

**Thresholds: gesture, idea and action in the Performance Art of
Andrew Drummond, Di ffrench
and David Mealing.**

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I dedicate this thesis to the memory of Di ffrench.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the work of three New Zealand artists who engaged with processes of performance art during the 1970s and 1980s. David Mealing, Andrew Drummond and Di ffrench integrated performance gestures that mutated into object or conceptual based practices in the 1980s and 1990s. An analysis of their work reveals both similarities and differences, all adjacent to corporeal, political and aesthetic issues and ideas that stem from international and national events particular to the milieu in which they worked. The three artists stand apart from their contemporaries due to their focussed positions as socio-political commentators during a turbulent time in New Zealand history. A large body of written and oral research on their work provides an historical view of the period from 1969 – 1999 that will focus specifically on their aesthetic experimentation and concerns with the fragmentation of the body, self and identity, and, importantly, their intended use of art to effect change.

Performance art in New Zealand underwent a burst of energy from 1969 as time-based activity offered an alternative to the static painterly or totemic art practices, as found in much international late modernism. Mealing, Drummond and ffrench explored a notion of performance art that resided in and beyond the margins of mainstream activity. A concept of the limen or the margin, the threshold and the littoral zone – a metaphorical place of creativity is applied to this analysis of their work. These individuals expressed through ritual and symbol found in notions of the limen, socio-political beliefs that reflected a view of artistic responsibility toward pressing issues of identity, freedom of expression, ecological wellbeing and the human condition.

Each artist concentrated on phenomenological themes surrounding the body, explored alternative sculptural material and enjoyed instances of imaginative communication. The body trace that evolved from the temporal moment, their relationship to the land and the urban environment, and an intersubjective exchange with the audience were all engaged with. This is articulated in their practices of socio-political interaction, as expressed through

Mealing's interventions, a spatial/kinetic continuum, as seen in Drummond's sculptures, and a performative materialisation of difference as evident in the cibachromes of Di ffrench. Historical international precedents of performance art will interweave with this specific New Zealand study in order to further highlight the diversity of performance art that these artists employed in their idiosyncratic journeys along the borderlands of art making.

Chapter One:

Introduction ***Performing Life***

Performance and body art has been an effective interventionist practice with which a number of artists' in New Zealand have engaged since the early 1970s. The distinct ethos of the era reached and infiltrated the New Zealand art scene in the late 1960s due to the energy of specific New Zealand artists and teachers such as Jim Allen (b.1922) who taught at the Elam School of Fine Arts from 1960-1976 and Tom Taylor (1925-1994) who taught at the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts, from 1960-1992. During their sabbaticals in Europe and America in 1968/69, both reacted to the international phenomenon of performance art and an alternative sculptural practice that incorporated the artist's body and process art. Until the late 1960s the diversity of international art such as Happenings, performance art, conceptual art, minimalism and abstract expressionism seemed to have occurred in New Zealand in close succession after a delayed period of time, where previous emphasis had been placed on depicting the landscape. The new generation of post-World War Two baby boomers was coming into maturity, and their awareness of the international current of activity was acute.

Allen's *New Zealand Environment # 5* (1969), (Govett-Brewster Art Gallery) and Taylor's *Palladian Subdivision*, (1972/73), (Canterbury Society of the Arts Gallery) were among the first examples of installation art in New Zealand employing multi-media techniques and notions of ephemerality. Allen's *Contact: A Performance in Three Parts* (1974), the first significant manifestation of performance in New Zealand, explored issues of articulating space, communication and the sensory/corporeal body. Other artists who engaged with installation and performance at the beginning of the 1970s were students from the two University art schools such as Phil Dadson (b.1946) Leon Narbey (b.1947), Bruce Barber (b. 1950), all students of Allen, and

Pauline Rhodes (b.1937), Rosemary Johnson (1942-1982) and Boyd Web (b.1947), students of Taylor's. Narbey's *Real Time* exhibition at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in 1970 was also an important multi-media installation in the development of a performance aesthetic in New Zealand. Filling the entire gallery the exhibition consisted of a mixture of ultra-violet lighting, PVC plastic, perspex, acrylic sheeting and sound. The kinetic light and sound environment invited audience participation in order to activate the space. Dadson inaugurated the Scratch Orchestra (Antipodean Twig) in 1970 after spending time in England with the musician Cornelius Cardew¹. Dadson's *Purposeless Work* (1971), (**illus 1**) in which participants swept the shoreline of Karekare Beach for an unspecified length of time, and Scratch Orchestra performances that pooled resources in improvised musical exercises, challenged the idea of one sole producer of a work and utilised the found object and conceptual ideas of creativity - they are also among the earliest forays into performance techniques in New Zealand.

Fluxus, conceptual art, performance art and the Happenings² of the 1960s and 1970s in America and Europe were all reactions against the formalism of modern art with its emphasis on style and content. Performance art, which gave emphasis to the artist's body, 'as a locus of the self and the site

¹ Cornelius Cardew (1936-1981), musician, composer, graphic artist and researcher studied at the Royal Academy of Music, London from 1953-1957 and studied electronic music in Cologne in 1958. He was an assistant to Karlheinz Stockhausen from 1958-1960 and became Professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music in 1967. While teaching an experimental music class at Morley College, England, Cardew formed the Scratch Orchestra, a large experimental music group, which operated for several years giving performances all over Britain and abroad. During the late 1960s the question of 'art from whom' was debated and Cardew became more directly involved with the politics of art making. Cardew's Scratch Orchestra called for a pooling of resources by the group as a kind of collectivity, with no one soloist or dominant figure. Dadson's Scratch Orchestra, (later renamed From Scratch), was based on Cardew's idea of improvisation and equal participation by group members.

² Allan Kaprow coined the term Happening in 1959, to refer to a spontaneous event. Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, New York 1959, was the first public event to include members of the public in the artwork. Such events took the form of music, visual art or theatre and became popular in New York in the late 1950s, and a phenomenon in the 1960s and 1970s. Through Happenings the artists self-consciously cast their bodies within a collective sphere of inquiry. Banal, everyday events relocated into the art world provided a tension through simplified actions. 'As Kaprow insisted of Happenings 'the line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps indistinct as possible, actions or material could be used from any context except from the arts'. Quoted from *The Artist's Body*, Phaidon, London, 2000, p. 28.

where the public domain meets the private, where the social is negotiated and made sense of³ was informed by political unrest and turmoil across the globe. The protest and counter-cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s that incorporated anti-Vietnam sentiments, a questioning of the 'space age', feminism, free-love and the civil rights movement all have art-historical precedents in European Futurism and Dadaism in the early twentieth century and the French International Situationist movement of the late 1950s. The artist's body in the 1960s and 1970s became a site where revolutionary ideals were articulated and examined. The work of German performance artist and sculptor Joseph Beuys, the global Fluxus organisation⁴ and South American performance art had resonance in the practice of New Zealand performance artists such as Allen, Dadson, Juliet Batten, Rhodes, John Cousins and (expatriate artists) Bruce Barber and Nick Spill, who all gave particular relevance to New Zealand environmental, feminist and body oriented issues.

Young New Zealand artists were aware of the international revolutionary questioning of academic and museological systems that simultaneously elevated and alienated art and the art-object from society. Often performances in New Zealand occurred away from the gallery environment and critiqued institutionalism. The Auckland City Art Gallery, (as it as then called) though, supported post-object and performance art and included a number of performances in its Project Programme from 1975 to 1977. A relationship between Australian artists and organisations was also developed at this time with New Zealand artists participating in the Mildura Sculpture Triennials, the Experimental Art Foundation exhibitions and the Sydney Biennales in Australia. New Zealand performance in the 1970s was practised initially as a means of

³ Tracey Warr, *The Artist's Body*, p.20.

⁴ Fluxus was a term coined in 1961 by George Macunias as the title for an anthology of work by an international group of artists (that included Joseph Beuys and Yoko Ono). The Fluxus events were more political than those of the Happenings, tending toward activism 'against art as a medium for the artist's ego...and tends therefore towards the spirit of the collective, to anonymity and ANTI-INDIVIDUALISM'. (Macunais, quoted from *The Artist's Body*, p. 29). Fluxus stressed the idea that an artwork is never finished, but rather as a series of ever changing ideas. Fluxus incorporated music, dance, sculpture and performance.

extending knowledge in both a text/idea driven context and an orientation towards bodily, temporal, aural and spatial concepts, reflecting the climate of social, political and cultural change.

A plethora of events occupied New Zealand in the 1970s such as the Vietnam war (anti-Vietnam demonstrators made an impact in 1970 when they confronted American Vice President Spiro T. Agnew on his arrival in Auckland), French nuclear testing in Mururoa, Maori demands for land rights and changing governments, (the right wing National Party returned to power in 1975 after the death of Labour Prime Minister Norman Kirk in 1974 and was re-elected in 1978 and 1981). Students and youth, like their international counter-parts, resolved to demonstrate and critique governmental decision-making. Left wing artists across the globe embraced activism as a means to test the limits of tolerance and enforce their collective power to effect change. Radicalism aligned itself to the politics of the left in opposition to conservative, right wing governments in New Zealand, Australia, the United States and Europe. The student protest movement, born out of the American Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) organization during the 1960s, the events of the May uprising in France in 1968 and the anti-war protest at Kent State University, Ohio in 1970, where four students were killed by the gunfire of US national guardsmen, augmented the climate of dissent and change in New Zealand during the 1970s, and to a considerable extent informed the burgeoning post-object and performance art movement.

Although the 1980s heralded a return to the art-object, conceptual and performance precedents remained largely intact for those New Zealand artists who had continued to employ spatial and gestural-centred notions in their work. The political climate during the 1980s, included worsening economic problems under the leadership of National Party Prime Minister Robert Muldoon and political problems associated with the 1981 tour of the South African Springbok rugby team which led to violent protest across the nation. Environmental exploitation of the land and the proposed Aramoana aluminium smelter in

Otago in 1981, the continued support of nuclear ships visiting New Zealand shores (until 1984 when Labour was returned to power and banned nuclear vessels from entering New Zealand ports) were other issues that artists actively responded to and supported through performances and installations. Encouraged by increased forums in this country such as ANZART and the F.1. Sculpture Project, time based practice became more sophisticated in the 1980s. Inter-media strategies have continued to develop performance art as a broad tool for the negotiation of contemporary life in Australasia.

Three of New Zealand's most effective socio-political performance artists, Di ffrench (1946-1999), David Mealing (b.1948) and Andrew Drummond (b.1951), generated performances, sculpture and photography that centred on the activation of materials and concept through their engagement with notions of metaphor, play and symbols that encapsulate the psyche and corporeal body. To isolate these three artists from within a history of New Zealand performance art is also to isolate and affirm their important contribution to the development of the genre. All three artists sustained the performance impetus in their work and adhered to strong left-wing social, economic and political allegiances.

Although markedly idiosyncratic, their practices moved in several directions that invite a cross-examination of their aesthetic considerations. By charting their performance activity from the 1970s and ensuing practices of the 1980s and toward the end of the 1990s, linearities and convergences will reveal aesthetic narratives that harnessed performance approaches. These approaches include, among an investigation of liminal time, space and gesture, openness to provoking change within art and life - implemented from three unique positions. Mealing, Drummond and ffrench are deserving of art-historical review in relation to performance art in New Zealand. In the context of this thesis, which examines the notion of liminality and the littoral, they each individually and collectively convey varying levels of marginality. The nexus of Mealing, Drummond and ffrench's work is multi-layered, time specific and

socio-political in nature as they engage with the body and the self on a multitude of levels. Art-historical precedents of Conceptualism, Dadaism, Fluxus, body art and performance inform their practice and all, at points in their career, reject the art object in favour of live actions. All three artists responded to the political, aesthetic and phenomenological issues particular to the ethos. Although it is useful in order to art-historically contextualise the era - to mention the activities of certain artists, or exhibitions and performances that occurred concurrently with Mealing, Drummond's and Ffrench's work, the emphasis will be placed specifically on the unfolding characteristics of performance, and the conceptual and sculptural characteristics of these three artists.

The multi-layered work of Mealing, Drummond and Ffrench exposes a unique alignment of principles. All enmeshed corporeal, political and aesthetic issues that disrupted and dissolved pre-conceived responses and relations between artist, spectator and critic in highly politicised terms heightened by the events of apartheid, feminism and ecological pollution. The modernist idea of boundaries and opposition (to the past and to duality between mind and body) is resisted in their practice; instead a post-modernist rendering of meaning and an engagement of multiple viewpoints are relayed, leaving interpretive fields open for negotiation. Ffrench in particular displays a post-modern articulation of feminism, pastiche, irony and inter-textuality, drawing on a variety of sources to augment the experience of 'difference' in society.

Mealing and Drummond sought change through the actions of the artist, Mealing through the personae of a 'worker-artist', Drummond through the alchemical, scientific potential of material and action. Where Mealing saw social change through pragmatic but imaginative means in *Jumble Sale* (1975), and *Desolation Row* (1978), Drummond invested the inherent symbolism of sculptural materials with spiritual and transformative process to address environmental crises, as seen in *Filter Action* (1980). Ffrench, like Mealing and Drummond, evoked the role of the worker/shaman artist in her 'performance sculpture' and activated materials in a ritualistic response to political and

environmental atrocities; e.g. *Active Perimeter* (1981) and *Fontanel* (1981). The artist's political statements made with the corporeal body in a performance/installation context exposed the duplicities and the complexities of the artists' role in art/life worlds.

These artists work visually, conceptually and metaphorically within the littoral and liminal zones, the margins of possibility and chance defining the area between high and low tide, the threshold between body and psyche. This space between a space that defies orthodox understandings of art, life and theatre is 'an instant of pure potentiality'.⁵ The littoral zone (an area on a beach between the high and low tide) in performance art is a zone where 'art world' and 'life world' overlap.⁶ Many New Zealand performance artists cultivated responses to the New Zealand psyche through a littoralist approach that incorporated inter-media techniques with an investigation of the body and self in a political context. Other artists working in this 'zone' include John Cousins, Juliet Batten, Chris Cree-Brown and Phil Dadson in such interventions as Dadson's, *Purposeless Work* (1971), (**illus 1**) and Batten's *100 Women Project* (1985). Such littoral responses to everyday cultural and social state serve to draw out a facet of New Zealand performance art that is closely related to the land and the urban environment. Mealing, Drummond and French's performances referenced the littoral zone as a site for creative processes to convey a sense of renewal and the passing of time, performances whereby the land and the sea ultimately meet to wash away the remnants of a fleeting human trace of action-ritual. Although these performances may physically have taken place or directly referenced the shoreline, they are also politically and conceptually *liminal*. The liminal moment, (the limen being the 'margin' or being on a threshold), is a transformative phase from which an artist can work, a time when old structures have broken down and new ones are being created. This is

⁵ Victor Turner *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. NY: PAJ Publ., 1982, p. 44.

⁶ See Ian Hunter's essay 'Other Ways and Meanings' Public Practices, South Island Arts Projects, 1994, pp. 21-24 and John Hurrell's 'Gangrenous Encounters: Outside the Littoral Zone', Art Now, Museum of New Zealand, 1994, pp. 13-17.

particularly true of the 1970s and 1980s as performance artists worked through socio-political and cultural phases of change. Liminal strategies can create new readings and blend one perception (or condition) with another physiological or psychological response. As Victor Turner states: 'Liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun and the moon'.⁷

Liminal performances by Mealing, Drummond and French combine cyclic ritual and rites of transformative passage. The power and play of symbols and metaphor interweave in the imaginative moment of performance.

Liminality, marginality, and structural inferiority are conditions in which are frequently generated myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems, and works of art. These cultural forms provide a set of templates or models which are, at one level, periodical reclassifications of reality and man's relationship to society, nature, and culture. But they are more than classifications, since they incite men to action as well as to thought.⁸

Littoral and liminal interventions in New Zealand during the 1970s and 1980s generated a consciousness not only of the unlimited possibilities in art but also of an attitude that indeed art could alter the tenor of cultural, political, aesthetic and environmental awareness. Through an examination of the work of Mealing, Drummond and French, divided into three chapters, themes particular to and cohesive in their work will illustrate how performance in New Zealand articulated a diverse but cohesive socio-political commentary. With this in mind, an examination of their work with regard to notions of liminality and the littoral will assist in asking and answering questions of how and why performance artists manoeuvred within the margins and shorelines of an ephemeral aesthetic form of behaviour.

The three artists share, if not a common methodology or 'result', then an impetus grounded in conceptual and performance art, which developed in New Zealand art history from the late 1960s. Hence the second chapter will

⁷ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, NY: PAJ Publ., 1982, p.95.

⁸ Ibid, p. 52.

concentrate on the performance and conceptual practice of David Mealing who trained in the University of Auckland Elam School of Fine Arts painting department in the late 1960s. This will provide an art-historical framework both nationally and internationally, as performance art first appeared publicly in New Zealand as an art movement in Auckland at around the same time Mealing graduated with honours from Elam in 1970. Prevailing issues for contemporary artists of the 1970s will be examined, such as political protests, arguments for and against the commodification of the art object, the use of the artist's body and aspects of the counter-cultural movement. Early liminal-oriented work by Mealing can be seen to directly reference 1970s international conceptual, minimalist and revolutionary-activist approaches that sought to change the exalted perception of art and artist. The Prague Spring and student-led protests in Paris and globally during 1968 are important components to Mealing's sociological, political and 'aesthetic' interventions as is the work of Joseph Beuys who portrayed the persona of the shaman in order to heal what he described as 'the vast social wound' inherent in contemporary society.

From 1969 to 1984 Mealing engaged in a specific dialectic within the art world during his 'active' years as an artist in New Zealand. This dialectic took on a unique form of rigorous aesthetic analysis that critiqued simultaneously the hierarchical structures of the 'art world', the alienation created by the museological space, and social and political inertia in a consumer driven world. Mealing's particular vision defied a rigid interpretation of static artistic dogma, to articulate instead a dynamic view of society's ever-changing experiences. Investigating the elements or rites that constitute daily life, from a basic struggle for survival to the battle for freedom against totalitarian forces as manifested through Apartheid and the Vietnam War and in student clashes with 'authority' throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Mealing's imagination and energy in the creative process confronted and rebuked existing power structures. Mealing's rationale is based on the power of the imaginative function of the artist to traverse the connections between one's intuitive understanding of life

and reality. Inspired by reading the work of German and French Marxist sociologists and philosophers such as Jacques Pommerville, Hegel and Georges Gurvitch, Mealing's artistic approach utilised the methodology of sociological research, direct observation and quantitative modes that served to relay his ideas of Art as a development and expansion of real living experience.

As Mealing asserts:

The better our understanding of the fact that there is a permanent relationship, varying according to the social setting, between all the forces at work within the framework of collective life, the deeper our awareness of the existential reality of the work of art.⁹

Mealing's sociological stance and methodology is apparent early in his career and is reflective of Fluxus artists Joseph Beuys, Allan Kaprow and Hans Haacke. His gestures towards social change consist of video/photo-documentation, letters, ideas and inter-views/inter-changes between artist and 'participant', (i.e. institutions or communities and individuals). Conducted in real time they are social interventions or Happenings in the liminal sense, i.e. where an artist can work with a socialist attitude that art/life worlds are parallel, and it is in the gap between them that art produces an effect in a social and cultural arena, as the American pioneer performance artist Allan Kaprow observes: 'the art/life genre reflected equally the artificial aspects of everyday life and the lifelike qualities of created art'.

Of course, when you do life consciously, life becomes pretty strange – paying attention changes the thing attended – so the Happenings were not nearly as lifelike as I supposed they might be. But I learned something about life and 'life'.¹⁰

Performance art began to function in Mealing's work from the early 1970s as he drew upon examples of Fluxus art and Happenings; through installations, *Wool* (1970), *Blood the River of Life* (1973) and *Jumble Sale* (1975), and paintings, *New Morning, Water/Colours/Dung*, (1972). The ritualised interrogations of the

⁹ David Mealing *Blood the River of Life*, catalogue 1973.

¹⁰ Allan Kaprow, 'Performing Life', *Performance Anthology: A Source Book of California Performance Art*, San Francisco, Contemporary Arts Press, 1989, p. x.

Viennese Actionists¹¹ and Beuysian interventions into prevailing art/life systems informed later performances, as he became more occupied with art as a playful but serious and potentially confrontational social experiment, as in *Lifecycle/Bicycle* (1976), *Desolation Row: A Socio-political Statement* and *Grey Lynn Playground: Community Project*, (1978).

Mealing did not purposely seek conflict with institutions, but inevitably the 'contentious' and challenging nature of his work, in particular *Crucifixion* (1978) and *Getting Cold Feet* (1979), resulted in restriction and censorship from within the gallery system, that ultimately led to his complete rejection of 'art world' nomenclature. After his exit from the perceived constraints and constructs of 'art', Mealing has continued melding art, life and performance by closely working with local community as Director of the Petone Settlers Museum in Lower Hutt, Wellington.

Chapter three will cross over into this early examination of performance art with the entrance of Andrew Drummond into the New Zealand art world ostensibly in 1976 after his return from Canada. The 1970s in New Zealand was an intense decade of experimentation with performance art. Alternative venues in the North and South Islands, artist-run spaces, collaborations, and new technology available to record and augment the fleeting gesture, all heightened the degree of performance activity in this country. Drummond, (as a protagonist and developing artist), increased the visibility of performance in New Zealand as sculptural kinaesthesia that had first found articulation in the

¹¹ The Viennese Actionists began ritualised performances in Germany in 1962. The Austrian artist Hermann Nitsch, performed *1st Action* (1962), dressed in white overalls he was attached to rings attached to a wall as if he were being crucified. His friend and fellow Actionist poured blood onto his head letting it run over his body. 'Nitsch aimed at an ecstatic redemption through the powerful emotional experience of the physical contact with blood and by assuming the role of Christ'. (*The Artist's Body*, p.92). Nitsch produced a series of events throughout the 1970s called the *Orgies, Mysteries, Theatre*, in which animals were symbolically crucified and their entrails and blood poured over naked bodies. The rationale of such events lay in Nitsch's belief that humankind's aggressive and violent instincts were repressed and muted through the media. The 'natural' ritual of animal sacrifice had become a taboo in contemporary society and the Actionist events were supposed to release negative energy in the audience. Other Actionists included Otto Muhl, Gunter Brus, Arnulf Rainer and Valie Export. The Viennese Actionists developed existential and psychological theories of art as therapy, based on the studies of Sigmund Freud.

practices of Len Lye the New Zealand born kinetic sculptor, and Jim Allen during the height of late modernism in the 1960s and 1970s. Diverse international movements such as Pop-Art, Op-Art, Constructivism, Art & Language, Arte Povera, Abstract Expressionism and action painting infiltrated through international art journals, touring exhibitions and the travels of artists such as Allen, Taylor, Dadson, Mealing and Drummond, and made a broad impact on New Zealand artists. Alternative interpretations of the modernist avant-garde, particularly as given by semiologist Umberto Eco and philosopher Michel Foucault during the 1960s, were also widely acknowledged and shared in the expansion of art making practices globally in the ensuing decades. For example, 'Eco interpreted the contemporary artwork as an open system where the experience of the work is flexible and constantly renewable'.¹² Vanguard artists in this fecund period of art history were working in a paradoxical place where veils between ideological spheres became thinner, blurring and highlighting manifold distinctions between polemical binaries. Drummond, however, was not driven by a conscious semiological or phenomenological application, but rather by an inherent and habitual need to connect with the qualities and possibilities of the body and mind through an understanding of the creative power of symbol and metaphor placed within objects and people.

Although Mealing and Drummond may *appear* diametrically opposed in their approach to materials and execution of a work, their processes can be seen to relate to each other through a range of politically based actions, performance action and Beuysian notions of creativity, healing and regeneration. Drummond later, however, turned toward the making of art objects, (as opposed to the Fluxus attitude of rejecting the professionalism of the art market) and Mealing's interest lies solely with the direct 'real time' exchange with communities of people. Drummond's aesthetic incorporates a sculptural vision that is relayed through metaphorical kinetic devices, contextualised by the spirit of the land. His journey from performance to

¹² Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera*, London, Phaidon Press, 1999, p. 26.

sculpture has traversed concepts of liminal space and time and connects with a socialist and humanist position. Mathematics and the physics of space in the realm of what Marcel Duchamp described the 'fourth dimension' has occupied the artist since his entry into the art world in the mid 1970s. The perennial question of 'how do you tread lightly on the planet?' has informed the sensitivity of much of his practice until the present day.

Always connected with the interrelationship between the land, the psyche and the people, Drummond's sculptural, conceptual and performance synaesthesia included action, and an interest in the transformative power of materials. This is evident in his 1975 series of performances in Scotland, the Dynamic Energy Art Group (DEAG) series in 1977, through to performances of 1978, *Ngaruanga Set*, *Crucifixion*, *Suspension/Ascension* and in the solitary land art actions *Filter Action* and *Earth Vein* (1980). Drummond's alchemical creation of sculptural systems was an act arising out of a conscious need for change in a political climate of greed and exploitation of the land. Drummond's performance and sculptural impetus was Beuysian in the sense that components were activated not by personality alone, but by a unique affiliation with the symbolic and holistic possibilities of particular materials. As Beuys declared:

When I appear as a kind of shamanistic figure, or allude to it, I do it to stress my belief in other priorities and the need to come up with a completely different plan for working with substances.¹³

Drummond's cathartic actions also reveal 1960s and 1970s environmental land art techniques as in conducting rituals of walking great distances to leave a physical trace on the land, and the use of maps as indexical signs of expeditions. Drummond's later sculptural practice in the 1990s continued to evoke liminal interrelationships between the body and land through corporeal, fragmented imagery, such as arteries and limbs and

¹³ Joseph Beuys quoted from *Joseph Beuys*, Caroline Tisdall, Thames and Hudson, London, 1979, p.23.

allegorical suggestions of multiple journeys. His performance work can also be seen as embodied, intertwining vision and touch with a temporal sense of self. The French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau Ponty identified the notion of 'subjectivity in process', i.e. the body *belonging* to space and time rather than *conceiving* space and time, thus the body's temporal structure (subjectivity and objectivity as performative rather than fixed) can complicate the viewer's attempts to locate themselves as *coherent* in relation to the work of art. The object, however, in Drummond's performance process, evolved organically, playing a unique role in the extension of his performance practice. The object ultimately resolved what Drummond perceived as the limitations of performance for him personally and enabled him to materialise ('see') the conceptual performance process.¹⁴ A freedom of interpretation and potential that remains in a liminal state of flux, time past with the present is alluded to through Drummond's kinetic machines that have an aesthetic evocative of another time. This provides a means to convey a metaphorical transportation from time to another, devoid of theatricality or parody.

An inner visualisation of aesthetic sensibility is conveyed through the practice of Di ffrench who worked intensely within the spheres of sculpture, painting, performance and photography from the 1970s until the 1990s. Ffrench's work is examined in the fourth chapter, as it was not until the early 1980s that her aesthetic vision took on an art-historical and political currency, concurrent with the development of 1970s and 1980s performance energy. Performance art in the 1980s stressed the importance of the collaborative action as a means to implement feminist sensibilities. As the decade progressed, artists increasingly recorded or contained the performance action through objects, with an emphasis on photographs, video/film, sculpture or

¹⁴ Note also Carolee Schneeman's statement, 'Early on I felt that the mind was subject to the dynamics of its body. The body activating pulse of eye and stroke, the mark-signifying event and transferred from 'actual' space to constructed space. And that it was essential to dance, to exercise before going to paint in order to see *better*: to bring the mind's eye alert and clear as the muscular relay of eye hand would be.' Carolee Schneemann: *The Woman Who Uses Her Body as Her Art*, *Artforum* 19, n.3 (November 1980): 70, quoted from Amelia Jones *Body Art Performing the Subject*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, pp. 301-302, f/n 32.

musical composition. Performance in New Zealand also began to harness more theatrically based gestures, and the increasing poststructuralist intricacies of the semiotic and deconstructive discourse of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Umberto Eco and Julia Kristeva. This has continued in the 1990s as performance artists explore identity through performativity, seeking unfixed sites for negotiation through symbols found in reality and ritual.

Ffrench's political motivations during the 1970s and 1980s echoed her contemporaries, Mealing and Drummond, in a concern for the environment, freedom of speech, and racial equality. Socio-political concerns such as the Aramoana Smelter issue, oppression of African and Irish people, and the police state were explored through performances and installations in the early 1980s, such as *Fontanel* (1981), *Gut Reaction* (1981), and *The Opinion* (1984). These performances were intended to be a harsh critique on the brutality of inhumane action. Ffrench's use of her own body in these performances is not as a site of desire, but rather, like Drummond as an activator of materials to convey a deeper message than that of scopophilic control achieved through the male gaze. A feminist sensibility is conveyed in her early sculptures and performances from the late 1970s and 1980s, which display a critique of, and a desire to overcome the obstacle of women's perceived biological oppression; to explore issues of corporeality, vulnerability/weakness, social subordination and importantly, *invisibility*.

Her overlay of idea with a three-dimensional sculptural experimentation in performance work indicates a gestural process within a cogent understanding of theory and practice, and resulted in the discovery of a unique photographic technique of slide projections onto three-dimensional haptic matter. In her deft use of materials as signifiers for the past and present Ffrench, technically, perceptibly and metaphorically explored through performance work the aesthetic symbolic potential of found objects.

Ffrench's interest in the body as a means of exploring political gender issues through the rhetoric of the pose is indicative of feminist Body Art that

coincided in the early 1970s with the Women's Movement in America, Australia and Europe. Free from patriarchal associations or artistic tradition, feminist body art allowed for an interrogation of those areas particular, exclusive and personal to women. The feminist critique of Cartesian notions of dualism – that of separation of the mind (male) and body (female) was replaced by an emphasis on the integration of the mind with the body, the body becoming a site whereby negotiation of power relations is both formulated and resisted.

Social interaction, sexuality/gender construction and nature/culture binaries were theories negotiated and challenged by performance and body artists in the late 1970s until the 1980s, when a questioning and critique of body art as 'essentialist' was regarded as reinforcing and colluding with the commodification and eroticisation of the female body for male gratification. Body Art however, in terms of a feminist reading was 'reanalysed later in the decade of the 1980s as theorists recognised once again the silence imposed on the cultural body.'¹⁵

Ffrench developed her performance process into 'performance photography' in the 1990s. The nude figure in Ffrench's photographic oeuvre such as the *Fundamental Series*, *The Idea Becomes Extinct*, (1990), *Hunter/Warrior Series*, (1990) and her series of cibachromes from the mid to late 1990s are all sites for confronting assumptions and contradictions inherent in voyeuristic Western representations of the anonymous nude figure. With the use of her body, as well as that of others, both male and female, she aimed to decentralize and subvert the enduring notion of the body being a disinterested subject of desire. A questioning of the male gaze rather than a simplistic

¹⁵ See Anne Marsh 'Ritual performance and ecology', *Body and Self, Performance Art in Australia 1969-92*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1993, p.169. 'The American model of ecological feminism, which celebrated woman's experience and her biological difference, and was connected to a counter-cultural interpretation of the body, was criticised for its essentialism. Ecological feminism, which was seen to reaffirm the binary opposition nature-culture, was criticised as a biologically determined discourse. However, despite a more sophisticated theory, the body and the notion of a corporeal existence returned for analysis in the 1980s. The examination of the social construction of gender difference which dominated cultural theory in the 1970s and early 1980s was reanalysed later in the decade as theorists recognized the cultural silence once again imposed on the body'.

reversal created a dialogue of gender and racial identity in her photography, that in turn created critical references to aggression, sexuality, and conditioned states of (non) being.

While Mealing aligned himself with the political interventions of the 1960s and 1970s to then abandon art world rhetoric, Drummond and French ultimately retained the art object, which at times was devoid of, and in other instances, oriented towards, the body. Consequently, what evolved from their time-based work, could be described as the rhetoric of 'trace'. In the case of Mealing his work in the new millennium is conceptual and community orientated; Drummond's contemporary sculptural synaesthesia incorporates metaphors of the body into highly sophisticated and metaphoric kinetic sculptures; and French's photographic series of the 1990s are a performative expression of the signified body within a locus of contemporary and mythic interpretations. Drummond's sculptural tension lies in a dual experience of transcendence and acceptance of the everyday and is pursued and informed through ancient traditions to modernism, through performance to sculpture. French also translates layers of historical and real time in an analytical, but tactile and poetically inspired text-driven account of sculptural possibilities. Conversely, Mealing's use of the everyday as raw material to be enlivened, evolved from technical applications ranging from colour-field painting, conceptual art to performance processes being worked through in Auckland in the early 1970s, toward an exploration of art as lived and shared experience and vice-versa.

It is clear that sophisticated performance gestures and actions by New Zealand artists were provoked by a desire to not only explore concepts of kinetic energy and aesthetic corporeal responses, but to also reveal aspects of the art world and socio-political structures as potential systems of impingement to be questioned. Hence performance provided a means of expression that could escape the confines of a late modernist compartmentalisation. Mealing, Drummond and French developed an idiosyncratic language of intent that

challenged their own assumptions about the art making process as well as providing a means to negotiate structures and systems, while remaining in the liminal and littoral precincts of unlimited creative imagination.

Chapter Two:

David Mealing *Artifice Falling*

David Mealing's career developed from a late 1960s painterly aesthetic and experimentation with alternative sculptural materials into conceptualism and performance art, indicative of a 1970s inclination to engage with processes of creativity. His work aimed to dissolve, in the spirit of the counter culture, the pervasive boundaries and limitations of art world institutions, hierarchies and capitalist emphases on the art object. Mealing applied Marxist, sociological and phenomenological analytical tools, and through the notion of the imaginative function of the 'worker-artist', he communicated and developed socio-aesthetic intervention. Mealing's political and corporeal strategies and socio-political commitment toward his method of art making remained (and remains) predominant in his career. *Jumble Sale*, (1975) *Crucifixion*, (1978), *Wasteland*, (1978) and *Grey Lynn: A Community Project*, (1978) are idiosyncratic creative gestures that strove for lasting change in attitudes toward how art is made and received and are some of the most challenging (and underrated) examples of early postmodern conceptual practice in New Zealand during the 1970s and 1980s.

David Mealing attended Mount Albert Grammar School where sculptor Arnold Manaaki Wilson¹ was his art teacher. Brought up in a conservative, but liberally minded and socially conscious family in the (then) mainly working class Labour stronghold of Mt Albert, Auckland, Mealing was undoubtedly

¹ Arnold Manaaki Wilson (b. 1928) was the first Maori to graduate with a Diploma in Fine Arts with Honours in sculpture from the University of New Zealand at the Elam School of Fine Arts, and also the first to enter the teaching profession in 1955 as a secondary school art teacher. Wilson's training was in the classical realist tradition, but John Weeks introduced him to modernist reductivism, elementism and the simplification of biomorphism and "primitivism". Wilson is credited with "bridging the gap" between the old and the new, Maori and European styles, and "his ability to straddle two traditions, more especially to engage with international modernism on his own Maori terms, gave rise to a very distinctive bicultural or cross-cultural contribution to the contemporary Maori art movement". Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, 'Arnold Manaaki Wilson: The 'Godfather' of Contemporary Maori Art', *Art New Zealand* No. 96, 2000, pp. 94-98.

aware of the social divisions between different factors of society that were later explored in his performance and conceptual work. He went on to study at the Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland in 1966-1969 under the tutelage of Colin McCahon, graduating in 1970 with a Diploma in Fine Arts with Honours in Painting.²

At Elam, Mealing's creativity and self-analysis were fuelled by the teaching methods of Jim Allen³ and Colin McCahon who encouraged freedom of artistic expression, thought and experimentation. McCahon's influence as a teacher was manifold and Mealing recalls his first year at Elam under McCahon's tutelage as a challenging experience mentally, technically and aesthetically.⁴ McCahon taught Mealing to have courage in 'unloading personal beliefs and establishing a solid base on which to take in new issues'.⁵ As far as

² Mealing's Honours thesis is entitled: 'The new ancestors and the new abstractionists'. Auckland University, 1969 and examines the work of Barnett Newman, Ad Reinhardt, Jules Olitski and Mark Rothko.

Mealing on graduating was appointed Junior Lecturer in Freehand Drawing at the School of Architecture, at the University of Auckland for two years as an assistant to Patrick Hanly. He then travelled to South America for one year in 1973 to study archaeological ruins and on his return taught art part-time at a Maximum Security Prison. In 1976 Mealing embarked on another personal research tour to Britain, Europe, West Coast of America and Mexico to see historical and contemporary art.

³ Allen graduated with a Diploma of Fine Arts from Canterbury University School of Art in 1948, under the tutelage of Francis Shurrock. He then studied at the Royal College of Art, London, graduating in 1952, and was liaison organiser to the New Zealand Education Department from 1953 until his appointment in 1960 as lecturer at the Auckland University School of Fine Arts where he later became associate professor. Allen returned from travel in Europe, America and Mexico in 1968/69, and as a result of this journey his sculptural and teaching practice changed dramatically. From 1977-1984 Allen was the Head of School of Art at the Sydney College of the Arts. He exhibited at the Mildura Sculpture Triennials from 1967 and co-founded the New Zealand Society of Sculptors and Painters in 1960. His early sculpture consisted of bronzes such as *Boys Head*, (1952), exhibited at the Royal Academy, *The Three Shadows*, (1956) (soldered metal) and *The Light Modulator*, (1960) (concrete, collection of the Auckland City Art Gallery). His public commissioned work includes the stained glass windows *Stations of the Cross*, (1960) at the Futuna Chapel, Karori, Wellington, a metal crucifix 1961 at St Andrews Church, Papakura, Auckland and the 1974 Christchurch Commonwealth Games site specific sculpture (located at QEII Park for the Games, now destroyed).

⁴ The first year painting students of 1966 were required to paint a still life composition of eggs on a saucer for two terms of a three-term year. Mealing states that a sense of discipline and stamina was thus instilled along with an acute sense of the passion for life and for what one believed in. (Conversation with David Mealing, 20th August 1999).

⁵ Conversation with David Mealing 20th August 1999. The artist also recalls an occasion where a student in his painting class in 1966 challenged McCahon by stating that 'painting was dead' and that instead, 'artists were in an age of flux and movement', to which McCahon replied that

Mealing is concerned, McCahon awakened in him a growing need to investigate creative possibilities centring on the social and political. McCahon's 'gentle and fragile nature', his ability to unflinchingly show his beliefs, infiltrate precepts of thinking, deal with issues of opposites in art and life, became lasting and powerful tools of personal inquiry that furthered Mealing's development as an artist.

Mealing's graduate and post-graduate work, although object oriented, became increasingly involved with the idea of 'moving through spaces, thinking processes and different pressures of the mind'⁶. In reading international art magazines⁷ and talking to contemporaries such as Phil Dadson⁸, Mealing began to relish the freedom to experiment and in a sense sought to 'escape art'.⁹ Mealing however, was not acknowledged to be, or publicly included in the tight-knit Auckland group of young experimental artists, students of Allen's such as Dadson, Leon Narbey, Kimberly Gray, Bruce Barber and Maree Horner, and perhaps it is because he preferred to move independently, opting to stay outside the circle,¹⁰ that such a separation was reinforced. Therefore Mealing has secured minimal consideration as a protagonist of performance in many accounts of post-object art in New Zealand.¹¹

'painting will always be live because painting is still'. McCahon became a 'guru' to his students 'a kind of Timothy Leary, a Ginsberg'.

⁶ Conversation with David Mealing, July 1998.

⁷ Through a part-time job working for Gordon & Gotch (NZ) Ltd, a major distributor of art publications from Europe and America such as *Studio International*, *Art International*, *Art News*, *Art in America* and *Vernissage*, Mealing was further exposed to current international practice, especially that of the Fluxus Movement, the Body Artists, Arte Povera, Conceptual Art and subversive Action Art.

⁸ Phil Dadson studied at the Elam School of Fine Arts from 1965-67. During 1968-69 he travelled to Europe and worked in London with Cornelius Cardew and the experimental musical group *Scratch Orchestra*. On his return Dadson completed an honours degree in Fine Arts at the Elam School of Fine Art, 1970-71 and 'incepted' the *Scratch Orchestra*, *Antipodean Twig* (later *From Scratch*). Dadson collaborated with fellow students, the filmmakers and sculptors Darcy Lange and Leon Narbey, and enlisted the talents of Bruce Barber, Lisa McAlpine and Jim Allen in the first *Scratch* performances in 1970-71.

⁹ Conversation with David Mealing, August 20th 1999.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ The unpublished MA thesis written by Jonathan Smart in 1982, 'Art as Social Comment', (Canterbury University) gives Mealing's work special consideration, in particular, *Crucifixion*, *Wasteland*, and *Sting/Stung*.

Painting at the time of Mealing's graduation in 1970 had increasingly given way to the sweep of performance activity overseas, especially East Europe and California performance and conceptual art. American art was in a state of crisis and conceptual art was considered to be 'the nervous breakdown of modernism'.¹² Political events globally coincided with the increasing dematerialisation of the art object and Mealing was particularly influenced by events surrounding international student unrest and protest. Many issues can be attributed to demonstrations and revolutionary action en masse, the Vietnam War, the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963 and Martin Luther King in 1968, anti-colonial revolutions, theological reforms, race riots in the United States, the Civil Rights Movement, Proletarian Cultural Revolution, Pop Music and the Counter-Culture. Despite Kennedy's belief that: 'in free society art is not a weapon...' and that 'artists are not engineers of the soul'¹³, a deep sense of malaise generated by events of the 1960s was reflected in the wider aesthetic climate, and especially by conceptual and performance artists.¹⁴

The events which have elicited specific responses from visual artists include President Kennedy's assassination, the war in Vietnam and particularly the use of napalm and "antipersonnel" weapons, the racial rioting in our cities. But a broader protest is apparent – against social inequities of every kind, corruption in the universities and, in general, the materialistic torpor and consumer-oriented character of the society.¹⁵

¹² Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art*, Phaidon, London, 1998, p. 123.

¹³ John F. Kennedy, Actionist events were supposed to release negative energy in the audience. Other Actionists included Otto Muhl, Gunter Brus, Arnulf Rainer and Valie Export. The Viennese Actionists developed existential and psychological theories based on the studies of Sigmund Freud which were based on the notion of art as therapy. quoted from *The Penguin Dictionary of Modern Quotations*, J. M and M. J Cohen, Penguin Books, England, 1978, p. 121.

¹⁴ Documenta IV in 1968, Kassel reflected the climate of anger and revolution elsewhere in Europe. Selection processes were questioned, important artists withdrew from exhibiting, the situation in France caused transport problems, budget difficulties and student protests in Milan and Venice threatened the event. Pamphlets distributed by students throughout the Documenta denounced the event as being an 'instrument of oppression', and attacked American art and artists; 'what else remains for the artists of a nation which wages such a criminal war as that in Vietnam but to produce Minimal Art?' 'Politics and Art, *Studio International*, Sept 1968, Vol 176, No 903, p.63.

¹⁵ Dore Ashton, 'Response to Crisis in American Art', *Art in America* Jan/Feb 1969, p.32.

Student uprisings across the globe also influenced the turn away from the art object. In France during 1968 a solid protest movement was born that was termed the May revolution. Anti-Vietnam demonstrators had been arrested, and a group of students occupied the University of Paris at Sorbonne administration office to protest police brutality. Their example set off strikes of students and workers throughout the country, and by the third week of May the country was virtually paralysed by a general strike. From this point the Sorbonne was a site of revolution, protest and heated debate on a myriad of subjects. The government's attempts to end the strike failed and the fall of de Gaulle's government appeared imminent. The detestation of culture in particular was one of the dominant traits of the May Revolution. Slogans were inscribed on the walls of colleges and in the streets of Paris, such as 'imagination takes power, free the passions, never work, and live without dead time'. The sterility of creation when viewing 'culture' from a distance removed from reality irked those students who saw the cultural elite as a consumer driven group unable to recognise their own creativity. There were calls to abolish painting as well as exhibitions of dead painters.

A profound antecedent to the events of May 1968 was the group of artists, urbanists, filmmakers and sculptors, known as the French Situationists. Led by Guy Debord and the Scandinavian artist Asger Jorn in the late 1950s, they developed political and aesthetic interventions through the medium of film, written theory and dedication to action and revolution. The Situationists aimed their barbs at capitalist society while simultaneously proposing a new model for the city. As with Karl Marx and Henri Lefebvre, the Situationists identified a crisis in society: that of the division between actors and spectators, producers and consumers.

The Situationists wanted a different kind of revolution: they wanted the imagination, not a group of men, to seize power, and poetry and art to

be made by all. Enough they declared. To hell with work, to hell with boredom! Create and construct an eternal festival.¹⁶

Indeed Italian and Russian Futurists during the early 1900s attacked predominant forms of art such as Cubism and Impressionism and the complacency of bourgeois audiences when viewing art. They staged a series of mass demonstrations, such as the 1918 and 1920 reconstructions that commemorated the October Revolution in Petrograd.

Guy Debord, in his book *The Society of the Spectacle*, (1967), identified a phenomenon of late capitalism in the 1950s where 'spectacle' came to metaphorically mean a state of passive consumer driven immersion;

Spectacle in general, as the concrete immersion of life is the autonomous movement of the non-living. Spectacle is not a collation of images, but a *social relation* between people mediated through images.¹⁷

This concept of the 'spectacle' became pivotal to the Situationist critique. Adding to Marxian notions of alienation¹⁸, the Situationists believed that to

¹⁶ Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*, Fontana Press, London, 1992, p. 551.

¹⁷ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, (1967), quoted from Bruce Barber 'Cinematic Subversion and the Theory of the Avant Guard', *Reading Rooms*, Eyelevel Publications, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1991, p. 117.

¹⁸ Marxism, in building cultural resistance to capitalist structures, asserts that art's practical use is found in an expression of the underlying economic relations in society that art is progressive when it supports the cause of the society under which it is created. The two-dimensionality of painting after the horrors of the Second World War (1939-1945) appeared inappropriate to the realities of the world, counterproductive and rendering art and life as separate spheres. In 1947 French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre published *The Critique of Everyday Life*, in which alienation, from work, society, body and self prevented full participation in life. Lefebvre analysed the ways in which commodities and industrial culture had colonized all social and cultural relations, in a growing sense of totality versus anarchism. Thus sculpture (as a direct result of Lefebvre's philosophy) began to emerge in the late Modernist climate as an aesthetic means by which to approach/reprocess issues of space and social reality. This developed further into the movements/events such as Happenings, Performance Art and installation work of the 1960s and 1970s.

Marxist theory of alienation and Freudian analysis of 'The Uncanny', are two underlying, powerful texts that resound in the development of 1970s conceptual, performance and postmodern art making. Freud's essay *The Uncanny*, (first published in 1919, reprinted in *Freud: Collected Works*, Vol 4. The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psychoanalysis., London, 1925) denoted what was the opposite of the familiar, frightening in its 'unhomeliness', but paradoxically found in the everyday. This sense of displacement and repression reflected Marx's premise of commodification of the object, overloaded with meanings and significance.

ensure continued economic growth, capitalism had created 'pseudo needs' to increase spectacular commodity consumption, seducing once vilified producers into consumers. To confront and change the world, the Situationists proposed a communistic based society through the notion of the 'derive' (a mode of experimental behaviour linked to the conditions of urban society and a technique of transient passage through various ambiances)¹⁹ and 'detournement' (rerouting pre-existing events and images in a situationist use of these means). This would create a constant state of revolution and newness and abolish the worst horror inherent in the society of the spectacle – boredom. 'We have a world of pleasures to win, and nothing to lose but boredom'.²⁰ Pseudo needs would be replaced by real desires and individuals would construct the situations of their lives, release their own potential and obtain their own pleasure. The Situationists supported vandalism, strikes, and sabotage as a means to destroy the manufactured spectacle and commodity economy, and by the late 1960s Situationist ideas began to infiltrate other countries and take effect in universities, especially during the May Revolution of 1968, where revolutionary slogans were taken from the Situationist texts.

Student unrest was a widespread phenomenon in the late 1960s – even in New Zealand. Social and political consciousness, a growing awareness of the propagandist machine and capitalist spectacle was increasingly questioned, society was fragmenting and performance artists of the 1960s started to reflect this sense of alienation. The nature and role of the artist was called into question, and society's inclination to surround the artist with an aura of mystique appeared an anathema to the social purpose of art that Mealing, in New Zealand and many other vanguard artists internationally were beginning

The object, socially produced, becomes a fetish, falsely overloaded with meaning, thus creating estrangement and alienation from the world.

¹⁹ Guy Debord, 'Theory of the Derive', *Situationist International Anthology*, 1958, cited from web link. Through the magazine, *Situationiste Internationale* founded in 1957, a number of their ideas such as 'Constructed Situation', 'Situationism', 'Psychogeography', 'Derive', 'Detournement', and 'Decomposition' were examined.

²⁰ Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, Left Bank Books, Rebel Press, London, 1983.

to believe in. The notion that art could mix with politics was a new process for Mealing, and although this thinking was still nascent in 1969, Mealing became increasingly critical of art jargon and hierarchical structures within the art world; he wanted to work instead within the political sphere.

After Jim Allen returned from sabbatical in Europe, America and Mexico in 1968/1969, where he witnessed first hand many sit-ins, protests and experimental practice within French universities²¹, an important shift in his sculptural attitude is apparent, one that was to impact upon the subsequent installation and performance work of a younger generation of artists emerging from Elam, including Mealing. Allen placed an emphasis on 'poor' materials, a radical departure from his previous practice, which had concentrated on formal, enduring materials such as aluminium, bronze, silver and wood. Allen was to embrace contemporary art of the time (without condemning the old traditions) such as Arte Povera²², and European and Latin American strains of Conceptual Art.²³

Allen's first two interactive installations in Auckland at the Barry Lett Galleries *Small Worlds* and *New Zealand Environment # 5* (1969) demanded

²¹ A scrapbook of Allen's held at the Elam School of Fine Arts Library contains newspaper clippings of the events of 1968/69 in Europe.

²² Arte Povera is an Italian movement that explored the inherent perceptual and sensual possibilities of 'poor' materials. It was established in 1967 with the publication of the Germano Celant text *Arte Povera: Notes for a Guerrilla War* and the 1967 exhibition curated by Celant *Arte Povera – Im spazio*, held at La Bertesca Gallery, Genoa. A common thread linking Arte Povera artists was the element of protest against a perceived American imperialism as manifested by the Vietnam War. Michelangelo Pistoletto in 1965 constructed an interactive installation, *Vietnam*, an example of process art where images of figures protesting against the war were attached to a mirror that reflected the visitors to the gallery, who in this way became part of the exhibit. Celant saw the Arte Povera work as anti-capitalist, anti-bourgeois acts of resistance – expressions of social and cultural unrest. In Celant's 1969 publication *Arte Povera* he criticised the 'objectivity' of Op, Pop and Minimalist Art as separate from life and stressed the importance of materials that were vital and alive. Further permutations of Arte Povera included performance art, subversive action as art and dematerialisation of the art object, all arenas which artists were to increasingly explore throughout the 1970s.

