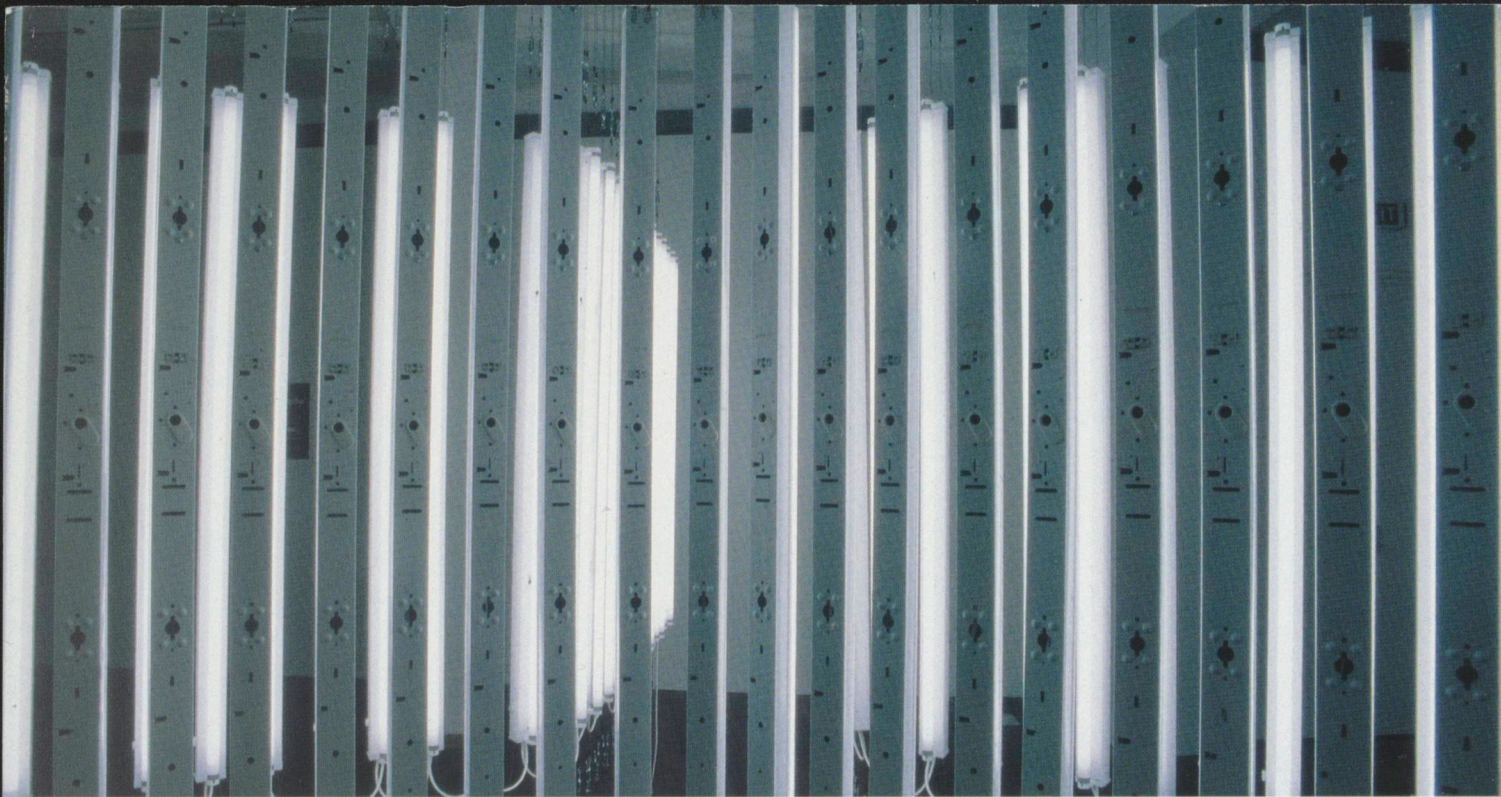


1998

peter roche

conduit:



into the light

Peter Roche's fluorescent light installation at the New Gallery, *Conduit*, continues a series of light works he has been developing over recent years. *Starsite* and *Flash cut* for example, have seen Roche construct environments of fluorescent tubes, only to set about destroying them – in the former, with a troop of battery-operated toys; in the latter, with a swinging chainsaw. Equally dramatic was *Point blank*, in which Roche shot out the fluorescent lights of the gallery with an air rifle.

