

# scope

*Contemporary Research Topics*

art & design 30

August 2025

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Contemporary Research Topics

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The series *Scope (Art & Design)* aims to engage discussion on contemporary research in the visual arts and design. It is concerned with views and critical debates surrounding issues of practice, theory, history and their relationships as manifested through the visual and related arts and activities, such as sound, performance, curation, tactile and immersive environments, digital scapes and methodological considerations. Within Aotearoa/New Zealand and its Pacific neighbours as a backdrop, but not its only stage, *Scope (Art & Design)* seeks to address the matters which concern contemporary artists and arts enquirers in their environments of practice.

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## MAKING AND DOING

Edward Hanfling

What I am going to write about here might seem stupidly obvious, but sometimes, in our wisdom, we lose sight of the stupidly obvious. Everything published in this journal is research. In particular, the various texts each represent (to use the simplest term) practice research. I use 'practice research' to describe a form of research that primarily involves making or doing, including, as is sometimes the case, making or doing (seemingly) nothing. I say 'primarily' because it is the making or doing that drives a practice research project.

In some instances, without the benefit of reading this journal, say, we might see the results of practice research but not 'see' the research itself. An artwork or design, exhibition or event may be said to embody knowledge, in the sense that it would not exist without knowledge having been put into it. But whether the work communicates that knowledge is a different matter. It does not have to do so. An artwork, for example, is not expected to be simply a vehicle for a specific content; in fact, the indefinable or uncertain nature of the content is often what is considered to give it value.

The difficulty in seeing the research in practice has been a significant obstacle to widespread acceptance of practice as research. Gaining such acceptance has taken a good deal of time and effort – not least, the effort that has gone into research about practice research. The attempt to demonstrate how and why making and doing stuff can produce a research contribution or new knowledge has produced a copious literature, much of which is tedious – ironically, a drily theoretical defence of practical inquiry. There is a case for suggesting that the attempt was misguided – that it would have been more honest to assert that making and doing stuff has value in itself, rather than bending over backwards to fit it into existing (and largely Eurocentric) definitions of 'research' – playing someone else's game. But the attempt was worthy and ultimately worthwhile – for a while (more on that soon).

We got there. (Or you did. After all, I am an art historian, so I have never had to agitate for my research to be recognised as such.) For many years, artists and designers have been happily logging their works and exhibitions as 'research outputs' and showing how they make a 'contribution to the research environment' – certainly since 2003, when, on the recommendation of the Tertiary Education Advisory Committee, the Labour-led government introduced the Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF).

'Happily'? There were admittedly grumblings and rumblings along the way. Preparing a portfolio of outputs and contributions could consume time that might otherwise have been devoted to actually doing research. It was not always a happy experience to have the quality of one's research judged by others. The emphasis on 'international' recognition caused some to wonder how New Zealand-based activities could fail to be international (unless New Zealand is on a different planet). Polytech-based researchers typically have a smaller proportion of their positions allocated for research and thus always seemed at a disadvantage compared to those in the universities. And, in the early years, practice research did not seem to get the same credit as research in other (more venerable) fields.

Still, during a period when enrolments in tertiary arts and humanities programmes declined (as, commensurately, student fees and debt increased), it was sheer good luck that the survival of these allegedly useless disciplines was not entirely dependent on bums on seats. The PBRF also supported the principle that degree-level courses depend on research-informed teaching; without the always-changing knowledge generated by researchers engaging in and

with research and other researchers, the content of those courses would calcify, become static, intransigent and dangerously repressive. Moreover, there were well-meaning and intelligent academics involved in running the PBRF; they responded to, rather than reacted against, the various criticisms of the system and increasingly made room for the peculiarities of practice research. The research and the research-based funding system shaped each other to their mutual benefit.

This journal is a legacy of what now seem like heady times. Since 2006, it has helped staff and (mainly but not exclusively postgraduate) students at Otago Polytechnic, as well as artists and art-writers from further afield (sometimes those who have been artists-in-residence at Dunedin School of Art, sometimes researchers with no affiliation to this institution finding in *Scope* a conducive, peer-reviewed forum), demonstrate that what they do is research.

It would be easy to diminish what goes on in these pages as a kind of Baudrillardian hyper-real representation of a representation of research – a façade, erected not to pass off as research something that is not research, but to satisfy a bureaucratic demand for documentary evidence of research where it is not able to be seen in things made or done (that recurrent difficulty for practice research referred to earlier). The journal, in these terms, is merely a means to an end: it helps to fill the coffers and perpetuate the programmes offered by the institution and the jobs of those who teach them.

Perhaps there was a pragmatic reason for establishing the journal. Perhaps, also, we should celebrate such pragmatism, given that the so-called ‘creative industries’ are typically regarded as the most airy-fairy and economically deficient of all the industries. But it would be stupid – or dishonest – to dismiss the content of the journal, which, even a cursory reading of two decades of circulation reveals to be variously substantial, deep, informed, complex, incisive, questioning, far-reaching and keenly felt.

In the very first (2006) issue, Leoni Schmidt wrote in her editorial of the importance of multiple methods of communicating the embodied knowledge of making and doing: “It is in the productive tension between the word and the image, making and writing, practice and theory, theory and history, where new understandings can happen.” I find in this a parallel with my own suggestion, in *Scope: Art & Design* 24 (2023), that the ‘research contribution’ of practice research be defined by “what happens when an artist registers and reflects on dissonances or collisions between self, subject, materials, field, discipline and world.” Both these attempts to support the value of practice research identify a certain friction between the making or doing and whatever else that activity rubs up against (“tension,” “dissonances,” “collisions”). I would further suggest that the ‘research outputs’ and ‘contributions to research’ of practice research are not useful or functional in the way that many other forms of making and doing in the world are – that is, they produce friction for precisely the reason that they are not productive in the usual ways of manufacturing and selling, exploiting and despoiling and generally having catastrophic consequences for the planet and its inhabitants, human and non-human.

Of course, there are those who defend the arts and humanities against the charge of economic uselessness by contradicting it: study in these disciplines, they say, may not lead directly to a specific job, but it produces people (or ‘people people,’ if that is the plural of a ‘people person’) with the ‘soft skills,’ the critical thinking and clear communication to be assets to any industry. But why should anyone aspire to be an asset to any productive, and therefore destructive, industry? It is better, surely, to make and do in the aimless manner of practice research, not to answer a question but to raise questions, not to follow an established methodology but to make it up as one goes along, not to produce something with a predetermined effect, meaning or result but to observe “what happens” when one brings about unexpected or unstable relationships.

“We got there,” I wrote earlier; practice research earned its keep in a performance-based research environment. At Otago Polytechnic, as I suspect at other institutions, art and design research has more than earned its keep; it has propped up other, less research-active disciplines. Now, though, research – of any kind, in any discipline – is no longer valuable currency. The PBRF has gone. With the rise of stupid, or dishonest (or both), rich, white men



pursuing power through right-ring populism, there is little demand for new knowledge. Quite the contrary: to reimpose the old non-inclusive social order on a populace who have been persuaded to believe they are finally being included – to go back to the old ways of oppression and exploitation – requires not encouraging (as I described earlier as the goal of the PBRF) “research-informed teaching” and “the always-changing knowledge generated by researchers engaging in and with research and researchers,” but an anti-research culture in which tertiary education programmes are forced to “calcify, become static, intransigent and dangerously repressive” or, better still, are closed down altogether. Research into climate change is merely an impediment to continuing the old ways of wreaking havoc on the world; research in the arts and humanities only distracts the masses from their proper purpose, doing the labour of making money for wealthy individuals and corporations.

It took a while – and a little tinkering with the ‘rules’ – for practice research to be recognised as research. Just as we were making the most of our meagre winnings, the rules changed. It is possible that it is no longer worth playing the research game. But we have no stake in the new game. What to do? Just keep on making and doing, I suppose (and I should emphasise again that making and doing what appears to be nothing has value in the current climate). When the currently dominant ideologies and the systems they uphold come to naught and survival becomes the name of the game, I hazard a guess that those who have been making and doing without producing more and more destruction will be those whose knowledge is immensely useful. *Then*, we can talk about the value of ‘soft skills.’ Then, practice (or, as one might put it, existing) will be the only form of research worth doing. And I doubt anyone will bother doing as I am stupidly doing now, writing an academic plea for the obvious value of practice research.

**Edward Hanfling** teaches art history and theory and supervises postgraduate research at Dunedin School of Art. He writes regularly as a critic for *Art New Zealand*, and has published articles in journals such as the *Burlington Magazine*, the *Journal of Australian and New Zealand Art*, the *Journal of Visual Art Practice* and *Third Text*, with a particular focus on art historical issues of judgement and value. Published books include *250 Years of New Zealand Painting* (Bateman 2021), as co-author and co-editor. He currently serves as editor for *Scope (Art & Design)* and as co-editor of *Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue*.

# PRETENDING THE WORLD IS FUNNY AND FOREVER: REFLECTION ON AESTHETICS OF HAUNTOLOGICAL LIMINALITY

Natalie Wardell



Figure 1. *Pretending the World is Funny and Forever*, installation view, 2024.  
Multi-sensory installation. Photograph: Natalie Wardell.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This article draws upon a three-and-a-half-year research inquiry undertaken as part of my Master of Fine Arts at the Dunedin School of Art. The final exhibition, *Pretending the World is Funny and Forever*, presented as the culmination of this research, is discussed in the concluding section. Central to this paper is an exploration of how my research shaped my art practice, focusing on the conceptual strategies that informed its aesthetic, material, olfactory and auditory dimensions.

The structure of the article is deliberately referential, tracing the theoretical genealogy underpinning hauntological-liminal aesthetics. Within this framework, references are not simply citations but act as revenants – ghostly returns of prior intellectual gestures.

The structure reflects this methodological approach. It begins with a theoretical framing that guided the research, followed by three interwoven sections: the first explores the concept of the poor image and degraded visibility; the second examines liminal space; and the third investigates sound and moving image as affective technologies. The final section analyses my MFA installation as a culmination of the hauntological-liminal concerns developed throughout the paper.

## CONCEPTUAL STRATEGIES

“Capitalism is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and the relics.”

Mark Fisher<sup>1</sup>

The term ‘millennial’ refers to those (like me) born at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries – a generation shaped by the cultural and economic conditions of late capitalism. In much of the Western world, millennials have come of age under the influence of neoliberalism, an economic and political philosophy that has reshaped global policy since the 1980s. In the United Kingdom, this shift was led by Margaret Thatcher (Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990) and in the United States by Ronald Reagan (President from 1981 to 1989). In New Zealand, similar reforms were introduced between 1984 and 1988 under the label “Rogernomics,” named after Labour finance minister Roger Douglas.<sup>2</sup>

Neoliberalism promotes free markets, deregulation and the minimisation of state involvement in economic and social affairs. Framed as a remedy for economic stagnation, it casts government control as a source of inefficiency. These policies gained global traction through institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which advocated for neoliberal reforms in developing countries. Although this model promised revitalisation and growth, it ultimately exacerbated economic inequality and eroded community cohesion by prioritising corporate interests over public welfare.

It is this condition that arguably has drawn so many members of the millennial generation (but also people across all ages and locations) to the work of Mark Fisher. Fisher, also known under his blogging alias k-punk, was an influential English political and cultural theorist and a lecturer in the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London. His sudden death in 2017 had a lasting impact not only on his students and colleagues at Goldsmiths, but also on many people who felt seen and understood through his work, whether through his blog or the hours of lectures posted to *YouTube*.

Many young people are turning to the work of Mark Fisher to better understand the world we live in – a world that often feels unmoored. Time appears to accelerate, while cultural and political movements remain stagnant or regress. Fisher’s writing resonates with the emotional and psychological effects of this condition, one shaped not by a new phenomenon but by the first generation to be fully immersed in – and affected by – communicative capitalism, where technological advancement sustains and intensifies capitalist logics of distraction, performance and affective capture.

I first encountered Mark Fisher through his book *Capitalist Realism* (2009), in which he critiques the ideological stagnation of contemporary life.<sup>3</sup> Fisher defines capitalist realism as a condition in which neoliberal capitalism is perceived as not only dominant but inescapable – permeating everything from our work-life boundaries, further blurred by smartphones and email, to the pressure to monetise every aspect of our lives. Hobbies become marketable skill sets; relationships become networks. Social interaction is increasingly measured in likes, followers and digital metrics, producing a transactional atmosphere that mirrors market logic.

Accompanying this is a pervasive cultural stasis: years blur together, while media endlessly recycles itself through reboots, remakes and remixes, making it increasingly difficult to imagine a future that does not merely repackage the past. This affective landscape resonates with the lived experience of many millennials and Gen Z – particularly

in the West – where younger generations are often projected to earn less than their parents, experiencing increased precarity and pressure. As Australian journalist Miles Herbert reflected in 2024, entering his thirties brought the realisation that “the life my parents had would never – no matter how hard I grafted – be mine.”<sup>4</sup> He captures a common generational dissonance: the gap between inherited ideals and the harsh material conditions of the present. Within the neoliberal doctrine of personal responsibility, individuals are left to navigate rising education debt, inaccessible healthcare and impossible benchmarks of success. Fisher's theory of capitalist realism captures this foreclosure of the imagination – the loss of even the possibility of imagining a different future.

Within this environment, emotional energy is not merely suppressed, it is absorbed and redirected through a process often referred to as ‘affective capture.’ This term describes the way emotional expression, especially within digital and neoliberal systems, is co-opted and commodified rather than leading to real structural change. Social media platforms, for example, turn emotions like grief, outrage and hope into content streams and data points, generating engagement while neutralising their transformative potential. As Fisher notes, “affective disorders are forms of captured discontent.” In this context, emotional life is circulated endlessly through likes, shares and metrics, but rarely results in collective action or material shifts.<sup>5</sup> The ecological consequences of consumer capitalism – pollution, climate collapse, and the rise of single-use culture – only intensify this affective saturation. As the global elite look towards Mars as a speculative refuge, many are left grappling with a future that feels increasingly fragmented, deferred and haunted.

Capitalist realism is not a specific set of positions that people hold. It is a state of affairs – an ingrained cultural logic, or what Fisher calls a “psychic infrastructure” – that clouds our ability to see the world differently and imagine alternative social futures. Put another way, we are living in a time characterised by a unique blend of highly popular ways of making sense of the world.<sup>6</sup> When combined as they are now, these ideological structures make this attitude not only possible to hold but also exceedingly difficult to escape. It is a perfect storm.

In *Ghosts of My Life* (2014), Fisher explored cultural responses to capitalist realism, reintroducing ‘hauntology’ to describe a pervasive sense of nostalgia for the unfulfilled potential of the past.<sup>7</sup> This term cleverly intertwines the metaphor of a ghost or spectre with the philosophical theory of ontology, evident, for instance, in German philosopher Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927).<sup>8</sup> Heidegger highlighted the concept of ‘the human’ as integral to understanding the ontological dimension of time, examining the temporal relationship of human existence to being (‘sein’) through a phenomenological analysis of human existence (‘dasein’).<sup>9</sup>

Within the context of hauntology, ontology becomes paradoxical: it traditionally concerns the nature of being, yet haunting belongs to the realm of non-being or the absence of a return to being itself. In a sense, hauntology places essences back into non-existence and transcendental phantoms into phenomenology. Therefore, hauntology becomes a temporal question; while a ghost exists outside of time and place, its ontology creates a tangible presence. Heidegger's notion of ‘being-toward-death’ emphasises the intrinsic connection between our awareness of mortality and our experience of time, highlighting the importance of the present moment and encouraging a more authentic engagement with life.<sup>10</sup> This ontology brings beginnings and endings. But what happens when the dead keep returning?

Hauntology is deeply woven into critiques of capitalism, first appearing in French philosopher Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (1993).<sup>11</sup> Derrida examined the haunting nature of Karl Marx's thought, particularly the influence of Marx and Friedrich Engels' *Communist Manifesto* (1848) on the political and cultural discourse of the time. Derrida's concept of hauntology examines how the past continues to influence the present and future. It suggests that, despite its seeming non-existence in the present, the past persists and exerts influence.

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the perceived triumph of neoliberalism, Derrida addressed the ghost of Marxism within the dichotomy between capitalism and Marxism; as with any binary opposition, the one cannot be free of the other. The refusal to recognise this is exemplified by Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), which argued that the collapse of communism marked the victory of capitalism and that

Western neoliberal democracy represented the pinnacle of human ideological evolution and the universalisation of governance.<sup>12</sup> During the Cold War – a period marked by intense anti-communism in the West and near-nuclear confrontations – neoliberalism was predicted to dominate globally. Fukuyama's vision of an 'end of history' proposed a utopian reality of Western democracy akin to Plato's *Republic*.<sup>13</sup> However, despite the Cold War's end, the fear of nuclear destruction persisted and communism was not eradicated, leaving the world to grapple with the challenges of this neoliberal 'Eden.'

Within the twenty-first century, we are now faced with a devastating avalanche of compounding crises known as the meta-crisis, far greater than that of the Cold War. The meta-crisis encapsulates the deep, complex nature of contemporary crises, including climate change, pollution, economic instability, housing shortages, nuclear threats and mental health issues, culminating in existential crises.<sup>14</sup> Derrida's hauntology helps us to understand the unfulfilled promises and latent conflicts of Fukuyama's neoliberal triumphalism, now manifesting in these pervasive and interlinked global crises.

These factors led me to examine the effects of what I have come to call 'hauntological liminality.' This evolved into an exploration of what occurs aesthetically when hauntology becomes a central focus – both in cultural production and through trends of expression that emerge via a phenomenological connection with being in the world. These trends reflect emotional landscapes aligned with Fisher's concept of hauntology, revealing a shared affective atmosphere shaped by nostalgia and anxiety, brought about by the unfulfilled promises of our past ideas of the future. Therefore, this article is a reflection on the affects and effects of hauntological liminality. The hauntological dimension emerges from the unfulfilled hopes for the future – what Fisher refers to as 'lost futures' – in which we are haunted by past visions of progress that never materialised. Liminality arises from a pervasive sense of stuckness and suspension, produced by the long-term impacts of neoliberal policies on both individuals and communities.<sup>15</sup>

The term 'liminality' originated in anthropology and sociology, notably through Arnold van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage* (1906) and Victor Turner's *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969).<sup>16</sup> Van Gennep outlined three stages in rites of passage: the rites of separation, where individuals are removed from their previous social roles; the transitional stage, where individuals undergo the middle phase of a ritual process; and the rites of incorporation, where individuals emerge into new roles within their social structure.<sup>17</sup>

Turner categorised these stages into pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal phases, particularly emphasising the significance of the liminal.<sup>18</sup> From the 1960s to the early 1980s, Turner expanded on van Gennep's work by developing his theory of 'communitas'.<sup>19</sup> Derived from Latin, *communitas* describes an unstructured community where individuals are considered equal and experience unity within liminality. Turner argued that rituals create liminal spaces that break down social norms and emphasise collective identity through symbolism. These rituals facilitate social change by temporarily suspending participants from their social roles, allowing both individuals and communities to engage in new developments.

Hauntological liminality, however, indefinitely extends the temporary suspension typically found in the liminal stage of a rite of passage, resulting in a breakdown – or loss – of *communitas*. Philosopher Byung-Chul Han, in his 2019 work *The Disappearance of Rituals*, links this condition to the effects of neoliberalism.<sup>20</sup> Han argues that rituals, through symbolic repetition, once provided a sense of being "at home in the world."<sup>21</sup> Yet, in the twenty-first century, we have become trapped in a loop of cultural and symbolic production devoid of depth, leaving many without the grounding, stability and communal belonging that traditional rites and rituals once offered. This echoes Mark Fisher's critique in *Capitalist Realism*, where he writes: "Capitalism is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and the relics."<sup>22</sup>

Together, Han and Fisher frame a cultural condition marked by symbolic exhaustion and emotional dislocation, where the loss of ritual not only disrupts collective meaning-making but leaves individuals in a state of suspended passage – with no resolution, no arrival, and no shared transformation.



## AESTHETICS

To understand what constitutes an aesthetic experience as hauntological and liminal, one must consider its corresponding affects, which reflect conditions often driven by nostalgia. Cultural theorist Svetlana Boym, in *The Future of Nostalgia* (2011), describes nostalgia as not only a reaction to spatial displacement but also a profound shift in how we culturally perceive time – as a “historical emotion” that seeks grounding in an increasingly unstable present.<sup>23</sup> This temporal nostalgia manifests through a revival of aesthetic markers such as retro media, fashion and technology, including the resurgence of vinyl records, Polaroid cameras, cassette tapes and reboots of television shows and movies.

A sense of longing is particularly pronounced in millennial nostalgia, where those who came of age during the 1990s and early 2000s experience an emotional attachment to the aesthetics and media of that period. This yearning is often intensified by contemporary feelings of precarity, disconnection and uncertainty, producing cultural expressions steeped in retro aesthetics, digital melancholia and the recycling of the past. Aesthetic experience, in this context, stems from ideas of analogue technological innovation through digital repositioning, or through the aesthetics of early home computer systems and memories of childhood homes and public spaces such as swimming pools, shopping malls and playgrounds. One expression of this involves the use of technology that emerged around the late 1980s and '90s, such as first-generation home video (VHS) cameras and early digital cameras.

In his book *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past* (2010), British music journalist Simon Reynolds observes how contemporary culture has become increasingly obsessed with its own past, continuously remixing and repurposing historical artefacts to evoke a comforting sense of familiarity – even for times never personally experienced.<sup>24</sup> This phenomenon reflects a broader collapse of historical consciousness, which philosopher and cultural theorist Fredric Jameson theorised is produced by late-stage capitalism, creating a “glossy mirage” of history, where the past is no longer authentically retrieved but stylised into simulations and pastiches.<sup>25</sup> A nostalgic mode develops as a result of postmodernist cannibalisation and appropriation of past styles, creating an overstimulating imitation that dislocates history. As Jameson describes, “the history of aesthetic styles displaces ‘real history,’” resulting in a paradoxical nostalgia for an imagined past.<sup>26</sup> This aestheticised unreality shapes the development of hauntological and liminal aesthetics, emerging through the nostalgic mode – an impulse reignited by an affective longing and a contemporary yearning for a generational idea of a lost future.

I argue that artists who engage with hauntological liminality do so in an attempt to aesthetically subvert the nostalgic impulse – present within Jameson’s “glossy mirage” – by disrupting temporality through artistic methodologies that, like a ghost, are out of time and place, moving through the “ruins and relics” of postmodern nostalgia associated predominantly with the connective generation (millennials).

## THE POOR IMAGE

In her 2009 essay, “In Defence of the Poor Image,” filmmaker Hito Steyerl describes “a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed, as well as copied and pasted into other distributions.”<sup>27</sup> Unlike the rich image – high-resolution, pristine, and emblematic of “capitalist studio production” – the poor image critiques the broken promises of digital technology, often showcasing glitches, pixelation and low fidelity. It often utilises late twentieth-century technologies, such as CDs, VHS tapes and low-resolution digital recordings, ripped, downloaded, burned, or compressed into MP3 files. Existing outside traditional capitalist production, the poor image is characterised by a lower quality often resulting from its possession as pirated content, emerging through acts of copying and sharing entertainment and images. Steyerl notes that the distinction between rich and poor image has become more pronounced due to neoliberal policies that distribute and fund many facets of pop culture, particularly in the film and music industries, reinforcing what Jameson earlier described as the commodification of historical memory through aestheticised nostalgia and the “glossy mirage.”

## LIMINAL SPACE

Technological nostalgia is particularly evident within certain representations of liminal spaces. Here, the poor image actively subverts the “glossy mirage” of polished nostalgia. Through its visible imperfections, it resists idealised reconstructions of the past. Instead, it participates in a hauntological aesthetic, intertwining with the affective textures of millennial nostalgia and reflecting the lost futures embedded within digital decay – an aesthetic that became prevalent during the early 2000s with the introduction of home computers and the emergence of the internet.

Internet-based liminal aesthetics synthesise elements of outdated technologies with contemporary digital recording and mixing techniques. Drawing upon nostalgia for earlier modes of recording, alongside the uncanny and dreamlike qualities of digital imagery, artists such as Liminal Dreamscape, Dreembloom and Liminalmoods integrate lo-fi textures, poor image quality, blurring, graininess and ambient noise as defining features of their representations of liminal spaces.

These virtual environments frequently evoke a sense of limbo or labyrinthine disorientation – spaces that feel stretched, emptied or off-centre, where temporal and spatial expectations dissolve. A notable example is *The Backrooms*, which originally emerged from a 2019 4chan thread and was later developed into a viral series by YouTuber Kane Parsons (Kane Pixels). Depicting endless, yellowish rooms lit by harsh fluorescent lights, *The Backrooms* evokes a powerful sense of entrapment, sameness, and existential unease.

Much like other internet-borne liminal aesthetics, *The Backrooms* constructs a space that is simultaneously familiar and strange – a labyrinth where architecture collapses into repetition and where the mundane becomes subtly menacing. This fusion of outdated technology, repetitive spatial structures and emotional unease underscores the affective power of digital liminal spaces. Parsons’ aesthetic approach explores the slowing and stalling of time, whether through the repetitive depiction of architectural elements such as doorways and hallways, the collapse of boundaries between interior and exterior spaces or the distortion of time and place itself. These strategies generate eerie, unhomely effects, evoking past memories not only through compositional choices but also through an uncanny, nostalgic mode that emphasises lo-fi, grainy visual textures.

Parsons’ adoption of such imperfect footage, reminiscent of 1990s camcorders, layers nostalgia with decay, mirroring themes of deferred futures and temporal dislocation central to hauntological aesthetics. The incorporation of handheld camcorder aesthetics recalls the era of home videos and early personal recording devices, before the advent of high-definition screens and streaming services. Present too is a sense of longing for the physical sites of entertainment culture – video rental stores, record shops, e-malls, and movie theatres – which have been slowly disappearing, if not entirely erased.

## SOUND AND MOVING IMAGE

Particularly through sound and film documentation – oscillating between analogue and digital textures – hauntological-liminal aesthetics have developed an afterlife of their own, evolving into a predominantly electronic and ambient sonic language. A defining example is William Basinski’s *The Disintegration Loops* (2001), composed of decaying tape recordings that were digitised as they physically deteriorated in real time. Created on the morning of the 2001 World Trade Centre attacks, the work has become an emblem of sonic mourning – an accidental elegy where entropy, memory and historical trauma converge. Basinski’s project pushes the concept of the poor image and poor sound to a material limit; the disintegrating magnetic tape tracks serve not only as audio but as physical decay. While the accompanying VHS footage captures the smoke from the physical collapse of the towers drifting across the city, the work literalises loss – its sonic and visual textures collapsing as the medium itself fails. The experience of listening becomes durational and meditative, forcing the audience to dwell within temporal disintegration.

Building on these themes of memory, degradation and spectral recurrence, Leyland James Kirby – under the moniker The Caretaker – created a body of work that explores the emotional textures of lost time. Sampling from 1920s and 1930s ballroom recordings, his compositions stretch, slow down and distort sound, immersing listeners in atmospheres that feel suspended between presence and disappearance. Titles like *Sadly, the Future Is No Longer What It Was* (2009) echo the core hauntological motif described by Fisher: the loss of belief in a viable or imaginable future. Kirby himself frames the work as “an opus of loss, desire and bewilderment at current situations,” asking “What happened to the future we were promised and promised ourselves? Is this the soundtrack of a world in decline?” This self-reflexive questioning anchors the project in a distinctly late-capitalist melancholia – one in which even the future arrives haunted.<sup>28</sup> Kirby’s soundscapes invite listeners into a dreamlike drift: neither fully nostalgic nor entirely abstract, where the past flickers and disappears.

Contemporary artist Mark Leckey’s *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* (1999) similarly traffics in temporal loops and degraded aesthetics. The work assembles found footage of British underground youth culture – northern soul, disco, rave – into a grainy, dreamlike video described by Leckey as both a “ghost film” and an “exorcism.” It evokes a deep sense of nostalgia and temporal dislocation, capturing the shift from collective enchantment to what Leckey calls “disclosing a delusion.”<sup>29</sup> Through his use of VHS textures, looping and repetition, Leckey stages a kind of cultural haunting in which euphoric memories of youth become trapped in a visual purgatory. Rather than invoking liberation, the work evokes a suspended state where past cultural moments endlessly repeat without resolution – joy rendered uncanny through its persistence.

Where Leckey renders this sense of cultural suspension visually, Fisher turns to sound and urban space to explore how melancholia persists in the everyday textures of neoliberal life. In *DOCH Lecture #1*, he plays a track by British music producer Burial to demonstrate how hauntological textures reflect the physical and emotional atmosphere of twenty-first-century London – marked by abandonment, precarity and post-rave exhaustion. He elaborated on this in a blog post, later republished in *Ghosts of My Life*, describing a walk through the city while listening to Burial’s 2006 album *Untrue*. Fisher likens the album to “the faded ten-year-old tag of a kid whose Rave dreams have been crushed by a series of dead-end jobs,” articulating a uniquely contemporary melancholia – residue without release, rhythm without future.<sup>30</sup>



Figure 2. Detail of champagne tower and red wine scent diffuser, 2024.  
Plastic champagne glasses,  
Velluto Rosso.  
Photograph: Natalie Wardell.



Figure 3. Speaker-coat sculpture, 2024.  
Mixed media.  
Photograph: Natalie Wardell.



Figure 4. Raining window installation, 2024. Mixed media.  
Photograph: Natalie Wardell.

In a similar spirit, I became attuned to the ambient atmospheres of my own urban environment during the COVID-19 lockdowns. While writing my dissertation, I took long walks through Dunedin, gravitating toward a particular site that seemed to condense the very tensions Fisher describes: a broken colonial house with tags on the walls, smashed-out windows and the lingering smell of Lynx in the air. Abandoned on a small hill by the railway tracks, it stood as a decaying monument. I visited it frequently until it was torn down, a few months after I finally worked up the courage to step inside. Now, in 2025, a new McDonald's is opening just down the road.

## FINAL EXHIBITION

My 2024 exhibition, *Pretending the World is Funny and Forever*, sought to materialise the conceptual strategies explored throughout my MFA. Emerging from personal memory shaped by the cultural conditions of hauntological liminality, the work took the form of a multi-display, multi-sensory installation combining image, object, sound and scent.

With a digitised version of deteriorating VHS footage, filmed by my father Ian Wardell on New Year's Eve 2000, at its centre, the installation explored the tension between nostalgia and the loss of future possibility. That moment – when the world was expected to change – lingered as a question throughout the exhibition. The faint, ghostly scent of red wine infused the space via a plastic champagne tower, referencing 1990s domestic rituals – specifically my parents' dinner parties featuring Velluto Rosso box wine. The use of 'forever materials' such as plastic, objects like plastic wine glasses (masquerading as glass) and unstable VHS tapes (digitised in a futile attempt to preserve them) exposed the fragile illusions of time and materiality.

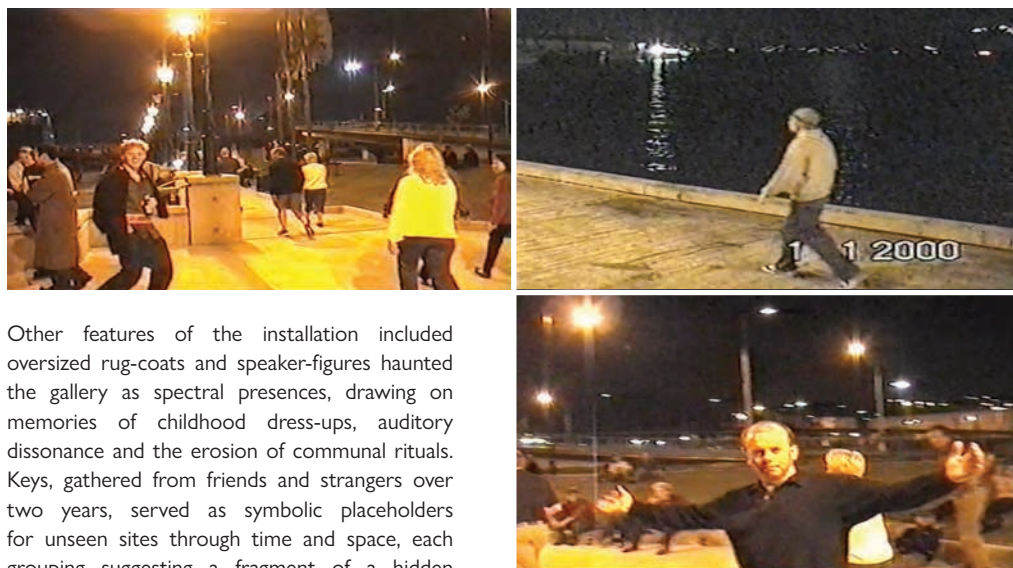


Figure 5. Digitised VHS footage projection, 2024. Still from home video footage. Photograph: Natalie Wardell.

Other features of the installation included oversized rug-coats and speaker-figures haunted the gallery as spectral presences, drawing on memories of childhood dress-ups, auditory dissonance and the erosion of communal rituals. Keys, gathered from friends and strangers over two years, served as symbolic placeholders for unseen sites through time and space, each grouping suggesting a fragment of a hidden narrative. Two large seascape paintings submerged viewers within a psychological storm, reflecting the emotional volatility explored in my research.

A fabricated 'raining window' installation recalled cinematic tropes of longing and introspection, while a slowed and distorted track of New Year's fireworks whispered through the gallery, its muffled voices acting like spectral observers – echoes of deferred futures and celebrations that never fully arrived.

Drawing on hauntological-liminal strategies, the exhibition did not seek to directly illustrate the research, but to embody its affective and conceptual concerns. Through atmosphere, scale and sensory tension, the installation



Figure 6. Still from New Year's Eve 1999–2000, from digitised VHS footage. Photograph: Natalie Wardell.



Figure 7. Still from New Year's morning sunrise over the ocean, welcoming the millennium, 2000. Photograph: Natalie Wardell.

aimed to evoke the emotional texture of a moment suspended between memory and anticipation – a future that feels irretrievably lost.

While the exhibition was not designed to provide resolution, the personal quality of the VHS footage became a key point of connection. Viewers frequently engaged in conversations around their own recollections of the millennium – where they were, what they felt – or, in some cases, reflected on not having been alive at that time. It was this affective anchoring in personal and cultural memory that allowed the other elements of the show to resonate more deeply. The melancholy that emerged was not solely projected by the work but co-produced through the viewer's own associations and felt responses; not represented through explicit narrative but brought forth through atmosphere and embodied experience. Affective engagement – rooted in time, loss and speculation – became the primary mode through which the installation invited reflection.



Figure 8. Image of abandoned house on the hill, 2023. Photograph: Natalie Wardell.

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## ON THE SPECTACLE AND THE PERFORMANCE OF SUFFERING

Wesley John Fourie

This essay explores the enduring phenomenon of the spectacle of suffering throughout recorded history and its utilisation by artists, particularly in the online realm, as a tool for performance and simulacra. The surreal impact of this phenomenon is evident in contemporary society across mediums such as film, television and contemporary art. Throughout recorded history, societies have orchestrated spectacles of suffering, performance and self-exposure as public rituals that often mask cruelty under the guise of public entertainment. These events are rarely neutral; they reflect and reproduce prevailing ideologies, reinforcing hierarchies of power and visibility. From the Roman colosseums to TikTok livestreams, public spectatorship has persisted as a structure for both control and participation. This essay examines the evolution of spectacle across history, focusing particularly on its entanglement with economic precarity, surveillance and curated vulnerability in contemporary digital culture. Through an analysis that spans dance marathons of the Great Depression, Roman gladiatorial combat, digital platforms, like OnlyFans and Instagram, and contemporary queer performance art, I argue that the spectacle of suffering has not disappeared, it has merely transformed, becoming more intimate, algorithmically mediated and embedded within the architecture of everyday life.

Historically, endurance competitions transitioned from celebratory origins to darker exploitations of human suffering. For instance, on 18 February 1923, Olie Finnerty and Edgar Van Ollefin danced for seven hours straight in Sunderland, England. Shortly after, the same year, Alma Cummings set a record by dancing for 27 continuous hours at the Audubon Ballroom in New York. During the Great Depression, dance marathons gained popularity, providing food and shelter as entertainment for spectators while contestants, often desperate for income, endured severe physical and emotional tolls. These marathons, deemed by the church as unethical (due to the contestants' dancing being considered crass, not because of the inherently exploitative nature of the competitions), began to fall out of favour with the general populace as the revelation that they were essentially watching people suffer as a means of entertainment became explicitly clear. The practice was eventually outlawed.

Sydney Pollack's 1969 film *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* captures the tragic outcomes of endurance contests and reflects on the human condition through strangers' shared suffering encapsulated as entertainment.<sup>1</sup> The film tells the story of Gloria Beatty and Robert Syverton (Jane Fonda and Michael Sarrazin) who team up and try to win a dance marathon. The film ends with Robert shooting Gloria when she is unable to commit suicide after they exit the competition. When a police officer asks him why he shot her, Robert utters the phrase that gives the film its title, comparing the experience of a dance marathon (and perhaps that time in history, or the act of objectifying and commodifying one's body) to that of a racehorse.

While the practice of dance marathons was outlawed, people have since watched similar forms of spectacle as a means of spending time and look down at others' suffering. Ironically, there is a return to physically looking down too, by way of the gaze directed down at a phone screen, comparable to a spectator at the gladiatorial fights of Ancient Rome. Dance marathons mirror such earlier forms of public suffering, where combat was transformed into civic duty, entertainment and economic gain at the cost of dignity and humanity.

A gladiator (Latin: *gladiator*, 'swordsmen,' from Latin *gladius*, 'sword') was an armed combatant who entertained audiences in the Roman Republic and Roman Empire in violent confrontations with other gladiators, wild animals and condemned criminals. Some gladiators were volunteers who risked their lives and their legal and social standing by appearing in the arena. Most were despised as slaves, schooled under harsh conditions, socially marginalised and segregated even in death.

Fast-forward to the twenty-first century and contemporary iterations of the spectacle persist, predominantly through screens. The long-running reality TV show *Survivor* serves as a potent example, demanding contestants undergo simulated hardship while being scrutinised on camera. Contestants endure extreme calorie restrictions and physical tribulation, their trials designed to evoke emotional investment from viewers as they consume this mediated discomfort from a distance. The show commodifies suffering, presenting vulnerability both as a liability and a commodity, cultivated to create palpable narratives and generate alliances among competitors. Contestants are stripped of basic comforts and placed in manufactured environments designed to simulate and stimulate hardship, all under the watchful eye of the camera. In the American *Survivor* series, contestants are only required to be given 200 calories a day,<sup>2</sup> and over the course of their time on the show often show extreme signs of deteriorating health as their bodies literally eat away. What emerges is a gamified version of survival where pain, hunger and emotional breakdowns are not only expected but essential to the narrative arc. These moments of suffering are carefully edited and broadcast to generate emotional investment but, more crucially, to entertain.

Particularly resonant is *Survivor*'s positioning of vulnerability as both a liability and a commodity. Crying too early can mark a contestant as weak, while well-timed suffering can garner sympathy and secure alliances. The show teaches us how to weaponise visibility, to show just enough of the self to be legible and palatable. During the finale, the remaining contestants must pitch themselves and their game strategy throughout the show to a jury made up of members they have personally voted off.

Another example of spectated suffering through reality TV is the show *Alone* (2015 – ). It follows the self-documented daily struggles of 10 individuals as they survive in the wilderness for as long as possible using a limited amount of survival equipment. With the exception of medical check-ins, the participants are isolated from each other and all other humans (besides the camerapeople filming them). As in *Survivor*, contestants' vulnerabilities are exposed as they are left to fend for themselves in environments chosen to simulate and stimulate emotional and bodily harm.

*The Hunger Games*, a trilogy of young adult novels by Suzanne Collins, subsequently adapted for film, satirises the televised spectacle of suffering, presenting a dystopia country, Panem, where the brutal suffering of the marginalised is ritualised into an annual event for the entertainment of a wealthy elite, called the Capitol.<sup>3</sup> The Capitol watches the 'tributes' (participants) with fascination, a voyeurism masked as tradition and civic engagement. This spectacle is not only tolerated but celebrated. The more dramatic the suffering, the higher the ratings. What emerges is a society where grief, violence and death are aestheticised for mass consumption, reflecting a perverse power dynamic in which empathy is replaced by entertainment. The state manufactures this performance of pain, carefully framing the tributes' experiences with stylised broadcasts, character arcs and strategic editing – a mirror to reality TV's narrative manipulation. This ensures the suffering is palatable, commodified and devoid of its raw, political meaning while maintaining the power over the districts. In this way, the Games become a form of social control – trauma staged so that the privileged can feel both entertained and absolved. Concurrent to this narrative arc is the transformation of Katniss Everdeen, the main protagonist and narrator of *The Hunger Games*, from human (lived experience) into icon – the Mockingjay, a symbol of the resistance across the districts of Panem towards the Capitol.

Marina Abramović's famous 1974 performance artwork, *Rhythm 0*, reads today as an incisive reflection on the commodification of suffering and vulnerability.<sup>4</sup> Over a period of six hours, Abramović gave herself over to an audience armed with a variety of objects intended for either pleasure or pain. Her body became a vessel for

the audience, a beaker in the science lab of human behaviour. In allowing audiences to interact with and violate her body, she showed the risks of exposure transforming into pain and the fine line between engagement and exploitation when the boundaries of what is considered acceptable slip.

New Zealand writer and artist Sam Te Kani describes the rise of the phenomenon of commodification and objectification of the self in the online context as “neoslavery.”<sup>5</sup> The term applies to “even something like OnlyFans, which hasn’t necessarily come into being because of the technology that facilitates it, which it obviously does,” but it is ultimately “a confluence of other factors, including an ambient universal precariousness, that forces ordinary everyday people to commodify their last asset, which is their bodies.”<sup>6</sup> From the rise of reality TV in the twentieth century, the voyeurism directed at people in less privileged positions has continued and moved from the television screen to the phone, through online trends like the TikTok “crazes,” where contemporary ‘gladiators’ are gazed at, judged and ridiculed for selling themselves to generate an income. ‘Influencers’ represent a recent manifestation of this phenomenon, and fall into two main categories: on the one hand, those who are born into privileged backgrounds or are famous for being famous, such as the Kardashians), and on the other end of the spectrum, those who are less privileged but aspire to this same fame (unburdened by talent but exploiting the nepotism inherent in our gorgeous neoliberal reality). Both kinds of influencer perform in the same way, marketing (typically bogus) products or ideals of a lifestyle, while probably behaving radically differently off camera. Often seeking class ascension, influencers have come to be polarising figures in contemporary society, either objects of desire or seen as being less than, but either way dehumanised through this process of being spectated upon, navigating a realm where their worth is tied to surface-level visibility.

The complexities of digital personae are evident in those instances in which the performance of identity is exposed and revealed to be deliberately misleading. In 2006, ‘Bree’ became “the first viral star,” a 16-year-old girl “from a very small (undisclosed) town”, who began posting on her YouTube account as ‘LonelyGirl15.’<sup>7</sup> She amassed an online following of over 50,000 before the series was discovered to be a hoax following the ‘death’ of Bree at the hands of a religious cult called The Order, who supposedly sought her rare blood type for its life-giving qualities.<sup>8</sup> On 7 September 2006, a message was posted to Lonelygirl15.com, signed by ‘The Creators,’ in which they confirmed that the show was scripted and declared LonelyGirl15 “the birth of a new art form.”

Similarly, Argentinian artist Amalia Ulman’s *Excellences and Perfections* (2014) dissected identity through a sustained online performance, ultimately revealing the constructed nature of online personas.<sup>9</sup> Over the duration of the work, beginning as a relatively ‘plain Jane’ character inspired by 2010s Tumblr Girls, dominated by a pastel palette, ‘cutesy’ culture, with blonde hair and a traditional girlish aesthetic, her online persona moved into a ‘bad girl’ character, undergoing a series of hoaxed body modifications (including tattoos, a nose job and a boob job), who flashed stacks of money around and channelled Artic Monkeys chic as she donned leather jackets and smoked against the wall. The final metamorphosis was into a “health and wellness Goddess.” These three archetypes were selected as they amass the largest online followings. At the end of the four months, her online audience was let in on the joke: they had been hoaxed and the illusion of this curated cyber persona was broken. The response she received was mixed.

In the New Zealand context, artist Natasha Matila-Smith has made bold projects involving the invention of an online persona, akin to the earthy twenty-teens where the rise of the Tumblr Girl gave way to a new form of online disclosure.<sup>10</sup> Matila-Smith works primarily within video, using her own body and her lived experiences as a means of ‘confessing’ and connecting to her audience, expressing something of herself while grappling with the nuances of online self-presentation.

The tension between fabricated identity and reality emerges when considering the impact on individuals navigating public spaces after performing curated lives online through social media apps such as Instagram and TikTok. The camera, as a tool of documentation, complicates the delineation between performance and reality, challenging both the artist and audience to discern authenticity in representation.

Cindy Sherman's photographic series *Untitled Film Stills* (1977–80) exemplifies this notion, subverting self-presentation by staging image-based narratives that question authenticity and identity construction in visual culture.<sup>11</sup> Sherman's self-portraits, staged to resemble stills from old Hollywood movies or TV shows, challenge the viewer to consider their own performances of social roles and expectations. In Sherman's work, identity is revealed to be not a fixed or stable essence but constituted through repeated acts, performative and mediated, in line with Judith Butler's seminal text *Gender Trouble* (1990).<sup>12</sup> Sherman's reflection on identity resonates deeply within queer communities, particularly as spaces once deemed safe, like Tumblr, have become fraught with complexities and negative counter-narratives.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres, responding to the death of his partner Ross Laycock from HIV AIDS, in his 1991 *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, poignantly contemplates absence and queer visibility through metaphor, illustrating the profound emotional layers attached to acts of public sharing that linger in liminal spaces of absence and presence. The work represents the artist's partner Ross Laycock's 'ideal' weight in candy. The audience is invited into the experience, and encouraged to take a piece of candy, acting as a literal representation of Ross' decay as his body was eaten away by the disease.

New Zealand artist Regina Gorge, in *Pebbling (a love expanding outwards)* (2025), engages with this action through the lens of an up-and-coming artist looking to locate themselves within the greater arts community on a national scale.<sup>13</sup> Gorge created a total of 4321 ceramic rocks for the audience to take from where they were scattered intricately across the floor and embedded in the floorboards of Invercargill's Art Attic Gallery, sprinkled across its roof, and throughout the streets of Waihōpai, as well as being sent across the country to gallery spaces with a note which read "YOU'VE BEEN PEBBLED." The idea of literally giving oneself away to an audience ripples throughout the various references of this essay, and my particular interest is in how these examples choose to give themselves over to a panopticon-like forum for surveillance.

Britney Spears serves as a contemporary example, embodying the complexities of self-disclosure. Once deemed the 'princess of pop,' the icon underwent an Icarus-style fall under the incessant watchful gaze of the media. Since the conclusion of her conservatorship, Spears has repeatedly uploaded videos of herself performing to the camera on Instagram, often scantily clad, singing, dancing, sometimes with props (including knives).<sup>14</sup> The debate rages on about whether this person is mentally capable after years of living in the spotlight.

In the digital age, visibility often oscillates between empowerment and entrapment. The ability to document and broadcast oneself, while liberating, leads to curated identities existing as simulacra devoid of genuine connection. Ultimately, the projects and references discussed in this article highlight intersections of performance, visibility, and identity and what it means to exist as part of the spectacle, as people navigate representation amid societal expectations. The like economy, born from social media platforms, plays a powerful role in determining what is seen, valued and rewarded. It incentivises performances of vulnerability, spectacle and beauty in the algorithm. Since the days of fighting in Ancient Rome, these roles of spectator and spectated have changed, evolving through technology to become symptoms of the capitalist spectacle.

This article, laden with examples of performance, and suffering, has sought to provide a nuanced understanding of how contemporary issues shape public perception, complicating and redefining the boundaries of visibility, representation and the inherent costs of spectacle in both art and life. Visibility is never neutral. It always involves power, cost and potential. The gaze can wound, it can also witness. As artists and audiences, the task is to look with care, to question the terms of exposure and to consider what is being shown, what is being withheld and to what end.



