

Notes on Artists Project May 1988



Pauline Rhodes's *Intensum/Extensum* Installation

To many gallery visitors this type of sculptural installation is so removed from what they traditionally accept as 'sculpture' that it is confusing, obscure and infinitely baffling. Its title, *Intensum/Extensum*, can seem equally perplexing, having been formed by joining the words, 'intensive', 'extensive' and 'summation' to create two new words to sum up the ideas in the work. They are referring to open-ended, expanding, closed or concentrated states and it is these ideas which are central to the work.

These notes, therefore, are an attempt to explain in simple terms some of the complex ideas, interesting features and unusual processes involved in this latest work by Pauline Rhodes.

Firstly, this work is just one part of a continuously on-going series. Her previous installations and her land work *Extensums* are all closely related in materials and processes with this installation and with each other. Each develops very consciously from the last as actual parts are reformed and recycled in an on-going, evolutionary and developmental

process. If we have been following Pauline Rhodes's installations we might notice, for instance, that the stained canvas at the base of the floor placements, some of the rock and some of the screen-like extendables have all been small parts of earlier works. Reappearing in this new installation, they emphasise the on-going and the transient, temporary nature of each work.

Each new installation carries parts, like memories from earlier works, but in each new situation the parts are reformed into a new, unified work - special to its own site, its own time and its own place in the on-going cycle. Within each installation something totally new and different is injected. This may become one of the catalysts for the next installation. In this way Pauline Rhodes's sculptures are transient and ephemeral. "Art that lasts too long goes too far", she says, so the materials are planned and created, selected, assembled and placed into a deliberately temporary creation. When the exhibition closes the units will be disassembled and the parts returned to the artist's studio to wait until some of them will be revived and reworked in response to a new situation, a new site, a new stimulus. In this way they roll-up and unroll time, unleashing the material of the past back into the material of the present. Past, present and future become one in the 'actual'. In a way it can also be seen as a metaphor for the physical condition of humanity. Everything is variable, flexible - nothing is constant.

By closely examining the pieces in this sculpture you will see that the way they have been arranged in these Gallery spaces is in a very deliberate response to the shapes, surfaces, cultural and architectural nature of the Gallery space itself. The rising or suspended forms leap upwards to the light source in the ceiling panels and articulate or make physically visible the airy spaces above the Centre Court. On the square of the carpeted floor the folded, overlapping canvas strips make a central cross, and over them the stone slabs draw an organic circle. Thus the forms in the sculpture are in careful harmony with the site, and the place it is in becomes included in the 'context' or artistic statement of the piece. By looking for these co-relationships between the sculpture and its site you will gradually become aware of how the artist has responded to the circumstantial parameters of the site - its architecture, materials, shape and its cultural significance.

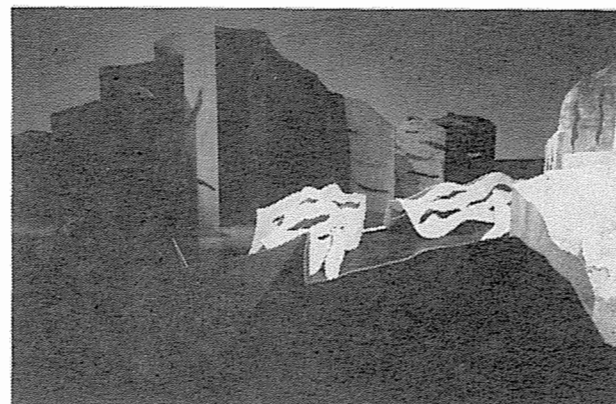
By creating an installation like this in this space Pauline Rhodes has not just been an observer of the space, but through her use of it becomes an 'activator' of the space. She creates for us a visual equivalent of her own intellectual and emotional response to the site.

This way the whole art work becomes an 'experience' rather than an 'object'. In many African cultures, for example, art operates in a similar way. Art has no hierarchy of materials or permanence, but it has a vitally important part in the 'experience' of society. Our Western world is sometimes in danger of ignoring the 'experience' of art in favour of 'objects' or commodities whose function is purely to be bought, sold and individually owned. Looking at Pauline Rhodes's sculpture from this point of view, you will notice how the art is decidedly non-materialist and operates outside art consumerism.

Turning now to the actual materials Pauline Rhodes has used, we need to be aware that those selected are operating on a number of different levels. Our first approach could be to consider the basic nature of each. Is it stone originating from the earth? Is it thin plywood or canvas cloth and thus derived from plant forms? At what stage in the natural evolution of chemical elements into material form have the selected materials arrived? In other words, how far are they 'processed'? Is this 'processing' organic and natural or are the materials manufactured into this particular form by human processes and then by the artist herself? Having answered those questions in response to this sculptural piece it is also wise to ask yourself whether the selected materials may also have cultural and artistic connections of which you may not initially have been aware. You see, the greater your awareness of exactly what you are looking at and the associations those objects have, then the wider and richer your artistic experience will be.

