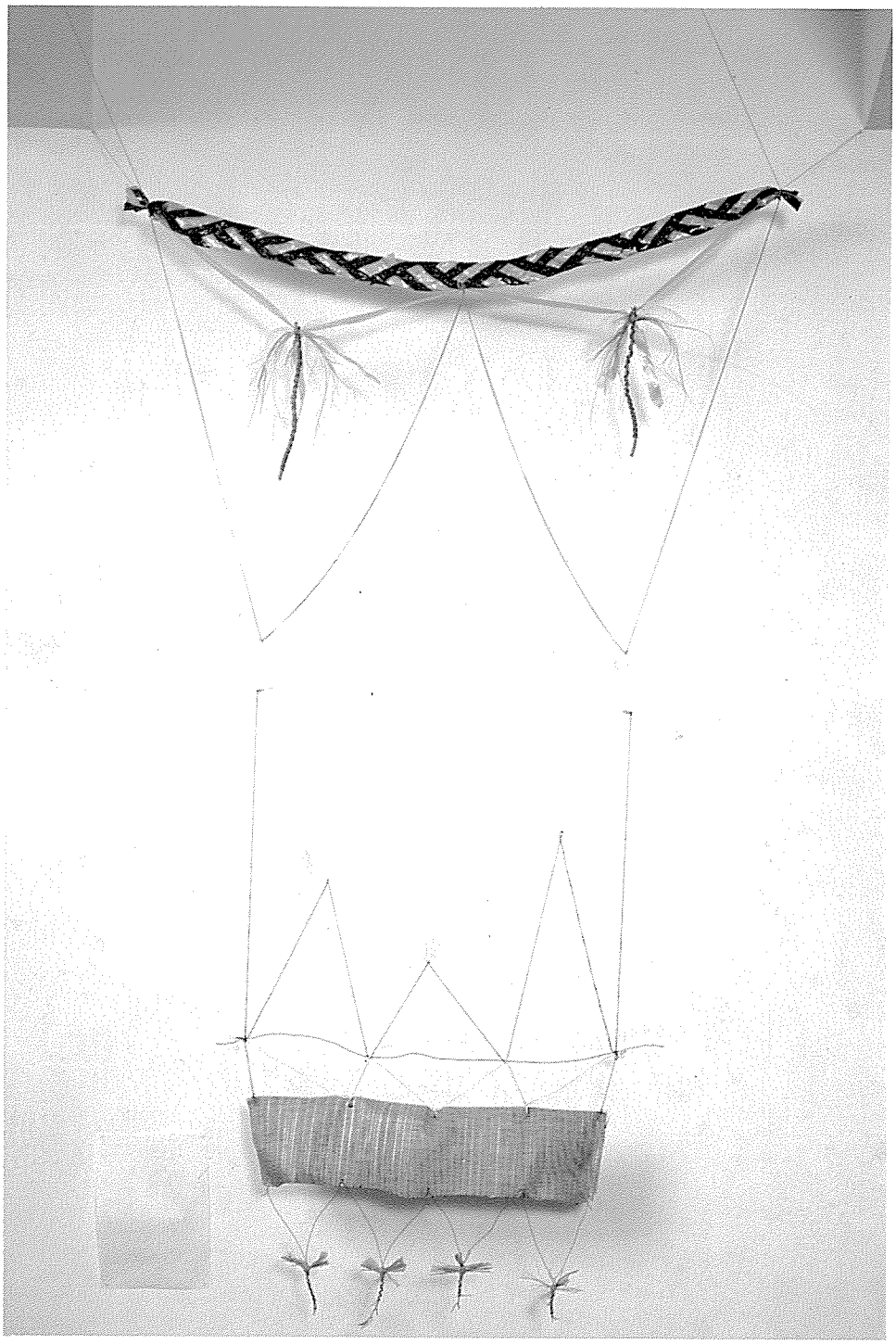
AGMANZ JOURNAL 17:1



QUARTERLY OF THE ART GALLERIES & MUSUEMS ASSOCIATION OF NEW ZEALAND

AGMANZ
JOURNAL

winter '87
~~Autumn '86~~

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IN THIS ISSUE

This issue is based on papers presented at the Criticism Symposium at the National Art Gallery in late January. The event, organised by the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council to coincide with a visit to New Zealand by Stuart Morgan, English writer and critic, was very successful and attracted a large number of artists and museum professionals.It is hoped that it will be one of many and not just a one-off event.

As an introduction I have used a paper by Jim and Mary Barr. This is followed by three feminist papers by Juliet Batten, Merylyn Tweedie and Lita Barrie which provide a broad perspective or framework for institutions to attempt to redress a very unsatisfactory and unbalanced view of women. It was my intention to also include the papers under the topic 'Maori Art and New Zealand Art — influence or appropriation?! Unfortunately this was not possible.

A further paper by Lita Barrie, presented at the Agmanz Conference, which takes to task the exhibitions Oro del Peru, a Peruvian gold show touring New Zealand, and Eye In The Sun at the Dowse Art Museum. This paper takes on board the extended debate in Artforum last year on Primitivism, a large show at the Museum of Modern Art where the curator, William Ruben supports the modernist stance by the appropriation and usage of other cultures. This is compulsory reading and I was remiss in not bringing it to everyone's attention last year.

Bob Maysmor of Porirua Museum talks about Greenpeace and the Rainbow Warrior affair and the huge response to this show. It raises the questions of audience numbers (falling for many institutions), accessibility, to whom does the institution have a responsibility?

Finally a President's report to inform you of the year's events.

I would more than welcome critical reviews of books and exhibitions.

I hope by the next issue we will have a flourishing debate column.

Jan Bieringa

NOTES

Publicize your conservation needs

Slide/tape programme available for showing

The ICCCP has produced a 10 minute slide/tape show. This explains to the public the conservation role of museums, galleries and archives. It talks about the resources needed by these institutions for their conservation work and calls for greater government commitment to the development of these resources.

Enthusiastic comments have been received from those who have seen it.

If you would like to receive a copy for showing in your gallery or would like copies of the script, apply to:

The Secretary
ICCCP
Arts Branch
Department of Internal Affairs
Private Bag
WELLINGTON

State:

1) Whether you want an automatic programme or a manually operated programme
2) Any equipment you are unable to obtain for screening this production which will have to be provided by the ICCCP.

Art Galleries and Museums Association Workshop Programme

May

2, 3, 4 "Textile conservation: storage and display of textiles"
Contact: Gordon White
Venue: Otago Museum
This workshop is designed for all museum people who are interested in and concerned with the care of textiles. The course will offer practical suggestions — methods for the storage and display of textiles in museums

19-20 "Docent Training"
Contact: Gillian Chaplin
Venue: Auckland City Art Gallery

24-24 "Acts and Facts"
Contact: Beverley McCulloch
Venue: Canterbury Museum
The workshop is to cover the law regarding Maori artifacts, antiquities, historic places, classified buildings. Regulations regarding collections of native birds, aspects of insurance cover etc.

June

7-8 "Paper Preservation"
Contact: Bronwyn Simes
Venue: National Museum
Emphasis is on understanding the factors that help speed up deterioration and method of storage that will slow down the process. Practical work will cover handling techniques, matting and framing, dry cleaning and encapsulating.

Other workshops later in the year. Further details closer to the date.

August
- Displays on low budgets. Venue Porirua. Contact Bronwyn Simes, National Museum
- Our Public Communication. Venue Waikato Contact Sherry Reanolds, Auckland Museum

September

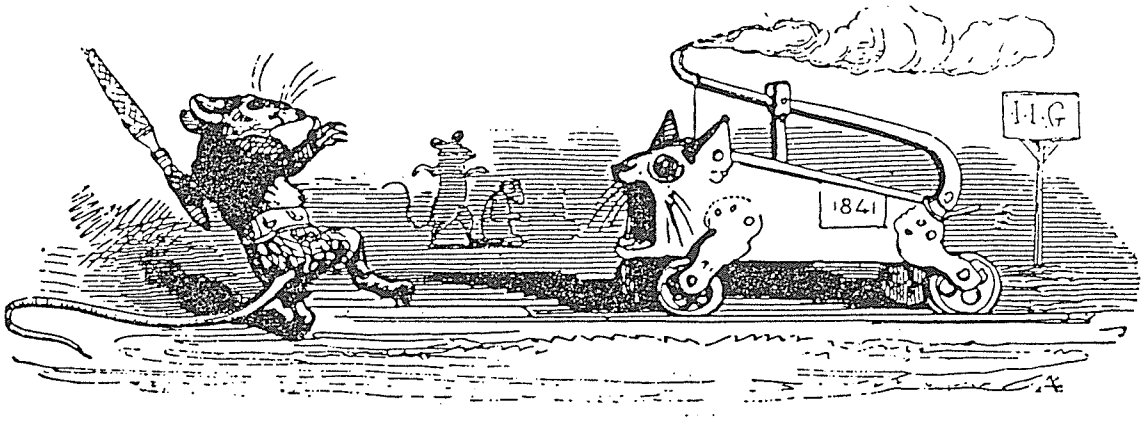
17, 18, 19 Exhibitions Officers Seminar Venue Wellington Contact Ross Ryltell Wellington City Art Gallery

October Marketing venue Auckland Contact Sherry Reanolds, Auckland Museum

November
- Storage venue Waiouru Army Museum
  Contact Steve Stanford Q.E. II Army Memorial Museum
- Production of a small publication Auckland Contact Sherry Reanolds, Auckland Museum

Bronwyn Simes
LIAISON OFFICER

DOIN' WHAT COMES NEUTRALLY



". . . and if there were objections, they shrugged their shoulders pityingly."
(Gustave Flaubert. Bouvard and Pecuchet)

This paper follows on from two others, one given at the Auckland City Art Gallery which is to be published by the gallery with the others in the series later this year, the other at the recent Critics Symposium. In these precursors we examined with the aid of feminist analysis the relationship between artists, art galleries and, in the later presentation, critics. Because of the specialised audience of this publication, we are now going to concentrate on one pervasive factor in the power relationship between the institution and the art producer, and that is its gallery-centric nature. In doing so we will suggest that because institutions continue to view the culture with myopic disregard for the many layers not determined by their own institutional needs, they are in danger of becoming irrelevant.

Our concern then is the relationship between public art institutions and art producers. This relationship, like all others in our society, is political, but we are going to argue that many of our art institutions deny these politics, claiming instead a stance of neutrality.

Feminist theory has proved central to any post-modernist attitude toward art and it is no less pertinent in trying to understand the power relationship of art institutions and artists. We assert that this relationship parallels in many significant ways that between men and women. The powerful and the not powerful.

The problem is nicely stated by Hans Haacke, long time observer of the power manipulations of art institutions.

> *"An institution's intellectual and moral position becomes tenuous only if it claims to be free of ideological bias."*
> (Hans Haacke. *Art In America;* February 1984)

I-I-I-Ideology

Now here we would define ideology roughly as the ways in which what we say and what we believe connect with the power-structures and power-relations of the society we live in. How we fit ourselves in to where we find ourselves. The premise then is that the art institutions in New Zealand on the whole claim to be free of ideological bias, indeed to be *above* ideology.

> *"The Art Museum must provide an opportunity for 'a fresh and unbiased look at our culture — to look into our history, with the intention of making people look into the future . . . People should not know the stance of the Art Museum staff.'"*
> (Bruce Robinson, Director, Waikato Museum of Art and History. *Nexus;* 29 July 1985)

> *"A blockbuster exhibition at the Auckland City Art Gallery pulls in a bigger crowd than a Springbok test match at Eden Park, and it's a good deal less political too."*
> (Rodney Wilson, Director, Auckland City Art Gallery. *New Zealand today;* 1985)

> *"Without further elaboration the painting must, and can, stand alone in its own terms."*
> (John Coley, Director, Robert McDougall Art Gallery. *Christchurch Press;* 9 September 1982)

Now of course this apparent lack of bias, this stated even handedness, this objectiveness, is illusory. There can be no such thing as an objective, value free art institution. Or any institution for that matter. To paraphrase Ruth Hubbard, writing about Darwin: these institutions are part of the politics, economics and sociology of our era: they are generated by them and in turn help to generate them.

If they ignore this fact our art institutions will continue to be inexorably pushed to the periphery of any involvement with art and with culture. And further, by clinging to an anachronistic position, they will exert unjustifiable and demoralising power over the producers on whom they depend: the artists.

It's not that artists aren't acknowledged as the source by the institutions. They are, and often in fulsome terms:

> *" — however, more than anything else it is meant as a tribute to the artist himself who has made and continues to*

make us see what we have been afraid or unable to see."
(Luit Bieringa, Director, Manawatu Art Gallery. *McCahon 'religious' works 1946-1952.* 1975)

"Finally we would like to thank the artists themselves. Without their extraordinary creative talents none of this would have been possible."
(Sir Michael Fowler, Chairman Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council. *ANZART Australian and New Zealand artists in Edinburgh.* 1984)

"The paintings in this exhibition are by Colin McCahon. Without him and his vision they could not exist."
(Jim Barr, Director, Dowse Art Gallery. *Colin McCahon at the Dowse Art Gallery.* 1980)

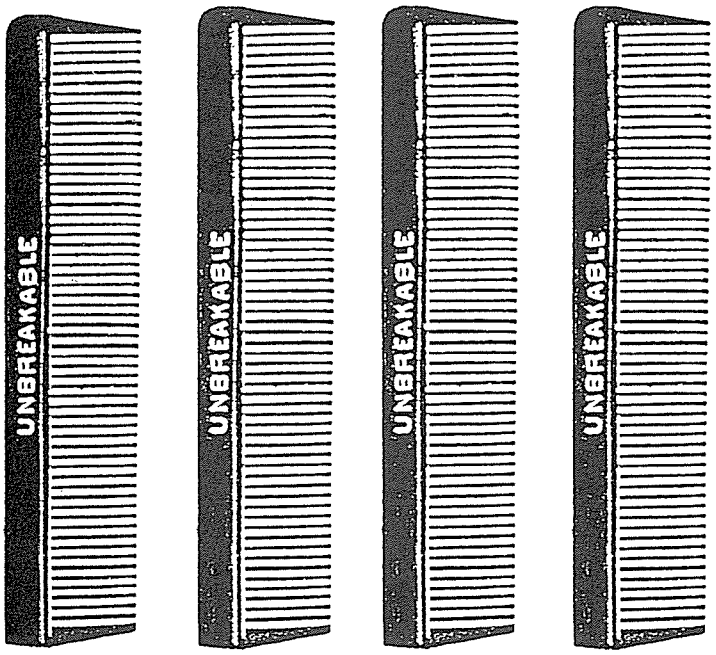
And rather more chillingly:

"There are certain structures that an artist must follow if success if to be gained."
(Rodney Wilson. *Inner City News;* 31 July 1984)

"You have to take into consideration that these people [actors concerned at the closure of their theatre] *are involved in the theatre and they tend to overdramatise the issues."*
(Sir Michael Fowler. *New Zealand Times;* 18 August 1985)

The point is that despite these compliments, back-handed and otherwise, artists and their work are often used by the art institutions to quite different ends than this seeming evenhandedness would suggest. They are not the neutral service institutions they present themselves as; the disclaiming of politics does not divest them of it.

Leaning across the table he stared deep into her eyes. "Let's not talk about me" he murmured, "let's talk about you . . . What do you really think about me?"



The perceptions developed by feminists, (and particularly in our case those of Angela Dworkin in her book *Pornography: men possessing women* published by The Women's Press in 1981) in their analysis of male-supremacist ideology are valuable in analysing the relationships of artists and galleries. The powers asserted by men over women are the powers taken by a male centric society that can reference the world only in relation to itself. Sound familiar?

