

Te Adam
Pātaka Art
Toi Gallery

Behind Closed Doors

NEW ZEALAND ART FROM PRIVATE COLLECTIONS IN WELLINGTON
CURATED BY CHRISTINA BARTON
4 JUNE–18 DECEMBER 2011

We are what we collect.

Collecting is a particularly human pastime. It can be distinguished from the more prosaic or perverse impulses to accumulate or hoard by the processes of selection and arrangement that accompany the activity. The decisions that bring a collection into being, help it grow and give it shape, are intimately tied to the tastes, values and proclivities of the individual collector who creates it. Because each collection is different, it tells us something unique about the subject who compiled it. No wonder, then, that collecting has been described as a 'mirror of the self'.

Yet collecting is also a shared activity, relying on classifications that pre-exist the subject and value systems to which they consciously or unconsciously subscribe. A collection takes shape over time through interactions and transactions amongst people. Telling stories about loved objects has the double purpose of assigning personal meaning to things whilst knitting individuals into a wider context. Collecting, then, is social and it is temporally and spatially specific; it is the means by which an individual negotiates their place within a larger scene, culture or country; how he or she makes sense of and marks the passage of time.

Behind Closed Doors traffics between these two poles of self and society to present a selection of modern and contemporary New Zealand art drawn exclusively from private collections in Wellington. The exhibition brings together works that normally belong in the personal worlds constructed by their owners and places these in an institutional frame, where they have been arranged to offer insights into the nature of art in New Zealand as it has unfolded from 1946 to the present.

The exhibition sets out to posit a reciprocal relation between the shared forces that grant value to certain artists and art forms and the private desires that propel their selection and acquisition. It weaves together the big-picture narratives of art history, through which we come to understand and codify artistic practice within the frame of national culture, with the smaller material histories that track how works of art come into being, where and when they are presented, and how and why they circulate.

Limiting its selection to private collections in Wellington, *Behind Closed Doors* further particularises these processes to point to the specific dynamics that shape this city's social, economic, cultural and political identity. These works are a telling complement to the public collections that are also housed here; their presentation now just one modest iteration drawn from a plentiful store of possibilities. We are very grateful to all involved for their willingness to allow their works to be seen; this is a unique opportunity to determine how private possessions grant and are granted collective meaning.

This exhibition is dedicated to Peter McLeavey who has helped foster a love of New Zealand art that has shaped the cultural outlook of this city.

A REVOLVING SHOWCASE

Every six weeks the works in this window space will change. Over the course of the exhibition visitors will have the opportunity to see works by Rita Angus and Simon Denny (June–July); Ronnie van Hout (July–August); Billy Apple (September); Francis Upritchard (October); and Daniel du Bern and Dane Mitchell (November–December). These have been selected as especially suited to this highly visible showcase, either because of their physical properties or their conceptual pertinence. This is the spot where the building opens to its surroundings; it seems the fitting place to extend, refresh and complicate the narratives that unravel in the Gallery's interior.

RITA ANGUS (1908–1970)

Fish 1967–9

oil on canvas

Private Collection, Wellington

This painting is one of a series made after Rita Angus spent time sketching in the Napier Aquarium in 1967 on one of her frequent visits to her parents. With its deep blues and burnt shades of orange and its careful placement of fish and rocks in layered bands that neatly follow the perimeter of the picture, this vivid painting is more than an observational study. It operates on three further interconnected registers: as a personal emblem (Angus was a Pisces); as a symbol (representing a harmonious universe where every element seems in perfect balance) and, as a modernist manifesto (metaphorically alluding to painting's higher claims to self-containment).

Rita Angus is one of New Zealand's most respected artists who won the attention of fellow artists, critics and curators, despite her fierce independence, which saw her refuse the overtures of dealer galleries and which kept New Zealand's first professional art historians at arm's length. This painting is similar to one in the national collection (*Fish V*, 1969), which was included in the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa's major retrospective (*Rita Angus: Life and Vision*) that toured the country in 2008–09.

SIMON DENNY (born 1982)

Deep Sea Vaudeo 2009

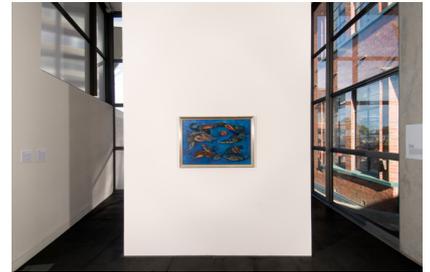
video installation

Private Collection, Wellington

Catrin Lorch (writing in *Frieze Magazine*) describes *Deep Sea Vaudeo* as 'a multi-layered farewell to the triangular relationship between performance, sculpture and media art—a relationship now overtaken by flat screens, computer monitors and online personas'. The work consists not only of the carefully made video we watch on the screen (which documents a recent installation Denny re-constructed in a German television studio), but also the ordinary cabinet and clunky monitor on which it is presented.

Here Denny overlays his appreciation of the physical character of the television set as a closed box into which we look, with his interest in aquaria as hermetically sealed miniature marine environments designed to be viewed from the outside. He focuses on the materiality of a medium that strategically locates itself between television and film, object and image, installation and documentation, to suspend and historicise the turns art has taken in the face of rapid technological innovation.

Simon Denny completed a BFA at the Elam School of Fine Arts in Auckland in 2004 before undertaking postgraduate study at the Städelschule in Frankfurt (2007–09). He is now living in Berlin. His works have been shown in New Zealand, Australia and more recently Europe. He is represented by Michael Lett in Auckland and Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Cologne.



RONNIE VAN HOUT (born 1962)

Duck Character and Mouse Character 1999

mixed media

Private Collection, Wellington

Justin Paton calls Ronnie van Hout's *Duck Character and Mouse Character* 'one of his most spectacular homages to the skew-whiff'. Visitors may be struck by the familiarity of these figures, not just because they are wonky replicas of Walt Disney's most famous inventions (Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse) but because they might have seen sculptures very like these in a playground on the waterfront at Picton (probably as they waited for the Interisland ferry). These are the more direct source for van Hout's installation, and in relation to these originals they are remarkably good renditions, though the artist has added a 'spicy' video and soundtrack that turns both duck and mouse into lascivious onlookers.

Though unlike anything else in Van Hout's oeuvre, this work encapsulates the very best of what he is known for. Freely raiding from both high and low art sources, Van Hout exemplifies the postmodern plagiarist for whom there is nothing new in the world. And yet here he manages to convey a funny tenderness that not only honours the naive efforts of the unknown maker of Picton's version of Disney's characters, but he also invests Duck and Mouse with human traits that give the works life despite their obvious and far-from-perfect fabrication. There is something plangent and touching in this most awkward appropriation.

