



transit  
ZONE

INSTALLATION: Robert MacPherson  
SOUND: from Australia, Europe, UK, USA  
JEWELLERY: Brennan, Freeman, Gough, Holdsworth, West

16 March - 13 April 1991  
Ivan Dougherty Gallery

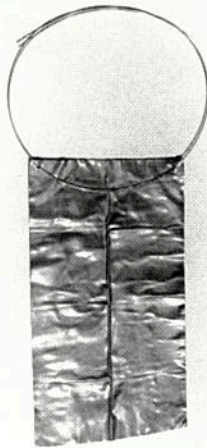


'moving across spaces traditionally closed to each other'

This exhibition at the Ivan Dougherty Gallery offers the opportunity to reconsider some of the boundaries and definitions such as art/craft, sculpture/jewellery, art/sound when considering what is 'art'. Often appraised by medium rather than the outcome of a meaningful combination of idea, materials, technique and form, art may also be evaluated from a particular social, political or cultural context - which can differ between the maker and the viewer.

<sup>1</sup> D. Losche, 'Toni Warburton', Art and Australia 28/4, 1990, p90

Margaret West  
Bib 1982-1990  
lead and stainless steel



Warwick Freeman  
Pawa bead necklace 1987  
pawa shell, oxidised silver



Rowena Gough  
Water circles 1991  
birdseye veneer, watercolour,  
graphite, lacquer



transit ZONE is an intentionally provocative juxtaposition of medium and practitioners. These practitioners defy such boundaries: MacPherson, a painter who no longer exclusively uses a brush to make paintings; jewellers whose works draw on personal experience or social concerns as well as knowledge of technique and material (and is this radically different to the motive of 'fine' artists?); sound that encourages the listener to extend their concept of 'music' and its relation to current art practice.

Louise Pether  
Exhibition Co-ordinator

## ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY JEWELLERY:

a discussion between Margaret West (jeweller) and Bonita Ely (installation artist)

**Q** Peter Fuller states that the qualities of fine jewellery lie in a detailed knowledge of gemology, precious metal work and mounting techniques. He considers "new practitioners are denigrating established knowledges, traditions, skills, techniques, practices and above all values." What is your response to this?<sup>1</sup>

**MW** I would have thought it's time for these values to be challenged. The role of artists and the practice of art making have been questioned throughout this century. There is no reason why the traditions of jewellery should not be placed under a similar scrutiny.

I consider Peter Fuller to be a most erudite and perceptive writer; and I find this statement difficult to come to terms with, but it cannot be dismissed. The point is appropriately developed by Reinhold Ludwig.

"Modern art consciously intends to irritate its beholder. To disturb our accustomed ways of seeing and thus to force us into a confrontation with modern art works. This attitude may fascinate the art collector but can often lead the general public to reject modern art. As a rule neither the art lover nor the artist himself wants his own body and appearance to become an object of unpleasant confrontation."<sup>2</sup>

I think this is the hub of the problem with contemporary jewellery, putting confrontational pieces on our own bodies can be threatening.

**BE** I don't think that's a reason why people shouldn't make it!

<sup>1</sup> Peter Fuller 'Modern Jewellery' Images of God: the consolation of lost illusions The Hogarth Press, London, 1985

<sup>2</sup> Reinhold Ludwig 'Why there's no market (at the moment) for artistic jewellery' Art Aurea 4/90 p36-37

**MW** Neither do I. I think Peter Fuller has the two issues confused. When we're talking about jewellery we should be aware of the difference between the making and the wearing. No matter what your concerns are as a maker of jewellery, the wearers of jewellery have their own agenda.

**BE** It's like making a sculpture with the audience in mind which is very compromising. You must do what you feel is appropriate to the idea.

**MW** For contemporary jewellers there is a wealth of source material available, particularly on what the concerns of jewellery have been in the past in many cultures. This cross-fertilised with broader art-making issues provides a rich resource indeed.

**BE** Like the concepts of possession and beautification.

**MW** Yes, and the display of wealth and portable wealth; the notion of belonging to a group or being different from a group. All those sorts of things we use clothing and particularly jewellery to demonstrate are very potent human issues which can be a springboard for development of work.

**BE** A jeweller would have a specific site in mind anyway, a particular body and type, a particular gender?

**MW** Yes, but not always and whether the work is intended to be worn, or exists as an object of contemplation, confrontation or provocation, no maker has control beyond the studio.

