



Left, *Untitled, Interior*, undated photograph, by Joanna Margaret Paul. Above, *Still Life, Barrys Bay*, c1975. Below, *Stations of the Cross*, 1971.

The book maps each phase of Paul's life. In 1970 she moved to Dunedin and the following year married fellow artist Jeffrey Harris. Harris' stylistic debt to Paul doesn't usually get much oxygen, but it's unavoidable once you see works such as Paul's 1971 *Stations of the Cross*. You can see why her work dramatically evolved to distinguish herself in later years.

**M**odernism, dominated by swaggering men in pursuit of transcendence, tended to eschew mundane, messy home life as unworthy. Navigating the hurdles of managing motherhood and an art career – aspects of herself she did not see as mutually exclusive – Paul took up the domestic setting as her subject and made it an asset, throwing a visual hand grenade of colour and line at the kitchen table or the loving, intimate portraits of her children.

Her first solo exhibition was in 1968, and in 1975 she was included in the celebrated Christchurch exhibition "Six Women Artists". Then, in 1983, she was made a Frances Hodgkins fellow at the University of Otago, parting ways with Harris the subsequent year, moving to Wellington, then settling in Whanganui.

Paul lived in the river town for the rest of her life, excluding stints in other places including her year-long Rita Angus Residency in Wellington in 1993. The Sarjeant held the first major survey of her work in 1989. Her inter- and multidisciplinary

approach foretakens many present-day practices. I particularly love the drawing works of the late 1980s and 90s – the minimal colour and line, ingenious use of negative space, flatness and stencilled inscriptions – and her earlier paintings, with their dreamily skewed perspective. They are truly things of wonder.

Tragically, Paul died at just 57, apparently overcome by fumes while bathing in

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a thermal pool in Rotorua. She left behind about nine published books and some 5000 artworks, ranging across drawing, photography, painting and film, much of it never exhibited. *Imagined in the context of a room* provides a much-needed, accessible overview of Paul's evolving career – as a pioneering artist, poet, mother, feminist and woman. It's a wonderfully designed book full of stunning art by an extraordinary artist. ■

**JOANNA MARGARET PAUL:** *Imagined in the context of a room*, eds Lauren Gutsell and Lucy Hammonds (Dunedin Public Art Gallery, \$65)



## Twisted sister

Patricia Donovan's latest is a taut tale of dark family secrets.

by GILL SOUTH

**T**here's nothing like a novel that points out the big bad baddie at the outset, lets some of the nasty stuff play out, then makes you doubt the reality you thought you were operating in. **THE MADISON GAP**, the second novel by Kiwi writer Patricia Donovan (Mary Egan, \$29.99), creates a feeling of unease from the beginning, as Lexi Madison welcomes her older sister Chrissy, who regularly comes to stay at her Glebe, Sydney, home. This time she seems to be intending to stay longer than usual, giving little detail of the state of her marriage, which seems in turmoil.

During the visit, the sultry Chrissy seems intent on throwing out lures to any attractive man she sees, including Lexi's husband, Conor, who says he wants Chrissy out. Lexi, who has always looked up to her sister and hates confrontation, watches with horror as a number of events play out, but it's only when things get really bad that she decides to investigate what has triggered her sister's antisocial behaviour. It's tautly paced and succinctly written, and Donovan cranks the pressure up nicely, propelling Lexi forward into making some changes. Lexi begins to question whether the life she is so proud of is really worth preserving. Or has she just ended up here by accident? Enjoyable but uncomfortable reading. ■

