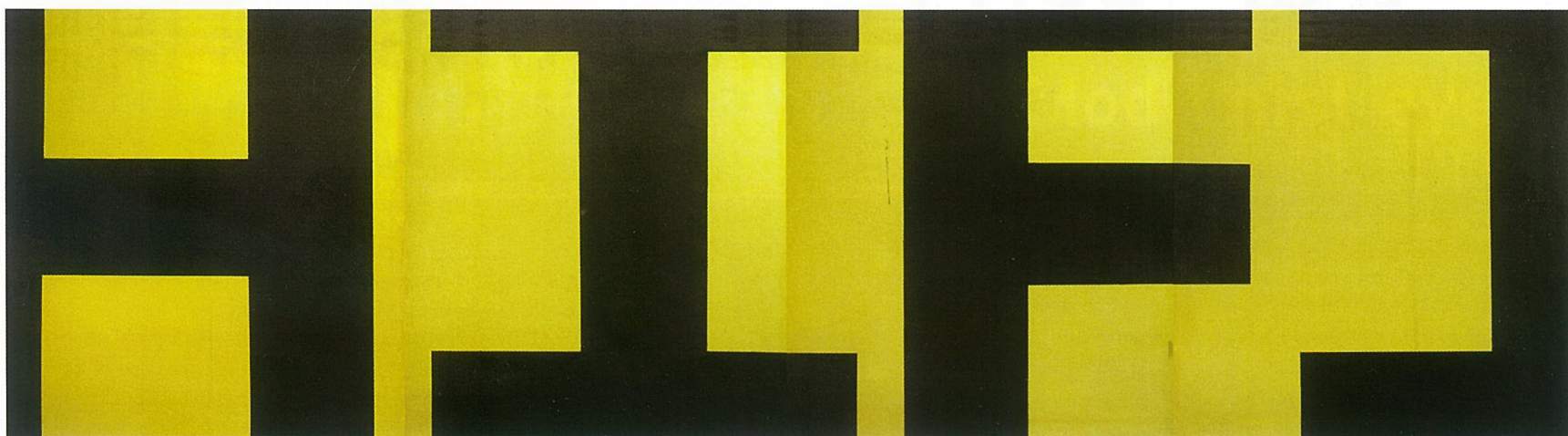
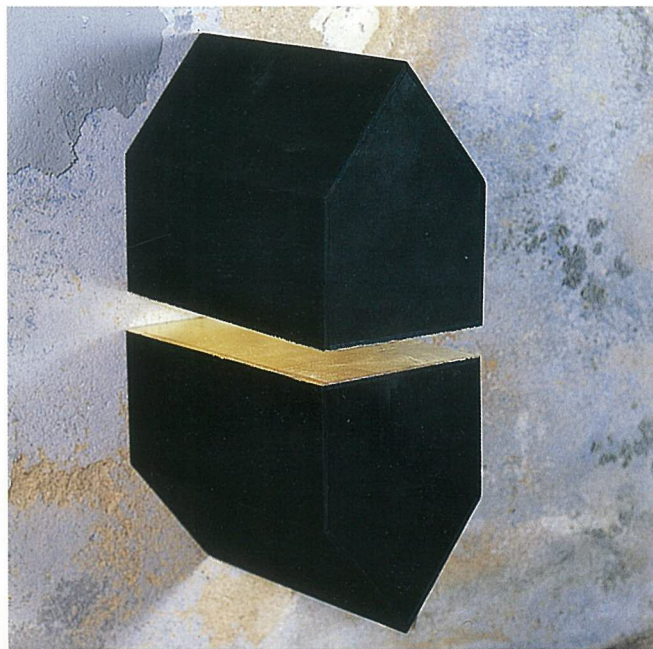


# Bambury WORKS 1975-1999



## Three takes on Stephen Bambury's postmodern abstraction

### PAINTING'S DOUBLE AND PAINTING'S SURPLUS

From its beginnings in the mid 1970s Stephen Bambury's abstract painting has demonstrated an abiding concern with the infinitely subtle, infinitely variable logic of relationship between opposed elements. His paintings are acutely attuned to the presence of their own mirror image, to the *doppelgänger* shadow which is integral to their particular form of melancholic poise. The still presence of Bambury's work is always crossed by an elegiac sense of absence and incompleteness. For Bambury this incompleteness or lack is accepted as possibility, it is the unrepresentable content of painting, the promise of its unactualised potential.

Especially in Bambury's work over the last ten years, bifurcations of motif, slipped alignments, bisected fields, reversals of emptiness and fullness accrue to signify a continual erosion of control over the self-identity of the painting as object. These doublings and reflections within the work are overdetermined, signifying fluctuating dualities within the relationship between artist and painting, between the painting and the world it is found in, between the historical contexts of the painting and what Adorno referred to as the artwork's 'plus or surplus' which survives any change of context or interpretation.

Allan Smith, from James Ross (ed.) *New Zealand Modernism - The Content of the Form. Paintings from The Gibbs Collection*, Auckland 1997

### PAINTING'S HISTORY AND PAINTING'S GLORIFICATION

Besides overlaying the cross with this variety of value-laden materials, colours and surfaces, Bambury enriches it, opening it up to difference, constructing for it an ever-expanding frame of reference and response. Just as it became difficult to say with the *Site works* what was green and what was blue, what was square, what rectangular, so it becomes hard to say what is a cross. What are the limits of its associations, what are its internal contradictions, and when does it change into some other figure altogether? Far from being transfixed by the figure, Bambury is interested in its ground, in its many historical contexts, in the surrounding wall, and the many places to which it belongs, in defining it from the outside as much as from the inside. He is engaged by the possibilities offered by inverting, rotating, splitting and doubling the figure so as to unlock new forms. By investing, divesting and re-investing the cross with visual meanings in a bravura display of geometric invention, Bambury supplants Malevich's iconoclasm with a glorification of painting.

Wystan Curnow in Wystan Curnow and William McAloon, *Stephen Bambury*, Nelson, 2000

### PAINTING'S POSSIBILITY AND PAINTING IN THE WORLD

... While he sought to embrace the possibilities afforded by postmodernism, such as its reconsideration of notions of originality, autonomy and authority, Bambury equally saw modernism as a prematurely liquidated project, one that was still rich with possibilities.

Bambury's explorations of those possibilities are neither in the form of simulationist appropriations of modernist abstraction, nor as parodic restagings of its failures. ... Nor is it that Bambury wishes to entirely resuscitate the utopian project of early modernism, by which art would ultimately disappear, as it gave way to a new unity of art and life. His position is more tentative than this, one that seeks to allow his works to exist within history while continuing to act in the world.

Wystan Curnow in Wystan Curnow and William McAloon, *Stephen Bambury*, Nelson, 2000

A City Gallery Wellington Touring Exhibition.

**TOP RIGHT: STEPHEN BAMBURY  
HAUSEN (ANOTHER PLACE) SLOVENIA 2000  
CHARRED WOOD AND GOLD LEAF**

**MIDDLE: STEPHEN BAMBURY  
IDEOGRAM (VII) 2000  
RESIN AND GRAPHITE ON 4 ALUMINIUM PANELS**



11 AUGUST - 28 OCTOBER 2001

ALLAN SMITH //  
CURATOR CONTEMPORARY ART //