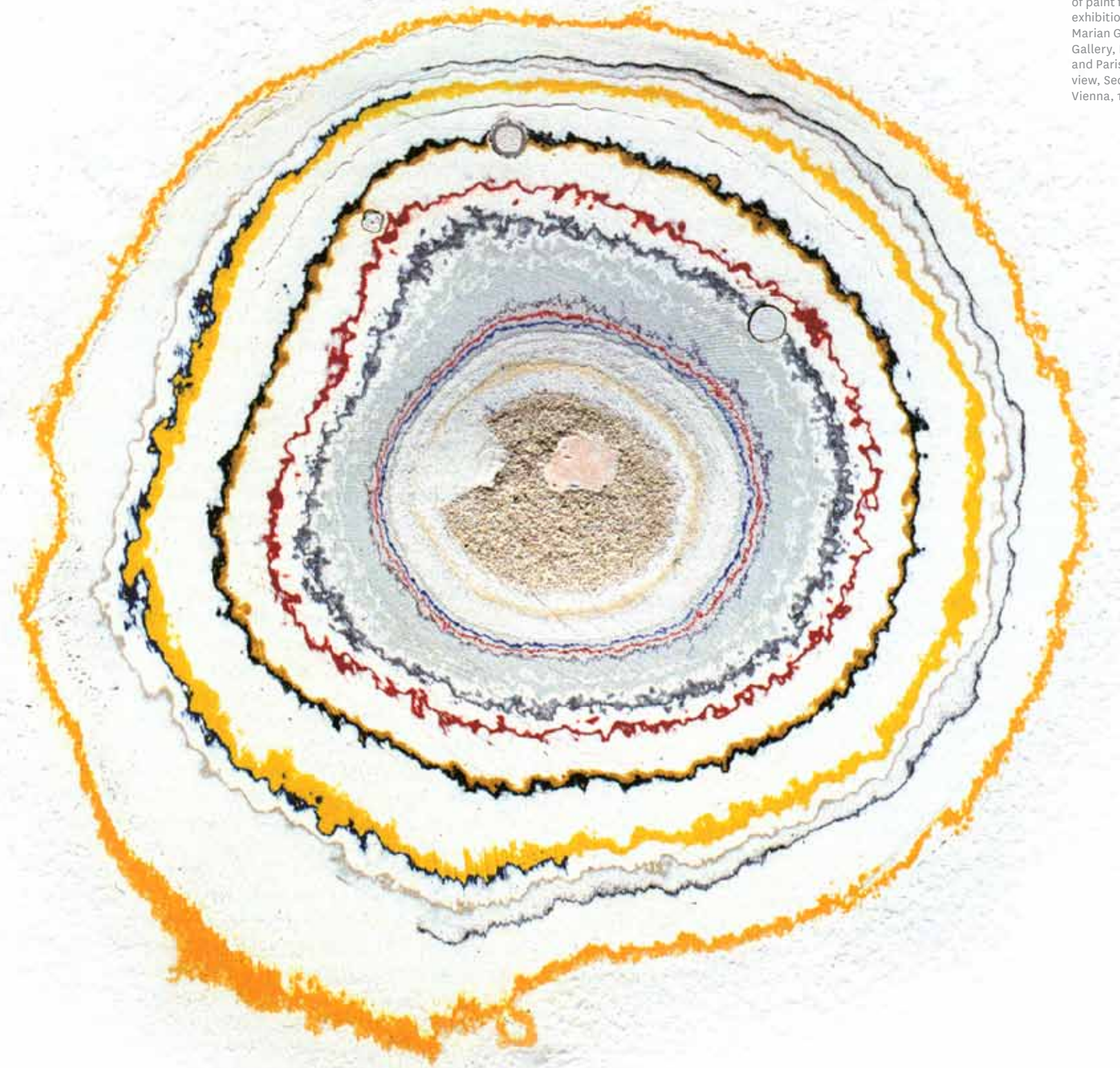
**De-Building** appears in the Sutton and Ravenscar Galleries as well as under the stairs, on the Twinset monitors and Bunker mural from 5 February until 15 May 2011.

