



**BRIT BUNKLEY**  
critical illusions

Front cover: video still from Return of the Body Snatchers, 2003

I would like to thank:

Andrea Gardner, Noah Bunkley,

The Wallace Trust, Auckland, NZ



Wanganui UCOL, Wanganui, NZ



Mary Newton Gallery, Wellington, NZ



Steve Russell at the Pelorus Trust Mediagallery at  
the NZ Film Archive



Amanda Wayers at Lopdell House, Auckland, NZ

The Staff at the Quay School of Arts, Wanganui UCOL

The design team at the Wanganui School of Design: Natasha Linskil-Leper and Stacey Jones

ISBN: 0-473-010010-X

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{1} Fleeced; 2004



{1} Minnesota Glass Detail; St. Paul, Minnesota; 1992

{2} Minnesota History Center; St. Paul, Minnesota; 1992

## “Vignettes of Fear and Illusion”

Joanne Drayton PhD. Programme Director Master of Design,  
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A journey unfolds in Brit Bunkley's work. It is a passage across borders, through time, space and media. It is the navigation of his voyage and its distillation mapped in the creative process that is so compelling. His change of location – his decision to come to New Zealand – parallels a shift in his work. As a New York based artist in the 1980s and early 1990s, Brit's work was sculptural and photographic. The larger canvas of government funded arts projects in the United States gave him an opportunity to explore temporary and permanent public sculpture and installation. Using fake façades and brick edifices like *Gate Mask* (1984), Brit created barriers that confounded not only movement but understanding. How were these walls to be interpreted? What did they mean? And through his public projects flowed an iconographic language of symbolism. His icons look almost like branded logos, yet their meanings are not corporate, global, or even necessarily shared but sit in public spaces as part of a system of private reference. Outwardly there is an expectation of serious intent and meaning, yet it is that which eludes us.

A shift to New Zealand in 1995 corresponded with a shift in practice. The opportunity to create in real public space was superseded by a need to realise creative vision in virtual space. Brit began to explore the possibilities of new media, new technology, and new processes. His three-dimensional public projects now became confections of cyber-space. He found that his strange and extraordinary structures that could be imaged and made virtually were infinitely more variable and open-ended than those that could be built. New media unlocked the door to pure folly. Gravity, scale, and cost could be defied, and structures built purely on information. In her introduction to the International Rapid Prototyping Sculpture Exhibition (2003) Mary Hale Visser perceptively reflected that, “it wouldn't be until this decade that the computer would be recognised as a means for collecting and altering three-dimensional forms with as radical an impact on the next century as photography and filmmaking were on the last.” The computer is a sculptural tool with seemingly endless possibilities.

Inevitably, though, there must also be an environment – a setting for folly – a virtual space to contain the virtual idea. The creating of a world or setting in which to place the object of desire was a parallel frontier of discovery. And so landscape grew up around the sculptural object and when rendered as a digital image *Gate Mask* became indistinguishable from *Planter* and *Mushroom*. What these pieces make evident is that the digital image does not privilege the real or the true. The artist becomes in effect a conjurer and magician, and the imaginary edifice stands as solidly and convincingly as made work. The seductive, hands on quality of three-dimensional form has been replaced by the temptations of the eye. We do not need to touch it to be convinced because as everyone knows – seeing is believing. Or is it? It is this quality of slippage between the real and the unreal that is disturbing, and at the same time gripping in Brit Bunkley's work. Is *Bird Mouth* a real fascist-style megaphone protruding from a wall or the *Corner (the) Market* a real place? What do we believe and what is true? Or is it our folly to try and make a distinction?

This sense of the surreal is even more pronounced in Brit Bunkley's animated vignettes. To his objects and environments he adds the dimensions of time and movement. Bunkley's vignettes continue to confound our orientation. Not only do they contain disquieting and discordant relationships between real and unreal but there is a sense of menace and foreboding. It is not overt, but like a child's undefinable fear of darkness. A child fears the black void and the things it might contain. But the void itself is as chilling as any menace it might hold. They are not naive worlds that Brit Bunkley creates but ones that touch the primal child to remind us of the source of psychosis. We watch the sideshow clown with his gaping mouth and swiveling head. It contains the joy and colour of a visit to the circus or a fair, but there is something decidedly menacing about the sightless eyes that seem to track. There is threat where we expect innocence.

Experiences of childhood are replayed in another vignette that includes Santa Claus rummaging through his bag. The jolly old elf seems incongruous in a futuristic potentially violent environment, and our readings shift ambivalently and unknowingly. Is he in danger? Is he the source of danger? Or is he just irrelevant? – A red herring. That's the disturbing thing. The end of the vignette comes before our questions are answered. The desire to know is unrequited. We stare into the void. A friendly and familiar fiction has been kidnapped and appropriated into another fiction and there are no conventions to offer understanding.

But there is a political sub-plot in much of Brit Bunkley's work. He seems to adopt an anti-government position; however once again we are left wondering which government. There is a sense of "big brother" and of impending peril implicit in Orwell's *1984*, but again this is not specific. Notions of war, anarchy and political activism play through his images, but more as metaphors than specific narratives or events. And one feels the threat comes from something bigger than just government. Bunkley's *Corner (the) Market* picks away satirically at the vagaries of capitalism with its all-consuming appetite to sell and to own. There is humour and irony in his send-up of branding, logos, and corporate icons. Disney is spoofed, but obliquely. His art is often playful, but playful in places like a cat is playful with a mouse. His work evokes the old adage – "power tends to corrupt, absolute power corrupts absolutely" – and inevitably one wonders whether the true villain here isn't power itself because absolute power casts the long shadow that extinguishes individuality.



