WHAT IT'S WORTH

Art usually conducts its affair with money in rooms sealed politely from view. But the artists on this wall turn the relationship into a very public – and playful – affair. ▢ In his *Dotto* brooch, Warwick Freeman invades a piece of pearl shell with an unmissable mark of art's romance with money – a red dot like an art dealer's 'sold' sticker. Freeman's title pays homage to his friend jeweler Otto Künzli, who once invited viewers to an empty gallery and gave each guest a red 'sold' pin to wear. ▢ Peter Robinson's 'Sorry Sold Out' looks like something propped outside a fruit stall at the end of a day's trade. But it's also a sly bit of commentary on his rise to fame as a commentator on race relations. Responding in advance to objections that he was cashing in on the craze for multiculturalism, Robinson made paintings that loudly advertised his own sell-outs and compromises. ▢ In the words of Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan, the third work here lets 'everyone be a dealer'. The original Wrong Gallery was established in a rent-free niche between two galleries in a hyper-expensive New York art district. With little more than one square metre of space, it was the city's smallest gallery – until its creators shrank it and produced this knee-high version, along with dollhouse copies of the provocative exhibits that made the Wrong Gallery's reputation. ▢ In an international art scene filled with supersized new museums and supersized artworks made to fit them, the creators of the Wrong Gallery propose a new way of dealing with cultural overload: Think small. ▢

UNDER THE SKIN

Sharpen up. Though the Surrealist movement is now almost 100 years old, its favourite subjects and techniques still have the power to get under the skin. ☐ The artists grouped here all inherit the Surrealists' fascination with fetishes, fatal objects, and sharp-edged erotic props. Putting familiar things together in needling and unexpected ways, they evoke the desires and vulnerabilities of bodies without depicting them directly. ☐ The second panel of Giovanni Intra's work *L'Amour Fou* depicts one of the most famous Surrealist objects ever made – the iron ominously spiked with nails that Man Ray made in 1921 and named *Gift*. 'L'amour fou' is the title of a novel by André Breton, the leader of the Surrealist movement. French for 'mad love', the phrase could serve as an alternative title for *Erika with Knives*, in which Peter Peryer soaks a domestic interior in an atmosphere of film-noir dread. Nearby, Mikala Dwyer, Paul McCarthy and John Parker (with his aptly named 'Points and Penetration Ware') arrange similarly arresting encounters between vulnerable surfaces and knife-sharp edges. ☐ Rohan Wealleans's sculptured paintings are the products of real knifework. Building up layer after layer of paint, he then slices back through with a Stanley knife to reveal ornate reefs of colour. ☐

PAINTING IN PIECES

Though the birthdates of the artists grouped here span more than sixty years, all of them enliven abstract painting with eccentric formats and chance effects. In the process, they prove that interesting abstract art is seldom truly abstract at all, but full of tantalizing fragments and flickers of the world beyond the painting. ▢ One of the modest masters of New Zealand abstract art, Don Peebles has always embraced happy accidents in his paintings, often working directly on timber offcuts and allowing the grain of the wood to influence an unfolding composition. Richard Killeen builds chance more aggressively into his well-known 'cutouts', insisting that whoever hangs his work has to decide where each bit goes. ▢ The youngest artist in *Reboot*, Eileen Leung also gives other people a hand in arranging her little gardens of painted sculpture (or sculptured painting). And she brings a tonic humility and lightness to the sometimes solemn business of abstract painting. With their shrubby shapes and fine wooden stands, Leung's paintings suggest the props and 'flats' used to evoke landscape on the theatrical stage. They invite us to lean down and imaginatively enter a whimsical theatre of painting's effects. ▢

OUT THERE

The night sky, the cosmos, the possibility of extraterrestrial life... The artists here evoke some dauntingly large subjects with emphatically earthbound materials. Their real subject is the comedy and poignancy of any attempt to put a frame around a limitless universe. ◻ Hany Armanious discovers the universe in a sheet of sandpaper. Michael Parekowhai names his photograph of a plastic Two-Dollar Shop star after one of the southern stars used by Maori navigators. And Ronnie van Hout rummages in his family history for a hand-built spacecraft. ◻ In her warm-toned photograph of a hand-made cardboard house, Marie Shannon envisions the home as a precious but necessarily fragile thing afloat in endless night. Francis Upritchard, another model-maker, constructs her universe from resin and old school compasses. It's as if a student began drowsing at her desk during an astronomy lesson and dreamed this tabletop galaxy into being. ◻ In their attempts to model what's 'out there' with materials near at hand, these artists lend weight to a thought of American sculptor Vincent Fecteau. 'That's one of the most beautiful things about art – the faith or will that can make a rubber band or a pushpin the location of all this meaning and at the same time acknowledge the limitation of its reality.' ◻