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## WHAT WATER REMEMBERS: *JUST LIKE SILK VELVET*

Rachel Hope Allan

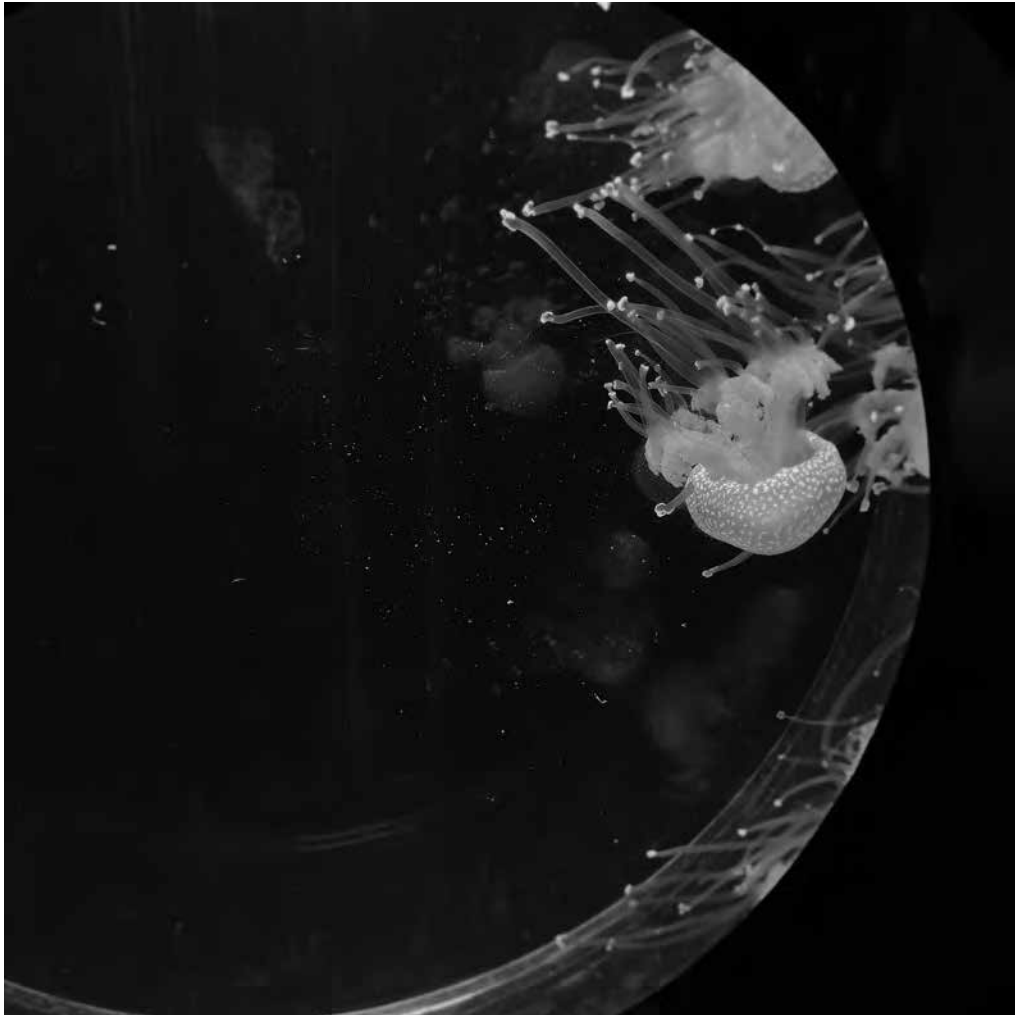


Figure 1. Rachel Hope Allan, *Fluther*, shot 2024, printed 2024, inkjet print on white polyester film, 500x500mm.



I am attracted to places where light filters strangely, where movement is slowed and the body is no longer entirely governed by gravity. I've always felt at home in the water. When I was young, I would scull in slow circles or dive to the bottom and lie very still. When you are submerged, even in a swimming pool, you feel less visible. You can listen differently. The pressure of the water against your skin is a kind of holding.

Swimming, I often think about sea jellies,<sup>1</sup> their grace suspended between gravity and light. Jellies know that to endure is often to dissolve, to become diffuse and invisible but still to shimmer at the edge of perception. In their silent drift we discover what it is to float, to feel, to simply be. To capture them is almost impossible; to witness them is almost enough – a moment held, then released like a breath. To be adrift is not the same as to be lost. Adrift is a kind of direction too, although it may not satisfy the systems of navigation or extraction. To drift is to follow the body's own will through space, to go where you are pulled – if you are lucky, towards light. A breath. A tread.

These thoughts ripple through my practice, where water seeps into both subject and metaphor. Bodies (nonhuman) are suspended, rippling, tangled. Light and space are altered by viscosity, by movement, by containment. Here, water is not just a backdrop – it is a medium of experience, a record of longing, an archive of contact. Water both holds and hides. It remakes us.

The exhibition *Just Like Silk Velvet* debuted in July 2024 at the Art Attic Gallery, a unique artist-run space located in a heritage building in Invercargill, Waihopai. *Just Like Silk Velvet* is not only a study of marine creatures contained behind glass, but also an inquiry into the nature of looking, recording and translating experiences through photography. It uncovers a profound symbiotic relationship between subject and maker, image and world, emerging from a personal search for some solace.

Jellies occupy a liminal territory between visibility and disappearance, between fragility and extraordinary endurance. They dwell in a luminous counter-world, just beneath the surface. They pulse, bloom and consume, unburdened by anatomical structures typically associated with agency or consciousness. Jellies are ancient survivors that have become potent symbols of intuition, mystery, and immortality – creatures that are as much metaphor as they are material reality. In this series, I explore the tensions between the ephemeral and the eternal, between what is seen and what resists capture. Through the photographic process, these creatures are both arrested and set adrift; light, lens and technology converge to render visible a fleeting, poetic kind of motion.

Figure 2. Rachel Hope Allan, *Just Like Silk Velvet*, 2024, inkjet print on Epson Hot Press Bright, 1080x4300mm.

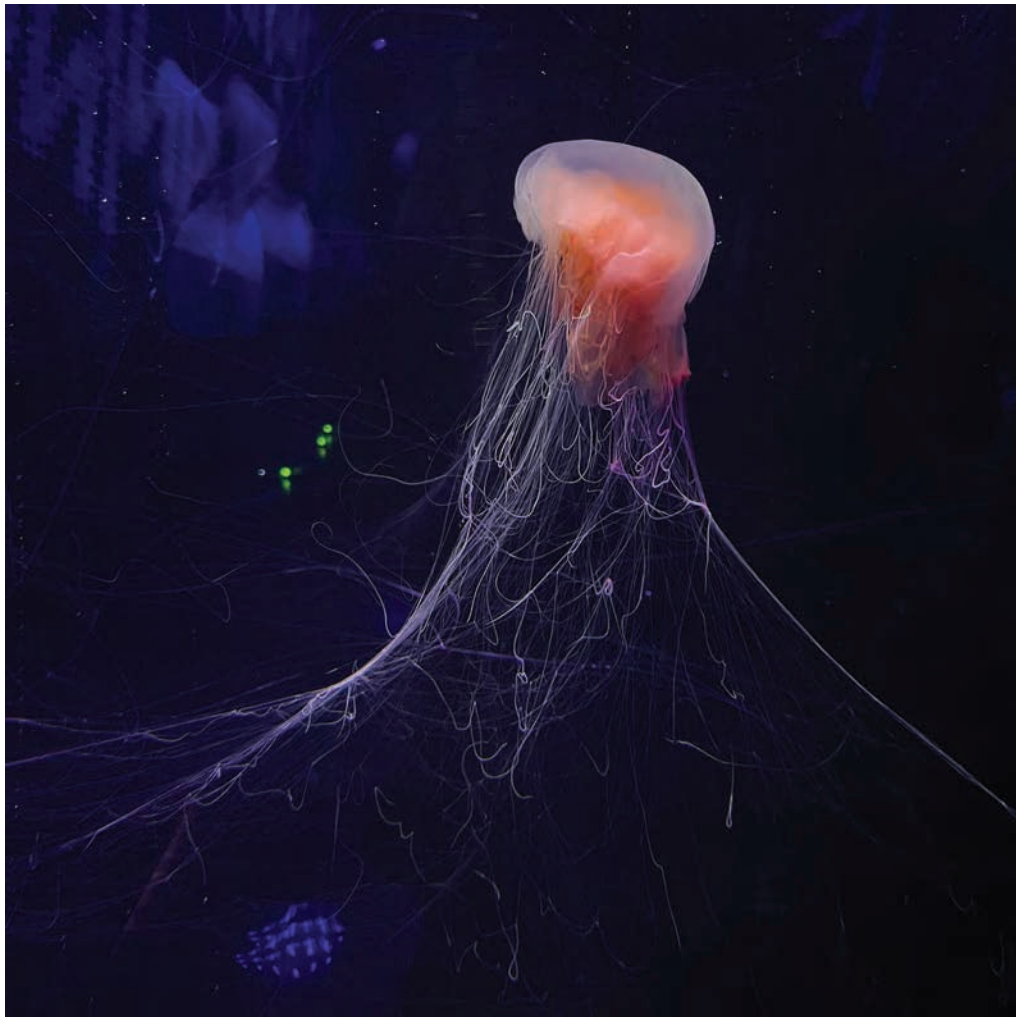


Figure 3. Rachel Hope Allan, *Abbott*, shot 2024, printed 2024, inkjet print on Moab Slickrock Metallic paper, 900x900mm.

The Art Attic Gallery once housed one of New Zealand's earliest photographic studios. The space is rich with history and lovely light, each room feeling like a fishbowl. The centerpiece for *Just Like Silk Velvet* (the exhibition) was *Just Like Silk Velvet* (the print), measuring just over 4.3 metres and created to fit the longest wall in the gallery. This work is a photographic montage, a collapsing of multiple pictures, times and places, into a single immersive image. Here, observations of aquatic beings turned into reflections on myself – my own affinity for enclosed, watery spaces, my preference for solitude over the swarm. Each encounter with a creature behind glass revealed a little more about myself. The work infiltrated my dreams, accompanied my walks with my dog and surfaced in idle moments, such as waiting in line at the supermarket. It became an extension of my consciousness – pulsating, floating, hovering between waking and sleeping states. The jellies and I became one.



Figure 4. Rachel Hope Allan, *Costello*, shot 2024, printed 2024, inkjet print on Moab Slickrock Metallic Pearl paper, 250x250mm.

Sea Jellies are beautiful, alien, elusive creatures that challenge what we think we know about bodies, movement and survival. They are ecological indicators, barometers of a damaged world.<sup>2</sup> Their blooms have shut down nuclear powerplants,<sup>3</sup> disrupted Beluga caviar production<sup>4</sup> and temporarily disabled the *USS Ronald Reagan*.<sup>5</sup> Their uncanny persistence points to an uncomfortable truth: that they may outlast us, surviving in the environments we have degraded beyond our own capacity to endure.<sup>6</sup> Their silent, ancient resilience speaks volumes about the world we have created and the one we might leave behind. During the exhibition a swarm of people gathered around the *Just Like Silk Velvet* print, irresistibly drawn to its presence, their eyes, bodies and imaginations engaging with the work. They wanted to touch it, dance next to it. They spoke of poems, memories and dreams, all conjured by these enigmatic creatures without hearts, brains or bones but whose presence was undeniably felt.

*Abbott* and *Costello* were photographed at the Melbourne Aquarium in the summer of 2024. Their titles reference the floating cephalopod-like extraterrestrials in *Arrival*, the 2016 science fiction film directed by Denis

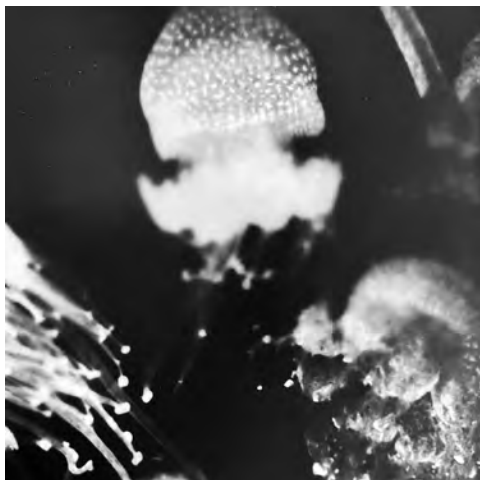


Figure 5. Rachel Hope Allan, *Osaka*, printed 2024, gelatin silver print on Vintage Tura, 350x230mm, unique photogram.



Figure 6. Rachel Hope Allan, *Tokyo*, printed 2024, gelatin silver print on Vintage Tura, 350x230mm, unique photogram.

Villeneuve, which drifts through my mind like a dream. In the film, the aliens hover not in water but in a thick, dark atmosphere, suspended, weightless, unknowable, utterly other. The narrative unfolds around ideas of translation, communication and the non-linear perception of time. The alien visitors are nicknamed “Abbott” and “Costello” by the human linguist and physicist tasked with decoding their looping, smoke-ring language.<sup>7</sup> In *Arrival*, time folds back on itself, events are remembered before they occur and understanding arrives not through logic but through immersion, rhythm and return. While working on this series I thought about how memory loops and shutters, how perception flickers, how images surface from the depths of consciousness, like jellies rising into light.

*Abbott* and *Costello*, like their cinematic namesakes, inhabit a space beyond direct comprehension. They are gestures towards the unsayable: forms suspended in luminous darkness, pulsing quietly. They’re invitations to linger in ambiguity. They suggest a mode of being that is simultaneously familiar and unknowable, beautiful and unsettling. *Abbott* and *Costello*, like memory itself, exist somewhere between sensation and story. Where time dilates, folds and flows and where photography becomes not a record but a trace of something already slipping away.

The story of *Osaka* and *Smack* begins on the banks of the Kamo River in Kyoto. Dressed in a 1950s cerulean blue frock, with my fox draped around my shoulders, I was unwrapping my egg sandwich when a hawk swooped down and scratched the back of my hand as it snatched at my Tamago Sando. The next day I felt sick, feverish even, so nursing what I jokingly dubbed “Kyoto bird flu” and a couple of Strong Zeros (portable thirst-quenchers with no sugar, but 9% alcohol), I decided to stick to my plan and take a train to the world-renowned Osaka Aquarium Kaiyukan. I knew about their “Jellyfish Corner” – an immersive, darkened underground space where the jellies bloom overhead and are displayed in Perspex wheels that highlight their otherworldly movement and luminous translucence.

The experience within the aquarium was disorientating and hypnotic. In the low light, the jellies pulsed and floated, almost disembodied, recalling the weightlessness and alienness of Villeneuve’s heptapod aliens. Photographing them became an intuitive act, capturing not just their physical forms but also the sense of drifting between worlds, of slipping outside of time.

In *Smack*, storytelling, personal narrative and atmospheric image-making converge. The scratches on my hand, the lingering feverishness, the sensory overload of the neon-lit Osaka streets – all these elements infect the act of photographing. As a result, *Smack* functions not simply as a record of jellies but as a translation of a specific



Figure 7. Rachel Hope Allan, *Smack*, shot 2023, printed 2024,  
inkjet print on white polyester film, 500x500mm.

moment in time – one characterized by dislocation, wonder and a heightened awareness of the fragility and strangeness of perception itself. It is a fever dream made real, inviting viewers into a space where certainty dissolves and communication becomes gestural, ambiguous and fluid. They emerge out of the dark. *Swarm and Bloom*.

My work has long been preoccupied with the trauma of captivity, the ways in which animals glitch against the artificial worlds built to contain them. In zoos and aquariums alike I have documented these environments, simulations of nature, constructed for human spectatorship, where animals became unwilling actors.

This inquiry into enclosure, perception and aquatic life extended from jellies to penguins, because they occupy a threshold – adapted survivors yet visibly compromised. Penguins who in the wild feed on jellies seem almost to defy their captivity in water, and they appear to look back at you. I often imagine how similar they might feel to touch – smooth, yielding, just like silk velvet, shaped by their wet world.



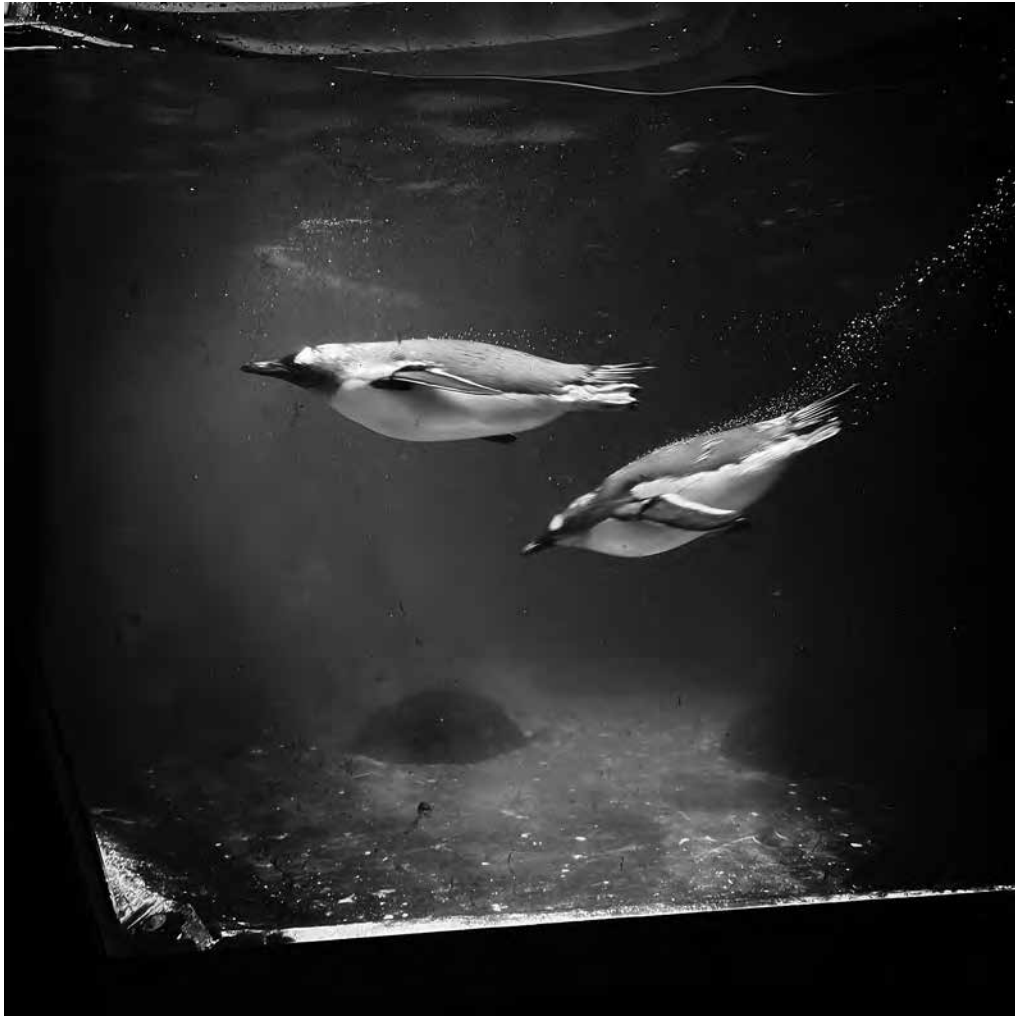


Figure 8. Rachel Hope Allan, *Muscle Cramps*, shot 2024, printed 2024, inkjet print on Moab Entrada, 300x300mm.

But whereas the jellies appear entirely at ease within their synthetic oceans, the penguins cannot hide their dislocation. It isn't just that they are captive, it is that they seem conscious of their captivity. In their fluorescently lit glass enclosures, smeared and dripping with condensation, they are both hyper-visible and deeply obscured. What does it mean to look? What does it mean to be seen? How do we live with (and through) these layers of mediation?

An aquarium is a place for water. A place for what water holds. It is a place of artifice, but also a place for proximity. Despite being behind glass, we are close. The aquarium is a container, but it is also an interface – a threshold space in which two worlds can almost touch.

Perhaps that is what these photographs are, too. A place for water. A place for drift. A threshold.





Figure 9. Rachel Hope Allan, *Breathing Difficulties*, shot 2024, printed 2024, inkjet print on Moab Entrada, 300x300mm.

Water connects everything. It sustains these creatures, it shapes them, it isolates them. Like the jellies emerging into the light, my images emerge from the darkness of exposure, reliant on the fluid chemistry of development and, more recently, on the currents of digital processes. Yet the water we encounter in aquariums is not the open ocean. It is contained, regulated, fabricated substance, just as the environments are simulations. These artificial worlds are the meeting point of spectacle and artifice.

This series does not attempt to replicate reality. It acknowledges the artifice, the melancholy and the resilience. *Just Like Silk Velvet* conjures an aquarium both real and imagined – an architecture of water, memory and survival. Philosopher Elizabeth Grosz writes, “To inhabit the world well is to inhabit the borders, to be at the edge, to be touched across the membrane.”<sup>8</sup> Perhaps, like the jellies themselves, this series offers a quiet resistance to enclosure – a counter world, a pulse, a bloom, a passage through a different kind of space just beyond reach, not able to be named, yet deeply felt.

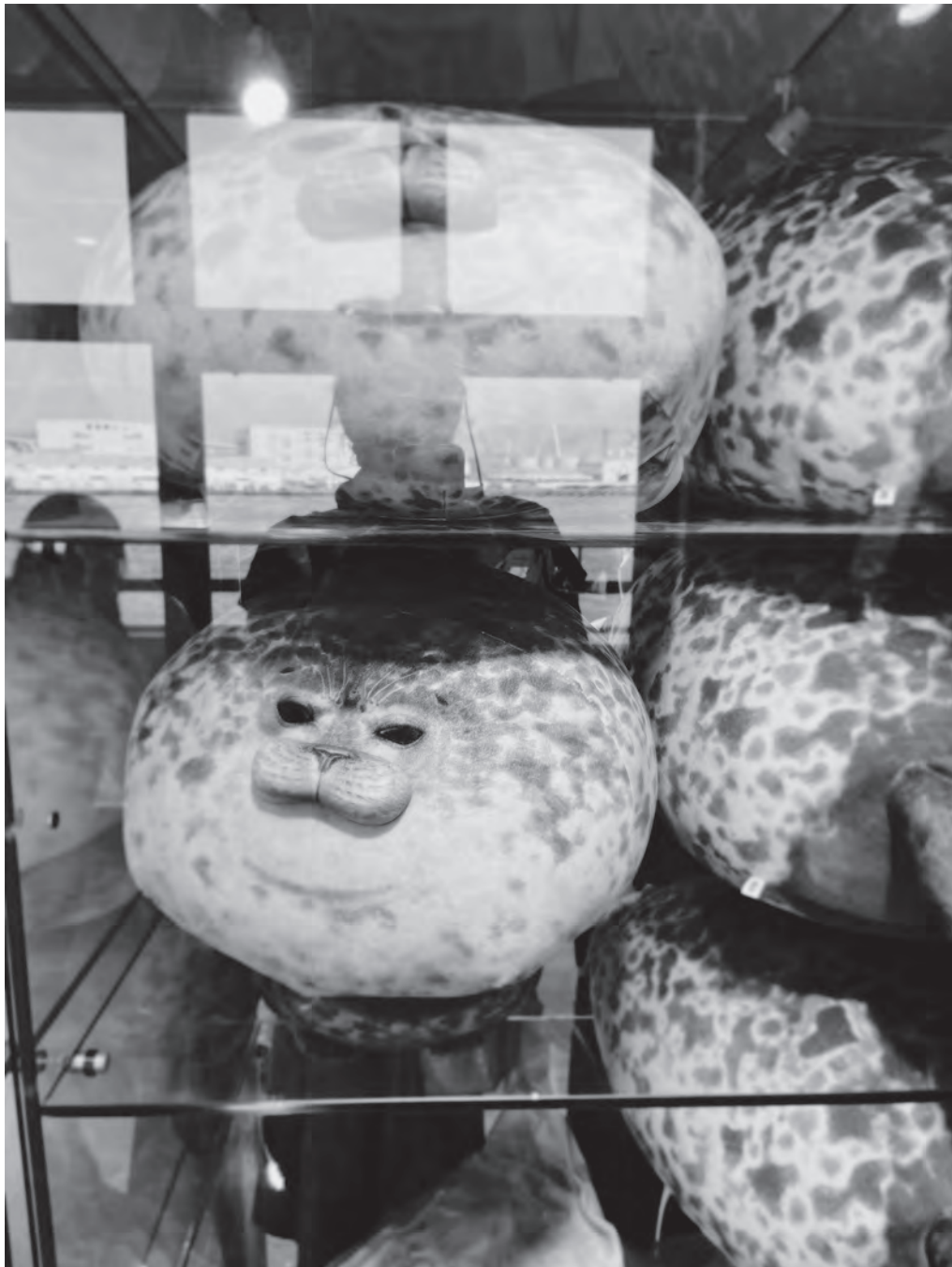


Figure 10. Rachel Hope Allan, *Self-portrait*: Osaka Aquarium Kaiyukan, 10 March 2023.

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- 1 Sea jellies is the preferred term used by marine biologists to avoid the association with fish. But not all jellies are jellyfish. "Explainer: Jelly vs. jellyfish: What's the difference?" *Science News Explores*, 1 April 2008, <https://www.snexplores.org/article/explainer-jelly-vs-jellyfish-whats-difference>.
- 2 "Warm Weather Brings Jellyfish Bloom to UK Seas," *The Guardian*, 30 July 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/jul/30/warm-weather-jellyfish-bloom-uk>.
- 3 David Miller, "Jellyfish Force Torness Nuclear Reactor Shutdown," *BBC News*, 30 June 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-13971005>.
- 4 *Attack of the Killer Jellyfish*, Episode 1, hosted by Damond Benningfield, Marine Science Institute, The University of Texas at Austin, 15 October 2006, <https://utmsi.utexas.edu/science-and-the-sea/radio-program/attack-of-the-killer-jellyfish/>.
- 5 Ben Smee, "Jellyfish Would 'Inevitably' Force Nuclear Submarines into Shutdown if Fleet Based in Brisbane, Expert Says," *The Guardian*, 10 March 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/mar/11/jellyfish-nuclear-submarine-emergency-reactor-shutdown-brisbane-base-moreton-bay-australia>.
- 6 Sean Fleming, "Jellyfish Are Taking Over the World – and Climate Change Could be to Blame," *World Economic Forum*, 8 January 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2019/01/how-an-explosion-of-jellyfish-is-wreaking-havoc/>.
- 7 Bud Abbott and Lou Costello were a comedy duo famous for their circular, often absurd misunderstandings, such as the classic sketch "Who's On First?" "The Naughty Nineties: Who's On First? – Abbott and Costello," *Youtube*, accessed 22 June 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sYOUFGfK4bU>.
- 8 Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 11.

## IN THE WORLD OF THE EARTHFORMS

Jerry Howlett

### THE MYTH OF THE EARTHFORM

*At the beginning of all things the Mother Earth emerged from Chaos and laid an egg, its shell made of clay. From the clay she grew grass and trees and added water to nourish them. She peopled the water with fish and the earth with beasts. From the clay of the land she created a new people to act as guardians of the land, to tend to it and to help it grow and prosper. Then she birthed a son to watch over the people, to help them in their task. They were joyous and she taught them to speak, to sing and dance. But the Earth Son was jealous of his mother's people, and set to making people of his own. Created in jealousy and greed by the Earth Son, the new people took on those qualities. When he introduced them to the Earth and the people of the land, the newcomers took control. They treated the people of the land with ill will, enslaving some for their own means as they hacked and changed the contours of the Earth, creating deep valleys and mounding up tall hills and mountains. The Earth Mother wept as she saw what was happening, salty tears fell upon the earth and swelled into great seas, surrounding the land and creating huge islands. The newcomers would not listen to the Earth Mother as she called for them to stop their careless destruction. They only cared for and listened to themselves and their Creator, who was content to stand back and watch as they carved out their own lands to rule.*



Figure 1. Jerry Howlett, *Reworlding*, 2024.

*They became greedy and violent warring against each other over land, resources and ideologies. Where once the Earth Mother and the lands had been the source of life, to be looked after and cared for, now they were only seen as a resource to be used for individual benefit. And so it came to be that the natural balance of the world was lost. The Earth Mother's strength was failing and all that was once green and good began to die. The air and waterways became polluted and the weather systems changed, the planet warmed, the ice at the ends of the earth melted and the waters rose, continents burned.*

*Cracks formed in the surface of the earth and the eggshell broke and from it emerged mountainous creatures. These children of the Earth Mother, carrying the earth from where they had broken through, were living islands in the chaos. They were new worlds where life could survive and rejuvenate, another chance.*

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Stories and narratives have been an important part of human development, helping to inform the way we think, communicate and see the world. They have the ability to transport us to distant places and times past, present and future or to entirely new worlds. Stories have always had a part in shaping my art practice, informing and inspiring. This article brings together research and writing from my Master of Fine Arts project at Dunedin School of Art. The resulting exhibition, *Reworlding*, consisted of five large-scale figurative sculptures, the 'Earthforms.' These large earthly creatures appeared to be walking through the gallery, carrying on their backs miniature landscapes, vibrant worlds built upon the ruins of the old. Placed in possible times yet to come, the project is a 'speculative fabulation,' a weaving together of old stories and new, influenced by real places, events and actions. It is a story of stories, of ongoingness in a time of crisis, of being present, worlding, living and dying, becoming with. The concept of speculative fabulation comes from American scholar Donna Haraway, who describes it as a way of telling stories that blend science and fiction to imagine and explore how humans, animals and the planet might live together in new and better ways. It has become both the methodology and framework for this article.



Figure 2. Jerry Howlett, *Reworlding*, 2024.



The following narrative gives an account of our past. It follows a rough chronological trail of thoughts and moments in time, touching on theorists who sought to expand our world views and promote an interconnected approach to worlding. For me, this structure was important in thinking towards the development of the work, informing the world-building of my studio work and evolution of the Earthforms. The narrative finishes by looking forwards in time towards the birth of the Earthforms and an attempt to re-world. It is a story of a time yet to come should we not manage to correct our destructive path, which is causing the planetary crises that we are facing.

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Let us begin with world creation. While science dates Earth's formation to 4.6 billion years ago,<sup>1</sup> most cultures tell their own origin stories. These myths – though fantastical to the Western rationalist mind – carry truths and reflect relationships between people and nature. They give rivers, animals and celestial bodies voices and roles, treating the Earth as alive and agential.

Greek mythology offers Gaia, who emerged from Chaos, followed by deities like Pontus and Cronus who ruled seas and harvests. The Babylonian *Enuma Elish* describes the Earth formed from the goddess Tiamat's body. The motif of the cosmic egg spans Greek, Egyptian, Chinese, Finnish and Polynesian traditions. In the *Kalevala*, the world hatches from a bird's egg. In many Indigenous stories, the Earth rests on the back of a turtle or serpent. These stories reveal a shared sense of deep interconnection between people and more-than-human life.

Such stories teach respect and care for land. But during the time known as the Age of Exploration, from the late fifteenth to the seventeenth century, colonisation and Christianity disrupted Indigenous beliefs, imposing dualistic worldviews. The Scientific Revolution replaced spirits with laws and dismissed myth as primitive. Nature became objectified, the binary of culture versus nature shaping ecological exploitation well into the twenty-first century.



Figure 3. Jerry Howlett, *Earthform I*, 2024.



Figure 4. Jerry Howlett, *Earthform I*, detail, 2024.

In the 1970s, James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis' Gaia Hypothesis proposed that Earth functions as a self-regulating organism. The theory, while formulated in the realm of science, using a scientific framework to explain the functioning of the planet, was criticised by scientists, stating that it is only weakly supported by, or at odds with, the available scientific evidence. Because of this criticism, the Gaia Hypothesis finds itself in an unusual position. Not recognised by the scientific community, it has become something of a speculative fabulation. It proposes an alternative view that manages to give the Earth back some of the agency lost in most scientific practices. The Gaia hypothesis bridges the gap between science and cultural myths and engages in a broader discussion about Earth's interconnected systems and concepts of planetary health.

The Holocene epoch, lasting 11,700 years, offered relative climate stability that enabled civilizations to flourish.<sup>2</sup> But industrialisation, urbanisation, deforestation and population growth destabilised this balance and as a result we now live in the period of time called the Anthropocene. This is a time marked by the overwhelming influence of human activity on Earth's systems, a time of climate change, loss of biodiversity and mass extinction. Greenhouse gases have raised global temperatures by 1.2°C since preindustrial times. Exceeding 1.5°C would trigger irreversible damage.<sup>3</sup> The Anthropocene has revealed both our entanglement with planetary processes and our responsibility for the widespread harm we are causing. Biodiversity is collapsing.

The concept of biodiversity hotspots, introduced by Norman Myers in 1989, identified regions rich in endemic species under severe threat. By 2022, 36 such hotspots covered just 2.5% of Earth's surface, with only 30% of original vegetation remaining. These zones shifted the idea of conservation from single species to entire ecosystems. However, efforts to protect these hotspots often fell into conflict with development goals, particularly in regions struggling with poverty.

Deforestation and land conversion degrade ecosystems. Forests regulate temperature, retain moisture and support biodiversity. Once cleared, soil erodes and deserts advance. Environmental destruction feeds back into climate change, trapping us in a cycle of loss.



A root issue is the Eurocentric division between nature and culture. This worldview assumes human dominance and detachment from ecological systems. Philosopher Bruno Latour calls our crisis a “mutation in our relation to the world.”<sup>4</sup> What Latour proposes instead is to move beyond the division between nature and culture and embrace ‘worlding,’ a way of being that acknowledges entanglement, co-becoming and embodied presence.

Colonialism violently interrupted many Indigenous ways of worlding. Yet these practices persist and provide valuable insights. In the Philippines, the animistic belief system of Mariit sees all things as possessing souls. It shapes daily decisions, from construction to wildlife protection, and holds that natural disasters arise from disrespecting nature.<sup>5</sup>

Oxford researcher Ashley Massey found that belief in mythical beings can foster conservation.<sup>6</sup> In Sabah, Malaysia, fear of the forest-dwelling Kopizo has protected habitats. In The Gambia, the Ninki-nanka is said to haunt mangroves, leading to their preservation. But when colonial authorities and missionaries dismantled these beliefs, ecological degradation followed.<sup>7</sup> Such local, culturally embedded systems of care often succeed where top-down conservation fails. They are rooted in reciprocity, responsibility and intergenerational continuity; not abstract science, but lived experience. They require no empirical proof to be effective, only a deep sense of duty to protect.

Robin Wall Kimmerer, a botanist and Citizen Potawatomi Nation member, writes about Indigenous ways of knowing that see the world as full of life and agency. To name beings is to enter into relationship with them. The idea of the ‘honourable harvest’ teaches that we must take only what we need, give thanks and never harm the source. It is a guide to sustainable living rooted in gratitude and mutual care.<sup>8</sup>

Some governments have embraced elements of these principles. In 2014, the New Zealand government redefined Te Urewera from a national park to a legal person, recognising its inherent worth through a settlement with Ngāi Tūhoe.<sup>9</sup> In 2017, the Whanganui River received the same recognition through the Te Awa Tupua Act.<sup>10</sup> These shifts reflect a growing willingness to honour Indigenous relationships with land, not as ownership but as kinship.



Figure 5. Jerry Howlett, *Earthform II*, 2024.

Meanwhile, Western philosophies have also reconsidered non-human agency. Object-oriented ontology (OOO), led by Graham Harman, posits that objects exist independently of human perception and exert influence.<sup>11</sup> Jane Bennett, in *Vibrant Matter*, describes a “thing-power” that runs through all matter. She argues for a “political ecology” that acknowledges distributed agency across humans, tools, ecosystems and debris alike.<sup>12</sup> While these perspectives overlap with Indigenous thought, they arise from different traditions. Indigenous worldviews often see spirit as inherent in all things, while recent Western theories remain grounded in materialist ontology. Still, both challenge anthropocentrism and invite deeper ethical consideration of the non-human.

Donna Haraway encourages us to “stay with the trouble,” to remain present in the midst of environmental and social complexity, and demonstrate “response-ability,” the capacity to respond with care and accountability. She urges multispecies collaboration and imaginative kinship, forms of connection that transcend human exceptionalism.<sup>13</sup> There are examples of community-driven sustainability that are aligned with the idea of taking response-ability. In Kamikatsu, Japan, residents sort waste into dozens of categories, striving for zero waste.<sup>14</sup> In Capannori, Italy, grassroots efforts have dramatically reduced rubbish.<sup>15</sup> In Cairo, the Zareaeb community recycles nearly all collected waste.<sup>16</sup> These models have shown what is possible but also contrast with the global waste trade, where wealthy nations offload refuse onto poorer ones.<sup>17</sup>

We are living in a time of ruination.<sup>18</sup> Climate change, war, extractive industries and displacement have left behind broken landscapes and shattered ecologies. Sociologist Georg Simmel saw ruins as places where the balance between human intention and natural forces collapses.<sup>19</sup> Coral reefs – once vibrant, ancient ecosystems – are now bleached and lifeless, destroyed in moments by deep-sea trawling and rising temperatures.<sup>20</sup> They are underwater ruins, like bombed cities. Ruins warn us. They hold memory, grief, and potential.<sup>21</sup> Haraway’s *Camille Stories* imagine a future shaped not by escape or denial, but by collective repair. She calls for “making kin,” a practice of extending care beyond bloodlines to include animals, plants, ecosystems and technologies.<sup>22</sup>



Figure 6. Jerry Howlett, *Earthform II* detail, 2024.

Kin-making is about building relationships, not hierarchies. It supports resilience through diversity and reciprocity. It is a feminist, post-anthropocentric politics of survival. Haraway likens it to string figures – games of weaving connections, passing meaning from hand to hand, species to species. Not all patterns succeed. Some fail, others surprise. But the act of making and remaking is itself vital.

We are not separate from the world. For Haraway, we are humus, not Homo. In the compost of multispecies life, not all contribute equally, but those who can must care for those who cannot.<sup>23</sup> This ethic of response-ability urges us to act in solidarity with the vulnerable: human, animal and ecological.

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*There was a time when things could have gone either way, when there was still hope that we could band together and save our world from the catastrophes that we were heading towards. Looking back, it was a time of great dithering, inaction was the one action, talk but no follow through. For decades the science had been there pointing to the obvious fact: that we were heading towards a manmade disaster of global proportions, that our greed and lack of responsibility towards the natural world was putting it and thus ourselves at risk. Carbon emissions were steadily climbing, the temperature of the planet increasing. Deforestation and agriculture were cutting into habitats of many of the world's species, leading towards a loss of biodiversity in favour of monocultures. Weather events grew more frequent and aggressive, drought, wildfires and hurricanes flourished.*

*Over the next decades the climate continued to change. In 2032 the 1.5°C target, set by the Paris Agreement to reduce warming, was missed as the temperature was reached well before it had initially been predicted. Caught on the back foot, a new target of 2°C was set, but that too was reached in 2040, only eight years later. Work had been too slow to keep up with the speed at which the warming was going. Like a snowball rolling down a mountain, the problem was only getting bigger the further it went. By 2044, unified governments and corporations had finally begun to lower emissions and developed new technologies that began to slow and stabilise the increase in global temperature. But the damage had been done.*



Figure 7. Jerry Howlett, *Earthform III*, 2024.



Figure 8. Jerry Howlett, *Earthform V*, 2024.

The northern Polar Region faced its first ice-free summer in 2033. The Arctic Sea now endures entirely ice-free summer months. This event in turn fuelled the acceleration of global temperatures; the Arctic had lost much of its ability to cool the planet. Species that had once depended upon the floating ice, such as the harp seal, were now all but extinct. The once mighty Polar bears, the great predators of the Arctic, now numbered only a few hundred, surviving as scavengers. The ice shelves of the Antarctic were no better, and colonies of penguins, from Chinstrap to Adélie, disappeared, their home gone with the ice, mud replacing the frozen shores, habitats no longer fit for their survival. The Emperor Penguin is now on the brink of extinction with only two known colonies left, holding on for survival.

The loss of ice from the Polar Regions contributed to a rise in sea levels and increasing flooding events in low-lying coastal cities around the world. By 2054 the levels had risen by two metres, leading to the displacement of many cities and communities in coastal areas. And as the levels continued to rise, more and more communities were forced to move away to higher land, away from the changing coastlines.

The arctic permafrost thawed at an alarming rate all through the 2040s, adding to the flooding and slowly changing the landscape. The land, once a frozen solid structure, became unstable and vulnerable to collapse. Huge landslides flowed across the tundra, creating channels that would become seasonal rivers. Huge mudflats formed or expanded as the silt was deposited after its journey, washed from inland to the coast. This build-up of sediment only added further to the pressures of sea rise.

Human population was still on the rise, the cities needing vast amounts of resources just to feed their growing populations. In richer nations, technology enabled the production of food more efficiently within smaller areas of land and huge glasshouses could grow plants vertically, requiring far less space than traditional farming methods. For poorer nations this was not possible. Fertile lands became increasingly valuable and more and more forests and other ecological hotspots were being cleared for agriculture by the day. Food came at the cost of important ecosystems and biodiversity. The diminishing biodiversity increased the likelihood of viruses, pathogens and diseases, spreading through species, leading to more pandemics as they jumped from animal to human.





Figure 9. Jerry Howlett, *Earthform IV*, detail, 2024.



Figure 10. Jerry Howlett, *Earthform 1*, 2024.

*In 2069 a virus swept through the human population with a mortality rate of two in every five people infected. Within a few weeks it had burnt itself out, but it had become the biggest health crisis in human history, spreading across the globe faster than it could be traced and prevented. Human population numbers had peaked at 9 billion before the virus outbreak and in the weeks following it was estimated that the population had dropped sharply to 5.4 billion. In the years that followed, this number would continue to fall.*

*The increasing natural disasters resulting in the destruction of towns were also taking a toll, and all around the world the number of displaced people was in the millions. About 55% of land had become uninhabitable for human life, making it harder for those displaced to find new locations to settle.*

*As the twenty-first century was drawing to a close, seismic activity began to increase around the planet. The activity started out small and unnoticeable, like the beating of a heart, but began to increase over a three-year period. Towards the end it was enough to collapse structures, shift earth and bury cities. Then one day the earth heaved and ruptured, and out emerged colossal beings of soil, stone, forest and sea – the Earthforms. The exact number of them is unknown. Born from the womb of the Earth, the upheaval of each being created mobile environments, the Earth's crust lifted up upon their backs, they and it becoming one, a symbiotic composite. The Earthforms arose in varying locations, but each of these locations contained some form of ecosystem, with or without the presence of humans. Many of these were endangered environments, and the Earthforms – some measuring hundreds, others thousands of metres in size – carried and supported life, nurturing it as though in a nursery. Often the Earthforms could be seen herded together with interrelated ecosystems, creating corridors of passage between.*

*These beings roamed large distances, not bound by land, able to pass through oceans between continents.*

*Following the event of the Earthforms' emergence, which came to be known as The Great Upheaval, there was a period of turmoil and uncertainty. The perception of the world had shifted dramatically in a way that no one could have ever predicted. Many people were scared of these new towering creatures, believing that they would lead to the destruction of everything, but there were others who embraced them.*

*For those who had been lifted up upon the Earthforms, life had changed suddenly. The land had shifted beneath them; in places buildings had sunken and been buried in the embrace of the moving earth. Other structures collapsed into piles of rubble, while some even survived intact. In the time that followed, the immediate thoughts were of shelter, food and water. While the human-made structures had fallen into ruin, the flora growing upon the Earthforms began to thrive as though this change had reinvigorated them. Within days, new growth had sprouted and started to reclaim the areas around the fallen structures, and older established plants grew with new energy, blooming and some even setting fruit. Where trees and shrubs were felled in order to provide materials to build, new seedlings rose up to take their places. It was as if growth had accelerated.*

*In their need to rebuild shelter, the people looked to the materials around them, the rubble and ruins of their old dwellings, the rock and clays of the shifted earth and the wood, grasses and other plant materials. Tools were in short supply and they had to make do sharing with each other those that they could find or even make amongst themselves. This for the most part drew communities together, to work and care for each other.*

*Food and water were their other priorities. Water, it was discovered, was not an issue, for they found sources of it trickling from what must have been springs in the ground, creating pools and streams. At first food was harder to source. Supplies were built from what could be scavenged from within the ruins of buildings and some with foraging experience were able to share what could be eaten from the land around them. This was limited within the first days but as the plant life continued to flourish more became available and gardens were set up to provide fresh produce for the community.*

*Non-human species too took time to adjust to the changes, but they did not take long; they found their habitats rapidly recovering around them, as though the Earthform was adapting its landscape to provide for them.*



Figure 11. Jerry Howlett, *Earthform III*, 2024.



Figure 12. Jerry Howlett, *Earthform I*, detail, 2024.





Figure 13. Jerry Howlett, *Earthform I*, 2024.

*And so life found a way to continue. Whilst it was hard and uncertain to begin with, as time passed the inhabitants soon found ways of living with the land, amongst the ruins of their past. Ever present in their minds was the notion that the land on which they were living was alive and that they were dependent upon it for their continued survival. The Earthform was not just ground, but kin. To harm it was to harm themselves. Its health was their health. Relationships were formed between Earthform and human. The Earthform provided the environments for life to thrive for human and non-human. In return, people took only what was needed. They gave thanks. They replanted, recycled, restored. Human and non-human lives interwove. Kin-making became necessity, not theory. Communities raised children with stories of the old world and the Earthforms, stories not of apocalypse, but of responsibility.*

Jerry Howlett is a Dunedin based sculptor. He Graduated with a Master of Fine Arts with Distinction at the Dunedin School of Art in 2024. His work explores themes of sustainability and environmentalism and the connection between humans and nature, through storytelling and sculpture.

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## BURIED GIANT: DRAWING LOSS

Stephen Ellis

My name is Stephen Ellis. I draw.

Drawing is my OCD. Not drawing as preparation or placeholder, but drawing as the finished art object. Drawing is how I think, see and speak. It is how I explain the world to myself, and myself to myself. It is my outlet and my inlet, it creates and soothes my anxieties.

I will define drawing as the use of linear mark-making to accumulate image. The dictionary definition insists on a two dimensional outcome, but the current quest for art-making opportunities outside and between the old disciplines has let drawing expand into three dimensions, into textiles, even glass. Drawing is not secondary or temporary, and need not be preparatory. Drawing has mana. It is probably older than painting and sculpture; our species has always made marks. In the late 1970s, my painting tutor at the Dunedin School of Art (DSA) called me an “effing useless painter.” It was a judgement I shared. There was no place then for drawing as art object; drawing was considered an exercise or a step to a senior discipline. For years I used drawing in the service of other media, as an animator, a storyboard artist and a concept artist in film and television. It wasn’t until 2011 that life allowed me to return to a full-time art practice when I embarked on a master’s degree at Unitec in Auckland.

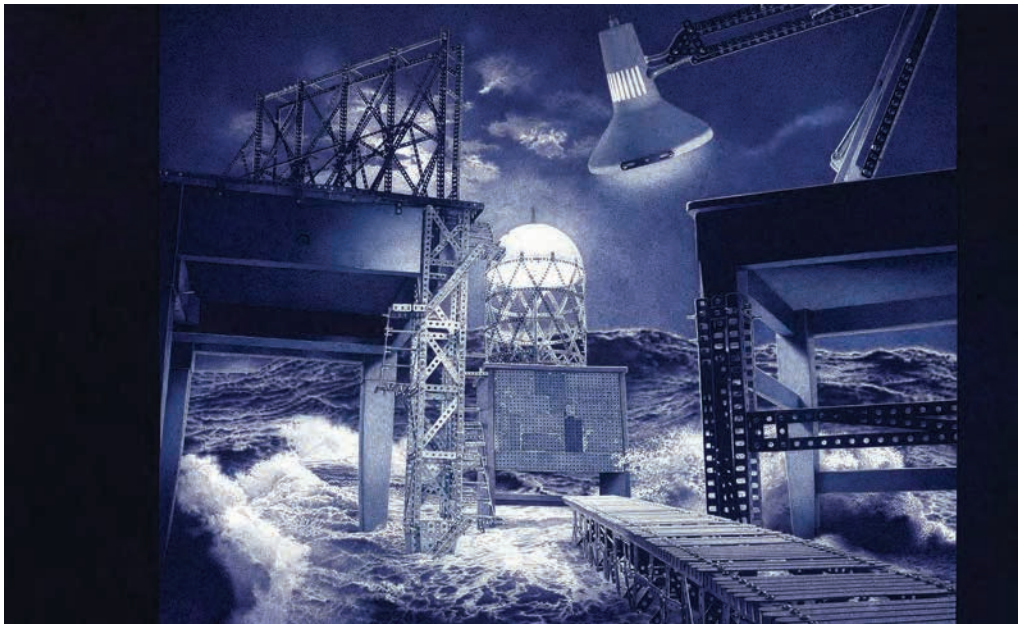


Figure 1. Floating Bodies: *Necessary Protection*, 2014.  
Ballpoint pen and correction fluid on Hahnemuhle paper, 1195x1705mm.



Figure 2. *Opposite Shore: In too deep, come too far*, 2017.

Ballpoint pen and correction fluid on Hahnemuhler paper, 1240x780mm, private collection, Auckland.



What follows is a survey of a decade or so of drawing practice, a progression of suites of drawings on environmental themes in various media and at a variety of scales, landing at the DSA residency undertaken in February–March 2025 and the *Buried Giant* project. It is a progression from climate change sensitivity to climate grief; from an historical and analytical lens to a personal and felt response. The early work embraced big art-historical themes; the residency granted me an autobiographical solastalgic moment.

The earlier suites of drawings, *Floating Bodies* (2013–14), *Permafrost* (2015–16) and *Opposite Shore* (2016–17) are in ballpoint pen. This is the ‘drawingest’ process I could have conceived, and I wish I had found a less arduous and long-winded way to get what I see in my head onto the paper:

I make rough studies to hone a composition  
When I am satisfied, I will start researching art historical precedents  
At the same time, I start making and finding objects and models appropriate to the content of the work  
I then pose the models in dioramas  
I photograph the dioramas  
I Photoshop the photographs, resolving the composition and adding atmospherics  
Then, at last, I draw.

In these earlier suites the art historical quotations are from the Romantic Sublime.<sup>1</sup> This is the acknowledgement of a debt to another time when the arts spoke of awe at the indomitable power of Nature and human insignificance in the face of forces like storms, earthquakes and eruptions. The other role of these quoted images is to suggest that cultural history is in as much jeopardy as natural history in the Coming Storm.

