

From the collection

Born in Sydney in 1951, Auckland-based artist John Lyall became a New Zealand resident in 1983 after a three-year period in the late 1970s working on archaeological digs in the UK.

After studying sound and performance as part of a Fine Arts degree at Sydney College of the Arts in the early 1980s, he moved to Auckland and became a secondary school teacher, often recruiting pupils into his performances.

He completed an MFA in sculpture at Elam in 1993 but with such a multi-disciplinary background, Lyall continues to work in many media. He has presented performances in the UK, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, including at the opening of the Aotea Centre, and his cyber opera *Requiem for Electronic Moa* was presented at the Auckland Sound/Culture Festival in 1999. But he is perhaps best known for his exquisite, large-format photographs featuring strange depictions of nature.

During a major renovation of the Auckland War Memorial Museum's animal displays in the 1990s, Lyall was given open access to document this fascinating transition.

The stuffed contents of carefully constructed pictorial narratives of natural history soon merged into strange new ecologies, which Lyall captured in his *The Naming of the Parts* series. Works from this series were shown in "Bright Paradise", the

inaugural Auckland Triennial (curated by present Elam lecturer Allan Smith) in 2001 and later that year one of the photographs was purchased for The University of Auckland art collection.

Lyall's interest in the bizarre ways nature can become culture is also evident in a range of books that bear his name. *Putting Our Town on the Map* (1995), which inspired a set of postage stamps and a TV documentary, focused on New Zealand's culture of giant roadside carrots, cows and gumboots, and was co-authored with Dr Claudia Bell (Sociology).

Although much of Lyall's practice seems to respond to the iconography of New Zealand, and increasingly more exotic places, Australia still features prominently in his work. Recent work has used stuffed animals to re-enact the birdlife he remembers from his mother's back yard in Sydney.

Readers may have noticed Lyall working in the window of Whitcoulls on Queen Street, sharing the space with a menagerie of stuffed pets of varied cultural origins as part of the AK07 Auckland Festival Windows project.

Andrew Clifford



JOHN LYALL *The Naming of the Parts* (the Auckland War Memorial Museum): a Natural History, 1987-2000, colour photograph, 750 x 580, The University of Auckland Art Collection