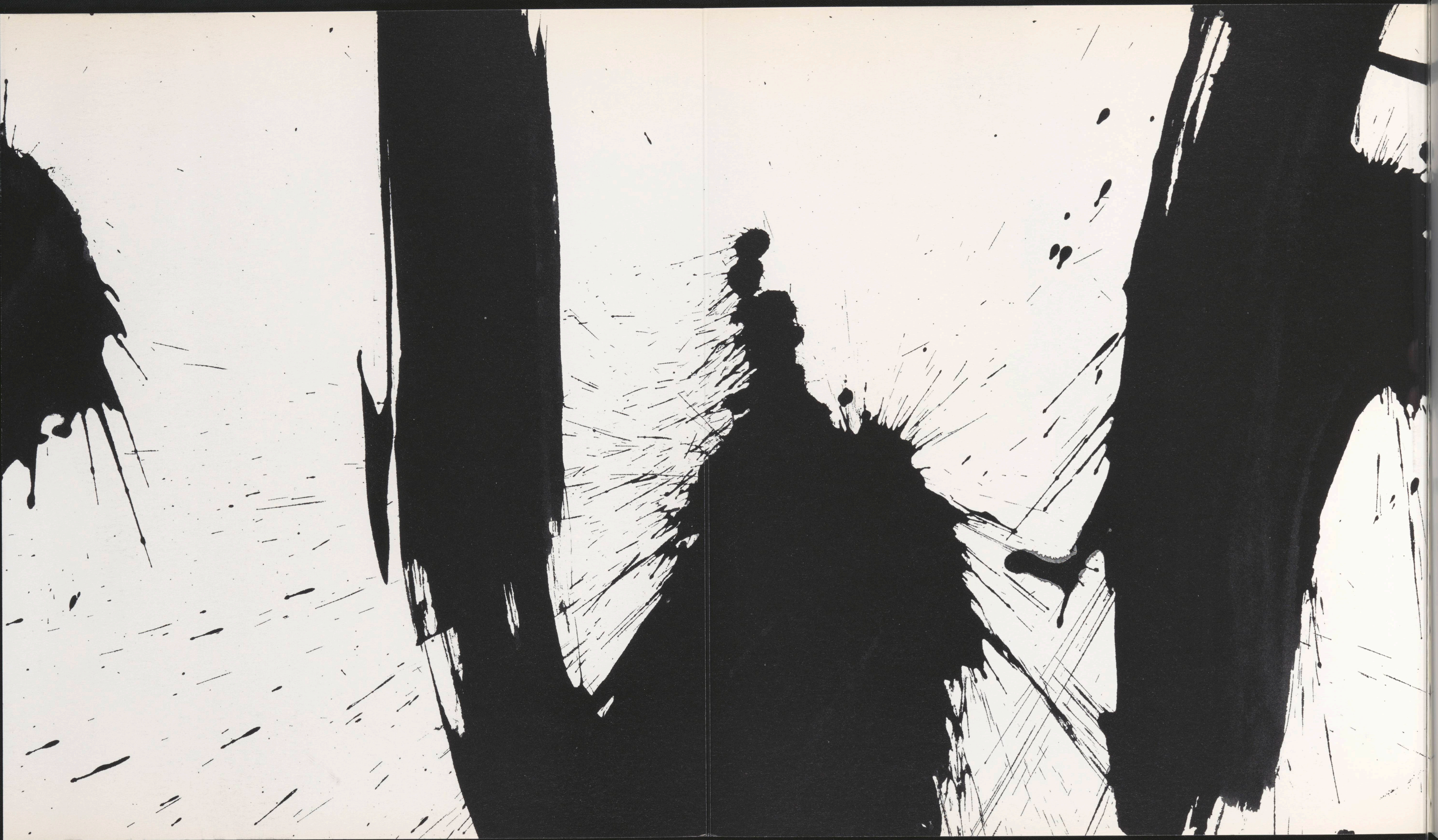


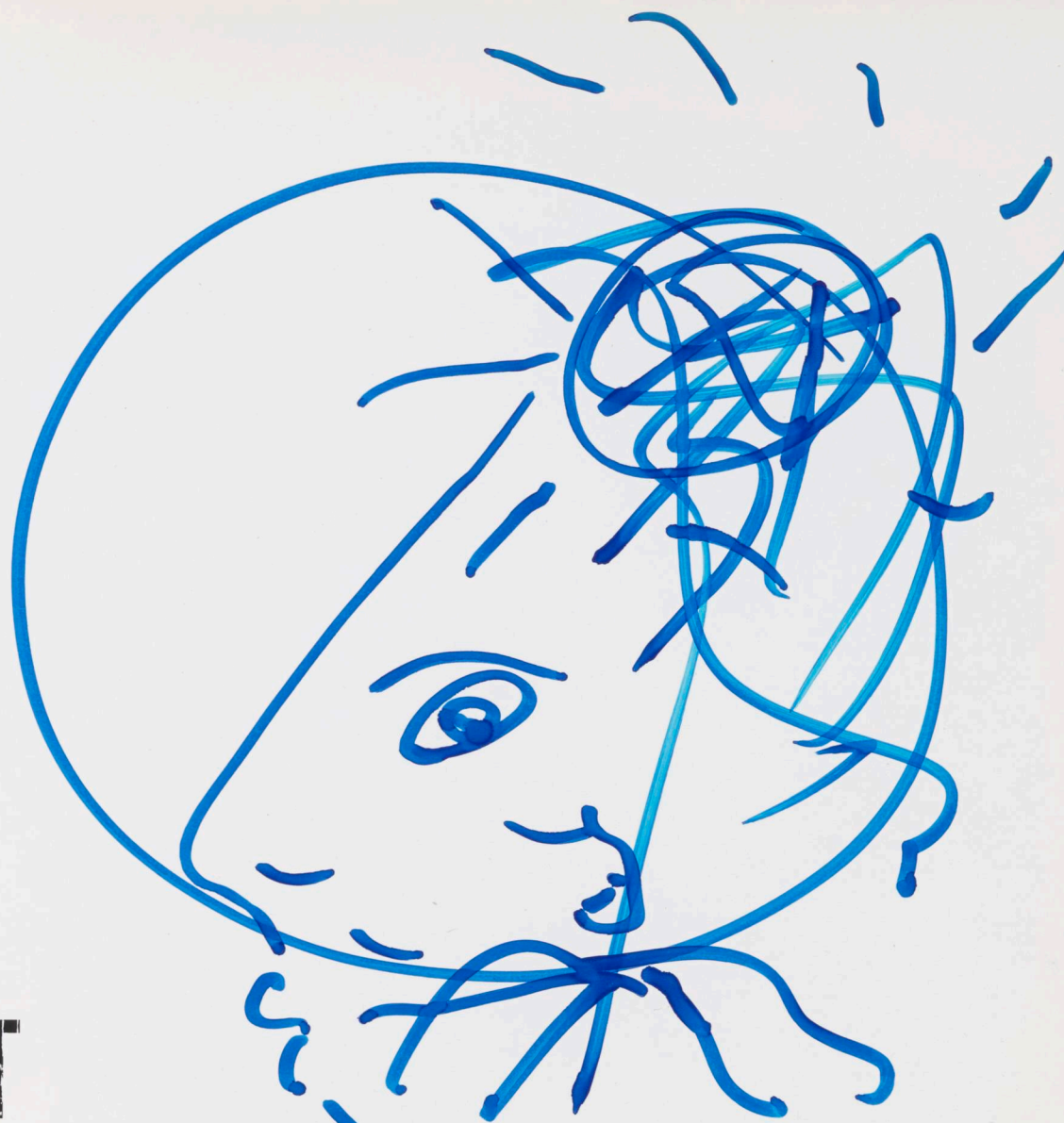
MAX GIMBLETT

WYSTAN CURNOW
THOMAS McEVILLEY
BARBARA KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT

THE BRUSH OF ALL THINGS







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BARBARA KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT

For Scott,
by Robert & Good
wishes for Adventure,
Max Gimblett.

MAX
WYSTAN CURNOW
THOMAS McEVILLEY
BARBARA KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT
GIMBLETT

**THE
BRUSH
OF ALL
THINGS**

CURATED BY WYSTAN CURNOW

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD7
CHRIS SAINES

THE TRANSITION FROM THREE TO FOUR8
THOMAS McEVILLEY

THE GREAT ARCHIVE OF THE GESTURE23
WYSTAN CURNOW

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN A WORK IS FINISHED?57
MAX GIMBLETT INTERVIEWED BY BARBARA KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT

CATALOGUE OF WORKS66

BIOGRAPHY68

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS69

SELECTED PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COLLECTIONS70

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY71



FOREWORD

Whether Western by stylistic descent or Eastern by sheer force of nature, *The Brush of All Things* is loaded. Almost everything that Max Gimblett creates holds and carries with it these signs of convergence – between contemporary art forms and living cultures or between ancient belief systems and their latent iconographies. His is an art that has long gathered up and been nourished by such dualisms, a site for the testing of ideas and beliefs, a place in which apparent opposites can and do find sanctuary.

Max Gimblett was born and raised in Auckland, New Zealand, but has lived in the United States for almost all of his adult life. His art has its progenitors and its roots in New York – Len Lye central among them – but its branches are fully extended in their embrace of Asia and the Pacific Rim. He is decidedly of here but determinedly from there and even his paintings can be three-dimensional objects as much as two-dimensional visual fields. In spirit and intent a work by Gimblett often forms in the spaces between things.

Consider that Gimblett leitmotif, the quatrefoil, and you might think of how basic leaf and plant forms helped to build a sophisticated grammar of architectural forms in Gothic architecture, a space for admitting light and symbolically framing it. A Gimblett quatrefoil makes a contemporary object of that historic space then shifts its meaning at the surface, searching for the particular in the face of the universal. When painting becomes object, and objects inhabit and displace the space that painting works to represent, art's primary languages are not the only things transformed.

A work by Gimblett often summons up the indivisibility of mind and body in its titling, its human scale (think of Leonardo's Vitruvian man) or the visible and invisible mysteries of its spatial or gestural reach. Some gradually unfold the

poetics of colour and light in all their infinite potential. Others give immediate testimony to the forceful action of the artist's hand, delivering paint or ink onto surfaces barely able to contain them. Both gestures, those that sublimate all trace of their making and those that actively load them up, are as carefully calibrated.

We live in a world apparently replete with knowledge but demonstrably short on self-knowledge, a position that seems to me to be central to this work. No matter how broad Gimblett's interests and emotional range can seem, his works are acts of creative synthesis between forms of knowledge. They result from deep enquiry into the human condition: its states of becoming and of being, its belief systems, its humours and its character. Part ascetic and part hedonist, part sacred and part profane, there are many parts to Max Gimblett.

The Brush of All Things is the sum of those parts that have emerged as central strands of Gimblett's practice. It is an important project; not least that it is the first substantial showing of his work by a New Zealand public gallery. For that I am greatly indebted to principal sponsor Spicers who have worked with us since 2001 and have again enabled us to extend a major exhibition's reach. My thanks go to Spicers and also to the City Gallery Wellington's director, Paula Savage, for helping to make this exhibition accessible to more New Zealanders.

Joining that endeavour were a number of generous lenders, both private individuals and gallerists, whom I also wish to thank. Gary Langsford of Gow Langsford Gallery in Auckland and Cheryl Haines of Haines Gallery in San Francisco, Max's dealer galleries of long standing, have been in the foreground of that support, as has Max himself and his wife Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in New York. This project has largely been fed from those strands, joined by major American and New Zealand based works drawn from private, trust and corporate collections.

I wish to acknowledge too the staff who contributed so fully to *The Brush of All Things*, expertly led by project manager Louise Pether

and guided by coordinating curator Robert Leonard. Their endeavours include an exciting 32-minute video showing the artist at work, produced by curator of education Roger Taberner, and a series of dramatic new still images taken by photographer Jennifer French, several of which are reproduced here. My thanks go also to the University of Auckland's Elam School of Fine Art for providing the studio space in which filming took place. The ongoing support of Anthony Fodero, Max Gimblett's studio manager, both of the artist and of this exhibition, is recognised with gratitude.

This brings me to the writers who have made such considered and original contributions to this publication. I want to warmly thank for his contribution Thomas McEvilly, Distinguished Lecturer in Art History at Houston's Rice University and a recipient of the Mather Award for Distinction in Art Criticism from the College Art Association, and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, University Professor and Professor of Performance Studies at New York University, for hers. They have both added immensely to our knowledge of Max Gimblett's work, in all the richness of its art histories and cultural codings and in all the problems attending its completion.

Editor Michael Gifkins, and designers Arch MacDonnell and Jane Hatfield of Inhouse, have in their tireless attention to detail taken this catalogue to a level of excellence fully consistent with the work it portrays.

Last, I wish to acknowledge the vital and open collaboration that occurred between exhibition curator and writer Wystan Curnow and the artist Max Gimblett. A professor in the department of English at the University of Auckland, Wystan Curnow has written extensively on Max Gimblett, including most recently a major monographic study. He has used this occasion, though, to speak to and through a skilfully selected body of work. It is with immense pride that this gallery presents *The Brush of All Things*, and with deep gratitude that I record its abiding thanks to Wystan Curnow and Max Gimblett.

Chris Saines
Director
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

THE TRANSITION FROM THREE TO FOUR

THOMAS McEVILLEY

IDENTITIES

To locate Max Gimblett in the world one might begin by noting that he was born in 1935 in New Zealand. But that is a simplification of what is in fact a more complex location. In both these coordinates – time and space – there are major displacements in Gimblett's work which invest it with an inner complexity that is often hidden by the studied simplicity of its surface.

Gimblett went through adolescence and early adulthood in the period when American Abstract Expressionism was the dominant form of Modern art, yet he was not chronologically a member of that generation. Franz Kline, for example, was born in 1910; Jackson Pollock in 1912; Phillip Guston and Ad Reinhardt in 1913; Robert Motherwell in 1915 – and so on. Gimblett was twenty years or so younger than these pioneers of American Modernism who, now seen historically, seem to assume gigantic proportions. Closer to Gimblett in time (to confine this discussion for a moment to Americans, for reasons I will come to) are Larry Rivers, born 1923 and Robert Rauschenberg (1925). Among his more exact contemporaries are Jim Dine (born 1936), James Rosenquist (1933), Andy Warhol (1930), and Ed Ruscha (1937). In other words, in terms of American art history, Gimblett is of the generation of the Pop artists rather than the Abstract Expressionists. Yet perhaps because of originating in a part of the world – the South Pacific – which is burdened with little historical mandate in the western sense, Gimblett has felt free to move about in history and has used whatever parts of it his inner purposes needed; chronologically he might be described as on the edge between Modernism and post-Modernism, and though he sees himself, correctly, I think, as primarily a Modernist artist, he has chosen, like a post-Modernist, to redefine and recombine historical elements from different times and places as his personal, rather than historical, mandate decrees. These elements may be eastern or

western, ancient or modern, as the somewhat undefined situation of New Zealand allows.

Gimblett's spatial coordinate involves even more displacement than his sliding scale of time. As a youth he left New Zealand before the realisation that he was to be an artist had fully dawned. In 1956 he went to London, to which he returned in 1959; in 1962 he moved to Toronto, then, in 1965, to San Francisco, and finally, after brief residences in Bloomington, Indiana, and Austin, Texas, in 1972 he moved to New York, where he lives still. In other words, he has lived in New York through the 1970s, 80s, 90s, and the early 2000s, a period when New York was still arguably (perhaps not unquestionably, but arguably) the centre of art historical ferment and change.

In Toronto from 1962–64 he worked as a ceramicist (already, perhaps, drawn to the Far East and antiquity), an activity that awakened him to various materials and their interactions with both ambient light and each other. Then in San Francisco he attended the School of the Art Institute of San Francisco, where he experimented with a series of painterly styles generally rooted in Abstract Expressionism, which was still dominant in the art schools and would remain so for several more years. He especially acknowledges the influences of Robert Motherwell, Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock and, not as significantly, Barnett Newman, along with somewhat less gigantic but still unquestionably authentic Modernist figures such as Burgoyne Diller and Mark Tobey. While he spends part of each year in New Zealand, and his background there remains a prominent part of his attitude and personality, over the years he understandably came to regard himself as more an American painter than a New Zealander.

Meanwhile there is another even greater displacement involved. Among Gimblett's widespread multiculturalist incorporations are, for example, various Asian and Asian-Pacific styles that would probably not have entered his work if he had grown up in, say, Chicago rather

than Auckland. The main Asian component in the oeuvre is the influence of the Zen painting tradition of the 18th and 19th centuries. It is not only the great painters of the Zen tradition Gimblett has long been drawn toward but also the particular Rinzai spirituality that lies behind some of them.

These displacements – both eastward and westward – did not cancel out Gimblett's identity as a New Zealander. In the 1970s he came under the influence of New Zealand artist Len Lye, who was living at the time in New York. Lye was always interested in a painterly approach to abstract painting, from the most free-wheeling forms of Surrealist abstraction in the 1930s to the 'Action Painting' of the New York School in the 1950s. His liking for 'doodling' and energetic brushwork informed both his films and his paintings. The spontaneity of his bodily movements was an integral part of his technique. Lye's influence encouraged the younger Gimblett to loosen up his style and involve it with sudden and intuitive bodily movements – almost a performative aspect. Gimblett was, in other words, becoming more of an Action Painter, but partly under the influence of his New Zealand countryman rather than exclusively American influences.

Another New Zealand artist who should be compared is Colin McCahon. McCahon's work, beginning in the 1940s but increasingly after 1962, frequently involved painting words, often biblical in origin, mostly in a simple legible script, in a style that is echoed in Julian Schnabel's word-paintings of the late 1980s (with texts based mostly on William Gaddis's *Recognitions*) and also resembles the work of certain so-called Outsider artists, some American (such as Clementine Hunter, William Hawkins, Sister Gertude Morgan, and others), some from South Africa and elsewhere. Many New Zealanders regard McCahon as their foremost national painter because of the uncanny sense of wholeness of being that his works after

1962 convey. Lye, in contrast to McCahon's pseudo-outsider tonality, may be described as New Zealand's first avante-garde artist. Gimblett once met McCahon, who died in 1987 and who is still more or less unknown in the West. (McCahon remarked to the mutual friend who had introduced them, 'He is an American.') But Lye was his first teacher, oddly not in New Zealand but in the United States beginning in 1972, five years after the term Conceptual Art had been devised by Sol LeWitt. Gimblett's mature work began a few years later and may be described roughly as a combination of American Modernism with Zen tradition under the auspices of a New Zealand ethnicity.

Finally, in summing up these displacements, Gimblett identifies himself as a western Modern artist, even an American Modern artist, yet his work derives as much from influences of the Pacific Basin area where he grew up, though not specifically New Zealand-based influences. The influence of Zen, for example, seems natural to Gimblett, and carries with it an echo of Asia's proximity to New Zealand, but also can be traced partly to American artists with West Coast connections such as Clyfford Still and Mark Tobey. Gimblett has made a harmonious post-war synthesis of America and Japan. The influence of the Japanese painter Gibbon Sengai is at least as present as that of American artists and Gimblett often approaches the pictorial surface – whether paper or canvas – with the sudden warrior-like spirit of Rinzai Zen. Indeed, it might be reasonable to regard him as a global artist, gathering influences and elements from many sources.

Despite this multiculturalism inherent in his oeuvre, Gimblett has not been conspicuously involved in colonial and post-colonial issues. As a white New Zealander he symbolises the colonialist tradition, but his work, like his heritage, contains both East and West, and the eastern element is not especially bound up with New Zealand's colonial history. By way of

contrast, New Zealand artist Gordon Walters began to incorporate Maori motifs into his works in the 1940s and by the 1960s had developed a synthetic style that combined elements of Maori art with elements derived from the European Modernism of Mondrian, Sophie Tauber-Arp, and Victor Vasarely. Two great differences can be observed. First, Gimblett has been far more drawn into American Modernism than that of Europe – though he acknowledges respect for, and some influence from, European Modernists such as Malevich. Second, he has not conspicuously dealt with the particular New Zealand heritage of post-colonial multiculturalism, the troubled relationship between the Maori and the Pakeha (European-derived) traditions. Still, his work remains multiculturalist. Japanese painters from Gibbon Sengai (1750–1837) to Hakuin Ekaku (1685–1768) and Yamaoka Tesshu (1836–88) mean as much to him, and figure in his work as much as, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock and Mark Tobey.

