



Tom Risley

Further Concern with Still Life and Composition

15 December 1989 – 14 February 1990

An International Artist's Project

organised by the Auckland City Art Gallery

supported by the Australia/New Zealand Foundation

Still life with burnt orange vase 1989

five components:

(a) car bonnets

(b) carpet, twine

(c) fibreglass, epoxy resin on plywood armature

(d) corrugated iron

(e) foam rubber mattress

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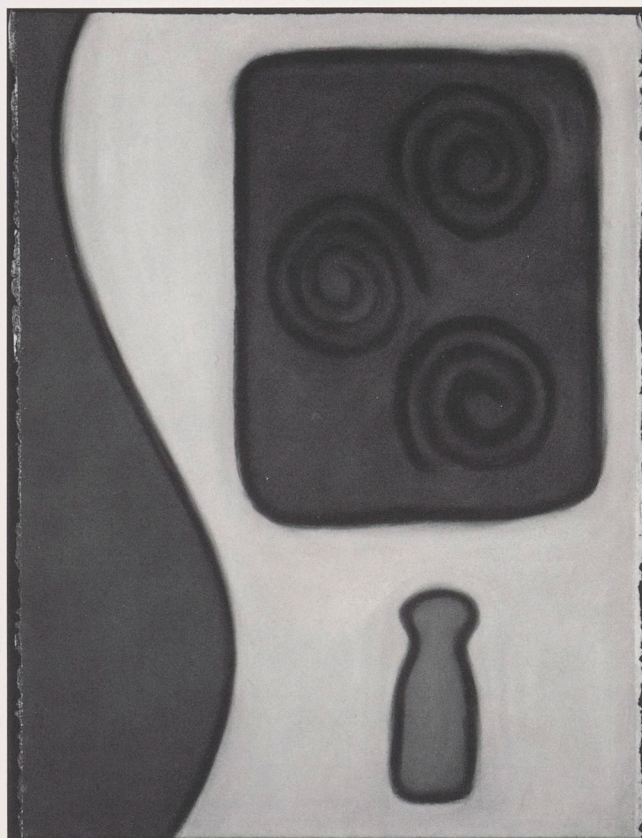
Tom Risley

Tom Risley improvises adventurously, he doesn't plan. He is a magician who surprises himself and his viewers by conjuring through adjustment of viewpoint – like the rabbit from a duck, a comfortable upright chair from a reef-washed canoe, metal tom-toms from motor car panels, turtles and crocodiles from beach-flotsam rubber thongs. (Does New Zealand wear thongs? Minimal flip-flops, they are the simplest form of footwear.)

'With a thong in my art' was the title of a 1983 article on Risley and the too-cute phrase is nevertheless fair enough in its evocation of carefree song-in-heart pleasure in creativity, in making things, in bringing back to life humankind's cast-off and decayed artefacts.

He has lived in big-city Brisbane among disused shipping and dumped motor cars. He knows the present-day rustic folk arts of carved motor-tyre swans, and suspended car-door signs, announcing the roadside entrances to Queensland homes. In Cairns he knew the drum-beat of sheet-metal hammering in boys' classes in manual trades; he has not been to any art school. He knows that for country folk anywhere, not only in his native North Queensland, creative ingenuity and improvisation in repairing and in cost-free construction of things have always been a natural part of life.

He knows plenty about art too. His father Noel Risley was a beachcomber and a sculptor who also sold carvings to Great Barrier Reef tourists; some of the tourist-sculptures were carved not from wood but from unconventional materials such as volcanic lava, or coral. Tom is familiar with the museums of Paris, and sees connections between



Auckland drawing 1989
(from a series of twelve)
pastel on paper
770 x 580 mm

Australian bush creativity and the direct power of Melanesian, black African and Australian Aboriginal art. Last year (1988) I observed him having a gregarious good time at the Biennale in Venice, mixing with the international new-art scene, checking out the Old Masters in the churches and museums.

