

**1,000 Words or a Picture: Could Poetry be a Contemporary Art?**

A **ka mate ka ora** colloquium

INVITATION

- 1.1 You are invited to submit either '1,000 words' or 'a picture' to issue #7 of *Ka Mate Ka Ora*.
- 1.2 The format for this issue will be a montage of these contributions to create a virtual colloquium round the proposition.
- 2.1 Various aspects of poetry activity could be addressed: writing, publishing, other forms of presentation, reviewing, critiquing, clarifying, theorizing.
- 2.2 Problems of the use of poetry such as representation, nonsense, and presentation, saying and showing, might equally be encompassed.
- 3.1 What a picture is depends on how you use that word.
- 3.2 Maybe a word is a thing that poetry can speak of isomorphically.
- 4.1 All contributions will be of equal value
- 4.2 Contributions will be refereed

“The picture is a model of reality”

“What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence”

“What can be shown cannot be said” - Ludwig Wittgenstein



THE PICTURE IS A MODEL OF REALITY, THE POEM IS TOO

Styrofoam, invented in the USA in the early 1940s by the Dow Chemical Company was to become, in the form of a simple cup, an iconic model of reality that is totally ‘twentieth-century’; so portable, so light, so throwaway, so versatile and utterly suited to a fast-paced world.

I want to present two poems that complicate the picture of the cup. Poems that make almost entirely different pictures yet faithfully avow the cup as part of the postmodern era.

The first poem, written in 1990, is by the Australian poet, Ken Bolton:

## Timeless Moment (Little Cup Sestina)

a true account of talking to a styrofoam cup, one night,  
outside the university architecture department

*for David Saunders & Bruno Taut*

Little styrofoam cup  
I really like you:  
in my mind's idea.  
That sort of  
round, inflated look  
astronauts have

in that pearly light they have  
inevitably to get photographed in, cup,  
a look  
you take almost with you,  
wherever you go, the look of  
a thing to which illusions don't stick: the Idea

of the future as a rosy thing, the idea  
that a sort of 1910 visionary German architect might have  
had ("shining cities of  
the night," for example), little cup,  
you don't support. You  
look grubby no matter how clean you look.

The look  
of shading, where you turn away from the light, cross-hatching  
can't suggest: the idea  
of clean and dark as a continuum you  
have at your shady edges, & have  
in any light, is like a smudge! Little cup,  
you are so resolutely the repository of

so many things you never wished to be the repository of.  
Most of them negative(!) I like your look,  
I think you are alright. Cup,  
Roland Barthes says: farce is the negation of the idea  
of materialist hope (cf. Vico, Marx & others). Have  
you heard of that? It is the notion, in your case, that you

repeat the idea represented by Cup (you  
are one!), like farce repeats the idea of  
tragedy-minus meaning, noble meaning. The idea the Bauhaus might have  
had: about good design both being, & symbolising, The Future-you look  
like you say nix to that. The idea  
of you it is said, is degree zero, where zero means "32 below"-emotionally

like 'cryonics for the brain', not that I don't like you.  
What do you say, cup?

"I like you too-cup to human-you  
have a clear idea of my status as replacement of  
the Table & the Chair, as philosophical exemplars of reality, thru  
my look, real and artificial, & so reminding, comfortably, of  
Progress. Well I guess I don't remind of that, & that's what  
you're saying. You say, Don't worry but. And I like that.  
I'm useful too-did you forget? Probably you didn't.  
Maybe you should have a Coke out of me, if you have  
enough money. Do you have?"  
"Stop there!" I said. "Yes I do," I said, "I have."

A decade later, in the multifarious jumble of poetic anomie and experiment of early twenty-first century post-modernism, the US poet Brenda Hillman's poem 'Styrofoam Cup' rewrote John Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. Unlike Bolton, Hillman doesn't embrace the little cup nor does she question, philosophically, its form, its function, its artificiality - instead, she defiantly constructs, from Keatsian traces, a short and witty anti-ode. She hurls the phrase 'thou still unravished' back two centuries to the young poet, a man of his own times, -  
'Beauty is truth, truth beauty," - that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.'  
said John Keats. And the contemporary urn, beautiful or not, is made of chemicals, says Brenda Hillman.

### **Styrofoam Cup**

thou still unravished thou  
  
thou, thou bride  
  
thou unstill,  
  
thou unravished unbride  
  
unthou unbride

When I chip away distractedly at a styrofoam cup am I somehow unthouing an unbride?

### **Works cited**

Bolton, Ken. *Sestina to the Centre of the Brain*. Adelaide, SA: Little Esther, 1990.

Hillman, Brenda. *Cascadia*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2001.

Keats, John. *The Complete Poems*. Ed. John Barnard. Middlesex, UK: Penguin, 1973

REBUS

I am trying to find out where and how a certain New Zealand poet has been anthologized in recent years when I come across, on the Amazon site, the hundred most commonly used words in *An Anthology of New Zealand Poetry in English*, edited by Jenny Bornholdt, Gregory O'Brien and Mark Williams (OUP, 1997). Some of these words—*Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, University, Zealand*—are clearly residual artefacts drawn from the introduction and/or the biographies of the poets represented and so don't come from the poems; there are probably likewise others—*book, born, new, press*—that don't belong but, short of eviscerating the text, there's no way of knowing, so I leave them on a list of ninety-five that now reads:

*across / again / air / another / away / between / birds / black / blue / body / book / born / came / children / cold / come / dark / day / dead / death / door / down / dream / earth / even / eyes / face / fall / far / first / go / god / green / hands / head / heart / hills / home / house / know / land / last / leaves / let / lie / life / light / little / live / long / look / love / man / may / men / moon / morning / mountain / new / night / nothing / now / old / once / people / place / poems / press / rain / red / river / road / say / sea / see / sings / sky / small / still / stone / sun / take / things / think / though / time / tree / two / water / white / wind / words / world / years / yet*

It's hard to resist the thought that this list conceals as it reveals an ur-poem, a base template for the imaginings of those represented in the anthology and, by extension, all those who have written poems in English in New Zealand. There are in this ur poem children but no adults; men but no women; black, blue, green, red, white but no brown, orange or yellow; cold but no hot; old but no young; love but no hate; time without space, stone without rock, rain without tears, death without birth ... sun and moon are both here though, dark and light, night and day, sky, mountain, river and sea. Some of the sequences seem spookily felicitous: *hands / head / heart / hills / home / house*; while others—*nothing / now / old / once*—hint at a residual meaning that, like a ghost fragment from Samuel Beckett, can't quite be recovered. The commonest word (339 occurrences) is *down*.

