

# Towards a theory of everything



**A**rtist Patrick Pound has lived in Melbourne for ten years maintaining an exhibition programme in both New Zealand and Australia over that time. In a mid year exhibition at the Adam Gallery, Wellington, Patrick will show a group of work that comes from his long engaging series called *Towards a theory of everything*. For this exhibition, Patrick has been collaborating with two Australian artists/photographers, Charles Green and Lyndell Brown.

A major 1999 work from the series, exhibited at Anna Bibby Gallery in Auckland last year, was titled *Systematic-towards a theory of everything, 1999* and has been purchased by the Chartwell Collection. Sue Gardiner spoke to Patrick about this work and his trans-Tasman experiences.

**S.G. Patrick, can you tell me about *Systematic-towards a theory of everything, 1999*?**

P.P. It is a very large collage on six blackboards and is a key part of a larger series I am involved in which deals with the way we habitually use knowledge systems to order our worlds. I am interested in how we describe our world, how we explain it.

**S.G. The blackboard is traditionally seen as a way of organising and presenting information – of scheduling time, solving problems and emphasising expertise. We have all spent many years supposedly gaining knowledge from a blackboard!**

P.P. McCahon's *Teaching Aids* has been an important reference point for this work – there is a definite feel of the school room in it. Hannah Hoch's scrapbooks, Krutikov's *Diploma Project*, Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* panels, Richter's *Atlas* and Kabakov's bulletin boards all take a similar approach. This work of mine includes a stamp album cover, a model aeroplane manual, a page from a porcelain guide, a found photograph, pages from a violin teacher's book, a gallery floor plan, a German language book, even an old camera case. The list seems endless! I buy from second hand bookshops the way artists once drew from nature. People have started to give me things they find as well.

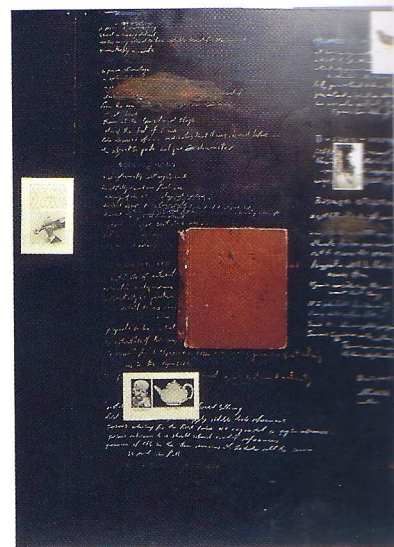
**S.G. What kind of activities do you focus on when you do your research?**

P.P. I am particularly fascinated by "the eccentric collector" – a person who tackles the job of describing the world in a manic, eccentric way. For example, I have a book, a thesaurus, which presents six thousand ways that booksellers can describe the books they sell. People become consumed with the need to classify, order, prioritise, collect and control. I'm interested in the approach of the natural historian, comparing like with like, succession and resemblance. *Systematic* has extracts from this list written in chalk, overlapping across its surface.

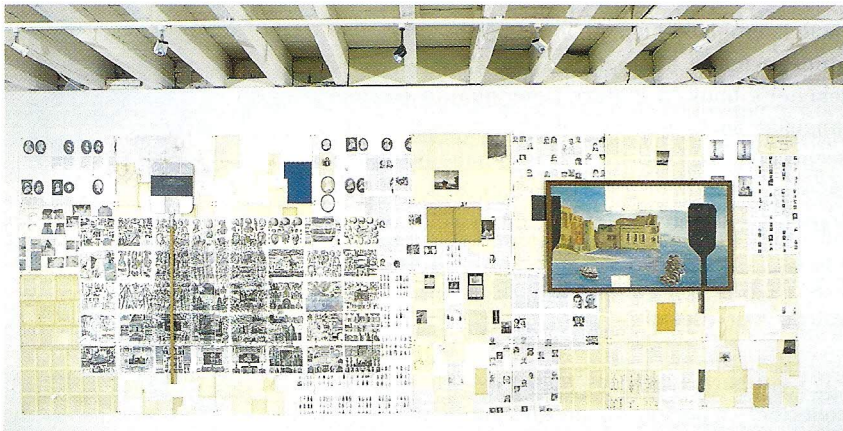
**S.G. What are some other examples of this manic collecting?**

P.P. People try to make sense of the world through assembling, listing and categorising. Collection is classification lived. I am interested in systematic collection from Noah's ark to Hitler, where those collected wore their indexation on their arms. I am interested in why people collect – and love to come across people's collections of old newspaper clippings, artists' and children's scrapbooks and lists of things. Meaning is to be found in the

Detail of *Systematic-towards a theory of everything, 1999*



accumulation of details. There is a point when these activities become obsessive, as if people just can't help themselves. Then there is the more usual manner of making systematic sense of our world from the bank queue, or the airport, to the shopping list. We even have systems for putting things off! From the flow chart to the newspaper summary of the death notices, I'm interested in looking for patterns of intention.



*Before and After - towards a theory of everything, 1999*

**S.G. You are soon to bring a book out about this interest and the towards a theory of everything project. Can you tell us about the book?**

P.P. The book is eighty pages of images of source material and artworks. Dealing with knowledge systems can sound rather dry and highbrow but this reading of everything as a system means the project is extraordinarily, and somewhat dauntingly, open! My project includes everything from Rousseau's *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* to a flier I received in the mail-box claiming a cure for tiredness. The book also contains two suitably labyrinthine essays surveying the topic from butterfly collectors to making a tapestry of a poodle.

**S.G. There have been many New Zealand artists who have moved to Australia and eventually become part of Australian art history. Many lost touch with New Zealand and only exhibited in Australia. For example, Australians are surprised to find out that early modernist painters such as Roland Wakelin, Godfrey Miller and Nancy Borlase were in fact from New Zealand. How have you maintained a presence in both countries and do you still regard yourself as a**

**New Zealand artist after ten years in Australia?**

P.P. I exhibit every year in New Zealand and I often get introduced as a New Zealand artist by Australians. Although I would just describe myself simply as an artist, my work is related to New Zealand. When you spend your formative years in any country, the art of that part of the world is what you are going to use as one of your benchmarks. My work is informed by New Zealand art, by my early interest in McCahon, Walters and Killeen for example. I worked for a while as an assistant to Rick Killeen. I like to joke that I was McCahon's assistant's assistant. What you see regularly influences you. New Zealand is like my index - it is where people know my work, where I can refer back to, as a large part of my audience and support base is in New Zealand.

**S.G. What effect did the move to Australia have on your work?**

P.P. The move to Australia mainly widened things for me. There has been more choice of outlets, more public and artists' spaces, more writing, more people to connect with. Connections between New Zealand and Australian art is not something new, it has strong historical roots and today, it is often the dealers that are really committed to fostering exchanges.

**S.G. You have been in the finalist's selection for the Australian based Moët and Chandon Prize and travelling exhibition twice. What has this meant to you?**

P.P. As part of this prize, my work toured around all the main public galleries in Australia. Curators see your work and then invitations follow to participate in other projects. Also, one of these works was bought by the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne.

**S.G. Do you have any other exhibitions/projects planned for 2000?**

P.P. Yes. I have five works touring various Asian countries including Thailand, China and Malaysia as part of an Australian show called Art and Land. I also have solo shows with Anna Bibby in Auckland and Hamish McKay in Wellington and a Sydney dealer show coming up. ■