[3] *Corner (the) Market*; 1992

## BRIT BUNKLEY SCULPTOR

**critical illusions** It is the creation of questions and doubts that is one of the overriding achievements of Brit Bunkley's work, and recently, in an interview, I was fortunate enough to be able to discuss some of the emerging issues with the artist himself. The following is a transcript of this interview.

### A big part of your practice in the United States was public sculpture. What moved you to produce this kind of work?

During the years when I lived in NYC, I spent the majority of my studio time focusing on the public art realm: outdoor installations and art in architecture commissions. Throughout this period I received 7 or so commissions, and was finalist for many more. The completed projects ranged from temporary sculptures such as one situated in a NYC park through the NY Public Art Fund - to permanent works such as the front entrance of the Minnesota History Center commissioned by the Art in Architecture Percent for Art programme.

I still have requests to be a finalist for projects from overseas Percent for Art organizations - though it has proven impractical from such a great distance.

I began to focus on public art work during graduate school in the early 80's. My motives were both the somewhat moral imperative of bringing art from the elite gallery and collector to the public, and the practical incentive of making large sculptures where both the site and the money are guaranteed in advance. During the 80's and 90's the US government funding for the arts was slashed - with one exception - the percent for art programs. Nearly 300 public art organizations now exist in the US. These programs grew out of a statutory requirement that a specific percentage (about 1%) of public moneys must be allocated for the construction of building projects in the arts.

### Who influenced you, and what was it about their practice that was particularly inspirational?

I'd say that my primary influence was a teacher in undergraduate school in Minneapolis named Siah Armajani. He helped spearhead the public art movement in the US and began to rise in influence as an internationally recognized architectural sculptor along with Mary Miss and Alice Aycock (who was also a major influence on me as a teacher in post-graduate school in NYC). Siah had also collaborated with computer scientists in the late 60's creating a quirky mixture of text based conceptual art, philosophy and computer influenced graphics. Armajani's lectures at art school were exceptional in their encyclopedic knowledge of contemporary art, science and philosophy, punctured by a unique revolutionary social-political passion and sifi-tinged humor. I think it was his enthusiasm for a socially and politically charged art that has left the most lasting impression. His emphasis on the need for the artist to be consistently engaged in new ideas and methodologies is also a powerful memory.

### Is there anyone else who has been inspirational in your public art practice?

Vito Acconci whose team has created stunningly creative public art solutions. Travelling across the US by plane is almost like visiting a permanent Vito Acconci show; he seems to have a

public artwork in almost every airport I have travelled through – many of them extraordinary. Last year he gave an inspiring lecture as the keynote speaker at a public art symposium in Wellington. Although I was puzzled on why he was not supportive of percent for art laws (given his recent career existed primarily by virtue of these programmes), Acconci gave a rousing, witty and convincing defence of public art...as always.

Alice Aycock created some of the most compelling art (public and private) of the 80's – ominous and complex.

Dennis Oppenheim's public art practice has also been quite influential. He recently described in his interview in the April 05 Sculpture magazine, the limitations of public art quite well; "...when I think of very difficult work that's hard to have in the public, hard to reckon with, it's difficult to see it having any prospect of a future right now. The paradox is, that's what artists are supposed to do. They're supposed to challenge the conventions: that's their job, to jump on a horse and travel on it the rest of their lives into unknown territory."

As Oppenheim stated, in Europe decisions on public work are generally made by museum curators. In the US public art has too often devolved into safe mediocre design for buildings due to overbearing local bureaucracies and developers.

A more concerted focus on temporary public art may be one answer in solving the many limitations of public art.

### What made you leave the United States?

I originally left the US simply to leave New York City for a more rural lifestyle that would be more conducive to bringing up our new child. Upstate New York would have sufficed at the time, but I landed this job teaching sculpture at the art school in Wanganui (now the Quay School of the Arts at Whanganui UCOL) ...a mere 16,000 kilometres away from NYC. I had always heard wonderful things about New Zealand, which is considered somewhat of a utopia by many Americans. We thought we would give it a few years. We ended up falling in love with New Zealand and becoming citizens (holding dual citizenship). The life style here has no comparison in the USA. The weather here is amazingly temperate. The landscape is stunning. The politics, public health and education are comparatively democratic and civilized.

With far more government financial support per capita than the USA, I believe that the arts in New Zealand are overall of far better quality as relative to size to other larger countries. From Wanganui, where I live in the North Island, many remarkable galleries are accessible within a two hour car trip. Sydney is less than three hours away by airplane. (I take my students every two years to the Sydney Biennial, one of the best art surveys in the world.)

With the advances in telecommunications, the existential sense of isolation that I understand once existed here is reportedly far less now. To be honest, I often felt more "isolated" in New York City.



