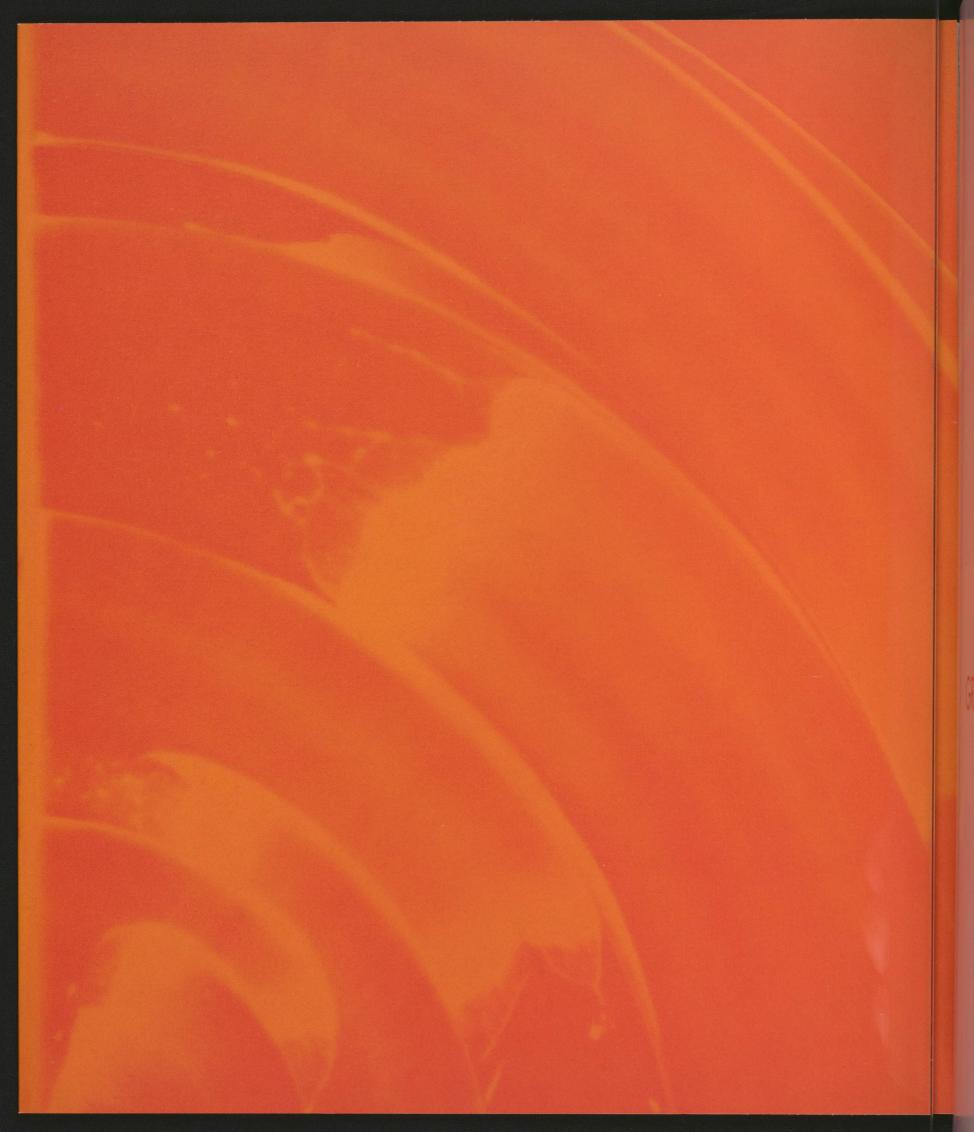
GRETCHENALBRECHT

illuminations



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John McDermott Gretchen Albrecht 2001

RON BROWNSON

with contributions by MARY KISLER AND BRONWYN FLETCHER

GRETCHENALBRECHT illuminations





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Ron Brownson
Senior Curator
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

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cover: Dervish 1983 (detail)

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The paintings of Gretchen Albrecht, particularly the ovals and hemispheres at the heart of this survey, are some of the more widely recognised images in contemporary New Zealand art, their visual and formal iconography now as distinguished as it is distinctive.

Foreword

CHRIS SAINES

But in considering her as an artist, one whose career already spans the same number of years as that of Rita Angus, have we become guilty of looking at her work with increasing pleasure while appreciating its real significance less? *Gretchen Albrecht illuminations*, by searching for and revealing the visual intelligence that informs these works, forcefully argues that there is much more in what meets the eye.

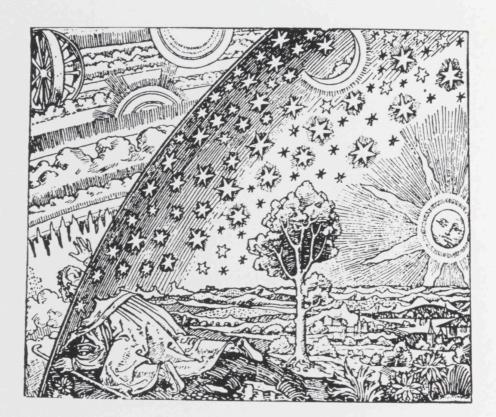
This is a persuasive body of work, comprising canvases shaped by much more than their aesthetic and geometric considerations. While the beautifully articulated surfaces and colours of Albrecht's paintings are always redolent with imaginative and emotional potential, their abstract nature tends to absorb and disperse their more profound origins and layers of associative meaning. Gretchen Albrecht's particular synthesis of colour and space provides as certain a reply to the paradoxes of culture as it does to the phenomena of nature. Beyond the universalities of literature and poetry, of family and faith, her works touch on the cosmologies that divine and order the terrestrial and celestial worlds. And in so doing they touch us all.

The Gallery clearly owes its greatest debt to Gretchen Albrecht. I join with curator and writer Ron Brownson in thanking Gretchen for the wonderfully open spirit with which she has entertained long hours of imposition on her professional and personal life. As with any undertaking of this kind, the close working relationship between artist and curator is a crucial one – the radically conceived design of the exhibition being but one part of their collaborative adventure. Ron Brownson has brought remarkable empathy and insight to this, the first major presentation of Albrecht's paintings in Auckland. He has been joined in these pages by Mary Kisler and Bronwyn Fletcher and they have, together, given us highly considered readings of Albrecht's work that will inevitably change the way we see and understand it.

Gretchen Albrecht illuminations is the first exhibition of a contemporary New Zealand artist sponsored by Ernst & Young in their long-standing association with the Gallery. I want especially to thank John Judge and Wayne Jackson for their enthusiastic belief in this project. I also wish to acknowledge those Patrons of the Gallery who have so generously lent us their support, among them Dayle and Chris Mace, whose close interest in this endeavour has sustained it from the outset. They were immediately joined by Jenny Gibbs, Erika and Robin Congreve, Jan and Trevor Farmer and Harriet Friedlander who all gave no less vital backing to this publication. I would like also to acknowledge the much valued support of Creative New Zealand; and finally but significantly, the generous assistance of the Friends of the Gallery, who through their president Niyaz Martin Wilson have supported this book as part of their ongoing commitment to New Zealand contemporary artists. I am deeply grateful to you all.

Chris Saines Director Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Seven sorrows - flight 1995 (detail) Carol England collection



Nicholas de Cuba, *Machinery of the Heavens* from *Reconciliation of Opposites*, Rome, c. 1445

A song of the rolling earth, and of words according, Were you thinking that those were the words, those upright lines? those curves, angles, dots? No, those are not the words, the substantial words are in the ground and sea,

They are in the air, they are in you.

Walt Whitman, 'A Song of the Rolling Earth', Leaves of Grass

Gretchen Albrecht illuminations

RON BROWNSON

GEOMETRY COMES TOGETHER

For over twenty years Gretchen Albrecht has committed herself to the creation of two major sequences of paintings, in oval or hemispherical shapes. When the artist initiated this project during 1981 she had no notion that these pure geometric forms would also delineate her vocation as an artist committed to a personal search for a metaphysical cosmology. By embarking on such a visual expedition, Albrecht gave it an ambitious goal to realise a painting's subject matter through the utilisation of non-objective colour. This self-conscious decision to create meaning from within the vehicle of painterly abstraction is a huge and challenging task in New Zealand, a country where non-figurative painting has been known by the public for less than fifty years. When Albrecht chose to move away from the landscape and figurative paintings created during the first fifteen years of her career, she decided to employ her own experience to render a world in terms of its emotional appearances.

LEARNING FROM NATURE

Gretchen Albrecht has always been obsessed with nature's lightfluxing contrasts. All conceptions about her significance as a painter have to accept that she regards 'Nature' as a cosmological resource of illumination. Her early figurative paintings and drawings (1963–1969) are essentially psychological images of relationships, and they treat verdant foliage in vaguely New Zealand landscape spaces as being environmental scenarios that can help direct the expressive meanings which encircle these visual microdramas. In the early 1970s Albrecht's response to nature was rendered by larger paintings which looked at nature from a more intimate and close-up point of view. This soon developed into poetic images of still-lives-in-landscape, brilliantly informed by the artist's admiration for Frances Hodgkins' application of close-views up against a deep and textured space. Such searching for the scale and character of 'Nature' led to the early stained-pigment paintings of terrestrial and celestial 'gardens', a major series that effectively established her national reputation as an artist.

Albrecht's art became, over a period of five years, more responsive to the current shifts occurring both in paint handling and in its chemistry. She had already used wet-staining techniques in her garden paintings, yet these images initially related more to her own fluid use of watercolour than her regard for American painting. Seeing Morris Louis' huge acrylic paintings at the Auckland City Art Gallery in late 1971 was a deeply encouraging experience for Albrecht. It affirmed the direction that she had already initiated in her own painting style of the previous five years, but it was also a challenge to make her art more substantial in its subject and more dynamic in its aspiration.¹

Albrecht moved her home and studio to Titirangi in 1972. This shift from a city location to a more verdant suburb quickly changed her subject matter; she started to look at how light acts as colour. Her more rigorous subjects were inspired, experientially, by the littoral, that shifting edge where the Tasman Sea converges with Auckland's west-coast shoreline. She began studying the colour intersections between time, light, ground, air and sky.2 It was during these years that Albrecht started to exploit the idea of spectral contrajour, where light is painted as a colour scheme in an articulate relationship with the direction from which light comes, and when it is being observed. In fact, by using contrajour as a means to give light its own colour and its own hued direction, Albrecht had immediately involved the effects of directional geometry and gravity within her painting's methodology. Gravity became a referent presence by her use of minutely controlled pours and directed stainings. While these flowing paint-forms may have been made by lifting and lowering the canvas from a horizontal position, they were also presented to viewers as being parallel to an imagined

horizon – read as existing between a west/east atmospheric refraction. This made the poured shapes become a metaphorical sighting of colour-clouds and cloud-curtains, and as expansive condensations of deep-hued paint floating in air at a great altitude above a far-reaching, but unseen, earth.

These important paintings of cloud-worlds prefigure the shifts and procedures that would later materialise in Gretchen Albrecht's treatment of paint in her oval and hemisphere series; paint just had to coalesce as a concentrated essence, a *jus* of nature, be it the nature of the world or of the self. ³ Paint had to flow freely, like air currents, and it had to move between flat planes into deep space. Paint had to have a colour-filled foundation, a ground-form that could grip the pictorial environment that it was regarding.

A significant realisation occurred when Albrecht understood. especially after her encounter with Morris Louis' art, that her paintings could enfold a visual cosmography, not only in their existential mediation on a meaning-filled space but in how her paintings could function as symbolic colour-filled objects placed before viewers. Like the work of other contemporary American non-objective painters, she needed her images to expand beyond her canvas's stretcher. She wanted to break from the limitations of a painting's edge by creating a space that expands outwards. Albrecht became aware that for her images to become eidetic, to manifest a vivid recollection of something comprehended within the processes of perception, they had to classify themselves as cosmological images. This is the identification of the eidetic, not through a re-creation of nature's experience, but through its pictorial evocation. For this painter, a mimesis of nature would become transformed into a pictorial mapping reaching far beyond the restrictions arising from specific visual recollections.

GEOMETRY AND BEAUTY

Euclid alone has looked on Beauty bare.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Only Euclid looked on Beauty bare.

