

Reflections

Documents

Documentation



Points of Contact

Jim Allen, Len Lye, Hélio Oiticica

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Edited by Christina Barton, Tyler Cann and Mercedes Vicente

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth
Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi, Victoria University of Wellington
Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand, 2011

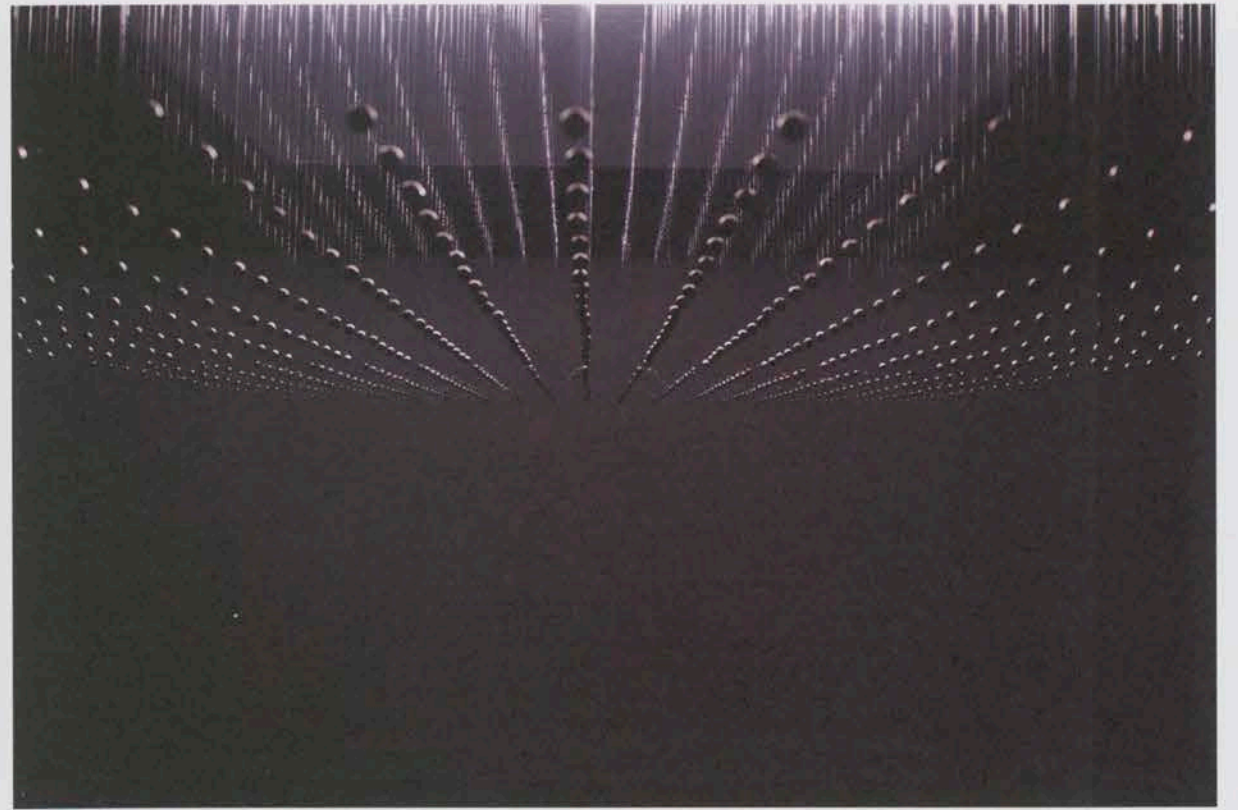


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Front Cover: (above) Jim Allen, *Computer Dance*, Part 1, *Contact*, performance, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2010; (below) Jim Allen, *Computer Dance*, Part 1, *Contact*, performance, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1974. Photo: Bryony Dalefield.
 Back Cover: Ivan Cardosa filming Hélio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro, 1979. Photo: Eduardo Viveiros.
 Front Inside Cover: Jim Allen, *Tribute to Hone Tuwhare*.
 Back Inside Cover: Film still from Len Lye, *Colour Box*.
 Prelim left: Len Lye, *Grass*.
 Prelim Right: Detail of Jim Allen, *Space Plane, Environment No. 1*.

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Foreword

Points of Contact: Jim Allen, Len Lye, Hélio Oiticica is an important project on two related counts. Firstly, it brings together three artists whose works have not been seen together before, on the basis of formal, philosophical and historical links that exist amongst them, which are documented here for the first time, the purpose being to establish an alternative narrative within the mainstream trajectory of 20th-century art. Secondly, it provides the context for the re-creation and re-staging of key works by the New Zealand artist who pioneered post-object art in this country, Jim Allen (born 1922), thus ensuring his exposure to new generations and creating an appropriate context to assess the nature of his work and explore a specific set of connections that link it to the wider frame of experimental art practice as it unfolded across the globe in the volatile period of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

New Zealand-born Len Lye (1901–1980) and Brazilian Hélio Oiticica (1937–1980) are acknowledged internationally for their respective practices. These spanned direct film, kinetic sculpture, painting, installation and participatory performance, as well as bodies of writing that pushed language into new territory in their efforts to convey their revolutionary views on art and life. Jim Allen, in contrast, is not as well known as he should be, even in his own country. *Points of Contact* has been conceived to redress this by providing resources and an occasion for some of his most significant works to be seen for the first time since they were originally presented. Rather than working in isolation, curators Tyler Cann and Mercedes Vicente have chosen to establish a relevant and, indeed, historically-telling context for them, which tracks Allen's encounters with his peers and shows how all three artists shared an approach to art-making that sought to connect with spectators at a deep, potentially transformative level.

As institutions dedicated to supporting contemporary art across all its forms, and producing more nuanced accounts of art's recent history, the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery and the Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi are proud to have hosted this important exhibition and to support a publication which both documents and extends it. We believe that such projects add not only to our store of knowledge of New Zealand art, but can also critically contribute to the re-writing of art history as it is currently being undertaken across the globe, under the sway of post-colonial, post-national and post-modern discourses.

This exhibition is especially poignant given the ephemeral nature of so much post-object art. While one of the key achievements of *Points of Contact* has been the reconstruction of Jim Allen's *Small Worlds* (1969) and the performance *Contact* (1974), we also acknowledge and are grateful for the work of Projeto Hélio Oiticica, which has been dedicated, since the artist's death and the disastrous fire that destroyed so much of his work in October 2009, to the preservation of Oiticica's practice; and for the assistance of the Len Lye Foundation's Collection and Archive, which has been based at the Govett-Brewster since 1980 and is similarly committed to the survival and dissemination of Lye's work. All such efforts ensure that the achievements of these artists live on, so that the conceptual challenge of their work can enjoy appropriate material realisation.

Likewise, this publication is another key means to ensure that the work and creative thinking these artists generated survive and that new generations of

viewers can learn from and respond to them. While focusing in particular on Jim Allen, and providing factual evidence of the fruitful ways in which he responded to and interacted with both Lye and Oiticica, we believe all three artists will be better understood as substantial contributors to the critical practices that have transformed our understanding of what art can be and do.

In mounting such an exhibition and producing its accompanying publication there are many people to thank. Firstly and importantly, this exhibition could never have been realised without the commitment, energy and enthusiasm of Jim Allen. For the reconstruction and re-presentation of Jim Allen's work we are especially grateful to Allen's technical assistants Norman Edgerton and James Charlton, *Contact's* choreographer Rebecca Wood, dancers Anna Bates, Sarah Campus, Geoff Gilson, Jack Gray, Rachel Ruckstuhl-mann and Josh Rutter, and videographer Peter Wareing. We also strongly acknowledge the vital support of Michael Lett, Creative New Zealand Toi Aotearoa and Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. In securing the loan of Oiticica's work we are very grateful to Projeto Hélio Oiticica in Rio de Janeiro and Guy Brett in London. For the presentation of Len Lye's works we thank The Len Lye Foundation and The New Zealand Film Archive Ngā Kaitiaki O Ngā Taonga Whitiāhua.

This is the second successful collaboration of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery and the Adam Art Gallery (following the staging of the Darcy Lange exhibition at both venues in 2006–7). The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery must be acknowledged as initiator of this exhibition and organiser of its original presentation and subsequent tour. The Adam Art Gallery in turn has fully played its part by facilitating the production of the catalogue and by organising the visit of the Brazilian art historian, Paulo Venancio Filho, who was able to deepen our understanding of Oiticica's Brazilian context, as well as extend his knowledge by being exposed to the work of both Len Lye and Jim Allen. We are very grateful to contributors to the exhibition, its public programme and publication, in particular Guy Brett, whose advice, knowledge and support has been invaluable; to the University of Rio de Janeiro and the School of Languages and Cultures, Victoria University of Wellington in particular Patricia Vasconcelos Cavalcanti de Marotta; and the Embassy of Brazil, for supporting the visit of Paulo Venancio Filho, and to our designers, The International Office who have so beautifully produced this publication.

Rhana Devenport
Director, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery

Christina Barton
Director, Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi

Reflections



Jim Allen, *Small Worlds*, as installed at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2010.

Points of Contact

Tyler Cann & Mercedes Vicente

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In 1968, Jim Allen took a sabbatical from his position as Head of Sculpture and Associate Professor at Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland. He travelled to London, then to France and the United States, visiting universities in New York, Chicago, Berkeley and elsewhere before heading to Mexico and returning homeward. While still in New Zealand, a visiting publisher had introduced Allen to the book *Kinetic Art: The Language of Movement*. He wrote to its author, critic and curator Guy Brett, asking to meet in London, and expressed his admiration for the tactile sensibility of Brazilian artists Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark who featured in the book.¹ A planned solo exhibition of Oiticica's work at Signals Gallery in London had been cancelled when the gallery unexpectedly closed, but the works had already been shipped from Brazil and some were still in Brett's apartment when Allen visited him in 1968.² Oiticica's sculptural bóides (loosely translated as 'fireballs') made a deep and lasting impression on the visiting artist. They inspired aspects of his first exhibition upon returning to New Zealand, *Small Worlds* at Barry Lett Galleries in June 1969.³ Oiticica's parangolés – structured capes and banners designed to be worn while moving to the rhythm of samba – were also acknowledged in Allen's 1974 performance *Contact*, one section of which was called *Parangolé Capes*. Through works like these, as well as his activities as a teacher at Elam, Allen became an instrumental figure in the development of experimental, conceptual and performative practices in New Zealand, grouped under the term of 'post-object' art.

While Allen was in New York, Peter Tomory, former director of Auckland City Art Gallery then teaching at Columbia University, suggested that he visit fellow New Zealand-born artist, Len Lye. Allen was previously unaware of Lye. The impact of this encounter was such that Allen and his co-editor Wytan Curnow subsequently dedicated their seminal 1976 book *New Art* to Lye, saying 'Len Lye's work is inspired not so much by the electronic or the scientific expressions of energy as by the expressions of the "old" brain as he calls it, in myth and ritual, in the consciousness of energy in our own bodies'.⁴ This conception of movement and energy, central to Lye's film and sculptural work from the 1930s to the 1970s, established his position in the history of 20th-century art, and links his work to Hélio Oiticica's as well.

1. Jim Allen, letter to Guy Brett, 3 August 1968, published in this catalogue, p. 48.

2. Detailed account of this encounter appears in Guy Brett's essay in this catalogue, pp. 19–22.

3. *Small Worlds* was originally titled *Small Worlds/5 Environmental Structures*. These structures were titled: 1. *Space Plane*; 2. *'Thine Own Hands' Poem Environment to Hone Tuwhare*; 3. *Articulation for Dance*; 4. *Three Dimensions*; 5. *Water*. See Jim Allen/*Small Worlds/5 Environmental Structures*, gallery flyer, Barry Lett Galleries, 3–13 June 1969. Since that original presentation, Nos 2, 3 and 4 were reconstructed by the artist and presented at Michael Lett, Auckland, in *Small Worlds*, 17 March–17 April 2010. Here No. 2 was re-titled by the artist as *Tribute to Hone Tuwhare* and Nos 3 and 4 were re-titled as one work: *Small Worlds*. Nos 1 and 5 were reconstructed for the *Points of Contact* exhibition and were re-titled by the artist as *Space Plane, Environment No. 1* and *Water Pillow*.

4. Jim Allen and Wytan Curnow, *New Art: Some Recent New Zealand Sculpture and Post-object Art*, Heinemann Educational Books (NZ) Ltd., Auckland, 1976, n.p.

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The connections outlined above constitute the rationale for the exhibition *Points of Contact: Jim Allen, Len Lye, Hélio Oiticica*. With its reconstitution of the five *Small Worlds* and re-presentation of the 1974 seminal performance *Contact*, each for the first time, Jim Allen is surely the exhibition's protagonist; it is through the prism of Oiticica and Lye that *Points of Contact* offers a view of his work. There is no doubt Allen's practice changed radically following his return from sabbatical in 1969, and that this precipitated developments in New Zealand art generally. However, it would be a mistake to mythologise the trip or boil these two encounters down to a simple narrative of 'influence'. While still pervasive as art-historical shorthand, the notion suggests the passive reception of external forces, and is surely inadequate to describe the dynamics of Allen's reception of Oiticica, Lye, or any other artist's work. Creative work only emerges in response to the ideas and works of others, and there are numerous other people and experiences that could be summoned to explain the shift in Allen's practice. As Guy Brett notes here, the encounters with Oiticica and Lye form a case of 'a coming to fruition of ideas which were already latent in the minds of artists in different parts of the world'.⁵ *Points of Contact* aims to recognise these personal connections that, nevertheless, had some effect on Allen and on the direction of contemporary art in New Zealand, and to bring their formal and conceptual relationships to light.

While the encounters at issue took place in London and New York, the links between New Zealand and Brazilian art explored in *Points of Contact* are remarkable for their deviation from canonical European and North American art-historical narratives. In this, the exhibition draws on an argument made in the introduction to the 1999 exhibition supplement *Action/Replay* that post-object or conceptual practices in New Zealand, unlike those developed in North America, drew less from minimalism than from kineticism. The curators Wytan Curnow, Christina Barton, John Hurrell and Robert Leonard state:

The emergence of post-object work in New Zealand coincides with the emergence, not with the supercession, of formalist abstraction as in New York. That is to say, the local post-object moment was not notably mediated by American practices...If there is a connecting thread, and a group of practices that replaces minimalism as a transition to the post-object, it is kineticism, focused on movement and light.⁶

Points of Contact picks up this connecting thread, revealing a micro-history that sits in a global context.

Forming part of this context are the social upheavals that erupted around the world in 1968, which constituted the backdrop of Allen's travels. The main purpose of his sabbatical trip was to visit art schools in the UK and the United States. Riots and student protests marked this experience considerably. In March, anti-war protestors were met with brutal police repression as they occupied London's Grosvenor Square.

5. Brett, p. 21.

6. Wytan Curnow, Christina Barton, John Hurrell and Robert Leonard, *Action Replay: Post-script*, Artspace, Auckland and Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, 1999, p.10.

Allen travelled to France in May, amidst the massive student uprisings that forced de Gaulle's government to flee to Germany. Returning to London, Allen found that art students had begun a six-week occupation of Hornsey College of Art, demanding changes to the educational system. New York seethed with anti-war and civil rights protests as well; Columbia University was still recovering from the student occupations of April. Allen visited Chicago in the shadow of the bloodshed surrounding the August 1968 Democratic Convention. Berkeley had been a centre of protest since the Free Speech Movement began in 1964. Massive student protests also shook Mexico City; their violent suppression culminated in October, when several hundred people were killed by government forces. Allen remembers the buses still lacking windows and visibly strafed by gunfire.⁷

In Brazil that year, the military dictatorship was also rocked by public protest. In June, students, artists and intellectuals staged the March of the One Hundred Thousand. The violent repression of popular protest culminated in December, with the suspension of habeas corpus and the consolidation of military rule. Oiticica's parangolés included in *Points of Contact* were originally created in this same year. The political dimension of these works is suggested by the *Parangolé P16 Cape 12* declaring 'of adversity we live' ('da adversidade vivemos'). Oiticica's 1968 banner 'Be an outlaw, be a hero' was also carried in a protest in Ipanema, and later shown at a concert of Caetano Veloso at the Sucata nightclub, which was interrupted by a police raid. Ivan Cardoso's film *HO* shows various people wearing parangolés and dancing samba amidst a soundtrack punctuated by sirens and gunfire. While Cardoso was unaware of the precedent, it is interesting to note that these sounds accompany sequences of direct animation in Lye's films as well.

Lye himself was clearly sympathetic to the student protestors and the civil rights movement. In an interview he recorded with Jim Allen during their meeting, Lye expressed the view that 'I think the whole thing is absolutely marvellous that out of this agitation and actual physical action, things have happened', but he also worried about the stamina of revolutionary fever and losing track of its original goals.⁸ Lye joined the Art Workers Coalition and its initial protest at MOMA in 1969. While there were student protests against the Vietnam War in the late 1960s, nothing on the scale of these events touched New Zealand.

Although the relationship between these political events and artistic currents is complex, it is not difficult to imagine in the midst of these upheavals a growing sense among artists that the static object of aesthetic contemplation was inadequate to the times. Since the late 1950s, the participation of the spectator in works of art had often been seen as correlative to the activation of the citizen. *Small Worlds* were the first of Allen's works that moved toward the creating of an environment and situation rather than a self-contained aesthetic object, and where the participation of the viewer became a central aesthetic concern, seen as a catalyst for the viewer's empowerment.

7. Detailed accounts of these events have been published in the interview with the artist and Wylan Curnow and Robert Leonard, 'Contact', *Art New Zealand*, Winter 2000, pp.48-55, 99. Also in the interview with Allen and the curators in this catalogue pp.28-36.

8. Len Lye (interviewer), *Jim Allen re. Eng & NZ. Art & Students Roll A*. [Audio Recording] 25 October 1968. Len Lye Foundation Collection, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery (No. 4237).



