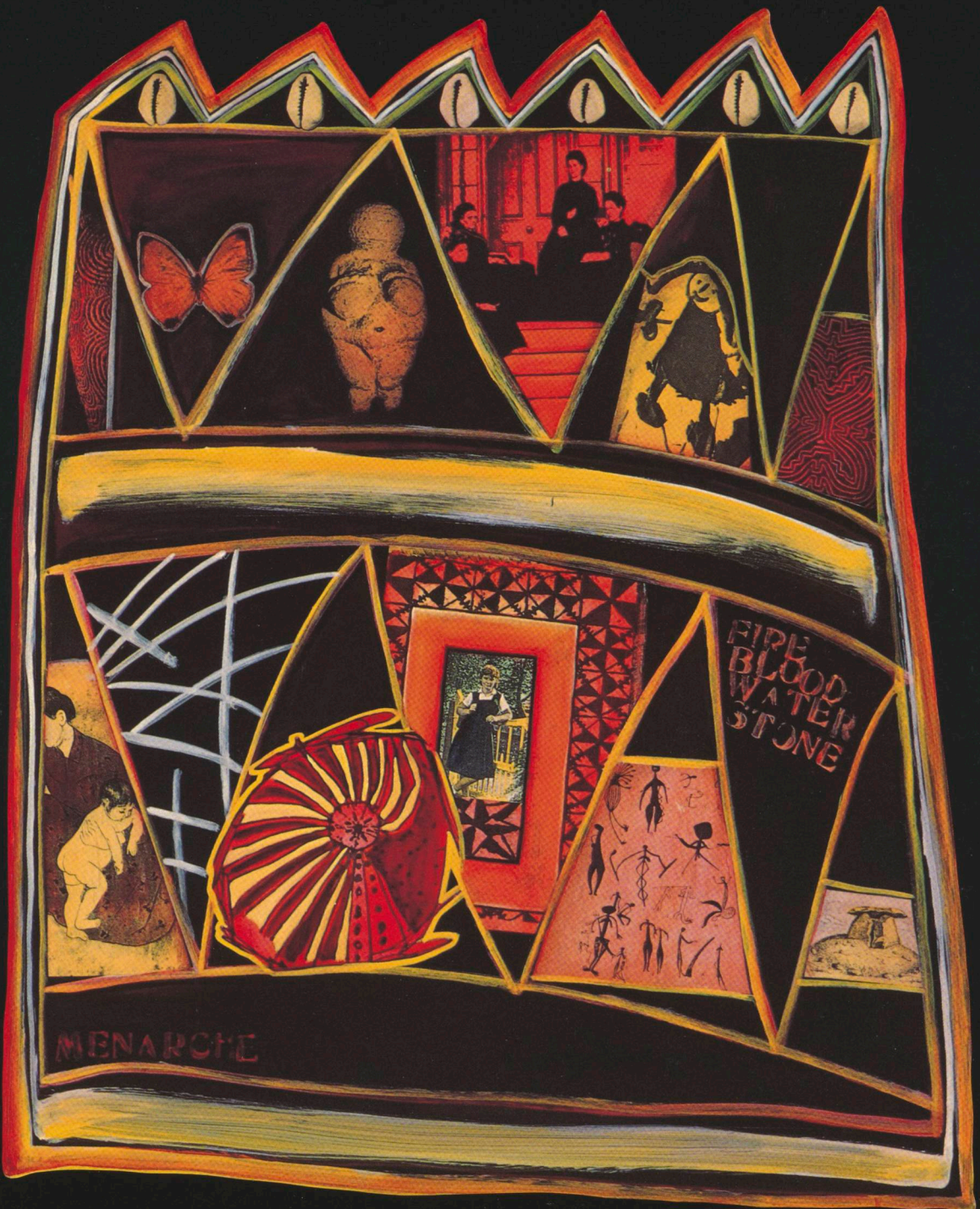
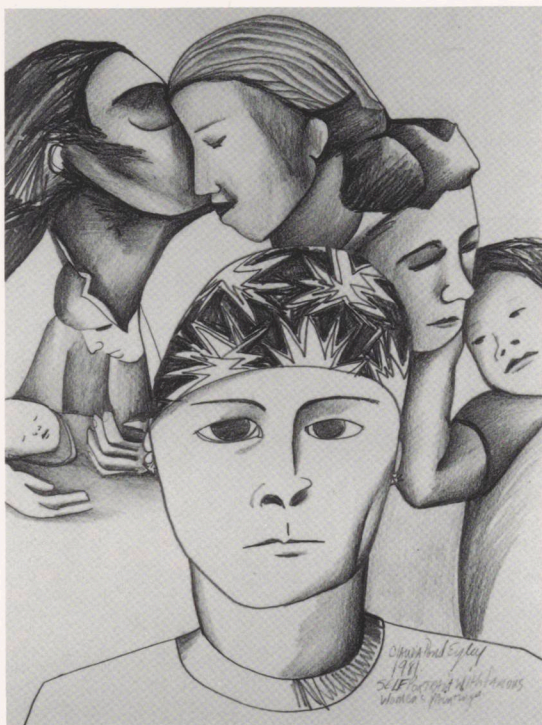


