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# COLIN MCCAHERN

1919-1987 New Zealand

## **The Fourteen Stations of the Cross** 1966

acrylic on paper

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, gift of the artist, 1981

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In McCahon's *The Fourteen Stations of the Cross*, the rugged hills of New Zealand bear witness, come to embody or are restaged as the metaphysical site for the Passion of Christ. The blackened (scorched) earth is cut and divided into a series of discrete scenes, and yet it has a unified formal quality that allows the parts to be read as a single unfolding panorama. As with a number of landscapes that McCahon generated in this era, the central register of this work is the passage of time – it is a painting to 'walk past'.

There is a brutal simplicity to the artist's handling of this story and depiction of the landscape, it is almost as if this narrative is so ingrained in the psyche of this place that it is present everywhere and in everything. As McCahon noted of this subject:

'A landscape is an ever-recurring theme in my painting and even when the landscape is not directly stated as such it has been implied both in form and light... Certainly the landscape is New Zealand but in an amalgam of both North and South. Nor is this the tourist's landscape we so often see painted. I am dealing with the essential monotony of this land..., a "landscape with too few lovers" ...'

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# SIMON MORRIS

b 1963 New Zealand

## **August Pause** 2006

acrylic on linen

Courtesy of the artist and Two Rooms Gallery

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This is the first time *August Pause* has been displayed, despite the fact that this work was completed half a decade ago. There is a long history of artists creating works that are not presented until a later period and it is interesting to consider such an elaborately patterned painting in this light. Seemingly 'held back' by the artist this is a stark almost unforgiving painting; it is in fact difficult to look at for a sustained period. There are a number of factors that contribute to this situation, from the harsh contrast between the chosen black and white hues, to the tightness of the visual arrangement. In many respects the painting's reference to a moment of respite, silence and/or rest seems at odds with the optical equation that this work delivers. While *August Pause* might challenge viewers to consider their communion with an artwork; is it a fleeting or a sustained experience? For the artist, this is one work from a continuing series of paintings produced between other art projects: it is a place for him to relax, breathe and refocus.

In a number of respects *August Pause* is a very simple unromantic celebration of the process of painting; from laying out a clear formula to its execution in the most rudimentary set of terms. In this context black becomes an 'unloaded' colour, its selection is seemingly bereft of meaning as it articulates the artist's idea in the most clear and concise set of terms.

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# STEPHEN BAMBURY

b 1951 New Zealand

## **Ngamotu** 1993

oil, steel and water

Courtesy of Two Rooms Gallery

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Ngā Motu or ‘the islands’ is a well-known location in New Plymouth that was renamed the Sugar Loaf Islands by Captain Cook in the 1770s. Today this offshore area takes in a number of ancient and massive volcanic stacks, a temperamental West Coast foreshore and a functioning port. The permutations of these natural and man-made elements resurface in this floor sculpture by Stephen Bambury, who produced it with the support of a local engineering company, for a solo exhibition at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Plymouth during the early nineties.

At a simple level *Ngamotu* could be seen as referencing a local geographical, geological and economic context: Taranaki is layered with the imprints of significant volcanic activity; it has major industries extracting rich mineral deposits; and crowds of surfers are attracted to its black sand beaches. At another level *Ngamotu* is more elusive, it is part of a larger series of Chakra works, in which a cross motif is repeated seven times in a continuous vertical line. By placing this work directly on the gallery floor, the artist plays with how this work is to be read; it clearly inhabits the audience’s space, it reflects back the architecture of the room and it alludes to another realm in its mercurial darkness. *Ngamotu* succinctly shows Bambury’s diverse set of interests, taking in eastern mysticism, western symbolism, the permutations of early modernism and minimalist sculpture.

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# TOM KREISLER

1938-2002 New Zealand

## **Night Weather** 1984

acrylic on canvas

Collection Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

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*Night Weather* is part of a series of maps that Kreisler started painting in the eighties and is a subject that he would regularly return to for the rest of his career. The daily weather forecast as depicted in newspapers was of specific interest, because it was a form of visual communication that readers had come to accept as a given. These maps were an important routine in people's lives that were designed to provide clear meteorological information and yet they also had a distinctly hand-rendered quality. Kreisler often sought to interrogate elements which came from an everyday situation and see how they shifted when they entered an art context. The weather map series pays particular homage to this idea, but it also recalibrates how audiences see the 'original' source information – a 'regular' weather map is never the same once you have seen Kreisler's version.