In each of these works, the result was darkness; emphatic and oppressive, yet at the same time exhilarating. The sources of *Conduit* lie further back than this, however, in the recurring concerns of Roche's practice over twenty years as a sculptor, installation and performance artist.

Darkness, with its associated connotations of danger and loss first emerged in Roche's performances in the early eighties, with his then partner Linda Buis. In *Museum piece* (1980), for example, the pair negotiated their way around the Auckland Domain, notorious at the time for a number of violent assaults, taking their bearings from shouts to each other and the glowing monolith of the Auckland Museum above them. *Night piece* (1981), performed at a disused Auckland gasworks, saw the two precariously scale the decrepit buildings under cover of darkness, leaving lit candles dispersed around the site in their wake.

The object works which Roche began making in the mid-eighties might best be described as surrogates for those performative experiences,

- 2 DEC 1998

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Biography

Peter Roche was born in Auckland in 1957 and studied at Elam School of Fine Arts, the University of Auckland. Between 1979 and 1984 Roche and Linda Buis presented 25 performances including works at Auckland City Art Gallery and the Biennale of Sydney. An Arts Council grant allowed him to travel to Europe that year, and he exhibited installations in London and Portsmouth. Returning to New Zealand in 1985, Roche commenced exhibiting as a sculptor and installation artist.

His solo exhibitions have included *Trans-mutations* (Centre for Contemporary Art, Hamilton, 1989) *Trophies and emblems* (Artspace, Auckland, Wellington City Art Gallery and Dunedin Public Art Gallery, 1990) and *Tribal fictions* (Fisher Gallery, Auckland, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery New Plymouth and McDougall Art Annex, Christchurch, 1996). In addition to this, Roche has been included in numerous major exhibitions since the mid-eighties, such as Auckland City Art Gallery's *Surface tension* (1992), the first *Asia Pacific Triennial* (Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 1993), *Art Now* (Museum of New Zealand, 1994) and the Kwangju Biennale, Korea (1995). Roche was awarded an Arts Council Fellowship in 1993, and was artist-in-residence at the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts in 1995.

In 1995 Roche moved his studio to the old Ambassador Theatre in Point Chevalier, Auckland and this coincided with a return to performance. As well as presenting works at the Ambassador, Roche has performed at 23A Gallery (*Point blank*) and Artspace, Sydney (*violation*).

Peter Roche is represented in Auckland by Artis Gallery and in Wellington by New Work Studio.



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Christina Barton 'Peter Roche and Linda Buis: Recent drawings and sculptures' *Art New Zealand* no. 42 Auckland, 1987, pp 72-3

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Peter Roche: Trophies and emblems self published, Auckland, 1990

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Christina Barton *Surface tension: Ten artist in the nineties* Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland, 1992

William McAloon *Station to station: The way of the cross* Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland, 1994

