



Cat fur sculpture 1993

MARIE SHANNON

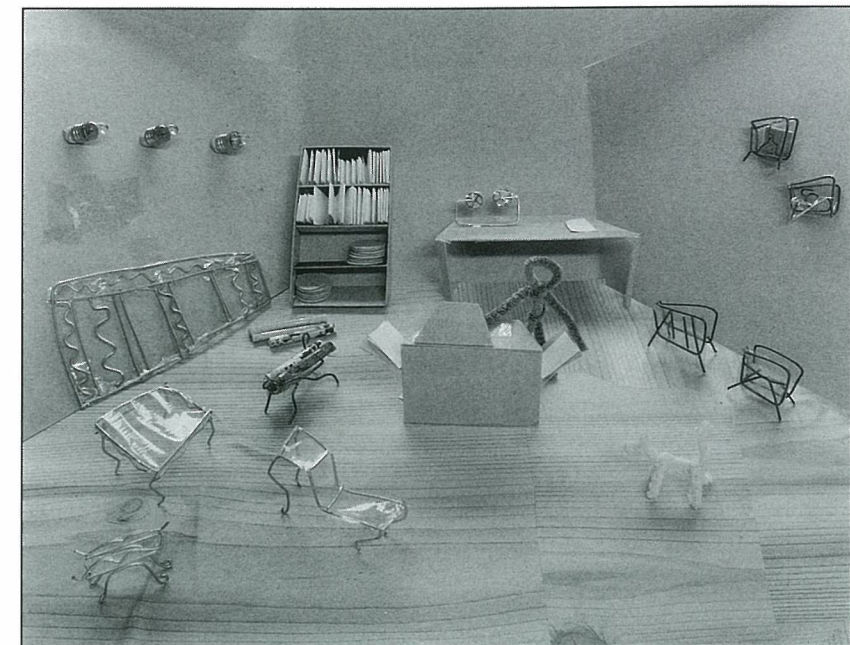
Making the Best of Things

The creative process is a mysterious thing. Evasive and wilful, it resists analysis, devising notions of success or failure which lie beyond the rational. Like the objects of desire it brings forth, the creative process can be described but not satisfactorily explained.

In psychological terms, the creative process is regarded as having four distinct aspects, which often occur in sequence as stages. These are preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. Preparation consists of gathering the necessary information, facts, opinions, or data. Then there always follows a time when nothing appears to be happening. Perhaps subconsciously the problem is being churned over during this period, which, for want of better understanding of it, is simply termed incubation.

At some point in the creative process there comes an 'aha!' reaction, a moment of illumination when everything seems to have fallen into place and the way ahead is clear. Finally the solution must be checked, the possibilities verified to see if they are practical. Psychologists have often attempted to study whether or not a particular personality type or set of characteristics might typify the creative person. The one characteristic that stands out is persistence. The creative process often depends on sheer hard work.

Her most labour-intensive project to date, *The Creative Process* is a five minute animated film by Marie Shannon. The film depicts a (female) artist at work in her studio, constructing a large sculpture from modelling margarine. The audience is privy to the secrets of the creative process, as Shannon's pipecleaner artist-figure prepares her material, considers her ideas, discards her initial attempts, and completes her artwork — a fully modelled horse's head. The figure's environment is precisely ordered — no extraneous visual clutter to interrupt her creativity — and she plays music on her stereo as an aid to concentration. As



In the studio of Merylyn Tweedie 1991

the figure creates object after discarded object, she relates anecdotes of her early life to the viewer, discussing the series of blind alleys which led her to become an artist.

The effect is one of a spurious documentary, the (real) subject replaced by a pipecleaner stand-in: high brow on a low budget, as if Gerry Anderson were pulling the strings on the *South Bank Show*. Shannon invites the viewer to suspend disbelief and enter the world of the artist, to invest a bent pipecleaner with the character and history of an unnamed but particular creative force. This engagement on the part of the viewer requires him or her to enter into the creative process, to complete the work through translation of the image into an experience of life.