²³ Brazilian performance and conceptual artists were not so concerned with art practice itself, but more with the environmental and political issues of the genius loci, reflected in materials and encompassing the body and total environment. This is particularly so of Brazilian artists and intellectuals Lygia Clark, Helio Oiticica, Mira Schendel and Glauber Rocha, who produced the bulk of their work in the 1960s and 1970s. In London Allen made contact with Guy Brett, the author of *Kinetic Art*, London, Studio Vista, 1968, and was able to make acquaintance with the work of those South American artists that Allen had read about.

the gallery visitor move through the installation, thus creating a gestural energy within the sculptural materials. Allen transformed the gallery with PVC, hessian, steel, pine sawdust, raw wool and effusions of green ultra-violet light, aiming to provoke a multi-sensory experience that would give participants an abstracted understanding of rural New Zealand. The confrontational 'kinetic' space and sexual metaphors of *New Zealand Environment # 5* were later explored in another installation at the Barry Lett Galleries, *Barb Wire 2 Works*, (1970) and in the performance series held at the Auckland City Art Gallery *Contact: A Work in Three Parts* (1974), an embodied metaphor for improved individual relationships and communication within society. 'All these works were designed for the spectator to discover avenues for visual exploration, kinaesthetic experiences contained within the environmental areas'.²⁴

Similarly, Mealing's first installation, at the Auckland Society of Arts in 1970,²⁵ was an interactive, kinetic space for visitors entitled *Wool*.²⁶ (illus 2) The gallery was filled from ceiling to floor with the shorn wool of sheep and evoked images of cloud formations. It caused somewhat of a stir. Was this new 'informal art', art? Enthusiastically it was proclaimed to be a successful exhibition in the 'normally staid gallery environment of the Auckland Society of Arts', and from all reports the opening was 'the strangest art event in the city's history.'²⁷

Wool waist high and wool ankle deep. Wool up to the shoulder and wool over the head. Wool in hills, in mounds and in mountains. Wool that could be waded through, swum through or just thrown about. Whatever else art does, it begins by changing your mind a little. It leaves the world

²⁴ Jim Allen, 1974 typescript of *Contact, A work in three parts*, Elam School of Fine Arts Library, artists file.

²⁵ Running concurrently and in stark contrast to Mealing's romantic 'wool wonderland' was Jim Allen's, *Barb Wire 2 Works*, (1970) at the Barry Lett Galleries.

²⁶ Leon Narbey's *Real Time* at the opening of the Govett Brewster Art Gallery in 1970 was another important event in the dematerialisation of the art object in New Zealand. A "light and sound environment", occupying the five floors of the Gallery, audience participation was mandatory. The programmed light sequences and sound activated by spectators passing created an environment of kinetic responses and a playful inquiry of space and time.

²⁷ Hamish Keith, 'Exhibition at Society of Arts: Art News' *Auckland Star*, 18.7.70.

looking like a slightly different place. Mealing's orgy of wool does just that.²⁸

Mealing's interactive art environment evoked a playful insouciance. His use of wool echoed the Arte Povera attitude of creatively utilising material other than the traditional solid sculptural totems found in the iconic work of Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore. With his emphasis on 'informal art', Mealing's installation provoked an experience of art for community participation and enjoyment on a tactile and an imaginative level. Mealing and Allen's installations also echoed the ideas of American artist Robert Morris who wrote an article entitled 'Anti-Form' for *Artforum* in 1968.²⁹ Morris's *Felt* pieces (1967-68), attached to a single point on a wall cascaded randomly onto the floor, inviting a tactile, 'social' response from the viewer. In the influential 'Anti-Form' essay Morris defined the radical practice of process-oriented art as a means to disengage with 'preconceived enduring forms and orders'.³⁰ Morris cited the work of Jackson Pollock, Claes Oldenburg and Richard Serra as examples of work that focussed on a direct investigation of materials and confrontation of the senses.

Mealing's next exhibition was a series of paintings at the Barry Lett Galleries, *New Morning* (1971) 'created by David Mealing and the Art Workshop'³¹ that challenged assumptions associated with the artist as sole producer of a work in much the same fashion as Andy Warhol's Factory. Mealing engaged a professional car spray painter and directed him in the execution of a series of paintings that were primarily based on American colour field painting, in particular the work of Helen Frankenthaler, Jules Olitski and Morris Louis.³² Louis had experimented with new water-soluble latex paints,

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Robert Morris, 'Antiform', *Artforum*, April, 1968, pp. 33-35.

³⁰ Ibid, p.35.

³¹ Exhibition catalogue, Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland 1971.

³² Mealing visited an exhibition of Louis's work on display at the Auckland Art Gallery in 1971. Olitski and Louis began experimenting with colour staining techniques in 1960, after visiting the studio of the colour field pioneer Helen Frankenthaler (b.1928) who avoided the appearance of brush strokes by pouring paint onto unprimed canvas to achieve immediacy and

layering the paint on the canvas to give a three dimensional diaphanous appearance of colour. It was this technique that Mealing employed for the series of paintings.³³ Mealing in *New Morning* conveyed an interest in immediacy of action through emphasising the process of creation as the primary meaning of the work. This in itself is suggestive of the Action Painting of Jackson Pollock, a famous profile of whom was featured in *American Life* magazine 1951.³⁴ Pollock's performativity is pivotal to the corporeal extension of the picture plane. The 1951 edition of *Art News* reproduced photographs taken by Hans Namuth in 1950 of Pollock's painterly process that stressed his creative uniqueness. Pollock, as described by American art historian Amelia Jones, is the hinge between modernism and postmodernism. The creative function of what Jones terms the 'Pollockian performative' unveiled the body of the male modernist genius to present an intersubjective exchange between the artist and audience.³⁵ By dribbling, throwing and pouring paint onto the canvas, the artist's body interrupts the two- dimensionality of the picture plane to work in unframed space. The act of creation becomes a performance, (the documentation of which is also relocated in status) and Pollock's action painting exerted a profound influence on subsequent performance artists of the 1960s and 1970s, (such as Allan Kaprow, Shigeko Kubota, Carolee Schneemann, Ana Mendieta and the Japanese Gutai Group) who recognised the shift in the creative gesture to that of enactment in real time, real space and literal materials that included the artist's body in the mark making process.³⁶

transparency of colour. By 1965, Olitski had begun using a spray gun to apply paint, allowing the boundaries between colours to meld into one another.

³³ The titles of Mealing's colour field paintings reflected a personal epiphany of sorts, *Exultate, Jubilate, Gardens in the Rain (after Monet), Hymn to Light, The Night (John III, 2), In the Sunset's Glow and New Life (Resurrection)*.

³⁴ Robert Goodnough 'Pollock Paints a Picture', *Art News* 50, No. 3, May 1951 pp. 38-41, 60-61.

³⁵ See Amelia Jones, 'The Pollockian Performative and the Revision of the Modernist Subject', *Body Art Performing the Subject*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, chapter 2, pp. 53-102.

³⁶ Allan Kaprow wrote an essay entitled 'The Legacy of Jackson Pollock', *Art News* 57, No.6, October 1958 pp. 24-26 in which he eulogizes Pollock as '...the embodiment of our ambition for absolute liberation and a secretly cherished wish to overturn old tables of crockery and flat

Evolving his thinking to fully embrace the ephemeral and conceptual, Mealing's contribution as guest artist to the 1971 *International Sculpture Symposium*³⁷ in Auckland (inaugurated by Jim Allen), was planned to evoke an awareness of art as purely an experience rather than an object to be possessed. As an extension of the colour-field premise in *New Morning* (and to some extent *Wool* in the evocation of cloud formations), Mealing stressed his desire to experiment with Arte Povera, and Duchampian anti-formal qualities of art:

I wish to destroy the rectangle and substitute the 'medium' of indefinite form. Make painting be a thing in itself through image. Free painting from its rectangularity, two-dimensionality, and rigidity, and alleged purity.³⁸

Sky Project was to be of seven days duration over a period of two weeks, taking place on fine days only. Mt Eden was intended as the focal point, an image created in the sky by coloured smoke emitted from a Cessna aeroplane manoeuvred in such a manner as to resemble 'skywriting' over the crater. By using the sky as both theme and canvas, the illusion of pictorial space created previously on hardboard gave way to the creation of real or actual space with the use of dyes and aircraft. Describing the artwork, Mealing writes,

This project is an attempt to change art (i.e. paintings) into a system of total environments which can be enjoyed, but never possessed – as a SUNSET is unpossessed. It involves the blend of natural and mechanical substances operating on primal elements – wind, water, air, and light – with the tools of modernity – aircraft, dyes, radio and film.³⁹

champagne. We saw in his example the possibility of an astonishing freshness, a sort of ecstatic blindness.' p. 24.

³⁷ The Sculpture Symposium invited six international artists and included a series of public events that took place over a four-week period. The artists invited included: Michio Ihara (Japan), Helen Escobedo (Mexico), Fred Loopstra (USA), Ton Burrows (Canada), Bert Flugelman (Australia) and Hiroaki Ueda (Japan). The brief for the Symposium placed emphasis on cultural ties that existed between Auckland and other Pacific countries. Other artists invited to contribute to the Symposium included Allen and Adrian Hall, who both created ephemeral sculptural events. Hall's project *St Lukes Dome: Mt Albert*, consisted of a Dome that was to be lifted by 10,000 Helium balloons. Allen designed a light and sound show for the amphitheatre created in the crater of Mt Eden, burning three 30 foot high wooden towers.

³⁸ David Mealing artist statement, *Sky Project* 1971.

³⁹ David Mealing, artist statement, *Sky Project*.

The 'system of total environments' was based on the prismatic seven colours of the rainbow arranged in arcs, squares, orbs and variants in the sky, determined by the wind to create a continuum of line in space. Water and dry ice was also planned to interact with the dye and natural phenomena to create showers and a rainbow. *Sky Project* was never to materialise as an event due to sponsorship difficulties. However, the written documentation of the project and initial test run results (by all accounts) indicated that this concept was to be an interesting experiment in extending Mealing's painterly interests of colour, without the limitations of the gallery environment. *Sky Project* rejected notions of 'finish' and 'commerce', while yet dependent on a number of businesses to successfully sponsor the event. Mealing's *Sky Project*⁴⁰ connects with notions of immateriality and transcendence that relate to the idea of the 'void' in art during the 1960s. The concept that was *Sky Project* evoked the European examples of the void, as seen by French artist Yves Klein, in rendering possible the spiritual context of the 'immaterial', in his *Leap into the Void*, 1961, and his idea of 'signing' the sky in 1947.⁴¹

Related to *Sky Project* and *New Morning*, is Mealing's final exhibition of 'tangible' aesthetic objects, *Watercolours/Dung*, 1972, exhibited at the Barry Lett Galleries. Inspired by the American colour field painters, and action painting, *Watercolours/Dung* involved a method of dropping pure colour onto a

⁴⁰ An exhibition was planned to coincide with *Sky Project*, *Pot of Gold*, at the Valentine Galleries, Auckland.

⁴¹ The Dutch artist Marinus Boezem executed during the 1960s and 1970s a series of highly ephemeral gestures that dealt with immateriality in a site-specific setting. The motif of the sky is a theme explored by Boezem in such works as *Signing the Sky by an Aeroplane*, (1969), and *Flying Man*, (1979). Klein's concept of flying into the distant sky and signing it as his first art work is realised by Boezem's *Signing the Sky by an Aeroplane*, in which a skywriting plane signed the artist's name over Amsterdam. Boezem's use of the material apparatus of the airplane parodies Klein's project of Shamanistic flight, pointing to the materiality of the body in the grip of gravity. Hans Haacke created *Sky Line*, (1967), whereby the artist released helium filled white balloons in Central Park, New York. Robert Morris's *Steam Cloud*, (1969) and Dennis Oppenheim's *Whirlpool, Eye of the Storm*, (1973), in which an airplane pilot, directed by radio from the ground, traced the schemata of a tornado in the sky using the jet of smoke discharged by the aircraft. The Arte Povera artist Jannis Kounellis exhibited *The coal bin*, a steel container filled with lumps of raw coal at the inaugural 'Arte povera – Im spazio' in 1967. Indeed, Mealing questioned in his *Sky Project* proposal, '...a white line in the sea, a heap of coal – can these be works of art?'

series of canvases and allowing nature to intervene in the final process. Left outside exposed to rain, wind and sun, the finished work and concept reveal a certain 'unravelling of delight in the natural environment'.⁴² Mealing drew on the imaginative associative processes of colour, quoting Olitski:

Painting is...a structure born of the flow of colour feeling. Colour in colour is felt at any and every place of the pictorial organization, in its immediacy – its peculiarity, colour is felt throughout.⁴³

The works were composed of an amalgamation of acrylic, dye and watercolour on paper and were purely concerned with the ephemeral qualities of colour. The after-effect generated by the immediacy of the physical substance of paint evoked an illusion of space that hovered between imagination and corporeality. Mealing had begun to challenge the boundaries of formative art historical assumptions. In *Watercolours/Dung* he relished the freedom to experiment, concluding the technical process of this series by placing a box of animal manure under each art work in the exhibition space, stipulating that it be sold along with the painting.⁴⁴ This emphasis on the cyclical process of life is a theme developed in later work, e.g. *Blood the River of Life* and in *Lifecycle/Bicycle*. Mealing allowed the natural environment to dictate which direction he should take as both an artist and a human being in an imaginative way, with an acutely attuned consciousness of a world in which turbulence, destruction and ignorance can obfuscate and confuse those unravelling threads of delight in the creative process.

⁴² Conversation with David Mealing, August 20th, 1999.

⁴³ Jules Olitski, 1966, quoted by David Mealing, *Watercolours/Dung* catalogue, Barry Lett Galleries, 1972.

⁴⁴ Other examples of excrement in art include work by Piero Manzoni, *Artist's Shit* (1961), Chris Olifi, *The Holy Virgin Mary* (1999) Julia Morison *100-headless woman*, *Shit* (1997) and John Cousins (urine), *Membrane* (1985). The use of excrement implies a questioning of body and self, 'transforming the question of 'Where do I come from, into what is inside me? A manifestation of the desire to explore the interior body through what might be called 'bodily knowledge – the knowledge, pleasure, curiosity and disgust surrounding that primary bodily product – shit.' (Helen Molesworth, 'Excremental Fantasies', *The Artist's Body*, Phaidon, London, 2000, p.200.

Against the Present Order

Paralleling the frustration with existing structures that characterises today's youth in the social and political spheres, Arte Povera is against the present order of art."⁴⁵

David Mealing, 1971.

A growing alignment with Marxist principles is evident early on in Mealing's work⁴⁶, the violent 1968 student-led protests and clashes with authority in Europe and America being a significant influence on Mealing's subversive art action statements, *Molotov*, (1972) and the installation *Breath*, (1972). Many New Zealand artists have employed political statements in their work. Mealing, Drummond and French are in fact the three main artists who have consciously found a socialist stance to be the effective means to protest capitalism. The growing market forces in New Zealand during post war years saw artists colluding with art world dialectics of production and commodification, the relevancy of political art lost to the whims of taste. John Maynard, exhibitions officer for the Auckland City Art Gallery from 1974-1976, observed in 1969: ⁴⁷ 'Art Galleries tend to institutionalise art and one of the problems is too few people realise that artists are where the action is'.⁴⁸ Indeed Maynard's observation echoed a growing disaffection felt toward traditional forms of artistic practice that centred primarily on the art object as a commodity by a few artists (perhaps naively) at that time, such as Bruce Barber, Mealing and Nick Spill. Action was a means whereby artists could protest against this perceived 'institutionalism', and through action they presented themselves not

⁴⁵ David Mealing, artist statement, proposal for *Sky Project*, Auckland Centennial Celebrations International Sculpture Symposium, August 12 to September 12, 1971.

⁴⁶ Mealing in 1972 formed a collaborative organization *The Storemen and Packers' Revolutionary Theatre Group (Marxist-Leninist)*, at the Gordon & Gotch magazine assembly plant where he worked. It had been inspired by reports from China that following the Cultural Revolution every factory had a drama group. Mealing and co-workers formed their own drama organization and staged *How Progressive Storemen and Packers' Exposed Capitalist Welfare Myth*, a play dealing with workers' grievances.

⁴⁷ Then Director for the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth.

⁴⁸ John Maynard, *Art and Community*, July 1969, Vol 5, No 7, p. 6.

just as experimental but also as alternative. For artists such as Mealing who wanted their work to exist in a decreasing gap between art and life, modernist compartmentalisation of function and career was an anathema.

Mealing's anarchic action, the conceptual/performance work called *Molotov* was a protest against an international touring exhibition of Mediaeval French art at the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1972.⁴⁹ (illus 3) The intent was to create a scene on the morning of the first day of the exhibition opening by arriving in a 'get-away car', yelling threats to the awaiting public that a molotov cocktail was to be thrown into the gallery, and leaving after the action had been completed. Although unsuccessful on the day and now in retrospect rather amusing, (the public thought it was an entertaining, harmless street performance and gave them a round of delighted applause), Mealing and his cohorts reflected an artistic unease. *Molotov's* destructive gesture stated a desire to reject the sterilisation of artistic culture that had become apparent in New Zealand art galleries and museums.⁵⁰

French bourgeois culture had been under fire publicly since the events of 1968 in Paris, (and indeed as far back as the revolution of 1848⁵¹ and again by the Futurists and Dadaists between the two world wars who attacked bourgeois values through irony and ridicule). 'Culture' was seen by the left wing baby boomers of a new generation in the 1960s as an aristocratic privilege that

⁴⁹ Guy Debord in an essay *The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics and Art*, 1963, cites an event that occurred during that year in Caracas, Venezuela. Revolutionary students made an armed attack on an exhibition of French art and carried off five paintings, which they then offered to return in exchange for the release of political prisoners. The armed forces recaptured the paintings after a battle, and a few days' later students threw bombs at the police van that was transporting the paintings, they 'unfortunately' did not succeed in destroying it. 'This is clearly an exemplary way to treat the art of the past, to bring it back into play in life and to re-establish priorities'.

⁵⁰ *Molotov* was also a reaction against French testing of nuclear weapons in Mururoa, which had begun in 1966.

⁵¹ A series of violent uprisings in European countries where workers and peasants revolted against developing capitalist practices that resulted in greater poverty. Participating in the revolutions were Poles, Danes, Germans, Italians, Czechs, Slovaks Hungarians, Croats, and Romanians who demanded self-determination from the empires that dominated them. Although governmental changes achieved by the revolutions of 1848 were short-lived, the revolutions influenced the course of European government in the long term by undermining the concept of absolute monarchy and establishing an impetus for liberalism and socialism.

alienated and denied participation, as it was founded on 'respect, nostalgia, apprehension and terror'.⁵² Mealing's social conscience abhorred the idea of the artist shut away in an ivory tower to appease the conservative bourgeois notion of the inoffensive artist creating objects to buy and sell, ('culture is the inverse of life', wrote the students in 1968.) As Mealing states:

Bourgeois society has a limitless fund of tricks, it shuts up works of art in museums and salons, and turns spectators away from them; it mocks and scorns new ways of seeing, doing and thinking. It buys and sells works of art and justifies their economic value by their aesthetic value and vice versa, it diffuses it in order to diminish the power of the scandal...⁵³

Mealing's installation *Breath* (1972), Universities Arts Festival, Elam, was a collaborative work initiated by Mealing and the 'Guerilla Art Action Group' that included fellow artists Keir Volkering, Peter Loveridge, Andrew Gough and Geoff Steven. The piece has a particular resonance in the career of Mealing as it addressed personal, angry senses felt at the time toward the climate of conservatism at Elam,⁵⁴ as well as being a direct response to the recent revolutionary happenings in Europe.

Breath was an 'environment project' and consisted of white canvases hung from the Elam Lecture Hall ceiling. Four electric fans buffeted the canvases, a sound track and projected slides of molotov cocktails and slogans that read; 'the great art trip is over', and 'the history of art is a history of fascism' completed the installation. Although it was concerned with formal qualities and processes of 'lighting movements and sequences, hot/cold temperatures, light/dark, created sound effects, the time-span of wind gusts...and more',⁵⁵ its purpose was to raise the level of revolutionary awareness in the minds and bodies of the university community. Corporeal

⁵² Andre Fermigier, 'No More Claudels', *Art and Confrontation: France and the Arts in an Age of Change*, Studio Vista, London, 1969, p.58.

⁵³ David Mealing, *Blood the River of Life: a collective art and life study*, catalogue, 1973.

⁵⁴ Conversation with David Mealing, July 1998. The Art History Department at Elam became a separate subject from the art school in 1973 which would have contributed to the climate of dissent at Elam that Mealing was reacting to.

⁵⁵ David Mealing, *Breath*, 14th NZ Universities Arts Festival, programme, Auckland, 1972.

energy activated the space on entering the lecture hall; the fans and heaters related the body to wind gusts and changes in temperature within the physical environment. Mealing's intent was to connect the event to a wider experience of people's minds and lives within a concentrated form, highlighting notions of control and change as phenomena of everyday social and physical experience.

It is therefore possible to exhibit in concentrated form socio-political phenomena that relate in the same way to the whole of socio-political behaviour. The air and atmospheric parts of the environment are particularly crucial, because of their revolutionary potential, at this time of social change. Seen in this context art is an unnecessary activity.⁵⁶

Intended as a means of encouraging public creativity and receptivity to the total environment, *Breath* instead incensed the onlookers/participants, provoking on many occasions outrage and violent responses.⁵⁷ It is precisely due to the subversive statements such as 'art is unnecessary', 'painting is dead' or 'eliminate illusion of all kinds' as written on the walls of the Sorbonne that *Breath* would have prompted such a reaction. *Breath* was a radical attempt at addressing a perceived political and artistic apathy within the student and wider communities at that time. It also echoed the May uprising by incorporating political themes and combat-like methods of confrontation *Breath* was an environment that provoked a more analytical and critical approach to thinking. Whilst simultaneously reflective and confrontational, the exercise posited a questioning on Mealing's behalf of the kind of audiences he wished to engage.

By the early 1970s the dissolution of art/life distinctions was a contemporary artistic and aesthetic strategy. It was an avant-garde means to encompass a wider and younger audience and to attack a traditional humanist resistance to revolution in culture and society.

Much of modern art is created precisely out of a need to destroy the distinction between art and life, just as much of modern social thought is directed at the dissolution of the distinction, formerly believed to be inevitable and ineluctable, between social thought and social

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Students threw objects at the screens and attacked the canvases. Conversation with David Mealing, 1998.

practice...Call this new public whatever you wish: pop, youth, body, drug, or non-linear – the fact is that it constitutes a large, rich, and increasingly powerful constituency which shares with the avant-garde artist a distrust of the very category of the artistic and with the utopian radical thinker an indifference to the benefits of historical consciousness as we have cultivated it up to now.⁵⁸

Mealing henceforth embarked on a focussed path within and against the hierarchy of the art world, veering toward 'movement, stasis, duality and coordination'.⁵⁹ By 1973 he had divorced himself from the commodity system of art making, to create instead a scenario whereby he could intercede outside the gallery space and provide a community with an educational tool of understanding beyond the elite language of the art world. Working against the myth of the exalted artist, Mealing negotiated his art making between the poles of capitalist aesthetic appreciation and political ennui.

If social comment is subordinate to style and form the political message is likely to be lost on the exclusive walls of the art gallery. But where the political 'message' is dominant the artist's work is likely to be dismissed as propaganda.⁶⁰

Aware of the potential incompatibility of the two extremes, Mealing's challenge was to create works that could fall in the liminal gap between an awareness of self/ego and an awareness of the collective whole. The arena in which he explored these extremes comprised the gallery space and the wider community, through works such as *Blood the River of Life*, *Jumble Sale: A Marketplace*, and *Sting/Stung*.

Blood the River of Life: A Collective Art and Life Study occurred in August 1973 at the Auckland Building Centre. Notions of 'social time' can be applied to the reading of combined components of *Blood the River of Life*. Mealing's knowledge of sociology, social time and the multiplicity of social

⁵⁸ Hayden White, 'The Culture of Criticism', *Liberations. New Essays on the Humanities in Revolution*, edited by John Cage and Ihab Hassan, Middletown, Connecticut, Wesleyan University Press, 1971, p.57.

⁵⁹ David Mealing, artist statement for *Bicycle/Lifecycle*, Experimental Art Foundation, 1976.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

frameworks provided a springboard for his collective 'art actions'. As the sociologist Georges Gurvitch wrote:

There is a tendency towards correspondence between total social phenomenon and total man... This 'total man' cannot be reduced to his mental life, not even to the collective consciousness. He is a body as much as he is a participant of societies, of classes of groups, of We-nesses: all representing total social phenomena. And by this reciprocal participation, the total social phenomenon participates in man as much as man participates in the whole.⁶¹

Blood the River of Life was a political gesture toward the integration of the collective whole in society, a 'social sculpture', whereby all participants shared a sequence in social time.⁶² Mealing stressed a confrontational direction and re-evaluation of reality, decentring the gaze from the artist to a broader acknowledgment of art and life, a negation of the self whilst still engaging the imaginative function of art. *Blood the River of Life* echoed Beuys's famous slogan 'everyone is an artist', and incorporated Beuys's theory of 'social sculpture' - the belief that creative thinking can cross disciplines in order to shape the environment, political systems, the economy or the classroom from a chaotic state into a state of form or structure.

Utilising early video technology, Mealing set up in collaboration with the Blood Transfusion Service, a closed circuit TV and video monitors in the space provided and relayed pre-recorded images alongside actual donors in real time of nurses taking blood samples from the volunteers.⁶³ Primarily set up as a service to inform the community of the Transfusion Unit, the project was 'to be seen as no more than an extension of our everyday existence'. The spectator was encouraged to form his or her own judgements about the Service from the

⁶¹ Georges Gurvitch, *The Spectrum of Social Time*, Dordrecht-Holland: Reidel, 1964, p. 28.

⁶² Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* adorns the cover of *Blood the River of Life*, thus further emphasizing notions of 'totality' in the universe.

⁶³ Mealing's pioneering use of video to document his performances and conceptual work has largely been bypassed in the latent analysis of New Zealand video art. Mealing was quick to recognise and engage the creative potential of video. His first work to utilise the medium of video, *Blood the River of Life*, in 1973, was used purely as a sociological recording of a 'happening' whilst the *Wasteland* series, 1978, successfully combined the performative body/personae of the artist with a sociological overlay.

information and data provided.⁶⁴ The spirit of goodwill in giving a pint of blood as a valid form of aesthetic expression for Mealing, the Service, the participants and onlookers, was emphasised by Mealing who approached donors lying on their beds and told them 'You are showing unlimited potential creativity'.⁶⁵ The anti-formal gesture of Mealing's earlier explorations took on the purpose of strengthening and healing community spirit through the creative process. A theme of giving and the cyclic nature of life in *Blood the River of Life*, worked conceptually with the idea of a symbolic sanguification i.e., a formation of or conversion of food into blood that is donated by the goodwill of others for the needy. Mealing's social sculpture thus extended the otherwise isolated artistic gesture into the community – transposing the everyday experience into a creative impulse. Mealing enlisted the assistance of Geoffrey Chappell, an original member of Dadson's Scratch Orchestra in the production of the catalogue. **(illus 4)** Stressing the 'organic unity of society', and upholding the Marxist ideal of the totality of man, Chappell insists on the role of the artist as one that serves as a fulcrum in the makeup of a society.

Any art which is politically involved should set out to do one of two things. It can crystallize the past so a society can see what it has put behind it and to gain a fuller understanding of the present. Secondly, by an imaginative act it can anticipate possible futures and help shape that future...⁶⁶

The sociological stance embraced by both Chappell and Mealing emphasised a humanistic view of the world where societies never reach completion but are in a dynamic, evolutionary state of flux in which imagination has a crucial role to play.

Mealing's commitment to socialism, as a means to deploy a social commentary in art, became fully engaged in another liminal intervention, *Jumble Sale: A Marketplace*, (1975), which challenged the purpose of artistic

⁶⁴ David Mealing, *Blood the River of Life: A collective art and life study*, catalogue, 1973, p.1.

⁶⁵ David Mealing quoted in 'Mealing's Bloodbath', *Alternative Cinema*, Vol. 3, No. 31, November 1973.

⁶⁶ Geoffrey Chappell, *Blood the River of Life*, catalogue p. 11.

creation. By asking, 'art for whom?' and situating the art event within the pretensions of the art gallery, Mealing exposed Modernism's specialized discourse of painting and totemic associations with other *objets des arts*, to open up a broader consideration of 'art' otherwise hermetically sealed within the confines of the gallery walls. However, any artist who embraces art as a political and social tool faces a dilemma that runs the danger of 'serving two masters'.

Under capitalism any socially committed art serves two masters whose demands are not always compatible: the canons of aesthetic worth must be satisfied while there is also a necessity to get the political message across. These two demands pose both technical and social dilemmas for the artist, which must be taken into account in any critical appreciation of political art and the context within which it must work.⁶⁷

Mealing was invited by John Maynard, exhibitions officer at the Auckland City Art Gallery to contribute to their Project Programme in 1975.⁶⁸ Bringing art into the world of the everyday and vice versa on a grand scale, Mealing's proposal was an ambitious risk for the gallery, but one that was to have lasting impact. *Jumble Sale* took three months to co-ordinate and was completely devoid of any artifice. The entire gallery space was cleared to accommodate stalls representing local community groups with all proceeds going toward the individual charities represented. Over 55 organizations contributed, ranging from Krishna Consciousness, Corso, Yoga International, Plunket Society, Te Manaaki Society, Animal Welfare, and Ecology Action. The groups had the use of the space free of charge and became 'artists' selling their goods and keeping the profits. *Jumble Sale* actively engaged participants in the construction and success of the meaning and intent. The catalogue was given no aesthetic surface and merely recorded the details of each charity

⁶⁷ Jonathan Smart & Hugh Lauder, 'Ideology and Political Art in New Zealand: A Radical View', *Landfall*, No. 53, March, 1985 p.83.

⁶⁸ The project programme of 1975 included an installation/ performance by Gray Nichol who installed a large-scale concrete block in the sculpture court of the Auckland City Art Gallery supported by a steel frame under which the artist lay in a restricted position for 24 hours.

organization. **(illus 5)** The opening page quoting Beuys was the only clue to Mealing's way of thinking and working:

My concept of organization is an artistic one insofar as it must come to fruition within the laws of organisms and in organic form. A total work of art is only possible within the context of the whole society. Everyone will be necessarily a co-creator of a social architecture, and, so long as anyone cannot participate, the ideal form of democracy has not been reached.⁶⁹

The action of turning a 'respected' city art gallery into a large jumble sale for eight days created controversy in some circles of the art community and local government. The reviewer for the local newspaper warned art goers to 'stay away' from the gallery, because 'in the name of art the place has been turned into a scruffy rubbish bazaar'. The director of the gallery, Ernest Smith, declared the event a work of art likening it in formalist terms to a scene from Bruegel, and stating that it 'advances the realism of our time.' But local council members called the jumble 'most regrettable'- '...What do we have next, strip-tease in the crematorium?'⁷⁰

The conceptual nature of *Jumble Sale* provoked a questioning of the very nature of what constituted art, and who it was made for. If art is displayed in the gallery context it assumes a framework of formalist recognition that is related and defined in the structuralist sense i.e. a set of oppositions, to other works of art. Mealing's intervention of a 'non-aesthetic' intrusion forced a reconsideration of the broader cultural dialogue otherwise excluded from the aesthetic sphere, also challenging ruling and professional class audiences.

Imagination was a key component to Mealing's contribution to *Post Object Art in New Zealand and Australia*, 1976, a group exhibition held at the Adelaide Experimental Art Foundation Jam Factory, organised by Donald

⁶⁹ Joseph Beuys quoted from *Jumble Sale: A Marketplace*, catalogue, 1975.

⁷⁰ Quoted from unidentified newspaper article, 'Jumble sale art is social commentary'. Collection of the artist.

Brook.⁷¹ *Lifecycle/Bicycle's* conceptual premise was based on the experience of an individual's spontaneous travel and the creative impulses that flow from this.⁷² A bicycle was provided free of use for participants to navigate the art works located in the basement of the Jam Factory as well as for longer journeys. The cyclist's name, age, address, and remarks on their journey and the exhibition were to be written down and sent to Mealing who was living in Europe.

While abroad in Europe during 1976 Mealing happened upon a performance event at the De Appel Gallery in Amsterdam of the Viennese Actionists and witnessed 'lectures' and photography by Arnulf Rainer, Herman Nitsch, Jana Haimsohn and Rudolf Schwarzkogler. The Viennese Actionists staged controversial cathartic rituals in Germany during the 1960s and 1970s that involved the sacrifice of animals in an orgy of blood letting in order to free violence and anger in a repressed society. Rainer at the time of Mealing's visit had developed his drawing-over of photographic self-portraits during the early 1970s. These portraits revealed an intuitive psychological level below the surface, into a performative sequence of 'facial theatre, publicized physical exercises, nonsensical movement on film and graphic self-corrections'.⁷³ **(illus 6)** The Viennese Actionists' use of art as therapy, Rainer's experimentation in character analysis, change, 'communication-addiction, nervous exertion and a

⁷¹ Donald Brook co-founded the EAF in 1974 with Noel Sheridan and wrote extensively on the nature of post-object art, its inherent and problematic nature within the art system that defines a work of art as being contextual and self-sufficient, unique, rare, permanent and elevated in importance above common things. Brook warned of the tendency at that time towards a Socialist Realism as a means of propagandist control, explaining that Marxism for the second time in the 20th century had missed its opportunity to utilise the non-object approach of art making. Brook tested his theories of art through this establishment, one of which was the theory that post object art was a means to investigate intellectual imaginative systems rather than sensory experience, and that experimental art was "trans-institutional". The EAF hosted many visiting artists, among them Joseph Beuys, Merce Cunningham and Germano Celant. Other artists to contribute to *Post Object Art in Australia and New Zealand* 1976 included Jim Allen, (who was artist-in-residence at the EAF that year) Kimberly Gray, Bruce Barber and John Lethbridge.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Arnulf Rainer, artist statement, Vienna, 1971, reproduced by the De Appel Gallery, 1976.

summoning of dormant, or psychopathic reserves of energy⁷⁴ made an apparent impression on Mealing, who on his return to New Zealand in 1977 extended his previous conceptual work into performative socio-political interrogations.⁷⁵ This exposure to the performances of European avant-garde artists increased Mealing's desire to reveal complexities and dimensions of social problems such as unemployment, and homelessness, which were to be fully explored through the installations and performances *Sting/Stung*, and importantly, *Crucifixion*, (1978).⁷⁶

Sting/Stung (1977), an installation initially constructed for the Pakuranga Arts Festival and later that year at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, worked with a holistic idea of the organization of the beehive as a desirable model for a

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Mealing also spent time in Peru during 1976, collaborating with a Peruvian artist on a conceptual piece *Communications*. He also attended a lecture by the Philippine artist David Medalla at the Acme Gallery, Covent Garden. Medalla, a poet, dancer, kinetic sculptor and a socially committed artist, created through a combination of multi-dimensional techniques evocations of 'the historical, mythological, cultural and psychological realities in which people live'.⁷⁵ Mealing and Medalla both initiated through their performances a commentary on social conditions and a merging of art and life in order to break the sense of alienation and separation from the imaginative function of art. Another English artist with a parallel rationale to Mealing, Medalla and Conrad Atkinson is Steven Willats, an artist who developed a semiotic approach to socio-political art making. 'An artwork as an embodiment of a social state will need to establish explicit connections between the parameters of the system (its underlying rules), and their manifestation in the real world as a coded structure of behaviour conventions'. (Steven Willats, 'Art Work as Social Model' *Studio International*, Vol 191, No. 980, March/April, 1976 p.101).

⁷⁶ The English socialist artist, Conrad Atkinson, has worked closely with working class communities in Britain, integrating their working conditions, problems and living situations into multi-dimensional works of art that define the message as the medium, geared toward raising levels of consciousness in art audiences and in the media. *Strike* (1972) and *Work, Wages and Prices* (1974), both held at the ICA broke down formalist, traditional concepts of art making. Atkinson's interest was to show how art worked in society, and how one could change the structure through which art was shown. Both exhibitions analysed existing situations occurring at the time in industry-related areas. *Strike* took as its subject matter a yearlong strike in an English thermometer factory where workers were dissatisfied with how little say they had in their working conditions and where many of the factory workers had mercury poisoning. Documenting the ongoing meetings between workers and management, Atkinson invited the media and public to the events and the installation of documentation. The event received national coverage and as an after effect unionised that section of the London factory. *Work, Wages and Prices*, a didactic and rhetorical statement about society in Britain in the 1970s was an installation comprising wage slips, photographs, statements and Stock Exchange tickertape that highlighted the differentiations in society between wealth and extreme poverty. Atkinson's interventions had interested Mealing, who saw his strategy aligned to his own, as an alternative to the traditional emphasis on formal properties in art making. It is clear that such an alternative way of operating was paramount to Mealing's socio-political dialectic.

future socialist society. The catalogue supplement to *Sting/Stung* is again an important element to the process and outcome of his concept and demarcates the social structure of the activity of bees in relation to 'Art Work as Social Model'.⁷⁷ (illus 7) The beehive as an ideal structure of society was also an important matter for Beuys, who studied the organization of the working bee after reading Rudolph Steiner's lectures *About Bees*, 1923 and Maurice Maeterlinck's essay *The Life of the Bee*, 1901. Beuys was especially taken with the way bees generate wax and create honeycombs.

What had interested me about bees, or rather about their life system, is the total heat organization of such an organism and the sculpturally finished forms within this organism.⁷⁸

Indeed honey symbolised to Beuys intellectual growth, warmth and love as seen in the performance *Explaining Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965) and the monumental installation *Honey Pump* (1977) at Museum Fridericianum, Kassel. *Honey Pump* is undoubtedly an important reference for Mealing's installation, *Sting/Stung*. The variety of issues associated with *Honey Pump* such as the need to recreate a spiritual basis for humanity, is translated in the installation in which honey was pumped from a central well through plastic hoses and kept circulating by ship's engines churning fat in a nearby room. Mealing's installation was made up of three hives inside the gallery which included an 'observation hive with a tube outlet for the bees situated near a window, a compilation of video tape-material focused on the observation hive which was recorded for simultaneous playback on a TV monitor'.⁷⁹

The chief purpose of this work is to communicate (sting) some of the areas of activity and diversity that the spectator/perceiver can initiate within the social architecture of the human hive. It would be presumptuous to go further and recommend lines of development; this is up to the individual imagination (stung).⁸⁰

⁷⁷ One of the essays incorporated in the catalogue was written by Steven Willats, published in *Studio International* Vol. 191, No. 980, March/April, 1976, reprinted in *Sting/Stung*, 1977.

⁷⁸ Joseph Beuys, quoted from *Lives of the Great 20th Century Artists*, Edward Lucie-Smith, Thames & Hudson, London, 1999, p. 334.

⁷⁹ David Mealing, *Sting/Stung* exhibition catalogue, 1977.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

Mealing in *Sting/Stung*, emphasised that if art is to remain vital, it must re-engage itself within the social environment, rather than divorce itself in a separate and alienated space, devoid of social or communal experience.

It is in the performances produced from the late 1970s, *Crucifixion*, *Derelict Man* and *Desolation Row*, that Mealing's political and social stance was at its most powerful. Articulated through an erudite conceptualisation and performative personae these performances effectively captured the idea of the artist as a radical critic of society, and indicated a change in the perceived function and role of art and artist.

Crucifixion was a performance conceived to protest against rioting in Soweto during 1976⁸¹ and the effects of apartheid imposed by the South African National Government since 1948. The New Zealand National Government had returned to power in 1975, the eviction of Polynesian over-stayers in New Zealand, the occupation of Bastion Point in 1977 by Maori activists who wanted it returned to the original owners (Ngati Whatua) and the Government's dubious sporting, cultural and economic ties with South Africa all sparked a nation of debate and protest. These issues are at the core of *Crucifixion*. Intended for the Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North *Crucifixion* was a 'political work of art concerned with the erosion of freedom and democracy and the beginnings of a police state in New Zealand.'⁸² The debacle that resulted from the performance proposal effectively diverted attention from the greater humanistic issues, such as great suffering, that Mealing had

⁸¹ Soweto was at the forefront of the anti-apartheid struggle in 1976 when a spontaneous uprising was sparked by the South African government's decision to impose Afrikaans, in place of English, as the language of instruction in township schools. The riots spread to other townships and at least 575 people were killed by government armed forces.

⁸² David Mealing, artist statement for *Crucifixion*, Manawatu Art Gallery, 1978. Originally, the proposal had been submitted to the Auckland Art Gallery in 1977 and was entitled *Rape, a triptych*. Described as an 'artistic/religious/political tableau', *Rape* was an installation in three interrelated spaces that incorporated a videotaped interview and 'rape scene' to be replaced at hourly intervals and a programme of synchronised lighting i.e. light and dark. Developing into *Crucifixion*, the performance/installation aimed to highlight further, themes of racism, repression, exploitation, denial of human rights and dignity, the struggle of Maori and Polynesian peoples in their fight for survival and freedom as a communal culture. It ultimately aimed to persuade the Government to change its sporting policy with South Africa.

intended, to highlight instead insidious political wrangling within aspects of the New Zealand art system. Thus incensed by such attitudes, *Getting Cold Feet* elegantly rebuked and revoked the artists right to comment and use creativity as a weapon against evil in the world.

A complex proposal, *Crucifixion's* political strands were emotionally laden issues relating to festering racial conflict in New Zealand and the. *Crucifixion* however, was 'postponed' at the last minute by the director of the Manawatu Art Gallery, Luit Bieringa, who thought the performance proposal too politically overwrought, problematic and unsustainable. *Getting Cold Feet*, 1978, sardonically profiled the events leading up to the cancellation, through several months of written correspondence between co-trustees of 'The Mealing Affair' and Luit Bieringa. It also included a set of six Polaroid photographs, depicting Mealing's bare feet submerged in seawater, (which references an element of the littoral). As a single installation, *Crucifixion* consisted of several naked people lashed onto a rugby goal post at one end of the Gallery, an altar with a football on it at the other end with a film of Soweto riots projected above. A recorded commentary of a rugby test match between the All Blacks and the Springboks acted as the soundtrack to the film. The Gallery area became defined as a church with the intention of creating a critical rather than devotional atmosphere, with a local New Zealand context: 'one of my intentions is to raise questions about an artist operating in a provincial, middle class rugby orientated community and relating these ideas to wider, national issues'.⁸³ (illus 8)

The 'postponement' of *Crucifixion* less than a month before its opening initiated a series of letters and phone calls that centred on the issue of censorship and broken commitments by the Gallery. At stake was not only the Gallery in relation to changing position based on Bieringa's career motivations, but also the actions of Mealing who insisted on exhibiting a personal letter in *Getting Cold Feet* at the Manawatu (as part of the touring New Zealand

⁸³ David Mealing, artist statement for *Crucifixion*, Manawatu Art Gallery, 1978.

Sculptors in Mildura Exhibition 1978/79), written by Bieringa to Mealing justifying his decision,

As you know I have been under severe criticism from the city fathers and public in recent months for the programmes I have put together and after much politicking I have been able to retain my independence from the wankers, however the timing of *Crucifixion* would open up the whole confrontation again and for the sake of progress I have made thus far I am reluctant to light the fuse again so soon.

All this may sound like 'getting cold feet', and in a way I suppose it is when looked at in isolation...⁸⁴

Nick Spill, who had organised the Mildura touring exhibition acting on behalf of Mealing (who was overseas at the time), was in a compromising situation. 'I'd resorted to playing a Kissinger-type-mediator goosestepping on a tightrope and trying to commit an artist's cardinal sin – 'compromise'...'⁸⁵ However, he faithfully recorded the events that comprise *The Mealing Affair* in his typically honest manner:

Bieringa did not want the personal letter shown, he was willing to show the rest of the piece but not the letter marked 'confidential'. He also objected to the ambiguous wording in the catalogue, the public showing of the commissioned videotape originally for *Crucifixion* at the Auckland City Art Gallery before he had seen it and been asked if this was OK, the fact that some of David's ideas for the *Crucifixion* installation were impractical and impossible to realise, and last but not least the fact that the show was never cancelled but only postponed.⁸⁶

Crucifixion was ostensibly 'axed' and *Getting Cold Feet* was censored, the letter removed for the Manawatu exhibition, then 'lost', and after some effort relocated. But *Getting Cold Feet* was exhibited in complete form for the rest of the tour.

As Jonathan Smart observes:

⁸⁴ Luit Bieringa, letter to David Mealing, 1978. Quoted from *The Mealing Affair*, Nick Spill. Bieringa was Director of the Manawatu Art Gallery from 1971-79 and had applied for the National Gallery Directorship in 1978. Bieringa feared controversy over *Crucifixion* would put his application in jeopardy. He subsequently became director of the National Art Gallery, 1980-89.

⁸⁵ Nick Spill, *The Mealing Affair*, 1978, unpaginated.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

In this case the pressures on a public art gallery director forced a compromise of professional integrity. Bieringa's act of censorship was unethical, and further complicated by his holding the letter, which initially prevented the work being shown at the Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui...Mealing's action may also have been equally unethical. He broke confidentiality in assembling *Getting Cold Feet*, and then did not honour the system of commission by showing the videotape in Auckland.⁸⁷

Compromise it seems is the key 'dirty' word in the case of 'The Mealing Affair'. Bieringa's correspondence to Mealing is replete with the rhetoric and cliché of compromise, 'give and take', dealing with the 'checks and balances' of art networks:

Whether you like it or not as long as you and I wish to survive with the aid of public patronage we shall always have to give and take no matter how hard we push at the limits of tolerance.

Unless of course we choose to work only in the rarified atmosphere of private institutions such as our home, studio, and occasionally dealer gallery, but even then...⁸⁸

This comment in fact sums up the conditions of an artist working within the capitalist infrastructures of a modern society. Expatriate artist Bruce Barber performed *Stocks and Bonds*, (1975), (**illus 9**) at the Auckland City Art Gallery, which is another example of how an artist uses the medium of performance to create an 'operational' critique on art world systems.⁸⁹

- Given 1. The artist as petty offender and/or judge.
 2. The gallery as churchyard and/or market place.
 NB Are the principles of the gallery egalitarian?
 Are the principles of the work egalitarian?⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Jonathan Smart, *Art as Social Comment*, unpublished MA Art History Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1982, pp. 241-242.

⁸⁸ Luit Bieringa, letter to David Mealing, 11th April, 1979. Quoted from Nick Spill, *The Mealing Affair*, 1978, unpaginated.

⁸⁹ Bruce Barber studied at Elam from 1969-1974 and graduated with an MFA. He was part of the performance art movement in Auckland and contributed to numerous performance events, one of them being *Four Men in a Boat*, at the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1974. Performances include *Mt Eden Crater Performance* (1973), and *Reading Room 2: Remembering Vietnam Again* (1987). Barber teaches at the Nova Scotia School of Art, Halifax.

⁹⁰ Bruce Barber, artist slide talk for *Stocks and Bonds, A Survey of Contemporary New Zealand Sculpture*. Vol. 1, compiled by Ken Adams, Auckland, Lynfield College, 1985.

Stocks and Bonds, meaning 'financial assets and liabilities', and in the case of the performance, physical restraints, was 'an examination of some of the distinguishing features of the public gallery situation when confronted with an art work that attempts to deny the efficacies of the situation'.⁹¹ The installation included closed circuit television monitors enabling people to view inside the gallery after hours, and a public address system so the constrained artist could harangue the audience within and also outside the gallery itself. Barber stayed locked in the stocks for four days, between United Nations Day (for respite from international disorder), Labour Day (for respite from business) and his mother's birthday (for the artist's stock and bond), and was situated in a space between rooms in the gallery. The 'petty offender', asserted his assumptions about the gallery system as being one of contemporary idolatry, and rather than keeping his artist's fee, Barber gave it to the attendant who watched over him. Barber confronted the audience's inherent voyeuristic tendencies. Incorporated in these performances such as *Stocks and Bonds* was an examination of social and economic interaction on a confrontational level.

Nick Spill's *Survival* (1978), as part of the 'Platforms' group exhibition at the CSA Gallery Christchurch, is also an example of a performance that brazenly and openly parodied the role of the artist as enforced producer in a capitalist world.⁹² Two performers manacled to each end of a platform and wearing T-shirts that read: ART IN THE HANDS OF CAPITALISM and CAPITALISM IN THE HANDS OF ART, were made to drink freshly squeezed

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² English born Nick Spill arrived in New Zealand in 1962. He graduated with a double degree in English and Art History from Auckland University in 1973, he was in the first class of Art History in Tony Green's new Art History Department. Spill moved toward performance art and a conceptual frame of reference through the use of theatre and movement. He participated in a number of happenings which he describes as being 'the start of discovering some kind of spiritual basis for a new rejuvenating art form which was diametrically opposed to the more cerebral and philosophical explanations to new art that more intellectual critics were espousing, what I call the Clement Greenberg approach'. (Nick Spill, *Being an Artist in the Seventies*, (unpublished manuscript) p.3). Spill conducted a series of performances from 1974-1978 that were firmly based in notions of language and art, wit he believed could open up social situations and jolt a person's perception. 'Wit' is the old Anglo Saxon word for 'Mind'. Spill left New Zealand in 1978 for New York, he now lives in Miami Beach, Florida.

lemon juice out of a tin can with the warning: 'Working in an art gallery can be dangerous to your health'. The lemons were left to rot on the floor and the shirts left on the platform after the performance.⁹³ (illus 10)

Mealing, Barber and Spill all similarly exposed in their performances of the mid 1970s the international current of unrest and distrust the artist had in their uneasy relationship with the gallery system, art history and indeed their audience. American artist Hans Haacke, too, is particularly erudite when discussing issues of representation in art institutions, the function of art history and the totalitarian status quo that artists have had to negotiate:⁹⁴

In order to contribute to the gradual decomposition of the belief structure of today's fantastically resilient capitalism, one cannot but mimic and play along with some of its ways. Only history will tell in retrospect who was co-opting with whom, if one can really speak of co-optation [sic] in such a dialectically complex setting.⁹⁵

The Worker-Artist

Mealing's subsequent performances *Breadline*, *Desolation Row* and *Wasteland*, (1978), aimed to draw attention to the plight of those living in the fringes of society i.e. the unemployed, homeless or outsiders relegated to spheres of 'cultural liminality', those (like the Polynesian over-stayers) outside

⁹³ Nick Spill, *Being an Artist in the Seventies*, (unpublished manuscript) p.10.

