



HEADWAY

New Artists Show 2006



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New Artists Show 2006

ANDREW BARBER, MARTIN BASHER, FIONA CONNOR,
ROBERT HOOD, TESSA LAIRD, CLARE NOONAN.

Exhibition dates: 22 July - 2 September 2006

The annual ARTSPACE new artists' exhibition highlights contemporary art practice in New Zealand, which is new and vital. This year six artists had the opportunity to realise their work in a larger context.

It is a problematic premise seeking the new, as the question always arises 'what is new?' and the assumption exists that the new is always better. Therefore this selection of artists is less about the new and more of a glimpse at the dynamism and momentum of contemporary art in New Zealand at present. The show hopes to reflect this by presenting six individual artists who are making headway as critical voices.

Andrew Barber lives and works in Auckland and is co-director of artist initiative rm103 Gallery. Since 2002 he has been exhibiting in artist-run spaces throughout New Zealand and Australia.

After studying art at New York's Columbia University, Martin Basher returned to Wellington in 2005 to focus on his work. His interdisciplinary practice considers the environmental and social implications of consumption in our contemporary age.

Fiona Connor graduated from Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland in 2003 and is a founding member of artist-run Special Gallery in Auckland. She has exhibited in artist-initiated spaces throughout New Zealand.

Robert Hood lives in Christchurch and holds a BFA from Ilam School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury. He has exhibited in group and solo exhibitions in Christchurch, Dunedin and Melbourne, and managed SOFA Gallery in 2003 and 2004.

Tessa Laird is an Auckland-based writer and artist. Currently completing her Masters at Elam School of Fine Arts and lecturing in Contextual Studies at Manukau School of Visual Art, she balances dual interests in writing and making.

Christchurch-based Clare Noonan completed her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Sculpture at the University of Canterbury in 2003. She has exhibited in a number of group shows in artist-run spaces in Christchurch, Dunedin and Wellington.



ANDREW BARBER

THE VALUE OF ANDREW BARBER'S NO COLLAR ABSTRACTION

In this exhibition Andrew Barber re-makes ARTSPACE's wash-room walls as a series of grey monochrome paintings on linen. Overall decisions on scale and colour are made according to the characteristics of these walls, while their detail—scotia, skirting boards and light-switches—have been outlined and remain to be painted. Much could be said about the way Barber flips the practice many abstract painters took up in the nineteen nineties of abandoning the traditional specificity of the painting ground in favour of the wall. *Wall Painting, Washroom (ARTSPACE – Auckland)* wryly reverses the set of priorities that such a move entailed, Barber makes the wall the object of painting to be executed on canvas and in so doing calls the specificity of the painting ground back into play.

The fact that these paintings take ARTSPACE's wash-room as their object makes it clear that Barber sees value in the methods and practices found in actual, lived, concrete experience. It is this experience, as opposed to an interest in the metaphysics of presence or the purity often associated with modernist painting, that Barber privileges. Getting out from underneath the weight of such interests is a productive move for a contemporary abstract painter. By clearing the ground of painting of the theological haze and humanist riffs that often accompany such interests, the painter finds an opportunity to open a dialogue with contemporary culture.

Yet, even as something to be cast off, it remains that in painting's connectivity with such interests lies a core component of painting's ability to be compelling today. This is paradoxical. It means that one can find something new and of value in the mixed pleasure of contemporary painting's relationship and re-telling of modernism. Such value can be found in the sense of play mixed with melancholy, or in low rent and/or dystopic scenarios that none-the-less call out to courtly and/or utopic ones if only through dissent. This value is a frictional remainder, an historical malcontent that comes clean on painting's lack of innocence. It is capable of eliciting a feeling of alienation and boredom in the viewer that problematizes the frequently all too self-assured and emancipatory special effects of some contemporary art.

