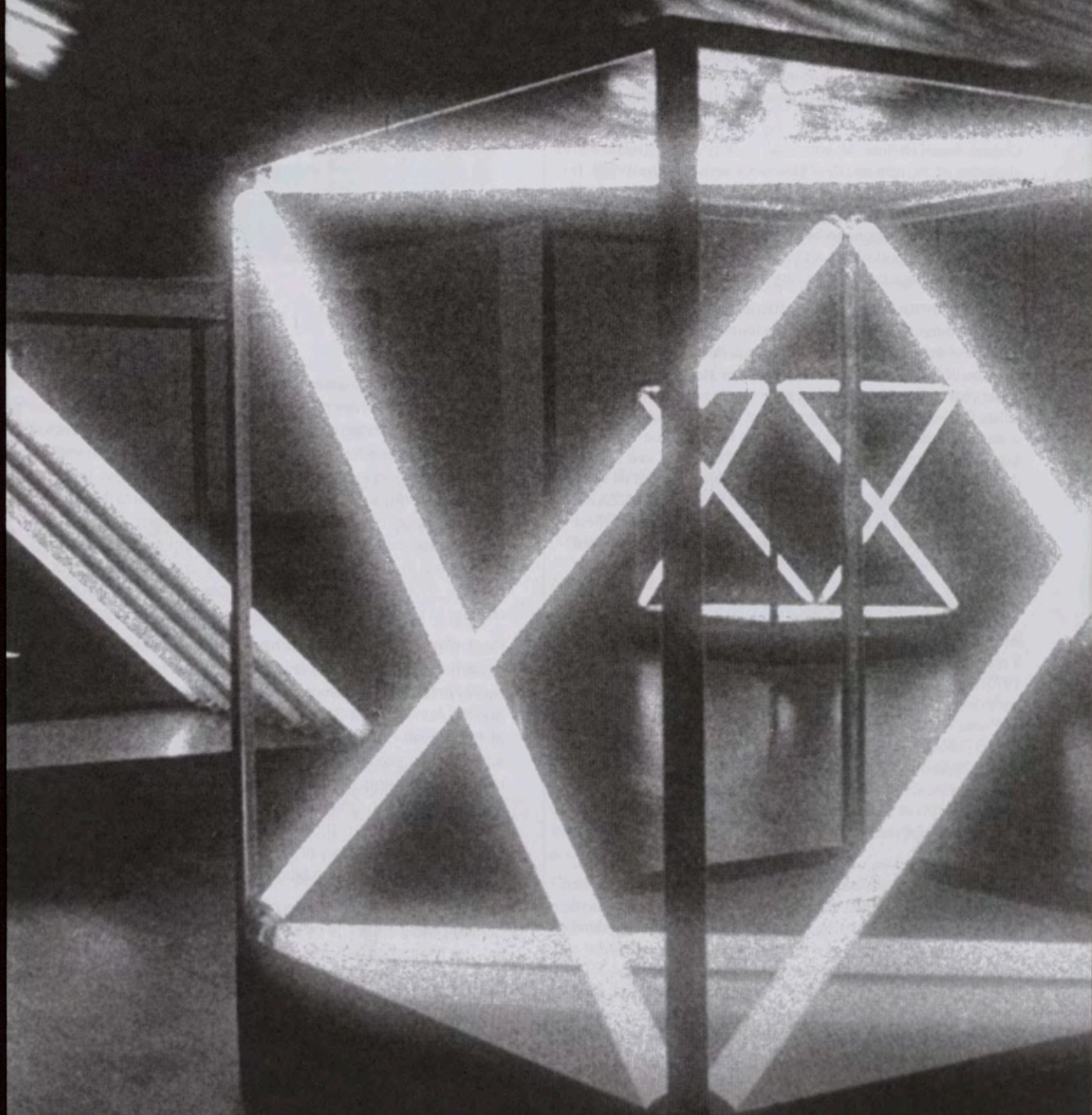


# ACTION REPLAY

post object art



## director's foreword

In February 1970 the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery opened with the exhibition *Real Time*, an installation by a recent Auckland Fine Arts graduate Leon Narbey. This was an exceptional event in many ways. It went right against the grain of exhibition programmes in New Zealand let alone the conservative inauguration ceremonies usually associated with public galleries. For a start the opening event was a solo exhibition by a virtually unknown artist. It was also an event at the cutting edge of international trends in art practice. *Real Time* was a site-specific installation – a temporal environment involving an impermanent arrangement of both materials and effects such as light, sound and movement.

Commissioned by John Maynard, the Gallery's first director and champion of the new art, *Real Time* set a scene for the 1970s. It ushered into the public domain a radical new set of attitudes to art production and reception in New Zealand, attitudes taking the form of a movement that came to be known as post object art. By the end of the 1970s post object art had established many conditions now commonplace in contemporary art practice in the 1990s.