⁹⁴ Hans Haacke similarly experienced issues of 'censorship' when his proposed show commissioned by the Guggenheim Museum in 1971, was called off shortly before it was due to open. The Museum stated that Haacke's 'real-time social systems', were incompatible with the functions of a prestigious art institution.⁹⁴ The two real-estate pieces that caused the most controversy included maps, typewritten data, photographs and charts detailing the property holdings and business dealings of a New York City slumlord. Haacke exhibited the rejected work in other venues and fifteen years later reconsidered the circumstances of the cancellation in another exhibition *Unfinished Business*, 1985-86. Occupying a key place in the critique of art institutions, Haacke's real-estate pieces – including the official reaction that they provoked – interrogated the museum as a primary mediating agency, foregrounding how it determines and limits the reading of artistic texts. The works also confronted the broader social functions of the museum – its points of intersection with specific economic or political interests and its role in legitimating political realities in a society structured on relations of oppression and exploitation.

⁹⁵ Hans Haacke, 'Hans Haacke, Interview by Margaret Sheffield', *Studio International*, March/April, 1976, p.123.

the security of stable social (post-colonial) definitions. Di French similarly in performances and photography explored thresholds of social and cultural identity and highlighted the difficulties of negotiating and living in a fixed dominant cultural collective. Mealing's work at the Petone Settlers Museum, through collaboration with cultural groups enables a direct production of cultural meaning, rather than a reflection of its liminality.

By adopting the personae of the working class/socialist 'artist' Mealing created scenarios whereby the elitist, transcendent image of the male artist is at once (perhaps subconsciously) engaged with but also simultaneously subverted. By costuming himself and recreating the gestures of outsiders, drunks, derelicts and unemployed, Mealing in such 'performances' as the derelict man in *Breadline*, signified himself as a 'worker artist'.⁹⁶ Mealing writes:

The idea of the artist as a priest or saint is a cherished holdover from 19th century Romanticism. It creates an atmosphere that makes it a sacrilege to analyse the artist's economic and ideological position and the role he actually plays in society's superstructure.⁹⁷

For his contribution to the 1978 Mildura Sculpture Triennial, Mealing conducted a series of performances outside of the gallery space that centred on the theme of unemployment. Entitled *Wasteland*, it included two concurrent and related performances, *Soup Kitchen* and *Breadline*. *Wasteland* was an

⁹⁶ The historical notion of the divinely inspired, transcendent male artist working within the devotional, sanctified atmosphere of the gallery space, is seemingly rejected by Mealing in *Crucifixion* and performances such as *Breadline* and *Desolation Row*. However the paradoxical embodiment of Mealing's actions, are examples of how the male body can remain a modernist (veiled) site of artistic (male) creativity, relayed also through the 'indexed' photographic and video image. Amelia Jones cites the performative body of Jackson Pollock as the ultimate case of the artist as being both 'visible' (allowing it to signify) and invisible (rendering it in the naturalized, and so seemingly transparent codes of masculine genius). Tracing the trajectory of embodied and indexed male 'creativity' from modernism to postmodernism, Jones notes the mutability of such signification that paralleled technological, social and cultural change. The artist tended to want to differentiate 'himself' from conventional middle class style and either adopted the image of the dandy or the proletariat, exploited worker. 'The massification of society (this democratic levelling through photography and other industrial technologies and demographic shifts) brought with it a concomitant need for the creation of a new 'unique' subject ... artists tended to align themselves with the working class, taking on sartorial signifiers of the peasant or labourer (used jackets, rumpled fabrics, messy hair, or in the case of Van Gogh and Paul Cézanne, actual peasants clothing)...'

⁹⁷ David Mealing, artist statement, *Crucifixion*, 1978.

installation of an ever-increasing mound of twenty-five thousand newspapers – each one representing an unemployed person ‘discarded like yesterday’s paper’, (the newspapers were later recycled after the installation had finished). To highlight his point, Mealing pinned to the wall of the gallery the latest unemployment figures. A videotaped interview with a local unemployed person in Mildura was played during the exhibition and in *Soup Kitchen*, watery soup made from a 1930s depression recipe, was offered to local people. The performance, *Breadline*, caused the most controversy. Mealing dressed in the garb of a street person, proceeded to wolf down bread and drink beer (the ‘crumbs and crusts’ of the dole) in front of an audience, and then ‘shatter communion’ by throwing the loaf of bread defiantly at the audience ‘of religious art believers’.⁹⁸ The audience pelted Mealing with the bread he had thrown at them, symbolising the abuse the unemployed are often subjected to. The *Wasteland* project was deemed by critics one of the most successful of the political statements and in the light of the Mildura controversy an effective comment on the ‘waste of human resources, and the gulf between those who have work and those who haven’t’.⁹⁹

Other versions of the Mildura performance *Breadline* (1978) have been given in Cuba Street, Wellington, and Albert Park, Auckland. The videotaped Albert Park performance follows Mealing acting out the gestures of a homeless person. The camera is focussed on a park bench, and the normal activity of the passers-by on a fine day sets the scene. A ‘businessman’ walks past the bench eating his lunch that he throws unfinished into a rubbish bin, carrying on his way. The derelict man, supposedly watching from afar shuffles over to the bin and surreptitiously fishes out the uneaten bread roll, sits on the bench and begins to eat it, pulling out a large bottle of beer from his overcoat. The bread is quickly eaten and the beer gulped down. The derelict man shares his lunch

⁹⁸ David Mealing, artist statement, written material ACAG.

⁹⁹ David Mealing, artist statement ‘Project Programme Proposal, *Wasteland*’, 1977.

with the seagulls, throws away a brown paper bag, wipes his mouth on the sleeve of his coat and walks away.

Desolation Row (1978) performed at the Artists Co-Op in Wellington was recorded on videotape and was an unrehearsed collaborative action, with Mealing directing the proceedings. The Actionist 'art as therapy' principal is evident in this piece, advertised as a 'socio-political statement' with photographs of the artist dressed in a white mechanic's suit and peaked cap. **(illus 11)** The main signifying element in *Desolation Row* is that of yeast and bread. A group of people is divided into groups; two women make a constant flow of lovingly prepared bread, kneading and baking, another group are 'spectators' and a smaller group of naked men and one woman chose to perform once the bread was presented to them on a table. Mealing opened numerous bottles of beer and the naked group of people began to eat and drink, then throw pieces of food at each other. The 'spectators' having been given freshly baked loaves join in by throwing soggy bread at the naked group of people who are behaving like primates. The aftermath of the fight is a ground filled with bread and beer and overturned furniture. The air of 'civilised' discussion to follow after the mayhem concludes with the bread-makers' ('breadwinners') disgust at the events and the conclusion that the superficiality ('yeasting') of capitalist production over time becomes stale.¹⁰⁰

Mealing's most 'enduring' work, the *Grey Lynn Park Development: A Community Project* (1978), was approved by the Auckland City Council and local business who provided materials and labour at cost to build a children's playground and tower. The joint project created by local residents of Grey Lynn

¹⁰⁰ The connotative use of bread, (the body of Christ), as the essential victual to sustain life is a powerful symbol and also recalls the Digger movement in Haight Ashbury, San Francisco at the beginning of the counter-culture in 1966. The Diggers, a group of alienated young people began to distribute in the local park free food donated by individuals and markets. Soon the Diggers 'working through the medium of love' began to bake their own bread and made it available to all on a daily basis. It became clear to the Diggers and the Hippies that the strength of industrial capitalism was against their ideal of a new community morality, that of providing bread and housing, and 'a space to create the new world'. The Diggers helped to initiate an alliance of the alienated young people and the political left, who adopted lifestyles in open rebellion toward established institutions.

was videotaped and documented by Mealing and then exhibited as an installation at the Auckland City Art Gallery. The playground, an exciting and stimulating environment for children is still used today and was a valuable exercise for the community in building trust, creativity and addressing issues of alienation:

Art for whom? Is still the unanswered question. This is the true root of the current crisis in art. It's a crisis of function. Who is art for, whose interest does it serve. From that follow all other symptoms of crisis – doubts about the justification of the activity, defensiveness about the 'freedom of expression', perplexity even about What Action to Take.¹⁰¹

Mealing's last two 'art world' interventions, *Tea and Toast*, (1981) and *Chickenfeed on April Fools' Day*, (1984) were concerned with a gathering of documentation of people's responses and opinions on a range of political and aesthetic topics and concerns. Mealing as the worker-artist provided a platform for the average person to speak his or her mind on everyday issues, with the ever-debated topic of how art can be manifested on a level of relevancy to the public in general, an issue that is ever present, contested and rarely engaged with by an artist on a such pragmatic level.

Tea and Toast, was a socio-political piece carried out for the 1981 Christchurch ANZART programme and is an extension of *Crucifixion*. The anti-apartheid message, the binary oppositions between politics/art, freedom/repression, ideology/aesthetics, church/state, and artist/audience, were intended as a 'points of departure, a presentation of a problem, that of the role of art in society'.¹⁰² The Springbok Tour of 1981 'was influential in raising the political consciousness of artists in New Zealand'.¹⁰³ Mealing, not impervious to the irony of the 1981 situation, played on notions of segregation and privilege. *Tea and Toast's* original proposal was modified due to budget constraints - rather than an outdoor barricaded installation, it occurred indoors

¹⁰¹ David Mealing, artist proposal, *Grey Lynn Park Development: A Community Project*, 1978.

¹⁰² David Mealing, 'Original Proposal for ANZART', *Tea and Toast*, 1981.

¹⁰³ Jonathan Smart & Hugh Lauder, 'Ideology and Political Art in New Zealand: A Radical View', *Landfall* No. 58, March, 1985, p.98.

in the Christchurch Arts Centre for one day. The space was defined and closed off by wire and metal drums, security guards only allowed access to those who had a pass while others remained outside the area with an information sheet containing ideas behind the work. Inside the room two tape recordings ran simultaneously featuring an art lecture and a collage of political speech recordings that cancelled each other out.¹⁰⁴ The audience became an integral part of the work and their responses were recorded on a blackboard, generating discussion and an investigation of perceived problems in the realms of art and politics.

Chickenfeed on April Fools' Day, included in the 'Artists in Dunedin Project', 1984¹⁰⁵ again elicited the public's response, specifically on the issue of an \$8.00 increase in the General Wages Order. Mealing approached the local radio station 4ZB in order to involve the general public, by inviting listeners on a given day to indicate what items can be purchased for up to 78 cents and by allocating two five minute phone-in sessions to include the radio host, artist and listeners. The results were to be collated and fed into a computer with a print-out at the Municipal Chambers, but there was very little reported action from the public. Mealing's essay in the accompanying catalogue included comments on the police state, the aftermath of the Springbok Tour, Arts Council Funding, erosion of artistic freedom and the role of the artist as defined by capitalist society,

Bourgeois society changed the role of art. From an obvious propagandist function, whether for religion, nationalism, politics or education, from having been closely tied to one or another patron or interest group, art finds itself occupying a freedom which increasingly takes on the appearance of a vacuum.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ David Mealing, artist proposal, *Tea and Toast*, 1981.

¹⁰⁵ *New Art in New Zealand, Artists from the 1984 Art in Dunedin Project*, was inaugurated as a response to the problematic second ANZART in Hobart, 1983 and the

¹⁰⁶ David Mealing, 'The State of the Art', *New Art in New Zealand, Artists from the 1984 Art in Dunedin Project*, p. 43.

Although Mealing after *Chickenfeed on April Fools' Day* withdrew from the 'vacuum' of the 'art world', his role as Director of the Petone Settlers Museum in Lower Hutt is considered by the artist as an extension of his performative and conceptual practice on a practical level. An historical exhibition of 'the first real conflict between capital and labour in Wellington' curated by Mealing, *Trouble at t' Mill - Petone Woollen Mill Strike 1890* (1987), reminded viewers through archival photographs, union banners, handbill designs, and enlarged mounted text about 'profound change brought into art by industrialisation - mass production, and art's interest in problems of originality and duplication...'¹⁰⁷

The Esplanade Project (Hell Forbid the day we drive down the Esplanade and see Sign after Sign) (1988) outlined recent changes to and plans for the Western end of the Esplanade in Petone. The community were invited to ask questions, raise issues and contribute to the political and historical implications of the project. Furthering community-based initiatives, Mealing today focuses on the histories/herstories of the local community and the newly settled refugees, and migrants, pictorial, written and oral histories, their trials and adaptations into a new culture. A series of multi-ethnic exhibitions on issues of migration and settlement including the Greek (1991), Polish (1992), Italian (1995), English (1996) and Tokelau (1999) communities has been an ongoing performative exercise that works with the connective tissue of cultural differences.

Mealing's work at the Museum – Te Whare Whakaaro o Pito-one (The Story House of Petone) encompasses exhibition and archival material, multi-media interactives, videos and audio visual programmes, educational resources and an encouragement of active participation from the specific communities in and around Wellington/Lower Hutt/Petone region,

The essence and spirit of the Museum is sharing – sharing knowledge and experience, thoughts and memories. Unless we share, much is lost.

¹⁰⁷ Ian Wedde, *Evening Post*, 22.10.87.

¹⁰⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 2.

Access in its broadest sense requires a shift in the power base towards that of the community group. Initiatives are derived from them hence providing an opportunity for them to experiment with freer expression and a range of subjects. This approach allows the institution to respond to initiatives from the community as partners in project programmes.

Access gives institutions the potential to widen their audiences and enables institutions to respond to and support public interests. Programmes also work towards changing the traditional view of a museum from being exclusive to inclusive.¹⁰⁸

Mealing's work dissolved in the spirit of the counter-culture the pervasive boundaries and limitations of art world institutions, hierarchies and capitalist emphases on the art object. In applying Marxist, sociological and phenomenological readings as analytical tools, Mealing's understanding of how the imaginative function of the worker-artist personae communicates and lives the ideal of social intervention was achieved. Through political and corporeal strategies employed by Mealing, liminal negotiations of cultural, social and economic difference provoked a radical shift in the post-object and performance course of art making in New Zealand. Rather than perform the author function solely in a Pollockian sense, Mealing's path of rejecting the sustainable object is replaced with a Beuysian, altruistic desire to provoke enduring change from within the substrata of society itself.

¹⁰⁸ David Mealing & Theresa Sawicka, 'Living in Two Worlds – The History of a Process', *New Zealand Museums Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 1997 p.58, 61.

Chapter Three:

Andrew Drummond

An Inner Echo

Andrew Drummond is among the most significant performance artists in New Zealand. His career, beginning in the mid 1970s, spans three decades and his work is a definitive part of developing performance practices in New Zealand. Many performance artists in this country during the 1970s engaged in body-oriented processes, exploring themes centring on gesture and action to generate an understanding not only of space, but also of the interrelationships between body, self, audience and the world. New Zealand forums that encouraged a growing awareness of performance evolved out of artist participation in Australian events such as the Experimental Art Foundation (EAF, beginning in 1974), Mildura Sculpture Triennials (1961-1982) and the Sydney Biennale (beginning in 1975), increased the development of performance activity in this country during the 1970s and 1980s. The Wellington Artists' Co-Op, ANZART and F.1. Sculpture Project were key forums initiated by Irish-born artist and administrator Ian Hunter from 1978-1983.¹

Crucial to the development of 'littoral' associations with performance and post-object art in New Zealand is Hunter's identification of the littoral as an interventionist tendency, an integration of the manifold levels of society, the economy, community, and ecology with a deeper understanding of creative systems. Hunter asserted:

This is a way of working that implies the recognition of the legitimacy of the creative process and intuitive ways of working and thinking as an

¹ Ian Hunter lived in New Zealand from 1973-1983, he graduated from Dublin University in 1970 majoring in sculpture. He established several artist run spaces and conferences throughout New Zealand that aimed to forge greater relations between artists in New Zealand and abroad with an underlying desire to engender a collective political stance. These venues and events provided ways for artists to collaborate, discuss and identify their struggles in making a living and extending their careers in a culture largely ignorant of the activities of artists. See Appendix One.

important and active constituent element in most other spheres of human activity and professional behaviour.²

Mealing's creative process articulated a littoral socio-political attitude (as described above by Hunter). Drummond also incorporated littoral tendencies that resided in the power of performance to further unfold imaginative possibilities. However his use of the littoral also incorporated an intimate relationship with the place between land and sea, whereas Mealing operated within the realm of sociological and conceptual intervention. Performance provided a fulcrum in the development of Drummond's sculptural investigation. Elements of kinetic activation use of liminal, ritual time and space, and phenomenological associations with the corporeal and spiritual worlds all produced a body of work that conveyed an interest in the magic of objects and movement. Throughout the artist's performance oeuvre is a socio-political concern for the environment, and the people living off the land, which is manifested through action-energy and an acute absorption of the spirit of place. This phenomenological intervention between the inside and the outside, the seer and what is seen, created a body-world relationship articulated through an aesthetic allegorical language, as Merleau-Ponty explains, the skin and bones of the self *and* the world intertwine, as 'the body is a being of two leaves'.³ Drummond sought through his sculptural language, and established through the corporeal and political, an adhesion between the two.

Drummond attended Palmerston North Teachers College from 1970-1972 and was a pupil of Ray Thorburn⁴ who introduced him to the work of Len

² Ian Hunter, 'Other Ways and Meanings', *Public Practices*, South Island Art Projects, 1994, p.22.

John Hurrell has identified this approach as problematic in its perceived sense of purity, avoiding corruption from institutions. See Hurrell's essay 'Gangrenous Encounters *Art Now: The first review of contemporary New Zealand art*, Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa, 1994, pp. 13-17.

³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'The Visible and the Invisible', *The Intertwining – The Chiasm*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1968, p.138.

⁴ Ray Thorburn, a graduate of Elam began teaching at the Palmerston North Teachers College during the early 1970s. He was a Frances Hodgkins Fellow at Otago in 1973, and completed an M. A. in Art Education at Ohio State University and was awarded a PhD in art Education.

Lye, expatriate New Zealand kinetic artist and the contemporary international style of conceptual and abstract art. Drummond exhibited *Kinetic Paintings* in Dunedin during 1973 at Dawson's Gallery and *Kinetic Constructions* (1974) in Palmerston North. These consisted of spray-painted constructions on board, overlaid by painted glass panels, which explored formal and technical aspects of kinesis. Drummond's work in his final year at University of Waterloo, Canada (1975) also included 'self-destructing' kinetic work that recalled the formal investigations of Marcel Duchamp and the Constructivists. Duchamp's *Rotary glass plate (precision optics)* (1920), Moholy-Nagy's prophetic manifesto *The dynamic-constructive system of forces* (1921), Alexander Calder's *Construction* (1931), *Homage to New York* (1960), by Yves Tinguely and the *combines* of Robert Rauschenberg created a kinetic genre concerned with an integration and extension of the dynamics of three-dimensional space. These non-static implications of kinetic art, found also in the work of Len Lye,⁵ have been explored and developed into precision sculpture by Drummond. The relationship between the dynamics of the body and kinetic sculpture and the connection between the 'Old Brain'⁶ and bodily processes imbued Lye's work with scientific and mythical investigations of the unconscious. As Lye commented: 'Myth is going to be the final way, it's through myth that we're going to appreciate the essence of individuality, in terms of art. It's got to be in ritual, conceived ritual...'⁷ Bodily and psychic energies inherent in Lye's sculpture and film were informed by the physical implications of modern life,

Thorburn, an associate of Lye, was a colour field painter of austere abstractionism. His paintings were often completed in the spray-painting bay of a panel beaters and emphasis was made on the conception of the work rather than the execution and produced work of an intellectual and aesthetic rigour.

⁵ Drummond was appointed in Lye's Will to look after the educational interests of the films. Drummond brought the movies of Lye back to New Zealand in 1976 and now believes that Lye's films are being exploited commercially. In 1980, the year of Lye's death, Drummond (while Frances Hodgkins Fellow), artist erected a memorial to him on Mt Zion, Dunedin.

⁶ The term 'Old Brain', as used in biology, refers to the area of the brain that developed first in the course of human evolution. Lye associated this area with the mental powers that lay outside rationality – it was his conception of the 'unconscious'. He saw it as closely connected also to the processes of the body.

⁷ Len Lye, 'Ray Thorburn interviews Len Lye', *Art International*, 19/4. 1975, p. 68.

observations of movement in a technological age recombined with a deeply sensed experience of the impetus of human motion. As he writes of his work during the 1960s:

Instead of sketching lines and accents described by things in motion, I now tried to tie and plait their particular motion characteristics into my sinews – to attach an inner echo of them to my bones.⁸

This translation from a metaphorical rendering of motion to a corporeal, kinaesthetic, sphere of experience is seen in performance art, in the movement of materials in space through air currents, the dimensions of time and importantly the body as it lives through an exteriority.

Movement produces the possibility of a work of art whose form *is* a process of growth. This growth might be revealed through the spectator's actions, linked to his movements, or it might grow of itself from within, responding spontaneously to the environment.⁹

Kinetic time and action, closely related to the phenomenological understanding of the body, self and land, is an enduring performance interest in Drummond's work that was to extend from the mid 1970s into liminal action as a form of communication with the world.

The artist departed for Canada in 1974, where he attended the University of Waterloo, 1974-76, majoring in Sculpture in the Honours programme. In 1975 the artist, dealer and gallery owner, Richard Demarco organised a two-month course in Fine Arts at the University of Edinburgh in which Drummond participated. Joseph Beuys, Professor of Sculpture at the Dusseldorf Academy from 1961-1972, was then at the height of his fame. He had been invited to teach at Edinburgh and conducted open forums of debate on his expanded notion of art as 'social sculpture'. Beuys considered his role of a teacher as equal to that of an artist. He incited political activism prevalent

⁸ Len Lye, 'The Practice', from *The Art that Moves*, unpublished manuscript, 1964, quoted from 'Len Lye's Sculpture and the Body of his Work', Wystan Curnow, *Art New Zealand*. No. 17, 1980, p.37.

⁹ Guy Brett, *Kinetic Art*, Studio Vista, London, 1968, p.8.

among students across the world in the late 1960s and integrated it into his classes and teaching strategies.¹⁰

Energy Plan for the Western Man was a series of lectures conducted while Beuys toured the United States in 1974 that demonstrated principles of his conceptual 'university', the Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research. Beuys was influenced by the Austrian Anthroposophist, Rudolph Steiner who had called for a regeneration of thinking that could lead to an alternative to both private (Western) and state (Eastern) capitalism.¹¹ On meeting the incarcerated murderer, Jimmy Boyle,¹² Beuys spoke of the body as a metaphorical prison, physically confined 'compared to worlds beyond, the body of perception, the body of feeling, the body of thinking and, the body of consciousness'.¹³ Symbols of healing used by Beuys such as gauze bandages, the cross form, allusions to Christ, Celtic traditions and the trance of the Shaman were referenced by Beuys in Scotland through a series of happenings and performances.¹⁴ Like Mealing elements of Beuys's teaching can be identified in Drummond's performance work, particularly in allowing personal and universal symbols or metaphors to become valid sculptural material. For Drummond the importance of play, reaching beyond the limitations of 'rationality' (imposed by conditioned states of social behaviour)

¹⁰ In 1967 the German Student Party was founded in Beuys' class and their activities continued there throughout the late 1960s. Following years of conflict with the school's administration Beuys was dismissed in 1972. The final point of contention was the battle waged against the bureaucracy over the policy of 'restricted entry' under which only a select number of students could be enrolled. In line with his belief that those who feel they have something to teach and those who feel they have something to learn have the right to come together, Beuys deliberately over-enrolled his classes. The multiple *Democracy is Merry* (1973) was made from a photograph of Beuys with his students being escorted from the school after a sit-in protesting the school's admission policy.

¹¹ Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys: We Go This Way*, Violette Editions, London, 1998 p. 141.

¹² Jimmy Boyle was imprisoned and unable to practice sculpture or any artistic endeavours. Beuys went on a hunger strike to protest this inhumane treatment of prisoners.

¹³ Caroline Tisdall *Joseph Beuys: We Go This Way* p. 196.

¹⁴ The weeklong action, *Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me*, had been performed in New York in 1974 during the same tour, both of these events presaged Beuys's visit to Scotland, where his reputation was growing. A performance piece was conducted while in Scotland, *Three Pots Action*, a blessing of the walls and space of the Poorhouse, and an exhibition of drawings, *The Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland*, was held at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh.

toward a freedom of expression, and a journey of learning became processes of refinement from the mid 1970s.

Drummond conducted a series of performances while in Scotland and Canada that explored the dimensions of time and recalled aspects of Celtic rites. *Time/Space Sequence, Homage to Callanish* (1975) was based on the ancient power of the Scottish stone circles in Callanish.¹⁵ Drummond then explored the labyrinth or maze form in the performances *Spira Mirabilis: The Golden Triangle*, and *Primitive Arrowhead Redesigned* (**illus 12**) that adopted the role of the shaman by traversing spiral forms outlined by candles in a meditative rhythm. In another collaborative 'performance drawing', *Circles 7 x 7* (1976), (**illus 13**) circles were imprinted into the snow each seven feet in diameter and coloured with potassium permanganate by a group of numbered participants. Ancient signs of spirals and mazes symbolise initiation and birth, death and rebirth.¹⁶ The labyrinth is an indication of change as the centre 'signifies the place and opportunity for a perception so fundamental that it demands a basic change in direction'.¹⁷ At a time of heightened unease and anxiety in the world, such references to symbols found on ancient ruins and artefacts, an evocation of primitive rituals e.g. the agrarian cycle of birth, death to rebirth, echoed a contemporary need for art to 'bespeak its origins'.¹⁸

On returning in New Zealand in 1976 Drummond was appointed Education Officer at the National Art Gallery, Wellington. The artist had created the Dynamic Energy Art Group (DEAG) in Scotland, whereby the mobilisation of energy provided not only the process but also the content of a series of

¹⁵ The site in the Isle of Lewis, Scotland, consists of avenues that come together in a cross shape with a circle of standing stones in the middle. Inside the circle is a chambered tomb. It is thought that Callanish was a solar and lunar observatory. Drummond directed the actions of several performers who were lying in sleeping bags around a stone circle bisected by poles, which represented lay lines or lines of energy force. The performers changed their positions every 10 seconds to the command of a drum beaten from a distance by Drummond.

¹⁶ Spirals can be found in the work of Richard Long and the Canadian artist Bill Vazan, who both constructed spirals of stones through which people could enter and participate in the experience of exploring the sequence.

¹⁷ Hermann Kern, 'Labyrinths: Tradition and Contemporary Works', *Artforum*, May 1961, p. 60.

¹⁸ Jack Burnham, quoted from *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, Lucy Lippard, Pantheon Books, New York, 1983, p. 8.

performances. (illus 14, 15) The artist produced photographic documentation outlining his DEAG work from Canada and Scotland and the first New Zealand performances, *Ritual for Summer Solstice*, *Onto Skin*, and *A Conversation Between Two Animals* (1977).

Ritual for Summer Solstice (1977), conducted in the garden of a friend's house, coincided with Easter. Drummond, wearing a white boiler suit, remained tied to a St Andrew's cross while participants walked around him chanting 'Onto Skin, Bones Growth' finally lining up in front of the cross and throwing bones at the artist while yelling 'Blood Lets'.¹⁹ *Bones/Whirls/Skin* (1977) was another ritual cleansing performance where the artist encased in animal hide (like a Parangole cape) whirled like a dervish. Bones hanging on a cord attached around his head added a primal dimension and the performance ended with the artist falling in a state of trance onto the ground. These two performances not unlike Mealing's performance *Crucifixion*, drew on Christian and pagan rites also to be seen in *Suspension/Ascension* and *Crucifixion* (1978).²⁰ They are also, in their kinaesthetic quality, a corporeal embodiment of what Lye described as an attempt to tie and plait particular motion characteristics into the sinews of the body, 'to attach an inner echo of them to my bones'.

Onto Skin, a performance in three parts, took place at the Auckland City Art Gallery as part of the 1977 Young Contemporaries show. (illus 16) Drummond's sophisticated sequence of events combined the elements of skin, his own and that of an animal hide. Manacled to the floor of the gallery, his

¹⁹ Heather Curnow, Elva Bett, *Newsletter* 1978, No 12 unpaginated.

²⁰ Beuys's early interactions with plants, animals and the natural sciences were manifested through traditional methods of observation, experimentation and recording of data. Animals in his performances were used to accompany him on journeys and to have conversations with. *Explaining Pictures to a Dead Hare*, (1965) and *I Like America and America Likes Me*, (1974) were performances whereby animals represented spirit guardians to the shaman. Animals unlike humans can pass freely from one level of existence to another. *A Conversation Between two Animals*, (1977), performed at Palmerston North Teachers College, exhibited Drummond's interest in new electronic technology interspersed with a shamanistic view of transformation and echoes that of Beuys's fascination with the natural world. Drummond's conversation with an owl via an electronic network of photocells mounted in front of both participants was based on a notation of signs. Ending the 'conversation' Drummond threw white flour onto an animal hide pinned to the wall.

accomplice and fellow artist Nick Spill poured ruber latex over his back. An animal hide was stretched on the floor beside him and a bone structure was positioned in another part of the room. After this 'second skin' had dried it was peeled off and placed gently onto the bone structure. Drummond ended the performance by curling up in a foetal position on the hide. This performance is a crucial moment in the artist's performative gestures. The metaphorical use of the skin (a container) and the body (a vessel), the threshold between the inner and outer, suggested the liminal existence of material and spiritual realities. The skin forms a filter that links the interiority of the artist's experience with the visible world.

Between the alleged colours and visibles, we would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which for its part is not a thing, but a latency, and a *flesh* of things.²¹

Drummond described the skin as a 'literal tangible', imbued with an invisible energy force, 'initially the skin concept was a physical entity and what wasn't skin was non-material – it was an area of nothing, which in itself had energies'.²² The 'self imprisoned' state of being manacled to the floor while dangerous fumes threatened to harm him, meant that the artist had to retreat into an interior space, another reality in order to complete the action. The pain involved had not been considered prior to the performance, yet it created another dimension of tension and release once the skin was removed. The skin-sloughing motif of ancient pagan times indicated a renewal, laying the residue over the bones and assuming a foetal position completed the cyclical metaphor of rebirth.²³

²¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'The Visible and the Invisible', *The Intertwining – The Chiasm*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1968, pp. 132, 133.

²² Andrew Drummond, *Onto Skin, A Performance in Three Parts*, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1977, unpaginated.

²³ The use of skin as a vehicle for energy was further explored in *Skin Print Event* (1977) an action directed by Drummond at the University of Canterbury. Six performers applied ink to their torsos and walked up 'running tracks' demarcated by white lines painted on the grass, toward six animal skins. They then pressed their bodies onto the skins, leaving an imprint. It was also an action that created a ritual dialectic with the self and other, a phenomenological intertwining, "because the body belongs to the order of things as the world is universal flesh". (Merleau-Ponty, 'The Visible and the Invisible', *The Intertwining – The Chiasm*, p.137). The

A diagram drawn by Drummond reveals the connections made between the visible and invisible, the tangible and intangible dimensions of his performative language.

Installation/Performance Structure

SKIN	BONE (s)	SKIN/EYE
LETS	GROWTH	SEES
BLOOD (red)	CANDLES LASER	LIGHT

Such diagrams that indicate performance processes is also a technique employed by performance analyst and anthropologist Victor Turner, who studied and interpreted the numerous ethnographic forms of ritual and symbol in different societies.²⁴ Turner in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* identified three dimensions inherent in symbolic ritual: the exegetic (explanations of coherence), operational (the values and meaning of the symbol's use), and the positional (a reflection of many different facets of ritual as they relate to other symbols). Rites of passage (a moment of transformation or change) and cyclic ritual (a culturally defined moment of seasonal or cyclic change) are also identified as well as the ambiguous attributes of liminality. Drummond's cleansing performances could be described as cyclic ritual. Other actions such as *Crucifixion*, *Filter Action* and *Earth Vein* are more aligned with

event had an air of a shared ritual or festival, almost like a sports day, onlookers had a picnic, but there was no one winner, 'they were all winners. Even the people having the picnic were winners, because everyone was sharing the occasion'. (Andrew Drummond, interview with Ron Brownson, taped interview transcript, 1978).

²⁴ Turner lived among the Ndembu, a central African tribe, from 1950-1954, studying their society and their religious practices.

rituals of transformation. All however are intuitive and devoid of theatricality, and were processes of absorption and reflection that came alive through an intrinsic sense of the presence of the past.

Drummond's *Crucifixion* (1978) performed in March at the CSA 'Platforms' exhibition, was a further development of *Ritual for Summer Solstice* and had been inspired by the reading of the tenth station of the cross, where Christ's clothes were torn off before the Crucifixion. 'For The artist the violent stripping off of clothing/skin represented a transcending of the physical before progressing to a spiritual state'²⁵ which indicates that this performance was a rite of passage. Indeed Christ's transcendence into the spiritual, re-enacted by the artist, created controversy, not because of the subject matter but for the display of nudity in a public place, and as a result like Mealing suffered issues of censorship. The offended citizens of Christchurch misinterpreted the simple and economical actions.

Entering naked into the art gallery space, the artist lay on a St Andrew's cross, wearing a gas mask and pilots helmet. A heart-pulse visual display unit recorded on a screen his physical and emotional state while latex was poured onto his body. Casting off the skin he laid the residue on the cross along with polaroid photographs (taken by Paul Johns) that had recorded the performance. **(illus 17)** A simulated heartbeat sounded under the cross when the photographs were placed on the structure thus revealing simultaneously inner and outer, natural and artificial states. Two Christian spectators, offended by his nudity, complained to the police and charges were laid. Police removed the polaroid prints from the installation after gallery staff defied the law by reinstating them (they had been removed after the complaints had been made public). Charges were dismissed after a prolonged court case in Wellington, as the performance was part of an Arts Festival and no undue emphasis was given to the artist's private parts.²⁶ As a test case²⁷ Hamish Keith found it to be

²⁵ Heather Curnow, Elva Bett, *Newsletter*, No 12, June/July, 1979, unpaginated.

²⁶ *Crucifixion* was part of the Platforms exhibition at the CSA Gallery. Organised by Neil Dawson, Marty Mendlesberg and Rosemary Johnson, fifteen artists were invited to interpret

very dangerous, with some serious connotations for the contemporary arts, he was also however, interested in the immediacy of the performance process.

Perhaps the best thing to come out of the whole affair is the clear emphasis placed on the value of directly experiencing a work of art. There is, in fact, no other way to get the message. In a society that deludes itself into thinking that there is some natural virtue in mass and instant communication, it is comforting to think that the arts are reasserting some basic tribal truths.²⁸

According to the artist *Crucifixion* had been a 'questioning of Christ's spirituality'. Drummond's performance was not a religious statement but rather it was:

...About the spirituality of life, and that there's more to life than the physical aspects of it. The casting of the skin and the ripping off of the cast were a cleansing process. But at the same time there was a life after death element.²⁹

The performance drew on a number of personal associations. Drummond, (whose namesake is St Andrew), was born into a Bretheren family who placed emphasis on living a dedicated religious life. St Andrew (patron saint of Scotland) was the first Apostle to follow Christ and performed many acts of healing on missionary journeys. He was crucified on a diagonal cross bound with rope rather than nailed to a cross. The death of Christ however, is the central, visual focus of Christian contemplation, expressed through symbols and allegory and the artist sought to represent the human dimension of Christ's sacrifice.

five different sculptural structures. The Arts Festival Board, which included Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, defended the performance and supported the artist. The Judge for the case did not think 'that the behaviour was sufficiently serious to warrant the interference of the criminal law so as to prevent some more serious offence taking place'. However, Drummond's performance was proclaimed by the judge to be 'ill mannered, in bad taste, crude and offensive'. Evidence in defence of the performance, was given by Hamish Keith, (chairman of the QEII Arts Council) and Tom Taylor, who 'described the growing use of the artist's body as a sculpture form'. *The Evening Post*, 4. 8.78.

²⁷ 'It was a test case, and I felt just like a rat in a laboratory situation', Andrew Drummond, quoted from *The Evening Post*, 4. 8. 78.

²⁸ Hamish Keith, *New Zealand Listener* 9th September 1978. p. 28.

²⁹ Andrew Drummond, *The Evening Post* 4.8.78.

The nudity issue surrounding the event revealed some interesting assumptions pertaining to the image and to the function of the artist in society. Mealing and Drummond through their crucifixion performances colluded with a traditional image of the transcendent male artist as a mediator of universal principles, political and spiritual. Through the use of their bodies and for Drummond the residue of a ritualised action, they aimed to create change within the fabric of society. They both however subverted, in revealing their vulnerability through nudity, what Amelia Jones describes as the limitations of late modernism's compartmentalisation of gender.

The modernist genius must have a body that is visible as male, and yet this body must be naturalized (made invisible) in order for the rhetoric of transcendentalism to do its work successfully: the artist as divinely inspired is effectively disembodied, and ostensibly desexed, in the art historical or critical text. The artist must be embodied as male in order to be considered an artist – placed within a (patri)lineage as originary and divinely inspired – but his embodiment (his particularity as a gendered and otherwise vulnerable, immanent subject) must be hidden to ensure his transcendence as disembodied and divinely inspired.³⁰

Mealing and Drummond are artists visibly connected with the male prerogative of inspired creative 'genius'. But by disengaging with modernism's careful veiling of the male corporeal gender, they solicited an alternate strategy of art making based on the phenomenological 'expressive space' of the lived body. The politicisation of Mealing's *Crucifixion*, as a protest against oppression, and for Drummond a politicisation of the personal and spiritual, that was indicative of the growing fragmentation of the subject in society that had been occurring since the 1960s.

The photo-documentation of the *Crucifixion* performance exposed the body as supplementary, as visible proof and contingent upon the photograph for confirmation. The residue of the skin and the polaroids that existed only as reminders after the event, further challenged the notion of the performance as only being 'real' if it was witnessed in real time. Drummond realised the

³⁰ Amelia Jones, *Body Art Performing the Subject*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1998, p. 62.

potential of performance documentation and carefully began record his performances.³¹ The recording of the articulate body submits to an encapsulation of the moment of creation, as seen in the photographs of Pollock reproduced in *Art News* 1951. The role of the camera in performance art provides an anchor to the performative moment, as Jones writes:

The photograph of the performance is a supplement of a supplement: a seemingly rigorous visual, indexical marker of a body's having 'been there' before the camera/audience.³²

The originary presence of the artist is deferred in the photographic evidence, introducing a static representation of temporal dimensions, a trace that paradoxically accents a modernist reliance on pure visuality. However, the photograph also presents an operational and exegetic function - the temporal performance is experienced by a viewer, who then deciphers the image in accordance with their own understandings of the particular symbology presented to them, removed from Drummond's real time, but reflected in their own dimension of real time.

After the *Crucifixion* controversy Drummond preferred to conduct private performances in order to 'preserve a sense of honesty'. *The Ngaruanga Set*, a series of performances where the artist tried 'to put a humanity and the animal together'³³, an exchange between animal and animal, was conducted at the Wellington Artists Co-Op in 1978.³⁴ This set of performances was filmed and photographed by Ian Hunter and visiting Chinese artist Eva Man Wah-Yuen.

³¹ This is seen in the documentation sold to accompany a later version of the performance *A Conversation Between Two Animals* in 1978, which consisted of photographs and a sound recording packaged into a box. This was performed in collaboration with Jonathan Besser at the Elva Bett Gallery in Wellington. Drummond took the role of the 'animal' while Besser was introduced as the 'alter-ego'. A stuffed owl on a stand "remained a mute witness to this ritual, and projected on the wall of the gallery was a coloured slide of a human brain, creating both backdrop and altar-piece". (Heather Curnow, Elva Bett, *Newsletter*, No 12, 1979).

³² Amelia Jones, 'Postmodernism, Subjectivity, and Body Art', *Body Art Performing the Subject*, p. 36.

³³ Andrew Drummond, interview with Ron Brownson, unpublished transcript of taped interview, 1978.

³⁴ *The Ngaruanga Set* had intended to be performed in the Ngaruanga meatworks, an abandoned warehouse in Wellington. Drummond, Ian Hunter and visiting Chinese artist Eva Man Wah-Yuen spent time exploring the building before it was demolished in 1978. The subsequent development of the Artists' Co-Op in a dis-used wool store provided an alternative.

The photographs were reproduced in a limited edition book in which Drummond provided descriptions of the performances. The overriding statement in this work centred on the physical nature of New Zealand society, as he explained:

We kill a million animals a year in this country and there is a real ritual evolved around that. It's a commercial thing, but there's also the whole aspect of the physical aspects of New Zealand and how the meatworks really are a perfect statement of the physical nature of New Zealand – look at the sports we play; the whole match culture we have evolved and the freezing works are one way of showing its reality.³⁵

The four performances consisted of *Like a Bull at a Gate*, *Skin/Body Suspension*, *Twenty Directions in an Enclosure* and *Onto Skin*.

Like a Bull at a Gate, 'where the animal after repeated attempts takes his leave'³⁶ involved the artist running toward a suspended animal hide, onto which pieces of liver were attached, and ricocheting off the skin. Eventually he attacked the hide with a sharp instrument ripping it apart and stepping through. This symbolic act of ripping the corporeal skin to freedom on the other side contrasted with *Skin/Body Suspension*, where the artist was suspended for one tortuous hour by the wrists and ankles above the floor, a large skin was suspended in parallel above him. Eventually the skin dropped on top of him after candles burnt through string and he struggled to be free of the heavy and suffocating material. The subtitle 'We are the animals' was confronted, and the artist worked through the idea of becoming removed from the 'personality' to become a corporeal vehicle for transformative ritual.

Twenty Directions in an Enclosure,³⁷ (**illus 18**) created a visually arresting tableau of imagery; a trace of white flour left behind by Drummond on a large blood-red floor covering evoked tracks left by animals in the wild. The artist's movements were directed by a compasses attached to his wrists, ankles

³⁵ Andrew Drummond, interview with Ron Brownson, unpublished transcript, of taped interview, 1978.

³⁶ Andrew Drummond, *Ngaruanga Set*, limited edition book, 1978, unpaginated.

³⁷ Contributing to the Mildura Sculpture Triennial prior to this, Drummond performed *Twenty Directions in an Enclosure: A Pointing Performance*, where numbered compasses strapped to his body and magnets dangling from an overhead web informed him where to travel, a bag of leaking sand demarcating his tracks.

and body as they responded to the attractions and repulsions of a network of suspended magnets. The process itself, with the use of magnets is not unlike the Chinese practice of Geomancy, or feng shui. The feng shui master or geomant employs a circular magnetic compass marked off in rings of data relating to astrological elements in order to locate a site where the energies (or chi') of the land and sky are brought into perfect balance. Geomancy is also an ancient form of divination in which handfuls of soil were scattered on the ground, (or markings made in the earth or sand) and a range of dot configurations then 'read' by a seer. The *Ngaruanga Set* involved a complex metaphorical relationship with the range of materials used that commented on the uneasy duplicity of society in evoking the mass killing rites in freezing works. An allusion to ancient sacrificial motifs, a critical reference to 'tribal truths' and the loss of respect for life, was made through the artist's body.

After resigning from the National Art Gallery as education officer in 1978, Drummond performed *Suspension/Ascension* at the Manawatu Art Gallery.³⁸ (illus 19) This performance was included as part of the *Flights of Fancy* exhibition, a theme that belied the intensity of the artist's performance. Dressed in a wet suit, encased in a metal cage and again suspended by the wrists and ankles (counter balanced by sash weights), he thrashed his body in the limited confines of the cage in an attempt to bite an apple dangling above his head while a television placed in front of the cage, flickered a blue screen and emitted a sound track of the sea. The audience felt acutely the sheer exertion of the performance; his cries of agony and frustration elicited a response of anxiety and some spectators approached the cage wanting to help him. Finally he broke free from the restraints and removed the sweltering wet suit. Eating a few mouthfulls of the apple he threw the rest into the audience. The artist, in striving to bite the apple that marked the Fall of Man, also evoked

³⁸ *Suspension/Ascension* was repeated again in 1979 at what was to become the Janne Land Gallery, Blair Street, Wellington. Nick Spill conducted his *Artist Talks Lectures*.

³⁹ Rudolph Steiner, *The Whitsun Mystery and its Connection with the Ascension*, Rudolph Steiner Archive world wide web, last modified 13 Jan 2001).

the moment of Christ's Ascension, with, however, the weight of mortality limiting or suspending his 'transcendence'.

The etheric body is being drawn all the time towards the sun, not towards the earth. Our constitution as human beings is such that our physical body has *earthly heaviness, gravity...*³⁹

The threshold state (that of knowledge of the state between death and a new birth) that Drummond evoked in this performance is imbued with mythic connotations, augmented by the volatile corporeal dimension of putting the body at risk.

Exchange: The body and land

Ecological and sociological issues pertaining to the fragility of the natural environment had become a primary source of concern and aesthetic attention for Drummond by the end of the 1970s. The effects of urban destruction, alienation and the connection between a political and natural analysis of the eco-system occupied many performance artists of the 1970s and 1980s. As Anne Marsh explains:

Performance artists who presented rituals using natural materials such as earth, fire and water were often inspired by ecological and environmental concerns. These issues became increasingly important throughout the 1960s and 1970s in juxtaposition with an evolving political analysis which stressed the personal responsibility of the active subject, at the same time as it valued personal experience and the liberation of the instincts.⁴⁰

With an array of sculptural media the artist explored - in performances, installation and sculpture - the symbolic, alchemical potential of components such as beeswax, blood, fire, willow, gauze, slate, coal, copper, cotton wool and fossil stone that represented his form of spiritual and physical energy and body/self relations. Drummond provoked a greater understanding of the

⁴⁰ Anne Marsh, 'Ritual performance and ecology; feminist and activist performance'. *Body and Self: Performance Art in Australia 1969-92*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1993, p.141.

responsibility needed to sustain a healthy ecological system. Where Mealing investigated 'social time' in the urban environment through collaborative action, Drummond expressed his socio-political awareness through a concern for the land and an interest in how objects relate to the body and psyche. This was achieved through imaginative solutions: through a projection of the artist's body in space, inhabiting the centre and the periphery, the personal and the political and an associated language of sculptural symbol. As he stated: 'I treat myself as an entity in space.' *The Grass is Greener, Filter, Action, Earth Vein, Toxick* and *Red Wedge* are some performance/installations with overt references to democratic impingement, despoliation and exploitation of the land.

For Drummond's installation in 1979 at the Manawatu Art Gallery *The Grass is Greener*, themes of space and time were relayed through video monitors. The installation consisted of a polythene and plastic mesh hill two metres high, eight metres long. Suspended from cords attached to the gallery's ceiling beams, the construction had grass (grown at the nearby DSIR Grasslands Division site) growing on the exterior.⁴¹ **(illus 20)** The hollow interior displayed two video monitors at opposite ends, one played a loop of a man walking, the other was an image of a caged eagle. A table inside the centre was scattered with political party manifestos and newspapers, which were accumulated each day open at the national news page, 'to enable participants to be familiarised with issues of the day',⁴² meanwhile underneath the table a pile of grass clippings slowly decomposed. **(illus 21)** In association with the installation a public forum was held on the theme 'how has the erosion of freedoms in society limited our choices of growth?' This overt socio-political stance is similar to the attitude of Mealing, particularly in the symbolic daily ritual of a newspaper being added to the installation. Bags of grass were also

⁴¹ Hans Haacke created *Grass Grows* in 1966 whereby grass grew on top of a 3-foot square Plexiglass cube and again in 1969 (for the 'Earth Art' exhibition) in a mound formation. "The phenomenon of organic growth as an essential component of an ecosystem is an early example of issues which would be later explored further in more fully developed ecological art works". (*Land and Environmental Art*, Phaidon, London, 1999, p. 138).

⁴² Andrew Drummond, *The Grass is Greener*, exhibition catalogue, Manawatu Art Gallery, 1979, unpaginated.

delivered and placed around the information table, creating grass mulch over the exhibition period, thus the exhibition space was permeated with an overwhelming smell of compost. The participatory aspect of the installation was emphasised and spectators through conversation and debate were invited to question the way individual choices in life were made.

The rapid erosion of freedoms within society in the last decade has had a numbing and destructive effect on the way the individual perceives his choices and consequently the manner in which he pursues that choice.⁴³

Themes of 'inside/outside' and time and space, were qualities emphasised through sculptural media and conceptual idea. The grass hill/cavern, reminiscent of Arte Povera materials, and the socio-political overlay, sought to interrogate and challenge complacency the artist perceived to be inherent in the lives of ordinary citizens. Without questioning political systems, and failing to sow new seeds of creative possibilities that would heal the 'vast social wound', infrastructures can implode and Drummond through this installation, sought to integrate and fertilize art and life.

The importance of environmental and socio-political issues to Drummond's developing oeuvre became clear during his residency as Frances Hodgkins Fellow for 1980 at the University of Otago in Dunedin. This fellowship provided him with accommodation, a studio and financial support to develop his work.⁴⁴ The liminal use of operational and positional symbols to indicate multiple references, personal, contemporary and ancient developed in Dunedin, beginning with *Filter Action*, a private ritual conducted at Aramoana Estuary.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ The appointment of Drummond for the fellowship received media attention, due to the fact that he for a while known as an ephemeral, 'post object artist'. He was well aware of the suspicion generated by performance activity, and the *Crucifixion* incident had made this clear. 'Many people find this hard to cope with. They're often still struggling with abstract art. Even some people who think they know about art refuse to admit it is art at all. Some people are tied up with preconceptions of what art should be. They have sacred ideas about art. But I don't believe the references have to be so strict'. (Andrew Drummond, 'Art with the energies of life', *The Otago Daily Times*, 5. 9. 80).

During his residency Drummond combined a strong aesthetic response to the land with a renewed interest in making objects associated with performances and installations.

The object fits in, if there's an object to be fitted in. That comes out organically, it just grows out. And that had been the problem, because I'd been forcibly not nurturing the object for the sake of philosophy, and that wasn't right...My work wasn't growing and as soon as I stopped suppressing the object, I just shot ahead.⁴⁵

Used in conjunction with an action, the object took on a purpose other than a single, static viewpoint. Captured by the beauty of the Central Otago landscape, the artist, inspired by the natural environment, began to work in a site beyond the infrastructures of the commercial art gallery, a strategy that many international sculptors absorbed during 1970s and 1980s. Land art sculptors during the 1970s worked within the vast spaces of land, which 'signalled the possibility of the liminal sites as a position'.⁴⁶ A limitless multiplicity of locations outside of the gallery presented space as an ambiguous field of changing positions, viewpoints, depths and dimensions that unfold with movements of the body. This was revealed simply through the nomadic action of walking (and as seen in Drummond's significant land art performance/installation, *Earth Vein*).

The first works to be made during the artist's fellowship were *King and Queen, in union*, (**illus 22**) and *Warrior*, large sculptures of willow wood and slate that resembled Pictish runes and evoked gendered allusions to Duchamp's watercolours of chess pieces such as *King and Queen with Nudes*, (1912). These sculptures are pivotal in Drummond's particular symbolic rhetoric, reappearing in different guises in performances, installations and objects throughout the 1980s and 1990s.⁴⁷

In searching for material with similar connotations to skin and bones, Drummond explored the estuary environment of Aramoana. A divining rod

⁴⁵ Andrew Drummond, interview with David Naulls, 1981.

