

# ALEXIS HUNTER



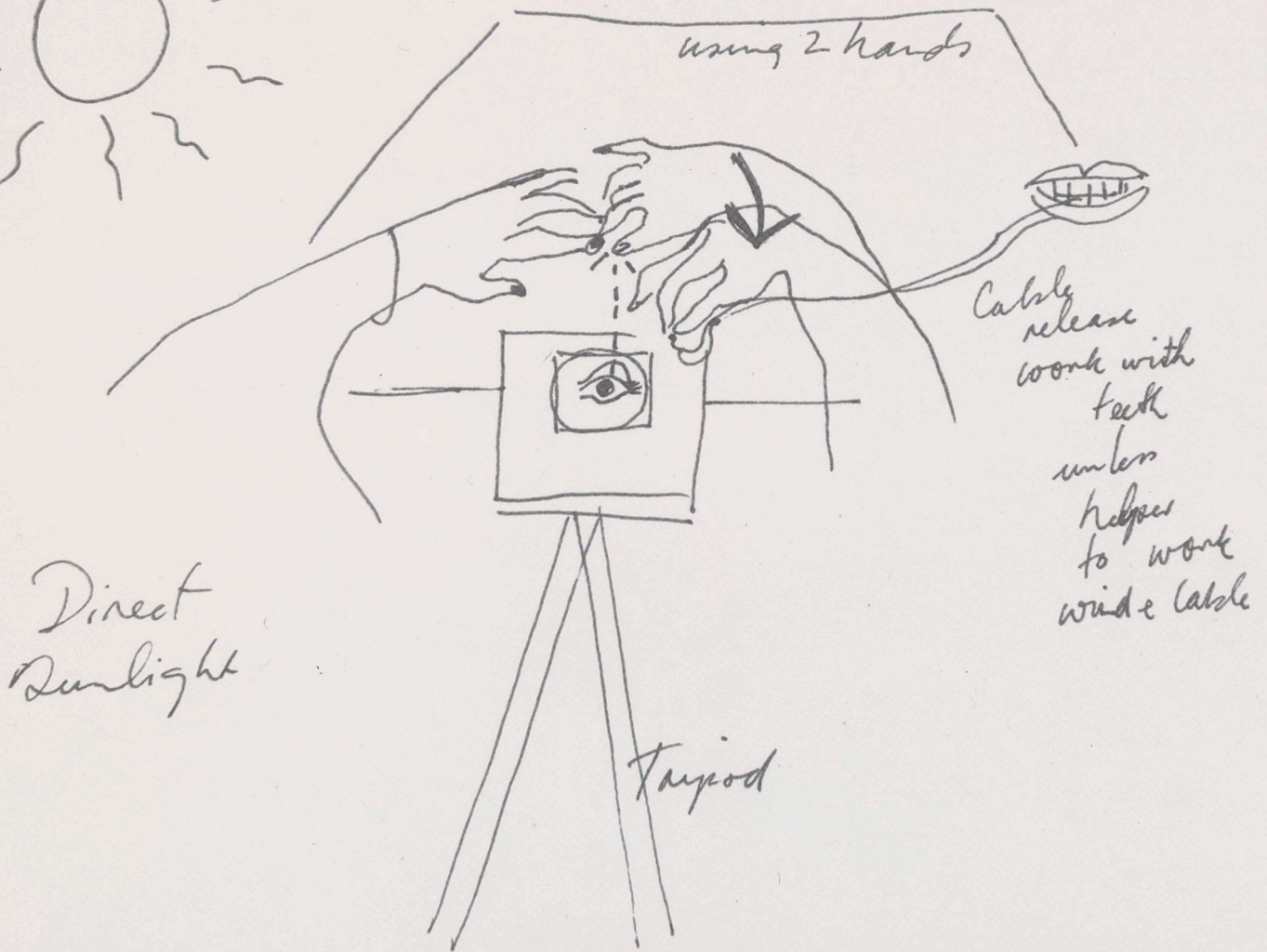
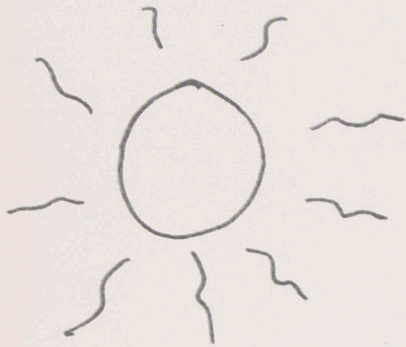
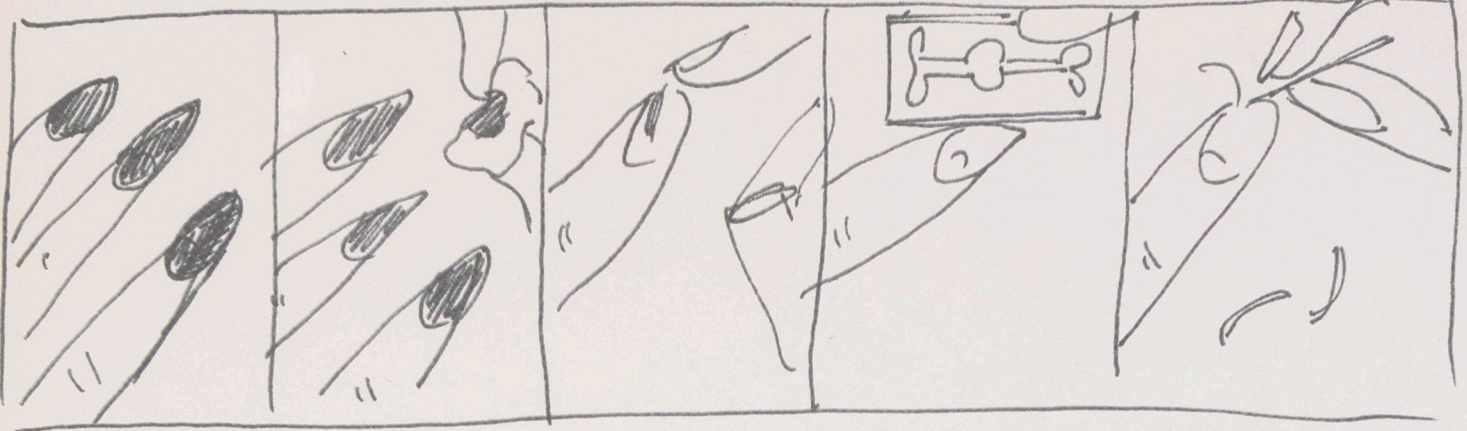
Fears/Dreams/Desires

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change: Decisive Action

1989

ALEXIS HUNTER

Fears / Dreams / Desires

A NOVEL BY ALEXIS HUNTER

1989

ALEXIS HUNTER

Fears / Dreams / Desires

A survey exhibition 1976-1988

Auckland City Art Gallery

Assisted by the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand

Handled with care by Air New Zealand Cargo



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## Foreword

The recognition in the 1970s that there is a feminist art history and that there are feminist artists, and have been since the High Renaissance, was a significant development in contemporary art and epistemology.

The New Zealand artist, Alexis Hunter, established herself as a key progressive artist in Britain during this time and contributed both as an artist and theorist to the aesthetic and philosophical discussions which took place internationally.

The exhibition that this catalogue documents is retrospective to the extent that it looks back over twelve years. It begins with the photographic narrative sequences which marked a major development in Hunter's work and can be considered as a vital contribution, not only to feminist art but to art practice.

Having established an appropriate and forceful medium for her concerns Hunter later returned to painting to address issues that, because of their mythopoeic nature, were inappropriate for photographic treatment.

Hunter returns regularly to New Zealand and continues to make references in her work to her motherland, revealing a position that straddles international and regionalist concerns, clearly one of the features of post-modernist art practice.

The Auckland City Art Gallery's programme of solo exhibitions of New Zealand art enables us to review the progress and contribution of major New Zealand artists working both in this country and abroad.

Each exhibition, however, should be seen not only as an expression of the artist's work, but as an investigation of recent and current art practice which has much wider ramifications.

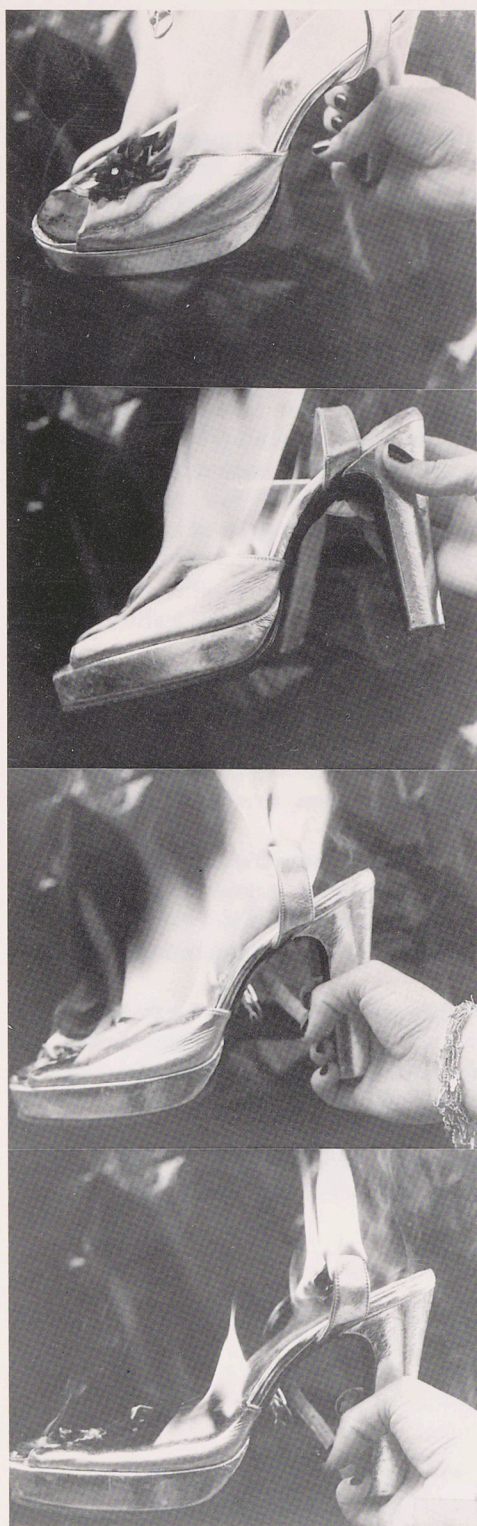
Alexis Hunter *Fears/Dreams/Desires* celebrates the art of Alexis Hunter, the controversial and positive impact of feminist art on our times and the extreme importance of feminist revisionism in art history and theory, the effects of which will eventually be accepted as a fundamental contribution to twentieth century culture.

The Gallery gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Alexis Hunter and the many lenders to this exhibition, both in New Zealand and abroad. Our special thanks go to Elizabeth Eastmond, Lecturer, Department of Art History, University of Auckland, guest curator of the exhibition in association with Alexa Johnston, the Gallery's Senior Curator of Contemporary New Zealand Art. We also thank the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand and Air New Zealand for their generous support of the exhibition.

Christopher Johnstone

DIRECTOR





4 Approach to Fear XIII: Pain—  
Destruction of Cause 1977  
colour photographs, 2 panels  
1015 x 425mm each  
Courtesy of the artist

## Signs of the Times: Alexis Hunter's photo-narratives

Alexa M. Johnston

Alexis Hunter's photo-narrative sequences, made between 1976 and 1981 have been widely exhibited, reproduced and discussed. Hunter created them in Britain at a time when feminist challenges to Western society's expectations of women (and women's consequent expectations of themselves) were current and vigorously debated.

A number of the photo-narrative sequences appeared in important exhibitions. Nine of the *Approaches to Fear* works were included in the Hayward Gallery's annual exhibition in 1978. (*Cat. 3 and 4* in this exhibition were among those shown.) All the selectors for the 1978 Hayward were women and they chose to exhibit works by sixteen women and seven men, a choice which was seen by many as a milestone in women artists' long struggle for acknowledgement by major institutions. The all-male panel for the previous year's exhibition had chosen one woman and twenty-nine men.

Alexis Hunter's works entered an international discourse which centred, for a time, on feminism and its questioning of male privilege. In 1978 the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London showed Hunter's photo-narratives in a solo exhibition called 'Approaches to Fear'. Hunter was also included in 'Three perspectives on photography—Recent British Photography' in June 1979 at the Hayward Gallery.

