

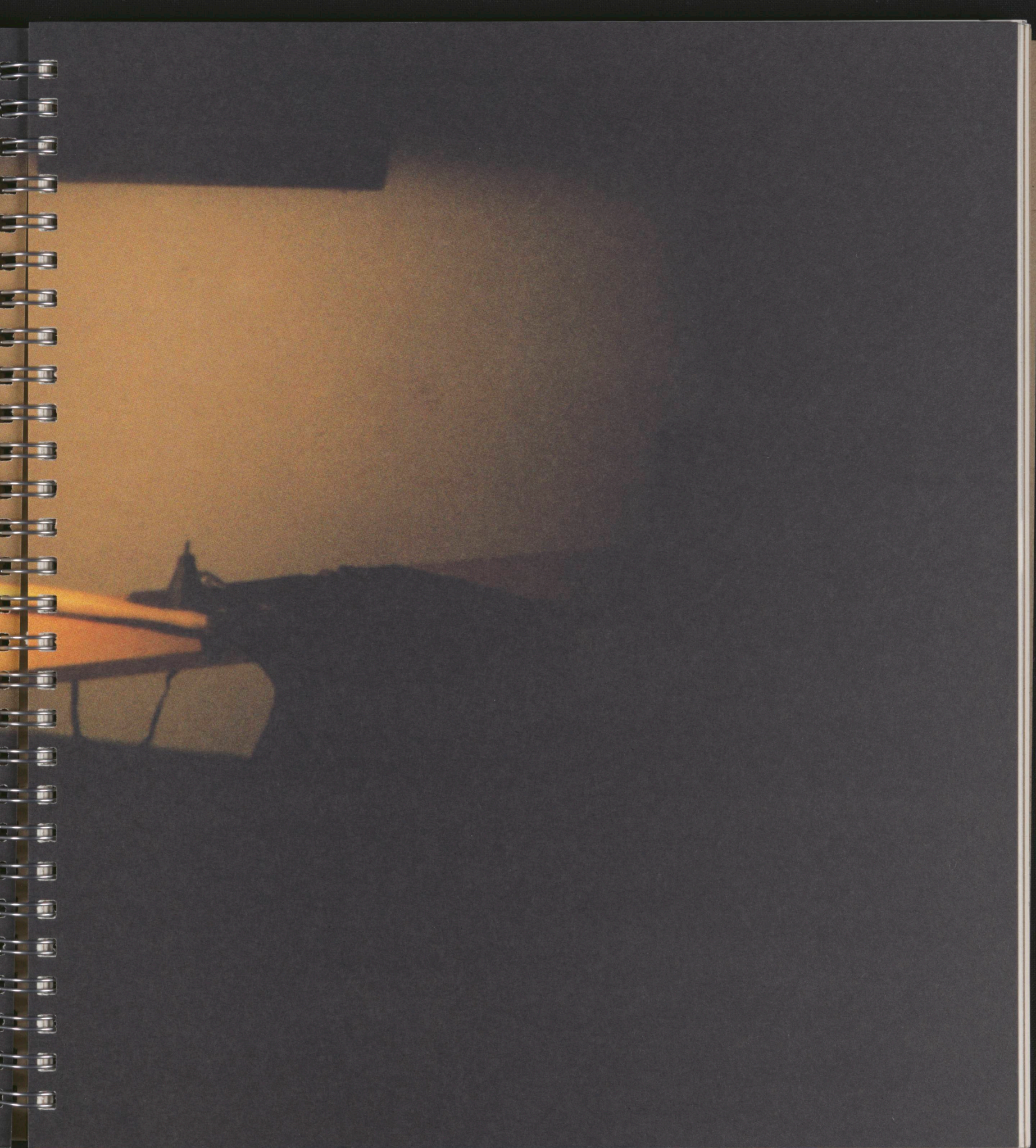
GREER
TWISS **theatre**
WORKSHOP





theatre
**WORK
SHOP**

**GREER
TWISS**



First published on the occasion of *Greer Twiss: Theatre Workshop*
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki 8 March – 2 June 2003

Guest Curator: Allan Smith

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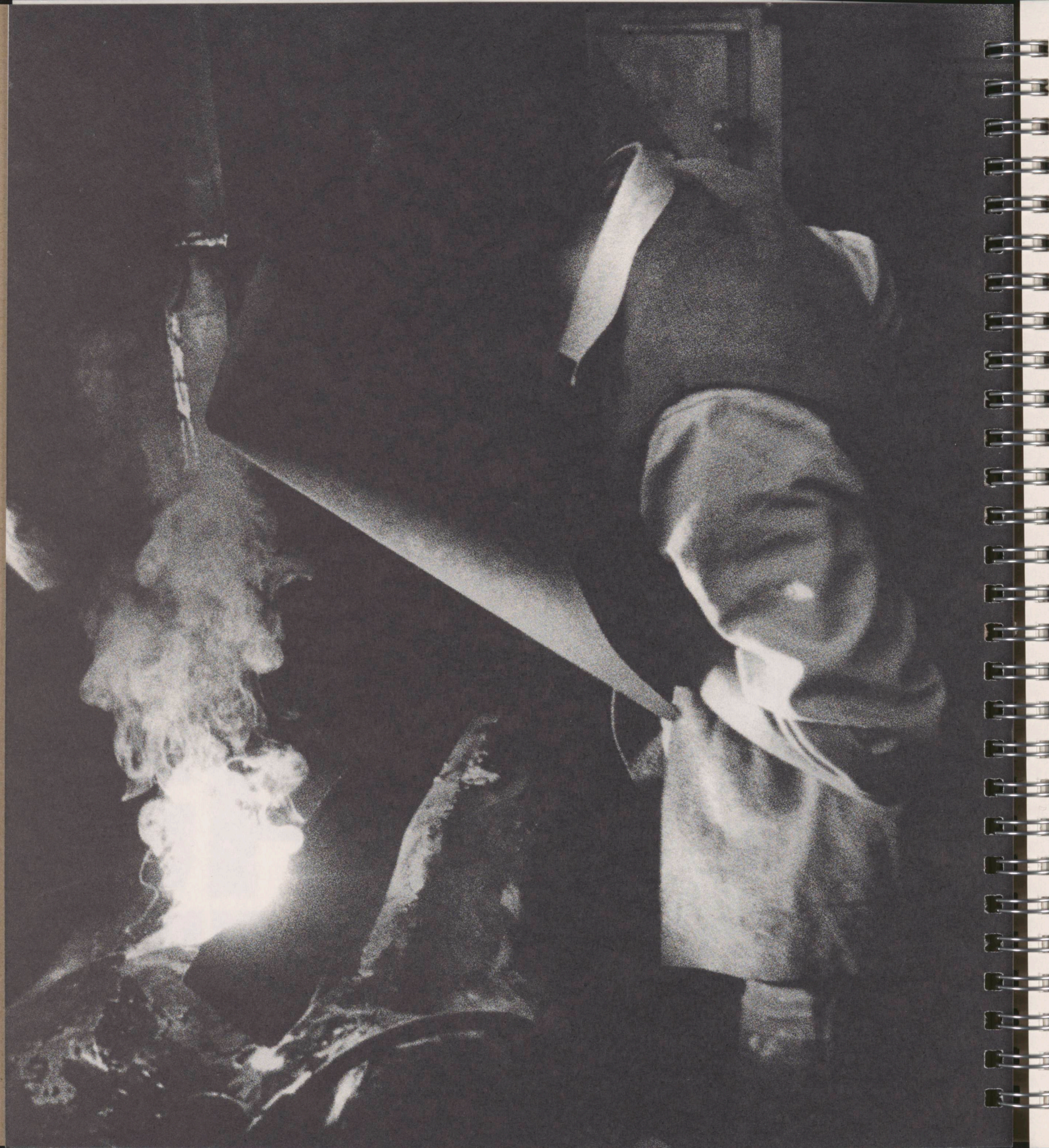
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GREER TWISS

WORK STICK OP theatre



FOREWORD

Foreword

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Foreword

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although my interest in the art of Greer Twiss goes back to my first year as a fine arts student at Elam, it was only when employed as a curator at the Auckland Art Gallery that I explored the idea of an in-depth survey of Greer's career. Since leaving the Gallery to return as a teacher to Elam myself I continued the development of the project as a contractor to the Gallery.

I owe a lot to a small group of people who have made significant contributions to the development of this project. Firstly I want to thank both Greer and Dee Twiss for many hours of discussion and debate; for assistance with material from their files; for numerous meals and considerable patience in responding to my endless emails and phone calls. I have learnt a great deal from them both over the last year or so and look forward to our conversation continuing in the future.

Once again my thanks go to supportive staff at the Gallery: Fiona Wilson for her unfailingly positive contribution to exhibition design; John McIver for the care he has taken with re-photographing a select group of works for the catalogue; Penny Hacking and Julie Koke for keeping track of the exhibition through the registration process; Catherine Hammond, Caroline McBride and Catherine O'Brien for research assistance and advice; Claudine Björklund and Geoff Penrose for their typically enthusiastic attention to promotional matters; Ingrid Ford for attending to conservational details; Roger Taberner for educational initiatives and Kim O'Loughlin for development of the public programme; Ben Curnow for his thorough and perceptive approach to catalogue editing; Louise Pether for her managerial overview; Chris Saines for his recognition that this exhibition was overdue.

Finally I want to acknowledge how much the Gallery and myself owe to the creative team at Inhouse Design for their work on the catalogue. Arch MacDonnell and his staff have, as they often do, gone 'above and beyond' with their time and commitment to this project; it is a privilege to work with them.

Allan Smith

FOREWORD

There is something of the alchemist about Greer Twiss, as he pours, bends and fashions the basest of metals into some of our most precious works of contemporary art. While highly regarded as an artist and teacher, it is the deliciously transformative power of Twiss's imagination that continues to excite such wide affection for his work. Greer Twiss has a deep understanding of how sculptural form behaves in and through space. His human and abstracted forms – sometimes plastically complete and sometimes partial – strut their way across the comic-tragic stage of ordinary life. Exhibition curator, Allan Smith, was right to call this survey Twiss's *Theatre Workshop*, for it is just that: a place of relentless experimentation and refinement, reflecting the gamut of despair and elation which animates the human condition.

While so evidently a sculptor, Twiss manipulates the built and natural environments that contain his works just as the playwright or puppeteer might use the proscenium, wings or backdrop of the theatre. Regardless of their scale or location, his sculptures always seem to imply an unseen order of pictorial cues. Their elements appear, each in relation to the other, as seen through an external frame of reference, situating themselves in some wider *mise en scène* of their own making. And that is one of Twiss's most accomplished qualities – an intuitive yet studied ability to read and to subtly alter the sense of scale in the very spaces where his works make their meaning.

Of course the Gallery's endeavour to gather up and interpret the evidence of such a rich and varied career puts us greatly in the debt of others. I wish to thank first the individual and institutional lenders who responded to our calls so positively. Creative New Zealand have been instrumental in contributing to the research and development of this project, and the Chartwell Trust, through the enthusiasm of Rob Gardiner, has enabled this publication to be grasped in an innovative and apposite way. My thanks also go to the Friends of the Gallery for their continuing support of our major publication programme. And I want to warmly acknowledge project manager Louise Pether for her unswerving dedication to a complex task, Greer's gallerist Jane Sanders for her manifold support, and Dr Robin Woodward for the insights she has brought to Twiss's work in her historically based essay.

As curator and writer, Allan Smith has done a remarkable job in drawing this body of work together, marshalling an extensive chronology and interpreting the life's work of the artist with a keen intelligence. Both he and the Gallery have received exceptional support in this project from Greer Twiss himself and from his wife Dee. It is they whom I thank finally for their profound contribution to the making and the realisation of *Greer Twiss: Theatre Workshop*. Welcome to it.

Chris Saines
Director

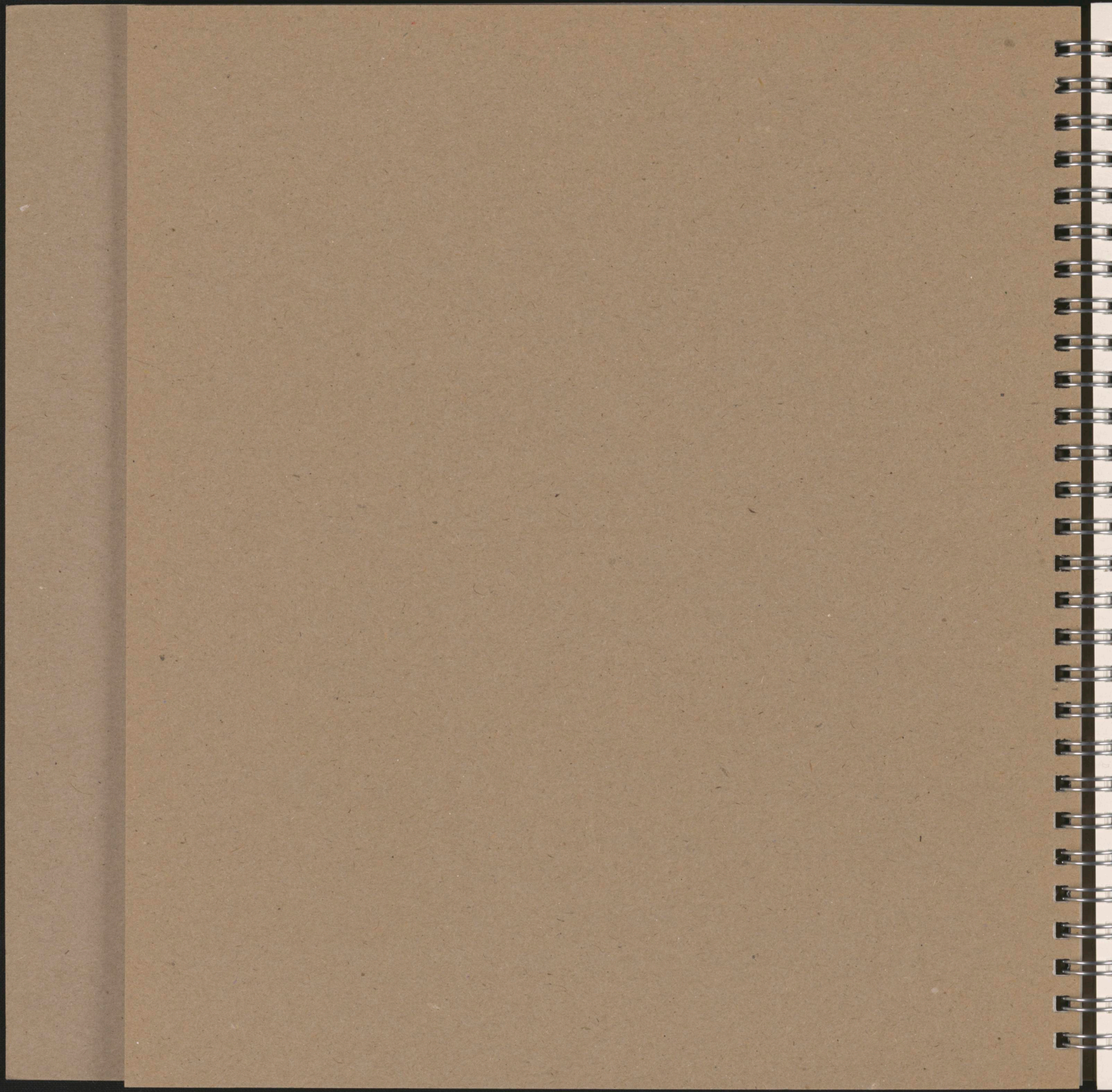
CHRIS SAINES

FORWARD



**TABLETOP
THEATRE**

**ALLAN
SMITH**



TABLETOP THEATRE: HALF AN APPLE AND A PAIR OF SPECTACLES

Along with the table-top, Degas, for one, explicitly projected his scene of action against a bare floor or stage ... To arrange the action upon either table or floor allows it to be seen both as three-dimensional and as a flat silhouette of itself, and it permits it to be seen as in front of or on top of an absolute barrier to sight, a table-top or floor that marks an end to the space of the picture.

Philip Fisher, *Making and effacing art*

Faussone's hands ... illustrated and glossed his tales, imitating, as required, a shovel, a monkey wrench, a hammer. In the stagnant air of the mess hall they designed the elegant catenaries of the suspension bridge and the spires of the derricks, coming to the rescue of speech when it stalled. They had reminded me of distant readings of Darwin, of the artificer's hand that, making tools and bending matter, stirred the human brain from its torpor and still guides and stimulates and draws it ahead, as a dog with a blind master.

Primo Levi, *The wrench*

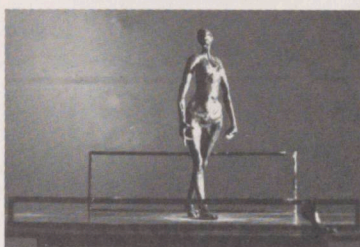
ALLAN SMITH

01 THEATRE OF OBJECTS

In Greer Twiss's collection of clippings pertaining to his youthful activity as a locally renowned puppeteer, there is a photograph of him in his Auckland Grammar School uniform operating the two-handed rig of a marionette. The intensity of concentration is obvious as Twiss manipulates a set of sticks and strings, controlling the jerky actions of a puppet on the stage below, outside the photograph. With a lifetime of making and investigation in between, there are both overt and subtle links between the preoccupations of the young puppeteer and Twiss's most recent exhibition of small-scale soldered struts, ladders, movie cameras, birds, guns and boats, held at the 40 George Street gallery late last year. It became clear to me when I was writing about his 1993 installation *Decoys and Delusions* how, in one way or another, the dexterous manipulation of objects and a language of theatrical staging has always been of central importance in Twiss's art.¹ Twiss's sculptural *œuvre* has developed as an ongoing narrative of theatrical contrivances, as a series of skillfully fabricated and self-consciously staged events. Subject to this theatrically shaded aesthetic, elements drawn from an everyday world of people and things are made strange, undergoing various forms of disassembly, reconstruction and re-presentation as elegantly formal set-pieces.

A persistent feature of Twiss's practice has been the devoted attention he has paid to the spatial deployment of figural components and objects on a stage-like platform, plane or base-plate. Twiss's characteristic method for setting things out has most very often involved a tense play between spatial diagramming and the corporeal reciprocities of touch; between the optical organisation of the ensemble and the density of its physical traits. Severed hands and sections of bronze fingers point and push at key places in the work, enacting a discontinuous grammar of touch within a rationalized geometrical space. The linearity of tilted struts, angled brackets, ropes and diagonal lines of sight is constantly opposed to cast or modelled objects and to the emphatic materiality of lead, bronze or steel. Implements and devices such as spectacles, rulers and string-lines are presented as highly tactile objects that invite our prehensile grasp, as if to remind us that such aids for seeing and measuring the world are prosthetic tools which extend the capability of the body in the physical world. Twiss's groups of objects or partial objects always appear as if they have just been moved into their current configuration to test out their dynamic interaction. They trigger the impulse to pick them up, handle, inspect and rearrange them, as we would the scaled-down props of a set designer's model. The sense that we could almost remake, rearrange or go to work on the components in Twiss's sculptures is heightened by the variations on the language of artisanal effects he has played out over the years, in parallel with his adoption of varying spatial formats.

Twiss's attention to the solutions of joining and surface-finishing required by different materials is that of an artist whose models are machine-shop specialists,

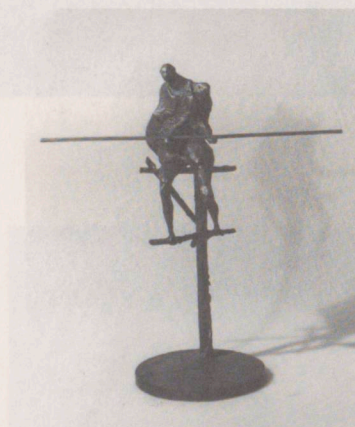


Ladder for an Albatross 2002
Shift 3 (dancer) 1972

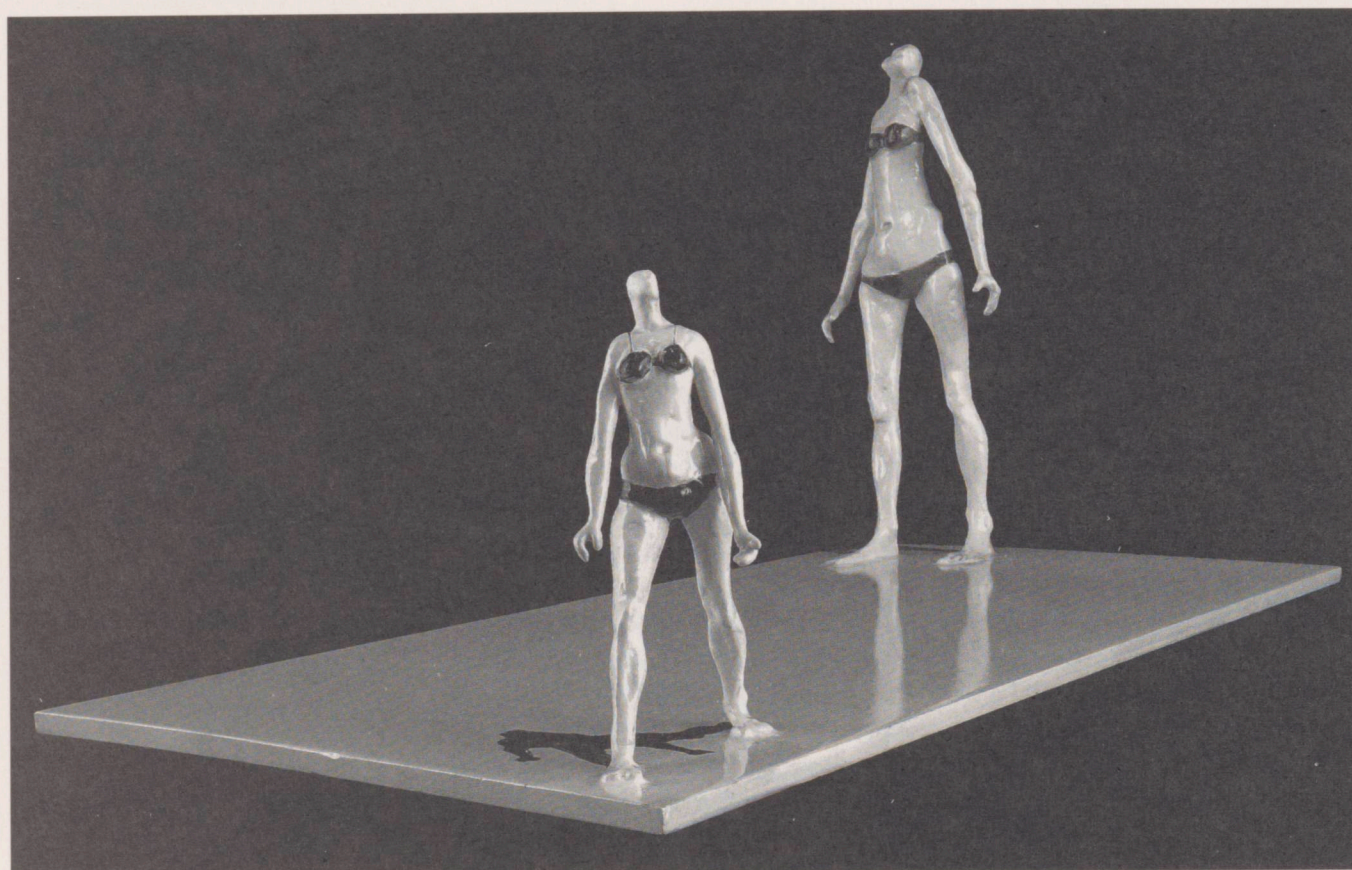
carpenters, metalworkers or pragmatic repairmen as much as other artists. His chosen materials and predominantly oily-grey, black and silver colour schemes (a number of late 1960s and 1970s pieces notwithstanding) have kept the aesthetic tenor of his work close to the worlds of the light-industrial factory floor and the metal workshop. However, his use of rolls of lead sheet, pre-cut steel plate, sections of tread-plate, industrial fastenings and sheets of galvanized steel can be contrasted to the brute literalist use that American artists like Robert Morris and Richard Serra made of such materials in Minimal art. No matter how heavy and resistant the material – be it lengths of square-section steel or dull grey lead – Twiss always introduces an elegant lightening of its inert physicality through deft applications of the artisanal touch or gesture, even when he is not fashioning resemblances from it. By accentuating the manual processes of small-scale workshop techniques, such as cutting with snips or guillotine, folding, grinding, soldering and welding, staining, hand-painting, scouring and filing, Twiss insinuates the mark of the private craftsman into the industrial matrix of mechanization and abstraction.

Tools have always held a special fascination for Twiss, because they are, as he puts it, 'objects that humans had been dealing with'.² He has a collection of tools, some of which belonged to his father, a cabinet-maker and builder; he still has a saw which his grandfather sawed wood with. The megaphone on the table of his 1989 work *Anonymous Builder: A Renaissance Dreamer*³ is based on one that has been in the family since it was used on a ship of the line in Nelson's fleet. As a child Twiss was always playing in his parents' workshops and took a short cut to primary school through the cluttered yard of Auckland sculptor Richard Gross, whose bronze *Athlete* (1936) sits atop a gate of the Domain. Not only does Twiss concern himself with variations on the theme of artisanal processes, but often in his art he also turns the tools of his trade into virtual fetish-objects. Hand tools he has modelled or used as 'found objects' in his work include: a ball-peen hammer, claw hammer, trowels, dividers, pocket knives, saw-horses, soldering iron, drill, chisel, wooden plaster floats, steel rules, a wooden folding ruler, axes, brooms, telescope, binoculars, G-clamps and carry-straps.

For any artist who makes physical objects and retains intimate physical control, rather than merely creative jurisdiction over their production, the studio workshop with its equipment is obviously of central importance, as both an actual locale and an imaginary plenum. Even so, only a few artists incorporate or index the language of the workshop in their finished work in the way that Twiss has done repeatedly during his career. Twiss's studio workshop serves as a storehouse, a properties room, and a clearing-house for ideas in the making. It is both a densely laden physical site and an originary psychic space. This double orientation is characteristic of Twiss's sculpture, only with changing emphases at different junctures in his career: it pulls toward the robust, the literally physical and the objectively present, and it withdraws into a complex interiority.



