

S C O U R

an installation by Joyce Campbell

Scour

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photography: Snow and the artist

essay: Jonathan Bywater

produced on the occasion of the exhibition

Scour an installation by Joyce Campbell

at the Fisher Gallery

Friday 24 March - Sunday 23 April 1995.

Jonathan Bywater

This exhibition was generously assisted by The Howick/
Pakuranga Community Arts Council and
Mend-a-Bath International.



The indent on the mattress beside her showed where he had lain during the night. Now, though, the sheets were cold where the duvet had been turned aside. Light was burning behind the curtains.

The more I cleaned, the more specks and shavings I noticed. Four times I stepped on the vacuum cleaner's switch to stop and pack up, only to spot a few hairs or a scrap of paper trimming so intrusively visible that they had to be the last thing I got, sucked neatly away. By the time I finally bundled the coiled flex and the warm Hoover body back into the cupboard, I could tell I needed to get outdoors for the rest of the day. Twists of sellotape, dropped pins tied down by the carpet.

Showered, she notices, she loses something of her familiar, naked, lived in smell. The freshness of pine woods, the scent of wild flowers, highlights a lack. The fenugreek earth of happiness, the acrid armpits of worry.

On the floor were a pair of jeans, underwear still inside, over the chair a shirt.

Home tired, I wash away sticky afternoon city grime, bus fumes, working up a grey, sickly lather.

Fingers wringing together briskly he soaps up to the hairs on his wrists. Wash house. Porch, gumboots, parkas. The sand soap tears at your hands, leaving dry white skin on the sides of your fingers.

wash and wear, grime, smear,

At school a teacher, in his fifties, told the story of a religious visitor to his house, years earlier. He had walked into the bathroom as his guest was taking a bath, to deliver him a towel, and found him kneeling in the bathwater. He was kneeling, he explained, in order to avoid seeing his own genitals, to keep his thoughts pure.

It wasn't until I was up a ladder, changing the blown bulb that I noticed the walls for the first time. Above a certain height in the kitchen, curving out over the stovetop, the walls were glazed with a golden film of grease. Oily dust, black fleece, floated out from the dull sheen of years of frying, that had gone unscrubbed for so long that it appeared to have soaked into the paint.

washed away, weathered, gnarled,
cured, aired,

So much upset left me worn out, my shoulders heavy, my chest hollow.

dirty sheets, dirty books, dirty looks

In the empty school chapel the Oamaru stone walls carried traces of the pews' occupants. At the end of each row the silhouette of a person could be made out in the grey of body oils, the grey of school uniform. Sweat, breath, the vapours of kneeling and standing, of singing and sitting restless, marking the stone. The figure traces all in sitting position.

The huge terrycloth robe warmly enveloped his scrubbed, pink flesh, like a sleeved candlewick bedspread. With his head tipped forward he stood, eyes closed, towelling off his hair.

The creek had eaten away the dirt at the bottom of the bank where it turned, to follow the fenceline down the far paddock. Poking with a stick down through the weed, you could sometimes chase eels out of hiding. We had learned at school about crocodiles in Australia, how they take their prey underwater and lodge them under banks to soften.

It takes a while for the water to run warm. It is then suddenly hot. A wet hand screws the tap off with the base of the thumb. Quick to the towel and in to eat.

The condensation had cleared from the window. Feeling the side of the empty bath, though, she could detect the lingering warmth of the water. She ran a finger through the fresh grease line three quarters of the way up the side. The black grit of shaving hairs was suspended in the oily band.

In front of me in the queue was the neck of an old man in a black blazer. He carried his sherry flagons in a bowling bag. He had a severe short back and sides, the hair on top neatly watered and combed. Stale tobacco and alcohol stuck out from behind splashings of Old Spice like newspaper shoved behind cushions.

shift, shrift, white sheet, sackcloth and ashes,
soot, smut, smoke,

The yellow soap is lifted up from a gluey pool of clear ooze on the porcelain. Its underside has bled white. The scent of laundry.

For years I couldn't think of him without feeling pointlessly regretful. Time rinsed away the guilt but my conscience was a scourge. Always I'd wonder at the sick feeling of remorse. How can I do anything about it now?

Every morning as she rose to meet the day she would begin by sponging herself of sleep, rubbing it from her eyes, splashing it away from her face.

The high lathe and plaster ceiling, with paper curling away in one corner from the damp of last winter. The strips of lathe mark out a white grid, their edges visible for the black dust that has seeped into the plaster in the spaces between with moisture from the roof space.

The cat's coat had been getting oily and matted, yellowed with age. Then, one evening, he was gone. We scoured the farm but never found him.

In from the sun, from work, she washes, satisfied with the brownish churn of the lather. The suds rinse away.

As a child I remember wondering about all the parts of myself that I had lost in the world around me. The memory is linked to scraping myself on a tree, losing some flesh to the bark. I wondered about leaving some of myself with each trace of blood or toenail clipping. What would it be like to retain awareness of these parts of yourself? I'll forget, lose track of them.

It took years from the clearing of the hillside to the first signs of a slip. Although many roots went with the larger stumps as they were blasted and dragged away, those that bound the slope remained beneath the grass for a long while before they dissolved into the soil.

All her tools had a rich patina, carefully pared and oiled blades, grips comfortably worn in to the grasp.

On the sink bench cups piled up, tea dregs dried into the bottom.

At lunchtime she would visit the toilets, if not to piss first, to wash her hands. Eating, the smell of soap accompanying the food to her mouth.

He moved the armchair to cover the stain in the carpet as the rug would look odd right up to the wall. Every so often he'd think to rearrange the room but found that the stain stopped him.

Before bed, a bath.



JOYCE CAMPBELL: Exhibitions

- 1990 *Small Change*
Group Exhibition C.S.A. Gallery, Christchurch.
- 1990 *Shape of things to come* C.S.A. Gallery / SRAC
- 1992 *Light Sensitive*
Artspace, Auckland.
Sweetness and Light
with Saskia Leek, Archilles House Auckland
Vogue/Vague - New Sculptors / New Sculpture
C.S.A. Gallery, Christchurch.
emBODY
University of Canterbury Women's festival exhibition
Bleach
with Ruth Boysak,
High street Project Gallery, Christchurch.
- 1993 *Gaining Interest*
Group Exhibition, Artspace, Auckland.
Saving Grace
High street Project Gallery, Christchurch.
Women's Lives
Group Exhibition McDougall Art Annex,
Suffer
Group Exhibition Teststrip Gallery, Auckland,
Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington.
Standard Deviation
Set design/ installation Artspace, Auckland.
Gift of the Artist
Group Exhibition Artspace, Auckland.
Constance Törning
Window Project Auckland City Art Gallery.
- 1994 *Art Now - Site, Body, Sign, Material*
The Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa.