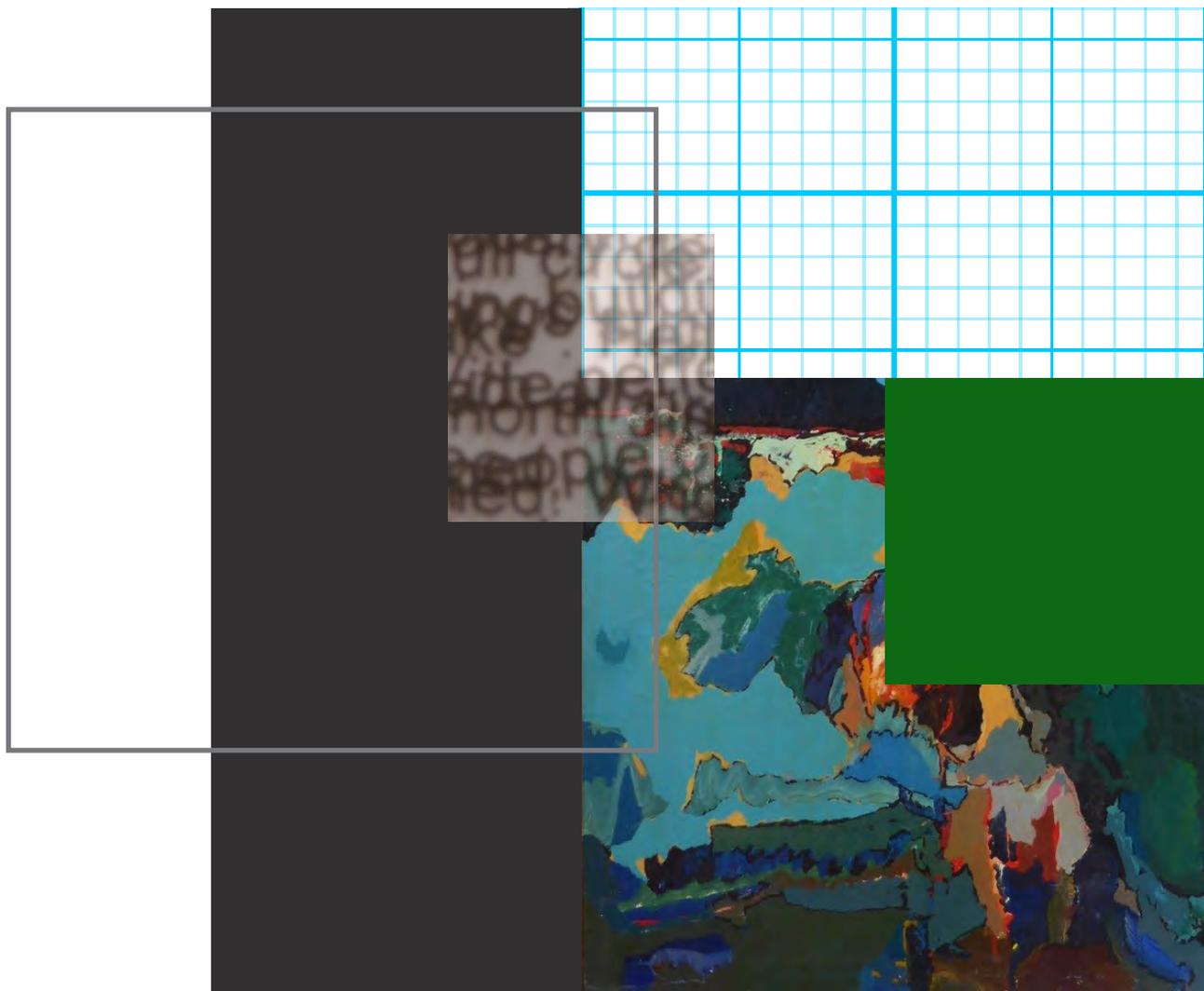




ROSS GRAY_
THEN AGAIN

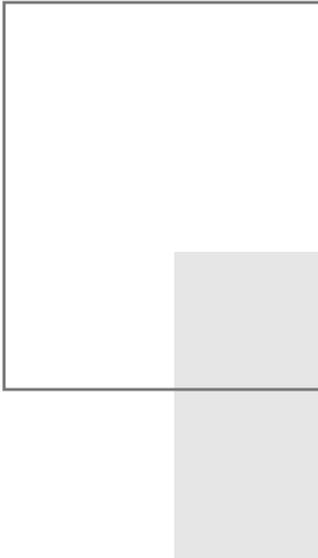
1970 - 2020





“HERITAGE IS THE INHERITANCE
FROM THE PAST, THE PRESENT
LOOKING BACK AND VALUING
THE PAST”

ROSS GRAY, DESTRUCTION CONTINUES, LETTER TO THE EDITOR, THE PRESS, AUGUST 4, 2012



ROSS GRAY_
THEN AGAIN

1970 - 2020

The exhibition *Then Again* is a glimpse into Gray's practice over the last fifty years, and forms a broad historic narrative. The show traces the evolving changes of his work, but also the constant reoccurring threads and themes - from the explosive and abstract paintings inspired by everyday life through to the pulsating works that memorialise the intricacies, subtleties and architectural forms of the urban landscape.