Acrobat 1963
Welders 1959



Frozen Frame 1968

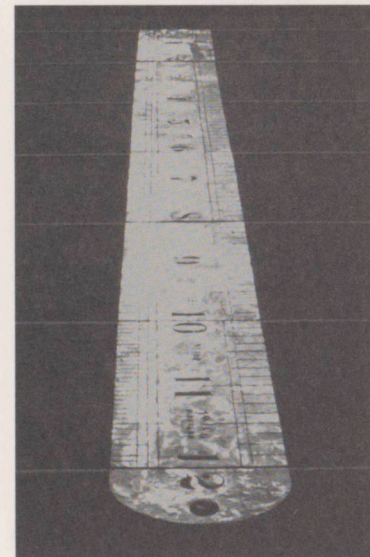
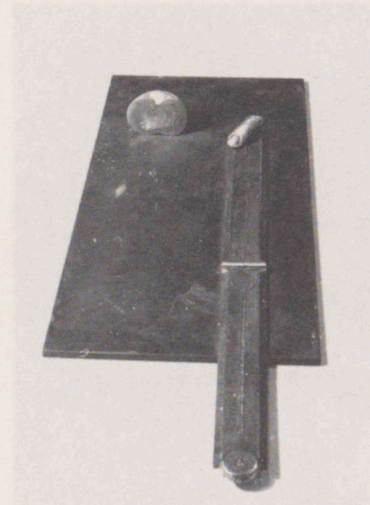
02 THE TABLE AND THE MISE EN SCÈNE

The stage is a type of table, the table a type of stage. A dining table, a writer's desk, a painter's trolley, a metal shop's workbench, a computer workstation, are all supported or propped-up surfaces on which one gathers, sorts, stacks and works on things and sets things out for special attention. Each type of tabletop has its formalities, its typical organization, layout and generic patterns of use that we adhere to or depart from as need dictates. We stage so many aspects of our lives of thinking, making, eating and presentation on tables of one sort or another. There is something fundamental about the familiarity and proximity of tables.

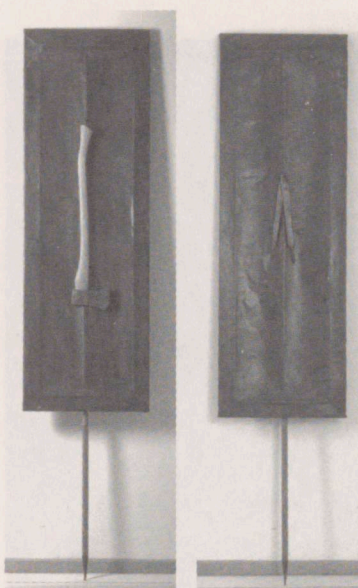
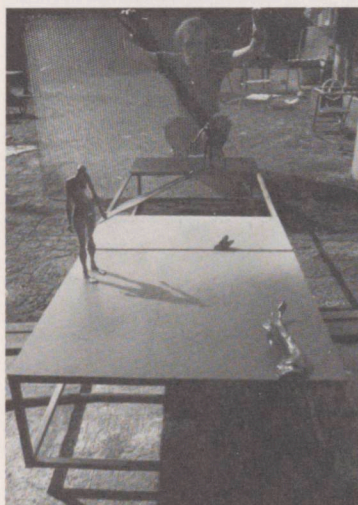
The depiction and use of tables or table-like surfaces in modern art has a significant history in itself. In an intriguing and sustained discussion of the place of the table within modernism, Philip Fisher explains how the table functions as 'a human measure' because of its relation to 'the radius of the will'. That is, the fabrication of a primary object like a table, the sort of uses it is put to, and its presentation of what lies within arm's reach, gives it status as a preserver of the basic integrity and connectedness of human physical activities in a special way. 'The table, and with it the entire world of traditional craft objects, was uniquely adjusted to the radius of the individual will in a way that the George Washington Bridge or a computer chip is not', says Fisher.⁴

Representing the space of activity for the 'radius of the will' and 'the artisanal working space of hand and eye', in modern painting the tabletop gradually displaced the Albertian paradigm of the painting as a 'window' to look through. In modernist sculpture, a similar shift of orientation occurred when artists began to abandon the plinth and spread works laterally across the gallery floor, treating the floor as an extended surface for staging events and setting things out. In both sculpture and painting, a traditional hierarchy of vertically oriented composition was thus supplanted by a concept of horizontal aggregation and distribution. Centrally important to this paradigm shift is the implicit primacy given to the physicality of touch and manual activity over the merely optical; the 'seeing' is dependent on the 'setting out'. Twiss's work, while asserting a primacy of touch over disembodied vision, is continually caught up in a productive dialectic between sight and manual intervention. The artist has assembled numerous works as though their elements were deployed on some kind of tabletop. Twiss's surrogate or actual tables, with their objects arrayed in varying states of elliptical incompleteness, reference the active benchtops of the studio workshop, the designer's draughting table or the set designer's drawing board, where work on objects or diagrams proceeds in stages, with a selection of appropriate tools to hand.

Although Twiss's figure sculptures from 1958 up to 1965 do not include tables as such, they are predominantly of an intimate scale which makes them at home on a table or a book shelf. Even in these early works, the attention to



Measure 1974
12 x 6 1974 (detail)



a figure's placement on a base or as an object in relation to a surrounding space begins to take hold. For Twiss it was important that the figures function as things in reach; as a newspaper reviewer claimed in 1964, 'Twiss believes that indoor sculpture should be small enough to be picked up and handled readily'.⁵ Also important to many of these early works is Twiss's use of a fragmented structural element to locate the figures and their frozen movement in space, providing a highly abbreviated *mise en scène*. The wire and pole of the *Acrobat* (1963), the hurdle frame of *Hurdler* (1964), the bar and stand of *Jump* (1965), and the scaffolding of the *Welders* (1959) all serve to frame the figures and to construct a small, tightly defined arena in which they act. In the *Runners* series of 1964-65, Twiss sometimes developed the idea of movement within carefully marked out boundaries by using long strip-bases, analogous to running lanes, thus increasing the sense of directionality and pressure within a demarcated zone.

In the *Frozen Frame* series of 1967-70, variously reclining figures, partial or complete, lie or sit on their rectangular ground planes, occasionally offset by small vertical poles acting as positional markers. Adjustments of location were felt to be crucial. When the bathers had their shadows painted on the base-plate, or were sliced through, parallel to the side of the base, the figures appeared as tiny, manipulable objects which had been positioned to accentuate the surface and edges of the base and the tensions of the unoccupied, in-between spaces of the ensemble. Some of the groups of *Frozen Frame* figures were installed on low, table-like bases. But the most obviously table-type compositions were the 1970 works *Frame of Reference 1* and *Frame of Reference 2*. Each used a long table, made from a welded one-inch square-section steel framework, with segmented sheet metal tops – the first like a waist-high lunch room or office table, the second like a long, low coffee-table. In the second work, one segment of the tabletop had been removed, so that a cut-out shadow was all that crossed the gap between the divided sections; the table opened up to space below it, as would a stage with a trapdoor.

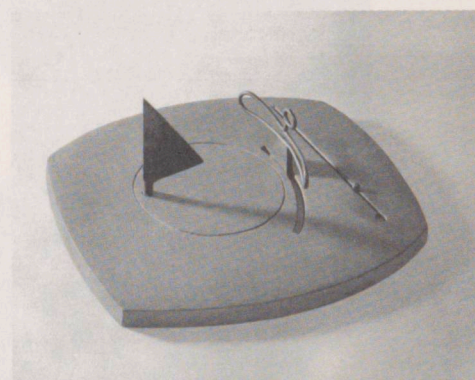
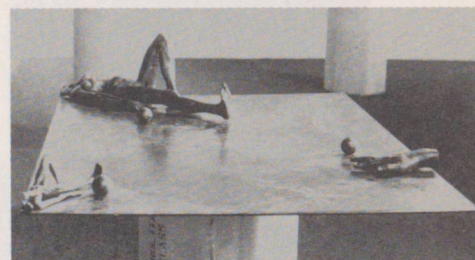
Between 1972 and 1975, in his *Intersections* and *Of Lead Lines and Links* series, Twiss produced some of his most intense explorations of the tabletop paradigm with cast bronze items on steel sheet. The following works will suffice as examples: *Now* (1972), *Coil* (1972), *Warp 2* (1972), *VW Split* (1974), and *Sight Line* (1974).

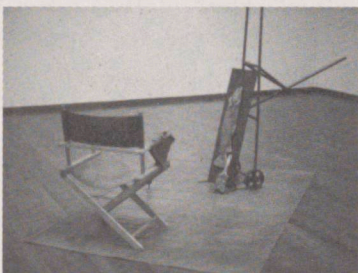
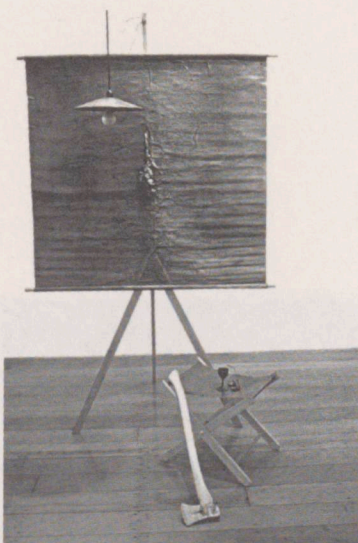
The contents of these works are as follows: (1) Two cast hands, from different models, are opposed at either end of a flat steel plate, which has been finished with a grinder; they are like hands on a card-table waiting for the deal, the space between them is charged. (2) A cast hand clasps a coil of real, thick rope resting on a square of tread-plate, sometimes known as footplate. The cross-hatched steel plate is both a propped up, displaced section of the floor and, because of the relaxed angle of the hand, it is also a type of table surface.

(3) A cast model motorbike, a female body minus an arm and a head and a leg cut off above the knee, all of a different scale, all bronze, are dispersed on a metal plate with a sphere whose scale remains unverifiable without further information. (4) A model VW cast in bronze is cut in two, the alignments of its separated sections marked by the taut V of a string-line pinned to the steel base by a brass nail, a severed bronze digit and the finger of a cast hand cut off at the edge of the base-plate. (5) An apple cut in half and half a pair of spectacles, sliced through, we are to believe, by a laser-like optical vector, and left to roll on a large flat plate.

The best of Twiss's steel-plate works operate as compressed perceptual diagrams containing potent psychological tensions. These tightly constructed set-pieces configure a matrix of tensions between self-conscious acts of seeing and manipulating objects in a visual field. Twiss conceived of them as demonstrating conundrums and incompatibilities of viewpoint, conflicting vantage points, ambiguities of scale and the provocative cues provided by incomplete information. In the 1970s particularly, the artist was greatly taken with analyses of vision being undertaken by perceptual psychologists.⁶ Twiss talks about the way the incomplete bodies or segments of hands serve to provoke speculation about the complete body, which remains unseen. This tension between a part and its absent source, between a sectional detail and an invisible remainder, may also be suggestive of deeper psychological anxieties. The strangely disjunctive components and dismembered body parts, incommensurable in scale, suggest a game in progress wherein primary psychic trauma is domesticated through play.

This combination of an investigative sense of playful experiment and a jarring psychology of disjunction puts these works in a lineage coming out of Giacometti's early tabletop pieces. Rosalind Krauss has said that what Giacometti had invented with his early works such as *No More Play* (1933) and *Man, Woman and Child* (c. 1931) was the 'sculpture-as-board-game'.⁷ Although Twiss's works have no literally moveable parts, there is a sense that the horizontal ensemble is to be looked at from above and mentally engaged from all four sides, as we would a pool table, for example, with the game in progress and much at stake. When discussing these works and my response to what I perceive to be their mapping of a psychologically weighted and visually constricted space, Twiss reminded me of Picasso's comparison of the space of a painting to the arena after a bull-fight. Being an accumulation of past actions, the work of art displays evidential remains, like the patches of blood and kicked-up sand in the arena, as traces of a complex event. Perhaps, in the end, the most appropriate model for these tables on which strange dissections occur is the infamous Surrealist one evoked by Lautréamont's image of 'the chance encounter on an operating table of a sewing machine and an umbrella'.





Other works in which tables or improvised tabletops play a central role include *Vacation 1 Burnout* (1986), *Anonymous Builder: A Renaissance Dreamer* (1989), and the installation *Decoys and Delusions* (1993). The floor-based installation *Vacation 1* is part of a group of works employing outdoor holiday furniture such as folding canvas stools, deck-chairs and tents, and generic objects like wineglasses, lampshades and brooms, assembled on thin lead tarpaulins or groundsheets. The lead sheets also resemble tablecloths – soft tables, in other words – spread out for a picnic, or mats on the ground in a marketplace for displaying wares. They temporarily establish a spatial territory semi-independent from their surroundings for the performance of a particular activity. (I am also put in mind of a very Twissian shot from Dziga Vertov's film *The Man with a Movie Camera*, 1929, showing an itinerant conjurer's hands hovering on the edge of a cloth spread on the ground for the performance of the cups and balls mystery.) *Vacation 1* has a whiff of the crime scene about it, too: a site in which spacious summer holiday banality is frozen into strangeness through the alien presence of the broken figurine and the broom, which may well have swept up other circumstantial evidence.

The *Anonymous Builder* was partly constructed to provide an archetypal wearer for an artisan's apron. In the preceding year Twiss had made several lead aprons with pockets containing objects such as rolls of paper, paper darts, model steps, templates, squares and duck decoys – all clues to artisanal practice and perceptual gaming. One such apron is draped over the missile in *Dreaming of S.A.M.* and contains a mask. Twiss wanted the figure to acknowledge the hundreds of unknown skilled craftsmen who physically constructed the Renaissance temples and palaces, converting into stone the paper dreams of their architects. He also intended this figure to stand in as surrogate for himself as creative director and maker of the 1990 exhibition in which it was first shown. In a sense though, the table the builder sits at is the real subject of the work: it is the table and what it represents in terms of a working space and a wider culture of manual construction that makes the role of the artisan possible; the table dreams the builder into being. The model of the large *Act One Scene One*, a theatre of memory assembled from stage props of dome, tower, steps and hill, sits in front of the builder as the ideal object made on a studio table. The theatrical model is a miniature world, fashioned by a Robinson Crusoe-like designer at a table that is itself like an island where one is free to order, direct and build, making, to quote Fisher again, a 'world out of the seeds and parts of a prior world from which only fragments have been recovered'.⁸

In *Decoys and Delusions*, the artist constructed an expansive and meandering fantasy, merging studio and garage imagery, theatre flats and props, with over-size toys all made from lead and galvanized sheet steel. The work includes two long tables each with a row of bowler hats and two chairs co-opted as tables.

Show and Tell 1984

Vacation 2 Gone Fishing 1984 Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Anonymous Builder: A Renaissance Dreamer 1989 (detail)





Twiss's adaptation of the chair makes me think of Picasso's pioneering collage *Still-Life with Chair-Caning* (1912) which indicates, through an ambiguous series of semiotic displacements, a chair being used as a small café table or domestic side-table, or at least a chair being referenced by the covering on a table. I am also reminded of the way Italian artist Daniel Spoerri fixed a narrow plank-table to a chair: attached to the plank were plates, cups, tins and other mealtime remains, thus constructing a sectional slice of time spent with objects. Putting things on tables, or improvised 'tables' such as saw-horses or chairs, as Twiss says, gives objects a sense of scale that a plinth does not provide. Supports such as saw-horses moreover bring with them an associated work ethic, so the objects retain a personal, non-precious valency that the anonymous formality of art gallery pedestals would erase.

03 'TOUCHING IS BELIEVING, NOT SEEING'

In a slide talk given to the New Zealand Society of Sculptors, Painters and Associates in 1986, Greer Twiss sought to differentiate the primary concerns of sculptors from those which preoccupied painters.⁹ Twiss opposed the 'real time, real space' resources of the sculptor to the unreality and surface-based illusions of painting. He then declared: 'Touching is believing, not seeing'. Behind Twiss's aphorism lies the popular adage that 'seeing is believing' and the biblical account of Doubting Thomas, who was sceptical of reports concerning the resurrection of Jesus and wanted evidence he could both see and touch.¹⁰ Twiss's art practice is predicated on continual intersections and close negotiations between the tactile and the optical, and, as we shall see, upon a number of productive substitutions between sculpture and painting.

Twiss's bronze *Touch* (1972) is cast directly from life. The act of touching, enacted by a hand on a shoulder, and doubled by the impress of a bikini strap on the shoulder, has been cut away from the bodies of the two participants. The two-part amalgam of hand and shoulder suggests a reciprocity of touching, a metonymical freezing of the two-way relation between subject and object, between the protagonist touching and the world touching back. Twiss's frequent use of cast hands engaged in pressing, holding or tentatively touching things has a historical link with Cézanne's making of paintings to answer the density of the world's simultaneous closeness to and distance from us, through an affectionately dense matrix of touches and readjustments of touch. Much closer to his generation, and a likely influence on Twiss, is Jasper Johns, who used cast body parts and hand and object imprints on his painted surfaces. Among the major theoretical influences on artists working in the late 1960s and early 1970s, reflected in the art theory discussions that Twiss helped lead in the Elam sculpture department during these years, was phenomenology. One aim of phenomenological discussion was to increase awareness of the body in space



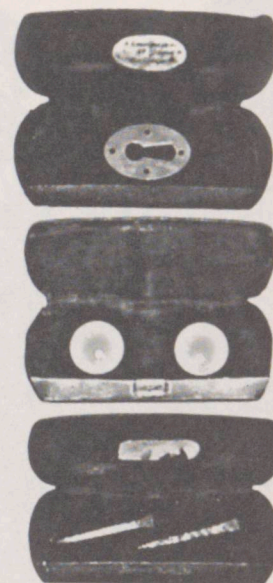
Footplate 1974 Private collection, Auckland
Now 1972
Touch 1972

as caught-up in a related world of things and therefore unable to be abstracted from what Maurice Merleau-Ponty called its 'communion' or 'coition' with the world: 'Our body is both an object among objects and that which sees and touches them'.¹¹

The 1974 work *Full Stop Clamp* enacts a particularly intense and anxious relationship between seeing the world and getting a physical grip on it. A small G-clamp has been screwed down on a bronze cast of a pair of spectacles, which had belonged to the artist's father. The work was made shortly after the father's death and exists as a type of relic signifying absence, transposed into the concentrated physical actions of placement and applied pressure. As part of his deceased father's effects, the spectacles made Twiss think of all the traffic of images and information which had passed through these lenses but had now been stopped.¹² *Full Stop Clamp* is part of a group of works, including *Full Stop Knot* and *Full Stop Sight*, which the artist made with a job lot of steel discs the size of bread-and-butter plates passed onto him by a metal-shop. To Twiss the discs were like full stops, abrupt punctuation marks in a grammar of objects. *Full Stop Sight* has a pair of spectacles folded flat, cast in lead and attached to its plate with a rope staple; again Twiss has turned to the concept of blocked, or arrested vision. Twiss has produced another meditation on the constriction and extinction of eyesight with a suite of three old spectacles cases, although this work has never been publicly exhibited. The first case contains a small brass keyhole, the second two flat silver buttons, and the third two small spikes. The three cases offer a choice between an uncomfortable narrowing of vision, the opacity of eyes blind for life, and the pain of punctured eyeballs.

The title of Twiss's major series for 1976, *Barriers and Sight Screens*, promises further investigation of seeing imbricated in difficult relationships with physicality – of seeing as a stop/start, on/off, speed-up/slow-down sort of experience. It is worth quoting Twiss's 1986 slide lecture commentary again as he explains how he thought about this series. 'I was interested in the idea of stoppages, of stopping things happening. So these were barriers, based on just ordinary road barriers, except I wanted to shift them out of that context in some way ... I saw these as physical barriers; I thought they were barriers that also were barriers to seeing, like sight screens on a cricket field are barriers to see things against. And there are other barriers that are put up, like trig stations, you know, trig things on top of hills. They put up a plate for you to sight against. You can't see beyond them.'¹³

Barrier 1 sits low to the floor, its long, horizontal and pivoted diagonal lengths of rectangular-section steel providing an immovable obstacle at shin-height and knee-level. In *Sight Screen* (1976) and *Trig* (1976), stubby steel bracing supports thick plates of steel, cast bronze rags inflect the implacable rigidity of the welded steel assemblage. Sculptures in the *Barriers and Sight Screens* series and the *Site/Sight* series which followed, all deliver a high



Spectacles cases, collection of the artist
Full Stop Sight 1974



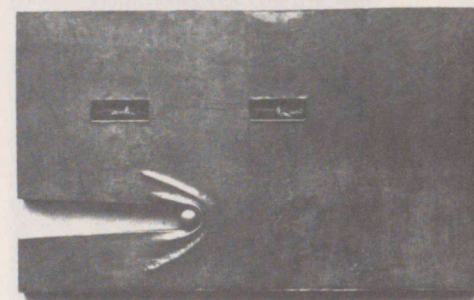
Coil 1972

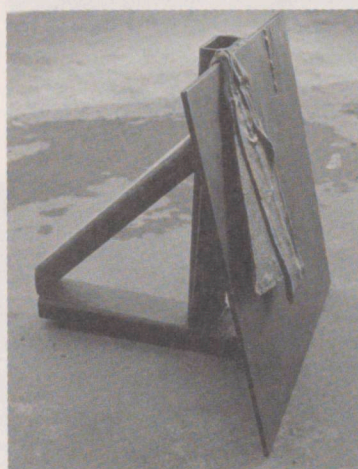
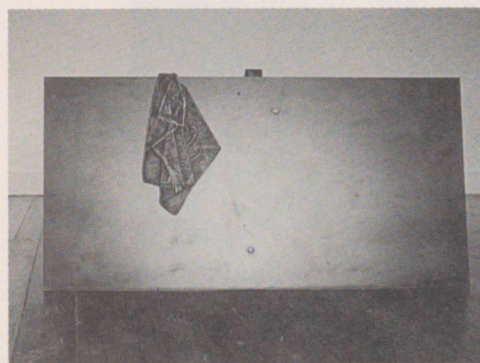
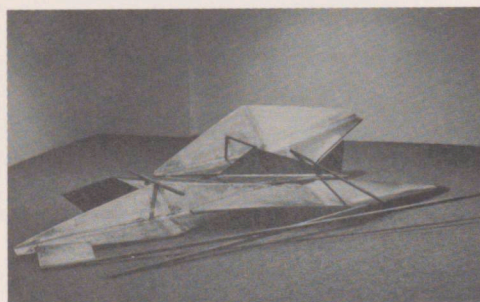
degree of optical appeal because of the diagrammatic and spatial intrigue of their criss-crossing and skewed struts or leaning and propped sheets of steel. The sturdiness of the lengths of steel and the brutal opacity of the metal sheet, however, resist this optical mobility. The syncopated accenting of the works with various details such as tabs, lugs, cast rags and pieces of rope not only increases the frequency of optical events but also serves to intensify the staccato, disruptive nature of the process of looking which the sculpture ensnare us in.

Twiss's variations on the theme of visual and physical barriers seem tailor-made for what has alternatively been called 'sculpture-as-obstacle' and 'blockaded space'.¹⁴ Both James Hall and Philip Fisher have discussed the way the modernist sculptural object or installation's occupation of space has been assertively physical and disruptive. This has developed as a recurring ingredient in modern and contemporary art to the extent that art which signals a resistant and obstructive demeanour in either a literal sense (either physically or optically) or in an interpretative sense, has been regarded as more worthy of our serious regard. Such art requires greater effort to overcome its contradictory overtures to the viewer of defiant 'come on' and indifferent alienation; this effort is the viewer's reward. Examples of paintings and wall-based works which are deliberately blocked interpretatively, to the point of triggering our recoil from what is a virtually autistic, inertial object, would be Jasper Johns' paintings from the late 1950s and early 1960s and the wood, rope and lead constructions of Robert Morris from the early 1960s. Both Fisher and Hall take Anthony Caro's work of the 1960s and 70s as exemplary of the literal-impedimental school, particularly through Caro's 'decisive occupation of floor space'.¹⁵ Whereas Twiss's patinated steel plates with epigrammatic attachments (such as *Link* and *Push Line* from 1974) put me in mind of Johns and Morris, when Fisher talks of the willful 'danger, sharpness, resistance, and frustration'¹⁶ that Caro built into his sculpture I am reminded of the experience of walking around and in between a dozen of Twiss's *Site/Sight Works* assemblages in the Barry Lett Gallery in 1977. I still recall an irresistible impulse to become engaged with the tense junctions and disjunctions of these crossed, splayed and cantilevered lengths of steel, but also the passive-aggression of their low-slung projections and jutting angularity.

04 SEEING SHADOWS

Another example of the occluded vision thematic, from a decade and a half later, is the wedge-shaped, lead-covered block which Twiss's anonymous Renaissance builder has across his eyes. Twiss explains this covering of the eyes as merely guaranteeing the builder's anonymity. But surely there is more at stake. Any form of blanking out the eyes, whether with blindfolds, black rectangles or pixellated blurring, triggers a disconcerting sense of stalled





exchange between viewer and viewed, an interruption of the empathy effect.¹⁷ Could the anonymity that this builder enjoys be akin to the anonymity Twiss has said he valued as a puppeteer, acting unseen by the audience but manipulating events on the stage within their field of vision – an animated body in one location and a directing intelligence in another? A further implication of this masked figure is perhaps that restriction of one faculty is the cost of superiority in another. In this case, loss of external sight may promise an enhancement of internal vision; the small hot air balloon, a sign of imaginative drift, which sprouts from the back of the builder's head, would support this reading. The history of art is full of images that couple a condition of blindness with a renewed and more urgent sense of touch; supposedly, an enhanced sense of touch would be equally desirable for a maker of things. Jacques Derrida, who has curated an exhibition of such imagery, writes: 'the *mise en scène* of the blind is always inscribed in a theatre or theory of the hands'.¹⁸

At the very least, Twiss's blind 'maker' seems to be an advocate for a renewed application of tactile intelligence to our variously scaled world-making endeavours. It is telling that Twiss chose a Renaissance mannequin to stage an implicit critique of different forms of perception. It was in the Renaissance, at the dawn of modernity, that all forms of visual representational practices – most importantly the artifice of linear perspective – were established according to geometrical and mathematical principles. In his brief historical look at architecture's relationship to the senses, Juhani Pallasmaa summarises what this meant for the faculty of touch: 'During the Renaissance the five senses were understood to form a hierarchical system from the highest sense of vision down to touch ... The invention of perspectival representation made the eye the centre-point of the perceptual world as well as of the concept of the self. Perspectival representation itself turned into a symbolic form, one that not only describes but also conditions perception.'¹⁹

Although a hot air balloon growing from the head of a blinded artisan is quite plausibly about imagination, or flights of fancy, I would like to suggest that Twiss's intermittent fixation on the motifs of the hot air balloon and the airship has much to do with meditations on the reduction of confidence in optical prowess. Most of Twiss's balloons are lead, which popular wisdom tells us always go down; many of them are already collapsed, deflated; one is suspended from heavy chains. Some look like empty shells, or curious and alien devices. One of the key novelties of early balloon flights from Montgolfier to Nadar was the dramatic expansion of the visual field they offered, as map-like patchworks of town and countryside came into view. Yet what takes over all of Twiss's balloons in the end is inertia: the melancholic weight of materiality triumphs as they succumb to gravitational slump. The balloons trigger rather morbid reveries of the survival of mass, weight and density over images of free-floating opticality.

