

# From the collection

Often mistaken for part of the architecture, Don Driver's *Untitled Construction* (1982) is both simple and spectacular.

It is one of seven art works by different contemporary artists commissioned by Pat Hanly in 1982 to complement the design of the new School of Architecture building.

Known for his ability to exploit the suggestive power of combinations of ordinary things, Driver was given a dark corner of the foyer to animate. Fixed to the wall at the top by a system of five towel rails, vinyl sheets in the three primary colours of red, yellow and blue and the secondary colour of orange, create a bright four-metre fall of colour down the wall. Floating freely in front like a set of mirrors for a caged bird are three suspended steel panels which turn slowly in space with wind currents, reflecting alternately the work and its surrounds.

Taranaki-based Driver trained as a dental technician and then worked for a paint and wallpaper merchant in New Plymouth, and is self-taught as an artist. His six-month bus trip across the United States provided first-hand experience of the colour field paintings of American abstraction, and the assemblages of Pop artists which motivated him to "not to copy, but to make an equivalent from materials around me".

Often described as a regional artist, Driver transforms everyday materials to leap beyond their mundane origins into the realm of art. As a child he

always wanted to be a magician – "the inexplicable and magical have always appealed to me", he explains – and his works often use unexpected juxtapositions. As the manager of a fertiliser works who provided materials to Driver remarked: "It is a great achievement for a fertiliser bag to become a work of art – and a surprising one."

One of the lessons that Driver learned through his close observation of American expressionism was that colour need not be placed in the service of form but could assert its own identity. In this work, the proximity of the complementary colours orange and blue helps them enhance each other's strength. Recycling discarded tarpaulin material ("Used is a criteria" as Elizabeth Smither notes in her poem, *Pouch for Don*) Driver finds his colour ready-made. He affects an informality which seems casual, but the bands of colour are carefully measured out against each other, their distance from the wall and each other balanced to create shadows and depth. By hanging shiny panels in front of the colour, Driver invites a reflective response.

Driver instructs people to stop looking for meanings in his work, saying "I am simply exploiting colour and form in relationship one to the other. What you see is what the painting really is. There is no story behind it. No inner significance." This work keeps the play between warm and cool colours constant but its free-floating steel parts offer change, and a different effect to every viewer.

Lynda Tyler

## Art



Don Driver (born 1930)  
*Untitled Construction, 1982, mixed media,*  
*five vinyl sheets and three suspended steel panels,*  
*3087 x 2090 x 640mm*