

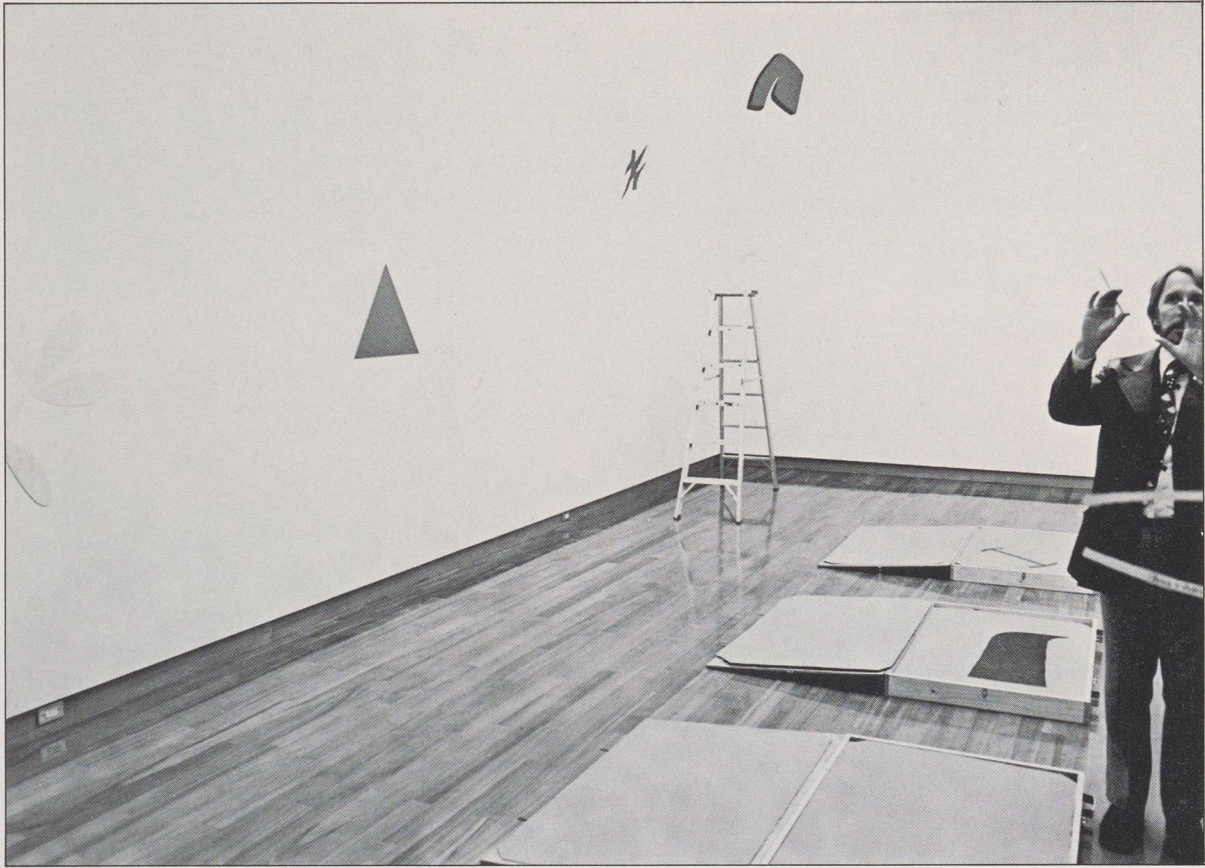
1982



AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY
ARTIST'S PROJECT No. 1

AUGUST 1982

RICHARD KILLEEN
CHANCE AND INEVITABILITY 1982
85 pieces Alkyd on Aluminium



For the past four years Richard Killeen has been making paintings in which the component parts are flat metal cut-outs. They are hung on the wall in arrangements which differ every time the work is shown. They have no frame other than the wall itself — in this exhibition the cut-outs hang on all the walls of the gallery.

This work was commissioned by the Auckland City Art Gallery as the initial exhibition in a series of artist's projects. For the artist it is, in many respects, also a first. This is the largest cut-out Killeen has ever made — both in the size of the individual pieces and in their number. It is the first time Killeen has invited people at an exhibition opening to participate in the hanging. Each person had the opportunity to take a cut-out, a hammer and a nail, perhaps climb a ladder, and place his or her cut-out anywhere on the walls of the gallery. So the art work takes shape gradually with the involvement of a large number of people.

Killeen has gradually loosened his hold on the composition of the painted metal cut-outs. The first ones were hung by the artist in a dealer gallery, then, once purchased, the owner was free to arrange them as he/she wished — but an initial public arrangement by the artist had taken place. Then in a 1981 exhibition, Killeen invited friends to each hang a work and the name of the person who did the arranging was given in the exhibition catalogue. Now Killeen has invited a large number of people, many of them unknown to him, to take part in the hanging of one large work. So this is a cooperative art work in its composition and consequently raises some interesting issues. By inviting others to do the hanging, and surrendering the usual artist's control over the composition of his work, Killeen makes himself vulnerable. Whatever we do with the pieces, Killeen is still the artist — we are anonymous but his name stays on the label and he accepts the final responsibility for the work. Yet our contribution, though anonymous, is not totally carefree and Killeen knows this too. He involves us, the viewers and participants, in the painstaking and often self-conscious task of making an art work; putting us in the position of artists making difficult decisions. Just where to place the piece we are given — what does it 'go' with, how do we respond to the colour shape and texture of 'our' piece —

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and the fact that our decision is influenced by those of people who preceded us and will also be affected by those who come after.

Richard Killeen's control of the work, then, lies in the long process of arriving at the form of the individual pieces. He gathers, selects, refines and constructs the shapes, discarding many in the process. He believes that each piece makes an indispensable contribution to the work. They must all be able to survive as individual shapes no matter where they are put. Despite the wide variation in size, shape and colour, each must hold its own. A balance is required.

The shapes in this work are less vehemently two-dimensional than in some earlier cut-outs in which each piece had only one colour, sprayed on for a smooth flat finish and creating silhouettes on the wall which had no potential for emerging into our space. Here he has used diverse colours and has applied the paint with brush, knife or fingers. In some, the paint gives a strong illusion of three-dimensionality; in others, colour shape and texture combine to suggest holes punched in the wall and spaces beyond. Some are immediately recognisable as representing objects we know in the world; but others are tantalisingly obscure, suggesting totems or emblems from many cultures. Some are complex, others stark and simple.

Killeen knows the sources he used for his work, and in the adjacent gallery he has displayed them for our inspection. But he is aware that we each bring to any art work our own experience of the world, so the associations or meanings for the shapes vary with each viewer. Each of us reads it differently, and we are encouraged to do so.

Chance and Inevitability encompasses the predominant features of Killeen's present work: the varied nature of the individual cut-outs and the artist's exploration of open composition.

Alexa M. Johnston

Curator of New Zealand Painting and Sculpture

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Richard Killeen was born in Auckland in 1946. From 1964 to 1966 he studied painting at Elam School of Fine Art, graduating with a Diploma of Fine Arts. In 1968 he held a two-man show with Ian Scott (Barry Lett Galleries). His first one-man shows were at the Barry Lett Galleries in 1970, and the Petar/James Gallery in 1972 and 1973. He won the Tokoroa Art Award. He has exhibited widely throughout New Zealand. Across the Pacific, August 1978, was the first of his 'Cut-out' works — a concept he continues to use.