This artistic enjoyment will have nothing to do with the commercial value of the material used, but it will have a tremendous amount to do with what material is selected, how it is processed, how it is placed or organised and to what other forms and materials it is relating to either physically or culturally. What materials are considered old? The rocks are perhaps five million years old. What materials are new? The long, rhythmic strands of polypropelene, a

synthetic material made from a continuous filament thermally bonded, are new. What materials are hard/soft, pliable/flexible, light/heavy, and how are these and other contrasts orchestrated and arranged? These are the questions the viewer needs to ask - and the installation will answer. In the answers lie the 'context' or 'meaning' of the art work and the artistic 'experience' it offers.

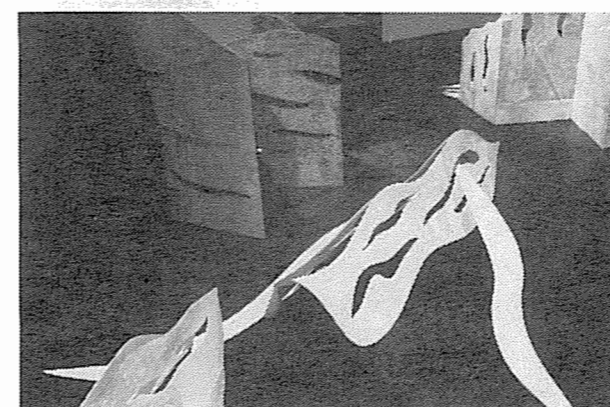


The other factor deeply significant in this work, as it has been in Pauline Rhodes's earlier works, is the staining process she uses to provide these colourful, interesting and organically marked surfaces on her sculptural forms. To create these rust stains on the stone, the plywood, or on the polypropelene Pauline Rhodes has obviously interfaced these materials with steel sheets. The earlier presence of the steel is now only visible by the layer of iron oxide which has been created by the chemical interrelationship between the two materials. Thus iron, one of the most basic elements of the earth, is united with the other basic elements air, water and time. One element influences and interpenetrates another, producing these unique colours and textures. To some extent, and now with 10 or more years experimentation, Pauline Rhodes can control the depth and colours of the stained markings. But to some extent too, she is deliberately employing and accepting the element of 'chance'. Notice and give some thought to how she has prepared the other forms. For instance, some of the Oamaru stone on the floor of the Centre Court is sawn, and some chipped and broken. The plywood is cut and in places penetrated by organically inspired

and precisely rhythmic lineal lines.

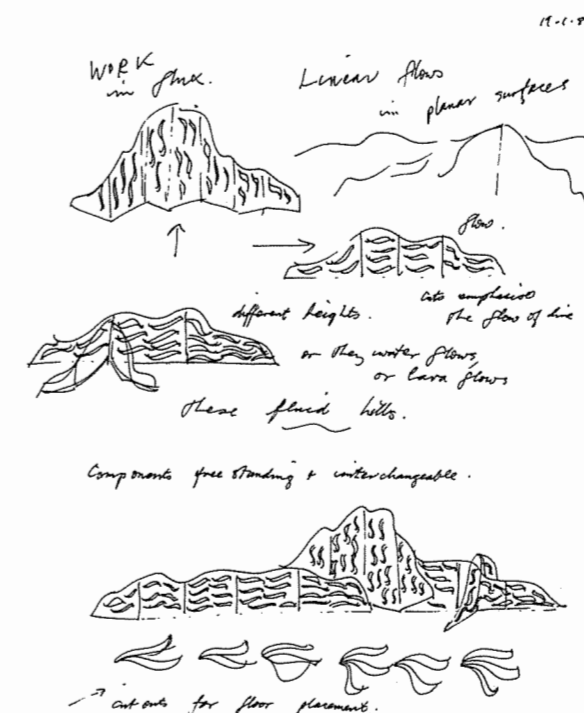
It is this orchestration of line which makes the initial, and perhaps the major impact in the pieces installed on the Centre North Gallery room. The rhythmic folding of the upright extendables as they flux and flow, curve and stretch around the space create an infinitely varied, yet also infinitely harmonious set of forms. You need to move around and through them keeping constantly alert to the interplay of one form seen against the backdrop of another. Watch for contrasts, similarities and subtle shifts of balance and form. Watch how the forms subtly incline together and evolve almost imperceptibly into unexpected entities. You will find your pleasure growing as you unexpectedly discover new similarities linking what you initially felt were so different. This unification of idea and matter is what art is, and always has been about. Sometimes we have just got so accustomed to seeing it in its traditional form that we have forgotten how to look.