**BE** So when the work is not being 'worn' it in effect becomes a sculptural item?

**MW** Some contemporary jewellery is informed by the concerns of contemporary art making such as performance, installation and sculpture as well as by the concerns of jewellery in a very broad cultural and historical context, thus becoming a hybrid.

**BE** So a definition one way or another is not important - the object is there or not there?

**MW** Some categories are clear but there are grey areas. I'm not sure that I know where the boundaries are, or that I care. We have this obsession about putting things in boxes. Why is it not sufficient to say "it's a work about this, informed by this; and it is to be worn, or not worn except in the mind of the viewer"

**Q** Fuller queries the "democratic enjoyment of all substances" in contemporary jewellery. What are appropriate materials?

**MW** The issue of the properties that materials bring to any work has been something that contemporary artists have engaged with in an open and thoughtful way. A cornerstones of the contemporary jewellery movement has been to discard the notion of materials having their own intrinsic preciousness. When it might have been appropriate to use gold and diamonds, paper has been used. This is the provocative or "contemporary" statement, in some instances.

I believe there are no taboo materials from the point of the contemporary jeweller, but there certainly are from the public's view-point. If you go to somewhere like Angus and Coote the materials are very carefully selected for their traditionally acknowledged worth, perceived durability and most importantly - marketability.

**BE** I can't imagine anything that jewellery shouldn't be made of bar dangerous things - lead? Depends on where you come from - if you have a sense of fun then Micky Mouse watches are appropriate.

**MW** It also depends on where you are going to. If you have an ambition to sell a lot of work then its necessary to engage with public preference. If not then you should be aware of the flack you'll get and the need to educate people encouraging them to be a little more daring.

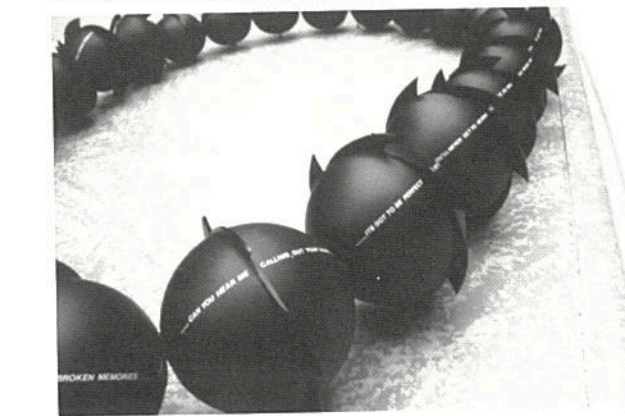
**BE** I guess the wearability thing is what causes the most angst?

**MW** Wearability and materials run neck and neck.

**BE** Jewellery can *infer* wearability rather than be wearable —like Anne Brennan's mouth pieces - the idea or concept is strong but you would not consider wearing them.

**MW** Our insistence on jewellery being 'comfortably' wearable is aberrant. If you look at the way in which almost all other cultures have

Annie Holdsworth Mourning Piece 1989-1990 anodised aluminium, perspex, letraset



ornamented their bodies for example with enormous lip-plugs, you must acknowledge that we make incredible demands on our jewellery. It must be discreet and allow us to move unencumbered. This doesn't give makers much room to manoeuvre. In order to expand jewellery's currently austere horizons other strategies have been developed.

**BE** Jewellery is unexpectedly political, your work for instance dealing with nuclear issues, Anne's relating to domestic concerns, and Warwick Freeman's as a pakeha New Zealander using Polynesian references. Warwick also works with the economic fact that he must make jewellery that is wearable and will be purchased.

**MW** It is a political decision to make work of that nature. The same as a decision to make non-wearable work is a political and cultural decision, like the decision to make installation rather than sculpture.

**BE** Yes, taking the object out of the commodity area - no one can purchase it and it's not a permanent or precious thing. The time element which object sculpture doesn't utilise as much demands a response that is more bodily. Wanting people to participate rather than encounter a dictatorial statement by the artist. The body is denigrated traditionally but here is allowed to be part of the work's interpretation.

**MW** I suppose some contemporary jewellery could be seen to denigrate the body in that sense. One of the objections to "confrontational" contemporary jewellery is that it is supposed to be wearable, but turns the wearer into a "thing".