## Did you have any conception of how this cultural and geographical shift might change your work?

I had no idea how this relocation would change my work. It was an adventure. I had learned 3D software for presentation and design purposes. Since we initially were planning to be here temporarily, I decided to only plan sculpture using this new software to cut back on space and shipping costs. I was unaware that I would be seeing an “end” to my fledging public art career and a subsequent move into digital art.

## What kind of opportunities for public sculpture have you found outside the United States?

As mentioned, creating public art work overseas has become no longer feasible. From my experience, the public art opportunities that I have encountered in Australia or New Zealand have been impractical. Australia has a few such programmes, with most commissions reserved for Australian residents only. Although some wonderful public art has been built in New Zealand, percent for art laws do not exist in New Zealand.

I believe that the intermittent complications here with budgeting and transparency in the selection processes can be alleviated by percent for art laws. Cost cuttings by bureaucracies are prevented (or at least made very difficult) by these laws; the budget usually remains intact. Only after an extensive search for finalists by artists, curators, architects and other experts, a small group of generally 3-5 finalists are chosen to make models and visit the sites. The artists are paid for their site and model work by the commissioning agency. The mild form of chauvinism here and overseas of choosing only “local” artists is also somewhat offset by strict rules against xenophobic bias in some more enlightened percent for art laws. Through such laws, adequate money is set aside (by mandate) to cover expenses throughout all the necessary stages - from selection to completion.

In spite of a general lack of percent for art ordinances, many fantastic examples of public art exist in this part of the world. My personal favourites include those commissioned by the Wellington Sculpture Trust. They have funded an astounding percentage of excellent works... such as Andrew Drummond’s two public sculptures and Anton Parsons’s *Invisible City*.

## Do you think your relocation has changed your practice, and if it has, how?

Because of my relative isolation from sources of commissioned work, I jumped head first into the 3D digital realm which has proven not only a technical challenge but opened up creative possibilities that I never knew existed.

Using 3D software, I discovered that I was creating what resembled constructed or staged photography (such as Boyd Webb, James Casebere, Sandy Skogland or Thomas Demand)... but with a virtual camera, and with a virtual set. When I began exploring the animation capabilities of the software in the late nineties, I moved into time based “constructed reality”. I began with short animated dream-like symbolic (though not surreal) videos the length of ads. Recently I have been stringing these animations together to create suites of vignettes.

In addition, the video evolved to include “real people content” or RPC’s (animated moving images of real, not animated people that can be inserted into a virtual landscape...used for architectural rendering promotion animations for the architecture industry). These RPC’s



(4) Gate Mask, 1984



{5} *Following Gravity's Rainbow*, 2002 - 2004

("real people content") are both still and moving cut-outs of people that can be easily and seamlessly inserted into a virtual ("wire mesh") 3D computer scene. These cut out images of people then become a component of the digital scene. On one level they then appear to convincingly live within the virtual scene. On another level they create a tension between real and virtual space.

### What links can you make between your earlier work, say of the 1980s and early 90s, and that of your more recent practice?

I am as interested in monuments (subverting "monuments") as I was in the 80's. By subversion of the monument (as opposed to such "counter-monument" techniques as practiced by a number of European artists), I designed structures with exaggerated and often traditional features - using heavy monumental materials (such as brick and other masonry) and also investigating contemporary options for the western tradition of architectural monumental ornamentation. This architectural basis for some past work has now become the subject of 2D and 3D prints and scenes for the video vignettes. So for instance, the brick chimney-like structure used for the video installation *Following Gravity's Rainbow* is obliquely based on earlier brick works such as *Gate Mask* - a faux brick wall - though the intent is quite different. *Following Gravity's Rainbow* is a prop in a video installation that is meant to be a conduit between real and virtual space. Originally designed for a bridge project, *Gate Mask* was a large free-standing wall that was placed in a public area as the opposite of a bridge - an obstruction. It was meant to force pedestrians to choose a path around it creating new paths. It also had references to local architecture, façade as face, and architecture of powerful institutions...all slightly twisted and morphed for emotional effect.

As mentioned above, I am still using works from literature such as *Gravity's Rainbow* as inspiration. *Gravity's Rainbow*, winner of the National Book Award in the US for 1973 is regarded by many as one of the great works of 20th century literature. Richard Locke, editor of the New York Times Book Review described this 1973 novel "a work of paranoid genius... bonecrushingly dense, compulsively elaborate, silly, obscene, funny, tragic, pastoral, historical, philosophical, poetic, grindingly dull, inspired, horrific, cold, bloated, beached and blasted".



[6] Bay Shore Icons and Clock Medallion; 1992



[7] Monument to "Death the Impersonator"; 1985

This now somewhat dated book by Thomas Pynchon was cited as “all about sculpture” by a sculpture teacher, Bill Bollinger in the late 70’s. Although I never did figure out how it was “all about sculpture”, reading it at the time was an enlightening experience. *Gravity’s Rainbow* influenced several early pieces including *Monument for ‘Death the Impersonator’*. (“Death the Impersonator” was a quote from a passage on the structure of the chimney withstanding the atomic blast). Another nod to Pynchon was an unbuilt theme park – ironically called a *Peace Park* based also on the Italian Mannerist (and proto-surreal) park of Bomarzo conceptualized in collaboration with Chip Sullivan.