New Zealand, in terms of the map of the world, is roughly halfway between Japan and the United States. From his position of origin, Gimblett has reached out to both these distant traditions and between them has found a middle way. Other elements from foreign cultures have also entered his work, though less prominently. These include, according to one published list, ‘biblical and Celtic myths... Tantra, Koans, Chinese and Islamic calligraphy, Japanese ceramics, and Jungian psychology’¹ – to which one might add Maoritanga, Greek mythology, heraldry, and a host of other things.

SHAPES

Another factor that contributes to the inner complexity of Gimblett’s synthesis has to do with ancient art. Modern artists in general see their work within the Modernist context pretty exclusively, not especially concerned with possible

roots in antiquity. When the Primary Shapes movement, for example, became temporarily dominant, it was regarded by its practitioners as a brand-new beginning for the composition of the image. Yet the emphasis on primary shapes is derived from roots in antiquity – primarily certain cultures of the Chalcolithic and Bronze Ages. Though perhaps less consciously than its Japanese and American aspects, another aspect of Gimblett’s work involves archetypal shapes that were formed and defined in those very early ages. The paintings of Gimblett’s early period – up till the late 1970s but continuing with less constancy thereafter – usually involved rectangular supports, as western easel paintings in general have done since the Renaissance. In relating to a rectangular picture it is as if one were looking out a window at a *veduta* or view, perhaps a landscape that seems to be on the other side of the wall one sees through – as Leon Battista Alberti described the situation in his *de Pictura* in 1436. This is the most common and hence least conspicuous pictorial shape. One is so accustomed to it that it merely seems natural. The shape does not enter into the work as another pictorial element, or as a sculptural aspect, but functions merely to support the picture, which is what one is looking at rather than the support itself. Gimblett soon began to vary the shape of the support, rendering it an active element in the picture or, to put it slightly differently, rendering the picture into a kind of sculpture – an object whose shape defines its nature. Gimblett’s practice evolved through a period of work with circles and circular supports. Finally, in 1983, in an experience which the artist has called his ‘mid-life transformation’,² Gimblett concluded several years of formal searching for alternatives to the rectangle by finding the quatrefoil.

The quatrefoil is defined by the *OED* as ‘a compound leaf or flower consisting of four (usually rounded) leaflets or petals radiating from a common centre.’ Most of Gimblett’s works in this format are geometrised, meaning

that the petals of the flowers are not merely rounded in an organic sense but are composed of four perfect circles that intersect at a single point. It is a format which virtually no other modern artist has emphasised. It also has very deep roots in antiquity as an expression of a way of viewing the universe, which is presented as a vast four-petalled flower, the four petals representing the four quarters of space or other quaternities. This is a religious concept that probably goes back to the Neolithic Age – the era of the worship of vegetation and especially the flowering stage of vegetation.³ At some point, perhaps in the Chalcolithic Age – in the Old World roughly the fourth millennium BC – in the work of artists of the northern regions of Mesopotamia, specifically the two highly advanced Chalcolithic communities of Halaf and Samarra, the flower icon was reduced to its fundamental underlying element – the centre-plus-quaternity configuration of which it is one variant.

The centre-plus-quaternity (which is also called the mandala configuration) was the earliest exercise of human mental power to make a picture of the whole universe at once, both in terms of time and of space. It survived in the mandala format in India and as the basic configuration of the compass – a centre surrounded by the four quarters of space, North, South, East, and West – and of the clock – a centre surrounded by four quarters of time. It was the original human way of ordering both space and time and it still dominates our conceptions of them (though the digital clock face may change that). In addition the picture contains the idea of subjectivity as the defining power; the centre seems to mark the presence of a subject who, from the central position, stands and regards the world round about. The subject, or individual human, stands as it were at the centre of his universe and surveys it as its lord and master. It is in other words not only, like the Neolithic flowering universe, a picture of what happens outside of us, it includes us. When Sargon of Akkad, about 2350 BC, first expressed the idea of an

individual dominating the whole universe, he called himself the Lord of the Four Quarters. It was he (or subjectivity in general) that stood in the dominating position at the centre, and his feeling of being lord and master is based upon his ability to organise the world around himself, to impose order upon it through an exercise of subjectivity.

In our time the quatrefoil, like archetypal icons in general, has lost much of its ideological content and – as in the chivalry of the French Middle Ages – has come to be used as a mainly decorative motif. But its basic if somewhat hidden ideology speaks of a self-conscious subject surrounded on all sides by quadrants of space and time. Gimblett's choice of it gave his work an implication of universal meaning in a form essentially separate from other forms used in Modern art. It was a new field to develop in his own way, defining both himself and his work as his grasp of the quatrefoil developed.

In the mandala configuration the centre-with-quaternity (often in a lotus form that relates to the quatrefoil) is usually surrounded by a circle. This has to do with the fact that to have shape and order, something must be finite and enclosed, but also with the fact that the circle is innately infinite – without beginning or end,

or where every point is both beginning and end. So the mandala configuration presents the finite world in the midst of an indefinable infinity. The quatrefoil, the softest and most flowery of the major variants of this motif, reiterates this relationship four times – adding both more references to infinity and more references to the finity of the square. This area of thought is often referred to under the rubric of the ancient geometrical problem called squaring the circle.

One of several geometrical problems defined by the ancient Greeks, this involves the construction of a square whose area is equal to that of a given circle. Early Greek geometers working with straight edge and compass regarded this as impossible with those tools, and modern mathematicians agree. Still, later Greeks devised a method using so-called higher curves, and the problem was solved algebraically in 1882 by the German, Ferdinand Lindeman. In any case, the phrase 'squaring the circle' has expanded its suggestiveness beyond this original technical meaning and has come to stand for a kind of spiritual challenge involving unifying different modes of cognition and feeling. All this is implied in the quatrefoil.

Jung, who was fascinated in a loose and non-mathematical way by the idea of the squaring of

the circle, and who has exercised a lot of influence on Gimblett, posits that 'the four directions and the four elements [are] a symbolical equivalent of the four basic elements of consciousness.'⁴ The squaring of the circle then is the harmonious integration of the four basic elements of consciousness. But, after this definition emphasising the balance of the components, Jung proceeded to point out that 'the transition from three to four is a problem.'⁵ To be more explicit, he explained, 'The incomplete state of existence is . . . expressed by a triadic system, and the complete (spiritual) state by a tetradic system.'⁶ He calls more or less any symmetrical combination of square and circle the 'squaring of the circle',⁷ not using the term in the exact sense of the ancient Greek geometers but in a looser sense involving ideas of spirituality. He sees this conjunction of square and circle as 'a rearranging of the personality... a kind of new centering.'⁸ 'They express order,' he declares, 'balance and wholeness.'⁹ He does not deal with the problem of obtaining shapes of equal area, but simply defines it as 'the form of a circle in a square or vice versa.'¹⁰ According to this reading the quatrefoil represents a process of integrating different functions of the mind, from practical earth-measurement to access to the absolute, or transcendence.

Ghosts, Demons and Dragons – 2 1987/88
1015 x 4825 mm (40" x 190") (triptych)
acrylic polymer on canvas
Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki,
Auckland, New Zealand



The circle, in Jung's view, represents the unconscious,¹¹ while the square 'is the quaternary form of the *lapis philosophorum*'¹² (the Philosopher's Stone). The quatrefoil, with its four circles symmetrically arranged around a centre, can be regarded as participating in the mystery of the squaring of the circle – as a possible shape for the Stone.

Gimblett has made several works based on the paintings of Sengai, the Zen painter of the 18th to 19th centuries about whom Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki wrote a book.¹³ The particular work that is most relevant to the squaring of the circle, and thus to many of Gimblett's own works, is Sengai's black ink drawing *The Universe*, comprising three figures arranged horizontally from left to right: a square, a triangle, and a circle, each made with a single brushstroke. Several of Gimblett's works reproduce this sequence of shapes in a similar horizontal arrangement and in the same order. Some are drawings (like *Ghost Sengai*, 1990/95), some are painted triptychs which reproduce the three shapes not as representations but as shaped canvases, that is, sculptural presences (such as *Ghosts, Demons and Dragons – 2*, 1987–88), while in one case (*Sengai*, 1997) they have become three-dimensional solids.

Sengai's title, if indeed it is authentic, implies that these shapes are the building blocks from combinations and repetitions of which the universe is made up. A traditional Japanese interpretation of this painting is repeated word for word in Suzuki's book and at least half a dozen others. 'The circle-triangle-square', as Suzuki puts it, 'is Sengai's picture of the universe. The circle represents the infinite, and the infinite is at the basis of all things. But the infinite itself is formless. We humans endowed with senses and intellect demand tangible forms. Hence a triangle. The triangle is the beginning of all forms. Out of it first comes the square. A square is the triangle doubled. The doubling process goes on infinitely and we have the multitudinosity of things, which the

Chinese philosopher calls "the ten thousand things", that is, the universe.'¹⁴

There are other ways of interpreting this series of primary shapes. In one sense it seems the physical universe that is implied by the title, but the three shapes could as easily represent different modes of thought or understanding – that is, the mental universe. Traditionally the circle represents cyclicity – such as, say, the eternal-recurrence idea of time or history – but at the same time it represents cyclical forms of thought such as the idea found in Zen and other contexts that all modes of thought lead ultimately back to a beginning or ground zero. The line forming the circle never goes anywhere but back to its own beginning, endlessly, and thus can be called a symbol of infinity – whether infinite space-time or infinite consciousness.

The square traditionally is the basic iconograph of three-dimensional space – space with a centre and four directions, extended finitely. It similarly represents matter and the whole material realm. In psychological terms it relates to what in the slang of a not-so-distant bygone era might have been called 'square' types of thinking (somewhat as in Alan Watts's popular work of the 1960s, *Beat Zen, Square Zen, and Zen*).

The triangle is somewhat less obvious. In terms of the spatial universe it can be seen as upright, indicating a pointing upward toward some kind of transcendence. Psychologically it may indicate different subjectivities bearing on different agendas – perhaps two subjectivities competing for control of a third, or perhaps three separate but interrelated subjectivities. In some sense it can be felt as a stage that mediates between the square and the circle. As such it relates to the traditional problem of squaring the circle. Suggesting that the triangle in Sengai's *The Universe* mediates the square and the circle is geometrically simplistic, but is based on the idea that if the number of lines involved in a figure such as a square is reduced the figure comes closer to the one-line construction of the circle.

So, as Jung understood, the triangle is the main problem. 'If the wholeness symbolised by the quaternity is divided into equal halves, it produces two opposing triads.'¹⁵ Its wholeness is gone; it represents 'incomplete' existence because of the loss of the fourth element. Jung feels that the quaternity is the unconscious, and that when the archetype of quaternity moves across the line into consciousness, it leaves one of its four parts behind in the unconscious, 'held fast by the *horror vacui* of the unconscious.'¹⁶ 'Thus there arises a triad which... constellates a corresponding triad in opposition to it'¹⁷ – and thence the ten thousand things. There seems to be a rough (but only a rough) correspondence between Jung's analysis and that which Suzuki and others have fastened to Sengai's work.

A somewhat parallel idea to Sengai's representation of the universe by elementary geometrical forms is found in Plato's *Timaeus*, where a small number of three-dimensional shapes (the 'Platonic solids') are conceived as the totality of elements making up the order of the cosmos – an idea which seems to have come to Plato from the geometrical/metaphysical tradition of the Pythagorean school. There is not much similarity between Plato's list in the *Timaeus* and Sengai's three shapes, but the underlying structural idea is similar: that the universe can be broken down into a small number of figures ('primary shapes') that combine somewhat as the Four Elements have traditionally been regarded as capable of combining into any of the myriad of things.

Several of Gimblett's paintings are based on the format of concentric circles – such as *Zen*, 1980–85; *Echo*, 1990; and *The Wheel*, 1998 – in all of which the inner circle is made up of empty space, that is, it is a round hole in the centre of the surrounding circle. Others of Gimblett's works involving the format of concentric circles lack the central hole. In *Blue/Red – to Len Lye*, 1977, for example, the inner smaller circle is red while the large surrounding concen-

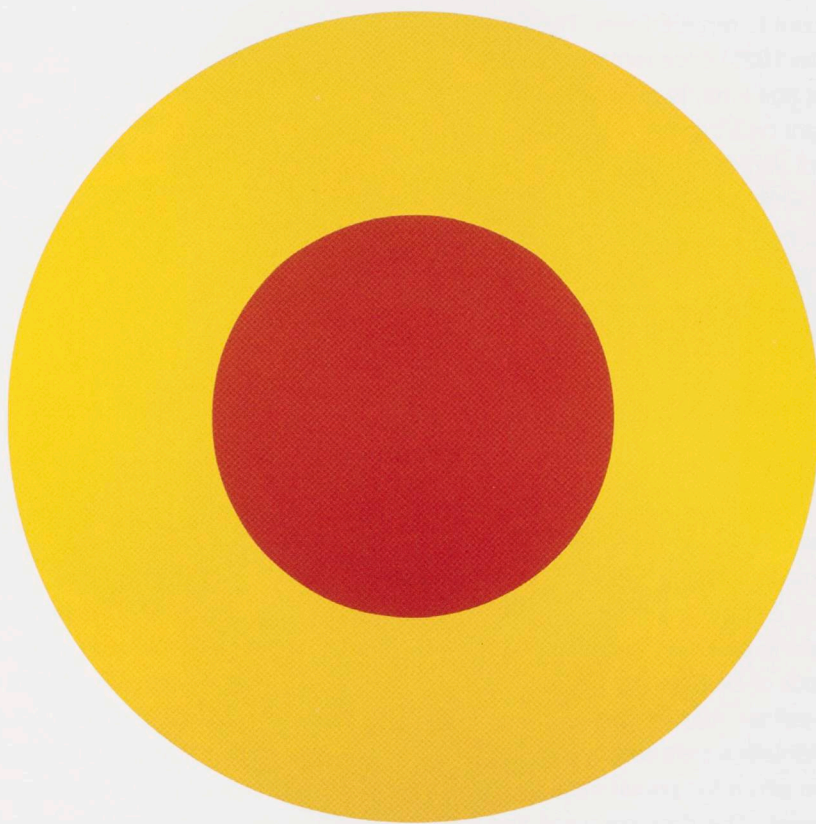
tric one is blue; in *Black/Red*, 1981, the inner circle is red and the outer concentric one is black.

Like the centre-plus-quaternity format, the format of two concentric circles is very ancient and possibly very meaningful. Andre Leroi-Gourhan¹⁸ sees the two concentric circles as one of a variety of related iconographs for the reproductive organs of the Double Goddess, who presides over both begetting and perishing.

The works with the empty or hollow circular centres suggest a place which is indefinable yet somehow at the centre of it all. Something is implied about the place the painting itself comes from, where it passes from non-being into being. De Kooning is famously supposed to have remarked that 'there is a place where it happens' – meaning where the painting comes into being. This 'place' is evidently outside the ordinary space of everyday life (which might better be described as square); that is, it is a different space from that of ordinary life, a space that is Other. This formulation, as well as the hollow centres of the circular works, relates to Gimblett's koan-like saying, 'no mind/all mind'. It is the place which, in terms of ordinary consciousness, is vacant, yet in another sense accounts for everything, as in the Buddhist idea of emptiness. There is a quasi-religious sense behind this empty circle, a sense reflected in Gimblett's remark, 'You walk up to the altar and paint.'¹⁹

In terms of the black-ink drawings of the Zen tradition, a circle made with one stroke of the brush is known as an *enso* or a *mu* painting – the painting of nothing. The one-stroke painting or drawing is made quickly, without premeditation or reconsideration or revision. If it is perfect it becomes perfect in an instant. It represents the unity of the mind and the action, neither preceding and controlling the other but both arising spontaneously from the hollow center of *mu*. In the Zen tradition, and also in Gimblett's practice, a painting can be worked and reworked, sometimes over a period of months or even years. The no mind/all mind one-stroke black ink drawing, on the other hand, is to be done instantly

India 1980/81
2030 mm (80") diameter
oil and wax on canvas



and with no revision. It is a primal mark, a mark which is the trace of the beginning of everything – the first mark of the universe.

This Zen approach is similar to the Late Modernist practice called Action Painting and involves the negation of traditional modes of painting which are based on long-established conventions. In the twentieth century the conventions of different national artistic traditions around the world came to be set aside at different moments under the influence of the example of Action Painting. The moment comes when the artist decides to try to step completely outside his or her inherited set of conventions and simply make a primal mark, a mark that is not premeditated or learned but rises only from the present moment, not carrying the burden of the past on its back. A classical instance of this moment of transition was the formation of the Indian group called the Bombay Progressives in 1947, right after World War II, when old ways seemed outworn and a new Americanism seemed about to replace them. The artist Tyeb Mehta (born 1925) once remarked, 'It took courage, at that time, to pick up a brush, to make a mark on a canvas' – meaning a mark that was not an inherited icon or motif, a mark expressing what it feels like to be outside of all tradition, to be a lone individual bringing up an unknown mark from the unknown depths of one's own sensibility; to make a primal mark upon the blank sheet of nothingness. This was the lonely courage that the confrontation of tradition with Action Painting required – as once Pollock, when someone said, 'You're supposed to paint from nature,' replied, 'I am nature.'

Gimblett, as observed above, may be regarded as having made a synthesis of American Action Painting and Zen quick painting. There does indeed seem to be a significant relation between them. Pollock or De Kooning, not unlike the Zen quick-painter, may be regarded as having asserted mentally a state with nothing behind it, a state from which the primal mark could leap instantaneously. This does not mean that the

mark is unlike any the artist has previously made. The Zen painter, like Gimblett, might make hundreds or thousands of *ensos*, as Pollock, when he approached the empty surface before him on the floor and dripped loops of colour upon it, knew the arm motion of the gesture from hundreds of previous occasions – or as Gimblett has practised and re-practised what he calls his forehand and backhand gestures.

In the Cabalistic tradition of *zim-zum*, primal being is regarded as a totality or unity with no inner differentiation; then it withdraws from around its centre leaving an empty space in which a universe may arise. At that moment the empty circle at the middle of the painting awaits that first mark from which all later ones will grow or derive. In terms of Modern western painting Malevich used the circle as such a primal shape; similarly, Gimblett describes Kenneth Noland's target paintings as representations of the tantric ontology in which each level expands into a larger or more multifarious level – somewhat like Leroi-Gourhan's idea of the Magdalenian iconograph. In other cases (such as James Lee Byars) the emphasis on the circle may be regarded as Platonic (which means by implication Pythagorean). In that tradition the circle represents the unchanging perfection underlying the changing imperfection of the everyday world; above the level of the moon, says Aristotle, everything moves only in circles, whereas below that level, in the everyday world, things move erratically and unpredictably in an inexplicable way that springs out of the infinite web of causality.

POETICS

Despite these connections with various cultures and ages, one should not overemphasise the iconographic aspect of Gimblett's work. It is meaningful indeed, but does not subsist by itself. It is mixed up with a sensibility-based poetics which is, like its iconography, distinctly his and, as is apt to be the way with poetics,

not always easy to put one's finger on. Some of his works, for example, such as *Jade* and *Buddha Amida*, both 1985, and *Chapel by the Sea*, 1986/87, employ all-over composition, which recognises no beginning and no end, no centre, no development from a primal mark. Its effect on the viewer is more of sensibility than construction. The surface is suspended in an inchoate state before it has hardened into symbolic forms that might be called an iconography. In *Fish – 2*, 1984, the combination of all-over composition with conspicuous dripping not only involves a hint of homage to Pollock, but adds to the sense of a poetics that is still flowing and seeking; it had not dried yet, like primordial life-forms in the early oceanic phase of the earth. In a different way *Zen*, 1996, is also somewhat pre-iconographic. Except for the inconspicuous implication of a quaternity, it is an appeal to pure sensibility. It has a sense, I think, of what Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space*, called 'intimate immensity'.²⁰ It is not that these elements of sensibility have no connection with the iconographic aspect of the oeuvre; it is that some works emphasise the one aspect more than the other.