I post the full list on my weblog and, sure enough, a reader can't resist making a poem out of it. He's a man from Scotland with an Indian name but I know nothing else about him; and, unfortunately, his poem lacks the luminous strangeness of the unedited list. This perhaps means that the ur poem is non-negotiable, is analogous to a Chomskyan deep structure generative of New Zealand poems without constituting anything other than a list of archetypal resonances that act upon our peculiar psyche. *Rain / red / river / road*, for instance, could be taking us along a muddy clay track somewhere in Northland to a bach where we might at last *cherchez la femme*. Or not.

One of the notable things about the list is that, while it looks like a slice of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, any poems generated from it would be relentlessly elemental and rigorously anti-urban in focus. They would all be, more or less, landscapes. You could conjure Georg Trakl style poems from it at will, for instance, but a Frank O'Hara imitation is not remotely possible. Or, to change the focus, you could certainly parody James K Baxter using these ninety-odd words but not Alan Brunton or Leigh Davis. If I were teaching a creative writing class, I think, I would first ask the students to compose a poem using all of the words on the list; and then to try to write the same poem using none of them.

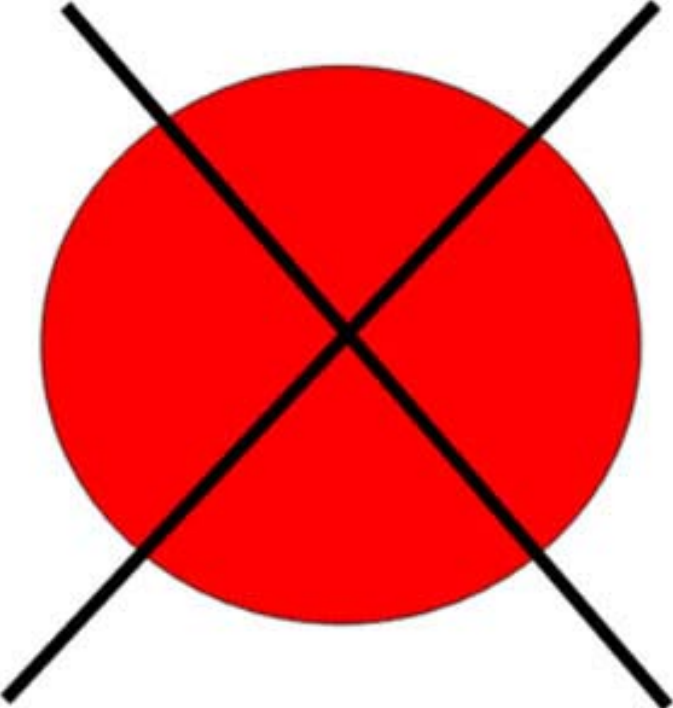
Naturally I can't resist the first exercise but, oddly, can't bring myself to alter the order of the words; the resulting simple play with lineation doesn't satisfy me and moreover, like the Scottish Indian's attempt, somehow diminishes the plain alphabetical list. What I would really like to do is read the words aloud, not to myself in the privacy of my flat, but to a live audience on some public occasion. I feel that if I were to do this, the piece might come across as highly ironic, even satiric, while at the same time making a performance that is deeply moving. Perhaps it is one of those rare found poems that partake of caricature and authenticity, that is risible and meaningful in equal degrees.

So that, although my first instinct was to read the list as anachronistic, absurdly solemn, fatally skewed towards the portentous lyric utterance—*come / dark / day / dead / death / door / down / dream / earth*—there is something about it that I can't dismiss, something irreducible, even incontrovertible. It is in the end a kind of rebus: *a representation of words in the form of pictures or symbols, often presented as a puzzle*. This might sound contradictory but isn't necessarily so; for the list is made up of units that resemble words but might in fact act more like tesserae, the chips of faience or marble or smalti that go to make up a mosaic. If you could solve this puzzle, I think, if you could assemble this sonorous mosaic, you would then have an answer to the question as to whether (or not) poetry could be a contemporary art: *across / again / air / another / away ...*

**Sue Fitchett:**

OX ART

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**Brian Flaherty**

I BOUGHT HATS AND SHOES.IT WAS A WILD NIGHT

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[link](#)

Tony Green

LONG CATTLE PROD

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**Paul Hartigan**

THE STOLEN HEART OF RABELAIS GARGANTUA, 2009

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David Howard

LA MERCED

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**Lesley Kaiser and John Barnett**

A PICTURE / A THOUSAND WORDS

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## A THOUSAND WORDS

In her 1964 essay ‘Against interpretation’, the critic Susan Sontag issued a clarion call: ‘In place of a hermeneutics,’ she wrote, ‘we need an erotics of art.’ (14) This was uttered in strong opposition to the idea that art was representational and hence required interpretation, an approach, she felt, that sundered content from form. ‘By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that,’ wrote Sontag, ‘one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable, comfortable.’ (8) Elsewhere in the essay she noted that ‘To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world – in order to set up a shadow world of “meanings.”’ (7) ‘It doesn’t matter whether artists intend, or don’t intend, for their works to be interpreted[,]’ (9) Sontag added, quoting D. H. Lawrence to good effect: ‘Never trust the teller, trust the tale.’ (9)

Sontag’s essay was written before evolutionary biology and evolutionary psychology had become established in the way they now are (Richard Dawkins’s *The selfish gene* wasn’t published until 1976, if we take that as a marker of the mainstream emergence of the modern evolutionary synthesis). But if we read Sontag’s comments through this lens we see how very modern her take is (and see its affinity with Henry Flynt’s concept of ‘brend’[1]): the ‘erotics of art’ metaphor implies that we approach a cultural production with a pre-set for taste; this pre-set is somatic, of the body, that is to say, but not in the nature of an ‘idea’; this pre-set is genetic in origin and so on. Sontag is discussing what happens at the interface with cultural productions: what the human organism does with its pre-set in-place preferences in conjunction with, say, a work of art (keeping to Sontag’s language). The experience we have is something not reducible to a discussion of content and meaning, but is something more in the nature of a sensual encounter. Interpretation applies to content only, and since content is not all that comprises the experience of encountering a work of art, and since the experience of a work of art is sensual in nature, interpretation (hermeneutics) should therefore be superseded by ‘an erotics of art’.

We are biological beings, and so any encounter with a work of art is, as far as we are concerned, a biological encounter: there is, after all, no way to experience anything free of our organismic constraints and pre-programming. Our experience is intuitive, visceral, and this is contrasted by Sontag with the intellectual (the interpretive). There is, of course, a place for both, but Sontag

underlines the fact that the visceral is primary, because what happens, in fact, *is* visceral: the pre-set to individual taste leads us when experiencing a work of art to react at the level of the body, and the body, we might say, knows a good thing when it sees it.