Edna St. Vincent Millay, misquoted by Gertrude Stein

Euclid, the great Greek geometer, defined beauty as being the purest harmony existent between physical relations. Beauty had its own human logic that was completely internal to itself and which could be defined by points, curved lines, straight lines, circles, right angles, surfaces and planes. Beauty could only be comprehended when space – a physical or an abstract space – was measurable. The Greeks regarded beauty as quantifying the true nature of geometry: to measure shape was to actually discover beauty's identity. Few now would define beauty only by measuring the size and scale of physical relationships. Volume and matter, epidermis and smell, colour and hue, light and movement, desire and language are only some of beauty's more current and more gripping motivations. Beauty is no longer a sector limited by geometry; it has grown into a metasensate and emotional amalgamation possessing a shifting logic not limited in any manner by the complexity of human response. It is this altered state of beauty that Gretchen Albrecht addresses in her geometric ovals and hemispheres; their shape has provided her with an invitation to redefine what beauty can mean for her own paintings. Beauty has grown into a visual emblem of the emotions that summon us to perceive how vast our feelings can grow, when they well up from the colourful stimulus of appearances. We want beauty, but we do not

commonly agree on what beauty means; we prefer to look at beauty's effects rather than beauty's essences. Beauty is no longer just a self-existent physical and harmonious entity, but a consciousness that grows out of geometry, colour and shape. Beauty has expanded far beyond the early Greek notions about the measure of physicality towards a visual cosmology that defines our responses to appearances by our intensely metaphysical need for meaning to reveal beauty as a human propensity rather than as a mere attraction.

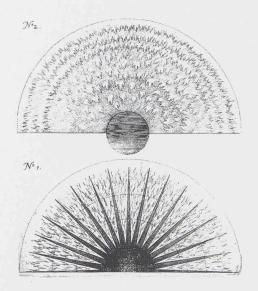
The geometry of the hemisphere implies another type of pictorial space. Gretchen Albrecht says that it is 'a shape to contain the feeling'. As he is not concerned with reiterating the beauty of universals, although she has been committed for over two decades to the use of two universal shapes. Her hemispheres are parabolic sections of a sphere, and her ovals are elliptical cuts through a cone. Albrecht first began painting hemispheres while living in Dunedin during 1981, when she was the Frances Hodgkins Fellow at the University of Otago: 'I knew I wanted the hemisphere in 1981. I went to Dunedin with quadrants, the hemisphere happened in the studio, I put the quadrants together. I wanted to break out of the rectangle and the square, and to introduce a curve.

The hemisphere of vision is the hemisphere of illumination.

Oxford English Dictionary

Albrecht has always preferred to use the non-technical word 'hemisphere' for her parabolic form, and the word 'oval' for her elliptical form. These descriptors are the artist's own choices, and they reinforce the truth that she does not regard these shapes as being either inert or neutral formats. Historically, the hemisphere has always been the bearer of cosmological meanings: it connotes a realm of action, life and reflection; it locates the two halves of the

Robert Fludd, *The great sex act of heaven and earth* from *Utriusque cosmia*, Oppenheim, 1619



cerebrum of the brain; it maps or projects half of the celestial globe; it marks one half of the terrestrial globe named the Southern Hemisphere, it defines that seasonal half of the globe which is divided by the equinoctial; it is half the compass of the heavens that we observe.

Their ovall conceptions, or egges within their bodies.

Thomas Browne



The oval, in contradistinction, indicates the form of an egg; an ellipsoidal shape having the properties of an elongated circle or elliptical outline; a closed curve with a chief axis that is significantly longer than the axis which is at right angles to it; with one end pointed more than the other; a cartouche; a window, a picture-frame; an echinus or ovolo. The oval is the most parasynthetic of all geometric forms other than the circle: oval-arched; oval-berried; oval-bodied; oval-faced; oval-figured; oval-shaped.

As shapes on which to place and move paint, the hemisphere and the oval have offered Albrecht two innovative formats that have become central to her style. These two formats have developed into two series and have become part of the artist's visual signature. They reference her understanding of past art history and contain many levels of referential autobiography (as Mary Kisler and Bronwyn Fletcher note, respectively, in their essays here). The two shapes – hemisphere and oval – delineate the pictorial conceptions which surround her cosmological inspiration.

Gretchen Albrecht has always valued the relationships between cosmology and the art of the past. In Gregor Reisch's great book, the *Margarita Philosophica*, the Greek astronomer Ptolemy is shown using a quadrant to help him observe and record the motions of celestial objects. Next to him, and guiding him, stands Astronomy, in the guise of the muse Urania. Astronomy shows the geometer how to use the geometric quadrant to perceive what he is looking at (see illustration). Such an imaginative pairing of cosmology and experience with inspiration parallels how Albrecht regards a painting's format and its potential to express responses to experience. She wants to know what the world will show her, not about what it looks like but about what it feels like – up close and at a great distance. Another telling comparison between knowledge of the world and knowledge of a larger geometric universe can be seen in Nicholas de Cuba's renowned *Reconciliation*

of Opposites (c. 1445), where the world is located by heliocentric cosmology. A flat, quadranted earth exists within a hemispherical quadrant. When one exits the hemisphere one sees what exists both inside and outside of a huge and spectral 'world'.⁷

Albrecht's ovals function as images of terrestrial and celestial cosmology just as contemporary maps help us to learn visually; they show ways to observe the known and the unknown world. One can employ an oval's shape and surface form to report metaphorically on unfamiliar 'countries' of the mind. Nineteenth-century maps distorted how we look at the world; they always showed the North Pole at the top of a perfect sphere, the South Pole at the bottom and the Atlantic Ocean centrally placed as the key water mass between the North and South. Such a Eurocentric view of the world led to a misconception about the physical and perceptual relationships between land and sea masses. If neither the Equator nor the central meridian are aligned with a map's axes, one can create an oblique map. Ernst Hammer's brilliant 1892 modification of the Lambert-Azimuthal Equal Area map projection developed an innovative mode of exhibiting the whole world in one image where there was an equality between all spatial areas. This projection conveyed much less distortion because the relative sizes of ocean to landmass were clearly expressed. In either an oblique or transverse oval projection the whole of the Earth could be seen as placed within one ellipse. The north-south and east-west coordinates were not distorted, and they could shift anywhere using a polyconic projection. South, for instance, could actually be sited at the top of the oval. All parallels and meridians became complex curving

lines. The map of the world could shift from a sphere to an ellipse by simply dividing all longitudes by two and then stretching the map out twice as wide.

BIRTH BORNE

It goes without saying that everything human beings touch is impregnated with meaning; the trouble is that the moment that we perceive it, meaning scatters and disappears. There is no meaning but meanings. Each of them is instantaneous and lasts no longer than its appearance.

Octavio Paz 8

The innovative paintings *Pacific annunciation* [p. 61] and *Origin* [p. 42] substantiate Gretchen Albrecht's ambitious plan during 1983 to embark on a series of hemispheres that pivot about the metaphysical communication of a painterly subject. Both these large paintings are situated in the artist's celebration of one particular day – 25 March – cherished by all Catholics as the holy festival of Lady Day.⁹ By advancing the notion that non-representational painting may awaken the actuality of the Annunciation, Albrecht preconceives that the meaning of her painting can proceed beyond the purely formal relationships between planes of quadranted colour. She wants to vindicate her approach towards colour's articulation of symbolic meanings without limiting herself to any decorative objective. These two paintings register Albrecht's aspiration to render the moment of an instantaneous connection between a spiritual emanation and a physical incarnation.

The Annunciation did not occur over a period of seconds; it happened as an instantaneous collision of a spiritual being with a human being and this coming together resulted in a unique impregnation. The immediate admission of Mary being pregnant becomes, in these paintings, the juxtaposition of symbolic colours with an ineffable

subject matter. The experiential fate that the artist requires of her paintings occurs when the act of visual perception creates a metaphorical understanding. Octavio Paz writes of this cosmological occurrence: 'The act of seeing is transformed into an intellectual operation that is also a magical rite: to see is to understand and to understand is to commune.'10

The event of the Annunciation is one of paired realities — two cathexes exist between the Archangel Gabriel as the shekhinah of transformative light and the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God-made-flesh. These beings do not exist in the same world's flux; because of this contradiction the history of painting has always adored this subject's pictorial potential and realised that the selection of each figure's colour attests to colour's innate ability to function as both representation and as symbol. In these paintings each quadrant functions as an eidetic signal; the idea of an initiating plenitude is registered by colour harmonies that both evoke and epitomise the presence of the Annunciation.

Gretchen Albrecht views the Annunciation as an eidolon; the epitome of an unfathomable apparition. The religious nature of the subject is first suggested by the charismatic nature of each painting's title – *Pacific annunciation* and *Origin* act as fecund signs. The aspirations of these paintings, and their titular 'sign-words', are votive and ecstatic: they sanction the unmatched mystery of the Virgin Mary's experience of pregnancy, they elaborate a self-conscious subject matter, they evidence a belief in human meaning, and they look towards reality from a cosmic manifestation of feminine experience. Such a consecution of symbolic layerings and subjective

conflations is central to any understanding of Gretchen Albrecht's paintings; they shimmer with messages intended to embody ideas of concentrated memory.

Historically, a painter would often frequently use a pink or a red raiment to register the identity of the Archangel Gabriel as 'he' manifested a spiritual presence. These colours were often placed against a blue/green/violet-clothed and earth-bound Virgin Mary. The Annunciation is one of the major spiritual concepts within the iconographical traditions of painting, particularly Italian painting of the Renaissance. Gretchen Albrecht has long studied the art of Piero della Francesca, Fra Filippo Lippi, Fra Angelico and Duccio di Buoninsegna. The significance of their symbolic colour schemata was not determined by any decorative purposes but by the requirements of religious iconography that acknowledged the dalliance between the celestial and the terrestrial.

By choosing to invoke the Annunciation as a subject connoted by two colours in a metaphorical and quintessential relationship of pure hue, Albrecht claims that colour and meaning can co-exist as subjective parallels for a visual notation concerning an event. Colour does not testify about the existence of pictorial space but gives evidence for the signification that can be gathered from the opposition of two controlling hues. What allows her paintings to operate as symbolic images is the notion that the titles are quintessential to any comprehension of each painting's subject. When this knowledge is accepted, the significance of an incarnation as a reductivist conversation between two colour forms becomes both apparent and enunciate.

Albrecht treats her colour, in these early years of her hemispheres, with the expressive recognition that we may fruitfully associate with the symbolic functionality of flags. By marrying a diverse pair of quadranted colours together, a painting's title becomes the 'describing land' or 'notable personage' that the painter invites viewers to visit.

Flags are also understood as collisions of a word (name of a country) and an image (symbol of a place) because of their apposite power to bear an abstract meaning as a contrast of metaphorical colour-shapes. To recognise a flag as a sign is also to acknowledge the capacity of colours to reveal powerfully emblematic meanings.¹¹

As symbolic signs, Pacific annunciation and Origin are key works in understanding the motivation of titles in Albrecht's art: titles operate like haiku with a catalytic ability to invoke meaning. Without such a self-conscious assurance, Pacific annunciation and Origin might be perceived only as visual essays produced to investigate fields of oppositional colour. Other paintings from the same years - Emperor 1983 [p. 41], Solomon's song 1984 [p. 45] – also concentrate colour oppositions for the purpose of creating symbolic meaning. They operate as visual avatars, as manifestations of abstract concepts, searching for extra-sensory realms. They stage memory as being a gesture of recognition signified by a named being, or by a sign for another time in history. We may know of these evoked personages or places, not from our own personal knowledge or individual experience, but from the titles' ability to convey some of the enigmas which surround words for names that we recognise. Hardly any of us have ever used the words 'Hello Solomon' when greeting another person, but when we read the title Solomon's song, we may know which man is actually being referred to, where and when he lived and what he wrote. Albrecht uses such words as titles because of their ability to create meaning.

Another major achievement is *Dervish* 1983 [p. 44], which reveals many of the layered tropes about the intersection

of appearance, title and meaning that Gretchen Albrecht was to subsequently make even more complex. Here, the painting uses the application of mutually intense and energised hues for a shimmering, motile purpose. The attachment of such a loaded and poetic title to the coupling of colour and signification gives rise to sensations of movement, of light-filled ecstasy, and of a limpid, sensuous and touchy heat. Such high-toned hues are amongst the artist's most joyous, and are not quelled by the cool appearances of any other shade. Gamboge-in-carthamous is the terminology for the colour scheme of Dervish: an unequivocal temper of tangerine-reddened yellow drives towards a core sustained by a centrally vertical zip. At this conjunction a counterpoising curtain folds upwards from the left quadrant, whose powdery magenta-russeted sang-de-boeuf meets the colour red by itself. Red was, according to ancient Jewish tradition, the first colour ever to be named and the word-colour for red connoted the palpable nature of the living blood of Adam. All these associations are apposite, for Dervish is Albrecht's most Moorish vision of place, culture and movements of colour in confluence. 12

GARDEN

But this is nought to those Soule-ravishing,
Sweete, heavenly Meditations which doe spring
From Gardens, able to rap and inspire
The coldest Muse, with Coelestiall fire;
You melt the flintiest Heart, and it advance
Above the Spheares in a delightfull Trance.