Another Australian artist, Rosalie Gascoigne, was a native of Auckland and, like Risley, is a lover and transformer of found objects, though not always of artefacts; she accumulates natural objects as well. Gascoigne's professional starting-point was domestic Japanese ikebana arrangements in Canberra, not the tourist art-market and the trade school in Cairns. Her works evoke slow natural processes like growth, the seasons, the qualities of light: they are not contemplative, abstract and subtle.

I mention Gascoigne's work not only because it uses found objects but also because it has been

seen recently in New Zealand; and because it can be contrasted with Risley's work which is usually figurative not abstract, active rather than contemplative. However both artists are profoundly concerned with subtlety. Risley just as much as Gascoigne delights in the colours and textures produced by exposure to wind, water, light and the passage of time, notably in works made from dismantled latticework laths, that is from painted timber screens which once provided an interface between the timeless elements and transient human activities. Risley's work is a joyous grab at extended human vitality. It accepts the natural beauties of decay but affirms the equally natural rejuvenation and maintenance of vitality that are possible through recycling waste materials.

I compliment the Auckland City Art Gallery on its judgment in choosing so excellent an artist as Risley; its programming skills in filling in with solo shows the broader picture presented by *Advance Australian Painting* (1988); its art-political pointedness in choosing an artist whose work is intensely regional in content (tropical North Queensland rustic, not metropolitan); and its eco-political timeliness in choosing an artist whose optimistic work signifies a future for an endangered planet Earth.

Daniel Thomas

Director, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Biography

1947 Born Rockhampton, Queensland

1950 Moved to Cairns, North Queensland

No formal art education; seven years in the electrical trade; eleven years in the C.S.I.R.O. Rainforest Research Division.

Now living in Herberton, North Queensland.

Solo exhibitions

1981 Martin Gallery, Townsville

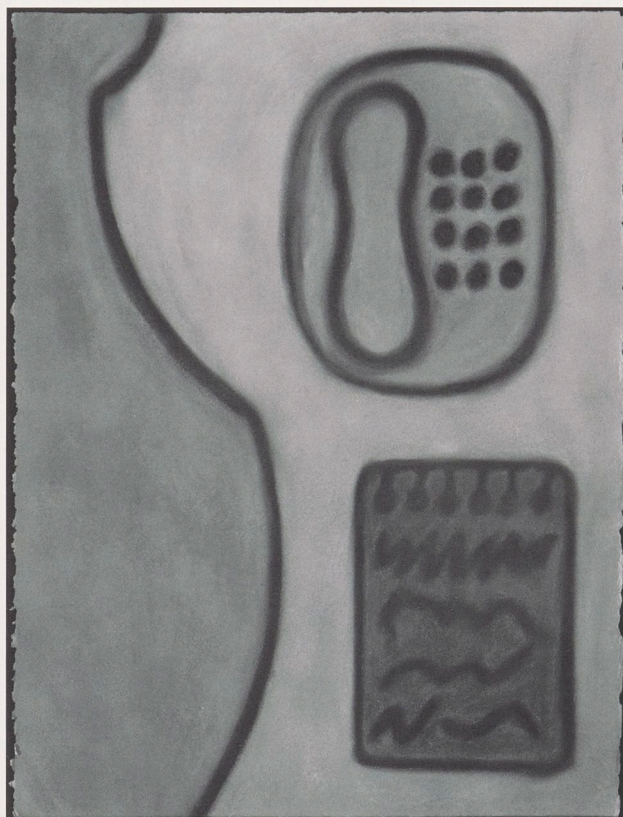
1982 Ray Hughes Gallery, Brisbane

1983 Ray Hughes Gallery, Brisbane

1984 Brisbane College of Advanced Education, Kelvin Grove Campus Gallery

1985 Ray Hughes Gallery, Sydney

1986 Ray Hughes Gallery, Brisbane



Auckland drawing 1989

(from a series of twelve)

