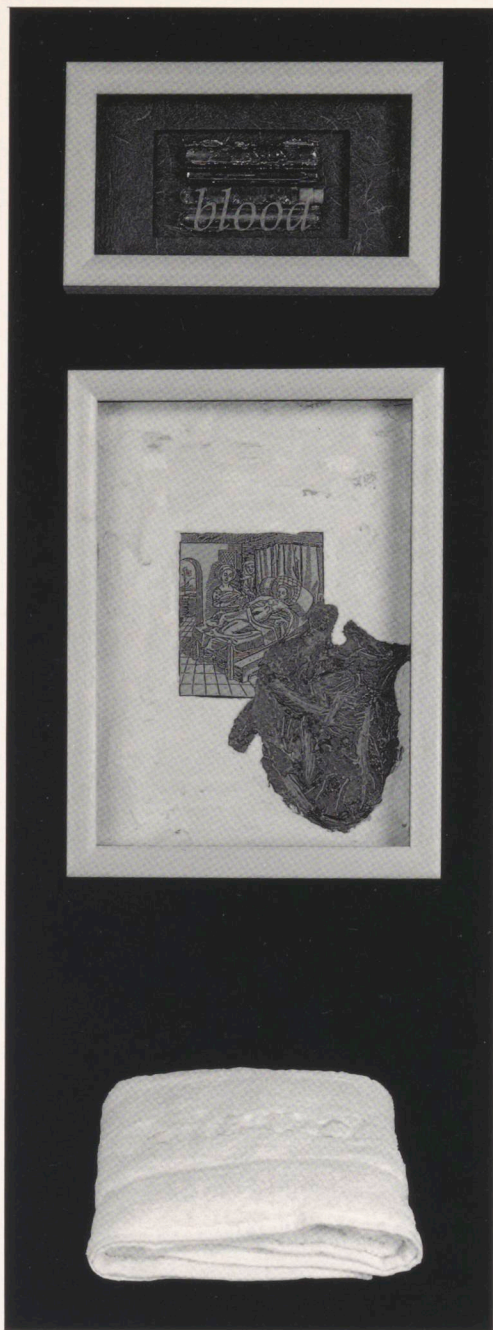


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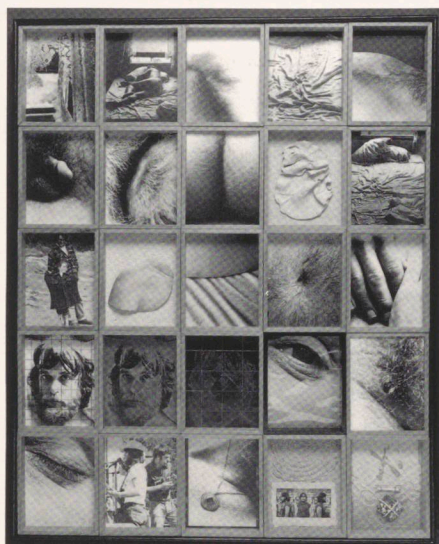
carole sheppheard





*Abjection/ Absolution* 1992 (detail)

*John* 1981



In 1980 Carole Shepherd was a founder of the Women Artists' Association in Auckland which still flourishes as a supportive environment for women artists to exhibit and develop their work. In 1991 she was a founder of the Artists' Alliance, an association which represents and promotes the professional and individual needs of working artists. These political organisations are committed to collective strength as a means of increasing the power of the individual. In both of them she has been an inspiration to other artists and a vehement and formidable representative of artists' views. Shepherd is a political person.

In this exhibition you see a small selection of her works, spanning thirteen years. They are evidence that political action and commitment to the support of others, whether family, students or fellow artists has not diminished Shepherd's ability to produce her own work and to keep an art practice and production which is challenging, sometimes disturbing, yet unfailingly beautiful and rewarding to the viewer.

So Carole Shepherd is an appropriate artist to begin this series of exhibitions which celebrate the achievements of five feminist artists who are part of the Auckland community. Shepherd's career reflects her feminist ideals, yet her works also contain within them the paradox of feminism; that while it speaks from the position of the feminine, it simultaneously seeks to transform the meanings which have attached to that position. The transformation of materials and meanings is central to all her work.

The earliest piece in this show *John* is in some respects a textbook example of a feminist work. Shepherd offers a bound-together collection of images. She uses a wide range of media - photography, collage, cast paper and ceramics, thus blurring Western craft/art boundaries. Although a portrait it has the nature of a diary, a collection of views which demonstrate the

# carole shepheard

complexity of one life, one identity. The 'subject' of the portrait is actively an observer of us, the viewers.