William Prynne

When Gertrude Stein told her readers to stare at her words to see who she was, she asked them to 'Look at Me Now and Here I Am'. ¹³ With Gretchen Albrecht, the titles that she gives to her paintings are always keys to their perception. She uses titles as if they were *haiku*.

Her paintings' titles essentialise what her works of art have as their subject, not as images, but as painted entities which are charged with altering the environment that they may come to inhabit. This is immediately manifest in her two important sequences of garden paintings, which are never limited by mundane issues of a garden's physical scale or its planting scheme. Albrecht considers gardens as environments where spiritual concerns can be reflected in colour. She ranges widely and considers the medieval notions of a *hortus conclusus*, the sacred and enclosed garden, or new Eden, where the Virgin Mary was enclosed by walls to mark her own pure state. The painter also looks at the *hortus universalis*, the celestial garden where we encounter worlds outside the temporal terrestrial sphere.

In 1985 Gretchen Albrecht returned to the theme of gardens that she had been investigating a generation earlier. This occurred in response to the commission of an artist's project at Auckland City Art Gallery, instigated by Gallery curator Alexa Johnston. What resulted was the painter's first installation of paintings. The four paintings were Arbour [p. 64], Exile, Blossom [p. 49] and Orchard - for Keats [p. 48]. Each painting is a virtual mirror of itself with a vertical 'spine' at the centre of its hemisphere as if to stabilise the effects of gravity on the motion of colour. The palette of the garden paintings employs coruscating hues in swirling, charged motions which concentrically encompass a lower axial point in radiating shimmers. Air stirs this garden room into a transmission of changing colour; late spring enters early summer. This movement in colour gave the installation its name: Seasonal.

Between 1997 and 2001, Gretchen Albrecht turned again to the theme of gardens in a sequence of paintings that further advance her cosmological search for how the characteristics of imagined gardens could be visualised by paint. In the brilliant Autumnal mirror 1997 [p. 63] late summer is transformed into an aureole, a nimbus of butter-golden yellows tinctured with saffron. A horizontal floats above a shimmering horizontal, which is parallel and vet also vertically mirrored. Here, summer's heat fuels the coming of autumn's colours. In the pendant paintings, Pohutukawa – summer 1999 [p. 47] and Blue ground - midnight 2001 [p. 59], large swathes of red and blue create huge, floating symbolic colour fields. In Pohutukawa - summer there is a visual sensation of pohutukawa flowers being in bloom. The painting wears the pohutukawa's identity as a rutilant epidermis. The pair of cool grey strips echo the cool underside of the pohutukawa's leaves. In Blue ground - midnight a luminescent nocturnal-blue sky arches across a massive space which is intersected by a strip-like symbol of the galactic Milky Way striding across its centre. The skyand-earth gardens that Albrecht has recently evoked use colour to look at scale from both a macrocosmic and a microcosmic point of view. They recall the truth and beauty of Henry David Thoreau's remarks in Walden: 'Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads.' 14

In recent years Albrecht has searched for meaning in the intersection of light and dark, in blackness, in whiteness and in greyness. *In memory of my father – ashes* 1996 [p. 23] and *Gains and losses – Aequus* 1998 [p. 32] trace the parallels between the sensations of breathing and the notions of black and white being the ingredients of our daily atmosphere: our night and day, our birth and death. They put black and white together, not as opposite colours but as symbiotic hues. Albrecht utilises paint here as registering the shift between light and dark hues, regulating hue like a pulsing heart-beat that we perceive but which we cannot hear. The use of colour as a metaphor

for such body rhythms ensues with the three contrasted hues of *Saint Andrew's day* 1996 [p. 26]. Albrecht addresses the notion of life being present in terms of colour's movement, as a memory of sensing, and a breathing of air between sensate colours.

MARY - MOTHER OF ONE WHO IS GOD

Stabat mater dolorosa
luxta crucem lacrimosa
dum pendebat filius;
cuius animam gementem
contristantem et dolentum
pertransivit gladius.¹⁵

Gretchen Albrecht's understanding of how we may gain spiritual knowledge from painting is fundamental to the metaphysical subjects of her ovals and hemispheres. Her 1995 series of the *Seven sorrows* is arguably her most religious works of art. ¹⁶ They revisit the Roman Catholic tradition of focussed meditations named the Seven Sorrows of Mary. Although Mary's life had become central to early Christian faith, she was a paradox because she was the one Virgin Mother.

The seven paintings contemplate Mary's grief for her dead son using the awareness that her complex identity would become a symbolic emblem over two millennia. To understand Mary's sorrows is to acknowledge her many identities: the Mary of Nazareth, the Virgin Mary, the Second Eve, the Blessed Mother, the Mater Dolorosa, the Queen of Heaven, the God-bearer, the Mother of Sorrows, the Woman of Valour, the Mother of the Church, the Mediatrix of all Graces, the Mother of God, the Star of the Sea, the Mother

of Peace, the Queen of Angels, the Mother of Truth, the Adornment of Worship, the Gate of Heaven, the Mater Gloriosa.

Such compelling and expressive names are among the many reverential titles that were given to Mary, and all are connected with the Marian allegories considered by Gretchen Albrecht's seven paintings. The first sorrow is Seven sorrows - Simeon. Simeon had foreseen Jesus' death: 'And it was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.' 17 In Seven sorrows - flight [p. 30] it is evident that the Holy Family's flight into Egypt occurred at night, a receding dusky red against a yellow dawn. Seven sorrows - loss [p. 60] ponders the time when Jesus disappeared into Jerusalem's Temple and the waiting of Mary is indicated by the blue panel seen against the light horizontal 'gate' into the Temple. Seven sorrows - daughters [p. 31] brings the three daughters of Jerusalem together in a conversation as they witness Jesus on his final journey to the Calvary of Golgotha. Seven sorrows cross marks the Crucifixion of Jesus and renders his blood against a radiant pillar, suggesting the Cross that he has died upon. In Seven sorrows - deposition Christ's body is horizontal and is brought into the dazzling white-light shekhinah which marks the Sepulchre's entrance. Seven sorrows - burial shows Jesus Christ entombed but his Resurrection is signposted by a nimbus-like golden horizontal rising up the painting's surface.

None of Albrecht's seven paintings attempts to act as a simple illustration of what the Seven Sorrows of Mary mean as Marian theology, or even as a series of telling 'pictures'. Instead, they conceive of colour's conversation with geometry as moods that can parallel what the Virgin Mother was feeling and experiencing. For instance, *Seven sorrows – flight* looks at a going away from a dusky place (red/blue bar) to a morning place (yellow/golden bar). There is a movement within the painting from left to right, and this is a visual

passage acting as metaphor for a real journey, made from darkness to light. *Seven sorrows – loss* is a vision of Mary standing against darkness with a gate of light seen *contrajour* through a distant opening; the eye travels from right to left as if Mary is looking back to see what she wants and needs to see: her son Jesus. The Seven Sorrows have always been meditations about how to heal oneself from a great loss. Consequently, Albrecht's paintings seek to use the redemptive qualities of the story of Mary's loss of Jesus to affirm human life through looking at death's effect on the living. ¹⁸

SEA OF FAITH

Exaltation is the going
Of an inland soul to the sea,
Past the houses – past the headlands –
Into deep eternity –

Emily Dickinson

Fire's turning, first sea, and of sea the half is earth, the half burner earth is dispersed at sea and is measured so as to form the same proportion as existed before it became earth . . .

Heraclitus of Ephesos

For Gretchen Albrecht the sea's locale has always been one of the most important vehicles for her study of light's action. The sea's light became an enlarged cosmological phenomenon and expanded her knowledge of the coast's brightness, the wind's illumination, the earth's luminosity and the glow of memory. Such fluxing senses about light as nature's greatest operating principle were transformed into painterly issues; she became pictorially motivated and

stimulated by her eidetic recollection. Perception became recall; memory became a collection of images. For Albrecht, the sea's light and the sky's colour have mutated into the most natural of twins; they are hues defined by time. She deliberates on how paint can become an image of light's continually shifting identity. At times sea-light can be light that comes from the western compass point, looked at as if it were front-lit during morning, north-lit at noon or back-lit at dusk. Whatever the time, light changes and colours look different, even from the same point of view. The idea of a time near dusk was especially attractive to Albrecht as it was during these hours that water-light could reveal its own illuminational essence by reinforcing that we always perceive light as colour. The encounters between time and water-light, sea-light, shore-light, sky-light provided a fresh cosmological subject for the painter. Landscape was no longer a place marked by topography but a coloured elucidation of time, memory and motion.

Just as the sea could become a cosmological light-metaphor for human life, so the sky, the sea, the air and the earth shifted into tangible workings of the celestial and the terrestrial. The painting Sea of faith 1989 [p. 40] used the lessons Albrecht had gained from her thinking about the nature of water – most always the Tasman Sea – and transformed her ideas into a less terrestrial, considerably more aqueous, emotion. The painting's title is from Matthew Arnold's best-known poem, 'Dover Beach':

The Sea of Faith

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore

Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.

But now I only hear

Its melancholy, long withdrawing roar,

Retreating, to the breath

Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear

And naked shingles of the world . . .

Sea of faith is a painted dream of oceans and immersive movements that well up from deep within water to a foaming, rivuleted surface. There are no quiet ripples or tumescent roars, but wavy spumes that peak and never collapse. Here, what was once the earthly is entirely submerged into a terrain made from H₂O – terra oceanus.

Paint as fluid matter, and as a cosmic theme of change, appears continually and in many diverse incarnations throughout Albrecht's career: as water, clouds, smoke, ice, blood, flames and stellar constellations. Heraclitus wrote: 'Everything flows and nothing abides; everything gives way and nothing stays fixed . . . You cannot step twice into the same river, for other waters and yet others go ever flowing on. It is in changing that things find repose.'20 Albrecht never paints a world that remains static; things that change are always sighted against things that change. What does not change is never present, or even articulated as an entity. Two paintings, in particular, indicate the artist's recent immersion with issues of time and eternity, of human mutability and the absence of permanence: Storm 1998 [p. 28] and Star cluster - hydra 1999 [p. 27]. They address the intersection of galactic dark matter, matter that is not seen by the eyes but which is seen by the mind. 21

Luminous galactic matter is frequently not known by observable sight but by models based on cosmic simulations which posit the gravitational forces necessary to sustain stellar motion. By attempting to observe the invisible Albrecht confirms, in these two paintings, that the bandwidth of her subject matter extends from the microcosmos to the macrocosmos. If you know that

matter expands, collides, contracts and transfigures itself, then the smoke clouds of *Storm* become a freezing, airy, conflagration of water, ice and black-white flame. *Star cluster – hydra* may be an axial star-map of Hydra, the largest constellation, meandering from the celestial equator into the southern celestial hemisphere. The white gaseous nebulae both shine by their own light as cloudy emissions and reflect light by appearing against a darker absorbent background. ²²

DEAD RECKONING

The startling *Gains and losses* paintings of 1998 and 1999 indicate how much of Gretchen Albrecht's art is sourced from inside her own life's experience. They corroborate how she has been able to transform emotional loss into self-awareness. The *Gains and losses* paintings are visual monuments which consider what it means to lose the continuity of love felt for another and the series celebrates the notion that love is never extinguished by mere physical separation.

Nunc lento sonitu dicunt.

Morieris.

Now, this Bell tolling softly for another,

saies to me, Thou must die.

No man is an *Iland*, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the *Continent*, a part of the *maine*, if a clod be washed away by the *Sea*, *Europe* is the lesse, as well as if the *Promonontorie* were, as well as if a *Mannor* of thy *friends* or of *thine own* were; any mans *death* diminishes *me*, because I am involved in *Mankinde*; And therefore never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for *thee*...²³

We die with the dying:

See, they depart, and we go with them.

