

Primary Products

Maddie Leach

Maddie Leach was born in Auckland in 1970. She studied sculpture at the University of Canterbury, completing her Masters in Fine Arts in 1999. She is currently a lecturer in fine arts at the College of Creative Arts, Massey University in Wellington. Since graduating Leach has developed an installation practice that combines various elements and media in site-specific situations that often solicit active engagement from the audience. These entail the insertion of objects that derive from or refer to real sites and activities – for example a working ice rink, a life-size sail boat, or a load of firewood – into the highly structured environment of an art gallery or museum. Her work references both a history of conceptual and minimalist art and the prosaic realms of leisure, sport and trade. She has undertaken solo projects in various galleries throughout New Zealand including Waikato Museum of Art and History (2002), Dunedin Public Art Gallery (2004) and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (2007). Her works have also been presented in a number of group exhibitions, including *Telecom Prospect 2004 New Art New Zealand* (Wellington, 2004), *High Tide: New Currents in Art from Australia and New Zealand* (Warsaw and Vilnius, 2006) and *Trans-Versa: Conversing across the South* (Santiago, 2006).

Maddie Leach's *One Shining Gum* was conceived in response to an invitation to participate in an exhibition in Santiago, Chile, in 2006. The idea was to bring artists from Australia and New Zealand to Santiago where they would explore their context and present their responses in various venues around the city. This followed from the curators' conviction that effective cultural exchange would be better achieved if artists were able to produce new (rather than simply show existing) work. Their aim was to establish a platform for connection and interchange with the local art community and for this to serve as a model for The South Project – an organisation charged with forging connections amongst cultural practitioners working in various centres in a southern region that stretches from South Africa to South America and encompasses Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific – under the auspices of which the exhibition was to take place.

Leach's response was highly attuned to the politics of exchange and yet perversely resistant to the project's idealistic ambitions. She chose to make her work before arriving in Santiago, sending something she believed the Chileans 'did not need': a eucalyptus log felled from a Wairarapa woodlot strapped into a pine crate. Her plan was to present this log in its crate in the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, and then to donate the wood to the local community. Sadly, the project did not run the course Leach had intended. The log was shipped from Wellington via Singapore to Valparaíso (Santiago's nearest port) ten weeks before the exhibition was to open, but missed its trans-shipment in Hong Kong so the crate arrived too late to be installed for the opening of the exhibition. Indeed, Leach spent two anxious weeks in Santiago anticipating the consignment's arrival. The nearest she got to the work was to see the ship that carried it, the *Cap Palmas*, docked in Valparaíso Harbour. In the end, Chilean agriculture officers refused the crate's entry and insisted that the logs were either immediately destroyed, or sent back to New Zealand. Battered by its travels, this is the work's first (and perhaps final) showing.

One Shining Gum is more than one artist's idiosyncratic response to a curator's invitation. It cannily makes reference to the practicalities of global trade and to the competitive realities facing New Zealand's primary industries. For Chile is also a wood-producing nation. Like New Zealand it embarked on a substantial programme of exotic planting in the 1970s and now rivals this country in the quantity of *pinus radiata* and eucalyptus which it grows and exports to meet the needs of the world's pulp and paper industry. In order to fulfil the exhibition's brief, Leach made an artwork that literalised a connection between Chile and New Zealand. Her work reminds us that both countries grow similar forests because of shared environmental conditions. By its passage across the Pacific, *One Shining Gum* links the two nations. But, the difficulties Leach encountered and the bureaucratic hurdles she failed to overcome prove that there are still forceful barriers that divide us. Perhaps it was best that the log never reached its destination, for this would have granted it some utilitarian purpose. Now we have a counter to the normal flow of commodities, an object whose redundancy reminds us of art's essential arbitrariness. One might posit this as *One Shining Gum's* real value.

