From the collection

Developing the new Conference Centre for the University in 1982, architects Kingston Reynolds Thom and Allardice worked with architectural drawing lecturer Pat Hanly to brighten the place up.

Hanly himself worked with Claudia Pond Eyley to make a large mural for the exterior, while Don Driver and Barry Lett were commissioned to make wall hangings. As sculptors, Greer Twiss and Peter Nicholl positioned lengths of timber and steel outside. Dick Frizzell had been on the staff at Elam as a part-timer since 1980, and was entranced with post-abstraction in the United States. Francis Pound had announced the arrival of New Image painting in Auckland with a winter exhibition at the Auckland Art Gallery in 1982, and with Paul Hartigan, Denys Watkins and Gavin Chilcott, Dick Frizzell was a leading light.

Escaping from designing the packaging for slug pellets, Frizzell had fled advertising for the higher realms of cultural production in the 1970s, his painting reaching its apogee with the Dancing Chicken of 1980. Heading straight for the New York art world for confirmation of his direction, Frizzell collaborated American artists for advice, and was crestfallen to be returned to sender. Neil Jenney directed him to examine his own backyard and “represent”, assuming that success would follow: “So that is what I did - one item at a time, iconicised as a worker is exaggerated, his tools are shrunk, dwarf a nearby handsaw and sawhorse. Just as his form as a worker is exaggerated, his tools are shrunk, abbreviated to become toy-like signs of the hand-built nature of the job ahead. Celebrating the worker as hero, Frizzell also reveals his ironic affection for the particularities of the fast-growing kiwi suburb of the seventies. Fashionable Spanish-style haciendas parade along the top of the painting, with concrete driveways leading to the road. Frizzell contrives to peel the image back at the corner, pretending to show the four-by-two framing of the wall itself. His aim is to reveal the artifice of painting itself, which is no longer striving to be naturalistic, or a window onto the world, but instead foregrounds the conventions of art making itself with disjunctions of scale and placement, and a flattening of form and colour.

Like a split-screen movie, Frizzell provides scenes within the scene to give more information about the activity. Inset at the bottom is a red-shirted figure in profile, his hammer lifted above his head as he aims at an upright which is cropped out of sight. Above him against a brilliant violet background, a wheelbarrow is being pushed up a makeshift ramp by the central figure, as if time has elapsed, and we are viewing the next frame in a comic strip. The imagery is recognizably kiwi, but the content is as much a display of painting skill as it is an unpacking of the construction industry’s skills. Glossy layers of enamel paint are built up and scraped back with bold shifts of colour and a heavy use of line. Even the attendant piebald dog functions to activate space, directing attention above.

After 16 years on staff, Dick Frizzell left Elam to become a full time painter in 1996. His contribution to the University will be celebrated with an exhibition at Old Government House from 10 June to 19 July. The artist will speak at the opening at 6pm on Monday 10 June, and all are welcome to attend.

Dick Frizzell, Workers on Construction Site, 1982, enamel on Ruffit board, 3040 x 3400mm

From the cultural collection

The idea of the New Zealand Cartographic Society (NZCS) for a proper wall map for schools was born back in the late 1990s in response to the Department of Survey and Land Information’s decision to discontinue production of their only physical wall map of New Zealand (NZMS 293, 2nd edition) in 1994.

The map was made by NZCS member Barry Bradley as principal cartographer and designer with assistance from Phil Dixon and Geoff Arten. Another member, Roger Smith, provided relief information.

The idea behind this project was to provide an affordable educational aid for teaching geography. The map incorporates strong visual symbolism with careful application of colour and selection and generalisation of features. The addition of both hypsometric and bathymetric layers enhances the new digitally-derived relief elevation image. Road and rail networks along with population centres and settlements feature strongly. Major topographic features, spot heights and islands are also mapped and named. An inset of the Pacific Hemisphere visually demonstrates New Zealand’s position in the water and its relationship to its offshore island territories and Pacific island neighbours. Overall, this design helps to give an instant impression of New Zealand’s physical character and its relationship to subsequent settlement and infrastructure patterns.

The University’s map collection consists of over 50,000 sheets covering most parts of the world, with special emphasis on New Zealand and the Pacific region. The collection includes the basic New Zealand topographical series, beginning with NZMS 1 published in 1939, and it also includes urban plans, aerial photos and a wide range of thematic mapping. Maps provide a powerful medium with which to portray information about a place, and their relevance crosses many different academic disciplines. The map collection is used by students and staff across the University including those from the Faculties of Arts, Science and Engineering, and the Business School.

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