**ARTS  
VICTORIA**



THE UNIVERSITY  
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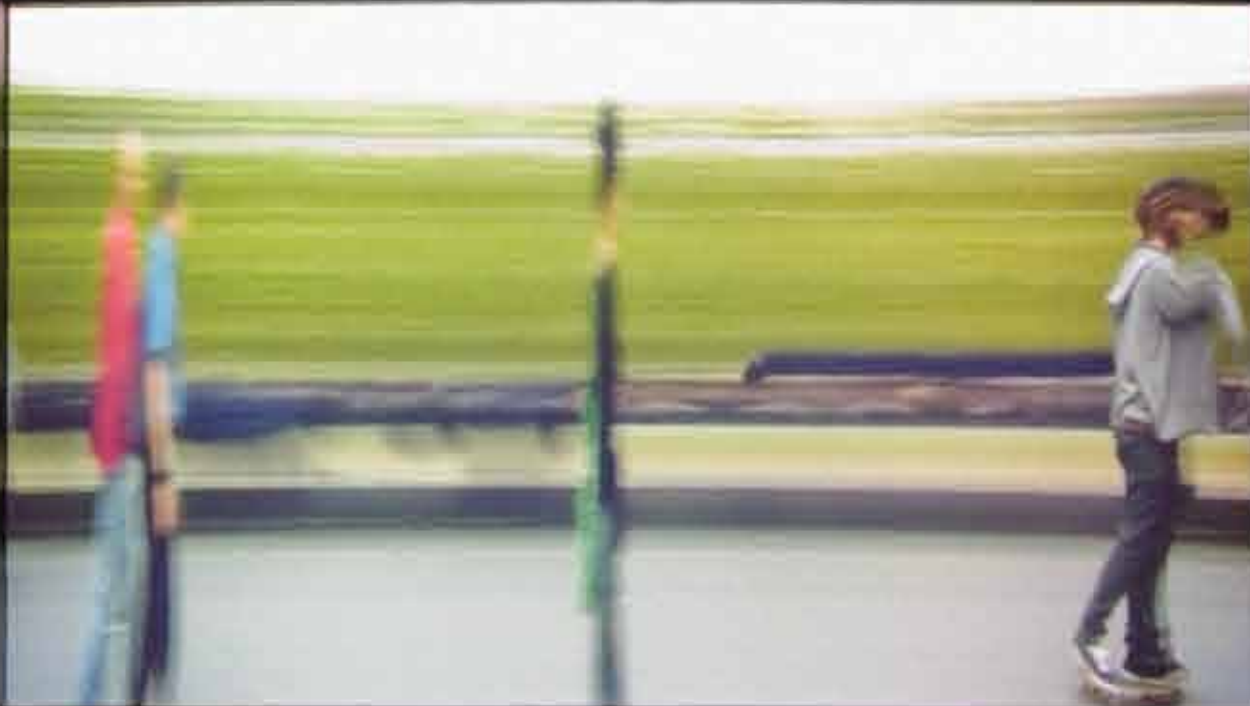
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ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND THE ARTS AUCKLAND



Pierre Huyghe  
**Timekeeper** 1999.  
Circular abrasion to  
the wall revealing  
the successive layers  
of paint from past  
exhibitions. Courtesy  
Marian Goodman  
Gallery, New York  
and Paris. Installation  
view, Secession  
Vienna, 1999



## one step forwards



‘I want the work to be visually seductive but also unsettling in the sense that once the viewer is engaged they have their internal model destabilised and are left with a notion that their perception of the world is not as concrete as they first imagined it to be.’

