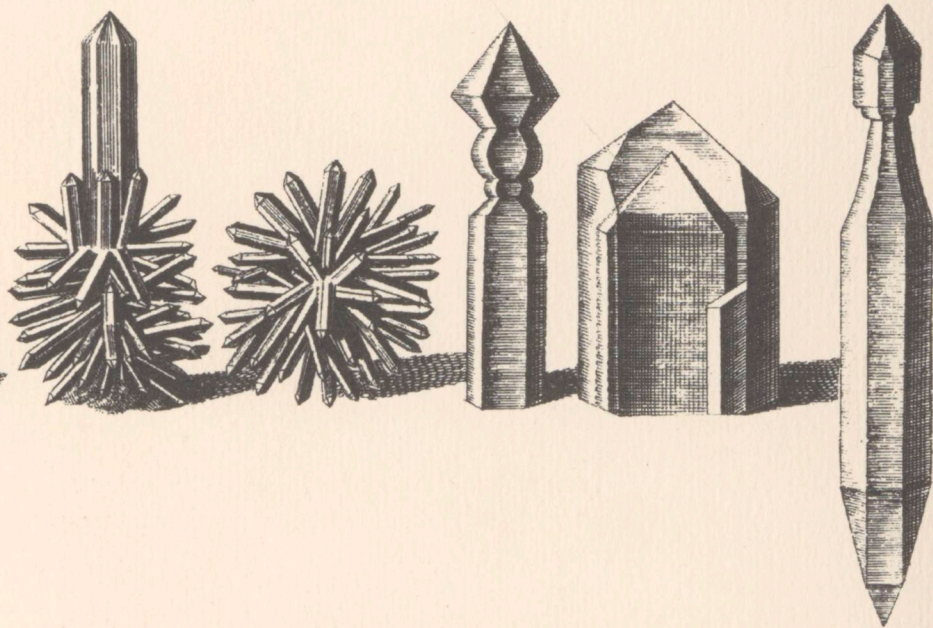
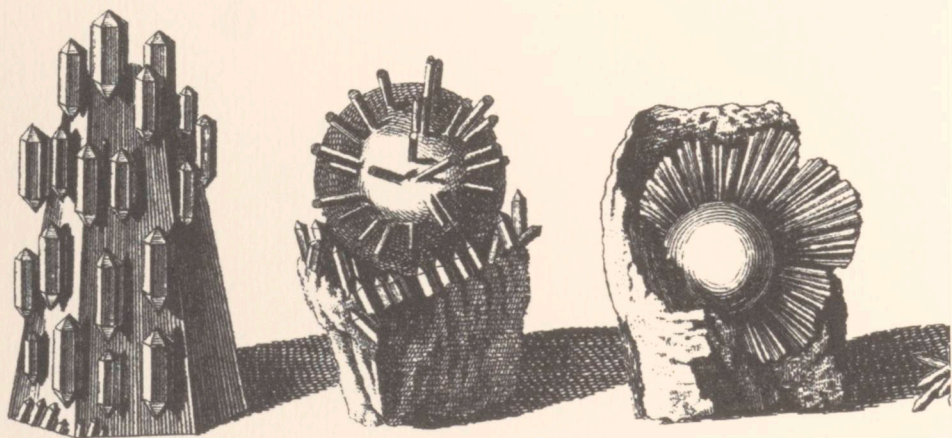


2000

The Crystal Chain Gang

prismatic geometry in recent art





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Allan Smith



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Director's Foreword

The Crystal Chain Gang combines the work of a group of artists from New Zealand and Australia, all of whom have created objects or images in some way responsive to the formal, structural or spiritual play of things crystalline and prismatic. Imagine the complex cross-reflections of light on a multi-faceted stone, the seeming infinite geometry of the snowflake, or the tessellations of a paving pattern. All of these things imply potentially endless repetition and extension, mineral or mathematical, and all find analogies in this exhibition. As 'new age' as this might sound, the story of art and crystals forms a little-known part of early modernism and has foundations that extend back into antiquity.

The Crystal Chain Gang is the second in a series of exhibitions presented at the New Gallery as part of the Vodafone Series of Contemporary Art. As before, Vodafone have lent invaluable support to this project for which we are further indebted to John Rohan, Managing Director, and the Vodafone team. It is always a great joy working with a sponsor who shares your excitement in the intellectual and creative potential of contemporary art. Special thanks must also go to Rob Gardiner and to the Chartwell Trust. Rob's generosity in support of the contemporary visual arts can sometimes seem without boundary and his enthusiasm for this project has encouraged it greatly.

Among the show's several other supporters, can I acknowledge the role played by *Metro* magazine, the Gallery's media partner. Thank you also to Creative New Zealand; the Gallery was again fortunate to receive a grant in support of this project that has greatly assisted its development.

This too is the first major exhibition to be presented by Allan Smith as the Gallery's newly appointed Curator of Contemporary Art. He has developed the project with the rigour and passion that marks all of his work, making *The Crystal Chain Gang* the kind of exhibition that will infiltrate the memory and extend the senses.

Chris Saines

Director

Auckland Art Gallery, Toi o Tāmaki



1. CASPAR DAVID FRIEDRICH, *SEA OF ICE* c.1823-24, HAMBURGER KÜNSTHALLE

A Brief Introduction to Crystalline Modernism

What we see in the crystal is always the bursting forth of life, of time, in its dividing in two or differentiation.

GILLES DELEUZE, "THE CRYSTALS OF TIME"

The 'thirties become a decade fabricated out of crystal and prisms, a world heavy with illusion. Never has the phantasmal appeared so solid.

ROBERT SMITHSON, "ULTRAMODERNE"

Linking thirteen artists from Australia and New Zealand, *The Crystal Chain Gang* adds a new chapter to an old story of fascination with things faceted, prismatic and transparent. The crystal, an object in which mathematics and mysticism are often said to meet, has a long history in human culture and a special place in modernity.

To write an adequate, formal history of modern art and architecture under the rubric of 'the crystalline' would be a rich and engrossing task. And one would hope to do more than merely update Wilhelm Worringer's characterisation of 'abstraction', in contrast to 'empathy', as the inorganic crystalline. Such a history might start with Cézanne's close packed, faceted cliff faces and move through Picasso's cubist interpenetration of planes; Rodchenko's telescoped geometric constructions; Popova's razor sharp, tilted architectonics; Mies van der Rohe's literal and phenomenal transparencies; Mikhail Matiushin's paintings of the crystal's internal reflections; Tony Smith's polyhedral plywood sculptures; Donald Judd's mineral obduracy of steel and plexiglass; and I.M. Pei's glass pyramid. And, it might pause at Matthew Barney's saddle, sheathed in its hexagonal iridescence, or with Ashton Raggatt McDougall's aborescent tiling of RMIT's Storey Hall in Melbourne.

Such a history, however, is beyond the scope of this essay, so I will look at just a few links in this very long and intriguing chain of events, objects

and ideas. The title of the exhibition, *The Crystal Chain Gang*, is adapted from the group name of 14 utopian German architects and artists, gathered under the leadership of Bruno Taut in 1919, calling themselves the Crystal (or Glass) Chain.¹ The drawings and writings of this visionary group are filled with imagery of glass mountains, ice caves, crystal towers and radiating emanations of geometricised light.

The intellectual atmosphere in which members of the original, semi-secret, Crystal Chain wrote their letters and sent their drawings to each other was strongly shaped by 19th century Romantic ideas and the reworking of these ideas in the post-World War I crucible of Late-Expressionism. For Romantic writers such as Friedrich William Schelling, seeking a *modus vivendi* for the individual and Nature, for Art and the Absolute Spirit, the crystalline could be read as a sign of "the spiritual within the material".² Its mathematical clarity and internal luminosity, its apparent nesting of the organic within the inorganic, made the crystal a paradoxical emblem of divinised form. The crystal, for many philosophers, artists and architects in the early modern period, was a potent symbol for transcendence when hope in the creative act itself and capitulation to the aesthetic illusion was gradually displacing Christian iconography as the primary key to truth.

Both Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Sea of Ice* (fig. 1) and Hans Scharoun's drawing *Principles of Architecture* (fig. 2) show a crystalline landscape in which the organic and the inorganic interfuse. As Friedrich's arctic water has slowly, intricately frozen and convulsed itself into a shattered architecture of ice, so Scharoun's prismatic buildings have burst, shard-like from a geometric plant. In both cases elemental forces seem harnessed to the same will to abstract form. Like Scharoun, the Luckhardt brothers and Carl Krayl were also members of Taut's Chain. Wassili and Hans Luckhardt's faceted dome in *Crystal on Sphere* (fig. 3) harks back to Taut's famous prismatic Glass Pavilion of 1914. Taut's Pavilion was inspired in turn by the writer Paul Scheerbart who believed unconditionally in the power of transparent and multi-coloured glass architecture to foster positive social change. Krayl's fragile *Star House* with its tracery of