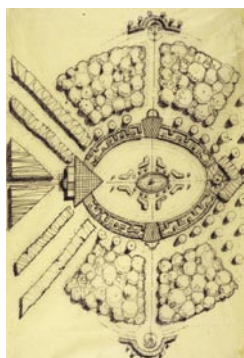
The installation *Following Gravity’s Rainbow* borrowed heavily from the book (as is obvious from the title). It also used elements from the 50’s ode to paranoia, the film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. *Following Gravity’s Rainbow* is a vertically projected animation-video that weaves together 3D animations, text and conventional moving images that obliquely reflect sinister and paranoid/whimsical social-political realities.

Other content that has remained consistent to my interests includes a fascination with sinister social-political elements of human nature. One embodiment of this interest was the fool or clown – a character who had “a licence to perform, cavort, and poke fun at his betters and employers, especially at court” (Encarta). So for example, I used an imitation cast iron bank of a clown/fool head for an electronic piece in the early 90’s. A similar mechanical head now appears in a new video vignette, *Masquerade*.

### What do you understand by the notion of digital or virtual reality, and how does it assist you in conveying your ideas?

I have been experimenting with converging real sculptural objects with digitally produced virtual 3D projections, such as in the work, *Following Gravity’s Rainbow*, a large brick faced object that projects a chimney-sky animated scene.

My emphasis is on what Suzanne MacAulay (now chair of the Art and Performing Arts Department at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs) called “a counter-perspective (illusionistic apertures in ceilings and walls that favour flatness yet admit a kind of trompe l’oeil fragmentation that virtual space encompasses). This is identified as a creative process



{8} *Peace Park*; 1986  
by Chip Sullivan



{9} *Peace Monument*; 1986



(10) *Fleece Blackout*; Video animation stills: 2004



{11} Casey Jones; 2004



{12} Casey Jones train sign modifier; 2004



[13] *Masquerade*; Video animation still; 2004



where techniques, visual tropes and media are 'refashioned' according to precedent and convention in order to achieve different and contemporary cultural significance". By "virtual reality", I am simply referring to the illusion of pictorial reality similar to trompe l'oeil, not the haptic (touch sense) virtual reality of science fiction.

In other words the software is capable of relative photorealism that allows me to create images and video vignettes that are strange but convincing on some levels. This level of distorted realism is why digital technology has recently been used as a vital tool by many artists. I find it useful in creating a wondrous but tense and bombastic world that in my opinion reflects current reflect vital and significant social and political observations.

### What frontiers in your work have been opened up by new media technology? Do you see it as having any limitations?

I personally am not interested in what are generally considered two of the cutting edge art forms of new media technology: interactive and web art. (I am not sure if the current state of digital technology is up to the creative abilities of artists.) I am however, as mentioned earlier, fascinated by the tremendous potential of digital video and animation.

Another somewhat related area that I find interesting is the capability of turning a 3D digital file (used for both a 2D print and animation) into a physical 3D object. The digital space in which the scenes in my 2D prints and animations exist is made up of a group of models - digital "wire mesh" objects (configured ones and zeroes) that define the space and the volumes within the space. For the last 12 or so years, machines have been used that create 3D objects for various industries (such as medical, automotive and furniture design firms) using rapid prototype printing and CNC digitally directed machining. Rapid prototype printing simply calculates many thin cross sections of the virtual model and builds these layers together out of such materials as extruded plastic, cut and glued paper or bonded plaster.



{14} *Global*; 2000



{15} *Body Snatchers (convoy)*; 2003

The limitations with this method of outputting 3D images are the scale, expense and material restrictions – though this method is getting cheaper, and the objects are getting bigger. Several US artists use this method as a tool to create larger multi-media work such as Robert Lazzarini who no longer will show his rapid prototypes. He recently wrote me stating that: “My use of rapid prototyping is really only as an intermediary to a final piece. It is a way for me to create models faster. The computer is an important part of my process which also includes equal parts industrial and the handmade. However, it’s not really a part of my content.” Other pioneering 3D digital artists such as Michael Rees now make metal sculptures from casts made from rapid prototypes. CNC digitally directed machining is now used by some sculptors.

Computer 3D printing is not used much in art here (or in art anywhere in the world for that matter) ...mostly due to the limitations mentioned above. However, three Intersculpt shows have taken place in New Zealand (which I helped organize – at the Sarjeant in Wanganui, the Adam in Wellington and snowwhite gallery in Auckland). Intersculpt is a biennial 3D digital event that opens simultaneously in 8 - 10 cities worldwide utilizing rapid prototyping as both a tool and as a component of the content, prints of 3D stills, and 3D animation. The Intersculpt shows here and abroad have included international and New Zealand artists (such as Susan Jowsey, Marcus Williams, Eugene Hansen, John Lyall, myself and Hye Rim Lee). This year Ian Gwilt who is teaching at UTS (University of Technology, Sydney) and I are putting together a related show called *Made Known* at the UTS Gallery.

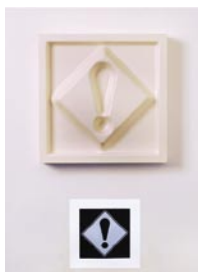
### I understand that film has had a special influence on your work. What sorts of films particularly capture your imagination, and why?

I began using the 3D software *3D Studio* for animation in the late 90's. It was developed primarily as animation software for games and special effects in film, but is also used for design work. I began creating non linear short pieces of 1-2 minutes in a terse “advertising length” and have since begun to string them together as longer interrelated vignettes.