It's not that simple, of course. Following the initial encounter with a work of art, the mind kicks in, and as soon as, say, someone asks us what we think of a particular work, away we go: we offer up an opinion, an appraisal, and then proceed to defend it should it come under attack and so on. But this 'intellectual' level approach is secondary: it grows out of the original somatic encounter, which is as it is, regardless of any intellectual opinions we may have, opinions that may, in fact, run counter to how we feel: if we're trying to toe a critical party line, for instance. The mind follows the body, as expression follows touch, but it is the body not the mind that knows.

Individual taste then, has a pre-set, and initially declares itself at the sensual level and not the intellectual. The pre-set over time becomes conditioned, by the method of comparison – this is compared with that and that is found to be 'better', for example – and by the way we say that taste becomes informed: as one understands more about the work, the artist, their contexts and so on. For instance, Rainer Werner Fassbinder's film *The marriage of Maria Braun* could be viewed as a Douglas Sirk-inspired romantic melodrama harking back to the acting styles, lighting and cinematography of the 1950s in the manner of homage. But an understanding of the post-war situation in Germany tends to make one view the film as a searing critique of a society in denial of the Third Reich years, a society in which people manipulate each other and, as it were, prostitute themselves in order to survive, and a society wherein the cost of survival has been the erosion of common values like decency and openness. This conditioning of taste, its 'informedness', is a follow-on, however. Unless coercion is applied we don't tend to follow up on an encounter with a given work unless our pre-set is so geared. Thus our informed and better and indeed 'good' taste is dependent on biological pre-set and reaction. One's taste is truly one's own: it is a function of the biological being, within the context of the natural world, one actually is. And this is a somatic matter: a sensual affair. Discussion of content and talk of meaning belong to a different context – that of chatter, formal and otherwise – and their relation to the original encounter with the work, though it may be enlightening, and a pleasure in itself, is

essentially parasitic. ‘A map is not the territory,’ as the philosopher Alfred Korzybski has said (750). Or, to put it another way, the concept, the map, is not the thing itself.

To summarise:

- 1 Our taste is a function of our biology and of our organismic placement in the natural world.
- 2 We are pre-set in terms of individual taste (brend).
- 3 The initial encounter with a cultural production is sensual rather than ‘intellectual’.
- 4 Taste is conditioned by the comparative method, as this cultural production is compared to that.[2]
- 5 The concept of a given thing is not the thing itself.

Works cited

Flynt, Henry. ‘ART or BREND?’, 1968. Retrieved 16 April 2009 from Henry Flynt Philosophy <http://www.henryflynt.org/aesthetics/artbrend.html>

Korzybski, Alfred. ‘A non-Aristotelian system and its necessity for rigour in mathematics and physics,’ a paper presented before the American Mathematical Society at the New Orleans, Louisiana meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 28 December 1931. Reprinted in *Science and sanity: an introduction to non-Aristotelian systems and general semantics*. 5th ed. Fort Worth, Texas: Institute of General Semantics, 1994 (first published 1933).

Sontag, Susan. ‘Against interpretation’, *Evergreen Review*, 1964. Reprinted in *Against interpretation and other essays*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York, 1966. Picador edition, 2001.

1. Flynt: 'The essence of a just-liking is that in it, you are not aware that the object you value is less personal to you than your very valuing.

'These just-likings are your "brend." [...]

'Even though brend is defined exclusively in terms of what you like, it is not necessarily solitary. The definition simply recognizes that valuing is an act of individuals; that to counterpose the likes of the community to the likes of the individuals who make it up is an ideological deception.' Published 1968.

2. Thus likes are subject to change.

WRITING A POEM ABOUT A PICTURE OR TWO OR THREE OR 4

Writing a poem about a picture depicting someone else's moment/s on a journey later written about, one of which has been pictured in a painting by another in another century, was my challenge. The new moment isn't pictorial as such, but a white canvas with three words scribbled seemingly fast on it, that gives the isomorphic sense of the speed and excitement of the take-off moment of travel. This to me is the poem in itself. I saw it too in the tumbled mass of images my head had from the scribbled words "Goethe in Italy" when I walked around the Kunsthaus Art Gallery in Zürich and Cy Twombly's painting (1) speedily leapt in reverse image which my brain reversed back for me to see it, into my un-expecting eyes. As a thought, the phrase was a poem complete. It gave me such a kick, I wanted to translate the mass into words that would both bring Tischbein's image of Goethe to mind as well as Andy Warhol's psychedelic print of part of Tischbein's picture i.e. of Goethe's head and travelling hat (not to mention subliminal images of Marilyn Monroe and the Campbell's soup can hovering) and also at the same time to excise it, because in Twombly's new image, they weren't there, but were very possibly in many a viewer's mind. I wanted also to make a picture of the colour and shapes I knew of as being Italy-to-me-while-journeying, as well as to show in words as unpainted as possible, the way it felt to me the painter had seen or painted his picture, because of the roughness, rawness, readiness and speed of travel over the canvas of his strokes, which also seemed part of the isomorphs that made up the poem.

Besides, I wanted to put into my poem three words from the third sentence (2) of Goethe's original German rendition of his *Italian Journey* because these are so redolent of the furniture of travel of the time and somehow untranslatable. A *Mantelsack* is a cloak bag and a *Dachsranzen* is a badger-fur-lined leather travel bag, both precursors of the contemporary nylon or leather coat sack and packsack, while a *Postchaise* is, of course, a fast travelling carriage. At this moment in his report of 3rd September 1786, Goethe does not mention the travelling hat which is conceived by Tischbein, and then again by Warhol, and which I picture we always picture Goethe as wearing, whether he did or not. In the first sentence of *Italienische Reise*, Goethe tells us he got up at three in the morning in Karlsbad just six days after his birthday to slip away before anyone could catch him, as they might have used post-party celebrations-in-mind as an excuse to hold him back. His sense of urgency, delight, excitement, wonder, relief at being secretly away at last was my background reading recalled by memory the split-second I saw Twombly's words in white which stopped me in my tracks; then, looking further around the gallery walls, I saw

Twombly had painted a series of pictures that might be, for example, the bushes flashing by or a mountain seen out of the corner of the *Postchaise* as Goethe's carriage dashed deep and deeper into Italy from Zwota on the beautiful day that revealed itself as the mist lifted, or on those following it. Two multi-part paintings painted at Bassano in 1978 inspired by Goethe's travel memoir.

Really to get the picture, you'd better go to the Kunsthau in Zürich and look at Twombly's series to see what I mean and see whether it strikes you the way it does me. I'd be fascinated to know how you picture it all. If it helps to while away your journey, here's the poem I wrote down in one go after I'd got back from a trip from Frankfurt (Goethe's birthplace) to Florence in 2008, the first time I'd revisited Italy for years. I couldn't wait to get (into the *Postchaise* and) there either.