During the 1970s many public galleries presented the new art through commissioned project programmes, performances and events, yet few acquired work for their collections. The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery is an exception. From its opening year the gallery has collected post object art including key pieces by Jim Allen, Christine Hellyar, Maree Horner and Darcy Lange. It has continued to recontextualise works from its collection within its exhibition and publication programmes. The 1980s saw a wind down in institutional involvement in post object art but its spirit lived on in events such as the F-1 Sculpture Project and ANZART. Artspace was born in the mid 1980s out of the tradition of these initiatives. Despite its significance, post object art has remained hidden in most public accounts of contemporary art in New Zealand.

The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery is pleased to be working with Artspace on *Action Replay*. The multi-part project seeks to provoke a reassessment of post object art, both of its significance in the 1970s and for subsequent practice. The project is neither definitive nor exhaustive. Indeed it has been structured to stimulate debate and wide contribution through a forum, a seminar and a post-project publication. In doing so the partners seek to put the issues, strategies and approaches of this historical work back into circulation. *Action Replay* is an important project for both galleries, one that involves us thinking about our own place within the infrastructure for presenting contemporary art in this country.

*Action Replay* draws on a team of galleries, gallery staff and independent curators, each bringing something unique to the project. On behalf of this team, I extend our thanks to: Creative New Zealand, for supporting this project financially; Auckland Art Gallery for providing us with space in the New Gallery for a component involving Colin McCahon; The New Zealand Film Archive; The Colin McCahon Trust; Sony Ltd; Wayne Laird; John Maynard, Jim Allen and Tony Green who were there from the beginning; and the artists, who in some cases had to completely reconstruct their work for the exhibitions.

Gregory Burke  
Director, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery  
On behalf of Artspace and the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery



Christine Hellyar County Clothesline 1973

## curators' introduction

*Action Replay* revisits a time and a milieu of radical art practice without parallel in this country's art history. 1970s post object art broke with painting and sculpture as it had been practiced and set the precedents for much of the art which followed. And yet the works in this exhibition are largely unknown to the majority of today's art audience. This is largely due to the poor representation of post object art in collections and to its inadequate coverage in the history books. With works assembled in the main from the artists' own collections, or remade for the occasion, *Action Replay* recovers a crucial chapter in the history of contemporary New Zealand art.

Post object art is represented here broadly, but not systematically. *Action Replay* presents works by more than twenty artists in a sequence of curatorial sketches at Artspace and the Auckland Art Gallery and a consolidated presentation at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. This is not an historical survey; each sketch proposes a distinctive but characteristic mix of media and subject, rather than a chronological or thematic moment. Offsetting such economies is a display of documentation from the period from the archives of the Auckland City Art Gallery and a forthcoming catalogue which fully backgrounds the exhibition.

The 1970s was the decade in which the elements of the contemporary art scene as we know it emerged and began to link up. The period saw the development of an art market, the creation of a national infrastructure of public galleries committed to contemporary art, the birth of local art magazines and art criticism, and the emergence of university art history departments. While post object art made a significant contribution to this nascent system, it also existed at one remove. Partly this was because it took issue with aspects of the art system and partly because it possessed the independent energy and coherence of an art movement. The

space this critical distance represented was to eventually to take the form of collectives like the Artists' Co-op with its woolstore in Wellington, an early artist-run space, and From Scratch.

The term "post object" defined the new practice by negation, indicating a desire to avoid the formal and political compromises that late modernist painting especially seemed mired in, but it also suggested, by inference, the copious bag of new materials, media and approaches - installation, performance, photography, video - it broke open. Elsewhere this art was called post minimal art, conceptual art or arte povera. Yet none of these terms does justice to the startling and exhilarating expansion of the field of the visual arts that took place during this time, or to the variety of new subjects or the freshness and directness of the modes of address that characterised the new work.

Typically the art of *Action Replay* tends to present as much as represent the world. In place of an inert picturing of things, ideas, events, we have an art which often just situates or re-stages them in their actuality. Adrian Hall arranges concrete foundation blocks in a gallery space. Colin McCahon's *Blind* is literally painted on canvas blinds. Performances by Andrew Drummond, Peter Roche and Bruce Barber are real events documented and represented as video or slides, while John Lethbridge's photographs are like stills from such performances. The environments of Jim Allen and Leon Narbey are performative in another way: the viewer's own movement activates sounds or lights. And there are works in this show which are literally sensational: that emit real light (Jim Allen), that produce real sounds (Billy Apple/Anne Lockwood), that generate actual heat (Roger Peters). Either way the physical body is a measure or an index, and sometimes a highly visceral one, of not only of actuality, but also of subjectivity and the

social. Although the conceptual, language-based works of Terrence Handscomb, Mel Bochner and Betty Collings present themselves as more cerebral than physical, yet they too are concerned with the body and with actualising the processes of their making. The words, numbers and symbols of these notations and diagrams present language in action. So there are common features to post object work despite the striking variety of forms, subjects and media.