Anthony Caro Cool Deck 1970-71

Barrier 1 1976

Sight Screen 1 1976

Small Sight Screen 1976

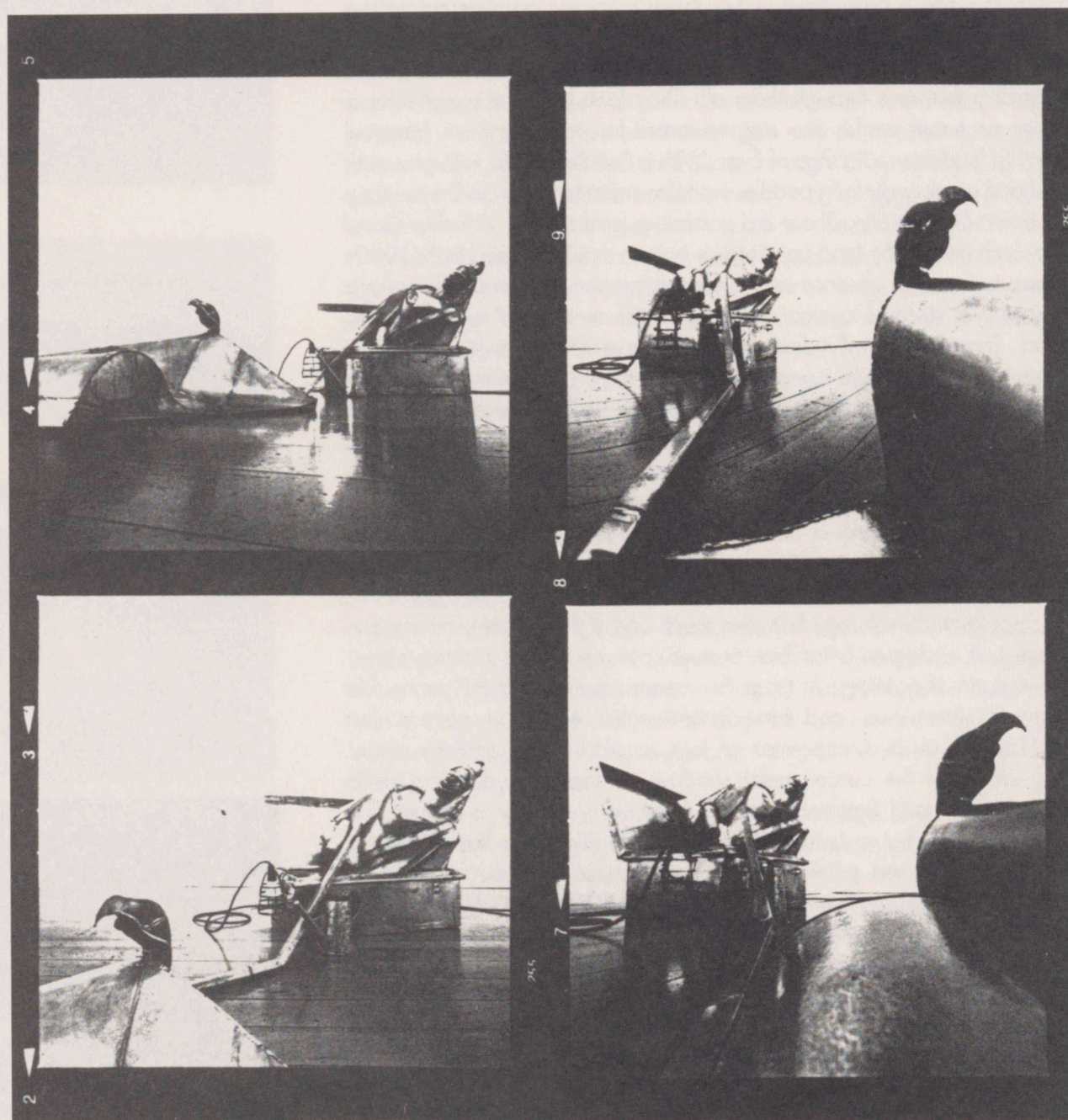
The *Anonymous Builder* is thus part of a melancholic body of work, including the balloons and airships from the late 1980s and early 1990s. The emotional tenor of these works is determined by two things primarily: the charcoal tonings and dingy silver bloom of their lead sheathing and soldered sutures, and the ironic vein of abandonment, temporal displacement and disenfranchised monumentality that runs through them all. They look like works made for a twilight or nocturnal world; like stage furniture for some forsaken historical tragedy. The lead-skinned canoe of *Even With a Paddle* (1988) with gas mask attached and an absurdly long paddle, waits for embarkation on its Dante-esque journey down the river Styx. There is a portentous lead curtain, *Window Cover* (1988) which echoes the lead painting-like objects that Twiss used in the 1980s as opaque tableaux of absence and blindness, propped up on easels or hung on the wall with dividers to measure the darkness or a trowel to accompany the dead. Though originally designed to cover a window which the artist disliked in the gallery where it was first installed, this work now haunts me with its lugubrious folds covering a blank section of wall wherever it is newly installed. The hexagonally sectioned missile of *Dreaming of S.A.M.* (1988) with cast straw boater, mask and apron, promises some sort of post-apocalyptic, homemade mayhem combining festivity and death. The lovingly crafted lead surfaces of all these works is fatally alluring; it soaks up light and vision, returning a smoky blankness to the viewer's inquiring gaze (indeed Twiss has spoken of the 'evilness' of the lead's appearance as well as its beauty).

The oppositional exchange between touch and sight is closely mirrored in the intermittent dialogue Twiss has pursued between the sculptural object and the rhetoric of painting. At times this means playing with the permeable boundaries between two- and three-dimensionality. A case in point is *Red Legs 2* (1969) with its juxtaposition of legs, cast from life, and the almost cartoony clarity of the cut-out metal shadow on the floor, doubling as a silhouette for the total figure in another pose. It is almost as though the profile of this total figure is beginning to come alive in a liquid pool of freshly spilled bright red paint. What is most noticeable about shadows in Twiss's work, apart from their ubiquity between 1968 and 1974, is their overtly graphic nature. The way Twiss will cut around a shadow like a tailor's pattern, and use the shadow to become a virtually independent object occupying its own space, fetishises the shadow's flatness. This effect is enhanced when lighting in a gallery casts an actual shadow, challenging the artificial one. The shadow seems to continually assert its two-dimensional life as over and against the body; it operates as the painted or drawn doppelganger to Twiss's sculptured figures.

Twiss's shadow-play tells us something about several of the artist's pre-occupations. The flip between flat and round was part of the perceptual mechanism at the heart of the *Frozen Frame* series. The sliced or complete



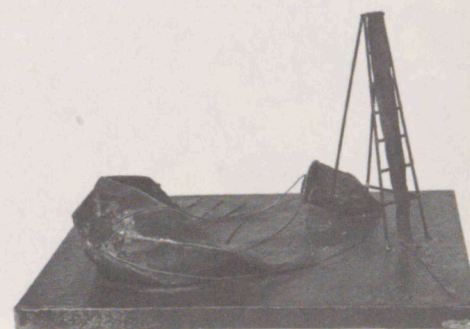
Shadow 1972



Hobson's Baggage 1995

figures, angled or vertical rods, the painted shadows and affixed parts all depend on this flat/solid dynamic. Even without a shadow attached, the flat top of *Red Legs 2*'s sliced legs is cleanly and graphically legible as a geometric rather than corporeal reality. Though no cut-out shadows are involved, a tabletop work such as *VW Split* also combines, as does any board-game frozen mid-play, a specific graphic order with a set of solid objects. *Airship* (1988) is a drawing on lead sheet which looks like the faintest impression made by a cut-out pattern for a small model airship. It is the graphic promise of the various zeppelins and hot air balloons that Twiss made in the round. Twiss is a collector of paper and cardboard models. He has slightly dilapidated, assembled light card models of Florence Cathedral and the Statue of Liberty in his studio and various folios of unmade paper planes. The tabs, slots, dotted lines and flattened multi-part imagery of the printed sheets for card modelling all add up to an aesthetic of possibility. The unmade printed sheets are haunted by imagined three-dimensionality, and the assembled models look capable of collapsing back into flatness. The folded and faceted galvanized steel construction of Twiss's various Queen Victoria figures give them the appearance of assembled metal variants of his cardboard Statue of Liberty. One of Twiss's earliest experiences of making things as a young boy required the forming of three-dimensional objects from flat, cut-out components; Twiss would sometimes help with the spot-welding of metal frames for lampshades in the family workshop of his parents' business. The lamps were made by stitching oil-soaked paper to wire armatures. The paper shapes were cut out expertly by Twiss's mother, who was a trained pattern cutter.

Twiss's shuttling focus between form in the round and the flat diagram, and most particularly his protracted interest in shadows, continually rehearses the traditional myth of the invention of painting and sculpture. Citing Pliny as an ancient source, Victor I. Stoichita explains in his study of shadows in Western art, that the art of painting 'began with tracing an outline around a man's shadow and consequently that pictures were originally done in this way'.²⁰ According to Pliny, sculpture too had its origins in shadows, as told in the story of Butades the potter, who built up a clay relief from the outline that his daughter had drawn around her departing lover's silhouette, and hardened it with fire in the kiln; it is said that this likeness was preserved in the Shrine of the Nymphs. The shadow in Western art came to be seen as an essential sign of being, of the soul and of the life of the body; only the dead were understood to have no shadows. At the same time, the shadow guaranteed the power and authenticity of depictive representation. To take away the shadow, to steal it, as did the grey man in the famous story of Peter Schlemihl's shadow, would be to diabolically rupture this primary metaphysical link between the individual and their signature of being.²¹ The image of Peter Schlemihl's shadow, folded up and put in the grey man's pocket, is one that would appeal to Twiss, and



Statue of Liberty cardboard model
Collapsed Balloon 1988

actually has a kind of parallel in the story he tells of once putting a figure with a set of detachable shadows into an international group exhibition. The figure itself was stolen during the exhibition, so Twiss distributed all of the shadows to the other artists in the show, thereby dispersing multiples of the missing figure's shadow around the globe. It is the very separability of the perceptual field into its constituent and often contradictory parts that has often motivated Twiss's art – the sense that an object or ensemble of things is susceptible to all kinds of dismantling and folding-away.

05 'DISPERSED HISTORY IN EMOTIONAL AND FORMAL FRAGMENTS'

One of the aspects of Greer Twiss's art that I find myself continually returning to when looking at or thinking about his work is its language of parts and fragments. Inextricably related to all the separable parts, of course, is the syntactical emphasis on links, joints, weld-lines and soldered seams. Twiss's part-to-part language of relations puts him in a well rehearsed tradition of modernism which begins in earnest with late nineteenth century artists such as Degas, Manet and Rodin, and which becomes a foundational trope of twentieth-century art with Picasso, Schwitters, Giacometti, and Brancusi (not to mention the literary tradition and writers such as Walt Whitman, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein, or architects such as Carlo Scarpa, Morphosis and the early Frank Gehry).²² The legacy can be tracked through scores of late modern and postmodern artists into its proliferation in the digitization of contemporary culture. Twiss's work has no obvious truck with digitization except for keeping as complete an image bank of the *œuvre* as possible. His culture of parts and fitments combines a late nineteenth-century, Rodin-inspired aesthetic of reusable casts, parts and foundry piece moulds, with a metal-shop pragmatism of marking up steel plates, chopping, grinding and welding.

Twiss's *métier* of collecting, arranging and assembling parts follows metonymic and synecdochic principles of organization. Metonymy is to do with syntax, with chains of connections, contiguities, sequences, links, joinings and couplings of units of language employed like parts from an inventory, or a lexicon of prefabricated parts. It has also to do with lacunae, gaps, breaks, disjunctions and displacements, rather than organic wholes and seamless narratives. Synecdoche means the part standing in for the whole. As evidence for this principle at work in Twiss's art, one need only make a list: amputated arms and legs; severed fingers; sections of torsos sliced through; an apple and a pair of spectacles cut in half; display bases interrupted by a missing section; knots; sections of rope; cut lengths of steel; hooks, clasps, clamps, shackles, wing-nuts, bolts, ringbolts; thick soldering seams; welding lines; tools standing in for absent artisans; isolated objects like the attributes of saints; domes and cupolas

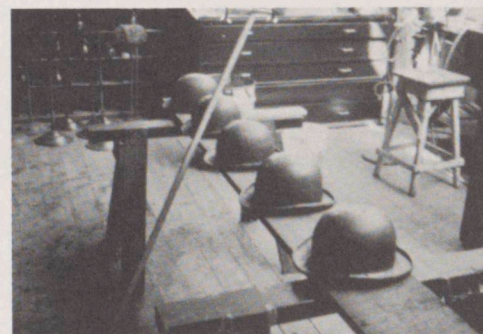


representing a lost world of Italian architecture; birds on poles like an ornithologists catalogue array; fake museum objects in clusters with tags; and bowler hats, wind-up gramophones and muskets standing in for colonial baggage.

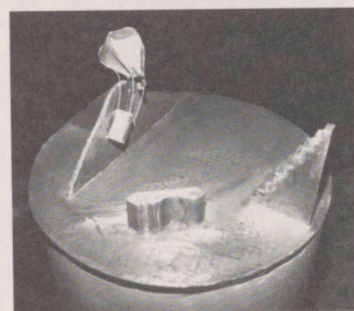
What is apparent from this list is that it encompasses both Twiss's attention to a staccato, differentiated syntax of fabrication, and also the collector's passion for things; the psychology of one feeds the other. Twiss's practice attests to the desire to accumulate, compile, arrange and rearrange. It also declares his attraction to things, which come to stand in for something personal, historical or cultural that has in some way become inaccessible or displaced, and recoverable only through memory or a physical re-membering and re-construction into talismanic, surrogate objects. Tools recall actual people, codes of working class culture, specific making technologies. Domes, ladders and empty steps conjure up a de Chirico-inspired imaginary locale of deserted Italian piazzas, suggesting nostalgia for lost paradigms of cultural integration. Twiss is constantly trading in what Jannis Kounellis has called, in his own work, 'dispersed history in emotional and formal fragments'.²³

One relatively recent example of Twiss's eye for the object as fragment, as metonymic object of a past era, still haunting the present, is the bowler hat featured as the catalogue cover image, which shows *Bowler and Flower* (1993). It was originally one of the nine bowler hats used in the *Decoys and Delusions* installation, and four of these had emblematic objects attached – a tank, a hammer, a bird, and a flower. A semi-circle of plain lead bowler hats also sat on the floor in the 1995 installation *A Right Royal Summer*. Twiss's lead bowler, beautifully shaped over a milliner's block, combines the traditional craft of the milliner with that of the metalworker, and, with theatrical flourish, gives dignity to a melancholy object. The associations of the bowler hat are very rich, and whilst foremost in the artist's mind was the notion of the bowler as a sign for colonial baggage, washed up on local shores, he could hardly be unaware of the hat's unusual power of being at once so simple and archetypal, yet overdetermined with possible associations. For most viewers, a few key links will be made first-off, including perhaps Magritte's paintings of anonymous gentlemen in bowler hats; Charlie Chaplin's use of the hat as an accoutrement of the beleaguered modern everyman; Laurel and Hardy, always wearing theirs, and Samuel Beckett's insistence (with the comic duo in mind) that the four main characters of *Waiting for Godot* should all wear bowler hats; John Steed in the 1960s TV series *The Avengers*; and Oddjob's steel-rimmed bowler in the James Bond film *Goldfinger*. Some may even know that, in its earliest form, the bowler was even harder than Twiss's current version and that some shipyard workers wore it as protective headgear. It is intriguing to know that Le Corbusier included it in his list of classic type-objects, and believed the arrival of modernism was declared as 'the bowler hat appeared on the horizon'.

Allan Smith



Bowler hats in studio, 1993

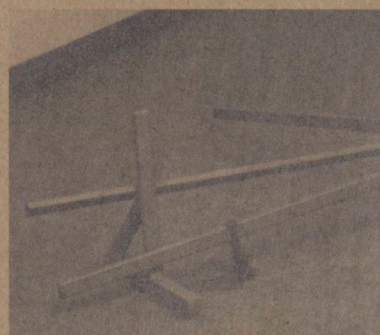
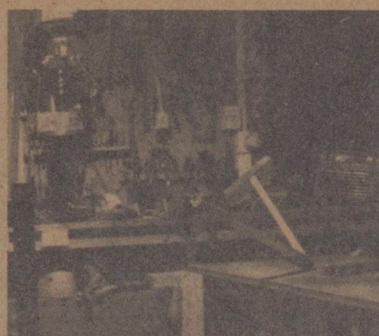


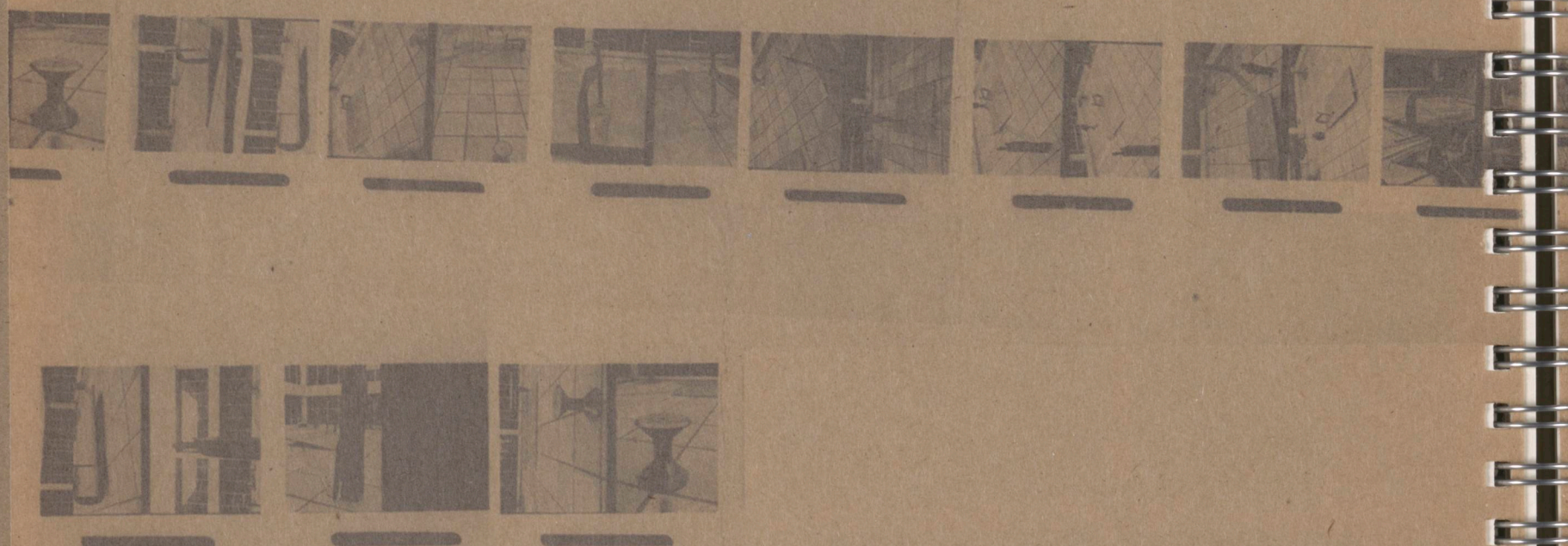
1. Allan Smith, *Decoys and Delusions: Greer Twiss*, Fisher Gallery, Auckland, 1993.
2. The artist quoted in Babara Maré, 'Greer Twiss: sculpture', thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Art History, University of Auckland, June 1988, p.176.
3. When first exhibited at Gow Langsford Gallery in 1990, this work was titled 'The Anonymous Architect'. By the time it was shown at Artis Gallery in 1997, however, its title had changed to *Anonymous Builder: A Renaissance Dreamer*.
4. Philip Fisher, *Making and effacing art: modern American art in a culture of museums*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1991, p.150.
5. The artist quoted in Maré, op. cit., p.16.
6. See Maré, op. cit., p.172.
7. Rosalind E. Krauss, *Passages in modern sculpture*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 1988, p.118.
8. Fisher, *Making and Effacing Art*, p.218.
9. See transcript in Maré, *Greer Twiss: Sculpture*, pp.169-185.
10. 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.' John 20:24-29, *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1984, pp.808-9.
11. Maurice Merleau-Ponty quoted in Juhani Pallasmaa, *The eyes of the skin: architecture and the senses*, Academy Editions, London, 1996, p.11.
12. Greer Twiss in conversation with the author, December 2002. All other references to the artist's comments are from the same source unless otherwise stated.
13. The artist quoted in Maré, op. cit., p.176.
14. See James Hall, 'The Education of the Senses II: Hollows and Bumps in Space', *The world as sculpture*, pp.279-301.
15. Fisher quoted in Hall, *The world as sculpture*, p.298.
16. Ibid.
17. Note Twiss's playing with the idea of an identity-denying blindfold in the photograph of him with Wystan Curnow and Rodney Kirk Smith on page 73.
18. Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, p.26.
19. Pallasmaa, *The eyes of the skin*, p.7.
20. Quoted in Victor I. Stoichita, *A Short History of the Shadow*, Reaktion Books, London, 1997, pp.11-12.
21. See Stoichita, *A short history of the shadow*, pp.165-68.
22. For a reading of details of legs and feet in Manet, which chimes with Twiss's *Red Legs*, see Linda Nochlin, *The body in pieces: the fragment as a metaphor of modernity*, Thames and Hudson, London, 2001. pp.34-41. For discussion of metonymy and fragmentation in Jasper Johns, see Fred Orton, 'Present, the Scene of My Selves, the Occasion of these Ruses', *Figuring Jasper Johns*, Reaktion Books, London, 1994, pp.17-88. See also Albert Elsen, 'Notes on the Partial Figure', *Artforum*, November 1969, pp.58-63; and Victor Burgin, 'The City in Pieces', *In/different spaces: place and memory in visual culture*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles/London, 1997, pp.139-160.
23. Jannis Kounellis, in *Kounellis*, Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci, Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Prato, 2001, p.255.

Boxed Rocket 1988

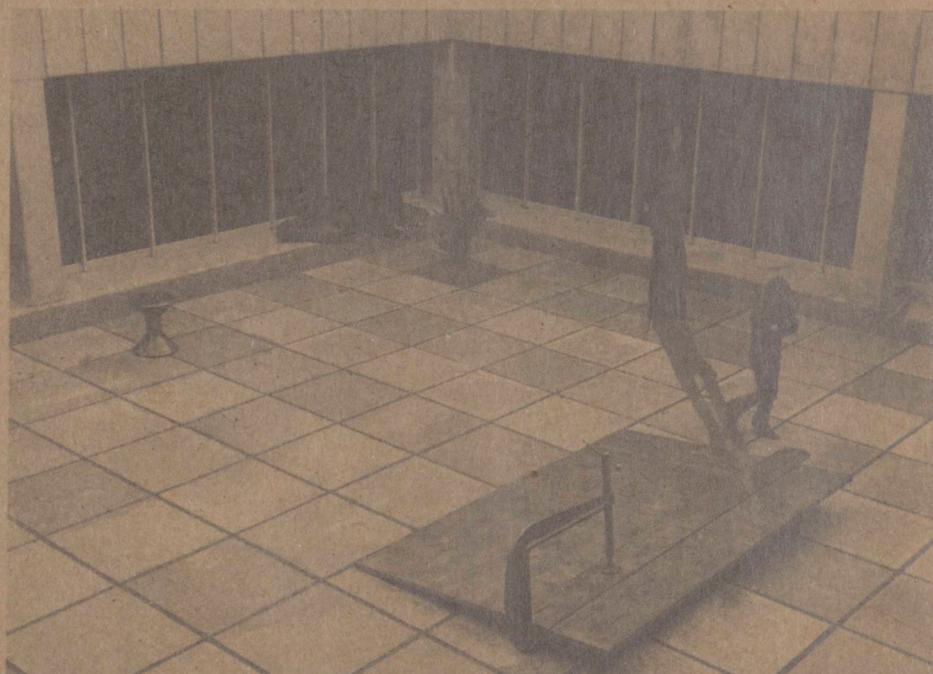
Airship 1988

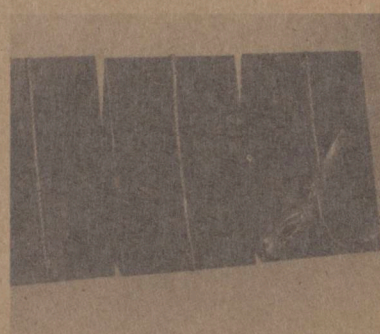
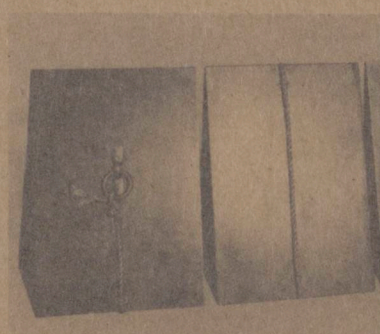
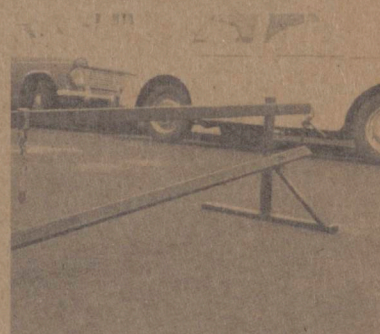
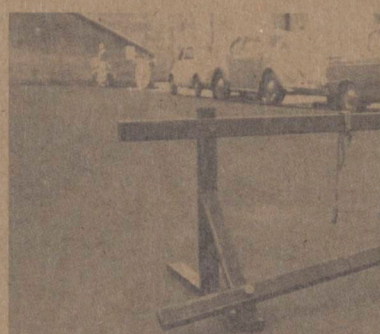
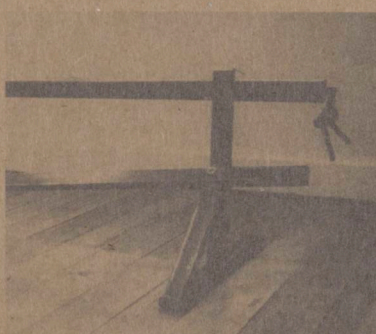
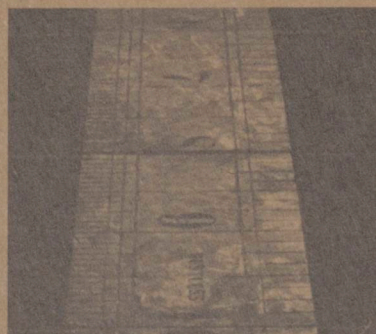
Over the Hills 1990