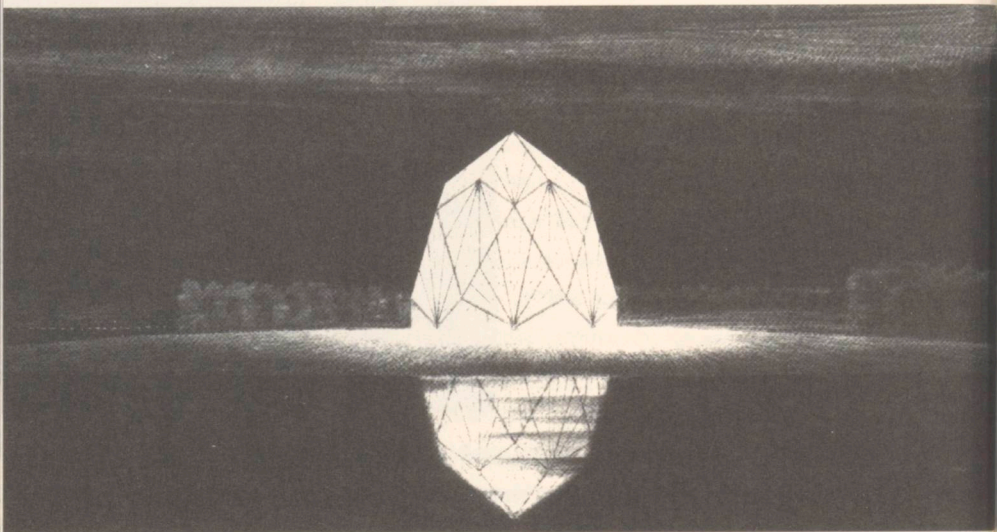
2. HANS SCHAROUN
PRINCIPLES OF ARCHITECTURE
C.1919
AKADEMIE DER KÜNSTE
BERLIN



filaments and snowflake scintillations resembles something from a Scherbart fantasy of “constant and slowly shifting architecture, like gradually changing kaleidoscopes”.³ (fig. 4)

In 1901, at the opening ceremony of the Darmstadt Artists' Colony, the architect Peter Behrens theatrically held aloft a large crystal as a 'Zeichen' (Sign) of new beginnings attained through the refining process of aesthetic experience: “as coal-dust, seized by the force of the elements, is transformed into the pure, brilliant and clearly formed diamond crystal”.⁴ In the 1919 mission statement of the new Bauhaus, Walter Gropius proclaimed an integrated community of painters, craftsmen and architects, built together as a living architecture, “rising to heaven out of the hands of a million workers, the crystal symbol of the new faith of the future”.⁵ Behrens' use of the crystal to endorse a moment of transformative spectacle, and Taut's language of heavenly ascensions, all rely on oft-rehearsed historico-literary precedents. Some of the most familiar of these precedents are: the para-biblical mythology of the Queen of Sheba's audience with King Solomon on a crystal floor; Ezekiel's Old

Testament vision of the heavenly creature surrounded by “the colour of the terrible crystal”; the Grail legends of the crystal chalice; and the vision in St. John’s Revelation of the New Jerusalem with a light “like a jasper stone, clear as crystal”.⁶



3. WASSILI AND HANS LUCKHARDT, *CRYSTAL ON SPHERE* 1920, AKADEMIE DER KÜNSTE, BERLIN

As lonely creators of ecstatic paper architecture, and prophetic advocates of a visionary sublime, the Crystal Chain brotherhood were Nietzschean in their aspirations. Behren’s designation too, of his theatrical crystal as ‘Zeichen’, was no doubt a reference to the section titled “Das Zeichen” in Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, which tells of Zarathustra’s emergence from his cave like the rising sun. Zarathustra’s cave in the icy mountain peaks is a symbol of the mind, turned in on itself toward the task of self-knowledge and alchemical transmutation. The Artists’ Colony at Darmstadt was also built on a promontory overlooking the city. Nietzsche’s Zarathustra brings his message from mountain fastnesses down to the lowlands where the masses live. To Behrens and Taut, crystal aesthetics promised to bridge the gap between what Manfredo Tafuri

and Francesco Dal Co have called an "aristocracy of the spirit" and an alienated "mankind that had found itself again".⁷

The symbolism which links elevated place and atmospheric rarefaction with the potential for ecstatic change is present in the numerous drawings Bruno Taut made of alpine architecture (fig.6). In Taut's alpine images of decorated glacial form, and glistening geometric fantasies he endeavoured to live out Nietzsche's dictum: "He who perceives, let him learn to build with mountains."⁸ Taut's ultimate goal was to refurbish entire mountain ranges with Grail-shrines and crystal-lined caves, lit up at night by multi-coloured beacons, and to cover continents with gem-encrusted 'ray-domes' and 'sparkling palaces'. Another Expressionist architect, Otto Kohtz, had expressed similar aspirations in 1909: "The time may come when man has the power ... to play with mountains as a child plays with sand. To create works of art as high as the Himalayas, formed from his imagination as the jeweller forms a casket for his jewels, perforated like lace, with stone used like metal, forest and field like jewels, glaciers like pearls, and water like crystal".⁹

In the words of Taut, and his partners in luminous enterprises, the exacerbated wish for "stalagmitic wonders on the mosaic of the holy earth"; for "sparkling, crystalline objects, scattered enchantingly around the landscape"; and the belief in "the awakening child's brain as in the diamond casket, in which the life of the soul crystallises vitally into enduring runes"¹⁰ - all attest to a desperate assertion of beauty in an increasingly utilitarian world. This assertion of beauty, however, tries to win the modern over on its own terms. The plunge into the mystical depths of the crystal was an attempt to find a deep and essential life at the heart of the inorganic, for it was the rule of the inorganic which held sway in burgeoning modernity. As secular and impersonal modernism forced spirituality, mysticism, imagination and individuality into forms of alienated isolation, this brittle faith in the crystal's depths was a gamble on a form of creative knowledge that promised immunity "from the gnawing worms of disappointment."¹¹ Crystal symbolism offered hope that primordial mysteries and creative fire could still be stolen,

Prometheus like, from the dark places of the new age.

In his book *Inventing Kindergarten* Norman Brosterman tells a quieter, yet no less significant, story of the crystal's infiltration into early modernism.¹² Broster's fascinating book traces the formal and philosophical links between Friedrich Froebel's 20 kindergarten 'play gifts' – which included parquetry, building blocks, paper folding, paper weaving and jointed slats – and the modernist languages of abstraction and geometric construction. Froebel, the German inventor of kindergarten, was a crystallographer. Froebel's university studies in physics, chemistry and mineralogy all served to confirm his growing conviction that everything in the world bore evidence of universal structural laws. New studies in late 18th and early 19th century mineralogy and chemistry such as Abbé René Just Haüy's *Traité de Minéralogie* and John Dalton's *New System of Chemical Philosophy*, supported the ancient Platonic argument that everything in the world was assembled from different configurations of the same very small particles. Froebel's studies continued at Berlin University's Mineralogical Museum, under the tutelage of Christian Samuel Weiss.

Weiss took crystallography from a largely speculative philosophical endeavour to a rationally based mathematical methodology linking the geometrical symmetries of crystals to their internal chemical structure. For one day every week, Froebel was assigned the task of categorizing the University's

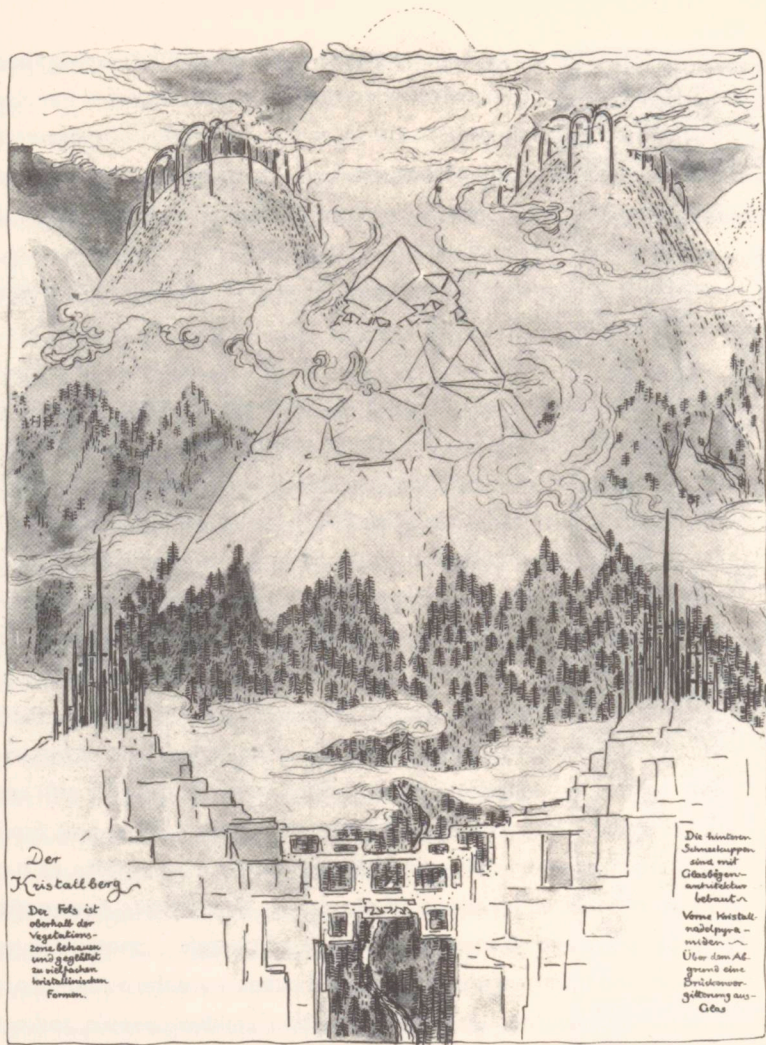


5. PETER BEHRENS
EX-LIBRIS c. 1920

substantial mineralogical specimens on the basis of their varying shapes. To Froebel, this work meant direct contact with “the geometric handiwork of God”, and a stimulation to consider the universality of patterns that held the human, plant and mineral worlds together: “My rocks and crystals served me as a mirror wherein I might descry mankind, and man’s development and history. ... Nature and man now seemed to me mutually to explain each other, through all their numberless various stages of development.”¹³