The major bases of the post object scene were the art schools, especially Elam School of Art at Auckland University during Jim Allen's tenure as Head of Sculpture, and to a lesser extent Ilam School of Art at the University of Canterbury under Tom Taylor. Largely through the bold efforts of John Maynard as the first director of New Plymouth's Govett-Brewster Art Gallery and then as exhibition officer at Auckland City Art Gallery, and later Ian Hunter, Nick Spill and Andrew Drummond at Wellington's National Art Gallery, the public gallery system served as a significant if occasional venue for post object projects. Other public galleries, such as Manawatu Art Gallery under the directorship of Luit Bieringa, were occasional players. A few dealers like Auckland's Barry Lett Galleries (later RKS) were also important. Commonly projects of the era critically addressed the exhibition site, challenging the physical and curatorial limits of orthodox gallery spaces, or appropriating non-art sites like Mount Eden crater, Bledisloe Place, Cathedral Square, the abandoned Ngarauanga meatworks and Epsom Showgrounds, incorporating aspects of such sites into the work.

The scene was stimulated and informed by a small but steady flow of visiting artists from Britain and North America. Jim Allen was instrumental in bringing to Elam, as visiting teachers, a number of young sculptors with very current information, like John Panting (an expatriate), Adrian Hall and Kieran Lyons. Added to that was the return as a student of Philip Dadson following a stint with Cornelius Cardew's London Scratch Orchestra. Ian Hunter came out from the United Kingdom; Andrew Drummond returned from Canada and a meeting with Joseph Beuys in Edinburgh. Billy Apple, then based in New York, made two substantial visits involving many exhibitions during the decade, before returning here permanently in the 1980s. Darcy Lange made a return visit. As elsewhere in the late 1960s and early 1970s, universities were hothouses of creative and political action, with a highly precocious generation of students coming out of the art schools, Bruce Barber, Maree Horner, Christine Hellyar and Roger Peters among them.

Crucial as all the input of visitors was to the independent energy and coherence of the post object scene, the coming and going was also a measure of its instability and impermanence. The small scale of the New Zealand art scene and the difficulty of sustaining a post object practice took its toll: some artists left the country, some gave up art altogether. As *Action Replay* shows post object art nevertheless captured the intellectual high ground of the period and displayed a creative engagement with international contemporary art practice that only in the 1990s have we come to take for granted.

Tina Barton, Wystan Curnow, John Hurrell, and Robert Leonard  
*Action Replay* Curatorium

## artists

JIM ALLEN

BILLY APPLE

BRUCE BARBER

MEL BOCHNER

CITYGROUP

BETTY COLLINGS

PHILIP DADSON

ANDREW DRUMMOND

ADRIAN HALL

TERRENCE HANDSCOMB

CHRISTINE HELLYAR

MAREE HORNER

DARCY LANGE

ANNEA LOCKWOOD

JOHN LETHBRIDGE

COLIN McCAGON

LEON NARBEBY

ROGER PETERS

PAULINE RHODES

PETER ROCHE

WARREN VISCOE

### ARTSPACE

300 Karangahape Road, Auckland

6-16 October 1998

#### Action Replay I

Billy Apple and Annea Lockwood, Betty Collings, Leon Narbey, Roger Peters

20 October - 7 November 1998

#### Action Replay II

Jim Allen, CITYGROUP, Andrew Drummond, Terrence Handscomb, Darcy Lange, John Lethbridge, Peter Roche

10-27 November 1998

#### Action Replay III

Bruce Barber, Pauline Rhodes, Philip Dadson

### GOVETT-BREWSTER ART GALLERY

Queen Street, New Plymouth

14 November - 13 December 1998

#### Action Replay IV

Jim Allen, Billy Apple and Annea Lockwood, CITYGROUP, Betty Collings, Philip Dadson, Andrew Drummond, Terrence Handscomb, Christine Hellyar, Maree Horner, Darcy Lange, John Lethbridge, Colin McCahon, Leon Narbey, Roger Peters, Peter Roche, Warren Viscoe

Sunday 15 November, 12.30

A screening of *A Film of Real Time* by Leon Narbey

Sunday 15 November, 1.30pm

Forum

### AUCKLAND ART GALLERY

Khartoum Place, Auckland

28 November 1998 - 31 January 1998

#### Action Replay V

Mel Bochner, Adrian Hall, Colin McCahon

Wednesday 25 November 7pm

Seminar

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Govett-Brewster Art Gallery  
Public Programmes

Wednesday 2 December 8pm,

Saturday 5 December, 2pm.

Screenings of seminal New Zealand films of the 1970s

Thursdays throughout November, 12.15 - 12.45pm

Floor talks by Gallery staff and invited guests

Organised by Artspace, Auckland and the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth with support from Creative New Zealand Toi Aotearoa and Auckland Art Gallery Toi O Tamaki.

Artspace phone 09 303 4965 fax 09 366 1842 Govett-Brewster Art Gallery phone 06 758 5149 fax 06 758 0390

A R T S P A C E

GOVETT-BREWSTER ART GALLERY  
CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM ■ LEN LYE ARCHIVE

Leon Narbey *Real Time*, opening exhibition at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, February 1970.