I have been obsessed by film since art school days in the late 70's. The early strange work by Herzog, Fassbinder, Pasolini, and Wenders fascinated me in art school. However, it was not until the mid 90's that I, like many people, came to appreciate non narrative art film or video in what has come to be called “filmic” art work (since these moving images could be made either on video tape, digitally or on film). I think the new found appreciation of this art form was due to the creative use of the new high resolution projectors and the use of new cheap digital cinematic techniques in film and video. The recent work by Bill Viola, Shirin Neshat, Diana Thater, Gary Hill and the projections of Tony Ousler (the giants of filmic/video art) have all been inspiring.



{16} *Yield Displaced; 2002*



{17} *Hazard Displaced; 2002*

David Lynch is possibly the most influential filmmaker for me. His films, several of which have the creative breath of filmic art works, also command the immense resources of major motion picture companies. This resource allows for a perfection of the media, unavailable to most mortals. Lynch's unique dreamscapes, compelling combinations of beauty, terror and humour, are what many artists strive for.

Fear, paranoia, and to an extent nihilism, are feelings that seem implicit in some of your work. Are we to read this as a vague sense of unease and discomfort, something more part of the human psychological condition, or is there a specific political agenda played out through your work? Another way of putting it might be, is there a source for the menace in your work?

Regarding "menace", David Lynch describes the source of his menace as simply "ideas". He doesn't elaborate, but implies that they seem to float from an archetypal well or parallel universe into his head. Whatever... They are great. The "source of my menace"? The sadness and anger that I feel when seeing injustices as a result of institutional and political structures that reinforce the uglier side of people.

Regarding fear and paranoia? I had lived for many years in the US - at the potential receiving end of *Gravity's Rainbow* (a colloquial term from Pynchon's book, now applied to the arc of a ground to ground missile trajectory). MAD, or "mutually assured destruction" in a nuclear war was the stated policy of the US military. The US and USSR came far too close for comfort in starting a nuclear war several times. For me, this real threat became a source of obsession. In addition, I was a bit shocked when about 20 years ago it began to become clear to me that most academic evidence demonstrated that much of what passes as the free press in democracies does indeed (to a degree relative to power) "manage consent". Initially what seemed a paranoid proposition has indeed become one of the most well documented "facts" in the social sciences. I think that in part these fixations compelled me to dwell on both the complex human condition as well as the concrete political models as spelled out by such luminaries as Noam Chomsky and Ed Herman.

Sinister emotions, nihilism, conformism and paranoid tendencies certainly seem to be common elements of human nature. So are kindness, empathy, creativity and peaceful feelings. Somehow the tension of these seemingly opposing forces seems to ferment the best art.

What do you think about the role art should play in politics? Does it have one? Do you have a sense that art might make a difference?

I believe that art often effectively reflects politics one way or another and can be powerful on this level but it does not usually enact change; it tends to be didactic and preachy when artists try. I'm not sure if political art can change or inform political sentiment. I think that clear and honest journalism using legitimate facts and allowing for intelligent and wide ranging debate (which is very rare) is far more effective in informing people... On the other hand, some works do seem to have some sort of political power.

I was impressed that a tapestry depicting Picasso's Guernica which hangs at the entrance of the Security Council building at the UN was covered over the day that former Secretary of State Powell gave his speech presenting the US case for war against Iraq... you know the speech that contained the "evidence" of weapons of mass destruction. This speech was clearly seen by most of the assembly as a false pretext for initiating what (according to the historian Ali Tariq) most of the third world has come to call the "4th Oil War" - now with its own "Guernica" in Falluja. The speech was given by the very same person, Colin Powell who, when he was appointed the new deputy for the American Division assisted in the cover-up of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam in 1968 for two years (as revealed by Newsweek in 1996). Powell, when in high level decision making positions, also supported (without regret) the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein when committing his worst atrocities (as did many in the current Bush administration). The covering of the anti war image by a curtain was significant in this instance in demonstrating the political power of an image – albeit a copy (simulation) of a historical 20th century masterpiece.

A clown, Santa Claus - western symbols of mirth and benevolence (how much more innocent and Disney can you get?) but in your work it seems there is the potential for the clown's head to rotate right round, exorcist-fashion, and that Santa Claus might be groping in his bag, not for presents, but for a meat cleaver ...is this my paranoia or yours?

Maybe it's yours? Though I certainly never intended it to be taken this way, it is fitting.

Political art may not change the world, but overtly psychologically disturbing and unsettling art (occasionally with political overtones) has been quite potent in recent years. It has been in the air. Off the top of my head examples include the work of the Chapman Brothers, Paul McCarthy, L. Budd, Sara Lucas, Tracy Emin and Matthew Barney.

As mentioned, the clown or fool (especially that mechanized or marionette version) has had a history in mythology and art as a potentially dangerous character. Not just the trite film, "IT" ... but in many areas across the board from Ingmar Bergman to Paul McCarthy. Disney has had an effect of sanitizing mythology or fairy tales. Unlike the Disney version, the original fairy tale of Cinderella was filled with menace and gore. The sisters were found out as impostors by the prince only when blood poured all over his carriage. This was due to cutting off their toes in order to fit into the slippers. The original Pinocchio was a far more sinister fool-clown-like character than the nice little boy in the Disney film. It is also not a coincidence that Disney Corporation (one of the two largest media firms in the world) came very close to preventing the release of Michael Moore's last political film (before it was saved at the last minute by a small independent distributor).