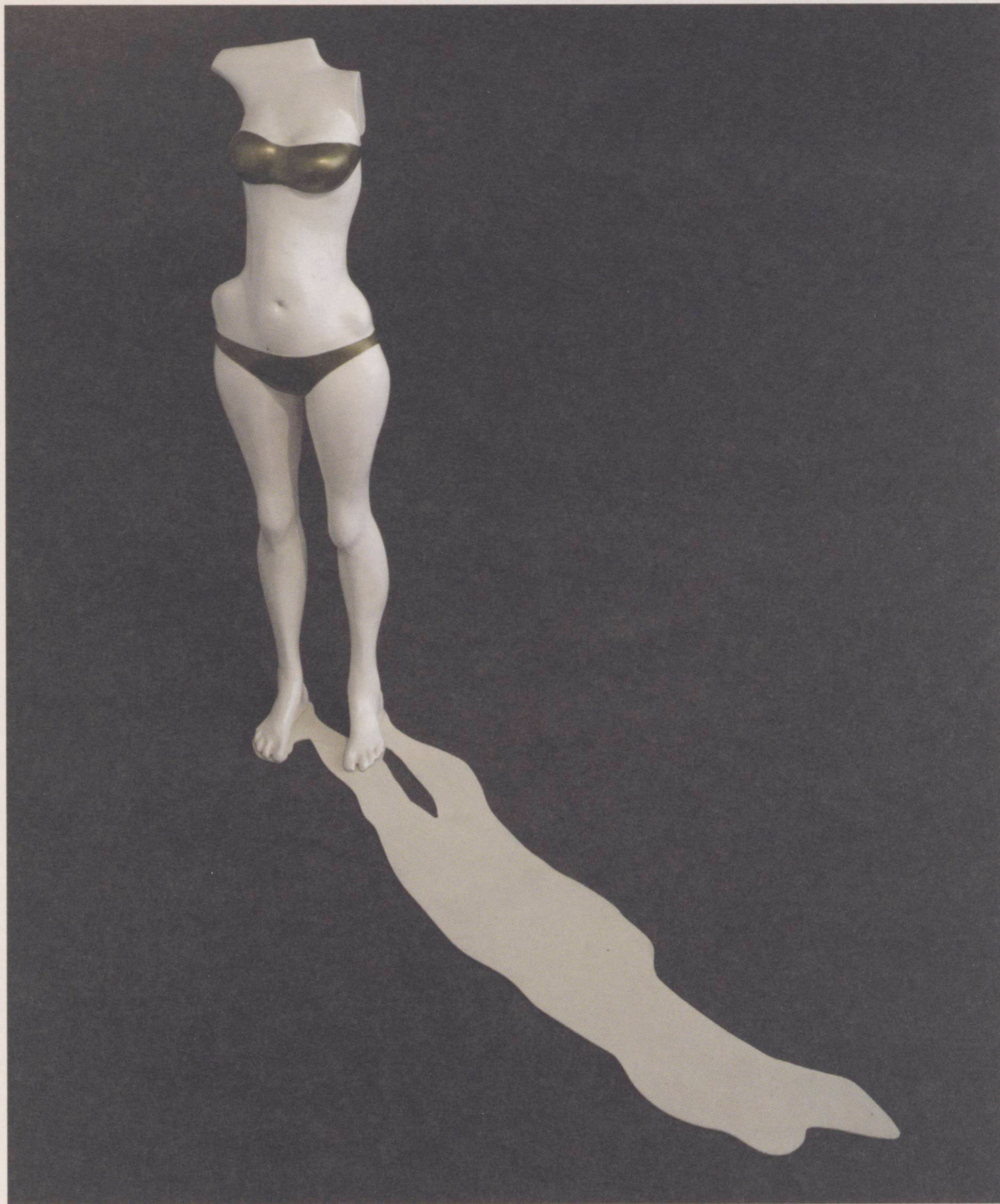




Scale Shift 1974-75



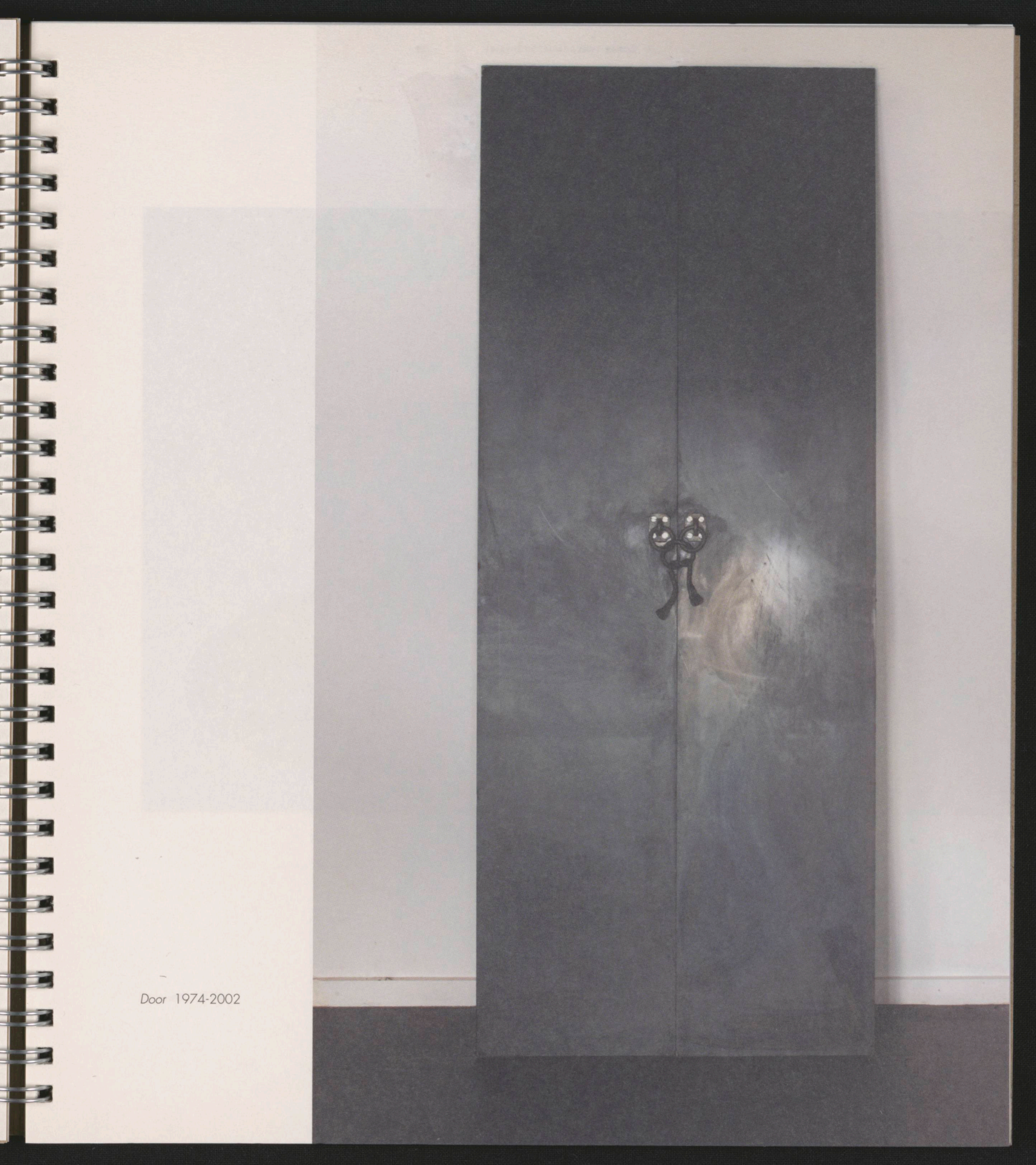




Bikini Girl and Shadow 1968



Red Legs 2 1969



Door 1974-2002



Full Stop Clamp 1974

Push Line 1974

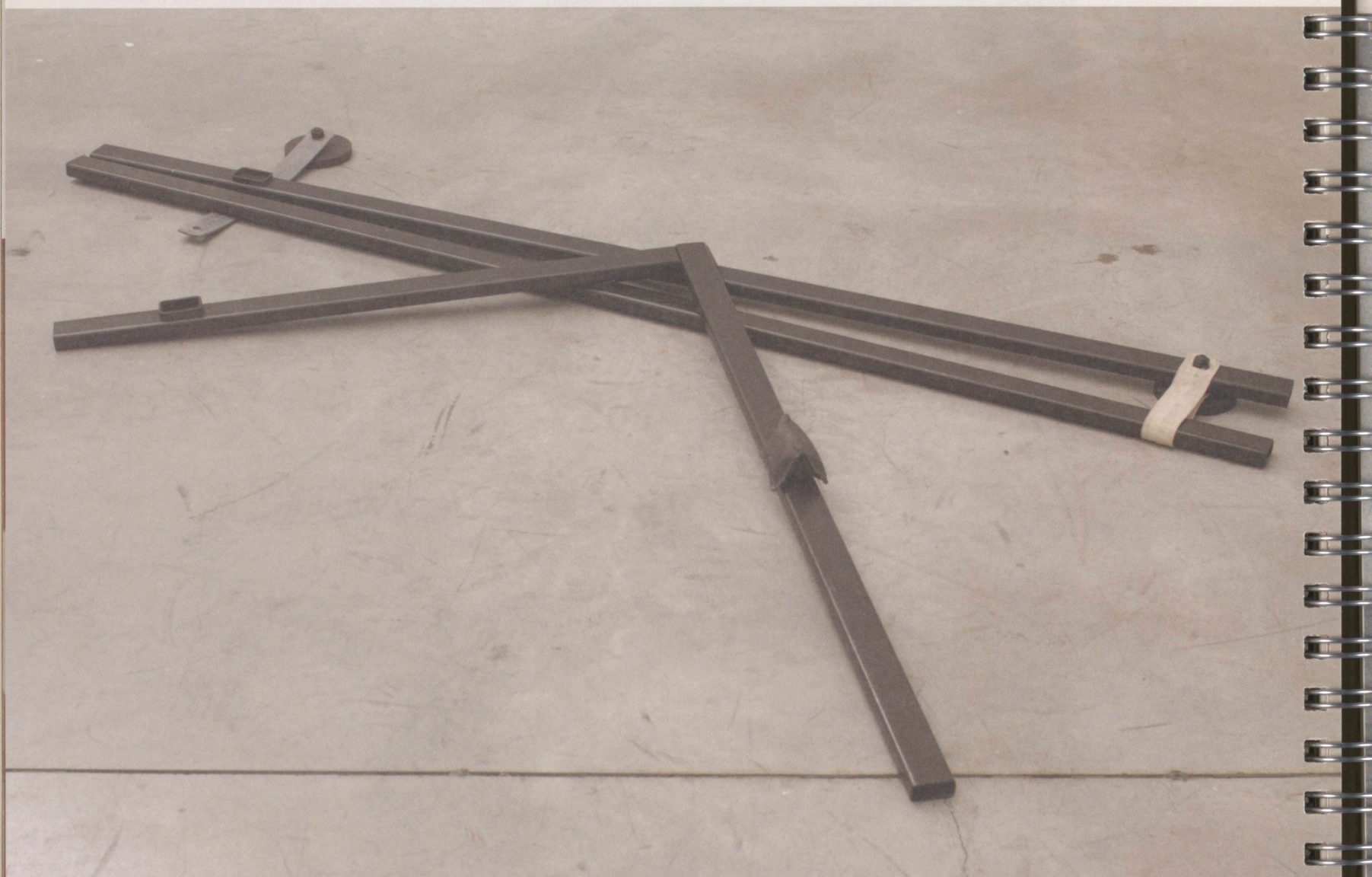


VW Split 1974

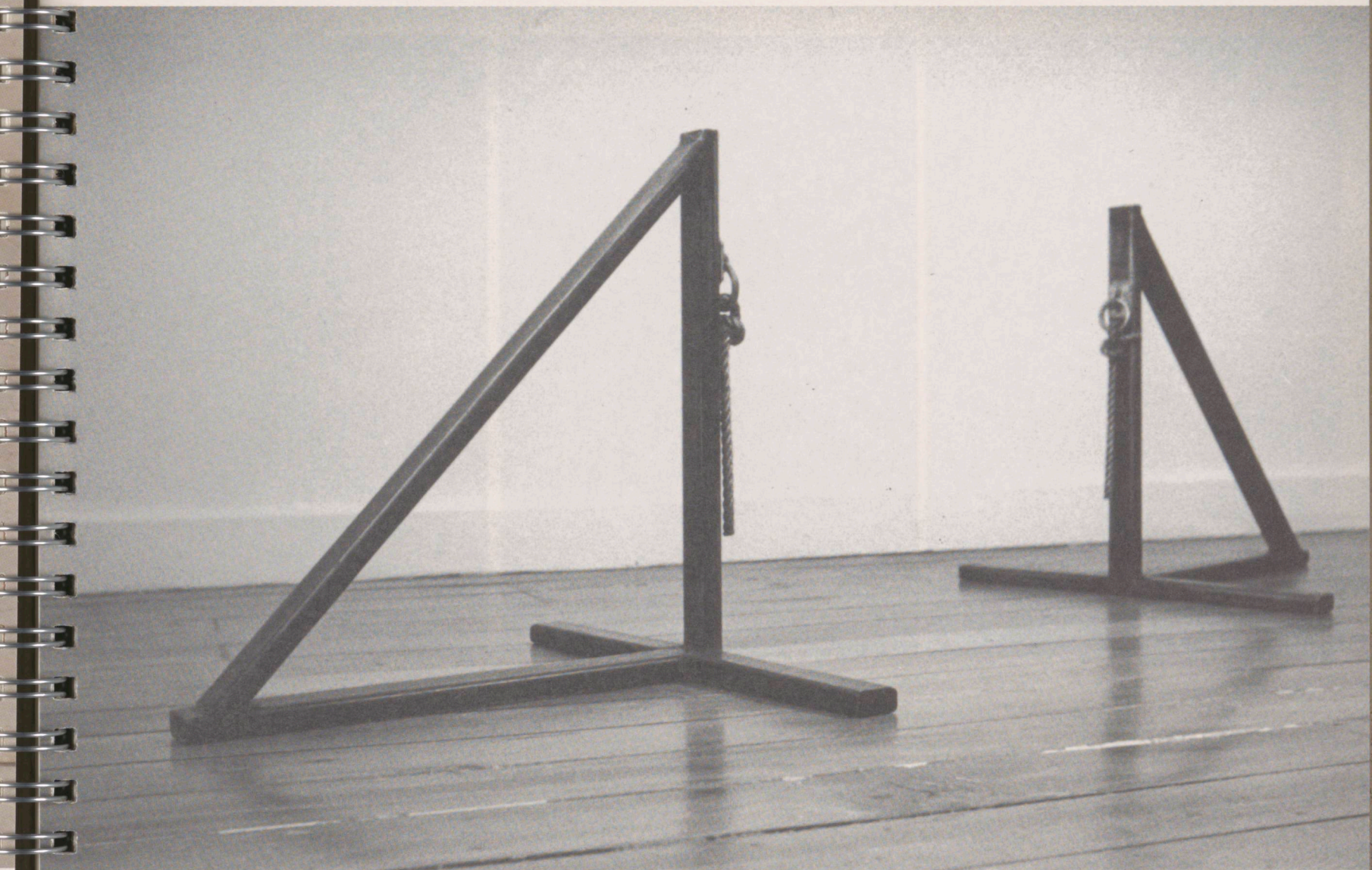


Site/Sight 1977

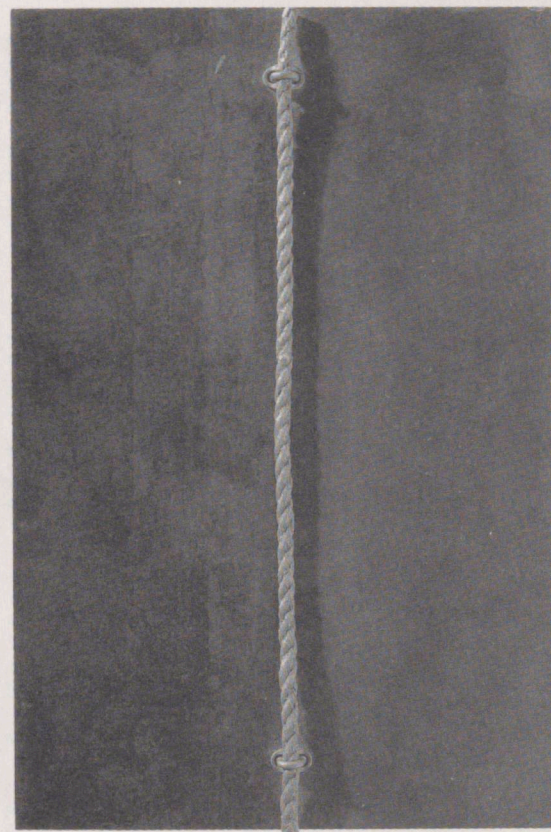
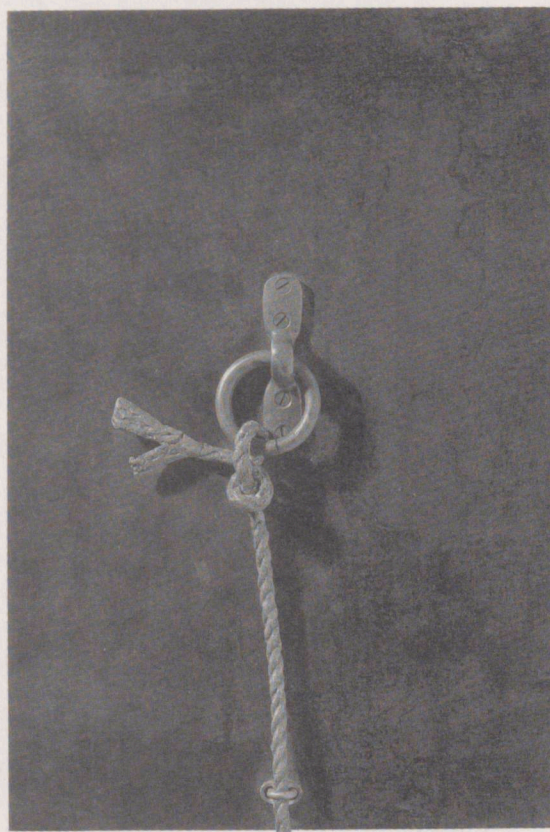




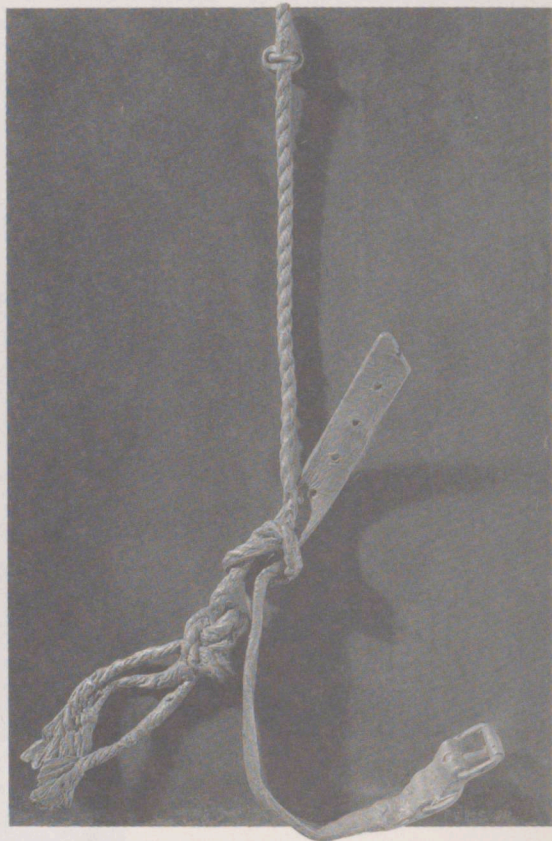
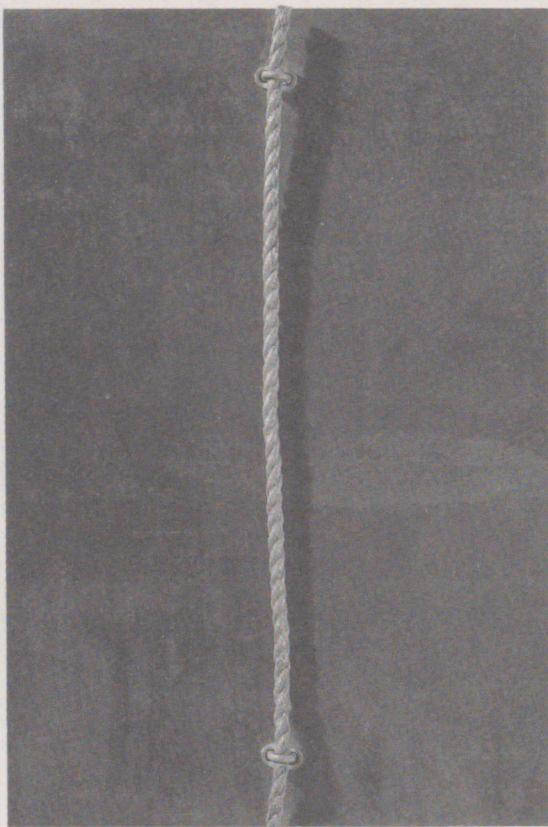
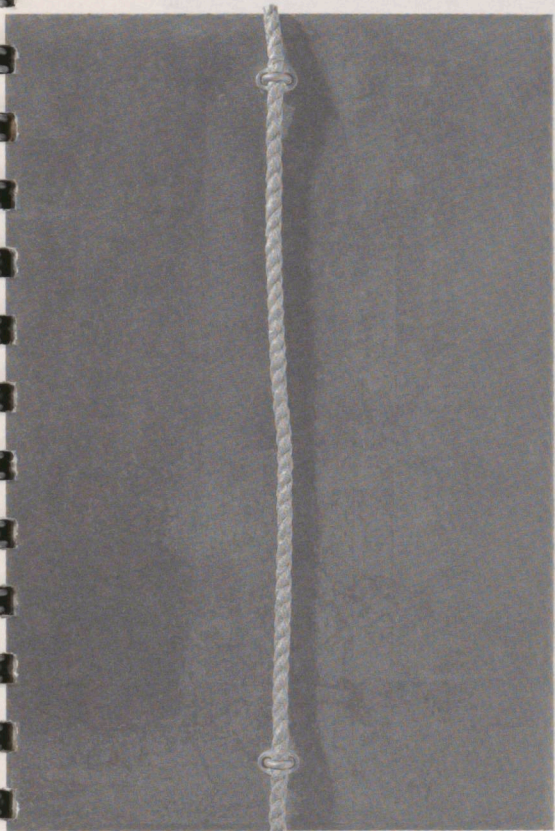
Intersection 1979

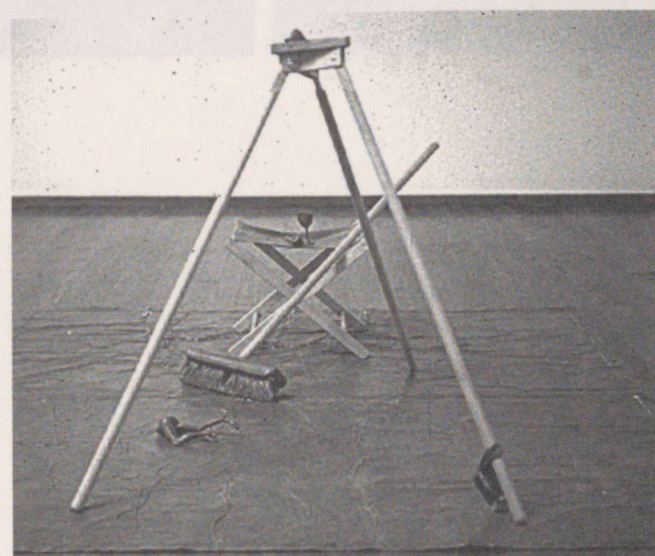
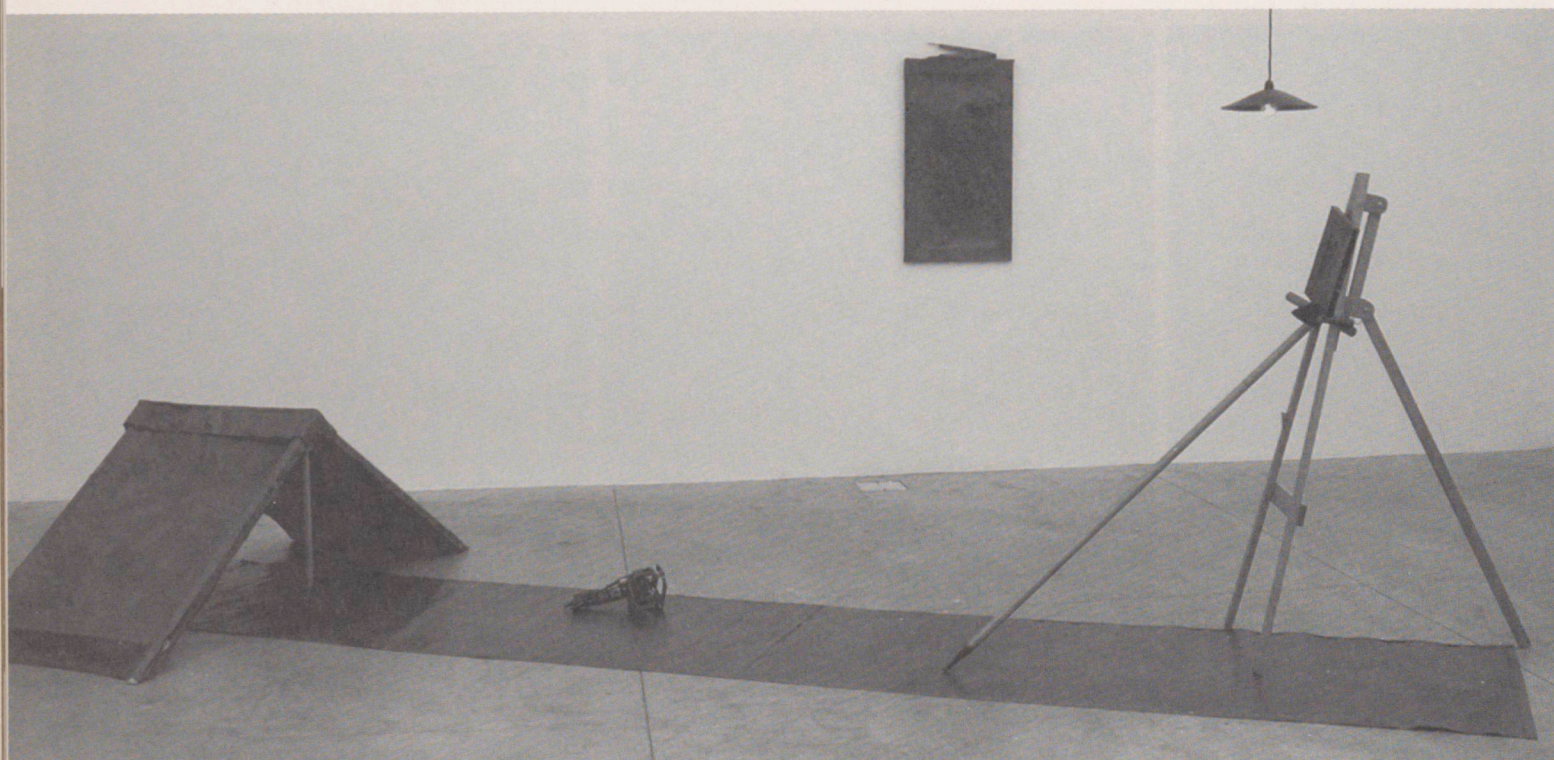