Such an assertion of self, of course, requires the creation of an "other", and consequently and inevitably, assertion at the expense of that "other", in this case the artists. The good of the institution and its needs are seen as more important than the good and needs of artists. This is not to say that the two needs do not on occasion coincide, but to note that such coincidence is always from the point of view of the institution.

It is in asserting the priority of their identity that art institutions are increasingly creating problems both in their relations with artists and with their audience. It causes a conflict between what is perceived by the institution to be its own needs and those of the artists.

"Mr Keith said the gallery employed a professional director who had the necessary training to define what was art and what wasn't."
(Hamish Keith, Chairman Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council. *Taranaki Herald;* 13 November 1979)

"We believe that our training provides us with a basis for opinion."
(Bruce Robinson. *Nexus;* 29 July 1985)

And this rather poignant dialogue between a gallery director and a City Councillor advocating the inclusion of china painting in the gallery's exhibition programme:

Mr Barr: "I said that when their work was of the quality we would want to show then we would show it."
Mrs Mildenhall: Who would be the judge of that?
Mr Barr: I would be.
Mrs Mildenhall: You are qualified in that?
Mr Barr: Yes.
(Hutt News; 7 December 1976)

The Dowse has continued this tradition of institutional bullying:

"I'm not going to tell them [the long suffering public of Lower Hutt] how they feel about a work of art neither are they going to tell me what I show."
(James Mack, Director, Dowse Art Museum. *Evening Post;* 7 January 1986)

Setting aside what exactly this 'training' consists of, what these 'qualifications' are, the institutions are constantly referring to that indefinable 'something' which art works must have before being admitted into the gallery. It smacks of magic.

And when criteria for inclusion in or exclusion from the institutions are discussed:

"The only criteria ever really applied has been one of quality control."
(Dick Bett, Director, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. *TACO: the politics of exhibition.* 1983)

"The criterion of excellence is applied to all our programmes and we do not recognise ourselves as a forum for untried artists . . ."
(Rodney Wilson. *Metro;* February 1986)

The question then must be, what exactly are these criteria which are being applied with such rigour? They are very rarely debated openly. More often than not there is a fallback on gallery staff 'professionalism', on their 'training', specifics that put these criteria beyond *unprofessional* or *untrained* discussion. That is, by anyone who doesn't work in an art institution.

And when these issues are addressed by the institutions the effects are often comic as in this recent paper on collecting policy for the Hocken Library pictures department:

"In New Zealand, at least, the major photographically derived image is not exactly welcomed as an equal on the same wall with a major paint-derived image. At the back of this

strange anomaly there lies perhaps a large skeletal carytid in our cultural cupboard whose removal would bring down the house. it is this ingrained administrative prejudice coupled with the photographers own exclusive brethren-like reluctance to delegate curatorial control beyond their own circle which renders it unlikely that photography will, for the moment anyway, take its rightful place. It has been suggested that the Hocken Pictures Department collect only those photographs which have been taken by painters."

(Hocken Library. Pictures Department. *Towards an acquisitions policy)*

Such a straightforward assertion of a gallery's institutional requirements over cultural fact is unusual. A more subtle marker of this phenomenon can be seen in the title of an exhibition recently displayed at the Auckland City Art Gallery. The exhibition was titled simply enough *Milan Mrkusich* and subtitled *:a decade further on 1974-1983.* But just a minute, this is 1985, two years after the period the exhibition covers. The decade it transpires is the time since the *institution* last had a major exhibition of this artist's work.

The title and concept of the show are thus directly tied to the institution and seen from its point of view rather than to what the artist is trying to do.

Now this focusing of the exhibition to the institution's activities rather than the artist's has a rather curious effect. Mrkusich's last paintings in his first Auckland City Art Gallery show are dated 1971. The first in the new exhibition are dated 1974. There are therefore two intriguing missing years: 1972 and 1973. There is now an unexpected subtext constructed by the point of view taken. Was there something wrong with the work from this period? Was Mrkusich not painting at this time? And what of the work created since 1983, another 18 months worth? Was that not worth showing either?

We would suggest that what we see here is an institution's assertion of its self over the artist. The first exhibition showed a decade of Mrkusich's work. Fine. Now the second show was conceived as a match to the first so it too had to cover a decade. At this point the idea begins to distort the presentation of the work. The assertion of self is about to sacrifice two, possibly three, years of the artist's work to an exhibition title.

The point is that the decade is fixed to the *institution's* needs and identity, not the artist's. We're not suggesting that this was done in opposition to the artist or that it was done in any underhand way, but we are suggesting that in the end the institution's conception of its own role and needs worked against the idea of the exhibition, which we assume was to see what the artist had painted since the gallery last assessed his work. A more accurate but far less catchy title that would have ensured such a view might have been *Milan Mrkusich: the last 13 years.*

Good intentions are not the issue here. The issue is to question the assumption art institutions act from a neutral stance. They do not.

Another example of a major exhibition from another institution is — *Views/exposures* organised by the National Art Gallery in 1982.

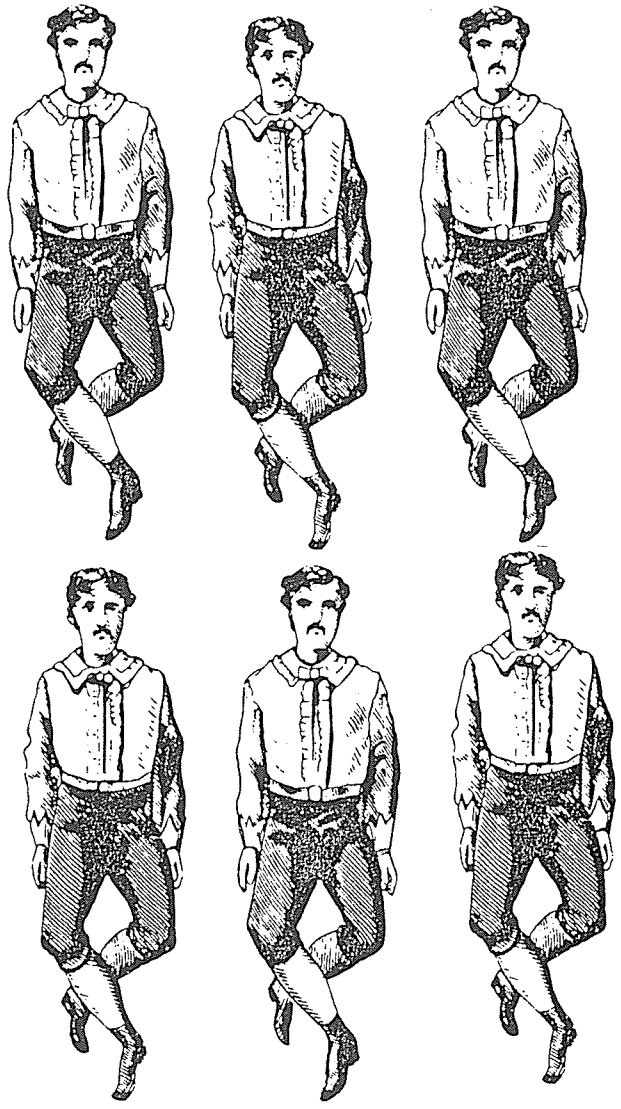
This exhibition has its roots in an earlier photographic show titled *The Active eye* which was arranged by the same director, Luit Bieringa, in 1975. It was a survey that was "compiled through a combination of special invitations and open entries". The exhibition was a great success and is generally regarded as marking an important step in the recognition by the art institutions of photography in New Zealand.

Seven years later, now Director of the National Art Gallery, Bieringa again sees the need for an exhibition to "expose the work of a number of individual photographers whose work reflects and forms part of the broader spectrum" in order to "demonstrate the broader achievements within the New Zealand framework."

Again the selection of work was left to the artists: "once the decision was made as to whom to invite . . . no further curatorial role was taken by the organisers. The choice of images was left to the participants."

And yet we find this non curated, non selected and, we think it fair to say, uneven exhibition is purchased in toto by the National Art Gallery. What does this mean? Well, we would say that what was being purchased here wasn't so much the *work* as the *idea of the exhibition,* and we would suggest that the exhibition, a mixture of good, bad and indifferent (a long way from the excellence aspired to in gallery policy) was bought as a package because it was seen specifically to represent 'something'. We would further suggest that this 'something' is the Gallery itself. The Gallery was purchasing what it saw as a sign of *its* contribution to photography.

The National Art Gallery is not alone in this contruction of its own history. The current Auckland City Art Gallery exhibition *Aspects of recent New Zealand art: sculpture* shares the generic title of the Gallery's curated *"Aspects"* series of shows. This obscures the fact that this is simply an exhibition of recent work, just like any one might encounter in a dealer exhibition. And yet, like *Views/exposures,* the bulk of the show is being purchased, in this case to mark the occasion of the gallery's commitment to contemporary New Zealand sculpture.



". . . and on the door of the hut William wrote "No Girls Aloud."

(Just William. Richmal Compton)

And then there is the wider assertion of self, with self defined of course as white and male. Both women and Maoris are so far excluded from any serious consideration that they are seldom even given the doubtful benefit of token acknowledgement.

In her introduction to the exhibition *New women artists* Jenny Neligan showed defiant confidence:

> *"I do not think women are discriminated against in the visual arts today."*
> (Jenny Neligan. *New Women Artists* organised by the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. 1984)

That is a reasurring assumption to make, but of course it is not true. It is important to remember that our institutions are male structured and women only invited to participate on those terms. As though to remind us of the problem, in the catalogue for *New women artists* nine of the eleven photographs are large glamour shots of the artists, not illustrations of the work.

But they are cunning these men. Their point of view is so persuasive. Their confidence so great that even its apparent even handedness only serves to remind women of their place.

Regrettably Jim Barr again at the Dowse Art Gallery in an introduction to an all women exhibition:

> *"To bring them together as* women *might be looked on in the same way that one might view an exhibition of works by blue eyed people. It is interesting that they should be so blessed but the work they have produced must stand or fall on its own merit and that of its creator as an* artist.
> (Jim Barr. *Invited North Island artists.* 1977)

Until relatively recently the presence of women in the art establishment has not even been an issue, but now there are a number of women directors and many more women filling positions at all levels. Yet still for most of the art establishment the issue of women and women's art does not feature — as one artist rather dryly put it: "one even suspects that the number of women now involved in the art institutions is just an indicator of how irrelevant art has become to the patriarchy."

It is very difficult to find any statements about women and their concerns at all, except in the context of "women's exhibitions." They are virtually invisible. This has meant that in dealing with women artists it has proved impossible to follow our practice of using the words of those making the decisions. It has required a different strategy: one of counting the silences.

It seems to us that here the intellectual and moral stance of the institutions can be seriously questioned. That we should begin to look at what we *are* doing, not at what we assure everyone we are doing. The criteria the institutions operate by must be challenged if — as we assert — a major part of our people are consistently excluded.

"We don't want Equality, We want Everything"

(Grafitti, Wellington)

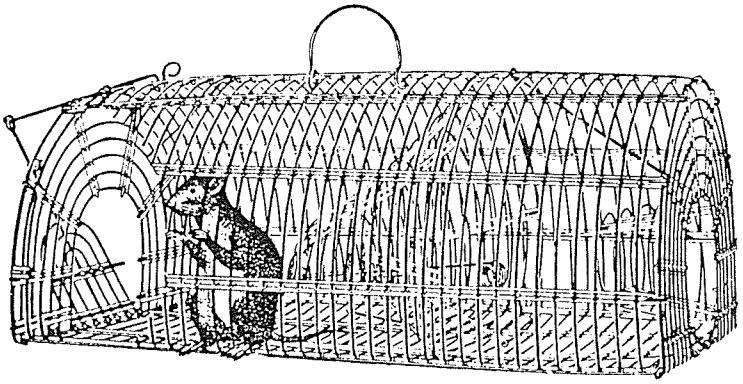
The simplest way to conceptualise this problem is to look again at the inclusion (or rather exclusion) of women from public art gallery exhibitions. Numbers are not the whole story of course but they make a compelling start. These figures are from the shows toured by the New Zealand Art Gallery Directors Council in 1983. These statistics will of course be no news to women but for the record:

New Zealand painting: 1940-1960 72 works, 24 of women
New Zealand drawing: 82 works, 19 of women
One person exhibitions: 6 exhibitions, 2 of women
The new image: 7 artists, no women
and, mercifully: *Views/exposures:* 10 artists, 5 women.

More recently:

Auckland City Art Gallery's *Aspects of New Zealand art:* Three exhibitions, 27 artists, 3 women.
And in Nelson at the Suter *The word:* 24 works, 5 by women.

Gallery-centric as a term is interchangeable with male-centric.



Include/Exclude . . . Exclusion/Exclusive

And the art institutions also exercise their power more widely through exclusion. For without exclusion it is not possible to have exclusiveness at all, and it is not possible to establish standards unless someone is unable to reach them. It's a bit like an exam system without a published syllabus.

Exclusion is mainly expressed by galleries through their exhibition programme. For as John Coley put it:

> *"Fast-paced, changing exhibitions have become a distinctive feature of many New Zealand art galleries."*
> *(Christchurch Press;* 21 August 1985)

We would strengthen this statement and say *all* New Zealand art galleries. It is primarily through exhibitions — and publications — that the art galleries perform their perceived function to:

> *". . . seek out, and display, study, and conserve works that exemplify excellence."*
> (Bruce Robinson. *Nexus;* 29 July 1985)

In this game artists tend to be the variously ranked pieces rather than the players. As Donald Judd rather sourly remarked:

> *"The ultimate problem for the bureaucrats . . . is how to get passable art from the most compliant."*
> *(Art in America;* September 1984)

For many women artists the exhibition formula is a particular problem with its very clear requirements of format, duration, scale, number of works and individuality. Many artists are now choosing to work outside the institutional system for it is clear that many expectations of exhibitions are unsuited to feminist concerns.

"The more Art Galleries there are, the merrier we shall be."