pastel on paper

770 x 580 mm

1987 Ray Hughes Gallery, Brisbane

Ray Hughes Gallery, Sydney

1988 Ray Hughes Gallery, Brisbane

1989 Ray Hughes Gallery, Sydney

Ray Hughes Gallery, Brisbane

Selected group exhibitions

1981 First Australian Sculpture Triennial, Melbourne

1982 'Sculpture '82', Warana and Commonwealth Games Festival, Brisbane

1984 Second Australian Sculpture Triennial, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

'Appositions', Brisbane College of Advanced Education, Kelvin Grove Campus Gallery

1985 'Trois Australiens', Galerie Baudoin Lebon, Paris

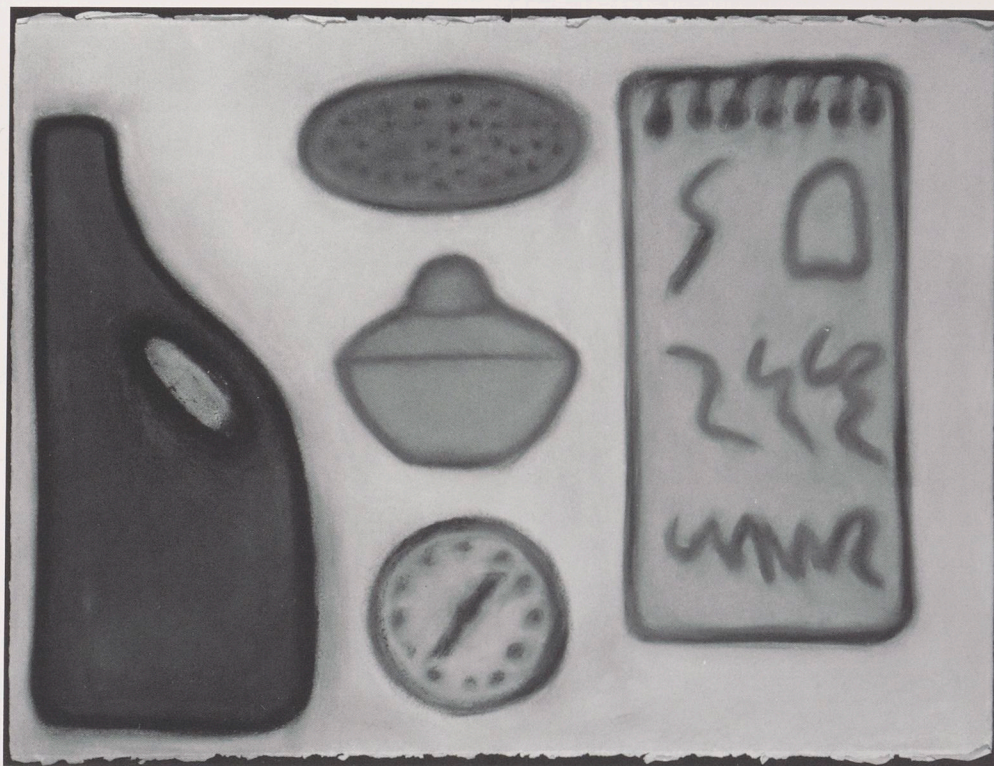
'The First Exhibition', Ray Hughes Gallery, Sydney

'Queensland Works', University Gallery, Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane

'Australian Perspecta', Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

'Six New Directions', Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

1987 Third Australian Sculpture Triennial, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne



Auckland drawing 1989
(from a series of twelve)
pastel on paper
580 × 770 mm

'M.O.C.A. Opens: A Review of Contemporary Australian Art', Museum of Contemporary Art, Brisbane

'Painters and Sculptors: A Survey of Australian Contemporary Art', Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane; also at Saitama Museum of Contemporary Art, Japan

1988 Four Australian artists, Tokyo

'Seventeen Australian Artists', Ray Hughes Gallery at the Venice Biennale, Venice