We are born with the dead:

See, they return and bring us with them. 24

Death lives within a heart bounded only by memory's own life. The mutuality of human life and human death, of life's mortality and its spiritual existence, is never painted as a dilemma in Albrecht's work. She is not painting death here; she is painting death's life. What brings her to perceive the formal, the physical and the spiritual as existing in an intertwined conversation? Her rationale is that separation is indistinguishable from gain. Loss is transformed into pictorial strata – the 'geology' of existence becomes a location which signposts the one dynamic motto that tempers the future of all human relationships: I am to be dead. ²⁵

In Gains and losses – my father – red 1998, In memory of my father – winter 1999 [p. 71] and Meditation for my father 1998 [p. 34] Albrecht has set herself the wrenchingly difficult task of painting oval tombs of memory. These sepulchres transform her early 1980s approach to faith's own inspiration, gained from Christian art's iconography, into a much more poetic visual mythos. What was once the rendering of a received iconography becomes a more eloquent and personal cosmology. Her faith in this series is built on her need to transmute her own grief into a testimony which identifies, reveals, captures and recollects the life and spirit of her late father, Reuben Albrecht (1909–1995).²⁶

Reuben Albrecht's death is activated as a presence, not of him dying but of him living. Each painting is a meditation on the appearance of death's door as a geometric eye on what it means to perceive death. The *Gains and losses* paintings are a pulsing monument, the catafalque of

death's consolation to the soul of the artist. Remember that John Donne chose to deliver his own death sermon:

... this *excitus a morte*, is but *introitus in mortem*, this *issue*, this deliverance *from* that *death*, the death of the *wombe*, is an *entrance*, a delivering to *another death*, the manifold deathes of this *world*. Wee have a winding sheete in our Mothers wombe, which growes from our conception, and wee come into the world, wound up into that *winding sheet*, for wee come to *seeke a grave*...²⁷

Death's portrait is rendered as a cruciform floating inside a blooded ether, but punctuated with arresting breaths of sanguinous colour. ²⁸ Colin McCahon and Albrecht both recognised that their experience could give rise to dark semblances about reality in New Zealand as a post-paradisical promised land. Here is not a live-and-let-live place but a mirror to death's necropolis.

Albrecht locates fate as a deathscape that yawps while it lets itself be pondered. This condition of *bardo*, that state of the soul after death and before rebirth, is considered by Buddhists as death's living heart. The *Gains and losses* paintings work as visual triages which Albrecht holds up as a mirror to her loss. They visually attempt to speak with death's voice.

Fear of mortality does not exist in these paintings; mortality is imagined as a harmony between the organic present and the geometric past. The sanguinary hues flowing throughout these paintings evince a serious mood of authority, a calming future and totally energised immolation. There are three distinct spaces within this *bardo*-world: a warm-blooded ground that proceeds forwards to cooler and excitedly swirling flame-tufts that emit fibrous trails. This cloudy, furnaced environment is overlaid with an engorging tremor of geometry; one is a living vertical and the other an

expiring horizontal bar. These muscular, vascular forms are massive, and couple to make a cruciform – all the physical associations between a cross and a monument to the dead are intentional. There is a further double, or coupled, connotation that bears witness to death as a process from physical consciousness to spiritual consciousness. The cruciform becomes an active symbol of death's presence with the vertical bar and life's absence is actuated by the horizontal bar. The entire feeling of these paintings is of a lucid intensity, a palpable masculinity, and a radiant accord gathered in a union of apprehending reconciliation.

AT-ONEMENT

Life, like a dome of many coloured glass, Stains the white radiance of eternity.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, Adonais

Curved and absolute spaces, titles hung like lyric signals, and boundless confluences of colour are the three defining characters within Gretchen Albrecht's art. From the heliocentric empyrean to the celestial infinitude, from anthropocentric geometry to metaphysical cosmology, Albrecht paints a mythos whose purpose is to speak with colour, to touch with shape, to hear with time and to savour with rotation. Her imagination looks at colour and imagines it as incarnate seeing. Her illuminations consist of self-revelations born from colour's motile conjunction. Gretchen Albrecht sees her painting as being a vessel fired by love's available light seeking insights from the desiring heart of appearances.

- 1. Morris Louis, Auckland City Art Gallery, 12 October to 28 November 1971. This was the first major 'one-man show' of a contemporary American painter shown at the newly refurbished Gallery. It is instructive to consider the difficulty that non-objective art meant for a New Zealand audience in 1971. The critic T.J. McNamara wrote of the Louis exhibition: 'It is important to realise that Louis is talking about colour to the exclusion of everything else; that there is no symbolism in his work at all. The experience offered by each of these pictures is purely visual.' (New Zealand Herald, October 1971) The idea that Louis' paintings were self-reflexive and devoid of any landscape reference was not accepted by the curator Hamish Keith: 'Look closely at these paintings and let them do their thing. Then, if you have any doubt about their relevance to the world, go out of the gallery and look at the waterfall in the new sculpture garden. You may be surprised to find that Louis has taught you an entirely new way of seeing.' (Auckland Star, October 1971)
- 2. Three key cloud paintings are *Marine sky sunset* 1975 (Erika and Robin Congreve collection), *Karekare* 1 1974 (private collection), and *Winter sky, Karekare* 1973 (J. B. Gibbs Trust collection).
- 3. Gretchen Albrecht's early 1970s cloud paintings are among her most attractive early works of art, but their investigation of beauty has not yet led to their subsequent critical appreciation.
- 4. Gretchen Albrecht, quoted in Linda Gill, *Gretchen Albrecht*, Random Century, Auckland, 1991, p. 33.
- 5. Gretchen Albrecht in conversation with Ron Brownson, 30 November 2001.
- 6. Margarita Philosophica, Freiburg, 1503.
- 7. Nicholas de Cuba's *Reconciliation of Opposites*: see Harry Robin, *The Scientific Image: From Cave to Computer*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1992, p. 186.
- 8. Octavio Paz, *Convergences: Essays on Art and Literature*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1991, p. 53.
- 9. '... as I have no interest in the Church's affairs this date is therefore not important to me. It is the pictorial themes mysterious, unfathomable, life-giving, life-creating that I am interested in re-inventing in my painting.' Gretchen Albrecht in conversation with Ron Brownson, 30 January 2002.
- 10. Paz, op.cit, p. 43.
- 11. The Stars and Stripes is the name of the national flag of the United States of America and consists of fifty white stars representing the current states on a blue field, and seven red and six white horizontal stripes representing the original states. It also is known as the Star Spangled Banner and, even more frequently, as the Red, White and Blue. To say 'the Red, White and Blue' has the same function as

enunciating 'America' because of the symbolic associations when these colours' names are together.

- 12. Dervish's intense use of pure and shrugged hues recalls a famous colour environment created by John Fowler and Nancy Lancaster in 1958. The 'buttah yallah' room at 22 Avery Row, London was one of the most influential colour environments for works of art designed in the 20th century. See Stephen Calloway, Twentieth-Century Decoration: The Domestic Environment from 1900 to the Present, Weidenfield and Nicholson, London, 1988, pp. 310–311.
- 13. Gertrude Stein, Look at Me Now and Here I Am, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1971.
- 14. Quoted in David W. Wolfe, *Tales from the Underground: A Natural History of Subterranean Life*, Perseus Publishing, Cambridge, 2001, p. 35.
- 15. A translation of the 'Stabat Mater' is:

At the cross her station keeping, stood the mournful Mother weeping, close to Jesus at the last. Through her soul, His sorrow sharing, Bowed with anguish, deeply grieved, Now at length the sword has passed.

Stephen Gaslee (editor), *The Oxford Book of Medieval Latin Verse*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1928, p. 152.

16. 'I must emphasise that my seven paintings do not attempt to illustrate the Seven Sorrows, rather, they are meant to be experienced as sharing an equivalent relationship to the special Rosary; seven giant oval beads strung round the Gallery walls, forming a circular, rhythmical, continuous repetition of shared relationships as an aid to contemplation.' Gretchen Albrecht, unpublished statement, 1995.

17. Luke 2:25.

- 18. Consider Henryk Gorecki's expansion of the orbit of the Marian sorrows when, in his Symphony No. 3, the difficult question is asked: Where has he gone, My dearest son (Kajze mi sie podziol moj synocek zabily).
- 19. Rita Angus did not have a life-long attachment for ocean light. Colin McCahon cherished sea-light especially in the later years of his life. Frances Hodgkins considered sea-light as a stimulus to some of

her finest paintings and drawings – consider the vertiginous *Wings over Water* in the Tate Britain collection

- 20. Heraclitus, *The Presocratics*, Philip Wheelwright (editor), Odyssey Press, New York, 1966, p. 66.
- 21. Vera Rubin, the eminent astronomer of terrestrial magnetism, has written about what happens if one awakes from a dream, and when coming to consciousness one stands alone in a pitch-black cavern where one has to light a match, which when ignited reveals a shadow an eidolon the unseen moving presence. An encounter with this phantasm is tantamount to an observation of the invisible. Rubin notes that 'we learn from the motion of the Magellanic Clouds, two satellite galaxies gloriously visible in the Southern Hemisphere, that they orbit within the Milky Way galaxy's halo and that the halo continues beyond the clouds, spanning a distance of almost 300,000 light-years.' Vera Rubin, 'Dark Matter in the Cosmos', *Scientific American Presents*, 9.1, Spring 1998. The Magellanic Clouds are two irregular galaxies that are observable in New Zealand as detached portions of the Milky Way. Both Clouds orbit the Earth's galaxy in a plane perpendicular to its surface, and as such can be thought to be hemispherical.
- 22. In the 17th century, to daub meant to apply whitewash onto plaster in a wave-like motion, as a fluid milk-paint. The word daub derives from the Latin *dealbare*, to whiten, and opposes denigrare, to blacken. The sense of *daub* as meaning that painting is not going well is a 19th century notion. Albrecht uses French plasterer's tools to move paint upon her canvas.
- 23. John Donne, Selected Prose, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1967, pp.100-101.
- 24. T.S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding', from Four Quartets, in Collected Poems, Harcourt Brace and Company, New York, 1963, p. 208.
- 25. Gretchen Albrecht's willingness to regard death as a momentous subject for her painting has received little discussion. Even Colin McCahon's paintings concerned with death have rarely been seen for what the artist believed them to be for New Zealanders: encouragements for the recognition of life. Death as an actuated subject is evidenced in much New Zealand art.
- 26. 'I view the *Gains and losses* series as trying to reach a sense of emotional equilibrium where I create a *painted parallel* [artist's emphasis] state using compositional devices of geometric bars or forms, parallel and equal, to achieve a balance or harmonious equivalent.' Gretchen Albrecht in conversation with Ron Brownson, 30 January 2002.
- 27. John Donne, Selected Prose, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1967, p. 377.
- 28. Death-consciousness is a major subject in many works of art by Rita Angus, Colin McCahon and Tony Fomison.



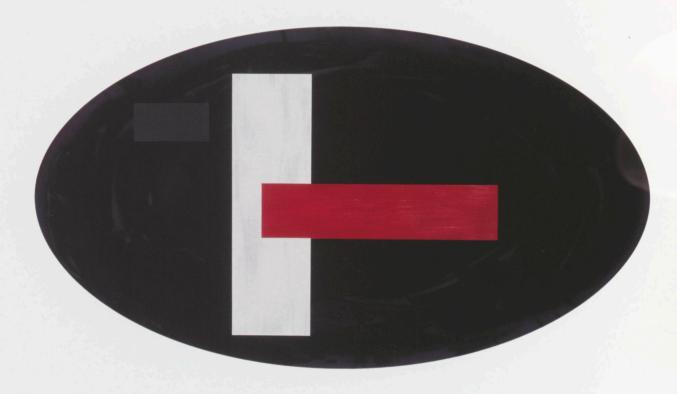
In memory of my father – ashes 1996 acrylic on canvas hemisphere 1225 x 2500 J. B. Gibbs Trust collection



Meditation for Reuben Albrecht – body 1996 acrylic and oil on canvas on oval stretcher 1370 x 2420 Alan Gibbs collection



Claritas – white cross 1998 acrylic and oil on canvas on oval stretcher 730 x 1200 private collection



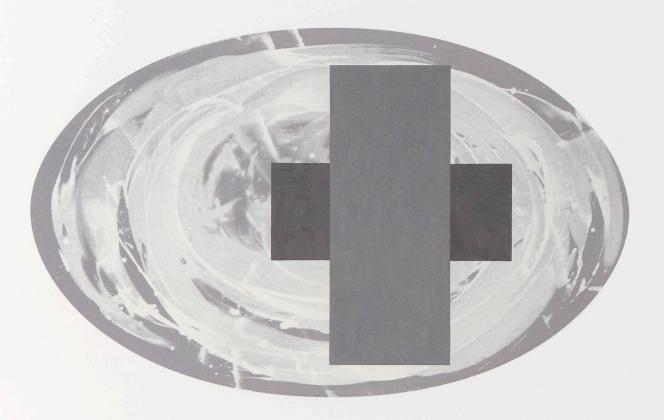
Saint Andrew's day 1996 acrylic and oil on canvas on oval stretcher 1370 x 2450 Jan and Trevor Farmer collection