Through Gray's constant explorations he has pushed and pulled at the possibilities of paint, while also investigating both an expressive and reductive modernism. But Gray's paintings are more than an exercise in modernism, they are expressive of the social changes that have ebbed and flowed around him - from the Vietnam War of the 1970's, to the social and economic upheaval of New Zealand in the 1980's, to the psychological and physical impacts of the 2010 and 2011 Christchurch earthquakes.

A constant theme for Gray has been the importance of a City's built heritage and an individual's sense of identity and memory associated with it - the way memories are passed from one generation to the next to help inform the present. But also the blatant destruction of New Zealand's built heritage in the name of progress; Gray's paintings reflect the constant transformation and development of our built heritage. And through this process he has become an advocate for the conservation and preservation of our shared built heritage and in turn our cultural identity.

But, Gray is more than just an artist and advocate, he is also a very generous person. He has been a dedicated teacher for over 42 years, freely passing on this wisdom and infectious passions for the arts to countless generations of students of all ages - creating his own heritage.

The Aigantighe Art Gallery would like to sincerely thank Ross Gray for his generosity and for the opportunity to exhibit his works for the first time in Timaru.

Hamish Pettengell

THEN AGAIN

DR ANDREW PAUL WOOD

It is entirely appropriate that Ross Gray, born in Whanganui in 1945, be recognised with a major exhibition in Timaru at the Aigantighe Art Gallery. During his forty-five-year teaching career he and his wife, Lorraine, taught at Timaru Boys' High in 1970 and 1971, right at the beginning of his professional art career when he produced his first significant paintings.

Gray's initial formal art education took place from 1964 to 1966 at the University of Canterbury, School of Fine Arts, as a member of the Gopas Generation of artists who went through the school under the severe eye and blunt feedback of the controversial artist and lecturer, Rudolf Gopas (1913-1983). Gopas is best known for fostering a school of neo-expressionist painting at Canterbury, his most celebrated students included Tony Fomison, Phillip Clairmont, Allen Maddox and Philippa Blair. Also, Philip Trusttum was two years ahead and left a huge impression on Gray. After receiving his diploma, Gray worked at Crown Crystal glass factory and painted for a year before going on to get his teaching qualification at Christchurch Teachers' College.

"Having Rudi Gopas for Stage 2 Painting was a complete revelation," says Gray, "he took us through the fundamentals of modernism, abstraction and expressionism. There was Klee, Kandinsky and French philosopher, Etienne Gilson, whose writings Gopas frequently read from - the elevation of colour and acrylic paint, the compositional dynamism of the parabolic curve, the freeing of painting from the illustrative, or anecdotal, based on things outside the canvas, and so much more. I was in awe of the man, even after art school. My painting, *Chromatic Transposition* (1971), is a bit of an homage to Rudi - partly because he lived three doors along from the scene from which the painting developed."



Chromatic Transposition, 1971
Acrylic on hardboard
1270mm x965mm



Ross Gray's
home in Timaru
1970 -1971

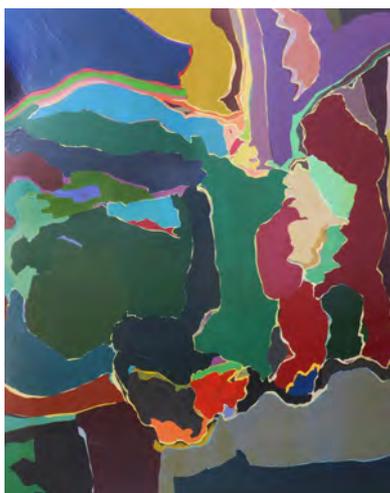
Gopas' influence is clear in the work of Gray's Timaru period. For example, in his use of bold, relatively pure colour and abstraction – although tending more to colour field-type painting emphasising the flatness of the hardboard panel's surface rather than the vigorous gestural mark-making and impasto (where paint is laid on in thick layers so that the brush or painting-knife strokes are visible) – generally associated with the Gopas Generation. But, Gray was more interested in formal composition, spatial modulation and layering of colour that has more in common with the nineteenth century French Cloisonnism (where flat areas of colour are outlined to keep them separate).

