



Everyone needs to let their hair down now and then.



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ART GALLERY

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Christchurch Art Gallery is Ten: Highs and Lows

Jenny Harper

IN RECOGNITION OF THE ANNIVERSARY of the move of Christchurch's public art gallery from its former existence as the Robert McDougall in the Botanic Gardens to its new more central city location (now eerily empty), I've been asked by *Bulletin*'s editor to recall some highs and lows of the last ten years. So here goes—and stay with me during this reflection, which takes the place of my usual foreword.

Of course, I haven't been director throughout the entire ten-year period, and I can't take credit for arguing for this new building, nor for planning and watching over the detail of its development. That glory belongs to my predecessors, both John Coley and, latterly and more directly, fundraiser and director-on-the-spot, Tony Preston. It was a long journey, as Preston himself noted in 2003: 'Debate waxed and waned, troughed and crested, until in 1969 there was a recommendation as a matter of urgency for a new building to replace the charming, but quite inadequate McDougall...'

Just as the establishment of a public art gallery in Christchurch, the Robert McDougall, came relatively late in New Zealand's cultural landscape, its 'urgent' replacement was to take some thirty-four years to achieve.²

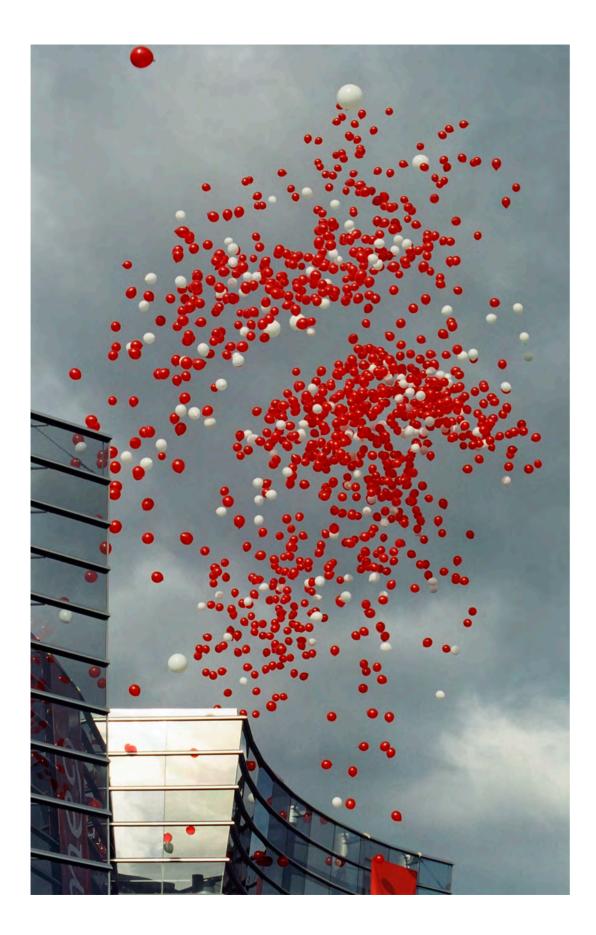
Despite not being part of this civic achievement, I recall its occasion vividly, having flown from Wellington where I lived to be part of the grand opening of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu on a chilly but fine Saturday morning in May 2003. I'd been asked to review it, so I'd already seen through the new gallery, but I did not want to miss the weekend of events.3 It was justifiably a major celebration, with speeches by then mayor, Garry Moore and prime minister Helen Clark; red balloons were released in jubilation, 'Pokarekare Ana' was sung by Dame Malvina Major and a specially-commissioned work, 'Fanfare' by Gareth Farr, played triumphantly at the morning opening. Special lift-out sections were prepared by *The Press*, and kapa haka performances, string quartets, brass bands and comedy events secured this as a major community weekend. A triumph of planning, fundraising and sheer hard work had paid off.

The former Robert McDougall Art Gallery had closed its doors in June 2002, its 70th anniversary, in preparation for the change. Through this period of planned closure, Christchurch had a mere ten months to endure without its

art heart—a time no doubt made easier by the anticipation of a brand new development opening shortly.

Of course, there were architectural detractors from the beginning. Shortly after the hoardings came down in 2002, local historian John Wilson offered a preliminary verdict in a dismissive but amusing term that stuck in the public's imagination—'a warehouse in a tutu'; David McPhail's 'aircraft hangar wearing a ball gown' was less catchy. ⁴ And the late architect Peter Beaven did not think the new art gallery sat at all well with old Christchurch, describing it as a 'great alien'. ⁵

However, Christchurch's public flocked to see it and supporters also went to print, with Hamish Keith proffering that the building was at the very least a 'very practical warehouse in a very elegant tutu'. He expressed relief at the lack of 'interactive thingy[s]', approving this as a sign of 'curators getting back to basics and letting the art speak for itself'. A major cultural voyage was over and former director John Coley described the new building as being 'as far removed from its precursor in the gardens as a Ferrari is from a Model T'.?



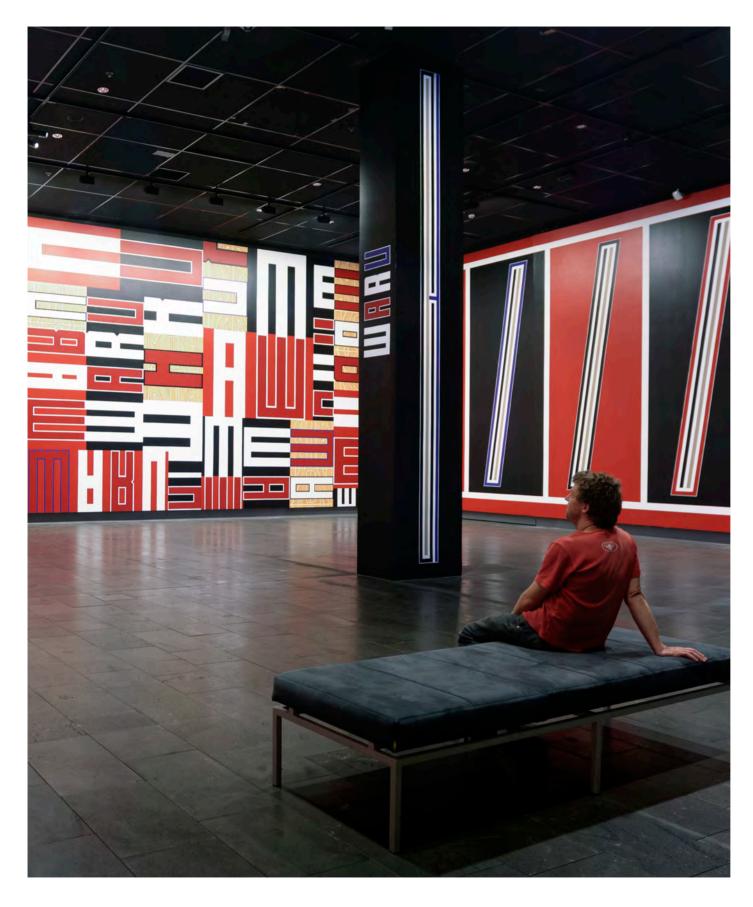
So an early triumph and a definite 'high'. My own assessment? I said on several occasions it was a great leap of faith and an incredible cultural investment, an architectural statement which broke the rules of the Victorian Gothic and colonial surroundings; an intervention and interloper. Although unlikely to be classed among the architectural wonders of the world, this nonetheless functional building has seemed in some small way like 'our Bilbao'. A certain poignancy is attached to this view from a distance, postearthquake and after so many demolitions, but I praised it from the beginning for *not* presenting as a temple of art nor for being a 'safe-looking building', but for being a precocious intervention and an upstart.⁸

When I reviewed the Gallery prior to returning here to take the helm, I also noted that, while the collections were quite rightly given pride of place, their display seemed 'a little too sedate and strangely static'. Identifying a sense in which the model of the cherished McDougall had been transferred to a new site, without having been rethought, I considered the challenge for this new Gallery was, 'to raise the stakes by acknowledging it is no longer the McDougall, but [rather] is poised to become the force in the New Zealand art scene that Christchurch deserves.'9

Despite great first-year visitor numbers, subsequent exhibitions lacked focus and it was perhaps unsurprising that numbers began to fall below expectations established in the business case for the new building. Nor that it was reviewed by City Council in 2005–6 in the locally infamous 'Paradigm Shift'. Probably an exercise which was needed, it was certainly poorly handled in public relations terms. As Martin van Beynen wrote in *The Press*, former director Tony Preston, a 'civic hero in 2003, left the art gallery in 2006 with his pride battered'. Other staff also left and a number of key funders and Gallery supporters were understandably unsettled and angry.

So there was important work to be done when newly appointed senior staff Blair Jackson, Neil Semple and I began in October 2006. We were excited by the potential of the Gallery and ambitious for its future. A top priority for us was to demonstrate the Gallery could bring in larger and more diverse audiences and hold their interest; a key Council target was to reduce the cost per visit. They were mutually supportive, but differently expressed goals.

We got to work, within nine months also appointing Justin Paton, our well-regarded senior curator and a great communicator about art and its tasks. As sometimes happens at a time of turnover, there was virtually no programme in place, but Giacometti: Sculptures, Prints and Drawings from the Maeght Foundation in late 2006 was wonderful.



Installation view of **Darryn George**: **Pulse** in 2008



A young visitor in **White on White** with Scott Eady's *Child Prodigy #1* (*Grandad*) in 2008



Installation view of Brought to Light: a new view of the collection in 2010

'We were on a roll.
Individual presentations may have been challenging to support, but nothing was too difficult for Christchurch Art Gallery.'

I recall speaking at a women's lunch while it was on and being asked whether we'd ever get to see Picasso here in Christchurch. Sighing inside, I wanted to shake the questioner and say, 'You have a show here now by a great artist much admired by Picasso—go while you have the chance!' (I was new and recall being more tentative in expressing myself then.)

Gallery staff worked well at this time, embracing the tasks at hand and setting about activating and enlivening the inside of the building, heralding change fairly early on with a memorable Daniel Crooks video show and immersive Darryn George installation (*Pulse*, 2008). We commissioned a series of temporary art installations in our foyer, from Sara Hughes's *United we fall* (2008) to Inez Crawford's *Bouncy Marae* (2008) to the Andrew Drummond kinetic sculpture in place on 4 September 2010. (I wince now at the desperation of the bright national flags which decked the balconies and the Italian cars on the forecourt for a time in early 2006. Where was the Gallery's confidence in art to bring in an audience?) A lively new schools and public programme was organised also.

And we started to show art outside the Gallery in an early iteration of **Outer Spaces**. The unfortunate 'bunker' on our forecourt became a site for murals outside, while inside a sound art programme offered those going to the car park below some often mysterious accompaniment.

We were on a roll. Individual presentations may have been challenging to support, but nothing was too difficult for Christchurch Art Gallery.

A significant early high point occurred when we secured extra funding within the Council's 2009–19 long-term plan to remodel the upstairs gallery spaces and to re-present our collections. Consequently, it was a moment of huge pride for us to open the seemingly more light-filled and larger exhibition spaces of Brought to Light in 2010. A newly-conceived display of our collections, it began with a powhiri or greeting space acknowledging the first settlers in this region and was extended by local and national stories and vignettes explored through our collections. Showing some great recently-bought works, including Bill Hammond's Living large 6 (1995), purchased for us by our supportive Trust after the unfortunate failure of a hanging device while it was in our care (a definite 'low' in our recent history). The exhibition Brought to Light set up conversations between and within works of art and visitors; it raised questions as well as proposing answers; it both gave public pleasure and won us professional accolades. It was a model art exhibition, one I'm sure we aspire to parallel, if in a differing format, when we are able to

I was also especially proud of our family-friendly space, which was developed with a series of colour-themed

exhibitions: I See Red, White on White and latterly, Blue Planet, which flowed into a trail of works throughout Brought to Light that encouraged families not to simply stay in the 'play section' but to explore all the way through. These exhibitions remain models for this kind of display, never talking down to anyone, appealing to kids of all ages.

Christchurch Art Gallery has also showed a firm commitment to local and locally-trained artists such as Julia Morison, Bill Hammond and Andrew Drummond, with full-scale exhibitions and well-designed catalogues—and offering these to other centres. Our exhibition of Canterbury-trained Séraphine Pick toured to Wellington and Dunedin; The Vault: Neil Pardington went to five other venues in New Zealand.

Positive press followed us all the way and our visitor numbers were also buoyant, with 470,074 visitors in 2009–10 (up from 391,000 in 2007–8). In an internationally-benchmarked survey in 2010, it was revealed that a staggering 91% of Christchurch residents defined themselves as repeat visitors. We found that visitors stayed an average of 71 minutes, with first-time visitors staying 91 minutes in all, indicating the Gallery is probably a good size. Some 74% said they would recommend us to others and I was thrilled by the fact that 28% of visitors found themselves challenged by what they saw at the Gallery (compared with 2% who came expecting this during their visit).



Above: Installation view of **Blue Planet** in 2009, featuring Helen Calder's *B40-097-275* and *B48-102-250* (both 2010; Courtesy of the artist and Antoinette Godkin Gallery)

Installation view of Brought to
Light: a new view of the collection
in 2010, featuring Michael
Parekowhai's My Sister, My Self
(2006; collection of Christchurch
Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu,
purchased 2008)

Crowds queuing for tickets in the final days of **Ron Mueck** in 2010





'... we were confidently predicting a total visitor count of at least 700,000—the equivalent of more than twice the population of this city.'

And we've attracted some major and extraordinary gifts during the last ten years, from artists Max Gimblett and Philip Trusttum among others. I recall well being in Melbourne at the opening of **Ron Mueck** at the National Gallery of Victoria when the announcement was made of the wonderful and unexpectedly sizeable bequest by Norman Barrett. Supporters such as this are of the greatest significance to the Gallery, enabling the proper continuation of collecting at a time when prices outstrip city budgets. In this context, I also consider the establishment of the Challenge Grant to have been a wonderful high point. In an agreement between Council and the Art Gallery Trust, which I think is still unique in Australasia and perhaps anywhere, individual donations for collection development are matched dollar-for-dollar up to an agreed level annually. Long may it continue!

I guess Ron Mueck was the best-known recent high point in the Gallery's history. A huge public success, this exhibition, to which we allocated the entire downstairs area, attracted 135,400 visitors, 60% from Christchurch, 33% of whom were first-time visitors. It also inserted more than \$3 million into the local economy. Neatly sandwiched between the September and February earthquakes, the emotional pull of these great and small sculptures was profound and lasting—visitors really engaged with looking and with marvelling at life and death. People still mention it often.

Gallery staff were fully engaged as we triumphantly replaced this single show with three: Van der Velden: Otira; Leo Bensemann: A Fantastic Art Venture; and De-Building. Launched on 10 February 2011, with three new publications and a major gift and bequest also to celebrate, it was too early to gauge overall success, but using pre-Mueck visitor figures as a guide, we were confidently predicting a total visitor count in 2010-11 of at least 700,000—the equivalent of more than twice the population of this city. How cruel when 22 February cut all that short.

I won't dwell too long on the more than two years of closure since our Gallery became the city's headquarters for emergency response in what was a national disaster. It was positive to have provided a safe haven at this time of recovery, but *Bulletin* readers are only too aware of our eagerness to reopen this key community facility and our frustration—shared by our audiences—at continuing delays, whatever the reasons and their legitimacy. The

demolition of apartments next door was an explicable hold-up, but much time has passed since then. Not withstanding our own repair programme is more complex than we thought initially, we loathe the doors staying shut.

As for many in Canterbury during the last two years, this period will no doubt be seen as an all-time 'low'; a time of enforced closure destructive to the cultural well-being of our community and our ability to contribute to the daily life of a busy inner-city. However, while we remain unable to predict an opening date with confidence, we have not been rudderless as we deal with the situation on a daily basis.

Against all odds, we've become a 'Gallery without Walls', sometimes showing art on display boards outside (as with Reconstruction: Conversations on a City along Worcester Boulevard in 2012), sometimes presenting works on newly exposed walls (Kay Rosen's Here are the people and there is the steeple and Wayne Youle's I seem to have temporarily misplaced my sense of humour), sometimes supporting artists affected by the earthquakes as in the Rolling Maul series. We've enhanced and multiplied our Outer Spaces art projects around the Gallery and further afield, presenting projects on walls, in windows and on rooftops throughout the city. In short, we're creatively continuing with what we might have done within the Gallery in different ways, but also literally expanding what is possible.

The most profound local impact to date was made in 2012 with the return to New Zealand of Michael Parekowhai's 2011 Venice Biennale presentation. An intricately-carved Steinway piano was winched into our temporary space at 212 Madras Street and played beautifully during opening hours while, across the road on a readily-accessible site amongst the rubble and destruction, two bronze bulls sat or stood atop bronze pianos. Few could have envisaged the extraordinary layers of meaning this would acquire in our broader community's imagination. Would it have seemed so poignant, so redolent with meaning in our more-manicured gallery spaces? Would it have invaded the hearts, heads and lives of our citizens to the same extent? What a lesson for us all. We were particularly pleased when in April of this year, our **Outer Spaces** programme was recognised with the top national award for Exhibition Excellence—Art at the Museums Aotearoa Awards.

Michael Parekowhai **Chapman's Homer** (detail) 2011. Bronze, stainless steel. Courtesy of the artist and Michael Lett, Auckland

It is always good to get recognition, but there's something special about receiving such an accolade from your peers.

This *Bulletin* has come into its own in ways we didn't then imagine, becoming freer and more like a journal without such a full gallery-specific programme to promote. And as we reverse the normal order of things in a range of ways, another superb publication is in print to accompany Christchurch Art Gallery's new Shane Cotton exhibition, currently in Campbelltown, NSW before it opens at City Gallery Wellington later this year. (And yes, we expect to show this in Christchurch at the end of its current tour.)

Our staff have identified and tackled back-of-house projects, so that now 90% of our collection is available online with images copyright-cleared for Gallery use, and a great 'My Gallery' function is operating on our website (have you tried it yet?). We've enhanced our presence online by blogging daily (and more), and maintained our profile locally and further afield.

Sadly in April 2012 we needed to lay off some staff, but with a closure so much longer than we initially hoped, with our collections in lock-down and our building rendered inaccessible to visitors, we are simply unable to sustain all aspects of our operation. A strong core of committed staff remains and other key positions will be re-advertised prior to reopening.