The Sublime impulse is to overwhelm the viewer or the listener or reader – to overwhelm with scale, with content and with what I will call ‘overwork.’ The drawings are large and densely drawn in tiny marks. The largest took ten weeks to make. The densest passages have nine ‘coats’ of ink, accumulated in a compass-point crosshatch. The modelling of volume uses curved marks inherited from printmaking.

It would be ironic at best, hypocritical at worst, for a climate-conscious practice to use premium carbon-dense materials. Choices were made early to use humble materials like ballpoint pens and paper – essentially, the contents of the stationery cupboard. I auditioned many pens before settling on a limpid blue that came with an assurance of colourfastness and longevity. Blue is the least fugitive pigment and this ultramarine with its oily purple sheen brought a legacy of lapis lazuli and documentary associations with blueprints and carbon paper. Choosing paper is always tricky; humble papers have short lives and premium papers have accumulated considerable carbon footprints by the time they reach New Zealand. My compromise is to use Italian and German rag papers that are largely comprised of reclaimed textile fibres and have long projected lifespans.

I have always worked in series or suites. The drawings in each suite are linked by theme, medium, content and scale – and by metaphor. Suites from 2014 to 2016 used ballpoint pen, large scale and European Sublime progenitors to address climate change, sea level rise and the loss of permafrost and ice.

In 2016 tens of thousands of people were leaving their homes and looking for shelter elsewhere, in what became known as The Migrant Crisis. Geopolitical forces in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, some of them climate driven,<sup>2</sup> were compelling people to move in numbers not seen since the wars of the twentieth century. This is not just our past – it will more and more be our future. The ‘climate refugee’ will be a subset of ‘refugee,’ and refuge will be rarer, smaller and harder to find.

These are the themes of the *Opposite Shore* suite (2016–17). I have returned to the turbulent seas of earlier work; now they carry refugee transports and multiple inflatable dinghies. A rickety jetty offers the only landing, distress is signalled, the signal goes unseen. The quotations here are from migrations of another time and place: the North Sea coasts of the Netherlands and France in the early nineteenth century and the jetty is a verbatim quote from the coastal genre paintings of the Achenbach brothers.<sup>3</sup> Europe was then exporting its poor and dispossessed in a massive colonial project, the effects of which we are still feeling today.

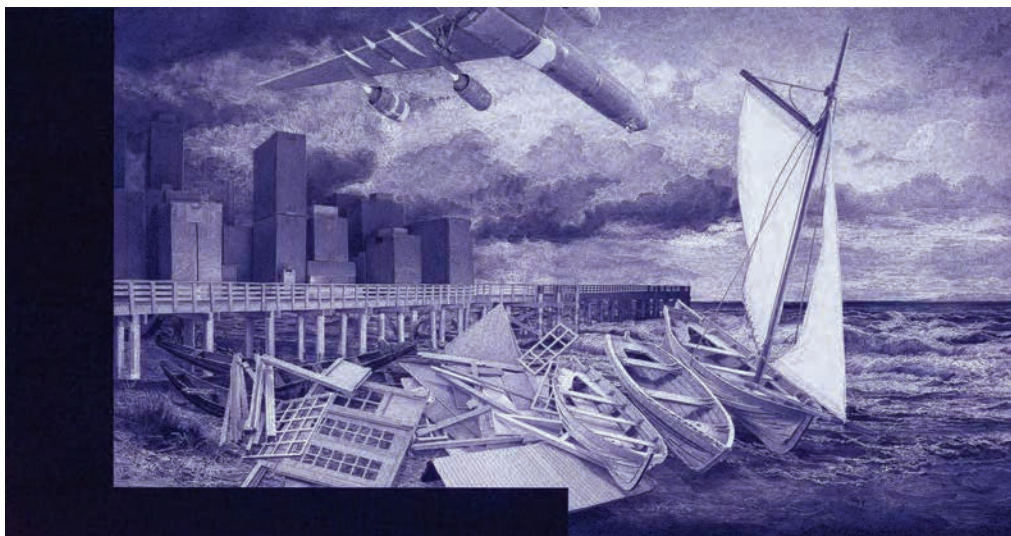


Figure 3. *Headforemost: Landed*, 2018.

Ballpoint pen and correction fluid on Hahnemuhler paper, 790x1475mm, private collection, Auckland.

Like the majority of New Zealanders, I am a product of migration, of ancestors who made similar perilous sea voyages at that time. One branch of the family moved to the Far North in 1849 to find that the land their church group had purchased was a swamp. Migrant uncertainties and reinventions followed and it was twenty years before the family found a permanent home. Research led me to a similar but more dramatic story on Auckland's Manukau Harbour. Te Uru Waitākere Contemporary Gallery overlooks the site of the story of the *Headforemost* suite (2018); the gallery was approached to show the work and an early decision was made to show the models with the drawings.

In 1839, William Cornwallis Symonds, acting for the Manukau Land Company, bought Pūponga Peninsula (now known as Cornwallis) on the Manukau harbour in Auckland from an earlier settler. Symonds thought he was acquiring a much larger block and iwi disputed the sale. That didn't stop him from reporting favourably to the Land Company, nor the Company from dispatching the ship *Brilliant* with about 30 Scottish migrants on board. Symonds was a colonial archetype, ambitious and energetic. At 29 he was a captain in the British army, deputed for William Hobson gathering signatures for the Treaty in the Auckland area, was deputy Government Surveyor, Chief Magistrate and freelanced as a land speculator. He was also hasty, knowing that his Manukau Land Company was competing for land and emigrants. These were capitalist ventures, selling land and prospects on inflated claims, boosterism and some almost magical thinking. The Scots on the *Brilliant* had paid for land for which Symonds had no title. The *Brilliant* took ten months to reach New Zealand, arriving in the Manukau to no title, no town, no dwellings. The migrants were invited ashore, provisioned and helped by tangata whenua to build whare.

Then, on 23 November 1841, a message arrived from the other side of the Manukau asking the *Brilliant's* doctor to attend a sick woman. The doctor was not available, so Symonds gathered three other colonists, "a native" and some medicines from the *Brilliant* and set off across the Manukau.<sup>4</sup> The *New Zealand Gazette* reported:

A violent and sudden squall struck the boat, which was observed to go down head-foremost about a mile from the ship ... Owing to the dangerous sea running it was found impractical to proceed to the unfortunate men and those on the shore were compelled to witness their unhappy fate.<sup>5</sup>

Symonds' settlement failed. Families drifted away to the newly established capital at Auckland on the Waitematā. By 1850 Symonds' city was abandoned.



Figure 4. *Pond: Pond IX*, 2019.

Graphite and gouache on Fabriano paper 560x760mm, private collection, Auckland.

I have migrated briefly a couple of times and know the heady limitlessness of a new place, of reinvention – redemption, even. But I also know the feeling of displacement or misplacement. Knowing that Home is not elsewhere does not allay the post-colonial unease of not being entirely at home here either. This, I suppose, is the migrant legacy that shades these images. The *Headforemost* suite is comprised of four large drawings, all themed and titled on aspects of the settlement of Cornwallis; *Unsettlement*, *Capitalise*, *Landed* and *Conveyed* (all 2018). For the first time, all the quotes are from the history of New Zealand painting, because although migration is a global theme, this is a very local story. They are all from unmistakably Romantic models.

Drawing is hard work – at this scale, anyway. I have a stiff neck and twisted shoulder. During the making of the *Headforemost* drawings, I also began to experience overuse pains in my hand. That, and the awareness that I was becoming ‘the ballpoint pen guy,’ made me reassess my process. The *Pond* drawings (2019) are of a different medium and a very different scale.

Robert FitzRoy was New Zealand’s second Governor. He had been the captain of Darwin’s *Beagle* and went on to found the British Meteorological Office. His life’s work was the prediction of storms and the protection of shipping and seafarers from their destructive force. To that end he invented the weather forecast and a system of storm warnings that could be telegraphed to coastal stations and displayed to ships as drums and cones hung from masts on shore, indicating wind strength and direction.<sup>6</sup> FitzRoy sits at a moment between climate ignorance and climate science. His *Weather Book: A Manual of Practical Meteorology* (1863) was the first popular guide to the causes and patterns of weather. The skies in the *Pond* suite of graphite drawings quote directly from the cloud illustrations in the *Weather Book*.

Now, the oceans have become commercialised, militarised and irremediably polluted. The idea that the sea is limitless goes back long before FitzRoy and has always been taken as licence to dump waste offshore. Plastic is now in the deepest parts of the oceans. All the models for the *Pond* suite were made from found plastic: chopsticks, milk bottles, Lego, bits of packaging. The surface of the sea is a hardware store tarpaulin.

These images are drawn in graphite, a softer and kinder medium than ballpoint pen. Because it is softer, the marks are fainter, so more marks are needed to amass a dense tone. What I’ve gained in comfort, I’ve lost in time. But these drawings are small, about A4 size and smaller.





Figure 5. (Still Life): *(Cold Soldier) Still Life*, 2019.

Coloured pencil and gouache on digital on print on Fabriano paper 760x560mm, private collection, Auckland.



Figure 6. *each to each: each to each*, 2021.  
Coloured pencil on digital print on Hahnemuhle paper 700x1000mm.

In 2015 I attended the Gallipoli Centennial commemorations at Gallipoli. My father's father fought there, surviving the battle of Chunuk Bair and another two years on the Western Front in France. Of course he was permanently psychologically damaged by the experience. He died when I was 8. All I remember is a dour humourless man who would sit out Anzac Day in a darkened room, alone with his memories. It took four years for my tiny Gallipoli experience to filter through into drawings. Although the commemorations were thick with references to service and sacrifice and heroism, I was more interested in that unmentioned legacy: the alcoholism, mental illness and domestic violence that echo down the generations.

The *(Still Life)* drawings (2019–20) are in red coloured pencil; martial, military and I guess bloody reds. The post battle imagery of smashed buildings, downed communications and the dead are far from Romantic sea imagery. The torn and bashed cardboard box buildings refer to Grozny in Chechnya, but they have a tragic resonance today. The background structures are domestic objects like cake tins, a cheese grater, Berocca® tubes.

I have always insisted that I don't make still lifes; that the dioramas are just a step to achieving the distortions of scale I'm looking for. I know where these distortions come from. As a child, I experienced incidents of hypnagogia. It is a "threshold consciousness" between sleep and waking in which lucid dreaming, sleep paralysis and hallucinatory displacements of familiar surroundings occur.<sup>7</sup> My memory of these hallucinations is, I think, foundational to how I see. The *(Still Life)* of the titles is a rather belated admission that the dioramas and the domestic scale are, at least in part, in the still life tradition, although *Nature Morte* may have been more appropriate.

Then came COVID-19, and we were all compelled into a still life world of domestic interiors. With just me and my daughter at home, I saw an opportunity to reevaluate the domestic and the mute army of things that supports our lives. The resulting suite is called *each to each* (2020–21), a kind of relay of vessels. These objects have never existed; they are visitants from a different order of being. The COVID pause let me teach myself Blender, an open-source 3D modelling and animation programme. It is a different-but-same kind of modelling, and the virtual camera makes the photography stage of my process redundant. The outcome, though, was always going to be drawn.



Figure 7. *Unfolding: Unfolding 2*, 2022.

Coloured pencil on Lana paper 300x300mm, private collection, Auckland.

The drawings have a weird cosiness for me. Despite the unreality, these interiors do not feel unsafe. There are no landscapes outside the windows, only clouds; we are, truly, in a bubble. If these images seem like an inappropriate reaction to the nearest thing to global catastrophe in my lifetime, I can only say that the lockdowns let the clamour of modern living die away and small essentials become visible. Blender offered a new way of seeing, or at least of manifesting. When the 'normal' returned, and in response to a slower-moving panic, I began experimenting with AI.

AI image generation has advanced exponentially since then, to the point where it threatens to replace graphic artists and concept artists. This grown-up AI is of much less interest to me than its naïve, rather stupid, predecessor. I used an Australian image generator called Night Café, named after the Vincent van Gogh painting of the same title.<sup>8</sup> In 2021 it was in its infancy. One of the first prompts I tried included the words 'climate catastrophe' and in the chaos of colour and tone that the AI delivered it also offered a cat. Although relatively primitive, this early iteration offered an intriguing type of image, totally agnostic about figure-and-ground, composition and colour theory. As I learnt to control the prompts, I began to see fragments of image that I could use. I always asked for monochrome images and the prompts always included the word 'unfolding,' the title of the resulting suite (2022).





Figure 8. Petrus van der Velden, *Mount Rolleston and the Otira River*, 1893.  
Oil on canvas, 1015x1700mm, Christchurch Art Gallery/Te Puna o Waiwhetū Accession number 69/144.

'Unfolding' is one of those journalistic clichés, used to describe ongoing events and unresolved situations: 'unfolding hostage drama,' 'unfolding wage dispute.' It is also used to describe the climate crisis. Including the word in the prompts to the AI provoked some tempting results. I used these in the same way I use other found imagery – edited, composed, some elements exaggerated, some removed. In the foregrounds I again staged dioramas: floating garbage to suggest plastic contamination, a model whare to suggest coastal erosion and so on. These drawings are all the same size, use the same media and are presented in identical deep box frames like museum specimens.

Lamp black is a pigment with a deep history. As the name implies it is made from soot and is one of the darkest densest blacks. It is pure carbon and, as such, brings some controversial freight with it into the twenty-first century, as does New Zealand's relationship with coal.

There are three types of coal: lignite, bituminous and anthracite. The cleanest is anthracite, a dense hard coal. One of New Zealand's few anthracite deposits is under the Fox River on the West Coast.<sup>9</sup> This seems to me to be emblematic of the choices this country has made and must make: fossil fuel or ecotourism, coal or ice, black or white? I bought a 10kg bag of bituminous coal from Mitre 10 (a small climate crime in itself) and was surprised at its gem-like beauty. The three small *Glacier Country* drawings (all 2023) in the *Lamp Black* (2023) suite suspend coal gems impossibly large over AI-generated alpine landscapes. I think you can see my ambivalence. As a South Islander I grew up with coal. It heated the houses I lived in and cooked my food. It gave winter Dunedin a distinctive smell and left a haze of carbon on every horizontal surface in South Dunedin. It employed a large number of (mostly) men – union men. Coal gave us the Labour Party. Coal, then, was good.

I tried to make my own lamp black from the Mitre 10 coal, crushing it as finely as I could, binding the dust with gum Arabic and thinning it with water. The results were not encouraging: a thin smear of grey speckled with black dots. So, the *Lamp Black* drawings are made with an industrially produced soot, baked in a kiln to the densest light-absorbing black. I'm aware that this is when climate irony tips towards climate hypocrisy.

I think of the three *Glacier Country* drawings as coal portraits, tributes to the trees that fell 30 to 70 million years ago and the people who mined them, but also the shockingly irresponsible diggers of holes, polluters of waterways and heaters of the planet. Coal mined on the West Coast travelled to Christchurch by rail, via the Ōtira Gorge and the village of Cass. These are evocative, pregnant names in the history of New Zealand art: Petrus van der Velden made many colossal oils of the Ōtira Gorge;<sup>10 11</sup> Cass, by Rita Angus, is New Zealand's most-loved painting.<sup>12</sup> One can stand for the New Zealand Romantic relationship to the land, the other for a



Figure 9. *Lamp Black: Lamp Black*, 2023.

Soot on Fabriano paper, 710x1000mm, private collection, Auckland.

later, changing relationship. In Cass, the rail wagons to the right are coal wagons. I made cardboard models of the entrance to the Ōtira Tunnel and the train station at Cass, posing them with a toy train set in an impossible alpine landscape.

Ōtira is usually translated as 'of travellers,' a reference to pounamu gatherers crossing the Southern Alps. Whetu Moataane, a Kāi Tahu language expert, has another interpretation: Ōti rā, the closing of the day.<sup>13</sup> Darkness gathers early in the Gorge, and the title *Close of Day* (2023) suggests the end of the age of coal.

The final drawing in the suite is called *Lamp Black* (2023) and quotes from both van der Velden and Angus. The process has changed again: The *Lamp Black* pieces are drawn with a brush.

That brings us up to date and to the *Buried Giant* project that brought me to the DSA. I will quote from my application for the residency:

The residency would be used to research and produce a suite of drawings on the theme of solastalgia. Solastalgia is the distress caused by environmental degradation – more than 'climate grief,' the word resonates with nostalgia and implies a tarnishing of memories. The working title of the project is *Buried Giant* in reference to unacknowledged grief for lost landscape and memory, both current and ancestral. The project will address landscapes we already mourn.

The project will research elegiac imagery from twentieth century regionalist New Zealand painting, privileging South Island and Otago exemplars. Such imagery can be found in the oeuvres of Rita Angus, Bill Sutton, Doris Lusk and others. Models would then be made of suitable structures from those works, other models of my own devising would be added. Simultaneously, models of 'mourners' would be sought, principally in antique and opportunity shops. It is anticipated that these would be domestic-scaled wood and ceramic figures.



Figure 10. *Buried Giant: Dear Wee June*, 2025.  
Coloured pencil on Fabriano paper, 700x960mm.

I liked the idea so much that I started work on the *Buried Giant* suite last year (2024) and several drawings are already realised. They vary in medium – some are raw pigment drawn with a brush, others are coloured pencil – and they vary greatly in size. Like *Lamp Black* they quote from twentieth-century South Island landscape painting and, as predicted, the human figure has turned up; found wooden figures of about the same mid-century vintage. These are folk art renderings of the human form and here they stand in for us all – clumsy people in an altered land.

I was in Dunedin briefly in August 2024 and visited the Hocken Collection to see Colin McCahon's *Dear Wee June*,<sup>14</sup> a pencil study for that painting<sup>15</sup> and a Cilla McQueen drawing of the same subject.<sup>16</sup> And I visited Wee June's grave at Port Chalmers.

Here is McCahon's version of June's epitaph:

In Loving Memory of  
Dear Wee June  
Who fell asleep 12th of March 1935  
Aged 4 years and 9 months  
“of such is the Kingdom of Heaven”

McCahon was a graduate of the Dunedin School of Art and his South Island-ness pervades all his work. *Dear Wee June* isn't his best, and there might be a smirk of condescension at the sentimentality of June's epitaph. In McCahon's pencil study, the Otago Harbour and Aramoana are in the background. In the painting he has replaced the harbour with the Tākaka Hills.

My response is also titled *Dear Wee June* (2025). I am conscious of issues of tapu here; I am trying to tread very carefully around images of death and burial. My Southern Catholic upbringing embraces the concept of tapu; we don't stand on graves, we wash our hands when we leave urupā and cemeteries. I would like to take a rubbing of Wee June's gravestone, but the weight of that upbringing prevents me. There are senior traditions here, and older ways of seeing the land, landscape and belonging. Since McCahon, at least three generations of Māori artmakers





Figure 11. *Dear Wee June*, 2025.  
Coloured pencil on Fabriano paper, 700x960mm.

have been using old and new media to tell other stories of the land and land loss. They are not my stories to tell; I can only record my own responses. However, the 'Buried Giant' of the title is Papatūānuku, the Green Man, or Mother Nature, a personification of the mauri or life force beneath our feet.

In keeping with the theme of solastalgia, my quotations are from Bill Sutton's *Nor'wester in the Cemetery* (1950)<sup>17</sup> and Angus's *Flight* (1967).<sup>18</sup> *Nor'wester* is a montage of the Barbados Street Cemetery in Christchurch with a rural Canterbury landscape. *Flight* reacts to the destruction of the Bolton Street Cemetery in Wellington and montages a fragment of a gravestone with others relocated to Makara. On the distant hill, scrub is being burnt off. Both these images pivot from Romantic landscape to something more honest about land use and its price. They use elegiac imagery to critique the death industries that still dominate our economy. Angus's *Flight* title is deeply ironic.

The DSA residency was a gift in so many ways. It brought me back south to familiar, if changing, places, it has given me access to the Hocken and City collections and it has given me time and space to make new work on this very personal theme.

Saint Clair Beach is deeply imprinted in my mental landscape. Even after my family moved to Christchurch my sister and I would spend all our school holidays there with grandparents. The beach has changed since then, the sand has gone. Climate change is an aggravating factor, but not the only one. The remaining piles of the old groynes have gone too. The groynes were an early twentieth century attempt to lessen the wave impact on the soft tissue of the beach and dunes, arguably more effective than the huge sand sausages that are the remaining defence against encroachment.<sup>19</sup> There is another residue of the sublime here – the power of the sea and our puny efforts at defence. My current relationship to the beach is solastalgic and in the work I have made here I interrogate that relationship – the physical changes to the beach and the emotional changes to me. In the first drawing of the suite, *Undertow* (2025), the standing poles of the groynes make a room, a remembered bedroom, exposed to the coming storm.



Figure 12. *Undertow I*, 2025.  
Coloured pencil on Fabriano paper, 700x960mm.

I must have been two or three years old. It was summer, Saint Clair Beach was crowded. I was with my sister, mother and grandmother. They took me to the water's edge to paddle, the women holding my hands, but the feeling of the sand sucking out from under my feet as the waves retreated caused a panic so intense I still remember it.

That feeling of vertiginous insecurity, I think, informs all this work.

Stephen Ellis's practice is part sculptural, part pictorial; in an inversion of conventional practice He starts with object-making and ends with drawing. He makes, finds and repairs models, montaging them in dioramas with Sublime landscapes and climate effects, often quoted verbatim from art history. The final large images are painstakingly accumulated out of tiny marks on paper, speaking to the heroic futility of attempting to repair a damaged planet. They also refer to emotional states using visionary and hypnagogic displacement, disproportion and distortions of scale in the visualisation of psychic as well as physical threat.

Ellis's framing and cadrage are informed by a twenty year career in the film industry, the drawings are windows to a threatened world; it is dusk, never dawn, and in the failing light the shapes and meanings of objects are not quite apprehensible. "We are between waking and sleep; what was safe is safe no longer, and what was familiar is now tainted by dread."

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- 2 Abdulaziz Almulhim, et al. "Climate-Induced Migration in the Global South: An In Depth Analysis," *NPJ Climate Action* 3, no. 47 (2024), accessed 9 June 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44168-024-00133-1>.
- 3 Oswald Achenbach (German, 1827–1905), Artnet, accessed 9 June 2025 <https://www.artnet.com/artists/oswald-achenbach/>; Andreas Achenbach (German, 1815–1910), Artnet. Accessed June 9 2025. <https://www.artnet.com/artists/andreas-achenbach/>.
- 4 "Death of Capt. W.C. Symonds," *New Zealand Gazette and Wellington Spectator* II, no. 96, 8 December 1841, 3, accessed June 9 2025, [https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZGWS18411208.2.9?items\\_per\\_page=25&page=5&query=death&snippet=true&sort\\_by=byDA](https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZGWS18411208.2.9?items_per_page=25&page=5&query=death&snippet=true&sort_by=byDA).
- 5 "Death of Capt. W.C. Symonds," 3.
- 6 Erick Brenstrum, "A Weather Eye," *New Zealand Geographic* 099 (September–October 2009), accessed 9 June 2025, <https://www.nzgeo.com/stories/a-weather-eyel/>.
- 7 Allison Eck, "Behind the Veil of Hypnagogic Sleep," *Harvard Medicine* (Autumn 2022), accessed 9 June 2025, <https://magazine.hms.harvard.edu/articles/behind-veil-hypnagogic-sleep>.
- 8 "About Nightcafé Studio," accessed 9 June 2025, <https://nightcafe.studio/pages/about-nightcafe>.
- 9 "Story: Coal and Coal Mining," *Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, accessed 9 June 2025, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/coal-and-coal-mining/sources>.
- 10 Peter Vangioni, *Otira – Van Der Velden* (Christchurch: Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, 2018).
- 11 Rita Angus, *Cass*, 1936. Oil on canvas on board 550 x 650mm, Christchurch Art Gallery/Te Puna o Waiwhetu a69/74.
- 12 Jill Trevelyan, *Rita Angus: An Artist's Life* (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2021).
- 13 Vangioni, *Otira*, 39 and footnote 59.
- 14 Colin McCahon, *Dear Wee June*, 1948, oil on canvas, 910 x 910 mm, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hakena, University of Otago, a78/195.
- 15 Colin McCahon, *Drawing for 'Dear Wee June'*, 1945, pencil, paper on paper, 210 x 249 mm, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hakena, University of Otago, 87/79.
- 16 Cilla McQueen, *Dear Wee June, Port Chalmers Graveyard*, pencil on paper, 300 x 420 mm, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hakena, University of Otago, 08/146.
- 17 William Sutton, *Nor'wester in the Cemetery*, 1950, oil on canvas, 1490 x 1800 mm, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, a1954/35.
- 18 Rita Angus, *Flight*, 1969, oil on hardboard, 602 x 607 mm, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, 1970-0012-1
- 19 Craig Borley, "Groynes buffeted by failure, opposition," *Otago Daily Times*, Sunday 11 October 2015, <https://www.odt.co.nz/news/dunedin/groynes-buffeted-failure-opposition>.

## ON HER OWN TERMS: REFLECTIONS ON THE CAREER OF SANDRA THOMSON

Dorothee Pauli

Sandra Thomson is an Ōtautahi Christchurch-based painter, printmaker, graphic artist and qualified sociologist. Over the last 40 years, she has maintained a consistent national and international exhibition record, using her dual skill set and well-honed powers of observation to critically examine the patriarchal structure of Western societies and how individual identities are shaped by discourses of power and resistance. She has long been fascinated by the human need to establish and adhere to spiritual belief systems, and our pre-occupation with variously imagined end-of-world scenarios. Most recently, she turned her attention to specific aspects of Western science, namely the preservation and genetic manipulation of animal DNA. She has dealt with these themes in long thematic cycles, which over the course of her career grew more pessimistic in tone. This is not surprising, given that Thomson consistently leans into the more destructive aspect of human agency and the psychological, social and environmental vulnerabilities it creates. But a tangible sense of despair is often balanced by a near gleeful appreciation of the more absurd aspects of our existence, captured in a distinctive style that relies in equal measure on observational accuracy and expressive distortion. This article, mostly based on conversations with the artist, provides a brief and largely chronological survey of her career and aims to encourage a more detailed engagement with Thomson's ongoing contribution to printmaking and drawing in Aotearoa New Zealand. To begin that discussion, the opening paragraphs are dedicated to her most recent exhibitions, which exemplify Thomson's sequential mode of addressing complex and challenging subject matter.

*Uncertainty* (2025), Thomson's latest show at the City Art Depot gallery in Christchurch, provides a logical conclusion to a theme first explored in *Interference* (2019) and *Banking* (2022). All three of these substantial collections of drawings, as well as the countless studies that preceded the final works, highlight how deeply she engages with the social phenomena she is interested in. More specifically, they represent Thomson's way of processing the ethical ambiguities and long-term impact of species conservation, extinction cycles and resurrection genetics.<sup>1</sup> *Interference* addressed our dysfunctional relationship with primates, humankind's closest living relatives on the planet. In a series of drawings best described as psychological portraits, Thomson attempted to capture the inner life and agency of the great apes, who find themselves monitored, displaced, orphaned, raised in captivity or domesticated as pets. She was inspired in part by the themes raised in Karen Joy Fowler's best-selling novel *We are all completely besides ourselves* (2013), about a child who grows up believing a chimpanzee to be her sister, as a result of an experiment by her psychologist father.<sup>2</sup> In Thomson's images, the subjects do not turn away. They hold and return the gaze of the viewer and assert themselves as powerless, but not passive receivers of the human interferences in their lives.

*Banking* focused on our well-intentioned but often misguided efforts to save the very species that we have pushed to the edge of extinction, through the preservation, or banking, of genetic materials. The show confronted her audience with a set of surreal and unsettling depictions of complete animals in a state of cryopreservation, and of animal parts such as a hoof, ear, head or tail. Collectively, they encouraged a secondary reading of the exhibition as a contemplation of patriarchal power structures that extend to our dealings with non-human lifeforms and the ethical dilemmas posed by scientific practices that attempt to mitigate that fact.



Figure 1. Sandra Thomson, *Saved but Changed 2*, 2018 (watercolour and chalk pencil, 766x562mm), (From the exhibition *Interference*, 2019, City Art Depot, Christchurch).



Figure 2. Sandra Thomson, *Shrinking Habitat*, 2018 (watercolour and chalk pencil, 1197x842mm), (From the exhibition *Interference*, 2019, City Art Depot, Christchurch).



Figure 3. Sandra Thomson, *Depository 4*, 2022, (watercolour and chalk, 420x297mm), (From the exhibition *Banking*, 2022, City Art Depot, Christchurch).



Figure 4. Sandra Thomson, *Depository 13*, 2022, (watercolour and chalk, 420x297mm), (From the exhibition *Banking*, 2022, City Art Depot, Christchurch).



*Uncertainty* (2025) addressed the next step in that cycle by illustrating in Thompson's fluid and vigorous drawing style the wider consequences of the possible resurrection of lost species. The show consisted of a sequence of somewhat distorted but plausible and engaging portraits of fictitious animals brought back from extinction with the help of closely related surviving host species. *Uncertainty*, in many ways a meditation on conflicting concepts of conservation, was all the more topical as it coincided with the news of the partial recreation of the dire wolf by Colossal Biosciences, co-founded by controversial Harvard geneticist George Church.<sup>3</sup> Thomson also referred to plans for the resurrection of the Tasmanian tiger (or thylacine), the dodo, the woolly mammoth and the passenger Pigeon,<sup>4</sup> as well as the ongoing debate about the authenticity of a species brought back into existence in this way. The exhibition pointed to questions about viable habitats for the resurrected creatures, how humans will interact with them and the price that the initial host species may have to pay when forced to participate in de-extinction projects. Thomson's collection of surreal yet vulnerable creatures was clearly inspired by her interpretation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), but also by legitimate questions about who is 'saved' first when we play God – animals that humans consider to be cute and appealing, or the less handsome ones?<sup>5</sup>

Overall, then, *Uncertainty* was a befitting and stylistically cohesive finale to Thomson's engagement with recent chapters of natural history. As was the case with *Interference* and *Banking*, her attention to detail references the work of pioneering eighteenth and nineteenth century illustrators of exotic fauna and flora, but without their sense of enthusiasm for the ideological positions and notions of progress embodied by Western science. In line with Thomson's dual training, it was arguably the human species that was the most closely observed subject of all three shows. When seen in the context of human exceptionalism, the works reminded us why our control over and relationship with all the earth's creatures is faltering. So far, neither our scientific insights into climate change and extinction cycles, nor the moral obligations we may feel towards vulnerable species, have persuaded us to behave in accordance with humankind's place in the planet's environmental and spiritual eco-systems.



Figure 5. Sandra Thomson, *Uncertainty 1*, 2025, (watercolour and chalk pencil, 565x385mm, (From the exhibition *Banking*, 2022, City Art Depot, Christchurch).



Figure 6. Sandra Thomson, *Uncertainty 14*, 2025, (watercolour and chalk pencil, 770x565mm, (From the exhibition *Banking*, 2022, City Art Depot, Christchurch).



Thomson's engagement with some of the more problematic aspects of scientific endeavour and the eugenic temptations offered by technology relate to her thoughts on another evolutionary process, which in future may impact profoundly on what it means to be human. The advances made in the development of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) relate directly to Thomson's interest in the sociological functions of art in a variety of historical contexts. She is well aware that the evolution of GenAI may challenge sociologist Howard Becker's argument that "the social systems which produce art survive in all sorts of ways, though never exactly as they have in the past."<sup>6</sup> The digital revolution has impacted on the social structures Becker is referring to in ways he could not have foreseen in the 1980s, as much as they have changed the teaching, production and consumption of art itself. Some fear that GenAI could spell the end of art or human creativity altogether. If creativity is defined as the ability to generate ideas that are new, valuable and surprising,<sup>7</sup> then it can be argued that machines by now have pulled up alongside their human counterparts. That said, similar debates followed the emergence of photography in the nineteenth century and the appearance of Marcel Duchamp's disruptive ready-mades in the early twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> Neither development resulted in the death of art.

It remains to be seen what philosophical, legal and economic implications GenAI will have for any future art world, but Thomson freely admits that she remains unaffected by the ongoing speculative discussions on that topic, and that as a late-career artist she is free to make that choice. She is not tempted to explore digital technology as an iterative tool linked to linguistic prompts. For her, creativity is about the flow, about being in the moment, letting the materiality of analogue media guide her process and the decision-making about when something is right, or as right as it can be.<sup>9</sup> As she approaches the final chapters of her career, some might suggest that her work could even be studied as a historical model of what it means or once meant to be a professional artist. It is traditional in technique and maintains an understanding of art as a profoundly intellectual and physical activity, associated with critical thinking, technical skill, observational exactitude, consistent effort and inventiveness. More specifically, her work confirms that it is the creative human mind that searches for and reflects on the "causal relationships between different actors in the world."<sup>10</sup> That timeless quality could be seen as a leitmotif of Thomson's entire creative output thus far.

In many ways, Thomson's career confirms Becker's statement that the production of art is closely aligned with the social structures that produce it, and in that sense she followed the most obvious and reliable path to artistic professionalism twentieth century Aotearoa New Zealand could offer. She developed her practice well before the digital revolution and could consider the impact of the industrial revolution on Western modes of art with the benefit of hindsight. Her training more or less followed the expected route of tertiary study, but from the beginning she sought to accommodate both her interest in the social sciences as well as the fine arts. At the University of Canterbury she completed a BA in Sociology in 1974 and a BFA in 1981.<sup>11</sup> At Ilam, her tutors were Don Peebles, Doris Lusk, Laurence Aberhart and Barry Cleavin. It was a lecture given by Cleavin that persuaded Thomson to switch from painting to printmaking as her major focus. Drypoint etching and woodcut were her preferred media; she enjoyed the physicality of the carving process involved. Lithography was not well supported at the school and therefore did not feature prominently in her later work. From Cleavin especially she inherited a commitment to technical excellence and compositional exactitude, a quality she later also looked for in her own students' work.<sup>12</sup>

At Ilam, she Thomson formed her first and arguably most significant professional networks, confirming the collaborative nature of art making and the importance of an ongoing exchange of ideas.<sup>13</sup> She was, and still is, especially close to Nicola Jackson and her partner Stuart Griffiths, but was also friends with Lorraine Webb, Karen Mason and Jill McIntosh. Even though younger New Zealand artists at the time were beginning to look closer to home for inspiration, in terms of the style and the content their work, Thomson, like many of her friends, remained committed to using European traditions as the yardstick to measure her own efforts. Expressionism, particularly German Expressionism, was her guide. She still admires the work of Max Beckmann, Ernst-Ludwig Kirchner and Käthe Kollwitz, but also the more lyrical paintings and pastels of Marc Chagall. More recently she studied the drawings of Paula Rego, inspired by Rego's productivity and the daring scale of much of her work. Nicola Hicks, Sarah Simblet and William Kentridge are other contemporary influences, while closer to home she looks to the work of not only Jackson but Kristin Hollis, Kushana Bush and Robin White.

In line with these expanding influences, coupled with her reading of broader social developments, Thomson's style and choice of media evolved continuously, with drawing remaining the one constant in her practice. Early work, such as *The Ridgeway Flyers* (1981, etching, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū), with its compositional exactitude and technical control, clearly demonstrates the formative influence of Cleavin and a choice of subject matter as yet untroubled by the ideological shifts of the later twentieth century. That changed as she turned her attention to the broader goals and concepts of post-modernism. The immediacy of conceptual and performance art, as well as pop art and the Women's Art Movement (WAM), proved especially appealing for younger New Zealand artists at the time and like most of her contemporaries Thomson was familiar with key WAM projects such as Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* (1974–1979). Moreover, as previously noted, Thomson emerged from art school in 1981, a watershed year in the history of New Zealand because of the culture war ignited by the Springbok Tour. Already an Anti-Vietnam war protester as a high-school student, Thomson was a HART member before the tour and very active on the barricades during the event itself. For her, the tour shattered the illusion of national unity and heightened her awareness of the polarised and patriarchal nature of New Zealand society.<sup>14</sup>



Figure 7. Sandra Thomson, *Neglected Women Drown 2/20*, 1988, (woodcut, 815x565mm), Collection of the Ara Institute of Canterbury, Christchurch.



Figure 8. Sandra Thomson, *Neglected Women Jump 4/20*, 1988, (woodcut, 770x590mm), Collection of the Ara Institute of Canterbury, Christchurch.

Arguably, the open debates about cultural identity and social justice of the late 1970s and 1980s further encouraged Thomson to do “her own thing”<sup>15</sup> and to use her work to respond to contemporary socio-political debates that affected her directly and to her study of feminist theory. The *Neglected Women* series of woodcuts (1988) was a direct response to an article Thomson had read a Hong Kong newspaper reporting on the suicides committed by women desperate to escape the social and cultural isolation imposed on them in a deeply patriarchal society.<sup>16</sup> In these deceptively colourful works, groups of women can be seen jumping from high buildings or drowning themselves in dark rivers. They mark the appearance of a style that Cassandra Fusco later described as “agonistic, funky-edged and rarely ‘soft’.”<sup>17</sup> Their appeal is at first satirical, and the serious, if not tragic, message of these vigorously carved woodcuts only reveals itself at a second or third glance. This is entirely appropriate to the marginalised position the women found themselves in and the invisible psychological damage they suffered as a consequence. Women, or more precisely the limitations imposed on women through shifting modes of gender

construction, continued to inspire subsequent prints and print cycles, such as *The Levitator* (1990, lithograph, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa) and *If the Shoe Fits* (1995, woodcut, Ara Institute of Canterbury). The latter, depicting crippled toes completing a tortuously high-heeled shoe, points to Thomson's decade-long investigation of "some of the manufactured extremes that shape, reshape, define and redefine not only the human body, but also the wider power structure in society."<sup>18</sup>

The question of gender construction resurfaced in a series of works addressing some of the themes she encountered while travelling to Mexico and later Spain, both countries which in Thomson's opinion are very unlike secular New Zealand. Her time in these deeply religious countries inspired a long thematic cycle addressing Catholic phenomena such as relics and saints, the cloak of Guadeloupe and forgeries of the shroud of Turin. Female saints and what constitutes appropriate conduct in women, as postulated by a religious patriarchy, took centre stage in *Saintly Behaviour* (2001). With works such as *St Agatha* (2001, woodblock), Thomson pointed to the extreme self-abnegation and humility women had to demonstrate before they could be considered worthy of sainthood. In response to these bodies of work Cassandra Fusco pointed out that:

Sandra Thomson makes no claim to universal truths. But she squarely rejects and endeavours to deconstruct what she sees as the 'death dealing' binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity – past and present. Thomson's work explores subjectivity and the forces shaping it – cultural, social and political. This recent series builds upon earlier investigations wherein authoritarian and manipulative pressures are exposed as limiting women's perspectives, enticing them to aspire to impossible positions.<sup>19</sup>

Thomson concluded her engagement with the construction of female identity according to Catholic dogma with *Relics* (2004). The latter included a series of works in the shape and size of nuns' collars, featuring symbols such as tightly wound rosebuds to signify the sexual repression of that self-declared bride of Christ, while grid-based overlays resembling a tight mesh can be read as markers of voluntary incarceration.<sup>20</sup>

Thomson's sustained critique of patriarchal power structures and their impact on the lives of women was not lost on Pamela Gerrish-Nunn, formerly a lecturer at the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts. *Cutting a Dash* (2007), held at the SoFA gallery (then located at the Christchurch Arts Centre) and curated by Gerrish-Nunn, was



Figure 9. Sandra Thomson, *Underwear for Amazons*, 1996 (woodcut, 480x620mm), From the exhibition *Supporting Roles*, 1997, CoCA, Christchurch. (Private collection, Christchurch).



Figure 10. Sandra Thomson, *Collar for a Bride of Christ*, 2004, (screenprint on fabric, 550x520mm approx.), From the exhibition *Relics*, 2004, CoCA, Christchurch, (Private collection, Christchurch)

the first and, so far, only retrospective of Thomson's work. A feminist art historian, Gerrish-Nunn could identify with many of the underlying messages in Thomson's work, which also included the satirical trawl through the history of fashion. Included in the retrospective was *Underwear for Amazons* (1996, woodcut), featuring a selection of corsets and other such shapewear on mannequin stands. They refer not only to the changing beauty standards applied to the female form, but also to how individuals can be persuaded to squeeze into modes of performing gender in ways that are not of their own choosing. At the time, Thomson pointed out that some women chose to wear corset-like structures for their protective appeal.<sup>21</sup> But even then they can be criticised for doing so – further proof that women's sense of self and their appearance are continuously patrolled from different ideological positions.<sup>22</sup>

Thomson's deepening feminist analysis of contemporary society provided her with a clear understanding of the common social contracts and obligations that could have dissipated her professional focus. She accepted a modest lifestyle ahead of more commercial directions her work could have taken. Independently minded and not tied down domestic commitments, she travelled widely, and still does, having only recently returned from Vietnam. Previously, in the tradition of the Big OE, she not only explored Mexico and Europe but also the United States, Asia and Australia. Drawing all along the way and haunting art galleries wherever she went, she came to understand first-hand the interdependency of cultural change and artistic production. A variety of part-time jobs kept her financially afloat. In 1988, she landed a temporary teaching position at what was then the Christchurch Polytechnic School of Art and Design and it was her former tutor Graham Bennett who eventually helped her to secure permanent employment at the school. Print-making and drawing formed the mainstay of her teaching. Overall, Thomson experienced the studio team as a highly supportive additional professional network, and appreciated working alongside a "unified staff talking about teaching, sharing ideas and projects."<sup>23</sup> Thomson stayed most closely associated with the Applied Visual Arts stream, before retiring in early 2024. While not without its recurring challenges, Thomson enjoyed teaching, especially when "students really caught on" and in so doing challenged her to learn something new. This, in Thomson's words, is one of the often-overlooked benefits of teaching, namely the exploration of new media students may be interested in or finding new artist models.<sup>24</sup> She led their explorations by example and demonstrated the benefits of practice-based research through her consistent and often experimental use of graphic media.

Thomson has only ever worked full-time for two years and, as alluded to above, the 35 years she taught at the School were therefore highly productive in terms of her personal art practice as well. Rather than curtailing her creative output, the often collaborative projects instigated by her colleagues helped her build a consistent exhibition record at local and international venues. That said, by her own admission, Thomson has never been good at blowing her own trumpet. Therefore, a drawing prize she earned in 1984 in the former Yugoslavia and the Olivia Spencer Bower award in 1993 remain the only such entries in her artist's CV. Her stable employment also meant that in 1994 Thomson was able to buy a modest house in the central city, where the spare bedroom serves as her studio. She lives by Virginia Woolf's assertion that a woman not only needs an independent income, but also a "room of one's own," if she wants her creative practice to flourish.<sup>25</sup>

Thomson's discussions with colleagues and students alike opened up new thematic directions in her work and she eventually turned her attention to the wider issue of the exploitation of power and trust in religious institutions. In *Tricks and Traps* (2007), held at Gallery 64zero3 in Christchurch, works like *Dirty Linen* (2006, screenprint on fabric) and *Evidence Singlets* (2007, screenprint, mixed media) confronted head-on the issue of child abuse in the Catholic church and the cover-ups that protect the perpetrators to this day. Appropriately, while still formally inventive, no element of satire or visual pun lightened the tone of this exhibition. In hindsight, it could be seen as a first indication that Thomson's work was beginning to take on a more serious note. This would have found the approval of Warren Feeney, who earlier commented that "Thomson is on far more secure ground when she evokes more seriously subtle emotions."<sup>26</sup> Overall, though, she has received very little critical or art historical attention. Her style, subject matter and preferred media have not widely resonated with local commentators, which is not an unusual response to art focused on social commentary. Another feature of her process, namely the amount of work and time Thomson devoted to thematic cycles, could easily disappoint audiences with shorter attention spans.





Figure 11. Sandra Thomson, *Dirty Linen*, 2006  
(detail, screenprint on fabric).



Figure 12. Sandra Thomson, *Dirty Linen*, 2006  
(detail, screenprint on fabric).

At times Thomson's choice of subject matter has taken on a prophetic aspect. Anticipating the Covid 19 pandemic by some five years, *Waiting* (2015) explored the intersection of spiritual beliefs, superstition and end-of-world scenarios. Referencing the Book of Revelations, and in particular The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, this suite of works featured long wallpaper drops covered in densely drawn signifiers of pending doom, such as mushroom clouds and the now all too familiar shapes of spikey viruses. Thomson has long been interested in the social function of apocalyptic narratives, which these days circulate most freely on the internet. According to Thomson,

Most societies share narratives of the cataclysmic destruction of the earth, the annihilation of evil and the creation of paradise. For the religious, this is seen as inevitable, meaningful and part of the divine plan. There is now a growing belief in a secular apocalypse. It is also seen as inevitable but for the secular the destruction is meaningless, there is no redemption and no hope.<sup>27</sup>

And as we await (more and more anxiously, it seems) further threats to the existing world order and notions of human equality, much of Thomson's older work has become highly relevant again. It reminds us that social progress, can be easily undone, that we apparently do not learn from history and that one of art's essential and enduring functions, regardless of the social systems that produce it, is to reflect on what it means to be human.



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- 1 Sandra Thomson, personal communication, 12 September 2024. For additional information on all three exhibitions, see City Art Depot, <https://www.cityart.co.nz>.
- 2 Karen Joy Fowler, *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (New York: Marian Wood Books, 2013).
- 3 "Far From Fiction," Colossal Laboratories & Biosciences, accessed 2 April 2025, <https://colossal.com/direwolf/>.
- 4 "10 Long-Lost Animals De-Extinction Scientists Are Attempting to Bring Back From The Grave," *DiscoverWildlife*, 5 March 2025, <https://www.discoverwildlife.com/animal-facts/de-extinction-species>.
- 5 Thomson, personal communication, 11 November 2024.
- 6 Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982) 6.
- 7 Margaret A. Boden, "Creativity and Artificial Intelligence," *Artificial Intelligence* 103, nos. 1–2 (August 1998): 347.
- 8 Claudia Baxter, "Ai Art: The End of Creativity or a New Movement?" *BBC*, 22 October 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20241018-ai-art-the-end-of-creativity-or-a-new-movement>.
- 9 Thomson, personal communication, 30 January 2025.
- 10 Laurie Clarke, "When AI Can Make Art-What Does It Mean for Art?" *The Guardian*, 12 November 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/nov/12/when-ai-can-make-art-what-does-it-mean-for-creativity-dall-e-midjourney>.
- 11 Thomson's parents shared none of her creative interests. Her father was a grain merchant and her mother raised the three children. Thomson describes her brother Jim as the obviously artistically gifted one, but sadly he was killed in a motorcycle accident in Australia, aged only 22. Her surviving sibling is her sister Ruth, who eventually settled in Australia. Sandra Thomson, personal communication, 11 November 2024.
- 12 Thomson, personal communication, 11 November 2024.
- 13 Becker, *Art Worlds*.
- 14 Thomson, personal communication, 17 October 2024.
- 15 Thomson, personal communication, 11 November 2024.
- 16 Thomson, personal communication, 11 November 2024. While Thomson has a clear recollection of the article, it is not locatable in any digital archives.
- 17 Cassandra Fusco, "Impossible Postures: Sandra Thomson," *Craft Arts International*, no. 53 (2001): 35.
- 18 S Thomson, quoted in Fusco, "Impossible Postures", 35.
- 19 Fusco, "Impossible Postures: Sandra Thomson", 38.
- 20 At the time, Thomson immersed herself in medieval history in particular, and came across St Humility, a thirteenth-century Italian nun, who lived as a so-called anchoress or hermit in a closed-off cell for 12 years. Fusco, "Impossible Postures," 37.
- 21 Thomson, personal communication, 12 September 2024.
- 22 See Melis Mulazimoglu Erkal, "The Cultural History of the Corset and Gendered Body in Social and Literary Landscapes," *European Journal of Language and Literature Studies* 3, no. 3 (September–December 2017): 109–118, [https://revistia.com/files/articles/ejls\\_v3\\_i3\\_17/Melis.pdf](https://revistia.com/files/articles/ejls_v3_i3_17/Melis.pdf); Ellie V. Bramley, "Liberate Rather Than Repress: Why Corsets are Having a Fashion Moment," *The Guardian*, 1 March 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2024/mar/01/liberate-repress-corsets-bound-back-fashion>.
- 23 Thomson, personal communication, 17 October 2024. Denise Copland joined her in the printmaking studio on a part-time basis, while Cheryl Lucas taught drawing and ceramics. Michael Reed was responsible for 2-D design, illustration and printmaking. Bill Cummings, Bing Dawe, Randall Watson and Phil Aitken were mostly involved in 3-D and product design courses, while various other full and part-time staff members taught the academic components of the rapidly evolving programs of the school.
- 24 Thomson, personal communication, 17 October 2024.
- 25 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Hogarth Press, 1929). Thomson's 'room of her own' proved to be especially important after the Christchurch earthquakes, when many of her contemporaries lost their affordable studio spaces in the inner city and therefore their ability to keep on working.
- 26 Warren Feeney, "Supporting Roles," *The Press*, 11 September 1996, 12.