### **'Goethe in Italy'**

*after Cy Twombly's painting series "Goethe in Italy" (1978), Kunsthau, Zürich*

No trace of Tischbein's too long left leg  
cloak, travelling hat  
nor the Ozymandias  
ruins sands

no image of J.W.  
or his sketches  
or the fabled '*Italienische Reise*'  
incised.

On a painted white postcard shape  
enlarged to a wall canvas  
over-painted & scrubbed  
rubbed out & re-scribbled in blue  
and in black re-written over-painted  
in white & scribbled again

### *GOETHE IN ITALY*

(equally fabled?)  
written fast in a sure

unkempt hand & almost re-erased.

You jump seeing it  
does it say what is says

your mind is cypresses & tall  
narrow houses with small windows  
shutters, soft cream & brown  
campaniles, hills & the light  
of spreading cedars like  
the Buddha could've sat under  
(if not a Bodhi)  
keeping cool in illumination.

Cy paints earth browns & greens  
in a switch of brush-like  
speedy bush – he leaves white shapes  
right where you want him to  
for storms & your eyes to breathe  
his thrill at the words  
you're old friends meeting  
for the first time.

*Mantelsack and Dachsrannen*  
thrown into a *Postchaise*  
you've taken off  
with them both  
all the way south.

Note: J.H.W Tischbein's portrait "*Goethe in der römischen Campagna*" (1786-1787) is in the Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main

## References

1. *Goethe in Italy*. Two multi-part paintings by Cy Twombly, Bassano, 1978. Kunsthaus, Zürich.
2. “Ich warf mich ganz allein, nur einen Mantelsack und Dachsranzen aufpackend, in eine Postchaise und gelangte halb nach acht Uhr nach Zwota, an einem schönen stillen Nebelmorgen.” Eintrag vom 3 September 1786, *Italienische Reise*. J.W. von Goethe. Insel Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1976. “Quite alone I threw myself, my cloak bag and packsack into a carriage and by half-past eight had reached Zwota on a beautiful, still and misty morning.” Entry for 3 September 1786, *Italian Journey*. J. W. von Goethe (my translation).

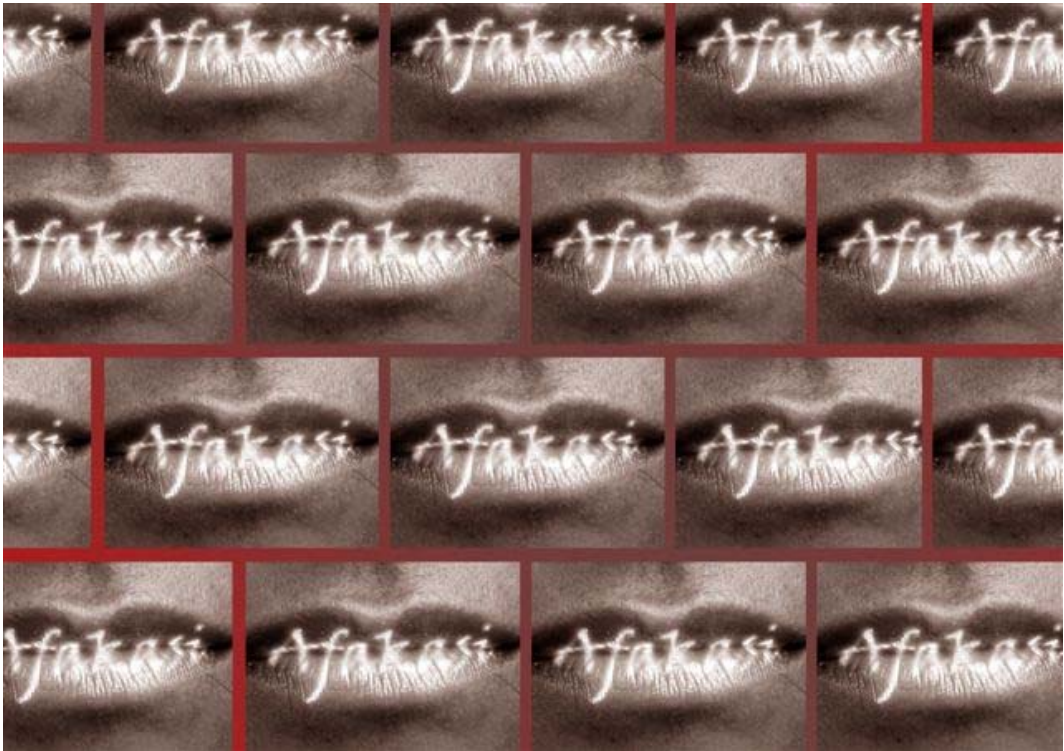
Richard Killeen

UNTITLED

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AN ALPHABET FOR TWO

When Marcel Duchamp took a urinal and reconstituted it as sculpture by adding the title **Fountain** , 1917, he implicated language in the construction of contemporary art ; and signified the possibility that words , like plumbing fixtures , could be readymades . By providing a new interpretation for a familiar noun , he made visible not words or their meanings , but the delicate relationship between the two .

Our cultural authority on words and meanings is the dictionary ; which is also a readymade treasury of art materials . This suggested one possibility for the conjoining of poetry and contemporary art : I sent a poem in the form of an alphabetical list to Murray Edmond . Unexpectedly , he responded in kind by composing a poem of complementary words , each in some way inspired by its alphabetical equivalent on the first list . This is part of the enjoyment of being a member of a community of practitioners : receiving such gifts .

What Murray gave me included more than the pleasure of his verbal adroitness and wit ; by sited me as reader at the point of intersection where his words change the intentions of mine , Murray enabled me to appreciate how I had constructed my relationship between words and meaning . This led to a third list , a poem to evince how Murray's words changed my own thinking . Reading down each list reveals a poem while reading the lists together , and reading across the rows of words , yields a surplus ; in this surplus is another consideration of Duchamp's practice .

allusive	assure	alluring
billow	brindle	bloom
caesura	cult	cleave
dust	dimmer	dream
exult	earn	eternity
feather	fonder	fallen
gift	gone	grieve
hover	heather	harrow
impulse	illusiv	innocent
junction	jamb	jealousy
kindle	kale	kowhai
lambent	lei	laughter

map	moribund	memory
nuance	nutiation	nictation
origin	over	obviate
prospect	pennyworth	peer
quest	quasher	quicken
rein	rust	redux
shimmer	shift	sinuous
transpire	tincture	tinglish
usher	ululate	unveil
veil	vein	vernal
wonder	willow	wilderness
xeno	xylem	xystus
yearn	yap	yare
zenith	zest	zoozoo

A poem is a text ; as readers , we tend to follow it like a map , trying to determine how its material topography delineates the writer's construction of meaning . But in this combined work meaning is performative , occuring between writers , between poems ; these lists represent the space of meaning as topology or the dynamics of movement .