Open Barrier 1976-2002

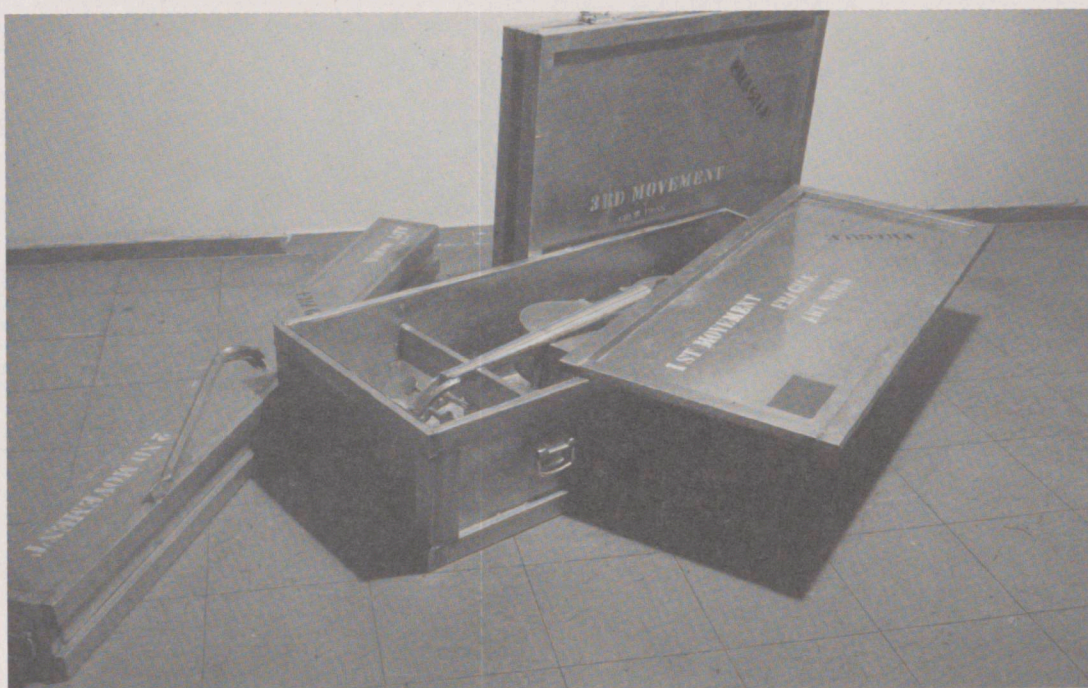
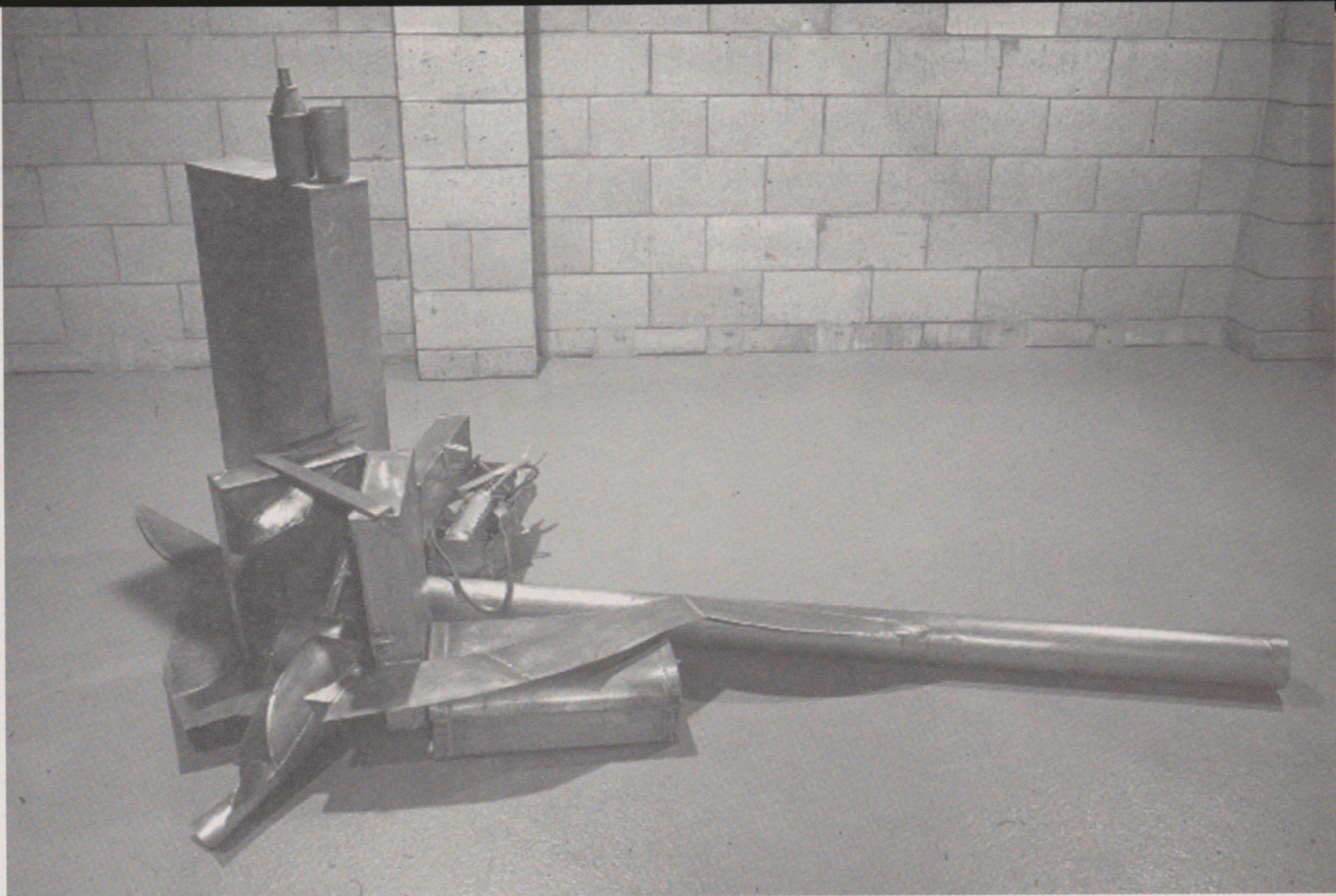


Lead by 5 1974

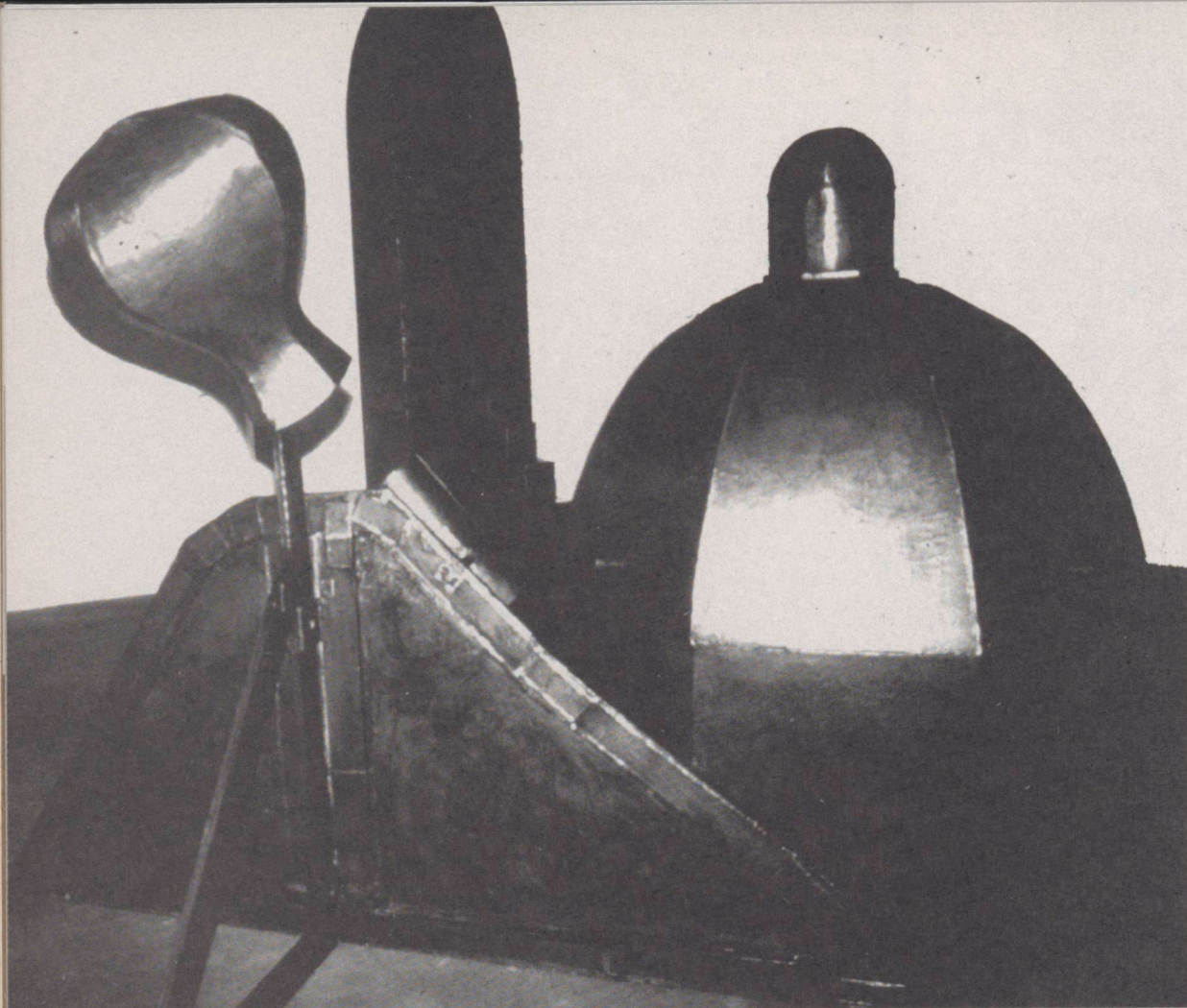




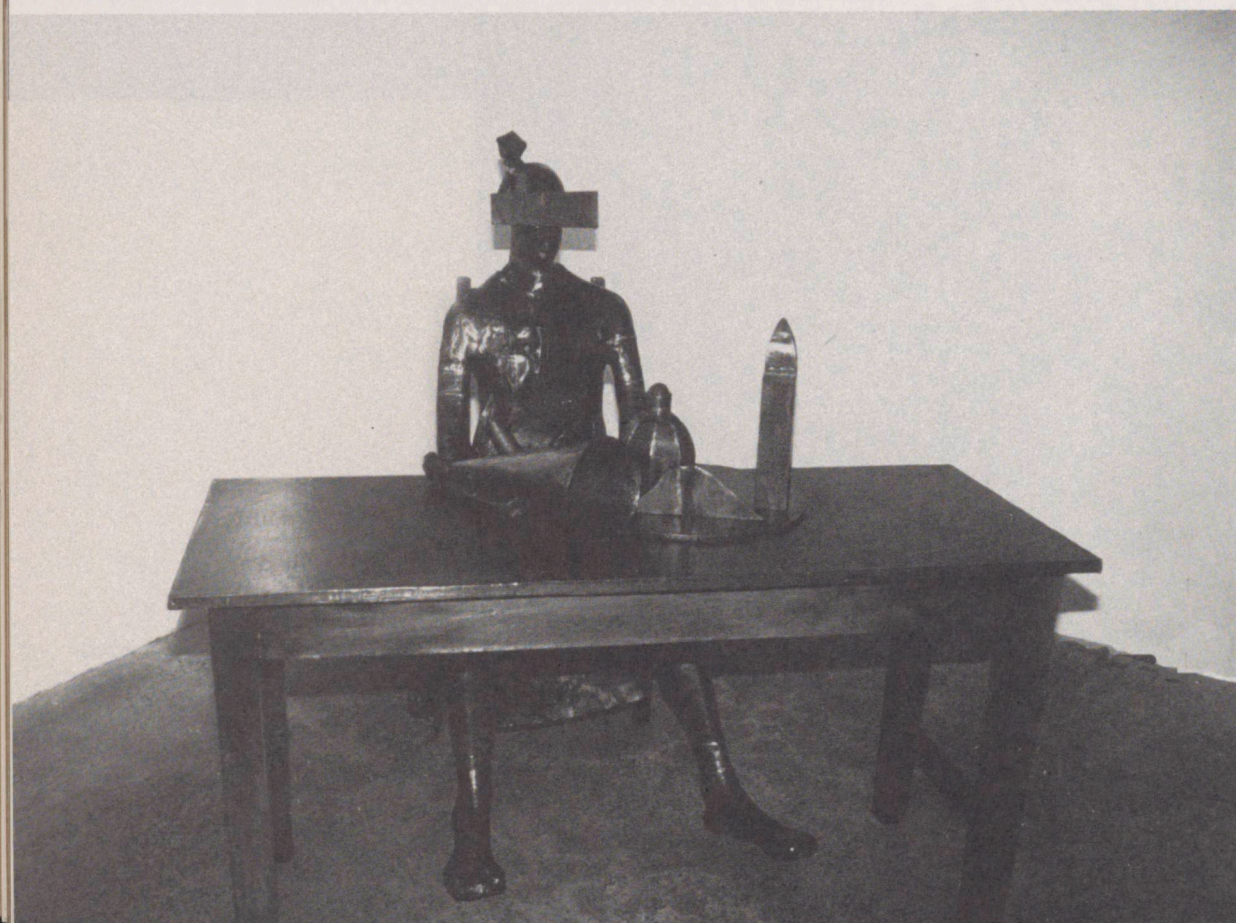
No Sun, No Rain, No Radiation 1986
Vacation 1 Burnout 1984



I Have Everything to Declare 1999
A Work in Three Movements 1998

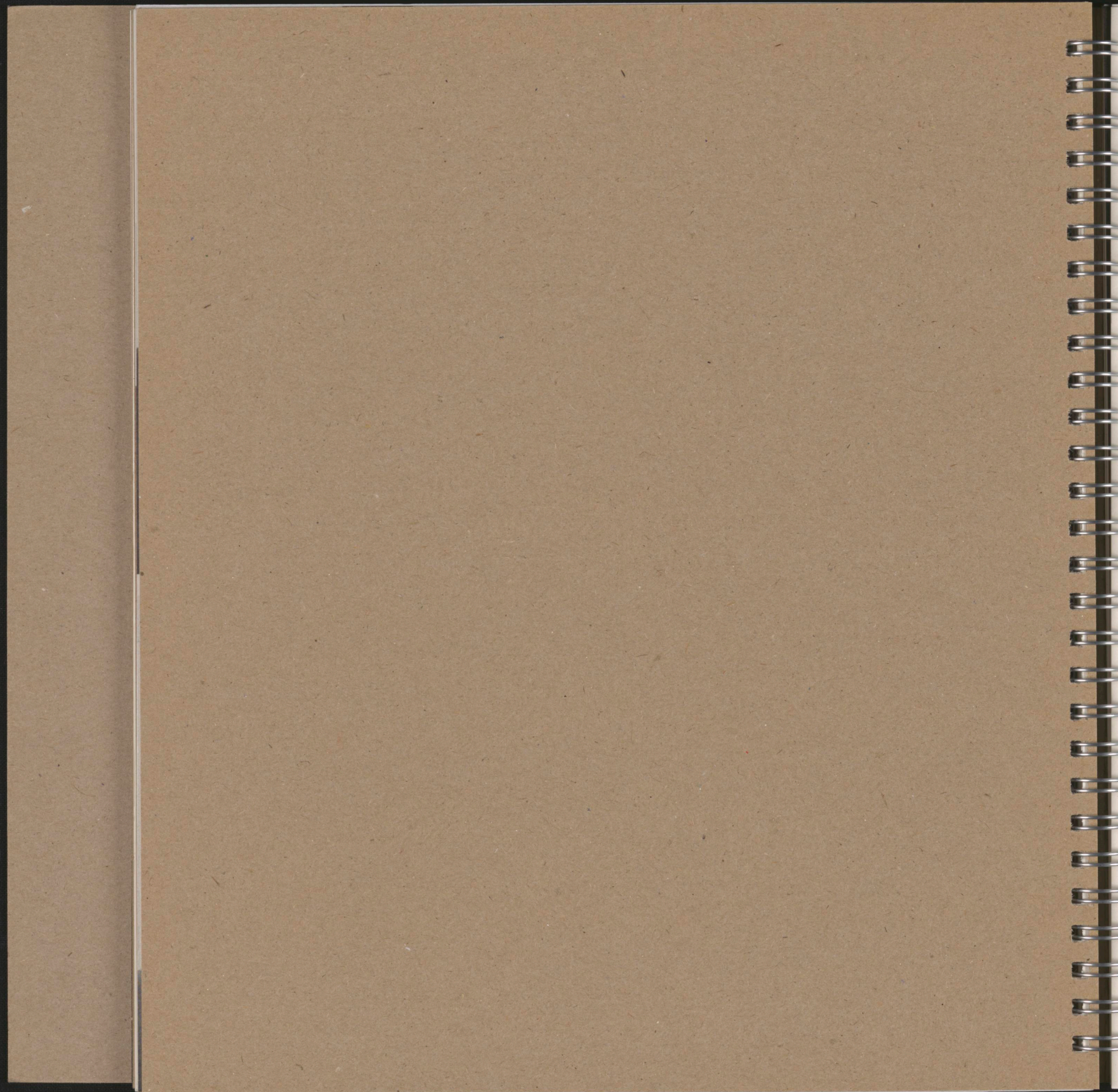


Act One Scene One 1989



Anonymous Builder: A Renaissance Dreamer 1989

**THINKING AND
MAKING
ROBIN WOODWARD**



THINKING AND MAKING:

THE WORK OF GREER TWISS FROM 1958 TO THE PRESENT

When he first came to public notice in the late 1950s, Greer Twiss was essentially a figurative sculptor. In form and modelling, his early work showed an awareness of the sculpture of Henry Moore, which he had seen in an exhibition at the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1956. This touring exhibition of Moore's work was the show that gave many New Zealanders their first experience of modernist art, and provoked widespread controversy. At that time, Twiss was a first-year student at art school. He had enrolled as a Diploma candidate at the Elam School of Fine Arts and was being tutored in drawing and modelling from life, as well as studying from plaster casts – copies of Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Assyrian or Renaissance masterpieces. Such was the traditional art school programme, and it offered foundations that would serve Twiss well. A keen eye and an analytical approach have been cornerstones of his practice throughout the subsequent decades.

In the life-modelling class, students would spend a whole term working up a single clay figure, which was then cast in plaster – and for much of the artist's student days the art school had facilities for casting only in plaster. But in Twiss's final Diploma year, Lyndon Smith, an Honours candidate, was given charge of the sculpture department, and together Smith and Twiss decided to try casting in metal. There were no instruction manuals available on lost wax casting to guide them, except for Cellini's classic treatise, which was of limited use: 'We weren't into horse dung and eggs!', as Twiss puts it, referring to original constituents of the process.¹ Conditions were nevertheless primitive. They cleared a corner at art school, and started with relatively low-temperature metals such

ROBIN WOODWARD



Drapery exercise in plaster c.1957

as lead and aluminium. With no safety equipment, using an old vacuum cleaner as the blower for their furnace, they began melting metals to temperatures of 750° Fahrenheit. Making moulds from brick-dust and plaster, melting bits of lead pipes in old baked-bean cans, the two senior students eventually completed their first successful cast: Greer Twiss's *Miner Going Down*, which was cast in lead. Twiss's first bronze cast, *Welders*, followed in 1960.

Another early work, *Flounder Spearers* (1959) was made in cast iron, a different process altogether. Here the sculptor made a pattern (or prototype) that could be packed in sand and cast at a jobbing foundry, and even cast in multiples if required. The *Flounder Spearers* comprises two casts of the same figure, moreover obtaining a greater volumetric presence than the works that were cast at Elam. The solidity of these figures, in part, reflects the need to make a mould that can be lifted cleanly in and out of a sand box. With the surrounding sand left undisturbed, the molten metal was then simply poured into the shape left by the mould.

In the lost wax method, which Twiss continued to explore in his home foundry, there could be greater 'undercutting' (removal of material from behind or underneath a cast form) because the preliminary material, wax, was melted out of the mould and molten metal poured in to replace it. Because of the elementary nature of the facilities, however, he could only cast small pieces. As a consequence, in these years Twiss often presented his figures within a framework. The 'frame' provided physical support, as well as affording a formal context and offering an extension of the implied narrative of the figures. Moreover it served to increase the overall dimensions of the works and give the figures an appearance of being more substantial in size than they actually were (in reality, the earliest figures cast by Twiss do not exceed 200 mm in any dimension). *People on a Bus*, *Welders*, *Miner*, and *Acrobat* all operate in this way.

With casting in permanent materials still in its infancy in New Zealand, and carving holding no particular interest to him, Twiss was willing to explore alternative approaches and new materials. In *Boy on a Tricycle* (1959) the plaster figure of the child is placed upon an actual child's trike, which he had found 'lying around'. Critics were incensed at the incorporation of a real object in a piece of sculpture. They wanted 'real' art. The young sculptor might well be 'a man of ideas, but one wonders if it was a good idea to mount an otherwise nicely formalised boy's figure upon a very real bicycle', wrote the reviewer for the *New Zealand Herald*.²

Twiss has always had a fascination with the child's world of games, toys and play items. This manifested itself early in his interest in puppetry, and it was also in tune with modern artists such as Picasso, who had used two toy cars in the creation of his 1952 work *Baboon and Young*, for example. In Twiss's sculpture of the 1960s, this 'human interest' factor and attention to the close-at-hand, the familiar and domestic would continue through variations on themes



Miner Going Down 1959
Flounder Spearers 1959

reflecting the everyday activities and prevailing social perspectives of 'middle New Zealand' in the mid-twentieth century.

Technically, *Boy on a Tricycle* was atypical of Twiss's usual practice however. The combination of materials was a diversion from what had already become his principal methodology. The playful novelty of such an approach was nevertheless evidence of the inquisitive energy with which he furthered the technical base of his art after leaving Elam and moving on to Teachers' College in 1960. Twiss was soon extending his skills into areas such as welding, at the same time as continuing to cast in sand. He ventured into ceramics, and, with the help of his father, built a kiln at home, then another at Tamaki Intermediate School, where he started teaching in 1961.

The kiln at Tamaki was of particular importance in the early years of the sculptor's career. Twiss would model his sculptures in wax, make the moulds, fire them in the kiln during the day, then load them in the boot of his car and trundle them off to the Lees Brothers jobbing foundry in Newmarket. But the success rate was variable. For example, only about 60% of his *Athletes* survived the process as moulds would get damaged, casts would have air-bubbles in them, and many works simply exploded during the pouring. (Twiss used to gauge the development of his technical expertise by how close to his moulds the foundry men were prepared to stand during casting.) Determined to improve on his skills, he approached the Arts Council for assistance and, in 1965, received a grant to study bronze casting and art foundry work in Britain and Europe.

It was the trip of a lifetime for Twiss. The international art scene which he encountered in London and in Europe was a 'melting-pot' in which the assertive and colourful new forms of Anthony Caro circulated alongside the less strident modernist languages of Henry Moore, Emilio Greco and others. Twiss was accepted to work in the foundry at the Royal College of Art in London, where Bernard Meadows (one of Henry Moore's studio assistants) was the Head of Sculpture. Here, finally, the young New Zealander received professional instruction about casting in metals. Twiss was also in the student group that the influential curator and critic David Sylvester took 'behind the scenes' at the Tate Gallery to view the major Giacometti show he was curating, and from Peter Tomory he gained an introduction to Emilio Greco, whom he visited in Rome; while there, he worked in some local art foundries. Giacometti and Greco, both Italians,³ were pre-eminent representatives of a highly idiosyncratic figurative tradition in modernist sculpture. Like Twiss, both were modellers, and were interested in exploring the formal proportions of the human body. Greco's figures tend to be elongated and voluptuous, in a similar vein to Twiss's bikini girls; Giacometti's are emaciated, attenuated and non-classical in proportion – characteristics that had already begun to feature in Twiss's work. While Giacometti achieved an immediacy by working directly in plaster over a wire armature, Twiss had already begun modelling directly in wax.



Foundry in backyard of Mt Wellington home, 1968

Fellow New Zealanders Steve Furlonger and John Panting had also made the pilgrimage to London. Twiss joined them at the Royal College of Art, where they were working at the forefront of ideas coming from American rather than European-based international developments in sculpture – using new materials such as fibreglass, Perspex and other plastics. The approaches of Panting and Furlonger were obviously closely related to and influenced by the abstract, cut and welded steel work of Caro rather than the organic carving aesthetic of Moore, and reflected the 'transfer of interest from European to American art' so evident in British art at the time.⁴ Twiss's introduction of colour to his works was one of the first marks of his alignment with the 'new generation' of sculptors. The polychromatic medieval sculpture he had seen in Italy had surprised and deeply impressed him, and it was with this as well as the Constructivist and Pop strains of new British work at the back of his mind that, over the next few years, he began to cover his bronze sculptures with colour – first with 'medieval' paint surfaces, then the glossy reds, whites, blues and yellows of car paints.

Greer Twiss returned from Europe to take up a position as lecturer in Sculpture at Elam, in 1966. Sculpture was in the ascendant in the school, and the department was dynamic. The appointment of a sculptor, Paul Beadle, as Professor and Head of School in 1961 was of seminal importance to the establishment of a stronger profile for sculpture in New Zealand. Beadle was also proactive in establishing a professional standing for artists through the inauguration of the NZSSP, the New Zealand Society of Sculptors and Painters. Twiss's work was complemented at Elam by that of his colleague Jim Allen, one of New Zealand's first 'post-object' sculptors and an influential figure locally as a polemicist and broker of new ideas. For his part, Twiss got straight back into developing bronze-casting facilities. He set up a foundry at his home in Mt Wellington, building a kiln there with Jeff and Robin Scholes. With Jim Allen he built a furnace at Elam, which he utilized in the fabrication of the work for which he is perhaps most widely known, the *Karangahape Road Fountain* (1967-69).

Karangahape Road Fountain is one of two public sculptures commissioned by the Auckland City Council in the 1960s. The other is Molly Macalister's *Maori Warrior* (1964-66), made for Queen Elizabeth Square, downtown. Both are significant in that they broke with traditional expectations of public sculpture in New Zealand. Neither is a commemorative work; they were commissioned simply as urban ornament – a concept that had arisen in the twentieth century with the intention of creating a link between the skyscrapers of modern urban development and the human scale of the city's inhabitants. (Alexander Calder's public commissions in the United States and Picasso's *Chicago Civic Centre Sculpture* of 1966 would be cases in point.) However, in a city unfamiliar with such a concept of public sculpture *per se*, the Council felt the need to indicate a *raison d'être* for the work.

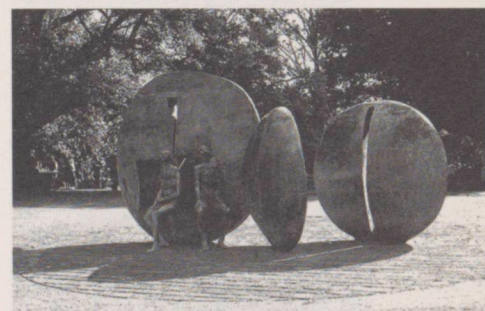


No French Test 1964
Netballers 1965

Twiss was commissioned to design a fountain – a fountain on an exposed, windy site that attracted a lot of foot-traffic. This presented the sculptor with a particular set of difficulties, which he addressed principally by incorporating three large, perforated discs against which his figures would sit. Twiss's discs spatially integrate the sculpture into the environment by subtly mimicking the intersection at the adjacent street corner, mirroring the directional movement of foot-traffic through the site, and providing ledges for his life-size bronze figures to sit on, in static imitation of the numerous members of the public who sit on benches in the park. The discs also contain and confine the water element of the fountain. In the long term, these design features, and in particular the successful scaling of the sculpture to its site, have served the sculpture well. Despite development of the area over the past thirty years, the fountain has remained independent of any programmes of urban renewal. Twiss's work thus continues to be one of the most successfully integrated sculptures in any urban environment in the country. A similar example of an effective integration of the urban and the sculptural is Para Matchitt's *Bridge Sculpture* (1993) in Wellington.