In 1981 the Edward Totah Gallery in London showed four groups of photo-narrative sequences in a large solo exhibition. A substantial catalogue was produced, partly funded by the Arts Council of Great Britain. A year later Hunter was one of twenty-four British artists chosen to exhibit at the 1982 Sydney Biennale where three photo-narrative sequences were shown (*cat. 4, 7 and 8*). The influential feminist critic Lucy Lippard, who wrote the introductory article for the Hayward Annual exhibition, also contributed an essay to Hunter's Totah Gallery catalogue. Lippard wrote:

*Alexis Hunter makes icons of fearlessness for women, metaphors for feminism, freely expressed emotion, political consciousness of others. These icons may be art (which is essentially passive) but they depict action of unexpected kinds. In most of her photo-serials Hunter aims for two levels of communication—the overt political message and psychological identification. On both levels, the viewers bring their own lives and feelings to continue the image sequences. (1981)<sup>1</sup>*

Lippard also pointed out that Hunter's work contains throughout "a thread of rage at capitalism focused on the mass media which have, as Judith Williamson puts it, been 'selling us ourselves' for profit"<sup>2</sup>

Catalogue essays of course have different work to do from general criticism. In a 1983 thesis titled *Encounters of the first kind: critics' responses to feminist art in Britain, 1970–1978* Caroline Osborne discusses the range of critical responses to the 1978 Hayward Gallery exhibition. Osborne initially notes that in that exhibition, only three of the exhibiting women artists described themselves as feminist—Susan Hiller, Mary Kelly and Alexis Hunter. The aim of the exhibition's selectors was to establish women artists as an integral part of the contemporary art scene rather than to make a strong feminist statement. Establishment critics were generally relieved that the content of the show was not solely political and used this fact to dismiss and further marginalise feminist art by insisting that it was not art at all; feminist writers however were disappointed at the token representation of feminist artists.

The thrust of Osborne's analysis of reviews of feminist art in Britain in the 1970s, is that the majority of reviewers both male and female were reluctant to accept the wide diversity of feminist work, and in Hunter's case (and Mary Kelly's) insisted that works which were ambiguous in meaning, or too intellectual, could not be educative in a political sense.

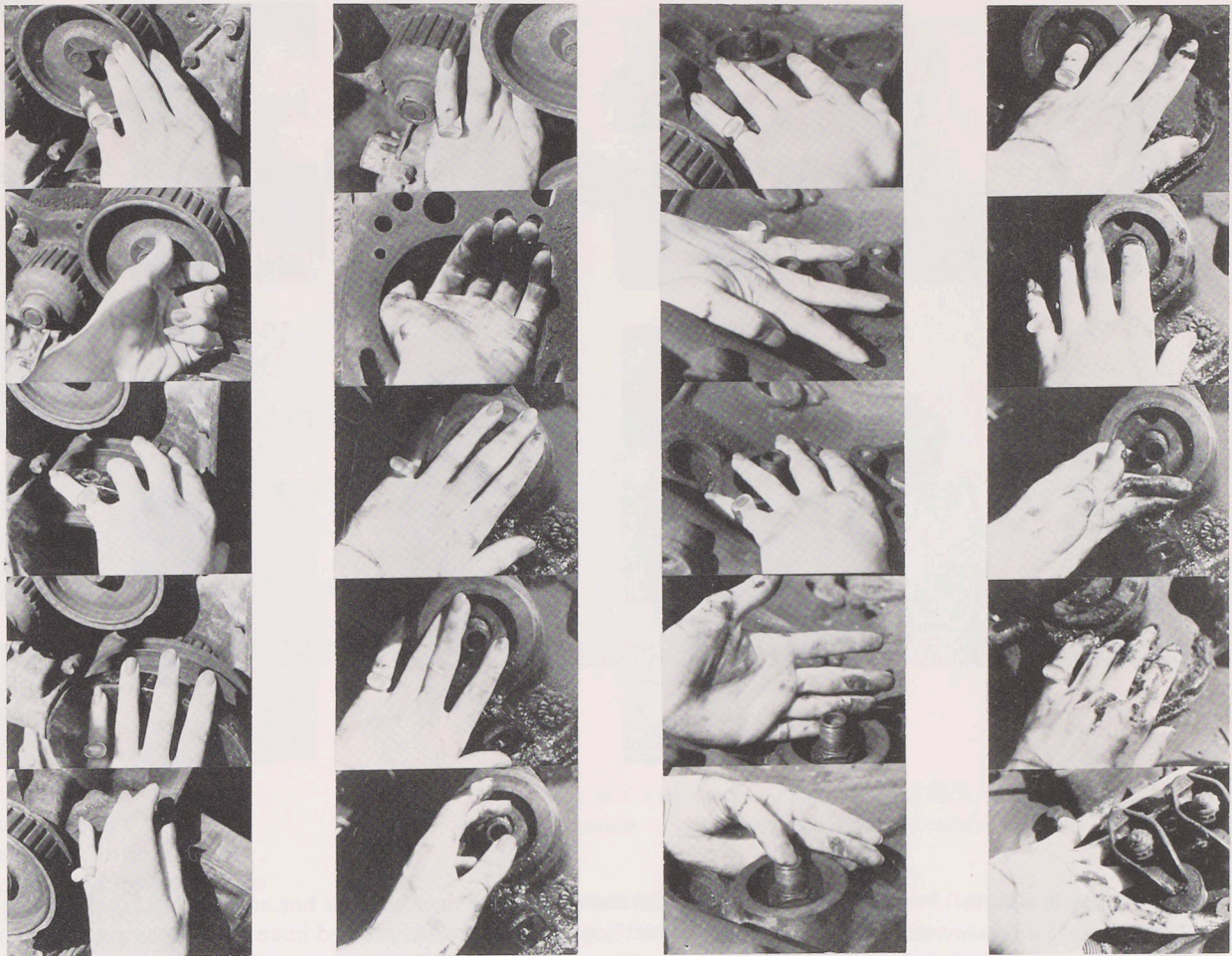
In 1982 Alexis Hunter returned to New Zealand and exhibited new photo-narratives at RKS Art in Auckland. She spoke about having two styles of work in the photo-narratives. In the earlier straight photographic style images are clear, if ambiguous in meaning. Later she experimented with painting over the photographs, then colour photocopying them, which resulted in a more opaque message to the viewer and allowed greater opportunity for individual readings. Examples of both approaches are included in the present exhibition.

I interviewed Alexis Hunter for *Art New Zealand* in 1982, after the Sydney Biennale exhibition. The first paragraph of my introduction was deleted by the editor. It read:

*'Feminist' is not a word with which many New Zealand art critics or historians feel comfortable. In so far as the purpose of feminism is to criticise, unsettle, even topple the patriarchal system which oppresses women, this is not surprising. The art world here has managed until now to evade the issue of feminist art practice, and generally hostile or patronising responses to feminist art have ensured the rarity of work which has political content, which attacks or satirises the patriarchy both in the art world and society.<sup>3</sup>*

In New Zealand prescriptive responses to feminist art have remained the norm. Comments like too feminist, too intellectual, too obscure, too transparent, too personal, too wordy, are still directed at works by Merylyn Tweedie, Christine Hellyar, Jacqueline Fahey, Julia Morison, Mary Kay, Fiona Pardington, Carole Shephard and others.

The 1980s have been years of increased conservatism in New Zealand as in Britain. Monetarist economic policies, adopted after the Thatcher model by a nominally Labour Government in New Zealand, have resulted in reduced Government funding of and responsibility for a wide range of services and activities. The newly established Ministry of Women's Affairs and Department of Conservation lack the money or legal clout to have significant impact on the general trend. The backlash against Maori demands for greater self-determination is extreme, despite some hard-won progress. The idealism of the 1970s has been replaced by a cynical acceptance of the status quo, a tendency to deny collective responsibility for social inequality and an assumption that all problems are individually caused and must therefore be individually solved. Against this background the aims of the early feminist



2 Approach to Fear III:  
 Taboo—Demystify 1976  
 colour photographs, 4 panels  
 1225 x 395mm each  
 Scottish National Gallery of  
 Modern Art, Edinburgh

movement can seem hopelessly idealistic.

Alexis Hunter's original intention with her photo-narratives was to communicate with women beyond the art establishment, an aim which many feminist artists in New Zealand shared in the 1970s. To this end Hunter exhibited her most political work in public institutions and alternative spaces. She considered ways of approaching a wider audience and decided to make images that would look familiar to readers of women's magazines. Hunter felt that much political art failed to engage with those women. In the photo-narratives Hunter's use of hands parodies a common advertising convention of disembodied female hands clutching at or stroking the product for sale, giving it a tactile, desirable reality.<sup>4</sup>

The photo-narratives were widely seen, but the responses of ordinary women of the kind Hunter hoped to reach are not recorded. At this end of the 1980s politically involved artists of all persuasions have become more realistic about how they can communicate most effectively and with whom. Changes in the art market have also reduced the likelihood of politically committed art being commercially shown. Contemporary art has moved more emphatically into the field of profitable investment. As art is translated into status symbol, the role of the dealer is increasingly that of investment advisor/fashion consultant.



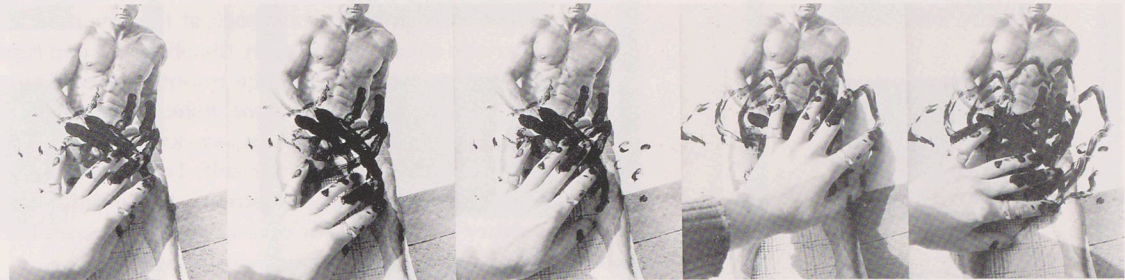
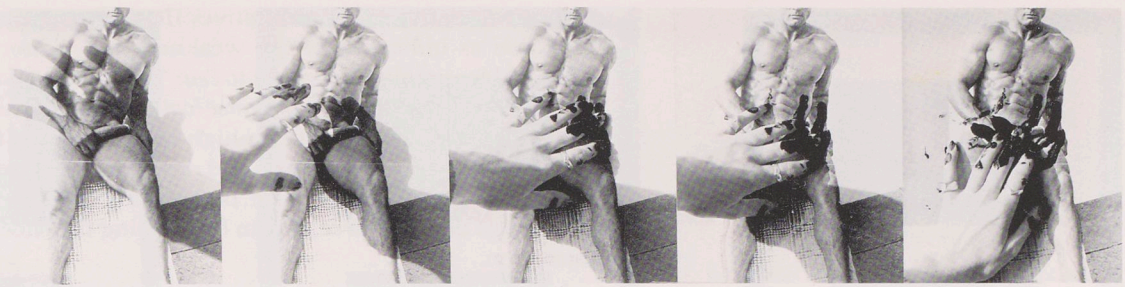
6 The Marxist's Wife  
 (still does the housework) 1978  
 colour photocopies, 4 panels  
 1230 x 393mm each  
 Courtesy of the artist

Hunter eventually decided that her art was not reaching the audience she had hoped for and concentrated instead on showing in dealer galleries and public institutions. This realisation informed her decision to move from photography back to painting, a move which stemmed also from a desire for greater self-expression and a closer involvement with contemporary art theory. However, as Elizabeth Eastmond points out in her essay in this catalogue, the underlying political thrust of Hunter's work remains constant.

What can we make now of the photo-narrative sequences? Do they still have the power to confront, unsettle and challenge an audience? For most women the years since they were made have not produced deep or substantial changes. The fears Hunter was approaching seem just as real: fear of anger, fear of violence, of pain, fear of losing control, fear of being a feminist and rocking the boat and a 1980s fear of losing hard-won gains by pushing those in power for more. (Why is there still so little decent childcare available in our cities and workplaces)?

Taboos live on. In *Approach to Fear III: Taboo—Demystify (cat.2)* the insistently sexual probing of oily machinery and consequent dirtying of feminine hands still disturbs deep-seated expectations of women's physical and moral cleanliness. Women's place as society's cleaners is endlessly reinforced in advertisements for a myriad of products. In a discussion of design in consumer society, Adrian Forty quotes a household management book from 1906:

*To struggle against dust, to remove it, whether from the surface of the body, from furniture or clothes, whether by cleaning the floors or renewing the atmosphere, is to do the work of the hygienist, fulfilling one of the most essential*



5 Approach to Fear XVII:  
 Masculinisation  
 of Society—Exorcise 1977  
 colour photographs, 2 panels  
 1250 x 400mm each  
 Courtesy of the artist

*tasks of the housewife... Disorder and lack of cleanliness should cause a sort of suffering in the mistress of the house.<sup>5</sup>*

In *The Marxist's Wife (still does the housework)* (cat.6) both title and image communicate an ironic and clear political message. This housewife is genuinely dedicated to the cleaning task but is foiled by the word MAN which keeps getting dirtier despite her efforts. The woman's hand in *Approach to Fear XVII: Masculinisation of Society—Exorcise* (cat.5) has taken on the opposite role, no longer content to clean. She applies dirt to another image of a man, this time a beefcake photograph, icon of male sexual narcissism. The woman's hand is an agent of change, not stimulating the man but cancelling his assumption of phallic power. This work seems to be a precursor of the later series *An Artist looking for her Muse* (cat.16 to 20) in which another priapic, self-obsessed male is painted out of the picture.