This is network space , through which meaning is transiting ; it is not located in the text but is generated by hypertextual connections , which can be both random and linguistically or subjectively ordered .The work itself is an event ; enfolded within but not identical to the text object .

For Duchamp , modern art needed to interrogate and exceed the ocular ; he uses language to confront and confound our usual ways of seeing . Poetry too is more than a visual artform : the voice resonating in the cavity of the body before entering the domain of the audience ; the structure of the stanza referring , through the Italian derivation of the word , to a chamber , a room to be entered . Poetry is a spatial artform , not confined to the finite dimensions of the page .

An innovation in printing enabled Mallarme to use the field of the page to represent the space of thought in **Un Coup de Des** , 1895 ; perhaps one way we can locate our writing practice in the materiality of contemporary life is to work with this new experience of space . The network , the mutability of meaning , creative collaboration ; this is a current locality in Aotearoa .

## IS THERE A FUTURE FOR THE POETRY BLOG?

Most people's response to the term "Poetry Blog" is to think of it as an electronic notebook where you post poems as you write them. And that's certainly a practical use of the medium. I can't help feeling, though, that it doesn't really fully exploit the existence of abundant, flexible, easily-accessible (and indexable) free space on the Internet.

What's more, there are a number of still-contentious copyright issues over whether an editor – or competition judge – might not perceive these online postings as "prior publication," especially if your blog's freely available. How can this *not* be regarded as publication (= making public), albeit *self*-publication, in fact?

So what other uses can be found for the poetry blog?

The facilities freely on offer include:

- static images
- hyperlinks
- sound or video files

With these at your disposal, you can easily illustrate your poems with appropriate images, link to other sites with analogous material, or post clips of yourself or others reading or performing. In short, the interactive electronic performance poem is now no more of an unattainable dream than home-movies in the days of Super-8.

My own further suggestions for simple, practical uses of the of the average blog would include:

### **1. The discussion forum**

This can be illustrated by the following post:

<http://mairangibay.blogspot.com/2006/08/coromandel.html>

on my own blog *The Imaginary Museum*

<http://mairangibay.blogspot.com/>

Matt Harris, a Creative Writing-teaching colleague, sent me an email outlining a class discussion he'd had of one of my poems. The students had a number of queries about it, which I tried to answer as best I could. This in its turn sparked a certain amount of comment from other readers of the blog. One (Olivia Macassey) remarked of my rather laissez-faire attitude towards warring interpretations:

*I'm reminded of how, when I was in high school, everyone liked to do their art projects on this one particular NZ artist because he always told students they could say whatever they wanted about his work and he would back them up.*

All in all, it seemed to show how comments can grow to dwarf the original blog entry.

## **2. The translation workshop**

The Internet may be the ideal medium for poetic translation (or transformation – whichever you prefer). The existence of abundant linguistic resources online (complete foreign language texts / line-by-line cribs for classic authors) can help you flesh out your version of a poem with the aid of a few judicious hyperlinks.

In the case of Ovid, for example, I was able to justify my rather free interpretation of some of his exile poems, “Ovid in Otherworld”:

<http://ovidius-naso.blogspot.com/2008/04/ovid-in-otherworld.html>

by providing a link (first) to a complete Latin text:

<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/ovid.html>

then to Tony Kline's complete, literal, freely-downloadable translation of the whole of Ovid:

<http://www.tonykline.co.uk/PITBR/Latin/Ovidexilehome.htm>

I myself found that the perils of thus encountering one of your own heroes online cannot be underestimated, when I posted a series of Paul Celan translations with a mini-essay attempting to justify some of the freer contrasts and juxtapositions I'd permitted myself:

<http://mairangibay.blogspot.com/2007/03/meeting-paul-celan.html>

It came as a bit of a surprise to receive, within days, the following comment from Pierre Joris, one of the most eminent commentators on Celan's work:

*Maybe I have spent too much time these last 40 years thinking about Celan & translating his work, &*

*maybe Celan's work has been too essential for my own writing for me to have a detached view on this, but the association of PC with Britney Spears makes me shudder ...*

It was even more interesting, though, to see how quickly others waded into the debate. It wasn't vital to me (or, I'm sure, to Pierre Joris) to *win* the exchange – what was important was to expound the reasoning behind so apparently frivolous a montage as that of Britney Spears with Paul Celan.

### **3. The reprinted editorial or review**

How many people actually read poetry magazines nowadays? And yet they're still seen as the principal way of establishing a reputation in the field.

A lot of unsung work goes into keeping this archipelago of specialised print-outlets in existence. Most poets must have worked on one at one time or another – others have gone further, developing an almost missionary zeal for helping out beginners with judicious editorial advice and encouragement.

There doesn't seem to me to be any harm in posting your own editorials or reviews online after they've appeared in a magazine. After all, if the views you were outlining were worth putting in print in the first place, why shouldn't they reach the far larger audience accessible on the Internet? I'd venture to suggest, in fact, that far fewer volumes of reprinted essays and reviews will be required in future.

Long-meditated, carefully-revised books such as T. S. Eliot's *The Sacred Wood* (1920) or Wallace Stevens' *The Necessary Angel* (1951) will always retain their value, but I doubt many would dispute that far too many volumes of tattered-up prefaces and reviews have been pumped out in the past, when the best of their contents could simply have been posted online.

At any rate, that was the reasoning I followed when I put up the editorial for my guest issue of *Landfall* [214: *Open House* (2007)], supplementing it with a *Poetry NZ* essay in which I'd enlarged on some of the same themes:

[\[http://mairangibay.blogspot.com/2007/08/landfall-214.html\]](http://mairangibay.blogspot.com/2007/08/landfall-214.html).

Once again, it was interesting to see how many comments this inspired. Some points were more obscure than I'd meant to make them; others, however, came across loud and clear.

Rightly or wrongly, I felt it was a timely essay. Whether others agree is up to them. What's best about the Poetry Blog is how it can reflect the democracy of the web. You can measure the success of a site by the

number of hits it receives, but that's a simplistic criterion. What *I* like about the internet is the virtually limitless number of specialised – but non-exclusive – interest groups it can accommodate.

Surely that's an attractive enough picture to justify *this* thousand words?