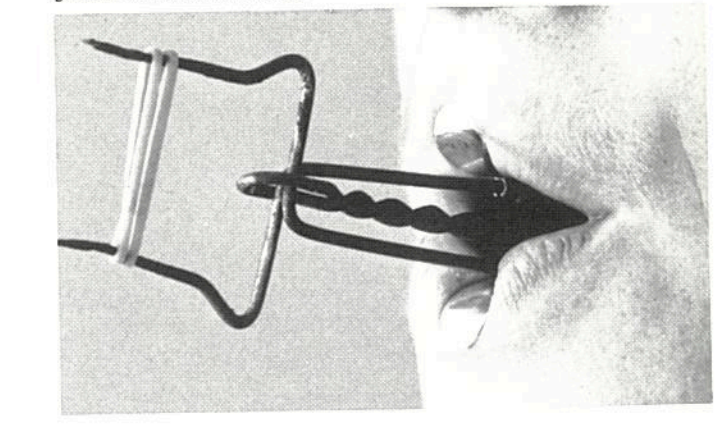
**Q** What are the current debates internationally and the current concerns of Australian art jewellers?

**MW** The debates and concerns are similar. Broad jewellery issues are being addressed, specific making skills and conditions tested, human (psychological and social) concerns considered; the broader cultural concerns that apply to art practice generally are sometimes engaged to develop some hybrid attitudes. I believe that revolutionary attitudes are waning There's a pullback and an acknowledgement of an exciting and very rich heritage to be worked through afresh.

**BE** Julie Ewington reviewing Sydney exhibitions in *Art Monthly* recently noted there seems to be a personal investment in the conceptual development of work, rather than it being 'art about art', and it is dealing with issues integral to society and the environment.

**MW** It's difficult for a jeweller to work without engaging with social as well as cultural issues. It is often suggested that making for a consumer is a weakening in the attitude of the jewellery maker. I don't see that as a compromise in a negative sense. It can be a collaboration, for the maker and the wearer - a dialogue between two people. The work itself cannot exist without the participation of the maker and is impoverished without the participation of the wearer, or the viewer.

Anne Brennan a subject is raised which the liar wishes buried from the series Something Altogether Else 1986 galvanised wire tweezers, brass, rubber





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## unsound

towards a representation of 'other' music

If *Broken Music*, the exhibition of artists' recordworks staged at this Gallery last year, confirmed Jacques Attali's observation that "the sound object has become artifice, independent of the listener and composer"<sup>1</sup> *unsound*, through its specific mode of auditory channeling (headphones), may reflect literally his assertion that "each spectator has a solitary relation with a material object; the consumption of music is individualised, a simulacrum of ritual sacrifice, a blind spectacle."<sup>2</sup>

*unsound* is an asymmetrical survey of recent Australian and international experimental music/soundworks which aims to introduce to both a student and general audience, a variety of music and sound de-/constructions, perspectives and frames of reference.<sup>3</sup>

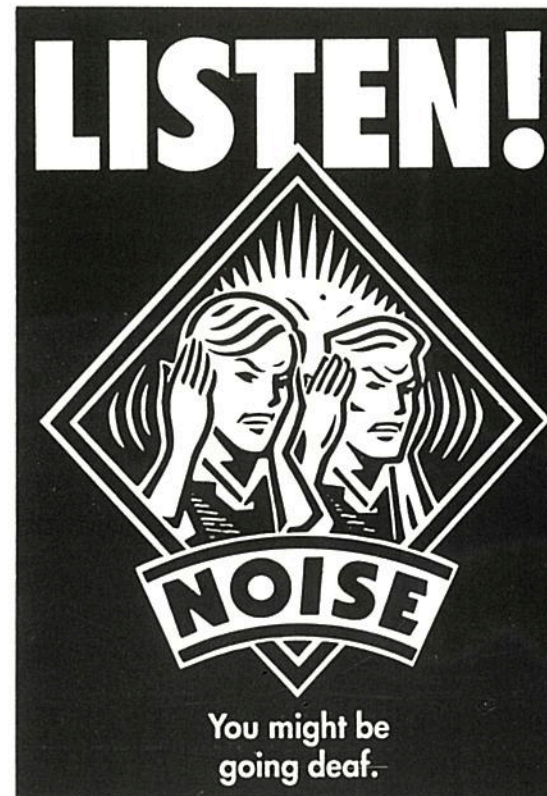
Post-/industrial music, electronic music, *musique concrete*, improvised music, voice, *poesie sonore*/text-sound poetry, audio collages, sampling and cut-ups, radio art, broken music. These ambivalent zones of differentiation constitute the generally invisible (unseen) and inaudible (unheard) 'other' of contemporary western music, which is situated beyond both the commercial market systems of popular music and the modernist musical *avant-garde* of state-financed academies (where 'serious' post serialists conflict with 'unserious' experimentalists).<sup>4</sup>