Ambiguous and disturbing imagery is common in Hunter's work. *Approach to Fear I: Violence—Identify with Aggressor* (cat.1) possesses a malevolent strangeness. Hunter spoke of four possible readings of this work:

*Although the woman's hand is being scratched by the cat which she continues to tease, she is overcoming the pain by identifying with the positive reaction of the cat. But also... because she identifies with men (symbolised by the cat) not women, she does not notice the little things which make up patriarchal oppression (symbolised by the scratches on her hand). The cat could represent the woman's Animus: the masculine part of her unconscious mind in Jungian psychology, which she is trying to overcome, or that she is frightened of. Yet another interpretation is that there is a masochistic element in the passivity of the hand—the hand of a woman who only feels feminine when she is dominated. (1978)<sup>6</sup>*

In several of the photo-narratives Hunter uses women's clothing and decoration as indicators of the weakness and subservience attached to traditional femininity. *Approach to Fear VII: Pain—Solace* and *Approach to Fear XIII: Pain—Destruction of Cause* (cat.3 and 4) are two of Hunter's most exhibited works. Both centre on high-heeled shoes, a fetishistic source of delight for both sexes and of pain and restriction for women. Ten years have made flat shoes more fashionable, but clothing codes die hard. Hunter takes her revenge on the source of pain by burning the shoe in a scene of ritual destruction.

In *A Young Polynesian Considers Cultural Imperialism before she goes to the Disco* (cat.11) a woman again rejects conventional decoration and in so doing defies the operations of racism and colonialism which require conformity of dress, behaviour and thought. She literally breaks the chain around her neck and thrusts it back at the giver.

Hunter also considers carefully the obsessive and repetitive rituals which are built into housework and the maintenance of an acceptable personal appearance. In *To Silent Women* (cat.9) she depicts a perversion of a grooming ritual, the manicure. The woman, working in isolation, razors her nails to points, then apparently cuts herself. Using her own blood she writes a message of challenge to other women, 'Alone We Failed'. Her actions can be seen as either masochistic or courageous as she uses her life-blood to break out of her isolation and engage with others.

Despite political and economic changes and social upheavals Alexis Hunter's photo-narrative sequences are still effective communicators. They have survived the decade with their import intact and like most of the best art which deals with issues, they speak beyond their original time and place.

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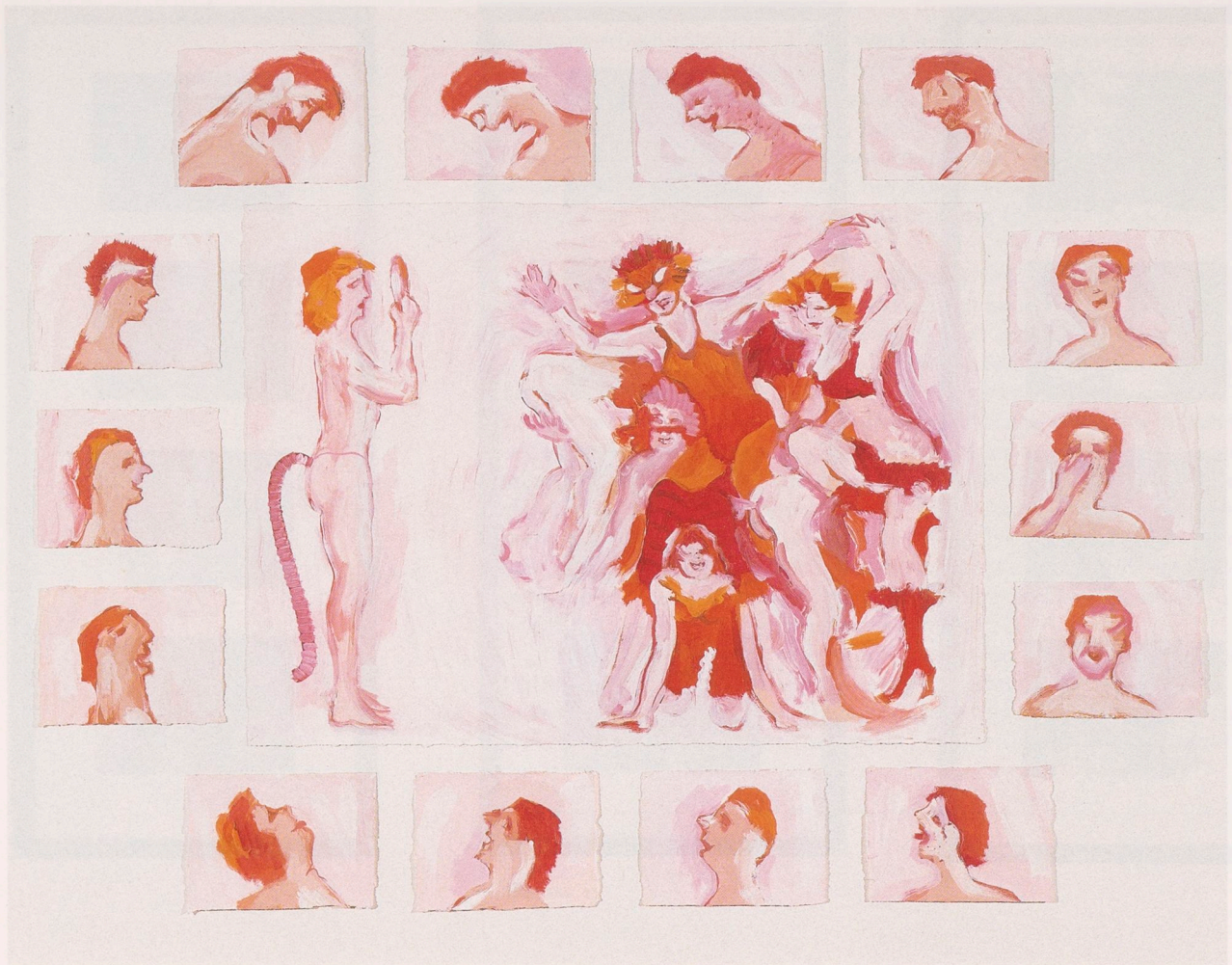
#### Notes

- 1 Lucy Lippard 'Hands On' *Alexis Hunter—Photographic Narrative Sequences* Edward Totah Gallery London 1981
- 2 *ibid*
- 3 Alexa Johnston 'Alexis Hunter' *Art New Zealand* 24 p46
- 4 Alexis Hunter quoted in Sandy Nairne *State of the Art* London 1987 p137
- 5 Adrian Forty *Objects of Desire: Design and Society 1750—1980* London 1986 p168
- 6 Alexis Hunter interviewed by James Scott and Nina Kellgren 1978, printed in *Alexis Hunter—Photographic Narrative Sequences* Edward Totah Gallery London 1981



11 A Young Polynesian Considers Cultural  
Imperialism before she goes to the Disco 1981  
colour photocopies, 3 panels  
1045 x 390mm each  
Courtesy of Michael Neill and  
Makare Rupana, Auckland





12 Pride 1981  
acrylic on 15 pieces of paper  
895 x 1210mm (overall)  
National Art Gallery, New Zealand

## Alexis Hunter: Fears/Dreams/Desires

Elizabeth Eastmond

**F**ears. Dreams. Desires. The unknown, the irrational and the powerful, uncivilised yearning for the 'other': these ambiguous, inchoate states fuel the dramas of the psyche explored in the work of Alexis Hunter.

*Art is a structure of symbols, and those people who do not comprehend that language will pass it by. But because of this symbolic nature we can communicate in ways that are not always rational, theoretical or even conscious. There is a gap between thought and visual stimulus, a moment of perception that surfaces from the unconscious, which comes from the combined efforts of the artist and the observer of her work. (Alexis Hunter 1980)<sup>1</sup>*

*I don't want to work unless there is some meaning that by painting I can communicate something personal and political. A painting is ambiguous, very sensuous and has to come from your core. (1984)<sup>2</sup>*

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When the painter Alexis Hunter arrived in England from New Zealand in 1972, the effects of the social and political upheavals of the late 1960s were evident. In the arts the challenge to modernism by radical art practice and feminism was gathering momentum and in the wider social sphere the women's movement was becoming increasingly significant.

This exhibition deals with key works from 1976 to 1988. It is in part a record of one artist's provocative interventions in those crucial years when feminist art and issues gained wider public recognition, as they did on the occasion of the 1978 second Hayward Annual Exhibition in London, which included work by Hunter. This landmark exhibition presented women's art to a mainstream audience; it also incited much hostile reaction from critics. The years since then have seen a rapid succession of movements in the arts and major changes in western society's attitudes to the issues raised by feminism. Few critics now would claim they simply "didn't like the idea of all those liberated women artists at the Hayward Gallery".<sup>3</sup> Hunter's pioneering work then and over the next few years has unswervingly challenged the status quo and made a vital contribution to our current sense of art and culture of that time.



21 Alexis Hunter  
*Left-handed Dream* 1982  
 acrylic on paper  
 570 x 770mm  
 Courtesy of the artist



41 Alexis Hunter  
*Passionate Instincts II* 1983  
 oil on canvas  
 180 x 230mm  
 Courtesy of P. Corrigan, London



53 Alexis Hunter  
*A Man dreaming of his Mother* 1986–89  
 oil on canvas  
 2120 x 1575mm  
 Courtesy of the artist

Hunter's initial recognition came with the photographic narrative sequences called *Approaches to Fear* (cat.1–5). These sequences were a central concern until 1981, when she returned to painting. The 1982 acrylic *Left-handed Dream* (cat. 21) (painted with the left hand) was a key work displaying Hunter's desire to investigate the physicality and sensuality of painting, as well as its psychology. She also spoke of a need "to go right back"<sup>4</sup> in terms of subject matter and her work began to develop a personal politicised mythology in the *Male Myths* series. These explored the notion of gender-bias in mythology and continued to develop a freely expressive technique.

*If you bury yourself in Artemisia's golden folds, you know she really loved painting* (1982)<sup>5</sup>

This series was followed in the early 1980s by two others, *Conflicts of the Psyche* (cat. 28–31) and *Passionate Instincts* (cat. 32–37 and 41–45), the latter expressing a dynamic sexuality. Both, like the *Male Myths*, were related stylistically to neo-expressionism. In more recent paintings Alexis Hunter has moved away from a flamboyant neo-expressionism and her style has become increasingly deliberate, in tandem with an ongoing interest in romanticism and surrealism.

Despite the formal differences between early and late works, this exhibition shows the frequently interlocking themes of Hunter's series. Compare, for instance, the 1977 serial photographic *Approach to Fear XVII: Masculinisation of Society — Exorcise* (cat. 5) with the 1982 painting *Considering Theory* (cat. 13). In the former, a woman's hand obscures the male's genitals with paint while in the latter a woman gleefully bites the snake's phallic tail. Both in their different ways are gestures of exorcism which wittily defy the power and significations of the phallus and propose an active female sexuality. The theme has remained consistent, although worked from different perspectives. In the photographic narrative sequences its expression relates to contemporary social issues. In *Conflicts of the Psyche* (cat. 28–31) and in *Passionate Instincts* (cat. 32–37 and 41–45) female sexuality is communicated metaphorically. "In the past" said Hunter "I did work about the burden of change on women who had been socialised into being dependent but this work is about being totally independent and struggling with decisions without fear. Now I feel I have the freedom to work emotionally and passionately". (1984)<sup>6</sup>

These paintings are driven by an impulse to delve beneath the surface of things revealing a tension between ideology and the subconscious. That impulse is a major preoccupation in Hunter's work. In the earlier serial photographic pieces it is expressed as a critique of a socially constructed femininity and in recent painting focuses on the irrationality of dream: *The Land dreaming of the Sea* (cat. 54); *A Man dreaming of his Mother* (cat. 53).