Regarding the myth of Santa Claus, he was originally based on Nicholas, a 4th-century bishop of Asia Minor in the Mid East known for giving gifts to the poor. According to Encarta, the saint later evolved into "Sankt Nikolaus in Germany and Sanct Herr Nicholaas or Sinterklaas in Holland. In these countries Nicholas was sometimes said to ride through the sky on a horse delivering gifts. He wore a bishop's robes, and was at times accompanied by Black Peter, an elf whose job was to whip naughty children". Eventually, this character was replaced by the more modernized "Dutch figure, SinterKlaas, which settlers brought with them to Nieuw

Amsterdam (now New York) who inspired the American transformation of the figure and even gave him his name”.

The terrorist Mid Easterner has now replaced the scary “communist” as an official symbol of irrational, paranoid fear in much of the West – what in the seminal book *Manufacturing Consent* Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky call a “filter” - “a national religion and control mechanism” of the media.

I am amused by the fact that this kind person, Nicholas originally from the Mid East, the south of Turkey evolved into a quite ominous mythical person during the late European Middle Ages before he was resurrected in one of the major commercial capitals of the late nineteenth century New York City as a ruddy jolly fat man. His new persona and de facto “branding” managed to dramatically increase retail sales.

So what are your intentions with this kind of work? With Santa and your clown?

I don't know exactly...something to do with politics, irony and the human condition...whatever the “human condition” is... to entangle both whimsy and fear, which to a certain extent both Santa and the clown embody (though few are aware of the history of Santa Claus and his former sidekick Black Peter).



{18} Lost (from *Following Gravity's Rainbow*); Animation video still; 2002-2005

## What aspects of New Zealand life have specifically fed your work?

This is too big of a question to elaborate in detail. However, one only needs to see Sam Neill's excellent film *Cinema of Unease* to understand the New Zealand sense of place. This documentary describes the tradition of making filmic works that combine dark and brooding atmospheres with the beauty of New Zealand's culture and landscape. Clearly many elements of New Zealand's culture, social political system, geography and history have shaped my work over the course of the last 10 years I have lived here – from placing NZ landscape into backgrounds of 2D prints and animations, to content that is increasingly specific to the country and its place in the world.



(19) *Bird Mouth*; 2002 - 2003

**BIOGRAPHY**  
**SELECTED SOLO**

**EXHIBITIONS**

- 2005** *Following Gravity's Rainbow*, Pelorus Trust Mediagallery NZ Film Archive  
Mediaplex; Wellington, NZ  
*Toto, We Are Not in Kansas Anymore*, Lopdell House, Auckland, NZ  
Mary Newton Gallery, *Animal Farm*, (with John Roy), Wellington, NZ
- 2003** *3d Digital: Recent Work*, McPherson Gallery, Auckland, NZ
- 2002** *3D Works: Signs ('and other similar entities')*, Te Tuhi - The Mark (formerly the Iris  
Fisher Gallery), Pakuranga, Auckland, NZ
- 2001** *Digital Reflections*; Manawatu Gallery, Palmerston North, New Zealand
- 1998** *Monuments and Icons*, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui, New Zealand
- 1993** Thomas Barry Gallery, Minneapolis, Minnesota

**RECENT GROUP**  
**EXHIBITIONS**

- 2005** UTS Gallery, *Made Known : Rapid Prototyping Sculpture Show*, co-curator and  
contributor, Sydney, Australia  
Auckland Art Festival 2005, Wallace Trust Gallery, Auckland, NZ  
*Vodafone Digital Art Awards*, Disruptiv Gallery, Auckland
- 2004** *Ciberart-Bilbao 2004*, Bilbao, Spain  
*First International Festival Of Electronic Art 404 /Astas*, Rosario, Argentina  
*Thailand New Media Festival and Art Show*, Bangkok, Thailand  
*International RP Sculpture Exhibition*, 2002: The Rourke Museum in Moorhead,  
Minnesota, New York Institute of Technology; 2003: Fine Arts Gallery at  
Southwestern University in Georgetown Texas, 2004: University of Houston-Clear  
Lake Gallery, Texas, Zoller Gallery at Penn State University, Yeditepe University,  
Istanbul, Turkey, Chicago Institute of Technology, Chicago, Ill. 2005: University of  
Conn. College of Art and Architecture and the Robert v. Fullerton Art Museum. Cal  
State, San Bernardino  
*Rencontres Internationales Paris/ Berlin*, Paris, France  
*Exit - Experimental Video Festival*, The Inaugural Auckland International  
Experimental Video Festival
- 2003** *SIGGRAPH: 2003*, San Diego, California  
*Transference, The Manipulation Of Vision: Philip George, Ian Gwilt, and Brit  
Bunkley*, Mary Place Gallery, Paddington (Sydney), Australia

*Intersculpt:2003*, Snowwhite Gallery Unitec, Auckland, & La Fnac Digitale Paris, France - video screening, and rp & Warehouse at the Museum of Science & Industry in Manchester, UK & The Exploratorium, San Francisco, California

*Expace [ex-space] project #002 video screening*, Knitting Factory, NY, New York  
*Not Still Art Festival*, May 16-17, 2003, The Micro Museum, Brooklyn, New York

**2002** *SIGGRAPH: 2002 Artist-in-residence* ("working artist"), and SIGGRAPH art gallery show, San Antonio, Texas

*st@rt up : new interactive media and animation*, Te Papa, The Museum of NZ, Wellington, NZ

*ShortFuse 32 Film Festival*, 321 Queen St, Auckland, NZ.