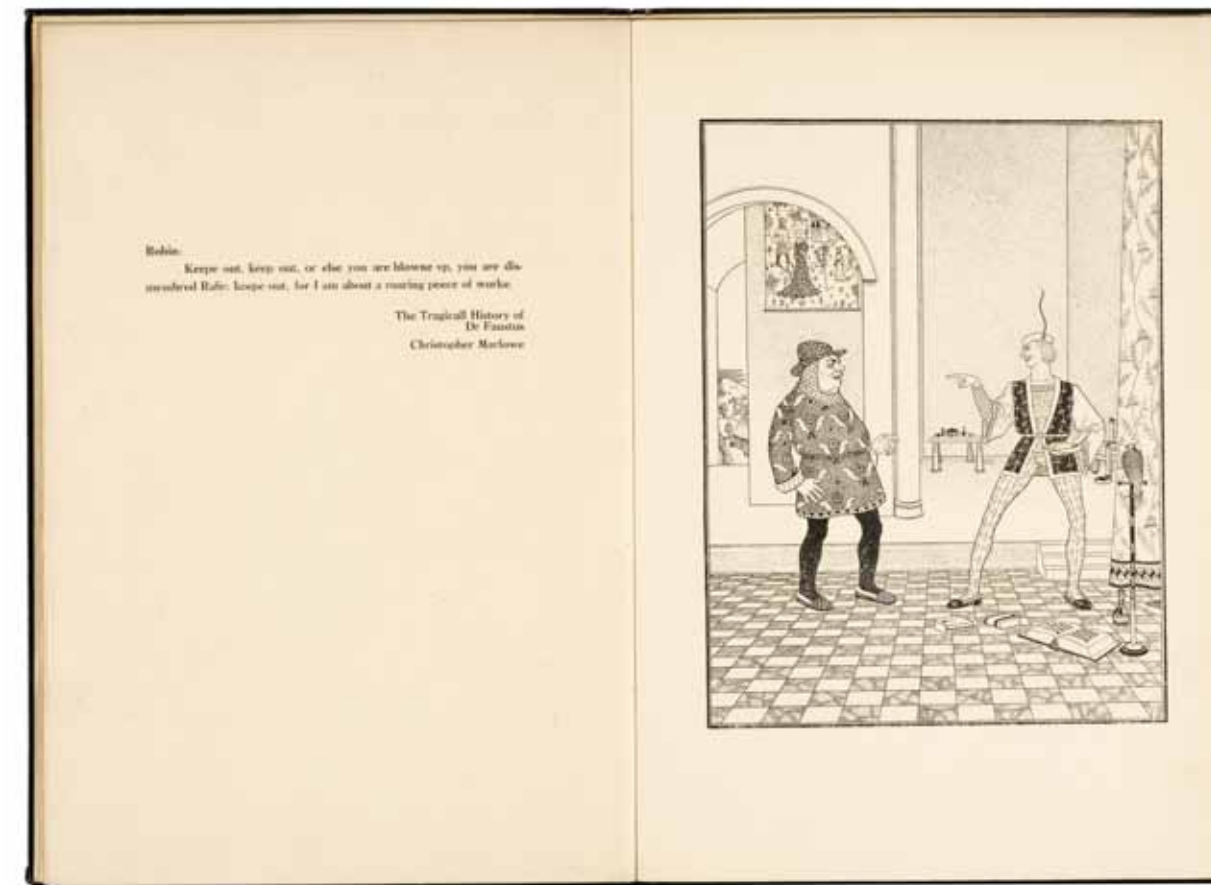
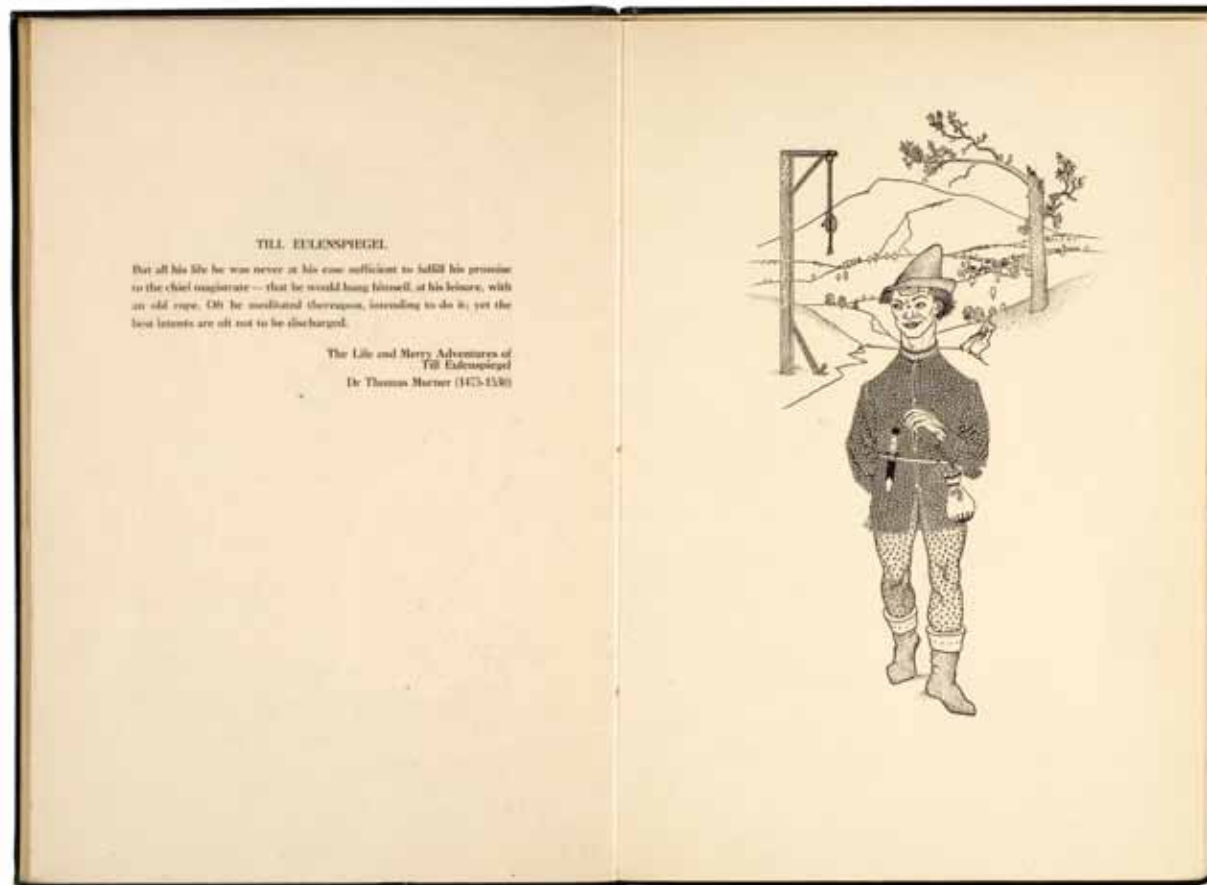
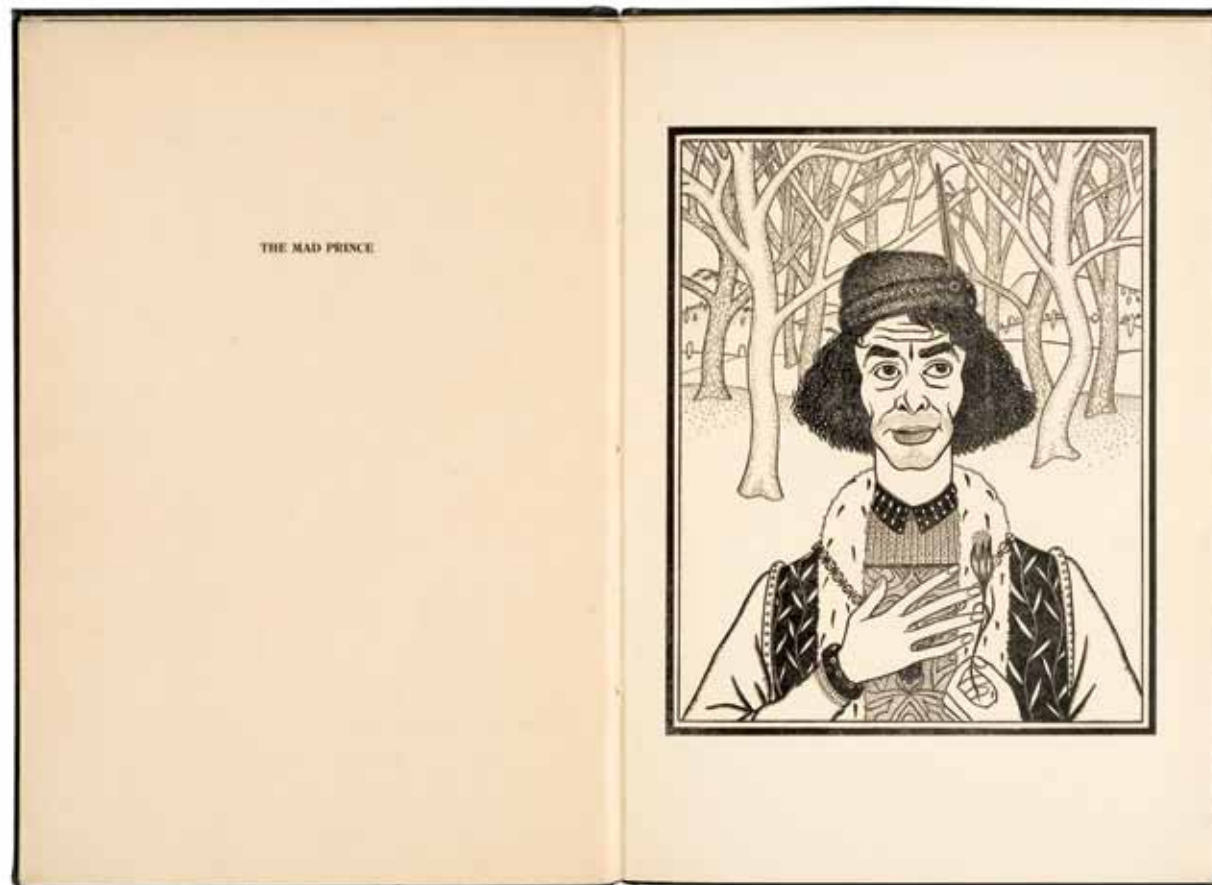
Daniel Crooks