## MOTHERCAKE: DRAWING FROM A DIALOGICAL ORGAN

Sam Loe

'Mothercake' is the verbatim translation from my German mother tongue of the word 'mutterkuchen,' meaning placenta. The placenta is an organ that has fascinated me since I first grew one in my own body alongside my eldest child 18 years ago. This intrigue has evolved into a central theme in my artistic practice, allowing me to explore both the Bodily and the Self while moving into a more relational space with the Other.<sup>1</sup> As a third body formed between mother and child, the placenta embodies what I consider a dialogical organ – an intermediary space where individual boundaries dissolve into shared existence and meaning emerges through embodied interaction. Siri Hustvedt, art critic and author, describes the placenta as the least understood of all human organs. It has been overlooked both from a scientific and philosophical point of view but contains rich possibilities and new perspectives – not least, intercorporeal, intersubjective models through which to think about making as well as viewing art. Through what I term 'somatic abstraction,'<sup>2</sup> my drawings and paintings investigate the physicality, emotionality and psychology of the mother-child experience within and beyond the traditional Madonna and Pietà tropes and the domestic subjects historically assigned to and associated with mother-artists. This essay summarises my postgraduate diploma research and studio practice at the Dunedin School of Art resulting in a final exhibition at Project 100, Nelson, in December 2024.



Figure 1. Sam Loe, *Tender Inheritance*, 2024. Acrylic and oil paint, 540x635mm framed.

## THE MOTHERCAKE SERIES

I exhibited a series of painted and collaged works rendered in a soft, fleshy mucous palette that reveal cartoonish compositions where external and internal body-parts and abstracted, intuitive gestures and textures emerge and overlap, with paint serving as a “flexible glue holding everything together.”<sup>3</sup> I explore tensions between opposites, notably cohesion and disintegration, creating what has been described to me as “retinal residues and ‘art dust’ striving but never quite permitted to resolve.”<sup>4</sup> Two of the larger works are cut-out pieces presented on unstretched canvas and velcroed directly onto the wall, exploring installation relationships between body and space. The paintings on stretched canvas speak to symbolic narratives that open into imaginary interior landscapes. My paintings begin with a deep empathy and visceral response to mother and child imagery from art history, and in this essay, I explore both the historical context of motherhood and art making as well as the relevance of continuing to engage with these themes in contemporary art practice.

Somatic abstraction allows me to continue the interoceptive and exteroceptive inquiry of inhabiting my body that I have developed over many years of Yoga and somatic inquiry. By working with abstraction, I explore the internal, embodied experience of motherhood – the sensations, emotional turbulence, physical transformation and psychological complexity – without being constrained by how motherhood ‘should’ look. There’s also something powerful about abstraction’s refusal to make motherhood consumable or comprehensible to the male gaze. I come to drawing and painting with a curiosity about physicality itself and from the perspective of my reproductive body. Biologically, a reproductive body requires ongoing ‘re-inhabiting’ because it continues to change so much over a lifetime, including menarche and menstruation, pregnancy, birthing, breast-feeding, matrescence, perimenopause and menopause; each stage requires adaptation to new physical and emotional experiences. This re-inhabiting could be considered analogous to making a painting. Just as a body changes over time, a painting evolves through a series of both subtle and bold shifts from blank canvas to finished artwork. Each stage requires a response, layer or adaptation to what’s already there. This process obscures some of what came before, but also perhaps still reveals some of the initial layers or even blank canvas, much like the way our bodies retain traces of earlier stages.

The term ‘mothercake’ frames my methodology and work. When I divide the word into its two constituent parts, it seems that the ‘mother’ part informs my subject matter and concepts through critical theory, art historical methodologies, feminism, community of practice as well as auto-ethnographical exploration and is what I aim to speak to through this text. The mother-child relationship is particularly potent for me as my oldest child is stepping into adulthood after a life of medical complexities, hospital visits and terrifying experiences, which I as his mother have navigated alongside him. The ‘cake’ part is about the making – recipes, ingredients and methods that form my studio research and therefore the materiality and physicality of the work. When ‘mother’ and ‘cake’ come together they offer a dialogue and collaboration that births my placental paintings.

## THE PLACENTA AS A DIALOGICAL NOTION

The dialogical placenta referred to in the title of this essay goes beyond language to include bodily sensation. Philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin emphasises that meaning emerges through interaction rather than existing in isolation. For Bakhtin, dialogue transcends verbal exchange: “in dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit; with his whole body.”<sup>5</sup> This embodied understanding of dialogue directly informs my somatic approach to painting, where the placenta serves as both subject and methodological metaphor. My work often plays with calculated shapes as well as more spontaneous and intuitive gestures, hard edges against soft smudges and texture versus flatness to engage with the allusiveness of this subject. I am feeling my way through a personal language of abstraction using my ‘mother sense’ to explore the space between two bodies, in this case mother and child – a kind of third body that speaks to an intercorporeality.<sup>6</sup>

The placental subject naturally leads to the question of what happens in the space between the painter's body and the viewer's body. As Hustvedt points out, "The act of space between is how human beings develop over time."<sup>7</sup> Beyond its biological importance as an organ body that forms between mother and child, the placenta continues to exist figuratively after birth through social space and the nurturing of parenting. Hustvedt argues that ignoring the placenta correlates with disregarding the maternal, the driving force of life itself. For Hustvedt, "The placenta is the dialogical organ, and it symbolises humanity's maternal origin, our radical dependence on others, and the terrifying borderlines between male and female, between human and animal, and between body and soul."<sup>8</sup>

A similar idea is prominent in te ao Māori where Papatūānuku, the earth mother, represents the maternal origin and the relationship humans have with the land. The word 'whenua' in te reo Māori means both placenta and land, showing the deep connection between people and their environment. This connection includes soil, rocks, plants, animals and the people of the land (tangata whenua), highlighting the umbilical tether between people and place. It is customary practice to bury a newborn's whenua (placenta) and pito (umbilical cord) in a significant place, often under a native tree. This ritual, connecting child to land and ancestors to future, inspired me to do the same for my own children birthed here in Aotearoa. Having called three countries home in my lifetime, I've grappled with the notion of belonging and at times felt unmoored from any single cultural or national identity. In response, I've turned inward, seeking to map my sense of home and spiritual connection within the landscape of my own body.

The dialogical notion of the placenta allows me to explore a shared aliveness that connects my soma as a painter to the viewer's soma, raising questions about balancing personal subjectivity and experience with the objectivity required by critical research. As art critic Edward Hanfling notes, there is a difference between creating art for oneself and producing research with academic rigour and relevance.<sup>9</sup> My challenge lies in framing auto-ethnography or my own personal narrative as research that carries a duty to an audience and a discipline, ensuring that my work transcends mere self-satisfaction or therapy. In other words, I want my work to get from ME to WE.

In her essay 'Painting Bodies,'<sup>10</sup> artist Helen Johnson describes how the full-bodied engagement of painting serves the subject matter so that "the vulnerability of this moment is carried forth on another register."<sup>11</sup> She suggests that when we paint bodies, they show us our unconscious selves in ways we can't anticipate or control; "inhabiting one's body in order to carry out a subjective outpouring is perhaps paradoxically, a useful means to help us find a way outside ourselves".<sup>12</sup> Johnson discusses how one might make paintings that reflect experiences of motherhood in their intimacy and generosity; and, I would add, speak to the experience of holding and caring and to the verb of mothering that requires ongoing adaptation, transformation and re-inhabiting. As both artist and writer, she speaks to the challenges still presented to mother-artists: "I have internalised an idea that mothers and art don't mix, that art about motherhood is boring. This idea remains entrenched in the artistic canon though there are points of rupture."<sup>13</sup> The word 'rupture' stands out to me here as it speaks simultaneously to destructive and creative forces. It alludes to the physical violence of birth – the breaking of membranes – while also describing the metaphorical breaking of artistic conventions that have excluded maternal experience. From an empowering perspective, 'rupture' represents the breaching of aesthetic boundaries and the disruption of a male-dominated canon in art history.

## ADDRESSING THE MATERNAL BLIND SPOTS IN ART HISTORY

Early depictions of mothers were heavily influenced by male perspectives, often disregarding the complexities of maternal experience.<sup>14</sup> Catherine McCormack, in her book *Women in the Picture*, writes about the limited and often idealised representations of motherhood in classical art, particularly Madonna and Child imagery, typically demure and young European women "unruffled by motherhood's physical and emotional strains and attentive to the male infant on her lap, at her breast, or in her arms."<sup>15</sup> Purity and virtue have continued to drive the mother narrative through the twentieth century, not just within art or religious contexts but deep into secular perceptions of what it means to be a 'good' woman. The serene aesthetic applied by male artists to motherhood and the pregnant or maternal body kept it controlled, contained and non-threatening. Perhaps this is why the moment of

birth itself has been a blind spot in the story of art, a taboo or too obscene to contemplate, the opening of one body to produce another being the ultimate in abjection. The act of giving birth blurs the boundaries between self and other, as the mother's body expels a being that was once part of herself but is now separate.

Julia Kristeva points to the human reaction of horror to the threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of distinction between subject and object or Self and Other.<sup>16</sup> Her writings on the abject and development of 'herethics' offer feminist artists a mode of interpretation that challenges patriarchal norms in art history by embracing the ambiguous, bodily and relational aspects of maternal experience.<sup>17</sup> Louise Bourgeois has explored these themes extensively, evident in her 2007 series of red gouache drawings, which centre birthing and breastfeeding and carry titles such as *The Good Mother*, *The Bad Mother*, *The Hysterical Mother* and *The Feeding*. Hustvedt admires the way Bourgeois "addressed the push and pull of intimate human relations, the bonds formed, as well as the separations, breaks or cuts that occur in the zone between people – a space that is not the self and not the other, but a third thing."<sup>18</sup> It is this third thing that I am grappling with portraying in my own work through the process of somatic abstraction.

The ongoing challenge of integrating motherhood into the broader artistic discourse is surprisingly visible within the history of abstraction. Post-war American abstraction was led by "the ejaculations of [Jackson] Pollock,"<sup>19</sup> despite the fact that many women artists also made abstract expressionist work at this time, including Lee Krasner, Helen Frankenthaler and Joan Mitchell. Male critics celebrated masculine qualities such as large scale, energy and genius when in fact Pollock's work could easily have been seen as lyrical and optical and embracing more feminine principles. Often described as trailblazers or "Mothers of Abstraction,"<sup>20</sup> only one of the key abstract expressionists actually gave birth – Grace Hartigan, who quickly and absolutely rejected the role of mothering, leaving her son Jeffery to be raised by her parents.<sup>21</sup> Decades later Hartigan openly declared that she "hated being a mother."<sup>22</sup> She felt motherhood was incompatible with an art career, an attitude that was shared by Joan Mitchell who had several abortions because of this belief.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the second wave of feminist critique around motherhood and painting evolved in earnest during the 1980s with the seminal *Mothers* touring exhibition, mounted by the Women's Art Gallery. The exhibition catalogue contained two pivotal articles by Bridie Lonie and Juliet Batten that highlighted both the under-represented traditions of nurturing and mothering in New Zealand's art history and contemporary motherhood concerns. Batten concluded prophetically that the next stage for art was to unlock the female experience and explore every aspect of women's fertility. "From the still birth to the live birth, from the deformed child to the healthy child, from the joy of a growing infant to the torment and rage of it – all these subjects remain like unborn infants themselves, curling in the shadows of a dusty closet, waiting to be released into the light of day."<sup>23</sup>

Today, despite ongoing challenges, we do reassuringly find increasing representation of the realities of motherhood in contemporary art. The touring exhibition *Acts of Creation: On Art and Motherhood*, curated by Hettie Judah, addresses the disturbing blind spot in art history, asserting the mother-artist as an important cultural figure. The show included, many contemporary works, such as the child-mother paintings of Marlene Dumas, Chantal Joffe's double portrait of herself naked next to her clothed daughter and Caroline Walker's still life of feeding bottles and pumps – all of them using fast, expressionistic brush strokes to map out the anxiety of their subjects. Bobby Baker's *Timed Drawings* attempts to convey the dark humour of motherhood through a series of sketches, one of which depicts crisps on the carpet done in five snatched minutes, another a "captivatingly tragicomic" drawing of her own head suddenly exploding as she attempts a self-embrace, entitled *Comfort Yourself, all within 20 lonely minutes*.<sup>24</sup>

Another recent exhibition, *Maternal Inheritances* at La Trobe Art Institute in 2023, took as its underlying theme the phenomenon of mitochondrial DNA transference from mother to offspring, examining complex relationships with time, memory and identity. The exhibition linked ancestral connections to future visions of hope and possibility, linking reproductive and ecological care and echoing some of the matriarchal notions of Indigenous knowledge, where the land is acknowledged as the life-giving Mother Earth. One of the artists, Jahnne Pasco-White, hung her



fleshy, organic paintings, entitled *Milky Ways*, in an outdoor courtyard as if they were stained sheets hanging on a washing line. The works have no central focus but rather a bodily wash of colours that speak to postpartum leakiness. Using natural dye and staining processes, fabrics are cut, interlocked and overlapped into assemblages that hold the feeling of repair and restructure. Many of her paintings reveal flux and vulnerability, yet convey solid competence and trust in the process, recording the re-inhabiting that I am so interested in.

## PROCESS, EVALUATION AND RESEARCH OUTCOMES OF THE MOTHERCAKE SERIES

Like Pasco-White, though with a different aesthetic sensibility, I use collage and cut-out shapes to speak to rupture, repair and re-inhabiting. The shapes are often those that I have made with my own body or that I see and feel in historical paintings depicting motherhood, which, when I interpret and transpose them, feels like a conversation across time. Abstract forms emerge as visual manifestations of my exploration of placental subject matter, suggesting connections that go beyond the biological to embrace societal, metaphorical and philosophical dimensions of motherhood. I find myself returning again and again to the emotive and progressive works of mother, artist and social activist Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945). Her work addresses war, poverty and hunger as well as women's rights such as the abolition of anti-abortion laws. Her most famous work, *Woman with Dead Child* (1903) shows the two figures entwined into a highly visceral portrait of maternal love and grief. The artist served as her own model; she sketching herself in front of a mirror, while cradling her seven-year-old son Peter, who heartbreakingly met his premature death a few years later in the First World War. In an era when many children did not live past the age of five, Kollwitz gave public expression to the primal pain that mothers suffered in private. She drew on personal experiences but managed to speak to society as a whole. Sadly, more than a century later, her themes are still highly relevant, especially when it comes to war, refugees as well as women's rights on abortion.<sup>25</sup>

Kollwitz's drawings, etchings and lithographs became the starting point for my *Mothercake* series. Considered a "Konnerin – master of her craft,"<sup>26</sup> her technical and graphic renderings of form and shape, often through cross-hatching techniques, are particularly effective in communicating the emotionality of her subjects. In Elizabeth Premingers's 1992 essay "Kollwitz Reconsidered,"<sup>27</sup> I appreciate the invitation to view her works in terms of a continual interaction of oppositions. "She was at once conventional and unconventional, conservative and progressive, reflecting an unresolved duel that was played out in her life and her art. These contradictory elements account for the richness of her work as well as for some of the confusions surrounding her accomplishment."<sup>28</sup> These oppositions and contradictions create an umbilical pull and push in me, as well as nourishing seeds of inspiration for my own drawings and paintings.

Pietàs, especially those of Kollwitz, speak very directly across history to my personal contemporary experience. As someone who has watched my own child survive several near-death experiences due to medical complications, I connect deeply with this imagery of maternal grief and fear. *Tender Inheritance* (Figure 1) responds directly to Kollwitz's etchings. With a felt sense of figure and body, I drew from the shapes and connections in her artworks but continuously rotated the canvas as I worked, allowing new abstract, organic forms to emerge, some ugly and repulsive, some pleasing to me, through a pastel colour palette that adds a stark contrast to the black marks that reference the originals. Additional layers in oil paint develop through emotional engagement with the sensory entanglement of bodies as touching, pulsing shapes and gestures keeping the figurative present. I also bring to the canvas memories and a practice of observation of embodiment through many years of life drawing as well as through teaching Yoga and somatics.

With *Physis* (Figure 2), titled for both the philosophical principle of nature's growth and the medical term for bone growth plates, I wanted to speak more to the re-inhabiting of the reproductive body through a multilayered approach. Each medium, from charcoal to gouache to acrylics and finally oils, remains partially visible as shapes build upon the overall form, creating an entanglement of medium, shape, colour and gesture that evokes the bodily



Figure 2. Sam Loe, *Physis*, 2024.  
Charcoal, housepaint, gouache, acrylic spray paint, acrylic and oil on canvas, 900x1600mm.



Figure 3. Sam Loe, *Sometimes things that come apart can be glued together*, 2024.

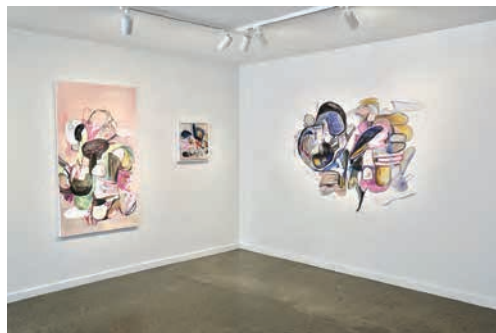
Charcoal, gouache, acrylic, acrylic glue, oil and oil stick on rabbit size soaked canvas, 1350x1700mm.

whilst letting go of the figurative, embracing the placenta as an organ of relationship.

In my assembled shape paintings or cut-pieces, such as *Sometimes things that come apart can be glued together* (Figure 3), I further develop the tension that emerges between sharp edges and expressive gestures by using scissors as a drawing tool, marking the rupture and repair around the original forms before reassembling and adding another layer of paint. These cut-out shapes also allow me to push the forms out of the frame, from centre to the edge, and feel the paintings as new organ objects or bodies developing in relationship with the architectural space and the viewer. I have become increasingly interested in creating something along the lines of what philosopher Alexander R Galloway calls an “intraface.”<sup>29</sup> This speaks to a modernist painting strategy dealing with the centre/edge relationship, where framing conditions migrate inwardly whilst the image pushes outward to create a “zone of indecision” where the subject and object hover and interweave. I see this as a key concern emerging from this body of work and my research intention – to develop somatic abstraction and its capacity to inhabit and invite a physical response and dialogue with the viewer, returning to the placental notion of a third, relational space.

I observed people's different interactions with the stretched canvas works and the cut pieces in my postgraduate diploma exhibition. They seemed to respond more viscerally to the latter, moving around them, stepping back, leaning in and walking along them as they tried to position their bodies in relationship to the shapes. Teetering between painting and object, the cut-pieces activated the architectural space and so, for me, more successfully mediated between internal and external worlds, bringing in the placental theme as lived experience rather than depiction. I'd like to think that in this way sensations of nurture, care and mothering (as a verb) are present in the space between the artist and the viewer.

To conclude, ‘mutterkuchen,’ or ‘mothercake,’ encapsulates the duality inherent in my practice; the ‘mother’



Figures 4 and 5. *Mothercake* installation views, 2024.

aspect informs my conceptual subject matter while the 'cake' leads me to the embodiment of the making process. I continue to be fascinated by shape versus form and developing a personal painting language, especially through being curious about how 'to mother,' the verb, might cross over into the verbs 'to draw' and 'to paint.' I hope that my collaged, abstracted, placental paintings create some cohesion whilst allowing for oppositional tensions: the inside and outside of a body, recognisable and abstract elements, hardness and softness of mark and paint, darkness and lightness of feeling as well as movements of contraction and expansion. Such disparities and contradictions can create a feeling of tension akin to the strange somatic sense one might experience on the edge of something – like a sneeze, a yawn, a burp or any other abject action that is simultaneously grotesque and beautiful in its release. This is also felt in encountering something private in a public space, mirroring the complexities of motherhood itself. I find myself feeling grateful to mothercake as nurturing and supportive subject and matter. It allows me to delve into both the joy and the shadows of my relationship with motherhood and womanhood through somatic abstract mark-making, while simultaneously engaging in dialogue with the universal mothering experience. As Hustvedt says, "In play, the person establishes an umbilical connection between self and world. The artist carves out her work in intermediate space."<sup>30</sup>

This research has expanded my artistic practice by embracing both figuration and abstraction to work in tandem, resulting in a collision of forms and bodies allowing for both an interiority and an exteriority to be birthed in my paintings. The theory, history and community of practice illuminates the ongoing need for diverse representations of motherhood in contemporary art. By embracing the dialogical nature of the placenta as a metaphor, my work aims to contribute to a broader conversation about the interrelationships between bodies, representations and experiences.

Sam Loe is currently studying for her MFA in painting at



Figure 6. 'Symbiosis' on the wall as part of *Mothercake* installation view, 2024.



Figure 7. 'Mothercake' at Project 100, Nelson.

Whitecliffe College, Auckland under the supervision of Anoushka Akel and Noel Ivanoff. Her practice continues to explore the interplay between embodied presence and visual expression, where sensory landscapes manifest in material form as a way of exploring 'in-betweenness' through liminal states of consciousness and the relationships of body, ground and space.

- 1 These terms are capitalised to signify their specific meaning in philosophical discourse: the Bodily points to experiences around bodily awareness; the Self refers to eastern meditation traditions that speak to the higher Self; and the Other refers to the ways we separate from other people who are different from us.
- 2 This was the topic of my Postgraduate Certificate in Visual Arts Research Methodologies essay in completed in October 2023, "A Practice of Somatic Abstraction."
- 3 Jo Addison, a friend and art lecturer in London, gave me this feedback on my work.
- 4 Thomas Koed, writer and friend, provided this written feedback.
- 5 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, edited and translated by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 293.
- 6 'Intercorporeality' is an important concept proposed in the 1950s by French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in his essay "The Philosopher and his Shadow" as well as in his unfinished work "The Visible and the Invisible." This concept focuses on the potential relationship in which two or more bodies are always and already embedded. See "Intercorporeality: What Is It?" accessed 23 June 2025, <https://youtu.be/ttk1Jxr9zjU?si=ggxnQtVrEatPtEol>.
- 7 Siri Hustvedt, "Both-And," *Mothers, Fathers and Others* (London: Sceptre, 2021), 197.
- 8 Sinéad McCausland, "A Meeting of Minds," *Three Souls Conference*, Columbia Global Centers, 23 October 2018, accessed 17 October 2023, <https://globalcenters.columbia.edu/news/meeting-minds-and-bodies-three-souls-conference>.
- 9 Edward Hanfling, "Where Do I Come From? What Am I? Where Am I Going? The Problem of Self-Discovery in Art Making as Research Inquiry," *Scope: Art and Design* 25 (August 2023): 87.
- 10 Helen Johnson, "Painting Bodies," in *The Dialogics of Contemporary Art: Painting Politics*, ed. Simon Ingram, et al. (Berlin: Kerber Verlag, 2022): 92–103.
- 11 Ibid, 96.
- 12 Ibid, 97.
- 13 Ibid, 99.
- 14 Sarah Moroz, "How Women Artists Are Shaping the Way We See Motherhood," *Artsy*, 6 May 2021, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-women-artists-shaping-way-motherhood>.
- 15 Catherine McCormack, *Women in the Picture: Women, Art and the Power of Looking* (London: Icon Books, 2021), 81.
- 16 Philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva developed these now well understood and represented themes of the abject in her 1980 book, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 2024), accessed 24 June 2025, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/kris21457> (originally published in French as *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: Essai sur l'abjection*).
- 17 See Julia Kristeva, "Prelude to an Ethics of the Feminine," *The Feminine: The International Psychoanalytical Association's 51st International Congress and The International Psychoanalytical Studies Organization's 25th Conference*, London, 24 July 2019, <http://kristeva.fr/prelude-to-an-ethics-of-the-feminine.html>.
- 18 Hustvedt, "Both-And," 209.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 One example is *Mothers of Abstraction*, 12 June 12 – 25 September 2016, Denver Art Museum, giving 12 female abstract expressionists the show they should have had during the art movement's heyday.
- 21 "New Book Traces Artist Grace Hartigan's 'Magpie Borrowings,'" *Washington Post*, 9 April 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/restless-ambition-grace-hartigan-painter-by-cathy-curtis/2015/04/09/2ab66ac6-d154-11e4-ab77-9646eea6a4c7\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/restless-ambition-grace-hartigan-painter-by-cathy-curtis/2015/04/09/2ab66ac6-d154-11e4-ab77-9646eea6a4c7_story.html).



- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Juliet Batten, "Mother and Child in Western Art: The unrealised Theme," in *Mothers*, exhibition catalogue (Wellington: Women's Gallery, 1981).
- 24 Laura Cumming, "Acts of Creation: On Art and Motherhood Review – All of Life Starts Here," *The Guardian*, 17 March 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2024/mar/17/acts-of-creation-on-art-and-motherhood-arnolfini-bristol-hayward-gallery-touring-review>.
- 25 Hannelore Fischer, director of the Käthe Kollwitz Museum in Cologne, has stated that "Kollwitz deals with such basic human themes that the world always returns to them." Alan M. Jalon, "Why Käthe Kollwitz's Art Remains Shockingly Resonant 150 Years Later," *Forward*, 3 August 2017, <https://forward.com/culture/art/378185/why-kathe-kollwitzs-art-remains-shockingly-resonant-150-years-later/>.
- 26 Elizabeth Prelinger, "Kollwitz Reconsidered," in *Käthe Kollwitz* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1992), 13–86, accessed 24 June 2025, 14, <https://www.nga.gov/content/dam/ngaweb/research/publications/pdfs/kathe-kollwitz.pdf>.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 This is a concept discussed by David Joselit, "Marking, Scoring, Storing, and Speculating (on Time)," in Isabelle Graw and Eva Lajer-Burcharth, *Painting Beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-medium Condition* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 18.
- 30 Hustvedt, "Both-And," 209.

## BODILY SENSING

Jackie Ryder

*Moving through the landscape ... feeling, hearing, seeing, touching, through the mind,  
the eye and the hand – the touch and texture of things*

Barbara Hepworth

My Master of Visual Arts project explored connection between the body and immediate surroundings. The investigation was based on 'lived experience' of place, an idea associated with phenomenology and philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961). He suggests the human body is the centre of our experiential world, providing us with knowledge and understanding of our surroundings through its multiple sensory systems.<sup>1</sup> This applies as much to an audience's experience of an artwork as to the artist's experience that generated the work in the first place. Before considering how an individual might connect with an artwork, I investigate my connection to St Clair Beach. I frequently go there to walk my dog, the perfect activity to allow an increased awareness of my surroundings, particularly focusing on the non-visual senses of sound and touch.

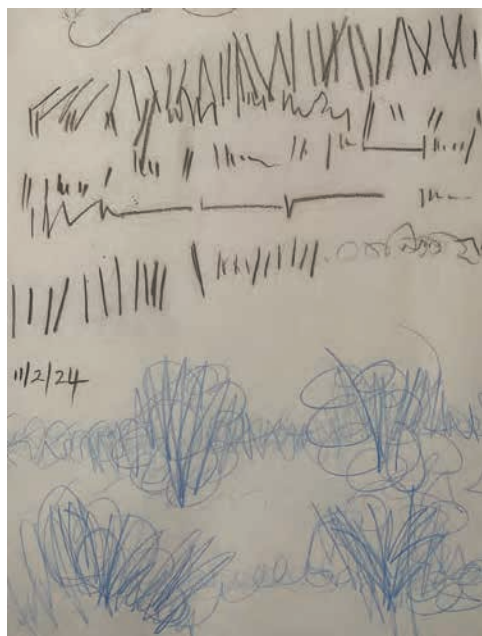


Figure 1. "Blind drawing" mark making in response to sounds heard around me at the beach.



Figure 2. Close up of the graphic elements and stitch used in *Sea banners* (2024) to suggest repetition of natural cycles such as tidal movement (cotton, linen, screenprint and stitch).

## THE NON-VISUAL LANDSCAPE

During the time spent on my visual art project, it was difficult to ignore the dominant role of sight in my connection to the world. I became keenly aware of the ocular-centric basis of the culture we live in. Although our sensory systems work together providing information and connection, vision has long been held at the top of the sensorial hierarchy and therefore at the height of our consciousness. To eliminate this visual input I began to practise 'blind drawing,' closing my eyes and drawing marks in response to the sounds around me. This was an interesting exercise. Without the usual visual critique, my drawing became freer and more gestural, the marks a physical response to the layers and qualities of sounds of the beach (Figure 1).

UK multimedia artist Debbie Lyddon explores the use of sound notation, offering the viewer a chance to imagine what a landscape sounds like when experiencing her visual work. She uses repetition of elements, marks, shapes and tonal variations, creating rhythmic compositions, her visual interpretation of sound.<sup>2</sup> In its most basic form rhythm could be described as a pattern of sounds with gaps or silences in between, occurring over time. I have responded to the sound of waves surging and retreating as part of my interpretation of the beach environment, evident in *Sea banners* (2024), where repetition of elements and shapes mimics the rhythm of natural cycles (Figure 2).

## OUTER SENSING, INNER SEEING

Another way to interpret connection to place is to rely on the memory of feelings and images following walks at the beach. Lyddon uses this approach in her work, "as I make work I draw up memories of these images and experiences – outer sensing turns into inner seeing."<sup>3</sup> She is influenced by British artist Wilhelmina Barns-Graham (1912–2004), who would make faithful sketches on location to become familiar with a place, but back in the studio used these to feed and inform her imagination to capture the essence of a place, often producing a non-literal representation.<sup>4</sup> I have adopted this approach, supplementing it with the use of found objects that provide a physical link back to the site

### *Haptic perception*

Haptic perception is involved in the conception, making and installation of my work. This can be described as the interaction between sensory systems used to absorb information by way of movement, touch and vision, producing feelings and emotions, often before conscious awareness. Jennifer Fisher defines the haptic sense as extending from "actual touch, to include the auto tactility of physical comportment and perambulation."<sup>5</sup> In other words, tactile information through direct pressure is combined with an awareness of the body moving through space to provide a haptic experience in both the making and reaction to art.

Textiles have a special affinity with the haptic. The maker draws on tactile properties not only in choice of materials, but also during their manipulation and alteration. Touch is often a subliminal repetitive activity such as that seen in hand stitching. During the project I became aware of the similarities between this process and the automatic rhythm and repetition of cycles witnessed in the natural world. Touch can also be used to explore the limitations of a material, such as pulling threads to expose the warp and weft – destruction and repair, fragility and strength, expressed in a textile language (Figure 3).

Just as the environment 'touches' us through the skin envelope that covers our body, I imagine the surface of a fabric to function in the same way. My studio research included burying fabrics at an old dump site at the beach, exposing them to earth and rusting artifacts, leaving marks and stains as a visual trace of decay (Figure 4). In this process I am an intermediary, instigating the conditions for a reaction to occur. I was influenced by New Zealand artist Pauline Rhodes, who also allows air and water to alter her palette with rusty stains and marks. Christina Barton writes of Rhodes' work that it "enacts process and literalises time."<sup>6</sup> The artist becomes as much a conduit as a creator.



Figure 3. Close up of pulled threads exposing the structure of cloth (buried linen and machine stitch).



Figure 4. Cloth buried amongst old rusting artefacts at dump site found at the beach.

### ***Bodily sensing***

I began the second half of my studio research mindful of Fisher's definition of haptic perception, which combines touch with an awareness of our body position in space. To address the tactile experience, I invited the audience to touch my work. The term 'aesthetic touch' can be used to describe this engagement, defined as a way to explore textures, materials and forms for their tactile qualities and characteristics.<sup>7</sup> It represents a gradual recognition that touch deserves equal theoretical consideration alongside vision in the aesthetic experience of art. The word 'aesthetics' is derived from the Greek word *aisthesis*, "the science of sensory perception" based on optical perception rather than intellect.<sup>8</sup> Historically, it is often concerned with the nature of beauty. But the visual bias bound up in the phrase 'aesthetically pleasing' fails to account for non-visual modes of interaction, appreciation and understanding of art.<sup>9</sup> Merleau-Ponty argues for the multisensory nature of aesthetic experience, which includes our capacity for feeling (being affected) as well as sensing (to perceive).<sup>10</sup>

My research confirms the importance of aesthetic touch in the experience of art, revealing qualities and information about the work that are inaccessible to sight alone. Comparing sight and touch, artist Rosalyn Driscoll suggests that "each embodies a different way of knowing."<sup>11</sup> Seeing is a distance sense, positioning us as an observer with a link to comprehension and reason, while touch involves intimate contact, providing us with sensory information that connects us to the maker and potentially igniting memories of past tactile encounters. Our tactile perception begins in early childhood, where touch is used to gain knowledge about our immediate world, and continues throughout life contributing to our internal library of tactile experiences. These individual memories and experiences will influence our perception and understanding of future engagements with art.

In a gallery exhibition, visitors tend to have an in-built reluctance to handle objects, even when invited to do so, because artworks are perceived to be precious and for visual consumption alone. Introducing touch demands a new way of working and thinking for the artist. The material properties, methods of display and potential engagement

between work and audience must all be considered. In my MVA exhibition, an invitation to physically handle the work was communicated to gallery visitors through subtle signage on the walls (only partially successful), while a further tactile experience was offered at a 'stitching station,' a table with choices of thread and fabric, connecting visitors to some of the processes used in my work. In an age when virtual reality is increasingly prevalent, this 'hands on' experience seems especially valuable as a way of learning.

Keeping in mind Fisher's suggestion that the other part of haptic sensibility is an awareness of one's own body in space, in *Kelp Forest* (2024–2025) I suspended 23 cylinders from the gallery ceiling (Figure 5). The freely hanging objects surrounded the viewer, stimulating their sensitivity to body shape and position in relation to the cylinders as they navigated a path between them. A conscious decision to use low light levels encouraged people to slow down, allowing time for eyes to adjust in the course of closer examination of the details.

Other works were anchored by slender threads extending from the wall. The use of handmade eyelets randomly placed along the fabric edges allowed for flexibility and multiple hanging options for each work (Figure 6). Spotlights highlighted the forms and resulted in shadows, solid to the eye but elusive to touch, evident in *Dancing in the sea breeze ... bending like skinny limbs* (2025) (Figure 7). The combination of rust-stained cloth, silk and shadows suggested vulnerability and strength co-existing. The rusty cloth is in fact punctured with holes that are strengthened with stitches running around the margins, halting the process of degradation for some time at least. In contrast, the light touch of blue silk winding its way through the utilitarian cloth indicates movement and agility (Figure 8).



Figure 5. Installation of *Kelp Forest* (2024–2025) at Dunedin School of Art Gallery.





Figure 6. Close up of hand stitched eyelet (hand-dyed silk and string).



Figure 7. The transient shadows produced using a spotlight on the work *Dancing in the sea breeze... bending like skinny limbs* (2025).



Figure 8. *Dancing in the sea breeze... bending like skinny limbs* at Dunedin School of Art Gallery (hand-dyed silk, cotton sheeting, and stitch).

Both sides of a textile work are important to me; I consider the 'other' or non-worked side to generate aesthetic touch too. In the work *Desire lines* (2024–2025), it shows another rendition of the randomly stitched pathways snaking their way across a material landscape (Figure 9). The term 'desire lines' refers to informal pathways created by the continual, wandering and spontaneous movement of people, as distinct from the official pathways imposed upon us by authorities. This aligns with my thoughts about the other side of the fabric, where things happen despite rather than because of conscious thought. The centres of the screen-printed images on the 'front' side are filled with seed stitch, a labour-intensive task that contrasts with a separate layer of cloth hanging behind (Figure 10). The surface of the latter was transformed by a natural time-based process while it lay buried at the dumpsite for six weeks. I resisted the urge to add stitch to the disintegrating, decaying surface of this cloth, opting instead for the residue of the process to speak for itself.



Figure 9. The just as important "other side" of fabric part of *Desire lines* (2024-25).



Figure 10. Installation of *Desire lines* at Dunedin School of Art Gallery  
(hand dyed cotton, screen print, stitch and buried sheeting).

My research has reimagined my art practice, which now more systematically considers the sensing body during the conception and making of work. As Merleau-Ponty suggested, human perception, be it visual, aural, olfactory, tactile or gustatory, is our connection to the world. This perception may be constituted by description rather than analysis, by direct experience instead of distant or passive understanding and by wonder rather than acceptance. My investigation has shed light on the importance of haptic perception and multisensory experience as part of our perception and understanding of art. Through aesthetic touch, a gallery audience too might be stimulated to use imaginative transformations of ideas and perceptions about the world around us.

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- 1 Komarine Romdenh-Romluc, *Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203482896>.
- 2 Debbie Lyddon, "Notations – Seeing Sound," accessed 12 June 2025, <https://debbielyddon.wordpress.com/2015/05/18/notations-seeing-sound/>. This blog post provides information about the application of 'auditory visibility' in Lyddon's work.
- 3 Debbie Lyddon, "Debbie Lyddon: Responding to Environment," accessed 26 June 2025, <https://www.textileartist.org/responding-to-environment/>.
- 4 Wilhelmina Barns-Graham Trust, accessed 12 June 2025, <https://www.barns-grahamtrust.org.uk>.
- 5 Jennifer Fisher, "Tactile Affects," *Tessera* 32 (Summer 2002): 19-20, <https://doi.org/10.25071/1923-9408.25273>.
- 6 Christina Barton, *Ground/Work: The Art of Pauline Rhodes* (Wellington: Adam Art Gallery & Victoria University Press, 2002), 17–18.
- 7 See Alberto Gallace and Charles Spence, "Tactile Aesthetics: Towards a Definition of its Characteristics and Neural Correlates," *Social Semiotics* 21, no. 4 (September 2011): 569–589.
- 8 Mark Paterson, *The Senses of Touch: Haptics Affects and Technologies* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 83–84.
- 9 Jenni Lauwrens, "Touch as an Aesthetic Experience," *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 18, no. 4 (2019): 323–341.
- 10 Paterson, *Senses of Touch*, 81–83
- 11 Robyn Driscoll, *The Sensing Body in the Visual Arts: Making and Experiencing Sculpture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 16.

## TRACES: AN EXPLORATION OF PLACE

Alexia Moore

Place is the physical basis of our experience and an inherent fact in our existence in the world. More than a location, place shapes and is shaped by us, informed by our experience and interactions, the physical world and its history, our memories and emotions. I explored these layers and complexities in my BVA Honours printmaking project, *Traces*, 2024 at the Dunedin School of Art. The outcome was a series of eight relief-print woodcut diptychs. Each diptych includes one image-based print and one text-based print, printed in solid black. Both the images and the texts have place as their core referential content, but do not explicitly depict, place. The project took a phenomenological approach, condensing experiences of place and drawing on memory and emotion, with the result of abstracted and formally reduced imagery and text. My aim is to explore the capacity of reduction to invite deep engagement from the viewer, expand potential meaning and amplify affective impact.

### WHAT IS PLACE?

The study of place can be broadly categorised into three approaches: descriptive or regional, phenomenological and social constructivist.<sup>1</sup> British geographer John Agnew defines place as a “meaningful location,” having not only a) location or objective coordinates and b) locale or a material setting and visual form, but also c) a sense of place.<sup>2</sup> That is, places have a level of relation to the human experience and the human capacity for meaning-making and emotional attachment. This definition is an example of a phenomenological approach in line with the views of the humanists of the 1970s, who emphasised human experience and subjectivity. According to Yi-Fu Tuan, a major figure in humanist geography, an understanding of place begins with an understanding of human nature.<sup>3</sup> Our sense of place is formed through our experience, in relation to locale or a material setting. Tuan describes it as a product of ‘pause’.<sup>4</sup> This pause allows attachment and emotion to build.

Indigenous ontologies disrupt the humanist notion that human interaction is necessary to a definition of place. According to Alison Jones and Te Kawehau Hoskins, Māori ontologies take for granted that the non-human world, other beings and material objects, have agency, can “speak, act, and have effects independently of human thought and will.”<sup>5</sup> Mason Durie states that all things, beings and objects have *mauri*, a “vigour, impetus, and potentiality,” often thought of as a life force.<sup>6</sup> This material setting (which Agnew would call ‘locale’) has a rich existence and vitality regardless of human interaction and perception. Humans then exist in relation to the world around us, not as more or less significant. Recent post-humanist and new materialist theories follow this view that non-human things in the world have agency, emphasising the interconnectedness of all things.<sup>7</sup>

Place, definitionally, may not need human interaction. However, it is an intriguing layer in the exploration of ourselves, because although humans may not be essential to place, place is essential to human experience. Edward Casey argues for the ontological importance of place as a fundamental aspect of our existence, stating that “to live is to live locally, to know is first of all to know the place one is in.”<sup>8</sup> This is in line with Fred Lukerman’s assertion that “consciousness of place is an immediately apparent part of reality.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, there is no existence without place; to be human is to be in place. Tim Cresswell summarises these arguments as the idea that “place is primary to the construction of meaning and society ... because it is the experiential fact of our existence.”<sup>10</sup>

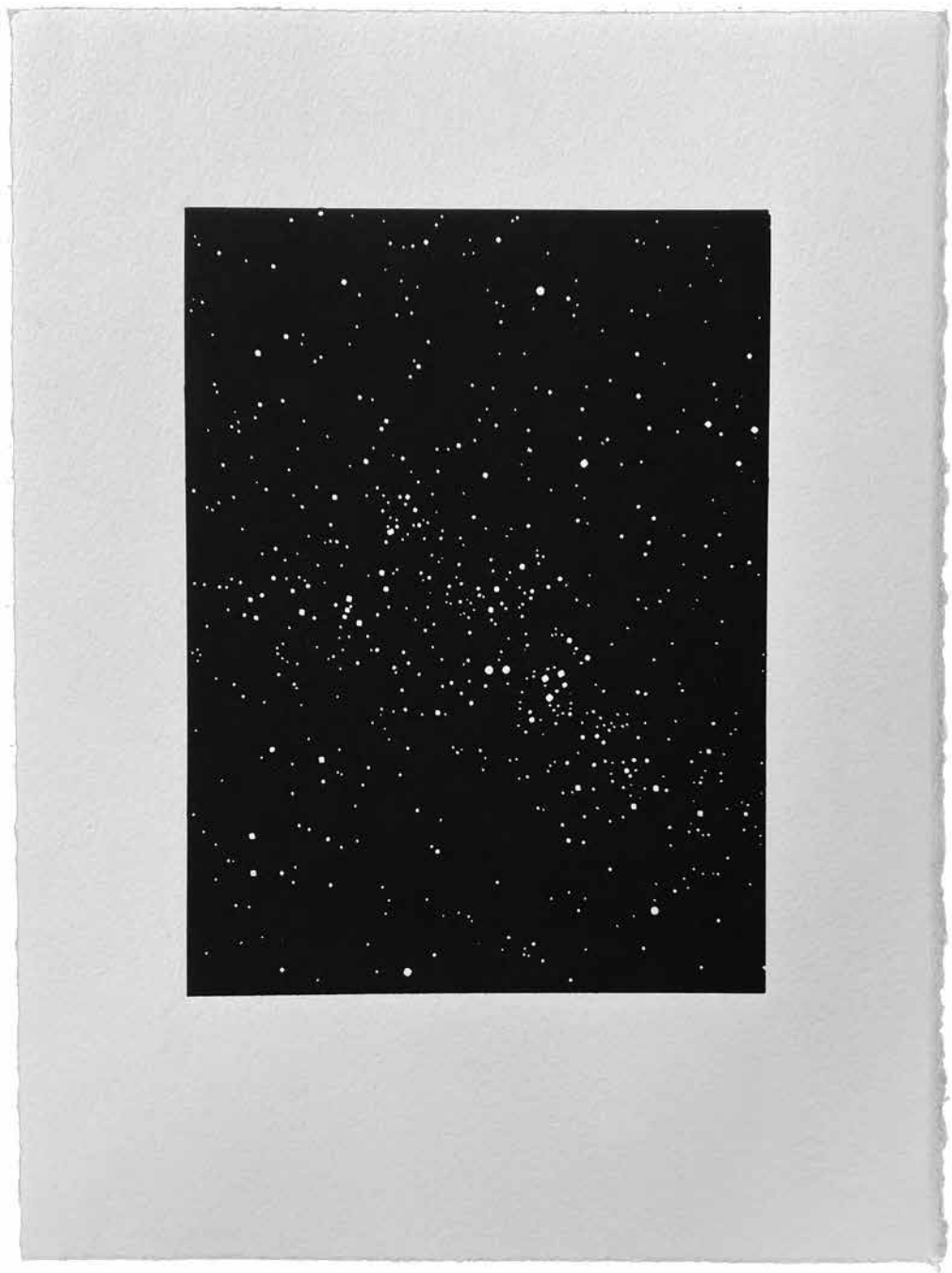


Figure 1. Alexia Moore, *An opening*, 2024,  
woodcut on BFK Rives paper, 380x280mm, from the series *Traces*.





Figure 2. Alexia Moore, *An opening*, 2024, woodcut on BFK Rives paper, 380x280mm, from the series *Traces*.

Central to the experience of place is memory. French philosopher Henri Bergson refuted the idea of memory as a storage system, a mind container for past events, and rather emphasised the active relationship memory has with our experience.<sup>11</sup> In Bergson's concept of duration, time is thought of qualitatively through the fullness of lived experiences, rather than quantitatively through linear measurement.<sup>12</sup> Memory is tied to this experience of time, allowing us to integrate past experience with present consciousness in an active process in which past and present shape each other. Casey's phenomenological theory likewise suggests that memory is not a static repository. Casey maintains that memory is not just a mental function but an undeniable factor in our experience of place and the physical world.<sup>13</sup> Emotional responses to place are integral to the formation of memories, which, in turn, can evoke further emotional response, shaping our perception of place.<sup>14</sup> Although this human experience, intertwined with memory and emotion, may not be a requisite element of place, there remains a richness to it that justifies asking: what is place to us?

## WHAT IS PLACE TO US?

In Aotearoa, tangata whenua can answer this question with whakapapa. Such an answer may go beyond phenomenological experience. It is not uncommon to hear Māori refer to a mountain or a river – what Pākehā might think of as a location or thing in the landscape – as self.<sup>15</sup> All things have whakapapa, an origin with layers of history and connection.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, for Māori, there is a cosmogony in which all things descend from one set of primal parents, and therefore all things are related.<sup>17</sup> A whakapapa connection to place is beyond physical experience and beyond a single lifetime.

As a Pākehā artist, I explore my relation to place through experience and memory. *Traces* takes a phenomenological approach to the subject matter, focusing on the experiential and relational aspects of what it is to be human in place. I do not whakapapa to this land or the places that I explore in this work. I focus on places I have lived or frequented and built emotional and storied attachment to. In this way, I return to Bergson's idea of duration and the experience of time as lived rather than measured. If we think of our experience in this way, it follows that place is not static or fixed; rather, it develops over time as memories accumulate. Places can be viewed as gathering personal and collective thoughts, memories, stories and emotions.<sup>18</sup> Lucy Lippard captures this idea, stating that place is "latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person's life ... a layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth."<sup>19</sup> Place has not only a material level and an imagined level but also a practised and lived level.<sup>20</sup> If place is thought of as lived and experienced, then it is a thing to be in and with, not to view from the outside. In my work, I do not claim to get to the essence of specific places. Instead, I aim to get at something of the feeling of this place-experience. I explore this notion through my own lived experiences of place.

## WHAT IS PLACE IN MY WORK?

My art process involves layering, collecting and building up. This starts introspectively, with reflections on experience, memory and emotion. The initial explorations are expansive, involving musing, writing and sketching. I extend my attention to the material setting of places, to the sensory and emotional experience, to memories and stories and events. In a way, my process embodies the idea of place as continually layered, collecting and transforming.

This is not unlike the process of New Zealand artist Amanda Watson, who works with and in place, responding to site and layering experience and memory to create gestural and abstract paintings in a process that reveals her experience.<sup>21</sup> First, the canvas is taken into the environment and wrapped around various surfaces in order for the pouring and directing of ink to take an indexical impression of the site; the canvas is then taken to a studio where it is further worked into, using memories, photographs and other recordings; finally the canvas is taken back into the environment and worked into again, this time using sensory experiences of sound, colour and light.

My process also involves sitting with the work. I work mostly from memory of experience rather than working with tangible experience in real time. I focus on durational memories and personal attachments. One artist who sits with memory in this way is Zarina Hashmi. Hashmi was an Indian-born, United States-based artist, whose work often centred around ideas of displacement and home.<sup>22</sup> She spoke of how her works were intertwined with memory, using words and images to weave together recollections of place and home.<sup>23</sup> In *Home is a Foreign Place* (1999), she recreated a home that she could not return to in a series of 36 woodblock prints, each featuring an abstracted geometric form printed in black ink and an Urdu inscription to which the titles correspond.<sup>24</sup> Titles such as the *Door*, *Courtyard*, *Hot Breeze*, *Rain*, *Fragrance* and *Despair* recall objects, physical areas, weather, sensory experiences and emotional experiences of place.<sup>25</sup> My visual and text-based reflections on place similarly explore the depth and breadth of personal experience.

Working with woodcut as a medium and the process of printmaking slows down the production of imagery, allowing me again to sit with the subject matter. Images are sketched on paper, transferred to blocks, and carved. The blocks are coated in shellac, rolled in ink and pressed onto paper that has been torn and soaked in water. This physical process allows my mind to be free to dwell on the memories and emotions associated with the place that the work is about. This acts as another experience, an iterative memory, feeding back into the creation of the text in my works in a reciprocal relationship. For me, the physicality of carving imagery into a woodblock and pressing that block into paper holds a relation to memory. The block holds the memory of the carved marks; the paper holds the memory of the impression. These objects have thereby gain layers over time. Hashmi also works with woodcuts and paper. She likens paper to skin for its ability to “age, stain and keep secrets.”<sup>26</sup> Through the process of printmaking, I physically engage with memory and emotion connected to place, bringing them back into the tangible world.