In this work we are rewarded if we systematically question each aspect. Watch where forms cluster in segments, run along together, contract and expand, twist or progress in hops and leaps. Look how they can lean lightly together and gradually begin to rise into vertical forms. Notice how lightly the artist's hand is imposed upon them, how they just lean temporarily together or, at the most, are just lightly tied.



If you are the sort of viewer who best enjoys an abstract form by finding in it your personal metaphors for experiences you have had in the physical or spiritual world, then let your imagination loose. Respond to the forms you see which evoke for you hills, clouds, water, birds, boats, flames or anything else. Allow for abstract concepts too. Find physical metaphors for moods, spirit, regeneration, flexibility, openness, compaction, co-existence, interdependence or independence. Don't look for specific symbols which tie an idea down too precisely. Instead, let the 'ideas' which come to your stream of consciousness act as bridges or viaducts to span the gaps between the meaning of the work, your experiences on this planet and the artist's intention. As May Stevens, a contemporary art writer has said, "The nature and praxis of art must be seen to be reflexive as well as reflective".

Above all, be relaxed and open to the art experience. It works on as many levels as you wish to consider, but is also passionately real. "I have always been attracted to the REAL world", Pauline Rhodes writes, "the sticks and stones, the sea, the hills and yet also to the notions of poetry, mysticism and philosophy. I would like to marry all those together somehow".



Pauline Rhodes

Born 1937 in Christchurch.

1965-66 Lives in Nigeria and travels in Europe.

1967 Lives in England.

1970 Returns to Christchurch.

1972-74 University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts

1976 Christchurch Teachers College

Pauline Rhodes is currently living and working in Christchurch and has been exhibiting in solo and group exhibitions since 1978.

Solo Exhibitions

- 1977 Christchurch, CSA Gallery *Energy fields, stone movements*
- 1978 Christchurch, CSA Gallery *Paraplans for projects*
- 1979 Christchurch, CSA Gallery *Towards two squares*
- 1981 Christchurch, CSA Gallery *Stained silence*
Christchurch, CSA Gallery *Intensum/ extensum*
- 1982 Christchurch, Robert McDougall Art Gallery *Intensum*
- 1983 Christchurch, Gingko *Paperwork for projects*
Christchurch, CSA Gallery *Extensum/ extensor*
- 1985 Auckland City Art Gallery *Intensums '85*
Akaroa Gallery *Greenpiece extensum*
- 1986 New Plymouth, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery *Sculpture project 1986-1986: Intensum/extensum*
Christchurch, James/ Paul Gallery *Intensum/extensum*
- 1987 Wellington City Gallery, Project Series- *Intensum in memoriam*
Christchurch, CSA Gallery *Works in progress - Extensums*
Auckland, ARTSPACE- *Extensum - soft ground*
- 1988 Wellington, 33 1/3 Gallery *Intensum-rising ground*
Christchurch, Robert McDougall Art Gallery *Intensum/Extensum*

Artist's Statements

F1 New Zealand sculpture project, Wellington, F1 Publication, 1983:15

Intensums '85 (catalogue), Auckland City Art Gallery, 1985

Bibliography

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Gablik, Suzi. *New Zealand report: Art people. Art in America*, March 1982. 35-41 (illus.) Also in *Art in New Zealand*, Autumn 1982, 23:14-16

Hunter, Ian. *Three sculptors at the National Art Gallery, Wellington. Art Network*, Winter 1982, 6: 57-58 (illus.)

Kirker, Anne. *New Zealand women artists*. Auckland, Reed Methuen, 1986

National Art Gallery. *Content/context: a survey of recent New Zealand art*, Wellington, National Art Gallery, 1986

New art in New Zealand: artists from the '1984 Art in Dunedin' project, 1984, (illus.)

Pitts, Priscilla. *Review. Art New Zealand*, Winter 1985, 35: 20-21 (illus.)

Rhodes, Pauline. *Daily runs. Splash*, April 1986, 4: 92-98

Strathdee, Barbara. *Women artists at the F1 NZ sculpture project. Art New Zealand*, 1983, 26: 54-55 (illus.)

Webb, Evan. *Extensum/extensor: Pauline Rhodes. Art New Zealand*, Summer 1983, 29: 18 (illus.)

Jonathan Smart. *Art New Zealand*, 41 86/87

Ian Wedde. *Art New Zealand*, 44 '87

Susan Foster. *Art New Zealand*, 44 '87



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