TROPHY ROOM

Three portraits of unlikely ancestors, for the walls of a fictional trophy room. ☐ First: a shadowy Mickey Mouse, conjured by sculptor Neil Dawson from the light fittings in a hotel room in Los Angeles (Mickey's home town). ☐ Next: Ricky Swallow's image of his own wood-carving of the hooded skull-mask made famous by the *Scream* movies. By photographing his sculpture and putting it back in a frame, Swallow returns the mask to its origins in a painting – Edvard Munch's *The Scream* – and transforms a fragment of recent pop culture into a grand and gloomy ancestral portrait. ☐ And finally, there's Michael Parekowhai's portrait of a taxidermised sparrow. In grand old homes, the trophy room contained the stuffed heads of animals alongside elaborate portraits of the hunters who killed them. But Parekowhai makes it hard to tell if we're looking at the hunter or the game. He's made this tiny bird as fearsome as a bald eagle, and named him after an American gun manufacturer. *Ed Brown* looks like he's capable of going after something much bigger than breadcrumbs. ☐

SHELF LIFE

Among the pleasures of seeing artworks in a collector's home are the collisions and confusions of art and life. All kinds of objects share the same wall or shelf, and art history mingles with personal history. ◻ When public galleries get their hands on private art collections, these collisions tend to get tidied up and big works muscle ahead of smaller ones. This shelf, however, makes room for some of the small works that have played an equally large part in defining the collection's generous scope and playful tone. The line-up includes collectibles, multiples, giveaways and souvenirs. There's art that's been shrunk down into jewellery, and jewellery with designs on art. ◻ Many of the works look like items you might encounter in their dozens on the shelves of a shop – from videos to boomboxes, wristwatches to figurines. But the artists tamper by hand with these mass-produced objects to create idiosyncratic new objects of desire. Ronnie van Hout turns a giant of New Zealand art history into a pocket-sized action figure. Michael Stevenson presents a line of home-made videos that promise to unveil art-world conspiracies. And Lachlan Warner creates devotional Buddhas from the remnants of a commercialised Christian ritual – easter egg wrappers. ◻ Then there are objects that defy us to say exactly what they are. Hany Armanious is a master at creating objects that words won't stick to. In a world where most objects have a strictly defined name and use, he reminds us that one of the most useful things art can do is keep us guessing and wondering. ◻

SOMEONE SOMEWHERE ELSE

When so many images deliver their messages loud and fast, one of the best ways to make people listen may be to talk in a quiet voice. That's one explanation for the renewed interest among contemporary artists in paintings of intimate scale and quiet colour. ◻ Michael Harrison has painted on paper for most of his two-decade career. His pale washes of acrylic on diary-like pages evoke the flow of dreams and the blur of half-remembered encounters. Like Jeffrey Harris, represented here by two intense early works on paper, Harrison has never subscribed to the view that minor media produce minor artworks. ◻ Though the two Japanese artists here do not work on paper, they too make paintings that artfully muffle or veil the feelings that seem to inspire them. Yuko Murata paints bare and overcast scenes where the only movement belongs to the artist's brush. Like Harrison, she seems to paint memories of places rather than the places themselves. ◻ In her series *Chasing Butterflies*, Kyoko Murase uses paint in a fluid state to suggest fluid states of mind and heart. Her brushwork ensures that we too treat these paintings personally – leaning in close to see the daydreamers and sleepwalkers half-hidden by her flowing strokes. ◻