## one frame backwards



Installation views of Daniel Crooks **Pan No.2** (**one step forwards**, **one frame backwards**) 2007. DV/DVD, 16:9, stereo, 4:43 min.  
Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, purchased 2008.  
Reproduced courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery





# LEO BENSEMANN

## An Art Venture

Leo Bensemenn (1912–1986) was a pivotal figure bridging the worlds of literature and visual arts—a go-between like no other. Peter Simpson is an authority on this distinctive artist.

ONE OF THE MOST ACCOMPLISHED and versatile New Zealanders in the arts of his generation, Leo Bensemenn was hugely admired for the technical expertise and aesthetic refinement he brought to a wide range of activities, encompassing painting, drawing, wood engraving, music, calligraphy, illustration and design, as well as editing and publishing.

‘Intolerant of anything second-rate in attitude or achievement,’ according to composer Douglas Lilburn, Bensemenn was ‘essentially, intuitively, artist and craftsman’. Fellow Group artist John Coley wrote: ‘He could be called a latter-day Renaissance man ... an influential figure in arts and letters far beyond the boundaries of Christchurch.’ And Bill Sutton once said of him, ‘Leo has always been at the top, as far as I’m concerned ... he set the highest standards in everything he did.’ Such testimonials are not difficult to find.

Born in Takaka, from mixed German and Irish ancestry, Bensemenn was educated at Nelson College, moving in 1931 to Christchurch—the city in which he spent the remainder of his life. Out of work in the depression and self-trained apart from night classes at the Canterbury College School of Art, Bensemenn applied himself first to the graphic arts of drawing and book illustration. The like of his ink drawings in

particular had never been seen in New Zealand, before or since. Witty, mysterious, highly literate and allusive, fantastical in style and subject, they contrasted dramatically with the then current fashion for realism and regional landscape, establishing Bensemenn as a challenging outsider within New Zealand art. The publication of his *Fantastica: Thirteen Drawings* in 1937 led directly to a forty-year partnership at the fledgling but historically important Caxton Press in Christchurch, publisher of *Landfall* and most important writers of the day (Curnow, Glover, Sargeson, Mason, Fairburn, Brasch, Hyde, Frame, Baxter).

In the same year Bensemenn joined Caxton he became, at the invitation of Rita Angus, a member of the key artistic organisation The Group (1927–77), for which he designed and printed brilliant annual catalogues throughout its glory years as the leading showplace for New Zealand art. The Group became the main outlet for his creative work—at first mostly strikingly idiosyncratic portraits and graphic pieces, but later increasingly strong and utterly distinctive landscapes of scenes in Canterbury, Central Otago, the West Coast and Takaka/Golden Bay.

Bensemenn had begun experimenting with portraiture around 1935, and by the time he joined The Group it was his primary genre,

Interior pages of *Fantastica: Thirteen Drawings* by Leo Bensemenn, 1937. Reproduced with permission





Cover of The Group's 1953 annual catalogue, designed by Bensemann. Reproduced with permission

**‘Bensemann was a non-conformist who paid little attention to the ebb and flow of artistic fashion.’**

making him one of the few New Zealand artists of the time to give priority to portraiture over landscape painting. An important stimulus to his portraiture was his friendship with Angus, also a gifted portrait painter, with whom he and Lawrence Baigent shared lodgings at 97 Cambridge Terrace in 1938. Close proximity led to several portraits of each artist by the other, paintings which share characteristics of sound drawing, crisp lines, bright clear colour, complex interplay of foreground and background, awareness of art history, psychological insight into character and engagement in role-playing and imaginative play—qualities well illustrated in Bensemann's *Portrait of Rita Angus* and his many portraits of Baigent. The priority Bensemann gave to portraiture is illustrated by the fact that at Group shows between 1938 and 1960 he exhibited thirty-three portraits and only eight landscapes. Although after 1960 landscape increasingly dominated his output, he always retained the capacity for strong and idiosyncratic portraits such as his studies of fellow Group artists *Doris Lusk* (1960) and *G.T. Moffitt* (1975). On the strength of his portraits alone Bensemann could claim a key role in the art history of his era.