While we cannot currently make our collections directly available, our schools and other public programmes have been delivered in classrooms and other spaces across the city and a team of volunteer guides has stayed with us. The shop has opened in new premises in the temporary central library building between Lichfield and Tuam streets; we have now established temporary off-site venues at 212 Madras Street and 209 Tuam Street, and we look forward to the repairs of CoCA next door in Gloucester Street, which we hope to lease for some months.





Installation view of Reconstruction: Conversations on a City in 2012

During our forthcoming repairs, there are adjustments we'd like to make to the building and site, opportunities to take advantage of in and around our Gallery to ensure its longer-term well-being and future. We recognise that Christchurch is awash with opportunities, not all of which are affordable, but we'll push for some while they're possible. And many thanks to our Council for supporting the go-ahead of the Gallery's repair schedule even in the face of some unknowns. I'm glad it hasn't taken thirty-four years this century to agree and act on the wellbeing and continued long life of our city's art gallery.

Our first ten years has presented a whirlwind of changes, with immediate challenges remaining. Who could have predicted even half of these on 10 May 2003? Throughout our highs and lows, however, no other city in this country has taken a new gallery to its heart as has Christchurch. I am fully aware of how a visit to any metropolitan art gallery in the world reveals a city's DNA: its memory through its collections and its imagination through the new art and experiences it encourages. Four years of closure seems too long now, but—in order to continue to attract loans and to become the Gallery we were once more—there should be no short cuts taken to ensure the building's future seismic resilience.

As we approach our 10th birthday in May, and present a range of new works in the burst of fresh images of people in an inner-city programme we're calling **Populate!** Christchurch Art Gallery faces the uncertainties of its future with a confidence honed by realism, but also with an unwavering belief in the important difference we have made and can continue to make. So here's to our amazing staff, volunteers and audiences—may the next ten years bring us resolution, advancement and great good fortune.

Jenny Harper
Director
April 2013



NOTES

- Tony Preston, cited in Kim Knight, 'Everybody knew this was long overdue', Sunday Star-Times, Life & Review section, 4 May 2003, p.5 (italics mine).
- Public art galleries were established in both Auckland and Dunedin in 1888, with collections relatively speaking well-endowed by private donors from their inception.
- 'Ex tenebris lux; comment by Jenny Harper', Architecture New Zealand, May/June 2003, pp.30-2.
- 4. John Wilson, 'Warehouse in a tutu', *The Press*, 11 December 2002, C1; David McPhail, *The Press*, 13 December 2002.
- Peter Beaven, cited in David Killick, 'Architecture award for vocal veteran', The Press, 19 May 2003, A3.
- Hamish Keith, Sunday Star-Times, Life & Review section, 4 May 2003, p.4.
- John Coley, 'A place to enjoy', The Press, special section, 10 May 2003, p.7.

- 8. As in Jenny Harper, 'Dream it—do it—prove it', paper delivered at Creative New Zealand's 21st Century Arts Conference, Christchurch, 22 June 2010. I also publicly admitted preearthquakes to misgivings about the space-hungry white marble staircase inside and the significant shortcomings of the Worcester Boulevard-facing side, in particular the lack of an inviting entrance for pedestrian passers-by.
- Jenny Harper, 'Achievements and challenges', The Journal of New Zealand Art History, vol.24, 2003, pp.1-3.
- 10. Martin van Beynen, 'When the gallery cheered', The Press, Mainlander section, 6 May 2006, D3.
- Christchurch City Council, Strategic Plan: A framework for achievement, 6pp. brochure, July 2006, p.2.

THE DECADE IN REVIEW

A RUNDOWN OF SOME OF THE BIGGEST AND SMALLEST NUMBERS OF THE GALLERY'S FIRST DECADE.

DOLLAR TOTAL OF 'NEW MONEY' BROUGHT INTO THE CITY AS A DIRECT RESULT OF HOSTING RON MUECK

060,000

VISITORS TO THE GALLERY

,800,000

DOLLAR TOTAL OF NORMAN BARRETT'S **BEQUEST IN 2010**

Our 2 millionth visitor, on 1 July 2008

JOHN BRISTOW, OF GUERNSEY

ATTENDED THE WEDNESDAY EVENING LECTURE PROGRAMME

TOTAL LAND AREA OF THE GALLERY AND FORECOURT

WORKS IN THE COLLECTION BY 2013

2,7

PANES OF GLASS IN THE SCULPTURE WALL

35,14(

VISITORS TO RON MUECK

HOURS OPEN SINCE 10 MAY 2003

,395

PARTICIPANTS IN THE ART BITES PROGRAMME

CEILING TILES

To be replaced throughout the building as part of our repair programme

PUBLICATIONS DIGITISED ON THE GALLERY WEBSITE

WORKS ADDED TO THE COLLECTION SINCE 2003

DAYS OF PAY-PER-VIEW EXHIBITIONS

611

GIFTS OR BEQUESTS TO THE COLLECTION

NUMBER OF EXHIBITIONS

NUMBER OF LOANS OUT

PUBLICATIONS PRODUCED

EARTHQUAKES OF MAGNITUDE SIX OR OVER TO STRIKE CHRISTCHURCH

SPARROWS TRAPPED IN THE FOVER AFTER EQC STAFF LEFT

ROYAL VISIT

SEATS IN THE AUDITORIUM

STUD HEIGHT OF THE FOYER IN METRES

THREE

IT'S OUR PARTY AND WE'LL CRY IF WE WANT TO

On 10 May 2013, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu turns ten. Which is fantastic. But it's probably fair to say that there's a bittersweet quality to the celebrations around this particular anniversary, as it also marks two years and eleven weeks of closure for the Gallery, and catches us staring down the barrel of another two years without our home.

It's frustrating. And then some.

However, we're not going to let these little, ahem, inconveniences get in the way of our party. Populate! is our birthday programme, and it's our attempt to bring some unexpected faces and figures back to the depleted central city. *Bulletin* spoke to the Gallery's senior curator Justin Paton about what he really wants for the tenth birthday, what he finds funny, and what he really doesn't.





BULLETIN: Let's start with a simple one: Why is the show called Populate!? Does the exclamation mark mean we're expected to shout it?

JUSTIN PATON: No need to shout it. But the exclamation mark is certainly there to intensify the word, to make it as active and 'verby' as possible. On the art front, this is definitely a time for verbs not nouns: for art that gets out there and does something. The exclamation mark makes 'populate' into a command, a good-natured call to arms. That call goes out to the audience, of course, who we hope will come into the city to see some of the things we're presenting. But it's also a challenge to ourselves, as we attempt to produce more art in and for Christchurch. One of the most striking things about the inner city now is that it's depopulated, so we wanted to play directly with the idea of human presence. Art as a way of populating a too-quiet city with faces and figures—albeit idiosyncratic ones. My hope for viewers is that exploring the birthday programme will be like bumping into a series of interesting strangers.

B: Is Pop art also in there in the title?

JP: Yes, glad to embrace the Pop in populate, especially since Pop was so interested in urban subjects. There's also a nod to pop-up shops and galleries, which are everywhere in post-quake Christchurch. I loved comedian Dai Henwood's comment that Mayor Bob Parker's memoir about the earthquakes should really have been a pop-up book. I also have to admit that, after naming the programme Populate! we wondered nervously about whether a vandal might change the 'p' to a 'c' on posters. But given the dearth of people in the central city, that too could be a useful injunction...

B: How does it feel to be celebrating a birthday when the Gallery's been closed for more than two years now? When the earthquake happened did it even cross your mind that we'd still be in this situation at this point?

JP: It's funny, in a bleak way, to look back at the early days of the Gallery's closure and think how optimistic we were. Would we be closed for two months? Three months? Could it even be six? By June or so we'd planned a full reopening programme: community murals, a barbecue, a complete rehang of the collection. We'd printed brochures and begun distributing them. And then the bad news started to trickle down. Anything resembling solid information was very hard to come by (although it's interesting what people leave on photocopiers). But you didn't need to be a sleuth to see what was coming. Plenty of us were learning how long it would take for repairs on our own homes to begin. Considering the size of the Gallery building, the preciousness of its contents, and

the complexity of its ownership and insurance, it was easy to guess how much more complicated and slow-moving that fix-up was going to be. So the expanded **Outer Spaces** programme wasn't just for the community. It was also an internal rallying exercise and an act of productive desperation—a way of convincing ourselves we still existed.

B: How does a big gallery suddenly equip itself for making and showing art outdoors?

JP: One of the problems with big galleries, or art museums as they're called overseas, is that they don't do anything suddenly. They're prone to isolation and inertia; they fall in love with their own politics and protocols. It's hard to talk about the value of change without getting into Oprah Winfrey territory, but I think it's great that, having been moved in the worst way by the earthquakes, the Gallery has moved positively to a new way of doing things. We've realised more than fifty Outer Spaces projects in two years. Some have been small, like the poster runs and night-time videos, and some have involved huge efforts, like Felicity's Rolling Maul series of local artist exhibitions. But all of them, by pre-quake standards, exist way beyond our old comfort zones. We're the opposite of risk-averse at present. We'll try anything, almost.

B: There are a number of organisations working to enliven spaces around the city. The Gallery has worked with Gap Filler before on a number of occasions, one being the Wayne Youle mural in Sydenham, and a number of elements in the Populate! programme have been aided by Life in Vacant Spaces. Can you tell me where the Gallery fits into this mix?

JP: I don't think anything fits right now, and that's a good thing. At the level of art, many kinds of organisations and individuals are out there throwing their time and idealism and resources at the city. Every drive through town turns up some surprising image or intervention, and you're often uncertain who's responsible for which bit of art. In fact there are so many projects firing out there now that the



Demo crews work in front of Kay Rosen's Here are the people and there is the steeple in 2012

main problem may be congestion, as artists jostle for the chance to make their mark on prime sites before development begins. We encountered this with the big Wayne Youle wall, where it turned out that several other artists had been eyeing the same space that Gap Filler had earlier secured. But a sense of goodwill and shared purpose seems to have kept territorialism at bay and buoyed the various projects along. Among the things the Gallery can bring to this landscape are people, know-how and resources. What it can bring especially is its relationship with artists. When things are happening at speed in an unpredictable setting, artists have to know they're in good hands.

B: In the last issue of Bulletin Lee Stickells talked of guerrilla interventions within the city. But in Christchurch at present it seems that the guerrilla is now the establishment. Do the structures and systems that are now appearing around these strangle the frontier spirit, or add essential quality control?

'In the early post-quake days, I think art mattered simply because it was art—a sign that some humans were home and determined to keep things interesting.'

JP: Would-be makers of public art need all the help they can get to make things happen in such a messy environment. But I think things are shifting at present. I suspect we'll look back on this period with (very qualified) nostalgia, as a time when the rules for public art in the new city weren't yet fully worked out. A wild west moment, when official productions were contending for space with unlicensed forms of creation and also with things that are not art but look a hell of a lot like it. As commercial development swings into action, the public art landscape will become more regulated and bureaucratised. And, as that happens, what art means in the city will also change. In the early post-quake days, I think art mattered simply because it was art—a sign that some humans were home and determined to keep things interesting. But we can expect to see artists enlisted more and more as the standardbearers of 'development'. Along with this will come the institutionalisation of a particular kind of userfriendly and community-spirited public art—the kind of thing that bolsters the city's image as a top ten Lonely Planet destination. That's fine. But you'd have to say it's also a great time for a really prickly, antagonistic public artist to get out there and start rubbing the city up the wrong way.

B: But the birthday programme seems more celebratory than prickly...

JP: That's true, none of the projects are directly polemical, but I hope at least that they help to keep things strange in Christchurch. When I was talking with Ronnie van Hout about his sculpture Comin' Down, he started recalling the do-it-yourself monuments and pieces of not-quite-art that defined his mental map of the city as a kid—things like the legs sticking out of a stack of tyres outside a tyre yard in Rolleston, or the wacky civic 'sculptures' in Brighton Mall. My own list would include the big black boat that used to sit behind a fence on Ferry Road and the Feejee Mermaid in a grimy old case in the Brighton Mini Zoo. Whether by intention or accident, these things were a relief to come across; they hinted at another city within the city—an older,

weirder Christchurch. Jo Langford's recent SCAPE project, the city of lights above Cranmer Square, did something like that. And I'd consider our work done if even a few of the things in the birthday line-up found their way onto some people's inner maps of Christchurch today.

B: It strikes me that art is competing for attention with projects that are more social in intention (I'm thinking of things like the Dance-O-Mat here) but are judged on similar criteria in terms of their visual impact or the impression they make on the public. Does that have an impact on the types of projects you commission or engage in?

JP: Well it's quite possible to argue that those social projects are art too. They might have more art in them-more imagination and energy-than 'straighter' projects like murals or sculptures. Either way, I think competition is good for public art in any city and in this city especially, where the public art dialogue for too long centred on big, permanent projects and the inevitable 'negative reactions' to them. The more people and groups that are out there doing what they do distinctively, the more all the other people and groups are compelled to sharpen up and define their own acts. For instance, since a lot of new public art in the city has been semi-abstract, it felt to us like a good time to explore portraiture and figuration. The human face and figure remain such powerful tools for artists in public space; that's why advertisers use them all the time. Also, with several of the city's well-known statues still missing from their plinths, it seemed timely to wonder what kind of monuments or counter-monuments might be wanted in the new Christchurch.

B: We've noted the loss of a number of those historic statues around the city in this magazine over the past couple of years. But surely public art today has moved on from monuments to the worthy figures of yesteryear?

JP: It has. And if you read almost any blurb or statement accompanying a public art project today, it



Installing Peter Stichbury's NDE in April 2013

'... the problem is not monumentality versus non-monumentality. It's blandness versus interestingness, or inertia versus liveliness.'





will tell you that the artist is rejecting the monumental and all its associations with permanence and singularity—both coded 'bad' in the current spectrum of public-art values. But the problem is not monumentality versus non-monumentality. It's blandness versus interestingness, or inertia versus liveliness. If you'll excuse the mixed metaphor, 'the monumental' has been turned into a kind of straw man, which commentators today freely vilify in order to valorise other kinds of practice. But figurative sculptures don't have to be permanent. They too can be moved, changed, re-sited. And non-monumental sculptures can be just as space- and resource-hungry, and just as lame, as any monumental work. What's interesting today, I think, is that the lessons of 'sculpture in the expanded field'—lessons of impermanence, site-responsiveness and process have been absorbed by sculptors of all kinds. Antony Gormley is one of the best examples. He might cast figures in bronze, but those figures live emphatically in the expanded field, and they don't live there forever.

B: So you don't think we should be looking to make more permanent additions to the cityscape at this point?

JP: No, I don't think anyone should. One of the most welcome developments in public art commissioning in recent years has been the imposition of fixed life-spans on works. There is nothing more depressing than a big bit of art that's been left out on stage for too long. Things being as they are in Christchurch, I'd prefer us to think of public artworks—even if they're made of tonnes of steel—not as fixtures but as performances. The operative model here should be stand-up comedy. Get out there on stage, do your best to get a response, and then get off before you wear out your welcome. The problem is, it's hard to stay funny when you're staring down an army of engineers, fundraisers, health and safety inspectors, and officials murmuring 'resource consent'.

B: There's a definite bias toward those who 'stay funny' in the Populate! line-up. Art is meant to be a serious matter. Is it okay to simply laugh at it?

JP: I think laughter is one of the most serious responses we can have to art, all the more so because it wells up

"...the best comedians expose the absurdity of the rules we live by. And I think some of the best contemporary artists do something similar."

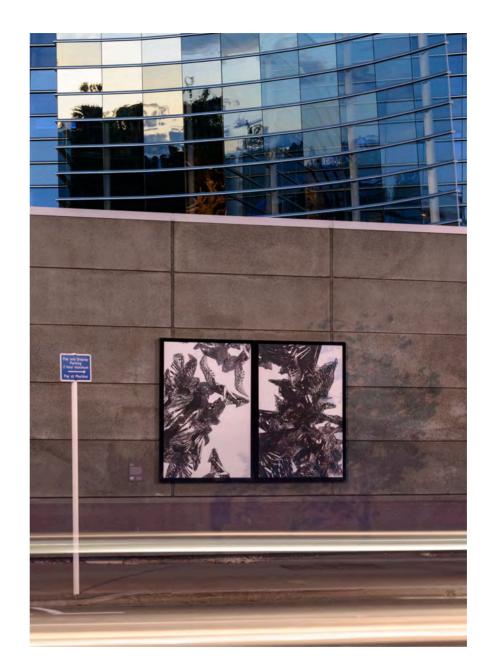
involuntarily. It's tricky, of course, because what's funny to me might not be funny to you; there's that great Mel Brooks line where he says something like, 'Tragedy is when I get a paper cut, comedy is when you fall down a manhole and die.' The humour that runs through the tenth-birthday programme is certainly of the bent, gallows variety, which I guess could be considered as a coping mechanism in the often grim urban setting. It's about the comedy of being 'only human' in a world where things don't always go your way. The figurehead here has got to be the one in Yvonne Todd's new image, Mood Sandwich, which affects me the way all her images do. I laugh, then wonder if it's okay to be laughing, then wonder what it says about me that I laughed in the first place. In art I think that's the best kind of laughter—the kind that brings some nervousness in its wake, because we feel it's revealed something we hadn't acknowledged before in ourselves. By pushing conventions and assumptions to extremes, the best comedians expose the absurdity of the rules we live by. And I think some of the best contemporary artists do something similar. On top of all this we might say that the plight of public art generally is comic, or maybe tragicomic. Once upon a time it had this assured place at the heart of civic life and architecture. These days it's not sure where it belongs. It's down off its plinth and out on its ear. And the earthquakes have only increased that sense of instability.

B: The Gallery is essentially a collecting institution, and we have continued to make acquisitions for the city's collection over the duration of our closure. But our lack of suitable display space means that in many ways we are currently forced to operate primarily in the territory of smaller artist run spaces or dealer galleries—where does that leave us?

JP: Well, on one hand it leaves us in a state of painful anticipation, endlessly planning and re-planning the reopening exhibitions in which we get to show these recent gifts and acquisitions. On the other hand, it's nudged—or maybe shoved—us into doing new things. Finding possible exhibition spaces, refitting them, and then filling them with things other than collection objects. It'd be a total fib to say the process doesn't come with major frustrations and complications—all that stuff about signage, monitoring, permissions and public access that you never have to worry about in a purpose-built building. But with luck the fact the venues are unusual makes the art seem more interesting when you finally reach it. Tony Oursler, for instance, is a wonderful artist to encounter in a normal gallery setting. But there's going to be something very memorable about seeing his works blinking and muttering away to themselves in the stairwell and corridor of a historic Christchurch building.