BILLY APPLE (born 1935)

From the Malcolm Brow Collection 1997

acrylic on canvas

Private Collection, Wellington

In 1988 Billy Apple produced his first *From the Collection* painting. This was for the Bank of New Zealand collection, which was then being compiled by Peter McLeavey especially for its sleek new headquarters in central Wellington. In the same year he also produced a canvas for Jenny and Alan Gibbs, two prominent Auckland collectors who emerged at that time as key patrons of the arts. Since then, Apple has worked with private, corporate and institutional collectors, providing works that rigidly adhere to his aesthetic framework (in terms of format, graphic design and wording) and yet which are always personalised according to the inclinations or identities of his patrons. Together this series is a fascinating tribute to the model of collaboration Apple has instigated as his *modus operandi*. Over time it is also evolving as a collective portrait of the art world in New Zealand.

Billy Apple is a leading conceptual artist whose career has unfolded since the late 1950s in London, New York and New Zealand. International recognition for his singular contribution to the history of conceptual art was awarded in 2009 with a major two-part exhibition surveying the various dimensions of his practice staged in Rotterdam at the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, one of Europe's leading galleries. Here curators Zoë Gray and Nicholas Schafhausen paid tribute to his 'direct approach to the commercialisation of his art', acknowledging its timeliness in our era of remarkable art-market growth.

BILLY APPLE (born 1935)**Lunches 2005**

acrylic on canvas

Private Collection, Wellington

Hamish McKay, the individual with whom Billy Apple has transacted this work, will be well known to Wellingtonians as owner of a leading dealer gallery in the city, which in turn represents the artist. In this instance, McKay commissioned this work in his capacity as a private admirer of the artist (payment being the price of lunch with Apple on his trips to Wellington up to the value of the painting). Whether this work remains in McKay's possession, or is acquired for another collection, it will always register this very particular relationship.

Apple has made a career of drawing to attention these kinds of interactions which underpin the social and economic life of art in any setting. His specific contribution has been to render such goings on the very content of his practice.

BILLY APPLE (born 1935)From the Paid (*The artist has to live like everybody else*) series**Infringement notice, NZ Police 1998**

A3 paper with lithographed text and attached invoice

Private Collection, Wellington

Studio blue fish 1998

A3 paper with lithographed text and attached invoice

Private Collection, Wellington

Trauma 1999

A3 paper with lithographed text and attached invoice

Private Collection, Wellington

AMI insurance 2000

A3 paper with lithographed text and attached invoice

Private Collection, Wellington

These works are examples of an ongoing series Billy Apple has undertaken since 1987, in which he invites potential patrons to select and pay an invoice. The record of this payment then serves as the basis of an artwork with its defining by-line, 'The artist has to live like everybody else'. The power of this series lies in the ambivalence of this statement: of course the artist is merely human and thus goes about his business like anybody (a fact richly proven by the prosaic nature of the invoices on display), but in pointing this out, doesn't this make him different? By drawing attention to the economic conditions within which we are all mired, Apple achieves a degree of critical distance, adding the more intangible value of 'art' to what would otherwise be the normal affairs of life.

FRANCIS UPRITCHARD (born 1976)**Rona 2008**

modelling material, foil, wire, paint

Private Collection, Wellington

Lamp 2008

ceramic lamp base and shade, electrical parts

Private Collection, Wellington

Lamp 2008

ceramic lamp base and shade, electrical parts

Private Collection, Wellington

These three works were all included in Francis Upritchard's project *rainwob i*, completed as part of her artist residency at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in 2008. Here, one of the six figures from the original installation, *Rona*, sits along with two of the artist's key props: lamps that emanate light through tiny slits of eyes. She is what Upritchard calls one of her 'plastic people'. In scale, modelling and colour she is patently unreal and yet, through the artist's handling of her materials, this figure has been granted an affecting humanity.

It is Upritchard's ability to animate raw matter—invest mysterious life into things—that proves the alchemy of sculpture as a medium. This is especially the case when it comes to scale, for as we suspend disbelief and bring *Rona*, and the anthropomorphic lamps that stand sentinel with her, to life, we let go our sense of ourselves and allow the plinth to expand relatively, at which point the surface turns into an extensive ground. Poised thus, these figures appear to be looking vigilantly outward, connecting us through their gazes in our occupation of their middle distance, to become part of their spooky world view.

Francis Upritchard studied at the School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury, graduating in 1997. She moved to London in 1998 and, along with developing her practice as a sculptor, instigated and ran The Bart Wells Institute, an artist-run space that staged a succession of exhibitions in a disused building Hackney. Since then, she has exhibited widely in the UK, Europe, the USA, Australia and New Zealand, enjoying considerable attention from collectors, including Charles Saatchi. With Judy Millar, she represented New Zealand at the 2009 Venice Biennale and is currently working towards a major exhibition at Nottingham Contemporary in 2012. She is represented by Kate MacGarry in London, Ivan Anthony in Auckland and Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington.

DANE MITCHELL (born 1976)
Untitled (Flag) from The Barricades 2007
 shovel and flag
 Private Collection, Wellington

Dane Mitchell is interested in exploring the rich visual repertoire associated with political movements, in this case the sculptural forms generated by popular uprisings and the street demonstrations to which they give rise. This work was included a larger installation of works at Starkwhite in Auckland in 2007. Of this project Mitchell has written:

The Barricades project offers a visual, not linear logic. All the various forms the work takes in the exhibition aim to remove the original context from which these objects and images come—rendering, remaking and reforming them in a detached manner—so that the cold harsh light of the gallery might work towards removing the exactness and authority of their specific history, and allow some breathing room—a respite. The project is unconcerned with dating, naming or contextualising the barricades or the specific locale in which the related works find their origins, so that they might possibly be blasted out of a historical continuum, to operate as images and objects without specific narratives. Perhaps through this they may, to quote Adorno, awaken congealed life in petrified objects.

Dane Mitchell graduated from the Auckland Institute of Technology in 1998. He has exhibited widely in Australia, New Zealand, Brazil and Germany, in both solo and group projects, including, notably the Sao Paulo Biennial (2004), the Scape Biennial (Christchurch, 2006), DAADGalerie, Berlin (2009) and the Busan Biennale in 2010. He has undertaken residencies in New Plymouth, Dunedin, Wellington, London and Berlin. Mitchell is represented by Starkwhite in Auckland.

DANIEL DU BERN (BORN 1980)

Protection: Pure (2/5) 2005-6

enamel on canvas

Private Collection, Wellington

This work was included in *Protection*, Daniel du Bern's solo exhibition in the Michael Hirschfeld Gallery at City Gallery Wellington in 2006. Here it was presented along with a range of works in different media that combined the artist's various interests in the history of abstract art, punk and skate culture, the marketing campaigns of Tourism New Zealand and the graphic styles of extremist anarchist groups.

Daniel du Bern graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Massey University in 2003. He has exhibited in various solo and group exhibitions in New Zealand, Australia and the USA. He is currently living and working in Melbourne, Australia.

WOOLLASTON IN WELLINGTON

M. T. (Toss) Woollaston (1910–1998) is a key figure in the history of modern New Zealand art. He also holds a special place in the cultural life of Wellington. This is largely due to the unique relationship he developed with his principal dealer, Peter McLeavey, who introduced his paintings to Wellington audiences in 1968 (the very first exhibition he held in his gallery at 147 Cuba Street) and continued to show his work even after he died in 1998. Woollaston is known first as a painter of landscapes, notably those he lived in and visited frequently—in Taranaki, Nelson, Greymouth and Wellington. His works challenged audiences with their expressive brushwork, unconventional perspectives and earthy palette, but were taken up by a cultural intelligentsia as properly modern responses adequate to the task of capturing a true sense of place. Less well known but now justly admired are Woollaston's portraits, which bring the same intensity to bear on his treatment of the human form as his depictions of the natural environment. As a taste for his work grew in the 1960s and 1970s, so commissions became more frequent from friends and supporters who invited him to capture their likeness. This often entailed Woollaston spending time with his patrons, staying and sketching in their homes and finding inventive means to coax recalcitrant family members into becoming compliant sitters. This selection of works balances Woollaston's love of landscape with his fascination for human character, bringing to light a small range of works from the many that are held in local collections.

M. T. WOOLLASTON (1910–1998)*Tasman Bay*, 1928 1974–75

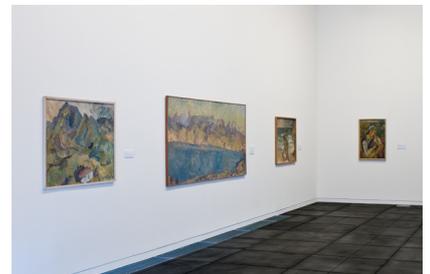
oil on board

Private Collection, Wellington

This is one of Woollaston's famed 'four-by-nine-foot' canvases (1100 x 2700mm), which he started to paint in the 1970s on the advice of Peter McLeavey. This new scale enabled him to expand his vision of the landscape to its full panoramic potential.

With its high vantage point and sweeping vista, Woollaston faithfully captures the striking topography of Tasman Bay in Nelson. But by including the intriguing date of 1928 in the title, the artist reminds us he is painting from memory, recalling the very first time he saw this scene as an eighteen-year-old, his head then full of Shelley's romantic poetry.

Writer, Ian Wedde calls this a 'history painting', not only because the artist's life story is woven into the depiction, but also because it instantiates the historical mindset of romanticism, a cultural outlook that has its roots in 18th-century Europe and which informed the development of art in New Zealand well into the 20th-century. Woollaston, therefore, sets out to achieve more than a simple description of a real place. He both re-presents a loved landscape and acknowledges the cultural source that underpins his aesthetic investment in it.



M. T. WOOLLASTON (1910–1998)

Bayly's Hill 1969

oil on board

Private Collection, Wellington

Bayly's Hill is a favourite motif of Woollaston's. This is the highest point in a range visible from his parents' home near Huinga in Taranaki that the artist returned to on a number of occasions. As a child he called these the 'Far-away Hills' that 'held [his] imagination strained and taut' as his 'sole representatives of distance'. Thus this motif serves as a vital starting point and touchstone for the artist in his efforts to bring the landscape close.

M. T. WOOLLASTON (1910–1998)

Paris Family Portrait 1978–9

oil on board

Private Collection, Wellington

Poet by the sea 1969

oil on board

Private Collection, Wellington

This painting strikingly brings together Woollaston's twin concerns of portraiture and landscape. Here we see the poet, editor and patron Charles Brasch (1909–1973) reading by the sea, a location perfectly suited to the founding editor of the literary journal *Landfall*. Though an invention of the artist (rather than a commission), Woollaston has caught Brasch's craggy features, granting him a statuesque quality that lends the work its solemn grandeur. This painting testifies to the close friendship the poet and the painter enjoyed (Brasch even supported Woollaston financially in times of particular need). The stillness and absorption of the poet, who sits with his back to the sea, suggests that Woollaston sees Brasch as a contemplative figure whose view of the world is mediated by literature; a concept that would have resonated with the painter, who inevitably works at some remove from direct experience.

M. T. WOOLLASTON (1910–1998)

The pianist 1975

oil on board

Private Collection, Wellington

M. T. WOOLLASTON (1910–1998)

Edith reading circa 1956–8

oil on board

Private Collection, Wellington

Woollaston's wife, Edith was a regular subject of his portrait studies. Here she is shown on a balcony that looks out over the city of Greymouth, where the Woollaston family lived between 1949 and 1968. Edith was a lifelong support to the artist, not only caring for their four children and looking after their home life, but also encouraging Woollaston to paint even when their financial situation was at its direst. As the artist wrote to Peter McLeavey in February 1967, Edith was 'not the kind to "promote" me in a business sort of way, but the kind who knew what was right for me to do though the whole world seemed against it'. Muse and mentor, she was 'no mere second' bringing a 'great independence of her own' to their partnership. He fondly goes on to describe her love of 'cats, stones, spinning and weaving, books, and the wild plants of our harsh landscape'.

M. T. WOOLLASTON (1910–1998)

Nelson landscape (with [The cello player] on verso) 1947

oil on card

Private Collection, Wellington

By bringing into intimate proximity a landscape and a figure study, this double-sided painting literally embodies the theme of this grouping of Woollaston's works. Until they reframed it, the current owner had no idea that Woollaston had painted a portrait of a cello player on the reverse of the card; proof indeed that when Woollaston had so little money to spend on materials he would re-use any support he could to continue his practice.