Apart from an early period of experimentation with watercolour landscapes in the mid-1930s, Bensemann turned late to landscape painting and it was 1945 before he exhibited his first landscape in oils. This set



Left: Leo Bensemann *Portrait of Rita Angus* c.1937/8. Oil on canvas. Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Purchased 1992 with New Zealand Lottery Grants Board funds. Reproduced with permission

Right: Leo Bensemann *Pass in Winter* 1971. Oil on canvas. Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu. Harry Courtney Archer estate, 2002. Reproduced with permission



him firmly apart from his Group contemporaries—Toss Woollaston, Olivia Spencer Bower, Colin McCahon, Doris Lusk, Bill Sutton and others—all of whom were primarily devoted to landscape. However, from 1961 Bensemann decisively changed direction and for the remaining twenty-five years of his life landscape became his predominant mode. His turn towards landscape in his fifties is somewhat surprising, since it occurred at a time when landscape was becoming less important in New Zealand art, especially among younger painters who were turning towards abstraction—to take up landscape painting in the 1960s could be seen as a conservative option. However, Bensemann was a non-conformist who paid little attention to the ebb and flow of artistic fashion. He pursued his own road with determination and independence, and the best of his landscapes transcend the conventions of the genre, often opening a vein of surrealism and striking the viewer with the pure originality of their conception and execution.

After retiring in 1978, Bensemann at last became a full-time artist, and in three outstanding solo shows in 1979, 1981 and 1983 did the finest work of his long career. Awarded an OBE in 1985 for his services to art and literature, he died in 1986. Always something of an odd man out, Bensemann has proved hard to integrate into the accepted narrative of New Zealand art history, and is much less well known

than he deserves. However, the sheer quality of his output over more than fifty years is steadily extending his reputation as one of New Zealand's most distinctive artists.

Peter Simpson

*Peter Simpson is a writer, editor, critic and publisher. His contribution to New Zealand literature is impressive and he has written and edited widely on significant New Zealand artists and writers. He is currently director of the Holloway Press at the University of Auckland.*

**Leo Bensemann: An Art Venture** is in Touring Gallery C and the Borg Henry Gallery from 11 February until 15 May. Coinciding with the opening of the exhibition, Auckland University Press will publish *Fantastica: The World of Leo Bensemann* by Peter Simpson. This copiously illustrated hardback book includes all the works in the exhibition plus many more; it is the first comprehensive survey of Leo Bensemann as artist and printer.

#### EVENTS

##### SATURDAY 12 FEBRUARY

**Art in the Morning / Inside the Dark Arts** Known for his portraits and landscapes, Leo Bensemann is equally recognised for his contribution to New Zealand graphic design and typography. With Dr Noel Waite, senior lecturer at the University of Otago, and Bruce Bascand, managing director of The Caxton Press. 8.30am / Alchemy / Friends \$20 / public \$30 / breakfast included / book by 9 February, see the website or tel: (03) 941 7356

##### WEDNESDAY 23 FEBRUARY

**Inside/Outside: Leo Bensemann's place in New Zealand Art History** Leo Bensemann occupies an ambiguous role in New Zealand art history—at once inside the leading institutions of his day (The Group, The Caxton Press) and outside the prevailing forms and narratives of New Zealand art. Curator, acclaimed writer and associate professor of English at the University of Auckland, Peter Simpson explores this theme. 6pm / Philip Carter Family Auditorium / free Sponsored by The Press





George Dunlop Leslie  
**In the wizard's garden** c.1904. Oil on canvas. Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, presented to the Canterbury Society of Arts by W. Harris 1907 and donated to the Gallery in 1932

# Storytellers

MANY OF THE WORKS in **Brought To Light** have a story to tell, but none more so than the selection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century narrative paintings and sculptures in **Storytellers**. Paintings with narrative themes were extremely popular with Victorian and Edwardian audiences, and here in Christchurch during the period examples were collected with great zeal by the Canterbury Society of Arts as well as local art patrons. Many of the examples in the current selection were presented by benefactors when the Robert McDougall Art Gallery opened in 1932.

Often reflecting Victorian social values and conveying an almost overtly moralising tone, narrative painters drew heavily on symbolism to provide clues and cues for viewers. A key work in the exhibition, George Dunlop Leslie's *In the wizard's garden* is loaded with symbolism that references the notion of the 'fallen woman'. Symbols include the hitched up scarlet dress, the fallen leaves in the foreground and the

Petrus van der Velden **The Dutch funeral** 1875. Oil on canvas. Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, donated by Henry Charles Drury van Asch 1932



shears—shown with open blades they suggest a loss of virtue. The presence of the silhouetted figure entering the garden adds a sinister element that contrasts strongly with the innocence of the young woman. The stream dividing the two figures symbolises a barrier between them—her virtue hangs in the balance and the viewer is left guessing as to whether she will remain pure or, through the act of crossing the stream, succumb to wantonness.

Other works such as Charles Eastlake's *With fingers weary and worn*, and George Knowles's *Glasgerion*, directly reference and illustrate various poems; these works provide a visual interpretation of a storyline that appealed to the artist. Petrus van der Velden's *The Dutch funeral* forms part of a wider narrative sequence that, when placed in the context of his other Marken funeral paintings, collectively relates a saga centred around the death of a fisherman. His body journeys from the beach to his village in a funeral barge, before the

procession of his casket from the church to the cemetery that forms the subject of *The Dutch funeral*. The story of loss is reinforced in the individual faces following the coffin: from the grim staunchness of the men pushing the coffin sled to the inconsolable women at the centre of the group and the pensive inquisitiveness of the two children.

