



“Today a young man on acid realised that all matter is merely energy condensed to a slow vibration – that we are all one consciousness experiencing itself subjectively. There is no such thing as death, life is only a dream, and we’re the imagination of ourselves. Here’s Tom with the weather.”

– Bill Hicks, *Sane Man* (1989)

This initial quote comes from the late great American comedian, satirist and social critic Bill Hicks. Who during one of his infamous stand-up routines introduced this thought with the following proposition: “Wouldn’t you like to see a positive LSD story on the news? To base your decision on information rather than scare tactics and superstition? Perhaps? Wouldn’t that be interesting? Just for once?”

Arguably this is a provocative place to start the group exhibition *Elsewhere*, and yet there is something in the sensibility and set of concerns presented by Hicks which is apparent in this selection of artworks. Delving into the depths of the unknown, ruminating on the edge of reason, destabilizing the line between fact and fiction, and raising doubts about what could be considered ‘normal’, is ever present in this display.

Elsewhere brings works from the Gallery’s permanent collection together with a series of long and short-term loans. This material is from a selection of New Zealand and international artists, which spans a thirty year period and reflects a diverse set of concerns around documentary, memory and history. This thematic exhibition sets-up a broad range of coordinates for reading the various ways that contemporary artists have and continue to disturb our relationship with notions of place, narrative and time.

While ‘elsewhere’ is not exactly placeless, here it appears as a piece of non-descript New Zealand coastline, the Mediterranean and Kansas. What it represents is difficult to fathom. It is this elusive quality, where the vague exists on the same plateau as the descriptive, which a number of artists are interested in testing and discussing; such as the smell of an ‘unknown’ bodily presence; reconstructing a ‘lost’ dance and measuring the imperceptible colour of light at a particular place and time.

① LAURENCE ABERHART [b 1949 New Zealand]

The Mediterranean, Spain, 19 November 1994 1995

platinum print

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.
Purchased 2007 with funds from the Dunedin City Council.

Laurence Aberhart has been setting up his camera on foreshores in New Zealand, Australia, Japan and Spain for more than two decades. But rather than facing inland to capture the topographical features and remnants of civilisation, he turns his back on these signs of place and instead looks outwards to register or take in the vanishing point. In many respects these photographs contravene Aberhart’s ‘standard practice’. There are no placeholders that reflect the slow march of time, or people’s need to be seen, identified, and/or registered. Instead these photographs delve into a more poetic set of values. Even if the indexical moment is still noted in the photographic records, the camera points to an endless ‘timeless’ horizon and so the subsequent image hovers somewhere between being an abstract, and concrete, record.

② MATT HENRY [b 1973 New Zealand]

Untitled Dyad (Signal Yellow / Grey) 2011

acrylic and lacquer on linen

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.
Gifted 2011 by the artist through Starkwhite.

Over recent years, Matt Henry has been assiduously generating paintings and sculptures that mimic the latest gadgets and designer items, which have become such a feature of our modern lives. These surrogates, as the artist suggests, can stand in for our mod-con desires - they are functionless blanks that do not need to operate or fill our brains with another set of wants. *Untitled Dyad (Signal Yellow / Grey)* sees a continuation of the artist’s line of inquiry into the vestiges of modernism and the contemporary conflation of art, design and consumerism. In this particular artwork, Henry produces a minimalist painting which simulates the proportions, palette (on one-side) and placement of an office divider. His artwork both disavows its physical status, while it also interrupts and brings into question the very value and functionality of art.

③ ANN SHELTON [b 1967 New Zealand]

0900 #1 from “A Girl in Every Port” series 1999

c-type print

Private loan collection, Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Ann Shelton first came to serious attention as a photographer with the publication in 1997 of *REDEYE*, which documented the people in and around the Auckland artist-run space Teststrip. Since that period, Shelton has consistently produced a diverse range of practice which analysis the relationship between gender, politics and history as it is framed through photographic history. In the “A Girl in Every Port” series, Shelton seeks out the glamorous areas of a cruise liner; the top deck games area, a Grecian style indoor pool and a lavish honeymoon suite. However, while this small set of images taps into an existing set of highly rehearsed tropes; The Love Boat, *cruise* liner and Fantasy Island, there is also a seamier set of connotations at play in these photos. The vacated ship is strangely uneasy; the decor for all its ostentatious trappings cannot conceal the wear and tear of reality.

BILL HENSON [b 1955 Australian]

④ **Untitled #93** 2001-2002

c-type photograph

Private loan collection, Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

⑧ **Untitled #117** 2001-2002

c-type photograph

Private loan collection, Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Bill Henson is renowned for creating dark, elegant and fragile photographs; elements which are clearly depicted in *Untitled #93* and *Untitled #117*. Duality is a common theme throughout Henson’s work and the adolescent is a perfect model for this; hovering between two states – the child and the adult. These subjects, on the precipice of adulthood, encompass innocence, self-awareness, uncertainty and detachment from both themselves and the viewer. The models’ faces are partly shadowed, there is a lack of spatial cues beyond the subjects themselves and the photographic technique, Bokeh, used by Henson creates a painterly atmosphere in each work. These qualities are not only consistent throughout Henson’s practice, but also add to the vague, ambiguous nature of these works. Henson’s images consistently require the viewer to question what it is they are looking at, and it is this equivocal nature of his photographs, in combination with the nude adolescent subjects, which can create divided opinions around his powerful works.

