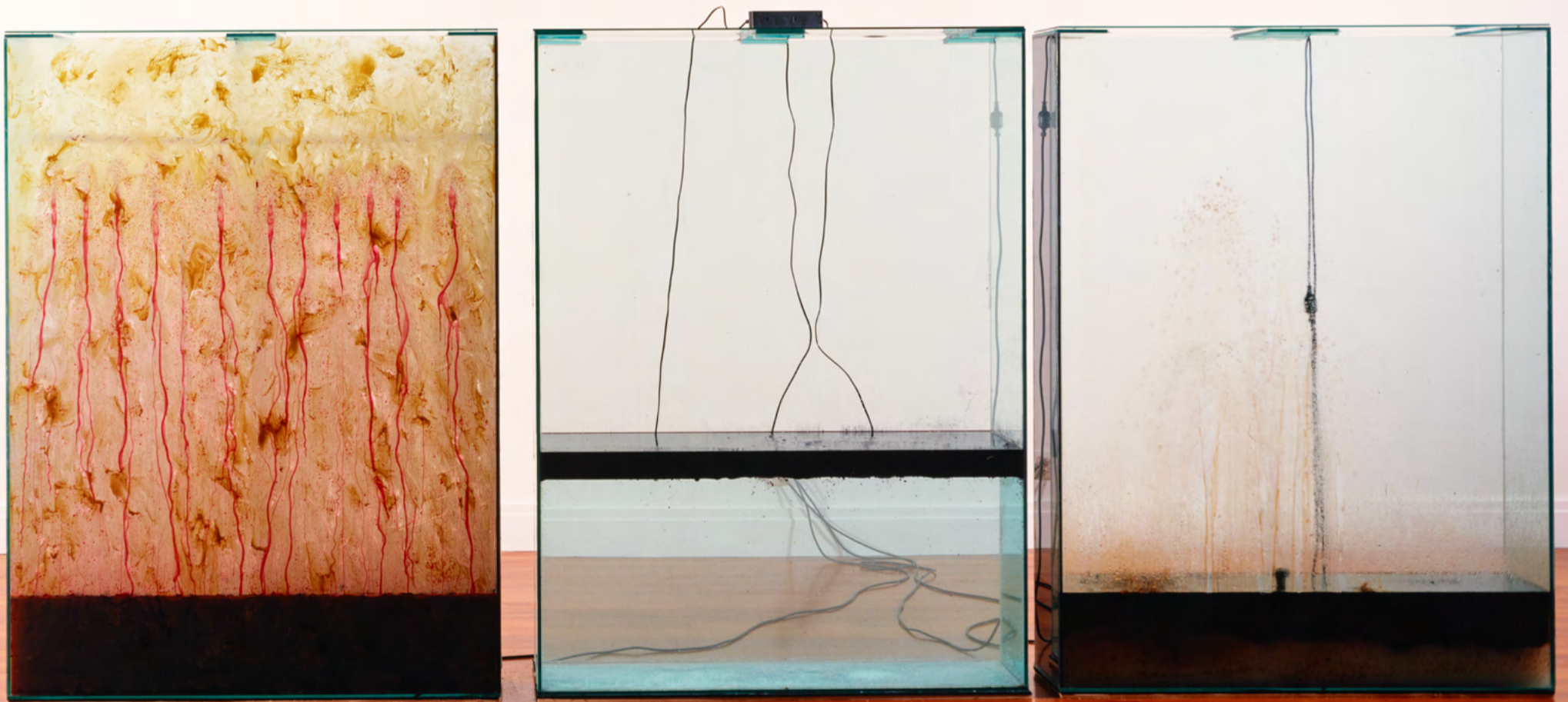
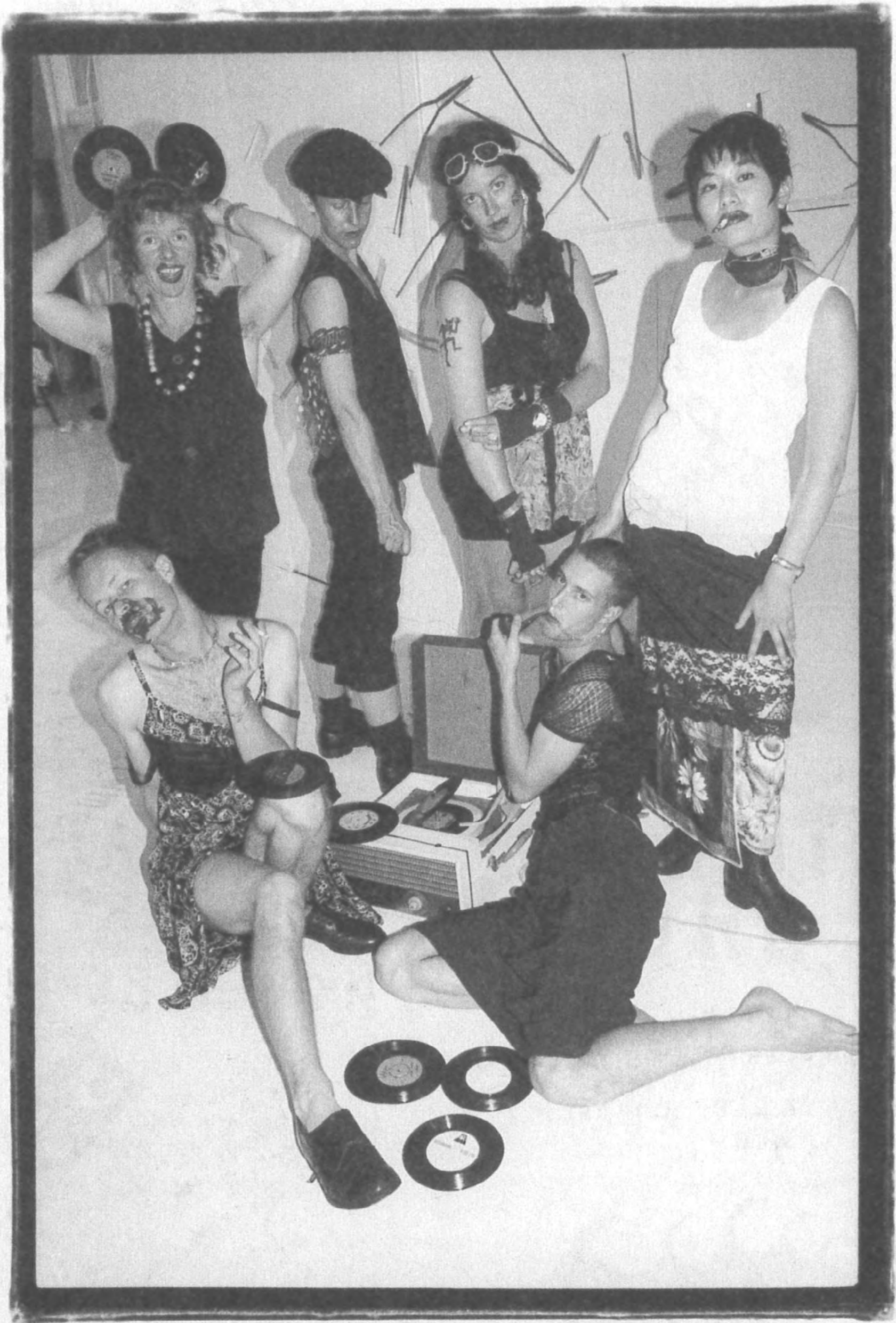