2.2.3.1 (333 TYPES OF POETIC MIMESIS IN 999 WORDS)

Representation is a central issue of poetic language acts. It is keyed to argument or persuasion or seduction or nonsense or expression or reportage or surrealism or private experience or direct communication or description or abrasion or unpleasantness or revenge or reaction or exclusion or doctrine or blindness or singularity or blankness-with-a-color or hands holding or replication or mode envy or displacement or bodies or clothes or faces or voices or fingers or explosions or intimacy or rejection or entry or imbrication or bridges or gaps or dendrites or patterns or neutrality or genderlessness or bricolage or power or succumbing or agreement or schooling or fear or umbrage or florals or urbanity or undressing or predictability or surprise or corner-turning or the city or the country or tribal identity or security or assurance or acquiescence or community or connection or breaking out or unveiling or delving or insisting or believing or interrogating or relentlessness or interiority or extrusion or somasis or diegesis or intelligibility or allocating or clearing or invoking or desire or longing or tending or reaching or trans-temporalism or unearthing or deducing or fornicating or unhinging or singing or flattening or creasing or crinkling or berating or harking or haunting or lying or sighing or laughing or needling or asserting or bettering or belonging or ghettoizing or blue-printing or seizing or yielding or assizing or memorializing or promising or presenting or grammar lust or lavish preparation for infinite space or excruciating strip or replacement destruction or texting the body or positive negation or mystery training or suggestion or cultural assumption nodes or delirium tending or concretizing or enumerating or framing or holding-the-curtain or hammering the piano or setting up for god or homologizing or synonymizing or speaking-for or vindicating or escaping or pinning or purring or enjoying or enjoining or intoning or moaning or toying or honoring or dramatizing or reverting or excoriating or calling or chanting or picking the threads or warping or simulcasting or checkering or complaining or amazing or childing or commanding or swindling or decoding or processing or purging or fondling or tinkering or haggling or carving or re-doing or traveling or tendering or jazzing or arithmetizing or adoring or myth or stranding or arching or jimmying or woman or screen or counting or slowing or copying or inverting or murmuring or anchoring or pointillism or chiaroscuro or domestic wrangling or instanding or detailing surface or inscribing nakedness or archaic allusion jointures or fastening self-to-self or toggling disjunctures or suturing objects to limbs or crawling inside the body or applying one extreme to another or sieve-eyes or open-handedness or windy eloquence curtains or staring into the sun or other-self-blanking or animalizing or binding or preferring heavy words or imbuing the surroundings or making verbal islands or syllable caressing or paper-worshipping or anthropologizing or including everything or code switching or womb-focus or penis

syntax or inhabiting history via the supposition of a single subject or doing the moors for the old tongue or tracing the desk or universalizing one's own hands or tightening the genre weave or tracking with punctuation or twirling a maze or side-trips or parentheticals or hyphen-dragging or little-rooming or cultural entwining or using the microphone or swerving the screen or forwarding the code or three-dimensional multi-presenting graphemes or sound effects or reality bullets or grave adoration or gauze touch or bird dancing or mountain gorging or river emulation or star map or constellated equivocation or pillow rest or master leaning or list or blueprint or branches or veins or subway trajectories or palimpsest or spider web or cambium or epidermis or thread or museum piling or direct address or letter-touching or surfacing or positioning or fixation or infinite vex or blood ink or anonymity or scalping or world-roping or persona obsessing or grace with a smile on light graphemes or cutting coy image vulnerabilities or looping blood and ink together soundly or shining a calm light behind cultural trees or recycling the innards of words or mixing clay with a receptive verbal surface or assortment or undoing or presentness or embroidery or vacuity or resentment or twist or curling an animal's body in the shape of words or spitting coffee on the ground in letters or watching the page brim with water or negotiating or demarcation or implicating or underneathing or response or blanket coverage or removal or eyes or ears or finding the sidewalk with legs like a pen or stitching books across or howling in a justified screed or lolling in a cultural sofa pattern or crawling along the shore spreading ideas or filling entire rooms or mimicking witchery sounds or throwing a winch between centuries or making a map of what everyone says or prescription or directive or incommensurability or inventing a persona grid or traducing national documents or claiming a past or honoring a style or mystic photographs or morpheme lodgings or intralinear urban casements or using words as clasps the reader or bathing a particular or making an anaphora wall or writing to someone or slanting with dedication or prancing in interstices or conveying a right to be there or turning your mind into gears or hammering planks on clouds or kissing sophistry or insisting on the process or scalping reference of complacency or grazing on the crystal or dimensional strata or chalk or tablet or hidden words or disappearing ink or recipe or score or scar or pain field or floating petals or reading entrails or substituting objects for personal impulses or phrasal pas de deux or tying up reserves in single words or cramming the mouth tenderly full of letters or leaning on allusion's heavy sword or calling forth recognizable substances in a limited context or stroking the forehead of childhood or spreading one's flayed skin over one's idea of nationhood or sublime overreaching or teetering concrete with abstract terms or talking on the bus or signaling as if underwater or getting my mouth close to your ear and that's just Englishes now.

A word, or a thousand pictures?

## RĒINGA



a digital poem by Helen Sword

In Māori legend, Cape Rēinga is 'the place of leaping spirits', where departing souls fling themselves seaward, slide down the roots of an old pōhutukawa tree and begin their journey to the underworld.

My homage to *te rerenga wairua* brings together the ancient art of stained glass mosaic, the venerable poetic tradition of *ekphrasis* (cf Keats, Rilke, Yeats, Merrill, Sexton) and the transformative magic of digital imaging.

Enter the poem through the tree at the end of the world. To begin your journey, choose a sailboat. Explore the pōhutukawa blossoms; click on a new sailboat from time to time; and don't forget the moon. Every reader's pathway will create a different poem. To end your journey, leap away [click Exit].

[link](#)

SNAPSHOTS

‘1.1 You are invited to submit either “1,000 words” or “a picture” and

‘4.1 All contributions will be of equal value.’ (KMKO email).

Conclusion: A picture will be worth a thousand words. Or ‘A picture tells a story as well as a large amount of descriptive text’ (Martin). ‘[A] large amount’: some forms of the phrase claim it takes ten thousand words to equal a picture. The comparison has been around for more than a hundred years:

The idea that a picture can convey what might take many words to express was voiced by a character in Ivan S. Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons*, 1862:

"The drawing shows me at one glance what might be spread over ten pages in a book." (Martin)

But the expression became familiar through 20th century American advertising:

The earliest example that I can find is from the text of an instructional talk given by the newspaper editor Arthur Brisbane to the *Syracuse Advertising Men's Club*, in March 1911:

"Use a picture. It's worth a thousand words." (Martin)