**Storytellers** brings together some of the Gallery's best-known works alongside a number of lesser known gems.

Peter Vangioni  
*Curator*

*Storytellers is in the collection galleries.*

## EVENT

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**WEDNESDAY 15 DECEMBER**  
Floortalk / Brought to Light:  
New Collection Display Highlights  
Join curator Peter Vangioni for a look at the new Victorian narrative paintings on display in **Storytellers**. Ken Hall and Māori art educator Piripi Waretini open new conversations in **He Taonga Rangatira Noble Treasures** featuring well-known historical portraits by Gottfried Lindauer and Charles Goldie and more recent and contemporary works by Max Hailstone and Fiona Pardington. The Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand's founding document, is the connecting thread of this section. 6pm / exhibition space / free  
Sponsored by The Press





Sarah Pepperle  
and David Simpson

An art gallery is a whole lot more than what's on the walls. Its success is measured in the speakers it provides for talks, the number of visitors to its website, the manner in which it communicates with a diverse range of visitor groups, even the quality of the coffee it serves. Another good indicator is the quality of the publications it produces. The Gallery has one of the most ambitious publishing programmes of any public gallery in New Zealand, currently producing several major publications every year, as well as four issues of *Bulletin* and numerous smaller projects.

Two members of staff work in the publishing department: Sarah Pepperle and David Simpson. Both have a background in publishing and bring a great deal of editorial experience to

the Gallery, with time spent working for major publishers in the UK and in the publishing departments of other museums and galleries.

Coming up soon are major publications on Dutch expatriate artist Petrus van der Velden, Shane Cotton and a substantial new collections book based on the **Brought to Light** exhibition. With recent successes in both the BeST awards and the Museums Australia Publishing and Design Awards, publishing at the Gallery is going from strength to strength.

# PAGEWORK #9

## CAT AUBURN

The following double-page spread is given over to the ninth instalment in our 'Pagework' series. Each quarter the Gallery commissions an artist to create a new and unique work of art especially for *Bulletin*. It's about actively supporting the generation of new work.

Cat Auburn's collages and sculpture reflect her interest in memory, spectacle and the power of space and form. The source material for her work on paper ranges from *National Geographic* and *Time* magazines, her own drawings and sculpture as well as a subversive gleaning of other artists work. They are then spliced and re-configured to create surreal hybrid imagery. Floating in black voids, parts from ornamental circus-like creatures are amalgamated with animal anatomy, made to appear as if they are separate yet unalterably grafted to each other. These extravagant but restrained collages evoke both scientific experiments and a childhood world of carnivals and carousels. This superimposition conveys uneasy messages

about the way the natural world is interpreted and integrated into an artificial environment.

Auburn's practice involves labour-intensive fibreglass constructions that result in delicate and complex sculptures. She says her works 'involve no trickery or deceit, they try to let you in so you can see how they are constructed and you can see the narratives for yourself'. Auburn was Olivia Spencer Bower artist in residence for 2010. She graduated from Auckland University in 2007 with a postgraduate diploma in fine art.

