

MARIE SHANNON [b 1960 New Zealand]

Art bloopers 1994

black and white photograph

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Purchased 1995 with funds from the Dunedin
Public Art Gallery Society.

There is an inherent self-consciousness in the narrator's voice that is an unshakable aspect of this work. Like a joke that has lost momentum, this text, debilitated by the delivery of a complex scenario, lacks the necessary comedic punch. The emotional line between melancholy and humour is brought into sharp focus. Shannon indicates there is little separating these two divides. Under these circumstances it becomes ambiguous where the blooper even starts and ends – both artist and reader share in the embarrassment together.

ET AL. [b 1953 New Zealand]

The guide 1990

A green chair, 3 tables, 2 text panels, 1 roll of gold newspaper, 1 epoxy resin page and 1 lamp.
Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.
Purchased 1997 by the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society.

What is this central text a guide to? Why would you select, edit and blow it up for added effect? By simply cutting this text from its source and pasting it into *The guide*, et al. is able to disturb the original meaning of these words. They no longer fit seamlessly into a narrative structure and instead subscribe to an obscure set of references and associations. All the elements in this discordant installation, share in being displaced from their original context and severed of their function. Stripped of pivotal information, these isolated items offer no biographical or descriptive clues to relieve the viewers' torment. And perhaps this is the underlying theme of *The guide* – it is a speculative exercise, designed to draw out a range of readings that are not dependent on logical or pleasurable connections, but instead upon discursive and ambivalent relations.

RONNIE VAN HOUT [b 1962 New Zealand]

**Help me I'm in the land of
the giants** 1996

clay and plywood

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Purchased 1997 by the Dunedin Public Art Gallery
Society.

Where is this mythical land of giants? And who or what is so threatening to elicit this proclamation? Is this a cry for help that can easily be appeased or will it only be settled in 2022? These seem to be the words of someone suffering from a lack of confidence or facing serious levels of anxiety, or someone who is riddled with self-doubt. Perhaps it's the voice of the artist who is disturbed by having to express himself or produce something meaningful, in an environment where nothing is certain and everything meaningful has already happened. But is this what the artist is actually saying or something that he really believes? It is the uncertainty of this text that reveals our dependency as readers and viewers on the narratives and mythologies of so-called giants.

GIOVANNI INTRA [1968-2002 New Zealand]

Panadology 1996

acrylic on paper

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Purchased 1997 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society.

Laid out in four distinct horizons these sheets of blackened paper and random splattering of white acrylic produce an array of instant associations: stars bursting in deep space, chemical reactions, mutating organisms or psychedelic visions. This is an artwork that looks serious in its intent and yet by the same token it seems to undermine this aesthetic by making reference to more illicit and transgressive acts. Here language becomes a key for unlocking these abstract grounds or at least a framework for speculating about this substance.

Panadology might be a pseudo-scientific term invented by Intra for artistic effect, but it also sounds strikingly like the legitimate study of panadol. And in this artist's hands it is difficult to tell if this prescription is being used for medical or recreational ends. As Intra noted: 'Everyone who makes work has to live out the production of their own fantasy, it's an undeniable condition of practice. I do live the work, but in my own terms. There are aspects of my life where I do participate in areas which may be regarded as transgressive. But really, what is transgression? It has to rely on a concept of boundary, but culture isn't a wall and transgression isn't just the act of breaking it. What's to say the boundary isn't a fantasy in itself?'

Barbara Blake 'Giovanni Intra: Germ-free adolescence' *Art New Zealand* 70, 1994, p. 109.

JOHN REYNOLDS [b 1956 New Zealand]

**Drawings from the
Epistamadologies series** 2001

oil stick on paper

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Gifted 2002 by the artist.

This set of signpost drawings is part of a much larger and ongoing series of works that Reynolds has been producing over recent years. Here the humble street sign has been *pimped-up*; a vertical stack of names laid out in alphabetical order pointing to places to contemplate rather than visit. The accumulative, almost maniacal, treatment of these banal place-holders, transforms the language of geography into a much more unwieldy and absurdist beast. Reading from left to right this series of drawings starts to display a sense of order, even if the connections between the locations might be fuzzy. Just as the signpost system seems to start to take on a logical order, Reynolds introduces another subset of intellectual tangents whose new coordinates open up another realm of possibilities.

COLIN McCAHON [1919-1987 New Zealand]

I am 1954

oil on hessian

The Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena,
University of Otago, Dunedin

Much has been made of the shift in writing style from the block letters of *I Am* 1954, and *I and Thou* 1954-55, to a more cursive script in works like *Let us possess one world* 1955. The changes coincide with Mc Cahon's experimentation and increasing use of more readily available, commercially produced paints. These were also inexpensive, dried faster and had a flatter finish than traditional oil paints. Having said this however, it would be a mistake to equate the shift in McCahon's style according to his use of particular mediums.

Such a reading would fail to take note of the important typographical decisions that are being made in relation to each text. There is a direct correlation between the physical structure of *I AM* and the unwavering tone of this proclamation. Small in scale but not diminutive in its presence *I Am* is an assertive painting; the stacked letters are even given added weight by the cubist field that creates an undefined sense of space. It is this disconcerting relationship between figure ground and the treatment of the letterforms, simultaneously solid and transparent, that makes this text so concrete, percussive and physical.

PETER ROBINSON [b 1965 New Zealand]

Untitled 1994

wood, oil acrylic, oilstick, light bulb, tin, wool
Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.
Purchased 1995 with funds from the Dunedin
Public Art Gallery Society.

There is something decidedly dodgy about this crate. It looks like it will do the job, but only just. Held together by a loose array of tin, paint, nails and an assortment of timbers its easy to get the impression that this crate has been whipped up with a keen eye on the clock and budget. Expenses have been spared. But like any DIY project the crate has a physicality that goes well beyond its functionality. This is a weighty piece of packaging. *Untitled* was the cornerstone of Robinson's contribution to *Cultural Safety*, a tightly curated New Zealand survey exhibition, shown at several major German art institutions in the mid-nineties. In that context, the sales slogans which festoon the crate's outer shell, would have read like an artist wanting to cash in on of his cultural and geographical isolation. But as a regular player in the language, imagery and politics of biculturalism, Robinson does not provide such an easy angle on where he stands in this regard. Is he an inside trader, stock-taker or elusive free agent?