EMPTY GALLERY

Denise Kum  
Selected text and press





Teststrip photo shoot for Stamp magazine, 1992

# ARTFORUM

LETTER WYSTAN CURNOW FROM AUCKLAND

## EAST OF CHAMPIONS

**F**ebruary is summertime down under. We have beaches and cruise ships, we have rock concerts, one-day cricket, and sunny prospects. Primal Scream, Ministry, Grant Lee Buffalo,

R.E.M., and, I almost forgot, the Rolling Stones have lined up alongside locals like Crowded House, the Headless Chickens, and Spies Underground. Cricket has dominated one or other TV network Sri Lanka vs. Australia in Sydney, England vs. Zimbabwe in Perth, The West Indians are here and the South Africans are due soon. The economy is overheating. After twenty years of stagnation and decline, last year's 6 percent growth and a burgeoning budget surplus have put the country in a new mood.

In downtown Auckland the signs of the upturn are unmistakable. Office blocks more or less vacant since the '87 stock-market crash are filling again, and others are being built—cranes have returned to the skyline. Aucklanders have suddenly acquired a passion for inner-city living, and since there are no apartment buildings here—New Zealanders are supposed to live in wooden bungalows in suburbs—office buildings are everywhere being made over and plans for apartment blocks drawn up. The developers and their clients are coattailing on the young artists, entrepreneurs, and students who had previously occupied these buildings as squatters, caretakers, and low-renters. An expanded street life and café-and-club scene have formed, their sophistication doing much to make inner-city living seem attractive. Before the crash, high rents had been pushing the galleries out toward the suburbs; now, having weathered the recession surprisingly well, some have moved back. New galleries are opening up. Auckland's dozen or so quality commercial galleries make it the center



of the country's small but flourishing art market. A few salient factors dictate the terms of cultural life in Auckland, and in New Zealand generally. The country is small: 3.5 million people occupy a land mass the size of Japan, with its 123 million people. Ten percent are Maori, mostly of mixed Maori and European ancestry, and clustered at the lower end of the socioeconomic

scale. New Zealand is isolated: its nearest neighbor, Australia, is not all that close, Sydney being about as far from Auckland as London from Moscow. Some five to six thousand miles separate us from Beijing, Tokyo, Los Angeles, and Santiago. First discovered by Polynesian explorers about 1,000 years ago, and by European explorers about 300 years ago, New Zealand has a brief modern history, dating from 1840, when the British persuaded the Maori inhabitants to "sign" what they called a "treaty" ceding the country to the Queen.

Not surprisingly, New Zealand possesses no distinguished collections of European art to add to the Maori *taonga* or treasures in its museums or on its *marae*, or tribal meeting grounds. Few historical or contemporary international exhibitions visit here or are originated by our art galleries, and internationally established contemporary artists are rarely represented locally in public or private collections or by commercial dealers. A developing link with Australia provides the exception to this pattern of isolation: Australian artists like John Nixon and Imants Tillers show with dealers here, and New Zealanders like Stephen Bambury and Julian Dashper exhibit regularly in Australia. The MCA in Sydney has been particularly active in showcasing and collecting New Zealand work—Julia Morison, William Dunning, Yuk King Tan, Jacqueline Fraser, Shane Cotton, Peter Robinson, Michael Parekowhai, and Denise Kum were included in its recent postcolonialist show, "Localities of Desire."