REMNANTS

AND

REPLICANTS

Artists have long been fascinated by the ruins and remnants of earlier civilizations. But the artists here invite us to ask a scarier question. How will the twenty-first century – with its torrent of new products and trash-heaps of discarded ones – look to the archaeologists of the future? ◻ Inspired by sci-fi writer J G Ballard's bleak visions of the near future, Ricky Swallow recreates mass-produced objects from his own lifetime as though they are remnants of a long-gone past. Dane Mitchell gives that fantasy a droll twist by casting slide carousels in chunks of plaster, like exhibits from an antiquities museum of the future. Here art history's tools and props have themselves become ancient history. Meanwhile, Glen Hayward offers an eye-fooling carving of the polystyrene packaging from around a new computer. To create this technofossil, Hayward devoted hours to a piece of e-trash that was meant to be instantly discarded. ◻ From Swallow's miniature monument to et al's philosophical workstation, a spirit of salvage animates these works. In the world of new technology, each product is out-of-date almost as soon as it hits the shelves. The artists here, however, look for ways to put obsolete technology back into imaginative service. ◻ There is certainly no end of technology to reclaim. Nearly 200,000 computers become obsolete in America every day. ◻

SOMEBODIES

Dummies, stand-ins and body doubles are everywhere in art of the last decade. Rejecting the supermodel physiques and ethnic blandness of standard shop mannequins, artists have created mannequins with some lifelike flaws and things to say – not anybodies but somebodies. □ Michael Parekowhai's *Thief* provides the unusual spectacle of a custom-made Maori mannequin. He also wears a name badge that reads 'Hi my name is Hori'. Although Hori is the name of Parekowhai's father, it has also been used as a derogatory term for any Maori male. This mannequin is one of a group of three titled after the children's rhyme that runs 'richman, poorman, beggarman, thief...' Parekowhai has pointedly left out the rich man. □ *Thief* is keeping an eye on another self-portrait that topples expectations about its maker's identity. A tireless explorer of the gap between who people are and who they dream of becoming, Ronnie van Hout here presents a model of himself in black-face makeup – an image based on the 1986 comedy *Soul Man*, in which a student wins a Harvard scholarship after dyeing his skin black. □ Where portrait busts traditionally commemorate the great and the good, van Hout appears to have knocked from his pedestal for this attempted change of identity. □

‘I’ TROUBLE

When the prophet Moses asks the name of God in the Christian bible, God replies with ‘I am that I am’. The New Zealand painter Colin McCahon rang many changes on the words ‘I am’. Sometimes they’re given monumental scale, in booming assertions of being and belief. In his painting here, however, the ‘I am’ is spoken by an anxious, doubt-racked voice. The artist confesses his fears in a dark studio, and then carries on despite his doubts – or perhaps because of them. Several artists on these walls remix McCahon’s famous words. All of them talk back to each other about the power of painted words and their ability to speak for the artist. Some of the biggest words here project the largest doubts about grand statements. At first glance, Michael Parekowhai’s enormous ‘I AM HE’ suggests an egotistical pronouncement. ‘He’ in Maori, however, means not ‘one ‘but ‘some’ – a twist that turns this artwork from a solo proclamation to an assertion of belonging. Bigger still are the words of Melbourne artist Rose Nolan, who responds to all the backchat and cross-talk in the room with a massive assertion of the word SELFLESS. When we encounter big words in public they’re usually selling a product or personality. Nolan, though, uses letters four metres high to speak up for the absence of ego.

THE

ARTIST

PREPARES

The photographs and sculptures here provide working answers to some endlessly vexing questions: What are artists for? What's their place in the big social picture? What kind of faces should they show the world? And should the world expect to see the artists – or is that just celebrity worship by other means? □ Some of the artists shield themselves from view or teasingly distort the evidence. Peter Peryer chooses to photograph himself face-down in a bath, and the results suggest a crime scene photo more than any conventional self-portrait. Patrick Pound provides a bag-full of faces of the people he 'could have been', and also shows off one of the many intellectual honours he's ordered through the mail. □ Other artists multiply themselves, or offer up masks and fragments. Stephen Birch takes the desire to 'own a piece of the artist' to a startling extreme, by turning his own head and those of artist friends into coldly staring, wall-mounted trophies. British artist Gillian Wearing fuses the familiar look of cosmetic and sleeping masks with another kind of mask altogether – the death-mask plaster casts that were made of famous people until the late-nineteenth century. Modelled exactly on her own features, Wearing's work poses one of self-portraiture's central questions in the form of a sculptural riddle: Are we the masks we wear? □ So in this room, artists sleep, hide, hold their breath, stand up and topple over. But the most active account of what artists do appears in a four-page book by et al. The first spread reads: 'The artist prepares...' The next spread concludes: '...to hunt.' □