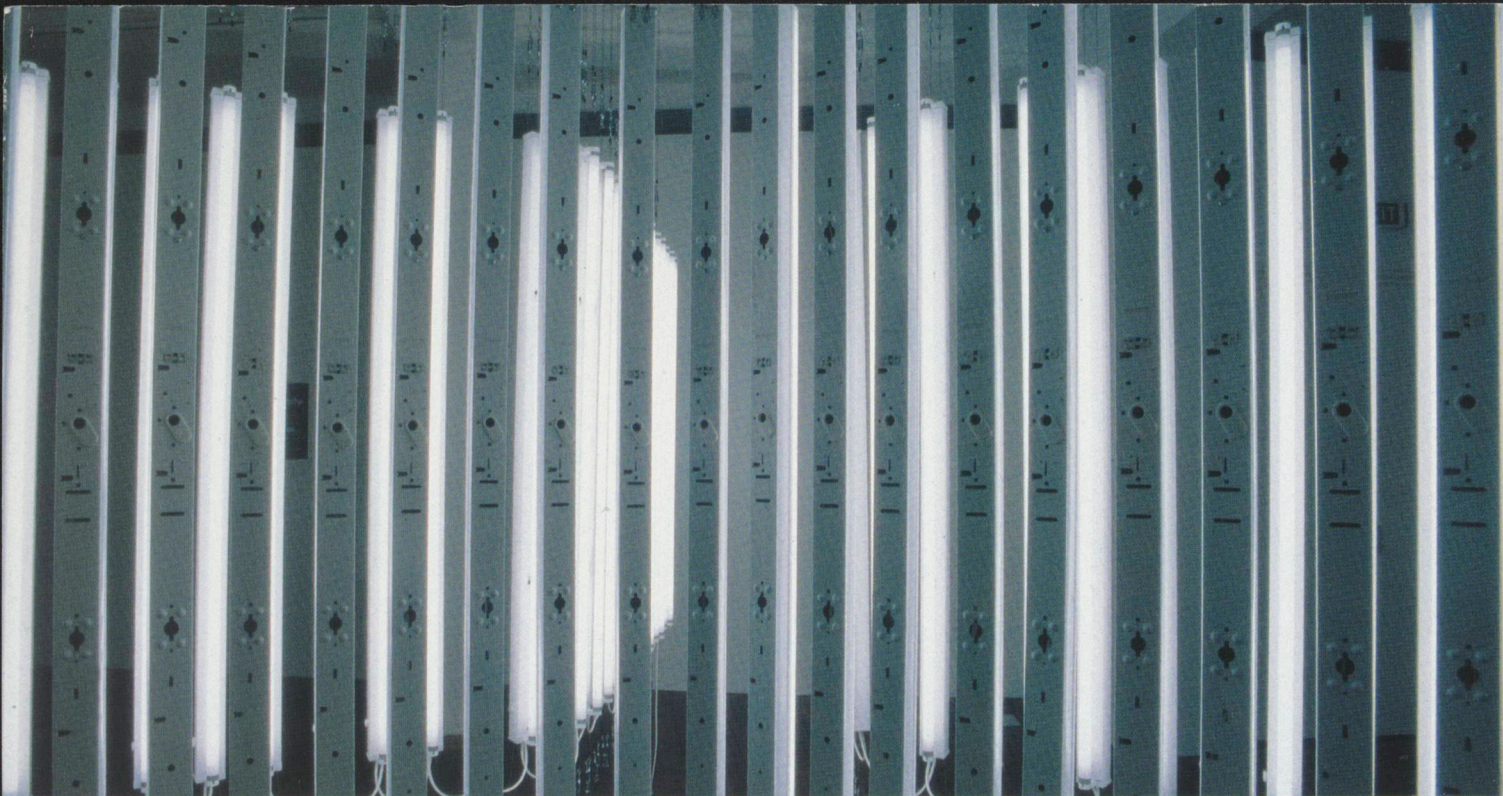
Art Now: Recent sculpture and installation Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, 1994

Peter Roche: Starsite University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts, Christchurch, 1995