List of Works

All works courtesy of the artist

- | | |
|---|---|
| <i>One Shining Gum (Savia Brillante) 2006-7</i> | pine crate, eucalyptus logs, plastic strapping
1m (height) × 1m (width) × 3m (length)
printed paper mounted on aluminium
289 × 202mm |
| <i>One Shining Gum (Carterton) 2006</i> | video transferred to DVD and looped
duration 2 minutes |
| <i>One Shining Gum (Valparaiso) 2006</i> | video transferred to DVD and looped
duration 19 minutes |

Primary Products

Fiona Amundsen

Fiona Amundsen was born in Auckland in 1973. Amundsen studied social anthropology at the Universities of Auckland and Waikato, gaining a Masters in Social Science in 2005 with her thesis examining the writings of key photographic theorists: Roland Barthes, Geoffrey Batchen, Jean Baudrillard, Pierre Bourdieu and Susan Sontag. Her practice as a photographer stems from this theoretical base, but it is also prompted by her understanding of the uses to which photography has been put by anthropologists, as well as by her employment as a technician in a photographic laboratory. She has been exhibiting since the late 1990s, first in artist-run spaces and now in dealer and public galleries. Amundsen has tended to work in series, taking a typological approach to a particular subject to build a collection of images that show social spaces such as race tracks, city squares and motorways. These are always presented without people so that their physical qualities can be seen in an unrelentingly frank and uninflected manner. Recent exhibitions include *Slow Release: Recent Photography from New Zealand* (Wellington and Melbourne, 2002), *Garden Place* (Hamilton, Wanganui and Auckland, 2004-6) and *Telecom Prospect 2007 New Art New Zealand* (Wellington, 2007).

Fiona Amundsen presents five photographs that stem from the curator's invitation to produce new work for this exhibition that focuses specifically on the Kaingaroa Forest in the central North Island. This is one of the oldest and largest man-made forests in New Zealand, which is now growing over 1.3 million trees that will be pruned and cut for use in the building industry, for packaging and the production of paper. Kaingaroa is a key focus for the forestry industry; around it are clustered research facilities, mills, processing plants, transport hubs and service centres. The forest is now owned by private interests which lease the land from the Crown and local iwi. Prior to this it was managed first by the New Zealand Forest Service and then by state-owned enterprises set up in the mid 1980s in the wake of Rogernomics.

Exotic species were first planted here at the turn of the 20th century by government employees using prison labour, to find a use for the tussock-covered pumice land that had already proven too poor for farming. The scale of planting was stepped up in the 1920s when it was realised that New Zealand would face a critical shortage of wood if the country was to rely exclusively on its surviving supply of native timber. This was undertaken, using increasingly mechanised means, by gangs of local Māori, immigrants, returned servicemen and the unemployed, who lived with forestry personnel in purpose-built settlements in what was often described as rough and isolated conditions. The forest reached its maximum size in the 1960s and 1970s when large numbers of trees were planted to service the local pulp and paper industry and in response to international demand from buyers in Australia and Japan. More recently, as timber prices fluctuate, the area has seen some land returned for dairy farming. And as is the case with the forestry industry in general, the impact of privatisation is still evident, with high unemployment and shrinking profits leaving little to invest in the forest's amenity and recreational potential.

Amundsen shows us little of this in her photographs. Indeed there are no signs of the industry, no trace even of the pine trees that are most typical of this location. Instead she takes us to the civic centres of three townships: Kawerau, Murupara and Rotorua, and lets these sites speak entirely for themselves. We see urban spaces articulated by built forms, tiled surfaces, services and signage. There are trees here, yet none signal the industry that sustains them. They could be anywhere, except that the artist in her titles has taken great pains to state exactly where they are and when they were taken.

To make sense of these photographs we must acknowledge this geographical specificity and the context of the commission. In this light we might view these urban scenes in relation to the forest that grows nearby: both are highly structured environments shaped by science and technology, economics and social history; neither has figured much in art, failing as they do to meet the standards of scenic beauty; one is culture with nature added, the other nature acculturated. But what is really at stake is a careful yet poignant consideration of the photographic medium itself. Amundsen knows that the camera can only show what is there; so she lets her apparatus constitute its subject. By mechanical means she reveals how spaces have been manipulated, how they in turn exert surreptitious control, and how they always speak of an absent elsewhere that is invisible to us.

List of Works

All works courtesy of the artist, McNamara Gallery,
Wanganui and Roger Williams Contemporary, Auckland

From left to right:

1 *City Focus, Rotorua,*
24/06/2007, 5.30 (waiting birds) 2007 chromira digital photograph
1000 × 800mm

2 *Jellicoe Court, Kawerau,*
06/05/2007, 6.57 (star burst) 2007 chromira digital photograph
1000 × 800mm

3 *Jellicoe Court (facing North), Kawerau,*
06/05/2007, 7.13 (autumn light) 2007 chromira digital photograph
1000 × 800mm

4 *Jellicoe Court (facing East), Kawerau,*
22/04/2007, 7.05 (glowing lamp) 2007 chromira digital photograph
1000 × 800mm

5 *Civic Square, Murupara,*
02/06/2007, 7.21 (bird and lamp-post) 2007 chromira digital photograph
1000 × 800mm

The artist would like to thank Mary Barton (Rotorua) and Betty Tanirau (Murupara) for their assistance in the making of these works.