WALK WITH ME

Colin McCahon (1919–1988) is widely regarded as New Zealand's greatest artist. This is not only for the unique visual language he developed to convey the complex physical and cultural landscape of New Zealand but for the scale of his ambition and the seriousness of his purpose. This saw him seeking to produce 'paintings to live by' in an era when art was being stripped of its ethical and spiritual meaning and reduced to mere material surface and exchangeable commodity. His stature has further been confirmed by the attention of critics and curators who have written extensively on his work and produced exhibitions that variously address his output, as well as by the efforts of public institutions to secure key works for their collections (an exercise at times strategically assisted by the artist himself). In recent times the value of McCahon's paintings has risen dramatically, taking his work out of the reach of many. Hence, one might say that McCahon is no longer in direct circulation; he has thoroughly entered history. However, this was not always the case, as his career doggedly attests. Through times of public misunderstanding and financial insecurity, that continued into the 1970s, McCahon received vital support from cultural figures—like Charles Brasch, Rodney Kennedy, and Ron O'Reilly—who were the first to acquire his work. Then, a nascent dealer gallery system introduced McCahon's work to collectors, who were able to secure paintings for moderate prices (some of which have found their way into circulation again via the secondary market), and a new generation of art historians and curators, who followed his work with enthusiasm. In Wellington Peter McLeavey was McCahon's champion, staging 17 solo exhibitions of his work between 1968 and 1983 and showing some of his most significant series. This selection of works, which will change over the course of the exhibition, is testament to the loyal support McCahon enjoyed from certain key figures with whom he shared his struggles and achievements especially in those difficult early years.

COLIN McCAHON (1919–1987)

[View from Mrs Neame's old house at Mahau] circa 1940

oil and charcoal on paper

Private Collection, Wellington

Toss Woollaston once owned this work, retrieving it after McCahon discarded it as unsuccessful and providing its descriptive title. Woollaston eventually gave it to Peter McLeavey to sell, who first had to have the work conserved to minimise the effects of it having spent time rolled up. We can now appreciate the painting as both an early attempt to extract the formal qualities of a particular subject and as evidence of the close friendship Woollaston and McCahon enjoyed after they met in 1937, during the period when McCahon did seasonal work in Nelson and spent time with the Woollastons, who were then living in Mapua.



COLIN McCANHON (1919–1987)

The Canoe Tainui 1969

synthetic polymer on hardboard, 8 panels

Private Collection, Wellington

This painting was first shown at Peter McLeavey Gallery in July 1969. It was purchased from that show by its current owners. It is one of a number of works painted in a highly productive period in the late 1960s and 1970s in which the artist drew on Māori texts he found in (amongst others) Matire Kereama's *The Tail of the Fish: Maori Memories of the Far North*, in this case the genealogy of Tainui included in the book's preface. This litany of names that tracks through the generations from ancient times until the present is a powerful form of history writing in which people are linked to each other by name, blood, and location. It is especially poignant to note the second to last panel which features a number of European names, for here the legacy of colonisation is inscribed. But as the last panel attests, with its exclusive concentration of Māori names, *The Canoe Tainui* also signals the revival of Māori in the present.

COLIN McCANHON (1919–1987)

Singing Women 1945–46

oil on paper on board

Private Collection, Wellington

With eyes fixed on points beyond the frame and mouths open in song, these two strong women convey a visionary intensity that suggests they are bearers of deeper meaning; they are vessels, perhaps, through which a message is being delivered. According to his biographer, Gordon H. Brown, *Singing Women* is an immediate precursor to Colin McCMahon's earliest religious paintings. Brown states that the study was based on McCMahon attending an evangelical concert in Dunedin in 1945. This painting therefore foreshadows the productive and controversial period (1947–1950) in which McCMahon painted religious subjects set into local New Zealand landscapes.

This work was included in McCMahon's first solo exhibition (of 42 landscapes and figurative works) in Wellington, organised by his friend and early patron, Ron O'Reilly, and presented at the Wellington Public Library in February 1948. Reflecting on this exhibition in 1972, O'Reilly described its effect as being 'like tossing a stone into a swarm of bees'. Despite negative comments, O'Reilly continued to support the artist, serving as a life-long sounding board and confidante, as well as collector, curator and interpreter of his work.

COLIN McCANHON (1919–1987)

Elias Will He Come to Save Him? 1961–62

enamel and sand on hardboard

Private Collection, Wellington

When McCMahon began painting his magnificent *Elias* series in 1959, the first to fully embody the written word in his oeuvre, Toss Woollaston wrote in their defence: 'When a whole sky cries "Elias"...who shall say lettering shall not be big in a picture?'. These paintings draw on the biblical account of Christ's crucifixion, in particular, the moment when he calls out from the Cross, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' and bystanders wonder whether he will indeed be saved. For McCMahon this is a crucial moment of doubt at the very core of the Christian narrative, but also one with which he could personally identify as someone deeply engaged in questions of faith concerning both the possibility of spiritual salvation and the power of art to communicate.

COLIN McCANHON (1919–1987)

The Third Bellini Madonna 1961–62

enamel on hardboard

Private Collection, Wellington

This is one of five paintings based on McCahon's great admiration for the Venetian artist Giovanni Bellini (c.1430–1516) that were produced between the first and second *Gate* series (1960–62). Rather than use figurative means the artist deploys a purely abstract language that endeavours to both embody the underlying structure of Bellini's strikingly architectonic compositions and convey the secret symbolism of his iconography. There are even references to Bellini's skill in capturing the decorative effects of marble and the play of shadows, which were designed to heighten the realism of the Renaissance artist's subjects. Typically with McCahon, though, this attempt to convey the tender interplay of mother and child as a meeting of human and divine is mixed with an awareness of his immediate surroundings. Having moved from Titirangi into the city of Auckland, McCahon used the rooflines of his neighbourhood as the basis for this play of open and closed form.

The owner of this work is a frame maker. They have taken great care to devise a surround for the painting that sensitively responds to its formal appearance. This proves that not all acts of interpretation need take verbal or written form.

COLIN McCANHON (1919–1987)

Angels and Bed 2. For Peter 1976

synthetic polymer paint on paper

Private Collection, Wellington

This painting is one of the first three McCahon painted in his *Angels and Bed* series (1976–77), all of which were dedicated to friends (the other two were Walter Auburn and Rodney Kennedy). The series (which numbers fourteen in all) was sparked by hearing of Rodney Kennedy's fall from a ladder that broke some ribs and left him temporarily bedridden. We see the bed as a rectangular shape jutting up from the lower edge. This gives the illusion we are elevated above it, suggesting that our view is that of the angel come to care for the patient. Those other rectangular shapes give the impression of a room in which the subject is sequestered, a space from which the outside world can be glimpsed as if through a window.