A useful approach to this theme is suggested by Wystan Curnow's linkage of Gimblett with James Lee Byars. There are similarities in their poetics that are partly derived from the fact that both these culturally western artists were deeply influenced by Japanese tradition. The glaring differences in the poetics of their materials and surfaces involve nuances in how they received this Japanese influence. In Byars's case the main influence was one of the two originating creators of the Noh drama, Ze-Ami (or Seami) (1363–1444); in Gimblett's case it was the Zen painter Sengai (1750–1837). Though both were Zen-oriented, Ze-Ami, four hundred years earlier, was much closer to the pre-Zen religion Shintoism, characterised by a precious delicacy of mysterious images. He wrote of *yugen*, which means more or less 'what lies beneath the surface', illustrating it with images: 'When notes fall sweetly and flutter delicately to the

ear'; 'a white bird with a flower in its beak'; at both the beginning and end of the book a phrase is repeated three times: 'Deeply secret, deeply secret, deeply secret.'²¹ Sengai, though by no means lacking delicacy, also infused his brush with a rugged strength and at times a deliberate parodic crudeness.

Another element of the Japanese tradition that had tremendous influence on both Gimblett and Byars is the *mu* painting, the zero or nothing painting mentioned before, a circular brush-stroke made quickly in a single movement and not revised – also called the *enso*. Yet in terms of the Action Painting aspect of the *mu* painting, Gimblett has made it a part of his practice, while for Byars not the making but the admiration of the *mu* was a part of his practice; his appreciation of the idea behind it *was* the work – but he didn't make them with his own hand. Gimblett, in contrast, long immersed in the tough warrior tradition of Rinzaï, has made perhaps hundreds of one-stroke *ensos* with a hearty shout and an emphatic stamp of his foot.

Gimblett is more forthrightly Zen, even entitling some works by that word alone. For Byars the strangeness of Shinto ('deeply secret, deeply secret, deeply secret') was a way to avoid being in any tradition: it was too secret to call it a tradition. But Gimblett earnestly reveres and practises what he has come to understand as Zen painting. This in itself is a strong element in his poetics, but typically Gimblett complicates it by mixing in other forms of sensibility, without necessarily any iconographic intention. Sometimes the Zen element appears pure or isolated, as in *Transformation*, 1984, but more often it overlaps in some way with elements from western tradition, especially American Modernism. In for example *Black/Red*, 1981, one could think of a Suprematist work or a tantric work.

Gimblett's repeated emphasis on the circular format is another element of his poetics – in part a deliberate rejection of the square, albeit acknowledging that in some cases the circle lies within the square of the support. Circular

Buddha Amida 1985
3050 mm (120") diameter
acrylic polymer and metallic
pigments on canvas
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki,
New Zealand



thought is far more to Gimblett's taste than rectilinearity. It implies Vitruvian man inscribed within the circle. An ordinary dimension is 80 inches (2032 mm) in diameter. Somewhat larger than normal human size, it is nevertheless close and can embrace the human form in its extended Vitruvian position comfortably.

Yet another aspect of poetic sensibility that Gimblett and Byars share in part lies in their choices of materials, which in both cases go well beyond the ordinary materials of painting and sculpture. Byars favoured gold, gold-leaf, and tissue paper alongside traditional materials such as marble. (He never used paint and canvas.) Gimblett's use of materials yields even further to personal sensibility in its many nuanced varieties. 'Here,' in the words of Wystan Curnow, 'is an inventory. We have gold leaf and gesso; we have bole clay and plaster, pearlescent pigments, polyurethane, acrylic polymer, French vinyl and Plexiglas. And mirror glass. We have shellac, silica, sea-shells. Mother of pearl (gold-lipped, black-lipped). What is more we have cow bone, turtle shell, paua and epoxy resin; we have lacquer, pumice, silver, moon gold, copper and lead. We have inks from five countries, and yes, we've got kauri gum, we've got jade and we've got Japanese leaf.'²² The 'inventory' is like an inventory not only of Gimblett's personal sensibility but also of his life, its various locations and the influences picked up in them, his feeling of closeness to Japan as well as to American Minimalism, and his feeling, in part derived from Zen, of an inner linkage between different realms of nature and forms of life. It is in part this vast array of both natural and artificial materials that combine to create what Gimblett has called *Temenos* – an ancient Greek word which (as Liddel and Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon* puts it), signifies 'a piece of land that is sacred to a god: the precinct of a temple.' Gimblett's statement that when hanging his works, 'I experience Temenos... I feel whole,'²³ is not so far from Byars's declaration, 'I make atmospheres.'

PAINTINGS

The diptychs composed of two equal-sized square panels hung side by side with their edges touching (such as *Concord* and *Current*, both 1999, *The Brush of Porfirio Didonna*, 1999/2000, and *The Brush of All Things*, 2001) serve not only as retinal or sensibility-based paintings but also underline the inner structure of Gimblett's whole oeuvre. Sometimes the relationship between the panels suggests an iconographic reading, as in *Concord*, where the left panel is a monochrome of oil-gilded red gold and the right panel is an *enso* on a paler ground. The *enso* as a painting of zero, of nothingness, roughly equals, in Buddhist terms, the Prajnaparamita idea of emptiness. The monochrome panel on the left shows nothingness or emptiness, while the right-hand panel indicates the concept iconographically. They may be interpreted as two forms of the same primal reduction to zero that according to much Buddhist thought underlies all apparent forms. Here the one-stroke circle is the 'primal mark'.

Other diptychs suggest the group of dualities to the resolution of which Gimblett's work is dedicated: between East and West, between meaning and sensibility, between expressiveness and geometry, and between Modernism and tradition. Usually the formal element (an *enso* or a similar form) occupies the right-hand panel, emptiness declares itself on the left. These paintings make an appeal that could be called minimalist (without the capital M) – but the emptiness theme is also dualistic, indicating what has been called fullness-emptiness, or the plenum-void. They are paintings that reside in silence yet from which, it is implied, all sound proceeds.

Sky Gate, 2003, is a quatrefoil 60 inches (1524 mm) in diameter. Here and in a handful

of other paintings (*Guardian*, 2000, *The Golden Flower*, 2001, and a few more) the inner structure of the quatrefoil – the four circles intersecting at one point – is brought clearly into the open, distinct from the monochrome ground. Usually in the quatrefoils Gimblett permits free handling of the ground, often with all-over patterning, but in *Sky Gate* the ground stays monochrome so the quatrefoil pattern can clearly distinguish itself from it. Insofar as the quatrefoil is a cosmogram, or symbol of the order of the universe, it is as if the universe decided in this one instance to mask the usual multiplicity of its surface so its inner structure could frankly declare itself. A moment later it may mask itself again with seemingly disordered inner turmoil, as in *Action Painting*, 1995, or all-over patterning that, as in *Blue Spirit*, 1997, implies extension beyond the edges into an infinite or indefinite expanse. The inner structure of *Sky Gate* is outlined in 'moon gold', the traditional association of gold with eternity suggesting that here we are looking at the inner order that never has changed and never will change.

Title and image together suggest that the ability to enter the sky – or, to enter heaven – depends on bringing four separate totalities into absolute and interlinked balance. The quaternity suggests the four elements or the four directions, or other aspects of totality that Jung has said are associated with the number four. Each circle is itself a totality, without beginning or end, or with both beginning and end everywhere; linked by the idea of quaternity they create or suggest a greater totality that encompasses them all. The whole structure is flower-like, and the petals of the circles may be seen as emerging from the monochrome ground as the process of creation spreads itself outward from one central source through some power which can either lie hidden within it or spread itself momentarily outward into visibility, or both at once. Alternately, they may be seen as fading back into the centre as the subjectivity that is dealing with them has balanced them and

prepared itself for entry into the invisible power at the centre. Each of the four realms which emerges is itself a perfect circle, indicating that reality, when spread out into distinguishable parts, is perfect, as it is when combined into a whole. Reality is perfect both as whole and as part; whole is contained within part as part is contained within whole. This is part of the secret of 'emptiness'. The whole demonstrates its dynamic ability to expand and contract yet remain the same. In a sense the whole and each of its parts is a perfect whole. This is the type of idea that underlies the great Buddhist text the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, which may be in whole or in part of Chinese composition and which underlies at some distance many passages in Zen texts.

Gimblett's colours sometimes seem expressive or based on pure feeling, like Abstract Expressionist colour, and sometimes seem symbolical. In this case, insofar as the title suggests the Gates of Heaven, there is an odd resolution of duality in the image, because, as one author puts it, 'Yellow is the colour of the gates of heaven'²⁴ – whereas red is the colour of hell. Here Hell is contained, or neutralised, within the golden circles of heaven.

Awe, 1981, is a 100 x 100 inch (2540 x 2540 mm) square – larger than human scale and thus more abstract and closer to an absolute cosmic order. It does not seem to represent a flowing and transient human state of mind (as do, for example, the three gigantic *ensos* *One Stroke Bone – for Anthony Fodero*, *big mind*, and *Empty Water*). *Awe* is not only too large but too hard-edged and uncompromisingly symmetrical to represent a momentary glimpse of the flow and gush of human thoughts and feelings. It has reminded some viewers of the work of Barnett Newman (though that is not Gimblett's favorite comparison; for that type of work he prefers Burgoyne Diller).

Blue Spirit 1997



In this work Gimblett's choice of the black seems very personal. Chinese tradition, and to an extent the Zen black-ink tradition that derives largely from it, recognises five different blacks.²⁵ A particular blue is, at least to the western sensibility, an even more personal choice. Blue is regarded as 'the colour of ambiguous depth.'²⁶ This is not only because of its association with both sky and sea, but because of perceptual qualities within it. In Yves Klein's blue monochromes (which have impressed Gimblett) this is easily illustrated. If a viewer stands some distance from one – say ten or fifteen feet – it seems to suggest an infinite cosmic depth – much as Klein once remarked that they were portraits of the night sky as seen through his studio window. But as the viewer moves closer the ambiguous depth of the blue gradually flattens out till, up close, the works seem to be (as they are) flat painted surfaces directly in front of one.

The upright blue bar in *Awe* seems to be behind the black, but not infinitely behind it so much as at a middle distance. This is an ultra-simplified, even dissected, version of Hans Hoffman's push-pull relation between adjacent colours. Yet the bar itself is positioned as an icon or votive object, which implies that it is in front of, rather than behind, the black framing surface.

The paintings consisting of bars in a field in a figure/ground relationship immediately precede the quatrefoils. Both demonstrate a tendency toward the cosmogram, an extremely simplified picture, or symbolic suggestion, of the universe. The quatrefoil is a softer and more complex unfolding than the bar, which is contracted about as far as it can get, holding its selfhood rigidly within itself – at least for the moment.

The upright central bar that is seen in *Awe*, and also in *Red Violet/Blue – Summer*, 1980; *Light Green/Red – to Dora*, 1978; and *Yellow/Red – Pacific*, 1978, is about the height of an average human being, occupying Gimblett's characteristic 80 x 80 inch (2032 x 2032 mm) square

which might just contain a huge (basketball-player-size) human with arms widely extended, inhabiting the square the way Vitruvian man occupies the squared circle. Yet the hard-edged rigidity of these works seems to deny that they represent transient states of mind so much as unchanging ratios underlying the changing appearances of things, as in Pythagorean mathematico-aesthetics.

Gimblett is not exactly what one would call a religious artist. He is a secular artist who has great respect for religious traditions and often uses suggestions of religious iconography in his work. His attitude might roughly be compared to that of the Bengali Renaissance, in which Ramakrishna and Vivekananda proclaimed all religions to be based on the same intuitions of the sacred underpinnings of the universe. Most of Gimblett's religious references are to Zen, but some are Hindu, and a handful of works involve Christian references in either their motifs or their titles.

One of these in the present exhibition is *Crucifixion after Peter Gabriel*, 1989/90. *Crucifixion* embodies one of the dualities that Gimblett's synthesis is involved in both pointing out and, in a way, resolving. Gimblett describes the development of his work as moving through a series of styles which he characterises as either wet or dry. First it was wet – in his early years in the Abstract Expressionist tradition; then it became dry in hard-edged works such as *Awe*. Then it became wet again with the quatrefoils. Art historically the wet is conspicuously associated with Abstract Expressionism as represented by Pollock, the dry by Newman. The wet is the trace of the dripping, pouring, or throwing of liquid; it does not have clean sharp edges but one part of the picture seems to flow into the next (or sometimes there are no parts to be distinguished at all). The Chinese-Japanese flung ink tradition could also be

mentioned here. The dry involves geometrical regularity and hard clear edges, usually made with the aid of tape; it does not show brush-strokes nor does it mingle colors together so much as show them side by side in discrete areas. Perhaps the essence of the distinction is hard edges versus ragged dripping edges.

One distinctive trait of *Crucifixion* is its mixing of these two approaches, which ordinarily have been kept separate. Another is its use of the central Christian motif despite the fact it compromises the centre-plus-quaternity format. Gimblett first covered the entire area the cross was to occupy with tape, then threw paints at the surface, first white, then red, then green. Removing the tape, and retaping the edges of the cross-shaped space from outside, he painted it black onto raw canvas. The effect is of hard edges alongside the splash and drip of flung paint.

The cross shape here compromises the centre-plus-quaternity format because the Christian cross lengthened one limb, which it put at the bottom, supposedly so the cross would more resemble the human bodily shape as crucified. In addition it is not placed precisely in the centre of the quatrefoil surface, again denying the centre-plus-quaternity format. It is a picturesque work whose effect on the viewer is immediately startling or arresting, at least in part because of these dislocations and dualities.

One Stroke Bone – for Anthony Fodero, 2002; *big mind*, 2002; and *Empty Water*, 2003, are outsized *ensos* or *mu* paintings. Each was made in a single muscular full-bodied stroke with a household mop dipped into black paint once only, like a giant ink brush into an ink pot. Each starts, as is characteristic of Gimblett – almost a kind of ethical principle for him – in the upper right corner. Two are circular, as if inviting or declaring the *enso* connection while the materials of acrylic paint (mixed with vinyl

polymers) and canvas stretched on a rectangular wooden frame clearly point the work in another direction, that of the western tradition of easel painting.

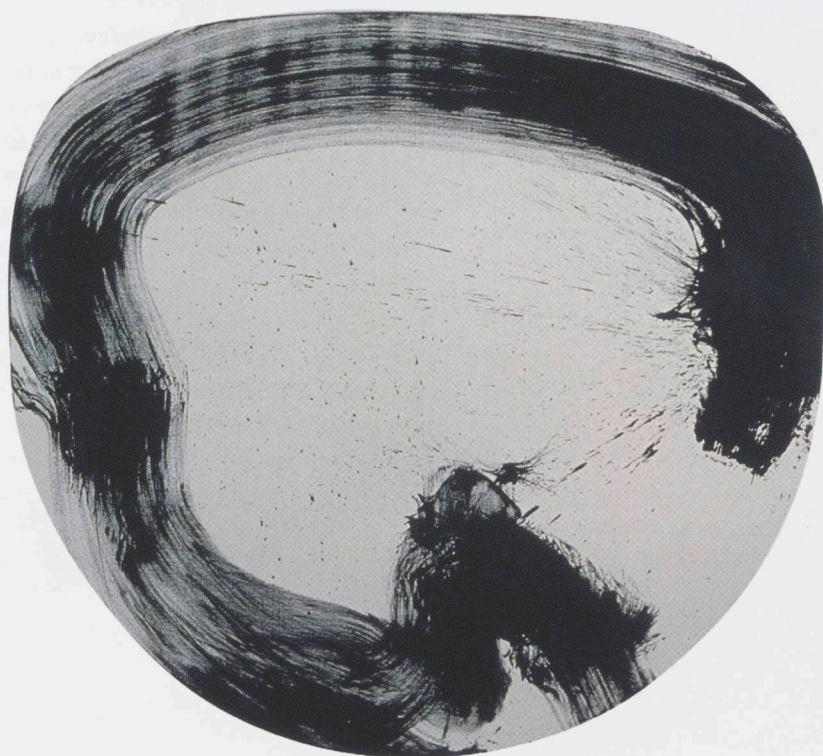
In the two circular examples the swirl of the mop is guided by the shape of the support – the edge. Still, they do not duplicate it mechanically but vary it in suggestive ways. One circle seems to have exploded into being, the other to have been thoughtfully and rationally contrived by the forces (whatever you call them) that make things what they are.

In a way that probably derives from feeling as much as intellectual contrivance, Gimblett here as elsewhere combines central traditions of the East and the West. *One-Stroke Bone* – for Anthony Fodero combines western signs of impulsive unrestrained vigour in its Pollockian splatter, and similar eastern signs in terms of its relation to the flung-ink school of calligraphy. Gimblett's state of mind in the performance of the painting act (for it is here rather performative) seems to have been somehow between, or somehow combining, elements of Pollock's and Sengai's sensibilities.

Empty Water is smaller (50 rather than 80 inches in diameter) and shows a tighter control. The circle almost closes itself but not quite; some openness is necessary for the flowing of water to happen or – as Zen texts ultimately based on Nagarjuna say – 'It is emptiness that makes the world possible.'

big mind, in contrast to those two, is a horizontal rectangle roughly based, in both directions, on the human figure – Vitruvian man occupying geometry again. The compromised or quirky nature of the circle – which is almost squared at three corners – allows it to participate loosely in the squaring-the-circle theme. *big mind*, as the universal subjectivity, is the squared circle, impossibility seen in actual action. It incorporates two of Sengai's three primary shapes – with a gap where the missing part makes life possible.

big mind 2002



ENDS

In the last twenty years the question has repeatedly been raised what the future of art might be – or if it even has a future. The idea that art would have a kind of an end was first raised by Pliny the Elder in his *Encyclopedia* in the first century AD. It was revived, for our time, by Hegel. Recently the idea that art has already ended or is just now actually at its end has been much discussed. In 1984 an anthology of essays was published called *The Death of Art* containing Arthur Danto's essay, 'The End of Art'. In the same year Hans Belting published a little book called *The End of the History of Art?* Two years later came Victor Burgin's *The End of Art Theory*. Then the idea died down for a while, but it has recently come back with renewed energy and even a kind of ferocity. In 1998 Fredric Jameson entered the discussion with an essay called "'End of Art" or "End of History"?' In 2003 Julian Spaulding's *The Eclipse of Art* appeared, and in 2004 Donald Kuspit published a book called, again, *The End of Art*.²⁷ The two recent books, by Spaulding and Kuspit, were more or less invectives against post-Modernism. Spaulding feels, to simplify and encapsulate his much longer argument, that art has lost its channels of connection with the larger public world around it; Kuspit, again to simplify and encapsulate, that art had long fulfilled the function of revealing the unconscious of society, and that now it has turned itself into the service of the conscious mind as an instrument of social-cultural-political critique, and has lost its depth as it renounced the deep service it once provided.

I might agree with them if I felt that post-Modernism had become as puritanical and exclusivistic as Modernism was in its day. But it has always seemed to me, on the contrary,

that post-Modernism (as many have said) is essentially a pluralistic ideology that does not exclude any option except the exclusion of options. In other words, today, and in the foreseeable future, it should be possible for an artist to root his or her work in Modernism, or in pre-Modernism, or in post-Modernism, or in any combination of these paths.