How the painter achieves valueless value in painting is no mean feat. Not all painting will make it: it is a question of economy and strategy. The painting that makes it does so through seeming to dispose of and practically undermine traditional notions of value, only to subsequently translate and recuperate them in ways that generate new meaning in painting. Such painting would first unfold seeming aristocratic or aesthetic value and then fold this back onto public, social space. Such a space is transitive and built into an artwork as a *feeling*. It is the feeling of the public commons (a communitarian sentiment) a place built in the imagination with reassuringly pragmatic rules of thumb and standard measures. This is romantic. In the case of painting it would mean that older, more established and even idealistic,



Andrew Barber, *Wall Painting, Washroom (ARTSPACE – Auckland)*, 2006.
Acrylic on linen



'blue blood' values are traded for the pragmatics of the 'blue collar,' and even, the 'no collar'—the tee-shirt as opposed to the blue denim collared shirt. The no-collar, it must be said, is not exactly what the 'no-brow' is to the 'high-brow,' but not all that far away either—for the no collar disposes of the courtly value of high-church modernist painting and supplements it with pedestrian value of the kind found in the feeling outlined above.

If Barber's 'no collar abstraction' enacts value it does so through the connoisseurship of the tradesman painter's techniques and the sense of sureness that a trade can entail in an increasingly virtualised and abstracted society. The no-collar painter is the one who works rapidly and with real physical skill: he or she works without fuss and, in the case of Barber, is able to 'cut in' to the scotia, skirting board and light switches of a room freehand and without tape. There is a fitness of method in this, for if a painter provides a quote for a job, the work should be completed in good time and be well executed. It is within this economy of feeling, skill and time, combined with the physicality of large painting projects such as *Wall Painting* that one can find the value of Andrew Barber's no collar abstraction.

Simon Ingram
July 2006



MARTIN BASHER

DESCENT INTO THE FUTURE

Martin Basher's work is a rendering of a dystopic world of low gravity, high toxicity and non-existent liability – a post-apocalyptic world on a coca cola high. In this ongoing project, race cars fly through deserted favella, past rivers flowing chemical green, while oilfields bubble in flame and crumbled organic supermarkets are left looted, broken and bleeding. Sprawling wastelands are abandoned to slum-dwellers, while pristine, manicured forests high in the mountains have become a playground for the rich. The air is heavy, hot and silent, punctured only by the oily roar of a big-block chevy-V8 and the ethereal flutter of a thousand butterfly wings.

In *Headway*, Basher continues a formal interplay between genres and commercial processes to create tableaux that combine flat, representational images with immersive sculptural environments. Tapping the rich narrative potential of representational painting and the undeniable 'presentness' of three-dimensional objects, the fictive environments he makes become remarkably real. Images initially created as large-scale oil paintings become commercially printed can labels. Commercial product is retooled into artwork. Paintings are rendered in three dimension as full scale, walk through installations. Like Natural History dioramas and Disney rides, the lines between flatness and form – indeed between fake and real – become blurred.

Basher's work is set upon mounds of construction debris – the detrius of collapsed buildings and ruined landscape. Read as discrete narrative fragments, these piles can function like story-board cells, or pages of a comic-book yet unwritten, or like the debris of an abandoned Paul McCarthy-esque performance, letting viewers imagine their own scenarios within the pieces.

On one, an 18-carat gold oil drum oozes oil created from gleaming dribbles of black paint, like Jackson Pollock meeting Simon Starling.¹ On another, a magnificent yet strangely unnatural multicolored butterfly hangs from a tree trunk, neither wholly natural nor clearly artificial. Framed by a ruined thicket of painted trees, a scenario arises in which both trees and butterfly seem tainted by some kind of genetic modification. In a third scenario, a shopping cart loaded with hoarded food is left teetering and abandoned half way up an incline. Reminiscent of the flag-raising of Iwo Jima or like a riff on Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, the scene has an abject theatricality, as if the struggles of allegorical bare-breasted liberty have been supplanted by the task of hauling looted goods home.