B: Director Jenny Harper often refers to the extraordinary high the Gallery was on just before the 2011 earthquake, with attendance records constantly being broken. Do you think that momentum has been lost? Does it matter?

JP: That kind of cultural momentum takes a long time to build but can disappear alarmingly fast. And in the first few months of the Gallery's closure we could feel it ebbing by the day. It could give you a panicky, block-the-exits sort of feeling, as though something irreversible was in train—and sometimes it still does. I mean, it's our tenth birthday coming up, and we've now been closed for more than a fifth of that time. Two days out of every ten that this building has existed. That's an alarming statistic. But what are you meant to do? It's our party and, as the song says, we'll cry if we want to, but we're not going to mope for too long. All things considered we are lucky to be here with the spirit and wherewithal to still be doing what we like doing. There are more settled places in the country to be presenting art, but I can't think of any that are more interesting.



Toshi Endo **Wolf-Cub** 2013. Digital file. Reproduced courtesy of the artist



The Gallery celebrates its tenth birthday with a burst of art in the city—including whopping new murals, nighttime projections and sculptures where you least expect them.

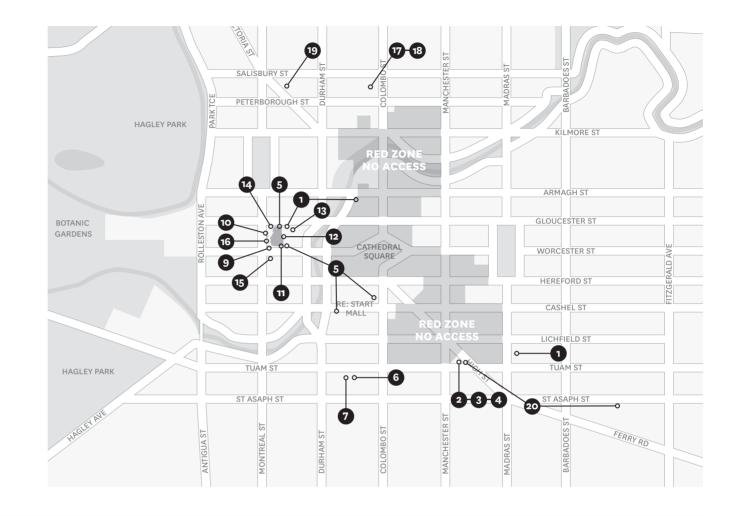
THE PRESS



Life& Leisure







- Tony Oursler: Bright Burn Want 10 May – 30 June / 212 Madras Street and Worcester Boulevard Coming Soon / Oxford Terrace See page 22
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 I seem to have temporarily
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When

10 May - 30 June

Where 212 Madras Street and Worcester **Boulevard**

> When **Coming Soon**

Where Oxford Terrace



Fall tension tension wonder bright burn want

Curator Felicity Milburn on Tony Oursler and the grotesque.

THE WORDS COME SLOWLY AT FIRST, tested out carefully like steps on spring ice, gradually building in speed and intensity. The plaintive voice stalls on certain phrases, black-stained lips repeating and worrying at them until they separate from any sense of meaning, or until a new thought breaks in. And all the while, her chameleon eyes roll, goggle, peer, blink, twitch and squint at the surrounding blackness. This is the strange, melancholy mantra of *Sang*, and she can't wait to meet you.

A disconcerting envoy from the parallel universe of American multimedia artist Tony Oursler, *Sang* embodies his trademark fusion of fractured physicality, unexpected humour and acute unease. Since the mid 1970s, Oursler has been expanding the parameters of video art, projecting his anxious, morphing images onto fibreglass forms, walls and even (in the case of his 'psycho-landscape' *The Influence Machine*, which was displayed on the riverbank outside London's Tate Modern earlier this year) smoke. From neurotic talking heads and multiple-personality spectacles to monstrous outdoor projections, the selection of Oursler works Christchurch Art Gallery has brought together as part of **Populate!** offers a fascinating take on the grotesque as a subject and style in contemporary art.

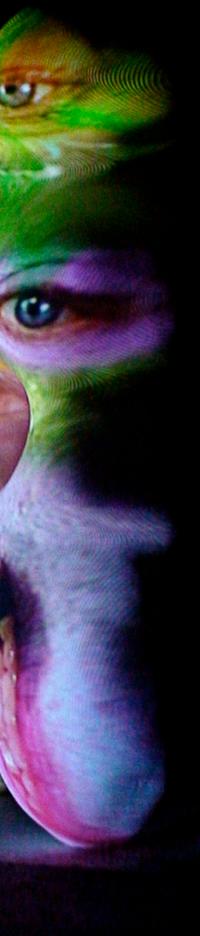
The convention of the grotesque had its beginnings in the late fifteenth century, when a series of ancient Roman wall paintings were discovered amidst the buried ruins of Nero's famed Domus Aurea. Named after the cave-like rooms in which they were found, these grottescas featured an array of fantastical, often risqué, human/animal/plant hybrids that must have presented an electrifying contrast to the serene order Renaissance scholars had previously admired in classical art. The effect of these intoxicating visions on artists and architects was immediate and profound, and their influence has been traced from the elaborate decorative designs Raphael created for the papal loggia in the Vatican, to works produced by artists in the Baroque and Romantic periods. At the end of the eighteenth century, Francisco Goya set down his own nightmarish human/animal changelings, incorporating grotesquely altered and exaggerated figures into his Los Caprichos series of aquatint prints in order to satirise the follies of Spanish society. His later, infamous, Black Paintings were visions of an earthly hell featuring witches, warlocks and a monstrous Saturn. Since the turn of the last century, the grotesque has attained a growing currency in contemporary art, prompted, perhaps, by an 'end of times' zeitgeist. Artists such as Patricia Piccinini, for example, have responded to advances in genetic modification and cloning by taking the idea of an artificially 'corrected' species to logical, but alarmingly unnatural conclusions. In 2004, Robert Storr curated Disparities and Deformations: Our Grotesque for the 5th Santa Fe biennial, with works by Louise Bourgeois, Sigmar Polke, Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy among others (it also included Oursler's Softy, in which fragments of a distorted yellow face were projected onto a large

'Though their faces distort with alien tics, their failings and preoccupations are all too familiar. As monstrous as these works may be ... they are never monsters.'

fibreglass form, described by one commentator as resembling a giant melting marshmallow). Storr's exhibition explored the grotesque not only as a quality or subject, but as a mode of operation that places the viewer on the threshold between known and unknown, attraction and repulsion, dream and nightmare.

Such disruption of the familiar and expected can allow artists to open up new perspectives. New Zealand performance artist David Cross has suggested that the value of such incongruities lies in their ability to 'penetrate and unsettle the conscious self of the viewer . In a 2005 installation/performance, Bounce, at City Gallery Wellington he lay prone and almost completely encased beneath a brightly coloured inflated structure that resembled a bouncy castle for children. With only his eyes remaining visible, he was wholly subject to the attentions of visitors (friendly and otherwise) who were encouraged to take off their shoes but given no other direction. The work redrew the parameters of the conventional gallery dynamic (where the visitor looks and the work is looked at), and imbued a structure associated with innocent pleasure with the potential for inflicting injury. These shifts resulted in altered, and at times worryingly sadistic, visitor/art interactions.

Fittingly, the broad church of contemporary grotesque contains its share of darkness, as epitomised by the now-destroyed *Hell* (1999/2000) by Jake and Dinos Chapman,



a sprawling panorama of the unrelenting horror of war played out in pitiless detail by hundreds of plastic figurines. The satirical works of Italian sculptor Maurizio Cattelan, too, often come with a nasty bite, as was the case with *HIM* (2001), which depicted a schoolboy kneeling in prayer, positioned with his back to the viewer. Those who came close enough to peer around the devout child discovered they were looking into the face of Adolf Hitler. In the tradition of those early Roman fresco painters, however, there's also plenty of fertile ground for those artists who prefer to temper their uneasy visions with a more playful humour.

For pure entertainment value, it's hard to go past the gurning, gyrating, mutating forms of Robert McLeod's electrically-coloured plywood cut-outs. Bristling with weapons, bared teeth, pop-out eyes and feral cartoon animals, *Two Tongues* (2001; Christchurch Art Gallery) is a chaotic and discombobulating revelation. Against elements of pure, gross-out vulgarity, the elaborate, interlaced composition projects a surprising baroque grandeur. Overriding the passivity of conventional gallery viewing, *Two Tongues* practically climbs off the wall to demand our attention, like a small child pulling faces, each more hideous than the next. It's a vision of life at the outer edges of the human condition, the moment after the wind has changed.

Upsetting any smug delusions of separation from our fellow animals, Joanna Braithwaite's deadpan reworkings of traditional society portraits combine humour with incongruous hybridity. In *Lizard Lounge* (2013; see p.xx), a pair of louche lace monitors regards us from a leather chair, their distinctly human postures and attitudes at once repugnant and charismatic. The initial, startling 'wrongness' of Braithwaite's painting is held in check by her eye for the

small details that establish character; the turn of a head, the direction and intensity of a gaze, the casual grip on a banded tail or an ornate pipe. As a conceit, it's both patently absurd and highly seductive—as long as you don't think about the sound those tails would make slithering over the furniture. Braithwaite calls up a persuasive human psychology from her animal subjects, whether they be leering lizards, wayward fish or pious kereru, with a deft economy. It's a facility that is shared by Tony Oursler, whose projected personae establish themselves via the bare minimum of recognisable features—often just eyes, mouth and voice. Though their faces distort with alien tics, their failings and preoccupations are all too familiar. As monstrous as these works may be—and the theatrical Spectar (2006), with its roiling psychedelic colours and bickering multiple personalities certainly falls into that category—they are never monsters. It is the realisation of our unbreakable connection with these mutated and distorted beings-and the recognition of our own frailties and existential angst that keeps us transfixed.

Previous page: Tony Oursler Sang 2008. Fibreglass form, BluRay, BluRay player, projector. Courtesy of the artist and Jensen Sydney and Fox/Jensen Auckland

Tony Oursler **Spectar** 2006. Fibreglass form, BluRay, BluRay player, projector. Courtesy of the artist and Jensen Sydney and Fox/ Jensen Auckland

NOTES

 David Cross, 'Some Kind of Beautiful: The Grotesque Body in Contemporary Art', PHD thesis, 2006. 02

When 10 May - 23 June

Where 209 Tuam Street

Jess Johnson: Wurm Whorl Narthex

JUSTIN PATON: Your drawings are like pages from some big book of civilisation. But it's not quite our civilisation. Whose is it?

JESS JOHNSON: I'm not sure yet. It's the early days of civilisation. The fun part where you get to make rules up as you go along. I think of the drawings I am currently working on as embryonic. They're not yet fully formed or inhabiting a solid reality. Eventually though, I hope to grow them into something much larger than they currently are. By rendering them with enough detail and internal logic which feeds backs on itself, I'll be able to create a 'reality loop' that will enable them to inhabit their own unique world.

JP: How important is science fiction for your art?

JJ: I think it comes down to when I first formulated my interests in other worlds. When you're young, your eyes and mind are wide open. Your brain is this giant sponge. You're discovering things for the first time, believing you're peeling back the secrets of the universe. Thinking about possibilities, future worlds, parallel worlds, astral travel, aliens watching over the Earth. All those notions are a lot closer to the surface—as real as anything else that is presented to you as real. Around this time, I also had these reality morphing experiences that I couldn't explain. You're supposed to dismiss them or forget about them when you grow up. It's easy to say, 'Oh I was just under the influence of drugs or I was having a mental episode that I didn't understand'. But these interests, experiences and feelings that I had as a young adult, they've continued to stay fresh for me and feed my artwork. I can't say anything has really changed in my head from that time.

JP: The writer John Updike has used the phrase 'entering in' to describe the kind of rapt attention and imaginative transport he experienced as a child leaning over a page of cartoons. Am I right to guess you took similar pleasure in comics and storybooks?

JJ: Totally. I loved poring over comic books and maps as a child. It's like you want to eat them. I'd spend hours trying to copy them too. That feeling is still what I look for in art today. I'm very attracted to obsessive texturing. I think part of it is recognising similar compulsions in artists. You feel a kind of affinity with them.

JP: And does making them deliver similar pleasures? JJ: My favorite state is spending hours covering a blank page with detail and patterns. And I get a kick when I recognise it in other people's drawings. I'll see how someone has drawn wood or water or sky by using

JP: I'll avoid doing the obvious thing and asking you how long your works on paper take to make. But do people use the word 'obsessive' to describe them? And if they do, how do you like it?

how they felt when drawing it.

JJ: A lot of people see obsessive behavior as a disorder. Something to be medicated and fixed. I actually see it as a superpower. To excel in any area, you need a level of intense focus and tunnel vision. Of obsession with your subject. And that state is actually enjoyable and desirable for people who have obsessive traits. Obsessiveness of course can be both a blessing and a curse. The notion of not having my artwork to fixate upon actually makes me quite panicky. When I was younger I wasn't able to manage it. It was chaotic and unfocused. I would obsess about random, unhealthy things. Unsuccessful relationships. Stalking people on the internet. Fixating on moles. Really crap stuff. If it turns inward you can eat yourself up. But now that I'm more aware of how my brain works, I can train it. I operate better with a very fixed routine.

JP: This way of animating the whole surface of a piece of paper with pattern and densely woven imagery how did you come to it, evolve it?

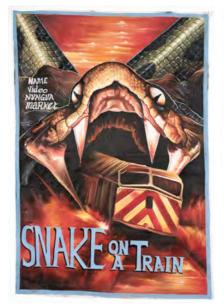
JJ: I've enjoyed covering a piece of paper with repeated patterns since childhood. The earliest drawings I remember doing were pages of interlocking smiley faces from about age six. In terms of it becoming my focus as an artist, I'd probably pinpoint it to an experience I had working as a gallery attendant at Tate Modern in London. I was basically employed as a security guard





Camp Blood: Hand-Painted Film Posters







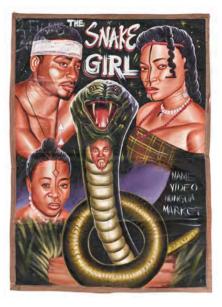
Artist unknown Camp Blood (detail).

Acrylic on flour sack. Private

collection, Christchurch



Artist unknown **Marksman II**. Acrylic on flour sack. Private collection,



Artist unknown **The Snake Girl**. Acrylic on flour sack. Private collection, Christchurch

Christchurch painter Roger Boyce on his collection of hand-painted movie posters.

THE FIRST ONE I SAW was in the Southampton lounge of a bona fide art star. I wasn't surprised to see it there, as the owner—despite an earned public reputation for actual 'niceness'—had a private predilection for gore. I'd once attempted to sit through *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* with her and a friend. I couldn't endure the movie but the equally gory hand-painted African movie poster gave rise to an acquisitive urge. I wanted one.

Seems she'd bought the poster from an LA dealer (Ernie Wolfe, if memory serves) for more than I was willing to pay. An early discoverer and proponent of the posters, most of which had been produced from the mid eighties to nineties, he'd spotted the things in Accra. The fabulously lurid hand-painted posters advertised American, Chinese and African action and horror films and gave rise to an informal street-guild of painters and their casual apprentices.

Early on Wolfe bought, for a pittance, as many of the film-bills as he could find. He went so far as to send runners bush, ferreting for the posters where—after being retired and abandoned by traveling theatre operators—they were being employed by rural Ghanaians as curtains,

tarps and tablecloths. The painted acrylic images made their sewn-together cotton flour-sack grounds more durable, moisture resistant and serviceable as household tarps.

After Wolfe published *Extreme Canvas* an avid group of American and European collectors soon exhausted the geographic source of original posters. Poster artists whose trade had been made redundant by cheap photomechanical reproduction quickly began turning out faux posters for the folk-art trade. Which to my eye were and are inferior to the authentic first generation images.

Lucky for me the most sought out of the original posters were often African visual exaggerations of already heroically exaggerated American action film imagery... steroidal action stars all but disappearing into their own mountains of grotesque muscle while their already amply siliconed love-interests became near-dirigible in proportion. Posters for African films—which featured voodoo eye-beams, cannibalism, body parts and rivers of blood—were, for some reason, of less interest to western collectors. And thus the remaining selection was rich and, more importantly to a skinning-by visual artist, the price was right. I located an African dealer (in Accra) and bought as many as my budget and then-wife would allow.

04

When Ongoing

Where 209 Tuam Street*

*On the roof, viewable from Tuam Street. Sorry no roof access.

Ronnie van Hout: Comin' Down

JUSTIN PATON: You grew up in Christchurch. Do monuments or public sculptures have much of a place in your memories of the city? What do you remember of 'art in public'?

RVH: Like everyone who grew up in Christchurch I remember a number of public sculptures, or should that be monuments. The ones that stand out would be Godley in the square, Robert Falcon Scott near the Worcester Street bridge and the war memorial next to the Cathedral in the square. There was also Captain Cook and Queen Victoria in Victoria Square. These I guess are statues and I probably never saw them as art. They took their place alongside the whale skeleton in the museum, the Captain Scarlet mannequin placed near the entrance of the Tivoli cinema, and the Spitfire at the airport. Too good not to mention would also be the hamburger-shaped hamburger stand in Wigram, the various legs sticking out of piles of tyres outside a tyre vard in Rolleston, the field gun at the RSA, the anti-aircraft gun and mine in Redcliffs, the whole of New Brighton mall in the 1970s and the small cottage at the bottom of Mt Pleasant that for some reason I thought was Captain Cook's cottage and where I imagined his lonely wife reading his distant letters at a table by candlelight. There are many other examples of objects in the public space that hold memory for me, but the question of them as art would be an interesting discussion.

JP: You've been back to Christchurch several times in the past two years. What's your impression of the public art landscape here now, in a city where a lot has fallen, including the Godley and Scott sculptures, and where a lot has gone?