Shannon's *The Creative Process* develops from her recent black and white photographs. These have depicted noteworthy New Zealand art figures going about their daily routines, rendered in kitchen-drawer materials — cardboard, sellotape, contact paper, wire. (A slightly earlier series of photographs by Shannon pictured largely unpopulated domestic tableaux, built on a similar dolls' house scale.) In her latest works, Shannon moves away from home, looking at the simultaneously private and public worlds constructed by the artist to facilitate the creative process.

Making something out of nothing much at all has long been part of Shannon's artistic practice. She is a sort of womble of the artworld, making things out of the things that the everyday folks leave behind. Shannon is adept at adapting readily-found materials to creative purposes, seeing big possibilities in the smallest things. For Shannon, the creative impulse is centred in the mundane. But creativity has always been about working with what you've got — making the best of things.

Lara Strongman



The pursuit of cosiness II 1986

Marie Shannon

Biography

- 1960 Born in Nelson
- 1983 Graduated BFA (Photography), Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland
- 1988 Queen Elizabeth Arts Council Grant
Lives and works in Auckland

Solo Exhibitions

- 1983 Real Pictures Gallery, Auckland
- 1985 Real Pictures Gallery, Auckland
- 1986 New Vision Gallery, Auckland
Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch
- 1987 *Animal pictures*, Room 11, Auckland
- 1988 *Romance and animals*, Southern Cross Gallery, Wellington
- 1989 *Indoor fireworks*, George Fraser Gallery, Auckland

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1979 *Works 1979*, Auckland Society of Arts
- 1980 *Art from the art school*, University of Auckland
BYO show, Real Pictures Gallery, Auckland
Little works, Outreach Gallery, Auckland
- 1982 *New Zealand landscape show; Pohutakawa show*, Real Pictures Gallery, Auckland
- 1983 *House show*, Real Pictures Gallery, Auckland
Centenary show, Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland
- 1984 Brooke/Gifford Gallery, Christchurch
Exposures Gallery, Wellington
- 1986 New Vision Gallery, Auckland
The self, Bishop Suter Art Gallery, Nelson (touring exhibition)
Content/Context: a survey of recent New Zealand art, Shed 11, National Art Gallery, Wellington
Artis Gallery, Auckland
- 1987 Room 11, Auckland

- 1988 *Group two*, 33½ Gallery, Wellington
Southern Cross Gallery, Wellington
Two photographers, Waikato Museum of Art and History, Hamilton
Hearts and minds, National Library Gallery, Wellington
Mezzanine Gallery, New Zealand High Commission, London
Seven photographers, update, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui
The painted zoo, Shed 11, National Art Gallery, Wellington
- 1989 *Art too*, National Library Gallery, Wellington
Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui
Southern Cross Gallery, Wellington
Constructed intimacies, Moët and Chandon New Zealand Art Foundation (touring exhibition)
Imposing narratives, Wellington City Art Gallery
- 1990 *In the forest of dream*, Moët & Chandon NZ Art Foundation (touring exhibition)
- 1992 *Headlands: thinking through New Zealand art*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

Bibliography

- Bosworth, Rhondda. 'Marie Shannon, domestic scenery' *Six women photographers*, *Photoforum* 56, 1987
- Burke, Gregory. 'An indeterminate surface' *Imposing narratives*, Wellington City Art Gallery, 1989
- Leonard, Robert and Stuart McKenzie. 'Something from nothingness comes', *Art New Zealand* 61, 1991-1992
Photoforum Review 33, 1987
- Pitts, Priscilla. 'Exchanging looks: aspects of gender and representation in contemporary New Zealand photography', *Imposing narratives*, Wellington City Art Gallery, 1989
- Stacy, Gwen. 'The "panoramic" photographs of Marie Shannon', *Art New Zealand* 35, 1985