'The New Generation', Australian National Gallery, Canberra

'Creating Australia' ('The Great Australian Art Show'), Official Bicentenary Exhibition, travelling State Galleries

Public collections

Australian National Gallery, Canberra; Phillip Morris Collection

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Art Bank, Sydney

Brisbane College of Advanced Education Collection,

Queensland Museum of Contemporary Art, Brisbane

¹Gold Coast Art Gallery, Queensland

Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth

Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville, Queensland

Australian National Gallery, Canberra

Riddoch Gallery, Mt. Gambier, South Australia

Acknowledgements

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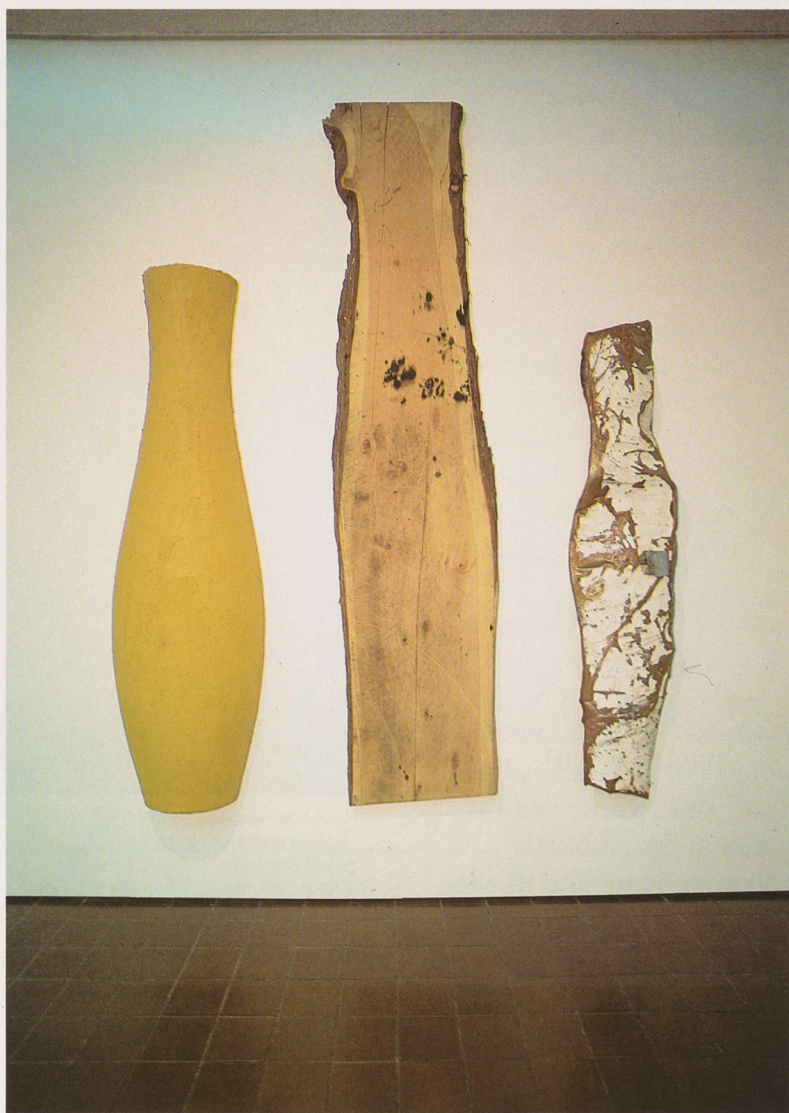
An International Artist's Project 1989 – 1990



Still life with orange vase 1989

five components:

- (a) fibreglass, epoxy resin on plywood armature
- (b) concrete blocks
- (c) wood
- (d) door panel with glass pane
- (e) hardboard sign with carpet



Still life with yellow ochre vase 1989
three components:
(a) fibreglass, epoxy resin on plywood armature
(b) timber slab
(c) truck panel