Depicting fragments of a world sullied by over-consumption, one can infer that Basher's message is a salutatory one, for we are not as far away from a world of gold barrels of luxury fuels as we might like. In fact, the gluttony of swollen shopping



Martin Basher, *The Western Way: Scene 1, 2 + 3*, 2006. Tinned meat product, acrylic on butterfly, 18 carat gold-plated drum and various media

carts, and the tragedy of environmental ruin are all too familiar in the present. Though the world he depicts is more than a little surreal, Basher's global fictions have their roots very much in the real and the local. His is a compelling indictment of a materialistic world, rendered with a twisted Disneyland splendor – a world begun in the imagination, transcribed in paint, and extended into object.

Amy Howden-Chapman, with the collaboration of Martin Basher
July 2006

¹ In the work *One Ton* (2005), Starling presented five hand-made platinum prints. The images depicted the one ton of platinum ore required to produce these five platinum photographs.

<http://www.martinbasher.com>



FIONA CONNOR

The static immobility of nature is what really scares me. Nothing weighs heavier on me than an old tree. Look at it: it goes on aging for centuries without ever having lived, without ever changing. The Empire State Building doesn't change either, but people around it are changing all the time. An urban landscape is in a state of perpetual transformation.¹

Armed with a modest bicycle, a video camcorder mounted at right angles to the direction of her bike and her own vigor, Fiona Connor's self generated video piece tracks over the buildings and ephemera adjoining a city pathway in one continuous take. We survey a cityscape in state of constant passing, until gradually slowing to a standstill to linger upon a collection of large stones, limpidly highlighted against the city's multifaceted surroundings in pedestrian rock gardens.

At this point, what starts as a meandering record of a journey through Auckland's downtown streets is interrupted by an introspective stare of suspicion, as if the presence of rocks in the gardens have eerily tapped into the aura of "static immobility" which for Antonioni resides in the agelessness of trees. Fiona's summation of time and place begins to signal a concern for a certain consciousness of nature that has been relocated, maybe inadvertently, to the banalities of a distinctively local setting.

For Connor, these moments in which the camera pauses over the rocks stand as meditatively weighted instances, points of time in which a contrast of different time relations, states and pace become apparent. Gardens literally exposed to the elements engage in a relatively accelerated form of temporal progression – summer, winter and autumn all mark their passing in the color of leaves – and yet "the way rocks sit amongst gardens that undeniably change, where growth is a certainty" emphasize that "rocks take part in a radically different time scale."²

Also at play in this sense of time is the catalogue of Fiona's previous work, particularly the *Time Capsule* series, in which an entire show was buried in order to be dug up for exhibition in the future. This video's interest in rocks, however, isn't centered on an idea of time stopped or captured so much as on a sense of *extended* time – an idea of different temporalities co-existing. The rocks themselves have a real and concrete materiality that speaks volubly of their thing-ness; and in its relation to the real world, rock represents a kind of zero degree. At various points the video footage tracks indoors to frame rock gardens against the granite-clad foyers of corporate buildings (notably the Copthorne Hotel and the Auckland Club Tower) to make this relation even more apparent. What matters is not that we recognize the buildings, although many may do so, but that we perform a kind of intellectual montage in superimposing the knowledge we bring of the materials to our awareness of their new context. Fiona recognizes intuitively that the



Fiona Connor, *Working title*, 2006. Glass, stainless-steel plated copper, silicon and vinyl

haphazard nature of these displays relates to a *juxtaposition* of the material ideologies inherent in competing surfaces. Like a time capsule, her video seeks to momentarily suspend the 'rules' of urban pace, to pay the rocks a more attenuated attention than they would otherwise receive as an act of resistance to the politics inherent in the spaces into which they are now subsumed.

For Fiona, the observational mode is best characterized by drawing, and the schematized structure of her video – Track, Stop, Inspect... Go – might thus be thought of as engaging a linear play of varied trajectories *intersecting* space. Fiona thinks that "the act of drawing is more about taking part in a larger dialogue than the actual drawing itself", so that drawing is a way to orient oneself between "the act of looking" and the "infinite detail and logic of what is around you."³ Perhaps in this instance, what drawing 'asks' most to be is declared in equilibrium with a suspension of space-time relationships. Both the literal act of engaging ones immediate surroundings through linear drawings on paper and the conceptualization of drawing via schematic video tracks focus on drawing as an essentially time-based activity, obscurely aligned with histories of materials.