Max Gimblett's work is an instance of such comfortable acceptance of multiplicity, which can contain paradox or contradiction without feeling itself discredited. The one clear requisite, it seems to me, is the same as it has long been – that the artist be sure that his or her work is true to his or her innermost feelings and emotional needs, whatever they might be. Gimblett's oeuvre contains elements of pre-Modernism, Modernism, and (as pointed out here and there in the foregoing pages) post-Modernism too. It draws freely from East and West, and from various ages of history, without seeing a need to be exclusively and solely either this or that. It contains multiculturalism without conspicuous post-colonial preoccupations; it acknowledges and honours aesthetic feeling in Kant's terms without feeling bound exclusively to that pole. Gimblett seems to believe (as John Yau put it)²⁸ 'that time is circular', and in a circle, as mentioned above, beginning and end are everywhere, so anything can be accepted as having the same value as anything else. There is no need to exclude; indeed, to exclude any part of a circle would destroy its circularity and thus the totality of its meaning. Above all Gimblett has remained, whatever sources or materials he was dealing with, true to his inner urges and needs. The Zen stamp of the foot is an expression of earnestness. There is a simple honesty to it all that seems to avoid the various proclamations, lamentations, and celebrations that the idea of the end of art has embodied.

1 Lita Barrie in *Walters Gimblett Bambury*, Christchurch, New Zealand, Jonathan Jensen Gallery, 1992, np.

2 John Yau, 'Going Forth', in Wistan Curnow and John Yau, *Max Gimblett*, Auckland, New Zealand, Craig Potton Publishing in association with Gow Langsford Gallery, 2002, p. 107.

3 For early examples see Beatrice Laura Goff, *Symbols of Prehistoric Mesopotamia*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1963, figs 404, 411, 58 and elsewhere.

4 C.J. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, Princeton University Press, Bollingen series vol. XX.14, 1970, p. 210.

5 Ibid., p. 212.

6 C.J. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series XX.5, 1968, p. 360.

7 Ibid., p. 361.

8 Ibid., p. 360.

9 Ibid., p. 361.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., p. 76.

12 Ibid., p. 363.

13 Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Sengai the Zen Master*, London, Faber and Faber, 1971.

14 Ibid., p. 36.

15 Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, p. 235.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 André Leroi-Gourhan, *The Dawn of European Art*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, and other works.

19 See p. 58, 'How do you know when a work is finished?', interview with Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. A version of this interview will appear in *Art from Start to Finish*, edited by Howard S. Becker, forthcoming.

20 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1968, chapter 4.

21 Arthur Waley, *The Noh Plays of Japan*, New York, Grove Press, 1957, pp. 21, 22.

22 Wistan Curnow, 'An Exhilaration of the Spirit' in Curnow and Yau, *Max Gimblett*, p. 23.

23 John Yau in *ibid.*, p. 103.

24 Alexander Theroux, *The Primary Colours*, New York, Henry Holt, 1994, pp. 69–70, 159.

25 Ibid., p. 90.

26 Ibid., p. 1.

27 Berel Lang, ed., *The Death of Art*, New York, Haven Publishers, 1984. Arthur Danto, 'The End of Art', was republished in his *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 81–116. Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art?*, English translation, 1987. Victor Burgin, *The End of Art Theory*, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, Humanities Press International, 1986. Fredric Jameson, "'End of Art" or "End of History"?' in *The Cultural Turn*, London, Verso, 1998. Julian Spaulding, *The Eclipse of Art*, Munich, Prestel, 2003. Donald Kuspit, *The End of Art*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

28 John Yau, 'Going Forth' in Curnow and Yau, *Max Gimblett*.

Temenos 2002
635 x 927 mm (25" x 36 1/2")
ink on Thai Cal Ling paper





THE GREAT ARCHIVE OF THE GESTURE

WYSTAN CURNOW

Max Gimblett is a New Zealander who became a painter in the United States. He has lived and worked in New York since the early 1970s. He had his first solo exhibition there in 1976 and in Auckland the following year. Since then he has shown regularly in both cities and has been a constant visitor to the land of his birth and upbringing. While Gimblett's work is rooted in the Abstract Expressionist art of New York, and in an aesthetic specific to the post-World War II American moment, it has secured a significant place in New Zealand art history. All New Zealand art, like all American art, enters into at least two histories, histories which have changed strikingly in themselves and in their inter-relationships over the decades covered by this show. Max Gimblett's career plays a more comprehensive part in this double history than most. There is of course Billy Apple, but the appropriate comparison is with Len Lye, with whom Gimblett shared an aesthetic, a country of origin and a place of long-term residence. During the 1970s, Lye was for Gimblett compatriot, mentor and friend.

The Brush of All Things consists of more than forty works drawn from a career spanning forty years. It is not a formal retrospective; that would have required many more works and a selection geared to chronology and to a full account of their history. This overview is synchronic, rather than diachronic, designed to bring out the range of affect and meaning. It is organised into groupings which give rise to striking contrasts and comparisons of shape, medium and subject, juxtapositions which showcase the complexity and depth of Gimblett's work and expose some of its lesser known dimensions. The groupings come together more like a set of movements in

a musical composition than as stages in a narrative or argument; they provide a progression that is eventful, cumulative, but by no means conclusive or exhaustive.

The aim was more to test and extend than reinforce the present appreciation and knowledge of Gimblett's work. As it turns out, the selection draws heavily on particular periods: 1977–1981, 1994–1996, and 2000–2004. The story of the 1982 'crisis' that saw Gimblett turning away from monochromatic abstraction and its associated formalism, and the resulting development of a vocabulary of shaped canvases – notably the 'signature' quatrefoil shape – wetter brushwork and an 'alchemical' attitude to his materials – this is well enough known.¹ Although the outcome of this opening of the field of meaning is everywhere evident here, the quatrefoil appears as only one shape among many and the emphasis is on earlier and newer work. Few viewers will have seen the hard-edged geometric colour paintings of the later 1970s, and none the recent works on paper, the figurative mode, 'personal' subject matter and mordant humour of which will come as a surprise. These latter works, like the sculptural pieces, are being exhibited for the first time. Furthermore, some of the groupings will seem to offer a 'darker' Gimblett than visitors to his dealer gallery shows are perhaps accustomed to.

The title, *The Brush of All Things*, points to the broadly gestural basis of so much of Gimblett's work (pouring, splashing and hurling are all permitted). Since the early 1980s he has twice, in 1994–96 and 2000–04, renewed the gesture by returning to the well of his ink drawings, which are his most direct link back to the

abstract expressionism of Pollock and Motherwell. The documentary made for the exhibition by Roger Taberner of the artist at work in the studio helps us to better understand and appreciate the gesture's traces. When we witness these long-practised and choreographed, intensely physical and mental actions, we recognise the skills involved but more importantly gain an insight into the nature of the language of the trace.

Each of the spaces housing the exhibition contains a grouping of works which coalesce in theme and affect. There is nothing very hard and fast about these arrangements; they have been designed as installations, and have taken into consideration the various sizes, shapes, light conditions of the spaces available. As this is the first substantial public gallery showing of Gimblett's work in New Zealand,² the spaces were thought of as offering fresh and expansive circumstances to many of these works, enhancing their opportunities to have their say and to draw one another out through the conversations that might be arranged for them.

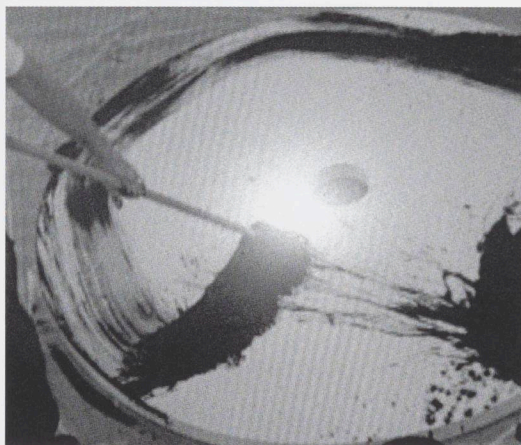
Of course, Gimblett's work can't be fully appreciated without knowledge of the range of contextual reference implicit in the shapes of his paintings, in the materials he uses, in the titles and the language of gesture he employs, and in the references to Eastern and Western religious history and practice, to

alchemy, Jungian psychology, to other arts and artists, and to events of the day both recent and remote. But as their simple and direct means of address suggest, such information has its use only in relation to what goes on for us in front of the work. Content is primarily based there, where the painting invites us to attend in kind to a visual language whose performance is central to its meaning. Both the film of Gimblett at work and the groupings that structure the exhibition are meant to make those acts of engagement more fruitful. This commentary is intended as a supplement to them both.

For several years now Max Gimblett has been working at the height of his powers. The clearest indication of this is the expressive range of his current work. Compare *Brother* with *One-Stroke Bone – for Anthony Fodero*, and with *Tiger* – all from 2002. But it is also a range that has grown wider and deeper as his work has matured. This exhibition offers then a brush with death. A spectacle of violence and an act of sacrifice. A touch of fear. An air of sadness. A moment of stillness. A rush of blood and a sudden surge of energy. A ripple of laughter. An aura of beauty. A tide of emotion. And that is by no means all.

1 See my essay for *Max Gimblett. Objects of Alchemy*. Auckland, Artis Gallery, 1990, pp. 1–10.

2 *Transformation, Recent Paintings*, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1984, 16 pp. There were 9 paintings and 33 ink drawings dated from 1980–1984.



One Stroke Bone –
for Anthony Fodero 2002



STATE OF GRACE

I am touched, as you are too, by the brush of all things. The world does not stand so far off in these paintings; it is more than forthcoming. The intervening space is charged with the anticipation of our response. The charge is optical, proprioceptual (felt in the muscles and tendons), psychological and semiotic. At its height the anticipation may be experienced as a state of grace. The painting with this name speaks not only for the works with which it shares its immediate space but for the exhibition as a whole. The procession of figures (or is it perhaps a field of crosses?) that people its surface speak of the collective, both of works in the show (they recall the quatrefoil shaped paintings) and of us, their viewers, pressing forward to greet with open arms whoever or whatever awaits them. They do appear to press forward, but if we are looking up, do they float on high instead, like an angelic band of sky-divers?³

State of Grace aside, the paintings in this grouping are the most recent. Each is the graphic record of a single two-handed high-risk stroke not of a brush but a mop or roller on a large stretched canvas, the hallucination of which, sheeted home to viewers' muscles and tendons, is what charges the space between it and you – just the thing to fire up your mirror neurons. In the case of *sword of no-sword*, painted for the documentary, we have the added advantage of a filmed record of the performance of its making.

Gimblett's drawings are actually paintings on paper, mostly spontaneous ink drawings done with a brush and informed by the tradition of Japanese calligraphy as practised by such masters as Sengai. Not so much studies for the paintings proper, his drawings belong to a separate line of work, going back to 1965. There are many thousands of these and their influence on Gimblett's oeuvre constitutes its secret history.⁴ Almost twenty years of painting the one-stroke circle on paper, *enso* in Zen nomenclature, preceded their first appearance on canvas, in small paintings like *You Can't Chase Two Rabbits*, 1998⁵ and then in large works such as *One-Stroke Bone – for Anthony Fodero* from 2002, hanging in this group. These are the culmination of Gimblett's drawing practice. Here, all of a Zen sudden, empty space is transfixed by pure act.

3 The artist told me this work was painted in recollection of a drawing made at 30,000 feet somewhere between New York and Auckland, or more precisely of the sensation of slippage that occurred in the process of drawing where a doodle unexpectedly became a pattern, something of more consequence, something like the emotion we find in *State of Grace*.

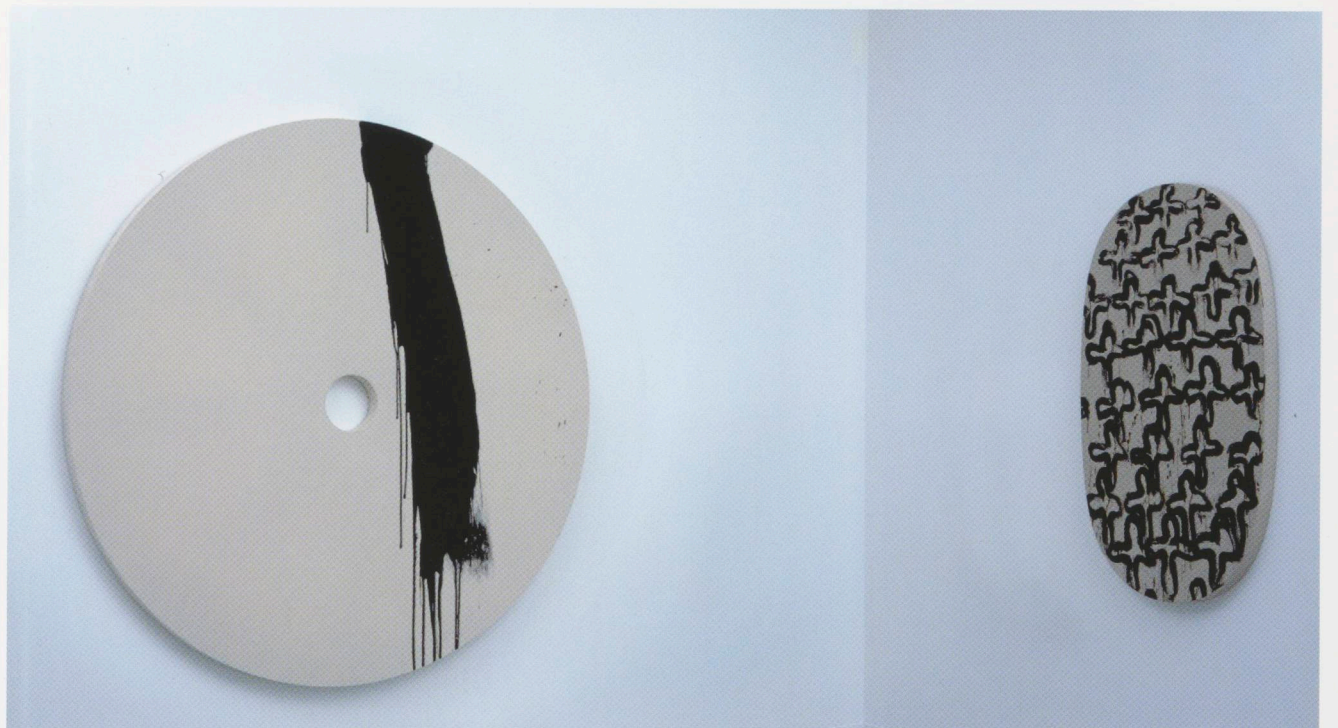
4 The Queensland Art Gallery's 2002 retrospective *Max Gimblett. The Language of Drawing* comprised almost a hundred works on paper.

5 See Wystan Curnow and John Yau, *Max Gimblett*, Craig Potton Publishing in association with Gow Langsford Gallery, 2002, pp. 104–5 for a reproduction and Yau's commentary. The *enso* 'is one of the deepest symbols in Japanese Zen. When man becomes empty of illusion, he appears to himself in the clearest light... This state in Zen is called "spiritual poverty" The *enso* is a symbolic representation of this Zen state, intuitively grasped, portrayed with boldness and beauty. The shape of the *enso* is also a succinct expression of the transcending of worldly distraction and as such is an essential statement of the tranquillity of Zen. This form is also the simplest representation of the experience of the Absolute void; it encompasses the universe with an endless line.' Yasuichi Awakawa, *Zen Painting*, 1970, p. 112.





sword of no-sword 2004
State of Grace 1994



AWE

A space for *Awe*. This canvas, the largest work in this group, dominates the space around it; at two and a half metres square it looms over and threatens to engulf whoever is drawn towards its blue-violet centre. Although chronologically and stylistically *Awe* belongs in the third grouping of works, along with *Blue/Red – to Len Lye* and *Yellow/Red – Pacific*, here it seems far removed from the dayglo, ozone-free world they occupy. *Awe*'s world is a night-time world. The three squat ovals *Angel*, *Crossing*; *The Maltese Falcon – after Marsden Hartley* and *Mithra* share its space, their 'noir' surfaces scarred, etched, ghosted with images of crosses and an angel wing, while allusions to German militarism, Christian sacrifice, ancient Persian gods, Bogart movies and Medieval orders flap around and about their moonlit obscurities.

Such is its size, *Awe* is framed by the wall it is on, even the room it is in. It is the centrepiece of a group of works, an arrangement which takes on the form of an installation. This is perhaps an unusual circumstance, for Gimblett's works are by nature self-contained;

or rather they position themselves in relation to the viewer and only indirectly to the space shared by them both. But Gimblett has taken up sculpture, albeit tentatively. *Mithra* is a work in transition, a painting at rest on chocks, waiting to be hung on the wall or returned to the storage stacks, caught and cast in copper, its bale-fire reflections warming the cool violet of *Awe*'s central bar.

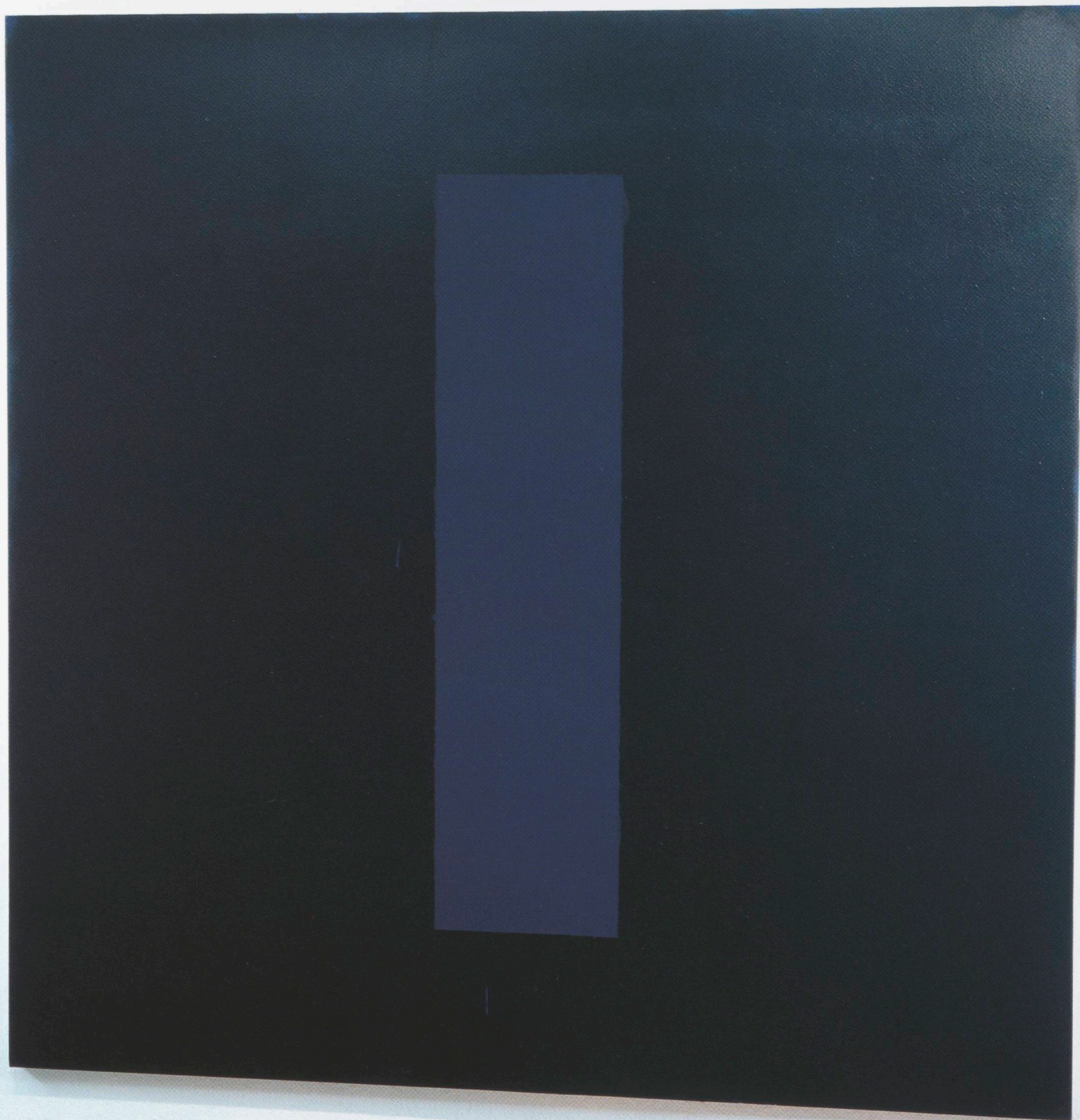
On the floor is a scatter of skulls made from shells; hence the marine title, *Low Tide*. They evoke as well the shock of discovery of what has up until now been hidden: there has been a massacre here. The scene is disconcerting not only for what it seems to depict but because of the pale pearly beauty of the shell, and (worse) the maniacal grin on the face of these death's heads. They seem to mock us, throwing our suffering, shame, our mortality back in our faces. The space is full of the mingled sensations of the Sublime. The fear of darkness, the terror of death, of emptiness and silence is here, but held back, suspended, relieved even by touches of breathtaking beauty.⁶

⁶ For a comprehensive discussion of the relation of the Sublime to emergence of the monochrome painting, see Thomas McEvilley, 'Seeking the Primal through Paint: The Monochromatic Icon', in *The Exile's Return, Toward a Redefinition of Painting for the Post-Modern Era*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 1–56.