A very pleasurable, and often underrated, aspect of Alexis Hunter's work is its humour, variously wry and ironic, exhilaratingly comic or effectively deflating. A curious wit pervades the titles of the photographic narrative series: *Taboo—Demystify*, *Masculinisation of Society—Exorcise*, *Violence—Identify with Aggressor*—they have something of the rhythm of witches' incantations. Defiant humour appears in works like *London* (cat.10) or *Considering Theory* (cat.13). In the latter the Woman/Eve and the snake glare manically at each other. *Portrait of the artist as a young bitch barking at Nothing* (cat.40) is a droll example of the artist's ability to satirise herself and artistic pretensions by using the painting's title as an abrupt departure



44 Passionate Instincts XV 1985  
oil on canvas  
180 x 230mm  
Private collection, Auckland



29 Conflicts of the Psyche—The Struggle  
between Ambition and Desire II 1984–85  
oil on canvas  
1705 x 1940mm  
Courtesy of the artist



Paula Rego (b.1935) United Kingdom  
*Cabbage and Potato* 1982  
 acrylic on paper  
 1020 x 1410mm  
 Courtesy of Irwin Joffe, London



26 Alexis Hunter  
*Zeus and Hera* 1987  
 monoprint  
 565 x 760mm  
 Courtesy of Todd Gallery, London



16 Alexis Hunter  
*An Artist looking for her Muse* 1982  
 acrylic on paper  
 1016 x 1270mm  
 Courtesy of Edward Totah, London

from high seriousness. *A Young Polynesian Considers Cultural Imperialism before she goes to the Disco* (cat.11) operates in a similarly bathetic manner. Hunter has described the humour of *An Artist looking for her Muse* (cat. 16–20), which feature a masturbating, priapic devil, as “colonial”. Perhaps “colonial” implies freedom from the kind of restraint critic Robert Rosenblum discerns in twentieth century British art. He sees the British as perpetrators of “a social mode of reticence, understatement and gentility” which can make their work seem “hushed, diminutive, pallid”.<sup>8</sup>

Rosenblum’s context provides a clue to understanding an aspect of Hunter’s place in British art of the late 70s and early 80s. Restraint is not a characteristic of her work. Rather her black humour, often playful vulgarity and raw technique are factors both setting her work somewhat apart and also lending it something of its special impact. Of course Hunter’s art also has a general context. Her serial photographs can be read in the context of contemporary photo-text work, while the paintings may be considered in relation to the concerns of artists like Ken Kiff, who explores the unconscious, and Paula Rego, with her bizarre accumulations of animals and malevolent children.

*I hope that people realise that the work itself can be ambiguous and the logic and political perspective in the title has been applied to give people a starting-point to work on themselves. (1978)*<sup>9</sup>

Hunter’s project is frequently challenging because of its openness to multiple readings. Along with her use of irony and pastiche, this lack of fixity locates Hunter in a postmodern context. Her work can be problematic when it deviates into baffling ambiguity and even, occasionally, into irreconcilable contradiction. But Hunter obviously enjoys unsettling her viewers and making them work, an agreeable task for those stimulated by paradox and disposed to query their ideological stance. *London* (cat.10) poses involvement with the 1981 summer riots as, for some, a site of individual catharsis through the use of violence. The young woman pictured brandishes a molotov cocktail with obvious delight. Why does the artist choose this image and can the woman’s action be condoned? In the later painting *Conflicts of the Psyche—The Struggle between Ambition and Desire II* (cat.29) it is unclear which protagonist, the woman or the chimaera, represents which drive: “Whether the chimaera represents ambition or sexual desire I don’t know—the elements are all part of the same thing. In the end you can’t separate them and that is why they haunt you, that is the struggle”. (1984)<sup>10</sup>

Hunter’s tactical use of wit and her work’s openness to varying often conflicted readings can also be understood as a function of Lucy Lippard’s notion of the artist’s “strategy of opposition”.<sup>11</sup> This refusal to accommodate is variously expressed. Works like *The Marxist’s Wife (still does the housework)* (cat.6) critique the insistence of bourgeois values. Debunking humour is another device. Conflict is constantly emphasised, dominant in the early *Domestic Warfare* (1978, Arts Council of Great Britain), implicit in *War and Nature* (cat.8), overt in the series *A Goddess fighting the Patriarchy* (cat.14) and forming the title of a whole series of paintings, *Conflicts of the Psyche* (cat.28–31). Predictability is frequently thwarted on several fronts, in terms of style and iconography. The 1988 monoprints *Zeus and Hera* (cat. 26 and 27) feature a minuscule Zeus posturing on the shoulder of a distinctly gooey, smiling Hera. Here the almost chocolate box style and mode of representation provoke as did the deliberately crude technique and imagery of *An Artist looking for her Muse* in 1982.

*An Artist looking for her Muse* (cat.16–20) demonstrates Hunter’s



16 An Artist looking for her Muse 1982  
acrylic on paper  
1016 x 1270mm  
Courtesy of Edward Totah, London

longstanding fascination with theories of creativity. She has cited the importance of Marion Milner's *On Not Being Able To Paint* (1957) which investigates the role of the unconscious in creativity and has also been influenced by Melanie Klein's theories of omnipotence, separation and creativity.<sup>12</sup> In the Muse series a female in profile approaches a frontally positioned priapic devil figure. An artist looking for her muse? Conditioned by centuries of nude female muses in display, inspiration and support mode, the viewer does a double-take before assimilating the radical shift in the use of signifiers here. The female figure represents the artist actively seeking inspiration and the male the muse or, as Hunter describes it "the ego... engaged in rather masturbatory activities—a private visual pun on Freudian psychology where power is represented by the phallus". (1984)<sup>13</sup> These works reveal the gender-biased nature of traditional representations of the muse. They also propose, part-seriously, part-playfully a role-reversed muse for the woman artist and, by implication, also address the question of the sources and conditions of creativity for women. Yet Hunter's work on the theme of the muse has caused difficulty for some viewers, because of the apparent potential for quite drastic misreadings. Despite the title, some still perceived the female figure as the muse. Others were uncomfortable with the Jungian implication that the source of inspiration is given to the 'other', for the woman artist, a male symbol. Ironically, the result of the quest rebounds on the artist (and viewer). As pictured by Hunter, that potential source of inspiration is concerned only with pleasuring himself. He is selfishly insufficient for the woman artist's needs.

Yet the dynamic, the balance of power between the two figures shifts from image to image within the series and meaning fluctuates. In *An Artist looking for her Muse* (cat.18), black overpainting almost completely obliterates the devilish muse. A snake-like woman (reminiscent, in one variant of the myth, of the transformation of the gorgon Medusa after her decapitation by Perseus) stumbles into the black void unable to locate even a semblance of inspiration. In cat.19 of this group, the situation is less bleak. Here the female figure wears a snake-like mask like Medusa's which symbolises omnipotence and the power of the gaze. She strides towards the muse who appears to disintegrate behind forceful slashes of paint. A positive reading here might have the Medusa/artist figure representing her own power source, one that need not be construed along Jungian lines where a male analogue represents the 'other'. Given that Hunter is a highly literate artist (whose focus on Medusa has returned in recent work), this reading may also be reinforced by Freud's interpretation of Medusa's head as a castrated/castrating vulva. In the context of this version of *An Artist looking for her Muse*, the vulva becomes not only a powerful force but also a threatening one in opposition to the phallus of the masturbating male devil.<sup>14</sup>

The muse theme has resurfaced in recent monoprints—*An Artist and her Muse (dancing)* (cat.24) and *An Artist and her Muse* (cat.25)—where a woman and an amusingly monstrous, hairy muse embrace and dance together, their relationship apparently resolved. Here the woman artist has relinquished her distancing profile and engages the viewer with a carefree expression which, like Hera in *Zeus and Hera* (cat.26), exhibits a similar knowing satisfaction. Is Hunter posing the woman artist as at one with her creative potential, even more confident of her "freedom to work emotionally and passionately"? Or, more disturbingly, is the woman artist dancing to the devil's tune, the tune of male ideology? Once again the viewer is presented with a paradox.

'An Artist Looking For Her Muse' comprised one of the first exhibitions of neo-expressionist related work in New Zealand. Neo-expressionism has come under fire in some recent critical writing and its dominance has waned





28 Alexis Hunter  
 Conflicts of the Psyche—The Struggle  
 between Greed and Freedom 1983  
 oil on canvas  
 1825 x 1670mm  
 Courtesy of the artist



Alexis Hunter  
 Cumbrian Fell Sheep 1983  
 drypoint  
 355 x 507mm  
 Courtesy of the artist

as other movements, such as neo-geo, neo-concept, and neo-minimalism, have dominated the art media. Griselda Pollock's critique accuses neo-expressionism of being highly reactionary because it aligns artists with a romantic tradition which historically excluded women, privileged the male-artist-as-genius and promoted a signatory, gestural mode of painting peculiarly suited to market demand.<sup>15</sup> Pointed as this analysis is, its emphasis on style does not adequately allow for work which embodies a critique of representation, or, as in Hunter's case, a superbly subversive manipulation of iconography in what was the 'new painting' of the time.

*This is the war of the images.* (Adrienne Rich)<sup>16</sup>

*Considering Theory* (cat.13) for example, rebels against the established representation of Eve and the serpent in which Woman is in thrall to and representative of the forces of evil. The title and image are in effectively dynamic tension, revealing the gap between theorising and individual action. In Hunter's bold and cogent version, Eve takes her revenge against Genesis-narrative and its shaping of western Christian-influenced thought. She springs aggressively into action and begins to devour the somewhat affronted serpent. Eve is also, it seems, usurping that traditional emblem of paradox, the snake with its tail in its mouth. She simultaneously sinks her teeth into patriarchal theology and intellectual conceit.

A telling iconographic shift appears in *Conflicts of the Psyche—The Struggle between Ambition and Desire II* (cat.29), which re-reads Henry Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (1781, Detroit Institute of Arts). "In that painting" says Hunter "the woman's back is arched over the bed and the Incubus which has a dog's face, and wings, is sitting on her stomach. In my painting she has turned away from the Incubus, refusing to be possessed by it. The night circles around like black fingers". (1984)<sup>17</sup>

Neither do critiques like Pollock's allow for the wider social and political implications of works like Hunter's *The Struggle between Greed and Freedom* (cat.28) the earliest of her *Conflicts of the Psyche* series. As its title suggests, this is not simply a dramatic image of animals in combat; for the artist, the animals are symbolic.

*To me greed is reptilian. I started thinking about this painting [The Struggle between Greed and Freedom] in the States. I wanted to work out what I didn't like about American ideology. In the States I found a kind of liberalism that comes from the belief that everybody should be free, unconstrained, but which has gone too far until the individual is free to be totally self-interested and capitalistic. I've used an eagle because it represents freedom in American ideology, and also means strength and protection. Although the eagle is a killer of vermin and rodents in this painting it is being held down by a reptilian chimaera.* (1984)<sup>18</sup>

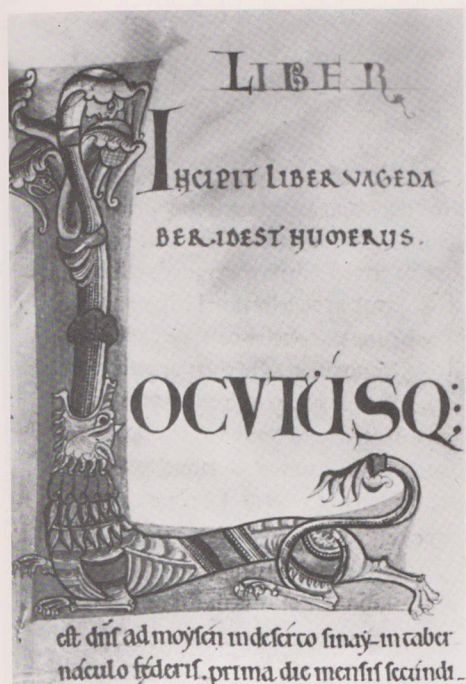
Beasts and mythical monsters play a major role in *Conflicts of the Psyche* (cat. 28 – 31) and *Passionate Instincts* (cat. 32 – 37 and 41 – 45) and in several charcoal drawings associated with these series. A stimulus was the artist's residency in the Lake District in 1983 when she completed drypoints like the delicate *Cumbrian Fell Sheep*. Animal imagery has been popular in the 1980s. A number of exhibitions have featured animal themes, and art magazines of the early 80s offer what is almost a postmodern bestiary.<sup>19</sup> This unsettling imagery, as Hunter has found, provided scope to express contemporary neuroses. One memorable image by the Dutch painter Jan van T'Slot, in a cynically 80s response to Edwin Landseer's confidently imperial *The Monarch*



37 Passionate Instincts XIII 1984-85  
oil on canvas  
1264 x 1150mm  
Courtesy of the artist



39 Le Cri de Mururoa 1987  
oil on canvas  
1200 x 1230mm  
Private collection, London



Initial to the Book of Numbers. Bible.  
Winchester, mid 12th century.  
Oxford, Bodleian Library,  
MS. Auct. E. inf. 1, fol. 66.