Yet to suggest that many of the practitioners are 'simply' marginalised is to belie their implicit ideological imperatives (self-production and distribution; technical and/or cultural opposition, intervention, transgression) and the concomitant aesthetic and formal diversities. Further, such marginalisation has not precluded frequent convergences and transmutations of multiple stylistic codes e.g. the 'mass avant-gardism' of Laurie Anderson.

It is not, however, within the scope of this exhibition and brief introductory text to proffer either a problematical linear history of experimental sound practices, or a description of their synchronic complexities.<sup>5</sup> Consider the following random possibilities:

Karlheinz Stockhausen, Kraftwerk, Afrika Bambaataa - three points on a line?; despite the cultural amateurishness which dominated much of Italian musical Futurism on a theoretical and programmatic level, the impact of numerous manifestos - notably Russolo's *The Art of Noises* and Marinetti's *Destruction of Syntax/Words in Freedom*, both 1913 - can be traced through to many of the present soundworks; Alvin Lucier's treatment of natural radio frequency emissions in the ionosphere; Luc Ferrari's mapping of Algerian sonic terrains; cybernetic voices, mutant speech, looped phonemes; *Plunderphonics*, John Oswald's audio piracy as compositional prerogative, a non-hierarchical musical archaeology which antagonises copyright morality (the political economy of noise); more than a distractional technique, the cut-up (pause button or razor-blade virtuosity) demands a dexterity of listening to decode the ironic and subversive resonances provoked by the continuity of disjunctions; groove-lock to Non's (Boyd Rice) multi-speed/multi-axis black hole noise;...

Alessio Cavallaro: Curator



"...the opinion that Beethoven is comprehensible and Schoenberg incomprehensible is an objective deception. The general public, totally cut-off from the production of new music, is alienated by the outward characteristics of such music.... The dissonances which horrify them testify to their own conditions; for that reason alone do they find them unbearable..." Theodor Adorno<sup>6</sup>; "[Throbbing Gristle] always brought real cruelty to their staged representations of inhumanity. They piled horror on horror, matched brutal noise with brutal image. No filters here to reduce them..." Biba Kopf.<sup>7</sup>

"What was so fascinating about tape possibility was that a second, which we had always thought was a relatively short space of time, became fifteen inches. It became something quite long that could be cut-up" John Cage.<sup>8</sup>

"We now live in a hyper-modern world where panic noise (the electronic soundtrack of TV... white sounds in all the 'futureshops') appears as a kind of affective hologram providing a veneer of coherency for the reality of an imploding culture...music/vibration as servomechanism enters directly into the postmodern body and passes through it without a trace, leaving only an altered energy state.... Never seen but equally never shut out, music as panic vibrations secretes through the body of the social." Panic Music<sup>9</sup>

Graphic taken from the *Noise Management at Work* materials produced by Worksafe Australia

<sup>1</sup> J. Attali *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* trans. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1985 p36

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p32

<sup>3</sup> With very few exceptions, most theorists of music and aurality undermine their own immediate critical relevance by writing with little or no

knowledge of the current developments or complex displacements within music culture. Almost invariably, references are reduced to 'genres' (experimental) and generic icons (John Cage).

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that some of the most significant developments in new music practices emerged from within media studios and universities - often sites of new technologies e.g. *musique concrete* at Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française in 1948 (Pierre Schaeffer); electronic music at Cologne Radio, NWDR, 1950 (Herbert Eimert)

<sup>5</sup> It is hoped that the suggested reading list, and copies of album cover notes and articles which accompany most of the cassettes in this exhibition will be useful in detailing certain theoretical and historical specificities.