Hélio Oiticica, *Inauguration of Parangolé at the exhibition Opinião 65, Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro, 1965.*
Photo: Desdémone Bardin. Projecto Hélio Oiticica

The works functioned as an environment within the gallery made up of a constellation of single works, each affording a slightly different sensory experience. The sensory elements of these works aimed to trigger an exploratory response, moving from the strictly visual toward a more experiential sensory and social encounter. Allen's intentions were to juxtapose 'elements of matter, space, sound, light and movement, a format for sensual and intellectual exploration'.⁹ The use of UV lights meant that not only did the sculptural materials fluoresce, but the clothes, teeth and eyes of the spectators as well. Borrowing a term coined independently by both J.R. Soto and Hélio Oiticica, Allen called the works 'Penetrables', and wrote 'I'm trying to create an environment which physically involves the viewer. As the viewer walks among the sculptures, to other viewers he becomes part of the sculpture'.¹⁰ Part of *Small Worlds* (previously *Articulation for Dance*), is composed of a heavy, dense grid of suspended nylon cords. Pushing oneself inside is an effort rewarded by a startling perceptual shift. The cords entangle one's arms and brush against the face, a flaxen mat softens the floor, while everything in one's visual field becomes enveloped in a luminous cloud. There is space enough inside for only two or three people. The experience may be shared, but it is always quickly followed by the possibly uncomfortable realisation that one is being seen from the outside as well, as 'part of the sculpture'.

The PVC strips and threads of *Tribute to Hone Tuwhare* let the spectator pass through more easily. Once inside, the inward-facing vertical strips of fragmented text reveal themselves more fully. Tuwhare's poem repeatedly refers to parts of the body and the senses. According to Allen, this work directly relates to his experience of Oiticica's *B30 Box Bolidé 17*. In Oiticica's work, one has to reach into the translucent box and pull out the pouch full of blue pigment to reveal the strip of text, reading 'through my blood, through my sweat, this love lives'. While the bolidé is activated by a gesture of the hand, *Tribute to Hone Tuwhare*, like Oiticica's penetrables – which Allen never saw – required a full bodily immersion.

For the first time in *Small Worlds* Allen introduced a different, and possibly more radical, notion of the kinetic into his work, where movement is generated by the viewer's body rather than by any mechanical means, and brought his work more in line with Brett's description of 'a kineticism of the body' he saw in the work of Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica.¹¹ Although Lye's work is predominately motor-driven, this notion resonates with his interest in 'the consciousness of movement in our own bodies' that makes the body the locus of his kinetics. Lye's forceful kinetic sculptures literally shake the ground, and their vibration viscerally connects with the spectator's body.

Allen designed large, wind-driven kinetic sculptures, such as his maquette for Palmerston North Teachers' College or the work for the New Zealand Pavilion at Expo '70 Osaka, a grid of standing steel rods hinged at the base that would sway in

9. 'Towards an Attitude', *Five Sculptors: Jim Allen, Laurence Karasek, Warren Viscoe, Greer Twiss, Terry Powell*, New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts Special Exhibition Catalogue, Wellington, 1970, n.p.

10. 'Viewer Part of Sculpture', *Auckland Star*, 4 June 1969.

11. Guy Brett, *Kinetic Art: The Language of Movement*, Studio Vista, London, 1968.

the wind to create 'a continually varying arrangement of shining lines [that] could collide, making a random music'.¹² Allen's kinetic works also included the 45-foot tall 'Sails' for the 1973 Commonwealth Games.¹³ However, these rather traditional forms activated by natural elements such as wind still operated primarily at a visual level, and although he/she would feel the wind that moves them, would not have invoked the spectator's body the way *Small Worlds* and Lye's works do.

If there are formal comparisons to make between, say, the moiré patterns in *Fountain's* steel rods and *Space Plane, Environment No. 1's* nylon threads, it is likely because each was interested in the point at which vision becomes corporeal. It is the viewer that introduces the kinetic element to the environment or penetrable sculpture simply affords the viewer a sensorial bodily experience (rather than 'pure visuality'). It is the viewer's active participation that makes the work kinetic.

Alongside the works displayed in *Points of Contact*, Allen's performance *Contact* was re-staged over the opening weekend for the first time since its original presentation. The three-part performance consists of *Computer Dance*, where three blindfolded couples attempt to establish contact with each other using low-tech transmitters and sensors; *Parangolé Capes*, a sensuous coming-out-of-a-cocoon scene where the four performers liberate themselves from their material wrappings, a direct reference Oiticica's parangolés; and *Body Articulation/Imprint*, consisting of the six performers applying red, blue and yellow paint to themselves and then each other. Allen's desire to establish a participatory relationship with the spectator in *Small Worlds* had receded by the time of *Contact*, which retains a more conventional distinction between audience and performers. However, the body remains a central focus of this work. The physical experience of the performers metaphorically suggests more general relationships between people, but it is also felt empathically by the audience. In the awkward technological mediation of *Computer Dance*, the claustrophobia of the capes, and the sensuality of paint, *Contact* illustrates modes of connection to others. As with the works of Len Lye, although not interactive, in the actual moment of the performance these models of physical behaviour create an experiential, rather than distant or passively contemplative, relationship to the spectator.

The limited access to large Oiticica installations in the aftermath of the fire that caused the disappearance of a substantial body of the Projeto Hélio Oiticica, along with the modest scale of *Points of Contact* meant that this exhibition did not engage with some aspects and developments of later works by Allen and Oiticica that are nevertheless of interest in their parallel similitudes and divergences and in relation to the works presented in this exhibition. For instance Allen's *NZ Environment no. 5*, also from 1969, would resonate with Oiticica's *Tropicália* of 1966–7, in their respective choice of materials that carry cultural and political associations. Allen's use of oiled wool, woodchips, hessian, and green neon tube invoked the industries that have made New Zealand what it is today, and challenged 19th-century colonial representations of the landscape as an untouched, unspoilt Eden of the South Pacific, still prevalent in the way Aotearoa is marketed to tourists today. Likewise, Oiticica's labyrinth-like environment with parrots, plants, sand, texts, and a television plays on the clichés

12. *Arts & Community* vol.8, no.2 Feb 1972, pp.7–8.

13. '\$15,000 to make Games Sculpture', *Auckland Star*, 30 July 1973.



Len Lye, Morris Gross, Robert Graves (in white suit) and Ann Lye, *Wind Wand Test*, West Village, New York, 1960. Photo: Maurie Logie. Len Lye Foundation Collection, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.

of Brazilian culture and the conflict between tradition and technology typical in the Third World. Such associations are absent in the earlier *Small Worlds* where their materiality seems to respond to formalist concerns rather than specific symbolic cultural associations or the emotional charge of his later *Barbed Wire* 1970, in which Allen addresses perceptions of social alienation in a specifically New Zealand context.

Oiticica's self-conscious intention in *Tropicália*, to 'institute and characterise a state of Brazilian avant-garde art' and create a language that would articulate a Brazilian cultural identity, finds no national equivalent in Allen.¹⁴ While Allen acknowledged a kindred sensibility with Brazilian artists such as Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, to 'being ourselves part of Oceania'¹⁵ and make similar use of materials drawn from the natural environment, there is no clear aim in Allen's work to define a New Zealand identity. Allen, along with the group of artists that emerged from Elam in the early 1970s were all Pākehā (European descendants), with a very distinct sense of an inherited British identity. Prominent artists like Allen almost inevitably headed to Britain to study at schools like the Royal College of Art in London, and it was only there that they were marked with a lesser 'colonial' status. This is radically different from Oiticica's notion of the myth of miscegenation alluded to in his writings on *Tropicália*, where he states, 'we are Blacks, Indians, Whites, everything at the same time – our culture has nothing to do with European, despite being, to this day, subjugated to it: only the White and the Indian did not capitulate to it'.¹⁶ Allen's absorption of Oiticica's avant-garde ideas of the activation of the object and empowerment are removed from Oiticica's overt statements about issues of race and identity. In 1969 cultural politics were not evident in Allen's work, at the time his installations engaged a universalist plane of ideas around the sensorial experience, activation of the object, and audience participation.¹⁷

Having said this, one can draw a shared political commitment in both artists to an art practice that engages primarily with life, rather than with an eagerness to

14. While this is true of *Small Worlds*, in recent years *NZ Environment No. 5* has been contextualised within post-colonial discourses and included in exhibitions such as Wystan Curnow and Priscilla Pitts's exhibition, *A Few Years of New Zealand Landscape Art*, George Fraser Gallery, Auckland 1990, and Christina Barton's exhibition *Primary Products*, Adam Art Gallery, 2007.

15. Jim Allen, letter to Guy Brett, 3 August 1968. For Allen touching the red earth of Oiticica's bolidés directly resonated with the red clay he used as a material to make pots with school children whilst he was an arts advisor in Northland before he took up his position at Elam. See Allen's comments in his interview in this catalogue, pp.34–35.

16. Hélio Oiticica, 'Tropicália, March 4 1968', in *Hélio Oiticica*, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, and Projeto Hélio Oiticica, Rotterdam, Paris and Rio de Janeiro, 1992, pp.124–125.

17. It is, however, telling that Allen incorporated a poem by Hone Tuwhare in *Small Worlds*. Tuwhare was a Māori poet, whose involvement in the trade union movement proved his left-leaning politics. He aligned himself with a new generation of Māori activists who collaborated with sympathetic Pākehā in the late 1960s and early 1970s to agitate for the redress of Māori loss of land and culture. This is a powerful moment that precedes New Zealand's official acknowledgement of its bicultural status (in 1990) and the struggles of the Māori protest movement that marked the 1970s and 1980s.



Jim Allen inside *New Zealand Environment No. 5*, 1969. Govett-Brewster Art Gallery Collection.

build artistic careers (as Guy Brett points out in his essay here), and seeks agency in art, perceived here as an empowering experience. Allen's choice, upon returning in 1952 from his studies at the Royal College of Art, to participate in experimental pedagogical work with poor Māori children in Northland¹⁸ over the opportunity to establish a career as a sculptor (when he declined a major public art commission that would have compromised his artistic integrity), resonates with Oiticica's engaged activities with an art of the street and with individuals in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. This aspiration, also shared by Lye, insinuates their chosen marginal positions with respect to the dominant centres and forms of art-making.

The history of such fleeting encounters seemed to invite the unique and unlikely co-location of works by Lye, Oiticica and Allen, to indeed experience their strong synergies. Recognising the significance that Lye's kinetic art and Oiticica's physically-engaged and participatory ideas had in the work of Jim Allen, *Points of Contact* sheds new light on the environmental and performance-based work that came to characterise post-object art in New Zealand.

18. Christina Barton draws attention to Allen's involvement with the progressive educational model of Gordon Tovey, who revolutionised art teaching within New Zealand and the South Pacific in the mid 1950s, and which would have later informed and influenced his teaching at Elam. Barton writes, 'Allen replaced a traditional British model in which knowledge is passed down from master to pupil with new modes of communal interchange and cross-fertilisation that derived from his work in the school communities of the Far North and from the radicalised thinking that came out of the student protests of 1968. This grants to Allen's work at Elam a political charge that opened the way to an invigorated period of experiment'. Barton, 'Jim Allen Now', *ArtLink*, vol. 27 no 2, 2007, p.26.

Harbingers

Guy Brett

In 1968 my book *Kinetic Art: The Language of Movement* was published by Studio Vista in London. In many ways it was the outcome of my association with Signals (1964–66), a grouping of avant-garde artists with control of a large exhibition space in central London and a substantial newspaper-format publication, initiated by two close friends of mine, the artist David Medalla and the curator Paul Keeler. Medalla had arrived in London four years previously from the Philippines, an exceptionally knowledgeable and cultivated young man who in our first conversation astonished me by his familiarity with English poetry. He had a very international outlook, and at a time when the British art world's connections were limited to western Europe and the United States, Signals began to introduce the up-to-the-minute innovatory work of artists from countries considered peripheral to the mainstream of modern culture.

A rough sort of division could be made between the two most active tendencies in contemporary art at the time. One was loosely referred to as the New Figuration, of which Pop Art was an example. Pop introduced new subject matter but in formal terms was content to continue with the traditional categories of painting and sculpture (enlivened, occasionally, by Happenings and early forms of performance art). The other tendency was Kinetic Art, inspired by cosmological advances in the perception of space and time, which transformed the abstract constructivist/concrete inheritance with new materials, movement and spectator participation. Signals sided with the kineticists.

During its brief two years of existence Signals gave substantial shows to Takis (Greece), J.R. Soto (Venezuela), Sergio Camargo (Brazil), Lygia Clark (Brazil), Alejandro Otero (Venezuela), Carlos Cruz-Diez (Venezuela), Gerhardt von Graevenitz (Germany), Li Yuan-chia (China-Taiwan) Mira Schendel (Brazil) and others, backed up by a special edition of *Signals Newsbulletin* devoted to each artist. Hélio Oiticica was to have had an exhibition at Signals and a sizeable consignment of his works had already been shipped to London from Rio when Signals' financial backer abruptly withdrew his support and the enterprise was forced to close. It was unimaginable that the works of Oiticica would be sent back to Brazil without being seen by anybody, so I decided to assemble a selection in my flat in Soho in order to show them to gallery directors and interest them in making an exhibition. It was this display that Jim Allen saw when he and his wife Pam came to my flat during his sabbatical year of travelling and seeking out the latest in European and American avant-garde experiment. The Oiticica works subsequently formed the core of the now-celebrated Whitechapel Experiment at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London in 1969, the largest presentation of his work in his life-time.

My kinetic art book, which Jim Allen had read in New Zealand before setting out on his tour, had aroused a certain controversy when published in Britain. It was noticed that I'd left out certain prominent representatives of the tendency like Nicolas Schöffer and Victor Vasarely, and included the relatively unknown and more sensuous work of Camargo, Schendel, Oiticica and Clark (the latter two under the heading of 'kineticism of the body', a phrase which Lygia Clark liked). In fact

it was precisely this change of emphasis that Jim Allen responded to. In a letter I received from him during his stay in London he made a revealing connection with New Zealand:

Being ourselves part of Oceania and enjoying a close and somewhat unique relationship with the natural environment I think we are especially receptive to an art form which makes use of simple tactile media: paper, stones, gravel, sand, cloth and water, employed with such finite sensibility and sophistication.¹

It was implicit in the letter that he believed that direct creative connections could be made between artists in any part of the world without needing to gain the approval of the 'centre'.

Jim Allen was 'profoundly impressed' by the work of Hélio Oiticica, as I had been. There was an almost uncanny convergence in our response to it.² We both fell for a particular work – *B30 Box Bolidé 17 (poem-box)*, 1965–66. It is included in the *Points of Contact* show. Hélio himself described it as 'really a work I love', and 'the beginning of a new way'.³ Here is how Jim remembered it:

It was a small box. You had to open a door and inside was a plastic bag, full of light blue pigment. You lifted the bag, pulled it towards you and a length of clear plastic with the poem printed on it unfurled. The poem was in memory of a friend killed by undercover police. Works like these turned my attention towards viewer participation.⁴

Some thoughts I had at the time about the poem-box also mentioned, or implied, viewer participation:

Meaning seems to flow into you through your body and mind simultaneously. Language becomes something in which you are enveloped, words are indivisible from action. And all the time the box retains the centre of energy, and the poem can be returned and closed.⁵

Jim Allen responded equally strongly to the *Parangolé Capes* of Oiticica, which go beyond the delimited world of the box to become an invitation to act, dance, and reflect within a cluster of materials, colours and words worn directly on the body. Oiticica stressed the way the *Capes* combine a means of outward-turning declaration with an inward-turning self-absorption, a dialectic between 'watching' and 'wearing' in the action of each of his *Capes*. In my conclusion to *Kinetic Art* I had written that in the participatory propositions of artists like Oiticica, Clark or Medalla 'the work's

1. Jim Allen, letter to Guy Brett, 3 August 1968, published in this catalogue, p.48.

2. 'Contact: Jim Allen talks to Wylan Curnow & Robert Leonard', *Art New Zealand*, no. 95, Winter 2000, p. 52

3. Hélio Oiticica, letter to Guy Brett, 12 April 1967.

4. Jim Allen, 'Contact', op. cit., p.52.

5. Guy Brett, letter to Hélio Oiticica, 28 March 1967.

expression is not fixed. It is unknown, an expression of each person's individuality'. Oiticica particularly liked those lines and he had, indeed, a ethic and a vision of the release of the creative energy which every person has within themselves. He thought of a proposition as a 'life-act' rather than an object or an image. He referred to it as a 'mother-cell', which could be exported anywhere, taken up by others and mixed with local cultural possibilities. Jim Allen, as Christina Barton has written, was able to 'take up this suggestion because he already believed that art could mobilise people and understood that materials engender their own abstract but situated meanings'.⁶

Jim Allen's contact with the work of Oiticica is a perfect indication of the creative connections that are constantly made by artists themselves, independent of the institution of art. In this case there is not only the forging of a New Zealand/Brazil link when such a possibility was not even contemplated in the mainstream centres, but also the coming to fruition of ideas which were already latent in the minds of artists in different parts of the world. Physical journeys may lie behind the formation of these links, as was the case with Jim Allen's sabbatical wanderings, but the connections can also be virtual, 'in the air', the process by which artists arrive at parallel ideas without knowledge of one another, at least in the conventional sense. This kind of fluidity makes one wonder how many more types of contact may be operating that we don't know about.

Len Lye's work ostensibly has little to do with Oiticica's. However, the more one looks at both their lives the more one becomes aware of striking similarities in their attitudes. Both were fiercely independent in their thinking. Neither made an effort to impress the powers that be in the art world. When he was given a Guggenheim Fellowship and came to the US, Oiticica was determined he would 'never become another firecracker in the New York art scene'.⁷ He had no interest in selling his work and supported himself by working as a translator and night telephonist. Lye also, according to his biographer Roger Horrocks, made no career moves while in New York, preferring to 'stay on the margins'.⁸ Both artists were united by their intensely experimental attitude to art and to life. Oiticica invented a concept he called *Delirium Ambulatorium*, referring to discoveries one could make while walking the streets, and the poet Alastair Reid considered that Lye's 'day-to-day life ... was some of his best work'.⁹ Len Lye was 'a street person', according to his widow Ann,¹⁰ and Oiticica, on his return to Rio de Janeiro from New York in 1978 said 'I've practically lived my life in the street, and I have a great facility for making friends with people I don't know'.¹¹ Oiticica would have surely recognised in the following anecdote from Reid a light-hearted example of what he himself on

6. Christina Barton, 'In and Out of Sight/Site: Jim Allen and the World Picture', Talk given at South Project, Santiago de Chile, 3 October 2006. Quoted with the author's kind permission.