COLIN McCANHON (1919–1987)

Muriwai 1974

synthetic polymer paint on unstretched jute

Private Collection, Wellington

This painting was given to its owner to mark the sad occasion of the death of his wife. McCahon had been asked for something to commemorate her passing and took nearly a year to arrive at what he thought was suitable. In the meantime his thinking gave rise to the *Jet Out* series (1973), charcoal drawings which show a cross/aeroplane/spirit launching into the sky above the beach at Muriwai (as Māori believe, a point on the journey of the dead homeward to Hawaiiki). One of these drawings usually hangs with this work, a gift of the owner's father, lifelong friend and supporter of McCahon, Ron O'Reilly. This painting, with its brilliant crack of light between a dark sea and a lowering sky, justly serves as a solemn but reassuring memento.

COLIN McCAHON (1919–1987)

Painting for Luit—not to solve the problem 1970
synthetic polymer paint on unstretched jute canvas
Private Collection, Wellington

McCahon's inscription here refers to Bertold Brecht's poem 'The Plum Tree' (1934), which tells the story of a plum tree that cannot grow nor fruit because it gets too little sun, being shaded by a fence designed to stop people trampling it. The owner of this work recalls its genesis and the circumstances of its dedication:

I used to be at [Colin's] home most afternoons, when I was doing my thesis research on his and Toss Woollaston's work and he had been struggling with the translation of a Bertolt Brecht poem. He didn't agree with the English translation in a Penguin edition of German poetry—not that he knew German, but he knew what was intended by the poem. I didn't think about it for months and it must have been Christmas... that I turned up and he just had this rolled up canvas and put it up for me and said 'This is for you'. And there it was—the issue at stake was the translation.... The surprise wasn't the possible value of the work, the surprise was that he had thought this through, that he thought it worthwhile to actually put it onto canvas and say 'Look, here, have it'.

—Luit Bieringa, 2001

RONNIE VAN HOUT (born 1962)

Muriwai c. 1972 1998
acrylic on plastic
Private Collection, Wellington

Like many modern and contemporary New Zealand artists, Ronnie van Hout is aware of the central status of Colin McCahon in New Zealand's art history. Like his peers, his acknowledgement of the 'master' teeters between homage and appropriation. Here the artist turns a documentary photograph of McCahon in his studio (first published in the *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*) into a miniature diorama, bringing the man behind the paintings to life as well as reducing him to entirely manageable proportions.

Ronnie van Hout attended the School of Fine Arts at the University of Canterbury between 1980 and 1982, where he majored in film. In 1999 he received a Master of Fine Arts from RMIT University, Melbourne. Since 1981 he has exhibited regularly in New Zealand and Australia, and his work has been included in exhibitions in the USA, Netherlands, Austria and Germany. He currently lives and works in Melbourne. He is represented in Wellington by Hamish McKay Gallery.

OFF THE BLOCK

Not every collector can afford a unique original. Not everyone who is attracted to art wants to collect paintings and objects. Sometimes it is possible to specialise in an artform that is not exclusively expensive, that can be accumulated without overly worrying about whether there is sufficient wall space to hang something. Such is the case with these limited-edition letterpress books designed, printed and bound by Brendan O'Brien. Here canonical figures like Ralph Hotere, Rita Angus, Colin McCahon and Mari Mahr rub shoulders with lesser-known artists such as Noel McKenna, Joanna Paul and Pip Culbert. Here too, the purity of their visual iconography is complicated by the introduction of words; not the language of criticism to which visual art must often submit, but the parallel texts of poets and writers with whom a rapport has been built.



HAND-PRINTED BOOKS BY BRENDAN O'BRIEN (born 1959)

Two walk in Edinburgh, 2011. Photographs by Mari Mahr, with poems by Gregory O'Brien and an afterword by Jenny Bornholdt, The Holloway Press, Auckland

Air pocket, 2004. Pip Culbert, with poems by Jenny Bornholdt and Gregory O'Brien, Fernbank Studio, Wellington

Six poems for Bill Manhire, 1996. Various authors, cover by Brendan O'Brien.

The wolf of Horeke, 2008. Drawings by Noel McKenna, poem by Gregory O'Brien, Fernbank Studio, Wellington

Caught in this sensual music all: a tribute to Janet Paul, 2000. Various authors, cover by Brendan O'Brien, Fernbank Studio in association with City Gallery, Wellington.

Access to lilac, 2005. Drawings and poems by Joanna Margaret Paul, University of Otago Library, Dunedin.

The cherry now, 2001. Drawings and poems by Joanna Margaret Paul, Fernbank Studio, Wellington.

Ode to the little hotel, 2002. Jenny Bornholdt, with drawings by Gregory O'Brien, Wellington.

Talking Toss Woollaston, 1996. Woollaston in conversation with Gregory O'Brien, Wellington.

The approach: twelve poems, 2002. Various authors, wood-engraving by John Drawbridge, Institute of Modern Letters and Wai-te-ata Press, Victoria University of Wellington.

Two walk in Paris, 2007. Photographs by Mari Mahr, poems by Jenny Bornholdt, Fernbank Studio, Wellington.

Rose, 2000. Drawings and poems by Joanna Margaret Paul, Fernbank Studio, Wellington.

The way, 2000. Poem by Jenny Bornholdt, Fernbank Studio, Wellington.

Magnolia tree, 2001. Photo-collages by Brendan O'Brien, Fernbank Studio, Wellington.

Reno, 2005. August Kleinzahler, Fernbank Studio, Wellington.

Pine, 2005. Ralph Hotere and Bill Manhire, The Otakou Press, Dunedin.

Rita, 2001. Seven poems by Colin McCahon, edited by Peter Simpson, Fernbank Studio, Wellington and The Holloway Press, Auckland.

Private Collection, Wellington

MIXED MESSAGES

The 1990s in New Zealand were a turbulent time in cultural terms. Against the backdrop of New Zealand's redefinition as a bicultural nation and in light of the larger processes of global decolonisation that granted cultural identity new and urgent relevance, art became a contested terrain. Here visual motifs were deployed as volatile signs of cultural difference and arguments were fought over the role of representation as a tool of colonisation. The 'cultural turn' mapped out in this decade is not directly evidenced here, rather its traces can be detected. On the one hand they condition how we 'read' the trenchantly formalist practices of Ralph Hotere and Gordon Walters as having a charged cultural content (white here is not merely a colour, nor can a line and circle simply function as neutral shapes). On the other, they inform how Shane Cotton, Peter Robinson and Jacqueline Fraser—three artists who came to prominence in the 1990s—use materials, objects and symbols to figure the unequal distribution of power and its damaging effects.