⑤ MARTIN CREED [b 1968 England]

Work No. 312: A lamp going on and off 2003

lamp, electric timer switch

Collection of Jim Barr and Mary Barr.

Martin Creed is well known for producing subtle interventions or realisations of ideas that shift viewers’ consciousness. His alarmingly simple artworks are designed to raise questions about the artist’s (and by extension, the artworks) role as a provocateur, conjuror and trickster. The *Work No.* series, which *A lamp going on and off* is number 312, is a rather utilitarian title for such a rich plethora of artworks. The messaging around this series pays homage to the at times, dry coordinates that marked out the serialisation of various modes of conceptual, abstract and minimalist art production, whose influences are still evident in the strategies that artist’s employ today. There is a strangely nagging quality to this particular work by Creed; the light is not frenetic in its turning on and off, as the constant flickering both lures you in and also affects how one experiences the other elements in this exhibition. Here the brevity of the idea and its manifestation becomes a powerful tool. It has the ability to transform and transport us from the actual to the imaginary in a split second.

⑥ MARIE SHANNON [b 1960 New Zealand]

Two heaters 1992

black and white photograph

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

Marie Shannon’s unsettling and innately comical photographic studies usually place domestic routines and its inhabitants centre stage. *Two Heaters* can be read within this larger body of practice, and yet it is also a strikingly singular image, which locates the ‘home front’ on a wild New Zealand foreshore. What makes this such a memorable image is not its staging, but rather the casual relationship of these appliances positioning to their setting. Like alien life forms landing in a new world, the heaters purvey their domain ready to go forth and stake their claim. Of course the idea that the appliances have taken over, been set free, or have become possessed, is completely absurd. But is it beyond the bounds of reason to think about how much we have come to rely on, or crave the domestic. Maybe as this work suggests, nature can only be fully appreciated with our home comforts within easy reach.

ELSEWHERE

⑦ SRIWHANA SPONG [b 1979 New Zealand]

Costume for a Mourner 2010

digital video on DVD, duration 8.22 min

Courtesy of the artist and Michael Lett.

Costume for a Mourner re-creates a small component of the ballet *Le chant du Rossignol (The Song of the Nightingale)* choreographed and composed by the legendary duo George Balanchine and Igor Stravinsky. Spong's re-imagined dance is based on historical accounts and a rare photographic glimpse of the original Ballet Russes performances from the early twentieth century, largely because Balanchine believed that photographic records undermined the experience and power of the physical performance. Spong's film follows a male dancer who wears a large black and white smock, based on the original designs by Henri Matisse, as he transitions through a series of highly choreographed moves. This beautifully rendered film captures the momentary theatrical power of this performance; it seemingly connects us with the original 'lost' work while also reminding us of our dependence on the artist's ability to transport us to an unknown/non-existent place.

⑨ CHRISTINE WEBSTER [b 1958 New Zealand]

Under The Airport 1980

black and white photograph

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased 1981 with funds from the Dunedin Public Art Gallery Society.

Christine Webster is best known for work that investigates the accepted boundaries in society through the exploration of areas such as identity, sexuality, fantasy and gender stereotypes. While at first glance it may seem unexpected to identify this early work with Webster, it does contain two elements that are consistently developed and played with throughout her oeuvre. Firstly, the work is reminiscent of a movie still where the image captured appears to be only one small moment of a much larger 'scene'; and secondly, the character is placed in obscurely dark surroundings. *Under The Airport* blatantly plays on its own ambiguity, expecting the viewer to fill in the gaps in the narrative. By doing so it seems to raise more questions than answers. Where is he running to? And perhaps more importantly – what is he running from?

⑩ DANE MITCHELL [b 1976 New Zealand]

Epitaph 2011

perfume and cabinet

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Purchased 2012 with funds from Dunedin Public Art Gallery and with assistance from Starkwhite and the artist.

Nearly everyone has experienced a moment when even a subtle fragrance brings a memory to the forefront of our minds... smells, feelings and memories seem to become so easily and intimately entwined. Dane Mitchell plays with this paradigm in *Epitaph*, where perfume is used as a sculptural medium, evoking and transmitting the idea of objects into the brain. Here the viewer is required to face the vitrine and place their own face in the hole provided, a move which ensures the viewer is focusing on, and engaging with, the work. This site responsive perfume, created in collaboration with perfumer Michel Roudnitska, plays on the unknown

and the ambiguous, transporting the viewer elsewhere – to another time, place, or even realm – just for a moment. The mirror which lines the base of the vitrine also adds to this idea of transportation, referencing a concept that was explored in Jean Cocteau's film *Orphée* (1950), where mirrors acted as gateways to the afterlife, able to be crossed by those still living. *Epitaph* has the ability to make you feel nostalgic, connected, melancholic or comforted by tantalising wisps of olfactory memory.