Both the imagery and text go through a process of formal reduction – a condensing of ideas, experiences, memories and emotions that I have explored in the earlier stages of my process. The works are printed in a solid, flat black; the imagery created with line or dot work; and the text produced in a simple sans serif. My motivation to reduce and abstract comes from a desire to get at those things that are difficult to explain, articulate or represent: our tangible and intangible lived experiences of place, and the memories and emotions that shape and are shaped by those experiences. It may seem counterintuitive to simplify in order to communicate complexity. I approach it as a distillation, exploring the capacity that the reduced form has to say more than what is obvious and explicit.

## WHAT IS PLACE IN READING MY WORK?

In this project, my aim is for formal reduction to function as conceptual expansion. The limited palette and formally reduced aesthetic have something of the quality of minimalism. Such abstraction often has the appearance of simplifying content, but I have often felt it can have the effect of deepening the affective impact. I explore whether the creation of condensed forms can reduce volume without taking away weight. My aim is for this condensed form to pull the audience in and draw out emotional responses. This is in line with Kirk Varnedoe’s assertion that reduction can act as a means to expand or amplify.<sup>27</sup> Varnedoe dismissed early interpretations of abstract art as lacking substantive content, acknowledging its ability to convey profound meaning and emotional depth. Abstraction and emotion are not mutually exclusive. Reduction of form can work to invite engagement and open up space for emotional response.

Given the relational, experiential and emotional basis of my making, I want the work to remain open to an experience and emotion-based response in the viewer. Deepa Bhashti finds a similar quality in Hashmi’s work: “while minimal in their execution, and thus open to multiple meanings, her works ... are rich in associations.”<sup>28</sup> Like Hashmi, I steer clear of explicit illustration of locations but load my works with suggestive implication. I want to create room for the viewer to bring their own experience, memory and emotion to the work.

In reflecting on the pared back visual language of my prints, I find there are varying degrees of representation and abstraction. Figures 3 and 4 show abstract linework. Figure 5 could be read as representing veins, rivers, roots or myriad other things, depending on the viewers' interpretations and biases. Figure 6 might be seen as a pile of bricks. However, there is still an abstraction from the experience of place that leaves the imagery open to interpretation.

Roland Barthes, a seminal figure in semiotic theory, argued that there is an instability between signs and meaning; a sign is open to interpretation within a viewer's context irrespective of author intention.<sup>29</sup> I work with this instability, aiming to connect with the audience and open up space for them to bring their own experiences, memories and emotions to the pieces. It is relevant to consider that these works are viewed in series, paired with texts, rather than in isolation. This influences the experience of the work and has a cumulative effect on meaning-making. Barthes spoke of text as a form of 'anchorage,' allowing meaning to be more fixed or communicating a preferred interpretation.<sup>30</sup> Text can work to add or disrupt meaning. There is a conversation at play between the works themselves and indeed between the works and the audience. This is perhaps where the emotional intent of the work can be read or experienced.

A similar relationship is at play in Chris Burden's *Coyote Stories* (2005), in which the artist worked with master printer Jacob Samuel to produce a series of prints detailing stories of encounters the artist had with coyotes.<sup>31</sup> The series is a collection of etchings of objects and sites that played a significant role in these stories, together with digital prints of the stories written in Burden's own handwriting. According to Samuel, Burden told him "I don't want there to be any pictures of coyotes, I want the coyote to be in the imagination."<sup>32</sup> Similarly, my images do not illustrate the words, or vice versa. However, in placing them in relation to each other, the meaning of both image and text shifts. This interplay between text and image is summed up by a review of Burden's work: "the relationship between them, like the looping cursive, is neither clear nor didactic; its perception is dependent on meditative reading."<sup>33</sup> It is this meditative reading that I aim to invite in my work.

Burden's text is narrative-based story with action and a timeline. The text in Roni Horn's *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* (1999) is more fragmentary and musing. Horn's work is a series of 15 lithographs of the surface of the River Thames. Initially, the water surfaces have an emotional depth that feels hard to place. On closer inspection, numbers invite you to refer to footnotes that open up deep layers of research and reference, an expansive world of meaning.<sup>34</sup> These footnotes contain observations of colour and texture, lines from songs and poems, references to books and movies, accounts of bodies found in the water, definitions of water, personal thoughts and musings of the artist and questions directed to the viewer.<sup>35</sup> They are at times loose and fragmentary in nature, a stream of consciousness,<sup>36</sup> perhaps inviting the viewer to explore their own thoughts when looking at the images. The text in my work uses this fragmentary and speculative tone, avoiding explicit descriptions of place but referring to tangentially connected ideas to invite a similar engagement and reflection in the viewer.

There is a similar fragmented style in the work of contemporary writers such as Jenny Offill and Rebecca Solnit. Offill's writing, such as the novels *Dept. of Speculation* (2014) and *Weather* (2020), is often characterised as autofiction, blending elements of autobiography and fictional storytelling.<sup>37</sup> She often draws from her own life experience through snippets of thought, cultural references and disjointed observations, reflecting on the personal while resonating with broader human experiences.<sup>38</sup> Solnit's writing, such as the book of autobiographical essays *A Field Guide To Getting Lost* (2005), similarly straddles the line between autobiography and fiction.<sup>39</sup> Like Offill, she employs a fragmented narrative style that allows for the exploration of disparate ideas and memories.

The text of my print works is intended to be musing and fragmentary, rooted in personal memory and emotion but speaking to a wider experience. I made choices in the writing process to hold them in reference to memory and emotion rather than make them explicitly personal. I wanted the text to be matter-of-fact, favouring metaphor over simile, giving a register of clarity. The text is not overtly expressive or florid and often based in action rather than description. In this way it is not pushing the inside out but speaking in parallel to emotional experience. John

Ward Knox, an artist who often writes creative prose in response to art, speaks about the impact of the removal of excess in writing:

I've always been struck by the simpler sentences, and how they're the most open to creating a sense of empathy for the character of the situation. Maybe not even a sense of empathy, but it's something that hits you in between your guts and your lungs. They tend to just be matter-of-fact sentences ... So where Steinbeck simply says, 'and the world opened out' – there are no flowery descriptions there – it's just an action and an object.<sup>40</sup>

The matter-of-fact sentences of my text, focused on object and action rather than description, are in a similar register to the image-based works that sit alongside them. They are pared back, withholding a certain amount of information. The text is not an explanation of the imagery, nor is it a description of the place. It is a reduction of form, in a practice of saying less in order to communicate more. As with imagery, the aim in this reduction is to expand the possibility of meaning and interpretation, allowing the viewer to bring their own experiences, memories and emotions to this meditation on place.

## CONCLUSION

The eight diptych woodcut prints, that are the outcome of my BVA Honours project, each include one image-based print of minimalist line or dot work and one text-based print containing a short paragraph of musing and fragmentary prose. The project was informed by the idea of place as lived experience, entwined with memory and emotion. The work is a distillation of this experience. It steers clear of obvious illustration, employing reduction as a means to expand and amplify communication and emotional response.





Figure 3. Alexia Moore, *Time is different*, 2024,  
woodcut on BFK Rives paper, 380x280mm, from the series *Traces*.

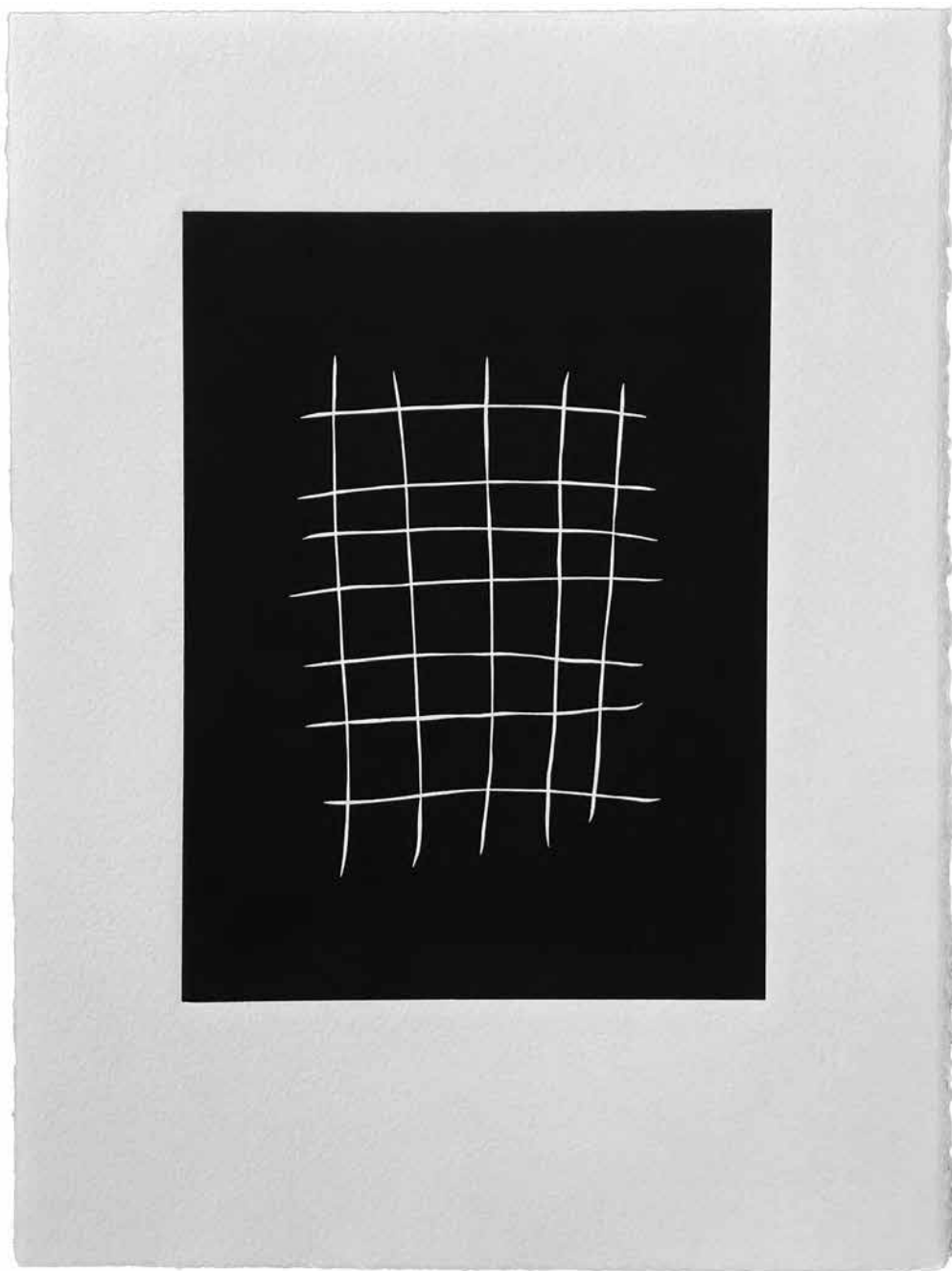


Figure 4. Alexia Moore, *White noise*, 2024,  
woodcut on BFK Rives paper, 380x280mm, from the series *Traces*.

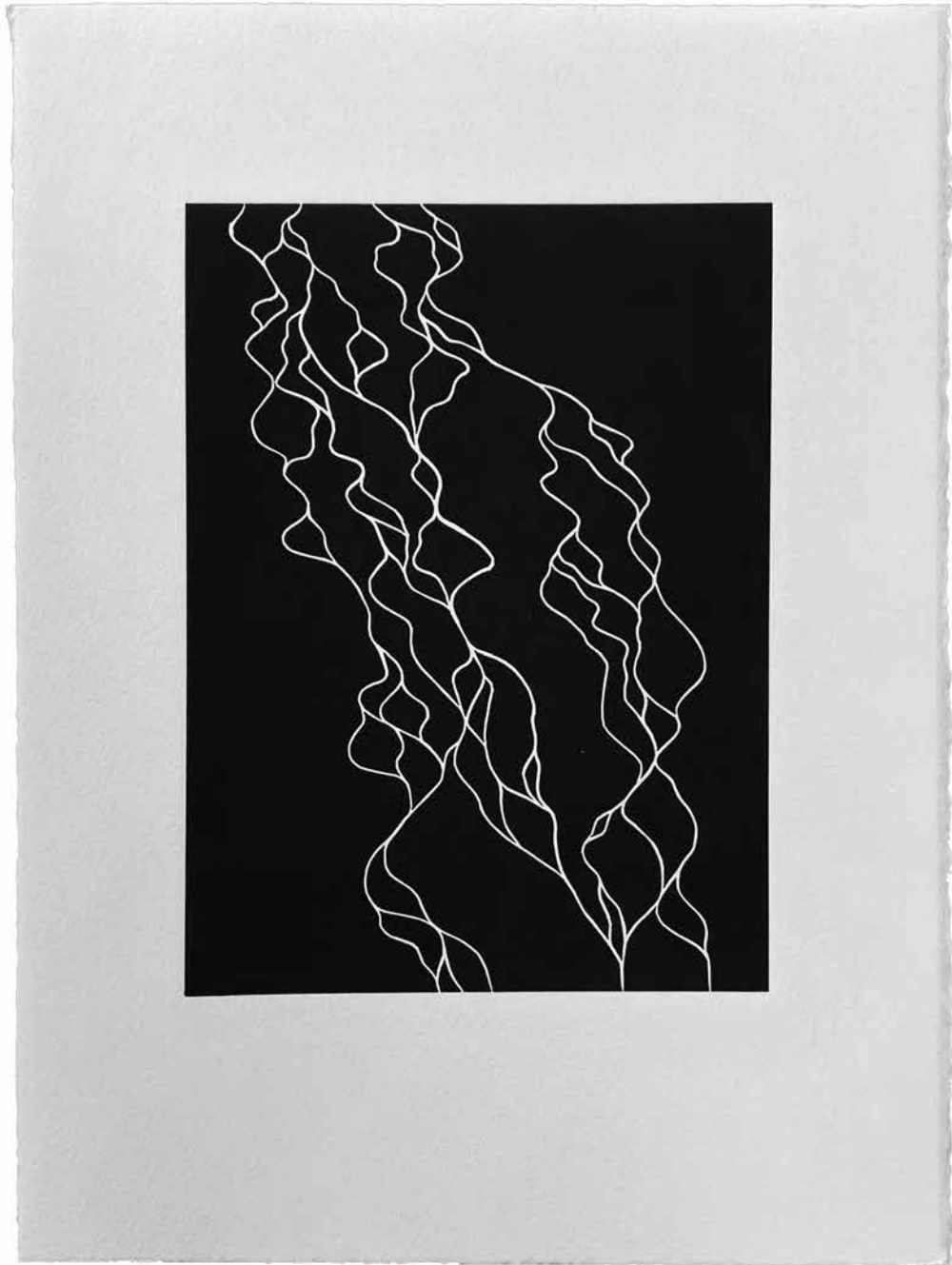


Figure 5. Alexia Moore, *Echoes in the ground*, 2024, woodcut on BFK Rives paper, 380x280mm, from the series *Traces*.

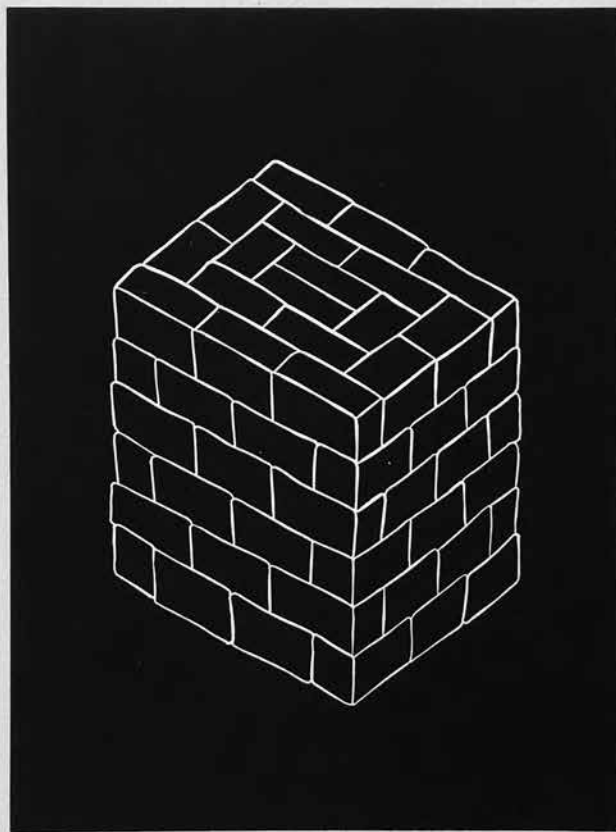


Figure 6. Alexia Moore, *Part of it*, 2024,  
woodcut on BFK Rives paper, 380x280mm, from the series *Traces*.

Alexia Moore is a Pākehā artist, writer and designer based in Ōtepoti. She holds a Bachelor of Visual Arts Honours with First Class Honours from the Dunedin School of Art. Her work explores the interplay between place, memory and emotion. Alexia is a Lecturer in the School of Design at Otago Polytechnic.

- 1 Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004). The descriptive or regional approach views places as discrete areas and physically describable locations. The humanists challenged this view, arguing that a physically describable location becomes a place when you attach human experience and emotion to it. The social constructivist approach focuses on how places are constructed by wider social and political movements within society.
- 2 John A. Agnew, *Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society* (Winchester, MA: Allen and Unwin, 1987), 7.
- 3 Yi-Fu Tuan, "Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective," *Progress in Human Geography* 6 (1974): 246.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Te Kawehau Hoskins and Alison Jones, "Non-human Others and Kaupapa Maori Research," in *Critical Conversations in Kaupapa Māori* (London: Huia, 2017).
- 6 Mason Durie, *Mauri Ora: The Dynamics of Māori Health* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2001), x.
- 7 Jerry Lee Rosiek, Jimmy Snyder & Scott L. Pratt, "The New Materialisms and Indigenous Theories of Non-human Agency: Making the Case for Respectful Anti-colonial Engagement," *Qualitative inquiry* 26, no. 3-4 (2020): 331–346.
- 8 Edward Casey, "How to Get From Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time," in *Senses of Place*, ed. Steven Feld and Keith H. Baso (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1996), 18.
- 9 Fred Lukerman, "Geography as a formal intellectual discipline and the way in which it contributes to human knowledge" *Canadian Geographer* 8, no. 4 (1964): 168.
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- 24 Zarina Hashmi, *Home is a Foreign Place*, 1999, Portfolio of 36 woodcuts with chine collé. Bhasthi, "Zarina and the Idea of Home."
- 25 Bhasthi, "Zarina and the Idea of Home." Kirk Varnedoe, *A Fine Disregard* (New York: Abrams, 1990). This idea was a rereading of abstraction in response to the historical view that it involves purging 'life' from 'art.' During the twentieth century, abstract art was often viewed as lacking substantive content, with formalist approaches emphasising the formal qualities of art over its capacity to convey meaning.
- 26 Bhasthi, "Zarina and the Idea of Home."
- 27 Kirk Varnedoe, *A Fine Disregard* (New York: Abrams, 1990). This idea was a rereading of abstraction in response to the historical view that it involves purging 'life' from 'art.' During the twentieth century, abstract art was often viewed as lacking substantive content, with formalist approaches emphasising the formal qualities of art over its capacity to convey meaning.
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- 35 Alice Sanger, "Roni Horn: [no title]," Tate, April 2009, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/horn-no-title-p13058>.
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## WHEN A TRIG STATION BECOMES A HOME

Jude Hanson Stevens

*When A Trig Station Becomes a Home* (2024) was a BVA Honours project undertaken at Dunedin School of Art, focusing on the 16 four-legged trig structures sited on volcanic cones, sand dunes, clay mounds and harbour walls of Muaūpoko (Otago Peninsula). Sculptures representing these trig stations created an installation representing an abstracted topography, using a 1:100 scale from the elevation of the stations above sea level. The sculptures range from 3 centimetres tall, representing 3 metres of elevation, to 4080 centimetres, representing 408 metres of elevation, and stood in equivalent positions to where they stand within the landscape.

The material for these structures was collected colonial waste in the form of native timber – upcycling remnants of houses, such as doors, skirting boards, framing, beams and cladding, derived from trees that would have once thrived in the large podocarp broadleaved forest covering the pre-colonial peninsula and Aotearoa. The sculptures show the histories of the forests and the houses, through layers of chipped paint, brass hardware, screw holes and the beautiful wood grain of rimu, kauri and kahikatea. Each sculpture is different; some were more thoroughly worked into, with turned legs, while others are true to the original form, holding obvious machinery marks and stains from nail oxidation.



Within the installation, directly across from the 'peninsula's' wooden topography, was a seventeenth wooden structure, this one with three legs, representing a tripod. It holds a book of photographic documentation. I took four photographs, pointing the camera north, east, south and west, from each trig station on Muaūpoko that I could access, widening the point of the compass to the width of the camera's lens. The images are square, like the gridding of the land during colonial settlement. The panorama is incomplete, purposely broken; jarring lines run through the landscape to imply the colonial infrastructure of roads, fences, power lines and the planting of introduced trees. I surveyed the land through documentation, fragmenting Muaūpoko like my early counterparts did. The criss-crossing of timber makes its own abstract grid within the made landscape.

The physical body of work took form through the detailed research into the trig stations erected by colonial surveyors. Intrigued by their alien-like form and the role they've played in the gridding of the landscape, I investigated the connection between the act of surveying and the act of image-taking – their similarities in process and consequence – and considered the endurance of these colonial monuments, reminders of an intrusive past and the proud marking of land seized from whenua Māori.

Muaūpoko is a small finger of land on the South Island's east coast, pointing into the Pacific Ocean, branching off from the city of Dunedin and made up of a volcanic field of small dormant cones separating the rugged white sand coast and the calm shores of the harbour. With its large varieties of seabirds and marine mammals, it is claimed to be the wildlife capital of Aotearoa.<sup>1</sup> Abundance of these animals was even greater before human settlement. Thousands of seabirds are thought to have gathered, taking up kilometres of the ocean's surface. Moa roamed and bays leading to rocky headlands were rich with kai moana. A unique geography and proximity to the continental shelf create these ideal habitats. Through stories from Muaūpoko's tangata whenua, first Māori interaction with the Peninsula can be estimated between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>2</sup> This is extremely early in the timeline of Aotearoa's indigenous settlements and due to the copious amount of food, the protected side of the harbour and the resources from the covering forests made it an ideal place to not only live but thrive.

The first substantial European settlement on Muaūpoko was through whalers and sealers in the 1820s. Long established Kāi Tahu hapū of Muaūpoko traded goods with them for small portions of their land located in Ōtākou.<sup>3</sup> But it wasn't until 1844 that the second wave of European interest in Muaūpoko began. The focus changed from access to seafood to total ownership of land for pastoral farming and more settlement. In charge of this change was Edward Gibbon Wakefield and his New Zealand Company. Negotiations for the 'Otago Block' were important to his systematic plan for colonisation. The deal went ahead and whenua Māori were left with 2700 hectares in the northern corner of the original 9700.<sup>4</sup> The hills turned from native forest to large farms. By 1860, the Peninsula was home to an estimated 12,000 people. George Malcolm Thomson, a leading natural scientist of the period, observed the change in landscape over the decade from his arrival in 1870, concluding that "the whole face of nature had been altered."<sup>5</sup> Trees and ferns gave way to grass. At this point, there was very little of the native biota left at all.

Trig or triangulation stations were built at visible points in the land, typically hilltops with an open view. Surveyors used a theodolite, a telescope-like mechanism, pointing it from station to station to measure bearings, with angles established either clockwise, or anticlockwise off a reference direction of either north, south, east or west.<sup>6</sup> Once all three bearings were found, triangulation was used to establish accurate measurement between the stations to assist precise geographic mapping.

Among the great surveyor-engineers, John Rochfort (1832–1893), was a key individual responsible for mapping, exploring and facilitating European settlement in New Zealand. Rochfort embarked on his journey to New Zealand in 1852 with Government Surveyors, N.Z. In 1853 Rochfort wrote and published *Adventures of a Surveyor in New Zealand and the Australian Gold Diggings*, which captures the early pre-settlement landscape of New Zealand and the difficulties of traipsing through native bush to reach a particular elevation: "We started early but had not proceeded far before we lost the track, and walked about twenty miles, through long grass, fern and tei toi [toe toe], taking it in turns to be leader; the first man had to lie down every few steps to force a passage through the tangled mass."<sup>7</sup> Carrying around pre-manufactured trig stations was at times not possible. Instead, four-legged markers were constructed on site out of the materials they had at hand – generally the smaller trunks or larger branches from surrounding native trees. To make an accurate survey from the tops of the hills or points reached, they needed these structures to be visible above shrubbery and other trees from sometimes 50 to 100 kilometres away.<sup>8</sup> A structurally sound four-legged structure could be built simply and up to four metres tall. The point from which they surveyed would be directly under the structure; the four legs would enable the theodolite to have a clear viewpoint in every direction. A white or pale-coloured piece of fabric was placed on top to make them easier to spot from distance and hold the four legs together (as seen on the cover of the 2023 edition of *The Measure of the Man: The Life of Archie Bogle CBE, FNZIS, Surveyor of the Century*). The original rustic bivouac-shaped structures were eventually replaced with the more rigid structural station with which we are familiar.

The form of the trig station and the colonial act of surveying has been critically examined by artist Bridget Rewiti (Ngāti Ranginui, Ngāi Te Rangi) in lens-based and moving image work. The lens is generally filtered through historical Māori narratives and lived experiences of colonisation, while surveying and trig structures often feature



FIGURE 1. Jude Stevens, What a Trig Station Sees, A24Q.



FIGURE 2. Jude Stevens, What a Trig Station Sees, A23K.



FIGURE 3. Jude Stevens, What a Trig Station Sees, A2258.



FIGURE 4. Jude Stevens, What a Trig Station Sees, A23n.

prominently. *Can I be in your video?* (2012) and *It's a long shot* (2012) are parts of a four-video series. Set in both Tauranga Moana and Te Tai Poutini, they are split screen videos, one showing Rewiti constructing a camera obscura tent, reminiscent of an early surveyor's tent, and the other showing what the camera obscura produces – an inverted view of the reflected landscape. The sites are significant to the iwi and hapū of the specific area due to the geological deposits they hold.<sup>9</sup> Rewiti's tents in these sacred areas directly resemble what surveyors would have looked like and experienced, as well as the bizarre sight this would have been for early whenua Māori.

In Rewiti's exhibition *Illustrated Shards* (2021), amongst other photographic and moving image works were seven vertical columns, each with three separately framed stereographs of different trig stations. The 42 images were presented small, giving the objects a feeling of fragility or insignificance. Luring the viewer in, much like trig stations do, the images were designed to be looked at through binoculars that make them look three-dimensional. Reviewing the exhibition, David Eggleton states that “for the Māori who were already present in the landscape, encountering these devices was an anxiety-provoking intrusion.”<sup>10</sup> Eggleton also observes that the survey tools were referred to as objects of ‘taipō,’ which translates as ‘devil’ or ‘alien.’ The same term was applied to early photographers taking imagery with the use of a tripod. There is therefore a structural similarity between early New Zealand surveyors, with theodolites and trig stations, and early New Zealand landscape photographers, with tripods and cameras. Both were modern technologies, crucial for new settlers across New Zealand. The act of image-taking seems to relate closely to the act of surveying. Photography, like surveying, captures and grids the land according to the operator's decisions, confining a landscape to square perimeters. Once the processing of each action has been completed, the result has an enduring presence. New Zealand ecologist Geoff Park writes of the grid as an ancient feature engraved in the European landscape: “Desperate for flat land, the grid consumed everything in its path. The grid's rectangular arrangement of space was an essential precondition of the capitalist settlement plan.”<sup>11</sup> To grid, one might suggest, is to conquer.

Edward Gibbon Wakefield (1769–1862) was one of the key minds behind the systematic colonisation of Te Ika-a-Māui and Te Waipounamu. As a volatile young man, Wakefield found himself between the walls of London's Newgate prison. It was here that his strong philosophies on colonialism grew, through readings of utilitarianists and classical economists. Wakefield began to express some of his theories and ideologies through in his diaries: “Colonisation will be conducted systematically with a view to the greatest benefit to the mother country.”<sup>12</sup> Wakefield set up the New Zealand Company as a commercial enterprise designed to settle the land of Aotearoa. The company was responsible for the gridding of most of the country with no consideration of the wellbeing of Māori or Papatūānuku.

In the early 1880s, Takaparawhau, or Bastion Point, home to the Ngāti Whātua iwi located in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland overlooking the Waitemata Harbour, was taken by the crown for defence purposes. In 1885, military fortifications were constructed in response to the ‘Russian scare.’ The Crown held onto the land for the duration of two world wars, leaving Ngāti Whātua with only a slither of land. In 1951, Māori families living in Okahu Bay, next to Takaparawhau, were abruptly evicted, their houses burned to completely clear the land. In 1977, the government announced the military no longer needed Bastion Point. Ngāti Whātua iwi thought the land would be rightfully handed back to them but instead the government had plans to divide the land up and develop it into high income housing. Two days prior to the start of excavation, Ngāti Whātua iwi and supporting protesters reclaimed the land, occupying it for 506 days. It took ten years after the protest for the government to understand what was rightfully Ngāti Whātua's.<sup>13</sup> The headland of Takaparawhau is home to a geodetic survey mark. During the occupation the wooden trig station was transformed by the protesters into a liveable shelter, as documented by photographer John Miller, who had observed other political social battles in Aotearoa. Miller showed the structure's beautiful modifications of colourful painted wood and recycled glass windows. Cassandra Barnett's words poignantly respond to the image: “When is a trig station a home? When it has feet planted in the earth and four walls. When it squats, forgetting to survey. When it is inhabited with aroha. Reach for Ranginui, reach for Papatūānuku.”<sup>14</sup>



The installation *Flagging the Future: Te Kiritangata – The Last Palisade* (1995), by Diane Prince (Ngā Puhi, Ngāta Whatua), uses a structure that resembles a trig station to provoke responses to Pākehā land ownership and the treatment of whenua Māori since early settlement. Prince had a large part to do with the research surrounding the Bastion Point protest and with many other Māori activist movements and social actions regarding land ownership. The work gained attention as part of the 1995 *Korurangi: New Māori Art* exhibition at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki due to Prince's use of the New Zealand flag, which lay on the floor and had the words 'please walk on me' stencilled onto it, though it also featured a woven basket, dried korari and rākau from harakeke making the triangular shape of a trig station with a grid-like cross in the middle.<sup>15</sup> What upset certain people was that a patriotic symbol could be vandalised and treated with such insolence. One might suggest that the work penetrated the comforting and secure walls of the colonising culture, the homely condition that insulates or blinds its inhabitants from the real vandalism and insolent behaviour that has taken, and is still taking, place.

Here, it is worth returning to the sculptural representations of trig stations described at the beginning of this article, using native timber remnants of New Zealand houses, and to consider Moana Jackson's metaphoric description of colonisation as one house replacing another:

The houses represent societies, and each house provides a secure shelter for the people who live in that house. The strength of a house rests on its foundations; the foundations keep the structure above it sturdy and upright. The foundations of society include a resource base utilised to ensure its physical survival; a political system to organise it; justice and laws for the security and safety of its citizens; education to maintain and develop it; health practices to support the well-being of its members; and a language to carry its values, views and norms.<sup>16</sup>

When the first European settlers arrived and the Pākehā house was built in Aotearoa, it changed the neighbourhood for good. For many parts of the motu, the neighbourhood started with the four-legged trig structures on the tops of the surrounding hills, followed by the felling of native hardwoods, such as kauri, rimu, tōtara, kahikatea, mataī and silver beech, used to build the new homes and furniture inside them. Remnants of these forests, in the form of joists, posts, skirtings and doors, are now found scattered across neighbourhoods, in wood piles, skip bins and landfill. *When A Trig Station Becomes a Home* uses the colonial structure of the trig station and the materials that emerged from its use in the New Zealand environment. The form of the trig station reassembles the dismantled home and neighbourhood, replanting the native materials feet into the ground, giving it four walls, forgetting to survey. There is new life as it reaches for Ranginui and for Papatūānuku.



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- 2 "The History of Ōtākou," accessed 26 June 2025, <https://www.otakourunaka.co.nz/tkou-history>.
- 3 West, *The Face of Nature*, 22.
- 4 Jonathan West, "Owning the Otago Peninsula: The Role of Property in Shaping Economy, Society and Environment, 1844–1900," *New Zealand Journal of History* 46, no. 1 (2012): 52.
- 5 Alison Ballance, "Book Charts Changing Face of Otago Peninsula," *RNZ*, 10 May 2018, 13.27–13.31, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/ourchangingworld/audio/2018643983/book-charts-changing-face-of-otago-peninsula>.
- 6 "Bearing in Surveying: Learn Its Types, Meridians & Designations," *Testbook*, 11 July 2023, <https://testbook.com/civil-engineering/bearing-in-surveying-meaning-and-types>.
- 7 John Rochort, *The Adventures of a Surveyor in New Zealand and the Australian Gold Diggings* (Christchurch: Capper Press, 1974).
- 8 Gordon Andreassend, Andrew Blackman and Don McKay, eds., *The Measure of the Man: The Life of Archie Bogle CBE, FNZIS, Surveyor of the Century* (Wellington: Survey and Spatial New Zealand, 2024).
- 9 Bridget Reweti, *It's a Long Shot*, 2012, Circuit Artist Moving Image Aotearoa New Zealand, accessed 26 June 2025, <https://www.circuit.org.nz/work/its-a-long-shot>.
- 10 David Eggleton, "Bridget Reweti's Illustrated Shards," 17 November 2021, Circuit Artist Moving Image Aotearoa New Zealand.
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- 15 Hana Pera Aoake, "On Diane Prince's Flagging the Future: Te Kiritangata – The Last Palisade," *Art News Aotearoa*, 10 December 2023, <https://artnews.co.nz/on-diane-princes-flagging-the-future-te-kiritangata-the-last-palisade/>.
- 16 Rebecca Kiddle, et al., *Imagining Decolonisation* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2020), 23–24.





## MY PLACE AS A WEAVER: RANGAHAU, PURAKU AND TONU, AKO FOR AKO

Stella Lange

Tēnā koutou katoa Ko tangata Tiriti  
Ko whakaparanga mai Tiamana Ingarangi  
I whānau ahu i roto i te London,  
A i whakaaroahia ki Aotearoa hou Zealand.  
Nō Ōtepoti  
Ko kaipūtaiao  
He kakōrero Te Kura Matatini ki Otago| Otago Polytechnic  
Ko Stella Lange.

This article sets out to document my ongoing journey to become an informed treaty partner and tertiary educator, with a better understanding of Māori approaches to design that helps me to support all my students.<sup>1</sup> I did not know what I needed to know, but knew I needed to do 'something.' In this project, I explored whakapapa to inform and guide a creative textile project. In that praxis I developed a deeper understanding of how ākonga could be supported to adopt a kaupapa Māori approach in creative design projects. This project also reinforced the need for te reo to be normalised in tertiary education contexts; language is an important tool in decolonisation.

Increasingly, over the past decade, as a kaiako educator in design, including postgraduate design, I have found my Māori undergraduate and post graduate students want to approach creative practice from a kaupapa Māori perspective. I have wholeheartedly supported them and welcomed this ākonga-led embrace of indigenous mahi and kaupapa. But as tangata Tiriti, someone who is not Indigenous to New Zealand, I felt ill-prepared to fully support and guide them, despite many years of professional development to build bicultural competence and understanding.

Over decades I participated in a variety of Treaty of Waitangi courses and various seminars and sessions on bicultural New Zealand, all with the intention of being a good treaty partner. Institutionally, Te Kura Matatini ki Otago (Otago Polytechnic) provides support for both ākonga and kaiako. Te Punaka Ōwheo support ākonga, providing a Māori Student Support Centre. Kaiako can access the Māori Development and Kaitohutohu Office, something I had done frequently, guiding ākonga through a consultation process to ensure that their research was respectful and mindful in bicultural Aotearoa.

In 2020, I attended a wānanga led by Olly Ohlson that explored a Māori world view, Io and Te Kore. I began to recognise the gap between my own understanding and framing of the world around me and Olly's as Māori. I glimpsed and also understood that the earth, comprised of layers of geology and sedimentary rocks, was at the same time layered with Māori tupuna, buried ancestors. Olly explained that whare (buildings) represent lineage and whānau in metaphorical and literal ways that no one before had told me. I began to understand at an embodied level the concept of 'world view,' something that had until then had been a mere academic framework.



I installed the *Aki* app on my phone and tried every day to become more familiar with te reo Māori. I navigated a mihi, trying to shoehorn my personal story of a New Zealander, born while my parents were travelling abroad and with an early nomadic family life in New Zealand, into the traditional format needing a mountain and a river. These were the things that I, as tangata Tiriti was encouraged to do – but none of it informed how I could better support my Māori ākonga with their creative practice. I recalled *Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development*,<sup>2</sup> which positions learning as something that can only happen when one has the right foundation to step from. I understood that where I stood was far from where I wanted and needed to be, and I searched for a path to bring me closer, so I could step to where I wanted to be.

I have worked with several postgraduate ākonga keen to use a kaupapa Māori approach in their design research and projects. Like many of our Māori ākonga, they expressed a disconnect from their Māori heritage and were exploring and learning more about their whakapapa through their creative projects. I wanted to support them, but I didn't understand how to.

I approached the problem as I had been taught to approach research problems. I read as much as I could and tried to relate what I read to what I was doing. I read, and watched, Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonising Methodologies* and understood the awkward space in which indigenous people and research historically have come together.<sup>3</sup> I read Hirini Moko Mead's *Tikanga Māori*, reading and rereading the chapters on creative practice.<sup>4</sup> I was seeking understanding of how my ākonga could use a kaupapa approach for their creative research projects.

My early understanding of a kaupapa Māori approach was fuzzy. My PhD research had looked to published literature to explore notions of scientific reproducibility, accuracy and validity, and to understand the context and materials I was working with. Published literature in this case did not help me understand how to support ākonga adopt a kaupapa Māori approach to their creative projects.

Felicity Ware, Mary Breheny and Margaret Forster, in their 2018 article on what they call "Kaupapa kōrero," are clear that "kaupapa is a base or foundation for understanding knowledge and action."<sup>5</sup> Definitions of kaupapa tend to assume understanding of a culture that I did not have: "Māori approach, Māori topic, Māori customary practice, Māori institution, Māori agenda, Māori principles, Māori ideology – a philosophical doctrine, incorporating the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of Māori society."<sup>6</sup>

I belatedly recognised what sociologist Martin Tolich has identified: I had implicitly learned that as Pākehā it is not my role or place to investigate Māori creative or research practices.<sup>7</sup> While I can't remember directly being told not to engage with Māori art and design, every encounter was tinged with an expectation that I would need to do significant learning and research to even begin, but there was no overt guidance as to what that research might be. As a kaiako, I was expected to teach first and second year courses that required students to consider what bicultural practice looked like in creative Aotearoa New Zealand. I introduced readings by Julie Paama-Pengelly and directed students towards IPONZ resources on meaning in Māori design.<sup>8</sup> I also included as a reading Joe Citizen's article (in a 2020 issue of this journal) on Pākehā paralysis and his warning that working in bicultural spaces requires care.<sup>9</sup> All of this set up the same implicit message: Māori things are things Pākehā don't understand.

Tolich sets out a history of separation between Pākehā and Māori research practices, where Pākehā are implicitly taught not to engage.<sup>10</sup> I admit, when students who identified as Māori introduced Māori concepts, ideas and forms, I was excited for them but knew I didn't know enough to guide them, so I encouraged warmly and stepped back. I took care not to comment on, select, highlight, discuss or otherwise refer to Māori design practice, because who was I as Pākehā to take on that role of commenting on Māori work.<sup>11</sup> As a result, ākonga were left to discuss and evaluate what they found on their own. This could not continue. So, in 2024, I stepped away from my day-to-day mahi to become once again an ākonga, in Toi Maruata – Certificate in Māori and Indigenous Art. The course comprised weekly classes from 6 to 9 p.m., and weekend noho – extended stays at local marae. Nēpia Mahuika and Rangimārie Mahuika explain that wānanga are research spaces and research methodologies, and this proved true for me; the wānanga was a rich research space.<sup>12</sup>

Classes began and ended with karakia, and waiata, practices I knew of but that until that point were not part of my own teaching. As a class we ate a meal together, bringing kai to share. In groups we worked on a collaborative creative work, as well as being expected to discuss our developing individual creative works. Each week we were introduced to a whakataukī and elements of kōwhaiwhai. Our kaiako asked us what waiata we wanted to sing or what karakia we wanted to use; they assumed we knew many waiata and karakia, and when we hesitated or repeated last week's choice they suggested new options. We discussed kawa and tikanga, and what good practice looked like in terms of Māori creative practice. Rangahau (research) was expected.

There were three aromatawai (assessments) and we were expected to show a basic understanding of kawa and tikanga as we completed these. It was in these aromatawai that I at first struggled and then developed the confidence to set aside my reservations about how I, as Pākehā, could engage in toi Māori. In these aromatawai I was challenged to consider whakapapa.

Like many people descended from settlers to Aotearoa, I had some idea of my family origins and histories, but little specific detail. My heritage was something I had to research, not something I knew intuitively. Individuality had always been presented to me as of greater importance than my 'pedigree,' perhaps because my pedigree was working class.

A photo of my father's family gathered to celebrate Christmas in 1957 took on special significance (Figure 1). My father was one of the young men at the back of the group of 22 people. As children we had been told he was one of a family with 12 or 14 children. Following his death, we learned he was one of maybe 18, maybe more. It was a large extended family comprising children born in and out of wedlock, marriage, death and several remarriages. My mother's family was just as complex: meetings and marriages on ships, children left behind and never sent for, orphanages, out of wedlock children and long-lost siblings reunited in their seventies. My birth in England to New Zealand parents added a layer of complexity, as did an adopted brother and fostered siblings. Whakapapa as an expression of lineage for me was not straightforward. I wondered how my family history could be reduced to waka, mountain, river and naming my tūpuna?



Figure 1. Lange Family 1957, Matamata, Aotearoa New Zealand.

At one noho, I was introduced to the whakapapa of kōhatu (stone) as preparation to work with stone carving, then later to the whakapapa of light and of creation, of plants, trees, birds and sea animals. My understanding of whakapapa expanded from specifics of genealogy or personal heritage to something more universal, where everything is connected. What had been a limiting concept, in the context of my own messy heritage, become a tool to position what I knew and what I was doing in a much expanded framework. Linda Tuhiwai Smith calls this relationality, explaining that everyone is connected to everything, animate or inanimate, through lines of descent and interconnectedness.<sup>13</sup> This concept of interconnectedness has long been written about and yet it was new to me and, as described here by Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal, made perfect sense:

More than just a genealogical descent of all things from atua (deities) to present, whakapapa framework also predicts future outcomes. In addition to describing a full range of co-generational and inter-generational relationships, this framework can also be used as a tool for scientific enquiry to examine the nature, origins, interrelatedness and future predictions of events and experiences. Whakapapa allows people to locate themselves in the work both figuratively and in relation to their ancestors and future descendants.<sup>14</sup>

This quote was the prompt to consider the whakapapa of my own textile practice, weaving. Indigenous Diné weavers, Lynda Teller Pete and Barbara Teller Ornelas, reminded me that a weaver does not work in isolation.<sup>15</sup> Without the tools, the fibre and the materials to dye the yarn, and without harvesting in a way that protects future growth, nothing can be woven. Teller Pete explains that to sit at a loom and weave is a prayer for rain, because everything on the loom, and therefore the loom itself, as well as the weaver, requires rain to grow before it can be used.<sup>16</sup> What resonated with me was this positioning of weaving as a non-timebound collaborative work, recognising the weaver, as well as all those who made the weaving tools and those who harvest the fibres and care for the land. This was a whakapapa framework I could draw on.

Historian Nēpia Mahuika refers to Apirana Ngata's description of whakapapa as "the process of layering one thing upon another," concluding that "everything has a whakapapa ... every word, thought, object, mineral, place and person."<sup>17</sup> I began to document the whakapapa of my own weaving practice, of the materials (cotton, and dyes) and the people who had taught me weaving in person (Nynka Piebenga, Christine Keller), those who had taught me through their writings (Peggy Osterkamp, Anne Dixon, Marguerite Porter Davidson) or who encouraged my steps into weaving (Suzanne Muir, Margery Blackman, Pam McKinlay, Jill Milne, Pamela Treanor). Responding to Lynda Teller Pete and Barbara Teller I explicitly identified, and in doing so thanked, those who made my weaving equipment (Fred Farhm, Jim Wilson, Bluster Bay, Bob Gilmore, Mr Loman of Hamilton, Schact, Ashford) and provided the materials I used to learn and to weave with (Ashfords, Maurice Brassard, Vienne, Thread Collective Australia, Nannes Notions New Zealand). My list of those who contributed extends to digital spaces, Ravelry, Handwoven.net and Jane Stafford's Weaving School. Reaching back into history I looked for atua I need to thank and identified Hine-te-iwaiwa (weaving) and Hine Rēhia (weaving knowledge) as well as the old German deities Frau Holda (weaving) and Frau Perchta (spinning). I include Martin Luther amongst those I thank, for my whānau were protestants and it was that, perhaps, that lead them here to Aotearoa New Zealand.

This approach to whakapapa situates my own practice in a wider community. Without this community, their making, their sharing of knowledge and providing materials, my practice could not be. What had seemed solitary explorations, sitting at my loom and making cloth, became instead a much richer and connected practice shared across time and location and communities, a non-timebound practice.

With this new-to-me understanding of whakapapa, acknowledging the importance of recognising and naming the origin and interconnectedness of everything, I looked to a more generalised familial whakapapa, finding settlers from Germany, Scotland and Yorkshire, England. All these places had traditions of loom weaving. I adopted the language of my family six generations back and chose Weberi ('weaving,' in German) as a name for my practice. Without a marae, or taonga handed down, my research is somewhat disconnected. This is tātai hikohiko, a whakapapa approach to indicate a line of descent using a few key ancestors rather than a complete lineage.<sup>18</sup>

Royal recognises this as a methodology, whakapapa providing the impetus to identify the antecedents or parents of a phenomenon.<sup>19</sup> My waka are the Skiold (1844), Routarua (1911) and Ruahine (1911). I learned that my Lange tūpuna came here under the protection of a sponsor, Count Kuno Rantzau, who provided the passage and equipment that they, as indentured serfs, could not afford. I recognised my ancestors were workers; all used their hands to farm, or work for a living. My work was informed. My whakapapa project focused on celebrating ancestral traditions of work, of manual and skill labour done with hands – making, growing, mending, driving, cooking, sewing. My current practice is very much hand-work, hand-weaving and sewing.

Online repositories, especially Ralph Griswold's Handweaving.net, provided access to weaving texts of German origin. In that digital te whare pora (house of weaving) I saw patterns that my tūpuna might have seen or used and began to look for something to weave that could reference this knowledge and history, whakapapa embodied.

A pattern from 1815 (#80275)<sup>20</sup> looked promising, but with floats over 17 threads wouldn't work for my handwoven domestic textiles, where those floats would be loops that would catch as the cloth was used. I looked for a variation of that patterning and found it in G.H. Oelsner's 1915 Handbook of Weaves (Figure 2) (#44273).<sup>21</sup>

This draft used two colours. When woven, it looks like two tapes crossed over and under to form cloth, and in the spaces between these tapes are small clusters of whetū (stars). Mick Pendergrast identifies this pattern of two over two as tumu.<sup>22</sup> I mapped the draft for the cloth digitally in iWeaveit software developed by Sally Breckenridge. My confidence grew as I deliberately acknowledged all those whose mahi I was drawing on in the creation of this work.

The warp was made using a vintage warping mill, which carries the name CA Landis and was gifted to me by Morag McKenzie. I wove the cloth using an eight shaft, countermarch loom made by Fred and Pam Fram, with shuttles from Shacht. I cut the cloth using my mother Carol June Stanley's dressmaking scissors and stitched with a vintage Singer 201 from 1952, bought new as a wedding present for Olive Annetta Waring and housed in a cabinet made by her new husband, subsequently sold to me by their son.

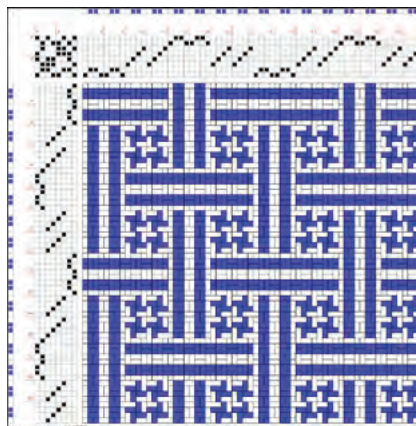


Figure 2. G.H. Oelsner, *A Handbook of Weaves*, 1915, #44273.



Figure 3. Weaving on Fred's Shed Loom, made by Fred and Pam Fram.



Figure 4. Sewn using Singer 201, 1952, a wedding present for Olive Annetta Waring.