Organized by the Moving Image Centre with additional support, Creative New Zealand and the Screen Innovation Fund.

**2001** *Intersculpt:NZ*, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui & Adam Art Gallery, Wellington, NZ

*But is it just Craft?*, John Holden Gallery, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK

*Intersculpt:2001*, Righton Gallery, Manchester Metropolitan University, Cavendish Street, Manchester, UK; Archetype Gallery & Paris 6 City Hall, Mairie du Vle

arrondissement de Paris, France & Firefly Building, 123 Webster Street, Dayton, OH 4540

*The Boston Cyberarts Festival-Not Still Art Festival 2001 International*

Screening; Boston; the Coolidge Corner Theater; and the Micro Museum, NYC

*The Big Art Trip*, New Zealand TV 1, video screening (and interview)

*Dans le jardin des beaux arts*, 2001 Art project curated by Jacqueline Wassen, Sen McGlenn and Sonja van Kerkhoff. In the ARS AEMULA NATURAE courtyard, Pieterkerkgrecht 9a, Leiden, Netherlands.

*The Future Of Work*, Museum Cite des Sciences et de l'Industrie, Paris, France

*Big Stuff*, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui, New Zealand

## SELECTED SITE

### WORK

**1995** *Five Gothic Masks*, a permanent commission at City College, NYC, sponsored by the N.Y. Dormitory Commission (a subsidiary of the N.Y. Percent for Art program)

**1992** *Bay Shore Icons and Frieze*, a permanent commission at the Bay Shore Train Station, Bay Shore, sponsored by the N.Y. N.Y. M.T.A. Arts for Transit Commission, Long Island Railroad; Minnesota Percent for Art in Public Places, The Minnesota History Center front entrance, St. Paul, Minnesota.

**1988** *Miami Sculpture Exhibition*, commission for a temporary sculpture at Kenneth Meyers Park, Coconut Grove, Miami, Florida

**1987** *O.I.A. Tenth Anniversary Exhibition of Outdoor Sculpture*, Newhouse Gallery, Snug Harbor, N.Y.C., N.Y. curated by John Perreault and Elisabeth Egbert



- 1984 *Gate Mask*, sculpture built at Franklin and Center Streets, NYC, funded by N.Y.S.C.A., (Gate Mask was later moved to a permanent site at the Islip Art Museum, E. Islip, N.Y as part of the “Proposal and Proposition” show. It burned down in 1986.)
- 1982 *The Public Art Fund’s Sculpture in Cadman Plaza*, site sculpture at Columbus Park, Cadman Plaza Brooklyn, N.Y.

## SELECTED GRANTS AND FELLOWSHIPS

- 1985-1986 Rome Prize Fellowship (“Prix de Rome”), Fellowship at the American Academy in Rome
- 1983-1984 New York State Council on the Arts (N.Y.S.C.A.), Project grant
- 1983 C.A.P.S. (Creative Artist’s Program Service), N.Y. State artist’s fellowship grant
- 1980-1981 US National Endowment for the Arts, Artist’s fellowship

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2005 *The Art of Place Making: Public Art, Urban Design and Interpretation That Tell You Where You Are*, by Ronald Lee Fleming, The Townscape Institute, Cambridge MA
- 2004 2nd International Symposium of Interactive Media Design catalogue, Yeditepe University, Istanbul, Turkey; 2004 Ciberart-Bilbao 2004 Exhibition Catalogue
- 2003 International Rapid Prototyping Sculpture Exhibition Catalogue; Siggraph 2003 Electronic Art and Animation Catalogue; TV 3, Nightline, January 28, 2003; *Bytes Will Outlive Stone*, New Zealand Herald, January 27, 2003
- 2002 Siggraph 2002 Electronic Art and Animation Catalogue: Entry for Brit Bunkley
- 2001 *The Big Art Trip*, TV 1 New Zealand, interview, broadcast July 2001; Unlimited Magazine, May 2001 issue
- 2000 *It’s sculpture Jim, but not as we know it*. The Wellington Dominion, November 2, 2000
- 1994 *Riders Train Their Gaze on LIRR Art*, New York Newsday, July 22, 1994
- 1992 *Making History Come Alive*, Minneapolis Star-Tribune, April 19, 1992
- 1988 *Proposals for Art in History Center*, Twin Cities Star-Tribune, May 11, 1988; NYC Public Art Fund Inc., Anniversary Edition Catalogue 1988
- 1987 *City as Sculpture Garden: Seeing the New and Daring*, Michael Brenson, The New York Times, July 17, 1987
- 1984 *The Working of the Artist’s Mind*, The New York Times (L.I. edition), Sept. 23, 1984  
*How a Work Comes into Being*, New York Newsday, Oct. 8, 1984; *Sculpture Goes Outdoors for the Summer*, Michael Brenson, The New York Times, July 13, 1984
- 1983 C.A.P.S. *Sculptors*, Allen Wallach, Arts Magazine, December 1983