⑪ WAYNE BARRAR [b 1957 New Zealand]

Raw unfinished cavity, salt mine, Hutchinson, Kansas, USA 2004

2010

colour pigment print

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Gifted 2011 by the artist.

This work comes from a significant long-term photographic series that the Dunedin Public Art Gallery exhibited, toured and was subsequently gifted by Wayne Barrar. *An Expanding Subterra* sought to document the growing utilisation by transnational companies and state funded organisations of the underground as a place to store and extract a rich plethora of resources. *Raw unfinished cavity, salt mine, Hutchinson, Kansas, USA 2004*, captures a recently stripped tunnel that is waiting to be fitted out so that it can join the massive network of storage facilities that lie beneath Kansas. The once mythical endless frontier that was the American Midwest may no longer exist on the surface, but as this work indicates it can now be found in the underworld. This newly tunnelled out vanishing point becomes both a place of security, used to escape the problems of an increasingly environmentally degraded and populated surface, and a dead-end, where access is tightly controlled physically and psychologically, by a few political and economic orders.

⑫ JULIAN DASHPER [1960 – 2009 New Zealand]

Here I was given 1990-1991

acrylic on canvas with conservation fabric, tape, cord and frames

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

"The modernism that came into New Zealand had to come a long way to get here. It is only natural, given the way it was packaged, that it got damaged along the way. Whatever, ours was one with some mileage on the clock even before we got to take it for a spin." – Julian Dashper in *Headlands: Thinking Through New Zealand Art*.

In this quotation Julian Dashper alludes to New Zealand's geographical isolation and the impact this has on the way information is received, altered and interpreted after it travels the substantial distances to reach our shores. Regarded as one of New Zealand's most well-known contemporary artists, Dashper's work focuses on this information, specifically the theory and history around conceptual, abstract and minimalist ideologies. In his own handmade form of modernism, *Here I was given* consists of three imperfect, un-stretched, fragmented frames of various sizes that allow the institutional walls to show through, thus drawing attention to the way art is framed, both literally and figuratively. As the title suggests Dashper makes a reference to Colin McCahon's 1961 work *Here I give thanks to Mondrian*, where the canvas is broken up into areas of light and dark voids and angular shapes. While it is often hard to decide whether Dashper is mocking the ambitions of modern art or replicating elements of other's works as a gesture of keen affiliation, one thing is for sure – Dashper's work could not exist without the art history which precedes it.

⑬ SPENCER FINCH [b 1962 American]

Ice Cave Fox Glacier 2008

neon tube and gels

Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Gifted 2008 by the artist.

New Zealand was a far off wonderland for a young Spencer Finch when he studied geography at high school in America. During his artist's in residency at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 2008, Finch travelled to the West Coast of the South Island to immerse himself in the New Zealand landscape. As an intrepid artist, tourist and explorer Finch was fascinated with idea of making a series of field recordings of Fox and Franz Joseph Glacier, in particular the dramatic aspects of these sites at an instant and long-term level. Finch set-out to measure and record the colour temperature of light as it refracted in an ice cave and the subtle shifts in colour in the associated glacial rivers as the melt released a rich tableau of geological matter. In *Ice Cave Fox Glacier* the artist breaks sunlight down to its precise colour consistency, as it appeared to him at an exact moment and place. Housed in one of the Gallery's vitrines the neon tubes' artificial light is reworked so that it mimics a sublime moment in nature.

⑭ RONNIE VAN HOUT [b 1962 New Zealand]

I've Abandoned Me 2003

mixed media

Long term loan collection, Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Ronnie van Hout has consistently explored the self-portrait genre throughout his career. In *I've Abandoned Me* the artist is presented as a life-size resin figure, twice. The two figures, who seem oblivious to each other, are dressed in op-shop suits and are both looking at screens in front of them. On one screen Australia's Hanging Rock is shown with the sun slowly setting on a continuous loop; on the other, van Hout is shown wearing a variety of disguises and questioning onlookers (and himself). Between the two van Hout's, perched against a rock, is a monkey whose hands are grasping a screen showing the same video of van Hout. This work plays with the construction of identity and the fantasies of self. The artist has replicated himself almost exactly, and yet this is juxtaposed with multiple new identities created within the video. He is both imposing and manipulating himself within the space and questioning the viewer as he does it. Van Hout has a strong and freakishly real presence within the space while he is somewhere else entirely. The use of sculpture, moving images and model making seems to split the artist's existence into a number of locations. The self-deprecating strangeness mixed with the van Hout style humour creates an unusual and unique form of confrontation.

ELSEWHERE

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A department of the Dunedin City Council