Offered a post in 1816 as professor of mineralogy at the University of Stockholm, Froebel chose instead to launch his career in child education. The backbone of his educational system was a graduated series of exercises called the ‘gifts’, which guided the child through an increasingly complex and varied understanding of the world around them. It was Froebel’s intention that his system of blocks, geometric shapes, coloured papers, strings and lattices impart a vision of physical, social and spiritual order through the hand/eye coordination of fundamental physical attributes such as texture, weight, colour, shape and number. Froebel had not abandoned his crystallographic imagination, merely applied it in an unexpected context. In *Peas work* for instance, the 19th gift, which utilised small sticks to connect lattices of peas or balls of wax, Froebel was actually adopting Weiss’s understanding of crystal form as based on symmetrical collocations of atoms. As Brosterman summarises: “Froebel perceived that since the shape of crystals – combinations of triangles and tetrahedrons, squares and cubes – are the outcome of the same natural laws that result in the growth of children, people, and entire societies, handling and manipulating models of these forms correctly would reveal and illuminate the logic of creation.”¹⁴

Brosterman points to a surprising abundance of formal homologies between Froebel’s exercises and the stylistic vocabularies of architects and artists such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky, who had all been taught the Froebel system as children and retained an active interest in its principles as adults. Apart from the numerous physical and structural correspondences between Froebelian aesthetics



6. BRUNO TAUT, *THE CRYSTAL MOUNTAIN* 1918, AKADEMIE DER KÜNSTE, BERLIN

and the language of modernism, an equally important link between modernist form and Froebel's system is the search for essences.

Froebel's pantheistic pedagogy, assuming all physical and psychological structure, at micro and macro levels, to be reflective of benign universal order, was, for example, close in spirit to what became Kandinsky's notion of "the Principle of Internal Necessity". This 'Principle' was an active

one, and signified a Hegelian materialisation of the spirit, a making concrete of the universal. Kandinsky's alternative term for this material realisation of the absolute was 'crystallisation'. It is the crystallisation of a purified visual language, musical in its complexity and clarity, that will lead to what Kandinsky calls "the Epoch of the Great Spiritual". Unpacking this utopian rhetoric of purity, Mark Cheetham explains that, for Kandinsky, "To crystallise is to capture purely an essence, to arrest and manifest it historically and materially. ... Crystallisation and abstraction are techniques ... they distill essence, whether in the seer's stone (one mystical incarnation of the crystal) or an abstract painting".¹⁵

Paul Klee, who Kandinsky claimed as a fellow "abstract painter of spiritual essence", also had an investment in the crystal. Klee's crystal world, however, unlike Kandinsky's, was immanent rather than transcendent. His graphic universe was morphological and process oriented rather than teleological in intent. In a 1914 diary entry Klee talks of crystalline abstraction as an escape from present horrors: "In the great pit of forms lie broken fragments to some of which we still cling. ... A junkyard of unauthentic elements for the creation of impure crystals. ... But then the whole crystal cluster once bled. I thought I was dying, ... but how can I die, I who am crystal? I crystal."¹⁶ Mark Cheetham convincingly reads the central geometric motif in Klee's painting *Fish Magic*, 1925, as a crystal suspended on a string and growing in solution, as in a laboratory experiment. Rather than withdrawal, crystallisation here means vulnerable immersion in the world-medium, and a precision of attentiveness. The artist has conceived of himself as a crystal, preserved from the arbitrary destructiveness of the world, through the serene clarity of his vision.

Trapped inside Klee's crystal in *Fish Magic* is a clock face. Crystals have often been regarded as special kinds of temporal artefacts, as possessing powers of temporal suspension and compression. Gilles Deleuze turns to the crystal as his special symbol of cinematic temporality in modernism. Post-World War II, modern time is 'out of joint', it is fractured and presses together the real and the virtual, the false and the true, the opaque and the transparent, the past and the present in

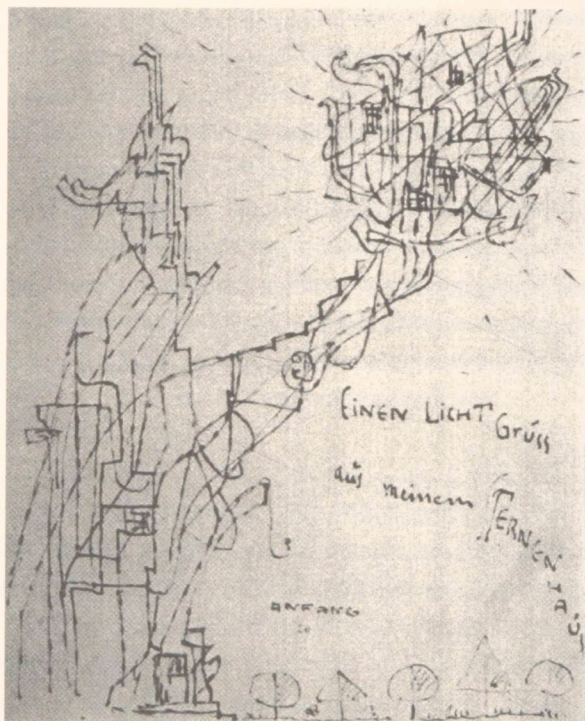
incommensurable constructions. Depiction and the unity of place and action, on which movement dominated early modern films relied, are now displaced by a continually splitting temporality, a perpetual differentiation between past and present. This splitting produces image and sound particles which are constantly connecting and aggregating, reversing their positions in terms of the real and the virtual, or freezing their multiple contents into pure, perfectly cut crystalline worlds. "We see in the crystal the perpetual foundation of time, non-chronological time, Cronos and not Chronos. This is the powerful, non-organic Life which grips the world. The visionary, the seer, is the one who sees in the crystal, and what he sees is the gushing of time as dividing in two, as splitting."¹⁷

As Deleuze opposes his fractured time-crystals to the movement-image of early modernism, so Robert Smithson contrasts early modernist realism, naturalism and organicism, with the crystalline time of the Ultramoderne. The Ultramoderne is a condition of the 1930s; that age of chrome angles, stepped brickwork, mirrors and trans-historical decorative quotation. For Smithson, the teleological realism of the modern is displaced by something more refractive, convoluted and ambiguous. In the "Time-Crystal" of the 1930s, "that multi-faceted segment of time", Smithson discovers "premonitions, labyrinths, cycles, and repetitions that lead us to a concrete area of the infinite."¹⁸ Smithson attends to the fractured terrain of Ultramoderne built form and imaginative space, with the same rigorous scrutiny he applies to the entropic and overwhelmingly archaic forms of the natural landscape. In describing the geologic landscape, Smithson's language becomes fractal, tectonic, precarious, laden and splintered, to mimic and inhabit this ancient yet active matrix of temporality and matter.

In his 1966 essay "The Crystal Land", Smithson describes how, on first encounter, a Donald Judd pink plexiglass box resembled "a giant crystal from another planet". With its symmetrically grouped surfaces, internal wires like a set of axes, inversions between transparency and opacity, and its hard factuality - this box embodied "the formal logic of

crystallography". Smithson describes Judd and himself cracking open deposits of tiny quartz crystals on a group visit to Upper Montclair quarry in New Jersey. The quarry was rich in minerals including: allanite; azurite; goethite; greenocktie; orthoclase; quartz; tourmaline and uxelite. Looking across to the surrounding countryside Smithson notes the cubic clusters of houses in white, petal pink, frosted mint, rose, antique green and lilac – nestling between concrete networks of roads and highways: "In fact", he says, "the entire landscape has a mineral presence. From the shiny chrome diners to glass windows of shopping centres, a sense of the crystalline prevails."¹⁹

Smithson begins to see everything around him as manifestations of a crystallised, sharp-edged physicality; everything thickens up into optical, aural and tactile shards, dense matter, congealed gleams, sectional views and tilted, compressed objects. Travelling home in his car, the dashboard



4. CARL KRAYL
*LIGHT-GREETINGS
 FROM MY STAR-HOUSE*
 1920
 HABLİK COLLECTION
 ITZEHOE

is a configuration of chrome in a steel escarpment, the glass disc of the speedometer stands out, the radio buttons are a row of jutting cubes, the images in the tilted rearview mirror overlay the busy landscape of sounds, folding papers and photographs constantly forming and disassembling in the back seat. ♦

“Things extreme, and scattrng bright”²⁰: The Crystal Chain Gang

The ‘history of art’, according to Kubler, resembles ‘a broken but much repaired chain made of string and wire’ that connects ‘occasional jewelled links’.

ROBERT SMITHSON, “*ULTRAMODERNE*”

The process of crystallisation was more advanced. The fences along the road were so heavily encrusted that they formed a continuous palisade, a white frost at least six inches thick on either side of the palings. The few houses between the trees glistened like wedding cakes, their white roofs and chimneys transformed into exotic minarets and baroque domes. On a lawn of green glass spurs a child’s tricycle glittered like a Fabergé gem, the wheels starred into brilliant jasper crowns.

J.G. BALLARD, *THE CRYSTAL WORLD*

In the same year Robert Smithson wrote “The Crystal Land”, J.G. Ballard published his science fiction novel *The Crystal World*. Ballard tells the beautiful and horrific tale of a process of crystallisation which is taking over a corner of forest in the Cameroon Republic. Trees, flowers and animals are all being transformed into frozen, jewel encrusted objects as the diabolical mineralogy spreads like a virus. This relentless

petrification is the result of a sub-atomic aberration in the space-time continuum which begins to function like a faulty film projector. Any form affected starts to stack up around itself a laminated crust of all its possible temporal exposures. For the last two years Richard Reddaway has been working on a series of lattice and block configurations using mirrors and mirror tiles on wood. The series takes its name from Ballard's novel. It is both the frosty prismatic glitter of Ballard's vision that attracts Reddaway and the anarchic proliferation, the cancerous potential for spatial infiltration displayed by Ballard's mineralogy.