<sup>6</sup> T. Adorno *Philosophy of Modern Music* (1948) trans. A. G. Mitchell and W. V. Bloomster, London, Sheed and Ward, 1973 p9

<sup>7</sup> B. Kopf: *Baccilus Culture* in C. Neal *Tape Delay* Middlesex, SAF Publishing, 1987 p11

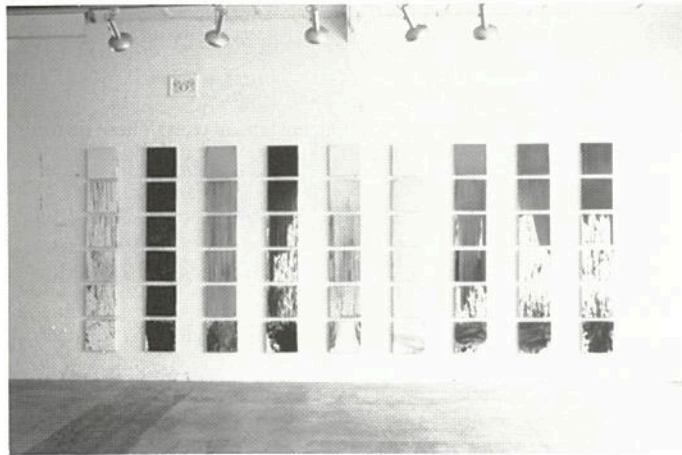
<sup>8</sup> J. Cage in R. Kostelanetz *Conversing with Cage* New York, Limelight Editions, 1988 p164

<sup>9</sup> A. Kroker, M. Kroker, D. Cook *Panic Encyclopaedia: the definitive guide to the postmodern scene* Hampshire, MacMillan Education Ltd 1989 pp155-156

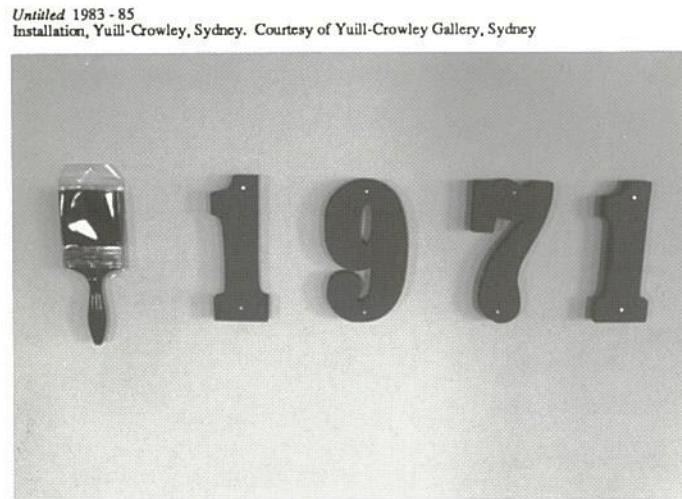


# The Texture of Clouds

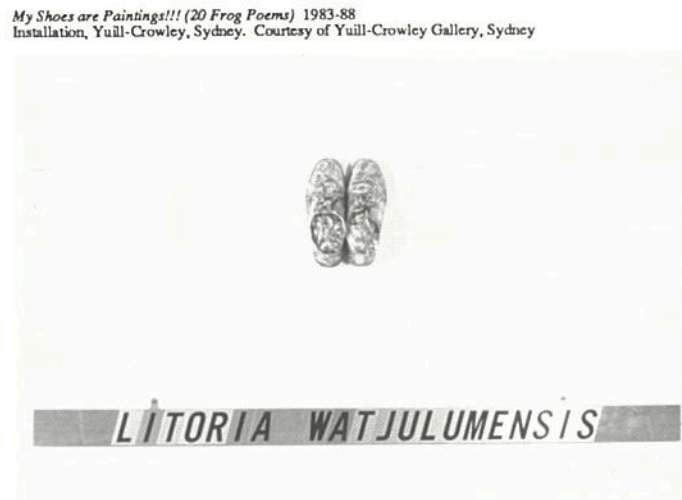
an essay on Robert MacPherson to accompany the installation  
*SUNDOG: 12 FROG POEMS (GREEN WHIZZER) FOR J. B.* 1988-89



*Sarah's Merle* 1976 - 77  
 Installation, Yuill-Crowley, Sydney. Courtesy of Yuill-Crowley Gallery, Sydney