Stephen Cleland
July 2006

¹ Michelangelo Antonioni, *Blow-Up: A Film* London: Lorrimer Publishing, 1971, p19.

² Email conversation with artist, Monday, 10 July 2006.

³ Ibid.



ROBERT HOOD

DON'T WORRY I'LL BE ARMING THE TROOPS WITH THE NEW HIGH POWER MACHINERY & THE FORCEFIELD IS STILL INTACT. *

xxxx: I think it's appropriate that we ensure the information we give them is accurate and current.

xxxx: we have to ensure that the visual systems and data analysis unit has been correctly applied to the new visual field, that way on our return everyone will realise the truth.

xxx: When dealing with the clean-up we're constantly investing resources that have a no forcible outcome.

xxx: do you realise in heaven no one will recognise themselves.

xxxx: when learning about the sites, gathering more information and very carefully using that to prioritize the application of the resources we have, to the most important areas, we assume we're reducing the hazard to our workforce and to the surrounding communities. So my presence gives assurance that they are getting access and getting the same information that prioritises the use of our resources.

xxxx: it reminds me of when we were caught in the pale glow of the tractor beam.

XXXX: it's the pressure, there's this pressure on my head.

xxxx: I knew the data was incorrect.

2. How would you say you approached this assignment?

I am assigned to the Restoration Advisory Board as a function of my position. When I was notified I was going to be the vice commander, I was told part of those duties was to co-chair the Restoration Advisory Board. I began receiving the Report to Stakeholders and learning about the base clean-up.

Being on my third assignment to Edwards, I feel like I am a part of this community. I lived on base during all three of those assignments, for a total of 9 years. I was really happy to see the progress we've made on cleaning up these sites and the very reasoned and disciplined approach that has been taken up discussing the options we've had. It is remarkable that we've been able to go out and get funds to start this clean-up while we're still working toward our Record of Decisions. Members know we've got some significant challenges ahead but we're tackling each one with deliberateness. I was



Robert Hood, *badmoonrisingbadmoonrisingbadmoonrising*, 2006. Michangelo ceiling tiles, sound loops and video

very pleased to see that, so I was looking forward to being a part of that group. Any group that's been able to do that is a group I truly enjoy and I look forward to the great challenges that are to come. I think we've laid a true foundation of solidarity and we've finally overcome the technological limitations and of course we'll be buying a new keyboard anytime soon.

* we've re-inforced the firewalls and plugged all the holes.



TESSA LAIRD

A4 ATOLL

When I was 12 I belonged to a club led by Mr Bent. He was a Vietnam Vet and ex Green Beret. We spent long weekends in the Ureweras, identifying plants and insects, fording rivers, building bivouacs and other cool stuff. Back at school we displayed our findings on nature study tables, arranging the stones, leaves, insects, and 'fossils' we'd collected on our excursions, and annotating it all in our best handwriting.

It was serious geeky fun, and not a million miles from the quasi-science of Tessa Laird's take on ethno-botany or her ode to the kumara. Something of the nature study table and the social studies pin-board inhabits *The Sweet Potato and Oceania*. The juvenile form co-mingles with the museological adult. Uncertain graphs and lumpy homo phyto-morphic pottery samples are among the data. Quaint, Margaret Mead-like curiosity and trust in the information sits on the wall while conversations about taxonomy, Linnaeus, eugenics, culture and diaspora, drift around the edges of this A4 atoll.

The crudely rendered images, all purpley like the vegetable itself, are wryly observed facsimiles of original texts. There's a dusty, stack room resurrection in the work that recalls those times of cultural simplicity when unbeknownst to the anthropologists more groundwork for present-day unrest was being laid. The down but not out spectre of colonialism continues to cause conflict in Timor Leste, Papua, the Solomons, Vanuatu, Fiji and Tahiti to name only a few sites, all Oceanic homes to varieties of the humble tuber: *Ipomoea Batatas*.