⁴⁶ Brian Wallis, 'Survey', *Land and Environmental Art*, Phaidon, London, 1999, p.40.

⁴⁷ These sculptures are in the collection of Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, New Zealand.

shape and three-pointed star was created out of found freshly cut willow branches, (willow is the wood traditionally used by water diviners, and the art of divination has associations with geomancy).⁴⁸ He bandaged and sealed the wood with beeswax where the limbs were cut off to form 'forks' which became divining rods for energies. The *Queen* (positioned with 'legs' on the floor) has a 'bloodspot' on the upper most bandages, and a crescent copper wire between the 'legs'. The *King*, (positioned with forked limbs upright) has a steel foot (earth plate) with a slate insert shaped as a projectile, the *Warrior* has a stripped bandaged willow pole with a sling of cotton wool holding a freeze-dried kidney. The male/female co-ordinates of the sculptures recur in the subsequent performances *Filter Action* and *Earth Vein*; these structures became 'witnesses' to rites of transformation.⁴⁹ Willow suggested bones, and the beeswax/bandages skin. Slate implied connotations of learning (i.e. inscriptions on a blackboard), copper is a swift energy conductor, and used in conjunction with cotton wool or muslin (live and dead materials together), suggested notions of binding and healing.

The symbolic aspect of the materials is really important. The reason for using a bandage is because it creates a whole myriad of pictures in people's minds: of closing something that's open, of healing, of a skin, of something that you can put through and pull out – it's two way like a filter.⁵⁰

Beuys, in several installations and performances, had used materials such as slate and copper. In *Directional Forces*, (1974) the blackboard became a prime repository for articulating his philosophies on religion, economics and agriculture.⁵¹ For *Permanent Conference* (1975), copper and iron rods were

⁴⁸ See John Mitchell, *The Earth Spirit*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1975, pp. 12-16.

⁴⁹ 'In the Brahmin *Vedas*, the four natural elements are contained in wood until the wood is 'dismembered' by fire, a mystery re-enacted every time fire is made with sticks. First the wood is divided in two; then the female half is laid on the earth and the male vertical is twirled upon it until flame ensues.' Lucy Lippard *Overlay*: p. 172.

⁵⁰ Andrew Drummond, written transcript of unpublished interview with David Naulls, 1980.

⁵¹ *Directional Forces* was a major environment of blackboards that went through four stages of living social sculpture to museum piece, exhibited at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1974. There is also a direct correlation between Beuys's use of the blackboard with Rudolph Steiner, who also drew on slate and blackboard.

grouped 'in a numerical sequence of dialogues, groupings, encounters',⁵² copper was an important symbolic component for alchemical change in many of Beuys's sculptures and performances.⁵³

Drummond's objects progressed to articulate themes in *Filter Action*, an eloquent ritual of transformation and cleansing, that took place in a littoral zone at Aramoana, a proposed site for an aluminium smelter. Aramoana, (meaning 'pathway to the sea'), was once a Maori burial ground and several New Zealand artists including Di ffrench were inspired to create work commenting on the ecological disaster that an aluminium smelter would present to sacred land. The group exhibition, *Aramoana*, at the Wellington City Art Gallery, 1980⁵⁴ was an exhibition motivated by the Aramoana protest. Drummond's *Filter Action* although socio-political in nature, was not a political protest, yet it conveyed a

⁵² Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys: We Go This Way*, Violette Editions, London, 1998, p. 96.

⁵³ In the action *Vitex agnus castus*, performed in Naples, 1972, Beuys lay beside several sheets of copper and rubbed the element constantly for three hours 'until friction gave way to frenzy, his whole body trembled, as in Dionysian frenzy. Charged with suffering.' (Lucio Amelio, 'The Neapolitan Tetralogy: An interview with Lucio Amelio', Pamela Kort, *Joseph Beuys Arena – where would I have got if I had been intelligent!* Dia Center for the Arts, New York, 1994, p.42.

⁵⁴ Other artists in the *Aramoana* exhibition included Russell Moses, Chris Cree Brown, Cilla McQueen, Ralph Hotere, Anna Caselberg, Marilyn Webb, Di ffrench and Joanna Paul. Drummond exhibited a sculpture *Take a whiff of cathode waste* was a 'sadistically humorous' sculpture constructed for the exhibition at the Wellington City Art Gallery. Drummond invited participants to inhale the fumes of aluminium waste, cyanide, carbon dioxide and fluoride through a mask attached to a square glass display unit. *Toxick*, a performance/installation at the Bosshard Galleries in Dunedin was the main political statement concerning the Aramoana smelter proposal, and was exhibited in video form as part of the *Aramoana* exhibition at the Wellington City Gallery. Drummond covered the walls of the Bosshard with a length of aluminium foil and a length of two plastic tubes, that symbolised 'blood arteries', filled with animal blood. The gallery windows were blanked out with aluminium fabric blinds and the word *Toxick* was sprawled with red spray paint onto the window. A mound of dirt on the floor with three upright willow sticks bound in cotton sealed with beeswax and inserted with slate and plumb lines resembled sentinels, 'crosses or the calculations of surveyors and environmentalists on the grave of Aramoana'. A series of images from Dr Paul van Moeseke's report refuting government calculations of smelter economics was projected onto a wall; a gas bottle lay at a distance and a metronome counted the passage of time. Dr Paul van Moeseke was Professor of Economics at the University of Otago and outlined in his report ('Aluminium Smelting in New Zealand: an Economic Appraisal', Economics Discussions Papers, University of Otago, 1981) the extent of fluoride poisoning on vegetation, animals and humans that the smelter would create. Drummond entered the gallery dressed in his boiler suit, wrapped tightly with cotton wool around his head and hands and wearing a gas mask, released an orange distress flare into the crowded gallery, at which point the audience fled. (illus 23) The action highlighted the anger felt by Drummond, that irrational and thoughtless politicians put the vulnerability of the environment and the natural wild life living on the estuary at risk.

search for a panacea for an ecosystem under threat by capitalist ignorance and greed. Carefully conceived preparation included the construction of a special pack to carry the ingredients for several actions: kidneys, ground filters made from muslin, and divining rods made from willow. The basis of the piece lay in the notion of the estuary being a filter, which 'raised the issue of whether the environment could continue to filter and absorb the by-products of industrial expansion'.⁵⁵ The artist, dressed in his customary white boiler suit, began the performance (photographed by Nick Spill), by emerging from the native grasses bordering the estuary. Carrying a long copper divining rod and the pack, a site for the action was chosen. The small willow divining instruments were placed to form a circle in the estuary and the copper rod was inserted vertically in the centre of the circle. Thus the process began. Filters of muslin were laid on the mud in an East/West configuration and chimes were sounded at intervals to signify time and purification of the objects (as an alchemist might have in rituals that included prayer at intermittent moments) and were placed on the muslin and mud. Three animal kidneys were used: placed in the artist's hand while he walked around the circle, placed in his mouth and then spat in a hole, and held at a distance from his body with string and dropped into a hole. **(illus 24)** Ground and hand filters were like semi-permeable skins and were activated in sequence by the artist's gestures. When the action was over one piece of muslin was buried with the kidneys, all the materials were repacked and the twenty-first divining rod was left in the ground in the centre of the circle.⁵⁶ A drawing of a cross section of a kidney was included as part of the documentation of this private performance. The kidney filters the body's toxins and in this ritual could also be read as the philosophers' stone of transformation. A mandala pattern created by the willow, the kidneys, muslin and copper became symbols for a broader semiotic language, invested with the artist's concerns for the environment. Julia Kristeva uses the term 'semiotic' to

⁵⁵ Andrew Drummond, written transcript of unpublished interview with David Naulls, 1981.

⁵⁶ Andrew Drummond written account of *Filter Action*, Elam School of Fine Arts, Open Drawer File.

describe the connections between child and mother before the child has been initiated into the 'symbolic order'.⁵⁷ The rhythms, sensations and pulsations of the maternal body form the base upon which one develops a system of 'signification', never entirely forgotten. The intuitive energies of the semiotic allow for a creative use of language and combined with the symbolic can create new meanings. Drummond's use of the semiotic in *Filter Action* is centred on the maternal body of the land and the destruction imposed by patriarchy. New meanings evoked in this action, within a framework of ancient shamanistic rites, inscribed the land as one might inscribe a damaged body. 'I started to deal with the idea that the landscape was the body and it needs nurturing, and where it's bleeding it needs to be healed'.⁵⁸

Another gesture of grace toward the land was *Earth Vein*, performed at Lake Mahinerangi, Otago in 1980, in a location that had been heavily exploited in the extraction of all the significant gold veins.

The act of putting back into the earth an element of social and economic significance was as a gesture of recognition of not only our exploitative nature but to recognise the balances that must be maintained if a fruitful co-existence is ever to be achieved.⁵⁹

Earth Vein consisted of 500 metres of soft-core copper pipe in fifty metre lengths inserted under a disused water race.⁶⁰ All aspects of the land

⁵⁷ See Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1995, pp. 104-106.

⁵⁸ Andrew Drummond, quoted from Anne Kirker, *Supports for Falling Limbs and Articles for an Ongoing Nature*, Queensland Art Gallery, 1990, unpaginated.

⁵⁹ Andrew Drummond, *Art Project: Frances Hodgkins Fellow, University of Otago. Overview*, 1980.

⁶⁰ Creating a buried line within the earth's surface recalls some of the land and environmental art of the 1960s and 70s. Betty Beaumont created *Cable Piece* (1977) in Illinois that consists of an iron ring made out of 12 kilometres of 1 cm diameter cable and measures thirty metres in diameter. A time based work; the iron ring is still slowly sinking into the ground and stunting the growth of the grass. Walter De Maria's *Las Vegas Piece*, (1969) consists of four trenches dug in straight lines to form a square. Overlapping the artificial grid are curved patterns of natural streams, 'the piece is meant to be experienced at ground level, it explores ideas of measurement and orientation of the body in the landscape and by digging into the earth De Maria also comments on how map making devices are imposed on the natural landscape'. Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking*, (1967), Dennis Oppenheim's *Time Line*, (1968), and *Cancelled Crop*, (1969), and Carl Andre's *Secant*, (1977) are all land art pieces that engage with the act of the journey or walking, leaving a trace in the earth.

installation were documented and published in book format. A trench was dug in the bottom of the water race to a depth of five inches and lined with cotton wool at the point where the nine copper pipe ends meet. Stripped willow branches in the form of divining rods in the female *Queen* position held the tube down. Actions associated with the insertion of the copper wire were then undertaken - entitled *Action for 9 Stoppages* and *Filter Action for 2 Entries* (that also reference Duchamp's paintings *3 Standard Stoppages*, and *Network of Stoppages*, (1913-14) in their personal units of measurement). Dressed in his white boiler suit with another pack designed by the artist to carry and keep beeswax at melting point, Drummond walked the length of the channel and performed *Action for 9 Stoppages*, a ritual to join the connecting lengths of the copper, by 'joining, wrapping, sealing and mounding'.⁶¹ *Filter Action for Two Entries* was then conducted at twilight. The two entries functioned as receivers for energy. Beeswax was melted over an open fire and then used in combination with muslin to coat the copper ends. They were then buried within a mound of earth and clay. Finally, Drummond poured the fire's embers over the mounds.⁶² (illus 25) *Earth Vein's* liminal connotation is augmented through the use of fire. Lucy Lippard has interpreted the symbolic, historic and ritualistic use of fire in *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*: 'Fire is a boundary – between health/luck/fecundity and illness/bad fortune/bareness; between light and dark, or between life and death'.⁶³ In the ritual that took place during twilight, a threshold sphere when solar and lunar light energies intersect, Drummond's body became an alchemical vehicle for transformation.

Rituals like *Earth Vein* could be described as 'psycho-geographical', i.e. conveying the environment's effects on the emotions and behaviour of individuals. A 'psycho-geographer' is one who explores and reports on such psycho-geographical phenomena. In 1957 Guy Debord developed strategies

⁶¹ Andrew Drummond, *Vein*, 1980 limited edition publication, unpaginated.

⁶² *Antic*, No.5 June 1989.

⁶³ Lucy Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1983, p.175.

for the International Situationists that included psycho-geography and the theory of the 'Derive' that informed land artists of the 1960s and 1970s. Derive, literally translated as 'drifting', is a flow of acts, gestures, strolls and encounters, 'it is a technique of transient passage through various ambiances'.⁶⁴ The Derive is aware of psycho-geographical effects, including behaviour linked to the conditions of urban society. The actions of Drummond, like that of the Derive, are an analysis 'of the absolute or relative character of fissures in the urban network',⁶⁵ manifesting an awareness of the people living within a landscape that is often unforgiving and demanding. The dominating overlay of exploitation of the land by autocratic powers, economic and ecological boundaries imposed against the land and the inhabitants by the urban network, is observed and manifested through the artist's actions. The performances were metaphors for a greater energy needed for renewal, 'the focus of the earth and the focus of our place on it and the relationship between the two is what I'm doing and it's done through energy.'⁶⁶ The *Earth Vein* action took on a gendered role of the female, and the male component was articulated in a gallery installation *City Vein* in 1981, a work in progress that was to be completed in 1983.

The third performance to interrogate capitalist repercussions on the environment was *Red Wedge*, (1983) 'a symbol, a gesture'⁶⁷ that relayed the artist's sensitivity to the indigenous people and the sacredness of the land. A performance/installation at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, *Red Wedge* was a direct statement about a proposed sewerage disposal project in Taranaki and Drummond's response to this issue. The people of Taranaki had received the 'thin end of the wedge' and it appeared too difficult to retract. A large triangular jeweller's case was placed in the middle of the gallery space under a suspended 'wall'. Red fluorescent light lit the area under the wall. The

⁶⁴ Guy Debord, 'Theory of the Derive', *Situationist International*, 1958. World Wide Web.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Andrew Drummond, interview with David Naulls, 1981.

⁶⁷ Andrew Drummond, from artist statement *Red Wedge*, Govett Brewster Art Gallery, July 1983.

audience entered the gallery area by two doorways, enabling them to choose which side of the divided room to sit in. Local Maori Kaumatua Milton Hohaia offered a prayer in the gallery before the performance commenced. Drummond, dressed in white, began by placing objects from the sea inside the case. This was achieved by the artist who slid along the floor on his stomach under the wall and fetching sea weed, shell fish, and fish that had been placed at each end of the gallery, and sliding again toward the opened side of the case and placing them inside (echoing the ebb and flow of the ocean). **(illus 26, 27)** The second part of the performance/installation occurred two weeks later. Hohaia and Tom Mutch carried the jewellers' case to Cape Taranaki. Hohaia ceremoniously buried the objects, returning what had been taken back to the earth. **(illus 28)**

The political issue of the proposed disposal of hazardous wastes into the sea was reacted against by the artist, such as the implications of the National Government's 'think big' attitude, the exploitation of the environment that affects the greater ecological equilibrium and the lives of people who are cleaved to the land. There is also an underlying metaphor of 'cultural transfer' and reciprocation, worked through by dialogue, respect and negotiation toward a positive outcome - despite the odds.

Parallax: The Body as Vessel

Drummond's bodily schema presented through the residue of performances and through sculptural artefacts conveyed a gestalt of physical sensuality and fragility. From the *Crucifixion* performance in 1978, Drummond became interested in the absence of the body, a physicality hinted at only through trace after the action. Absence in this performance not only suggested mortality but also an embodiment of the soul or the inner life of the artist implied by the residue placed on the cross.

Installation as performance and a shift to a gallery context during the 1980s, resolved his formal inclination to represent the body in absentia while maintaining a sense of process. In *Cycles/Stages* (1982), *Sentinel, From the Valley of the Shadow* (1984) and *Five Sights, Vessels and Containers* (1988) sense experience, or sense impression, was created by an engrammatic⁶⁸ image of his own body. This was achieved by the creation of an empty shell or a cast skin, (recalling *Onto Skin* and *Crucifixion*), or by a shadow projection. These body images were either bandaged sculptures or woven from willow. They hinted at a past personal experience, they symbolised ecological issues and signalled a sense of renewal on the cusp of realisation. 'In much recent art of the body there is a sense of emptying a vessel, perhaps in anticipation of its being refilled with a new substance, perhaps just before discarding it.'⁶⁹ A pivot between these installations however is *City Vein* (1983) a major work that concluded the performances and sculptural work completed during Drummond's year as Frances Hodgkins Fellow.

Cycles/Stages (1982) at the National Art Gallery was a highly performative transitory installation designed specifically for the gallery space allocated to the artist. A reference to shifting space and time, the installation included several familiar components. Thirty bare willow branches, some bandaged and stripped of bark, formed an avenue along the walls of the space, which was bathed in greenish blue light, signifying the element and colour of copper. Six projected photographs of willow trees in summer and three triangles of beeswax set into corners created a visual and mysterious tableau. The triangles symbolised the completion of stages, and the mystical association with the number three (or the Trinity) suggested perfection and completion. Eerie wind instrument music was played, 'as if in homage to the

⁶⁸ Engram: A physical alteration thought to occur in lining of the neural tissue in response to stimuli and posited as an explanation for memory.

⁶⁹ Thomas McEvelley, 'The Millennial Body: The Art of the Figure at the End of Humanity', *Sculpture*, October 1997, Vol. 6, No. 8, p.27.

living illusion'.⁷⁰ Static slides and moving images of the artist dressed in white were projected at an angle onto the left hand wall to suggest time shifts or another dimension, whether dream-scape or memory. A white three-dimensional sculpture of the artist's body created the central component in the room. Cast in resin and bandages the figure appeared to be getting up, or lying down, suspended in a liminal point in time and positioned as if to watch the progress of the projected image. **(illus 29)** Although a personal statement about regeneration and growth, it also implied an ecological stance against irresponsible treatment of natural resources.

A work linking the progression of Drummond's performance to an articulation of performance in sculptural terms is *Journey of the Sensitive Cripple*, an installation constructed for the 1982 F.1. Sculpture Project (inaugurated by Ian Hunter). This temporary installation incorporated residual components of a 'past journey' (*Earth Vein*) and provided a realisation of how to present *Earth Vein* in sculptural format. Nine copper stoppages rested on slate within a triangular glass case, and a copper walking stick hovered above it 'like a bullet', a cartridge shell was suspended in the distance. **(illus 30)** A print of the first *City Vein* map, engraved into slate and hand painted was also exhibited.⁷¹ The installation at F.1. demanded audience participation. To view the work a narrow walkway in the gabled ceiling of the exhibition space had to be negotiated from which there was a two-storey drop, thus forcing viewers to 'perform'. **(illus 31)** The installation referred to the intense journey he made along the contour of the *Earth Vein*. A video documenting the artist walking barefoot along the *Vein* had been made, 'however it did not have the transcendent and meditative power that he wanted, being more a formal record

⁷⁰ Elva Bett, 'Bricks and plants come into own', *The Dominion*, 19.5.82.

⁷¹ *City Vein*, 1981 was initially the title of an installation at the Wellington City Art Gallery it was the 'male' part to *Earth Vein*, and a work in progress. This early version of *City Vein* contained elements of the *Earth Vein* ritual and installation into the land, reminding viewers of the half kilometre length of the vein. It incorporated a length of copper wire, slate, willow 'stoppages', and a new element of red neon. Drummond had taken Polaroid photographs along Courtney place documenting nine road symbols, which related to the nine stoppages in *Earth Vein*.

of the process of walking'.⁷² A realisation that the literal action seen from the 'outside' did not adequately convey the interiority of the experience convinced Drummond to explore further the static object as a means to convey ephemeral qualities.

City Vein (1983), a major installation at the Hocken Library, completed the cycle initiated by *Filter Action* and *Earth Vein*. *City Vein* (now in the collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery), also demands active participation and inaugurates the temporal and spatial awareness of the solitary journey along the vein. The entire work is also a reference to Duchamp's play on perspective and interest in the 'fourth-dimension' and fascination with mechanical reproduction, in such work as *The Chocolate Grinder* (1913) and *The Large Glass* (1915-1923). With a use of perspective that disturbs rather than codifies patterns of seeing, Duchamp echoed the ideas of philosopher and mathematician Jules-Henri Poincaré who 'argued that we are completely free to choose which geometry of physical space we prefer to determine measurement in the universe'⁷³. The fourth-dimension is essentially the mirror of the third-dimension. A three-dimensional object casts a shadow in only two dimensions, and from that observation Duchamp concluded that a three-dimensional object must in turn, be the shadow of another object in four dimensions. *The Large Glass, To Be Looked At (From the Other Side of the Glass) With One Eye, Close To, for Almost an Hour* (1918) and *The Illuminating Gas (Etant donné)* (1946-1966) are particular works of Duchamp's that captured Drummond's imagination and interest in the collision of industry, technology, science, art and the body. Time and space articulated through a sculptural rendering of perspective and scale, also draws upon Albrecht Durer's studies and engravings such as *Artist and Model from the Painter's Manual* (1538) and Seventeenth century treatises on perspective such as camera lucida and

⁷² Gregory Burke, 'Andrew Drummond: An Introduction', *AGMANZ Journal*, No. 18, 1987/88, p.18.

⁷³ *Marcel Duchamp*, Dawn Ades, Neil Cox, David Hopkins, Thames & Hudson, London, 1999, p. 113.

camera obscura, early photographic techniques using prisms and lenses to cast an image of an object onto glass or screen, on which it is traced. These scientific processes are seen in the 1983 *City Vein* installation, which skews and traces perspective with both familiar and strange objects, juxtaposed into a highly sophisticated and interactive tableau. A glass tube divided into nine equal sections echoing the nine stoppages was fixed in a glass-fronted case backed with slate, the ends of the glass tube remaining outside of the case. At one end three funnels imply 'entries', and a pipe at the other end suggests an exit, but the tube is tilted so that the entry is below the level of the exit. The case is viewed through brass binoculars fixed to an old school desk several feet away. The desk is the axis to the installation, and along with an accompanying attached chair, is on rollers, 'suggesting temporality and displacement, a thoroughfare mirroring references to roads within the glass case'.⁷⁴ **(illus 32)** The desk puts people in a situation where other viewers had also been, a familiar place that is somehow distorted and challenged by a new way of viewing the city and the natural environment as contingent, integrated, reflected and dependent upon each other. When looking through the binoculars, the specially constructed lenses are instead 'inverted' to make the image smaller and difficult to see, invoking a binocular parallax of vision.⁷⁵ When a copper walking stick that penetrates an ink well on the right of the desk is moved in a circular fashion, a trace is left on a piece of slate by a compass on the left of the desk. The binoculars are thus also moved along the path of the glass tube, tracking its stoppages (and, by cunning proxy) also along the half kilometre length of the *Earth Vein*. The map of the female component, *Earth Vein*, is mounted behind the viewer in an oak frame (a billiard table cut to size) and illuminated in blood red neon. *City Vein*, when viewed through the binoculars, reflects the glowing neon of *Earth Vein* and the familiar nine stoppages. The layering of concept and construct is completed in the *City Vein*

⁷⁴ Gregory Burke, *AGMANZ Journal*, p.18.

⁷⁵ A binocular parallax is the apparent difference in position of an object as seen separately by one eye, and then by the other, the head remaining unmoved.

installation, through an ingenious device for people to act upon the 'city issues' inherent in the dual dialogue of city/earth, male/female, yin/yang relationships.

For six weeks during 1984 Drummond was artist in residence at the Pier Arts Centre in Orkney, Scotland. He then travelled to Edinburgh and installed *Sentinel*⁷⁶ as part of the third ANZART festival. A second installation *From the Valley of the Shadow* was created while he was living in Portsmouth at the end of his time abroad. *Sentinel* was a statement about a crisis in the artist's personal life - a relationship under strain but it also conveyed a wider concern for the defoliation caused by Northern Europe's acid rain. Several ash saplings, bone-like in their whiteness were attached with slate shards, suggestive of pictograms, Pictish writing on ancient ruins (and recalling *King and Queen, in union*). The trees were collected from the embankment of the railway that joins Edinburgh and Glasgow and symbolised a mutual relationship of protection between artist and the trees. A silhouetted lead figure of the artist 'cornered' in the gallery space stood, arms raised in apprehension. An image of the artist was projected on the wall through a 'gunsight', which heightened the tension and risk of the standing figure. A copper seesaw with a projectile was placed in the centre of the room, which trapped the leaden image of the artist, caught in the crossfire. **(illus 33)** 'The targeted image suggests the apocalypse, a hair-trigger away from utter destruction'.⁷⁷ *Sentinel's* precarious world of dangerous connotations and visual puns exposed the artist as a watchman under fire by forces outside of his control. *From the Valley of the Shadow* **(illus 34)** similarly combined an ecological theme, the dark danger of nuclear submarines stationed at Portsmouth, with a personal experience, conveyed through the use of cast body parts - a 'wheel' of legs that rotated, 'moving like a shadow' across the room. Made from plaster and bandages the interconnected design of the wheel is similar to an ancient symbol of Buddhist renewal, a swastika image of regeneration.

⁷⁶ *Sentinel* was presented again at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 1985.

⁷⁷ Peter Entwisle, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, publicity leaflet.

Drummond's white-bandaged plaster casts of body parts generate an aura of suspended mortality. A state of absence and presence, yet an essence of intimacy is also conveyed. This condition of chance relates to an elusive liminal state of displacement that encompasses time and space as well as indefinable relations, such as exchange and response. Duchamp's definition of such an interface is 'infra-thin', a virtually imperceptible but absolute threshold between two things (incorporating touch and smell as well as sight), a passage from one in-between state or condition or dimension to another. Duchamp's body casts, *Female Fig Leaf* (1950) and *With my Tongue in Cheek* (1959) concern the sense of such an ambiguous bodily trace. Duchamp wrote that 'allegory (in general) is an application of the infra thin'.

Allegory is derived from the Greek term *allegoria*, which means leading or guiding by means of another thing. Here he [Duchamp] points to the separation, or gap between what is presented and what is signified, between the given concrete particular and a more general or abstract dimension.⁷⁸

The subtle layering of the infra-thin notion - in the application of signified and actual dimensions, and a metaphorical use of the body - are further realised by Drummond's series of works: *Five Sights*, *Braided Rivers*, *Images from the Woodcutter* and *Vessels and Containers*, all completed while artist in residence in Wanganui during 1987.⁷⁹

Drummond amalgamated the memory and residue of his collecting activities along the banks of the Maerewhenua River, Otago and the Wanganui River. *Five Sights* comprised the residual objects of these excursions placed into five separate cases (not unlike the jeweller's case of *Red Wedge*). The objects were constructed from soldered copper, and resembled tools and artefacts; they were then embedded in beeswax soaked linen and secured by strips of willow. *Braided Rivers* featured six massive drawings on graphite paper leaning out from constructed slate forms, 'existing somewhere between

⁷⁸ *Marcel Duchamp*, Dawn Ades et al, Thames & Hudson, London, 1999, p. 184.

⁷⁹ Exhibited at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 1987 and the Govett Brewster Art Gallery in 1988.

the river and the body'.⁸⁰ *Vessels and Containers* incorporated woven willow, copper, stone and farm implements, while *Images from the Woodcutter* was an installation of curved 'windows' in the gallery with tree branches drawn into graphite covered panels. These major works articulated a liminal and littoral interrelatedness between the world and the self. The psycho-geographical aspects of the work are apparent and elegantly conveyed by his phenomenological sensed and sentient language, through the rendering of anatomical associations between the body and the land. Intricate braided systems of rivers, veins, capillaries and roots in *Braided River* are overlaid with a shadow figure form of the artist, interspersed with slate shelters that represented:

A place of repose between the ebb and flow suggested by the river metaphor...The drawings appeared to present an existential dilemma: that of finding a place between the currents of continual change suggested by the river and the shelters we take along life's journey.⁸¹

Vessels and Containers, was composed of several objects alternately made from finely honed Oamaru stone, copper, farm implements and willow. (illus 35) The audience had to walk among and through the curious constructions that resembled vessels or agricultural equipment interspersed with large woven forms of emblematic mummified shapes. A willow bound body slithering off copper strips, impaled by a copper walking stick, was sub-titled *Beyond a Veil*. (illus 36) The energy conducting properties of copper are perhaps offered to the body in a ritual burial in order to help it on a future journey. The symbol of the walking stick or crutch allegorically refers to wisdom or great age, or of the crippled, or the emblem of those who care for them.⁸² The quasi allusion to death and 'resurrection' in *Beyond a Veil* was augmented by the willow-shell body image. Ancient Egyptians believed the image of the soul was identical to

⁸⁰ Andrew Drummond, 'Ending with a new beginning', *New Zealand Listener*, 6. 6. 87, p. 47.

⁸¹ Lita Barrie, 'Andrew Drummond: Toward an Allegorical Use of the Body', *Art New Zealand*, No. 44, 1987, p.66.

⁸² *Hall's Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, James Hall, John Murray Publishers, London 1974, p. 86. A crutch is also the attribute of Saturn and of Kronos, god of Time. In Greek mythology, Hephaistos, the lame blacksmith of the gods, uses a crutch.

that of the material body. At the time of departure from the physical world the corporeal residue was bound and wrapped, the visual significations of identity masked. Drummond's once inhabited willow-shell is emptied of the soul-double, leaving only a trace of its form. The body-image often incorporates objects intimately known into its schema of identity. The walking stick then remains behind too, hovering above the body it once belonged to:

External objects, implements, and instruments with which the subject continually interacts become, while they are being used, intimate, vital, even libidinally cathected parts of the body image.⁸³

Drummond's 'supports' for limbs (and psyche) in a large body of work exhibited at the Auckland Art Gallery, *Images from Another Archaeology* (1989), offered prosthetic cures for broken or fragmented bodies and minds, evoking a painful human state of life-intensity, and were objects of the bricoleur.⁸⁴ These implements, created tableaux of psychologically imbued artefacts arranged in chambers that suggested dream and precarious corporeality. They were made from willow, gold leaf and copper, etched graphite tablets and cast body parts in beeswax. *Transporter for an Outstretched Body*, *Repository for Dreams and Journeys* and *A place for Supporting Limbs* comprised the complete exhibition, taking the participant on an archaeological journey made through the body. *Transporter for an Outstretched Body*, as the title suggests, was the machine at the heart of the triptych. Situated in a long narrow space that connects the upper and lower galleries, this 'pump' (recalling the idea behind Beuys's *Honey Pump*) kept up the energy flow. Two huge copper wheels with a connecting limb of wood, allegorically and alchemically conducted the function necessary to keep up regeneration and momentum. *Rotating Device for a Chest* in the heart of the larger wheel, suggested 'a memorial on the wall. It is the heart itself, its

⁸³ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies, Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Indiana University Press, 1994, p.80.

⁸⁴ Bricolage is a technique of collecting and reassembling materials to uncover and explore ideas relating to the modified environment.

miniature valves spun out from the chest with a massive centrifugal force'.⁸⁵ *Repository for Dreams and Journeys* comprised three 'seats' (reminiscent of Duchamp's *Female Fig Leaf*) made from granite and indented imprints of buttocks in beeswax; they also evoked a subtle infra-thin sensation through the scent of the beeswax permeating the gallery space. Slate tablets inscribed with 'hieroglyphs' extending from the walls of the room, encompassed the dreamer, a reminder of journeys once made, or yet to be made. **(illus 37)** A threshold dream state of consciousness and imagination, a waking meditation was captured in this chamber of stasis and energy. *A Place for Supporting Limbs and Vessels* occupied the lower part of the gallery indicating its function as the foundation of the tableaux. It was both the beginning and the end of the archaeological search for self. Bone-like willow and copper cradles populated the space - a lectern and broken cast of the wheel/heart faced this delicate audience. A wall cabinet containing copper vessels awaited application and function. The archaeological body in this installation, like that of *Filter Action*, the *Vein* series and sculptural casts, described a self-attentive knowledge of loss and the courage needed to keep the resolve learnt along a route of grief and injury. These chambers were an aesthetic moment when viewer and view coalesced. They offered a balm and support to the lessons and paths, past and future, that one must inevitably respond to.

Following this major installation, public sculptural commissions such as *Stationary Limbs* (1990), (Fletcher Challenge Collection) *Listening and Viewing Device* (1994) (Wellington City Council), *For Beating and Breathing* (1995) (Robert McDougall Art Gallery), and *Assignation Device* (2000) (Collection Kiwi Properties New Zealand), developed further the metaphorical link between the body and machine. These sculptures, while evoking corporeal connotations are also related to themes of industrial production. *Stationary Limbs*, incorporates patterns from an Auckland Foundry onto copper and bronze gilding. The

⁸⁵ Peter Leech, 'Embodying Art', catalogue for *Images from Another Archaeology*, Auckland City Art Gallery Artist's Project, 1989, unpaginated.

considerable crutch and limb-like structure provides a duality of meaning, between bodily and mechanical function, a surrogate provision awaiting an absent body. The accent on the malfunctioning body witnessed through the collection and application of discarded or broken forms such as driftwood, have a curious similarity with manufactured machines. We are unsure though, if these objects are able to work or bear the weight of the collective metaphorical body. *Listening and Viewing Device* permanently installed on Druids Hill in the Wellington Botanical Gardens, is an enormous copper coil (reminiscent of a Tesla Coil)⁸⁶ supported by a large gimbal. **(illus 38)** This instrument is 'a dream device', that sways and swoons in the wind, attuned to the kinetic pulse of the landscape, and is described by the artist as being:

...Like a flower, a whirlwind, or a vortex, or a wellspring. The specific meaning is not necessarily clear, because there's not one specific meaning...To enable people to access those meanings, you have to dwell in the idea of the half-closed eyes – in other words, the state between conscious and preconscious thought. And, when people are doing that, they are allowing their dream world to be activated.⁸⁷

This totemic object, as indicated by Drummond's description, becomes an infra-thin mediator of interactive relationships and a celebration of the human qualities of wonder.

Drummond's interest in early scientific discoveries and feats of engineering made by Serbian-American inventor Nikola Tesla in the Nineteenth century, such as magnetic fields, alternating current dynamos, transformers, energy receivers and polyphase motors, inform much of the kinetic fascination of his recent work. In pursuit of perfection, precision sculpture combined with corporeal and emotional attributes, offer a matrix of creative possibilities. The visceral and confrontational sculpture/installation *For Beating and Breathing* comprising; *Device for breathing and reaching*, *90 Device, beating* and *Imperfect Atmospheres* draws on medical intervention of the human heart,

⁸⁶ A copper device invented in 1891 by Nikola Tesla, a Serbian-American inventor and researcher, that produces a powerful electric field.

⁸⁷ Andrew Drummond quoted from 'We all Dream all the Time', Justin Paton, *Listener* December 3 1994, p.53.

angioplasty and the 'now-instant' of life (breath) to integrate multiple references to the land, body and machine. *Device for breathing and reaching* evokes the idea that technology has reached a point where it can keep the body working even in a temporary situation to extend life. **(illus 39)** In angioplastic surgery an artery is inflated to increase flow of blood. The artist has constructed a device using a glass vein-like cylinder hanging in space with bleached willow wood attached to a shuttle. The ritualised action of the device slowly draws the groaning shuttle and willow inside the cylinder where, as it reaches the opposite end, air pressure is expelled. This new gasp propels the shuttle back along the vein until the willow nervously quivers outside the space at the exit. The device operates phenomenologically between one area and another, between a practical and metaphorical function. The polymorphic pulsation, in beat with the rhythms of the human life support system activates an intimacy with the mechanical process of the machine. *90 Device, beating* suggests a maquette of the Canterbury landscape. A glass plane with a broken edge, like a coastline pumps blue fluid along an arterial route with two pulsating 'kidneys' into a reservoir. The fluid is circulated and recycled along the braided arteries/river by a 'heart' located in the reservoir. Again the flow and pulse of the fluid is closely related to the beat of a heart, and although this work suggests elements of *Filter Action*, the focus lies on the impact of technology in our lives and the similarities of the eco-system with that of the body. *Imperfect Atmospheres* makes reference to self-contained atmospheric environments. By trapping chemicals onto paper or schlagmetal, the immediacy of 'a moment, a breath, an instant'⁸⁸ is recorded. The atmospheric 'drawings' have a glass tube inserted into the side of the frame, which focuses attention on the moment in isolation. A red substance, which seems to have spread or bled over the paper from a darker epicentre, is a substance of great beauty, but also alludes to baser physical elements - oxides, dried blood, kidneys, life and death. The laboratory atmosphere of the installation recalls some experiment into the

⁸⁸ Andrew Drummond, interview transcript, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, October 1995.

behaviour of natural phenomena. The absence and presence of the body, the melancholy of the moment conveyed by qualities of breath, shudder and fluid, red, blue, glass and brass overlaid onto the natural function of the land, expresses the artists desire to discover through the instant, ideas of beauty and perfection.

Machines that work 'but have no real function' such as *For Digestion* (1996) continued Drummond's theme of machinery transported from another ecology and reasserts the artist's beginnings as a kinetic artist during the early 1970s. Materials and metaphor oscillate between aesthetics, science and engineering; the poetical nature of the devices also recalls Duchamp's *Large Glass*. The idea of sculpture as a social product began to take on a salient visual and conceptual philosophy during the mid 1990s in work that applies research into the West Coast coal mining industry. Drummond's emotional and analytical response to the history of coal mining in this region, a landscape of enormous, dangerous beauty, is seen in a number of sculptures that draw upon the minerals, flora, coal mining engineering, and oral histories of those people who survived by excavating the land. The duality of the natural environment and the harsh reality of brutal but necessary exploitation to provide one of the basic necessities for life – fuel - creates sculptural tension as well as interconnected references to past work. *Vented Devices* (1992), (illus 40) *Livery for Extractions* (1997), *Samples, Rotating Core* and *Coal Wheel* (1998) are some in a series of West Coast inspired work that isolate and juxtapose elements and movement into sophisticated sculpture. *Counter Rotating Device* 2000 and *Assigantion Device* 2000 are two precision sculptures informed by extraction technologies and are closely aligned with a performance consciousness of ritual, transcendence, space and time. *Counter Rotating Device* articulates space by a rotating glass tube filled with coal dust. As it moves from its axis in an unpredictable arc, the brittle coal inside the chute rushes from end to end while slender copper filaments leave a chevron trace imprinted on more coal dust at the base of the sculpture, marking time.

Assignment Device permanently installed at the Sun Alliance Building, Auckland, is an enormous rotating brass wheel with specially cast and polished resin crystals placed around the rim. (illus 41) The recurring leit-motif of the wheel in his work from early performances and sculpture such as *Spira Miribius*, *Circle 7 x 7 x 7*, *From the Valley of the Shadow*, and *Rotating Device for Chest* is visually connected to Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel*, (1913) and with the giant coal wheels found in early mining history. This juggernaut is a wheel of latent fire, a heart of energy to keep the agrarian cycle of life, death and rebirth quiescent but mutable.

Drummond's performance trajectory interconnects elements of time, space, matter, and metaphor. The importance of kinetics in his work is never underestimated, the ritual association of movement as a process of growth and celebration of individuality, combines with a profound understanding of the earth's gift to humanity. The artist has taken the time to consider, unfold and respect the liminal histories and dreams found in past settlements as they affect the present condition of a place. By delving into the earth and materials to uncover a 'rhythmic ground pulse in deep time'⁸⁹, Drummond's sculptural inner echo of the land rebounds with a light precision, a weightless trace that measures and repairs as it quickens and changes in the passing moment.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Chapter Four:

Di ffrench *Image Seeking*

Di ffrench, through a complex weave of idea, performance, sculpture and photography invested her art with 'a search for a system of meanings'. These 'meanings', remain unfixed in her photographic work of the 1990s, yet through a performative search for identity beginning with sculpture, installation and performance in late 1970s and 1980s, liminal strategies convey an exploration of gender, politics, feminism and formal concerns for perspective and pictorial construction. A littoral and liminal reading of her work united her with Mealing and Drummond in her use of gesture, sculpture and concept to make a socio-political stand.

The second wave of the feminist movement gained momentum and spread a wider sense of activism and consciousness during the 1970s. An explosion of feminist theoretical writing on the politics of the personal, phallogentricity and relationships between desire, language and identity such as Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970) and Sheila Rowbotham *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (1973) drew on earlier writers, such as Simone de Beauvoir and Virginia Woolf, to argue that women have internalised the ideology of femininity and that a revolution was required within language and culture as well as material structures. The question posited by Linda Nochlin in 1971, 'Why have there been no great women artists?'¹ signalled the beginning of inquiry into the (mis)representation of women artists, and questioned the white male western viewpoint as being *the* viewpoint of the art historian. Performance art by women critiquing patriarchal history of art, engaged directly with collective political activism and individual liberation through self-knowledge. By attempting to redress the imbalance of representation of women artists, the portrayal of women by men was also attacked. Yves Klein's

¹ 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' *Art News* Jan 1971, pp. 22-39.

Anthropometries of the Blue Period (1960) and Piero Manzoni's *Living Sculpture* (1961) are classic examples of the male creator/genius taking ownership of the female body as a sexual commodity and aesthetic tool. Film theorist Laura Mulvey's 1975 essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'² effectively exposed the politics of the male gaze upon the object of the passive female, attributing traditional combined notions of spectacle and narrative to the ideological constraints of a patriarchal culture. Scopophilia, a Freudian notion of 'control through gaze' is revealed by Mulvey as the means by which the viewer's (male) sexual ego is aroused through the voyeuristic action of looking. Deterministic and indeed pessimistic, Mulvey's theory ostensibly asserted that dominant male viewing pleasures infiltrate into all levels of society. However, since the publication of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', feminists have acknowledged the more complex gender issues at stake other than that of passivity and active male viewing, to instead investigate strategies (primarily linguistic) of *how* gender identities are constructed. Therefore performance/body art can be recognised as displaying what could be termed *politics of the 'spectacular' body*. The word 'spectacular' is used as it conveys a reading of performance as 'spectacle' - implicated voyeuristically (that is in turn extremely political), and denotes a degree of conflict and paradox in the making and reception of works of art that engages the alienated (gendered) body and audience as an effective interventionist gesture.

Body artists of the 1970s can be seen to bypass capitalist spectacle; that of 'abject non-creativity' and scopophilic receptivity by addressing issues of passivity and isolation in order to challenge systems of power in society and culture, achieved through an interventionist approach to the spectacular.

Body art asks us to interrogate not only the politics of visibility but also the very structures through which the subject takes place through the inevitably eroticised exchange of interpretation.³

² Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' first published in *Screen*, 16 (3), 1975, pp. 6-18. The article has been reprinted repeatedly and much debated.

³ Amelia Jones, *Body Art Performing the Subject*, p.123.

The primary differences of artistic production, reception and clarification between male and female performance artists can be identified as assuming a male gendered interpretation, i.e. male body art has been read as depersonalised, universal and transparent whilst women's body art was perceived as masochistic, obscene, exhibitionist, narcissistic and anti-feminist. Through an acknowledgement and understanding of the intertwined tropes of gender and sexuality within cultural codes, performance art executed by women confronted issues of the gaze by engaging with 'the rhetoric of the pose', unlike their male counterparts who located themselves 'as transcendent, somehow mythically cohering independently of the other'.⁴ Carolee Schneeman's performance *Eye/Body*, (1963) effectively translated the dichotomy that is Body Art. Perception and reception of the eroticised or ritualised body garnered what is termed an 'inter-subjective' exchange between artist and audience. Primarily interpreted as a feminist strategy for dislocating the gaze in masculine terms, this exchange breaks down previous modernist interpretations of artistic production, to instead open up a wider discourse associated with 'the circuits of desire informing artistic production and reception'.⁵ Schneemann's inscribed self within an elaborate environment of constructions, mirrors, painted panels, and umbrellas, became a visual and haptic cipher, 'an integral material',⁶ that juxtaposed the 'shared' moment of subjective and objective, interested and disinterested gaze. As a gradual erosion of the idea of the body as a stable, finite, autonomous object, Body Art is employed by the artist in a myriad of permutations as a means of expressionistic socio-political and psychological/physiological discourse. For Duffrench though, the spectacular body of performance in temporal time was unsatisfactory. The artist was more interested in activating materials within the locus of the body-image. Photography and film from 1984 onwards therefore became a means whereby gender politics, the gaze and artistic production were intensely portrayed.

⁴ Ibid, p.122.

⁵ Ibid, p.5.

⁶ Carolee Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works and Selected Writings*, ed. Bruce McPherson, New York, 1979, p.52.

Born in Melbourne, French immigrated to New Zealand from Australia at the age of 16 in 1963 and settled with her parents in Auckland. As a teenager French studied both art history and practical art at secondary school and was particularly interested in medieval book illumination and renaissance art. Her art historical quest began while in Auckland studying at the Auckland Institute of Technology, later citing Scottish expressionist painters neo-expressionists, and the colour field painters, Helen Frankenthaler and Morris Louis as precedents for initiating a lifelong interest in art history.⁷ French met the sculptor Peter Nicholls in Auckland January 1965 and five months later they married. Nicholls and French worked together on sculptural projects, such as the outdoor environmental project in Albert Park, Auckland, 1977, other private performances, and more recently the Chesterfield couch at Oamaru, 1992.⁸ The collaborative nature of their professional relationship, each contributing to the other's practice both directly and indirectly, was to remain a steadfast process.⁹

French's sculpture from 1976 and performances from 1981 convey a critique of, and aspiration to overcome, the obstacle of women's perceived biological oppression. Vulnerability, social subordination and, importantly, the invisibility of women, whether mothers and/or artists, was an ongoing reality and for many New Zealand artists the 1980s heralded a time whereby the imbalance in patriarchal art world politics was addressed.¹⁰ French, (like Mealing), protested

⁷ Di French in a taped interview with Lita Barrie, 1984, Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa, Hector Library.

⁸ French also contributed to Art in the Mail projects both in New Zealand and in America, exhibiting works with the titles of *Smelling You on a Bulge of Freshly Mown Grass*, at the Broadway Galleries, Milwaukee, USA, 1976, and *Fit for Towels – One Extra Breast*, University of Georgia, Athens USA, 1977. The New Zealand Mail Art Movement, initiated by Nick Spill in 1976, was *Art in the Mail: Where Worlds Collide*.

⁹ This collaboration has since raised questions as to the extent of Nicholl's technical contribution to her photographic series and drawings: see Rob Garrett 'Horizontal Verticle', *Light and Illusion*, Di French, catalogue, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, 2000.

¹⁰ The pervasive nature of this oppression can be identified in a review of French's work by Peter Leech 'Art and Association' in the *Otago Daily Times* November 1982. French exhibited at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 1982 a selection of her sculptures from the 1970s and photographs from the *Fontanel* and *Same Leaves* performances. Reviewing the exhibition Peter Leech described French as an artist with 'an undisciplined imagination', with no sense of a 'unitary aesthetic concern or even any signatorial artistic stamp', describing her sculptural work as derivative of male contemporaries. Her response to this unfortunate reading of the exhibition is

tyranny and apartheid, and along with her concerns for the environment (like Drummond), and feminist emphasis, were manifested through performances in the 1980s. Ffrench defied an idea of art being about a good time, that instead art could be a disturbing experience: a protest against violence, brutality and the inhumane. As Anne Kirker observes:

Inevitably provocative and striking in her technique, the socio-political content of Di fFrench's performance work reflected the changing role of the female artist. Integrating herself in the same space as her public, she respected the power of art to explore and reveal fundamental truths. Even more so, she saw it as her right to comment on matters that either attack a patriarchal system or involve areas of interest that were previously considered to be outside a woman's domain¹¹.

Ffrench recognised early in her career a physical and spiritual connection with the environment as a creative impetus. Utilising the found object, she transformed her responses into constructions that were conceived of in a highly physical manner and encouraged participation from the viewer. Early sculptural constructions such as *Filter Screen* (1977), *Aeonian Dance* (1977), and *Weeping Eclipse at Carey's Bay* (1980) drew directly from her observations of nature, while *Hanging Diary* and *Mother, Daughter, Woman* (1980) participated in a burgeoning feminist dialogue occurring in New Zealand during the 1980s.

Filter Screen, one of three sculptures installed in Albert Park in 1977 expressed her socio-political attitude towards pollution in the native bush reserves

worth examining, fFrench dates and describes her working progress from *Aeonian Dance*, to *South Pacific Souvenir*, outlining the variety of materials used prior to and without reference to any of the men that she is supposed to be 'replicating'. 'When one makes sculpture, it is basic to understand the nature of materials, symbolism and spatial concepts. This derives from and is strong in traditional constructivist principles. It is nonsense to suggest I step back for anyone who is inclined to use the same material. I can hardly be expected to withdraw the *Blue Pacific Souvenir* because Peter Leech wants us all to believe it has 'replicative associations already exhibited by my contemporaries'?' (Di fFrench, 'Sculptress replies to critic', *Otago Daily Times*, 8. 11. 82. Note also the vocation ascribed to fFrench, that of a 'Sculptress'.)

¹¹ Anne Kirker, *New Zealand Women Artists: A Survey of 150 Years*, Craftsman House, Australia, 1993, p 173.

in the Auckland area.¹² Made from bamboo, hooks, cheesecloth and rope lashings *Filter Screen* was a mini environment where people could enter and sit within the sculpture. The artist had collected bamboo from a building site where a bamboo grove had been bulldozed, and on each growth ring of cane a hook was inserted which caught and held the cheesecloth taut like a skin filter – these created curves directed by the natural ring spacings. The stretched, taut material framed by natural timber, or hanging freely, became a leitmotif that appears consistently in her sculptural work from *Aeonian Dance* through to her short feature film *Shelters* (1996).

The human figure as a primary source of inspiration and expression in her work can be seen in *Aeonian Dance* (1977). Performed on Pakiri Beach, Auckland, it was a performance/sculpture imbued with a profound respect for nature that integrated concepts of time passing with found objects on the beach. The structure was built, on a mound a few yards from the sea, out of twisted manuka stakes, cheesecloth membrane, fishing line and feathers from a dead albatross her children found in the morning tide.¹³ The sea, 'sails' and feathers evoked a sense of flight and freedom in riding the waves and wind, while the sky and sea were 'framed' in the transparent cheesecloth. (illus 42) In a photograph of *Aeonian Dance* taken by Nicholls, ffrench, naked and with her arms outstretched, appears to embrace and rejoice in the freedom of the fleeting moment, acknowledging a cyclic instant of renewal. Before leaving with her family to work in the United States¹⁴, she realised that photography could be an important component in her

¹² *Filter Screen* was accompanied by the confrontational *Garbage Rocks*, encrustations of garbage found in bush near a reserve and set in concrete. The third in the series was entitled *Tank*, a timber and transparent polythene water sculpture.

¹³ The materials used for *Aeonian* are outlined in an artist's statement written in 1978, however in Anne Kirker's *New Zealand Women Artists* the materials are listed as willow timber supports and the feathers from a petrel.