*'Pagework' has been generously supported by an anonymous donor.*

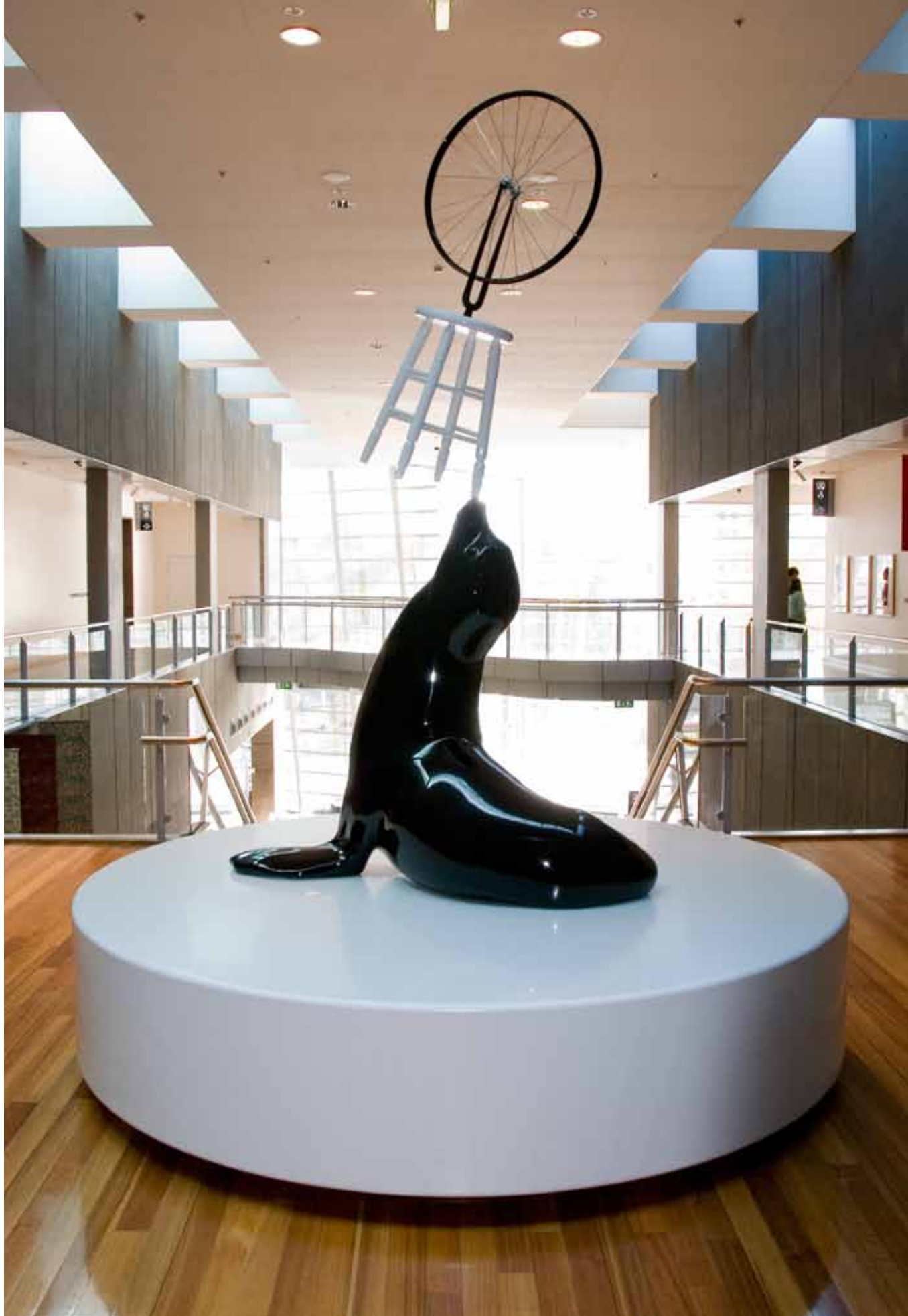


Over page:  
Cat Auburn Carousel #15  
2010. Collage on paper.  
Reproduced courtesy of  
the artist









## My Favourite

Matt Arnold



*Matt Arnold is co-founder of web design company Sons & Co. In October this year, Sons & Co. were awarded the supreme Purple Pin award by the Designers' Institute for their work on Christchurch Art Gallery's website.*

For me, the wonderful thing about art is that it's a woolly, undefined thing. What is art? I don't know.

At one point art was simply oil paintings of rich people. Then artists, who were often poor, painted other poor people and sometimes those people were naked. It was all pretty figurative, but it soon became expressionist and abstract and the people's faces were a little lopsided and sometimes didn't resemble faces at all. And before we knew it art was very difficult to define: it was found rubbish, recycled advertising, shit in a can, a shark in formaldehyde, a used condom and a dead dad. Then it was auctioned.

Marcel Duchamp saw this coming. Almost 100 years ago he created a useless object out of two very functional things: a kitchen stool and a bicycle wheel. He called it art and it was art. We know that now because it's

in all the books. And then in 2006 Michael Parekowhai placed a replica of Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* on the nose of a performing seal. I first saw it sitting on the landing at the top of the Gallery stairs and it was one of those irritating 'I really wish I'd thought of that first' moments. I'd seen the seal before in Parekowhai's *The Horn of Africa*, balancing a Steinway grand piano—it was a beautiful, impossible thing you'd rarely see in the wild. But why swap the big Steinway for Duchamp?

Duchamp liked the idea of the 'Readymade': taking everyday, mass-produced items and subverting established notions of what constitutes art. In response Parekowhai takes two existing works of art, one a 'fake', and elaborately joins them using the materials of mass-production to once again ask the question, 'what is art?'

I find it a bit confusing, but I really like it.

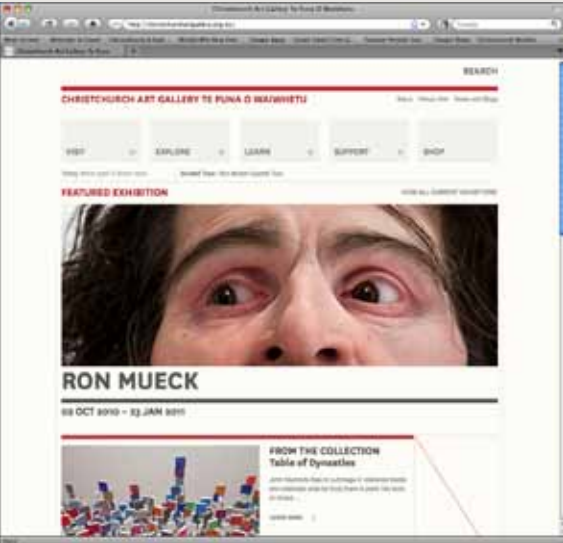
Michael Parekowhai  
**My Sister, My Self** 2006.  
Fibreglass, mild steel,  
wood, automotive paint.  
Collection of Christchurch  
Art Gallery Te Puna o  
Waiwhetu, purchased,  
2008. Reproduced  
courtesy of the artist  
and Michael Lett



New Gallery Publication

Petrus van der Velden is one of New Zealand’s keystone artists, and this sumptuous publication brings together major examples of his ground-breaking Otira series from public and private lenders throughout New Zealand. It highlights the manner in which van der Velden’s art has resonated throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, and explores the fascination his Otira works continue to exert on art lovers and artists. This richly illustrated publication is a long overdue addition to the scholarship on a truly international artist. Pre-order your copy at the Gallery shop now.

96 pages / hardcover / \$49.99



Simply the BeST Awards

We were delighted to hear that the Gallery’s website was awarded not only a gold medal, but the Purple Pin in the interactive category at the annual BeST awards in October. The Purple Pin is given to a piece of design that ‘raises the bar for New Zealand design’, and while we at the Gallery have long felt that describes this site and the fantastic work done by its creators Sons & Co., it’s extremely special to have that recognised in such an emphatic manner.