{20} *Fleeced*, 2004

# IMAGE REFERENCE

- {1} **Fleeced**; LOM digital 3D print; 250mm x 200mm x 150mm each detail; 2004  
In this work, I utilized the "displaced map modifier" within the 3D software. This "modifier" functions by pushing and pulling a dense wire frame mesh with a bitmap/raster image so they appear as "growths"
- {2} Minnesota History Center Icons detail (image of original glass sample) and front entrance of the Minnesota History Center (in collaboration with the architectural firm Hammel, Green and Abrahamson); St. Paul, Minnesota; 1992; The "icons" originally meant to encompass the entire front entrance were spread throughout the building, and concentrated on one areas as a "system of icons": images deeply sandblasted in glass, representing Minnesota's history, geography and culture.
- {3} **Corner (the) Market**; mixed media; 10m x 4.5m x 5m; a collaborative project with Andrea Gardner, Bill Bell, and Elana Herzog - at Art Initiatives in New York City, based on a faux financial center office; 1992
- {4} **Gate Mask**; New York City; 6.5m x 3.3m x 1.4m; wood, veneer brick, Mylar; 1984
- {5} **Following Gravity's Rainbow**; veneer brick on wood; 1.5m x 1.5m x 2m structure video projection, smoke machine; 2003-2005; The brick in the scene on the ceiling projection is a "map" of a photograph of the brick on the brick structure from which the projection is emanating.
- {6} **Bay Shore Icons and Clock Medallion**; The "icons", representations of the suburban New York city train station's area's culture, geography and history: 59cm x 52cm x 10cm each; **Clock Medallion**, an abstraction of a constructivist influenced "clock": 1m diameter x 15cm, PGFRC (reinforced mortar)
- {7} **Monument to "Death the Impersonator"**; 75cm x 76cm 102cm; "mini-brick" on wood and Plexiglas, 1985; The somewhat bombastic phrase, *Death the Impersonator* is from a passage in the book, *Gravity's Rainbow* that explains (among other things) the ability of chimneys to withstand atomic blasts of the new *cosmic bomb*, a fictional WW2 German version of the atomic bomb.
- {8 & 9} **Peace Park and Peace Monument**; Peace Park was a theoretical collaborative "theme park" with Chip Sullivan, roughly based on both the plot of *Gravity's Rainbow* and the Mannerist park *Bomarzo*, a labyrinthine park north of Rome of fantastic follies and sculptures that reportedly illustrated the battle between divine and earthly love. The drawing of the park is by University of California Landscape Architecture professor Chip Sullivan. The Peace Monument model is an element of the park that is clearly meant to satirize such names as the Reagan administration's *Peacemaker* - multiple war-headed missiles. The model: wood and vinyl; 97cm x 64cm x 64cm; 1986
- {10} Stills from the **Fleece Blackout**; Video Animation: 2004
- {11 & 12} **Casey Jones** ; 250 x 200 x 200 mm (each); LOM paper digital 3D print; 2004  
In these works, like "Fleeced" above, I utilized the "displaced map modifier" within the 3D software. This "modifier" functions by pushing a dense wire frame mesh with a bitmap/raster image.
- The modifier used in this work is a photograph of a NZ railroad warning sign. This image, an ironic sign of authority, is embossed on the head of *Casey Jones* (the mythical train driver) in a checker board pattern.
- {13} **Masquerade**; 2004; video still; The "clown" (whose wire mesh model was given away on the internet) reflects in his nose, eyes and hat, a moving image video of a person in a gas mask. (This person was waiting for the weapons of mass destruction preceding the 2003 invasion of Iraq.) The clown image was based on a popular mechanical cast iron clown bank from the 19th century who rolled his eyes as he "ate" coins.
- {14} **Global**; 240 x 300 x 200 mm; Microstone digital 3D print, wood shelf; 2000
- {15} **Body Snatchers (convoy)**; 410 x 150 x 140 mm each; Microstone digital 3D print; 2003
- {16} **Yield Displaced**; LOM paper Rapid Prototype and inkjet print; 550 mm x 550 mm x 50mm (the LOM); 2002; Like *fleeced* above, this work also uses a displaced modifier, pictured next to the work.
- {17} **Hazard Displaced**; CNC cut foam with paint and ink jet print; 300 mm 300 mm x 40 mm (CNC sculpture); 2002
- {18} **Lost**; a video animation still projected on the ceiling in the installation, *Following Gravity's Rainbow*; 2002-2005
- {19} **Bird Mouth**; Lambda Print; 1422 x 1016mm; 2002 - 2003 in collaboration with Andrea Gardner. The image in the wallpapered background is a photograph of an anti-fascist, feminist rally by anarchists in Barcelona in 1936.
- {20} **Fleeced**; LOM digital 3D print; 250mm x 200mm x 150mm each; details of individual "sheep" with a wire mesh rendered model of the *Flower Sheep*; 2004
- {21} **Girl in the Canoe**; (in collaboration with Andrea Gardner); video still, 2005



[21] Girl in the Canoe; Video animation still; 2005



# BRIT BUNKLEY

## critical illusions

New Media, Public Art,  
Sculpture

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