¹⁴ At the University of Wisconsin 1978, where she had a studio, ffrench's work became more solidly sculptural in construction, she chiselled the surfaces of local timbers and drew inspiration from the unique surrounding environment. *Wisconsin Lakes* (1978) was a large sculpture of driftwood timbers from the shore of Lake Superior that became a trestle and a sheet of clear plastic filled with water formed the contours pressing about the timber framework. The work reflected the 'undulating ripples of prairie grasses and lake surfaces'. The very distinct landscape of the area contrasted with ffrench's knowledge of the New Zealand bush and captivated her imagination - something which is also translated in *Tumbleweed*, a series of cheesecloth, wire and fluorescent orange spray painted

practice enabling a flexibility of idea and process. '...I photographed Aeonian just before I left for the USA and the gales and salty winds had eroded the sails/wings, it died beautifully...' ¹⁵ The early works from Albert Park and Pakiri Beach posited the body within the littoral zone and dealt with her direct sensual response to the natural environment through the bodily experience.

After the return of the Nicholls/ffrench family in 1979 to New Zealand, (basing themselves in Dunedin), ffrench was invited to participate in the 1980 Hansells Sculpture Exhibition, held at Masterton. The Hansells Exhibition was initiated in 1971 by Rodney Wilson, then director of the Wairarapa Arts Centre and philanthropically supported by John Maunsell, managing director of Hansells New Zealand Limited. The 1980 exhibition invited 21 artists to create works centring on the theme 'Earth, Water, Air, Fire', which was intended to encompass the wide diversity of sculptural activity in New Zealand beyond the conventional static sculptural object. ¹⁶

Weeping Eclipse at Carey's Bay retained the formal sculptural interest the artist had displayed and experimented with while in Wisconsin. The large-scale installation consisted of three appliquéd and painted jute scrolls coloured red, yellow and green. Ffrench's 'lunar construction' had been influenced by living in the littoral zone of Carey's Bay, Dunedin, and watching the daily changes in the harbour and the effects of the sun and moon on the colour of the water. By acknowledging the feminist impulses in her personal philosophy her sculpture

sculptures that effectively evoked the movement and shape of the tumbleweeds that dance across the surface of the arid American landscape.

¹⁵ Di ffrench quoted from Anne Kirker's *New Zealand Women Artists*, p. 174.

¹⁶ See 'Twenty-One Sculptors in Masterton', Neil Rowe, *Art New Zealand* 1980, No 16, pp. 48-53. The Hansells Sculpture Exhibition contributed to the development of sculptural practice in New Zealand during the 1970s, providing the only forum for sculptors to exhibit within New Zealand. After the demise of the Australian Mildura Triennials in 1978 it was planned that the Hansells Biennial event would become a new trans-Tasman event. The artists involved in the exhibition produced work as an on-going process and members of the public were invited to ask questions as each work progressed. Some of the artists included: Jacqueline Fraser, Neil Dawson, Stuart Griffiths, Peter Nicholls, Morgan Jones, Christopher Booth, and Peter Gibson. See also *New Zealand Sculpture 80, Hansells Sculpture Exhibition Past, Present, Future*, Exhibition Catalogue. The new Arts Centre Director, Neil Rowe, decided to democratically divide the prize amongst all of the participants, rejected the previous award system of appointing a single prizewinner in 1980.

began to move between states of both separation from and connection with domestic and public spheres.

This romantic/analytical polarity of means is nurtured by my isolation where images are seen in razor sharp focus – ranging from turgid gothic feminist works – sometimes using doors as a metaphor to express the claustrophobia of the modern woman's 'housewifery syndrome', to *Garbage Rocks*, 1977 where I was involved in social concerns to do with environmental pollution as well as a debate on the condominium concept of urban living.¹⁷

The symbology of a doorway suggests a liminal state of displacement. Outside mainstream discourse the artist recognised the power of gender politics as a platform to politically explore body and self. The liminality of being a woman artist, an 'other' in the world, meant that differences of 'outsiders' or groups of people such as political protesters, homosexuals, cultural 'minorities' and people living in the margins of society, contained the rich stories and histories that could be translated aesthetically into performances and photography.

The Women's Gallery established in Wellington in 1979, aimed to encourage untapped or repressed creativity by redressing the imbalance of women artists' (in)visibility and the division inherent in the visual arts between the representation of art created by men and that of women. The lack of work by women artists shown in public art galleries and the sparsity of written work about or by women was being addressed in the 1980s through such enterprises as the Women's Art Gallery, and the Ponsonby Outreach in Auckland.

In a taped interview with Lita Barrie, 1984¹⁸ the artist reiterated feminist concerns, citing the Women's Art Movement in Sydney during the 1970s, Lucy Lippard's book *From the Center*, Juliet Batten's *Menstrual Maze*, Alexis Hunter's early photographic series in the 1970s, the art history courses of Cheryl Southeran during 1977 at Auckland University, and the New Zealand Feminist Art Network

¹⁷ Di ffrench, hand written artist statement, 1980, sourced from the 'Open Drawers' file, Elam School of Fine Arts Library, Auckland University.

¹⁸ Di ffrench, interviewed by Lita Barrie, 1984, Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa, Hector Library archives.

during the early 1980s as an inspiration to her development as an artist.¹⁹ Alternative materials and techniques such as performance, the emphasis on idea and content over finished product, the 'personal is political' dialectic and the development of art networks for women outside of the gallery system in New Zealand all contributed to the growing sense of possibilities available to her. The immediate and personal medium of video and the increasing use of photography by women artists was an attractive option. Collaborative projects and a sense of control over the portrayal of women could be achieved and this was something Ffrench wanted to explore for herself further.

Exhibitions at the Women's Art Gallery had focussed on issues of *Mothers, Women and Violence, Self-images, A Season's Diaries* and *Sexuality*. The artist's *Hanging Diary*²⁰ was a large installation included in *A Season's Diaries*, 1980.²¹ The twenty-one contributors were asked to describe one month in their lives. Approaches ranged from the sculptural and painting, to the written word. The installation was ostensibly a 'hanging calendar: a row of gauze days, two each across, were hung on bamboo rods attached by fish hooks to leather straps suspended from the ceiling.'²² Ffrench impressed a red greasepaint image of her body on each piece of gauze daily for the month of June 1980, attaching on the corner a torn piece of newspaper to indicate the passing of each day.²³ (illus 43) The work became a multi-layered metaphor for a number of interests in her ongoing practice. Ideas of transparency relayed through cloth, ideas of violence, repression and victimization, were symbolized by the body impressions. Describing the work she commented:

¹⁹ Ffrench's initial introduction to feminism developed through political areas rather than art areas. *The Female Eunuch* and *The Dialectics of Sex*, are two books that she cites in the taped interview with Barrie as influential to her feminist awakening.

²⁰ Later installed at the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts Gallery, 1981.

²¹ The first exhibition of the same theme occurred at the Victoria University Library in 1977 and shown subsequently in Christchurch and at the Women's Studies Conference in 1978.

²² Bridie Lonie, 'Diaries' *Art New Zealand*, No 18, Summer 1981, p.14.

²³ *Diary* also shares some affinities with the American artist Eva Hesse's suspended panels *Contingent*, 1969, made from cheesecloth, latex and fibreglass. The sensuous relationship of the materials resembling flesh and tactile qualities are similar to Ffrench's aesthetic at the time.

The paradox: the strange beauty created by moving around and through the work – touch, smell of leather, fabric and body makeup; the draught created by one's own body which separated the gauzes, undulating with intrusion.²⁴

French was particularly concerned about the introduction of corporal punishment for girls in school and reading of this debate in the newspapers began working on *Hanging Diary* with this in mind, 'there are so many forms rape can take...I call *Hanging Diary, Intrusions*.'²⁵ *Hanging Diary's* body imprint of the artist, its connotation of flesh and the vulnerability of the body, the kinaesthetic implications and phenomenological intertwining of the world with self, make this an early performative layering of idea and content.

On her return to New Zealand, French gained an extended understanding of the manipulation of materials, such as fibreglass, through interviewing and observing technicians in a fibreglass factory.²⁶ The technique of casting resin and fibreglass construction was to play an important role in her later performance/installation work in which she constructed props and sculptures that were integral to the overall understanding and meaning. Fibreglass was used to suggest a notion of transparency and in her contribution to the *Mothers* exhibition at the Women's Gallery in 1981,²⁷ *Mother, Daughter, Woman*, three fibre glass bowls filled with water symbolised the membrane and fecund cycle of womanhood. 'Fibreglass is a resilient material, which in this work has the translucence of a

²⁴ Di French, quoted from *A Women's Picture Book, 25 Artists of Aotearoa (New Zealand)*, Marian Evans, Bridie Lonie and Tilly Lloyd, Government Printing Office, Wellington, 1988 p. 14.

²⁵ Di French, quoted in *Broadsheet*, June 1983, p. 23.

²⁶ Largely self-taught, apart from secondary school classes and one year at the Auckland Institute of Technology, French chose not to study at a university art school but to study liberal arts learning skills directly off tradespeople who did not attempt to influence her ideas or challenge her independent commitment to being an artist. Although working collaboratively was a strength, as manifested through such projects as *The Suffrage Tapestry*, and her short feature film, *Shelters* 1996, French at all times was fearlessly independent and singular in her approach to art and life.

²⁷ For the touring exhibition *Mothers*, 1980/81, a group of women were invited to create works centring on the common experience of being a mother or daughter. *Mothers* was a successful touring exhibition that brought to the wider public's attention work created by women who are now New Zealand's leading mid-career and senior artists. Jacqueline Fahey's *My Skirt's in Your Fucking Room*, Robyn Kahukiwa's *Hinetitama*, drawings by Joanna Paul and a Jane Zusters sculpture, were among the works exhibited. Women artists in New Zealand and abroad (through the initiatives of Women's Galleries and collectives) began to create work that centred on the female bodily functions and cycles as a means to re-evaluate women's much maligned biology.

membrane filled with water. The meniscus is the membrane, the sealing in.²⁸ This work is replete with the imagery of childbirth and the relationship between mother and daughter and is unique in its poetic allusions to femininity and strength.²⁹ *Mother, Daughter, Woman* encompassed three stages in the life of a woman through the trinity of bowls shaped to suggest the contours of a woman's stomach.

Water is level with the edges, a meniscus, and is symbolic with life. Mirror image photographs seen through the water are two sides of the personality, relating to mother and daughter. Water has a density and the women are watching eternally through this. They become ghosts who are and are what has gone before and what will inevitably come after.³⁰

French began to employ her own personal *memento mori*, revealing her awareness of the fugitive moment. This particular iconography revolved around the forces of life and death, the ultimate inevitability and temporal existence of humanity. Although poetically inspired, she also approached her art and life with a sense of pragmatism. Being a mother early in life to a large family meant her time management skills had to be finely honed. Balancing her own career with motherhood was emotionally draining, and exercise and discipline increased her stamina to maintain both. In a letter written almost a decade later in 1989, French reconciles her artistic calling and motherhood by putting herself and her career first:

I moved to a larger studio in the Octagon above the Regent Theatre and I have sorted out (myself) and the family so that I am not always available to sort out trivial things. Also I have finally made the ultimate decision – that I do make art works and probably won't do much else for the rest of my life.

²⁸ Di French quoted from *A Woman's Picture Book* p.112.

²⁹ Women artists in New Zealand and abroad through the initiatives of Women's Galleries and collectives began to create work that centred on the cycles and bodily functions of women as a means to re-evaluate women's much maligned biology. *The Menstrual Maze* (1983), co-ordinated by Juliet Batten was an ephemeral environment constructed at the Auckland Ponsonby Women's Outreach. A political statement, *The Menstrual Maze* intended to promote a change of attitude to the taboo subject of menstruation. Motherhood too as a subject has suffered (and still does suffer) censorship. 'The fear of woman's tethered power has at times driven men into desperate attempts to control their sexual desires, while the life giving power of her biology has inspired further Taboos'. (Catherine Elwes, 'Floating Femininity', *Woman's Images of Men*, Ed by Sarah Kent and Jacqueline Morreau, Pandora Press, London, 1985 p.181) However, French has stated in handwritten notes that she was uninterested in using biological bodily functions such as menstruation as an inspiration for her work.

³⁰ Di French quoted from *A Woman's Picture Book*, p. 112.

May as well get on with it. I have always had the odd niggle that one should be sensibly employed and doing responsible things. But I don't do sensible things and I may as well enjoy it all.³¹

One senses that the artist, despite being devoted to her children and husband, struggled with herself and her family over a period of years to create a space and a place in which she could guiltlessly abandon all vestiges of 'responsibility' in order to fully explore her creative potential.

The outrage felt by Dunedin based artists at what they regarded as capitalist exploitation and the threat of annihilation of coastal wild life at Aramoana, was conveyed in an exhibition at the Wellington Art Gallery in 1980/81. French contributed three large environmental installations, *South Pacific Souvenir*, *Promenade* and *Active Perimeter*: a political triptych of considerable impact, as protest against a plan for a smelter to be built on Aramoana. The series drew on a range of materials and metaphors that created individually powerful statements as well as reverberating collectively in a sculptural dialogue. They were a continuation of her earlier installations in the recurring use of bamboo and hooks, but significantly more confrontational in nature. The third work in the Aramoana series, *Active Perimeter* garnered the most attention. A pyramid of 80 garbage-filled kleensaks, symbolised 'the modern pyramid of pollution'.³² Left to slowly rot, (providing a less than subtle infra-thin component of smell) the pyramid, lashed precisely to poles within a bamboo structure and surrounded by nine aluminium rubbish tins (each emphasized by an angry blue stripe of fluorescent paint), effectively translated the undesirable and damaging effects of nuclear waste disposal in the South Pacific. (illus 44) As Jonathan Smart wrote:

As a work of political art this was a visually arresting metaphor which through the stench of the rubbish tied the observer back into the immediate and literal, thereby making its political impact.³³

³¹ Personal letter to Jonathan Smart dated, 20.2.89.

³² Di French, unpublished artist notes, 1981, Robert McDougall Art Gallery loan collection.

³³ Jonathan Smart & Hugh Lauder, 'Ideology and Political Art in New Zealand: A Radical View' *Landfall* March 1985, no 53, p. 89.

Cilla McQueen's poem *Smelt* also provides a tandem metaphor for both Drummond's performance *Toxick* and ffrench's *Active Perimeter*.³⁴

As an artist concerned with ecological issues, ffrench's main concern was to divert attention away from her individual ego in order to express a more encompassing and effective political framework. Her early sculptural practice enabled an investigation into time and medium and developed an ability to move lucidly between sculpture, painting, theory and performance, genres that coalesced in her ensuing photographic and performance oeuvre.

Performing Difference

Moving into a performance phase from 1981, ffrench's socio-political aesthetic evolved into choreographed and often chilling performances that demarcated her political and feminist beliefs as well as a being an apposite medium to investigate new creative impulses and techniques. Identity, socially constructed and gender-implicit is one primary ongoing concern in her work from the early 1980s onward, although ffrench herself chose not to highlight her knowledge of feminist theory as part of her creative and working process, it is nevertheless an important component to acknowledge. This alone creates an interesting dichotomy. Ffrench was undoubtedly an artist with feminist principles, admiring radical feminists for their honesty and courage in attempting to eradicate social constructions of gender at legal, political, social and cultural levels. Her historical acknowledgement of the repression of women, and her sculptures and performances indicate strong personal feminist convictions. She states categorically that: 'aspects of my work evoke femininity (strength) without being feminist, such as *Mother, Daughter, Woman*. Whereas *Diary* was a feminist work, with political intent'.³⁵ But it is her wariness of being labelled or pigeonholed and her desire to remain working subjectively, especially during the 1980s feminist

³⁴ See Appendix: Two.

³⁵ Di ffrench, handwritten artist statement, undated.

backlash against radicalism, that kept a public reading of feminism in her work at bay.

In *Fractures* (1981), the artist explored the metamorphosis of her emerging identity as a woman and as an artist.³⁶ Compared to performances by Drummond (*Suspension/Ascension*, *Crucifixion*) and Mealing (*Crucifixion* and *Breadline*) *Fractures* deals with performing identity in a personal arena of the domestic sphere rather than a public gallery space. However, the nudity in this performance is also an unveiling of the artist's body as contingent to the creative process. In the sequence of slides that documented this event,³⁷ the artist can be seen to celebrate and reject the conditioned rites of womanhood. Dressed in a cocktail dress, stilettos and full facial makeup, she delicately placed several floral arrangements in crystal vases on a series of plinths with studied concentration and then proceeded to overlay paint directly from the tube onto the glass of three collages of text (constructed from Foster's *How to Paint* booklets) made prior to the performance. (illus 45) The darkened setting is both familiar and oppressive and, as the events unfolded, the domestic nature of her environment became more incongruous, highlighting the conflict in the deconstruction of her 'feminine' persona. French then appeared to realign her identity by discarding the dress, shoes and makeup, donning a blue boiler suit as an indication of her new role as a 'serious artist' marking the crystallization from a 'weak' female, into a determined and focussed practitioner. In doing so, her momentary nakedness was captured on film, emphasizing the vulnerability of her body and embodied state as a socially constructed site of interchanging identity. The overalls like Mealing and Drummond's white boiler suits, symbolise or indicate the worker-artist and diverts

³⁶ French also cites a childhood memory in the construction of this performance. A glamorous woman French knew when a child during the 1950s, used to dress in net ball gowns with camellias in her hair. "I saw her dressed in a ballerina length cocktail frock, sherry glass in hand, awaiting the arrival of her new Kelvinator refrigerator. She did floral arrangements - her art. She was also moody, melancholic, very special. I organised a routine for her - because for me to understand her, to have such a clear memory of her, I was coming to terms with my own mirror. I was saying there are no limits, but they are inevitably built. The only thing to do is to break them down and keep on going forward." Quoted from *Broadsheet*, June 1983, p. 23.

³⁷ *Fractures* was documented by Peter Nicholls, and is not without an element of spectacle, French's slow strip tease is at once beautiful and disquieting in its collusion with the gaze.

attention to the artist's ego. Ffrench then overturned and smashed with a machete the crystal vases of flowers. **(illus 46)** The sartorial change into neutral work dress, juxtaposing 'serious' attire with the broken crystal vase³⁸ was symbolic of the personal fracture in her makeup as a woman and the fractures that feminism was beginning to create in traditional social roles for women. 'Since this work I have attempted to harden and strengthen my body through intense mental and physical discipline. To reject fear, anger, frustration – weak responses'.³⁹

Following *Fractures*, a trilogy of political performances, *Gut Reaction*, (1981) *Fontanel* (1981) and *The Opinion* (1983) were statements made against an impingement of freedom and democracy. 'Public protest is one form of individual or collective opinion; other more reflective actions usually follow a gut reaction to a given situation'.⁴⁰ These political performances recall Mealing and Drummond's more 'violent' actions such as *Molotov* and *Toxick*. *Gut Reaction*, devised after the death of Bobby Sands in Ireland⁴¹ was an installation/ performance for the University of Canterbury at the Peterborough Centre in June 1981.⁴² Being of Catholic Irish heritage, the artist was aware from a young age of the longstanding conflict, unrest and oppression in Ireland. *Gut Reaction* emphasized the continual thrust of violence relayed through the incessant sound of semi-automatic gunfire and the protracted action of throwing 'missiles' (such as rocks, slabs of concrete and asphalt) at a target on the wall. Three video sets played images of her undulating abdomen in a continuous loop for the duration of the performance. **(illus 47)** Her intent was to draw the audience closer to the target wall challenging the audience's reaction by exposing them to the sounds and images of violence. Ffrench emphasized on a number of occasions that her role in a performance was

³⁸ The shattered glass is also interesting to note as fFrench subsequently worked with broken materials in performances and in her photographic tableaux of ruptured matter.

³⁹ Di fFrench, unpublished artist's notes, undated, Robert McDougall Art Gallery loan collection.

⁴⁰ Artist notes to accompany the performance of *Gut Reaction*, 1981, University of Canterbury. Also published in *The Women's Picture Book*, p.111.

⁴¹ Bobby Sands, a Provisional Sinn Fein member, died after a hunger strike to protest against Margaret Thatcher's denial of their status as political prisoners. Ten Provisional prisoners died in this fashion amid the worst violence in Northern Ireland since the early 1970s.

⁴² Ffrench had planned to perform *Gut Reaction* at the 1985 ANZART, and constructed an artist statement *ANZART In Auckland, Gut Reaction*. It was never performed in 1985.

one of activation, of materials and concept rather than a performance-persona or an 'actor' per se: 'The **work** was violent – **not my acting**.'⁴³ Using her own body as material, ffrench regarded herself not as a potential site for sexual connotation but as a 'power source', in much the same way as Drummond referred to himself as 'an entity in space'. Abdominal control, the belly as a centrifugal force or a site where life begins and ends, also metaphorically absorbs the shock of violence as 'the abdomen controls against anger, fear and frustration'.⁴⁴ It was at this point in her life that she began to train in martial arts, an interest that was to inform her artistic practice on a number of levels. Karate focussed her attention on the mechanics required for mental and physical discipline and activated her investigation of the 'ideal' body that was to occupy her working aesthetic during the 1990s.

ffrench's powerful and beautiful performance *Fontanel* (performed at the 1981 ANZART in Christchurch) was the result of a conceptual multi-layered approach. The issue at the heart of *Fontanel* was the political turmoil in Uganda during the 1970s and Idi Amin's reign of terror relayed through television coverage throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The Springbok tour protest marches were occurring at this time, and just as Mealing responded to brutality imposed by apartheid in 1978, ffrench also felt moved to create a performance that drew upon racial inequalities. The tyrannical and murderous regime which caused the deaths of thousands of Ugandans, was a political nightmare that she associated with a loss of compassion in a world of increasing brutality. The *Fontanel* performance was a political protest against the parasitical nature of violence that was emphasized by the cruelty of Amin's executions.⁴⁵ The blatant cruelty ffrench observed in everyday life also reinforced her growing concerns for violent issues in

⁴³ Di ffrench, handwritten artist's notes, undated.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ 'Amin devised this execution where the prisoners knelt in a row and one was given a sledgehammer then the prisoners executed each other...this really did happen, human beings behave like this, it could be happening now or something just as abominable, and we know it is. Generally when authority responds to social problems by becoming violent and negatively tough, the population increases in violence. Violence feeds on itself.' (Di ffrench *A Woman's Picture Book*, p. 114).

society, as the potential for brutality was also evident in New Zealand at the time of making *Fontanel*. Police misuse of the baton to wound and grievously harm protestors of the Springbok tour highlighted the vulnerability of children and the fact that all humans were potentially subject to out-of-control damage. *Fontanel* was a transformative ritual of unusual beauty given the nature of the protest.

For the performance, a room in the Christchurch Arts Centre was lit with five candles and the floor was covered with black builders' paper on which a circle of seven skull-sized, rock-like ovid forms were placed. A slide projector, situated above the installation, was turned on and the candles then blown out. Working to a precise beat, (pulse and breath), the artist projected 36 slides of black Africans in 'reverse', (photographic negative) within the ring of forms followed by its mirror image, (the photographic positive) which included a cross drawn over the fontanel area of the skull. The sepia images displayed over the sculptural forms created distortions that contrasted with the three dimensional objects. **(illus 48)** After the slide sequence was completed she walked into the area and sprayed the paper with toxic white lacquer. The next sequence of *Fontanel* evoked a curious sense of violence and unveiling. Ffrench removed a gauze patch from each ovid form to reveal a black hole (which indicated change) in the 'fontanel'. The clay structures became vessels of containment, symbolic of the 'womb, the universe, or just life'.⁴⁶ Leaving the image of the last slide on, and armed with a steel machete, she struck each vessel across the fontanel at which they crumbled, spilling ash over the 'white lacquer, over the projected sepia portrait taking up the colour – becoming a landscape merging like a ghost.'⁴⁷ **(illus 49)** In conclusion, the artist picked up the last two remaining vessels, which were intact and completely wrapped in gauze. Unwrapping and crumbling the vessels with her hands she then left the area, 'revealing a desert-like landscape of sepia ash surrounded by broken shards of

⁴⁶ Unpublished artist notes, undated, Robert McDougall Art Gallery loan collection.

⁴⁷ Di ffrench, *The Women's Picture Book*, p. 114.

clay – the portrait taking up the subtle contours of ash – present to prehistory.⁴⁸ *Fontanel*, although motivated by the cruelty of racism, and intolerance, evoked a sense of regeneration, a continuous cycle of civilization and evolution, time and space, birth and death.⁴⁹

Fontanel was an important precursor to her later technique of projected photographic imagery over a bed of ruptured matter, to be re-photographed and developed as a cibachrome. This photographic 'discovery' was explored again in a performance/installation entitled, *The Same Leaves*, performed at the National Art Gallery, Wellington in 1982.⁵⁰ In an interpretative account written in February 1982, the artist cites the 'inevitability of recycled nature, every year spring is a fresh experience',⁵¹ as her inspiration. *The Same Leaves* was constructed by ffrench as an examination of her journey toward the commitment and the participation in making art. The performance consisted of a plinth sprayed white, two ropes hanging on the wall, a fibreglass bowl, a large piece of canvas on the floor and five sets of seven seedpods on five sheets of white wet paper on the canvas/floor. The seedpods were filled with pure paint pigment, and during the performance slides of paintings by Rousseau (*The Snake Charmer*, being one such image specified) were projected over the landscape of small sculptures. (illus 50) They were activated by an adze that:

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ In an interview with a friend, ffrench expanded on *Fontanel*. The performance was perceived to portray a time sequence involving a 'transition from ancient to 'pre-white' dominated cultures through to the present white dominated period and extending to the future as it may or shall be'. The overlay of white lacquer suggested the ascendancy of 'white-skinned' people, from the 'oneness' between man and the environment during antiquity to the 'plastic superficiality of white supremacy, a sense of unnaturalness, the plastic veneer of white civilization on human differences'. The interview goes on to reveal a dream the artist had after reading about the anthropologist Dr Leakey's discovery of human skulls in Northern Tanzania, the dream-skulls breaking open with black ash spilling over white ground. This in turn coincided with ffrench's knowledge of an ancient Celtic custom in which the cremated bodily remains of the dead are placed in a clay urn, and then broken open as a religious act of liberating the spirit from their earthly remains. The gesture of breaking open the womb-like vessels and spilling ash as relayed through the performance, symbolized a "going back, the end of the physical part." (Unpublished artist's notes, 1981, Robert McDougall Art Gallery loan collection).

⁵⁰ An earlier version of *Same Leaves* was also performed at the Women's Art Gallery in November 1981, ffrench realised it as a model for a more involved installation, performance and importantly for the photographic element.

⁵¹ Di ffrench, *The Same Leaves: An Interpretative Account*, February 1982, Robert McDougall Art Gallery loan collection.

...transformed into wattle seeds which explode in the heat. The weapon helps create an installation, which shows the soul, the psyche is revealed. The essence of the performance is in the installation, created by its process.⁵²

Working to an urgent count, the artist, after smashing the pods removed the clay husks, arranging them in a semi-circle around the papers then:

I find a red slide, leave it on, then taking up the washing bowl I pour water from it onto the red tempera powder. With my hand moving in the powder and water, it mixes and becomes paint on paper. A thick red painting.⁵³

This process is repeated until all of the pieces of paper are thick with colour, and hung on the gallery wall behind, paint trickles from the excess off the edge of the paper, down the wall – ‘a red journey’. The artist then approached the plinth, climbed onto it and hoisted herself onto the ropes, then kicked the plinth over onto the debris on the floor. **(illus 51)** ‘I hang motionless. Stillness represents movement, balancing opposed forces’.⁵⁴ The resultant installation consisted of the residue of the performance accompanied with photographic documentation of the actual performance. Her growing interest in the creative possibilities of photography was worked through in both *Fontanel*, and *The Same Leaves*. The third performance that seemingly completes this nascent investigation into the resulting photographic tableaux is *Asters*, performed at the 1983 ANZART in Hobart.

Asters is an important work to examine in order to understand further her working process, specifically the idea and medium leading toward a growing experimentation with surfaces, content and representation of the human (male) figure. French described the performance as focussing on ‘an obsession, a violence, a war’,⁵⁵ those prevalent concerns with life/death polarities find signification in the sculptural materials used. A bow commonly used in archery represented the manifestation of an obsession and the exchange of energy,

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Di French, *Statement of Intent: Asters*, Robert McDougall Art Gallery loan collection.

The Bow is one of the most effective ways of storing the 'strain' energy of human muscles and releasing it to propel a missile weapon.

With a Bow, when the bowstring is released some of the stored strain energy is communicated directly to the missile as Kinetic Energy.⁵⁶

According to John Hurrell who was present at the performance, the artist (dressed in mechanic's overalls) began the work by hanging the bow on the wall and spraying the vessel (full of ashes), with acrid smelling white paint.

Alternating between modern and primitive male roles, she repeatedly referred to tribal hunting cultures in her images, such as roasting a skin bound club over a burning torch thrust into a huge mound of earth, and then dripping black paint, like blood, from it, when it was suspended on the wall.⁵⁷

Images of a young (homosexual) male with an animal hide stretched over his body and a video of a supine male nude with the petals of silvery pink asters lightly falling over his body was interspersed with the action. (illus 52, 53) An old Japanese legend relayed by ffrench indicates the symbology behind the imagery,

He rode out searching for a site. Having great power, being a master in archery he ordered Asters to be planted where they [sic] fell. And soon the plains were undulating with Asters.⁵⁸

The metaphor of war and death juxtaposed with the beauty and colour of a sweep of flowers becomes embodied through the use of the male nude. The stretched animal hide (indicating a target or a site) and his fallen body conjured imagery of death brought about by war. He becomes a memorial, an entire field undulating with colour. Rather than 'perform herself', ffrench's author function remained veiled. Dressed in the worker's garb of mechanic's overalls which hid her femininity, her ritualised actions did not engage the audience in the traditional way of seeing women (as scopophilic objects of desire) by dancing or revealing

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ John Hurrell, 'The New Zealand Presence in Tasmania', *Art New Zealand*, No. 28, 1983 p. 21.

⁵⁸ Quoted from Di ffrench, *Statement of Intent: Asters*.

emotion.⁵⁹ Emotion was conveyed only through the display of her photographs of the male nude and her gaze rather than that of the audiences was displayed.

The third performance to complete the more overt political/protest trilogy, of *Gut Reaction* and *Fontanel*, is *The Opinion*.⁶⁰ *The Opinion* took a year of development, until it took the final pared-down form, and in viewing the performance on video, one can discern the economical use of sculpture and gesture in order to convey the idea that had evolved over a period of time and thought. Ffrench felt that a reliance on critical and judgemental pronouncements of overseas opinion had created a sense of torpor in the New Zealand psyche. The elements that made up the performance and the way in which they were juxtaposed, presented a visual cipher for abuse, fragility and erosion of power structures. As previously explored in *Gut Reaction*, and *Fontanel*, *The Opinion* concerned itself with the easy manipulation of media to convey truths and half-truths, issues of violence and victimization.

The *Opinion* performance/installation began with the artist pouring red and black paint ('a journey, the blood of the workers')⁶¹ into a large fibreglass container and then carefully placing it strategically in front of a lectern, a tall 'mechanical mouth' and a cubed, fibreglass plinth filled with a stack of newspapers. The top paper showed David Lange and Robert Muldoon during the 1984 election campaign. Another newspaper stack was situated to the right of the artist who, standing on the plinth, (which symbolised a position of authority), manipulated the mouth open and shut, delivering the 'speech', as given by those in power, the politicians and heads of multi-national corporations. The fibreglass mouth and lectern resembled the shape of a ship's bow, representing 'overseas opinion',⁶² wordlessly 'speaking' to the audience. The hollow thud of the heavy jaw ('the

⁵⁹ "I felt during the Hobart ANZART there were female performers presenting themselves very strongly as subjects on display without enough intellectual or fully resolved conceptual content. One questions their motives".

⁶⁰ *The Opinion* was first performed at the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1984, as part of the Artist's Projects programme and later in conjunction with the exhibition *Spare Parts* at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch 1985 for which the performance was videotaped.

⁶¹ Jonathan Smart, 'Opinion by Di f French', *The Press*, Wednesday, October 16, 1985.

⁶² Di f French, performance notes, 1985, Robert McDougall Art Gallery.

smiling viciousness of propaganda')⁶³ echoed in the gallery space, while the artist slowly and resolutely reached for news pages from the stack, screwing them up to be thrown into the awaiting container. Ffrench described the container in the accompanying notes to the performance as, 'catching and consuming the 'speech' of the mechanical mouth'. During the action an historical newsreel of the 1951 Wellington Labour Party rally was projected across the objects, towards the wall and over the tall newspaper stack. The atmosphere was altered as turbid smoke slowly began to filter into the performance space, and the sound of an incoming tide progressively became louder. **(illus 54)** The littoral as a site of arrival and departure, of colonists/immigrants, expatriates and opinion became a tangible metaphor in the performance. Ffrench used the beach as site to create the mould and plaster cast for the bowl used in the performance/installation as well as recording the incoming tide. **(illus 55)** The shoreline thus encapsulates a moment of creativity with an overlay of symbol to express a socio-political and personal stance against blind acceptance.

The effect of the shadow cast by the artist (a reference perhaps, to an alter ego) provided a corporeal trace juxtaposed with the soundtrack and film loop. *The Opinion's* visual and aesthetic employment of texture as a signification for time and change is another example of how integral performance was to the aesthetic expansion of her oeuvre. The dynamics of her sculptural and performance journey are a source of reference points. They are in fact prototypes to her subsequent 'performance' photographic technique that developed as early on as *Fractures*, where glass and colour mingled in a personal ritual of cathartic identity seeking. The prescient vehicle of understanding however, was *Fontanel*. It was a decisive ritual of discovery with photographic projections onto ash and clay that produced a three-dimensional, textured landscape, open for further exploration.

⁶³ Jonathan Smart, 'Opinion by Di fFrench', *The Press*, Wednesday, October 16, 1985.

Stretching the Boundaries. Breaking the Rules

Having realised the potential of the camera to relay her ideas, French transposed the kinetic performative gesture of her previous work into a series of cibachromes, with the narrative body as her major theme. Through her newly acquired development of projections onto refractive matter, initiated by such performances as *Fontanel*, *The Same Leaves* and the layering of *The Opinion*, she found the photographic medium to be a fluid base through which she could embody complex philosophical and art-historical ideas.

French's reliance on, and disciplined working through of, the idea, is evident in the extant writing and work books of the artist, and is translated into her sculpture, performance and photography. The idea as ever developing and evolving, even after the 'event' as a changing and ongoing process, excited her. Her statement in 'A Woman's Picture Book' in 1986 best sums up her working process:

It is only through learning techniques and being involved in a variety of materials that I am able to effectively portray my ideas. My interest first of all is in researching the idea. And the way the idea and the materials come together decides whether the outcome appears beautiful to some people. Appears, because sometimes objects, like people, are not what they seem to be.⁶⁴

Indeed her fascination with appearances remained an enduring concern. French again reiterated this notion, that her study of appearances was something akin to a continual working process that an external appearance can only relay partially that which is hidden within the subject.⁶⁵ The photograph could capture the evolution of these thought patterns and processes, at times connecting and meeting and also ricocheting into other fields of inquiry.

The medium of the photograph as an embodied sign, and also as a corporeal form of knowledge, thus working with dualities of synchronicity, is a key

⁶⁴ Di French, *A Woman's Picture Book*, p.110.

⁶⁵ Di French, hand written artist statement, 1988.

to creating photographic works of art that are motivated by an intense philosophical investigation. As Dore Bowen states:

The photograph's reference to a time past disturbs a synchronic analysis. It exists as a perceptual object, but also defines a spatial relief, an unfolding topography. Thus the photograph demarcates particular fields – locations that recombine the relations of normative space and time, operating to mark, inhibit and open onto sites of discontinuous desire.⁶⁶

Photography is recognised, according to Roland Barthes, as beginning and ending with body, yoking the image and the desiring gaze. Ffrench's (re)construction of gender in her photography loosened preconceived ideas of sexuality and eroticism. Believing that people and art can transcend gender beyond rigid interpretations, her notion of eros or love resided in the power of the eye/lenses to convey a freedom of expression, with respect to the subject being photographed. By reversing accepted practices, of both gender performativity and photography, she stretched boundaries and broke rules.

Her technique of photographing from dark (obscura) to light (lucida) within a highly constructed framework of perspective complicated concepts of the gaze, evoking an awareness that 'the viewer is ultimately the subject' within a sculptural landscape of time and history.⁶⁷

Working from dark to light. Utilising light contained/refracted from within a matrix of a floor bound installation. Drawing up this light through long exposures and *slow soak* from a projected light source bound by total darkness.⁶⁸

The resulting image is not one of a reproduced three-dimensional reality, neither is it a moment of frozen time. It does not reconstruct imagined reality in tableau form, where still imagery is manifested through traditional forms (as in Boyd Webb), nor does it distort reality through wide angle lens. But by a subtle positioning of the camera itself, which records the original image in black and white for subsequent projection onto refractory matter such as coal, the image carries the viewer

⁶⁶ Dore Bowen, 'Hysteria and the helio-trope: on bodies gender and the photograph', *Afterimage*, 01.02.1999, p.2.

⁶⁷ Di ffrench, 'Statement of Intent', artist notes, undated.

⁶⁸ Di ffrench typewritten artist statement 'Stretching the Boundaries. Breaking the Rules', undated.

through a complex journey of illusion. Photographic imagery has been manipulated since the Bauhaus (and earlier), but the artist in *rephotographing* a projected slide, textualised by tactile matter, created a singular technique and highly performative image.

The photographs are *not* photomontage. They are made by a lengthy process of photographing light and illusion, using materials with refractive qualities. Therefore the negatives and transparencies are never manipulated or touched by hand.⁶⁹

An infra-thin reading in her technique can be applied. The subtle shifts achieved by merging a black landscape and black and white image, transformed by tungsten light, created what the artist described as 'an imprinted memory – a slightly indistinct image where the sequence moves in and out of focus/time',⁷⁰ or recalling *Fontanel* where the image 'became a landscape – merging like a ghost'. The resulting index, a body engram, evocative of 'having been there before' is loaded with many semiotic registers that reveals itself as a nexus of multiple meanings which shift and oscillate with the context of the world.

The type of consciousness the photograph involves is indeed truly unprecedented, since it establishes not a consciousness of the being-thereof the thing (which any copy could provoke) but an awareness of its having-been-there. What we have is a new space-time category: spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority, the photograph being an illogical conjunction between the here-now and the there-then.⁷¹

Arnolfini's Hat (1985), a portrait, was the first work completed in a series of photographic images concerning transformation through time, relationships of individuals according to their cultural and social context and a linkup of psychological tensions.⁷² *Giovanni Arnolfini and his Wife* (1434) by Jan van Eyck provided the historical model for the photograph. French created a black and

⁶⁹ Di ffrench, typewritten artist statement, *Fundamental Series 1986/87*.

⁷⁰ Di ffrench, *Black and Photographs and Cibachromes*, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, 1990

⁷¹ Roland Barthes, 'The Rhetoric of the Image,' in *Image/Music/Text*, New York, Noonday Press, 1977, p. 45.

⁷² Other portraits include *The Thousand Rock Series*, 1987/88 portraits of Glenda Norris and Julia Morison, 1990.

white self-portrait wearing a large black hat she had made. Projected onto coal her face appears to be 'lifting up through time' and is accompanied by orange fish swimming around her head. A surreal hand overlaid with several eyes, floats in the foreground, palm facing forward as if blessing the viewer 'like a marriage between the viewer and the person in the portrait'.⁷³ The wife in the painting is demure and apprehensive. Ffrench however is wearing the hat of authority worn by Arnolfini, and is also recapturing the authorial visibility of the artist depicted in the mirror behind the couple by presenting herself in a self-portrait. *Arnolfini's Hat* is a double entendre; it deconstructs the notion of the wife/woman artist as anonymous 'other', it parodies the power structures of patriarchal history and (re)places feminine strength into the contemporary world.

The marriage of Arnolfini really irritates me, his tyranny, the little dogs on the floor, and yet it's a really beautiful painting, I have a love-hate relationship with it. It's a comment about the relationship between people and the viewer and looking at the social hierarchy of that time and putting it into 1985.⁷⁴

Arnolfini's Hat was a testing ground for ideas, hypothesis and theories and a realization that 'there is no existence of an unquestionable certainty or truth that will make us all comfortable'.⁷⁵ The installation/photographic construction implied an ongoing dialogue with the viewer that is an inter-subjective exchange between the artist's desiring gaze, her erotic investments, and that of the participant.

Ffrench's use of the male nude in her series of cibachromes from 1986 seemingly added to an uncomfortable paradox of feminist discourse in relation to eroticism. The *Fundamental Series*, (1986/87), were based on her observations of athletes training.

I watch the men and the women train and the difference is fascinating, the men have powerful dynamics – a reality/idealism which I intend to explore visually, and psychologically through sculpture and photography.⁷⁶

⁷³ Di ffrench, 'The Arnolfini Work', typewritten artists notes, undated.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Di ffrench, 'Statement of Intent', artists notes, undated.

⁷⁶ Di ffrench, artist statement, *Statement/Photography/Portraiture*, 1985.

The Greek philosophy of the Ideal Man - that of the disciplined training of the mind and body forms the underlying philosophy of the *Fundamental* series. The inherent 'unconscious' sense of primal well-being that the male athletes displayed, rather than a 'macho' sense of pride was explored and classical Greek sculpture of male athletes provided the foundation. A knowledge of sculptural processes (as a manifestation of an internal reality) combined with a conscious treatment of time and space, light and illusion, merged and activated 'the illusion of a new reality'.⁷⁷

From the Raising of Adam, depicts a male model in the pose of Michelangelo's Adam on the Sistine Chapel Ceiling glowing in liquid amber light. **(illus 56)** Photographed first in black and white the image was then projected on to a bed of crushed coal. *From the Raising of Adam* appears passive at first glance, but the muscular body belies an energy and power further enhanced by the clenched fist. The latent dynamism of this image is encoded with the ambiguity of sensuality and aggression, desire and objectivity. The *Fundamental* series for French was an idea generated from an awareness of and interest in racial memory, the precarious survival of civilizations and the socially coded rhetoric of masculinity. There is a dichotomy of intent: by representing the male nude within a framework of classical Greek sculpture, French reworked the Ideal Male (as identified by men) into her own personal description, colluding with and eschewing the traditional projections of masculinity in art history.

When *The Fundamental Series* was exhibited, alongside the 'working' images of black and white studies, reaction was one of fascination as to the artist's working process and curiosity that a female artist was dealing with a previously taboo subject of the male nude. The exhibition, *Women's Images of Men*, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London 1980, fused several issues such as the emergence of important women artists in the contemporary art scene, the use of art as a political vehicle and the renewed popularity of figurative art. The depiction by women of men punctured the prevalent masculine mystique and the male gaze by representing the artists' views of patriarchy in both the domestic and public

⁷⁷ Ibid.

spheres. Critics and the public were at once horrified and mesmerised by the depiction of men in art by women.⁷⁸ The exhibition for the first time confronted the gaze of the dominant male system, and contorted the assumption made by John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* that men act and women appear.⁷⁹ 'The viewer viewed through the eyes of his traditional sitter confronts us with the inequality of that original relationship'.⁸⁰ French juxtaposed the power roles of the muse/artist and celebrating the act of looking, seeking her own sexuality within the process. 'I approach the study of the human form with respect, and primarily intend to project human dignity and humanity. There is no satirical intent'.⁸¹ Indeed she represented the male nude positively, asserting her own sexuality and intersubjective exchange of desire with the subject with deference, rather than as a predatory act of satire.

As part of the 1986 *Content/Context* exhibition at the National Art Gallery, French exhibited photographs from the *Fundamental* series. In a review of the exhibition Lita Barrie states the problematic nature of the nude studies, reading them as 'pornographic'.

French's images were of fragmented portions of heavily muscular male bodies, heroically posed with bits of Parthenon-like architecture appearing through a dappled haze. The overall effect of the images worries me because they resemble the Fascist images of male nudity recreated on classical Greek ideals and used as propaganda to bolster masculinist supremacy in the Nazi regime.⁸²

The Nazi propagandist machine glorified nature and the distant past in order to delineate peoples 'proper' places in life, their proper classes and gender roles. This separatist stance as a reactionary racism would appear to be an anathema to the philosophical and spiritual beliefs of the artist, although French photographed

⁷⁸ Although the imagery did not primarily focus on genitalia the press however did, accusing the exhibition as being 'a veritable forest of penises'. (*Women's Images of Men*, Pandora Press, London, 1990, p. 20). This unprecedented exhibition included photographs, paintings, sculpture and performance art by such artists as Mandy Havers, Mouse Katz and Gertrude Elias. Themes that the women artists portrayed in their work centred primarily on the abuse of patriarchal power, the power of critics, teachers and art historians. The male as an object of desire however did not appear without irony.

⁷⁹ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, Penguin, British Broadcasting Corporation, London, 1972, p. 47.

⁸⁰ Jacqueline Morreau & Catherine Elwes, 'Lighting a Candle', *Women's Images of Men*, p.16.

⁸¹ Di French, Work-plan. August 1988/1989.

⁸² Lita Barrie, 'Now Screening: Blockbuster Two', *New Zealand Listener*, December 20, 1986, p. 37.

Polynesian models that could be interpreted as being a 'Pakeha gaze'. Instead French through a post-structuralist reading that denotes a blurring of binary opposites, a blurring of 'otherness', manifested a multi-dimensional viewpoint. As Jillian Lloyd writes:

She will not oppose, for to oppose the monolith of patriarchal tradition is to accept the role of otherness, to form a negative reflection of the patriarchal Subject's persona, to enhance the patriarchal identity by reinforcing its parameters.⁸³

French agreed with Simone de Beauvoir's statement that 'women are not born, they are made' and are conditioned by a series of socially prescribed roles. The female body, according to de Beauvoir, ought to be the situation and instrumentality of women's freedom, not a defining and limiting essence.⁸⁴ Since the *Hanging Diary* installation, she started to ask questions centring on gender such as: 'does gender matter, what is strong, what is weak, does vulnerability invite destruction and when does it attract protection'.⁸⁵ Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity can be applied to French's reworking of sexual codes. In texts such as *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) Butler uses the term 'compulsory heterosexuality' to describe the institution which maintains the coherence of gender identity through reference to the fixed opposition male/female, in which each category is defined through its difference to the other. Both French and Butler suggest that gender is more fluid than we tend to assume; rather it is a set of gestures, which are performed upon the surface of the body. 'There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results'.⁸⁶ As French wrote:

I am interested that 'issues' surrounding the 'body' to be the focus of critical dialogue, avoiding the use of sexuality and the image of his/her 'body' as a

⁸³ Jillian Lloyd, *Di French: Projects 1990 – 1992*, Di French, 1992 p.15.

⁸⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* Routledge, New York, 1990, p.12.

⁸⁵ Di French, handwritten notes, undated.

⁸⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p. 6.

representative of 'problem'. The resulting dialogue becoming a replacement of an old order and its restricted bounds.⁸⁷

Di Ffrench was Trust Bank Artist in Residence at the Christchurch Arts Centre during 1990. Provided with a studio and situated away from her family she was able to fully devote her time to research and development of photographic performativity. Major work produced during this period includes *The Idea Becomes Extinct*, *Taking Possession*, *Hunter/Warrior*, and *Life Drawing Class* each series dealing with layers of time, illusion/allusion and the physicality of women as the disinterested subject of the male gaze. Coal dust piled in her studio (the former University of Canterbury life drawing room, now part of the Arts Centre of Christchurch) formed the landscape, which was photographed from a two-metre height with her Nikon F3 camera. **(illus 57)** The resulting transparency was projected back onto the floor onto which further sculptural material and photographic studies were added before the final shot. **(illus 58)** The organic matter of coal/carbon is the predominant chemical component in the human organism, with this in mind, the corporeal imagery that merge with this landscape seem to oscillate in another reality, hovering in time.

The female nude of *The Idea Becomes Extinct* is consciously assuming the pose of the unfinished marble sculpture, Michelangelo's *Awakening Slave*, (c.1520), and is described by the artist as 'an un-coded display of female sexuality'.⁸⁸ **(illus 59)** The arching body of Di Ffrench appears to be awakening from the shackles of patriarchy and is fragmented/fragmenting, her head in the darkness of coal, 'symbolic of intuition and instincts'.⁸⁹ The vulnerability of the flesh is intensified through the projection of the image onto a severe landscape. **(illus 60)** The sculptural dissection of the body echoes an era of the heroic past, fragments of civilisations and further highlights the objectification of the female form. The cracked body also alludes to (like *Fractures*), the fissures in how women see themselves, driven by spectatorial consumerism. 'Fracture the gaze that

⁸⁷ Di Ffrench, typewritten statement, undated.

⁸⁸ Di Ffrench, handwritten notes, undated.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

commodifies the female form'.⁹⁰ The anonymous female nude in art history objectified and 'used' as material for the delectation of male satisfaction does not return the gaze, but when she does as in Manet's *Olympia*, and Titian's *Venus of Urbino* she is judged to be a whore. Ffrench evades, rejects and distorts this reading of 'the art nude', her leg crossed, 'positioned to deny any intrusion' she is embedded in her own sense of self-discovery through the rhetoric of the pose. As Somer Brodribb declares: 'The female body is sometimes the sacrifice, sometimes the great crime which brings art into the world'.⁹¹

Developed from *The Idea Becomes Extinct*, *Taking Possession* depicts a female form in a stance of defence. (illus 61) Indeed the artist, practising Karate at that time believed that women were only just beginning to realise the 'power potential of muscle groups to increase strength and stamina, physically and psychologically becoming their own subject/focus'.⁹² The rutilant figure has emerged from the organic matter of the carbon landscape and stands spotlighted in ready defence. It is a complete transition from an awakening potential to full realisation. The blackness of the background is suggestive of a subterranean zone of an acute inner consciousness, the head submerged, cut off from the physicality of the body as 'positive aggression is controlled by the brain'.⁹³ Reminiscent of the skin over the male nude in *Asters*, the hand on her abdomen is a 'cognitive assertion of the body as a shield against aggression'. The nude figure engages with 'Kata' movements, (a technique of readiness and defence in Karate) channelling, fending and manipulating the body's energy forces. Jillian Lloyd interprets the hand as physical manifestation of the Gaze:

The Gaze is distilled in the imprint of a hand planted forcibly on her hip. In all the *Taking Possession* images the Gaze is implicitly a physical presence like this hand, capable of taking, shaping and violating and, by the same token, susceptible to reprisals.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Di f french, diary entry, March 1990.

⁹¹ Somer Brodribb, *Nothing Mat(t)ers: A Feminist Critique of Postmodernism*, Spinifex Press, Australia, 1992, p. 127.