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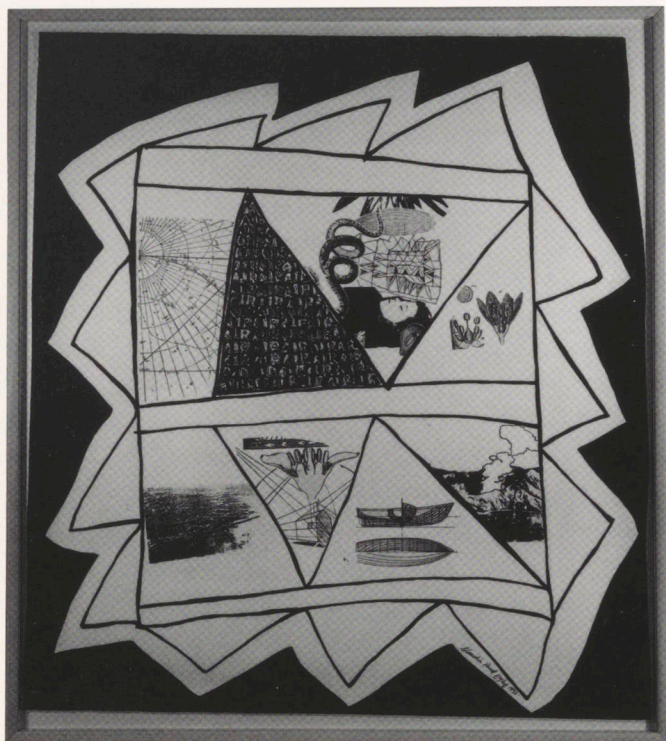
claudia pond eyley





Self-portrait with famous women's paintings 1981

Persephone's journey and return 1992



'It was in 1980, when having painted "professionally" for ten years that I started to use my home environment as the subject of my work.' This is Claudia Pond Eyley writing in 1985, and the inverted commas she uses around the word 'professional' are significant. The divide between the professional and the personal, between the intimate and the acceptable, in art practice, was one that feminist artists in the 1970s and 1980s were determined to challenge. To invoke experiences, emotions, hopes and fears that were particular to them and to their lives as women was a political statement, asserting that these were important enough to be the substance of significant art. *Unruly Practices 2* provides a brief survey of Pond Eyley's development of this personal theme.

The landscape that Claudia Pond Eyley returned to most often in the 1980s was her own garden in the Auckland suburb of Mount Eden, an environment she created and tended herself. In those paintings her earlier abstract explorations of colour relationships were put to work creating optical vibration through the use of complementary colours. The lush foliage seems to vibrate with life, to shimmer in the heat and to celebrate its own growth and vigour. In many of these garden works Maungawhau (Mount Eden), ancient *pa* site and guardian of the area, is a looming presence. Pond Eyley sets this powerful landform with its terraced reminders of earlier inhabitants alongside the more transient liveliness of the domestic garden and asserts the wholeness and continuity of nature. In a more recent work *Spirit garden* 1991, painted after travelling in Asia, Pond Eyley describes the stillness and quiet beauty of meditation gardens.

In 1981 Claudia Pond Eyley began a series of etched and drawn self-portraits. In each of them she asserts the indebtedness she feels to women of the past and the identification she claims with them. They include self-portraits with a Tree of life, with Ancient figures, with Amazon and with a Venus figure. The work included in this exhibition is *Self-portrait with famous women's paintings*. Claudia Pond Eyley speaks of the excitement

claudia pond eyley

she felt at discovering works by women artists like Kathe Kollwitz and Mary Cassatt in which the intimacy of relationships between women is joyfully expressed. This confident celebration of the connections created by female experience through the ages has been a strong theme in feminist art and one to which Pond Eyley is particularly drawn. Many of her own works draw on the importance of her relationships with the women in her own family and with female friends.

Images from art made by women from other cultures are a continuous theme in the series of 'shield' paintings she began in 1983. The repeating triangular forms of a shield, first seen in an Australian museum, have both intrinsic and structural uses for her. They allow her to use a collage technique, building up a pattern of images and symbols; they also create a net-like form in which all images have equal weight and importance. In *Shield for ancient mothers* 1983, Claudia Pond Eyley alternates fertility images with repeated words: fire, water, blood and stone which are the spiritual elements of that constant female symbol, the moon. Not all the figures in this 'shield' are from ancient or tribal cultures. At the top is a childhood drawing made by one of Claudia Pond Eyley's daughters and at lower right appears a detail of a surrealist painting by Max Ernst called *The lone swimmer*. There is no narrative in these works, instead Pond Eyley uses the cumulative power of repeated motifs to celebrate the extraordinary continuity of human life through all cultures and many thousands of years.