54 Alexis Hunter  
The Land dreaming of the Sea 1986  
oil on canvas  
1585 x 1755mm  
Courtesy of the artist

*Of The Glen* (1851, John Dewar & Sons Ltd) has a rather weedy stag vomiting over a vertiginous cliff. For many artists animal imagery simply supplied an exotic alternative to figuration but for others like Alexis Hunter and Americans Melissa Miller and Janet Cooling, this imagery serves as a metaphor for the human condition. It's a romantic notion of course and the debt to this tradition is generally apparent when comparing works like *Passionate Instincts IX* (cat. 35) with Delacroix' *Lion and Lioness in a Cavern* (1856, Montreal Museum of Fine Art). According to Hunter, her animals "are about domination and the aggression of the creative urge—an urge for power. This is visualised in images of chimaera of different species mating, and they represent the creative animus/anima of artists. Although they are involved in acts of procreation, in the very process of being attracted to one another's power, each has left itself vulnerable. All the chimaeras in my paintings are to do with a kind of mutation as well... They are portraits of nature after the bomb, of a future in which all we have left is our fear of one another's power". (1984)<sup>20</sup> Hence the deformed beast in *Le Cri de Mururoa* (cat.39), with its obvious reference to French nuclear testing in the South Pacific.

Hunter also uses animals as functions of self-image. They provide a strategy, through the use of metaphor, for dealing with the political problems surrounding the representation of women. "I might refer to the female now" says Hunter "but she is always active, symbolic of female action and although painted in a sensual style, she is not up for sale, not offered to the viewer. This is one of the reasons I started using animals". (1984)<sup>21</sup>

Hunter's animals display a presence that recalls those marvellous beasts in medieval illuminated books and elsewhere in medieval art. Meyer Schapiro has called these medieval creatures "psychologically significant images of force [which] invite no systematic intellectual apprehension, but are grasped as individual, often irrational fantasies".<sup>22</sup> These "images of force" are at once cute and demonic in *Passionate Instincts XIII* (cat.37), broodingly sexual in cat.35 while in the tiny cat.41 the force is overtly sexual. Here a hybrid beast and bird copulate amid swirling brushstrokes in an amoral 80s version of the medieval representation of lust.

*Passionate Instincts* has a bold, sensual confidence both in technique and subject matter unusual until recently in the work of a woman artist. Historically it was deemed inappropriate and unfeminine for women to paint in this manner. The libido as a rationale for creativity was the province of masculinity. Even surrealist women artists who worked within an ambience that encouraged the expression of sexual fantasy "more often than not avoided the imagery of adult female sexual experience. Among women artists there is no erotic art as confrontational, explicit and shocking as that by Bellmer, Dali... and no male love object that could be opposed to the femmefant and the erotic muse".<sup>23</sup>

Hunter's animals, monsters and hybrids act as metaphors of an unconstrained, undomesticated female sexuality and are linked with her interest in psychoanalysis. Their dynamism calls to mind Jane Gallop's formulation of a psychoanalysis which can "unsettle feminism's tendency to accept a traditional, unified, rational, puritanical self—a self supposedly free from the violence of desire".<sup>24</sup> To me they also provide a visual parallel to that notion of 'écriture féminine' or 'writing the body' expressed by French theorists like Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous. Cixous' 1977 novel *Angst* unleashes a deluge of extreme, frequently violent and bizarre imagery often involving animals and monsters. "Your desires... turn back into rats... in bedrooms behind beds, the curtains are big with monsters, animals, strange disgusting species... nights are full of worms at their tail-end".<sup>25</sup>

In 1986 Alexis Hunter was resident in Houston, Texas and visited Mexico. She continued to paint monsters but located them in landscapes relating to



James Dixon (1887–1971) United Kingdom  
Grey Lag Geese Resting on the West End  
Lake Tory Island 1969  
oil on paper  
Courtesy of George Melly  
and the RONA Library, London

regional mythology. These large, powerful, densely worked canvases show the interaction between myth and environment. Here literally are the spirits of place. In *The Messengers Of Yacatecuhtli* (cat.47) two very odd beasts confront one another on a mountain ridge beneath an O'Keefian sky. *Culture Shock* (cat.46) shows a hybrid female figure walking through a desert. She wears a Mexican mask like a protuberance, symbolising the extension of self. Her body is covered with eyes focused on the viewer: the viewer is the viewed as the female protagonist subsumes the idea of the gaze within her own body. An eerie function of the eye motif, both here and in *The Clouds of Uxmal* (cat.48), is to present a landscape of presence and intelligence. Thus in these works Hunter conceives of landscape as an animate, fertile source of meaning and desire. This notion is further developed in more recent works. *The Land dreaming of the Sea* (cat.54) has these two elements of nature as more than animate: they are personified. In contrast *Hine Nui Te Po* (cat.57), great goddess of the underworld, is not represented in human form at all but as land and sky, pregnant with meaning.

The series *Landscapes of the Heart* (cat.49–52) pushed the possibilities of landscape in interesting directions. This is a project shared with other contemporary British artists, such as Therese Oulton, whose re-visioning of landscape, like Hunter's, owes a debt to romanticism. These memorised or fictional landscapes become vehicles for mood and emotion. While they are about place, Hunter says "by this I do not mean a mere description, but spiritual and cultural force". (1987)<sup>26</sup> "These small paintings are investigations into the understanding of emotional and cultural relationships to various landscapes. How much do we project our own alienation onto a landscape? Conversely, does a landscape work on the senses and affect mood?". (1988)<sup>27</sup> These recent works also demonstrate the development of Hunter's interest in naive, or outsider, art. "I look at schizophrenic and children's art, and English naive painters—the way they distort reality, and their brushwork. There is a painting by James Dixon of Tory Island. The brushwork is incredible, you can feel the wind and taste the salt of the sea in it". (1984)<sup>28</sup>

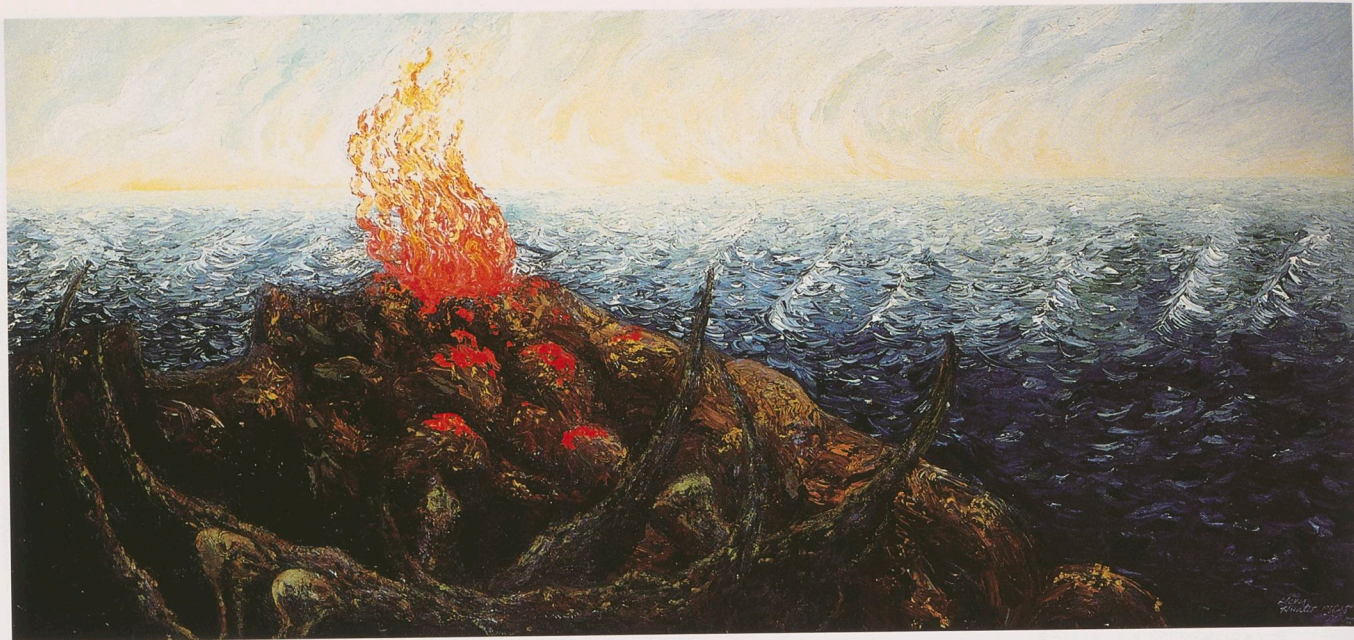
Traditionally landscape painting has been coded in gender terms. Both artist and viewer have generally been constructed as a male whose territorialising gaze travels over the passive female land: the classic culture/nature dichotomy.<sup>29</sup> As terrains of the imagination pictured by an artist who is a feminist and aware of current philosophical debate, Hunter's landscapes can be read on a level involving gender as a factor. As the Houston and *Landscapes of the Heart* series show, Hunter's perception is of an active landscape. She uses small, scattered fires in *Landscapes of the Heart (Waitakere)* (cat.49) and vast fields of flames in *Landscapes of the Heart (for Aldous Huxley)* (cat.50) to animate the land, charging it with a vital signifying force. These works, like *The Waiting* (cat.58), are particularly successful in the way they make landscape a carrier of meaning and as constructed by a woman artist, landscape that speaks with a feminine voice.

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Alexis Hunter has maintained regular contact with New Zealand, visiting and exhibiting here every few years. Exhibitions like those of the photographic narratives in 1980 and two years later, 'An Artist Looking For Her Muse' had some impact in formal terms and in the issues raised. She has lectured widely. In 1982 she contributed to the forum 'Postmodernism' at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts, lectured at the Australian Centre for Photography in Sydney and introduced the work of Paula Rego, Nancy Spero and Mary Kelly to the Auckland Women Artists Association. Hunter has curated exhibitions<sup>30</sup> and written on the arts, notably the article 'Feminist



50 Landscapes of the Heart (for Aldous Huxley) 1986  
oil on canvas  
510 x 610mm  
Courtesy of the artist



58 The Waiting 1987-88  
oil on canvas  
710 x 1510mm  
Courtesy of RKS Art, Auckland



Allie Eagle (b.1949) New Zealand  
 Oh Yes We Will We Will 1978  
 watercolour  
 Courtesy of the artist



Alexis Hunter  
 A Man Waiting for the Harpies 1986  
 oil on canvas  
 1727 x 2042mm  
 (Earlier version, now repainted, cat.58)

Perceptions' published in 1980 in *Artscribe*.<sup>31</sup> This engagement with theory as well as practice, which is also a characteristic of artists like Kelly, Martha Rosler and Barbara Kruger, has led the critic Craig Owens to see this as a special aspect of the feminist strand of postmodernism.<sup>32</sup> But like many such women artists' activism, particularly in the 70s before the terms and debates surrounding postmodernism were widely accessible, this 'special aspect' also derives from a situation where an artist has dual allegiances: to the art world and to a major social movement of our time.

Hunter's contact with New Zealand has provided sustenance for that obsession particularly typical of expatriates: the need to redefine where they belong, to find a locus for self-assessment. "I returned to New Zealand in 1980 to find out who I really was again — rather than getting through life with an image projected on me of 'Fear-of-Feminism'". (1988)<sup>33</sup> (Hunter used 'Fear-of-Feminism' here as an alternative title for the *Approaches to Fear* series.) Hunter's shift from photographic narratives to painting, while a transition already in place, was encouraged by discussions she had with New Zealand artists Colin McCahon and Patrick Hanly. In another instance a specific work impressed Hunter. Allie Eagle's emphatic and stylistically fluent *Oh Yes We Will We Will* was also a factor in Hunter's return to painting. Certain works draw obviously on New Zealand in terms of theme. *A Young Polynesian Considers Cultural Imperialism before she goes to the Disco* (cat.11) is one. Another is *Landscapes of the Heart (Waitakere)* (cat.49) with its reference to those dark ponga-clad hills where Hunter once lived. Some works from 1988, *Hine Nui Te Po* (cat.57) for instance, were completed in New Zealand and are based on Maori myths. These are not unproblematic in a country where the politics of appropriation is a particularly sensitive issue. Hunter was aware of these difficulties and her approach deliberately differed from her treatment of European myth: "There was no place for the irony of the *Male Myths* series and just to state some aspect of the myths challenging enough". (1988)<sup>34</sup>

Also completed in New Zealand in 1988 was the enigmatic *The Waiting* (cat.58). This work had been exhibited in Britain as *A Man Waiting for the Harpies* (1986).<sup>35</sup> Continuing her frequent practice of reworking paintings, Hunter painted out the man's figure (he had batted away at a calm prospect while harpies gathered behind him) and substituted the fire. The new version pares away the earlier literalism and arrives at a particularly economical, evocative image. Its mystery and strange tension work effectively on the imagination. Those fires of anger and destruction in the early photographic narrative sequences have been transformed here into a metaphor for subconscious desire. Indeed, the image as a whole, together with the unease expressed in its title, conveys a kind of synthesis of desire, dream and fear. The harpies from Hunter's earlier version of *The Waiting* remain in force behind the flames. They continue to haunt.

## Notes

- 1 Alexis Hunter 'Feminist Perceptions' *Artscribe* No 25 1980 p28
- 2 'Alexis Hunter interviewed by Caroline Osborne' *Artscribe* No 4 1980 p49
- 3 Kenneth Robinson *Punch* 6 September 1978 quoted in Caroline J Osborne *Encounters Of The First Kind: Critics' Responses To Feminist Art In Britain 1970 - 1978* (MA Thesis) University of Sussex 1983 p67



- 4 In a videotaped conversation with Juliet Batten Elizabeth Eastmond and Cheryl Sotheran Auckland 1982 Art History Department Slide Library University of Auckland
- 5 Artist's statement Camden Town 7 December 1982. The reference is to the Italian artist Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1652/3) who painted biblical themes often focusing on powerful women
- 6 'Alexis Hunter interviewed By Caroline Osborne' p48
- 7 *ibid* p48
- 8 Robert Rosenblum 'British Twentieth Century Art: A Transatlantic View' in Susan Compton ed *British Art in the Twentieth Century: The Modern Movement* Royal Academy of Arts London and Prestel-Verlag Munich 1986 p90
- 9 'Extracts taken from an interview by the film makers James Scott and Nina Kellgren with Alexis Hunter in 1978' in *Alexis Hunter, Photographic Narrative Sequences* with critical essays by Lucy R Lippard and Margaret Richards, Edward Totah Gallery London 1981
- 10 'Alexis Hunter interviewed by Caroline Osborne' p49
- 11 Lucy R Lippard 'Hands On' in *Alexis Hunter, Photographic Narrative Sequences*
- 12 Juliet Mitchell ed *The Selected Melanie Klein* Harmondsworth 1986
- 13 'Alexis Hunter interviewed by Caroline Osborne' p48
- 14 Karl Theweleit *Male Fantasies* Cambridge and Oxford 1987 p201. In addition, Karl Theweleit's construction of the significations of Medusa's head has it hung with phalluses and less a symbol of frightening lack than "a symbol (attached to her by men themselves!) of man's fear of her uncastrated, horrifying sexual power)"
- 15 Griselda Pollock 'Screening the seventies: sexuality and representation in feminist practice—a Brechtian perspective' in *Vision and Difference, Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* London 1988 p156
- 16 Adrienne Rich 'The Images' in *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far, Poems 1978-1981* Toronto 1981 p5
- 17 'Alexis Hunter interviewed by Caroline Osborne' p49
- 18 *ibid* p48
- 19 Marcia Tucker 'An Iconography of Recent Figurative Painting: Sex, Death, Violence and Apocalypse' *Artforum* Summer 1982 pp70-75
- 20 'Alexis Hunter interviewed by Caroline Osborne' p50
- 21 *ibid* p49
- 22 Meyer Schapiro 'On the Aesthetic Attitude in Romanesque Art' in *Art and Thought: issued in honour of Dr Ananda K. Coomaraswamy on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* London 1947 p137
- 23 Whitney Chadwick *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* London 1985 p107
- 24 Jane Gallop *Feminism and Psychoanalysis, The Daughter's Seduction* London and Basingstoke 1982 pxii
- 25 Hélène Cixous *Angst* Paris 1977 trans and reprinted London 1985 p55. See also Cixous' subversive sliding from semiotics to erotics in 'The Laugh of the Medusa' included in *New French Feminisms, An Anthology* ed and introd Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron Brighton 1981 pp245-264
- 26 Artist's statement 1987
- 27 Artist's statement accompanying the exhibition *Landscapes of the Heart* RKS Art Auckland 1988
- 28 'Alexis Hunter interviewed by Caroline Osborne' p50
- 29 In the context of New Zealand art these notions have been developed

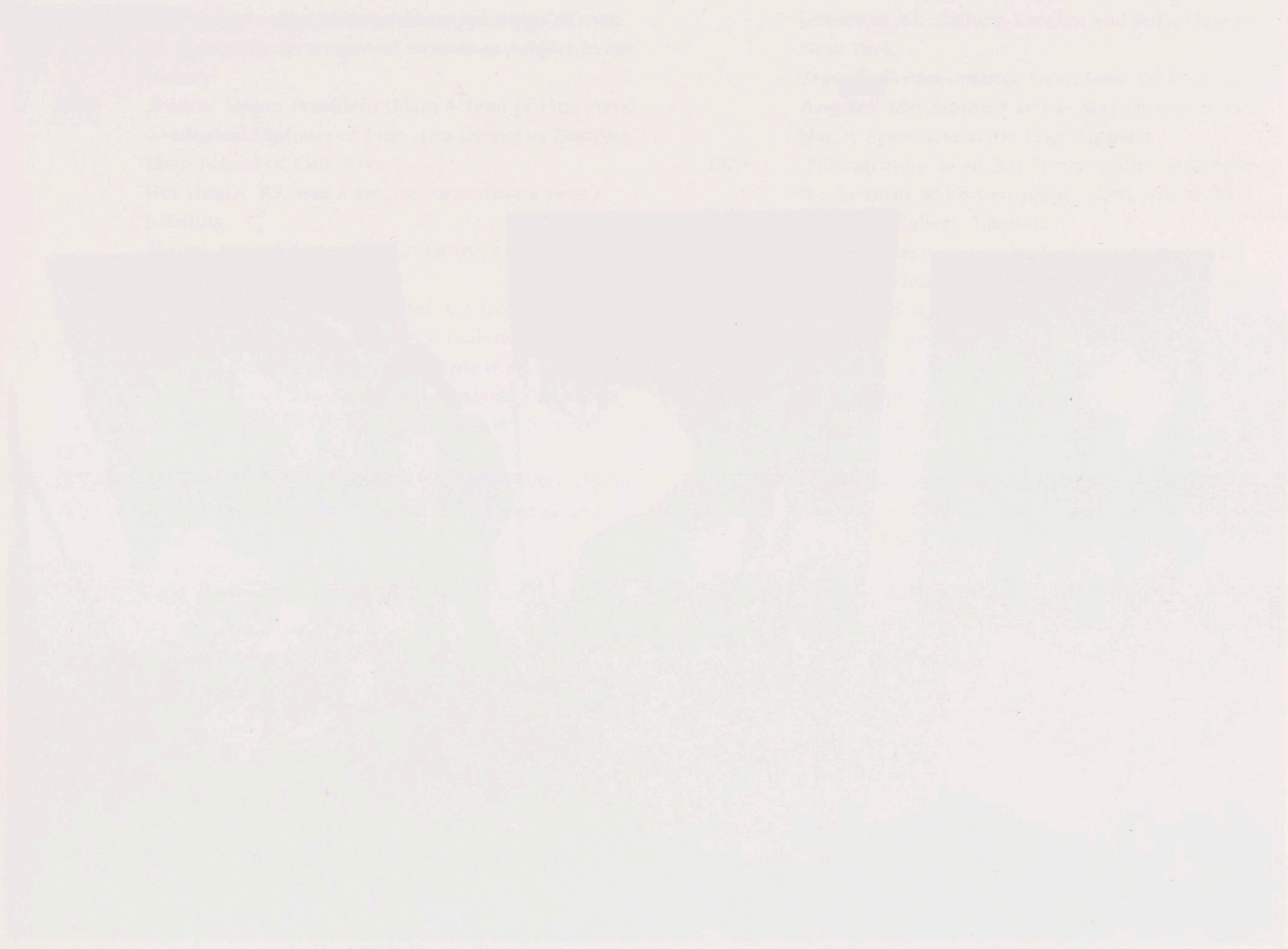
- by Francis Pound in 'Nationalist Antitheses: A Compendium' *Antic* No 1 June 1986 pp73-84 and Wystan Curnow 'Landscape and the Body' *Antic* No3 November 1987 pp143-163
- 30 See this catalogue's list of exhibitions
- 31 op cit *Artscribe* No25 1980 pp25-29. This piece was invaluable for foregrounding feminist artists and for contextualising and categorising strategies of feminist art practice
- 32 Craig Owens 'The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism' in *The Anti-Aesthetic, Essays on Postmodern Culture* ed and introd Hal Foster Port Townsend 1983 p63
- 33 Unpublished section of artist's statement in 'Mark Making' a chapter by Alexis Hunter in '68'78'88: *From Women's Liberation to Feminism* ed Amanda Sebestyen Great Britain 1988
- 34 Artist's statement Auckland 1988
- 35 Exhibited in *The Golden Thread? Classical Mythology in Contemporary Art* November 1986-May 1987. Organised by the Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston and Milton Keynes Exhibition Gallery



35 Passionate Instincts IX 1984  
oil on canvas  
1676 x 1848mm  
Courtesy of Albert Totah, Milan

# Documentation

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Artist's studio, showing the artist standing next to several large paintings.

## Chronology

- 1948 Born Parnell, Auckland. Lived and attended school in west Auckland
- 1956–60 Attended Kowhai Art School
- 1965–71 Assistant preparator Auckland Institute and Museum
- 1966–69 Attended Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland  
Primarily taught by Garth Tapper and Colin McCahon  
Worked on series of naturalistic paintings of men to oppose the treatment of woman-as-subject in art history
- 1969 Student Union President (Elam School of Fine Arts)  
Graduated Diploma of Fine Arts (Hons) in Painting, Elam School of Fine Arts  
Her thesis, '69, was a journal recording a year's painting  
Travel Award, University of Otago, Dunedin
- 1970 Travelled around Australia
- 1971 Diploma of Teaching (Art and Art History)  
Auckland Secondary Teachers' College  
Worked on series of neo-realist paintings on the popular visual culture of New Zealand (cameos of suburban life, snapshots, grocery calendars etc)
- 1972 Moved to London
- 1972–75 Member Women's Workshop of the Artists' Union  
Art practice focused on collective strategies and feminist politics
- 1973 Obtained a studio through the SPACE organisation initiated by artists such as Bridget Riley. Worked on collage and tinted photographs. Began photographing tattoos  
Worked freelance for commercial film companies as well as making a film of her own, *Anatomy of a Friendship*—experience which conditioned her appropriation of advertising and commercial art techniques used in the photo-narrative sequences which established her international reputation
- 1974 Designed exhibition panels for Inner London Education Authority  
Visited New York and Spain and painted hyper-realist series, 'Object Paintings', using tattoo photographs, an experiment in reverse sexism
- 1975 Painted works exploring states of emotion 'The Breakfast Series'  
'Sexual Warfare': photographic essay documenting methods of murder committed by women against men; opposition to society's treatment of rape victims  
Co-ordinated 'Space Open Studios' with the participation of two hundred artists. Studios in London's East End opened to the public for three weeks
- 1976–77 Member Women's Arts Alliance, curated exhibitions with the Alliance's Gallery Collective  
'Approaches to Fear': began experimenting with sequential photography using fetishistic personal symbols to oppose the subterfuges of advertising in women's magazines
- 1977 'Female Imagery in Women's Art Practice': public lecture at Air Gallery, London and SoHo Gallery, New York  
Travelled cross-country from New York to Los Angeles. Met feminist artists May Stevens and Nancy Spero and critic Lucy Lippard
- 1978 'Photography as an Art Form': public lecture at the Institute of Contemporary Arts and at the Hayward Gallery, London  
Interviewed on video by James Scott and Nina Kellgren, shown at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London  
Taught graphics at Epsom School of Art  
Began using colour photocopier in the photographic sequences
- 1979 'Women in Media and Communication': public lecture at London College of Printing  
'Body Politic': public lecture at the Hayward Gallery, London
- 1980 Returned to New Zealand for two months  
Concentrated on writing and reading, anticipating major stylistic change
- 1981 Began painting over photocopies. Used device of central image surrounded by smaller images representing the unconscious  
Major Award, Greater London Arts Association Grant, Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand  
'Experimental Public Workshop': public lecture with Adrian Henri at the Serpentine Gallery, London  
Returned to painting. Work influenced by naive painters (James Dixon and Alfred Wallis) and art of schizophrenic patients  
Began researching psychology and psychoanalysis
- 1982 Exhibited at 4th Biennale of Sydney and lectured at Outreach and at RKS Art in Auckland, Rotorua City Art Gallery and Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney: "My new work engages the language of painting to attack mythical archetypes of the patriarchy: the Witch, Siren, Amazon and the Foolish Woman"  
Contributed to 'Postmodernism' forum at the

- 1983 Institute of Contemporary Arts, London  
Grant, Greater London Arts Council, printmaker in residence, Lowick House, Cumbria. Etchings investigated the artist and muse idea. Animal imagery explored in drypoints of sheep and gamecocks.  
Spoke at A.I.R. Gallery, (the New York women's gallery) and at the 'Women in Literature Festival' Polytechnic of North London: "There may be a day when we can let ourselves go and come up with angels instead of monsters—though not repressed sexless angels with tidy wings and pursed lips—but great flowing spirits"  
Began 'Conflicts of the Psyche' series
- 1984 Contributed to Liverpool Artists' Workshop Lecture Programme  
Lectures: 'Women and the Arts' Third Eye Centre, Glasgow and 'Young Contemporaries Conference' Institute of Contemporary Arts, Glasgow  
Appeared in film 'Lives of Artists' by Monica Morawietz, Sue Aron and Rowena Rowling.  
Shown at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, distributed by *Concorde*, the Arts Council of Great Britain and the British Council  
Led artists' delegation to Turkish Embassy in London asking for the release of prisoner of conscience, Turkish painter Orhan Taylen  
Began 'Passionate Instincts' series  
Lecture tour around Irish art schools (Belfast, Dublin, Cork)
- 1985 'Women and Art': public lecture at Mary Ward Centre, London  
Worked on Separation series, influenced by Melanie Klein's theories  
Spoke at Outreach, Auckland and National Art Gallery, New Zealand  
Visited Tahiti to work on ideas related to Mururoa, an extension of the 'Passionate Instincts' series  
Appeared in Gervaise Soeouroe's video 'Studio 5', which accompanied the exhibition 'Passion and Power' in New York  
Interviewed in 'Sexuality, Image and Identity' in the Channel 4 television series *The State of the Art*  
Married Baxter Mitchell in Scotland  
Taught at the Slade School of Art, London
- 1986 'Why Paint?': public lecture at Institute of Contemporary Arts, London  
Visiting Assistant Professor in Photography and Painting, University of Houston, Texas. Visited Mérida, Yucatan.  
Mayan architecture and mythology influenced the work completed in Houston
- 1987 Travelled: Spain, Tangiers, France, Italy, Monte Carlo, Belgium  
Taught at St Martins and Chelsea Schools of Art, London
- 1988 Grant, Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand  
Lectured at Auckland City Art Gallery
- 1989 'The Horizon: Reality or Metaphor?': lecture delivered at the Association of Art Historians' Fifteenth Annual Conference; at the London Institute  
'Joan Miró: Paintings and Drawings 1929–41': public lecture at the Whitechapel Gallery, London

## Solo exhibitions

- 1971 'Paintings: Snapshot series' Mollers Gallery, Auckland  
1972 'Sculptures and Paintings' Mollers Gallery, Auckland  
1973 'Architecture of the dispossessed' Architectural Association, London  
1977 'Feminist Perceptions' Women's Arts Alliance, London  
1978 'Approaches to Fear' Institute of Contemporary Arts, London  
1979 'Approaches to Fear' Bristol Arts Laboratory, Bristol  
1980 'Sequential Xerox Work' New 57 Gallery, Edinburgh  
1981 'Sequential Xerox Work' Edward Totah Gallery, London  
1982 'Sequential Xerox Work' RKS Art, Auckland  
'Dreams, Nightmares and Male Myths' Edward Totah Gallery, London  
1983 'An Artist looking for her Muse' RKS Art, Auckland  
'Conflicts of the Psyche' Edward Totah Gallery, London  
'Conflicts of the Psyche' Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff  
Edward Totah Gallery—Forum Internationale Kunstmesse, Zurich  
1985 'Male Myths' New Vision Gallery, Auckland  
1986 'Landscapes and Separation Series' Totah Gallery, New York  
1987 'Monotypes' Todd Gallery, London  
1988 'Landscapes of the Heart' RKS Art, Auckland  
'Hawaiiki Series' Brooker Gallery, Wellington  
1989 'Fears/Dreams/Desires: A survey exhibition 1976–1988' Auckland City Art Gallery

## Group exhibitions

- \* curator Alexis Hunter + member curatorial group
- 1969 + 'The Neo-Realists' Bett Duncan Gallery, Wellington  
1971 'New Zealand Young Contemporaries' Auckland City Art Gallery  
1973 + 'The Artists' Union Women's Workshop Manifesto' Almost Free Theatre, London  
1974 Tabernacle Street Open Studios, London  
1975 'Sexuality and Socialisation' Northern Arts Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne  
New Zealand House, London  
'Junge Britische Grafik' Hamburg  
'Group exhibitions' Space Open Studios, London  
1976 'British Realists' Ikon Gallery, Birmingham  
1977 'Whitechapel Open' Whitechapel Gallery, London  
1978 'Hayward Annual' Hayward Gallery, London  
'Arts for Society' Whitechapel Gallery, London and Belfast  
'The Women's Art Festival' Birmingham Arts Laboratory  
1979 'Un Certain Art Anglais' Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris  
'JP2' Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels  
'Both Sides Now' Artemisia Gallery, Chicago  
'Artists of the British Left' Artists' Space, New York  
'Three Perspectives on Photography' Hayward Gallery, London  
1980 'A Woman's View' Edward Totah Gallery, London  
'Issue, Social Strategies by Women Artists' Institute of Contemporary Arts, London  
'Works on Paper' Edward Totah Gallery, London  
'Art for Industry' Lloyds Bank, London  
'Heresies Benefit' Grey Gallery, New York  
1981 'Summer Exhibition' Serpentine Gallery, London  
'Hommage aux Artistes Inconnues' Paris  
'Bodies of Artists' Skibsbj Artcenter, Hjørring  
'Artery Magazine 10th Anniversary Exhibition' Wildcat Theatre, Edinburgh  
'Camden Artists Group' Camden Arts Centre, London  
1982 Kingston Museum and Art Gallery  
'The 4th Biennale of Sydney: Vision in Disbelief' Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney  
'Arteder 82' Feria Internacional de Muestras de Bilbao  
+ 'Sense and Sensibility in Feminist Art Practice' The Midland Group, Nottingham  
1983 'Extended Media' Sheffield Polytechnic  
'Photo(Graphic) Vision' The Winchester Gallery  
'Art in Aid of Amnesty' Work of Art Gallery, London  
'The Print Show' Angela Flowers Gallery, London  
'Small is Beautiful' Angela Flowers Gallery, London



- 1984 'Print Show' Blond Fine Art, London  
 'The Monoprint Show' Angela Flowers Gallery, London  
 'Autographs' Cambridge Darkroom, Cambridge  
 'Eighth British International Print Biennale' Bradford  
 'Masks' Cafe Gallery, London & Nottingham Arts  
 'Amsterdam-London' Galerie Rob Jurka, Amsterdam  
 'Artists for the 1990s' Paton Gallery, London  
 Nottingham Arts Centre, Nottingham
- 1985 '2nd International Art Fair' London  
 Edward Totah Gallery, London  
 'The Air and Space Contemporary Art Auction' Air Gallery London  
 'Auction for Ethiopia' Riverside Gallery, London  
 'Images of War' Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff  
 'Animals' Edward Totah Gallery, London  
 \* 'Passion and Power' La Mama La Galleria with Gracie Mansion Gallery, New York  
 'Air and Space for Artists' Air Gallery, London  
 'Famine Appeal for Ethiopia and the Sahel' Bonhams Auctioneers and Valuers, London  
 Berry Street Open Studios, London  
 'Double Elephant' Printmakers' Council, Barbican Arts Centre, London  
 'Nature Morte' Edward Totah Gallery, London  
 'Camden Artists Group' Queens Elm Gallery, London  
 The River Cafe Gallery, London  
 'The New Europeans' Germans Van Eck Gallery, New York
- 1986 'Human Zoo' The Castle Museum, Nottingham  
 'Hand Signals' Ikon Gallery, Birmingham and travelling  
 'Identity/Desire' Scottish Arts Council Touring Exhibition  
 'The Golden Thread? Classical Mythology in Contemporary Art' Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston and Milton Keynes Exhibition Gallery  
 'New Acquisitions' National Art Gallery, Wellington  
 + 'Camden Artists Group' Falcon Gallery, London
- 1987 'The State of the Art' Institute of Contemporary Arts, London  
 'Whitechapel Open' Whitechapel Gallery, London  
 + 'Erewhon' New Zealand House, London  
 'XIX Festival International de la Peinture' Chateau-Musée de Cagnes-sur-Mer  
 Aldrich Museum, New York  
 'Sky Editions' Slaughterhouse Gallery, London  
 'Women Artists' Diary Exhibition' The Small Mansion Gallery, London  
 'Cats' Louise Hallett Gallery, London
- 1988 'Studio Lithographs' Muka Gallery, Auckland  
 'Private Lives' Todd Gallery, London  
 'Kunst Uit Muka Studio' Fransmasereiecentrum, Kasterlee  
 'Connections Project/Conexus' Museo de Arts Contemporanea, Sao Paulo  
 'Homage to the Square' Flaxman Gallery, London
- 1989 'The Lighthouse Benefit Auction' London  
 'Islington Arts Fair' London  
 'Bath Arts Fair' Bath  
 'Idylls in 1989' Todd Gallery, London  
 'The Environment' The Art Gallery, London  
 'Opportunities for Women in the 3rd World: Benefit Auction' Smiths Gallery, London  
 '20 years of Feminism' Reeves Women's Hotel, London  
 'Wandsworth and Putney Fairs' Fine Art Marquee, London  
 'Time to Go Benefit Auction' Conway Hall, London  
 'Print Show' Todd Gallery, London  
 'He Kokonga' Auckland City Art Gallery  
 'Space Artists' Air Gallery, London  
 'Intergraphic 90' Berlin

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\* includes commentary by Alexis Hunter

- \* *Directory of Artists Space Open Studios* 1972
- Hayward Annual 1978* Arts Council of Great Britain 1978
- Un Certain Art Anglais* Musée de l'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris 1979
- Three Perspectives on Photography* Hayward Gallery Arts Council of Great Britain 1979
- \* *Issue, Social Strategies by Women Artists* Institute of Contemporary Arts, London 1980
- \* *Hunter, McAlpine and Fumpston* New Zealand High Commission 1981
- \* *1981 Summer Exhibition* Serpentine Gallery Arts Council of Great Britain 1981
- Camden Artists* Camden Arts Center 1981
- Bodies of Artists* Skibsky Artcenter Hjørring 1981
- \* *Alexis Hunter, Photographic Narrative Sequences* with critical essays by Lucy R Lippard and Margaret Richards, Edward Totah Gallery 1981. (Alexis Hunter also designed the catalogue)
- The 4th Biennale of Sydney 'Vision in Disbelief'* Art Gallery of New South Wales 1982
- Arteder 82 Feria Internacional de Muestras de Bilbao* 1982
- \* *Sense and Sensibility in Feminist Art Practice* The Midland Group 1982 (Catalogue and poster designed by Alexis Hunter)
- Photo(Graphic) Vision* The Winchester Gallery 1983
- Eighth British International Print Biennale* City of Bradford Metropolitan Council 1984
- Artists for the 1990s* Paton Gallery 1984
- The Camden Artists Group* Falcon Gallery 1986
- Human Zoo* Nottingham Castle Museum 1986
- London Fields Artists: An Open Studios Exhibition by Space Artists* 1986
- \* *The Golden Thread? Classical Mythology in Contemporary Art* Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston and Milton Keynes Exhibition Gallery 1986-87
- 150 Artists Book, Connections Project/Conexus* Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, New York 1987
- XIX Festival International de la Peinture* Chateau-Musée de Cagnes-sur-Mer 1987

## Public collections

- Auckland City Art Gallery
- Govett Brewster Gallery, New Plymouth
- Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North
- National Art Gallery, New Zealand
- Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui
- University of Otago, Dunedin
- Arts Council of Great Britain, London
- Camden Council, London
- Contemporary Arts Society, London
- Greater London Arts, London
- Imperial War Museum, London
- Northern Arts, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
- Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh
- Zurich Museum, Zurich
- University of Houston, Texas



