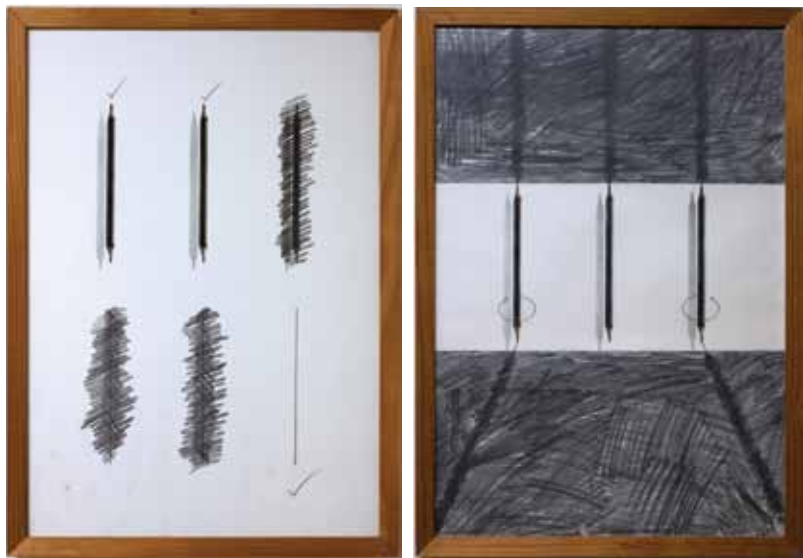


From the collection



Helensville-born folk singer - and erstwhile editor of *Craccum* - Peter Cape was as famous for his beautifully produced art books as he was for the classic kiwiana songs "Tamarunui on the Main Trunk Line" and "All Black Jerseys". In the last decade of his short life he published four surveys of New Zealand painting and crafts based on interviews done with artists as part of his job as arts and religion editor at Radio New Zealand. *Prints and Printmakers in New Zealand* was published in 1974, during the heyday of printmaking in New Zealand.

Featuring 23 artists, Peter Cape's book ranged widely over different intaglio and planographic techniques championed by the practitioners. Representing silkscreen printing was John Lethbridge whose imagery for his silkscreen prints in the early 1970s used the sinuous line and elongated forms of the Aesthetic Movement from the turn of the century. His entwined couples were Aubrey Beardsley-like, the kaleidoscopic colours of their hair and clothes in

perfect registration as testament to Lethbridge's technical skill.

By the time Cape's book appeared, Lethbridge was a student at Elam School of Fine Arts. His period of study there coincided with the post-object movement, and he became

focused on making minimal process works which explored the materials and methods of artmaking. After graduation, he exhibited his Double Ended Series of drawings at Peter Webb's Barrington Galleries before taking the works with him to Sydney. There, one of the works won the Mosman Art Prize and the remainder immediately sold from a dealer gallery, funding overseas travel to London and New York. Returning to Australia, Lethbridge became a Professor of Fine Arts at Sydney College of the Arts in Rozelle where he taught for over two decades.

These two works were purchased from Lethbridge's Elam graduation exhibition. The first shows a pencil sharpened at two ends as a repeated vertical element. This reinforces the business of manufacture: the artifact has been made with the implement that is depicted. The drawing tool shifts its meaning from being part of the process of making, or the "how", to being the "what", or the subject of the image. In that role, it performs as the measure, the figure and

the activator of the pictorial space. The wording of the title of the series is close to "double entendre", a French expression to denote the existence of multiple meanings for a phrase. Lethbridge's double-ended pencils are the visual equivalent of this, and he works with a visual pun, the lead in the pencil very much in evidence.

The first drawing shows two super-realistic pencils together in a row at top left. Cleverly rendered to appear suspended in space, they cast a shadow behind them as if lit by an unseen light source on the right. Above them are ticks, as if they have met with the artist's approval, while the third pencil in this row (also hung with a shadow) has been obscured by diagonal shading. Below this row are lined up two blocks of cross hatching, as if two more drawn pencils might have been there but have been thoroughly obliterated as unworthy. Surviving the censorship is a hand-drawn vertical line which ends the progression, like the full-stop in a sentence, which also earns the final tick.

The second image shows the pencils mounted like specimens or equipment in a diagram in a technical manual. An arrow indicates clockwise rotation for the pencil at left while on the right the arrow describes an anticlockwise motion. Contrasting with the meticulous realism of these forms, the background is roughly shaded to create an illusion of depth, so that the pencils become architectural, propping up the entry to a room.

Celebrating the graphic arts as they do, these works also marked the end of the artist's period of concentration on drawing, and pointed the way to his future career in sculpture and installation.

Linda Tyler

John Lethbridge, Black double ended series, 1975 body colour