The *Karangahape Road Fountain* was not, however, Greer Twiss's first significant commission. In 1963, he had been asked by the steel fabricating company J. Mercer & Sons Ltd to create a work for their site in May Road, Mt Roskill. This inspired instance of commercial patronage resulted in an equally remarkable work: a kinetic, abstract, stainless steel sculpture, *Sun in Tree* (1963) which was in all respects revolutionary in the history of public sculpture in New Zealand. At that time, commissioned works in light industrial materials, pieces that were substantially abstract in form, and even instances of commercial patronage of sculpture were virtually unheard of in this country.

Working within the Constructivist aesthetic had nonetheless been a diversion for Twiss, who immediately turned again to figurative work and to modelling and casting his pieces. Whereas *Sun in Tree* had incorporated actual motion, he returned to intimating movement through 'freezing' action and gesture. The subjects of his 1960s works – acrobats, athletes, protesters and bathers – are all captured in mid-action. Sometimes a group activity is represented, while in other pieces the subject is solitary. There is often little to identify the affiliation of figures beyond a sign or symbol, such as a stamp for an athlete's number, or the slogan on a flag or banner. Typically these figures are elongated, exaggerated, modelled out-of-proportion and sometimes simplified and abbreviated right down to simple signifiers such as an athlete's singlet. Multiple figures coalesce into spiky clusters. Sharing various stylistic traits, Twiss's figures have a formal genesis in the work of English sculptors that he had admired for some time such as Reg Butler, Kenneth Armitage and Lynn Chadwick. Along with Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and others, these three artists were included in the exhibition 'Recent British Sculpture' which toured New Zealand in 1962.



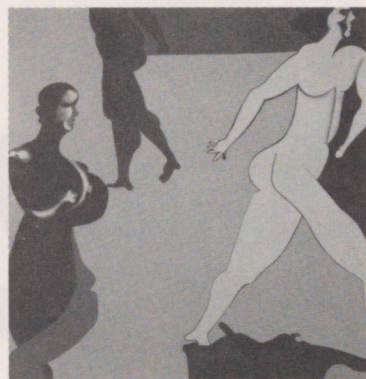
Karangahape Road Fountain 1967-69
Sun in Tree 1963
Wall 1965



Thematically as well as stylistically, the 1960s works present a fairly tight grouping. This was a period in which the world came to New Zealand, and New Zealand went out to the world with new confidence. The introduction of television coincided with the 1960 Rome Olympics, so New Zealanders could see their local heroes starring in the international arena. Athletes of the Arthur Lydiard school, Peter Snell, Murray Halberg, John Davies and Bill Baillie all became household names and formed a part of the political, cultural, social and sporting aspirations of their fellow New Zealanders. There was the advent of international air travel, and the Beatles tour in 1964 (note Twiss's 1965 work *We Love You Ringo*) and Twiss's work clearly reflects the burgeoning sense of national identity. However, at this point in his career, the artist was more interested in formal and spatial considerations of how people move and interact in certain situations than in the specifics of issues. (Thus *Patriots* [1966] and British-based Ban the Bomb marchers can be seen to develop within Twiss's work into protesters against the Vietnam War and, almost twenty years later, into protesters and police clashing over the 1981 Springbok rugby tour.) Overall these works highlight a shift of focus for New Zealand on the world stage, document the rise of the student counter-culture, and herald a new socio-political awareness.

The *Frozen Frames* series (1967-71) continues the pattern of Twiss's earlier works. These are figurative pieces that contain references to the artist's immediate environment as well as recalling his study in Europe, particularly in the way they reflect Emilio Greco's treatment of the female form. The notion of the freeze-frame, however, relates not to the sculptural tradition but to photography and to the cinematic process of capturing a moment within a larger sequence, by stopping the rolling of the film. The question of sculpture's engagement with temporality surfaced at Elam in this period, as some debated whether the emerging time-based arts should come under the auspices of the Sculpture or the Photography department.

Twiss was interested in the way his contemporary Pat Hanly had explored notions of time, viewpoint and framing in his paintings. Hanly was painting works in which the figure hypothetically continued beyond the boundaries of the image, somewhat in the manner of a snapshot. In particular, Twiss was intrigued by the fact that a painter could control the viewpoint of the spectator to an extent not currently enjoyed by sculptors. In response, he started to create a forced perspective in his sculptures, through which he aimed to control the standpoint of the viewer, requiring them to stand in a particular place in order to 'read' the work. In *Frozen Frames*, Twiss was equating the base-plate of the sculpture with the picture plane of a painting. Just as Hanly was doing, he started to crop the edges of his figures, constructing frozen offcuts of the visible world. Over the next few years, the cropped figures evolved further into anatomical fragments; hands, feet or legs were all that was to remain of the human participants in Twiss's work for some time.



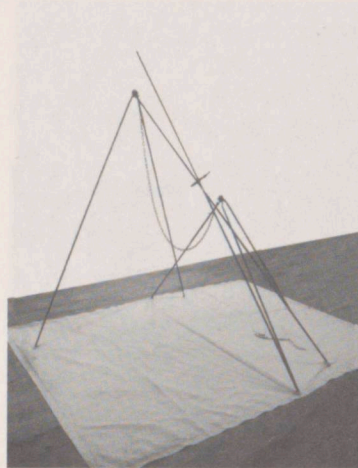
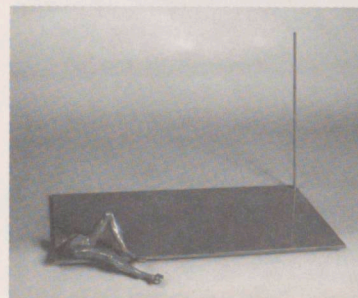
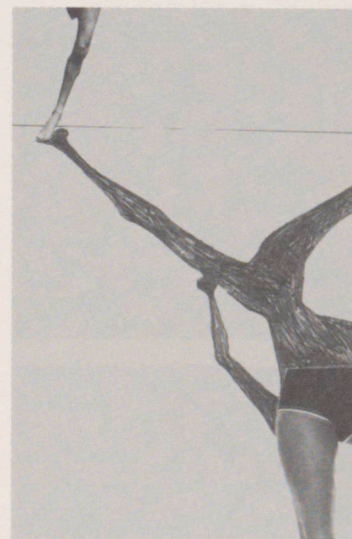
Remember New Zealand 1981
Pat Hanly Figures in Light 14 1964

Greer Twiss's wife, Dee, had been studying psychology at Auckland University since 1968, and her interests in the investigation of perception, and factors that could effect changes in perception, caught his attention. What particularly fascinated him were issues surrounding the perception of movement and speed, size and scale. Working on the theory that scale does not exist *per se*, and is not an absolute, but must be determined on a comparative basis, he started incorporating a greater variety of objects in individual sculptures. For Twiss, the combination of disparate objects or parts summoned up the idea of signals, signposts and cues, and led to a consideration of how one extrapolates from such indicators. *Warp 2* (1972) for example, has a ball in the middle of the base-plate. The ball's scale is communicated by its proportional relationship to the items around it, the objects it interacts with. Also included in this work are a large leg, a small figure, and an even smaller motorbike. The viewer's perception of the ball changes in relation to each of the other elements in the composition.

Just when Twiss had pushed the remains of his figurative work, the anatomical fragments, seemingly as far as they could go, he veered off on a new tangent: he started to incorporate actual objects in his sculpture, and then he began to cast such items. More importantly, he was making direct casts rather than producing a model first. As often happens in his work, simple elements from the sculptor's daily life led the way. In *Take Two* and *Coil* (both 1972) hands — remnants of the human form — hold a coiled rope. Rope entered the scene quite casually, as Twiss was demonstrating the technique of casting to students at Elam and needed something to cast as a demonstration piece. A length of rope was at hand, so it was transformed into bronze. In his sculptures the rope is cast in a variety of metals. In *Lead by 5* (1974) it is cast in lead and used as a lead, which ends up tied to a dog-collar. Here the use of verbal and visual puns comes into play.

In these sculptures, the figurative element becomes increasingly marginalized, driven further and further out toward the extremities of the work. In some pieces the human element remains only by association. In *Sight Line* (1974) for example, there is simply a pair of spectacles and an apple. In turn, these objects are abbreviated — dissected by an imaginary plane, a line of sight which cuts an actual physical path through them. What is left of the pair of spectacles has a formal connection back to the *Frozen Frame* works, while the title of this work heralds the 1977 *Sight/Site* works.

For much of the following decade Twiss focused on aspects of frameworks, barriers, structures and supports that operate in sculpture, in the construction industry, or in domestic scenarios. Often these elements become the actual sculpture, as in the *Support System* works and the *Tripod* series; in other instances the connections are less literal. Cushions and clamps are included; ropes, banners, straps, supports, even canvas straps with handles for carrying glass, end

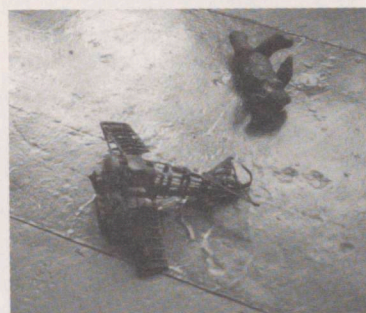
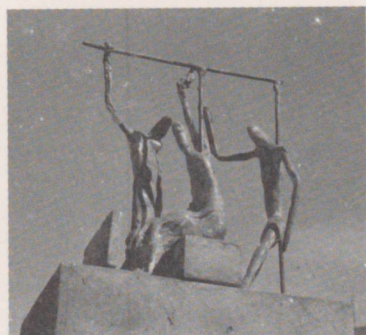


Untitled (Frozen Frames) 1966

Line of Sight 1974

Plane 1971

Chained Tripods 1981



up in the works. This line of thinking can be seen to extend in both directions in the artist's work: the earliest acrobats, miners, straphangers and welders all incorporated support systems. So too, in the last few years, have Twiss's *Albatrosses* (both large and small) benefited from armatures to hold them up.

If Twiss was feeling 'burnt out' by the early 1980s, having virtually exhausted this theme and its ramifications, tragically the metaphor became an awful fact. In 1983 the artist's family home and studio were destroyed in a devastating fire. His subsequent series of *Vacation* installations, including *Vacation 1 Burnt Out* (1984) had strong autobiographical aspects, as did *No Sun, No Rain, No Radiation* (1986), commissioned for the Auckland City Art Gallery's 'Aspects of Recent New Zealand Sculpture' exhibition. There was one room in the house that was not completely destroyed in the blaze, and remnants of objects from that room, as well as others found in the ashes, were used in *No Sun, No Rain, No Radiation*. Twiss used his son Toby's teddy bear (retrieved from the ashes) and a model aeroplane that had not been completely destroyed in the fire, and in a way he simply completed the process that the fire had begun. He put these personal domestic items in moulds, and burnt them out – this time as part of the sculptural process of casting them – so that the fire found its way into the work, not just thematically but physically.

In *No Sun, No Rain, No Radiation* Twiss also started to use larger pieces of lead sheeting (in the tent, for example) and found that he had to make wooden structures to provide the necessary support. Thus it is a work in which many of the sculptor's technical interests intersect with his social concerns and also with the continuing autobiographical elements informing his work. In the early decades of Twiss's career, social concerns had been key features of his sculpture, coupled with a strong interest in issues of national identity. The themes of identity based on socio-historical identification and locale reappear, with telling modifications, and prevail in the work of the 1990s.

The 1993 Fisher Gallery installation *Decoys and Delusions* clearly demonstrates a major redrawing of the artist's interests within a constructed socio-political landscape of signs and symbols. A new language of fabrication also emerges, as the thematic focus shifts once more. This time it is one of folded, bent, cut and soldered, galvanized metal, with its blotchy rawness of finish (though shaped lead sheet, including corrugated inserts, are also utilized). Objects and icons of national identity mix the mythic Kiwi facility for improvisation in the garage-workshop with the imaginative conundrums of the artist's studio, and comical attributes of the colonizer – saw-horses, workbenches, models, cut-out trees and clouds, a modular house, birds, rabbits and bowler hats. 'National identity' itself appears in a state of disarray and self-examination.

The association of the word decoy with duck-shooting and duck quackers led Twiss into the new dimension (for him) of acoustic sculpture, in the development of this installation. The sound emitting from the old lead-covered bakelite

People on a Bus (Straphangers) 1959

Flight Trainer for an Albatross 1999

No Sun, No Rain, No Radiation 1986 (detail)

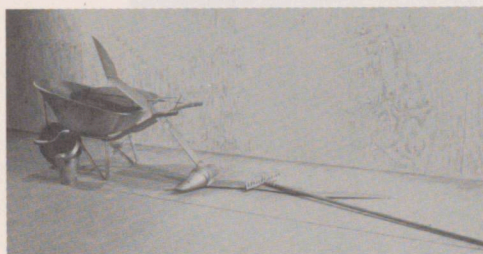
radio on the floor was not music, but the noise of a saw. If a microlight aircraft worked to teach orphaned geese how to fly in the movie *Fly Away Home*, which the artist had seen on TV, then surely the sound of a saw was appropriate for Twiss's ducks mounted on saw-horses. In the Artis Gallery installation of the following year, *A Right Royal Summer*, it was an ancient wind-up gramophone that emitted the sound, this time of waves and birdcalls in the exhibition's title work. But in one corner of the gallery this gave way to a recording of Gilbert and Sullivan. The record seemed to be stuck in a groove. The issue was imperialism, and Queen Victoria herself was a captive audience. An earlier work, *Edible History* (1992) included sculptures of native birds listening to recordings of readings from Captain Cook's journals. Here the sculptor took issue with Cook's musings on New Zealand native birds – the explorer's focus shifting effortlessly from discussing their feathered finery to fricassee. For Twiss it was not casserole but conservation that mattered.

Twiss has made other birds, singularly and in groups, that perch on poles and are animated by recorded birdsongs. In 1998 Twiss was much taken with Roger McDonald's novel *Mr Darwin's shooter*, narrated by Darwin's manservant Covington, 'a meticulous plunderer' whose 'work was killing small birds'. Stuffing his dead birds into sleek shapes for storage, Covington reflects: 'There was no need to pretty them up. They were not made as objects for a show case, but for a naturalist's examination cabinet ... Covington mused half-sleeping that birds' column-shapes were expressions of music – tubes for wind that he could hear ... the sweet and the loud in rows with their heads tilted slightly over, their beaks aligned and their feet twiglike and tied with shipping tags.'⁵ Although McDonald's novel did influence Twiss's 2000 installation *A Curious Collection*, some of his earlier bird pieces might as well have been made with such passages in mind.

The aesthetics of packaging, classification and presentation, allegorized as tools of colonial imperialism, are hauntingly distilled in *Te Papa* (1998). The primary form of the work is a full-size version in zinc-coated steel of a traditional Carnegie Case, once common exhibition furniture in the Auckland Museum. In this instance, one of the exhibits has taken wing and partially escaped the incarceration of its display. Related works such as *Venus in the Park* (1996), *Victoria and the Birds* (1994) and *Hobson's Baggage* (1995) continued to skirmish with the rhetoric of empire and civic aggrandizement, colonial landscape gardening and other signifiers of cultural packaging and relocation. Twiss's cumbersome, faceted Venus alludes to the most ancient form of the Venus of Willendorf as well as the omnipresent conventions of Western art, summed up in the form of the reclining nude; his several versions of the regally attired Queen Victoria reference the innumerable parks and domains throughout the colonised world whose key axes are dominated by bronze or marble sovereigns and/or winged Greek deities.⁶



Decoys and Delusions 1993 (detail)
Francis Williamson *Queen Victoria* 1897-99, Albert Park, Auckland



What's a Dead Albatross Doing in a Place Like This? (1999) is an appropriate work to summarize Greer Twiss's practice to date. Thinking about a request for an outdoor garden work, the artist's eye lighted upon an old wheelbarrow that happened to be in his studio. (Such casual 'chance encounters', needless to say, belie the creative and intellectual engagement that the sculptor actually brings to the undertaking.) Into the wheelbarrow went a rake and a garden broom. The angle they form suggests the wingspan of a bird – a big bird, an albatross. Twiss adds a boat to the construction: a model boat and some water. But the water is made out of galvanized iron. It is heavy. So too is the albatross. Like his lead balloons of the late 1980s, it will never fly; it is chained to the wheelbarrow, secured, safe. He preserves it – as in a museum display. But a dead albatross, in a wheelbarrow, in a sculpture, in a garden? Albatrosses die at sea – so what is a dead albatross doing in a place like this? One thinks initially perhaps of Coleridge's stricken bird in the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and the resultant curse; then one thinks of the contemporary curses from the natural world that we bring upon ourselves through excessive commercial trawling, set nets, oil slicks, chemical spills, and toxic industrial waste. With the anxieties of post-colonial history and ecological disaster well in the frame now, Twiss's winning athletes and cancer-free, bikini-clad sunbathers of the 1960s seem like representatives of a very different country.

Robin Woodward

1. Greer Twiss in conversation with the author, December 2002. All other references to the artist's comments are from the same source unless otherwise stated.

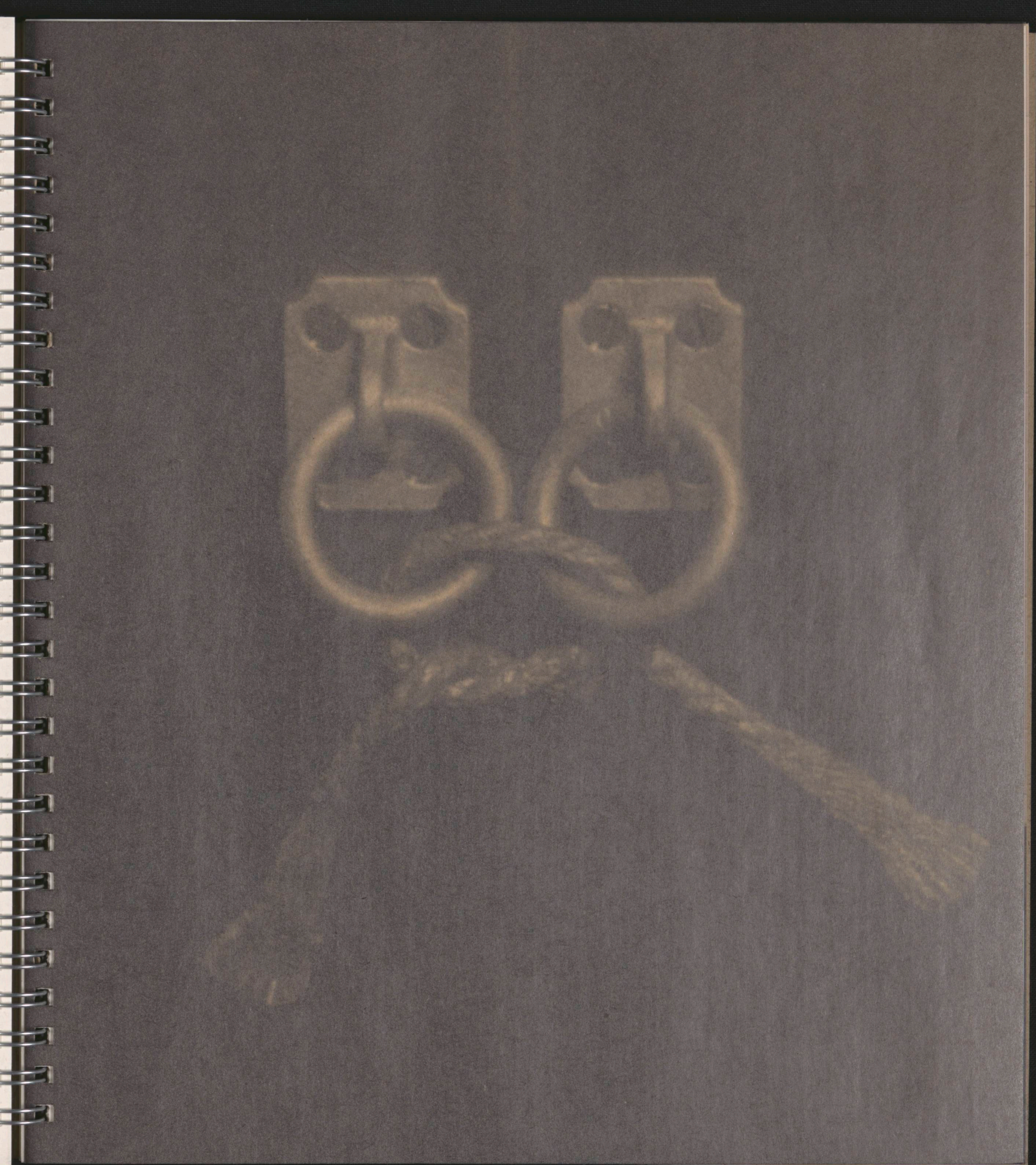
2. I.V. Porsolt, 'Liveliest Show in Years', *New Zealand Herald*, 30 May 1956.

3. Alberto Giacometti was Swiss-born but was trained as a sculptor in Italy from the age of 19.

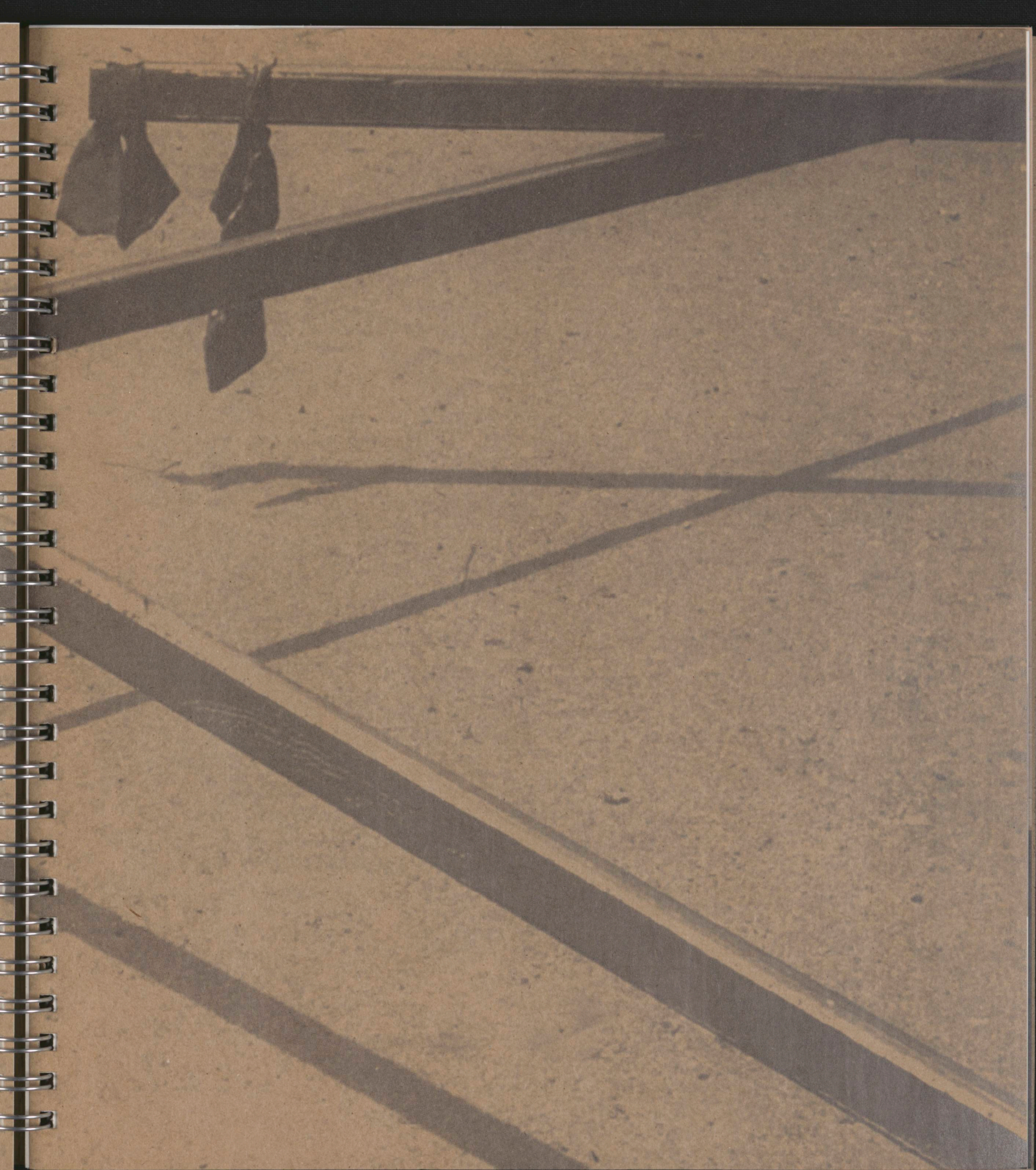
4. Charles Harrison, in 'Sculpture's Recent Past', Terry A. Neff (ed.), *A quiet revolution: British sculpture since 1965* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago/Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco/Thames and Hudson, London, 1987) explains the generational conflicts at play in British art of the late 1950s and 1960s in these terms: 'One clear measure of the division between generations which occurred during the late 1950s is the transfer of interest from European to American art.' p.12.

