

INTRODUCTION

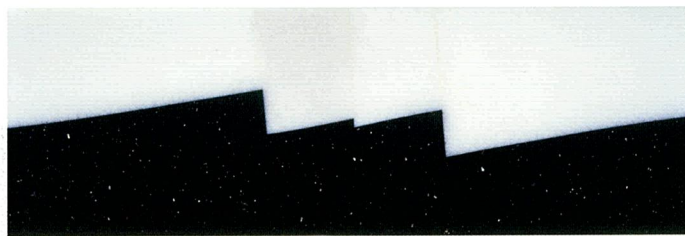
John Edgar's installation is as much about the changing landscape as it is of the implied social and cultural changes consolidated within the work.

LIE OF THE LAND embodies a conversation to advance our explorations and experiences of seeking and finding a place, of signalling a position, of constructing a foundation, and of making a mark – through stone or flag.

Along with a fusion of an artist's traditional stone working techniques and a development of personal and political experiences, *LIE OF THE LAND* also affirms the role of the museum as pivotal in an examination of cultural histories.

Auckland Museum is pleased to present this inaugural exhibition in the Decorative Arts West gallery.

DR T L RODNEY WILSON



BEING IN THIRDSPACE

A room or, more precisely, a space of exhibition, like the spaces we inhabit and yet special, different because what is there, inside, is different – like things we have seen before, and yet in their arrangement, and their naming, composing something else. Making Thirdspace visible.

A R Ammons has written that "Things are visible ideas", by which he means, to quote from his poem *The Marriage* (1973, 10), that

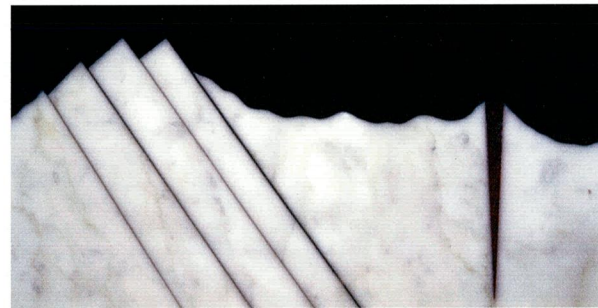
The world is wound round
with theorems . . .
it can't get loose from
meanings and the mind
can't pull free of it

In Ammons' terms, a poem occurs at the intersection between meanings and the world, without taking their place – it, like John Edgar's sculptures, makes the intersection visible, in the process opening Thirdspace to us.

THE SPACE OF THOUGHT AND UNDERSTANDING

The term "Thirdspace" is taken from Edward Soja, an urban geographer whose purpose in inventing the term is "to encourage you to think differently about the meanings and significance of space and those related concepts that compose and comprise the inherent spatiality of human life: place, location, locality, landscape, environment, home, city, region, territory, and geography." (1996:1). Edgar's exhibitions have persistently offered this same encouragement, being compositions in and of social space – in the museum or gallery; of sculpted, three-dimensional objects which embody and are shaped by elements of our collective knowledge.

LIE OF THE LAND as an organisation of space (an instance of Thirdspace) provides us with a powerful incentive to think about what it means to occupy "lived social space" which, for Soja, combines "the real and the imagined, things and thought on equal terms" and so becomes "the terrain for the generation of 'counterspaces', spaces of resistance to the dominant order" (68). Each position for looking, as we move and stop in the space of the gallery, places us in new relations with each and all of the objects; each of us, engaging with the objects through the knowledge of our world which we bring with us, will create a different narrative of the meaning of each object and of the exhibition as a whole, as a result of the route we take through it. Each object both opens out onto the lived world beyond, and draws that world into, the exhibition space, a kind of mental breathing, the pulse of embodied thinking.



Cross Country and *Interface*, for example, if seen together, open up the processes of spatial thinking which it is part of Edgar's purpose to explore. Both works draw on our knowledge and experience of landscapes, and of the landscape as a particular mode of depicting the land. Both are built on the fundamental binaries of light and dark, land and sky; in both the horizon line is the focus of activity, the marker of that upward pressure which is such a characteristic feature of his stone landscapes. Each is also the contrary to the other: by reversing the pairing of light/sky and dark/land; by making the horizon line a division between, in *Interface*, and a journey across, in *Cross Country*; and through another binary, whole/fragment.



The rectangular shape of *Interface* and the abstract contours of its horizon give its surface a screen-like quality, a closed and inclusive space of representation which we look into; by contrast, the unfinished three sides of *Cross Country* encourage a recognition that it is a fragment taken from larger, absent domains of time, space, and matter. Each composes its binaries into something more and becomes an instance of thirdspace, a stone place which, in Soja's words, is simultaneously "real-and-imagined".