RVH: The public art landscape in Christchurch post earthquakes is very dynamic and interesting; there seem to be many official and unofficial responses to the unfolding events. Some of these responses are made consciously as art and many (like the multitude of hand-made signs) can be seen in the area of art making. Then there is the whole environment of the city and its surrounding suburbs to be seen as a monument. Whether natural or caused by people, the destruction, disappearance or complete change of shared space is cause for discussion and debate about how we want our experiences to be in the future, and those discussions are for me a place where art exists. Christchurch is now an odd place where much of what you see is in some way a memorial. Loss and grieving and the many other human responses to the familiar being no longer present connect us and all such responses are of value. I obviously tend to see the world in terms of art.

JP: Your own contribution to this place is a figure that will appear four storeys high on top of the old Post Office building at 209 Tuam Street. Who is he and what's he up to?

RVH: The figure is a large three-dimensional replica of myself, pointing up to the sky with one very long arm and looking down to the street, as if imploring others to see what I am seeing. Moving east along Tuam Street, you will be able to look up and see it.



Ronnie van Hout **Comin' Down** (detail) 2013. Painted polyurethane over VH grade machined polystyrene, glue, welded steel armature. Courtesy the artist



JP: Why did you call it Comin' Down?

RVH: I wanted to capture multiple meanings. The pulling down or the falling down of buildings, that something in the sky is possibly coming down, or the idea that an experience is passing and we are coming down to ground from a high point. There is a sense of it being a moment between cause and effect. What exactly is it that is comin' down?

JP: It's not the first time one of your stand-ins has looked skyward. In the sculpture House and School, which is in Christchurch Art Gallery's collection, we see a little video of you in your childhood bedroom in Aranui peering up fearfully at the sky. Is it a Christchurch thing especially, this sense of the sky as a place from which the unknown might descend? Are the skies bigger here?

RVH: There was also the figure from the exhibition *Ersatz* who shakes a fist at a higher being, or at the circumstance he finds himself in. The flatness of Christchurch seems to exaggerate the expanse of the sky, that feeling of being under a domed canopy. It creates a kind of pressure on the psyche and you can feel small under that largeness. The feeling of being powerless in the world is an aspect of the UFO phenomenon, where the unknown (aliens) can exert control over you, abducting and probing and doing whatever they like. There's a UFO hovering above the house in *House and School*. That's what the figure in the video is looking up at. Experiencing the earthquakes can also contribute to a sense of smallness and powerlessness.

JP: How about public sculpture's relationship with power? In putting a figure up there on the roof, were you thinking about those creepy old images of dictators on balconies looking out over the crowd?

RVH: I wasn't necessarily thinking of dictators, creepy or otherwise, but when I look at it now I can see how someone might, as if the pointing gesture is some kind of twisted salute. There is also the image of Martin Luther King after he was shot on the balcony in Memphis with all his support people pointing to the window where the shots came from. I think someone pointing can indicate where the power lies, in the way that they hold the position of someone who sees. This is the mystical power attributed to artists—the kind of power dictators throughout history have not liked. Often it's just a dumb kind of power. 'Look at that cloud—it looks a bit like a dog riding a motorbike.'

JP: The history of public sculpture is full of figures whose gestures are hard for us to understand today. We know that they mattered hugely to the cultures they were part of, but we're not always sure what they stood for—often because they come to us only in fragments. If you had to explain your new

monument to an audience in the future, what would you tell them it stands for?

RVH: I would say it is a monument to a gesture. When we extend our bodies into the world we move from our internal state to an external one. Pointing at something is a basic form of art making: 'Hey, look at that'. We invite someone else to see what we are seeing, and we create a relationship between people and the thing that is pointed at. I am interested in that state, which is the state of being a threshold, or a door that is neither open nor closed. Ajar. Between inside and outside.

JP: Maybe it's worth asking the same question about some other public works of yours, the big robot sculptures for Melbourne and Lower Hutt, which don't stand at all but lie down. What are they saying about civic life and sculpture? Are they owning up to some failure in advance—lying down on the job?

RVH: Instead of representing one of the ambitions of the industrial revolution (the elimination of labour), this robot finds itself without purpose in a post-industrial society. It has no job to lie down on, except the job of representing its failure and allowing us a portal to empathy. There is a history of lying down, of luxury, reclining on the chaise, relaxing. It is a position that doesn't threaten. Or maybe the robot just fell over.

JP: And more generally, how do you feel about the idea that art should be 'public-spirited'? We have this view of public art as virtuous and life-enhancing, as art 'for everyone'. Where do you see your work sitting in relation to that position? What do you want it to do for, or to, or against, the public?

RVH: There is no requirement of public art to be anything or take a position. It is an undefined activity. From the beginnings of the modern period art has been a discussion. This has often been interpreted as 'art must challenge us', and this challenge is really only the challenge of what we think art should be and look like. I have heard discussion around supposedly 'challenging' art, where the only threat discussed was one of cost. I do think art should be 'for everyone', but this is probably an impossible socialist ambition, because the market, dominated by the status quo, seems to be interested in maintaining the position of art being elite. I like to think my work could be described as popular. Does my art enhance life? There are ebbs and flows, ups and downs, sometimes 'my' life is enhanced, but usually it's just so-so. Virtuosity is something I have consciously not pursued. From early on, I have been interested in the outsider, and those things in life we reject. With my public work I hope passers-by will project themselves into the sculpture and then past it. Giving the work some recognisable human feature lets this happen. This projection is a simple act, like pointing, that is common to us all.

05

When From 10 May

Where See map for locations

Faces from the Collection

Curator Ken Hall looks into some faces from the collection, and makes the case for taking them public.

I Think I Saw You Once Somewhere Before

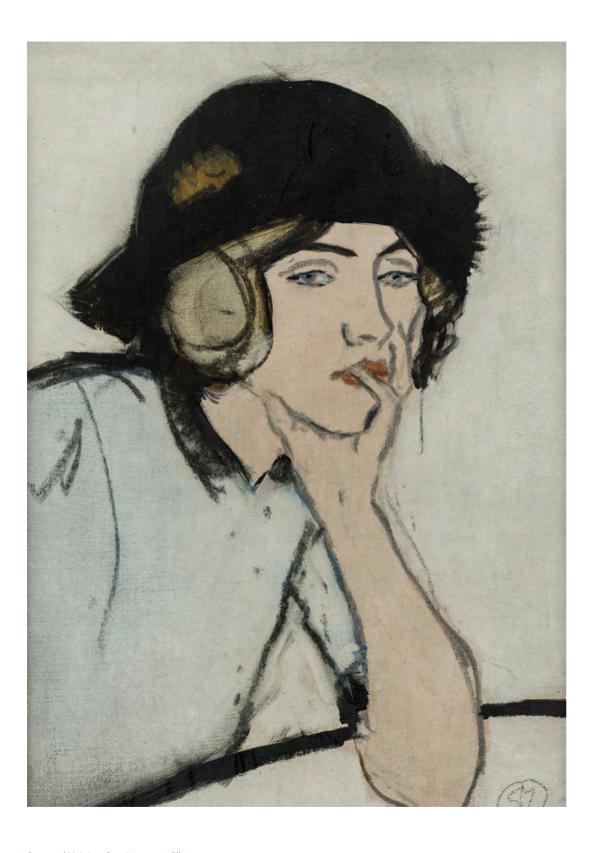
BACK-OF-HOUSE at Christchurch Art Gallery there are many faces, safely in storage, away from the public eye. A cursory glance through the sliding racks might easily suggest an excess of erstwhile civic worthies: portraits of rounded gents in mayoral chains, bewhiskered gentlemen soldiers, bishops, stately city matrons and society dames. Each carries stories, but these—along with their subjects' former importance—can initially appear forgotten, filed or otherwise mislaid. (All are valued of course; it's also certain that among them are enduring treasures.)

Many other likenesses in the collection, however, are not portraits in the traditional sense. These are works of art in which the sitters' identities or public reputation have never greatly mattered. Instead, elusive stories, invented visions or broader notions have been given form—devoid of obvious narrative, these portraits carry in their intent an intangible, poetic sensibility. It's a quality that has strengthened over time. A number of works within this category are about to receive more attention than they've had for a while, starting within the **Populate!** programme. (More on this soon.) One of the least-known of these—somewhat inexplicably—is Gertrude Demain Hammond's *A Reading from Plato*, an arresting water-colour of a young woman richly swathed in fur, apparently lost

in philosophical thought. The painting was shown at the Royal Academy in London (where Hammond was a regular exhibitor) in 1903 and again in Christchurch at the New Zealand International Exhibition in 1906-7. Presented within a large collection of British art, it was bought by James Jamieson, a local art collector. Following Jamieson's death in 1927 it was given to the city by his family in 1932, where it become part of the founding collection of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery—one of just 160 paintings and sculptures it contained. Hammond was primarily an illustrator, whose commissions included drawings for the aesthetic movement's The Yellow Book. This painting was one of the finest she exhibited; in its attention to detail and enduringly romantic mood it shows the lingering influence of Pre-Raphaelite art. As was typical with their work, its slightly swooning subject has allowed her identity to be subservient to the artist's storytelling goals.

The pensive qualities of Hammond's painting are matched in the work of New Zealand-born, Christchurch-trained Raymond McIntyre, who made an impact in London art circles with his stylised portraits and streetscapes between 1911 and the 1920s. Three of the artist's works in the Gallery's collection were based on a favourite model, the young stage actress Phyllis Constance Cavendish, whom he painted numerous times during 1912–14.

Gertrude Hammond A
Reading From Plato c.1903.
Watercolour. Collection of
Christchurch Art Gallery Te
Puna o Waiwhetu, presented
by the Jamieson family, 1932



Raymond McIntyre Suzette c.1914. Oil on panel. Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, presented by Mrs M. Good, London, 1975 'Surrounded by air, with space and horizons to explore, his childhood appears privileged and blessed...'

A comparison with her likeness captured in a London photographic studio several years later (from the collection of the National Portrait Gallery, London) suggests that McIntyre's sultry aestheticism replaced a markedly sunny disposition. McIntyre himself claimed to have 'invented her type' and strictly sought a quality of aloofness. His inventiveness extended to the coiled and plaited hairstyle seen in *Suzette*, *Ruth* and other works, which he fashioned for his model based on a 'severe style' worn by the peasant women of Breton. Together, his set of elegant portraits is indebted to various influences, including art nouveau and Japanese wood-block prints. Dreamy and devoid of specific personality, they remain pleasingly decorative imagined human likenesses.

Aesthetic allure was a less pressing demand in Eric Gill's wood engraving Ruth Lowinsky (1924), which also depends for its success on a high degree of formal elegance. Unlike McIntyre's frequently renamed actress, this work bears the name of a real person: Ruth J. Emilie Lowinsky (née Hirsch), whose husband Thomas Esmond Lowinsky became a close friend of Eric Gill's. Ruth and Thomas both studied art at the Slade School of Art in London, where they are likely to have met the well-known sculptor, typographer and printmaker. Gill executed many portraits of their family, including this work, which was included in a book of his wood-engravings published in 1924. Ruth Lowinsky found her own





Right: Jeffrey Harris **Grandparents at Okains** 1976. Collection of Christchurch Art
Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, purchased 2011.
Reproduced with permission

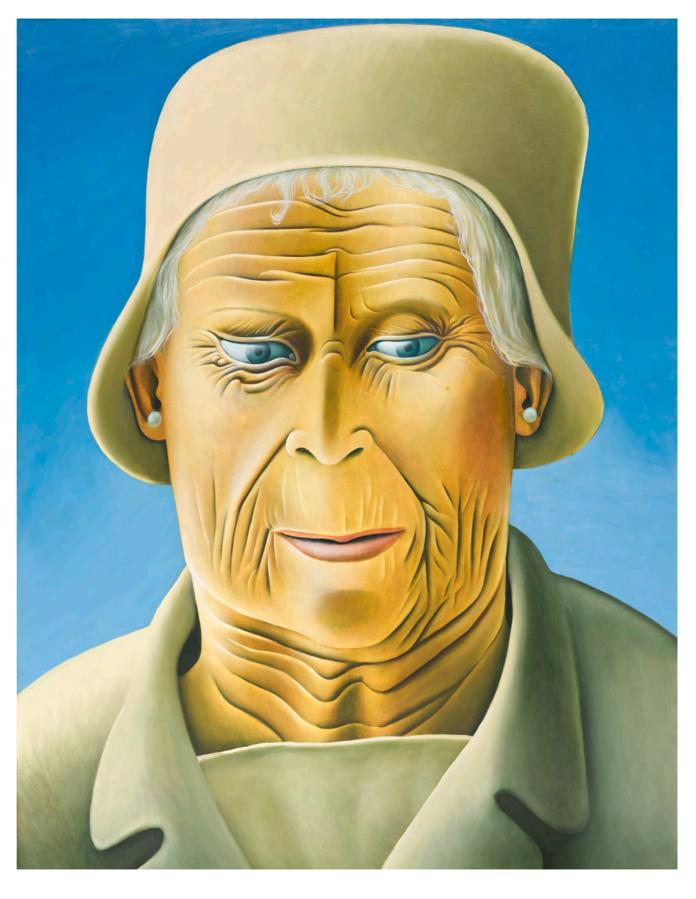


public success from 1931 onward as a food writer and society hostess. While retaining a measure of individuality in the engraving, she is nevertheless transformed by Gill into a sculptural, generic everywoman. With her embellished silhouette profile, Lowinsky has been simplified into a graphic emblem; like a Wedgwood jasperware plaque she is also classicised and finely wrought.

Rita Angus's Portrait of O'Donell Moffett (c.1936) is another likeness that carries a real person's name yet presents something other than a standard portrait. The boy appears carved and smoothly finished: his face a stylised mask. His bright-eyed, open expression evokes a phrase in Shakespeare's The Seven Ages of Man (from As You Like It), the 'school-boy, with his satchel, And shining morning face, creeping like snail, Unwillingly to school'. (Master Moffett, however, is more intent than unwilling.) Similarly emblematic is Frances Hodgkins's Boy in a Wood (c.1929), whose name we'll never need to know. Surrounded by air, with space and horizons to explore, his childhood appears privileged and blessed, though his expression somehow suggests the idea of the brevity of this phase. In the simple medium of lead pencil, Hodgkins has beautifully suggested the essence of a stage of life. The issue of specific personality vs. generic representation is also wrapped up in Harry Linley Richardson's Portrait of a Maori Boy, a painterly study of an unknown youth who faces the viewer; alert and serious, bathed in light.

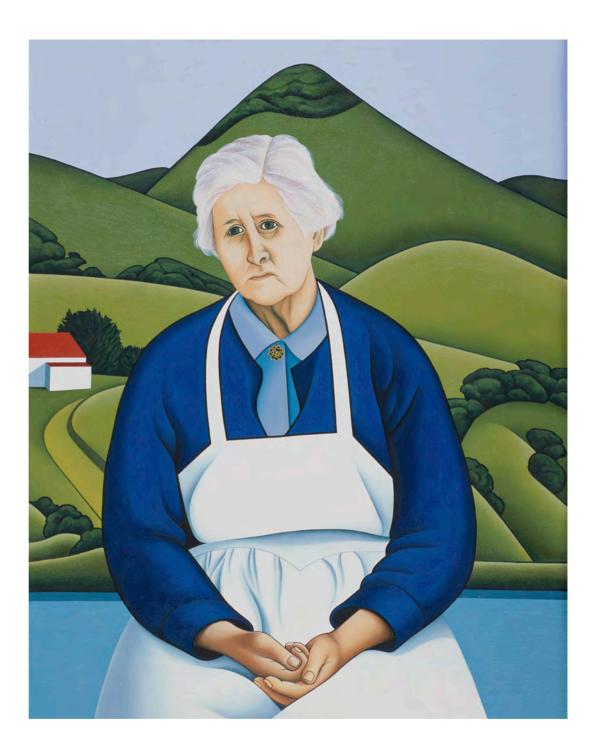
'Although we may know nothing about these people or their lives, it is easily possible to connect with these paintings...'

Michael Smither **Portrait of my mother** 1972. Oil on board. Collection
of Christchurch Art Gallery Te
Puna o Waiwhetu, purchased 1981.
Reproduced courtesy of M.D. Smither



There are also faces that seem to symbolise an era; ancestral likenesses that speak of recollection and experience: Robin White's memorable portrait of her mother, Florence and Harbour Cone (1974), Michael Smither's equally powerful Portrait of my mother (1972) and Jeffrey Harris's vibrant and forlorn Grandparents at Okains (1976). Although we may know nothing about these people or their lives, it is easily possible to connect with these paintings, each of which holds an extraordinary sense of community identification and belonging. Somehow there is a generosity in their very existence, as images of the artists' close family members that were intended to be widely shared. All three can readily stop us in our tracks through their visual impact and contents: tenderly articulated, worn expressions; the rich, familiar colour of this land; hard-edged lines overlaid on faces, crumpled cloth and landforms. Like public memorials, the stories behind these personal images now belong to many; the artists seem to ask us, their audience, to likewise remember and respect those we have also known and loved.

It will be a fine day when we can return such treasures to our Gallery walls, but in this interim phase, we'll take advantage of the challenges set before us, and pleasure over the coming months in bringing these and other portraits to prominence around the city. While the originals remain cared for and protected in our storage spaces, sharp-focus, enlarged photographs of well-framed portraits will be positioned in carefully matched outdoor public spaces, reaffirming the important role that art holds for us. This particular selection of portraits embraces storytelling, the imaginative realm and contemplation, and is a characterful reminder of a wonderfully rich, accumulated community resource.



Above: Robin White Florence and Harbour Cone 1974. Oil on canvas. Collection of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, purchased 1975. Reproduced with permission

When Coming Soon

Where Lichfield Street

Mark Braunias: Groove Zone Shuffle JUSTIN PATON: Before too long this big crowd of figures will be painted on a big bare wall in Lichfield Street. In the meantime can you tell us who exactly the figures are?

MARK BRAUNIAS: I didn't really consider these figures as individuals but more as generic forms, evolving out of the same odd gene pool. The forms took shape at the time of making. They more or less grew on the page. However I am quite happy if the viewer wants to bring an identity to them—that can be part of the process.

JP: And how about the big story. There are seventysomething characters, and they seem to be rushing towards each other from opposite ends of the wall. Two tribes? East versus west?