*Untitled* 1983 - 85  
 Installation, Yuill-Crowley, Sydney. Courtesy of Yuill-Crowley Gallery, Sydney



*My Shoes are Paintings!!! (20 Frog Poems)* 1983-88  
 Installation, Yuill-Crowley, Sydney. Courtesy of Yuill-Crowley Gallery, Sydney

Modernist painting, in the canonical formulation given it by Clement Greenberg, rested upon a number of fundamentals. In its historically determined quest for an ever increasing purity, painting was called upon to forego both referentially and the illusion of depth. Its program was nothing less than the interrogation of its 'conditions of possibility': this mandate was to be achieved via the modernist painter's exploration of flatness, shape of the painterly support, and the nature of paint. These conditions, Greenberg argued, constituted the irreducible determinants of painting's existence and as such were the only proper concerns of the modernist painter.

Robert MacPherson has, over a period of fifteen years, engaged in a practice which systematically pursues these investigations but in a manner far removed from the seriousness of the Greenbergian imperative. In adopting these strictures, MacPherson proved obedient to the letter but not the spirit of these rules. Early in his career, considering the 'fact of paint' as one of the determining conditions of painting, MacPherson asked whether paint, in its immediate liquid form, might not constitute 'painting'. Some logical consequences follow: all painted surfaces can be seen as painting and all activities involving the application of liquid to a surface become painting. Thus MacPherson asks: is paint in a can 'painting'? Does the handle of the brush, having been dipped in paint as part of its manufacture, confer upon the brush the category 'painting'? Cleaning his shoes, the realisation occurs: my shoes are paintings!

In appearing to follow the rule which demanded that painting rid itself of everything that did not properly belong to it, MacPherson finds painting everywhere. 'Painting', in its initial formulation, disappears and MacPherson, in effect, stops 'being a painter'. Rather than devising systems determining the application of paint to surface, he will simply choose to exhibit painted surfaces. Road signs and printed materials, for example, will be paired with brushes as varieties of paintings. The formal device of pairing and the choice of signs are significant for most of his subsequent work.

While painting, as an activity rigidly defined by Greenbergian formalism, did provide MacPherson with a system of operations useful in generating work focussed on that definition, this work remained caught within the hermeneutic it sought to subvert. MacPherson's painting remained ostensibly about painting. Working with signs, as painted surfaces and as naming devices, shifted the focus from the system of painting to the system of language. In this shift, he once again employs a pre-existing set of rules as a means of structuring his work. MacPherson's chosen system, species taxonomy, concerns itself in this instance with the naming, ordering, and classification of frogs. The resulting work, culled under the collective title *Frog Poems*, makes apparent certain operations of language, in particular the relationship between name and named. At the same time, this recourse to a relatively obscure branch of biology foregrounds the function of what might be termed 'explanatory fictions' in the experience of an artwork.

In the first of the exhibitions appearing under this title, *My Shoes Are Paintings: 20 Frog Poems*, MacPherson showed twenty works. Each comprised a wall-mounted pair consisting of an object and a sign board bearing the Latin name of a frog species. In these pairs, the sign serves as both name, for the object, and title, for the work. Beyond this correspondence of name/object and title/work exists another for each pair relies upon a scientific explanation of their union. For example,

*Litoria Phyllochroa* is a species of tree frog. In the work of this title, a chain saw is presented. These explanations, for those not familiar with this area of natural history, can only be taken on trust. Against this trust, a trust perhaps too readily invested in the artist, MacPherson pits the supposed conventionality of language. Invoking a material basis for each pair, he proffers a language system in which the relationship between name and named is no longer arbitrary but ordained.

Successive exhibitions in this series have concentrated on language as a system of differences operating between terms. Here, MacPherson favours an installation mode in which each repeated object functions as a unit rather than as a discrete work. In *17 Frog Poems (For G. N. and A. W. (who by example) taught the kinder way)*, seventeen army camp stretchers were paired with sign boards bearing the names of burrowing or hibernating frogs. *20 Frog Poems: Distant Thunder (A Memorial) for D. M.* coupled beehives with the names of frogs commonly, but incorrectly, termed tree frogs. As in the earliest *Frog Poems*, explanations for the choice of object can be found but in the later exhibitions MacPherson highlights the propensity for allusive correspondences between the name or species category and the selected objects. In multiplying the objects, MacPherson empties out the significance of their material differences and invests them with a meaning we might term symbolic.