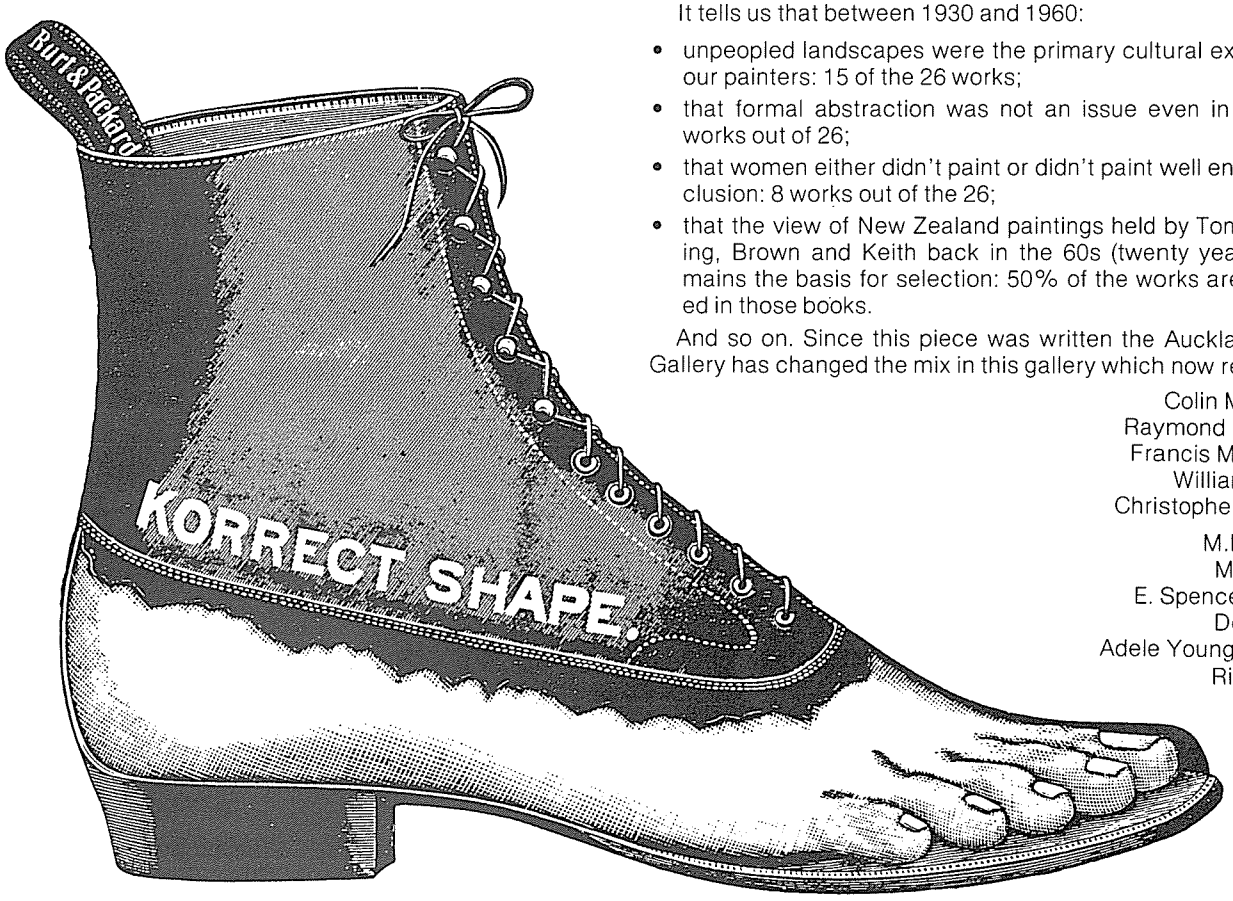
(John Coley. *Christchurch Star;* 16 May 1979)

Public institutions do not have infinite resources; they must make choices about what to exhibit and what not to exhibit, how many works to include by each artist, what sort of opening, what to publish and what not to publish, how many colour illustrations, what to buy and what not to buy etc etc. But these are all *political* decisions and the grounds on which they are made should be the subject of discussion and debate.

At present the institutions often maintain that the shape of what they do is forced on them by practicalities of space and money.

The implication to be drawn from this position is that with infinite resources there would be no need for these institutions to make any decisions at all. They could then be completely neutral and all inclusive. We like *that* impossibility as little as we like the present system of refusing to admit that the choices made are anything other than 'objective' and 'rational' seeking for 'excellence'.

What is happening at present is that these institutions *do* of course make choices, but they frequently hide behind what we see as a logistical red herring with its self congratulating implication of "Well, if only we had more money . . . if there were but room . . ." Resources are not the point; it is a matter of accepting and then — hopefully — being prepared to defend the choices made.



"The history of modern painting has been the struggle against the Catalogue."

(Barnett Newman)

In asserting the priority of their own perceptions institutions also find the power to name. To a large extend this power of naming is the power the galleries have to set work in a context of their own making. It is the permission to write the agenda, to set the territory and the rules. It allows, for instance, artists to have their work put into all sorts of contexts on the grounds that the institution is just showing the collection. Any combination of works by different artists make a statement. Institutional claims to be simply rotating the collection are ingenuous.

> *"They are in the business, he says, of placing those objects in relation to each other so that they have maximum impact."*
> (Bruce Robinson. *Nexus;* 29 July 1985)

Impact as defined by the gallery, not the artist. Setting the context of exhibitions is in effect the renaming of art in the galleries' terms.

Exhibitions are never neutral no matter how blankly hung. Let's take as example the paintings hung in the top section of the new Auckland City Art Gallery wing. This display amazingly enough is one of very few semi-permanent hangings of this kind. It is of works showing the development of New Zealand painting from around 1930 to 1960. The works are shown as the record. Not as opinionated choice but as the final result of refined research. There is no printed material to give any other point of view. This then is the semi permanently displayed record of those years for the general public. What does it tell us? How has this period been named?

It tells us that between 1930 and 1960:

- unpeopled landscapes were the primary cultural expression of our painters: 15 of the 26 works;
- that formal abstraction was not an issue even in the 50s: 3 works out of 26;
- that women either didn't paint or didn't paint well enough for inclusion: 8 works out of the 26;
- that the view of New Zealand paintings held by Tomory, Docking, Brown and Keith back in the 60s (twenty years ago) remains the basis for selection: 50% of the works are reproduced in those books.

And so on. Since this piece was written the Auckland City Art Gallery has changed the mix in this gallery which now reads:

Colin McCahon: 6
Raymond McIntyre: 1
Francis McCraken: 1
William Sutton: 1
Christopher Perkins: 1

M.E.R Tripe: 1
May Smith: 1
E. Spencer Macky: 1
Doris Lusk: 1
Adele Younghusband: 1
Rita Angus: 4

Now that is political and opinionated. The fixation with McCahon and the land persists. The women have been evened up okay, although downstairs in the contemporary section they represent only 8 of the 25 works. By now MrKusich, Walters and Woollaston and abstract art in general must have got the message so far as the gallery's concept of painting of the 40s to 60s is concerned. This view is fine but still has no accompanying material to provide any particular context for the exhibition other than history as 'fact'. The history of modern painting is indeed 'the struggle against the catalogue' (in this case the selection). Once again it is not simply that we disagree with the view being stated (although we do happen to disagree strongly with this one), but to point out that it is not 'just paintings from the collection'. The collection also has works by Rata Lovell-Smith, Gordon Walters, Olivia Spencer-Bower, Don Peebles, Flora Scales, Charles Tole etc. This is a political choice. There are for instance two works by John Holmwood and none by Gabrielle Hope. What is shown to the public as a seemingly 'neutral' display is in fact extremely contentious. There is nothing wrong with that, it could be enjoyably pro-

vocative, but only if it is acknowledged as such, and the viewers are let in on some of the reasons behind the choices.

It is by understanding how the galleries and their curators see New Zealand art in such installations that we can read better the temporary exhibitions they curate. The National Art Gallery recently 'named' an exhibition of nine works by Don Driver a 'Retrospective' in their newspaper advertising. In fact five of the pieces were dated 1978, three were post 1980 and one from the late 60s. Although it can be argued that the word retrospective means to refer back, the word has specific meaning in the context of gallery exhibitions. A meaning that is not reflected in such an arbitrary showing.

Occasionally the galleries are challenged for this 'naming' and what are often essentially 'open storage' exhibitions are questioned. Ian Wedde got it right discussing one such exhibition at the National Art Gallery last year.

> *"All the same, it's sometimes like the kids bringing you breakfast in bed: all that effort, all those good intentions, but deep down you wish they'd left it where it was."*
> *(Evening Post;* 23 October 1985)

Henry: "What Treasure, Uncle?" Exeter: "Tennis-balls my liege."

(Henry V. Act 1, scene 2)

In support of the urge to own we are constantly told that our institutions are the nation's treasure houses and we should give them more money both to look after these 'named' treasures already secured and in order to secure more.

> *"The chairman [sic] of the National Art Gallery Council, Mrs Lynette Corner, said the nation had a national treasure held in the National Art Gallery."*
> *(Evening Post; 21 November 1984)*

Even the government has a view on this:

> *"The government said it wanted the Pacific Cultural Centre project to be on a world scale* [presumably that means big], *and capable of housing New Zealand's art and artefact treasures."*
> *(Evening Post;* 12 September 1985)

It seems to us pertinent to question what they are doing with all this stuff they are accumulating and, of course, how do they recognise a national treasure when they find one.

Rodney Wilson is pretty clear on this and confessed to a *Metro* reporter that he had a fascination with the process involved which he described as:

> *"the collecting, acquisition and stockpiling of cultural material, the relics of our culture, which over time are sorted into some kind of order to say something about what we have been and are now."*
> (Rodney Wilson. *Metro;* 1984)

And so we come full circle. The issues are the same: What *is* this seemingly neutral process of sorting 'into some kind of order'? How are the terms defined, the priorities set? What sort of 'something' is to be said about our culture?

Art instititions have, over the last ten or so years, made great strides in professionalising their approach to the arts. It seems to us that now the problem is their reluctance to assert their opinions and subject them to debate. In terms of professionalism our galleries seem to have many of the answers. Now is the time to start asking the questions.

Jim and Mary Barr
March 1986

Note: *Jim and Mary Barr are freelance researchers and curators. Jim was director at the Dowse Art Gallery 1976-1981. Together they have curated exhibitions of Michael Smither and Peter Peryer and at present they are curating a survey exhibition of Phil Clairmont for the Sarjeant Art Gallery.*

FEMINIST ART AND THE POLITICS OF CRITICISM

1. Discrimination

In 1986 it should no longer be necessary to have to establish the fact of women's oppression. I intend to take the fact of the oppression of women artists as my starting point. We all know now how women artists have been consigned to oblivion, written out of art history and trivalised. I hope by now it is common knowledge, for example, that the main art history text by Janson does not include a single woman artist. I hope it is well understood how women, in being degraded into the nude passive object of art, laid out for the male eye, have been denied a place as the active intelligent makers of art, (which is not to say that women have not made art, have not always claimed a place for themselves).

The extent of the misogyny directed towards creative women may be less well recognised, especially when they begin to create out of their specifically female experience. In New Zealand, it was the women writers of the '30s who were the first to attract venomous attacks. A.R.D.

Fairburn, the old man of misogynous writing, scornfully called them the 'menstrual school of poetry', and his colleague Denis Glover was not much better. In 1936 he wrote:

> *Alas New Zealand literature distils an atmosphere of petticoats and frills (or shall we say, to shock the dear old vicars) an atmosphere of brassieres and knickers? (N.Z. Listener, November 10, 1984)*

And in response to Patricia Godsiff's offering of her first book of poems, Glover declared:

> *"Your function is to be a wife and mother: The world can do without your little posies of flowers". (Spiral 1, p23)*

Women artists began to attract male vitriol when they started doing things their way — organising their own exhibitions, doing their own defining of themselves, and most outrageous of all, opening their own gallery. Neil Rowe's review in the Evening Post has become the classic piece of male vitriol for feminist historians to study. He claimed that there was no such thing as gender-based discrimination in art, and that

> *. . . [a gallery] that is so dogmatically based on an ideology that is determined to show art that serves its own polemical ends has less to do with art than it has to do with politics and a form of therapy for disgruntled ladies. Evening Post, February 2, 1980*

The word 'therapy' often comes up when threatened men review feminist art — the implication being of course, that such women are mentally sick and in need of rehabilitation.

As far as discrimination is concerned, many interesting statistics were presented at a Sexism in the Arts seminar in 1983. At that time I surveyed the Auckland City Art Gallery's exhibitions to see what percentage of women artists were included. The figures ranged from 0% to a dizzy high of 21%. The only exception to this pattern was the exhibition curated by Alexa Johnstone, where women made up 45% of the total. 'New Image', 'Thirty Nine Drawings by Eight N.Z. Artists' (1977), and 'The Grid' were all 'men's shows'. Even the exhibition 'Little Works' (Bogle, 1978) contained only twelve works by women out of a total of ninety-one.

So much for the facts. What of the response to the facts?

I wish to distinguish between the liberal response and the radical response, to make it quite clear what feminist artists are aiming for.

The liberal response has two aims:

(a) First, to redress the balance. To get at least equal representation of women artists in all major exhibitions. To see women in positions in art schools, as art gallery directors, and other positions of power in the art world. To see women fairly represented in critical writing. To see women written about seriously, and not consigned to the margins of the art world.

(b) To reclaim the devalued aspects of women's art; to reclaim the 'feminine'. To lift the taboos on women's 'content' in art. To develop a feminine or feminist aesthetic.

While not denying the validity of these aims, I wish to establish quite clearly that these aims are not enough. I want now to push further and discuss the radical feminist perspective embraced by both feminist artists and critics.

2. Dismantling the Structures

The radical feminist wants not just reform, but a change in the structures of oppression. In the art world there are political structures — i.e. how art making and selling and evaluation is set up — that need to be challenged. And there are ideological structures — a whole framework of thinking about art which needs to be dismantled if the oppression of women artists is to stop.

It is this aspect that I would like to focus on now.

Dismantling involves challenging some of the ideological structures set up by the male-dominated art world:

(a) That art has no gender/race/class. Many people (not only men) find the idea of gender/race/class identity threatening. A recent example is Derek Bolt (actor and N.Z. Mastermind!) in the *N.Z. Listener* column 'What I'd Watch':

> *Ah, well, if I remember I'll watch* Art from Under *. . . to see if this* Kaleidoscope *rerun makes me as angry as when I first saw it. I detest labels — even (especially?) fashionable ones like 'Maori woman' . . . There are no labels — only people. A painter is a painter,* Kaleidoscope, *an arts programme should focus on that. That Emily Karaka is a Maori woman makes her paintings not a whit better or worse (January 4, 1986)*

This kind of comment completely denies fundamental differences and inequalities in our society. The cultural experience of a woman, a Maori, is different from that of a man, a pakeha, and it is only the oppression of the psyche that buries and represses this fact. These are differences that matter — vitally — when one group has been denied its reality/validity by another more powerful group. It is all very well for the powerful to say that differences don't matter or don't exist. After all they have everything to gain from this belief. Culture is so saturated with male pakeha bias that the last person to see it is, not surprisingly, a male pakeha mastermind!

(b) That art is a matter of aesthetics only. There has been a bias towards seeing art movements in terms of style. The women's art movement emphasises new content, new methods of making and much more. To concentrate exclusively on aesthetics is to deny the importance of content, of the conditions surrounding the making of art, and of cultural context. It perpetuates a myth (capitalist based) that art is an object, isolated, standing alone.

(c) The myth of the Great Tradition — the Great Artists — who stands alone, separated from society — 'transcending' it even. Where does this view leave the quilt-maker, the Navaho weaver or sand-painter, the Maori weaver or carver? It is a view that is a product of Western male hegemony/supremacy and a tool in marginalising many forms of art-making, especially those of women.

3. Replacing the Structures

I want to look at four different aspects to this important undertaking.

(i) Art and culture must be seen together. Women have suffered especially from the critical view of the art object as something isolated, separated from its function and the conditions of its making. Here is Ralph Pomeroy's critique of an important London exhibition of Navaho blankets in 1974:

> *I am going to forget,* in order to really see them, *that a group of Navaho blankets are not only that. In order to consider them, as I feel they ought to be considered — as Art with a capital A — I am going to look at them as paintings — created with dye instead of pigment, on unstretched fabric instead of canvas — by several nameless masters of abstract art. (quoted in Parker & Pollock,* Old Mistresses *p.68)*

Note how the makers become male, the fabric turns to canvas and the weaving to painting before the critic can approach the work!

The same has happened with quilts, those that have been 'discovered' and hung in art galleries tend to be those that invite analogy with abstract paintings. They are viewed on walls, not beds, and the quilts that speak most eloquently of their female context — the album quilts, the highly personalised friendship quilts — tend to be screened out, or facts about their social background suppressed.

The whole elevation of status is linked with a denial of function. The feminist critic will insist on function, on social context, on cultural meaning, of the connection of the art work with the lives of its makers.

In 1982 I visited an exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum called '600 Years

of Embroidery from the Permanent Collection 1380 — 1980'. Once again, for this traditional female art to be viewed as art, the curators first had to suppress the history of its changing social context and the simplefact that this art was made by women. The catalogue entry opened with this remarkable sentence:

> *Embroidery, since earliest times, has been a major expression of* **man's** *creative impulse to embellish objects in* **his** *environment. As such, it has evolved into an important art form, (my emphases).*

Here in New Zealand we are not much better. I will give just one example: Peter Shaw's article on quilt-maker Malcolm Harrison in *N.Z. Crafts,* July 1983. Now here we have an interesting situation — a man working (and very well) in a traditional female art form. But does the reviewer explore this? He doesn't even acknowledge it!