MB: Possibly some dodgy crowd management. I think of them as coming into or out from the centre of the city. Moving to and fro from Lichfield Street in a 'Groove Zone Shuffle' bubble. Each end of the design has elements which suggest that the movement is circular—that they return again in either direction. The juncture where they meet is less about rivalry and more about the chaos that can occur when a crowd crosses at the lights and so on. It's about people wanting to relocate their centre. Coming back home. In a different way.

JP: You've drawn and painted directly on to many walls over the years. Will this be the biggest you've taken on?

MB: There can be no doubt about that. Strange to say this is the first wall I've approached where I didn't think of it as a wall exactly. With no real floor or ceiling it suggested an independent structure such as board or canvas. My approach was to try and make a painting rather than my massive-scale sketchbooks as in the past.

JP: As well as being your biggest, will this be your first work in an outdoor setting? Your first 'public artwork'?

MB: Yes, in the sense that it will be out in the open twentyfour hours of the day. There will be no closed door at 5pm. No sleeping on the job for this painting.

JP: How does that change things? Are there things you do or don't do in a public setting that you might or might not for the more insider audience you find in a gallery?

MB: I have always been a fan of art in the cave or house—the interior spaces where the outside world cannot intrude and you have freedom to channel dreams through process. So working out in the open had always been something that didn't fit easily with me. Nothing really to do with the insider audience but more about my insider habits. This work is very much in response to the current situation in Christchurch so yes it is quite a different approach. Normally I to try to make art I like first and then put it out there and see if anyone can see what I see. Groove Zone Shuffle is intended for the Christchurch shufflers grooving in and out of the city zone. When it's done, I hope it's something optimistic.

JP: Looking at your designs, I find myself thinking of older public murals—the kinds of semi-abstract friezes that might have been painted in the 1950s to perk up and modernise public spaces? Does that ring any bells for you?

MB: Perhaps in the sense that my organic shapes have the look of European modernism. The use of line and form, the play of figure and ground. There is something retro about them I will admit—I am fond of that period in art and culture. Modernist writers like Herbert Read and the Cold War meeting head on with Elvis.

JP: I think it's partly to do with the colour, which is bright but also often has a faded, slightly dated quality to it. The pinks remind me of calamine lotion; the greens wouldn't be out of place on the walls of an old South Island bach. Where do these colours come from?



When
Until 26 June
—

Where Lichfield Street

Yvonne Todd: Mood Sandwich

JUSTIN PATON: Though you do landscapes and still lifes occasionally, portraits have been at the centre for you all the way through. What's the reason?

YVONNE TODD: I've always been interested in revising and reworking photographic conventions and the portrait offers an almost-endless array of 'conventional' manifestations. Landscapes are a bit more limiting, and I find still lifes to be reliant on composition, which can be unexpectedly problematic. I recently spent a day hypercritically agonising over the placement of a pea and a seashell in an otherwise reductive still life, trying all kinds of pedantic repositionings. Portraits don't usually require that level of compositional obsession. The human form is hard to get wrong.

JP: People today are more accustomed to having their pictures taken than ever before. Is it true to say you're fascinated by a slightly earlier moment in the history of photography, when there was a lot more nervousness and anxiety in the average photograph?

vT: Yes. And it's probably to do with the large-format view camera I use. It requires me to put my head under a black cloth and compose the image rigorously whilst viewing everything upside down and back to front. It's not particularly conducive to carefree, spontaneous shooting. The camera remains stationed on its tripod while everyone else dances to its tune. There's a static quality to the resulting portraits, which annoys me occasionally, but it also gives them their slightly awkward edge. Also, I don't offer much in the way of direction when I photograph people. I assume that they will understand by osmosis. This can make for interesting outcomes.

JP: And was it wedding photography you had in mind here? Your subject looks like a bride, though perhaps of the runaway hippy variety...

YT: I like to think of her as an angel. The new Pope was elected a few days before I took the photograph and the young woman seems to be a sort of disrupted angel form. Most of the intended goodness and virtue has materialised but not entirely correctly. Although this is incidental, my original idea for the image was based vaguely on a haiku I wrote in Standard Three in which a flock of sheep was, in fact, a groundbreaking metaphor for clouds. The poem ended with the words 'chewing air'. I was thinking about projecting a photograph of clouds onto the white dress, but decided it might be a bit overcooked, with the long arm and all.

Yvonne Todd Mood Sandwich (detail) 2013. Reproduced courtesy of the artist



'I like to think of her as an angel. The new Pope was elected a few days before I took the photograph and the young woman seems to be a sort of disrupted angel form.'

JP: You often work with pairs and series and groups. In this case, the second image is a bunch of carrots, retouched as though they are frocks in a late 1950s photograph—the juxtaposition is perfectly awful and perfectly funny, but I'd be hard pressed to say why. At the risk of ruining the joke, could you explain why you photographed lowly carrots in the first place, and why you've paired them here with the portrait?

vT: I photographed the carrots twenty years ago when I was in my first year of photographic study. I was planning on exhibiting it this year in some sort of arcane 1993/2013 conversation. The carrot forms had a connection with the large arm; it seemed to work visually as a diptych. And it's an open-ended pairing, which feeds my interest in being willfully obscure. I've also been experimenting with the hand-colouring of black and white prints, which is something I've always despised for being fussy and deeply passé. It seemed time to make peace. The pastel bodies of the carrots are my first steps towards reconciliation.

When
Ongoing
-Where
Colombo Street
Sydenham

Wayne Youle:
I seem to have temporarily
misplaced my sense of humour

JUSTIN PATON: Your mural I seem to have temporarily misplaced my sense of humour, produced with Gap Filler, was one of the Gallery's first big post-earthquake Outer Spaces project. That was eighteen months back. Does it look the same to you now or different?

WAYNE YOULE: I don't see the work much, more by design than coincidence. I have a thing for not going back to a show or display of my work once it is up. This work though is a little harder to avoid due to its longevity, scale and placement within the city. When I do pass by I smile and nod to it, and if the kids are in the car they refer to it as 'the toilet papa painted'. The mural still seems strangely relevant, as the site remains empty and people are still pushing to get things back to how they were.

JP: The title of the work suggested it was hard to make jokes at that time (even as you tucked plenty of jokes into the work itself). Has that changed?

wy: It was more that I found fewer things funny then. The Groucho Marx mask was the catalyst for the title—maybe it was about putting on humour as a disguise. I couldn't find humour in the events at the time but I start to smile more when I see what people have done with the new spaces and opportunities provided in the city—the resourcefulness,

the creative uses for tarpaulins. And while laughter went on hold in the city, I suggested in the title that it would one day return.

JP: To mark the mural's role in getting the Outer Spaces programme up and running, we've asked you back to do a pagework for this anniversary issue. What are you planning?

wy: I would really like the page to be something that, if you wanted to, you could craft. Something you remove and cut out and make into something else. Bearing in mind the Groucho mask in the mural and the anniversary **Populate!** theme, I've been thinking a bit about masks. But the big question is, whose face is appropriate?

JP: You've used masks a lot. Some paper bags, some balaclavas. What's their appeal for you?

wv: A mask allows you to be something or someone you are not. The act of concealment only makes the viewer want to see more—to find out what is behind it. A mask can help avoid prejudice and at the same time instill fear and judgment. It's the physical act of putting one on that never gets old for me. [The masks never made it, but cookies did. See p.63.]



Wayne Youle I seem to have temporarily misplaced my sense of humour (detail) 2011

When
Ongoing
Where
Worcester
Boulevard

Gregor Kregar: Reflective Lullaby

JUSTIN PATON: As everyone who has seen your works at Christchurch Airport will know, you often make big sculptures with a geometric quality. Gnomes, however large, aren't the first things viewers might expect you to be interested in. What's the appeal of these figures for you?

GREGOR KREGAR: I'm interested reinterpreting mundane objects, shapes, situations or materials. In my large geometric works I do this by creating complex structures out of basic shapes—triangles, squares, pentagons and hexagons. And with the gnomes I am interested in how something that is usually made out of plastic or concrete and is associated with a low, kitsch aesthetic can be transformed into an arresting monumental sculpture.

JP: You've made some smaller gnomes in cast glass, but lately it's been stainless steel. Why the shift to this material?

GK: The glass transformed cheap plaster gnomes into precious objects. Glass is a material that the alchemists were interested in, as it is in a constant state of flux. And alchemists in the Middle Ages perceived gnomes as mystical, semi-scientific creatures. Even the word gnome originates from the word gnosis—knowledge. Disney changed them into popular cartoon icons. The steel is like an armour for them. It is alluring because it is shiny, but we just see our reflections in it.

JP: You come from Slovenia in central Europe, where many heroic statues have been raised and later toppled during moments of 'regime change'. Do you see your 'Reflective Lullabies', as you call them, in relation to that tradition of heroic statuary?

GK: They are not the heroes of one event but rather the funny philosophers of everyday life.

JP: How about all those monuments to labour that were raised during the early twentieth century? Gnomes are known as labourers too ...

GK: I agree that they can be labourers but they are also thinkers. All the gnomes I've made are without tools and are standing in contemplative positions. So I suppose they are monuments to reflection.

JP: Christchurch too has lost some monuments, through seismic rather than political ructions. How do you think the gnomes will read in the post-earthquake city? What effect would you like them to have?

GK: That's a difficult one. I hope that they will provoke some discussions. Some people will not see anything positive in them, but I am sure that plenty of others will find them philosophical and humorous. Gnomes were always perceived as the guardians of the underground and possessors of special powers and knowledge. So I hope they are seen as beings that want to settle the ground in Christchurch. I think Christchurch is also a perfect location for them because of its reputation for gardens. We will be putting gnomes on the city's 'front lawn'.

JP: We once explored the possibility of placing your gnomes on a plinth formerly occupied by one of Christchurch's founding fathers. The possibility was rejected for being too irreverent. Do you see the gnomes that way?

GK: I think they are serious and irreverent. I like that although they celebrate beings that are not looked upon as high art, they are very serious in terms of their scale and materiality. Like our lives they operate between the ridiculous and the sublime. We could also say that bronze or stone figures of founding fathers and fallen heroes can be looked at with a fair amount of irony and humour, when the ideologies that made them have changed. The gnomes' message is to focus on small things or situations that we regularly miss in our busy lives.



Gregor Kregar Reflective Lullaby (John) (detail) 2013. Mirror-polished stainless steel. Courtesy the artist and Gow Langsford Gallery Bolever Worktchard: BULLETIN

'I GUESS I'M TRYING TO SLOW DOWN THE HUMAN CONNECTION TO THE WORKS, REMINDING VIEWERS THAT IT'S A WORK OF ART—NOT A HUMAN BUT A NOTION OF A HUMAN.'

JUSTIN PATON: Like a lot of your recent figures, Believer is hard to place in time. He seems of the relatively recent past yet also from centuries back.

FRANCIS UPRITCHARD: I agree that time has a strange sense in this work. I deliberately don't finish the sculpting properly before firing, so there are always holes to fill and parts to sand; I try to make the figures look repaired or faded. When I choose fabrics and colours I try to select material that feels either nostalgic or futuristic.

JP: Also like many of your figures, this 'believer' has closed eyes. He's not quite with us. Why?

FU: A friend who did chalk art on the pavement once told me that when he filled in the pupil of a figure's eye the coins started to drop into the hat. In fact, as a cheat, he

often rubbed out the eyes a few times during the day and then filled them in again to maximise profits. With my sculptures I guess I'm trying to slow down the human connection to the works, reminding viewers that it's a work of art—not a human but a notion of a human.

JP: Robert Leonard included your work in a show called Daydream Believers. Do you see parallels between artists and believers? Is a faith in dreams part of art-making for you?

Fu: Yes, I think so. I think that living life on your own path is very important.

JP: There's a hint, though, that this believer's beliefs come at a cost. He's immersed in them, but he seems removed from the social world as a result. Am I right $to\ think\ of\ fringe-dwellers,\ one-man\ religions,\ gurus$ without a congregation?

Fu: Yes, your intuition is right on. At the time I was making this work I was thinking about yoga, about spiritual beliefs and about people's attempts to free themselves from unhappiness. Interestingly, when I first showed *Believer* in New York, lots of people read the figure as an American Indian, which had not been part of my conscious thinking, but I guess that culture shaped the idea and the aesthetic of freedom in the 1960s. Dream catchers! Spirit guides! Face paint! I think of my sculpture as bearing the costume for an ill-informed, half-digested, short-cut attempt to mental clarity and peace, yet still somehow maintaining a noble grace—because they're nice concepts to try for.

When Ongoing

Where Worcester Boulevard JUSTIN PATON: Your portrait paintings are finely worked and usually only a few feet across. How has it felt to make such a painting knowing that it will be blown up to billboard scale?

PETER STICHBURY: Knowing it will be transformed into a huge illumination does feel slightly strange. All those small hairs and tiny details I've been sweating over will end up as scruffy foot-long gestural brushstrokes. I should really be painting with a microscope. Actually, once it's blown up, even the linen will look like the moon's surface.

JP: Have you made a public artwork before? Have you felt like a 'public artist' while making it?

PS: No, this is the first one. Making a show usually revolves around the relationship of each painting to the others and of the paintings to the given space, so a singular public artwork is a novel challenge. I think studio painting can look oddly disconnected when it's taken outside into daylight and forced to contend with the scale of nature and buildings. My particular kind of painting seems to need an internal architectural context to make sense, a quiet and protective incubator to exist within. Ironically one of the great things about this project was the opportunity to be unencumbered by the rules I create for gallery shows.

JP: What do you reckon it will do on the exterior of Christchurch Art Gallery that it might not do if seen on a wall inside it?

PS: I'm hoping that being a large outdoor transparency will give a painting a mirage quality, the feeling of a technological deity on a giant computer screen looking over the nearby streets.

JP: Though you're immersed in the tradition of portrait painting, you're not at all opposed to photography and reproduction. Indeed, you have occasionally tampered with your own paintings—cloned and altered them. How exactly do you do this, and why?

PS: After you've laboured over a single work for six weeks, it's liberating to digitally play Dr Frankenstein with the finished painting. Photoshop gives me the

freedom to accentuate or degrade the image's beauty or asymmetry. I remember when they cloned Dolly the sheep at the Roslin Institute in Scotland, there were reports of biological mishaps and failures before a successful clone was rendered. I think there must be drawers and drawers of malformed animals hidden away somewhere. I quite like the idea of having incorrect or botched manipulated paintings, like the 'In-Valid' characters in Gattaca—though I do get to the point where I need to put down the digital tools and get back to the hard graft of the studio.

JP: We're used to seeing perfect faces on a vast scale, on billboards and in advertising. Do you want your portrait to stand apart from that kind of imagery or to overlap with it confusingly? PS: It is unavoidable to think about the overlap, but I explored these ideas extensively in my first couple of shows. Now subverting advertising imagery is like flogging a twicedead horse; most people are complicit in the consumer/advertiser transaction. However, leading up to this project, I did try to take photos of a cosmetics counter light-box at LAX, but I found out that Chanel doesn't take kindly to rogue artists photographing a photograph of Brad Pitt. Maybe they thought it was industrial espionage...





Peter Stichbury **NDE** (detail) 2013. Acrylic on linen. Courtesy of Tracy Williams, Ltd. New York

JP: People familiar with your work will recognise the woman in this work; she's a model you've often used, called Estelle. But here you've refrained from naming her, and also left out the background details you sometimes include. Where is she? What's happening to her?

PS: She's in an in-between place, a transition from one reality to another. I was reading about neurosurgeon Dr Eben Alexander's near-death experience and then started investigating other people's similar experiences. The commonalities of their visions close to death are uncanny and they exist across religious beliefs, culture and time. There's the clichéd beckoning light or tunnel and the person's loved ones welcoming them into the afterlife. Often there's a communing with a loving God explaining that it's not their time and they must go back to their body. Whether or not these recollections are true or hallucinations caused by neurotransmitters or lack of oxygen in the brain at time of death is anyone's guess, but the experiencers truly believe that what they have gone through is real. When they recover and return to their everyday lives they often report being less materialistic, more loving and altruistic in general.

JP: Where else have your internet searches been leading you lately? You seem to keep a close eye on some of the stranger developments in contemporary psychology, which feed the crackpot back-stories you give your characters.

PS: Yes, the back-stories can get somewhat convoluted and a little crackpot-ish. Their invisibility is a real paradox but I enjoy traipsing over a huge terrain. This year I've been researching ufology and its folklore, specifically Leslie Kean and Stanton Friedman's work on the subject. The mythology surrounding UFOs or UAPs (unidentified aerial phenomenon) is full of the most bizarre stories.

JP: There's nothing obviously bizarre about your portrait, but the eyes suggest she might herself have seen something very unusual. What's with that gaze?

PS: It's a middle distance gaze. A state of reverie, lost in thought. I liked the ambiguity it gave the character. Is she the 'angel' beckoning the departed to the afterlife or

the person experiencing the vision or hallucination?

JP: Does the gaze have art historical precedents? I've seen that book on Ingres in your studio...
PS: The historical precedent in this case and with many of the Estelles is Lucian Freud's Girl With A Kitten from 1947 but I had also been looking at Antonello da Messina's Christ at the Column. I discovered the work of Domenico Gnoli recently. The way he painted hair was incredible, and I suspect his example has crept in somewhere too.

JP: Public art has to carry quite a burden of responsibility; it's expected to be all things to all people. Instead let's imagine just one person walking along Worcester Boulevard one night in June and encountering your work. What, ideally, do you hope they will see?

PS: I agree public art does carry quite a burden—often a need for approval revolving around sensation and visual punchlines. But I like that it can also be enigmatic and mysterious. A giant floating portrait close to the heavens will probably elicit more questions than answers. Who is this? Why do they have that particular expression? I'm hoping it won't make much rational or narrative sense but will induce an uneasy emotional response, like witnessing a UFO.

When Ongoing

Where Worcester Boulevard

Kay Rosen:Here are the people and there is the steeple



Kay Rosen Here are the people and there is the steeple 2012. Acrylic paint on wall

JUSTIN PATON: Your mural for Christchurch makes spectacular use of the word 'PEOPLE'. I wonder if it's a word that seems especially loaded to you, as an observer of and sometime commentator on American politics. 'We, the people…'?

KAY ROSEN: Yes, it is. I think a lot about the PEOPLE and feel frustrated about their/our position in the US, and also in the world. Where is the line drawn? I guess with power. PEOPLE lose more and more power every day to global corporate and financial interests. That includes the mainstream press in America. (The biggest disaster, which they don't report on, is themselves.) I strongly support grassroots movements, especially environmental ones, that challenge these powers. I belong to many but am partial to the more activist ones, like Greenpeace, Rainforest Action Network, and 350.org. I've also been active in local anti-nuclear and peace movements in the past. And the Occupy movement is far from dead.