While considering the ends and means of painting within the formalist paradigm, MacPherson developed a fiction of symbolic explanation which continues to structure his work today. Looking at the painter's brush, MacPherson discovered not only a painting, but an elemental world in miniature for within the bristles, handle and banding one finds the triad: animal, vegetable, mineral. In *20 Frog Poems: Distant Thunder*, this triad is invoked in the chosen objects. The beehives with their metal lids (vegetable and mineral) are home to bees (animal). The beehives are thus doubly paintings; materially in their composi-

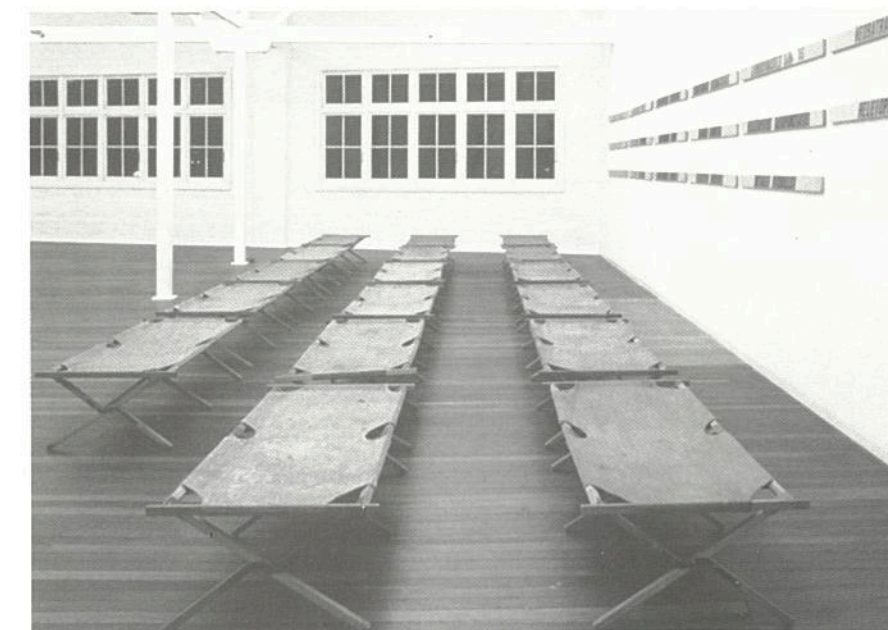
tion of painted sides and metaphorically in their duplication of the elemental microcosm. This invocation of what is absent, for the bees are not physically present in the installation, extends to the title. *Distant Thunder* heralds the approach of summer storms and the sound of rain upon the tin roofs of Queensland houses. These tin roofs upon timber houses are reproduced in the form of the beehives themselves. Here the audibly absent is doubly invoked, for the distant thunder could equally recall the sound of bees approaching the hive.

*Sundog: 12 Frog Poems (Green Whizzer) for J. B.* pairs twelve loaves of white bread sitting on plinths with a corresponding number of international symbols for cloud types. As with *Distant Thunder*, the animal element of MacPherson's triad is invoked in absentia, by way of the title for materially only the vegetable and mineral are present in the bread and the painted plinths. However the titular frogs are present in a manner at once sensuous and allusive for what authorises the linkage of clouds and loaves here is more than a simple numerical correspondence. The white fluffiness of the loaf parallels a naive conception of the texture of a cloud, but a cloud has no proper texture to speak of. It would feel, simply, moist.

MacPherson revisits one of the rules of modernism in this exhibition. Alluding to clouds in the form and texture of the loaves and symbolising them directly in the signs of meteorology, he reminds us of the earlier prohibition against the illusion of painterly depth. For clouds, like the loaves on their plinths, appear to rest within space and in their movement and formation attest to celestial depths. If the system of language can still be considered a governing concern here, it is its metaphoric dimension which is of note. At once material and abstract, as instantiated here, this capacity to perceive likeness is one which MacPherson shows to be able to escape those efforts to contain it.

Ingrid Periz

*17 Frog Poems (for G. N. & A. W. [Who By Example] Taught the Kinder Way)* 1987 - 89  
 Installation, Yuill-Crowley, Sydney. Courtesy of Yuill-Crowley Gallery, Sydney



Meteorological symbol for *Cumulus*

Cu