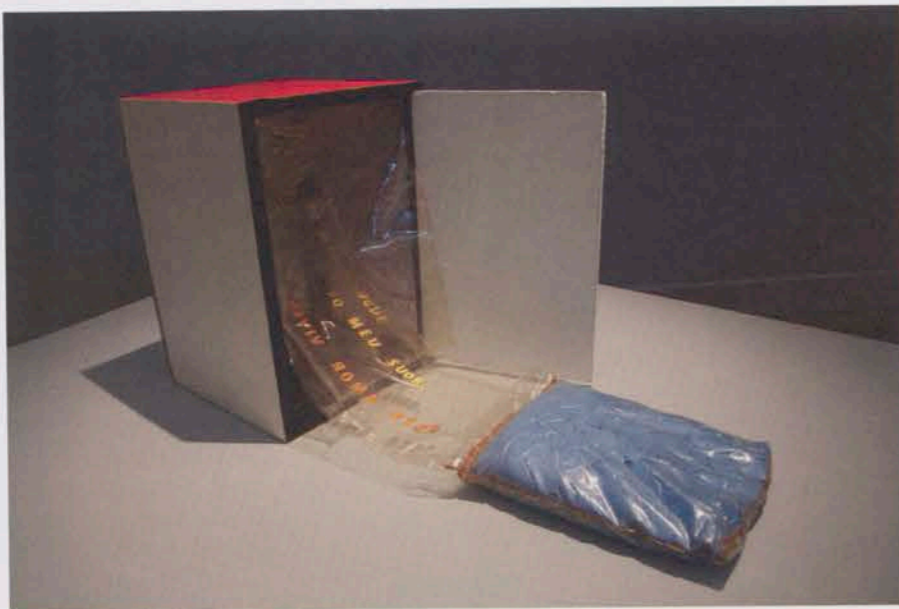
7. Hélio Oiticica, letter to Guy Brett, 1972.

8. Roger Horrocks, *Len Lye: A Biography*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2001, p. 232.

9. Roger Horrocks, op. cit., p.293.

10. Ibid.

11. Hélio Oiticica, quoted in Guy Brett, 'The Experimental Exercise of Liberty', *Hélio Oiticica*, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, and Projeto Hélio Oiticica, Rotterdam, Paris and Rio de Janeiro, 1992, p.235.



Hélio Oiticica, *B30 Box Bolidé 17* (poem-box), 1965–66.

another occasion called 'the experimentalised day-to-day':¹² 'He [Lye] lived in his senses', Reid wrote,

more than anybody I've ever known. Smells and taste just as much as the other senses. Walking in the Village we would decide that instead of just looking at people that passed, we would look entirely at their noses. If you just keep noses in mind and don't look at anything else it's mind-blowing! Then we'd do ears. He educated my senses a lot.¹³

It is the drive to experiment – even when expressed lightly – that may be the first and deepest 'point of contact' linking the three artists in this exhibition.

12. Hélio Oiticica, 'World Shelter', 1973, an unpublished text quoted in *Hélio Oiticica*, op. cit., p.233.

13. Roger Horrocks, op. cit., p.293.

Phoenixes

Christina Barton

For me, the pivot around which *Points of Contact* Jim Allen, Len Lye, Hélio Oiticica revolves is Oiticica's *B30 Box Bolidé 17* (poem-box) of 1965–66. My reasons serve as the subject of this short essay, the title of which has been chosen self-consciously to counterpoint Guy Brett's, which precedes it in this publication. If a harbinger is a person or entity that signals the approach of something, thus auguring the future; a phoenix is a mythic creature whose immortality is achieved only through destruction. It is only the bird's fiery death that ensures its eternal return, thus recalling the conflagration that precedes rebirth. Together they tease out time, in equal measure hinting at what is to come and reflecting on what is perpetually in the process of being lost. It is in this attenuated space between past and future that *B30 Box Bolidé 17* seems to smoulder (remember, the Portuguese word 'bolidé' means 'fireball', and that a horrendous fire destroyed so much of Oiticica's work in 2009), its presence raising questions about the artistic legacies this exhibition seeks to document.

Firstly and importantly, *B30 Box Bolidé 17* is the only historical artefact in the exhibition; the only work of art that is a unique original, not a reconstruction, edition, photographic or digital copy. It is an actual object made by the hands of the artist Hélio Oiticica. If I touched this box I would come into direct contact with materials he had cut, compiled, constructed, and coloured. Set out on a simple wooden table, the box's contents partly unravelled to reveal its interior, *B30 Box Bolidé 17* emanates an aura, like a reliquary or icon. Its scale is intimate, enticing; close attention proves that it is made by hand from simple materials: wood, steel-wire mesh, plastic, glass, pigment and paint. Through this work a bridge is built between 1965 and 2011 that links the exhibition to an actual past and a real point of origin.¹

I am intrigued too, because this very box was shipped to London in 1966 for inclusion in the solo exhibition Oiticica was invited to stage at Signals Gallery that was planned but never realised. This meant the work was being stored at the home of Guy Brett – then a young art critic and a keen supporter of the programme at Signals, who had made contact with Oiticica in Rio de Janeiro in 1965. It is here that visiting New Zealand sculptor, Jim Allen was able to view it, when he visited Brett whilst on sabbatical from his job at Elam School of Fine Arts in Auckland in 1968. In other words, this is the object that links Jim Allen to Oiticica through the vital intermediary of Guy Brett. It is a 'point of contact' in a very literal sense. While the story of Allen's encounter and his reaction to this work are told elsewhere in this catalogue, what matters here is that *B30 Box Bolidé 17* is tangible proof of an artistic connection that subsequently shaped his career. This is borne out in the placement of *B30 Box Bolidé 17* adjacent to Jim Allen's *Tribute to Hone Tuwhare*, in which Allen takes the lesson he learnt from Oiticica and applies it in his large-

¹ In relation to this discussion, it is worthwhile noting that the small scale of this object – its portability – is one important reason for its presence in this exhibition. This 'ease of handling' is a factor in its survival and circulation. My thanks to Mercedes Vicente for this observation, in conversation with the author, November 2011.

scale, walk-in environmental sculpture, attaching lines from Tuwhare's poem ('Thine own hands have fashioned' from *No Ordinary Sun*, 1964) to vertical strips of plastic that hang suspended amongst a welter of nylon threads, which viewers are meant to walk into and reach out and handle in order for the words to make a tactile as well as visual impression.

Then, peering closely at Oiticica's box, I cannot help but notice the effects of time: the plastic has yellowed slightly and stiffened, the pigment seems to have solidified, the paint is not so fresh and there are signs that the letters of the text, which are revealed as the bag of pigment is unpacked, are loosening from their plastic ground. I am struck by the notion that it is not only the work's aesthetic qualities that are evident; its 'age value' (as Alois Riegl would call it) is also visible.² These are the marks of historical time that conservators seek to slow, the relentless progress of which secures the distance between past and present and attenuates what was once 'living'; with its 'please do not touch' sign, this object now belongs to the realm of the museum. Is Oiticica's ambition to engage the spectator and make sculpture participatory now only an abstract principle, enshrined in this precious receptacle? What can the words this poem box contains: 'Through my blood, through my sweat, this love will live', which he hoped would be activated by touch, mean now?

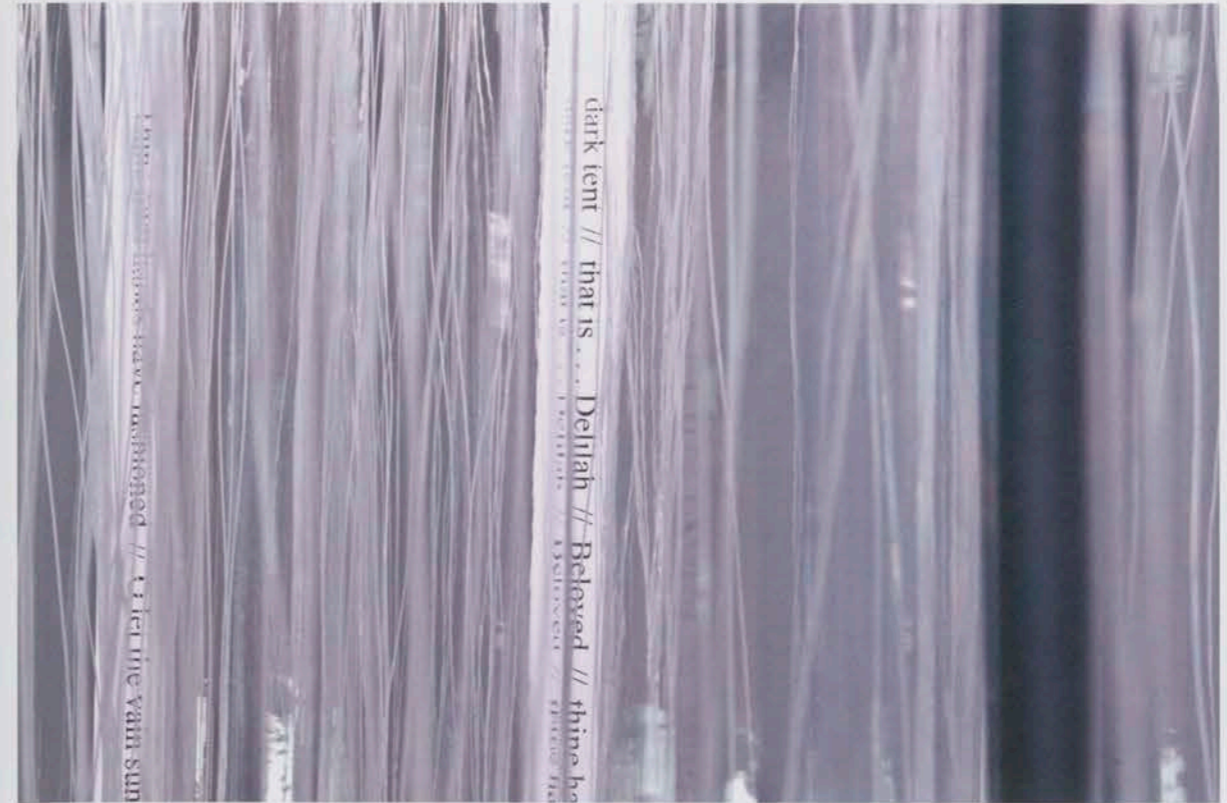
Guy Brett eloquently describes Oiticica's bolidés as introducing 'spatial divisions' which play 'on the mysteries of interior spaces, of opening and closing, of what can't be physically entered or completely seen'.³ Perhaps Oiticica was withholding something all along, limiting our access to the object by manipulating its scale and creating a sense of secrecy that tantalises as much as engages the spectator. Could this presage the historical object's fate within the context of museum culture, yet leave open the possibility that the idea this box embodies can still reach the viewer without the power of touch? Could the constraints imposed by both the nature of the object and the strictures of its current situation actually enable a new kind of experience, one that is hypothetical, yes, but potent nonetheless?

Certainly this is the conundrum that confronts me, as I return from the past of Oiticica's production and Brett and Allen's interaction – which are utterly out of reach – to my situation here, where his object and I are tangibly present. Standing in front of the work, I hear the blood pulsing in my ears (just as Oiticica would have it), my hands tingle with a desire to reach out; the experience of seeing is still embodied, despite the accretions of time and the gallery's prohibitions. Language is perhaps the key to the work's continuing promise: 'this love will live' is a statement cast in the future tense; it retains an emissary force across the cleavage of years.

To understand the work as speaking to the future, even as it retreats into the past, is also to appreciate the present-ness of Jim Allen's *Small Worlds*. Though first installed in 1969, the structures presented in this exhibition are brand new; they are

² See Alois Riegl, 'The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin', [1903], translated by Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo, reprinted in *Oppositions*, 25, Fall 1982, pp. 21–51, especially, p. 24.

³ Guy Brett, 'The Experimental Exercise of Liberty', in *Hélio Oiticica*, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, and Projeto Hélio Oiticica, Rotterdam, Paris and Rio de Janeiro, 1992, p. 226.



Detail of Jim Allen, *Tribute to Hone Tuwhare*, as installed at Adam Art Gallery, 2010.

reconstructions of the 'originals' which were dismantled and dispersed after their one and only showing. Conceived thus, *Tribute to Hone Tuwhare* does not merely register the linear effects of 'influence'; it is an idea revived in a different time and place (proving the phoenix's eternal youthfulness). As Guy Brett has stated, Oiticica proposed that 'life acts' would 'replace the image as a kind of experimental practice which could be exported anywhere, taken up by others and mix with local cultural possibilities'.⁴ Allen recognises this, making a work that responds to Oiticica's re-visioning of sculpture as an immersive and participatory practice, but using the words of a New Zealand poet to embed the idea in another context. By re-making his work again more than forty years later, Allen underscores a commitment to the idea over the artefact, and its ongoing timeliness and translatability.⁵ He grants the concept a second chance, at the same time reigniting the 'fire' of Tuwhare's erotic love poem, which speaks so eloquently of yet-to-be-consummated desire:

[...]
thine hands contain the splendid fire
of poised lances:
they are exquisite pinnacles
of light O lord...⁶

Further, and on a different track, the presence of *B30 Box Bolidé 17* in *Points of Contact* enables a confrontation between the auratic object (in Walter Benjamin's terms) and the copy, which is the status of so much else in the show. A singular artefact that belongs in one physical location (Oiticica's studio, Guy Brett's collection, the sanctified space of the gallery) is counterpoised with reproductions that potentially can circulate in many places (even simultaneously); its combination of age and aesthetic values a defining mark of its distinction. This box's ageing materials contrast with the glistening newness of Jim Allen's faithful reconstructions; its dusty surfaces a riposte to the polished finish and smoothly silent mechanics of Len Lye's kinetic sculptures that have been lovingly restored by the Len Lye Foundation for exhibition purposes. Its plinth-bound preciousness is a reminder of what happens when objects are understood to be historical and unique, compared with the open generosity of an interactive work like Oiticica's *Made-on-the-Body-Capes* (1968/2010), where lengths of brightly coloured store-bought fabric are acquired according to the artist's instructions, and simply hung on fourteen hooks so that visitors can drape these on their bodies and move around in them as they fancy. Further, the

4. Guy Brett, 'Border Crossings' in *Transcontinental: Nine Latin American Artists*, Verso, in association with Ikon Gallery, Birmingham and Cornerhouse, Manchester, London and New York, 1990, p.9.

5. In an email to the author (14 June 2011), Allen offers the fascinating suggestion that Auckland in 1969 was the 'wrong time' for *Small Worlds*, that now there is a receptive audience for the work that would 'get' its meaning, thus justifying his decision to reconstruct the works in the absence of an original.

6. Hone Tuwhare, from 'Thine own hands have fashioned' [1964] reprinted in *Deep River Talking: Collected Poems by Hone Tuwhare*, Godwit Press, New Zealand, 1993, p.34.

specific material qualities this humble container manifests, which require such careful and prolonged examination, bear little relation to the photographic and digital copies that either serve documentary purposes or convey the content of works (as is the case with Ivan Cardosa's and Len Lye's films transferred to DVD) but not their material essence.

For all three artists: Jim Allen, Len Lye and Hélio Oiticica, the conventional concept of art embodied in a singular precious object means little. They are less interested in the creation of static things than in the manipulation of materials as prompts for active engagement. Sometimes, their work has not survived because it was conceived in relation to a specific situation or because it was never more than an idea or proposal. Likewise all matured in an era of mechanical reproduction and embraced the possibilities of film and photography and the principles and products of mass production and mechanisation. So there is an irony in the fact that everything in this exhibition is treated with equal respect and, by labelling and lighting and the usual conventions of gallery presentation, any differences in origin or status are obviated. There is little to discriminate between old and new, unique and copy, reconstruction and facsimile; each and every work is awarded its own gravitas.

What do we take from this? That the museum/gallery has a vested interest in preserving, or even creating aura for its objects, to secure its status as sacred container and thus to maintain the hierarchical relation between the possessors of objects and the pilgrims who come to pay homage? Or that the institution understands its duty to protect and honour the ideas these works embody, even if or especially because concepts are capable of outliving their original material existence and can be carried forward in new, different or multiple formats and are available to everyone? While the cynic in me would fear the former, the idealist hopes for the latter. Judging by the efforts of Jim Allen and his team, the Len Lye Foundation, and Projeto Hélio Oiticica, there are artists and their advocates who share this hope. This final 'point of contact' poses a challenge to the institutions of art, at the same time as it sets an agenda for their future work: to play a role as sites of renewal as well as historical repositories. It is in these terms that the legacy of these artists will be well served and new and future audiences will properly experience the charge of their work.

**Jim Allen interviewed
by Tyler Cann & Mercedes Vicente**

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This is an edited transcript of the interview, which was conducted in Auckland on 5 August 2010 and at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery after the Contact performance on 12 December 2010.

Mercedes Vicente (MV): How do you feel about bringing the work of Len Lye and Hélio Oiticica into this exhibition?

Jim Allen (JA): I really like the association.

MV: Tell us about your impressions of encountering the work of Oiticica on your trip to London in 1968.