Primary Products

Jim Allen

Jim Allen was born in Wellington in 1922. He trained as a sculptor at the University of Canterbury (1946–48) and the Royal College of Art in London (1949–52). On his return to New Zealand he joined the Department of Education as a field officer under Gordon Tovey, the national supervisor of art and craft, contributing to Tovey's ground-breaking scheme to make art a central focus of the education system. In 1960 he was appointed Head of Sculpture at the Elam School of Fine Arts in Auckland. In 1976 Allen left New Zealand to become founding head of the Sydney College of the Arts in Sydney. In these roles Allen developed his innovative ideas about teaching and his commitment to new forms of art-making, both of which had an important impact on emerging generations of artists with whom he came into contact. He retired in 1998 and now lives and works in Auckland. Allen began his career as a traditional sculptor, making discrete objects by conventional means and undertaking a number of important public commissions. After a sabbatical trip to Europe, the USA and Mexico in 1968, Allen turned from making permanent objects to working in ephemeral and site-specific modes to produce installations and performances that utilised new media and actively engaged audiences. Little of this work has survived and it is only in the last few years that efforts have been undertaken to re-stage and remake works – for example in *Action Replay: Post-Object Art* (Artspace, Auckland, 1999) and *O-AR Part I* (St Paul St, Auckland, 2007) – so that Allen's important contribution to the 'new art' of the 1970s can be remembered.

N*ew Zealand Environment No 5* was the final installation in a series of works Jim Allen produced immediately after he returned from Europe and the USA in 1969. It was presented at the Barry Lett Galleries in Auckland, a key venue for advanced and experimental practice in the period, and then purchased for the collection of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth, a new art gallery dedicated to collecting and presenting contemporary art, by the gallery's first director and fierce advocate for sculptural innovation, John Maynard. It is one of the very few works by Jim Allen in a museum collection.

This work critically re-conceives how an artist might treat landscape as their subject. As the title suggests, this walk-in installation is proposed as a specifically 'New Zealand environment'. Unlike earlier modes of landscape depiction, this does not present itself as a pleasing view rendered in paint on a flat surface. In other words it overthrows a longstanding romantic investment in the landscape as a site for aesthetic pleasure. By refusing the distance that normally pertains when a painter paints or a viewer observes a scene, Allen denies art's aestheticising potential, plunging his viewers into a more visceral and multi-sensory engagement with the natural world, and so suggests an altered relationship to nature.

It is no surprise that the world-in-microcosm Allen constructs is neither an unspoiled primordial paradise nor a tamed and cultivated haven. His assemblage of materials unflinchingly reminds us of a very different investment in nature which sees the land in terms of its productive rather than aesthetic potential. This steel and hessian enclosure, with its carpet of fresh wood chips, greasy wool and barbed wire bathed in the unnatural glow of green neon, actually entails the same processes of extraction and alienation that take place in real agricultural situations. In this sense it enacts those processes rather than representing them. Here our exploitative relationship with the natural world is brought home with intense phenomenological force.

Allen describes this work as a proposition about the 'non-indigenous European environment'. Such self-consciousness suggests a new, more critical model of artistic practice; one might go so far as to suggest that here a 'post-colonial' landscape is inaugurated. That this is three-dimensional not pictorial, closer in kind to the 'primary structures' of American minimalists, and strikingly reminiscent of the immersive environments of the Brazilian conceptualist, Hélio Oiticica, is highly significant. Allen's travels in 1968 brought him into contact with a generation of artists who offered new ways of making works that suited the material and political realities of their moment. Allen adapts these models to his local situation, making a structure that accurately captures the newly industrialised New Zealand landscape and our increasing alienation from it.