With their different signature formatting, Melinda Harper, Kerrie Poliness, Anthony Sumich, Simon Morris and Anne-Marie May all explore the translations, realignments, displacements and proliferous adjacencies of crystalline form. To some extent, all of these artists are idiosyncratic crystallographers; their geometric fabrics and field dispositions bear the strong imprint of the personal, the improvisational and the unpredictable. Grouped together, their engagement with geometry implies a distant, interrogative stance as well as ludic high-spiritedness. What amounts to an almost tumbling *jouissance* is supervised by a defensive overlapping of patch and stitch; a chain mail of facet and wedge, and a forbidding frontality of format. Though the pleasure quotient is high with this work, the seductions of the planimetric and the tactile are shadowed by anxiety. In an age attuned to the imagery of biological and chemical complexity, crystalline patterning can mediate between the exhilarating inversions of the organic/inorganic on the one hand, and the fear of technology's ability to replicate nature or of nature's capacity for exorbitant, systemic growth, on the other.

In principle, I would expect artists such as Harper, Sumich and Morris to be more interested in the idea of what crystallographers are now calling quasi-crystals, which display non-periodic long-range order, rather than the predictable repeating behaviours traditionally expected of crystals. A contemporary, textural application of the new mathematics of crystallography is evident in Melbourne's predominantly green RMIT Storey Hall refurbishment (fig. 7). The architects, Ashton Raggatt

McDougall, have structured what Herman Finsterlin might call a “mystical green space-lattice” according to the non-repeating tilings invented by mathematical physicist Roger Penrose. As one critic has noted, the Storey Hall project links German Expressionist architecture and cinema with the contemporary attention to mutant life forms: “a new virus or genetic code, a new crystal intelligence.”²¹

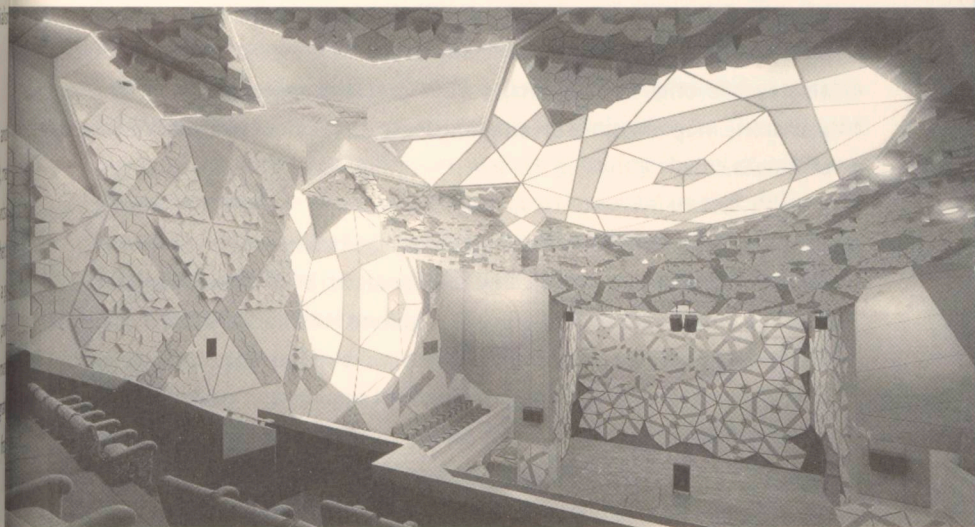
Gavin Hipkins’ 92-part photographic ideogram *Action (the model)* is a melancholic work. In 1968, a lecturer at Victoria University’s Mathematics department, David Patterson, constructed and painted these cardboard models to demonstrate ‘The ninety-two non-uniform convex polyhedra with regular faces’. Together the stacked prints configure the word ‘action’ and its inverted double. Hipkins was interested in the convergence of his own year of birth, the year of hoped for international industrial and student revolution and the year that the models were constructed. Installed, as a rule, in Victoria University, this work speaks of a tentative pedagogical optimism that is blurred by nostalgia and regret. These unassuming little models, their claims to systemic completeness now muted, reference other utopian projects such as Buckminster Fuller’s geodesic domes and counterculture housing. Hipkins’ pedagogical metaphysics, however, are very different from the sturdy essentialism of Friedrich Froebel.

In a slightly different vein, Gregor Kregar’s glass and steel orb is another utopian image containing its own critique. The work’s title, *OKO*, means ‘eye’ in Slovenian. Like the English word, it reads the same forwards and backwards. With a blue iris at one end, and a green one at the other, this large glass eye connotes both blindness and 360° seeing. Like a giant globe, with its green, white and blue evoking the colours of the planet, Kregar’s vitreous eyeball combines great strength with shimmering delicacy. With its coloured glass panels and allusion to global integration, *OKO* is like a fantasy of Scheebartian harmony, beautiful in the fragile lunacy of its vision.

Both Stephen Bram and Jim Speers have a long- standing interest in crystal

form. In 1990 Stephen Bram organised a photography exhibition of microscopic views of crystals. In the catalogue, *Seven Photomicrographs*, Bram says that, like the photograph, the crystal makes visible the condition of its own growth: "It marks time and perception's debt to geometry". Bronwyn Clark-Coolee, in one of the catalogue essays locates Bram's interest in crystal form within a chosen heritage of Russian Suprematism and Constructivism.²² What Clark-Coolee also suggests is that contemporary geometric abstractionists like Bram are working with their own 'crises of dimension', their own version of Malevich and Matiushin's search for plausible models of visual form in a changing world. Bram often constructs white cardboard or plastic forms whose faceted planes are determined, like his wall drawings, by perspectival trajectories. In both his drawings and models there is an interplay between the given coordinate points of an actual site and the openness of the formations plotted from these points.

Jim Speers' diagrammatic wall drawing *Steno's Law on Canaan Downs* is an updating of a series of drawings he made for the Christchurch High Street Project space in 1993, titled *Emeralds and Other Beryls*. Painted in pale



7. ASHTON RAGGATT McDOUGALL, *RMIT STOREY HALL AUDITORIUM*, 1995

yellow, soft greens, black, and red on a straw-coloured ground, Speers intended his new work to reference the hand-coloured plates in James Sowerby's 19th century, *British Mineralogy or Coloured Figures intended to elucidate The Mineralogy of Great Britain*. Steno's Law refers to the dictum of orthodox crystallography that all identically shaped facets will be parallel. Cannan Downs is a quartz-rich part of Takaka Hill near Nelson, where the artist grew up. Speers feels that crystallographic diagramming, which takes you right into a "rule-based world" with seemingly endless taxonomic scope, and offers access to invisible atomic activity, ends by taking you further and further into virtualities and abstractions.

The work of Regina Walter, Ruth Watson and Louise Weaver contribute an extraordinarily delicate and effervescent beauty to this exhibition. The title of Ruth Watson's work *The Glass Bead Game* refers to Herman Hesse's mystically oriented novel about a utopian community dedicated to the formal beauties of music and mathematics. Made from champagne-pink frosted glass beads pinned to a fabric support, Watson's constellation of tiny globules forms a heart-shaped map of the world. This map is a cordiform projection, invented in the early 16th century by the German astronomer Johannes Stobern. A particular 18th century Islamic globe, with emeralds for sea and rubies for the land was in the artist's mind when she was making this piece. Her ornamental map also recalls other novelty maps from precious materials such as the gemstone map of France given to the French President by Czar Nicholas of Russia.

Louise Weaver's *Rainbow Lorikeet (grafting)* looks like a survivor from J.G. Ballard's crystallised forest: "By day fantastic birds flew through the petrified forest, and jewelled crocodiles glittered like heraldic salamanders on the banks of the crystalline river".²³ A real bird has acquired a second skin, a shimmering pink, squamos sheath of sequins and coloured thread. The tiny piece of coral that forms part of its frozen foliage is a miniature sign of the bird's slow and magical transformation into its mineral life-after-death. The bird has survived through crystallisation, through exchanging its organic nature for an inorganic one.

Regina Walter's *Fauxbergé* trinkets and chandelier also look like props from Ballard's frozen world. Made from cheap bits of plastic, glass and beads Walter's gift-boxed, floral gems are like the strange orchids that Ballard describes: "Glittering below her in the sunlight was what appeared to be an immense crystalline orchid carved from some quartz-like mineral. ... The internal faces of the quartz had been cut with remarkable skill, so that a dozen images of the orchid were refracted, one upon the other, as if seen through a maze of prisms."²⁴ Before writing *The Crystal World* Ballard had also published a short story, "The Time Garden" in which he tells of Count Axel and his wife who live a life of exquisite, timeless serenity as long as there still remain enough of the crystal flowers in the Time Garden for them to pick. Each flower picked momentarily halts the flow of a formless horde on the plane below which will eventually overrun them and their exhausted garden.