JA: I first became aware of Oiticica when Guy Brett published a book called *Kinetic Art*. I wrote to him and he invited my wife and I to visit him in his apartment in London. When we got there it was fortunate timing as Oiticica's work was stored there in readiness for an upcoming exhibition, so we were able to see and handle the work. The box exhibited in *Points of Contact* [B30 Box *Bolidé 17*] was probably the work that excited me the most. The background to that was that a friend of Oiticica, who was regarded as a criminal, was shot and killed by the police. He made the box to commemorate the death of a friend. In practice you open the box and pick up the plastic bag filled with coloured tempera powder and pull it out and read the poem on the attached clear plastic. It seemed to me that the box encapsulated a lot of elements which contributed to the interpretive relationship between what was the static object and what was your association of memory in a poignant and effective way. Amongst his other work was a large glass bolidé filled with red earth and this struck a chord as I had previously been working with groups of children in the far North of New Zealand with identical coloured earth with similar feel and texture. So that sort of created another spark which increased my level of interest in Oiticica. It was a great way to reach a relationship with another artist, although I never met him unfortunately.

Tyler Cann (TC): And how did you think to write to Len Lye in New York?

JA: I went from Europe to America, landed in Boston and then on to New York. There I met Peter Tomory, ex-gallery director from Auckland City Art Gallery. It was Peter who gave me his address which enabled me to call on him. Len was very welcoming. I think at that stage he said I was the first academic from New Zealand that had shown any interest in him. It was a great meeting and at some stage he persuaded me to sit down and conduct an interview with him [an edited transcript of this is also published in this publication]. I had come from Britain where there was a lot of disturbance in the art schools and universities, and from the turmoil in France, so when

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I got to the point of the interview all of these extreme experiences were still very much on my mind. I don't know whether those concerns came through in the interview, but there would have been a certain tenseness about it. Len had a three-level building with his studio at the top. A lot of his works were stored there and he activated two of them for my benefit. One was a vibrating metal rod and the other was a long sheet of metal which flapped up and down and made an enormous noise. It was frightening to be close to.

TC: That would have been a work called *Sea Serpent or God of the Sea*. We have it at the Govett-Brewster now.

JA: Well he turned this on and a thunderous roar went through the whole building and I began to look around wondering what was going to happen next. I remember those two pieces quite clearly! In 1969 Len and Ann came back to New Zealand and had Christmas with his brother who happened to live in Birkenhead as we did. He invited Pam and myself over to join him and the family so that was a nice follow up.

TC: Had you seen much kinetic work up to that point?

JA: I saw a lot of kinetic work while I was in Britain. There was a Festival of Britain on the South Bank while I was there, which was helpful because it brought a lot of work from all over the country together on the one site.

TC: I want to take you back to that sabbatical trip in 1968. After London you went to France. Could you tell us about your experience there?

JA: We were in Winchester and ran into Heinz Henges who had been one of the lecturers at the Royal College when I was there in the 1950s. Heinz had a farm in France and suggested that we go and stay at his place which was quite close to the Lascaux caves. This was great as I had been there once before when Heinz had taken a party of us students through to visit them in the '50s. At that time they had not been opened to the public for long as they had only been discovered in the latter part of the war and they were then pretty much in the original state. This time when we saw them they had suffered from exposure and the area was fenced off. While we were at the farm there were student uprisings in Paris, which were later supported by the trade unions. The banks closed and the country went into shutdown. The farm next to us was owned by Harvard University currently occupied by archaeology students. When news came that Bobby Kennedy had been shot they freaked out and all left for home. We decided that it was time we get out as well, like the French government who had left for Germany for protection. We had a little Volkswagen and managed to get to England on the last drop of petrol, before anything happened to the ferries.

TC: So you never made it to Paris, saw galleries or anything like that?

JA: We didn't go to Paris because we couldn't get there. When we got to London we stayed with [John Panting and his wife] near Crystal Palace where all the refugee student leaders like Rudi Dutschke and a few others along with a large population of German and French students were camping out and sleeping in tents. The gathering had a big fire going and speeches were being made and discussion took place continuously 24 hours a day. At the same time there was unrest in the English art schools. William Coldstream, a professor from the Slade School, had been asked to make a report, which would enable English art schools to offer degrees in fine arts. His report was a very conservative thing and took little notice of contemporary art events. Protest commenced at the Hornsey College of Art. Hornsey was located in the old BBC television studios where television in Britain had first commenced. The BBC had all this original and dated television equipment, which they no longer had a use for so when they moved out to new premises they donated all this equipment to the Hornsey College of Art. The Hornsey people were very excited about all the audio and visual opportunities this gift opened up for them. Unfortunately, this and other strictures did not sit easily with the Coldstream Report. As they were powerless to effect change they took direct action by taking over the school, shutting the principal and administrative staff out. The teaching staff largely supported this response. A further unpopular aspect of the Report was that only a certain number of selected schools were allowed to offer these degree courses and those that were not on the list saw their days as being numbered. The protest snowballed and there were wholesale sit-ins and shut-outs. Associated with this disturbance the influential ICA Galleries organised discussions with all the parties involved and ran a continuous display, as it happened, of student arguments, along with explanatory and supporting statements from teachers and staff from the schools. For me I learnt a lot more about the educational system than I would have normally as it was exposed in ways, which I would never have seen or heard otherwise. With my leave report to the university I made up a booklet, which set out the issues and arguments of these events and circulated it to students and staff. It aroused little interest and the only response I had was from Tony Green.

MV: Was there any of this sort of change prior to you going overseas?

JA: It was moving in that direction and a major contributing factor were the acquisitions of serials by the school library; *ArtForum*, *Art International* and other magazines, which materially assisted change. When Lucy Lippard was here in 1974, she said she thought she was going to find something pretty provincial, but she was surprised to find that we were probably in advance of some of the current work happening in New York.

TC: Tell us more about your trip to the States.

JA: I went from London to Boston then to Yale to meet Adrian Hall, who I had heard from Steve Furlonger and John Panting as someone I should meet.

Adrian was doing a Masters and he was also exhibiting in New York and was familiar with many of the New York artists of the period. From there I visited Le Courbusier's Carpenter Centre at Harvard and then onto New York where I stayed with Arthur Lawrence who for a time had been teaching art history at Elam, and also met up with Peter Tomory. I saw Peter at a time when they were still washing the blood off the steps of Columbia University and he was dodging problems by conducting his classes out in the park. From New York I flew to Buffalo and then to Chicago where Mayor Daley had called in the National Guard to quell protests...on the streets and at the Democratic convention. In protest at Daley's action artists from all over America had written and painted protests, exhibited, they papered the walls of the Contemporary Art Gallery. Every known artist was represented in the exhibition so it was a colossal nationwide outburst of feeling against what was widely seen as an atrocity. From there I went to the University of Illinois campus at Urbana-Champaign where Merce Cunningham and John Cage were based. I was welcomed with great hospitality by Ed Zagorski who had spent time at Elam. From there I flew to LA and then to San Francisco. I went to Berkeley where they were just recovering from serious trouble and wasn't a good time to visit but I did meet quite a few artists from the Bay area. I met Marvin Topovsky head of glass at Berkeley and also Peter Volkus in ceramics, which was instructive, and a pleasure.

MV: It must have been interesting for you to follow a trail of universities looking at pedagogy at a time when everyone was up in arms and the most radical voices were coming and protesting the situation. It seems that your inspiration did not come so much from the main European art galleries and museums, but you were looking at art produced by students. Is that correct?

JA: By getting into the schools you actually made contact with a whole range of people who were working professionally outside of the institution. I saw a lot of exhibitions, Judd, Morris, Eva Hesse and many others. I visited major museums, Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan. Went to Philadelphia and spent time with the Duchamps and paid a visit to the Barnes Foundation at a time when visitors were still being heavily scrutinised. There was just so much beyond the scope of this limited account.

TC: Sounds like quite an amazing journey! A lot of hot spots.

JA: Absolutely, yeah!

TC: So, I would imagine that you came back to New Zealand with a lot of ideas around the 'spectator' and the significance of participation in the work of art. Amidst all this unrest, it was a notion that had a strong social or political dimension to it.

JA: Absolutely! I was on a different wavelength altogether. The problem was translating it into this environment which given the time was not easy.

MV: Who were your allies, the people you could talk to?

JA: I didn't have many I could talk to. Tony Green in the art history department was physically separate but we struck up a good relationship early on. During my travels I visited Wystan Curnow in upstate New York where he was doing his doctorate with Morse Peckham. One of the major differences between New York and here in NZ was that the work got talked about and published in books, magazines and good critical reviews in the daily press. So my plea to Wystan at the time was that we need a writer to review, report and record work as it happened. In time by becoming involved both Wystan and Tony Green made a huge contribution to opening up and bringing change to the scene. Later, from the early 1970s we had a succession of visiting artists on short-term contracts, Adrian Hall, followed by Kieran Lyons, John Panting, Steve Furlonger and Ti Parks from Australia. They led from the front with groundbreaking exhibitions of their own work and brought a wealth of knowledge and experience to give fresh impetus to teaching students.

MV: When you returned not only your practice changed radically, but you also introduced new notions of sculpture that became known as post-object art to a generation of students at Elam. Some of these activities by students like Maree Horner, John Lethbridge, David Brown, Bruce Barber, Leon Narbey were documented in the *Permanent and Impermanent Forms* exhibition.¹

JA: During that sabbatical year I spent most of it visiting many art schools in England to see how they operated. Panting and Furlonger who had been through the Royal College of Art had set up their own workshop in London. They survived by part-time teaching in a number of schools and I was fortunate enough to be able to travel round with them. I sat in on their selection panels for students, assessments of student work, met staff and observed their teaching. The sum total of this experience led to changes in my own teaching and in my work as well. I came back to New Zealand with fresh eyes and new incentives. There was a slow development within the school. Mainly due I think to the build up in the library where students became more familiar with what was happening in Europe, America and in particular New York and the West coast during the 1960s. I don't think this was greeted with a great deal of enthusiasm by many people here but certainly sparked a response from art students and the like minded. When 'post-object' so called, began to take hold a few people began to make work which departed well from the norm, adventurous, experimental, which triggered others into action. Once it got started the school developed its own culture; younger ones saw what the older students were doing and began to think for themselves. I came to the conclusion that it was only necessary to give people the self-confidence to be able to say/make and do what

1. Govett-Brewster Art Gallery 1971, photo-documentation included in *Points of Contact* at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2010

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Bruce Barber, Maree Horner, David Brown, *Three Situations*, 1971, mixed media temporary installation, Bledisloe Place, Auckland. Photo: Department of Art History, University of Auckland.

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they wanted, and to encourage them by supplying materials and opening up other resources. I found myself thinking ahead and trying to extend what was going on. John Maynard, the first Director of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, moved to Auckland and became the [Exhibition Officer] at the Auckland City Art Gallery [ACAG]. One of the first things that John did was to set up a programme of bringing artists into the gallery. There was a meeting with a group of students and he asked them to go away and think up projects, which they might present in the gallery. This was the initiation of the Project Programmes and led to a whole series of projects, which lasted at least a fortnight on each occasion. It gave the opportunity for a public presentation of experimental work, which had been happening in the art school and hadn't been seen outside and not too many people would have known about. I think in general it got an enthusiastic reception and gave a great boost to the young artists.

TC: Could you tell us about one of the student projects, such as *Three Situations* at Bledisloe Place in 1971?

JA: I had a good working relationship with Cath Tizard, Chairperson of the ACAG Committee and Sir Dove-Myer Robinson then Mayor of Auckland following the International Sculpture Symposium of the previous year. With 'Robbie's' support we were able to do things on the streets of Auckland and open doors, which normally would have been closed. Bledisloe Place came to us courtesy of Colin McCahon who had suggested to Fletchers at the conclusion of the previous year's Festival, that they should extend it next to sculpture and architecture, so this year it came to me and we did it in collaboration

with students from the School of Architecture. Part of the commitment to the Auckland City Council was that people should be able to experience whatever we constructed. I appointed a committee of students who were willing to take this on as a school project and I gave it to them as a problem. The eventual team included Maree Horner, David Brown, and Roger Peters amongst others and included representatives from the School of Architecture. Adrian Hall was also in attendance and gave valuable help. I acted as co-ordinator with Fletchers and the City Council. The decision was to make three situations which people could walk through. One was a very large inflatable, the second, a large pyramid shape, and the third a rectangular box structure. They were very big structures, very different from the \$20 paid out to painting students of the previous year. However Fletchers didn't flinch from the extra cost. Separate from this group, and as an extra, many students got involved in providing lunchtime entertainment where they cooked up things which were then given out to the audience. So it became a sort of happening at each lunchtime.

MV: Going through the list of students that were in your years, it was interesting to see some names like Darcy Lange, Leon Narbey and Phil Dadson. Phil was one of your students before you went overseas?

JA: Phil decided to take a year off, go to Europe and study with Cornelius Cardew. He was away for over a year, came back and took up his course again. He immediately set up the 'antipodean twig' of Cardew's Scratch Orchestra and I think the first performance was in our lecture theatre at Elam. Amazing things followed; Whatipu Beach swept with yard brooms, performances in the Parnell Rose Garden and on the steps just behind the Art Gallery and more... All these involved groups of people knitted together in common endeavour.

TC: *Contact* seems to be very much related to this coming together. You have figures coming out from this solitary or cocooned existence, or from each individual colour eventually they start slapping each other and mixing colours. Were some of the original performers your students?

JA: Only one art student. The rest came as volunteers from Auckland Teachers College. Art students weren't interested. They were all busy doing their own thing.

TC: So there is a relationship between this narrative dimension that *Contact* has and what you were trying to do with your students? You could talk about pedagogy in terms of students coming out of themselves, or maybe the opposite and becoming more individual.

JA: I started off at Elam from my traditional background of teaching people how to do things, we had life modelling, plaster moulding and all that kind of stuff, but I realised that I had to make a bridge somewhere. It was a slow

process, helped by my previous work with children through the Māori experimental programme in Northland. There I came across a teacher of a sole charge school in a rural community named Elwyn Richardson. He came from a science background and he built a whole programme out of the surrounding environment, much of it from interesting things that children had found when he took them on field trips. And then back in the classroom he encouraged them to examine their finds under the microscope and describe what they saw. They were encouraged to draw and paint, write stories and poems and over time the school culture became one of open-ended enquiry into all aspects of the curriculum. What Elwyn did was to release the creativity within children by initiating a process of self-discovery. That was very much in my mind when I was put in that educational situation at Elam. I was very conscious that when it came to teaching the territory was full of pitfalls for the teacher and for the student and it had to be handled very sensitively to get people to release their inner selves. For these embryo artists I don't think you can teach it, all you can do is to try and release those innate abilities.

MV: I'd like to address the issue of re-enacting performances after many years. It is good to ask what it means for you to re-enact *Contact*, now 34 years later? There is a lot to consider when you cannot reproduce the same piece exactly, and so what do you do?

JA: I have no problems with it. I was interested in doing it again and it also offers a moment to reassess it. I have had numerous requests over a long period of time to repeat it and it became a matter of making the most of the opportunity when it came. This time I was dealing with a team of people very different from the original group who came from Training College with no previous experience but all in all managed very well. This time they were professional dancers and performers and they were open to being more interpretive in the three different roles they were being asked to play. This factor and given the size of the space that we were asked to play in, and that the performance had to be stretched over two days, *Contact* was almost like doing it new though based on the original idea.

MV: Amelia Jones discusses how the arguments around performance art change dramatically whether they come from art history or from performance studies. The art historians tend to want to repeat the piece exactly, very carefully noting how it was made. It's about keeping the piece as it was, while the performing arts community cares more about the live event.

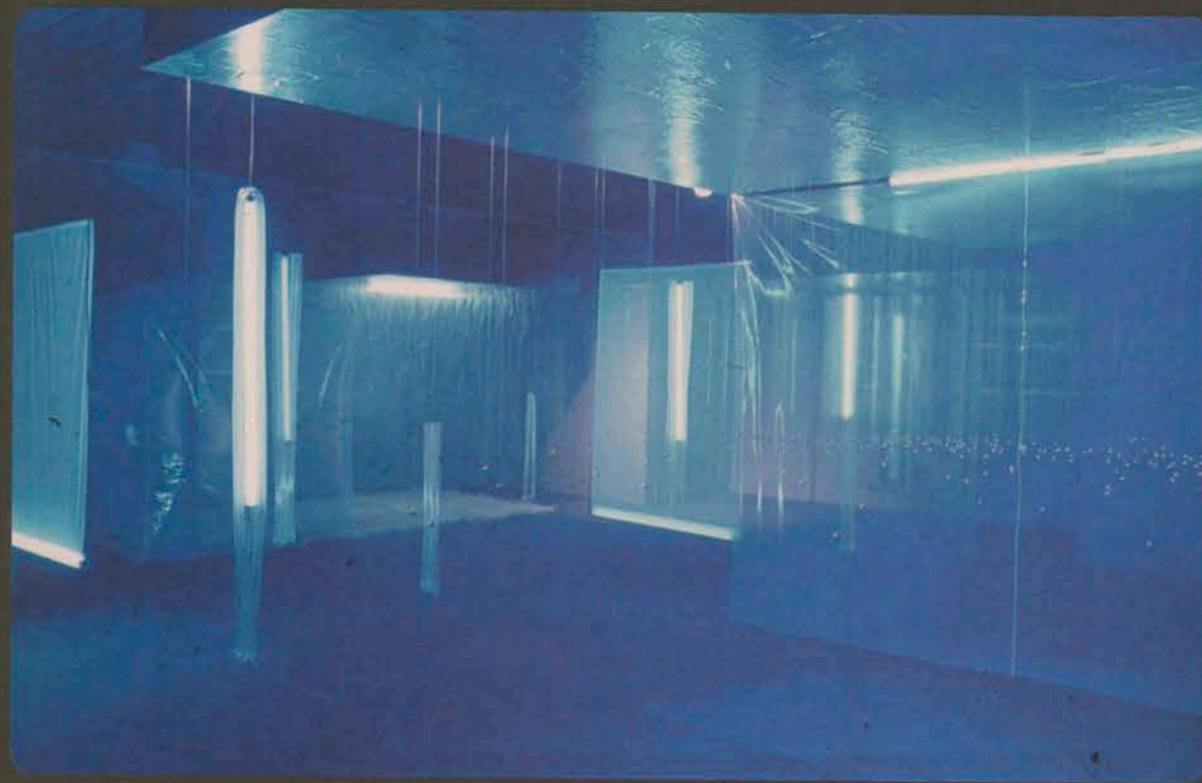
TC: It's also a question of what is most faithful to the original intention of the performance, which might have been to create a live event, or attempt to make a window into an historical event.