In a work dedicated to her elder daughter, *Menarche shield for Brigid*, the powerfully symbolic 'Venus' of Willendorf, a fertility figure made 25,000 years BC, appears alongside a butterfly which suggests flight and separation. Several of the other images in the work are from Pond Eyley's own family; a photograph of her great-grandmother as a young woman, another of Brigid as an adolescent in school uniform and a drawing from her childhood. The artist's concern is with the emotional parting of mother from daughter as the daughter reaches sexual maturity, and a celebration of

the paradoxical continuity which the parting signifies.

The most recent works in this exhibition are from a series titled *Persephone's journey and return*. In Greek legend Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, was carried off to the underworld by the god Hades. Demeter roamed the earth weeping and searching for her daughter and eventually contracted with Hades to have Persephone return. However Hades gave Persephone a magic pomegranate which ensured that she went back to the underworld for the three months of winter each year. Her reappearance on earth each year heralds the coming of spring.

The story has many resonances. Sexual maturity as a cause of separation between mother and daughter, the power of the subconscious, the underworld of dreams and the discovery of the self. It is also quintessentially about the cycles of nature, the endlessly repeating patterns of the cosmos. In this series Claudia Pond Eyley expands her vocabulary of symbols and meditates on the transformations in her own life, looking for inherent meaning. A female sleeper appears in all the works surrounded by such images as the creature Ouroboros which holds its tail to make a circle, just as night and day endlessly chase each other and so bind together the universe. The orbit of the earth which controls the seasons. The serpent which represents water and the nourishing of the embryo in the womb. The owl of dreams and the boat which carries the sleeper into the world of the unconscious. The word 'air' appears repeatedly in the larger work of the series asserting the importance of mind and intellect alongside the power of the earth and of nature. Symbols shift and change as we consider them and this fluidity of association is the essential meaning in Claudia Pond Eyley's works.

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 Claudia Pond Eyley's work and to salute her achievements as a feminist artist.

Alexa M. Johnston
Principal Curator



Claudia Pond Eyley 1993 (Photograph by Jennifer French)

biography

Claudia Pond Eyley was born in Matamata in 1946. She attended school in Montreal and New York and then studied at the Elam School of Art in Auckland, graduating in 1968. After a year at Auckland Secondary Teachers College she began exhibiting in 1969. She exhibited regularly during the 1970s and travelled to the North America, Britain, Europe and Mexico. She exhibited work at the United Women's Convention in Christchurch in 1977 and in 1980 showed a work titled 'Voyage to New Zealand' which focused on her own family history. She has been an active member of the Women Artists Association in Auckland and has regularly contributed posters and prints in support of anti-nuclear protests, women's issues in law and in the workplace and environmental causes. Her images have appeared in numerous publications, and with Robin White she wrote and illustrated *28 days in Kiribati* published by the New Women's Press in 1987. The book tells of her visit with her daughter to Kiribati where Robin White lives. She has had many public commissions: from community murals in Mount Eden to a major series of paintings for the Auckland High Court in 1990, which tell the Maori and Pakeha histories of the Auckland isthmus. At present she is working on a tile mural for Khartoum Place which celebrates the centenary of women's suffrage in New Zealand. Claudia Pond Eyley teaches freehand drawing at the University of Auckland School of Architecture. She is married and lives in Auckland.

catalogue

Mt Eden garden I August 1979

acrylic on canvas 1010 x 1060mm

collection of the artist

Self-portrait with famous women's paintings 1981

pencil 380 x 380mm

collection of the artist

Shield for ancient mothers 1983

acrylic and paper collage on canvas 1020 x 1003mm

Auckland City Art Gallery collection,

purchased 1983

Menarche shield for Brigid 1983

acrylic, paper, photomontage on hardboard 1230 x 902mm

collection of Brigid Eyley

Shield with ochre/black surround 1985

acrylic on canvas 2030 x 1420mm

collection of the artist

Spirit garden 1991

acrylic on canvas 1680 x 2010mm

collection of the artist

Persephone's journey and return 1992

silkscreen print and ink and acrylic on paper 1450 x 1600mm

collection of the artist

Persephone's journey and return 1993

acrylic on hardboard, 6 panels, each 440 x 350mm

collection of the artist

On the table:

Gifts for women friends 1983

mixed media 830 x 360 x 30mm

collection of the artist

Books:

Menarche Book 1984

Birth Book 1984

Painted Book 1987

Persephone's journey and return 1992

Photographs: John McIver

Design: Glenn Hunt

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