The visions of the original Crystal Chain, of a world recreated through a glass and crystalline sublime, were paradoxically modern and regressive at the same time. Theirs was a proffered escape from the modernism of capitalist Europe and its mechanised city. But the very qualities of dematerialisation, evanescence and hypnotic sparkle, that made their crystalline so appealing, were also typical of modernity in its dissolution of metaphysical *terra firma* and its capture of the modern subject in a hall of mirrors. The contemporary versions of crystallinity set out in this exhibition bear the hallmarks of a similar ambivalence. The sugared fantasies of sparkle and reflection, and the glittering chains of prismatic geometry make the phantasmal real but also remind us that diffraction can be the most appealing form of distraction. When the crystal makes the eternal visible, or the universal concrete, it also makes the real virtual and the visible an illusion. ♦

NOTES

1. The *Gläserne Kette*. See Iain Boyd Whyte, *The Crystal Chain Letters: Architectural Fantasies by Bruno Taut and His Circle*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London 1985.
2. See Regine Prange, "The Crystalline", in Keith Hartley (ed.), *The Romantic Spirit in German Art 1790-1990*, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh; South Bank Centre, London; Oktagon Verlag, Munich 1994, pp. 155-163.
3. Paul Scheerbart's *Münchhausen und Clarissa*, in Rosemarie Haag Bletter, "Paul Scheerbart's Architectural Fantasies", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 34, 1975, p. 92.
4. Alexander Koch in Prange, p. 158.
5. Walter Gropius in Rosemarie Haag Bletter, "The Interpretation of the Glass Dream - Expressionist Architecture and the History of the Crystal Metaphor", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 40, 1981, pp. 20-37. Nicola Palmer's unpublished thesis, *The Crystal as a Symbol of Transformation: an Exploration of the Utopian Ideology of Bruno Taut*, University of Auckland, 1991, was also helpful here.
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7. Manfredo Tafuri, Francesco Dal Co, trans. Robert Erich Wolf, *Modern Architecture/1*, Faber and Faber, London 1986, pp. 13, 115.
8. Friedrich Nietzsche in Wolfgang Peht, trans. J. A. Underwood, Edith Küstner, *Expressionist Architecture*, Thames and Hudson, London 1973, p. 42.
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11. Hablik in Whyte, p. 137.
12. Norman Brosterman, *Inventing Kindergarten*, Harry N. Abrams Inc., New York 1997.
13. Friedrich Froebel in Brosterman, p. 25.
14. Brosterman, p. 25.
15. Mark Cheetham, *The Rhetoric of Purity: Essentialist Theory and the Advent of Abstract Painting*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York 1991, p. 88.
16. Paul Klee in Cheetham, p. 145.
17. Gilles Deleuze, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, Robert Galeta, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1997, p. 81. Apart from recurring discussion through the book, note "The crystals of time", pp. 68-97.
18. Robert Smithson, "Ultramoderne" in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, ed. Nancy Holt, New York University Press, New York, 1979, p. 49.
19. Robert Smithson in Smithson, pp. 19-20.
20. "things/ Extreme, and scattrng bright" is from John Donne's poem, "Aire and Angels".
21. Alex Selenitsch, "Seven Kinds of Resurrection", *Transition 52/53*, 1996, p. 19.
22. Bronwyn Clark-Coolie in Stephen Bram, *Seven Photomicrographs*, 200 Gertrude Street and The Australian Centre for Photography, Melbourne, 1990, unpaginated.
23. J. G. Ballard, *The Crystal World*, Jonathan Cape, London 1966, p. 7.
24. Ballard, p. 39. ♦

Artists' Biographies and Selected Works

Stephen Bram was born in Melbourne in 1961. Between 1991 and 1997 Bram was known for his geometric abstract paintings of tilting and floating architectural elements. These sharp-edged shapes had been subjected to extreme perspectival distortion. Since 1998 he has preferred to paint his planimetric two-point and three-point perspectival paintings directly onto the wall so they engage with a specific architectural space. He currently lives and works in Munich. He is represented by Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne and Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington. For further information see: <http://www.unisa.edu.au/samstag/scholars/scholars99/bram.htm>

STEPHEN BRAM
UNTITLED (THREE POINT PERSPECTIVE)
2000



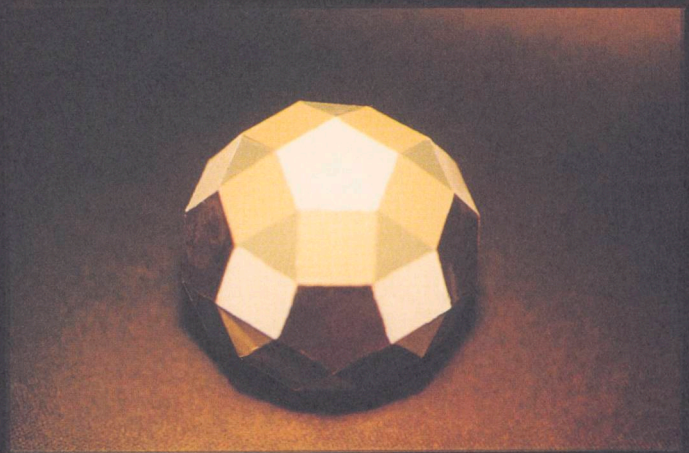
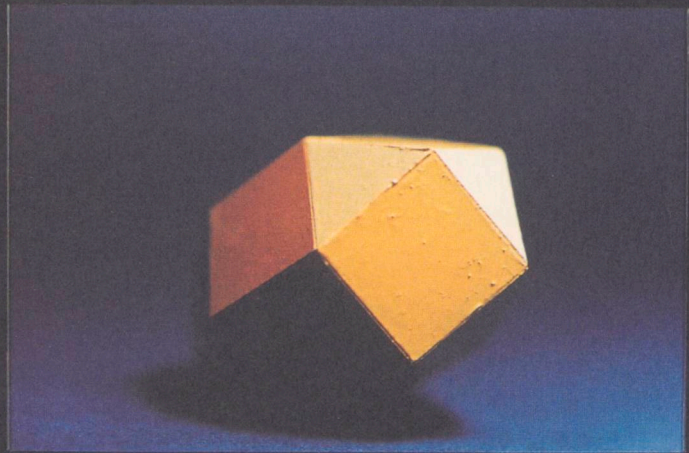
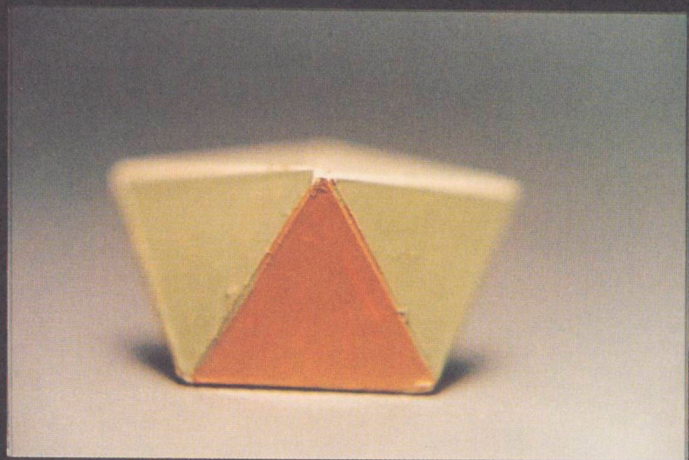
Melinda Harper was born in Darwin in 1965. Between 1989 and 1994 she was actively involved in the artist-run gallery Store 5. She is constantly reinvigorating formats from earlier modernist movements such as Suprematism, Constructivism, Rayonism, and Op art with a restless variety of colour codings and patterning from textile design, Indian miniature paintings, and the post-natural world of plastics and electronic screens. In 1999 she collaborated with Kerrie Poliness to design an exhibition of coloured silk scarves. She is interested in colour and pattern as a language of instability and possibility. She is currently artist in residence at the Barcelona studio of the Australia Council and is represented by Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne and David Pestorius, Brisbane. For further information see:
<http://www.contemporaryart.com.au/>

MELINDA HARPER
UNTITLED
1999



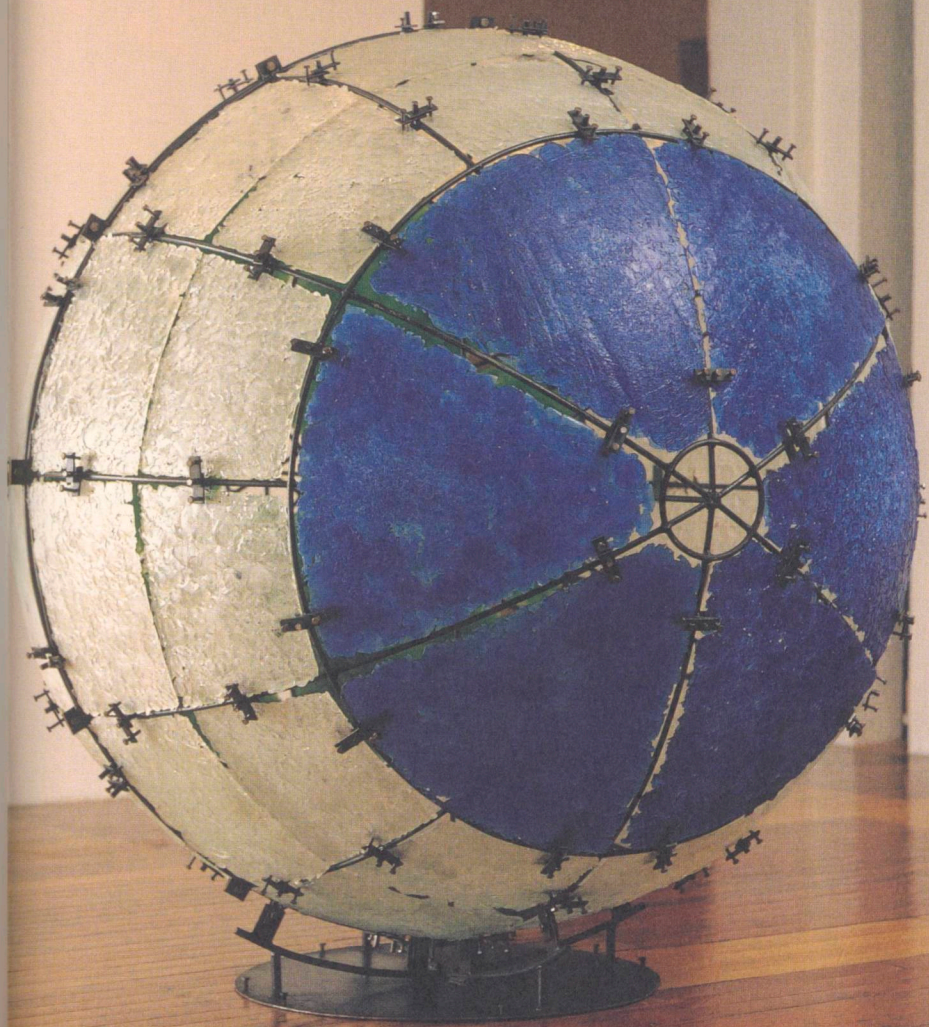
Gavin Hipkins was born in Auckland in 1968. In his photographic genealogy of modern form, a serialised imagery of bowls, cups, light bulbs, and ornamental bosses, have paralleled his stacked photograms of circles, discs and spheres. At times his hypnotic, repeating imagery of ordinary objects implies both a sexualisation and mechanisation of vision. His vision of a receding Modernist landscape is marked by pathos, nostalgia and a sense of loss. This year he leaves his post teaching Photographic Theory and Criticism at Massey University, Wellington, to enrol in the MFA programme at The University of British Columbia, Vancouver. He is represented by Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington and Ivan Anthony Gallery, Auckland.