Gregory Burke 'Peter Roche' *Art + Text* no. 53, Sydney, 1996 pp 76-77

Peter Roche: Tribal fictions Fisher Gallery, Auckland, 1996

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into the light

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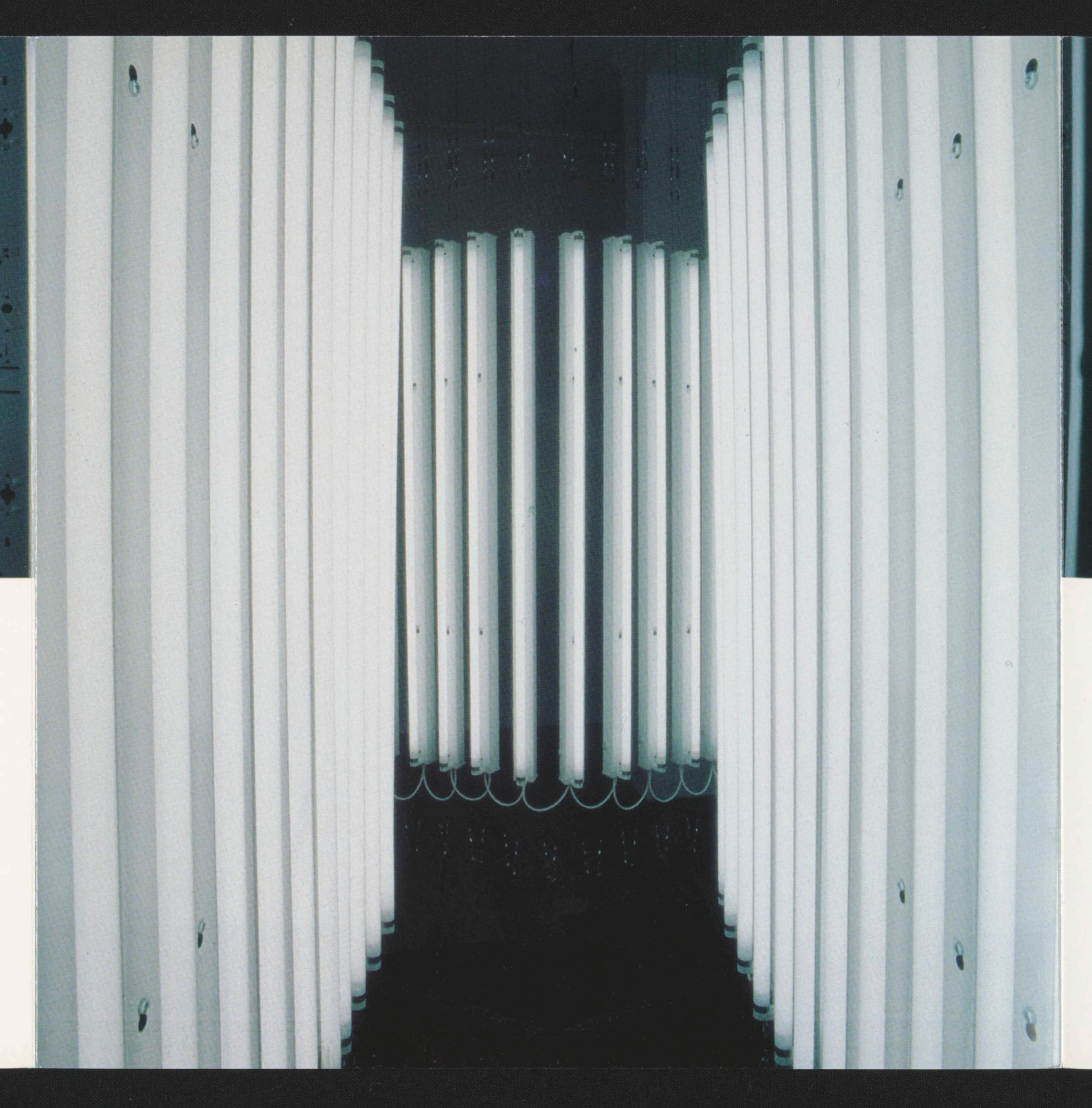
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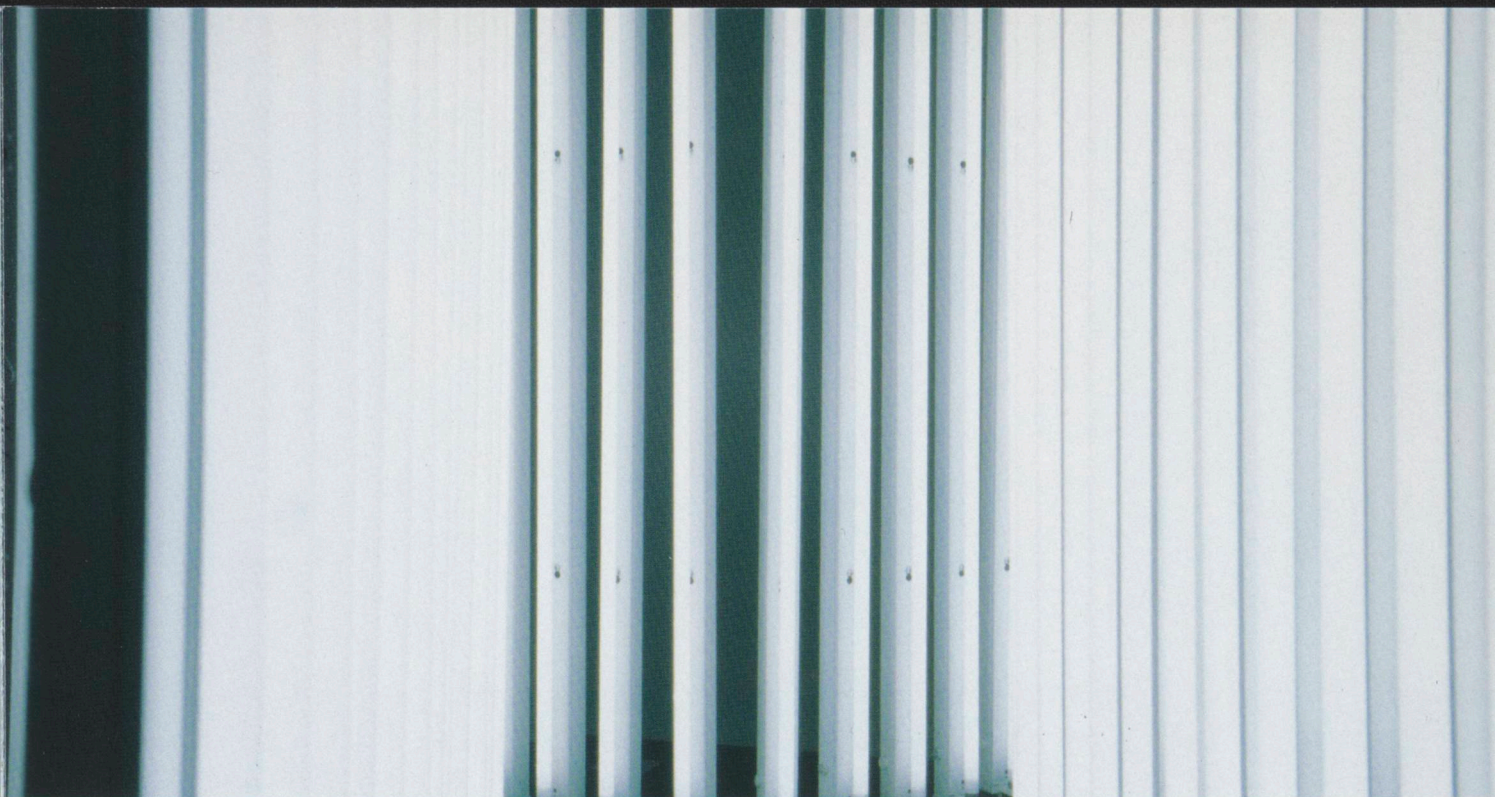
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stand-ins for their intense physical or psychological states, and for Roche's body itself. Anthropomorphic, machine-like constructions, such as those in *Trophies and emblems*, or his more recent black lacquered disc works, are all bound to a human scale, and assume an intense theatricality, territoriality and menacing beauty.