This approach is typified in the two paintings Gray entered in the 1970 Manawatu Art Prize, *August One* and *August Two*. At the time the Manawatu Art Prize was one of the most prestigious in the country. *August Two* was accepted for the prize's touring exhibition that year. He had been quick to take to the relatively new acrylic paint, championed by Gopas at art school when oil was still the more highly regarded medium. Acrylic paint lent itself well to the kind of painting Gray was interested in throughout the early years of the 1970s - allowing the paint to move on the canvas to dictate the forms it took.



This Time, 1971
Acrylic on hardboard
460mm x 635mm

Not that Gray's painting was always completely abstract. There were forays into figuration through a similar process of deconstruction and abstraction as seen in *This Time* (1971), where he engages with the typically South Canterbury enthusiasm of horse racing. Gray explores dynamic time and motion in the painting, both that of the horse and jockey, and that of the paint. The painting acts as a physical record of that moment, as well as the process of its own making, and is much more gestural and expressive.



August Two, 1971
Acrylic on hardboard
1390mm x 1095mm



Now and Then, 1971
Acrylic on hardboard
965mm x 914mm
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi O Tāmaki
Collection

There is a clear suggestion of the influence of Auckland artist Pat Hanly (1932–2004) – who, it should be recalled, had been commissioned by architect Sir Miles Warren (1929–) to paint his famous mural *Rainbow Pieces* in the Christchurch Town Hall in 1971.

“I didn’t know Hanly’s work well in my early stages,” explains Gray, “but I probably became more aware of his work when I taught the newly introduced University Entrance Art History at Timaru Boys’ High School – there was a section on Hanly in the new reference book for New Zealand painting, *Introduction to New Zealand Painting*, by Gordon Brown and Hamish Keith. The colouristic boldness and the (controlled) freedom with paint impressed me and I think there is more than a hint of that in *This Time*. *This Time* was painted as a Christmas present for my father-in-law, Ray, who listened to the races on the radio every Saturday, as did many in those days!”

Around the same time Gray made the *Timaru Herald* and *Whanganui Herald* when he, along with Jeffrey Harris and Geoff Thornley, had their paintings shown in Auckland Art Gallery’s *New Zealand Young Contemporaries* exhibition, and then purchased for the gallery’s collection. Gray’s painting, *Now and Then* (1971), used ancient Greek ruins – something he was teaching as part of 6th Form Art History – and is an early example of Gray’s interest in architecture, time and destruction. Three years later, Gray had his first solo exhibition, *Ross Gray Paintings*, at the Canterbury Society of Artists (CSA) Gallery, now the Centre of Contemporary Art (CoCA). This marked, for the first time, the appearance of the modernist grid – with a soft twist of cubism – as a way of composing his paintings. Gray continues to return to the grid, sometimes as a reflection of the squaring up enlargement process, sometimes to provide a geometric foil to the organic and curvilinear forms employed, and sometimes as a space, time and architectural referent.



In Transit, 1975
Acrylic on hardboard
1180mm x 860mm



Hold your Fire, 1987
Acrylic on canvas
1800mm x 1800mm

He and Lorraine took a break from teaching in 1979 to tour the United Kingdom and Europe in a campervan. "We saw a phenomenal quantity and range of visual art," says Gray, "and visited many of the architectural treasures in Italy, France, Germany and UK - from the Pantheon in Rome to the Charles Rennie Mackintosh Hill House Helensburgh, all the great cathedrals and loads of art museums. Seeing for the first time the actual works – Renaissance in the Uffizi, Piero della Francesca, and Cubist Braque and Picasso in Paris – which I had been teaching 6th and 7th form Art History about (from books and slides only). It was memorable. Visiting Cezanne's house in Aix en Provence is still quite a vivid memory. The Pompidou Centre was a highlight, then there was Mies van der Rohe's Neue Nationalgalerie and the Brücke Museum in Berlin."

From 1981 to 1995 Gray was head of Cashmere High School's Art Department in Christchurch, and halfway through this time another significant event took place that had a profound impact on the artist's work. In 1985 Gray was struck by Neil Frazer's geometric abstract painting *Battleground* (1985), then recently purchased by the Robert McDougall Gallery (now Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū). "The intensity of his *Battleground* struck me when I saw it," explains Gray, "it was the strength of composition, intensity of colour, boldness of paint handling, not to mention the scale. I think works like *Hold Your Fire* (1987) reflect something of his influence, this came at a time not long before I saw the new German art exhibition."