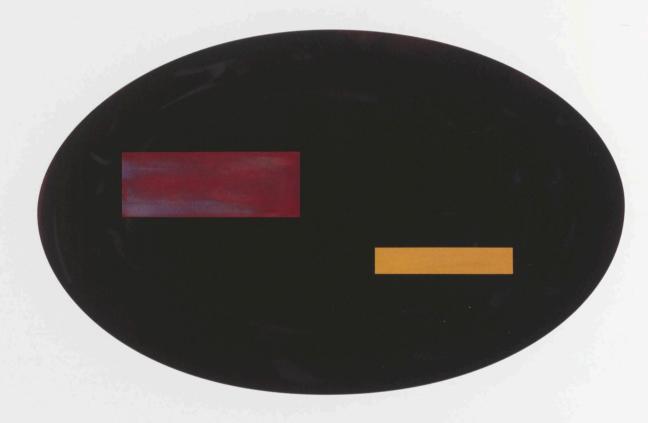
Star cluster – hydra 1999 acrylic on canvas hemisphere 2000 x 4000 Anthony Lewis collection



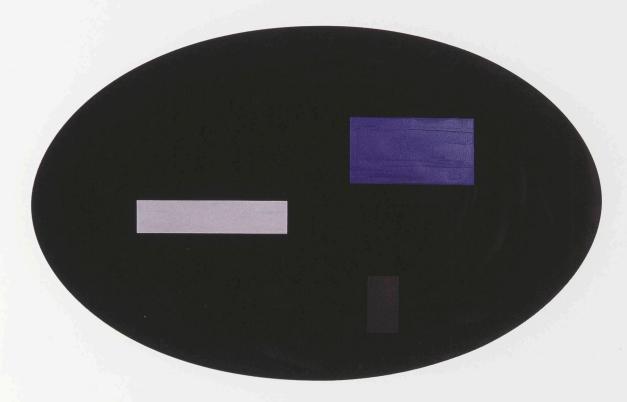
Storm 1998 acrylic on canvas hemisphere 2000 x 4000 private collection



Claritas – grey cross 2000 acrylic and oil on canvas on oval stretcher 1140 x 1830 private collection



Seven sorrows – flight 1995 acrylic and oil on canvas on oval stretcher 1200 x 1900 Carol England collection



Seven sorrows – daughters 1995 acrylic and oil on canvas on oval stretcher 1150 x 1830 private collection



Gains and losses – Aequus 1998 acrylic and oil on canvas on oval stretcher 1370 x 2420 Annie and Greg Dow collection



Black portal – for Dad 1996 acrylic on canvas hemisphere 1230 x 2460 private collection



Meditation for my father 1998 acrylic and oil on canvas on oval stretcher 730 x 1200 private collection The eye is called the first of all the gates
Through which the Intellect may learn and taste
The ear is second, with the attentive Word,
That arms and nourishes the Mind.

Renascent Readings

MARY KISLER

New meanings began to be incorporated in European art from the 14th century onwards. While earlier Byzantine artists depicted saints and other figures with accompanying symbols to aid identification, or placed them in stylised settings that indicated a particular scene in a story, they depicted God as an abstract colour field of gold, believing that his multiplicity of meanings was too great to be contained within a worldly narrative. A work was framed not only by the architectural structures in which it was placed, but also metaphorically by the layers of meanings within a narrative that was seen to exist both within and without time and space. With the development of humanism, however, Renaissance religious painting, while incorporating these meanings, focused on placing narrative within a recognisable setting, aided by new techniques such as perspective and the study of the human body. Recognising aspects of daily life, either in architecture or people's clothing, helped the faithful place the drama in their own time and place. Yet the function of art works, and their interpretation by the faithful, remained similar at

certain levels. Spectators had to be emotionally moved by what they witnessed, experiencing what the Greeks called *aletheia* – an unveiling of truth or meaning. In Fra Angelico's famous *Annunciation* (c.1449, San Marco) what we *see* is a moment in a narrative: an angel telling a young woman seated in a 15th century portico that she will give birth to a miraculous child. What we share, in front of Fra Angelico's painting, is the Virgin's awakening to what that miracle will entail – a recognition that the joy of birth and motherhood will be tempered by loss.

When Gretchen Albrecht viewed such works, she described their effect:

... a revelation of the power of painting hit me when I first looked at these historical works. The ability of paintings to emotionally affect and carry meaning is as relevant today as it was then... aspects of the everyday found in many Renaissance paintings – things we all recognise and can share, can also be imbued with a sense of mystery and significance.²

Such frames of reference are invaluable tools when considering Albrecht's interpretations of these themes. While the figures that define traditional narrative are set aside in her abstract paintings, the hemisphere found in Romanesque and Renaissance art and architecture becomes both form and frame; the gesture and movement of narrative being translated into the fluidity of paint itself. Whereas *Pacific annunciation* 1983 [p. 61], a work produced after her first visit to Italy, depicts two halves of a hemisphere which appear in sharp contrast to one another, the seeds of her later treatment of the theme are evident. In the earlier work the deep, contemplative, acquiescent blue which symbolises the cloak of the Virgin, is counterbalanced by the rich, iridescent sweeps of pink which suggest the gradual closing of Gabriel's wings as he alights before Mary.

The 14th century charismatic preacher San Bernardino of Siena introduced an apocryphal element to Christ's conception by stressing that the angels in heaven held their breath while they waited in hope

that Mary would accept the responsibility of the Annunciation.3 Such an interpretation allowed women a place in spiritual discourse denied them in texts that defined Mary solely as the passive vessel in which Christ was conceived. Albrecht's ongoing interest in what was described as 'the human crisis' of the Annunciation developed further in her 1984 series Colloguy which explore the five laudable conditions of the Blessed Virgin. In each Renaissance Colloquy, the response of Mary is central to the image and can be identified by hand gesture. In Albrecht's series, this gesture is translated into the movement within the two halves of each hemisphere, while colour suggests the Virgin's changing states of emotion. The sense of urgency in both halves of Albrecht's Colloguy 1 – disquiet suggests the description given by Nicholas of Lyra of how the Virgin was troubled at first by Gabriel's message (but in wonder rather than disbelief, as she was used to seeing angels). Baxandall describes how in the third Colloguy, Inquiry, the Virgin extends her hand to the angel, asking how she can conceive, as she has not known a man and has vowed to remain virginal for ever, and so on. In Albrecht's third Colloquy deep swathes of pink draw back from a strong grapey violet, and yet the dark line which divides the two sections is also met with a fine band of silvery-white which oscillates in response. This shimmering movement gradually evolves into the calm Colloquy 5 - merit where both gold and white sections are in gestural harmony.

The relationship between icon and spectator worked in other ways that might seem incomprehensible to many observers today. In both the medieval and Renaissance

world, an icon of the Virgin Mary was considered to be her very likeness, capable of an interrelationship with the viewer that we may often only partially comprehend. 4 The church argued that power resided in Mary's person, not in her image - the image was merely the medium through which it was believed she communicated with her worshippers. Yet orally little distinction was made - the perception was that the image was the person it represented, so that it was addressed directly as the person, rather than as mere representation. This interrelationship between image and spectator was seen to have wide-reaching effects that moved well beyond spiritual exegesis. Miracle tales focused on the emotional and physical aspects of each story, helping to create an intimate relationship between image and spectator. When talking about the Virgin Mary, the Church emphasised her softness and beauty and the Christ-child's human helplessness, while the tragedy of their suffering aimed to create an empathetic response; 'eliciting protective feelings of parental love for the child, and a sort of courtly love for the mother, but a love whose links with the more ordinary stages of incipient desire are never entirely submerged.'5

Nowhere is this complex relationship between spectator and icon more apparent than in the church of the Santissima Annunziata in Florence. The anonymous 14th century fresco from which the church gets its name depicts the angel Gabriel kneeling in a simple room before the Virgin Mary, who in turn gazes directly upward to God and the Holy Ghost. The dove flies towards her on rays of gold which also contain the raised words of her acceptance, joyously obedient to God's will. Hers is an active rather than passive consent. Her arms curve around the prayer book in her lap; she is an enclosed body, a pure vessel for the Christ child, without stain. In a society where instability and uncertainty was seen to come both from within and without, the symbolic enclosure of Christ within the Virgin's womb was believed to have enormous efficacy.



Unknown artist, *The annunciation*, 14th century fresco, Church of the Santissima Annunziata, Florence

Popular belief that an angel had helped with the depiction of Mary's face, when the artist monk felt overwhelmed by his task, gave miraculous powers to this image. Mary had, in effect, a threefold manifestation: as the iconic mother of God who would intercede on the part of the faithful; as a political and personal adviser who could empower decisions and create miracles; and as a loving woman who should be cared for as if still mortal. Indeed, many of the gifts bestowed on her relate to her femininity – she is adorned with a jewelled crown and her painted neck is hung with necklaces. While she is no longer publicly recognised for her political interventions, the Annunciate Virgin continues to have an important and powerful social role.

Further scenes from a much grander fresco cycle (painted between 1486 and 1490) added to Albrecht's renewed relationship to Florentine art. These were the Birth of the Baptist and the Birth of the Virgin Mary, by Domenico Ghirlandaio, in the choir chapel of Santa Maria Novella. While the practice of portraying citizens within religious paintings became extremely common during the 15th century, there is a particularly poignant aspect to three of the women included in the cycle. The patron, Giovanni Tornabuoni, is depicted kneeling below one wall of the fresco facing his wife, in the traditional pose for donors. Yet the contemporary spectator would have been well aware of the tragedies incorporated into these fresco cycles, for Francesca Tornabuoni had died giving birth to Giovanni's third child. Furthermore, a similar fate had befallen their daughter Lodovica, portrayed as a witness to the scene of the birth of the Virgin Mary, as well as Giovanni's daughter-in-law, Giovanna degli Albizzi, who

observes the Visitation between Mary and her cousin Elizabeth. Yet the frescoes also gave solace. The perils inherent in childbirth have been redressed for the women of the Tornabuoni family – *rifatto* (remade) in paint; they are eternally present while absent.

These particular works had structural resonances with Albrecht's own hemispheres, their position on opposite walls 'two halves that complete each other'. In viewing these works, Albrecht's initial empathy for the scenes of birth later became woven into the layers of meaning already accrued to the hemispheres. As maternal images, (birth/baby/bed), surrounded by supportive women, she could see reflected her own experience, alongside that of her mother and grandmother. Albrecht was particularly drawn to the way such themes allow the spectator to emotionally recognise 'what all of us have and will experience as part of our human existence – the cycle of life – and the great longing we assuage as adults for mother, innocence, and love'.

This complex relationship between the faithful and certain religious paintings is signified fully in Piero della Francesca's fresco of the *Madonna del Parto* (c.1460), a work hugely influential in Gretchen Albrecht's work in the 1980s. Revered and respected as an icon, and the constant focus of art historians, she is also treated as a close and worthy friend. Near the end of the Second World War art historians decided that treasures such as Piero's *Madonna* should be moved to Florence for safe-keeping against the depredations of the Germans. However, the locals opposed the decision – the women of Monterchi rose up 'like wasps' and drove the art historians out – and again, when the painting was wanted for an exhibition in Florence, the same thing happened. A similar relationship can be seen with the shrine of the *Annunziata* in Florence. Although as an art historical object there is little to single it out, the elaborate surroundings of the fresco point to its potency, and the affection of the women and men who seem

to be constantly in attendance even today is a tangible demonstration of their devotion and affection.

In 1992 Gretchen Albrecht returned to Italy, revisiting specific architectural sites and artworks that had inspired and influenced her work after her first stay in Florence thirteen years earlier. During this second visit her ongoing pleasure in the forms, colours and geometries of Renaissance art was heightened by a new awareness of the layered meanings accruing to certain paintings. New work produced as a result of this second visit was tempered by her deeper understanding of the way in which these paintings continue to function emotionally and spiritually in a reciprocal relationship with the spectator.

The effect of Albrecht's second visit to Italy is immediately apparent in her new works relating to this theme. In Annunciation 1992 there is a marked change – the pink is more pulsating, kinetic, as if drawn both towards and away from the blues and purples which make up the other half of the hemisphere. Now we sense a different visualisation of Gabriel's message, a casting of light in the centre of the hemisphere which shimmers, disrupts and transforms. Drops of paint are impelled forwards at the uppermost curve of the hemisphere, penetrating the more translucent blues and lilacs on the right. An inky ovoid form reaches up as if to greet and envelop this casting of light. While this could be read as a metaphor for the physical miracle that is taking place, it also implies Mary's emotional response to the event.