NAMES

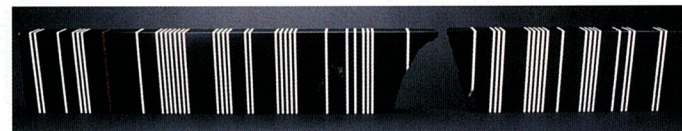
John Edgar marks the social embeddedness and intent of his objects by giving them names, an effect of which is to underscore their existence as visible ideas. To bring the objects into language is to play two modes of representation off against each other, and to anticipate their reframing by writing such as this.

It is also to acknowledge that lived social spaces "teem with symbols [and] are also vitally filled with politics and ideology, with the real and the imagined intertwined" (Soja: 68) So the title of the exhibition is itself a name for such a vital space, in which "lie" refers both to topography (the horizon line) and to deception, "land" being both a name for physical territory and for the place of identity, property, society, and nation.

With this as a context, *Vent:Confrontation* becomes not only the name for the active part of a volcano but associates release with destructive power. Such an idea is given even greater social force by the implication that it is the keystone of an arch which is being forced apart. The fractured stone slab, *Rohe:Boundary Stone*, placed together with the three *Flagstones*, invokes a complex of ideas to do with competing versions of "the nation" or contested sovereignties, and globalisation as the displacing of national histories and cultures, both suggested by the different flags occupying the same ground and by the broken boundary marker.

WRITING

The purpose of writing is to make ideas visible. Thought of this way, any material shaped to a communicative purpose is an instance of writing. In a discussion of electronic writing, Rob Wittig links as surfaces on which to write "The ephemeral cathode ray tube [and the] semi-eternality of stone" (1994: xi).



In *Code:Digital Memory* Edgar brings late twentieth century electronic writing into contact with its oldest ancestor by creating a stone barcode representing information and its binary mode of storage and reproduction. Thinking this work together with *Cross Country* focusses attention on three other aspects: the extension of the barcode into a series which is broken off rather than completed; the fracturing of the bar; and the inclusion of an element (the strip of red granite) which escapes the binary pattern. Each of these aspects of the sculpture challenge the self-enclosure of the abstract world of digital information, drawing attention to what is left out of our systems for knowing, exposing the unknown or unacknowledged which they would seek to conceal.

Like a page with two columns of printing the double columns of *Loom:Kaitiaki* engage the eye vertically and horizontally at the same time. By shifting these pieces off the horizontal axis typical of other works in the exhibition, Edgar brings other elements of our lived social experience to mind. Columns, suggesting the remnant of an official building; the horizon lines become profiles, suggesting an antique human form; the space between, like the white space of the page, locating the as-yet-to-be-written or what

the passage of time has erased. These possibilities or meanings are focussed by the names: *Loom* invokes both a weaving together, a process of composition, and a sense of threat, here linked with connotations of judgment and accumulated memory and wisdom in *Kaitiaki*/guardian.

COMMITMENTS

Badge:Southern Cross – A flag not flying, but to be seen on the floor/ground, a Southern Cross of stone stars in which the Union Jack is replaced by crossed bones and the red of the stars has leached into the once-blue background. W. A Glue notes that protocol requires that the New Zealand flag should not be allowed to touch the ground, and that "the breaking of the flag at the masthead is regarded as a symbol of hope for the future; the lowering of the flag at dusk is a symbol of respect for the past" (1965: 27–28).

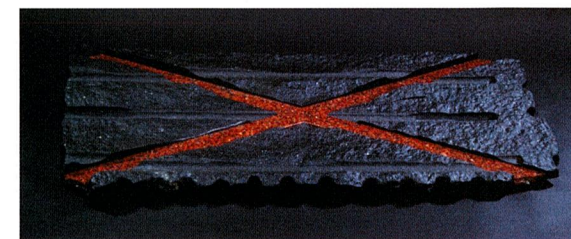
By creating a space (*Badge*) in which the New Zealand flag as one of the most pervasive symbols of national identity can be thought into relation with a re-visioning of it, John Edgar has powerfully located the "argument" of this exhibition. The past of New Zealand seems to be simply past, relics of no active purpose in the present, even if (or perhaps because) they are stored in *Digital Memory*; and the future seems to lack hope, a red desert in which the bones of the past will not again come to life, the idea of the nation robbed of its vitality.

And yet, look again at the beauty of those marble bones, the pure translucency of line and surface. Against the abstract spaces of economic reason, where the land becomes a commodity and the flag signifies a brand, the stone ideas which John Edgar offers us as another means of thinking about the world and our place in it seem resolute, located between hope and loss, between fracture and order. An experience of Thirdspace, an incentive to reimagine the lie of the land in a new statement of purpose and direction.

As Ammons puts it in a poem entitled *Emerson* (1973: 15),

The stone longs for flight,
the flier for a bead, even
a grain, of connective stone:
which is to say, all
flight, of imaginative hope or
fact, takes accuracy from stone.

BRIAN OPIE



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