That German exhibition was *Wild, Visionary, Spectral: New German Art* hosted in July and August of 1986 by the then National Art Gallery in Wellington (now part of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa). The exhibition was put together by the Art Gallery of South Australia in Adelaide and was accompanied by a catalogue by Australian curator Ron Radford. This show exposed Gray to the work of Joseph Beuys, Jörg Immendorff, Anselm Kiefer, Sigmar Polke and others. But in particular, this show exposed Gray to Gerhard Richter, whose harnessing of neo-expressionism in the service of social commentary left a lasting impression.



Look Both Ways, 1996
Acrylic on canvas
1500mm x 1200mm
Cashmere High
School, Christchurch,
Collection

Gray had regular exhibitions throughout the 1980s and 1990s around New Zealand, but particularly at CoCA – the ‘community’ ethos of which had struck a chord with Gray since the late sixties when he first exhibited in the old Durham Street CSA Gallery. Another major shift in Gray’s work took place in 1996 with the solo survey show, *Look Both Ways*, displayed in CoCA’s large Mair Gallery. This exhibition contained the painting *Calling the Shots* (1996) which protested against the destruction of the Kaiapoi Woollen Mills building and introduced an ongoing reconsideration of the grid implicit in Gray’s work as an architectural metaphor. This metaphor is a concrete expression of the artist’s activism for the protection of architectural heritage. This interest in architecture, architectural heritage and time evolves through a number of formats in Gray’s works. It ranges, from the combination of acrylic paint and drawn charcoal line in *Past: Presence* (2000), then takes on a plan-like, architectonic quality in *Minder* (2009), the grid becomes the physical composition of a constructivist installation in *Soundings* (2004), and their more Mondrian and Malevich-inspired scaled-down modular variation of *Memory Block* (2008).

The catastrophic Canterbury earthquakes of 2010 and 2011, and the threatened destruction of so much of Christchurch’s architectural heritage, intensified Gray’s desire to make painting about the interaction of time, memory, destruction and the built environment. The development of these leitmotifs finds full expression in Gray’s 2011 survey *Ross Gray: Reverb* at CoCA, Mair and North Galleries, in 2011 (cut short by the February 22 Christchurch earthquake) documenting the experiments mentioned above since *Calling the Shots* in 1996. Gray’s frequent letters to *The Press*, calling for heritage retention in post-quake Christchurch, have been complementary to his paintings. His 2013 exhibition *Demolish* at the Ashburton Art Gallery included a series called *The Word*, that utilised typography as a key expressive element.



Wounded, 1996
Acrylic on canvas
1160mm x 1600mm



Handling with Care, 2000 Acrylic
on canvas
1700mm x 2390mm

Gray has also held more directly political roles: he has been Deputy Chair of Historic Places Canterbury since 2012, Deputy Chair of the Christchurch Civic Trust since 2016, a vocal member of the campaign to save McLean's Mansion, and a key organiser of the pop-up exhibitions *Valuing Our Heritage* in an empty shop in Cathedral Junction during 2013-2015. In the exhibition *Battle Lines 235+* (a reference to the number of heritage buildings demolished post-quakes in Christchurch) at Chambers Art Gallery in Christchurch, there is a far greater militancy and urgency in the work, and a conscious return to the inclusion of figuration as a strong tool for connecting the message with the audience.

Gray continues to exhibit at Chambers Art Gallery where he has a studio. Although no longer modular in format, the work still engages in the artist's ongoing exploration of a range of themes: the physicality of the paint, the time-based process of drawing and painting, the colour and brushwork of mark-making, the grid as a compositional and architectural metaphor, and the concerns with politics, power, collective ownership of public spaces and the built environment, alongside memory and uncertainty. The local remains a strong touchstone in Gray's artworks, but, as always, the work is ever evolving. We conclude on a newer work, *Wormwood* (2019), which is part of a series that begins with line drawings and colour notes, this is expanded onto panels by means of an overhead projector, worked and reworked, then manipulated and layered into an expressive evocation of contemporary Christchurch – and the wider world.



Power Play, 2017
Acrylic on canvas
2440mm x 1830mm



Merge, 1971
Acrylic on hardboard
855mm x 940mm



Wormwood, 2019
Acrylic on board
900mm x 900mm

Biography

Born in Wanganui in 1945, Ross Gray graduated with a Diploma of Fine Arts from the University of Canterbury in 1967, taught by Bill Sutton and Rudolf Gopas. He received a Diploma of Teaching from Christchurch Teachers' College in 1968.

Later he returned to complete a Master of Fine Arts (Distinction) in 2003 from the University of Canterbury.