L. BUDD (active 1975–1999)
Untitled [suitcase] 1995
 Mixed media

L. Budd comments on the OE of H G 1915–99 2002
 adjusted photograph

Medium-long shot, 1957, France 2002
 adjusted photograph

Long-shot, Cook Islands, 1960 2002
 adjusted photograph

Establishing shot, Ireland, 1995 2002
 adjusted photograph

Close up, India, 1972 2002
 adjusted photograph

Private Collection, Wellington

This assemblage of suitcase (and contents) and framed images is the product of an intriguing interaction between owner and artist. The suitcase was acquired as an example of the work of L. Budd, an artist known for their recycling of found objects that are characteristically painted and annotated by hand with words, numbers and obscure markings. Taking the object at face value, the owner started bringing the suitcase along on their travels, setting it up on arrival and photographing it in destinations like Australia, France, England and Norfolk Island. Sometime later, the photographs found their way to the artist, who 'adjusted' them as is typical of their practice, returning them with a new imagined itinerary. This is a fascinating instance of the freedom allowed the private collector to do what they want with their possessions, but it also testifies to the fruitful possibilities enabled by the interactions of artists and patrons.

L. Budd is no longer active; however their extant work is documented and disseminated by the Estate of L. Budd, which maintains and builds an archive of material relating to their practice.

SHANE COTTON (born 1964)
Blue head 2004
 acrylic on canvas
 Private Collection, Wellington

Shane Cotton combines imagery drawn from a variety of sources to examine the historical legacy that has shaped him artistically and culturally. His works draw on his dual Ngāpuhi and Pākehā heritage and, in the case of this painting, deal with the mobile and consequential transactions between

them. Here, a non-native bird (the ubiquitous sparrow) faces an upoko tuhi (decorated human head, the kind that was traded by Māori in the 19th-century). Both seem to hover in front of their painted grounds, unhinged from their contexts as only painting allows (the inscription 'kikorangi' reinforces such a reading as the word conjures both the colour blue and the infinite space of the firmament).

Shane Cotton is a key artist to have emerged in the 1990s; he belongs to a generation of Māori artists fully equipped in the language of contemporary art who deal with their cultural inheritance in critical and complex fashion. He graduated with a BFA from the School of Fine Arts at the University of Canterbury in 1988. Since that date he has exhibited widely throughout New Zealand, in Australia and recently in London. His ground-breaking show in 1993 at the Hamish McKay Gallery is legendary for the way it both introduced a radically new style in his painting (registering the impact of his exposure to the painted houses (like Rongopai) of the East Coast) and provided iconic images that addressed the politics of the moment. These works were quickly acquired by collectors, who have continued to follow and support his work closely. Shane Cotton lives and works in Palmerston North.

PETER ROBINSON (born 1966)

Untitled 1994

tar and oil stick on paper

Private Collection, Wellington

Peter Robinson graduated with a BFA from the School of Fine Arts at the University of Canterbury in 1989. He has exhibited extensively throughout New Zealand and in Australia and Germany. As well as representing New Zealand at the Venice Biennale in 2001, his works have been included in major exhibitions in Sydney, Sao Paolo, Vilnius, Madrid, Seoul, and Johannesburg (amongst others). He lives and works in Auckland.

PETER ROBINSON (born 1966)

Stealth 2003

aluminium frame, polyester fibreglass resin, araldite, glue, epoxy industrial paint

Private Collection, Wellington

This sleekly sinister sculpture is similar to the object Peter Robinson included in his installation, *Divine Comedy*, at the Venice Biennale in 2001, when he exhibited alongside Jacqueline Fraser as New Zealand's first representatives at this important exhibition. It might be thought of as the next stage in the evolution of Robinson's thought after his depictions of canoes, planes and motorcars that appeared in his work in the mid 1990s. These were extrapolations from visual sources that included Gordon Walters' koru paintings as well as 19th-century paintings by the followers of Māori prophets in the new-generation meeting houses built to foster a sense of identity in the 1870s. The artist adapted these as emblems of mobility and translation to serve as his response to debates about cultural identity that galvanised the 1990s. The stealth bomber took the discussion into the arena of global politics. Here, Robinson seems less interested in the plane as a symbol of speed or technological advancement, than drawn to the ways a deadly threat can conceal its very presence.

GORDON WALTERS (1919–1995)*Tautahi* 1969

acrylic and pva on canvas

Private Collection, Wellington

Though Gordon Walters committed his career to a highly refined exploration of a strictly geometrical abstraction, which has secured him eminent status as one of our most important modernist artists, he will probably always be best known for his 'koru' paintings. He pursued these between the late 1950s and the early 1980s, adapting the curving bulb-like forms he knew from kowhaiwhai (rafter painting) into subtly composed combinations of alternating positive and negative horizontal bars and circles.

Tautahi is one such work. It was shown in his first exhibition at Peter McLeavey Gallery in May 1969, along with others in the series, including *Kahukura*, which is in the Victoria University of Wellington Art Collection.

PASSIONATE ABSTRACTION

The works in this gallery collectively amount to a small history of painting, in particular one that tracks between abstraction and figuration as these modes of making have taken form from 1946 to the present. Here the specific language of painting is inventively attended to; line and colour, surface and ground, frame and support, shape and gesture are explored, even when the traditional materials of painting are not strictly adhered to. Here too, painting's relation to the world is refuted, tested, and recalled as a source, a reference point and a suppressed trace. The term 'passionate abstraction' is invoked not only because it conveys the deeply felt engagement of these artists with their medium, but also as a sideways nod to French theorist Jean Baudrillard who describes possession as 'that process of passionate abstraction' in his often-quoted essay: 'The System of Collecting'. Such quotation allows for a connection to be made between painting and possession: as the painter abstracts from nature, so the collector removes an object from circulation. Could this mean that abstract painting is the ideal analogy for the act of collecting? Is painting therefore the ultimate commodity, a pure embodiment of the unrequited desire to possess?