In recent years the Auckland City Art Gallery has mounted a series of Australian survey exhibitions, of which last year's "Aussemblage" was the most recent. Otherwise the Auckland galleries, along with Artspace and Teststrip, two staunch "alternative" spaces, and the Auckland City Art Gallery's new

### STUART MCKENZIE ON TESTSTRIP

## JUNK JOINT

**WHILE THE PUBLIC galleries and institutions declare new deaths, new purities, new beginnings in art, the Auckland artist-run gallery Teststrip gets down to the dirty business of making art and showing as much of it as possible. Denise Kum, Giovanni Intra, Kirsty Cameron, Guy Treadgold, Susan Hillery, Judy Darragh, Simon Cuming, and Daniel Malone are core Teststrip. They organize the exhibitions, publish the catalogues, pay the rent. "When Teststrip set out on its venture in 1992," a local writer has said, "it was surreal. Now it has become real."**

**Emphasizing this subversive move into reality, Teststrip has recently relocated from the trendy, café part of town to K-Road, a strip of saunas and girlie bars. In photography, a test strip is a means of ex-**

Michael Parekowhai, *Acts II, 1994*, lacquered wood and custom wood, three parts, each ca. 35 3/8 x 111 1/2".

## LETTER

space, are more or less exclusively devoted to contemporary New Zealand art. Precisely because the scene is so self-contained and small, there is a demand for variety and complexity. New Zealand has its own art world, whose resources and structures are in fact surprisingly well developed considering the size of the population. It is also a world which depends for its variety and complexity almost entirely on the local product. Partly because of this, young artists tend to flourish here. That was borne out in last year's "Art Now" survey of sculpture at the Museum of New Zealand, in Wellington, and will be confirmed by "Cultural Safety," a show of New Zealand art that opens shortly at the Frankfurt Kunstverein.

The two events that have most shaped the country over the last ten years are, first, the 1984 election of a Labor government whose unexpected, and radical, free-market program shocked its supporters and left the country ideologically confused and politically traumatized. Since New Zealand never had much of an old right, the new fundamentalism is capitalist, not Christian, managerial, not moral. Second, in 1985 the jurisdiction of the Waitangi Tribunal, set up to hear claims against the Crown over actions since 1975, was extended to actions dating back to the Treaty's signature. The extension has obliged New Zealanders to confront their past and has enabled them to begin shaping a more truly bicultural future for themselves. Support for and resistance to both the free market and biculturalism is to be found on both sides of the traditional political divide. But there is no doubt about the dramatic impact both events have had on the support structures of the arts, and on artistic and critical practice.

Insofar as the state itself is in disrepute, so is public support for culture. Government funding for the arts, vital in a country with little history of private patronage, continues, but now comes largely from lottery profits and is administered by Arts Council "managers" in the form of "investments." Government has ceased funding research in the humanities. The National Library is laying off staff. One art collector told me he was

**perimenting with exposures, so it seems appropriate that Teststrip should be in a red-light area. Here and at their previous space (which doubled as a bedsit) the Teststrippers have put on one contagiously good show after another.**

**As its name suggests, Teststrip has no fixed image. Besides the eight core mutineers, it shows a range of other artists whose work is either unknown to public galleries or a bit too rugged to show without explanatory captions and general spit and polish. Teststrip is experimental, trying things out, trying things on. A Teststrip highlight was "Sad Sketches," 1994, for which Cameron constructed a sickly child's room, lair of a future psycho: girly pictures with vampires scribbled over them were pinned to pink floral wallpaper. Tapping a similar vein, Ronnie van Hout glued lengths of cord to the gallery walls to reproduce British serial killer Dennis Nielsen's drawings of his mutilated victims. Providing a droll commentary on Nielsen's disfigurative art, several weepy cartoon characters, stitched out of felt, mouthed heart-felt sentiments like "I am sorry," and "I am sad."**

**Teststrip shows often tread a fine line between reporting and celebrating social dysfunction. There is a Nietzschean amorality here, and also a strenuous Romanticism in the style of Keats' promise that until we are sick, we understand not. Intra's and Vicki Kerr's 1994 show "Waiting Room" exemplified Keats' precarious notion of health. Confronting Teststrip's usual focus on grunge, they turned the gallery into a pristine white space, sterilizing and curving the walls to eliminate any corners where bacteria might gather. To keep the room uncontaminated, visitors had to wear plastic slippers and surgical masks. Using medicine as a metaphor for social hang-ups, Kerr and Intra were also paying parodic homage to Modernism's mania for white space.**

**Teststrip is actively radical while celebrating the bankruptcy of the avant-garde. Its engagement with contemporary society passes through a spirited struggle with art history. Mirroring an old avant-garde convention, its exhibitions often embrace materials and ideas that society has labeled "junk." This gives bite to another dictum applied to Teststrip: "If junk sculpture is destined to turn back into junk then this gallery considers it its duty to accelerate the process."**

*Robert McKinlay is one of the directors of MAP, a film production company based in Wellington.*

in favor of requiring the Arts Council to become self-funding in five years or get the ax, another that her offer to buy a building for Auckland's City Art Gallery was met with a counteroffer from the mayor: would she like to buy the gallery itself? Traditional arguments for the public funding of culture are no longer listened to. I suspect that when they succeeded in the past, it was less that they convinced than that they were not met by confident counterarguments—which are now all too ready to hand. So the case for culture in New Zealand today largely stands or falls on the ability of individuals and organizations to describe what they do in commercial and business-management terms, which is to say, their ability to elaborate on a metaphor. This is the only language game in town.

Few have confronted its distortions; among them, as you would expect, are a number of the country's more incisive artists. Derrick Cherrie, Ruth Watson, Julian Dashper, Michael Parekowhai, and Billy Apple have variously taken up and at the same time dismantled the metaphor. The reception of their work raises the question: who sets the rules by which art's "accountability" is to be judged? Those within the support structure have in fact been slow to construct an effective counterargument, another language game. Biculturalist policies extrapolated from the terms of the Treaty of Waitangi come closest. In the meantime, many are learning to play the official code and in some cases to play it very well.