⁹² Di f french, handwritten notes, undated.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Jillian Lloyd, *Di f french: Projects 1990-1992*, p.12.

As in *Asters* the hand transposed onto a membrane/skin is also a protective 'sealing in', circumventing the intrusion of ownership.

No longer is the body vulnerable, it has the reflex action of a shield; thus countering the generalised perception of a conditioned viewing; i.e., the female figure as forever vulnerable, with potential to be exploited.⁹⁵

The *Hunter/Warrior* series conveys the image of man as ancient warrior/athlete, as if recorded on the walls of caves in a time past, but still a legitimate legacy of contemporary domination. The notion that there are possibilities of alternatives, a non gendered aggression that is productive, creative and (re)constructive, is manifested through this series. The nude figures control and display their strength, not through the manipulation of weaponry as the tools of oppression but through the force of dynamic energy relayed through musculature. As Jillian Lloyd writes 'taking away the weapons and the victims allows us to see yet another aspect of aggression as patriarchal heritage'.⁹⁶ Her inclusion of the ancient male Greek statue of the Kouros, standing fixedly in defiance of time (and an 'icon of phallic power'), signifies the inherent longevity of the warrior male in continuation and evolution through history. This image is indeed a time line of evolution, from pre-history to the present, in continuum.

A silhouetted duplication of the black and white study in the *Hunter/Warrior*, (spliced and layed out in a montage tableau), indicates the shadow of the psyche/ego and the shadow of time past, an allegorical repetition of body trace. **(illus 62)** The twin figure, devoid of features could be interpreted in phenomenological terms as the 'originary presence to itself',⁹⁷ a trace in flux with the past and present an interested and disinterested spectator. This particular image from the series, a working tableau before being projected onto a sculptural

⁹⁵ Di ffrench, hand written statement, 'Taking Possession', 1990.

⁹⁶ Jillian Lloyd, *Di ffrench: Projects 1990-1992*, p.12.

⁹⁷ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Phenomenology*, State University of New York, 1991, p.53. Lyotard differentiates between the difference and sameness of the ego in an intersubjective exchange with the world. The empirical ego is 'interested in the world, and it lives there entirely naturally; on the basis of this ego the phenomenological attitude constitutes a *doubling of this ego*, which establishes the disinterested spectator, the phenomenological ego. It is this ego of the disinterested spectator that looks into the phenomenological reflection, undertaken itself through a disinterested attitude of the spectator.' pp. 51-52.

three dimensional landscape, draws a striking parallel with that of Bauhaus artist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's montage, *Jealousy* (1930)⁹⁸. (illus 63) Both *Jealousy* and *Hunter Warrior* construct two pairs of figures/silhouettes within a minimal architectural linearity, and in both compositions an inter-relating diagonal line connects two double figures. Moholy-Nagy believed that photography could supplement our opticality and disengage the reliance on traditional perceptual and aesthetic habits. Combining photographic imagery with drawing, and experimenting with the light effects of substances such as lenses, crystals and liquids, was employed by Moholy-Nagy, who was aware of the full range of possibilities offered by this technique both in exploring subject matter and spatiality. He described his process thus:

They are pieced together from various photographs and are an experimental method of simultaneous representation; compressed interpenetration of visual and verbal wit; weird combinations of the most realistic, imitative means which pass into imaginary spheres. They can, however, also be forthright, tell a story; more veristic than life itself. It will soon be possible to do this work, at present still in its infancy and done by hand, mechanically, with the aid of projections and new printing processes⁹⁹.

Through such photomontages as *Leda and the Swan*, and *The Law of Series*, (1925), Moholy-Nagy explored the dynamism of energy exchange between figures in a spatial articulation of perspective. Like Moholy-Nagy, French constructed her photographic tableaux on the idea of sequences within the frame, 'repetition as a space-time organisational motif'.¹⁰⁰ French herself describes the series as an attempt to:

Divide the surface into distinct sections or time zones. Linear perspective and other devices link these 'layers of time', which together with environmental and architectural installations, orients, locking the subject into its own reality.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ An entry in French's diary, 1990, indicates that this was more than a coincidence. A list of library books that the artist consulted includes a reference to an unspecified book on Moholy-Nagy.

⁹⁹ Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, quoted from Dawn Ades, *Photomontage*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1996, p.151.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 153.

¹⁰¹ Di French, *Black and Photographs and Cibachromes*, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, 1990.

In this series of cibachromes, an analysis of art history, theory and practice and the intricacies of the intersubjective exchange moved between the natural world, culture, memory, and the 'erotic investments' of the gaze, perhaps otherwise veiled by conditioned ways of seeing.

In the *Image Seeking Its Text Series* (1990), the figure is subtracted, and replaced instead with landscapes of organic matter. Ffrench's interest in deconstruction and structuralism is evoked in this series, with references to Beckett's theatre of the non-body in which language replaces matter¹⁰². Her poem, the axis of this series, is a cibachrome image of text and includes, a double-ended metal arrow positioned at the top of the frame.¹⁰³ The body in absentia, consists of studies of the environment such as a bed of fallen autumnal Ginkgo leaves or the branches of a tree projected onto coal and tempera then re-photographed.¹⁰⁴ A drawing of a rose is transformed into an image not unlike a stained glass window in a church, but with a highly charged reference to female genitalia. Devoid of the literal body, yet an evocative trace, *Image Seeking its Text*, is a semiotic rendering of the environment and the power of the body, even 'invisible', as an invitation to discover a different place. The 'heautosopic'¹⁰⁵ image in search of its 'text' becomes an animated exchange, bearing its index like the double-ended arrow, that points away from its origin and towards its receiver.

The construction of what Luce Irigaray calls a 'symbolic interpretation of anatomy'¹⁰⁶ can be applied to ffrench's cibachromes. A position of multiplicity, centred on 'difference' creates a polemic of identity. In the *Coding/Observer*

¹⁰² Irish playwright and novelist Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) is associated with the Theatre of the Absurd. He employed a minimalist approach to his plays, stripping the stage of unnecessary spectacle and characters. The existential content of his work is relayed through monologues, the self becomes a stream of words an observing consciousness and an object being observed. This paradox of the self is seen in his play *Not I* (1973).

¹⁰³ Appendix: Three, *Image Seeking its Text*, poem by Di ffrench.

¹⁰⁴ It is related to *The Same Leaves* performance/installation in the close association with nature, especially in the creation of the ruptured matter intermingled with coloured tempera powders.

¹⁰⁵ Heautoscopy: This is a term for self, identity and recognition of the role of the image which we have of ourselves in the formation of our subjectivities. It is also a way of talking about *sight* of self, of the photograph not as a mirror but as an access point into a definition of identity.

¹⁰⁶ See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Ithaca University Press, New York, 1985.

Series, (1992)¹⁰⁷ the portrayal of the female figure amidst a complex architectural scape where contemporary and antique worlds meet, the threshold state of difference, acknowledges multiple viewpoints that lock into a single subject. *The Gates, Coding*, depicting a divided female body *cut in half* is imprisoned by the Iron Gates of Patriarchy. (illus 64) The eye tries to bring the pieces back together but they hover dissected, beheaded, in a forest or an inferno. The claustrophobic reference to the doorway as a threshold site, is an ominous presence, but the figure is a divided subject, in opposition to patriarchy, transgressing social codes and the totality of being. An interest in the human fear of difference and projecting past landscapes onto the present, formed the premise for her short feature film *Shelters* (1996). A collaborative project,¹⁰⁸ *Shelters* describes a state of mind, an interlacing between the physical outer world of the subject and an inner or psychic state. The film is an interpretation of the history of a 'loner', a feral man who lived in Otago during the 1920s and was taken away to one of the many asylums in Dunedin. Shelters built by trappers more than half a century earlier were found on ffrench's property bought in Otago, 'these traces spoke of fragmented isolated lives and indomitable wills'.¹⁰⁹ The men in the story are represented by silhouette and shadow creating an ambiguous hybrid identity and oscillating states of cultural displacement. 'Shelters is a visual poem to the dignity and humour of a kind of marginal living that others have called insane'.¹¹⁰

ffrench's technical virtuosity, her photographic, alchemical transformation of materials was highly performative, culminating from her intense research and practice as a performance-sculptor. Her untimely death in 1999 leaves a question mark over the fate of the projects she was developing until the last days of her life. Even in an acute state of terminal illness, the artist was researching through performance and photography the liminal position between life and death. Like the

¹⁰⁷ Exhibited at the National Art Gallery, 1992.

¹⁰⁸ Prose written by Rob Garrett and Sarah McMillan, narrated by Wallis Barnicoat, sets by Peter Nicholls, original soundtrack, Jack Body, camerawork, Paul Donovan and editing by Julie Watson. Other collaborative projects include *The Chesterfield Couch* 1992, and the *Suffrage Tapestry* 1993.

¹⁰⁹ Di ffrench, 'Shelter', typewritten artist statement, 1996.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

American performance artist Hannah Wilke, who died of lymphoma in 1993¹¹¹, French embarked on a project that depicted the radical changes that were occurring in her body brought about by aggressive medical therapy and how her diseased body negotiated femininity through the rhetoric of the pose. French throughout her life concerned herself with sensibilities and sentiments found in a socio-political consciousness and conducted an investigation into the politics of the body, gender and self. Like an imprint dividing and multiplying to re-emerge in another form, the play of metaphor and metonymy in her work amalgamate with a fierce political stance against cultural conflict and exploitation of nature. Her theory and application of gender performativity acknowledges specific tactics of rebellion, (and consequences of misplaced aggression), thus providing a map for the future as well as a critique of the present.

¹¹¹ Hannah Wilke produced a series of life-sized colour photographs *Intra-Venus* (1993) that depicted the artist undergoing treatment for cancer.

Chapter Five:

Conclusion: *The Breath of Art*

I've spoken of breathing. Yet I could have mentioned the human circulatory system, or the effects of bodies touching, or the feeling of time passing. Universals (shareables) are plentiful. From this point on, as far as the artist is concerned, it is a question of selecting and joining those features of breathing (or whatever) into a performable plan that may reach acutely into a participant's own sense of it *and* resonate its implications.¹

Allan Kaprow's 'sketch for a possible breathing piece' (1979) located the Happening in a cycle of joining and release, the auditory and visual manifestations of breath (rendered tactile by fans moving the air) and tied the rhythmic movement of breathing to the swell of the ocean. These components, placed presciently at the thresholds of performance art, define the existential, phenomenological aspects of the lived body and lived experience that performance artists engaged with from the 1970s.

Art in society and society in art, this creative intersection, evident in the performance art and sculptural practices of David Mealing, Andrew Drummond and Di ffrench, combined a variety of aesthetic attitudes with a variety of socio-political positions and issues prevalent internationally and, importantly, in New Zealand from 1969-1999. Having developed as a political strategy for change since the Futurists and as a collective stance against the forces of conservatism, performance art became a genre that in the hands of the three artists, reflected elements of the broader cultural sphere of New Zealand history. International developing attitudes toward the function of art can be seen in the work of these artists who found creative potential in performance art to be a transformative passage. While performance provided a platform for experimentation with idea and material, it also enabled them to project their

¹ Allan Kaprow, 'Performing Life', *Performance Anthology, Source Book of California Performance Art*, Last Gasp Press, San Francisco, 1989, p.xi.

desire for socio-political change, or at least awareness of, racial, ecological, spiritual and sexual issues.

The conditions or points of reference for performance art in New Zealand have indeed changed since it first appeared in 1969. Performance is now apparent, not in the sense of spontaneous 'happenings' or fleeting gestures based in ritual, but rather through a sophisticated interplay of technology and the body (as seen in the video installation work of New Zealand artist Lisa Reihana, the Australian artist Stelarc's mechanized prosthetic body parts, or the American artist Tony Oursler whose 'abject' video/sculpture installations engage the spectator on varying levels of fascination and repulsion). The influence Mealing, Drummond and French have exerted on the development of performative practices in the crossings of conceptual art, sculpture and photography in New Zealand has been immense. Their opening up of these practices that coincided with an alliance between art and society shifted the emphasis of art away from the prevailing modernism of formal representation, to a fluid interpretation of form and content. Just as the breath-impulse of performance art provides a focus on movement as a process of growth, their oeuvres represented a point of view and now a point of departure, signalled by the death of Di French.

In the second chapter, Mealing's application of performance techniques through to his rejection of form for interaction with communities in the arena of museological mediation, worked through and with ideas of space and process. This threshold notion encompassed ephemeral qualities pertaining to the visible and invisible such as *Wool* and *Sky Project* and transgressed commercial codes of purchase and exchange as seen in *Jumble Sale: A Market Place*. The *Crucifixion* controversy (or 'the Bieringa Affair', as Mealing calls it) highlighted the divisions between art-world and life-world politics that, although a catalyst to his abdication from the art arena, pinpointed the exact threshold of intersubjective negotiation and political intervention found in his subsequent practice. His alignment with interventionist strategies, such as revolutionary confrontation, Marxist principles of supporting societal causes under which art is

created, and protesting against issues of Apartheid and the police state, are also elements found in French's artistic practice. However, while Mealing looked toward both reaction and revolution, French's *Fontanel* engaged less with a direct confrontation with the manifesto of apartheid, but rather with a focus on the liminal states of a race of people and their precarious survival, evoked through a transformative ritual of action and materials.

Mealing negotiated the dichotomy of working within and against the totality of Man. His stance against the evil totalitarianism of apartheid was juxtaposed with an inclination to participate in the interchangeable contribution of social time. *Blood the River of Life* echoed Gurvitch's notion of Man participating as much with the body as representing total social phenomena and vice versa. This view of 'Total Man' as an aggregate of the class system was conversely confronted by French in her breakdown of social codes. Her transgression into an opposition, a deconstruction into a divided self, sought to liberate the totality of one's being. This strategy is documented by Anne Marsh, who observes: 'Chance, play, and the fractured nature of identity were presented by artists in an attempt to destabilize the notion that 'man' is at the centre of the universe'.² The fragmentation of the subject in French's work during the 1990s stemmed from political precedents and body-oriented focus in the 1970s and 1980s that resisted the normalization of art and life, for example her performance *Asters* and her photography, particularly the *Hunter/Warrior* and *Coding/Observer* series. It is interesting to compare Mealing's *Blood the River of Life* catalogue image with that of French's *The Gates, Observer*. The Vitruvian Man, as Ihab Hassan commented in 1969: '...arms spread and legs apart, giving the human measure to circle, square and universe, no longer takes our breath away. A post-humanism is in the making. What will be its shape?'³ In viewing French's image one could conclude that its shape is mutable, divided and in defiance of the shadow cast by patriarchy. Indeed the divided self stands in the doorway, at the threshold, a space separating the inside and outside,

² Anne Marsh, *Body and Self, Performance Art in Australia 1969-1992*, p.227.

³ Ihab Hassan, *Liberations. New Essays on the Humanities in Revolution*, p. xi.

connection and separation - an ambiguous liminal space of the non-body. 'With the nothingness of the door between us, we are neither distant nor identical, but in relation, holding each other'.⁴

As discussed in Chapter Three, Andrew Drummond's exploration of liminal space and infra-thin connotation reverberated with clarity of vision: from Duchampian kinetic manifestations of allegorical devices, to the instance of performance signified through the expressive space of the lived body. It is interesting to note that the original translation of the name for Duchamp's *Stoppages*, a concept incorporated freely by Drummond, is 'invisible mending'. The 'invisible mending' or healing relayed in the performances *Filter Action*, *Earth Vein* and *Red Wedge* aimed to encourage a positive relationship with the land. The body of consciousness spoken of by Joseph Beuys in 1975 was recognised intuitively by Drummond to be an interchanging phenomenological body of sentient energy-perception cathartically experienced through performances such as his self-imprisoned state in *Onto Skin*. The body as a vessel: the skin as a container, these 'literal tangibles' are ideas about the body and self that were translated through performance residue and the effect of the absent body that integrated a constancy of metaphorical associations with the land, as seen in *Five Sights*, *Vessels and Containers*. The psychological implications of *Journey of the Sensitive Cripple* are apparent in the title and premise of the installation. The broken or damaged body was a semiotic site of both unease and astute connection to the metaphorical interchange between land and body. Drummond's socio-political and aesthetic attitude differs from that of Mealing in that his focus has remained on the magical capacity of the art object, and the dichotomy inherent in both protecting and mining the Earth's resources. Mealing's *Sting/Stung*, however, displayed a similar healing impulse to Drummond's, as both artists articulated a shared need to create a spiritual basis from which humanity's intellectual growth could be sustained. Drummond's deliberation of the manifold shapes that energy can provoke has continued to inform his practice. His fascination with the coal mining industry

⁴ A. W. Metcalf 'Doorways', *Janus Head*, Vol 3, No. 2, 2000, p. 6. World wide web archive.

and the metaphorical associations inherent in the idea of fuel, provide a sculptural language that encompasses not only the technological, kinetic precision of recent sculpture such as *Assignment Device*, but also a deep analysis of the accompanying layers of history and geologies.

Photographic or textual residue of the performance moment was recognised by all three artists to be crucial to the content and meaning in their work. In Chapter Three Di ffrench's performance and sculpture were seen to lead ultimately into performative photographic studies of complex associations with gender and culture and an intense sculptural process of manipulating matter and perspective. Ffrench's equivocal position on the subject of sexuality and gender resided in the liminal element of openness and exchange. Ffrench's photographic message echoed a wider international interest in the use of photography to explore identity politics and the current of the gaze as also seen in the work of American artists Cindy Sherman and Carolee Schneemann. The Greek word for theatre 'theatron' translates as 'gaze'; indeed ffrench created tableaux not unlike a theatrical set awaiting a spectator. It is also interesting to relate this notion to her series *Image Seeking Its Text* in which the theatre of the non-body is represented by organic matter. The gaze is returned by a body image/text, and the gaze is deflected back onto the viewer in a cyclic ritual of interpretation and reversibility of perception. 'Perhaps 'world' and image would reveal our folly in believing that it is we who possess the image when the image has all along possessed us'.⁵

The photograph provided the prime repository of meaning for ffrench; yet there is also a correlation between Drummond and ffrench in their sculptural interest in body trace and absence. Ffrench's installation *Hanging Diaries*, the cibachrome series *Image Seeking Its Text* and Drummond's skin-sloughing motifs and body casts in works such as *Cycles/Stages* and *From the Valley of the Shadow* all exhibited the 'body as having been there before', with an emphasis on the infra-thin element of the fourth dimension. This notion of the infra-thin corresponds with the significance that the artists gave to the actual

⁵ Editorial 'The Image' *Janus Head* Vol, 3 No. 2. p. 2. World wide web archive.

moment of production. This in itself indicates a seemingly intangible moment, but conveys how they experienced the self and the world.

A concern for the environment, apparent in Drummond and ffrench's installations for the Aramoana protest, united them in a political stance against exploitation of natural resources. This commonality in their oeuvres also highlighted a desire to transcend the expression of an individual ego, to instead seek to communicate a more encompassing and harmonious ecological order. They both understood ecology to be the basis of negotiation; saw global problems as culturally and mutually shared, and recognised ecology to be the link and prime motivator towards resolving economic decisions. Ecological and human tragedy learnt at Tiannamen Square, the ongoing Middle East crisis and conflicts in Ireland and Bosnia and the recent environmental threats imposed by Global Warming are unfortunately indicative of our inability to survive with anything other than a tragic non-visionary understanding of the planet. As Buckminster Fuller observed in 1969:

It is probable that during that one-third of a century of the curtain raising of the 21st Century the number of boo-boos, biased blunders, short-sighted misjudgements, opinionated self-deceits of humanity will total, at minimum, six hundred trillion errors.⁶

The special operational properties of symbol have been particularly strong in the three artist's work, and indeed are not uncommon to the overall aims of performance art. From this notion of symbol evolved a weave of positional associations that were realised through political, transformative or cyclic action. The mutual socio-political thread, in their aesthetic considerations were manifested in such work as Mealing's; *Blood the River of Life*, *Crucifixion* and *Wasteland*, Drummond's *Filter Action* and *The Grass is Greener* and ffrench's *Fontanel*, *Gut Reaction* and *The Opinion*. Their symbolic use of blood - seen in ffrench's *The Opinion* 'the blood of the workers' (red paint), Mealing's *Blood the River*, (blood donors) and to a certain extent Drummond's use of animal blood and the colour red - form a connection, a unified representation of

⁶ Buckminster Fuller, 'Man's Changing Role in Universe', *Liberations, New Essays on the Humanities in Revolution*, p. 211.

blood letting, sacrifice, suffering, sanguification, and a journey toward the light of knowledge (redemption). Other symbols that resonate in the collective view of their work centre on phenomenological activations of seer and seen, inner and outer states of experience such as the use of skin, filters, shelters and membrane in Drummond and ffrench's performances, sculpture and photography. Arte Povera materials, such as newspaper, bread, dung, kidneys and grass in Mealing's *Water/Colours/Dung* and *Wasteland*, grass and newspapers in Drummond's *The Grass is Greener* and *Filter Action* and ffrench's newspaper stack in *The Opinion*, were transformed through the technique of bricolage into socio-political commentary. The artist's body as a medium of political interpretation as evident in Mealing's *Crucifixion*, Drummond's *Suspension/Ascension* and *Crucifixion* and ffrench's *The Idea Becomes Extinct* and *Taking Possession*, unveiled the modernist tendency to alienate the corporeal processes by which art is created. The nudity issue in their work was controversial for all three artists. The body truly felt, corporeally and spiritually, became a literalised metaphor for vulnerability, spiritual presence and political confrontation.

Piero Manzoni's series of pneumatic air sculptures (1959) and *Artist's Breath* (1960) in which breath is contained within the membrane of balloons, illustrate the transient nature of the body and the instability of the fleeting moment. Over time these balloons or 'bodies of air' have slowly deflated collapsing onto their wooden plinths 'so providing a relic of the dead artist's body'.⁷ The body of the artist presents itself as more than an instrument of action, it contributes to a lifetime of consciousness and memory and Mealing, Drummond and ffrench discovered that, as you confront your body you face your psyche as well. Although Manzoni's *Artist's Breath* has poignantly altered over time, the body is a cause of sensation that is immediate in its creation of both past and future considerations. Mealing's installation *Breath*, a provocative expose of the questionable status of the art object, revealed air to be tactile, an 'invisible' polarity to the physicality of paint and canvas. Similarly, the life

⁷ *The Artist's Body*, Phaidon, London, 2000, p. 163.

impulse of breath meditation was articulated in ffrench's *Gut Reaction*, a performance that responded to the human dilemma of opposing factions in Ireland. Drummond's *For Beating and Breathing* installation resonates, too, with confrontation in an uneasy rite of inhale/exhale in a tenuous world of exchange between land/body, city/nature, life/death.

The death of Di ffrench in May 1999 has yet to be felt in New Zealand art history. The 'feeling of time passing', acutely relayed by ffrench in her performances and photography, signalled, (like all else in our lives), changing conditions. In life and art she engaged in conversations with death and by doing so she has taught us a little more about life. Her absence is representative of the precariousness of 'the performable plan' of the breath of art, yet the trace and memory left behind in the thresholds of performance art can still keep evolving into a new state of 'becoming'. Our memory of the psychic dimension of the other, therefore, constitutes a powerful renewal, and in the journey of performance art in New Zealand, a sense of completeness.

The range of Mealing, Drummond and ffrench's liminal and littoral experiences of art and life resonated with a myriad of implications, with imagination and social reality, with the autobiographical and prophetic. Their breath, movement and imagination echoed with the sound and flux of the ocean. Such attentiveness to the peripheral parts of our surroundings and ourselves resulted in performance, sculpture and photography, less clearly framed than the theatrical or painterly arts, thus lending themselves more readily to the insights waiting in the threshold.

Appendix: One

ANZART

ANZART 1981, inaugurated by Ian Hunter, grew out of the Side/FX, *Prime Export* initiative and this major exchange between New Zealand, Australian and other international artists continued until its unfortunate demise in 1985. The first ANZART event took place at the Christchurch Arts Centre and included artists, Mike Parr, Bonita Ely, Dom de Clario, Ulay and Marina Abramovic, Claire Fergusson, Phil Dadson, Andrew Drummond, Chris Cree-Brown, Di ffrench and David Mealing. The 1981 ANZART was the first time in New Zealand that performance and installation had come together on an a large scale. The exchange between artists highlighted experimental and diverse processes of art. Expatriate artist Claire Fergusson performed *Primeval Woman Emerging from the Sludge*, the Dunedin based artist Di ffrench *Fontanel*, European body artists Ulay and Marina Abramovic, *Witnessing*, and Australian performance artist Mike Parr gave a lecture entitled *Artaudian Gnosticism*. There were slide talks, musical concerts, Australian and New Zealand video and audio arts, experimental film and an exhibition of artists' books.

The 1983 ANZART in Hobart further consolidated overseas connections and a group of New Zealand artists taking part included Di ffrench, Mary Louise Brown, John Cousins, Andrew Drummond, Stuart Griffiths, Colleen Anstey and Peter Roche and Linda Buis. Drummond, John Rose and Steve Turpie performed *Grafting*, a healing ritual for ailing trees in the inner city; ffrench performed *Asters* and Dadson *Jetty*.

In 1984 artists affiliated with the previous ANZART forums travelled to Edinburgh to perform in the Edinburgh International Festival of the Arts as part of a wider contingency of international experimental art. Andrew Drummond and the Group *From Scratch* participated as did film and video artists Gregor Nicholas and Peter Wells. However, only one woman was included in the selection, despite the claims for open democratic processes and visibility of alternative artists. John Cousins performed the eloquent (seven hours long)

Membrane at Edinburgh,¹ which consisted of sculptural components glass perspex, clear polythene and the artist's own body. Two 'complementary expressive systems' - fluid (water and urine) and gas (inhaled and exhaled air) were passed through his body, which served as an "organic transformer of the sound making resource".² The pitched percussion resulting from the artist's urinary cycle passing through sounding reeds and activating sounding drums was random and linked intrinsically to the biological and personal rhythms of the artist's body. The 'pressure dome' to which the sounding reeds were attached was visually arresting and evoked a quietly luminous chamber of hiatus. The English Press however, did not appreciate the expressive quality of the work and Cousins found himself the centre of a tabloid expose criticising the funding for an artist to travel half way around the world in order to 'pee in front of an audience'. *Membrane's* classical and abstract quality however, provided a catalyst for other performance work.³ The 1984 Edinburgh experience as with Hobart, strove to maintain the Trans-Tasman links established in the late 70s with a view to promoting New Zealand art in the broader international scene. Ian Hunter had since withdrawn from the administrative responsibilities and had moved to London, but still supported the event maintaining the importance of artist control and non-institutional planning for the continuing success of the biannual forum.

In such a small and relatively isolated country like New Zealand there exists a very real danger that mainstream or officially sanctioned art orthodoxies can become too powerfully located in central arts administrative thinking and institutional/cultural planning. So that they inevitably, even unwittingly, squeeze out or effectively suppress those ideas, cultural processes and individuals who don't appear to conform to the accepted norms. In this sense ANZART and artists events should by their very nature, be continually seeking to challenge the assumptions we hold about ourselves as a nation and cultural community, an attitude which is by definition also the essence of a healthy, open and democratic society...⁴

¹ Previously performed in Dunedin as part of *New Art in Dunedin* (1984).

² John Cousins, 'Membrane a Description of a Performance', *New Art in Dunedin*, 1984.

³ *Bowed Piece* (1986) in particular combined basic bodily functions (an integration of muscular activity to generate octaves of heart beat) within a sculptural framework.

⁴ Ian Hunter, *Keeping the ANZART Idea Alive*: London, 27 March 1985.

ANZART 1985 in Auckland was the final event and by far the largest and most complicated. The unorganised administration for the event resulted in no real promotion or expertise to unify the event, and the theme *Time-Specific* seemed inappropriate given the artists' emphasis on exploring space and location.⁵ There was, however, a plethora of installations, artists' books, performance, sound, forums, artists' talks, exhibitions and evenings of film by more than 30 artists over a two-week period, despite strife and minimal funding. A weekend feminist seminar, an Art and Gender forum, and a hui held at the Whaiora Marae in Otara discussed cultural bias in the arts. Tracey Moffatt's film *Guniwaya Ngigu* documenting the land rights protests at the Brisbane Commonwealth Games elicited much media response, as did much of the Australian film, video and performance work.⁶

In Juliet Batten's *100 Women Project* issues of collaborative art, questions of hierarchy and democracy, balance between process and product were augmented by the group activity performed on Te Henga Beach. One hundred women built sand-forms together and performed rituals that built up a combined energy of sharing. The piece was gradually washed away by the tide, witnessed by the 100 women who had taken part. Ecological feminist performance and ritual was criticised during the 70s and 80s as being essentialist, reaffirming the binary opposition of biological determinism.

Ritual performance that celebrated nature and the biological body was criticised by Marxists and feminists within the artworld. The celebration of biological difference, the desire to return to one's instinctual or ancestral roots, and the heralding of a 'primitive' existence that was free of social repression were all considered to be ineffectual ways of promoting social change. Such critiques were a shift from the concerns of the counter-culture where change was to be implemented through lifestyle and alternative culture(s).⁷

⁵ See Pamela Zeplin's article 'Eruptions in Volcano City', *Artlink* Vol 5 Nos 3 & 4, August/September 1985, pp. 5-6.

⁶ There were some performances by Mike Sukolski, Arthur Wicks, Andrew Hayim, Bronte Edwards, Stuart Griffiths and the Japanese artists Junko Wada and Akio Suzuki, as well as an evening of performance video art.

⁷ Anne Marsh *Body and Self, Performance Art in Australia 1969-92* p. 151.

Batten's feminism defied these criticisms, her work dealt with previously 'taboo' subjects of domesticity, motherhood and the darker side of female sexuality. Batten, inspired by female artists and historians such as Lucy Lippard and Griselda Pollock, began teaching courses on women artists at Auckland University's Continuing Education Department combining practical art exercises, getting the women to explore the content of their own lives, and to work collaboratively. Out of these teaching exercises, art environments such as the *Menstrual Maze* (1983) and numerous sand projects were initiated. Batten was also instrumental in facilitating the Ponsonby Women's Outreach, a gallery environment for women, and she has studied and written extensively on the history of women's art.

Although ANZART has not been kept alive, its invaluable provision for the development of performance art in New Zealand and as an avenue for further risk taking in the arts during the 1980s, (after the demise of the Mildura Sculpture Triennial in 1978), created a nexus of activity beyond commercial enterprises.

Another project initiated by Ian Hunter and implemented by David Mealing, Stuart Griffiths, Barbara Strathdee, Mary Louise Brown and Vivienne Lynn, was the F.1. Sculpture Project,⁸ a five-week festival of installation, performance, seminars and video art held at the Teal Lemonade Factory in Wellington, 1982. The F.1. initiative arose out of a need to address the lack of support and to increase exposure for sculptors. A series of workshops were organised and materials were provided for making sculpture, performance and inter-media presentations. The large-scale space accommodated the diverse work of a greater portion of the artistic community in New Zealand. F.1., and promoted a greater public understanding of sculpture and the role of sculptors in the New Zealand cultural scene. Lack of funding for the arts was an issue addressed by ANZART and F.1., the 'self help' philosophy of these initiatives

⁸ Hunter developed this after the 1981 *Construction and Process* international Biennale, which was held in a disused Polish factory, and the solidarity movement *Artists and Filmmakers Union*, in Poland.

empowered artists to create relationships with potential sponsors in the business world. Working toward a common objective by pooling resources, time and energy the F.1. Project was a major event and an unqualified success in building a collectivity for future artists. Some artists to contribute included Greer Twiss, Don Driver, Pauline Rhodes, Stuart Griffiths, Jacqueline Fraser, Andrew Drummond, John Cousins, Jack Body, Chris Cree-Brown and Colleen Anstey. There was a ten hour poetry session, sound and songs, and evenings of dance and film. International participants to F.1. included David Kerr from the Experimental Art Foundation and Richard Demarco from Edinburgh. F.1. provided the opportunity to debate feminist issues in the arts and to address the problem of invisibility for women artists. The work of New Zealand women sculptors was advocated in a two-day seminar organised by Juliet Batten and Barbara Strathdee as well as work from the United States, Great Britain, Australia and Italy. A discussion of feminist goals resulted in the establishment of a National Women Artist's Association in 1986.

Appendix: Two

S M E L T

*Oboy I nearly blew up the pressure
cooker just now because I was
writing poetry*

*but caught it just
in time when the house was full of
smoke & it finally percolated through
to me sitting at my typewriter.*

*What impressed me was in fact the strength
of aluminium:*

*it so elegantly contained
the carbonisation of mutton hocks &
high degree of heat after the steam had
all blown out at a frighteningly elevated
temperature —*

*I mean if I had pressure
building up like that inside me I'd shatter,
& spray lethal shards everywhere,*

*but there
it was when I rushed out to the kitchen,
whistling & spinning & hot as hell, keeping
it all trapped, & gradually disintegrating
the meat inside.*

*Aluminium once smelted, it
seems, stays firmer than flesh, withstands all
shocks:*

*in an aluminium world, I suppose,
you'd not escape or go to gas & air, but
cook in your own juices till they cracked
black & stinking, murdered your sinews
& expired as dust.*

CILLA MCQUEEN

Appendix: Three

**IMAGE SEEKING
ITS' TEXT
TRACK ROSE FRAME
PROP ARROW THORN
WAR SECTION
IMPRINT DIVIDING
MEMORY LINES RUN
EMBLEM ENVIRONMENTAL
LIGHT STUDY
AUTUMN TRACK**

Di ffrench

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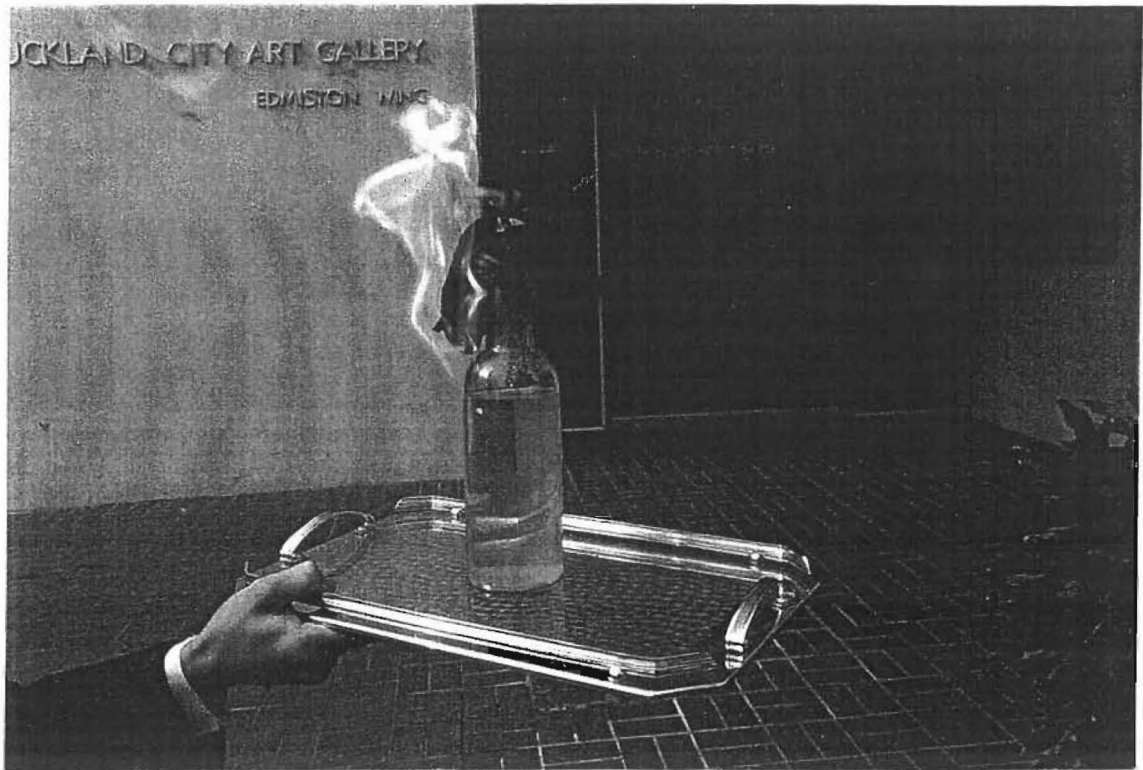
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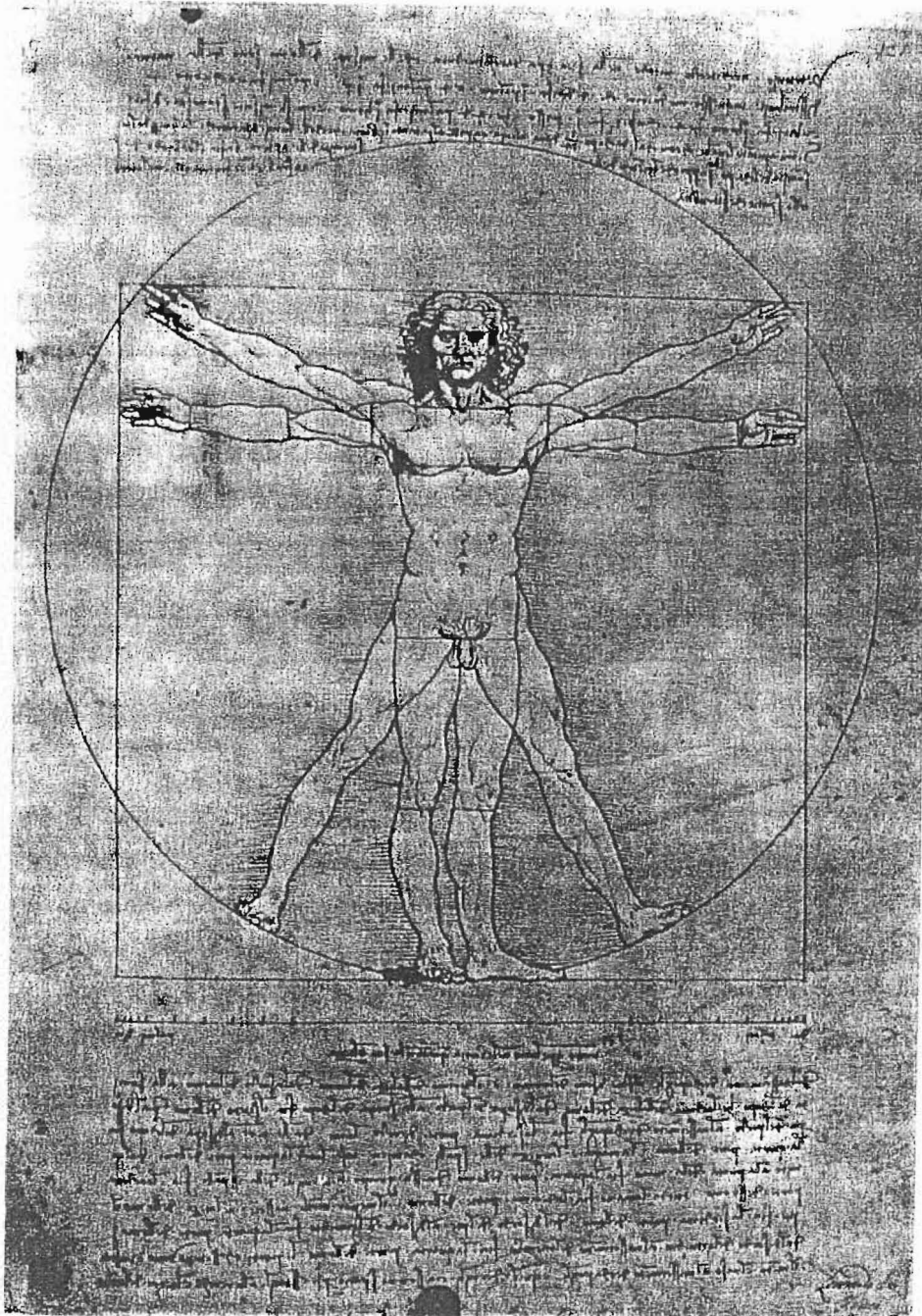


Illus 2.



Illus 3.

Blood the river of life



A Collective Art and Life Study

The ordinary man's art critic GARTH GILMOUR looks at the trendy vogue in art.

The emperor's new pose

The more we see of art, the more we are aware of the emperor's new pose, which is a pose of the emperor's new pose.

The emperor's new pose is a pose of the emperor's new pose, which is a pose of the emperor's new pose.

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Jumble sale art is "social commentary"

The jumble sale art is a social commentary on the art world, which is a social commentary on the art world.

Art Public Can't Buy But Will They Like It?

When the Billy Apple exhibition closed at the Auckland City Art Gallery in August, the artist left his works behind him.

The artist left his works behind him, which is a social commentary on the art world.



BILLY APPLE

MIDWEEK

By Mervyn Cull

The artist left his works behind him, which is a social commentary on the art world.

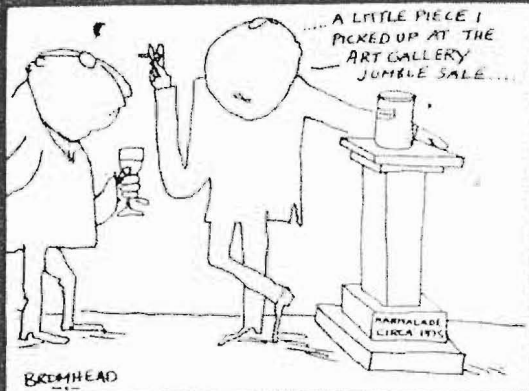
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BREEZHEAD

Back to Bovine Buttockery?

The artist left his works behind him, which is a social commentary on the art world.

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Art Gallery Use 'A Disgrace' And 'a Success'

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Curso Aid To Project In Tanzania

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Art Gallery Venue For Jumble Sale

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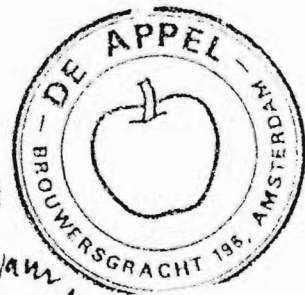
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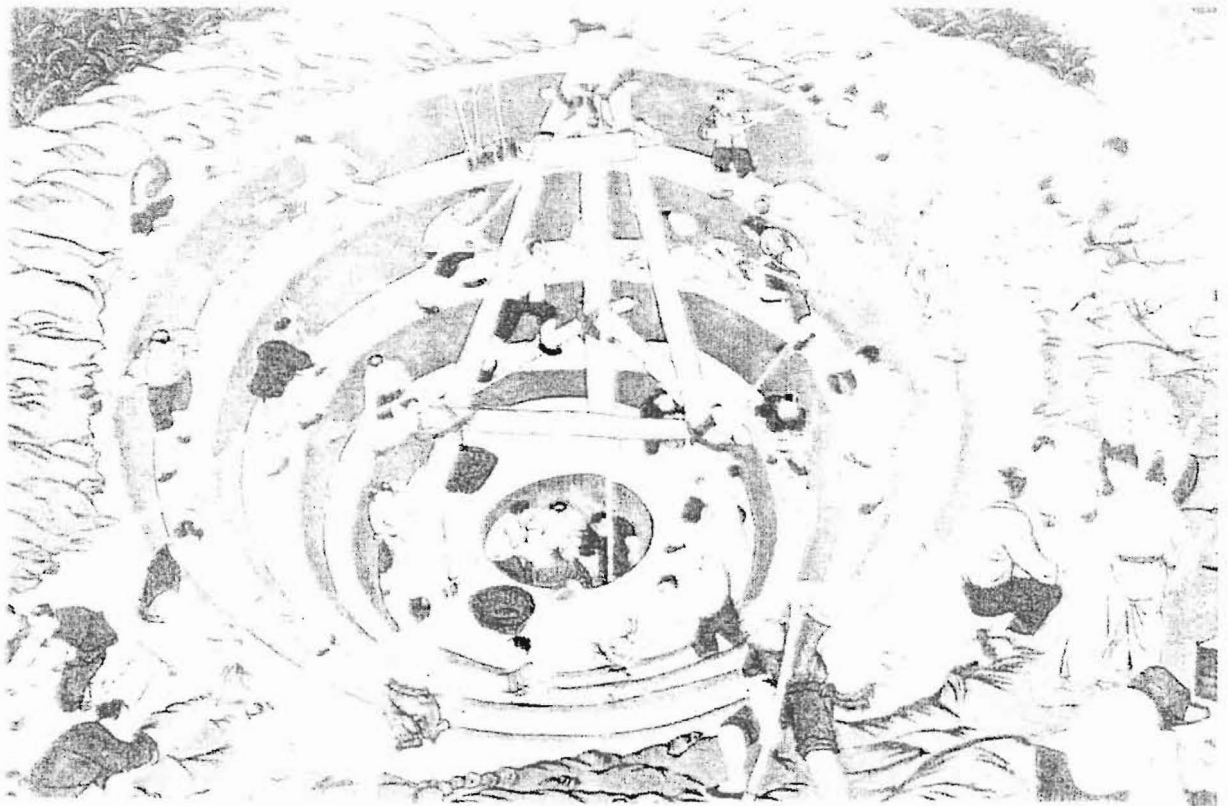
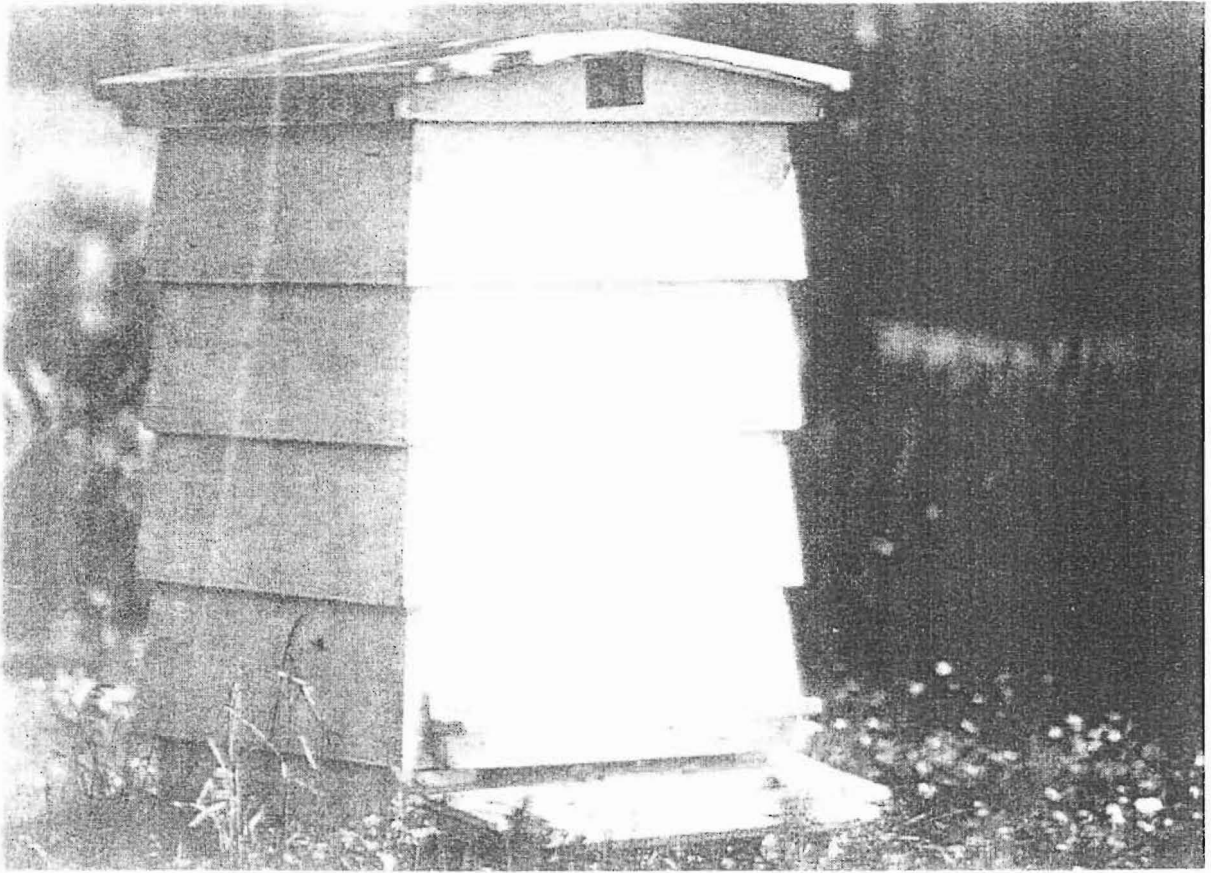
The artist left his works behind him, which is a social commentary on the art world.

