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TIME TRAVEL

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## TIME TRAVEL

Jane Venis

I write this editorial at a time when the new coalition government has been in office less than a year and is already wreaking havoc here in Aotearoa New Zealand. Once again, education has become a 'political football.' For those of us teaching and researching in art and design education, a non-STEM<sup>1</sup> area, we are aware of our increasing vulnerability. However, disturbing as this is for our sector, it is only one of many areas under threat. In this editorial I touch on two key areas of concern, the Treaty Principles Bill and the Fast-track Approvals Bill.

David Seymour's Treaty Principles Bill is truly terrifying. How could the coalition government even consider supporting this nonsensical document to select committee stage? What sort of government would consider changing the interpretation of our nation's founding document? Melanie Nelson writes in *E Tangata*, "While the Treaty technically can't be edited, the Treaty Principles Bill could profoundly alter its practical application."<sup>2</sup>

The current treaty principles have been developed through decades of scholarship and commitment, and a deep understanding of te reo Māori and tikanga Māori. Expert translation and analysis of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and The Treaty of Waitangi have been developed and fine-tuned, leading to a deeper understanding of the differences in interpretation of the Māori and English versions. Consequently, as a country, there has been a growing acknowledgement of the pain and damage caused to Māori through colonisation. The current principles are a living document used widely in local, regional and national government and in many institutions from the time that the Waitangi Tribunal was established.<sup>3</sup>

Enter the coalition government. Seymour's solution is profoundly simple – he wants to remove all reference to Māori from his newly formed Treaty Principles. Ah David! Of course it's just so easy, as you blindly point out, because we are all the same, every-single-one-of-us, end of story. It is no wonder that you want to take us back to the heydays of assimilation of mid last century. I pause to wonder – as Minister of Space, is Judith Collins also minister of time travel? Has she been delegated to assist you, our hero of oneness? I can just imagine you in your superhero outfit – the light blue tights and yellow cape and your two huge right wings. Will you fly in ever decreasing circles? One can only hope.

Operating in tandem with the regressive Treaty Principles Bill has been the systematic removal of te reo Māori from use in government ministries, once again sending a message that the Māori language is not valued. However, it is heartening that there are thousands who have taken to the streets and will continue to register the growing fury at this populist approach.

Protest can take many forms and in times of political turmoil artists' voices will not be silenced. The question arises: "What can artists say through their work that cannot be said in other ways?" This issue of *Scope: Art and Design* is bursting with insights from writers and makers whose work is focused on environmental, cultural and feminist concerns. I will also briefly link these key issues to some major national and international exhibitions.

It is ironic that at a time when the government is seen to be suppressing Iwi Māori voices that the Mataaho Collective, comprising four Māori women – Bridget Reweti, Erena Baker, Sarah Hudson and Terri Te Tau – have won the prestigious Golden Lion at the 2024 Venice Biennale for their collective work, *Takapau*. "Referring to matrilinear

traditions of textiles with its womb-like cradle, the installation is both a cosmology and a shelter," the jury said in their citation for the prize, which was read out by jury president Julia Bryan-Wilson. "It's impressive scale is a feat of engineering that was only made possible by the collective strength and creativity of the group."<sup>4</sup> This huge woven latticed work is created from polyester hi-vis tie-downs and forms a waharoa or entranceway to the Arsenale section of the exhibition.<sup>5</sup>

In this issue of *Scope: Art and Design*, Isaiah Okeroa also uses textiles in a non-traditional way. Harakeke strands form a projection surface for his video work *Kiwa*. In his article, he writes of finding strength and grounding in his identity through exploration of whakapapa, tikanga and the use of taonga pūoro. This is the first of several artist pages written by BVA Honours graduates. *Kiwa* was shown in the Rear Window of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

Identity is also at the forefront of Eva Ding's writing about Chinese paper cutting, a female cultural practice that embodies specific symbols designed to pass on information to other women. She explores this traditional Chinese practice through a contemporary feminist lens. In contrast to Ding's slowly unfolding, evocative and personal text is another article with a feminist focus. "The Reconfigure Project" by Michele Beevors is based on the work of a Dunedin feminist artist collective. It blends reflection on the various practices of the artists with contemporary feminist theory. It also serves as a riveting curatorial article where, at times, the writer's fury is palpable.