JP: What made 'PEOPLE' the right word on which to base your work in Christchurch?

KR: The text is a verbal and visual metaphor for the controversial Christchurch Cathedral which is in turn an icon and name-bearer of the city. The PEOPLE built, grew, and sustained it.

JP: Your work gets us thinking about language in a very physical and also social way. Individual letters act and interact with each other, building new visual and verbal structures. How exactly do you see that happening in your work for Christchurch?

KR: The word STEE-PLE shares and builds on the -PLE of PEOPLE, suggesting that the PEOPLE are the foundation for institutions and societal structures. The horizontal ground level word PEOPLE launches the soaring, heavenbound STEEPLE, off its back and shoulders, so to speak.

BULLETIN I 48

When Coming Soon

Where Worcester Boulevard

Dick FrizzellContacts



Dick Frizzell **Contacts** (detail) 2003/13. Courtesy of the artist and Gow/Langsford Gallery

DICK FRIZZELL: Lots of intrusive lumps where a tree might have been a better option. Very hard to get rid of once they're there. Bring back 'statues'. No, seriously, the problem often looks like frustrated sculptors

JUSTIN PATON: 'Public art'. What do those words bring to mind for you?

ues'. No, seriously, the problem often looks like frustrated sculptors suddenly presented with a chance to dance and overcooking it at our expense. Like 'sculpture trails'—who dreamed *them* up? Having said all that, of course successful 'public' art works do exist—Wayne Youle's mural being one of them. And it would be interesting to go into what the trick is—something to do with the deployment of 'universal' clues I suspect.

JP: You're known as an artist with a Pop bent, and an interest in popular forms like comics and commercial signage. But have you made much work before that actually sits outside in all weathers?

DF: Well, I guess I've done my share of murals. As with public art, unless you have the gravitas and reputation that bends the public to your will I think you have a responsibility to take the public with you to some extent. I think that's why Athfield 'failed' in Christchurch—you can race too far ahead of the public in your revolutionary fervour. I think the challenge of any public engagement is to be true to yourself and the audience—a sort of double intellectual challenge. I think it's a modernist hangover, this 'self-expression at all costs' thing. That the artist knows better somehow. Heaven forbid!

JP: Your mural Contacts is based a comic-book panel, portraying an implausibly handsome artist (no offence!) with thwarted hopes. What drew you to it?

DF: I guess it was just the 'absurd art cliché' thing that got me going. It's from an old American love comic I got a lot of material from in the seventies. Lots of cheese and great myths about bohemia and garrets. My father used to make a song and dance about me going off to 'starve in a garret', so it's favourite myth of mine.

JP: And how about the painting he's holding—and hoping to sell? It's a portrait of the famous 'Four Square Grocer'. Is it true you invented the logo?

DF: I didn't design him—he existed before I was born. I picked him up along with a lot of local logos while researching a show called *Everybody*'s *Business* and eventually he starred in a show of his own. I liked the idea of changing the portrait in the comic. It put me right in the picture. I even cut it out badly to match the comic's ham-fisted aesthetic.

JP: Your mural is going on the back of CoCA, where artworks were shown and sold. So your painter is close to—but far from—getting 'inside' the art world. Any self-portraiture at work there? Do you see yourself as insider or outsider?

DF: Haha. Very good point—that delusional nitwit being very much 'outside' the art racket and doomed obviously to never be in it! I think I'm pretty much in it, or in a sort of one-man art world. I have known what it's like to be on the outside (my early 'Landscape period') and, oh boy, that takes a bit of rationalising. Becoming a professional Ishmael. But then I did the Tiki show and—badabing!—I was back in again. It's something you have to figure out—where you fit.

JP: How's your own 'contacts' list?

DF: Well being tapped for a mural job like this is pretty good stuff. Makes you feel part of some significant Christchurch art adventure.

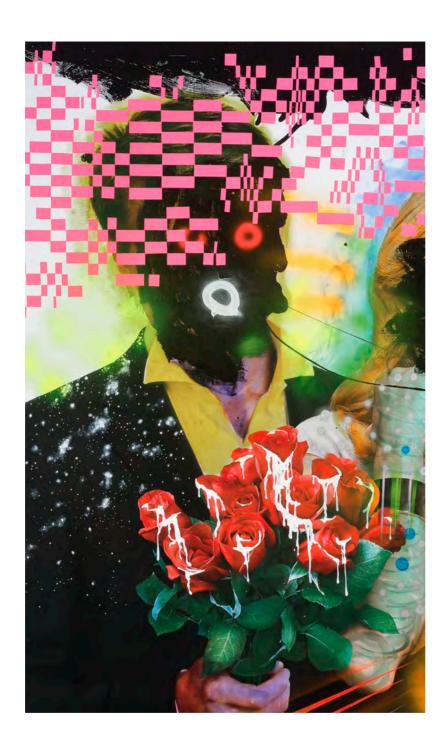
JP: And your thoughts on the state of Christchurch today, all those years since you did your time at Ilam?

DF: I'm not sure about that futuristic Cathedral they're proposing. Too much Flash Gordon I think. But I'd like to say what an amazing community-art vibe Christchurch is projecting right now—nothing like a disaster on this scale to focus the mind I suppose. All of a sudden there is a reason for art to roll up its sleeves and get busy. Dilettantes beware!

When Ongoing

Where Christchurch Art Gallery Forecourt

Judy Darragh: Sissy Squat



Judy Darragh Sissy Squat (detail) 2012/13. Digital print on adhesive vinyl, based on a work from 2012 of the same name in the collection of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. Courtesy Jonathan Smart Gallery and Two Rooms

JUSTIN PATON: Your work Sissy Squat will appear as a large vinyl on the exterior glass doors of Christchurch Art Gallery. In an odd way this takes the work back to its origins. Can you tell us how this work began?

JUDY DARRAGH: I had been making work on found posters and thinking about how to scale up. I was seeing these large PVC banners advertising films hanging in cinema foyers and loving the smooth 'plastic' finish of the digital surface. The ticket cashier pulls them from storage for me, and I let chance decide which banners are selected. My practice has often relied on found objects, but here I am recycling the banner imagery and breaking down the digital surface.

JP: There's a 'happy couple' in the picture—one which will be forced to part ways when the Gallery opens its doors again. What were they promoting or advertising originally?

JD: I have forgotten the title of the film already. Bloody good elimination job! The film was a Hollywood romcom, target audience twenty-somethings, starring a stereotypical blonde-haired and blue-eyed couple. Happy endings et cetera, so I wanted to interrupt this. On the doors it'll certainly allude to the comings and goings of relationships.

JP: You've subjected the figures to some major 'corrections'. What are your favoured materials and methods for this? And are those corrections signs of aggression towards the original image or enthusiasm for it?

JD: This work is from a series called *SCI FI*, where each work is titled after a gym activity; I wanted to give the works more 'muscle' or 'action'. Firstly I erased the actors' faces and the text. Then I responded to the remaining surface and forms using ink, paint, spray-paint and tape. I see these applications as being like glitches breaking the surface—a pixellated intervention. We view the world through television and computer screens. My marks interrupt the view right through. They're aggressive that way, like graffiti.

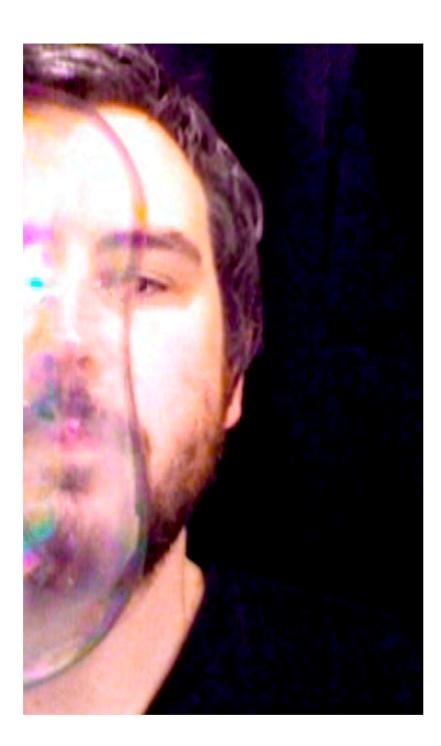
JP: Sissy Squat has been seen in a gallery setting before, and indeed it's just been acquired by Auckland Art Gallery. The Christchurch version is out in public space in a city with its fair share of graffiti and high-vis colours? Do you think it will register differently there?

JD: Well, the image has been recycled from cinema foyer to art gallery to gallery doorway and back to art gallery—a great journey through public space. It's behaving like a moveable screen or skin slipping between spaces—an alien on the move.

When Until 30 June

Where 56 Worcester Boulevard 6–10pm





Steve Carr Majo 2010. SD transferred to DVD, duration 3 min 40 secs. Courtesy of the artist and Michael Lett, Auckland

JUSTIN PATON: Majo is a very simple video. It's you, a bubble-making toy, and a creepy 1970s soundtrack. Yet the effect of those things combined is very odd. Can you tell us how they came together and why?

STEVE CARR: I was based in Sapporo, Japan, on a three-month residency. As the internet speed is superb in Japan, I ended up watching a lot of horror and sci-fi films. When I looked at the initial footage that was to become *Majo*, the floating head and the ghostly orb reminded me of early memories of *Dr Who*, which fascinated and terrified me as a child. That memory, combined with watching a lot of horror, led to the addition of the soundtrack, which comes from Dario Argento's *Suspiria*, a film about witchcraft, psychology and madness. *Majo* also means 'witch' in Japanese.

Jp: Has the footage been slowed down? Or reversed even? You seem drowsy or tranced in it—as though you're imbibing something from that bubble you're blowing...

sc: *Majo* was made in isolation and I think that comes through in the piece. I don't remember being drunk at the time, but I was certainly going a little stir crazy. Nothing is reversed, but the speed of the original footage has been manipulated to match the soundtrack.

JP: As a maker of videos and short films, do you feel envious of the budgets and technology available to feature film-makers or more commercial operators?

sc: While in the past I leaned towards 16mm, 35mm or HD technology, this film is shot with the camera in my laptop. I was using this process simply to see how the bubble-making process worked on camera, yet in the end, the lo-tech quality of the result was what I enjoyed most. It was a relief to work fast with very few pre-production considerations. But of course, I am totally envious of their budgets; I have films in my head that, with a big budget, I would make today.

JP: Some people see the video as funny, while others regard it as sinister. How do you see it, and what's been your favourite response to the work?

sc: A lot of the films I enjoy work on a physical level, when they activate an awareness of our bodies and their limitations. Horror definitely does this—all those panicked breaths and last gasps. Here the bubble is the menacing second character in the film. A student once asked, 'Are you giving life to the bubble or is taking life from you?' I quite liked that.

When Ongoing

Where Christchurch Art Gallery Forecourt

Joanna Braithwaite: Lizard Lounge

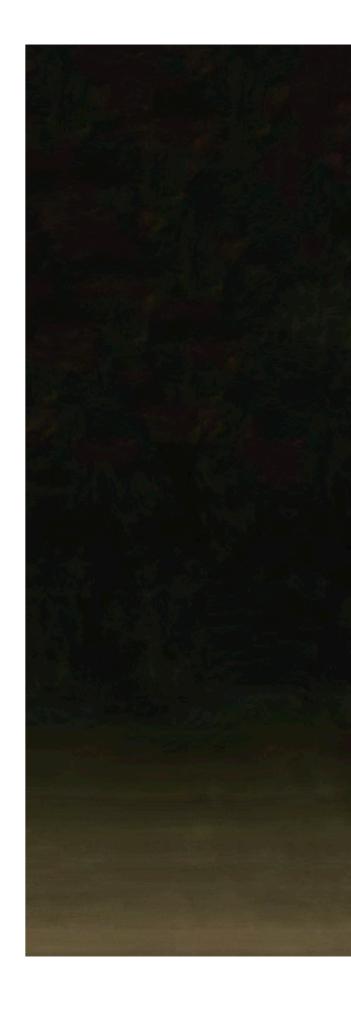
'The lace monitors have an enclosure in his lounge, but they wander freely whenever he is home. Their movements and presence were mesmerising...'

FELICITY MILBURN: Lizard Lounge is part of a body of work that transposes animals into very human situations—here a kind of gentleman's drawing room. What especially intrigues you about this kind of juxtaposition and do you have any favourite examples?

JOANNA BRAITHWAITE: I find lizards historically fascinating, so placing them in an environment along with props that were evocative of a Victorian gentleman's club seemed most appropriate. Recently, I've been enjoying juxtaposing my animal subjects with objects and items that refer to aspects of the human world. I like the questions and reactions that can arise out of these combinations—for example, my painting titled *Royal Mount*, in which I painted a racehorse wearing a Hermès scarf, based on one I had seen worn by the Queen, certainly resulted in some interesting feedback!

FM: Can you tell us a little about your encounter with the lizards that are the subject of this painting?

JB: I became acquainted with the lace monitors featured in *Lizard Lounge* after doing some research on the internet and finding a man who was a registered breeder. When I met him, I discovered he was exceptionally knowledgeable on all matters reptile. The lace monitors have an enclosure in his lounge, but they wander freely whenever he is home. Their movements and presence were mesmerising and it was an amazing opportunity to observe such magnificent creatures at close quarters, and in such an unusual context.





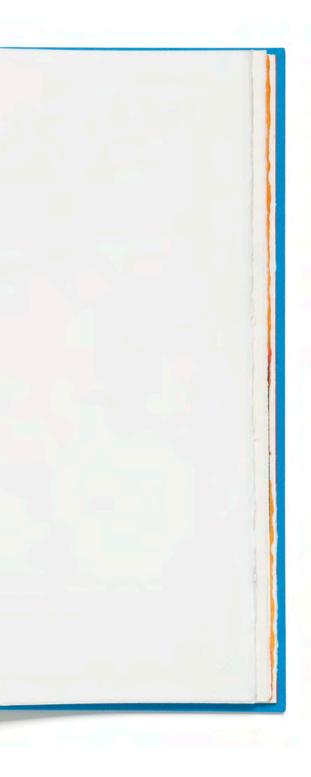
When 10 May – 7 June

Where Central Library Peterborough

Face Books



Max Gimblett **Untitled** 2005. Pencil and ink



JUSTIN PATON: The exhibition's called Face Books, but there's not a computer or screen in sight. Tell us a bit about what's in the show?

PETER VANGIONI: In keeping with the Gallery's **Populate!** theme, **Face Books** presents a range of artist's books featuring portraits and figure studies. It's an eclectic mix and it includes examples from modernists, post-modernists, symbolists, primitivists and plain old illustrationists. Artists such as Marc Chagall, Pablo Picasso, Colin McCahon, Aubrey Beardsley, Eileen Mayo, Edward Burne-Jones, Eric Ravilious, Gertrude Hermes, Robin White, Stuart Page, Tony de Lautour, Max Gimblett, Len Lye, Julian Dashper and Richard Killeen to name a 'few'.

JP: People upload millions of photos of faces to social networking sites every day. For you what's the reason to go back and look for portraits in books?

PV: I think books offer one of the most accessible experiences people can have with art. You directly interact with books—handle the object, pull it off the shelf, open the cover, turn the pages. It's tactile and you're immediately involved in the experience as opposed to one step removed, viewing digitally reproduced images on a computer screen and clicking a mouse. I know, I know, these books are untouchable in glass-covered cabinets, but when they are not on display they are available for the public to view in our reference library. But also, the wide variety of artistic approaches to portraiture and figure studies in Face Books is fascinating. Contrasting approaches to the same subject matter; the profile portraits of Leo Bensemann, Richard Killeen and Tony de Lautour, the falling figures of Marc Chagall and Eileen Mayo or the figure-within-a-landscape relief prints by Edward Burne-Jones and Robin White say.

JP: With the Gallery closed, and our collections off-limits, we've been drawing on art from unexpected places. Is that the case here? Where have the things in Face Books come from? PV: All the objects included in this exhibition have been drawn from the Robert and Barbara Stewart Library and Archives at Christchurch Art Gallery. Over the past few years there has been a concerted effort to build up a collection of artist's books in the library; it's a point of difference that can make it unique, and the artist's books often complement the art held in the

collections. This library could be a fusty old research library where art historians spend hours with their noses in academic books, but with the added focus of collecting artist's books and examples of fine printing it is so much more. The process of building this collection has led to some very generous gifts of books from Peter Dunbar's family, Jim Barr and Mary Barr, Max Gimblett, Alan Loney and the Bensemann family.

JP: There are some fairly precious pieces of book art here: fine paper, fine printing. But one of the items involves an act of creative vandalism. What is this book and what's happened to it?

Pv: This book is a first edition copy of Robert Hughes's *The Shock of the New*, a classic account of western art in the twentieth century, recently donated to the Library by Jim Barr and Mary Barr. Artists visiting Jim and Mary were invited to make additions to the book, and interventions by Max Gimblett, Marie Shannon, Neil Dawson, John Reynolds, Richard Killeen and more abound throughout the pages. In Face Books *The Shock of the New* will be open on a page reproducing a self portrait by Vincent van Gogh, with his ear cut out by Julian Dashper.

JP: If the library was on fire and you only had time to grab one of these books, which one would you choose?

PV: If I was running for my life past these display cases I would grab the Kelmscott Press edition of *Syr Isambrace* from 1897. It's absolutely exceptional and, being a letterpress printer myself, I am in awe of it. Kelmscott Press books are the pinnacle of printing and having this copy in the Gallery's library is very special. It's printed by hand on a Victorian, cast iron Albion press using hand-set Chaucer type—a typeface designed for exclusive use at the Kelmscott Press by William Morris himself. The quality of printing, hand-made paper and binding is truly sublime; you know you are handling something special when you open its covers. The highly decorative, ornamental woodcut borders and initial letters are exquisite, but most important for me is the wonderful frontispiece woodcut by Edward Burne-Jones of Syr Isambrace wandering through a spooky forest. No second thoughts, I'd grab this book and run.

When Ongoing

Where Central Library Peterborough

Richard Killeen: The Inner Binding

'I find that images of transformed animals can make people feel uneasy because they imply the existence of another reality...'