One face of my woven cloth represents intertwined knowledges, practices and families, and was filled with whetū to mark all who had contributed (directly or indirectly) knowledge, materials and support for the project. Māori, like many cultures, view whetū as people who are no longer living with us on earth.

The second face of the woven cloth has come to represent to me all the hands and work that led to this cloth. I realised that the reverse pattern looked like the three-fingered hand often used in whakairo (carving). Designer Johnson Witehira discusses how the significance of three – three-fingered hands, three baskets of knowledge – is much debated, with no real definitive answer.<sup>23</sup> A H McLintock had earlier speculated on the prevalence of the three-fingered hand motif in carvings of Māori and other Pacific cultures, while noting that



there are nonetheless many examples with four and five fingers.<sup>24</sup> My kaiako, Marewa, stressed the importance of the artist choosing their symbols, and in this work I choose to see the reverse as embodying multiple three-fingered hands, all representing the multiple makers whose contributions enabled my practice.

As ākonga working with a creative project, I explored the whakapapa of my own practice. What had until this time been a theoretical or distant concept became an informative and guiding framework for my creative project. The importance of acknowledging all those who shared their knowledge and provided tools so that I could develop this work sits seemingly in opposition to western approaches that emphasise individual creativity and uniqueness.

I now have more confidence to support ākonga who wish to explore kaupapa Māori in their study and can ask them to begin with a focus on the broader and important whakapapa of their project. In acknowledging the origins of their materials and their knowledge, ākonga can articulate a whakapapa for their creative work orally, through writing or when presenting. I understand that there is far more complexity to kaupapa Māori approaches than whakapapa alone, something I hope to address in future study.

I am, as I had hoped when I began, several steps nearer to being confident to support Māori students who want to explore a kaupapa Māori approach in their design work. For me, this is a beginning of a deliberate foray towards decolonising my own teaching practice for creative projects. My tangata whenua kaiako has suggested my role is to make, in anticipation of a time when use of te reo and Māori approaches to creative practice are normalised. Now is a time to rebalance my own biased education and learn more about the reo and toi practices of the place in which I live.



Ākonga:	learner
Aromatawai:	assessment
Io:	supreme being
Kaiako:	teacher, instructor
Kaitohutohu:	advisor, instructor
Karakia:	a chant or prayer
Kaupapa:	agenda, plan, purpose
Kōhatu:	stone, rock
Korowai:	cloak
Kōwhaiwhai:	painted designs
Mahi:	work, make, practise
Maruata:	daybreak, dawn
Mihi:	to greet, acknowledge
Noho:	to live, settle, stay
Pākehā:	Non-Polynesian New Zealander
Rangahau:	to seek, research, investigate
Tangata Tiriti:	People of the treaty, non-Māori who live in New Zealand
Tātai hikohiko:	an abbreviated line of decent
Te Ao Mārama:	the world of light, of humans
Te Kore:	the realm of potential being, the Void
Te Reo Māori:	Māori language
Te whare pora:	house of weaving
Tūpuna:	ancestors
Toi:	art, knowledge
Waiata:	to sing, chant
Wānanga:	to meet, seminar, conference, school
Whakapapa:	to give history
Whakataukī:	to utter a proverb, significant saying
Whetū:	star, cluster of stars

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- 1 Special thanks to my kaiako Marewa Severne and to Scott Klenner, as well as Professor Margo Barton, who supported my study by approving my Research Study Leave. Note: In this article I use te reo Māori where it is important to identify Māori knowledge, practices or concepts. Te reo Māori is an official language of Aotearoa New Zealand and to sub it out would suggest otherwise. In recognition that te reo Māori is not as widely spoken as English, endnotes and glossary provide translations for those who need them.
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## WAKA WHETŪ: A JOURNEY THROUGH PUAKA MATARIKI, PROJECT-BASED LEARNING, AND CULTURE-CENTRED DESIGN

Denise Narciso and Taryn Ormsby

Me mātau ki te whetū, i mua kōkiri o te haere.  
(Before you set forth on a journey be sure you know the stars.)

Design education in Aotearoa New Zealand is undergoing a significant transformation – one driven by the need for cultural responsiveness, authentic engagement and learning experiences immersing students in real-world problems, connecting them to their place and their community.<sup>1</sup> Within the Communication Design programme at Otago Polytechnic, there is a growing expectation to embed ethical frameworks that enable students to practise responsibly as designers in a bicultural context. Our programme is increasingly committed to working meaningfully with minority communities and placing Māori at the centre of decision-making. This approach ensures mana whenua have genuine authority in shaping how cultural concepts are represented in project outcomes. By making space for Māori perspectives – voices that have historically been underrepresented in a Eurocentric design curriculum – we move toward more authentic, inclusive and grounded design practices.

In navigating this evolving landscape, we turn to the stars – both metaphorically and literally – that have long guided journeys across moana (oceans) and whenua (land).

*Waka Whetū* – a collaborative exhibition developed by third-year Communication Design students at Otago Polytechnic in partnership with Tūhura Otago Museum – served as a navigational tool in this journey. The *Waka Whetū* project offers a case study for how design education can engage with Indigenous knowledge systems while fostering contemporary creative practice. It exemplifies the potential of design to act as a bridge between cultural narratives and pedagogical innovation.

In Communication Design at Otago Polytechnic, Project-Based Learning (PBL) forms a core component of the curriculum in the latter stages of the degree. PBL is a student-centred model grounded in constructivist principles: learning is context-specific; students are active participants in their learning; and knowledge is co-constructed through social interaction.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, PBL is recognised as a form of inquiry-based learning in which authentic questions and real-world challenges provide the context for deep and meaningful educational experiences.<sup>3</sup>

In Semester 1, 2024, third-year Communication Design students at Otago Polytechnic developed an interactive experience exploring Puaka Matariki – the Māori New Year – through visual storytelling, digital media and installation design. Their aim was to illuminate the cultural and astronomical significance of this star cluster, creating a platform that fostered both academic inquiry and public engagement. At the heart of *Waka Whetū*, the resulting exhibition, was a pedagogical approach informed by two interwoven frameworks: High-Quality Project-Based Learning (HQPBL)<sup>4</sup> and Culture-Centred Design (CCD), as articulated in the Indigenous Design and Innovation Aotearoa (IDIA) Toolkit.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 1. High Quality Project-Based Learning infographics designed by Denise Narciso.

The High Quality Project-Based Learning (HQPBL) framework (Figure 1) developed by the Buck Institute for Education expands on this foundation by identifying six key elements that distinguish impactful project work from more superficial or activity-based learning:

1. **Intellectual challenge and accomplishment**, which ensures engagement with complex ideas and critical thinking;
2. **Authenticity**, which connects projects to real-world issues, contexts, and communities;
3. **Public product**, which extends the learning beyond the classroom and into community-facing outcomes;
4. **Collaboration**, fostering teamwork, communication, and shared ownership;
5. **Reflection**, encouraging learners to critically examine their processes and outcomes; and
6. **Project management**, which develops students' capacity to plan, organise, and sustain progress over time, including goal-setting, time management, and task coordination.

Together, these dimensions scaffold project work that is considered to be rigorous, relevant and resonant with the world students are preparing to enter.

Running parallel to this educational framework in the *Waka Whetū* project was Culture-Centred Design (CCD) (Figure 2), a design methodology grounded in Indigenous-led knowledge systems and relational worldviews. As articulated in the IDIA Toolkit, CCD operates not only as a cultural lens but as an ethical foundation, foregrounding principles of relationality, reciprocity and accountability to takata whenua (people of the land). Rather than treating culture as an aesthetic element or a secondary concern, CCD positions it as the core from which design inquiry emerges. It prioritises Indigenous voices, aspirations and lived experiences, ensuring that the design process itself becomes a site of inclusion and care.

Together, HQPBL and CCD (Figure 3) enabled a learning experience that was not only academically rigorous but also socially and culturally transformative. *Waka Whetū* exemplifies how these frameworks, when meaningfully integrated, can shape design education that is both future-facing and deeply rooted in place.



Figure 2. Culture-Centred Design infographics designed by Denise Narciso.

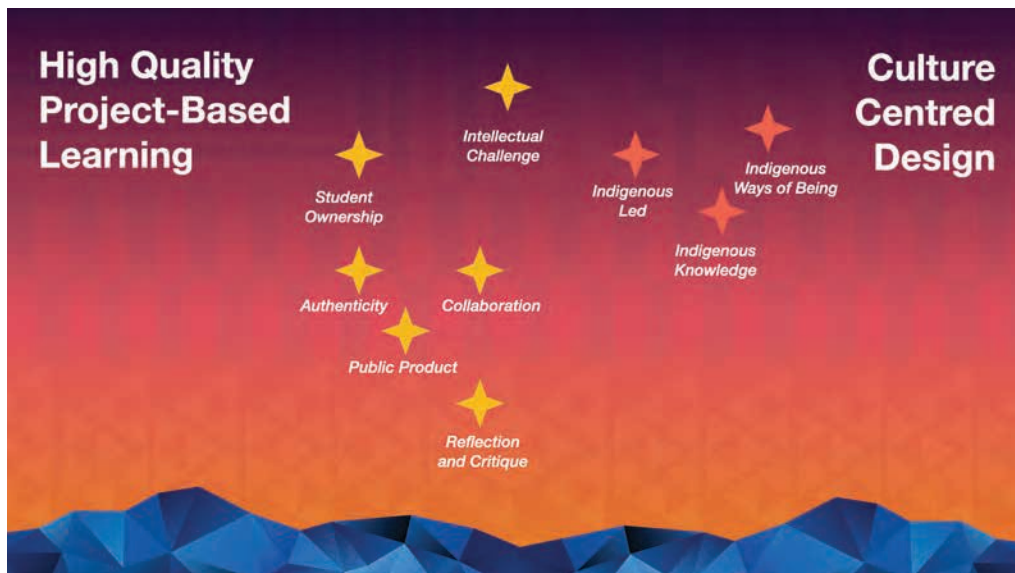


Figure 3. HQPBL and CCD framework. Image by Denise Narciso.



## BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: CO-DESIGN IN ACTION

This project extended deliberately beyond the boundaries of the traditional classroom, where learning often revolves around teacher-led instructions. The HQPBL model turns the tables by encouraging students to lead their own learning journey and builds on constructivist action-orientated approach to learning.<sup>6</sup>

Students worked in close consultation with Kāi Tahu astronomer Victoria Campbell; Gerard O'Regan, Curator and Pouhere Kaupapa Māori (Māori advisor) at Tūhura Otago Museum; Head of Exhibitions and Creative Services, Craig Scott; and staff from Te Punaka Ōwheo (Māori Student Support Centre). These partnerships were instrumental in ensuring that the exhibition was both culturally grounded and pedagogically robust. Importantly, the collaboration was framed as designing *with* rather than *for* Māori – an ethos of co-creation that foregrounded relationality, reciprocity and shared knowledge. The outcome was a vibrant and resonant cultural experience that emerged through meaningful dialogue and mutual respect.

## RESEARCH AND IDEATION: UNVEILING THE STARS

The project commenced with a rigorous research phase that foregrounded the cultural, ecological and educational significance of the lone star Puaka and the Matariki star cluster. Students explored the symbolic meanings of these stars, their roles in marking seasonal transitions and ties to agricultural cycles, spiritual reflection and social renewal. Within te ao Māori (the Māori world), the stars are not passive celestial objects; they are active participants in the rhythms of life and indicators of time, wellbeing, and environmental change.

Students engaged with diverse sources, privileging oral histories and storytelling shared by Victoria Campbell.<sup>7</sup> This deepened their understanding of both the historical and contemporary dimensions of mātauraka Māori (Māori knowledge). Students approached the project with openness, humility and active listening, centring the voices and perspectives of Māori in their design approach. This *kōrero* (discussion) provided not only insight into the specific roles and meanings of each star within the Matariki cluster but also revealed the gendered balance and spiritual significance underpinning the Māori lunar calendar. Students learned how Indigenous people use these constellations as a framework for reflection, renewal and the cyclical nature of life – insights that informed and enriched their design responses at every level. This also highlights the importance of collaboration, reflection and critique in HQPBL, where students include diverse perspectives and feedback that improve both the process and the design outcome.

## PITCHING IDEAS: COLLABORATING AND REFRAMING EXPECTATIONS

After building a strong foundation through research and cultural learning, students moved into the pitching stage of the project. As part of this process, they visited Tūhura Otago Museum to observe the space where the exhibition would take place. Then, they sketched out early ideas and thought through how their work might fit within the physical environment and the project goal. This helped them understand how their designs could connect with visitors in a real-world setting.

Back in the classroom, students developed their concepts further, working across areas such as branding, animation, interactive installations and educational content. They met with their lecturers to brainstorm ideas before the formal pitch. These discussions encouraged students to push their thinking and consider how to make their work more meaningful and engaging. The pitching session itself was a key moment in the project, giving students a chance to present their ideas to peers, teachers and cultural advisors, and to receive constructive feedback. This process helped them refine the work and build confidence to take their ideas into the next stage of development.

## DEVELOPMENT AND REFINEMENT: TURNING IDEAS INTO REALITY

After the pitch presentations, students moved into the development phase, where they began turning their ideas into finished work for the public exhibition. This stage involved refining their concepts, testing different approaches and working closely with others to solve design problems. Collaboration and feedback were key throughout, with students regularly checking in with lecturers, peers, project partners and cultural advisors to make sure their work stayed on track and respected the kaupapa (guiding purpose) of the project.

A significant learning moment emerged during consultation, particularly regarding the arrangement and representation of the Matariki stars in the event logo. Initially, students had proposed a random star configuration with colours they had individually selected. However, through feedback from Victoria, they learned that each star has a specific order and is associated with a designated colour from the national branding – an important detail that was subsequently incorporated into the final designs.<sup>8</sup>

Some illustration designs also required refinement throughout the development process. In the early stages, one of the main poster concepts featured an illustration depicting kai (food) positioned above a head – an arrangement considered tapu (restricted). While this placement initially seemed like an innocent design choice, it became an important learning moment for the students, deepening their understanding of tikaka (customary practices) and the need for culturally respectful visual storytelling.

## THE EXHIBITION: A PUBLIC PRODUCT AND CULTURAL DIALOGUE

The final exhibition showcased a diverse range of design outcomes – including visual branding and marketing materials, digital animations, and interactive experiences – crafted to engage and educate the public. Rather than relying on static displays, students aimed to create an immersive and dynamic environment. A standout feature was a large star installation paired with projection animations, pre-recorded audio and sound design, offering a multisensory experience for visitors. Consistent visual storytelling was reinforced through a set of illustrated icons, developed in alignment with the national Matariki brand standards and used throughout the exhibition to unify its visual identity. Students paid careful attention to elements such as colour palettes, imagery and language to ensure cultural accuracy and uphold the exhibition's integrity.

One of the highlights was a moving image piece shown in the Tūhura Otago Museum planetarium, a 360-degree dome theatre. This work invited the audience to travel through the stars on a celestial waka (canoe). Each star in the Matariki cluster was represented through unique, hand-drawn illustrations (Figure 4). Students wrote the script, recorded the karakia (blessing) and edited the animation and sound. The karakia included in Matariki branding was used and Victoria asked permission from Rangī Mātāmua and the Office for Māori Crown Relations – Te Arawhiti to use it in the southern dialect.<sup>9</sup> This piece brought together storytelling, design and collaboration, and was a strong example of how students applied both creative and cultural learning in a meaningful way.



Figure 4. *Waka Whetū*, Planetarium animation screenshots.

The exhibition also featured educational content that linked Matariki's seasonal messages with current environmental themes. One interactive display paired each star with a recipe based on seasonal, locally available ingredients translated from English into te reo Māori (the Māori language). The students took inspiration from the recipe, illustrated the ingredients and used the overarching branding for the layout and composition for a take-home recipe card (Figure 5). This offered visitors a way to connect Matariki to sustainable food practices and, through passing on the recipes, to their whānau.

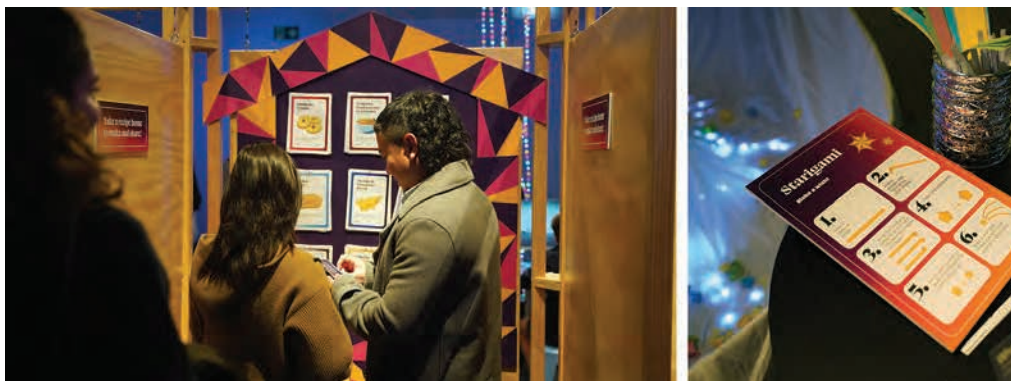


Figure 5. *Waka Whetū* Exhibition. Photography: Taryn Ormsby.

Another interactive piece, *Starigami*, invited visitors to write a wish on a piece of paper, fold it into a star and place it in a central wishing well, encouraging quiet reflection and a personal connection to the kaupapa. Clear visual instructions guided visitors through the folding process. A highlight for this section was a large, paper mâché star installation, which served as a centrepiece within the exhibition layout.

Throughout the development period, students participated in fortnightly check-ins with project partners and cultural advisors. These meetings helped guide the creative process, ensuring each stage remained accountable, responsive and culturally appropriate. The ongoing dialogue between designers and advisors created a strong foundation for learning and cultural integrity. The iterative nature of the work – developing, testing, receiving feedback and refining – allowed students to grow their skills in real time and approach challenges with professionalism.

The *Waka Whetū* exhibition was the final result of the students' hard work, launched during the Matariki season. This timing was important, as it connected the exhibition to Māori practices of renewal and reflection during this special time of year.

The exhibition was more than just a display of student work – it became a space for learning, discussion, and cultural connection. It offered both Māori and non-Māori communities a chance to engage with Māori knowledge systems and see their relevance in today's world.

## REFLECTION AND IMPACT: A MEANINGFUL CONTRIBUTION

Looking back on the project, students felt proud to be part of something much bigger than a regular class project. *Waka Whetū* gave them the chance to contribute to important conversations about environmental care, cultural sustainability and the valuable knowledge of Māori culture. The exhibition showed how design can be a tool for social change and mutual respect.



Figure 6. *Waka Whetū* Exhibition. Photograph: Taryn Ormsby.

Over 5,000 people visited the exhibition during its two-week run, which was a great public response and showed that the project had real impact. Visitors commented on both the quality of the design and the depth of cultural understanding the exhibition offered.

This project highlighted that regular conversations and strong relationships with cultural advisors were key to getting it right. These interactions helped both students and staff understand Māori customs and ways of knowing, being and doing. Respectful engagement required flexibility, openness and humility from everyone involved.

## BEHIND THE SCENES: FACILITATORS AND TEAMWORK

Lecturers took on roles beyond just teaching – they acted as facilitators, cultural guides, project managers and sometimes even as contributors to the design team. This flexibility required care, especially when dealing with sensitive cultural topics.

A lot of the success of *Waka Whetū* came from the 'invisible work' behind the scenes and responding and adapting to the needs of the project. Examples of this included coordinating with different stakeholders, securing sponsorships, experimenting with new technology and managing the dynamics between students, staff and cultural advisors. Both students and lecturers put in a lot of effort to make the project a success.



## LOOKING AHEAD: A MODEL FOR THE FUTURE

*Waka Whetū* offers a model that can be used in design education, both in Aotearoa and elsewhere. By integrating Indigenous leadership, community involvement and project-based learning into the curriculum, educators can help students become not only skilled designers but also culturally aware and socially responsible individuals. The use of HQPBL alongside Culture-Centred Design complemented the Communication Design programme and encouraged educational experiences that respect Indigenous knowledge. This approach helped students develop the empathy and understanding needed to work in diverse cultural settings. Just as our ancestors once looked to the stars for direction, as educators we can embrace the teachings embedded within these frameworks and navigate towards a more inclusive, collaborative and culturally connected future.

## CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

At this point we're still reflecting and learning from the experience, but we have identified some initial thoughts for future initiatives that seek to integrate cultural knowledge in design education.

The project-based learning model becomes more rigorous and impactful when specific criteria are carefully considered during course design. We found that culture-centred projects gain deeper meaning and relevance when clients and Indigenous partners are fully engaged throughout the entire design process, fostering stronger connections between the students, the work and its real-world context.

Conversations, relationship-building and interactions with cultural advisors at every stage of the design process were crucial in ensuring project outcomes remained respectful and aligned with the subtleties of Indigenous knowledge and ways of being. This project emphasised that bicultural projects require ongoing reflection, adaptation and openness from all stakeholders – students, staff and clients.





Figure 8. Waka Whetū Exhibition, Planetarium entrance. Photograph: Taryn Ormsby.

Cultural safety and creating inclusive environments for students and staff is paramount for success. Bicultural projects in Aotearoa should be inclusive for people of all cultural backgrounds, whether you're a student, educator, designer or member of the public, involved in the design process or interacting with the exhibition. Everyone should feel safe to engage and have their voices heard to encourage shared connection, understanding, respect and reciprocity. Safely facilitating conversations with students that enhanced the mana of the project improved their experiences of learning, as well as their social and academic outcomes.

The combination of High-Quality Project-Based Learning alongside Culture-Centred Design principles provides a robust framework to follow for future projects to enhance student learning, foster cultural engagement and prepare graduates for community-oriented, inclusive design practice. The Communication Design programme at Otago Polytechnic aims to share and refine this model for future projects and are eager to gather feedback from other teaching staff, students and stakeholders to enhance its effectiveness and applicability.

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**Taryn Ormsby** is a Māori artist, designer and Kaiako (lecturer) of Ngāti Maniapoto and Pakeha descent within the School of Design at Otago Polytechnic. Having worked in the design industry for more than 15 years in Australia, London and now Aotearoa (New Zealand), she blends a deep understanding of communication design in practice with a genuine curiosity for effective methods of teaching. With her industry links, Taryn is passionate about connecting talented students with real-world projects and internship experiences to enhance their learning and career development. Taryn holds a Bachelor of Design from UniSC, and a Certificate in Māori and Indigenous Art.

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# EMIEMI E NGĀ TĪMOKAMOKA KI TE TĀTAI I TE ARA NUKUNUKU – MAPPING MIGRATORY PATTERNS THROUGH WHAKAPAPA, PLACE AND HOME

Hayley Walmsley

I was rushing down Lincoln Road in Christchurch, heading home late from a potluck with colleagues. I'd had three drinks – not drunk, just that soft buzz where your pride gets louder. So, when I saw a guy in a hoodie that read 'Matauri Bay,' I didn't hesitate. "That's where I'm from!" I called out, smiling, and launched into telling him about *Migratory Patterns* – the show I'd just curated – and how several works came from, or near, Matauri Bay. He lit up, tipsy too, and said he couldn't wait to see it. Connection sparked – over a hoodie.

From 31 January to 16 March 2025, *Migratory Patterns* ran at Toi Moroki, Centre of Contemporary Art (CoCA). It featured works by Jonny Waters, Jesse-James Pickery, Nikita Rewha, Aidan Geraghty, Aroha Novak, Heramaahina Eketone, Moewai Marsh, Isaiah Okeroa, David Garcia, Jon Jeet – and me.

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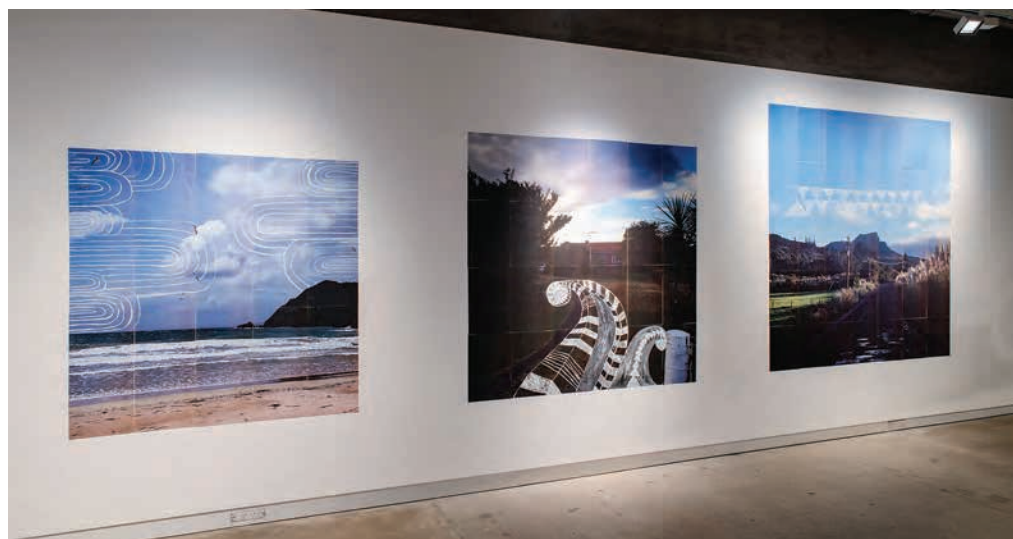


Figure 1. (Gallery Wide Shot of 3 paste-ups) Hayley Walmsley (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Pākehā)

From left to right,

*She wasn't sure if she could afford to move back*, paste up, 1340x1370mm, 2024.

*It's much smaller than I remember it*, paste Up, 1600x1600mm, 2016.

*She always knew where home was...* paste up, 1900x1900mm, 2024.

*Emiemi e ngā timokamoka*, part of this essay's title, evokes fragments coalescing, scattered parts seeking shape and direction. *Tātai i te ara nukunuku* speaks to tracing a migratory path through space, identity and layered belonging. Sometimes it's crooked. Sometimes it doubles back. Still, we follow it, hoping it leads somewhere that feels like home.

Whakapapa, place and home aren't fixed – they're dynamic relationships, places we carry and reshape. *Tātai* is a word meaning: lineage, naming, constellation.<sup>1</sup> *Nukunuku* suggests movement that shifts and returns. For Ngāpuhi, it echoes *Nukutāwhiti*, navigator of Ngātokimatawhaorua, named for the waka *Matawhaorua*, first captained by Kupe.<sup>2</sup> These ancestral pathways remind us that migration is generational, holding space for lives in pieces, and the work of aligning them into something navigable.

Before Christchurch, I lived in Dunedin, where I completed my Master of Visual Arts in 2019. Even after nearly a decade, it was never home; I was there for school, a job or a boy. I got stuck – couldn't afford to move closer to home, despite wanting to.

Still, I was surprised to find I missed Dunedin. I considered how migration affects *mana* and *wairua*. Whether it's across the street or across the world, we're always following a migratory path, moving closer or further from parts of ourselves.

What even is “home”?

I was born in Auckland, raised in Kerikeri but my roots lie in Pupuke and Matangirau, along Whangaroa Harbour. Home isn't static.<sup>3</sup> I've moved many times. If you rent, move for work, survival or love, the number creeps up fast.

Who am “I”?

Tēnā tātou katoa  
Ko Emiemi tōku maunga  
Ko Whangaroa tōku awa  
Nō Kerikeri ahau  
Ko Walmsley tōku whānau  
Ko Hayley tōku ingoa<sup>4</sup>

My father says we all lose interest in a long *pepeha*. My maunga does the talking, to those taught to listen. Only those trying to prove something, or who don't really know where they're from, drag out their *pepeha*, unless it's a ceremonial moment where *whakapapa* carries *mana*.

I am Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Porou and Ngāti Pākehā, English and Irish, a mother and daughter. My Ngāpuhi *whakapapa* spans several hapū, some older than Ngāpuhi itself – autochthonous, with no waka, present since the creation of Whangaroa Harbour.<sup>5</sup> My mother is adopted and doesn't know enough to pass on – but it's there. She is where my Irish and Ngāti Porou heritage come from. I carry my decidedly English surname, always.

An absurdist by nature, I am contradiction and complement, grounded and floating. Never just one thing – I live inside the spaces between,<sup>6</sup> within the word “and” – I make peace with it, even draw strength from it. I am a navigator, shaping space as I go, carving out places to fit inside when the world forgets to leave them.

A practice grounded in becoming. Holding myself, without apology, together.<sup>7</sup>

I'm layered and narrative driven, I use allegory and humour to speak to difficult things. Typically working in photography, a medium always about presence and disappearance. It asks to be remembered, even as it captures what will be lost.<sup>8</sup>

I talk about myself a lot. Odd, for someone introverted. But it's not performance: If anything, it's an overdeveloped urge to explain my existence. To hold tight to anything that might steady my ground.<sup>9</sup>

The exhibition *Migratory Patterns* came from that tension – feeling fragmented, wanting to make meaning. I used the tools I had: story, whakapapa, memory, whenua, people.

As someone who's cried flying over One Tree Hill, I can tell you – this is personal. But it's also structural. For those of us in the afterlife of colonisation, with layered identities and multiple locations, creation is resistance. Reclamation.<sup>10</sup> It says: "I'm still here. I exist. I'm not dead yet ..."<sup>11</sup> Drawing a line – however crooked – back to somewhere that felt like home. Resisting erasure.

When I asked the artists to take part, each of them said yes – to the ache of leaving, the weirdness of return, the work of re-making identity. Whether we left homes that never felt like home, or never lived there at all, we were reimagining. My story became ours. We'd been carrying fragments – silently. But through the work, we found shared commitment to where we come from, even when it was complicated, shifting or far away – claiming those places. For home. For tūrangawaewae. Even when we're still figuring out what that means.

The artists in *Migratory Patterns* work with whenua, food, adornment, memory and the cultural markers we carry or collect, to explore home as something lived. Each artist draws on whakapapa not as a static marker, but a living thread that binds us to place, memory and others. Many of us are Māori and several hold mixed ancestries – layers that aren't side notes, but central to how we live and make. The exhibition also included artists of Pacific, Filipino and Pākehā descent. Our work contains survival, disruption, reimagining and return. We ask what it means to belong when the places we belong to are changing, distant, or hard to reach.<sup>12</sup> We create space in a world that hasn't always made space for us.

There are frameworks that hold this – Kaupapa Māori, Indigenous resurgence, the politics of refusal, decolonial aesthetics, food sovereignty, critical geography, Queer Indigenous thinking.<sup>13</sup> But mostly this is lived knowledge, the kind that comes from movement and includes finding echoes of yourself in whenua that isn't yours – and making something anyway.

In that process, communities of practice form – quietly, slowly – through shared making, presence, and care.<sup>14</sup> They become another kind of home, especially when the ones we've come from, or long to return to, are shifting underfoot.

Some I've met through art school or group shows, others through the art scene. In every case, we've stayed in meaningful contact. Not a collective. Not a formal group. A web of connection, built through time and shared questions, through whakapapa, admiration, resonance. These relationships keep you from disappearing. They remind you you're not alone, bringing community back into what can feel like the siloed experience of individual artist practices. That's community – not the kind you apply to, but the kind you find by being in the world, making work, having conversations, paying attention. When you live in the in-between – of places, roles, selves – these people help hold it together. That's how it starts. And if you're lucky, it grows – quietly, with care.

The exhibition opened with a mihi whakatau – warm, grounding, spiritually charged. Jade Cavalcante, CoCA's Exhibition Delivery Manager, and I gave speeches to welcome our communities, anchoring the kaupapa. The next day we held a community potluck, bringing food, whānau and laughter into the gallery. Seven artists gave a floor talk, followed by a waiata session – not a performance, but a shared breath. Later, we ran a jewellery and windchime workshop using leftover beads from one of the artworks – another way of making, holding and remembering through touch. I gave four curator talks to Ilaam and Ara students about communities of practice – how to contextualise the show together. These moments mattered. They were the work, the threads that stitched everything together.

Before anything else, we bring stories. Even ones we don't fully know. A name you've heard your whole life. A tune. The smell of a kitchen. Stories travel with us through hands, bodies, work, whether we mean them to or not.



Whakapapa isn't always a tidy chart.<sup>15</sup> Sometimes it's a gesture, memory or question you've circled for years. The works in *Migratory Patterns* treat ancestry as a living practice: asking, honouring, remaking.

Whenua, too, is an ancestor.<sup>16</sup>  
Not just a setting – it's the work.  
The memory.  
The material.  
The body.

Jesse-James Pickery's *He ārai ke* suspends porcelain beads across the gallery entrance – a soft threshold. Grounded in the whenua we both come from, the beads are made from some of the finest porcelain in the world.<sup>17</sup> As they knock together, they echo the sound of shells at Matauri Bay when a wave recedes. There is the healing of lives in that sound; the work creates a shift, marking movement between inside and out.<sup>18</sup> A moment to arrive.

Heramaahina Eketone's ceramics echo this gently. Hung in a clean vertical line at the far end of the gallery, they signal a stop – or a return. *Roimata* (*Those Tears that we let fall for home when we are away from our tūrangawaewae*) holds a constellation: memory, grief, hope. The work feels like a body remembering something older than itself and reaching toward it.

Moewai Marsh's earth pigment works and handmade paper are quiet, patient, full of aroha, gathered as much as made. Each piece holds time and care – the kind that comes from being with land, not just taking from it. You can feel the warm caress of Papatūānuku. The labour is love. The material is trust.<sup>19</sup>

These artists shape whenua and story – because earth remembers. Their practices are slow, embodied, deliberate.<sup>20</sup> They ask us to listen to what's held in the unsaid. In these works, clay and pigment are whakapapa, carrying memory, intention and return. Curating them felt like watching a conversation unfold: between artist and whenua, between memory and form and between whānau.

Sound moved through *Migratory Patterns*, not just literally, but as a vibration that lingered. It ran through the talks, the quiet conversations, the shared breath of the waiata session. Not a performance – just proud. Collective. Gallery hosts were heard stating, "It's OK, you're allowed to touch this one,"<sup>21</sup> encouraging people to play with the porcelain beads, which tinkled like long-forgotten magic.

The sound of ceramic on ceramic.  
A story told sideways.  
The silence after a song.



Figure 2. Jesse-James Pickery (Ngāti Whātua, Ngāpuhi).  
Detail – *He ārai ke*, wood, nylon, Matauri Bay porcelain,  
1800x2350mm, 2025.

Not always visible. Not always loud. But carrying us from one work to the next. Making space. Asking only that we listen – just for a moment – before we move on.

Adornment was evident in the exhibition not as decoration but reclamation, protection, visibility, whakapapa and a way of claiming space – showing who you are before saying a word. Aroha Novak's work, *Whānau Whakaahua*, made that intention clear. Her materials held protest and memory, softness and edge. Fibre served as reclamation – something many once used as rongoā.<sup>22</sup> It reminded me of dressing for a funeral or a hīkoi – knowing your clothing speaks, bringing that care into the everyday.



Figure 3. Nikita Rewha (Ngāti Kuta, Ngāti Wai, Patukeha, Ngāpuhi).

*Huri*, jute twine for the whenu, sisal for the hukahuka, cotton crochet yarn and pheasant feathers, 1110x260mm, 2025.

Nikita Rewha's kakahu, *Huri*, looks like it would wrap the body and wairua like a ritual – a shield to be worn like karakia, woven from connection with care. Her naked-style weaving, rooted in Te Tai Tokerau practice, reveals every decision.<sup>23</sup> It is protective and exposed, something worn when you need to be held, a lineage made visible. Her work, like mine, is part of that long weaving that comes from a life of multiplicity. These works aren't made to just sit on bodies. They speak to them, through them. "Here I am." "This is mine." "I belong to something." "Know that – before I even open my mouth." Nikita and I understand that our adornment can be shield, signal and thread. The body carries whakapapa. Even when we don't know the full story, the shape of it still sits under the skin.

Food was one of the first things I talked about when dreaming up *Migratory Patterns*, not as something nice – like "oh, let's feed people" – but as something we carry, across flats, cities, generations. It lives in the pantry in an old biscuit tin, or in the way someone stirs a pot, or weird combinations your parents fed you as kids – edible memory, lineage shared through taste.<sup>24</sup> So, we held a potluck to embody the ethos of feeding the body to feed the mind. Everyone brought a dish that reminded them of home, however they defined that. Recipes were inherited, improvised or reheated with love. That was the point: to bring those reminders we carry with us.<sup>25</sup>

Aidan Geraghty's sculptures speak to kai systems, tuna trails and ecological memory – what's been lost, and what remains. Based on hīnaki, woven pots used to catch tuna, his works draw on childhood trips to the Wairewa drains. His ancestral awa, the Waimakariri, once connected Kāi Tahu to the rich mahika kai of the high country. Now, runoff from industrial farming seeps into it. His skeletal forms echo that breakdown – of waters, of taoka – but also hold space for sustenance. For survival.<sup>26</sup>

David Garcia's *Canoe Spread* maps relationships, anchored by a tapa cloth gifted to him by Tui Emma Gillies.<sup>27</sup> His work crosses oceans, Philippines to Aotearoa, currently without a way to return. His tiny terracotta canoes recall kinship journeys, a gentle nod to shared connections across words and food. The canoes are joined by tapa and metal – an empty can of liver spread, the spoon resting like quiet protest, a mouthful of memory. The can echoes Aidan's work, not through form but through a nod to shared meals, homesick cooking, the emotional weight of kai.



Figure 4. Aidan Geraghty (Kāi Tahu, Ngāi Tūāhuriri) *Pī*, galvanised/oxidised steel and aluminium sculpture, kōkōwai and kota, 980x400x380mm, 2025.

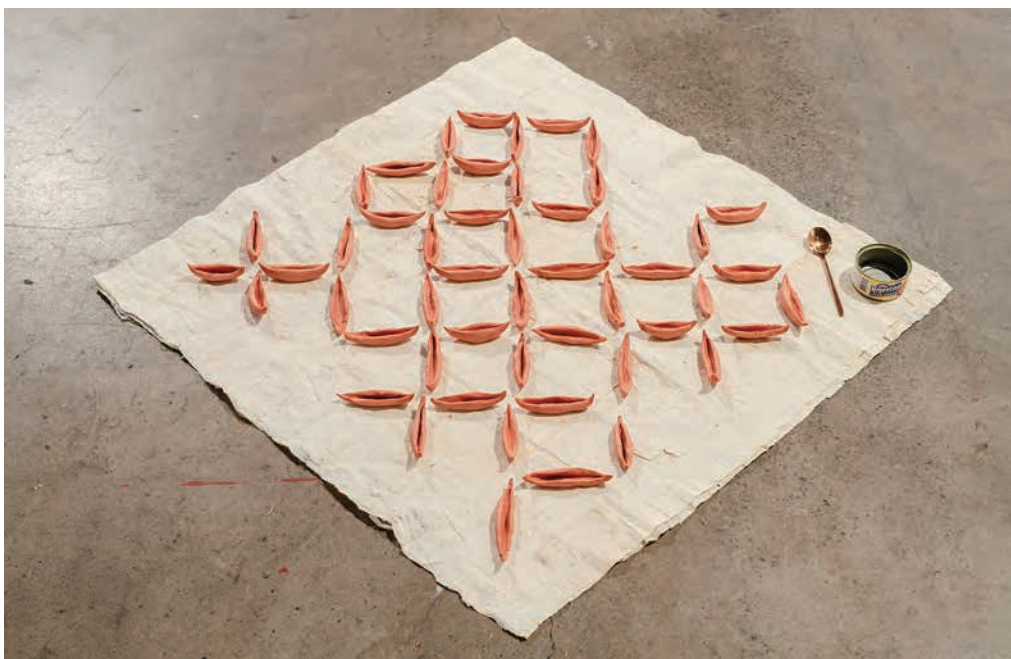


Figure 5. David Garcia (Kapampangan, Tagalog) *Canoe Spread*, tapa gifted from Tui Emma Gillies, terracotta, can, spoon, 750x730mm, 2025.

David keeps stealing my potluck recipes. We first met at a potluck hosted by Tui. I took a green chicken curry and he asked for the recipe. Then he made it for the potluck. So, I made my mother's meatballs and again he asked. We joke he'll serve them next time. Recipes are meant to be shared. You make something, someone takes a bit and maybe it turns up later, slightly changed, slightly theirs, still somehow yours. That's how it travels – through aroha.

Movement was always there – behind the gathering, the kai, the kōrero. It lingered in the shifting of bodies and the memories stirred by taste. Migration isn't always dramatic. Sometimes it's your nana's doughboys (dumplings), a maunga remembered from afar, a longing unnamed until it stirs.<sup>28</sup> From these threads, the questions unfolded. What does it mean to carry home – or to seek it, not knowing if it wants us back? For all of us, movement is remembering, remaking, survival.

Jonny Waters' *Pou* holds the story of Hine Paaka. Once a towering matai situated near Ashburton, she was named after a local chief's wife. She was a way marker for many, standing solidly in the surrounding landscape. She fell in 1945.<sup>29</sup> Jonny placed a baby matai beside the *Pou*, marking remembrance, resistance and return. His work holds a quieter voice. Stillness, not silence.<sup>30</sup>

Isaiah Okeroa's *lo* creates space for Queer whakapapa and the quiet in-between as it moves through the process of developing into existence.<sup>31</sup> It honours masculine energy through a takatāpui lens – sacred, embodied, expansive. His body becomes a tether, holding us to a promise to reflect on gender, identity and belonging. Whakapapa doesn't live in databases; it lives in flesh, in voice, in the space between silence and saying.<sup>32</sup> This is a migratory practice through self rather than space. It returns through movement and sound – to home, a concept of memory as much as whenua.

Jon Jeet's *Jai jai Hanuman*, connecting my dad home is a tribute to his father. No spectacle – just reverence. Whakapapa meets remembrance. Jon's father, Richard, taught his children belief. Jon is of Maniapoto and Fijian Indian descent. His work carries all of that – Māori, Indian, Black, male, "exotic," labels others gave him before he could name himself. The piece draws on the memory of watching *Barangabali*, a 1976 film about Hanuman, the god of strength. In one scene, Hanuman throws rocks into the sea to build a bridge. Jon used 65 rocks, one for each year of his father's life, each inscribed with "Hiraman" or "Hanuman." They span a wooden bridge from Fiji to Bluff, anchored by Fijian stones.<sup>33</sup>

Not just an artwork – a map.  
A memory walked.

My practice is layered, materially and conceptually.<sup>34</sup> The paste-ups are tiled A3 sheets, hand-trimmed. I use photography for its contradiction: proof of something real and a marker of what's lost. Like memory, these works are held not by permanence but attention. In the gallery they were pasted onto the wall as temporary offerings that lived briefly, then disappeared. They were overlaid with white gouache, fragile as breath, a gesture of *wairua*, a connection to places I don't always feel allowed to return to.



Figure 6. Jonny Waters (Tauwi, Tangata Tiriti)  
*He Pou Whakamaumahara a Hine Paaka*,  
burnt matai and matai sapling,  
Pou- 1000x210x105mm, 2025.

*She wasn't sure if she could afford to move back* shows Matauri Bay, remote, unaffordable, beloved.<sup>35</sup> The gouache glimmers like heat waves. Longing and impossibility, side by side.<sup>36</sup> *It's much smaller than I remember* it returns to my whāngai grandmother's homestead. Prickle grass. Slow mornings. Not grand, but formative. Then *She always knew where home was ...* – Whangaroa, a site of love, war, loss. Taratara lost his head refusing Maungataniwha a wife, his body scattered across the harbour and valley floor. Emiemi cried rivers.<sup>37</sup> The gouache became a protection, a kind of shield – quiet, but deliberate.<sup>38</sup> In Ōtautahi, Northlanders recognised Taratara. Some came just to stand with their maunga. Whether Māori or Ngāti Pākehā, it meant something.

A marker of home, seen from afar.

Mapping a broken thread. The ache of belonging. The tenderness of return.



Figure 7. Hayley Walmsley and Nikita Rewha, *Please take your shoes off at the door*, shoes, various dimensions, 2025.

As an initial threshold to the show, Nikita and I created *Please Take Your Shoes Off at the Door*, a line of shoes placed at the gallery entrance. Part joke, part challenge, it nodded to tikanga: the quiet ritual of removing shoes before entering a wharehau or someone's home, a gesture that changes how you step inside.<sup>39</sup>

CoCA sits on Ngāi Tūāhuriri land and acknowledges mana whenua as rightful custodians. This isn't just symbolic; it shapes how the space works, how it opens, who is invited in. Our exhibition opened with a mihi whakatau, grounding the kaupapa in whenua – in relationships that precede and outlast us. The gallery has matured through phases: art society, dealer gallery, public space. In 2016, it became Toi Moroki, with bilingual signage to reflect Aotearoa's renewed commitment to a bicultural reality. By early 2025, CoCA had already weathered waves of transformation – earthquakes, rebuilds, partnerships.<sup>40</sup> By the time I arrived, it knew how to hold a contradiction, to be many things – and still feel like home. The gallery wasn't just a container, it was part of the kaupapa, shaped by legacy, disruption and care. It was a place where we could ask questions about movement, identity and belonging, and be met not with answers but with room to explore. Public programming was also integral, from the potluck to waiata to quiet conversations. The drinks after closing and the laughter and snorts during install were enactments of whakapapa as story, food as memory, voice as presence.

Art doesn't live in isolation. It makes space – to be awkward or weird. Sometimes that energy takes hold, gathering people, which was always the ache at this show's heart: the tension between moving away but still holding something close; the grief of leaving places that don't wait for you; the discomfort of missing somewhere you're not sure ever truly held you.



The works provoked people into sharing when something clicked – a memory or truth recognised. Maybe that's the point. This isn't art, it's life. It didn't just sit there. It made room.<sup>41</sup> At times it was tangled, but something kept pulling us toward each other. Something that held. This was a place to sit with identity, memory, longing, joy and contradiction, without tidying it up. There was aroha in the generosity of people just showing up, in the clay, food, waiata, in the awkwardness and chaotic gremlin energy of myself and my friends.<sup>42</sup>

That's what this writing is: a space to hold. But I have unresolved tension between holding space for others and speaking from within it. I worry that I say too much or not enough, and that I linger in curatorial context when what I want is to bring the artists forward. Though the exhibition layout matters, what I mean is the conceptual weaving, the whakapapa of the kaupapa, the relational threads that guided who was included and why. The logic of the exhibition lives in the frameworks of whakapapa, memory, care, survival, refusal and return. The curatorial, here, is about more than arrangement; it's about intention, context and the way a show can hold lived experience without needing to explain itself too neatly.

I know that I need to show the shape of the conceptual idea, to make its edges visible, even as I try to stay soft within them. The shape of that space is made from values held together by memory, story and the ache of wanting to belong. There are no clean lines. But there's structure in the way we arrive into it – through aroha, through trust, through a willingness to sit with contradiction. That, too, is curatorial thinking: how you hold people, how you frame questions, how you decide what stories are invited in.

I think that's why I cling to these frameworks so tightly: because they echo the shape of the stories I come from. My whakapapa is a little broken; there's a small incision in my grandparents' generation. Both my parents were raised by others: one through whāngai, one through closed court adoption. I've never had that tidy ancestral thread. I am a direct descendant of Hongi Hika, but the line feels blurry. My mother's is blurrier still, half-developed in the dark. Mine's a net – patched, re-tied, held together, not perfect, but strong, the kind that shows up in what we fix, fold and make again. But I've been doing the work.

Stitching what I can.

Listening. Asking.

On the afternoon that my dad told me about Hongi Hika, I stayed with an honorary auntie; I know we're related, just don't know how. Her daughter grew up alongside me. Years of kapa haka, changing the TV with a bamboo stick and watching Juice TV. I don't know the exact whakapapa line between us, but I know we belong together. That aunt's house sits on whenua where Hongi Hika built a pā and chose to die.<sup>43</sup> My whānau – at Pupuke – still remember the exact tree he died under. And now, because someone told me, I carry that too.

Whakapapa isn't confined to hereditation.<sup>44</sup> Everything has whakapapa, from the rocks and dirt to the formation of landscapes. The people who raised my parents, who fed them, held them, made them who they are – those lines are part of me too, not just inherited but passed on through action, care and survival. That's what *Migratory Patterns* became: a map of active care and survival, drawn crooked with a crayon, scratching out our ideas of home, unlike Cook's expedition south, which was clumsy, brutal, built on theft and draped in the illusion of discovery. *Migratory Patterns* remained a way to say: This is home.

Even if it arrived in fragments.

Even if I had to put it together myself.

(With glue from Mum's kitchen drawer, and stories she only tells after two coffees, a vape and yelling at us to get in the car to head north.)