His first outrageous statement is:

> *When Malcolm Harrison first stated, he was almost alone in doing quilt-making. (p.25)*

A whole tradition wiped out in a single sentence! The article ends:

> *There can be no doubt that his skill and inventiveness have raised a pastime which was formerly regarded as one step up from occupational therapy to the level of an important art form.*

However, some bouquets are due too. Jim Ritchie, in a recent *Listener* (January 11, 1986), wrote a small piece about a quilt exhibition at the Waikato Art Museum, entitled 'Stitches that Speak of Time', in which he said this:

> *"... quilting says much about women's roles and whoever may do it now it remains a women's art form, whether collectively or personally created. Quilts speak of time and order and care and practicality, frugality, of making do by making.*

And Ian MacMillan writes with respect and an acknowledgement of function in his article on Cook Island women's patchwork in the latest *Art New Zealand* (No. 37, p.46).

(ii) The Organisation of Art. The way art is organised has worked against women artists, especially those who struggle to raise children. Women artists have been forced to put energy into alternative structures in order to organise art in a way that works *with* and not against them, and critics need to understand this when looking at, for example, Women's Gallery events, or Association of Women Artists exhibitions.

Some of the changes have been:

- Towards group shows: recognising that many women simply can't get together the body of work required for a solo show, especially during child-rearing years.
- Theme shows: these challenge through being content-based; they draw artists together, and make a political statement; e.,g. *Mothers, Women and Violence,* organised by the Women's Gallery.
- The gallery as cultural space — not only for art, but for music, poetry, meetings etc.
- Women-only openings: to provide a different cultural context for the exposure of work, to reach different audiences.

• Educational: the group playing an empowering, sharing, supportive role, e.g. through slide talks, feedback after shows, skills sharing.

• A co-operative emphasis: collective organisation, collaborative art and events. Professional and developing artists exhibiting side by side.

(iii) Feminist criticism: It is vital that this develop alongside feminist art. Feminist criticism will discuss content as well as style. It will examine the *vision* of the artist as well as aesthetics. It will not hesitate to criticise a limited vision of humanity, as expressed for example, in racist or sexist art. An example of feminist criticism embarking on such an attack was seen recently in Alexa Johnstone's catalogue essay for the Auckland City Art Gallery's show *Anxious Images:*

> *In a society which degrades and undervalues women, there will obviously be degraded women, and to mock them for their degradation is hypocrisy. (Barry) Cleavin has either not caught up with, or chooses to ignore, the changing social climate of the past fifteen years. The ridiculing and bestialization of oppressed people by their oppressors is never acceptable, not even in the visual arts, despite these often being seen as free from Society's constraints.*

And again, Priscilla Pitts in the latest *Art New Zealand:*

> *(Merylyn) Tweedie's attitude to her art-making is perhaps summed up in* The Artist Prepares *('to hunt') ... an aggressive image to be sure, but anyone who doubts the need for a spot of feminist savagery clearly missed the Allen Jones exhibition of lithographs at Portfolio Gallery.*
>
> *This is the man who gave the world the pornographic woman-as-slave/sex object/animal* Table Sculpture, *his large, highly coloured lithographs ... weren't much of an improvement ... in terms of their representations of women. This sort of 'variety' we can surely do without. (No.37, p.19)*

(iii) Political art: Feminist art is political art whether it deals with a political 'subject' or not. I would like to challenge critics to drop their double standards. They tend to approve of political art when the target is safely elsewhere — e.g. Hotere on Aramoana, Pat Hanly on nuclear shups — but when the reviewer is identified with the target of the art, as happens when a male reviewer confronts feminist art, the result has often been panic rather than appraisal; panic that is but thinly disguised behind an argument that politics and art don't mix. Recent examples of this are John Roberts' failure to come to terms with the art of Claudia Pond Eyley *(N.Z. Listener,* 6 April, 1985), and Bruce Birdling on Emily Karaka in *Art New Zealand* 26. He was relieved to find her work

> *transcended any preoccupation with male/female — white/black subjective grievances that could have* **weighed down her work.** (p.38; my emphases)

However, her environmentally concerned political work presents no such problems. Birdling even praises Karaka for being 'concerned and angry about it and determined to do something the best way she knows — in her art.' Once again, black grievances in South Africa prove easier for the reviewer to deal with than racism at home. When Karaka does a piece on Biko, suddenly the work is totally acceptable:

> *We are confronted with facts only in this painting. ... This is the strongest statement I have seen in her work so far.*

I shall leave the last word to Harmony Hammond, U.S. feminist artist and writer:

> *All good criticism must deal with art in the terms that the art itself sets up. If men can't deal with feminist art, they shouldn't write about it.* (Wrappings, *p.49)*

Juliet Batten
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FEMINIST ISSUES IN NZ ART

(WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO IMAGING OF THE NUDE FEMALE/THE NAKED WOMAN)

How can women analyse their exploitation, inscribe their claims within an order prescribed by the masculine. Is a politics of women possible *there?* (Luce Irigaray, quoted by Jacabus, *The Question of Language* : 207)

Can we counter the western cultural hegemony in its ceaseless and generally unquestioned production of meanings, and if so how far has the project of deconstructing male-defined universals proceeded? For it would seem that apart from a certain piety on the subject of pronouns, there is little indication of feminist impact on the sovereignty of male discourse; the theoretical cares of the various disciplines in the arts remain essentially unchanged. Their terms and methods are as always, speaking only of a world of male domination, a united voice against cultural pluralism.

Annette Kuhn rightly defines feminism as a political practice or set of practices with its own history and forms of organisation, 'it is not a monolith; it comes in different varieties, offers a range of analyses of the position of women and different strategies for social change' (*Womens' Pictures,* 1982 : 3) Indeed theoretical studies, such as Kuhn's have proved illuminating as Lisa *Tickner* notes, to the extent that we have moved from seeing 'feminist work as consequent upon its female authorship, to seeing it as articulated across a range of strategies : as a politics of art rather than a female aesthetic.' (*lip,* 1984 : 14)

Rather than issuing forth with a polemical documentary approach of suming up male critics failings, women artist's humiliations, and all the misunderstandings at the interface of women's groups and the institutionalised art world, I shall address instead the relationship between feminism and the reading of an art work, assuming of course that a relationship of some kind is there to be explored or constructed. This assumption in turn implies the acceptance of some form of feminist cultural politics; that the cultural (ie images, representations, meanings and ideologies) is a legitimate and an important area of analysis and intervention for feminists. Indeed one of the major theoretical contributions of the women's movement has been its insistence an the significance of sexual difference, and in particular in the form of dominant representations of women, and the ideological character of such representations.

To put forward the case for a feminist cultural politics then, is to hold to the belief that ideology must be seen as an active and pervasive perpetuation of social norms. For instance, the stereotypical images of women promoted in women's magazines became the cultural construction of an ideal female, images that verify and substantiate the ideological representation of women as objects of evaluation in terms of socially predefined visual criteria of beauty and availability. Indeed the logical and final outcome of the cultural dominance of objectifying women, is the male sexual violence seen in certain forms of hard pornography, that is, women as object-victim addressed specifically to the male viewer/voyeur.

'The deconstruction of pleasure,' is cited by Laura Mulvey, 'as a radical weapon' against the masculinity of the (cinematic) gaze. (*Screen,* Vol 16, 1975 : 7). The masculine gaze being in this case the way the unconscious, as formed by the dominant order, structures ways of seeing and looking, and can by extension be applied to any art work. Thus the feminist-reading, that has become the basis of certain forms of feminist criticism, regards imagery as cultural bearers of dominant ideologies which can be exposed and the images themselves transformed, so-to-speak, in retrospect. This scrutiny adds to the cultural stereotype the political logic of feminism, that holds the image accountable for the reproduction of norms.

In a world 'ordered by sexual imbalance,' Mulvey maintains, 'pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic pleasure.' (*Screen,* Vol 16 1975 : 11). Angela Carter calls this process, 'a gap left in the text of just the right size for the reader to insert his prick into? (Carter quoted by Jahn Ellis in '*Photography*/Pornography/Art/Pornography,' *Screen,* Vol 21, 1980-81 : 105). That is the representation of pleasure is addressed to an audience constructed as masculine, and that a reliance upon a concentration on the figure of the woman tends to oust any other considerations, and the image is in direct erotic rapport with the spectator/viewer/audience.

In portraying women as sexually powerless, passive and available, Peter Peryer in *Ann Noble : Easter* (1979), makes visible his own claim as a sexually dominating presence (even if he himself is absent from the image). Indeed Anne Noble, a naked contemporary artist of Peryers', is reduced to little more than a good fuck, and as Parker and Pollock have noted, in reference to such imaging, the 'individual artist does not simply express himself but is rather the privileged user of the language of his culture which pre-exists him as as a series of historically reinforced codes, signs, and meanings which he manipulates, or even transforms but can never exist outside of.' *(Old Mistresses,* 1981 : 16). Pleasure itself therefore becomes a political issue, insofar as such forms of male gratification are oppressive to us, bound up as they are in a structuring of sexual difference.

To challenge these dominant forms of signification is a concern shared by feminist representations of many lands, across all media, and this concern is based on the notion that in a sexist society women have no language of their own, and are therefore alienated from culturally dominant forms of expression, this allows therefore a feminist politics of intervention to take place. In particular the feminist artists' resolve to take up a political stance, suggests thereby, a conscious intent on the part of the artist to incorporate a particular position, or range of positions, in her work. A feminist intervention in culture that involves a number of fundamental questions about the ways in which works create meanings, and define and compose their viewers, is an important issue that the feminist artist needs to address, for if an artwork may or may not be readable in terms of feminist *intent,* or *feminist* meaning, the issue is decided at the moment of viewing/reading. Thus it becomes a problem of intentionality and an awareness that the artist's objectives do not, and cannot necessarily encompass the range of meanings available from a work, and that feminists are still forced to ask the leading question; under what conditions are readings in fact determined or determinable by their intended input? That is, whatever the overt intentions of the feminist artist, in many cases, readings of their works must often take place outside of any control they may wish to exert. In other words the meaning does not reside purely in the work itself but is, to some degree, an independent product and as Paul Ricouer has noted, 'the right of the viewer and the right of the text converge in an important struggle that generates the whole dynamics of interpretation.' *(Interpretation Theory : Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning,* 1976) The feminist artist must therefore be

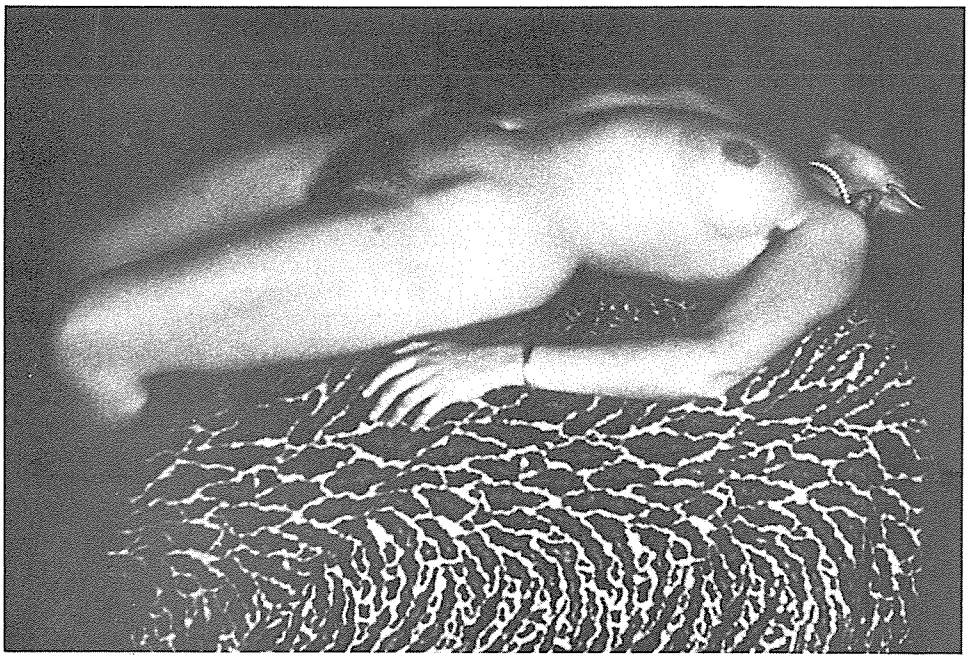
aware that her mental intention and the meaning of the art work/text, as read by the viewer may cease to coincide; that the art work can become disconnected from the viewing/reading. Thus whatever the overt intentions of the feminist artist, in many cases, readings of the work must often take place outside of any control they may wish to exert, in other words meaning does not reside purely in the work itself.

The artist who wishes to take up a feminist stance therefore has several options; one might be to continue the work she is doing and simply (and perhaps naively) hope that the work will read as it was intended, or to more actively limit the range of meanings available from the work. Such attempts could include addressing a specific audience and trying to ensure that the work reaches only that audience (for example woman only), or by dealing with a particular issue on which positions are already to some extent clear, and to attempt to determine the reading by taking up a very overt stance, (for example dealing with such issues as rape, incest or pornography), or by trying to limit readings in other ways through interviews, reviews and/or personal appearances.

In the case of Carole Shepheard's etching *Joyce's Lilies*, (1983), part of a series titled *Body Covers*, a statement by the artist was issued in conjunction with her Auckland exhibition. Shepheard states (and I quote her at length):

> *The linking of the organic elements were chosen in a tactile/visual way with personal associations made at all times. The overall feeling of a positive attitude towards the female form, enabled me to expose the 'human-ness' of the models, and give them importance as individual woman rather than the exploited 'life-model' stereotype. I also chose to use 'models' whose bodies resembled many woman I know, and therefore gave some ease to the somewhat dubious area of body exposure that is constantly being misused and exploited (Shepheard, 'Artists' Statement', Portfolio Gallery, March 1984)*

In **Body Covers** Shepheard attempts to undermine/deconstruct dominant forms of representation of the female nude, and intervenes as a feminist in the politics of pleasure. By contrast Peryer, in *Anne Noble — Easter,* operates within 'historically reinforced codes of male gratification as a privileged user of the language of his culture (Parker and Pollock, *Old Mistresses,* 1981 : 16). Shepheard notes in her gallery statement that identification and acknowledgement of female experience are important aspects of her feminist art, and although difficult she says 'to interpret, because of the damage of the past in areas of paintings of women, there is need to explore more fully the strength women have now in themselves, their bodies, and their lives.' This type of work she sees as a 'positive attempt to ensure that women are recorded accurately in art-history, as they honestly are, rather than as *some* might wish them to be.' ('Artist's statement,' 1983). Shepheard refuses to name our oppressors, but we must name to overcome, and whether the male artist acknowledges or refutes his mastery he continues, needless — to say, to be 'warmly received,' as Craig Owen has said, 'by a society unwilling to admit that it has been driven from its position of centrality; their is an official art which like the culture that produced it, has yet to come to terms with its own impoverishment.' (*The Anti-Aesthetic,* 'Feminists and Postmodernism,' 1981 : 67)



Peter Peryer. Anne Noble. Easter 1979.

Carole Shepheard. Joyce's Lilies 1983.