While the Virgin's role as a distanced goddess/protector/ intercessor is undeniable, her maternal function linked her body, and the cultural and psychological rituals associated with it, directly to that of women. Just as the figures in a 15th century Annunciation were predicated upon the responsive presence of the spectator, so the contemporary viewer is drawn into the polyvalent readings of Albrecht's work. While mirroring the Byzantine understanding of the power of abstraction to represent what we know but cannot see, much of her ongoing work derives from a fascination with and response to the unmediated human message incorporated in the Renaissance paintings described above, and the way they continue to function. At the same time her works reflect her own maturing as a woman and artist, displaying an enriched vitality. Like the icons from which she has drawn her inspiration, Albrecht's canvases can be read as sites of containment where meaning is explored, revealing truths about human experience that are both specific and universal.

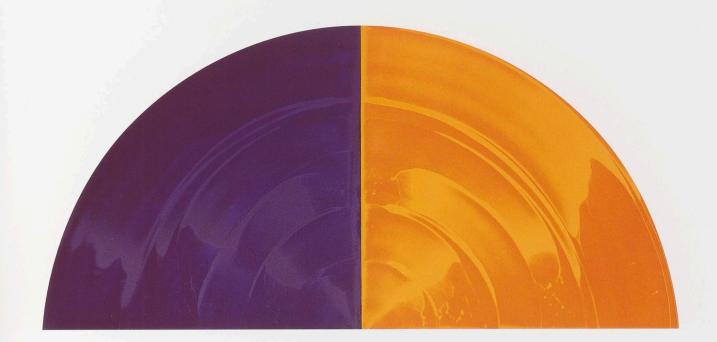
- 1. The first lines of the Florentine Feo Belcari's play, *Abraham and Isaac*, acted in 1449, quoted in Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in 15th Century Italy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford & New York, 1989, p. 153.
- 2. Gretchen Albrecht, email to Mary Kisler, 19 July 2001.
- 3. Iris Origo, The Merchant of Prato, Penguin, London, 1963, p. 75.
- 4. Richard C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London, 1980, pp. 51–52.
- 5. Gretchen Albrecht, email to Mary Kisler, 19 December 2001.
- 6. Jack M. Greenstein, *Mantegna and Painting as Historical Narrative*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992, p. 167.
- 7. ibid
- 8. . . . ma son le donne che si oppongono. Prima di partire siamo andati a risultarla, già al suo cimitero; subito anche questa volta sono sbucati, da tutte le parti, sciami di comari inviperite come le vespe. Vittorio Dini, Il potere delle antiche madri, Boringhieri, Turin, 1980, p. 23.
- 9. Peter Hohenstatt, *Masters of Italian Art: Leonardo da Vinci*, Könemann, Koln, 1998, p. 59.



Nomadic geometries – Jupiter 1993 acrylic and oil on canvas on oval stretcher 1560 x 2400 Catherine Sang and Mike McConnel collection



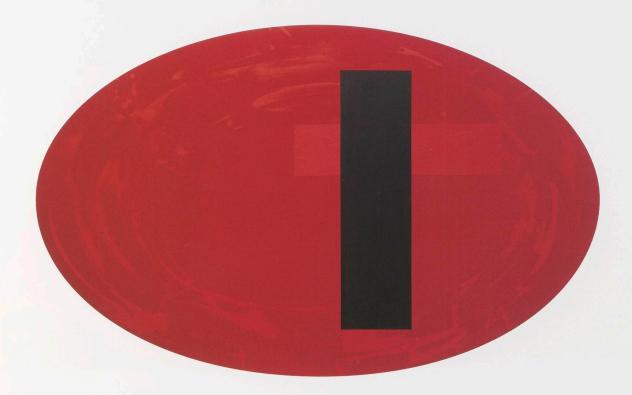
Sea of faith 1989 acrylic on undivided hemisphere 1200 x 2400 Erika and Robin Congreve collection



Emperor 1983 acrylic on canvas hemisphere 1250 x 2500 private collection



Origin 1983
acrylic on canvas hemisphere
1680 x 3360
J. B. Gibbs Trust collection



Meditation – sanguis 1996 acrylic on canvas on oval stretcher 1140 x 1830 private collection



Dervish 1983
acrylic on canvas hemisphere
1530 x 3060
Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
courtesy of Waikato Museum of Art and History Te Whare Taonga o Waikato



Solomon's song 1984 acrylic on canvas hemisphere 1530 x 3060 private collection



Summer fire – winter smoke 1992 acrylic on canvas hemisphere 1000 x 2000 Carol Banks and Rhys Harrison collection



Pohutukawa – summer 1999 acrylic and oil on canvas on oval stretcher 2000 × 3600 private collection



Orchard – for Keats 1985 acrylic and oil on canvas hemisphere 1830 x 3660 Fletcher Art Trust collection



Blossom 1985
acrylic and oil on canvas hemisphere
1830 x 3660
Waikato Museum of Art and History Te Whare Taonga o Waikato



Nocturne – nomadic geometries II 1992 acrylic and oil on canvas on oval stretcher 1540 x 2440 Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki gift of the Patrons of the Gallery, 1992 All my work springs from my personal life experiences. The spiritual and the physical and the formal are three strands intertwined and inseparable that inform the paintings – you might say the painting's DNA, and give them their content; their 'raison d'être'. ¹

A Life in Shapes

At first sight, Gretchen Albrecht's semicircular and ovalshaped paintings might not appear to advance a biographical reading of her work as readily as her figurative paintings from the early 1960s, in which her personal and domestic struggles as a young mother were encapsulated in painted images of a private mythological world populated by vulnerable women and children being preyed upon by beasts, wizards and masked and unknown foes.

The shaped paintings do not look like conventional self-portraits, which rely upon the practice of mimesis for their true-to-life value to be established. It was not mimetic likeness, however, that Gretchen Albrecht noted when she looked at a self-portrait painted by fellow New Zealand artist, Helen Flora Scales:

I met Helen Scales first through her paintings which I came upon almost by chance while wandering through the Auckland City Art Gallery one afternoon at the end of 1975.

One of the galleries upstairs was filled with small oil paintings, mostly landscapes and still lives, and three self-portraits. One of these self-portraits stopped me in my tracks with its extraordinary emotional power. The head tilted on an angle, black smudges for eyes, a large triangular nose, mouth wiped away to a broken line – the skull beneath the flesh palpably felt – it seemed to me at once vulnerable and strong: the brushstrokes in all their variety of smudges, the rubbed bare canvas patches, the licks, wisps and firm thick strokes of paint constructed an image redolent of a life lived – an image full of the presence of old age. It belonged, in my mind, with the great self-portrait of 1945 by Bonnard, and those direct, exposed self-revelations of late Rembrandt.²

Scales painted the self-portrait to which Albrecht refers in 1968 when she was eighty-one years old. It is the way that Scales has painted her self-portrait that creates the 'presence of old age'; it is not the practice of mimesis that reveals the 'self' of the self-portrait.

Another self-portrait that exerted an enormous impact on Albrecht for the manner in which it decisively eschews the notion of mimesis was Frances Hodgkins' *Self-Portrait: Still Life* c.1935. In this well-known work, Hodgkins conflates the genres of self-portraiture and still life, presenting a gathering of objects that in some way stand for herself: a pink rose, a vase and a bowl, a pink high-heeled shoe, a belt and a variety of brightly patterned scarves. Elizabeth Eastmond suggests that by allowing this group of objects to speak for the self, Hodgkins avoids the 'problematics associated with physical appearance in the construction of and reading of self-portraiture by women artists.' ³

In a speech delivered at the Auckland Art Gallery in 1996, Albrecht described her initial response to Frances Hodgkins' *Self-Portrait: Still Life*:

In 1963, as a fourth year art student at the newly relocated School of Fine Arts, my Art History lecturer, Kurt von Meier, walked me down to the Auckland Art Gallery and stood me in front of this painting. The frontal, flat composition of an assortment of personal clothing – shoe, belt, hat, flower, scarf – and the mix of colours and

patterns, are an eloquent metaphor for Frances Hodgkins herself, the woman and the painter. Understanding this was revelatory for me.⁴

We can see how Albrecht incorporated the strategies of Hodgkins' metaphorical self-portrait into her own early figurative works, in which the disquieting array of figures, like Hodgkins' ensemble of personal items, represented different aspects of herself. The self did not however vanish from Albrecht's work along with the figure. On the contrary, the forms of the hemisphere and the oval have become the artist's metaphorical means of speaking of herself.

The artist is embodied quite literally in her two shaped canvases through the link to two distinctly female life experiences – the caesarean birth of her son which was to later generate the form of the semicircular canvas divided vertically at the centre and a hysterectomy which would lead Albrecht to the form of the dark oval. The connection between the caesarean scar and the divided hemisphere can be found in two entries in Albrecht's studio notebook from 1981, where she lists the features of the divided hemisphere in the following sequence:

The hemisphere divided. Locates the colour. Equal, mirrored, statement and response. Fusion of centre join. Caesarean scar. Made whole again.

In another entry, which is almost a duplicate of the first, the final three phrases read:

Fusion of centre join. Caesarean scar. Self.

When extracts from Albrecht's notebook were published in the catalogue for the 1982 exhibition Seven Painters / The

Eighties, an edited version of the notebook entry appears in which the three phrases now read:

Fusion at the centre join. A scar. Made whole again.⁵

With the removal of the words 'caesarean' and 'self' the context from which the divided hemisphere emerged is lost. By reinstating this personal trace of laceration we are able to locate the woman, the mother and the artist in Albrecht's hemisphere.

We can now see, for instance, that Albrecht's early divided hemispheres, the scale of which was determined by the span of the artist's extended arms and united by the caesarean scar at the centre, operate as a figure of maternal enclosure through an overall effect of uterine metonymy. The viewer is enfolded into both the body of the mother and the body of the artist. The dialogue between the opposing quadrants of the hemisphere progressively became more strategic as Albrecht explored the metaphorical connotations of opposition. The title of the impressive blue and orange hemisphere *Leda* 1982 suggests an element of force in this union of opposites and the abutment of the two wings of the hemisphere painted in sweeping arcs of colour might now connote the lascivious embrace of the swan.

In 1983, Albrecht began to explore the potential of the dividing line of the hemisphere. Rather than treating the coloured quadrants as two distinct parts, she began to compromise the strict division by painting across the divide. The work *Origin* 1983 [p. 42] is composed of a green and a pink quadrant joined together. At the top of the pink quadrant a streak of green paint disrupts the apparent purity of the two opposing coloured quadrants as do the barely discernible green and pink vertical lines that trace the seam of the join. The leap of green that traverses the join gives the work a force that suggests movement and an originating principle. If we regard the streak of



Helen Scales, *Portrait*, 1968 private collection

green paint as a germinative band of matter leaping across the central threshold into being, we might also consider as relevant to a work about origins, the set of etymologies which link matter with *mater* (the mother), and matrix (the womb).

The matrixial origin of the divided hemisphere is manifested most clearly in Albrecht's many paintings based on the biblical story of the Annunciation, in which the Word of God is made flesh within the womb of the Virgin Mary. The story of the Annunciation is the subject of at least ten paintings produced over a ten-year period. Seven of these are divided hemispheres, one is a single-piece undivided hemisphere and another is an oval-shaped work.

In a studio notebook entry from 1981 Albrecht recorded her response to a representation of the Annunciation painted by Duccio in 1311:

Have pinned up Duccio's Annunciation for Christmas. Love that pink and blue. Those two different energies meeting at the centre – conception point. 6

This too is what we see in two of Albrecht's divided hemispheres, *Annunciation – Duccio* 1982, and *Pacific annunciation* 1983 [p. 61]. The works are both made up of a pink and blue quadrant joined together, recalling the colours of the garments worn by the angel and Virgin in so many trecento and quattrocento paintings of the Annunciation. In Albrecht's paintings, we see a union of energies in the abutment of the contrasting halves of pink and blue and we see the mysterious centre, the conception point, in the join where the two quadrants meet. Through this union the artist figures a moment,

the instant of conception, where the Word becomes flesh in Mary's womb. The incandescent lines of paint gathered at the central axis catch the light of the Word at the very moment of its incarnation.

The cyclical form of the oval-shaped canvas, which was introduced into Albrecht's work in 1989, offered her a new shaped framework within which to continue her investigation of themes related to the cycle of life, death and renewal. The oval might be regarded as the mirror image of the hemisphere, not only because the artist has added a lower curve to the half-circle and moulded it into an oval, but also because the change in shape mirrors the change in Albrecht's own life. A hysterectomy in 1989 was to generate the form of the dark oval. Where the hemisphere encapsulates ideas about birth and beginnings, the oval encapsulates the second phase of human life dealing with ideas about absence, loss, endings and rebirth. As Linda Gill writes, within the oval we find 'reconciliation, acquiescence and renewal.'7 Further than this, Albrecht's dark oval, connected to the artist's hysterectomy and, by association, to the idea of an absent centre, can be viewed as a powerful maternal metaphor for absence and loss.