JA: I think it's legitimate from all those points because one would want to imagine the new performance against the old and see where the differences

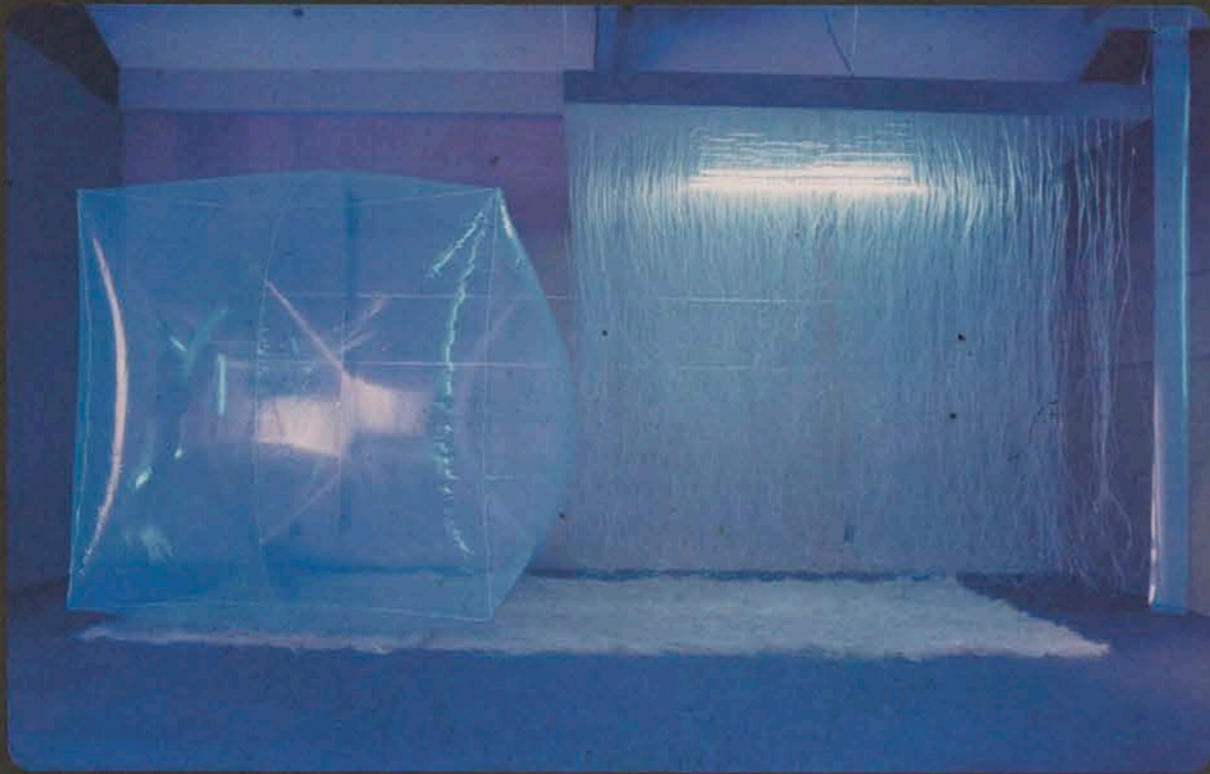
are because there is value to be learned from difference. It highlights things you were probably not conscious of in the first place. While the performance was happening here I was comparing it to 1974. I think we may have gotten more excited that time because at one stage we thought that the audience was going to join in, which would have created problems for the Auckland City Art Gallery.

TC: At the Govett-Brewster we were standing on the balcony and the performers were below, so that we were viewing them like an audience would in a theatre. Could you compare these dynamics between the performers and the audience to the original performance?

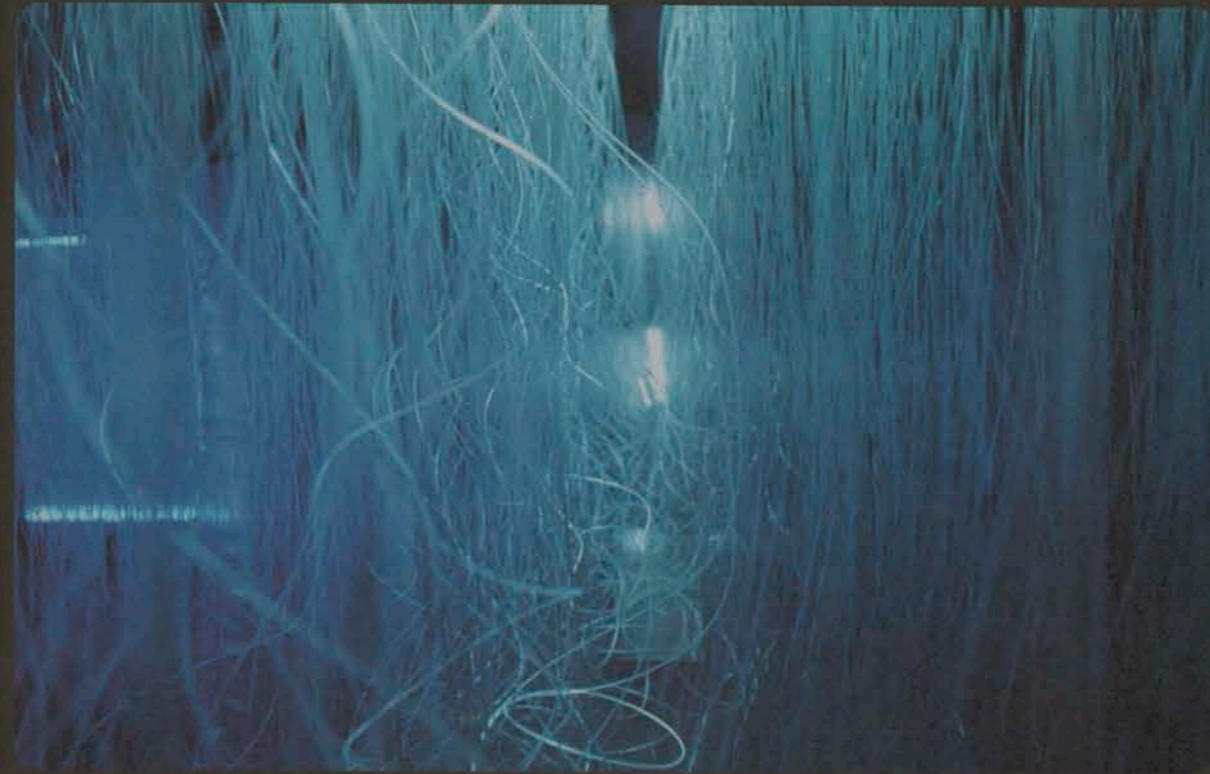
JA: In the original work the audience and the performers were on the same level and close to the action though the amount of viewing space was limited. Also these were lunchtime crowds, in a way, chance visitors, so there was a major attitudinal difference. I think the audience didn't become really involved until the final piece. We had then four couples, which because of space restrictions here we had to bring down to three. So with greater numbers I think the performers became more excited and this became a problem because the audience got excited with them and I really had a fear that they were going to break the barriers and storm into the middle of the action. And I was thinking 'Oh no, here we are in the middle of the art gallery and we've got a riot on the second floor!' Luckily it didn't happen but it came very close. The ACAG was a very large space, where we were able to put the three situations in a row, so it was *Computer Dance* at one end, *Parangolé Capes* in the middle and *Body Articulation* at the other end. The performers were able to do one, then move to the next and so on. It was comprehensive and we were able to run the three lots in one sitting. When we came to the Govett-Brewster it was a question of adapting to the space. So from four partners we moved back to three. We did exactly the same things we did originally, but because there were fewer performers and a smaller space, the relationships differed. The same spatial differences occurred with the *Small Worlds* installations. In Barry Lett's small upstairs gallery the works were in close proximity to each other and we were able to convert that into a very different kind of environment with the use of UV light. In this smaller space the white shirts fluoresced, eyeballs fluoresced, and the works themselves fluoresced. So there was different interaction between the work and between people and ultimately the UV had a binding effect. In Michael Lett's small gallery the UV lights were lost because of the light coming through the doorway but that did something else so it became successful in a different way... we needed to get the best effect of the work hanging in that space. We had the same exercise when we came to the Govett-Brewster. Norman Edgerton tried three different sets of lights to maximise the visualisation of the work. I think we finished up with a thing called a 'butcher's tube'. Apparently it is supposed to make the meat look redder!



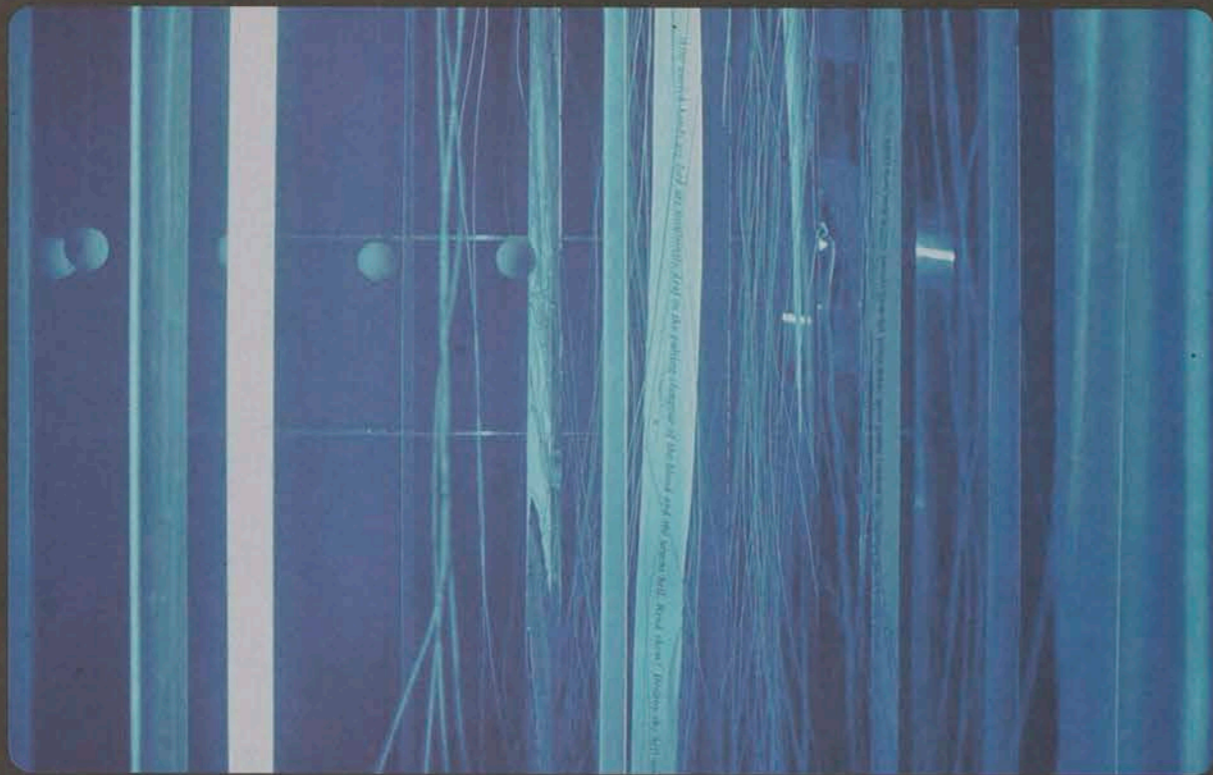
Jim Allen, installation view of *Small Worlds*, Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland, 1969.



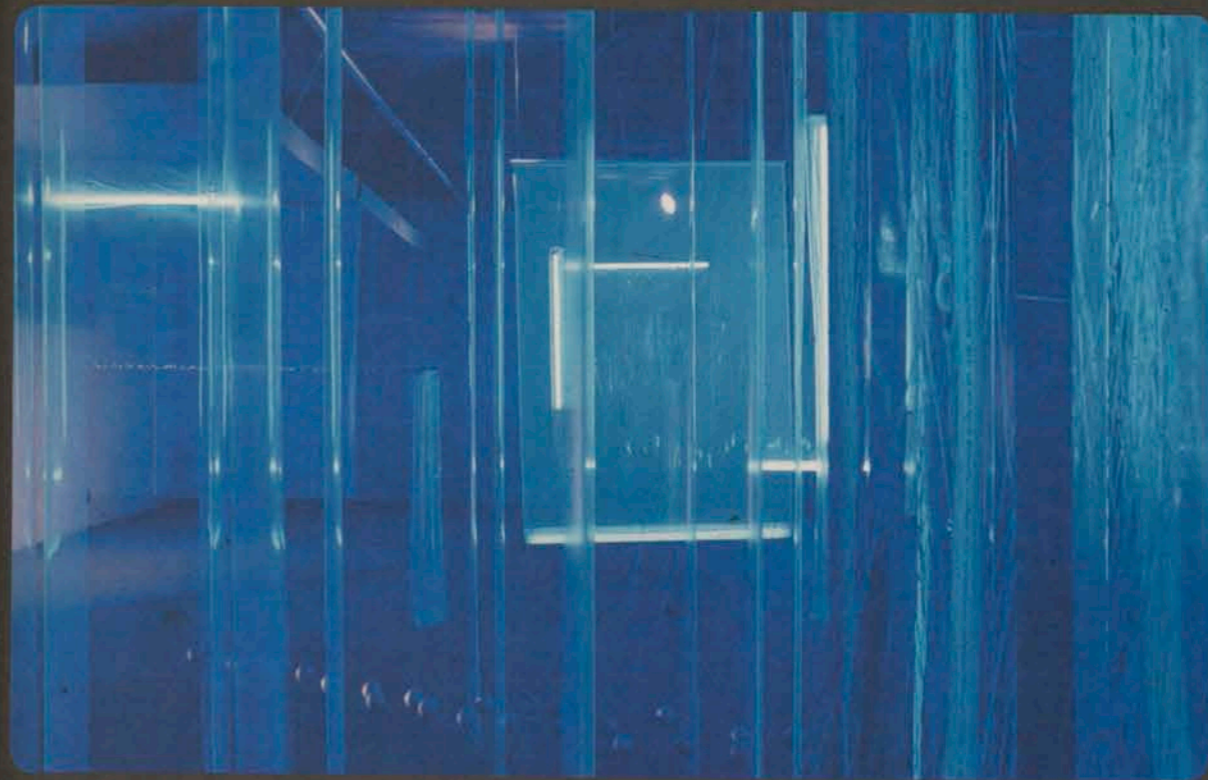
Jim Allen, installation view of *Small Worlds*,
Barry Lett Galleries, 1969.



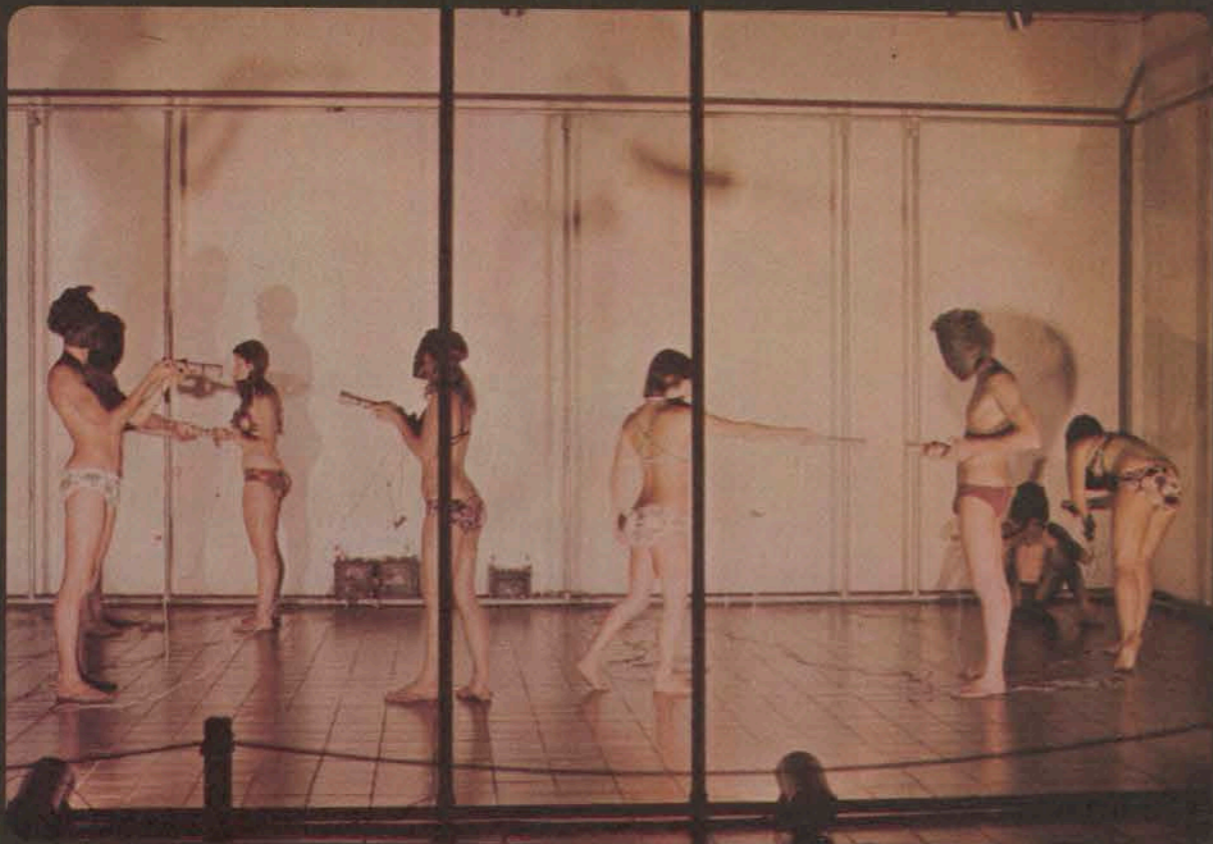
Detail of Jim Allen, *Small Worlds*, 1969.