Low Tide (detail) 1995



Awe 1981



Mithra 1996
Low Tide 1995



The Maltese Falcon –
after Marsden Hartley 1995/96



BLUE/RED – TO LEN LYE

As time has gone by the paintings in this grouping have grown somewhat isolated from Gimblett's work as a whole. The 'Geos' as he calls these 'geometrical abstractions' are now early works, and because they precede the 1982 crisis, the continuity of the post-crisis works may seem a continuing rebuke. However the fact that *Blue/Red – to Len Lye* and *Buddha* are among the most memorable and original works Gimblett has ever painted hardly supports such a view.⁷

This grouping might be compared to that around *Sky Gate* in which much later works are brought together; both create spaces in which light moves the viewer, literally and emotionally; in the one colour supplies the impetus, in the other, reflection. In both spaces binary and four-fold structures predominate. An arrangement bringing together works from both is not hard to imagine.

The square Geos recall Barnett Newman. Gimblett's bar doesn't work like Newman's 'zip' or band, however. While certainly for both painters their device, sometimes single, sometimes repeated, stands (upright) for the human figure, and a point of reference for the viewer viewing, Gimblett's still partakes of

'composition' or 'geometry' – it is a figure in a figure/ground relationship in the space of the painting, whereas Newman's functions as a figure in the room the painting shares with the viewer. Gimblett is still at this stage connected to Mondrian – via Burgoyne Diller. Moreover, his bar is centred, positioning us there, or holding us between a double bar. Ordinarily the Geos do not loom over us. Although somewhat taller than us they hang a foot or so from the floor, thus grounding themselves in our space. Nor do they engulf us by their lateral reach. Compared to Newman, it is more of a one-on-one relationship. In fact from the time of the Geos onward, the sizes and hanging heights of all of his works have been measured against the viewer's body, whole or in part.

The bar, or the field between bars, is the point of focus of attention from which content develops. The often intense colours of the figure/ground relationship open up a kinetically active optical space around the bar. With *Blue/Red – to Len Lye* this starts to happen quickly, in a flash, the blue/red clash setting off pulsations, whereas *Buddha's* content is released slowly. And in fact it was slowly painted; while *Red Violet/Blue – Summer*, for example, is a 'one-shot' wet painting with one coat for the field and one for the bar, *Buddha* has countless layers, its top coat sporting a long, unique and colourful genealogy stretching back over several years.

⁷ There are six large tondos in all from the early 1980s, all remarkable works. Not included in the exhibition are *Zen* which is black with a white centre and was shown in *Transformation*; *Black/Red* (two works); and *India*, which is yellow with a red centre.

Transformation Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki 1984

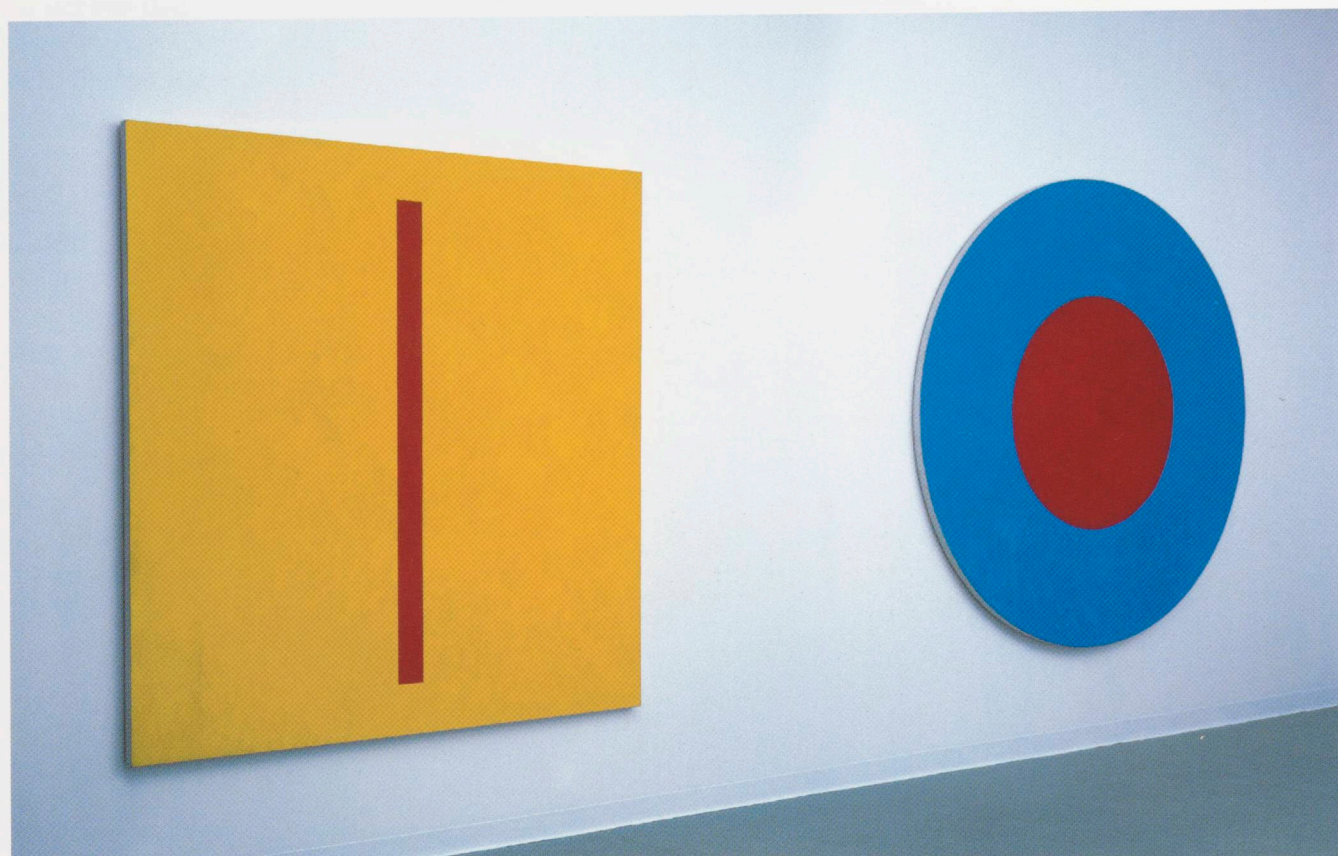




BLUE/RED
TO LEN

Yellow/Red – Pacific 1978

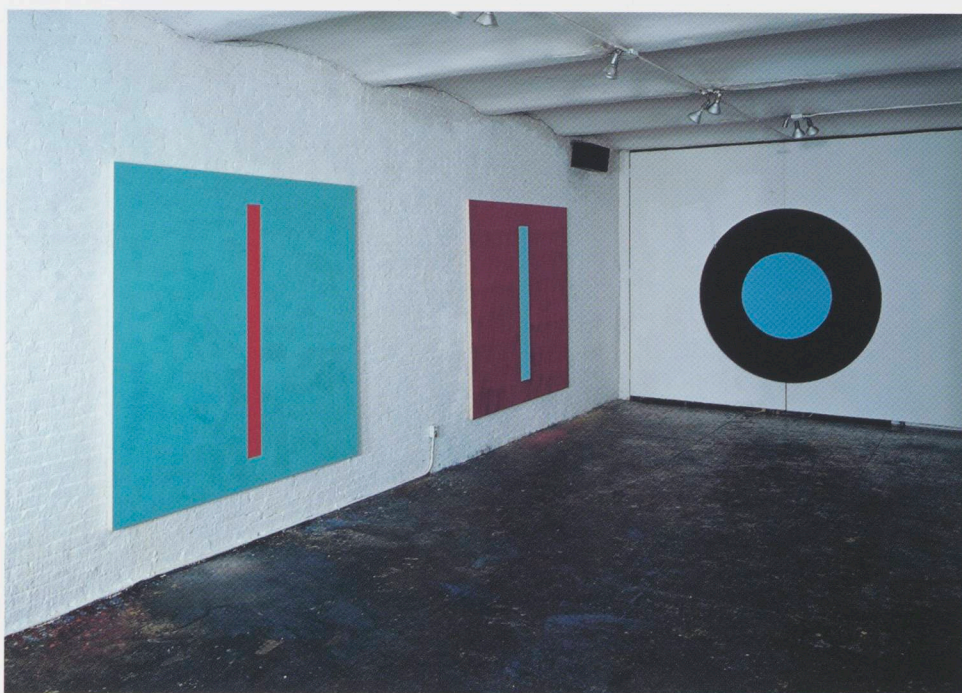
Blue/Red – to Len Lye 1980







Artist's assistants unpacking works in
storage warehouse, the Bronx, NYC
Light Green/Red – to Dora 1978
Red Violet/Blue – Summer 1980
Buddha 1980/86



CRUCIFIXION – AFTER PETER GABRIEL

Certainly there are works to lord it over you in this grouping – paintings to engulf, to spook and rattle us as we move into this space in the exhibition. Gathered here are some of Gimblett's largest and most powerful works. With *Crucifixion* and adjacent to it *Red Sea*, an altarpiece triptych, this is the most Christian of the groupings. An array of tall mirror-shaped ovals stands sentinel and echoes the black, red and green of the quatrefoil *Crucifixion*. *Action Painting* and *Delacroix and Caduceus* offer counterpoints – the first, to my way of looking, seems a gigantic and menacing tiki figure, the second another take on death and the need for healing. The pitch of the emotion here is high; it is bloody, brutal and theatrical. Fear and pathos, violence and sacrifice, fill the air.

Crucifixion. It begins properly with a violent gesture; a quantity of red paint is hurled at the canvas. Into this Gimblett then painted in the cross, his brushwork twisting and turning with the agony of Christ's body, as though he was himself both God and God-killer. Then some green. The performance of *Red Sea* appears no less strenuous, or distressing. It maybe that by some miraculous intervention

the sea is indeed about to part and let God's chosen people escape to safety, but it has not happened yet. What we have before us is a wall of blood; that is to say, the representation of paint as blood, and the business of the painter as covering canvases with it – and the work involved, of filling the brush, pushing it across the canvas, filling it again, until the job is done and another canvas is taken up and the task renewed. The only other image in the work is an 'unintended' one – owing to the pressure of the brush on the canvas, more paint is left on it as it hits the central upright of the stretcher leaving, by the time the canvas has been completely covered, a vertical line where the upright is.

Christians come to their awareness through suffering, Buddhists through joy. With these two paintings Gimblett participates in the Christian progress by embodying it in his acts, making of them acts which speak for themselves to the viewer. He does the same with the works in the *State of Grace* grouping, the most Zen Buddhist of the spaces. Gimblett is neither Buddhist nor Christian, but he has a deep interest in and knowledge of both. Of the two, Zen, through the growing significance of his drawing for his painting, has had the greatest influence on his practice. In this regard he has extended and surpassed the achievement of Robert Motherwell. Equally important has been his effort to forge from Eastern and Western, the Christian and Buddhist sources, new forms of thought and feeling. The quatrefoil is one such, as are the complex 'alchemies' of his materials.

Crucifixion – after
Peter Gabriel 1989/91





Jade 2003
Tiger 2003
Onyx 2003

artist's studio, New York City



Jade 2003
Tiger 2003
Onyx 2003
Action Painting 1995
artist's studio, New York City





SKY GATE

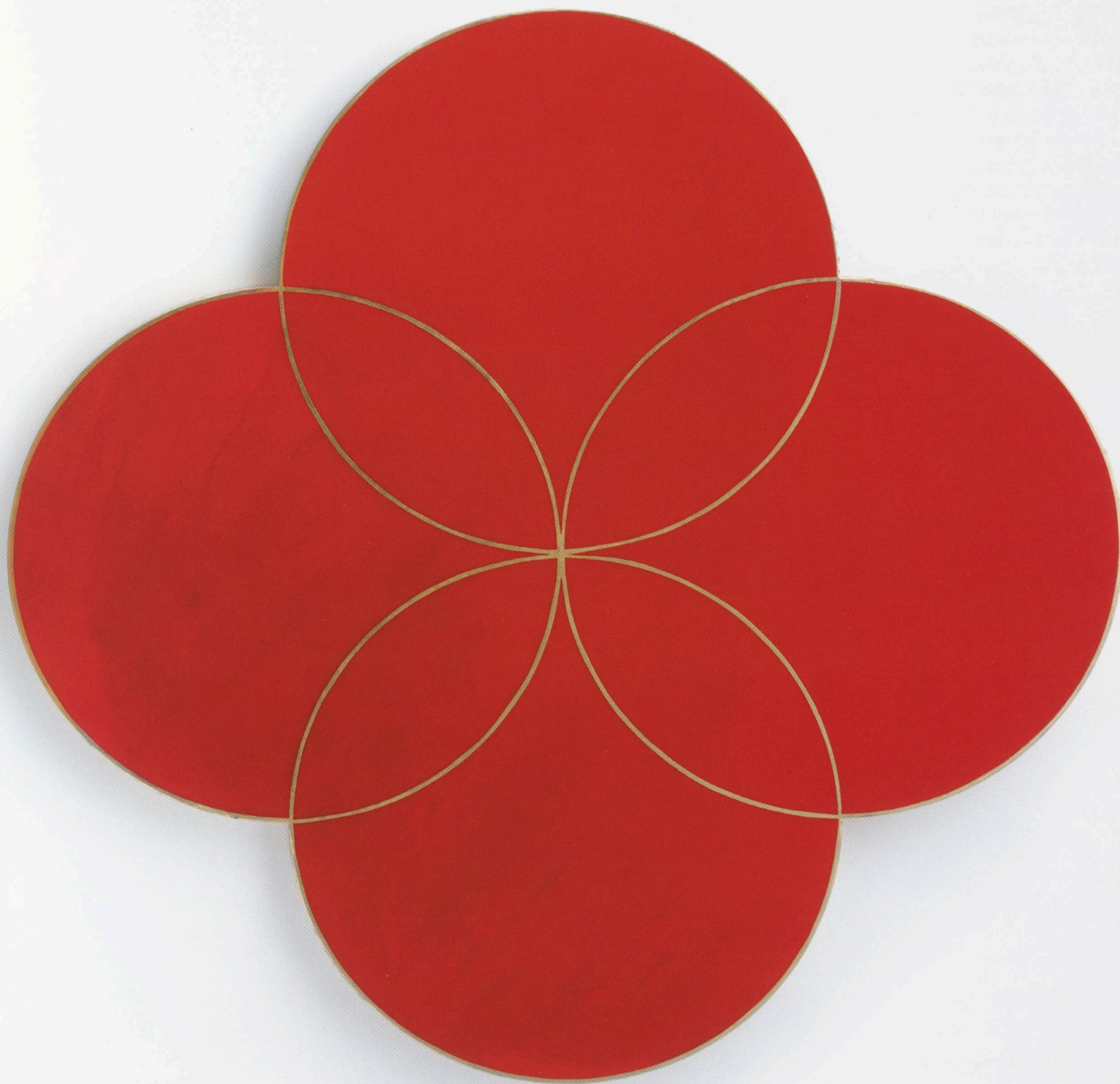
As the colour relations are what move us with the Geos, reflection is what does it with these works. The light that bounces off their gorgeous shiny surfaces, that forms a brilliant aura on the wall at the centre of *Kiss*, the shadowy reflections of our own images which get caught in the surfaces of *Current* and *Two Stroke Bowl – for Vietnam* as we come into and go from their vicinity, both typify the ambience of a room in which light is at once meaning and a literal sign of our active relationship to the works. Light is growing in the *Sky Gate* grouping whereas in the *Awe* grouping it seems in retreat. The light in the works is feeble, pale, mottled; their reflections are intermittent and dark – the gloss on the black surface of *Awe* only intensifies the mystery of its depth.

Light serves beauty directly in these paintings, a beauty that shines in their silver and gold surfaces and glows from their layers of amber polyurethane. There's no denying their seductiveness, and yet Gimblett has said to me that beauty has no character unless there is something of the shadow about it. *Two Stroke Bowl – for Vietnam* is an apology by way of a tribute to

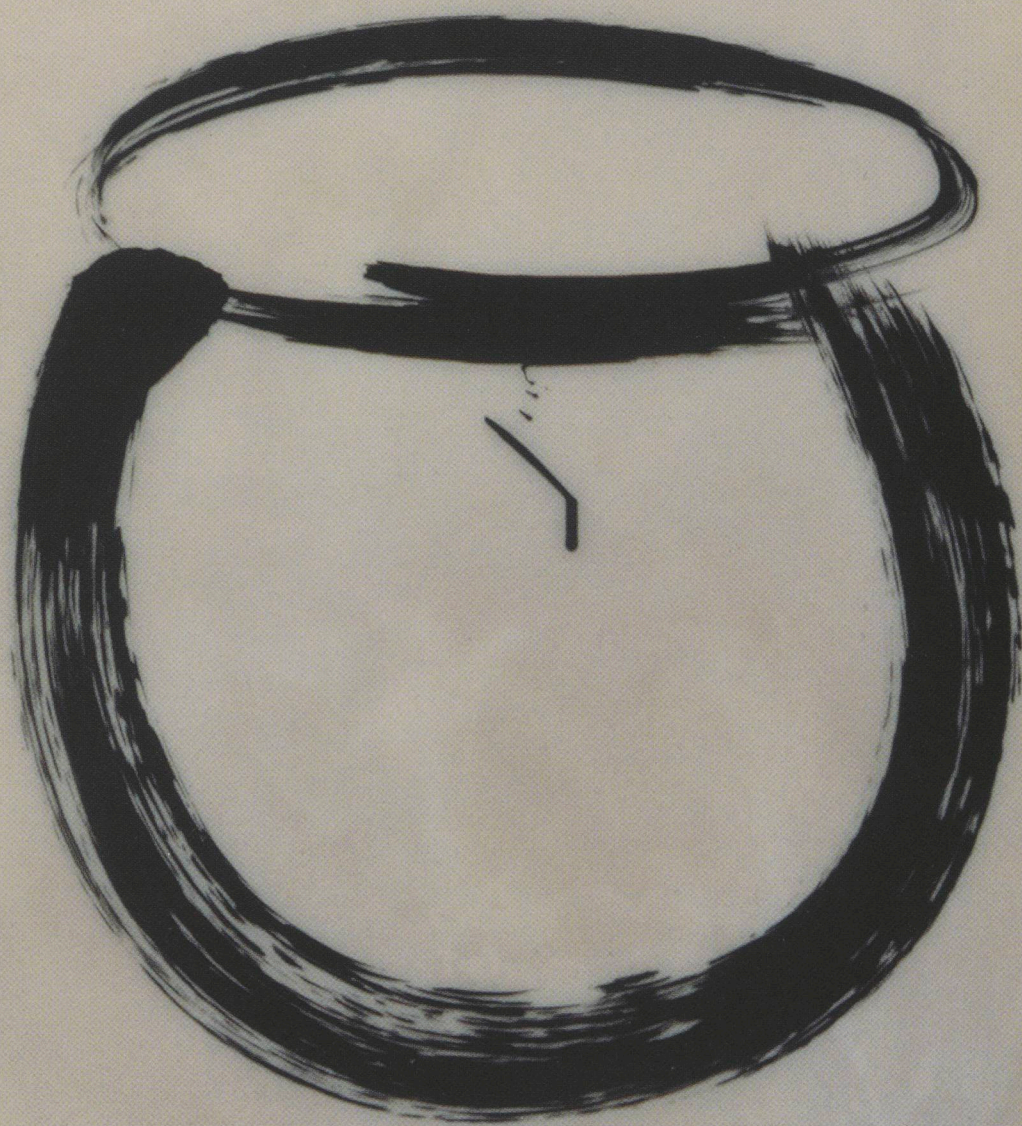
that country for the destruction and suffering America visited upon it. Like all the double-square paintings which combine gilded and calligraphic panels, it relies for its organisation of feeling on Asian precedents. The gilded moon-gold panel brings a quiet and sober beauty to the adjacent panel on which the traditional figure of a humble two-stroke bowl is painted.

The fear of beauty and pleasure which these works so confidently challenge is also a manifestation of the shadow. A fear of *Sky Gate*'s overheated redness, perhaps? Or the fear which leaves much recent art looking righteously unattractive, smugly ugly? Pleasure and seriousness are commonly opposed, morally and politically. Art that is morally serious and repulsive to look at is assumed to be radical, while art that is decorative or beautiful is assumed to be conservative, not to say reactionary and decadent. *Kiss* and *Pin Wheel – for Len Lye* are especially excessive, seemingly too beautiful to be art. Yet if they are ornaments they lack a sense of proportion, or propriety. So what are they? Or, if they seem such poised and perfectly fitting objects, for what are they fitted? The value this uncertainty adds transforms the pleasures the works give, enhances their ability to change our forms of thought and feeling.

Sky Gate 2003
Two Stroke Bowl –
for Vietnam 2000 (detail over)











FUCKIN' CHARMER

The stencilled death's heads in *Delacroix and Caduceus*, the skulls that fill the drawers of *Spirit Box* and populate *Low Tide's* killing field, the skeleton of *Bub*, all predate these drawings by a few years but together with them they signal an emerging engagement with mortality and death. As we have been observing, the body is always present in Gimblett's work. The Geos' bar is a spine, the vertical axis of the cross and the quatrefoil is one too – see *Crucifixion*; see *Spine*. If the impressions left by the vertical stretcher bars on *Red Sea* are thought of as spines, then the work depicts three flayed and bleeding backs. Whether such responses are speculative or deeply implicit, the subject of mortality seems to be the occasion for the emergence of more figurative depictions of the body, which culminate in this show with drawings where the frisson of death is closely associated with the act of its representation.

Körperwelten is the title of a drawing not included in this group, but relevant to a discussion of them. It's also the name of an exhibition of real corpses and body parts that has in recent years attracted millions of visitors in Europe and Asia. *Body Worlds* was made possible by 'plastination', a process invented by the exhibition's owner, Gunther von Hagens, which preserves corpses from decomposition by replacing bodily fluids and fats with reactive polymers such as silicone rubber, epoxy resins and polyester. Ethical concerns about the donor programme on which the process depends, and the shocking and fascinating reality of the exhibits, have produced controversy and legal threats. The skeletal head-and-shoulders portraits, such as *Drawing Board Morte*; *Guardian – from the Shadow Drawer* and *Mrs Gimblett in all her beauty* were inspired in part by *Body Worlds* and its catalogue. This shedding of light on the dark interior spaces of the human body,

this parting the curtains of clothing, flesh, taboo from the body, this rendering visible of the invisible, is perhaps the exception that proves the non-figurative rule.

Mind you, drawing in Gimblett's hands has always been the more unruly, mercurial medium, one that entertains slippage and drift (such as into figuration), one in which the artist is free to scare himself or to have a laugh. But these particular drawings take unprecedented liberties. They have become personal. They are mordantly humorous, and cartoon-like. So it is not just that Gimblett makes a specimen of himself, not just that he prepares himself for 'plastination' – do all those epoxy resins and polymers sound rather familiar? It is that in scaring himself by depictions of and by a 'shadow', Gimblett is perhaps proposing a psychological equivalent to plastination. *Max's midnight guest* and *Brother* are surely trusted friends or friendly selves; but are they, really? I don't think so. *Mrs Gimblett in all her beauty?* Are you kidding yourself? Again? I know you, Gimblett. You think you're a fuckin' charmer, don't you? Look at you.

Writing about the Geos in 1980, Ronny H. Cohen remarked on how his painting 'projects self-assurance', noting that this confidence required settled conviction, and how both were integral to Gimblett's processes.⁸ Looking back from the vantage point of this exhibition, there is indeed a half-truth to this view. The other half is to be found in these remarkable and deeply serious cartoons, and in their relation to the complete ink drawings, that great archive of the gesture that is their source.

We may think the drawings here are directed at the Max Gimblett who reigns supreme in the rest of this exhibition, or we may think they are directed at any response to the exhibition that considers this an adequate response to the drawings. It is over to us.

⁸ Ronny H. Cohen, 'Max Gimblett – A Color Visionary', in *Max Gimblett*, San Francisco, Modernism, 1980, pp. 3–11.









HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN A WORK IS FINISHED?

MAX GIMBLETT
INTERVIEWED BY BARBARA
KIRSHENBLATT-GIMBLETT¹

BKG: The question before us is, how do you know when a work is finished?

MG: Well, you told me yesterday we'd be doing this, so I allowed myself just before dawn this morning to make a list. What I was interested in initially was the variety of ways in which I approach completion.

The completion is in the beginning

BKG: Are there any works that you have on the go at the moment where you don't know where to stop or you ask yourself the question, 'Are they finished?'

MG: Well, it's a great question. One idea would be the clarity or lack of clarity in the beginning of a particular work or family of works. You may have your completion in your beginning paradigm if you more or less stay on the path of that paradigm or concept.

'No rules study'

MG: In 'no rules study', you could have the concept that the moment that you can analyse the structure, you are free to change it or break it. You've developed a constant which frees you up to make it either asymmetrical or move it into another structure or cross it with a/or into a fresh hybrid. That would be no rules study.

Poets teach me ways to begin and complete paintings

MG: Poets teach me ways to begin and complete paintings. Now if we could drop the language of beginning and completing and sort of move into a language of the work: every original voice of poetry suggests a way to work. I read a very long article on Stanley Kunitz. And I realised that when I read a Stanley Kunitz, a John Yau, an Anurima Banerji, a D.H. Lawrence, a Robert

Creeley, a Lewis Hyde, or a Rainer Maria Rilke, any one of their poems, I am delivered a voice, and that voice suggests a style, suggests an aesthetic, suggests content and form, suggests a whole paradigm in which I might do a work.

Completion is the front door

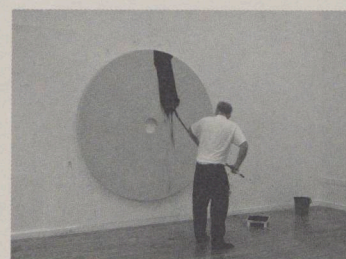
MG: To begin is to complete. On the other hand, the completion is the front door. The final editor is the letting go of the work, when it goes to the audience for them to complete within themselves and with the work as the altar of the presence.

Getting hysterical, being desperate!

MG: De Kooning used to say, because he's such a magnificent artist and writer and speaker, what little bits have been recorded, those scraps, what he would say sometimes is: 'I would complete a work by getting hysterical.' So, it's like an idea of how do you get your body out of the work, how do you get out of it. Well, kamikaze pilot, you get out of your *body* by ramming something. My early look-alike De Koonings, I would *charge* the canvas with a loaded house painter's brush, shouting. That's not so different from the way I do my Zen inks now, slapping my foot and shouting. So, getting hysterical, and desperate, is a way to complete a work.

Completion is more important than beginning? A false hierarchy

MG: There's endless ways to complete. So, in our renewal, in our daily renewal, we would find that our aesthetic's determined by how you begin, how you proceed, and how you complete. Well, we could sense a false hierarchy, that the completion's more important than the beginning, in that the completion puts the



stamp on the object. However, because Cézanne's water colours of the Provence landscape in a few primary colours with a few touches, told us everything that leads, if you will, to Donald Judd, less is more, you can really only stop with the object and complete or fail in relation to your conviction that has something to do with how you've begun and something to do with how you've proceeded. Your ever-emerging fresh model.

A continuous field

MG: Because we're in a continuous field – John Cage enters now – and because we're living in indeterminacy and synchronicity, how is one work separated from another, as a unit, or family of relations? So that's why I work in family relationships, and a one-off usually means I ended some path I didn't choose to go down, walk down, or take a turning, or ceased on that path. Perhaps. Now John Cage's convictions about the *I Ching* and models of synchronicity were so powerful that he could map out a concept and proceed with a work and be utterly successful. So, the curiosity that's endless in beginning a drawing or a painting, or the making of a book, is that I attempt to find a voice that will deliver the maximum content in the cleanest, clearest aesthetics. 'Water is never clumsy.'

Reverses

MG: Think for a moment not of style, but of procedure. Somebody once told me I was the master of the reversal. So in 'no rules study', 'one stroke bone' is one stroke. Then there is two strokes. Two stroke bone. Somewhere in there, when you add strokes, you're composing, and when you're composing with 'add-ons', you have to be very, very alert as to what is your mental activity between the various movements

of the construction, of the composing. If you suddenly reverse, what was clear is shattered. The broken, fragmented pieces may deliver a form, a structure. Osiris and Seth.

'all mind/no mind'

MG: I've trained myself to do a lot of painting without thinking. And that means I have to be very, very clear before I start. Now, *Cove*, the jade painting that's in New Zealand – I got an unusually white painting, where I thought I was underpainting and building this chalky white surface – at some point I thought, well what it needs is, it needs watery jade green thalo and then I'll get to build a jade painting. So I walked up and in a few strokes, I gave it this, and I stepped back, and to my amazement and delight and horror, it was completed, and it was your and my visit to Waitomo Caves, it was a jade temple interior – I called it *Cove* after Katherine Mansfield's *At the Bay*.

If your mind was free enough, if in your humility and letting go and surrender you walk up to the altar and paint, thinking in your mental mind, 'This is a light undercoating coat that's leading up to something else,' and then instantly you had a masterpiece. So the disconnect between the mental attitude and what's achieved is incredibly freeing. That's like a letting go of all the erected decisions in your history as a painter to date about how to complete a painting. You have a new completion. Some other time, you could start a painting to move to that position or actually begin with that paradigm, and then again you might find yourself going off somewhere else.

It's about letting go of a fixed idea or a projection, of what you want to see, let go of it. Let go of the beginning. Let go of the next step in the logical process. Let go of scale. Let go of

emotional resolution within a work. You might turn up a dark night painting that is full on light. Let go of doing something beautiful. You're trying to generate endless opportunities. You're trying to have a paradigm that is completely open to the moment.

BKG: What I heard you say was that in painting *Cove*, you started out thinking you were doing underpainting, and then somehow discovered that you had completed it. Then you suggested that, well, you might proceed with the intention of doing a painting like *Cove*.

MG: Okay. We know – we know that when people analyse music or writing, they can tell from the voice within the work about the two decades it was done in. Apparently, *nobody* works outside the style of their time, the dialects of their time, the language of their time. So sometimes, you can make what appears to be a big jump in your aesthetics by finding yourself in an entirely new place that you didn't know anything about, and then you can capitalise on that, once you come to and realise that you did it, that you participated in it.

Where does one work end and another begin?

BKG: How do you know where one work ends and the next begins? Particularly when you're working on a family of works. One of the striking things about the *Mirror* paintings is that you did work on them as a group over a very, very long period of time. There were many points where I thought to myself, it's done, why not just go move on to another painting. You worked across the whole group, you worked on them for years.

MG: From 1983/89 is the main thrust of this grouping of works.



BKG: That's rather different from the experience that you described with *Cove*. Would you like to say something about the *Mirror* paintings?

MG: I can try. The *Mirror* paintings were loaded up – they were mirrors, they were secret cabinets, they were Christian Middle Ages, they were alchemy, they were gold and silver, they had heterodox crosses, they had anthropomorphic Christian crosses, they were *loaded*. They were like treasure chests. They had accretion of layers and in their final years, only worked when there were a lot of precious metals added to the opening paradigm.

Until I was in my late forties, in some families of works, I didn't have utter conviction about how to complete, in the sense that a lot of the value in the paintings was about my groping my way along through trial and error. To make something incredibly rich by *inclusion* and by concentrating on it and by bearing down on it over a long period of time, to be sure about it. Now I can do that also in an instant. But it took post-mid-life for the dualism to quieten down. Shall I go this way or that? Shall I go up or down, left or right? Shall I follow *both*?

**Rinzai. Gradual and Fast.
'At every step the pure wind rises'**

BKG: In the *Mirror* paintings you have, as you put it, a way of working that's very slow. You also have a way of working that's very fast.

MG: I practise Rinzai Zen. Koan study and calligraphy. Two conditions: fast and gradual. You can be in a period of fast completion and get the odd slow one, and you could be in a period of slow completion with layers, and get the odd fast one. Now I am in a period of equally balanced slow and fast completion. In my case, it has something to do with the days

and the hours I don't have assistants with me in the studio, the work I have to be private to do, it has to do with how much energy I've got in relation to rest and caffeine and sugar and exercise, and it's got to do with if I'm relying on linear line elements, or whether I'm into sheets or fields of mass across the plane. Does my visual art practice follow my life, or my life follow the practice?

One is very alert about one's process in relation to expressing oneself. In my studio where I can draw in six different modes, paint in about three or four modes, I can do journal work, we can make books, you can dream up ceramics, and you can make sculpture, and you can make phone calls, where people will make stuff for you at your direction, you can fax them a drawing, and you can also have discussions with people, like I do with Anthony Fodero, my studio manager, where they will help develop the object. The creative energy can move in many mediums and methods.

BKG: Say more about what's *fast* about it.

MG: Well, you *can* do something quicker in your body than your mind can record. Mental, verbal – you can beat them both – you can beat the mental thought process with your body movement. Get ahead of it. A lot of sports does that. Beat the verbal. But also you might beat the personal *identity*, you might beat the narcissism, you might beat being caught up in any self-consciousness.

BKG: For someone who hasn't seen your work, can you describe the internal experience of working in a way that you would characterise as fast completion? Which of your works would be examples of fast completion?

MG: *First Painting* (1965), *Gate* (1985), *State of Grace* (1994), *Bridge* (1979), *You Can't Chase*

Two Rabbits (1998), *Empty Water* (2003), *big mind* (2002), *One Stroke Bone – for Anthony Fodero* (2002), *No Trace* (2003), and *Cloak – an NZ Childhood* (2001) are some examples.

BKG: In other words, where there's a calligraphic or gestural movement?

MG: Possibly, or it could be a pour, or a throw, or a pool. It can be any gesture, it doesn't *have* to be calligraphic

BKG: Is it gestural?

MG: *Everything's* gestural, to me.

Layers and gesture

MG: You might be in a period of working on a particular group of works or you might have many groups of works going forward at the same time. You could have *boundaries* between them. You could do that by titles, you could do that by shape, you could do that by the particular wall you work them on. The section or the area of the studio that they live in, or a separate studio.

Let's say you're going after layered works, you're glazing. Or, you get some very good layered works in a non-layered period, because you couldn't complete a work in the fast mode. And it was interesting enough when you didn't *complete* it, for you to see a way into it to continue, and it turned into layers, although you had tried to complete it as fast. But it didn't work. It was unsatisfactory, so what we've got is addition and subtraction. Adrian Stokes, in *The Image in Form*, calls it carving and modelling.² You can add or you can subtract, or you can do both. I do almost *no* work by subtraction in an ongoing piece, we do it by re-stretching or re-surfacing a panel, you know, throwing out what went wrong and starting again with a fresh surface entirely, If the calligraphy sometimes



doesn't work on the poly, we wipe it off with denatured alcohol, and it leaves a golden shadow. So when you do the *next* move, you have to incorporate the shadow. You've got to incorporate that shadow into the move, you've got dualism and the Other there. Much of my current work's about trying to defeat dualism and be whole without double references. But you know, if you've got two squares together, obviously you're *playing* on the dualism, you're playing the left and right.

Now, I actually haven't had a period of layers for quite a long time, as a recognised way to go. When I say that, I realise how wrong I am, because all the polyurethane and epoxy work are layers. They're all layers. They're layers of light bouncing through the transparent polyurethane and the epoxy to somewhere near the originally touched primary plane. It is pretty startling, for me. It's like a crystal-clear lake of water in the mountains, where the air's very crisp, and you can see all the rocks on the bottom, and they're glistening morning dew. You can see everything all the way through to the primary plane. It's an idea about see-throughs.

BKG: My sense is that the layering that you do in these works, which are often two panels (or not), with one of the panels a calligraphic move, is rather different from the layering you did on the *Mirror* family, for example.

MG: Agreed.

BKG: What's the difference?

MG: Well, either one retains all the planes in the transparency, or one is cloaking the planes with opaque information that is building to a *statement* that's about what's buried, or what's hidden, or what's underneath, or what's suggested, or what it took to get here.

Completion in different mediums

MG: There are a lot of different completion modes in different *mediums*. They affect each other, they go across boundaries. For instance, *Spirit Box* – you know, a jeweller, Warwick Freeman. A carpenter, Jim Cooper. Master carpenter, master jeweller. A studio manager, Anthony Fodero, who did the drawing of the cabinet. An earlier studio manager, Todd Strothers, who drew the original skull. My decisions on shape and the eternal return; eight drawers; the scale in relation to the body; the decision *not* to play with a pedestal – beyond Brancusi (not part of the piece); to keep it unadorned and closed, a great mystery. I always wanted it to look like a skyscraper – it could be said to be my replacement for the World Trade Towers, which were out my window and is now in my heart. It's not Henry Miller's air-conditioned nightmare, but it does contain endangered species, and it is the death mask's skull. And some of them are floppy bits glued onto cloth in a very sophisticated manner so they're soft. They're soft skulls, they drape – as we used to strip the skin off live human beings, what's that called?

BKG: Flaying.

MG: Flaying. Titian at 99 paints a man being flayed upside down, it's a disgusting thing. And Vietnam veterans have told me of finding American soldiers flayed on a cross in a village.

'This is a stone from the endless beach'

MG: Now that's another completion – having *no* idea about what the completion will be. Being completely open about it. It can end at any given second or moment. You could *play* with it and say it ends before it begins. And, you know, that would be some idea of effortlessness

in terms of Integral Yoga. Effortlessness. There's nothing to it. I mean, there's *everything* to it, and there's *nothing* to it. When Bob Creeley was brought along by Wistan Curnow to that Quay Street winter cold-water studio in Auckland in 1995 and Bob handed me *The Dogs of Auckland* manuscript, I was foolish enough to lift my head up and look at Bob and say, 'It's going to be effortless!'³ He slowly caught my eye and said, 'Sounds difficult to me.' And it *was* difficult, he was right. The project, the book, took four years to complete.