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- 1 From my understanding, *tātai* carries a particular resonance in Te Tai Tokerau due to its connections to whakapapa, naming and navigation. While not exclusive to the region, the term evokes a layered sense of lineage that feels especially significant within my own whakapapa and experience.
- 2 “The Ngātokimatawhaorua Canoe, *Te Ara – The Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, accessed 23 April 2025, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/photograph/4134/the-ngatokimatawhaorua-canoe>.
- 3 Gary Bramley, “Brief of Evidence of Gary Bramley,” Wai 1040, #A47 (Waitangi Tribunal, 2006), 4-6. Bramley affirms that certain hapū of Whangaroa trace their lineage to before the arrival of waka, connecting identity to whenua through creation stories rather than migration.
- 4 See Jacinta Ruru, “Who Are Your Waters?” *e-flux Architecture* (July 2019), <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/liquid-utility/259674/who-are-your-waters/>. Ruru discusses the Māori understanding of water as integral to identity, where questions like “Ko wai koe?” (“Who are you?”) literally ask, “Who are your waters?”
- 5 Karanga Pourewa, “Brief of Evidence: Karanga Pourewa,” submitted to the Waitangi Tribunal, Wai 1040, 7, accessed 16 February 2025, <https://whangaroapapahapu.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/BoE-Karanga-Pourewa.pdf>. Whakaki, an ancestor of Ngāti Kawau, lived during the 1700s – prior to the formation of Ngāpuhi as an iwi. His role maintaining ahi kā at Whakaangi underscores Ngāti Kawau’s presence in the region before Ngāpuhi’s emergence. The term ‘autochthonous’ refers to people, cultures or entities that originate in the place where they are found. In this context, it reflects whakapapa passed down through kōrero tuku iho (oral transmission), affirming ancestral presence in Whangaroa prior to the arrival of named waka. This understanding was also discussed with my father in April 2024.
- 6 Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Vintage, 1991); Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 3rd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2022); and Carl Mika, *Indigenous Education and the Metaphysics of Presence: A Worlded Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2017).
- 7 Georgina Tuari Stewart, *Māori Philosophy: Indigenous Thinking from Aotearoa* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).
- 8 Craig Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism,” *October* 12 (Spring 1980): 67–86; Albert Camus, *Create Dangerously: The Power and Responsibility of the Artist*, trans. Sandra Smith (New York: Vintage, 2019); Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981); Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004); and Larry Sultan, *Pictures from Home* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992).
- 9 Pourewa, “Brief of Evidence,” para. 60. “I think that I should have been taught more about my traditional history, about my own culture. We later taught this traditional knowledge in the training schemes I set up.”
- 10 For further discussion of Indigenous methodologies and resistance, see Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*; Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999); and Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin, eds., *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action in and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016).
- 11 Hayley Walmsley, “I’m Not Dead Yet” (unpublished artist book, Dunedin School of Art, 2018).
- 12 Claudia Bell, “Local Claims to Fame: Rural Identity Assertion in New Zealand,” *Space and Culture* 10, no. 1 (2007): 131. Bell is critical of how some local identity markers simplify or sanitise history in favour of more easily consumable or marketable versions of place.

- 13 See Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*; Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*; Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40; and Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).
- 14 Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Moana Jackson, *He Whaipanga Hou: The Report of the Māori and the Criminal Justice System* (Wellington: Department of Justice, 1987). See also Moana Jackson, "Where to Next? Decolonisation and the Stories in the Land," *The Spinoff*, 7 March 2020, <https://thespinoff.co.nz/atea/07-03-2020/where-to-next-decolonisation-and-the-stories-in-the-land/>; and Moana Jackson, "Globalisation and the Colonising State," in *Resistance: An Indigenous Response to Neoliberalism*, ed. Maria Bargh (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2007), 89–98.
- 15 Pourewa, "Statement of Evidence," 8. This evidence supports the recognition of *kōrero tuku iho* (oral histories) as legitimate repositories of whakapapa, intergenerational memory and place-based identity.
- 16 Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal, "Whenua – Land," *Te Ara – The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, 2005, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/whenua-land>.
- 17 For further reading on the geological context of halloysite clay deposits in Northland, see Robert Brathwaite, et al., "Geology, Mineralogy and Geochemistry of the Rhyolite-hosted Maungaparerua Clay Deposit, Northland, New Zealand," *New Zealand Journal of Geology and Geophysics* 57, no. 4 (2014): 357–368, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00288306.2014.920889>.
- 18 See Bill McKay and Antonia Walmsley, "Māori Time: Notions of Space, Time and Building Form in the South Pacific," *Idea Journal* 4, no. 1 (2003): 85–95, accessed 12 May 2025, <https://journal.idea-edu.com/index.php/home/article/view/236>. This kind of threshold space aligns with Māori understandings of *paepae* – not just as a physical entry point, but as a temporal and relational moment of arrival. In Māori architecture, particularly the whare, entry is experienced in time rather than space, through a sequence of steps and pauses.
- 19 See Sarah Hudson, "Moewai Marsh – Tauraka Toi: A Landing Place," *He Kapunga Oneone*, February 2022, accessed 12 May 2025, <https://www.kauaeraro.com/matauranga/moewai-marsh>; Sinead Overbye, "Te Hikoi Toi: He Toi He Whenua – Artworks of the Earth," *The Post*, March 2023, accessed 12 May 2025, <https://www.thepost.co.nz/culture/350089705/te-hikoi-toi-he-toi-he-whenua-artworks-earth/>; and Sian Montgomery-Neutze, "Earth Pigment Practices in Aotearoa: Advice for Non-Māori," *He Kapunga Oneone*, March 2023, accessed 12 May 2025, <https://www.kauaeraro.com/akoranga-1/advice-for-nonmaori>.
- 20 Garth Harmsworth and Shelton Awatere, "Indigenous Māori Knowledge and Perspectives of Ecosystems," in *Ecosystem Services in New Zealand – Conditions and Trends*, ed. John Dymond (Lincoln: Manaaki Whenua Press, 2013), 276. Māori knowledge systems perceive ecosystems as interconnected and animate, shaped by values like *mauri* and *whānauatanga*, which align with curatorial approaches grounded in listening, care and reciprocal relationship.
- 21 We wanted people to hear the sound the beads in Jesse's work made, but most gallery visitors are hesitant to touch artworks unless explicitly invited to.
- 22 See Aroha Novak, "Portfolio," accessed 23 February 2025, <http://www.arohanovak.com/>. Novak's work frequently incorporates plants connected to rongoā Māori – traditional systems of healing that use native plants for spiritual and medicinal purposes. Many of these, once valued, are now often regarded as weeds or without benefit, yet remain tied to practices of care, protection and whakapapa. This was discussed with Aroha in a video call while preparing for the show.
- 23 As discussed in Nikita Rewha's artist talk, *Migratory Patterns*, Toi Moroki CoCA, Christchurch, 1 February 2025. *Huri* is a tribute to her tūpuna buried at Kororāreka Cemetery, beside one of the oldest churches in the country. The work was described as an ode to the act of turning – a gesture of change, "in my strange native mind." For regional context, see "Māori Clothing and Adornment – Kākahu Māori," *Te Ara – The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, accessed 1 May 2025, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/maori-clothing-and-adornment-kakahu-maori>.
- 24 My own parents were experts at this: mince and canned spaghetti 'stew,' cold canned spaghetti sandwiches at the beach and Maggi oriental noodles with cheese.
- 25 Jessica Hutchings, Jo Smith and Garth Harmsworth, "Elevating the Mana of Soil Through the Hua Parakore Framework," *MAJ Journal* 7, no. 1 (2018): 92–95; Harmsworth and Awatere, "Indigenous Māori Knowledge and Perspectives of Ecosystems," 278. These authors describe food sovereignty and kai systems as deeply relational, grounded in whakapapa, care, mauri and intergenerational survival. Hua Parakore values inherited food practices and memory as cultural knowledge, while mahinga kai and ecological systems are framed through kaitiakitanga and ancestral responsibility.
- 26 Mya Morrison-Middleton, "Off the Beaten Track with Aidan and Moewai," *Pantograph Punch*, 12 July 2023, <https://www.pantograph-punch.com/posts/off-the-beaten-track-with-aidan-and-moewai>.
- 27 For more information on David Garcia's mapping-based art practice and Filipino heritage, see David Garcia, *Satellites*, accessed 10 May 2025, <https://www.satellites.co.nz/archive/people/david-garcia>. The tapa used in Garcia's *Canoe Spread* installation was gifted to him by Tui Emma Gillies and used with permission in *Migratory Patterns*.

- 28 See Alice Te Punga Somerville, *Once Were Pacific: Māori Connections to Oceania* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), especially her discussion on the emotional and cultural geographies of migration.
- 29 *Kia Kaha Hine Paaka*, Ashburton Museum, November 18, 2016, accessed November 12, 2024, <https://ashburtonmuseum.wordpress.com/2016/11/18/kia-kaha-hine-paaka/>. This resource provides the historical context for Hine Paaka, a towering matai named after a local chief's wife, which stood near Ashburton until 1945. Her story informs Waters' *Pou*, which marks remembrance, resistance, and return.
- 30 For Jonny Waters' broader practice, see Charles Clark, "Jonathan Waters: Graffiti on the Fringe of Society," *Critic Te Ārohi*, accessed 10 May 2025, <https://www.critic.co.nz/culture/article/7286/jonathan-waters-graffiti-on-the-fringe-of-society>.
- 31 For information about another iteration of this work, see *Isaiah Okeroa: Io*, Arts House Trust, accessed 10 May 2025, <https://www.artshousetrust.co.nz/current-exhibitions/isaiah-okeroa-io>.
- 32 Georgina Tuari Stewart, "Mātauranga Māori: A Philosophy from Aotearoa," *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand* 52, no. 1 (2022): 18–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03036758.2020.1779757>.
- 33 See Jon Jeet, "Jon Jeet Artist Website," accessed 10 May 2025, <https://www.jonjeet.com/>. In the *Ramayana*, Hanuman builds a bridge to Lanka using floating stones inscribed with the name of Lord Rama – a narrative referenced through the inscribed rocks in Jeet's installation.
- 34 See Hayley Walmsley, "Suzie No Friends," *Scope: (Art & Design)* 20 (2020): 91–95, <https://doi.org/10.34074/scop.1020002>.
- 35 "Kerikeri Market Insights," [realestate.co.nz](https://www.realestate.co.nz), accessed 30 April 2025, <https://www.realestate.co.nz/insights/northland/far-north/kerikeri>. The median house price in Kerikeri – the nearest major town to Matauri Bay, which is too small to have its own housing data – is \$868,000, highlighting ongoing affordability challenges for many Māori families seeking to return.
- 36 Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse," 70–73. Owens frames allegory as a structure that fixes the ephemeral through recontextualization.
- 37 "Ōhākiri Pā (St Paul's Rock) Scenic Reserve Historic Heritage Assessment," Department of Conservation, 2020, 7, accessed 3 May 2025, <https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/conservation/historic/by-region/northland/ohakiri-pa-st-pauls-rock-scenic-reserve-historic-heritage-assessment.pdf>.
- 38 Robert Jahnke, "He Tataitanga Āhua Toi: The House That Riwai Built, A Continuum of Māori Art" (PhD diss., Massey University, 2006), 22–23, 129.
- 39 See McKay and Walmsley, "Māori Time," 91. The wharenui is often understood as an embodiment of an ancestor, addressed like a living person. Removing shoes becomes not just courtesy, but recognition.
- 40 "History," CoCA, <https://coca.org.nz/history/>.
- 41 Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse," 74–75.
- 42 We had wanted to play music for the opening, so David brought in a speaker, but we forgot to turn it on. It wasn't perfect. But it was real.
- 43 As told to me by Zita Nathan (the aunt whose house is situated where the communal garden of this pā used to be) in April 2024.
- 44 Jahnke, "He tataitanga āhua toi," 79; Bramley, *Wai 1040* #A47, 8.

## NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS: CAITLIN ROSE DONNELLY AND HER NETWORK OF PRACTICE

Four exhibitions at the Forrester Gallery,  
Ōamaru, 1 February – 6 April 2025

Vicki Lenihan

It's a bright late summer Sunday when we drive up to Makotukutuku along the Tai-o-Āraiteuru coastline, moseying about the cribs and revisiting sites of my childhood summers. There's enough time to lunch before the Forrester Gallery opens for the afternoon. We have come north to see the most ambitious installation my whanauka, Caitlin Rose Donnelly, has coordinated since graduating from Dunedin School of Art with her Master of Fine Arts in 2021.

Since that Master's project, *Māmā*, in which Donnelly's practice shifted in scale from jewellery to textile sculpture and began to incorporate the raw materials of the landscape and literal translations of the actions her work describes, she has continued to develop and reiterate her exploration of being "Kāi Tahu, a mother; a woman in rural Aotearoa, and an adoptee."<sup>1</sup> Donnelly is up for it; fit, busy, young and invigorated by her discovery of her ancestry, she approaches each new stage in her journey with infectious vim, bringing her peers and offspring and forebears, her tuakana and her teina, along with her.

I have worked with and alongside Donnelly several times since her graduation on kaupapa that offer the ringatoi involved space to investigate and express individual identity – through kōrero, wānaka and mahitoi – while upholding a collective expression of self. It was during a hīkoi to Whakatū to participate together in the 2023 Nelson Jewellery Week that I first heard about her intention to fill the Forrester Gallery with stories of family ties, maternity, womanhood and adoption. Her excitement was palpable, and though the manifestation of her vision

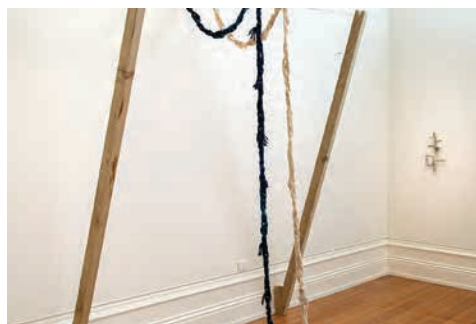


Figure 1. Poipoia te Kākano.



was a long way off, the surety of her commitment was convincing. I have been looking forward to this, keen to see how a colonnaded former bank in the centre of the town's historic precinct copes with being taken over by a posse of articulate and skilled contemporary women artists responding to the myriad cultural conundrums that late capitalism poses.

We enter the Forrester Gallery at opening time and have the place to ourselves. This suits me. I appreciate the opportunity to drift through the spaces at my own pace. My tāne does the same and we weave in and out of the four-part show without interruption, saving our thoughts for later discussion.

*Poiipoia te Kākano* (nurture the seed) occupies the large main entrance gallery. I am related to each of the ringatoi exhibiting in this grouping and am familiar with their personal canons; most of the works shown are not new to me, but their arrangement is. I am surprised by the absence of an incidental aural accompaniment to the works shown in this space, not least because I have become accustomed to Donnelly's kaupapa of inclusion extending to related musicians and wordsmiths who are often represented through sound works. The quiet affords contemplation time, whereupon lauded local poet whanauka Iona Winter's response to the kaupapa, *Kōkōwai | Pigments* (2025), reached via QR code, is revealed.

Donnelly's life-size simulacrum of a rural clothesline is draped with two braided strips of blanket, in imitation of whaling ship chains and in reference to her contact-era tūpuna and the new materials and technologies they embraced. *Mahana* (2021) was created for *Tauraka Toi*, the Paemanu take-over of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery that year, where it shared kōrerorero with other whaling works, including my own.<sup>2</sup> Here, it continues to inform and expand our shared stories and anchors the room's investigation of familial links.

Jess Nicholson's contributions to this kōrero are familiar to me too.<sup>3</sup> The interlinked ceramic loops of *Whakawhanaukataka chain* (2024), at once chainmail and puzzling magic trick, still astound me: the simplicity of the inference, that we are connected by whenua, belies the intense problem-solving and technical skill Nicholson has honed since moving to Ōtepoti to forage along ancestral pathways. Across the way, the sharp protrusions of *Tūmatakuru I* (2024), akin to the obstinate spikes of our fragrant taoka species taramea and matagouri, cradle wee treasures and more links, a possible metaphor for what Nicholson has encountered en route.

Emma Kitson's three versions of the print *Tāniko Argyle* (2024) resonate with my own interest in the overlaps of visual vocabularies that exist in our whakapapa.<sup>4</sup> Pātaki (flounder) diamonds, reminders that hard work reaps rewards, morph into the tohu of the historically dominant Clan Campbell, which has since broadened into a denotation of wealth and elegance. Both readings celebrate abundance and the rich colours Kitson creates from repurposed make-up, old stationery and pantry staples reinforce this message for me: waste not, want not. I learn through social media the neon ink of these prints changes dramatically under black light. While underscoring the work's investigation of embedded meanings that shift depending upon the direction of light, the intensity of scrutiny or a change of view, this easter egg highlights the joys of embracing new scenes and reminds me of a not-too-distant big city, bright lights past. Further around the room, *He Kōura Whakamā* (2018) (an embarrassment of riches) depicts a fading quintet of kōura, special occasion fare and a further symbol of abundance, suggesting family feasts and other continued customary practices that cement our attachment to each other and to our environment.

Megan Brady's delicate pulled-thread textile work *Aramoana* (2025) tugs at my heartstrings. Much smaller in scale than similar works I have seen,<sup>5</sup> this iteration re-presents the same interplay of absence and presence and thrown shadows, of movement measuring shifting time or registering faint breeze or sudden breath, intimating the two-forward-one-back steps we take towards understanding ourselves. The linens remind me of whānau afternoon teas and my investigations into ancestral materials and practices and preference for shadow play in my own work. Found and fossicked treasures embedded in the rimu brackets read as everyday gems, reminding us of the importance of honouring our environs.



Figure 2. Broken.

Allison Beck is closer in age to me than most in this group. I assume her textured black painting, *No hea au* (2024) (Where am I from?), is unabashedly goth, which makes her one of my people in another way; black is happy-sad love and longing, loss and belonging, soulful and a blank slate and goes with everything. Refracting and absorbing the ambient light, the embedded gameboard without players or simple raranga pattern is frisky and coy, injecting a mature dose of ironic self-awareness – perhaps signalling that Beck is also an adoptee whose whakapapa discovery has come later in life – into the overarching kōrero.

The titles of two of Kate Steven West's three small oil and gesso canvas works, *Te Pū (Roots Origin)* (2024), *Te Aka (creeper, vine)* (2024) and *Untitled* (2024)), neatly encapsulate the artist's intention – to draw attention to lingering, temporal kinship connections. The thin veil that separates us from our predecessors emerges faintly from the backgrounds between the modern and ancient peoples therein, each generation holding onto the same mahinga kai that keep us sustained and tethered.

The evolving network of practitioners that describes and supports Donnelly's journey of discovery and practice continues in *Broken Narratives* with Victoria McIntosh, who taught Donnelly undergraduate jewellery and offered support for Donnelly's burgeoning investigation into her identity, heavily informed by herself being an adoptee. While the stories and works that each has chosen to illustrate their adoption experience diverge significantly in detail, there are subtle overlaps in the accompanying texts that indicate a shared trauma of being disconnected from their birth parents. I imagine a fair amount of cathartic stabbing went into the exquisitely worked embossments, beading and embroidery showcased in McIntosh's *My Invented History* (2004) and *Ungrateful* (2025), and enjoy that the upcycled and titivated found objects of *When a Secret Tastes Like a Lie* (2025) have been set off-centre with obvious care. I have previously exhibited work alongside Donnelly's *Mauri* (2022), a celebration of her sons and their enthusiastic contributions to her evolving self-description. In this space, the chatter of the mahitōi speaks to the reassurance that one's little limpets are alive and well when they are active and noisy, gathering treasures to bring home for Mum.

A mountain of laundry is stashed in the smallest room beneath the stairs, evoking a washhouse – either a basement, an outhouse or an anteroom nearest the backdoor on the way to the clothesline. This is *Kei te Haere Ahau* (2025) (I am going), Donnelly's solo work, a magnification of earlier similar works that began at *Māmā*. A tapering red elevation constructed from paint-soaked bedsheets cascades from a fixed point high up the facing wall, rising out of an undulation of black bedding that calls to mind foothills or a filthy river. A faint trickling sound emanates from beneath this kinetic jumble. It sounds a little like a subterranean drain or an almost-dry creek and not a bit like the torrent the magnitude of the artwork suggests. The trickle reminds me as much of the state of our stained and strained ancestral rivers as it does the messy and debilitating experience of post-natal menses made arduous by never-ending rounds of housework and maternal obligations. This landscape serves as reminder that the onus of caring for our mauka and awa, our habitat and therefore us, is a collective task, not just the responsibility of those individuals that are looking after home and hearth.

Upstairs, kith join kin in the former bank manager's residence; the extant domestic fixtures provide a comfortable backdrop to *Iti Biti Matapihi* (tiny windows), a playful title that the collected artists coined during development. Blanket forts, repurposed materials, dolls houses, movable figurines and children's scribbles call to mind learning through play, taking things apart and reconfiguring them and their stories; a process many artists actively reconnect with during their research phase. Here, this pedagogy is the star of the show, a reminder that figuring out who we are and where we fit in this world can be fun; grown-ups and kiddos alike are encouraged to be fully in the space and to touch and rearrange some of the works as they wish.

Sunlight streams through *Uenuku? (Where is the joy?)* (2025), Alix Ashworth's kaleidoscopic glass paintings of charismatic dancing characters, reminiscent of a 1970s calisthenics pamphlet or New Age bible, filling the space with their exuberance. *Taki Tahi* (2023) (under, over), a familiar banner fashioned from blankets adorned with sparkling appliqué symbols of kaitiaki by Aroha Novak and Georgina May Young, is draped from a wall across



Figure 3. Mahana.

the sunny room creating a cubby-hole, *He Kapua Mā* (2025) (colours song), which is jam-packed with bespoke cushions and illustrated pukapuka curated by Piupiu Maya Turei. There is, I am happy to see, ample evidence that this wee hideout has indeed been gainfully occupied by little people. Zoe Thompson-Moore's *glimmer* and *glad rags* (both ongoing), chopped up traces of everyday life, challenge my aversion to microplastic mess. The glitter is contained, however, like a centre-pieced ancient relic, and the innocuous fabric remnants that decorate the fireplace relate the artist's vivid yet orderly process. Kitson's no rules colouring-in squab cover and pillowcase, *Rā Okioki (Rest Day)* (2022), have been filled in further with felt pens since I last saw it, wrinkles and bunches in the cloth reminiscent of rainy-day activities at the crib and evidence that interaction and relaxation, as invited, have occurred there.

Nearby, Stevens West's *Make and Make Again Lightbox* (2023) is strewn with shapes of household gadgets and natural things, offering endless catalysts for possible storytelling. I imagine the satisfying schlopp of scissors cutting through ice-cream container plastic, and discover random morsels at the bottom of the shapes' kete, letters left over from previous play. Stevens West's chunky wooden toy, *Tutu chainsaw* (2025), hung above a mantlepiece, appeals to my Girls Can Do Anything upbringing and latter-day sculptural practice; soft yet heavy and sharp-toothed, painted with flora that upon closer inspection turns out to be a taoka species that if prepared correctly is sweet and intoxicating, but deadly if not. Below, in *Whare Takata* (2024) (womb), the venerable importance of motherhood is upheld by Stevens West's redecorated pre-loved treasure trove and modernist dolls house, populated by Ashworth's charming clay figures; the audience is invited to collaborate further with the artists and interact with the work's elements, adding their own stories to this house of humanity.

Interspersed amongst these works are two iterations of *Trace* (2015, 2025), each created by Donnelly with her boys, measures of time passing as her brood grows and learns to communicate through mark-making. These works remind me of when our boys were young and developing their visual and written literacies. We've kept most of those creations, not least because of the accidental genius of children putting ideas to paper – reminders to bring an honest and hopeful approach to all artistic endeavours.

And that, for me, is the overarching theme of the entire Forrester Gallery undertaking: open-heartedness. It is successful because it depends upon forming and maintaining frank, kind and generous communications and space for participants – creators and consumers alike – to think, test, discuss, improve, share, rinse and repeat. Donnelly has learnt much from her wholehearted engagement in all opportunities that have come her way since art school, has digested those experiences, let them percolate with aroha and consideration and extended her insight and eagerness to effectively express who she is through her art practice to now encompass and implement an emerging curatorial practice that offers the same space to others.





Figure 4. This image and the following are from the room; *Iti*.









**Acknowledgements:** All photographs by Justin Spiers.

**Vicki Marie Lenihan** is an Ōtepoti-based multimedia artist, writer, curator, educator, arts advisor and event producer whose practice centres on celebrating self-determination, hauora and sustainability. She is the Dunedin School of Art's Kaiāwhina Māori.

- 1 Caitlin Donnelly, "Māmā," *Scope (Art & Design)* 23 (2022): 10-17, <https://doi.org/10.34074/scope.1023024>.
- 2 *Paemanu: Tauraka Toi: A Landing Place*, 11 December 2021 – 25 April 2022, <https://dunedin.art.museum/exhibitions/past/paemanu-auraka-toi/>.
- 3 Jess Nicholson, *Whakawhanaukataka*, Blue Oyster Art Project Space, 2 November – 20 December 2024, <https://blueoyster.org.nz/exhibitions/whakawhanaukataka/>.
- 4 In my case, in particular, aramoana or 'ki uta, ki tai,' and its formal similarity yet distinctly different denotation to the heraldic chevron.
- 5 See Megan Brady, *Between tide and time*, 2023, accessed 26 May 2025, <https://selwynstories.selwynlibraries.co.nz/nodes/view/6172>.



## KO MURIHIKU TŌKU WHAEA – SOUTHERN MOTHER

Kyla Cresswell, Emma Kitson and Kim Lowe

In 2021, Kyla Cresswell, Emma Kitson and Kim Lowe teamed up to produce *Ko Murihiku Tōku Whaea – Southern Mother*: a touring exhibition that stemmed from a friendship forged at the Dunedin School of Art (DSA) in the early 1990s. Opening at Pātaka Art + Museum in Porirua and subsequently touring through venues in Otago and Southland, the exhibition celebrated the artists' shared love of printmaking inspired by their teacher Marilyn Webb, who encouraged them to explore the depths of their rich ancestry and identities, to value a connection to place and to believe in their own voices.



Figure 1. Southern Mother logo.

The crucible for *Ko Murihiku Tōku Whaea* was the artists' connection to the southern region of Te Waipounamu – the whenua of the “Southern Mother” at the bottom of the South Island of Aotearoa: Emma Riha Kitson is a descendant of Kai Tahu ki Murihiku; Kyla Cresswell and Kim Lowe both grew up in Murihiku and are descendants of Southland settlers. This strong sense of affinity with Murihiku – the atmosphere and values of the place and its people – is eloquently articulated in their exhibition statement:

In the Murihiku region, there is a feeling of being lightly tethered to the wild land beneath. At the coast, there are vast skies, far reaching horizon lines, and expansive sea. Inland, landforms loom high, and mountain caps feed the bitterly cold awa. The rich resources of the area have attracted generations of people, however, the harsh climate has put off just as many. Among Southlanders exists a strong social fabric, and your whakapapa – along with the weather – is often the first topic of introduction.

In the interview below, Kyla, Emma and Kim reflect on their collaboration and how it influenced both their individual practices and their collective vision as well as the value of community engagement throughout the different iterations of the exhibition.

What were your expectations at the beginning of this project? How did it start?

Emma Kitson: It was early 2020 and I was working at Pātaka as Curator Community Exhibitions, when I asked Kim and Kyla if they wanted to submit a proposal to do an exhibition with me. I was curating, designing and installing exhibitions but I had only recently started printmaking again. I had long admired Kim and Kyla's work and it was really just an excuse to hang out with them (though mostly virtually) and talk about our art practices.



Figure 2. Kyla, Emma and Kim the Te Atamira opening.

I wanted to have a strong curatorial theme to connect our work, so I listed our connections: All of us graduated from the BFA course the first time it was offered at the DSA; all whakapapa to the south; all printmakers; and all mums.

I decided to shift the focus of motherhood to Murihiku (Southland) as the Mother of our ancestors, which aligned with the Māori world view on places being personified.

After the first exhibition at Pātaka in Porirua in 2021, we discussed the possibility of touring the exhibition, and we were especially interested in taking it back to Murihiku. It was a chance meeting with Louise Garrett at the opening of *Tauraka Toi* at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery that led to the exhibition at Te Atamira in Queenstown in 2022. I uncharacteristically took the opportunity to pitch our *Southern Mother* exhibition to Louise. One of the great things about working in a collective is that it shifts the focus from individual ego to collective support. While I wouldn't be comfortable pitching a solo exhibition, I had no problem with enthusiastically expressing my admiration for my friends' artwork. After the Queenstown exhibition, Kyla took over the job of sending out enquiries and proposals to other galleries.

At the start, I just wanted to have an exhibition with my friends. So, it's fair to say *Southern Mother* exceeded all my expectations.

Kyla Cresswell: It was wonderful that Emma created this opportunity. I enjoyed the chance to show with friends and to re-examine my connection to the south. It was appealing to work with peers, share the load and learn from each other.

When the Pātaka show opened, I was still living in Wellington, but later that year moved to the tiny town of Athol in the northern part of Murihiku, before later coming to Ōtepoti Dunedin. Making some of the work for this show as it travelled was quite a cathartic way to process these big changes in my environment. My work became more of a response to returning south, the places, rivers, plants. I was naturally drawn to thinking of my formative years in the printmaking department at DSA and growing up in Murihiku.

Initially, I only anticipated the one show, but I enjoyed making the connections with the other southern galleries and in the touring it felt like we were weaving in some of our past, our time in the 90's at the DSA, and our whānau connections.

**Kim Lowe:** I love working collaboratively but, as a mum, the opportunities to do this had been quite limited for me up until this point. We were still in the middle of Covid restrictions and it felt important to make connections again. Also, I loved the focus on printmaking while hanging out with friends.

**What do you think contributed to making this such a successful exhibition series?**

**Kim Lowe:** The whakapapa aspect was timely and gave us an opportunity to reconnect with Murihiku Southland and Otago audiences. Having time to travel and support each other during the installations and residencies gave me a sense of connection in what is sometimes a very isolating industry. The collective has given us all more exposure and allowed each of our practices to grow. Also, it didn't matter that I was working on small etchings or large paintings, we had the space to play with scale and techniques, changing it up for each new show.

**Kyla Cresswell:** The public talks and events built community connections, honed thoughts on our practices, gave printmaking the stage – in particular the artists' talk at Te Atamira. Bringing works on paper to the fore felt really empowering. I agree with Kim, the whakapapa aspect and working with Kim and Emma gave a great sense of not being in it alone. The project was flexible, so works could be swapped in and out or created to respond to the site in which they were shown.

It was a privilege to work with regional institutions in terms of their infrastructure, timelines and the opportunities their audience and local support enabled. The galleries frequently had other programmes built around the show, like school holiday programmes (He Waka Tuia), music or seminar events (Eastern Southland Gallery, Te Atamira). As someone returning to live in Murihiku, then Ōtepoti, it gave me a great sense of being grounded. I loved the full circle sense of returning to the DSA for the final show.



Figure 3. Kyla's workshop at He Waka Tuia.



Figure 4. Emma talking to staff and students at DSA.



Figure 5. Kyla with DSA students.

**Emma Kitson:** Community engagement was a key to the success of this exhibition. By doing artists' talks and print workshops alongside the exhibitions we got to really connect with and gain insight from the local communities.

The artists' talk with Louise at Te Atamira was a huge highlight. I think all of us were overwhelmed, firstly by the amount of people who attended but also by the audience response. There were so many questions that the talk went well over an hour.

I feel the exhibitions were also balanced by our different cultural backgrounds and distinct artistic styles. With my exploration of Kāi Tahu whakapapa, Kim's Chinese heritage and Kyla's Pākehā perspective, it gave multiple ways to connect with our audience and created a well-rounded exhibition.

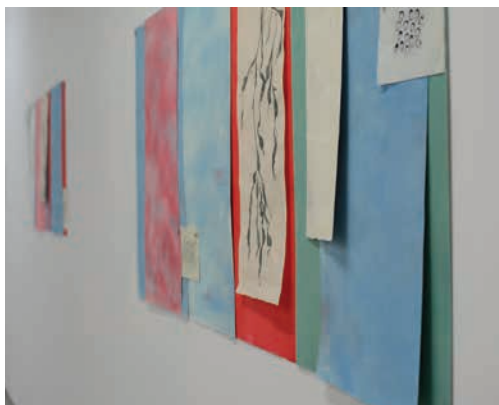


Figure 6. Kim's install at DSA.

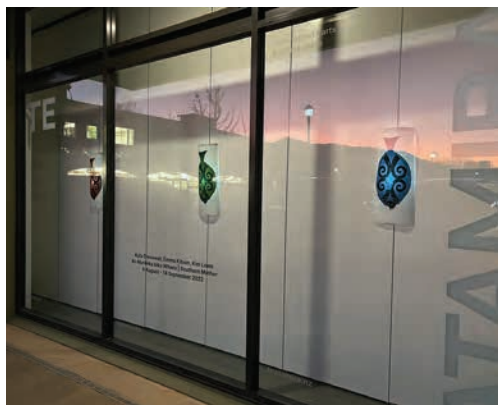


Figure 7. Emma's Glowing patiki and glowing skies at Te Atamira.

**What were some of the more challenging aspects of this experience for you?**

**What were some things that you hadn't done before?**

**Kyla Cresswell:** Moving house and studio twice throughout the schedule was challenging! It was new for me to see the stages and work involved for a Creative New Zealand (CNZ) grant process. Even though I had taken some workshops in the past, I really valued this way of engaging with the public and it gave me confidence to continue running more with Little Prints, my portable printmaking workshop. The whole process was an education in exhibition logistics, scheduling, promotional timelines and considering how to create a different experience for each show, alongside how to reach a wider audience. Being able to discuss work, layout and next directions with each other was useful.

**Emma Kitson:** Applying for a CNZ grant for the Queenstown exhibition was a new challenge for me. Luckily, we had the support of Louise Garrett, who was then arts and culture coordinator at Te Atamira. It was the last funding round before CNZ changed the application process and it was incredibly stressful watching the application numbers going up each day. However, it was all worth it when we got the funding approved.

I'd had limited experience doing public workshops, therefore facilitating print workshops at the Eastern Southland Gallery was a real step up for me. The print studio and residence there are a real hidden gem that more printmakers in New Zealand should be made aware of.

**Kim Lowe:** I'd often been the one to drive and organise projects, so I really valued being able to sit back a bit and participate collectively. It was nice to not be in the driver's seat for a change. I'd also started teaching 0.8 in my role at Ara Institute of Canterbury, so had to juggle both commitments. I really appreciated Emma's direction and curatorial gallery knowledge and Kyla's perfectionism and technical expertise.

**How has the series *Ko Murihiku Tōku Whaea – Southern Mother* influenced your artistic practice?**

**Emma Kitson:** Exhibiting with Kim and Kyla really gave me a confidence boost and motivation to create more print works. The exhibitions in Murihiku that allowed me to travel and spend time there were invaluable to me exploring my Kāi Tahu whakapapa through my print practice.

**Kyla Cresswell:** I iteratively focused on the Murihiku area on my return home, with the artworks frequently responding directly to that place. The residency time at DSA made me more curious about creating and installing print-adjacent works – pieces that are multidisciplinary, grounded in print but occupying the space differently to how I currently present my work. I have learnt a lot from my co-exhibitors and enjoyed being part of a group. I've been influenced

by Emma's curiosity, which encourages a playful and experimental approach and Kim's experienced perspective, which inspires broadening horizons and seeking challenges. The series reinforced my love printmaking and the community around it, reminding me of how the world of print is relevant, exciting, vast and connected.

**Kim Lowe:** I loved being able to focus on different aspects and techniques of working on paper, from etching to relief and brush painting. Deadlines tend to bring out the best creative moments and expanding on the previous show was both an efficient yet expansive way of working. I think we've all learned as much from each other in this way. I also especially valued the residency at the DSA and getting back into the print studios where we'd learned our trade. The gallery and exhibition provided space and freedom for me to return to a modular way of installing larger works and this has really pushed my work in a direction that I'm still really enjoying.

**Do you have any other insights or reflections?**

**Kim Lowe:** I think the collective focus on printmaking has been very timely following the post-Covid resurgence of crafting and DIY making. Printmaking, especially, has seen a resurgence during this time: Printopia Festival of Print in Auckland; Ōtautahi Prints! Print Fair in Christchurch; the establishment of the Muka Press and Marilynn Webb print studio at the Eastern Southland Arts Centre and workshops catering to the Southern region have all helped to reinvigorate printmaking as a viable and sustainable practice. It has been wonderful being a part of this.

**Kyla Cresswell:** I agree that there is a real interest in creating by hand. Printmaking is fantastic in terms of the community around it. The scope of techniques, means of distribution and potential for many different visual languages is always exciting. The exhibition created so many opportunities. I hadn't expected such great community-building outcomes.

**Emma Kitson:** I had a very limited knowledge of the different regional galleries in Murihiku, so travelling this exhibition around was a real eye opener for me. Each of the galleries had different ways of doing things; we had to adapt to each venue's ways of working. Community engagement with the galleries is strong in these areas and the feedback from workshop participants was incredibly supportive.



Figure 8. Kyla working on Öreti from the river series, mezzotint plate and scraping tools.

**Ko Murihiku Tōku Whaea – Southern Mother touring exhibition dates:**

Pātaka Art + Museum, Porirua: 29 October – 5 December 2021

Te Atamira, Queenstown: 6 August – 14 September 2022

Eastern Southland Gallery, Gore: 4 February – 26 March 2023

He Waka Tuia, Invercargill: 30 March – 5 May 2024

Dunedin School of Art Gallery, Dunedin: 27 May 27 – 14 June 2024



**Acknowledgements:** The artists acknowledge their teacher, Marilyn Webb, who encouraged them to explore the depths of their rich ancestry and identities, to value a connection to place and to believe in their strengths and voice. E te manawa titi, e te māreikura. Moe mai rā e tō mātou kaiako ātaahua, Marilyn Webb (1937–2021). Thank you also to Louise Garrett for her assistance in writing and editing this article.

**Kyla Cresswell** (b. Wellington) grew up in Invercargill. She majored in Printmaking at the Dunedin School of Art, graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1996. Overseas in the early 2000's, Kyla continued to study printmaking in Japan, the UK and Canada at print workshops and with individuals. In 2006 - 2010, Kyla established and directed Solander: Works on Paper Gallery in Wellington. Founding Little Prints Printmaking in the past few years, has enabled Kyla to facilitate printmaking workshops and spread her enthusiasm for print. In May of 2023 and 2024 she taught at Printopia, the New Zealand Festival of Printmaking, Auckland. Kyla was awarded the Southland Young Contemporary of the Year in 1996, the William Hodges Fellowship in 2022 and Artist in Residence at the Dunedin School of Art in 2024. Kyla has exhibited widely in New Zealand and overseas. Kyla's work is held in the Department of Conservation Collection, Eastern Southland Gallery Collection, Hocken Collections Te Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago and the Southland Museum and Art Gallery Collection, as well as private collections in Canada, Australia, Japan and the UK.

**Emma Kitson** (Kāi Tahu, Kāti Māmoe, Waitaha) is an artist, designer, educator and curator who resides in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington. Her whakapapa traces its roots to Whenua Hou, the first planned bicultural settlement at the southern end of Te Waipounamu. Kitson graduated from the Dunedin School of Art in 1996. She then worked at Otago Museum, which led to employment at many museums and art galleries in New Zealand and Australia. After studying Industrial Design at Massey University in the early 2000s, she focused mainly on her design work. Becoming a mother in 2012 was the catalyst for Kitson to return to making art, with printmaking her medium of choice. Joining Paemanu Ngāi Tahu Contemporary Visual Arts collective in 2014, she has contributed to their major exhibitions at CoCA, Dunedin Public Art Gallery and the Asia Pacific Triennale 11.

**Kim Lowe** is an artist of NZ Chinese and Pākeha descent based in Ōtautahi Christchurch. She completed a Masters in Fine Arts (Printmaking) with distinction from the University of Canterbury in 2009 and was the recipient of the Olivia Spencer Bower award in 2019. She is currently a Senior Academic at Ara Art and Design lecturing in Professional Studies, Printmaking and Creativity. Her artwork often uses forms and elements of her hybridised ancestry and from the Te Waipounamu environment.

## THE ARTIST: COLLABORATIVE PORTRAITURE

Julia Holden

### INTRODUCTION

In July and August 2024, I undertook a residency at Dunedin School of Art (DSA) to extend an ongoing series of performative portraits intended to foreground the invisible labour of creative practitioners. While previous series, *I'm Your Fan* and *Lyttelton Redux*, explore artistic lineage and history of place, *The Artist* emerged from what I felt was a pressing need to highlight the undervalued work of artists – an urgency compounded by recent cuts to Aotearoa New Zealand's arts funding. Through collaboration with DSA students and local artists, I developed eight portraits, one self-portrait and three still life works. These works fuse sculpture, painting and performance to render tangible the often intangible act of artistic labour.

### METHODOLOGY: PERFORMANCE PAINTING AS INTIMATE DIALOGUE

*The Artist* series relies on a process I have developed termed *Performance Painting*, a live, collaborative action where the subject becomes the literal 'living canvas' for their doppelgänger portrait. Unlike traditional portraiture, this method prioritises negotiation for both parties, artist and portrait subject, through active dialogue and trust, from initial conversation through to the finished painting. Before entering the studio, each participant – ranging from students to established artists – engaged in discussions to select an object, tool or material emblematic of their practice. These choices, such as painter Michael Greaves' brushes (Figure 1), writer/director Pennie Hunt's director handbook and reference cards (Figure 2) and photographer Charly Walsh's camera (Figure 3), were then incorporated into the portrait as painted, constructed, sculptural elements made from clay, wood or, in Wesley Fourie's case, fresh daffodils dipped in wax and painted to a facsimile of his own bronze *Narcissist Daffodils* (Figure 4).

Dunedin's arts community embraced this collaborative process with welcome openness. My initial artist's talk at the beginning of the residency, where I outlined the background and my intention for *The Artist* and invited participation, proved pivotal. Staff, students and local artists responded with a generosity that became integral to the work. This collective enthusiasm mirrored the project's core belief – that artistic labour is fundamentally relational.

The studio painting session itself is brief (30–60 minutes), a deliberate compression of time to capture the immediacy of wet paint. The single photograph of the session acts as a record or 'residue' of the performance that has taken place and is usually offered as an edition 1/1, reflecting the live Performance Painting's singularity in the same way a painting on canvas is considered 'singular.' Yet this brevity belies the depth of preparation: the initial conversations, gathering materials, scouting Dunedin's second-hand shops for appropriate clothing, sculpting the hair and other elements in clay and readying the bathroom for the post-performance shower. I aim to be fully prepared before participants arrive at the studio at the allotted time. I literally cannot make the work without their fully engaged presence, so I strive for a calm, respectful and prepared environment to enable an enjoyable experience for all involved. Once the painting starts, there is no going back!



Figure 1. Julia Holden, *The Painter: Michael Greaves*. Archival pigment print, 650x520mm, edition 1/1, framed, 2024.



Figure 2. Julia Holden, *The Writer / Director: Penne Hunt*. Archival pigment print, 650x520mm, edition 1/1, framed, 2024.



Figure 3. Julia Holden, *The Photographer: Charly Walsh*. Archival pigment print, 650x520mm, edition 1/1, framed, 2024.



Figure 4. Julia Holden, *The Artist / Curator: Wesley John Fourie*. Archival pigment print, 650x520mm, edition 1/1, framed, 2024.

For me, it is a great pleasure to collaborate with fellow artists to make these Performance Paintings as my way of acknowledging their hard work in bringing their specific interests and ideas into visual and material reality. Painting can be a solitary practice, and while I enjoy working in oils and other media, the connection, trust and free-ranging conversations that arise within the bubble of intimacy formed while creating these works together is the true magic for me, and I hope this is reflected in the resulting portraits.

## THEMES: LABOUR, VISIBILITY, AND THE ARTIST'S ARCHIVE

*The Artist* connects with my ongoing series, *I'm Your Fan*, 2014–present), which considers the artist-self in relation to an artist's primary influence or artistic hero. The series highlights connections between artists and their mentors past and present, paying homage to the ways in which we, as artists, connect across time, engaged in dynamic and ongoing visual conversations.

The long drive from Waiheke Island to Dunedin gave me time to reflect on the current government's drastic arts funding cuts – a policy that dismisses art's vital role in shaping Aotearoa's cultural and community life, while framing artists as economic under-contributors. This thinking crystallised into action: I began drafting a list of 44 artist occupations (from painters to poets, filmmakers to 'outsider' artists), refocused my original plan and transformed the residency into an active tribute to these often-invisible workers.

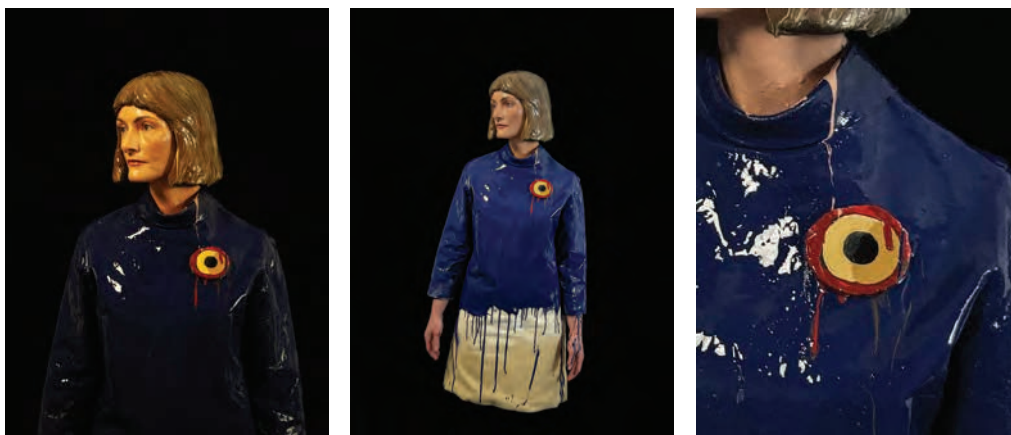


Figure 5a-5c. Julia Holden, *The Jeweller: Octavia Cook*.  
Archival pigment print, 650x520mm, edition 1/1, framed, 2024 and details.

The new series, *The Artist*, operates as both tribute and critique. The eight new Dunedin works are intended as a first step towards developing the 44 artist occupations into an independent online visual resource about, and for, the often-unseen artists in our midst. By foregrounding the artists and including an element to suggest their activity or occupation, the work confronts the absurdity of defining 'artist' within narrow economic metrics.

In Dunedin, this took on a local resonance. The 1960s dress worn by Octavia Cook, sourced from an op shop, carries the label 'Made by Broadway Boutique, St. Andrews St, Dunedin,' a clothing manufacturer that was based in Dunedin's now long-defunct clothing district. The dress, originally yellow, now partially painted with high-gloss acrylic house paint, is affixed with my painted, handmade cardboard version of Octavia's brooch, *Vul*, based on a vulture's eye from her animal eye jewellery series (Figure 5). These material choices – the repurposed dress, the hand-painted brooch – became metaphors for the often-overlooked physicality of creative labour, transforming Dunedin's industrial ghosts into testaments of artistic persistence.

## OUTCOMES: EXHIBITIONS AND AWARDS

Alongside the portraits, I also made three still life works that complicate this dialogue further by extending *The Artist's* interrogation of homage and materiality. These works belong to my ongoing *fanfiction* still life series. Fan fiction is a term used to describe the inventions of an admirer of an existing piece of work (most often a novel, TV show or movie), which feature characters or storylines borrowed from the original. The three-dimensional rendering of early twentieth-century paintings in soft clay and house paint function as portraits in absentia, masquerading as doppelgängers for the original two-dimensional paintings by Édouard Manet and Antoine Vollon.

The three works were accepted into the contemporary art award *Pushing Clay* 2024, with *Mound of Butter* (after Antoine Vollon) (Figure 6) winning the Forsyth Barr Runner-Up Award. This recognition underscored the project's central paradox: even as the work critiques systemic invisibility, it must navigate the very institutions that arbitrate value.

Sarah McGaughran reworked the sculptural latex 'skin' from her work, *Dea Matrona* (2023), to fashion a fleshy shirt for her portrait. I then had the pleasure of exaggerating the garment's pustulent qualities with my house paints. The painted garment or 'residue' of the studio performance portrait was submitted independent of the photograph to the *Molly Morpeth Canaday Award* 2025. Our collaboration, titled *Intertrigo*, won the Akel Award (Runner Up) (Figure 7).

Making *The Poet: Isla Huia* with my Ōtautahi Christchurch friend, Isla Huia Martin, was a particularly poignant experience. In the portrait, Isla holds my clay and house-paint replica of her poetry collection, *Talia* – a finalist in the Mary and Peter Biggs Award for Poetry in the 2024 Ockham Book Awards, with cover artwork by her close friend, the late artist Natalia Saegusa (1990–2022). Natalia and I had collaborated a decade earlier on her portrait for the original *I'm Your Fan* series, referencing Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's *Self-Portrait* (1913) (Figure 8). Her absence lent a quiet tenderness and gravity to this new work, a reminder of how artistic collaborations ripple across time. *The Poet: Isla Huia* was a finalist in the *Zonta Ashburton Women's Art Awards* 2025.

Just before packing up the DSA studio at the end of the residency, as an experiment, I attempted a self-portrait in which I did the entire process on myself to see if I could manage all the elements involved. This involved shaping clay into my 'hair,' painting myself in high-gloss house paint and photographing myself without any outside assistance – a very messy, unmanageable process as it turns out. The results are ... interesting. The work will be exhibited publicly for the first time at New Zealand Portrait Gallery's upcoming exhibition, *Me: Artists Paint Themselves*, August 2025.

In September 2024, *The Artist* exhibition at PG Gallery 192 in Christchurch showed all eight DSA portraits. Future iterations of *The Artist* aim to include more of the 'cursory list' of 44 occupations, with Dunedin serving as the first chapter. This archival approach reframes the residency not as a finite project but as a growing, living record.