Detail of Jim Allen, *Tribute to Hone Tuwhare*, 1969.

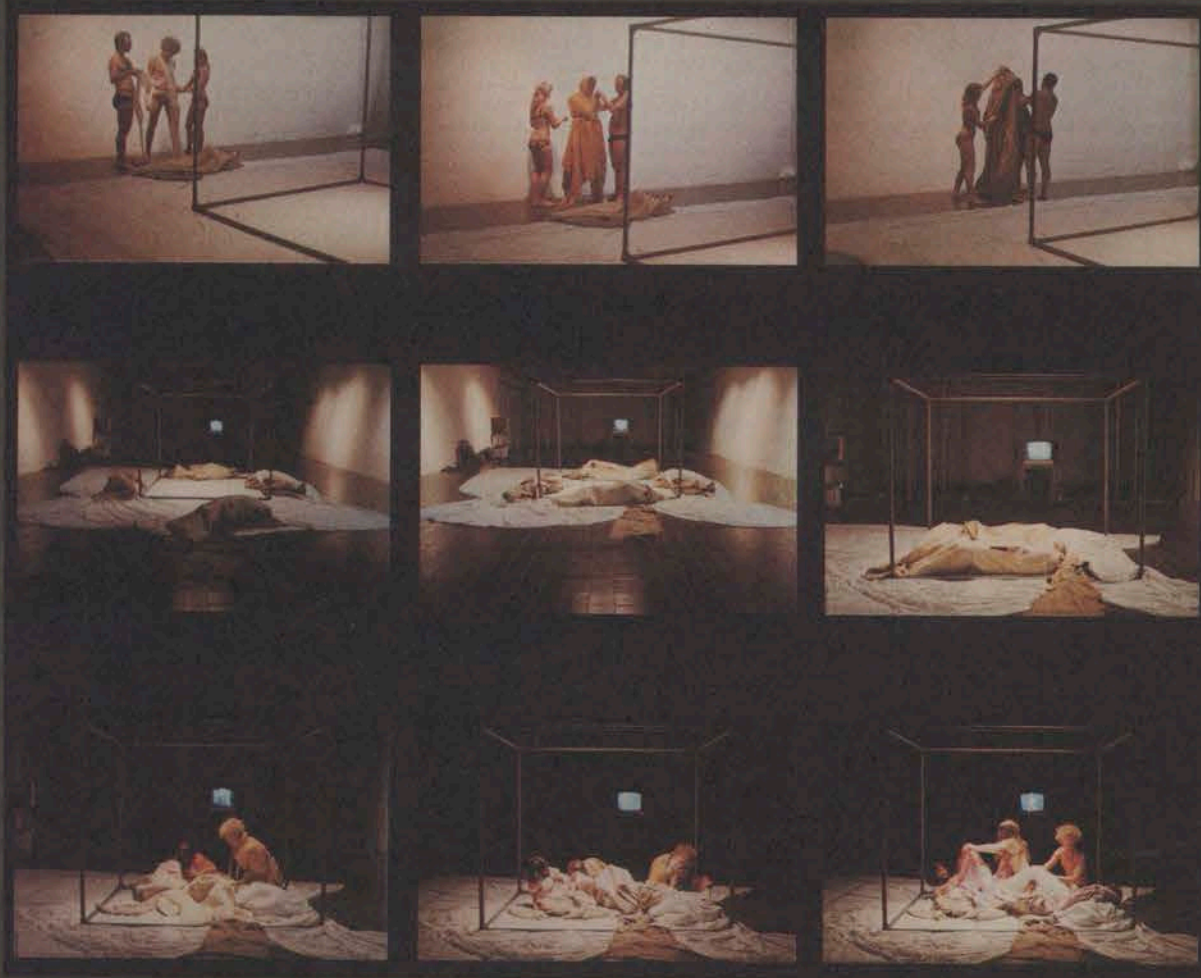


Jim Allen, installation view of *Small Worlds*,
Barry Lett Galleries, 1969.

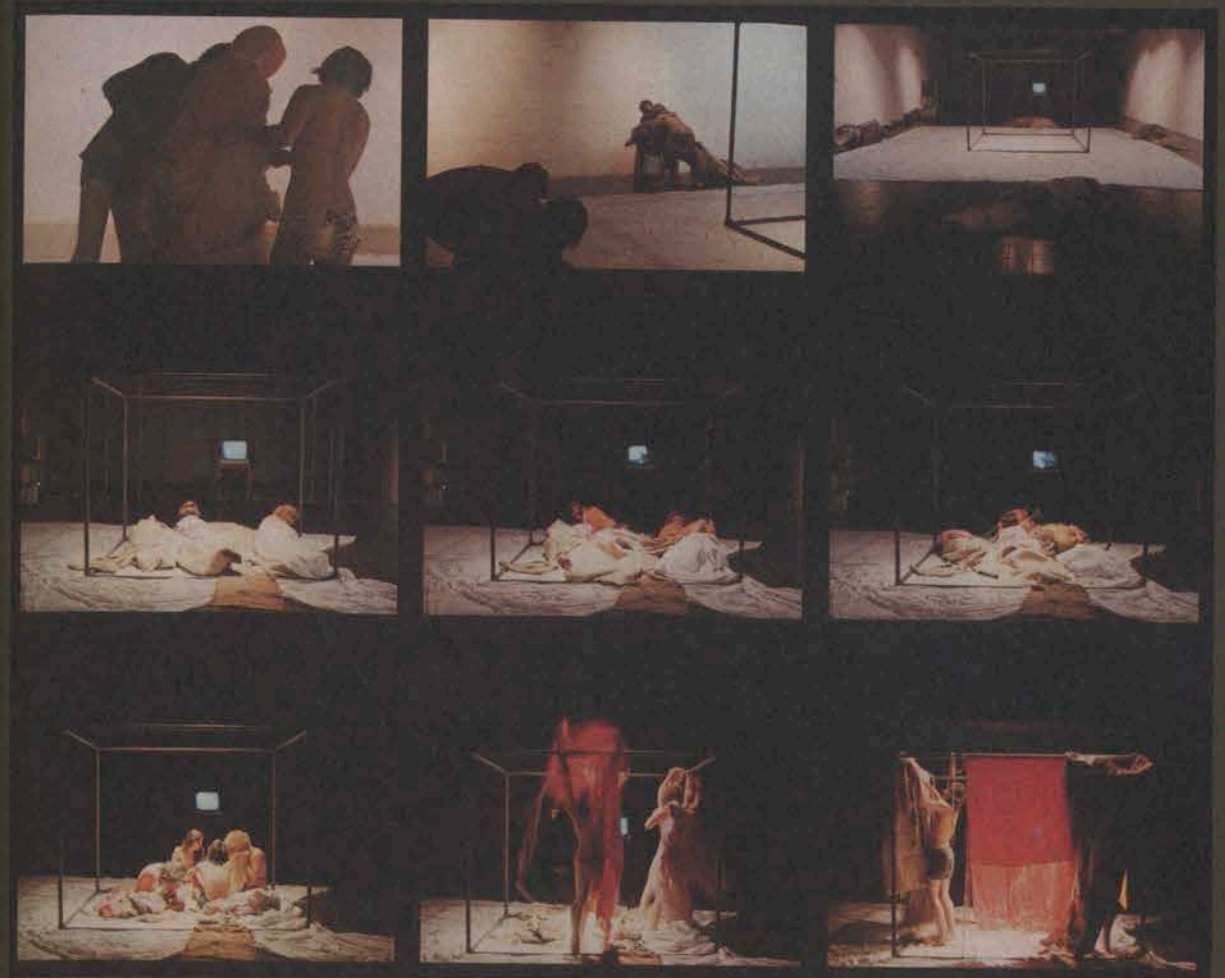


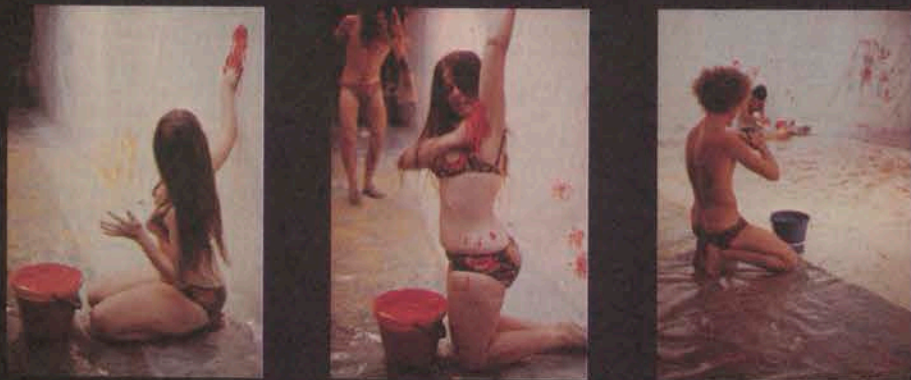
Jim Allen, *Computer Dance, Part 1, Contact*, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1974. Photo: Bryony Dalefield. Published in Jim Allen and Wystan Curnow, *New Art*, 1976, pp. 42-43.





Jim Allen, *Parangolé Capes, Part 2, Contact*, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1974. Photo: Bryony Dalefield. Published in Jim Allen and Wystan Curnow, *New Art*, 1976, pp. 44-45.





Jim Allen, *Body Articulation/Imprint, Part 3, Contact*, Auckland City Art Gallery, 1974. Photo: Bryony Dalefield. Published in Jim Allen and Wystan Curnow, *New Art*, 1976, pp. 46-47.





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PO BOX 2175 • AUCKLAND • NEW ZEALAND • TELEPHONE 30-060

W.R.Allen,
41 Schubert Rd.,
Putney,
London, S.W.15.
3rd August, 1968.

Dear Mr.Brett,

Early in 1967 I met a representative of Studio Vista visiting New Zealand. We discussed your book, then in preparation, and the need for an authouritative publication on kinetic art.

I would like to express my appreciation of the outcome of your work. In addition to succeeding in a general sense I am particularly grateful for the attention and sympathetic rendering which you give to the almost unknown work of Helio Oiticica, Lygia Clark and Mira Schendel. Being ourselves part of oceania and enjoying a close and somewhat unique physical relationship with the natural environment I think we are especially receptive to an art form which makes use of simple tactile media; paper, stones, gravel, sand, cloth and water, employed with such finite sensibility and sophistication.

I would very much like to establish contact with these artists with the intention of endeavouring to arrange an exhibition of work and perhaps a personal visit to New Zealand. Can you advise me how to get in touch? Further, you mention that it is planned to have an exhibition of Helio Oiticica's work at the Whitechapel this year; when is this likely to take place?

Sorry to burden you with these requests,

Yours sincerely,

Jim Allen

W.R.Allen.
Senior Lecturer in Sculpture

Telephone:874.1275



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SCHOOL OF ENE ARTS

21st November, 1973

AIRMAIL

Mr. Len Lye,
Box 12175,
Loiza Station,
PUERTO RICO,
U.S. 00914

Dear Len,

I was delighted to hear from you and renew contact again. I will be very happy to forward your Ms. For your records, the address is:

Mrs. E. Prosser,
Seven Seas Publishers,
Box 1431,
WELLINGTON.

I have not met Glen Pownall author of the 'Kinetic Art' book, but apart from 'off the rail' comments regarding artists and amateurs, this book has simple, straightforward, useful information to offer and I was happy to support its publication.

At present I am engaged on editing material for a book on contemporary sculpture in New Zealand, to be published by Heinemann's and due out by the middle of 1974. After consultation with the publishers and fellow contributors, we would be very pleased to have your approval and permission to dedicate this work to yourself. In a small way we hope to gain further recognition and acknowledgement of your pioneer work in so many fields. In addition to giving biographical details I would like to include the following short statement culled from notes passed by you to Peter Tomory to me in 1967:

'Like most people, I don't get much emotional satisfaction from parallels made between human and mechanical principles and processes, such as the way our thought processes may be similar to those of a 'brain machine's' or our feedback workings to those of a kinetic sculpture's. But there's one thing I do like to ask myself: does the marked vibration and oscillation, the rhythm and spinning, undulation and orbiting which goes on in my work serve to isolate an image which portrays the fundamental force of nature - energy.'

Len Lye, 1965

I put this forward as a suggestion. This text may no longer be acceptable to you or you may have something which you feel would be more appropriate. Either way, I would be grateful if you would let me have your ideas on this.



-2-

I am busily engaged in making sculpture, some teaching, some writing. Thank you for your kind thoughts.

Kindest regards to Anne and best wishes and success to yourself.

Sincerely,

Jim Allen

P.S. I have your biography up to 1965 from an exhibition catalogue. Could you let me have information to up-date to 1973?

Enc; Original Ms. and copy

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Jim Allen interviewed by Len Lye

25 October 1968

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This taped interview was conducted in two parts on 25 October 1968 in New York City when Jim Allen met Len Lye for the first time during his sabbatical trip to the USA and Europe. The tape was transcribed by Paul Brobbel in January 2011. The audiotape is held in the Len Lye Collection and Archive, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery (Catalogue ID 4237 and 4244). This is an edited version of the interview, ellipses have been inserted where text has been deleted.

Len Lye (LL): Now this roll of tape goes with the previous roll of tape and the previous roll of tape is by Marisol (the Argentinian sculptor) whose comments on her exhibition in Venice you've just heard.... I was talking ... to my friend, Jim Allen, who's a sculptor and he's just left England and he's on his way to New Zealand. And we were talking about New Zealand and talking about art and talking about riots and in general gassing around. And here is Jim Allen now....

Jim Allen (JA): The art scene in England today is in a very interesting state because the question of art education has been raised in a general sense but there are also a number of issues, fundamental issues, which affect the lives of the students, which they've taken positive action about. One of the interesting things about it is that this has led to ... sit-ins and lock outs and that kind of thing and there have been all kinds of demonstrations. But one of the interesting things has been that when it's come to a point of formulating exactly what they want or where they want to go there's been a certain inarticulateness. They haven't quite known exactly how to put what they felt has been wrong with the system or even what they want to see in place of what already exists. In this situation many of the staff of the art colleges who sympathise with the issues raised by the students stepped in and helped them formulate what they felt...would right the situation or restore it to a much healthier state. The...rather unfortunate thing which has occurred out of this is that many of these teachers are part-time people and in many cases their contracts have not been renewed by the authorities which have employed them so we have a rather strange situation that many of the teachers are out of a job and the students who they were sympathetic to and helped formulate their demands are now back in the art school.

LL: Alright, I follow. Maybe the teachers were artists themselves (I don't know, you haven't told me) doing a part-time job. You mentioned that and I suppose therefore they're artists also, at least they'll have a very thorough grounding. Now you yourself are an artist and you're a teacher ... what were the issues? Were there many or a single one? Tell us, Jim!

JA: Well just to clear you on the first point, many of these teachers are artists, in fact I assume that the situation in the States is much the same as it is in England that artists due to [having to] make their way to buy their materials

and creat their art have to have some kind of employment and the great number othem go into teaching. So we find that the people that are involved in these issues are the serious hard working artists who are doing the most avant-gare, contemporary work in England today. These are the people who are direct involved in this situation.

Now to come back to your other question as to what are the specific issues which have been raised by ... this situation. One is the entrance requirements to art colleges. A few years ago there was an inquiry into art education in England and rather stringent requirements were imposed on entrance to the art colleges in terms of academic attainment. And ... the question being raised is 'what does academic attainment as such have to do with creating works of art or training people who are going to make works of art?' This is the first major question.

The second question is the fact that once the people are in the art school they find themselves controlled into rather tight situations. In other words if you enroll as a sculptor and then you go to a department of sculpture you stay in that department. Now you might be making things which carry you into the fields of light, film making, painting things and so on like this. But there was, and in many cases still is, a lack of flexibility allowing the art student to move freely between areas of, say, painting, sculpture and design. This has been a big bone of contention.

And the third one (and I'm not trying to give them degrees of importance by making them one, two and three, they are all more or less of equal importance) is the question of academic studies which are demanded of them alongside of their studio practical work. Now when I talk about academic studies I mean art history, or some kind of liberal studies programme which can include English, psychology and physiology or any one of the sciences.

LL: Excuse me! Does any of it include revolution? [Laughs]

JA: [Laughs] That ... that just happens, in this kind of situation.

LL: So I see how it is, but ... who has the power? Who allocates the funds for the students and the teachers salary? Is it the government or the borough councils or donors or trustees? Who has the power?

JA: Well the art colleges are controlled by the local authority wherever the art college is situated. That local authority is the one that administers the funds and the day-to-day running of the colleges and also grants for the students. Now this is another thing which has come out of this situation ... it has been customary in the past to make grants to a student for a year's duration. Now this has been changed. One or two of the art college local authorities pressed that the duration of the grants should be restricted to a monthly basis, so

this means that the student remains more or less permanently on the hook. If he's a good boy his grant carries on for the next month and if there's any fuss or bother the local authority is now in the position to cancel his grant. This has been one of the worst features which has grown out of the conflict between the authorities and students and teachers.

LL: ... wouldn't that only make matters worse? You can't keep repressing people and then jumping on them as well and in the end the next time around they'll be more violent. They'll chase after these guys who have the power and maybe put rude words on their front door or something. You know, get a little close to home ...?

JA: Yeah this is very true and there's going to be quite a bit more than just rude words chalked on a door. [both laugh] Naturally the students are very upset about this because it means any sense of security which might exist in this situation has now been taken from them.

LL: Well anyway Jim, the problems exist here and everybody's trying to ... shake them up into ways that are more convenient and more sensible and reasonable and I think the whole thing is absolutely marvellous, that out of this agitation and actual physical action things have happened... Now I don't want to go into a political or revolutionary thing, I'd rather hear the more constructive things that you have in mind about your own attitude and your own theories about teaching and which you're going back to New Zealand to apply. Would you like to tell us a little about that?