Lewis Hyde⁴ and I are attempting to finalise *Oxherding* right now, and we began at the Rockefeller Foundation residency at Bellagio in 1991.⁵ It's 2003, and I have yet to complete the last drawing. Of course, it being the symbolic last drawing of the ten, 'Entering the marketplace with helping hands'.⁶ Is it one figure, is it two figures? Michael Wenger, who wrote *33 Fingers*, says, 'One figure in relationship.'⁷ Lewis says, 'Two for sure.' Relationship is the point. I could do the tenth drawing, it could be so startling, it could make me go back and redraw a couple of the other two, you see, because the tail is going to wag the dog – Uroborus – wag the ox, so, how come *Oxherding's* taken thirteen/fourteen years to complete? Brancusi said, 'Things are not difficult to make. What is difficult is to put ourselves in condition (or a state) to make them.'⁸ *Oxherding* is *refusing* to complete, and when I asked Roshi Susan Postal how come I couldn't get my hands on 8, 9, and 10, she was very warm and she said, 'They are non-experiential. Nobody can be sure about those three pictures while they're still in their body.' She said, 'Trust yourself. You've done the preceding steps. You're acting in good faith. Trust the situation.' Roshi Postal is telling me I will never *know* the



resolution of 8, 9 or 10, it's not given to somebody in their body to *know* it. However we have her blessing and hence permission to complete! Earlier, in Australia, in 2001, I visited Rochi Hogen Yamahata, of the Open Way Centre, in Byron Bay, New South Wales. And when I told the Rochi I was having trouble ink painting the ten *Oxherding* pictures, he instantly said, quietly, 'In your life?' It made it possible for me to continue and be successful, Rochi Hogen Yamahata giving me that insight. He wrote an inscription for me in the book *On the Open Way* that is inspirational: 'This is a stone from the endless beach.'⁹

Non-fitters

MG: Every now and then there's a work that completes in a way that it doesn't fit at all, so it's what we'd call a non-fitter. Now, the non-fit's interesting, because this business of me playing with the unknown, not named or recognised in any hints or clues in conscious mind, places the variety of them, as diverse as is possible to bring about, 'That's the non-fit, they *just don't fit*.' So then you could have a show at the end of your life of all the paintings that didn't fit. And the lousy thing that as a young painter I destroyed a lot of those paintings 'cause they upset me too much. And they didn't fit because they were hellish, or nightmarish, or I didn't understand the style, or I never could analyse them. Now, the non-fit could be a whole – you know, you could, in some great, gigantic fire or something, lose all your work and only be left with the non-fitters, and would that be *you*? Yes it would.

BKG: Are you saying that non-fitters are a kind of completion if only because, being out of place, they don't seem to lead anywhere? They are dead-ends. But, just for that reason, they

matter. That is, they unsettle the categories into which everything else seems to fit.

MG: Absolutely, yes. You wouldn't want to close yourself down within your *categories*, your *walls* or your *styles*. What's the temptation for a painter? To repeat work that the market would like to digest because of a lack of willingness to exert yourself to tell the truth, or to be honest. And what you find, for instance – poetry's a great help to me – in Robert Creeley's voice, the poems are merciless. They are *merciless* on *themselves*. The searchlight on the poem by the poet, the searchlight by the poem on the poem itself, is *ruthless* and *merciless*. This I accept for myself at my best. There is a ruthlessness. It's in his very *language*. What he's got is absolutely fierce self-knowledge.

Degree of difficulty

BKG: You also have some very difficult work.

MG: That's another idea about completion, if you will. If we take the Olympic Games, for instance, you could be leading the Olympic high board diving championships, and you could have somebody right up there next to you, and you have to select your last dive. In your last dive you might have to choose a high degree of difficulty – like, you'd only managed it three times out of ten in training. So, either you do one that you can get eight times out of ten, and draw for first, or lose, or you can take a risk – a very high risk. So you can take a *very high risk* in your degree of difficulty, and fail. You are competing with your Other. If we think of *Octopus Caresses the Moon*, it just came about. I tried to do the *Frog on the Log*, and failed. Before I did *Octopus Caresses the Moon*, I did *Fish Swims towards Moon*. I didn't know what I was doing. It was only when I did the second one, I could see the first one. There's only two

in that family so far. I would love to have four or five in the group. When I tried to do the third one, *Frog on the Log*, I fell flat on my face. Because I *projected* it, I didn't *wait* for it, I didn't live in the *unknown* – I had *greed*. I had *greed*, I *grasped* at it. I *forced* it, and I *lost* it. Whereas the other ones took eight to ten years, and they were arrived at in the unknown to unknown manner. But the degree of difficulty was extremely high. *Extremely* high. I almost didn't make it. And I *didn't* make it on the *Frog on the Log*. I didn't. I had to cut its throat.

Destruction, editing, repressing, compensation

BKG: You mentioned earlier that you have destroyed works.

MG: Far too many when I was younger.

BKG: But you still do.

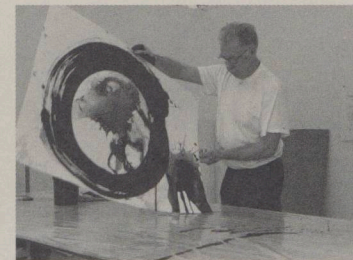
MG: Well, there's a difference between destruction and editing.

BKG: What's the difference?

MG: Well, destruction is, you have a very good work, and you get emotional at some point, you just can't live with it, so you knife it, you cut its throat and get rid of it. That's a repression. It comes back to haunt you, it comes up again. It's like a dream motif you can't get any resolution on till you go to the analyst. I mean, you track it in your books, examine it, turn it over every which way, draw it and it keeps coming!

BKG: And editing?

MG: Editing? It's a calculated mode of composing done at the time of doing the work, or later, where some are judged more worthy of retaining than others. And, as you know, I take you and Anthony – particularly Anthony – into consideration on that. But you sort of, in your gut know, in your body, you know, when it's



complete and is a keeper. Jackson was a master of completion. I haven't seen any Jackson Pollock works that are not complete. He was a *master* of completion. Didn't matter what year, what period, or what mode. He completed it. He knew how to complete. He knew how to stay in the particular work, the particular paradigm. Editing carries a self-knowledge that, while open, is far-seeing and whole.

BKG: In what sense?

MG: It's a decisive function. With my ink drawings, I edit quickly the same day or next morning or directly within the wet ink session. I might do thirty and I might toss out ten, I might do ten and toss out eight, I might do ten and keep eight. Depends on how the impulse went that day. And then before we photograph them usually weeks later Anthony and I go through them quite slowly and we both have a vote. And we vote into three piles—keepers, losers, and still in process. And I think we get that overall more or less right. And we do that with the paintings too. The losers get torn up and cut up and tossed out.

So editing's very different from destruction. Destruction is a repression of such a magnitude that it – it's almost like a mutilation, it's a part of my Dionysian complex, that if I have too much ecstasy, too much partying, I get, by compensation, involved in dismemberment, and something has to be sacrificed. And when I was younger I sometimes sacrificed paintings rather than parts of my body. Or other people. I mean, it's life and death. It can be brutal. I remember I got one show back from a dealer out of town in my early life in New York, where nothing had sold, I destroyed the whole show of paintings, four or five. I mean, it would be marvellous for you and I to have them now. It's

part of a family of works – they were double-bar geos – it's a family of works where our own collection is modest. And sometimes, years ago, in the late 60s and early 70s, we destroyed some works, you and I, 'cause we just couldn't get them in the truck. We had no money and we had to go right across the country again, you know, there wasn't room for them. We gave a few away and destroyed the rest. A younger painter now would perhaps have a digital image. Even if the work got destroyed, there is a photographic record that's helpful. In the beginning you and I couldn't even afford photography.

BKG: So, when you divide up, say, when you do – particularly the works that are completed quickly, and there are many of them, it seems – it strikes me that part of your process of, if you will, completion, is deciding which to keep, which not. In other words, that the editing is actually part of the process.

MG: True.

BKG: That is in part what allows you to be free to do a lot.

MG: True.

BKG: To work quickly, because you know you're not going to keep it all.

Finished, finished off, finished up

MG: I'm realising that there's something unpleasant about the two words 'completion' and 'finished'. There's something unpleasant about them. *Completion* feels like it's coming from the field of psychology. That's what it feels like. And finished? Finished, you know, finished up? Finished? Finished is a bit *ugly*, it's like, 'So, he *began* it', well, it's not very inspired to *begin* something, you know. Like, we're not finished with the painting just because we stopped touching it wet. It goes out into the

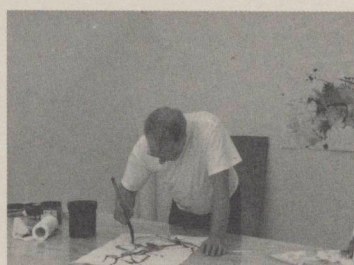
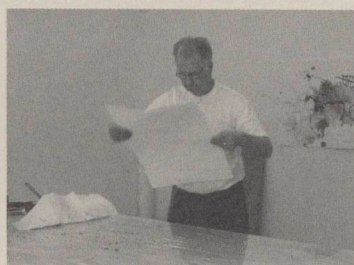
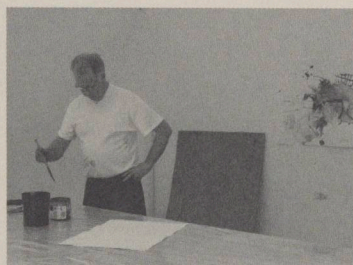
world, it's in the database, it becomes mythical, it's a legend. Can we come up with another word, or are we stuck with 'completion'? 'Completion' is passable, the tough one is 'finished'.

Ways to focus

MG: In my Zen ink drawing practice that is governed by 'all mind/no mind', I allow myself a tiny window at the beginning of a session in which I might name a motif. It might be *enso*. By focusing on a single motif for the entire drawing session, I get tremendous direction and very fine tuning of variations of the motif. If restlessness enters my mind, that is often signalled by wishing to switch to another motif within the session – and that can occur, but the most successful ink drawing sessions, *zenga*, have been when I've had the discipline to stay with the motif. It's the limitation, the severe limitation of the motif, which allows for the variety of the variants.

Automatism

MG: By utterly freeing the mind from any recognisable motif, recognisable to the mind by naming, by a word, a thought, there is the possibility in ink painting... Fast usually works out better than slow. There is thought felt in the body, through the senses, that are *not* thoughts as words. Without relying only on body movement, automatism encourages an abstract field of activity where composition and mark become extremely lively and often result in fresh views across the page space. Automatism with wet ink feels like the perfect match of concept and material and allows me extraordinary freedom. Over the years, this has led to a wide range of experimentation and feels open into the future. I can't wait to have another session!



Conviction. The golden certainty

BKG: I've often felt that, like the *Mirror* group, there may only be ten or twelve or whatever number of actual physical works, but many more could have been made. There was a certain arbitrariness as to whether you kept going on one painting or stopped and then started on another surface.

MG: Absolutely, I agree. I wonder what we can say further about this arbitrary function. You are also saying there were a lot of paintings underneath any single painting, so how did I end any one of them? Part of it was that they had to get very rich, very beautiful. They had to get thick and juicy. They had to become layered with meanings. They had to grow into themselves so that they utterly departed from where they began. They desired to arrive somewhere by journeying. They are pilgrims.

BKG: But, they were thick and juicy at many points, and you kept going.

MG: Right. Well, I had to have ultimate conviction of their meaning.

BKG: That's actually a point that you've come back to several times, the idea of being convinced, or the work being convincing, or your having conviction...

MG: Yes, for me to be convinced? How to be secure? Doubt is a marvellous motivator for some. However a crucial reality about conviction is enlightenment. In John Steven's translation of *Zen and the Art of Calligraphy*, the essence of *sho*, there is a chapter on Tesshu, the No-sword warrior. Tesshu is one of my masters. One of my teachers. John Stevens writes that Tesshu's great enlightenment was when he was 45 years old.¹⁰ Magnified ink particles demonstrate that the *bokki* has changed. It shifts to vibrant, full-spirited and overflowing with energy. Tesshu's

conviction is apparent. You can photograph the solid ink particles and magnify them and demonstrate the authority of the stroke. The health of it! There's no fucking arguing with that. It's not in the written style, it's in the actual stroke and gesture in the ink. That is empirical science as far as I'm concerned.

Failed or incomplete?

BKG: About the distinction between failed and incomplete, if it's failed, it's not that it's incomplete; it's that it's complete but doesn't work. If you see anything incomplete it means you could still work on it...

MG: That's good...

BKG: and come to a point of conviction.

MG: That's good. Yes.

BKG: The question is whether the paintings that *don't* soar—the ones that “fail”—should be destroyed and you start all over again. Or, whether continuing to work on them would bring them to successful completion. So my question is, about the works that don't soar, are they incomplete? Did you stop too soon? Or, are they simply un-completable, in which case, they should be destroyed?

MG: If they should have been destroyed, they would have been destroyed, in the main. Or if I get my hands on them, they will be, other than some materials that entropy and drop away.

Procedures/Vehicles

BKG: One of the interesting things about your work is the way that you come up with a set of conditions, whether a set of forms like the shaped canvasses, which are based on geometry, or procedures.

MG: Yes, shape, surface, touch, scale, light, materials. The shape as a container, as an

edge, as a boundary.

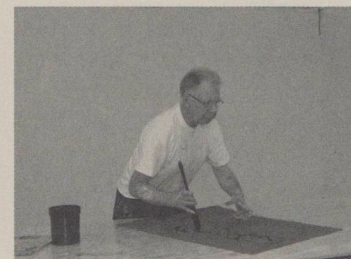
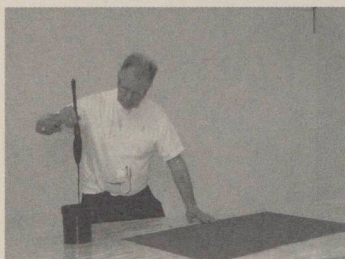
BKG: Some conditions seem to be established before you start and provide the framework within which you can improvise, be spontaneous.

MG: Well said. There is crossover from a completed work to a new one. As you proceed with all of those conditions, you continue to improvise, based on what you were learning. So there would be a crescendo, there would be a lifting, and then the impulse would be over and there would be a dropping away. You would become satiated.

Exhausting the impulse

BKG: Like I said earlier, one of the themes that keeps coming up is the idea of conviction. In terms of *your* deciding *for yourself* whether to keep going or let go, you had to have conviction about what you saw before you. You said something now that is a bit different. You said, ‘the *impulse* would be over’. That you would feel satiated. How would you know?

MG: You'd stop touching, you'd put the tools down, you'd sit down, just plain stop, you'd feel satisfied, you'd feel satiated. You could stop arbitrarily. There's endless ways. We've talked about that. You could get hysterical, you could get desperate. Someone could walk in, like Chris Martin, or Anthony, or Matt, and say, ‘Don't touch that again, that's done!’ and you were all ready to *pounce* on it and make your next move, but they say you're not *allowed* to touch that! Somebody offered that view, and it's marvellous that they offered you that view. Some of my finest paintings have been stopped by other people. I don't think the single artist should have to decide when the work is completed. It's an idea about



democracy, that a group would take a decision about something.

BKG: Yeah, that's less about the impulse being over, and more about somebody coming in from the outside, saying it's done.

MG: Well, do you know when you're finished making love, do you know when the meal's over. You *know*. The more experience you have, the more you know. I mean, do you know when you're dying? When you're done? When this interview is complete? You can feel sometimes that you can soar higher, or be more inspired. In the last ten or twenty percent of the process, you can turn it up a couple of notches.

Some works are done within a season, say September through May, or within a year. They're not allowed to go over to another year. That's a way to complete. We're setting a time limit, a boundary. You have a sense of how many works you do in a year in a given mode. You see, something about completion is in how many works you make. Tesshu, who probably wrote a million pieces altogether, did 4500 Sutra drawings that were absolutely magnificent, in one day, with five assistants. And in one year, he did 180,000 pieces, an average of 500 a day. His wife told him he was crazy – 'Why was he doing so many works?' she asked. He said he was doing a piece for everybody in Japan. At that time there were 35 million people in Japan. His wife said, 'You're not going to make it, you don't have enough time.' He said, 'Don't worry, I'm going to get rid of this shitbag of a body soon, and get another.' In other words, that could be me. Tesshu withdrew from his body at the age of fifty-three.

All or nothing

BKG: You used the word arbitrary, which I think's important.

MG: Set ahead of time or abrupt, non-rational endings.

BKG: Right. Sometimes, decisions are practical, but you also say that the outcomes can be inspired. The arbitrary's interesting because, for example, in your two-part ceramic collaboration with Phil Sims, one project is abstract clay sculpture, and the other is a group of mythological gestural figures in clay, that are derived, so far, from Hindu Indian and Aztec and Mayan mythologies, to mention only a few sources. You determined that there would be a set of procedures one, two, or three moves, but beyond four moves, the work would be destroyed. The decision to limit the move – the limit to one, two, or three moves – was arbitrary, but it was also *not* arbitrary, because by being decisive within a limited number of moves, you introduced chance into the process and eliminated revision. This work was not about a long process.

MG: If they didn't work, we tossed them out. They were all or nothing.

BKG: All or nothing. Now that's a very different way of working.

MG: All or nothing is not layers.

BKG: Right.

MG: Not gradual.

BKG: So what's 'all or nothing' about?

MG: You either get it right or you don't. And you conserve energy and time by moving on. And you keep doing it till you get it right. Get it right in terms of what? In terms of the paradigm you began with – freshness, clarity and inspiration. Actually, you stay very close to what you began with. You usually don't discover any new mode halfway through. It's usually the cluster of meaning that you began with. The first few are

the freshest. When I do calligraphy, the first couple are often the best. Then you start another paradigm, another day, another session. Not somewhere in the middle of the earlier one. It's tough to keep the initial qualities of freshness, clarity and inspiration going.

Performing clay

BKG: But I think that what's interesting here is the idea that completion has not to do with working on it till you get it right, in the sense of working on the same *work*.

MG: No, it has to do with mindfulness. If you are relentless with your mind and your intelligence in setting up the paradigm, and you've got the paradigm more or less correct, for the procedure, when you begin, you can turn your mind off. And you can perform it. You perform spontaneity and improvisation in relation to the paradigm.

BKG: Each work is a performance.

Arbitrary and spontaneous

BKG: So the principle of one, two, or three moves is arbitrary, in the sense that you simply set it down as a condition of the working process, but you didn't pick the number out of a hat. You could have picked 200. So, why was the number predetermined here?

MG: It came from my calligraphic process. You couldn't retain spontaneity and improvisation after about three moves. We had a sense – there were two of us working together – we did very few two moves, we did threes and fours. And I said at the end, I thought we'd worked with the psychological Other. There had been a third person present. I think it was the beautiful woman we were both inspired by, the wind, the magnificence of the hot kiln firing nearby, which

we were wood-stoking. The anima, or the muse. There was this sense which one has with leaving a chair empty at the dinner table, that Elijah will come and join the meal.

There is the sense of constructing something for the Other. One move each, another/an Other. Two moves each, another/an Other. There was the sense of a psychological Other. In doing a collaboration, we performed a third identity. It's neither he nor I. It's Sims/Gimblett, or Gimblett/Sims. In 1966, we did an etching together at the San Francisco Art Institute, in which we both drew half the face. And we kept – we only printed two, and we each have one, from 1965. It's an etching of Phil's face and mine, merged.

BKG: I guess, what I was trying to say is that, while the actual number – whether it's two, three, four – is 'arbitrary', what isn't arbitrary is the idea of the fewest number of moves needed.

MG: Okay. For me, it comes from late Cézanne watercolours, minimalism, and Zenga. I see your mental state but I continue to insist the number of moves was not arbitrary. It comes from forty years of calligraphy on my part. It comes from one-stroke and two-stroke bone. After you've gone beyond three and four strokes, the composition possibly becomes Cubist.

BKG: Right. But what I was trying to say is that what wasn't arbitrary was the principle of very few moves.

MG: Nor were the numbers arbitrary. There was nothing arbitrary about any of it. It was based on profound experience. We both have thirty-nine years of studio practice. We brought everything we knew to the situation.

BKG: Right. But it's not a limit. It's not a number of moves that you bring to all your work.

MG: No. Each work has its own requirements.

BKG: Or body of works, or family of works.

Unknown to unknown

The five petals of the one flower open, and the fruit of itself is ripe.¹¹

MG: One big idea is, if you're fortunate enough to begin a work in the unknown, to know nothing. And to stay in knowing nothing, and take all your direction from the autonomous object, from the work itself. Never touch it or proceed to project a thought into it, or an emotion, but instead, try to understand how to serve it. And hang out around it until it lets you know with utter conviction the next move. You sometimes get an extraordinary work. And that has no time barrier. That's not measured in any way by a human quality. So to live in the unknown – you know, we could say, to be in silence as opposed to mind – but without going there, to live in the unknown is a startling way to do a work. Now John Yau's written about my work,¹² and he and I have worked so much together that we've investigated – and it's a true persona, what Zen might call the not-self, the non-work – which in Kali you'd find, perhaps, as the shadow in the alien. In other words, Hindu teachers will teach us of our non-identity, no such thing as identity: do not be caught up in the identity of yourself, do not become caught up in the particular identity of the work. Now, in that nature of the alien, there is the huge energy of what is not human. Human is a tiny part of things. The ocean, the unconscious – these are things that are not knowable. Sometimes you can participate in a work from and in that source.