The profound impact of the loss of her father in 1995 has informed four series of oval paintings which were produced and exhibited in consecutive years from 1995–1998.

In the exhibition *The seven sorrows of Mary*, the artist created a 'rosary' of seven large black ovals that she described as 'seven giant beads, strung around the gallery walls, forming a circular, rhythmical, continuous repetition of shared relationships as an aid to contemplation.' ⁸

These dark contemplative paintings refer to the Catholic Marian tradition commemorating the Virgin Mary's Seven Sorrows, or the

seven events in the Virgin's life in which she grieves for the fate of her son. Their enormous power was generated by the contrast between the velvety black surfaces of each painting and the coloured bars and rectangles within the oval. In *Seven sorrows – loss* 1995 [p. 60] two large rectangles, one horizontal and one vertical, feature in the composition. The long horizontal bar is painted white and appears as a glowing ghostly figure lying alongside a blue vertical rectangle painted in fluid strokes. A sense of loss permeates this painting, conveyed in the relationship between the standing and lying figures, by the absence of life suggested by the prone white rectangle and by the sorrowful aqueous form of the blue rectangle.

Flashes of dark red paint punctuate the black surface of the oval painting *Seven sorrows – burial* 1995. The solitary figure of a bright yellow horizontal rectangle at the upperright of the painting lights up the dark surface. This stunning geometric form contrasted against an almost indiscernible black rectangle suggests the indelible presence of a life now gone within the lives of those who remain behind.

Where one might expect to see the figure of a cross in *Seven sorrows – cross* 1995, it is interesting that we find instead what appears to be a dismantled tau cross. An upright rectangle painted in gold stands at the right of the oval while a wide red transverse bar is placed at its left. The positioning of the two parts of a cross separately dislocates the stability of the form and in doing so might suggest the anguish of an inevitable loss that cannot yet be faced.

In the 1996 exhibition Meditation on the life of my father, the paintings were just that - a series of contemplative images painted after her father's death, in which private memories of a relationship between father and daughter are explored in paint. There is a deep sense of foreboding in Meditation - lung 1996 with its surface of purple and black paint spiralling into the centre of the oval like a long painful intake of breath. Two large horizontal rectangles painted blood red and olive add to the visceral connotation of the painting in which the artist reflects upon the respiratory disease that claimed her father's life. Meditation - sea 1996, by contrast, is a serene image composed of a blue painted field with a floating horizontal rectangle painted in oil in the same shade as the acrylic background. The sheen on the surface of the blue rectangle makes it appear as if it is just emerging from the depths of the sea. A smaller cream-coloured vertical rectangle positioned near the upper left of the painting appears to hover above the shimmering blue stratum of paint around the perimeter of the oval like a seagull flying above the ocean.

In this set of paintings Albrecht had begun the process of using the last of the shaped stretchers constructed for her by her father. The works thus marked the end of a long collaborative partnership between father and daughter. In a sense her father stands behind Albrecht's work, for it is his beautifully constructed framework that forms the spine of so many of his daughter's paintings.

In Albrecht's next series, *Mirrors and lakes* 1997, the artist continued her meditation on the cycle of life. Where the dark oval paintings in her *Seven sorrows* series connoted the seat of the emotions and the very centre of loss, the reflective surfaces of both a mirror and a lake in this body of work function as a larger metaphor for a state of inner reflection. From 1997 she has increasingly favoured a composition that includes two horizontally oriented geometric elements and an

elliptical current of paint that sweeps from the perimeter of the oval into the centre and back again in a vortex of colour. These formal changes in her work signal a stylistic movement toward a sense of inner balance within the composition of the oval that also appears to correspond to a personal shift in the artist's own life.

Albrecht characterises all of the paintings she produced in 1998 and in the early stages of 1999 as part of the expansive series *Gains and losses*. Each painting, she suggests, deals with the process involved in reaching a sense of emotional equilibrium:

In the past three years I have been preoccupied with trying to express ideas in my paintings about mortality, love and loss. I have realised in the process, that through attempting to try and paint a fitting memorial to the spirit and memory of my late father, that loss also has its gains.⁹

This search for equilibrium is manifested in works such as *In time and measure true* 1998 and *Aequus – grey* 1999. In both these paintings the two large horizontal bars within the composition are positioned in a perfectly balanced parallel alignment in the centre of the oval. The two charcoal coloured bars are equal measures in *In time and measure true* while in *Aequus – grey*, where the title derives from the Latin meaning 'even', a sense of evenness and inner balance is achieved through the way that the contrasting white and black bars balance each other out. Measure and balance might be regarded then as the key ingredients of the paintings that make up the *Gains and losses* series. There is however another element that is also an essential part of Albrecht's search for balance and harmony in the painted world of the

ovals. To date, there are four oval paintings that Albrecht has called *Claritas*, beginning with the first example in 1998 and the most recent in 2001. In *Claritas* 1998 the surface emits a radiant light created by the swirls of iridescent white acrylic paint over the top of a silver-grey ground. A white horizontal bar at the centre-left of the picture plane appears to slide above the thinner black horizontal bar beneath it that extends almost to the right edge of the oval.

It was this sense of radiance that was joyfully manifested in the series of oval paintings entitled *The cicada's song*, exhibited in October 1999 at the Sue Crockford Gallery in Auckland. The bright red painted surfaces of the ovals evoke the glorious scarlet blossoms and ovate leaves of the native New Zealand pohutukawa tree in high summer and, by association, we can almost hear the rhythmic chirping of the cicada during mating season. The paintings in this series such as the giant oval *Pohutukawa – the cicada's song* 1999, and a related work *Pohutukawa* 2000, also operate as a metonym for the changing seasons and the cycle of life.

For twenty years Gretchen Albrecht has read and reread John Berger's essay 'The Ambush of Absence', where he writes: 'The function of painting is to fill an absence with the simulacrum of a presence.' 10 She has realised that her two generative geometric shapes can also function to substitute absence with the simulacrum of a presence. The hemisphere and oval are the first inside, the first home where we came into being within the maternal body of woman. Furthermore, the generative feminine forms are themselves metaphors for artistic creation. The feminine geometry of Gretchen Albrecht's two bodies of shaped paintings undeniably signals a presence rather than an absence. The presence that the hemispheres and ovals simulate is that of the artist and woman herself.

- 1. Gretchen Albrecht, undated personal correspondence.
- 2. Gretchen Albrecht, 'A Personal Reminiscence', *Art New Zealand* 37, 1985, p. 52.
- 3. Elizabeth Eastmond, 'Metaphor and the Self-Portrait: Frances Hodgkins's *Self-Portrait: Still Life* and *Still Life: Self-Portrait, Art History* 22, 1999, p. 673.
- 4. Gretchen Albrecht, address, 'Celebrity Choice', New Gallery, Auckland City Art Gallery, 2 November 1996, Albrecht file 2, Biography/ Articles, E.H. McCormick Research Library, Auckland.
- 5. Gretchen Albrecht, Seven Painters / The Eighties, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui, 1982, p. 14.
- 6. ibid., p. 14.
- 7. Linda Gill, *Gretchen Albrecht*, Random Century, Auckland, 1991, p. 52.
- 8. Gretchen Albrecht, artist statement, *The seven sorrows of Mary*, 1995, personal archive.
- 9. Gretchen Albrecht, undated personal correspondence, manila file, 'Poems, writings on my paintings etc', personal archive.
- 10. John Berger, 'The Ambush of Absence', Village Voice, New York, 16 November 1982, p. 112.



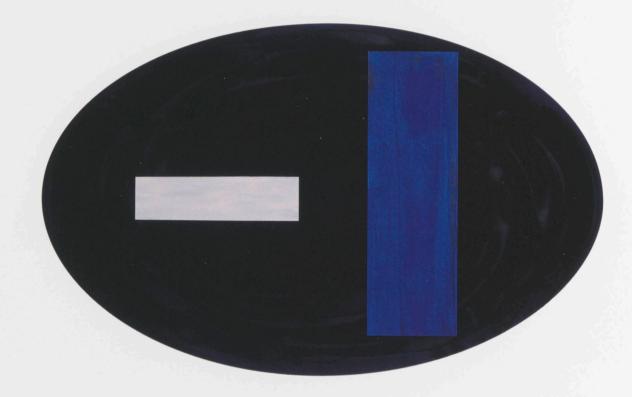
Of myst and watere 1986 oil on canvas hemisphere 1520 x 3040 private collection



Exile 1985
acrylic on canvas hemisphere
1830 x 3660
Erika and Robin Congreve collection



Blue ground - midnight 2001 acrylic and oil on canvas on oval stretcher 1140 x 1830 private collection



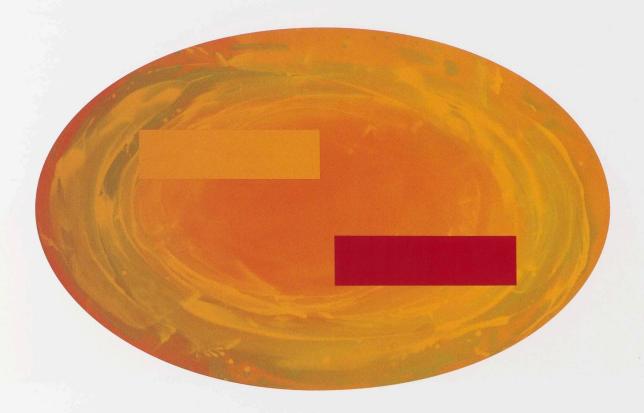
Seven sorrows – loss 1995 acrylic and oil on canvas on oval stretcher 1200 x 1900 private collection



Pacific annunciation 1983 acrylic on canvas hemisphere 1530 x 3060 private collection



Bright mantled ocean 2000 acrylic on canvas hemisphere 2000 x 4000 private collection



Autumnal mirror 1997 acrylic and oil on canvas on oval stretcher 1200 x 1900 private collection



Arbour 1985 acrylic and oil on canvas hemisphere 1830 x 3660 private collection 1943 Born Onehunga, Auckland.
1960–63 Attends University of Auckland School of Fine Arts.
Graduates Diploma of Fine Arts (Honours in Painting).
Fowlds Memorial Prize.

Biography

1964 First one-person exhibition opened by Colin McCahon. 1969 First trip to Australia to visit galleries. 1970 First exhibition in Sydney, Australia. 1993 1972 Establishes studio in Titirangi, Auckland. 1994 Teaching Fellow in Painting at the University of Auckland 1972-73 School of Fine Arts. 1978 Designs and paints banners for the set of Gillian 1995 Whitehead's opera Tristan and Iseult. 1978-79 Travels through America and Europe, visiting museums 1980 Designs and paints the set for Hotspur - a Ballad for Music, music by Gillian Whitehead, text by Fleur Adcock. 1997 1981 Travels to England to assist with touring performances Awarded the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship, lives 2000 in Dunedin. 1984 Works at the Gertrude Street Studios, Melbourne.

1985 Travels to New York for the exhibition NZ/NY.

1986 Travels to Chicago for the exhibition New Zealand Art Today.

1987 Travels to Europe to visit Documenta VIII, Kassel.
Establishes studio in Grey Lynn, Auckland.

1988 Exhibition at Todd Gallery, London.

1991 Tours England and France to visit museums and gardens.

1992 Travels to England for solo exhibition at Clare Hall, Cambridge University.
Spends the rest of 1992 in Britain and accompanies the exhibition

Spends the rest of 1992 in Britain and accompanies the exhibition Distance Looks Our Way to its venues in Spain and Holland.

August 1992–February 1993 works at studio in Whitechapel, London. Two paintings selected for inclusion in British touring exhibition Reclaiming the Madonna, Usher Gallery, Lincoln, England.

Returns to New Zealand.

Works at Exeter Press, SoHo, New York making 28 unique paperpulp images.

Works at Limeworks Lithography Workshops in Christchurch,
New Zealand making lithographs.

Travels to America.

1996 Visiting Artist, Painting Department, Nelson Polytechnic.

Artist's Choice: A Selection from the Collection, curated for Auckland Art
Gallery, December 1996 – February 1997.

Works in New York and visits Britain.

Visits Walter de Maria's *The Lightning Field*, New Mexico; Donald Judd Estate and Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas; *Documenta X*, Kassel; sculpture projects, Munster; Venice Biennale.

Companion of the Order of New Zealand.

