



JOHN

LYALL

TOWARDS AN HYPER- FERAL ART,

AOTEAROA: PICKETING THE SUBLIME;

GIVEN BOTH A BLUE

DISPLACEMENT

AND AN ILLUMINATING VESSEL

Seeking to represent the freshly-encountered Antipodes in the late 18th Century, William Hodges appears to tuck between the conventions of classicism and the demands of scientific objectivity. Steaming into the country a century later, Eugene von Guérard responds to the landscape with a seemingly smooth blend of rigorous observation and Romantic awe – sensibilities he had acquired in Europe and honed across the Tasman. Accessible in style and breathtaking in content, the paintings which derive from his brief excursion might be taken as predecessors of the reverie-inducing imagery of today's tourist trade.

Following on from his reworking of Hodges' Cascade Cove, John Lyall engages with von Guérard's iconic depiction of Lake Wakatipu, opening a window on its glossy surface to reveal the models and assumptions which are its underpinnings. Each of the elements which mesh so seamlessly and innocently in the painting take on a new dimension as signifiers which have strayed from home, as concepts from afar which are refigured in new fields. Pristine

T O W A R D S A N H Y P E R - F E R A L A R T ,

snowcapped peaks return as the demarcating, A O T E A R C
domesticating devices of the picket fence and the balustrade, a body of water as the windows which frame the pleasing prospect. Supported by doweling – fashioned from an introduced timber – the whole piece is deprived of a solid foundation in the local terrain.



Excluded from the painted version of Lake Wakatipu, but vital to von Guérard's expression, is the medium by which he and his baggage have arrived at this place: which is to say, the vessels which convey bodies, materials and meanings from one point on the globe to another. Lyall provides such a craft, but in a kitset form which reminds us that it has been modelled



G I V E N B O T H A B L U E D I S P L A

R O A : P I C K E T I N G T H E S U B L I M E ;

elsewhere, cast to European specifications. Like the worldview it conveys, the ship is no longer as stable and upstanding as it appeared when it left home. This vessel is furthermore, implicated in an extraordinary displacement of water. For what von Guérard's landscape presents us with, Lyall proposes, is not the cold, grey depths of the glacial lake before him, but the warm radiance of some "South Sea" atoll, uplifted and transposed into an alpine prospect – a backdrop which is itself a wandering artifact of the Northern sublime. For all the painter's 'conscientious respect for physical facts'¹, then, what he actually delivers are two favourite figments of the European imagination – both of which have crisscrossed the oceans between Europe and its Antipodes before they have converged on this particular picture plane.

From here, von Guérard's Wakatipu and its Mitre Peak companion themselves enter the transglobal flow – as showpieces on the international exposition circuit – where they will provide further sustenance for the Northern fantasy of the South Seas. As Lyall recognises, this is a vital moment in the accelerating circulation of the Pacific image, one in which we can see intentions and effects, objects and their projections slipping past each other, like the mirrored vessels either side of his large glass. And if there is any light to be shed on these processes, it will come not from the depths of reason, whose flagships have foundered in these foreign waters, but from the heights of artifice, epitomised by a porcelain waka – misplaced, miscoloured, and hopelessly miscast as candleholder.

Nigel Clark



AND AN ILLUMINATING VESSEL

1. This was the assessment of a contemporary London reviewer, quoted by Charles Eldredge in *Pacific Parallels: Artists and the Landscape in New Zealand* University of Washington Press, Seattle and London, 1991 p. 26

Nigel Clark is a frequent commentator on John Lyall's work. He teaches sociology at the University of Auckland.

BIOGRAPHY

John Lyall was born in Sydney in 1951. After working at a variety of jobs both in Australia and England – including builders labourer, scientific instrument calibrator and video maker – Lyall enrolled at Sydney College of the Arts in 1980, graduating Bachelor of Visual Arts in 1982. He moved to Auckland the following year and undertook training as a secondary art teacher in 1984.

As well as teaching in both secondary and tertiary institutions, Lyall has made contributions to the development of the New Zealand secondary schools curriculum, in art, computing and technology. He graduated Master of Fine Arts (Hons.) from the University of Auckland in 1993.

In addition to his work in sculpture and installation, Lyall has pursued a wide-ranging practice in photography, video and performance. As a solo performer, Lyall has had a continuing presence at **Soundwatch**, Auckland Artspace's sound and media festival, since its establishment in 1989. He has also performed with the group **People who hit things**, with whom he is currently developing a percussion opera. In 1993, Lyall was one of three New Zealanders to perform at the Kawasaki City Museum, Tokyo as part of **Mind of Synergetic Fields**, the second international **Soundculture** Festival.

John Lyall lives in Auckland.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1995

Retrospectum Escalante Gallery, Auckland

The Waterfall, Kant's Train Set and a Tent The Drawings Gallery, Auckland

1994

Towards an Hyper-Feral Art, Aotearoa: Pumping up the Sublime; Given both a Waterfall and a Designated Seat Fisher Gallery, Auckland

Towards a Hyper-Feral Art, Aotearoa Claybrook Gallery, Auckland

1993

Towards a Feral Art, Aotearoa: Three Cartesean Stoppages; Given both an Uncertain Locus and Chaotic Materia Lopdell House Gallery, Auckland

1989

Towards a Feral Art, Aotearoa Real Pictures Auckland

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1995

The Nervous System: Twelve artists explore images and identities in crisis Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth and City Gallery, Wellington

1994

Art Now: Recent sculpture and installation Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington

Open the shutter: Auckland photographers now Auckland Institute and Museum

JOHN
LYALL

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Art Now: Recent sculpture and installation Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, 1994

Nigel Clark 'Towards an Hyper-Feral Art: John Lyall at Karekare'

Art New Zealand 78, Auckland, 1996 pp. 54-56

Richard Dale 'New Zealand sounds in Japan: Soundculture '93'

Art New Zealand 70, Auckland, 1994 pp. 42, 110

Elizabeth Knox 'The Nervous System: New Zealand neuroses'

Art AsiaPacific vol. 3. No. 3, Sydney, 1996 pp. 36-37

Open the shutter: Auckland photographers now PhotoForum, Auckland, 1994

Priscilla Pitts and Allan Smith, editors **The Nervous System: Twelve artists explore images and identities in crisis** Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth and City Gallery, Wellington, 1995

United Banking Group/Sarjeant Gallery Photographic award Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui, 1990



Eugene von Guérard **Lake Wakatipu with Mount Earnslaw, Middle Island, New Zealand** 1877-79

OIL ON CANVAS, 991 X 1765MM, AUCKLAND ART GALLERY, MACKELVIE TRUST COLLECTION, PURCHASED 1971

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