One measure of this is the quantity of art-museum expansion going on. Four of the country's eight major museums are building new premises or acquiring and refurbishing existing ones that situate them closer to the heart of their respective cities and so to their audiences. In Auckland, a trust formed by collectors Jennifer and Alan Gibbs has bought a four-story building specifically to enable the City Art Gallery adequately to present its premier collection of contemporary New Zealand art. As the City Council was unwilling to contribute more than the \$1 annual rent charged by the trust, the Gallery will rely for running costs on leases to shops and cafés on the lower two levels. This is an extraordinary act of private patronage for New Zealand, and may be a sign of things to come.

Far and away the largest and most significant museum building under construction occupies a spectacular Wellington waterfront site where it will serve as a singular *waharoa*, or entryway, to the capital and the country. The Museum of New Zealand/Te Papa Tongarewa is a new and a unique institution that aims to be the first genuinely bicultural museum in the world. Its origins lie in the Museum of New Zealand—one of those conventional, culturally questionable combinations of ethnographic and natural history collections—and the National Art Gallery, both of which long shared the same roof and governing board. Since the appointment of

*continued on page 104*

# Art + Text



*Lube*, 1994  
Petrolatum, water, oils, dye, glass and pumps, 2 units at 200 x 150 x 35 cm, 1 units at 200 x 150 x 50 cm  
Courtesy Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

## Denise Kum TOXIC TASTE

by Giovanni Intra

Situated between Chinoiserie and rococo decadence, Denise Kum's art engages an anthropological dandyism; it is never what it is supposed to be. Utilizing multiple tropes of display, she traffics substances into the gallery from the supermarket and the laboratory, transforming them into essays on the uncanniness of shape and form. Whether food or chemicals, we are confronted with both the delectable and the poisonous.

In this sense, her installations in New Zealand and Australia since 1991 have amounted to a flotilla of migrating materials, a cargo cult of rarefied oddities. Kum arranges alluring concoctions of smell, heat, and movement; the results transport in the same way as the glazed ducks turning perpetually in the windows of Chinese restaurants. But whereas it is often drenched in its own materiality - literally up to its elbows in what Robert Morris described as the "stuff" and "slime" available to artists since Minimalism - Kum's work continues to dabble in the phenomenological playdough of sculpture. A sensory encyclopaedia, the tactile and olfactory delicacies she offers are considerable. Lotus leaves, for instance, simmer under hot lamps; dried, salted octopuses cast out wretched odors, and gallons of soy sauce are left to develop lacy islands of turquoise mold.

There is always something tasty about what Kum lays before an audience. But hers is not an art of trifling gratification; nor even of disgust for that matter. For these sculptures made from foodstuffs cannot simply be relished as symbolic consommés of Asian culture, or as exotic spices in the seasoning of cultural translation as some have been tempted to assume. Rather, staple truths are put through a strainer.

It cannot be denied that Kum has suffered from a certain culinary reputation - not an entirely inconvenient category in which to place a Chinese woman artist. It is therefore imperative to understand how her recent work has done much to problematize this apparent essentialism. If cultural orality as told through the figure of nutrition remains Kum's guiding principle, this must now be expanded to include the indigestible by-products of Western society.

Kum's food sculptures can usefully be conceived as deconstructed, "unpacked" menus. For example, *Sauce Box*, which was exhibited in "Localities of Desire" at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art in 1994, contains the necessary comestibles for a meal of Peking duck. The inventory of this work reads like a recipe: 23 kilos of lard; black bean sauce; soy sauce; soy oil; duck marinade; dried, salted preserved duck; dried duck heads, bills, and wings.



*Sauce Box*, 1994  
Glass, medical trolleys, light bulbs, marinades, oils, dried, goods, 300 x 150 x 200 cm. Approx.  
Courtesy Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney. Photo Heidrun Lohr



*Chromoscope*, 1994  
Petrolatum, automote blue, handblown soda lime glass, plate glass, steel frame, incandescent lights, 250 x 110 x 110 cm Photo Ann Shelton

Where formlessness becomes too acute, however, Kum resorts to welcome symmetry. For without these protective glass cabinets, whose pristine geometry belies the disorder scaled safely inside, the aesthetic regime would be defiled: not only would the content spread to pollute the atmosphere, as in the untraceable journeys of germs or pollen grains, it would cease to be an object of critical reflection as well. In reverse, asserting order requires a new form of vision. Approximating the pixelated depthlessness of a TV screen, Kum's glassed-in, three-dimensional fare shines engagingly through its hermetic veils, like a parody of the contract of museum display. Works such as *Lube* (1994) conjure this spectacle of containment on a grand scale. Exhibited in the Museum of New Zealand's "Art Now," a survey of recent 3-D-based art, *Lube*'s swirling, crystalline movement is mesmerizing. It has all the charm of a biopsy translated into a disco light show.

*Lube* rebuts the old saying "oil and water don't mix." In essence, it is a fountain - a pump machine that generates enchantment through the motion of liquid. But as if to negate its appearance, it actually sprays a cascade of toxic waste. Humorously, this sculpture utilizes some of the tactics of spatial organization employed by Rothko: the "field" is horizontally divided, generating contrasts between light and dark; muted opacities are set off against ecstatic areas of color. It bloats the flatness of the picture plane by total immersion of figure and ground: the artist in fact clambered inside the huge glass tanks, using spatulas and brushes to apply assorted dyes and petrochemical products to its surfaces.

Not oil paints but industrial oils, Kum has acquired her materials on her many visits to the product facilities at British Petroleum, Auckland. In situ in the lab, Kum works with scientists testing, weighing, and sorting candidates for future sculptural use. Frequently, their discourse on petrochemicals admits to opposing points of view. "Texture," for one, is not particularly relevant to industry.