Roche's object works have frequently been cast as representing the future projections of our mid-century, both utopian and apocalyptic. Combining light and electromechanical components with totalitarian, militaristic or corporate imagery, these works bear a nostalgia for a moment when the instruments of social control seemed unobtrusive and crudely manifest.

Roche's use of fluorescent light is important in this sense. Invented in the late thirties and coming

into widespread use after the second world war, fluorescent light is technology that emerged on the cusp of Western society's transition from an industrial to a post-industrial base. From shopping malls to correctional facilities, school to hospitals, fluorescent light our defining social spaces.

Conduit crosses the boundaries of Roche's performance and object-based practices, creating an environment in which it is the viewer, rather than the artist, who emerges as performer. Looking as much like a temple as a prison chamber, *Conduit* is at once transfixing and disconcerting.

Extending from the centre of its space in three radiating arms, the work creates a passage of light through the viewer may pass. A matrix of wires and casings, as much as the lights themselves, builds the work into an elaborate –

yet emblematically – modernist structure, its form defined by its materiality.

Standing outside the work, the light from dozens of fluorescent tubes is too bright to behold, yet powerfully attractive. Inside, the luminosity of *Conduit* is almost completely unbearable but totally seductive. The heightened temperature of the massed fluorescents is markedly uncomfortable, and their suspended electrics carry with them an edge of danger.

Negotiating the spaces of the work thus describes a path of precariousness and deprivation as much as the one meditateness or transcendence its illumination might initially seem to offer. It is these dual currents, a path between light and darkness, which make *Conduit* so compelling.

William McAloon



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published on the occasion of Conduit an artist's project by Peter Roche at the New Gallery 29 August - 22 November 1998

Installation Assistance: Glenn Campbell, Mei Hill, Michael Duffin Photography: Jennifer French
Photograph of Peter Roche: Ann Shelton Design: Inhouse Design Curator: William McAloon

Conduit was commissioned with the generous support of Erika and Robin Congreve and Creative New Zealand.
The work was subsequently purchased for the collection of Auckland Art Gallery.

ISBN 0 86463 231 2

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