Arnulf RAINER



VIDEO TAPES
EXPOSITIE: Foto werken, van 19 tot 30 Januari
19 JANUARI 1977, 20 uur
Stichting "de Appel", Brouwersgracht 196, Amsterdam,





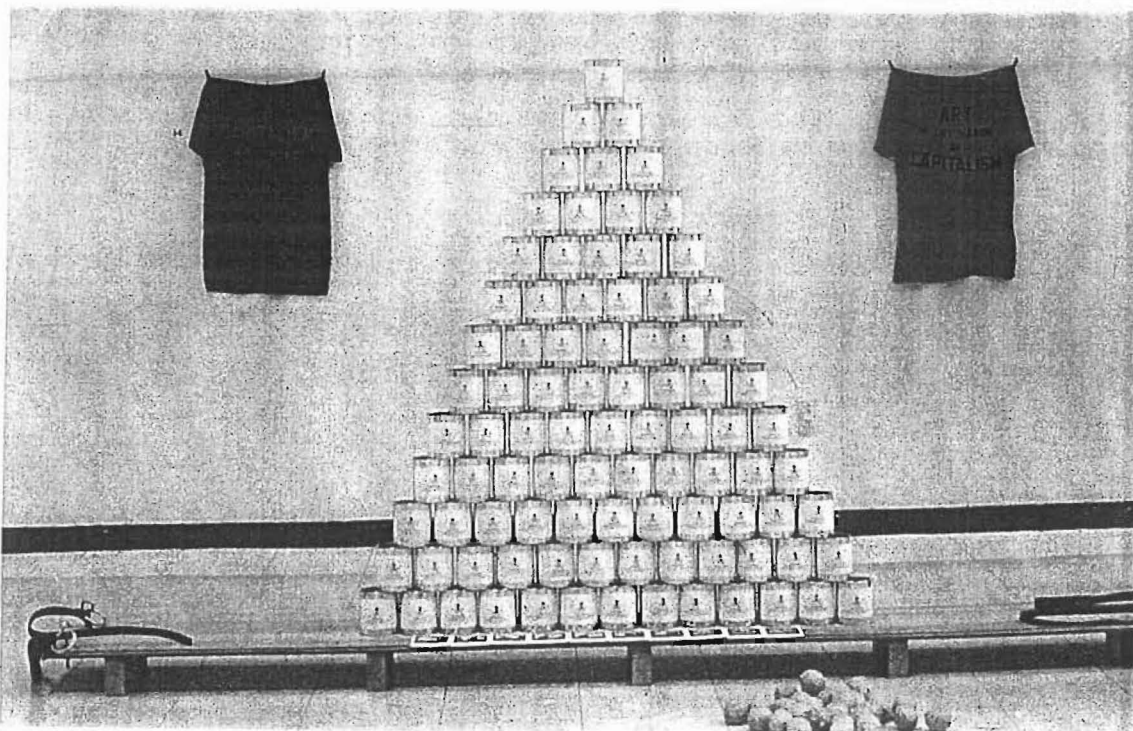
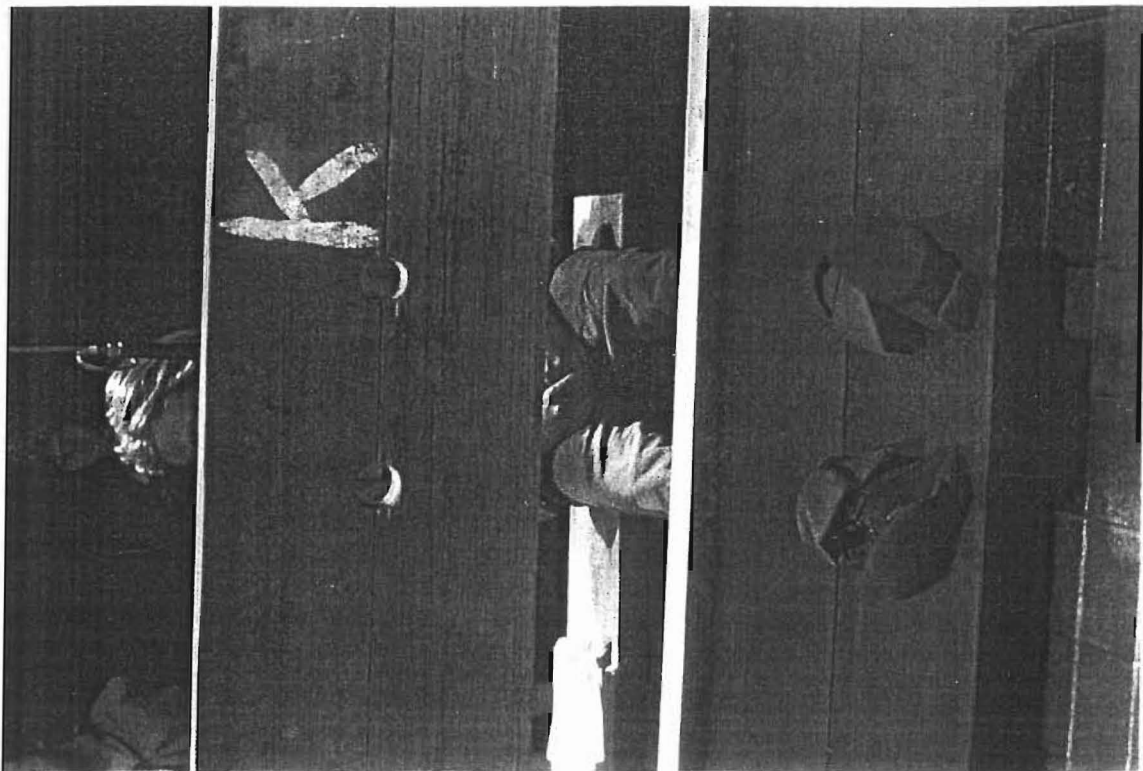
Illus 7.

DAVID MEALING CRUCIFIXION 22 APRIL – 14 MAY 1978

MANAWATU ART GALLERY 398 MAIN ST. P.O. BOX 565, PALMERSTON NORTH TEL. (063) 88188



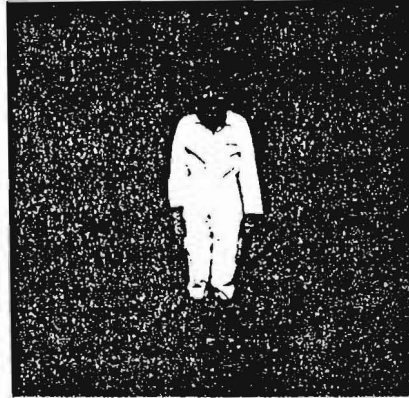
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Illus 9.
Illus 10.

ARTISTS CO—OP

136-740 Thordon Quay Wellington P.O. Box 6103 FURTHER INFORMATION 758840/842803



■ DAVID MEALING

'DESOLIATION...RQL'

A SOCIO - POLITICAL STATEMENT

SATURDAY 18TH NOVEMBER 1978

136-740 THORDON QUAY 3/FLOOR

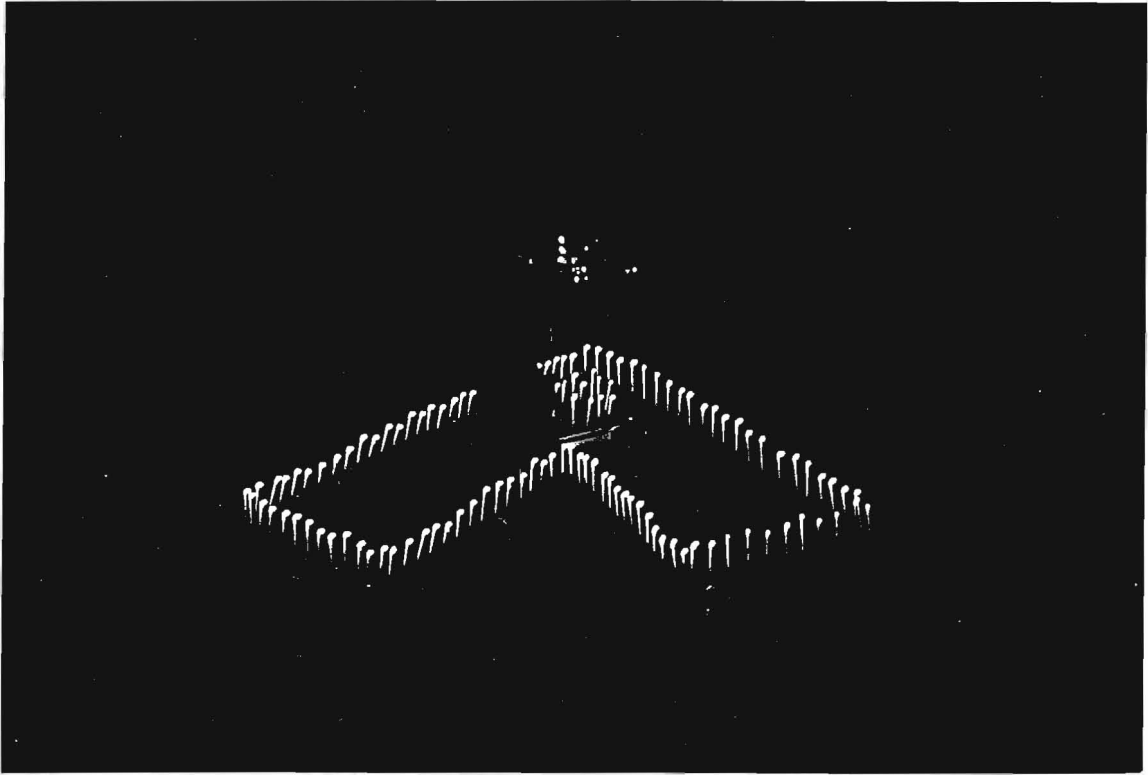
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PERFORMANCE 8.30PM.

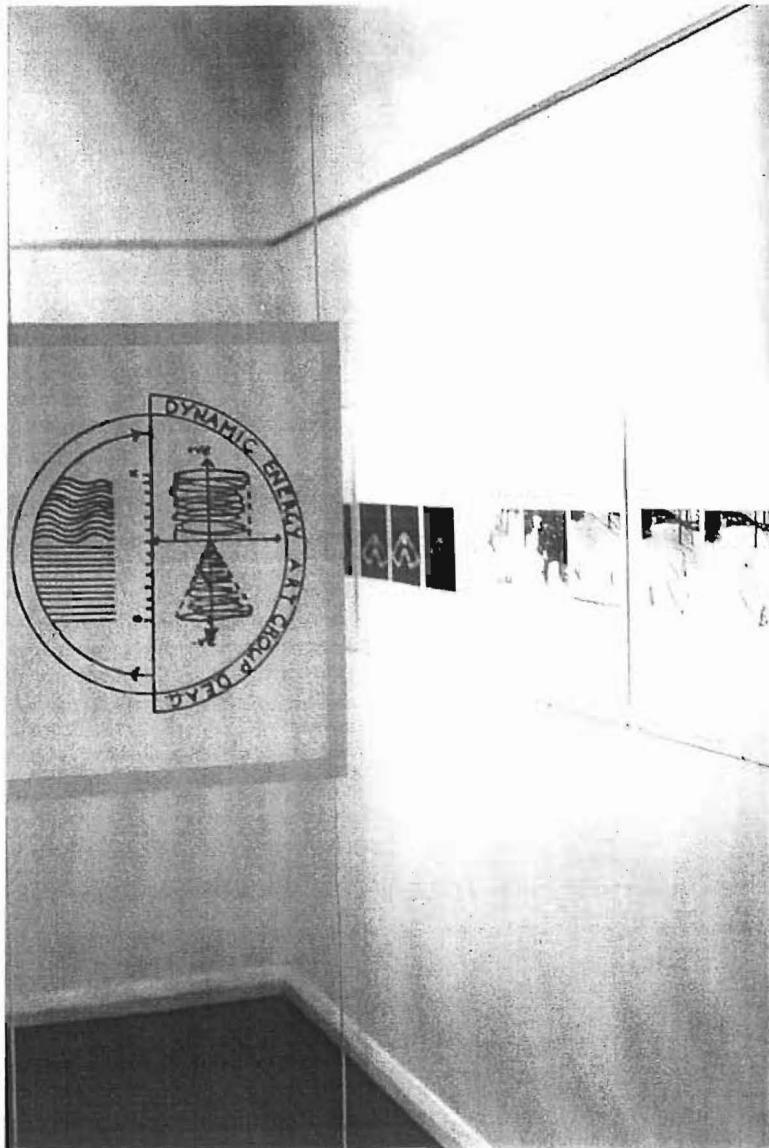
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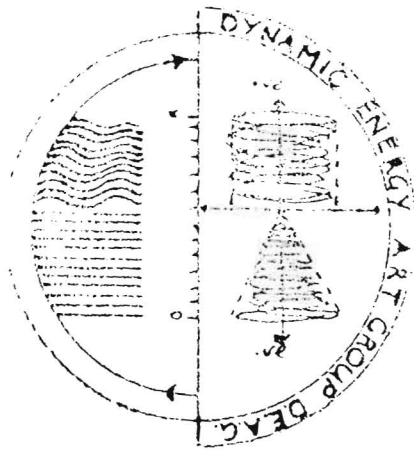
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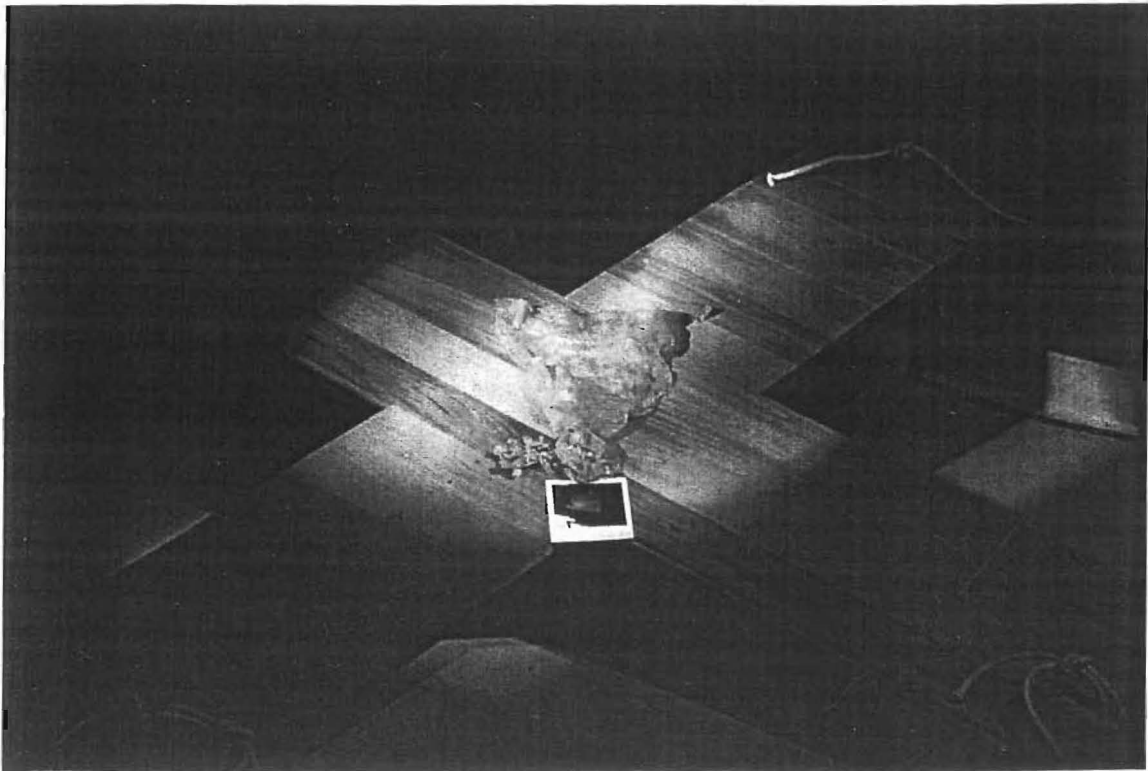
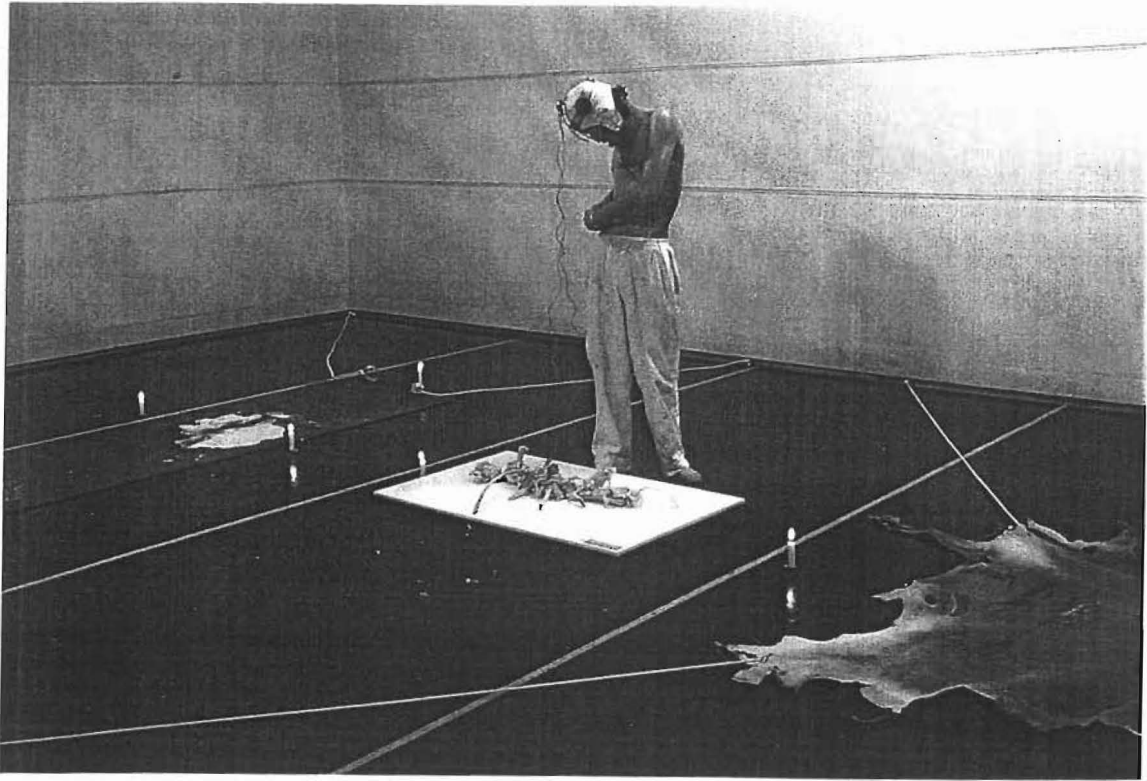
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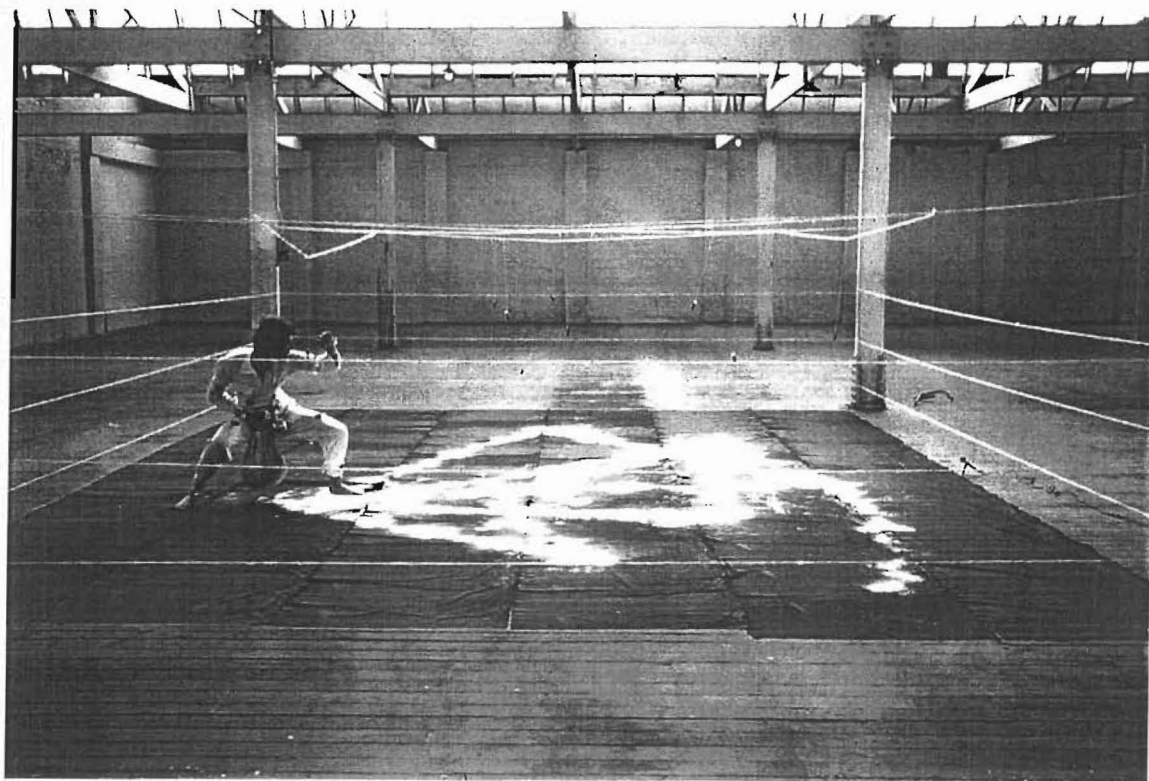
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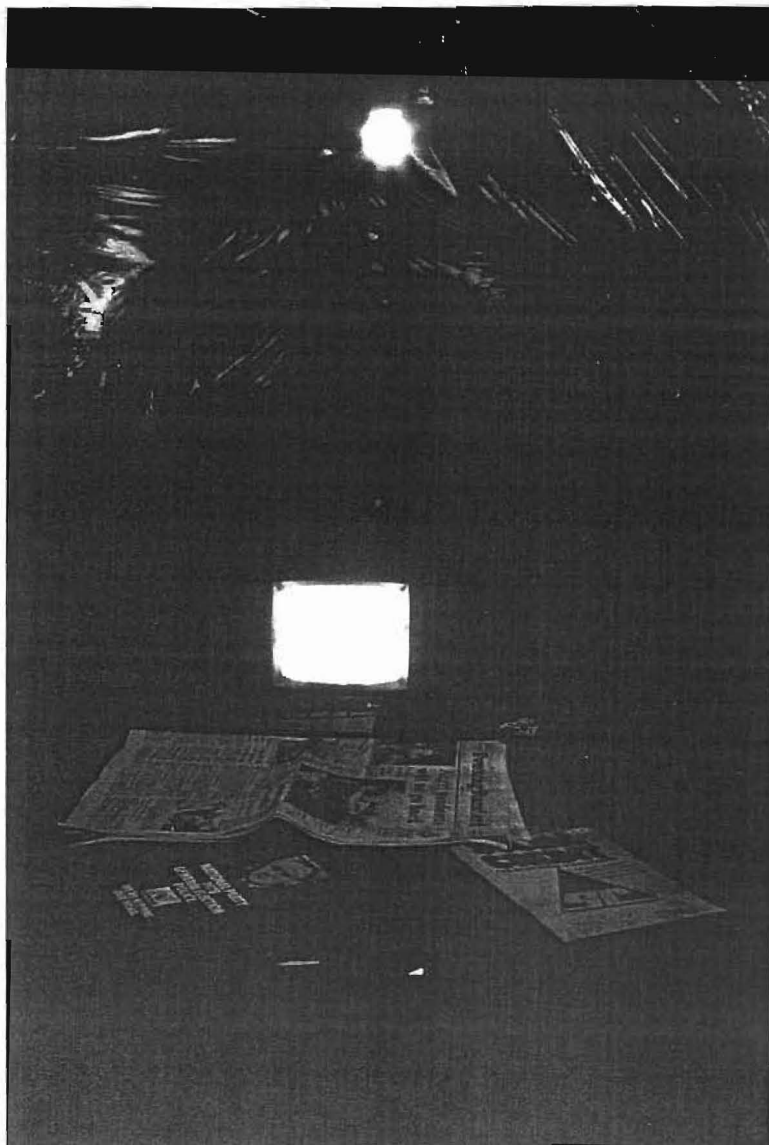
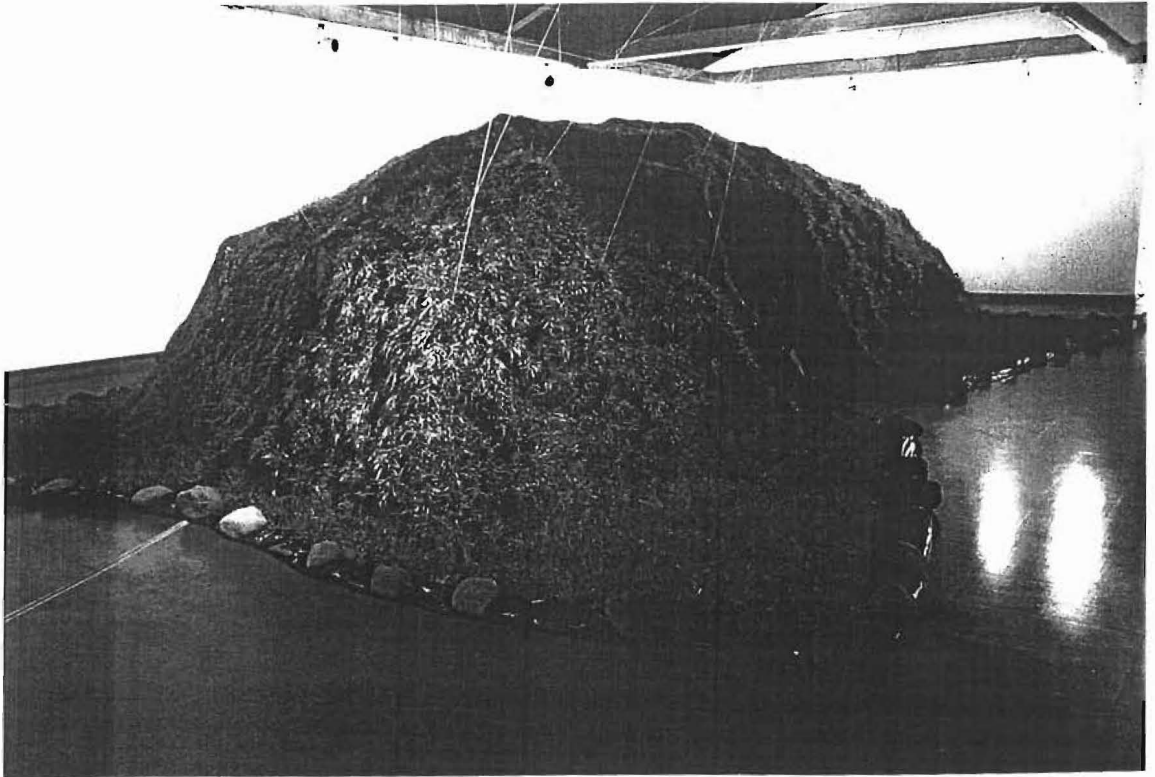
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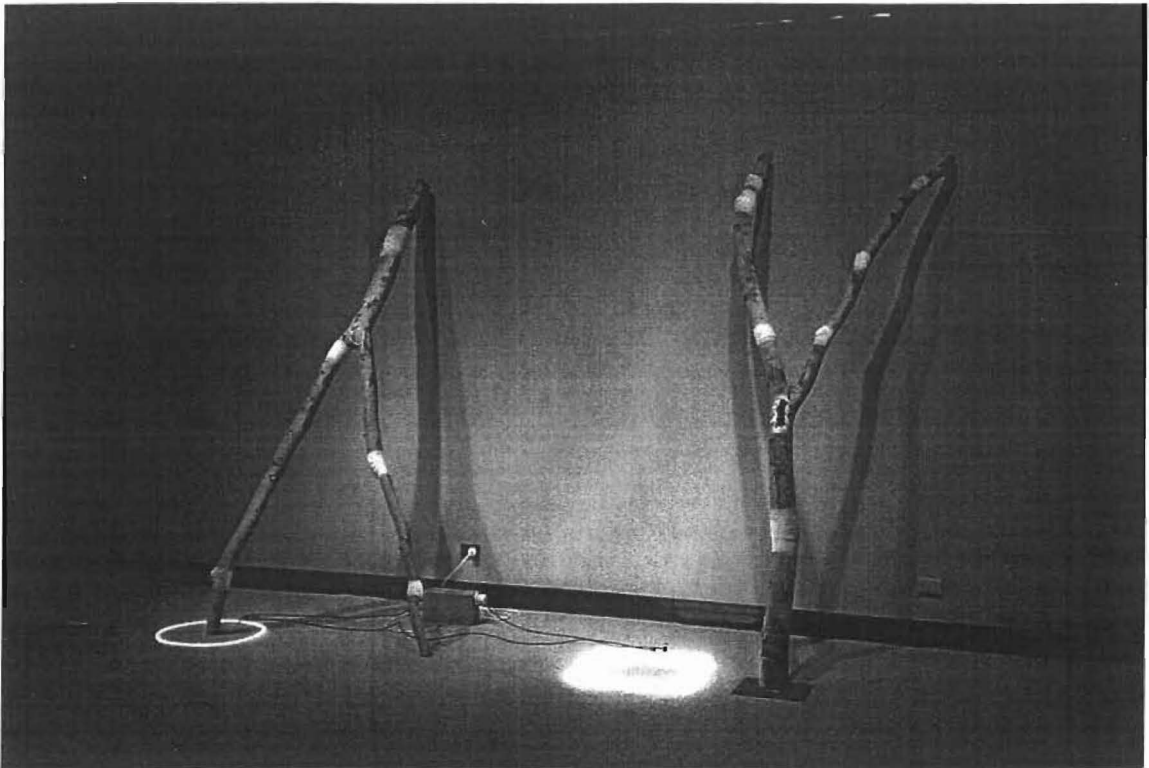
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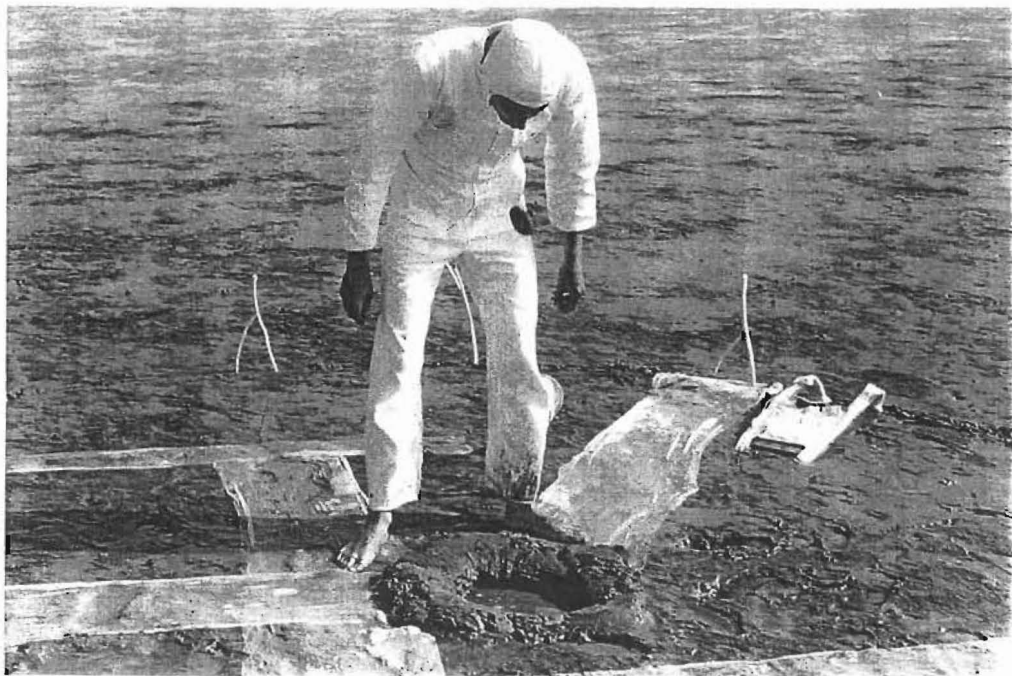
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Illus 22.



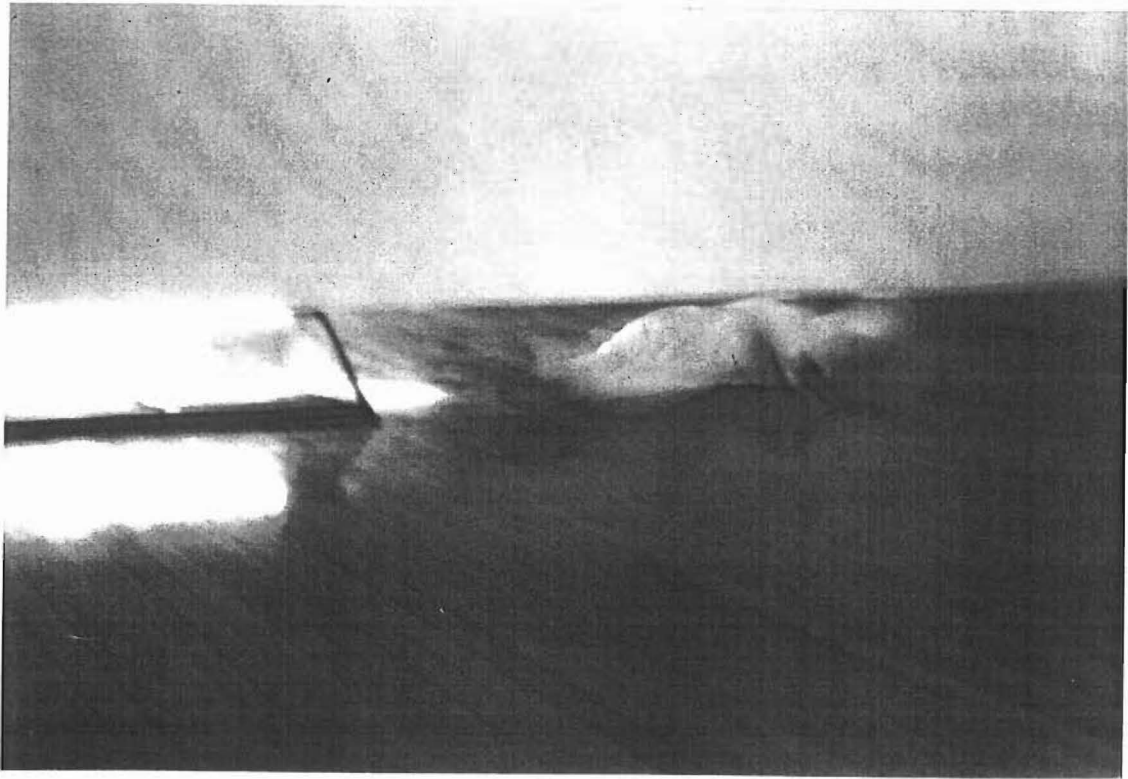
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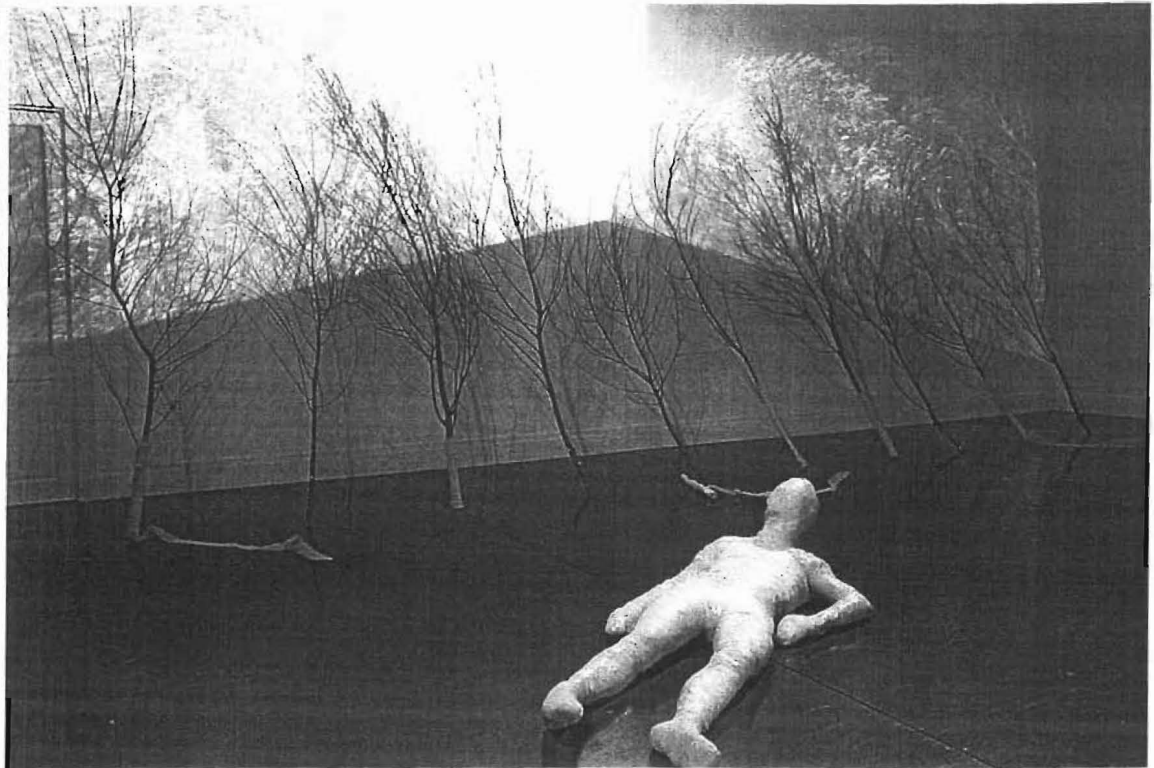
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Illus 26.



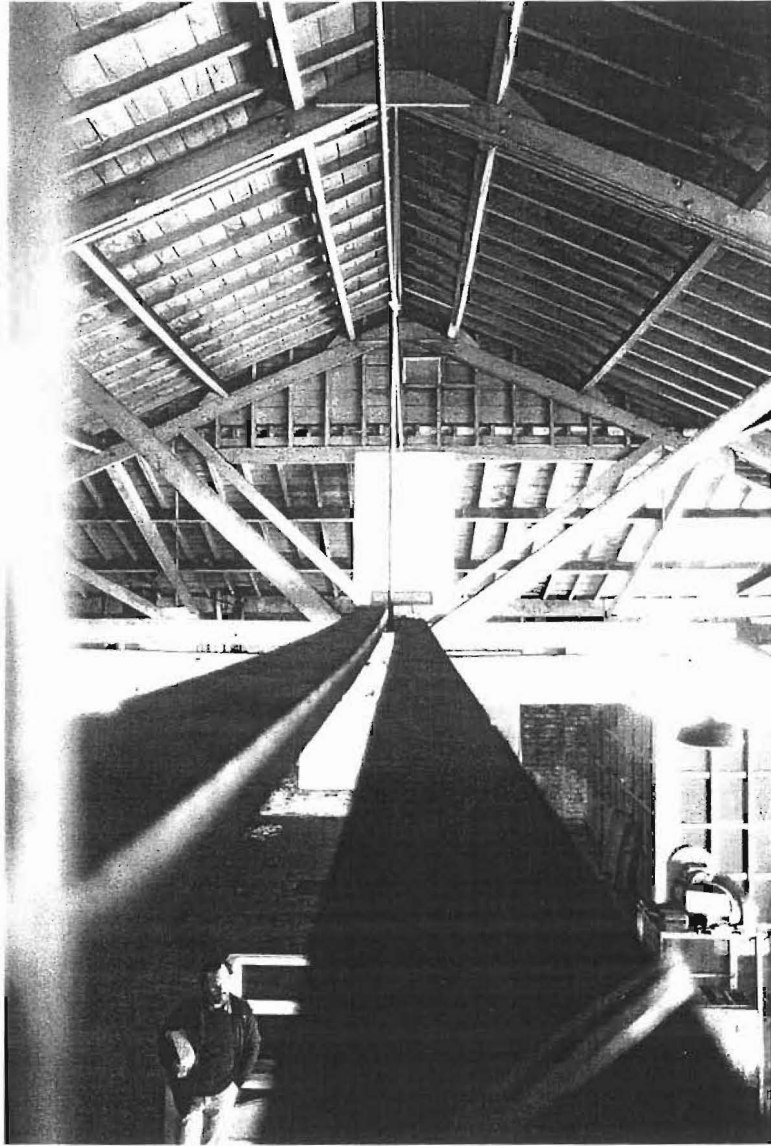
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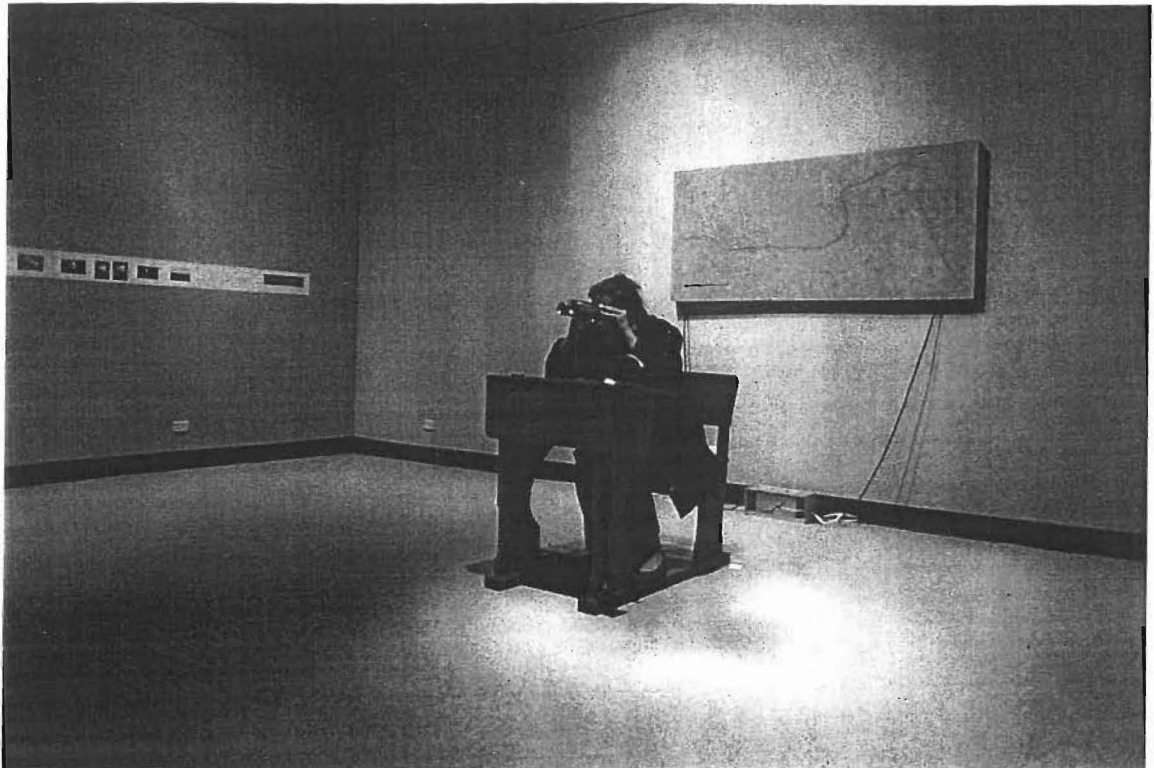
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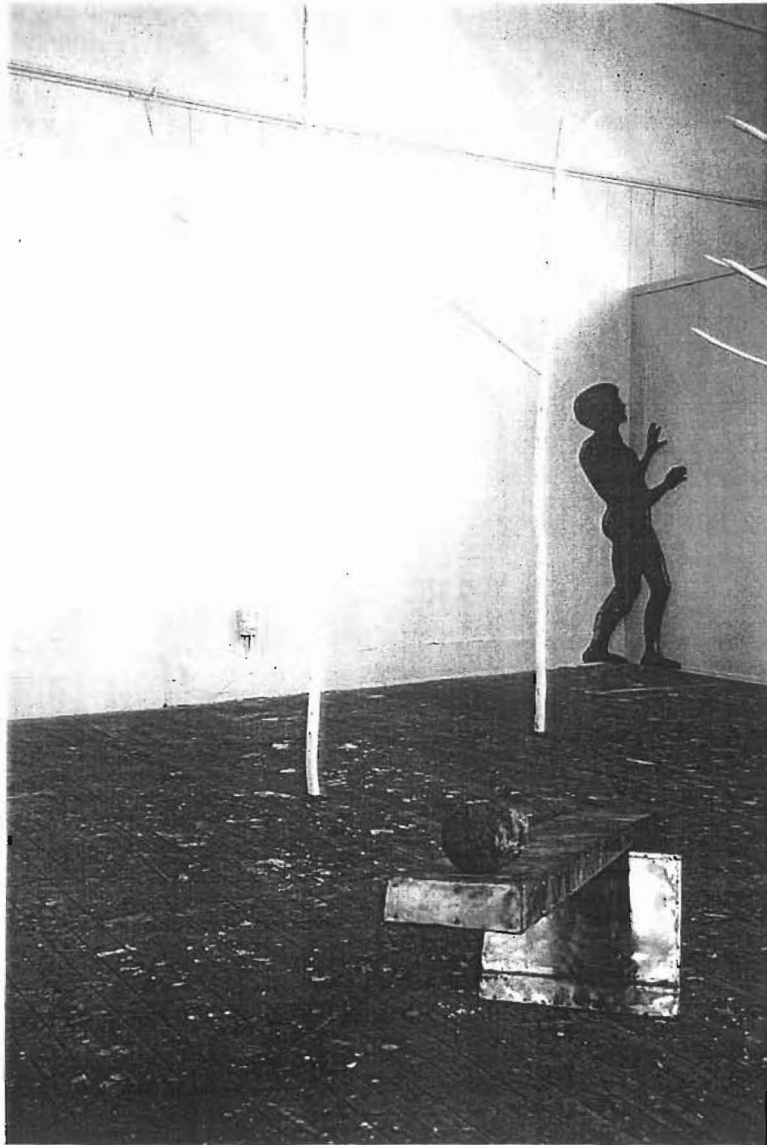
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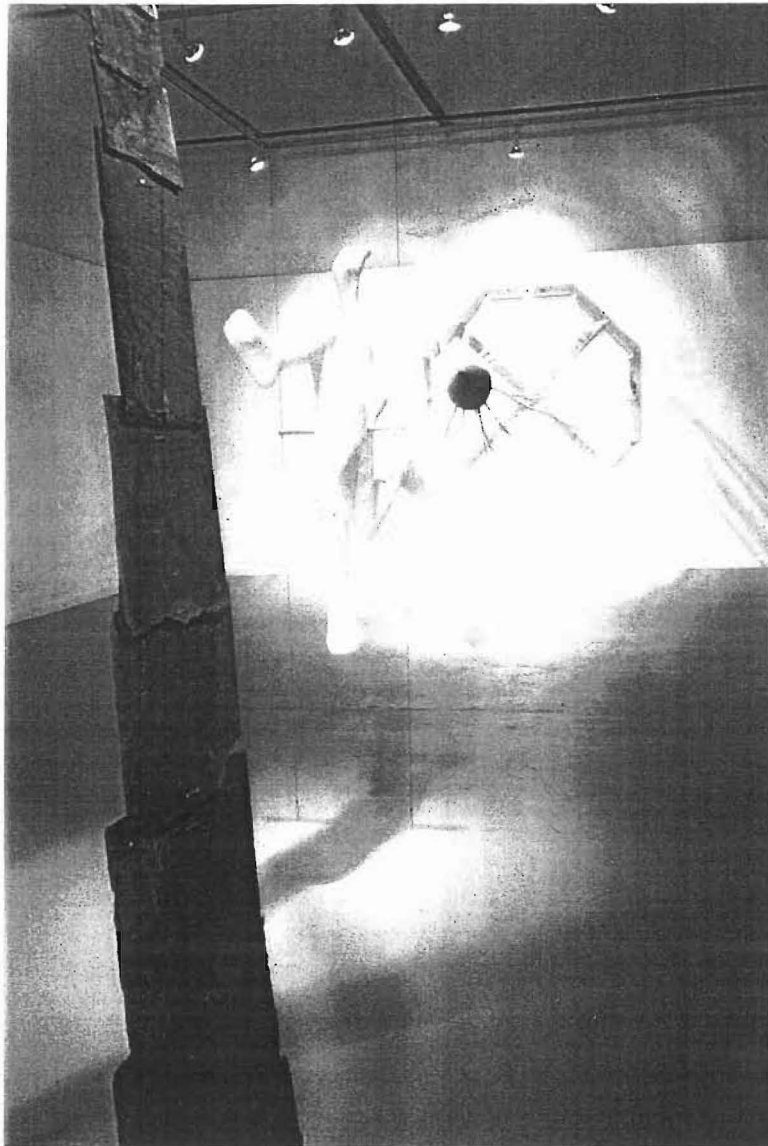
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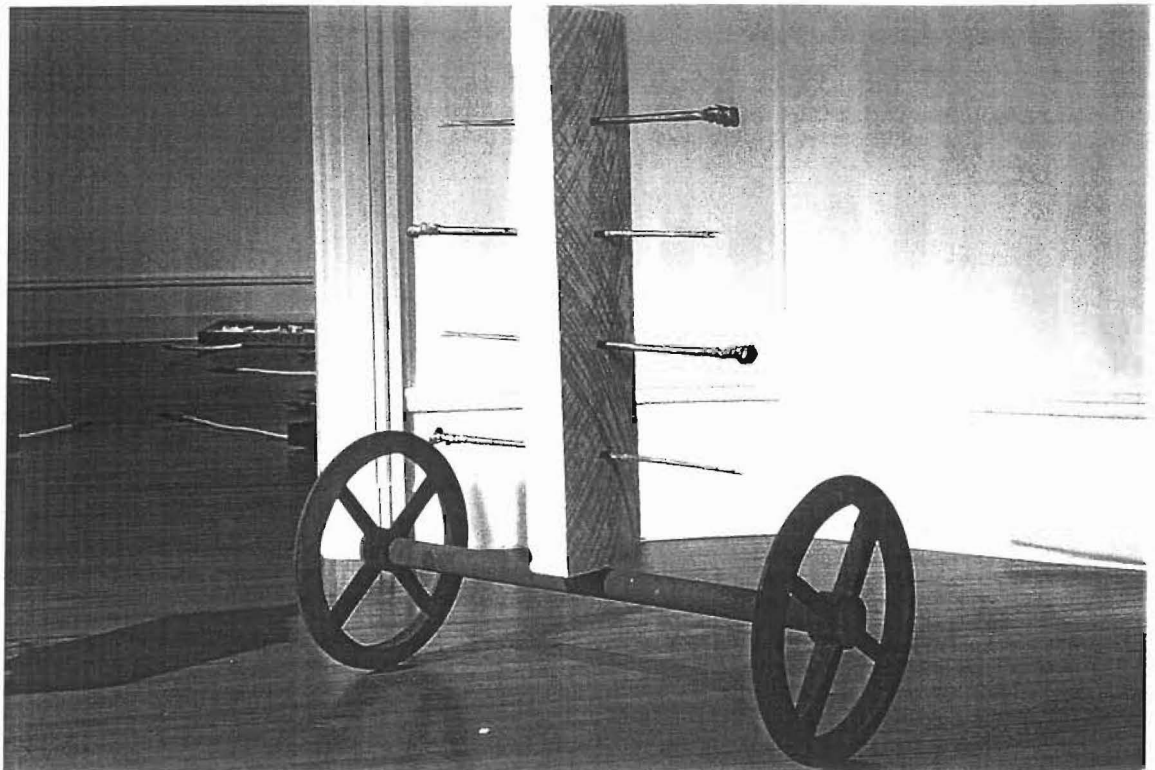
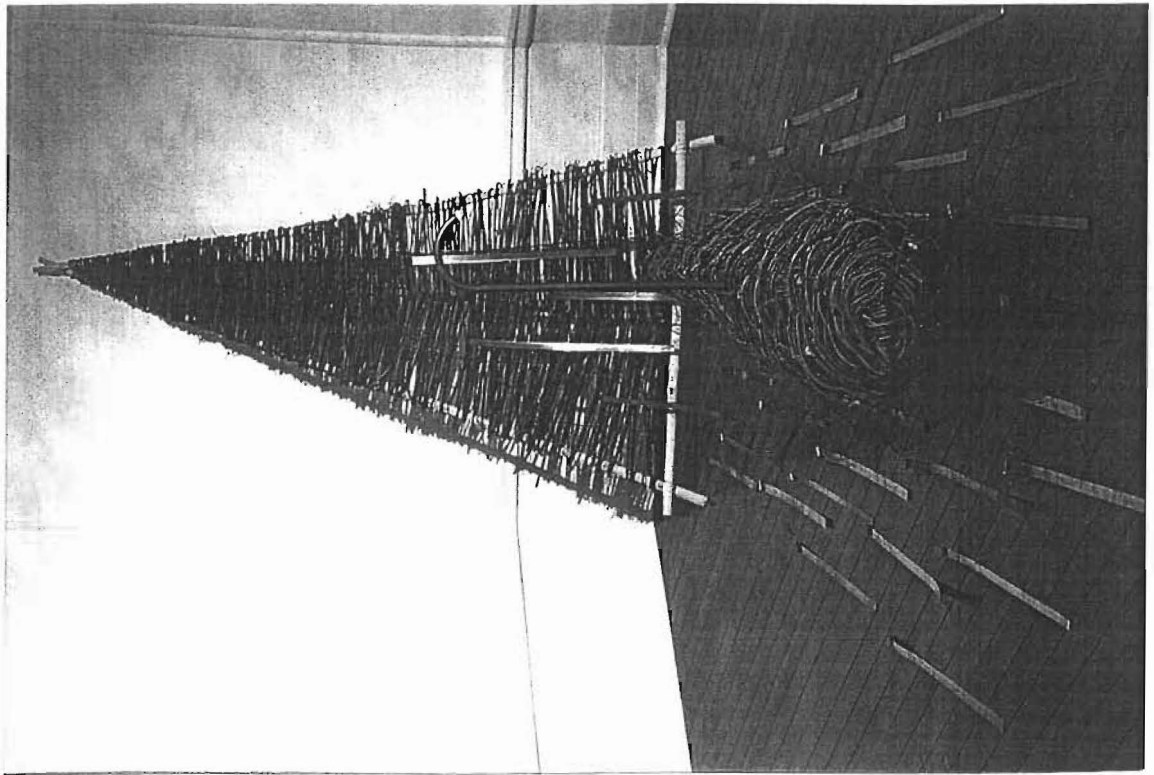
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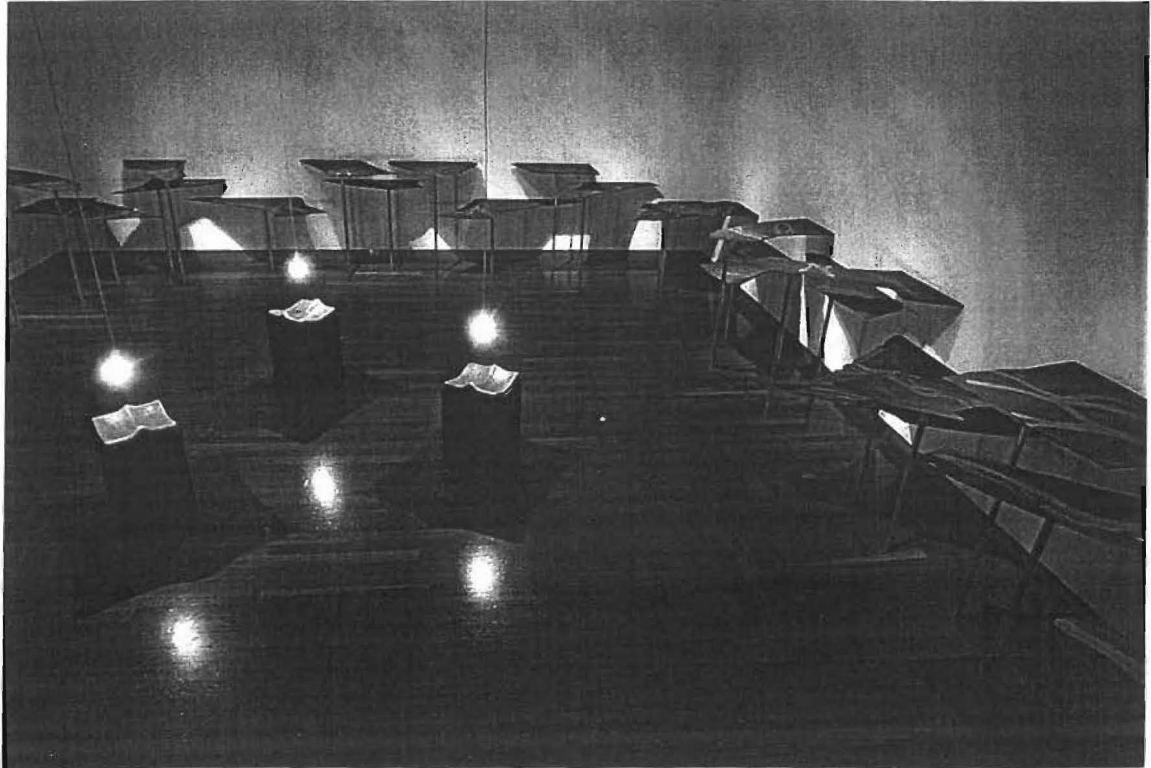
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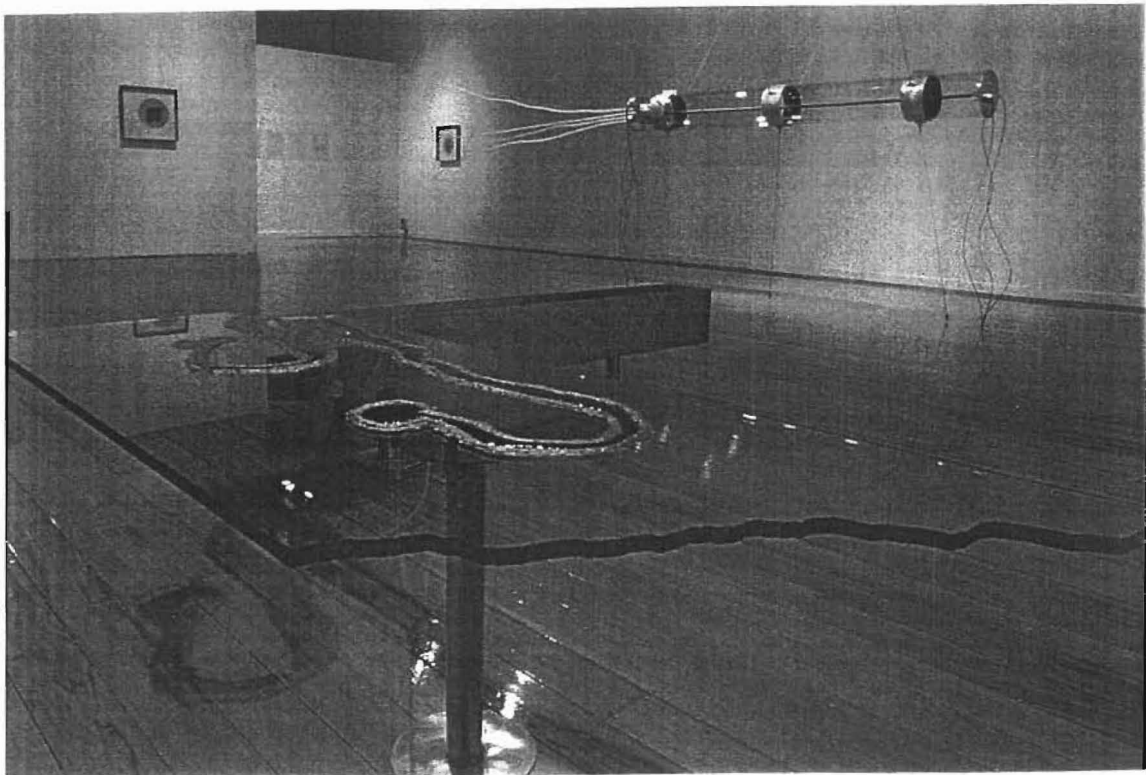
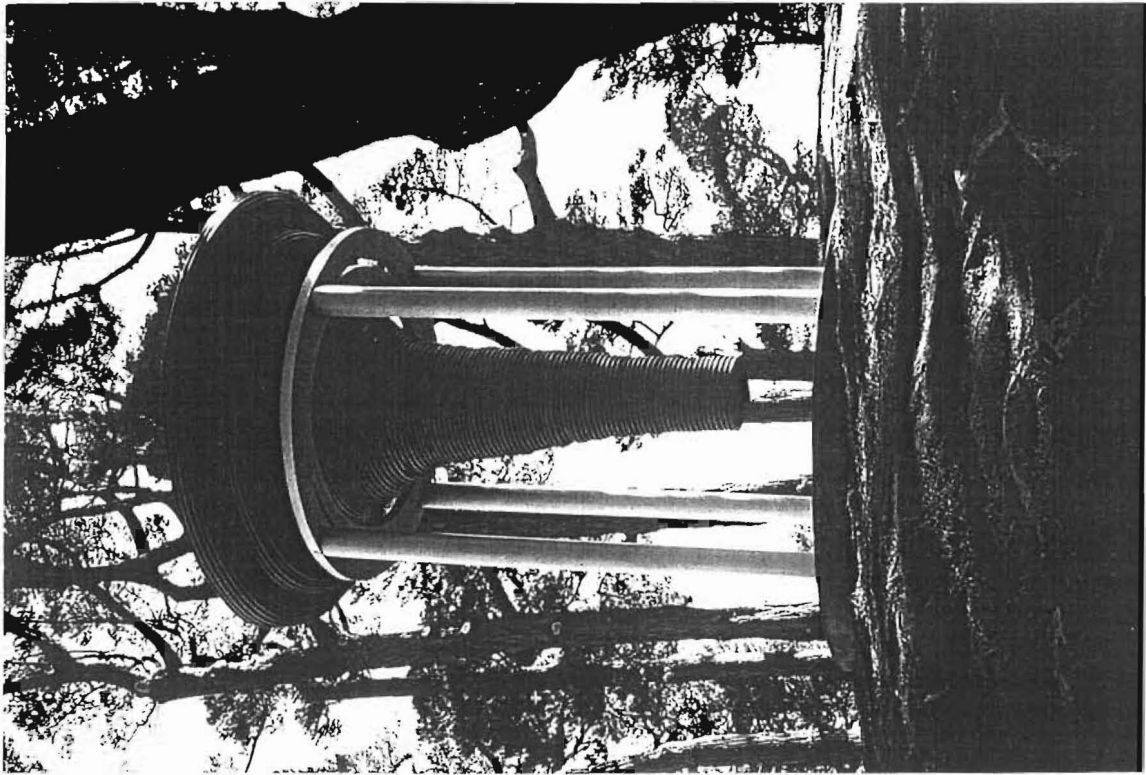
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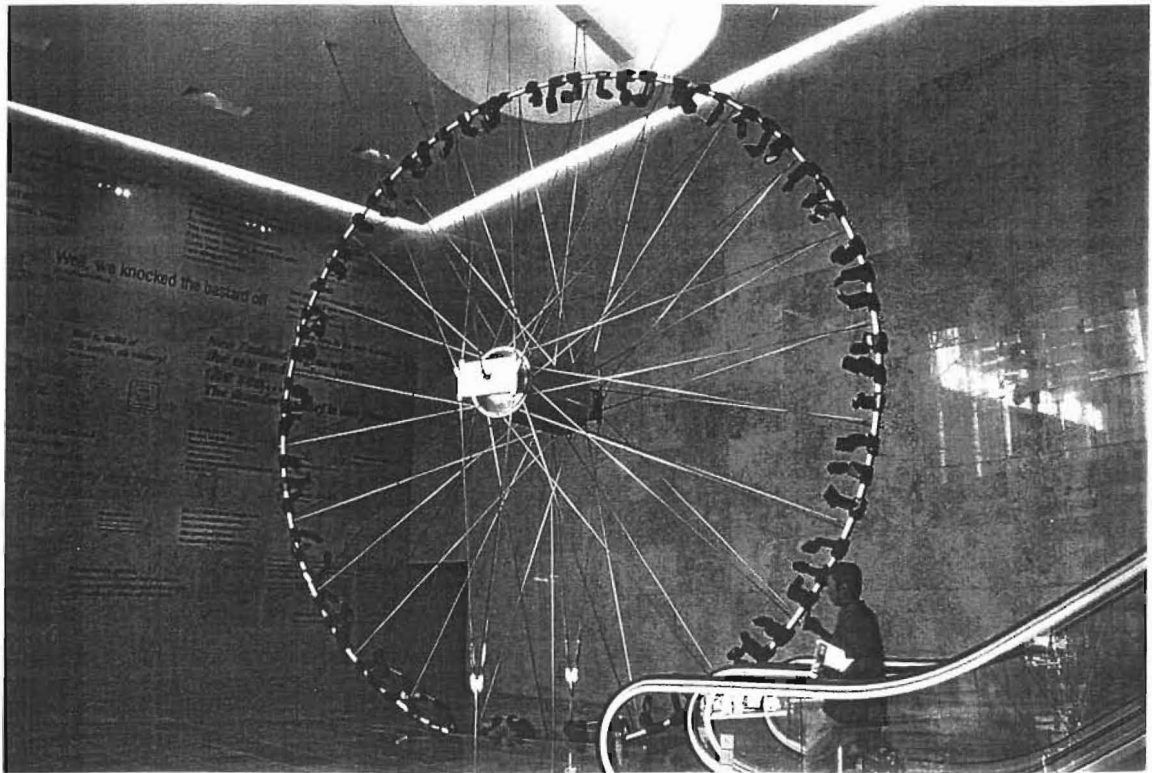
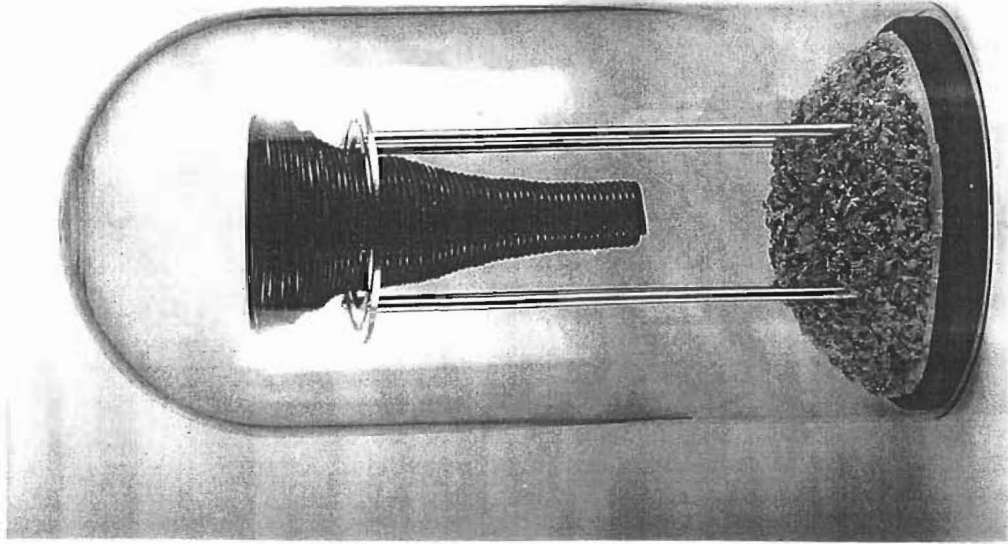
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Illus 36.