We also picked up a gold award in the editorial and books category for *B.161*, designed by long-term creative partners Strategy, and a bronze in the same category for *The Vault: Neil Pardington*, designed by the artist. A huge thanks and congratulations to everyone involved in all of these projects. Check out the awards at [bestawards.co.nz](http://bestawards.co.nz).

Gallery wins at MAPDA 2010

The winning didn’t stop there! The Gallery also scooped the prize for Best Major Catalogue at the Museums Australia Multimedia and Publication Design Awards for *The Vault: Neil Pardington*. The judges commended the ‘outstanding production values, understated but with a brave use of silver papers and well balanced use of imagery and typography’.



Keeping up with Museum Practice

Congratulations to our six staff members who have recently completed the National Certificate in Museum Practice (level 4). The qualification ensures candidates have essential knowledge of the four cornerstones of museum practice in New Zealand: collection maintenance; Māori in museums; the purposes, functions, and responsibilities of museums; and the skills required to scope and propose a public museum programme. A further twelve Gallery staff are currently studying for this certificate.



Clockwise from left: Kate MacShane, Michael Purdie, Lynley McDougall, Deborah Hyde, Liz Garland, Karen Wayne

School Holidays

MIXED MEDIA MAGIC

Collage, sculpture, creative adventure on paper and beyond.

Ages 6–8: 17, 19 Jan, 10.30am–12pm / Ages 9–12: 17, 19, 21 Jan, 1.30–3pm / \$5 / education centre / book online or tel: (03) 941 7382

WONKY DONKEY BEHIND THE SCENES

Design your own ‘Wonky’ characters with illustrator Katz Cowley and get a sneak preview of the preliminary drawings for Katz’s forthcoming books.

Ages 6–8: 24, 26 Jan, 10.30am–12pm / Ages 9–12: 24, 26, 28 Jan, 1.30–3pm / \$5 / education centre / book online or tel: (03) 941 7382

EXPLORE AND DRAW

Explore the Gallery with this fun activity sheet.

20 Dec – 31 Jan / 10am–4pm daily / collect from the Art Cart in the foyer



Welcome to our new Volunteer Guides, from top left: Brigid Buckenham, Ana Carnerero Calle, Jill Cunningham, Anna Dadson, Laura Dunham, Asher Jemison, John McKelvey, Steve Moulton, Maureen Pearce, Kirsty Peel, Theresa Shaughnessy, Alice Tappenden and Mary-Louise Twigg

Event Highlights

STILL: JOLT DANCE COMPANY

*Still* is a spectacular new contemporary dance piece from one of New Zealand’s foremost dance companies, exploring the body, self-reflection, exposure and the notion of life within stillness. Choreography by Fleur de Their and direction from Lyn Cotton.

Jolt Dance Company is a mixed-ability dance group whose vision is to give voice to people with disabilities and celebrate their uniqueness.

Rehearsal

Watch the development and rehearsal process of *Still*.

2, 5, 9 December / 10am–12.30pm / 1.30–4pm / free

Performance

8, 9, 11 December / 7.30pm / Saturday performance 2pm only / 50mins / \$18 / \$15 / ticket sales online and at the door

WAITANGI DAY

Live music from singer-songwriter Ariana Tikao and guests, and a feature screening of award-winning film *The Strength of Water*, set and shot in Hokianga by playwright Briar Grace-Smith and first-time director Armagan Ballantyne. See the website for full Waitangi Day programme details.

6 February / free



Still from *The Strength of Water*, 2009

SUMI INK WORKSHOP WITH MAX GIMBLETT

Renowned artist and practicing Rinzaï Zen Buddhist Max Gimblett leads a sumi ink workshop on ink drawing and Asian aesthetics.

13 February / 11am / education centre / \$85 / book online / enquiries tel: (03) 941 7342



Max Gimblett’s sumi ink workshop at The Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2009. Photo: John Savage, Auckland





Wayne Youle *I look at you with envy for you have as many bright ideas as your Granny had marbles* 2009. Mixed media. Reproduced courtesy of the artist and Tim Melville Gallery, Auckland. Photo: Kallan Macleod

## 10 Down: A Wayne Youle Survey

4 March – 6 June

Ten years of sharp-witted art-making by North Canterbury artist Wayne Youle. Of Ngāti Whakaeke, Ngā Puhi and European descent, Youle tackles matters of race, religion and cultural diversity with humour and energy. Ranging from video and painting to model-making, digital photography and even knitting, this survey presents more than fifty works in many media in a dense salon-style hang that is part toy box, part cabinet of curiosity and part brainstorm. From Youle’s witty ‘cover versions’ of famous New Zealand artists to his many variations on the theme of cultural collision, *10 Down* contains plenty to amuse, offend and inspire.

*Toured by Pataka Museum*

## BLAST! Pat Hanly: the painter and his protests

5 March – 29 May

Pat Hanly (1932–2004) is an important figure in the story of New Zealand’s efforts to be nuclear-free, and his art is filled with colour, passion and protest. Introducing a new generation to the artist’s work, this exhibition highlights New Zealand’s nuclear-free status and the protests of the past. Hanly’s bold and celebratory paintings are displayed alongside his wife Gil Hanly’s documentary photographs to explore an important aspect of our shared history. A book by Trish Gribben accompanying the exhibition further opens the dynamic imagery in Hanly’s work to viewers young and old.

*A Lopdell House Gallery Touring Exhibition.*

**Bill Hammond: Jingle Jangle Morning**  
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BPANZ Book Design award winner

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