JUSTIN PATON: What is it about these animal forms that draws you to them so often in your recent work?

RICHARD KILLEEN: I have used animals as subject matter since 1970. I am drawn to them because we share the same origins, and they are a reminder of who we are—I find that images of transformed animals can make people feel uneasy because they imply the existence of another reality. This is especially true in New Zealand where many artists use words instead of images.

JP: The forms merge and meld in such complicated ways in your work on the Peterborough Street library. What kind of process does this involve?

RK: I use Illustrator, a vector-based computer program, to develop and change the images. It is very good for creating pattern and controlling shape in a very concise way. It contains tools for altering imagery which I could not alter any other way. I started using a computer in 1986 as the development of my own vocabulary was important to me.

JP: Libraries, perhaps a bit like galleries, are places where a culture's memories are stored. How do you think that role is faring in the age of digitisation?

RK: The library's role is still in many ways the same but it has moved away from books to the internet. The difference lies in the access and search abilities that lead people to believe that they no longer need to have knowledge themselves, only the process required to find what they need to know at the time.

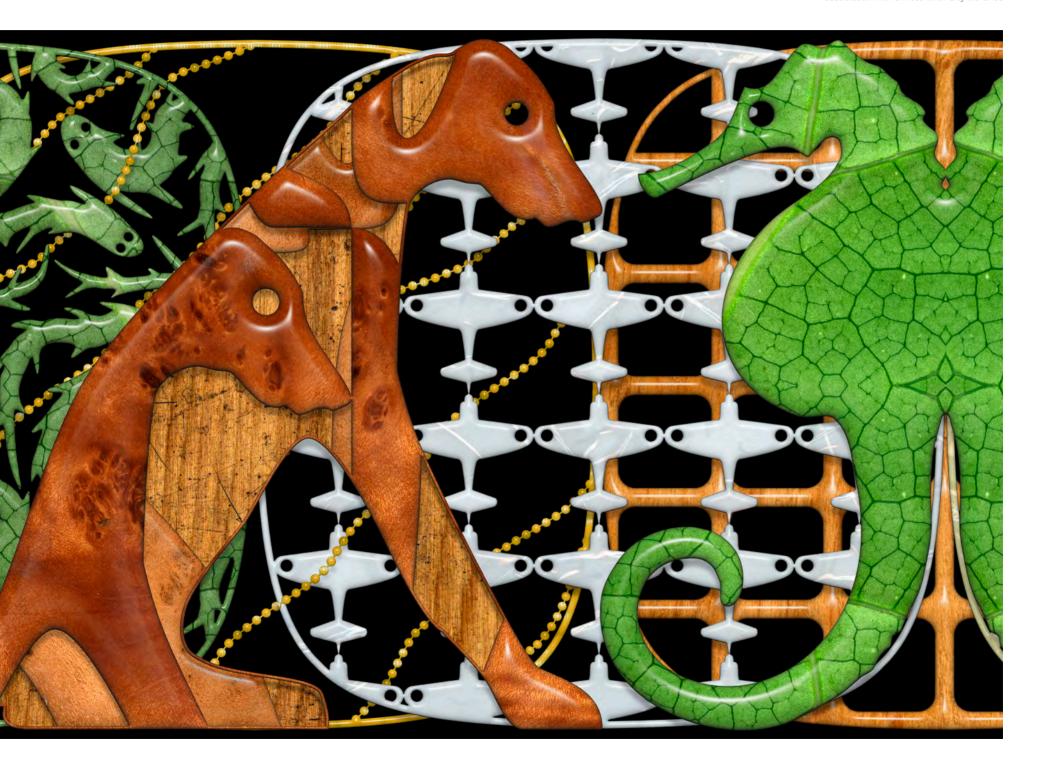
JP: A big question, but what role do you see art

playing today in relation to cultural memory?

RK: As art moves away from attempting to make the invisible visible and we become more literal in our view of the world, retaining visual language and cultural memory becomes more difficult. Cultural memory does not reside in the everyday. All art forms are languages, and these need to survive for there to be cultural memory. We used to have form and content but now we have theory and ego which is much more individualistic. When we think we understand how the tree grows the tree god dies.



Richard Killeen **The inner binding** (detail) 2012. Translucent vinyl. Courtesy of the artist. A Christchurch Art Gallery Outer Spaces project in association with Christchurch City Libraries





JUSTIN PATON: As a sometime reviewer, blogger and prolific interjector on various online forums, you're a very vocal painter. So why paint ventriloquist's dummies—figures that can't speak for themselves?

ROGER BOYCE: A talking painter has all the charm of, say, a talking dog... great for its freak-value but with rapidly diminishing pleasure-returns. At the risk of embarking on interpretation—something I advise my painting students to resist—the dummy heads are a sort of stand-in for the painted object itself. The object has no volition or voice 'cepting that of the fellow who is—so to speak—elbow deep up the dummy's backside.

JP: You've painted abstractly in the past—and for all I know you may do so again. But why your current attraction to painting figures in broadly brushed, poster-bright colour? Whether or not they speak for you, the dummies look like they gave you pleasure to paint...

RB: The heads look fun because they were fun. I did, in the near past, spend a great deal of time running the clock out on abstract or non-objective painting-moves. Believe it or not I was once young enough, and delusional enough, to consider that it might be possible to make an 'important' painting. Whatever that might be. Due in part to my culture-free background I suffered from the callow belief that abstraction, as a point of departure, was the most promising avenue to that end. And no one in New York went to the trouble of disabusing me. When I moved to New Zealand I circled back to figuration because I had a languishing, but well developed, skill-set in that area and I became more interested in having fun than in making something someone might see as important.

JP: And you're painting landscapes too. The dummies are propped up in front of two 'South Islandy' scenic views. Is this your tilt, as a relative newcomer to this part of the world, at 'the great New Zealand landscape'?

RB: I think that in painting these landscapes I may have completed a grand tour of everything I said I'd never do as a painter. I honestly didn't think at all about having a tilt at the great New Zealand landscape. I reckon I don't yet know enough about greater New Zealand, its landscape, or its great landscape painting tradition, to do right (or purposefully wrong) in its regard. The landscape pictures I worked off (and generalised) were, as is the habit these days, scavenged from Google Images. I was frankly more interested in the landscapes' geographic notation than their national origination. Can't I just hear the air pissing out of my ascent balloon after that revelation...

JP: We're dropping these scenes into a gravelly urban setting in Christchurch. How do you hope they'll 'read'—or maybe the operative word is 'speak'—against that backdrop?

RB: I imagine it cutting two ways. There's a certain jokerish or adversarial quality to the heads which might sup on the natural and man-made adversity of daily negotiating Christchurch. The 'cutting' would take place in the viewer's habit of seeing or thinking—whether they saw the joke as being on them or with them.

When Saturday 11 May

Where
Tuam Street
(afternoon) and
Darkroom, 336
St Asaph Street
(evening)

David Kilgour and the Heavy Eights

What you should be now: an interview with David Kilgour

With David Kilgour set to play at the Gallery's tenth-birthday celebrations, curator Peter Vangioni talked to the New Zealand music legend about his Christchurch days and current projects.

PETER VANGIONI: I know you are often identified as a Dunedin musician, and rightly so, but two of your early Clean records were recorded here in Christchurch—Tally Ho and Great Sounds Great..., as well as your Great Unwashed album—so I'm guessing you have spent some time here. I'm interested to know what connections you have with Canterbury and Christchurch?

DAVID KILGOUR: We had a grandmother, uncles and cousins in North Canterbury, and the same in Christchurch, so we would visit during school holidays. And for four years as children we lived on a farm at Cheviot. My brother Hamish [drummer in the Clean] was born in Christchurch. We toured a lot as the Clean so made more connections in the music world—we were already friendly with people like Jane Walker and Paul Kean via the Toy Love connection, which lead us to other musicians like Jay Clarkson. Near the end of the first round of the Clean we all moved to Christchurch, where we lived for a number of years on and off, flitting between Dunedin and Christchurch.

PV: I was recalling the different Christchurch venues where I have seen you play live in different guises since the late 1980s (Subway, Old Star, Provincial, Harbour Light, Dux, Horticultural

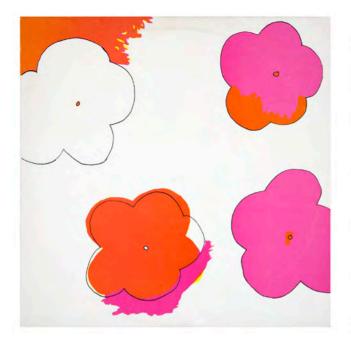
Hall), and they have all pretty much gone now, which highlights how much this town has been transformed lately. What was the most memorable Christchurch venue for you?

DK: Well out of that lot I'd pick the Harbour Light—it was odd, but good old fashioned odd. Wunderbar is also close to the heart. Mention must go to Al Parks's old Mollet Street warehouse venue. That's where the Enemy and the Clean met the Basket Cases (of which Paul Kean and Jane Walker were members) in '78.

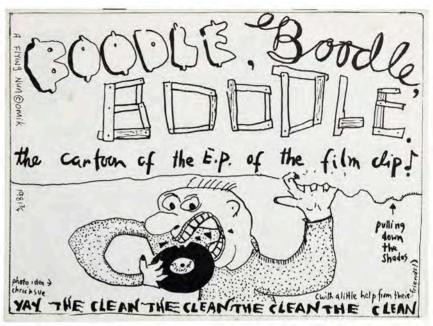
PV: The video for 1981's 'Anything Could Happen' has taken on more significance for me since the earthquakes. It was shot in a crowded Cathedral Square, much of which has now been demolished, a rubbish dump and the ruined Cranmer Court before it was restored. For me, it comes close to summing up this town as it is now but also as it once was. Did the band have much input into directing the video?

DK: No, but we were allowed to offer ideas which were turned down. I wanted us filmed on the back of a truck driving around Christchurch. Andy Shaw put all that together really, the scenes mimicking the lyrics etc. He was a hard taskmaster but he did alright, he did. I doubt we were easy to 'work' with and we were green as the hills, sort of.









Left: The Great Unwashed Clean out of our Minds 1983. Lp cover. Flying Nun

Above: The Clean **Boodle**, **Boodle**, **Boodle** 1981. Comic book. Flying Nun

PV: What music were you exposed to growing up in North Canterbury?

DK: Late sixties/early seventies radio, which was still very eclectic back then, especially commercial radio. So we caught the sniff of the sixties which morphed into the seventies which morphed into late seventies punk. Right across the board as far as time zones and style changes, from early hippy bubblings to snot-spitting skinheads in the square.

PV: I know you have an affection for Syd Barrett and Skip Spence. Were their albums easy to come by in the early 1980s and did they have any influence on your tunes?

DK: I scored Syd's *The Madcap Laughs* about 1976, I bought it on a whim in a second-hand store in Christchurch while on holiday. I knew and liked early Pink Floyd, so figured it worth a go. I thought it pretty nutty on first listening but grew to love it and yeah, I'd say he influenced my writing during the early Clean period. There was something punk rock and loose about Syd which was endearing and inspiring. Same with Skip Spence but I didn't discover him till the early nineties. But yeah, he's great, outta space. Check out the Clean track 'Sad Eyed Lady', especially the *Odditties* version, that's me trying to mimic Syd.

PV: Perhaps one of the most interesting and memorable visual elements from your career is the cover art you've been involved with, particularly the comicbook style graphics and hand-scribbled typefaces seen on covers of early Clean records. I'm thinking here especially of the various hand-drawn texts used on the back of Great Sounds Great..., the Boodle Boodle Boodle ep and comic and the Tally Ho insert; were you into comics? Where did all those quirky font designs come from and was there an influence behind the Clean's comic-strip/sketch aesthetic.

DK: I think Hamish and I were pretty good at fast free-form doodlings, and I have always been attracted to minimalist art and music. It also grew from the post-punk hangover of DIY and sticking it to the corporate suit-and-tie straight line world.

PV: The Clean actually produced a comic which was sold with the first copies of Boodle Boodle Boodle. Was it a group effort by the band?

DK: That was basically Chris Knox's idea. But yes we all read comics as kids and adults. I loved Robert Crumb, especially those *Weirdo* comics he did.

PV: Your solo career has progressed in leaps and bounds since your first album was released in 1991. What have been the high points along the solo path?

DK: The music, the world travel and the friends I've made via the music. The tour I did with Yo La Tengo (of which I was a member) and Lambchop in the early 2000s is a particularly fond memory.

PV: Much of your recent output has been recorded in Dunedin at Tin Shed and Wooden Shed. What do you like about these recording studios?

DK: Wooden Shed is usually the name of my home studio. Tin Shed is the name of Thomas Bell's recording set up. Both mobile units. I'm not a big fan of 'real' studios, and like to find interesting places to record and be creative.

PV: What current projects are you working on?

DK: Myself and the Heavies are closish to having a new LP in the can. We hope to have it complete by spring 2013. We recorded three tracks last week that we are very happy with and we also just returned from playing WOMAD in New Plymouth. We started the new LP last autumn and are only jamming on loose ideas, or recording for two or three days at a time whenever there's new material.



Opening Weekend Events

The **Populate!** birthday party is proudly brought to Christchurch by the Canterbury Community Trust.



Populate! is also supported by:







Saturday 11 May

Populate! Family Trail

Pick up a fun, interactive activity book from 209 Tuam Street or 212 Madras Street and go on an artful adventure. Throughout the day from 10am / free

Imagination Playground

An incredible play system made up of giant blocks in many unique shapes and sizes. Designed by a New York architect, it offers endless creative potential for children to play, dream, build and explore.

Suitable for ages 2 and over.

10-5pm / corner of High and Tuam streets / free

Artist Talk: Gregor Kegar

Gregor Kregar, winner of the Lexus Premier Award at *Headland Sculpture in the Gulf* 2013, reflects on his extensive practice and strips away our preconceptions about gnomes.

11am / 209 Tuam Street / free

Artist Talk: Jess Johnson

Join senior curator Justin Paton for a conversation with artist Jess Johnson, and discover the influences behind her richly layered drawings and installation practices.

12pm / 209 Tuam Street / free

Music Party

A free concert to celebrate our birthday. The fantastic line-up of performers includes Jen Turner, the Byllie Jean Project, Delaney Davidson, the Eastern and David Kilgour and the Heavy Eights.

12-5pm / corner of High and Tuam streets / free

Guided Tours of Outer Spaces

Our friendly and experienced volunteer guides take you through the cast of characters that make up **Populate!** 1.45 and 2.45pm / meet at 209 Tuam Street / free

Film: Chuck Close

An outstanding portrait of one of the world's leading contemporary painters, who reinvented portraiture and triumphed in the face of adversity.

3pm / Alice Cinematheque / free

Populate! Party

Join David Kilgour and the Heavy Eights for a memorable finale to our birthday celebrations. Support from Dark Matter.

8.30pm / Darkroom / 336 St Asaph Street / free

Sunday May 12

Populate! Family Trail

Pick up a fun, interactive activity book from 209 Tuam Street or 212 Madras Street and go on an artful adventure. Throughout the day from 10am / free

Imagination Playground

An incredible play system made up of giant blocks in many unique shapes and sizes. Designed by a New York architect, it offers endless creative potential for children to play, dream, build and explore.

Suitable for ages 2 and over.

10-5pm / corner of High and Tuam streets / free

Guided Tours of Outer Spaces

Our friendly and experienced volunteer guides take you through the cast of characters that make up **Populate!**11am and 1pm / meet at 209 Tuam Street / free

Film: Annie Leibovitz-Life Through a Lens

Annie Leibovitz has photographed the rich and famous, the profound and the powerful, the exceptional and notorious. Masterful at exposing her photographic subjects, in this film she has made the decision to bare her artistic process to the camera.

83 mins

2pm / Alice Cinematheque / free

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

WAYNE YOULE

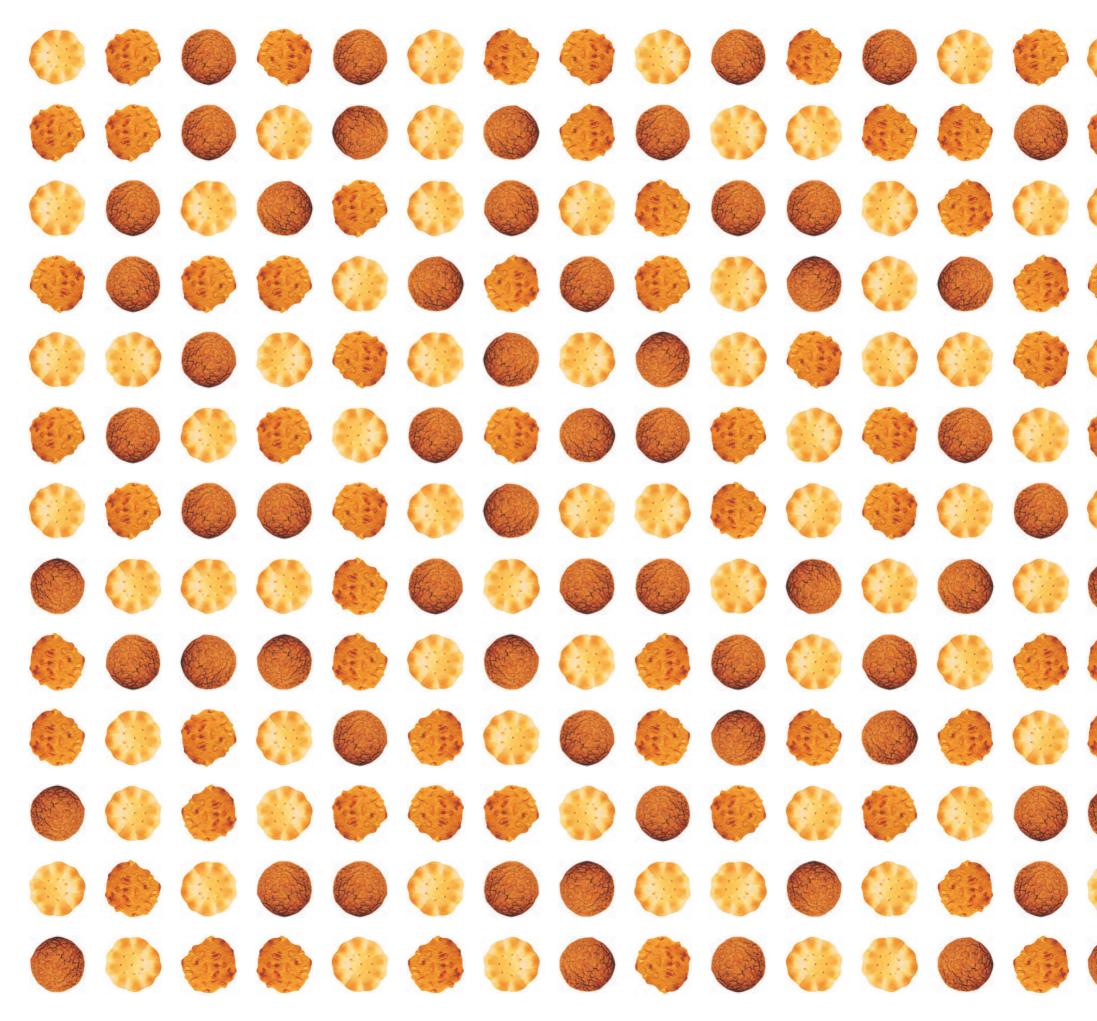
It's a dislocating world out there right now, and all those vacant spaces, building sites and road works can leave you feeling a little, well... lost. For our latest 'Pagework', local artist Wayne Youle (whose supersized shadowboard mural still graces its long wall on Colombo Street in Sydenham) raids the family sampler box for some home-made locator beacons. *Happy Trails* offers comfort (or maybe just comfort food) for all those navigating post-quake Christchurch on the way to their own happy ever after.

