

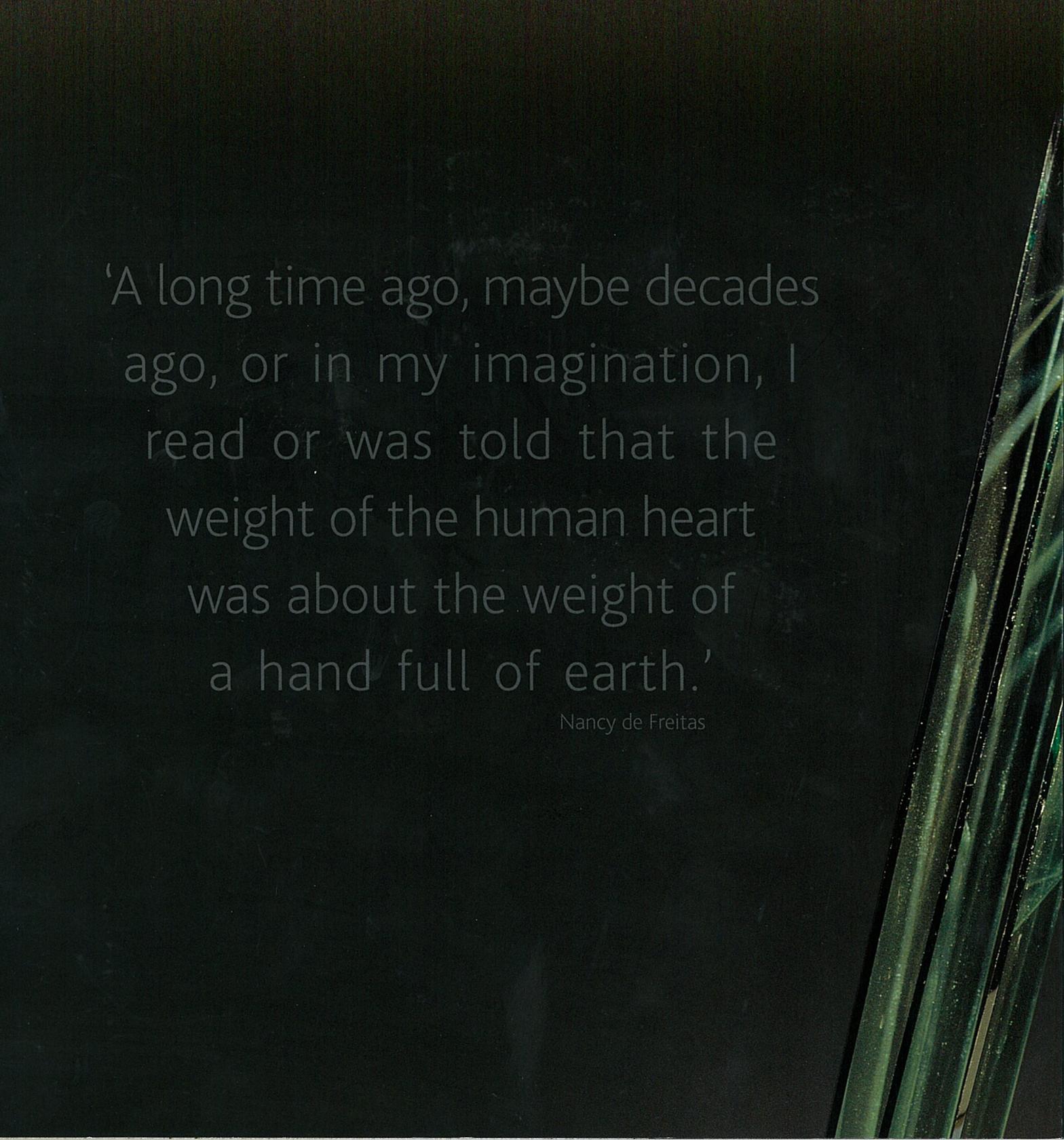
WEIGHT OF
THE HUMAN HEART



the Weight of the Human Heart
NANCY DE FREITAS

IN COLLABORATION WITH KAPKA KASSABOVA AND MARK STOREY

2 APRIL – 27 JUNE 2004 BORG HENRY GALLERY



'A long time ago, maybe decades ago, or in my imagination, I read or was told that the weight of the human heart was about the weight of a hand full of earth.'

Nancy de Freitas





happy home, Dad is looking out the window
my mother, my father and
the summer has come The summer
home

woman cleaning hair from her brush, while fragments of the shed hair are whisked through a door by the wind.

Kassabova and Storey have again produced multiple recorded texts, audible only at close range from various locations in the gallery space. In one of the recordings, a woman with a slight foreign accent speaks feelingly of her experiences of houses in different times and places. Behind her narrative lies the pressure of past events, unspecified but suggestive: 'My country was in crisis ... Years after my brother ... disappeared ... They thought he might come back. They said he must have somewhere to come back to. Somewhere that he knows. A home.' These sculptural, auditory and filmed elements combine to produce, in the viewer, a stimulating range of sensations. **Weight of the Human Heart** is an ambitious exercise in collaboration between de Freitas, Kassabova and Storey, who also worked together on **Parallel Histories**. The trio have been involved in this project over several

years, with a high level of commitment and interaction. It is a self-conscious kind of activity, too, in that the participating artists are, by implication, conversing about the nature of collaboration. Collaboration as a creative practice is also the focus of de Freitas' academic research, so she has a double involvement, both as participant and observer.