MILAN MRKUSICH (born 1925)*Composition with curves* 1946

acrylic on paper

Private Collection, Wellington

Milan Mrkusich is a key figure in the history of abstract art in New Zealand; indeed he is credited with producing the first fully abstract painting in 1946. This drawing was produced at this time and bears witness to his initial interest in the non-figurative work of British artist Ben Nicholson and the improvisations of Wassily Kandinsky. It serves as a fitting starting point for the selection of works in this section of the Gallery. Here we see the artist deploying a fine sinuous line to animate a surface. This is not an abstraction from reality, but a composition created purely from visual elements that are manipulated on a flat ground.

Mrkusich trained as a commercial artist, taking additional life-drawing classes to feed his interest in painting. Drawn to art via architecture and design, he established (with two partners) the design firm Brenner Associates in 1949. This operated until 1958 at which point he began to paint full time. Mrkusich has had three surveys of his work (in 1972, 1985 and 2009) and he is represented in all major collections throughout New Zealand. He lives in Auckland where he is represented by Sue Crockford Gallery. In Wellington he has shown with Peter McLeavey (1969–1990) and Hamish McKay Gallery (since 1999).



PATRICK LUNDBERG (born 1984)*No title* 2009

oil on bathroom cupboard doors

Private Collection, Wellington

This painting, the most recent in the exhibition, was first presented in 2010 at Robert Heald Gallery, the newest dealer space to open in Wellington. Compared to the painting by Mrkusich on the opposite wall, this work does not play with line and colour on a flat surface. Rather the artist incises and scrapes away a found surface (painted doors) to make shapes. Though Mrkusich's process is additive and Lundberg's subtractive, they both generate form in relation to a flat and bounded ground. While Mrkusich was seeking a truth inherent in pure form and Lundberg is more concerned with the material reality of what is given, both make works that are rigorously non-representational. To this end they bookend the 'small history of painting' which is this Gallery's focus.

Patrick Lundberg graduated with a BFA from Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland in 2005 and after graduating was a co-founder of the artist-initiated space *A Centre for Art* in Auckland (which operated between 2007 and 2010). He lives and works in Auckland.

JULIAN DASHPER (1960–2009)*Here I was given* 1990–91

acrylic on canvas with conservation fabric, tape, cord and frames

Private Collection, Wellington

Julian Dashper was a key artist of his generation. He graduated from Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland in 1982 and went on to exhibit regularly throughout New Zealand, Australia, and in the later stages of his career, in the USA and Europe. Dashper's practice was a thoughtful and mainly affectionate negotiation of what it meant to be a painter at a certain time in history and in a certain place in the world. He was interested in exploring how the art system worked, including the production of a canon (*Here I was given* is typical in its title's veiled homage to Colin McCahon's *Here I give thanks to Mondrian* from the first *Gate* series of 1961). He consistently drew attention to art's modes of production, dissemination and reception, and he tested the boundaries between art and popular culture. In Wellington, Dashper showed for a time at the Peter McLeavey Gallery, but since 1995 he has been represented by Hamish McKay Gallery.

ROB McLEOD (born 1948)*Merkland: Stiff Jumble, Series No II* 1988

oil on canvas

Private Collection, Wellington

Rob McLeod is a well-known and much-admired artist and teacher who lives and works in Wellington. He actually hails from Glasgow, immigrating to New Zealand in 1972. This painting typically deploys clashing colour and visceral paint application to create a layered and textured surface that betrays no obvious content. However, the title serves as a 'locator': 'merkland' being a Scottish term for the value of a parcel of land as well as the name of a street in McLeod's place of birth. Thus this canvas could be thought of as a map that situates the artist both in the material present and in an imaginative past.

MICHAEL SMITHER (born 1939)

The Diver 1973

acrylic on canvas

Private Collection, Wellington

Michael Smither is known as a key inheritor of New Zealand's regional realist tradition. His paintings not only catalogue the landscapes he lives in and cares about (especially Taranaki where he grew up) but also provide fiercely honest insights into the dynamics of family life. In all of these he manages to capture multiple senses of time, whether it is the snapshot instant of an action or expression; the duration of a journey through a landscape, or the slow effects of geological time that smooth stones and erode shorelines. This work is no exception, capturing the frozen moment of a diver before they hit the water.

The painting's placement in this gallery is intentional. It serves as the pivot around which the arrangement of works swings, to offer an insightful play on the figure/ground relationship that is fundamental to the art of painting. The lesson here is that while Smither paints a figure in the round, which appears to be falling through space, what is actually before us is slick pigment on a flat surface. Perhaps he is giving visual form to older artist, Toss Woollaston's conception of painting, who characterises his feelings before the blank canvas as being:

... much akin to standing on a diving board, hesitating, gathering oneself together in the decision for the exhilarating plunge, then being immersed in the overwhelming element. Surfacing again, one can then review the plunge, and get ready for the next.

—M.T. Woollaston, *The Far-away Hills*, 1962

ROHAN WEALLEANS (born 1977)

Loaf 2004

acrylic house paint on board

Private Collection, Wellington

This painting is typical of Rohan Wealleans' practice in its testing of the boundaries and proprieties of painting. *Loaf's* bulbous form seems to erupt like a pustule from its surface, its viscously glossy surface splitting and cracking to reveal patterned layers that look like corrosion or scar tissue. This is in fact the result of a painstaking process that has the artist building up and then cutting back layer upon layer of paint, like a plastic surgeon or an archaeologist. Perhaps these two professions fit the artist's idea of painting: one seeks to repair lost beauty, the other to retrieve the past; both wish to ameliorate the passage of time by working over or digging beneath a surface.

Rohan Wealleans graduated with a BFA from Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland in 2000, going on to complete his MFA in 2002. He controversially won the Waikato Art Award in 2003, and has since held residencies in Dunedin, Sydney and Taipei. He exhibits regularly in New Zealand and Australia and was included in the Biennale of Sydney in 2010. He is represented by Ivan Anthony Gallery, Auckland; Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, and Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington.

Ralph HOTERE (born 1931)

White drip 1982

oil on corrugated iron

Private Collection, Wellington

Ralph Hotere is a vital figure in the history of New Zealand art. He is one of that first generation of Māori artists to study art in the 1950s (attending the Dunedin School of Art and the Central School of Art in London). Throughout his career he has made a self-conscious choice to be appreciated first as an artist and not because he is Māori. In the 1950s he was one of a number of artists appointed by Gordon Tovey to work as art advisors who travelled the country visiting schools and bringing art into the classroom.