GAVIN HIPKINS
THE MODEL (ACTION)
1999-2000



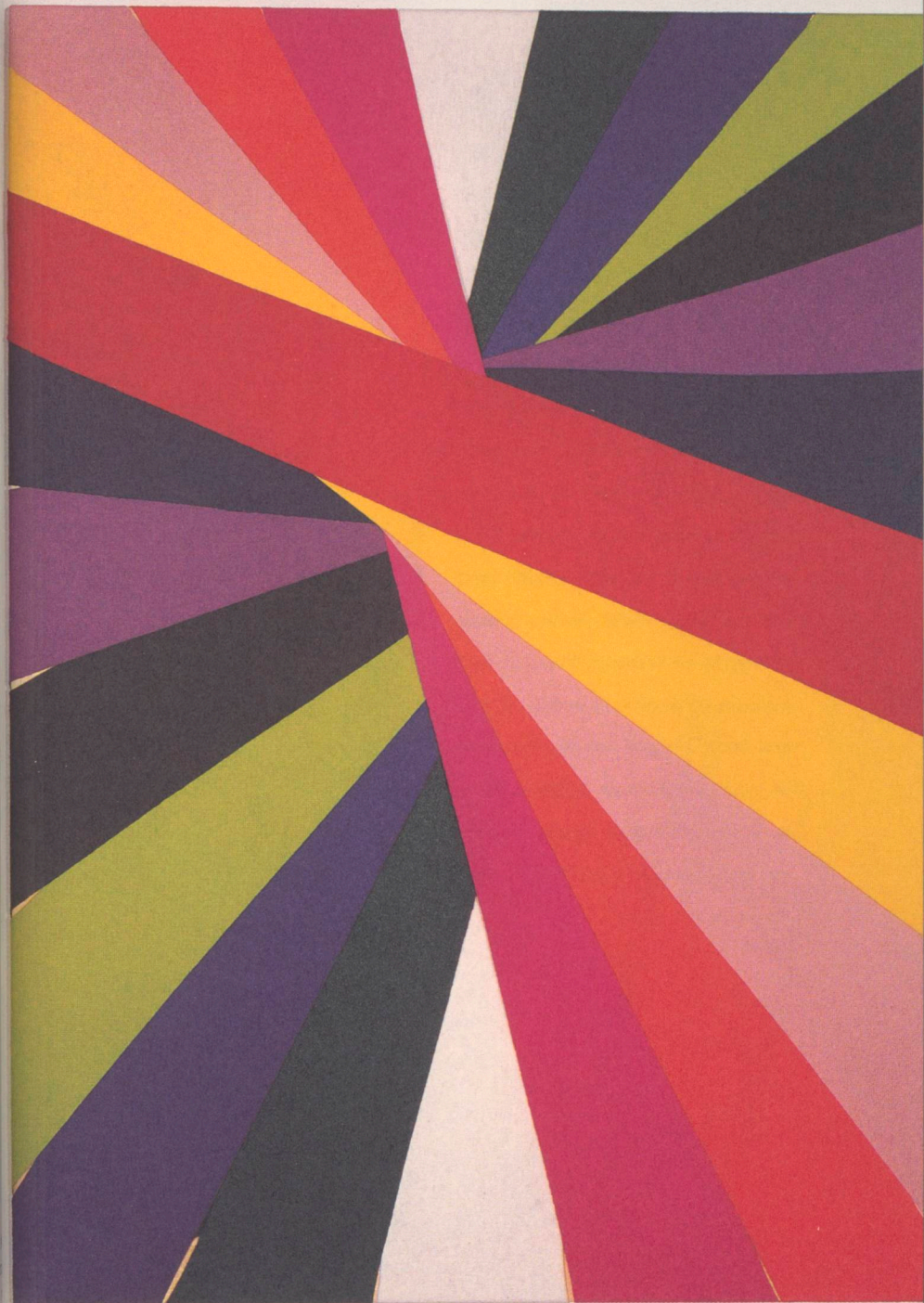
Gregor Kregar was born in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in 1972. After completing undergraduate studies in the Academy of Fine Arts, University of Ljubljana, in 1996, and exhibiting in numerous group and solo shows, he pursued further studies in Drama and Ceramics. In 1998 he completed his MFA in sculpture at the University of Auckland. The heavy materiality and sturdy construction of his art references the world of hard, no-nonsense manual labour, as well as the dark theatricality of European existentialism. The repetition of closely packed forms is a common ingredient in his art. He has used dozens of cast ceramic hands to multiply a gesture into a wall of bristling form, and vertically installed railway lines to create a monument to the tautology of human endeavour.

GREGOR KREGAR
OKO
1999



Anne-Marie May was born in Melbourne in 1965. During the last ten years she has exhibited in numerous group and solo exhibitions in Australia, Japan and Europe. Like Stephen Bram, Melinda Harper and Kerrie Poliness, she was included in the exhibition *Geometric Painting in Australia 1941-1997*, curated for the University of Queensland Art Gallery, by David Pestorius in 1997. In a 1994 exhibition in the 200 Gertrude Street gallery, she provided twelve words to clarify her formal procedures: "measure, rule, mark, cut, cover, staple, divide, overlap, intersect, cut, wrap, repeat". Her work always combines informal, craft-referenced materials with a high-modern love of logical fabrication. She now lives and works in Alice Springs, Central Australia, which she describes as "layered, tactile and colour saturated". She is represented by Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney.

ANNE-MARIE MAY
UNTITLED
1993



Simon Morris was born in Hamilton in 1963. He specialises in a highly graphic mode of geometric abstraction. His fields of dots, disjunctive grids and complex matrices of linear circuitry are animated by precisely controlled optical tremors. These accented fields of graphic information hover between relational and non-relational organisation. He has sometimes used chance, by throwing dice, to determine variations on a formal system. He is part of the 2000-2001 collaborative wall-painting project *Painted Spaces*, curated by artist David Thomas, which includes Australian, American, British and New Zealand artists. He is represented by Anna Bibby Gallery, Auckland, New Work Studio, Wellington and Lesley Kreisler Gallery, New Plymouth.