There is also growing fury regarding the current government's total indifference to environmental and climate-change concerns. Once again, the coalition time-machine has been called to action in support of the Fast-track Approvals Bill. This time, we are hurtling backwards to the Muldoon era's "Think Big" policies where major hydro, roading and mining projects caused not only mass environmental destruction, but also major economic blowouts. If this Bill passes in its current form, it will be a disaster for the environment, as all power to make decisions on major infrastructure projects is vested in only three government ministers. Although there is an expert panel to consider submissions, "Conservation groups have been quick to point out that, no matter the recommendations of the panel, the legislation gives those three ministers final say!"<sup>6</sup>

Visiting "Folded in the Hills," the retrospective exhibition of Marilyn Webb (1937-2021, Ngāpuhi, Te Roroa and Ngāti Kahu) at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, her lifetime of environmental activism comes into focus. One of Muldoon's "Think Big" proposals, the Aramoana aluminium smelter, was a theme of both Marilyn Webb and Ralph Hotere's oeuvre. However, many of Webb's print and pastel works focus on less well-known but equally fragile environments such as Lake Mahinerangi and the Ida Valley. "It is these representations of the isolated or endangered landscape that have provided a framework for Webb's environmental activism, which is a defining characteristic of her art."<sup>7</sup>

The voices of artists and designers whose work centres on environmental issues are vital. In her Designers' Page, "Backyard Biodiversity | Manaakitanga te Taiao," Meg Brasell-Jones is focusing on "think small" or, more accurately, think local. She presents the graphic design development within the community project and highlights the commitment of a large network of individuals and organisations who collaborated to make it happen. Kinship with the environment is also a theme in Sara McGaughan's "The Ōtepoti Ecogothic." Her haggis-like giant latex sculptures house living ecosystems of plants in soil that continue their cycles of life, death and decay.

A third grouping of texts focuses on residencies in the ceramic studio. The first is by Jeanne-Claire Dubois, who documents her road trip around Aotearoa New Zealand as she discovers various clays and sands to be used her ceramic experiments. The article is filled with the excitement of her discoveries. A second article, "Fellow Travellers," by visiting artist Joseph Batt, details various processes and techniques alongside his experiences with fellow artists in the ceramic studio.

With so many articles, it is not possible to introduce them all, so please enjoy *Scope: Art and Design* 26, knowing that more surprises will unfold.

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Jane is the co-editor of *The Politics of Design: Privilege and Prejudice in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and South Africa* (2021) and *Art and Design: History, Theory, Practice* (2017). She is now in her fifth year as editor of the journal *Scope: Art and Design*. Her own art writing links with her studio practice, exploring the fertile ground between art and design. Jane is a Professor at Otago Polytechnic working with postgraduate students at the Dunedin School of Art. She has PHD in Fine Arts from Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Australia, and an MFA (with Distinction), from the Dunedin School of Art.

- 1 Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).
- 2 Melanie Nelson, "Painting over Te Tiriti," *E Tangata*, 17 March 2024.  
<https://e-tangata.co.nz/comment-and-analysis/treaty-principles-bill-painting-over-te-tiriti/>
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Mark Amery, "NZ Artists Win Prestigious Biennale Award," *Otago Daily Times*, 21 April 2024,  
<https://www.odt.co.nz/entertainment/arts/nz-artists-win-prestigious-venice-biennale-award>
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Kate Green, "Fast-track Bill: Which Projects Could be Approved for Quicker Consent?" *Radio NZ*, 12 April 2024,  
<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/514060/fast-track-bill-which-projects-could-be-approved-for-quicker-consent>
- 7 Lauren Gutsell, Lucy Hammonds and Bridget Reweti, "Marilynn Webb: Folded in the Hills," *Dunedin Public Art Gallery*,  
<https://dunedin.art.museum/exhibitions/past/marilynn-webb-2/>