It depends, though, on the kind of picture, the kinds of words. With that in mind I looked for poems that could ‘paint a picture’ in much less than a thousand words. One example is the following, by the Dutch poet Gerrit Kouwenaar (1923-):

gebeurtenis

Rokend een sigaret van blonde gestolen tabak  
sta ik op de landweg

hoe egypte zich mengt met zuring  
hoe windstille damp (nog onvergelykbaar  
met gifgas) de verboden geur  
als een kamer vasthoudt

hoe de populieren hun zilver tonen  
hoe de hemel eensklaps voorgoed van god ontdaan is

hoe de naam stilte zelfs te luid is  
hoe er niets gebeurt niets gebeurt  
hoe er volstrekt niets gebeurt –  
Gerrit Kouwenaar, *Vallende Stilte*, p. 78

Translation:

event

Smoking a cigarette of blond stolen tobacco  
I stand in the country lane

how egypt mingles with sorrel  
how wind-still haze (as yet not comparable  
with poison gas) retains like a room  
the forbidden odour

how the poplars show their silver  
how heaven suddenly forever is divested of god

how the name silence even is too loud  
how nothing happens nothing happens  
how absolutely nothing happens –

Number of words, in each version, 67. The image is simple enough: lone teenager in countryside, poplars, summer haze, cigarette smoke. What would not be visible in a picture of that scene are the details that make ‘event’ memorable: the forbidden action, the sudden insight or awareness of God’s non-existence, and the conclusion that this makes apparently no difference: nothing happens.

A.S Byatt, in *Portraits in Fiction*, describes the difference between a painted portrait and a written one as follows:

A portrait in a novel or a story may be a portrait of invisible things – thought processes, attractions, repulsions, subtle or violent changes in whole lives, or groups of lives. Even the description in visual language of a face or body may depend on being unseen for its force. (Byatt, 1)

She points out that any written portrait relies on ‘the endlessly varying visual images’ produced by the ‘constructive visualising work’ each reader does. She finds it distressing when publishers want to use images of real people to represent her fictional characters on book covers, because ‘it limits the readers’ imaginations’ (Byatt, 2).

This, I think, points to the crucial difference between visual images and written descriptions. How accurate do we want the picture to be? The young person in Kouwenaar’s poem is recognisable because of the event, not the physical setting. The event is more inner than outer, the illicit cigarette could be replaced by alcohol, pork, or blasphemy, depending on one’s cultural surroundings. The experience of rebellion, guilt, discovery and independence remains recognisable and invisible.

On the other hand, sometimes a picture can do clearly what any number of words would struggle to convey. Think of a map of the London underground. Description would be complex and useless. But the basic situation is relatively unchanging, in spite of fast trains and hurrying people. Kouwenaar uses ‘event’ as a title; something happens even if to an observer ‘nothing happens’. The element of time is added to the image, however short the moment.

Another fragment of time is considered in the next poem, also by Kouwenaar.

Het heffen van glazen  
met uiteenlopende inhoud  
en vooral de handbeweging  
die de bloody mary aan de lippen brengt  
wordt door de lichte luie en ongelooflijk  
sierlijke oceaandeining  
van zaterdag 7 november 1964  
sterk vereenvoudigd  
Gerrit Kouwenaar, *Vallende Stilte*, p. 88

Translation:

The lifting of glasses  
with diverse contents  
and above all the hand movement  
that brings the bloody mary to the lips  
becomes through the light lazy and incredibly  
graceful ocean swell  
of saturday 7 november 1964  
strongly simplified

The image of people at a bar on a ship is familiar enough to not need details of light, colours, distances. A painter or film director would have to make decisions on all such aspects, taking several choices out of the viewer's hands. The main idea is again a sudden awareness, here of two coinciding movements, the momentary, precise act of lifting glass to lips, and the large, endless undulation of ocean waves; adding the date only *seems* to particularise that movement. To show the same contrast and interaction would require a moving picture at least, and even then, I think, some remark or voice over would be necessary to convey the thought. Lost in translation: 'uiteenlopend' means literally 'dispersing', suggesting in this context the swirl of Brownian movement in a liquid.

The value of images or words depends, then, on the effect intended and the amount of information desired by the reader or viewer. Sometimes we want to be told, other times we like to feel intrigued or use our imagination.

Sources used:

Byatt, A. S. *Portraits in Fiction*. London: Random/Vintage, 2002

Kouwenaar, Gerrit. *Vallende Stilte: Een Keuze uit Eigen Werk (Falling Silence: A Selection from His Own Work)* Amsterdam: Querido, 2008

Martin, Gary. 'A picture is worth a thousand words'. <http://phrases.org.uk> Accessed 1-2-2009

**Ruth Watson**

ENTANGLED (SHOVEL)

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Albert Wendt

BLACK WINDOW 1, 3, 4, 5



## Notes on Contributors

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**John Barnett** has a background in publishing and often works in collaboration with Lesley Kaiser.

Australian poet **Pam Brown's** most recent book is *True Thoughts* (Salt Modern Poets 2008). Another collection, *Authentic Local*, is due from Papertiger Media in June 2009. Pam was poetry editor for *Overland* from 1997-2002 and currently co-edits *Jacket* magazine. She keeps a blog <http://thedeletions.blogspot.com>

**Martin Edmond** lives and writes in Sydney. His most recent book is *The Supply Party: Ludwig Becker on the Burke & Wills Expedition*. Becker was the Artist and Naturalist on that famously doomed undertaking. Martin keeps a blog <http://lucaantara.blogspot.com/>

**Sue Fitchett** is a poet, retired psychologist, conservationist and Waiheke Islander. She is co-author and editor of various books of poetry and author of *Palaver lava queen* (Auckland UP 2004). She was the Louis Johnson bursar 2001-02 and co-winner of the 1998 NZ Poetry Society's International Competition. Sue comments: '[OX art](#) is a response to the commodification of art. When we see a RED sticker in a gallery we know someone has plenty of money to be able to spend on art. I have used Microsoft tools to make a PICTURE that has no commodity value and may also be a poem.'

**Brian Flaherty** is a digital poet, co-editor of [Trout](#) and co-cordinator of **nzepc**. He is currently writing a blog <http://beadedinsects.wordpress.com/>

'If all the great poets were given an iPhone (with camera, video/audio recorder, *brushes*, music, maps/gps, internet, word processor, games....) and asked to *create*, what would be the result? a wild night of hypertext home movies? a multimedia cypher? terabytes of digital doggerel? a google library of tapa notebooks? multicast e-poetries and twitter haikus? would they construct vast video anthologies or illustrate their poems with literal pics? maybe they would discard words completely for the sound of white noise, or techno-dance with the percussive rhythms of strobe? are poets balancing on the edge of a digital future, a sea-change into something rich and strange, or was [Wittgenstein](#) right all along?'

**Tony Green** lives in North Shore City and is a long time consumer and producer in the arts. He has a blog ([http://Tony\\_Green.typepad.com](http://Tony_Green.typepad.com)) and a new book, *Poussin's Humour*, is in press.