Often petrogens yet to appear on the market, the oils used in *Lube* and elsewhere are either still undeveloped miracle greases or tonics for promoting digestion in sheep and cattle. While these sludgy chemicals and mutagenic tracers might set off alarm bells among artists such as Hans Haacke or the French collective BP, Kum is not especially phased by them. She prefers instead to ponder their aesthetics, their sheer absurdities. Already part of the kaleidoscope of world pollution, she turns them into new vocabularies of striation, line, mass, and impenetrable darkness.

*Chromoscope*, another work from 1994, plays a similar tactic of pseudo-scientific industrial plagiarism. This time the product in question is petrolatum. A disarmingly versatile material, it has been used as a gynaecological lubricant; just the sort of teratogen one would want to keep as far away as possible from the reproductive organs.

Like blue toxic margarine spread onto a large glass sandwich, *Chromoscope* exploits petrolatum for its adhesive and liquid properties. Melted into ripply textures using a hair drier, the material embeds numerous wobbly glass spheres. These spheres, blown from soda-lime glass, amass into a static, gleaming bubble bath. Thoughts of chemophobia and environmental armageddon aside, the extreme chromatic intensity of this work ushers in what can only be described as the Willy Wonka effect of contemporary sculpture.

Kum's most recent contraptions, *Sculpi* (1995), are made of flabbercast. A flexible polyurethane elastomer developed for cinematic prosthetics, it was used to flesh out the legs of the jogging dinosaurs in Spielberg's *Jurassic Park*. This pretend musculature shudders and bounces back just like real living tissue.

The irony that a brand-new elastomer is used to simulate prehistoric cellulite is not lost on these *Sculpi*. After all, their own anatomies are cast in rubber surgical gloves and condoms. Trussed up in white crepe bandages and perched on stainless steel autoclave trays, they present a kind of object lesson which applies generally to Kum's investigations into chemicals and petroleum and synthetic products: namely, that her elusive forms slide off the map of traditional cultural and industrial usage.

Appearing as a decaying skyline heaped on a street vendor's cart, *Sauce Box* comprises a reversal of the Vanitas tradition in Dutch still life. But nothing here forestalls the threat of decomposition as is achieved in Vanitas, which attempts to trick mortality through the virtues of painterly craft. On the contrary, *Sauce Box* revels in the processes of rot and organic dissolution. The materials are left to the ravages of the open air. This erosion of form - the stinking, dripping, and corroding - points to the inevitability of decay, synonymous with the sculptural act.

*Sauce Box* might equally be commenting on the museological appetite (as stated in the "Localities" exhibition brochure) to "seek out" and present "cultural difference." But since its ingredients are piled up on hospital trolleys, a pathological hue is cast over Kum's offering. Food enters the scene only to exceed its use-by date; the museum must swallow the bitter pill of potlatch.



*Sculpi*, 1995  
Flabbercast, condoms, latex gloves, bandages, glass and autoclave trays  
25 x 80 x 65 cm. Photo Ann Shelton

# Art Asia Pacific



DANIEL MALONE and DENISE KUM, Kum of Sum Yung Guy, 1997, video installation, dimensions variable, courtesy the artists.

Start with a ubiquitous image: a shot of the rising sun. You almost expect the sound of a gong to be struck, announcing: 'The East'. But instead you get some funky Hong Kong pop, the camera pans to the right and we are in Auckland's eastern suburbs, home to the city's burgeoning population of recent Asian immigrants. We follow the travels of Sum Yung Guy, a Hong Kong action hero and Asian day-tripper, played, with the help of prosthetic eyelids, by the performance artist Daniel Malone. Excerpts from an English-language program for Chinese speakers are interspersed occasionally, the instructor exhorting his students to 'Go West'. But Sum Yung walks against the flow, through the housing complex and into the East. Cut to Chinese areas of the city and to our hero, a self-orientalised modern-day flâneur, at ease in restaurants, record shops, supermarkets and book stores, sampling the produce, investigating the wares. As the poster image of himself set within a collection of other Chinese posters suggests, Sum Yung integrates himself into this orientalised reading of Auckland.

The video, Kum of Sum Yung Guy, 1997, made by Daniel Malone and Denise Kum, who is better known as a sculptor and installation artist, doesn't represent a nostalgic longing for the Other with which traditional orientalists generally identify. Rather, its explicit play with racial authenticity takes an ironic and distanced position from the orientalist's fantasy, keeping it at arms length.

## For Kum, Malone and Tan typically Chinese or Asian signifiers are used to unsettle established meanings and to quest on the claims of authenticity.

In his book, *The Location of Culture*,<sup>1</sup> Homi Bhabha uses the term 'the third space' to locate individuals who have hyphenated identities - Chinese-New Zealanders, for example. This space, according to Bhabha, constitutes 'the conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricised and read anew'.<sup>2</sup> It is this freedom of translation, a certain emancipation identifiable in the third space but by no means exclusive to the domain of the hyphenated identity, that allows appropriation to become valid as a political, social and aesthetic strategy. This strategy can be called post-orientalist<sup>3</sup> and is seen in the work of three contemporary New Zealand artists - Kum, Malone and the sculptor and installation artist Yuk King Tan - all of whom have used the signs of Chinese or other East Asian cultures.<sup>4</sup>



DANIEL MALONE and DENISE KUM, Kum of Sum Yung Guy, 1997, video installation, dimensions variable, courtesy the artists.