This kind of deconstruction of the genre of portraiture and its complicity in the presentation of women as objects for viewing, as available to a male gaze, rather than active individuals, has been the subject of much feminist art writing and debate. But this is a portrait of a man, Shepheard's partner. And it is both an erotic and a loving portrait. At a time when feminist debates were at their hottest *John* was included in a Women Artists' Association exhibition, *Images of Men*. In that context its sympathy for its male subject was far from orthodox, indeed almost a heresy.

In her *Body covers* etching series of 1983 Shepheard grappled with the issue of representing women's bodies in an assertive yet sensual way. Shepheard makes a shift from the depersonalised nature of life-model imagery through careful selection of the body parts she shows and the presentation of attributes alongside them. These objects are all gifts which bear personal meanings for the artist and connect with the women named in the prints. The prints are also glowing evidence of Shepheard's outstanding technical ability as a printmaker. Their silken surfaces invite the touch of a hand, without suggesting ownership or control of the women depicted.

Her 1991 *Window Work* for the Auckland City Art Gallery, reworked for this exhibition, demonstrates another facet of her work, an investigation of 'goddess' images in ancient art and revisiting those symbols of female power. The work is called *Essence and Shadow* and Shepheard's subject is an ancient statue in the Louvre, known as Nike of Samothrace, the winged Goddess of Victory. She noted that most art-historical discussions of the sculpture centre on the technical achievements of the work and the possible reconstruction of the missing parts of her body, rather

than the power of the goddess and the respect she commanded. Shepheard represents Nike as a monumental presence in a local landscape, her body still incomplete but her identity restored. By reversing the image in her print, she also reverses the traditional fixed view of the work, both physical and intellectual.

Shepheard's work is never simply didactic. She is no presenter of a party line, and while there are visual and intellectual connections among the works shown here, she has constantly pushed into new areas and media. *Assemblage* and *gathering* are a common thread, and in more recent works she has extended to an exploration of text as well as image.

In *Abjection/Absolution* Shepheard turns again to the human body and confronts the taboo surrounding the substances that it emits. She notes that we are anxious to control what goes into our bodies and devote much time and thought to the food we eat, while seeing the final stages of the bodily cycle as defiling. The work seems to argue for a more holistic view of organic processes with images of medieval intensity, and also to comment on the damaging persistence, among women in particular, of dissatisfaction with the reality of less-than-perfect human bodies. The title *Abjection/Absolution* and the installation of the work with a folded towel beneath each panel suggest a ritual cleansing, perhaps a cleansing of our perceptions. Shepheard presents the work in her usual meticulous fashion, thus creating a disjunction between substances which disturb and images of strange beauty.

In this year celebrating the centenary of women's suffrage in New Zealand, the Auckland City Art Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of Carole Shepheard's work and to salute her achievements as a feminist artist.

Alexa M. Johnston  
Principal Curator



Carole Shepheard 1993 (Photograph by Gil Hanly)

## biography

Carole Shepheard was born in Taumarunui in 1945. She studied at the Elam School of Fine Arts, graduating with honours in Design. After spending several years at home with her two children, she began exhibiting and since 1977 has shown work throughout New Zealand. Shepheard has a particularly close involvement with autographic printmaking, in which the artist carries out the entire process from conception to completion. Her works are in most important public and private collections in New Zealand, and she has received several major commissions.

In addition to working as an artist Carole Shepheard has devoted much energy to teaching and curatorial projects. She recently selected an exhibition of works by New Zealand women printmakers which will tour the country as part of women's suffrage centenary celebrations. She has also organised exhibitions of artists books, an area of art practice which connects with her feminist perspective and her experience as a printmaker. She has written and lectured in the areas of women's art, feminist art and on the debates around the divisions between craft and art, especially as they relate to the work of women artists.

Carole Shepheard is currently Senior Lecturer, Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland. She lives and works in Auckland.

## catalogue

*John* 1981

mixed media 1270 x 1019mm  
collection of John Thomson

*Gay's sarong* 1983 (from the series Body covers)

etching 228 x 328 mm (image)  
Auckland City Art Gallery collection,  
purchased 1984

*Marion's necklace* 1983 (from the series Body covers)

etching 228 x 328mm (image)  
Auckland City Art Gallery collection,  
purchased 1984

*Amazon shield 2* 1984 (from the series Flight of the soul)

acrylic on canvas, mixed media additions 1650mm diam.  
private collection, Auckland

*Gifts for the journey* 1987

mixed media 795 x 1800mm  
collection of the artist

*Fragments from the shrine* 1987

mixed media 1000 x 800mm  
private collection, Auckland

*Essence and shadow* 1991

mixed media 4290 x 2055mm  
collection of the artist

*Abjection/Absolution* 1992

mixed media, 8 panels each 950 x 345mm

Photographs: John McIver

Design: Glenn Hunt

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Front page *Essence and shadow* 1991, reworked 1993

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