The tuber's muscularity contrasts with the green tendrils and papery flowers showing above ground. A member of the family *Convolvulaceae*, the flowers resemble those of its close relative Morning Glory and bring to mind the special properties of its seeds, which contain the *alkaloid ergine d-lysergic acid amide* [better known as natural LSD]. Laird might refer to these trippy characteristics in the seemingly improvised aspects of her work – the dreamy cadence of 'inchworm', paintings of the tubers in space, resembling something by a stoner Nancy Adams, or in the way she finds a conspiracy hidden in the coincidence of the words Peru and *peru peru* [Maori potato].

Root vegetables apparently lack subtlety, and as a consequence are kinda funny. Comic gestures aside however, within Tessa's gestetnered schema is an appreciation of their corporeity *and* their divinity. Tuber as trope. A nifty device and one to keep in mind when considering the implications not only of the Monsanto-fication of staple foods, but also the melancholy inherent in its sprawling migrations. Sticky contemporary issues like identity and sovereignty are planted here with this, the sweetest of all vegetables.



Tessa Laird, *The Sweet Potato and Oceania*, 2006 - detail. Acrylic over photocopied A4 paper

Andrea Low
July 2006



CLARE NOONAN

*The world in English is measured by the body – spans of hands and feet, a yard the length from nose to fingers at the end of an outstretched arm.
The world of tools is a world of handles, arms, blades, and legs.¹*

Clare Noonan's feet, both sets, have been doing a fair bit of work lately. They've covered quite a bit of ground, in many senses. They've travelled, near and far, been uprooted, relocated, and planted in new locations. Following their own directions and with homing pigeon instincts the feet seem to find their way here, there, and back again. Here *Track* and *Trace (remapped)* are installed as signs, as remains to show the former presence of what has been. Continuing their journey from the south to the north, Noonan's feet are now flanked by concrete, and on first glance you could be mistaken that someone has lost something below and gone searching on an archaeological dig.

Track is an impeccable replica of Noonan's own feet, cast in wax, that sit upturned on the floor, silent and still, but with the potential of movement; a compass is set into the ball of the right foot, a displacement device, set in the pivot point. Alongside hangs *Trace (remapped)*, mock topographical maps that on close inspection chart the contours of a journey. But step back to view in their unfolded entirety and the only thing you'll find your way around are the cartographic forms of the soles of Noonan's feet. The maps are a relief in a measurable form, a projection of the body onto the landscape. Taking direction from these wouldn't get you very far at all, but consider them within the larger context of Noonan's work and you start to comprehend her relationship with the landscape, the journey, the body, and the tool.

In the past, Noonan has crafted unique tools; series of exterior devices and mobile utilities related to navigating the landscape, and rather superfluous to needs. Realising an interest in the "transformation of the tool, with its human trace, into a mechanical extension into space"², the attention has turned to focus on the body's reference devices and actions. Using her inherent navigational tools, the hand and the foot, Noonan samples bionic combinations of these implements in relation to the environment in which they are immediately situated in. With the self as a recording instrument, the works are an archival record of Noonan's own foundation, a rendering of herself coordinated as a place, an object and an agent. When you consider the ball of the foot as a pivot, an inherent compass, the displacement of the body is a tangible idea to which Noonan is giving us visual clues to, creating an image of the body as a tool, tracking a journey, tracing an existence.



Clare Noonan, *Track*, 2004. Wax and found compass

Vanessa Coxhead
July 2006

¹ Susan Stewart, *On Longing*. USA:Duke University Press, , 1993, p102.

² Ibid, p102.



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22 July - 2 September 2006

Talks at 3pm every Saturday during the exhibition

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Image credit: Jennifer French and ARTSPACE

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ARTSPACE^{NZ}

Level 1, 300 Karangahape Road
PO Box 68418, Newton, Auckland, New Zealand
Phone: +64 9 303 4965, Fax +64 9 366 1842
artspace@artspace.org.nz, www.artspace.org.nz
Hours: Tuesday - Friday 10am-6pm, Saturday 11am-4pm