

## CHRISTINE WEBSTER

[b.1958 New Zealand]

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### **Albert Park - P. Waller** 1984

Cibachrome

### **Devouring A Persimmon In The Back Yard** 1983

Cibachrome

### **Kauaeranga Valley** 1984

Cibachrome

All collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery

Purchased 1984 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society

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Exploring issues of identity and sexuality through a feminist lens, Christine Webster's career has produced photographic series that confront the viewer with intimations of violence, the troubled psyche, and gender transgressions. Among the most prominent of these is the *Black Carnival* series, a coterie of characters shot against a black backdrop, who revel in taboos and unconventional modes of presentation of the self.

In these works however, the landscape provides the background: in *Kauaeranga Valley* there is a wet, moss covered rock face above a forest pool; in *Devouring A Persimmon In The Back Yard*, the green of a lawn fills the frame; and in *Albert Park - P. Waller* there is the trunk of a Canary Island date palm, likely in central Auckland. The figures that inhabit them are grotesque and distorted by the camera's artifice. Acts such as eating and bathing are warped into ominous rituals and the altered or featureless faces provoke alarm for the viewer, who may feel they have encountered a scene unintended to be witnessed by anyone else.

Webster's use of colour in these works adds to their eeriness. The profile of the figure in front of the palm is contorted by a long exposure and bathed in a bilious yellow light, while a bluish hue accentuates the wanness of the body emerging from the water. Further, the pallid face of the figure eating a persimmon is highlighted by red lipstick that heightens the violence of their consumption.

BEN CAUCHI  
[b.1974 New Zealand]

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**Guardian (After Sassoferrato)** 2006

Ambrotype

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery

Purchased 2006 with funds from the Dunedin City Council

**The Fool** 2005

Ambrotype

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery

Purchased 2006 with funds from the Dunedin City Council

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Ben Cauchi's process involves working with alternative and outdated modes of photography to create one-off images. *The Fool* and *Guardian (After Sassoferrato)* are ambrotypes, a process introduced in the 1850s that involves coating a glass plate in collodion, then dipping it in a silver nitrate bath and exposing it using the camera.

The quality of the detail in an ambrotype made it the preferred method of photography for the time. What interests Cauchi, in addition to the photo-making process itself, are the unique results it yields that resemble nineteenth century images. In his works the blemishes and markings do not occur from age, but are imperfections arising in their production.

It is the treatment of the figures in these two photographs that is unsettling to the viewer. Both allude to death: the faceless figure in *Guardian (After Sassoferrato)* imitates the robed entities that haunt the living in Victorian spirit photography, and death is invoked through the executioner's hood in *The Fool*. However, in a contemporary context the latter may conjure up associations with the infamous image of a hooded Iraqi prisoner uncovered in the Abu Ghraib prison scandal that had occurred not long before this photograph was made. That we cannot see the subjects' faces invites speculation as to what their intentions might be; do they wish us harm? Or do they invoke our pity?

RONNIE VAN HOUT  
[b.1962 New Zealand]

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**Hybrid [alien figure]** 1999

Xerox on paper

Long term loan collection, Dunedin Public Art Gallery

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As a child, Ronnie van Hout became fascinated with the phenomenon of UFOs: 'I discovered this UFO magazine and it had photos of UFOs... I thought they had photographed them and it was true.' *Hybrid [alien figure]* could be inspired by the 1995 film *Alien Autopsy*. This was allegedly genuine footage of surgeons operating on the body of an extra-terrestrial recovered from the downed spacecraft of the 1947 Roswell flying saucer incident.

Here, van Hout's own likeness is conflated with the alien corpse, lying on an operating table under the poised hands of the surgeon who is just out of frame. The elongated arms and neck on the cadaver suggest it is not human—although the face appears to be—and as with a number of van Hout's works, it resembles the artist himself, wearing a scowl that could be read as pain or anger.

The disturbance we feel witnessing this photograph could be read as a reaction to a classically uncanny scene: the corpse's face is human, but its emaciated body is not quite right. This means, even if one has little knowledge of aliens as depicted in popular culture, it is recognised that what we are looking at is not meant to be of this world.

WAYNE BARRAR  
[b.1957 New Zealand]

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**'Man in outback', underground museum,  
Cooper Pedy, Australia 2002** 2002

Selenium toned silver gelatin prints  
Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery  
Given 2012 by the artist

PETER BLACK  
[b.1948 New Zealand]

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**Motel Entrance, Napier** 1981

Black and white photograph  
Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery  
Given 2006 by Jim Barr and Mary Barr

ANNE NOBLE  
[b1954 New Zealand]

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**Moira** Nov 1976

Chrome tinted photograph  
Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery  
Purchased 1981 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art  
Gallery Society

PETER PERYER  
[b.1941 New Zealand]

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**Self Portrait in Bath** 1977

Gelatin silver print

**Erika with Bare Back** c.1977

Black and white photograph

**Erika in Sunlight** 1975

Black and white photograph

All Jim Barr and Mary Barr loan collection, Dunedin  
Public Art Gallery

RONNIE VAN HOUT  
[b.1962 New Zealand]

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**Untitled** from **Mephitis** series 1995

Black and white photograph

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery

Purchased 1997 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art  
Gallery Society

ANS WESTRA  
[b.1936 New Zealand]

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**Untitled** late 20th century  
Black and white photograph  
Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery  
Purchased 1982 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art  
Gallery Society

MARGARET DAWSON  
[b.1950 New Zealand]

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**Rook. Corvus frugilegus** 20th century  
Cibachrome laid on canvas  
Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery  
Purchased 1991 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art  
Gallery Society