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# LEN LYE

1901-1980 New Zealand

**Free Radicals** (1958m rev 1979)

**Particles in Space** (1980)

Originally 16mm, B&W, sound. Digital transfer by Weta Digital Ltd and Park Road Production from material made available by the New Zealand Film Archive Ngā Kaitiaki O Ngā Taonga Whitiāhua  
Courtesy of the Len Lye Foundation

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Len Lye was always fascinated with how he could represent, harness and celebrate energy through his artwork. Lye saw the life force energy in everything - he was obsessed with the idea that his experiments in kinetic sculpture, painting and film should at their essence capture the wild brilliance of nature. *Free Radicals* and *Particles in Space* are both stark black and white direct films that Lye spent a sustained period working on, and which he would complete at the end of his career. Lye described *Free Radicals* as 'white ziggle-zag-splutter scratches on black 16mm film in quite doodling fashion'. There is a playful swagger to the lines and dots that dance, punctuate and reverberate across the black filmic field in these works - they both animate the accompanying 'tribal' soundscape and create a uniquely electric spectacle.

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# LUISE FONG

b 1964 New Zealand

## **Dredge** 1993

gesso, Chinese ink, acrylic, gouache, enamel on board and fabric

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Gifted 1997 by the artist

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Luise Fong is an artist whose work hovers at the edge of abstraction; the human body is an ever-present symptom of her painterly explorations. Part of the *Pathology* series, *Dredge* sees the artist metaphorically exhuming a relic or vestige from an unknown place of origin. The reference to Pathology is important; it involves the scientific investigation of the source, cause and development of a disease at a molecular level. Under these auspices *Dredge* comes to be associated with the unwell, secreting and abject body. However, Fong blows-up these blighted remains for closer inspection and in the process she shifts the corporeal and metaphysical relationship that viewers have with this malady, returning it to a discourse about surface, embellishment and beauty.

As Fong notes of her paintings: 'Water is an intrinsic part of my working process. Water, in which to suspend pigment, to drip onto the surface, to wash away traces of colour, to create separations of ink. ... I watch the undersurface emerge, washing back through black layers. Drilling or cutting holes in the surface is a further reaching-back beyond certainty. We cannot trust what the surface tells us. The image shifts and slides, disintegrates like clouds of smoke in a winter sky.'

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# MILAN MRKUSICH

b 1925 New Zealand

## **Painting Dark III** 1971

oil on canvas

Private loan collection, Dunedin Public Art Gallery

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“Shut your eyes, wait, think of nothing. Now open them ... One sees nothing but a great coloured undulation. What then? An irradiation and glory of colour. This is what a picture should give us...an abyss in which the eye is lost, a secret germination, a coloured state of grace...Lose consciousness. Descend with the painter into the dim tangled roots of things, and rise again from them in colours, be steeped in the light of them.”

These remarks by Paul Cézanne over a hundred years ago about painting are remarkably apt with respect to Milan Mrkusich's colour field paintings from the early seventies. Mrkusich's exploration of colour in the *Painting Dark* series from this period, embody Cézanne's idea that 'to paint is to register one's sensations of colour'. In his hands painting is stripped backed to a raw pure state, it becomes a place to recalibrate our consciousness. In the context of this exhibition *Painting Dark III* hovers at the edge of darkness, it is the blue abyss of dusk - the sublime shadowy realm at the edge of reason.

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# RALPH HOTERE

b 1931 (Te Aupouri) New Zealand

## **Black Painting** 1968-1969

brilite lacquer on hardboard

Collection Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

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Frank Stella famously remarked in a radio interview in 1964 that 'I knew a wise-guy who used to make fun of my painting, but he didn't like the Abstract Expressionists either. He said they would be good painters if they could only keep the paint as good as it is in the can. And that's what I tried to do. I tried to keep the paint as good as it was in the can.' Ralph Hotere's *Black Painting* series 1 – 7 produced only a few years after Stella's interview embody a number of concerns that this American modernist raises in this discussion. Hotere's high gloss black paintings that stretch out across the gallery, present a hard reality; they reflect back the viewers gaze rather than providing a renaissance (perspectival) window to be looked through.