SIMON MORRIS
DEPLOY
1996-2000



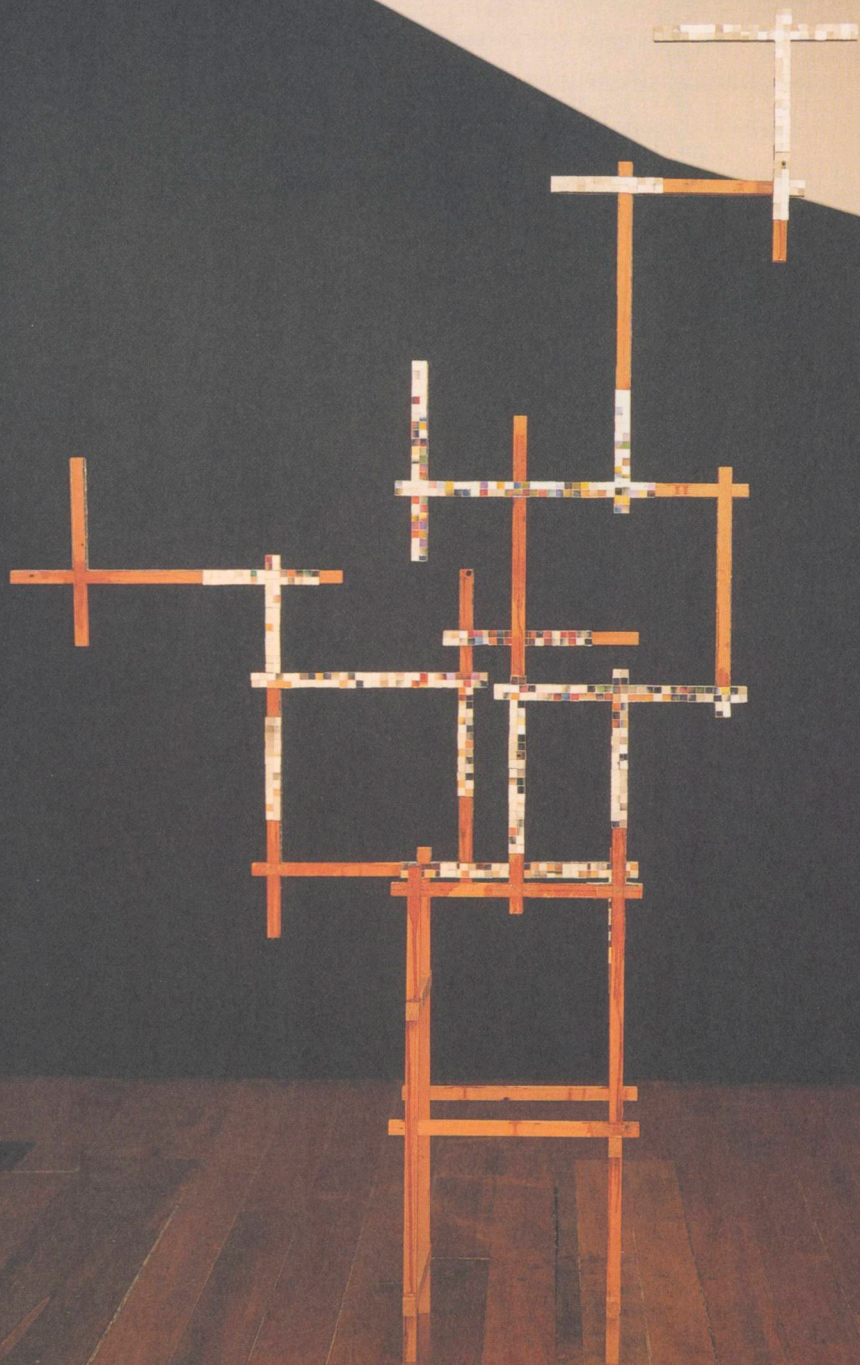
Kerrie Poliness was born in Melbourne in 1962. In the later 1990s she transferred her geometric webs, grids and tessellations from canvases to walls. Her series *Black O Wall Drawings*, for instance, exist as a boxed set of instructions, marker pens, chalk and string, enabling gallerists and collectors to draw up a work directly on the wall according to set parameters. These drawings combine impersonal system with idiosyncratic estimation and inflection. Commenting on this shift between uniformity and irregularity, on what she calls "organic geometry", she says: "It is the nature of how crystals grow, why snowflakes are all different, why nature is asymmetrical". In 1999 she collaborated with Melinda Harper to design an exhibition of coloured silk scarves. She is represented by Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney.

KERRIE POLINESS
UNTITLED PAINTING
1994



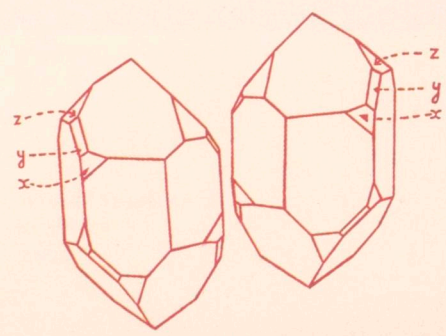
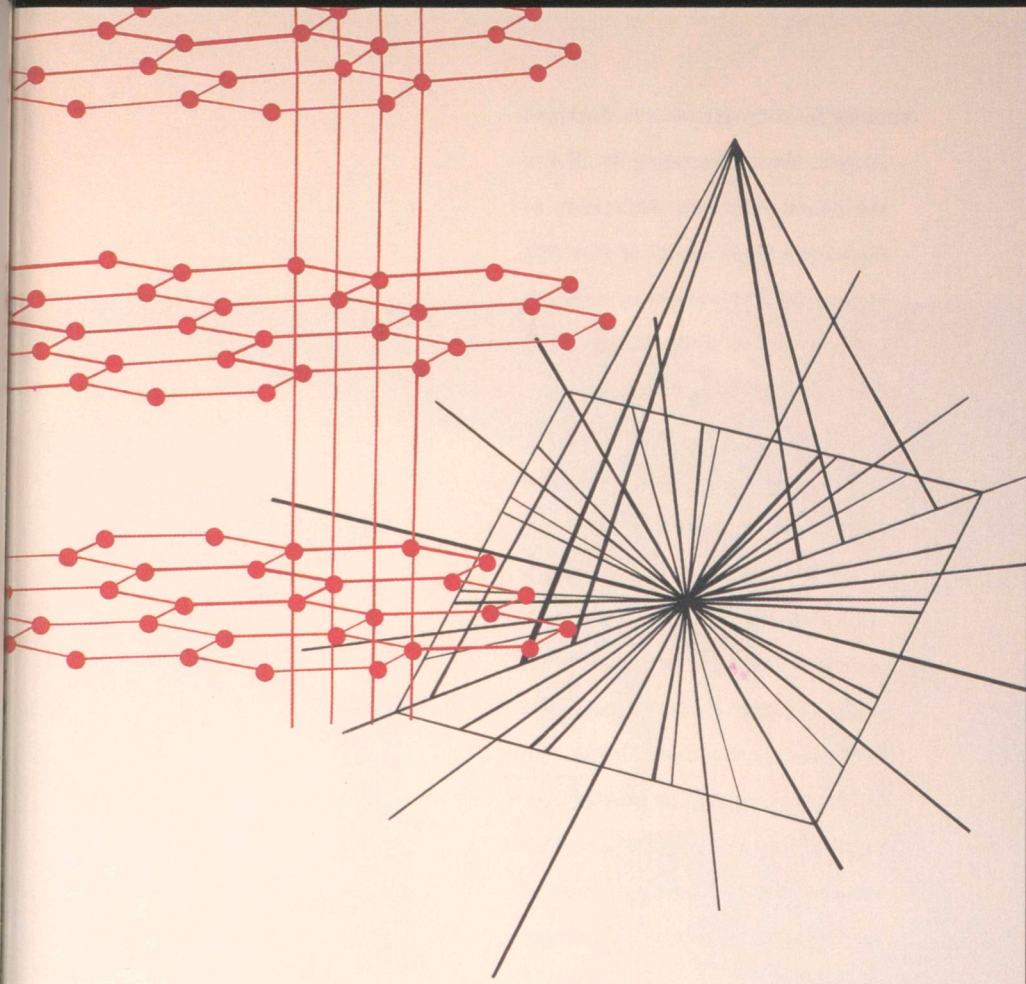
Richard Reddaway was born in Lower Hutt in 1962. From the mid 1980s he has exhibited consistently in group and solo exhibitions in this country and offshore. His stacked, tumbling and interlocking small figure sculptures and his overlapping photo-montages of crouching figures were particularly resonant with critical interest in bodily transformations during the 1990s. Though his recent work is figural in implication, the representational elements have virtually disappeared. His current work declares an interest in contemporary theories of chaos; of emergent and processual forms of order that mix kitsch confections with geometric complexity and pattern. He is represented by the Jonathan Smart Gallery, Christchurch, and Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington.

RICHARD REDDAWAY
THE CRYSTAL WORLD
1998



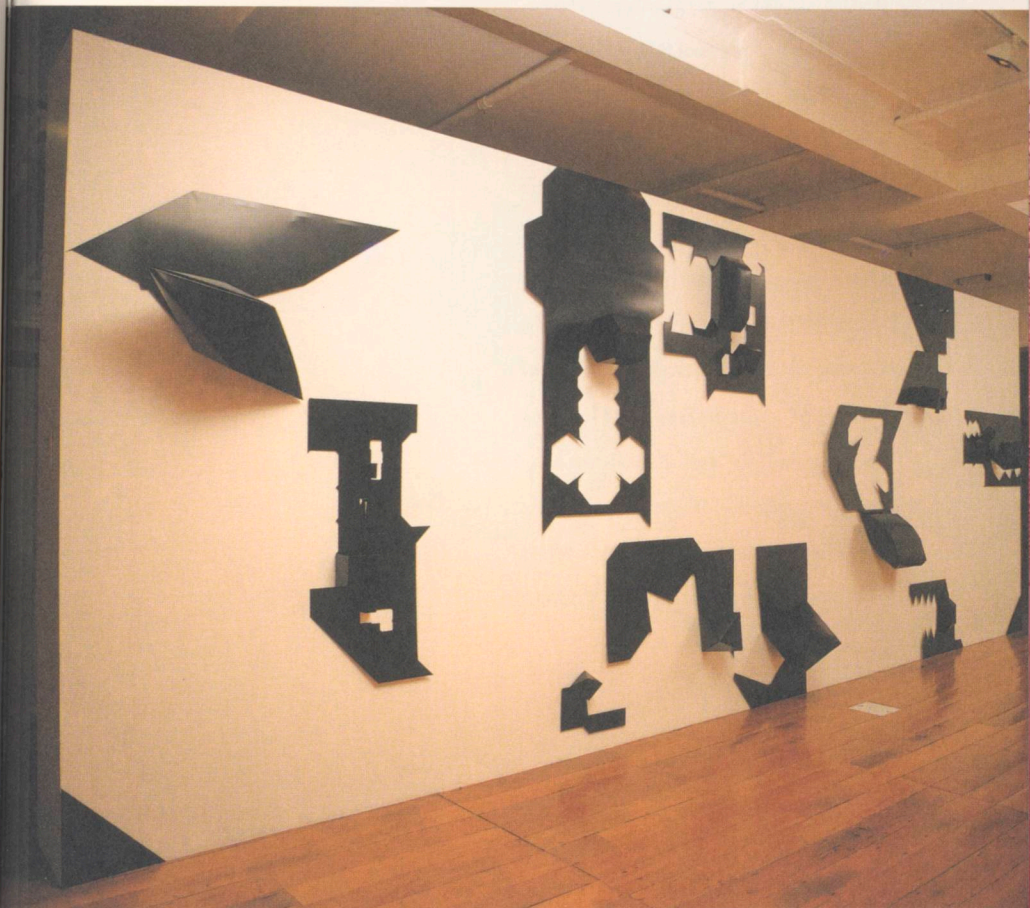
Jim Speers was born in Kalabo, Zambia in 1970. He grew up in Nelson and attended Ilam School of Fine Arts, Canterbury University, Christchurch. His interest in crystals is long-standing. His perspex lightboxes and architectural installations are crystalline in their alternating language of transparency/opacity and their play between physical construction and the virtualities of pattern. He says: "I'm drawn to crystals, they are evidence of a maths I don't really understand but can touch. It's about entering a rule-based world. They evoke an unlikely and fascinating architecture, immaterial in its repetition and lack of scale while, at the same time – taxonomic possibilities seem endless." He is currently the Frances Hodgkins Fellow at Dunedin's University of Otago. He is represented by the Jensen Gallery, Auckland.