Salman Rushdie once remarked, 'We're all exiles now', and he is right. Migration, diaspora, globalisation and international travel affect millions of people around the world. Evocations of the fragility of house and home will stir sympathetic responses in many of us; it is not necessary to be a migrant in any literal sense to be able to empathise with such feelings. Some would argue that human beings are, almost by definition, exiled by birth from the psychological and physical plentitude of life in the womb – we forever lament that loss of wholeness and belonging, represented in ideas of Paradise, Heaven, Arcadia, the Garden of Eden or 'the

green green grass of home'. Adding the passage from country to country to the normal burdens of consciousness is merely a further twist of the knife.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky wrote:

You must know that there is nothing higher and stronger and more wholesome and useful for life in after years than some good memory, especially a memory connected with childhood, with home ... If a man carries many such memories with him into life, he is safe to the end of his days, and if we have only one good memory left in our hearts, even that may sometime be the means of saving us.

This quote, which I found among some background papers that de Freitas lent me, points towards the emotional core of this project. **Weight of the Human Heart** is concerned with (among other things) the preservation of the child within us, through memory and imagination

My brother gone.

— a theme as old as Wordsworth and as pertinent today as it was 200 years ago.

Collaboration is an especially evocative means through which to approach loss, nostalgia or rupture because, through its 'working together' aspect, it denies and transcends isolation and selfhood. This gives the installation a beguiling optimism. All the elements — objects and structures made and found, sounds, words, moving images, light and darkness — are filtered through the varying sensibilities of the collaborating artists to produce a subtle harmony, like a piece of haunting *son et lumière* chamber music.

Peter Simpson

Peter Simpson is Associate Professor of English at the University of Auckland and a widely published commentator on literature, the visual arts and cultural history.

All images (details, DVD stills and installation photograph) from *Weight of the Human Heart* 2004. Reproduced courtesy of Nancy de Freitas.



A woman with long dark hair is shown in a dark room, looking down at a glowing, textured object she is holding. The room is dimly lit, with light coming from a window in the background, creating a dramatic, low-key atmosphere. The glowing object at the bottom of the frame has a warm, orange-red hue and a rough, crystalline texture.

Nancy de Freitas would like to acknowledge the generous support and patronage of:

Auckland University of Technology (research grant); Pilkington New Zealand Ltd (sponsor of the sculptural component); AMP Capital Investors (patrons, New Loft Artist in Residence Project); Steven and Sam Tozer of Brownstreet Productions, Auckland; Relda McDowall of E-scape Glass, Invercargill (glass hands); University of Auckland Music School; Anna Rainey (actor); Paul Barrett, Anne-Marie Davis, Inigo Echevarria, Karen Hunter, Robert Leek and Elena Stejko (speaking voices).

Nancy de Freitas

Nancy de Freitas' work is grounded in an awareness of immigrant sensitivities and a notion of exile. Recent work has explored the human condition in which cultural material such as tradition, memory and identity are preserved, reconstructed, questioned and sometimes discarded as markers of individuality. Her work reveals a desire to understand what our home and our memories of it mean to us.

Nancy was born in the West Indies and lived in many countries before settling in New Zealand. She is a graduate of the Ontario College of Art and Design and the University of Auckland where she completed a Masters degree in Fine Art. Since then she has been active as both a professional artist and an academic.

Kapka Kassabova

Kapka Kassabova is an award-winning poet, novelist and travel writer. She was born and raised in Bulgaria, moving to New Zealand in 1992. Her debut novel *Reconnaissance* won the 2000 Commonwealth Writers' Prize for best first novel in South-East Asia and the

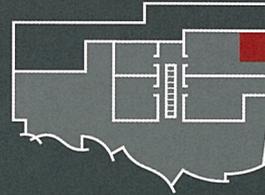
Pacific, and her first book of poetry won the 1999 Montana Best First Book of Poetry. She was the 2002 NZ Cathay Pacific Travel Writer of the Year, and in 2003 she held the Creative New Zealand Berlin Writer's Residency. Kapka currently teaches at the University of Auckland.

Mark Storey

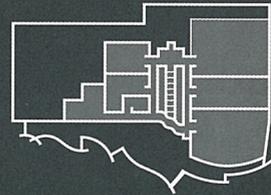
Mark Storey is an award-winning composer, musician and sound recordist. He has had works performed by the Ensemble Philharmonia, 175 East and the Karlheinz Company. Mark has worked on various multi-media projects, including a sound installation at Auckland's Artspace and the sound component for

an installation by Maureen Lander at Te Papa. Mark is also a film and TV sound recordist, and has made documentary programmes for Concert FM, been a guest lecturer at the University of Auckland School of Music and a part-time lecturer at the Auckland University of Technology.

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