[long cattle prod](#) (JT3) 28.12.08 150 x 100mm acrylic on recycled paper, is a response to the current interest in asemic poetry; see <http://thenewpostliterate.blogspot.com/>

Artist **Paul Hartigan** and curator **Bill Milbank** in conversation 26 March 2009

**BM:** You have worked with neon and had a strong interest in pop culture for many years. How does this new work fit into your current practice?

**PH:** The new 3D works are generically titled *The Undrawn*. This is brand new territory for me, a place where my core concerns remain true, yet the drawing is configured in forms perhaps not immediately recognisable as a Paul Hartigan work. The literal pop image is gone, irrevocably amended, blended, anthropomorphised into a double-coded dialogue. These works are over the top and over the Pop.

[The Stolen Heart of Rabelais Gargantua](#), 2009. Neon and acrylic on gesso painted wood, approx 400m2.

**David Howard** enjoys collaboration and has recently worked with the composers Marta Jirackova (Czech Republic), Brina Jez (Slovenia) and Johanna Selleck (Australia). A CD of Johanna's settings, featuring sopranos Judith Dodsworth and Merlyn Quaife, is forthcoming from Move Records. Following David's appearance at the Fifth International Poetry Festival in Granada (2009), he is developing a project with the Dutch poet Arjen Duinker that combines poetry and pyrotechnics.

**Lesley Kaiser** is an artist and author who often works in collaboration with John Barnett. Her most recent exhibition, *Preserve, Renew, Invent [Light Bytes]* at MIC Toi Rerehiko, Auckland (2008) involved exhibiting in a number of sites (see <http://www.lesleykaiser.com>), and a related paper has been recently published in *International Journal of the Book* 5.2 (2009). She is a senior lecturer at the Auckland University of Technology School of Art and Design.

**Jan Kemp** lives outside Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Co-editor with Jack Ross of Auckland UP's *Classic, Contemporary and New New Zealand Poets in Performance*, CD and text anthologies (2006-08). A CD, *Jan Kemp reads from her poems*, came out from The Poetry Archive (UK) [www.poetryarchive.org](http://www.poetryarchive.org) in 2008.

**Richard Killeen** was born in 1946 and lives in Auckland. He has a website <http://www.richardkilleen.com>. Images for **nzepc** can be found at <http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/misc/killeen.asp> and figures for **ka mate ka ora** are at <http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/kmko/killeen2.asp>

**Cilla McQueen** lives and writes in Bluff. She has published ten books of poetry, most recently *Fire-penny* and the CD *A Wind Harp* (Otago UP 2006).

[Higgs Boson](#). Drawing, pencil on paper. Found quotations drawn at random from *Physics World* 6.9 (1993).

**Selina Tusitala Marsh** teaches New Zealand and Pacific literature at the University of Auckland and coordinates Pasifika Poetry Web. Her first poetry collection, *Fast Talking PI* (Auckland UP 2009) is accompanied by a spoken word CD. [Afakasi/Totolua](#). 'Afakasi' (half of one) references a mixed blood identity forged in Aotearoa and marked by one's ability to speak for oneself. 'Totolua' (two bloods) explores binaries of identity imposed by societies who are ill-equipped to decipher borderlands – places where nuance thrives and art begins.

**Tim Page** is a musician and songwriter who also works as a digital media specialist at the University of Auckland. He has collaborated with Selina Tusitala Marsh on a number of multi-media poetry projects, most notably composition and production of music to complement spoken word recordings, released with Selina's poetry collection *Fast Talking PI* (Auckland UP 2009).

**Ann Poulsen** is a cultural researcher and creative practitioner. Her work in the area of image/text includes 'Aesthetics of Abundance' in *NowSeeHear* (Victoria UP 1990) and 'Circumlocution' on the text works of sculptor Richard Long in the journal *Double Dialogues* 2006. She recently submitted her doctoral thesis 'Another Way with Words: Language as twentieth-century art practice' (University of Auckland) and is an exhibited photographer, combining image and text in her artworks.

**Jack Ross's** latest novel *EMO*, the last in a trilogy made up of *Nights with Giordano Bruno* (2000) and *The Imaginary Museum of Atlantis* (2006), came out from Titus Books in 2008. He has also published two collections of short fiction and several volumes of poetry. Other books include the Auckland UP audio/text anthologies *Classic, Contemporary and New New Zealand Poets in Performance* (2006-08), edited with Jan Kemp. Jack's blog can be found at <http://mairangibay.blogspot.com/>

**Lisa Samuels** teaches at the University of Auckland. Her new poetry books are *Throe* (Oystercatcher 2009) and *Tomorrowland* (Shearsman 2009). Current projects include *Metropolis*, a poetic fantasy of urbanisation, and *Anti M*, a book of omitted prose.

**Helen Sword** \*Helen Sword\* is a poet, scholar, jeweller and mosaicist who teaches digital poetics and higher education pedagogy – but not both at the same time – at the University of Auckland. Her most recent book, *The Writer's Diet*

<http://www.pearson.com.au/storesnz/styles/professional/titleDetails.asp?GroupItemID=17776&StoreID=146>

(Pearson Education NZ 2007), offers academic writers a tongue-in-cheek guide to verbal fitness. Helen's digital poetry website can be found at <http://helensword.ac.nz/index.htm>.

**Fredrika van Elburg** completed a PhD in English at the University of Auckland in 2007. Her current project is a collection of translations of Dutch poetry of the 1950s into English. The translations of Kouwenaar in her essay are from this work.

**Ruth Watson's** work has been included in international Biennales including Sydney (1992), Korea (1995), and surveys of New Zealand and Australian art, including *Paradise Now: Contemporary Art from the Pacific* (Asia Society Gallery, New York, 2004). She writes on art and currently teaches at the Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland. Her work can be seen via:

<http://www.tworooms.org.nz/artists/ruthwatson/>

[Entangled \(shovel\)](#) 1.5m high. Glass road safety spheres, resin, wood and metal. 2008.

**Albert Wendt** returned to Auckland in 2008 after four years as Citizens' Chair at the University of Hawai'i. His first solo exhibition in Aotearoa was at the Macarthy Gallery in Auckland in 2008. Since then he has had a joint exhibition at the same gallery with the prominent Samoan artist and poet Momoe Malietoa von Reiche. A new verse novel, *The Adventures of Vela*, is forthcoming from Huia Publishers in 2009. Albert comments: 'I paint poems now. I also continue to write them. And sometimes I use my published poems in my paintings.'

[Black Window 1, 3, 4, 5](#) Acrylic on canvas, 2008. 760 x 1015 mm; 760 x 1015 mm; 760 x 915 mm; 610 x 760 mm.