Merylyn Tweedie
(revised version April 1986)

Note: *Merylyn Tweedie is a graduate in Fine Arts from Canterbury University. She is a practising artist and simultaneously studying Art History and attending Elam School of Fine Arts on a part-time basis.*

REMISSIONS: TOWARD A DECONSTRUCTION OF PHALLIC UNIVOCALITY

This is the first of two essays which argue in favour of the need for a deconstruction of that unitary viewpoint based on masculine privilege: phallic univocality. In the second essay I intent to proceed further in developing the theoretical issues introduced in this essay and to extend these through readings of specific experimental artworks, in which the human body begins to be dephallocentrised and connected, instead, to the natural environment.

My concern in this essay is to outline the contribution of theory to feminist art practice and its reception.

Since my intention is to be provocative, I will begin with the assertion, that in New Zealand up to this date art criticism — both non-feminist and feminist — has ignored the crucial question of subjectivity, as constituted by historical and social factors.

I will be arguing that the process of addressing this question demonstrates the need to implement a project for feminist theory as an enterprise which attempts to disrupt dominant discourses in culture. Such a project would — through an examination of the diverse factors which determine artistic production itself, and the repression of women through these determinants — aim to transform the way art is used and perceived. Specifically, I will be arguing for the need to locate feminist politics within a revaluation of art as a social practice; a revaluation which must examine how 'femininity' is determined as an ideological construct.

The issue of sexual 'difference' is central to feminist theory. Any theorization of the process by which women grapple toward a self-conception revolves around the problem of thinking outside the patriarchally determined dichotomies — Same/Other, Subject/Object, that is to say, 'Masculine'/'Feminine' — identified as the basis of western culture by Simone de Beauvoir 36 years ago. The domination by men of women which continues in advanced western cultures today, is not effected by force (in general) but more insidiously through the creation of consent, by means of an elaborate apparatus of binary oppositions.

In the words of Hélène Cixous:

"the complete set of symbolic systems — everything said, everything organised as discourse — art, religion, family, language — everything that seizes us everything that forms us — everything is organised on the basis of hierarchical oppositions, which come back to the opposition man/woman".[1]

The pivotal question for any feminist theory attempting to include women as an active subject is whether we want to reorganise the relationship of difference to one of "sameness", through a dialectics of valorisation, or whether we want to subvert the over-determined saturated metaphors of binary oppositions which organise our perceptions.

In the initial phases of feminist inquiry into the vexed issue of difference, the pendulum swung between "same as" and "different from". The radical critiques undertaken by American feminists — notably, Kate Millet and Elizabeth Janeway — used the concepts of sex-role stereotyping to argue that biological sex is not co-extensive with social gender; that gender is an acquired facet of social life produced through societal conditioning and re-inforced through social pressure. The belief that deemphasising sexual difference would remove a major obstacle to women's participation in cultural and political life, reached its most extreme form in Shulamith Firestone's critique in which she attempted to abolish even the mammalian function performed by women as childbearers.

In the recent evolutions of feminist inquiry, however, there has been a shift to what Gerda Lerner calls the "woman centred analysis", with its increased willingness to challenge the old naming of difference by the privileged, with a reclaiming of difference. That is to say, the woman centred perspective examines the meaning of difference in terms of its value TO WOMEN.

The new french feminisms — echoes of which have not yet resounded in New Zealand art criticism — posit difference as a problematic with a subversive potential. Both their perspective and methodology are disconnected from the empirical, sociological approach of American feminisms. Whereas American feminists focus upon the OPPRESSION of woman as sexual identity (in a prescription for pragmatic action to rebalance inequality), the new french feminists analyse the REPRESSION of women as difference and alterity within western signifying practises.

As we know the French are passionate for theory. And the most revolutionizing texts of the new french feminists are by women of letters. Inspired by a Marxist anti-bourgeois tradition, skilled in dialectical argumentation, they employ a combination of semiotic, philosophic and psychoanalytic concepts to examine the sexual subject's inscription in culture through language. Not afraid to appropriate concepts for their own purpose from such seminal male thinkers as Saussure, Freud, Lacan and Derrida, they combine theory with a subjectivism which confounds the protocols of patriarchal, academic discourse. For, as Elaine Marks says: ▶

"Their tradition, resolutely atheistic loudly proclaims the death of God, the death of man, the death of the privileged work of art. It concentrates on the act of reading and writing as subversive political." [2]

Underlying new french feminisms is the post-structuralist premise, that the world is experienced phenomenologically as a vast text encompassing all human symbolic systems. And they utilise this premise to argue that throughout western history the text — or, logos — has been based on a binary structure of culturally determined oppositions, that is to say, 'masculine' and 'feminine'. The strongest voices among the french feminists — Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva — argue that women's repression is embedded in the foundations of the text — in the complex linguistic and logical processes that produce meaning. So that what we perceive as the 'real' becomes merely a manifestation of the symbolic order as constituted to privilege men. Only by deconstructing[3] this phallogocentrism, can we transform the 'real' in a fundamental way.

In the words of Hélène Cixous:

"the logocentric project has always undeniably existed to found phallocentrism, to insure for masculine order a rationale equal to history itself" [4]

They argue that within the phallocentric order woman receives an illusory recognition. She IS but she IS NOT — except insofar as she exists as man's opposite, HIS other and not as otherness in HER own right. She is HIS repressed, trapped in the cycle of HIS representations. She exists merely as a reflection of HIS claims to knowledge, of HIS interpretation of her body and her sexuality. A reproduction merely, reflecting back to him a vision of HIS masculine privilege; she is designated through absence: minus phallus = minus power, minus authenticity.

The politics of repression is, in the words of Josette Féral:

"founded upon the negation of her difference, upon her exclusion from knowledge and from herself" [5]

By being subjected to a principle of Identity conceived wholly as masculine (signified by the phallus), woman exists as a function of what she is not. She is caught between, what Kristeva calls the "not that" and the "not yet". [6]

The most revolutionary dimension of the new french feminisms lies in their insistence upon the specifity of feminine unconscious, which they locate as the central focus of struggle against women's repression. As Féral elaborates:

"woman's unconscious is "the noise" in the system, the defect. It is a surplus which patriarchal society has always wanted to get rid of by denying it any specifity, thus positing the same society's right to talk about it in terms of identity with and resemblance to the male model." [7]

Their examination of the unconscious differs from the canonical Freudian formulation of the unconscious, which could only unlease the already spoken stories — since it has been constituted by the repressed in culture. Instead they insist upon the release of an unspoken feminine unconscious, freed from cultural constraints. And they argue that this unconscious must inform the genuinely political feminine text. In Cixous' words:

"that level of the unconscious is always reshaped by the forceful return of a libido which is not so easily controlled and by the singular, by the non-cultural by a language which is savage and which can certainly be heard." [8]

In various ways, they call for the creation of a specifically women's language and writing, informed by the feminine unconscious, to speak the female body through the cracks in the syntax, semantics and logic of male language. Such "writing-in-the-feminine" ("l'ecriture feminine") would forge an anti-logos weapon for reappropriating the female body which man has confiscated as his property. As Cixous says:

"Let her speak of her sexuality and God knows she has enough to say, in such a way that she manages to unblock female and male sexuality, and to "dephallocentrise' the body, deliver man from his phallus." [9]

Alright, so to return to my initial assertion that New Zealand art criticism ignores the question of the socio-historic determinants of subjectivity. I suggest that the major contribution french deconstructivist theory — and I include here male theorists who have addressed the 'woman question', namely, Lacan, Derrida, Lyotard and Granoff — offers art criticism, it that it demonstrates that the human subject is not a DISCRETE self, but a COMPOUND and that it cannot be known without examining the ideological formulations of patriarchy.

New Zealand art criticism — with the notable exception of Pound's 'Frames on the Land' argument — still operates largely within a modernist tradition insofar as it approaches the artwork as an autonomous entity, applying to its formalist analyses of stylistic and thematic qualities. This approach fails to acknowledge the complexities of authorship and of audience reception as they are constituted outside the artwork, by sets of social relations deriving from ideological determinants. Through this omission, New Zealand art criticism consistently fails to locate art as a social practice and fails to recognise the subversive potential within criticism itself. I would go so far as to name this omission a HEDONISM, since by avoiding the interrelations obtaining between art, subject and their historical conjunction, criticism can only hope to provide entertainment. [10]

Whatever position criticism adopts contains its own affiliations and historical agendas, even IF these are not made explicit, or if the critic is ignorant of them — as most New Zealand critics are. The formalist approach simply plays into the lap of the status-quo, by preserving art as a marginal activity, as though it had no momentum to contribute to social practices.

Feminist art criticism in New Zealand to date, also operates largely within a modernist tradition of stylistic analysis, although there have been attempts to identify various stylistic features as recurrent motifs in women's art and to relate these to societal conditions within which women make artwork. And to this extent a break HAS been made with the modernist conception of the autonomy of art.

The approach is, of course, empirical since it is based on observations only. And unfortunately it has sometimes been elaborated into an inhibitive form of prescriptivism, which advocates the use of certain stylistic devices and subject matter as though these were more genuine expressions for women. Even if an exhaustive inventory of features occurring in women's art were compiled and compared with those occurring in men's art, that still could NOT establish these as more "genuine" expressions for women. What we would find from such a patrist pursuit would be symptomatic expressions of historically determined difference. Any inference from such contingent symptoms without an examination of their origins (within the ideological formulations of patriarchy) is simply untenable.

And I would urge that every precaution must be made against the 'erection' of a feminist imperialism which merely mouths slogans to legislate the "right" way to package a so-called 'female' product. (I voice this objection in full awareness of the predictable counter-objection that I am splintering a — fictitious — "solidarity" within women's art practice. That no unified purpose exists among women artists in New Zealand is a fact, obvious to the least informed. That a hegemony exists among a vocal spokesgroup, is perhaps obvious, but not readily challenged — such being the partisanship of meek liberalism).

Where the french feminists' advocation that women draw from a feminine unconscious differs enormously from this simplistic prescriptivism, is that they provide analytic tools for examining psychological experience, to distinguish what is culturally determined as internalisation of repression from the unexplored areas deriving from an

uncoded libido. They certainly do not predefine the expressive form this would take which — after all — would contradict the argument that the feminine unconscious is a not-yet explored terrain. [11]

New Zealand empirical, prescriptive feminism fails to distinguish the psychological experience of internalised repression. And from work I have seen the stylistic features and themes which are fatuously applauded as somehow "genuinely female" are — ironically — symptomatic of those very internalisations. (I am referring here to small scale, preoccupation with detail and domesticity and fragmentation). There is no remaining need for the art phallocracy to exclude art by women, when women themselves presume to legislate for one another a prescription which is symptomatic of repression.

On the positive side, feminist critics have reviewed more women's artwork. Nevertheless, by using the thematic and stylistic tools acquired from the patriarchs. Such pragmatic actions for women's inclusion WITHIN the phallocentric order is highly dubious when there is complicity with its terms. Indeed, the very notion of "promoting" an artist is a very phallic notion. And it would appear that women's art is HOMOgenized (formed into HIS genus?) to be impaled on the phallic pedestal.

This is to distort the purpose of much women's art which attempts to transform the dominant (phallocentric) order with an 'other' perspective.

Given the inherent dangers of co-option with the recent upsurge of token-feminist sympathy by self-consciously styled 'liberal' male critics, who extend their paternalistic tolerance to feminist art issues (in some cases after years of flagrant disinterest), the role of the feminist critic is in serious need of clarification. The extension of masculine ordering to accommodate a position for women is — after all — so very MISSIONARY. Perhaps it should be argued, as Gayatri Spivak advocates, that feminist critics:

> *"produce useful and scrupulously FAKE readings in place of the passively active fake orgasm"* [12]

(Indeed, the premature rush by male critics at the 'New Zealand Critics Conference' — in which this paper was presented — to emit their sudden tolerance on feminist issues in the session which preceded the panel of women speakers on feminism, gives substance to this view. Within this repressive tolerance timing is, after all, masculine privilege. Need feminists STILL fake appreciation at being consigned to follow after masculine perogative? Perhaps we should question, instead, how long they can keep it UP?).

Again, on the positive side, feminist critics have emphasized the value of giving expression to women's personal experience. But I want to argue that a radical reconceptualisation of the personal to include socio-historic determinants and unconscious aspects, makes a more theoretical approach to personal experience necessary. That the personal simply cannot be left at the level of the experiential only, if any real TRANSFORMATION of the structures of women's repression is to occur — which I locate as the goal of feminist art practice and criticism.

The personal is not political, when, as Martha Rosler expressed it:

> *"attention narrows to the privileged tinkering with, or attention to one's solely private sphere, divorced from any collective struggle or publicly conjoined act and simply names the personal practice as political. For art this can mean doing work that looks like art has always looked, that challenges little, but about which one asserts that it is valid because it was done by a woman."* [13]

To emphasize the need for a point of intersection between theory and practice, I want to briefly characterize four categories of women's art in New Zealand in terms of their unexamined presuppositions.

The first category is what I will call the 'Chicago — Lippard school of "shared-imagery" art', which emphasizes vaginal forms and menstruation and employs certain stylistic devises — pastel colours, soft materials and flowers. In this context Lippard's 'From the Centre' has become analogous to the Edmonds cookbook, as a recipe for how to make a so-called feminist artwork. Alright, so it is derivative and dated and in my opinion always was grossly unsuccessful. But what I want to emphasize is that it is based on essentialist thinking which poses differences between men and women as innate and irreducible.

These artists simply reverse the valuations attributed to each sex, to elevate an "essential female" and through this simple reversion attempt to encourage women's self-esteem through new prestige attached to women's biology.

The error of such a-historical views on women is, as Adrienne Rich says:

> *"we cannot ever know what is truly male or female"* [14]

which when stated emphatically sounds so self-evident as to be banal — except that it is not self-evident within certain New Zealand feminist circles. While I do not deny the importance of biological difference by any means, I certainly would refute claims that biological experiences are UNMODIFIED through socio-historical factors (one need only consider the strikingly different experience Eastern women have of childbirth, for example, or even of our own grandmother's experience of menstruation, when it was considered a "curse" and not the highpoint in female sexual cycle). The problem — and the challenge — is to extricate the influences of biology from ways it has been culturally coded within patriarchy.

This category of vaginal art, by singling out and focussing upon the very organ which is the favoured site for the patriarchal inscriptions which created women's repression CONFORMS to the powers in operation, because it employs an iconography of the body which does not disrupt phallocentric significations.

I want to make a fine distinction here concerned with the way the body is employed in art practice, since I am of the opinion expounded by Derrida and by the French feminists, that woman's body can be the privileged site from which to deconstruct phallocentric thinking. However, this requires that the female body is employed in such a way as to disrupt the restrictive symbolic order, by introducing new significations.

When the french feminists advocate "writing the body", they are not presupposing crude biological reductivism (which lies at the basis of the "shared imagery" school), but instead referring to instinctual desires and drives which are also linked to their concept of a feminine unconscious.

I am personally committed to the view that ALL good art — by men or women — is OF the body. And I would locate the major obstacle for women artists as that of finding free access to a body which has been colonised for them, through patriarchal cultural coding. Because art is open to multiple interpretations the associations produced through the old patriarchal ideologies are extremely persistent. Often the significations of signifiers — particularly if the signifier relates to the female body — are not perceived, or they are confused. An example here would be Carolee Schneeman, of course, who attempted to reclaim an area of female eroticism for women, but inadvertently, through the relentlessness of the phallocentric order, evoked a voyeuristic male response. And to give a New Zealand example, which illustrates Cixous' argument that the male body must also be dephallocentrised, would be John Cousins' 'Membrane' performance work, in which the penis acted as a signifier for natural transformation processes, but was mis-interpreted — and by feminists — as a phallus. Obviously, the penis and the phallus are not the same — one expects this degree of perception and literacy at very least.