25 An Artist and her Muse 1987  
monoprint  
800 x 1160mm  
Courtesy of Todd Gallery, London



48 The Clouds of Uxmal 1986  
oil on canvas  
1675 x 2127mm  
Courtesy of the artist

# Catalogue

- 1 Approach to Fear I: Violence—  
Identify with Aggressor 1976  
colour photographs, 2 panels  
805 x 260mm each  
Courtesy of the artist
- 2 Approach to Fear III: Taboo—Demystify 1976  
colour photographs, 4 panels  
1225 x 395mm each  
Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh
- 3 Approach to Fear VII: Pain—Solace 1977  
colour photographs, 3 panels  
1015 x 255mm each  
Courtesy of the artist
- 4 Approach to Fear XIII: Pain—  
Destruction of Cause 1977  
colour photographs, 2 panels  
1015 x 425mm each  
Courtesy of the artist
- 5 Approach to Fear XVII: Masculinisation  
of Society—Exorcise 1977  
colour photographs, 2 panels  
1250 x 400mm each  
Courtesy of the artist
- 6 The Marxist's Wife (still does the housework) 1978  
colour photocopies, 4 panels  
1230 x 393mm each  
Courtesy of the artist
- 7 Gender Confusion: Incubus/Succubus II 1978  
colour photocopies, 4 panels  
1000 x 427mm each  
National Art Gallery, New Zealand
- 8 War and Nature 1979  
colour photocopies, 2 panels  
1230 x 393mm each  
Imperial War Museum, London
- 9 To Silent Women 1981  
colour photocopies, 6 panels  
1250 x 400mm each  
Courtesy of the artist
- 10 London 1981  
colour photocopies, 2 panels  
1205 x 460mm each  
Courtesy of RKS Art, Auckland
- 11 A Young Polynesian Considers Cultural  
Imperialism before she goes to the Disco 1981  
colour photocopies, 3 panels  
1045 x 390mm each  
Courtesy of Michael Neill and  
Makare Rupana, Auckland
- 12 Pride 1981  
acrylic on 15 pieces of paper  
895 x 1210mm (overall)  
National Art Gallery, New Zealand
- 13 Considering Theory 1982  
acrylic on paper  
660 x 762mm  
Private collection, Dallas, Texas
- 14 A Goddess fighting the Patriarchy 1982  
acrylic on lithograph  
750 x 1060mm  
Private collection, Auckland
- 15 A Goddess fighting Voyeurism 1983  
acrylic on lithograph  
750 x 1060mm  
Courtesy of Robert Heller, London
- 16 An Artist looking for her Muse 1982  
acrylic on paper  
1016 x 1270mm  
Courtesy of Edward Totah, London
- 17 An Artist looking for her Muse 1983  
lithograph  
750 x 1060mm  
Courtesy of Bronwynne Taylor, Christchurch

- 18 *An Artist looking for her Muse* 1983  
acrylic on lithograph  
755 x 1065mm  
Private collection, Auckland
- 19 *An Artist looking for her Muse* 1983  
acrylic on lithograph  
787 x 1065mm  
Courtesy of RKS Art, Auckland
- 20 *An Artist looking for her Muse* 1983  
acrylic on lithograph  
755 x 1065mm  
Courtesy of Edward Totah, London
- 21 *Left-handed Dream* 1982  
acrylic on paper  
570 x 770mm  
Courtesy of the artist
- 22 *Left-handed Dream (landscape)* 1982  
acrylic on paper  
570 x 770mm  
Courtesy of the artist
- 23 *Manaene* 1982  
acrylic on paper, 4 panels  
700 x 1000mm each  
Courtesy of Edward Totah, London
- 24 *An Artist and her Muse (dancing)* 1987  
black and white monoprint  
570 x 765mm  
Courtesy of Todd Gallery, London
- 25 *An Artist and her Muse* 1987  
monoprint  
800 x 1160mm  
Courtesy of Todd Gallery, London
- 26 *Zeus and Hera* 1987  
monoprint  
565 x 760mm  
Courtesy of Todd Gallery, London
- 27 *Zeus and Hera* 1987  
black and white monoprint  
565 x 760mm  
Courtesy of the artist
- 28 *Conflicts of the Psyche—The Struggle  
between Greed and Freedom* 1983  
oil on canvas  
1825 x 1670mm  
Courtesy of the artist
- 29 *Conflicts of the Psyche—The Struggle  
between Ambition and Desire II* 1984–85  
oil on canvas  
1705 x 1940mm  
Courtesy of the artist
- 30 *Conflicts of the Psyche—The Struggle  
between Instinct and Logic* 1983  
oil on canvas  
1825 x 1670mm  
Courtesy of the artist
- 31 *Conflicts of the Psyche—The Struggle  
between Passion and Reason* 1984  
oil on canvas  
2135 x 2440mm  
Courtesy of the artist
- 32 *Passionate Instincts V* 1983  
oil on canvas  
1300 x 910mm  
Courtesy of Edward Totah, London
- 33 *Passionate Instincts VI* 1983  
oil on canvas  
1150 x 1260mm  
Courtesy of Unilever PLC, London
- 34 *Passionate Instincts VIII* 1984  
oil on canvas  
1757 x 1595mm  
National Art Gallery, New Zealand
- 35 *Passionate Instincts IX* 1984  
oil on canvas  
1676 x 1848mm  
Courtesy of Albert Totah, Milan



13 Considering Theory 1982  
acrylic on paper  
660 x 762mm  
Private collection, Dallas, Texas





38 Siamese Separation 1985-86  
oil on canvas  
1385 x 1230mm  
Courtesy of the artist

- 36 *Passionate Instincts XI* 1984  
oil on canvas  
1098 x 995mm  
Courtesy of the Contemporary Art Society, London
- 37 *Passionate Instincts XIII* 1984-85  
oil on canvas  
1264 x 1150mm  
Courtesy of the artist
- 38 *Siamese Separation* 1985-86  
oil on canvas  
1385 x 1230mm  
Courtesy of the artist
- 39 *Le Cri de Mururoa* 1987  
oil on canvas  
1200 x 1230mm  
Private collection, London
- 40 *Portrait of the artist as a young bitch  
barking at Nothing* 1983  
oil on canvas  
180 x 230mm  
Courtesy of Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland
- 41 *Passionate Instincts II* 1983  
oil on canvas  
180 x 230mm  
Courtesy of P. Corrigan, London
- 42 *Passionate Instincts III* 1983  
oil on canvas  
180 x 230mm  
Private collection, Auckland
- 43 *Passionate Instincts IV* 1983  
oil on canvas  
180 x 230mm  
Courtesy of Ray Hughes, Sydney
- 44 *Passionate Instincts XV* 1985  
oil on canvas  
180 x 230mm  
Private collection, Auckland
- 45 *Passionate Instincts XVII* 1985  
oil on canvas  
180 x 230mm  
Courtesy of Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland
- 46 *Culture Shock* 1986  
oil on canvas  
1215 x 1530mm  
Courtesy of the artist
- 47 *The Messengers of Yacatecuhtli* 1986  
oil on canvas  
1675 x 2130mm  
Courtesy of the artist
- 48 *The Clouds of Uxmal* 1986  
oil on canvas  
1675 x 2127mm  
Courtesy of the artist
- 49 *Landscapes of the Heart (Waitakere)* 1986  
oil on canvas  
510 x 610mm  
Private collection, Auckland
- 50 *Landscapes of the Heart (for Aldous Huxley)* 1986  
oil on canvas  
510 x 610mm  
Courtesy of the artist
- 51 *Landscapes of the Heart (for Michel Tournier)* 1986  
oil on canvas  
510 x 610mm  
Courtesy of RKS Art, Auckland
- 52 *Landscapes of the Heart (Yucatan)* 1987-88  
oil on canvas  
510 x 610mm  
Courtesy of RKS Art, Auckland
- 53 *A Man dreaming of his Mother* 1986-89  
oil on canvas  
2120 x 1575mm  
Courtesy of the artist

54 The Land dreaming of the Sea 1986  
oil on canvas  
1585 x 1755mm  
Courtesy of the artist

55 The Search 1987  
oil on canvas  
1225 x 1520mm  
Courtesy of the artist

56 Creation 1987  
oil on canvas  
2385 x 2610mm  
Courtesy of the artist

57 Hine Nui Te Po 1988  
oil on canvas  
1360 x 1560mm  
Courtesy of the artist

58 The Waiting 1987-88  
oil on canvas  
710 x 1510mm  
Courtesy of RKS Art, Auckland



10 London 1981  
colour photocopies, 2 panels  
1205 x 460mm each  
Courtesy of RKS Art, Auckland

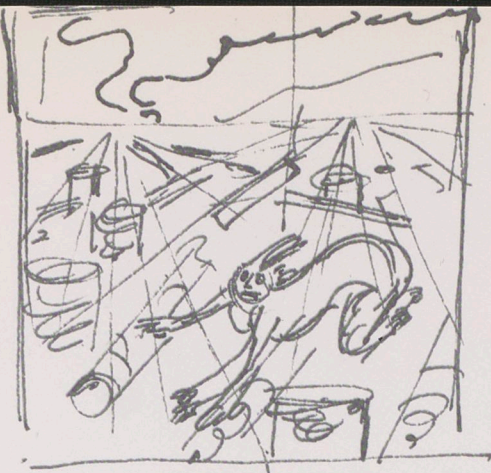
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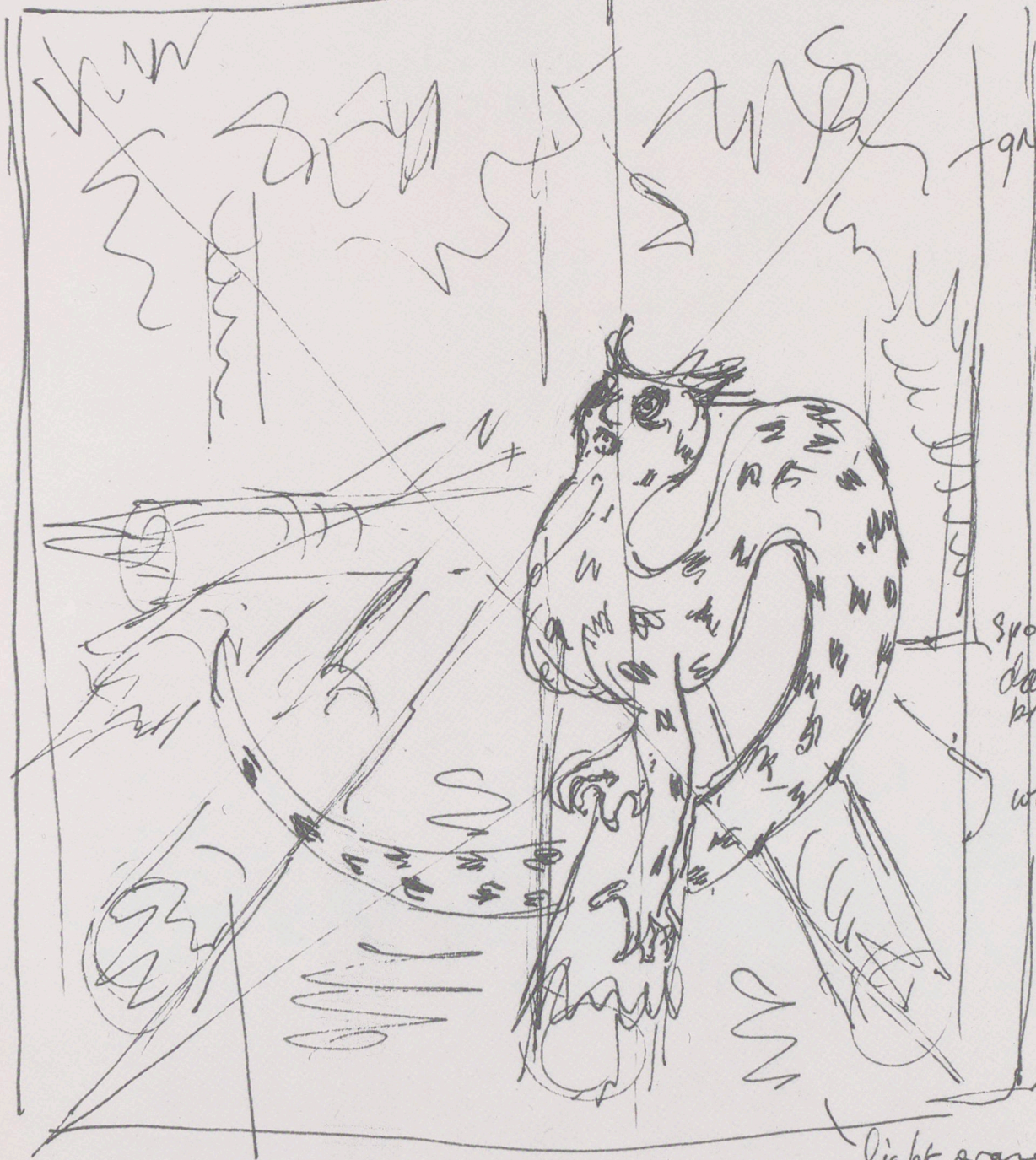
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**Fears / Dreams / Desires**  
A survey exhibition 1976–1988  
Auckland City Art Gallery, 21 July to 3 September 1989  
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golden se  
Van der  
point

Bolivia  
Passionate Instincts.

getting too sentimental?



green

Spotted  
dark  
brown  
on  
white/cream.

light orange

Dynamited trees jagged edges

Auckland City Art Gallery