Figure 6. Julia Holden, *Mound of Butter* (after Antoine Vollon). Sculpted soft clay and house paint. Archival pigment print, 520x400mm, edition 1/1, framed. Forsyth Barr Runner-Up Award, *Pushing Clay* Contemporary Clay Awards 2024.



Figure 7. Julia Holden and Sarah McGaughran, *Intertrigo*, 2024. Acrylic house paint on latex, dimensions variable, 2024. Winner, William Akel Award, Molly Morpeth Canaday Awards 2025.



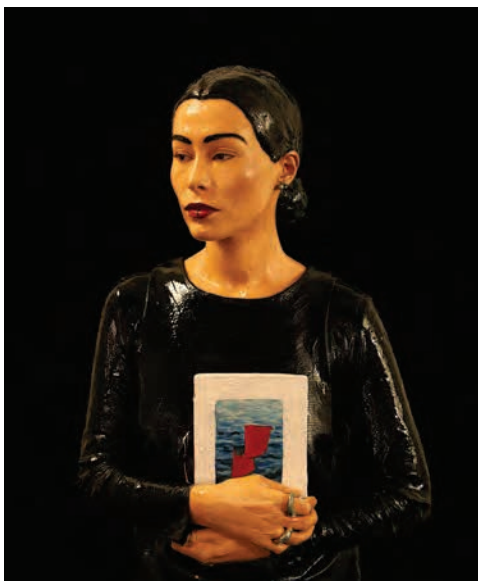


Figure 8. [Above] Julia Holden, *The Poet: Isla Huia*, Archival pigment print, 650x520mm, edition 1/1, framed, 2024. Features replica of *Talia* (2024) by Isla Huia Martin; cover artwork © Natalia Saegusa Estate. Finalist, Zonta Ashburton Female Art Awards 2025.

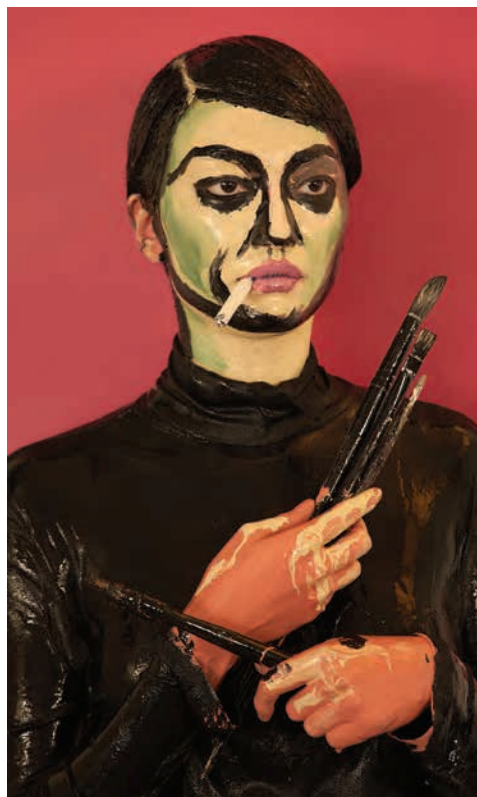


Figure 9. [Right] Julia Holden, *Self Portrait* (Natalia Saegusa, after Ernst Kirchner), Archival pigment print, 560x680mm, edition 1/3. 2015.

## CONCLUSION: TOWARD AN ETHICS OF RECOGNITION

*The Artist* series does not naively demand better funding or louder applause. Instead, it models a slower, more intimate form of recognition – one where the act of portrayal becomes a space of mutual acknowledgment. Like American artist Andrea Fraser's institutional critiques, the work exposes contradictions: it navigates award systems that arbitrate value even as it challenges their metrics. In an era of algorithmic creativity and austerity logic, the residency asked: What does it mean to see the artist fully? The answer, perhaps lies in the Dunedin collaborations – in the whakapapa of shared making that echoes Māori *toi* traditions, through the patient work of seeing on another and in the quiet weight of a finished portrait waiting to be witnessed.

Julia Holden is a Waiheke Island-based artist exploring collaborative portraiture through performance, painting, and social practice. Exhibitions include City Gallery Wellington, NZ Portrait Gallery and Sarjeant Gallery (Tylee Cottage alumna). Series: *I'm Your Fan* (2014–), *The Artist* (2024–) Awards: *Pushing Clay*, Molly Morpeth Canaday. MFA (Monash), BFA (Elam).

## AIRY (ARTIST IN RESIDENCE YAMANASHI)

Thomas Lord

In 2011, after completing my Bachelor of Visual Arts at the Dunedin School of Art, I faced two paths: take out a substantial loan to start a photography studio or find a job that required a degree – any degree. A quick online search led me to the Japanese Exchange and Teaching Programme, an initiative that employs foreign teachers in Japan's public school system to not only teach but act as cultural ambassadors of their home nation. By August the following year, I found myself in Yamanashi-ken working as an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) for the next two years.

The rural prefecture of Yamanashi welcomed me with a rhythm of life unlike anything I had known, marked by deep community ties, seasonal rituals, and a strong connection to the land. Immersing myself in this environment profoundly reshaped how I understood work and my place within a community. I picked fresh yuzu alongside locals, observed a 2000-year-old cherry blossom tree flower (Jindai-zukura) and immersed myself in daily life at every opportunity. Before leaving in late 2014, a serendipitous dinner in Yamanashi's capital city Kofu introduced me to Artist in Residence Yamanashi (AIRY), where two Danish artists shared insights into their full-time practices. Inspired, I promised myself that one day I would return, not as a teacher, but to AIRY as resident artist.

In March 2020, that promise was almost fulfilled when I was offered a residency at AIRY. Just as things were falling into place, the pandemic brought everything to a halt. Travel restrictions made the opportunity seem unattainable, but I remained in touch with AIRY's owner, artist Izumi Sakamoto. Our casual exchanges and updates on the weather and life in our respective countries proved valuable. She later told me that while many artists clamoured for a residency during uncertain times in their own countries, my consistent engagement reassured her of my genuine connection to Yamanashi. At the end of 2022, Izumi reached out: "How about next year?" I countered: "How about the year after?"<sup>1</sup>

With time to prepare, I applied for funding from the Asia New Zealand Foundation. After two unsuccessful attempts, I was awarded support in March 2024 as a recipient of the Arts Practitioners Fund, only a couple of months before my scheduled residency.

I arrived in Tokyo on the last day of June and was welcomed by a sweltering temperature of 37°C and high humidity. Before heading to Yamanashi, I visited the Reminders Photography Stronghold, a Tokyo-based photobook archive and exhibition space. There I deposited my 2021 photobook *screams like home* and encountered Tetsuo Kashiwada's book and exhibition *Warasano*, a meditation on loss and absence through the lens of an only child deciding not to take over the family house and garden.<sup>2</sup> Seeing his photobook displayed as an installation expanded my thinking about exhibiting work with pages laid out alongside framed prints, mirroring the act of turning pages. A wall-sized print overlaid with framed images caught my attention for some time. It wasn't just the scale that intrigued me, but also the precision of the framing. The detailed mattes were perfectly aligned to the imagery beneath.



Figure 1. Feature wall Tetsuo Kashiwada.

Another significant early visit was to the Enoura Observatory, an architectural project by photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto. The observatory was designed to connect visitors to the ancient rhythms of time: sunrise at the summer solstice aligns with a glass corridor, which also acts as a gallery housing Sugimoto's large silver gelatine *Seascapes*; a winter solstice chamber welcomes the first light of the season as it travels down a passage before illuminating the Light Well which dates back to the Edo period (1603-1868).<sup>3</sup> Walking through the observatory's gardens, encountering carefully placed ancient rocks and fossils, I felt a psychological shift. The pressure of producing work and the anxiety related to fulfilling obligations had lifted. I could simply be present and open to the experience and trust that my patient and slow practice, applied back home, would lead to honest and new work here. Absorb the land before reacting to it. Welcome chance encounters. These became guiding principles for my residency.

Travelling from Tokyo to Kofu is a beautiful experience in itself. The densely populated cityscape gradually gives way to lush greenery and dramatic gorges, before the journey passes through a mountainous tunnel emerging into Kofu. Kofu sits in a mountain basin, reminiscent of Central Otago and likewise famous for its fruit, wine and lakes – and of course Mt Fuji. Yamanashi has long drawn creatives such as the poet Bashō and the ukiyo-e artist Hokusai, who sought connection with nature, a retreat from the routines of Edo-period urban centres and a detachment from the material world. Beginning my month at AIRY, I felt grateful to be part of this rich tradition. AIRY occupies a former women's hospital founded by Izumi's father, with living quarters upstairs and a gallery below. It can host up to three residents at a time, but for my time I was the sole resident. It took a few days to become accustomed to my new surroundings. At night, the old hospital was filled with unfamiliar sounds and the shifting shadows of historical furniture. I came to accept these nocturnal offerings as a kind of unfamiliar language, one I tried to interpret rather than resist. I spent most nights venturing into the countryside nearby, reacquainting myself with Yamanashi's soundscape: a chorus of frogs in rice paddies, the relentless buzz of cicadas. Long moments were simply spent staying still, listening and attuning myself to subtle shifts within the landscape.

The extreme heat, which often exceeded 40°C, forced me to adapt. My original plan to create daily plein air drawings proved impossible, so I worked indoors during the cooler morning hours. The slow process of layering gouache and pastel while reflecting on my surroundings helped me cultivate patience. Just as I was ready to begin photographing with my large format camera, I discovered a crucial part had broken. With weeks before a replacement could arrive, I switched to a digital workflow but imposed constraints: shoot with a tripod, disable image previews and delay any form of review for days, to preserve an intentional slowness and time to process the experience offered before me and my lens.

I structured my work around revisiting Minobusan, a mountain that I used to visit regularly due to its beautiful natural features but also a place where unexpected encounters would occur. By slowing my movements and following intuitive decisions, I often spent hours in a single location where encounters with the land became more profound. One day, while sitting beside a narrow trail, I became aware of a plant swaying against the still air. I sat beside this plant and observed my surroundings for an hour or so, waiting, before finally noticing a massive toad directly in front of me. It had been there all along, motionless, observing me. As I reflect on this experience, a quote commonly attributed to Minor White comes to mind: "Be still with yourself until the object of your attention affirms your presence."

This encounter stayed with me. It was a reminder that patience reveals presence and that what is unseen is often simply unnoticed. Later, on a school visit, when sharing the image with a former teaching colleague, she reacted with astonishment. "We haven't seen that species around here in two years!" The toad, it seemed, was an unexpected messenger. Slowing down perception, actively listening to the land, became integral to my time in Yamanashi. On another occasion, a stray dog blocked my path in an aggressive manner while I was in a hurry



Figure 2. Stray dog at Shosenkyo Gorge.

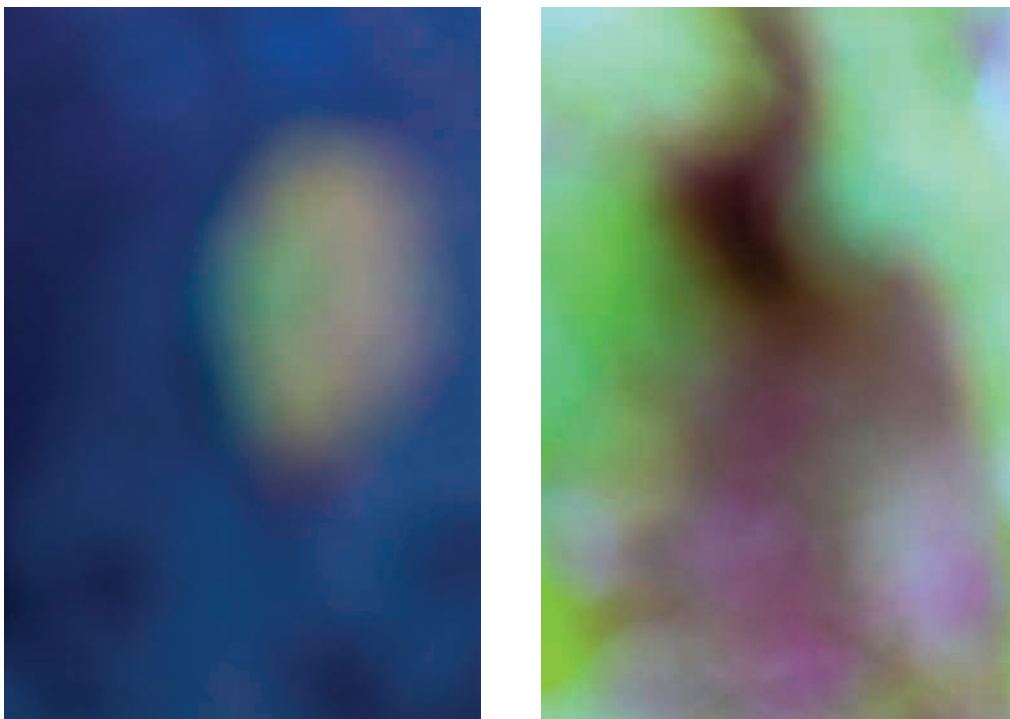


Figure 3. AIRY images – colour abstracts.

to catch my bus. For 40 minutes, it refused to let me pass. Rather than retreat, I moved to the side, mirroring its stillness. When it finally walked by me, I realised the delay had given me an extended period of contemplation, an unexpected slowing down that reshaped my sense of time. I began photographing in response to this altered rhythm, making images that attempted to represent the air of Yamanashi and the spaces between things.

Residencies come with opportunities beyond artmaking. At Yamanashi Gakuin University's International College of Liberal Arts, I gave an artist talk and a cyanotype workshop. My discussions with students revealed an interest in a slower, more intentional artistic process, something they often felt pressured to abandon in favour of fast, digital workflows and assessment deadlines. This also provided me with valuable networking opportunities and a chance to describe my experience of life for an art student at the Dunedin School of Art. Izumi also attended my workshop and employed two bilingual students to work as translators at my final exhibition.

The exhibition, titled *Caught a Glimpse*, took shape from my newly consolidated philosophy of making. Izumi was fascinated by the expression, which I had shared with her as I briefly noticed the summit of Mt Fuji while walking back to AIRY one day. 'Caught a glimpse' also suggests a reciprocity between the observer and the observed that is important in my process while reinforcing the idea that meaningful encounters are fleeting but deeply felt. Inspired by my visit to Reminders Photography Stronghold, I laid out my images as if sequencing a photobook. I wanted the viewer's eye to move across the whole work in the same way one encounters a busy forest scene, drifting, pausing and returning. Nightly observations of a murder of crows flying between buildings also informed the placement of smaller images across the wall.

Printing in Yamanashi presented challenges. The local print lab specialised in high-gloss graduation portraits, which didn't suit my aesthetic and reminded me of how grateful I am for the options and convenience we have here in Dunedin. In Tokyo, specialist printers often require an in-person business meeting to schedule a session, typically





Figure 4. Myself, Izumi Sakamoto and Dr Sam Stocker at iCLA.

booked several weeks in advance – a level of preparation that exceeded the short timeframe of my stay. However, research led me to Matsudaira, a master printer in Tokyo specialising in Piezography, a technique using multiple grey inks to achieve rich tonality and image quality unlike other inkjet printing. I had three key images printed using this process, deepening my appreciation for the materiality of prints and opening doors for future projects.

The exhibition attracted a diverse audience, much to Izumi's delight. Children were intrigued by the 'puzzle' of the layout, university professors engaged with discussions on contemporary photographic practice and first-time visitors to AIRY were excited to discover a new creative community in Kofu. Conversations unfolded naturally, many facilitated by the student translators.

I also left behind a cyanotype installation, which consisted of 12 prints on linen documenting a single hydrangea flower from Izumi's mother's garden. She spoke fondly of this plant, and much like the first exhibition I visited upon arriving in Japan, her mother is preparing for 'severe pruning' as she acknowledges that her time tending to the garden is coming to an end. This installation will form part of an ongoing collaboration with Izumi, who intends to approach it slowly, integrating the cyanotypes into her textile practice while reflecting on the memories this garden holds for her and her family.

The residency reaffirmed the importance of slow, immersive engagement with place. Encounters with a fox, a toad or a community of artists shaped the experience just as much as the work itself. Now back in New Zealand, I sit with a body of recently developed large format and medium format film, waiting for the right moment to re-engage with it physically. Izumi has extended an open invitation to return, ideally in a cooler season. My hope is to spend two months in Yamanashi in the future with my family. The work that began there remains unfinished. It waits patiently for its next chapter to unfold, slowly and in its own time.



Figure 5 Piezographic print.

Thomas Lord is a Lecturer in the photography studio at the Dunedin School of Art. As well as photography, Thomas has held exhibitions in painting where nostalgia, ecology and the concept of home forms a common thread between the two media. Recent projects include a group show on the Isle of Lewis as part of the Hebridean Dark Skies Festival as well as his 2021 large format photographic series *Super Sport Sunday*.



Figure 6. Piezographic print.

- 1 Izumi Sakamoto, email to author, 21 September 2022.
- 2 Tetsuo Kashiwada, *WARASONO* (Tokyo: Tetsuo Kashiwada, 2024), limited edition of 68 copies.
- 3 Odawara Art Foundation, *Enoura Observatory Catalogue* (Tokyo: Kajima Corporation, 2024), 25.

## RESIDENTIAL DRIVE

## Locke Unhold

This time last year I was preparing myself for my first artist residency. Chief among my preparations was to have little to no expectations; I knew that the more open I was the better the experience would be. I'm glad for this because I was correct. I had a truly enriching time at Driving Creek. I made new close friends, tried new techniques, explored a part of the country I hadn't been to before and took on new inspiration for my MFA work.

Driving Creek Pottery and Railway was established in 1974 by Barry Brickell (1935–2016). Brickell was a prolific and unique individual who is now considered a cornerstone of the ceramics and pottery history of Aotearoa New Zealand. Driving Creek is a large plot of land in the Coromandel that Brickell bought and where he set up his own pottery studio. But he also had a deep love of engineering and trains; he built a railway on the property so that he could go deeper into the hills to dig clay for his work. He also loved the native Aotearoa environment and began planting kauri by the thousands. As he became a popular figure, people came to ride the railway, which he eventually opened to the public. Now, almost ten years after his passing, it is a thriving tourist spot, artist hub and conservation achievement.



Figure 1. My first view of DCR as the sun was setting.



Figure 2. "The Sump" studio space as I was using it.



I learned from New Zealand ceramicist Neil Grant, who told stories about Brickell and his eccentricities, particularly about his proclivity for wearing little to no clothing. But other than that, I didn't know much about the man – not beyond the surface information about Driving Creek that I have laid out above. Everyone I knew who had spent time there raved about their experience, so that was my driving force to go.

After applying in 2023 and being accepted, I packed up my car and journeyed north in July 2024. It was a three-day trip from Dunedin to the Coromandel, with ferry rides and many stops along the way. I arrived as the sun was setting, exhausted after an eight-hour drive from Ōtaki. I got a quick tour around the property in the waning winter light by one of the conservation workers, knowing I would not remember any of it the following morning.

I spent the first few days getting my bearings and scrubbing down the studio space I was going to use. I wandered somewhat aimlessly around the property, trying to etch the narrow paths between ramshackle buildings and stacks of smashed pots into my brain. New Zealand is known for its DIY culture, and Driving Creek is a shining gem of an example. Adobe fills gaps around windows with stained glass embedded within. Crushed brick and ceramics make up the gravel pathways. Seen from above, the studio compound is a patchwork of corrugated iron roofs at disparate angles, put in place as needed. There is something small and creative and weird in every nook, cranny and corner.

Once settled in, most days during the first few weeks were fairly similar. I would wake up as late as I liked, have a small breakfast in the communal kitchen and then take my coffee up to the studio space. I listened to audio books as I made, sometimes throwing on the wheel and sometimes hand-building sculptural pieces. For dinner, one of the other residents would come up to my studio space and remind me of the time and we'd all head down to the kitchen. We took turns making meals for our group, sharing our favourite recipes and cooking tips, discussing our pottery plans. I became close with my fellow potters on residence – Charade Honey (Ngai Te Rangī), Fiona Gates (Te Rarawa, Rangitāne), Rona Ngahuia Osborne (Kai Tahu) and Janeen Page. We spent the evenings chatting about life, food, pottery and of course Barry Brickell. We still have a group chat together and I can't wait to see them all again.

In retrospect, I was deeply inspired by the works of Brickell that are scattered around the yard, though at the time I was not very conscious of it. Since my experience there, my sculptural work has become more abstract with figurative elements – twisting, bulging, and reconnecting parts of forms feeding into themselves. Just prior to my residency, I had been

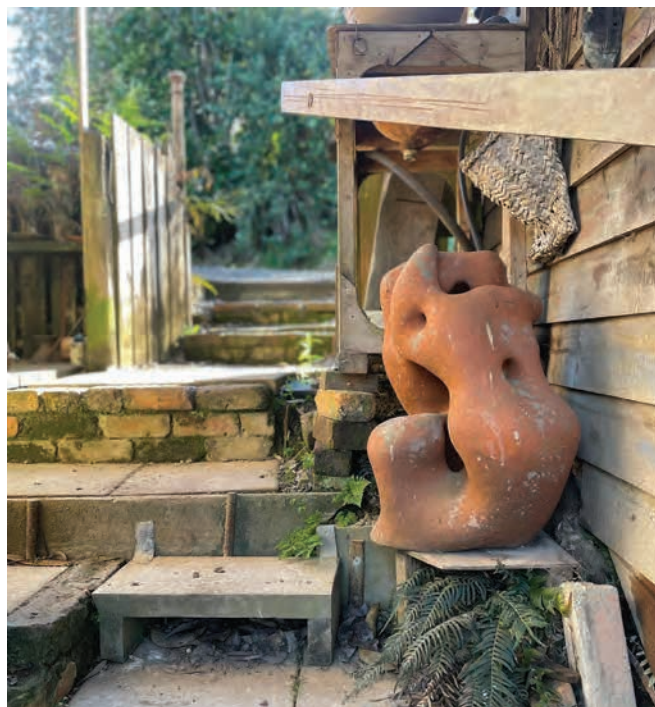


Figure 3. A sculpture sitting outside the door of the Sump studio space. Opposite the path is Barry's studio left in situ.



making a lot of phallic forms and I was concerned going into the residency that my work would be too weird and too queer for the place. But as I spent time there and learned more about Brickell and his work, I found that I fitted right in. He had built a small kiln close to his studio to fire his 'naughty sculptures' out of view of the public. Getting to use the adjacent space, I felt a kinship with the man I never met. I left a small phallic sculpture in that kiln as an homage.



Figure 4. Work in progress, new direction.

A year later I look back and can see the residency was a turning point in my own work. I went in with no expectations and came away with a changed practice. I see it as a testimony to how your environment as an artist can affect your work in ways you don't think it will. And the environment isn't just the physical place, but also the people and histories you are working within. We frequently talk about "community of practice" and how our work fits into it, how we are feeding into it and how it affects our work. It can be a difficult concept to fully appreciate. My time at Driving Creek has manifested this concept in a much more tangible way for me.

Now I look forward to whatever my next residency might be. How will it change me? How will another place and set of people progress my work?

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Figure 5. Untitled new work.

## STITCHING CONNECTION: A PRACTICE-BASED REFLECTION ON CREATIVE COLLABORATION DURING CANCER RECOVERY

Hannah Joynt

This article reflects on a year-long, long-distance creative collaboration between myself, a visual artist and educator, and my sister Allie, during her treatment and recovery from metastatic melanoma.<sup>1</sup> Combining cross-stitch, caricature illustration and virtual studio practice, our project emerged as a meaningful response to illness, geographic separation and the emotional demands of chronic care. Grounded in a feminist and relational approach to art-making, this collaboration sits at the intersection of contemporary craft, digital design and health narratives.

Drawing from a personal and practice-led perspective, the article explores how we transformed clinical time into creative time by co-creating a series of stitched portraits that used humour, shared memory and iterative processes to make space for reflection, connection and advocacy. While our work resonates with understandings of creative practice as therapeutic, it moves beyond formal art therapy frameworks, embracing artmaking as an everyday, embodied and adaptive form of care. The project is situated within relevant occupational therapy and health humanities research and points to future directions, including exhibition, public engagement and a long-distance walking art project. Ultimately, it proposes creative collaboration as a form of care capable of holding complexity, grief and joy.

Allie's diagnosis in late 2023 set in motion a year of intensive treatment – surgery, immunotherapy and the onset of lymphoedema requiring ongoing management. As her world became shaped by hospital appointments, fatigue and long hours in a bio-compression suit,<sup>2</sup> we found ourselves looking for



Figure 1. Hannah Joynt and Allie Joynt, *Big Sis Little Sus*, 2024, embroidery thread on ada cloth, 160x120mm.

ways to reconnect – to occupy the time and emotional space cancer demanded. Allie returned to cross-stitch, a craft learned from our grandmother, while I began sketching caricature portraits of our family. What started as a small act of care became a structured, humorous and imaginative collaboration.

Each month, I designed a new cross-stitch pattern using a tablet-based app, transforming my hand-drawn caricatures into stitchable templates. Allie ordered materials online and stitched them during treatment sessions in Queensland, while I worked on my own visual practice in Dunedin. Through weekly video calls, we developed what we called our “virtual studio” – a shared space for making and being, without the need for constant conversation.

From the outset, this project was about more than distraction. The repetitive nature of cross-stitching and the format of working methodically through each family member offered small, achievable goals that countered the passive routines of illness and set the course of creative activity for the duration of treatment. We also used humour to frame the portraits – “Chainsaw Jenny (aka Grandma)” proudly presents her beloved battery powered pruning tools amongst a carnage of branches and “Big Wheel Benjamin” astride his first bike breaks through the stitched frame with a perturbed pixel-style expression. Each character celebrates a moment, memory or person from our shared history; laughter is the best medicine. The humorous nature of the images was itself part of the therapeutic efficacy of the work. We reasserted our creative agency in the face of medical structures that often render patients as passive recipients.

These stitched works became personal artifacts of resilience, grief, laughter and time. Like the participants in Marie-Christine Ranger et al.’s 2023 study of art-based workshops for women with cancer, we found the creative process to be both grounding and revelatory.<sup>3</sup> The act of stitching served as a meditative space for Allie, while designing the portraits allowed me to channel anxiety into imagery. The work helped us both process change.

Although not framed as a formal study, our collaboration echoes Bodil Winther Hansen et al. of 2021 and their articulation of “Creative Activities as Intervention (CaI) in Occupational Therapy”: activities involving mind and body, experienced as meaningful and adaptable to context.<sup>4</sup> However, our approach was grounded in artistic practice rather than clinical intervention. The work was iterative, responsive and dialogic. Our tools ranged from illustration software and digital embroidery design apps to thread, cloth and video call – material and immaterial alike.



Figure 2. Hannah Joynt and Allie Joynt, Work in progress: *Big Wheel Benjamin*, 2024, embroidery thread on ada cloth, 250x200mm.

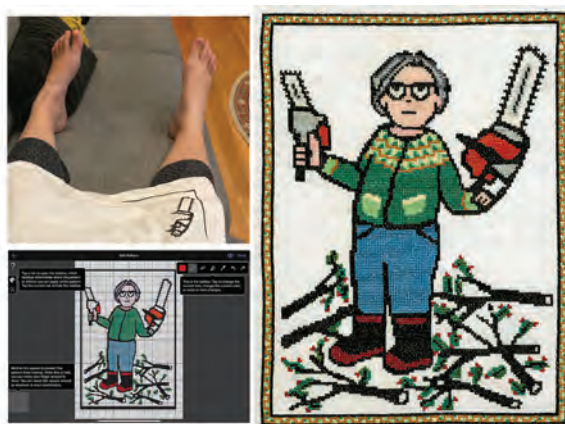


Figure 3. Hannah Joynt and Allie Joynt, Work in progress: *Chainsaw Jenny (aka Grandma)*, 2024, embroidery thread on ada cloth, 270x220mm.





Figure 4. Hannah Joynt and Allie Joynt, *Family Portrait Collection*, 2024, embroidery thread on ada cloth, various sizes between 140x140mm to 250x200mm.



The flexibility of the medium enabled us to adapt across time and geography. Our studio was wherever we were, stitched together by routine, intention and care. As with Ranger et al.'s community art workshops, we found the process of creative engagement – particularly its openness to vulnerability and imperfection – to be inherently transformational.

With the completion of treatment and Allie's NED (No Evidence of Disease) status, our creative focus is shifting. We are currently preparing for an exhibition and advocacy project with the Hope Horizons: Jenny Black Cancer Wellness Centre in Toowoomba. The exhibition will share our stitched portraits and story, aiming to raise awareness of lymphoedema and the lived realities of long-term cancer recovery.

We are also planning our next chapter: The Heysen Stitchpedition, a 1200km walk across South Australia's Heysen Trail, combining drawing, stitching and walking as artistic practice. This builds on my previous work (The Te Araroa Drawing Expedition, 2013) and continues our commitment to collaborative creativity as a form of public engagement and advocacy.<sup>5</sup>

This collaboration reminded us that creative practice can be a site of both healing and disruption – a place to hold space for grief, connection, boredom and joy. It allowed us to be present with each other, even across time zones and health systems. It blurred the boundaries between art and care, craft and ritual, family and collaboration.

As artists, sisters and co-creators, this work has expanded our understanding of what it means to make together – and how creative occupations can be not just a response to crisis but a form of resistance and reimagining.

**Hannah Joynt** is a senior lecturer in the College of Creative Practice and Enterprise at Otago Polytechnic where she has taught art and design since 2007. In 2021 she was recipient of the Ako Aotearoa Award for Sustained Excellence in Tertiary Teaching. In 2009 she won the COCA Anthony Harper award for Contemporary Art, 2010 winner of the Edinburgh Realty Art Awards, Dunedin. Hannah is a contemporary visual artist and educator who works in a range of media, processes, and scales. From digital illustration to oil painting, pastel drawing to laser cutting her practice is informed by notions of the absurd and our ever-changing relationship with landscape and the natural world. As a solo practitioner she has exhibited both nationally and internationally and to date has had 19 solo shows. Hannah also works collaboratively in projects across art and design disciplines but of particular significance is her ongoing collaborative artist duo with multimedia artist and musician Dr Jane Venis. Their collaboration includes live performances of drawing and music created in dual improvisation and performance art video works under the collective name *Small Measures*. In 2019 they undertook the Buinho Creative Art residency in Portugal and recent solo shows include: *Drawn to Sound* at Ashburton Art Gallery in 2019, *Dual* at CICA (Czong Institute of Contemporary Art) Museum in Seoul, South Korea in 2020 and in June 2021 their five-minute film *Flag Plant* was recently screen as a part of the Bomb Factory Artist Film Festival in London. In 2023 they exhibited at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery with their show *Precious and Pathetic*, a series of satiric video works, paintings and sculptures that engage with humour to examine power dynamics and offer absurd solutions to first world problems.

- 1 Metastatic melanoma is melanoma (skin cancer) that has spread to other sites of the body. The spread occurs through the lymphatic system and/or the blood vessels. "Metastatic Melanoma," accessed 25 May 2025, <https://dermnetnz.org/topics/metastatic-melanoma>.
- 2 A Bio Compression Suit is an inflatable garment designed to mimic the body's own lymphatic system to help fluid get circulated back into the body, resulting in a reduction of edema. "Bio Compression Pneumatic Compression Devices," accessed 25 May 2025, <https://biocompression.com/our-devices/>.
- 3 Marie-Christine Ranger, Sandra Houle, Alysson Rheault and Roanne Thomas, "Art-Based Workshops for Women: An Opportunity for Reflection on Identity and Transformation following Cancer Treatment," *Occupational Therapy International* (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1155/2023/1828314>.
- 4 Bodil Winther Hansen, Lena-Karin Erlandsson and Christel Leufstadius, "A Concept Analysis of Creative Activities as Intervention in Occupational Therapy," *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy* 28, no. 1 (2021): 63–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/11038128.2020.1775884>.
- 5 Hannah Joynt, "Te Araroa Drawing Expedition," *Scope: Art and Design* 11 (2015): 134–138. <https://thescope.org/journal/art-and-design/art-and-design-11/te-araroa-drawing-expedition>.

## DROSS: AN EXHIBITION

Scott Eady

The word dross conjures images of waste: objects of low value, poor quality or simply the unwanted. Its origins lie in the Old English *drōs*, meaning “scum on molten metal,” a residue to be discarded. My exhibition, *Dross*, held at Olga Gallery in Dunedin, explores this notion of cultural residue, using discarded materials to reflect on how value, history and identity sediment over time.<sup>1</sup> It asks what we choose to preserve, what we leave behind and who gets to decide what constitutes culture or legacy. In this body of work, things deemed undesirable or outcast, fragments of urban life, packaging materials and cast-offs are cast in bronze. This transformation lends permanence to the ephemeral, turning detritus into art, the ordinary into the extraordinary.

My interest in the overlooked began with the habit of keeping my head down. During a residency in Vladivostok in 2016, I spent hours walking the city and its shores, my gaze trained on the ground. The streets were cracked and potholed, the result of local corruption. Smiling at strangers was discouraged and so I kept my focus low. What I noticed instead were the layers of waste, broken infrastructure and graffiti that marked the cityscape. Through this dross, through what was broken, neglected and disordered, I came to understand something more enduring about the place: its culture, its politics, its history.



Figure 1. Scott Eady, *Air Filter (Vladivostok)*, 2016 – 2025, photographic print on Hahnemuhle paper.

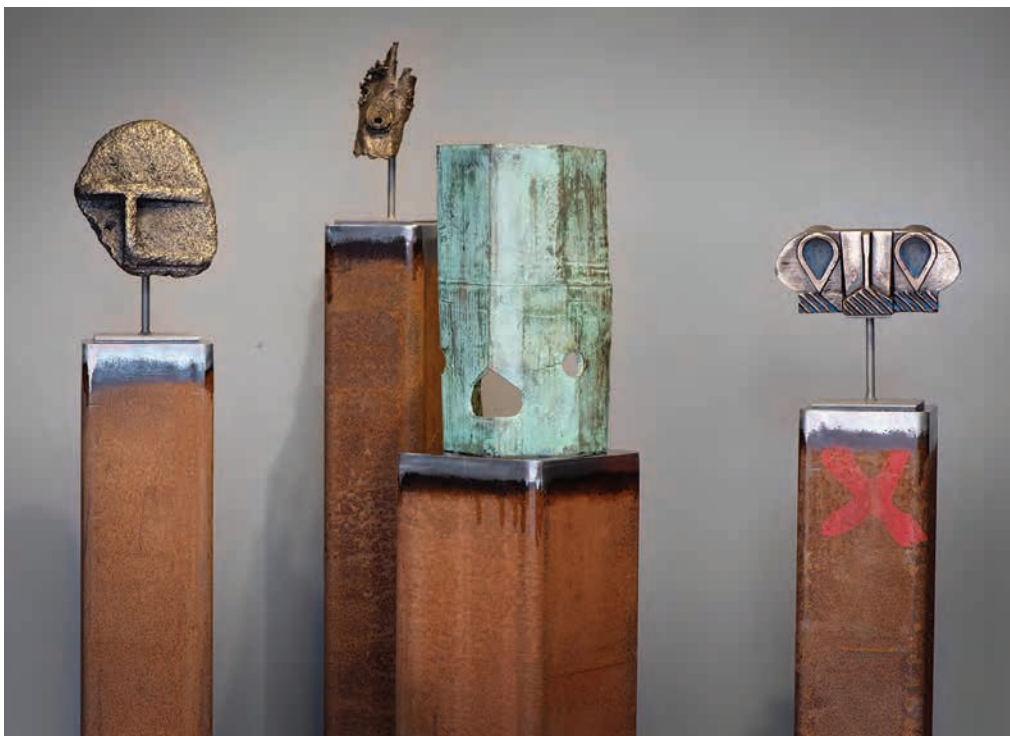


Figure 2. Scott Eady, Left to right: *Untitled (Wickliffe Street)*, 2025, bronze, steel; *Untitled (Cavell Street)*, 2025, bronze, steel. *Untitled (Otaki Street)*, 2025, bronze steel; *Untitled (Riego Street)*, 2025, bronze, steel. Photograph: Justin Spiers.

The process of making and encountering art is often rooted in a kind of looking that seeks recognition in the unfamiliar. Pareidolia is the human tendency to perceive meaningful images in abstract or random forms. It operates not only in our daily lives but is also fundamental to how artists select, shape and interpret materials. In *Dross*, the five untitled sculptures offer such moments: glimpses of figures or forms that might resemble something ancient or animate. This instinctive search for meaning is what first drew me to these discarded objects. But more than that, pareidolia is a mechanism through which artworks function: artists see significance where others might see chaos and invite viewers to do the same.

This way of finding meaning in overlooked matter extends into the installation itself. For *Dross*, I used bronze to cast a fragment of concrete found on a local site, then placed it within an old, graffitied, decommissioned spray-painting booth that was destined for the skip. The booth's steel panels, once tools of utility, now read as surfaces dense with memory. Decades of illicit marks, layered with dust and spray paint, become sedimented signatures. Like school desk carvings or ancient cave drawings, each tag or scrawl suggests a specific human presence. Through these marks, one could imaginatively travel through time to meet their makers. Collectively, the panels memorialise an art school community, preserving not only its traces but its spirit. In its Olga Gallery configuration, *Untitled #1* was described by *Otago Daily Times* reviewer James Dignan as "a semicircle of graffitied panels which become the pulpit and stained-glass windows of a postmodern brutalist church."<sup>2</sup>

Often dismissed as vandalism and described as mindless dross, graffiti is loaded with urban narratives, resistance and identity. It transforms spray booth walls, streets and public surfaces into urgent, unsanctioned canvases that speak for the marginalised, the disenfranchised and the unruly. As such, graffiti operates both in defiance of and in dialogue with the art world. Like bronze sculpture, it raises questions about visibility, value and permanence. When



Figure 3. Scott Eady, *Untitled (DSA)*, 2025, steel, paint.

brought into a gallery setting, graffiti's associations complicate the work, confronting viewers with competing ideas of authorship, authority, and aesthetics. Who gets to decide what counts as art? What marks are preserved and what are erased?

This interplay between past and present, perception and memory, links to a broader lineage in the history of art. Like phantom limbs, connections to earlier eras persist even when the original context is lost. No artwork is created in a vacuum. Our understanding is shaped by what we have seen and experienced before, whether in museum collections, ethnographic artifacts, modernist sculpture or even the archaeological fragments that proliferate on social media. These sculptures cannot help but echo such associations. They might recall tribal totems, votive relics or the visual language of early twentieth-century abstraction filtered through contemporary eyes and sensibilities.

Bronze, the material of these works, deepens that connection to art history. Valued since antiquity for its strength and longevity, bronze has served as a preferred medium for weapons, tools, bells and sculpture. Today, it still carries a weight of tradition and permanence but also speaks to ecological concerns. With approximately 88% of its content being copper, bronze is remarkably sustainable; a metal infinitely recyclable and requiring no new mining were it not for the demands of clean energy. In a time when many art materials are fleeting or synthetic, bronze offers both durability and environmental responsibility. Its resistance to decay also makes it practical: bronze sculptures are surprisingly simple and cost-effective to conserve.

Illicit acts of vandalism are captured in the video work *Section 15*. In their glory days, the featured bronze sculptures, titled *Calciami! (Kick Me)*, were exhibited at the Palazzo Bembo near the Rialto Bridge in Venice, where thousands





Figure 4. Scott Eady, *Untitled (Bayfield Inlet)*, 2025, bronze, steel.

of art and architecture enthusiasts encountered them during the 2013 Venice Biennale. After their return to New Zealand, they were retired to pasture like Ferdinand the Bull, seemingly docile, harmless objects until they became unwittingly complicit in a 'Section 15 of the Crimes Act' smash-and-grab.<sup>3</sup> The video documents the reactivation and recontextualisation of these once-static artworks as accomplices in a staged criminal act: captured in grainy surveillance footage, the sculptures are seen being used to violently shatter a glass door, their elegant bronze forms weaponised in a sudden, absurd act of destruction. This collision of art and crime invites questions about agency, value and the thin line between object and instrument, between cultural artefact and everyday detritus.

The sculptures in *Dross* draw on materials commonly found in the detritus of our urban and suburban environments: polystyrene packaging, pine bark, discarded demolition materials and corrugated cardboard. These humble, often overlooked fragments formed the original shapes that were later cast in bronze, their transformation both preserving and elevating the ordinary. Installed atop recycled, patinated steel plinths, once part of dismantled industrial structures, the sculptures maintain a dialogue between their refined final form and their unglamorous beginnings. This deliberate tension invites the viewer to navigate an interplay between perception and deception, expectation and critique. By repurposing the visual language of waste, *Dross* challenges aesthetic conventions and highlights a core concern of contemporary art: the ability to interrogate the material and cultural residue of late capitalism, and to find meaning and value within what society so readily discards.



Figure 5. Scott Eady, *Section 15*, 2025, 2 channel video, screen, plastic box, plinth.

**Scott Eady** is a senior lecturer in sculpture at the Dunedin School of Art at Otago Polytechnic. His work has been exhibited internationally at prestigious events such as the Venice Biennale and the Gwangju Biennale, South Korea. His sculptures are part of significant national collections, including the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Dunedin Public Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū, The Chartwell Collection at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, the University of Otago Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka, and international institutions such as the Artetage Museum of Modern Art, Vladivostok, Russia, and the New Zealand Honorary Consulate in Vladivostok. Eady has also completed prominent public commissions, including 'The Philanthropist's Stone' for the Wellington Sculpture Trust, 'Tātou Ahau' at Otago Polytechnic, and '7 Miles' at Caroline Freeman College, University of Otago.

Drawing upon a rich tapestry of personal encounters, shared experiences, and familial moments, Eady's practice examines the relationships between individuals and their environments, as well as the dynamics of synergistic experiences. His sculptures engage with the fragile, often fraught tension between societal structures and human connection, revealing underlying currents of vitality, humour, and empathy. Through this lens, Eady's work challenges perceptions, offering a thoughtful interrogation of how identity is shaped both personally and collectively.

1 Scott Eady, *Dross*, Olga, Dunedin, 29 February to 26 March 2025.

2 James Dignan, "Art Seen: March 3," *Otago Daily Times*, 13 March 2025.

3 See Aaron Lister, "Spit Me: Scott Eady," accessed 26 May 2025, <https://aaronlister.com/portfolio/spit-me-scott-eady/>.

## SOMETIMES

Carolyn Bell

Sometimes it's just the sky,  
the unknowable, the undone, the erased, the lost, the fragmented, the repressed,  
the unexplained, the abyss, the dread, the roots, the doubt, the unnamed, the  
empty, the impossible, the dream, the outcast, the hurtful, the hidden, the invisible,  
the shadows, the trace, the irretrievable, the blue, the blown, the spatial, the  
nonexistence, the displaced, the misinterpretation, the inexplicable, the nonlinear,  
the sparrow, the incapable, the indexical, the disembodied, the void, the riverlike,  
the impasse, the dust, the immaterial, the unintentional, the ephemeral, the line,  
the overlay, the formless, the absence, the idle, the unseen, the threshold, the  
palimpsest, the poetics, the contradiction, the dispersed, the fog, the sphinx, the  
beyond, the silence, the failure, the forgotten, the unravelling, the unmaking, the  
disused, the overlooked, the feminine, the ulterior, the felt, the uncertainty, the  
minimal, the volatile, the inconsolable, the temporal, the death, the leftover, the  
underneath, the mistake, the uncontrollable, the crux, the moon, the vanishing,  
the question, the indifferent, the disarticulated, the immemorial, the i, the ruin,  
the entanglement, the turmoil, the dematerialisation, the hum, the running, the  
conceptual, the deficient, the broken, the titanium, the non-site, the object, the  
incandescent, the monstrous, the unwritten, the futile, the misfit, the inexpressible,  
the rage, the five thousand, the blurred, the lament, the found, the unwanted,  
the shift, the amnesia, the embers, the orgasm, the spire, the distorted, the  
muse, the brick, the vestige, the echo, the residue, the passion, the indirect,  
the translation, the missed, the impression, the hollow, the wind, the austere,  
the effacing, the afterlife, the buried, the angel, the reflection, the processual,  
the system, the love, the mist, the late, the torn, the partially, the unclear, the  
release, the scar, the unacceptable, the accident, the estranged, the exception,  
the whatever, the window, the dislodged, the shell, the outline, the boundless,  
the secret, the minute, the edge, the alcoves, the until, the house, the apple, the  
dismissed, the formidable, the mar, the earthly, the grid, the mirror, the mark,  
the hour, the obscure, the cracks, the nuance, the still, the overthought, the  
ethereal, the subtle, the transcendental, the weeds, the architectural, the armour,  
the cage, the spine, the experimental, the perpetual, the imminent, the falling,  
the symbolic, the melancholy, the guess, the escape, the drawing, the distance,  
the wonder, the scales, the bone, the held, the curiosity, the in-between, the  
masquerade, the affective, the collapse, the room of one's own, the tenderness,  
the mystery, the deconstructed, the resonance, the sensitive, the nonsense, the  
knot, the irreparable, the favourite, the becoming, the metamorphosis, the lull,  
the quotidian, the bell, the untitled, the oscillating, the rustle, the waves, the  
promise, the wander, the sin, the tautological, the indiscernible, the darkness, the  
aside, the book, the fossil, the malaise, the gleaned, the decay, the existential, the

blankness, the phenomenological, the unconventional, the systems, the change, the rearranged, the stranger, the return, the rubbings, the liminal, the wish, the archive, the second, the bricoleur, the paradox, the fleeting, the deep, the delicate, the chance, the lightness, the divine, the numb, the whisper, the rust, the breath, the lie, the web, the intimacy, the unforgiven, the drifting, the wuthering, the dispossessed, the ambience, the fragile, the peeling, the sap, the intangible, the eclipse, the unexpected, the slow, the idea, the passage, the precious, the graphite, the solace, the raw, the memory, the vessel, the tension, the care, the imprint, the disintegration, the miscellaneous, the wound, the ghostly, the worn, the here, the womb, the simple, the illuminations, the veil, the unutterable, the whirl, the vertigo, the withdrawn, the moment, the enclosure, the imaginary, the promise, the linger, the enfolded, the surface, the chamber, the duration, the mess, the inevitable, the atmosphere, the ground, the stone, the instinct, the pure, the silhouette, the seam, the anemoia, the land, the enigma, the desire, the rumination, the floating, the evanescent, the rain, the synthesised, the detritus, the materiality, the lint, the precarious, the oblique, the dwelling, the repair, the rot, the untied, the suspended, the puddle, the waiting, the steep, the inconsistent, the whitewater, the gap, the sill, the lichen, the wistful, the longing, the rest, the abandoned, the bare, the tidal, the midden, the crevice, the shards, the fatigue, the endless, the hesitant, the slight, the fraught, the murmuration, the inconspicuous, the sensuous, the transitory, the geometries, the connection, the gesture, the vague, the held, the noticing, the tethered, the quantum, the disoriented, the distraction, the burden, the rapture, the thought, the core, the thorn, the miracle, the ecological, the horizon, the gravity, the sentimental, the farewell, the decomposition, the peace, the hopelessness, the interruption, the escape, the dredged, the quietude, the incomprehensible, the deadline, the star, the joy, the spill, the gasp, the transparent, the impenetrable, the wordless, the sullen, the reluctant, the unfinished, the flux, the hills the nothingness.

Carolyn Bell is from Ōtepoti Dunedin.





## Guidelines for Contributors

Submissions for *Scope (Art & Design)* are invited from artists, designers, curators, writers, theorists and historians. Submissions should be sent by 30 April for review and potential inclusion in the annual issue to: Edward Hanfling (Editor: [ed.hanfling@op.ac.nz](mailto:ed.hanfling@op.ac.nz)) or [scope.editorial@op.ac.nz](mailto:scope.editorial@op.ac.nz).

Please consult the information for contributors below and hardcopy or online versions for examples.

All submissions will be peer reviewed. Peer review comments will be sent to all submitters in due course, with details concerning the possible reworking of documents where relevant. All submissions must include disclosure of whether and how AI was used in writing the work. All final decisions concerning publication of submissions will reside with the Editors. Opinions published are those of the authors and not necessarily subscribed to by the Editors or Otago Polytechnic.

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Submission formats include: editorials; articles; perspectives; essays; artist and designer pages; logs and travel reports; reports on and reviews of exhibitions, projects, residencies and publications; and moving, interactive works (to be negotiated with the editors for the online version, with stills to appear in the hardcopy version). Other suggested formats will also be considered; and special topics comprising submissions by various contributors may be tendered to the editors. All material will be published both in hardcopy and online. Submissions should engage with contemporary arts practices in ways which may contribute to critical debate and new understandings.

High standards of writing, proofreading and adherence to consistency through the Chicago referencing style are expected. For more information, please refer to the Chicago Manual of Style, 17th edition; and consult prior issues for examples. A short biography of no more than 50 words; as well as title; details concerning institutional position and affiliation (where relevant); contact information (postal, email and telephone number) and ORCID number should be provided on a cover sheet, with all such information withheld from the body of the submission. Low resolution images with full captions should be inserted into texts to indicate where they would be preferred, while high resolution images should be sent separately.

Enquiries about future submissions can be directed to: [scope.editorial@op.ac.nz](mailto:scope.editorial@op.ac.nz).