JIM SPEERS
STENO'S LAW ON CANAAN DOWNS
2000



Anthony Sumich was born in Auckland in 1970. Since completing his BFA in sculpture from the University of Auckland's Elam School of Fine Arts in 1995 he has worked in different aspects of film and video design, direction and production. He has most recently been involved in Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* as digital assist operator. His art has often shown a marked predilection for fabricational intensity and systemic complexity. His 1999 Artspace project @@@@ (Everything I will never know) was a honey-combed installation of interlocking, jigsaw cut, strand-board. It was a viral formation which matched half-imagined mental operations to pragmatic architectural imperatives.

ANTHONY SUMICH
W3.3R
2000



Ruth Watson was born in West Melton, Canterbury in 1962. She has exhibited in New Zealand, Australia, Europe and the United States; including the 2000 group show *Rent* at Overgarden, Copenhagen; the Stedelijk Museum/ City Gallery, Wellington's 1996 exhibition *The World Over*; and *Boundary Rider*, the 1992 Biennale of Sydney. She is currently curating an exhibition of historical maps from the Collections of the Princeton University Library. The formal and semiotic languages of maps and game-boards have been an abiding interest and an influence on her art practice for many years. She lives and works in Sydney and is represented by the Jonathan Smart Gallery, Christchurch.

RUTH WATSON
THE GLASS BEAD GAME
1998-1999



Regina Walter was born in Sydney in 1970.

For several years now she has been developing an organic, atmospheric and ornamental interpretation of light, space and the object. Her work *Aurora* was inspired by a blue and clear glass chandelier seen in a 15th Century church on a trip to the East German town of Effelder in 1998. At this time she was interested in the decorative use made of crystal and snowflake imagery and beads in traditional folk art. She has made numerous flower lamps and bead paintings incorporating found glass and plastic components and light works using beaded wire spirals over bulbs. At present she is in Piast Trail in Poland for the two week long *Construction in Process* event. She is represented by the Mori Gallery, Sydney.

REGINA WALTER
AURORA
2000



Louise Weaver was born in Mansfield, Victoria, in 1966. Her work attests to an abiding interest in cabinets of curios; dioramic constructions of natural environments; and the taxonomy of flora and fauna. She conducts on-going research into textiles from a diversity of cultures and historical periods; and follows the exquisite crafting and finish of the specialist *couturier*. Her art distills intricacies of touch, strangeness of scale, and the secrecy of details. She lives and works in Melbourne and is represented by Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney.

LOUISE WEAVER
RAINBOW LORIKEET (GRAFTING)
1999



List of works

Stephen Bram

Untitled (Three Point Perspective)

2000

acrylic on wall

11750 x 3550 x 3760

Courtesy of the artist, Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne and Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington

Melinda Harper

Untitled

1996

oil on canvas

1220 x 1020

Courtesy of the artist and

Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne

Untitled

1996

oil on canvas

1320 x 1020

Courtesy of the artist and

Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne

Untitled

1999

oil on canvas

1320 x 1020

Courtesy of the artist and

Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne

Gavin Hipkins

The Model (Action)

1999-2000

colour photographs

220 x 320 x 12 each (92 pieces)

Victoria University of Wellington Art Collection

Gregor Kregar

OKO

1999

glass and steel

2150 x 2000 x 2000

Courtesy of the artist

Anne-Marie May

Untitled

1993

felt on canvas stretcher

1220 x 860

Courtesy of the artist and

Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney

Untitled

1993

felt on canvas stretcher

1220 x 860

Courtesy of the artist and

Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney

Simon Morris

Deploy

1996-2000

ink and acrylic on aluminium

dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist, Anna Bibby Gallery,

Auckland and New Work Studio, Wellington

Kerrie Poliness

Untitled Painting

8 works

1994, 1994, 1992, 1994, 1991, 1994, 1994,

1992 (installation sequence)

all works spray enamel on canvas

880 x 620 ; 560 x 390 ; 205 x 180 ; 555 x 390 ;

355 x 305 ; 555 x 390 ; 880 x 620 ; 505 x 405

Courtesy of the artist and

Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney

Richard Reddaway

The Crystal World

1998

mirror tiles, wood, resin

2600 x 1667 x 480

Courtesy of the artist and

Jonathan Smart Gallery, Christchurch

The Crystal World

1998

mirror tiles, wood, resin

2000 x 1000 x 480

Courtesy of the artist and

Jonathan Smart Gallery, Christchurch

The Crystal World, Figures 1-10
1999-2000
wood and mirrors
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and
Jonathan Smart Gallery, Christchurch

Jim Speers

Steno's Law on Canaan Downs
2000
acrylic on wall
3000 x 7920
Courtesy of the artist and
Andrew Jensen Gallery, Auckland

Anthony Sumich

W3.3r
2000
powder-coated aluminium
dimensions variable (13 pieces)
Courtesy of the artist

Regina Walter

Aurora
1999
spring steel, brass chain, crystal, glass and
plastic beads, plastic chain, wire,
pearlescent paint
960 x 930 dia.
Courtesy of the artist and Mori Gallery,
Sydney

Fauxbergé 2
1999
plastic, glass and crystal beads, wire,
display box
90 x 200 x 210
Private Collection, Sydney

Fauxbergé 3
2000
plastic, glass and crystal beads, wire,
display box
90 x 195 x 220
Private Collection, Sydney

Fauxbergé 4
2000
plastic, glass and crystal beads, wire,

display box
95 x 295 x 145
Courtesy of the artist and
Mori Gallery, Sydney

Fauxbergé 5
2000
plastic, glass and crystal beads, wire,
display box
85 x 120 x 110
Courtesy of the artist and
Mori Gallery, Sydney

Ruth Watson

The Glass Bead Game
1998-1999
rose-tinted glass beads, pins, fabric
on board
650 x 650 interior, 900 x 900 frame
Private Collection, Wellington

Polytopia
2000
mixed media with glass beads
150 dia.
Courtesy of the artist

Louise Weaver

Rainbow Lorikeet (Crafting)
1999
handcrocheted cotton pearl thread over
lorikeet, lilac branches, light globe,
silk, sequins, glass beads, silver leaf and
indian mirrors
500 x 380 x 120
Courtesy of the artist and
Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney

Rose Quartz (Pink Stone)
1998
quartz rock and handcrocheted lambs wool
200 x 140 x 120
Courtesy of the artist and
Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney

All measurements in millimetres.

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JULY 8 - SEPTEMBER 14, 2000

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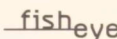
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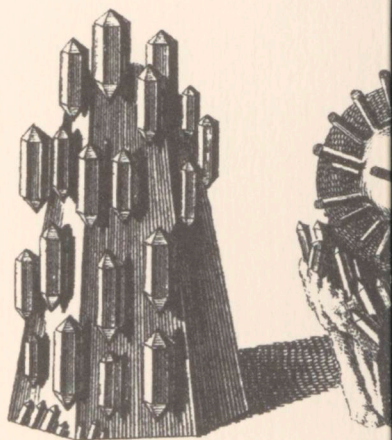
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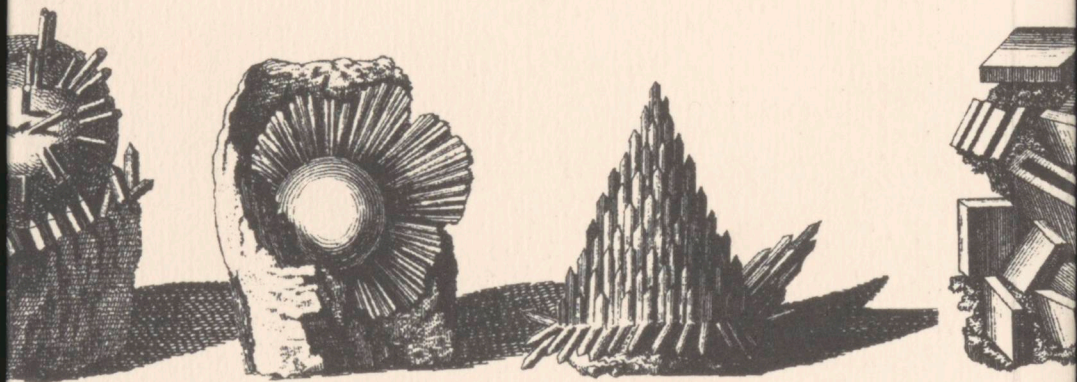
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