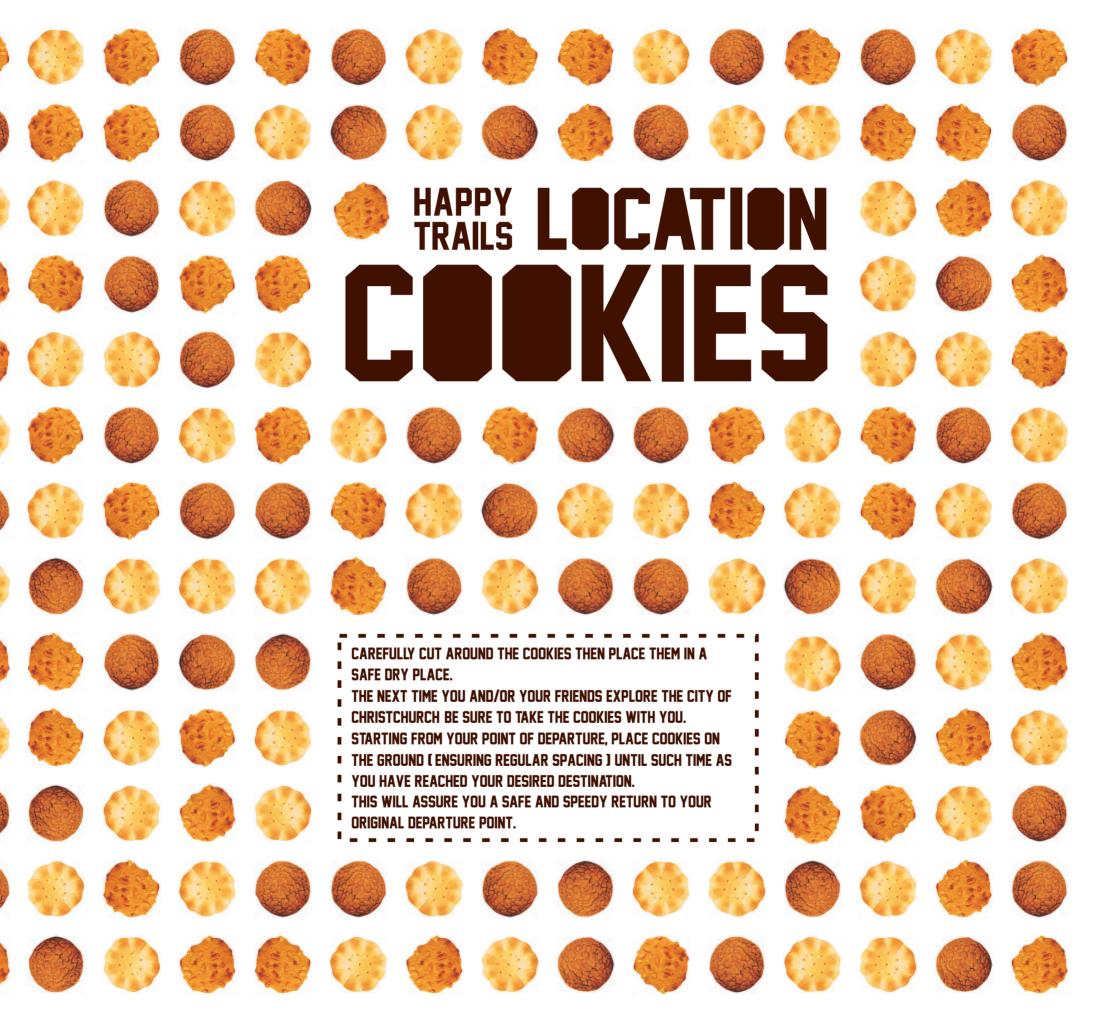
Felicity Milburn

Curator

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

Wayne Youle **Happy Trails** 2013





WHEN THELOW WENT VERYHIGH

Who said public art can't be fun?

JERRY SALTZ

Continuing our exploration of the strange and humourous face of public art, renowned American art critic Jerry Saltz chooses his favourite public artwork.



THE AUGHTS BEGAN with buzzing border-to-border energy and happy complacency. But instead of the love spreading and everyone becoming 'famous for fifteen minutes', by decade's end art-worlders fixated on a tiny clique of mostly male, mostly high-priced artists: Murakami, Hirst, Eliasson. Warhol's dictum was infernally inverted to 'In the future, only fifteen people will be famous.'

Jeff Koons is in, but not of, that little club. He's as famous as any of its members, though loved and hated in equal measure. (Sometimes all at once, by the same people.) Yet despite his self-created and enigmatic otherness, he is also the emblematic artist of the decade—its thumping, thumping heart.

Koons's work has always stood apart for its oneat-a-time perfection, epic theatricality, a corrupted, almost sick drive for purification, and an obsession with traditional artistic values. His work embodies our time and our America: It's big, bright, shiny, colourful, crowd-pleasing, heat-seeking, impeccably produced, polished, popular, expensive, and extroverted—while also being abrasive, creepily sexualised, fussy, twisted, and, let's face it, ditzy. He doesn't go in for the savvy art-about-art gestures that occupy so many current artists. And his work retains the essential ingredient that, to my mind, is necessary to all great art: strangeness.

You can see this in his glorious phantasmagorical masterpiece, the large-scale topiary sculpture Puppy. This 40-foot visitor from another aesthetic dimension appeared in New York in the first year of the new millennium. It assumed the form of a West Highland white terrier constructed of stainless steel and 23 tons of soil, swathed in more than 70,000 flowers that were kept alive by an internal irrigation system. The sculpture was fabricated in Germany in the early nineties, and it took eight years for Koons to bring Puppy to New York, where he plopped it down in front of the GE Building in Rockefeller Center. All through that blithe summer of 2000, amid a happy haze of peace and prosperity, crowds came to gawk at this bountiful botanical Buddha—an indolent idol from the artistic id. Like an early Beatles song, Puppy just made people happy. Even contemporary-art haters responded to it with grudging warmth. Unlike most public art, it reached out to viewers, and they responded. It was the antithesis of Richard Serra's Tilted Arc tonnage, which haughtily, icily demanded your respect. This was, after all, a puppy. It might lick your hand.

All of Koons's best art—the encased vacuum cleaners, the stainless-steel Rabbit (the late-twentieth century's signature work of simulationist sculpture), the amazing gleaming Balloon Dog, and the cast-iron recreation of a Civil War mortar exhibited at the Armory—has simultaneously flaunted extreme realism, idealism, and fantasy. Puppy adds to that: It is a virtual history of art, recalling the mottled surfaces of Delacroix (albeit on 'shrooms), the fantastical fairy-tale beings of Redon, a mutant Frankenstein canine from Seurat's La Grande Jatte, and the eye-buzzing Ben-Day dots of Roy Lichtenstein. As it emits the swirling amorphousness of Tiepolo and the pathos of Watteau, it is also a magnified, misshapen abstraction of Duchamp's urinal—a similarly deliberate gesture of antic outlandishness, and one that, of course, was signed 'R. Mutt.'

But most of all, *Puppy* is a telling self-portrait of an adamant, anxious, infatuated, and troubled soul. Despite Koons's cheerful Ronald Reagan optimism and daffy pronouncements (he called *Puppy* 'a contemporary Sacred Heart of Jesus'), just beneath the surface of the sculpture and its maker is an obsessive rage. Koons is a driven perfectionist in pursuit of unconditional love, and his *Puppy* is at once an overeager peace offering and a Trojan Horse declaration of war.

Koons, after all, has risen from the ashes. After his 1991 *Made in Heaven* exhibition, in which we saw graphic depictions of Koons and his ex-wife, the porn star La Cicciolina, having sex, Koons was shunned within the art world. He wasn't invited to biennials; he had only one more New York solo gallery show in the nineties. To get a sense of how that felt to Koons, consider that he once mused about being 'burned at the stake.'

So he spent most of the nineties working to return to New York with something utterly perfect, powerful, and beyond criticism. *Puppy* accomplished that. Not only was it an instant icon; it is the first piece of art exhibited in the twenty-first century that was clearly jockeying for pop-culture supremacy. Christo and Jeanne-Claude's ho-hum *Gates* or Olafur Eliasson's East River waterfalls would follow, without generating *Puppy*'s sparks of weird delight.

Koons's fearsome urge toward order was demonstrated to me a few days before the sculpture's 6 June 2000, unveiling. One warm evening I stopped by the GE Building to see *Puppy*'s progress. No one was around except Koons, wearing a green plastic hard hat. He amiably greeted me, and, after a bit, asked whether

I'd like to set a flower in place. 'Would I ever!' I replied. He told me to pick a flower from a nearby tray and place it 'anywhere you want'. I picked up a petunia, eyed *Puppy*, and set it in a front paw. I was thrilled. 'That's great, Jerry,' Koons said, before pausing, pulling my petunia out, and moving it a centimetre to the left. Now I was flabbergasted.

"... Puppy is at once an overeager peace offering and a Trojan Horse declaration of war."

But that moment crystallised what *Puppy* and its artist were about. There were 70,000 separate decisions involved in *Puppy*. Every flower had to be placed exactly right. It was mad! (*Puppy* remains a demanding pet: its owner, the mega-collector Peter Brant, spends upwards of \$75,000 per year maintaining it.) Koons was attempting to control chaos at the very moment when chaos was beginning its reign.

Puppy was the first of this decade's public-spectacle art extravaganzas, but it also marked the end of something, and the deepening chasm between sincerity and irony, joy and menace, life and decay. It is the last of a kind, a prelapsarian still point of perfection and innocence in a dissolving landscape of obliviousness. Puppy appeared at the end of a happy interregnum, after the Berlin Wall came down, before the economy disintegrated and the towers fell. It is an artefact from the last days of 'the end of history.' We didn't know it at the time, but what Victor Hugo called 'the deepening of shadow' was happening around us that summer. With Puppy, Koons laid a beautiful, ghastly laurel wreath at our doorstep. If it could speak, it would say, 'After me, the deluge.'

First published by New York magazine on 6 December 2009. Reproduced by kind permission of the author.

Jeff Koons Puppy 1992. Stainless steel, soil, geotextile fabric, internal irrigation system, and live flowering plants.

© Jeff Koons Rockefeller Center, 2000

STAFF PROFILE



The staff of Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu at 209 Tuam Street with *Huggong* (2012) by Seung Yul Oh. Courtesy of the artist and Starkwhite

Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu

As this is our tenth-birthday issue, it seemed odd to single out one member of staff or department for the staff profile. Instead, it seemed like a nice time to introduce everyone.

At present, the Gallery operates with some thirty-eight staff—of whom nearly a quarter are currently part-time, on secondment or long-term leave—working across two temporary exhibition spaces, one off-site shop and the back-of-house areas of the Gallery building. Of course, getting everyone together for a photo is a little like herding cats, and there were part-time hours,

holidays and colds to contend with—as a result some faces in the shot above are not fully three dimensional.

Since the closure of the Gallery building we've mounted more than fifty **Outer Spaces** projects and one major touring show, produced nine publications, hosted more than 130 events, taught hundreds of children and attended to countless back-of-house tasks. We've laughed. We've cried. We've scrutinised the situations vacant. (Just kidding.) But above all, we've tried to keep things interesting. For us and for you.

Looking at the big yellow balloon by Seung Yul Oh that forms the backdrop for this portrait, we could, of course, try and turn it into a metaphor for this peculiar moment in our history. A big balloon for our birthday party... The staff 'breathing life' into fresh projects... Something made from nothing... But instead we'd rather note the comment of one visitor who came to see Seung Yul's exhibition, reeled back at the sight, and asked whether the balloons were holding up the ceiling.

Big blobby yellow quake protectors? Base isolators you can inflate with a leaf blower? Well, as our real Gallery awaits base isolators of a much more expensive and slow-to-install kind, it's something nice to think about.

Meanwhile, everyone, these are the *Bulletin's* readers. *Bulletin* readers, this is everyone.

COMING SOON

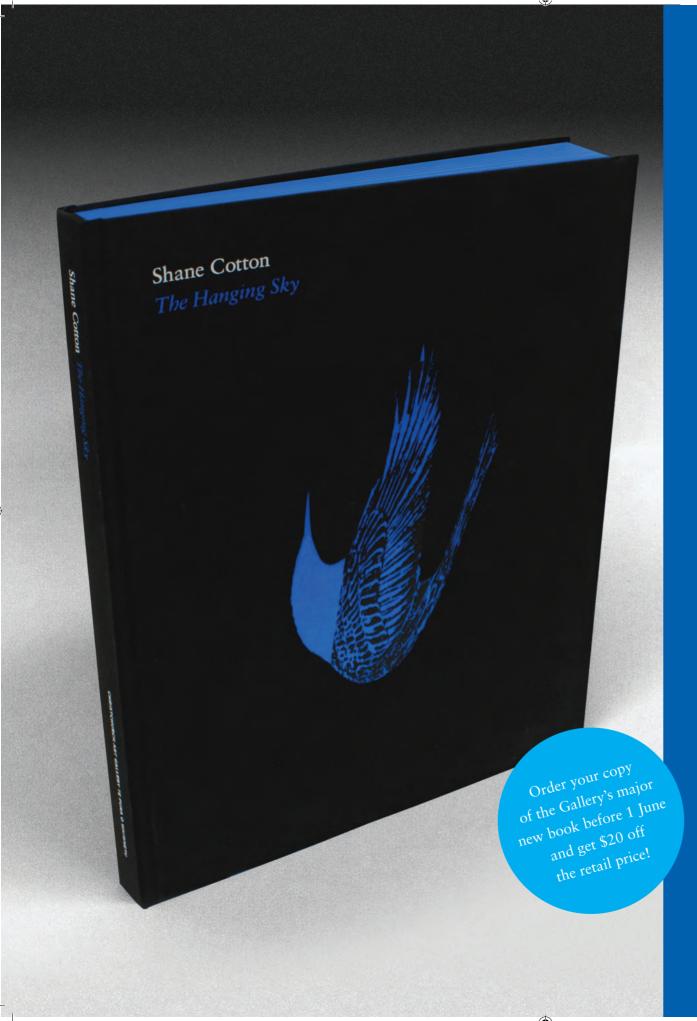


Sian Torrington, detail of work in progress, 2012

Sian Torrington: How you have held things

1 June – 12 July

Allowing, noticing, remembering and an eye for the potential in chaos are the key ingredients in Wellington-based artist Sian Torrington's latest project. How you have held things brings together a rich array of salvaged and reclaimed materials—building framing, house paint, wallpaper, weatherboards, fabric and even glitter—to create a remarkable site-specific installation for Christchurch. Disordered, fragmented and provisional, it honours the steadfast ingenuity with which the city's residents have responded to the earthquakes. After reading about people 'cleaning up drawers of smashed jam jars covered in apricot jam with cold water, sweeping, digging, mopping up liquefaction, stacking broken things', Torrington offers up an alternative kind of structure—a damaged, beautiful palace built from texture, colour and light.



Stepping up to the painting, I found myself on the edge of a blue-black void, a space whose colours suggested some time beyond day or night...

For two decades Shane Cotton has been one of New Zealand's most acclaimed painters. His works of the 1990s played a pivotal part in that decade's debates about place, belonging and bicultural identity. In the mid 2000s, however, Cotton headed in an unexpected direction: skywards. Employing a sombre new palette of blue and black, he painted the first in what would become a major series of skyscapes—vast, nocturnal spaces where strange birds speed and plummet. From these spare and vertiginous beginnings, Cotton's skyscapes have become increasingly complex and provocative, incorporating ragged skywriting and a host of charged images.

The Hanging Sky brings together highlights from this period with four distinctive new responses to the assembled works. New York essayist Eliot Weinberger offers a poetic meditation on what he calls 'the ghosts of birds' in Cotton's paintings. Christchurch Art Gallery senior curator Justin Paton plots his own encounters with Cotton across six years in which the artist was constantly 'finding space'. Australian curator Geraldine Kirrihi Barlow confronts the haunting role of Toi moko—tattooed Māori heads—in the paintings and in her own past. And Robert Leonard, Director of the Institute of Modern Art, argues the case for Cotton as a cultural surrealist exploring 'the treachery of images'.

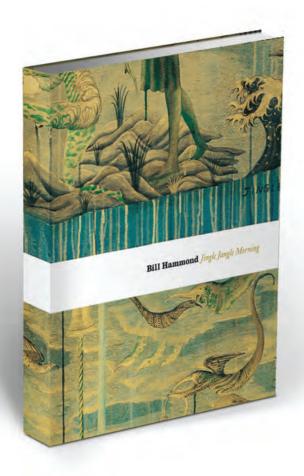
Presented on a grand scale, this covetable book is designed by award-winning designer Aaron Beehre and features 72 large-scale colour plates, a debossed cloth cover and blue page edges.

Shane Cotton *The Hanging Sky*

RRP \$120 *\$100 for orders placed before 1 June*In-store 14 June

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