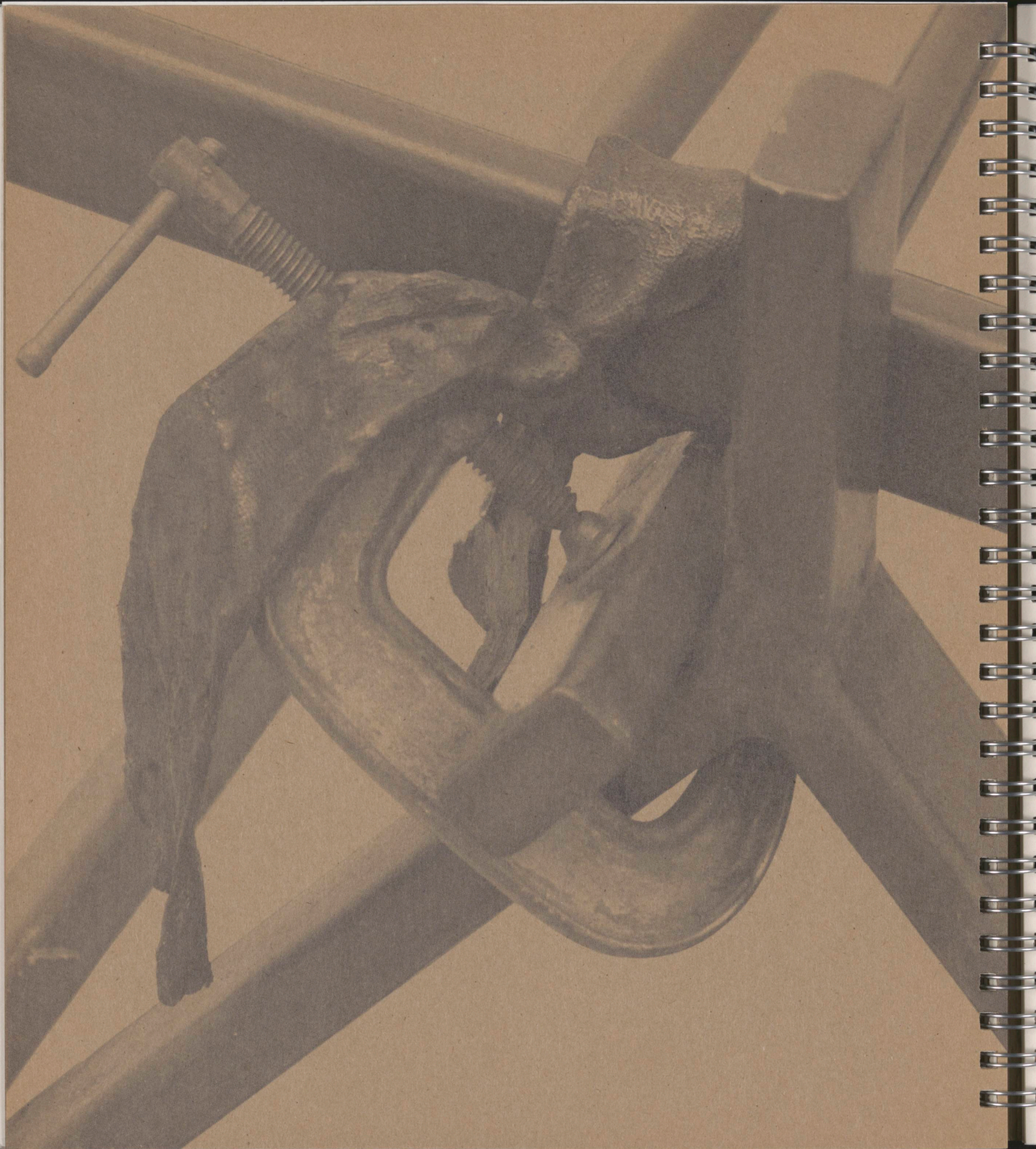
5. Roger McDonald, *Mr Darwin's shooter*, Vintage Book, Random House Australia, Sydney, 1999. p.257, p.256, p.255.

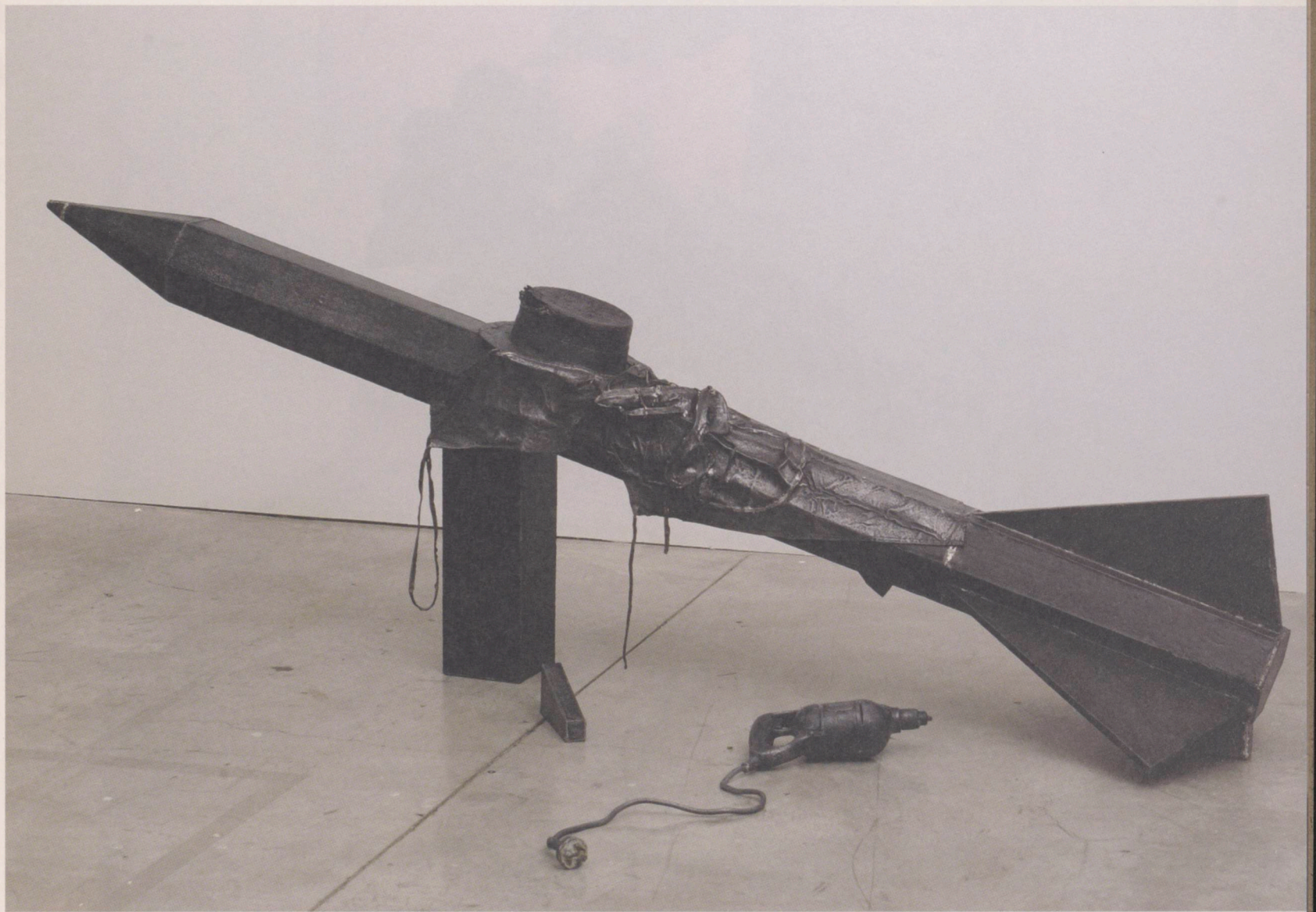
6. See Robin Woodward, 'Greer Twiss: a case of sculpture', *Greer Twiss: Fabrications 1996 – 2000, A Curious Collection: an installation*, Lopdell House Gallery, Auckland, 2000, for further discussion of this content in Twiss's recent work.











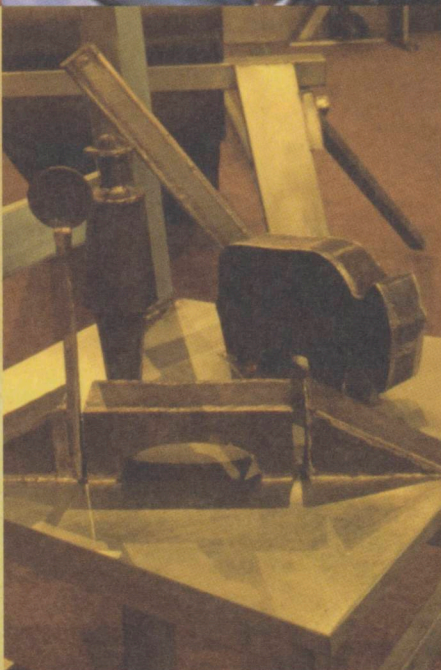
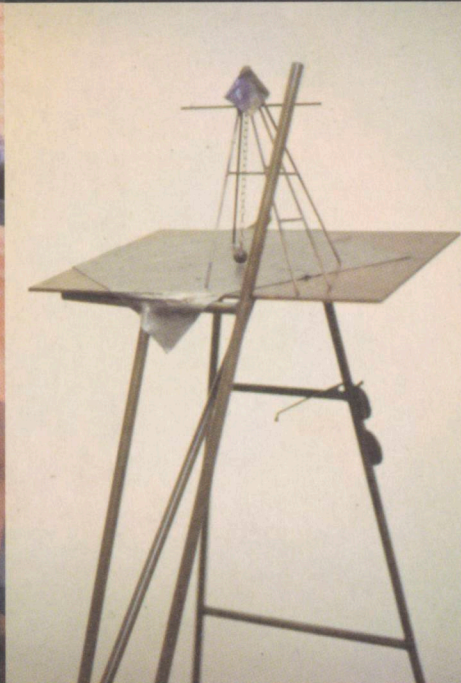
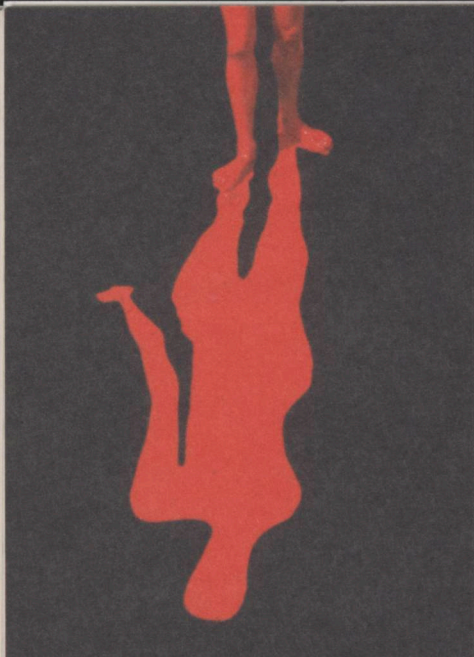
Dreaming of S.A.M. 1988



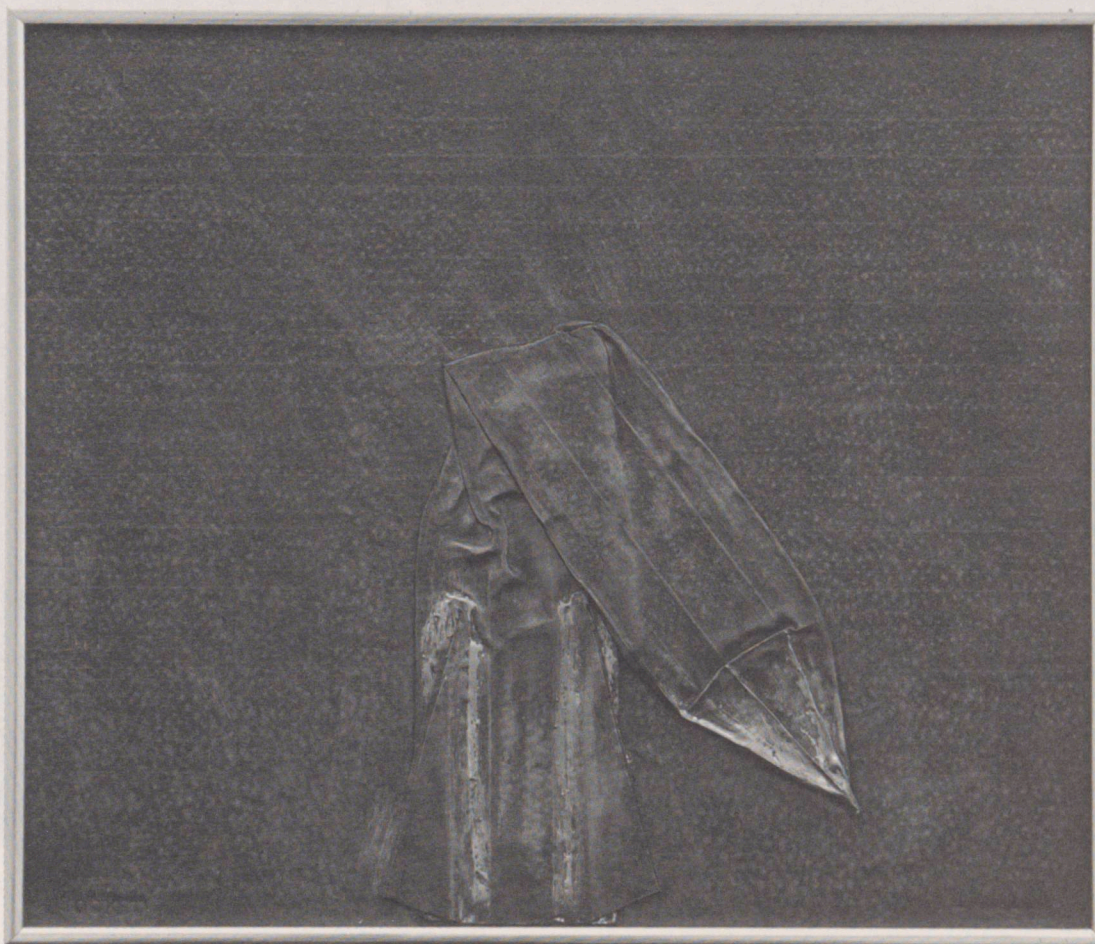
Bowler and Flower 1993

Te Papa 1999





details from Buttocks; Red Legs 1; Tripod, Tripod;
Decoys and Delusions; Up and Away 1993



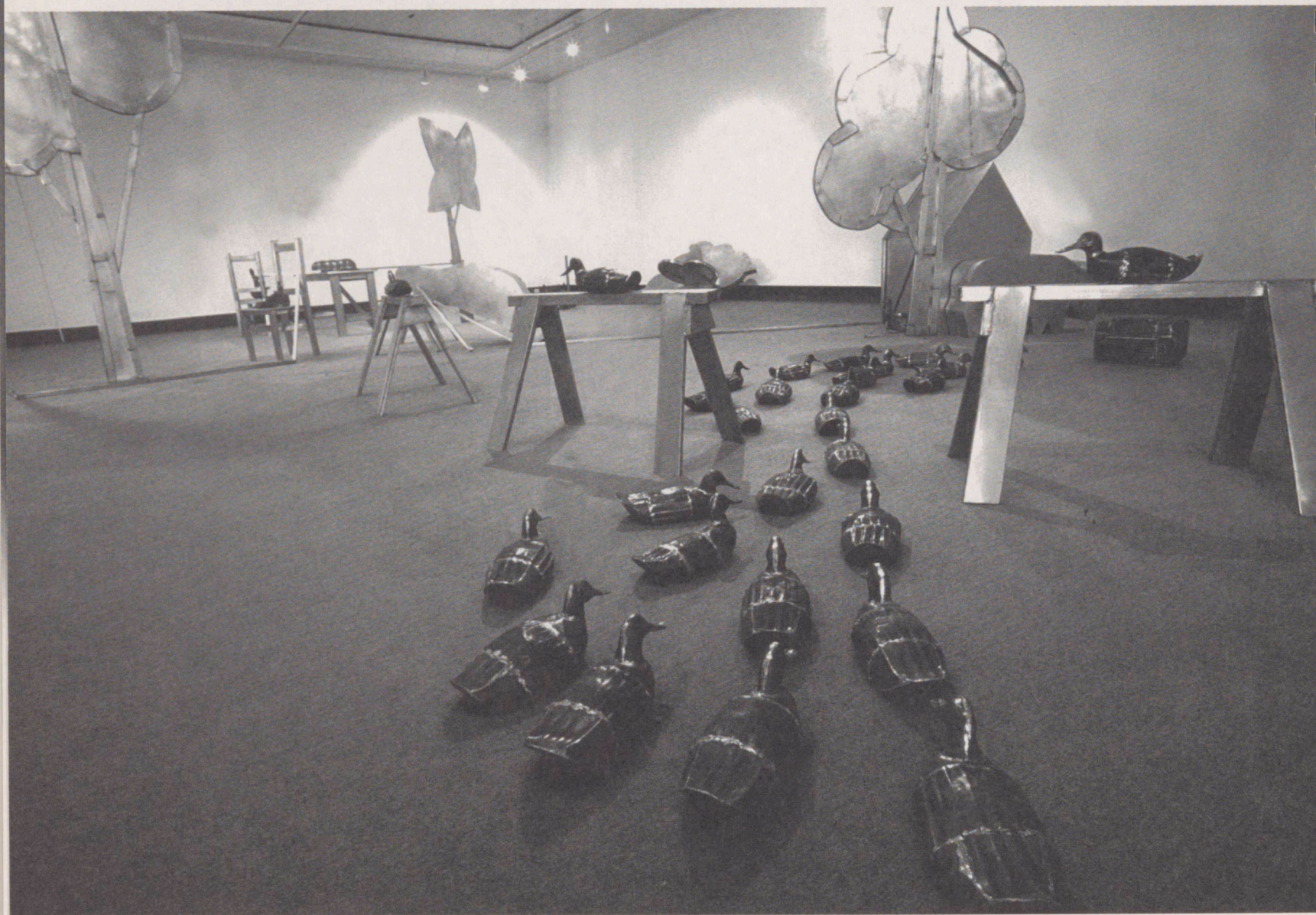
Flat Rocket 1988



A Group of Athletes 1964

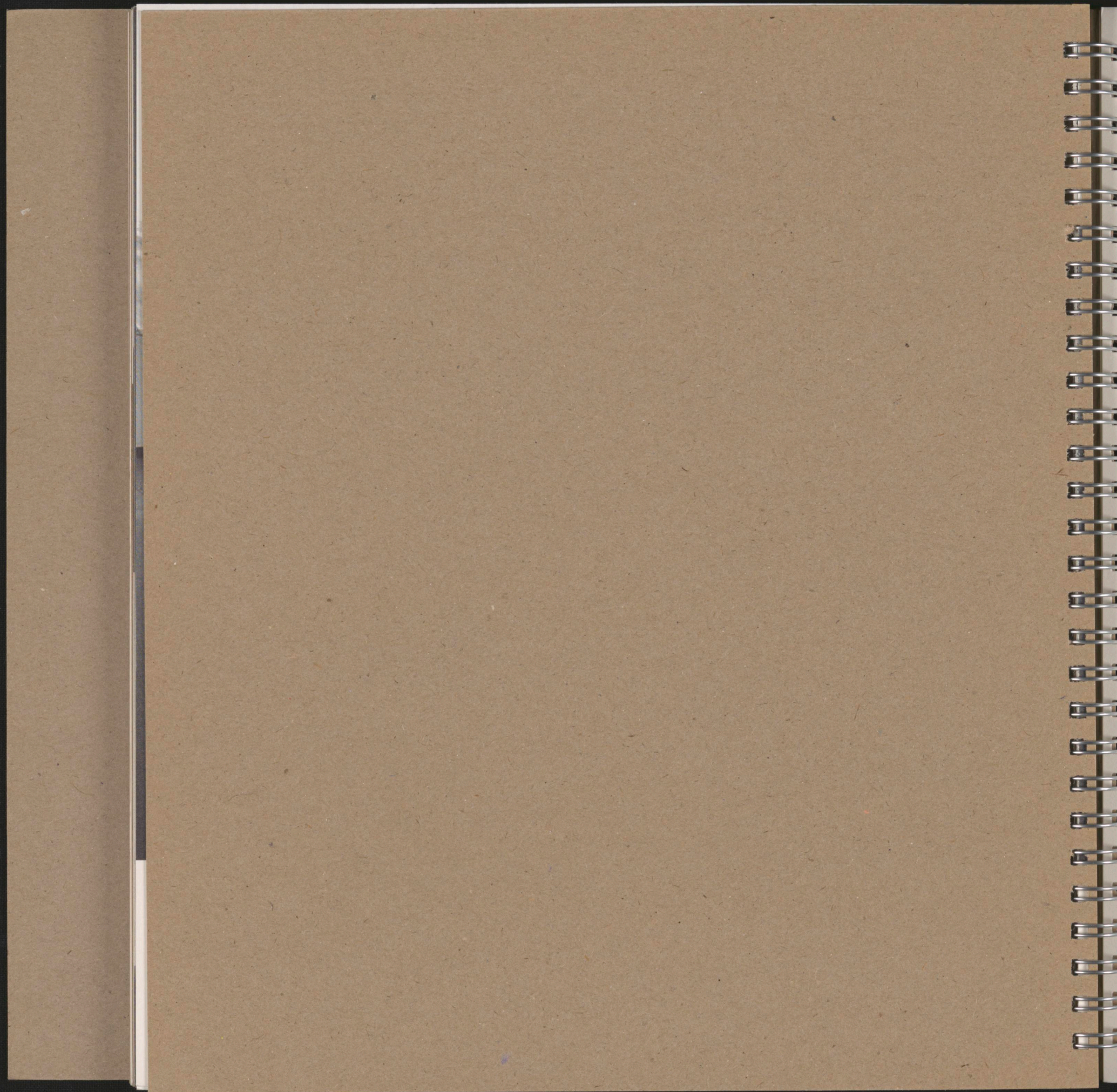


Marchers 1967
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki,
gift of the Friends of the Auckland Art Gallery 2001



Decoys and Delusions 1993

**BIOGRAPHY
BIBLIOGRAPHY
LIST OF WORKS**



BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

1937

Born Epsom, Auckland, New Zealand

1941 – 1950

Began making string-puppets at 4 years old, using balsa wood, dowels, plasticene and nut tree seed-pods for heads. Made wood and tissue paper kit-set model aeroplanes. Spent a lot of time at home, sick in bed due to chronic asthma, allowing opportunity for making things. Parents set aside a room in the family home where a puppet theatre was semi-permanently installed; Greer organised curtains, stage props, lighting and a simple sound system. Attended Vasanta Theosophist School in Epsom. Gave his first public marionette performance at the St John's Ambulance Society in 1946.

1951 – 1955

Secondary education at Auckland Grammar School, where he set up a string-puppet making group in a tiny turret room and produced a marionette rendition of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Trial by Jury*. Variety of public performances over the next few years.

1956 – 1959

Attended University of Auckland, Elam School of Fine Arts, following what was still a very traditional art education based on drawing from the life model and the classical cast. Graduated in 1959 with Diploma of Fine Arts with Honours in Sculpture.

Researched casting processes and cast works such as *Miners Going Down* in lead and then *Welders* and *Standing Man* in bronze.

The touring exhibition 'Henry Moore: an exhibition of sculpture and drawings', which came to the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1956, was a significant introduction to concerns of British and European modernism.

Exhibited works such as *Three Miners*, *Don Quixote*, *Flounder Spearers* and *Boy on a Tricycle* in the Auckland Society of Arts show for the Auckland Festival.

1960 – 1963

Attended Auckland Teachers' College and lectured in Puppetry and Pottery to Occupational Therapy School.

Participated in development of local TV productions with at least twenty performances of marionettes in two TV series: *Puppet Playhouse: Variety Show* and *Old Time Music Hall*.

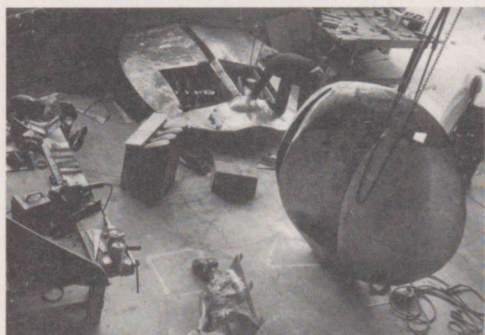
Founding member of the NZ Society of Sculptors, along with Jim Allen, Paul Beadle, Molly McAllister, Anne Tremain and Lyndon Smith.

Taught Art at Tamaki Intermediate School from 1961 until 1964.

Married Deirdre (Dee) Kirton in 1962.



TV puppet production, c.1961
working on Karangahape Road Fountain, c.1968
Handstand 1962



Exhibited in numerous group exhibitions such as the 1962 Auckland City Art Gallery show 'Painting and Sculpture'. Sculptures predominantly of small-scale figures, many of them performers such as acrobats, tumblers, tightrope walkers and singers. Established a bronze foundry with forced draught, oil-feed furnace at his Mt Wellington home and assisted Jim Allen in constructing a foundry at Elam.

Commissioned to make the angular, abstracted stainless-steel work *Sun in Tree* for Mercer & Sons Ltd., Auckland, 1963.

1964 – 1965

First solo exhibitions held at Ikon Gallery, Auckland and Eric Scholes Gallery, Rotorua in 1964. Took part in the Mildura Sculpture Triennial (Australia) in the same year. Major work from the *Athletes* series produced in these years featured runners, iconic events and objects from world of athletics. Exhibited works such as *The Bomb Will Maim*, *Remember Hiroshima*, *No French Test* and *We Love You Ringo* in 1965 solo exhibition at John Cordy's gallery, Auckland.

With assistance of Queen Elizabeth II Travel Grant, travelled to Australia, Egypt, Italy, Germany, Holland and England visiting art schools, art foundries, galleries and museums. Studied bronze casting at Royal College of Art, London, for 3 months. Saw works by artists such as Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Lynn Chadwick and Emilio Greco, the American-influenced work of Anthony Caro in which modelling and casting was replaced with cut, welded and brightly coloured spray-painted steel, and the fibreglass works of New Zealand sculptors John Panting and Steve Furlonger.

1966 – 1968

Commissioned by Auckland City Council to produce *Karangahape Road Fountain* (completed in 1969).

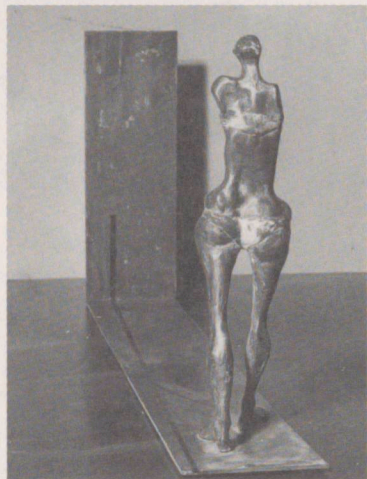
Lecturer, University of Auckland School of Fine Arts, Sculpture (Elam) from 1966 and Senior Lecturer from 1968.

Exhibited a major body of work from the *Frozen Frames* series at Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland, including *Bikini Girl and Shadow*, *Girl and Wall*, *Shadow Meets Shadow*, *Real & Implied*, *Perspective Planes 1 and II*, *Buttocks* and *Red Legs 1*. Thoroughly immersed in teaching at Elam and in reading current literature on the psychology of perception, which he quite deliberately applied to his art practice. Access to literature on human sensation, perception and cognition was through wife Dee, taking her first degree in psychology and education, and through conversations with staff members such as Dr Barry Kirkwood from the Psychology Department. Became particularly interested in issues of directing viewpoint, framing, shadows, incomplete forms and contradictory cues for interpretation; the formal devices of cropping and framing in painting and photography were key reference points.

1969 – 1971

First son, Toby, adopted in 1969. Arriving unexpectedly early, he spent his first three weeks within the Twiss family at the University of Auckland Fine Arts studio where Greer and Dee were working to finish *Karangahape Road Fountain*. Works such as *Red Legs 2*, *Plane 1-18*, *Frame 4-11*, *Shadow 2-18*, and *Pre-image 1-14* maintained the focus on issues of cropping, placement and cut-out shadows. During these years solo exhibitions were held at Victoria University, Wellington; Bonython Gallery, Sydney; and Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland.