A final objection I want to make against this vaginal art, is that it derives from an exterior view of the body as spectacle and not from an interior experience of the body as source of desire and instinct. Nor is this art extended or transformed beyond the private, it remains at the level of naive, infantile self-acknowledgement. A kind of women's equivalent to men's ejaculatory

art (what is called 'expressionist' but is so often, more accurately, "expresso-ist"). If sticky, splurgy substances must be splashed on canvas one hopes it would be to signify something more complex and interesting than the mere fact of sperm or ovum production.

At this point I want to qualify that even Lucy Lippard herself, abandoned and explicitly rejected her early, untenable essentialist position some years ago[15]. The subsequent changes and development of her position, illustrates the importance of self-criticism and revision, which must be employed by any feminist critic who is committed to the project of feminism — rather than to creating their own orthodoxy. In addition, Lippard has attempted to extend her feminism beyond a defence of women artists, to broader environmental and socialistic concerns[16]. And in so doing, she has criticised feminist art which conforms to the dominant order, to insist that it is only when feminist art expresses "different values" that it will communicate to a wider audience[17]. Against the background of the progression of her feminist thinking, the cloning from her initial — long superceded — essentialist position which continues in New Zealand today, serves as pathetic indictment of the lack of critical vigor, which characterizes feminist art thinking — just as it characterizes most other areas of the New Zealand artworld.

The second category of feminist art I want to characterize deals with a glorification of a matrilineal and sometimes mythical female past. Often expressed collaboratively, it includes wiccean moon dances, castles in the sand, horns, spirals, and neolithic venuses. This is what I will call the 'Merlin Stone induced school of ancient images of women'. While I do not, at all, undervaluate Merlin Stone's important contribution (by exposing the Watergate of the rise of patriarchal dominance, through the destruction and distortion of matrilineal pagan culture[18]) nevertheless, the kind of subcultural resistance groups which it has inspired and the kind of pictorial literalisms translated from it, somewhat curdle enthusiasm.

The major problem with this category of work, is that it has an aura of strained artificiality : it simply fails to engage an audience at the core of its experience. And I suggest it fails to do so because twentieth century women living in urban capitalist societies, have no direct experience of what it could be to have lived in an agrarian matrilineal culture. Such utopic projections tend to translate into palish, anemic expressions. At its' worst it constitutes an abuse of the very powerful expressions — still available to us — of these women from a culture which was based on women's strength. (One need only listen to the singing of Solomon Island women, who have still retained a matrilineal line).

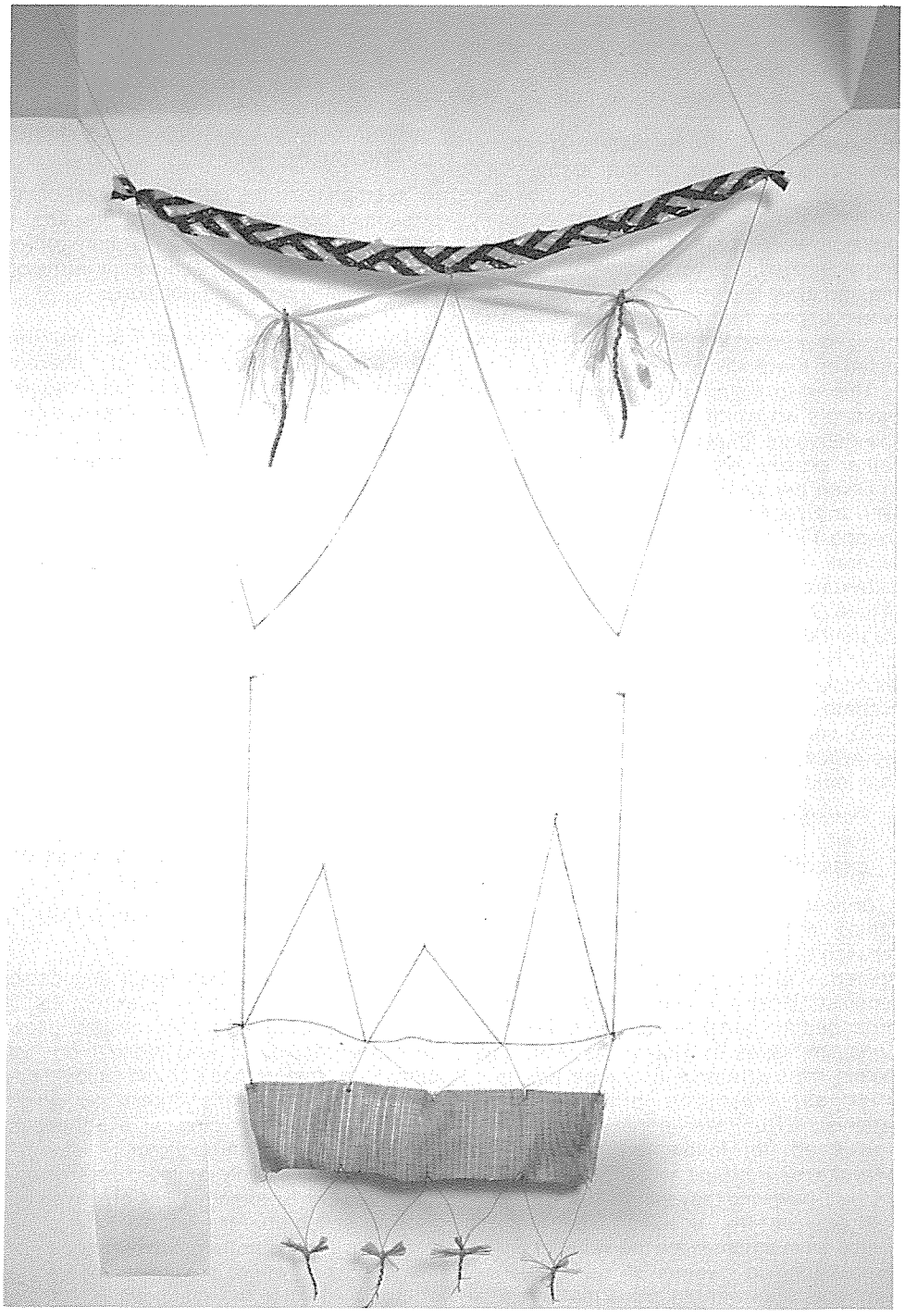
Nor does this work engage itself to the struggle to transform cultural codes which produce women's repression. Rather, it isolates itself on the margins as an alternative tradition, while compounding the patriarchal nature/culture division.

What also worries me about this work is that it idealises women as "passive", "nurturing", "peaceful" — contingent definitions only, which are provisional selections from among those produced by a phallocentric order. They relate to the inscription of women as silence. And I would urge that women's anger and assertion are very real reactions to the experience of lived oppression, which can be transformed into effective feminist art practice.

The third category I will characterize very briefly — although it includes the majority of practicing women artists in New Zealand — does not identify with, or sympathise with, the feminism prescribed here. Sometimes it is linked with statements such as "art has no gender" or — by more stringently careerist — "we are in a post-feminist era" (another patriarchal myth). But most often, it involves a sense of uncertainty about the relevance of gender to art.

Art most certainly does have gender in-

Jacqueline Fraser Untitled (for Peter McLeavey 1985).



sofar as its authors are inextricably effected by patriarchal ideologies — which constitute the pre- 'Text', from which signifiers are drawn. And a "post-feminist" era could hardly have begun when women have yet to re-define themselves against the old binary oppositions. Nevertheless, beneath these slogans is a more important indication of the impatience and embarrassment which marks the reaction of many women artists to fundamentalist feminism. Crudely exhibitionist vaginas and wimpish wiccean dances may satisfy the needs of 'born-again' women, born out of binary definitions; but they simply do not relate to the needs of women who have escaped retrenchment within binary thinking — though they may not yet have a coherent insight of a future direction.

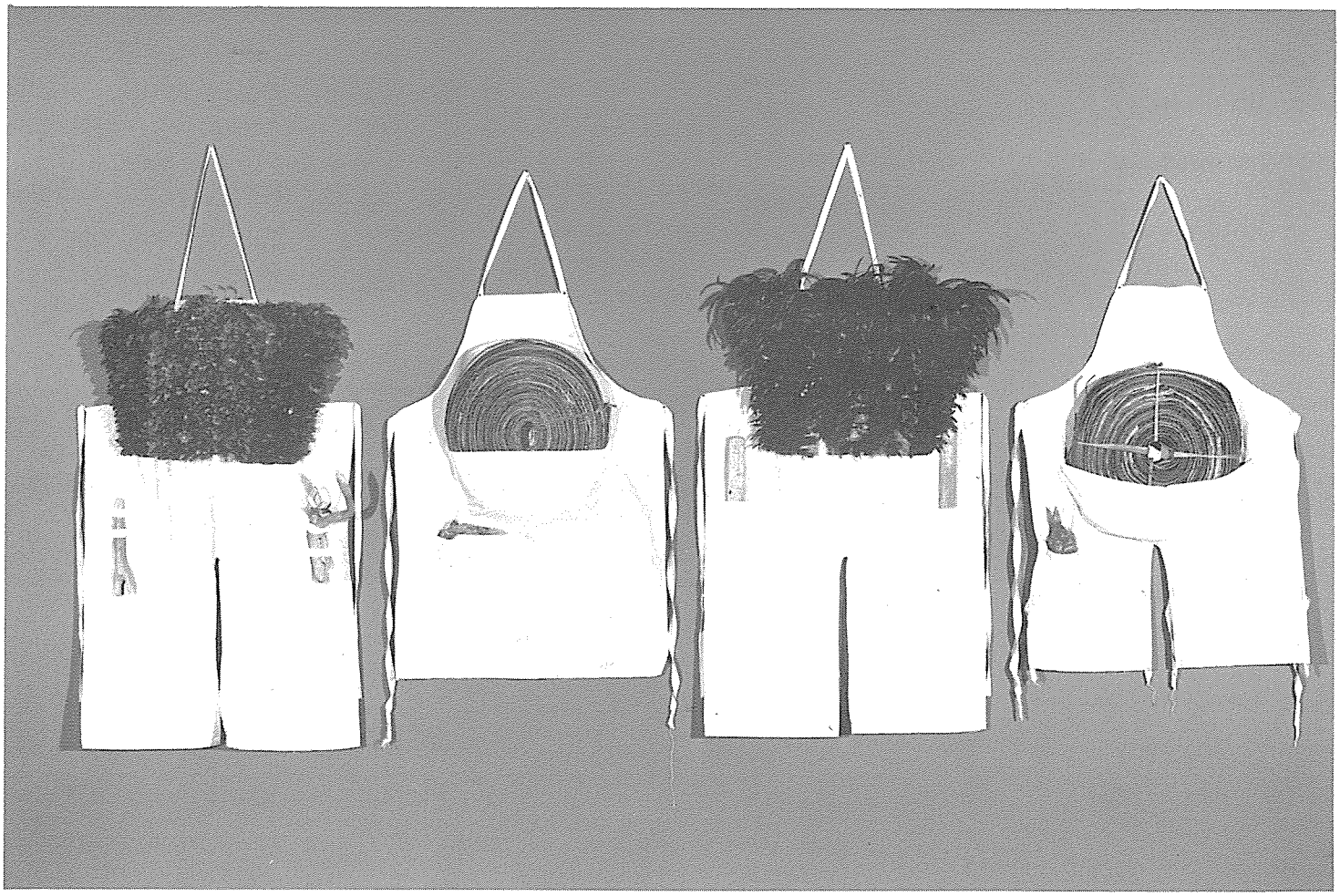
Women within this third category attempt in various ways, to negotiate with mainstream forms of art. And with varying degrees of success — since these forms are based on masculine praxis, to express different experience, given the different relations of men to socio-historic structures. By not fully understanding how their work is embedded in a cultural context and how they themselves are situated and formed by it, these women cannot assume full responsibility as 'Subject' of their work. I would suggest, that greater success has been attained by those women who have, nevertheless, managed to infuse some of their feminities within these forms — but an elaboration of this, would be a complete paper.

Overlapping, this category is a fourth category of artists who also do not identify with the feminism prescribed here, but who — in addition — do not relate to masculine praxis. Instead they work intuitively (as distinct from critically) from their PHYSICAL experience as Antipodean women, to the natural environment. To date, I consider this group to produce the strongest women's art in New Zealand, and I will give examples (since I am being positive) of Jacqueline Fraser, Christine Hellyar and Pauline Rhodes. Their selection of materials, construction methods and scale relate directly to their own physical experience so that the significations of their work, are very much of an Antipodean feminine body. I would suggest that it is for this reason that they are able to engage an audience at the core of its experience. I do not think it can be under-estimated that they work in an experimental way, since this provides greater freedoms to explore techniques that have not been coded, than traditional art forms can.[19]

What has not yet emerged in New Zealand is feminist work which plays upon the ambivalences inherent within the socio-historic determinants of 'femininity.' That is to say, CRITICAL feminist art, which challenges cultural codes which create women's repression. I have attempted to argue that this would require an understanding of the formation of the sexual Subject and that this is a vital intersection between theory and practice — an intersection I have tried to justify as a project for radical feminist criticism.

Before concluding there are two qualifications I want to make within my argument. Firstly, that I am not advocating a programmatic for deconstructive feminist art, but rather an intersection with theory which assists women to take responsibility as Subjects of their work. And I would add that there are dangers inherent in theory induced art IF it does not involve associative

Christine Hellyar. Pacific tool aprons. Mixed media: Calico, feathers, driftwood, plant fibre, Collection Dowse Art Museum. Photo courtesy of Glen Morris.



perception. (I myself, have been an adherent of de Beauvoir for too many years to underestimate the value of lived experience). An analogy here can be made between socialist theory and socialist realism : in which the latter (as art) often loses aesthetic power and becomes merely mechanical illustration of what is more interesting to read as theory. In this regard I am sympathetic to Marcuse' concept of "aesthetic mimesis" : namely that art's political potential lies in its aesthetic dimension.[20]

I have deliberately emphasized the notion of an 'intersection' to allow for the cross-referencing of theoretical stimuli with experiential perception. The motivation, after all, for examining the determinants of subjectivity is to study the Subject in growth — which is the area in which art operates. While art is endowed with little social power (in this particular conjunction with capitalist society) nevertheless, because it derives from an internal realm — the "imaginary" (which I use in Lacan's sense) — it can express contradictions within subjectivity more intimately than any other social context is able. While the problems involved in subjectivity apply to both men and women artists in their work, the symbolic order has very biased values to offer each sex — values which create extra difficulties for women artists. For this reason I argue for the need of a more theoretically informed feminist criticism, which is able to take account of the complications of subjectivity, in such a way as to contribute to the movement of feminist art.

Nevertheless, for the artist, as a human being living within a complex of personal relationships, there remains the need to return to the associative perception attached to these experiences.

The power of deconstructivist feminist art in the hands of Barbara Kruger, Mary Kelly and Martha Rosler, for example, is due also to a highly sophisticated level of literacy which most New Zealand women artists do not possess — and which is not encouraged through this country's art school education curriculum[21]. The intellectual woman is, after all, an OBSCENITY, within the binary oppositions: masculine = intellectual vs feminine = emotional.

And this relates to my second qualification: that New Zealand poses additional problems for the development of strong feminist art, because anti-intellectualism pervades all areas of the artworld. This is entrenched within the "modernist myth" of originality, to use Rosalind Krauss' phrase[22]. Because in New Zealand, art is mystified as personal expression, the spontaneous OVERFLOW of creativity, which in a 'Man Alone' culture is the privileged domain of rugged masculinity — rather like beer slops and other fluids which are peculiarly male.

The "master narrative"[23] is internalized as the ONE viewpoint — excluding not only women but Maori[24]. Before any radical RECONSTRUCTION enabling women's full participation in culture is possible, the primacy of this viewpoint must be deconstructed.