YUK KING TAN, Showbusiness, 1997, installation, track lighting, flash timer, mylar, dimensions variable, courtesy Auckland Museum

Their work appears in the context of a dramatically changing cultural landscape in New Zealand. Increased emigration from the East Asian region had, by the mid-1990s, produced a racial backlash against both new immigrants and established Chinese-New Zealanders. Race and anti-Asian sentiment became an issue in the 1996 election, and was exploited by the New Zealand First leader, Winston Peters, helping to secure his election success. Yuk King Tan can claim Chinese ethnicity, and most writing around her work reads that ethnicity in terms of a personal cultural identity, yet she only plays the Chinese card as required. While specific associations are evident- the use of firecrackers, the prominence of the colour red, an appropriation of stock cultural images that westerners commonly associate with the East - these can be seen less as markers of identity than as strong associative devices that frame the reading of her work and set the terms of Tan's contract with the viewer.



YUK KING TAN, *The Picturesque*, 1997 (detail), firecrackers, dimensions variable, courtesy Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth.

Visuality and perception have been a primary concern of Tan's. She dealt with this subject markedly in *Grapple*, 1998, a video project produced during a residency with a blind group in Townsville, Australia, and in *Showbusiness*, which was included in 'The Oriental Room' exhibition at the Auckland Museum in 1997. *Showbusiness* operated as a twist on the museum display cabinet, with Tan thwarting any attempt to see inside the vitrine by surrounding it with blinding lights which were directed at the viewer, though when the interior was lit at brief, regular intervals a mirrored base could be discerned. In exacerbating the difficulties of seeing, combined with the implied sexuality and engineered viewer frustration, the work was explosive. Tan has also explored the visible signs of race, working at the interface between cultures and their representation. In *White Dot, Black Dot*, 1995, she addresses essentialist positions on race: by constructing two circular reliefs - one made from vermicelli and the other from dried banana skins - she confronts the issue of white versus yellow skin colour.

More characteristically, yet still concerned with perception, Tan has also made use of firecrackers in a number of works, making virtuoso wall drawings of appropriated images. For 'The Picturesque', 1997, a series of large drawings using small red firecrackers, Tan sourced familiar eastern imagery, including appropriations from eighteenth-century Japanese woodblock prints, Chinese mist and mountainscapes and social realist revolutionary paintings, as well as western images such as a Dürer figure and generic scenes including photo-realist seascapes and a cityscape. The images are fused into pairs, each coupled with another image inverted below, rendering a doubling effect, a case of hyphenated realities, and a combination of the nostalgic with the exotic. By inviting the viewer to ignite the crackers, catharsis was achieved, partly because this type of firework is banned in New Zealand, but also by shifting the viewer's position from visual passivity into active transformation through destruction, dramatically demystifying the work's functional and institutional framework.

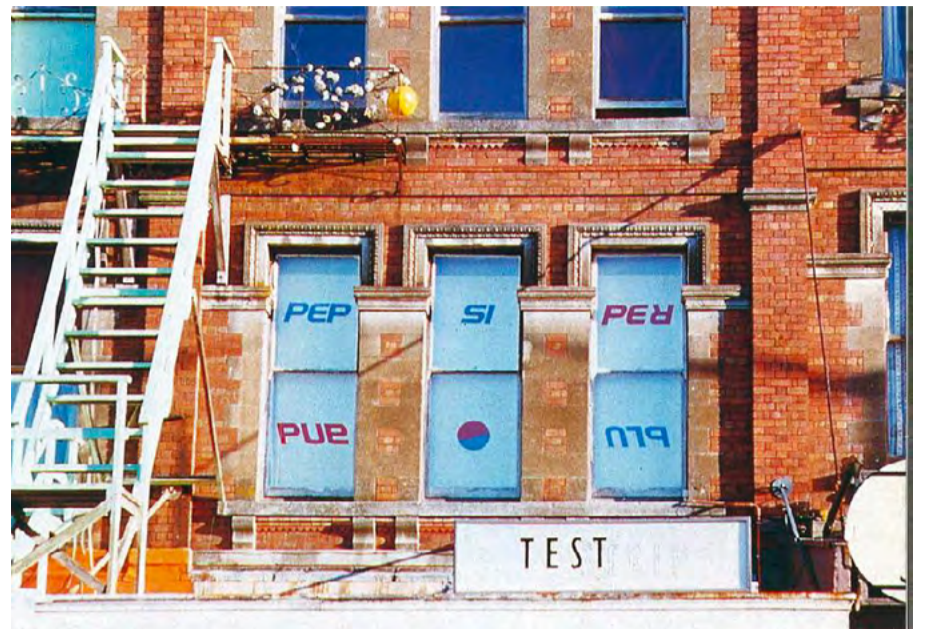


YUK KING TAN, *The Picturesque*, 1997, firecrackers, dimensions variable, courtesy Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth



Earlier work reinforces this same sense of fragmentation. Ping and Graft, 1994, took the personal fan, a symbol of oriental equipose, and displayed it on a wall in a multiple grid format. On each was a laser image of a segment of a Chinese face - Tan's mouth, ear, eye - fracturing representation of the self and denying any Gestalt-like reading. Thus in Tan's work associations specific to gender, language or race are construed strategically to achieve material and perceptual transformations that serve to investigate the possibilities of cultural translation.

Daniel Malone, whose practice has included installation, performance, assemblage, video and page works, engages with similar questions of representation and translation. For example, in an early performance, In Memorium of Columbus Discovering America, 1992, he represented a Cherokee heritage. He 'celebrated' the 500th anniversary of Columbus's discovery by striking a matchstick for each year, illuminating his naked body in the dark, and again aligning himself with the 'Other'. In Work for the Asian Community, 1997, Malone took translation as his subject. He created signage displaying enigmatic English transliterations of Chinese phrases, which in fact were Hong Kong film subtitles of Romanised Chinese slang, commonly used to overcome censorship laws in cinema. Thus the placard that read 'Holland Bank Cheque', in the Dutch flag's colours of red, white and blue, could be read phonetically as, 'You're so fucking dumb'. This served as a succinct reminder of the subversive element in Malone's work, in which the fluidity of language, culture and space are highlighted, without necessarily aligning the artist with any partisan view.