Helped organise the NZ Society of Sculptors and Painters' Sculpture Symposium, which brought five international sculptors to Auckland (Hiroki Ueda, Fred Loopstra, Tom Burrows, Helena Escobedo and Michio Ihara) and funded them to produce works around the city: Second son, Jacob born during the Sculpture Symposium and installation of Ueda's work.



working on *Karangahape Road Fountain*, c.1968

We Love you Ringo 1965

Girl and Wall 1968

1972 – 1974

Two major new series were produced in these years. The *Intersections* series of 1972 included work such as *Coil, Rope, Hang, Now, Touch, Shift 1-5*, and *Warp 1-3*, presented in a solo exhibition at Barry Lett Galleries. These works involved isolated hands clasping rope or touching a surface with occasional contrasts between real and cast objects. The *Shift* and *Warp* works were puzzling ensembles of objects and partial figures in conflicting scales set up like enigmatic board-games. These concerns were developed further in the extraordinarily intense and epigrammatic series *Of Lead Lines and Links* in 1974. A solo exhibition at Barry Lett Galleries included *Push Link, Push Line, Door, Lead by 5, VW Split, Line of Sight, Line Touch, Measure, Foot Plate, Full Stop Sight, and Full Stop Clamp*.

In 1974 work began on the commissioned work for Todd Motors, Porirua, completed in 1975. This work, *Scale Shift*, transformed the company's courtyard into a type of tabletop, upon which Greer deployed a large bronze cotton reel, a metal ruler with imperial calibrations fixed to a metal base by a huge G-clamp, red nylon rope and a long shadow folded upright in place of an absent figure.

Appointed as Head of Sculpture Section at Elam in 1974.

Adopted daughter Abbie was born in 1974.

1975 – 1980

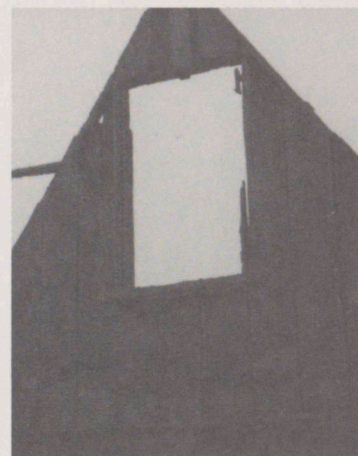
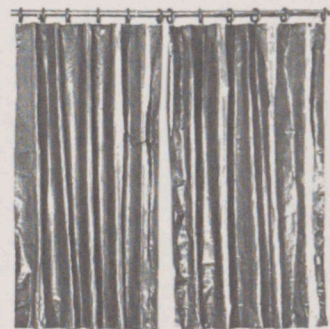
There were three key series from this period, all launched first at Barry Lett Galleries. Using lengths and plates of steel, *Barriers and Sight Screens* of 1976 were based on road workers' barriers, and sight-screens such as one sees at cricket grounds. They are like obstacles and obstructions in the gallery, though small cast rags and ties add whimsical, anecdotal details. Typical works include *Barrier 1, Open Barrier, Sight Screen 1*, and *Trig*. *Site/Sight Works* of 1977 employed steel brackets, plates and bars to demarcate territories of gallery floor space. Typical works include *Site Work Cross* and *Site/Sight Work*. *Support Systems* of 1979 played with the vocabulary of physical support such as cushioning, tying, strapping, leaning, propping, bolting, clamping. Typical works include *Intersection, Bundle, Pressure Point*, and *Support System 1*. Presented a seminar at the 'Sculpture 10 Conference', Toronto, in 1975; attended 'Sculpture Today Conference' in Toronto, 1978. Speakers at these conferences included Robert Smithson, Vito Acconci, Robert Morris, Mark di Suvero, Carl Andre, George Trakas, Anthony Caro, Rosalind Krauss and Rainer Banham.

1981 – 1987

'Greer Twiss: A Survey 1959 – 1981' toured nationally by the City Art Gallery, Wellington. Between 1981 and 1983 the *Tripod* series, begun in 1980, was shown in numerous solo shows throughout New Zealand, in Sydney and London, and works were included in group exhibitions in San Francisco, Pittsburgh (Carnegie International Invitational) and Auckland. Works such as *Twin Wedges, Direction Wedge, Chained Tripods* and *Triangle* referenced the versatility of the tripod as a device to support theodolites, telescopes or rifles, yet removed all real functions from their three-legged logic.

In 1983 fire destroyed family home, much of the art collection and materials of family history, causing the death of family friend, John Watson.

Made Associate Professor, Head of Sculpture Section at Elam in 1984. The major series between 1983 and 1987 was *Still Life*, including works such as *Vacation I Burnout, Vacation 2 Gone Fishing, Show and Tell, Tools of Trade 1 and 2, Circumstantial Evidence, No Sun, No Rain, No Radiation*. Dominant materials were lead and wood, used to present ordinary and archetypal objects on various supports such as folding chairs, screens, easels, banners, aprons and groundsheets.



Greer Twiss, Rodney Kirk-Smith and Wystan Curnow
at Toronto 'Sculpture Today Conference', 1978

Curtain 1989
house fire, 1983



1988 – 1992

In 1988 fire destroyed studio building, a considerable number of works in storage and in progress, including those intended for upcoming exhibition. In one month the same works were remade for the Gow Langsford exhibition, which contained works that moved between a melancholy of failed projects and reveries of romantic travel. Key pieces included *Boxed Rocket*, *Up and Away*, *Airship*, *Even with a Paddle*, *Dreaming of S.A.M.*, and *Bent Rocket*. Commissioned to make *Red Legs* and *Twin Tripods* for the Aurora Group at Penrose Industrial Park and later *Tripod Fish – Trophy* for Seoul Olympics Cultural Park. In 1989 spent 3 months travelling, mainly in France, Spain and Italy. In 1990 a strong body of work exhibited at Gow Langsford Gallery based on a theatrical reconstruction of Old World Europe imagined as stage sets of abandoned props, domes, cupolas, steps, empty piazzas, balloon launching pads and a redundant magic of manual fabrication. Key works include *Act One Scene One*, *Anonymous Builder: A Renaissance Dreamer*, *Revolving Stage*, *Grand Tour Set 1*, *Twin Domes at Nice*, *Venice is Sinking* and *Flight of Fancy*, a work commissioned by Bell, Gully, Buddle & Weir, Law Firm. Deputy Head of Department 1992 and 1993.

1993 – 1998

Installations and large works in galvanised sheet steel dominated this period. Greer enjoyed the ordinariness of the material, its associations with plumbing and roofing technology. The 1993 installation *Decoys and Delusions* at the Fisher Gallery, Auckland, brought together the objects and atmosphere of the artist's studio, the set-designer's workbench and the handyman's garage and included a sound component. In 1994 *A Right Royal Summer* installation at Artis Gallery, Auckland, was developed in association with multi-media festival *Soundwatch*. This work played with the idea of the beach as a transitional space, a site where the flotsam and jetsam of colonial settlement and imperial aspirations collected. Like braced stage flats, cut and folded forms of Queen Victoria, Rangitoto Island, pigeons, trees, a wind-up gramophone and the settler's homestead cluster together to claim territory. Commissioned to make *Victoria and the Birds* for Victoria University, Wellington. Other works in these years, such as *Hobson's Baggage*, *Venus in the Park*, *Tools of Conquest – Chainsaw*, *Flags of Convenience*, *A Work in Three Movements* and *Carnegie Case Project: A Case of Representation* investigate the imposed artifice of colonialism and the impassioned artifice of private and public collecting.

1999 – 2002

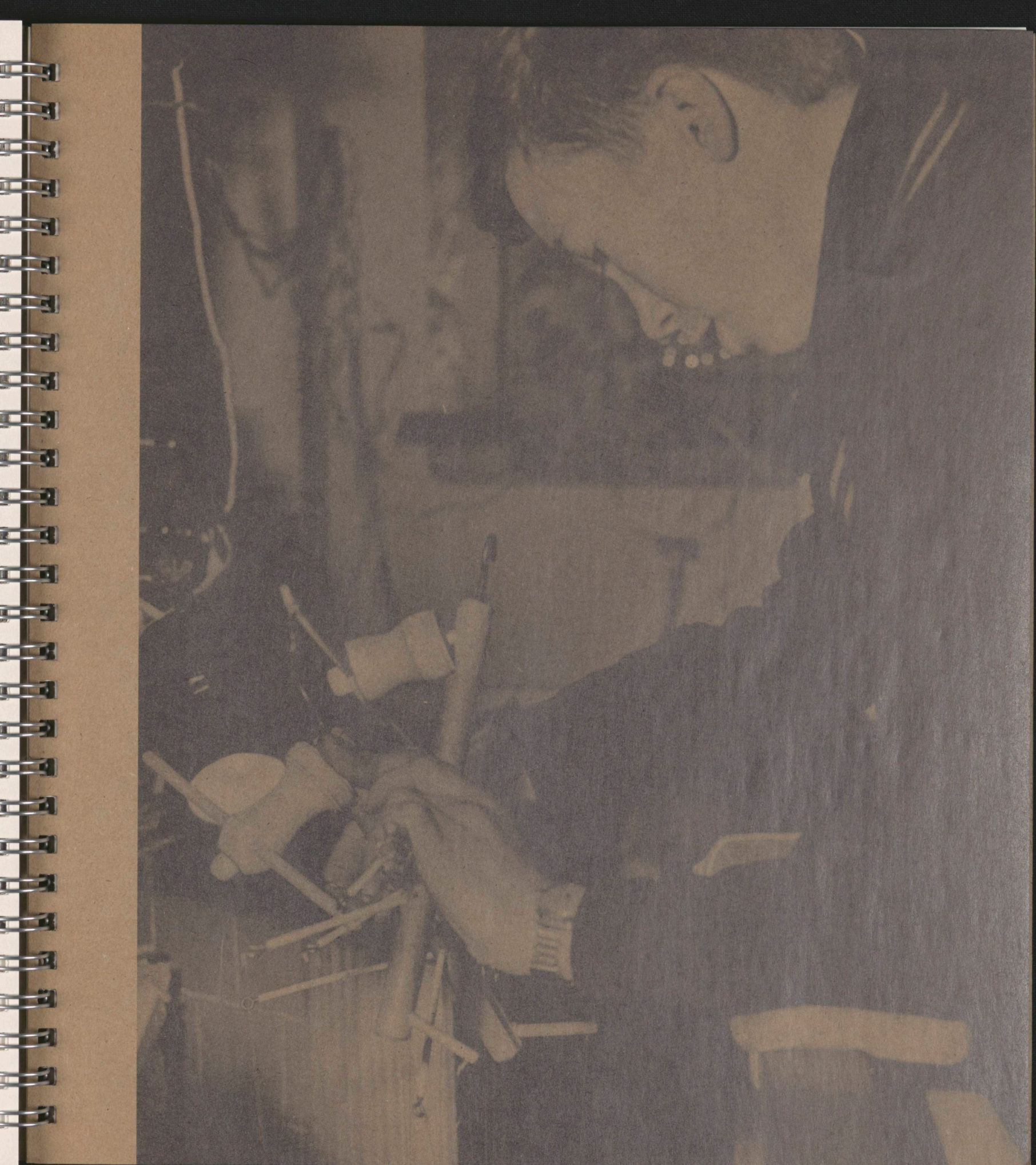
Retired in January 1999 from University of Auckland.

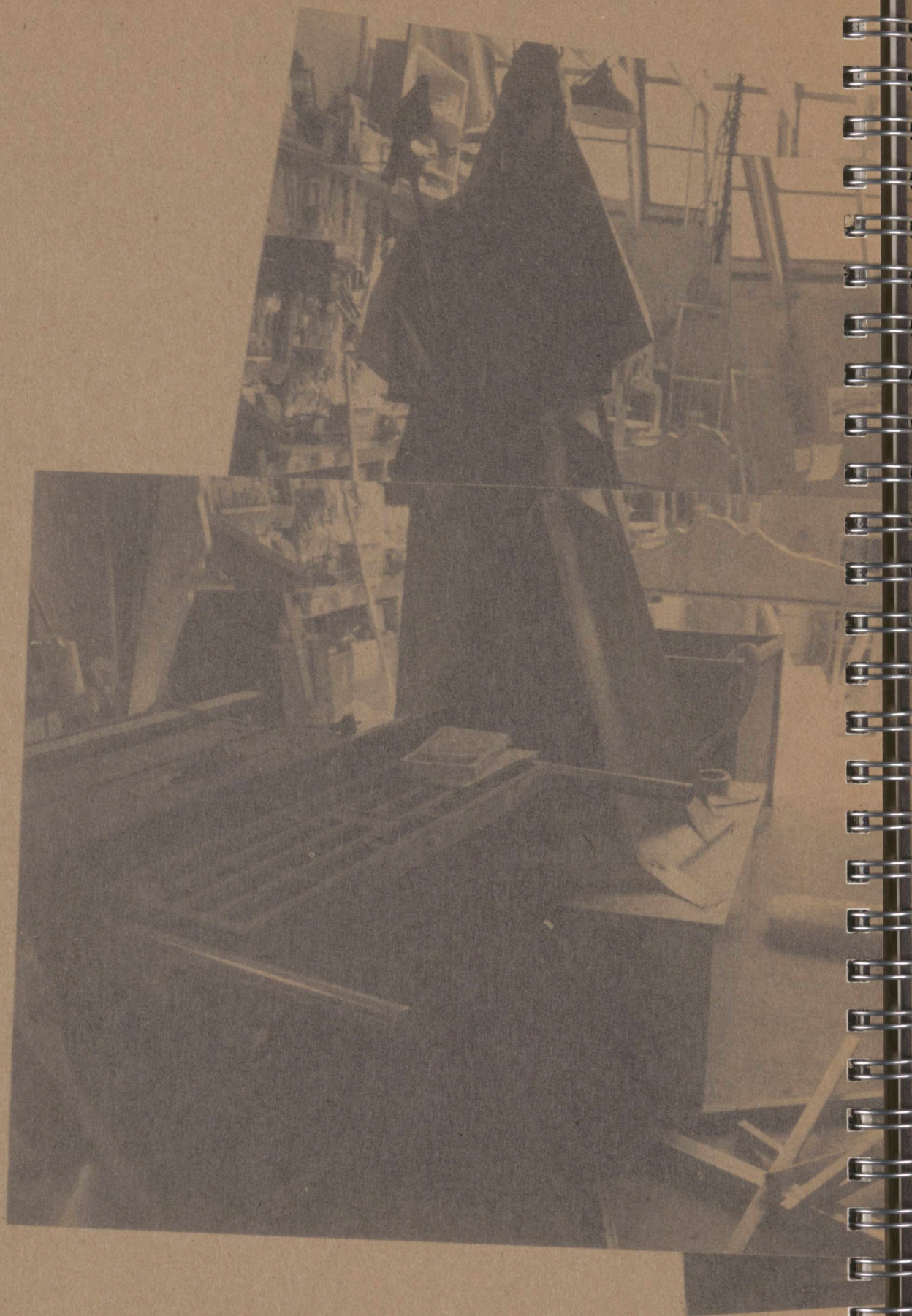
Invited to exhibit *A Work in Three Movements* in 'Volume and Form: a contemporary environmental and urban sculptural exhibition', Singapore, 1999.

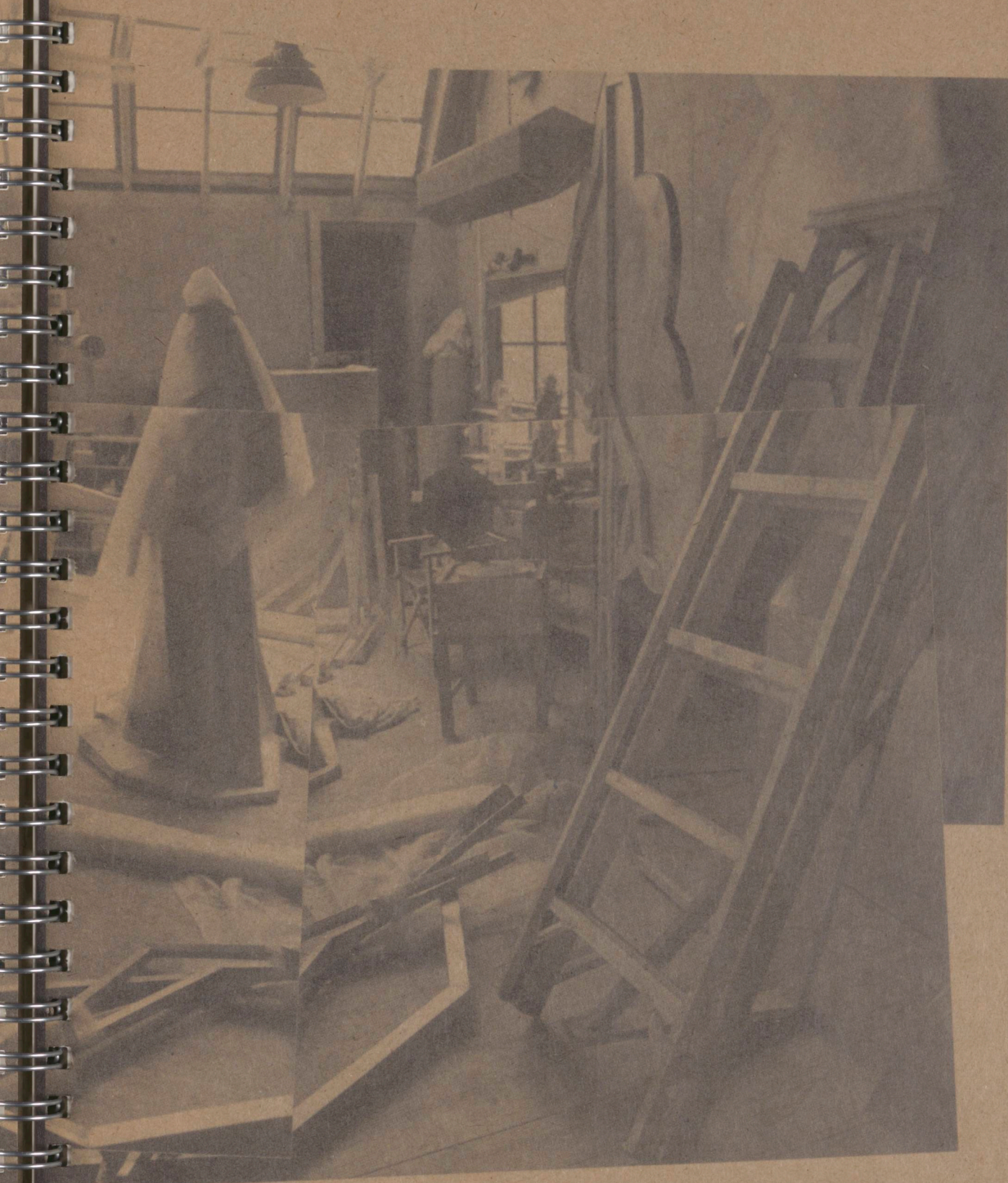
The last few years have seen a concentration on the thematic of birds and curious structures of support, be they the stacks of plates and cups in the *Picnic* series of thrice-labelled bronze native birds, tagged in Maori, Latin and common English, or the galvanized steel albatrosses caught in wall brackets, a scaffold of rods and ladders, or trapped in the side of a museum display case. Key works include *Te Papa*, *Grounded*, *Mounted*, and *What's a Dead Albatross Doing in a Place Like This?* Constructed from rusting mild steel in 2000, *A Curious Collection* was an installation project which looks at the origins of museums in the private collections of specimens, curios and artefacts fashionable in the sixteenth and centuries. The most recent exhibition marks a return to the intricate language of the maquette and explores the madness and misadventure of whaling, and tabletop versions of the large trapped albatross series. Made an Officer of New Zealand Merit in the 2002 Queen's Awards.

compiled by Allan Smith

artist in studio, 1989
George Street studio, c. 2000
Picnic Plates 1999









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Docking, Gil. 'A Conversation with Greer Twiss, Sculptor', *Ascent: a journal of the arts in New Zealand*, November 1967, pp. 46-53.

Green, Tony. 'Greer Twiss and Illusion', *Art New Zealand*, Summer 1986/87, pp. 40-43.

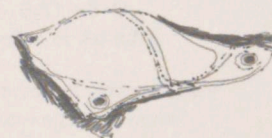
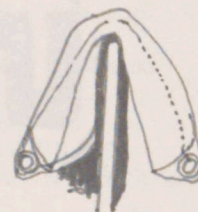
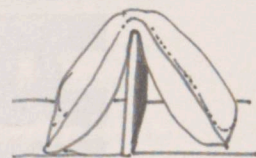
Paterson, Alistair. 'Making Sense of It: the found and structural art of Greer Twiss, Christine Hellyar and Terry Stringer', *Art New Zealand*, Spring 1981, pp. 20-25.

FILM

Profiles: Greer Twiss (videorecording) Director: Bruce Morrison. Produced by Anson Associates in association with Television New Zealand, 1983.

THESIS

Maré, Barbara. 'Greer Twiss: sculpture', a thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Art History, University of Auckland, June 1988.



LIST OF WORKS

Miner Going Down 1958
mixed media
300 x 100 x 100
Collection of the artist

Flounder Spearers 1959
cast iron
200 x 200 x 100
Collection of the artist

Welders 1959
bronze
250 x 300 x 130
Collection of W. R. Allen

Handstand 1962
bronze
300 x 200 x 60
Private Collection, Auckland

Acrobat 1963
bronze
340 x 310 x 140
Collection of Ivan Juriss

A Group of Athletes 1964
bronze
370 x 510 x 360
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1974

The Bomb Will Maim 1965
bronze
520 x 560 x 220
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1965

No French Test 1965
bronze and wood
310 x 225 x 200
Collection of the Museum
of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa

Patriots 1966
painted bronze
50 x 610 x 200
Paris Family Collection

Bikini Girl and Shadow 1968
painted fibreglass and
painted steel
1330 x 315 x 1495
Collection of the Museum
of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa

Buttocks 1968
fibreglass
1590 x 210 x 550
Collection of the artist

Frozen Frame 1968
lacquered bronze and
lacquered aluminium
308 x 610 x 305
Collection of the Museum
of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa

Girl and Wall 1968
painted bronze
250 x 100 x 400
Collection of Pat and
Gil Hanly

Red Legs 2 1969
fibreglass
1080 x 600 x 710
Collection of John and
Lynda Matthews

Shadow 1969
bronze
160 x 100 x 650
Collection of the artist

Plane 1970
painted bronze and
aluminium
200 x 610 x 310
Collection of the artist

Plane 1971
lacquered bronze and
lacquered aluminium
400 x 610 x 340
Collection of the Museum
of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa

Plane 7 (Jump) 1970
painted bronze and
aluminium
240 x 310 x 610
Collection of the artist

Red Plane 1970
painted bronze and aluminium
210 x 1220 x 300
Collection of the artist

Coil 1972
aluminium and rope
130 x 1170 x 860
Collection of the artist

Touch 1972
bronze
170 x 140 x 210
Collection of The University
of Auckland

Warp 1 1972
bronze and steel
200 x 910 x 910
Collection of Dr W. J. Poole

Warp 2 1972
bronze and steel
120 x 910 x 910
Collection of the artist

Doors 1974-2002
steel and lead
2000 x 800 x 800
Collection of the artist

Full Stop Clamp 1974
bronze, steel and aluminium
157 x 188 x 210
Collection of the Museum
of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa

Lead by 5 1974
lead and steel
460 x 1750 x 550
Collection of the Museum
of New Zealand
Te Papa Tongarewa

Push Line 1974
bronze and steel
800 x 122 x 61
Collection of Pat and
Gil Hanly

Push Link 1974
bronze, steel and lead
1220 x 920 x 600
Collection of Robert and
Elizabeth Ellis

Link 1974-2002
lead and steel
150 x 800 x 40
Collection of the artist

Sight Line 1974
bronze and steel
50 x 610 x 610
Collection of the artist

VW Split 1974
steel, bronze, string
760 x 610 x 70
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1974

Open Barrier 1976-2002
steel and bronze
140 x 800 x 800;
130 x 800 x 800
Collection of the artist

Sight/Site (Maquette) 1977
bronze and steel
100 x 500 x 500
Collection of the artist

Site/Sight 1977
steel and bronze
580 x 3000 x 3000
Collection of the artist

Site/Sight 1977
steel, brass, paint
100 x 400 x 600
Collection of the artist

Intersection 1979
steel, aluminium and canvas
150 x 610 x 310
Collection of the artist

Support System 1 1979
steel, aluminium and bronze
2260 x 2740 x 430
Collection of the artist

Support System 2 1979
steel and aluminium
1620 x 5290 x 1100
Collection of the artist

Show and Tell 1984
lead and wood (tawa)
1730 x 1600 x 1000
Collection of the artist

Tripod Tripod (and broken glass) 1984
steel and lead
1800 x 1000 x 1000
Collection of the artist

Vacation 1 Burnout 1984
lead and wood (tawa)
1500 x 2000 x 2000
Collection of the artist

Words from the Fire 1985
lead and wood
350 x 230 x 55
Collection of the artist

No Sun, No Rain, No Radiation 1986
wood and lead
1505 x 2050 x 4000
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1986

Standard Banner: Compasses 1986
wood (tawa) and lead
2210 x 517
Chartwell Collection,
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki

Standard Banner: Axe 1986
wood (tawa) and lead
2210 x 512
Chartwell Collection,
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki

Airship 1988
lead
415 x 354
Chartwell Collection,
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki

Balloon Box 1988
lead, brass, wood and glass
240 x 360 x 210
Collection of the artist

Boxed Rocket 1988
lead, wood and glass
500 x 250 x 200
Collection of Jacob Twiss

Dreaming of S.A.M. 1988
lead and wood
1000 x 2400 x 1400
Collection of the artist

Even with a Paddle 1988
lead and bronze
510 x 810 x 3060
Collection of the artist

Flat Rocket 1988
lead
300 x 400
Collection of Robert and
Elizabeth Ellis

Act One Scene One 1989
lead and wood
3000 x 4750 x 4000
(approx. installed dimensions)
Collection of the artist

Anonymous Builder: A Renaissance Dreamer 1989
lead and wood
1260 x 1410 x 1340
Collection of the artist

Curtain 1989
lead and wood
1500 x 1380 x 150
Collection of the artist

Lift Foyer Maquette 1989
lead, glass and wood
260 x 660 x 240
Collection of the artist

Over the Hills 1990
lead and wood
180 x 420 x 420
Collection of the artist

Steps 1990
bronze
200 x 190 x 111
Collection of the artist

Bowler and Flower 1993
lead
200 x 250 x 200
Collection of the artist

Hobson's Baggage 1995
zinc-coated steel
800 x 2600 x 1200
Collection of the artist

Flight Trainer for an Albatross 1999
lead and brass
220 x 410 x 190
Collection of Gerry Shorter

I Have Everything to Declare 1999
zinc-coated steel
1120 x 2670 x 1320
Collection of the artist

Te Papa 1999
zinc-coated steel
2030 x 1530 x 2375
Collection of the artist

Albatross Triptych 2000
lead and zinc-coated steel
725 x 625; 725 x 625;
723 x 714
Collection of the artist

Wheelie Bin 2001
lead and bronze
220 x 225 x 105
Collection of the artist

Harpoon 2002
zinc-coated steel and brass
160 x 280 x 175
Collection of the artist

Ladder for an Albatross 2002
brass and lead
420 x 470 x 300
Collection of Lyndy Sainsbury

Movietone - Black and White 2002
lead and brass
265 x 340 x 310
Collection of the artist

A selection of approximately
40 drawings and works
on paper
Collection of the artist

The exhibition is supplemented
by a room in which an
assemblage of artworks,
tools, equipment and collected
objects re-stages the lore of
the studio/workshop.

LIST OF THEATRE GROUP