After spending four years in Europe (1961–65) he developed a highly refined minimalist painting practice that later would be embellished with words that linked his forms to places, people and histories and literally brought poetry into the picture (his collaborations with leading writers like Bill Manhire, Hone Tuwhare, Cilla McQueen and Ian Wedde are particularly important). His range of media has also expanded to include vernacular materials like found timber, window frames, and corrugated iron. This aspect of his practice has also been encouraged through his collaborations with Bill Culbert, a New Zealand artist born in Port Chalmers who now resides in London.

Ralph Hotere has exhibited his work throughout New Zealand and is very well represented in public and private collections. There have been three important survey exhibitions of his work (1974, 1997 and 2000) and for many years he showed his work at Janne Land Gallery in Wellington. He is currently represented by Sue Crockford Gallery in Auckland. Hotere is still living and working in Port Chalmers.

MILAN MRKUSICH (born 1925)

Painting 1971

mixed media on canvas

Private Collection, Wellington

This is an example of Mrkusich's 'Corner Paintings', a body of work he began in 1968 and which developed into the 1970s. These treat the rectilinear shape of the canvas as a bounded surface within which an amorphous field of pigment appears to be contained, its corners 'snipped' by small wedges of solid colour that hold the composition steady. According to his son, Lewis Mrkusich, the artist recalls talking about the music of Mahler and Bruckner whilst sitting contemplating this work with the painting's owner.

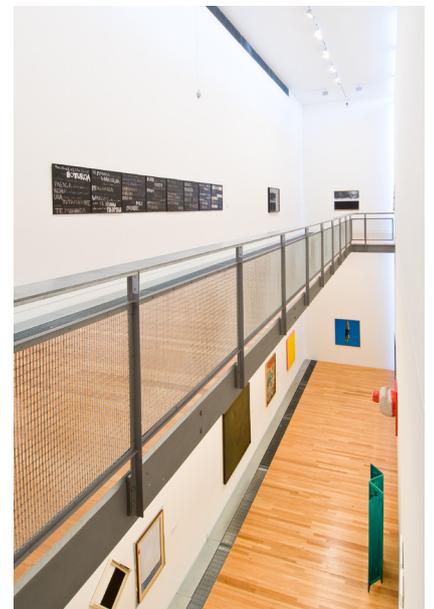
JEFFREY HARRIS (born 1949)

Woman in white 1988

oil on board

Private Collection, Wellington

This vibrant, large-scale painting is typical of the work Jeffrey Harris was making in the late 1980s, which saw him aligned with the new expressionism that came to prominence in that decade. While the enlarged scale and bravura brushwork may signal the confidence of the era, Harris's expressive manner has deeper roots, going back to the early 1970s where his love of colour and compulsion to chart all-too-human emotions first developed. Concentrating on a lone female figure, Harris here recalls the eponymous heroine of Wilkie Collins' famous novel, *The woman in white* (1860), a demented escapee from an asylum around which the plot of the novel revolves.



Jeffrey Harris is a self-taught artist who came to prominence in the 1970s with his emotionally and visually intense paintings and drawings that drew their contents from his life and the places and people that surrounded him. After an extensive period of time living and working in Australia (1986–2000), Harris is back in New Zealand and continuing to expand and develop the various threads of his practice. Harris has exhibited widely in Australia and New Zealand and his works are well represented in many public and private collections. A major survey of his work was organised and toured by the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 2004.

PHILIP TRUSTTUM (born 1940)

Miserly Emperor 1969

oil on board

Private Collection, Wellington

Philip Trusttum is reported as stating that the aim of his painting is to capture a 'certain feeling about life' (in an interview with Ray Thorburn in 1976). A lifetime's practice has entailed documenting even the most mundane facets of everyday life (playing tennis, riding a bike, gardens and domestic interiors) and filtering his experiences through his appreciation of the work of other artists, to convey his vision of things. At the point when this work was painted Trusttum was said to be processing the legacy of artists such as Klee, Matisse and Miró, but there appears to also be a profound admiration for the scintillating interiors of the late impressionist Pierre Bonnard and a love of Persian patterning.

Philip Trusttum graduated with a Diploma in Fine Arts from the School of Fine Arts at the University of Canterbury in 1964. He has been exhibiting his work regularly since the mid 1960s in New Zealand, Australia and the USA, and he is represented in public and private collections throughout the country. Though affected by the recent earthquakes in Christchurch, he continues to live and work there.

W. D. HAMMOND (born 1947)

Untitled 1998

oil on wooden screen

Private Collection, Wellington

This screen was acquired directly from the artist's studio. It lives in a home named after the extinct native huia bird.

W.D. (Bill) Hammond is a highly regarded artist who came to prominence in the 1980s with his complex, highly stylised paintings that married together landscapes, interior spaces and a panoply of twisted and flayed figures who sang, strutted and splayed themselves across their surfaces. After a trip to the Auckland Islands in 1990 he turned his attention to the ornithological domain, creating a world of bird figures that could belong to a mutant future or which re-envisage New Zealand's pre-human history. Hammond has exhibited regularly in New Zealand and two significant surveys of his work have been mounted (in 1999 and 2007). He has shown his work at Peter McLeavey Gallery since 1987.

AVA SEYMOUR (born 1967)

The White House Years 2006–07

Symphonia, La Moritz, Pablo, Alberto, Memento, El Presidenté, Roma, Prado, Rico, Symphonia II, Olympia, Sopranino, Senora, Oleg Cassini Sculpture, Ambassadors, Nero, Palm Beach, Credo, Mona, Nova

20 colour photographic prints

Private Collection, Wellington

Although Ava Seymour's series of photographic prints are technically not paintings they nevertheless participate in the discourse of abstraction, where colour and shape are manipulated as ends in themselves. Here, though, her materials bear with them traces of the world, which photography is believed to so faithfully capture. For Seymour has cut up and reconstituted photographs of that First Lady of fashion, Jackie Kennedy's glamorous wardrobe.

Ava Seymour studied at Prahran College of TAFE in Melbourne in 1989. In 2001 she was selected as the Frances Hodgkins Fellow at University of Otago and in 2009 she was awarded the McCahon House Residency. Her works have been included in numerous exhibitions in New Zealand and Australia. She lives and works in Auckland and is represented by Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland and Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington.

Behind Closed Doors is accompanied by a publication featuring photographs by Neil Pardington and texts by Lara Strongman. This documents a selection of the art works as they appear 'at home' and offers insights into their other life as treasured objects that have a particular place in the lives and imaginations of their owners. This can be ordered online at www.adamartgallery.org.nz/publications

Images: Installation Adam Art Gallery, Victoria University of Wellington 2011. Photography by Robert Cross.

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