And I would go so far as to suggest that this requires all investigations of art to be genderised.[25] Meaning that the sex — man or woman — of artist, critic and curator is taken into account, to make explicit the different relations of the sexes to the phallic institution of 'art'. If the myth of gender neutrality is to be deconstructed, then men in ALL these positions must be challenged to take responsibility for the privileged status of their sex.

What should be obvious, is that consistent with new french feminisms, I am not advocating pragmatic action, for equality of women within the EXISTING phallocentric order — which has been the approach in New Zealand, adopted from early American empirical feminism. But rather, the SUBVERSION of that order which, by entailment, includes the subversion of the construct of 'masculinity'.

Lita Barrie

Note: *Lita Barrie is an independent researcher who has investigated feminism over a number of years from various perspectives. Her philosophical training has enabled her to develop a theoretical approach to feminism particularly in support of feminist art. She is currently working on a book on New Zealand Post Modern Art Pictures.*

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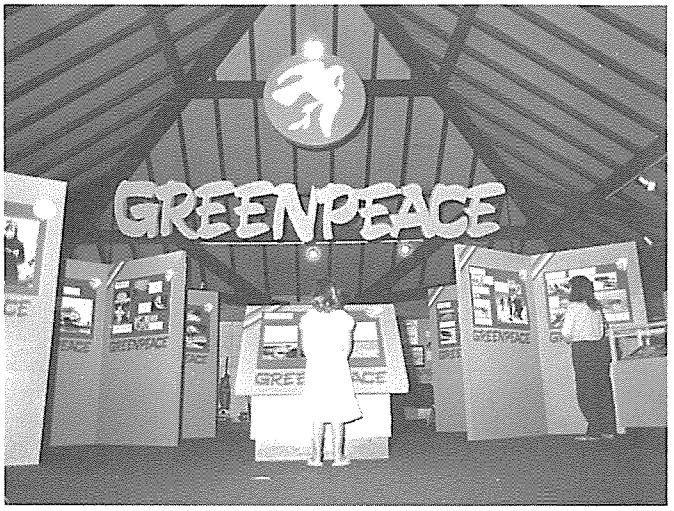
1. *Hélène Cixous, "Le Sexe ou la tete?" in LES CAHIERS DU GRIF 13 (October 1976) p7.*
2. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds NEW FRENCH FEMINISMS (Harvester Univ. Press, 1981) *p1.*
3. *'Deconstruction' is an activity of duplicit reading and writing which uses texts against their professed aims. In the critical project of its major exponent, Derrida, this methodology is employed to challenge the dominance of logocentric concepts and values within texts As Christopher Norris elaborates: "Deconstruction is avowedly post-structuralist in its refusal to accept the idea of structure as in any sense given or objectively 'there' in a text . . . (it) . . . starts out by rigorously suspending this assumed correspondence between mind, meaning and the concept of method which claims to unite them." in DECONSTRUCTION: THEORY AND PRACTICE,* (Methuen 1982) *p3.*
4. *Quoted in Elaine Marks "Women and Literature in France" in SIGNS: JOURNAL OF WOMEN IN CULTURE AND SOCIETY 3:4* (Summer 1978) *841.*
5. *Josette Féral, "The Powers of Difference" in THE FUTURE OF DIFFERENCE eds Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine* (Rutgers, Univ. Press, 1985)
6. *Julia Kristeva deconstructs the western concept of the subject as an organic, consistent identity. She argues that woman is lost on the fringe that separates the "pas encore" (not yet) from the "pas cela" (not that). See POLYLOGUES* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1977) *also "La femme ce n'est jamais ca" in TEL QUEL* (Autumn 1974) *a translation of which appears in NEW FRENCH FEMINISMS.*
7. *THE FUTURE OF DIFFERENCE p80.*
8. *LES CAHIERS DU GRIF 13 p13.*
9. *ibid p12.*
10. *The subversive political possibilities of criticism are powerfully articulated by Edward Said in THE WORD, THE TEXT AND THE CRITIC* (Harvard Univ. Press, 1983). *In "Opponents, Audiences, Constituences" Said argues: ". . . no one writes for oneself. There is always an Other and this Other willy-nilly turns interpretation into a social activity, albeit with unforeseen consequences, audiences constituences and so on. And, I would add, interpretation is the work of intellectuals a class badly in need today of moral rehabilitation" in THE ANTI-AESTHETIC* (Bay Press, 1983) *p137.*
11. *Luce Irigaray expounds the world in expansion which lies ahead for women. In "Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Minuit 1977) *a transmission of which appears in NEW FRENCH FEMINISMS, Irigaray uses Lewis Caroll's Alice as a symbol of woman's exploration in a new wonderland. By casting the looking glass upon the concepts which confine women the text emerges into the domain of speech which is freed of guilt from the old patriarchal taboos. And in the final play on "levres" — lips and labia — denies the separation produced through the dichotomy of self and other.*
12. *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Displacement and the Discourse of women" in DISPLACEMENT: DERRIDA AND AFTER ed Mark Krupnick* (Indiana Univ. Press, 1983) *p186.*
13. *Martha Rosler, statement made in a discussion "Is the Personal Political?" ICA 1980, quoted in WOMEN'S IMAGES OF MEN eds. Sarah Kent and Jacqueline Morreau* (Writers and Readers, 1985) *p178.*
14. *Adrienne Rich, in OH LIES SECRET AND SILENCES* (London 1980) *p78.*
15. *Lucy Lippard "Issue and Taboo", introduction ISSUE: SOCIAL STRATEGIES BY WOMAN ARTISTS* (ICA Catalogue to exhibition, 1980).
16. *See Lucy Lippard, OVERLAY* (Pantheon, 1983). *for the extension of feminist concerns to environmental issues. See GET THE MESSAGE? A DECADE OF ART FOR SOCIAL CHANGE* (E.P. Dutton, 1984) *for the extension of feminist concerns to socialist concerns.*
17. *GET THE MESSAGE? A DECADE OF ART FOR SOCIAL CHANGE. In particular, "The Dilemma" p34 and "The third Power: Feminism, Art and Class Consciousness" p115, p150, p152.*
18. *Merlin Stone, THE PARADISE PAPERS* (Virago, 1979).
19. *My conception of an Antipodean feminine body will be elaborated further through readings of specific works in the sequel essay.*

20. *For an interesting application of Marcuse' conception of the political potential of art, see Peter Fuller "Abstraction and the Potential Space" in ART AND PSYCHOANALYSIS* (Writers and Readers, 1980) *and "Aesthetics and nuclear Anaesthesia" in the NAKED ARTIST* (Writers and Readers, 1983).
21. *The lack of inclusion of theoretical studies in New Zealand art schools, is an omission peculiar to this country's notion of what constitutes art education. For women art students this omission is particularly retarding, when what is provided is, in effect, practices for implementing a masculine praxis.*
22. *Rosalind Krauss, THE ORIGINALITY OF THE AVANT GARDE AND OTHER MODERNIST MYTHS* (MIT Press, 1985).
23. *Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism" in THE ANTI-AESTHETIC* (Bay Press, 1983) *uses this phrase as a translation of Lyotard's "grand récrits", the icons of cultural authority, which are now being challenged with the narratives of 'others' (women and disenfrancised peoples).*
24. *'Ethnocentrism', like 'phallocentrism' is a product of the unitary white western masculine viewpoint, which conceives itself as the 'One', the identity principle, from which the non-white like women, becomes HIS 'other'. That is to say constructed in His image. The most extensive critical study of the inter-relations of these forms of 'centrism' which secure masculine dominance has been by Gayatri Spivak. Her work is particularly relevant to the New Zealand situation, in which the "master narrative" represses the non-white narrative, just as it represses women.*
25. *By insisting upon the genderising of investigations of art, I am to some extent following Gisela Ecker's suggestion. See "Introduction" to FEMINIST AESTHETICS* (The Women's Press, 1985).

GREENPEACE AT PORIRUA



Porirua Museum recently held an exhibition that featured the Greenpeace organisation. The display looked at the targets of the group, namely chemical pollution, nuclear wastes and threatened species and documented through photographs, text and video the resources of and the actions taken by Greenpeace over the last 17 years.

Why Greenpeace? Yes the question has been asked as to why the Porirua Museum should feature an exhibition about a group of people that have been called environmental agitators. Maybe a community museum should be concentrating its efforts on topics of a more local nature.

Before trying to justify or explain the reasons behind the decision to hold this exhibition we need to consider a wider issue. Should museums only concern themselves with matters relating to objects within and relevant to their collections? Of course not. Surely museums are also responsible for the documentation of history as it occurs, be it through their collections (especially photographic collections) or their display programmes.

Often social and political events, although widely covered by the media, are ignored by institutions such as museums, and yet when researching material to assist with the interpretation of a display we are often confronted with a lack of adequate information.

Modern-day changes, including social comment need to be recorded. Memories of older generations need to be documented but in addition to this is the need to record the efforts of conservation, not just of artifacts within museum walls but the conservation of our environment and the threatened species within it.

A three-man team has recently travelled to the Antarctica to carry out conservation work on Borchgrevink's Hut at Cape Adare. Several weeks earlier Greenpeace attempted to establish a base camp on the ice in the hope that their actions would ultimately help conserve the natural environment of the Antarctica. Were the principles behind these two expeditions so different?

The Porirua Museum presents a varied programme of feature exhibitions each year. Most topics fall into the categories of local history, general interest, Maori culture, and natural history/environment.

Despite widespread media coverage of the 'Rainbow Warrior' affair, it was felt that few people were really aware of who the Greenpeace group were and what they represented. It was decided that a display featuring such a group would fit easily into the natural history/environmental slot.

With school exams and pre-Xmas shopping, December visitor statistics tended to be low. It was hoped that the opening of the Greenpeace display planned to coincide with the trial of the French Agents accused of being involved in the Rainbow Warrior bombing, would attract a high degree of media coverage. The agents subsequent plea of 'guilty' threatened to sabotage this strategy. Despite the 'no trial' situation the public were interested. The support that the exhibition generated exceeded all expectations. Attendances over the period of the display broke all records.

Why Greenpeace? For people who visited the exhibition the answer was obvious. The subject was provocative, in some cases the photographic material was disturbing. People realised that what they were seeing actually concerned them.

Some museums can be guilty of a too conservative approach to exhibition programmes and interpretation.

In this age when we are competing against home videos and computer games we must present to the public interesting, unusual, PROVOCATIVE displays and exhibitions.

The rewards will be a stimulated public that will respond to such efforts and support future programmes with their attendance.

Bob Maysmor
Director Porirua Museum

EUROCENTRISM IN A PERSPEX BOX

At the basis of the art gallery is the myth of 'art' as a universal, a-historic category. The edifice of the modernist agenda which legislated a prescription for art's autonomy from social and political conditions. It is the archive of modernism.

The site for the modernist conception of 'art history' as a linear progression of stylistic innovations divorced from the socio-historic contingencies in which human beings express themselves. It is the instrument of modernism's deceptions. The reverential fiction of its false normativity.

Under the confrontation of the radical critiques of post-modern relativism the demise of the modernist conception of art's autonomy is immanent. And with its demise, the future of the art gallery becomes precarious. It is now the battle-site upon which opposing ideologies converge.

Its foundations based on claims to authority which are now being challenged. Its future would require a radical transformation of those claims. Its foreclosure would be the inevitability of its retention of that questionable authority.

The authority it legislates is vested in its constituent subject. That is a white, western, masculine subject which forms the unitary viewpoint from which the modernist conception of 'art' is constructed. A unitary viewpoint whose modes of discourse extend to the construction of the 'other' — the non-white and non-masculine — as the negation of itself.

Its procedures for supposedly representing the 'other' being defined through reference to itself, as the negative counterpart of itself are, in fact, modes of SELF-representation. Since these modes of representing the 'other' — as the "dark", the "mysterious", the "exotic" the "savage" and the "irrational" — serve as an inverted mirror for reflecting back its privilege as the knowing subject. They simply do not represent the 'other' in terms of its own difference — as otherness in its own right. But as otherness which inflates the western, masculine subject's self-image.

The art gallery is the great homogenizing principle within this "master narrative"[1] of the western, masculine subject. The site for the narrative of its own mastery over all that stands in relation of 'otherness' to its unitary, subjective viewpoint. The site of the narrative which secures the dubious right to homogenize all difference — including that which finds expression in the artefacts of the non-white and non-masculine — into its own totalizing schema what it calls: 'art history'.

This unitary centredness is the basis of the inverted forms of discourse — the '-centrisms' — represented by the "master narrative" of western imperialism. Namely, anthropocentrism, phallocentrism and eurocentrism. It is the latter form which I will discuss in this paper, in relation to the dilemma of the art gallery in the post-modern era.

Jean Francois Lyotard proposes that:

> *"post modern knowledge is not simply an instrument of power. It refines our sensitivity to difference and increases out tolerance of incommensurability".*[2]

The dilemma of the art-gallery in the post-modern era is to create a space for this "incommensurability". That is to say, a space in which the differences and specifities of 'other' narratives can be presented in terms of their own viewpoint.

But to acknowledge this difference is to accept cultural relativism, which entails the abandonment of the cherished modernist conception of the universality of aesthetic form. In this way the art gallery is trapped within the contradictions of the cross-currents of its cultural condition. It is based on a principle of similitude which denies the specifities of cultural difference in a period which demands that this heterogeneity is acknowledged.

In the words of Paul Ricoeur:

> *"when we discover that there are several cultures instead of just one and consequently at the time when we acknowledge the end of a sort of cultural monopoly be it illusory or real, we are threatened with the destruction of our own discovery. Suddenly it becomes possible that there are just OTHERS that we ourselves are an "other" among others."*[3]

The autonomy and universality which modernist theories attributed to aesthetic forms over and above their originating circumstances is undermined. What is at stake for the art gallery is that it must renegotiate its position in relation to the objects it contains. It must somehow allow them to speak their different viewpoint. Since any curatorship which fails to take into account the problems posed by cultural difference will be, within a eurocentric order, a reflection of eurocentric privilege and domination.

Creating a space for incommensurability within the walls of the institution which has been pre-defined to create an ambiance in which objects can be viewed "disinterestedly"[4] purely in terms of their aesthetic qualities (since this is the modernist canon of aesthetic appreciation) raises uncomfortable questions for the gallery curator. The gallery space which accorded with modernist ideals, as a supposedly neutral space, is now seen to carry the weight of eurocentric privilege. To view ob-

jects from other cultures purely in terms of their formal aesthetic qualities is to deny the intentionality proper to those objects. Since these objects were not made to be viewed in this way. They simply were not made to be seen in galleries.

The problem faced by the gallery curator is to somehow contextualize the objects from different cultures, within their original intentions. They simply cannot be displaced from their origins into a eurocentric context and left anonymous for aesthetic connoisseurship. This would be a form of what Herbert Marcuse defined as "repressive tolerance". The most insidious form of co-option. And the spectatorship of these objects, within a eurocentric perspective, would be the grossest form of voyeurism.

The dilemma of the art gallery attempting to present objects from different cultures, has been highlighted by the debate between Thomas McEvilley and William Rubin which developed from the Museum of Modern Art's 'Primitism in Twentieth Art' exhibition. The debate, which spanned the letter pages of 'Artforum' during 1984 and '85, ephasizes the ethical issues involved in any exhibition of the artefacts of different cultures in the context of western imperialism.

McEvilley's criticism that the MoMa:

> *"pretends to confront the Third world while really co-opting it and using it to consolidate western notions of quality and feelings of superiority".*[5]

is a resonating warning of the problems confronted by the New Zealand curator in the context of the colonisation of polynesian culture.