JA: Yes Elam, the art school in which I teach in, is a University Art School in Auckland, New Zealand, and the physical structure of the school is not too dissimilar from the art colleges in England. And we to a certain extent are experiencing the same problems only I think that we have a measure of flexibility which the art colleges in England haven't enjoyed. We operate as a faculty within the university and as such, through our meetings, we have a [mechanism] which permits changes. Now many of the art colleges in England, the machinery doesn't permit changes ... so therefore we have conflict. But in our situation there is a possibility of bringing in change, usually, if not very swift or very sudden, it's a gradually evolving change and when I think back at what our art school was like seven or eight years ago it's a vastly different place today and one hopes that in five or six years time it's going to be vastly different to what it is now, which means there is a healthy progression and outlook on what we are attempting to do ...

Now I've mentioned earlier about art history and liberal studies and one of the reactionary things I've observed in England was the art students felt that these things were not relevant to what they were making ... or ... that they had their own problems, their own concerns and these things came between them and their problems. In other words there wasn't a sense of relevancy.

Now I see this as being a great pity because obviously these areas contain

information, and information [is] important to anybody and certainly important to a creative person. This is the very stuff ... which he is going to use in whatever he's going to create.

LL: Excuse me Jim on that point. I came across a similar, well not problem but a similar situation in which people in various disciplines ... all creative stuff ... dance, music, acting, poetry, and so on, diverse fellows, had to do a lecture tour and we each had a turn as the protagonist of our medium and the other six of us would try and support with our views of our medium the relationship between ours and his. Now the trouble with ... the various departments in ... the humanities thing, in science or what-not, is they don't make the bridge for the student to see the relationship and perhaps they are inept at this and I know that you understand the problem and I think this is the deciding issue as to whether the other knowledge that you spoke of can be bridged and the link shown between it and the arts. You follow?

JA: Yes well this is the area of my immediate concern....I haven't seen a demonstration anywhere where anybody has solved this problem yet. The healthiest situation I've come across was at Leicester Art College where art history and liberal studies operated as a central core, and it was a core located very close to the kind of studio activities that were being practiced in that particular college. And in some measure there was a great deal of relevancy between these two things but not solving, really solving, it ... I think there has to be a very fundamental rethink about this whole thing.

LL: ... when it came to us as creative guys relating our medium to the other fellows, I, for instance, suddenly had to do a lot of thinking about poetry and see where it related to my efforts and then the next time around I'd have to think about dance and see how dance related to my particular interests in art and suddenly it would be something else again like John Cage's type of music and where that fitted in with say contemporary kinetic creation....

JA: Well I think, and this is my own personal theory, ... that we must restore this relevancy and the only way to do it is to start with the student, and with the artist, and what he wants to make, and I think this is the central thing, this has to remain capital [inaudible]. [End of Tape 1]

LL: [Start of Tape 2] ... We narrowed things down [to] showing the relationship between the various kinds of approaches to knowing stuff about your own creative abilities and the ends in view and the philosophical sides of the matter and to me ... the whole anchor of the whole damn work ... is individuality and its essence and how to experience it and how to express it and how to express it in such a way that the other guy can get gleanings of it that relate to his own ... way of putting it down, registering it, communicating it....

JA: The key word here is individuality and this really is the teacher's problem. The problem is that there is so much information which the teacher is aware



Lye with *Fountain* in his studio, circa 1970s. Unknown photographer. Len Lye Foundation Collection, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.

of. The teacher is aware of so many pitfalls and his natural instinct is to draw the lines, to explain and to give information. But I seriously question if this is the right way to go about things, if this really does encourage the development of individuality. Now ... for an example, if we go down to ... primary school level, here the young child is working in a fully integrated situation. He has one teacher who is handling all subjects and so even though times may change and the subject may change, the teacher inevitably maintains a progressive rhythm from what happened a short time before. But as time progresses in the school system ... we find complete fragmentation. This wholeness of place and one person situation disappears and we find that we have to begin to be in different places to get different bits of information. And these bits exist almost unrelated. They are pieces of information which are doled out to us as bits which at some stage or another we may recall to employ in our making activities.

LL: Yes Jim .. I agree. For instance Aristotle was tutor, say, of Alexander the Great and imbued that very able guy, who had a great feeling for culture as well as the strategy and tactics of warfare, ... with a lot of philosophical truths and attitude towards culture which got the whole of his society and societies he conquered into quite a going concern and everybody more or less having added wellbeing and what-not.

So bring us back then to the problem with the fellows who are around 18 to 20 and really want to get going, they want to get answers, they are full of vehemence about the creative urge and they just want to apply it. So have you any kind of idea? I have some but I'd like to hear yours and maybe elaborate, help me to think of some of mine. [Laughs] OK?

JA: But I think this is where the problem begins because my approach to this is to try and restore some measure of integration between thinking and feeling. I tend to [see] in students that arrive within my orbit at the early stages of art school as being dis-integrated personalities because the system has splintered them so much so therefore I try to do the opposite and create a situation, a climate, or environment of feeling which is an integrated one where anything goes, anything can be talked about, where any issues can be ... raised and one can tackle this and it can grow into any kind of thing at all.

LL: ... Now you talk about the younger stage of the game ... it's the absolute foundation stage for ... conditioning an individual [to] think that art is important and relate it to the rest of his education. I see all that, but ... how do you inspire an older student? Do any of your theories apply to the [older] student ...?

JA: Well, if we consider ... the older student more or less in isolation from his background one presumes that ... he has ideas about things which he wants to make. This being so they may be ill-defined and ill-formed and I think it is the role of the teacher in this situation to make the student aware

of realms of possibilities within the field of what he wants to make. To open up unsuspected probabilities, not to tell him exactly what he should do but open areas ... which you consider to be worthy of his investigation.

LL: Yeah. Alright, well what do you think about the way I approach this problem? First of all I try to get the artist to begin thinking in terms of utter simplicity. So that these terms relate to his experience and his daily perceptions of anything that attracts him in relation to it having some sort of significant beauty or aesthetic quality and then for him to memorise this little experience, this little incident and continue with these kinds of experiences throughout a day and finally if he can stay with it all day which is the big, big test I don't think any of us could make one of our sensory responses the major sensory response area we're going to experience all day long in spite of anything but if he can manage it to some degree to then go further and retain the memory of the feelings involved and why, or the vivid memory of the particular incident whether it be sound or colour or some motion or some actual physical thing, retain that so clearly in mind that he can in the evening before going to sleep think of these things and remember them, put them into sequence, remember them as they happened, not in a chronological order, then put them in chronological order and after that sort out the best one, and then, having that best one in mind sort of savour it, sort of a conjecture as to why? And gradually in this way he will either find after two or three weeks that he after all isn't so much interested in sound, he's more interested in light, or that he's more interested in the pattern of words or he's more interested in the way people smile and their little behaviours in any case that would say 'well after all it's acting or it's producing or it's directing that I'm interested in not painting as I thought or not music as I thought'. So in this way he can sieve out through his own sensory experience, and through his continuous application of thought to his problem of making himself confident of his own abilities and his own store of personally experienced information, about feelings, that in the end he finds he knows the game he's going in for, he knows the medium he's sure of the type of medium he wants, because he's tried all these sensory tricks and at long last after three months of applying himself in this way he's come to some sort of conclusion. What do you think of that as a helpful approach?

JA: Well I go along with this entirely. I would describe it as delineating a field of perceptual experience and I would regard the work of art as a constructed perceptual field. Now this indicates my line of thinking as to how I approach it because then if it is a field then one would want to sift through the field and at the early stages do this slowly and [perhaps by chance] and haphazardly you spoke of thinking about things before going to sleep at night and so on like this and one needs to have this kind of drifting sort of phase where the mind is free to roam at will where immediate sensual experience can precipitate images and thoughts and keeping yourself open to that experience. One can draw a line around it and say I am interested in this particular field but within this field certainly at the beginning stages one should let one's conscious and subconscious self and the oceanic depths that Ehrenzweig ... speak[s] of ... to permeate through our being centred around this problem.

LL: Okay, it seems that Jim and I see ... eye to eye, and actually what I'd like to discuss with him ... is about what it all adds up to....

JA: So I think the performance of art has to do with the human sensibility and when people make things they extend the boundaries and the experience of human sensibility. And I think this is the justification for it, if one is called upon to make a justification.

LL: Okay, thanks Jim and this is Roll B and it's coming to its little old stop.

Documentation

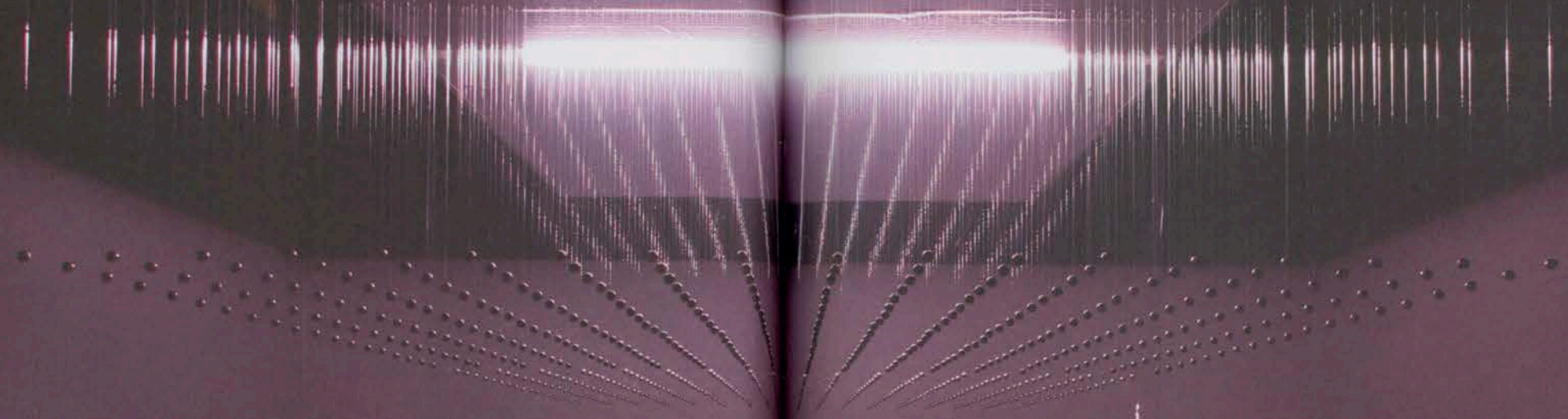


Documentation of Jim Allen, *Contact*, 1974 and 2010, as installed at Adam Art Gallery, 2010.

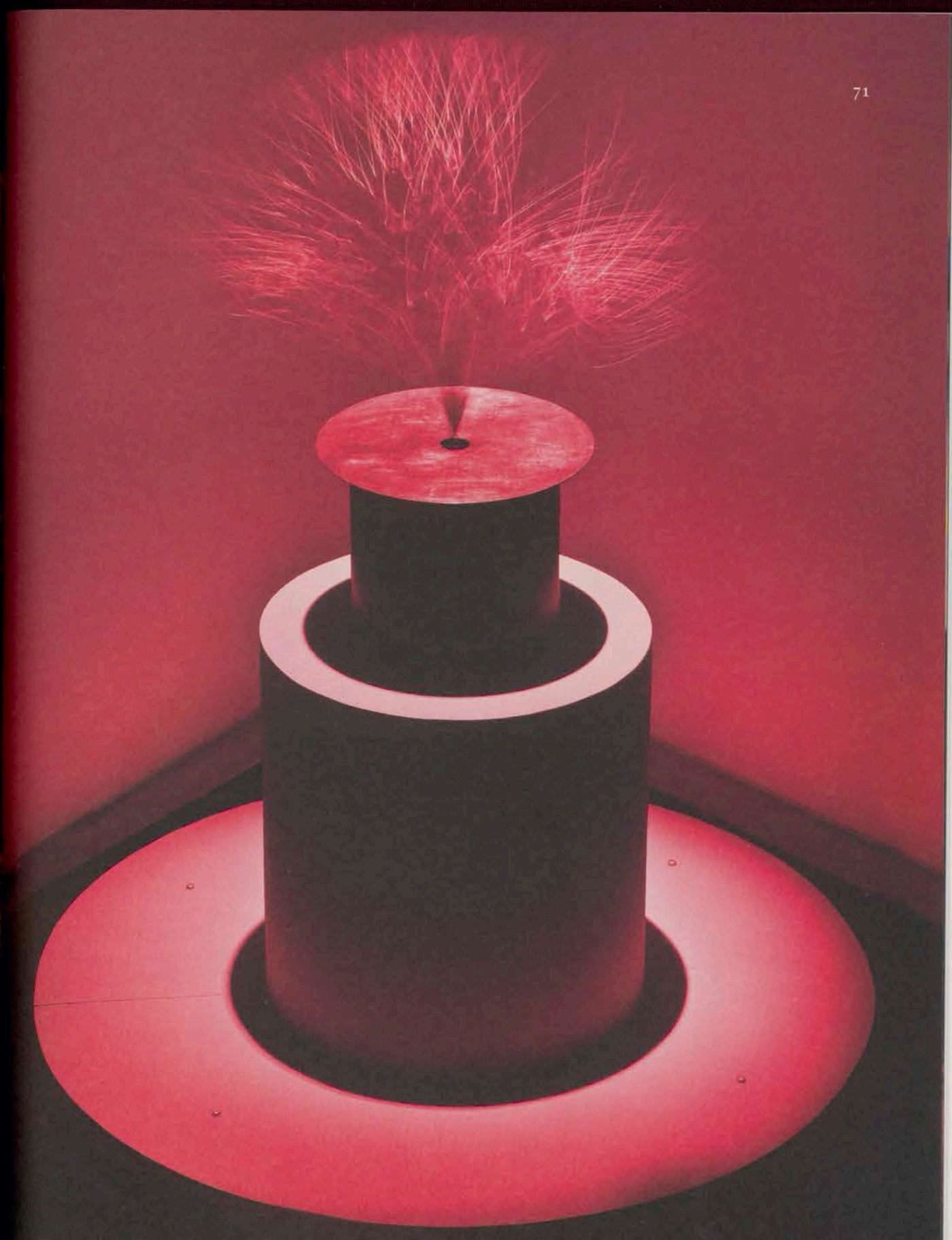
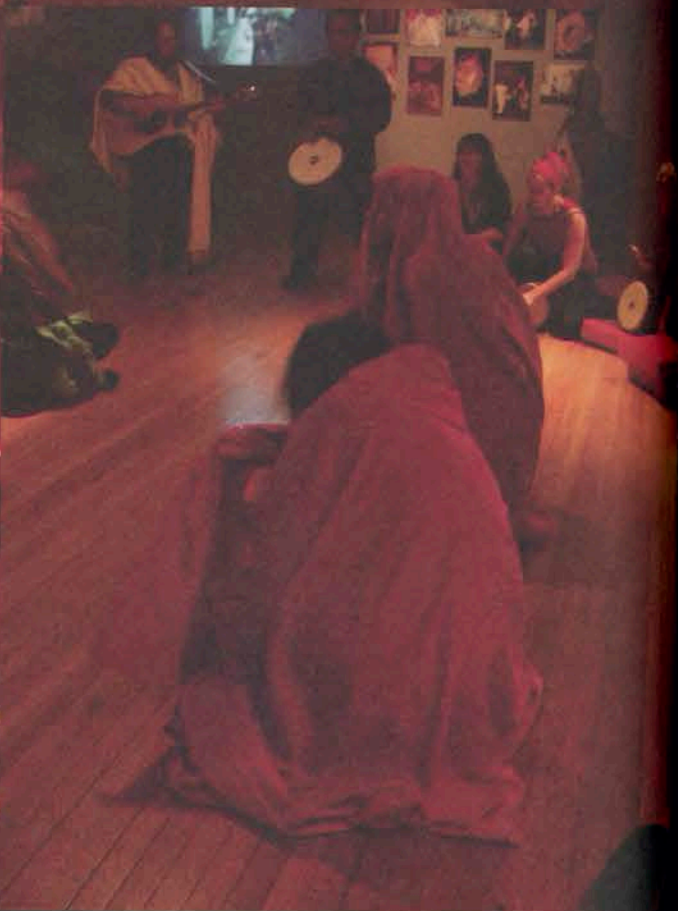
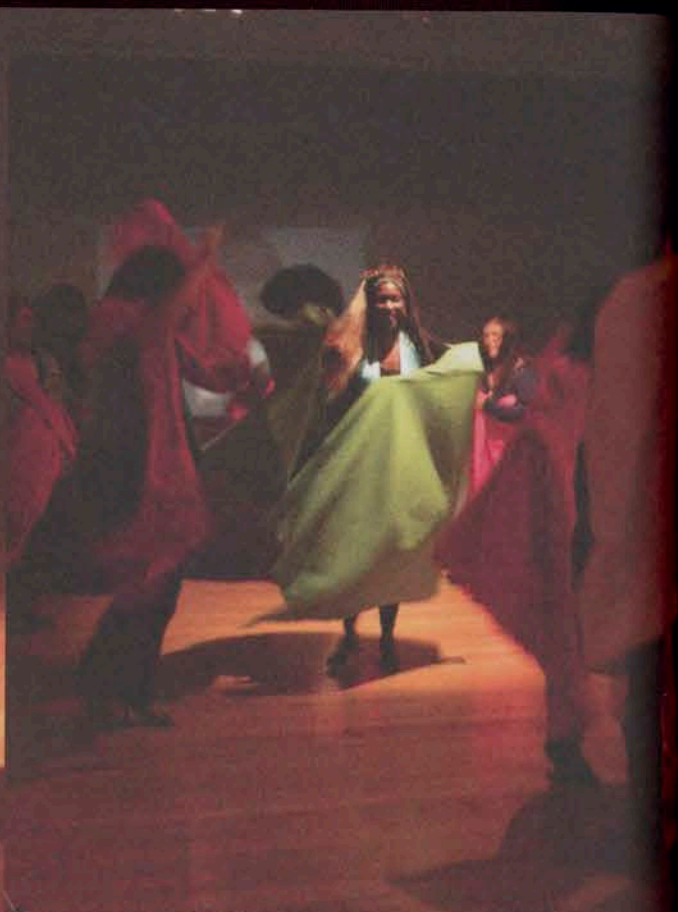
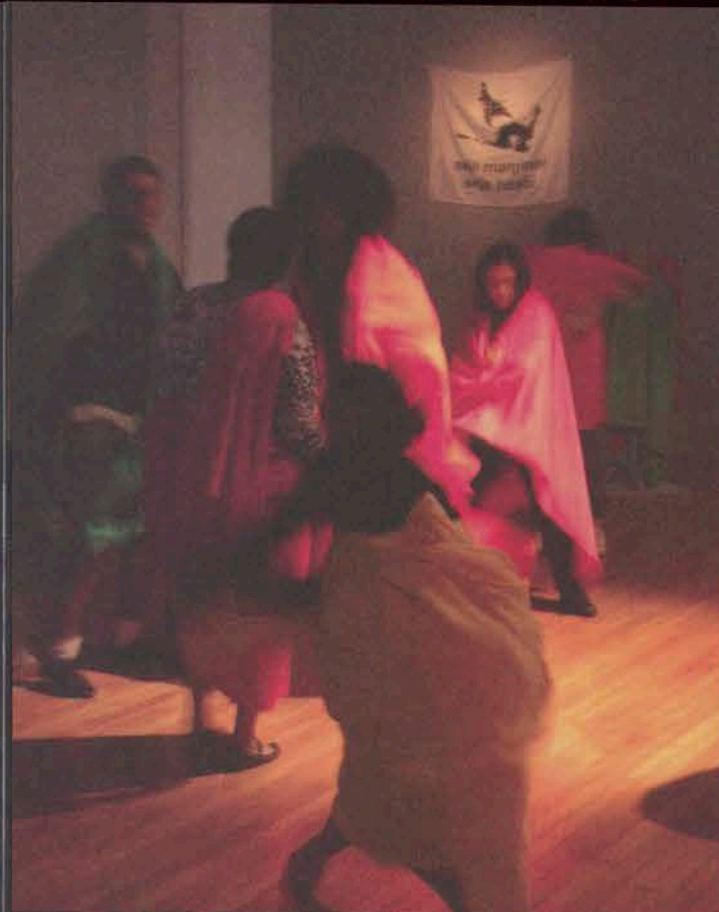


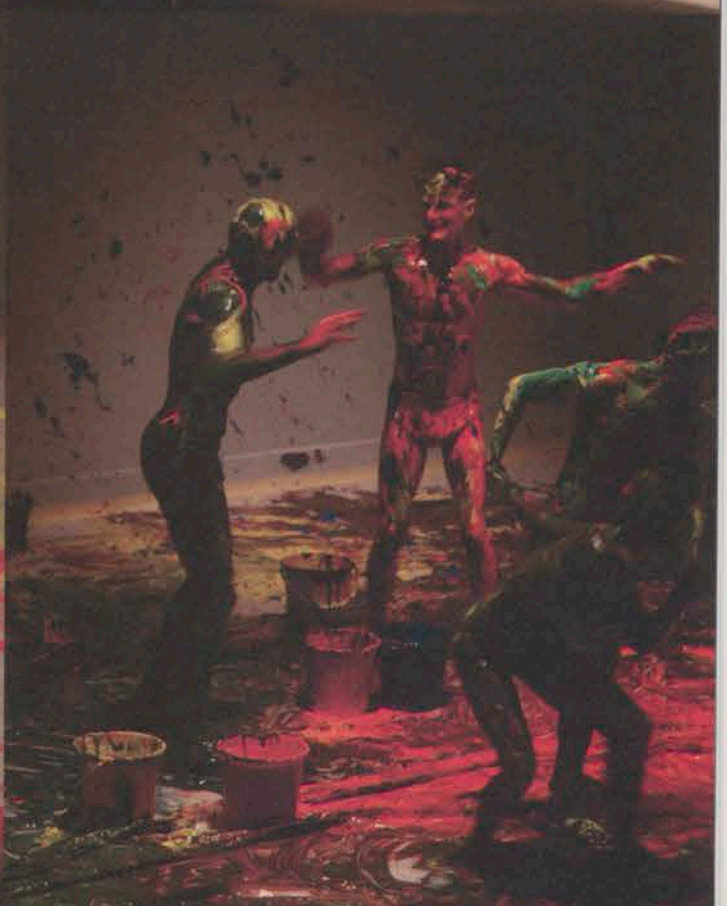
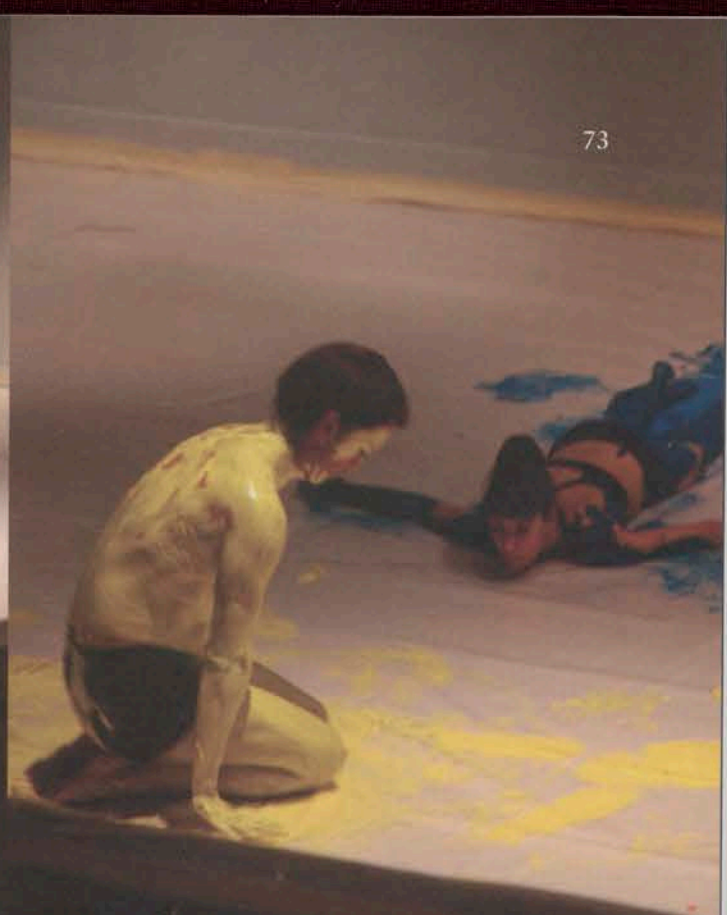














For full details of individual works see the list of works on page 77

pp.60–61 (from left to right) Len Lye, *Grass*; Jim Allen, *Water Pillow*; Len Lye, *Fountain*; and Hélio Oiticica, *B30 Box Bolidé 17 (poem-box)*, as installed at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2010.

pp.62–63 Jim Allen, *Water Pillow*, as installed at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2010.

pp.64–65 (from left to right) Jim Allen, *Tribute to Hone Tuwhare* and *Small Worlds*, as installed at Adam Art Gallery, 2010.

pp.66–67 Jim Allen, *Space Plane, Environment No. 1*, as installed at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2010.

pp.68–69 (from left to right) Hélio Oiticica, *Parangolé P16 Cape 12 'Of Adversity We Live'*; Len Lye, *Fire Bush*; Hélio Oiticica, *Made-on-the-Body-Capes*; Hélio Oiticica, *Parangolé P25 Cape 21 'Xoxoba'*; Len Lye, *A Colour Box*; as installed at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2010

p.70 Hélio Oiticica, *Made-on-the-Body-Capes*. Parangolé workshop led by Marlina Curtis, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2010.

p.71 Len Lye, *Fire Bush*, as installed at Adam Art Gallery, 2010.

p.72 (above) Jim Allen, *Computer Dance, Part 1, Contact*, (below) *Parangolé Capes, Part 2, Contact*, performed at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 11 December 2010.

p.73 Jim Allen, *Body Articulation/Imprint, Part 3, Contact*, performed at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 12 December 2010.

pp.74–75 Residual installation of Jim Allen, *Contact*, as installed at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2010.

Jim Allen, *Space Plane, Environment No. 1*, 1969
transparent plastic, nylon, metal balls, neon tubing (2010 reconstruction)
L 5000 × W 1500 × H 2480mm
Collection of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Jim Allen, *Tribute to Hone Tuwhare*, 1969
PVC, artificial UV light, nylon thread, wooden spheres, printed paper, peg board, square section aluminium tubing (2010 reconstruction)
text by Hone Tuwhare ('Thine own hands have fashioned' from No Ordinary Sun) reproduced with permission of the Estate of Hone Tuwhare
L 2000 × W 2000 × H 2330mm
Collection of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Jim Allen, *Water Pillow*, 1969
plastic, water, flax fibre, Plexiglas, black light, wood (2010 reconstruction)
L 1100 × W 1100 × H 250mm
Collection of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Jim Allen, *Small Worlds*, 1969
PVC, artificial UV light, nylon thread, wooden spheres, printed paper, peg board (2010 reconstruction)
L 4000 × W 2460 × H 2330mm
Collection of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Jim Allen, *Contact*, 1974
three-part performance restaged and videotaped at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2010
Courtesy the artist and Michael Lett (not performed at Adam Art Gallery)

Jim Allen, *Contact*, 1974
U-matic video transferred to digital of performance at Auckland City Art Gallery
Courtesy the artist and The New Zealand Film Archive Ngā Kaitiaki O Ngā Taonga Whitiāhua and Michael Lett

Jim Allen, *Contact*, 1974
DVD of 2010 performance at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery
Courtesy the artist and Michael Lett

Ivan Cardoso, *HO*, 1979
13 mins, 16mm transferred to digital, colour, sound
Courtesy the artist

Len Lye, *Fountain*, 1960
stainless steel rods, motor
H 2740 × 2000mm diameter
Len Lye Foundation Collection, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery

Len Lye, *Grass*, 1961–1965
stainless steel rods on on wood base, motor, coloured light
L 1580 × W 425 × H 2230mm
Len Lye Foundation Collection, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery

Len Lye, *Fire Bush*, 1961
Stainless steel rods, motor, coloured light (2007 reconstruction)
H 1200 × 1900mm diameter
Len Lye Foundation Collection, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery

Len Lye, *A Colour Box*, 1935
4 mins, 35mm film transferred to digital, Eastmancolour restoration of original Dufaycolour material held by the British National Film and Television Archive, music 'La Belle Creole' by Don Baretto and his Cuban Orchestra
Courtesy the British Post Office, Len Lye Foundation and
The New Zealand Film Archive Nga Kaitiaki O Nga Taonga Whitiāhua

Len Lye, *Free Radicals*, 1957
4mins, 16mm film transferred to digital, black and white, sound (revised 1979)
Courtesy The New Zealand Film Archive Nga Kaitiaki O Nga Taonga Whitiāhua
(not exhibited at Adam Art Gallery)

Len Lye, *Tal Farlow*, 1980
1 min. 30sec., 16 mm transferred to digital, black and white, sound
Courtesy Len Lye Foundation, The New Zealand Film Archive
Nga Kaitiaki O Nga Taonga Whitiāhua

Hélio Oiticica, *B30 Box Bolide 17 (poem box)*, 1965–66, variation of *Box Bolide 1 (poem box)*, 1968
oil with polyvinyl acetate emulsion on wood, polyvinyl chloride plastic sheeting, pigment, paper, glass, steel wire mesh
L 320 × W 230 × H 215mm
Collection of Guy Brett

Hélio Oiticica, *Parangolé P25 Cape 21 'Xoxoba'*, 1968
cotton fabric (exhibition copy)
H 1180 × W 1060 mm
Collection Projeto Hélio Oiticica

Hélio Oiticica, *Parangolé P16 Cape 12 'Of Adversity We Live'*, 1968
cotton fabric, burlap, plastic, nylon screen (exhibition copy)
H 1000 × W 650 mm
Collection of Projeto Hélio Oiticica

Hélio Oiticica, *Seja Marginal Seja Heroi*, 1968
silkscreen in mixed fabric (exhibition copy)
H 950 × W 1140 mm
Collection of Projeto Hélio Oiticica

Hélio Oiticica, *Inauguration of Parangolé at the exhibition Opinião 65, Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro*, 1965
10 colour photographs by Desdémone Bardin, mounted on foam core board
H 500 × W 330 mm
Collection of Projeto Hélio Oiticica

Hélio Oiticica, *Made-on-the-Body-Capes*, 1968 (re-staged 2010)
14 coloured capes
3000 mm long
Courtesy Projeto Hélio Oiticica

Jim Allen has been a practising artist since the 1950s and is in the forefront of the development of post-object and performance based art in Australasia. He was among the early exhibitors at the Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, South Australia and Founding Head of Sydney College of the Arts' Art School (which later became Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney). Since 2000 Allen has re-staged a number of early works, such as the two-part installation *O-AR* (1974) and the early performances *Contact* (1974), *Poetry for Chainsaws* (1976), *News* (1976) and *On Planting a Native* (1976) in Adelaide, Sydney, Auckland, New Plymouth and Wellington. His video works have been shown widely in America, Germany and the Netherlands. He exhibits regularly with Michael Lett, Auckland.

Christina Barton is Director of the Adam Art Gallery and Senior Lecturer in Art History at Victoria University of Wellington. She first documented the work of Jim Allen in her MA Thesis, 'Experiments in Art and Life: Post-object Art in New Zealand 1969-1979' (University of Auckland) in 1987 and has gone on to write about his practice as an artist and teacher in various venues since that groundbreaking study. Barton is recognised as one of New Zealand's few historians of post-object art and her interest in conceptual art and its legacy informs her work as a writer, curator and historian of contemporary art.

Guy Brett is a London-based art critic, curator and lecturer on art. He has published widely in the international art press and has contributed monographic essays to many artists' catalogues. Among his books are *Carnival of Perception* (essays, 2004), and *Through Our Own Eyes: Popular Art and Modern History* (1986). Brett has curated a number of influential exhibitions, including *Georges Vantongerloo: A Longing for Infinity* (Museo Reina Sofia, 2009), *Cildo Meireles*, co-curated with Vicente Todolí (Tate Modern, 2008), *Force Fields: Phases of the Kinetic* (MACBA, and Hayward Gallery 2000), *Transcontinental: Nine Latin American Artists* (Ikon Birmingham/Cornerhouse Manchester, 1990) and *Hélio Oiticica* (Whitechapel Gallery London, 1969).

Tyler Cann is curator at Ikon Gallery in Birmingham, UK as well as the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery's Len Lye Curator-at-Large. Originally from Los Angeles, he holds degrees in art history from the University of California, Berkeley and Harvard University. In his previous role as Curator of the Len Lye Collection at the Govett-Brewster he organised numerous exhibitions of Len Lye's work including *Individual Happiness Now!* (2005), *Chronosome* (2008), *The Cosmic Archive* (2009) and *All Souls Carnival* (2011). In addition, he has lectured widely and authored several essays on the artist's work, and co-edited with Wytan Curnow the monograph *Len Lye* (2009, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery and Len Lye Foundation).

Mercedes Vicente is Curator of Contemporary Art at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. Her numerous exhibitions show a commitment to art practices that are socially and politically engaged and bring a historical perspective to light. In 2006 she curated the survey *Darcy Lange: Study of an Artist at Work* at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery (Adam Art Gallery, 2007), followed by a series of exhibitions on Lange at international institutions including Ikon Gallery (Birmingham), Moderna Galerija (Ljubljana) and Camera Austria (Graz). She is contributing editor to the first Darcy Lange monograph, featuring essays by Guy Brett, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Dan Graham, Lawrence McDonald, John Miller, Geraldene Peters and Pedro G. Romero. Her writings have been published in international periodicals such as *Camera Austria*, *Flash Art*, *Exit*, *Lápiz*, *Manifesta Journal* and *Reading Room*.

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery

Director: Rhana Devenport

Assistant Director: Helen Telford

Exhibition Curators: Tyler Cann and Mercedes Vicente

Exhibition Coordination: Bryan James

Artist's Technicians: James Charlton, Norman Edgerton

Exhibition Installation: Sarah Buist, Kevin Castle, David Clegg, Maria Dobson, Coral Dolan,

Jonathan Geehan, Matt Henry, Sobranie Huang, Rachell Lambert, Tammy Lewis, Janeen Page,

Sarah Pye, Leonie Smith, Edmund Wealthall

Contact's Choreographer and Dancers: Rebecca Wood and Anna Bates

Sarah Campus, Geoff Gilson, Jack Gray, Rachel Ruckstuhl-mann, Josh Rutter

Contact's Videographer: Peter Wareing

Photographer: Bryan James

Registration: Amanda Ward

Designer: Kalee Jackson

Publicity and Administration: Clare Blackman, Kelly Loney, Fran Cooper

Education: Chris Barry, Rebecca Fawcner-Egli

Information Services: Kirsten Petersen, Mary-Ellen Batchelor, Anita Glass, Freyja Johns, Leannah

Kane, Keri Naus, Therese O'Connell, Sylvia Rechsteiner, Angel Sagar, Joanna Wilkes

Supporters: Creative New Zealand Toi Aotearoa, Michael Lett, Len Lye Foundation, Projeto Hélio

Oiticica, The New Zealand Film Archive Ngā Kaitiaki O Ngā Taonga Whitiāhua, Te Kairanga,

Radio Network

The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery is an art museum that fosters the development and interpretation of contemporary art and whose principal funder is the New Plymouth District Council.

Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi

Director: Christina Barton

Curator: Laura Preston

Exhibition Officer: Andy Cummins

Collection Officer: Rebecca Rice

Gallery Administrator: Therese Lloyd

Exhibition Installation: Norman Edgerton, Anton Berndt, David Clegg, Murray Hewitt,

Hutch Wilco

Exhibition presented with the assistance of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

The Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi is the art gallery of Victoria University of Wellington, from which it receives its principal funding.



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