DANIEL MALONE, Capital-ism is Dead, 1997, installation, core-flute board, vinyl-cut lettering wood, dimensions variable, courtesy the artist.

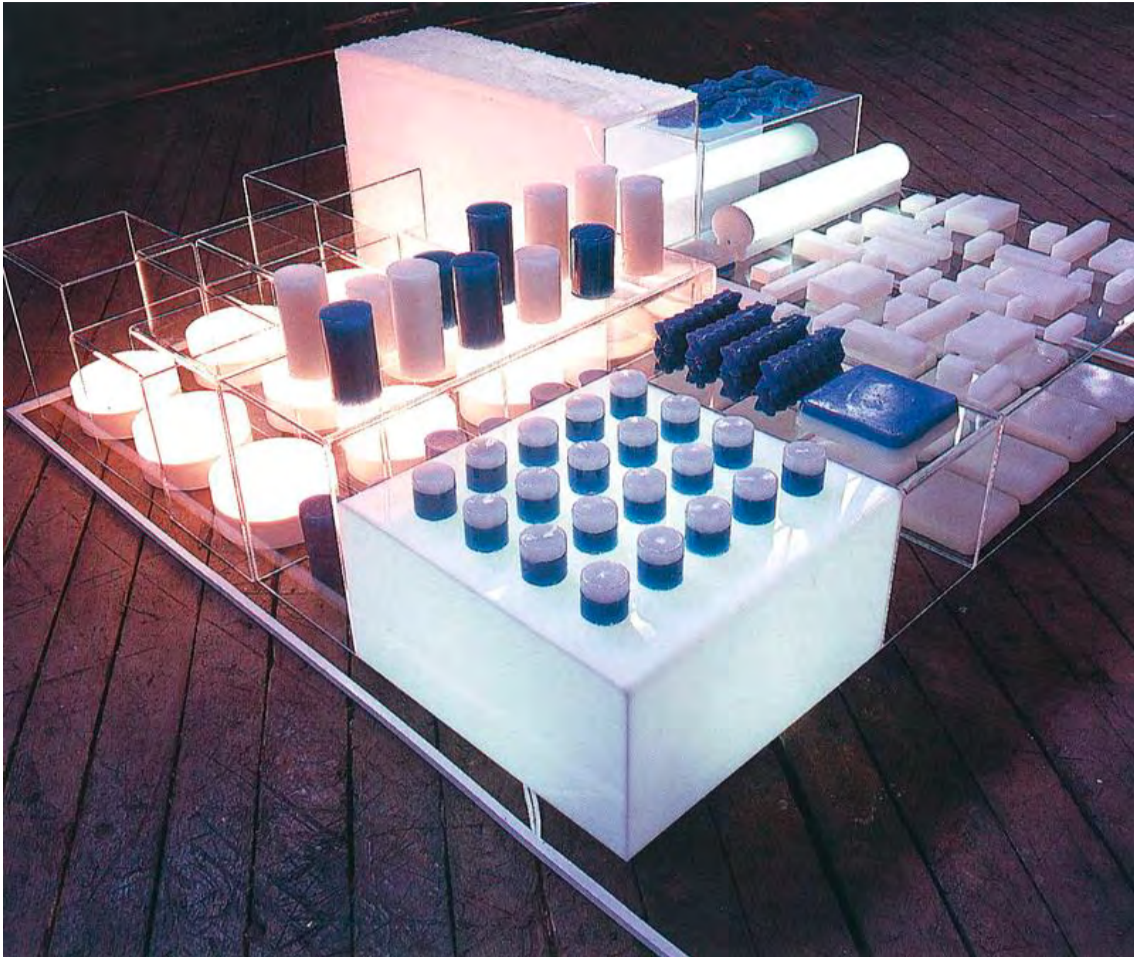


DANIEL MALONE, Asian Driver, 1996, installation view, Fiat car headlights, car battery, black polythene, enamel paint, sponsorship flag, dimensions variable, courtesy the artist.

Recently, Malone has exhibited aspects of Asian culture - including himself as 'Asian' - drawing upon that culture's most visible signs: advertisements, commercial posters and other strongly defined emblems of public presence, such as flags and large text. Once placed together they activate a tension between their received meanings, their interaction as cultural and social symbols. This is aptly displayed in Capital-ism is Dead, 1997, a window installation at Auckland gallery Teststrip, where Malone re-cast the Korean flag by melding the I Ching symbol of the flag with the logo and colours of the Pepsi Corporation. The viewer was forced to read accompanying text, 'blu and red is ded', upside down. With colour itself polemical, the work was a satire on the corporate jingle and the agitprop slogan.

**Kum's cultural presentations are a more homely orientalism, her eye catching the familiar rather than the exotic. At the same time she problematises the local, alluding to a non-existent and imagined hyphen.**

The word Orient is derived from the Latin oriens, meaning rising, or rising sun. For the opening of the Auckland gallery Fiat Lux in 1996, Malone painted a flag of a red rising sun on one wall and angled two Fiat car headlights onto it for the installation and performance, Asian Driver. Malone wittily and controversially registered one aspect of cultural integration, with the angled lights signalling a visual pun on slanted eyes. The Japanese Second World War flag, a powerful signifier here used as a generic stand-in for Asia, competed with a wall work, Drive, a version in negative of a 1990 text work by the New Zealand artist Julian Dashper, who referenced New Zealand's best-known artist, Colin McCahon. Here Dashper's Drive becomes 'orientalised' and re-contextualised for a different cultural moment in a critical engagement by Malone with New Zealand art historical precedents. That Malone is a non-Asian using Asian references argues against essentialist positions claiming to take primacy on questions of authenticity in culture and race.<sup>5</sup> Indeed the plurality in his work could be seen to challenge such notions, at the same time as it takes aim at prevalent signifiers of power.



