

*Billy Apple (b.1935), From the University of Auckland Art Collection, 2008*

*Acrylic on canvas, 762 x 533mm  
(1072 x 812mm framed)*

*The University of Auckland Art Collection*

For artist Billy Apple® (born Barrie Bates in Auckland) the mechanics of art, usually kept behind the scenes, have long been a focus for his work. Throughout the 1970s he executed activity and installation works that highlighted the significance of exhibition spaces to the work exhibited, cleaning windows, painting walls, adjusting lights. In contrast to the grandiose paintings made prior to the pop art movement, Billy Apple was more interested in everyday things and activities, such as shaving. He was particularly interested in the fact that it is the artist's role in the work that gives it value, just like a brand name. In 1962, while studying at the Royal College of Art in London, he changed his name to Billy Apple, effectively making his own life a work of art, undertaking a re-branding that included bleaching his hair, eyebrows and eyelashes. In 2007 Billy Apple became a registered trademark and then a registered brand in 2008.

The commerce of art has been a strong focus of Billy Apple's work, particularly his transaction works, beginning with *Numbered and Signed*, 1980, which was produced in an edition of 25 as a fundraiser for The University of Auckland – the Art Collection holds the original drawing for this work. An early precursor to the transaction works is *For Sale*, 1961, simply bearing the text "For Sale" in red and produced by Bates while he was still studying at the Royal College, with the assistance of his close associate, David Hockney. *Art for Sale*, his first transaction exhibition, took place at Peter Webb Galleries, Auckland, in 1981 and included



the canvas *Sold* and 10 works on paper – in keeping with the work's self-evident declaration, Webb was not allowed to open the exhibition until all works were sold. More enigmatic works followed, such as *POA*, *NFS* and *IOU*, all in 1987.

Commissioned for the Gellert Family Collection, the *From the Collection* series started with a 1980 page work in *Art New Zealand* magazine (#17, p.5) that declared a private owner's involvement with the artist. The first painted work was designed by the artist in New York in 1987 and produced in 1988, the last acquisition for the Bank of New Zealand art collection. This increasingly iconic series belongs to a growing list of corporate, private and public entities, with a new sub-group now

established for university collections. In these works the relationship between artist and collector is negotiated and declared with the work incorporating aspects of the buyer's branding, such as logos or colouring, while adhering to the artist's established fonts and compositional formats. As Wystan Curnow has written, it is like a portrait of the owner, which is the result of a transaction between artist and owner. In fact, it is the owner's name, rather than the artist's signature, that completes the work. For Fay Richwhite, the artist produced the work on a portion of yacht KZ-7's sail.

*From the University of Auckland Art Collection*, like all of the artist's transaction works, is the result of a direct relationship between the artist and the buyer, and represents that relationship in the work. The work has been designed to integrate with The University of Auckland's corporate identity using Pantone colours from the University's style guide. Even the black frame is part of the colour scheme and is designed to scale with the painting and spacer as integral parts of the work, as is the potential for it to be hung on a Mid Blue (PMS 313) wall to complete the corporate look. As Christina Barton has remarked of a comparable work in the Victoria University Art Collection, the work is a painting made for the University Collection that is a sign for its own content and context, and also serves the dual purpose of being an advertisement or frontispiece for that collection. She says: "It is both the conscience of the collection and its effect."

An exhibition of Billy Apple's 1969-1973 New York works is being held at the Adam Art Gallery in Wellington from 28 March. There is also a large retrospective planned for the Witte de Witt, Rotterdam later this year.

Andrew Clifford