

Don Driver Magician: an eco-critical perspective

Don Driver (1930-2011) is considered to be one of New Zealand's foremost assemblage artists. In this paper we intend to explore some of the threads connecting his works, focusing on reading his assemblage sculptures and installations within the context of ecology and animal studies. From this perspective it is clear that Driver was engaging with the conditions of industrial capitalism on a number of levels, exploring the contemporary psyche, our relationship to the natural environment and the rituals of our anthropocentric culture.

The visual aspects of Driver's local New Plymouth, an industrialized, international port, surfaced in his art and led to a preoccupation with energy, creating complex works that can be read as metaphors for the post-modern condition and with powerful premonitions of ecological crisis. His installation 'Burnt Out' at the Adelaide Festival Centre, 1985, addressed issues of weather and temperature increase, its effects on flora and fauna and its metaphorical connection to the human condition. His final work, *Elephants For Sale*, 2010, is evocative of our relationship with animals and deals with enormous questions such as the reality of extinction and the concept of our responsibility for life on this planet.

Excerpts from the film 'Don Driver Magician', made by the presenters, will be used to illustrate the main points. Driver's work will be briefly placed within the context of NZ art and the work of Australian artists such as Rosalie Gascoigne.

Bridget Sutherland works within the arts as a lecturer, documentary film maker, freelance curator and researcher. She is currently lecturing in Visual Arts and Design at ideaschool, Eastern Institute of Technology, NZ. Bridget has directed a feature documentary on the New Zealand musician David Kilgour and on the sculptor Anish Kapoor. She most recently co-produced and edited the film 'Don Driver Magician', a documentary directed by Paul Judge.

Paul Judge lectures at WINTEC in Media Arts. He has directed the short film adaptation of James K Baxter's poem 'Lament for Barney Flanagan' and most recently a documentary on Don Driver entitled 'Don Driver Magician'. He is also a writer on art, politics and environmental issues.