For a new generation of contemporary artist's the sixties was a watershed period as they sought to make their work conceptually, politically and socially relevant. This shift in consciousness was also echoed in the materials that artists started using. While artists' paints usually come in tubes, industrial and household paints are more often than not stored in cans. By sourcing paints the use of which suggested another 'everyday' set of values, artist's placed their work not simply in an art-for-art's-sake equation; they also wanted it to speak in frank, fresh and lively ways to their audiences.



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# JULIAN DASHPER

1960-2009

New Zealand

**Untitled** c.1998

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acrylic on canvas

Courtesy of the Julian Dashper Estate

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Julian Dashper was always interested in decoding the language of art and its often fraught relationship with the everyday. These paintings, which look the part, are designed to seduce you into a false sense of security because behind their seamless façade lie a number of nagging questions about the artist's gamesmanship, originality and values. The key reference point for the black disks in this *Untitled* series are 12inch LPs. Dashper's appropriation of this motif is not arbitrary; he wants to trigger a raft of ideas about the relationship between popular music and abstract painting. As Dashper noted in this regard: "Pop music! Popular music has allowed an adoption of informality as a formal position, deriving its energy through the collapsing of previously contradictory positions. This has allowed me to think about abstraction as a field or subject rather than a language or discipline. These works are about abstraction in the same way that my work can also be thought of as about painting rather than being a painting itself. This is also how I am able to consider reproduction as embodying creative potential rather than limiting it. Perfection is therefore not necessarily about physical absolutes or pristine condition but about the idea of appearance. Perfection truly does become a state of mind."

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# LISA REIHANA

b 1964 (Ngā Puhi, Ngāti Hine, Ngāi Tū) New Zealand

**Hinepukohurangi** (from *Digital Marae*) 2001

**Hinewai** (from *Digital Marae*) 2001

colour photograph on aluminium

Private loan collection, Dunedin Public Art Gallery

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Lisa Reihana originally conceived of the *Digital Marae* series as an immersive conceptual and spatial installation, designed to cloak spectators in a temporal darkness, where Maori gods and ancestors commune, pose and stand-in for a rich series of narratives. In this artist's hands these evocative stories of creation, cosmology and genealogy, are retold through a contemporary perspective and recast for an art context.

In *Back in Black* the two sisters Hinepukohurangi and Hinewai appear on opposing walls at the entrance to the exhibition. Hinepukohurangi is a beautiful mist maiden who descends and settles to earth in the evening only to disappear each dawn. According to Ngāi Tuhoē lore one night she falls in love with Uenuku, a human, but she can only be with him at night. Uenuku is frustrated by this situation, particularly because he is teased by his friends and family when he claims to be in a relationship with the ever elusive Hinepukohurangi. In an act of desperation and to prove his stories, Uenuku tricks the goddess so that she sleeps in and cannot escape back to her world. When Hinewai becomes aware of this situation she calls out to and awakes her sister. Hinepukohurangi returns to heaven and vows to never see Uenuku again.

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# DARRYN GEORGE

b 1970 (Ngā Puhi) New Zealand

## **The Lamb's Book of Life** 2011

automotive paint on aluminium

Courtesy of the artist

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# SHANE COTTON

b 1964 (Ngāti Rangī, Ngāti Hīne, Te Uri Taniwha) New Zealand

## **Proverbs** 2009

acrylic on linen

Private Collection, Wellington

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# MARY-LOUISE BROWNE

b 1957 New Zealand

## **Black Sash** 1986

black granite

Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

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# GAVIN HIPKINS

b 1968 New Zealand

## **The Well (Black)** 1999

silver gelatin photograph

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased 1999  
with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society

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# RACHAEL RAKENA

b 1969 (Ngāi Tahu/Kai Tahu, Ngāi Tuhoe/ Ngā Puhi) New Zealand

## **Kaore te aroha...(endless is the love...)** 2000

## **Ka u te kai a te po** 2000

## **One man is an island** 2000

High definition video

Courtesy of the artist

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