Gray has had a long career as a visual arts educator, teaching art and art history in secondary schools from 1969 - 1995. From 1999 to 2012 he taught drawing at the CPIT (Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology) School of Art and Design and School of Architectural Studies. From 2009 to 2016 he was the leader of the COCA Critique Group (following the Christchurch earthquakes of 2010 and 2011 and the closure of COCA was known as The Critique Group Christchurch).

Gray travelled to Germany on a Goethe-Institut German Language Artist's Scholarship in 1997 and in 1999 he was awarded the CoCA Guthrey Travel Award to Australia. His work is represented in private collections throughout New Zealand and overseas, as well as in numerous national public collections including: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki; Sarjeant Gallery Te Whare o Rehua Wanganui; The Suter Te Aratoi o Whakatu, Nelson; and Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu.

Gray lives and works in Christchurch.



Minder, 2009
Acrylic on hardboard
1800mm x 3000mm

Selected Exhibition History

Solo Exhibitions

- 2019 Boxing On, Chambers Art Gallery, Christchurch
- 2017 Paintbox, Chambers Art Gallery, Christchurch
- 2014 Battlelines 235+, Chambers Art Gallery, Christchurch
- 2013 Demolish, Ashburton Art Gallery, Ashburton
- 2012 Span, Forrester Gallery, Oamaru
- 2011 Preoccupied, an exhibition in two parts, Monumental, Dunedin
- 2011 Reverb, CoCA, Christchurch
- 2009 Resonance, SOFA Gallery, Christchurch
- 2008 Modulation, CoCA, Christchurch
- 2008 Modulation, Ghuznee Room, Bowen Galleries, Wellington
- 2006 Fit City, CoCA, Christchurch
- 2004 Soundings:A Painting Installation, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu
- 2003 Shift, University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts Gallery
- 2002 On the Wall, CoCA, Christchurch
- 2001 Building, CoCA, Christchurch
- 2000 Past Presence, CoCA, Christchurch
- 1998 Keeping Time, Janne Land Gallery, Wellington
- 1998 Fragile, CoCA, Christchurch
- 1997 Ross Gray – Circuit, Sarjeant Gallery, Te Whare o Rehua, Whanganui
- 1997 Bodies in Question, Oedipus Rex Gallery, Auckland
- 1996 Look Both Ways, survey exhibition (1971-1996),CoCA,Christchurch
- 1993 Under Siege, Janne Land Gallery, Wellington
- 1993 Frayed at the Edge, C.S.A. Gallery, Christchurch
- 1991 Balancing Act, Suter Gallery, Nelson
- 1991 Balancing Act, C.S.A. Gallery, Christchurch
- 1989 Altered States, C.S.A. Gallery, Christchurch
- 1988 Re-structuring, C.S.A. Gallery, Christchurch
- 1978 C.S.A. Gallery, Christchurch
- 1974 C.S.A. Gallery, Christchurch



Past : Presence, 2000
Acrylic on canvas
1370mm x 1830mm

Group Exhibitions

- 2016 Finalist, Parkin Drawing Prize, The New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington
- 2016 From The Studios, Chambers Art Gallery, Christchurch
- 2015 Finalist, Parkin Drawing Prize, The New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington
- 2013 [In]Box, Artbox, Christchurch
- 2011 Wonderland, Christmas Exhibition, Chambers @ 241, Christchurch
- 2011 Moving On, Christchurch Artists post quake, Arts in Oxford Gallery Oxford
- 2011 Finalists, New Zealand Painting and Printmaking Award, WSA, Hamilton
- 2010-2005 Finalists, CoCA Anthony Harper Contemporary Art Award, CoCA, Christchurch
- 2009 135 Gloucester St Studio Show, Quiqcorp, Christchurch
- 2006 End to Begin Again, CPIT Tutors' Exhibition, CoCA, Christchurch
- 2005 Urban Life – A Celebration In Art, Shed11, Wellington
- 2005 Finalists, Waikato National Art Award, WSA, Hamilton
- 2002 Look This Way, Christchurch College of Education Anniversary Art Show, CoCA, Christchurch
- 2000 Canterbury Painting in the 1990s, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch
- 1998 Gopas and his Students, CoCA, Christchurch
- 1998 Wallace Art Awards Exhibition of Finalists, Auckland
- 1990 Goodman Suter Biennale Exhibition, Suter Gallery, Nelson
- 1987 Whanganui Art Awards Exhibition, Sarjeant Gallery, Whanganui.
- 1987 Goodman Suter Biennale Exhibition, Suter Gallery, Nelson
- 1986 Montana Art Award, Touring Exhibition



1970 - 2020

ROSS GRAY_
THEN AGAIN



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