McEvilley's argument is based on a distinction he draws between viewing an object from the position of an outside observor (the 'etic' viewpoint) and viewing an object from the viewpoint of its maker (the 'emic' viewpoint) And he argues that the MoMa by not providing anthropological information and dates for tribal objects fails to give the:

> *"emic or inside sense of what primitive esthetics really are or were".*[6]

That these objects are not seen in the context of their religious and social purposes but are, instead, mis-appropriated into a formalist, modernist conception of aesthetic value.

Michael Newman, furthered the debate on the ethical issue raised by the exhibition by insisting that an exhibition dealing responsibly with 'primitivism' must:

> *"reflect on the conditions for its own appearance"*[7]

that is to say, to problematize the modernist view of what he described as:

> *"the primary of the visual, the universal, transcendental category of 'art' "*[8]

It is against the background of this debate on the MoMa's 'Primitivism' exhibition that I want to consider 'In the Eye of the Sun' and 'Oro del Peru'. Firstly, by considering whether these exhibitions contextualize the artefacts from the emic/inside view of their makers. Secondly, whether they contextualize the objects in such a way as to problematize the modernist view of the aesthetic autonomy on which the art gallery is based. The latter would, of course, follow from the presentation of the emic/inside viewpoint, since by admitting cultural relativity within the gallery's walls, the fiction of its neutrality would be exposed as a eurocentric construction.

More than any other New Zealand art gallery, the Dowse under the directorship of James Mack has explicitly addressed itself to the problem of eurocentrism, by presenting a series of thematic exhibitions of Oceanic and African artefacts. Nevertheless, by juxtaposing artefacts from a number of different cultures and historic eras the unification does not appear to be the intention of those objects within their fiction it is his expressed intention to avoid.

The problem raised by 'In the Eye of the Sun' is that by incorporating objects from a number of different cultures and historic era the unification does not appear to be the intention of those objects within their various religions so much as that they are unified by being non-European. The differences between the religions of creation are not foreground, in spite of the care which has been taken to provide anthropological information for individual objects.

This problem is made visibly apparent by the presentation of the objects, encased in individual perspex cabinets. It is a revealing co-incidence that the viewer approaching the cabinets has a reflection of themself through which the objects are seen, in the background. In other words, the viewer sees the objects THROUGH a SELF-reflection. Which is, of course, a visual metaphor for the definition of eurocentrism.

The use of green velvet in the bases of the cabinets combined with their positioning on plinths, has the effect of anaesthetizing the power of the objects. The presentation has too many associations with European pristine ornamentation and display to allow the objects to speak the emotive power they would have been invested with, in their original contexts.

The problem for the curator of an exhibition of objects from different cultures is to position the viewer in a relation to the objects which facilitates an empathy with their original purposes. But that empathy will never occur when the presentation itself, recalls European associations. The objects will, in that case, be translated into the eurocentric schema: an objects for connoisseurship, as pure aesthetic form.

Because the power of their objects derives from the religions and rituals from which they derive anthropological information is vitally important. While the Dowse has been scrupulous in providing such information, the plaques on which this information is recorded appear as an appendage to the cabinets, tending to diminish into the background. They appear, as I overheard on viewer say, as "nice little stories". They are miniaturized within the largeness of the European story which the gallery signifies.

Perhaps a reverse example might be given of two forms which in the European "story" have enormous emotive power: the cross and the swastika. If both forms were displaced into a different cultural and historic period and presented in velvet lined perspex cases with little plaques outlining their origins, would their emotive power within the European context be communicated to an outsider? If they were scrutinized in terms of their appeal as aesthetic form, would their original intentions be evident? And if they were displayed TOGETHER without any differentiation of the type of emoting they evoke, would that not constitute a hideous conflation of their significations within different historic periods and countries?

The supposed unification of the creation theme of 'In the Eye of the Sun', when applied to objects from different cultures and historic periods raises such questions.

The 'Oro del Peru' exhibition at the National Art Gallery, does not raise comparable issues in terms of its curatorship, because this was undertaken by the Museo Oro del Peru, itself. Nevertheless, the corporate image presented by Fletcher Challenge reinforces the most mercantile of eurocentric values: gold. Of course, gold is a "treasure" in the eurocentric scheme. These objects were not valued by the Incas because they were made of gold, but for the purposes they served within their culture.

Once again eurocentric projections intrude between the object and the viewer, and the objects are translated into European currency. The slick commercialism of the television advertisement for the exhibition manipulates European associations as a switchboard of buzz cues: these artefacts are "gold", they are "treasures"; recalling the Spanish conquest which amplifies the paralleling misappropriative acts on which art galleries themselves are founded.

Of course, advertising is based on the manipulation of cultural associations with a knowing scepticism which serves as a chilling warning to the most well intentioned curator. Since the problem for the curator is to disrupt and dispel the unconscious associations which the advertiser exploits. It is the perversity of our cultural period that, in general, public relations agencies and multi-corporations are infinitely more adept in identifying and locating these un-

conscious associations. After all, they have a profit incentive. While the curator who takes responsibility for disrupting these unconscious associations, by that very act, undermines the authority on which the art gallery is founded.

The presentation of the Peruvian artefacts shows no effort whatsoever to disrupt European associations. It is a Stewart Dawson presentation. Dimly lit to allow the gold to flicker against the screen of eurocentric associations. The anthropological information removed from the main display area as an addendum, making no attempt to contextualize objects, individually. It serves as a cursory gloss of unrelated information, which does not situate the artefacts within their original purposes. A sheek exhibitionism of the etic/outside viewpoint.

Alright, so I have attempted to situate both exhibitions within the dilemma of the art gallery in the post-modern era. That is, in terms of the relativistic perspective I quoted from Lyotard, which

> *"refines our sensitivity to difference and increases our tolerance of incommensurability"*

And I have argued that to create a space for "incommensurability" the art gallery must contexualize objects within the emic/inside viewpoint of the maker. That by this very act, the modernist view of aesthetic autonomy would be disrupted and the authority on which the art galley is based, transformed.

In view of the criticisms I have made of both exhibitions, against the background of the complex debate between McEvilley and Rubin, the scale of the problem faced by the art gallery in what I have described as its dilemma within the post-modern era, should be obvious.

At this point I can only conclude from a very personal perspective. Because I really do not know whether the art gallery can retrieve itself from the contradictions in which it is enmeshed. Perhaps it has reached the point nearing its obsolescence and can only look to a future as a commemorative of the modernist period. And perhaps this mortality was implicit in its very foundations, for as Theodor Adorno vividly describes:

> *"The German word museal (museum-like) has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the viewer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in a process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historic respect than to the needs of the present. Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic and association. Museums are the family sepulchre of works of art"*[9]

Lita Barrie

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1. *"Master narratives" is the translation of Jean Francois Lyotard's "grand recrits". These are the discourses by which the white, western, masculine subject legitimizes its own mastering position.*
2. Jean Francois Lyotard, THE POST MODERN CONDITION translated Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester Univ. Press, 1984)
3. *Paul Ricoeur "Civilization and National Culture" in HISTORY AND TRUTH translated Chas Kelbley* (Northwestern Univ. Press, 1965)
4. *The concept of the "disinterested" nature of aesthetic judgements derives from Immanuel Kant's analysis of judgements of beauty, in THE CRITIQUE OF JUDGEMENT. His analysis is not concerned with the empirical contingencies of actual judgements but with a formulation of their normative grounds (for justifying their validity as a class of judgement). While this form of judgement may be appropriate for western modern art it is not appropriate for artefacts from different cultures whose purposes are not purely aesthetic.*
5. *Thomas McEvilley, "Doctor Lawyer India" ARTFORUM Nov. 1984* pp55-60.
6. *ibid*
7. *Michael Newman "'Primitivism' and Modern Art" ART MONTHLY May 1985,* pp6-9.
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PRESIDENTS REPORT

Presented to the AGM in Wellington.

In reporting to you at the Annual General Meeting in Napier last year, I characterised the previous year as having been a busy one, and noted that it appeared almost traditional for Presidents of the Association to describe the year just ended as being busy. This year, however, whilst having been busy, can better be described as having been difficult. Some of the difficulties have been resolved, and there is perhaps little point in dwelling on them, but there have been others which seem to me to be symptomatic of the current state of the Association and the profession. These will not easily go away, and need to be addressed by AGMANZ, and indeed by all those involved in museums in New Zealand.

That in itself is an important distinction. I frequently hear the criticism that "AGMANZ should do something about this", or "AGMANZ should have done that", or "why didn't AGMANZ tell me about this or that?" Always the implicit suggestion is that AGMANZ is some bureaucratic structure which exists up (or down) there, doing things it shouldn't, or more frequently not doing things it should.

AGMANZ is us, you and me, each individual. If the Association has failed to achieve something, then that is a failure on the part of us all. The Association is not some mythical body existing out there which we can sit back and criticise. Unless all those who see museums in New Zealand as their professional concern participate in the affairs of the Association it will never be more than the Old Boys Club which it is sometimes accused of being (and the male noun is, I think, used deliberately).

"But we can't participate unless we know what is going on", I hear the response. True. The difficulties the Association has faced over the last eighteen months have meant that communication has not been as thorough and as effective as it should be. Changes of secretariat and address, an editor who has not been given enough support or resources, and officers and council members who have become over committed have all been problems additional to those we have always faced of scattered geography and small numbers in many parts of the country.

Communication is however a two way process, and more constructive input from those who complain, many of them of course not even members of the Association, would assist it in achieving the goals we seek. The increasing practice of involving members who are not members of Council on its various committees and working parties has been a constructive effort on the part of Council in recent years to involve a wider group of the membership.

More is needed from both sides, but at least hopefully the upheavals in the secretariat have been resolved with the appointment of Mrs Valerie Harris, who is now getting into full stride as the Association's Executive Secretary. I must also acknowledge the invaluable support of our Editor, Jan Bieringa, who stepped into the breach following Mrs Dewhirst's resignation, and

acted as the Associatoin's Secretary-Treasurer until Valerie took up her duties. Several Wellington regional members of Council, especially the two Vice-Presidetns, worked very hard for the Association during this difficult period.

The incoming council will have to give serious study to the future development of *AGAMANZ Journal.* The financial support and organisational structure necessary for the success of the *Journal* have become quite inadequate and the whole Association will have to achieve this. It will also be imperative that AGMANZ resolve the problems caused by the fact that those who have been doing most of the work in the Association are those who are already heavily committed through the growth and increasing professional activity of their own institutions. The Diploma programme in particular has been a heavy burden on a few individuals, and the difficulties experienced by Diploma students and tutors have usually arisen directly from this problem. The potential significance of the Diploma to the growth of the profession as a whole means that this is a matter for urgent attention.

1985 has not however been a year consisting only of troubles and difficulties. A lot of work has been done by and for the Association, and there have been significant achievements. Although no further students have completed the requirements for the Diploma, many have undertaken further components both theoretical and practical towards it. Thanks are again due to all those involved with the Diploma for their continuing voluntary work in this most important area of our endeavours.

Much of what has been done by the Association has been achieved through its participation in the work of other bodies, in particular in assisting government agencies with thier tasks. The New Zealand Lotteries Board continues to be the principal means of central government support for most museums, and the Association has continued to assist the Board by naming three representatives to the Advisory Committee for the Art Galleries and Museums Scheme of the Board. Following an encouraging meeting iwth the Minister of Internal Affairs, which I referred to in my report last year, a case was made to the Lottery Board for increased funding for the Scheme. We were most gratified to learn that the increase approverd was a most substantial one, which enabled the Board to continue to offer meaningful support to many development schemes in New Zealand museums. In addition, the Liaison Service subsidised by the Board was continued and extended to provide nationwide cover by the appointment of Mrs Beverley McCulloch to the position of Liaison Officer at Canterbury Museum .

An ironic aspect of the funding situation however was that the Lottery Board's grant to the Association itself was not significantly increased, in spite of a strong case having been made to the Board for this to happen. AGMANZ is involved in many aspects of government's work with museums and cultural and natural heritage, so it is disappointing that the Association has not been seen as deserving of the support needed to carry out this task adequately. This matter is being taken up again with the Board.

AGMANZ also contributed to the study undertaken by the working party on the new national museums of New Zealand. Vice-President Mina McKenzie made a substantial contribution of time and effort to that hard working group. The Association is grateful to her, and to her Museum Council for freeing her to undertake this work. Former AGMANZ President Ken Gorbey was consultant to the working party, and several members of the Association assisted in its work or made submissions to it. We regret that the report of the working party has not yet been released for public comment and discussion, since the development proposals for these national institutions are of considerable interest and impact for us all. It is important that once the report is released, it is studied by each and every one of us, and appropriate support given to what I gather are its far reaching proposals.

Mrs McKenzie has also represented the Association on the Management Committee for the New Zealand tour of *Te Maori,* which begins in the National Museum in Wellington in August. Several other Association members serve on that Committee also, including Dr Rodney Wilson who is very active as organiser of the exhibition team overseeing the practical management of the exhibition, and myself representing the interests of the lending museums. *Te Maori* is the most significant exhibition to be seen in New Zealand, and its impact will be considerable, both in relation to the exhibition itself as well as to its ongoing effects on museums in New Zealand and their trusteeship of Maori collections.

Aspects of this trusteeship were discussed at a hui held at Takapuwahia marae at Porirua in November. The hui was organised by the Association's working party on Maori collections to allow Association members an opporutnity to discuss aspects of issues raised in the care of Maori collections. The use and interpretation of these and other collections was the subject of a most stimulating and successful conference organised by the Museum Education Association of New Zealand (MEANZ), in which many AGMANZ members participated. Thanks must be recorded to MEANZ, and its President Judy Hoyle, for all their hard work in organising this most successful meeting. Further discussion within the profession, and wider discussion and consultation with Maori Community groups are envisaged as a result of both of these hui.

The Association and its members have an ongoing vital interest in the provision of conservation services for the cultural heritage in our care. Since the original report of the Arts Council Working Party in 1974, AGMANZ members have been active in promoting conservation needs in New Zealand. There have been a number of successes, in the training and employment of conservators in many more institutions than was the case fifteen years ago. However, much remains to be done. The Interim Committee for the Conservation of Cultural Property, set up wtih AGMANZ representation in 1978 after a different hui at Takapuwahia, has been closely involved in many of these important developments. The Interim Committee has not however been successful in its primary aim, outlined in the report of Nathan Stolow, of the establishment of conservation services in New Zealand through a nationally based Council and conservation laboratory network. The Interim Committee has felt that it has outlived its usefulness, and has indicated to the Minister of Internal Affairs the urgent need for further action perhaps of a different type in respect of conservation. AGMANZ has been closely involved in the discussion of what might follow the Interim Committee, and will continue to press for the future development and support of conservation services in our museums.

Allied with these moves, there has been concern at the impact on museums and their collections of the revisions, proposed and actual, to Government departments. The move of the Historic Places Trust to the new Department of Conservation involves an important group of our members with a different department from that to which museums have been related until now. The proposals for recreation and sport developments being suggested by Mr Moore have far reaching implications for many aspects of museums' activities and funding, especially since Mr Moore is also Minister of Tourism.

All of these developments have exciting potential for the furthering of our profession. It is vitally important that we are all alive to the possibilities, and cooperate to the fullest with one another to take advantage of them. I am confident we can work through the difficulties of which I spoke at the beginning of this Report. It is imperative that we do, since a strong and united AGMANZ is essential for the improvement of our profession and our institutions.

May I thank the members of the Association, and especially the members of Council, its various committees, and the Association's Executive Secretary and Editor, for their hard work and support during my term as President. May I extend to the new President my best wishes and my full support for a successful term of office. Thank you.

Stuart Park
6th April 1986

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Note: The next issue will make the individual working parties available to you. Please make contact with a council member in your area or offer suggestions to the working party most relevant to your specific field. It is your committee — they are there to serve your needs.

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