DENISE KUM, *Adeva 629*, 1998, installation, acrylic sheet, ethyl vinyl acetate, liquid acrylic, lights and electrical components, dimensions variable. Photograph Christopher Smee.

While Malone might just as easily cease his foray into Asian culture, for Denise Kum it has been constant in her work. In early installations, such as *devoted Victuals*, 1993, and *Sauce Box*, 1994, materials were adopted for their distillation of known and interpretative readings of Chinese food, and included substances such as fat and oil, as well as chicken feet, lotus leaves and soy sauce. These temporary installations with their degenerative materials discuss cultural presentation and consumption, using the language of the takeaway, the retail outlet and the museum display. Kum also experimented with chemical and industrial products - potentially hazardous substances that give an edge of disturbance to her work - to critically negotiate manufacturing and domestic production in a dynamic of attraction and repulsion.

The strategic use of colour and tactile shapes in Kum's recent sculptures has intensified this dynamic. Like a relief model of a modernist city, *Adeva 629*, 1998, displayed blue and white acetate objects created from moulds of such things as kitchenware, a 1950s doorbell and a small porcelain vase, replicating the mundane and rendering it sensuous, exciting to touch and to taste, especially because of the display-stand mode of presentation. But like all utopian models, this cityscape came at a cost. Its wares were potentially lethal, with their blue colour, according to Safety Standard categories, denoting poison and warning us of toxicity. Things are not what they seem in Kum's critique of the political (and domestic) economy.



DENISE KUM, *Fabergé*, 1996, installation, lipstick on glass, dimensions variable, courtesy the artist.

Kum has also shown a fascination with architectural surfaces and patterning and, like her use of everyday objects and processes, this comes from more than one cultural source. Visits to Las Vegas and Los Angeles consolidated her interest in pastiche and she has researched ornamentation in generic modernist aesthetics. In *Fabergé*, 1996, an installation in the shopfront of Teststrip, Kum used various shades of pink lipstick to draw a broad rectangular grid on the window. Located at the heart of Auckland's sex industry, the lipstick grid became a trace, a remainder of forbidden pleasures. An artists' exchange to Hong Kong in 1996 produced *Rich*, an installation that drew upon local domestic products such as security-grille doors, wall panels and commercial mahjong blocks: materials chosen for their geometric patterning and brilliant surfaces, but also for their value as signifiers of that city's social fabric. While Chinese cultural signifiers reside in Kum's work, their prominence, or recognition of their presence, depends on one's point of view, on whose cultural shades one is looking through. One of the aims of the traditional orientalist is to recreate for himself the Orient - the foreign - at home. But Kum's cultural presentations are a more homely orientalism, her eye catching the familiar rather than the exotic. At the same time she problematises the local, alluding to a nonexistent and imagined hyphen. If this arises out of Bhaba's third space, as the range of references Kum uses implies, then it is a space in which she is free 'to negotiate and translate cultural identities in a discontinuous intertextuality of cultural difference'.<sup>6</sup> Thus for Kum, Malone and Tan typically Chinese or Asian signifiers are used to unsettle established meanings and to question the claims of authenticity. This has led to an active critique of the institutional frameworks in which these artists work.



DENISE KUM, devoted Victuals, 1993 (detail) installation, hot-food warmer, metal trolleys, fat, glass, heat lamps, chicken feet, lotus roots, fungus, bean-curd, dimensions variable. Photograph Gavin Hopkins.

A discussion of post-orientalist strategies in New Zealand should not pass without mentioning the fate of 'The Oriental Room' exhibition in which Yuk King Tan presented *Showbusiness*. Curated by Jacob Faull, the exhibition of ten emerging New Zealand artists was held within the permanent exhibits space of the Asian Hall. One of the intentions of the exhibition was to intervene in the logic of the museum's own conventions and rhetoric of display, and many of the artists addressed orientalist concerns in a critical fashion. Along with Tan, Daniel Malone was also included. He presented *Slant Eyes*, a rhomboidal museum cabinet skewed to replicate the shape of two yin and yang Fukien porcelain vases on display inside. This work, as did many of the others in the exhibition, also served to highlight the limitations of the museum's own modes of representation and selection when it comes to race and culture, a skewed vision that is predominantly monocultural and homogeneous. 'The Oriental Room' must have got something right for it quickly became too hot to handle, and the museum prematurely and dictatorially closed the exhibition without adequate or specific explanation. The museum's action only served to confirm its oppressive ideology, which was one point of the intervention, and 'The Oriental Room' became something of a cause célèbre for supporters of the contemporary scene.

While it appears that some institutions are determined to take entrenched positions, and while there is much to decry in New Zealand concerning cultural and racial conditions, there exists, nonetheless, some space for artists such as these to contribute to a healthy dialogue, be it bicultural or multicultural, and to produce work whose vitality is, in fact, partly generated by these conditions.

<sup>1</sup> Homi K. Bhaba, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994. <sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 34. <sup>3</sup> A term taken from Gao Minglu, in *Inside Out- New Chinese art*, exhibition catalogue, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, 1998. <sup>4</sup> Other artists could include Luise Fong, Terry Urbahn, Peter Robinson and Bill Hammond. <sup>5</sup> This may be relevant in the context of the debate on the appropriation of Maori culture which has taken place in New Zealand this decade. <sup>6</sup> Bhaba, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

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