List of Works

New Zealand Environment No 5, 1969

steel tube, scrim, tow underfelt, nylon, string,
barbed wire, greasy wool, sawdust and neon tube
1829mm (high) × 1829mm (wide) × 5486mm (long)
Collection of Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

Primary Products

Paratene Matchitt

Paratene Matchitt was born in Tokomaru Bay on the East Coast in 1933. He trained as a teacher in Auckland and Dunedin and then joined the Department of Education as one of Gordon Tovey's team of arts advisors, working in schools in South Auckland for the next 17 years. After two years in Wanganui, Matchitt took up a position as art tutor at the Community College in Hawke's Bay and was based there until 1986. Since then he has worked fulltime as an artist, as well as contributing to the development of art and arts policy as an advisor and advocate. Matchitt is regarded as a leading artist of his generation, having exhibited widely in group and solo exhibitions since 1961. He credits both the great Ngāti Porou carver, Pine Taiapa, and the Pākehā educator, Gordon Tovey, as key influences in the development of his career. His practice has taken various forms – drawing, painting, stained glass and large-scale sculptures in wood and metal – and sets out to find a new formal and symbolic language capable of giving shape to his responses to his cultural inheritance and life experience. Matchitt is best known for his large-scale public commissions, including *Te Whanaketanga o Tainui*, a major mural he completed for Kimiora, the wharekai at Tūrangawaewae Marae in 1975; stained glass windows for the Māori Centre at the University of Waikato (1987), and the City to Sea Bridge in Wellington, which was completed in 1993.

Te *Wepu* was made for *Huakina*, an installation Paratene Matchitt undertook at the National Art Gallery in Wellington, on the invitation of the director, Luit Bieringa, in August 1986. The massive assemblage was too large for the long wall of the space it had been allocated, so Matchitt hung the first and largest section across the corner, to refuse his work's status as mere wall hanging, asserting instead its disruptive force as an intervention in the staid architecture of the gallery. At the same time, downstairs, the National Museum had installed *Te Māori*, the historic exhibition of taonga recently returned from its triumphant tour of America. In that original context, then, traditional and modern works of art were juxtaposed. The differences between these are instructive, for they point to Matchitt's refusal to conform to the strictures of tradition and his ambition to create a new art capable of conveying his artistic vision.

That Matchitt used demolition timber retrieved from a building site near his home in Napier is a vital component in the meaning of this work. Turning his back on carving and paying little regard to the type of timber he was using, Matchitt seems to be acknowledging the new situation in which Māori were living, one which had seen the widespread destruction of New Zealand's native forests, and the removal of Māori from their tribal homelands. He used European building techniques and tools to construct this massive work, laying out the timber to shape the basic form, and then nailing it in sections as any joiner would. As a result, the repetitive geometries that enliven the assemblage resemble the regular patterns of floorboards and shingles and the linear shapes of gables and fence posts as much as they do the customary designs of tāniko or tukutuku or the classic profiles of traditional Māori architecture.

But *Te Wepu* is made of wood, the material most readily available to Māori, and it contains elements that refer more specifically to Māori history. Its name is that given by Te Kooti, prophet leader and founder of the Ringatū Church, to the flag he won in battle with Ngāti Kahungunu and used as his fighting standard in the 1870s. The original flag was made by nuns and featured motifs – the crescent, cross, morning star, mountain and heart pierced by an arrow – conceived by Māori as symbols that could convey their sense of destiny in a world transformed by historical circumstances. They appear in Matchitt's work like shields pressed to the chests of five sentinels that clearly have their origin in the pou (carved ancestral figures) that stand in the whareniui or guard sacred ground.

Matchitt's huge wooden flag is a powerful pennant for a new Māori art, one that uses hybrid and abstract means, as Jim Ritchie stated in 1986, to 'bring the tension between nature and culture into resolution and repose'.¹ That *Te Wepu* is made from the very trees that now crowd close to the bush-clad back country that provided safe haven to Te Kooti is especially telling, for it proves a long history of Māori innovation. Like Te Kooti, who found new uses for Pākehā symbols to cope with the tragic circumstances that assailed him, Matchitt makes *Te Wepu* his battle cry and Trojan horse. For its material and form refuse the claims of tradition, just as its presence in the national collection inveigles traces of our troubled history into the heart of contemporary culture.

¹ Jim Ritchie, 'Para Matchitt' in *Huakina: An Installation by Para Matchitt*, National Art Gallery, 1986, not paginated.

List of Works

Te Wepu 1986

wood and metal

17m (length) × 2.5m (maximum height)

Collection of Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand, Wellington