Travels to Portugal, Ireland and Britain.

Participates in the exhibition '4' at the Het Koopmanshuis, Leusden.

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS		1974	Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland
Auckland	Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki	1975	Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch
University of Auckland			Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington		1976	Victoria University of Wellington
Victoria University of Wellington		1977	Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland
Creative New Zealand, Wellington			Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin
Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch		1978	Galerie Legard, Wellington
Dunedin Public Art Gallery			Peter Webb Galleries, Auckland
Hocken Library, Dunedin		1979	Galerie Legard, Wellington
Southland Art Gallery, Invercargill		1000	Elva Bett Gallery, Wellington
Manawat	tu Art Gallery, Palmerston North	1980	Peter Webb Galleries, Auckland
Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui		1981	Bosshard Galleries, Dunedin Hocken Library, Dunedin
Waikato Art Museum, Hamilton			Peter Webb Galleries, Auckland
Govett B	rewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth		Dunedin Public Art Gallery
Dowse A	art Gallery, Lower Hutt	1983	Janne Land Gallery, Wellington
Suter Gal	llery, Nelson	1984	New Vision Gallery, Auckland
Ministry of External Relations, Wellington			Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch
		1985	Artist in Focus, Dowse Art Gallery, Lower Hutt
Extensively represented in private collections in New Zealand,			Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland
Australia, America, Britain and Europe, including:			Seasonal - Artist Project, Auckland City Art Gallery
Fletcher Trust Art Collection, Wellington		1986	Centre for Contemporary Art, Hamilton
Bank of New Zealand Collection, Wellington			Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland
Electricorp Collection, Wellington		1987	AFTERnature: a survey – 23 years, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui
Chartwell Collection, Auckland and Hamilton		1367	Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland Forum North Gallery, Whangarei
Clare Hall, Cambridge University		1988	Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland
New Hall, Cambridge University			Todd Gallery, London
		1989	Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland
INDIVIDUAL EVIDENCE		1990	Centre for Contemporary Art, Hamilton
INDIVIDUAL EXHIBITIONS			Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland
1964 1967	Ikon Gallery, Auckland		Todd Gallery, London
	Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland	1991	Nocturne, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland
1970	Holdsworth Galleries, Sydney, Australia Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland	1992	Clare Hall Gallery, Cambridge University, England
1972	Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland	1993	Nomadic Geometries, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland
1973	Dawson's Gallery, Dunedin	1994	Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch
1070	Davison's Gallery, Duriculii		Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland

1995	The seven sorrows of Mary, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland	1977	Invited North Island Artists, Dowse Art Gallery, Lower Hutt
1996	Meditation on the life of my father, Sue Crockford Gallery,	1978	Auckland Artists, Auckland City Art Gallery
1007	Auckland		Benson and Hedges Art Award, Dowse Art Gallery, Lower Hutt Fomison/Clairmont/Albrecht, Elva Bett Gallery, Wellington
1997	Mirrors and lakes, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland		Opera Sets and Small Works, Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery,
1998	Gains and losses, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland		Christchurch
1999	Crossing the divide: a painter makes prints, a survey of graphic work 1964–1999, organised by the Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui	1979	Aspects of Recent New Zealand Painting, Wairarapa Arts Centre, Masterton
	The cicada's song, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland	1981	Paint – 4 Artists, Dowse Art Gallery, Lower Hutt
	Paintings and prints, Art above AVID, Wellington	1982	Seven Painters/The Eighties, co-ordinated and toured by the Sarjeant
2000	15 years - 1984-1999, Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch		Gallery, Wanganui
2001	Blind, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland		New Zealand Drawing 1982, Dunedin Public Art Gallery
		1983	Albrecht/Bambury/Gimblett/Ross, Centre for Contemporary Art, Hamilton
	TO COOLD EVILLUITIONS	1984	Contemporary New Zealand Prints, a travelling exhibition for Japan
1964	ED GROUP EXHIBITIONS Contemporary New Zealand Painting 1964, Auckland City Art Gallery		organised by the National Art Gallery, Wellington for the New Zealand – Japan Exchange programme
1965	New Zealand Painting 1965, Auckland City Art Gallery	1985	NZ/NY, 22 Wooster Gallery, New York
1967	Manawatu Prize, Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North		Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland
1968	New Zealand Woman Painters, Auckland Society of Arts		Prints by Contemporary New Zealand Artists, World Print Council,
1969	10 Years of New Zealand Painting in Auckland, Auckland		San Francisco
1909	City Art Gallery	1986	New Zealand Art Today, Marianne Deson Gallery, Chicago
1970	Art of the Sixties, Royal Tour exhibition, Auckland City Art		Content/Context, National Art Gallery, Wellington
1070	Gallery	1987	Albrecht/Reynolds, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland
1971	New Zealand Young Contemporaries, Auckland City Art Gallery	1988	Early Works, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland (with Richard Killeen, Jeffrey Harris, Gordon Walters)
1972	New Zealand Society of Sculptors and Painters 10th Anniversary exhibition, Osborne Galleries, Remuera	1989	The Cross, curated by John Reynolds, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland A Community of Women, National Art Gallery, Wellington
	First prize, Tokoroa Art Award	1990	Works on Paper, Todd Gallery, London
	Works in Progress, Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland		Albrecht, Apple, Killeen, Mrkusich, Walters, Sue Crockford Gallery,
1973	Twenty Women Artists, Auckland Society of Arts		Auckland
1974	Art '74, Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery, Christchurch	1991	Cross-Currents, Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton
1975	New Zealand's Women Painters, Auckland City Art Gallery		Signature of Place, Govett Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth
1976	Land 1976, Festival exhibition, Canterbury Society of Arts,		Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland
	Christchurch		Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch
	Manawatu Prize for Contemporary Art, Palmerston North	1992	Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland (with Jacqueline Fraser and John
	First prize, Pakuranga Art Award		Reynolds)

1992	Distance Looks Our Way – 10 artists from New Zealand at the Pabellon de los Artes, EXPO '92, Seville. Exhibition toured to Stelling Gallery, Leiden, Holland; Centro Cultural de Conde Duque, Madrid; Centro Cultural de Zamora (Caja de Espana), Zamora; Casa Elizalde, Barcelona; Auckland City Art Gallery; City Gallery, Wellington and Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North	2000	Orange/Blue, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland New Works, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland 25th Anniversary Exhibition, Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch '4' at the Het Koopmanshuis, Leusden Prospect 2001, City Gallery, Wellington, '4', Kunsthal Hof 88, Almalo, and at Beeld and Ambeld Gallery, Enschede, The Netherlands
1993	Reclaiming the Madonna, curated by Usher Gallery, Lincoln, England Academy Women – 100 Years of Women's Art in New	AWARDS	New Ovals, Robert Steele Gallery, New York AND COMMISSIONS
	Zealand, Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington	1972	First Prize, Tokoroa Art Award
1994	Sue Crockford Callery, Auckland	1973	Inaugural Zonta Award
1994	Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland Taking Stock of the '90s, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui Town and Gown, Victoria University Art Collection,	1975	Commission to make felt mural for the foyer of the Auckland University School of Medicine International Women's Year limited edition poster commissioned by the
1005	City Gallery, Wellington		Zonta Club of Auckland
1995	New Space, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland Group Show, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland Christmas Show, Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch Xmas Show, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland New Works, New Directions, Waikato Museum of Art and	1975	Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council grant First prize, Pakuranga Art Award
		1978	Banners for <i>Tristan and Iseult</i> , an opera by Gillian Whitehead for the Auckland Festival Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council grant
	History, Hamilton 20 Years, Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch	1980	Banners for <i>Hotspur – a Ballad for Music</i> by Gillian Whitehead,
1996	Group Exhibition, Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch		commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, New Zealand
	Gallery Artists – Group Show, Sue Crockford Gallery,	1981	Frances Hodgkins Fellowship, University of Otago, Dunedin
	Auckland	1984	Wine label commissioned by Collard Brothers Winery, Auckland
	ECNZ LIVE – Rutherford Trust Collection, City Gallery, Wellington	1985	Women in NZ Society 1884–1985 – a poster commissioned for the exhibition by the Dowse Art Gallery, Lower Hutt
1997	Gallery Artists, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland	1986	Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council travel grant
	Western Lights: Art & Design in West Auckland 1945–1980, Lopdell House Gallery, Titirangi	1988	Designed and executed backdrop for <i>Now is the Hour</i> , a collaboration with choreographer/dancer Douglas Wright
1998	Dream Collectors, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington 1970s – Group Exhibition, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland Leap of Faith – Contemporary New Zealand Art, Govett Brewster Gallery, New Plymouth	1993	Commission for Erika and Robin Congreve, Auckland
		1995	Designed and painted ten individual chairs for Fay, Richwhite, Auckland
		1996	Commission for Grahame Thomson, Auckland
		1997	Commission for Dayle and Chris Mace, Auckland.
1999	The Journey is the Destination, Auckland Art Gallery	1999	Commission <i>Pohutukawa – the cicada's song</i> for the Royal and Sun Alliance Centre, Auckland

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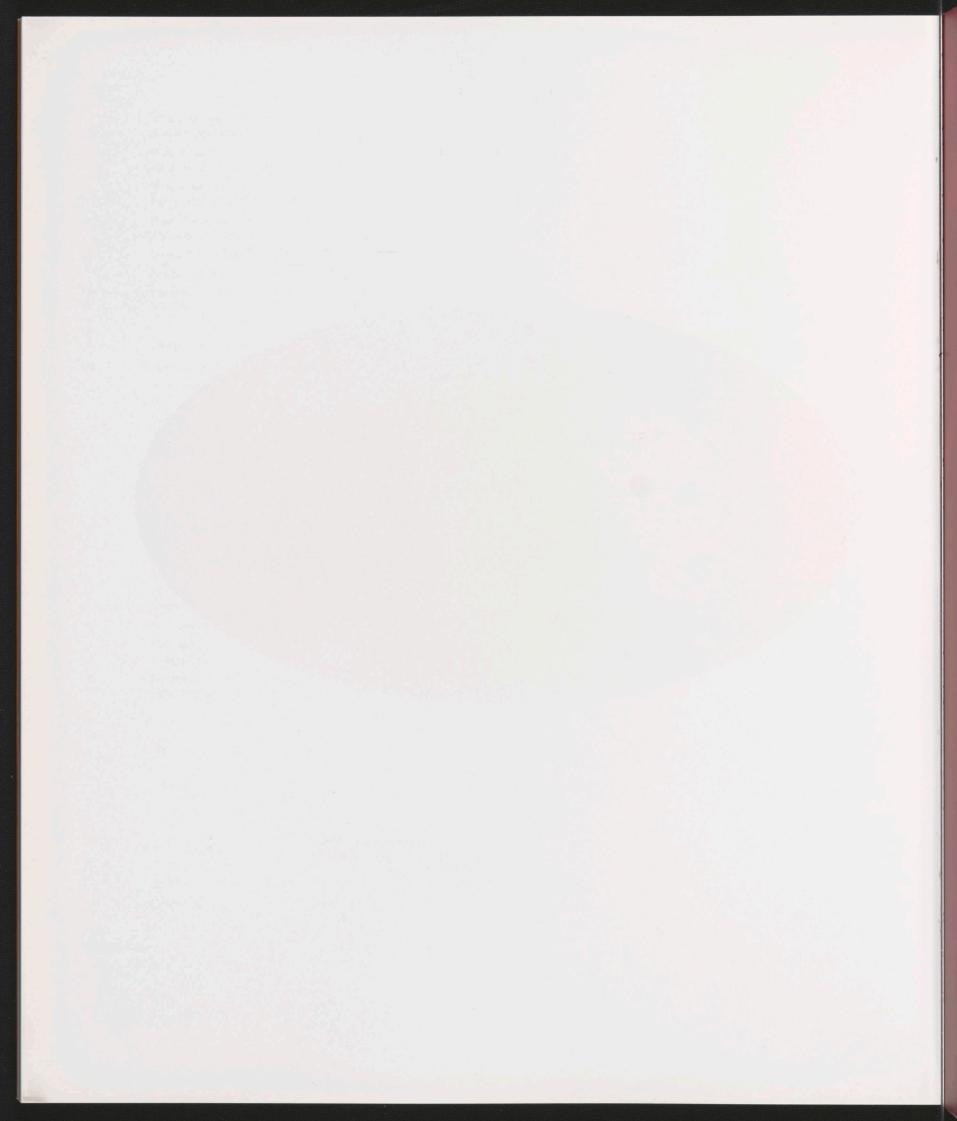
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In memory of my father – winter 1999 acrylic and oil on canvas on oval stretcher 2000 x 3600 private collection









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