Manhattan, 26 August, 2003

1 This text is drawn from a longer interview, an edited version of which will appear in *Art from Start to Finish*, edited by Howard S. Becker, forthcoming. The assistance of Anurima Banerji in transcribing and editing the original interview is gratefully acknowledged.

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3 Robert Creeley, *The Dogs of Auckland*, Auckland, Holloway Press, University of Auckland, 1998. For the drawings, see <http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/authors/creeley/dogpics/dogs1.html>

4 Lewis Hyde is the author of *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*, New York, Random House, 1983; and *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998.

5 The Ten Oxherding Pictures, by Shubun (15th century), from D.T. Suzuki, *The Manual of Zen Buddhism*, 1935 <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/mzb/oxherd.html>

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11 Ishu Miura and Ruth Fuller Sasaki, *The Zen Koan*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1965, p. 96.

12 Besides the essay 'Going Forth' in *Max Gimblett*, Yau contributed 'Drawing on the World' to *Max Gimblett: The Language of Drawing* by Anne Kirker, Brisbane, Australia, Queensland Art Gallery, 2002 and 'Max Gimblett: Painting as Paradox' in *Max Gimblett: Paintings*, Sydney, Australia, Sherman Galleries, 1995.

WORKS



Unless otherwise acknowledged, all works courtesy of the artist and Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand and Sydney, Australia, and Haines Gallery, San Francisco, USA

All dimensions height before width before depth

STATE OF GRACE

State of Grace 1994

acrylic polymer on canvas

1524 x 889 mm (60" x 35")

One Stroke Bone – for Anthony Fodero 2002

acrylic and vinyl polymers on canvas

2032 mm (80") diameter

Collection of Brian and Paddy Shaw, Auckland, New Zealand

big mind 2002

acrylic and vinyl polymers on canvas

1803 x 1981 mm (71" x 78")

Wand 1995/97

gesso, black bole clay, lacquer and

water gilded Swiss gold, oak

3226 x 44 mm (127" x 1 3/4")

sword of no-sword 2004

acrylic and vinyl polymers on canvas

2032 mm (80") diameter

AWE

Low Tide 1995

mother-of-pearl shell, 36 two-part units

dimensions variable

Awe 1981

acrylic polymer on canvas

2540 x 2540 mm (100" x 100")

Angel 1990/95

gesso, black bole clay, water gilded silver,

12k moon gold, lacquer

1524 x 889 mm (60" x 35")

Private Collection, Christchurch, New Zealand

Crossing 1990/91

acrylic polymer, silica on canvas

635 x 381 mm (25" x 15")

Collection of J. Gibbs Trust, Auckland, New Zealand

The Maltese Falcon – after Marsden Hartley 1995/96

acrylic and vinyl polymers and silica on canvas

889 x 527 mm (35" x 20 3/4")

Mithra 1996

gesso, red bole clay, water gilded copper and shellac on wood panel, bronze
1829 x 1778 x 216 mm (72" x 70" x 8 1/2")
Collection of Richard Schneider, Charleston, USA

BLUE/RED – TO LEN LYE

Blue/Red – to Len Lye 1980

oil and wax on canvas
2032 mm (80") diameter
Collection of The Fletcher Trust

Buddha 1980/86

acrylic polymer on canvas
2032 mm (80") diameter
Collection of Max Gimblett and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, New York

Red Violet/Blue – Summer 1980

acrylic polymer on canvas
2032 x 2032 mm (80" x 80")

Light Green/Red – to Dora 1978

oil and wax on canvas
2032 x 2032 mm (80" x 80")

Yellow/Red – Pacific 1978

oil and wax on canvas
2032 x 2032 mm (80" x 80")

CRUCIFIXION – AFTER PETER GABRIEL

Crucifixion – after Peter Gabriel 1989/91

acrylic polymer, charcoal on canvas
3048 mm (120") diameter

Red Sea 1995

acrylic and vinyl polymers on canvas
2032 x 6090 mm (80" x 240")
Collection of the Chartwell Trust,
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Delacroix and Caduceus 1994

acrylic and vinyl polymers on canvas
2134 x 2134 mm (84" x 84")

Onyx 2003

black gesso and polyurethane on wood panel
1778 x 762 mm (70" x 30")

Tiger 2003

gesso, acrylic and vinyl polymers, polyurethane, wood panel
1778 x 762 mm (70" x 30")

Jade 2003

gesso, acrylic and vinyl polymers, polyurethane, wood panel
1778 x 762 mm (70" x 30")
Collection of Richard Schneider, Charleston, USA

Action Painting 1995

acrylic and vinyl polymers on canvas
2286 mm (90") diameter

Wand 1995/97

gesso, black bole clay, lacquer and water gilded copper, oak
3226 x 44 mm (127 x 1 3/4")

SKY GATE

The Sign of Four 2003

gesso, acrylic and vinyl polymers, red clay, water gilded silver, polyurethane and lacquer on four wood panels
635 x 3937 mm (25" x 155")
Collection of Marc Lindale, Auckland, New Zealand

Current 1999

gesso, red clay, water gilded Swiss gold, polyurethane and vinyl polymer on wood panels
762 x 1524 mm (30" x 60")
Collection of Russell McVeagh, Auckland, New Zealand

Kiss 1991

gesso, water gilded silver and lacquer on wood panel
1016 mm (40") diameter
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Pinwheel – for Len Lye 2000

gesso, polyurethane, red clay and water gilded Swiss gold on wood panel
1270 mm (50") diameter
Private Collection, Auckland, New Zealand

Sky Gate 2003

gesso, acrylic and vinyl polymers, polyurethane, moon gold on wood panel
1524 mm (60") diameter

Two Stroke Bowl – for Vietnam 2000

gesso, black clay and moon gold on wood panel,
Plaster Weld, plaster, epoxy, acrylic and vinyl polymers on wood panel
762 x 1524 mm (30" x 60")
Private Collection, Auckland, New Zealand

Wand 1995/97

gesso, black bole clay, lacquer and water gilded silver, oak
3226 x 44 mm (127" x 1 3/4")

FUCKIN' CHARMER

Blue Spirit 1997

gesso, black bole clay, water gilded special blue variegated leaf on wood panel
1524 mm (60") diameter
Collection of John and Yvonne Sanders, Auckland, New Zealand

Spine 1984

acrylic polymer and metallic pigments on canvas
2286 mm (90") diameter
Private Collection, New Zealand

Fuckin' Charmer 1997

acrylic polymer and ink on Roma paper
482 x 673 mm (19" x 26 1/2")

Brother 2002

ink, pencil and mica on Oldenberg handmade paper
559 x 698 mm (22" x 27 1/2")

No. 1 Drawing – Hero Worship – it's for Barbara 1998

acrylic polymer, mica, ink and pencil on Gampi Torinoko cream handmade paper
508 x 762 mm (20" x 30")
Collection of Max Gimblett and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, New York

Drawing Board Morte 1997/2000

ink on Arches paper
584 x 762 mm (23" x 30")

Max's midnight guest 2002

ink, acrylic polymer, mica flakes, pencil on Oldenberg handmade paper
686 x 559 mm (27" x 22")

Guardian – from the Shadow Drawer 2000/01

ink, mica, and moon gold on Gampi Torinoko white handmade paper
565 x 749 mm (22 1/4" x 29 1/2")

Mr and Mrs Gimblett 1998/2000

ink, mica, Japanese leaf, Chine colle/Japanese handmade papers
762 x 508 mm (30" x 20")

Mrs Gimblett in all her beauty 2000

ink, pencil, mica on Gampi Torinoko white handmade paper
559 x 762 mm (22" x 30")

Moon woman cuts the oval 2002

ink on HMP Woodstock handmade paper
584 x 787 mm (23" x 31")

Mr and Mrs Gimblett (detail) 1998/2000



BIOGRAPHY

1935 Born Auckland, New Zealand

1956-57, 1959-61 Travelled in Europe

1962-64 Worked as a potter, Toronto, Canada

1964 Studied drawing, Ontario College of Art, Toronto, Canada
Married Barbara Kirshenblatt

1965 Studied painting, San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco

1967-70 Lived and painted in Bloomington, Indiana

1970-72 Lived and painted in Austin, Texas

1972 Moved to New York City
Met Len Lye

1979-88 Visiting Associate Professor of Art and Design,
Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York

1983-84 Travelled to Japan, India and Kenya

1989 National Endowment for the Arts, Washington D.C.,
Painting Fellowship
Founded Jade Studio, New York and Auckland (with
Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett)

1990 Appointed Trustee, Len Lye Foundation,
New Plymouth, New Zealand

1991 Residency, The Rockefeller Foundation, Study and
Conference Center, Bellagio, Lake Como, Italy

1991-92 J. Paul Getty Associate, The Getty Center for the
History of Art and the Humanities, Santa Monica, California

1992 Travelled to India and Japan

1993 Inaugural Artist in Residence, Queensland University
of Technology, Brisbane, Australia

1997 Travelled to Cambodia and Burma

2001 Made lithographs with Fred Genis, Byron Bay, Australia
Appointed Special Patron of the Queensland Art Gallery
Foundation, Brisbane, Australia

2002 Residency with Lewis Hyde, Anderson Ranch Arts
Center, Snowmass, Colorado

2003 Travelled to Mexico

2004 Artist in Residence, University of Auckland School
of Fine Arts (Elam)

Lives in New York, United States of America and in
Auckland, New Zealand

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2004 Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, Auckland, *Max Gimblett: The Brush of All Things*, curated by Wystan Curnow with catalogue essays by Thomas McEvilley and Wystan Curnow and an interview with Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. Travels to City Gallery, Wellington
Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland, *a very decided bright line*
Ngaumatau Fine Art Consultancy, Arrowtown, New Zealand, *Max Gimblett – Home*

2003 Haines Gallery, San Francisco, *True Mirror*
Margaret Thatcher Projects, New York, *Myth*
Gow Langsford Gallery, Sydney, *the dawn of beauty*
Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland, *silent waters*
Pfizer Inc., New York, *Max Gimblett: A Shared Language*, curated by Lisa Hatchadoorian

2002 Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, *Max Gimblett – the Language of Drawing*, curated by Anne Kirker (catalogue)
Kevin Bruk Gallery, Miami, *Beauty* and a paperworks and unique books collaboration with John Yau, *The Jolly Donkey Choir*

2001 Ethan Cohen Fine Arts, New York, *Ink Painting and Poems in Ink: A Collaboration with John Yau*
Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland, *The Silent Music*

2000 Haines Gallery, San Francisco, *The Painted Promise*

1999 Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland, *Night Gold*
Margaret Thatcher Projects, New York, *Bridge*

1998 Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland, *Spirit*
Jensen Gallery, Wellington, *Path*

1997 Haines Gallery, San Francisco, *Face of Silence*
Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland, *Holy Smoke*
Jensen Gallery, Wellington, *Ganesha*

1996 Haines Gallery, San Francisco, *Painting*
Jensen Gallery, Wellington, *Forge*

1995 Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland, *Axis Mundi*
Jensen Gallery, Wellington, *Crossing Full Tilt*
Sherman Galleries, Sydney, *Ancient Future* (catalogue)
Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland, *Geos – Paintings, Works on Paper, Prints, 1977–1982*

1993 Haines Gallery, San Francisco, *Presence*
Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland, *Oracle*

Jonathan Jensen Gallery, Christchurch, *Threshold of Light*
Michael Milburn Gallery, Brisbane, *Tablets of Light*
Fisher Gallery, Auckland, *Radiant Path – Works from 1965–1993*, curated by Diana Renker

1992 Horodner Romley Gallery, New York, *Crossing Full Tilt* (catalogue)
Jan Turner Gallery, Los Angeles, *Templar*
The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, Santa Monica, *Inside Star*
Jonathan Jensen Gallery, Christchurch, *Shields of Light*

1991 Haines Gallery, San Francisco, *Gold*
Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland, *Illuminations*
Gow Langsford Gallery, Wellington, *Chrysalis*

1990 Artis Gallery, Auckland, *Objects of Alchemy* (catalogue)

1989 Genovese Gallery, Boston, *Four to the Fourth*
Artis Gallery, Auckland, *Shapes of Change*
Brooker Gallery, Wellington, *Shapes of Time*
Brooker Gallery, Wellington, *Vessel – Drawing with Colour*

1988 White Columns, New York, *White Room Program*
LedisFlam Gallery, New York, *Max Gimblett Paintings*
Artis Gallery, Auckland, *Dragon Hum: Paintings, 1987–1988*
Northland Society of Arts, Whangarei, *Gems*

1987 Genovese Gallery, Boston, *Silk Route: Screenprints and Recent Paintings*
New Zealand Consulate-General, New York, *New Paintings and Paper Works*
Hamilton Art Centre, Foyer Gallery, Hamilton, *Selections from the Chartwell Collection: Max Gimblett*

1986 Artis Gallery, Auckland, *Pacific Paintings, 1984–86*
Hogarth Galleries, Sydney, *Pearls of the Pacific* (catalogue)
Hamilton Arts Centre, Hamilton, *Paintings and Works on Paper, 1977–86*

1985 R.C. Erpf Gallery, New York, *Selected Paintings from Twenty Years*
Modernism, San Francisco, *Transformation: Paintings on Paper, 1983–85*
New Vision Gallery, Auckland

1984 Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland, *Transformation* (catalogue), curated by Wystan Curnow

1983 Modernism, San Francisco, *Ambient Color Paintings, 1977–82*

1982 Galerie Nordenhake, Malmö
Galleri Engstrom, Stockholm

1981 Peter Webb Galleries, Auckland, *New Paintings*
RKS Art, Auckland, *Works on Paper*

1980 Modernism, San Francisco (catalogue)
Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland

1979 Nielsen Gallery, Boston (catalogue)
Connecticut College, New London, Connecticut (catalogue)
New Zealand Embassy, Washington, D.C. (catalogue)
Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland
Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch
Dowse Art Gallery, Lower Hutt
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

1978 Cuninghame Ward Gallery, New York
Marion Koogler McNay Art Institute, San Antonio, Texas (catalogue)
Laguna Gloria Art Museum, Austin, Texas (catalogue), travelling, curated by Barbara Zabel
Casat Gallery, La Jolla, California
Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland
Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton

1977 Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

1976 Cuninghame Ward Gallery, New York
Nielsen Gallery, Boston

1971 A Clean Well Lighted Place, Austin, Texas
Delahunty Gallery, Dallas, Texas

SELECTED PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

Achenbach Foundation, San Francisco
 Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
 Art Gallery of Queensland, Brisbane
 Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, Auckland
 Auckland City Library, Auckland
 Auckland War Memorial Museum Te Papa Whakihiku, Auckland
 Auckland University, Auckland
 Auckland University Library, Auckland
 Bank of Texas, Houston, Texas
 Bodleian Library, Oxford University, Oxford
 British Library, London
 Chartwell Collection, Auckland
 Connecticut College, New London, Connecticut
 Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin
 Electricorp, Wellington
 Fletcher Trust Collection, Auckland
 The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles
 Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth
 Grey Art Gallery, New York University Art Collection, New York
 Harris Collection, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island
 Herbert H. Lehman College, New York
 Joan Flasch Artist's Book Collection of The School of The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago
 Kansai Gaidai University, Osaka
 Laguna Gloria Art Museum, Austin, Texas
 Lang Art Gallery, Scripps College, Claremont, California
 Library of Congress, Dept of Special Collections, Washington, DC
 Lincoln University, Christchurch
 Louisville Art Gallery, Louisville, Kentucky
 Marion Koogler McNay Institute, San Antonio, Texas
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Wellington
 Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

Museum of Modern Art, New York
 Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington
 National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
 National Westminster Bank, New York
 New Arts Program, Lehigh Valley and Berks, Pennsylvania
 New York Public Library, New York
 New Zealand Embassy, Jakarta
 New Zealand Embassy, Tokyo
 New Zealand Embassy, Washington, DC
 Oeffentliche Kunstsammlung, Basel
 Ohio State University Library, Dept of Special Collections, Columbus, Ohio
 Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia
 Pfizer Inc, New York
 Prudential Insurance Company of America, Newark, New Jersey
 Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane
 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco
 San Jose Museum of Modern Art, San Jose, California
 Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui, New Zealand
 Schyls Collection, Malmö Konsthall, Sweden
 Scripps Medical Clinic, La Jolla, California
 Smith College Library, Mortimer Rare Book Room, Northampton, Massachusetts
 Stanford University, Green Library, Dept of Special Collections, Stanford, California
 State University of New York-Buffalo, Poetry/Rare Books, Buffalo, New York
 University of Alberta Library, Dept of Special Collections, Edmonton
 University of Arizona, Dept of Special Collections, Tucson, Arizona
 University of California Los Angeles Library, Dept of Special Collections, Los Angeles
 University of California San Diego, Dept of Special Collections, La Jolla, California
 University of California, Santa Barbara, Dept of Special Collections, Santa Barbara
 University of Connecticut, Dodd Research Center, Storrs, Connecticut

University of Delaware, Dept of Special Collections, Newark, Delaware
 University of Georgia Library, Dept of Special Collections, Athens, Georgia
 University of Iowa, Dept of Special Collections, Iowa City, Iowa
 University of Melbourne, Melbourne
 University of Minnesota, Dept of Special Collections, Elmer L Anderson Library, Minneapolis
 University of New South Wales, Sydney
 University of Wisconsin, Kohler Art Library, Elvehjem Museum of Art, Madison, Wisconsin
 Victoria University Library, Wellington
 Waikato Art Museum Te Whare Taonga o Waikato, Hamilton
 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
 Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book Library, New Haven, Connecticut

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ARTIST'S STATEMENTS AND INTERVIEWS

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1998 Kirker, Anne, 'Gimblett Reflects: Max Gimblett in Conversation with Anne Kirker', *Eyeline*, Summer 1997/98, No. 35, Brisbane, pp.14–17.

1994 *The Scent of Jade Islands*, Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North.

1991 *Inside Star*, The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, Santa Monica, California.

1987 *Content and Symbol*, Artis Gallery, Auckland.

1986 *Spirit Tracks: Big Abstract Drawings*, Pratt Manhattan Center Gallery, New York, and Pratt Institute Gallery, New York, p.20.

1984 Gimblett, Max, 'No Mind / All Mind', *Transformation – Recent Paintings by Max Gimblett*, catalogue, Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland.

1982 'My Paintings Are About Essence', *Seven Painters/The Eighties*, catalogue, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui, p.22.

1980 'In the Presence', *Art New Zealand*, Auckland, Vol. 17, pp.10–11.

1978 Curnow, Wystan, 'Max Gimblett's Works on Paper', *Art New Zealand*, Auckland, Winter 1978, No. 10, pp.26–27. Reprinted in *Max Gimblett*, Modernism catalogue, 1982.

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_____, and John Yau, *Max Gimblett*, Craig Potton Publishing and Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland, 2003.

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Dunn, Michael, *A Concise History of New Zealand Painting*, David Bateman, Auckland, in association with Craftsman House, Sydney, 1991.

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Einreinhofer, Nancy, *Drawings from the Collection of Helen Herrick and Milton Brutten*, Ben Shahn Galleries, Wayne, New Jersey, 1980.

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Haldemann, Anita (ed), *Schenkung zum Dank an Dieter Koepplin*, Freunde des Kunstmuseums und des Museums für Gegenwartskunst, Richter Verlage, Düsseldorf, 1999.

Hatchadoorian, Lisa, *Max Gimblett: A Shared Language*, Pfizer Inc., New York, 2003.

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- ____ (ed), *New Zealand Modernism – The Content of Form: Paintings from the Gibbs Collection*, Auckland, 1997.
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INSIDE FRONT COVER FLAP:
An Exhilaration of the Spirit – 15 2001
267 x 508 mm (10½" x 20")
sumi ink, vinyl polymer on paper

OUTSIDE FRONT COVER FLAP:
An Exhilaration of the Spirit – 16 2001
267 x 508 mm (10½" x 20")
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