

2000

Bronwyn Oliver

Fabrications



Auckland City Art Gallery

7 July – 20 August 1992



An Australian Artist's Project
Organised by the Auckland City Art Gallery
Supported by the Australia/New Zealand Foundation

Horn 1992 720 x 650 x 160 mm, copper

Bronwyn Oliver

What strikes one first about Bronwyn Oliver's fabrications (as she unpretentiously describes her sculptures) is their apparent age. Even when only days or weeks old (the time it takes to chemically impart a patina) they have the rich verdigris colour of centuries, like ancient relics from an unearthed civilisation. One day she is sitting cross-legged on the floor, systematically coaxing flexible strands of copper wire into delicate chrysalis or loofah-like shapes; the next they look as if they have been resurrected, like some archaeological treasure, from the depths of the Aegean Sea. It is a miraculous transformation that instantly bestows on the works the aura of the antique.

The shapes are not modern, but nor are they dated. They are as timeless as they are universal. The spiral, the corkscrew, the funnel, the cone and the loop are part of the stock of proven designs Mother Nature spins into a million permutations. The spiralling ammonite, the cone-shaped paper nautilus, the infundibular lily, the trumpet-like datura flower, the pendulous pitcher plant, the corkscrew single tusk of the narwhal – these are just some of the myriad zoological and botanical manifestations of such archetypal forms as Oliver has hung her fabrications upon. Perhaps this is why, in spite of her independent vision and creative spirit, Oliver's 'fabrications' feel vaguely familiar.

Whatever the allusions (sometimes prompted by such titles as 'Iris', 'Heart', 'Serpent' and 'Horn'), Oliver insists the works do not consciously stem from any personal investigations into natural morphology. 'I am not, and never have been remotely concerned with the observation of nature. My ideas do not begin with natural forms. I am interested in structure and what materials will do,' she says. Structure, in other words, is predicated on the specific properties of the material she chooses to use – whether copper wire, balsa, paper tissue, sheet metal or cane – all materials she has worked with at one time or another.

Although evocative of vessels (one of them is actually called *Vessel*), they are mainly open walled structures assembled from hundreds of tiny coils or a woven network of copper wire, either built up by hand, or over an armature. When an armature is used, this has to be removed when the structure is complete. Oliver tells of a hair-raising conflagration she caused in the shower of her tiny apartment/studio in Paris when she tried to burn out the core of a sculpture constructed in this way. What is left after such an operation is a kind of shell, like the moulted skin of a cicada that preserves the shape of the insect. While Oliver's sculptures sometimes form a continuous surface (such as when she uses a

mosaic of small metal plates), more often it is a lacy filigree that looks deceptively fragile and casts an intricate shadow on the supporting wall.

The importance of these shadows to the work is underscored by Oliver's persistence in creating sculptures which, though modelled in the round, are invariably wall mounted rather than free standing – *Sculpture* [that] *steps down from the pedestal*, in the words of a Sydney art critic – and the artist's insistence that each work be lit by a single light source.

Displayed in a gallery where artificial light is obligatory, the shadows Oliver's fabrications cast are constant. In a domestic situation where natural light is admitted, the shadows grow and diminish, darken and fade with the changing daylight, adding new dimensions to the works.

Four of these twelve fabrications were created by Oliver during a recent two month residency in Auckland under the auspices of the Australia/New Zealand Foundation's artist exchange programme. Oliver is the third Australian artist to have participated in this programme, and follows Tom Risley (1990) and Ari Purhonen (1991).

A.B.



Labyrinth IV 1991
(detail)



Listener 1992
340 x 240 x 200 mm
copper

List of Works

(all dimensions height before
width before depth)

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 <i>Vessel</i> 1991
1700 x 190 x 190 mm
copper | 7 <i>Whisker</i> 1990
2000 x 100 x 200 mm
copper
Private collection, Sydney |
| 2 <i>Chamber</i> 1991
1700 x 200 x 200 mm
copper, bronze | 8 <i>Serpent</i> 1988
2004 x 140 x 140 mm
copper, lead
Auckland City Art Gallery
collection, purchased 1992 |
| 3 <i>Twist</i> 1991
1800 x 130 x 130 mm
copper | 9 <i>Labyrinth IV</i> 1991
1800 x 500 x 130 mm
copper
Auckland City Art Gallery
collection, purchased 1992 |
| 4 <i>Hook</i> 1991
500 x 600 x 30 mm
copper, bronze | 10 <i>Horn</i> 1992
720 x 650 x 160 mm
copper |
| 5 <i>Dirigible</i> 1989
450 x 350 x 250 mm
copper | 11 <i>Listener</i> 1992
340 x 240 x 200 mm
copper |
| 6 <i>Spiral I</i> 1988
1100 x 1000 x 160 mm
copper | 12 <i>Blue Egg</i> 1988
400 x 260 x 260 mm
copper |

Unless otherwise stated, all
works have been lent courtesy
of Christine Abrahams Gallery,
Melbourne.



Biography

- 1959 Born New South Wales
- 1977–80 Bachelor of Education (Art),
Alexander Mackie CAE, Sydney
- 1982–83 Master of Art (Sculpture),
Chelsea School of Art, London

Awards

- 1981–83 New South Wales Travelling Art Scholarship
- 1982–83 Dyason Bequest Scholarship
- 1983–84 Fellowship in Sculpture, Gloucester
Institute of Art, Cheltenham
- 1984 Moya Dyring Bequest Studio,
Cité des Arts, Paris
- 1988 French/Australian Artist Exchange
- 1989 Sydney University Power Bequest Studio,
Cité des Arts, Paris
- 1989–90 Marten Bequest Scholarship for Sculpture
- 1990 Visual Arts/Craft Board Artist Development
Project Grant

Solo Exhibitions

- 1986 Since 1986 regular solo exhibitions with Roslyn
Oxley 9 Gallery, Sydney, and Christine Abrahams
Gallery, Melbourne

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1983 'Australian Paperworks', Museum of Traditional
Industries, Kyoto
'Young Contemporaries', ICA and Artspace,
London
- 1984 'Paper Trails', Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool
'Underwater', Plymouth Arts Centre, Plymouth
- 1985 'Mildura Triennial', Mildura Arts Centre
'Perspecta', Art Gallery of New South Wales/
Irving Sculpture Gallery
- 1988 'The New Generation', Australian National
Gallery, Canberra
'Five Australian Artists', City of Brest,
Centre Culturelle
- 1989 'Ten Australian Artists', Chapelle
Salpetrière, Paris
- 1990 'Recent Acquisitions', National Gallery of Victoria
'Australian Sculpture Triennial', National Gallery
of Victoria
- 1991 'Perspecta', Art Gallery of New South Wales
'Correspondences', Art Gallery of Queensland

Collections

Represented in public and private collections
in Australia and overseas, including:

- Art Gallery of New South Wales
National Gallery of Victoria
Meatmarket Collection, Melbourne
ICI Collection
New South Wales University Institute of Art
Queensland Art Gallery
Auckland City Art Gallery



Labyrinth IV 1991
1800 x 500 x 130 mm
copper