Illus 37.

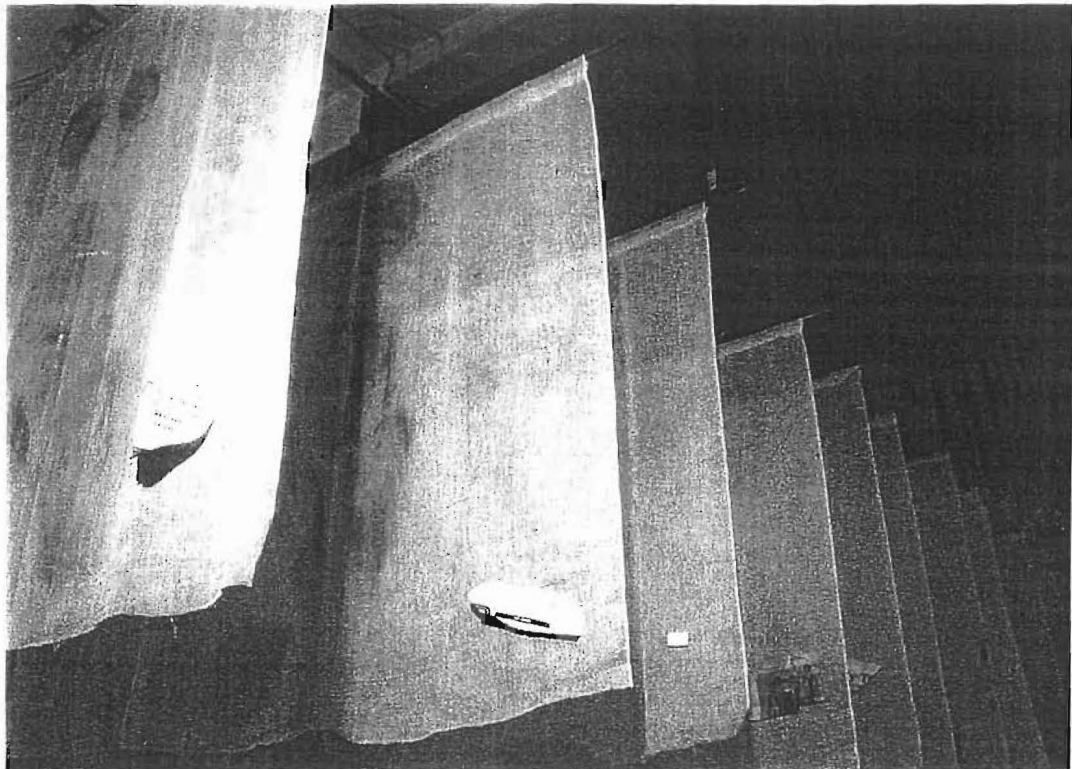
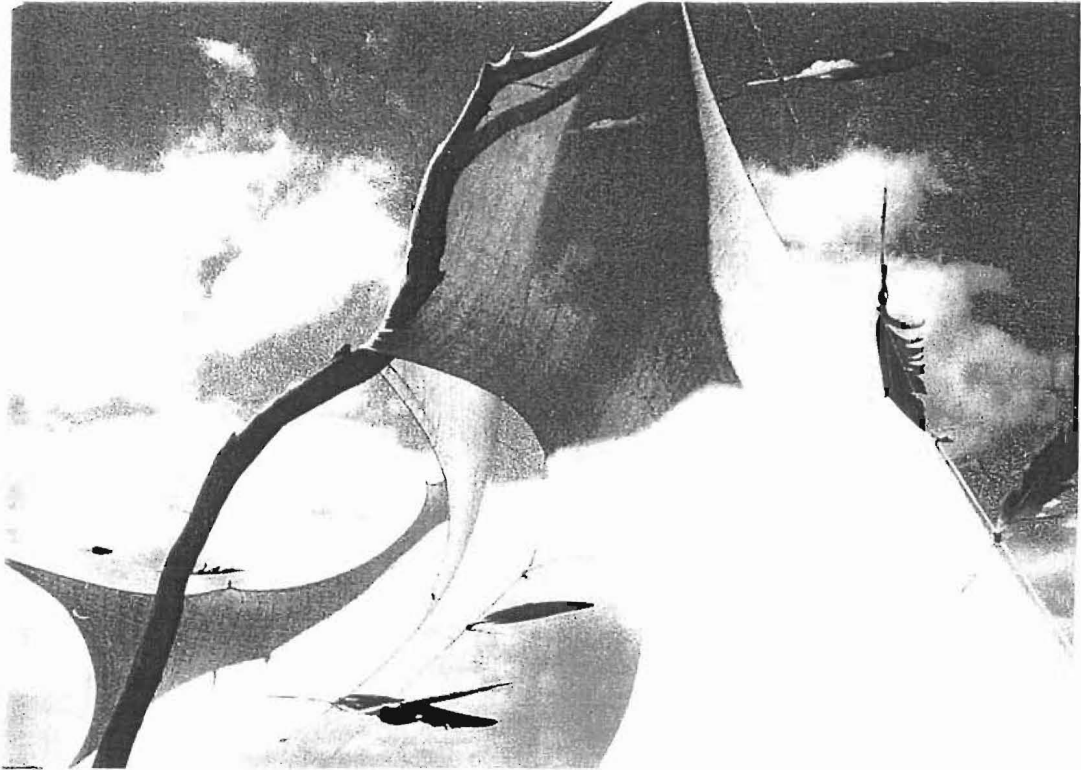


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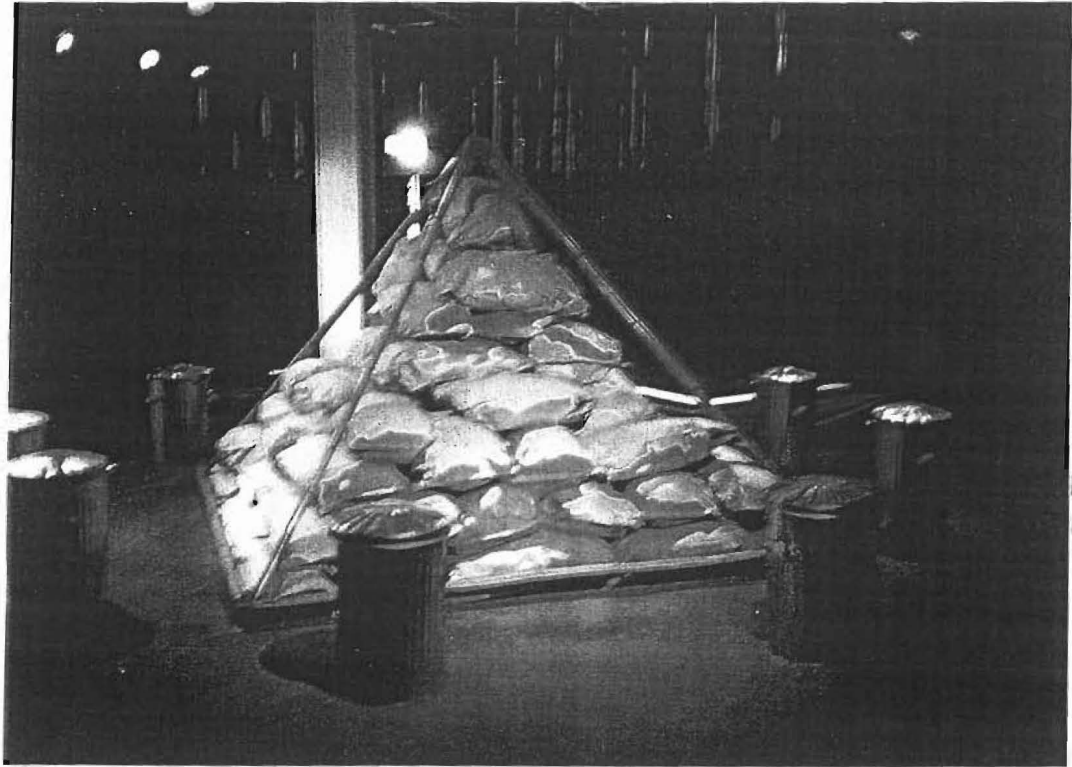


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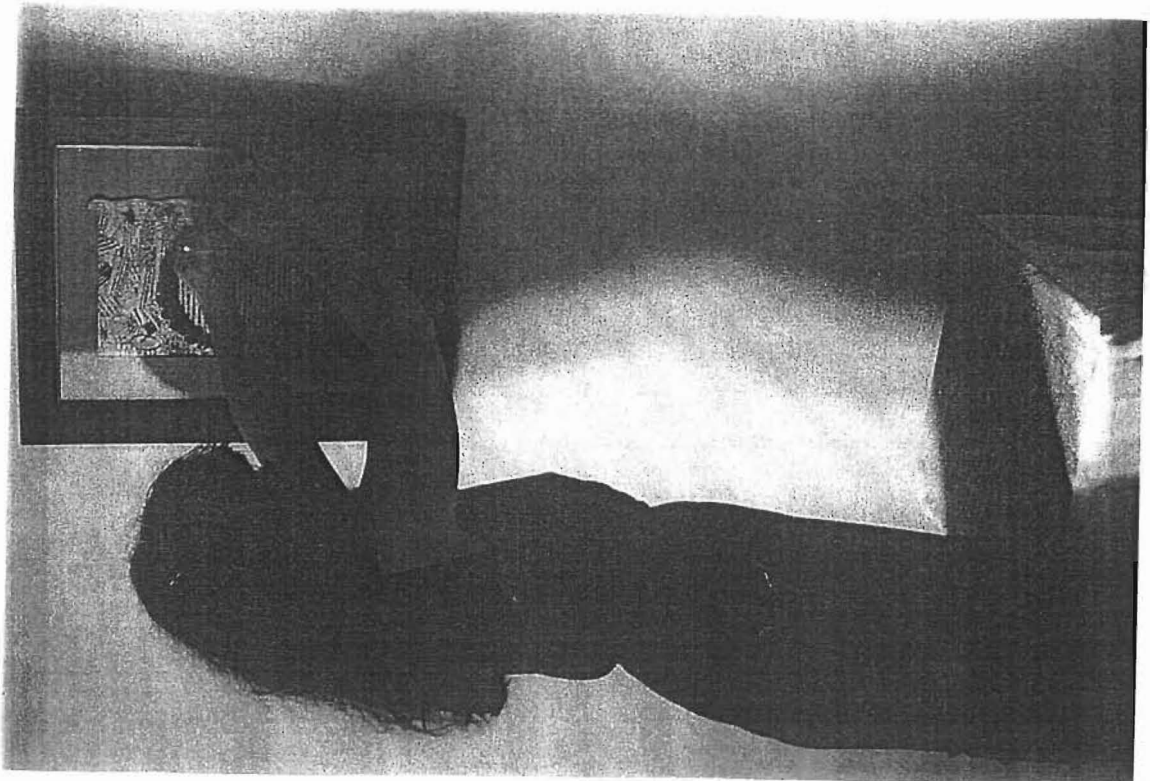
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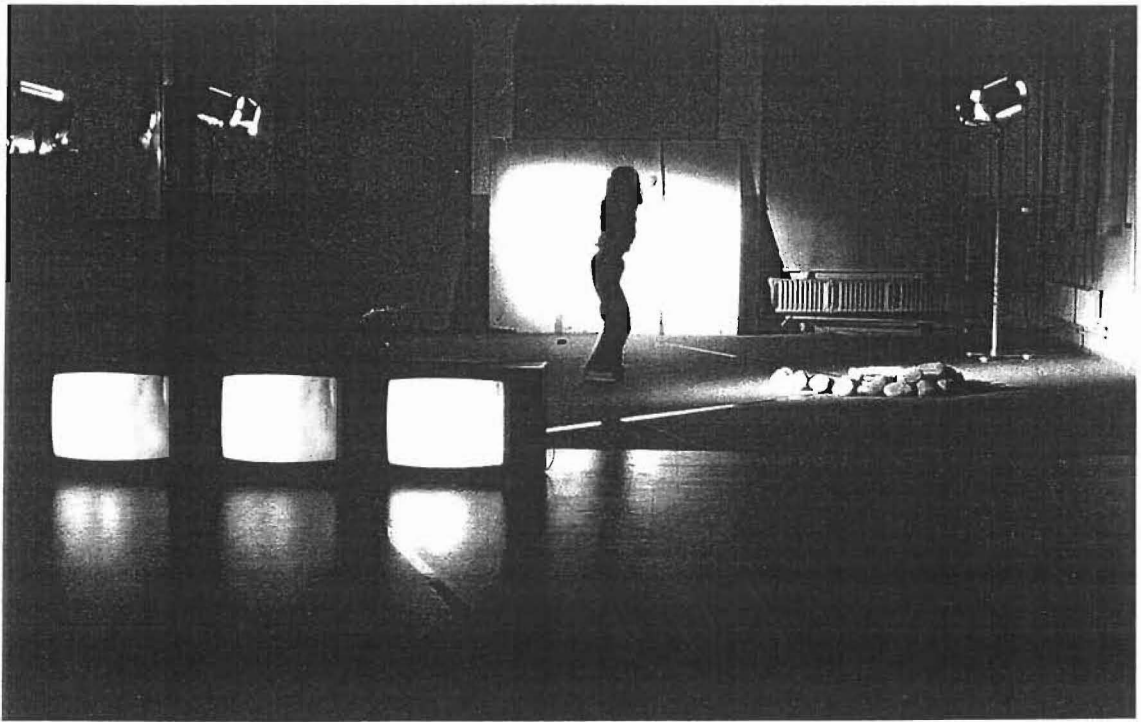
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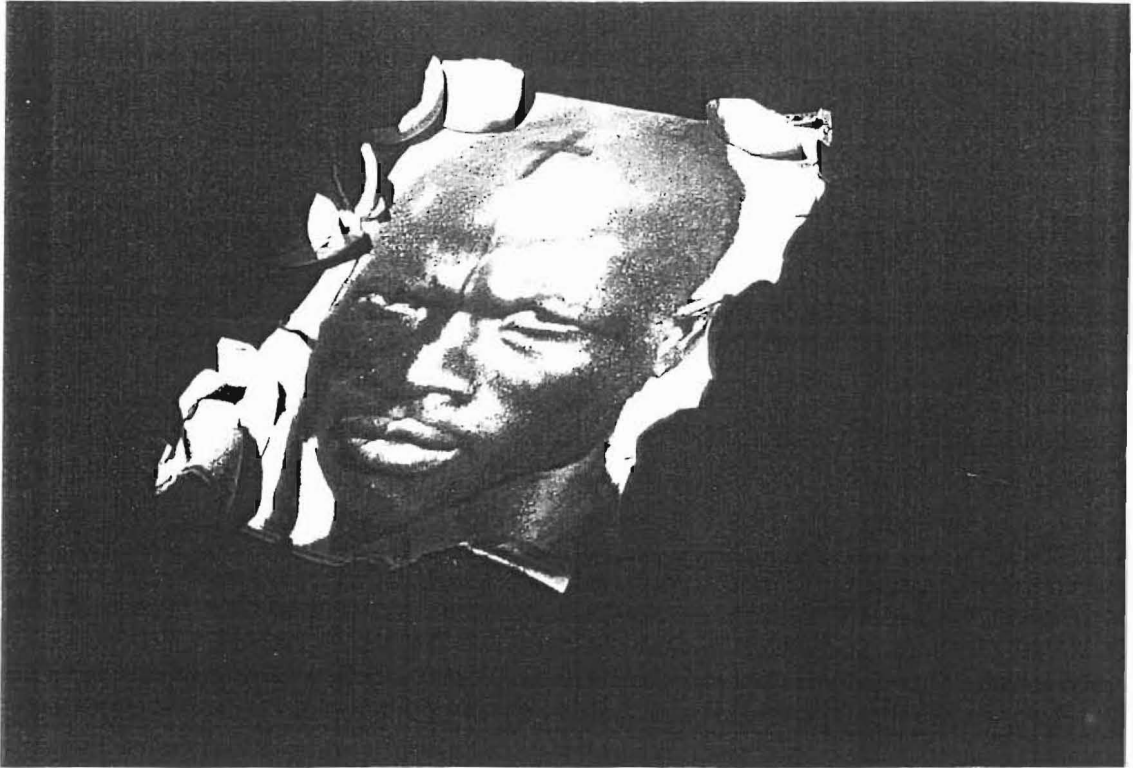
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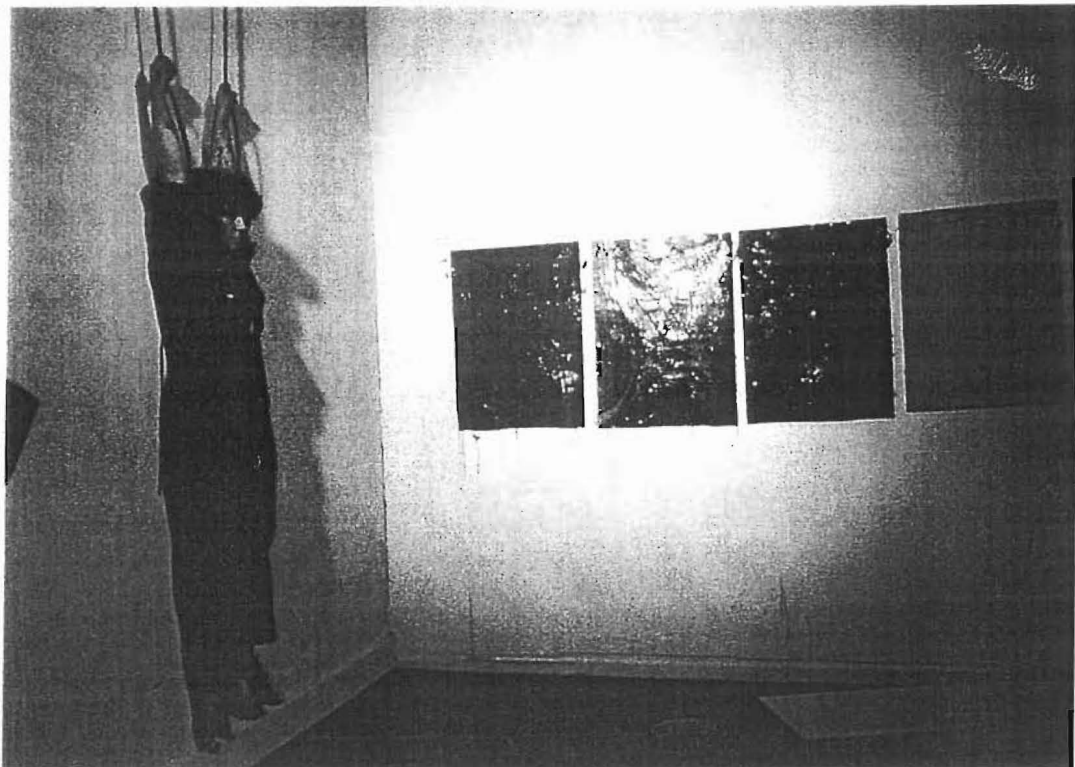
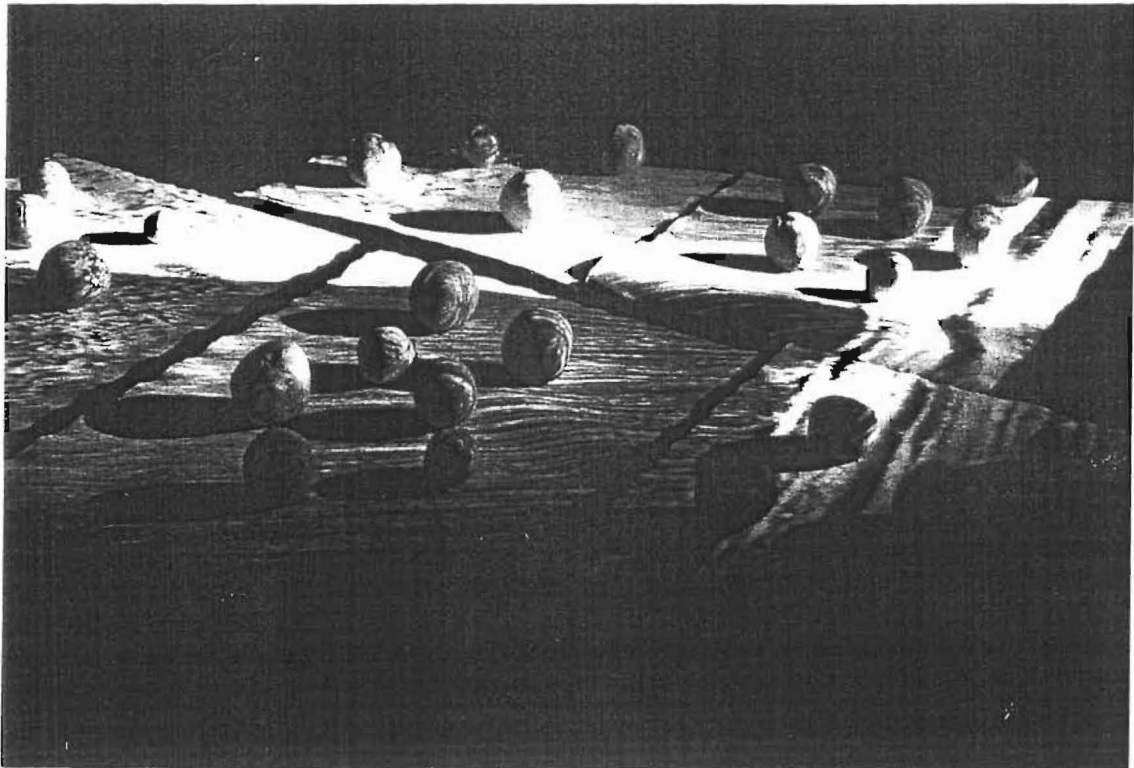
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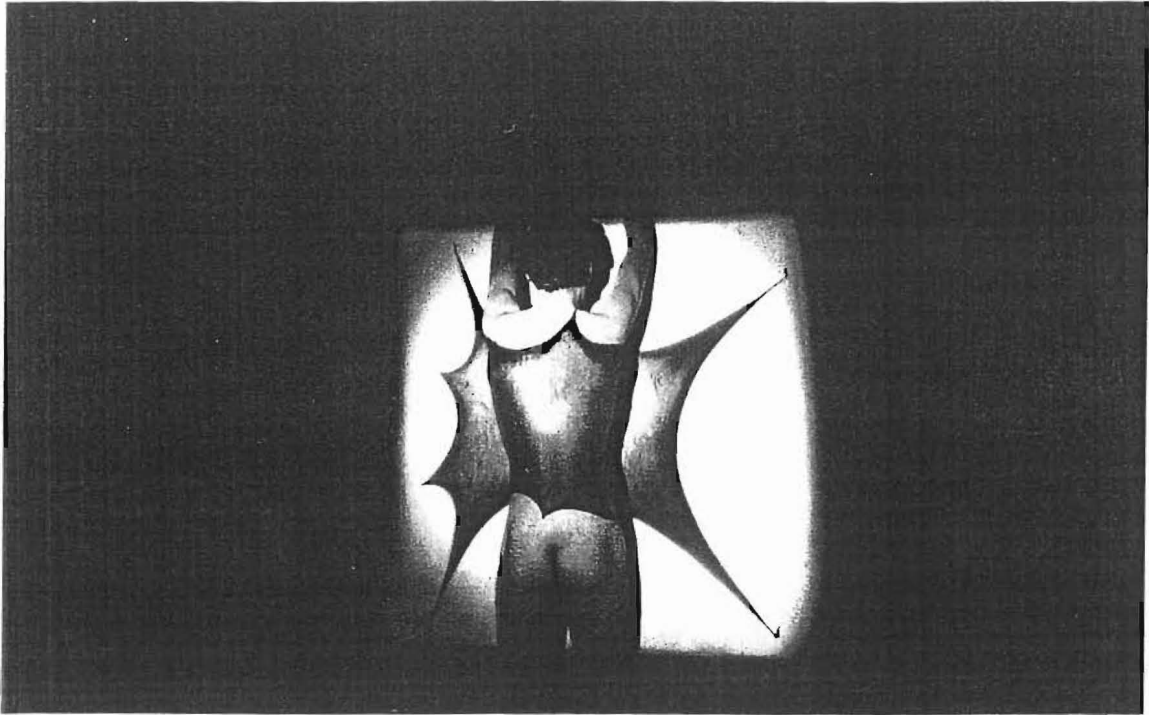
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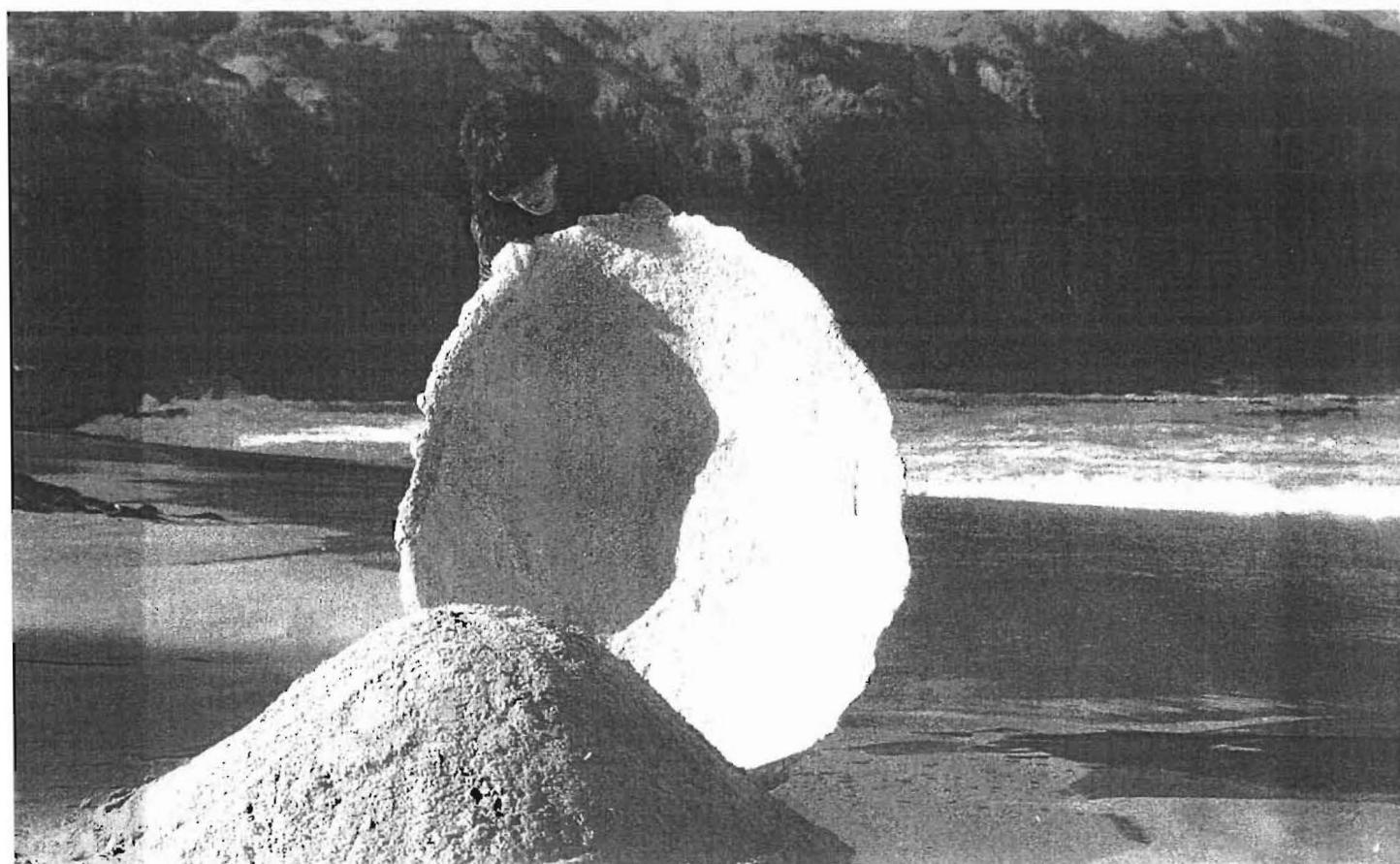
Illus 48.
Illus 49.



Illus 50.
Illus 51.



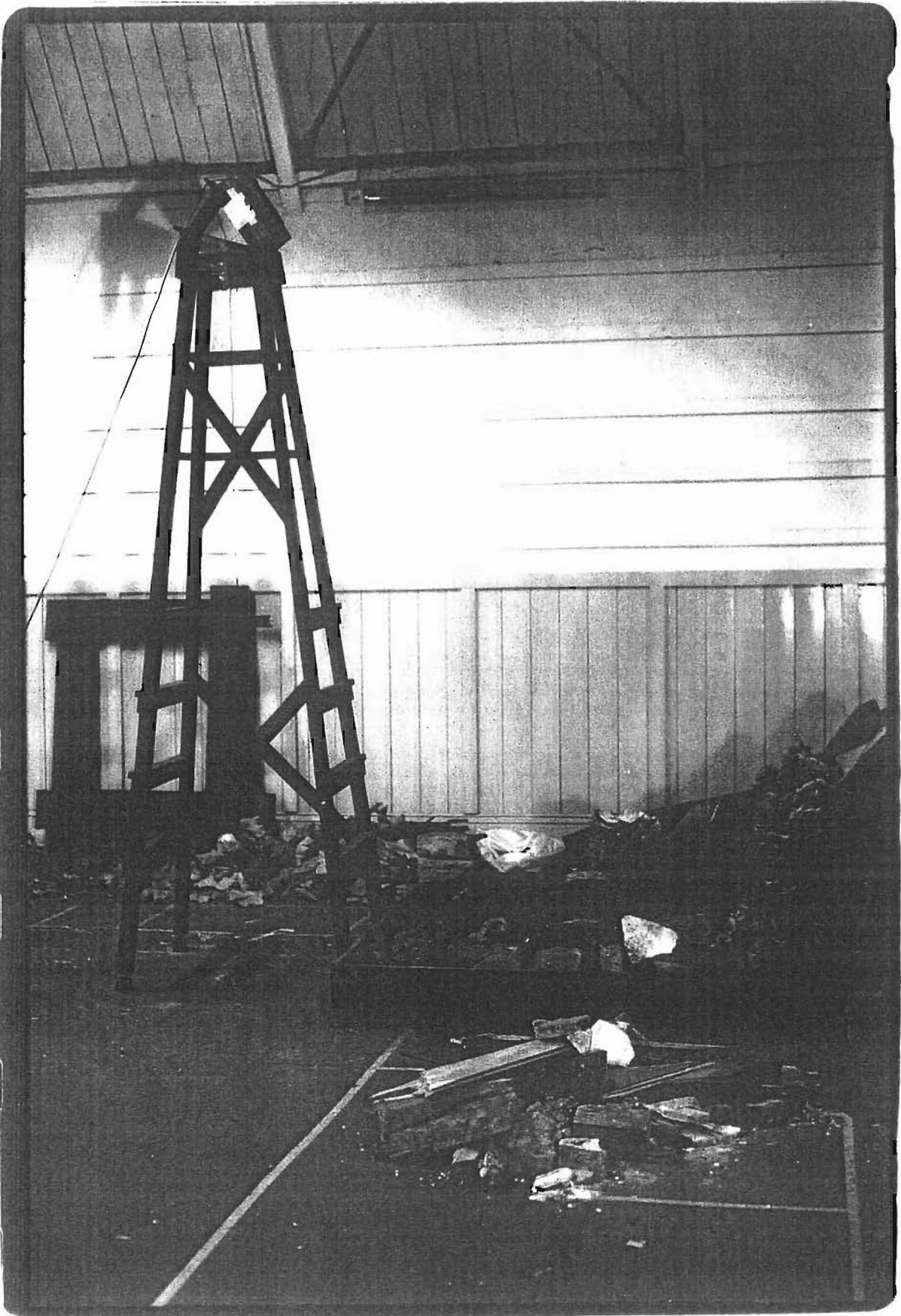
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Illus 53.



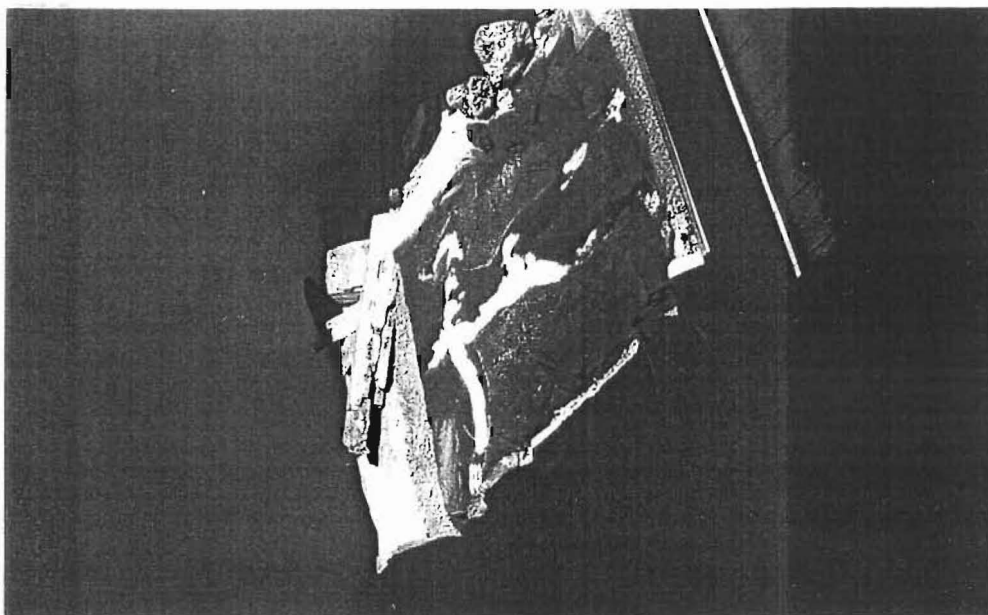
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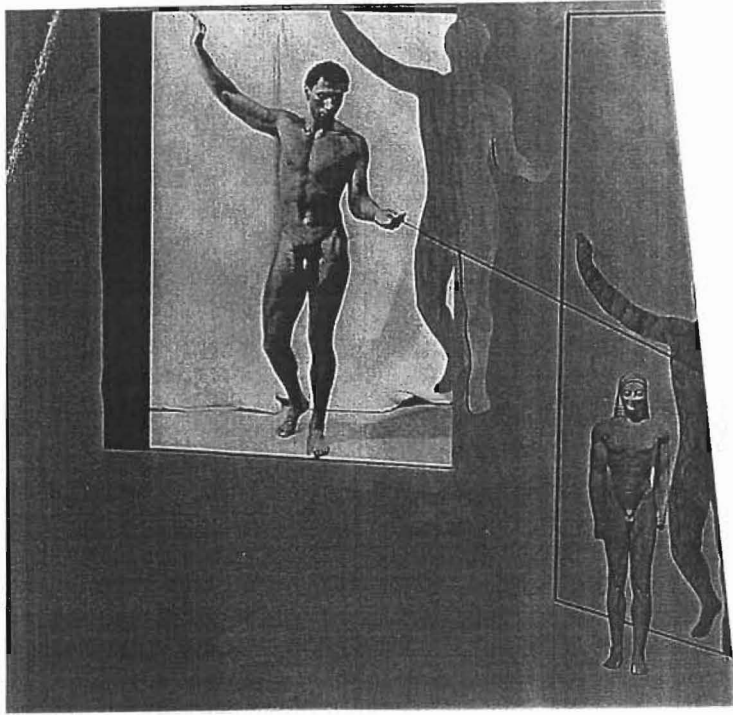
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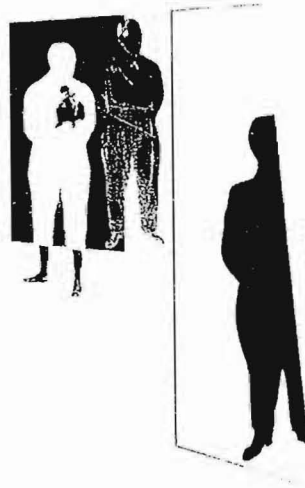
Illus 57.



Illus 58.
Illus 59.



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1930





Illus 64.

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